

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

The Second Annual Great Backyard Count will be held on **February 19–22**. The following's excerpted from a message written by National Audubon's Director of Communications, John Bianchi.

National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology invite every family and individual in the country to identify and count the birds they see at their bird feeders, in their backyards, and in local parks or other outdoor locations, aiding scientists' understanding of bird populations and their distribution. The key to this history-making event is that participants contribute their sightings online, through a revolutionary World Wide Web site, BirdSource (<http://birdsource.cornell.edu>). In turn, BirdSource provides almost instantaneous feedback to participants through compelling graphics, animated maps, and constantly updated summaries.

"It has become increasingly apparent that weather phenomena like El Niño may influence the winter movements of birds," says Audubon Senior Vice President for Science Frank Gill. "We need people to help us. If five percent of the approximately 54 million bird-watchers in the United States participate, we will add significantly to our knowledge of the current health of wintering birds across our continent."

Now, everyone can help by being part of the Second Annual Great Backyard Bird Count. On the weekend of February 19–22, parents, children, and grandparents — anyone with an interest in birds and access to the Internet — should watch their bird feeders and backyards, and count the maximum number of each of the different bird species he or she sees. For those without feeders, counts can be made in neighborhoods or local parks. Participants can spend as little or as much time as they want counting birds during the four-day period. They then submit their counts via BirdSource — which also offers assistance in bird identification — on an easy-to-use form.



AUDUBON CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS

Once again, SSAS will be awarding two full scholarships, one to an adult and one to a child age 10–14, to attend an Audubon camp this summer in Connecticut or Maine, respectively. Applicants or their parents should be members in good standing and be interested in sharing their camp experiences with fellow members, the community, and/or schools; we typically get only a few applicants, so apply! Financial need is not a basis for receiving a scholarship; the winners must provide their own transportation. Please contact either our Education Chairperson, Suzanne Lancer (536-6574 between 7 and 9 P.M.), or Doreen Remsen (472-6830) for details; the deadline to

apply is **March 10th**. The following descriptions come from an Audubon Ecology Camps & Workshops catalog.

The Maine camp occupies the 333-acre Todd Wildlife Sanctuary on Hog Island in Muscongus Bay. The primary aim of Audubon's Youth Ecology Camp is to instill a love, respect, and sense of stewardship for the natural world. Participants learn by doing — if we talk about something, we'll also see it, feel it, touch it, experience it. Fifty young campers, led by ten instructors, hike through cathedral-like spruce-fir forests, search for organisms in tide pools, and learn about seabirds, seals, and other wildlife. The evenings are filled with night hikes, stargazing, special guests, and songfests. The Youth Ecology Camp will be offered from July 29 to August 8 and August 11–21.

A Pileated Woodpecker (pictured) may be your alarm clock as its drumming breaks the silence of a New England



forest. This is one of nearly 100 avian species you could see during your stay here (in Greenwich, Connecticut) — though you'll do much more than identify birds. Our purpose is to learn how birds and all other species are tied together in an intricate web of life. You'll take leisurely hikes in our beautiful 522-acre nature sanctuary, through magnificent deciduous and hemlock forests, across lush meadows, alongside (and sometimes in) life-filled lakes, ponds, and streams. And you'll explore beach, intertidal, and marine ecosystems on Long Island Sound. Lecture and lab work supplement field studies, while optional classes might include nature photography, animal tracking, and orienteering. There's also ample time for stargazing, book browsing, meadow lounging, and camp camaraderie. Many educators come to improve their professional skills in sessions that emphasize practical teaching techniques for school classes, youth groups, and local Audubon chapter education programs. These workshops offer total immersion in the major natural habitats and ecosystems of New England. Facilities include a library, auditorium, dining hall, and double-occupancy rooms furnished with private baths. Dates are July 11–17, 18–24, and 25–31; August 1–7; and August 8–14.

SSAS Mission Statement — The mission of South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education, and preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

SSAS Post Office Statement — South Shore Skimmer is published monthly from September through December and February through June by South Shore Audubon Society, P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

HUMMINGBIRDS

Tom Toma

I was sitting on the edge of a bench made of stone. A wooden rack with hummingbird feeders and various flowers stood in front of me. Several photographers with a not-so-small fortune of cameras and telephoto lenses sat in a semicircle on either side of me. Whenever a hummingbird flew into the feeders or flowers, the hum of motor drives and the click of camera shutters filled the air. As I sat there quietly waiting for a hummingbird to return, I suddenly heard the unmistakable hum created by hummingbird wings as they beat 50 to 75 times a second. I looked around for the bird, and found a Broad-billed Hummingbird near my feet. It was hovering in front of a spider's web stretched across a gap in the rocks. It continuously moved forward and back, up and down, in a display of its great flying ability. As I looked closer, I discovered the bird was picking small gnat-like insects off the web. The hummingbird was using another predator to do his hunting for him.



This incident took place in legendary Madera Canyon, near the Santa Rita Lodge in the Santa Rita Mountains. This is one of the sky islands in southeastern Arizona. These "islands" are really mountains that rise from the desert, through forest and even up to alpine tundra. These various environments create a rich variety of wildlife. Madera Canyon has oak forest and riparian (riverbank) habitat, with 15 species of hummingbirds and over 200 birds on its checklist. Among the birds that can be seen here are the Elegant Trogon, Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, and Flammulated Owl.

To get to Madera Canyon, take Interstate Highway 19 south from Tucson to Green Valley. Take Exit 63 and drive east past the Continental School. Continue to Forest Road 62 for nine miles to the junction with Forest Road 70. Follow Forest Road 70 to Madera Canyon. These roads pass through the desert, offering some opportunities to stop and watch some desert birds before entering the canyon. As you enter the canyon, the elevation rises and you enter an oak forest. The mountains rise to over 9000 feet all around the canyon. There are several parking areas to stop, and trails to walk or hike from these areas. There are also camping and picnic areas in the canyon.

The family of hummingbirds includes the smallest and most colorful of birds: The Bee Hummingbird is about 2-1/4 inches, the world's smallest bird. The largest member of the family is 8-1/2 inches in length. There are 320 species of hummingbirds; fourteen breed in North America, one is a regular visitor, and seven others have been recorded as vagrants. They are purely New World birds and range from Alaska to the Strait of Magellan; most are tropical. More than a third of their weight is on the chest muscles. A hummingbird's heart is five times larger than a human heart for its size. The heart beats 1260 times a minute during moderate activity; the resting pulse is 615

but may drop to 36 on a cool night. Because of their small size and high consumption of energy, they would starve during the night if they did not have the ability to lower their temperature 30 degrees and reduce their heartbeat to conserve valuable energy.

The first Europeans to see these birds were from Christopher Columbus' crew. He mentioned the birds in his journal on October 21, 1492. He wrote "little birds...so different from ours it is a marvel," alluding to the tiny hummingbirds. Indeed these birds have always captured the imagination of humans. Huitzilopochtli, whose name means "hummingbird of the south," was an Aztec god of sun and war. They believed that warriors were reincarnated as hummingbirds. Mayans believed the great god created a pair of hummingbirds from leftovers after he created the other birds. He invited the other birds to celebrate and many birds brought gifts; among them was a House Finch who gave the red feathers for a scarf. The sun was there and gave a present of feathers that gleam and sparkle like gold and jewels. Since then, feathers of hummingbirds are iridescent in the sunlight.

The Navajo believed that these small birds began as very large birds. Because of their size, they had a huge appetite that destroyed many flowers. This upset the Great Spirit, so he shrunk the hummingbirds down to their present size. In fact, they became so small they could no longer sing. The other birds felt sorry for the hummingbirds, so they asked the Great Spirit to give them glorious feathers to make up for their loss of size and song. Obviously the Great Spirit agreed. Other Southwest Indian tribes considered the hummingbird a bringer of rain. The Zuni and Hopi believed this bird had a direct connection to the rain god. Many of their water jars were decorated with stylized hummingbird images, and hummingbirds were included in the ceremonial rain dances.

Hummingbirds are actually very dull in color, usually gray or brown. The brilliant color of these birds is created by the structure of their feathers. The feathers are overlaid with transparent cells that reflect certain colors of the light. When the observer is at the right angle to the feather and the light source, the brilliant colors become visible. That is why the bright reds, purples, blues, and greens seem to flash on and off as they move about. It is also the reason it is necessary to use a flash when photographing these birds. The light from the flash reflects the desired colors and also helps stop the movement of these quick-moving birds with a quick burst of light (usually less than a 1000th of a second). This intense but short burst of light does not harm or cause any discomfort to either plants or animals.

Modern cameras are a wonder of technology, with auto exposure and focus. One of the best technical developments is the TTL flash metering. TTL means "through the lens." The lens and camera work with the flash, so the shutter closes when the proper amount of light passes through the lens. Non-TTL or manual lenses are much

more difficult to use: First you must measure the distance from the subject to the flash. Then set the calculator on the back of the flash to the proper ASA and distance measured to set the aperture. Since hummingbirds are constantly moving, one must guess at the distance, or set up for a specific spot and wait for a bird to come to that spot.

Hummingbirds are like little gems, almost magical as they zip back and forth in front of flowers, creating images any photographer would love to capture on film, or bird-watcher would love to catch in memory.

GET FREE PERMITS FOR CONNETQUOT AND JFK SANCTUARY

Obtaining the free permits required for access to John F. Kennedy Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary (just east of Jones Beach) and Connetquot River State Park Preserve is an easy way of letting the Town of Oyster Bay and New York State know that you care about these places and about wildlife habitat in general.

To obtain a JFK Sanctuary permit request form, call 797-4110 or write to Edward Kennedy, Commissioner, Department of Parks, Town of Oyster Bay, 977 Hicksville Road, Massapequa, NY 11758. You don't need to be a Tobay resident to apply.

The Park Use Permit for Connetquot (good for up to eight people) is available by sending a letter to Connetquot River State Park Preserve, P.O. Box 505, Oakdale, NY 11769.

BROOKSIDE & TACKAPAUSHA THANKS

At our November 15th cleanup in Brookside Preserve, the following SSAS members and Brookside committee people helped distribute a neighborhood letter and remove another interesting collection of items from Milburn Creek and drier areas (bicycle frame, attaché case, shovel, pipe, tire, metal headboards, orange construction barrel, and the usual glass, plastic, and paper debris): Marie Brown, Susan Brychcy, Paul & Joan Butkerei, Clint Combes, Joan Elle, Betsy Gulotta, Janice Howard, Judy Hoyer, Gloria Karaman, Charles Kiefer, Scott Oglesby, George & Marianne Peters, Doris Pirodsky, Alvira Serdock, and Michael Sperling. A Great Blue Heron landed on the bridge to inspect our work.

At our December 18th Holiday Party for Wildlife at Tackapausha Museum, Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary's Pete Downing presented a live animal program, while the refreshment, membership, crayon, pinecone, and popcorn-stringing tables were run by SSAS helpers and loiterers (far better to have too much help than not enough) Kathy Battaglia, Gloria Berkowitz, Alice Blaustein, Betty Borowsky, Mary Jane Conlon, Pat Eagen, Claire Houser, Therese Lucas, Doreen Remsen, Jim Remsen, Jackie Richichi, Mary Jane Russell, Michael Sperling, Jonathan Staller, and Tom Torma.


SUPER BOWL BIRDSEED SALE REMINDER

Our second and last birdseed sale is **Sunday, January 31st**, from 9:30 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. at Tackapausha Museum on Washington Avenue in Seaford (between Merrick Road and Sunrise Highway). Although it's too late to preorder, some extra birdseed and feeders will be available. **HELP IS NEEDED** to process orders and carry seed around the parking lot. To volunteer, call Paul Butkerei late evenings (599-0395) or ask about helping when you arrive.

HAVE UMBRELLA, NEED ACCOUNTANT

After our October meeting ended, your editor found a black push-button umbrella in the front row near the doorway; I've been unable to give it away at subsequent meetings (active SSAS members are a very honest bunch). If it's yours, please call me at 541-0805 after 7:30 P.M.; if it's not, it could be yours for \$1 at one of our coffee-break raffles.

South Shore Audubon's annual summertime financial report and nonprofit tax statements (IRS Form 990, NY's G750-497) have been done by volunteers for most of our history. If you are an accountant, or know of an accountant, who would be willing to assist SSAS with our annual financial/tax statements on a pro bono basis, please contact prez Doreen at 472-6830 or treasurer Nancy at 520-9016. Thank you!



*Explore the coast
with the*
**AMERICAN
LITTORAL SOCIETY**

NEW YORK AQUARIUM (Sat., April 17th). A 2-1/2 hour behind-the-scenes tour of this wonderful facility in Coney Island. See walrus, sea otters, seals, sharks, sea turtles, penguins, local fish, and more. Cost: \$15 (\$8 kids).

FIRE ISLAND HIKE (Sat., May 8th). Visit the Sunken Forest during peak warbler migration. Hike the boardwalk trail through the holly maritime forest, dunes, and beach. Bring lunch. Cost: \$20 includes round-trip ferry and guides.

ASSATEAGUE SPRING WEEKEND (May 20-23). Visit Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge and Assateague National Seashore in Virginia. See nesting Bald Eagle and Osprey, wild horses, river otter, etc. Cost: \$260 includes 3 nights at Refuge Motor Inn, 3 evening programs and star watch, marsh boat tour, Safari bus tour, and all-you-can-eat seafood buffet.

JAMAICA BAY SUNSET BOAT CRUISE (Sat., June 5th). Enjoy a calm cruise aboard the "Dorothy B VIII" during peak bird nesting season. See Peregrine Falcon, egrets, herons, ibis, oystercatcher, terns, skimmers, and lots of shorebirds. Learn about the history & ecology of the refuge. Cost: \$35.

For information and free field trip brochure,
call/write Don Riepe, (718) 634-6467,
28 West 9th Road, Broad Channel, NY 11693

- ④ How did the Secretary Bird get its name?
- ⑤ What kind of bird has the keenest eyesight?

⑤ Hawk (pictured on this page) look like quill pens from years ago.
 ④ The feathers that dangle behind the bird's ears
 ③ They have inflatable body sacs under their skin
 mating call.
 ② Proclaim territory and to attract females with the
 warmed by the sagging stomach.
 ① The egg is placed on the feet of the male, where it's

CONSERVATION REPORT
Open Space vs. Urban Sprawl

Betty Barowsky

We're hearing a lot lately about "urban sprawl" juxtaposed with concerns about the loss of "open spaces" (in the Long Island section of the *New York Times*, Sunday, November 29, 1998; in the most recent "Letter of the Month" from the New York State Office of the National Audubon Society; and through a resolution passed by the Audubon Council of New York State). People seem to have finally noticed that if you continue to grow outward from an urban area you will use up open spaces, until finally there won't be any more to build on (not to mention to have for recreation and the preservation of wildlife). And the other thing that happens when you grow outward is that the inner city is neglected, leading to decay and even abandonment.

Well, there are relatively few areas of open space left in Nassau County. Most of what's left is in parks maintained by various levels of government, and perhaps some acres associated with large private properties, especially on the north shore.

Concerns about open space are not new to our chapter; we have always worked hard to maintain open space in the County. Among other things, we have participated in maintaining Cow Meadow Park; we manage Brookside Preserve; we have adopted Tackapausha Museum, with its associated wetlands area; we have helped prevent the conversion of part of Bethpage State Park into yet another golf course; we are participating in developing a plan to manage the south shore estuary; and so on. One of our hardest tasks has been to have people understand that *any* kind of open space development should be avoided. Many persons feel that a golf course is the same thing as a parcel of open space, that it's equivalent to undeveloped areas like the pine barrens or what's left of the Hempstead Plains, or the wetlands along the north and south shore, or even along some of the rivers that flow to the south shore bays and inlets. This misconception actually gives rise to two problems:

First, there is a world of difference between a golf course and a real wetlands area. Golf courses tend to use organic pesticides and herbicides, and they may support

nonnative vegetation. Even when they do employ native species, there are big differences in the total *amount* they use, and in the mixture of species, compared to what grows in undeveloped areas. No matter what golf-course developers contend, there is no way that golf courses can support meaningful numbers and varieties of native wildlife.

The second problem is perhaps more important yet more insidious. Psychologically, once you have changed an open space to a golf course, it becomes easier to make the next move: from golf course to commercial buildings or to private housing. What actually happens is that portions of the golf course are converted to other uses bit by bit.

What can we do now? We have to continue — perhaps redouble — our education effort. We also need to support proposed legislation that will mandate *planned* development, and will encourage that older, previously developed areas be built up before attacking undeveloped parcels. The Audubon Council of New York State has passed a "Smart Growth" resolution which supports the establishment of a policy similar to one recently passed by Maryland. There is already "smart growth" legislation submitted to the State legislature (A.10810 and S.7256). These bills would set up a "task force to assess and analyze New York laws and regulations, and make recommendations to the Governor and legislature about changes that would facilitate the utilization of existing infrastructure... and coordinate planning goals and policies among state departments and agencies."



Is it actually possible to employ principles of smart growth? Well, we already have one example in Hempstead Village, where a new mall is being developed on the site of the old Times Square Store. The location has always been commercially viable, close to Hempstead Village and Hempstead Town Hall, and near the busy thoroughfare of Peninsula Boulevard. The area will be converted from an eyesore to an attractive commercial enterprise, and should assist in revitalizing the downtown area of Hempstead. Those of us who have lived in Nassau for a while remember that that area was once the premier shopping district in south Nassau.

In sum: it is gratifying to see some real interest in preserving open spaces and in planning for controlled development. We will continue to promote these ideas and work to maintain the overall excellent quality of life we enjoy in Nassau County.

 NASSAU COUNTY POLLUTION HOTLINE 739-6666

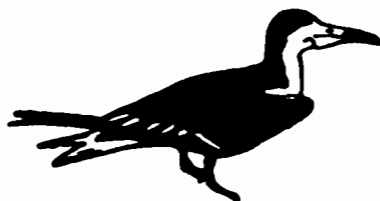
 RARE BIRD ALERT (212) 979-3070

1998-1999 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS, AND COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Doreen Remsen, President	472-6830
Jonathan Staller, Vice President & Environmental Festivals Coordinator	822-5957
Nancy Frame, Treasurer	520-9016
Christine Schmitt, Recording Secretary	887-7713
Doris Pirodsky, Corresponding Secretary	378-1790
Denise Comeau, Director (6/01)	437-7133
Michael Goldsmith, Director (6/01)	822-5272
Michael Higgiston, Director (6/00)	538-8376
Judy Hoyer, Director (6/00)	775-0159
Sandy Brenner, Director (6/99)	249-4919
Bill Holtweg, Director (6/99)	226-2519
Betty Borowsky, Conservation Legislation Chairperson	764-3596
Paul Butkerei, Wild Bird Feed Savings Day	599-0395
Joanne Del Prete, Special Trips Chairperson	433-0739
Joseph Grupp, Duck Survey	481-4208
Betsy Gulotta, Brookside Preserve Committee Chairperson	546-8841
Janice Howard, Hospitality Chairperson	420-9468
Marge Jaeger, Fund-raising Chairperson	536-9166
Elliott Kutner, Birding / Field Trips Chairperson	486-7667
Joseph Lancer, Binocular / Book Sales (7 to 9 P.M.)	536-6574
Suzanne Lancer, Education Chairperson (7 to 9 P.M.)	536-6574
Annie F. McIntyre, Educational Media Chairperson	379-2206
George Popkin, Financial Advisor (8 to 9 P.M.)	378-4467
James Remsen, Jr., Birdathon Co-Chairperson	764-5168
Jackie Richichi, Membership Chairperson	moving
Dolores Rogers, Welcoming Committee Chairperson	599-1224
Mary Jane Russell, <i>Armchair Activist</i> Chairperson	766-7397
Diane Singer, Publicity (5 to 8 P.M.)	561-6118
Michael Sperling, <i>Skimmer</i> Editor	541-0805
Tom Torma, Program Chairperson	223-7947

South Shore Audubon Society
P.O. Box 31
Freeport, NY 11520-0031

A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
Americans Committed to Conservation



U.S. POSTAGE PAID Permit No. 1181 NONPROFIT Freeport, NY
--

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

 PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

DATED MATERIAL