

South Shore

Skimmer



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Monogamy in Birds: Really??

by Betty Borowsky

DNA analysis has revealed so much about so many things. One of its most interesting uses has been to establish paternity. But paternity testing sometimes yields surprising results.

Banding studies confirm that many birds pair for life. Even when they separate from each other for a period of time, pairs rejoin to breed. For example, Ospreys that breed on Long Island travel to Central and South America for the winter, where they live alone until they migrate back to our area in the spring to breed. (Separate vacations can be very healthy for a long-term relationship).

Most people assumed that permanent pairing meant permanent monogamy. It sure looked like it. In fact, in 1968, David Lack, one of the most famous ornithologists of all time,¹ stated categorically that “well over nine-tenths [93%] of all passerine subfamilies are normally monogamous. . . . Polyandry is unknown.”²

With the advent of DNA testing, it became possible to find out if this

was actually true. And it turns out that Lack was wrong. He equated “pairing for life” with “monogamy for life.” Researchers were really surprised to find that the broods of 90% of all bird species had mixed paternities. Even in so-called “monogamous” species, 11% of the broods contained eggs with different fathers (EPP or extra-pair paternity).

Photo of Piping Plovers by Jay Koolpix



But then, as is always the case in science, these findings raised a more interesting question: **Why** do birds do it? In biological terms, what is the advantage to the males and females who engage in extra-pair matings?

It’s easy to ascribe a good motive to males—the more matings they have, the more offspring, and the more individuals will carry their genes in the next generation. But it’s not so easy to explain why females would do it. Females can produce only so many eggs regardless of how many males they mate with. What is the advantage to them?

One recent study has the answer for at least one species.³ In Pied Flycatchers (*Ficedula hypoleuca*), males tended to help defend another nest’s brood from predators more often when they had mated with the female in that nest. Pied Flycatchers tend to nest in groups. So experimental neighborhoods in the form of triplets of nest boxes with pairs of birds in close proximity were created. Only one male of the three pairs was permitted to mate with the three females; the other males could only mate with the females in their own nests. Then the behavior of all the males was observed when stuffed predators were presented at each nest. (Continued on page 3)

SSAS

A Chapter of the National Audubon Society
SSAudubon.org

Mission Statement — The mission of the 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.

New! Saturday Bird Walks!
See page 2 for details

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*Newsletter questions or comments?
Contact ssaseditor@gmail.com*

Bird Walks

by Joe Landesberg

Programs resume September 10.

Find program updates & links on
SSAudubon.org & facebook.com/
SSAudubon



Photo of Ringed Kingfisher by Bill Belford from trip to Belize with Joe Giunta's Happy Warblers, LLC (See <https://www.happywarblers.com/> for past and future trips)

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Join us on our Bird Walks! **To register, text me your name and contact information at 516-467-9498.** Bird Walks are free of charge and start at 9 AM. No walk if it rains or snows. Text me regarding questionable conditions.

June

Sunday 6/2: Massapequa Park (followed by SSAS Annual Picnic at Brady Park)
Sunday 6/9: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

Summer Break

August

Sunday 8/18: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve
Sunday 8/25: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Saturday 8/31: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens

September

Sunday 9/8: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
Saturday 9/14: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Sunday 9/22: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)
Saturday 9/28: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area

October

Sunday 10/6: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area
Saturday 10/12: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Sunday 10/20: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
Saturday 10/26: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

November

Sunday 11/3: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Saturday 11/9: Massapequa Lake (Merrick Road)
Sunday 11/17: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)
Saturday 11/23: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens

For future Bird Walks, check our website & Facebook page:

SSAudubon.org/bird-walks • Facebook.com/SSAudubon

Directions: SSAudubon.org/directions.asp

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The researchers observed how often each male of the triplet joined antipredator mobbing at each nest, and how close a specific male would get to the predator when each nest was defended. DNA tests showed that males who had mated with females in another nest “participated in antipredator defense” at that female’s nest significantly more often than males who had not mated with that female. So the advantage of extra-pair matings to the female was that her nest was better defended when there were several fathers of her brood because more males participated in its defense. This could be “a significant advantage to brood survival.”

So the original question should really have been: how many birds mate with only one individual for life—not how many birds share the same nest for life.

It’s all in how you ask the question! Here’s an even better example:

Some years ago, a man asked a geneticist whether his fifth child was really his because the fifth child looked so different from the other four. So the geneticist tested the DNA of all the children. And when the geneticist had the results, he was able to tell the man that the fifth child was definitely his.

What the geneticist decided **not** to tell the man was that none of the other children were!

1. David Lack, *Darwin’s Finches* (Cambridge: University Press, 1947; reissued New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).
2. David Lack, *Ecological Adaptations for Breeding in Birds* (London: Methuen, 1968).
3. Indrikis A. Krams, Adèle Mennerat, Tatjana Krama, and Sigrunn Eliasson, “Extra-pair Paternity Explains Cooperation,” *PNAS* 115, no. 5 (2022)

Photo of American Oystercatchers by Jay Koolpix



Third Annual SSAS Picnic

by Marilyn Hametz

Sunday, June 2 will be the South Shore Audubon Society’s third annual picnic!

The picnic will be in Brady Park, at Lakeshore Drive and Front Street in Massapequa Park, at about 11:30 AM (after an SSAS bird walk in Massapequa Preserve). Brady Park adjoins the preserve’s paved trail at mile marker 0.5.

Bring your children, grandchildren, and friends, and a cold lunch. SSAS will provide beverages, snacks, and prizes for the children’s scavenger hunt.

Individually wrapped desserts and additional snacks are always appreciated.

Everyone enjoys the raffle, so please consider donating what you can. Bird-related items; unused household or handmade items; house or garden plants; gift baskets and gift certificates are among the popular raffle items.

Please note there are no electrical outlets or grilling facilities, and alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.

There is a small parking lot and street parking on Lakeshore Drive. Our reserved section is partially roofed, so there is no need for a rain date.

Please contact Marilyn at mwhametz@optonline.net or 516-799-7189 to RSVP so we know how many folks will be coming or if you have any questions.

Audubon’s Guide to Ethical Bird Photography and Videography

As summer brings opportunities to photograph baby birds, keep in mind Audubon’s advice: The first essential element in bird photography and videography is a sincere respect for the birds and their environment. In any conflict of interest, the well-being of the birds and their habitats must come before the ambitions of the photographer or videographer.

Avoid causing unnecessary disturbance or stress to birds.

Nesting birds are particularly vulnerable and need extra consideration.

Beach-nesting birds (shorebirds and seabirds) require special care.

For basic guidelines see: <https://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography>

New York State's Native Birds of Greatest Conservation Need for 2025–35

by Russ Comeau

To be eligible for federal wildlife conservation funding, US states must develop a State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP).

These plans must identify a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list, with the plan focused on identifying the habitats SGCN require, recommended actions to address the threats to ensure the conservation of SGCN within the state, before they become too rare or costly to restore.

SWAPs are required to be updated every 10 years. New York State's current SWAP is from 2015, and updates for our 2025–35 plan are currently underway.

Listed below, 78 birds native to NYS are currently experiencing threats likely to jeopardize the future of their population here if action is not taken within the next 10 years. (Note: Category changes proposed for 2025–35 are in bold.)

Endangered: *In imminent danger of extirpation or extinction in NYS*

Golden Eagle, Spruce Grouse, Loggerhead Shrike, Short-eared Owl, Black Rail, Black Tern, Roseate Tern, Piping Plover

Threatened: *Likely to become a NYS endangered species within the foreseeable future*

Common Nighthawk, Yellow-breasted Chat, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Kentucky Warbler, Red Knot, Black Skimmer, Least Bittern, King Rail, Upland Sandpiper, Common Tern, Least Tern, Sedge Wren, Henslow's Sparrow

Special Concern: *A welfare concern or risk of endangerment has been documented in NYS*

Peregrine Falcon, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Pied-billed Grebe, Barn Owl, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Golden-winged Warbler, Northern Goshawk, Common Loon, American Bittern, Red-shouldered Hawk, Whip-poor-will, Red-headed Woodpecker, Horned Lark, Bicknell's Thrush, Cerulean Warbler, Vesper Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow. Proposed to be taken off list: **Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk**

High Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need

American Black Duck, Bay-breasted Warbler, Bobolink, Brown Thrasher, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Canada Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Cattle Egret, Eastern Meadowlark, Canada Jay, Little Gull, Northern Bobwhite, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Prothonotary Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Whimbrel

SGCN Proposed for 2025–35 SWAP

American Golden Plover, American Kestrel, American Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Bonaparte's Gull, Corey's Shearwater, Great Shearwater, Greater Yellowlegs, Gull-billed Tern, Horned Grebe, Hudsonian Godwit, Iceland Gull, Long-eared Owl, Marbled Godwit, Purple Sandpiper, Razorbill, Red-necked Phalarope, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderting, Tennessee Warbler, Willet

Learn more at: <https://dec.ny.gov/nature/animals-fish-plants/biodiversity-species-conservation/state-wildlife-action-plan>



Photo of Black Skimmers by Jay Koolpix

Take the Pledge to Be a Good Egg!

You can help give birds the space they need to safely rest, nest, feed, and raise their young by taking the Good Egg pledge to:

1. Respect fenced-off areas where birds are nesting;
2. Properly dispose of or carry out your trash; and,
3. Keep your dog off of nesting beaches.

With your help, we can protect New York's beach-nesting and migratory coastal birds. Take the pledge here:

<https://tinyurl.com/43rhwyek>

Protect Your Health and Our Precious Natural World: Avoid Plastic Beverage Containers

by Guy Jacob

If I were to ask you if you would purposefully break apart the plastic bottle or jug that you just drank from into tiny pieces and swallow them, I'm certain that I would get a strange, incredulous look. But, in fact, that is exactly what you are doing each time you drink from a plastic water bottle or fill a glass with juice or soda from a plastic jug. **Numerous research studies confirm that microplastics and nanoplastics (MNPs) leach from containers into the liquids that we ingest.**

And you're not only ingesting plastic, which is a byproduct of fracked methane gas: you're consuming a plethora of chemicals that are used to mold and shape that container. Chemicals added to plastics, including PFAS, phthalates, and bisphenols, are not benign. They are carcinogenic and endocrine disrupting toxins, and they are present in the bodies of nearly all Americans. Endocrine disruptors mimic, block, and interfere with your body's hormones, which can engender substantial health problems, including cancer, ADHD, diabetes, and other metabolic disorders as well as interference with growth, fertility, and reproduction.¹

MNPs are also emerging as a potential risk factor for cardiovascular disease. A recent study found that patients with carotid artery plaque in which MNPs were detected had a higher risk of heart attack, stroke, or death from any cause at 34 months of follow-up than those in whom MNPs were not detected.²

It should come as no surprise that our addiction to the convenience of plastics and the diseases that we incur due to our exposure to plastics' toxins are costing us not only in our health but in our wallets as well.

A recent study concluded that the health-care cost of plastic-attributable disease burden was \$249 billion in 2018 alone.³

Because all plastics are made from fossil fuels, they also contribute inordinately to our collective carbon budget. The petrochemical industry releases about four times as many planet-warming chemicals as the airline industry, according to researchers at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Plastics emissions are equivalent to about 600 coal plants, which is three times the number that currently operate in the US.⁴

The petrochemical industry lobbies hard against reductions in the production of single use plastics. Their false solution to our waste problem centers around chemical recycling, which is just a fancy term for incineration. Incineration only contributes to air pollution and does nothing to reduce plastics' carbon budget.⁵

Neither is old fashioned mechanical plastic recycling a solution. The same chemical toxins that course through our bodies and our ecosystems remain in recycled plastic. Moreover, non-intentionally added substances such as pesticides can contaminate plastics at various stages of their life-cycle, resulting in recycled materials containing an unknown number of

Photo of night heron by Jay Koolpix



chemical compounds at unknown concentrations.⁶

Evidence exists in our own region that we are ingesting fossil fuel derived plastics and the thousands of chemicals within them. Researchers found two microplastics hotspots off the coasts of Sands Point, Long Island, and New London, Connecticut. This has dire implications for our seafood industry. According to the National Capital Poison Center, microplastics are found in many filter-feeder seafoods, like oysters and mussels, and then consumed by humans.⁷

This recent research in the Long Island Sound is but another powerful example of why we cannot recycle our way out of exponentially greater production of single-use plastics. Our marine environments, which are critically important for the well-being of all life on earth, are already highly polluted by plastics because less than ten percent of plastic is recycled, albeit only recirculating the toxins into new products. The rest is incinerated, landfilled, or ends up polluting our waters.

For your own personal well-being, I urge you to purchase and drink from glass containers. Install a filtration system in your kitchen sink, and never waste your money or risk your health by purchasing water in plastic bottles.

We are each immersed in a toxic, unsustainable experiment not of our choosing. Beyond personal choices in the products we purchase, we must advocate for systemic change.

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

The NYS Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (S4246B/A5322B) would go a long way toward engendering such change by mandating the elimination of 15 of the most egregious toxins in packaging and as well as by reducing packaging by 50% over 12 years.⁸ Please contact your NYS Senator and Assemblymember to let them know that you support this bill.

1. <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/agents/endo-crine>
2. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38446676/>
3. <https://doi.org/10.1210/jendso/bvad163>
4. <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/4601309-plastics-industry-heats-world-four-times-as-much-as-air-travel-report-finds/>
5. <https://www.beyondplastics.org/publications/chemical-recycling>
6. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352340923008090?via=ihub>
7. <https://www.wshu.org/news/2024-04-17/ct-long-island-sound-microplastic-hotspots>
8. <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2023/A5322/amendment/B>

New York State Budget Wins for Birds and People

by Erin McGrath

In late April, the Legislature and Governor Kathy Hochul officially passed the 2024–25 New York State Budget, which includes environmental funding and policy proposals that will help protect birds and our shared environment.

We will be working alongside our partners in conservation, the Legislature, and the Governor's office to bring these important protections to life. Highlights include:

Environmental Protection Fund. New York State has committed \$400 million in funding for the EPF, which provides critical support for environmental programs, including Audubon's nature centers and sanctuaries. We are also pleased that the proposed language allowing funds from the EPF to be spent on staffing for state agencies was not included in the final budget proposal.

Clean Water Infrastructure. The Governor proposed to cut funding for clean water infrastructure by 50%. The final budget restores full funding for a total of \$500 million for this fiscal year. This proposal will help ensure that birds and people have access to clean water.

Capital for State Parks and the DEC. The final budget includes \$200 million in capital funding for the Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation and \$90 million for the Department of Environmental Conservation. Funds will support habitat improvement projects, the continued enhancement of the **New York State Birding Trail**, and more.

Plant 25 million Trees by 2033. The final budget includes \$47 million for planting 25 million trees by 2033, which will help New York State meet its goal of planting and maintaining 1.7 million acres of new forest by 2040.

Blue Buffers Voluntary Homeowner Buyout Program. Many New Yorkers are threatened by rising sea levels, which can put homes at risk of repeat flooding and years of costly damage. The final budget includes the Blue Buffers Voluntary Homeowner Buyout Program, which will give New Yorkers the option and means to relocate to safer areas, and then allow those properties to be used as part of natural flood control strategies, such as the restoration of living shorelines and salt marshes.

RAPID Act. The Renewable Action through Project Interconnection and Deployment (RAPID) Act would authorize the Office for Renewable Energy Siting (ORES) to issue permits for electric transmission projects and create a new expedited permitting process, including the development of new regulations and uniform standards and conditions. We are committed to working with ORES to minimize the risks of transmission construction and operation to biodiversity, and to speed the deployment of needed transmission infrastructure.



Photo of Eastern Bluebird by Bill Belford. New York State's bird is a target species of Audubon's Climate Watch. See <https://www.audubon.org/community-science/climate-watch>

In Defense of Weeds

by Louise DeCesare

We spend an enormous amount of time removing invasives at Tackapausha Native Garden, so defending weeds may come as a surprise. The truth is that not all weeds are bad, or at least that bad. I am not talking about mugwort running amok, but I do think the ubiquitous dandelion is more a nuisance than a threat. **Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*), hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*), and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) are three weeds common to gardens and lawns whose benefits you should consider before disposing with the garden waste.**

Eating invasives is very much in vogue, and each of these weeds are edible. But before you toss one of them into your salad bowl, make sure the soil they come from is clean of pesticides and other toxins. You can do this by having your local Cornell Cooperative Extension test your soil (see <https://ccenassau.org/>). You are the judge, so decide wisely—leave, trash, compost, or salad bowl!

Purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) is edible and rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals commonly used in cooking and salads. As a succulent ground cover, it prevents soil erosion. The fibrous roots are easy to pull while the taproot extracts water and nutrients deep in the soil. When the plant dies, it returns these nutrients to the topsoil making them accessible to other plants with shallow root systems.¹ Pull if you must, eat if safe, but leave a few to benefit your plants.

Hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) is a tender edible green with shallow fibrous roots that are easy to pull. Filled with vitamin C, calcium, magnesium, beta-carotene, antioxidants, and a mild peppery flavor, it makes an excellent addition to any microgreen salad. Be forewarned—weed before they go to seed. When the seeds mature in their capsules (siliques), they expand and explode with the slightest touch. Thousands of tiny seeds shoot out everywhere within a radius of 3–15 feet² and you will have just defeated your purpose! Because bittercress is common in lawns, make sure you test the soil for contaminants before eating.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is truly a wonder plant. The leaves are rich in fiber, iron, and calcium, as well as vitamins A, C, and E. It is a medicinal digestive aid, diuretic, and liver tonic. The roots can be brewed as a coffee substitute, and the flowers can be eaten or fermented to make wine.³ Similar to hairy bittercress, it is commonly found in lawns and propagates itself with hundreds of seeds that parachute out with the wind.

Unlike bittercress, weeding dandelion is difficult because the tap root is deep and must be completely removed or the plant will grow back. The best control strategy is to pick the flowers and buds below the surface before they go to seed. Dandelion flowers are early bloomers and an important food source for hungry pollinators, so leave the early blossoms for the bees and other insects until other pollen sources are available.

Please consider helping out at the Tackapausha Native Plant Garden. Contact Louise DeCesare at Lmdecasare128@gmail.com or call/text (917) 548-6974 for more information.

1. Brooklyn Botanic Garden https://www.bbg.org/article/weed_of_the_month_purslane
2. Brooklyn Botanic Garden https://www.bbg.org/article/weed_of_the_month_hairy_bittercress
3. Brooklyn Botanic Garden https://www.bbg.org/article/weed_of_the_month_dandelion



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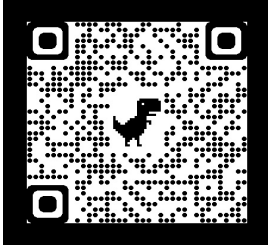
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Become a member of our local chapter for **only \$20 per year**. Receive our newsletter, *South Shore Skimmer*, which includes listings for our field trips and programs as well as the latest on environmental issues and initiatives.

To **join or renew** your membership, make your check payable to **South Shore Audubon Society** and send the form and check to: **PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031**.

→ **All memberships expire in September.** ←

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