COA Annual Meeting

by Debra Miller

Please join us on Saturday, March 28th in Stamford for COA's eighth Annual Meeting. The focus of this year's program is Birds of the Connecticut Coastline, and presentations on various aspects of this topic will be made by a lineup of interesting and informative speakers.

The Annual Meeting is a special opportunity for COA members and their guests to convene for an educational and entertaining day of fellowship with other birders. New members are especially encouraged to attend, so that they can meet the diverse group of people who belong to COA -- from beginning birders to professors of ornithology. Attending the meeting will give members a chance to chat with the people whose names appear in The Connecticut Warbler and the COA Bulletin and to hear talks by experts on the status of birds and birding along the Connecticut coastline. The following presentations are scheduled.

Coastal Wildlife and Habitat: Paul Merola, Wildlife Biologist, Waterfowl Program Leader, Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, will present a discussion of the DEP's coastal wildlife assessment relating to specific priorities and research needs. He will present an overview of activities and pressures that impact wildlife and habitat. DEP's activities, coastal habitat protection, and wetland habitat management and restoration will be highlighted in the discussion.

Stratford's Great Meadows Salt Marsh: Michael Aurelia, Director, Inland Wetland Watercourses Agency, Town of Greenwich, will present the history of the Great Meadows Marsh and nearby coastal habitats and review some of the threats to their continued existence. This presentation will also focus on reasons why tidal wetlands are such significant coastal habitats.

Greenwich's Islands: Tom Baptist, Conservation Coordinator, Town of Greenwich, will describe the natural history of the eight islands off the Greenwich shore and focus on the birds inhabiting them. The islands support a large heron rookery, a least tern

(continued on page 2)

Over 2,000 Flock to See Rare Boreal Owl

Birders have travelled from all over New England, New York, and from as far away as Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina to view a calm and cooperative Boreal Owl who is spending the winter at the Nature Conservancy's Sperry Preserve in Middlebury. Buzz Devine, who found the owl roosting in a spruce grove on January 12, estimates that well over 2,000 people have seen the bird so far.

There have been only three previous reports of sightings of Boreal Owls in Connecticut during this century, the most recent in 1946. Three 19th century specimens are believed to exist, but their whereabouts are unknown. Because none of the previous sightings was well documented, it appears that this bird will be accepted as the first documented state record.

MEETING REGISTRATION

To preregister for the Annual Meeting, send your name and address and a check for $10.00 per person plus $8.00 per buffet lunch (optional) to COA at 314 Unquoa Road, Fairfield, CT 06430.
Annual Meeting . . .

Colonies, two common tern colonies, possible nesting barn owls and nesting American oystercatchers, while providing important habitat for migrant and wintering species. Aspects of the island's natural history will be illustrated with slides and maps.

Chimon Island: Milan Bull, Director, Fairfield Nature Center and Director of Field Studies and Ornithology for the Connecticut Audubon Society, will provide a slide tour of Chimon Island, Norwalk, and an overview of the biological field work that led to its protection and designation as the gemstone of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge.

Greater New Haven Harbor: Arnold Devine (DEP Hazardous Waste Management) and Dwight Smith (Biology Department, Southern Connecticut State University) will explore the shoreline from Merwin Point in Milford to Lighthouse Point Park in East Haven, an area which includes a number of sites which offer outstanding seasonal and year-round birding opportunities. The estuarine and coastal environments -- mud flats, sand spits, rocky promontories, beaches and salt marshes -- along that part of Long Island Sound attract an exceptionally wide diversity of waterfowl and other avian species. During peak migration periods, a birding expedition to greater New Haven Harbor may produce over 120 species.

Bird Dispersal of Non-Native Plants: Leslie J. Mehrhoff, Connecticut State Biologist with the Connecticut Geological and Natural History Survey, will describe his efforts to study which birds help distribute the seeds of non-native plant species and raise questions on bird-plant interactions.

Ospreys and People: Gerald S. Mersereau will cover the period from 1900 to the present, traveling from Northern Scotland to Southern New England in a review of the relationship between Ospreys and human beings. He will discuss the "3 P's" -- Persecution, Pesticides and Plastic -- and their effect on Osprey populations both in Northern Scotland and Southern New England and Connecticut in particular. The program will include slides of Connecticut Ospreys.

Keeping a Birding Journal: Louis Bevier, Editor Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas, will discuss keeping a birding journal. He will focus on bird topography, problems encountered in the field, written descriptions of sightings, and an elimination process to use in identifying confusing species.

Field Ornithology and Human Disease: Mardi Crane, Volunteer Bird Bander at Greenwich Audubon and Director of Community Relations at Courtland Gardens Residence, will lead a discussion of considerations for protection against transmittable diseases in the birder's environment.

In addition to these presentations, there will be a number of other events during the day. A buffet luncheon ($8.00 per person) will be served, and attendees who prefer to bring a bag lunch are invited to eat in the dining room or, weather permitting, in the courtyard. After lunch there will be a short business meeting, during which COA officers and directors for 1992 will be elected.

A highlight of the day will be the presentation to Roland Clement of the 1992 Mabel Osgood Wright Award, which COA has created to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to Connecticut ornithology. Presentation of the award will be made at the business meeting, and a reception will be held in Mr. Clement's honor at the close of the day's activities.

Also, the popular COA Marketplace will be offering a variety of birding gear and bird related items at reasonable prices. And to top off the day, several lucky people will be winners of valuable birding equipment in the raffle. All in all, this will be a terrific event for Connecticut birders.

Registration is only $10.00 per person in advance (see box on page 1) or $12.00 at the door. The meeting will be held at Courtland Gardens Residence, 59 Courtland Avenue, Stamford, CT. From Route I-95, take Exit 9 to Route 1, turn onto Courtland Avenue at the first traffic light, and go one block. From the Merritt Parkway, take Exit 36, and go south on Route 106 (which eventually becomes Courtland Ave.) about 6 miles. The day will begin with registration from 8:00 to 9:00 am and conclude with the reception at 4:30 pm. See you there!
Conservation Watch

by Tom Baptist

The COA Conservation Committee is responsible for keeping track of development projects, changes in laws and regulations, and other events which may adversely affect birds and bird habitat in the state. Among the issues the Committee is currently monitoring are the following.

**Mute Swans:** The Department of Environmental Protection proposal to euthanize mute swans received a setback from the Legislative Regulation Review Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly in January. The Review Committee did not approve the regulations that would have enabled DEP personnel to shake swan eggs for the purpose of reducing the number of swans in the state. The Review Committee cited legal reasons for its disapproval; DEP Commissioner Timothy Keeney indicated that a revised regulation would be submitted soon.

**Sikorsky Airport:** Plans to erect aircraft landing lights in Stratford’s Great Meadows are proceeding. A draft environmental impact statement is being prepared in order to evaluate the effects of the proposed construction of the lights and their towers within the tidal wetlands of Great Meadows, situated west of Sikorsky Airport. A number of COA members have expressed concern about the possible effects of the construction and use of the lights on the birds inhabiting the marsh. COA members will be kept informed of the progress of the proposal via this newsletter.

**Budget Cuts:** In his new state budget, Governor Weicker has proposed substantial cuts in the already under-staffed Department of Environmental Protection. COA members are urged to let their state representatives know that enacting these cuts is bound to have a detrimental effect on the state’s environment.

COA members are urged to contact Conservation Committee Chairman Tom Baptist (203 938-8078) about development proposals and other activities that might adversely affect important bird habitat. The COA Conservation Committee will consider presenting information at public hearings about the effects of development on birds and their habitats in an effort to provide regulatory agencies with a more complete understanding of the consequences of their decisions.

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Fall Hawk Migration

Hawk watch coordinator Neil Currie reports that last fall’s hawk migration in Connecticut produced mixed results, with record numbers of four species but an unusually low total of Broad-winged Hawks. Partially because of the sharp drop in Broad-wings, overall totals were down significantly compared to last year -- from 27,845 to 22,401 birds at the Lighthouse Point lookout in New Haven and from 17,397 to 12,426 birds at the Quaker Ridge lookout in Greenwich.

The Quaker Ridge total is the lowest since the full time watch began in 1985. Turkey Vulture was the only species to show up in record numbers, with a total of 453 individuals. A high point of the watch was a Swainson’s Hawk on October 13. This was only the sixth Connecticut sighting of this western hawk and a first for the Quaker Ridge watch. Northern Harriers continued a four year decline, with only 74 birds counted this year compared to 332 in 1987.

Although the overall total was down at Lighthouse Point, record numbers of three species were observed: 1,863 Cooper’s Hawks, 474 Red-shouldered Hawks, and 658 Red-tailed Hawks. Ospreys also made a good showing at 3,034 individuals, their third best year yet.

Broad-wing counts were down at all lookouts, even those to the west of us in New York and New Jersey. There is no ready explanation for this. During prime migration period -- September 13 - 19 -- east winds and overcast skies limited the flights of Broad-wings. Even on good flight days, however, counts were down.

Observers at two full-time and four weekend hawk watching sites spent more than a thousand hours scanning the skies for raptors last fall. Elsbeth Johnson at Quaker Ridge and Ed Shove at Lighthouse Point are to be highly commended for their long hours at these lookouts. Full details on the 1991 hawk migration will appear in an upcoming issue of The Connecticut Warbler.

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**HOTLINE REPORTS**

To report sightings of rare, unusual, or migrating birds, call one of the following:

- Milan Bull 259-6305 or 255-8837
- Tom Rochovansky 222-7777
- Frank Mantlik 838-1694
92\textsuperscript{nd} Christmas Count

by Steve Broker

A total of 160 Count Day and 3 Count Week species were recorded on Connecticut's 17 Christmas Bird Counts during the period December 14 - January 2. Nearly 1000 field observers and feeder watchers participated in the 92\textsuperscript{nd} annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, tallying 450,000 birds in the process.

One quarter of all species were counted in 10-year-record-high numbers. A number of rarities were recorded, and six species and one sub-species/form were new to the 10 year species list. Many of those species identified as increasing or decreasing in numbers over the last 5 to 10 years continued their trends.

Species counted in high numbers included Great Blue Heron, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Sharp-shinned and Cooper’s Hawks, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, House Finch and American Goldfinch. The Carolina Wren population continues explosive growth. Red-bellied Woodpecker and Eastern Bluebird also increase in numbers steadily. Litchfield Hills had more than 2000 American Robins, and Woodbury-Roxbury had more than 5000.

New species/forms seen during Count Week but not on Count Day were Sandhill Crane and Razorbill on the Old Lyme-Saybrook count and Northern "Bullock’s" Oriole at New Haven. New to Count Day were Common Black-headed Gull (also at OL), Black-throated Green Warbler (Storrs), Golden-crowned Sparrow (Oxford), and European Goldfinch (Edwin Way Teale -Trail Wood). Other rarities included Northern Gannet and Tundra Swan. Four Snowy Owls were counted at Stratford-Milford, and Northern Saw-whet Owls were in high numbers. Good numbers of Northern Shrike were seen for the second year in a row.

Thirteen species were at record 10 year lows, most notably Hairy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper and Purple Finch. Two species, Barn Owl and Lapland Longspur, failed to be seen on any count for the first time in 10 years. American Kestrel numbers continue to be well below totals of the 1970s and early 1980s. Totals for Ruffed Grouse, American Coot and Eastern Meadowlark showed improvement.

Full details on the Christmas Count will appear in the next issue of The Connecticut Warbler.

Spring Birding Basics

by Alison Olivieri

So boy, those winter ducks, grebes and loons were great, right? Shepaug Dam's eagles were their reliable old selves and we had some luck with owls, too: the Snowies, the Short-eareds, a few of us even got Long-eareds and Saw Whets; and then, of course, there was the visiting dignitary in Middlebury.

But hey! Guess what? It’s SPRING and even if you didn’t get out all winter long now is the time to grab the notebook and the field glasses and get moving!

What’s coming first? Well, how about Red-winged Blackbirds, Eastern Phoebes, Eastern Bluebirds, American Robins and Common Grackles? Start looking and listening for the Red-wings now because some of the boys got here in late February and they’re staking claims in cattails and phragmites; Common Grackles will fall in then, too, with much bravado.

Phoebes with bobbing tails will be on insect sorties from unleaved limbs in mid-March while the Bluebirds buzz around a little lower down for the last remaining berries. Robins will come in after that, say, late March. (You may have been seeing these last two through winter because some of them stay.)

The trick is, if you know when to expect what, you can start to look early and you might find the very first one. Another group which shows up early is sparrows. How about White-throated Sparrows and Song Sparrows? (Some of these winter, don’t forget.) Both come in early in the month with distinctive songs that’ll start soon; you can start to look for Field Sparrows mid-March - find a field or brushy spot and look for a five-incher with a pink bill and a rusty cap.

On the coast, some small March arrivals include our threatened nester, the Piping Plover, around the middle of the month; Killdeer (distinctive in marking with two black breastbands and tawny rump patch plus its noisy call) and American Woodcock come a week or two later. Look for the latter in open fields and short grass wetlands; the aerial display and "peeeeent" call are unmistakable. Great Blue and Black-crowned Night Herons will be arriving later in the month (again, some winter).

As for ducks and geese: Ring-necked Ducks with the white on their bills will be showing up at inland locations in early March, followed by Common Goldeneye, Greater Scaup and Oldsquaw on the
In late March look for those small stunners -- Green-winged Teal -- in fresh and brackish ponds and salt marshes. Snow Geese (overhead, inland and coastal) and Brant (a smallish black goose with a white chinstrap) can be found floating on the coast in late March, along with Common Mergansers (large ducks with a lot of white) on large rivers and lakes.

April showers and some nice birds coming in, too: let's start with the season's star group, the warblers. Early warbs include Black and Whites, easy to spot creeping up and down on tree limbs; Common Yellowthroats, most uncommon-looking yellow birds sporting a striking black mask with a blue-gray border across the brow (males, anyway) and a wonderful song: "witchity-witchity-witchity-witch"; and Yellow Warblers, small pieces of the rainbow with another easy song: "sweet-sweet-I'm-so-sweet!"

Similar, but not the same family, Solitary Vireos arrive in late April; the ones with the white spectacles. Vireos have slightly heavier bills and are generally a tad larger than warblers.

Mid-April brings in some familiar birds, including Rufous-sided Towhees, scratching in the leaves and shouting "Drink-your-teeeee"; Chipping Sparrows sitting on wires and buzzing or rattling in one even pitch, with a lovely rusty cap, dark eyestripe and white between; larger cousins, the Brown Thrashers, come in around mid-April, scratching around the forest floor with their enormous tails and light eyes, followed at the end of the month by their close relatives, Gray Catbirds. You can also look for American Kestrels about now, hovering over fields or perched on snags or wires BUT the month would not be complete without the arrival of House Wrens (so get those boxes cleaned!). Just to wind up the songbirds, be on alert for that flash of orange and black signalling a Northern Oriole in late April.

Nearer the water, look for Snowy Egrets, small members of the clan with black legs and yellow feet, followed later in the month by Green-backed Herons, another small one but less obvious -- a skulker around the shore. Both nest locally but you'll have to really hunt. Black-bellied Plovers and Greater Yellowlegs both arrive in early April on the coast, and you might check the water while you're there for the occasional Common Loon and our very common summer resident, the Double-crested Cormorant.

May, the month of Birding Big Days, is when the true frenzy peaks. In fact, everything peaks, including warblers -- believe it or not, you can stay home and watch your trees because you'll see them everywhere. Try for American Redstarts: they come early in the month, and the males are flashy black and orange while the females are a softer vision in yellow and gray. Listen for Ovenbirds, calling "Teacher-teacher-teacher" from woods and even edges; they look like little thrushes but they're not. Speaking of thrushes, this month brings back the Wood Thrush with the most beautiful flutelike song of them all and distinctive large black breast spots.

Early May brings in Red-eyed Vireos with their white eyestripes bordered in black and their robinlike song, "cheerio-cheerio-teacher", along with Yellow-throated Vireos sporting wing bars, a yellow breast, and yellow spectacles.

In the flycatcher group, we find Least Flycatchers now, not so easy to ID but with more sharply defined gray above and white below than others in the group, wingbars and an eye-ring, about 5" long in open groves; followed by Eastern Wood Pewees in mid-May, slightly larger (about the size of a Phoebe) with wingbars and no eye-ring.

Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a little surer find than the last two, make themselves known in early May, followed by the stunning Scarlet Tanagers a week or so later.

At the coast, we find Semipalmated Plovers early in the month, smaller than the Killdeer with only one black breastband, and Semipalmated Sandpipers, our most numerous "peep" in migration. About the only thing you can confuse it with is the Western Sandpiper, and here's a tip: Semipalms look gray and Westerns look brown.

Any questions? Call me -- on second thought, don't bother, you'll only get the machine -- I'm going birding.
Milford Point Update

Birders who visit Milford Point often wonder about the fate of the rundown old house at the parking area. Milan Bull, COA and CT Audubon Society director, has informed us that the Milford Point Sanctuary and Bird Observatory, leased from the state of CT by CAS, will soon be transformed. After several years of fund raising and planning, work on the historic 1846 hotel is slated to begin in April. The complicated process of demolition and renovation will result in a fantastic new facility which will include exhibits and an observation tower open to all. Major work on the sanctuary itself will begin in March and consist of replacing non-native plants with native coastal species, dune restoration, and a new boardwalk to a new beach observation area. Labor for the sanctuary work will be largely volunteer. To donate money or time to this ambitious effort, contact Milan Bull at 259-6305.

Members' Corner

Among the nearly 1000 participants in this year’s CBC was one COA member and former director who establishes a new record each year that he participates in the count. George Zepko joined the Westport count for the 37th consecutive year, even though he was recovering from major surgery.

Winnie Burkett sends greetings from her new home in Texas, where she is already setting up a banding operation and has assumed compilership of the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR CBC. She misses Connecticut, and invites COA members to contact her when birding in the Houston area. Her address is 919 Layfair Place, Friendswood, TX 77546. Telephone (713) 992-5640.

Trips & Events

Wanderings of a Birder

COA member Professor Noble S. Proctor will give a lecture and slide show at the Peabody Museum, 170 Whitney Avenue, New Haven on Wednesday, March 4 at 4:00 pm and 8:00 pm. For the last 25 years, Professor Proctor has been leading trips to some of the world’s most exciting birding spots. In this lecture he will explore the bird life in several of his favorite regions, including Alaska, Africa, the Galapagos, and Australia.

Birds: Live and Spectacular

On Saturday, March 21, the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History and the Audubon Society of Northeast Connecticut will sponsor "Birds: Live and Spectacular" with live hawks and owls, hands-on activities for children, slide talks by experts, a photographic exhibit of Connecticut birds including rare and endangered species, and a number of other bird-related activities. The event will be held from 1:00 to 5:00 pm in the Jorgensen Auditorium at The University of Connecticut, 2132 Hillside Road, Storrs. For information, call 486-4460.

Connecticut Audubon

The Connecticut Audubon Society (CAS) announces the following field trips and has generously offered to extend its member rate to COA members. For more information contact Lauren Brown, CAS field trip coordinator, at 259-6305 or 481-0377.

Cuttyhunk Island Friday, March 27. Winter ducks from the ferry and early migrants on a windswept island with a year-round population of 30.

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge plus stops at Bombay Hook NWR and Milburn Landing SP with Jay Hand, Jim Mockalis, and Fred Sibley. Friday, May 1 - Sunday, May 3. Fantastic birding at some of the most beautiful and productive sites on the east coast. $250 charge includes bus transportation, hotel, and most meals.

Saugatuck Valley Audubon

The Saugatuck Valley Audubon Society (SVAS) announces the following field trips. For more information contact Phil Reinertsen, SVAS president, at 762-5704.

Woodcock Flights with COA president Frank Mantlik. Saturday, March 21 5:30 - 7:00pm. Dazzling mating displays. Meet at I-95, Exit 18 commuter lot. Raindate Sunday.

Spring Migrants at East Rock with COA director Tom Baptist. Sunday, April 26, 8:00am - 3:00pm. Probably the best migrant trap in Connecticut. Meet at Westport Nature Center.

Announcements

COA encourages local bird clubs to send announcements of field trips and other events to Jay Knox, Bulletin Editor, 43 Bridge Road, Weston, CT 06883
Spring Field Report

Please tear off the form which appears below, and use it to submit your Spring Field Report. List noteworthy sightings on separate sheet(s) of lined paper, giving species, date, number of individuals, and location. Use abbreviations when possible; for example, five Common Loons seen at Sherwood Island State Park on Feb. 26 should be entered as "Com. Loon 2/26 (5) SISP."

For common species, please record dates and locations of first, last, and maximum sightings. Rare and uncommon species, for which reports of all sightings are needed, are listed below. The compilers would greatly appreciate receiving your report with species listed in phylogenetic order; use the COA Connecticut Field List as a guide. Note: Detailed descriptions should be submitted for any species on the Field List which is denoted by * (rare) or # (hypothetical) or for any species not on the Field List. All reports will be preserved.

Worm-eating Warbler

For a dissertation on area sensitivity in breeding Worm-eating Warblers, George Gale would like information on breeding sites in lower Connecticut. He is aware of the Devils Den site, but would like to know of others, particularly those having ten or more pairs or a single pair on less than 10 acres. Contact him at 486-3169 or Dept of Biology, Box U43, UCONN, Storrs, CT 06269

COA Field Report Form for March 1 to May 31, 1992

Name: __________________________ Phone: __________________________

(Please correct address label on other side if necessary.)

How often have you birded this season?
1) Just around my yard 2) 1-6 days 3) 7-12 days 4) 13 or more days

Which species impressed you as being more common this year?

Which species impressed you as being scarce this year?

Rare and unusual species for which all records are needed:

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