





## NEW MEMBERSHIP BROCHURE

Marilyn Hametz

I hope you have seen our new membership brochure at general meetings, bird walks, or on our website. We hope it will help introduce South Shore Audubon Society to new faces and remind all of us of how much the Society offers.

Many thanks to Kerry Da Silva and Wendy Murbach, editorial committee; Veronica Byrne for the design; and Steven Schellenger for the photos. The photos of the Harlequin Duck, Magnolia Warbler, and Tufted Titmouse were all taken on our bird walks.

If you would like a printed copy of the brochure, please contact me at 799-7189 or marilynexpl@yahoo.com.

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**BOOKS FOR BIRDERS**

R. U. Abyrdar II

In keeping with our tradition of following up on a previous review like *The Big Year*, I will attempt to introduce you to a British version of this obsession, *Birders: Tales of a Tribe*, by Mark Cocker. He has been a member of a "tribe" of fanatics that we call extreme birders. In this book he recounts, in some detail, both humorous and serious, the British style of birding. In so doing, he introduces us to the venerable art of British "twitching." He combines elements of memoir, manifesto, and scientific study of why these Brits go about their obsessive enterprise. The hobby of watching birds is often seen as an eccentric hobby, but its value to the protection of our environment and wildlife in general is immeasurable. While this book is certainly written from a British perspective, there are similarities with our own fellow birders in America. The



"pond" isn't as vast as some might think. You will find this book a witty and entertaining overview of the subculture, lifestyles, and (mis)adventures of this all-consuming hobby. Are all birders lusting for the longest life list or the never-ending search for the rarest of birds? Since all the chapters are distinct, you are able to dip in here and there, rather than read from start to finish (Yay!).

Cocker understands us and reveals all the traits of a serious birder that we all know. He is not a mere bird-watcher but is a serious aficionado who travels around Britain, as well as all over the world, chasing after birds. Each birder described in the book has a particular story to tell; some humorous, some rather sad, but all about the wonders of birding. His characters are extraordinary! Some very serious anecdotes about some very exciting birding trips abound in this fine book. Birders of his "tribe" are not your average everyday birder, but are of the type that are truly obsessed about the big day list, big state list, and big life list, and are VERY serious indeed. Read it and find British "twitchers" at the top of their form! ENJOY!!

## SEEING THE UNCOMMON: A COMMON MURRE IN THE GRAND CANAL

Adele Portanova

Living on the south shore of Long Island in Massapequa gave me the opportunity to learn a new hobby — bird watching! Our house is situated on the Grand Canal, which is so wide in sections that you'd think it was a lake.

I've acquired the habit of always checking out the waterfowl passing by my kitchen window; the binoculars have a permanent place on the counter. In the fall/winter, the usual visitors return like clockwork: Hooded Mergansers (pictured), Common Mergansers, Ruddy Ducks, and occasional Common and Red-throated Loons (and even a harbor seal made a quick visit this past November).



On January 25, a very unusual waterbird caught my eye as it swam north at 3:30 P.M. I grabbed my ever-ready camera, called upstairs to my husband Peter to come outside, ran out the back door, and approached the water's edge with subdued excitement as the avian out-of-towner continued past our dock. I could see immediately that this bird was not something I'd ever seen in the canal and proceeded to capture images with my camera.

I did not realize it at first, but after checking with more-experienced birders, this was a Common Murre and is not normally spotted so close to shore!

The murre swam as far north in the canal as possible (it ends in a cul-de-sac) and it returned by me again, heading south. This unexpected guest didn't seem frightened by me, as I was a mere 25 feet from it. The murre kept its pace and headed south to return from whence s/he came, the Great South Bay. I tried to keep up with this unique traveler for a better picture by running into my neighbor's backyard, but the murre didn't stop and wasn't seen again.

Only one picture was "frame worthy"; moving birds are very difficult to capture. (Next time I will relinquish the camera to Peter; he remains calm under pressure and has a very steady hand!) Fortunately, the one photograph was good enough for Tom Burke and the Rare Bird Alert included it in the February 3, 2012 report. It was also reported to the NYS Avian Records Committee; they will hopefully confirm it at some point this year.

Birders have congratulated me on the find, but I like to think the murre found me so I could let others know that you never know when your rare bird will appear! Happy birding to all!

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**NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER**  
**Corpus Christi, Texas**  
**Part II: A Spectacle of Birds**

*Joe Grupp*

Having satisfactorily completed our exploration of Blucher Park in the center of the city of Corpus Christi, as described in Part I of this series, we still had time before we were to meet other family members for the celebration that was the real reason we were in Texas. Prepared with the names of a few birding spots, we decided to visit a second preserve.

Pulling into the parking area of Hans A. Suter Wildlife Area, it was immediately obvious that it was a popular preserve. People in comfortable numbers were coming and going that sunny afternoon. A boardwalk trail followed a stream across a marsh, ending near where the stream dumped its waters into the bay. The roughly third-of-a-mile trail was one of the focal points of the preserve and the one we decided to explore.

It was the right choice even before we fully realized how right the choice was. As we walked towards the bay on the well-maintained boardwalk, we were treated to a Common Moorhen and a few large turtles basking in the sun; a variety of long-legged waders, some feeding and some resting; and an assortment of ducks, none of which were new to us, while gulls and Boat-tailed Grackles were coming and going. Stopping to chat with a photographer, we learned that he was waiting to photograph any number of the four Cinnamon Teals (pictured) he knew were hid-



ing in the streamside vegetation. It was only when we reached the end of the boardwalk and could see for a good distance over the water and along the shore to the land that curved out into the bay that we discovered the spectacle that awaited us.

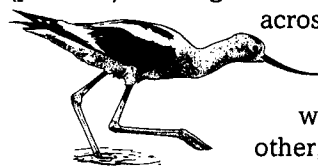
Birds that spend their lives dependent on water were spread out before us. They were at least a few thousand in number and of a number of different species. Most, but not all, were resting, heads tucked under their wings, close together in flocks, each flock comprised of a particular species. What made the spectacle more interesting was that the scene was graded by species as one looked down the shore and out over the water.

A stone's throw away and beyond on the sandy shore that separated us from the water were a few hundred Black Skimmers. They were faced towards us at a slight angle. Their black-and-red bills were all pointed in the same direction; their black bodies, with some of the white underparts showing, were all aligned with one another. It was not long before we noticed that when looking at the entire flock of Skimmers, not at individual birds, they created an eye-catching repetitive pattern and that many of the flocks of other species that were resting in the water were creating a repetitive pattern of their own. Each flock's pattern was determined by the markings of each individual bird.

Black-necked Stilts were in the water beyond the Skimmers. Their necks were pulled down and bills tucked in. The pattern they created was mostly black, dotted with a few white spots in the head and neck region of the birds. At first glance I was pretty sure they were stilts. Then they made the confirmation easy, as one lifted its head and walked away from the flock and started to feed. Looking over the flock, the white spots were eye-catching and off-centered against the black backs of the birds. If the birds' necks were extended, it would have been an altogether different scene. I don't ever recall seeing that many Black-necked Stilts resting in a flock before, but I am seldom in the range where Black-necked Stilts gather in numbers.

A hundred or more Northern Shovelers created a movable changing pattern of red, green, black, and white as they circled on the water's surface, feeding as Northern Shovelers do. They were in slightly deeper water than the stilts, where the stream entered the shallows. There were a few other species in and around them, but the show was all Northern Shovelers.

Then there were a thousand or more American Avocets (pictured), creating a black-and-white repetitive V pattern



across the flock. The back of each bird with its head pulled in created a single V. They were in two flocks close to each other, their location most likely determined by the depth of the water, as they were standing with the water just about touching their bellies.

A fair number of scaup created a more white than black pattern as they floated, resting beyond the avocets. Beyond them, a large number of gulls, mostly Laughing Gulls, bobbed on the water. Some were content just floating there; others were restless and there were some coming and going.

Beyond the gulls and on the marsh was what looked like a monstrous pile of white feathers. It took a look through the binoculars to realize the pile was really a fair number of White Pelicans, each a large bird when standing alone and these were quite close together. The marsh they were resting on jutted out into the water, beyond which there was more open water and then the mainland shore which curved out into the bay. The open water was almost empty of birds beyond the White Pelicans, but scattered on the mainland shore were thirty or so Brown Pelicans spread out standing mostly individually or a very few in pairs.

Not only did the flocks of individual species produce a distinctive pattern of their own, but even when a species formed two or more individual flocks they were near one another. The result was broken but concentric swaths of patterns created by the thousands of resting birds. I don't know how common an occurrence this phenomena is there; perhaps it's just another day at the refuge. I do know that I had never seen as many birds of as many individual species sorted out each in different areas, creating their own repetitive patterns on the landscape, as we did that afternoon.

**BROOKSIDE PRESERVE SPRING CLEANUP AND  
INVASIVES REMOVAL**

On **Sunday, April 15**, starting at 1 P.M., SSAS will have its spring cleanup at Brookside Preserve, rain or shine. Brookside is a 20-acre freshwater wetland, woodland, and upland area owned by Nassau County that was rescued from oblivion and is managed by SSAS. With help from a state grant, we produced a trail guide, educational freshwater wetland guide for children, and a video. PDF files of the guides can be downloaded from [ssaudubon.org](http://ssaudubon.org).

The Preserve is located on the Freeport-Baldwin border, along Milburn Creek; park at the main entrance on Brookside Avenue just north of Sunrise Highway (turn north at the traffic light that's just east of Freeport High School). Please bring gloves, rakes or clippers if possible, and friends of all ages.



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**BIRD WALKS**  
*Steve Schellenger*

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Any questions? Call Steve at 987-8103. Directions and summaries may be found at [ssaudubon.org](http://ssaudubon.org).

- Mar. 25 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Apr. 1 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and maybe Lido Preserve afterwards)
- Apr. 8 Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
- Apr. 15 Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside
- Apr. 22 Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
- Apr. 29 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- May 6 Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve
- May 13 Mill Pond Park

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Phone: (516) 931-1445  
Fax: (516) 931-1467  
E-Mail: [lgk1cpa@aol.com](mailto:lgk1cpa@aol.com)

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**MORTON TRIP REMINDER**

*John Gagliano*

On **Saturday, March 31** from 9 to 11 A.M., SSAS will visit the Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge, with the possibility to hand-feed Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and perhaps other birds. The 187-acre refuge boasts exceptionally diverse habitats, including bay beach, ponds, kettle holes, marshes, grasslands, and forest. Join us! Wear comfortable shoes and, if possible, bring binoculars and black-oil sunflower seed.

*Directions:* The Refuge's address is 784 Noyack Rd., Sag Harbor, NY 11963; phone number 631-286-0485. There is a small entrance fee (\$4 per car). Take Sunrise Highway (Route 27) to Southampton and turn left onto North Sea Road (County Road 38) toward North Sea for 2.6 miles. Turn right onto Noyac(k) Road and continue for 5 miles. The refuge entrance is on the left.

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**OUR TWELFTH ANNUAL  
CENTRAL PARK WALK**

On **Saturday, May 5**, SSAS is planning to be in Central Park for our annual (weather permitting) early May morning bird walk. Once again, Chris Cooper 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 (49 last year, including 17 warbler species).

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](mailto:jdelprete47@optonline.net)).

As usual, a group of us will be aboard the local Babylon line 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 7:08. 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. Join us!

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**SWS Garage Door Service Co.**

43 Mackey Ave.  
Port Washington, NY 11050

**(516) 627-0600**

Fax (516) 627-8504  
[SWSGARAGEDOORS@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SWSGARAGEDOORS@GMAIL.COM)

Steven W. Schellenger

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## 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](http://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](mailto:Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.com).

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## SSAS BIRDATHON 2012 IS COMING!

This year, SSAS will conduct its 25th 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 peak. Birding expertise and big pledges are not necessary; anyone can join one of SSAS's teams locally for all or part of the time, sponsor themselves, and have fun while helping us find species, or you can do your own Birdathon anywhere.

Mark the dates on your calendar — **Friday, May 11** from 5:00 P.M. until **Saturday, May 12** at 5:00 P.M. The rain dates are one week later at the same time. Team details will be in the next *Skimmer*.

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## GOOD FOOD, GOOD COMPANY, GOOD PRIZES!

Wendy Murbach

Put this on your calendar... SSAS's Annual Dinner — **Tuesday, June 12, 2012**. Our Annual Dinner will be held at Pompei Restaurant, 401 Hempstead Avenue, West Hempstead, at 6 P.M.



The price this year will be \$38 and will include wine and soda; hot hors d'oeuvres; salad; penne; choice of chicken, fish, eggplant rollatini, or roast beef; dessert; and coffee and tea.

The May–August issue of the *Skimmer* will include a reservation form but if you can't wait that long to send us your reservation, send your name, address, number of participants, and a check for \$38 for each participant to South Shore Audubon Society Dinner, P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520. You may call me at 546-6303 if you need further information.

## NOMINATIONS FOR THE 2012–2013 SSAS BOARD

South Shore Audubon Society's officers are elected each year. Directors are elected for 3-year terms. The SSAS nominating committee (chaired by Wendy Murbach) will provide a list of recommended candidates in next month's *Skimmer*. Suggestions may be submitted to the committee by any SSAS member.

At South Shore Audubon Society's general meeting on May 8, officers and directors will be elected for our next fiscal year, which begins July 1. All members attending that meeting may nominate candidates from the floor and vote. Officers and new directors will be installed at the annual dinner on June 12.

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## REMEMBERING ELLIOTT KUTNER

Michael Spelling

As you've read in this month's President's Message and perhaps heard via our e-list and Facebook page, Elliott Kutner passed away in early March. He was 88 years old and spent nearly 40 of those years leading SSAS's Sunday morning bird walks, in a way that set our walks apart from everyone else's and helped our chapter thrive. Instead of limiting the number of participants and trying to keep everyone quiet, the charismatic Elliott encouraged conversations and chose field trip locations, usually near bodies of water, that made it possible for dozens of people to share many of the same bird sightings.

Elliott was the featured speaker at our fourth meeting (in December 1970, presenting his "Birding Through My Window" film, which was among the homemade films he presented in many schools), our fourth president, and the perpetual chairperson of our board's nominating committee, through which he sought to recruit younger members who could lead the chapter in future decades.

His legacy with SSAS includes the Greening of Long Island campaign that he initiated in 1990. According to a *Skimmer* article that he wrote back then, the campaign's "ambitious" goal was to plant a million trees by 2000 as "our contribution towards the reduction of carbon in the air caused by our excessive auto exhaust and smokestack waste. It is known as global warming and it is bad!!" In its first year, a donation of 10,000 seedlings was obtained from a paper company for distribution by SSAS on Earth Day and all the local schools were contacted regarding the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation's school tree planting program. Members' donations to the Greening of L.I. campaign allowed us to meet the original goal of replacing the fungus-doomed Japanese black pines on our barrier beaches, and continue to be used for bird-friendly plantings in local parks and preserves.

The March 2002 *Skimmer* contained a letter that Elliott had sent to newspapers to voice SSAS's opposition to the six-week-long drive-through holiday lights shows in Jones Beach's West End. Here's an excerpt: "Is it necessary or

environmentally correct to set up two miles of lighted crystal beads for our amusement at the expense of Snowy Owls, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Horned Lark, Eastern Meadowlark, Sharp-shinned Hawk — just to name a few?... If we lose one bird to the crystal impostor, it is one bird too many... Ms. Castro [NYS Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro] is intent on turning Jones Beach into an amusement park. Robert Moses, to his credit, did not see our precious natural resource as a penny arcade. It was a jewel, to be enjoyed for its natural beauty; a place of escape and stretching from the bustle and congestion of city life."

In the April 1998 *Skimmer*, Elliott described his monthly meeting program, "About Spring and Time," as follows:

"How do we know they are here? Listen to the persistent call of the males feeding high in the trees. The buzzing notes of the Blackpoll are unmistakable, as is the pleading 'witchety' call of the Yellowthroat.

"Watch the leaves in that bush by the stream! A quickening in this or that branch announces the presence of that perfection of color and motion bent on a moment at streamside, to ease a parched throat and wet a dry wing. They feint and dodge at imagined danger. Suddenly, they step out and down to bathe, in a very brief moment of leisure — just as quickly, they are gone.

"A Blue Jay pair has sealed a contract with tomorrow. Quiet and intent now, in touch by a whispering whistle, they share a secret all their own. Gone is the raucous call and bully's role at the feeder. They are busy in a spruce nearby, climbing their ladder to tomorrow.

"It is quiet now except for the warblers moving north to fulfill a 3000 mile promise.

"For our neighbor birds, the challenge has moved from the arena of claim and counterclaim to the hush of the nest, egg, chick, and summer's fledgling.

"But it's *spring!* For one brief moment they pause, in the ultimate wisdom of instinct, to be refreshed by a cool pool, warmed by a friendly sun, to ruffle feathers wearied by travel — travel to that appointed place and task. And when another season is gone, they take up that wandering once more — home wherever night falls. The rhythm of that clock marks the days of our lives."

Here are some of the anecdotes that were written by long-time SSAS members, followed by a note sent to us by Elliott's son-in-law:

"I've been thinking about Elliott a lot these past days, fondly remembering the Sunday walks, especially out at Jamaica Bay. A bird would be sighted and Elliott made sure everyone got a look at the bird of the moment. We often thought Elliott had the birds trained to wait until he was finished showing them off to the group before they were allowed to take flight. Elliott was quite the teacher, passionate about the birds and nature in general. He shared that knowledge with enthusiasm and sincerity and will be long remembered for his principles." — Carole Adams

"A number of years ago, I was in the sauna at my sports club in Long Beach and the subjects of birding and SSAS came up in conversation. A woman seated in the sauna asked me 'Is Elliott

Kutner still with South Shore Audubon?' After I told her that he was still leading bird walks, she told me that over 20 years previously she had gone on walks with him and still remembered the walks fondly. It seems that everyone on Long Island knew Elliott and that his bird walks were likely to be discussed in all sorts of social situations." — Jim Brown

"Elliott was my 'father in birding.' He recognized my thirst for birds when I showed up one Sunday morning for his bird walk at the tender age of 11, and he made it his mission over the next several years to see to it that I thrived. At his funeral, many of us noted that, near the end of that beautiful service, a lone bird flew to the top of the little tree right by the graveside. It was a mockingbird. I smiled at that because, like the many-tongued mockingbird, Elliott speaks with many voices now too. Just as he took me under his wing, now I try to do the same with my volunteer work in New York's public schools, teaching kids about birds; that's Elliott speaking through me. All the people Elliott inspired — and there were so many — when we pass on that inspiration, we're passing on a bit of Elliott. As the mockingbird flew off over our heads, I realized that from now on, Elliott's spirit would be carried on the wings of many voices." — Chris Cooper

"I'll always remember Elliott telling people in a positive way: 'Everyone has something that they are good at and a special quality that they can use to help educate and promote a good cause such as South Shore Audubon... What is your special quality?'" — John Gaglione

"Elliott was a very important person in my life... and I'm sure SO many other lives. He led the walks with so much enthusiasm — making everyone a nature lover for life; shared his vast knowledge in an exciting way; and always knew everyone's name, making them feel recognized and welcome to the group!" — Mary May

"Elliott was my friend of 36 years and best man at my wedding. When time came for him to give the toast, everybody stood up with champagne glasses in hand, at which point he said, 'Everyone please be seated.' He then proceeded to give the longest but most heartfelt toast in the history of weddings. Angela and I will never forget that moment." — Jim Remsen

"My family was blessed to meet Elliott Kutner 19 years ago when my son Michael became involved with SSAS at age nine. Elliott inspired Michael's lifelong love of birds and nature. Michael has led our family and many others on that journey. Thank you, Elliott Kutner!" — Elizabeth Shannon

"Elliott loved life. 'Life is one big circle,' he would say. He cared for the environment as much as he cared for each and every one of us. He was my mentor and he taught me everything I know about bird-watching." — Jonathan Staller

"The family of Elliott Kutner extends its deepest gratitude to all members of the birding community who shared their sympathies with us during the memorial service and our time of mourning. Your heartfelt condolences and memories helped provide comfort during this very difficult time. We ask that each of you share and spread the wisdom, knowledge, and enthusiasm for life learned from Elliott with others that cross your path in life. In this way, his life and memory will pass from person to person and generation to generation. He loved and cherished every moment spent with each of you. May God bless you all." — The Kutner & Rubin Families

