

SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 51, NUMBER 4 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

DECEMBER 2020-JANUARY 2021

NEXT MEETING

DATE: Tuesday, December 8, 2020
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: ONLINE
SPEAKER: Shaibal S. Mitra
TOPIC: Bird Migration on Long Island



Before the program, please visit our website under Monthly Meetings at <http://www.ssaudubon.org/meetings-events.asp> or our Facebook page under Events for a link and phone number to join the Zoom meeting. If you do not have access to a computer or mobile device and need the phone number, please call 516-504-8711.

Long Island is an exceptional place to observe birds, owing to its diversity of habitats and geographic position. It is also a challenging environment for birders to navigate, for these same reasons, and because it is so densely urbanized. This talk will survey some of the many places on Long Island where birds can be sought, with special attention devoted to shorebirds during spring, pelagic birds from land during summer, the visible migration of hawks and many other species during fall, and gulls and waterfowl during winter. Similarities and differences between the North and South Shores, and between western and eastern Long Island will also be discussed, with tips on how to tailor one's field approach by region and season. Bird migration occurs throughout the year on Long Island -- and elsewhere as well. Birders can deepen their appreciation of birds and their insights into the natural world by learning to recognize seasonal movements at unexpected times and in unexpected places -- including right in one's own neighborhood.

Shai Mitra has studied birds in the northeastern United States and around the world for more than 35 years. He received a BA in Biology from Cornell University in 1989 and a PhD in Evolutionary Biology from the University of Chicago in 1996. From 1996-2000 he operated a major bird-banding station at the Fire Island Lighthouse, on the South Shore of Long Island. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor of Biology at the College of Staten Island, with

research interests in the areas of avian ecology, evolution, and conservation. Shai is Editor of *The Kingbird*, the quarterly publication of the New York State Ornithological Association; co-compiler of bird records for the New York City and Long Island region; Chair of the Rhode Island Avian Records Committee; and co-compiler of the Southern Nassau County and Napatree, Rhode Island, Christmas Bird Counts.

BONUS MEETING

DATE: Tuesday, December 15, 2020
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: ONLINE
SPEAKER: Brian Langloss
TOPIC: The Story of Plastic



Please register for *The Story of Plastic* at <http://bit.ly/TheStoryOfPlasticDec2020>. You can also click on the link from our website under Monthly Meetings or our Facebook page under Events.

The Story of Plastic is a battle cry for the current movement to reduce plastic pollution, a reality check about where plastics come from, and a rare glimpse into how the entire plastic production system pollutes and marginalizes communities, long before plastic pollution makes its way into the ocean.

Called "the most important documentary of the year" by Indie NYC, *The Story of Plastic* can be viewed for free on your own time between December 8th and December 15th. The link to view will be sent to all registrants one week prior to our December 15th panel discussion. See you there! (See page 6 for more on the film.)

Brian Langloss is the New York Campaign Organizer for Oceana. Oceana has been campaigning in New York State building support for the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act (see the September 2020 *Skimmer*), plus advancing ordinances at the local level to curb plastic pollution.

Atlantic White Cedar Swamp: Long Island was historically an important Atlantic White Cedar (AWC) stronghold as stands were believed to be present in an almost continuous chain from Brooklyn to Montauk, clustered along the southern edge of the terminal glacial moraine. Unfortunately, given the value of AWC as a timber species, AWC has been subjected to heavy harvesting pressure. Furthermore, given their particular habitat requirements, AWC swamps are highly sensitive to alterations of natural hydrology and land clearing associated with suburban and urban development. As such, AWC are now considered to be a globally rare species in need of conservation and management efforts locally and regionally. For our Sanctuary, a portion of the land proximal to the stormwater outfall was enhanced with the excavation of a channel and a shallow pond at the end of the channel. Excavated soil was stockpiled around the channel and pond in order to provide berms, which were in turn planted with Atlantic White Cedar and co-associated species.

Pitch Pine-Oak Forest: Although AWC is an incredibly adaptable species, plants are often subject to windthrow given their relatively shallow root systems. As such, existing oak trees on site were supplemented with species characteristic of Pitch Pine-Oak Forests in order to provide a buffer to the newly established AWC forest.

Hempstead Plains Grassland: An ecotone will be developed to transition into a habitat that will mimic a Hempstead Plains Grassland. A portion of the grassland area was planted and another portion will be seeded with characteristic species. The Grassland will serve as an investment into the overall operations of SSAS, as seeds from the planted species can be harvested for restoration work at other locations.

American Chestnut Mother Orchard: American Chestnut was once one of the most ubiquitous tree species in the eastern United States. Unfortunately, in the early 1900s, an introduced fungus caused a Chestnut Blight that decimated these populations. American Chestnut is now functionally extinct, and has been largely relegated to scattered sucker growth in the understory. Fortunately, researchers at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry have produced a blight-resistant, transgenic chestnut tree, which is nearing the end of a long regulatory review process. The American Chestnut Foundation and Save the Great South Bay have pollinated LI Ecotype Chestnuts, grown out seedlings, and are now establishing mother orchards for the production of blight-resistant LI ecotype plants, including at our Sanctuary.

We are excited to serve as pioneers in restoring once common but now rare native habitats. The birds are appreciative too: during the planting we saw Carolina Wren, Northern Flicker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Northern Cardinal, and an altercation be-



tween Blue Jays and a Cooper's Hawk (the Blue Jays won). We hope that the Sanctuary will serve as a model for others to Adopt-a-Sump through the Nassau County Department of Public Works. (For information on the Adopt-a-Sump program, call 516-571-9609.) There are hundreds of sumps available for habitat improvement in Nassau County: imagine the boon to birds if we could fill even some of them with native plants! We have lost 1/3 of our birds since 1970 and we could lose 2/3 of our birds in coming decades due to habitat destruction and climate change; this makes even microhabitats essential for the survival of birds. Some native oaks can support up to 557 species of caterpillars, and when it takes 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars in a season to raise a brood of five chickadees, the benefits of native plants are obvious.

Our sump-to-Sanctuary project was filmed and the video will be posted on our website, along with photos and a list of plants. The video includes interviews with those involved and Mike's history with SSAS.



Nassau County Stormwater Basins are fenced, gated, and locked, but we will schedule events for public access to our Sanctuary. A sign designating the Michael Sperling Memorial Bird Sanctuary will be posted at the gate and include a QR code to scan and link to our video and more information. We will offer opportunities for students and volunteers to participate in planting, maintaining, and conducting bird and pollinator surveys in the Sanctuary.

In addition to our donors, we would like to thank:

Joy Cirigliano, President of Four Harbors Audubon, for planting the idea

Frank Piccininni, for his vision, commitment, and efforts, which defrayed costs and made this project a reality

Spadefoot Design for their enthusiastic and energetic work

Nassau County Project Manager Daniel Davis, Attorneys Daniel Grippo and Nicholas Sarandis, Highways Superintendent Michael Fasano, Deputy County Executive Brian Schneider, and the Nassau County Department of Public Works for reviewing our plan, fielding our questions, shepherding us through the permitting process, providing access to the stormwater basin, and assisting with disposal of invasive vegetation

Save the Great South Bay for providing the American Chestnut Mother Orchard and volunteers to assist with maintenance of the Sanctuary

Long Island Natives for donating 25 Black Willow trees

Donations to the Michael Sperling Memorial Fund will continue to help us with the Sanctuary and other projects that honor his work. If you would like to make a donation, please make out your check to South Shore Audubon Society, and write Michael Sperling Memorial Fund on the memo line. Mail your check to P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so your donation is tax deductible.

squirrels were so skittish.

Then you hear the others overhead, a flock of Mourning Doves. Their wings make a signature sound, a squeak that calls for some WD-40, a sound I have come to despise. They plant themselves in the trees and stare at the deck. Now a second Mourning Dove lands on the railing. The small birds take to the air and land in various bushes and trees on our property to witness the descent of the Doves and the abrupt end of their feast.

When the second Mourning Dove alights on the railing and although yards away from that first one -- the battle begins. The first bird launches himself at the second bird. He does not want any other Mourning Dove to have any of that 20-foot smorgasbord. So, they open their wings and do battle. They flap like crazy against each other, bullying and battling until one loses and flies off.

While that battle rages, more Mourning Doves alight on the railing. The all-out wars begin. Usually the ones on the rail can chase the new arrivals away but some of the newcomers are pretty tough and they flap, flap, flap their wings at the early-bird diners.

These battles scatter the seeds and peanuts (peanuts are for the squirrels) all over the place. Into the yard, onto the deck. Our carefully-laid buffet for the birds is flung hither and yon. Essentially, the Mourning Doves fight until the food is no longer on the railing.

Some time later, the Mourning Doves flock to the roof of our house and then they fly off to war at some other place.

I propose that we officially change the name from Mourning Dove to Annoying Dove. Will you sign my petition?

Visit Frank's web site at www.franksoble.com. His books are available from smile.amazon.com (where you can support SSAS), Barnes and Noble, Kindle, eBooks, and at bookstores.



BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

How to be an Urban Birder by David Lindo

R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff



This is a British book by a British naturalist, writer, broadcaster, speaker, photographer, wildlife tour leader, and educator. He is a Londoner and runs the popular website "The Urban Birder World." That said, the author is widely known and a force for conservation and education for bird watching. But on the other side of the pond. To start, there are lots of pictures and lots of descriptions of parks and places in urban England. However, just ignore the names and the places and mentally substitute your own locality. No different than if the birds and places were on the West Coast. You would make an equivalent adjustment.

I trotted out my newly printed 4th edition of Peterson's

British Birds (purchased in London on a vacation visit years ago) to keep up with the narrative. Not really needed as there are photos of the British birds mentioned. There is no index, but a very excellent table of contents that serves fairly well.

After a short section on "What is Urban Birding?"; it goes into "How to Use This Book." The description is to make you a birder or a better birder and to take advantage of the surroundings where you live or work. While the concentration is on the local patch, it manages to move farther out into more distant places. The suggestions bring you closer and closer to becoming an ardent birder.

For the British birder, there is a list of 45 most common birds to be seen in London with photos and excellent line drawings. If you're curious or want to learn, this should certainly get your attention.

What follows is a complete rather good explanation of what a new birder needs to know about becoming one, or a fairly new birder who wants to know more. It covers sections on food for feeders, a discussion on nest boxes, a section on choosing binoculars, a small discussion of cameras starting with point and shoot, digiscoping, smart phones and use of the internet, birding apps, and joining groups.

The final section is how to be an urban birder. Here some of the previous material is covered again. The thrust is a bit different from what came before. It appears to be directed to helping a beginner become a better birder.

The book is written by a British author. It's a British book. But birding is a universal pursuit and much in the book is applicable to everyone and everywhere.



THE STORY OF PLASTIC

Guy Jacob

SSAS, through the generosity of Oceana, is providing our members the opportunity to view this film anytime from December 8th through December 15th and to participate in a panel Zoom discussion with us on December 15th. (See page 1 for details.) The film is not publicly available, but I urge you to watch it not only because it's an uncommon opportunity, but because it will impact your life. SSAS is a better organization when our members are well-informed.

As film critic Helen Highly stated, "You will not be the same person after you watch it; it will change your world view and your private life (but in a good way)."

Indie NYC is short for Indiewood/Hollywoodn't, which is an online publication devoted to the maintenance, presentation, and ideology of independently produced cinema. Helen Highly reviewed The Story of Plastic for Indie NYC and you can find the review at the link below. The link takes you directly to the article, but you still need to scroll to the end of the page because there is a long list of movie reviews: <http://indienyc.com/helenhighly-highlights-doc-nyc-2019-curtain-raiser-part-two/>

This review was admirable and heartfelt; Highly articulates a germane synopsis of the film's key points. There were a couple of paragraphs where the author said that she forgot a particular statistic and would need to look it up. Common sense tells me that journalists shouldn't do that. Look it up and include it in your article. These were unfortunate distractions from an otherwise excellent review that included valuable links and more information than even the documentary provided.

I too have concluded that recycling plastic is not only largely a waste of my time, but more importantly, a perpetuation of a troubling corporate myth and a terrible offense to third world countries. However, old "feel good" habits die hard -- I just cannot stop myself from recycling plastic (yet). Perhaps I never will stop; there is a role for recycling some types of plastic (mostly #1 and #2), and I want to believe that it can make a small, positive difference. Far, far more important, however, is the critical need to significantly reduce the amount of plastic produced in the first place, for our families, for our future. And the only way we're ever going to accomplish this is through state and federal hard-hitting legislation. Our new NYS law banning plastic bags is an excellent start.

The more you learn about plastic, the more you will see it for the toxic and climate-changing menace that it is. And you will understand that corporate greed is driving its ubiquitous, perilous immersion deep into our lives and into every crevice of the natural world.

PIGGYBACK THE POST OFFICE TO RECYCLE BATTERIES

Franklin Rothenberg

Every time I discard a used battery, it hurts me because I know it's going into a landfill. I actually collected my used batteries and put them in the Freeport Library collection box when I went to Audubon meetings there. It doesn't seem ecological to make a special trip there for that purpose.

I'm suggesting a national battery recycling program utilizing the post office facilities. People could put used batteries in an envelope or plastic bag and they would be collected at each post office site or they could be given to any postal officer similar to a letter being mailed.

En masse, the batteries have value and it would help the USPS stay profitable.

NYS ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDING

The following is an excerpt of a letter signed by 176 diverse organizations, including SSAS.

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Speaker Heastie:

Public funding to protect clean air and water, create and maintain local parks and enhance recreation, tackle climate change and its impacts, and conserve natural resources is critical to the health, safety and prosperity of all New Yorkers. With the \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act removed from the November 2020 ballot, it is imperative that New York State maintain environmental funding. State environmental funding furthers the goals of the Bond Act while creating good-paying jobs, strengthening local economies, and advancing environmental justice in frontline communities.

In the past, the environment has been treated like a luxury and all too often taken disproportionate funding cuts when the state faced financial crises. But environmental funding programs create jobs and economic opportunity, and, as the COVID pandemic has once again demonstrated, clear air, clean water and outdoor recreation are critical in protecting public health. When making difficult funding decisions, these resources and services must be recognized as essential. This funding also demonstrates a commitment by the state that can be used to leverage federal funds, specifically for future job-creating stimulus funding that could expand our ability to build resilience. Furthermore, the current impacts and dire threats we face from climate change remain during hard economic times and addressing them now will save money and lives, both now and in the long run. Hard economic times like these demand that we protect and enhance the environment we share, and in doing so, we can create solutions that will ensure we build a more prosperous future.

The full letter can be found on The Nature Conservancy website at <https://bit.ly/3dE54Wf>.

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A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Think Globally, but Join Locally!

Option 1. You can join SSAS for a year by sending \$20 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 by joining Audubon through us for the same price that it costs if you join through NAS (we get \$0 from these dues 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.

Renewing? Please send NAS renewals directly to NAS.

Donations to SSAS are always welcome! \$ _____

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

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