

CONSERVATION AWARD FOR MIKE FARINA

Jim Brown

Editor's note: Jim suggested that I include the remarks that he made at our annual dinner about our winner and the place that he manages; here they are.

Our Conservation Award is named in honor of Elliott Kutner, one of the founders of our chapter in the early 1970s, who passed away in March of 2012. Elliott was a chapter president and longtime leader of our bird walks. He brought countless people to the joy of birding and to work for environmental conservation. Elliott charismatically inspired people to engage in birding and conservation; he was a great birder and wonderful teacher.

Tonight we are proud to honor another stellar Long Island conservationist — Mike Farina — Conservation Biologist at the Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area. Like Elliott, Mike is a great birder and wonderful teacher!

Mike is in charge of an important parcel of land in the Town of Hempstead. The Marine Nature Study Area is approximately 52 acres in size, principally salt marsh; the preserve lies within the larger IBA (Important Bird Area) known as West Hempstead Bay/Jones Beach West. Bird species at risk within this area include Brant (pictured), Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers, Common and Least Terns, and Black Skimmers. All of these species frequent the Study Area. Mike is indeed the steward of an important piece of habitat on the South Shore of Long Island. The area is not only important habitat in itself, but important also because it is a *Study Area*, a living laboratory that enables the public to learn about the ecological importance and natural beauty of our salt marshes in particular, and the importance and beauty of nature in general.

Mike works diligently to not only preserve important species of birds and wildlife, and to conserve important habitat, but he is also a tireless educator, helping to enlighten us all and to create the environmentalists we will need in the future.

Mike has worked on a number of important surveys — of Clapper Rails, Seaside Sparrows, and winter Brant. He regularly surveys avian species in the Nature Study Area. He has provided ongoing access to the behavior of Peregrine Falcons and Ospreys in and near the preserve with the building of bird cams, which you can view online. And it is not only birds about which Mike is knowledgeable. A friend of his has said that “Mike is all about hands-on, about immersing oneself in the ecosystem. He seines and walks with us. One time, he had us bounce up and down in a corner of the marsh just to feel the pulse of the living earth. Whatever aquatic or terrestrial creature comes our way, Mike knows its name and its story.”

Mike is an environmental educator who works with all levels of students, from primary grades through



college students and beyond. The Sea Janitors — future environmental leaders I am sure — are a case in point [referring to members of an Oceanside club for sixth graders, a few of whom were present — ed.]. A teacher from the Oceanside School District has said that “Mike is a constant” and “he’ll always answer knocks on the door.” A retired teacher from the Woodmere School District has said that Mike’s “leadership enables our youth of tomorrow to not only love the salt marsh, but to become active stewards to protect it.” An adjunct professor at Adelphi has the following to say about Mike: “Mike Farina has taken the Study Area to a new level. His presentations to groups and the general public, as well as his photography and artistry, are an immeasurable asset to the Town of Hempstead.”

Mike’s contributions to conservation and education are indeed deep and weighty. But Mike is also, I am told, a bit of a prankster. Our program chair, one of our best birders, was taken in by a plastic pink flamingo planted by Mike to fool unwary birders. I am told he has done these fake plantings more than once!

The fact that Mike Farina finds fun and an abiding interest in the salt marsh has benefitted all Long Islanders who love nature. The beauty of the Marine Nature Study Area has certainly been a joy to the South Shore Audubon Society for many years! It is an honor and a privilege to present this year’s Elliott Kutner Conservation Award to Mike Farina!



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ASATEAGUE NATIONAL SEASHORE/CHINCOTEAGUE WILDLIFE REFUGE (September 18–21). Your cost (\$395) includes 3 nights lodging (double occupancy) at the Refuge Inn, breakfasts, guided hikes, evening programs, an “All-you-can-eat” seafood dinner, and a “Safari Bus Tour” of the backwash flats. \$495 if you want to go by van from Manhattan. \$150 extra for a single room. See eagles, wild ponies, raptors, shorebirds. Send check for full amount ASAP to NYC Audubon, 71 West 23rd Street (#1523), New York, NY 10010. Call (718) 474-0896 for more info. Leader: Don Riepe.

INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP (Saturday, September 20). For info contact Natalie Grant (alsbeach@nyc.rr.com) or call (718) 474-0896.

JAMAICA BAY SUNSET ECOLOGY CRUISE (Saturday, September 27, 3:00–6:00 P.M.). Boat the “Golden Sunshine” leaves from Pier 4, Sheepshead Bay. Learn about the history, ecology, management, and wildlife of this 13,000-acre urban preserve and see many species of birds, including osprey, oystercatcher, egrets, herons, terns, and other migrating species. Cost (\$55/person) includes 3-hour narrated tour, wine & cheese, fruit, drink, snacks. Leaders: Mickey Cohen, Don Riepe.

For information and free field trip brochure, call/write Don Riepe, (718) 474-0896, donriep@gmail.com, 28 West 9th Road, Broad Channel, NY 11693; www.littoralsociety.org.

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**NEW GATEWAY NRA
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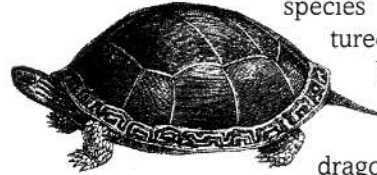
Editor's note: A Record of Decision (ROD) was signed by the National Park Service's Northeast Regional Director, Michael Caldwell, on June 11, following the recommendation of Gateway National Recreation Area Superintendent Jennifer T. Nersesian that a modified version of Alternative B ("Discovering Gateway") be adopted. Alternative C ("Experiencing Preserved Places") had been identified as the "environmentally preferable alternative based on the analysis of impacts." The public process for developing this new General Management Plan, including its Environmental Impact Statement, began in 2009. PDF files of various documents, including the 36-page ROD that is excerpted below, can be downloaded from <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=16091>. Of particular concern to SSAS is Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, whose manmade West Pond was often circled by us on Sunday morning bird walks before it was breached by Hurricane Sandy and is on our schedule for September 21; we are part of a coalition seeking to have the freshwater pond restored.

Jamaica Bay Unit. Under the selected alternative, Jamaica Bay will be a premier outdoor recreation destination. The parklands at Jamaica Bay will provide an unmatched variety of recreational, interpretive, and educational opportunities for New York residents and park visitors. New activities, programs, and enhanced facilities will attract users of all neighborhoods, backgrounds, and ages, drawing a diverse audience of local residents, national, and international visitors to enjoy all of the park's offerings. Areas within the Jamaica Bay Unit, including Floyd Bennett Field and the Rockaway Peninsula parks (Jacob Riis Park, Fort Tilden, and Breezy Point Tip), will emerge as destinations for daily use and multiple-day experiences.

The National Park Service (NPS) will continue cultivating and leveraging partnerships to accomplish natural resource objectives. Improving water quality within Jamaica Bay will be prioritized, along with restoring marine resources and degraded stretches of coastal habitats. Natural resource protection and restoration efforts in the Jamaica Bay Unit will focus on softening hardened coastal edges, restoring wetland and coastal habitats, and

creating additional freshwater wetlands. Increased use will be balanced with additional monitoring and management of wildlife and habitats. NPS will work closely with New York City and other landowners to build the resiliency of coastal habitat and to improve conditions along the entire Rockaway coastline. Conservation measures for threatened and endangered species, such as providing symbolic fencing with posts and signs around nesting birds, establishing buffer zones, and prohibiting certain recreational activities during breeding season, will continue, as needed.

Gateway has more than 300 bird species, 100 fish species, 30 mammal species, 25 reptile and amphibian species (painted turtle is pictured), and over 500 invertebrates, including aquatic macro invertebrates, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, beetles, and other insects.



The grasslands at Floyd Bennett Field and Fort Tilden are particularly beneficial for wildlife, including ground-nesting birds and migrating raptors.

The selected alternative proposes increases in visitor-related facilities for activities such as camping and outdoor education, and will include the reuse of existing buildings. These changes would both directly impact wildlife species by removing habitat and indirectly affect them by increasing noise and human activity, and would have the potential for adverse localized impacts on wildlife. While there may be adverse impacts, these impacts would not result in impairment because the duration of these impacts would be short and the majority of wildlife in the park would be protected through restricted access and by directing visitor use to areas that do not threaten the most sensitive habitat. Measures such as buffers and closures during nesting would substantially mitigate these impacts.

Closures and restrictions on access where sensitive species nest and maintenance of large habitats would provide substantial benefits for many species of wildlife, particularly those that nest on saltmarsh and wooded islands in Jamaica Bay (closed to the public), listed shorebirds, and associated beach wildlife and grassland-nesting birds. Because freshwater wetlands were once an integral part of the ecosystem in the region but are now quite rare, holistic planning to create freshwater wetlands at several park sites, including West Pond, as well as the creation of built freshwater wetlands at Floyd Bennett Field as part of the wetlands center in the selected alternative could result in significant localized benefits for freshwater-dependent wildlife species. Additional localized benefits from continuing to manage existing natural areas at Great Kills Park, northern Sandy Hook, and Breezy Point Tip and from the possible restoration of natural sand-transport processes at Rockaway Peninsula and Staten Island park sites are also anticipated in the selected alternative.

