

South Shore

Skimmer



Volume 56, Number 1 • South Shore Audubon Society • Fall 2025

Conservation: There's Good News...

Return to Forever Nature

by Russ Comeau

Ours is a transformative time. With a sense of shared purpose, larger-than-life native plant landscapers, gardening and outdoors groups, government conservation agencies, and public works departments are using more native plants in parks and civic spaces across Long Island.

They are joined by brave home gardeners who are returning to natural gardening that uses plants native to New York State to provide needy pollinators with habitat and respite in residential yards where such “no-longer lawns” should be maintained as per local ordinances.

Today's return to native plants isn't only happening on Long Island. It's caught on across New York State. It's even gone to the governor's office. It was a good day in February 2025 when Governor Hochul signed bill S794/A442* into law, establishing the **Native Plant and Seed Supply, Development and Enhancement Program** to provide a reliable native seed supply for our state by increasing production of much-needed native seeds, especially to be used in public land management, roadside landscaping, reforestation, pollinator promotion, habitat restoration, groundskeeping and maintenance on state lands and other state projects whenever possible.

Defining the list of plant seeds eligible for the new native plant seed supply program is the first task to be completed by February 2026 by the Department of Environmental Conservation, the Department of Economic Development, and the Department of Agriculture and Markets, with funding and implementation to follow.

(Cont. on page 5)

SSAS

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

SSAudubon.org

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.

and There's Bad News...

Climate Crisis Update: Backsliding Deeper into Chaos

by Jim Brown

Climate news has been bleak in recent months. Aside from the disaster events the world and our nation have experienced—the floods, excessive heat, storms, wildfires, and other manifestations of the climate out of control—our political leaders have embarked on a series of policies and actions that will only worsen the crisis.

The United States has never been a worldwide leader in the fight against climate change. Our government representatives at climate conferences have often stymied stronger actions that could have been taken at the global level. Too often only lip service, and not financial resources, has been provided by our officials at these meetings. Even though we are the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, responsible for much of the CO₂ currently in the earth's overheated atmosphere, the US government has failed to significantly reduce our own national emissions. It has also been reluctant to help people of poorer nations—those most impacted by rapid climate change—to cope with the impacts of a climate crisis not of their own making.

Since January 20, US climate policy has further retreated from reality. President Trump has again withdrawn the US from the Paris Agreement. That international treaty was designed to limit the rise of global temperatures from preindustrial times to below 2°C (3.6°F), and ideally below 1.5°C (2.7°F). Avoiding these limits of heating is becoming increasingly impossible to achieve in time—the time allotted to us to escape the worst dystopian scenarios predicted for the future of our planet and its inhabitants.

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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 11520-0031

*Newsletter questions or comments?
Contact ssaseditor@gmail.com*

***Congratulations
to our High School
Scholarship Winners!***

Marina Ioannou, South Side HS,
Rockville Centre
Isaac Martinez, Baldwin HS
Juilmi Perez Rosario, Freeport HS

If We Build It, They Will Come!

The **SSAS Purple Martin house and gourds**, donated by Jay Koolpix and installed at Marine Nature Study Area, provided nests for **75 fledglings** and a 67% success rate this summer. Nest boxes have helped counteract population declines and now provide virtually all nest sites for Purple Martins in the eastern US.

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Thank You, Donors!

Vicki Goldstein
Bruce Kopit
Michael Oppenheimer

***SSAS is Proud to Support
TRSAC Intern
Leah Hasselbring***

*Photo of Black-Crowned Night
Heron by Bill Belford*



Bird Walks

by Joe Landesberg

Join us on our Bird Walks! **To register, text me your name and contact information at 516-467-9498.** Bird Walks are free of charge and start at 9 AM. No walk if it rains or snows. Text me regarding questionable conditions. **You must register with a text number to be notified of cancellations or other changes.**

August

Sunday, 8/17: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve
Sunday, 8/24: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Sunday, 8/31: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens

September

Sunday, 9/7: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
Sunday, 9/14: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Saturday, 9/27: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area
Sunday, 9/28: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

October

Sunday 10/5: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area
Sunday 10/12: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Sunday 10/19: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
Sunday 10/26: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

November

Sunday 11/2: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Sunday 11/9: Massapequa Lake (Merrick Road)
Sunday 11/16: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens
Sunday 11/23: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area
Saturday 11/29: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area
Sunday 11/30: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

December

Sunday 12/7: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)
Sunday 12/14: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)

For Directions to listed Bird Walks: SSAudubon.org/directions.asp

For future Bird Walks, check our website & Facebook page:

SSAudubon.org/bird-walks • [Facebook.com/SSAudubon](https://www.facebook.com/SSAudubon)

Wildlife Hotline: (516) 674-0982



(formerly known as
Volunteers for Wildlife)
has been dedicated to the
preservation of Long Is-
land's wildlife and natural
habitats since 1982

<https://wildlifecenterli.org/>

Fall Programs at the Freeport Memorial Library

Piping Plover: The Story of a Fragile Shorebird Species and the Movement to Protect Them from Extinction with Chris Allieri

Wednesday, September 10 @ 7:30 PM

Note change from Tuesday

The Piping Plover of the Atlantic Coast is a federally threatened and New York State endangered species. The threats facing this tiny, yet mighty shorebird are numerous, ranging from human disturbance to predation, intense storms, rising seas, and coastal erosion caused by climate change. Fewer than eight thousand of these dynamic shorebirds remain in the world.

Chris will share photographs and stories, while also detailing how protections for the plovers have helped numerous other fragile species, ranging from the federally protected plant, Seabeach Amaranth, and other shorebirds such as American Oystercatchers, Least Terns, Common Terns, and Black Skimmers. He will provide key updates from the 2025 breeding season in New York and detail the imminent threats to the Endangered Species Act itself, the very law that protects the species.

Chris Allieri is the executive director and founder of the award-winning NYC Plover Project, a nonprofit organization working tirelessly to protect this species on the busiest beaches of New York City through volunteerism, community engagement, hands-on conservation efforts, and education programs in NYC's public schools.

What's on the Menu: Various Birds Enjoying Various Meals with Jay Koolpix

Tuesday, October 14 @ 7:30 PM

Enjoy a vivid visual feast as photos and videos reveal birds pecking seeds, plucking berries, and snatching insects, fish, eels, and even small mammals. Witness nature's most resourceful diners in catching and enjoying their meals.



A frequent presenter at SSAS and other local venues, photographer and philanthropist Jay Koolpix has dazzled and inspired us with his photography. He has contributed photos to National Geographic and the Environmental Education & Resiliency Center at Hempstead Lake State Park. For more about Jay, see the interview in the Summer 2023 Skimmer on the SSAS website (<https://www.ssaudubon.org/pdfs/skimmer/Skimmer-2023-06.pdf>).



Enjoying the seafood special. Photos by Jay Koolpix. Above left, Herring Gull; above right, Great Blue Heron; below left, Osprey.

You Know How to ID Birds by Sight and Song, but Do You Know How Birds Work? with Judy Paris

Wednesday, November 12 @ 7:30 PM

Note change from Tuesday

Judy will explain the anatomy and physiology of birds and how they work. She will answer questions such as what produces color in a bird (not all color comes from pigments), what are feathers and how do they form and grow, and how do birds make sound (they can make two sounds simultaneously). Using slides and videos, she will demystify what we don't see, for example, their respiratory system (how and why it's more efficient than ours), their digestive system (how some birds can eat a fish whole, bones and all, and do it without teeth), and their reproductive system (where and how a baby chick begins).

Judy Paris has been fascinated with birds from an early age. She earned a BA in physiology and later both a BS and MS in nursing, and eventually became a nursing professor. Now retired, she focuses on studying what makes birds tick, putting to use her love of science. She gives talks on many subjects, including birds and other wildlife. Her emphasis is always on changing people's perceptions about nature and all living things.

Winners of the 2025 SSAS College Scholarships

by Betty Borowsky & Betsy Gulotta

Education is the cornerstone of the mission of the South Shore Audubon Society: from how to recognize birds, to working to maintain or establish bird-friendly areas, to advocating for environmental strategies that will protect the health of not only birds but all living things. SSAS awards college scholarships to support the careers of students who plan to perpetuate these goals.

The winners of this year's scholarships are below.

Jerry and Evelyn Bishop Scholarship

When Jerry Bishop passed away many years ago, Evelyn, his wife, established this scholarship in his name. When Evelyn passed away only a few years ago (2022), her family continued their annual donations, and we changed the name to include hers.

Mary-Elizabeth Serrao, this year's winner, attends Canisius University in Buffalo, NY. She is majoring in animal behavior and ecology, and minoring in conservation. She is also taking some business courses, which will be very important in the future. We all know that to be successful, conservation must be a collaborative effort among scientists, politicians, business owners, and the community.

Mary-Elizabeth's professor wrote: "Emmy is a welcome addition to any course and all the professors speak very highly of her. Academically, she produces excellent work and has earned all As in her courses." Emmy plans to use the scholarship to fund her travel to Thailand to volunteer at an elephant rehabilitation center.

Jay Koolpix Scholarship

Benjamin Izaguirre Cortez, this year's winner, is studying for an MS in sustainability at Hofstra University, where he also earned a BS in sustainability studies. Benjamin has a 4.0 GPA in the Graduate School.

Benjamin is already active in the environment, working full time as an environmental scientist at the Fresh Kills Project. He also volunteers with a Green Team to promote sustainability through public discussions and educational initiatives for businesses and individuals. He suggests ways to reduce environmental impacts and cut costs through simple changes.

Ben's professor wrote that Ben cares deeply about the environment and shows great promise as a future leader in the field of sustainability. He plans to apply the scholarship towards his tuition.

We'll Miss You!

Wendy Murbach and Marilyn Hametz are retiring from the SSAS Board. We would like to thank them for their many years as leaders, mentors, and friends to all. They not only furthered conservation but also built a vibrant community of bird- and nature-lovers. Their Skimmer columns reflected our chapter's highlights, whether conservation successes, calls to action, or invitations to participate in our many activities. Below are two tributes.

Honoring Wendy Murbach by Jim Brown

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Wendy for all she's done, for being instrumental in making our chapter work hard and well in achieving conservation goals linked to our mission. She did all that serving as Membership Chair and President, and by participating in many other chapter activities and committees.

Wendy hosted planning meetings at her home. She was a key person in making sure our annual dinners went off without a hitch. Wendy was our representative to the Citizens Advisory Committee of the South Shore Estuary Reserve Council. In that position she introduced many of us to the larger group of Long Island conservationists. Always a true devotee of the TV game show *Jeopardy*, she livened up some of our general membership meetings with Bird Jeopardy. (She let me host it once in a while!)

As President from 2008–11, she was involved with many initiatives and conservation issues—dark skies, plastic pollution, and open space preservation, to name a few. A notable accomplishment of hers was involving our board with the Baldwin Oaks Civic Association's fight to save nearby land from development by Molloy College. The initiative was successful, and the Coes Neck property in question was eventually declared a perpetual preserve by the New York State Legislature.

I know Wendy enjoyed being SSAS President. She approached me in 2011 to consider a nomination to be the next one. I decided to accept. I always kid her on how she minimized the amount of work involved, to convince me to take on a very important volunteer position that she had managed so well for three years. I'm glad I took her up on it!

Honoring Marilyn Hametz by Janice Basilicata

I always had a fondness for Marilyn. Since the day I joined SSAS she was so welcoming, kind, and approachable. Always willing to give a helping hand even when I continually asked for letters I needed.

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(Cont. from page 4)

Then afterwards I'd ask her to change the font or realign the page, etc. Her response was always, "I'll do it tomorrow and I can drop them off if you'd like."

If you want to know how to set up a picnic with raffles, no one does it better than Marilyn. I'm thinking she doesn't have the word NO in her vocabulary. She even got us to see *Barbie*. I thought, really, *Barbie*? We all loved it and the cup of tea afterwards! She does so much but you'll never hear her complain. She is a kind, generous, warm woman and a pleasure to know. Thank you, Marilyn, for being so special.

(Editor's note: Over the years Marilyn's helping hand has extended to serving as Publicity Chair; working in our Tackapausha garden; creating the Michael Sperling Sanctuary; organizing our dinners, picnics, and holiday parties; serving on the Nominating Committee; representing us in Water for Long Island and advising us on water issues like the Navy Grumman groundwater plume; advising us on our bylaws; and countless other things.)

(Cont. from page 1)

A second native plant bill, S7359A/A7964A* was passed by the NY Senate and Assembly in June 2025, to create market recognition for NY native plants by attracting attention to them with seals or logos identifying native plants on product labeling, in advertising, sales displays, and educational materials to be distributed to horticultural producers, nurseries, garden centers, consumers, and others. A goal is to support native plant businesses and build public awareness and demand for native plants in New York State.

This bill will help growers, vendors, and consumers identify plants that are ecologically important to each of New York's regions. A trusted seal or logo certification will increase awareness and demand for native plants and give consumers confidence that what they are buying truly supports local ecosystems.

But this bill needs Governor Hochul's signature before the end of 2025 to become law. You can help by contacting the governor as soon as possible to let her know that you support this bill at <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form>

Native plants are essential to New York's ecosystems. They provide food and habitat for pollinators, birds, and wildlife species that have co-evolved with native plants for millions of years.

Native plants also improve soil health; require less water, less fertilizer, and fewer pesticides; replace invasives; filter stormwater; and support climate resilience. But despite their ecological value, native plants are underrepresented in the nursery trade and underutilized in home, municipal, and commercial landscapes. In other words, we need more native plants in the market and in the ground, and signing bill S7359A/A7964A into law is one way to address that.

As biodiversity loss and habitat loss continue, it is more important than ever that we support native plant choices that sustain New York's natural heritage.

Be proud and be a hero when you grow NY native plants.

*A big shoutout of gratitude to Senator Rachel May of Syracuse and Assemblymember Anna Kelles of Ithaca who introduced the two native plant bills asterisked above.

Tell Governor Hochul to Sign the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act!

Many vulnerable shorebirds, like the **Piping Plover** and **Red Knot**, rely on horseshoe crab eggs for food. In order to ensure their future survival, we need to make sure that horseshoe crabs can thrive.

Contact Governor Hochul: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form> or 1-518-474-8390

The Urban Owls

Looking for a gift for young readers? *The Urban Owls: How Flaco and Friends Made the City Their Home* by South Shore Audubon's own Christian Cooper (Hachette, 2025) is available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other booksellers.

Learn about Flaco, the Eurasian Eagle-Owl that captured all our hearts, Barry the Barred Owl, Geraldine the Great Horned Owl, and Rocky the Saw-whet Owl.

Chris got his start as a young birder with SSAS and now leads our annual Central Park Walk in May. He is the Emmy Award-winning host of *Extraordinary Birder* for National Geographic, and a vice president on the board of directors of the New York City Bird Alliance.

Photo of Great Horned Owl
by Bill Belford



Future of Stillwell Woods Preserve in the Balance

by Guy Jacob

Stillwell Woods Preserve is an ecological gem, and a proposed transfer of the preserve to the Town of Oyster Bay (TOB) has raised important questions about its future. The process of transferring this land began with an Intermunicipal Agreement (IMA) between Nassau County and the TOB. But the transfer cannot be finalized without parkland alienation legislation passed by the New York State Legislature and signed by Governor Hochul.

In NYS, parkland alienation doctrine refers to the legal process by which a municipality transfers ownership or changes the use of public parkland for a non-park purpose. This doctrine is rooted in the public trust doctrine, which generally protects natural resources, including parkland, for public use. Alienation requires authorization from the State Legislature, ensuring public oversight and preventing the loss of parkland without due process.¹

On July 16, a group of concerned TOB residents and I met with Supervisor Joseph Saladino and a group of TOB attorneys to discuss the future of Stillwell Woods Preserve.

We were heartened by Saladino's stated commitments to transparency and to protecting the natural beauty, wildlife habitat and wilderness character of all the remaining undeveloped acreage within Stillwell Woods Preserve as well as his openness to collaboration. Supervisor Saladino understands our conservation concerns, and we look forward to finding common ground with the TOB to ensure Stillwell's protection for posterity.

We emphasized our concern about the amount of time that has transpired since the TOB signed its IMA with Nassau County without a commitment to completing a survey. This has never been an option for the TOB. The precise language of their IMA mandates a survey prior to a transfer through alienation legislation that abides by the strict limitations preceding covenants have established:

1.2 Permitted Encumbrances. (a) The Premises is to be transferred subject to (i) any state of facts an accurate survey may show and any variations between the location of records lines, (ii) covenants, restrictions, reservations, easements and agreements of record, (iii) laws and governmental regulations that affect the use and maintenance of the Premises.²

After our helpful meeting, and in response to a letter I wrote subsequently, I received the following email on July 21 from Thomas M. Sabellico, TOB Special Counsel:

Thank you for your correspondence. At our meeting last week, the very first statement made by the Town's representatives was that after consultation with the Town Attorney, the Town was proceeding to have the property surveyed, with a view toward obtaining a complete, detailed Survey that will provide a definitive line between areas of the property (active vs. passive preserve) and detailing all features which exist on the property.

To that end, I have been advised by the Town Department of Public Works that the Town has completed its fee negotiation with GdB Geospatial, LS, PC, to perform the Survey of Stillwell Woods. We will keep you apprised of their progress.

The TOB's announcement is excellent news, and we much appreciate finally having the town's commitment to this IMA imperative. A thorough survey is foundational to habitat protection.

The TOB must also present a detailed draft project proposal that directly correlates with the IMA's \$12 million budget. Stakeholders are unable to evaluate potential environmental impacts without a site plan that provides a blueprint for development.

Resting on the underpinnings of a valid survey and a comprehensive project proposal, Nassau County must evaluate the need to categorize the potential transfer as a Type 1 action, which requires a more rigorous review process, potentially including the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), as per State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) guidelines. A Type I action is an action or class of actions that is more likely to have a significant adverse environmental impact than unlisted actions.^{3, 4}

Timing is key. With a comprehensive survey, a project proposal, a valid SEQR evaluation and a restrictive covenant in place, the NYS Legislature can defensibly consider alienation of parkland legislation. If, however, the NYS Legislature votes on alienation without these guardrails in place, it will establish a detrimental precedent for loss of undeveloped open space.

1. *Handbook on the Alienation and Conversion of Municipal Parkland in New York* (2017), <https://parks.ny.gov/documents/publications/alienationhandbook2017.pdf>

2. Intermunicipal Agreement Between the County of Nassau, New York and the Town of Oyster Bay, New York in Relation to the Transfer of Stillwell Preserve, <https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/46296/IMA-Stillwell-Woods-Preserve>

3. 6 N.Y.C.R.R. § 617.1(c)

4. 6 N.Y.C.R.R. 617.4(a).

Notes on Stillwell Woods Preserve Ecology

by Mike Zito

Unique ecological area that is rich in biodiversity, hosting a variety of plant and animal species.

Its meadows, surrounded by forests, provide an essential habitat for both grassland and forest birds.

Contains biomes that are rare in the urban sprawl regions of Long Island.

Several Audubon indicator species, documented on eBird—a project of Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology—have been observed.

Identified by over 200 Audubon leaders.

Highlighted in the National Audubon Society's 2023–28 Flight Plan.

Their presence signifies a healthy habitat that supports many bird species, making them crucial bioindicators for the ecosystem.

Declining Grassland Indicator Species Observed:

Eastern Meadowlark
Bobolink
American Kestrel
Grasshopper Sparrow
Northern Harrier

Declining Forest Indicator Species Observed:

Bald Eagle
Blackpoll Warbler
Chimney Swift
Prairie Warbler
Scarlet Tanager
Yellow Warbler
Wood Thrush
and the rapidly declining Rusty Blackbird

American Woodcock (an uncommon nocturnal migrant)

Photo of rare Bullock's Oriole at Stillwell Woods in October 2024 by Mike Zito. See it in full orange glory at <https://www.ssaudubon.org/newsletter>



(Cont. from page 1) Collectively, we are woefully falling behind in cutting emissions to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement. Last year, 2024, the hottest year—to date—on record, already showed a rise greater than 1.5°C.

The Biden Administration, and Obama earlier, pursued an “all of the above” energy strategy, increasing renewable energy production, e.g. wind and solar, but also supporting the extraction and use of fossil fuels. The US became a leader in oil and natural gas, surpassing Saudi Arabia, exporting petroleum products to Europe and Asia. While “all of the above” is inadequate in the fight against climate change, the newer “drill baby drill” policy recently adopted is worse. Support for renewable energy production is being rolled back. Offshore wind development has been virtually halted, and solar subsidies are being cut.

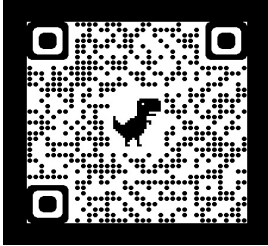
It has recently reached absurd heights with the recent news that Lee Zeldin's Environmental Protection Agency proposes to abandon the “Endangerment Finding,” a long-standing scientific finding that greenhouse gases, including CO₂, are harmful and dangerous to humans and the environment. That finding has historically given the EPA the authority to regulate greenhouse gases, lowering emissions for vehicles and power plants—enabling the agency to both fight climate change and improve human health. This announcement is, of course, a huge victory for the fossil fuel industry, as it is a direct attack on science and common sense.

The federal government is instituting policies that amount to “climate change denialism.” It has been decided that business interests, the profits accruing to fossil fuel companies, must take precedence over the health of the general public and the fight against climate change. These policies have impacted New York State climate policy as well. Recently Governor Hochul helped save one offshore wind project targeted by the Trump Administration, Empire Wind I, but only by agreeing, in exchange, to revive several previously rejected gas pipeline projects. Recent events have now put our state even more firmly on track to miss our own legislatively mandated renewable energy goals set by the 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

SSAS members, and many others, must confront this backsliding, which has become, at its extreme, complete denial of any global warming problem at all. As events develop in the coming weeks and months, follow our Facebook page for action alerts posted there. Also, join our SSAS email list on our webpage. There will be opportunities coming up to communicate with elected representatives, and to attend rallies, demonstrations, and hearings. There is strength in our numbers and in our strong commitment to a healthy planet. Take action!

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ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

Join us on our Bird Walks!

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 field trips 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 11520-0031**.

→ **All memberships expire in September.** ←

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