

South Shore

Skimmer



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New Grant Will Help Upgrade Our Native Plant Gardens

by Betty Borowsky

The South Shore Audubon Society maintains two native plant demonstration gardens: one at Tackapausha Museum and Preserve, and one at the Hempstead Plains Preserve. **We have received a Collaborative Grant from the National Audubon Society for \$1,000 to increase and diversify plantings, update and increase signage, and to increase the descriptive narratives of the plants and post them on our social media outlets.**

The **Tackapausha garden** is adjacent to an 84-acre preserve. The preserve serves as a narrow freshwater wetlands corridor through residential areas whose waters empty into the bay on the South Shore. The garden adds a small amount of native habitat to the existing wetlands, but has much more diversity than the wetlands. It is a magnet for pollinators, especially butterflies, and offers food and a nesting area for local and migratory songbirds.

The **Hempstead Plains garden** is near the Hempstead Plains Education Center, which is situated on a 17-acre grasslands preserve. The Hempstead Plains Preserve is the largest remaining parcel of the original grasslands that covered much of the center of Long Island.

The two gardens are located near the front entrances of the Museum and Preserve. This makes them focal points of interest and engagement with the public, because almost everyone who visits the preserves takes a moment to look at the gardens. They have become effective tools to promote planting native species.

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.

We hope to increase the gardens' effectiveness even more by planting new native species and adding appropriate identification signs, and then keying these to descriptive narratives for each species. Each narrative will contain the growing information, the habitat preferences, the specific benefits to pollinators and bird species, and the unique features of the plant.

Our gardening committee meets twice monthly during the growing season at Tackapausha, and about two times during the growing season at the Hempstead Plains.

We would love to have you join us. You don't need to know anything about gardening, and you don't have to come to every session, just as time permits. Even if you are an expert gardener, I believe you will learn something new every time you come.

Contact Louise DeCesare, Chair of the Native Plants Committee, at (917) 548-6974, or Betty Borowsky at (516) 764-3596 to learn more and to be added to our mailing list.

For more on the gardens, see page 5

Photo of Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Jay Koolpix



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

Scholarships for High School Students

SSAS awards four \$300 scholarships to graduating high school seniors who plan to pursue college studies related to the environment.

Candidates must reside on the South Shore of Nassau County to be eligible.

Applications available through your guidance counselor.

Scholarship winners are announced in June.

*Thank you to Kathryn Heinz
for her generous donation to
the Michael Sperling
Memorial Fund*

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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. **Please note that you must register with a text number to be notified of cancellations or other changes.**

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

April

Sunday 4/6: Jones Beach Coast Guard Station (Meet in parking area)
Saturday 4/19: Oceanside Marine Nature Study Area
Saturday 4/26: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)

May

Sunday 5/4: Massapequa Preserve (Meet at east end of train station)
Sunday 5/11: Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens | Happy Mother's Day!
Sunday 5/18: Hempstead Lake State Park (Meet in parking lot #3)
Sunday 5/25: Massapequa Lake (off Merrick Road)

June

Sunday 6/1: Mill Pond Park (Bellmore/Wantagh | Meet at gazebo)
Saturday 6/14: Massapequa Preserve (followed by the SSAS Annual Picnic in Brady Park)

No further walks until mid-August.

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](https://www.facebook.com/SSAudubon)

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land's wildlife and natural
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<https://wildlifecenterli.org/>

Spring Programs at the Freeport Memorial Library

**Avian Vagrancy:
The Sport and the Science of Rare Birds
with Shai Mitra**

Tuesday, March 11 @ 7:30 PM

Vagrant birds—individuals occurring far beyond the expected geographical limits of their taxa—have fascinated people for centuries. Long dismissed as the stuff of mere sport and as biologically meaningless accidents, these records are emerging as a valuable dataset. This talk begins with a discussion of the sport of finding and documenting rare birds, which is still more of an art than a science, despite technological revolutions in meteorology and surveillance. The resulting body of records constitutes a rapidly growing and increasingly accessible dataset that offers insights into important scientific questions: demographic trends in distant populations, the causes and consequences of long-distance dispersal, the biological properties of local sites, the forces shaping community composition, and, ultimately, a more rational approach to conservation.

Shai Mitra has studied birds in the northeastern United States and around the world for more than 40 years. He received a BA in Biology from Cornell University in 1989 and a PhD in Evolutionary Biology from the University of Chicago in 1996. From 1996 to 2000, he operated a major bird-banding station at the Fire Island Lighthouse on the South Shore of Long Island. Currently, he is an assistant professor of biology at the College of Staten Island, with research interests in the areas of avian ecology, evolution, and conservation. Shai is editor of *The Kingbird*, the quarterly publication of the New York State Ornithological Association; co-compiler of bird records for the New York City and Long Island region; chair of the Rhode Island Avian Records Committee; and co-compiler of the Southern Nassau County and Napatree, Rhode Island, Christmas Bird Counts.



Photo of Sage Thrasher by Bill Belford. Read Shai Mitra's report on this vagrant bird in the Great South Bay Audubon newsletter.

**Rescued Wildlife
with Bobby & Cathy Horvath**

Tuesday, April 8 @ 7:30 PM

Enjoy a meet-and-greet with live animals that the Horvaths have rescued and rehabilitated over the years under the nonprofit WINORR—Wildlife in Need of Rescue and Rehabilitation. Although unreleasable, these rescues serve as ambassadors and educators.

Bobby and Cathy have federal and state licenses to provide professional care for sick, injured, and orphaned wildlife. They receive no funds from federal, state, or county agencies, and are totally dependent on donations, grants, and fundraisers to pay for their daily operations. Visit WINORR on Facebook to donate.

**The Race to Save the World's Most Endangered Birds:
The Honeycreepers of Hawai'i
with Tyler Connell**

Tuesday, May 13 @ 7:30 PM

SSAS's very own Tyler Connell will talk about his experience last year working for the Kaua'i Forest Bird Recovery Project. The Hawaiian honeycreepers are some of the most genetically distinct, but also some of the most endangered, bird species in the world. One species, the Akikiki of Kaua'i, is down to one banded individual in the wild. But there is still hope: This year, a new, humane plan to reduce the mosquito population (the main vector of avian malaria, which is the biggest threat to birds in Hawai'i) will go into effect! Come join us to learn about the different honeycreepers on Kaua'i, the history of Hawai'i's biodiversity, and what's being done to save these unique and beautiful birds!

Tyler Connell is a field biologist and Long Island native who got his start by birding with SSAS. He has now done field work in nine US states as well as Australia.

More Birding Backpacks!

by Christie Tashjian

SSAS continues our mission to supply Birding Backpacks for Libraries. **Island Park Public Library** joins the Freeport, Hicksville, and North Merrick public libraries in accepting our backpacks. (See the Fall 2024 and Winter 2025 issues of the Skimmer.) Please visit the libraries to borrow binoculars and birding guides.

Two Scholarships Open to College Juniors, Seniors, or Graduate Students

by Betty Borowsky

We are very happy to offer two \$2,000 college scholarships this year: one funded by Evelyn Bishop and her family, and one funded by Jay Koolpix. Each will be awarded to a different college junior, senior, or graduate student who is taking courses to prepare for a degree in an area of biological or environmental science. This includes wildlife management, forestry, animal behavior, ecology, marine biology, oceanography, mammalogy, ornithology, or the field of sustainable and renewable energy.

To be eligible for the scholarships, applicants must be residents of one of the areas listed at www.ssaudubon.org/areas-we-serve.asp and/or attend a college in Nassau or Suffolk County.

Previous winners have used their scholarships to help purchase books, to pay for travel expenses to field sites, for specialized equipment, or other educational needs.

Applications are available at our website, www.ssaudubon.org, and are due by April 30, 2025. They should be emailed to either Betsy Gulotta, betsy.gulotta@ncc.edu, or Betty Borowsky, bborow@optonline.net, or sent by regular mail to Betsy Gulotta, 2 Anding Avenue, Merrick, NY 11566.

For more information and for assistance with application forms, do not hesitate to contact Betsy Gulotta or Betty Borowsky at the email addresses above.

Photo of Tree Swallow by Jay Koolpix



Don Riepe has 150 cedar bluebird/tree swallow bird boxes available for pick up free of charge. Contact donriepe@gmail.com

Fourth Annual SSAS Picnic

by Marilyn Hametz

Saturday, June 14 will be the Fourth Annual SSAS Picnic!

The picnic will be in Brady Park, at Lakeshore Drive and Front Street in Massapequa Park, at about 11:30 AM (after the 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, there will not be 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, mwhametz@optonline.net, 516-799-7189 or Betty, bborow@optonline.net, 516-764-3596 to RSVP so we know how many people will be coming or if you have questions.

Soldiers2Scientists at Hempstead Plains

by Michael Cohn

Soldiers2Scientists is a nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding veteran participation in outdoor community science projects.

From our work at Manassas Battlefield Park in Virginia, **Soldiers2Scientists has been asked to take over management of the nest box network at Hempstead Plains Preserve.** There are Tree Swallow, American Kestrel, Eastern Screech Owl and woodpecker nest boxes, totaling 15 all together, but several need some work. S2S is building a team of local veterans, university professors, and students to refurbish the boxes and ready them for the 2025 breeding, monitoring, and banding season.

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

South Shore Audubon Gardens

by Louise DeCesare

Thanks to a Collaborative Grant from the National Audubon Society, SSAS has additional funds to enhance and maintain both the Tackapausha and Hempstead Plains native plant demonstration gardens. Both gardens provide habitats for pollinators, birds, and native wildlife that are unique to their locations. The area under cultivation at the Tackapausha garden will be expanded with the addition of new varieties of native plants.

As part of our advocacy mission, SSAS plans to give public talks and tours of both demonstration gardens.

This will enable us to showcase how different native plant species help to create bird- and pollinator-friendly habitats. **We will post a QR code at each garden that will link visitors to our native plant directory on the SSAS website** (<https://www.ssaudubon.org/pdfs/native-plant-garden-at-tackapausha-museum.pdf>). Currently the directory lists the native plants in the Tackapausha garden. It will be updated to include native plant varieties unique to the Hempstead Plains garden, and expanded to include the new plantings at Tackapausha.

Each plant in the directory is listed alphabetically by common name. Visitors can easily match the plant signage at the gardens with information on the specific plant in the directory. Scientific names along with a photograph of the plant are provided for further identification. A brief description of each plant, its value to wildlife, and care instructions are also provided. We believe that making this information readily available further educates our visitors about the important role native plants play in supporting local wildlife. It is also our hope that this encourages visitors to create bird- and pollinator-friendly habitats by including native plants in their own home gardens.

We will keep you updated on our progress in the Skimmer. You can also visit our Facebook page for up-to-date announcements of public talks and tours. Stay informed and visit our directory on the website to help birds and pollinators by adding native plants to your own garden.

Please also consider helping us at either or both gardens. You don't need to be an experienced gardener. Just bring your enthusiasm and a few tools. We are a fun group of dedicated gardeners who are happy to welcome you. We meet at the Tackapausha garden on the first Saturday morning and the third Thursday afternoon of the month. Contact Louise DeCesare at Lmdecasare128@gmail.com or (917) 548-6984 for further information. Changes in our Tackapausha schedule and opportunities to help us at Hempstead Plains will also be posted on our Facebook page.

Black Plastic Woes

by Guy Jacob

Toss your black plastic spatula into the nearest garbage receptacle you can find! And while you're at it, dispose of all your black plastic kitchen utensils. They're likely to leach toxic chemicals into your food. As Zoë Schlinger, author and staff writer at the Atlantic, eloquently stated, "In a world of plastic consumer goods, avoiding the material entirely requires the fervor of a religious conversion. But getting rid of black plastic kitchen utensils is a low-stakes move, and worth it."¹

All black plastic is toxic and should be avoided like the plague. The black color is created by adding carbon black to the plastic. Carbon black contains polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), which are carcinogenic. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies carbon black as "possibly carcinogenic to humans."²

Discarded computers, phones, TVs, monitors, speakers, and appliances that contain toxic chemicals, including phthalates, flame retardants, and heavy metals such as cadmium, lead, nickel, chromium, and mercury, are melted down in the recycling process, mixed with other plastics, and turned into children's toys, single-use utensils, coffee stirrers, hot cup lids, cooking implements, insulated mugs, jewelry, garden hoses, and holiday decorations, among other items.²

A 2018 University of Plymouth study found **toxic chemicals present at up to 30 times the levels considered safe in 40 percent of the black plastic toys, thermoses, cocktail stirrers, and utensils tested.**³

A 2024 study conducted by scientists from Toxic Free Future and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, published in *Chemosphere*, found **high levels of cancer-causing, hormone-disrupting flame retardant chemicals in a variety of household products made with black plastics including food service ware, kitchen utensils, and toys.**⁴

This is why Andrew Turner, a biochemist at the University of Plymouth, warned, "Black plastic is particularly crucial to avoid!"

But there are currently NO government regulations covering the safety of recycled black plastic foodware. And don't hold your breath that any regulations will be forthcoming.

(Continued on page 7)

Conservation Update: From Fighting Climate Change to Opposing the Sands Casino

by Jim Brown

Over the past several months, SSAS has been engaged with numerous conservation issues, at various levels of government. Broad issues have included fighting climate change, protecting endangered and threatened species, reducing plastic pollution and the use of pesticides, encouraging the planting of native plant species, and saving important habitat for fauna and flora alike.

We have had success with some of these issues, and setbacks with others. **For example, the Climate Change Superfund Act, was passed by both houses of the New York State Legislature and signed into law by Governor Hochul.** The law requires major fossil fuel companies to pay \$3 billion for climate adaptation and remediation, money sorely needed because of disastrous impacts of the fossil fuel industry's greenhouse gas pollution New Yorkers have suffered for years. Unfortunately, another bill supported by SSAS, though it also passed both houses, was vetoed by the Governor. The bill, banning the harvesting of horseshoe crabs in New York, was designed to protect not only the drastically declining population of these crabs—"living fossils," virtually unchanged for 445 million years—but also to protect vulnerable shorebird species, such as the Red Knot and Piping Plover. These birds depend on horseshoe crab eggs for food. Hopefully, this measure will be introduced again and become law at a future date.

2025 will be a critical year for the global environment. Anthropogenic climate change continues apace, with negative impacts occurring stronger and sooner than anticipated by earlier scientific predictions. 2024 proved to be the hottest year on record, and average temperatures briefly exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels. The 1.5-degree mark is the long-term warming limit set by the Paris Climate Agreement, negotiated in 2015. The coming year will also be critical to our local Long Island environment—stresses and impacts related to rapid climate change and other factors, such as continuing loss of habitat and natural resources from overdevelopment.

A key element in fighting climate change is a rapid transition to 100 percent renewable energy, and central to that effort is the development of offshore wind. SSAS has long supported well-sited offshore wind facilities in the New York Bight, off the coast of Long Island.

Called the "Saudi Arabia of wind," this area is ideal for locating wind turbines capable of bringing wind-produced electricity to Long Island and further inland. Build-out of windfarms, along with electricity generated from the sun—solar energy—and other forms of noncombustible renewable energy, will eventually eliminate the need for fossil fuel plants, as the renewable sources come online.

Unfortunately, in recent months, a number of important offshore wind projects have been abandoned or delayed. Reasons for this have included unanticipated costs and supply chain issues. Perhaps the main reason has been the impact of opposition to these projects that has spread misinformation largely financed by the fossil fuel industry and right-wing political groups. The new administration in Washington has also decided that it will completely halt the development of all offshore wind development, as they will attempt to increasingly rely on fossil fuels to meet the nation's energy needs. "Drill, baby, drill!" is to be revived as a national mantra. President Trump is also removing the US from the Paris Climate Agreement, as he did during his first term.

SSAS will continue, in the face of these recent setbacks and reversals, to pursue well-sited offshore wind development. We realize how critical and important it is. Our chapter, in November, joined over 50 state and local organizations in urging Governor Hochul "to pull out all the stops to protect New York and assure we get the offshore wind energy we need, as well developed and as soon as possible." SSAS will be working with others this coming year to hold the Governor accountable to get these renewable energy projects completed, and done well.

A local issue of importance to SSAS has been the proposed Sands Casino development in the "Hub" area of Nassau County. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement was prepared by the developer, which SSAS reviewed. **Our board concluded that "South Shore Audubon Society is opposed to the Sands casino development as being too large and damaging to the natural resources around it. The Sands project should not go forward."** SSAS submitted over 30 pages of comments on the DEIS to the County. Negative impacts of the project on the aquifer system were noted as being particularly harmful. Also, we noted that the project, and any large project of this size, would severely and negatively impact the wildlife and flora of the natural areas surrounding the proposed casino/resort complex—the Hempstead Plains, Purcell Preserve, and the East Meadow Brook riparian corridor. We will continue addressing this critical local habitat issue as it progresses.

25 Cavity Nesters of Long Island

by Russ Comeau

Woodpeckers that breed on Long Island (Hairy, Downy, Red-bellied, Red-headed, Northern Flicker) are well equipped to chisel out their own nest cavities in dead trees (often called snags), dead limbs of live trees, or diseased trees because wood can be softer and easier to excavate than healthy trees.

The **Black-capped Chickadee** and **Red-breasted Nuthatch** can chip out their own nest holes too, but only in very soft, decayed wood.

No other cavity nesters on Long Island excavate their own nests in wood.

Small songbirds like the Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, and Tufted Titmouse are the right size to reuse many old woodpecker holes but may have to contend with each other and their nonnative nemeses—the European Starling and House Sparrow—for occupancy of an old woodpecker hole, a natural cavity in a tree, or a man-made nest box to call their own.

Medium to large birds like the American Kestrel, American Barn Owl, Eastern Screech Owl, and Barred Owl are often too big to be able to reuse many woodpecker holes. They tend to nest in appropriately-sized hideaways or hollows in dead trees, nest boxes, or wherever a suitable cavity can be found on a quiet building, barn, or other man-made structure. They may face competition for nest cavities from raccoons, starlings, or squirrels in the Great Crested Flycatcher's case.

The **Purple Martin** has become dependent on man-made colonial nest complexes. One style is a multistory, multifamily apartment-style birdhouse. Another arrangement is a metal "tree" with a dozen or more hanging plastic gourds that imitate the dried squash gourds that Native Americans used to keep these flycatching birds nearby.

The **Chimney Swift** has become dependent on chimneys. Only one pair may nest per chimney. They won't tolerate a second nesting pair but may allow nonbreeding swifts to roost in their chimney at night.

The **Belted Kingfisher** and **Bank Swallow** excavate tunnels leading to nest cavities in the dirt walls of bluffs or high vertical riverbanks, and eroding sea cliffs in the Bank Swallow's case. **Northern Rough-winged Swallows** don't excavate their own cavities but will nest in unused burrows at the periphery of a Bank Swallow colony, an empty kingfisher or rodent burrow, any cozy nook in a man-made structure, or any nest box that can be found.



Photo of Northern Flicker by Jay Koolpix

Monk Parakeets build an impenetrable stick structure with a roomy nest cavity inside, up against a man-made object such as a transformer on a utility pole. A flock of 5, 10, 25, 50 or more pairs may cooperatively maintain a massive stick compound, such as on a steeple or tower, with separate entries and nest cavities for each pair. It's not uncommon for an American Kestrel pair to occupy one of the nest cavities with a commanding view atop a large colony, which is tolerated by the parakeets because the defensive kestrels will challenge other raptors that come too close.



Photo of Eastern Screech Owl and Red-bellied Woodpecker by Jay Koolpix

(Continued from page 5)

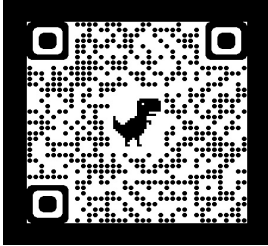
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1. <https://www.theatlantic.com/author/zoe-schlanger>
2. <https://www.beyondplastics.org/fact-sheets/black-plastic>
3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envint.2018.04.036>
4. <https://toxicfreefuture.org/press-room/first-ever-study-finds-cancer-causing-chemicals-in-black-plastic-food-contact-items-sold-in-the-u-s>

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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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