



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

ASPRINGTIME HIKE AT BREEZY POINT (Sun., Mar. 6, 10 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.). Meet at Fort Tilden, Bldg. 1, and carpool in a caravan led by Mickey Maxwell Cohen to the little-known western tip of Rockaway Peninsula. Highlights will include seashells and other stranded critters, dune foliage, shorebirds, and a surprising variety of rocks and minerals. For info & reservations, e-mail Mickey at bmcohen2@gmail.com.

EARLY SPRING BIRD WALK (Sat., Mar. 26, 10 A.M. to 1 P.M.). Meet at the Jamaica Bay Refuge for a slide program and walk to look for Eastern Phoebes, American Oystercatchers, Osprey and other early migrants. Leader: Don Riepe. Contact Don for info & reservations. With NYC Audubon. Free.

DEAD HORSE BAY, NY's BEST KEPT NATURAL SECRET (Sun., Apr. 3, 10 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.). Hike the trails and shoreline at Dead Horse Bay, Floyd Bennett Field, with Mickey Maxwell Cohen, author of "Discovering the Trails of Dead Horse Bay." Sturdy footwear is essential. For info, call the refuge at (718) 318-4340 or e-mail bmcohen2@gmail.com.

SPRING BIRD MIGRATION (Sat., Apr. 16, 10 A.M. to 1 P.M.). Meet at the Jamaica Bay Refuge for a slide program and hike around the gardens and ponds. Leader: Don Riepe. Contact Don for reservations. Free.

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.

**PROTECTING WILDLIFE AND PUBLIC HEALTH
FROM FERAL AND FREE-ROAMING CATS**

Editor's note: The following is posted on Audubon NY's Web site; it is one of the Conservation Policy Resolutions that have for many years been written, updated, and approved by Audubon NY's staff and our state's chapters. You can find them at <http://ny.audubon.org/conservation/advocacy/policy-resolutions>. The December issue of the *Skimmer* included our request that SSAS members support the American Bird Conservancy's petition to have Jones Beach's feral cat colonies be removed; it's at <http://abcbirds.org/get-involved/take-action/>.

The Issue: Feral and free-roaming domestic cats have been estimated to kill at least a billion birds every year in the United States, including rare and endangered species such as the Piping Plover. Such cats have also been estimated to kill more than a billion native small mammals annually, outcompeting native predators such as the Great Horned Owl and Red-tailed Hawk for important prey species.

Although they were domesticated over 8,000 years ago and introduced to North America through European exploration and colonization, feral and free-roaming domestic cats are considered to be an exotic, or nonnative, species in all environments they inhabit. Since they overwhelm native species in areas where they are

introduced, domestic cats can be classified as an invasive species. There are many unlawful established colonies of feral and free-roaming domestic cats on public lands and sensitive wildlife areas across the state.



As these populations increase, so do the threats to birds, other wildlife, and human health. In fact, domestic cats have been identified by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as one of the world's worst invasive species and a leading driver of bird species extinctions, and the 2014 State of the Birds report identified free-roaming and feral cats as the leading cause of bird declines next to habitat loss.

Many steps can be taken to mitigate the risks that feral and free-roaming cats pose to birds and other wildlife; in particular, responsible cat owners should keep their cats indoors and avoid feeding feral or free-roaming domestic cats in natural areas. In addition, nonlethal population control programs, such as the practice of "Trap, Neuter, Return" (TNR), have not been proven effective to manage growing feral cat colonies, and encourage the abandonment of cats, further exacerbating the problems. While some progress has been made in addressing the problem of feral and free-roaming cats, stronger controls and protections are needed to ensure that birds, other wildlife, and their habitat are protected from the spread of this invasive species.

Legislative/Administrative Actions: Audubon New York strongly urges the Governor, the State Legislature, and local communities to:

Oppose the feeding, maintenance, and the practice of TNR of feral cat colonies in or near places where native wildlife may be impacted, including state and local parks, wildlife refuges, and other natural areas.

Encourage the education of cat owners and non-cat owners on responsible pet care, including the value of keeping cats indoors and not feeding feral or free-roaming domestic cats.

Support reasonable measures, including legislative and regulatory initiatives needed to require parks staff, other public land managers, and municipalities to remove feral cat feeding stations and shelters on park property in or near Important Bird Areas or other sensitive wildlife habitats, and measures that will restrict and regulate the maintenance and movement of feral and free-roaming domestic cats outdoors.

Urge the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to enforce Agriculture and Markets Law section 374, subdivision 5 through local animal control officers.

Support legislation to authorize municipalities across the state to adopt a law allowing for cat registration and require a portion of the revenue generated from such registration programs to be dedicated toward pet owner education programs to keep cats indoors, and programs to remove feral and free-roaming cat populations from state and local parks, wildlife refuges, and other natural areas.

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff

This month's book is a very useful one for the novice or beginning birder looking for the "fun" in birding. We both recommend it highly; the more-experienced birder will find it valuable, too. The book, *Birding for the Curious: The Easiest Way for Anyone to Explore the Incredible World of Birds* by Nate Swick, is a small, nicely illustrated book that gets the beginner quickly up to speed.

The author begins with the basics: a chapter that deals with optics in a clear, concise language; no jargon here! It lets you know what you want to look for when you purchase your first pair of binoculars. Another chapter that we both found useful is devoted to how to choose the right field guide. It even gives a brief description of the better, more popular birding guides on the market today. Because this book was published last year, it is very up to date in the aforementioned respect. The author really begins with the basics!



The next chapter that we found particularly useful was the one on eBird, a brief but informative chapter on how to use your computer and the Internet to further enhance your birding experience. eBird is a must if you want to add your birding experiences to the world of citizen science. Ornithologists really appreciate our contributions to their own scientific community. It may not be a requirement, but it sure makes for a lot of fun and is a sure way to contribute.

In the chapter on the importance of field craft, you will learn about the many different ways to study particular types of birds. From waterfowl to shorebirds, from songbirds to raptors, these birds of the water, trees, and sky all have their own unique habitats and behaviors. It is a real-important chapter if you will be doing more than backyard birding. Mr. Swick makes all of this simple and easy to comprehend. For example, in the previous chapter on field guides that I mentioned earlier, he discusses the ongoing controversy over which are better — illustrations or photographs. This difference in field guides is a subject of much heated discussion in the world of birding.

In many ways, birding is a social hobby. Finding a bird club or other birders to go on bird walks as a group is the ultimate way to have fun! Birding can be done in many ways, in backyards, local parks and preserves, and even going far afield to increase your knowledge of birds and perhaps even adding a few birds to your "life list."

In addition to all this, there is a short discussion on the art of bird feeding as well as on native plantings or bird-scaping that will bring more birds to your yard. There are even some recipes for making your own suet treats for the local birds. Even the subject of birdhouses is mentioned. This book has a lot of information covered in short, no-nonsense paragraphs. Need we say again — no jargon spoken here! This book even goes a long way in allowing

a beginner to interact with the more informed in the birding community without feeling inadequate or left out.

Finally, this most-recent book is an excellent text for the novice birder or "backyard beginner." If you want to peek into this world of birding but are not necessarily ready to commit wholeheartedly, this is the place to begin the journey. We highly recommend this book. Read it... and ENJOY!!!

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WEDNESDAY, JUNE 15

Please mark your calendars for SSAS's 45th Annual Dinner! Because the second Tuesday was already unavailable when we booked the dinner many months ago, we'll be getting together a day later than usual. Cocktail hour at Pompei Ristorante in West Hempstead will begin at 6:30, followed by our usual mix of raffle drawings, award presentations, and food and wine. Details will be in the next two issues of the *Skimmer*.



**THOUGHTS, NEWS, AND OPINION FROM YOUR
CONSERVATION CHAIR**

Stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Deal!

Jim Brown

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a trade agreement among twelve Pacific Rim countries, including the United States. The agreement unfortunately involves more than simple trade among nations. The voluminous agreement was created mostly in secrecy over a number of years and was signed on February 4 in New Zealand. For the agreement to become binding on the United States, it will have to be approved by Congress. President Obama is hoping that the deal is ratified by July. Because Congress had earlier granted the President and his negotiators "fast track authority" to hammer out the deal without open, democratic discussion in our national legislature, Congress can now only vote the TPP up or down — no amendments or changes are to be considered.

The TPP will undoubtedly have negative impacts on many people and on our environment in many predictable ways. Often termed "NAFTA on steroids," this latest trade deal, directly involving nations comprising almost 40% of the world economy as measured by gross domes-

BEYOND TWEETING: APPS TO MAKE YOU A BETTER BIRDER

Zach Slavin

Editor's note: I attended the Audubon Convention in Leesburg, Virginia last July (the next one is in Park City, Utah, in July 2017). One of the highlights for me was a 70-minute “concurrent session” given by National Audubon’s Citizen Science Program Manager, Zach Slavin, during which he promised to send the audience a summary. I’ve been waiting to have space in the *Skimmer*, I’ve added a few updates in brackets.

Technology has been a part of birding for as long as people have been observing birds. Take John James Audubon, for instance: one of our country’s most famous early birders, his technology of choice happened to be a shotgun full of birdshot and a burlap bag. Not the most complex, and certainly not digital, but it was technology nonetheless.

Over the centuries, technological advances have changed the hobby of bird-watching several times over. Opera glasses and notepads replaced shotguns on the first Christmas Bird Counts in the early 1900s. By the middle of the 20th century, birders were equipped with the first field guides and better, lighter, more affordable binoculars. And today birders are heading out with 50 megapixel image-stabilized super-telephoto zoom cameras and precision-honed, multicoated, ultra-lightweight binoculars... and paper field guides, the technology of which hasn’t changed significantly since their inception nearly a century ago.

So take a look at some of the apps described below (as well as other birding apps not listed here) and the next time you go birding, heading out without your smartphone will feel as antiquated as heading out with a shotgun full of birdshot.

Field Guides

These apps are the most direct competitors with the classic paper field guides. Some, like iBird, are designed exclusively for the mobile app format, and others are digital versions of paper field guides you may already be familiar with (Sibley, Audubon, National Geographic, Peterson, etc.), but even the most bare-bone of field guide apps have some features that leverage the technology and go beyond the contents of the paper versions.

Sibley eGuide to the Birds of North America. For iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, Windows, and Blackberry; \$19.99. Covers 810 species and features all of the drawings, range maps, and explanatory text found in *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. Taking advantage of the digital format, it includes more than 2,000 recordings of songs and calls, a compare-species function, and a smart-search tool that allows you to filter species by color, shape, and your current location.

Audubon Birds Pro. For iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, HP, and Nook; \$3.99–\$9.99 [became free in October,

which Zach told us was going to happen soon]. Covers 821 species using photos instead of drawings, includes range maps that also cover Central and South America, has a good selection of audio recordings, including alternate calls and regional variations, and slightly more-descriptive text, including habitat, range, and nesting information. Similar-species and browse-by-family or shape tools are useful for identifying unknown birds, and includes a find-birds-with-eBird function to find nearby reports of specific species.

iBird. For iOS, Android, Kindle Fire, and Windows; \$2.99–\$39.99 (free Lite version). Covers 940 species (in the Pro version) with both photos and drawings of each species. Great audio recordings, including variations and convenient links to similar-sounding species. Contains copious amounts of information on each species, including notes on identification, ecology, behavior, and nests and eggs, as well as links to Wikipedia and Flickr and a very powerful filter/search tool. Five different versions from Lite to Ultimate available with different features and species.

Active Identification

Much like the field guides above, the goal of these apps is to help you identify an unknown bird. However, these apps take a more active role in the process, analyzing your observations, photos, and audio recordings to help you arrive at an ID. Most of these are less than a couple of years old and while they are fun and useful now, they show great promise for the application of this technology to birding in the future.

Merlin Bird ID. For iOS and Android; free. Amazing app for beginning and intermediate birders that asks you five questions to help identify over 400 common North American birds: Where were you? When did you see it? About how big was it (relative to other birds)? What were the main colors? And what was it doing? Provides photos and descriptions of matching bird species based on this information and is surprisingly accurate.

Birdsnap. For iOS and online; free. This app uses computer vision to identify the species of birds in the photos you upload. Simply take or upload an existing photo, zoom in to frame the bird, tap on the eye and tail, and then let Birdsnap go to work. Works really well with good, close-up photos; not so great for digiscoping with your smartphone.

BirdSong ID: USA Automatic. For iOS and Android; \$4.99. This is the app that people always ask about when it comes to birding apps; it allows you to make a 30-second recording of a bird singing, then attempts to identify the species based on the audio recording. Not incredibly accurate and getting a good recording with smartphone microphones can be difficult, but a very promising idea.

Citizen Science

Many people enjoy participating in citizen science programs like the Christmas and Great Backyard Bird Counts

