SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER

VOLUME 46, NUMBER 3 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY NOVEMBER 2015

NEXT MEETING

Paul Stessel

DATE: Tuesday, November 10, 2015
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)
SPEAKER: Mike Farina
TOPIC: The Fascinating Migration of Raptors

Our next program will feature a PowerPoint presentation about the purposes, uses, and data obtained from hawk watches, one of which is run by our guest speaker at Oceanside's Marine Nature Study Area. Mike Farina, the recipient of SSAS's Conservation Award at our annual dinner in 2014, will let us know about this autumn's hawk-watch sightings at MNSA and discuss other local watches.

Mike graduated from SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry in 1999 with a B.S. in environmental science and forest biology. On his Web site (www.michaelfarina.com), he writes "I can still remember the first sentence that I heard at orientation, '…this is not a field that people enter to get rich, it is a field for those who wish to make a difference.'" During the summers of his college years, he was an intern at the Marine Nature Study Area and began monitoring, photographing, and observing the "incredible bird life in the salt marshes of Oceanside." As the Conservation Biologist in charge of MNSA, he does "biological studies, aquarium maintenance, janitorial duties, repair and maintenance, landscaping, exhibit design, and outdoor education." Join us!

Pre-Meeting Book Discussion. Arrive a half-hour early to participate in a discussion led by R. U. Abyrdar II (aka Paul Stessel) of the book that he and Sy Schiff reviewed in the previous Skimmer. This meeting's book is Feeding Wild Birds in America: Culture, Commerce, and Conservation by Baicich, Barker, and Henderson.

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 Highway.

IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE WASTE, PLEASE BRING COFFEE MUGS TO OUR MEETINGS.
SHADE-GROWN COFFEE PROTECTS RAINFORESTS!

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.*

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(Try this: www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIxfVSS_65o.) Of course, I enjoyed that very much — plus I was able to add another bird to my life list.

But it got me thinking about bird-watching in general. People frequently ask me things like: What's the best time to watch birds? Where's the best place to watch birds?

The brief answer is that once you are bitten by the bug, you are watching birds all the time, and while there really are times and places when there is more bird activity, it really doesn't matter too much, because once you're turned on, you will see things all the time. For example, I used to work on the fifth floor of a building, and my window was at the level of the top of a flagpole. To my delight, a Red-tailed Hawk took over the top of the flagpole for many months. I learned a very great deal about Red-tailed Hawk behavior from that close vantage point — and so did almost everybody else in my office.

Now, some folks are just not into bird-watching — I have a cousin, who is otherwise quite normal, who doesn't get it at all. On the other hand, some folks have been bird-watchers since they were very young. SSAS is blessed with some young members who teach us a thing or two all the time and, of course, we encourage them in every way we can. But I think most of us have had an "aha!" moment, when the bird-watching switch was turned on. For me it was watching pigeons in Brooklyn with my grandfather when I was very young. How wonderful to fly! A field ecology course I took in college cemented the thing for me; I pored over Peterson for hours and hours.

One person told me it was seeing a flock of flamingos coming to land in Florida at dusk; another person spoke of seeing a Northern Cardinal on the snow in his backyard in the dead of winter — it goes on. I teach classes in field ecology at Nassau Community College, and it gives me unparalleled pleasure when I see that switch turn on in my students. I know they will be bird-watching and enjoying nature forever after.

So — in my opinion, the answer to "when to go bird-watching" is: all the time.

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HOLIDAY LIGHTS AT JONES BEACH

Michael Sperling

Unfortunately, the Holiday Lights Spectacular show that we strongly opposed from 2000 through 2005 (until it was moved for its final year to the Jones Beach Theater's parking field) and again when it was revived last year, is expected to start showing up along the road in the West End of Jones Beach by the time you receive this newsletter. The West End is a critical part of the "West Hempstead Bay / Jones Beach West" Important Bird Area.

On September 22, six Long Island Audubon chapters and the Queens County Bird Club were invited to a weekday lunch meeting three days later at the Long Island Regional Headquarters of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP). We were invited as a result of a letter we had sent last December, for which we received a defensive letter from the Regional Director in January. I represented SSAS at the meeting; two weeks earlier, I had e-mailed a Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) request to Albany for documents regarding the show (following up on a similar request nearly a year ago), but as I'm writing this, the deadline for receiving them (20 working days) is yet to be reached.

The meeting was attended by five Long Island OPRHP employees (including the Deputy Regional Director, Jones Beach's Director, the Environmental Manager for the LI Region, and the newly hired Environmental Analyst for Long Island), three other volunteers from the organizations that had signed the letter, and Audubon New York's new Long Island Bird Conservation Manager. We were told that last year's show drew 62,000 vehicles and that Live Nation Entertainment, Inc.'s gross was $1.2 million, of which $180,000 went to the LI Region's State Parks, with $15,000 to be spent on yet-to-be-determined environmental programs at Jones Beach. Live Nation, which operates the Jones Beach Theater, paid for all expenses except for one Parks' employee and the NYS Parks Police.

During its first run, the Holiday Lights Spectacular's peak attendance was 73,000 cars and buses in 2001. We object to the show's location for many reasons, including the exhaust and leaking toxic fluids from these vehicles as they slowly drive for two miles, where people view about 100 displays that are lit for over six weeks. The displays, the largest of which have been 30 feet tall and 150 feet wide, are supported by guy wires and connected via long electric cables to power sources that include large temporary generators.

The 2015 contract was being negotiated at the time of the meeting. Live Nation will probably start installing the displays on the road's shoulders on October 12 and erecting them on October 26. Since this is during the fall bird migration, it was suggested by OPRHP's Environmental Manager that the tallest displays be required to be erected last. The show would open on November 19 to the media, would run five nights per week for the next three weeks, then six nights per week, and then nightly during the peak of the holiday season through January 3.

As we wrote in a letter that was sent to newspaper editors back in 2002: "West End is one of the premier winter bird habitats in our region, home to Snowy Owls, Short-eared Owls, Long-eared Owls, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Merlins, Northern Harriers, Peregrine Falcons, Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, American Tree Sparrows, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Red-throated Loons, Common Loons, Horned Larks, and Eastern Meadowlarks, to name a few. West End and its environs are one of the few remaining crucial places that our wildlife have left for the daily needs of their lives. The true spirit of the season is about giving. Let's turn out the lights and give the little birds and creatures of West End back their home."

We Need Your Help! When you visit the West End, please take photos of show-related damage to plants, guy wires that aren't flagged, injured or dead birds (very few have been documented but we contend that they're grabbed by other wildlife and by Holiday Light Spectacular employees), broken light bulbs, etc. You can send them to mssperling@optonline.net. Please tell people not to attend the show; have them visit the habitat in daylight instead, in order to see why the show shouldn't be there.

Explore the coast with the

AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY

WINTER WATERFOWL WORKSHOP (Sat., Nov. 14, 10 A.M. to 1 P.M.). Meet at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge for a slide presentation and walk featuring the many species of ducks and geese that overwinter in NYC and Long Island. Learn about behavior, biology and how to identify birds in the field. Leader: Don Riepe. For info & reservations contact Don. Free.

ASSATEAGUE ISLAND / CHINCOTEAGUE REFUGE (Nov. 19–22). A great wildlife weekend at a national seashore and national wildlife refuge. See wild ponies, Bald Eagles, falcons, hawks, shorebirds, snow geese and lots more. Cost: $395/person includes three nights lodging at Refuge Inn, breakfasts, guided walks, Safari bus tour, plus an "All-you-can-eat" seafood dinner on Saturday night. Single supplement $180.

ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY (Sat., Dec. 12, 5 to 9 P.M.). 30th annual party in Broad Channel. Cost: $55 incl. buffet dinner, wine & beer, dessert & coffee plus door prizes, an "Ugly Auction" and entertainment. Preceded by a nature hike at 3 P.M.

WINTER BIRDS AT JAMAICA BAY (Sat., Dec. 19 (10 A.M. to 1 P.M.). Meet at the refuge for a hike around the pond and gardens to look for late migrants and winter birds arriving. Learn to identify many species, and how birds and other wildlife survive winter. For info & reservations, contact Don. Free.

For information and free field trip brochure,
call/write Don Riepe, (718) 474-0896, donriepe@gmail.com,
28 West 9th Road, Broad Channel, NY 11693;
www.littoralsociety.org.

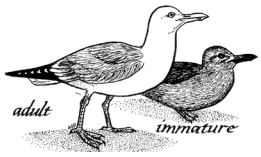
NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER
A Persistent Young Gull

Joe Grupp

This past summer, my wife and I frequently walked the Jones Beach boardwalk for exercise. It is a neat place to do so because health-walk signs are posted each tenth of a mile, starting at the Parking Field 6 entrance to the boardwalk. One then has the opportunity to know how far he or she has walked. Add to that all the things that attract one to a summer beach and the walk becomes a bit more than exercise. Whether on the beach, the boardwalk, or in the air, gulls are ever-present there.

On the return leg of a walk on a late August day, we were going down a ramp to a concrete walk that edges the sand. A scattering of gulls were at the base of the ramp, milling, seemingly, aimlessly about. Some were coming and going into the air; a few were rising a few feet into the air and settling back down again; most were walking about. As we descended the ramp, we noticed a recently fledged youngster. We could not help but notice it, because in a few more steps we could have fallen over it.

It was easy to tell it was a recently fledged Herring Gull youngster because of its chocolate-brown color with no easily defined markings and its all-black bill. Herring Gulls take four years, passing through a number of changes in plumage, to become the gray-winged white-bodied adult that many people call, along with other species of gulls, a "seagull." Its behavior also indicated that it was a really young bird, as it was running around with its body positioned horizontally, head and bill extended, as newly fledged gulls do when begging for food.



The bird was wandering around from one gull to another, frequently pecking at them. It did the same with the foot of another walker but without pecking. It seemed that it was just being a pest. The behavior seemed a bit crazy until an adult Herring Gull dropped down softly from above, wings extended and cupped to slow its descent, and landed on the concrete, somewhat close to the young bird. The young bird's concentration then focused on the adult, who pulled away from it at times. He rushed at it, plucked at its feathers, and chased it when it moved away, seemingly being a pest but really looking to be fed. All of this was happening as we proceeded only a few steps off the ramp.

The action was such that I remarked to my wife, "That mom gull (if it was a mom) is not about to feed that young bird. She is teaching it to survive on its own." As the young bird kept pecking and pecking at the adult, it appeared to our eyes that it was annoying it. Then I jokingly said to the young bird, "You have to earn a living on your own, bird!"

Just as I got the words out of my mouth, the young bird struck the adult at the base of its yellow bill and then again on the red spot near the end of the bill. The red spot is the spot that nestlings strike to be fed. When struck, the adult opens its bill and regurgitates food for the nestling.

It worked for this young bird also, because the adult opened its bill wide, as wide as the blades of a pair of scissors opened wide, faced the ground, and regurgitated a small bit of food onto the concrete. Before the adult lifted its head and closed its bill, the young bird pecked the food off the concrete, swallowed it, and went about pecking at other gulls and making us do the two-step to avoid falling over it. That young bird certainly knew what it was doing and I most certainly did not. Being persistent served it well that day, but it had better learn its foraging skills fast or its future will not be bright.

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SAVE THE DATE

Marilyn Hametz

The South Shore Audubon Annual Holiday Party for Children at the Tackapausha Museum in Seaford will be Saturday afternoon, **December 12**.

If you would like to enjoy the event as a South Shore Audubon volunteer, please contact me at 799-7189 or marilynexpl@yahoo.com.

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Lorraine Bondi
New York Agent/East Coast Agency Director

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WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Due to National Audubon Society's transition between contractors that handle its memberships, for this month none of the chapters were assigned new members. However, we do have two people to welcome who joined us directly and have been participating in our bird walks:

Massapequa..... Frank and Jamie Geraldi

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BIRD WALKS

Joe Landesberg

All walks start at **9 A.M.**; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Call me at 467-9498 in case of questionable conditions or for other info. Directions and lists of what we've seen are at ssaudubon.org.

Oct. 25	Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)
Nov. 1	Mill Pond Park (Wantagh / Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
Nov. 8	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Nov. 15	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Nov. 22	Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner
Nov. 29	Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
Dec. 6	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

NASSAU COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL HOTLINE 571-6306

SSAS FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE COMMENTS

Jim Brown

Below are the official comments of the South Shore Audubon Society sent to the National Park Service on September 16, giving our points of view regarding the 2014–2015 Draft Wilderness Stewardship Plan and Fire Island Draft General Management Plan.

Regarding the recently published Draft Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) and the Draft Fire Island National Seashore General Management Plan (GMP), we urge your agency to thoughtfully consider the comments below of the South Shore Audubon Society. Our organization is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society that represents approximately 1,500 families from the south shore of Long Island.

The Wilderness Area of Fire Island is extremely important to the South Shore Audubon Society and its members. This seven-mile-long wild section of Fire Island has been enjoyed by our members and many others over the years. The land provides important habitat for birds and other wildlife, as well as offering the possibility of a true "wilderness experience" to those who love nature. Most of our comments to follow are related most directly to the WSP for the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dunes Wilderness.

There are numerous positive elements in the WSP, and we are happy to see that the National Park Service plans to preserve wilderness qualities of the Otis Pike Wilderness, through continuing such activities as eliminating invasive species and protecting endangered species such as the Piping Plover. We appreciate that signage in the Wilderness will be kept to an absolute minimum.

Regarding the section of the WSP addressing Roads, Trails and Vehicle Cuts (VII A, page 19), we do have some important comments to make: We strongly believe that the Burma Road, an historic byway through the Wilderness, should be better maintained than it is at present and better than the WSP specifies. An important goal of the Wilderness Act has always been to provide opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. At present the Burma Road is inadequately maintained, and the Wilderness Stewardship Plan states that in the future only the trailheads of the path will be maintained. (Here an ambiguity should be noted: the WSP refers to maintenance only at the trailheads, whereas the GMP, p. 53, seemingly refers to maintenance of the whole path.) The Burma Road trail is currently severely overgrown, as are a couple of spur trails that lead to some of the most beautiful and unique parts of the Wilderness. If hikers and birders are unable to access important parts of the Wilderness, a key goal of the Wilderness Act — providing solitude and primitive recreation — will not be adequately realized. Importantly, wilderness areas require advocates, and it is necessary that possible advocates have access to the nature that is available at Fire Island.

The SSAS recommends that the Burma Road trail and several spur trails be maintained at a Wilderness Class 2 standard. It is not sufficient to maintain the Burma Road only at each terminus. It has been stated by NPS staff that finances may be an issue in the lack of effort put into the maintenance of these primitive trails. If that is the case, the Fire Island Seashore Management could perhaps ask local hiking and environmental groups to help with the task. Volunteers would be available to assist park personnel.

Regarding "Mosquito Surveillance and Management" addressed by the General Management Plan (p. 86 of GMP, Management Alternative 3), the South Shore Audubon Society recommends that NPS revise the plan to halt the spraying of pesticides and seek alternative, more natural methods of mosquito control.

Hopefully our suggestions for the GMP, and especially for the Wilderness Stewardship Plan (incorporated into the GMP as an appendix), will be adopted in the final versions of the plans. A Final GMP / EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) is now being formulated, taking into account public input from concerned individuals and organizations such as ours. There will be an additional public review of the reformulated GMP / EIS, after which a final document will be approved and a Record of Decision made. We will notify SSAS members of future developments as the planning process for Fire Island and its unique wilderness continues.

AUDUBON CALENDARS FOR SALE

Joe Landesberg is selling discounted Audubon calendars ($10 each) at our walks and meetings. This year we ordered calendars featuring Songbirds, National Parks, Wildflowers, and Trees. If you're interested, please see Joe.

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. Double-sided 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