VOLUME 35, NUMBER 5 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 2005

NEXT MEETING

Enid Klein

DATE:

Tuesday, February 8, 2005

TIME:

7:30 p.m.

PLACE:

Freeport Memorial Library

144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)

SPEAKER: John Potente TOPIC:

Wood Ducks

This month's meeting will feature a slide and video presentation on the lives of Long Island's colorful Wood Ducks. We'll watch their mating behavior, breeding cycle, and rearing of young, including film footage of brooding females in nest boxes.

John is the Director of Native America, a Long Islandbased environmental organization devoted to the preservation of native plant and bird species. He was our guest speaker in May 1999 and April 2003, for programs on woodpeckers and native backyard plants, respectively.

Native America has developed a number of nest boxes that prevent interference by squirrels, raccoons, and starlings. We'll see how their specialized pole guards protect Wood Duck ducklings. Join us!

Pre-Meeting Programs on Birds. Starting at 7 P.M. each month, Scott Oglesby and Jim Remsen will be discussing birds in the room beyond our coffee-break tables. Topic suggestions for future talks are welcome.

Another Parking Lot. In addition to the parking lot adjacent to the library, there's a lightly used, well-lit, and fairly close municipal lot on the east side of S. Ocean Ave., on the near (south) side of the Gulf station that borders Sunrise Highway.

<u></u> IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE WASTE, PLEASE BRING COFFEE MUGS TO OUR MEETINGS.

Shade-grown coffee protects rainforests! **************

OUR E-LIST http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ssas list

WE'RE HAVING A FLEA MARKET!

Belly Borowsky

HOLD THE DATE -- MAY 1, 2005! **HOLD YOUR HOLIDAY GIFTS!** HOLD ALL THOSE HOUSEHOLD ITEMS YOU DON'T USE ANYMORE! HOLD YOUR CHILDREN'S OUTGROWN TOYS! HOLD EVERYTHING!

Look for more information in the next Skimmer. Volunteers needed — call me at 764-3596.



Elliott Kutner

All walks start at 9:30 A.M. except for Pelham Bay; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Any questions? Call Elliott at 486-7667. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaudubon.org.

Jan. 23	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Jan. 30	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Feb. 6	Pelham Bay for Owls [pull over to street
	on extreme right after going through
90	Throgs Neck Bridge toll (Pennyfield
	Ave.); meet at 9 A.M.; hiking shoes
	recommended]
Feb. 13	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Feb. 20	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Ech 27	Zoob's Pour Powling Field #4. N.E. common

Feb. 27 Zach's Bay Parking Field #4, N.E. corner Mar. 6 Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner Mar. 13 *************************************

SSAS Post Office Statement — South Shore Skimmer is published monthly from September through December and February through May by South Shore Audubon Society, P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

HISTORY OF THE HOUSE SPARROW

Editor's note: This article, by John V. Dennis, is reprinted from the September/October 1999 issue of Bird Watcher's Digest. Mr. Dennis passed away in 2002 at age 86 and was the author of the top-notch book A Complete Guide to Bird Feeding.

People today do not need to be told about the faults of the House Sparrow (also called English Sparrow). But if we think it is a nuisance, what must people have thought 100 years ago when it was perhaps 10 times more abundant than it is today? For a perspective, it might be helpful to look back and find out where this pesky little bird came from, why it was brought over here, and what people were doing about it.

The natural range of the House Sparrow extends from the British Isles eastward through Russia and Siberia to western China. Arabia, Pakistan, India, and Burma (now Myanmar) are also part of its range.

As for its original homeland, Oliver Austin in his *Birds of the World* points out that the House Sparrow is a weaver finch and that this family originated in Africa. Family characteristics are a quarrelsome, boisterous temperament; gregariousness; a liking for grain; absence of a pleasing song; polygamy; a high reproduction rate; and year-round residency. The only other member of the weaver finches in the United States is the Eurasian Tree Sparrow, which in 1870 was introduced to St. Louis, Missouri.

House Sparrows were brought to the United States from England in 1850 for the purpose of controlling the larva of a geometrid moth known as the cankerworm. The moth larvae were defoliating shade and fruit trees in parts of the East. Nicholas Pike of the Brooklyn Institute of New York, who was very active in introducing European birds, received a first consignment of eight pairs of House Sparrows in the fall of 1850. These birds were held until the spring of 1851 and then released. They did not take hold. Additional birds were brought over and in the spring of 1853 were released in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn. These birds thrived and spread throughout the neighborhood. Over the next 30 years, House Sparrows were released all over the United States and in four provinces of Canada. Even if human beings had not had a hand in this, the species would have spread anyway. Although nonmigratory, these birds had a habit of hitchhiking on railcars carrying grain.

As mentioned in connection with the cankerworm, the House Sparrow's brief period of popularity was based upon its mistaken reputation as an important destroyer of injurious insects. Although primarily a grain-eater, the House Sparrow during the nesting season feeds insects to its young. Among the insects destroyed were beetles, weevils, crickets, grasshoppers, and cankerworms. Nesting almost year-round and raising from two to three broods a year (the average brood being five), the House

Sparrows did consume a good many insect pests. But many of our native birds do a far better job in this regard.

Arthur C. Bent, as he reported in his *Life Histories*, had an uncle who at first did everything he could to welcome the newcomers to his yard in Massachusetts. He first kept them in cages, and when they began to nest in nesting boxes, they were released into the wild. Neighborhood cats that preyed upon the birds were killed. But when he discovered that the sparrows were killing native birds and taking over their nesting sites, he began devising methods to get rid of them. He had a trench dug and baited it with grain. When the sparrows came there to feed, he blasted them with a shotgun. But it was too late. The House Sparrows were multiplying rapidly and raising havoc with native birds.

In 1912, in a book on Michigan birdlife, Walter B. Barrows summed up the faults of the House Sparrow: "It usurps the nesting sites of native birds, stops up gutters and downspouts with nesting material, spreads chicken mites and hog cholera, and defaces structures with its droppings."

In some states, bounties were paid to those who brought in specified numbers of dead sparrows. But to no avail.

House Sparrow populations continued to skyrocket in this country and Canada until the coming of the automobile. As automobiles replaced horses in cities, the sparrows were deprived of their

main source of food — partly digested grain in horse droppings. Thousands of them starved to death. Second, the sparrows were frequently killed by colliding with the same motor vehicles that were indirectly depriving them of their food supply. Beginning about 1915 and continuing up until the present, the House Sparrow population in North America has steadily declined. But there are still too many as far as Purple Martins and bluebirds are concerned.

To get some idea of how abundant the House Sparrow was around the turn of the last century, look in Bent's works and other literature of that time. For example, in getting rid of House Sparrows that were nesting in ivy that covered a church in Columbus, Mississippi, 459 of their eggs were broken and 700 young were killed. The ornithologist Frank Chapman counted some 400 House Sparrows bathing in a small puddle in Central Park in New York City. It was estimated that in suitable habitat there were as many House Sparrows as all other birds combined. This was around farms and in built-up areas.

Helping turn the tables on the House Sparrow are several of our native birds that are now preying on or competing with them. The Common Grackle often runs down and kills House Sparrows whenever it gets a chance. Typically, grackles decapitate their sparrow prey.

Ever since House Finches were released on Long Island in 1941, this western species has exploded in numbers in

much the same way as the House Sparrow did less than a century earlier. The two species compete for food and nesting sites, and occupy very much the same habitats. Under such conditions, one of the competing birds will gain ground at the expense of the other. In this case, the House Finch is winning out.

At my bird feeders in the small town where I live in Maryland, House Sparrows used to come in large flocks. Since the House Finch arrived about 10 years ago, I haven't seen even one House Sparrow in my yard. Among the few places where I still see them are at shopping malls and parking lots at fast-food restaurants. Here they live on scraps and French fries.

Almost every time there is a population explosion, the species in question reaches peak numbers and then begins to decline. Factors that cause the decline include disease, predation, competition, and adverse weather. The European Starling, introduced in 1890, has reached peak numbers in the East and has begun to decline. The same is true of the House Finch, which is subject to an eye infection that has led to heavy mortality. So all one has to do is wait, and natural factors will see to it that an overly abundant bird species will reach levels where it is no longer much of a pest.

Editor's sequel: The House Sparrow's numbers in Great Britain have declined from 25 million in the early 1970s (their peak) to 13 million in 2004, prompting the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the British Trust for Ornithology, and the British government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to create a booklet posing the question "Why do sparrows need help?" You can download it from www.defra.gov.uk/wildlifecountryside/ewd/sparrows.pdf.

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WILD BIRD CENTER

SIGN UP FOR OUR FAHNESTOCK WEEKEND!

Mary Jane Russell has arranged for us to spend **June 4** and 5 in Clarence Fahnestock Memorial State Park. The park and its Taconic Outdoor Education Center (where we'll stay) are located off the Taconic Parkway in the highlands of Putnam County, about 90 minutes away. The cost of this outing is expected to be about \$60 for SSAS members and \$65 for nonmembers.

Fahnestock is part of an Audubon Important Bird Area and consists of over 11,000 acres of oak, hickory, and hemlock forest, with lakes and ten

miles of trails. We'll use Fahnestock's rowboats and will try to arrange an easy canoe trip along the shore of the Hudson River at the nearby Constitution



Hudson River at the nearby Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary.

Three meals prepared by students of the Culinary Institute of America will be provided for all registrants (lunch and dinner on Saturday, breakfast on Sunday). Most rooms have five beds, so be ready to share your sleeping space with your fellow SSAS members and friends. SSAS's first weekend there was in October 1998, which was before they added indoor plumbing to the heated/electrified cabins.

A \$10 deposit, payable to South Shore Audubon Society, will hold your reservation. Please call Mary Jane at 766-7397 now if you're interested. We must have 35 advance registrants for this trip to occur.

OUR NEWEST THANK YOUS

SSAS would like to thank Joan Silverstone and Charu Champaneri for their financial donations, and Susan Pratt for donating a fine collection of birding books.

We'd like to belatedly thank SSAS member and Tackapausha employee Wendy Albin for playing the key role in saving our birdseed sale when the seed was dumped in the squirrel-patrolled parking lot by a late-night trucker who was supposed to leave the loaded trailer there.

Also, we'd like to thank the SSAS volunteers who juggled the 300 attendees at our December 18 Children's Holiday Party at Tackapausha: Gloria Berkowitz, Alice Blaustein, Helen Buckley, Glenda Delgado, Rose Kamins, Therese Lucas, Anna Marcotrigiano, Laurie Raisher, Dolores Rogers, Tom Schmelke, Chris Schmitt, and Mike Sperling.

17TH ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY

Our 2004–05 Waterfowl Survey will continue, rain or shine, on **Saturdays, February 5**, **February 26**, and **March 26**. Volunteers are welcome. If you are interested in spending a full or half-day visiting up to 28 locations from Valley Stream to Massapequa Park, call Joe Grupp, Research Chairperson, at 481-4208.

NASSAU COUNTY PRESERVES & PARKS

Michael Sperling

As you may be aware, at the end of 2004, Nassau County's government offered to give a dozen of our parks and preserves to the Towns of Oyster Bay, Hempstead, and North Hempstead, including Cantiague Park, Carle Place Memorial Park, Hempstead Harbor Beach Park, Herricks Park, Manhasset Valley Park, Massapegua Preserve, Stillwell Woods Preserve, and Whitney Pond Park. I've recently heard that Massapequa Preserve has been withdrawn from this list.

In addition, for the second year, our county is soliciting bids from private for-profit day camp operators to have exclusive or prioritized summer-long use of portions of Eisenhower, Wantagh, Cedar Creek, Cantiague, North Woodmere, Christopher Morley, Nickerson Beach, Cow Meadow, Grant, Bay Park, Tackapausha, and Old Bethpage Restoration Village. Last summer, the Suozzi Administration quietly arranged for private camps to occupy Wantagh. Cantiague, and Christopher Morley.

 ★★ WELCOME NEW MEMBERS ★★

Wendy Murbach

One of the wonderful perks that you get from an Audubon membership is the chance to be a part of your local Audubon chapter, South Shore Audubon Society.

You are automatically a valued member of this active and friendly chapter, so please come out to the next meeting at the Freeport Library from 7:30-9:30 P.M. on the second Tuesday of the month to hear what you can do to help preserve your local environment's health and viability, to hear about local issues that you can help to solve, and to see an interesting program.

Whether you are a beginning birder or someone with a large life list, you will enjoy our weekly Sunday bird walks led by Elliott Kutner, birder extraordinaire. Check out the special events that are mentioned in this Skimmer. Attend them yourself, and bring your family and friends too.

You are warmly invited to be an active participant in this vibrant all-volunteer organization comprised of persons who, like you, care about the earth we live on, about our local environment, and about the creatures that live alongside us.

Our new members since the last Skimmer are:

Baldwin...... Mr. Andrew Clarke, Gertrude

Elarde, Agnes Fazzolare, Emily Metcalf, Lauren Popkoff, Roy Rogers, Lynne Smith

Bellmore Jane Hunte

East Meadow Mr. R. E. Bohenberger, Immanuel Gamaliel, Frances Kammerer,

Robert Zuckerbrodt

East Rockaway James R. Crockett, Robert Kronstadt, Steven Lander Farmingdale Joseph Fiore Franklin Square David B. Cullen, Gaetano Ferrara, Ellen Palmisano Garden City Mr. David Ullman

Hempstead Julie Greco, Arlene Heckstall. Jeanne M. Hensler, Karen

Landsman, Kenneth Russell

Hewlett Daniel Goldstein

Hicksville Barry & Jacqueline Adels, Carolyn

A. Cirincion, Claire Kline,

Helen Kopyta

Levittown Brian H. Hallas, Rusi P. Sethna,

Ms. Janice L. Volz

Long Beach Jean Better, Gabriella Navarro

Lynbrook Kenneth Gibbons, Louis

Mondello, Donald S. Rainis.

Michelle Weinkauf

Massapequa Claudia Frost, Mr. Gerald Kinzer. Kathleen A. Marion, Carmela M.

Maskulyak, Vickie Maul, Lance Ullger, John Ward

Massapequa Park M. Peters-Spencer, Thomas

Stewart, Sue Swenson

Merrick Emily Mann, Sheila Siegel,

Morton Singer

Oceanside Harold Fichter, Rose Kras,

Myrna Lewak

Plainview Lucille Cretella, Fran J.

Pearlmutter, The Shaffer Family,

D. Spampinato, Hans A.

Stronstad

Rockville Centre Carol A. Kelly, Alice Steiner

Seaford Allen E. Conwell, Ms. Mary

Westermann

Stewart Manor....... Nancy Mone, Jim Pratt.

J. Van Meter

Valley Stream Ms. Malka Goldhirsch, Allen C.

Khatis, Angela Sabia, Catherine

Semder, Marion Smith

Wantagh Mr. Robert P. Graff, Eleanor M.

Kohler, Bertha Saladino



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NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER Umbrella Birding

Joe Grupp

The rain was coming down mostly as a fine drizzle and occasionally as a light shower. Everything was wet, soaked, the air heavy with moisture. The temperature was on the chilly side, in the high thirties. At best it was a nasty day, even though we had the best of it because not far north and west of the city it was a freezing rain and wet snow. I wanted to collect some data related to the SSAS Waterfowl Survey, prior to a complete survey that would take place in a couple of days, and the rain just was not cooperating. My intent was to do a survey of species and their numbers in the waterfowl habitat at the south end of Hempstead Lake State Park. That habitat includes the swamp, the lake south of the sailboat pond, the sailboat pond, and the south end of Hempstead Lake.

Curse the weather and full speed ahead — I wanted that data!!! (It was not critical to collect it on that given day, but I would have liked to have collected it anyway.) Standing by the car in the parking field at the park, dressed in warm clothing, good rain gear, and waterproof warm boots, with a light rain falling, I reached for that ever-practical technological innovation, my large golf umbrella that, by the way, has never seen a golf course. Birding with an umbrella — I say it with a smile. I don't recommend it, but I know it works.

I doubt that anyone can simply go birding using an umbrella without practicing the technique. As a matter of fact, it would not surprise me if no one would want to go birding in the rain with an umbrella. The technique itself is not easy to master unless one is fortunate to have someone along to hold the umbrella, in which case it becomes pretty easy. It is also not easy to find that someone who wants to go out in the rain and hold the umbrella for you while you look at birds.

Perhaps having a bit of air where some of my brain cells should exist, I have developed and mastered the technique. With a grin from ear to ear, the technique is now described. Technically, I discovered that my vertical dimensions, the vertical position of the pocket on my rain jacket,

and the length of the umbrella handle must be such that the heel of the handle of the umbrella can fit into the waist pocket of the worn jacket so the edge of the umbrella itself is just above eye level. Unfortunately, the makers of rain jackets and umbrellas pay no attention to those details and I don't dare suggest that they do, for fear of being laughed at beyond reason. Meeting the technicalities described allows the umbrella to be supported by the pocket and it can be steadied with just one hand. With some practice, that hand can simultaneously be used in conjunction with the other hand in the normal method of holding the binoculars. CRAZEEEEEEY!!!! Disclaimer: Trying this technique can result in injury, especially in a

wind of any kind! It may also cause people to wonder about your sanity.

It may be that I've been a closet umbrella birder, because I know that if I am going somewhere to umbrella bird, the weather conditions are such that the saner members of society have chosen not to go out and no one else will be there to see that crazy umbrella guy. Hey! Wait a minute, is not my umbrella called a golf umbrella and made for people who just may play golf in the rain? Perhaps umbrella birding is not so crazy after all. Only you, the reader, can be the judge.

My walk began with only a few Mallards found in the area of the swamp. The woodlands and fields were very quiet. Then all of a sudden, as I neared the southernmost lake, I was surrounded by motion and the calls of birds. A Red-bellied Woodpecker landed low on the dark trunk of a scraggly wild black cherry tree. As I lifted the binoculars, the white flash from the outer tail feathers of a Dark-eyed Junco caught my eye as it settled into the dried leaves to feed. There was movement at all levels around me and I began to notice more birds. White-throated Sparrows were found near the junco and an American Robin flew onto the limb of a tree. I heard a nearby "see-see-see" call and a Golden-crowned Kinglet flew pretty close, landing on the branch of a nearby shrub and then on another and another branch, and it was followed by two more. Whitebreasted Nuthatches called and I found two working some pretty thick branches. A Brown Creeper swooped low onto a trunk and began to work its way up, and nearby a second Creeper worked up another tree. I picked out other species one at a time and added Tufted Titmouse, Blackcapped Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, and Hairy Woodpecker to the day's list. All seemed to be part of a very loose flock and it was my luck to be somewhere in the middle of it, surrounded by the birds and by their motion and sounds.

I didn't do as well with the waterfowl numbers that I went to record. All four locations observed turned up only Mallards, Canada Geese, American Black Ducks, and Hooded Mergansers, and they totaled less than 100 birds. However, the loose flock of songbirds that surrounded me for a time provided what I consider to be a magic moment in the outdoors and it was even enhanced by the sound of the drops of rain that hit the umbrella. Crazy or not, umbrella birding worked that day.

SSAS Mission Statement

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

NY AUDUBON LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Editor's note: Our state office in Albany provided the following "2004 End of Session Update" on some federal and state legislative priorities. Those priorities are based on the Conservation Policy Resolutions approved by New York's Audubon chapters each spring, which you can download from http://ny.audubon.org/resolutions/2004/book_2004.pdf. For space reasons and to help keep you awake, I've omitted the article's federal priorities (the state priorities are more interesting to read about), which are reauthorizing the Long Island Sound Restoration Act, approving the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act, and adequate funding for the Forest Legacy Program and the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Clean Water Protection/Flooding Prevention Act

Regardless of size, freshwater wetlands contain a diverse range of plant and animal species, including some species that are exceptionally rare. These important communities provide essential habitats for many species of migratory waterfowl; for numerous threatened, endangered, or

special-concern species, such as the Bald Eagle and Osprey; and for countless other amphibian, avian, fish, and wildlife species to nest, breed, and feed. They also provide

countless other environmental benefits, from flood protection and storm-water runoff control, to filtering pollutants, pesticides, and sediments from the water. These benefits illustrate the need to protect the state's freshwater wetlands to the greatest extent possible.

Currently, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has the authority to regulate wetlands 12.4 acres or greater that are mapped, while the federal government (EPA and Army Corps) has authority over the rest. However, a 2001 Supreme Court ruling in Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. United States Army Corps of Engineers held that the federal government did not have the authority to regulate "isolated" wetlands under the Clean Water Act. "Isolated wetlands" are wetlands that are not connected by navigable surface water to waters of the U.S. Since that time, the federal government has backed away from protecting these extremely important areas. New York State needs to step in and ensure these vitally important areas are protected.

The Clean Water Protection/Flooding Prevention Act (A.7905-a/S.4480-a), sponsored by Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli and Senator Carl Marcellino, decreases the size threshold for DEC regulation of freshwater wetlands to 1 acre or larger, thus increasing the state's ability to protect these ecosystems. This legislation also greatly increases the state's ability to properly manage these habitats for the benefit of all New York's citizens, birds, and wildlife, by removing the mapping requirements for regulation. Without this increased level of protection, the health of all New York's water bodies is put at risk.

This legislation passed the Assembly with strong bipartisan support in 2004, but was held up in the Senate's rules committee.

Smart Growth Infrastructure Policy Act

Current local planning and zoning actions, and state development decisions, have expanded the infrastructure base of the state, requiring new development of roads, sewer systems, utilities, and other public facilities on green spaces instead of using structures that have already been built. This type of sprawl has resulted in great costs to the taxpayers and great costs to the environment of New York State. The loss of open space and the degradation of habitats that occurs from poorly planned development is one of the leading threats to many species of birds and other wildlife in New York. Several Audubon New York Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are also threatened by development proposals.

The Smart Growth Public Infrastructure Policy Act (A.8651-a, S.6255-a), sponsored by Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli and Senator Kenneth LaValle, helps to correct the pattern of development that has required expensive and expansive infrastructure projects, resulting in the underutilization and degradation of existing infrastructure. This important measure requires state agencies (like the Departments of Environmental Conservation, Transportation, Health, and others) to make smart development decisions and investments by requiring priority for funding new development projects to be given to those that utilize areas of existing infrastructure and those that are consistent with local governments' plans for development, instead of funding projects that destroy our important open spaces and farmland.

This legislation passed the Assembly, but stalled in the Senate's finance committee.

Community Preservation Act

While the population of New York State has not increased significantly over the past 30 years and in some areas has actually decreased, the land area covered by development has increased. This trend was recently highlighted in a Brookings Institute/Cornell University study, "Sprawl Without Growth: the Upstate Paradox." They found, in looking at upstate growth patterns for the years 1982 through 1997, that the amount of urbanized land increased 30 percent, while the population grew just 2.6 percent. They also observed this in central New York, where the population actually declined; over 100,000 new acres were developed. Many communities are exploring the different options available for conserving and protecting open space, but need increased resources to achieve their goals.

The Community Preservation Act (A.10053-A, S.6949-A), sponsored by Assemblyman Thomas DiNapoli and Senator Carl Marcellino, would authorize towns in New York State to adopt a transfer tax on certain real property transactions of up to 2% for the purpose of establishing a

community preservation fund to use for land conservation. A referendum would be required for participation. In effect, the communities would be authorized to spend this money to provide parkland; safeguard drinking water; protect farmland, habitat, and scenic views; and for other conservation activities.

This program is modeled after the successful program established by five eastern towns on Long Island, which has provided these communities with much-needed funds for land conservation initiatives. The funds could be used to match existing federal or state programs.

This bill is currently in the Assembly codes committee and is awaiting a vote by the Senate. [Editor's note: As far as I can determine, it wasn't approved.]

Expanding the Bottle Deposit Law

Currently, New York's Returnable Container Act, or Bottle Bill, requires a 5-cent deposit on all soda, beer, and wine cooler containers sold in New York State, but does not cover noncarbonated beverage containers, like for water, juice, iced tea, or sport drinks. The original Bottle Bill was created to reduce litter and support recycling of beverage containers, and has made a tremendous impact

in reducing this waste. However, noncarbonated

beverage containers are now littering parks, beaches, and other important bird habitats across the state.

A.3922-a/S.1696-a or the "Bigger, Better Bottle Bill," sponsored by Assemblyman DiNapoli and Senator LaValle, seeks to expand the bottle deposit law to include noncarbonated beverages. This proposal will also take back the "unclaimed" nickel deposits for the bottles that are not redeemed, and put that money into the state's Environmental Protection Fund to support recycling and other critically important environmental funding projects. Dedicating these unclaimed nickels to environmental funding projects makes good fiscal sense for New York as it faces a looming budget deficit.

This bill is currently in the Assembly's codes committee and in the Senate's environmental conservation committee. [Editor's note: This wasn't approved either.]

Environmental Protection Fund

As part of the recently passed budget, the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) was fully funded at \$125 million for fiscal year 2004/2005. Created in 1993, the Environmental Protection Fund is a legally dedicated funding source for pressing environmental projects that safeguard the environment, protect public health, and preserve New York's quality of life. Each year, this fund is to receive \$125 million for a host of critically important environmental projects, including clean water and land acquisition projects, farmland protection initiatives, county recycling programs, breast cancer research, and parks and historic preservation improvements and acquisition. Thanks to the efforts of your legislators, funding for traditional EPF programs was not cut.

BACKYARD BIRD COUNTS NEEDED

As most of you know, SSAS is compiling data on the birds seen in our area. Forms have appeared in previous *Skimmers* and are available at meetings, walks, our Web site, and from Joe Grupp or Michael Sperling. Please send dates, times, species, and numbers to Joe (660 Edgemere Ave, Uniondale, NY 11553; Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.com).

Great Backyard Bird Count. On the weekend of **February 18–21**, if you have Web access, National Audubon urges you to count birds for at least 15 minutes wherever you are in North America and add your data to www.birdsource.org. Last year's data is there.

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Certified Public Accountant

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JAMAICA BAY WILDLIFE REFUGE: SNOWBIRDS WALK (Sun., Feb. 20). Meet at the visitor center parking lot at 11 A.M. for a hike around the refuge to look for wintering songbirds, hawks & owls. Leader: Don Riepe. Free.

NEW YORK AQUARIUM (Sat., March 19, 10 A.M—12:30 P.M.). Join veteran marine educator Bob Cummings for a special 2-1/2 hour "Behind-the-Scenes" tour of this wonderful aquarium in Coney Island. See beluga whales, sea otters, walrus, penguins, sharks, and, of course, "Squirt the Wonder Clam." Cost: \$20 (kids \$10). Call Don. Reserve early.

GALAPAGOS ISLANDS — AGAIN! (March 25 to April 4). Call Mickey Cohen for info: (718) 471-2166.

ASSATEAGUE SPRING WEEKEND (May 19–22). Hike trails, beaches, and woods at Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge and Assateague National Seashore. See eagles, river otter, dolphin, Sika deer, brown-headed nuthatch, and many other species of songbirds and shorebirds. Cost: \$325 includes 3 nights at Refuge Inn (double occ.), boat tour of marshes, guided hikes, evening slide lectures, a star watch, and a Saturday night seafood buffet. Leaders: Mickey Cohen, Don Riepe. Call Don.

For information and free field trip brochure, call/write Don Riepe, (718) 318-9344, donriepe@aol.com, 28 West 9th Road, Broad Channel, NY 11693; www.alsnyc.org.

South Shore Audubon Society P.O. Box 31 Freeport, NY 11520-0031

A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Americans Committed to Conservation

FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED



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BECOME A MEMBER OF SSAS Think Globally, but Join Locally!

Option 1. You can join SSAS for a year by sending \$15 payable to **South Shore Audubon Society** using the form below. Our address is P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

Option 2. To join NAS and your all-volunteer local chapter, you can help SSAS survive NAS's major dues-share cutbacks by joining Audubon through us for the same price that it costs if you join through NAS (we get \$0 unless you join through us). Mail the form below and your check payable to **National Audubon Society** to SSAS at the address above. The special rate for the first year is \$20 per household; \$15 for students and seniors.

Renewing? Please send NAS renewals directly to NAS (we now get \$0 for all NAS renewals).

Donations to SSAS are always welcome!

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