OUTH HORE KIMMER

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1 --- SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2006

NEXT MEETING

Enid Klein

DATE: Tuesday, September 12, 2006

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library

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

SPEAKER: Fred Mushacke

TOPIC: Loss of Tidal Wellands on Long Island

After our summer break, SSAS's monthly meetings resume with a program by marine biologist Fred Mushacke, who is the Supervisor of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's Tidal Wetlands Inventory and GIS (Geographic Information System) Unit. Fred informs us that he has created "an extensive historic aerial photo library of the metropolitan area to explore historic trends of tidal wetlands." He will discuss the history of tidal wetlands, their values, trends of loss, potential causes of loss, and strategies to reverse the trend. Join us!

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

Parking Lots. 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. Also, SSAS has a verbal pledge from neighboring Citibank that cars will no longer be towed from their lot during our meetings, but we can't guarantee this.

during our meetings, but we can again the second of the se

SSAS BIRDSEED SALE COMING!

Our annual birdseed sale is scheduled for **Sunday**, **November 5**; please check next month's *Skimmer* for the order form.



Elliott Kutner

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains. Any questions? Call Elliott at 486-7667. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaudubon.org.

Aug. 27	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Sep. 3	Labor Day Weekend — No Walk
Sep. 10	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Sep. 17	Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve
Sep. 24	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Oct. 1	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Oct. 8	Marine Nature Study Area (Oceanside)
Oct. 15	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Oct. 22	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Oct. 29	Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve

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.

VOLUNTEER TODAY TO BE A CHAPERONE

Last October's *Skimmer* included an article by Betty Borowsky about our annual scholarship program that allows disadvantaged youngsters to spend four days at Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary's summer camp.

A different school district is chosen by Betty's committee each year. As you're reading this, we're about to send (or have already sent) up to 16 elementary school children on a bus from Hicksville High School to Oyster Bay from Monday, August 28 through Thursday, August 31. It's possible that we'll need additional chaperones aboard the bus, which will be leaving Hicksville at about 8:30. If

you're interested in volunteering for a day or more, please call Michael Sperling at 221-3921 or send e-mail to mssperling@optonline.net.

★★ 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 Ms. Gail Bernstein, Louise Donovan, Mr. Paul Bellmore Ms. Marlene Cohn, Danny DeMarco, George Koelling, Christine Senetto, Nancy Tapia, Nicholas Vaream Bethpage Elaine Krawchuk, Regina Stitt, Rosemary Styne East Meadow..... Joe Mc Donnell Elmont Mr. Charles Rowan Farmingdale Friend G. Calabro, Kenneth Ehrlich, Steven P. Macchia, Richard W. Merzbacher, Charles Thomas Floral Park Ann Giardiello Franklin Square Mr. & Mrs. F. Bruno, Elaine Creaco, Ms. Sylvia Jacobowitz, Mary A. Leahy Freeport Millicent La Marca, Janet Wall, Virginia L. White Garden City Margaret Taggart Hewlett Kelly Carmen

Hicksville Barbara Bruckner, R. L. Dagna, Juliette F. Fox,

Island Park A. D'Amato, Catherine M. Desmond

Levittown Phyllis Fariello, Jessica Whitebook

Inwood Edward J. Entwistle

Lido Beach..... Michael Greenseid

Lawrence Thomas Adler

Regina Kane, Janet Muller, Rob Walker

Long Beach	Jory & Oleck Affonso, Harry & Patricia Brissen, Elizabeth M. Moseman, John Nash, Sheila Pincus
Lynbrook	Susan Cohen, Anthony Generosa, Mavis Swanson
Malverne 1	E. J. Christiansen, Valerie Zaccari
	K. Colquholn, Susan Gerardi, A. Robert Graff, Irving Hamberger, Mrs. Lauren Osnato, Ruth Owsinski, Mark & Jane Rabin, Rosemary Schroeder, Friends of John Venditto
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Oceanside	Pat & Joe Book, Rob Brandenburg, Mrs. S. Ganulin, Anita Goldbort, Harry Oster, Jeff Roth
Old Bethpage 1	Linda Cummins
Plainview 1	Lucille Cretella, Dershowitz Family, Patricia Reuss
Rockville Centre (Cressie G. Carlyle, Aileen Evans, Eugene Friedman, Colette Hinton, Edward Koerber, Deborah F. Martin
Seaford	Cathleen Dey, Christine Edzards, Charles Lyons, Peter & Joan Schmidt, Lucille Sprague, Anthony Testa
Stewart Manor l	Ms. Selma Cohen, Duncan Fraser, John J. O'Neill, Nabil Sourour, Fahimeh Thomas
Uniondale l	Karen Varns
Valley Stream 1	Helen M. Badinelli, Claudia S. Cockerill, Tony Cused, Dorothy Malfa, Mrs. Constance Ord
Wantagh I	Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Miller, Christy Shadoff
West Hempstead	Wayne B. Kearns



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SETTING UP A BIRDBATH

Editor's note: This article, by Benjamin P. Burtt, appeared in the July/August 1995 issue of Bird Watcher's Digest.

Birds that might otherwise never enter your yard will be attracted to the sound of dripping water.

One of the best ways to attract birds in the summer is to provide a supply of water.

Whether birds use a birdbath will depend somewhat on how it is constructed and where it is placed.

The bath should be shallow at the edges — not more than 1/2 inch deep and sloped gradually to the center to a maximum depth of about two inches. To accommodate more than one bird at a time, the diameter should be at least two feet.

Whether the birdbath is on a pedestal or on the ground, it should be roughly 10 to 12 feet from the shelter of nearby shrubbery. Safety is the main consideration. Birds with wet feathers fly poorly and can be caught easily by cats. Consequently, the open location gives the birds a better chance to spot an approaching predator.

However, the bath should not be too far from the bushes, or the birds will be timid about using it. They seem to prefer to approach through the shrubs and then fly to the bath when the coast is clear. After bathing, they need a nearby spot to preen and dry off. Hence, the distance of 10 to 12 feet works best.

The actual design of the bath is immaterial if it meets the above specifications. The pedestal type sold commercially is quite good. A similar bath could be made by mounting a trash can lid on a piece of tile pipe. A rock suspended from the handle and hanging down inside the pipe holds the lid in place. These look quite nice once they have been painted to disguise the materials.

Water is more obvious to the birds if the inside of the bath is a dark color. Probably the only disadvantage of the commercial concrete models is their nearly white color. Tests have shown water in a dark container is used more often. Reflections from the water are much more noticeable in this type of bath. If the bird does not see the water, it will not use it.

A homemade bath can be constructed from concrete by digging a shallow hole in the ground and using the hole for a mold. Follow the specifications for the size given above. Be sure the cement is at least 1-1/2 inches thick.

If you do not wish to use concrete, the hole can be lined with a piece of thin plastic and weighed down with stones or dirt along the edges. The water presses the plastic against the dirt beneath it. This, together with the wrinkles in the plastic, gives a pretty good footing for the bathers.

Motion and Noise Help. Birds are strongly attracted by the motion and noise of dripping water. Let water fall into the bath at about one drop per second, and you will attract flycatchers, warblers, thrushes, and many birds that otherwise will not come to a bath or to a feeder. Several arrangements are possible. The simplest is a plastic bucket with a tiny hole. The container is suspended about two feet above the pool.

Or you can arrange a garden hose to slowly drip water into the bath or pool. There is now on the market a simple unit that can be set to do this quite conveniently. It is equipped with a small petcock on the side, to which a 50-foot length of miniature hose (1/4-inch plastic tubing) is fastened. The end of the miniature hose is fastened above the birdbath, or it can be connected to a piece of copper tubing that is mounted over the water. Also available is a little crockery pedestal that sits in the birdbath and contains the copper tubing going up, over, and down, dripping water into the bath.

With this arrangement, the regular faucet on the outside of the house is turned on. The little petcock is opened just a bit to allow water to drip from the end of tubing into the birdbath. The main valve on the special faucet is turned off unless you wish to connect the garden hose. Thus, the faucet is available for all its customary uses.

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.



JAMAICA BAY SUNSET CRUISES (Saturdays, Sept. 9th and Oct. 7th). Meet 4P.M. at Pier 6 in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn for a 3-hour narrated eco-tour of the backwater marshes of the bay aboard the 96' boat "Dorothy B VIII." See herons, ibis, oystercatchers, shorebirds, raptors, and waterfowl as they migrate through this 9,000 acre preserve. Cost: \$35 includes guides, wine & cheese, snacks. Leaders: Mickey Cohen, Don Riepe. Call or e-mail Don to reserve.

INTERNATIONAL BEACH CLEANUP DAY (Sat., Sept. 16th). Help us bring attention to marine debris. See *Skimmer* p. 5. CHINCOTEAGUE/ASSATEAGUE WEEKEND (Oct. 12–15). For more info call Don. E-mail: pat@littoralsociety.org.

NEW YORK AQUARIUM (Saturday, Nov. 4th). Meet 10 A.M. at aquarium entrance for 2-1/2 hour "Behind-the-Scenes" tour. Cost: \$25 (kids \$15). Call Don.

COSTA RICA (Jan. 27–Feb. 4, 2007). Visit three of the best wildlife areas and see resplendent quetzal, scarlet macaw, toucans, trogons, blue morpho butterflies, and many other species of wildlife. Cost: \$2,400 (approx.) includes airfare, lodging, bus/driver, local guides, 2 river cruises, aerial walkways, park fees, most meals.

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

BATHING BIRDS

Editor's note: The following article, by David M. Bird, is reprinted from the July/August 1996 issue of Bird Watcher's Digest. The clip art on pp. 3-5 is mine.

Watching an American robin wade breast-deep into a standing pool of water on a hot summer's day and then vigorously douse itself over and over is almost as refreshing to me as hopping into a clear mountain lake after a long, arduous hike. I said, almost.

Millions, perhaps billions, of dollars are spent each year in North America on several varieties of birdseed to attract birds to the yard, but less attention is paid to the provision of that other life-giving commodity necessary to a bird's well-being — water. To my mind, it is much more fun to watch a bird bathe itself than to watch it sit on a feeder and stuff its face.

In addition to food, vitamins, and minerals, water is essential to a bird's health. The daily needs of a given bird species depend on a wide range of environmental and physiological variables. To begin with, the smaller a bird is, the more water is lost daily through evaporation from the respiratory system and the skin. For example, a house wren weighing about 1/2 ounce can lose daily 37 percent of its body weight in water in this manner, while the larger bobwhite only loses 4 percent! Age can also be a factor. One-week-old ducklings drink more than three times as much water as 16-day-old ones. In some species, like California quail (pictured), males can withstand water loss

much better than females. Obviously, the temperature and humidity of the surrounding air play a role. A rise in air temperature from 30 to 40 degrees Centigrade

(86 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit) can increase water consumption by threefold. Higher air humidity means less water lost through respiration. Finally, birds can promote water conservation simply by reducing their physical activity.

Not all of a bird's daily water requirements are necessarily met by drinking. Some birds can supply up to 80 percent of their needs from metabolic water generated as a byproduct of chemical processes in their body. For many birds, such as raptors, the body fluids of their prey provide their second most important source of water. Similarly, insectivorous birds acquire much of their water from the juices of their insect prey. Swallows are an exception, though, often dipping down to drink surface water, because they lose water rapidly owing to the high metabolic cost of sustained flight. Seed-eaters, of course, have the greatest requirement for free water, and they actively seek it out from streams, ponds, water holes, dew, raindrops, puddles, and even snow.

Birds can fall into two categories of drinkers: gulpers and slurpers. The most common method used by land birds is to immerse the beak in water, tip the head up, and allow the water to trickle into the throat, where it is swallowed. Pigeons and doves, in equine style, just hold their beaks in the water and suck it up through pumping motions in the throat. Pelicans do neither, simply opening their huge beaks during a rainfall. Water intake may also possibly be accomplished through wetting food before eating it. A number of shorebird species engage in this practice, but whether it is done to facilitate swallowing the food or simply to clean sand from it is not certain.

Besides using it to cool themselves off on a hot day, birds engage in water bathing (there are other kinds of bathing, e.g., sun, dust) to facilitate the waterproofing of the feathers through oiling and preening, and secondarily to clean the plumage. Bathing is almost always followed by preening and oiling. Despite its importance, the actual behavior of bathing by birds has not been well studied.

Contrary to what some might think, birds are not covered in feathers from head to legs. The feathers actually grow in tracts known as pterylae that generally cover only 30 percent of the body, at least for land birds. The spaces in between are referred to as apteria. Thus, when birds bathe, they open and close certain feather tracts to expose the bare parts to the water. The trapped water is forced into the apteria and then squeezed through the pterylae to rinse and bathe the base of the feathers. This activity generally results in a thorough soaking and a waterlogged bird, and so it must be performed under sufficiently safe conditions to allow the bird enough time to groom itself. In most baths, though, the idea is not to soak the plumage, but instead to evenly dampen it to help with the oiling and preening procedures.

Just about all songbirds (jays, titmice, blackbirds, finches, thrushes, warblers, sparrows, woodpeckers, etc.) and most large land birds (eagles, hawks, crows, owls, etc.), with the exception of some gallinaceous species that apparently never bathe, engage in the practice of "stand-in" bathing. This generally consists of wading into a body of water to a depth suitable to the bird's needs, anywhere from one to three inches. Like my 13-year-old daughter, the smaller songbirds do not waste a lot of time bathing, but they are constantly active. A typical "stand-in" bath for a robin might consist of repeatedly dipping the head and breast into the water, vigorously shaking the body from side to side, and flicking the wings upward and forward. What separates the "stand-in" bath from the "stand-out" version (sometimes called "splash-bathing") is the fact that the latter version does not actually call for the bather to step into the water, but instead to stay on shore. The "stand-in" bather eventually wallows in the water, the head raised and the rump submerged with the tail fanned out. The wings are used one at a time to flip water across the back.

In contrast, raptors and pigeons are more like my 21year-old son, who cannot easily be coaxed out of a hot shower. These birds often just lie there in the water, partly submerged and motionless in between bouts of violent splashing. Interestingly, there is a hybrid form of the two aforementioned methods of bathing, but so far it has only been documented in babblers found in places like India and the Middle East.

Bathing is perhaps more exciting for swifts and swallows. Their short, weak legs and narrow, pointed wings preclude any form of "stand" bathing, so they simply dive into water during flight. They submerge just long and deep enough to create a spray of water that is scooped over the back. A raised tail slows their velocity and catches the spray of water, while the vibrating feathers help break it up into tiny bubbles.

The arboreal flycatchers and kingfishers (pictured) perform a variation on this theme by diving from a favorite perch into water anywhere from 5 to 50 feet below. After a quick dousing, they return to their perch and vibrate their wet feathers.

Just as for humans entering the

water at the beach, for birds there are

numerous variations on getting wet. For instance, vireos and buntings sometimes perform a combination of both "stand" and "dive" bathing. After standing for a few seconds beside a shallow stream, or by a puddle in the case of buntings, vireos perform a short dip and roll, and then return to a perch to vibrate the feathers. A further modification has been observed in the more lively, active birds, like yellowthroats, waterthrushes, wrens, and Carolina chickadees. They quickly dive, dart, or leap into the water, roll around and flick their wings, and then head off briefly to a bank or branch to dry out.

There are still other ways for birds to bathe. Parrots, woodpeckers, nuthatches, and larks love a good soaking from drizzling rain. They adopt special postures, similar to those used in sun-bathing, to make the most of it. Parrots in zoos sometimes hang upside down during rainfall. I recall one summer watching my captive kestrels respond to a garden hose peppered with holes so as to produce a fine spray and strung over the roof of their breeding cages. They ran excitedly back and forth along their perches with wings outspread, chirping like children playing in the rain.

Sometimes birds actually lie down in the rain. In England, during a sudden downpour, a flock of feral pigeons lay on the grass on one side while raising one wing vertically. Larks often bathe in the rain by lying down with both their wings outstretched. I have watched robins on many occasions hop across a lawn under the spray of a water sprinkler. And hummingbirds are well-known for flying through the moving fine spray or mist of a sprinkler or garden hose.

If neither stream, rain, garden hose, or sprinkler is handy, some birds, like the hornbills and budgerigars of the Old World, commonly resort to seeking out and rubbing against vegetation wetted by rain or dew. A number of North American species, such as merlins, rufouscrowned sparrows, and dark-eyed juncos, have also been

observed to "leaf-bathe" or flutter about the wet surfaces. Another variation is "dew-bathing." Flycatchers and Kirtland's warblers bathe in dew or condensed fog on the surface of leaves or grass.

Sometimes the inclination to bathe comes from a situation that presents itself to a bird in a playful mood. It could be bubbling or eddying water in a clear stream with a convenient branch located above from which to dive. On other occasions, a bird may be forced to utilize bathing methods that are not especially well-suited to it. For example, flickers, which prefer a rain bath, can look somewhat clumsy and off-balance bathing in a stream. Two young goldfinches once attempted to imitate the dive-bathing strategy of a red-eyed vireo. They soon gave up and returned to a "stand-in" bath.

Finally, aberrations in bathing behavior typical of a given species can be observed in situations potentially dangerous for birds.

Remember the famous bathroom scene in the Alfred Hitchcock movie, *Psycho*, in which the showering victim was unable to hear or see the approach of the killer? A thoroughly soaked bird will not easily escape a predator. For that reason, those putting out a birdbath are advised to elevate it at least 2 feet above the ground and to allow at least 15 feet of open terrain between it and any vegetation where cats and hawks can hide.

How often do birds bathe? Naturally, this is a function of the weather and the season of the year. On a sunny summer day, a chickadee or titmouse might bathe five times a day, but not at all on a cold, windy one. While afternoon is the preferred time, a bird usually starts bathing a few hours after sunrise and often ends the day with a late bath.

There are many other aspects of bathing behavior in birds, including drying, oiling, preening, sun-bathing, and dust-bathing, but these are subjects for another column. I am headed for the shower. No, nothing special — just hot water, soap, and shampoo.

The American Littoral Society's Northeast Chapter is coordinating the 21st Annual International Coastal Cleanup within New York State, scheduled for **September 16**. Its purposes are to clean the beaches and document what litters our shores, compile data to devise strategies to combat pollution, increase public participation in solving the problem of pollution, and increase public awareness and appreciation of the coastal environment.

In 2005, over 10,000 volunteers documented and removed over 171,500 pounds of debris from 329 sites along lakes, rivers, creeks, bays, sound, and ocean. For information on nearby cleanups (including Jones Beach and Long Beach), contact ALS's Barbara Cohen at ALSBeach@aol.com or 718-471-2166, or check www.alsnyc.org. For out-of-state cleanups info, call 1-800-262-BEACH.

SUCCESSFUL DINNER

Therese Lucas

Guitar music by Toby Tobias, wafting through the Colonial Room at the Coral House during the cocktail hour, started the celebration of SSAS's 35th Annual Dinner.

Due to the generous donations of many businesses and individuals, the super raffle and Chinese auction were a rousing success. Many people partook in the 50–50 raffle. Continuing the tradition, the raffle for the Birdathon participants was held as well. It was a pleasure to present the Service Award to Christine Marzigliano. The finishing touch was the bird-nest favors handmade by Kathy Asmus.

We look forward to seeing all of you next year. I hope to see many new faces as well.

Many thanks to our dinner donors:

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Our second annual flea market, organized by Maureen Rube and Betty Borowsky, followed its predecessor's footsteps by being postponed to its rain date, June 4. We thank everyone who contributed the items that enabled us to raise over \$350 and would like to give recognition to the members and friends who spent hours in the parking lot in Freeport: Ilse Goldsmith, Marian Hubbard, Jerry Ladden, Joe Landesburg, Therese Lucas, George & Marianne Peters, Jim Remsen, Maureen & Paul Rube, Chris Schmitt, Ed & Michael Sperling, and Nancy & Bill Youngfert. Thanks, also, to Kathy Asmus for drawing two of the signs that helped attract Sunrise Highway drivers' attention.

SSAS BACKYARD BIRD SURVEY

For several years, SSAS's Research Committee has been conducting a study to document the bird species found in the SSAS area and to estimate their numbers. We greatly appreciate input from anyone that feeds and/or observes birds in their yard or neighborhood.

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!

		to					
Date	Time	Species	No.	Date	Time	Species	No.
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				Addre	ss:		
				Phone	number: _		
				Please send to: Mr. J. Grupp, Research Chairperson			son
						Edgemere Ave., Uniondale No or	
						E-mail: Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.	com

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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!

% ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ Yes, I'd like to join: ☐ SSAS only						
NAME:						
ADDRESS:						
PHONE NO.:						
E-MAIL:						
Chapter Code R15 7XCH (South SI	ore Audubon Society)					