

South Shore

Skimmer



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If We Build It, They Will Come: Purple Martins at MNSA

by Mike Farina

What a phenomenal year for our local Purple Martins! Thanks to the generous support and donation from the South Shore Audubon Society, our 2026 nesting season reached a record-breaking 88% occupancy rate across our 24 gourd units, welcoming 86 nestlings into a booming colony of 130 birds. The transition to an optimized gourd setup made possible by South Shore Audubon's dedicated investment in local bird conservation has transformed the colony into a buzzing sanctuary, yielding a remarkable average of over four fledglings per active nest. From successful July banding days to proactive nest management, watching these aerial acrobats flourish in the salt marsh has been an extraordinary highlight, and we extend our deepest gratitude to South Shore Audubon for empowering this vital habitat success!

This marks the highest nesting efficiency recorded for the site since tracking began in 2021.

Year	Units	Nests	Success
2021	19	4	21%
2022	31	5	16%
2023	27	12	44%
2024	24	11	26%
2025	32	24	75%
2026	24	21	88%

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.

Editor's note: Nest boxes have helped counteract population declines and now provide virtually all nest sites for Purple Martins in the eastern US.



Photo of Purple Martins with SSAS gourds by Bill Belford



Photo of Purple Martin chick on banding day by Mike Farina
A bird in hand...

See all photos in color at <https://www.ssaudubon.org/newsletter>

A Growing Movement Underfoot

by Tom McCloskey

Have you noticed it in your travels this summer?

It seems that there is more of an abundance of colorful and varied blooms in our neighborhood gardens, and many of these are now native and perennial plants.

And it's a trend that's continuing to grow. (Cont. on page 7)

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Newsletter questions or comments?
Contact ssaseditor@gmail.com

Bird Walks

by Joe Landesberg

Congratulations to our High School Scholarship Winners!

Mya Grayson, Freeport HS
Charles Pennissi, South Side HS,
Rockville Centre
Hunter Tarab, Baldwin HS

SSAS is Proud to Support Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center Intern

Christopher Reyes
for mentoring young campers

Thank You, Donors!

Leah Bishop
Vicki & Evan Goldstein
Paul Greenspan & Chris Wisniewski

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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.

August

Sunday 8/23: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Sunday 8/30: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)

September

Saturday 9/5: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area
Sunday 9/6: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)
Sunday 9/13: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Sunday 9/20: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area
Sunday 9/27: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens

October

Sunday 10/4: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Saturday 10/10: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area (October Big Day)
Sunday 10/11: Massapequa Lake (Merrick Road)
Sunday 10/18: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Sunday 10/25: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

November

Sunday 11/1: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area
Sunday 11/8: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
Saturday 11/14: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area
Sunday 11/15: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Sunday 11/22: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Sunday 11/29: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

December

Sunday 12/6: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens
Sunday 12/13: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve
Saturday 12/19: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

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

Photo of rare Curlew Sandpiper at Jones Beach by Bill Belford



Wildlife Hotline: (516) 674-0982



(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/>

Fall Programs at the Freeport Memorial Library

144 West Merrick Road, Freeport, NY 11520

Open to the public. Free of charge. Light refreshments served. No need to RSVP. **Come at 7 PM before the program to meet, greet, eat, and learn about SSAS!**

Snowy Owls: The Ghosts of the Dunes with Jay Koolpix Tuesday, September 8 @ 7:30 PM

Meet the Snowy Owl through the eyes and lens of Jay Koolpix and his stunning photographs, engaging video clips, and fascinating facts. Captured entirely on Long Island, this presentation showcases the Snowy Owl's many expressions, behaviors, remarkable adaptations, and breathtaking flights. A ghost-white hunter of the Arctic tundra, the Snowy Owl is an unforgettable sight against Long Island's winter beaches, dunes, and ocean. Watch and discover what makes every encounter with this magnificent winter visitor so memorable.

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>).

Photos of Snowy Owls by Jay Koolpix



Migratory Behavior and Reproductive Timing in Songbirds with Abby Kimmitt Tuesday, October 13 @ 7:30 PM

Animals must time reproduction to coincide with optimal resources and conditions. Migration, which allows birds to live in seasonal environments, is energetically demanding and can constrain when reproduction occurs. Populations of the same species can differ in their migratory strategy, in which some migrate and others do not. Migrants can then be found in the same geographic space as residents during the winter and early spring, before departing for their own breeding grounds. Abby Kimmitt will discuss her past and upcoming work studying how females of the same species that differ in migratory behavior also differ in reproductive timing and physiology.

Abby earned a PhD in Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior from Indiana University and joined the Hofstra University faculty in 2024.

Planting a Pocket Prairie with Anthony Marinello Tuesday, November 10 @ 7:30 PM

Join Anthony Marinello, owner of Dropseed Native Landscapes native plant nursery, to learn about Long Island's grasslands and the extraordinary birds that call them home. Participants will discover what makes our grassland communities unique and why they deserve our appreciation and preservation. Find out how to convert part of your own property into a "pocket prairie" by restoring a small section of the native grasslands frequently lost to suburbanization and ornamental landscaping.

A native of Nassau County, Anthony founded Dropseed Native Landscapes to provide Long Islanders with the guidance and ability to transform their island into a native plant oasis that sustains both people and wildlife. He has served on the board of the Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI). He is a Certified Nursery & Landscape Professional (CNLP) of the NYS Nursery & Landscape Association and a Habitat and Ecosystems Land Professional of the National Audubon Society. He has been regularly featured in local and online media, such as Newsday and Yale e360, for his work as a native plant gardener, influencer, and educator.

Spraying Pesticides: Its Consequences May Be More Far-Reaching Than You Think

by Guy Jacob

I've never met a mosquito I didn't detest, and that's probably something we can all agree on. And I've never met a pollinator that I didn't like. And, of course, I love my family, including my two golden retrievers. That's why I refuse to hire a company to inject my property with insecticides.

Residential mosquito control companies use insecticides known as pyrethrins, which are chemicals derived from chrysanthemum flowers that are toxic to insects; more frequently, they use pyrethroids, which are synthetic chemicals that mimic pyrethrins. Mosquito Joe, Mosquito Squad, Mosquito Authority and a host of others use pyrethrins and pyrethroids in their standard treatment options.¹

The company may tell you that their product is natural, but that doesn't make their insecticide less toxic to birds, bees, butterflies, dragonflies, and ladybugs. These broad-spectrum insecticides are highly toxic to a wide variety of wildlife, not just mosquitoes.²

Pets exposed to pyrethroids can experience vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, and other symptoms. Have you ever wondered why your beloved dog got sick without any obvious explanation?³

Runoff from heavy rains washes these chemicals from your yards into surface waters, where they can poison aquatic organisms such as fish and crustaceans, which are highly sensitive to pyrethroids.⁴

People exposed to large amounts of pyrethroids can experience stinging skin, dizziness, headaches, or nausea that might last for several hours. Pyrethroids can enter your body if you breathe air containing the chemicals, you eat food that has been contaminated by the spray, or your skin comes into contact with the spray. Children and infants are the most vulnerable group to pyrethroids, as is true with many other toxic risks.⁵

What we do in our own backyards ultimately impacts on our neighbors' yards. Either pesticide spray and residues or protected beneficial pollinators will waft over and under our fences.⁶

But how can we both protect our loved ones and wildlife while also protecting ourselves from nasty bites?

I use the Biogents' Mosquitair CO2 (BG-Mosquitair CO2) trap, which I find to be an effective insecticide-free tool to control all mosquito species and other flying blood-feeding insects. I have two in my yard. In the long run, I'm not only protecting the health of people, pets, backyard birds, and beneficial insects like caterpillars and butterflies, but I'm also saving hundreds of dollars each year by avoiding pesticides.⁷

And I collaborate with nature. Dragonflies and damselflies are voracious mosquito predators of both aquatic larvae and winged adults. Attracting them helps to keep mosquitoes at bay. Instead of killing them along with mosquitoes, I seek to attract these beauties to my home gardens. Besides pond plants, black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), Joe Pye weed (*Eutrochium* species), and swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*) are excellent choices for attracting Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies) because they draw in their favorite airborne prey, such as midges, mosquitoes, and small moths.⁸

Besides clothing, there are numerous other steps we can take, including source reduction by eliminating standing water and placing mosquito dunks in our ponds and water-filled urns that hold aquatic plants.

My home is my kingdom. My property is a refuge for wildlife. What I do on my land impacts my family, my friends, my neighbors, and my pets.

Notes

1-5. <https://blog.nwf.org/2020/09/what-you-need-to-know-before-spraying-for-mosquitoes/>

6. <https://xerces.org/press/study-pesticide-sprays-for-mosquitos-may-kill-pollinators-drift-into-neighboring-yards>

7. <https://eu.biogents.com/bg-mosquitair-co2/>

8. <https://blog.nwf.org/2019/07/mosquitoes-suck-how-to-say-bye-to-bites-naturally/>; <https://extension.psu.edu/attracting-dragons-and-damsels-to-backyard-ponds>

Don't let pesticides poison my pond!

Photo of Mallard duckling by Janice Cepler



Osprey Banding

*Described by a grateful biologist who
no longer works professionally in the field*

*by Robyn Elman
@acouplewithoutborders*

Each year on July 4th—a holiday that brings us much stress thinking of the birds, other wildlife, and pets affected by the fireworks and crowded beaches—we have something to look forward to.

It is on this day each year that we go out with the legendary crew of John Z(arudsky) and Bobby Horvath to do a census and marsh cleanup, and to band Osprey chicks, under federal permit.

It has become an annual tradition that Paul and I are so grateful to be a part of.

This year, the 95–100 degree temperatures finally lessened that morning, and we had a warm but nice day with a bit of a breeze out on the marsh waters between Lido and Oceanside. The tides dictate when we “set sail,” and we left at 9 AM with the incoming high tide. The tides also dictate when it is time to end the day.

Paul’s quote as I was climbing the ladder with a large chick, one hand around the top of its thick legs and its body just relaxing against mine, explained it best: “They really are the best chicks.”

When approaching the nest, I wonder what the chicks are thinking.

They lay there, completely motionless, as if we were T-Rex. “They can’t see us if we don’t move.” They don’t try to bite. They don’t try to use their already long sharp talons to scratch us. They just lay there as we extend the left leg and put the size-8 band around it, motionless until the band is properly closed—a process that takes less than 20 seconds.

For the more “feisty” chicks that try to stand up, or nests that are high up requiring a ladder, one of us holds the chick while our feet are safely on the ground, and one of the permitted banders puts the band on. The chicks closely watch their new jewelry being placed and never struggle or protest.

The adults, on the other hand, do loudly protest! They scream and swoop down at us, usually not too close, from the moment the boat comes near until the moment we walk away. As soon as we take the anchor up and start moving away, they come right back to the nest to check on their family.

On this July 4th, 2026, we successfully banded 23 chicks, with three others observed that were too small to receive their bands.

This critical research helps conservationists track migration patterns, lifespan, and survival rates.

It also plays a vital role in measuring the success of reintroduction programs following the species’ near-extinction from DDT.

You can guess what date we’re looking forward to next year!

Photo of Robyn and Osprey by Paul Steil



Photo of Osprey by Janice Cepler



Opposing Nuclear Power in New York State

by Jim Brown

The South Shore Audubon Society strongly opposes Governor Hochul's current plan to expand nuclear power in our State. Nuclear power is a false solution to climate change, as well as dangerous, unhealthy, and expensive. We recently submitted the comments below to the New York State Public Service Commission in opposition to the plan, which is called the Nuclear Reliability Backbone. The comment period has now been extended to September 24, 2026. **SSAS members and friends are urged to take action** and post individual comments opposing the Governor's plan on the PSC website: Go to <https://dps.ny.gov/> and click on Search Case Files. Enter case number 26-E-0335 and choose Post Comments from the upper right screen.

If you prefer not to post electronically, a short, personalized note voicing your opinion can be mailed to the PSC address below:

Honorable Michelle L. Phillips
Secretary to the Commission
New York State Public Service Commission
Empire State Plaza, Agency Building 3
Albany, NY 12223-1350

Re: Case Number 26-E-0335

Dear Secretary Phillips,

Governor Hochul and her Administration are pushing ill-advised plans to expand nuclear power in New York State. Earlier this month, the Governor announced the kickoff of what she and her commissioners term the Nuclear Reliability Backbone process. The Governor, the Public Service Commission (PSC), the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and the New York Power Authority (NYPA) are all engaged to build out 5 GW of new nuclear power generation. Five new plants would be added to four existing nuclear plants already operating in our State.

The South Shore Audubon Society, in our comments on the PSC's Order Establishing a Nuclear Reliability Backbone, urges that this so-called "backbone" process be stopped and abandoned forever. Building additional nuclear power plants is a misguided energy policy—misguided in the extreme.

There are critical, salient reasons why New York should not be pursuing nuclear power:

1. Nuclear power is a false solution to climate change. Nuclear energy is not renewable, and the nuclear fuel cycle requires huge amounts of energy derived largely from fossil fuels. Most importantly, building nuclear power plants is a very lengthy, expensive process, distracting us from the absolute necessity of quickly building truly clean and renewable energy infrastructure based on wind, solar, and geothermal energy sources. Given the severity of the climate crisis and the rapid speed of global heating, we simply cannot afford this nuclear distraction from the climate action we should be taking. The fossil fuel industry is happy observing this distraction being adopted by the Hochul Administration. The pursuit of nuclear power prolongs their very existence, and the extraction and use of dirty oil, gas, and even coal, can continue unabated.

Audubon chapters have long been attuned to climate change impacts on the planet and its wildlife, especially birds. Studies published by the National Audubon Society, such as "Birds & Climate Change" (<https://www.audubon.org/menu/birds-climate-change-report>) and "Survival by Degrees: 389 Bird Species on the Brink" (<https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees>), highlight a very basic finding: Climate change poses the most serious threat to bird species and populations, birds are facing dramatic declines in numbers, and many species are endangered and threatened with extinction. SSAS has taken these studies to heart, and we realize that a rapid adoption of clean, renewal energy is necessary to save birds, along with the rest of the planet's inhabitants. We say NO to nuclear power!

2. Nuclear power is dangerous. Negative health impacts are related not just to horrendous nuclear accidents but also to populations involved in the whole nuclear fuel cycle. Negative health outcomes, often affecting Indigenous individuals and communities, begin with those mining and transporting the uranium; increased cancer rates are also found among people living close to nuclear power plants. Nuclear waste is also highly dangerous. It can last for hundreds of thousands of years, and no one has ever figured out how to get rid of it.

3. Nuclear power is expensive. It is costly now for New Yorkers and Long Islanders, and will become more so, if the current Administration's nuclear plans are realized. Long Islanders are still paying for the closed Shoreham nuclear power plant. In addition, Long Island ratepayers are paying \$76 billion in bill surcharges (Zero Emission Credits or ZECs) for the functioning of four uneconomic upstate nuclear plants. It is estimated that the "backbone" plan for five additional upstate nuclear power plants will cost \$100 billion, which will add another \$12 billion to bills paid by LIPA/PSEG customers. (*Cont. on page 7*)

(Cont. from page 6)

Though Long Island may not be burdened with its own nuke plant, we certainly will feel a steep financial burden from the ones planned for upstate New York.

SSAS wishes to state categorically to the PSC that nuclear power should play no part in New York State's energy future!

(Cont. from page 1)

A 2023 study by the National Wildlife Federation of US Gardening Consumers found:

28% of US adults (73.2 million) are purchasing plants that are beneficial for native bees, butterflies, and birds. **More than 1 in 4 persons, up from 25% in 2019.**

17% of US adults (44.5 million) are purchasing plants that are native to their region. **Up from 14% in 2019.**

12% of US adults (approximately 32.3 million) are converting parts of their lawn to a natural or wildflower landscape, subsequently reducing mowing (gas-powered mowers, which churn out carbon pollution). **Up from 9% in 2019.**

Because of more demand, many of our local garden centers are now making more native perennials available.

Although the buying season is ending, you may still find quality native perennials at good prices. Planting them now, before winter, can give them a strong head start for next spring.

Local resources can also help guide your native gardening journey, including organizations such as the volunteer-supported Long Island Native Plant Initiative in Brentwood and businesses such as Dropseed Native Landscapes in Malverne. (See program on page 3.)

If you want to do more of your own research on native gardening, please check out two inspirational and informative books written by entomologist, ecologist, and conservationist Doug Tallamy, *Nature's Best Hope* and *Bringing Nature Home*.

Also, for a firsthand look at **what you can do** in your garden, please **see our showcase SSAS Native Garden** located at the front of the Tackapausha Museum and Preserve in Seaford.

Native plantings on your property will not only create more needed habitats that encourage increased biodiversity, but they can also give you a real sense of wonder and belonging in our natural world.

Keep your spirit of native plantings growing!

Black Skimmer Tracking Project Update

by Kate Goodenough and Brien Weiner

During the second week of July, SSAS partnered with lead ecologist Kate Goodenough of Larid Research and Conservation, the Town of Hempstead Department of Conservation and Waterways, Audubon New York, and others to deploy GPS tags on adult Black Skimmers nesting on our beaches. We captured a total of 28 adult skimmers that provided samples for Project Poop, genetic testing, and stable isotope diet characterization.

The tags are set to collect data every 60 minutes throughout the life of the device but have the potential to collect more data if the tag voltage is above a certain threshold. By the end of July, we collected about 3,000 location points per individual for a total of nearly 50,000 location points for Black Skimmers. We have already begun to see differences in movements this season compared to previous seasons, with individuals traveling longer distances to forage both east and west of the breeding colony.

There seems to be a split between where males and females are foraging. The males appear to use bays and marshes more to the west of the breeding colony while females are choosing to head east up island. Most of the longer foraging movements are occurring at night between 10 PM and 3 AM. We have also documented out of state travel with individuals visiting the New Jersey coast and the Connecticut side of Long Island Sound.

The longer foraging distances may be related to a lack of menhaden and other forage fish that is also affecting Osprey productivity in our area and up and down the Atlantic Coast. (See David Gessner, "Ospreys in the Chesapeake Bay are Starving to Death at Disastrous Rates. What Will It Take To Save Them?" *Audubon Magazine*, Summer 2026,)

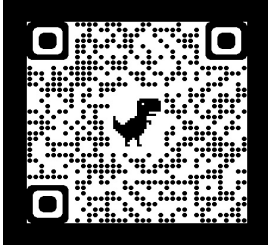
Projects like our Black Skimmer Tracking Project produce data that can be used for conservation actions and policy decisions, such as menhaden catch limits, for the benefit of our coastal ecosystem and economy.

Our skimmer project is producing so much data that a better way to collect it is needed. **We are looking to raise \$2350 to purchase a HUB that would collect data for our tagged Black Skimmers and American Oystercatchers and future tagging of Least Terns.**

If you would like to help, please send a check made out to South Shore Audubon Society, PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520. Write Black Skimmer Tracking Project on the memo line. Any amount is appreciated and all donations are tax-deductable.

South Shore Audubon Society
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Visit Our Website:



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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 \$25 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.** ←

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip+4 _____ - _____

Phone _____ Email _____

***Please Circle One: JOIN or RENEW**

Donations are tax deductible.