



ISSUE LIII • WINTER 2020

## A "Golden" Moment at Brookside County Park

by Lisa Nasta

The Golden-crowned Sparrow is a species that commonly winters on the Pacific coast and is rare to be seen here. The only other NY state records of this species are from Nassau County (1954, 1987, 1995) and earlier this year (Jan. 2019) in Delaware County. That makes this bird the 1st Suffolk County record, 4th Long Island record and the 5th NY state record. Since the news broke of its presence birders and photographers have "flocked" here from across the region to get a "gander" at this regional mega-rarity. The bird was identified as a Golden-crowned Sparrow and local birders were "twitching" in suspense of the reveal of the exact location of this bird. The finder then posted it on Ebird and the location of Brookside County Park was revealed on the rare-bird alert and through various social media outlets.



*"The bird was first seen by a photographer at the park on 11/15/19 who posted a photo of it on Facebook 'What's this Bird' group the following day asking for species identification only specifying the location as Long Island."*

**- Lisa Nasta**

I have been a volunteer at Brookside for about three years. I am there one Sunday a month for a couple of hours to fill the feeders, pick up trash and give tours for those who visit. For the most part I am usually "owl" by myself and hardly see a visitor. When the news came to light the night before I was to be at Brookside the next day, I couldn't sleep not knowing how this was going to go. No one knew if the bird was even still there, and I was concerned about the chaos of a lot of people and not enough parking. It could potentially have been an "auk"ward situation. I was in touch with board member Jack Carlson and he volunteered to help direct visitors to park across the street. We were just going to have to "wing" it. I arrived at first light and there were a handful of birders already on the scene. The bird was still there! There was an exuberant feeling as we quietly assembled on the deck of the house situated in front of the feeders feet away with our optics and lenses on the bird while large and gentle snowflakes fell from the sky around us that just added to the surrealism of the situation.

Throughout the day we had many visitors most being their first time at Brookside County Park. Some had to wait longer than others (up to 2 hours) to see the bird depending on when they arrived. The bird gave intermittent views in the morning and disappeared into the rhododendrons for a time. After 12 noon, it stayed in view more frequently. It was a good day for casual and veteran birders alike who may have added the bird to their life list or their county list. Coming together over a rare bird is a celebratory occasion and it's nice to catch up with old friends as well as meet new ones who all share the same passion.

I find it amazing that this bird picked our very own Brookside County Park where it could have easily been overlooked. Some (especially those who traveled a distance by car and train) expressed appreciation of being able to use the facilities and warming up inside a bit in which such conveniences are not available at most rare bird stakeouts. The day was im"peck"able, everyone was considerate of one another, no one got too close to the bird, and there was not a piece of trash left behind. The only "egret" I have is that I would have liked to have been prepared to have hot chocolate and coffee for everyone. I wonder what the odds are of another rare bird coming to Brookside again? Overall, it was a memorable experience that hopefully birders will be "raven" about for years to come. At the time of this article it was reportedly seen for at least 10 days.





Watercolor Cardinal by Jan Guarino

## President's Message

by Jody Banaszak

Hello my little birding friends! Hope you are all in the holiday spirit and not stressing too much. Sometimes there's just too much to do. Some things you want to do and some you don't. The first weekend of December I had 8 things to do. Of course I couldn't do them all. But one thing I hope to never miss is the decoy show at the Suffolk County Historical Society in Riverhead. They have a decoy show every year. The carvings of birds, ducks, shorebirds, spoons, animals, cutting boards and old working decoys are incredible. I usually buy a carving of a shore bird or duck from an elderly man named James Buttonow. My son and his wife usually go too, and I buy him one for Christmas.

My son had my grandson, Davis, who is only 6 1/2 months old, in front of him in a baby sling. That kid couldn't take his eyes off all the decoys and had such an intent look on his face. Young birder!! I also got a few history lessons this year. I asked one of the old timers there if he knew a carver named Ernest Steck. He did and gave me some information. I bought one of my first carvings of a shore bird from him in the 70's. I don't even remember where, but it was about \$25. My brother-in-law, at the time, had bought us a life size Canada Goose that he carved. Ernest lived in Quogue. I went to his house a few times to buy one or two more. He was a crude painter and painted shellac or something over the paint, which would cause it to crack and peel later on in time. I still have them on shelves in my living room! Some of our members are carvers and raffle them off at our annual dinner in May!! Maybe you will be lucky enough to win one this year.

I'm happy to say that we've had some luck catching some of the vandals at Brookside County Park. There's been some graffiti perps, but no luck with that yet. There's also been a rare sparrow there bringing in many birders and putting us on the map!! Lisa Nasta will be having an article about that.

I went to the dumps the other day to get some compost. Of course you know how I feel about garbage. Well a truck I front of me, waiting to get on the scale, had a trailer filled with carpentry stuff. Plastic, boxes, wood, etc. He had no tarp over the trailer so anything could blow out, which I'm sure did. My blood pressure went up. Use a tarp!! I always notice the birds at the dumps. During the summer, I guess with the rain, there's always ducks and geese in the little pond and mud puddles. Some have babies. Now it's pretty much just puddles and the babies are grown. They are so happy to be in that water and drinking away. I thought how disgusting, but I guess they don't care. Maybe they don't have taste buds! There are of course many gulls and even turkey vultures. One guy there said he even saw a bald eagle! It's an amazing place, the dumps. They drive up these steep hills to bury the garbage to make it look like a big grass mountain. You'd never know there is garbage under there. And, of course, if you look around, you may find something good to take home!! Happy birding!

## Sandpiper Snippets

Today, there are three hundred million fewer seabirds in the world than there were in 1950, a population decline of seventy percent. These magnificent birds rely on fish as their primary food source, but often cannot find enough to eat. A new bill in Congress would help essential fish populations to rebound for the seabirds and marine wildlife that depend on them. Ask your U.S. representative to support the Forage Fish Conservation Act.

Hot Pepper Suet, sold in some stores, is effective in warding off squirrels from bird feeders. Squirrels hate it, but ravens love it.

Your backyard can be a welcome winter haven for birds if left a little messy after a fall cleanup. It provides food and shelter for birds during cold winter months, according to Tod Winston, Audubon's Plants for Birds program manager.

During fall cleanup, leave seed heads on coneflowers, black-eyed Susans and native wildflowers to provide a helpful food cache for birds. The seeds are almost invisible, but birds can feed on them all winter long. Dead plants can also provide protein-packed bird snacks in the form of insect larvae that remain behind.

A small brush pile of thin fallen branches can provide shelter and protection from the elements for wintering birds.

To find species suited to your yard, enter your ZIP code in Audubon's native plants database. You can find species descriptions for trees, shrubs and plants, the birds they attract, and distinctive features. The website also provides local nurseries where you can order and purchase your selections. Find the database at: [www.audubon.org/native-plants](http://www.audubon.org/native-plants)



# Noses by Harry Anderson

Birds, in general, apparently do not have a highly developed sense of smell. The short answer is that they generally don't need one for survival, for the same reason we don't need tails. The exception to this is found in vultures. They can sniff out the sulfurous chemical compounds coming off carrion from a mile away. Sea birds and parrots also find their noses very useful. Nature tries not provide its creatures with useless or inefficient mechanisms. A Chinese saying points out that long legs would be extremely inconvenient for a duck.

As strange as it might seem, salmon have a very keen sense of smell. They use it during migration. They can use it to identify the actual spots in a stream where they were born with their own GPS. Bears come in on top with sensitive noses. They can smell 2,100 times better than we can and are able to detect a carcass 20 miles away. And as for sensing potential mates in heat, that increases almost to 100 miles. There is a bit of advice in Alaska holding that if a pine cone falls in the forest, an eagle will see it, a deer will hear it, but a bear will smell it - and possibly you as well.

Dogs, of course are legendary. They have a remarkable ability to identify and remember scents that allow them to find anything from a corpse to a bedbug. The bloodhound searching for a escapee is a familiar scene. We might actually stink to a dog, but once they sniff us, it is permanently cataloged. A snake smells with its flicking tongue that when brought back into its mouth contacts the Jacobson gland that senses odors. Not to be neglected, a male insect can smell a female from a mile away. Spiders "smell" with chemical receptors on their legs.

Where does this leave us? Our sense of smell does not compare well with other species since we do not need it for day to day survival, except to detect possible danger as with leaking gas, gasoline or rotten eggs. But a Rockefeller University study determined that our noses can smell at least one trillion distinct smells. What would list of them all look like? It would take a lifetime to create one; and once created, it would take another lifetime to read it. Women, it would appear, have a better sense of smell than men.



The Black Vulture, or best known as the American Black Vulture

# Birds and Beans by Annette Brownell



We'd like to take another shot at getting a bird friendly coffee movement happening. At our Fall Festival in 2018 we introduced shade grown direct trade coffee and explained the benefits of why shade grown coffee is more profitable for the land and the migratory birds, as well as the communities in Central and South America who model sustainable farming.

These small family farms truly help stop the population loss of migratory birds such as Orioles, warblers, thrush, swallow, flycatchers, king birds and more. These birds need forests in the neo-tropics to stay healthy and rested to be able to return north for nesting. Large growers of sun grown coffee land clear and use heavy doses of herbicides, chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Although they are much less work, they create eco-deserts. As Great South Bay Audubon Society is committed to a sustainable earth, we would like to introduce Birds and Beans coffee. It is 100% certified shade grown Bird Friendly, USDA Organic and fair trade. By supporting this endeavor on a regular basis, you are supporting bird conservation and family farmers throughout the Americas. The coffee is available in **Light Roast** from the Peruvian Ceanor farms of Café Femenino, **Dark Roast** from the San Juan de Rio Coco region of the northern Highlands of Nicaragua and **Decaf French Roast** in Peru, high on the slopes of the Amazon River basin.



To order contact **Annette Brownell** at (631) 665-4406 or email [info@GSBAS.org](mailto:info@GSBAS.org)

The coffee is \$12 for a 12oz bag. This is not a fund raiser. GSBAS is just passing the price on. Coffee delivery is 7 days. We will keep a supply of each of the 3 types of coffee and you will be able to get it directly. We hope that you are willing to try this coffee and commit to helping with a more sustainable Earth.



# Help for Climate Change

by Annette Brownell

For 40 plus years the environmental community has been fighting against the causes of climate change that have led to the slippery slope we are now on. With buildings and traffic growing everywhere, while impervious surfaces have replaced forests and grass lands and many of our neighbors developing tree phobia, ignorant to the consequences of their actions, it has been an uphill battle that we absolutely cannot afford to lose.

Perhaps the tides are changing. Studies show that younger people are finally beginning to return to the outdoors and rediscovering nature. Additionally, there has been more focus in the media about sounding the alarm. It's no longer the rich and the famous holding concerts for global warming while they violate their own message by taking their private jets everywhere.

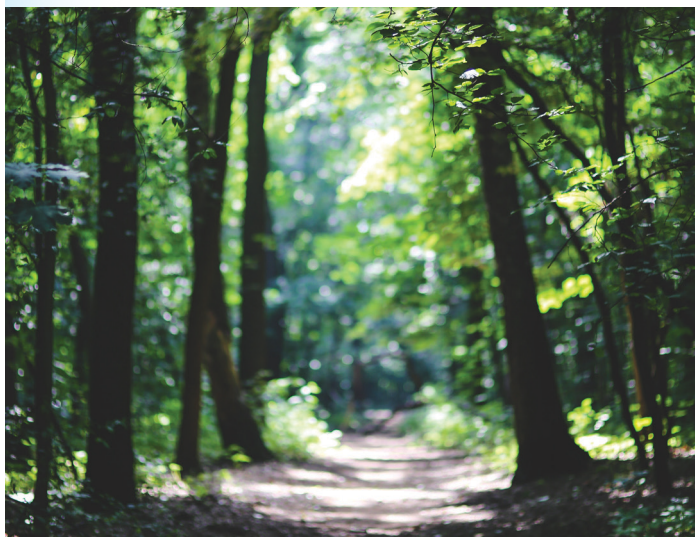
The epiphany? Plant more trees! A recent study published in Science recognizes the tremendous positive environmental impact of forests. Trees remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. They will increase the absorption of carbon dioxide to meet environmental needs, storing it in their roots, trunks and branches. Researchers are not talking about a few trees. They are talking about a trillion.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is on board! They say that protecting existing natural forests would remove 153 billion tons of carbon from the atmosphere by 2150. A combination of regrowth and new growth are important to moving forward to reverse climate change.

This brings up several other topics for consideration. Circling back to native plants, designed to thrive in their natural habitat, providing food, shelter and soil benefits in their own backyard, so to speak. Gaining a new appreciation for that giant oak? Connected green space - people are under the impression that a tree here and there is enough. Maximum benefit is achieved for nature when there are quantities of uninterrupted green environment, where wildlife can flow from one area to another to find food and shelter. Trees bring rain. If we don't want a desert planet, plant trees.



*"A recent study published in Science recognizes the tremendous positive environmental impact of forests. Trees remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere."*  
~ Annette Brownell



Of course, we also have to look at some of the dangers to nature forests. The single greatest danger to forests health in New York (beside urban sprawl) is deer. Hard to think that those brown eyed beauties are just chewing up the saplings that are our future, leaving way for fern to grow (that deer don't eat) that suffocate little seedlings and prevent them from emerging. This sensitive topic is left for another time.

## Quick Snippet

~ To learn more about the native vegetation on Long Island, visit the Long Island Native Plant Initiative website at <http://www.linpi.org/>. Our January speaker just happens to be the President of LINPI, so come prepared with your questions for Rusty.

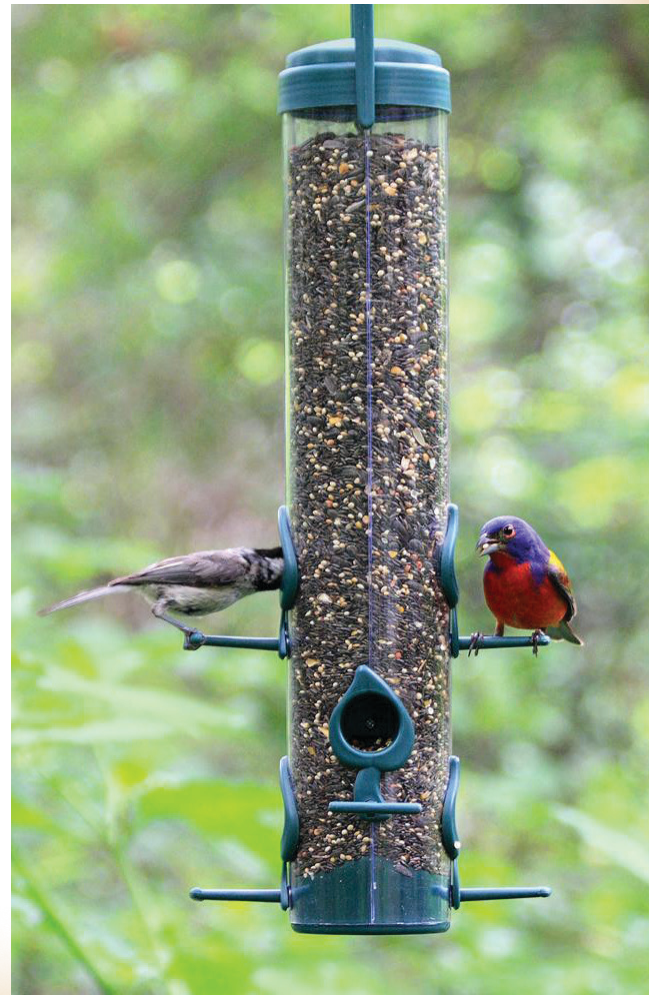


# Feeder Survey November 2019

Compiled by Helga Merryman

The other day I was happy to find a seldom seen (in my yard) Fox Sparrow feeding on the ground with an assortment of other sparrows (unfortunately too late for the survey). Sparrows are small somewhat dull brown or gray, seed eating, passerines (which means their feet are designed for perching), they are commonly found on the ground, grasses, shrubs or trees and identified by conical bills, distinctive head patterns and songs. American or new world sparrows are more closely related to old-world buntings than they are to old-world sparrows. The ubiquitous House Sparrow AKA English Sparrow is not native to the new world but is a member of the family of old-world Sparrows sometimes referred to as true sparrows. Viewing a flock of sparrows, it can be easy to lump the whole drab group of birds together with a snap identification but step back and observe them objectively and you might come up with a surprise. Case in point, a sharp-eyed birder watching a flock of White-throated Sparrows feeding on the ground at Brookside observed that one did not fit the description of the rest of the flock and identified it as a Golden-crowned Sparrow, commonly found on the West coast of the USA, giving Brookside Park its proverbial 15 minutes of fame when many birders descended on the park to see this visitor from across the country.

Welcome back to our new feeder survey season. The GSBAS Feeder Survey has been run for many years. The reward of the survey is to bring awareness of nature to our doorstep and share our observations with others. Anyone is welcome to join the survey at any time during the counting period from November to March, Instructions for the survey are in the November/December issue of the Sandpiper. For this survey period we had 8 participants, Banaszak, Caruso, Fogarty, Merryman, Paltridge, Sorenson, Unterschuetz and Wilson, the 7 areas covered were Babylon, Blue Point, Deer Park, East Islip, East Patchogue, Lindenhurst and North Babylon.



## Survey Data: November 2019

Red-tailed Hawk 0  
Sharp-shinned Hawk 0  
Cooper's hawk 1  
Rock pigeon 0  
Mourning Dove 106  
Monk Parakeet 0  
Red-bellied Woodpecker 8  
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 0  
Downy Woodpecker 7  
Hairy Woodpecker 0  
Northern Flicker 2  
Blue Jay 30  
American Crow 0

Black-capped Chickadee 18  
Tufted Titmouse 5  
Red-breasted Nuthatch 1  
White-breasted Nuthatch 1  
Carolina Wren 11  
American Robin 45  
Northern Mockingbird 5  
Brown Thrasher 0  
European Starling 71  
Towhee 0  
Fox Sparrow 0  
Song Sparrow 6  
White-throated Sparrow 17

Dark-eyed Junco 4  
Northern Cardinal 19  
Red-winged Blackbird 33  
Common Grackle 131+  
Brown-headed Cowbird 7  
House Finch 29  
American Goldfinch 10  
House Sparrow 116+

### OTHER SPECIES

Cat Bird 1  
Mallards 2  
Kingfisher 1



## Field Trip Report Suffolk Farm and Education Center

by John Gluth

A beautifully sunny, nearly windless (if brisk) morning greeted leaders and participants on hand for the field trip at Suffolk Farm and Education Center on 11/9. A nice counterpoint to last year's trip, which was equally sun-drenched but very windy. The most notable birds of the day were spotted before the full group had even assembled and left the parking lot: an Eastern Meadowlark which flew overhead, and a female Baltimore Oriole which was feeding alongside some robins on the red fruit of a Burning Bush.



Suffolk Farm and Education Center, Nov 11 2019

Most Orioles have migrated south of Long Island long before November rolls around. The predominantly open spaces of this location make for fairly easy spotting (and hearing) of any birds present. The lack of wind helped with the hearing a lot. For example, early in the trip Eastern Bluebirds were heard calling from somewhere to the south of the property, well before we spotted them flying in to land on utility wires and then down to the split rail fence surrounding one of the equestrian rings. Later, numerous sparrows feeding in the tall grass and still-standing corn stalks, or skulking through the nearby wind break, kept us on our toes. Song, Savannah and White-throated were the most plentiful, with only a few individuals of four other species detected. A couple of Palms were the only warbler species seen, not surprising given the lateness of the date. Canada geese, blackbirds (mostly Red-winged plus some Brown-headed Cowbirds), starlings and robins were the most abundant birds.

Raptors were scarce. This site can (and often does) produce several species during a visit, sometimes with more than one of each present. On this day the lack of wind probably hurt in this regard. In fact only a single Sharp-shinned Hawk - the presence of which we were alerted to by mobbing Blue Jays - was seen during the group effort. Overall it was a pleasant morning spent in an interesting, pastoral place, where the farm animals (cows, pigs, llamas) can help pick up the slack if the birding is subpar.

## Upcoming Speakers

All GSBAS Activities are FREE and open to the public. Meetings are held at the Seatuck Environmental Association (550 South Bay Avenue, Islip NY 11751). Refreshments begin at 7:00 and the program begins at 7:30 pm. Join us and bring a friend.

### January 16th

We had a speaker mishap in November! Rusty Schmidt from Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI) had some unexpected happenings in his life and the time and date got away from him. These things happen. We still had a great meeting thanks to the fast thinking and bird expertise of Ken Thompson. We are very glad, however, that we were able to reschedule Rusty as our January speaker. Rusty is a landscape ecologist employed by Nelson, Pope, and Voorhis in Melville, NY. He holds a BS in Biology from the University of Minnesota, where he did three years of coursework toward an MLA. He is president of the Long Island Native Plant Initiative (LINPI) and an Adjunct Professor in the Horticulture Department at Farmingdale State College.

### February 20th

How do we introduce our February speaker? John Turner has his hands in everything environmental as he has a passion for uplifting and repairing our natural world. He is one of the area's premier naturalists and knowledgeable on so many levels about a variety of topics. His book, *Exploring the Other Island*, is an invaluable guide to the natural wonders of Long Island. GSBAS has left it up to John to decide what the topic of his presentation will be, so come and be surprised and enlightened.

### March 19th

Tamson Yeh from Cornell Cooperative will be presenting her new spider lecture. Tamson is informative and fun to listen to. She is a wealth of knowledge and you will very much enjoy her lecture.



John Turner  
Premier Naturalists and Author

## Help Wanted!

Great South Bay Audubon Society needs someone to take on the role of volunteer coordinator for Brookside County Park.

According to our agreement with the County, we have to schedule people to be available at the Park for visitors on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons, to walk through the woods and maintain the trails (light clipping and pathway clearing), fill feeders and provide general information, as well as doing some general care inside the building. The coordinator would be somewhat of a recruiter as well.

Since we haven't had a coordinator in some time, our volunteers are lacking as well. It's hard to have a crew without a captain. It is a commitment, but not huge. We ask volunteers to donate 2 hours for a session. The ideal would be to have enough volunteers that each team of 2 would be assigned on Wednesday or Sunday a month. Once the ball is rolling again, the coordinator would fill in gaps in the schedule. Not too bad.

### Great South Bay Audubon Society Membership

Become a member of Great South Bay Audubon Society. Your contribution will support GSBAS conservation efforts, educational programs and our stewardship at Brookside County Park.

Please make checks payable to:  
"Great South Bay Audubon Society" and mail to:  
GSBAS, P.O. Box 267, Sayville, NY 11782

- ☐ New Membership \$20    ☐ New Membership Senior (62+) \$15  
☐ Renewal \$20                ☐ Renewal Senior (62+) \$15

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### Have you seen this sign on lawns around your neighborhood?

It is intended to raise awareness about nitrogen pollution and is supported by a coalition of Long Island environmental and civic organizations. Home owners bearing this sign have pledged not to use chemicals on their lawn.

To learn more about the water quality on Long Island or to purchase the lawn signs, visit the Long Island Water website at:  
<https://www.liwater.org/>



## Weekend Nature Walks for January/February

**Saturday, January 11, 2020 - 8:00 am**  
**- Birding & Breakfast, Connetquot River SPP**

Leader(s): Edith & Bob Wilson, Helga Merryman, Ken Thompson, Jack Carlson

Continental breakfast. Reservations required - Fill out the form on our programs page to register. Registration fee \$4. plus \$8 parking fee per car - unless you have yearly Empire pass.

**Saturday, February 1, 2020 - 8:30 am**  
**- Jones Beach West End**

Leader(s): Mike Cooper (516-523-2369, Bob Grover (516-318-8536)

Meet in the parking lot near the Coast Guard Station at West End.



**Directions to Brookside County Park**  
**59 Brook St, Sayville 11782**

The park is located on the north side of Brook St., just east of, and diagonally across from Sayville High School. Look for the large white sign that says "Brookside County Park". From the West and East via Sunrise Hwy: Sunrise Highway to Locust Ave. South, to Montauk Highway. Make a left onto Montauk Highway. Then a quick left onto Brook Street. (traffic light). Continue 2 miles, just past Sayville High School. The entrance to the park is on the left (north side of street). Look for the "Brookside County Park" sign. You may park in the high school parking lot and walk across the street to the park.





read more on page 1

Brookside County Park in West Sayville, the home of our Great South Bay Audubon Society has recently been abuzz with "eggs" citement due to a visiting Golden-crowned Sparrow seen feeding under the bird feeders amongst a group of White-throated Sparrows....

## A "Golden" Moment at Brookside County Park



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GSBAS Website GSBAS.org  
GSBAS Email Address info@gsbas.org



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