



EASTERN LONG ISLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY – From the Barrens to the Bays

Formerly Moriches Bay Audubon, established 1967

THE *OSPREY*

Summer 2026 – Vol. LVIII – No. 3



You are invited to join the friends and members of ELIAS at the

Annual Dinner

at The Bellport Country Club

on Wednesday, October 14, 2026.

The festivities begin at 6 pm

With guest speaker

Kevin Walsh

Kevin is a naturalist, educator, photographer, and author.

A lifelong birdwatcher, Kevin builds and monitors Eastern Bluebird and Eastern Screech Owl nest boxes in Suffolk County.

In his presentation

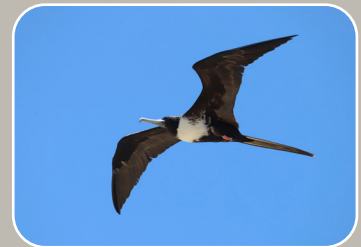
Screech Owl Nest Boxes: If You Build It, They Will Come

he will share his 35 years of experience hosting Eastern Bluebird and Eastern Screech Owl in his backyard nest boxes.

Watch for your invitation in September,
information will also be on the website

\$75 per person

For more information: eliasosprey@optonline.net



**Visit the Dry Tortugas
with Brian Moldashel**



**Story of a
neighborhood watch**



**Interesting sights
around LI**

THE PRESIDENTS CORNER | JUNE 2026

Spring & Summer 2026!

Byron Young

What happened to Spring? This has been a crazy Spring with very high temperatures followed by very cold temperatures and then June lands with nearly freezing temperatures in the Pine Barrens and strong winds. I guess if we could order our Spring weather it would be a nice gentle warm-up from the winter, light breezes from the south to help the birds migrate and nighttime rains, Camelot anyone?

I did not get out birding much this Spring but the folks that I spoke with were somewhat disappointed. Maybe it might have had something to do with the erratic weather, temperatures, and winds. Generally, migrating birds like a southerly wind to aid their spring migrations and a northerly wind to aid their fall migrations. This Spring our winds were dominated by northerly flows. Of course, the birds will find their way north either fighting the northern winds or finding some tracks that take them away from the stronger winds.

This is all speculation on my part, but I theorize that many of the songbirds may move along under the lee of the Appalachian Mountains, certainly

raptors do this using the thermals rising off the mountain chain to make their way north. The smaller birds may use the lighter winds along the flanks of the mountain range to their advantage while making their way north rather than fighting a strong headwind across the open vast ocean.

Following up on that thought I looked to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's eBird data base for information on the numbers of species reported for Suffolk County during the Spring Months of March April and May. To my surprise the number of species of birds observed in Suffolk County during the Spring Months has remained consistent averaging 287 species of birds being observed between 2020 and 2026. The range has varied from a low of 278 in 2024 to a high of 291 species in 2022 and 2023. I could not find any information on the numbers of birds migrating across Suffolk County each Spring but estimates put it in the billions. These birds migrate primarily at night. Those that we find on our field trips are the birds stopping to rest and refuel before heading north toward their nesting grounds.

Shifting gears a bit, New York Audubon approached Eastern Long Island Audubon asking about our interest in managing a MOTUS Station at Montauk. What is MOTUS you may ask? Well, Brian Moldashal, will be making a presentation on just that at an upcoming Members meeting. He described the MOTUS Wildlife Tracking system as a collaborative global network using automated radio telemetry to track small flying organisms such as birds, bats, and insects. When a tagged bird, butterfly or bat passes near one of these MOTUS Stations (they are all over the world) the animal's information is recorded and passed along to the researcher(s). Frequently their path is shown as they fly across the country.

Once the transfer is complete, we will organize a field trip to Montauk Point to view the site. Although the site may not be the most intriguing to look at the information it will provide could be priceless, at least until the next jump in technology comes along.

Good Birding!



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Late Summer & Fall Meetings



Monday, August 3 at 7 pm

Motus & the Science of Tracking Bird Movements

Brian Moldashel

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is a collaborative global network using automated radio telemetry to track small flying organisms, such as birds, bats, and insects. An initiative of Birds Canada, the program seeks to improve our understanding of the movement ecology of a wide range of species, answering questions related to how organisms move throughout the environment, what habitats they use, and much more.

Join Eastern Long Island Audubon Society to learn more about how this fascinating program works, what scientists have already learned from the data collected by it, and how ELIAS is getting involved in the program right here on Long Island.



Monday, September 14, 2026

The Long Island Conservation Alliance

Marshall Brown

In 2021 Marshall Brown co-founded The Long Island Conservation Alliance, focusing on community-driven habitat restoration and sustainable land management. He also co-founded Spadefoot Ecosystem Solutions, developing nature-based approaches to water treatment and pollution reduction. He will talk about the work that the Conservation Alliance is currently doing.



Monday, October 5, 2026

Birding 101 or Step One in a Life-time Hobby

Eileen Schwinn

Are you interested in learning more about one of the fastest growing activities in the US today? – Bird Watching! How do you start? What Tools of the Trade do you need? Where do I go to get more information? Please join Eileen Schwinn, an avid and active local birder, on October 5th, for a (hopefully informative and entertaining) presentation. Pick your own title for the evening: Birding 101, Birding for the Beginner, or Step One in a Life-time Hobby.

Although the birds in Cuba, Costa Rica, Trinidad/Tobago, Iceland, Germany, Aruba, Washington State, Ohio, California, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, New Mexico, Florida, Maine, New York, and New Hampshire have called her to visit over the past 20 years, Eileen stays close to home these days – birding in her yard (89 species and counting), along Dune Road and in many Suffolk County woods, fields, and waterfronts. No matter where you go, birding enriches your travels!. Come and learn how to enjoy it even more.



**QWR is renovating the
Nature Center.**

**Until they are finished,
our meetings will be held at
Moriches Bay Recreation Facility**

313 Frowein Road

Center Moriches, NY 11934.

**It is just west of
Center Moriches High School.**

Summer & Fall Bird Walks

Friday, August 21, 2026

Cupsogue County Park

Meet at 8:00 am at the western end of the parking lot on Dune Road. Arriving before 8:30 am ensures we will not have to pay any admission fee, and with low tide being just after 10:00 am, we will have plenty of time to walk down to the bayside mud flats and look for migrating shorebirds, graceful terns, and who knows what else!

This roughly 1.5 mile walk involves a fair amount of walking on both wet and dry sand, as well as potentially a shallow water crossing or two. Please bring suitable footwear such as beach shoes or waterproof boots (or leave your shoes somewhere dry and go barefoot, it is summer after all!). A spotting scope (if you have it) will aid in glimpsing distant birds, while water, snacks, and sun protection will help keep you comfortable. Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip at Brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Saturday, September 12, 2026

Terrell River County Park

Meet at 8:00 am at the parking lot on the south side of Montauk Highway, opposite Kalers Pond in Center Moriches. We will walk the flat, wooded trails south to Moriches Bay and seek out migrating songbirds such as warblers and vireos, while also keeping our eyes out for all other kinds of wildlife in this rich and diverse park. Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip at Brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Saturday, October 3, 2026

Fire Island Hawk Watch and Lighthouse Walk

Meet at 8:00 am at the eastern end of the parking lot at Field 5. Our traditional fall trip to Robert Moses State Park, we will walk the 3/4 mile boardwalk to the Fire Island Lighthouse — stopping at the Hawk Watch Platform along the way to “check out the raptor action”. Past visits at this time of the year by ELIAS had Chat, Gray Kingbird, Swainson’s Thrush, and A LOT of Yellow-rumped Warblers! Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip at Brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Sunday, October 18, 2026

Suffolk County Farm

Meet at 8:45 am at the parking lot by the new farm welcome center. Always a dynamic place in fall, the farm often hosts open field species such as Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark, as well as any number of raptors, sparrows, flycatchers, and more. This easy walk will cover less than two miles over flat farm fields and dirt roads. Please register with Brian Moldashel for this trip at Brian.moldashel@gmail.com.

Please be sure to register with the listed leader of the walk. That way you will be notified if there are any unexpected changes.

Have you seen something unusual while out birding?

If you have, take a picture and we will try to feature a new sighting in each issue.

This Yeti was spotted in the woods of Mattituck along New Suffolk Avenue shortly after the turn from Main Rd.

Have you noticed it?

Send your photo along with the location to eliasosprey@optonline.net



Eagles!

Article & Photos

Cathy Taldone Cammann

This past winter, on a quiet street on the North Fork, a local community had the opportunity to witness the magic and majesty of watching a pair of nesting American Bald Eagles. In January, one of the marvels of wildlife engineering was sighted, bringing unexpected delight to a small town. High up in a pine tree in front of the home of an unassuming resident, was the Eagle's nest. An Eagle builds the largest nest made by any North American bird, ranging from 4-6 feet wide and 3-4 feet deep – difficult to miss and causing quite the stir with the neighbors!

Eagles mate for life and use the same nest for many years continuing to build upon it. Eagles lay one to three eggs per year. In what was one of the coldest winters in recent history, this Eagle pair laid their eggs and successfully hatched two Eaglets after approximately 35 days of incubation.

Neighbors watched as the adult birds brought food to the nest and the Eaglets began to grow. Growth is quick, chicks are a mere 3 ounces at birth, and by 9-12 weeks are 3 feet tall, have full wingspan (6-8 feet) and weigh 10-12 lbs. Their diet consists primarily of fish, supplemented by small mammals/waterfowl. Community members were in awe of the enormity of the nest and the once in a lifetime experience of being able to watch an Eagle pair raise their young. For some, this meant from their front porch!

A sense of protection and concern developed while observing this magical spectacle of nature. The community became keenly aware of the magnificence, strength and beauty of their resident Bald Eagles. Bald and Golden Eagles are federally protected species and disturbing them is punishable by significant fines. No one wanted this nest disturbed; there was no media, and no crowds.

By 12 weeks the juvenile Eagles were almost as large as the adults. The



community waited to see the young fledge and make their first flight. They spread their wings, jumped in the nest and on tree branches and exercised to strengthen their wings. Once Eaglets fledge they remain around the nest territory for 4-12 weeks learning to hunt and fly. Their feathers are brown. It takes 4-5 years for the Eagle to develop its white head and tail and to reach maturity to be able to reproduce.

The Bald Eagle population has made a successful comeback through a concerted conservation effort. The Bald Eagle was facing extinction due to the use of pesticides in the 1960s. By the 1970s there was only one breeding pair remaining in New York State. Today there are hundreds of breeding pairs in New York State and one small town on the North Fork of Long Island has come to understand why the eagle has been a symbol of strength and freedom. One cannot



help but feel the majesty of their presence whether observing them in flight, tending to their young or boldly guarding their nesting place or defending themselves. This community hopes for their return next year to breed again and share another chapter in the life of an American Bald Eagle.



What did we see on the Field Trips?

Thank you to all the trip leaders who did such a good job taking birders of all skill levels into the woods and parks of Suffolk County. The leaders included: Darlene McNeil, Brian Moldashel, Rosemary Valente, Eileen Schwinn and Suzi Stewart. Here are some of the reports

...From Eileen Schwinn

Indian Island County Park, Riverhead – April 11, 2026

Twenty brave souls met for an hour and half walk through the Rock Garden Path, and the Picnic Area on a relatively cool (48°) and windy Saturday morning! The wind did keep the number of species seen down, but we did hear a few local residents for the season: Osprey, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Cardinal, as well as Palm and Pine Warblers. A cold and slow start to Spring Migration, the walk was enjoyed by all!

...From Brian Moldashel

North Fork Preserve County Park Riverhead – May 2, 2026

This park's diverse array of habitats always makes for a great place to kick off spring migration, and this day did not disappoint! Despite occasionally rainy weather, our group of twelve was greeted by a chorus of birdsong right from the parking lot, and we quickly got eyes on some early-arriving warblers such as Common Yellowthroat and Blue-winged Warbler. Though many of the other birds made us work for the good views, we encountered more than forty species over the course of the morning, including flashy local breeding birds such as Rose-breasted Grosbeak, as well as migrating songbirds like Northern Waterthrush. Overall, not a bad way to start the month!

...From Rosemary Valente

Broad Cove Preserve, Aquebogue - May 3, 2026

16 people met at Broad Cove Preserve for the second ELIAS May walk. A former duck farm recently opened to the public; this preserve features wide gravel paths and varied habitats. It was designated as the first North Fork location on the NYS Birding Trail right after we did the walk.

We saw a total of 38 species, the highlights being Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, a Bald Eagle, and both Yellowlegs species. The trail to the left leads to Reeves Bay through woods, while the right-hand path moves through woods and meadows to another, more open section of the bay. At the water, there are two paths. The left goes back along the water, where you can see the end of the main short trail. The right-hand path leads to what is now a new path through one of the meadows, where Bluebird boxes have been set up, along with a few benches.

This is a beautiful preserve with easily walkable paths. it is an all-season gem to visit

...From Brian Moldashel

Hubbard County Park Hampton Bays – May 9, 2026

This trip, held for the third year in a row, on World Migratory Bird Day, benefitted from a strong wave of migration the night before. Our walk through the woods to Flanders Bay was slow but fruitful, with great looks at birds like Black-throated Green Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo, while the open areas of the park were filled with singing Prairie Warblers and raucous Orchard Orioles. Although most of us missed the Red-headed Woodpeckers that a few got to see, with more than 55 species reported over nearly four and a half hours, it seems fair to say that everyone had at least one memorable moment from the trip, if not quite a few!

...From Darlene McNeil

Historic Global Big Day Effort at Wertheim NWR – May 9, 2026

On Saturday, May 9, 2026, a group of 31 local birdwatchers gathered at Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge in Suffolk County, New York, to participate in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's annual Global Big Day. This synchronized worldwide effort united over 80,000 eBirders across 203 countries to document global bird populations.

Darlene J. McNeil led the local team as they embarked on a 1-hour and 22-minute traveling survey covering 0.68 miles. Their targeted morning effort successfully added 33 species and 55 individual birds to a history-making global tally that collectively surpassed 8,000 species recorded in a single calendar day.

Key Sightings and Highlights

The mid-spring timing coincided perfectly with peak migration, yielding an impressive variety of residents and arriving insectivores:

Raptors on the Wing: The group noted active apex predators, counting three Ospreys and two Bald Eagles utilizing the refuge's waterways.

Warbler Waves: Six distinct species of wood-warblers made appearances, anchored by four Northern Yellow Warblers, alongside Blue-winged, Black-and-white, Pine, Common Yellowthroat, and Northern Parula warblers.

Refuge Specialties: Observers recorded a high diversity of songbirds, including Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Brown Thrashers, Eastern Towhees, and an Eastern Kingbird.

Data collected during the walk was submitted directly via eBird to help ornithologists track migration timing and long-term population health. Thank you to all 31 participants who lent their eyes and ears to make this global citizen-science event a record-breaking success.

From Suzi Stewert...

Terrell River County Park May 13, 2026

It was a blustery Wednesday morning when 9 of us walked the loop in Terrell County Park. We headed out down to Moriches Bay via the east path that wanders through the woods along Terrell River. Our first birds were a Great Egret and several Mute Swans. Then we had a flurry of spring migrants – orioles, flycatchers, gnatcatchers, vireos, Osprey & 8 species of warblers. As we got closer to the bay we found ducks, geese, gulls, & cormorants. It was high tide at the bay, windy with white caps. We didn't get to see the expected shorebirds, they were smart and taking cover. On our way back to the parking lot, we had 2 wonderful surprises – a Ruby-throated Hummingbird and a Magnolia Warbler. The day started out slowly, but turned into a pretty good birding day... 48 species, & 158 birds total!

From Darlene McNeil...

Braving the Rain: May Field Trip to Manorville Hills County Park May 14, 2026

A little spring rain couldn't dampen the spirits—or the success—of the five dedicated birders who met at Manorville Hills County Park for a morning trek. Together, the group

covered nearly a mile (0.98 miles) over the course of 2 hours and 29 minutes. Despite the wet weather, the damp woods were alive with activity, yielding an impressive total of 35 species.

Trip Highlights

Vibrant Vireos: The canopy was buzzing with vireos. The group recorded an outstanding nine Red-eyed Vireos, along with local favorites like the White-eyed Vireo and Yellow-throated Vireo.

Spring Arrivals: Three Yellow-billed Cuckoos made a fantastic showing, calling through the damp air. A brilliant male Ruby-throated Hummingbird also zipped into view, adding a flash of bright color to the gray morning.

Woodland Mainstays: Flocks of Tufted Titmice (5) and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers (4) kept observers busy, while Red-bellied Woodpeckers (3) and Gray Catbirds (6) provided a steady soundtrack to the walk.

Full Sightings List

For those interested in the complete breakdown, our documented checklist (eBird #S338906332) included:

Eastern Wood-Pewee (1)
Great Crested Flycatcher (1)
Black-capped Chickadee (3)
Blue Jay (1)

White-breasted Nuthatch (1)
American Robin (3)

Brown Thrasher (1)
Chipping Sparrow

Many thanks to Darlene McNeil for hosting, and to everyone who brought their rain gear and sharp eyes to make this rainy outing a memorable success!

From Darlene McNeil...

Spring Migration Magic at Bayard Cutting Arboretum

On a brilliant Friday morning, our group of six birders set out on a brisk, stroll through the lush landscapes and coastal edges of the Bayard Cutting Arboretum State Park. The spectacular spring weather proved perfect for birding, yielding an impressive total of 42 species.

Vibrant Spring Migrants: The highlight of the morning was the dazzling array of returning spring migrants. Our canopy was alive with color, featuring multiple sightings of the striking Baltimore Oriole and the cheerful Northern Yellow Warbler. We also managed to spot a Pine Warbler, a single Yellow-rumped Warbler, and a vocal Common Yellowthroat.

Raptors & Waterfowl: Looking upward and outward, the sunny skies brought out the local predators. We recorded both Osprey and Red-tailed Hawk, along with a Cooper's Hawk and a soaring Turkey Vulture.

Continued on page 12



Trip to Dry Tortugas National Park

Article & Photos by Brian Moldashel

When most people think of Key West, they usually picture Margaritaville, Ernest Hemingway, and endless combinations of sun and water. Ask a birder what comes to mind when they think of Key West and they might rattle off a number of classic South Florida birds, such as White-crowned Pigeon, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Gray Kingbird. While one could enjoy countless hours chasing down these species and many more through the likes of historic Fort Zachary Taylor and the lush Key West Botanical Garden, the island's true potential as a top birding destination arguably lies less in the richness of its parks and more in its position as the gateway to one of the most remote and unique birding locations in the continental United States: Dry Tortugas National Park.

Located roughly 70 miles west of Key West and accessible only by boat or seaplane, Dry Tortugas is one of the least visited parks in the entire National Parks system. As a collection of small islets far from the mainland, it is an important nesting site for several species of seabird, as well as being a prime stopover spot for trans-Caribbean and cross-Gulf migrants. Furthermore, lying tantalizingly close to Cuba and the Bahamas, it is also regularly host to vagrant birds from these islands and elsewhere in the Caribbean, adding an additional layer of excitement to any birding trip to the park. Together, these factors make Dry Tortugas one of the most exciting bird hotspots to visit during the peak of spring migration. At the end of April this year, I set out to do just that.

Actually, let me rephrase that: at the end of April, I set out to visit my mother! Since she moved to South Florida over a decade ago, I have tried to be a good son and visit her

once or twice a year. Though she is not as dedicated a birder as I am, her enthusiasm and curiosity (not to mention general encouraging maternal attitude, of course!) have made her a great birding buddy, and as such, we've focused more and more of our visits together around seeing birds. After a wonderful week spent in the Everglades last year, we resolved to make the Florida Keys our next destination, with an excursion to Dry Tortugas being a key centerpiece of the trip. Since ferry tickets to the park can be difficult to get during the peak of the spring rush, I scoured the reservation website months in advance and was eventually able to snag us two spots on the once-daily ferry heading there on Monday, April 27, after which we made all of the subsequent reservations for rental car, hotels, and the like.

I arrived at my Mom's place in Palm Beach County the Friday before the ferry trip and early the next morning we set out for the Keys, arriving in Key Largo shortly before noon. From there, we made a beeline down the Overseas Highway to Key West and spent much of the weekend visiting classic tourist sites like the Hemingway House and taking in

the natural sights and sounds of the islands. After the brutal winter we had up north here, it was wonderful to bask in the tropical heat and humidity! The wildlife seemed equally thrilled, as we encountered many singing and feeding birds on our short jaunts to places like the Key Deer National Wildlife Refuge – even bumping into one of the eponymous residents in the parking lot! The smallest subspecies of White-tailed Deer, Key Deer are endangered due to their limited range and persistent anthropogenic threats such as development and vehicle strikes. As exciting as this moment was, it was soon eclipsed by a close encounter with my most-wanted bird of the trip, the Magnificent Frigatebird. As Mom and I were observing the wildlife around a small freshwater lake called the Blue Hole, we watched in awe as a female Frigatebird came dropping slowly out of the sky and eventually made several low passes just above the water in front of us, tapping its bill to the surface each time to grab a drink! As a bird that I've dreamed of seeing ever since I learned of its existence, this incredible moment sent me over the moon, though little did I know that it wouldn't be the closest I would come to this



Brown Noddie

species over the course of the trip...

Monday morning came with a flurry of last-minute packing and a rush to catch the Uber ride to the ferry terminal. Arriving well before the 8:00 AM departure, we were part of the first group of passengers allowed on board and so were able to snag a pair of prime seats at the back of the top deck. We left the dock right on time and quickly reached top speed as we exited Key West harbor, gliding effortlessly across the glass-like surface of the Gulf of Mexico towards the Dry Tortugas. Indeed, the nearly two-and-a-half hour trip seemed to fly by, thanks not only to the excellent weather and sea conditions – the best they'd seen in weeks, according to the crew! – But also the fantastic scenery and thrill of this “mini-pelagic” voyage. Magnificent Frigatebirds soared effortlessly over the boat nearly the entire time, while several Sandwich Terns and Brown Pelicans joined us for a minute or two before peeling away and disappearing amongst the bright blue seas. Nevertheless, after nearly two hours, the anticipation of arriving at the park got the better of me, and I ceded my comfortable seat at the stern for a spot on the bow, where the crowd of mostly anxious birders made it standing room only.

As we stared at the horizon of seemingly-endless water, a small but angular silhouette seemed to manifest out of the waves themselves far off our port bow. Within minutes, this shape revealed itself to be a colossal, weathered red brick fort: Fort Jefferson. Built to protect the vital sea lanes of the country's southern coast, the massive fort – at over 16 million bricks, it is one of the largest free-standing masonry structures in the western hemisphere – served as a defensive outpost, a prison, and a quarantine hospital before it was designated a National Monument in 1935 by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Now largely abandoned, the fort serves as the park headquarters and gateway to most of its activities, such as snorkeling the crystal-clear waters around its walls. The courtyard within its walls also acts as a refuge for



Female Frigatebird

weary migrating birds, hosting the only trees and fresh water for miles.

Almost on cue, the emergence of the fort also signaled a noticeable change in the bird life around the boat. Taking my eyes off the island for a moment revealed a pair of graceful, dark-backed birds with gleaming white bellies flying buoyantly just off the starboard bow: Sooty Terns! Unlike the Common and Forster's Terns that we're used to here on Long Island, Sooty Terns spend much of their lives at sea, touching land only to breed on remote islands in tropical locales. Dry Tortugas is one of only a handful of breeding locations for this species in the continental United States, so seeing these birds here felt extra special. Not bad for the first lifer of the day! This pair was quickly joined by various others zipping to and fro, occasionally darting at the water to snap up an unsuspecting little fish. Scattered amongst them were similarly-sized all-dark terns with paler caps. These were Brown Noddies, another species of “tropical tern” rarely found in U.S. waters within sight of land. Named by sailors for their “foolish” – or, in olden days, “noddy” – habit of landing on ships to be snatched up by hungry mariners, these birds have a beautifully smooth plumage that evokes a cross between a tern and a sort of chocolate Cedar Waxwing. Lifer #2 for the day!

Pulling up to the dock at the foot of Fort Jefferson, the Tern and Noddy fracas reached a crescendo, both visually and aurally. A thin, swirling cloud of birds seemed to hover over the brushy peninsula extending away from the fort in front of us, while a din of cackles and cries rose from below it. This was Bush Key, a formerly disjunct island now connected via natural processes to the larger Garden Key and Fort Jefferson, and home to the breeding colonies of both of these species of seabird. Farther to our right, forming the eastern side of the little cove our ferry was docking in, was Long Key and its colony of nesting Magnificent Frigatebirds, the only one of its kind in the entire United States. Every branch of the island's half a dozen scrubby trees seemed to host



Sooty Tern chick

an entire family of Frigatebirds, with many more soaring overhead. Amid the seabird mayhem, I noticed a small shorebird land hardly two feet from me and begin frantically searching the deck for food. With its mottled brown and black plumage and bright orange feet, I immediately recognized it as a Ruddy Turnstone. Even the non-birders on board were charmed by how tame and fearless this bird and its several friends seemed. I still don't know how or why this scavenging behavior evolved among this population, but it was certainly a delight to us all!

At long last, lines were tied, walkways were lowered, and we were free to explore the island at will – with the express warning to be back at the boat by 2:45 pm so we could leave for Key West on time. With hardly four hours to see everything, we rushed to gather our things and immediately headed for the little spit of sand and brush connecting Garden Key to Bush Key. Here, just beyond a line of string separating the beach from the vegetation, we were astounded to see dozens of adult Sooty Terns and their chicks arrayed across the ground mere feet away from us. Seemingly completely oblivious or indifferent to our presence, we watched as smaller, downy chicks begged for food from their parents – sometimes successfully scoring a regurgitated morsel, other times being shunned into waiting patiently – while larger fledglings roamed more alertly and independently among the colony, their speckled white and black backs providing the only hint as to what species they belonged to. Many dutiful adults were coming and going with food, while those looking to take a rest obligingly took up spots in the sun, holding their wings akimbo to keep cool and leaving the small areas of shade open for the benefit of the younger birds. Just above the ground, in a fantastically obvious example of habitat partitioning, a similar scene was playing out in the nests of Brown Noddies, who shun the ground in favor of nesting and raising their young in the scrubby island brush. Mom and I could have spent hours taking in this spectacle, and indeed we lingered

longer than I would have first thought, snapping photos and watching the family drama unfold across the island, until eventually we forced ourselves to move on and, like a pair of young Sooty Terns, seek out our own shade within the thick walls of Fort Jefferson.

After a much-needed break from the beating sun and some gulps of water, we emerged from the fort into its immense courtyard, eager to see what else was calling the island home for the day. Once a bustling parade ground, the area is now a peaceful expanse of grass with scattered leafy trees and shrubs. Before we had much of a chance to decide which direction to head, our attention was grabbed by a man with binoculars striding with purpose across the field, waving frantically at his companions who were scanning a nearby tree. We joined them in rushing over to him, arriving in time to hear him exclaim “We’ve got the Pewee!” What would be utter gibberish to most people was music to our birding ears, as we immediately knew what “Pewee” he was talking about. Following him to the shadow of a small tree on the other side of the courtyard, we joined a small but growing number of birders clustered a respectful distance away, gazes cemented on one of the lowest branches. Bringing my own binoculars into focus on the limb revealed a small, grayish flycatcher with a subtly peaked head and distinct whitish line curling around the back half of each eye. This last field mark was a clincher: Cuban Pewee! Despite being fairly common throughout the Caribbean – including only a stone’s throw away in the Bahamas and Cuba – this species has only been recorded in the United States a dozen times or so, making it a birding rarity of the highest order. Like many of the other birders on the trip that day, I had been shocked when one was reported from Fort Jefferson more than a week prior to our visit, and had then watched with mounting anticipation (and no small amount of anxiety) as the bird was reported again and again with each passing day by successive groups visiting the island. Now, as we were gleefully watching the bird happily sally out from its perch

to hawk bug after bug, our little group couldn’t believe how fortunate we were that this incredible individual had stuck around as long as it had, let alone that it would be so astoundingly cooperative. Smiles and high fives were exchanged, and we all took our time enjoying the show put on by this special bird. Little would we know that this would be the last day that it was seen on the island, disappearing some time overnight to hopefully find its way back to familiar territory and kin.

Buoyed by our experiences with the Pewee and nesting seabirds, we spent the next few hours roaming the courtyard and inner walls of the fort, exploring with equal measure the area’s rich history and varied birdlife. Palm Warblers and Cattle Egrets were scattered around the lawn, the former actively pumping their tails while foraging for small insects, while the latter eyed us warily as they scouted for slightly larger prey in the ruins of the fort’s once-extensive barracks, now reduced to a mere foundation. The trees held small but often noisy groups of songbirds, including Northern Parula, American Redstart,



Cuban Pewee with a subtly peaked head and distinct whitish line curling around the back half of each eye

and Gray Kingbird. Occasionally, a Merlin or American Kestrel would zip across the courtyard, causing all of the smaller birds to scatter to safety. Perhaps the most intriguing sighting of the afternoon came in the form of a sleeping Nighthawk nestled in the crook of a tree limb, its cryptic plumage blending in perfectly with the tree's ragged bark. As several other birders alternated between scrutinizing the bird and paging through their field guides to determine if it was the widespread Common Nighthawk or the rarer, more localized Antillean Nighthawk, Mom and I chuckled in amusement as the bird in question lazily opened and closed its eyes, as if to say "You crazy people have fun with that, I'm going to take a nap..." While we never did figure out for sure what it was, as my first up close daytime sighting of a nightjar, I can't say I was very much bothered either way!

With our time on the island quickly running out, Mom and I hurried our way through the warren of hallways and rooms within the walls of the fort, stopping occasionally to read

the displays about its military and penal history. Most interesting of these was the panel on the fort's most famous prisoner, Dr. Samuel Mudd. Notorious for being the man who set John Wilkes Booth's broken leg after shooting President Lincoln, Mudd was tried and sentenced to life in prison for aiding the assassin, eventually being imprisoned at Fort Jefferson. In an interesting twist of fate, he was pardoned several years later by President Andrew Johnson due to his role in treating both fellow prisoners and prison staff during an especially severe yellow fever outbreak at the fort in 1867, during which time he actually became the prison doctor.

Leaving Mudd's cell to climb the stairs to the roof of the fort, we emerged back into the harsh sunlight to breathtaking views of the island and seas around us. Almost as if to greet us, a group of several dozen Magnificent Frigatebirds took turns soaring just over the fort's walls, coming so low that we could practically touch them as they flew by and my camera struggled to keep them in focus. As we slowly circled

the walls of the fort, stepping over the ruins of lookouts and marveling at the massive cannons still littering the stronghold, the birds continued to follow us, sometimes rising high on thermal currents before slowly gliding back down to the level of the walls or below. Eventually, seeing that it was nearly 2:45, we grudgingly left this incredible sight behind, rushing back to the boat after a quick obligatory stop at the park gift shop.

With the calls of the Terns and Noddies still going strong in the background, and an array of Frigatebirds and the odd Pelican flying overhead, our ferry pulled back from the dock and made one last counterclockwise loop of the island. As we steamed off to the east and back to civilization, I watched the fort and its avian inhabitants recede into the distance, growing dimmer in life but remaining vivid, forever, in my memory.

Yeesh, what a sappy ending!



Bush Key

What did we see...continued from page 6

Moving toward the water's edge, our sightings spanned a variety of habitats. We tallied a Green Heron, a Spotted Sandpiper, and multiple Common Terns. The swallows were out in full force catching insects over the open areas, dominated by a flock of 30 Barn Swallows.

Field Trip Highlights: Checklist

A few of the standout species recorded during our morning walk include:

Baltimore Oriole (2)
Northern Yellow Warbler (4)
Spotted Sandpiper (1)
Osprey (2)
Cooper's Hawk (1)
Common Yellowthroat (2)

For the full breakdown of observations from this checklist, you can view the complete submitted data set on eBird.

...From Brian Moldashel

EPCAL May 16, 2026

The trip to EPCAL on May 16 was a little lighter on diversity, but made up for it with some really fantastic sightings. Under a bluebird sky (alas, we didn't see any of those that day!) we enjoyed some startlingly close looks of gorgeous Baltimore Orioles and a surprisingly cooperative Grasshopper Sparrow. The highlight of the day was a low-flying Broad-winged Hawk, who made several slow circles over the walking trail for all to see. Although fairly common on the mainland, this strongly-patterned hawk is surprisingly scarce on Long Island, so we felt quite lucky to have had such a close encounter with one!

...From Eileen Schwinn

Quogue Wildlife Refuge May 20, 2026

It was an absolutely beautiful late spring day at Quogue Wildlife Refuge, not only was the weather cooperative, the birds certainly were as well. It would be difficult to pick out The Best Bird of the Day – but the young Great Horned Owls and the flock of Cedar Waxwings certainly come to my mind as being pretty special and terrific to see. And the female Bluebird – let's not forget her!

We saw 33 species in the 3-plus hours of walk.

...From Eileen Schwinn

Bald Hill & Hunters Garden May 17, 2026

Our Spring Walk to Bald Hill started as a cool late morning turned into an almost Summer Day! The birds were most cooperative, and with so many good eyes and ears (of the birders!), many of the group able to hear and see just about everything! As part of the group departed back to the cars, the remainder took the long way back, toward the kettle hole to the north (Blue Blazed Trail north), where we did encounter a rewarding small flock of warblers. A few highlights from included: Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Ovenbird, Northern Parula, Blackburnian Warbler, Scarlet Tanager and Indigo Bunting.

View this checklist online at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S341019556>

After Bald Hill, we ventured to **Hunters Garden** – where two other birders joined us. Mid-day is usually a quiet time for birds – and with the “sudden” uptick in the temperature, we walked about a mile along the trails, to the sparsely filled water spots. Hunters Garden added 12 species including: Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Crested Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, and Blackpoll Warbler.

...From Brian Moldashel

Cupspgue County Park May 23, 2026

Sadly, the weather was not on our side for my last trip of the month. Nevertheless, our hearty little group braved the cold (for May!) temperatures and stiff winds to tally a nice variety of shorebirds – including multiple Piping Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, and Black-bellied Plovers – as well as several distant Boat-tailed Grackles and a lone Black-crowned Night Heron. As we were about to head back to the parking lot, we were alerted by Matt Minkel to the presence of a rare Sandwich Tern, found by recent ELIAS speaker Aidan Perkins, loafing on a distant sandbar with a number of its Common cousins. We trudged as far across the mudflats as we dared and were rewarded with some distant yet diagnostic views of this uncommon visitor. A prize well worth the effort!

*Indigo Bunting seen at SoFo
Photo Brad Miles*





Eastern Bluebird (who had us stumped until it “woke up” and looked again like a male Bluebird! Photo: Brad Miles

...From Eileen Schwinn

**South Fork Museum of Natural History (SoFo)
June 14, 2026**

A delightful group of birders from both ELIAS and SoFo gathered at Sofo with many folks being members of both organizations. The walk was originally started by Eric Salzman about 10 years ago – recognizing the overlapping memberships and common goals of both groups. Continued after Eric’s passing, those who knew and learned from him, thought of him often as we slowly walked the well-mowed fields where we were treated to a number of most cooperative birds. Although the “Target Bird”, a recently seen Blue Grosbeak, decided to stay hidden (in spite of some Merlin detections by those using that, at times, helpful device). It was a very pleasant walk around SoFo! The usual nesting birds were well represented - and thanks to Brad Miles, a number of photos were taken!

The morning was surprisingly humid but mosquito-free, which was probably, as SoFo director, Frank Quevedo, said, due to the abundance of Purple Martins nesting in the field! A few highlight birds included the sun-lit male Indigo Bunting, the Cedar Waxwings, and the “sleeping” Eastern Bluebird (who had us stumped until it “woke up” and looked again like a male Bluebird!

There were 27 species seen on the mile long walk.



Remembering Ridgie Barnett

On May 25, 2026, Eastern LI Audubon lost a long-time, dear member, officer and friend – Ora Belle (Ridgie) Barnett. Her long life – 98 years – was spent doing good, not only for her family of five children, but to her community of Westhampton Beach, and the many civic organizations in this area. And to us, her involvement and dedication to Moriches Bay Audubon, now ELIAS, since the late 1970's was truly remarkable.

Ridgie in pre-Covid years, was the point person for our Annual Dinners. From the selection of the location, selecting the menu, setting up the Raffle, to the tidy work after the dinner, she was there. Her home was the meeting place each year for the “Fold and Stuff Parties”. A small handful of folks would get together and literally fold all the invitations, put inserts in, and place the whole thing in envelopes. Then, pre-printed address labels would be attached, envelopes sorted by zip codes, and brought to the local post office for mailing. Lots of work, but real labors of love, spend with friends, and with food provided by Ridgie! Ridgie, as a Director of ELIAS, made sure Members Meeting had snack and coffee, ice tea, or juice, for us all to enjoy – had this maybe boosted attendance at meetings as well???? As a member of the Board of ELIAS, Ridgie always brought a cool head, and well-thought-out assessment of anything on our meeting’s agenda. Her elected position as a Village of Westhampton Trustee, helped the Village become a Tree City – certainly adding to the beautiful Main Street, and an asset to the local birds!

A club like ours depends totally on the efforts of volunteers – and Ridgie was one of the best! The many years of friendship and contributions you made to our club will stay in our hearts – at each Annual dinner, Snack Table at Meetings, and in passing each bird in a tree while we walk the various locations you helped improve. We thank your family for sharing you with us. Rest in Peace.

Eileen Schwinn



Razorbill with Puffins at Eastern Egg Rock. Photo: Jean Hall

Seabirds and Shorelines

Many of our members have visited Maine, at Audubon Hog Island Camp or on other occasions so I thought they would like to know that Eastern Egg Rock now has a new nester. I am sure that Steve Kress would be pleased to know that the Puffins he brought there many years ago have a new species on the Island.

We get to see those Razorbills infrequently in the winter, usually in the Shinnecock Canal.

Sally

When a species returns to an ecosystem after a long absence, it happens by chance and gravity. Razorbills have been spotted prospecting at Eastern Egg Rock for over 40 years, drawn in by Razorbill decoys and the allure of the restored Tern and Puffin colonies. However, to our knowledge, they have never successfully nested on the island until this year. The gravitational pull of the island, so to speak, comes from the succession of seabird species that make Eastern Egg Rock an attractive place to nest.

Like how species begin to repopulate a forest after a wildfire, when a seabird community is lost, individual species return in a way that builds upon each other. It is rare for a seabird project to have the longevity to witness how species colonization unfolds, much less take part in that restoration.

Years of observation by Audubon stewards have revealed that the Terns, with their aggressive defense strategies, are foundational in creating an environment that is suitable for other seabirds, like Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, and Murres. It turns out that the seabirds themselves are the best decoys. Razorbills have been attracted to Eastern Egg Rock for years, but not until now did a surreptitious moment of chance occur: a pair of pioneering individuals formed a bond and elected to nest somewhere new. The interplay of what we can observe and what we do not yet understand is what makes the study of seabirds exciting.



COMING THIS FALL

September

■ Calendar Deadline

Be sure to send your photos to Byron & Sally for the 2027 Calendar. Deadline is September 15.

Byron
youngb53@optimum.net

Sally
eliasosprey@optonline.net

This is open to members only. Photos must be hi-res and taken in Suffolk County. They should be current photos taken between September 2025 and September 2026.

October

■ SAVE THE DATE for the ELIAS Annual Dinner

Wednesday, October 14 at The Bellport Yacht Club. Invitations going out in early Sept.

November

■ Watch for the Seed Sale at Quogue Wildlife Refuge

To Twitch or Not to Twitch

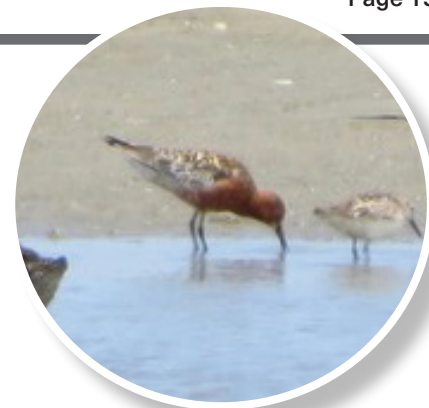
Eileen Schwinn

I used to drop everything to go chase a rare bird when one was reported almost anywhere in the tri-state area, as long as it was a one-day round trip twitch. I don't do that any more – I prefer to cover my own little “patch” of Dune Road, or anywhere in Southampton Township, as long as it doesn't involved getting trapped in the terrible traffic flows. So, two days after a delightful ELIAS Field Trip along Dune Road I decided to return to my favorite spot of that trip, the Tiana Bayside wash-over. That wash-over is a result of Super Storm Sandy when the Atlantic Ocean decided to visit Shinnecock Bay and a lovely set of sandy flats became the long-lasting result. The migrating and local nesting birds like that location probably more than I do!

I headed down to Dune Rd that day because a Royal Tern had been reported the day before, and, well, I just felt I could add that bird to my Year List. The tide was right – just about dead low – and that's the best time to check the feeding birds on the sand spits and the grassy marsh edge. I arrived at noon, walked to the end of the Town Long Dock, past the gazebo and little shaded pergola, set my scope up, but first, scanned with my binoculars for any large birds hanging out. Lots of birds, all shapes and sizes to go through. Looking through the scope, I started at the sandbars which were beginning to have tidal water creep up over them. Oystercatchers, Semipalmated Plovers, Piping Plovers, Willets, Semipalmated Sandpipers and Short-billed Dowitchers – all in pretty good numbers. And then, this smaller than the SB Dowitcher, but larger than the Semi-Sandpipers, bird appeared through my scope. Shockingly rusty-red from the upper back, the entire head and down to lower chest, with a longish bill. Different from the rest – and feeding with just its feet in the water, not thigh high like the Dowitchers it was associating with. OK – what have we

here????? My mind when through its inventory of possibilities – Red Knot? No. Right shade of rusty-red but wrong parts of the body, and too small. A Godwit? Too small. A Red Phalarope? Nope – nothing right except the rusty/rufous color! A Red-necked Stint? Maybe..... So, I did what any good birder does – I called a friend, Sue Benson. First, I asked where she was and what was she doing...” at home eating lunch.” Drop the lunch and grab your bird book! She did and I described what I was seeing – the rusty head, chest and shoulders, longish bill, dark legs, white from lower chest to vent, neat brown, tan, black, white and rust back, with a bit grayish between back and the underside of the bird. I could hear Sue flip through the pages – “How about a Curlew Sandpiper?”, she said. Reading me the description (which was basically what I had said to her a moment before), I said, “Yep. That's what this guy is! GET DOWN HERE!”. I immediately sent a message to the two internet birding locations that I – along with hundreds of other birders – use: New York Birding on Discord (Nassau-Suffolk-Chat), and Bird Finders on WhatsApp. My request was if anyone was out along Dune Road, especially if they had a good camera, please hustle down to Tiana Bayside – a possible Curlew Sandpiper is here. Of course, everyone was either at or heading to Jones Beach at that moment, to look for a Curlew Sandpiper which had been reported there the day before! I took some really poor photos with my cell phone and scope – good to ID the bird but really not Calendar Worthy....

As soon as Sue arrived, and after I let her catch her breath, I got her on the bird with my scope. I went back to my car to get my camera to get a picture or two. Those who know me, know I am a birder, not a photographer, so my small digital camera is no match for big guns that photographers carry. But, I shot away anyway! Sue and I spent about 45 minutes enjoying the



bird! Twice a helicopter flew by and flushed the birds, including the Curlew SP. Each time, the birds all returned! Two Black Skimmers showed up – bullies that they can be – and again, the birds flushed! The tide was rising, covering the sand flats. With the last swoop of the Skimmers, most of the birds on the flats took off, including the Curlew SP. All headed west along the bay. Sue decided to call it a day, but I stayed a bit longer, after posting that the bird “....had left the building”. I finally left two and a half hours after I got there. Shortly before I left, another birder, Ben B from the North Fork, showed up. The Curlew SP was no longer present. Ben went to a couple other shoreline spots – no joy.

A little while after I got home, Sue sent me an email – it was a life bird for her. I checked my old records and eBird – it seems this bird at Tiana was the first Suffolk County Curlew Sandpiper since August, 2013 (Mecox Bay). The prior year, 2012, had one which stayed in the area for a few days, mid-June, at the Westhampton Dunes Overlook Park (the raised platform on the north side of Dune Road, with a flats island only visible a low tide). I had been lucky enough to see both of those birds, 13 and 14 years ago. Lots of other birders and photographers saw those birds as well. The Jones Beach bird was a No-Show the day our Tiana bird was present – same bird? Who knows? And, in spite of others searching, the Tiana Curlew SP wasn't reported again after Sue and I saw it.

And no, I still haven't seen any Royal Terns this year - but that's OK - I will always keep checking my little local patch! I may be lucky another day!



THE OSPREY

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