

Commissioner Carnell Foskey
Nassau County Department of Parks, Recreation and Museums
Eisenhower Park Administration Building
East Meadow, NY 11554

Dear Commissioner Foskey:

As a resident of Nassau County, I am writing to support the Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon's proposal to restore a significant majority of the back field of Stillwell Woods Preserve into a grassland/meadow. Thanks to the County's decision to leave a portion of the back field in its natural state, grasses and wildflowers returned to the parcel this past spring and summer thereby creating important wildlife habitat that was utilized by a wide variety of bird and butterflies (including monarch butterflies, an iconic species in North America which faces an uncertain future due to habitat destruction in the US as well as its Mexican wintering grounds). Numerous stands of common milkweed, which Monarch butterflies depend on for feeding and reproduction, have been observed in the field. As you may know, milkweed is an important wildflower, host plant to not only butterflies, but over 400 species of insects, which then in turn provide an important food source for birds.

Stillwell Woods Preserve is an under-appreciated natural resource in Nassau County. Breeding birds in Stillwell include Eastern towhees, white eyed vireos, wood thrushes, black-capped chickadees, ring necked pheasants, blue winged warblers, Cooper's hawks, house wrens, Baltimore orioles, yellow warblers, yellow throated warblers, catbirds, redwinged blackbirds, willow flycatchers, goldfinches, field, chipping and song sparrows. Numerous spring migrants such as warblers, merlins, brown thrashers, both species of kinglets, bobolinks (another grassland bird in serious decline), yellow billed cuckoos and many others have all been observed in the wooded sections as well as the fields. There are also great horned and eastern screech owls residing in the preserve as well as red foxes and woodchucks. Each March, the fields are host to American woodcocks who perform their courtship displays as they ready for breeding season. Until they disappeared from the preserve several years back, Stillwell was one of the most reliable spots in Nassau County to observe northern bobwhites, yet another bird in decline. All in all, over 80 species of birds, as well as 20 species of butterflies have utilized the preserve.

Grasslands are our fastest disappearing ecosystem and it is vital that we preserve whatever parcels we can find on Long Island.

Nassau County has the wonderful opportunity to restore one of the last remaining parcels of grassland in the county. I urge you to protect this preserve for the benefit of both wildlife and the enjoyment of the community.

Sincerely,