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Long Island Botanical Society Newsletter

Barbara Hewlett Conolly, an advocate for nature

Peter Conolly
Alameda, California

My mother, Barbara Hewlett Conolly, was born in New York City on June 7th, 1927. Her mother's ride to the hospital was re-routed due to the parade celebrating Charles Lindbergh's solo transatlantic flight.

The family of three lived on the Upper East Side, and Mom attended the Brearley school through 12th grade, but she summered on her grandparents' farm in Jericho, out on Long Island, where she was introduced to horses and developed a love for all animals, including a pet rooster.



Barbara Hewlett (Conolly), Red Cross Motor Corps Ambulance Driver, 1945.

Her grandfather and father were successful painters: James Monroe Hewlett (see the constellations in Grand Central Station) and his son James Augustus — our Grandpa Gus. We also had a Grandpa Jack, because her parents went through a divorce and my grandmother, Marjorie Beard Hewlett McDonald, remarried. Grandma was a noted equestrian and horse show judge, and a member of the International Women's Polo team.

Grandma perhaps found that she did not have a natural affinity for child-rearing, so my Mom was mostly raised by her grandmother and a loving German woman named Mimi, with whom my Mom shared a bond throughout the years. We would visit Mimi in New York City.

Once the family had relocated out to Jericho full time, to a stucco house with stables and a non-functioning windmill, Mom claimed that she never missed the city at all. Her three best friends were the Dowdy sisters, Jean ("Beany") and Doris ("Sissy"), who attended the local public school, and Jane Lowe, a fellow Brearley student. One night Mom snuck out to meet one of them, having stuffed her bed with a clothes dummy. Grandma, looking for the dog, discovered the ruse and Mom "caught holy hell."

Mom now commuted into the city for school, and Grandma would drive a buggy with an old trotter named Wilfred to pick her up at the Hicksville station. They had to make sure to leave before the steam engine screamed, making Wilfred stampede.

During World War 2, Grandma joined the Red Cross Motor Corps, and thus inspired, so did my Mom. She rode a motorbike to her job driving an ambulance to ferry injured troops from Mitchell Air Field to the hospital. She loved running the siren. But often she had to take it slow, because some troops had intestinal injuries and the like.

At Barnard College, she majored in botany, with a specialty in genetics. Later, at age 20, she had a chance to apply for a job at the Cold Spring Harbor laboratories where Watson and Crick were pursuing their ground-breaking research on DNA. (She had taken a life-altering, comprehensive Adult Education course there on science and the natural world.) Alas, she fell off a horse and broke her neck, and missed out on the opportunity. My sister Cathie and I believe that in a later day and time, she might have been a career scientist. As it was, she was a lifelong "citizen" or "community" scientist. Darwin was a hero, and Mom could hold two thoughts in her head at the same

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Long Island Botanical Society

Founded: 1986 • Incorporated: 1989

The Long Island Botanical Society is dedicated to the promotion of field botany and a greater understanding of the plants that grow wild on Long Island, New York.

Visit the Society's Web site
www.libotanical.org

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Society News

LIBS receives three generous gifts. In May 2026, LIBS was notified that **Barbara H. Conolly** left a bequest in the amount of $25,000 to LIBS (not yet received, the will is in probate). In October 2026, LIBS received $10,000 from the **Carol Johnston** Charitable Fund; Carol's daughter, Dr. Marcia Johnston Wood, arranged for LIBS to receive the gift. **Guy Tudor** also left a bequest to LIBS, no more details are available at this time.

LIBS 40-year anniversary celebration, Montauk, Sept. 19, 2026. Forty-two LIBS members and friends attended this historic event (see p. 16). The following quotes summarize the day:

"*Saturday's event was an epic gathering of Long Island naturalists! A day to remember!*" Vicki Bustamante

"*We were super impressed with the enormity of the warmth we experienced hanging out with you lovely Long Islanders from out beyond the boroughs.*" Molly Rouzie

"*Not only was it a wonderful gathering of wonderful friends and colleagues, but the air was filled with felicity, both in the Third House and out in the fields of golden grasses.*" John Potente

"*THAT was so much fun. Thank you. And, WAY MORE than fun, having the opportunity to re-connect with our nerdy little, decades-long botany family.*" Karen Blumer

"*It was a wonderful meeting and LIBS will be there for a long time to come.*" Andy Greller

"*It was lovely to spend a beautiful late summer day with like-minded people.*" Agnes P. Cwalina

"*LIBS plays an important role as an authority and source of expertise.*" Melissa Feudi

"*I have to say that I really enjoyed this wonderful event and I have great hope for the future of LIBS!*" Sue Avery

"*LIBS is alive and relevant.*" Eric Lamont *(continued on page 15)*

In Memoriam

Theodore "Ted" Gordon
(1937-2026)

Robert "Bob" McGrath
(1959-2025)

Lenore Swenson
(1946-2024)

Guy Tudor
(1934-2026)

Some final reflections by Carol Johnston and tributes by members of the Long Island Botanical Society

"LIBS has been an important part of my life! I miss our meetings and the fellowship!" [Carol Johnston, May 2, 2026]

"I have so many memories of field trips together, as well as sitting on her porch amid the hummingbirds and watching every move of "her" ospreys." [Carol Johnston on the passing of Barbara Conolly, May 2, 2026]

"My macular degeneration is deteriorating and I don't like this loss of independence, but have to be grateful for all the years I had decent vision." [Carol Johnston, October 28, 2025]



The Ladies of LIBS. Left to right: Carol Johnston (1933-2026), Betty Lotowycz (1916-2016), and Barbara Conolly (1927-2026) at Shu Swamp Nature Preserve (Charles T. Church Preserve); photo taken in 2005.

"I've been asked to give a Zoom talk to my Wellesley '55 classmates this fall on my career in Botany. I'd like to have a few photos, and wondered if you still had any of our LIBS Newfoundland trip. I was using a camera and slides then, and I don't think they are usable. I was thinking particularly of the 2-3" high azaleas or any other pretty little tundra plant that had us down on our bellies to see the plant. That trip was so special! So was the Sierra Nevada trip, but those photos are accessible on my phone." [Carol Johnston, August 2, 2025]

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I am sorry beyond words to lose our dear LIBS colleague, Carol. She dedicated herself to furthering the goals of our Society. I remember her intense support of the LI Flora Atlas as a purely local endeavor. She made countless contributions herself. On a personal note, she was kind enough to invite me to join her and her family for a birdwatch in SW Florida while we were on our separate vacations there. We had a wonderful seafood lunch at a great spot near the Gulf coast. I will always keep that memory of her with me. I send condolences to her dear sister and her daughter. We are unlikely to see another person with her combination of societal dedication and scientific skill ever again. With sorrow, Andy Greller

We will always have memories of her as one of "The Ladies" of LIBS and botany - Carol, Barbara, and Betty - on many field trips together. I'd like to picture the 3 friends being out in the field together once again. Lois and Al Lindberg

Carol was such a dedicated member and good volunteer for our Botanical Society. She will certainly be missed and I know she had it quite difficult for several years before her passing and she endured her problems with faith and a quiet resolve. Another loss for the world as well as our little group. MaryLaura Lamont

It is sad to hear about all these early botany supporters passing, Skip, Barbara, and now, Carol. They were all important parts of energizing the effort to say that Long Island still has ecological value and that knowledge, conservation, and to some degree publicity are essential to preserve the natural character of a place we care about. We will all pass, but hopefully Long Island can maintain its unique botanical character (with help). Bob Zaremba

Very sad to lose one of our LIBS stalwarts. For a number of sporadic years, she and I would take an ephemeral-walk in Shu Swamp, with or without Barbara Conolly, to celebrate their successful work in its creation as a public place and preservation — and to keep an eye on the *Myosotis*. 93! What a life! She was always so helpful and willing to share. She will be missed. Karen Blumer

Carol Johnston was a founding member of LIBS and served as treasurer for 30 years. For many years, she hosted monthly meetings of the LIBS Flora Committee at Planting Fields Arboretum where the group worked on the *Atlas of the Flora of Long Island, New York*. Her plant collections are an important contribution to understanding the plants that grow wild on Long Island. She frequently led field trips to her beloved Shu Swamp Preserve and attended LIBS trips to Florida, Newfoundland, the Sierra Nevada, and elsewhere. LIBS members celebrate her life! Eric Lamont

(Barbara Hewlett Conolly, continued from page 9)

time, such as believing in God AND evolution. There is a 1975 interview with Mom by a Jericho historian which can be found online through the Jericho Public Library's Oral History archives. There is much talk about what was then called "ecology," and it's startling to hear her refer to "climate change" in 1975! (The library also has a taped interview with my grandmother, Marjorie Beard Hewlett.)



Horsewoman Barbara riding to the Meadow Brook Hounds.

After the war, Mom took up fox hunting and became the secretary treasurer of the Meadow Brook Hounds. Through this milieu she met my Dad, Joseph B. Conolly, Jr., who was "Master of the Hounds" as the Meadow Brook Hounds' fox hunting activities gave way to the more low-slung Buckram Beagles, who sought only hares and rarely caught any. It was a fine excuse to get out for a good Sunday walk after church, and was followed by a "Beagle Tea" happy hour at someone's warm home. (After beagling died out, we became the "Winter Wheezers," out for a good Sunday walk sans dogs.)



Joe (Master of the Buckram Beagles) and Barbara Conolly (Hunt Staff). Likely 1955.

In 1952, she married my Dad, and converted to the Catholic faith, and their marriage endured until his death in 2008. They honeymooned in a cottage at the Caumsett estate, then in 1953 moved into their house in Brookville, which was built by the noted architect Walter Uhl. He also built my grandmother's house on Beaver Lake in Mill Neck, where Mom and Dad relocated after her death. The Brookville house was in the Colonial style, designed to look like it was older than it actually was and had been added onto over the years. Uhl was an early and renowned proponent of repurposing wood and other elements from defunct buildings, such as farmhouses, and in our case a local race track.

In 1954, Mom was drawn into birdwatching through a friend, and she said this helped lead her to a wider interest in the natural world and ecology. She believed this is how people get drawn into the big holistic vision, through a gateway science specialty. She claims in the interview that she was always interested in "ecology," but when she was young there was no one who could answer her questions, so her interest at first got transferred to dogs and horses.

I was born in 1955, and my sister Cathie came along in 1958. My mother put in time as a Sunday School teacher (through I was never made to go), and she often took us along on a circuit of visits to the elderly and "shut-ins" of her acquaintance, always setting an example of concern for others, thinking of the less fortunate and lonely, and maintaining good friendship bonds.

As an avid birdwatcher and naturalist, she taught and led field trips with our schools, the Garden Club, the Human Resources Center, Planting Fields Arboretum, The Nature Conservancy and others. She regularly would host the annual Christmas Count bird survey. As a child I would go into the city with her when she was volunteering at the Museum of Natural History, and roam around being enraptured by the great whale, the dinosaur skeletons and caveman dioramas.

At home, she had always dreamt of having a family who would play games and interact after dinner as in olden times, and the intrusion of TV on our attentions during the 1960's must have caused her chagrin. When Mom and Dad built a ski house ("the Chalet") in Bondville, Vermont in 1965, following the lead of some friends, I figured that the laid-back pace of Vermont reminded them of Long Island back when it was mostly farms (my Dad grew up on a farm), and not overrun with development, as it became after the war. We got to know the concept of "long Vermont evenings" with no television, full of games and talk; we had many guests there over time, skiers and others, and Mom loved the scritching sound of utensils on the ceramic dinner plates as everyone enjoyed their well-prepared dinner.



Barbara H. Conolly (right of center) at Nature Conservancy outing, 1974. People identified: Leroy Wilcox, Zoe de Rapp, Decker Orr, Dick Nicodemus, Gil Rayner, Carl Helms, and Charlie Belt.

Mom and Dad were great travelers, and Mom was constantly documenting it all in photographs. I used to be in charge of setting up the projection screen for her apres-dinner slide shows, whether of trips, other family stuff, or various flora and fauna, which must have led to my lifelong cinematic obsessions.

I was always impressed by the dense social network that was my parent's life in the leafy suburbs of Long Island after the war. There were at one point 400 names on their Christmas card list. (Many, I later learned, were courtesy cards to Dad's dental patients, not necessarily close friends. But still!) We had a good life. In the summer we would swim at Jones Beach, in the Sound, or at the pools of two or three kind neighbors. By the 1970s, sister Cathie and I were away at schools. Mom and Dad kept busy, did hospice work and volunteered at the hospital cafeteria.

In 1982, my Mom's mother Marjorie died on board the Concorde during a trip to judge horse-carriage driving. In 1983 my Mom and Dad moved into her house on Beaver Lake. The Brookville house had been dubbed "Knockaulin" (named after a hill in Ireland — "beautiful hill" we were told it meant). The Mill Neck house would be "Lochaulin" (beautiful lake).

In 1989 my niece Abbey was born, and my mom and dad acquired a house on Sanibel Island in Florida. I think my Mom needed a project to take her mind off my sister's pregnancy … anyway, she always needed a project. She and Dad would winter there, and they would enjoy seeing their friends arrive on planes from the frozen north around February and come back to life after a couple of days in the sunshine. While living in Boston, I certainly appreciated the ability to hop on a plane at Logan and be there in the subtropics in 3 hours. She continued her botanizing activities while in Florida with the local organizations. (Fortunately, that house was sold shortly before one of the major hurricanes.)

It was at Beaver Lake that Mom was able to live out her life at home, surrounded by wildlife and the handy binoculars and telescope. During the Covid lockdown times, while she and my cousin Shelley were sitting on the porch overlooking the lake, a rooster showed up, jumped up onto Shelley's leg, and got himself adopted as a new Covid pet, a nice bookend to Mom's youthful days on the Jericho farm. She named him Huxley.

Two sisters from Haiti, Patricia and Guerda, tirelessly traded off being her constant caretakers in her final years. Cathie and I cannot thank them enough, and likewise the rest of Mom's wonderful support network, and all the previous caretakers who also tended to my father.

My Mom was a naturalist, teacher, community scientist, watercolorist and illustrator, journalist, poet, scrapbook maven, equestrian, obsessive keeper of lists of flora and fauna, and of course salary-free homemaker behind thousands of meals … honestly I don't know where she found the time and energy to do it all. (Being an early riser surely helped, for writing time particularly.) She was the Recording Secretary of the Long Island Botanical Society for three decades, on the board of the North Shore Wildlife Sanctuary, and a member of the Lyman Langdon Audubon Chapter. The trails at Shu Swamp Preserve in Mill Neck, a stone's throw from Lochaulin, are now named after her, and a fine place for a stroll.

Her books include *Bones and Other Poems* (2002), *An Illustrated Field Guide of the Shrubs and Woody Vines of Long Island* (2004; illustrator, co-author with Grace E. Lotowycz), *Look at the Birds of the Air* (2013), and *Nature Notes* (2024), a recent, beautifully illustrated volume compiling 40 years of observations on Beaver Lake and thereabouts.

She passed away peacefully at home on May 1st of this year [2026], a month short of her 99th birthday.



Barbara H. Conolly keying out a species of goldenrod (*Solidago*) in 2012 at a LIBS workshop in Northville, Suffolk County.



Barbara H. Conolly in 2024 (age 96) surveying Beaver Lake with spotting scope from the porch of her Mill Neck home.

Travels of Barbara Hewlett Conolly

In his tribute, Peter Conolly noted, "Mom and Dad were great travelers." Cathie Conolly has provided some details: "In early years, they traveled to the Pennsylvania Dutch country, Nova Scotia, and all over the northeast US. As we kids grew older, we traveled by station wagon and camper van across the country to many of the western National Parks. We floated the Grand Canyon together, and went to Alaska with her Mother along too.

In later years, Mom and Dad drove to Sanibel Island each fall, and back in spring by various routes, visiting friends along the way.

Mom and Dad visited many European countries, and ventured further to Morocco, China, India and Tibet among other more exotic locations. Mom always birded on these trips, though birding and botanizing were not the central focus of the trips."

Barbara traversed the length and width of Long Island on LIBS field trips recording the flora in checklists and photo albums. In 2012, Margaret Conover reported, "Over the years, Barbara Conolly attended and photographed 127 LIBS field trips." She travelled with LIBS members to the most floristically rich ecosystems in upstate New York and attended LIBS trips to Costa Rica, the Great Smoky Mountains, and Newfoundland. In 2011, she organized a 10 day LIBS trip to Florida, from Tallahassee to Fakahatchee, where the group of sixteen explored eight unique habitats and observed 33 federal- or state-listed rare, threatened, and endangered plant species, 30 species of ferns and fern allies, and 12 species of native orchids. Barbara wrote a delightful account of the trip in the LIBS Newsletter (2011; vol. 21, no. 3).

In 2004, Barbara wrote about the LIBS trip to the Great Smoky Mountains (LIBS Newsletter, 2004; vol. 14, p. 19): "We were led on a side trip to the White Oak Sink valley where we were told we might see Fairy Wand (*Chamaelirium luteum*) in bloom, a plant Betty [Lotowycz] had never found in the wild. We were a rather noisy and interactive group, and had noticed a dignified couple from Tennessee who seemed a bit taken aback by our behavior.

Suddenly Betty spied the object of the quest and shouted, "Hot damn! There's the Fairy Wand!" and flung herself on a rock to take a better look. At this point, the lady of the couple laid her head on her husband's shoulder and murmured softly, "Honey, ah told you they were from Noo Yawk."



LIBS 25th anniversary field trip participants, in 2011, at Highlands Hammock State Park, Florida. Front (left to right): Elaine Jacobsen, Eric Lamont, Barbara Conolly, Ann Johnson (sitting on rock), David Heerwagen, Ellen Kritzman (standing), Carol Johnston; Back (left to right): Bill Titus, Donald House, Dot Titus, Kathy Gaffney, Joanne Schlegel, Regina Conlon, Marian Hubbard, Margaret Conover, Yvonne Kuperberg.

Book Review

Illustrated Field Guide to Shrubs and Woody Vines of Long Island

Barbara H. Conolly and Grace E. Lotowycz (2004)



Before 2004, no treatment specifically on Long Island's shrubs and woody vines had been published. Several treatments on trees had been published, including the *Big Tree Census Records* (dating back to 1952) and George Peters' classic *The Trees of Long Island* (1973), but a void remained regarding the smaller woody plants. The authors shared the reason for writing their book: "This field guide was envisioned more than 20 years ago because it seemed to fill a need for botanists and horticulturists since there has long been a lack of a guide specifically addressed to the smaller woody plants of Long Island."

More than 190 species are discussed, of which more than 130 are illustrated and fully described. More than 60 are dealt with briefly. Each species entry includes common name, scientific name, family, native status, origin of name, morphological description, flowering dates, habitat, status on Long Island, and miscellaneous notes. The descriptions highlight important diagnostic features. Specific localities are given where a species has been recorded on Long Island. The illustrations, largely tracings of herbarium specimens, are clear and informative, and point out diagnostic characters.

This book is one of my favorites on Long Island natural history; I have been referring to it for more than 20 years and find it highly informative. It has provided answers to questions I have had about certain species. For example, the brambles (*Rubus*) of Long Island are a large and variable group. I have never found *Rubus pensilvanicus* (highbush blackberry) on Long Island, although some botanists list it as occurring on the island (Clemants 1999, Moore et al. 2022). I was pleased to read that Barbara and Betty also never observed *R. pensilvanicus* on Long Island (it confirmed my field observations); they noted, "Its range is south of Long Island, but occasional rumors occur that it has been seen here. We include it because it is worth looking for."

This book also serves as a baseline for measuring how many nonnative shrubs and woody vines have colonized Long Island since 2004. No natural history library should be without a copy of this valuable resource. Although the book is out of print, used copies are for sale online. 202 pp. ISBN: 0-9764275-0-8. Review by Eric Lamont.

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(Society News LIBS 40 Years, continued from page 10)

During a social hour, Eric introduced Ed Johan, president of the Third House Nature Center, who spent many hours organizing, setting up, and cleaning the space for the event. After Ed gave a brief history of the historic house, a catered lunch was served, followed by a nature walk around the Preserve.

Afterwards, a members meeting was held with a lot of discussion on the future of LIBS. It was agreed that LIBS needs to modernize communications by an updated website, social media, etc. Also, the society should host an annual members meeting. A zoom meeting will be held in November 2026 to discuss ways of achieving these goals.

The following reports were given at the members' meeting, 1) John Turner gave a Conservation Committee report on the botanically-rich Freeman Avenue site in Islip, restoration of West Brook in Islip, and discussed a lawsuit recently filed in the State Supreme Court to prevent the rebuilding of a dam on the Nissequogue River after its failure during a major storm event. 2) MaryLaura Lamont gave an Education Committee report: recent botanical walks were led at Quogue Wildlife Refuge and Orient State Park; another is planned for the bare cliffs at Wildwood State Park. 3) Andy Greller reported on collaborating with Melissa Feudi on a botanical and ecological survey of the rare Coastal Oak-Laurel Forest community at East Northport. 4) Louise Harrison reported on the current conservation status of Plum Island. 5) Steve Young presented his vision for the future of LIBS. Vicki Bustamante was thanked for the enormous amount of time and energy she put into making the LIBS event at Montauk a huge success.

Long Island Botanical Society
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LIBS 40-Year Anniversary Celebration
3rd House, Montauk, Long Island – September 19, 2026



Attendees: Jim Ash, Sue Avery, Terri Berger, Kim Berlin & Bernard Wood, Karen Blumer & Mike Madigan, Vicki Bustamante, Bob Chapman, Agnes P. Cwalina, Melissa Feudi (plus 2 guests), Andy Greller, Louise Harrison, Margaret Hayes, Donald House, Stephen Huysman, Jane Jackson, Ed Johann, Laura Juszczak, Chris Kreussling, Eric & MaryLaura Lamont, Aimee Lusty, Lynne Maher, Chris Mangels, Jeanine Miedzwiecki, Mary Pigliacelli, John Potente, Les Pozdena, Frank Quevedo, Frank & Kimberly Reiser, Molly Rouzie & Matthew Wills, Julie Sakalariadis, Dave Taft, John Turner, David Werier, Steve Young, and Bob Zaremba.