Gene Billings Remembered

Every day in so many ways we are confronted by choices. Some are simple choices, others more momentous and some even turn the direction of our lives. Gene Billings was confronted with just such a choice not too many years ago upon his retirement after a long and prosperous career with Travelers Insurance Company. Like so many recent retirees, Gene could have sat back, picked up the TV remote, and settled into the whirl and wonder of daytime television from the comfort of his living room. Luckily for us, Gene chose nothing of the sort. Instead, he began an ever increasing involvement in birding and environmental activities which led to his second and equally rewarding career as an avid birder, author, and activist.

Gene’s birding became his passion and then his avocation as this active and energetic man quickly immersed himself in a host of ornithological and environmental activities. His initial work on raptor migration and ecology culminated in his first book, “Finding Birds of Prey in Connecticut” which was published in 1987. In this 450 page book illustrated by Julie Zickefoose, Gene carefully and thoroughly documents the life history of each raptor species that occurs in Connecticut and also provided many locales throughout the state where each of these species may be found. In a second, and equally lengthy tome, Gene authored with Dave Rosgen a state birding guide entitled “Bird Finding in Connecticut.” In this book, Gene documented the habitats and species that could be found in hundreds of birding localities throughout the state. As if all this were not enough for several post-retirement careers, Gene was also treasurer of the Nature Conservancy and a member of the COA board.

The Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts: Centennial Outweighs Millennial

by Steven Broker

Those who are looking forward to Y2K as a time of great personal and historical significance could do well to read Stephen Jay Gould’s book, Questioning the Millennium (Harmony Books 1997). Gould writes in this quick reading and interesting book about calendrics, astronomy, and history, and he raises serious questions about how an arbitrarily chosen time period of 1000 years, with no basis in nature and a totally fuzzy start time, can have a precise finish time such as January 1, 2000 or January 1, 2001. The book deals successfully with human cultures, social status, apocalyptic beliefs, changing definitions for millennium, natural cycles, attempts to describe the future, present-day measurement and counting, changing understandings of the age of the earth, calendars, and calendar revisions, arbitrary solutions to unresolvable conflicts, and popular culture. Along the way, Gould notes that nature has given us only three primary cycles: days (which we calibrate

(continued on page 2)
Gene Billings Remembered (continued from page 1)

Gene's further ventures and adventures were tragically cut short when he, his wife Barbara, and their Norfolk friend Henrietta Meade boarded the ill-fated EgyptAir Flight 990, which was lost in the early morning hours about 60 miles southeast of Nantucket—a sorry loss for all. No doubt Gene had many more birding activities and works ongoing and he will be sadly and sorely missed by the COA birding community and all interested in Connecticut birds and the Connecticut environment. He will always be remembered for his gentleness and positive, supportive encouragement of the birding community. --- Dwight Smith and Patty Pendergast.

Christmas Counts --2000 (continued from page 1)

into hourly and other intervals), lunations (equal to 29.53059 days), and years (equal to 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 45.96768 seconds). These three astronomical periods which we use to record time are totally lacking in simple multiples of each other, hence great confusion and mathematical gymnastics ensue.

For reasons that you will have to seek out in Questioning the Millennium, I favor January 1, 2000 as the arbitrary end of the present millennium and the arbitrary start of the next. Gould's arguments convince me. Having started that, I propose that YIC (Year 100, right) and the fast-approaching winter birding season of 1999-2000 is for us a time of unarguable and genuine calendrical significance. Here's why.

The first Christmas Bird Count was held on December 25, 1900, and it included several individual counts held in the state of Connecticut. The results were published in Bird Lore and referred to in The Auk. A year later a second count was held. This year is the 100th such celebration, without interruption. Not only that, because of the curious combination of evolutionary stochasticity and constraint, I do have ten fingers, and I do have ten toes. I do count by a Base 10 system, and I suppose I do contradict the statements of above by placing significance in a round number of CBCs.

Whatever your philosophical or calendrical persuasion, you will find that special emphasis is being given to this year's CBCs. Be sure to join in the fun, to share your expertise, your eyes and ears, your fascination with and enthusiasm for our avifauna, your concern for biological conservation, and your interest in wildlife censusing. And may you bird for another 1000 years!

THE 100th ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 18, 1999-Sunday, January 2, 2000

CONNECTICUT CBC SCHEDULE

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1999

Hartford, CT (HA CT) Compiler Jay Kaplan, 71 Gracey Road, Canton, CT 06019 (860) 693-0157

New Haven, CT (NH CT), Compilers, Stephen P. Broker, 50 Hidden Place, Cheshire, CT 06410-3723, (203) 272-5192 and Chris Loscalzo, 67 Wepawaug Road, Woodbridge, CT 06525, (203) 389-6508

Storrs, CT (ST CT) Compiler, Steve Rogers, 75 Charles Lane, Storrs, CT 06268, (860) 429-1259

Woodbury-Roxbury, CT (WR CT) Compiler, Chris Wood, 6 Orton Lane, Woodbury, CT 06798, (203) 263-5331

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1999

Greenwich-Stamford, CT (GS CT) Compilers, Gary Palmer, 34 Field Road, Cos Cob, CT 06807, (203) 661-4897, Brian O'Toole, 6 Fort Hills Lane, Greenwich, CT 06831 (203) 629-1027, and Pat Bailey, 1435 Bedford Street, Apt. 10H, Stamford, CT 06905

Litchfield Hills, CT (LH CT) Compiler, Raymond E. Belding, 1229 Winsted Road #30, Torrington, CT 06790 (860) 482-4046

Lakeville-Sharon, CT (LS CT) Compiler Bob Moeller, P. O. Box 1119, Sharon, CT 06069 (860) 364-5936

(continued on page 3)
Winter Gull Workshop

by Jay Kaplan

GULL IDENTIFICATION WORKSHOPS SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY 5TH. On Saturday, February 5th, the Connecticut Ornithological Association will sponsor a gull identification workshop for birders of all levels of experience. With the Manchester Landfill scheduled to be closed as of January 1, 2000, this year's workshop moves to the Connecticut shore. Participants should plan to meet at the West Haven Boat Ramp at 9:00 am. This will be a roving trip along the coast and participants should dress for winter weather conditions and bring a lunch as it is anticipated that the workshop will last till mid-afternoon. Carpooling is encouraged. The objective of this workshop is to observe gulls in their various plumages. Additional information is available by calling the workshop leader, Patrick Comins at (860)342-3783.

Fall Field Day

by Patty Pendergast

Even Hurricane Floyd didn't dare wash out COA's Fall Field Day held at White Memorial in Litchfield on September 18th. We had really wonderful leaders with a diverse variety of opportunities for people of all ages and birding ability. 66 people came out in spite of the uncertainty of Floyd's path (76 had registered). The high pressure system that kept Floyd at bay produced many good birds for us and provided gorgeous crisp and clear weather. The day's species tally was 61, including 12 warbler species, 3 different vireos, and 4 kinds of swallows as well as Bald Eagle, Osprey, and an early movement of White-throated Sparrows. Mike Thomas did butterfly and dragonfly walks along with displaying collections of moths, butterflies, and dragonflies. He kindly spent hours answering questions. Julian Hough's slide show showcased fall warblers and identification tips. (continued on page 4)
Fall Field Day (continued from page 3)

tips. COA president Dave Provencher's sparrow id was well received. Both of these programs dealt with difficult identification issues in the field and are useful for all birders to review.

COA has found that workshops and field trips are a good way of sharing the organization's expertise. Many of the state's best come to Fall Field Day or the shorebird workshop led by Frank Mantlik. At these events a lot of field experience is disseminated in a good natured forum. In the coming year we will add a couple of more workshops or slide shows for the membership.

The Peregrine's Recovery
by Roland Clement

Many of you read that Interior Secretary Babbitt went to Boise, Idaho on August 21 to declare officially that one of our noblest birds, the Peregrine Falcon, had now recovered sufficiently to be removed from the Endangered Species list to which it was consigned in 1970.

In the interim, over 6000 young falcons were produced in a captive propagation program initiated by Tom Cade of Cornell University, and released to the wild to restore the wild population decimated by the introduction of DDT after World War II. From a nation-wide low of 159 known nesting pairs in 1975, there are now more than 1650 nesting pairs in the U.S., and more in Canada. The restoration program is now housed at the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise. The Center is now restoring California Condors and preparing to do the same for the Harpy Eagle of tropical America.

Along with the restoration of the Bald Eagle, also delisted as endangered a month or so earlier, this is a great conservation victory. Much was learned about falcons in the process. For example, young birds restored to the wild without the protection of parents were subject to heavy predation by Great Horned Owls, so the recovery teams "hacked" young birds on city skyscrapers, where there are few owls and abundant food in the form of pigeons and starlings. Another happy by product of the program is that falconers learned to produce birds for themselves.

Part of the fun of being at the celebration party in Boise was the opportunity to visit with scores of co-workers who had helped initiate and maintain the recovery program since the early 1970s. Although there were only three of us from New England, two British co-workers came, and local citizens swelled attendance at this major event to nearly one thousand people. What a weekend!

The COA E-Mail List
by Patty Pendergast

COA announces its sponsorship of a suite of birding related e-mail list services designed to enhance birding opportunities in the state. Three of the lists have been in service for several years but not previously sponsored by COA. These lists are maintained by volunteers and will succeed only with input from the birding community.

RBA: The weekly CT Rare Bird Alert - sent directly to your e-mail address weekly. transcription and list maintenance duties are shared with Jamie Meyers. Also disseminated via the BIRDEAST list server of RBAs from the eastern third of the US and can be accessed from several websites.

RARE Sightings: Rare to good sightings - sent as received. Rare sightings from surrounding state email hotlines are also passed on. CT RARE postings can also be viewed at http://www.virtualbirder.com/cgi-bin/symredir/bmail/ctbird/latest.html

Birds this Week: The weekly RBA transcript includes a list of the birds mentioned in the tape. I have most of the RBA Transcripts going back to the summer of 92. When Dori has time she prepares a file with the lists of birds from the top of the following week's old RBA's. However, this is the first thing that goes when she is busy. Lately it has fallen aside totally but Dori hopes to reinstitute at some point. Maintained by Patty Pendergast (winterwren@earthlink.net):

FYI: The FYI List functions as a forum to post actions, events and issues important to the Connecticut birding community at large. Examples of the kinds of items that will be posted are: the encephalitis outbreak, volunteer and job opportunities, political action alerts pertinent to birds and habitat protection, COA field trips, COA workshops, etc. General postings will be issued once a week. Alerts such as the encephalitis/crow survey or timely political action alerts will be issued as needed. FYI is not intended to be an interactive chat forum. This list is maintained by Patty Pendergast. When you have something you would like to post please send it directly to Patty at winterwren@earthlink.net. If you are only subscribing to this list please send request directly to Patty. CT-FYI postings can also be viewed at http://www.virtualbirder.com/cgi-bin/symredir/bmail/ctbird/latest.html
Hartford Audubon Society

Hammonasset Beach State Park on Sunday, December 5. Meet at the park entrance at 8:00 am to begin a search for Lapland Longspurs, owls, Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, and other winter species. Dress warmly for this morning trip. Leader Louise Tucker at (860)-749-8968.

Beginners Bird Walk at Station 43, South Windsor, on Saturday, January 8. Everything you always wanted to know about bird identification but were afraid to ask! Meet at the corner of Newberry Road and Main Street at 9:00 am. (please note change in time). Leaders Len Kendall (860)-658-7952 and Roger Preston (860)-658-5010.

Essex and East of the River on Saturday, January 15. An all day search for eagles, ducks, and other winter visitors. This area has produced Bald Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks, and Redheads. Dress warmly and bring lunch. Meet at the Goodspeed Opera House parking lot at 8:30 am. Leaders Patsy Mason (860) 673-3713 and Louise Tucker (860) 749-8968.

Simsbury River Walk on Saturday, January 29. Second in the River Walk series. In case of snow or ice, park behind Drake Hill Mall in the parking lots. We will go into the walk from its official entrance, off the Iron Horse Blvd. There have been bluebirds, Great Horned Owls nesting, flocks of robins, even a Northern Shrike, at this time of year. Meet at 8:00 am at the boat house off Drake Hill Road. Leader Stephanie Lovell (860) 521-2621.

Beginner's Bird Walk at Station 43, South Windsor on Sunday, March 12. Everything you always wanted to know about bird identification again. These walks are a special feature of HAS, designed to teach the basics of bird identification. Bring your binoculars, field guides, and questions! Meet at the corner of Newberry Road and Main Street at 8:00 am. Leaders Len Kendall (860)-658-7952 and Roger Preston (860)-658-5010.

Hartford Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 18 (blizzard date is Sunday, December 19. See the Christmas Bird Count article in this COA Bulletin issue for details about this and other CBC counts in the state Chairman: Patrick Comins (860) 342-3783. Steve Davis (860) 242-2135 and Jay Kaplan (860) 693-0157.

Hartford Audubon Society Meetings

All HAS meetings are held in the Elmwood Community Center on Tuesday evenings. Call Fran at (203)-237-2734 for details.

Potluck Supper and Meeting on Tuesday, December 7, starting at 6:30 pm. Bring a dish to share along with your own table setting for this annual December event. The Hospitality Committee will supply hot and cold beverages. Members are encouraged to bring their own slides for viewing---limited to a dozen. We will also have our annual auction, so feel free to bring something to be auctioned off. For further information call Len Kendall at (860)-658-7952.

Conservation of the Hyacinth Macaws in their Brazillian habitats, on Tuesday, January 11, meeting starting at 7:30 pm. A presentation by Alan Lurie, who will share his slides and experiences and discuss the ongoing efforts to preserve these magnificent macaws.

Birds of the Chesapeake Bay on Tuesday, February 11, meeting starting at 7:30 pm. Wildlife photographer Cliff Williams will present a program of slides and discussion focusing on the dynamics of bird colonies and habitats in this area and how he photographed them.

The Audubon Shop

Wintering Eagles on the Connecticut River. Beginning in January 8, Saturday, and every Saturday through February, see our National Symbol in the wild, along with other birds of prey and wintering waterbirds. Tickets are $16 in advance and include lunch at Oliver's Tavern in Essex. For more information and/or reservations call Jerry Connolly at The Audubon Shop in Madison at (203) 245-9056. Be sure to check out Jerry's latest collection of binoculars for sale now in his shop.

(more trips and events continued on page 6)
Trips and Events (continued from page 5)

New Haven Bird Club
Indoor Programs

All indoor programs are on the second Thursday of the month and will be held in the Jones Auditorium at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station on Huntington Street in New Haven. Social half-hour begins at 7:30 pm, the program begins at 8:00 pm.

Archaeopteryx and the Origin of Birds, on December 9, by Tom Tynig. In this indoor event, Tom presents a short course in the fragmented history of paleontologv as seen through the fascinating case of the 19th century discovery of Archaeopteryx. We will also make plans for the Christmas count at this meeting.

Member's Night and Christmas Count Report, on January 13, 2000. Bring some of your recent slides to show. Walk-ins welcome. Call Judy Moore at (203) 387-4582 to let us know what you are contributing. We will also have a report of our club's outstanding participation in the 1999 Christmas Count.

Texas----Coast, Valley, and Hills, on February 10, by Andy Griswold. Over 540 species recorded in Texas. Our enthusiastic guide is Andy Griswold, who has led numerous birding trips to Texas for Connecticut Audubon.

Field Trips/Outdoor Events

Bethany Lakes on Saturday, November 20. This trip will survey the four water company lakes for northern migrating waterfowl. We will see a variety of other residents including woodpeckers and our resident flock of turkeys. We will meet at the Lake Bethany parking lot. From Rte 69 take a right onto Hatfield Hill Road, go past the dam and around the corner to the parking lot. Call leader Pat Leahy at (203) 393-2427 for details.

Rarity Chase on Saturday, January 2, 2000! Get a jump on your New Year list, the first year of the new millennium. Take advantage of over one thousand birders who participated in the recent 15 Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts over a two week period. Go directly to the spots where they saw those rare winter birds and do it all within a day. Watch the newsletter for details. Call Field Director Steve Mayo at (203) 393-0694 for details.

REGIONAL HOTLINES

Connecticut (203) 254-3665
Rhode Island (401) 949-3970
Eastern Massachusetts (617) 259-8805
Western Massachusetts (413) 253-2218
Vermont (802) 547-4861
New Hampshire (603) 224-9900
Maine (207) 781-2332
New York Metro (212) 979-3070
Northern New Jersey (908) 766-2661
Cape May, New Jersey (609) 884-2626

Farmbrook, on Saturday, January 15 at 9:00 am. This is a favorite spot of Ranger Dan Barvir. He has spotted a variety of rare wintering birds in this location. Habitats for birding includes Farmbrook Pond, old converted farm fields, and scrubby brushes and birds associated with this kind of habitat, located at NW end of West Rock Ridge directly across from Laurel View Golf Course in Hamden. Wear appropriate footwear, moderate walking. Call leader Dan Barvir at (203) 946-6086 for details.

Sachuest Point and Rhode Island Coast, on Sunday, February 20, at 7:00 am. An all day trip in search of Harlequin Ducks, rare gulls, and other winter shore line birds. It can be cold and windy along the coast so bring or wear appropriate clothing. Bring lunch and drink. Bring a scope if you have one. We will meet at the I-95 Exit 54 commuter lot, closest to I-95 at 7:00 am. Call leader Andy Brand at (203)-230-1718 or andrew.brand@snet.com

Connecticut Valley & Eastern Shore on Saturday, February 26. Search the east shore from Madison to the lower Connecticut River for shorebirds, eagles, Rough-legged Hawks and ducks. Last year we saw a rare Black-headed Gull on this trip. Dress for cold, windy conditions. Bring lunch, drink, a scope if you have one. Meet at the Hammonasset State Park entrance at 8:00 am. Co-leaders Nancy Rosenbaum at (203) 288-8897 or Arne Rosengren at (203) 248-2903

The Fat Robin

Field trips to Farmington Canal Trip, Sleeping Giant, Lighthouse Point Park. Call Jim or Carol Zipp for details on these and other birding events at (203) 248-7068
Field Reports Requested

Birding observations by COA birders form the basis for the seasonal reports on the status of resident and migrating birds in the state which appear in The Connecticut Warbler and Audubon Field Notes. COA members are encouraged to report their sightings by filling in Species Report Forms. The forms can be obtained by calling Greg Hanisek at 203-574-3636.

Report periods and due dates are; Fall period from August 1 through November 30, report due December 10; Winter from December 1 to February 28, report due March 10; Spring from March 1 to May 30, report due June 10; Summer from June 1 to July 30, report due August 10. Please submit reports to Greg Hanisek, 175 Circuit Ave., Waterbury, CT 06708. Contributors should complete separate forms for each species observed. Sort the forms into phylogenetic order, using the COA Connecticut Field List as a guide. Detailed descriptions should be given for species on the Field List denoted by * (rare) or # (hypothetical) or for species not on the Field List. All reports will be preserved. Comments are welcomed.

Joining COA

The Connecticut Ornithological Association welcomes new members. COA is the only statewide organization devoted exclusively to birds and birding, and its members range from beginning birders to professional ornithologists. Joining COA is guaranteed to improve your knowledge of Connecticut birds and increase your enjoyment of Connecticut birding.

Membership costs as little as $12.00 per year and includes a copy of The Ten Best Birding Sites in Connecticut, the quarterly COA Bulletin, the quarterly The Connecticut Warbler, and invitations to COA events such as field trips and field days. Membership dues also support COA's rare bird hotline, conservation initiatives, and research projects. New members receive a copy of the official Connecticut Field List and a COA decal.

Present COA members who have not yet renewed for the current year can use the form below. Check the mailing label on the other side of this page to see whether your membership is current. If not, please send in the form today.

JOIN COA FOR THE BEST OF CONNECTICUT BIRDING

Please print or type

[] New Member  [] Renewal  [] Gift

Name ________________________________ Name2 ________________________________

(Memberships above the individual level can include a spouse or partner)

Address ________________________________ City ____________________ State _____ Zip Code ________

Telephone* ___________ Occupation* ________________________________

Bird Club or Audubon Chapter* ________________________________ Christmas Count Name* ________________________________

Level of Birding Experience* [ ] Beginner [ ] Novice [ ] Intermediate [ ] Advanced [ ] Expert

Membership Category [ ] Individual ($12) [ ] Family ($18) [ ] Contributing ($25) [ ] Sustaining ($40)

*Optional

Send this application with your check to:

Connecticut Ornithological Association, 314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06430

COA does not release its membership list to other organizations. Dues are tax deductible as allowed under the law.

MEMBERS: PLEASE GIVE THIS FORM TO A BIRDING FRIEND