



EASTERN LONG ISLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY – *From the Barrens to the Bays*
Formerly Moriches Bay Audubon, established 1967

THE **OSPREY**

September/October 2015 — Vol. XL No. 5

You are invited to join ELIAS at

*A Celebration of
Birding for Birders and friends*

Wednesday, October 14 at 6 pm

at The Birchwood, 512 Pulaski Street, Riverhead

Cocktails, Dinner, Raffles and fun

WITH GUEST SPEAKER PAM SALAWAY

*Marvins, Mystics, and Moxie:
What Are Birders Really Looking For?*



The President's Corner

Fall Weather Reports

Byron Young

Serious birders may spend as much time watching the weather reports as they do watching birds. They are looking for the passage of strong cold fronts, associated with movements of low pressure centers, which produce big flights of migratory birds in the fall. In other words they are looking for bad weather which causes the migratory birds to settle out until the bad weather passes and more favorable winds will aid them on their migrations. I am not suggesting that we all become weather junkies but if we pay attention to the weather reports and wind directions we can enjoy some great birding in the fall.

It won't be long before the fall migration is in full swing. It is time to fill out your annual birding list and enjoy some of the spectacular movements of shorebirds, hawks, and song birds as they pass over Long Island.

The fall migration starts earlier than most folks realize, with many shorebirds on the move south in late June. The peak of the fall migration runs between August and October but migrations continue into December for many species.

Fall birding can be a challenge as the birds have lost their spring breeding plumage and taken on a more drab appearance. Attention to detail is necessary when observing so a search through the ever-present field guide can lead you to the right species. While birding at Connecticut State Park in early August we encounter two waterthrushes, one was easily identified as a Northern Waterthrush by its eye stripe and striped yellowish underside but the second bird had a much lighter underside which lead us to the Louisiana Waterthrush. A check of my *Sibley's Field Guide* when I returned home found that there was a whitish phase adult Northern Waterthrush. Another important distinction is that New York lies at the northern end of the Louisiana Waterthrush range.

Now that everyone is concerned about identification of fall migrants, it is time to go out and test your skills. Long Island and

our local area are blessed with a number of great fall birding locations. One can visit a local south shore park or beach area like Dune Road, Cupsogue County Park, Smith Point County Park, Wertheim Wildlife Refuge to name a few. For those more adventurous types, head further west along the ocean beaches to Robert Moses State Park, or Jones Beach State Park.

One of the reasons Long Island has such nice fall birding is that many of the birds migrate based on geography. They will follow the coastline, or a major river system (The Hudson River or Connecticut River) or a ridge line such as the Appalachian Mountain chain. Our main feature is the coastline which gathers birds as they migrate from the north, it is always a marvel to see thousand of swallows migrating

along the barrier beach, to encounter woodland birds by the dozens or watch as wave after wave of Goldfinch or Pine Siskins pass over head. This is all followed by the returning waterfowl, migrating oceanic birds and those species that will spend some or all of the winter around Long Island.

So plan your fall birding, join a walk, explore on your own, but do plan to spend some time out and about looking for birds. One other item we should be aware of is keep your eyes open for the migrating Monarch Butterflies. It would be nice if you could record your observation as these beautiful insects are in trouble and any information regarding their status would be helpful in protecting them.!

Fall Field Trips

Saturday, Sept. 12, 2015 at 8:00 am

North Fork County Park

Trip Leader: Eileen Schwinn

Join us at this 314 acre County Park, known as a fall migrating bird stop-over point. Hopefully we will see south bound warblers and other birds. The ponds, open fields, and shady woods provide the food and protection many long distant travelers need to continue on their journey. Meet at the building at the end of long driveway. Entrance is on Sound Ave and there is now a sign indicating the park entrance to: North Fork County Park. (see picture below) As a point of reference the entrance is just east of Church Lane. Contact Eileen Schwinn at beachmed@optonline.net if you need any more details.



Saturday, October 3 at 8:00 am

Robert Moses/Fire Island Hawk Watch & Surrounding Area

Trip Leader: Eileen Schwinn

Meet at the eastern parking lot (Lot 5), of Robert Moses State Park, within sight of the Fire Island Lighthouse. We will walk to the observation platform and hopefully see various species of hawks and raptors as they follow the winds along the coastline. Other migrating passerines can be found along the barrier beach and we will make other parking lot stops within the State Park to look for a few more goodies! Please contact Eileen Schwinn at beachmed@optonline.net if you are interested in carpooling to the location. There is a \$10 charge per car at the Park, good at all the parking lots. Empire Pass is also honored.

All memberships are now renewable in January.

Renew now for 2016!

Your renewal will keep ELIAS strong.

ELIAS Meetings

Meetings are held at Quogue Wildlife Refuge, 3 Old Country Road, Quogue, NY.
All are welcome, there is no charge.

Monday, September 14th, 2015, at 7:15 pm

Off the Beaten Trail

Bob McGrath

We are delighted to have Bob McGrath as this month's guest speaker. His presentation will look at some of Long Island's unique plant and animal diversity.

Bob McGrath was a co-founder of the L.I. Pine Barrens Society, and served as past president. He is a passionate educator, conservationist, birder, botanist and herpetologist. One of his current projects is writing a book about local naturalists (mostly self-taught) who have vastly contributed to our understanding of our natural surroundings...and so much more! They include Roy Lathem, Paul Stoutenburg, and four of our past members from the Moriches Bay Audubon Society era, LeRoy Wilcox, Dennis Puleston, Gil Raynor and Art Cooley.

To Our Membership of ELIAS

It was brought to our attention by some of our members that their mailing label was incorrect on the last issue of the OSPREY.

Our Osprey staff, after a thorough investigation into all aspects of our mailing process have come to one conclusion, that the mailing printer selected the wrong database to use in the mailing process for placing the information on the mailing section of the Osprey. We notified the printer and asked him to clear out any and all older databases from the labeling printer before using the new one we sent him for the latests issue of the Osprey.

If any member did not receive last month's issue of the Osprey, please notify us and we will mail one out to you. However, you can always read last month's issue online by going to the Eastern Long Island web site and looking at the archives and read it there. We always place the current months issue online for anyone to read.

Thank you for being a loyal member of Eastern Long Island Audubon supporting the good work we try to do in our small world and community.

Sincerely,
John McNeil
Membership Chairman

Monday, October 5th, 2015, at 7:15 pm

Members Night!

Organized by Bob Adamo

Surprise...it's you, or whoever among you, who wants to participate! Yes, I'm resurrecting the old "Members Night"! During the last couple of years, a few of you have asked about doing it again (not every year like before) and since there are many new members who have not experienced this "sharing"...why not?

The ground rules are short & simple – any member who wishes to share his, or her talents, will not be turned away, and indeed, are encouraged to take part! The only requirement. contact Bob Adamo a week ahead of our meeting, so the schedule can set up.

As in the past, whatever you are proud of is "grist for our mill"! I'm talking photos, any type of arts & crafts, poetry, story telling, readings, vacation experiences, family histories, cooking experiences (both successes & failures...if they're funny) or just plain whatever! I'm sure you get the picture, so give it a shot and lets have some fun! Please, don't hesitate to call me with any questions you may have.

I will be the last presenter that night (following many others, I hope) with a Power Point presentation on the trip my wife, two friends and I took to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji in 2005.

Contact Bob Adamo if you would like to participate. Email him at radamo4691@gmail.com or call his cell 631-905-7360 or phone 631-369-1958.

**Join ELIAS on
Wednesday Evening
October 14, 2015 to**

Celebrate Birding

with guest speaker Pam Salaway
at The Birchwood in Riverhead

Questions? Call Evelyn 631-727-0417,
Ridgely 631-288-3628 or Sally 631 281 6008,

Hope to see you there!

A morning participating in a Study of Saltmarsh Sparrow Mercury Exposure at the Pine Neck Nature Sanctuary

Kathleen Heenan

Volunteer teacher,
NY State Audubon's *For the Birds* program

Early in a morning in mid-July 2014, I arrived at the Nature Conservancy's Pine Neck Reserve in East Quogue, located on the east side of Weesuck Creek, to observe and assist with the "sparrow round up", in a research project designed to assess the mercury exposure of Saltmarsh Sparrows. Unexpectedly, a Clapper Rail was also caught in a mist net.

I met Joe Janssen the Director of the Long Island Conservation Land Program for The Nature Conservancy. By the time Joe and I made it out to the testing site the Rail had been sampled, banded and released. We had hiked through the high grass of the tidal marsh in knee length rubber boots, leapt over gullies, walked across wooden planks where the water was coming in from Shinnecock Bay and maintained our balance while avoiding sink holes partially filled with water. I wondered what had I signed up to do. This year, on my second trip, on July 6, 2015, a Rail's nest (see photo) was seen, as was a Rail, which quickly flew away.

This was the fifth summer since 2008 that the Long Island Chapter of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), together with the Portland, Maine based Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI), has tested this area's Saltmarsh Sparrows for mercury. Their research project is supported by a grant from the NY State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA). BRI is a not-for-profit organization that assesses emerging threats to wildlife and ecosystems. Their website is <http://www.briloon.org/wetlands>.

Saltmarsh Sparrows migrate here in May from the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida to nest, breed and raise their young. The conditions in the preserve are very conducive for the breeding of the Saltmarsh Sparrow. The tall marsh grass provides a good place to build a nest and the many insects and invertebrates are a ready source of food (I came home with many no-see-um



Kathleen Heenan records the data for Oksana Lane, program director for the Biodiversity Research Institute, at a testing station as the researcher measures the bird.

bites around my neck and forehead). The birds are nicknamed "mice" because of their behavior. They travel short distances walking along the ground in the marsh. The birds land close to their nests, but not right at them in order to keep the location of their nests secret. They lay up to three clutches of eggs during the summer. However, they are encountering problems, not only from the mercury that has leached into their food sources, but also from a loss of nesting habitat due to rising sea levels as a result of Climate Change and Superstorms, which are flooding their nests. They also suffer from the effects of human development.

Saltmarsh Sparrows can serve as important bioindicators of the long term health of a coastal ecosystem. Wetlands serve as sponges for pollutants. Wetlands, including salt marshes, promote the conversion of inorganic mercury to the highly toxic organic methyl mercury, a substance that affects the central nervous system

Caitlin gently frees the unharmed Saltmarsh Sparrow.

(particularly the brain). Consequently the behavior, physiology and reproductive success of the Saltmarsh Sparrows breeding in these high mercury ecosystems could be negatively affected.

In years past, the mist nets on any day's sampling would catch 15 to 16 birds. However, the last two years only 7 to 8 have been captured with the same level of effort. The mercury may be coming from the trash incinerator in Hempstead or possibly smoke stacks in the Midwest. Mercury levels are higher on the south shore than on the north shore where they have been tested in Wading River





Derek Rogers of The Nature Conservancy holds the mist net to capture the birds. Top right, a Clapper Rail nest hidden in the marsh. Lower right, Derek holds a Clapper Rail that had flown into the mist net.

(this difference in mercury exposure, in addition to some preliminary “chemical fingerprinting” of the mercury sampled from these birds, suggests that the local incinerator rather than Midwestern smokestacks, may be the major source of mercury in these marshes). Mercury in the atmosphere settles on the surface of a marsh, eventually binding within particles of the sediment (it last for years), is methylated by bacteria into the toxic organic form or methyl mercury and enters into the food chain: insects, invertebrates such as spiders and amphipods (small flat bodied crustaceans i.e. beach fleas), that birds as well as fish eat.

So how do they safely capture, test and release these Saltmarsh Sparrows? TNC’s Senior Coastal Scientist, Nicole Maher, with staff and volunteers coordinated the morning events. BRI’s experienced and skillful wetlands program director, Oksana Lane, did the on site capture and sampling. The blood and feather samples will be analyzed later this fall at the BRI’s mercury research lab in Portland Maine. I recorded all the data Oksana was gathering about the birds, including the bird band numbers, age, gender, mass etc.

The Saltmarsh Sparrows are captured by setting up mist nets on metal poles in the marsh. Then, six to eight people make a

semi circle and run through the tall grass flushing out the sparrows and driving them into the nets. Or, they just spot the sparrows flying just over the marsh and directly into the nets. Once in a net, a bird is carefully removed with maybe a quick look to see if it is male or female. Blowing on their bellies and seeing a bit of a bare spot, a brood patch, indicates a female. The birds are put in individual small cotton drawstring bags and brought to the “processing station”. We kept the bags in the shade and sampled the females first. We were concerned that they not be away from their nests for very long. The birds squirmed big time trying to get out of the bags.

Oksana examined each bird and banded it with individually numbered U.S. Geological Survey issued bands, checked for body fat (it was always zero), and determined age and sex. She also removed a primary wing feather (P1) (one that had grown in August of the previous year and would reflect the cumulative mercury level likely from the Pine Neck area) and a tail feather that had grown in the birds’ wintering location. Finally, she extracted a minuscule amount of blood. The blood sample would reflect mercury level over only the past two to three weeks. In addition, the tail, wing chord, tarsus, and beaks were measured and recorded. Removing one flight

feather will not have a negative effect on a bird’s ability to fly because the birds molt (or grow) all new feathers in August-September before migrating south.

Then it was time for release. Caitlin, the seasoned and competent daughter of Nicole, and I carefully held each bird in our hands with our index and middle fingers gently around its neck. I gazed at the fine narrowly shaped beak and mustard colored stripes on the bird’s neck. The Saltmarsh Sparrow is quite a beautiful and delicate looking bird. We put each bird in our flattened palm and each flew away.

After a slog through the marsh, carrying our equipment and testing station to capture more birds in a new location, we ate hard-boiled (chicken) eggs (brought by Nicole), garnished with salt from the pickle weed plant in the marsh.

This year’s move to a new area did not result in finding any more birds. Last year with the aid of an electronic bird caller we netted three immature Common Yellowthroats, which were also banded, sampled and measured.

Now the results: the mercury levels in the salt marsh sparrows at the Pine Neck, the Merrill Lake Sanctuary in Accabonac

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

Harbor and three islands off Hempstead, all on the south shore, are elevated. But, as indicated above, on the north shore at Wading River the levels are substantially lower. The mercury levels in the primary feathers grown during the breeding season at Pine Neck were significantly higher than in the tail feathers that had grown during the winter season in the southeastern states.

In papers published in Ecotoxicology and NYSERDA reports (Lane et al.) the concentrations of mercury in Saltmarsh Sparrows on the south shore of Long Island are some of the highest measured throughout the breeding range. TNC and BRI plan to continue to monitor the mercury levels in these sparrows in the local salt marshes on LI and in the Northeast in 2016 and 2017.

In 2013, Governor Cuomo signed a bill, the Mercury Thermostat Collection Act mandating that all mercury thermostats be collected and recycled rather than being discarded into the waste stream where previously they were burned in incinerators and the mercury released to the atmosphere. To further incentivize the collection of thermostats, contractors are paid to return them to designated locations. The goal for 2015 is to collect 15,500 thermostats in New York State.

I'm grateful to TNC for inviting me to participate in the mercury level testing at Pine Neck. I have learned much from Oksana and Nicole. Plus, it was quite a new adventure and I was quite proud of not falling down in the soggy, treacherous salt marsh.



Kathleen releases a Common Yellowthroat, unharmed, back into the marsh. No doubt one of the happiest moments in that bird's life.



2nd Annual SEATUCK BIRDING CHALLENGE



Saturday, September 26, 2015 5 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Join us to help promote bird watching and conservation across Long Island. All levels welcome. Fall migration promises large numbers of birds and a great diversity of species.

Raise funds for Seatuck Environmental Association or your own conservation cause while increasing awareness of Seatuck's conservation and education work.

- Teams of 3 or more people - register as a team or join one of ours!
- Special *Student* categories (No fee for adult chaperon/coach)
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- Barbecue reception for all participants - 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.
- Entry Fee: \$50/person, \$10/student (sponsorships available!)
- More information and registration at www.seatuck.org or contact Lisa Smith at (631) 581-6908 or lsmith@seatuck.org




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Summer Field Trips to the Beach

Tiana Beach to Pikes Beach along Dune Road

Sally Newbert

On Saturday, July 18, ELIAS members headed to the bay side of Tiana Beach. Our first birdy encounter, not what anyone expected, was a dead Greater Shearwater washed up on the beach. There had been several reports during the week on the NY Listserve that Shearwaters had been washing up on beaches. Also on the Listserve, Paul Sweet from the Museum of Natural History in NYC wanted some samples. At the end of walk the bird was collected. Eileen Schwinn, the walk leader, brought it to a freezer at Quogue Wildlife Refuge. Byron Young contacted the Museum and Kathleen Heenan and Clary Oldstead, ELIAS members who were headed into the city on Monday, delivered the bird to the Museum. Special thanks to them for their good deed.

In an email from Mr. Sweet received a few weeks later, he noted that although they may not be able to determine if the bird's death was caused by disease, often they find that wrecked seabirds are emaciated and starved to death. Judging by the smell it was probably dead for some time so the museum will probably make a skeleton from it.

The group went on the look over the collection of shorebirds that were on beach and easily observed them from the pier without disturbing the birds. We were able to observe the ever impressive Black Skimmers, many Common Terns, Least Terns, Short-billed Dowitchers, Piping Plovers with chicks, Semi-palmated Plovers, Oystercatchers. and a few more. The group then went to Pikes Beach, only be greeted by an impending thunder storm.



Watching the birds from the pier at Tiana keeps the birders at enough of a distance so that the birds go about foraging without being disturbed (photo bottom left). Photo bottom right is the unfortunate Greater Shearwater that had washed up on the beach and by Monday was in the hands of the Museum of Natural History in NYC.

On the flats at Cupsoque

Sally Newbert

On Saturday, August 8 the group flocked to Cupsoque County Beach and walked and waded over to the flats. It was a fairly large group of birders who came to the walk and I believe they all had fun working with the shorebird IDs, debating tern IDs while enjoying close views of Piping Plover, Oystercatchers, Common Terns while a Yellowlegs showed off its dancing moves. At least 25 and probably more species were spotted.



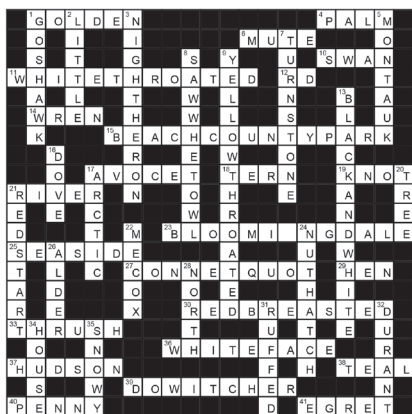
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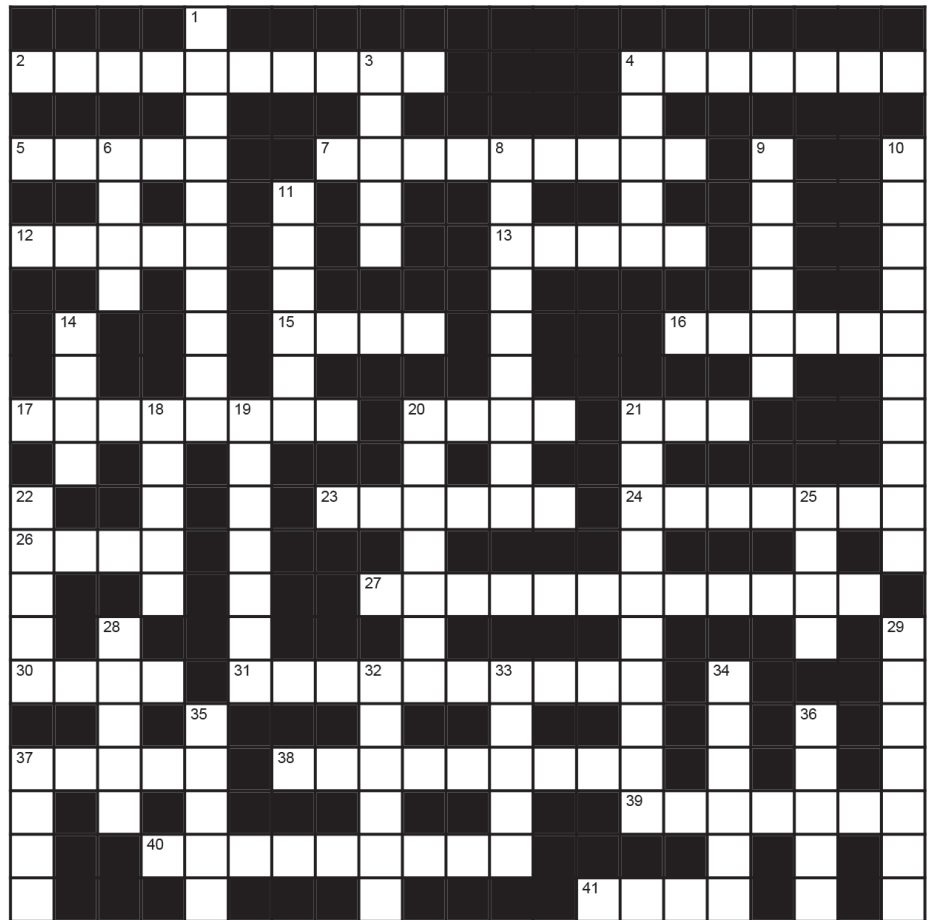
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**Answers to last issue's puzzle
 Summer Sightings by Tom Moran**



A Puzzle, the next best thing to being in the field??! Tom Moran



Across

- 2 Greater or Lesser _____
- 4 Boat-tailed _____
- 5 White _____ Ibis, good sightings at Captree this spring/summer
- 7 Long- or Shortbilled _____
- 12 da Vince would be amazed at the ones today (singular)
- 13 Perhaps this bird will appear at your window this Halloween to say "Nevermore"
- 15 Red-_____
- 16 A good filed guide
- 17 Roger Tory _____
- 20 American _____, runs on water
- 21 ____ Madness, but not basketball, for warblers
- 23 ELIAS's newsletter
- 24 John James _____
- 26 Black-headed _____, good views at Field 10 this January
- 27 _____ Preserve, on the North Fork
- 30 Black, Arctic, Roseate, Royal, even Sandwich this June are nice sightings at Cupsogue
- 31 Scott _____, author of "Of a Feather," and others
- 37 Peter _____, author of "The Art of Fishing," and others
- 38 Semipalmated _____, not the plover
- 39 American _____, smallest and most common local falcon
- 40 American _____, leave some thistle out
- 41 Common or Red-throated

Down

- 1 Was that a Downy or a Hairy?
- 3 Pink-footed and Greater White-fronted-, on the sod farms in Riverhead in January
- 4 Pied-billed-, for one
- 6 Fish _____, smaller than American
- 8 Ruddy _____
- 9 Eastern _____, says its name
- 10 _____ DEC, (2 words)
- 11 Yellow or Black-billed
- 14 Any one a group of small, nicely singing birds, often with a cocked tail
- 18 American _____, a pair nested at William Floyd Estate this summer
- 19 _____ Funnel, as a large flock of these migrating birds is called...
- 20 An exit before Robert Moses SP
- 21 Eastern _____, see-you see-yeer
- 22 Little _____, spotted at Gardiners County Park this year
- 25 Great _____ Heron
- 28 Similar to a Canada Goose
- 29 Ruby- or Golden-crowned
- 32 Medium sized sandpiper with a long bill, slightly-curved at end
- 33 _____ Point County Park, did you see the foxes by the FINS Tower?
- 34 _____'s Snipe, maybe see one at the North Fork Preserve
- 35 Little Blue _____, seen at Shirley Marina this year
- 36 Red-eyed _____, will sing all day
- 37 Often good to have while birding in buggy areas

Birding ain't easy

Bob Duchesne, Bangor Daily News

If God wanted birding to be easy, he wouldn't have created shorebirds. But here they come again, sneaking down our coast, defying identification. It's enough to make a birder switch to butterflies.

Shorebirds are a diverse group, and they have comical names, such as Dowitchers, Sanderlings, Knots, Turnstones, Curlews and Phalaropes. Not all birds found at the shore are shorebirds. Not all shorebirds are found at the shore. The American Woodcock and the Wilson's Snipe are classified as shorebirds, but you'd never find one on a mudflat. Red-necked and Red Phalaropes nest in prairie potholes but winter out in the ocean.

Thirty-eight species of shorebirds venture into Maine. Only eight breed here. One, the Piping Plover, is federally endangered, mostly because it likes to nest on sandy beaches, where it runs afoul of predators, dogs, people, Frisbees and dune buggies. One shorebird is state threatened. The Upland Sandpiper likes large plains of sparse vegetation, and most of those have been turned into subdivisions and shopping malls. Fortunately, they thrive on large blueberry barrens.

I've reached the age where I no longer study history — I merely remember it. When I first started exploring Maine's mudflats, the number of shorebirds was many times higher than it is today. Up to half a million Semipalmated Sandpipers flowed through Maine each year. Total numbers have fallen dramatically, perhaps because of climate change, perhaps because of habitat loss.

The shorebirds that pass through Maine pursue a risky strategy. Food is plentiful during the brief arctic spring. Shorebirds flock to the tundra to take advantage of this bounty and raise their young. In autumn, they return south, stopping at key mudflats along the way. Many of these important areas are in Maine. Shorebirds use these spots to refuel, feeding voraciously before continuing south.

Shorebird identification is a challenge because many of the birds look similar. Worse, they're usually distant, foraging

way out there in the mud. It's easy to tell the size difference between a Greater Yellowlegs and a Lesser Yellowlegs when they stand side by side. But that lone individual on the other side of the marsh could be either one. Only an experienced birder knows to look at the bill and compare the bird to itself. The bill of a Lesser Yellowlegs is about the length of the head. The bill of a Greater Yellowlegs is longer than the head. It's a clue that has saved me from embarrassment many times.

It's even tougher to distinguish between Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers. Despite the name, there's not much difference in bill length between the two. They are so similar that when I am guiding other birders, I resort to distraction as a tactic if asked to ID a distant Dowitcher. It goes something like this: "I think it's a Short-billed Dowitcher because — hey, look, an eagle!"

Fortunately, nature does much of the work for you, sorting out the birds by location. Long-billed Dowitchers mostly are out west. They may stray into Maine, but nearly every Dowitcher you see here is a Short-billed. If you see one that looks a little bit different, consult your field guide and good luck to you.

Nature also has sorted the other shorebirds for you by size, habits and habitats. Thirty-eight species may seem like a daunting number of confusing identifications. It discourages many birders. But only about half are actually on the mudflats. Upland Sandpipers are in the

blueberry barrens. Pectoral and Baird's Sandpipers like wet edges of farm fields. Purple Sandpipers forage only on rocks in winter. Solitary and Stilt Sandpipers favor small wetlands. Western Sandpipers are, well, western.

Next, you can sort them out by size. The smallest are Semipalmated, Least and White-rumped Sandpipers. They dominate the mudflats. Sometimes it's just a matter of figuring out the difference between these three diminutive species. Plovers are slightly bigger, but Piping Plovers prefer sandy beaches. The mudflats are thus left to the Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers. The latter is twice the size of the former, and it's slightly larger than the American Golden Plover, a mid-continent grassland species that sneaks onto Maine mudflats in small numbers. Add an occasional Killdeer, and you're really only sorting out four species of plover.

Most other shorebirds are larger. Sanderlings, Dunlins, Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstones and Red Knots stand above the peeps. Godwits, Willets, Whimbrels and Oystercatchers tower over those. Focus on learning the small ones, and the rest sort themselves out pretty easily. Or switch to butterflies.

Bob Duchesne is vice president of Maine Audubon's Penobscot Valley Chapter.

Used with permission of the author.

All of these shorebirds are also visitors to Long Island beaches and bays.

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North Fork Preserve County Park threatened with excessive development

**Eric Lamont,
Long Island Botanical Society,
President**

On 17 June 2015, a meeting of the North Fork Preserve (NFP) Suffolk County Park Advisory Committee was convened. Kevin Jennings, biologist for NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), and Eric Lamont, president of LIBS, were the invited speakers and they presented a map showing the recently (2013 and 214) mapped freshwater wetlands in the park. Over the past two years, DEC has been funding the mapping of extensive wetlands at NFP and intends to map additional nearby wetlands. Kevin explained that the vast majority of wetlands at NFP had not been mapped when the DEC last inventoried the area in 1993, but the regulatory process is now “in progress” for these wetlands.

Eric spoke of Long Swamp, 40 acres of which flows through the entire southernmost portion of NFP, and explained it has been locally known by that name for more than a century. Eric referred to accounts of Long Swamp from Roy Latham’s unpublished journal. The headwaters of Long Swamp lie just to the east of NFP on the north side of Sound Avenue. Water flows from east to west and increases in volume as more and more water enters the swamp from streams flowing down from the Harbor Hill Moraine. Currently, Long Swamp is not officially regulated by the DEC and Kevin reminded the committee that the process takes time. Eric also presented the results of the 2013 study of NFP’s rare ecological communities by ecologist Greg Edinger of NY Natural Heritage Program (see LIBS Newsletter (2014), vol. 21, page 10).

Nick Gibbons, Environmental Analyst for Suffolk County Department of Parks, Recreation & Conservation, stated that because the NFP wetlands are not currently regulated by the DEC the County is proceeding with plans to develop Long Swamp into “parking areas, picnic areas, and activity fields” and other wetlands will be developed into “playgrounds, basketball



PHOTO BY ERIC LAMONT, 20 JUNE 2015

*Suffolk County plans to develop this pond for active recreational use including paddle boats. The extensive blanket of lush green plants covering much of the pond bottom is a native bur-reed (*Sparganium* sp.). A 2014 LIBS field trip to the pond revealed it was bone dry on October 18th and vegetated with a rich diversity of sedges, rushes, and flowering herbs including wool-grass (*Scirpus cyperinus*), dense stands of spike-rush (*Eleocharis* spp.), several species of *Carex*, Canada rush (*Juncus canadensis*), soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), bur-reed (*Sparganium* sp.), water-primrose (*Ludwigia palustris*), among other species. Approximate size of the proposed pond is 4.5 acres.*

and tennis courts, and a spraypark.” Additionally, one large pond in the southeastern portion of the park (above) will be developed for “paddle boats” and another to the southwest will have a “fishing platform” constructed on its shoreline.

Suffolk County officials still appear uninformed that these ponds (“Paddleboat Pond” in particular) periodically dry up and the mucky substrate becomes blanketed with a dense cover of native vegetation. Some years the ponds are filled with water for 12 months and other years they are dry for 12 months. Some years the ponds are full in the spring and dry in summer; other years they are dry in spring and full in summer. Many ecologists now use the term “intermittent pond” rather than “vernal pond” when classifying this ecosystem.

Representatives from several other environmental groups attended the meeting including Eastern Long Island Audubon Society, Group for the East End, and North Fork Environmental Council. John

Turner, co-chair of the LIBS Conservation Committee, suggested to the NFP advisory committee that the County first conduct a comprehensive biological/ecological inventory, along the lines of what is now occurring at Plum Island, prior to any decisions relating to the numerous details to consider regarding the various elements of an active park. MaryLaura Lamont, chair of the LIBS Education Committee, asked if the County could legally fill-in Long Swamp and other freshwater wetlands. Nick Gibbons replied “yes” because the wetlands are not currently regulated by the DEC. Byron Young, president of Eastern Long Island Audubon Society, asked how long it would take the County to start implementing these development plans and the reply was four to five years.

The meeting was held at the Riverhead office of Suffolk County Legislator Al Krupski. North Fork Preserve County Park is located in the hamlet of Northville in the Township of Riverhead.

Annual Seed Sale Fundraiser

Saturday, November 7th from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

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