



# THE GREAT SOUTH BAY AUDUBON SOCIETY

A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

## Mission Statement:

*"The primary mission of the Great South Bay Audubon Society is to advocate for the conservation of habitats for native birds and other native wildlife on Long Island"*

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## THE SANDPIPER

# Changing Gulls in a Changing World.

by Matthew Furst



Herring gull foraging along shoreline of the Young's Island colony in Stony Brook. Photo by Matthew Furst.

Rarely do beachgoers make it clear to the world that these dive-bombing, chip-stalking, squawking birds are nothing but a nuisance. Despite seeing gulls flying among us every day, few people fully understand how human activity impacts the lives of these birds. Gulls have adapted to an unforgiving and rapidly changing world. While gulls may be well-adapted to an urbanized world, most people do not know the various ways we impact the health and behavior of these birds. Fortunately, developments in tracking technologies in recent years have enabled ecologists to address questions about gull-feeding behaviours.

For my master's research at Stony Brook University, under the supervision of Dr. Lesley Thorne, I GPS-tagged herring gulls from three colonies along the east coast that represented different levels of urban exposure. The most urban site was in Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge and the medium-level site was on Young's Island in Stony Brook Harbor. The colony that represented the most remote environment was on Tuckernuck Island, a small island off of Nantucket, Massachusetts. The results from our study were shocking and herring gulls at each colony traveled up to 45 km to feed. Gulls from Jamaica Bay flew up to 20 km offshore to presumably feed off of fishing discards and to active landfills in northern New Jersey.

Do you ever find yourself visiting the same deli each week to order your usual sandwich? Well, gulls have favorite eating spots too. Fascinatingly, many of the birds repeatedly travelled to the same exact feeding location day after day. The gulls breeding in Stony Brook Harbor showed another surprising behaviour. Even though the birds on Young's Island are living adjacent to Long Island Sound, none of the tagged birds feed in the Sound. All of the gulls from Young's Island feed in shopping centers, parking lots, inland parks on the north and south shores of Long Island. In contrast, all the Tuckernuck Island birds spent their time feeding at offshore shoals and salt marshes around Nantucket.

While gulls are thriving in an urbanized world, it is important to understand that it might come with a cost. Are these birds suffering health consequences for feeding on likely contaminated trash in landfills or discarded fish? Further research at Stony Brook University will shed light on these trends.

References: Furst, M., Veit, R. R., Hahn, M., Dheilly, N., & Thorne, L. H. (2018). Effects of urbanization on the foraging ecology and microbiota of the generalist seabird *Larus argentatus*. *PLoS One*, 13(12), e0209200.

# President's Message

## by Jody Banaszak

Hello my little birding friends! Hope you are all well and safe. I'm so glad the election is over and can't wait until it and Covid really are over. I went outside at 10am to look for something, (Nov. 7th) with a t-shirt on! I couldn't believe how warm it was. I saw and heard a bird that I couldn't identify singing a great song, directed to me. Then I went to my son's to do some work outside and heard and saw a red-bellied woodpecker calling to another one, and a blue jay with his squawk.

It felt so good to hear that in the peace and quiet, until some guy in a hot rod went down the street with his motor blasting. It really is calming and healthy to sit and listen to the birds. When I go out to fill my feeder, a little black capped chickadee comes out of nowhere to greet me! The same day, some kind of sparrow I think, came right to the feeder when I didn't even leave yet. I don't know what it was and don't think I will ever know all the sparrows. I think I know two. Some of our members know so many. I guess I have to study.

We had a nice cleanup at Brookside in October. About ten people showed up, including a couple from Nassau County, whom I've never met. We got a lot done with cleaning the pond and other debris that our little darling teenagers leave behind, and cleaning out brush and weeds, but still had a lot more to do. The County had a big limb from a tree over the shed cut and taken away. It broke from the last big storm we had. Thank you County! One of our Brookside "sitters" are snowbirds and have left for Florida. We could use a few more people to help out on Wednesdays and Sundays from 1pm -3pm.

Please email Steve at [steinbaumsteven@gmail.com](mailto:steinbaumsteven@gmail.com) if you can help. It doesn't have to be every Wednesday or Sunday. Even once a month is good.

We've had more people joining our Zoom meetings. I think some of us are getting the hang of how to sign on now. Hopefully we will be able to have our meetings at Seatuck soon. I know how you all miss my homemade chocolate chip cookies, Lisa's nice cakes and Annette's breads! We are also hoping to have our bird walks again next year. We haven't had any due to the Corona virus and bad turnouts. Keep checking our news blast and facebook pages. We've had a few council meetings via Zoom. It was hard to attend all of them due to the time frames. Hopefully we will be together again and back to normal. Enjoy your birds and nature and stay safe!

## DECEMBER VIRTUAL GATHERING

It has been our tradition for many years to have a party for our December general meeting, with everyone bringing food, drinks, pictures and stories to share. Not to be robbed of our festivities, we will be hosting a virtual party on December 17 as part of our general meeting.

Put on your party clothes and maybe gather with a few others to join us for the event. The evening will start at 7, with our special program on Avian Folklore. Afterward we will remain on the Zoom call for a physically distant but socially close get together to chat, share and visit.

This is a "bring your own booze" event! Gather with some wine, punch or soda and a few snacks and we will just have fun visiting. We miss everyone and hope to see you then!



## RECAP: Brookside Clean-up

### by Annette Brownell

The first Saturday in October was a crisp, lovely fall day to get together at Brookside for an outdoor cleanup. It was the first in person event that we have held since Covid turned the world on its side. We had a really nice turn out with about a dozen people showing up. We were so happy to get out and do something that we forgot all about our usual practice of having a sign in sheet in order to thank people. I am not going to start naming people, lest I forget someone.

We cut vines, freed trees and shrubs of invasive stranglers, cleared out poison ivy and those horrible sticker weeds from the garden along the driveway. The bushes look a little scary right now, but they really needed to be cut back in order to grow back in fully. We also gave the security cameras a really clear view of the driveway. Of course, there were bagels and coffee. We worked for about 3 hours and got a lot done – with so much more to go. The comradery was terrific. I was so glad to have the opportunity to catch up with people that I don't usually see except at our May dinner. Once again, I am reminded of how fortunate we are to have the members and friends we do. I know I speak for our whole board of directors when I say thank you to those who came and those who would have come if they found out sooner. You will not be without opportunity in the spring!

# Climate Change and Wildfires

by Jody Banaszak

Photo: Ed Hubbs

We've had a horrendous year with our weather. Hurricanes, wildfires, tornados, have done a lot of damage to us and wildlife. Melting glaciers, rising seas, larger fires and longer fire seasons are all due to climate change. Wildfires occur in the western United States all the time and climate change makes them even worse, especially this year. Olivia Sanderfoot of The National Science Foundation at the University of Washington Seattle did a study on how air pollution affects birds. She found that veterinarians and poultry scientists who did a study on captive birds found that smoke can damage lung tissue and leave animals susceptible to potentially lethal respiratory infections.

Some birds benefit from wildfires. Most wildfires burn unevenly, leaving behind different kinds of habitat patches for birds. For Black-backed Woodpeckers, newly burned forest provides food. Bark and wood boring beetles come in droves and lay eggs in the charred trees, and woodpeckers eat them when they reach the larval stage. There are other bugs that Dusky Flycatchers and Mountain Bluebirds hunt for in midair. Piliated Woodpeckers, Townsend's Warblers, and Golden-crowned Kinglets dwell in old-growth forests in search of new places to nest and forage. Sometimes birds start wildfires. When perched on power lines, they may touch two transmission lines at once and get zapped, starting an electrical fire. Hawks carrying snakes can touch power lines and start a fire. Some birds intentionally spread fires. Northern Australia raptors are reported picking up burning sticks and dropping them elsewhere to flush out prey like lizards and snakes.

Black Kites, Brown Falcons, and Whistling Kites are all known to spread fires intentionally for food. Rising temperatures and shifting rainfall patterns already threaten two thirds of North American bird species with extinction. Hopefully something will be done to combat climate change and make our country a better, safer place for humans, birds, and other animals.

## RECAP: ZOOM Events by Annette Brownell

As we navigate this season of not being able to host in person general monthly meetings, we have had and have planned a good line up of virtual programs.

In September, Enrico Nardone, from Seatuck Environmental, gave us an informative program on coyotes on Long Island. I was more than a little jealous to learn that there is a band of trained people that observe the coyotes where they are breeding and keep careful data on the slow but steady growth of this population.

I am personally excited about the fact that there are breeding pairs on Long Island, and surprised that I wasn't met with the same enthusiasm when I mentioned it to most people. Perhaps people are afraid because they don't know that much about coyote habits (like that they are really solitary, fairly non aggressive and not looking to confront you) or they don't understand how positive a return to nature it is for our environment.

Our October speaker was Tamson Yeh from Cornell Cooperative. Tamson shared her expertise on amazing spiders. We learned the different types of webs, how spiders weave them and how environmentally savvy spiders are. We learned about who bites, who is poisonous and who is helpful. As a gardener, I know that spiders are my friends. As someone with an imagination larger than her courage, I am trying to put into practice the things I learned and not run in terror or feel the need to kill something just because it has 8 legs.

I hope that more people will tune into our web speakers. It also gives us the opportunity to greet each other. The upcoming speakers are listed both in this newsletter and on our website.

Coyotes on Long Island, Spiders in the Home, and All About Owls were our three major Zoom events of the fall season. Much more to come this winter!



# How to Tell a Raven From a Crow

from National Audubon Society



American Crow

Common Raven

*These black birds may belong to the same family and look similar in some ways, but several distinctive traits help set them apart.*

You're outside, enjoying a sunny day when a shadow at your feet causes you to look up. A large, black bird flies over and lands in a nearby tree. You wonder: is that a **crow** or a **raven**? These two species, **Common Ravens** and **American Crows**, overlap widely throughout North America, and they look quite similar. But with a bit of practice, you can tell them apart.

You probably know that ravens are larger, the size of a Red-tailed Hawk. Ravens often travel in pairs, while crows are seen in larger groups. Also, watch the bird's tail as it flies overhead. The crow's tail feathers are basically the same length, so when the bird spreads its tail, it opens like a fan. Ravens, however, have longer middle feathers in their tails, so their tail appears wedge-shaped when open.

Listen closely to the birds' calls. Crows give a cawing sound. But ravens produce a lower croaking sound. We're back looking up at that tree. Now can you tell? Is this an American Crow or a Common Raven? That's a raven. The bird calls you hear on BirdNote come from the Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. To hear them again, begin with a visit to our website, BirdNote.org. Read on for more raven versus crow clues.

**ON THE GROUND** A raven's strut is often punctuated by a few two-footed hops

**BY VOICE** While crows caw and purr, ravens croak and scream bloody murder. Listen and compare the American Crow to the Common Raven:

**IN FLIGHT** Ravens ride the thermals and soar, whereas crows do more flapping. Also, as mentioned in the podcast, the raven's tail resembles a wedge, compared to the rounded fan-like shape of the crow's.

**UP CLOSE** Ravens have bigger, curvier beaks relative to crows. While both species have bristles at the base of the beak, the raven's are noticeably longer. Its throat feathers are also quite shaggy.

**LOCATION-WISE** Common Ravens are much less common than American Crows in the Eastern United States. Out West, it's a toss up. (Chihuahuan Ravens and Fish Crows are common in western states, but they're a whole different ID headache.) Look for ravens foraging in pairs; crows are highly sociable and will hang out in murders and communal roosts.

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Snow Buntings by John Gluth



Snowy Owl by John Gluth



Eastern Screech Owl with a Black and White Warbler by Lisa Nasta



Black swallowtail butterfly on a Cone flower by Janet Gremler



Yellow-headed Blackbird by Lisa Nasta

# CALLING ALL FRIENDS, MEMBERS AND NEIGHBORS!

for our 2020-2021 Annual Appeal



Photo: Dan Kristiansen

2020 has been a year like no other. With many of our social programs, such as our bird walks, public monthly meetings with educational and environmental speakers and our annual dinner and festival having been put on hold, Great South Bay Audubon Society has endeavored to continue bringing opportunities to our community via virtual programming, our newsletter and informative website. Although many programs have been temporarily halted, our expenses have not been.

Since the need to protect our environment does not take a break, we have also continued to partner with environmental groups such as National Audubon, The Nature Conservancy and The Environmental Protection League.

We look in hopeful expectation to be able to resume nature walks after the new year, and begin to add our other regular programming and events as the year progresses. The major project planned for this year will be to refurbish the Fran File bench at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum, to continue to honor the memory of Fran File, a woman who was a tireless supporter of both Great South Bay Audubon Society and nature.

## PLEASE SUPPORT OUR ANNUAL APPEAL.

Please fill out this form or visit our website at [greatsouthbayaudubon.org](https://greatsouthbayaudubon.org) to contribute.

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YOUR CONTRIBUTION MAY BE TAX DEDUCTIBLE AS GSBAS IS AN ALL-VOLUNTEER NOT-FOR-PROFIT 501(c)(3) ORGANIZATION. Please make checks payable to:

**Great South Bay Audubon Society** and mail to **GSBAS, P.O. Box 267, Sayville, NY 11782**

**Great South Bay Audubon Society Membership** Become a member of Great South Bay Audubon Society. Your contribution will support GSBAS conservation efforts, educational programs and our stewardship at Brookside County Park.

New Membership \$20     Renewal \$20     New Membership Senior (62+) \$15     Renewal Senior (62+) \$15

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