



Birders Unite

Wings Over LBI celebrates the birds of Barnegat

By **SUSAN BLOOM**
Correspondent

While the rocky inlets of Barnegat may seem like rough terrain for many species, they're actually an idyllic environment for the many shore birds that flock to Barnegat's inlets and jetties.

On March 5, these birds will be the feature attraction of Wings Over LBI, a variety of events presented through the collaborative efforts of Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, Friends of Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, the Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts & Sciences, and the Southern Ocean Birding Group.

Featured at the Barnegat Lighthouse Visitor Center, "birding enthusiasts can enjoy educational presentations on the birds of Barnegat from two expert partners — at 10 a.m., Susan Puder, president of the Southern Ocean Birding Group, and at 1 p.m., Fred Lesser, naturalist with the Ocean County Parks and Recreation Department," said Cynthia Coritz, superintendent of Bass River State Forest/Barnegat Lighthouse State Park.

Between and after their lectures and until 4 p.m., Puder said SOBG volunteers positioned on outdoor walkways will make binoculars and scopes available and assist visitors in identifying the area birds discussed.

"More than 50 types of birds are regulars here during the winter, and it's a great time to see them," Lesser said. "One bird that's particularly unique to the Barnegat area is the Harlequin duck, which typically shows up here between November and April and feeds on the mussels and barnacles on the rocks — that's their comfort zone."

In addition to Harlequin ducks, Puder said visitors should be able to see long-tailed ducks, loons, common eiders, and scoters.

"Birding is one of the fastest-growing activities in the nation. There are more than one million birders in New Jersey alone," said Puder, a Barnegat resident. "It should be a fun learning

experience for attendees and a great day to be outdoors to identify local birds and experience our unique natural habitat."

While Lesser and Puder have made similar presentations on local birds at the lighthouse in past years, the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce formalized the event this year, expanding it to include other organizations around LBI and promoting it under the new name of Wings Over LBI to help draw visitors to the island during the winter season.

"We want people to know that the activity of birding is not just something you can do in the summer," Lesser said. "Wings Over LBI will hopefully get people out to learn about nature and meet others who are interested in birding, so it's a good time for everybody."

Birding enthusiasts also can enjoy a celebration of Wings Over LBI at the Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts & Sciences in Loveladies on March 5, where a bird art exhibit run by the SOBG at the facility's Blai Gallery will take place from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The exhibit will feature 30 to 35 photos of local birds taken by members of the LBIF, Puder among them. Local environmental nonprofit organizations will have information tables set up from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the main gallery, and bird viewing will be available from the LBIF's elevated platform overlooking natural marshland.

For more information on events at Barnegat Lighthouse State Park at 208 Broadway in Barnegat Light, call 609-494-2016 or visit www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/parks/barnlig.html, or contact the Southern Ocean Birding Group at 609-698-2106 or visit www.southernoceanbirdinggroup.org.

For more information on the Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts & Sciences at 120 Long Beach Blvd. in Loveladies, call 609-494-1241 or visit www.lbifoundation.org.

Both events are free of charge. The Friends of Barnegat Lighthouse State Park can be contacted by visiting www.friendsofbarnegatlighthouse.org.



Birds that can be seen at Barnegat Inlet include (clockwise from left) an Ipswich Savannah sparrow found on the dunes, a purple sandpiper found on the jetty, flocks of Harlequin ducks and Greater Scaups.

(PHOTOS: COURTESY SUSAN PUDER)