

# COA Bulletin



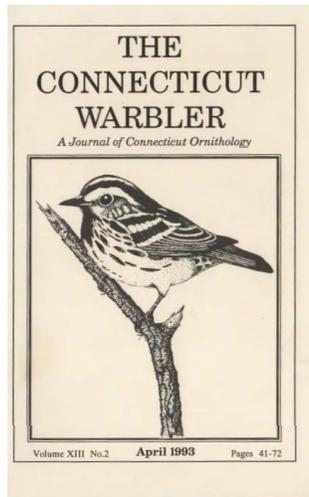
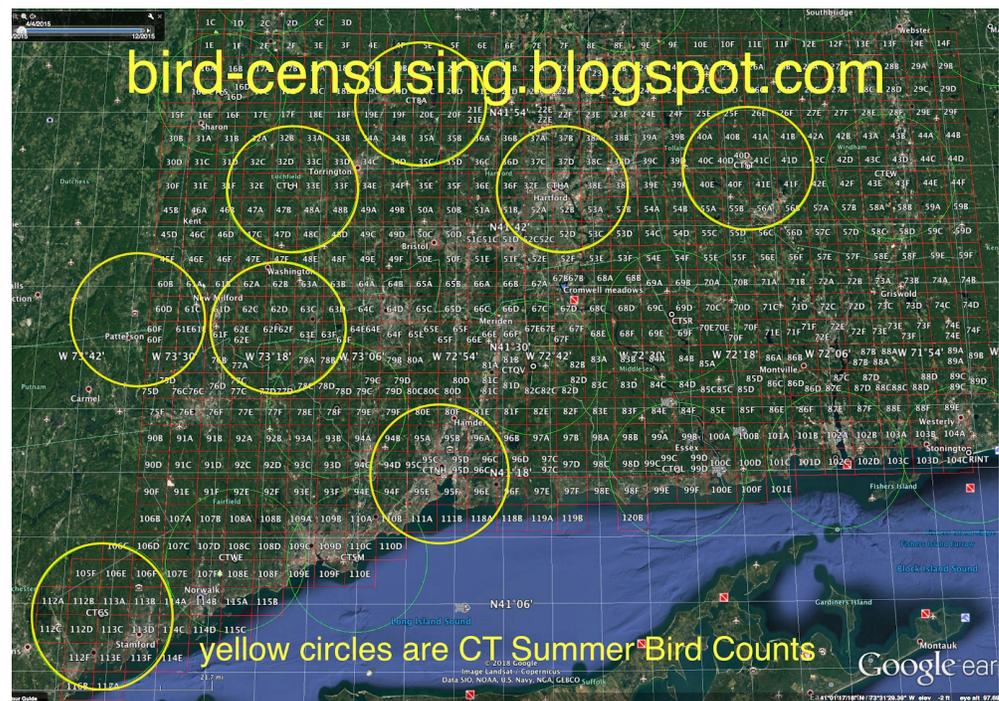
## Connecticut Summer Bird Count

Tom Robben

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

- Summer Bird Count p. 1-2
- Ann'l Meeting Wrap-up p. 3-4
- 2018 Mini Grants p. 5
- CT Bird Atlas Project p. 6-7
- Gull Workshop p. 8
- Photo Gallery p. 8-9
- 25 Years Ago in TCW p. 10-11

The eight Summer Bird Counts (SBCs) in Connecticut are ready to go ahead again this June, and for the first time this year, you can simultaneously (if you want) contribute your bird observations to TWO scientific bird studies: the ongoing Connecticut SBCs AND the new Connecticut Bird Atlas. If you choose to do that, you will want to know which Atlas block(s) you are observing birds in, which can be planned in advance with the map below:



COA is an all-volunteer organization with the mission of promoting interest in Connecticut birds, and collecting, preparing, and disseminating the best available scientific information on the status of Connecticut birds and their habitats. While COA is not primarily an advocacy organization, we work actively to provide scientific information and to support other conservation

Note that the CT SBCs started in 1976 in Greenwich-Stamford and 1978 in Woodbury-Roxbury, and since 1991 multiple other SBCs have been run, providing a unique multi-decade continual annual set of breeding data within the same areas. This time series is a valuable data set to help us understand the changing environment.

If you want to contribute to an SBC this year (with or without simultaneous contribution to the Connecticut Bird Atlas), please contact the compiler of the local SBC circle, as follows:

FIRST WEEKEND IN JUNE 2018: *June 3 only*

Woodbury-Roxbury, June 3. Contact: Russ Naylor, 44 Church St., Woodbury, CT 06798; 203 841-7779.

SECOND WEEKEND: June 9-10

- Greenwich-Stamford. Contact: Thomas Burke, 235 Highland Rd., Rye, NY 10580; 914 967-4922, [thomaswardburke@gmail.com](mailto:thomaswardburke@gmail.com), and Gary Palmer, 34 Field Rd., Cos Cob, CT 06830; 203 661-4897, [gejlpalmer@yahoo.com](mailto:gejlpalmer@yahoo.com)
- Hartford. Contact: Jay Kaplan, 71 Gracey Rd., Canton, CT 06019; 860 693-0157, [jaybrd49@aol.com](mailto:jaybrd49@aol.com)
- Litchfield Hills. Contact: David Tripp Jr., 298 Park Ave., Unit 2, Torrington, CT 06790; [dtrippjr@gmail.com](mailto:dtrippjr@gmail.com)
- New Haven. (NEW date) Contact: Steve Mayo, 27 Tuttle Court, Bethany, CT 06524; 203 551-1707, [rsdmayo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rsdmayo@sbcglobal.net)

THIRD WEEKEND: June 16-17

- New Milford / Pawling. Contact: Angela Dimmitt, PO Box 146, Sherman, CT 06784; 860 355-3429, [angeladimmit@aol.com](mailto:angeladimmit@aol.com)

FOURTH WEEKEND: June 23-24

- Barkhamsted. John Marshall and Dave Rosgen. Contact: John Marshall, 60 Wilson Dr., Watertown, CT 06795; 203 232-4393, [johnmarshall47@gmail.com](mailto:johnmarshall47@gmail.com)
- Storrs. (NEW date) Contact: Steve Morytko, 288 Varga Rd., Ashford, CT 06278; 860 680-5728, [smorytko@yahoo.com](mailto:smorytko@yahoo.com)

Except for Woodbury-Roxbury, all of these counts have a two-day window, but you do not have to bird both days.

SBCs operate like Christmas Bird Counts. If you want to participate in an SBC this year, please contact one of the SBC Compilers listed above, and agree on an area to cover. Within an SBC you will count birds in one of its Areas, headed by an Area Captain, who will report all the area observations to the SBC's Compiler, who will report all their compiled results for their SBC this year to the State Compiler (Joe Zeranski supported by Patrick Comins and Tom Robben), where the statewide compilation will be completed, analyzed, and the final report written.

For more details, including how to do Atlas work while doing your SBC work, go to: <https://bird-censusing.blogspot.com/> (and scroll down) or email to [robben99@gmail.com](mailto:robben99@gmail.com). Chris Elphick will also post suggestions about this (how to collect SBC data in a way that maximizes benefits for the atlas) on CTbirds listserv and on the CT Bird Atlas website (<http://www.ctbirdatlas.org/>) a few weeks before June.



## COA Annual Meeting Wrap-up

Kathy Van Der Aue

We had a packed house once again for the Annual Meeting which fortunately proceeded without last year's technology gremlins. After a short business meeting and elections we got underway with Chris Elphick's presentation on the Connecticut Bird Atlas. As of our meeting over 50% of the census blocks had already been adopted. Chris went over the reporting protocols, managing to keep the technicalities understandable with even a few light-hearted moments.



Chris Elphick enlightens the audience on how the CT Bird Atlas will unfold

The Bird Atlas is the most important project the Connecticut birding community has undertaken in more than 30 years, and we urge you to become involved. Think of the changes in our climate, our habitat loss from development and the changes in bird populations that we believe have taken place in these 30+ years. These presumed changes and their effects on our Connecticut birds need to be documented in order to support appropriate conservation decisions and for myriad other reasons.

Each block will ideally be adopted by an individual volunteer, but if you think you don't have time to assume such a role (they are asking for a minimum of 20 hours over three years) Chris suggested other ways to participate. How about a "Block Busting Party"?

Get a bunch of friends together, take an "orphan" block and go out and spend the day surveying! Doesn't that sound like fun? Bring a picnic, bird with friends and benefit science as well. All the information on the Atlas can be found at [www.ctbirdatlas.org](http://www.ctbirdatlas.org) or send an email to [ctbirdatlasvol@gmail.com](mailto:ctbirdatlasvol@gmail.com).

During the break that followed, the Mabel Osgood Wright Award was presented to Ted Gilman for his significant contributions to Connecticut ornithology and natural history/avian education. The Betty Kleiner Memorial Award went to Nick Bonomo for his excellent *Connecticut Warbler* article on the Mew Gull. Steve Broker presented his President's Awards to Bob Dixon, Sara Zagorski, Larry Reiter and Frank Mantlik in appreciation for the long hours and many, many ways in which they have helped to make COA successful during their service on the Board, which has now ended.



Ted Gilman receives the 2018 Mabel Osgood Wright Award

Our new award, the George Zepko Hog Island Camp Scholarship, went to Nicolas Main. This scholarship was established by George this year to give another young person the opportunity to attend Hog Island Camp in Bremen, Maine, a place that George himself attended and has such fond memories of.

Mini-Grants were distributed to seven deserving projects benefitting Connecticut's birds. This year our funds will provide Purple Martin and Osprey nesting facilities, nanotags for research on Ovenbirds, birdseed and binoculars

for an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science club (to encourage the next generation of conservationists).

John Himmelman, in his talk “Birds: Their Side of the Story”, gave us a humor filled talk about our favorite and not-so-favorite birds, their quirks and talents. From the “Hollywood Finch” with his sunglasses to Mozart’s pet Starling with his powdered wig he entwined entertainment with a fact-based informative narrative.



Scott Weidensaul at the podium

After our substantial hot lunch buffet, Scott Weidensaul gave the keynote presentation. His talk “Of a Feather, a (Brief) History of American Birding” was a timeline of American birding from the very beginning when settlers were stunned by the variety of birdlife in their new home up to modern times. He gave fascinating historical details of the lesser known backgrounds of some of our most famous ornithologists of yesteryear including liars, drunks, slave-runners and scoundrels, with of course, brilliant ornithologists among them. He discussed the fight for the International Migratory Bird Treaty Act (100 years old this year) and his experiences at Hog Island Camp in Bremen, Maine, where he teaches each year. He described the coming of

age journey taken by birding from an eccentric pastime to today's near obsession, making it “almost cool.” Attendees had the opportunity to buy his books (or bring their own) and get them signed.



Scott signs one of his books

The raffle had many wonderful items and earned COA money toward next year’s meeting and Mini-Grants. It is always a mixture of jubilation and disappointment and the tickets are drawn and the prizes awarded.

We thank all who attended.



George Zepko congratulates Nicolas Main, recipient of the George Zepko Hog Island Camp Scholarship



Attendees carefully consider the impressive array of raffle items

(All annual meeting photos by Frank Mantlik)

## 2018 Mini-Grant Awards

Once again COA was pleased to provide financial backing for projects of benefit to Connecticut's birds.

The recipients are:



**DENISON PEQUOTSEPOS NATURE CENTER-\$800:** to maintain and fill the bird feeders (\$300) and to purchase a scope and tripod for visitor use (\$500). They provided an additional \$700.



**NEW HAVEN PARKS, RECREATION AND TREES DEPARTMENT-\$500:** to maintain three bird feeding stations at their urban oases sites.



**GREAT HOLLOW NATURE PRESERVE-\$1,000:** to purchase 5 Motus Wildlife Tracking System radio nanotags for their Ovenbird study. They have an in-kind donation of a Motus tracking tower valued at \$3,000.



**FRIENDS OF OSWEGATCHIE HILLS NATURE PRESERVE-\$384.80:** for a 12-unit Purple Martin house, pole with pulley and Starling-proof doors.



**MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY-\$800:** to expand their successful Purple Martin colony at the Guilford Salt Meadow and install a new Purple Martin house at New Haven's West River Memorial Park, both with 24-unit gourd racks. They had \$1,700 toward the project from other sources.



**DAN FERRIER-\$700:** to replace two existing Osprey platforms in Old Saybrook that have fallen into disrepair.



**SARAH FAULKNER-\$1,500:** to purchase 12 pairs of Vortex Crossfire binoculars for her 8<sup>th</sup> grade science club. When Sarah approached Vortex, they donated an extra 14 pair!

The deadline for applications for next year's Mini-Grants is midnight on January 15, 2019. Information and application forms are on the COA website.



Kathy Van DerAue presents mini-grant awards at the Annual Meeting

## Connecticut Bird Atlas Project

By Craig Repasz

The Connecticut Bird Atlas Project is on schedule to begin surveys this spring.

The Connecticut Bird Atlas has made great progress over the past few months and has started to receive data from the many volunteers throughout the state.

The Connecticut Bird Atlas will map all species found in the state during both nesting and non-nesting seasons. From 2018-2020, we will be seeking the help of birdwatchers to document the distribution, abundance, and breeding activities of birds at sites throughout the entire state. The block adoption process was started on March

| Region         | Regional Coordinator | Number of blocks | Number of blocks adopted | Percent adopted |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| State          | Craig Repasz         | 601              | 398                      | 66%             |
| Lower CT River | Melissa Baston       | 71               | 55                       | 77%             |
| New Haven      | Steve Broker         | 78               | 72                       | 92%             |
| North Central  | Sara Zygorski        | 75               | 57                       | 76%             |
| North East     | Steve Morytko        | 77               | 50                       | 65%             |
| North West     | Buzz Devine          | 75               | 37                       | 49%             |
| South East     | David Provencher     | 75               | 22                       | 29%             |
| South West     | Frank Mantlik        | 73               | 50                       | 68%             |
| West Central   | Ken Elkins           | 77               | 55                       | 71%             |

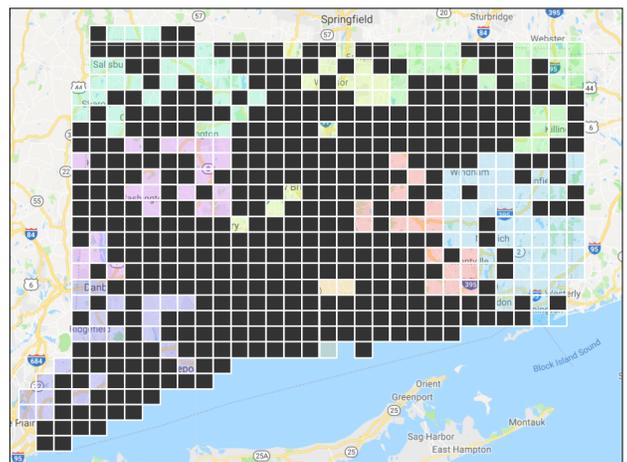
02. Within six weeks 398 of the 601 blocks (66%) that cover the state have been adopted. Please see the chart below for a break down of the block adoption progress for each of the eight regions.

The birding community is very anxious to get out and to survey their blocks. Several hundred reports have already come in with incidental observations of breeding behavior in ravens, owls, woodcock, turkeys, swans, crows, hawks, and a

growing number of other species. Birders will record the presence of all birds observed as well as any breeding behavior observed. These data can be reported using eBird by sharing your checklists with [ctbirdatlas](http://ctbirdatlas.org) or via paper forms, which can be printed off the atlas web site and mailed in. To date 28 bird species have been confirmed to be breeding in CT this year.

The website <http://www.ctbirdatlas.org> has been very active with the block sign up process, new blog posts every few days, and regular updates of other information. The website contains many educational tools and resources such as data sheets, that will be valuable to the volunteers.

Since September the CT Bird Atlas Project team has given 17 presentations to bird clubs and land trusts. They have transitioned to conducting training session throughout the state. Please see the table below to find a training session near you.



Map showing block adoption status as of April 22, 2018

| Date      | Time  | Region                        | Location   |
|-----------|-------|-------------------------------|--|
| 14-Apr-18 | 10:30 | Northwest                     | Audubon Sharon, 325 Cornwall Bridge Rd. Cornwall                         |
| 19-Apr-18 | 19:00 | New Haven                     | Whitney Center, Cultural Arts Center, 200 Leeder Hill Dr., Hamden        |
| 29-Apr-18 | 1:00  | North Central, Lower CT River | Glastonbury Connecticut Audubon Society, 1361 Main St, Glastonbury       |
| 3-May-18  | 7:00  | Northeast                     | Mansfield Public Library, 54 Warrenville Rd, Mansfield Center            |
| 19-May-18 | 10:00 | Southwest                     | Connecticut Audubon Society Center at Fairfield, 2325 Burr St. Fairfield |
| 3-Jun-18  | 10:00 | West Central                  | Bent of the River Audubon Center, 185 E Flat Hill Rd, Southbury          |

The CT Bird Atlas Project Team, Chris Elphick, Morgan Tingley, Valerie Steen (all from UConn) and Min Huang and Craig Repasz (CT DEEP) will soon switch focus to finalizing the nonbreeding aspect of the project, details of which will be rolled out over the summer.

We expect that we will experience some hiccups as we go through this first year of data collection, but we are trying to foresee and address issues before they rear up and so far, things have been going very smoothly. Access to private lands will be one of the most difficult parts of this project. We have secured access to many of the large private land holders (water companies), but the process is still evolving.

Thank you to everyone who has signed up to assist in this monumental project and please continue to get the word out in all the social circles you frequent. This project will benefit us all!!

It is an exciting time to be a birder in Connecticut.



## COA Gull Workshop

### Stratford Point

Stefan Martin

There were about 50 participants at Stratford Point the morning of March 7 for what turned out to be a very productive Gull Workshop! Other than Nick's PowerPoint, I'd say everybody genuinely enjoyed themselves! (Only teasing).

A big thank you to Nick Bonomo for leading the workshop. He really did a fantastic job covering this group of birds and was able to explain the intricacies of molt cycles and hybrids while still holding an audience (Other than Patrick and I when the Iceland flew past the window). It turns out that Stratford seemed to be the gull hotspot, and the group was treated to great views of a 1st cycle Thayer's Gull and a 1cy Iceland Gull rock scraping before the presentation was even over. Thank you to all of the scouts for doing an excellent job keeping track of activity along the coast. The Stratford Seawall by Marnick's produced some excellent views of a 1cy Iceland Gull and an incredibly cooperative adult Bonaparte's Gull. We stayed here for a while picking through the evolving flocks of plankton feeding birds while studying the different cycle combinations of Herring, Ring-billed and Great Black-backed Gulls. From here we moved to Long beach where the flock moved much closer to shore and grew drastically in size, with an estimated total of Brant and Gulls surpassing 12,000 birds. All in all, it was a great day! Thank you to everyone who participated in today's fantastic gulling adventure and I look forward to next time.

#### Highlights and Totals-

- 1 Thayer's
- 10-11 Iceland (many 1cy, 3-4 adults)
- 1 Lesser Black-backed
- 15 Great Black-backed
- 9,000 Ring-billed
- 2,000 Herring
- 300 Bonaparte's



Iceland (Thayer's) Gull at Stratford Point (Jason Reiger, 3/7/18)

#### April brought us a few more notable Charadriiformes .....



Little Gull at Oyster River mouth, New Haven (Nick Bonomo, 4/10/18)



Wilson's Plover at Milford Point (John Oshlick, 4/29/18)

## Gallery of Some Early Spring Observations



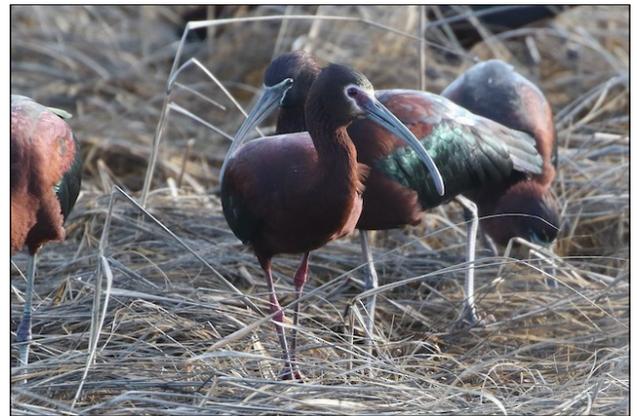
Yellow-throated Warbler at Greenwich Audubon Center (Anthony Vicciarelli, 4/21/18)



Hooded Warbler at Evergreen Cemetery, New Haven (Monica Nichols, 4/21/18)



Blue Grosbeak at Quinebaug Valley Fish Hatchery, Plainfield (Bob Dixon, 4/22/18)



White-faced Ibis at Hammonasset Beach State Park (Dan Rottino, 4/18/18)



Orange-crowned Warbler at Sasco Creek Marsh Open Space (Jim Jacques, 4/28/18)



Varied Thrush at Great Pond State Forest, Simsbury (Mark Danforth, 3/22/18)

## Twenty-Five Years Ago in *The Connecticut Warbler* Compiled by Steve Broker

Volume XIII, No. 2 (April 1993)

### Winter Ecology of the Long-eared Owl in Connecticut, by Dwight G. Smith and Arnold Devine

The Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*) is a rare to locally uncommon winter resident in Connecticut and often roosts in loose communal associations. Its wintering numbers can fluctuate from year to year. Little has been published regarding the status of this species in the state. . . Herein, we describe our observations of the habitat associations, habitat selection, roosting sites, and diet of wintering Long-eared Owls which we have gathered over the past 23 years within the state. This work is part of a long-term study of the ecology of Connecticut raptors.

Results: Winter Roost Site Distribution-The pattern of documented Long-eared Owl winter distribution within the state suggests a general southward drift or migration beginning in the latter part of October and continuing into winter that essentially stops at and by Long Island Sound. Roost Site Habitat Requirements-From 1973 to 1993 we found a total of 46 different winter roost sites of Long-eared Owls in Connecticut [see Table 1]. It would appear that the most important criteria for Long-eared Owl winter roost site habitat requirements in Connecticut include the availability of dense, cool stands of conifers for roosting, with adjacent open areas such as fields, meadows, pastures, cropland, or open marshes for hunting. Roost Site Fidelity-Over 64% of the winter roost sites were used for two or more winters. Several sites have been used more or less consistently over a decade . . . Diet-From 1974 to 1986 a total of 712 pellets were collected for an analysis of Long-eared Owl diet in Connecticut. Prey Species-A total of 981 prey individuals of at least 21 different species were identified from the pellets. These included 16 mammalian and five avian species. Mammals were the most important prey (97.8% of all individuals). [Ed's Note: Smith & Devine's long-term study of wintering Long-eared Owls is an essential read for anyone interested in the life history strategies of Long-eared Owls in Connecticut and throughout their range. Dwight Smith is the 2003 recipient and Buzz Devine is the 2011 recipient of COA's highest award, the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.]

### The Ups and Downs of a Virginia Rail Population, by Gordon Loery

The Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*) is a brownish, chicken-shaped, meadowlark-sized bird with a long bill that nests in marshes along the Bantam River and its tributaries, at the White Memorial Foundation, in Litchfield. Their loosely woven nests are attached to the stems of cattails or sedges, from a few inches to a foot or more above the ground or water and are thus vulnerable to spring flooding. The birds themselves are not uncommon in their preferred habitat, but are rarely seen because of their secretive habits. They stay close to the ground as they move through the dense marsh vegetation, are more apt to run than fly when frightened and are more active at dawn and dusk. The most likely place from which to observe them locally is the recently constructed boardwalk around the north shore of Little Pond. Even there, they are more often heard than seen. [Ed's note: Gordon Loery refers to field observer Andrew Magee's use of play-back taped rail calls to locate territorial males, and states, "Even an experienced birder cannot obtain a complete count of these elusive marsh residents without the use of special equipment." See Figure 1 for results of Virginia Rail censuses between 1965 and 1992. Gordon Loery is the 1997 recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.]

### Hammonasset: The Bittern and the Sparrow, by Florence McBride

On the afternoon of Monday, October 9, 1989, I was scouting for a field trip at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. While trying to get a clear look at two sparrows in the short grass of the picnic area near Cedar Island, I became aware of something behind them. Refocusing revealed it to be an immature American Bittern standing motionless against the longer marsh vegetation, approximately sixty feet away. . . It was an unaccustomed luxury - and an aesthetic experience - to see a member of this species in such close proximity, with time to absorb and appreciate detail. I followed it with my binoculars as it slowly and deliberately began walking along the edge of the

long grass. Very gradually it began to accelerate.

[Ed's Note: Flo McBride's account of a bittern stalking and capturing a sparrow is one of the most lyrical articles published in *The Connecticut Warbler*. She writes further that for her, "it was much more than an interesting piece of ornithological data, observed first-hand. . . I'm still searching for ways to understand and describe what I saw that day, the relationships of beauty and violence, life and death, that I saw that day. The bittern and the sparrow have given me - forced on me - a new sense of profound ironic truths which we struggle to express in words." Florence McBride is the 2012 recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.]

### **Spread-Wing and Tilting Display of the White-breasted Nuthatch, by Louis R. Bevier**

The White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*) is a species unusually versatile in its postures, performing varied forms of displays with the skill of an acrobat. The most familiar habit of this quirky bird is the way it moves head downward along the tree trunk, pulling its neck back and pointing its bill straight out from the bark. . . It was a cool and overcast morning [16 April 1992] when I had stopped to look through a flock of chickadees and kinglets along the Fenton River [in Mansfield, Connecticut]. I noticed a male White-breasted Nuthatch perched about twenty-five feet above the ground on a narrow horizontal branch of a maple near the streambed. What kept my attention was his posture, which was rigid, or frozen, with wings fully outspread and tail flared. Most usual were the movements performed by this nuthatch. With wings stiffly extended, it would gradually rotate forward from perching upright to hanging upside-down and then rotate back through the same arc to an upright position over the course of half a minute or so. Upon tilting forward and downward, the head was lowered and the nape feathers raised rough, his entirely glossy back crown showing well. This display was repeated several times, at one point the male moving to reposition himself on a larger branch where he continued the display. . . About twenty feet away and below the male was a female nuthatch perched horizontally and facing him . . .

[Ed's Note: Louis Bevier's detailed description of possible courtship between male and female nuthatches takes on further interest in light of the current Connecticut Bird Atlas, which gives safe dates of April 25 to August 10 for White-breasted Nuthatch. Louis states, "it seems unlikely this pair had begun nesting based the time of year and the fact they both were foraging with chickadees. The earliest egg dates for the White-breasted Nuthatch in New York are mid-April (Meade in Andrlle and Carroll 1988). If the pair had selected a nest site nearby, they apparently were not yet regularly occupying it . . ." He considers other, non-courtship related explanations for the nuthatch behavior described. Louis Bevier is the 2006 recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.]

These and other articles in the April 1993 issue of *The Connecticut Warbler* can be viewed in their entirety at the following link. Scroll down to pages 41-72.

<http://www.ctbirding.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CTWarblerVolume13.pdf>

# CONNECTICUT ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

314 Unquowa Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824  
www.ctbirding.org



## COA OFFICERS

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| President      | Stephen P. Broker, Cheshire, CT        |
| Vice President | Chris Loscalzo, Woodbridge, CT         |
| Secretary      | Denise Jernigan, South Glastonbury, CT |
| Treasurer      | Paul Wolter, Branford, CT              |

## COA CHAIRPERSONS

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Annual Meeting                | Tina Green, Maureen Wolter, Chris Howe |
| Conservation                  | Craig Repasz, Scott Kruitbosch         |
| Finance                       | Paul Wolter                            |
| Membership                    | Larry Reiter                           |
| Avian Records                 | Jay Kaplan                             |
| Research                      | Tom Robben                             |
| Workshops                     | Bill Batsford                          |
| The Connecticut Warbler       | Greg Hanisek                           |
| COA Bulletin                  | Andrew Dasinger, Kathy Van Der Aue     |
| Christmas Bird Count Compiler | Steve Broker                           |
| Summer Bird Count Compilers   | Joe Zeranski, Patrick Comins           |
| Great Backyard Bird Count     | Patrick Comins                         |
| Mini-Grants                   | Kathy Van Der Aue                      |

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 July 15, 2018 to:  
Kathleen Van Der Aue  
COABulletin@gmail.com  
762 Mill Hill Road  
Southport, CT 06890