

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION AT TACKAPAUSHA

Therese Lucas

This year, we are celebrating the wonders of our earth and its preservation at Tackapausha Museum and Preserve on **Saturday, April 23** from 1 to 3 P.M. SSAS will have a display table promoting membership. A cleanup and two guided nature walks are scheduled. Lending a helping hand at the cleanup would be an ideal activity, as Tackapausha was adopted by SSAS via the Adopt-a-Park program. Hope to see you there!



Tackapausha's entrance is on Washington Avenue in Seaford, about 1/2 mile south from Sunrise Highway and just north from Merrick Road.

The usual museum admission fees will apply; \$2 for adults and \$1 for children (ages 4 to 14; free for younger children accompanied by an adult).

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EVENTS AT THE HEMPSTEAD PLAINS

FRIDAY LUNCH WALKS

Enjoy early blooming wildflowers on the prairie. See the Bird's-foot Violet, Nassau County's official flower. Learn about our efforts to save this rare habitat. Join Friends of Hempstead Plains at our Friday Lunch Walks from 12:00 to 2:00 PM (weather permitting) on **April 15, May 6 & 20, June 3 & 17, and July 8**. Bring your cameras, binoculars, and sneakers.

WEEKEND VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY WORKDAYS

Help restore the native prairie at Nassau Community College. Remove invasive species. Join Friends of Hempstead Plains for our Weekend Workdays from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM on **April 16, May 7 & 22, and June 5 & 18**. Bring gloves, rakes, and clippers. Free; for more information, contact the Friends (see below).

SPRING POETRY WORKSHOP
(for Seasoned and Budding Poets)

Saturday, May 14, 2005 at the Hempstead Plains with Long Island nature poet Maxwell Wheat and introducing nature poet Edgar Carlson

- 9:30 Welcome and Introductions
- 9:45 Presentation: Hempstead Plains Natural History
- 10:00 Walks Led by Naturalists
- 11:15 Human History of the Hempstead Plains
- 11:30 Writing Session
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Continue Writing Session and Sharing
- 2:00 Conclusions & Announcement About Next Habitat Poetry Workshop



Free for members, \$10 for non-members; become a member for \$25. Registration is necessary; call 516-572-7570 or e-mail info@friendsofhp.org to register.

VOLUNTEER ANIMAL REHABILITATOR NEEDS HELPERS!

Gayle Wertz, the former *Skimmer* editor who lives in Massapequa and has spent decades rescuing wildlife, needs help in the rescue and transportation of trapped and/or injured waterfowl and other wildlife. Anyone who would like to volunteer to help can call her at 798-4215.

NOMINATIONS FOR 2005-2006 SSAS BOARD

At South Shore Audubon Society's general meeting on May 10, officers and directors will be elected for our next fiscal year. All members attending that meeting may nominate candidates from the floor and vote. The SSAS nominating committee (chaired by Wendy Murbach and including Betty Borowsky and Dolores Grupp) will provide a list of recommended candidates in next month's *Skimmer*.

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NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER Eagles at Reelfoot Lake, Part II

Joe Grupp

Editor's note: Part I of this article was in the March issue of the *Skimmer*, which will be available online as a PDF file at ssaadubon.org in early April.

We met in the morning at the entrance of the inn, at Reelfoot Lake State Park in Tennessee, and boarded a bus with about thirty others who were taking the morning State Park Eagle Tour. We got off the bus at one point on the tour for a single mature Bald Eagle perched in a tree relatively close to the road. The view of the bird was excellent through both binoculars and scope. The bird's white head and tail were pure and unspoiled, the large yellow bill appeared fearsome, and the yellow eyes looked at us as we looked at it. It blinked a few times, then looked away and then back again.

At another point, three eagles spooked a very large flock of Snow Geese (pictured) that rose in a confusing mass, circled in what appeared to be a random manner, gained altitude, and eventually formed lines and Vs in the sky as it dispersed to other locations. It was easy to see how difficult it might be for a predator to pick a single bird out of such a milling mass of geese.



Two of the three eagles drifted off to our side of the rising goose flock. Fairly close together, they circled, wings outstretched, catching the rising air of a thermal, the air doing all the work against gravity. They drifted farther and farther apart until they were about opposite each other, at which point they went into a shallow dive approaching one another. At the last moment, they slowed their dive and swooped slightly upward into a position where body and talons faced each other. They extended their talons as they stalled in the air, then grasped a talon of each other and tumbled together for a short distance. Releasing talons, they spread their wings again, catching the rising air, and repeated the process again and again. I lost track of the number of times it occurred, but it was probably five to eight. Chance alone allowed us to witness their prenuptial performance.

The trip ended around noon and we headed for the other side of the lake to find the Visitors' Center (VC) of the Reelfoot Lake National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), as we had scheduled an early morning eagle tour with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) the next day. Upon arriving, we found large fields spreading out into the refuge, bordered by strips of woodland that hid the main portion of the lake. Off to one side of the VC, an approximately mile-long trail ended at a small pond bordered by woods. Part of the trail emphasized plantings to attract birds. Birding the trail, we got an excellent view of a Pileated Woodpecker chopping away on a low stump as it foraged for food. Add that observation to two pairs of Purple Finches at the VC's feeder, along with a dozen or so other birds that we listed,

and we felt that we had a pretty good day even as we had only a few hours of light left before the short winter's day was over. We spent those hours exploring other areas around the lake.

The next morning, we were pleased to find that we were the only two people signed up for the early morning USFWS eagle tour, as it was a work and school day. Our tour took us through the gates and into the refuge, which was closed to the public to serve as a safe place for the wintering waterfowl, as hunting is a popular activity in the surrounding areas. Frequently, the report of gunfire near and far could be heard, resulting in a lot of pressure on the birds when they were not on refuge lands.

We saw a good number of eagles on the refuge. None were really dramatic observations; most were pretty good and we found them in a pristine environment because we and the USFWS naturalist were the only ones on the refuge. The best was yet to come, however, as we left and the naturalist took us to other areas outside of the refuge, some of which we had also visited the previous day. Around the corner at one location was a lone tree, a fair distance away across a grassy, shrubby wetland. The naturalist pulled the van to a good vantage point, and we got out and started counting the eagles that were in that tree... 6, 7, 8, 9, another flew in — 10, then another — 11. A 12th glided in, almost landed in the tree, then dropped to the ground out of sight. The naturalist assumed that a carcass was there and the eagles had gathered to feed. Eleven eagles concentrated in one tree is one of nature's better observations.

Our tour ended, as the previous day's did, near noon, giving us the afternoon to explore on our own — which we did, finding, among other birds, an Eastern Bluebird and getting an excellent view of a Loggerhead Shrike, adding them to our bird list. As the day began to ebb, we swung by the tree that held the eleven eagles earlier and found only two. We viewed them through the scope as they sat fairly close together on separate branches, one above the other. We realized they must be a pair, as one was much larger than the other and the females are known to be much larger than the males.

After we took a 20 minute walk on the levy that separates the bottomlands from the Mississippi River, we raced the then-setting sun and returned to the NWR to observe the sunset at an observation platform overlooking Reelfoot Lake. Turning into the road to the platform, we stopped to observe a Barred Owl in a low, small roadside tree, no binoculars needed. Driving on, we noticed a small herd of deer walking through the woods. The sun was already below the horizon when we reached the platform, but the stream of clouds running in a line across the lake was only beginning to change color. Over time, their white became yellow, then blended into red, then dull blue, and the colors reflected from the calm lake's surface as a beaver swam, slapped its tail on the water, and dove, then did it a few more times. Just as the color faded

SSAS BACKYARD BIRD SURVEY

The Research Committee is conducting a study to document the bird species found in the SSAS geographical area and to make some estimates as to their numbers. We request input from anyone that feeds and/or observes birds in their yard or neighborhood. If you would like to participate in this program, we would greatly appreciate it.

To participate, simply record the birds that you see in your yard, neighborhood, or at your feeder; the date, time, and the number or approximate number of each species; and fill in the table provided below. If you have more recordings than lines in the table, please attach an additional piece of paper to the table and submit the additional recordings in the same manner. At the end of each month, please mail or e-mail your record to me at the appropriate address listed below, or hand it to me at our monthly meeting. Additional survey sheets are available at SSAS events.

Please do not hesitate to submit your observations, even if you have been able to make only very few. **WE NEED YOUR INPUT!**

Dates: From _____ to _____

Date	Time	Species	No.	Date	Time	Species	No.

Submitted by: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone number: _____
 Please send to: Mr. J. Grupp, Research Chairperson
 660 Edgemere Ave., Uniondale NY 11553
 or
 E-mail: Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.com

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

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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!



Yes, I'd like to join: SSAS only National Audubon too

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