

South Shore

# Skimmer



Volume 55, Number 1 • South Shore Audubon Society • Fall 2024

## *Birding Backpacks for Libraries*

*by Christie Tashjian*

SSAS is pleased to report that we received a **National Audubon Society Collaborative Grant** of \$1,000 to provide Birding Backpacks for Libraries. We are purchasing high-quality binoculars, field guides, and supplies to assemble and distribute to libraries, each backpack valued at \$200. Our first delivery was to the Freeport Memorial Library (pictured below, Christie Tashjian, left, with Maryellen Cantanno, Head of Community Services, right). Thank you to Karen Farrell, Assistant Director for coordinating this.

Two more backpacks were accepted by Roseann Acosta, Acting Director of the Hicksville Public Library. Thank you to Marie Sutton, Head of Adult Programming for your help.

If you would like to borrow binoculars for yourself or go birding with a friend and could use an extra pair, both libraries have an extensive "Library of Things" where these backpacks are available. We hope you enjoy them!



**SSAS**

*A Chapter of the National Audubon Society*

**SSAudubon.org**

*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.*

## *18 Sparrows of Fall*

*by Russ Comeau*

Come fall, sparrows descend on Long Island in their largest numbers for the year. Wherever these "little brown jobs" (LBJs) land to rest and refuel on their way south, they tend to join mixed flocks of allied species and local House Sparrows. They busily forage, kicking and pecking, in concealing grass or on the ground, invariably close to any "edge" that provides safety, so they can dive into a thicket, rush under brush, or flit through a fence whenever alarmed by anything.

**Savannah Sparrow,\* Swamp Sparrow\*:** Both have a large fall influx that peaks in species-appropriate habitat from late September to mid-November.

**Chipping Sparrow\*:** Although it typically forages at ground level, this species frequents trees (low branches) more than other sparrows. A major peak in numbers occurs in spring (April and May), with a minor peak in fall, from early October to mid-November.

**Field Sparrow (M)\*:** Present here year-round. Numbers rise sharply from late September to early November as migrants pass through.

**Song Sparrow (M)\*:** This ubiquitous bird is present or passing through LI in very large numbers year-round.

**White-throated Sparrow\*:** Arrives and continues in very large numbers from late September straight through late May.

**White-crowned Sparrow:** Arrives and peaks rapidly during October. Fair in November.

\* = Species known to breed on Long Island

(M) = Multiple broods

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*SSAS Post Office Statement: South Shore Skimmer is published quarterly by the South Shore Audubon Society, PO Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031*

*Newsletter questions or comments?  
Contact [ssaseditor@gmail.com](mailto:ssaseditor@gmail.com)*

***Congratulations  
to our High School  
Scholarship Winners!***

Christopher Zervos, Baldwin HS  
Sophia Bracco, South Side HS,  
Rockville Centre  
Ethan Duffy, Freeport HS

***If We Build It, They Will Come!***

The **SSAS Purple Martin house and gourds**, donated by Jay Koolpix and installed at Marine Nature Study Area, provided nests for a wildly successful **65 fledglings** this summer.

Nest boxes have helped counteract population declines and now provide virtually all nest sites for Purple Martins in the eastern US.

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## *Bird Walks*

*by Joe Landesberg*

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.

### **August**

Sunday 8/18: Norman J. Levy 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

### **December**

Sunday 12/1: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)  
Sunday 12/8: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)  
Sunday 12/15: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)  
Saturday 12/21: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)  
Sunday 12/29: \*No walk\*

**For Directions to listed Bird Walks:** [SSAudubon.org/directions.asp](https://www.SSAudubon.org/directions.asp)  
**For future Bird Walks, check our website & Facebook page:**  
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land's wildlife and natural  
habitats since 1982

<https://wildlifecenterli.org/>

## *Winners of the 2024 SSAS College Scholarships*

*by Betty Borowsky & Betsy Gulotta*

Thanks to the generosity of the family of Evelyn and Jerry Bishop, and of Jay Koolpix, we are able to award two \$1,000 scholarships a year to juniors or seniors in college or to graduate students earning a degree in the areas of biological or environmental science or sustainable and renewable energy. The following is a brief description of the winners of this year's scholarships.

The winner of the Evelyn and Jerry Bishop scholarship is Aleyana Boothe. Aleyana is a senior at Hofstra, and plans to continue her studies there to obtain her master's degree. She is majoring in urban ecology and minoring in sustainability studies. Aleyana asked three persons at Hofstra to write her letters of recommendation, and each of them detailed a different significant environmental activity in which she was involved. Among her other achievements, she served as vice president and president of Hofstra's Leaders for Environmental Action and Fellowship (LEAF) Club, which she also helped found, and she interned for the Friends of Hempstead Plains.

Her career objective is to "ensure that all communities have access to environmental education opportunities, regardless of race, culture, or socioeconomic status." Specifically, she plans to use the scholarship money to help pay for subscriptions to GIS software. This will allow her to create an interactive web map especially designed for school district science coordinators that shows local areas of ecological concern. The map will be a great educational tool not only for educators, but for the public.

The winner of the Jay Koolpix award is Adam Li. Adam is a junior at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is studying sustainable food and farming.

Adam says he is "dedicating my life to regenerative agriculture." This is a relatively new but extremely important field. We have misused our farmland, causing erosion, soil degradation and depletion, and other damage. We are going to need innovative strategies to ameliorate these conditions to make sure we have abundant, clean food supplies in the future.

Adam spent this academic year in New Zealand, at the University of Otago, studying "alternative and sustainable agricultural methods, such as permaculture and biodynamic-style farming designed to increase flora and fauna diversity, soil life, and native pollinator populations."

Novel and effective strategies to increase our food supply with minimal damage to the environment while conserving native species is absolutely critical now. But we know this can be done. Think about shade-grown coffee!

We are very proud of these two students—we are confident that they will make a difference.

## *Fall Programs at the Freeport Memorial Library*

### **Naturalist Explorations in Cuba with Michael Friedman**

**Wednesday, September 11 @ 7:30 PM**  
**\*Note change from Tuesday\***

Dr. Michael Friedman was privileged to visit Cuba in March with the goal of learning about and photographing some of the enormous island's unique avian and other fauna. He will present information and photos of a few of these creatures, with a focus on endemic and endangered species, their ecology, and some of the environmental challenges confronting Cuba's biodiversity.

Michael is a biologist specializing in evolutionary ecology. He mentors student research on DNA barcoding and bird diversity at the Marine Nature Study Area in Oceanside. He has been an educator for the past 35 years, most recently teaching at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. He became an avid birder and amateur wildlife photographer during the pandemic.

### **Sea of Grass: Long Island's Salt Marshes with Betsy McCully**

**Tuesday, October 8 @ 7:30 PM**

Author Betsy McCully will present a slide-illustrated talk on our once vast salt marshes. Her latest book, *At the Glacier's Edge: A Natural History of Long Island from the Narrows to Montauk Point*, explores our natural world through her eyes as a longtime resident. She tells the story of how the island's diverse habitats evolved and recounts the efforts of environmental activists to restore what humans have degraded. Her first book was *City at the Water's Edge: A Natural History of New York*.

Betsy is a retired professor of English at Kingsborough College of CUNY. Her recent book is available from Rutgers University Press and Barnes and Noble for \$27.95, and from Amazon for \$27.44. Betsy will happily sign books purchased before and brought to her program.

*(Continued on page 4)*

**Galápagos Species:  
Why Your Life Lists Are Almost Certainly Wrong  
with Russell Burke**

**Tuesday, November 12 @ 7:30 PM**

The Galápagos Islands are famous for many reasons, including their unusual animals and plants. Counting them all requires us to think hard about what we mean by the term "species."

Let's admire the birds and reptiles of the Galápagos Islands and see if we can agree on just what a species is.

Dr. Russell Burke, professor of biology at Hofstra University, has visited the Galápagos Islands more than a dozen times with tourist groups, including several SSAS members.

## *SSAS Waterfowl Surveys*

*by Bill Belford*

This December will mark the **36th year** of the South Shore Audubon Waterfowl Surveys.

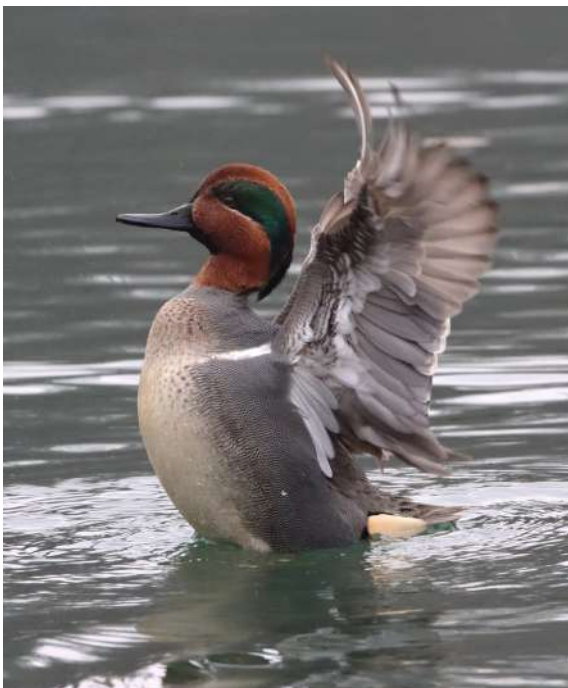
**We are fortunate here in Nassau County to have some beautiful species of waterfowl visit our area in the fall and winter.** All the ducks are in their finest breeding plumage in the winter (with the exception of the Ruddy Duck). And the odds are good that even in cold weather there will be open water on the ponds and lakes where the birds can find food.

Joe Grupp started the Waterfowl Surveys and was in charge of them for 28 years. I was one of the volunteers with Joe for about six years and took over in 2016 when Joe "retired" from the counts. **We survey many of the lakes and ponds on the south shore of Nassau County five times per season.** There is one survey in December and January, two in February, and one in March. The goal is to see if any population trends can be found in the species covered.

On the following page is a table showing the results of our December count from 2016–2023. Uncommon sightings include Pink-footed Goose in 2016, Blue-winged Teal in 2021, Eurasian Wigeon in 2020, Greater Scaup in 2021, Cackling Goose in 2018 and 2021, Long-tailed Duck in 2017, and five Common Mergansers in 2017, one in 2018, five in 2022, and two in 2023.

To participate in future waterfowl surveys, contact Bill Belford at 516-385-1759.

*Photos by Bill Belford. This page: Green-winged Teal, left; Northern Pintail, right. Next page: Northern Shoveler, left; Wood Ducks, right.*





	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Brant	0	3	69	0	9	119	0	1
Canada Goose	1852	350	1644	2833	2138	1669	2752	3354
Mute Swan	26	40	28	38	51	51	40	52
Wood Duck	1	3	1	0	0	3	1	0
Northern Shoveler	74	54	66	128	103	132	114	100
Gadwall	166	46	60	149	51	127	119	100
American Wigeon	69	24	10	3	13	17	16	25
Mallard	1090	562	599	1006	809	1050	575	792
American Black Duck	630	202	706	549	708	571	560	788
Northern Pintail	3	1	0	0	1	5	1	1
Green-winged Teal	28	10	8	44	33	42	48	21
Redhead	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Ring-necked Duck	26	62	50	39	35	43	32	50
Hooded Merganser	488	367	380	462	532	602	516	436
Ruddy Duck	74	137	82	82	12	37	118	87

## *Doldrums: Climate Inaction*

by Jim Brown

**Recent news on climate change is once again demonstrating the deepening of the crisis, matched only by the continuing political inaction** manifested by far too many political leaders throughout the world, the United States, and by our own state and local governments. The last 12 months have been the hottest months in recorded history, as the entire year of 2023 proved itself the hottest calendar year on record. These measurements date back 174 years. It is very possible that 2024 will break the record set last year. Heat waves are already sweeping areas of the world, from Saudi Arabia, where more than 1,300 pilgrims died from the excessive heat, to India, to the US. In our country, we are considering, like some other nations have already done, putting a scale value to successive heat wave events, and possibly even treating them exactly like hurricanes, and actually naming them as well.

In the face of these events, and others, like drought, sea level rise, flooding, and additional disasters fueled by rapid global heating, one might hope for concerted action by our elected representatives. This has not happened, and New York State furnishes a clear example of a failure to act to prevent further catastrophe.

Climate-related bills did not fare well in the NYS Legislature this year. **Two major pieces of legislation, the New York Home Energy Affordable Transition Act (the “HEAT” Act) and the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act, failed to pass the Assembly.** The HEAT Act would stop the construction of unnecessary new gas line hookups as well as cap energy expenditures for utility customers. The Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act would force plastics manufacturers, who comprise a major sector of the fossil fuel industry, to reduce plastic packaging and assume much of the cost of recycling, currently paid for by local taxpayers. As is the case with climate bills in general, the fossil fuel companies and their allies spent large sums in lobbying to defeat these bills. A victory in the Legislature for climate action did squeak by in the closing hours of the session: **the Climate Change Superfund Act did pass both houses in Albany, and awaits the Governor’s signature to make it law.** The bill requires major fossil fuel polluters—“Big Oil”—to pay the people of New York \$3 billion to climate change adaptation and remediation. All three of these key climate related bills, the two that failed and the one that passed, were supported by the South Shore Audubon Society.

**In addition, Governor Hochul surprisingly put congestion pricing for New York City on “indefinite” hold just before the measure was set to take effect.** Congestion pricing would reduce traffic in Manhattan, lower pollution, limit the production of greenhouse gases, as well as spur development of mass transit. Cities that have already introduced congestion pricing to limit traffic and fight climate change include Singapore, Stockholm, and Milan.

The two bills that failed in the Legislature this past session may receive a positive response from the Legislature and the Governor in the fall, as perhaps will also be the case for congestion pricing, which was agreed upon five years ago, before the recent halt imposed by the Governor. We also urge Governor Hochul to sign the Climate Superfund Act into law, especially as it appears that the industry opponents of the bill have not given up on defeating it, despite the last-minute legislative approval.

On the local level, inaction on climate change is also seen in a recent, unfortunately successful, attempt that has slowed the construction of desperately needed offshore wind. Local opponents of offshore wind, spreading misinformation, have delayed a longstanding south shore project. **The Long Beach City Council voted down Equinor’s Empire Wind II project, and their action was upheld by a gubernatorial veto of a bill that would have forced the city to accept the developer’s planned cable route, which was actually the most environmentally sound route.**

Current inaction on the need to fight climate change undoubtedly has multiple causes. But the major, core impediment in winning the fight is the sheer wealth and power wielded by the fossil fuel industry. The high profitability of the industry gives it the ability to affect critical political campaigns and influence legislation and executive action at all levels of government. The IPCC (the International Panel on Climate Change, “the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change”) and others who have dealt with climate change struggles over many years, correctly judge that **to halt the rapid global heating we are now experiencing will require deep changes in the basic social, economic, and political institutions we currently have.** One obvious and necessary change is to limit the overriding power of the very industry that is now directly causing the climate crisis. We have the technology to transition away from fossil fuels, but our struggle will not be easy.



## *Packaging Reduction is Part of the Solution*

by Guy Jacob

Given the significant economic, environmental, and quality of life consequences our throw-away culture has immersed us in, why more public officials aren't emphasizing reducing the amount of waste that's generated is mind-boggling. **The NYS Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (PRRIA) is the timely legislation we need to help mitigate the trouble we've created.**<sup>1</sup>

**The American Chemistry Council (ACC) and their affiliates, however, are working overtime trying to convince legislators that industry can't afford to reduce their plastic packaging by 30% over 12 years** as mandated by the PRRIA. **The ACC threatens costs passed on to consumers along with more limited merchandise options.** Carl MacGowan's *Newsday* article tells the real story about what Long Islanders won't be able to afford.<sup>2</sup> Among other fiscal nightmares, the estimated annual cost of tolls to carry ash to off-island landfills after Brookhaven closes is \$3.8M. Annually, about **19,444 trucks** will move ash from LI incinerators to landfills off the island after Brookhaven closes.

Moreover, the true price won't be how much industry will pass on its costs to consumers for having to comply with safer packaging alternatives, but how much we are already spending to cope with our poisoned bodies and degraded health. Research published in the *Journal of the Endocrine Society* estimates that endocrine disrupting chemicals found in plastics caused \$250 billion in health-care costs in 2018 alone.<sup>3-4</sup>

On June 7th, 37 courageous Democratic senators passed the PRRIA. The Assembly did not bring the bill to a vote.

1. S4246D/A5322D

2. Carl MacGowan, "Brookhaven Landfill Closure Likely to Drive Up Costs, Congestion on Long Island, Experts Say," *Newsday*, July 4, 2024.

3. Liam Davenport, "What's the Disease Burden from Plastic Exposure," *Medscape*, January 11, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/wcf3jfa2>.

4. Greenpeace, *Forever Toxic: The Science on Health Threats for Plastic Recycling*, May 24, 2023, <https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/reports/forever-toxic/>.



(Continued from page 1)

**American Tree Sparrow, Fox Sparrow:** These hardy species begin to arrive here in late October (Fox) or early November (Tree). Both spend the winter in species-appropriate habitat, through mid-April.

**Vesper Sparrow:** A species of special conservation concern in NY. Fair chance to see one foraging on the ground here from mid-October to late November.

**Lincoln's Sparrow:** Often "hidden" in mixed flocks. Passes through from mid-September to early November.

**Clay-colored Sparrow:** Prairies and plains of mid-US and Canada are its home range. But some are expected to show up on LI during fall migration, from early September to early November. Individuals often found in mixed flocks.

**Lark Sparrow:** Home range is the Midwest and West. But from mid-August through early November, individuals can be expected in grassy areas along the inlets, barrier beaches, and adjacent bays of LI's south shore.

**Saltmarsh Sparrow,\* Seaside Sparrow\*:** Species of greatest conservation need and special concern, respectively, in NY. They raise their families in LI's saltmarshes from May through late October (Seaside) or early November (Saltmarsh).

**Nelson's Sparrow:** Migrates from saltmarshes along the southeast coast of Canada and New England, passing through LI's saltmarshes from late September through early November, simultaneous with migrating Seaside and Saltmarsh sparrows.

**Henslow's Sparrow:** Listed as a threatened species in NY. In years gone by, it nested in coastal marshes on LI's south shore. But in the past 10 years, sadly, just four of this fallen sparrow have been confirmed (on eBird.com), all migrating through from late October to mid-December.

**Grasshopper Sparrow (M)\*:** A species of special concern in NY and in steep decline. Rare on LI in the fall. But from early May to early August, they're busily raising families at their LI stronghold, EPCAL grassland in Calverton.

### ***Tell Governor Hochul to Sign the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act!***

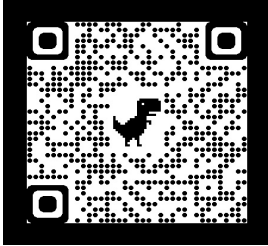
Many vulnerable shorebirds, like the **Piping Plover** and **Red Knot**, rely on horseshoe crab eggs for food. In order to ensure their future survival, we need to make sure that horseshoe crabs can thrive.

Contact Governor Hochul: <https://www.governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form> or 1-518-474-8390

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**ENJOY THE OUTDOORS**  
*Join us on our Bird Walks!*

### Join South Shore Audubon Society

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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