

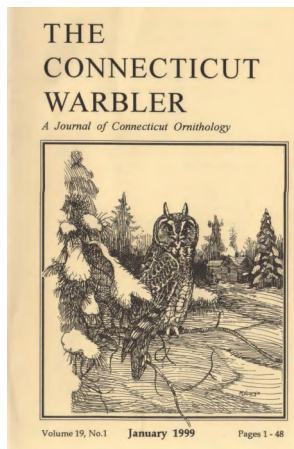


COA Bulletin

Connecticut Ornithological Association

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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 organizations in the state.

A Birder's Favorite Time of Year—Spring Migration

Aidan Kiley

Spring migration in the eastern United States is one of the greatest birding spectacles, and Connecticut is blessed with extraordinary numbers of neotropical migrants every year. If someone were to poll active Connecticut birders, I would guess that over half would respond that their favorite birding month is May! In this short article, I will summarize and comment on my experiences birding the town of Fairfield in May and provide some thoughts and suggestions for spring passerine birding in general.

I spend probably 90% of my spring migration birding in my hometown of Fairfield. Over the years, a few other local birders and I have figured out what the best spots are. Three of the best-known Fairfield spots for spring migrants are CT Audubon's Larsen Sanctuary, Birdcraft Sanctuary, and Lake Mohegan. I have been partial to Lake Mohegan for a decade. On a cool, crisp May morning, with south winds the previous night, there can be quite a warbler spectacle. The nearly 200-acre preserve has numerous trails and areas to explore. The best area is the large meadow that is a fairly short walk from the main parking lot. In early to mid-morning, the trees on the edge of the meadow will be illuminated by the sun, where there are often flocks of warblers, orioles, and vireos, along with a few flycatchers and more. A walk around the whole lake and the North Pond can take the better part of a morning. Over the years, I have been fortunate enough to see some great species in the spring here including Prothonotary Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and a handful of Mourning Warblers. The location has produced 33 total warbler species! In May of 2023, I found 80 species in one morning, quite a success for an inland spot.



Prothonotary Warbler, Lake Mohegan, Fairfield
(Aidan Kiley, 19 May 2021)

Birdcraft is one of the most famous spots for spring migrants in the state. This 6-acre location adjacent to Interstate 95 is a mini-Central Park. Because it is a lone wooded patch surrounded by the highway and the Post Road, birds pour in. Birdcraft has recorded a small handful of Summer Tanagers in recent springs, plus Kentucky and Prothonotary Warblers. This is also a good spot to see uncommon warblers such as Cape May, Bay-breasted, and Blackburnian. The uppermost trail along the school provides an opportunity to get close to eye level with tall oaks. There, it's possible to get excellent looks at some of the warblers such as the three listed above, plus Tennessee, which all tend to stay higher up in the canopy.



Summer Tanager , Birdcraft
(Edward Grzeda, 10 May 2022)



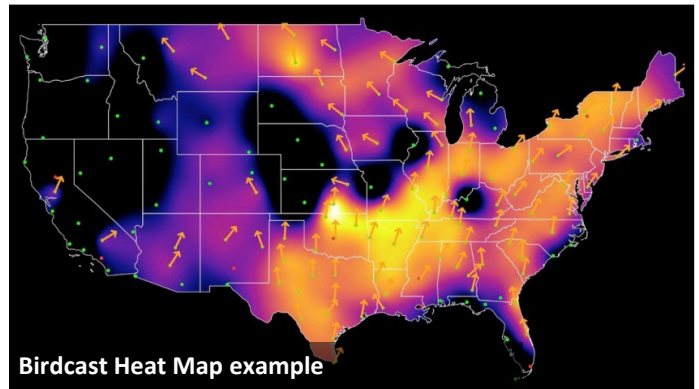
Gray-cheeked Thrush, Larsen Sanctuary
(Sam Buttrick, 28 Sep 2022)

Larsen Sanctuary is also a wonderful place to look for spring migrants. It has a significant advantage over Mohegan as it has no dogs and many fewer people. It's a peaceful gem. In May of 2020, Dave Alpeter found two immature male Summer Tanagers feeding together. I was lucky enough to self-find Yellow-throated Warblers there in late April of 2021 and May of 2022. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Gray-cheeked Thrush, and Mourning Warbler have been seen in recent springs as well.

Next, I'd like to discuss the town of Fairfield in a broader sense as well as some strategies for finding spring migrants. While I discussed the above three spots, Fairfield has plenty of other areas that should be checked for migrants. Pine Creek, Brett Woods, Ash Creek, Oak Lawn Cemetery, and Perry's Mill Ponds all have excellent habitat. To find interesting spring birds, I would highly recommend spreading out. Checking the same places over and over (which I am very guilty of) is a good strategy but it leaves some very productive locations unchecked. We all know that many rarities are found in the most random places. A second state record Western Flycatcher behind an abandoned school building in Branford is one of the best local examples. No matter what town or region you bird for migrants, try spreading out a bit. Birders and photographers flocking to Birdcraft can be fun but it's a terrible rarity-finding strategy. If people spread out to areas that few or no people check, I guarantee that more rarities would be found. In 2020, James Purcell and Alex Burdo tallied 138 species on their Fairfield (town) big day, a Connecticut record. While most of the species were seen in the top 3-4 locations, a good handful of species (often the better ones) were found at smaller, less known, or unknown spots, both on the record-breaking day and their previous town big days. On the record-breaking day, their only Cape May Warbler was an adult male in the William Raveis parking lot in Southport! It goes to show that the strategy of branching out often has great results.

Lastly, one of the biggest questions surrounding birding during spring (and fall) migration is how to predict which days will be most productive. Cornell has developed [BirdCast](#), which is primarily a tool

for predicting the quality of migration days. When in season, the website shows a nationwide map color-coded with the predicted intensity of migrant activity for the next three nights. It seems like it's a magic 8 ball for telling you when to go out birding at sunrise, but unfortunately determining good days includes analyzing additional factors plus having some luck! It's easy to get excited when a given night is a "High" migration night, and the red alert symbol comes up. But anyone who follows [BirdCast](https://birdcast.info) daily has surely experienced massive disappointment when you get out at sunrise the next morning at your favorite spot and can find only a small handful of warblers! Visit <https://birdcast.info> to explore!



[BirdCast](https://birdcast.info) is an incredible tool, but naturally, it has limitations. [BirdCast](https://birdcast.info) tells you that many migrant birds will be flying over a certain area on a given night. But this does NOT mean that there will be many migrant birds singing at your patch at sunrise! In my opinion, the most common reason for this disappointment is that birds keep going and don't necessarily land in a given area. The fact that millions of birds pass over CT in a night doesn't mean much, if most of them fly past. Additionally, a night of good winds (south in the spring, north in the fall) is just as likely to push birds out of our region as it is to bring in new ones. These reasons are why some of the "High" days on [BirdCast](https://birdcast.info) can be below average to terrible days! Additionally, there are other meteorological factors besides wind speed and direction. Temperature, humidity, cloud cover, and precipitation all play a significant role. In my experience, colder, cloudy days average better. Clouds and cooler temperatures keep activity around later into the morning and even the afternoon. If by mid-morning it's getting sunny and hot, warbler activity will often slow down, if not come to a complete halt, after what may have been a spectacular first few hours.

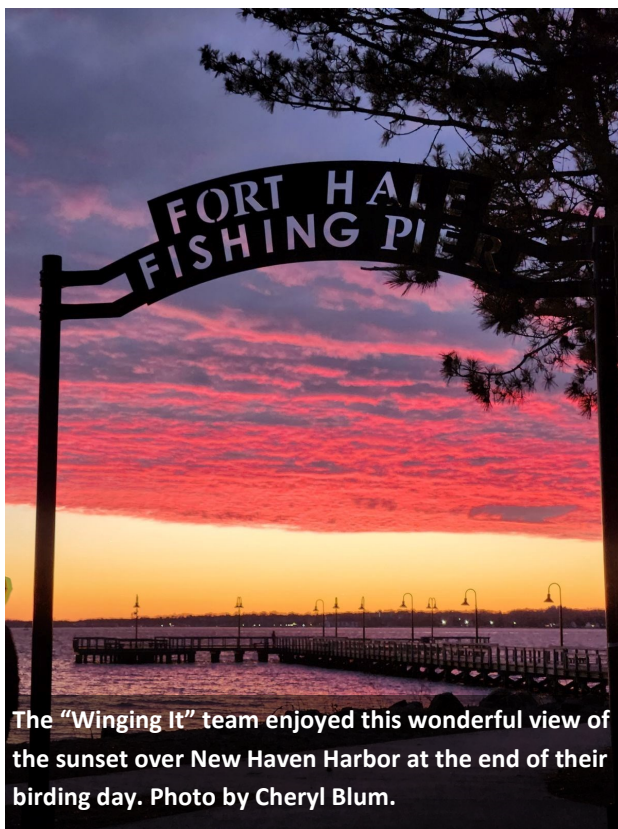
Rain is also an important factor. Rain is not pleasant to bird in, but some of the best spring mornings I've had were a little wet. Rain downs birds in flight. If birds are migrating at night and come across an area with unpleasant weather, they are likely to drop down. So, a night with rain a few hours before sunrise that slows or stops once it gets light out can be spectacular birding because when the storm clouds lift off you can see all the birds that were downed by the rain now active! This is all variable, hypothetical stuff that is extremely tricky to work out, but these are the main factors that are very much worth looking into if you want to maximize your May birding!

May is clearly one of the most important times of the year for birding in Connecticut. Some of my most memorable birding moments have been spring passerine birding here. Will we ever master predicting the best days to go birding in May? Probably not. However, for the time being, I will continue to keep my fingers crossed for those days with moderate south winds, clouds, cool temperatures, and light rain overnight stopping at sunrise.

2024 Mega Bowl Report

Chris Loscalzo, Mega Bowl Coordinator

Twenty teams made up of 60 birders from all four corners of the state (and the places in between) participated in the Eighth Annual Mega Bowl of CT this year. The birding portion of the event took place on Saturday, February 3rd, and the celebratory dinner took place on Sunday, February 4th. Most of the teams birded within a circle with a 5-mile radius while a few teams birded within an entire county. The "Egrets, I've Got A Few" team composed of Cody Limber, Alex Lin-Moore and Alison Robey found the most species (77) within a circle, while the "Darth Waders" team made up of Daniel Errichetti, Skyler Kardell and David Mathieu observed the most species (92) in a county (New London). The highest total for an inland circle (58 species) was achieved by the "Flock of Smeagols" team composed of Mark Wantroba and Lindsay Gress. The highlights were many, as rare birds were seen in a number of locations. Most were found at locations where they had been seen in the days or weeks before the event, but there were a few surprises found on the day of the event as well. The list of rare birds included: HARLEQUIN DUCK, EARED GREBE, GREAT EGRET, BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON, CLAPPER RAIL, VIRGINIA RAIL, SEMIPALMATED PLOVER, BLACK-HEADED GULL, COMMON GULL, RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD, NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL, RED-HEADED WOODPECKER, AMERICAN PIPIT, VESPER SPARROW, BALTIMORE ORIOLE AND HERMIT WARBLER. The combined efforts of all the teams led to the observation of 125 species.



The "Winging It" team enjoyed this wonderful view of the sunset over New Haven Harbor at the end of their birding day. Photo by Cheryl Blum.

About half of the participants were able to come to the Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby for the celebratory dinner. The food was superb and included several soups, chili, and a variety of desserts. Prizes were awarded to the highest scoring teams, the oldest and youngest participants, and to numerous people who saw the "golden bird" of the day, which was selected at random from the list of birds seen during the event. This year's golden bird was the Red-tailed Hawk.

An important aspect of the event is that the birding that the participants do translates into dollars donated to the CT-based conservation organization of their choice. This year, more than \$1,000 were donated to organizations all over the state. The recipients of the largest donations were: Save the Sound (\$140), A Place Called Hope (\$124), and the Goodwin-Niering Center

for the Environment at Connecticut College (\$108). Other organizations that received donations ranging in value from \$40 to \$100 included: CT Audubon Society, Sharon Audubon Center, New Haven Bird Club, New London Trees, Roger Tory Peterson Environmental Center, Ansonia Nature Center, Riverbound Farm, COA, and Roaring Brook Nature Center.

The Mega Bowl has evolved into a fun and friendly event where birders get together and go birding in their local areas to see what birds are surviving (and we hope thriving) in the middle of winter in our state. It is truly remarkable and gratifying to see how many different species are out there this time of year. We all challenge ourselves to see as many bird species as we can, and we are all rewarded with surprising and memorable sightings that encourage us to continue to go birding and to do what we can to preserve their habitats and ensure their continued existence.



President's Message

Chris Wood



As Aidan Kiley mentioned in his article, springtime is near, as is COA's first in-person Annual Meeting in several years. Our speakers this year epitomize both the scientific underpinnings of COA and the joy of birding that brings us to the hobby. Mike Webster and Marshall Iliff from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will talk about the Macaulay Library and eBird and how these programs contribute to protecting birds. These and other Cornell programs are valuable tools for modern birders as well as opportunities for meaningful contributions to the science of ornithology by avocational birders. Rosemary Mosco adds to the program with a light-hearted look at an often over-looked bird, the Rock Pigeon. I expect we will all learn something about pigeons that we did not know.

COA is proud of its role in melding the science and enjoyment of birding and all birders who contribute their expertise, time, and enthusiasm to expanding our knowledge base should also take pride in that effort. Clearly, however, birding can be valued simply for the peace, diversion, thrill, or whatever else motivates the activity. Connecticut is a great place for birding, with a great diversity of bird life within a relatively small area and with many excellent birders willing to share expertise and help others. COA contributes to that sharing with its CTBirds listserv, workshops, and guided field trips.

COA is also seeking to enhance birding opportunities and access through recommendations to DEEP about State Park management and habitat improvements. Coordination and cooperation with other conservation organizations helps COA influence decisions that affect bird populations.

All of this is to note that your membership in COA supports birds and birding in many ways, and your support is appreciated. I hope to see you at our Annual Meeting in March!

COA Awards 2024

Chris Wood, COA President

Every year, COA is proud to recognize outstanding contributions to the science and enjoyment of ornithology and birding at our Annual Meeting. The Mabel Osgood Wright Award is presented annually to a person or persons in Connecticut who have made a significant contribution to the knowledge, study, and conservation of birds. The Betty Kleiner Memorial Award honors the memory of Betty Kleiner, long-time editor of the Connecticut Warbler, COA's flagship publication, by recognizing a deserving author or artist in the field of ornithology. The COA President's Award recognizes exemplary service to the organization.



This year's Mabel Osgood Wright Award will be given to Tina Green, former COA President; tireless past organizer of and current key contributor to our Annual Meeting; generous sharer of birding information and field trip leader; and all-around friend to Connecticut birders.



The 2024 Betty Kleiner Award recognizes the important and highly useful publication "Connecticut Birds – Distribution and Status by Season" by Frank Gallo. This updated and accessible tabulation of when to expect the over 400 species of birds that occur in Connecticut will be a valuable resource to birders for years to come.

The 2024 President's Awards will be given to Miley Bull, COA co-founder, long-time Board member, and top Connecticut ornithologist; Denise Jernigan, long-time COA Secretary and helpful advisor to the COA Board; Ed Hagen, former Avian Records Committee member, founder of the Western Connecticut Bird Club, and inspiring birder and trip leader; and Paul Desjardins, a loyal and diligent reporter to CTBirds and friend to all birders.

We hope everyone will congratulate these deserving awardees when you encounter them at our Annual Meeting or out in the field.



40th COA Annual Meeting, March 9, 2024 In person at CT State Community College, Middlesex

Keynote Talk: Mike Webster—*Can Birding Save Birds?*

Research on birds (ornithology) has relied heavily on study specimens for centuries, and these specimens have revealed much of what we know about the ecology, life histories and evolution of birds. But today we can also collect a new type of specimen, the “media specimen,” which is an audio/video recording or photo of a bird in nature. These media capture key aspects of wild birds – their acoustic signals, physical displays, and other important behaviors – in ways that traditional physical specimens simply cannot.

Webster will illustrate how media specimens can be used for modern day ornithological research: research aimed at both understanding and conserving birds. He also will show how emerging new and inexpensive technologies are allowing everyday “citizen scientists” to collect and use media specimens, for example through eBird, leading to a better understanding of birds at continental and even global scales. These media and other data, contributed by birders across the globe, are now being used directly to help reverse declines in bird populations, and also to engage more people in caring about and conserving nature.



Rosemary Mosco



Rosemary Mosco is author of *A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird*. Rock Pigeons (*Columba livia*) are easily overlooked, but they're worth watching. Their forgotten history is deeply compelling, and they reveal truths about genetics, behavior, and ecology that can make you a better birder. In this talk, Rosemary Mosco, author of the bestselling book *A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird*, will help you fall in love with a familiar species – or at least fall in grudging respect.

Marshall J. Iliff



Marshall Iliff is Project Leader of eBird with expertise in eBird, Status and Trends, Migration, Species Distribution, and Taxonomy. Most of Marshall's time is spent helping to manage the eBird project, with a particular focus on data quality and review of our scientific output. He also helps coordinate the eBird/Clements taxonomy and its integration into Cornell Lab resources. Marshall is thrilled to see what eBird has become and to contribute to make it a little bit better. The notion of connecting birders around the world, through their sightings, to one another even when there may be language barriers or when they may be a world apart is inspiring to him.

Seeing [how we are already using the data](https://science.ebird.org/en) (<https://science.ebird.org/en>) and what the future potential is keeps him excited every day.

40th COA Annual Meeting
In person at CT State Community College, Middlesex

Register and pay at: <https://www.ctbirding.org/join-us/2024-annual-meeting/>

AGENDA

COA Business Meeting, Three Speakers, Birding Vendors, Raffle

8:00 AM Registration/COA Marketplace/Continental Breakfast

8:45 AM Welcome and COA Business Meeting by Chris
Wood Election of new Board Members and Officers

9:10 AM Marshall Iliff, eBird Project Leader

10:05 AM Presentation of COA Awards by Chris Wood, Allison Black, and Jo Fasciolo

Betty Kleiner Award

Mabel Osgood Wright Award

President's Award

COA Mini-grants

George Zepko Audubon Camp Scholarship

10:30 AM Presentation on infrared technology

10:45 AM Break/ COA Marketplace/ Raffle Viewing

11:30 AM Rosemary Mosco, Science Writer and Naturalist

Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird

12:25 PM Lunch at Founders Hall / COA Marketplace

1:45 PM Keynote Address – Mike Webster, Director of the Macaulay Library, Cornell University,
Can Birding Save Birds?

2:45 PM Raffle



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Vendors

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The Fat Robin
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Connecticut Audubon Society
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EcoTravel
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Sunrise Birding
gina@sunrisebirding.com

Milford Photo
customerservice@milfordphoto.com

CT Ornithological Association
contact@ctbirding.org

Macaulay Library/ eBird
macaulaylibrary@cornell.edu

AudubonCT
ct@audubon.org

Zeiss
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Thank you to CT State Community College, Middlesex, for hosting us and to Perk on Main for our delicious breakfast treats and luncheon.

COA Marketplace Items for Purchase

Be sure to get your raffle tickets and support our vendors. Stop by the COA table to purchase:

- ◆ The new COA cap featuring our new logo! 100% cotton twill. Leather strap. Khaki with brim in gray, green or blue
- ◆ Birds by the Season
- ◆ Birds of CT Checklist
- ◆ COA Bumper Sticker





Connecticut Ornithological Association
Checklist of the Birds of Connecticut

This list includes the 451 bird species recorded in Connecticut and accepted by the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC). The names and sequences of species follow the A.O.S. Checklist of the Birds of North America (7th ed., 1998 and supplements to the 64th, Aug. 2022).

Legend:
 * Rare in CT - ARCC requests details, learn more at ctbirding.org/reporting-rare-sightings/
 (S) Sight record only, (I) Introduction,
 (E) Extinct, (X) Extirpated, (**) Details needed only for recordings and banding records

Geese, Swans, Ducks	Mallard
— Black-bellied	— American Black Duck
— Whistling Duck*	— Northern Pintail
— Fulvous Whistling Duck*	— Green-winged Teal
— Snow Goose	— Canvasback
— Ross's Goose*	— Redhead
— Graylag Goose*	— Ring-necked Duck
— Greater White-fronted Goose	— Tufted Duck*
— Pink-footed Goose*	— Greater Scaup
— Brant	— Lesser Scaup
— Barnacle Goose	— King Eider
— Cackling Goose*	— Common Eider
— Canada Goose	— White-winged Scoter
— Mute Swan (I)	— Black Scoter
— Trumpeter Swan*	— Long-tailed Duck
— Tundra Swan	— Bufflehead
— Wood Duck	— Common Goldeneye
— Blue-winged Teal	— Barrow's Goldeneye
— Cinnamon Teal*	— Hooded Merganser
— Northern Shoveler	— Common Merganser
— Gadwall	— Red-breasted Merganser
— Eurasian Wigeon	— Ruddy Duck
— American Wigeon	

Winter Photo Gallery



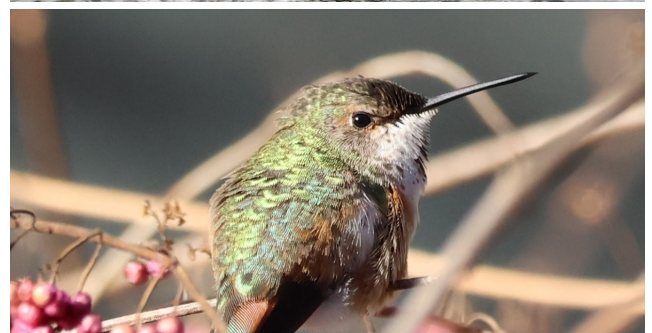
Bonaparte's Gull, Hammonasset Beach SP, Madison
(Christopher Unsworth, 23 Jan 2024)



Harlequin Ducks, Sherwood Island SP, Westport
(Matt Sharp, 15 Jan 2024)



Tufted Duck, Grannis Pond, East Haven
(Linda Ankerstjerne Olsen, 5 Jan 2024)



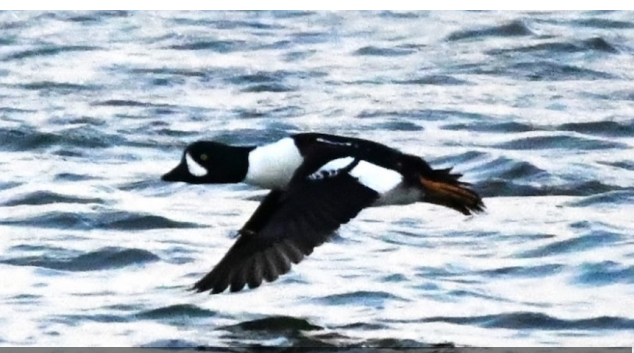
Rufous Hummingbird, Montgomery Ponetom, Cos Cob
(Nalini Jones, 5 Jan 2024)



Greater White-fronted Goose, Lambert Rd., Orange
(Josh Bernstein, 4 Jan 2024)



Hermit Warbler, Avalonia—Knox Preserve
(Chris Wood, 5 Feb 2024)



Barrow's Goldeneye, Sherwood Island SP, Westport
(Justin Hamlin, 7 Jan 2024)



Black-headed Gull, Czescik Marina, Stamford
(Mary Walsh, 12 Feb 2024)

Winter Photo Gallery



Common Gull (Kamchatka), Cummings Park, Stamford
(Jo Fasciolo, 11 Feb 2024)



Common Gull (European), Walmart Lot, Windham
(David Matthew, 4 Feb 2024)



Red-headed Woodpecker, Nichols Field & Forest,
Middlesex (Barry Marsh, 17 Jan 2024)



Northern Shrike, Miller Rd. Marsh/Field, Middlesex
(Shori Velles, 9 Feb 2024)



Eared Grebe, Stonington Town Dock, Stonington
(Abby Sesselberg, 2 Feb 2024)



LeConte's Sparrow, Sherwood Island, Westport
(Jo Fasciolo, 13 Jan 2024)



Black-throated Gray Warbler, Mt. Spring Rd., Tolland
(David Matthew, 7 Jan 2024)



Rough-legged Hawk, Shaker Rd., Enfield
(Gillian Smits, 4 Feb 2024)

The Museum Twitch

The Moorhen's Haunt, Richard Redgrave

Mark Aronson

General Impression Shape and Size, GISS (although some say JIZZ) is a tool we all use, consciously or unconsciously to help identify birds. The technique is especially helpful during that initial moment of observation which can be brief. In Connecticut, while driving – that glimpse of a large dark bird against a bright sky – GISS tells me it is either a vulture or an eagle, and the presence or absence of wings held in a dihedral might be enough to push my ID to a Turkey Vulture rather than an immature Bald Eagle. So, surprised was I when GISS came into action one day in the storage rooms of the Yale Center for British Art. While looking for a painting, I suddenly spied three moorhens hiding in the basement! Not wild ones of course, but birds, swimming about in the shade of a willow-lined riverbank.



The Moorhen's Haunt, Richard Redgrave, 1846, 8 1/2 x 12 inches

The initial look was brief, but I had enough time to look at Richard Redgrave's (b. 1804 – d. 1888) lovely, highly detailed landscape. In this view, Redgrave, who is known for his carefully observed views in a late Pre-Raphaelite style (*The Pre-Raphaelites were a group of English painters, poets, and art critics, founded in 1848 who rejected a mechanistic approach to art and wanted to reinstate complex composition, detail, and color*) spent most of his effort observing the trees, shrubs and flowers that frame and take up most of the picture. A little blue at left in the sky, and a smidgen of blue water at left. The rest of the river shows a brown color, indicating either shallow water and the riverbed below, or a pigment that has changed slightly to render it less colored. But three black blobs, two or three brushstrokes at most, were clearly birds sitting on the water. One

large stroke for the horizontal body, a second "S" stroke to make the neck, and in the lead bird a little white highlight (or is it the white flank mark feature of the moorhen?). But the red bill was prominent, and in my birders' eye, enough to suggest Moorhen. Maybe these would be gallinule if found here in Connecticut, but as British birds they must be moorhens. Redgrave knew his birds, I thought.



Once back in the office, I consulted the collection catalogue, the "field guide" to the museum's collection. Sure enough my quick ID was confirmed, as I discovered the title of the painting is "*The Moorhen's Haunt*". The three floating blobs of black paint were not only intended to be birds, but in the artist's own eye they were the subject and excuse to paint the scene. Redgrave's painting was first exhibited in 1846 at the annual exhibition of the British Institution. According to Redgrave's son the painter was only afforded the luxury to paint during the summer, when his other duties were not so pressing.¹ Even though the painting is finely composed and observed, it received some criticism in the press, where its title, and therefore the bird's identification was challenged! In a review of the exhibition published in the *Monthly Journal* in 1847, an anonymous critic wrote: "*The Moorhen's Haunt* – such is the title, but it must be an error, the haunt of the moorhen is not a brook over shaded with pollard willows; it should have been "*The Water-hen's Haunt*," though the reviewer went on to suggest "it is in these small brook scenes that the artist shows a taste and feeling rarely surpassed."²

While the nineteenth century distinction between "waterhen" and "moorhen" is somewhat lost in our contemporary nomenclature, the critic saw a difference. As bird names change, room for historic confusion grows. The art critic of 1847 was quite agitated by the bird's identification. I was simply startled by my moment of discovery in the storage rooms in the Yale Center for British Art. Identifying by GISS works, no matter what name one chooses to use.

¹ F. M. Redgrave, *Richard Redgrave, C.B., R.A.: a memoir from his diary*, London: Casell (1891) p. 46.

² *The Monthly Art Journal*, London, (1847) p. 81.

Twenty-Five Years Ago in *The Connecticut Warbler* **Compiled by Steve Broker, Volume 19, No. 1 (January 1999)**

Connecticut's Year Big Sit! An Overview, by John Himmelman

Quick review: The BIG SIT!, sponsored and originated by the New Haven Bird Club, is an event in which participants count how many birds they can see or hear from within a 17 foot circle in a 24 hour period. It is a tongue-in-cheek way of testing the theory that 'if one stayed in one place long enough, eventually every species of bird would fly by.' To put it plainly, it is a stationary Big Day. The BIG SIT! has traditionally taken place on a Sunday in mid October. October may not be considered the prime time for birding in Connecticut, but there is still good movement occurring with songbirds and shorebirds exiting and sparrows and waterfowl entering the state. At this time of year there is also a good chance to see any of our 15 species of raptors (16, if we're lucky), as well as our two vultures. The main reason for choosing this time of year, however, is to satisfy the human element of this count. While the weather can be unpredictable, fall in New England is a beautiful time of year to be outdoors.

[Editor's Note: John Himmelman ("BIG SIT! Chief") created The BIG SIT! in Fall 1993. The first two years of this extravaganza were held only in Connecticut. Over the course of the next four years, however, participation expanded to include count circles in 27 U.S. states, British Columbia, and England. John reviews the notable bird species found during each of these first six years. The BIG SIT! was held for the 31st consecutive year in 2023, establishing it as a favorite birding event for many Connecticut, national, and international birders.]

1998 Connecticut Summer Bird Count, by Joseph Zeranski and Thomas R. Baptist

The 1998 Summer Bird Count (SBC) provided interesting insight into the status of bird populations in Connecticut. A record 201 species were observed, and the number of birds per party hour increased to a new high of 95.5. Two hundred and thirty seven observers were greeted by generally favorable weather during the count period. While 31 species show sustained increases in numbers, at least 24 are in serious decline, and a dozen other species are on the verge of becoming extirpated as nesters in the state.

The online SBC tracts encompass a significant area of the state (1,642 square miles, or 31.2%), more than any other breeding bird census technique used in Connecticut. A review of SBCs conducted since 1993 reveal that the census effort has been consistent as measured by the number of participants and party hours logged. The resulting data provide useful insights into shortterm population changes, and some of the apparent population changes are summarized herein.

[Editor's Note: Tom Baptist provided the narrative portion of this article. He describes increasing and decreasing population of birds, as well as late lingerers and rarities. There is much good analysis to read. Joe Zeranski listed the statewide count totals. A ten page table of SBC results follows for the nine SBCs conducted. Two additional tables show the 31 bird species known to breed in the state

that show population increases and the 24 breeding species that show population declines. The 1998 data are compared here with the previous five years of SBC data, from the 1993 through 1997.

Of particular note to the present day reader are Zeranski & Baptist's tables of increasing populations of birds (Osprey, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Downy Woodpecker, American Crow, Gray Catbird, European Starling, and Field Sparrow included) and decreasing populations (Northern Goshawk, American Kestrel, Ruffed Grouse, Herring Gull, Northern Flicker, Wood Thrush, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Meadowlark, etc.). Most of these identified population trends still hold true twenty-five years later. We also will be able to recognize changing bird populations by comparing data from the 1982-86 Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas and the breeding component of the soon to be finalized Connecticut Bird Atlas (2017-2022).

Books on Birds, by Alan Brush

If you follow the news in print, on the radio, or TV, you cannot escape the occasional item on the recent fossil discoveries from Liaoning, China. The specimens *Sinosauropteryx*, *Protarchaeopteryx*, and *Caudipteryx* are unquestionably dinosaurs. However, a series of very early birds such as *Confuciusornis*, *Sinornis*, *Cathayornis*, and *Laoningornis* have also been found in the same location. These species are being described and debated in the current scientific literature. Coincidentally, a number of books have also appeared that deal with the origin of birds and the evolution of flight and feathers. One important point not yet universally accepted is that the origin of birds and the evolution of flight must be appreciated as two quite different events. It is now also established that feathers appear in the fossil record before the appearance of either flight or animals as morphologically advanced as Archaeopteryx, long considered the most primitive bird.

[Editor's Note: Alan Brush refers to several books and technical and popular articles published by leading figures in evolutionary biology ornithology, and science writing. All are worth consulting for competing theories on the origin of birds and the evolution of flight. Kevin Padian, whose Ph.D. thesis advisor at Yale was John Ostrom, coauthored a review article with Luis Chiappe entitled "The origin and early evolution of birds," with their popular article on the same topic appearing in Scientific American. Jennifer Ackerman (B.A. Yale, 1980) authored the article, "The origin of birds and their flight" in the July 1998 issue of National Geographic. She is known to many Connecticut birders for her books, including *The Genius of Birds*, and *What an Owl Knows*. She was the keynote speaker for COA's 2023 annual meeting, held on Zoom.

See also in this issue of *The Connecticut Warbler*. A Third Adult Again Assists at a Connecticut Bald Eagle Nest, by Donald A. Hopkins, Gerald S. Mersereau, and Alan C. Nordell; Connecticut's 1998 Fall Hawk Migration, by Neil Currie; Bird Behavior Notes: Eastern Screech-Owl Behavior at a Bal-Chatri Trap, by Dwight G. Smith; Dowitcher Dance, by Roland C. Clement; Connecticut Field Notes, Summer, June 1 to July 31, 1998, by Greg Hanisek; Photo Challenge, by Julian Hough.

Cover art of Long-eared Owl is by Michael DiGiorgio. The January 1999 issue of *The Connecticut Warbler* can be seen in its entirety at the following link to the COA website: <https://ctbirding.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CTWarblerVolume19.pdf?x92901> Download Vol. 19, and view pages 1-48.

COA/Greenwich Audubon: Spring Bird Tours and Bird Breakfast

FREE: May 4 @ 7:00 am - 11:00 am

Breakfast 9 AM, plus bird banding

Advance registration required

Details at <https://www.ctbirding.org/eventcal/coa-greenwich-audubon-spring-bird-tour-and-breakfast/>

Greenwich Audubon Center

613 Riversville Rd, Greenwich, CT, 06831, CT

This event is co-sponsored by the Connecticut Ornithological Association and Greenwich Audubon Center

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The Connecticut Ornithological Association is the only statewide organization devoted to birds and birding in Connecticut. Since its founding in 1984, its membership has grown to well over 500 people who range from beginning birders to professional ornithologists. COA does not release its membership list to other organizations. Contributions and donations are tax deductible as allowed under law. COA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization.

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Student	\$15/yr
Family	\$45/yr
Contributing	\$50/yr
Donor	\$75/yr
Benefactor	\$100/yr
Life	\$1000 (payable in three annual installments)



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