

SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 51, NUMBER 6 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

MARCH-APRIL 2021

NEXT MEETING

DATE: Tuesday, March 9, 2021
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: ONLINE
SPEAKER: Mike Andersen
TOPIC: Towards a Stable Taxonomy of the Birds of the World



NEXT MEETING AFTER NEXT MEETING

DATE: Tuesday, April 13, 2021
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: ONLINE
SPEAKER: Don Riepe
TOPIC: Jamaica Bay: History, Management, and Wildlife

Advances in DNA sequencing have improved our understanding of the evolutionary relationships of birds. In this talk, Mike Andersen will discuss what is happening in this exciting area of research called systematics. He will explain why changes to the order and names of birds occur by linking scientific discovery to taxonomic reclassification. He will give an overview of the birds of the world by focusing on key clades, including the so called “magnificent seven.” The overarching goal of this talk is to encourage you to see taxonomy as an exciting window into the evolutionary biology of birds.

Mike Andersen is Assistant Professor of Biology and Curator of Genomic Resources in the Museum of Southwestern Biology at the University of New Mexico. He is a lifelong birder, having grown up on Long Island, NY where he started birding. He graduated from Cornell University in 2004 and worked in the Macaulay Library at the Lab of Ornithology before moving to the University of Kansas, where he received his PhD in 2013. He is a systematic ornithologist and he studies the diversity and biogeography of birds on islands in the South Pacific.

See our website or Facebook for Zoom Meeting links.

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 to preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

Don has been photographing and working with birds, plants, management issues, and wildlife around Jamaica Bay for over 40 years. This show contains a variety of wildlife in an urban setting and how we have been creatively managing for them. Over 340 species of birds, 108 species of finfish, 70 species of butterflies, and 600 species of moths have been found in the bay either as breeding, migrating through, overwintering, or accidentally spending time in the area. His talk will include a long-standing raptor management marsh restoration project, terrapin research, marine debris removal, and unique photos of birds and wildlife living within the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens in NYC.

Don Riepe retired in 2003 from the National Park Service, where he worked as a naturalist, ranger, and manager of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in NYC. Currently, he is employed as Jamaica Bay Guardian and Director of the Northeast Chapter for the American Littoral Society. Don has written many articles on natural history subjects and his photographs have been published in many journals including *Scientific American*, *National Wildlife*, *Audubon*, *Defenders*, *Underwater Naturalist*, *Parade*, and *The New York Times*. He has an MS in Natural Resources Management from the University of New Hampshire and has taught a course in Wildlife Management at St. John's University. A long time member of the Port Authority's Bird Hazard Task Force, he also serves on the advisory board of NYC Audubon and is co-chair of the Jamaica Bay Task Force. He has no spare time.

IN MEMORIAM: SY SCHIFF

I Remember Sy -- a Wonderful Guy!

Paul Stessel

SSAS has lost an important member of our birding family! On January 14th Sy Schiff left us! What a bitter pill to take! But, we must remember the important memories that will be with us, forever. He was our oldest "active" member and many of us have fond memories of birding with him. I got to know Sy long before I moved to the South Shore and joined SSAS. I got to know Sy when we would bird in Joe Giunta's birding class at Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

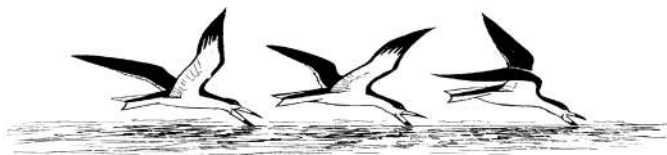
He was a wonderful and knowledgeable birder who was always willing to share his knowledge and wisdom about all things "birds." He was always willing to share this wisdom with whomever was within earshot! When on a bird walk, I always tried to stay by his side so that I could learn from him. Oh, the stories he told!

Once, on a bird walk at Jamaica Bay, we were walking through the gardens on the West Pond side and we came to a grove of willow oaks and he immediately told the story of being there for the dedication of this grove. You just had to stop and listen!

Sy loved the hobby of birding and the wonder of birds. He was an avid student of ornithology and a gifted birder and he passed his wisdom on to all who would listen. He wanted all of us to become better birders. His love of all things about birding was passed on to all who listened with a passion that was electric and intense.

I can remember a bird walk at Riis Park with our birding class, and as we were walking on the Mall, I mentioned the poet who had just given the poem at someone's inauguration. I mentioned how I liked the poem. To which Sy casually said to me, "If it doesn't rhyme, it's NOT a poem, it's prose!" We had a passionate discussion about his remark. I couldn't help remembering that moment when I recently listened to Amanda Gorman's own poem at Joe Biden's swearing-in ceremony. What memories! He will be missed by so many of us!

Before I forget, if you've ever birded Hempstead Lake State Park, you know what a wonderful experience it can be, but did you know that it was Sy who did the Birding Atlas that got the Park its IBA (Important Bird Area) designation from the State? Well, he did both the songbirds as well as the waterfowl at the Park. He was always involved! Enough already! I could go on forever! He will be missed!!



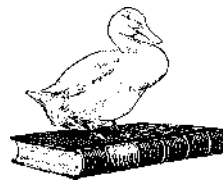
Remembering Sy

Michael Farina

Many know of Sy's birding adventures and expertise, but few are aware of his artistic interest in drawing, pastels, and woodcarving. In between his weekly birding visits and stories of how proud he was about his grandchildren, we would walk then eventually ride around the Marine Nature Study Area. He would start his visit by sharing a pastel he was working on in his art class. His number one interest was showing me his woodwork. From a relief on a plank, a figure carving, or a human head, he would always carry it with pride before showing me with a big grin. I would always have a separate pile of smaller logs, from my pruning, set aside for his inspection. Sy would examine each one with that discerning grin, looking for just the right piece. In 2011, I put his carving skills to the test when I asked him to create a Striped Bass for our hanging fish display. He researched, measured, sketched, created a template, and created our Striped Bass that I have currently hanging in the office. Anytime he was in the office and someone would come in for a question or comment, he would always take the time to introduce them to his handiwork hanging above them.



BOOKS FOR BIRDERS



Editor's note: Sy shared his wisdom with us not only in the field, but also in print for many years. We mourn the loss of a friend and teacher who educated, encouraged, and inspired so many of us.

Here is his final book review.

The Hidden Meaning of Birds: A Spiritual Field Guide by Arin Murphy-Hiscock

Sy Schiff

If you're a birder and into astrology and/or spiritualism, this book is for you. Birds as such are covered as a general entity. Sometimes a genus is mentioned, sometimes a few allied birds, and sometimes a single species. Each entry lists the name, scientific name, popular and common variants, geographic distribution, environment, physical description, and interesting facts.

Finally, a section on each species that no bird book has: "Myths, folklore and cultural associations" and "Omens and divinatory meaning." Myths come from many sources. Sometimes they are the same from all

MICHAEL SPERLING MEMORIAL

SSAS created the Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary by converting a Nassau County Stormwater Basin into a living tribute of native plants and wildlife habitat to honor our treasured President, Michael Sperling, who passed on February 5, 2020. We thank those who have generously contributed to his Memorial Fund. If you would like to make a donation to help us with the Sanctuary and similar projects, please make out your check to South Shore Audubon Society, and write Michael Sperling Memorial Fund on the memo line. Mail your check to P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, so your donation is fully tax deductible.

To learn more about Mike and the Sanctuary, and to see photos, videos, and a complete plant list, visit <https://smpilconsulting.com/the-michael-sperling-memorial-bird-sanctuary/>. The webpage will be updated to include a short film about the Sanctuary, information about Sanctuary events, and spring photos.



CREATE YOUR OWN BACKYARD BIRD SANCTUARY (AND HELP SSAS)

SSAS is delighted to announce an exciting partnership with the up-and-coming restoration contractor and design firm Spadefoot Design and Construction, LLC. Spadefoot helped us create the Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary and we are now offering to restore bird habitat in your own backyard! Imagine birding while sipping your morning coffee in the comfort of your own home. Spadefoot Design and Construction will generously work free of cost for any of our supporters who donate \$200 or more to SSAS during the first four months of 2021. Included in this gift are an individualized design consultation, a visual rendering, and a plant list to create your at-home bird sanctuary. Further, your contribution will be earmarked for future restoration projects and maintenance of the Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary. Visit <https://www.spadefoot-ny.com> or call (516) 225-8545.



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SSAS would like to thank the following donors for their contributions to the Michael Sperling Memorial Fund:

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Joanne Tow

SSAS would like to thank the following donors for their contributions beyond our membership fee:

Lloyd and Vivien Abrams
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Frank and Alene Scoblete
John Stahl



SCOBIE SQUAWKS The Big Birds

Frank Scoblete

I will admit that songbirds can be lovely, quick-flight-ed, and spectacularly colorful, but I have to tell the truth: I love the big birds -- the predators, the raptors. There is something truly wonderful watching an eagle or hawk eye its prey and then descend from the clouds at lightning speed to nail his or her breakfast, lunch, or dinner at that very moment.

As we were being driven up a Norwegian mountain, my wife, the Beautiful AP, and I saw a Golden Eagle soar high above us. He wasn't flapping his wings; he was being driven by an airshaft. His speed was impressive.

His descent was awesome. We couldn't see what animal he was hunting because the valley below was so deep, but I am guessing he enjoyed his meal.



Now many readers are aware that the latest theory of bird evolution traces birds back to the dinosaurs. That's correct, that little Blue Jay in your backyard eating the food you've laid out for him could be a direct evolutionary offshoot of the Tyrannosaurus Rex; after all, Blue Jays have been known to sever other birds' heads! They take no prisoners.

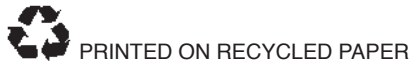
The largest flying birds on our planet at the moment belong to the Albatross family. Their wing span can reach 12 feet. That's impressive. The best eagles can reach is somewhere between six to seven feet. Still quite impressive.

Still these modern birds cannot match the prehistoric pterosaurs. These flying beasts had wing spans at times over 34 feet. These aerial brutes could weigh up

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

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Think Globally, but Join Locally!

Option 1. You can join SSAS for a year by sending \$20 payable to South Shore Audubon Society using the form below. Our address is P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

Option 2. To join NAS and your all-volunteer local chapter, you can help SSAS by joining Audubon through us for the same price that it costs if you join through NAS (we get \$0 from these dues unless you join through us). Mail the form below and your check payable to National Audubon Society to SSAS at the address above. The special rate for the first year is \$20 per household.

Renewing? Please send NAS renewals directly to NAS.

Donations to SSAS are always welcome! \$_____

Yes, I'd like to join: SSAS only National Audubon too

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