

SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 41, NUMBER 8 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

MAY–AUGUST 2011

NEXT MEETING

John Gagliano

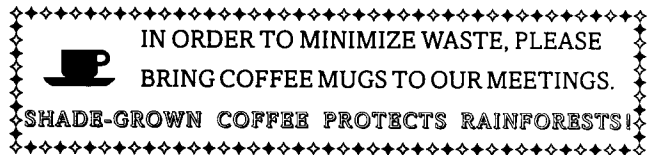
DATE: Tuesday, May 10, 2011
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. [at S. Ocean Ave.]
SPEAKER: Joe Giunta
TOPIC: Spring Warblers of the NYC Area

Warblers are jewels of the birding world. Their colorful plumage and delightful songs make them the most desired birds to see and identify during spring migration. The presentation at this month's meeting (our last until September) will cover the 35 species of warblers that are regularly seen in our area and, by popular demand, is our second annual spring warblers program given by Joe. We will learn about their distribution, abundance, habits, and ease or difficulty of identification, in a presentation enhanced with slides and bird songs.

Joe Giunta has been birding the New York City region for over 20 years. He is the birding instructor for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, has led bird walks for The Nature Conservancy and Brooklyn Bird Club, and gives lectures on birding and leads bird walks for the South Fork Natural History Society (SOFO) and New York City Audubon. He is the Bluebird Trail coordinator for SOFO, a captain in the Brooklyn Christmas Count, and has participated in breeding bird surveys for New York State. An enthusiastic traveler, he has birded extensively in Central and South America. Since retiring from the NYC school system as a math teacher in 2004, Joe has taught many birding classes, all with field trips. Join us!

Pre-Meeting Program on Birds. Starting at 7 P.M. most months, Scott Oglesby expands our birding horizons 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 gas station that borders Sunrise Hwy.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wendy Murbach

Thank you to all South Shore Audubon members for helping me to have the challenging experience of being the president of this vibrant organization. It has been an exciting and happy three years for me.

South Shore Audubon's Constitution and Bylaws mandate a term limit of three consecutive years for the presidency of this organization. My three years passed in a flash of activity and it is hard to believe that it was that long a time. I enjoyed so much of what I was doing.

We will be electing a new president at the May meeting and I will be installing that person and the rest of the newly elected officers at the June Annual Dinner. Please come out to vote and to our dinner to welcome the new slate of officers who will be piloting this organization for the next year.

I was lucky to have a wonderful Board of Directors to help me guide South Shore Audubon for these years. I thank each and every one of them for all that they did in service to the members and the organization. They have made my tenure a very productive and happy one and have made South Shore Audubon Society run smoothly and effectively.

Of course I will continue to work for the good of South Shore Audubon Society, because its mission is a valuable and important one, one that I care deeply about. We will be doing more environmentally based education work with children, taking on more causes, monitoring the habitat and environment locally and in far-reaching places, and providing programs, bird walks, and other activities for you, the members of South Shore Audubon Society.

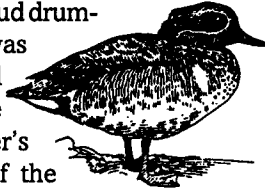
Thank you again for all your support and participation during these past three years. I appreciate you all.

NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER

Hairy Woodpecker – Drummer Boy

Joe Grupp

I was completely absorbed in watching a male Green-winged Teal (pictured) in good light that was close to me but was swimming away. I was in my own world and the world of the departing teal. The loud drumming of a nearby woodpecker was no more than some background noise in my consciousness. The repetitiveness of the woodpecker's drumming and the closeness of the sound soon shifted my focus from the teal to searching for and finding the woodpecker.



I found him not far off the trail, low in a tree and close to where I was standing. With naked eye I could see him in detail; through the binoculars in even greater detail. There was no doubt about the bird's identification. I was looking at and hearing a male Hairy Woodpecker as it was drumming away to proclaim territory and/or attract a mate. He drummed, paused, then drummed again, repeating that sequence over and over.

He was on a fairly thick, dead limb that angled sharply upward and then bent away from me. Just beyond the bend there was a round hole, about the size of a small jar cap, where an old branch had died, well before the limb did, and rotted away, the ragged remnants of its wood surrounding the hole. The limb itself had long since shed its bark, was weathered gray, and looked hard and dry. It was just below the bend in the limb that the woodpecker was perched, striking the limb with its beak.

I stood there watching and listening to rat-tat-tat-tat-tat, then a pause, over and over again. Between each drumming series, the bird stared directly at the limb for a moment as if ready to strike it again, then looked to the left, then to the right, then back to the tree and it would be rat-tat-tat-tat-tat all over again. Each time it paused, I had as detailed an observation of its features as possible. Each time it drummed, I became more aware of the fullness and almost musical quality to the repetitive sound and to its amplification. The limb was a primitive percussion musical instrument that the bird was playing.

The hole in the limb and the hollow chamber it leads to serve the same purpose as the opening in the body and inner hollow chamber of a violin. Pluck a string not attached to the violin and a weak sound is emitted. Attach the string to the violin and pluck it, and the vibration of the string vibrates the air in the violin's chamber, producing a sound that has a beauty and volume all its own.

Watching and listening, I knew that the limb did not have the strings of a violin but that the wood vibrated when struck by the woodpecker's beak. That, in turn, vibrated the air in the limb's chamber, emitting the loud drumming sound I was hearing. The bird was about six inches below the hole in the tree as it drummed away,

creating a sound much louder and fuller than it could elsewhere. Not every limb has the characteristics necessary to create such a sound, but this bird found the right one for both of us that day. Drummer Boy was still at it when I left and I could still hear him when I was quite far away.



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. 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:

- Atlantic Beach Kathryn Damico, Mary Lepper
- Bellmore Martha K. Cording, Ivonne Cubillos, D. G. Fernandez
- Bethpage Marie C. Rehill
- East Meadow James McLaughlin
- Elmont Victoria Pedersen, Francesco Rametta
- Farmingdale Katherine Boyle
- Garden City Elizabeth M. Bailey
- Glen Oaks Penny Laforest
- Hempstead F. Fearon
- Hicksville Patricia Schmidt, Ray Shelton
- Island Park Fran Mead
- Levittown Catherine Mienik
- Long Beach Leslie Weiss
- Massapequa Robert Elder
- Massapequa Park Viviana Coulard
- Plainview Beverly Artz, Flora Zemerling
- Wantagh Sally Lubell, Gloria McKanna, Ruth Westfall
- West Hempstead Glenda L. Manna, Lesley S. McAvoy, Valentine Tomicich



AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP STATUS (800) 274-4201



OUR ELEVENTH ANNUAL CENTRAL PARK WALK

On **Saturday, May 7**, SSAS is planning to be in Central Park for our annual (weather permitting) early May morning bird walk. Once again, Manhattan resident Chris Cooper, who birded with SSAS in his formative years and will be honored at our annual dinner, will lead us through the twisting, hilly maze of the Ramble and adjoining areas of the park. In previous years, we've recorded 45 to 70-plus species in under three hours (46 last year, including Chipping and Swamp Sparrows; Ruby-crowned Kinglet; Baltimore Oriole; Cedar Waxwing; Scarlet Tanager; Rose-breasted Grosbeak; Least Flycatcher; Hermit Thrush; Veery; Blue-headed, Yellow-throated, and Warbling Vireos; Common Yellowthroat; Ovenbird; American Redstart; Northern Waterthrush; Northern Parula; and Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blue-winged, Nashville, and Chestnut-sided Warblers). Join us!

The cost of the walk is \$5, which is a tax-deductible donation to SSAS (refundable if we rain out or you cancel in advance). Please send your check payable to South Shore Audubon Society, along with your phone number and e-mail address, to Joanne Del Prete, 20 Ceil Pl., Bethpage, NY 11714-4503 (phone 433-0739, jdelprete47@optonline.net).



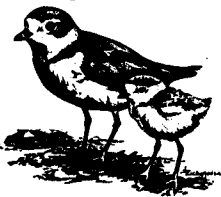
As usual, a group of us will be aboard the local Babylon train that is due in Penn Station at 8:12; you can look for Joanne toward the west end of the platform in Massapequa, boarding at 7:13. We plan to depart from Penn's LIRR waiting room at 8:30 to meet Chris at Belvedere Castle at around 9:15. Please buy a MetroCard for the subway. The walk usually ends around noon. You can bring lunch or buy it in the park, or head back home after the walk if you prefer. Joanne's cell (476-3761) will be on that day only.

PLOVER VOLUNTEERS WANTED

John Zarudsky

The Town of Hempstead's Department of Conservation and Waterways needs your help in ensuring the protection and survival of Piping Plovers (pictured), Least and Common Terns, and Black Skimmers that nest between Point Lookout and Atlantic Beach.

Audubon volunteers will help prevent disturbances to nesting areas, will record the presence of plover chicks and any incidents of predation, and can give beachgoers educational literature pertaining to Piping Plovers and terns. Help is particularly needed on evenings, weekends, and holidays from May through August. If you're interested and are able to volunteer regularly, please contact SSAS member John Zarudsky, Conservation Biologist, at 897-4126 (work) or 486-5272.



SSAS BACKYARD BIRD SURVEY PARTICIPANT OBSERVES NYS FLEDGLING RECORD

Joe Grupp

SSAS member Ruth Hyman, an SSAS Backyard Bird Survey participant since its inception and a participant in the Cornell Laboratory's Project FeederWatch program well before that, has been a diligent observer and recorder of the bird activities in her yard since at least 1994-95. Her diligence in observation and record keeping led to a realization that a male Red-bellied Woodpecker feeding a fledgling on September 12, 2010 in her yard was a significant observation. Her records showed that prior to that observation, August 14, 2009 was the latest date at which she had observed a Red-bellied Woodpecker fledgling.

Ruth researched her findings beyond her own records, using other sources and the cooperation of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, and was able to determine that her September 12 observation was in fact the latest fledgling date for the species in New York State. She subsequently submitted a paper on her findings to *The Kingbird*, the publication of the New York State Ornithological Association, and it appeared in the Vol. 60, No. 4, December 2010 edition. More details of her discovery and research findings can be found in that publication. Congratulations, Ruth!

BACKYARD SURVEY DATA NEEDED!

Joe Grupp

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. Please do not hesitate to submit your observations, even if you make only very few.

Simply record the date, time, and the number or approximate number of each species. 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. Survey sheets are available at SSAS events and at ssaudubon.org or you can create your own.

Please mail your data to Mr. J. Grupp, Research Chairperson, 660 Edgemere Ave., Uniondale, NY 11553 or e-mail Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.com.

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.*

INTERESTED IN A WETLANDS CRUISE?

Michael Sperling

As the *Skimmer* was heading into its four-month break, discussions were underway for SSAS and Great South Bay Audubon Society to share a weekend 1½ hour tour of the Ward Melville Heritage Organization's 88-acre wetlands preserve in Stony Brook aboard the 35-passenger pontoon boat *Discovery*. I expect the cost to be \$20 per person, with the trip led in June, July, or August by naturalist Sue Krause, who is a guide on about one-third of *Discovery's* public trips, president of Four Harbors Audubon Society, and an educator at Sweetbriar Nature Center. The schedule is determined by the tides; see www.wmho.org/WMHODiscoveryCruise.asp for information.

Sue is attempting to arrange an extra trip just for Auduboners; if you're interested in participating, e-mail mssperling@optonline.net and I'll let you know the plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUOTATIONS

Editor's note: As I'm typing this, events continue to unfold at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant a month after it was crippled by a 45–48 foot tsunami that was three times the height of the plant's seawall, and Japanese regulations have just been strengthened to require a second backup generator for all of their nuclear power plants. Here are some topical entries from *A Dictionary of Environmental Quotations* by Barbara K. Rodes and Rice Odell (published by Simon & Schuster, copyright 1992).

"In the nuclear industry, no acts of God can be permitted." — Hannes Alfvén [Nobel laureate in Physics], quoted in Linda Botts, ed., *Loose Talk*, 1980

"The emotional campaign against nuclear power plants not only exaggerates the hazards of using such power to generate electricity, but is equally irrational in its advocacy of solar power as a substitute." — Ronald Reagan, *Sierra*, 10 September 1980

"We can expect to see another serious [nuclear] accident in this country during the next 20 years." — James Asseltine, Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner, testimony, U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, May 1986

"It is easier to develop the safety systems than to do the cleanup after an accident, even if it is less tragic than the Chernobyl one." — N. I. Ryzhkov, Soviet Prime Minister, interview with *Moskovskaya Pravda*, 26 April 1990, quoted in *JPRS Report*, 5 July 1990

"The lesson that Wall Street learned from Three Mile Island was that a group of federally licensed operators — not appreciably better or worse than any other crew — could convert a \$2 billion asset into a \$1 billion cleanup job in about 90 minutes." — Peter Bradford [former Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner], quoted in *Washington Post*, 3 February 1991



*Explore the coast
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**AMERICAN
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CHINCOTEAGUE REFUGE / ASSATEAGUE NATIONAL SEASHORE (May 12–15). See eagles, falcons, shorebirds, warblers, plus endangered fox squirrel, red fox, Sika deer, river otter, and more. Cost: \$375. Car pooling available.

JAMAICA BAY SUNSET CRUISES (Sat., May 28 & June 18, 4–7 P.M.). Learn about history, ecology, and wildlife aboard the 100' boat "Golden Sunshine" from Sheepshead Bay. See egrets, herons, peregrine falcon, osprey, oystercatcher, terns, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Cost: \$45 incl. narrated tour plus wine & cheese, drink, fruit, snacks.

MONTAUK SPRING WEEKEND (June 3–5). Cost: \$375/person incl. 2 nights at Manor House, 5 meals, 5 guided field trips, 2 evening programs, a star watch plus free pickup at the LIRR station in Montauk. Come see orchids and heather in bloom.

HORSESHOE CRABS & TERRAPINS (Sat., June 18, 10 A.M. to 1 P.M.). Meet at Jamaica Bay Refuge center for hike around West Pond to look for mating horseshoe crabs and shorebirds. We'll also look for diamondback terrapins coming ashore to lay eggs. Bring boots & binoculars. Leaders: Mickey Cohen & Don Riepe. Call or e-mail Don to register.

CAPE ANN WHALE WATCH (Aug. 18–21).

JAMAICA BAY SHOREBIRD FESTIVAL (Sat., Aug. 27).

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.

NOMINATIONS FOR 2011–2012 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) has recruited the following candidates: President, Jim Brown; Vice President, Marilyn Hametz; Treasurer, Joe Landesberg; Recording Secretary, Don Temple; Corresponding Secretary, Therese Lucas; Directors (through June 2014), Kerry Da Silva and Steve Schellenger.

ANOTHER END-OF-YEAR THANK-YOU COLUMN

Michael Sperling

It's time once again to thank my fellow volunteers for helping to make these newsletters possible. I thank everyone who submitted articles, especially the most frequent contributors, Joe Grupp and Wendy Murbach; Therese Lucas for making all the trips to F&B Printers; Wendy for printing the chapter-only labels while I printed the rest; and Therese for labeling 11,933 newsletters with me (not counting this issue) and bringing them to the post office.

SSAS IS NOW ON FACEBOOK.COM — LIKE US!

NASSAU COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL HOTLINE 571-6306

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II

Welcome! I'll try in every issue to review a book that you'll enjoy reading. This first time I'll review *The Last Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* by Bruce Barcott. As birders all, we are on the side of fighting to protect our natural space against human and industrial threats. This book serves as an alarming "cautionary tale" about a conservation battle to save the breeding habitat of the last Scarlet Macaws left in Belize. The central person in this battle is Sharon Matola, an American ex-pat who moves to Belize and finds the popular Belize Zoo. The story focuses on the Belizean government's desire to build a dam that would foul the river on whose banks these macaws breed. This book will keep you deeply attuned to the battle as the author weaves his narrative. He utilizes an exceptional cast of characters to accomplish this. This environmental battle will resonate with all of us who are concerned with our fellow humans' proven ability to destroy our natural environment and all that live within. This narrative is suspenseful from beginning to end. The author's story is enhanced by both Sharon Matola's personality and his storytelling acumen — a must read! Having seen these beautiful birds in almond trees in southern Costa Rica, I know they are well worth fighting for!!

Editor's note: This column was written by SSAS member Paul Stessel, an aspiring birder and devoted backyard bird watcher who enjoys reading interesting and inspiring books about fellow birders.

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OUR WEB SITE (incl. online store) www.ssaudubon.org

JOIN US FOR EARTH DAY LOBBY DAY 2011

Laura McCarthy

Editor's note: Laura is the Grassroots Coordinator for Audubon New York. Earth Day Lobby Day this year is **Monday, May 2**, from 9:30 A.M. to 3:30 P.M.

Please join us for the 21st annual Earth Day Lobby Day in Albany. Hear from state government and environmental leaders, learn about environmental bills that are pending in Albany, and lobby your state lawmakers on environmental issues that are important to you.



This year's Earth Day Lobby Day will focus on critically important environmental issues, such as expanding solar energy, curbing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting watersheds from the dangers of hydrofracking, and making our communities more pedestrian-friendly.

Join hundreds of environmentalists from across the state in advocating for measures to protect our air, water, land, and health. No lobbying experience needed! This event is free and open to the public, but you must preregister to attend. Sign up now for Earth Day Lobby Day at www.tinyurl.com/albanyearthday.

Earth Day Lobby Day 2011 is being sponsored by Audubon New York, Citizens Campaign for the Environment, Environmental Advocates of New York, New York Interfaith Power and Light, New York Public Interest Research Group, Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, and other organizations.

BROOKLYN WATER WORKS PROPERTY UPDATE

On March 22, six SSAS board members plus one spouse attended a standing-room only meeting of the Freeport Landmark Preservation Commission in Village Hall that began with the good news that the six-story Waterworks Apartments proposal, which would have put Freeport's largest building just 3 feet, 2-1/2 inches south of SSAS-managed Brookside Preserve, had been withdrawn by the developer. The speakers that night, including two from SSAS, all voiced opposition to the 127-unit proposal and many supported the property's acquisition as open space. We are continuing to push for that outcome; Brooklyn Water Works was listed as a priority acquisition under Nassau County's two Environmental Bond Acts and there is unspent money available.

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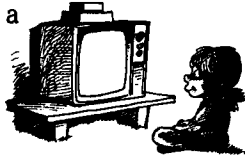
OUR E-LIST http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ssas_list

JOIN THE BIRDATHON!

Jim Remsen

This year SSAS will conduct its 24th annual Birdathon! SSAS raises funds through the Birdathon by having members get cash pledges for each species of bird identified during a 24-hour period in May, when the spring migration is at its height and over 125 species may be identified by the two teams that visit about a half-dozen locations.

If you aren't going with a team, why not try your own Birdathon? Do a variation on the usual theme of seeing as many species as you can during the count period. Use your imagination. Limit yourself to your backyard, a favorite park or preserve, or even a "couch potato" Birdathon. (For this one, you count as many bird species as you can on television during the 24 hours!)



Mark the dates on your calendar if you haven't already — **Friday, May 13 from 5:00 P.M. until Saturday, May 14 at 5:00 P.M.** — and join one of our intrepid leaders (or go it alone, in which case you choose the turf). Birding expertise is not necessary and your teammates will be happy to point out the birds for you. Rain dates are one week later at the same time.

Please note: In the event of questionable weather, I will decide whether or not to cancel the Birdathon by 3 P.M. on Friday, May 13. If you have any uncertainty about whether it will be postponed, please call me at (631) 957-0949 or (631) 748-8942 by 3 o'clock.

We need Birdathon prizes! As we have done in the past, we will make everyone who brings in at least one pledge (sponsoring yourself counts) eligible for a prize drawing to be held at our annual dinner (attendance not required). If you would like to donate a prize, please contact me.

Our schedule of starting places and leaders is as follows:

Friday, May 13 at 5 P.M. Meet Bill Hollweg and Steve Schellenger at Jones Beach's Coast Guard Station, or Joe Grupp and Jim Remsen at Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot).

Saturday, May 14. Meet Bill and Steve at Parking Field #3 of Hempstead Lake State Park at 6:00 A.M.; or Joe and Jim at Mill Pond, Merrick Road, Wantagh at 5:45 A.M. Bill & Steve's team will also visit Alley Pond Park, Forest Park, and Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. Other meeting places on Saturday for Joe & Jim's team will be Muttontown Preserve (normally the gate on Route 106) at 8 A.M., Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area at 11 A.M., and Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge at 1:15 P.M. Please try to notify us if you plan to go with one of these teams so they will know who to expect. Meeting times at Oceanside and Jamaica Bay for my team are estimates; we can be as much as 15 minutes earlier or 30 minutes later, depending on traffic.

Sponsors are the heart of the Birdathon. These are people who agree to give you 25¢, \$1, or any amount for

each species you see (they may also give you a flat pledge not based on number of species). Ask anyone you know, and don't forget yourself!

Note on Submitting Pledges: Pledges submitted to me must be received by June 13 to be eligible for prizes. Pledge forms, if you want them, are available at SSAS events. Let's make our 2011 Birdathon special by raising more funds than ever! Good luck!

Birdathon Chairperson: James Remsen, Jr., 8 Venetian Blvd., Lindenhurst, NY 11757.

BIRD WALKS

Steve Schellenger

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains. Any questions? Call Steve at 987-8103. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaudubon.org.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Apr. 24 | Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.) |
| May 1 | Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner |
| May 8 | Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3) |
| May 15 | Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge |
| May 22 | Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve |
| May 29 | <i>Memorial Day Weekend — No Walk</i> |
| June 5 | Mill Pond Park |
| June 12 | Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside
<i>Summer Break</i> |
| Aug. 14 | Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve |
| Aug. 21 | Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside |
| Aug. 28 | Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge |
| Sep. 4 | <i>Labor Day Weekend — No Walk</i> |
| Sep. 11 | Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner |

WHAT TO DO WITH DISPLACED YOUNG WILDLIFE

Most young wildlife that you come across are not orphaned. The parents are temporarily away finding food or are staying away to avoid attracting predators and will later return. If you are concerned that a bird or animal may be orphaned, watch from a distance for a while to see if the parents return. If you have to chase it, it doesn't need your help!

A nestling songbird is only partially feathered and cannot yet run, hop, or move about easily. It should be returned to the nest. If you can't find or reach the nest, make one from a berry box or strainer (something with drainage), line it with grasses, and secure it up in a tree close to where you found the bird. The parents will continue to feed it.

If you are certain a young songbird is orphaned, leave a message for Volunteers for Wildlife at 631-423-0982 for assistance and follow the emergency instructions at www.volunteersforwildlife.org.

RARE BIRD ALERT (212) 979-3070

WATCHING ROBINS FROM INCUBATION TO INDEPENDENCE

Michael Givant

Editor's note: The following article originally appeared on May 16, 2008 in Anton Community Newspapers and is reprinted with permission from the author, an SSAS member, whose monthly "A Bird's Eye View" articles appear in Anton's newspapers and on their website.

Early one morning last May [2007], a small group of birders that I was with were walking through Alley Pond Park, when we saw an American Robin just off the path. It was about 12 feet above the ground in a cup-shaped nest, incubating eggs. We paused for a few seconds while the robin kept an eye on us. As this was too delicate a time to agitate a soon-to-be parent, we kept walking. It was an exciting and mysterious moment; nature was sending out light green buds to change the landscape while birds' DNA was driving them to procreate. It wouldn't be the only time that season that I'd be paying close attention to a robin.

A little more than three weeks later, while hiking the Greenbelt Trail, I again saw just off the path the same-shaped nest at the same height. This nest was, however, empty. Any eggs it may have contained must have hatched by now and I wondered what newly born robins looked like. I wasn't going to have to wait long to find out.

A half-hour later, getting back to my house, I saw a small robin on our lawn, hopping up an incline like a tiny kangaroo. Its wings were short and held so tightly against its side that it looked wingless. An adult robin went into the shade of some bushes and came out holding a grub in its yellow bill. The youngster went straight to the parent, who deftly transferred the prize to the youngster's bill, into which it immediately disappeared. I watched the youngster's fuzziest head as it followed its meal ticket into the shade.

A short while later, the adult and fledgling were on our patio, where I was able to look at the youngster and listen to its calls for 30 minutes. The adult was on the rim of a large empty flowerpot and the chick hopped, then flew up inches to the rim. The adult left and I was standing within ten feet of the fledgling. Through binoculars, the first thing that I saw were rows of yellow cilia-like hairs on the side of its head. The chick's bill wasn't yet long and there was a white line at the base. The small bird had a buffy, almost yellow eye ring. Soon it was opening its bill and letting out three short notes. If it was calling for the adult to bring a tasty grub, it was going to wait a long time.

As the bird's calls became more frequent and squeaky, I got a long closeup view of its breast, which appeared to be rust colored and would become richly so when it matured. There were white specks all over the chick's shoulders and back. It had lost its fuzziest appearance but was still scruffy looking. The tail was then short but would become longer and the bill, which was bright yellow only at the tip, would become fully so as an adult. As the squeaky calls kept coming, I saw its open bill, revealing a

yellow mouth. The youngster was restless. It sounded three higher, more-urgent notes. Soon it emitted several short, high, loud, harsh notes. Soon the calls became even stronger.

The adult probably wanted the fledgling to come to it, not vice versa. The youngster had limited flight ability but was probably past the stage where mom or dad would bring it food. I don't know how long the chick kept up its calling, because I had to leave for a few minutes and when I returned it was gone.

In the next two weeks, I sporadically saw the fledgling. It was getting around in the world by foot. I wondered how long it would be before it could fly? On Independence Day, July 4th I got my answer. The fledgling and what turned out to be another but more advanced fledgling were on the lawn by the side of our house with an adult. As I walked toward them, they flew a short distance to a nearby tree. Minutes later, it was there again, this time with two other fledglings. It walked up the cement walkway and stood in front of a pine needle bush that had some rust-colored needles. I looked at it nearly in amazement. The bird's white and brown striated breast blended with the cream color of the cement, while the rust on its sides made it partially indecipherable from the burnt pine needles. The bird then flew to the roof of my car just beyond the bush, where it stood for a while. It had really matured. Would it be long before it was requesting the car keys?

The next evening, when I walked up the steps to my house, there was a loud rustling in the adjacent bushes. With wings beating excitedly, two robins, the fledgling and a slightly larger one, emerged from the cover of the bushes and flew across the street. They were like teenagers caught where they shouldn't be. That made me smile but it also was the last that I saw of my fledgling.

This spring [2008], while walking the Greenbelt Trail, I saw a robin on a log. Its eye looked like a tiny black marble surrounded by an area of molten white and seemed to have a primordial quality. Looking into its eye, I wondered how long it would be before this robin or a mate would be sitting in a cuplike nest, like the one that I saw last spring, incubating eggs.

Editor's Page Filler. The following is from "Bird Neighbors" by Neltje Blanchan, which was published in 1897, revised in 1904 and 1922, and is online at www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext99/bdnbr10.txt: Too much stress is laid on the mischief done by the robins in the cherry trees and strawberry patches, and too little upon the quantity of worms and insects they devour. Professor Treadwell, who experimented upon some young robins kept in captivity, learned that they ate sixty-eight earthworms daily — "that is, each bird ate forty-one percent more than its own weight in twelve hours! The length of these worms, if laid end to end, would be about fourteen feet. Man, at this rate, would eat about seventy pounds of flesh a day, and drink five or six gallons of water."



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