

## **Update on Preserving Plum Island**

Much has happened since we last reported to you earlier this year about our efforts to preserve Plum Island, an 840 acre island situated off Orient Point at the tip of the North Fork, by dedicating all or a significant fraction of it as Long Island's newest National Wildlife Refuge!

Presently, the federal legislation which authorized the sale of Plum Island to a private party is still in effect and the General Services Administration (GSA) is moving forward to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act to assess the environmental impact of several potential development scenarios. On May 20th the GSA held a hearing to solicit public input on issues relevant to the sale of the Island. A number of individuals and representatives from environmental organizations spoke, including many groups that are part of a newly formed "Preserve Plum Island" Coalition of which all Long Island Audubon chapters are a part. The mission of the Coalition is to have Congress reverse course on Plum Island by introducing and passing legislation which protects most or all of the Island by having it transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service as a National Wildlife Refuge.

In its comments to the GSA the Coalition urged that a complete and full four-season ecological/biological inventory be undertaken on the Island so that a complete and accurate assessment of the impacts development might have on these species and communities can be considered. Regarding alternatives in addition to considering the sale of the entire island for development purposes we asked the GSA to consider selling part of the island for development (the already disturbed footprint) while selling the 85-90% of the island that's undeveloped for conservation purposes. A number of other individuals and organizations spoke expressing their concerns. Of greatest note was the most welcome joint letter from the Environmental Protection Agency's two regional offices, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and especially the letter from Congressman Bishop in which he stated his support, publicly for the first time, for the establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge at Plum Island.

We already know much about the ecological worth of the island. For example, the narrow eastern portion of the island serves as a seal haul-out site for as many as several hundred harbor and grey seals during the colder months, making it one of, if not the most significant haul-out site in southern New England. Piping plovers, a federally threatened species, breed on the island and common and roseate terns, a federally endangered species, rest on the beaches of this undisturbed setting and feed actively in the waters surrounding the island as do numerous species of loons, grebes, and sea ducks. The shrubby coastal vegetation that covers the island (including extensive thickets of beach plum which gave the island its name) provides habitat for several dozen breeding birds as well as important migratory stopover habitat for migrating species. This latter feature has been shown to be important for songbird species migrating over water in that it allows them an opportunity to land and feed, thereby replenishing their energy reserves. A large freshwater wetland exists in the south-

western part of the Island. Cultural resources on the island include the Plum Island Lighthouse and the remains of Fort Terry, an old military fortification. These remains include a railroad track on which a small gauge railroad once ran, carrying munitions to needed parts of the island.

Other recent activities by LI Audubon Council representatives on behalf of the Coalition include:

- \* LIAC reps. met with Newsday's editorial staff which resulted in an editorial favorable to the Coalition's position; on Monday May 10th Newsday ran an editorial entitled "Keep it Wild, but with jobs".

- \* LIAC met with staff from Senator Chuck Schumer's to explain the Coalition's perspective. Senator Schumer is very interested in the Coalition's idea of preserving the Island.

- \* LIAC reps appeared on Bob DeLuca's East End Radio show "Going Green" to discuss the fate of Plum Island.

- \* As stated above LIAC spoke at May 20th GSA hearing in Greenport dealing with the proposed disposition of Plum Island.

- \* LIAC reps. met with the Southold Town Board and Conservation Advisory Council to express the Coalition's support for the creation of a National Wildlife Refuge.

- \* Through the committed effort of Stella Miller, HOBAS Chapter President, an online petition ([www.thepetitionsite.com/1/preserve-plum-island](http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/preserve-plum-island)), a Facebook page (Preserve Plum Island) and a website ([www.preserveplumisland.org](http://www.preserveplumisland.org)) have been created. Please take the time to sign the petition and check out the website and Facebook page for current news on this issue!!!

Stay tuned as the story concerning the fate of this environmentally significant island unfolds in the weeks and months ahead.

John Turner  
Conservation Chair  
Huntington - Oyster Bay Audubon Society