

South Shore

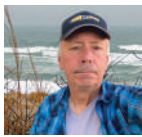
Skimmer



Volume 53, Number 4 • South Shore Audubon Society • Summer 2023

Looking Up: Long Island Born & Bred

by Russ Comeau



Russ Comeau

Do you know how many bird species are actively breeding on Long Island? Most people will guess way too low.

You may appreciate learning that a surprising 147 bird species reunite after the winter apart, fall in love all over again (many species are monogamous), and raise their families here, especially in the productive months of May, June, and July.

The top 25 confirmed nesters include some pleasant surprises: American Robin, Osprey, Gray Catbird, Common Grackle, European Starling, House Sparrow, Canada Goose, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, Northern Mockingbird, Red-winged Blackbird, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Mute Swan, Brown-headed Cowbird, Mourning Dove, Black-capped Chickadee, Yellow Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, Carolina Wren, Blue Jay, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, and Mallard.

The above species are the most

successful nesters in part because they are quite tolerant of human encroachment and have adapted to sharing our urban or suburban environments, man-made parks, or disturbed habitats.

Several other species adapted to human spaces when their natural breeding habitats were destroyed due to deforestation, agriculture,



Bald Eagles Born & Bred in Nassau County by Jay Koolpix

or residential or industrial development. For instance, Chimney Swifts adapted to the only places left for them to nest. But now, chimneys are less common, grated, or with narrow flues rendering them inhospitable to this declining species.

Common Nighthawks adapted to procreating on gravel rooftops because they lost their native breeding places on the ground. But now gravel roofs are a thing of the past, so we no longer offer Nighthawks any place to breed.

The beach nesters—Black Skimmer, American Oystercatcher, Common Tern, Least Tern, and Piping Plover—must be ardently protected from human encroachment during our beachgoing season, which is their breeding season.

Then there are the wilder ones—the majority—that, although they still nest on LI, they cannot easily adapt to our encroachment. We must preserve more secluded, native, undisturbed areas for them to provide privacy and respectful boundaries so they will feel at home raising their families here. ♦

READ MORE ABOUT IT

For a list of all 147 species of LI nesters, visit [facebook.com/SSAudubon](https://www.facebook.com/SSAudubon).

For confirmed LI breeding birds, visit NY Breeding Bird Atlas III: ebird.org/atlasny/

Be a Shorebird Monitor

Help needed evenings, weekends, & holidays.

The Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways needs your help to protect Piping Plovers, Least and Common Terns, Black Skimmers, and American Oystercatchers that nest between Point Lookout and Atlantic Beach from May through August.

If you are interested and can volunteer regularly, call Conservation Biologist John Zarudsky at 516-486-5272.

Coming Attractions

In-Person at Freeport Memorial Library:

Researching the Deadliest Birds with Todd Green • 9/12

See Page 4 for Details

More Programs Coming Your Way!

Find program updates & links on:
SSAudubon.org • [facebook.com/SSAudubon](https://www.facebook.com/SSAudubon)

South Shore Skimmer

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Table of Contents

News

- Shore Bird Monitor, Front Page
- Wildlife Legislation, p. 5
- NYS Budget Wins, p. 6

Columns

- Looking Up, Front Page
- On the Record, p. 3
- Scobe Squawks, p. 4
- Insights, p. 5
- Wise Owl, p. 5
- Through Guy's Eyes, p. 6
- Going Native, p. 7

Events

- Bird Walks, p. 2
- Programs, p. 4

Of Interest

- Ads, pp. 2, 4
- Mission Statement, p. 2
- Injured Wildlife Hotline, p. 4
- Social Media, p. 6
- Membership/Renewal Form, p. 8
- Who's Who @ SSAS, p. 8

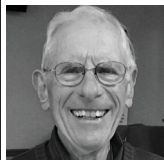
SSAS

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society
SSAudubon.org

The mission of the South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education; conduct research pertaining to local bird populations, wildlife, and habitat; and to preserve and restore our environment through responsible activism for the benefit of both people and wildlife. ♦

Bird Walks

by Joe Landesberg



Joe Landesberg

Join us on our Bird Walks! **To register, text me your name and contact information at 516-467-9498.** Bird Walks are free of charge and start at 9 AM. No walk if it rains. Text me regarding questionable conditions.

August Sundays

- 8/20: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh)
- 8/27: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)

September

- Sunday, 9/3: No Walk. Labor Day Weekend
- Saturday, 9/9:** Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area
- Sunday, 9/17: Jamaica Bay Refuge, Queens
- Sunday, 9/24: Norman J. Levy Park

October Sundays

- 10/1: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
- 10/8: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking lot)
- 10/15: Point Lookout/Lido Preserve
- 10/22: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
- 10/29: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh)

For future Bird Walks, check our website & Facebook page:

SSAudubon.org/bird-walks • Facebook.com/SSAudubon

Directions: SSAudubon.org/directions.asp

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Thank you, Brien!

South Shore Skimmer editors Alene & Frank Scoblete extend heartfelt thanks to Brien Weiner for her support, humor, and fortitude. She is a Wise Owl, indeed!



On the Record: Jay Koolpix

An Interview by Alene Scoblete

A frequent presenter at SSAS, photographer and philanthropist Jay Koolpix has dazzled and inspired us with his photography. What you might not know is that from age 11 to 63, Jay worked as a butcher, chauffeur, production expeditor, professional boxer, professional weightlifter, IT support technician, assistant bookkeeper, scale inspector, and certified watchmaker. He has contributed photos to National Geographic and the Environmental Education & Resiliency Center at Hempstead Lake State Park. Here we gain more insight into the man behind the camera.

When and how did you fall in love with nature?

JK: I lived in foster homes in Staten Island to the age of seventeen, before the Verrazano Bridge was built. Staten Island was about 50 percent wooded. I loved biking and playing in the woods. That's when I discovered birds and nature.

How did you get involved with photography?

JK: I bought my first camera when I was sixteen. For many years I wasn't very good at photography but in the back of my head I always dreamed and admired NatGeo photography. It wasn't until about twelve years ago that I started getting a bit more serious about nature photography. I began with macro photos of insects and flowers.

What was your learning process like?



Jay Koolpix

JK: It took years of trial and error to begin getting better quality photos. Studying other people's great photos was a big plus in gradually getting better. I never took any photography classes.

What drew you to birds?

JK: My big dream was to capture great moments in the life of various birds. I am still learning about birds. So much to know! When I retired ten years ago, I bought a very good camera and lens. I realized that would be a great asset to get closer to the birds and with good quality.

What are your three favorite birds and why?

JK: Hummingbirds, Ospreys, and Snowy Owls.

Hummingbirds can fly upside down and backwards and they make an incredible migration trip. There is an unbelievable variety of hummingbirds that are all so amazing.

Ospreys are fantastic fishermen and are found on every continent except Antarctica.

The Snowy Owl is so majestic in flight and even when just sitting there. Its simple black and white colors along with its yellow eyes make a wonderful combination. They can turn their heads almost 360 degrees in an instant.

Describe a typical day out with your camera.

JK: I usually head out into nature early in the morning to a spot that is quiet and where I should encounter a few types of birds. I watch a particular bird closely for usually a few hours and during that time try to capture a great moment, if possible. The thrill of my day is to go through my photos of the day and pick out the best—hopefully at least two very good ones. I love this challenge!

What advice do you have for budding nature photographers?

JK: I suggest that anyone who wants to get really good photos of birds to study, study, and study them for many hours. Pack plenty of patience, lots of film*, and batteries and—last, but not least—don't forget to remove your lens cap! Please leave your cell phone home. Or if it is absolutely necessary to have, at least turn it to vibrate.

*[*Editor's Note: Film is an inside joke among photographers.]*

Tell us about your philanthropy.

JK: I started the Thomas A. Mattia Scholarship for Veterans at Queens College many years ago in honor of my best friend Tom. He was in the third graduation class at Queens College. He was a real war hero and he inspired and enabled me to pursue my dreams of nature photography.

Last year, before the war in Ukraine, I began a scholarship in memory of my mother. She was in a Nazi concentration camp during WWII. I never knew her. The people of Ukraine are now going through the same horrors that she went through. This scholarship awards two students \$1,000 each, every year. St. George Academy is the high school in lower Manhattan where these students are. The students must be from Ukraine.

I recently started the Jay Koolpix Environmental Scholarship through the South Shore Audubon Society which assists college students with their education in environmental areas.

Hopefully, these three scholarships will help make our world a better place for all.

Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?

JK: Treat others the way you would like to be treated. We—all humans—are related. We all had the same mother and father going way back in time, through evolution or Adam and Eve, whatever you believe. ♦

Coming Attractions



Volunteers for Wildlife
Wildlife Hospital & Education Center
Rehabilitating injured wildlife since 1982.
Injured Wildlife Hotline: (516) 674-0982
volunteersforwildlife.org

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Researching the Deadliest Birds on Earth with Dr. Todd L. Green
Tuesday, September 12 @ 7:30 PM

➔ *In-Person Program at Freeport Memorial Library, Freeport, NY*



Todd L. Green

How is it that the majority of the population does not know cassowaries exist? These large, flightless birds native to Australia and New Guinea are far more charismatic than their relatives, ostriches and emus. Brightly colored heads and necks, crown-like structures, and dagger-shaped claws are just a few of the characteristics that make them fascinating.

Despite their territorially aggressive nature, these vegetarian birds are critically important to the delicate rain forest ecosystems that they inhabit. In addition, cassowaries are used as modern analogs by paleontologists to help untangle the mysteries of long-extinct dinosaurs.

One of the few cassowary researchers in the world, Todd is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow at NY Institute of Technology and has dedicated his career to studying and providing educational outreach for endangered cassowaries.

Follow Dr. Green on Twitter @TheCassowaryKid

View his current outreach projects at tinyurl.com/4fb6d7cn

More Programs Coming Your Way!

Find program updates & links on SSAudubon.org • facebook.com/SSAudubon

Scobe Squawks: Shiver Me Feathers!

by Frank Scoblete



Frank Scoblete

Birds are surprising to me. Just when I think I have the dimensions of some feathered creatures, they will throw a surprise at me.

Take the Blue Jays. My first introduction to this bird happened in Chicago a few decades ago.

Mama and Papa Blue Jay had situated their nest in a tree just outside a bustling bank and fast-food joints. Why such a curious location? I have no idea.

And when their eggs hatched (how many, I do not know) the parents became demonic. They would dive-bomb passers-by who they thought were interested in harming their babies. When I say “dive-bomb” I mean it literally. Out of bushy branches, these birds swooped like fighter jets and nailed humans. They tangled hair, pecked scalps and foreheads, and caused a racket to boot.

Soon television reporters showed up with their cameras, microphones, and slick hair or bleached blonde tresses, which were soon ruffled or bloodied by the feathery dive-bombers. These media denizens posed a serious threat to the baby birds—well, I *think* Mama and Papa Blue Jay thought that; they attacked as if they thought that.

Some of Chicago’s citizens succinctly opined to the press: “kill ‘em” or “kill them” or “kill all of them.” Our politics should be so unanimous!

It took police and bird experts to figure out how to handle the birds. The human authorities did move them to, perhaps, a forest? Or to one of the wonderful “farms” where parents send the kids’ dogs when death is too hard to explain?

Most of us know that Blue Jays are considered tough birds—the rightful heirs of the dinosaurs.

So, what about the Blue Jay that is terrified of my wife and me? He comes to our one-story deck in our private forest drawn by the mound of seeds we’ve put out for our friendly and hungry local birds. He catches a glimpse of us and rockets off.

Can a Blue Jay be timid? This has been going on for weeks. Even the varied sparrows who dine here have no fear of us as they eat until they look like feathered balloons.

What’s with this Blue Jay? His Chicago brethren would be ashamed of him. ♦



Blue Jay
by Jay Koolpix

Insights: Equinor's Empire Wind

by Jim Brown

The South Shore Audubon Society has confronted issues linked to offshore wind development for many years, primarily focusing on Empire Wind, a wind farm project that will contain upwards of 130 energy-producing turbines located on the continental shelf 15-30 miles south of Long Island. In 2015, along with our partner NYC Audubon, our chapter received a \$10,000 Audubon-administered grant that led to the publication of a report by our consultant ornithologist from Portland Maine's Biodiversity Research Institute analyzing in detail the possible impacts of offshore wind facilities on birds. In succeeding years, we have participated in meetings, hearings, workshops, and conferences dealing with this offshore wind initiative.

Given the ravages of climate change, and its increasingly negative impact on bird populations worldwide, early on SSAS supported the building of renewable energy infrastructure, including offshore wind. Climate change poses the greatest risk of all to the survival of birds. At the same time, we have urged developers and government regulators to mitigate the impact of the facilities on birds and other wildlife. We realize there will be negative impacts from the construction and operation of turbines, but that it is also possible to limit

environmental damage if proper attention is devoted to best practices for protecting wildlife and habitat.



Jim Brown

The Norwegian company Equinor, the principal developer of Empire Wind, is now seeking permits for the project. Construction should be completed by the end of the decade, enabling the production of enough renewable energy (2.1 gigawatts), to power one million New York homes. As part of the permitting process, Equinor is engaging in community outreach through meetings with environmentalists, elected officials, and the general public. There have also been hearings before governmental agencies to discuss the developer's plans. SSAS members are urged to continue participating in the process going forward. Input from Long Islanders who treasure birds is crucial to ensure we get the renewable energy we desperately need, along with minimal impact on wildlife and habitat. ♦

READ MORE ABOUT IT

Empire Wind: empirewind.com/

NYSERDA Offshore Wind: <https://tinyurl.com/48zpxu5>

The Wise Owl: Be a Good Egg

Each season is here for both people and shorebirds. Please take the Be a Good Egg Pledge: respect fenced-off nesting areas; properly dispose of or carry out your trash; and keep your dog off nesting beaches.



Wise Owl

When a person or dog walks through a nesting area, the adult birds run or fly off in fear, exposing the eggs or chicks to fatally high temperatures and drastically increasing the risk of predation.

Off-leash dogs and cats can injure or even kill birds, especially flightless chicks. Trash can entangle birds, be mistaken for food and ingested, and can attract predators.

CALLS TO ACTION

Pledge to Be a Good Egg at: tinyurl.com/4p74h5uw

Volunteer to further help our shorebirds: See front page

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act will allow the states, territories, and tribes to invest up to \$1.4 billion annually in proactive, on-the-ground, collaborative efforts to help species at risk by restoring habitat, controlling invasive species, reconnecting migration routes, addressing emerging diseases, and more.

RAWA is once-in-a-generation bipartisan legislation, and we need to ramp up support for the conservation of declining species before they become endangered.

Please ask your US Senators to support the Recovering America's Wildlife Act to help thousands of wildlife species, including more than 800 bird species, and prevent future extinctions.

CALL TO ACTION

Contact your US Senator: <https://tinyurl.com/5ba8ynch>

NYS Budget Wins for Birds and People

The 2023-2024 New York State Budget includes environmental funding and policy proposals that will help protect birds and our shared environment. SSAS joined coalition partners to advocate for these protections, and will continue to work towards their implementation.

Here are highlights:

Environmental Protection Fund:

New York State has committed another \$400 million in funding for the EPF, which provides critical support for environmental programs, including Audubon's nature centers and sanctuaries.

New York State Bird

Clean Water Infrastructure:



Eastern Bluebird by Bill Belford

The final budget provides an additional \$500 million in funding for water quality and clean water infrastructure,

Capital for State Parks and the DEC:

The final budget includes \$202.5 million for the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation and \$90 million for the Department of Environmental Conservation. Funds will support habitat improvement projects, the continued enhancement of the New York State Birding Trail, and more.

Acting on Climate:

Fifty percent of bird species are predicted to be either climate threatened or climate endangered by 2080, including at least fifty species in New York State. Proposals in this category include strategies to support a responsible clean energy transition, and phase out the use of fossil fuels in buildings. ♦

Through Guy's Eyes

by Guy Jacob

Neonics in Our Water



Guy Jacob

Like a creeping disease, neonicotinoids are a clear and present danger, and a growing chorus of organizations, businesses, and healthcare professionals are sounding the alarm bell about their toxic mischief. Neonicotinoids or neonics are a class of highly toxic pesticides that act as potent insect neurotoxins. They're ubiquitous on Long Island's nonorganic farms and private landscapes.

Neonics are linked to multiple health risks because they've made their way into the human diet and our groundwater. Environmental Protection Agency neonic poisoning reports include acute symptoms of rash, muscle tremor, difficulty breathing, vomiting, wheezing, lockjaw, memory loss, and renal failure among other problems.

These health risks are exacerbated by the widespread detection of the neonic imidacloprid in shallow samples of Long Island's groundwater collected from 54 monitoring wells across Long Island. The US Geological Society detected 53 different pesticides in Long Island groundwater, which account for a combination of neonicotinoid and other types of pesticide residues.

Three million Long Islanders rely on our sole source aquifers for drinking water, which is the highest concentration of New Yorkers who are being affected by pesticides. Our aquifers are among the most productive in the United States. While the rest of New York's aquifers are not as extensive as Long Island's, they are abundant, reliable sources of groundwater. Groundwater provides drinking water to one quarter of all New Yorkers.

Regulatory limits greatly underestimate the health risks due to potential synergistic effects of multiple pesticides. Fifty-three pesticide types detected sounds like a cocktail recipe for synergistic effects. Moreover, chronic effects of low-level exposure over decades as well as from one generation to the next through epigenetics pose a long-term risk. We are guinea pigs, each of us, forced to participate in an uncontrolled experiment, while use of egregious neonic pesticides continues unabated.

When a seed is coated with a neonic, the pesticide grows along with the plant and permeates the mature plant, including its pollen and nectar. Whether pollinator or pest, insects that eat from the plant ingest the neonic. Consequently, nontarget species, including bees and birds, are suffering significant population losses.

Bees and birds play a vital role in making life possible on our planet. Seventy-five percent of the world's crops depend on pollinators. Without them, most fruits, flowers, and seeds would cease to exist. The ecosystem services provided by pollination are essential and immeasurable.

Neonics are equal opportunity killers. And worse yet, for all the billions being spent on these toxic pesticides, neonic-treated seeds neither reduce pest levels nor boost crop yields. It's time for common sense legislation to protect our health. ♦

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Going Native: Fire on the Ground

by Betty Borowsky & Louise DeCesare



Betty Borowsky

When Europeans first came to Long Island, they must have felt blessed when they saw the land. It was perfect for agriculture. About half of it was fertile grasslands; there were no mountains, plenty of fresh water, and the soil had virtually no rocks. It was plow-ready. And if you were a shepherd, all you had to do was let the sheep wander the grasslands; it was all natural pasture. At that time, the grasslands, called the Hempstead Plains, covered about 40,000 acres of the central part of Nassau County. Today the largest parcels that remain are 17 acres, located on the campus of Nassau Community College and 25 acres nearby.

The remaining Plains has been called the jewel of Nassau County. The beauty of a tall grass prairie sneaks up on you. In winter it looks like stubble. But from spring through fall, when you look out over the Plains you can become mesmerized as the grasses bend to the wind, looking like nothing so much as the waves of a green ocean. And, if you look at it closely, you will see among the blades of grass, lovely brightly-colored flowers.

The Plains is also a repository of rare and endangered species. This is not only of botanical interest—the unusual plants also attract relatively rare birds and butterflies that require these specific plants to survive.

Managing any natural community is difficult; it is especially so when located in a suburb surrounded by homes and businesses. In addition to being an obvious target of developers, the native biological community is subject to

overgrowth by non-native and invasive species.

But there is an additional difficulty in maintaining grasslands—fire. Interestingly, because of the Hempstead Plains' current situation, there isn't enough of it!

Historically, fires helped maintain a grassland's unique assemblage of plants. Burning tends to kill invasives; the ashes also provide natural fertilizer for the survivors. Tall grasses, such as the predominant species on the Hempstead Plains, have much longer roots than lawn grasses, and the roots are unharmed by the fire. The Friends of Hempstead Plains, the nonprofit organization that manages these Preserves, decided that the 17-acre parcel on the College should be burned.

But now comes the really important part of the prescribed burn: finding out whether it was worth it.

Conducting a burn like this would have been a challenge even if the parcel to be burned were in the Midwest somewhere away from dense populations. But here the area was surrounded by schools and homes. There were concerns not only about the possibility of the fire's spreading to adjacent properties, but also about alarming the public when they saw fire and smoke on the Plains. Why, even people traveling along the Meadowbrook Parkway would see the smoke!

There were other concerns as well. Fire and police departments from local villages and the County, and Nassau Community College itself, had to give their approval for the burn; then, all the surrounding businesses and

organizations had to be notified in due time. To add to the difficulties, the perfect day for a burn had to be found. The day had to be in March or April before the grasses had begun their annual growth spurt; there could be no significant rain; the wind had to be just right; fire breaks had to be prepared within the Plains; and so many other details had to be resolved.

After a few tentative dates were rejected because of inferior conditions, all the stars aligned, and on April 19, 2023, about 30 percent of the 17-acre parcel was burnt. On the day of the burn members of the Nassau Community College security department and local fire and police departments were there; about ten members of Sustainable

Solutions (the company conducting the burn) attended; fire trucks, police vehicles, and an ambulance were stationed around the perimeter of the Plains.

The actual burn took several hours, and the cleanup a few more.

If you visit the Plains now, you can see the charred areas. And you will also see the tiny blades of grass beginning to grow from the soil. Recovery has already begun.

But now comes the really important part of the prescribed burn: finding out whether it was worth it. The Friends of the Hempstead Plains will be monitoring growth in the burned area for the next few years. Did the native species—especially the endangered ones—survive? How well will plants in the burnt areas grow in comparison to the ones in the unburnt areas? It will be especially interesting to see if the burn reduced the invasives.

Was it worth it? We'll let you know. ♦



Louise DeCesare

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Get outside and enjoy nature!
Join us on our bird walks. See p. 2 for details.

Join South Shore Audubon Society!

Become a member of our local chapter for **only \$20 per year!** Receive our newsletter, *South Shore Skimmer*, which includes listings for our local outings and programs as well as the latest on environmental issues and initiatives.

To **join or renew** your membership, make your check payable to **South Shore Audubon Society** and send the form and check to: **PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.**

→ **All memberships expire in September.** ←

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Circle One: JOIN or RENEW

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