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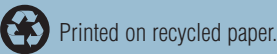
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A copy of the last annual report filed with the New York State Department of Law may be obtained by writing to NYS Attorney General's Charities Bureau, Attn: FOIL Officer, 120 Broadway, New York, NY, 10271 or may be obtained directly from the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, 2042 North Country Rd, Ste 103 Wading River, NY 11792



Credit: Travis Cutter



SLIPPING AWAY: Autumn into Winter at Wertheim.

Pine Barrens TV

The Pine Barrens Society's television program airs on Cablevision/Altice Public Access. October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026. The program can also be viewed on the Society's YouTube page at www.youtube.com/lipinebarrenssociety.

Towns of Babylon, Brookhaven, Huntington, Islip, Riverhead, Smithtown, Southampton & Southold Channel 20:

Mondays at 9:00 PM
Tuesdays at 4:00 PM
Sundays at 11:00 AM

Town of East Hampton:

Tuesdays at 4:00 PM
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Today

Long Island Pine Barrens Society Pays Tribute to Two Long-time Board Members

Credit: Top left-Travis Cutter, Top right-Wayne Cook, Bottom left-John Turner, Bottom right--Wayne Cook

Oh, what a mournful year for the Society. This year, we marked the passing of two of our stalwarts – Tom Casey in March and Bob McGrath in August – two giants of land preservation on Long Island.

Tom Casey was active with the Society for over 30 years, including serving on the Society’s Board of Directors until his passing at the age of 79. A resident of West Sayville, Tom was an English teacher for 32 years, as evidenced by his lyrical contributions to The Pine Barrens Today, the Society’s biannual newsletter. Tom’s greatest love was the outdoors. His free time was spent hiking and working to preserve outdoor spaces through his work with the Society and several other environmental non-profits.

Bob McGrath was one of the founders of the Society in 1977, when he was in his late teens. He served on the Board of Directors



TIMELESS MEMORIES. Top: Bob and Tom in the outdoors. Bottom: Robert T McGrath Preserve in Manorville, Tom in his signature shorts with Dick Amper at 30th Anniversary Celebration.

and as Vice President at the time of his passing at age 65.

Bob was a teacher – an outdoor educator – who resided in Medford. He shared his deep knowledge of the Long Island Pine Barrens with public school colleagues and students, and, in his later years, with college students and faculty.

John Turner, another Board member and founder, alerted the Town of Brookhaven of Bob’s untimely death. Town leaders agreed with John that a Pine Barrens parcel should be dedicated as a preserve to Bob, in recognition of his lifelong

preservation efforts. The resolution creating the Robert T. McGrath Nature Preserve appears on this page.

Tom and Bob may no longer be with us but their contributions to the Society and Long Island’s environment will not be forgotten.

Robert T. McGrath Nature Preserve

WHEREAS, the Town of Brookhaven is the owner of a parcel, approximately 26.4 acres in size, located in Manorville fronting on the east side of Halsey Manor Road and approximately 400 feet south of the Long Island Expressway, and

WHEREAS, the SCTM Number for said parcel is 0200-412.00-02.00-002.001; and

WHEREAS, the parcel is situated within the Core Preservation Area of the Central Pine Barren as established by Article 57 of the NYS Environmental Conservation Law and is located within Hydrogeologic Zone Three established pursuant to Section 208 of the Clean Water Act; and

WHEREAS, the Paumanok Path, a regionally significant hiking trail that extends from Rocky Point to Montauk Point, passes through the property thereby providing outdoor enthusiasts the opportunity to experience and enjoy the parcel; and

WHEREAS, the property contains typical upland Pine Barrens forest dominated by Pitch Pine and several oak species growing above an understory dominated by a variety of heath species, the forest of which is a rare community element as classified in the New York Natural Heritage Program; and

WHEREAS, the property contains two vernal pools, seasonal and ephemeral wetlands, that provide habitat to a variety of wetland dependent plant species, including Golden Hedge Hyssop and Virginia Meadow Beauty, thereby adding ecological and biological diversity to the site; and

WHEREAS, these vernal pools provide breeding habitat for several amphibian species including a New York State Endangered Species; and

WHEREAS, for all the above elucidated reasons, the Brookhaven Town Board finds said parcel is worthy for inclusion in the town’s nature preserve system pursuant to Chapter 77 of the town code; and

WHEREAS, Robert T. McGrath was a long long-time resident of the Town of Brookhaven who resided in Medford, was a founding member of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society who, in said capacity, devoted much of his life to protecting the Long Island Pine Barrens and its species, communities, and natural resources, and who was a passionate environmental educator who inspired countless other individuals to connect with nature and learn about its wonders;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Town Board of the Town of Brookhaven hereby designates the above-referenced property as a nature preserve pursuant to Chapter 77 of the Town Code and further dedicates it as part of the Town’s Nature Preserve System; and be it further

RESOLVED said parcel shall be called the “Robert T. McGrath Nature Preserve” in his honor.

OUR NEW LOOK IS COMING IN 2026!



Snake Stories

By John Turner

Mr. Turner is a member of the Board of Directors of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society. First published 4/27/25, TBR News Media Nature Matters Column

I was excited to discover four large plywood boards lying in the woods at the edge of a Town of Brookhaven preserve in Coram. While the dumping of the material was a thoughtless and selfish act by some careless individual, I knew the four boards provided an opportunity to see what was living beneath, as boards like this create habitat that several different animals like to use.

Lifting the top board, I peered down to see a curled up Ring-necked Snake. A little more than a foot long and the thickness of your pinky, the Ring-necked lives up to its name with a bright yellow ring around its neck matched by a pretty yellow belly. The top of the snake is grey (in other individuals I've seen, the dorsal or top side is more like a muted mauve color) making for an attractive if diminutive serpent.

I slowly turned over another board – success! Lying there was a slightly curled Milk Snake. The Milk Snake is very attractive, possessing irregularly shaped, burgundy-colored splotches on its back and sides which are outlined in black on a base of white. The extent of the splotches makes the white areas look like rings or bands. Milk Snakes get their name because they were once common around milking barns or cow sheds where they fed on the small mammals that are plentiful in such locations.

Of the 17 snake species found in New York State, 11 are native to Long Island: besides the two aforementioned species, others are the Northern Water Snake, Smooth Green Snake, Eastern Hognose Snake, the Northern Brown or DeKay's Snake, Northern Redbelly Snake, Eastern Worm Snake, Northern Black Racer, Common Garter Snake, and its cousin - the Eastern Ribbon Snake. We once had a twelfth snake, a venomous one – the Timber Rattlesnake - but this species has been extirpated from Long Island due to a combination of direct persecution and habitat destruction. The last known local Timber Rattlesnake was killed around 1912, apparently while sunning itself on the railroad tracks in Oakdale.

Credit: Travis Cutter, John Turner



SLITHERING ALONG. A Ribbon Snake at Cranberry Bog. John holding a Smooth Green Snake.

My holy grail of Long Island snakes long has been the Smooth Green Snake. This beautiful tropical-looking species, lime green with yellow tinges on the lower sides with white on the bottom, is a snake I've wanted to see on Long Island for at least 50 years and finally on May 20, 2025, I found one! Green Snakes were once relatively common on Long Island but have become increasingly rare due to the dual impacts of habitat destruction and pet collecting.

Black Racers live up to their name. They move at remarkable speeds when pressed – an action which I've seen twice - with the glossy, supercharged black serpents heading off through blueberry thickets. They also are able climbers. I once watched a Black Racer climb a multi-flora rose bush in a field in Yaphank in just a few seconds.

The Eastern Hognose Snake is another species that has become increasingly rare here. So named because of its upturned snout like a hog, this species devours toads and is a dweller of sandy habitats. When agitated, the snake at first may lunge at the object causing the disturbance; this is a bluff as its mouth stays closed. Then, often but not always, the hognose begins to writhe spasmodically, going into its “death throes,” turning belly up and flaying its tongue out of its mouth. Sometimes there's blood in the corner of its mouth; capillaries in its mouth lining can rupture and bleed, adding a convincing element to its “death.” But give this “dead” snake a couple of minutes of playing “possum” and, if the coast is clear, it will move away.

I've seen this behavior twice – once while co-leading a hike in the Manorville Hills of the Pine Barrens where we encountered a hognose on the edge of the trail that quickly “died,” and the second time while exploring the Albany Pine Bush. I had turned over a large board to find not one, but two hognose snakes beneath. Displaying opposite behaviors, one quickly shot away while the other remained in place and began its death feign act. I moved a few steps away and watched for several minutes as the snake became active again, darting its tongue out repeatedly to gain sensory information to determine if the “coast was clear.” (This is how snakes “smell” – by pulling in scent molecules and processing them in their Jacobsen's organ, located in their nasal chamber).

Northern Water Snakes live up to their name, frequenting wetland areas throughout the central and eastern parts of Suffolk County. The species is an attractive mix of tan, brown, and black, sometimes with patches of grey. They are fond of fish and frogs and can sometimes be seen swimming along the edges of a pond or stream in search of prey.

The Common Garter Snake and Eastern Ribbon Snake are quite similar in appearance and can be easily confused. They typically segregate by habitat with the Garter found in dry uplands and the Ribbon Snake liking wetter areas. Also, Ribbon Snakes are the thinner of the two, possess a longer tail, and have a characteristic little white dot in front of their eye that the Garter lacks.

Garter snakes are sometimes mistakenly called “garden snakes.” The name “garter” comes from the longitudinal stripes once found on women's garter belts; these long stripes are a conspicuous feature on this species. They are the most common snake species on Long Island.

Many people don't like snakes and some even fear them, perhaps since a few are venomous, although with the demise of the Timber Rattlesnake, no venomous snakes remain on Long Island. Objectively, there is nothing to fear from snakes. They are unique and fascinating life forms with interesting behaviors and survival strategies. For readers who like and appreciate snakes enough to have read to the end of this article, I hope you see one of our native species soon, perhaps by also becoming a flipper of boards!

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS NOTES

By Travis Cutter, Program Coordinator

2025 Scholarship Awarded

The 2025 Robin Hopkins Amper Environmental Scholarship was awarded to Sierra Needham, a student at Smithtown High School West who now attends SUNY New Paltz as an Environmental Science major. Sierra achieved an impressive 4.63 GPA, was an AP Scholar with Distinction, a National Merit Finalist and a co-author of the environmental children's story *A Problem For Real!* Sierra aims to become an environmental educator and, as she said in her application materials, hopes “to give future generations the same chance to discover awe in, and never give up on, their environment.” We couldn't agree more with this sentiment, and wish Sierra nothing but the best as she works towards this noble goal.

Credit: Sierra Needham



2025 WINNER. Sierra Needham is now a first-year student at SUNY New Paltz.

2025 ENVIRONMENTAL GALA



The LIPBS' 48th Anniversary Gala went live on Thursday, October 23rd. Its theme was “Preserving the People's Park,” and in keeping with that we highlighted first and foremost numerous species which inhabit the Long Island Pine Barrens. From places situated amid residential areas, like Fish Thicket Preserve, to reclaimed agricultural sites such as Cranberry Bog Preserve, we highlighted the diverse array of plants and animals that can be found across Long Island, as well as some of the history that led to where we are now. It was important to us to once more make the case that preserving land is important, not merely for the sake of it, but so we can create enriching places for education, recreation, exercise and more, for all Long Islanders. Hence, “the People's Park.”

BEST OF THE REST UPDATE

Credit: Travis Cutter



CLOSING THE GAPS: The preservation of a 65-acre parcel in Calverton was completed in September 2025.

The Best of the Rest initiative saw tremendous progress in the latter half of 2025! Most notably, the long-discussed 65-acre parcel on the west side of Fresh Pond Avenue in Calverton was finally, fully preserved by Suffolk County. The County is also working on the acquisition and preservation of 100 acres on the other side of the road. With the preservation of the 65 acres, and hopefully the additional 100 acres, the County will create a wide swath of preserved land which includes several DEC-owned properties, thus ensuring the quality of the habitat and its underlying aquifer for generations to come!

Also in the past few months, the Pine Barrens Commission has made significant progress towards the construction of a Pine Barrens Nature Center. A feasibility study is well underway and two public engagement sessions have been held. Site selection appears to target a few of our Best of the Rest parcels, which will fast track preservation. The Pine Barrens Society is an active participant in the study. For continual updates on the progress of the center, you can consult the Commission's website.

founder's
corner



Remembering Bobby McGrath: Our Early Years Together

By John Cryan

Mr. Cryan is one of the founders of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society.

It's almost impossible to recreate what it was like to live and grow up on the Long Island a half-century ago; things have changed so much. But for those who have lived through those times, they remain evergreen.

Credit: LIPBS



OUTDOOR EDUCATOR EXTRAORDINAIRE. Bob leading the way.

I first met Bobby at Hoyt Farm Park in Commack. The new ranger-naturalist there, Bob Giffen, had created a program for young people he called the Junior Naturalists. It served for some as an entry point for part-time summer employment as Bob's assistants during the busy summer season. Hoyt Farm was a former apple and peach orchard that was donated to the Town of Smithtown by a very generous Hoyt family descendant who wanted to see its 133 acres of morainal hills, deciduous oak-dominated woods, fields and kettle ponds, along with a historic house and outbuildings, preserved in perpetuity for the people and its own sake.

Bobby came as half of a pair, the other half being John Turner. The two of them grew up in Smithtown and bonded over their shared pursuit of bird watching. John was tall, quiet, and purposeful. Bobby was shorter, and a bundle of gregarious energy. The three of us met at the park, and, with the encouragement of Ranger Giffen, became close friends and, eventually, collaborators on the biggest project of our lifetimes.

We were within a few years of one another in age, close enough that we were maturing into adults during those early years together. Each of us had different personalities and areas of evolving interests, but they centered broadly on a modern form of general natural history popularized by Henry David Thoreau in this country, back in the early 1800s. The Transcendentalists of that era inspired Theodore Roosevelt to begin a more muscular version at the turn of last century, and that in turn morphed into the activist environmental movement of the 1960s, ignited by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. A 1970 book by Robert Arbib, *The Lord's Woods*, mesmerized with its tale of a paradise lost.

By the time the conjoined Sixties protest movements

(civil rights, antiwar, feminism, environmentalism and many others) had matured, broken apart, and taken less intertwined paths, local concerns began to rise to the fore. It was in that 70s aftermath that the seeds of what became the Long Island Pine Barrens Society were sown. That is a story yet to be fully told, but what the Society became is vividly recollected in Dick Amper's memoir, *Saving Long Island*.

Bobby's enthusiasm for nature knew no bounds. He was driven to share it with everyone he met. I first began to see that in how he conducted nature walks in the park. Whereas mine were somewhat stilted and academic, his were vibrant, earthy and visceral. He could pull stories and examples out of his hat. I followed him around for a while to up my game. Eventually I realized in-person teaching was not my forte, and retreated into my real strengths at the time: art and making collections, living and dead.

Bobby developed early a love of rare plants that complemented his passion for birds. We spent several field trips together searching for Pyxie Moss, Curly Grass Fern, Conrad's Corema, and many orchids, all over the Island. Bob Giffen took the three of us to Connetquot Park. He ran a bluebird nest box trail there, and it was there we got our first close-up look at many pine barrens organisms and landscapes, as that park was more than 30 times as large as Hoyt Farm.

We were put to work on a long-term project to turn the guest cottage next to Hoyt House into a real, bona fide nature center with exhibits and programs open to the public. The prior ranger-naturalist, Steve Pradon, had begun that task, but now, with support from Bob Giffen's long-serving boss, Smithtown Parks Department's Superintendent, Charles 'Buster' Toner, we got the green light, backed with town funding and resources such as carpentry assistance. By the late 70s we had a fully functioning exhibit space indoors, and a converted dry kettle hole outdoors as an amphitheater for outdoor assembly and teaching - a jumping-off spot for taking groups from schools, scout troops, and other organizations on instructional walks on the trails.

Throughout all of this I got to know Bobby, and John, much better. We each took the measure of the others' strengths and realized from our wanderings all over what was left of natural Long Island that it was all going fast - being paved over and built over as the wave of postwar suburbia rolled eastward, consuming the land we had come to love. In my last year of college, we had a series of discussions, Bobby, John and me, about starting a new organization to save what was left of terrestrial Long Island. Thus, in 1977, the Long Island Pine Barrens Society was born.

We could see that many of the natural areas in central Long Island that were left were situated in the former 250,000-plus-acres wilderness derisively called 'pine bar-

rens' back in the earliest colonial days, due to its forbidding strangeness, scary wildfires, and utter uselessness for farming or even grazing. We knew we had to get out there and reach the public, fast. But how to do it?

Bobby studied to be a teacher, and he was born for this. I have never met anyone more suited to that ancient and august, and now endangered, profession. He pressed for a strong initial effort to educate the public. Both John and I agreed. We quickly put together a 'pine barrens slide show,' and began touring around the Island with it. During those early years, we gave hundreds of such shows, and began circulating a newsletter, and later, a journal. We also reached out to the press, and local politicians. John took the lead on the latter and made it into his profession.

Bobby drew on strong family and professional connections to help launch and grow the Society. Two of the most important were the printing services provided gratis by Bobby's sweetheart, later to be wife, Denise's father to get the early editions of our nascent society's publications out, and the after-hours use of various offices for the three of us to meet in. These seemingly small things enabled us to grow a tiny new organization to the cusp of a powerhouse.

As we passed 500, then 1,000 members, we realized we'd have to incorporate the Society. When we did, we began to add new board members. Slowly, the organization grew into what it would become.

That took off on steroids when Dick Amper came onboard in the mid-80s as executive director.

Bobby has left this temporal sphere way too early. But he left an indelible mark on it, and on the people who had the privilege to know and work with him. We all have an

Credit: John Turner



IN HIS HAPPY PLACE: Bob in Manorville Hills.

obligation to carry on and continue his work to honor him and to the many others we have lost. And we have an equalobligation to honor, cherish, and perpetuate his and their memories.

Rest in peace, my friend.

The Oak Brush Plains at Pinelawn is Down to One Last Parcel, and It is in Jeopardy

The westernmost remaining piece of recognizable Oak Brush Plains vegetation is the 110-acre parcel owned by the Pinelawn Cemetery Association, often labeled on maps as "Colonial Springs Park." It is located east of Little East Neck Road and north of Long Island Avenue.

On November 24th, the Town of Babylon held a public hearing on a proposal to create a 'planned industrial park' zoning category for parcels greater in size than 90 acres. It was widely known that this proposal was a preliminary action to change the zoning of the Pinelawn Cemetery Association parcel from residential to the new proposed 'PIP' zoning. Most of the parties commenting at the hearing opposed the proposal, for reasons ranging from increased traffic, noise, and pollution impacts. A few supported it, hoping for more jobs for residents including those of adjacent Wyandanch, in particular.

What went unspoken was the tract's intrinsic ecological and clean groundwater recharge significance.

In the *Heath Hen*, Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1980, the Society's early journal, my article about the Oak Brush Plains laid out the significance and plight of this westernmost section of the original Long Island Pine Barrens. An earlier broadsheet flyer and article in the Sunday magazine section of *Newsday* by the late Long Island naturalist and ecologist Frederick C. Schlauch in the mid-1970s also highlighted this area.

The name 'Oak Brush Plains' is a more recent coinage of an older designation for the 'Brushy Plains,' a zone of transition eastward from the Hempstead Plains to the denser pine barrens formations near the Connetquot River drainage. Along this continuum or gradient, the easternmost tall grass prairie in the United States gradually transitioned first into islands of scrub and dwarf chestnut oak, mixed with patches of heath shrubs and

bracken, to islands with tall, columnar pitch pines, and finally to continuous 'plains' of the two shrubby pine barrens oaks, with diverse understory shrubs and wildflowers adapted to frequent wildfires, peppered with a scattered open canopy of pitch pine.

One of the reasons the Oak Brush Plains is so distinctive is its soils. Instead of the coarse, super-acidic Carver-Plymouth series of the eastern Pine Barrens, including the poorest soils of all at the Dwarf Pine Plains south of Riverhead, the Oak Brush Plains are underlain by the richer and smaller-grained Riverhead and Haven soil series. This reflects what the glaciers brought down from the continental areas directly north of Long Island, and what their meltwaters washed out of it to form the outwash plains south of the moraines, upon which most of the Pine Barrens vegetation developed.

As a result of this differential sediment sorting, the Oak Brush Plains had a richer flora and fauna than the rest of the upland pine barrens to its east. Even continuously-distributed pine barrens organisms varied along this continuum. So Buck Moths, for example, are larger and more densely scaled and colored in the Oak Brush Plains than in the far harsher Dwarf Pine Plains located 50 miles eastward.

It is vitally important to our future ability to restore the ecological functioning of much of our island, which was 'lost' in the runaway postwar development, but not permanently, if we can at least save the few remaining examples of each major original ecotype as 'seed parcels' for such restoration efforts. The Pinelawn tract is one such parcel. The rezoning should be turned down, and the parcel should be publicly acquired, and made into a real 'park,' a park preserve for the westernmost Pine Barrens remnant left on Long Island.

Credit: John Turner



SAVE WHAT'S LEFT: A Copse of Sumac at Pinelawn.