

South Shore

Skimmer



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Declining Biological Diversity Trends and Developments

by Jim Brown

Currently, as I write this column, the **United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity** (CBD) is having its 2024 Conference of Parties (COP 16) in Cali, Colombia. It is scheduled to meet from October 21 to November 1. A major purpose of the Conference is to review the progress of countries in advancing the goal of reducing biodiversity loss. Twenty-three different targets were set at the last COP, held in Montreal, Canada in 2022, to “halt and reverse biodiversity loss” by 2030. **Unfortunately, most nations have failed to even meet the deadline in formulating their plans to meet the goal of solving the “nature loss” crisis the earth is currently experiencing.**

Biodiversity loss, due to the extinction of plant and animal species on a global scale, or loss of species within a region or area, is indeed a crisis, a “Sixth Extinction.” The current and ongoing mass extinction event is caused by the activities of human beings, including habitat loss from development and anthropogenic climate change. Actual extinctions are occurring at an alarming rate, and that high rate is increasing.

Linked to actual extinctions is the alarming decline in numbers of individuals of different species, whether considered globally or regionally. Decline in numbers point to possible extinctions in the future. A recent report by the World Wildlife Fund and the Zoological Society of London, “Living Planet Report,” highlights this problem.

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.

The basic finding of the report is stated simply: **“Nature is being lost—with huge implications for us all.”** Over the 50-year period from 1970 to 2020, according to the report, wildlife populations decreased by 73% worldwide. Included in the study were 5,495 monitored species of vertebrates—amphibians, birds, fish, mammals, and reptiles. The percentage decline was 39% for North America, 35% for Europe and Central Asia, 60% for Asia and the Pacific, and 76% for Africa. The steepest decline occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean—95%. The declines in the North American, European, and Central Asian regions are at the lower end of the spectrum only because significant declines had already occurred in these more highly developed regions before 1970.

The 39% figure for North America seems to support the finding published in a 2019 article in the journal *Science*, “Decline of North American Avifauna,” which noted that **bird populations in North America declined by almost 30% since 1970, a loss of almost 3 billion breeding adult birds.**

The authors of the “Living Planet Report” offer a roadmap or guide to solving the biodiversity crisis. It includes transforming conservation activities and several key systems: food, energy, and the finance system. The key word here is “transforming,” as the report’s creators realize that deep changes must be made if the losses in biodiversity are to be halted and reversed.

In a similar fashion, the National Audubon Society in its current strategic plan, or “Flight Plan,” offers a guide to preserving wildlife diversity, focused especially on protecting birds. (Continued on page 3)

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

More Birding Backpacks!

by Christie Tashjian

SSAS continues our mission to supply Birding Backpacks for Libraries. Deborah Rood Goldman, Head of Reference at **North Merrick Public Library**, reached out and we were happy to oblige. Please visit their Library of Things to borrow binoculars and birding guides. (See the Fall 2024 Skimmer for backpacks at the Freeport and Hicksville public libraries.)

Thank you Donors!

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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.

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*

January

Sunday 1/5: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

Saturday 1/11: Massapequa Lake (at Merrick Road)

Sunday 1/19: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)

Saturday 1/25: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

February

Sunday 2/2: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area

Saturday 2/8: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

Sunday 2/16: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)

Saturday 2/22: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

March

Sunday 3/2: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)

Saturday 3/8: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)

Sunday 3/16: Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve

Saturday 3/22: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)

Sunday 3/30: Point Lookout Town Park/Lido Beach Passive Nature Area

For Directions to listed Bird Walks: SSAudubon.org/directions.asp

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

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

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<https://wildlifecenterli.org/>

Winter Programs on Zoom

For program links, visit our website & Facebook page:
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New York Black Skimmer Populations with Rob Longiaru

Tuesday, December 10 @ 7:30 PM

The Black Skimmer is not only the SSAS logo and mascot, but also an iconic Long Island species. Nesting locally by the hundreds on Nickerson Beach, the Black Skimmer is yet a species of special concern in New York State. Rob Longiaru will present his research toward creating an annual cycle understanding of New York's Black Skimmer populations.

Rob is a local conservationist involved in multiple projects across Long Island working to increase the biodiversity of its habitats. He attended Stony Brook University and was part of the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences studying Marine Sciences. His schooling and passion for the environment allowed him to pursue careers in habitat restoration, research, and public outreach. Rob currently works full-time as a Conservation Biologist with the Town of Hempstead. He is also a Director of the Friends of Hempstead Plains, and the Vice President of the Long Island Native Plant Initiative.

How Birds Created the World and Other Stories from *The Complete Language of Birds* with Randi Minetor

Tuesday, January 14 @ 7:30 PM

Ancient Egyptians believed that the Earth began as an egg laid by a giant goose. Ojibwa people of America's northern plains tell of a Great Flood that swept away the world's evils, and the bird that braved the deep waters to bring a bit of soil up from the bottom to restart the continent. European scientists once believed that geese survived the winters by turning themselves into barnacles and adhering to the bottoms of ships, transforming back into birds in spring. In her latest book, *The Complete Language of Birds*, bestselling author Randi Minetor bring us back to a time when birds seemed like magical beings with the answers for so many of the world's questions.

Randi writes the Birdfinding and Best Easy Bird Guides series for Falcon Guides/Globe Pequot Press and is the author of *Backyard Birding and Butterfly Gardening* and *Best Easy Day Hikes: Buffalo*. Her most recent book, *The Complete Language of Birds*, is an encyclopedia that unites classic illustrations, science, folklore, and mythology about more than 400 bird species around the world.

She writes for *Birding Magazine*, is a regional report editor for *North American Birds*, and served for three years as President of the Rochester Birding Association.

Randi's books are available from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other booksellers.

Goatsuckers Galore with John Turner

Tuesday, February 11 @ 7:30 PM

The program will focus on the fascinating folklore, biology, ecology, and conservation of Goatsuckers, a unique group of birds that are represented on Long Island by Common Nighthawks, Whip-poor-wills, and Chuck-will's-widows. The lecture will also discuss the results of eight years' worth of counting nighthawks during fall migration at the Stone Bridge Nighthawk Watch in Setauket. Come learn how these birds got their Goatsucker name!

John Turner is a Long Island-based birder, writer, naturalist, and conservationist. He is a cofounder of the LI Pine Barrens Society and a Conservation Policy Advocate for the Seatuck Environmental Association.

(Continued from page 1)

The Plan highlights Habitat Conservation, Climate Action, Policy, and Community Building. Goals to be reached by 2028 are specific and would create increased and better habitat for birds throughout all the Americas, result in well-sited renewable energy facilities, and involve natural approaches to climate change mitigation, adequate funding, sound environmental legislation, and building the Audubon network while forging productive alliances with other groups with shared goals.

Recent trends and developments related to the crisis of rapidly declining biological diversity all point to the need for individuals, groups, and nations to take part in the range of actions recommended by the Convention on Biological Diversity, the authors of the "Living Planet Report," and chapters of the National Audubon Society, like our own South Shore Audubon Society. **There is no lack of transformative action that must be accomplished, and accomplished soon.**

For more information:

<https://www.cbd.int/conferences/2024>

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/2024-living-planet-report>

<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.aaw1313>

<https://www.audubon.org/news/our-flight-path>

DIY Bird Feeders and Houses!

A Backyard Battle

by Lewis Edelstein

About six months ago I purchased a bird feeder with a video camera mounted in it. The camera records HD, has a motion detector, and is programmed to video a five to seven second burst when prompted by the motion detector. It even has a solar panel to keep the camera battery charged.

I mounted it in three different places in my backyard.

Each time I moved the feeder, no matter where I mounted it, it didn't matter, the squirrels found it. The images received from those three positions were exciting, but the seeds didn't last too long.

Thoroughly frustrated, I stopped to reconsider. Squirrels are smart, resourceful, and can leap 10 feet, in any direction, often swinging from moving branches to moving branches. Squirrels are clever, and anyone who has tried to rid themselves of them can attest to their tenacity and ability to invade any place they choose. Blogs, articles, websites all declared the same frustration in mounting a bird feeder just to have the squirrels gobble up all the seeds in short order.

But one thing I noticed is that squirrels cannot negotiate thin wire. Cables, shingles, branches are no problem. Sides of houses, concrete—they can scale them all. But they have no purchase on 1/8-inch wire. So I scouted my entire property looking for an open area where anything standing was at least 20 feet away from anything else. But I couldn't find one. There was always a branch, post, or side of a building that invariably provided an easy springboard for these opportunists.

So I did some research and found that their jump limit is actually 10 feet. And I decided to give it one last try.

I purchased 30 feet of plastic coated steel wire, two 2x4 posts 12 feet long, and two eyehooks. I screwed one eyehook on the top of each post, placed and fixed the two posts 20 feet apart, tied one end of the wire to one of the eyehooks, and then strung the wire through the feeder to the eyehook on the other post. I let the extra 10 feet dangle down that second post to standing level so that I could lower the feeder without a ladder. The feeder was elevated to almost 12 feet.

To keep the feeder stable I took a 2x2" piece of wood, put smaller eye hooks on the sides, and ran the wire through it, looping the wire twice through one of them so the feeder wouldn't shift along the wire. The weight of the feeder keeps it hanging down.

I also cleared any branches above or below the wire. Then I sat in my backyard for hours trying to think like a squirrel. It's not all that easy. No matter how many branches I cut down, there always seemed to be some way the squirrels could get to the feeder. Finally I bought a 12-foot ladder and a 12-foot telescoping tree trimmer. I hacked and sawed until there was nothing even remotely near the feeder.

It seems to have worked! So far the squirrels haven't been able to get to it. Frankly, I don't think there's a chance on their giving up; as long as there's food around, I believe they'll go for it.

BUT it has been up on the wire for a month and so far so good. Time will tell.

Below are some images of the local inhabitants I've captured and a picture of the feeder in my backyard.



Above left, Carolina Wren

Above right, Northern Cardinal

Eagle Scout Project

by Nate Milow

My name is Nate Milow, and I am working toward Eagle Scout with Troop 590 in Massapequa. I recently completed my Eagle Project at the Hofstra University Bird Sanctuary for the South Shore Audubon Society. **I worked with members of my troop and students from Hofstra, planting a native plant garden and installing houses for birds, bees, and bats.**

The road to the project was a long one. Back in early 2023, I visited Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve, which was previously a landfill. I noticed the work that was done to restore nature and biodiversity to the area, and specifically the bird houses they installed on trees and boxes for ground-nesting bees. This was the original inspiration for my project, however, I didn't know how or where I would execute it. Soon after this, my troop attended a cleanup at the SSAS Michael Sperling Bird Sanctuary, which was originally a sump. Here I met Guy Jacob, who was the SSAS beneficiary for my project. I spoke with him, and we planned to carry out my project at the Sperling Sanctuary, removing invasive plant species and replacing them with native ones, in addition to installing bird and bee houses.

I held a fundraiser for the project at a local restaurant, Saverio's Authentic Pizza. They were very helpful, and I was able to raise a good amount. But soon after this, due to Nassau County restrictions on work in the Sperling Sanctuary, I needed a new location for the project. Fortunately, Mr. Jacob put me in contact with Dr. J. Bret Bennington at Hofstra University, who said that I could complete my project at the Hofstra Bird Sanctuary.

With the project now back in motion, it was time to start gathering materials. **Thanks to generous donations from Home Depot and EastLand Fence, I was able to get almost all of the building materials, which allowed me to save most of the money raised for purchasing native plants.** Mr. Jacob also put me in contact with Pam Ireland at the Long Island Native Plant Initiative. With her help, we selected the best native plants to plant at the bird sanctuary. With all the supplies ready, I met with Dr. Bennington at the Hofstra Bird Sanctuary, where we picked an area for plantings and cleared it out, and he informed me about a need for bat houses in the sanctuary.

Now there was just one last thing to do. With the help of people from my troop, about a week before installation, we assembled the bird and bee houses. With everything in place, we were ready to carry out the project on October 12.

My troop met with Dr. Bennington at the sanctuary that morning. **We got to work putting in plantings, hanging birdhouses on trees, and putting bee boxes in the ground. We also used some of the money not spent on plants to purchase bat houses.** But with how high up they need to be, the job of hanging them was left to the Hofstra grounds crew.

The garden came out very nicely with the houses in place. All of the money not spent on materials was donated directly to SSAS. I am passionate about this project because I enjoy the outdoors and activities such as hiking and fishing. **In a time when the world is becoming much more developed, I feel that this project is a good way to help protect and maintain native biodiversity on Long Island.** I am very grateful to Mr. Jacob, Dr. Bennington, and Ms. Ireland. Without all the help they provided, my project wouldn't have turned out as well as it did. I would also like to thank Home Depot, EastLand Fence, and Saverio's for their generosity in helping raise money and provide supplies.

Gardening for Pollinators

by Guy Jacob

When we garden for pollinators, we garden for ourselves in sundry ways. Humankind relies on and is deeply connected to the fate of our pollinators. But pollinators are in trouble.

Extensive use of neonicotinoid pesticides has provoked catastrophic losses for New York State's 400+ native bee species. These losses threaten the state's ecosystems and the estimated \$439 million worth of pollination services pollinators provide to NYS crops, including apples, squash, tomatoes, blueberries, strawberries, cherries, and pears.

Birds, bees, and other pollinators desperately need our help, and there is much we can do in our own backyards to support their dwindling populations, even as we strengthen our relationships with these diminutive, delightful creatures. **The single most important thing we can do: plant native species in every spare corner of our private and community properties.**

Native flowering plants serve a critically important role in attracting and supporting a variety of native pollinators. Like us, native plants and native pollinators rely on one another and have a special bond with each other. They're like old friends who know each other well and will go out of their way to support one another. *(Continued on page 6)*

Native plant species and native pollinators are not the new kids on the block. They've been an integral part of our Long Island environment for centuries.

Native plants have coexisted with native pollinators for centuries, so their relationship with each other cannot be easily replaced by exotic species. This centuries-long coexistence has engendered a balance between many species, which makes it highly unlikely that one species would take over to the detriment of others. Only about 15 percent of exotic species are invasive, but this relatively small percentage are a direct threat to our native plants and animals because they destroy this balance by consuming far more than their fair share of space, nutrients, and water.

How can you enhance your own gardens? In September, I met with NYS Parks Horticulturist Victor Azzaretto and learned about his job, goals, and accomplishments. I took a tour of Bethpage State Park's school garden, wildflower garden, and greenhouse. The Bethpage school garden was founded in 2022 and is a thriving quintessential pollinator habitat that offers sundry colors year-round. **Victor's team compiled valuable information where you can garner ideas for your own backyard and community spaces** (see link below).

Delight in seeing butterflies and bees feast on nectar tucked between colorful flowers. It's like feeding your grandchildren a special meal for a singular reason, but even better because you're feeding pollinators day after day with the knowledge that you're doing your part for conservation.

While different species support pollinators during different seasons, I was thrilled this September and October to see so many bees and butterflies feasting on my vibrant variety of goldenrod and aster species. I patiently waited all summer, as I do each summer, watching my goldenrods and asters grow quietly and unattractively. Their time to burst with color is autumn, just when all the summer flowers have receded, and just in time to feed hungry pollinators.

Life on planet Earth would not exist as we know it without pollinators. Far from fearing bees, which are among the most important pollinators, we should venerate them and contemplate how much we depend on them for our blessed quality of life. Healthy populations of birds, butterflies, and bees bode well for humanity's future.

For detailed information about each plant featured in Bethpage's garden: <https://bethpagestateparkecology.blogspot.com/2022/08/bethpage-state-park-school-garden.html>

Soldiers2Scientists

by Michael Cohn

Soldiers2Scientists is a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding veteran participation in outdoor community science projects. We partner with national parks, federal and state wildlife commissions, science organizations, and conservation communities to offer valuable and engaging science projects for veterans of all ages and accessibility levels.

Soldiers2Scientists facilitates opportunities for veterans to work directly with scientists on important research and conservation projects that protect and preserve our nation's wildlife and natural resources.

Nominated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and honored at the White House for a Champions of Change Award, our work began in 2013, and we seek to support veterans seeking engaging outdoor recreation or career advancement, or those struggling with post-deployment transitions. Our purpose is to provide goal-oriented volunteer opportunities; we believe these projects offer veterans a chance to experience exclusive access to our national parks and public lands while continuing their service to the country in a new way. We offer opportunities such as single day projects, multi-day expeditions, and internships with local universities, scientists, and researchers.

We have strong partnerships with Great Basin National Park in Nevada, Canyonlands and Bryce Canyon National Parks in Utah, Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Ohio, and Shenandoah National Park and Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia. We also have many projects with state wildlife commissions and the military base-adjacent lands called Sentinel Landscapes in North Carolina and Florida. We have worked with individual veterans to get them involved in projects in their area in states all across the country as well.

Our projects have ranged from rattlesnake and gopher tortoise surgery and telemetry tracking to electrofishing surveys, biodiversity monitoring data collection, and bird banding and nestbox programs.

We hope to emulate the success of our American Kestrel nestbox program here on Long Island, and to help reverse declines in kestrel populations due to clearing of land and felling of the standing dead trees that these birds depend on for their nest sites.

To get involved, visit Soldiers2Scientists.org. You do not need to be a veteran to participate.

Woodpeckers

Keystone Species of Long Island

by Russ Comeau

Six woodpeckers are keystone species whose actions benefit many other flora and fauna species.

First, **woodpeckers' food foraging behavior is focused on dead, diseased, and insect-infested trees**, enabling them to rid many destructive tree pests from a wooded area, and to dissipate tree diseases from spreading to healthy trees.

Second, **a pair of woodpecker parents often (not always) excavates a new family nest cavity and multiple night roosting holes annually**. Their old cavities, which are still useful for several more years, are used by other birds, most of which cannot excavate their own nest cavities or year-round roost holes within which to survive extreme weather conditions.

Native Long Island nesters that can benefit from woodpeckers' second-hand cavities include American Kestrel, Great Crested Flycatcher, Carolina Wren, House Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Eastern Phoebe, and others.

A big problem faced by woodpeckers is that non-native European Starlings will often watch and wait while woodpeckers excavate a new nest, and then aggressively swoop in to take over the newly-finished nest.

Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers

These two look-alikes occur together and can only be told apart by an experienced eye. The body and bill dimensions of the Hairy are one-third larger, longer, and stouter than the Downy, which is about 6.5 inches long versus about 9.25 inches for the Hairy. The Downy is more prolific. You will see at least three or four Downy for every Hairy on Long Island.

With its shorter, stubbier bill, the Downy tends to pick and glean more off the surface of smaller tree limbs while the Hairy tends to spend more time digging into the trunks and larger limbs.

The diminutive Downy can forage in the understory, in thickets, scrub, shrubs, reeds, goldenrod, or stiff-stalked plants that would not be possible for the Hairy or larger woodpeckers. The Downy will chisel into galls, stems, and hollow stalks to eradicate many grubs and bugs on or within these plants.

Red-bellied and Red-headed Woodpeckers

The Red-bellied is a little longer, sleeker, and streamlined. The Red-headed is also built more fluidly, just a little shorter than the Red-bellied.

The Red-bellied and the Red-headed are both more opportunistic than other woodpeckers. Although they forage for insects on tree trunks and large limbs, they are also known to predate on the eggs and nestlings of other bird species, and occasionally catch minnows, small amphibians, and reptiles.



Their diets are high in mast (acorns, tree nuts), fruits, berries, seeds, and corn in season.

The Red-headed is also the most skilled flycatcher of the bunch, suddenly sallying out from a commanding perch in a snag to effortlessly snatch insects on the wing.

Northern Flicker

The Northern Flicker feeds mostly on the ground in short grass or soil where it probes and digs for its primary prey—worker ants coming and going to underground ant colonies.

In winter, ants retire several feet underground to be insulated from the elements and enter diapause, a state of suspended animation. By the time this occurs, most (not all) Flickers on Long Island will have already migrated to overwinter in southern Atlantic coastal states.

Still, some Flickers stay the winter here. Like other woodpeckers that winter here, Flickers will consume nuts, fruits, berries, and seeds throughout the winter months.

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is the only woodpecker on Long Island that is completely migratory. Sapsuckers are here from October through April. They migrate north of here from May through September.

Sapsuckers drill precise horizontal lines of holes (or wells) into the trunks of thin-barked trees to extract syrupy sap as their main food source. The sap also attracts insects that are dipped and eaten.

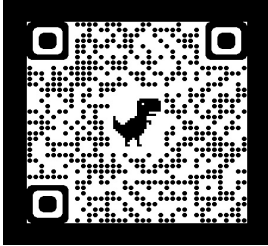
This adds another merit to this keystone species because the lives of many other migratory songbirds, especially hummingbirds and warblers, can depend on refueling at Sapsucker wells on their cross-continental spring and fall journeys.

Photo by Bill Belford. An uncommon species on LI, the Red-headed Woodpecker was the highlight of a North and South Shore Audubon bird walk at Jones Beach on October 19.

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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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