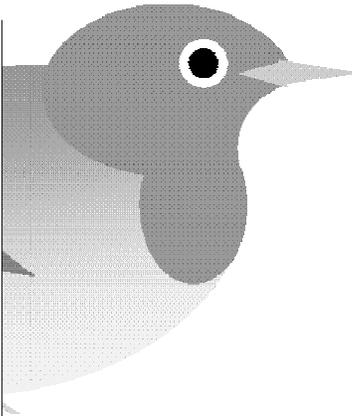
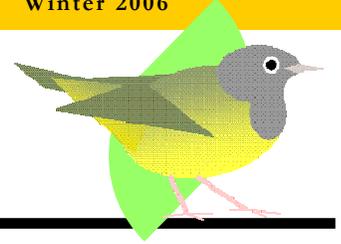


# COA BULLETIN



## THE 107TH NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

### Connecticut Christmas Bird Count 2006-2007 Schedule

Compiled by Stephen P. Broker

Contact compilers directly for information on participating in a specific count.

\* confirmed by compilers

#### Saturday, Dec. 16, 2006

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#### Sunday, Dec. 17, 2006

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# HOW TO “CAPTAIN” A CHRISTMAS COUNT

BY STEVE MAYO

In a moment of weakness, you've agreed to “captain” a Christmas count. A venerable compiler (all CBC compilers are venerable) just called you with a sad story about how the owner of an important territory, is suddenly unavailable. Your so-called compiler-friend then mails you a scrap of a topographic map photocopied from the State Library in 1973. What to do next? Don't worry. Rise to the occasion. Here are a few ways to succeed at a Connecticut Christmas Count.

**Study.** Do you know the difference between the call notes of a Song Sparrow vs. a White-throated Sparrow vs. a Cardinal vs. a Junco? How about the difference between a fly-over Ring-billed Gull versus Herring Gull? Can you separate a cowbird from a blackbird from grackle? You probably haven't been out and about in the cold lately. Get some experience with the common birds now, before it really counts on count day.



**Talk to the Vets.** Call the previous captains of the area. You can learn a tremendous amount about the habitat, historical finds, and must-stop sites. Don't miss the opportunity to berate them for their conflicting plans and lack of participation this year.

**Prepare.** This is war. Assemble your weapons and equipment. Include bottled water, Cheetos, granola, clean bins, digital camera, notebook, a Sibley Guide (especially if you are an optimist and anticipate seeing something really good). Toss 3 or 4 pairs of your best wool socks into the trunk of your car. You may need them, especially if you are crashing through the *phragmites* at 5 the morning, and then again at 7.



**Plan.** That old topo map is really useful. Check it against a recent Champion or Hagstrom Road Map. Take some time to study the map and drive some routes. Check bodies of water and anticipate what water will be open. Check for groves of Cedars, Norway Spruce or Pines (Owls). Check sheltered areas and warmer microclimates. Scout the low, wet areas (Snipe and Woodcock). Drainage ditches, manure/brush/trash dumps, abandoned fields, farms, railroad tracks, parking lot edges are all treasure troves for birds. Scout out the stocked feeders. Get permission in advance for access to private property.



What if you have nothing but urban/suburban sprawl? No problem. Check the map and drive roads, stopping for

schools, condos, housing projects, churches and industrial parks. Chain link fences hold vines and shrubs. Vines and shrubs hold Cardinals and White-throated Sparrows. For every 10 stops you'll get a Catbird. For every 100 you'll get a Brown Thrasher, and it'll be the only one that day.

**Delegate.** Your scrap of map probably covers a whole lot of square miles. Don't forget to pick up the phone and get some help. Get people to join you, but break them up in several groups. Field promotions are allowed; area captains can assign area lieutenants. Remember, piling up party-hours is the name of the game.

**Stop often.** Stop really often. You will blow away other captain's totals simply by stopping, turning off the car, jumping out and listening for a few moments. Do this each and every quarter or half mile. You will be amazed at how many more birds you can tally this way.

**Start (real) early.** There are owls to be found. Anyone with a powerful tape recorder can find them, especially on a light wind. Forget the popular and classical literature. Owls are not particularly wise, they are quite dumb. They readily respond to tapes. You are dumb too. Nobody else is out at 3:00 am. To the compiler, however, you're a hero. And if you do a coastal count, there are more than owls to be found. Check for rails too. Owls are found in the woodlots and rails are in the *spartina*. You should be able to figure that out, even in the dark.



**Start (not so) early.** The dawn is a magical time and if you have any Christmas Count experience, you'll know that many of your good birds will be found during sunrise. Waterfowl rise. Call notes start up. Raptors start to hunt. Save your best spots for the beautiful dawn minutes. Again, be prepared.

**Bird all day.** Daylight hours are precious. If your lieutenants suggest meeting in someone's posh living room for hot soup and cocoa, try to discourage them. Suggest they meet in a parking lot and offer them some of your Doritos, beef jerky and Red Bull.

**Look up.** It sounds rather intuitive, doesn't it? You already know that birds fly. You'll find raptors if you scan the skies. And even in an inland site, far from water, you might see gulls, herons and ducks moving about during the day. Are you done with your route and have an extra 30 minutes to kill, before compilation? Then drive around residential neighborhoods scanning tops of the bare trees for *Icterids* and hawks.



**Check the tides.** If you are lucky enough to be on the coast, check the same area at approximate high and low tides. Composition of birds may be quite different. An extended watch (sea watch) may yield some surprises. If you don't have the

## HOW TO “CAPTAIN” A CHRISTMAS COUNT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2)

time, see if you can find someone else to set up their scope up at a favorable location.

**Keep careful notes.** Remember, you are a Citizen Scientist. Write down the morning and afternoon weather conditions. If you forget, the next day you can scrounge the data from an online source such as Weather Underground. Note your miles walked and driven. Don't overestimate the walking and don't underestimate the driving. And don't forget the common stuff. Get accurate counts of Starlings, Pigeons and Gulls.

**Don't Over-count.** Determine age and sex every rare bird. Keep careful notes. You may end up seeing them again. Birds do move around after all.

**Finish late.** Many of us know about the famous, historical corvid roosts in areas such as Hartford and Orange. There are other flights to be found at dusk. If you are lucky, you will stumble upon an open spot where blackbirds, Robins, or even Bluebirds stream by before heading for bed.

**Go to the compilation.** Make sure you come in fashionably late with beggar ticks on your pants, wet, muddy footwear and the most outrageous case of hat-head possible. Get all your totals and field notes together. And if you have a rarity or two, be as coy as possible. Be ready when the compiler finally says, “Are there any other species not mentioned tonight?” Your reply should be, “So, do ya wannum all in taxonomic order?”

## 107TH CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

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Saturday, Dec. 23, 2006

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\*Stratford-Milford, CT (SM-CT) Compiler: Steve Mayo, 27 Tuttle Court, Bethany, CT 06524, [smayo@sikorsky.com](mailto:smayo@sikorsky.com), 203-393-0694

Saturday, Dec. 30, 2006

\*New London, CT (NL-CT) Compiler: Robert Dewire, 9 Canary Lane, Pawcatuck, CT 06379, [rcdewire@snet.net](mailto:rcdewire@snet.net), 860-599-3085

Sunday, Dec. 31, 2006

Old Lyme-Saybrook, CT (OL-CT) Contact: Potapaug Audubon Society, P.O. Box 591, Old Lyme, CT 06371 Barbara Barron, President, [bbarron687@gmail.com](mailto:bbarron687@gmail.com)

Monday, Jan. 1, 2007

\*Pawling (Hidden Valley), NY-CT (HV-NY) Compilers: Carena Pooth, 22 Brothers Road, Poughquag, NY 12570, [carena@prodigy.net](mailto:carena@prodigy.net), 845-724-3236; Angela Dimmitt, 48 Candlewood Mountain Road, New Milford, CT 06776, [angeladimmitt@aol.com](mailto:angeladimmitt@aol.com) 860-355-3429

Schedule ?

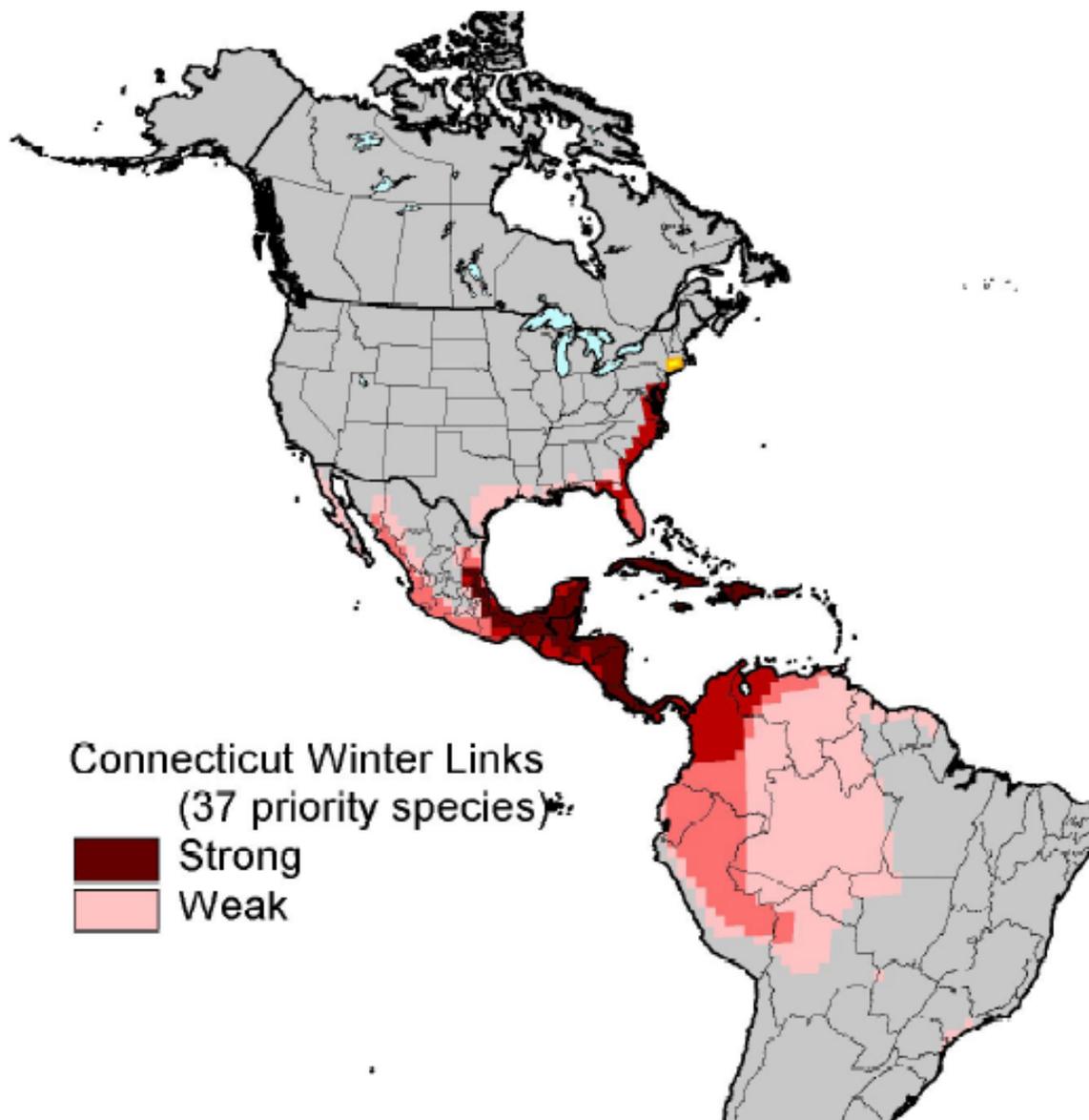
Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood, CT (EW-CT) Compiler: Sam Higgins, Hammond Hill, Hampton, CT 06247, [msamh@charter.net](mailto:msamh@charter.net) 860-455-0063



## WHERE ARE THE WINTERING GROUNDS FOR CONNECTICUT'S BIRDS OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

BY ANDREW DASINGER

In April 2006, Partners in Flight published the results of an analysis delineating the primary wintering grounds for birds of conservation importance that breed in each state. As the map below shows, the wintering grounds for Connecticut's birds of conservation importance are concentrated along the Atlantic seaboard, southeastern Mexico, Central America, the West Indies, and northwestern Colombia and Venezuela. This underscores the notion that many of our birds depend not only on conservation efforts within our state, but also rely on protection of habitat in certain specific geographical areas. Conditions in places like the island of Hispaniola, for example, where deforestation and habitat fragmentation are severe, could have significant effects on some of our birds.



From:

Blancher, P.J., B. Jacobs, A. Couturier, C.J. Beardmore, R. Dettmers, E.H. Dunn, W. Easton, E.E. Iñigo-Elias, T.D. Rich, K.V. Rosenberg and J.M. Ruth. 2006. Making Connections for Bird Conservation: Linking States, Provinces & Territories to Important Wintering and Breeding Grounds. Partners in Flight Technical Series No. 4. Partners in Flight website: <http://www.partnersinflight.org/pubs/ts/04-Connections>

## RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*MELANERNES CAROLINUS*) HELPED BY A STARLING (*STURNUS VULGARIS*) BY PAUL CARRIER

At a Red-bellied Woodpecker nest site discovered this summer in Harwinton, the author observed an unusual occurrence. After several visits by both parents to feed calling young situated 25' up in a hole of a small Scarlet Oak tree, a European Starling made a visit shortly after the male woodpecker had just left, and entered the occupied nesting hole. The Starling was observed carrying tree worms in its bill, and upon entering, the young began calling for food.

When the female woodpecker returned with a bill full of food, she looked into the hole, noticed the Starling inside, and moved further up the tree to wait. Shortly after, the Starling flew off with an empty bill, and the female woodpecker entered the nest hole and successfully fed the calling young within as well.

The observation described here seems to indicate a nesting pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers was being helped by this Starling in feeding their young inside.

Further observation revealed additional details of the relationship between the Starling and the woodpeckers. At one visit by the Starling, the male woodpecker arrived at the same time, violently chased the Starling off, with many Starling feathers being left behind. In time, it was observed the female woodpecker was tolerating the Starling's visits, while the male was not. It would also appear the nest belonged to the woodpeckers, and the young within were theirs; but were they?

Observed on the ground below the nest tree was a single wing from a bird. This wing was all brown feathered, indicating it as a possible fledgling Starling's wing. A feasible scenario from the information currently observed might be: the Starlings occupied this nesting hole first, raising their brood with some, or no success, caused by a possible visit from a predator, such as a raccoon.

Shortly after the Starlings vacated their nest, this pair of woodpeckers, who might have carved out this hole in a previous year ( it was an old excavated hole) moved in when vacant, producing a brood of their own. The Starling, presumably a female, might still have retained her instinct to feed young, and continued to do so with the welcome of the female woodpecker, and the disdain of the male.



Much has been written on the sharing of duties from "helper, or cooperative, breeders" who share in feeding other pair's young of the same species. This is well documented for jays and bluebirds. Also, the dumping of eggs into another's nest is known to occur with ducks of several species. But there is not much written of help feeding another species' young — this is a subject needing more observation and documentation to be better understood.



references:

The Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America - Francis Kortright - Wildlife Management Institute - 1967

The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior - David Sibley - Knopf - 2001

## UPCOMING EVENT AT CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

### **Saving Biological Diversity: Weighing Protection of Individual Species vs. Entire Ecosystems**

**Friday, April 6 and Saturday, April 7, 2007**

The 2007 Elizabeth Babbott Conant Interdisciplinary Conference on the Environment at Connecticut College

Hosted by the Goodwin-Niering Center for Conservation Biology and Environmental Studies

Keynote Address by Bryan Norton, distinguished environmental philosopher from Georgia Institute of Technology

Session I: Protecting Populations of Particular Species

Session II: Protecting Regional Ecosystems

Session III: The Need for Global Efforts to Save Biological Diversity

(860) 439-5417 [goodwin-nieringcenter@conncoll.edu](mailto:goodwin-nieringcenter@conncoll.edu) <http://goodwin-nieringcenter.conncoll.edu>

Co-sponsored by The Nature Conservancy, CT Chapter; National Audubon Society, CT Chapter; Beaver Brook Foundation; CT Forest and Park Association; Marjorie Dilley Lecture Fund; Connecticut Sea Grant Program

The conservation movement in North America emerged out of the shock of the extinction of the passenger pigeon and the near extinction of the American bison, species that had once been considered too numerous to be depleted. By the 1960s a broad consensus emerged in the United States that species should not be driven to extinction by human activities. Since then, however, the Endangered Species Act and major programs to restore endangered and threatened species have become controversial. Property rights advocates claim that endangered species protection hampers economic activity and land development to an unreasonable extent. At the same time, some conservationists are concerned that too much money and effort are devoted to endangered species, diverting attention from protection of entire ecosystems that support numerous species. They argue that preventing common species from becoming rare is the most effective long-term strategy given the limited resources available. Defenders of endangered species programs claim that protecting endangered species usually entails protecting entire ecosystems, and that endangered species can serve as effective symbols to rally popular support for ecosystem protection. Another controversial issue is how funds should be allocated for conservation between wealthy temperate-zone countries and less wealthy tropical countries that support most of the world's species diversity.

During this two-day conference we will learn about conservation and endangered species from a wide range of perspectives. Like all of the conferences sponsored by the Goodwin-Niering Center, this conference will be broadly interdisciplinary, with presentations by economists, political scientists, and conservation biologists. We will begin by examining the effectiveness and economics of endangered species protection. The second session will focus on efforts to sustain biological diversity in entire ecosystems or across regional landscapes. The third session will emphasize the best methods for protecting biological diversity on a global scale. An overview of these issues will be provided by two keynote addresses, and during a panel discussion that will end the conference.

This conference will provide a broad overview of our current understanding of how to prevent extinction and sustain biological diversity. The mix of speakers and topics should appeal to a wide audience of concerned citizens, college students and faculty, NGO representatives and policy makers.



**YOU HANG IN THERE WILLARD!**

## GIVE A GIFT OF COA MEMBERSHIP

New Member  Renewal  Gift

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COA is always in need of volunteer help. If you are interested, please check the areas below that you would like to know more about::

Computer skills  Events  Field trips  Finance  Workshops  Science

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314 Unquowa Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824

\* COA does not release its membership list to other organizations

Dues are tax deductible as allowed by law

The COA Bulletin is the quarterly newsletter of the Connecticut Ornithological Association, published in February, May, September, and December. Please submit materials for the next issue by January 30, 2007, to:

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Download a pdf version of the COA Bulletin (in color!) at [www.ctbirding.org](http://www.ctbirding.org)

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