



Shorebird Monitor: A Cool Way to Spend the Summer

by Brien Weiner

The Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways needs your help to protect Piping Plovers, Least and Common Terns, Black Skimmers, and American Oystercatchers that nest between Point Lookout and Atlantic Beach during the late spring and summer months.

Volunteers will help prevent disturbances to nesting areas and record the presence of Piping Plover chicks and any incidents of predation.

Help is particularly needed on evenings, weekends, and holidays from May through August.

If you are interested and can volunteer regularly, call John Zarudsky, Conservation Biologist, at 516-486-5272.



Piping Plovers
Courtesy Jay Koolpix

Join the team that won NYS Audubon's inaugural Share the Shore Award in 2021 for its excellence in beach stewardship!

This is an exciting opportunity to observe the many personalities and daily dramas of our beach-nesting birds, and to see rare terns and sandpipers on migration.



American Oystercatcher with Chick
Courtesy Jay Koolpix

You can help trace individual life histories by reporting band numbers on banded birds.

And you might find surprises!

Among our most notable observations last year were an oystercatcher attempting to raise a tern

chick and a fin-slapping critically endangered Northern Right Whale close to shore.

We encourage beach visitors to take the Be a Good Egg Pledge: respect fenced-off nesting areas; properly dispose of or carry out your trash; and keep your dog off nesting beaches.

When a person or dog walks through a nesting area, the adult birds run or fly off in fear, exposing the eggs or chicks to fatally high temperatures and drastically increasing the risk of predation.

Off-leash dogs and cats can injure or even kill birds, especially flightless chicks.

Trash can entangle birds, be mistaken for food and ingested, and can attract predators.

Audubon found that the populations of vulnerable coastal birds grew two to 34 times faster at stewardship sites, compared to birds in protected areas without known stewardship.

Volunteer this season and make a difference! ♦

How to Be a Good Egg

Each summer, beach-nesting birds lay their eggs directly on the sand and raise their chicks right on the shores of LI and NYC. By pledging to Share the Shore, you join a united effort of "good eggs" taking action for birds.

Pledge to Be a Good Egg at tinyurl.com/4p74h5uw

Coming Attractions

In-Person Event:

SSAS Picnic (following a Bird Walk) • 6/12

Fall Program:

The Pantanal with A Couple Without Borders • 9/13

See page 4 for details!

South Shore Skimmer

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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. We follow COVID protocols in effect at time of walk. Bird Walks are free of charge and start at 9 AM. No walk if it rains. Text me regarding questionable conditions.

June:

- Sunday, 6/5: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station Parking Area
- Sunday, 6/12: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station) Picnic to follow.

August:

- Sunday, 8/21: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve
- Saturday, 8/27: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

September:

- Sunday, 9/4: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
- Sunday, 9/11: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh)
- Sunday, 9/18: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
- Sunday, 9/25: Massapequa Lake (on Merrick Road)

October:

- Saturday, 10/1: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

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

Directions: SSAudubon.org/directions.asp



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On the Record: Don Riepe

An Interview by Alene Scoblete



Don Riepe

Don Riepe—naturalist, environmentalist, photographer, writer, and leader—has spent over four decades in and around Broad Channel and Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge (JBWR) focused on the history, wildlife, and management of the area. He currently heads the Jamaica Bay Restoration Project that aims to save New York from rising seas. Don's presentations for SSAS have included his stunning photographs that showcase the beauty of our local natural resources and highlight the challenges facing them.

How did your childhood in Ozone Park influence your career path?

DR: Ozone Park is located near Aqueduct Racetrack and the Resort World Casino. When I was young it was a large 100-acre farm with lots of vegetables as well as open space and trees lining the edges. It was there that I developed a love of nature. In high school, I told the teachers that I wanted to become a Forest Ranger or a farmer. They thought I was crazy since I lived in an urban area.

When did you recognize the impact of human activity on the environment?

DR: When I was a teenager I noticed that all the open areas with trees, vacant lots, and farms were disappearing and I thought that it was something that the adults should have protected.

Before long, there wasn't a square inch of open areas, as they were converted into malls, housing, and parking lots.

What are your three favorite birds and why?

DR: My three favorite birds are the Barn Owl, the Osprey, and the Black Skimmer.

I think Barn Owls are among the most beautiful of all raptors and they are struggling to find habitat in NYC. I put up large nest boxes in remote areas of the Bay and check them for young each year. There are at least five nesting pairs in Jamaica Bay.

There were no Ospreys in NYC in 1990. Since then, by providing nest platforms out in the marshes, there are now 25 nesting pairs in the Jamaica Bay area.

The Black Skimmers are so beautiful in flight and interesting to watch as they skim along the surface of the water trying to catch fish.

How has photography played a role in your life?

DR: I've always been interested in photography and joined a camera club in 1978. I've always said to people: If you don't have a photo of an activity or event—it didn't happen!

“If you don't have a photo of an activity or event—it didn't happen!”

I've used my photography skills to give talks on birds and various other topics and have given photos of Jamaica Bay to all the agencies involved in restoration work. That made me popular and was a good source of networking.

How did Superstorm Sandy impact your life and work?

DR: Superstorm Sandy brought five feet of water into my living room at high tide. Everything was destroyed and had to be replaced: the floors, walls, kitchen, bathroom, oil burner, electrical outlets, dock, etc.

The Bay wasn't impacted much except for the wildlife refuge trail which was breached. As a result, the West Pond became a tidal lagoon and it took five years for the National Park Service to rebuild the trail. The only other impact was debris that washed up on marsh and upland shorelines.

The storm was hopefully a wake up call to everyone living along the coast. We must be prepared to rebuild our protective dunes and marshes, curtail future development,

fight for renewable energy, and if possible, elevate our homes well above the current storm tide lines.

Of what achievement are you most proud in your role as manager of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge?

I'm proud of many achievements: educating thousands of young and old about wildlife issues and management, planting habitat for wildlife and people, and fully restoring Osprey and Barn Owl populations in Jamaica Bay.

What is the current Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Restoration Project and how can readers support it?

Jamaica Bay needs to be actively managed in order to maintain habitats for wildlife and a place for people to visit. It is not the Grand Canyon; it is a severely disturbed ecosystem that needs constant attention and restoration.

Readers can support the JBWR Restoration Project by volunteering at shoreline cleanups and supporting the American Littoral Society restoration corps.

Visit: littoralsociety.org/jamaica-bay.html

Contact Don: don@littoralsociety.org. ♦

Coming Attractions

SSAS Picnic

Sunday, June 12 @ 11:30 AM

→ *In-Person Event*

Bringing us together for the first time in over two years, the picnic will be in Brady Park, at Lakeshore Drive and Front Street in Massapequa Park, adjoining the Massapequa Preserve.

You can really make a day of it by first attending our bird walk that starts at 9 AM at Massapequa Preserve. The birders meet at the entrance at the east end of the train station.

Bring a cold lunch to the picnic. Individually wrapped snacks/desserts to share will be more than welcome.

SSAS will provide snacks, beverages, and prizes for our raffle and scavenger hunt.

RSVP to Marilynexpl@yahoo.com, or call (516) 799-7189.

Whether you go birding first or not, we hope to see you on June 12.

The Pantanal *with* A Couple Without Borders

Tuesday, September 13 @ 7:30 PM

→ *Format To Be Determined*

The Pantanal is a magical place in the heart of South America that boasts the largest concentration of wildlife in the Western Hemisphere. Robyn and Paul will share their birding and wildlife adventures with us through their photos. They will speak about the region, conservation, travel to the area, the jaguar, birds, and other wildlife.



Robyn & Paul

Robyn & Paul are a local conservation-driven birding couple who explore the world and share it with their over 25K followers on Instagram—both virtually and with in-person meetups. These passionate birders participate in volunteer and community science projects and speak throughout the country. Robyn has a degree in biology and was a zookeeper for the Wildlife Conservation Society at the Bronx Zoo. Visit them on Instagram @acouplewithoutborders.

More Programs Coming Your Way!

Find program updates & links on SSAudubon.org • facebook.com/SSAudubon

All SSAS memberships expire in September. Use the membership form on the back page to join or renew.

Eco Tips & Tricks

- Keep hydrated this summer by carrying a reusable water bottle of either glass or stainless steel to avoid the chemicals in plastic water bottles. The plastic tops on plastic water bottles may be the primary source of microplastics in the water.
- Bring your own reusable take-out containers to restaurants for leftovers to avoid disposable foam, plastic or paper containers. Even containers labeled “compostable” contain plasticizers that are likely toxic.

Email Eco Tips & Tricks to alene.scoblete@gmail.com

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Community Bag Donation

For the month of June, SSAS will receive a \$1 donation from each purchase of the \$2.50 reusable Community Bag at:

Stop & Shop
460 Franklin Avenue,
Franklin Square, NY

After June, we can still receive a \$1 donation if customers specify South Shore Audubon on the Giving Tag.

Thank you for your support!

Scobe Squawks

by Frank Scoblete

The Prairie Keepers: Secrets of the Zumwalt by Marcy Cottrell Houle



Frank Scoblete

Marcy Cottrell Houle is a terrific writer! *The Prairie Keepers* is her second book, her first being the outstanding *Wings for My Flight: The Peregrine Falcons of Chimney Rock*.

Marcy volunteers to study the Zumwalt Prairie in Oregon for her graduate class. Ferruginous, Red-tailed, and Swainson's Hawks mysteriously dominated the area.

The Zumwalt encompasses about 200 square miles, and she must fathom its secrets all by her lonesome. Mostly on foot.

Her goal: "If I could document that the Zumwalt Prairie had an abundance of native hawks sequestered within it and then discover why—what lay behind its strange prosperity—this knowledge could then be translated to other places."

She encounters contentious scientists working for over a half dozen government agencies who all disagree heatedly about the Zumwalt. The ranchers, whose families have lived there for generations, clash with the environmentalists.

And just about everyone thinks Marcy is a woman ineptly doing a man's job.

Marcy's nascent ideas do not sit well with the scientists and a few of them continually lambast her.

Marcy has her adventures too. She is chased by an angry bull, only to escape him, and then to be run down by a herd of cattle that she eludes by climbing a tree to wait them out.

She also does the almost impossible by getting warring factions to help her tag the raptor chicks.

Her descriptions are magnificent! The interlocking ecology and the (indeed!) cattle herds have created an almost Eden-like area where raptors thrive.

Her conclusions dispel long-held myths about the land, the raptors, the cattle, and what a woman can and cannot do.

I recommend this book without reservations. ♦

Note: Marcy Cottrell Houle will be our *On the Record* interviewee in the Fall 2022 issue of the *Skimmer*.

To read more articles by Frank, visit frankscoblete.com.

Insights

by Jim Brown

Fighting Climate Change in a Troubled World



Jim Brown

I'm writing this Skimmer column for the summer edition on **Earth Day**, April 22. This day of celebration and action, first held in 1970, is a day devoted to support environmental protection of our planet. The official theme for this year's activities is **"Invest in Our Planet."**

2022's Earth Day events are occurring in a turbulent period, characterized by a virulent pandemic, war, and rapid, deadly climate change. In days leading up to Earth Day the South Shore Audubon Society has worked to "invest in our planet."

We have been lobbying government representatives to pass important environmental bills—**Birds and Bees Protection Act, Fossil Fuel Subsidy Elimination Act, Teachers' Fossil Fuel Divestment Act**, and others. We were especially heartened by recent legislation passed as part of Governor Hochul's budget that strengthens the NYS Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act, protections sought by a broad coalition of environmental groups.

Recent climate news, however, has been as bleak as ever, if not more so. Events in recent weeks have included South African floods claiming over 400 lives; a report that temperatures in Antarctica have risen above normal levels, reaching 70 degrees Fahrenheit, thereby threatening massive loss of glacial ice; and extensive Arizona wildfires affecting 20,000 acres of land already parched by a mega-drought are ravaging the American Southwest.

Time is running out for us—the latest IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report gives humanity just three years to reduce emissions by half to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Centigrade.

We simply must make rapid social, political and economic changes at all levels of global society if we are to beat climate change and survive.

International cooperation is critical. Likewise with solutions to combating pandemics and avoiding wars—wars mixed up with a tragic reliance on fossil fuels, whether in Ukraine, Yemen, Libya or Iraq.

We environmentalists cannot ignore the larger picture. ♦

The Borowsky Report

by Betty Borowsky

Altruism in a Bird?

Biologists have long viewed so-called altruism—where one individual helps another without getting anything in return—with skepticism.

For example, many fish species visit “cleaner shrimp” and allow the shrimp to pick off the fish’s parasites—which must be a great relief to the fish. But the shrimp benefits too, because it consumes the parasites it removes.

I recently read a report* in which an altruistic act really seems to be altruistic. At least it is not at all evident how in the world the doer benefits from it.

Two scientific investigators wanting to gather more information about Australian Magpies’ social behaviors, spent months perfecting a tiny remote tracking device that would record intimate behavioral details. They expected to gather data from these devices as long as the bird lived.

Here’s what happened:

“...we found out how quickly magpies team up to solve a group problem. Within ten minutes of fitting the final tracker, we witnessed an adult female without a tracker working with her bill to try and remove the harness off of a younger bird. Within hours, most of the other trackers had been removed. By day three, even the dominant male of the group had its tracker successfully dismantled.”

The authors don’t say whether the birds were genetically related to each other or not. If so, there would be a good reason for them to help each other, to foster the continuity of the family’s specific gene set.

But if they weren’t related, isn’t it nice to think that maybe another species has a social conscience? ♦

* Joel Crampton, Celine H. Frère, Dominique A. Potvin, 2022. Australian Magpies *Gymnorhina tibicen* cooperate to remove tracking devices. *Australian Field Ornithology*, 39: pp. 7-11.

Through Guy’s Eyes

by Guy Jacob

Plum Island: You’ve Come a Long Way Baby!



Guy Jacob

Plum Island’s history is an intriguing mix of fact and fiction, as well as a bit of genuine mystery. And in the last two decades, its fate has been in peril. SSAS is one of 118 Connecticut, New York, and national groups dedicated to the preservation of this national treasure through our membership in the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.

Plum Island is an 840-acre isle between Orient Point and Fishers Island. Part of the island has long been the home of a federal research facility, which is being relocated to Kansas; the rest has remained a sanctuary for wildlife and native plants.

When federal and state governments identified 33 stewardship sites around Long Island Sound, they called Plum Island and the surrounding Gull Islands an “exemplary” habitat area deserving of special protection.

Plum Island is largely pristine, a rarity in the New York Metropolitan area. About three-quarters of the island has been intact since Fort Terry was deactivated in 1949 after World War II.



Courtesy Plum Island Coalition
preserveplumisland.org

Plum Island’s biodiversity includes more than 250 species of birds (60+ endangered or threatened), and about 1,000 seals. The coalition’s advocacy in rescuing the island’s biodiversity has also protected Long Island Sound’s water quality as well as the island’s value as a carbon sink.

In 2008, Congress ordered the sale of this environmentally sensitive land in Southold Town, about 1½ miles off Orient Point, to the highest bidder. A dozen years and much effort later, a provision in a 2020 bill took it off the auction block, and it will now be offered to other federal agencies. If none are interested, it would then be offered to the state, then local municipalities.

A 2020 Plum Island Coalition report recommended conserving this unique landmass as a sanctuary for wildlife, preservation of the Army fort, guided tours, an educational facility on the island’s east side and a research facility on the west side.

The coalition now seeks to convince Governor Hochul to ask President Biden to designate the island as a National Monument. The Town of Southold supports the proposal as does the Long Island Regional Planning Board.

Conservation of natural resources often takes time and patience. Plum Island’s advocates have demonstrated much of both.

Call To Email Governor Hochul:

—————> governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form

ACTION

Tell her to seal the island’s preservation deal by advocating for a new National Monument. ♦

Going Native: Volunteer Gardeners Needed

by Betty Borowsky & Louise DeCesare



Betty Borowsky

**Enjoy the
Outdoors!**

We offer two opportunities for volunteer gardeners.

The Friends of the Hempstead Plains welcomes you to help maintain the **Native Prairie Plant Demonstration Garden**. There are many tasks involved, including the removal of alien species. Contact Betty Borowsky at bborow@optonline.net or call (516) 764-3596 for current information. Visit: friendsofhp.org.

And/or, help us at **Tackapausha Native Garden** in Seaford. We meet each month on the first Saturday from 10 AM – Noon and the third Tuesday from 3 – 5 PM. To learn more, contact Louise DeCesare at Lmdecasare128@gmail.com or call (917) 548-6974.



Louise DeCesare

**Make New
Friends!**

Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary Update

by Brien Weiner

Our sump-to-bird sanctuary project has truly taken wing thanks to the generous support of many individuals and organizations:

- Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District for a \$10,000 grant and Long Island Conservancy for a \$5,700 matching grant to continue habitat restoration
- John Zarudsky and the Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways for donating many native trees, shrubs, and grasses from their nursery
- Plainedge High School Science Honor Society for helping us remove invasive vegetation and install neighborhood storm drain medallions
- Massapequa High School AP Environmental Science students for testing methods of removing mugwort
- Hofstra University Media Action students for creating media about the Sanctuary

Special thanks to our partner Spadefoot Design and Construction for their invaluable guidance and work in creating the Sanctuary and bringing the community together in the effort.

And finally, thank you to our members who contributed to the Michael Sperling Memorial Fund.

We are now able to remove remaining invasive vegetation and completely fill the sump's basin with native plants; we've also expanded the forest, created a new pond, and put down mulch. Our nesting Killdeer have returned to give the Sanctuary their approval!

To make a donation, send your check to South Shore Audubon Society, PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031. Write Michael Sperling Memorial Fund on the memo line.

For donations of \$200+, Spadefoot will design your own backyard bird sanctuary!

Visit spadefootny.com or call (516) 225-8545. ♦



Nesting Killdeer at Sperling Bird Sanctuary/Courtesy L. DeCesare



Wise Owl
Courtesy Danielle Scobleto

The Wise Owl: Beating the Bird Flu

Bird flu has been detected in wild birds in our region, so Audubon recommends removing feeders as a precautionary measure.

In the spring and summer, food resources are generally more abundant.

This is also a good time to wash feeders with soap and/or bleach to reduce the chances of infection! ♦

Support SSAS with Amazon Smile

Go to smile.amazon.com > Log into your Amazon account > Choose SSAS as your charity > Shop as usual

Prices remain the same, but SSAS receives 0.5% of eligible purchases.

Thank you for your support!

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See Page 4 for
Upcoming Programs!

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All SSAS Memberships Expire in September!
Renew your membership today!

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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Circle One: JOIN or RENEW

Donations are tax-deductible!