

South Shore

# Skimmer

Volume 52, Number 2 • South Shore Audubon Society • Winter 2022

## Protecting Skimmers and the Places They Need

by Brien Weiner

The Black Skimmer, an iconic South Shore Bird, and our Chapter's mascot and logo, is a sleek black-and-white tern with a toucan-like bill that it uses to skim small fish from shorelines. We host a spectacular skimmer colony at Nickerson Beach, but due to its size, it occupies a precarious position in the survival of the species.

**Skimmers are in decline.** According to the North American Breeding Survey, skimmer populations declined 4% per year between 1966 and 2015 for a cumulative loss of 87%. Breeding pairs are estimated at 65,000–70,000. Nickerson breeding pairs fluctuated between 230 and 467 from 2008 to 2019.

**The main threat to skimmers is development or other loss of their beach-nesting habitat.** The Black Skimmer is state-listed as a species of Special Concern, but SSAS and a coalition of Audubon chapters recommended changing its status to Threatened, which would prioritize its protection.

**Kate Goodenough**, who specializes in movement ecology and life history strategies of birds, **tracks Black Skimmer populations in New York using GPS.** She works with the Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways to track the Nickerson skimmers. ([laridresearch.com](http://laridresearch.com))

Goodenough and the TOH outfit

the skimmers with GPS data loggers that are set to collect location points at regular time intervals.

The data is transmitted when the logger comes into contact with a base station, accurately pinpointing bird locations to 10–20 meters.

The data show that approximately



"Skimmer with Babes" by Jay Koolpix

80% of the Nickerson skimmers are wintering in Florida with 20% in Cuba, confirming band resights that have documented Florida as an important wintering ground since the 1980s. (If you see a banded skimmer at Nickerson or elsewhere, please report it to the TOH and/or online to the USGS Bird Banding Laboratory.)

**Goodenough and the TOH deployed 25 tags in 2018 and four tags in 2019** with 100%

success in tracking skimmer movements within New York, the focus of the study. The migration tracking component is a bonus.

Migration data was pulled from 17 retuning skimmers, with several providing more than one season of data.

One reason for the lower return rate on migration data is that skimmers tend to preen the UHF antennas so that, while the logger continues to collect data, it cannot transmit it to the base stations. Goodenough and the TOH have since worked with the data logger designers to develop more appropriate devices.

**The team hopes that the movement data will help protect the places skimmers need along the Atlantic Coast.** They have shared their findings with National Audubon's Migratory Bird Initiative and the Smithsonian's Migratory Bird Center for inclusion with their Migratory Connectivity Project. Most vitally, their migration data will assist federal and state agencies with the management of skimmer staging and wintering locations in Florida. ♦

### Coming Attractions

On Zoom @ 7:30 PM:

Not All Who Wander Are Lost with Doug Robinson Jr. • Dec. 14  
Magnificent Raptors & Their Highways in the Sky with Ryan MacLean • Jan. 11  
See page 4 for program details!

### South Shore Skimmer

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- Guy Jacob
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- Wendy Murbach
- Brien Weiner

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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. ♦

## Bird Walks

by Joe Landesberg



Joe Landesberg

Join us on our Bird Walks! To register, text me your name and contact information at 516-467-9498. Masks and social distancing are required. Bird Walks are free of charge and start at 9 AM. No walk if it rains or snows. Text me regarding questionable conditions.

#### December Sundays:

- 5th – Hempstead Lake State Park (Parking Lot #3)
- 12th – Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh)
- 19th – Massapequa Preserve (Entrance at E. end of train station)
- 26th – Jones Beach Coast Guard Station

#### January Sundays:

- 2nd – Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Preserve
- 9th – Hempstead Lake State Park
- 16th – Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh)
- 23rd – Massapequa Preserve (Entrance at E. end of train station)
- 30th – Jones Beach Coast Guard Station

#### February Sundays:

- 6th – Massapequa Lake (On Merrick Rd./Park on Ocean Ave.)
- 13th – Hempstead Lake State Park (Parking Lot #3)
- 20th – Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Preserve
- 27th – Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh)

**For Future Bird Walks, check our website & Facebook page:**  
SSAudubon.org/bird-walks • Facebook.com/SSAudubon

**Directions:** SSAudubon.org/directions.asp

## Renewal Time for SSAS Members

by Wendy Murbach

If you joined SSAS directly (not through National Audubon), your membership expires every September when we begin our new year. **Because this is a new policy, we will keep you in our records through 2021.**

We value you! **So, please renew your membership using the form on page eight.** A big thank-you to those who have already renewed! ♦



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SSAS Post Office Statement—*South Shore Skimmer* is published quarterly by the South Shore Audubon Society, PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520.



Christian Cooper

# On the Record: Christian Cooper

An Interview by Alene Scoblete

Christian Cooper is a longtime Central Park birder and a board member of New York City Audubon. He is the author of the upcoming memoir *Better Living Through Birding*, to be published by Random House. A member of SSAS since childhood, Christian leads SSAS members on a free annual bird walk through Central Park as a thank-you to the Club that gave him his start.

## How did you get interested in birding and how did SSAS contribute to your birding life?

CC: I was in a youth woodworking class when I was in the 6th grade. I had zero interest in shop, but I built a bird feeder that I put up in the backyard. That got me started!

In those formative years, my dad looked for a place where my new passion would be nurtured. He found the SSAS Sunday morning walks led by the legendary Elliott Kutner. Without Elliott and those walks, I don't know if my interest in birding would have blossomed as it did.

## How did you become a bird walk leader?

CC: Ugh! I *hate* leading walks! It's too much pressure, making sure everybody has a great experience. So, I would lead walks only for the elementary school students in NYC Audubon's Feathered Friends program, and the annual SSAS walk in Central Park's Ramble.

However, recently, I helped lead a series of walks in the North Woods of Central Park, adjacent to Harlem, aimed at nurturing a new generation of African-American birders. All of us have to do our part to make sure birding is inclusive. Not only is it the right thing to do, but with the nation's changing demographics, we *must* get folks from communities birding and ensure that there will always be a constituency to support saving the birds and their habitat.

## What draws you to Central Park?

CC: It's one of the great migrant traps! Birds migrating by night are drawn in by the lights of the city, then need someplace to rest and refuel. In that sea of cement is the big, gorgeous swath of green in the middle of Manhattan!

On a great day, you can have 25+ species of warblers, all on foot over easy, paved paths, with benches to rest on, bathrooms, and even a cafe or two for food and drink. Plus the park is so damn gorgeous!

## Over the years, what changes in migration patterns have you noticed in Central Park?

CC: 1. Drastically fewer birds. That's agonizing. 2. The

birds are coming roughly a week to almost two weeks earlier than they used to—no doubt an adaptation to global warming.

## What are your three favorite birds and why?

CC: Blackburnian Warbler—that fire throat on a well-dressed male is stunning! Red-winged Blackbird—hearing and seeing the males return in early March is always my first sign of spring. Red-tailed Hawk—because they remind me of my dad, who flew gliders with the Long Island Soaring Association; he always envied the ability to soar effortlessly.

## How did you come to write Represent! #1: It's a Bird?

CC: I used to write and edit for Marvel Comics, many years ago; some of my old pals from there were working at DC

Comics when the Central Park incident happened. They asked me to write a story inspired by that. At first I was reluctant, but then I thought outside the box of superheroes, and it just poured out of me—a story that illuminates

where the Black Lives Matter movement comes from.

## Your personal story is compelling. What should be our takeaway?

CC: Be true to yourself. When I was growing up on Long Island, birding was *not* a popular thing for a school kid to do; but that was my passion, and I followed it. When I was a freshman in college, being gay and out in 1981 was *not* the road to a secure future; but it was who I was, and the road to happiness that I had to follow. And in that critical moment in Central Park, when a long, sorry history said that a Black man does *not* challenge the prerogatives of a white woman, I tried to do what my parents taught me: calmly but firmly plant a flag in the ground for my own human dignity, regardless of what history or another person might try to dictate. So, yes: Be true to yourself.

## Anything else you'd like to tell us?

CC: Go birding! And make sure newcomers (there are a *lot* who have just started birding, thanks to the pandemic) feel welcomed! ♦

“Be true to yourself.”

## Coming Attractions

### Not All Who Wander Are Lost with Doug Robinson Jr.

Tuesday, December 14 @ 7:30 PM

→ Virtual Program on Zoom



Doug Robinson Jr.

Birds are the greatest of voyagers and their annual migration is rooted in their exciting evolutionary history. Join Doug Robinson Jr. for a fascinating look into what's behind the perilous journeys our feathered friends take each year.

Doug is a behavioral ecologist who has studied bird behavior and its evolutionary and ecological underpinnings for over 20 years. His work and findings have influenced decision-makers in the field. A tenured faculty member of Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, New York, Doug teaches ecology, evolution, and animal behavior, as well as other sciences.

### Magnificent Raptors & Their Highways in the Sky with Ryan MacLean

Tuesday, January 11 @ 7:30 PM

→ Virtual Program on Zoom



Ryan MacLean

Ryan MacLean is the Bird Education Specialist of the Greenwich Audubon Center, where he conducts bird tours, bird identification workshops, school programs, summer camps, and virtual webinars. Ryan also oversees many of the Center's opportunities for the public to engage in Community Science bird research such as the Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch, Project FeederWatch as well as Summer and Christmas Bird Counts. A professional hawk watcher, he served as official counter for six seasons at Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch and counted hawks at Braddock Bay Raptor Research in Rochester, NY. For more information on the Greenwich Audubon Center and its birding offerings visit [greenwich.audubon.org](http://greenwich.audubon.org).

### More Virtual Programs Coming Your Way!

SAVE THE DATES: February 8 & March 8

Find program updates & links on [SSAudubon.org](http://SSAudubon.org) • [facebook.com/SSAudubon](https://facebook.com/SSAudubon)

### → The Great Backyard Bird Count • February 18–21 ←

Watch, learn about, count, and celebrate birds. Be a part of this global event. See [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for details.

### The Borowsky Report:

#### The Evelyn and Jerry Bishop College Scholarship

by Betty Borowsky



Betty Borowsky

We are saddened to tell you that Evelyn Bishop, the longtime benefactor of the South Shore Audubon Society's College Scholarship, passed away on October 21, 2021. All our condolences go to her family. She was a very dear friend, and she will be greatly missed.

Evelyn bequeathed us enough to award a \$1,000 scholarship annually for several years to come. We invite you or someone you know to apply for this excellent addition to any resume.

The award is for a college student who declares to have a career in the environment, conservation, or sustainable/renewable energy.

**Information and application:** [ssaudubon.org/bishop-scholarship](http://ssaudubon.org/bishop-scholarship)

**Questions?** Contact Betty Borowsky, 516-764-3596 or Betsy Gulotta, 516-546-8841. Application deadline: April 30, 2022. ♦



Wise Owl

### The Wise Owl: Support the Migratory Bird Protection Act

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 prohibits the taking (including killing, capturing, selling, trading, and transport) of protected migratory bird species without prior authorization by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Shockingly, this fundamental piece of legislation was gutted by the Trump Administration near the end of his term, but it was restored by the Biden Administration on September 30, 2021. The Migratory Bird Protection Act would reinforce the MBTA's crucial protections, but your US Representative needs to know how you feel.

To lend your support to this critical and bipartisan bill, simply **CALL TO ACTION** → go to <https://tinyurl.com/45d9u6y2>, fill out the short form, and click submit. ♦

## *Scobe Squawks*

by Frank Scoblete

### And a Hummingbird Shall Lead Them



Frank Scoblete

I just want to see one right now. I just want one; just one. I don't want a hundred or fifty or two even. Just one.

A hummingbird. Just one. Please!

My wife, the Beautiful AP and I have never seen a hummingbird, except in documentaries. In real life? None.

We know folks who love to go birding. They have seen many, many hummingbirds. Some have called us to tell us where to go (right now!) and we'll see the birds if we go, "Right now!" We hop in the car and head off, usually to Hempstead Lake State Park. There is an area where people see dozens and dozens of hummingbirds. In all of our visits, we have not seen one.

"Let's make our property welcoming to all the birds, animals, and insects that belong on Long Island. Right now all of our bushes, shrubs, trees, and plants come from Asia," said the Beautiful AP.

"You think that right here on our property we'll attract native stuff?" I asked.

"Not stuff. Native insects, bees, and animals—and hummingbirds."

Okay, so we have started making our property Long Islandish. We have a three-year plan. First we cut down an invasive tree that was given to us by a friend; a truly awful non-Long Island tree.

We then took up some of our grass around the outside of our property to plant creeping red thyme as ground cover. Ugh! We should not have done it the way we did it because the free dirt is now growing a mini-forest. I guess the grass had kept the rest of nature down. Now nature is sprouting like crazy.

Where the awful tree was, the Beautiful AP has planted two crops—spinach and soy beans. They're growing!

I planted native seeds all over the property. So far not a one—not a stinking one—has grown. In huge flower pots they are growing as are other native plants, but around the property? Nil.

We have planted some shrubs, bushes and trees that are native. The vast majority are doing well.

We have joined the Long Island Native Plant Gardening Group on FaceBook. We are learning every single day—usually about "stuff" we screwed up. ♦

## *Insights*

by Jim Brown

### Greta Got It Right: World Leaders Engage in Blah, Blah Blah While Our Planet Burns



Jim Brown

Young Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg spoke at a street protest following a youth climate conference recently held in Milan, just days before the start of the COP-26 Climate Summit being held in Glasgow.

At the protest Greta criticized world political leaders and governments for not walking their own talk on climate. **Greta termed their approach "blah, blah, blah."**

She affirmed that there has been a stream of pious talk about fighting climate change, limiting or halting its impact by pursuing measures to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

As the Glasgow COP begins, as the "blah, blah, blah" revs up its intensity, **little is being done quickly enough to solve the existential issue of our time.** Instead, governments are even greenlighting harmful fossil fuel projects like the Cambo oilfield off the coast of Scotland and numerous oil and gas pipelines in the U.S.

**The current Conference of Parties is a critical event,** as many climate scientists and activists note that unless strong climate initiatives arise from this current meeting, and concrete steps actually taken, there will be no chance that sufficient reductions in greenhouse gases will occur to realize the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Accord that called for limiting temperature rise by the end of the present century to 1.5–2.0°C (2.7–3.6°F) above preindustrial levels.

The World Meteorological Organization's latest Greenhouse Gas Bulletin notes that regarding those basic goals **"we are way off track."** The 2021 Emissions Gap Report of the UN Environment Programme tells us how far off track we will be: **we face a devastating increase of 2.7°C (4.9°F).**

**Governments are currently failing us, as young activists like Greta Thunberg warn us.**

Deep structural changes in our societies must be fought for and won to defeat the human-induced ravages of climate change. This requires concerted, relentless action by us all—not mere talk. ♦

# Through Guy's Eyes

by Guy Jacob

## A Perfect, Menacing Storm



Guy Jacob

Protecting biodiversity is equally as important as reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These conservation aspirations are flip sides of the same coin, both of which are essential for a healthy Earth. **Clean air and robust ecosystems work in unison:** the more biodiverse an environment is, the more carbon it stores and the better it filters ambient air; the cleaner our atmosphere is, the easier it is for our ecosystems to maintain the equilibrium of our planetary systems.

Poisoning ecosystems with potent, unnecessary, ineffective neonicotinoid pesticides, which often migrate far beyond their point of initial exposure, impairs biodiversity, which in turn diminishes biodiversity's prospects for absorbing GHGs.

Because of degenerative agriculture and land management practices, pollinators are in peril. Industrial agriculture that causes loss of habitats and deforestation, monocultures that threaten biodiversity, **the use of pesticides and the unfolding climate crisis converge as a perfect, menacing storm.**

Birds and bees, like all pollinators, play a vital role in making life possible on our planet. **Seventy-five percent of the world's crops depend on pollinators.** Without them, most fruits, flowers, and seeds would cease to exist. The ecosystem services provided by pollination are essential and immeasurable. Neonicotinoids affect pollinators' central nervous

systems, causing disorientation and weakening their immune system. A recent UN report predicts that as many as one million species will disappear from Earth because of human activities. (<https://tinyurl.com/3ks48cs5>)

**Pesticides, particularly neonicotinoids, also pose a threat to human health.** Pesticides get into the food web and make their way into the human diet. EPA neonic poisoning reports include acute symptoms of rash, muscle tremor, difficulty breathing, vomiting, wheezing, lock jaw, memory loss and renal failure among others. (<https://tinyurl.com/3mbprxdc>)

But hope resides in the New York State Legislature. **The Birds and Bees Protection Act** (S699A / A7429) would prohibit the sale of certain pesticides or use of seeds coated with such pesticides; it would require the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) to review the latest scientific information concerning certain pesticide active ingredients. This legislation represents the best opportunity presently to directly address the harmful effects of neonicotinoids in the Empire State.

**Wildlife extinction is merely a prelude to our own demise.** Humankind is not an island unto itself. The time is at hand for a new tomorrow, one that prioritizes what we say we value. Now is the time to stand for wildlife, even as we stand for our own health.

**CALL TO ACTION** → *Email or call your NYS Senator and Assembly Member to say you support the Birds & Bees Protection Act (S699A /A7429).* ♦

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### Eco Tips & Tricks

- ✓ Add indoor plants to your home for better air quality
- ✓ Stop the junk mail by getting removed from unwanted mailing lists

## Enjoy the outdoors and make new friends on our Sunday bird walks!

See page 2 for details.

### Thank You, Donors!

Louise De Cesare • Sanjay & Mamta Hathiramani • Harriet Jonquiere  
Linda Marshall • Wendy Spence Schmidt • Annegret Schoell  
Alene & Frank Scoblete ♦



# Going Native: Tackapausha

by Betty Borowsky & Louise DeCesare



Betty Borowsky

**A**utumn is both a time of abundance and decline. It conjures images of harvesting pumpkins, raking dead leaves, and cutting back withered plants. Even

so, our gardens are still teeming with life. Late bloomers are buzzing with pollinators. While raking and cutting back does happen, most plants that have gone to seed are left for visiting finches, cardinals, chickadees, and

sparrows to enjoy as a rich food source.

**Many thanks to the following gardeners for their help at Tackapausha during 2021:**

Mary Jane Baker, Betty Borowsky, Chris Braut, Louise DeCesare, Marianne Gumbs, Marilyn Hammetz, Bryn, Jerry, & Reagan Healey, Linda Ilan, Anne Mehlinger, Tom Schmelke, Sue Scotto, and Pearl Weinstein.

*(Apologies if we left you out! Please let the editors know and we'll thank you properly in the next issue.)*

**A special thank-you** to Dennis Fleury and Isabelle Fernandes from Tackapausha Museum and Preserve for their assistance and support.



Louise DeCesare

To Volunteer at **Tackapausha** Contact Louise: [lmdecasare128@gmail.com](mailto:lmdecasare128@gmail.com) or (917) 548-6974.

**To volunteer at Hempstead Plains,** contact Betty: [bborow@optonline.net](mailto:bborow@optonline.net). ♦

Tackapausha Volunteers (Left to Right): Regan & Jerry Healy, Sue Scotto, Linda Ilan



## A Letter from William Lane TRSAC Intern, Summer 2021

**A**s a child I began to attend the **Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center** Summer Sanctuary Adventures. We did so many things from going to the bay to catch and look at sea animals, like fish and crabs, to running around camp playing games and learning about birds. One of my favorite weeks of camp was survival week. I really looked up to the counselors and eventually I would become one myself!

I served as a Counselor in Training for a few years and now I'm an Intern! Being an intern has taught me a ton about leadership as a whole from leading a group to organizing activities. It has also taught me a lot about responsibility.

I love working with the other counselors to make this camp as amazing as it can be for all the children who attend it. I want to sincerely thank the South and North Shore Audubon Chapters for providing this opportunity for me to intern this year! ♦

*For more about the TR Sanctuary and Audubon Center, go to [ny.audubon.org/trsac](http://ny.audubon.org/trsac).*



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See Page 4 for  
Upcoming Programs!

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## SSAS

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## Who's Who

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## Join South Shore Audubon Society!

Become a member of our local chapter for **only \$20 per year!** Receive our newsletter, *South Shore Skimmer*, which includes listings for our local outings and programs as well as the latest on environmental issues and initiatives.

To **join or renew** your membership, make your check payable to **South Shore Audubon Society** and send the form and check to: **PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520.**

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