



THE **OSPREY**

Spring 2026 – Vol. LVIII – No. 2

Grasshopper Sparrows & EPCAL

Brian Moldashel

Take a walk along the runways at Enterprise Park at Calverton (EPCAL) in June and you're sure to encounter an incredible diversity of birdlife, from Turkey Vultures and American Kestrels flying overhead to Prairie Warblers and Chipping Sparrows flitting through the fields alongside you. Listen closely, however, between the hum of the occasional passing plane and the sweet song of Eastern Meadowlarks, and you might notice a distinctly insect-like buzz. You could be forgiven for brushing this off as one of the many background noises of summer, akin to the chirps of crickets and the drone of cicadas, but you would be overlooking one of Long Island's most enigmatic and unique breeding birds: the Grasshopper Sparrow.

Small and short-tailed, with a flat head and somewhat oversized bill, the Grasshopper Sparrow is a shy denizen of dry grasslands across North America. Clad in shades of brown,

buff, and white, this sparrow can be a sort of birder's Rorschach test: drab and unremarkable to some, subtly beautiful to others. The bird sports a warm brown back mottled with darker brown, black, and reddish streaks, a pattern and palette that combine to serve as the perfect camouflage in the dusty, grassy fields it calls home. Below, the breast is a uniform buffy brown transitioning to creamy white on the belly. The fairly plain face is dominated by a large, dark eye circled in off-white, with a narrow brown eyeline running back towards the nape and a beautiful warm orange spot between the eye and the bill. The top of the head is dark brown with a distinct pale line running down the center. Although Grasshopper Sparrows don't tend to fly around conspicuously, they will make short flights to and from perches on scattered trees and shrubs, allowing sharp-eyed observers to spot the bright yellowish patches on the

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Photo: Eileen Schwinn

Programs & Special events see page 3

Fourteen Spring Walks see pages 4 -5

Surprising origins of some of Long Island's Canada Geese see page 6.



**Saturday, April 25, 2026
from Noon to 3:00 pm
Rain Date April 26th**

**EARTH DAY
at QWR**

THE PRESIDENTS CORNER

2026 Birding

Byron Young

It is always exciting to begin a new year searching for local birds and rare winter visitors. I had hoped to make a trip to Montauk to see the sun rise and sample the bird population. However, my pillow and the chilly weather keep me closer to home. Starting the year off visiting several local spots (My backyard bird feeder, Artist Lake, the Carmen's River, Bellport, Robinson's Pond, Setauket Harbor, Mount Sinai Harbor, EPCAL, The Roanoke Avenue School, Edwards Avenue Buffalo Farm and Smith Point in quick succession). Encouraged by a mild January 7th day I decided to venture out along Dune Road in search of overwintering waterfowl, owls, among other birding treats.

Searching along Dune Road, looking for an American Bittern (No Joy), waterfowl, (No protection from the strong Northwest winds) I was disappointed with my search. Heading for Shinnecock Inlet hoping to find more accommodating birds, I was again disappointed because of the strong Northwest winds. Not giving up I stopped under the Ponquogue Bridge by the launching ramp to find a flock of several thousand Common Eider, mixed with some Brant, Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks, Scaup and several species of gulls. While doing a winter sit in the warmth of my vehicle, I had a Glaucous Gull fly in and land right in front of me, joining a flock of Herring Gulls. I reached out to Eileen to let her know of my find and to seek confirmation that my observation was correct. Upon arrival, Eileen confirmed my observation. Subsequently, we spent time watching the Common Eider flock move about the bay and debating the number of birds in the flock. I was more generous with my estimate (3,000) while Eileen was more conservative with her estimate

(2,000). No decision was reached other than this was a massive flock of Common Eider.

Feeling buoyed by this successful birding adventure, I looked to search out other birds only to be stalled by the extreme cold weather of late January and early February not to mention the snowstorms. Will March come in like a lion or a lamb? No matter March is always a tough month as we transition from winter to Spring. Spring will be here when you receive this Newsletter, I hope it brings pleasant weather and plenty of migrating birds for us to enjoy.

This Newsletter provides a list of upcoming bird walks. I suspect that additional walks will be added as we enter the spring bird migration season. Once the snow melts the American Woodcock should be arriving, entertaining us with their courtship displays. EPCAL is a good spot to hear their courtship display along with several other locations like the North Fork Preserve or a local farm field with some vegetation left on it. The Quogue Wildlife Refuge usually has a American Woodcock or two stopping by to rest and feed in the wet areas along the dam trail. However, you might stumble onto one of these small very camouflaged birds anywhere around Long Island.

Our local Osprey should be returning around mid-March to reclaim their nest sites. They will be looking to feast on the returning River Herring as they return to local streams to spawn. A prime location is the Peconic River in Riverhead. Over the past several years a large concentration of Osprey have captured River Herring at Woodhull's Dam on the stream that leads to Wildwood Lake. It is always exciting to watch as sometimes as

many a sixteen-Osprey are waiting their turn to catch a fresh meal.

Once April arrives, we are all thinking about flower gardens, returning songbirds and Earth Day. We will celebrate on April 25th from 12-3 pm with Quogue Wildlife Refuge. Hopefully there will be plenty of early migrating Warblers for us to view. Quickly following Earth Day and April, ELIAS, will host several bird walks looking for migrating warblers among the other migrants passing by on their way to nest in the boreal forests of New England, upstate New York, and southern Canada. The migratory season offers a variety of options from songbirds to shorebirds, and we will be offering walks that will or should provide an opportunity to view some of these birds.

I am going to stop here, as I have reached the warmer summer months, at least on paper. I feel better looking forward to the Spring and early Summer since there is still a good deal of snow on the ground outside. I hope that I have provided some hope as we look to survive this tough winter.

Good Birding!

Meetings & Special Events

Saturday, April 25, 2026
from Noon to 3:00 pm
Rain Date April 26th

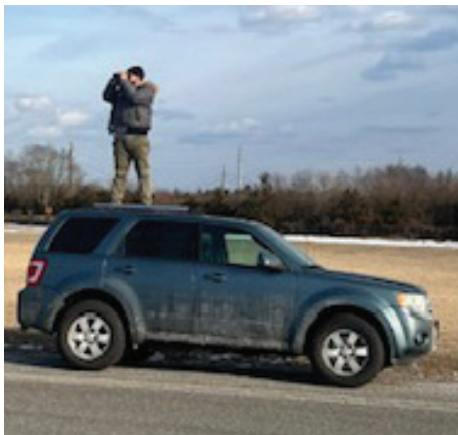
EARTH DAY at QWR

This celebration is offered by Eastern Long Island Audubon Society & Quogue Wildlife Refuge. A great day for all ages! Come and celebrate nature and our lovely planet at the Refuge! The day will include:..

- ◆ Guided birding walks
- ◆ Ambassador animals
- ◆ Face painting & crafts for children
- ◆ Environmental exhibitors
- ◆ Self-guided kayaking and canoeing on Old Ice Pond
- ◆ Native plant sale with the Long Island Native Plant Initiative
- ◆ Native sapling giveaway with Bartlett Tree Experts
- ◆ Hampton Coffee Company, and the *Land and Sea Smokehouse* food truck.
- ◆ Prescription Drug Takeback with HUGS, Inc & Quogue Village Police Department
- ◆ E-waste (old computers, televisions, phones etc) with EcoTech Management
- ◆ Reduce, Reuse, Recycle! Bring the below items on the day of the event for proper disposal, repurposing, or recycling. Household Items in good to excellent condition (furniture, working appliances, unopened paint cans) for the Habitat for Humanity Suffolk ReStore. Check day-of acceptance of larger furniture/ building materials by emailing a photo to

tom@habitatliny.org

No reservations necessary for Earth Day Celebration



Monday Evening
May 4, 2026 at 7 pm

Aidan's Big Year in Suffolk!

Aidan Perkins

Aidan started birding when he was 11 after watching the movie "The Big Year". Then at 23 in 2025 Aidan took on one of birding's greatest challenges, and attempted a big year of his own within Suffolk county. His goal — beating the record of 305. Come listen to Aidan talk about the trials and tribulations of this long but fruitful year of birding in Suffolk county.

A big year is a year-long quest to identify as many bird species as possible within a set boundary. You can do it in your yard, your local patch, over a state, county, a country, or the world. During a Big Year, there are few rules, but in general you must see or hear the bird, and you need to be sure of your identification. Getting a photo is good but not necessary.

Monday Evening
June 4, 2026 at 7 pm

Take a Walk Around Quogue Wildlife Refuge

Enjoy the warmer temperatures and the later sunset with this evening walk around QWR. We will be looking for resident and breeding birds.



Zebra Chaos ...at the night hide/Janis Hurley

Monday Evening
July 6, 2026 at 7 pm

Life on the Wild Side... The Best of Kenya

Discover the birdlife and extraordinary animals of Kenya with Wildlife Photographer, Janis Hurley. Lake Nakuru National Park has over 400 bird species. Other wildlife, include Leopards and Rothchild's Giraffes, located in the Great Rift Valley. The landscape revolves around an alkaline soda lake with acacia woodlands.

The northern Masai Mara ecosystem is a landscape of vast golden savannahs and lone trees with immense dramatic skies; a land of big cats. Amboseli National Park is overlooked by the iconic Mt. Kilimanjaro, and hosts a population of African Elephants. Finally, we will experience a helicopter flight over Lake Magadi in the Great Rift Valley and what it's like in a night hide at Lantorre Lodge, with animals approaching the waterhole.

You will leave the presentation with an intimate view of Bird and Animal life in Kenya...

QWR is renovating. This meeting will be held take place at Moriches Bay Recreation Facility 313 Frowein Road Center Moriches, NY 11934. It is just west of Center Moriches High School.

Spring Bird Walks

Saturday, April 11, 2026

Indian Island County Park

Cross River Drive - Route 105.

Follow the signage for the Park on Route 105

Led by Eileen Schwinn

We will be meeting at 8:30 am in the large parking lot, across from the restrooms, which you will see a short distance past the check-in kiosk. From there, we will follow the main road past the campgrounds, and park near the trailhead of the Rock Garden Trail. This trail takes us through woods and along the shoreline. We will be on the lookout for early warblers, woodpeckers and song birds along the way. The walk back is along Creek Road, and, if there's time, we will explore the Picnic Area - a peninsula along Terry's Creek and Flanders Bay. The walk will be approximately 1.5 miles along even ground. Please register with Eileen Schwinn (beachmed@optonline.net) for this Field Trip.

Saturday, May 2, 2026

North Fork County Park

Led by Brian Moldashel

Meet at 8:00 am in the main parking lot at the northern end of the entrance road at 5330 Sound Avenue in Aquebogue, just east of Church Lane. We will cover a variety of habitats over approximately two miles of easy hiking, including wetlands, woodlands, and open fields. From warblers to raptors, colorful breeding birds to exciting migrants, this park has it all! Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip: brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Sunday, May 3, 2026

Broad Cove Preserve

Overlook Drive, Aquebogue

Led by Rosemary Valente

Join us on Sunday, May 3rd at Broad Cove Preserve in Aquebogue. Meet in the parking area off Hubbard Rd, just east of Meetinghouse Creek, at 8:00 am. Please contact Rosemary Valente at 631-882-2464 (text or call) to register for this walk through a former duck farm with good trails and varied habitats.

Saturday, May 9, 2026

Hubbard County Park

Led by Brian in Moldashel

Meet at 8:00 am at the trailhead on Red Creek Rd. just off of Flanders Rd/Rte. 24, in Hampton Bays. This expansive park in the heart of the Pine Barrens is a mix of pine/oak forest, tidal creeks, beetle-ravaged clearings, and salt marsh at the edge of Flanders Bay. Past trips here have encountered over sixty species of bird in one walk, including such rarities as Red-headed Woodpecker and Broad-winged Hawk. The roughly 1.5 mile trail is flat, but can be muddy near the bay, so please wear appropriate footwear. Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip: brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Saturday, May 9, 2026

Wertheim NWR

340 Smith Road, Shirley

Led by Tom Moran

Meet at 8:00 am, at the trail head (near the picnic tables) on **World Migratory Bird Day**. A variety of habitats will be hosting migrating song birds, which will be pointed out by the ELIAS Leader. No registration is needed for this event.

Sunday, May 10, 2026

Manorville Hills County Park

Led by Tom Moran

Meet at 8:00 am in the first parking area from the main entrance off Rt 111. There is an overflow lot past this lot if needed. Primarily forested habitat where we'll find local residents and migrants. Distance covered is about 2.5 miles and should take about 3 hours. Contact: Tom Moran, tjmoran101@gmail.com.

Wednesday, May 13, 2026

Terrell River County Park

Led by Tom Moran

Meet in the parking lot across from Kaler's Pond, 43 Montauk Hwy, Center Moriches at 8:00 am. The walk is through forested habitat along the Terrell River to Moriches Bay which will permit us to see some forest and shore species. The walk is about 4 miles and should be about 3 hours. Contact Tom Moran, tjmoran101@gmail.com.

Friday, May 15, 2026

Bayard Cutting Arboretum

440 Montauk Highway, Great River

Led by Tom Moran

From 9:00 -12:00

Meet at 9 am in the main parking lot near the small gate house. The Arboretum includes paths through woodlands, a farm and gardens, along the Connetquot River and marshes. The diversity of habitat allows us to find a variety of spring birds. Contact: Tom Moran, tjmoran101@gmail.com.

Saturday, May 16, 2026**EPCAL****Led by Brian Moldashel**

Meeting at 8:00 am at Veteran's Memorial Park Parking Lot, on Route 25 in Calverton, this trip will follow the biking/hiking trail south toward the western runway and involve roughly 2.5-3 miles of easy walking. Eastern Meadowlark and Grasshopper Sparrows are summer nesting birds here, with warblers, vireos, and other migrating birds hopefully stopping by for us to see. Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip: brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Sunday, May 17, 2026**Bald Hill/Hunters Garden****Led by Eileen Schwinn**

The walk begins at 8:15 am, meeting at the trailhead of Bald Hill, Route 51, Northampton. Always a spring favorite, we start at Bald Hill, due to DEC authorized Wild Turkey Hunt Season. Warblers and other migrating and summer resident/nesting birds are usually vocal and exciting to see in the old woods and vernal ponds of the walking trails – approximately 1.5 miles. We will then move to Hunters Garden, which is located nearby. Please register with Eileen for this trip (beachmed@optonline.net)

Wednesday, May 20, 2026**Quoque Wildlife Refuge****3 Old Country Road, Quoque****Led by Eileen Schwinn**

Meeting near the animal rehabilitation cages, 8:15 am, this walk to the North Pond will bring us through pine woods, as well as along the raised boardwalk, to hear and see the birds which use the Refuge as a fueling-up and resting stop as they travel north to their summer nesting areas. We will cover 1-1.5 miles on the flat, wide paths of the Refuge. Please register with Eileen for this trip (beachmed@optonline.net)

Thursday, May 21, 2026**Shoreham Beach Town Park****143 N Country Rd, Shoreham, NY 11786****Led by Tom Moran****8:00am -12:00pm**

Park along the road inside the gate. We'll walk along the road to the beach looking for spring migrants. We'll have a very good chance of hearing the beautiful song of the Wood Thrush. The road is bounded on each side by forest with low shrubs. At the end of the road is a view of the Long Island Sound. The walk is approximately 1.8 miles. Contact: Tom Moran, tjmoran101@gmail.com

This is a Town of Brookhaven facility. Visitors are usually restricted to Town of Brookhaven residents with permits only. ELIAS has obtained permission for non residents to attend without charge but they will be required to register in advance, see the note below. Town residents will need to obtain an annual Town virtual permit, refer to the link provided below.

Town of Brookhaven residents will need to have paid for their annual passes prior to the walk. Here is the link for the Brookhaven residents to purchase their town stickers. (this was provided from a Town email, I believe the stickers have been replaced by virtual/online permits). <https://www.brookhavenny.gov/223/Parking-Information>

Non-Brookhaven residents will need to provide their license plate numbers so they can be put in the system for the day. Please contact me for further information.

Saturday, May 23, 2026**Cupsogue County Park****Led by Brian Moldashel**

Meet at 8:00 am at the western end of the parking lot on Dune Rd. Although known for its incredible shorebird diversity –much of which we will hope to experience ourselves– this park is also an excellent place to experience the visual spectacle of spring migration, as its location on the barrier beach serves as both a funnel and refuge for migrating songbirds and swallows. We will search the pines along the dunes and keep our eyes to sky while making our way out to the famous mudflats on the bay side in a walk that will cover less than a mile, but will involve some walking on sand and perhaps getting your feet wet. Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip: brian.moldashel@gmail.com .

Looking Ahead to June**Sunday, June 14, 2026****ELIAS & South Fork Natural History Museum (SoFo)****377 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton**

SoFo & ELIAS join together for the Eric Salzman Memorial Walk Meet at 8:00 am near the trail head, for a walk along the mowed path around open fields and the bordering woods. The approximately 1.5 mile walk will allow us to hear and see nesting warblers and other song birds. Please register with South Fork Natural History Museum on their website: SoFo.org/Calendar, and click on the listing for this free walk.



The surprising origins of some of Long Island's Canada Geese

Brian Moldashel

Bird migration is, without a doubt, one of the most incredible natural phenomena on this planet, and something that those of us who live on Long Island are fortunate to be able to observe throughout the seasons. There is an extra level of wonder in seeing a Blackburnian Warbler in May knowing that, only a few weeks earlier, it was chowing down on insects high in the rainforest canopy of Peru (see the Spring 2025 edition of *The Osprey* for more on this bird's amazing journey). Much the same can be said of a Snowy Owl in December, who may spend the winter hunting on South Shore beaches before returning north to pass the rest of the year in the wilds of arctic Canada. It can be easy to forget, however, that even common species undertake great journeys to arrive on our doorstep. This fact was brought into stark relief for me by a chance encounter I had with a Canada Goose last December, ensuring I would never look at the species the same way again.

It all began with a decidedly uncommon goose. In early December, Patrice Domeischel found a Ross's Goose feeding among several hundred Canada Geese on one of the lawns of the Flowerfield complex

in Saint James. A smaller and much rarer cousin of the familiar Snow Goose, this bird undertakes its own incredible migration largely through central North America as it transits between its breeding grounds around the Arctic Ocean and its wintering grounds in the southern United States and northern Mexico, only occasionally straying as far east as Long Island. Having never seen one before, on December 5th I headed to the North Shore to join the numerous other birders attempting to track this little celebrity down. My heart sank when I first arrived at Flowerfield and found only a handful of geese hanging out in one of the small local ponds – the Ross's Goose not among them – and things didn't get any better when I widened my search to include the nearby farm fields and Stony Brook Harbor. After an hour of searching elsewhere, I returned to the Flowerfield area and was ecstatic to see the large pond across the street covered in Canada Geese, with a little brilliant white goose floating squarely in the middle of them. I quickly drove into Flowerfield to alert some of the other birders who were on the hunt that morning and ended up giving several of them a ride back to Mills Pond, where we all got excellent views of the Ross's Goose as it quietly fed

and rested among its larger neighbors.

My goal accomplished, I turned my attention to the ever-growing flock of Canada Geese in the hopes of trying to estimate their numbers. Curiously, one was not like the others. In all respects a normal Canada Goose, this one was sporting a short but bright yellow tube around its neck, with three letters printed on it that I couldn't quite make out with my binoculars. I fired



off a few shots with my camera to scrutinize when I got home. That night, I downloaded the pictures onto my computer and, having generally little confidence in my photographic abilities, was surprised to find that I had one shot that showed the letters well enough to read: GXF. I found this incredibly exciting, as I knew that I had enough information to submit to the United States Bird Banding Laboratory, who would be able to tell me more about this particular goose.

Part of the United States Geological Survey, the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) has, for more than a hundred years, supplied and tracked all of the metal bands used in bird marking programs across the country. The data collected both from the bird banding process itself – such as sex, age, and weight of captured birds – as well as from reports of banded birds seen or found after their release, have been immensely important to increasing our knowledge of avian distribution and lifecycles. Although this neck collar wasn't a traditional bird band, I figured the BBL would have some information on it, so I went to their website and, sure enough, under "auxiliary markers" was an option for a yellow neck collar with black letters. I entered all of the information I had for the encounter and clicked "submit", figuring someone would get back to me shortly with a few details about a bird banded somewhere in the eastern U.S. or Canada.

A month later, I received a response from the BBL indicating that the neck collar was not part of any federal banding program and thus they did not have any detailed information for it. They did, however, copy the bander on the email, and the next day I received an email from Anthony Fox, a researcher at Aarhus University in Denmark. In what was easily the nicest and most detailed message I've ever received from a stranger, he explained that GXF, a female Canada Goose, was already an adult when she was banded in July 2022, not in the United States, not in Canada, but in Greenland! I was floored. Relatively speaking, I suppose Greenland isn't that much farther than parts of the

Canadian Arctic, but it still struck me as being beyond the normal range of this species, and certainly quite a distance from the North Shore of Long Island.

As it turns out, I was right to be surprised, for Greenland has only recently become a significant breeding location for Canada Geese. Prior to the 1980s, the species was an uncommon visitor to the western coast of the island, and was well-outnumbered in the summer by the native population of Greater White-fronted Goose (Fox et al. 2011). Aerial population surveys conducted in this area showed an exponential rise in Canada Goose numbers throughout the 1990s and 2000s, raising questions as to where these geese were coming from, where they were going in the non-breeding season, and what their impact would be on the local goose species. To this end, in 1992, a banding program was started to track these new visitors, in which a handful of geese would be rounded-up while they were molting their flight feathers – and thus unable to fly – and then sexed and aged, before finally being marked with yellow neck collars and released. An offshoot of an ongoing European project monitoring Greater White-fronted Geese, the program continues off and on to this day, and is partially funded by the USDA to survey wildfowl populations for avian influenza. It's through this program that GXF and a number of others were collared in the summer of 2022.

The data obtained from this program provide incredible insight into the migratory habits of not just the Greenland population, but Canada Geese as a whole. For instance, it appears that the overwhelming majority of Canada Geese breeding in west Greenland belong to the interior subspecies, whose closest breeding area to Greenland is over 800 miles to the south in northern Québec (Fox et al. 2011). Why would these birds risk the dangers of traveling such a long distance to potentially start breeding even later than they normally would? Incredibly, studies have shown that the Greenland-breeding geese not

only begin nesting at the same time as their counterparts in Québec, but they actually have larger average egg clutches (Fox et al. 2011). This is likely due to a climatic quirk: the average temperature in west Greenland in May is nearly 4 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than it is in northern Québec during the same period. Female geese arriving in Greenland are thus able to recover from the long flight from their wintering territories more quickly than those who stay farther south (Fox et al. 2011). Moreover, since there are substantially fewer predators in west Greenland, namely black bears, geese who breed there likely enjoy greater nesting success than those who remain in Québec. This combination of factors has allowed the numbers of Canada Geese breeding in Greenland to increase from a few in the 1990s to more than 40,000 by the early 2010s (Fox et al. 2011).

Equally revealing – and perhaps more interesting to us Long Islanders – is where these geese go when they leave Greenland. As it turns out, unlike other interior Canada Geese, who generally migrate away from coastal North America and spend the winter largely in the mid-Atlantic states and the Carolinas, the Greenland-breeding birds have adopted the migratory habits of their cousins, the Atlantic subspecies of Canada Goose, who breed from Newfoundland and Labrador down into northern Maine, and winter throughout the northeastern United States (Stroud et al. 2018). Most curiously, a substantial number of the Greenland-collared geese appear to spend most, if not all, of the winter here on Long Island, many as a part of the large flocks of geese that occur on the ponds and soccer fields of the North Shore between Stony Brook and Syosset. Indeed, of the 21 Greenland-collared Canada Geese seen or recovered in 2025 alone, 14 spent at least some part of the last three years on Long Island (Fox, pers. comm.). For example, after she was collared in Greenland in July 2022, GXF was next spotted four months later by Dick Cartwright at the Stony Brook Mill Pond. And she wasn't alone! Among

the other Canada Geese on the pond that day was another bird that had been collared at the same time as her, GXA. Both went undetected during the winter of 2023-2024 before they were seen separately on Mills Pond in St. James in December 2024. The fact that I then saw GFX on this same pond one year later is a testament to the remarkable fidelity that Canada Geese exhibit towards sites that are important to their yearly cycle, and the data from other birds collared in Greenland illustrate this in fascinating detail.

For instance, besides returning to many of the same breeding and non-breeding locations every year, the Greenland-collared Canada Geese utilize many of the same stopover points on their journey. This is especially apparent in the movements of two of the most well-reported individuals from the project, GY2 and GY5. Both were collared at the same time as GFX in July 2022 and were then resighted – along with seven other Greenland - collared geese – that October at a pair of small water treatment ponds over 1500 miles away in New Brunswick, Canada (Fox, pers. comm). These two geese have since been reported from that same site every single fall since 2022! This underscores how important even the smallest pieces of habitat are to a migratory species such as the Canada Goose (not to mention the fact that they must have a pretty darn good sense of direction...). Both birds have also overwintered on Long Island for at least part of each winter since January 2023, although they have yet to be reported this season as of the writing of this article in January 2026.

Although the collaring project has answered a number of questions concerning Greenland-breeding Canada Geese, there is one unanswered one that looms large in my mind: why here? Why would these geese, who breed in one of the most remote and austere parts of the world, and who could have their pick of any number of safe, food-rich overwintering sites, choose to travel thousands of miles to spend the

cooler months in some of the most suburban parts of Long Island? I can only speculate. Perhaps I'm not giving enough credit to our mild climate and the associated nutrients to be gleaned from largely unfrozen ponds and lawns. As evidenced by the thousands of geese who frequent Long Island in winter – to say nothing of the many hundreds who surely live here year-round – there must be something about this island that appeals to them. In any case, the next time you see a group of Canada Geese, give some thought as to where they might have come from. It may be farther than you think!

Acknowledgments & Works Cited

This article wouldn't have been possible without the information and studies provided by Tony Fox. If you see a banded bird, go to www.reportband.gov to report your sighting to the United States Bird Banding Laboratory. For more information on the status of Canada Geese breeding in Greenland, please consult the sources listed below:

Fox, A. D., Mitchell, C., Weegman, M. D., Griffin, L. R., Stroud, D. A., & Francis, I. S. (2013). Potential factors influencing increasing numbers of Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* in west Greenland. *Wildfowl*, 61, 30–44. Retrieved from <https://tidsskrift.dk/Wildfowl/article/view/153551>

Stroud, D. A., Cromie, R., Crowe, O., Denny, B., Stroud, R. A., Thomas, H., ... Fox, A. D. (2018). Annual movements of Interior Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* interior marked in Greenland, revealed by recoveries and re-sightings during 1992-2018. *Wildfowl*, 68, 70–83. Retrieved from <https://tidsskrift.dk/Wildfowl/article/view/154445>



2026 I BIRD NY Challenge

In 2017, NY State Department of Environmental Conservation began its I BIRD NY program, and it continues this year! The purpose is to promote - at no cost to the participants - a chance to connect with nature in a fun way! As in the past, the Challenge is open from 1 March through 1 November and open to all ages and abilities, with two divisions - youth and adult. Just identify 10 species of birds, note where and when you saw them, and submit your findings to the DEC by November 18, 2026. Forms can be found on the DEC I BIRD NY webpage. Each participant who completes the Challenge will receive a Completion Certificate and a commemorative patch. A Beginning Birder Handbook is also available on the website, as well as a listing of NY State Birding Trails. Over 1500 participants entered the Challenge last year - maybe this will be the first year for you! Warning - this Challenge can become addictive!!



For more information visit:
ibirdny.org

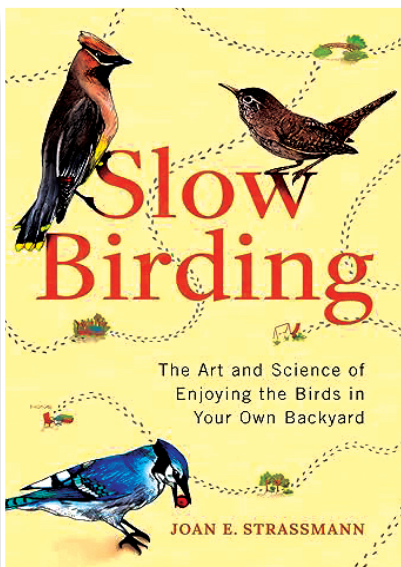


Book Reviews

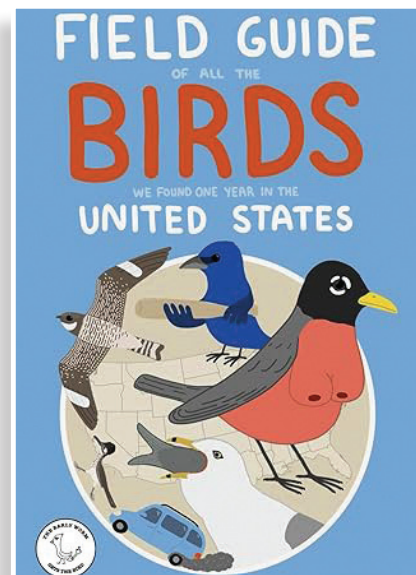
Written on an Epic Snow Day

Eileen Schwinn

Well, before the power goes out here, and before I head out to help my husband move some of the Epic Snow which somehow has filled our walks and driveway, I thought I'd spend a little time sharing with you two books I've recently read. And, boy, they couldn't be more different from each other! The first book, "Slow Birding", by Joan E. Strassmann, I may have mentioned a few years back when my own birding habit changed from being focused on distant travels to more local in nature. By local, I mean my neighborhood and my own yard. Strassmann, "an expert on the evolution of behavior", as noted by Stony Brook University Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Doug Futuyma, explores in detail many of our backyard birds – American Robin, Blue Jay, and Cardinal – among others, and what we actually can learn about these birds by just taking the time to watch them! Eating habits, mating habits, and flocking habits – are frequently supported by years of bird banding and various academic studies, as well as observations by Strassmann. She includes her local birding patches near her home in St Louis, which line up with some of our Long Island parks and locations in habitat. This further reinforces the concept of staying close to home and making repeat visits to those locations, sometime 3-4 or more times a week. Strassmann's concept of Slow Birding may not be for everyone, and that's OK. Included is a lot of scientific study, which can be a bit overwhelming at first, but on a snowy day like today, I can study – really study – the behavior of the White-throated Sparrows fighting over the one feeder in my yard with an open access to seeds!



The other book – Something completely different! "Field Guide (of all the) Birds (we found, one year in the) United States" by Quentin Reiser, with help from Owen. Ok, so you're not familiar with these two names.... Maybe these three names ring a bell: Kent Hoffmann, David Sigley, John from James' Audubody. No? Funny, they provide memorable "quotes" about this book on the back cover. OK, here's another hint: The Brothers Reiser decided in late 2023, to document all the birds they could find in one year, with absolutely "no knowledge about birds or birding". Really. Inspired by the little blue Golden Field Guide of birds of North America, given to Quentin years earlier by their grandmother (who really wasn't a birder, in his words), and their mom, these two, often a little (??) high, brothers spend 2024 covering 38,757 miles in the Lower 48 States, sleeping in their 2010 Kia Sedona minivan (purchased used), with bunk-bed cots, a butane stove and 400 cans of tuna fish. Before writing the book, they produced a two-hour "documentary", which you can watch for free on YouTube by entering "Listers: A Glimpse into Extreme Birdwatching". Over 3.1 million folks have already viewed this well put together, and very entertaining production. Quentin – the brother with the hockey-player hair – does most of the colorful commentary – though, as a spoiler alert (and if



you plan on watching this with young children), the language is a bit, well, salty for some. He is the author and illustrator of the accompanying book. No rhyme or reason to the order of their travels, the book starts with the birds seen just across the river from St Louis, in Illinois. Hey, do you see the connection?? Joan E. Stassmann lives in St Louis, and that's where the Brothers Reiser live..... ANYWAY, the book was a hoot – never meant to be an aid in bird ID, rather a tongue in cheek look at birding a Big Year, as seen by two guys at minimal expense, and zero knowledge. BUT, by the end of that Big Year, both were convinced that there's no better way to see this country than to go searching for birds! Both are birdwatchers now – "an incurable disease" Quentin calls it. And another thing they learned – "...when you pay attention to birds, you pay attention to a lot of other stuff as well." On a personal note, on their Notable Misses List, they didn't see a Connecticut Warbler (and neither have I!). Why did I actually purchase this book? Because their YouTube effort was free, I felt they deserved a little something for their efforts!

Two books, different perspectives – one slow birding, one fast birding. Both enjoyable, especially on an Epicly Snowy Week!



A Few Weeks in California & A Bird Festival to Boot!

January - what could be better than an escape from the east coast to visit a friend and attend a bird festival.

Sally Newbert

In mid-January I left for the Morro Bay Bird Festival. I stayed with my friend, MaryBeth Wilson, who lives in the nearby town of Templeton. On the first morning, sitting with coffee outside on the patio—the lyrics of an old song kept running through my head - *Well, they're out there a-havin' fun, In that warm California sun.* I sat with my back to the sun with that ear worm rolling around my head while I absorbed all that California sun. From the comfort of the patio we watched the Anna's Hummingbirds. (I had to use Merlin to realize they were Anna's Hummingbirds, not Ruby-throated). They were at their feeder almost all day and into the evening. I understand they pretty much stay put and do

not migrate. From her patio which was built into the side of a hill, you were just about level with the Ravens and Red-tail Hawks patrolling the hillsides. My friend's feeders hosted Bluebirds, Goldfinches. Scrub Jays, White-crowned Sparrows and House Finches, while the California Towhees patrolled the ground below.

As we headed to Morro Bay on the dirt road from the house we had California Quail running around, some familiar Dark-eyed Juncos and Acorn Woodpeckers on several electric polls. We picked up our festival tickets only to find that the Marketplace didn't get going till the next day. Making the best of it we went to see the Elephant Seal Haulout just north of Morro Bay. Moms and babes were ubiquitous on the beach. I am told the really dramatic time to see these huge seals is when the males are doing battle to become the beach master. These are huge seals, males can be 14 -16 feet in length and weigh up to 5,000 pounds. The females about half that. No males this day but more than enough Moms and babes to make the trip worthwhile.

We greatly anticipated our half-day cruise around the Morro Bay Harbor on Sunday. But first was a stop at the foot of Morro Rock famous for Peregrine Falcons. There is a small group of devoted Peregrine watchers that set up scopes usually between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm. They will gladly share their high power scopes with you so you can get a really good look at the birds. Beautiful and majestic sitting proudly on their rock. Without a scope they blend with the background and the birds are difficult to find.

The cruise went slowly around the harbor, we enjoyed quite a few familiar birds and sea otters (they are everywhere.) An Osprey sat on top of a mast with a fish in its talons, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Mergansers, Great Egrets and both Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night-Herons were along the shoreline. As the tide went out, the flats were revealed and they were covered with shore birds, too distant to ID. *Ah shucks, you know how frustrating that is!* From the boat we came up with a few good birds including Western Grebe, and White Pelican. Later in the day we drove around to the Marina Boardwalk Trail and spotted not only the White Pelican but the Western Grebe. Seen from the road a Long-billed Curlew and a Godwit were standing together. What a bill on that Curlew! The light was not on my side for a good picture, but at least you can get an idea of the size of that bill. Very IMPRESSIVE!



Moms and babies at the Elephant Seal Haulout. The babies are born with black fur.



How can you not be impressed at the size of that Curlew 's bill. Standing next to the Godwit lets you appreciate its size.

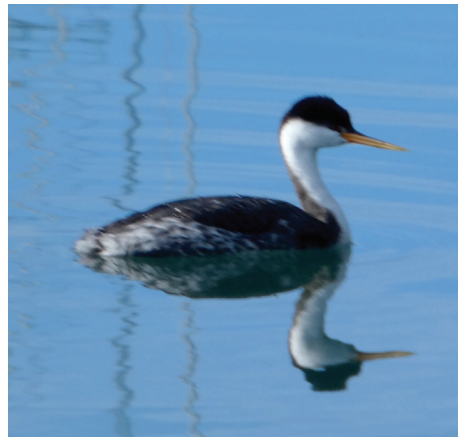


It seems not too many people are familiar with this area, called the Central Coast, it is just about halfway between LA and San Francisco. The hills are unusual from my Eastern perspective and I do not think we have much to compare to them, so steep it is hard to imagine walking on them. Many are used as vineyards and pastures for cattle. Just to orient you the well-known Hearst Castle (San Simeon) is a little north of Morro Bay. Yes, we did visit that one day.



I do not think I figured out how to get any pictures that really capture the hilly inaccessibility of this area. *Ah well maybe next time.*

The bird festival, organized by the Morro Coast Audubon Society, takes place over Martin Luther King, Jr's Birthday Weekend. There are over 500 events during the 3 full days and 2 half day that it runs. Putting, I am sure, the whole Club to work. Registration begins November 1 and the events fill quickly.



Going down the list of offerings we did a few of the locations on our own including Atascadero Lake, a winter host to White Pelicans, Ruddy Ducks, Bufflehead and DC Cormorants.

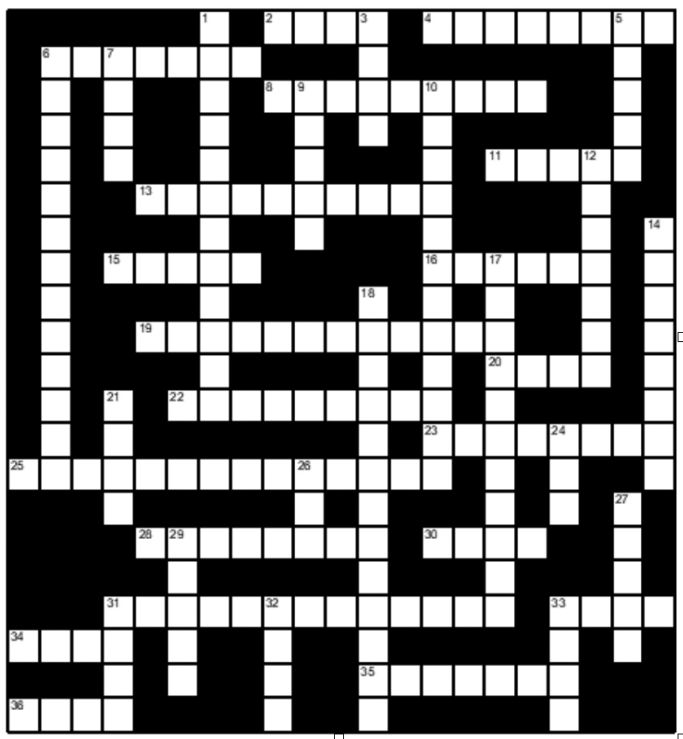
All of a sudden it was time to return to home. Arriving after the first big snow storm, just when the temperatures plummeted. You could tell by the tone of the crew as the passengers exited the airplane that they thought those living here are crazy! And at about 10 ° it is hard to argue.



Left side: California Scrub Jay, Western Grebe, Right side: White-crowned Sparrows, Male Bluebird, Anna's Hummingbird bottom White Pelicans with a Bufflehead

Some
(but not all)
birds you
might see on
field trips
this season

All Puzzles by
Tom Moran



Across

- 2 Rough-legged _____ made an appearance in Suffolk this year.
- 4 Tufted _____
- 6 Try along Dune Road
- 8 _____ Warbler, or someplace you better head back to according to a Grateful Dead song
- 11 _____ duck, a Stiff-tailed one.
- 13 A Pileated _____ was spotted at Caleb Smith Park this year
- 15 Not an egret, a _____
- 16 Northern _____, an uncommon visitor to Suffolk
- 19 _____ Plover, not when nonbreeding or juvenile. Maybe a better name would be Black Armpit Plover
- 20 _____ Sparrow or Swallow
- 22 A rare visitor from the northern tundra
- 23 _____ Wigeon
- 25 _____ Warbler, Will it show up again at Bayard Cutting Arboretum?
- 28 Northern _____, long bill, will forage in a circular pattern
- 30 _____ Swan, not always
- 31 _____ Nuthatch *yank*
- 33 _____, _____ goose
- 34 Warbler. Try the appropriately named _____ Meadow County Park
- 35 _____ Bluebird, NYS Bird
- 36 American _____

Down

- 1 This warbler might help prepare documents if another warbler needed legal assistance
- 3 _____ Eider, a real looker
- 5 _____ Owl, Egret
- 6 _____ Warbler. Fun to watch its nuthatch, creeper-like foraging on tree trunks. The only warbler that regularly does this
- 7 Blue or Green-winged _____
- 9 _____ Grebe
- 10 _____ or was that Cooper's?
- 12 A small alcid with a very small bill.
- 14 Lacks bold eyering of a Connecticut. A skulker.
- 17 _____ Loon. Points bill upward
- 18 _____ Blue, Grey or Green Warbler
- 21 _____ Eagle. Stop at Friendly's in Sayville for ice cream and see them on the nearby cellphone tower
- 24 _____ Farm, a good place to see 19 Across
- 26 Barred _____, when are we going to see one on Suffolk mainland?
- 27 Dark-eyed _____
- 29 _____ Woodpecker, larger than Downy
- 31 The direction traveled for 33 Down
- 32 How you feel when it's raining and you can't go birding
- 33 _____ Rd, Shinnecock to Cupsogue

Sudoku

1		2		5			4	
5			1	8		7		
	8		6					9
7							9	3
8								
	9						5	4
	5			8				2
3	4		9					

Word Search
The Bird Version

P	U	R	P	L	E	W	E	F	U	F
K	I	N	G	P	O	G	R	E	B	E
F	I	N	C	H	I	U	G	E	L	T
F	M	U	T	E	S	N	C	U	N	E
F	I	E	E	A	G	L	E	J	L	A
O	S	E	G	R	I	N	D	U	A	L
X	R	N	L	E	U	L	A	N	L	Y
T	O	H	O	D	F	O	R	C	C	L
S	C	R	O	W	I	O	O	O	I	A
O	C	O	O	T	S	N	A	W	D	R
D	W	E	S	T	H	A	W	K	L	K

Alcid	Gull	Snow
Cedar	Hawk	Sod
Coot	Jay	Song
Crow	Junco	Surf
Dune	King	Teal
Eagle	Lark	Tree
Eared	Loon	West
Field	Mute	Wood
Finch	Owl	Wren
Fish	Pine	
Fox	Pintail	
Grebe	Purple	

Birds as Messengers in a Changing World

Submitted by
Sepala Weliwitigoda



Photo: Dunlin & Sanderling by Scott Gilbert

Early in the morning, before traffic thickens and voices rise, birds begin speaking.

A sparrow calls from a fence post. A cardinal answers a distant call. A warbler threads its thin music through the trees. These small presences are easy to overlook, yet they are telling us something important. I pause without intending to. The morning feels briefly held in place by sound.

Across cultures, birds have long symbolized the sacred, the prophetic, and the powerful. Eagles appeared on imperial banners. Doves represented peace. Carrier pigeons once transported vital messages across long distances. Long before modern science, birds were already regarded as messengers.

Today, they carry a different kind of message.

Shifts in migration timing, shrinking populations, and altered breeding patterns often appear long before ecological disruption becomes obvious in other ways. Scientists describe birds as indicator species—organisms whose health reflects broader environmental conditions. When bird communities thrive, ecosystems are usually functioning well. When birds decline, something fundamental has begun to unravel.

To notice birds, then, is to notice early signs of change in forests, wetlands, fields, and coastlines. They speak as clearly in backyards, city parks, and roadside hedges as they do in wild places.

Yet birds are more than data points. They invite us to pay attention.

To watch a bird forage, sing, or settle onto a branch is to slow down. To listen is to step briefly outside the pace of modern life. In these quiet moments, birds remind us that wonder still exists and that relationship with the natural world begins with noticing.

Every bird feels like an expression of nature's wisdom, and every place it roams, nests, or perches becomes part of a living painting.

Unlike human paintings, these living canvases hold beating hearts—beings

without the capacity to agitate, demand, or speak in a language we readily understand. That is precisely why we must learn to listen and try to understand their subtle but profound communications. In doing so, we may not only save them, but also save ourselves.

History shows that collective action can make a difference. The Bald Eagle, once pushed to the brink of extinction by habitat loss and pesticide contamination, rebounded because citizens, scientists, and lawmakers acted together to protect it. Similar efforts to address air pollution, water contamination, and ozone-layer depletion demonstrate that environmental decline is not inevitable when society chooses to respond.

Birds now ask something simple and profound of us: to pay attention, to care, and to act where we can. Supporting habitat protection, science-based conservation, and thoughtful policy proposals at the local, state, and federal levels are among the practical ways to honor the messages birds carry.

So are small, everyday choices: planting native species, keeping cats indoors, easing back on pesticides, darkening the night sky, and tending the quiet, fragile spaces where birds make their lives.

These choices can become traditions within families—quiet, shared understandings about how to live gently on the land. An ethic of using chemicals only when truly necessary, recycling and reusing, favoring cleaner sources of energy when possible, and respecting the limits of the natural world slowly shapes a household into a place of care. In this way, an environmental culture begins at home.

At its heart is a simple conviction: we protect birds and the living world not only for ourselves, but for the children and grandchildren who will inherit what we leave behind.

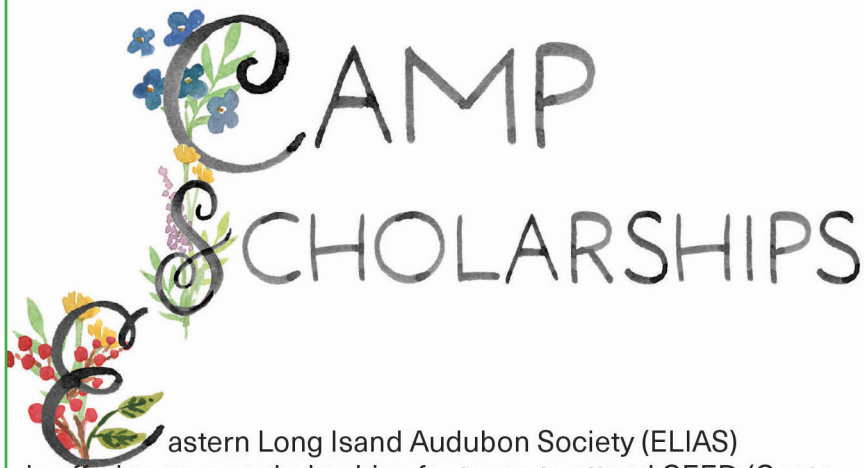
When we learn to notice birds more deeply, we learn to notice the world more honestly. And when we notice the world, we begin to protect it.



Answers to The Crossword Sudoku & Word Search



1	6	2	7	5	9	3	4	8
5	3	9	1	4	8	2	7	6
4	8	7	6	3	2	5	1	9
7	2	5	8	6	4	1	9	3
8	1	4	5	9	3	6	2	7
6	9	3	2	7	1	8	5	4
9	5	1	3	8	7	4	6	2
3	4	6	9	2	5	7	8	1
2	7	8	4	1	6	9	3	5



Eastern Long Island Audubon Society (ELIAS) is offering camp scholarships for teens to attend CEED (Center for Environmental Education and Discovery) Leadership Summer Day Camp Program. This scholarship opportunity is open to applicants residing in the ELIAS geographic area along the South Shore of Long Island from Patchogue to Montauk. This includes western Riverhead, Brookhaven, Southampton and East Hampton Townships.

The teen should be able to attend camp the week of July 27 through July 31 which is birding week at the CEED camp. People from the birding community will come in to discuss various birds, frequently bringing in live birds.

The camp is located at CEED Washington Lodge 287 South Country Road in Brookhaven hamlet, a few miles east of Bellport. Camp runs from 9 am to 3:30 pm.

The Leadership Camp is for students in 7th to 12th Grade, from 12 to 18 years old. Eastern Long Island Audubon Scholarship is offering a \$400 scholarship towards the \$550 cost.

The potential camper(s) should write to the Camp Committee at ELIAS, Box 206, East Quogue, NY, 11942 telling the committee what he or she hopes to learn from the camping experience.

The parent should also include a letter to express their willingness to take the camper to camp and pick them up. As a courtesy to parents before and after hours programs are available at no extra cost.

CEED requires a physical done within one year of the start of camp.

If you have an questions or know of a child looking for a scholarship to a nature-related camp call Doug Dittko, 631-398-0926.

The Laughing Gull

Q: Why do seagulls like to live by the sea?

A: Because if they lived by the bay they would be bagels.

Continued from page 1

leading edge of the wing and the spiky tail feathers that fan out as they land. It is often from these perches that males will sing their dry, buzzy song ending in a long trill that is reminiscent of the insects from which they get their name. Males and females look alike, while juveniles are more muted overall and have variable streaking across the chest.

Foraging primarily by sight on insects (including its namesake, which it seems to overwhelmingly prefer) and seeds, the Grasshopper Sparrow nests in a rather particular kind of pastoral habitat. In New York, it is most commonly found during the breeding season in large tracts of unmowed grassland interspersed with open areas for feeding and scattered clumps of larger vegetation for singing. This results in a sort of “Goldilocks” scenario, in which the habitat must be just right or the bird cannot thrive: if the grass is too thick, then there isn’t enough area for foraging, while if the grass is too sparse, there isn’t enough cover to protect it from predators. Similarly, too many or too few trees on the landscape can have a negative effect on Grasshopper Sparrow numbers, while research has shown that the species rarely occurs on parcels smaller than 20 acres. Although these habitat requirements may seem difficult to maintain, regular disturbance such as wildfires and low-intensity cultivation and landscaping

combined with minimal pesticide use mean that the species occurs in a variety of field and agricultural ecotypes. Locally, it continues to be regularly reported from a handful of farms across the East End, and would likely be found on others if greater observer effort were applied. Its stronghold, however, remains the fields around the runways at EPCAL, where it can be found in shockingly large numbers throughout the summer months. This author alone detected more than three dozen in one early July hike, and double-digit numbers are not uncommon there from mid-May through the end of August. This seeming abundance belies the species’s precarious existence across its range, particularly in the face of a growing number of threats to its continued survival.

Formerly considered common across Long Island, Grasshopper Sparrows have experienced a massive decline in both range and numbers over the last half-century, as the farm fields and meadows they require for breeding have disappeared in the face of increased human development and a general decline in agriculture. This mirrors a greater trend across the state, where the bird is now listed as a High Priority Species of Greatest Conservation Need by NYS DEC, and North America as a whole. Indeed, the North American Bird Conservation Initiative’s 2019 State of the Birds report infamously noted that numbers of grassland birds such as the Grasshopper Sparrow have declined

by more than 50% since 1970. This represents an estimated loss of more than 700 million individuals. Habitat loss and widespread pesticide use poisoning birds and affecting their food sources are overwhelmingly cited as the most important causes of decline for these species.

The uncertain future of EPCAL mirrors that of the Grasshopper Sparrow to an unsettling extent. Although development at the property has so far remained limited, large-scale propositions for the 1,600 acre site have run the gamut from a cargo airport to a campground. Recently, the Town of Riverhead has issued or expanded permits for intermittent use of the runways in a series of drag races, parking and shuttle services for the U.S. Open, and as a test track for a Racing School. Without long-term environmental protections, it seems certain that such activities will only increase, likely having a profoundly detrimental impact on the wildlife that call the site home. Fortunately, there is a large and vocal community of local residents, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, and conservation-minded groups—including ELIAS—who are making their voices heard and working to ensure that local decision makers understand the environmental and economic significance of limiting development on such a unique piece of property. In so doing, we can help guarantee that special birds such as the Grasshopper Sparrow continue to have a future on Long Island.



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