

SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 51, NUMBER 5 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 2021

NEXT MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, February 10, 2021
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: ONLINE
SPEAKER: Ken Elkins
TOPIC: All About Owls

The Zoom invitation will be posted on our website and Facebook page under Events.



Open your eyes wide for a fascinating look into the secret lives of all eleven species of owls that have been known to appear on Long Island. A few species are much more common than most people realize, but we'll discuss the threats to all owls created by humans. The group will learn more about their natural history by sharing their personal experiences with owls.

Ken Elkins, Community Conservation Manager, Audubon CT/NY

Ken's interest in birds started when he was 10 years old, while watching the birds at his grandmother's feeders in Vermont, and he has been obsessed ever since. After earning a degree in 1998 in Environmental Biology and Interpretation from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, he started his career in conservation education at Westmoor Park in West Hartford, CT and quickly moved on to the Connecticut Audubon Society. There, he was Director of Education, leading many EcoTravel trips, and led their World Series of Birding team for 8 years. In 2008, Ken moved on to National Audubon, where he is the Community Conservation Manager based at the Audubon Center at Bent of the River in Southbury. As a 2011 TogetherGreen Fellow, Ken co-developed the nationally recognized Bird Tales program and training materials with dementia care specialist Randy Griffin. He has trained over 100 dementia care staff and volunteers to implement the Bird Tales program in 10 states, Canada, and Great Britain. Ken is past President of the Connecticut Ornithological Association. He has served as the Christmas Bird Count compiler for the Woodbury-Roxbury CBC since 2012 and is a Regional Coordinator for the 2018-2020 Connecticut Bird Atlas project.

WINTER HIGHLIGHTS

Photos by Mike Zito



A vagrant Spotted Towhee was found by Shai Mitra at Baldwin Harbor Park during the Christmas Bird Count.

Red Crossbills irrupted along the South Shore. Their specialized bills allow them to break into unopened cones.

ACCELERATING RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Jim Brown

On April 3, 2020, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic and as a part of the annual budget process, New York enacted the Accelerated Renewable Energy Growth and Community Benefit Act. This act established the “first-of-its-kind” Office of Renewable Energy Siting (ORES), housed in the Department of State. The primary goal of the act and the agency linked to it is to speed up the siting and development of land-based renewable energy facilities in the State. This accelerated development is designed help the State reach its renewable energy goals contained in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), passed in July 2019. The “Accelerated Renewable Energy Act” also has a goal of creating jobs quickly as we emerge from the severe economic downturn created by Covid-19. Accelerating the development of clean renewable energy projects can also be seen as an important part of a Green New Deal initiative in our state.

The new law specifies that all large-scale renewable energy projects, defined as producing 25 megawatts or more of electricity, will now have to obtain construction or expansion permits from the newly established siting agency. New projects of between 20-25 megawatts can also opt in to the new permitting system. A renewable energy facility, e.g., a solar farm or a wind farm, would apply to ORES for a permit. ORES would then have 60 days to make a “completeness determination.” Such a determination requires that the developer consult with the local municipalities and communities that will be hosting the facilities. ORES would then issue the draft permit conditions, which would be followed by a comment period. ORES is then required by law to issue a final decision on approval or rejection of the project within one year of the date on which the application is declared complete or “within 6 months if the facility is proposed to be located on brownfield, former commercial or industrial, landfill, former power plant, and abandoned or underutilized sites.”

The “Accelerated Renewable Energy Act” tasked ORES with the promulgation of regulations to implement the new law, to be accomplished within one year of the law’s passage. In early September 2020, draft regulations and standards were released. The South Shore Audubon Society, most local Audubon chapters in our State, Audubon New York, the American Bird Conservancy and others have all officially weighed in on both the new law itself and the draft regulations and standards that have followed. SSAS recently signed on to two separate sets of comments that request significant changes in the draft regulations, changes that would strengthen wildlife and habitat protections.

The South Shore Audubon Society supports the basic goal of the “Accelerated Renewable Energy Act” to move New York State to 100% renewable energy ASAP. All states, including New York, are not currently doing nearly enough to reach necessary renewable energy targets. For example, only 4% of our state’s electricity is now derived from solar and wind sources. Clean renewable energy sources such as these must be actively pursued at an accelerated rate. Realizing the extreme urgency of the climate crisis, the need to keep global warming at a maximum of 1.5 degrees Centigrade, SSAS early on joined a coalition of environmental groups supporting the Off Fossil Fuels Act in the state legislature. The “Off Act” had at its goal achieving 100% renewable energy by 2030, a significantly quicker timeline than that of the CLCPA’s less aggressive goals pegged to the year 2050. Nevertheless, whether one is considering renewable energy goals of our current law, the CLCPA, or more ambitious goals that may be adopted in the future, we believe that targets can be achieved while simultaneously properly siting and designing facilities to minimize harm to wildlife and the environment.

We have expressed concerns with the new “Accelerated Renewable Energy Act,” concerns including: 1) the need to address all species of birds, not just those that are endangered or threatened, 2) provision of adequate compensatory mitigation when necessary, 3) avoiding counterproductive “green-for-green swaps,” 4) avoiding the placement of wind turbines in critical flyways, 5) ensuring environmental justice in the siting of facilities in low-income and minority communities, 6) incorporating technologies to reduce bird fatalities, 7) the need to provide for proper avian and wildlife surveys, which often require more than one year to complete, and 8) providing sufficient public input during the siting process.

In general, we hope the siting process for the land-based facilities covered by the new act will approximate what has been accomplished with the siting of wind farms offshore in federal waters. Under the aegis of NYSERDA (New York State Energy Research and Development Authority), possible sites for wind turbines in the Atlantic have been chosen following careful study. Multiyear surveys of wildlife have then been carried out within those selected areas. Audubon organizations, including our chapter, have actively participated in this offshore wind siting process. Although more offshore facilities, some of them already approved, must more rapidly be built and finally become operational, solid scientific work and critical public debate have already been completed. This collaborative process fosters the building-out of even more desperately needed wind farms in the chosen and studied marine sites. The same care should be given to land-based wind and solar projects, to ensure that they too are effective and minimize negative wildlife and habitat impacts.

We are experiencing a climate crisis that is accelerating at a rapid rate. Negative impacts from anthropogenic global warming are occurring faster and more often than previously predicted by climate scientists. Clean renewable energy must indeed be brought online quickly, but at the same time birds, other wildlife and critical habitat must be preserved as we simultaneously fight climate change. We believe both goals can be accomplished, so that when we finally are able to halt runaway climate chaos and save our planet, we will still be able to enjoy a rich environment—and nature’s birds!

PLUM ISLAND: OFF THE AUCTION BLOCK

Editor's note: On December 21, 2020, Congress took Plum Island off the auction block and put it on a path to preservation. SSAS was one of the founding members of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition that fought for a decade to protect this treasure of biodiversity. Here is the press release from our State chapter, Audubon New York:

"Bird and nature lovers can breathe a sigh of relief now that the option for Plum Island to be sold at auction is going, going, gone," said Erin McGrath, policy manager with Audubon New York.

"This ecological treasure is a key breeding and stopover site for thousands of birds, including at-risk and priority species like the Roseate Tern and Piping Plover. Losing it to human development would be an unacceptable loss of biodiversity. We applaud Senators Schumer, Murphy, and Blumenthal and Representatives Zeldin, DeLauro, and Courtney, for creating a path toward the future protection of Plum Island and the birds that depend on it."

The omnibus budget bill Congress passed today will save Plum Island from the auction block. The bill restores the normal disposal procedure for federal property instead of auctioning it off to the highest bidder.

Next steps then include ensuring the island is transferred to another federal agency, state, or other body, a process that may take several years.

"Our longtime push to save Plum Island from some 'high bidder' or anyone else who might neglect its natural resources, environmental value, our local stakeholders and concerned communities is now realized -- Plum Island is saved and its sale is finally off the table," said U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY). "It would have been a grave mistake to sell and develop Plum Island's 840 acres of habitat, which is home to many endangered species. That's why preventing the unnecessary sale requirement was a top priority of these negotiations. Now the people of Long Island will have their say in its future -- and rightfully so."

“It is rare in conservation to get a second chance. All too often, a species becomes irretrievably lost to extinction or a forest is irreparably destroyed by development. But Congress, through repeal of the mandate directing the sale of Plum Island, is giving the island a second chance,” said John Turner, spokesperson for the Preserve Plum Island Coalition. “But this second chance is really a first step. The Coalition calls on all those who care about Plum Island to stand by as we look to the next steps in keeping it forever in public ownership.”

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition (PPIC), an alliance of 116 organizations across New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, has been fighting to save the island's rare habitats and cultural resources for a decade. The Coalition has developed a vision for the island's future and will shift its attention to implementing that vision, starting with identifying an appropriate owner for Plum Island that can ensure conservation. (See <https://www.preserveplumisland.org/envision-report>)

Plum Island, located at the eastern end of Long Island Sound, is home to nationally significant natural and cultural resources including lands traditionally used by Indigenous nations; a historic decommissioned Army post; and more than 500 plant and animal species, 111 of which are species of conservation concern. For 11 years it has been at risk of being sold to private developers, which would deprive the public of all the island has to offer. Such a sale would also cause irreversible harm to wildlife, including seals and endangered roseate terns; threaten historical buildings; and risk Indigenous and American cultural history.

SSAS Mission Statement: The mission of the South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education; conduct research pertaining to local bird populations, wildlife, and habitat; and to preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

OUR WEBSITE <http://www.saudubon.org>

LIKE US! <http://facebook.com/SSAudubon>



MICHAEL SPERLING MEMORIAL

SSAS created the Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary by converting a Nassau County Stormwater Basin into a living tribute of native plants and wildlife habitat to honor our treasured President, Michael Sperling, who passed on February 5, 2020. We thank those who have generously contributed to his Memorial Fund. If you would like to make a donation to help us with the Sanctuary and similar projects, 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. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so your donation is tax deductible. See page 7 for a related opportunity.



**SSAS MEMBER ALERT:
NEW MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DATE**

All SSAS only members will renew their membership in September. National Audubon Society members will need to check their renewal date and renew directly through NAS.

NAT'L AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP STATUS (844) 428-3826

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Brooklyn Heights	Manus Connaghan
Commack	Melissa Fink
Floral Park	Wendy Spence Schmidt
Long Beach	Kim Tsirigotis
Malverne	Deborah Mawhirter
Massapequa	Isabella Fox, Brian Zimmerman
Merrick	Sandy White
Oceanside	Michael Bua
Rockville Centre	Lisa Mack
Springfield Gardens	Ray Eginton
Stony Brook	Douglas J. Futuyma
Wantagh	Genevieve Cameron

THANK YOU

SSAS would like to thank the following donors for their contributions to the Michael Sperling Memorial Fund:

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SSAS would like to thank the following donors for their contributions beyond our membership fee:

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MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT UPDATE

On January 5, 2021, the Trump Administration finalized their rollback of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The rule change overturns decades of bipartisan precedent, to only extend the MBTA's protections to activities that purposefully kill birds, exempting all industrial hazards from enforcement. Any "incidental" death -- no matter how inevitable, avoidable, or devastating to birds -- becomes immune from enforcement under the law.

Facts and figures on industrial causes of bird mortality in the United States:

Power lines: Up to 64 million birds per year

Communication towers: Up to 7 million birds per year

Oil waste pits: 500,000 to 1 million birds per year

Oil spills: The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill is estimated to have killed more than 1 million birds

SSAS urges the Biden-Harris administration and 117th Congress to make reinstating the MBTA a top conservation priority.

SCOBIE SQUAWKS: ONE "FLU" OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST

Frank Scoblete

There is something so beautiful that can carry something else that is so ugly that hundreds of millions of people have died from it.

The birds. The flu.

In all its shapes and configurations, the flu has attacked humanity for as long as humanity has existed. The ancient Greeks wrote about the wreckage flu could inflict on people. Young men, in fact, their best warriors, could sniffle on a Monday and die that Sunday.

We saw this in 1918 with the Spanish Flu. Over 50 million people, many strong young men, our own warriors, heading not for the glory of battle but for their eternal rest from a tortuous disease. There is no glory in coughing up your life.

According to Audubon magazine, wild birds, "mostly shorebirds such as Red Knots, Ruddy Turnstones, Dunlins, Semi-palmated Sandpipers, Sanderlings, Herring Gulls, and Laughing Gulls," among others, bring something to us other than their beauty. According to a recent study some 60% of birds that wend their way to Delaware Bay in the United States have some form of the flu virus.

Indeed, these birds carry some 150 different strains of the flu. Luckily for us, only a small percentage have been shown to affect people. Still, those yearly bouts of the flu that cause aches, pains, and death, have probably come from birds, often through beloved meats such as pork and chicken, as we'll see.

In fact, there seems to be an ancient world business practice that spews various viruses; these are called "wet markets" and they can be found throughout China.

In filthy conditions, wild animals such as bats and various species of birds, rodents, lizards, and monkeys spend their days waiting to be sold for food and also crapping on each other's heads and through the bars of each others' cramped cages. A great birthing ground for viruses of many types.

The greatest hosts of the flu are chickens but not from the Kentucky Fried Chicken bucket. No, these are homegrown in Asia and eaten with exotic creatures that might turn a Westerner's stomach inside out.

With developing nations hungering to join the West, their populations' actual hunger for chicken dinners has increased markedly. Such growth in the chicken-eating population is a symbol and a measure of a society's cultural growth. And with that growth comes the growth of the chicken population in those countries.

There are several vectors for in-flu-encing people. Here's one: the virus can go from wild birds to chickens and/or bats, to pigs and then to us. Most of you reading this probably remember the fears over "swine flu" and "bird flu" from some years ago. Well, Covid-19 probably took that route from the wet markets to the world's human immune system with devastating results for humans.

How do we stop the spread of the flu?

The first step is for the governments of the countries where wet markets thrive to close them down or, at the very least, categorize what foods they are allowed to sell and the level of cleanliness needed for proprietors, their goods, and property.

Do I think these precautions will happen in my lifetime?

No.

In fact, I think I am chirping on the wrong shore when it comes to such reforms.

(Squirrel alert: In a former column I wrote about feeding peanuts to squirrels who frequent my backyard. Stop! SSAS member Diana Ihmann got in touch with me and told me that squirrels have allergic reactions to peanuts. So, my wife, the Beautiful AP, and I have stopped feeding our squirrels peanuts.)

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



Northern Saw-whet Owl and Red-tailed Hawk
Photos by Bill Belford

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

E-mail Newsletter Manager: Help SSAS design an email newsletter and maintain a list of subscribers. Experience with Constant Contact or other email newsletter services required.

Hempstead Lake State Park Kiosk Volunteer: Create seasonal displays to post SSAS activities and photos at our kiosk in Hempstead Lake State Park.

Please email ssaseditor@gmail.com or call 516-220-7121 if you are interested in either position.

NATIONAL GRID'S LOOMING GREENPOINT NIGHTMARE WILL ALSO IMPACT LONG ISLAND

Guy Jacob

National Grid has big scary plans for their liquified fracked gas storage facility on Newtown Creek in the Greenpoint neighborhood of Brooklyn. None of these plans respect the mandates of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), New York's landmark climate legislation passed in 2019.

Their grandiose scheme involves replacing two old vaporizers and building two new ones. Vaporizers are designed to receive large volumes of liquefied methane gas and transform it to vaporized gas at a steady rate and pressure. Using a vaporizer, its liquid form is converted into the gaseous form only when needed. The utility company also seeks to add portable liquified natural gas (LNG) capabilities at the Greenpoint site that will allow the delivery of LNG via truck to on-system injection points on Long Island and in Massachusetts, and they want to continue construction of their Metropolitan Natural Gas Reliability Project, aka, the North Brooklyn pipeline, north into Greenpoint.

National Grid's schemes are direct threats to the safety of Brooklynites and Long Islanders alike. But the British corporation can only move forward with their reprehensible plans if their permits are approved by the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) as well as the New York City Fire Department (FDNY) and if rate hikes to the tune of nearly \$300 million are approved the Public Service Commission (PSC).

National Grid's latest proposals are a direct consequence of their rejected Williams Pipeline proposal. It's just another ploy that would jeopardize public safety and propel us deeper into their anachronistic, grungy web of noxious fracked gas.

Greenpoint is an environmental justice community that is finally making progress with the help of the Greenpoint Community Environmental Fund (GCEF), which is a joint program of the NYS Office of the Attorney General and the NYSDEC created in 2011. The GCEF is an environmental grant program created with monies obtained through a settlement with ExxonMobil over its Greenpoint oil spill. National Grid's plans would threaten this progress. Like many disaffected communities, Greenpoint would be saddled with the greatest risk while much of this fracked gas is trucked to generally wealthier communities out of state and on Long Island.

New York State banned new LNG facilities in 1976 for good reason. On February 10, 1973, a gas explosion occurred inside a Texas Eastern Transmission Pipeline tank storing LNG in the Bloomfield neighborhood of Staten Island. Forty workers died as the concrete cap on the tank rose 30 feet in the air and then came crashing back down, crushing them to death.

In an unfortunate backwards move, in 1999 the NYS Legislature formally lifted the moratorium, but left it up to the NYSDEC to create a system for siting new facilities. The NYSDEC lifted the ban on LNG storage in 2015 but left the moratorium intact in NYC due to high population density. National Grid wants NYC to go the way the rest of NYS went by creating a loophole.

NYS should reinstate a statewide ban, certainly not allow a loophole in NYC. LNG never was and is not currently safe. LNG explodes when spilled into water and, if spilled on the ground, can turn into rapidly expanding odorless clouds that can flash-freeze human flesh and suffocate by displacing oxygen. Once ignited at the source, LNG vapors can become inextinguishable flaming "pool fires." Fire fighters and emergency responders would be rendered powerless to assist any victims.

The \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act proposal was pulled from this year's ballot due to Covid-19. Now, National Grid wants to raise New Yorkers' monthly bills to pay for their dastardly schemes. It would be unconscionable to ask ratepayers to foot the bill for toxic LNG after the Cuomo administration rejected the notion of asking us to approve funds that would have gone toward important environmental programs. If taxpayers should not be asked to spend extra money on conservation, they certainly should not be asked to line the pockets of National Grid's shareholders.

National Grid is seeking to build portable LNG infrastructure at Greenpoint to make way for fracked gas truck deliveries on Long Island. Nassau and Suffolk Counties would come under increased highway safety pressures as LNG and compressed natural/methane gas (CNG) is trucked to the Barrett Power Plant in Island Park and other facilities. The population in both counties is like many areas in NYC where the ban on LNG storage and transport remains in effect for this very reason.

Fracked gas trucks carrying LNG and CNG through an expanse of highways that double as virtual pipelines are an ever-increasing hazard promulgated by the fossil fuel industry as an avenue to move their methane without the expense and stress of attempting to build actual pipelines. Even if the industry had the approval and the money, they could never practically build underground and underwater pipelines east into Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Enter virtual pipelines on wheels.

Within the past few years as fracked methane gas prices have plummeted and activists have battled new pipeline infrastructure, fossil fuel companies have been introducing virtual pipeline highway proposals as their stealthy alternative. When one door closes, they frantically pursue the next open door -- and they're hellbent on opening the door to virtual pipelines.

Their cost-saving, regulation-averting virtual pipeline trucks are in effect bomb trucks on wheels transporting an accident waiting to happen. There have already been crashes in Central New York that have resulted in methane leaks. The next accident could be much more severe.

Our root problem is the utter cognitive dissonance between a buildout of fracked gas infrastructure and the advancement of clean energy technologies in NYS. Turning a blind eye to fracking infrastructure while we erect offshore wind farms is like eating raw kale with one hand while eating fried pork fat with the other. How much more of that fried pork fat will you reach for, thereby making less room and desire for the kale? Certainly, in the near short run, the kale is helping to mitigate some of the harmful effects of eating fried pork fat, but over time such a diet will only prove to be a wretched exercise in futility.

National Grid's nefarious plots to hold back the hands of time smack of desperation on the dawn of a clean energy revolution. But time of the essence. We must resolve our cognitive dissonance before it's too late. Only when we check the ambitions of profiteers too self-absorbed in the moment to consider the risks for posterity, even while we demand that our leaders work relentlessly toward the sweeping ambitions of New York's climate law, will we engender the harmony between our laws and our actions so desperately needed to set us on a righteous path forward.

A clean energy future is the promise of clean air and water with good jobs in healthy, safe industries. It's ours for the taking if we only demand it. **Email Governor Cuomo:** <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>

GET READY FOR SPRING! SSAS is delighted to announce an exciting partnership with the up-and-coming restoration contractor and design firm Spadefoot Design and Construction, LLC. Spadefoot helped us create the Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary and we are now offering to restore bird habitat in your own backyard! Imagine birding while sipping your morning coffee in the comfort of your own home. Spadefoot Design and Construction will generously work free of cost for any of our supporters who donate \$200 or more to SSAS during the first 4 months of 2021. Included in this gift are an individualized design consultation, a visual rendering, and a plant list to create your at-home bird sanctuary. Further, your contribution will be earmarked for future restoration projects and maintenance of the Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary. Visit <https://www.spadefootny.com> or call (516) 225-8545.

South Shore Audubon Society

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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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