

South Shore

Skimmer



Volume 56, Number 3 • South Shore Audubon Society • Spring 2026

Audubon in Action Grant Awarded for SSAS Black Skimmer Tracking Project

by Brien Weiner

SSAS was awarded an Audubon in Action Grant of \$3,500 by the National Audubon Society for our Black Skimmer Tracking Project, which was featured in our Winter 2026 *Skimmer* (<https://www.ssaudubon.org/pdfs/skimmer/Skimmer-2025-12.pdf>).

The three-year project will monitor movements for a population of breeding skimmers in the SSAS area. Our goals are to make the connection between beach-nesting colony and places where birds forage in the back bays by tracking individual movements using GPS tags; to study how upgrades to wastewater management infrastructure in the back bays affect the birds' nesting and foraging; to determine where birds go on migration and why they return; to band chicks and collect fecal samples for DNA metabarcoding to study the chicks' diet; and to determine what makes our beaches successful nesting grounds relative to other locations on the Atlantic flyway.

Ultimately, we aim to protect the places skimmers need, which will also protect other beach-nesting species such as Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Least Tern, and Common Tern.

The grant gets us halfway to our goal of \$7000 to purchase 20 GPS tags. Each tag costs \$350. **Please consider making a donation of any amount.** For \$350, you can name the tagged bird and virtually tag along on its journey by map link. For \$1500, you can participate in training and placing the tags or banding the chicks, followed by dinner with lead ecologist Kate Goodenough.

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.



Photo of Black Skimmer family by Jay Koolpix

Our Sleeping Beauties

by Tom McCloskey

It's certainly been a long and frosty winter, a challenging time to for all of us creatures to best lay low, go slow, and stay warm.

Our two SSAS perennial native gardens are doing just that, now asleep and waiting for that moment to arrive to magically awaken once more in the soothing warmth of spring.

With the help of our volunteer gardeners, they will once again thrive throughout the sunny seasons ahead, providing food, shelter, and beauty to all the many creatures that come to visit—including bees, birds, butterflies, and many beneficial insects.

And you are also welcome to visit our native plant oases, where you can enjoy the many displays of color, the fragrances, and the interaction of our many varied inhabitants.

(Continued on page 4)

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*

Scholarships for High School Students

SSAS awards four \$300 scholarships to graduating high school seniors who plan to pursue college studies related to the environment.

Candidates must reside on the South Shore of Nassau County to be eligible.

Applications are available through your guidance counselor.

Scholarship winners are announced in June.

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Thank You, Donors!

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*Photo of Sharp-shinned Hawk
by Bill Belford*



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. Cancellations will also be posted on the SSAS Facebook page.

March

Sunday 3/1: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens

Sunday 3/8: Massapequa Lake (Merrick Road)

Saturday 3/14: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

Sunday 3/15: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve

Sunday 3/22: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)

Sunday 3/29: No walk

April

Sunday 4/5: No walk

Saturday 4/11: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

Sunday 4/12: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area

Sunday 4/19: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

Sunday 4/26: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

May

Sunday 5/3: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)

Sunday 5/10: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens

Sunday 5/17: Massapequa Lake (Merrick Road)

Sunday 5/24: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

Sunday 5/31: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

June

Saturday 6/6: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

Sunday 6/7: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)

followed by Annual Picnic in Brady Park (see page 4 for details)

Sunday 6/14: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve

For directions to Bird Walks: <https://www.ssaudubon.org/directions.asp>

Wildlife Hotline: (516) 674-0982

**WILDLIFE
CENTER
OF LONG ISLAND**  (formerly known as
Volunteers for Wildlife)
has been dedicated to the
preservation of Long
Island's wildlife and
natural habitats since 1982

<https://wildlifecenterli.org/>

Spring Programs at the Freeport Memorial Library

144 West Merrick Road, Freeport, NY 11520

The Hempstead Plains: The Last Stand of a Long Island Grassland with Paul van Wie

Tuesday, March 10 @ 7:30 PM

From the Friends of Hempstead Plains website: The Hempstead Plains is a rare East Coast prairie ecosystem that once covered 40,000 acres of central Long Island but today faces the risk of disappearing forever. This globally unique grassland has lost over 99.9 percent of its historic area to development and is designated G1 Critically Imperiled. Resembling the prairies of the Midwest—but sitting just east of New York City—the Hempstead Plains provides key habitat for birds, insects, and numerous rare and threatened plant species.

Join us as Dr. Paul van Wie, president of Friends of Hempstead Plains, shares his knowledge of the fascinating ecological and human history of the Plains and the ongoing efforts to protect and restore the native prairie so that it will endure for future generations.

Paul is also a professor of history at Molloy University; vice president of the Agricultural Society of Queens, Nassau and Suffolk Counties; and trustee of the Nassau County Historical Society and the Franklin Square Historical Society.

Monarch Migration and Birding in Mexico with Robyn & Paul of A Couple Without Borders

Tuesday, April 14 @ 7:30 PM

The monarch migration is one of the most incredible wonders of the world and something everyone should aim to see in their lifetime. Robyn Elman, director of Monarch Recovery Project NYC, will tell us about her firsthand experience on trips to Mexico that she and her husband run each year as A Couple Without Borders. Learn not only about the monarchs, but also about the communities that rely on them as well as the endemic birds of the area.

Photo of monarch by Jay Koolpix



Robyn & Paul are a local conservation-driven birding couple who explore the world and share it with their over 25K followers on Instagram. Robyn was a former zookeeper for the Wildlife Conservation Society at the Bronx Zoo. They are both involved with many community science and volunteer projects, including spending each July to September on monarch conservation in New York City and on Long Island, which was featured in *The New York Times* (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/14/nyregion/to-save-monarch-butterflies-they-had-to-silence-the-lawn-mowers.html>).

Seawatching on Long Island with Shai Mitra

Tuesday, May 12 @ 7:30 PM

Many species of oceanic birds can be seen from shore on Long Island. This talk will focus on the status and identification of oceanic birds such as shearwaters, storm-petrels, jaegers, alcids, and others, and also on when, where, and how to see them from land.

Shai Mitra has studied birds in the northeastern United States and around the world for more than 40 years. He received a BA in biology from Cornell University in 1989 and a PhD in evolutionary biology from the University of Chicago in 1996. From 1996 to 2000 he operated a major bird-banding station at the Fire Island Lighthouse, on the South Shore of Long Island. Currently, he is an assistant professor of biology at the College of Staten Island, with research interests in the areas of avian ecology, evolution, and conservation. Shai is editor of *The Kingbird*, the quarterly publication of the New York State Ornithological Association; co-compiler of bird records for the New York City and Long Island region; chair of the Rhode Island Avian Records Committee; and co-compiler of the Southern Nassau County and Napatree, Rhode Island, Christmas Bird Counts.

Photo of Razorbill by Bill Belford



Two Scholarships Open to College Juniors, Seniors, or Graduate Students

by Betty Borowsky

We are very happy to announce two college scholarships of \$2,000 each this year: the 2026 Jay Koolpix Environmental Scholarship and the 2026 Evelyn and Jerry Bishop Environmental Scholarship.

Each will be awarded to a current college junior, senior, or graduate student who is taking courses to prepare for a degree in an area of biological or environmental science. This includes wildlife management, forestry, animal behavior, ecology, marine biology, oceanography, mammalogy, ornithology, or the field of sustainable and renewable energy.

To be eligible for the scholarships, applicants must be residents of Nassau County and/or attend college in Nassau or Suffolk County.

Previous winners have used their scholarships to help pay for books, travel expenses to field sites, specialized equipment, or other educational needs.

Applications are available at our website (<https://www.ssaudubon.org>) and are due by April 30, 2026. They should be emailed to both Betsy Gulotta, sparky-sim24@gmail.com, and Betty Borowsky, bborow@optonline.net.

For more information and for assistance with application forms, do not hesitate to contact Betsy Gulotta or Betty Borowsky at the email addresses above.

(Continued from page 1)

We hope that your visit will awaken the seed in you to help us propagate our gardens, and inspire you to create your own native gardens at home.

Our gardens are located in front of the Tackapausha Museum in Seaford, and in front of the Hempstead Plains Education Center on the campus of Nassau Community College, Garden City. (Check the Hempstead Plains web site for hours before making the trip: <https://www.hempsteadplains.org/visit-preserve>)

If you are interested in lending a hand in our gardens, please contact Tom McCloskey at tc2750@gmail.com. No experience necessary.

Annual SSAS Central Park Walk

The annual SSAS Central Park Walk will be held on Saturday, May 2 (weather permitting). Chris Cooper will once again lead us through the twisting, hilly maze of the Ramble and adjoining areas of the park. Over the years, we've recorded from 31 to 70+ bird species in under three hours.

Chris got his start as a young birder with SSAS. 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.

We will leave from the Penn Station LIRR waiting area at 8:30 AM, and from Belvedere Castle in Central Park at 9 AM. You can use a contactless credit or debit card, smartphone, wearable device, or OMNY card for the subway. If purchasing an OMNY card, please do so in advance. OMNY cards are available at subway stations and other select locations.

To register, contact Louise (917-548-6974) or Alissa (516-578-3058). Space is limited.

Annual SSAS Picnic

The annual SSAS Picnic will be held on Sunday, June 7.

The picnic will be in Brady Park, at Lakeshore Drive and Front Street in Massapequa Park, at about 11:30 AM (after the SSAS bird walk in Massapequa Preserve). Brady Park adjoins the preserve's paved trail at mile marker 0.5.

Bring your children, grandchildren, and friends, and a cold lunch. SSAS will provide beverages, snacks, and prizes for the children's scavenger hunt. Individually wrapped desserts and additional snacks are always appreciated.

Everyone enjoys the raffle, so please consider donating what you can. Bird-related items, unused household or handmade items, house or garden plants, gift baskets, and gift certificates are among the popular raffle items. Raffle proceeds will go to our Black Skimmer tracking project (see page 1).

Please note there are no electrical outlets, there will not be grilling facilities, and alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park. There is a small parking lot and street parking on Lakeshore Drive. Our reserved section is partially roofed, so there is no need for a rain date.

Please contact Janice (jannybee@optimum.net) or Gail (516-608-1446) to RSVP.

Be a Big Bird Hero on Long Island

by Russ Comeau

Heed these eight nifty and easy ways that you can help Long Island's birds. Creating bird-safe habitats and reducing human-caused threats are critical actions for LI beach and backyard birds alike.

1. **Window safety:** Individuals can make residences and workplaces bird-friendly. Take window safety steps to prevent bird collisions with glass. Find out more: <https://abcbirds.org/solutions/preventing-collisions/>
2. **Lights out:** Turn lights out at night (11 PM–6 AM) during spring and fall migration to prevent disorienting birds. Learn more about providing safe passage for night-migrating birds: <https://www.audubon.org/our-work/cities-and-towns/lights-out>
3. **Plant native keystone species** in your garden that provide food (nectar, sprouts, berries, fruit, seeds, nuts) and shelter, and host insects that birds eat and feed to their babies. Find bird-friendly native plants for your zip code and yard conditions: <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>
4. **Avoid chemical overuse** of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizer in gardens and yards. These chemicals reduce the insect population (bird food), can poison wildlife, and run off to poison our waterways when it rains.
5. **Keep pet cats indoors.** Housecats are a top predator of wild birds. Take stray or unwanted housecats to shelters to be spayed/neutered and rehomed.
6. **Reduce and remove trash** at beaches and outdoor spaces. Food traces in garbage attract opportunistic predators (like housecats, raccoons, foxes, gulls, and crows) that will then discover and eat nearby bird eggs and chicks. Always take trash out with you, even if it wasn't yours. Fishing line is especially dangerous to birds.
7. **Respect nesting areas** by keeping pet dogs away. Even leashed dogs can scare parent birds away, leaving eggs or chicks vulnerable to predation and deadly heat or cold exposure. Eggs and baby birds cannot maintain their own temperature, depending entirely on their parents to provide life-saving thermal regulation.
8. **Don't fly kites and drones** or shoot fireworks near flocks or nesting sites.

Be a Big Bird Hero: None of these actions “takes a village”—they can be **do-it-yourself**. Even if you do just one of these things in 2026, you will be making a tangible difference for Long Island's wildlife. Birds will thank you!

Bird Photography with Jay Koolpix

You've seen his photos in the *Skimmer* and on Facebook. Now see Jay Koolpix in person as he presents

Birds of Nassau County's South Shore

Wednesday, April 15 @ 6:00 PM

at the Merrick Library

2279 Merrick Avenue, Merrick, NY 11566

Monday, April 27 @ 6:30 PM

at the Manhasset Public Library

30 Onderdonk Avenue, Manhasset, NY 11030

This program highlights some of the remarkable variety of birdlife found throughout southern Nassau County, pairing each species with a brief, engaging description and a glimpse into its unique behaviors.

A frequent presenter at SSAS and other local venues, photographer, philanthropist, and SSAS board member 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* (<https://www.ssaudubon.org/pdfs/skimmer/Skimmer-2023-06.pdf>).

Butterfly swimming? Double-crested Cormorant by Jay Koolpix



Horseshoe Crab Protection Act Signed into Law

The Horseshoe Crab Protection Act has been signed by Governor Kathy Hochul after a compromise with the legislature that allows for a three-year phaseout of commercial harvests of horseshoe crabs—with a total ban taking effect in 2029. This is a tremendous win for horseshoe crabs and the birds that rely on them

Thank you to all the SSAS members who called, emailed, and sent postcards to our legislators and the governor.

NYS Ocean Acidification Task Force: Its Unintended Revelations

by Guy Jacob

The NYS Returnable Container Act (a.k.a. Bottle Bill) reminds me of the first flip phones: They're so far out-of-date that few people could ever make use of one now. Enacted in 1982, the five-cent deposit has never increased. That's hurting our environment and our recycling and refill efforts. Enacting a modernized bottle bill would mean less litter, less polluted waterways, and less discarded natural resources while supporting greater wildlife and human health protections.¹

The final report of the NYS Ocean Acidification Task Force (NYSOATF), whose purpose was not to discuss more efficient waste diversion, nevertheless sheds a great deal of light about why we need passage of a Bigger Better Bottle Bill (BBBB, S5684).² The NYSOATF report reveals unequivocally why collection at redemption centers is far superior to curbside municipal collections, which perpetuate a misleading myth about the material that is collected curbside.

This mythology comes into poignant focus on page 23 of the NYSOATF report (section I-10), which discusses the potential use of ground glass to help recontour bay bottoms. This recommendation seeks a beneficial use for junk waste—waste that we should avoid engendering in the first place. Glass collected curbside for recycling has a small market and is in excess supply because it's contaminated. Using it for benthic repair would be like using dirty glass for roadbed aggregate. Certainly, it would be better to find some use for this inferior glass if we are first and foremost making efforts to minimize the amount of contaminated glass we collect in the future.

The contaminated glass is unmarketable because it was collected curbside by municipal recycling programs. Glass containers collected curbside are color-mixed, broken, and contaminated—that's why they have a negative market value. Municipalities seek to get rid of unmarketable curbside glass without being charged for it, but this scenario speaks far more to the inefficiency of curbside recycling than it does to the potential use of contaminated recycled glass.

Recycling glass through deposit systems is far more efficient than collecting glass curbside. Glass bottles collected through New York's deposit system are marketable because they're source-separated and clean. Consequently, we must encourage greater contributions to our deposit system and rely much less on municipal curbside systems.

The Bigger Better Bottle Bill would incentivize more recycling of beverage containers by increasing deposits to ten cents and by expanding types of eligible bottles.

Moreover, down-cycling recycled glass on our roads and marine ecosystems does not displace virgin materials used to make glass bottles and jars. The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (PRRIA, S1464) seeks to solve this problem by requiring minimum recycled content in glass and other containers.³ In this way, both bills work in tandem.

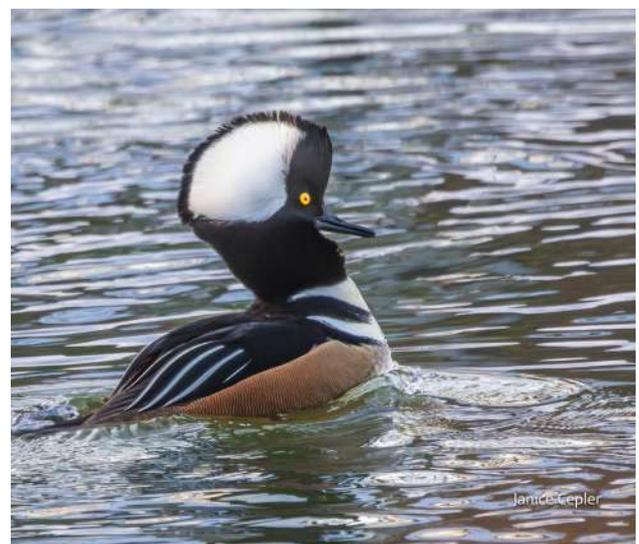
The optics of using contaminated glass for benthic repair would distract us from the task of collecting more marketable recycled glass. There is no evidence that the energy of using virgin gravel (clean dredge material) exceeds the energy of collecting and processing the glass bottles. The energy and material savings of the latter approach are questionable. Rather than focusing effort on potentially utilizing unmarketable recycled glass in the marine environment, we should legislate ways to maximize the highest quality recycled glass and thereby minimize the energy and resources required to use virgin materials.

ACTION ALERT: I submitted testimony on behalf of SSAS to the 2026 Joint NYS Legislative Budget Hearing in support of the Bigger Better Bottle Bill. **Please urge your NYS senator and Assembly member to support the BBBB (S5684).**

Notes:

1. <https://www.bottlebill40.org>; <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/about-bottle-bills/benefits-of-bottle-bills>
2. https://extapps.dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/oatfdraftreport.pdf; <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S5684>
3. <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2025/S1464>

Award-winning photo of Hooded Merganser by Janice Cepler



Janice Cepler

Campaign for a National Data Center Moratorium

by Jim Brown

Two computer-linked economic activities have grown dramatically in recent years—cryptocurrency mining, and the use and development of artificial intelligence (AI). Data centers, the basic infrastructure for the recent booms in both crypto and AI, have expanded greatly in size and number to accommodate the crypto boom and increased use of AI. Data centers are facilities that house computer servers and associated telecommunications and information storage systems. The US currently leads the world in this industry, with over 5,400 facilities nationwide. Worldwide there are over 10,500 data centers. Current expansion of data centers and their projected future growth are often spoken of with adjectives like “explosive” and “mega.” Capacity of these facilities is likely to triple by 2030.

From a strictly environmental perspective, the rapid expansion of US data centers poses severe problems, primarily due to the huge electricity and water requirements of the industry. In five years, water, used as coolant for the centers’ computers, may become unsustainable, equaling the amount of water used by 18.5 million households. Much of the water used is from sources of drinking water, including sources located in water-stressed regions of the country. Electricity use by all data centers—again if nothing is done to curtail the industry’s runaway expansion—may, by 2028, be equal to the energy consumed by approximately 28 million households. Unfortunately, 56 percent of this electricity is currently being generated from fossil fuels, and will only add to greenhouse gas emissions to accelerate the ongoing climate crisis.

Data center growth, based largely on crypto and AI, has already generated conflicts at the local level. Local communities have confronted major Big Tech and power companies attempting to build huge “hyperscale” data centers. In our state, people in the Finger Lakes region have had to fight data centers and power companies intent on obtaining land for purposes of cryptomining and AI data centers. The Greenidge Generation plant on the shores of Seneca Lake has now become a bitcoin mining facility, using natural gas. The operation takes an enormous amount of water from the lake to cool its thousands of computers, and returns the heated water to the lake, damaging the aquatic ecology. Local opposition has also arisen over a similar data center proposed for Cayuga Lake, this one to be dedicated to AI.

Opposition to data centers is growing throughout the country—in localities as diverse as Pennsylvania, Arizona, Missouri, Virginia, Texas, and Oregon.

Because of the numerous negative environmental impacts, coupled with negative impacts on electricity prices and jobs, SSAS recently joined Food and Water Watch, and over 200 local, state, regional, and national organizations in urging Congress to declare a national moratorium on new data centers. The moratorium would remain until adequate regulations for the industry are enacted. The impacts of rapidly expanding, unregulated data center, cryptocurrency and AI industries must be addressed to protect our national water supply and fight fossil fuel air pollution and climate change.

SSAS members and friends are urged to take action, now! Use the following link to send a letter to your Congress member, urging passage of a moratorium on data centers:

<https://act.foodandwaterwatch.org/page/92233/action/1>

*More wonderful waterfowl photos by Janice Cepler!
Top: Long-tailed Duck. Bottom: Red-breasted Merganser*

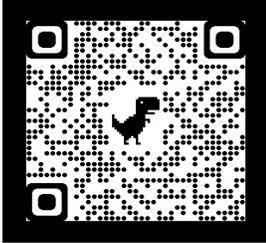


To view all our photos in color, see the *Skimmer* on the SSAS website at <https://www.ssaudubon.org/newsletter>

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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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Circle One: JOIN or RENEW

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