

NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER A Good End to a Good Day at Badlands National Park in South Dakota

Joe Grupp

The sun approaching the horizon had turned the rocky features of Badlands National Park into a layer cake of soft colors. Each horizontal layer of rock added color to the scene. There were tans, soft reds, grays, yellows, and greens. Each turn in the road revealed another magnificent scene. The setting sun also signified that our day of exploration there was coming to an end.

Our day was a good one, as one by one, the sum total of our observations increased as we drove through the park, stopping at times to walk to points of interest, etc. Early in the day, as we were walking to an overlook, we spotted a raptor perched on a low bluff. It was a Krider's Hawk, a new bird for us, but not a new species. It is a subspecies of the Red-tailed Hawk species, just as our Eastern Red-tailed Hawk is. Its range is somewhat limited and includes the northern plains.

There were times when we were stopped along the road through no fault of our own and had no choice but to add to our observations. Once it was for a coyote that was roaming back and forth across the road while coming toward us. After a time we realized that it was catching insects, probably grasshoppers, off the road's surface. Either coyotes are fond of the insects that that one was catching or they were just an easy meal for them, because we came across other coyotes doing the same thing four or five different times during the day.

Later on, we were stopped again as a large bison claimed the road. I doubt that the rental car company would have approved of me challenging the bison for my share of the road. Hundreds of pounds of muscle and bone covered in shaggy brown fur plodded towards us before finally joining others eating the tan-colored, dry autumn grasses on the prairie.

Voluntary stops added to our observations. One stop was to see bighorn sheep grazing near the roadside. Another stop had us get out of the car to better view two immature Bald Eagles circling low overhead. Yet another was to view a herd of about 20 pronghorns (pictured) grazing and resting in the not-too-distant grasses.



At one point it was just time to get out of the car for a while, and do a little more walking and exploring than we had been doing. Pulling off the road by a very large prairie dog colony, we walked a worn path winding through it.

When we parked, hundreds of dogs over acres of ground sat up alert and ready to flee into their burrows. While we were getting out of the car, that is exactly what they did and where there were hundreds of dogs a second or two before, only mounds of earth were then seen. I was a bit surprised when we walked into the colony



to find that when we moved slowly, even nearby dogs popped out of their burrows and showed no fear as they moved away feeding. Observing them was observing eating machines, as they took a few bites of one partly eaten plant and then moved on to the next.

A different type of motion caught our eyes in an area where the dogs eating had pretty much cleared the vegetation, leaving only short stubs of plants and lots of bare ground. A dozen Horned Larks were busy feeding there. They were of a different subspecies than the ones that are frequently seen at home in the Jones Beach area. Their yellow-and-black face markings were brighter and differed slightly from those of their eastern counterparts.

Reaching the end of our day, the sun was below the horizon but there was still the hint of a sunset painting the few clouds above it a light red. It was a pretty scene and we experienced a real cold nip in the air as we got out of the car to walk a very short trail, into the rocky gorges of that part of the park. The light of dusk was dull when some motion attracted our attention. Getting our binoculars on it, we found it to be a Mountain Bluebird alternating between feeding and perching at the edge of the trail. Mountain Bluebirds are western birds that we had seen before on other trips. Seeing that bird in the chill of the coming night and the last light of day was like unexpectedly meeting an old friend. It most certainly was a good way to end a good day!

THANK YOU, MARY JANE!

Jim Brown

Mary Jane Russell, due to personal commitments, has had to resign her position as our hospitality chair. For many years she has ably and consistently provided us with well-chosen refreshments and shade-grown coffee for our membership meetings. Mary Jane has done a wonderful job in this capacity for a long time, and we are sad that at this time she won't be able to attend as many meetings as she would like to do. Gail Brown has volunteered to step in and serve as the new hospitality chair.

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SSAS Mission Statement — *The mission of South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education; conduct research pertaining to local bird populations, wildlife, and habitat; and preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.*

SAVE TACKAPAUSHA AND GARVIES POINT: An Appeal to Our Members

Jim Brown

The South Shore Audubon Society is shocked and dismayed that County Executive Ed Mangano has said he plans to close Garvies Point and Tackapausha Museums after 2:00 P.M. and on weekends, and to lay off the full-time staff. The two sites house the most important natural history museums in Nassau County, and Mr. Mangano's planned action will effectively close them to the public, who visit after school hours and on the weekends.

We are urging the County to keep them open with their current staff. Closing or downgrading these facilities would be a huge loss to the Long Island community. They are designed to educate our children about the unique natural history and environment of Long Island, and there is no other comparable place for them to obtain that knowledge.

Tackapausha is of special concern to our chapter and dear to our hearts. SSAS adopted this important local site many years ago. We note, with great chagrin, that the \$1 million renovation of Tackapausha Museum and Preserve is almost completed. The improvements to the museum will provide even better and more informative exhibits. Meanwhile, the museum continues to house a unique collection of live animals that are the cornerstone of its educational programs. These can only be maintained by appropriately licensed personnel. At a time when monies are so scarce, it is absolutely unacceptable to waste any amount, never mind \$1 million — especially when it is already spent and, with so little more added, would benefit the community so much.

We have been informed that it costs about \$250,000 per year to run Tackapausha — a truly modest sum compared with other county expenditures, such as the \$2 million that was spent on a special election this past summer for a bond issue, and especially considering how much that money buys for the residents.

Long Island's museums and preserves contribute enormously to the outstanding quality of life that draws people to and keeps them on Long Island in spite of its huge tax burden. Remove these attractions and the Island will suffer the loss of its middle class, and consequently a large part of its tax base.

To help Tackapausha, a new support group, "The Friends of Tackapausha," has been formed and is working to establish its nonprofit 501(c)(3) status. Members of SSAS are urged to join and lend their support to this new organization.

We also call on our members to either call or write Nassau County Department of Parks, Recreation and Museums' Commissioner Foskey. Urge the Commissioner to keep these museums open. It is of the greatest importance to us and to all the residents of Long Island that both Tackapausha and Garvies Point Museums be saved from

even partial closure and curtailment of services. The facilities are unique, irreplaceable institutions in Nassau County, and their loss to the public would deprive our children of a priceless educational resource.

Letters can be addressed to Commissioner Carnell T. Foskey; Nassau County Department of Parks, Recreation and Museums; Eisenhower Park Administration Building;



1899 Hempstead Turnpike; East Meadow, NY 11554. He can be reached by phone at 572-0200.

Also, call, write, or e-mail your County Legislator and tell your representative to do everything possible to keep these important parks and preserves **fully staffed and fully open** to county residents.

BROOKSIDE PRESERVE'S FALL CLEANUP

SSAS's November 6 cleanup at chapter-managed Brookside Preserve had good weather and included the removal of an automobile tire, a folding chair, various articles of clothing, a buried vacuum cleaner, and an assortment of other goodies. We thank our volunteers — Lloyd & Vivien Abrams, Jim Brown, Diana Ihmann, Sara Josloff, Mary Ellen Kahn, Charlie Kiefer, Rich Kopsco, Therese Lucas, Elliott McLean, Cody Phillips, Steve Schellenger, and Mike Sperling.

JAMAICA BAY AGREEMENTS

Editor's note: The following is excerpted from an October 27 press release.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 2 Administrator Judith Enck today announced new agreements to improve the federal and city parklands around Jamaica Bay and improve overall water quality in the bay. The Mayor and Secretary Salazar signed an agreement committing to a joint planning process that will devise a new, unified governing model and new, common objectives for the 10,000 acres of publicly owned land in south Brooklyn and Queens. The Rockefeller Foundation and National Grid have generously agreed to support the design of a conceptual master plan for the Jamaica Bay parks. As part of this effort, at the request of New York City and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will designate the majority of Jamaica Bay a "No Discharge Zone," which bans boats from discharging sewage into the bay, improving water quality.

The agreement establishes a formal partnership between the National Park Service and the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation for the agencies to collaborate in four areas: effective management of parkland, science and restoration of Jamaica Bay, access and transportation to parklands around Jamaica Bay, and

engagement of New York City youth with hands-on science programs and fun public service projects to promote recreation, stewardship, and “green” careers.

- *Effective Management Through Collaboration.* The National Park Service and New York City Parks manage contiguous lands with overlapping missions. Through effective land use and program planning that ignore boundaries, they can create a seamless and interconnected network of natural, historical, and recreation spaces that all New Yorkers can visit, with or without a car.

- *Science and Restoration.* Through better coordination of research, data gathering, restoration efforts, and pilot projects, government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and academic institutions can work closer together to restore and conserve the health of Jamaica Bay.

- *Access and Transportation.* The city and the National Park Service will work to improve public access to Jamaica Bay and within Jamaica Bay through existing and new transportation choices, and through better public information about those options.

- *Youth and Education.* The city and the National Park Service can jointly develop a series of programs in which urban youth can learn the values of stewardship through service activities.

The agreement may also be expanded in the future to include federal and city parkland on Staten Island.

Jamaica Bay No Discharge Zone

The new Jamaica Bay No Discharge Zone agreement between the city, the EPA, and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation bans all boats from discharging sewage into a designated 20,000-acre area of Jamaica Bay. The area has adequate facilities for boats to pump out their sewage and boaters must now dispose of their sewage at these specially designated pump-out stations. Discharges of sewage from boats can contain harmful



levels of pathogens and chemicals, such as formaldehyde, phenols, and chlorine, which have a negative impact on water quality, pose a health risk, and impair marine life.

The Jamaica Bay No Discharge Zone encompasses 17,177 acres of open water and 2,695 acres of upland islands and salt marshes in Brooklyn and Queens.

The northeastern and southeastern parts of Jamaica Bay reach Nassau County, while the northern shore of the Rockaway Peninsula in Queens forms the southern boundary of the bay. The bay is connected to the Atlantic Ocean through the Rockaway Inlet, and eight tributaries empty into Jamaica Bay: Sheepshead Bay, Paerdegat Basin, Fresh Creek, Hendrix Creek, Spring Creek, Shellbank Basin, Bergen Basin, and Thurston Basin. The final affirmative determination from EPA of adequate pump-out facilities means that New York State may proceed to ban the discharge of boat sewage into Jamaica Bay and its tributaries.

BIRD WALKS

Steve Schellenger

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Any questions? Call Steve at 987-8103. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaudubon.org.

- Nov. 27 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Dec. 4 Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
- Dec. 11 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- Dec. 18 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Season's Greetings & Happy New Year!
- Jan. 8 Mill Pond Park (see above)
- Jan. 15 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)
- Jan. 22 Hempstead Lake State Park (see above)
- Jan. 29 Pelham Bay Park*
- Feb. 5 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
- Feb. 12 Mill Pond Park (see above)
- Feb. 19 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)

*For Pelham Bay Park (where we hope to see owls): Wear hiking shoes—it's a hilly forest walk to the bay. Take Throgs Neck Bridge to I-695 north to I-95 north. Take I-95 to exit #9, Hutchinson River Parkway north. Take first exit #5, Orchard Beach Rd., go past traffic circle, and continue on Orchard Beach Rd. to end. Turn left on Park Dr. to enter park. Go past another traffic circle and enter parking lot thru toll gates (free); meet at far left corner of parking lot (northeast corner). See <http://mappery.com/map-of/Pelham-Bay-Park-NYC-Map> for reference.

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