

SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 47, NUMBER 1 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2016

NEXT MEETING

Paul Stessel

DATE: Tuesday, September 13, 2016
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)
SPEAKER: Joe Giunta
TOPIC: Sparrows and Allies in the NYC Area

At our first monthly meeting after our summer break, our announcements and coffee break will be followed by a slide-enhanced presentation about many of the birds that are referred to as “LBJs” (little brown jobs). We all should leave with a better understanding and knowledge of sparrows and related birds that tend to be dismissed as too hard to identify.

A frequent guest speaker for SSAS, Joe Giunta has led bird walks for the Nature Conservancy, NYC Audubon, Brooklyn Bird Club, Road Scholars, and the South Fork Natural History Society. He has taught birding classes at Brooklyn Botanic Garden since 2001. He is the owner of Happy Warblers, a travel and education company, and has birded extensively in the U.S., Panama, Belize, and Costa Rica.

Pre-Meeting Book Discussion. Arrive a half-hour early to participate in a discussion led by R. U. Abyrdar II (aka Paul Stessel) of the book that he and Sy Schiff reviewed in the previous *Skimmer*. This meeting’s book is *The Armchair Birder: Discovering the Secret Lives of Familiar Birds* by John Yow.

Parking Lots. In addition to the parking lot adjacent to the library, there’s a lightly used, well-lit, and fairly close municipal lot on the east side of S. Ocean Ave., on the near (south) side of the gas station that borders Sunrise Highway.

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•  IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE WASTE, PLEASE
• BRING COFFEE MUGS TO OUR MEETINGS. •
• **SHADE-GROWN COFFEE PROTECTS RAINFORESTS!** •
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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

The Pleasures (and Challenges!) of Fall Birding

Betty Borowsky

Welcome to the 2016 fall birding season. Of course every season is good for birding, but the fall offers special opportunities in our area. At this time of the year, many species that have spent the summer north of us pass through on their way to their winter feeding grounds. With any luck we can observe them during their stay here.

While there is considerable overlap, and while anything can happen, in general the shorebirds (such as the sandpipers) tend to come earliest. Next come the songbirds (e.g., the warblers), and last the raptors (hawks, falcons). Migration of some birds can begin in July and end for others in December, but most migrants are in our area between August 15 and November 15.

Identifying birds in the fall is fun but can be very challenging. Some individuals are still juveniles with different plumage than the adults, and many adults have molted into their non-breeding plumage, which is far less distinctive than the breeding plumage we see in the spring. And some individuals are in-between, in transition from breeding to non-breeding plumage patterns! Songbirds are especially challenging, because the trees are still leafed and because most males are not singing. (Many species do have other calls, but these tend to be much less distinctive than their breeding songs.) So, identifying birds in the fall requires spotting and recognizing often-small differences among individuals. In fact, some guidebooks have several pages devoted to “confusing fall warblers.” And sometimes one just has to say “I don’t know what that bird is!”

But the main treat of the fall is the raptor migration. Here on the south shore, our geographic location affords us very special opportunities to view these birds, because the raptors’ migration route passes right over us. Raptors on the Atlantic Flyway tend to follow the coastline as they head south, and we’re right there.

The South Shore Audubon Society conducts bird walks almost every Sunday from mid August through mid June. These are free, open to all, and require no advance sign-

ups; you just show up at the site. Good opportunities to see and learn more about the raptors (including Peregrine Falcon, pictured) will come when we visit Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge on October 16, Jones Beach on October 23, and Point Lookout/Lido Preserve on October 30. Also, you might enjoy a visit to the Theodore Roosevelt Nature Center, at Jones Beach, which has a boardwalk into the dunes that affords an unobstructed field of view, and a handy set of life-sized silhouettes that can help you identify the birds as they fly overhead.



We also invite you to join us at our monthly general meetings. You will learn about important environmental conservation issues affecting our area, and enjoy our programs about birds and nature. Refreshments are served and there is plenty of time to socialize. All this is free as well.

So come on our bird walks and come to our meetings and enjoy birding with us!



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BIRD WALKS
Joe Landesberg

All walks start at **9 A.M.**; no walk if it rains. Call me at 467-9498 in case of questionable conditions or for other info. Directions and lists of what we've seen are at ssaadubon.org.

- Aug. 21* Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve
- Aug. 28 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- Sep. 4 Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)
- Sep. 11 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Sep. 18 Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
- Sep. 24 (Sat.) Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside
- Oct. 2 Hempstead Lake State Park (see above)
- Oct. 9 *Columbus Day Weekend — No Walk*

*After the May–August *Skimmer* was printed, the Town of Hempstead, as a result of Town Supervisor Anthony J. Santino's "\$5 million cost-saving initiative" that "directed all Hempstead Town department heads to institute 20 percent across-the-board cuts in discretionary spending" (quoting from the June 2016 *Hempstead Town Government Works for You* newsletter that was mailed to every "postal customer"), the Marine Nature Study Area's staff was cut and its seasonal Sunday hours were eliminated. Consequently, we've had to change locations for August 21, have scheduled a Saturday walk at MNSA for September 24, and (as we reported on our Facebook page in May) are trying to get the Conservation and Waterways staff restored at MNSA and elsewhere.



WEBMASTER WANTED

Back in 1999, when noisy dial-up modems plugged into a phone jack were how nearly everyone went online, SSAS was ahead of most chapters in having any Web site at all. Four years later, our current electronic communications chairperson, Anne-Marie Conn, was recruited by her parents and has kept our site going ever since. She's willing to continue but is ready to step aside in favor of someone who has more time to post what SSAS's board submits and, perhaps, the skills needed to give the site a more modern look. If you're interested, please contact Mike Sperling (Web and newsletter editor) at mssperling@optonline.net.



STUFF NEEDED FOR OUR FLEA MARKET

SSAS is planning to have a flea market / garage sale this fall. We will need things to sell, of course, and what you donate can be claimed as a tax deduction. So, please keep us in mind if you have items that you no longer need. If you're unable to bring your donation to the sale, we'll make arrangements to get it from you beforehand. Look for details in next month's *Skimmer*.

RULE #5: GET YOURSELF A NEMESIS BIRD

Editor's note: Back in February, the National Audubon Society's Web site started accumulating entries written by Nicholas Lund, introducing the column as follows: "Interested in birds but not sure where to start? Birding doesn't have to be intimidating for beginners — look no further than *The Birdist's Rules for Birding*, a weekly feature at www.audubon.org/section/birdists-rules-birding that will serve as a guide for all those looking to get deeper into the hobby." Topics covered so far include "Think Up Some Excuses to Go Chase Birds," "Know What Birds Are Doing Each Month," "How to Dress for Birding," "Learn to Bird From a Car," "Figure Out What Kind of Chickadees You've Got," "Go Someplace Weird," "It's Okay to Hate Starlings," "How to Misidentify a Bird With Grace and Dignity," and "What's the Best Bird-Named Sports Team?" (which has graphics of team logos and the corresponding birds). Here's part of rule #5:

For me, a "nemesis bird" is pretty much any species I've attempted to find many times but have always come up short. It's the kind of bird that makes me use up a vacation day to drive all the way out to where it's supposed to be or where it's been seen most recently, but then doesn't show its dumb face to me. If that happens once, it's annoying. If it happens twice, it's a personal affront and I have a new nemesis.

Not that I pioneered this term or anything. Different birders have different qualifications for when a bird becomes their nemesis. It might have to do with miles traveled; it might have to do with how common the species is (for common ones, it's easier to make things personal). It gets even more frustrating when everyone else is constantly mentioning how they "just saw a whole flock of [insert evil bird]! It was right over there!"

The point is, if a birder acquires a nemesis bird, they should feel lucky to have one. Despite how annoying it is to miss species that everyone else is seeing, nemesis birds drive you to become a better birder.

When you become obsessed with finding a certain species, you start to think harder about why you might be dipping (a birding term for failure). To find my sought-after Northern Goshawk, for example (pictured), I needed to make sure I was able to identify it from the similar-looking Cooper's Hawk, so I studied the minute differences between the two species in flight. When I was searching for Cape May Warblers, I needed to know their calls — which meant I had to learn all the warbler calls.



Plus, it's fun. Birding without a target is just a gussied-up walk in the woods; you need to have some sort of treasure.

Maybe you won't find it. Maybe you'll look in the exact same place as everyone else, but it just won't be there. Okay, try again. It's annoying, right? Good. Keep at it. Listen to the calls again. Study all the different plumages

and make sure you're looking in the right habitat at the perfect time. Also, learn a cool little end-zone dance [this is linked to a YouTube football video — ed.]. You'll need to celebrate when you finally beat your nemesis.



HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

The recipients of our annual graduation ceremony scholarships, arranged by Joe Landesberg, were Ryan Chelius from South Side H.S. in Rockville Centre, Takota Hager from Oceanside H.S., Lauren Johnson from Baldwin H.S., and Carly McBride from Freeport H.S. We congratulate all four and wish them success.



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COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Betsy Gulotta

Our winners of Jerry Bishop Environmental Scholarships this year both attended SSAS's annual dinner in June to accept their awards. We wish them well in their careers and thank Evelyn Bishop for her support.

Kaitlin R. Shahinian, from Farmingdale, graduated from Adelphi University in 2016 with a B.S. in Anthropology and Biology, and is continuing her graduate work there in Environmental Studies. She is interested in sustainability and is working to establish a community garden and composting program at Adelphi to help eliminate food waste.

Catherine Stolfi, from Medford, completed her undergraduate work at Stony Brook University and is also in the Environmental Studies graduate program at Adelphi. Between college and graduate school she has spent five years gaining professional experience, including an internship at the Town of Hempstead's Department of Conservation and Waterways. She would like to work in the public sector to address environmental problems.



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The continental shelf of the United States, including the waters of the New York Bight, offer ideal conditions for wind energy production. But wind energy is not a “silver bullet.” The Atlantic seaboard is a major migratory flyway for about 500 bird species. Most of the birds are flying over or very close to water. Without mindful siting based on scientific studies, offshore wind energy farms can be deadly for migratory birds in the Atlantic Flyway.

We hope that the proposed plan will guide the process of offshore wind farm development in a way that protects wildlife from direct and immediate impacts of the machinery as it helps create significant long-term solutions to combat climate change.

South Shore Audubon Society and New York City Audubon expect rigorous and extensive studies that will be completed over the next several years, ensuring that the planned wind farm will be well-sited – far from sensitive areas for birds, including key migratory routes; stop-over sites; breeding and nesting sites; areas where large numbers of birds congregate for feeding; or in sensitive habitats, such as wetlands.

The wind farm development process needs to include a way of assessing effects, including cumulative impacts, during all stages of the project.

All state and federal wildlife protection laws must be enforced [Endangered Species Act (ESA), Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), Bald and Golden Eagle [the latter is pictured] Protection Act (BGEPA), and National Environmental Policy Act].



Specific Comments on the EA

① Regarding the construction of a meteorological tower, we believe it is desirable to have one installed, as it is likely to provide the maximum amount of data during the course of the site assessment studies. A tower, as opposed to a buoy, would be necessary for mounting certain necessary radar equipment. This equipment would provide important information that would be useful to the study of birds in the area of the OWED.

② Tower lighting must comply with Manville’s 2013 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Revised Voluntary Guidelines for Communication Tower Design, Siting, Construction, Operation, Retrofitting, and Decommissioning.

③ Regarding Table 3-5 (p. 47), Biological Survey Types and Methods, we recommend that all avian surveys be undertaken for at least 3 years. Bird movement and migration can be greatly influenced by local weather conditions. A 3-year sample period will be a more-powerful indicator of habitat use.

④ Regarding Section 4-21 (p. 91) and discussion of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), we urge that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service be consulted and given a prominent role in researching and providing data regarding

the impacts of the site assessment activities — and later possible OWED construction — on migrating birds. Bird numbers and behavior during both spring and autumn migrations should be monitored and studied throughout this entire process. Baseline data at this point is particularly important, as migrant bird species do pass through areas in the proposed OWED.

⑤ Survey data for nearshore and offshore movement of Roseate Terns to foraging areas are sorely lacking for the planning area. If the current EA is relying on composite maps, these are definitely inadequate for Roseate Terns. There are two main problems with this: (1) Most Roseates at sea have been recorded as “UNTE” (unidentified tern species), with a comment that says “flock with 20% Roseates.” Most models used to create the species maps ignore the comment column. (2) There are few survey data from inshore near Great Gull Island, Jones Inlet, Rockaway Beach, and other tern colonies on the south shore of Long Island. Foraging sites and post-breeding aggregations (15 July – 15 September) need to be mapped for this species.

⑥ Attention to nocturnal migration of passerines is not addressed. The technology exists to use radar to survey nocturnal migration in the area. There is some baseline information about density, direction, and speed of migration over the northeastern U.S. as a starting point (see references), but mapping movement across the NY Bight still needs to be done. The general data show us that the majority of birds are moving over land, but there are significantly distinct periods where overwater flights occur. It is not known what causes this, whether it is strong wind conditions pushing large numbers of migrating land birds offshore or if birds are flying over the water to go from Massachusetts or New York to the Delmarva Peninsula.

The four articles [that pre-*Skimmer* were] referenced below illustrate how these data can be collected. The Farnsworth et al. (2016) and La Sorte et al. (2015) use NEUS radar data set to characterize nocturnal migration across the region and highlight the changes in phenology across the season and the night, and study altitudinal changes and their relationship to wind and seasonality (species composition). These studies highlight the potential power of radar to identify patterns of nocturnal bird (and bat and insect potentially) migration.

Van Doren et al. (2016) and Horton et al. (2016) use the newest types of dual pole radar to study bird behavior in crosswinds in the region, and specifically include references to offshore flights and birds flying over the Atlantic or getting drifted off the coast. These studies highlight similar power of radar, but toward a quite different end of actually understanding how birds are moving in winds.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely, Jim Brown, Conservation Chair, South Shore Audubon Society; and Susan Elbin, Ph.D., Director of Conservation and Science, New York City Audubon

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A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

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