



COA Bulletin

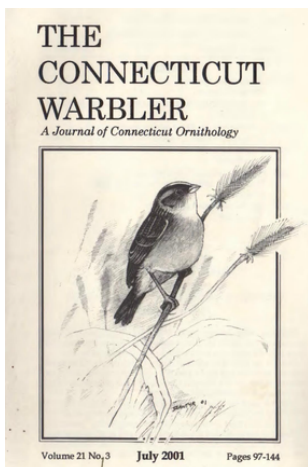
Connecticut Ornithological Association

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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.

Endangered Species at a Crossroads: The Future of Wildlife Protection and Coastal Birds in Connecticut

Johann Heupel and Jess Esposito-Halka

The Endangered Species Act, which turned 50 in 2023, is one of the most important conservation laws in U.S. history. Just three years later, the interpretation and future enforcement of the ESA faces uncertainty. This historic piece of legislation created the framework for conserving our imperiled wildlife by dictating how threatened and endangered species are designated and their habitats conserved. Since it was signed into law, the ESA has been shaped by decades of evolving interpretations, as each administration influences how it is enforced.

Recently, the Trump Administration announced a shift in the law's interpretation by narrowing how "harm" is defined under the ESA. Until now, the ESA prevented the harmful modification of habitat even if it does not directly kill or injure imperiled species. Historically, the definition of "harm" has extended beyond direct injury or death to individual animals, including activities that significantly alter or degrade habitat in ways that impair essential breeding, feeding, or sheltering. If upheld, this re-interpretation could allow modification of the environment that disturbs critical habitat, creating uncertainty of how the protections and evaluations of listed species under the ESA will be done. While the full consequences are unknown, several coastal birds in Connecticut illustrate what may be at stake.



Roseate Tern
Dan Russo
New London to Orient
Point Ferry
12 July 2026

The Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*), an uncommon summer breeder in the state, has been an endangered species under the ESA since 1987. A stunning seabird that spans the globe, our regional population depends on a limited number of coastal islands in New England and New York to raise their young each year. Every spring, these birds migrate thousands of miles from South America to a few offshore islands along the North Atlantic coast, including Falkner Island off the coast of Guilford, CT. This small, three-acre island supports the only breeding colony of Roseate Terns in the state, with approximately 30 annual breeding pairs. The island also provides nesting habitat for other sensitive coastal birds, including the American Oystercatcher and Common Tern, making it one of Connecticut's most important seabird colonies.



Falkner Island
Stewart B. McKinney Wildlife Refuge



American Oystercatcher
Jo Fasciolo
Compo Beach, Westport
30 June 2024

Falkner Island is part of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge, a federally protected coastal habitat managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Roseate Tern is a designated species protected under the ESA. For a species with limited presence in Connecticut, maintaining protections for breeding habitat is essential for preventing the loss of the local population.



Piping Plover
Johann Heupel
Milford Point, New Haven County
13 June 2026

The Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*) is another Connecticut breeding bird whose recovery has depended on strong habitat protections. Designated as threatened along the Atlantic Coast in 1985, the species relies on protected nesting areas for successful breeding. Over the past several decades, federal and state officials, conservation organizations, and community members have worked together to protect, monitor, and manage Piping Plover habitat. These collaborative efforts have helped support the species' recovery, but that progress could be jeopardized if protections under the ESA are weakened.

Piping Plovers nest on sandy beaches along the Connecticut coast, one of the region's most heavily used habitats. Their eggs and chicks face constant threats from beach recreation, off-road vehicles, unleashed dogs, and coastal development. Protecting these coastal habitats benefits more than shorebirds. Healthy beaches and dunes preserve native landscapes, help reduce the impacts of coastal storms, and contribute to resilient coastal communities.

The ability to safeguard these nesting areas comes in part from the Piping Plover's status as a species protected under the ESA, which calls for limiting activities that could damage or disturb breeding habitat and nesting sites. While the revised interpretation of the law would continue to prohibit direct harm to individual birds and their nests, it could prevent management of activities that could disrupt these coastal beaches before any direct harm takes place. It could also cause uncertainty about enforcement, as many activities may no longer constitute direct harm under federal law. Despite the impressive recovery of the local Piping Plover population, decades of progress could be lost if environmental protections are relaxed as federal priorities shift.

In further changes to federal endangered species policy, the Trump Administration expressed its intent to revoke safeguards granted to federally threatened species and evaluate critical habitat designations in relation to possible land use. This could place economic activities, such as cattle grazing, oil drilling, or mining in higher consideration than conservation priorities, making it more difficult to prevent recovering species from slipping back into endangered status. The Red Knot emphasizes the importance of keeping habitat conserved for threatened species.



Red Knot, Jo Fasciolo, Milford Point CT Audubon, New Haven County, 25 May 2026

Once prevalent along the Connecticut coast, the Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) is now a relatively uncommon sight. During migration, these birds stop along the coast to feed on horseshoe crab eggs. Listed as threatened under the ESA in 2015, the Red Knot continues to face recovery challenges as horseshoe crab populations are affected by overharvesting and environmental changes. Future development and other habitat-altering activities at coastal stopover sites, where these birds refuel during migration, could pose a serious threat to their populations. The loss or degradation of these coastal habitats could reduce horseshoe crab spawning areas and, in turn, limit the availability of the eggs Red Knots depend on to successfully complete their migration.



Connecticut Coastline

Right now, state and local regulations protecting these species and their essential habitats remain in effect, but the future of federal protections remains uncertain as these changes face legal challenges and continued review. The full consequences of these policy shifts are not yet understood as federal courts, state agencies, and local organizations begin to evaluate how these new interpretations may influence conservation efforts for species that depend on critical habitat.

The stakes of these changes, however, extend far beyond Connecticut's borders. Development of essential overwintering forests and grasslands for agricultural use may threaten Monarch butterflies. New logging and mining activities in the Pacific Northwest could jeopardize Spotted Owls, while draining wetlands for property development could eliminate nesting sites for dwindling Whooping Cranes. The plight of these species demonstrates that the uncertainty surrounding these changes extends far beyond a single species or region.

It is more important than ever to stay informed about changing policies and to speak up when policy and conservation collide. The future of our shared natural world depends on our willingness to act. The ESA was built through decades of advocacy, science, and public commitment, and its future depends on the continued efforts of those who recognize the importance of protecting species and their habitats.

You can help by contacting your [local representative](#) and expressing your support for a strong Endangered Species Act. You can also follow organizations such as [Earthjustice](#) as they work to challenge industry focused approaches to conservation that could weaken protections for imperiled species. The ESA exists because generations of people recognized that protecting our nation's wildlife and wild places is a responsibility we all share.



Piping Plover
Zachary Moller
Milford Point, New Haven County
25 April 2026

When possible, act locally as well. Participate in efforts to monitor endangered birds, plant native, bird-friendly gardens, preserve natural habitat, and reduce disturbances to wildlife by limiting unnecessary nighttime lighting. Every action, whether taken locally or on a national level, can help protect the species and habitats that depend on our continued commitment to conservation.

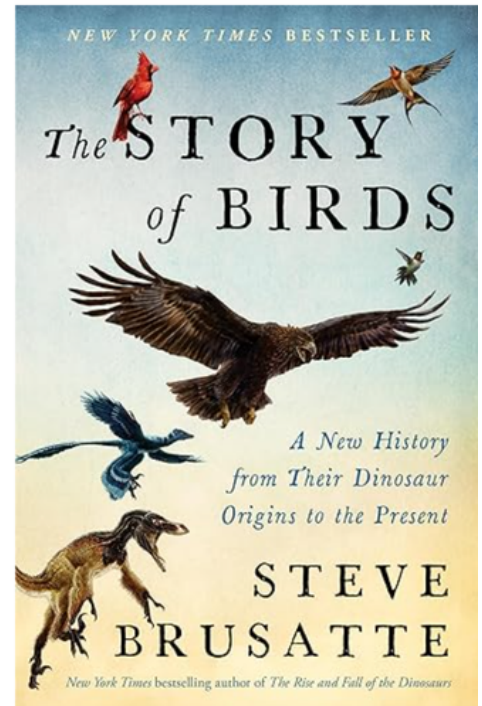


Book Review: *The Story of Birds: A New History from Their Dinosaur Origins to the Present*, Steve Brusatte, Author

Christopher S. Wood

By now, we're all aware that our favorite class of animals, birds, is actually a remnant of the famous dinosaurs that ruled the Earth for at least 160 million years until most were wiped out in the asteroid collision some 66 million years ago. It is somewhat easy to recognize this lineage when we see a turkey trot across the road in front of us, resembling nothing so much as a velociraptor terrorizing visitors to Jurassic Park in the movie. A bit harder to conceptualize, though, when watching our tiny hummingbirds flit about the garden, but there it is: they are dinosaurs too.

I recall learning, in Noble Proctor's Ornithology class at SCSU, about Archaeopteryx, at the time the earliest and only known example of an early bird at 150 million years old. This fossil provided a tentative connection to dinosaurs: subsequent paleontological study has discovered a series of fossils demonstrating clearly the link between birds and the other dinosaurs. Modern birds began appearing around 90 million years ago leading to the 11,000 or so species that we chase today.



All this is explained in a recent book by a lifelong paleontology student and researcher, who lays out the history of bird evolution in a mostly easy reading, engaging narration intended to inform the interested and convince the skeptical that birds are dinosaurs. This phylogeny is followed by a description of today's manifestation of this history: the variety and diversity of our birds, aptly described as "the most fine-tuned animals that live today."

From the development of feathers to the loss of tail bones, the evolution of birds from the same stock as the famous, if exaggerated, velociraptor of the Jurassic Park movie fame is explained with ample relatable examples. For example, I went to Cornell's *Birds of the World* to look up Cassowary photos and sure enough, there was a dinosaur.

And along the way, you will learn a lot about bird anatomy that you may not already know. If I ever learned so, I had forgotten that the wishbone had evolved into a spring that stores energy from the flight muscle for greater efficiency in flight. And the descriptions used to explain the dinosaur/bird connection are often stimulating.

Some of the details of bird genealogy are a bit of a slog, such as the complicated history of the ratites: ostriches, emus, tinamous, etc. But I gained a greater appreciation for the tinamous that I've seen in South America as the only western hemisphere representative of the ratite group, and the only still-flying members of that group. I expect any reader would find some eye-opening connection to a personal birding experience.

There are plenty of interesting factoids, such as that flycatchers (tyrant flycatchers, family Tyrannidae) whose songs we birders use to differentiate species, are not songbirds while ravens (Corvidae), whose vocalizations are less than melodic, are. This discussion led me down a rabbit hole in *Birds of the World* to try to understand where songbirds (oscines) separate from the rest of the passerine birds (sub-oscines) and why non-songbird hummingbirds learn song rather than inherit it like other sub-oscine species. The book presents many such opportunities for personal investigation of favorite bird groups.

Reading this book is probably somewhat easier with at least a passing knowledge of the science behind evolution and Earth's geologic history, some familiarity with bird taxonomy, and a willingness to accept time scales beyond our ken (a review of the provided chart of geological time periods is helpful). It is a book that requires a bit of a commitment at 448 pages (paperback). But if you, or any skeptical friends, still need convincing about birds' dinosaurian lineage, or if you want to learn more about that evolution and today's avian taxonomy, this book should do it.

The book closes with some sobering reminders of the challenges birds face today, sad facts of which we are all aware, and speculation about the future of bird evolution. Finally, the author provides in the epilogue an exhaustive listing of supplemental resources for anyone interested in going down any of the rabbit holes that beckon the reader in this book.

Available to download from Amazon Kindle or Apple Books, or by hard copy from Amazon or other bookstores or maybe your local library.

A Note of Gratitude

Arabella Pajoohi

When I learned that I was a recipient of the Zepko Scholarship and would have the opportunity to attend Hog Island Audubon Camp, I was ecstatic. As camp approached, however, my excitement was accompanied by nervousness: Who would my fellow campers be and would they love birding as much as I do? Would they share an interest in the conservation work that inspired me to attend?

Shortly after arriving, I realized that Hog Island was everything I hoped it would be and more: I was surrounded by other young birders who were passionate about birds, curious and eager to learn, and just as importantly, hilarious. The camp staff and volunteers were dedicated to ensuring that we learned as much as possible while enjoying every moment of camp. Perhaps most importantly, everyone I encountered – from campers to volunteers – was incredibly kind. When you are nervous and a bit homesick as I was on that first day, that kindness makes all the difference!



On our first day, we had the privilege of visiting Eastern Egg Rock by boat and learning about the island's history and the efforts of those who have dedicated themselves to its conservation. The island's seabird colony, consisting of everything from Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, and now, (as we found out on our final day of camp) Razorbills, to Roseate, Common, and Arctic Terns, was decimated throughout the 19th century due to over-hunting; in recent decades, however, Atlantic Puffins, among other seabirds, have returned to the island thanks to the tireless efforts of conservationists. To accomplish this took creativity and determination: for several years, Atlantic Puffin chicks were transported to the island and raised there, and decoys of the absent species were placed on the island in an effort to attract their live counterparts while the raucous calls from active seabird colonies were played to suggest that there was indeed a colony present on the island. These efforts were eventually rewarded when, in 1977, the first Puffin was observed on the island and, four years later, in 1981, a Puffin was observed carrying food to its chick.



Atlantic Puffin

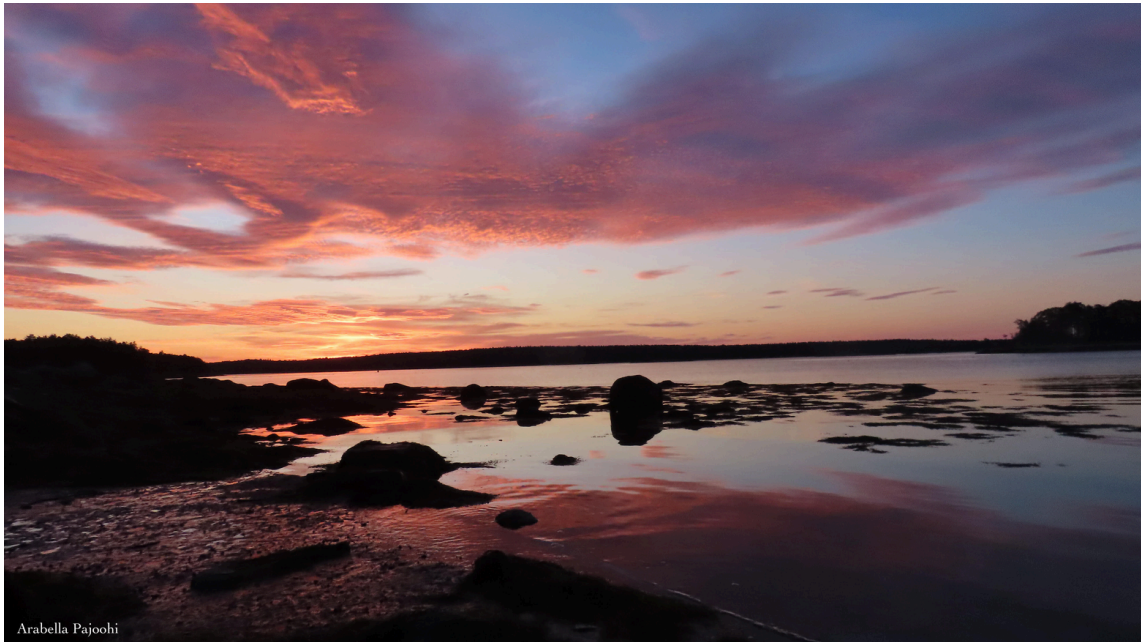


Black Guillemot

In addition to sharing this important conservation story, the current seabird researchers who are carrying on the legacy of conservation on Eastern Egg Rock, where they reside, rain or shine, kindly imparted upon us important values. We were reminded to “keep our options open,” especially at our age, and “not be afraid to take chances.” One of the researchers shared that she discovered her true passion only by experimenting, adding that she was several hours from her home but, despite the distance, was thrilled to have explored this opportunity. As someone who hopes to become a conservation scientist, I found her story deeply inspiring. Hearing about her struggles and how she overcame her fears resonated with me. I was reminded that fear is natural, and often, a meaningful journey begins with a combination of curiosity and courage.

Throughout camp, we also had the opportunity to listen to daily presentations by scientists discussing everything from hummingbird migration, what Merlin and eBird have allowed us to uncover, to the connections between physics and avian anatomy. I was especially fascinated by a presentation that focused on the ways in which physics and avian anatomy are connected. The speaker described the bills and tongues of hummingbirds, remarking upon their lamellae — that is, minute, lateral fringes in the tongue — that, when coated with a thin layer of nectar as the hummingbirds feed, create surface tension, maintaining the fringes in an oval shape until the hummingbird's tongue reaches the flower's nectar. Then, the surface tension vanishes, and the fringes on the hummingbird's tongue are unfurled, due to the fringes' springiness. As the hummingbird retracts its tongue from the flower's nectar, adhesive forces arise once again, creating cylindrical tubes that carry the nectar to the hummingbird's mouth. It was remarkable to learn about how the principles of physics directly applied to the natural world in this way.

I was also fascinated by the research and findings of one of our counselors, who also happened to be a doctor, licensed bander, and researcher. She shared various maps that showed the path of a Rufous Hummingbird who, after being banded in Lilian, Alabama, migrated thousands of miles to Juneau, Alaska. Our counselor stated that this was yet another mystery of avian migration, speculating whether the hummingbird's ascent along the coastline was driven by food sources (for instance, artificial feeders) or other factors. This was yet another reminder that despite our growing knowledge of the surrounding world, there will always be more to uncover and to aid in conservation.



Through my experience at Hog Island Audubon, I grew both as an individual and as a birder and found a community of people who share a love of birding and nature and understand the importance of protecting our natural world. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to explore such a unique ecosystem alongside passionate mentors and peers who share my love for the natural world. Thank you to everyone at COA for helping make a young birder's dreams come true.

Good birding,
Arabella Pajoohi
Girlsbirdtoo.com





COA President's Message

Dear COA Members and Friends,

Conservation is at the heart of the Connecticut Ornithological Association's mission. While COA is not a political advocacy organization, we have a responsibility to speak for Connecticut's birds when sound science and stewardship are at stake.

This year has reminded us how many challenges birds face. Osprey nesting success has declined in many areas, likely reflecting changes in the availability of the fish they depend on. Grassland birds continue to lose nesting opportunities when important bobolink fields are mowed during the breeding season. Aerial insectivores — swallows, swifts, flycatchers, and others — continue to struggle as insect populations decline. Along our coast, decisions about managing salt marshes and mudflats require thoughtful consideration because both habitats support different communities of birds and wildlife.

These issues remind us that conservation is rarely simple. Good decisions require careful planning, sound science, and an understanding of how management actions affect entire ecosystems.

COA will continue to encourage science-based conservation, share knowledge through our publications and programs, and work with partners who are committed to protecting Connecticut's birds and the habitats they depend upon. By staying informed and engaged, each of us can help ensure that future generations will continue to enjoy the remarkable diversity of birds that enrich our state.

Thank you for your continued support of the Connecticut Ornithological Association and for all you do on behalf of Connecticut's birds.

Warm wishes and good birding,
Cynthia Ehlinger
President, Connecticut Ornithological Association



Events

Join us for a Workshop!



Upcoming Workshops:

Oct. 10 -- Hawk ID Workshop at Lighthouse Point

Fall 2026 – Pelagic Birds and the Orient Point Ferry

Winter 2026 – Winter Duck Identification

Fall 2027 – Sparrow Identification

To find out more visit <https://www.ctbirding.org/birds-birding/workshops/>

Community Garden Harvest Challenge Continues in October!

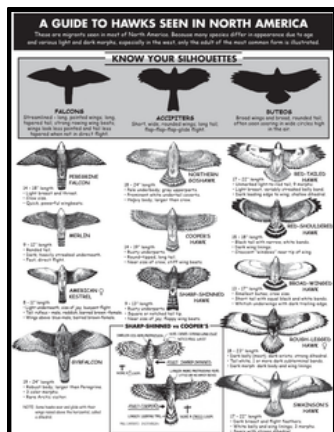
CTBirds ListServ Moderator and COA Associate Chuck Imbergamo will once again challenge birders in Connecticut to visit their local community gardens and see what birds might pop up. Chuck will be posting the weekly tallies on the the CTBirds ListServ. You must use eBird and the hotspot to record your birds. The birds can be seen anywhere within the confines of your hotspot and do NOT need to be seen in the gardens themselves. Birds must be accepted by our eBird reviewers to count. Follow all local rules, regulations and the ABA code of ethics, as always. The challenge is open to all, but is limited to community gardens within Connecticut. If your garden is not represented, please reach out to us by emailing contact@ctbirding.org. Happy Birding!



To find out more visit <https://www.ctbirding.org/events/community-garden-harvest-challenge/>

Get Ready for Fall Hawk Migration!

Fall hawk migration is just around the corner, and Connecticut birders should start getting ready. As temperatures cool and birds begin their southward journey, our skies can come alive with Broad-winged Hawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks, Ospreys, and other raptors. Great places to watch include:



[Know Your Hawks PDF](#)



[Hawk Migration Association](#)

- **Quaker Ridge Hawk Watch in Greenwich Audubon:** Runs late August through late November. An official hawk watch counter will be on site Monday through Friday from approximately 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. On the weekends, volunteer hawk watchers will be present during similar hours. JOIN IN ON THE FUN AT THE GREENWICH AUDUBON ANNUAL **HAWK WATCH FEST** ON SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2026. **PURCHASE YOUR TICKETS NOW!**
- **Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven:** Runs daily September through December. Observe migrating raptors and a wide variety of songbirds. The watch starts daily at 7 a.m. and continues as long as the hawks keep flying. Stop by anytime. Meet by the tall lone tree on top of the hill. If the gate is staffed, just let them know you are there for the Hawk Watch. 2 Lighthouse Road, New Haven. JOIN COORDINATOR STEVE MAYO FOR AN INTRODUCTION TO LIGHTHOUSE POINT AND HAWKWATCHING ON SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 6, 2026 @ 8:00 am - 11:00 am
- **Hoyden's Hill in Fairfield:** Visit any time for a great hawk watching experience. Go to the first field at Hoyden's Hill and start watching the skies. Often manned by our very own eBird reviewer, Aidan Kiley.

Bring your binoculars, look up, and keep an eye on the wind and weather, fall migration is coming!



Preventing Bird-Window Collisions

Cynthia Ehlinger

An estimated 365 million to nearly 1 billion birds die each year in the United States after colliding with windows, according to a study by Scott R. Loss and colleagues published in *The Condor* (2014). The authors estimated that 44% of these collisions occur at residential homes, making houses the single largest source of bird-window mortality. Glass reflects trees, sky, and vegetation or creates the illusion of a clear flight path, making it difficult for birds to recognize it as a barrier.

As I have learned from my own home, one of the highest-risk locations is a sliding glass door near a bird feeder. Birds feeding nearby may flush suddenly when startled and fly directly into the glass. Mourning Doves are among the species frequently involved in these collisions because of their rapid, low-level flight and tendency to visit backyard feeders.

The effectiveness of bird-friendly window treatments has been demonstrated at Yale University's Evans Hall, where patterned markers applied to the building's extensive glass walls reduced bird collisions by more than 90%. Similar studies at other buildings have consistently shown that properly installed exterior markers dramatically reduce collisions.

Fortunately, preventing window strikes at home is both easy and effective. This spring, I applied a bird-safe tape to the outside surface of my sliding glass door. This creates a visual pattern that birds can see while remaining unobtrusive to people. For maximum effectiveness, the markings should be spaced no more than 2 inches apart horizontally or 4 inches apart vertically — a guideline often referred to as the "2 × 4 rule."

Additional recommendations include placing bird feeders within 3 feet of a window, where birds cannot build up enough speed to sustain serious injury, or more than 30 feet away to reduce confusion caused by reflected habitat.

So far, no new feather imprints have appeared on my slider, but the fall migration and winter feeding season will be the true test of the technique's effectiveness.

Window collisions are one of the leading human-caused sources of bird mortality, but they are also among the most preventable. Installing bird-safe tape or other proven window treatments is a simple, inexpensive step that can significantly reduce bird deaths while allowing people to continue enjoying birds at backyard feeders.



Applying bird tape to a sliding glass door can be an easy and effective way to prevent bird strikes.

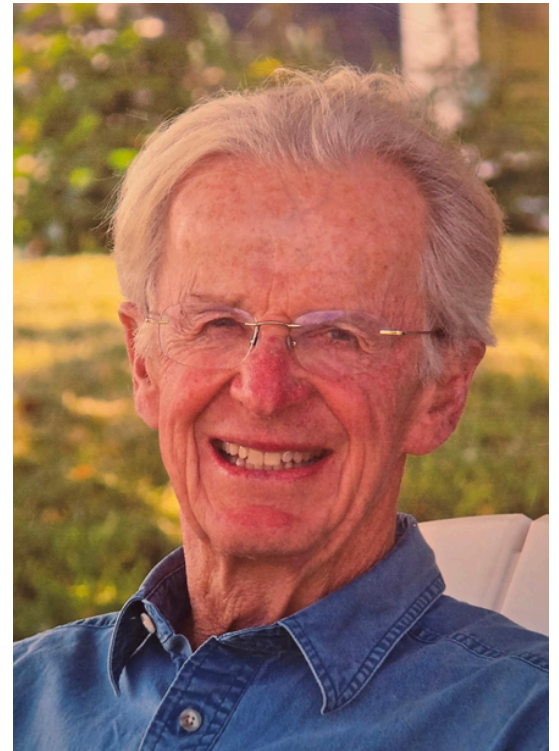
Take the Lights Out CT Pledge TODAY! When you participate in Lights Out CT, you commit to turning off your unnecessary outdoor and indoor lights every night during peak bird migration from 11 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Fall Migration: August 15 - November 15
Spring Migration: April 1 - May 31.

**Alan H. Brush September 29, 1934 to July 12, 2026****Lisa Wahle**

University of Connecticut-Storrs Professor Emeritus Alan H. Brush, 91, of Stonington, CT, an evolutionary biologist who specialized in feather proteins and taught generations of students during 30 years in the Department of Physiology and Neurobiology, died on July 12 after a brief hospitalization for ischemic stroke.

Alan was a creative researcher and lab director in molecular biology whose interest in the evolution of feathers led to 70 scientific papers and book chapters. His interests in science were broad and he was extremely well read, including publication of about 150 book reviews. He edited Volume X of Chemical Zoology and, with UConn Professor George Clark, the centenary volume Perspectives in Ornithology for the American Ornithologists Union. He brought broad-minded discernment to scholarly publication for 10 years as editor of *The Auk*, the former journal of the American Ornithologists' Union, and for 3 years as editor of CBE Views, published by the Council of Biological Editors. He was a member of the "Dream Team" that visited China in 1997 to study the then-recently discovered fossils of feathered dinosaurs.



He was a caring and supportive colleague, doctoral and post-doctoral advisor, as well as an informative and charismatic speaker in the lecture hall, at professional meetings of scientific societies, and on river and ocean voyages co-organized by the Museum of Natural History in New York and Discovery Tours. Adventure in retirement included a 2000-2001 voyage aboard a 33 ft sailboat Mokita, with his wife Mary Jane Brush from Maine south to the Florida Keys. Part of the voyage was retracing the path of the early naturalist Mark Catesby. They examined the state of nature then and now and published a volume with Alan's words and Mary Jane's watercolors (M.J. Brush and Alan H. Brush. 2018. *Mark Catesby's Legacy: Natural History Then and Now*. The Catesby Commemorative Trust).

Alan was born in Rochester, NY, on September 29, 1934, to Martin and Rebecca Elizabeth 'Betty' Brush (nee Trott). He grew up in Los Angeles, CA, with his younger brother, the late Richard (Sharlene) Brush, and was educated in LA public schools and at the University of Southern California. His Army service included tracking the persistence of radiation fallout for the Atomic Energy Project at the then-new UCLA campus facility for nuclear medicine and at the Mercury, NV, test site. His graduate degrees in Zoology were both conferred by UCLA and he held a post-doctoral appointment at the Cornell Ornithology Lab. Alan cheered college football and men's and women's basketball for both the Trojans and Bruins as well as the UConn Huskies.

Among Alan's many superpowers was a life-long talent for forming and maintaining loving friendships. He was generous, thoughtful, and curious, qualities that drew people of all ages and walks of life to him all the way from high school through a long and productive retirement. Alan had a fundamentally happy disposition and amplified joy in the lives of family, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and members of many communities. He will be missed by all.

Summer Photo Gallery



Marbled Godwit
Hammonasset Beach SP, New Haven County
Ed Jensen, 6 Aug 2026



American Avocet
Sasco Beach, Fairfield County
Jack Jerrild, 30 July 2026



Manx Shearwater
Harkness Memorial SP, New London County
Kara Mortimer, 31 July 2026



Wilson's Storm Petrel
Stonington Breakwater, New London County
Jo Fasciolo, 6 Aug 2026



Parasitic Jaeger
Hammonasset Beach SP, New Haven County
Russ Smiley, 30 July 2026



Wood Stork
Goshen Cove, New London County
Steven Hubbard, 12 July 2026



American White Pelican
Goshen Cove, New London County
Ben Rupp, 11 July 2026



Arctic Tern
Falkner Island, New Haven County
John Diener, 2 June 2026

A Historic First: Lesser Frigatebird Over Falkner Island

Jo Fasciolo



A Lesser Frigatebird (*Fregata ariel*) was photographed over Falkner Island in New Haven County on June 24, 2026, establishing a remarkable first official state record for Connecticut. Native to the tropical Pacific and Indian Oceans, this pelagic wanderer is an exceptionally rare vagrant to the continental United States. The record has been formally submitted to the Connecticut Ornithological Association (COA) Avian Records Committee for review.

To protect the island's highly sensitive, active nesting tern colony from human disturbance, details of the flyover sighting were intentionally suppressed by local authorities and observers. The documentation was released to the public in late July 2026. Many Connecticut birders expressed disappointment over missing an immediate opportunity to search for the bird along the Long Island Sound shoreline. The event ultimately sparked dialogue on balancing public notification with wildlife protection while prioritizing conservation.

Put into national and regional context, the Connecticut sighting represents only the second time in history that a Lesser Frigatebird has been verified directly on the Atlantic Coast of the United States, following a 66-year gap from the first East Coast record in Maine. The bird was part of an unprecedented mid-2026 influx of the species into the American Birding Association (ABA) Area, bringing the all-time continental United States total to at least eight accepted or pending records:

- July 3, 1960 (Maine): The first North American record; an adult male specimen collected at Deer Isle, Hancock County.
- July 11, 2003 (Wyoming): An unexpected inland record from Basin, Big Horn County.
- September 11, 2005 (Michigan): A well-photographed individual at Lake Erie Metropark, Wayne County.
- July 15, 2007 (California): A photographed female at Lanphere Dunes, Humboldt County.
- February 4, 2025 (California): A single bird observed in San Diego County.
- May 2026 (California): A bird photographed off San Clemente, Orange County.
- May 23, 2026 (Ohio): A spectacular inland record photographed over Sippo Lake in Stark County.
- June 24, 2026 (Connecticut): The Falkner Island individual detailed above.

Twenty-Five Years Ago in *The Connecticut Warbler*

Compiled by Steve Broker
Volume 21, No. 3 (July 2001)

Grasshopper Sparrow, by Patrick M. Comins

The visual identification of adult Grasshopper Sparrows is generally straightforward, being the only species of grassland-nesting sparrow found nesting in Connecticut lacking wingbars and with no streaks or markings on their sides. Structurally, Grasshopper Sparrows are rather typical *Ammodramus* sparrows, being small (Length 5", Wingspan 7.75", Weight 0.6 oz.), chunky, flat-headed, relatively large-billed, and having a relatively short, spiked tail. They also have a rather typical *Ammodramus* flight pattern with a hunched posture and weak-appearing flight on relatively short wings with quick fluttery wing beats. They rarely are seen flying for any appreciable distance, typically popping up, flying low over the grass for a few yards and dropping back down.

The Grasshopper Sparrow is listed as endangered by the State of Connecticut, meaning that its known nesting population is restricted to less than five locations in the state. The known nesting locations in Connecticut in recent years are Rentschler Field, Bradley International Airport, Windham Airport, and Northwest Park in Windsor. . . and another group of at least six singing males was discovered in a field in Suffield.

[Editor's Note: Patrick Comins's article on Grasshopper Sparrow ranks among the most well-researched, detailed species descriptions published in *The Connecticut Warbler*. Patrick describes the identification and behavior of this species, its taxonomy and status, and the physical appearances and habitat preferences of other sparrow species in Connecticut. More recent taxonomic studies have reclassified most of the sparrows formerly grouped with Grasshopper Sparrow into other genera, including *Centronyx* and *Ammospiza*. Patrick's interest in this sparrow species was prompted in part by his discovery of multiple singing birds at an abandoned tobacco field next to a shopping center in the Buckland Hills area of Manchester. That population ceased nesting by the year 2000.

Patrick discusses in 2001 the planned development in East Hartford of Rentschler Field - the site of the second largest population [of Grasshopper Sparrows] in the Connecticut River Valley. He calls for "the creation of at least one or two reservoir sites, i.e., large protected and managed grassland refuges of over 400 acres." He concludes that "subsidies for farmers may be necessary to make up for the loss of one of the hay crops, or as incentive to hay their fields later in the season." This advice from 25 years ago certainly resonates today in Connecticut with such other grassland species as Bobolink. The news today is not all bleak. The Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas (1982-86) found 8 atlas blocks with breeding evidence of Grasshopper Sparrow: 2 confirmed, 2 probable, and 4 possible. The posted results of the Connecticut Bird Atlas (2018-21) include 14 blocks with breeding evidence of Grasshopper Sparrow: 5 confirmed, 1 probable, and 8 possible.]

Black-tailed Godwit at Milford Point: First State Record, by Julian Hough

On Thursday, 18 April, 2001 at approximately 1:00 PM, Katie Hubbard found a breeding-plumaged godwit in the inter-tidal creeks at Milford Point, New Haven, Connecticut. She tentatively identified it as a Bar-tailed Godwit, a vagrant from Europe, Siberia, and Northwestern Alaska, and alerted staff at the Audubon Coastal Center. Together with Milan Bull, they watched the bird at length and quickly re-identified the bird as a Black-tailed Godwit, a similarly rare Eurasian species.

A small group of observers, alerted to the bird's presence by the prompt dissemination of the news, managed to see the bird at close range before it was inadvertently flushed by fishermen at 3:15 PM. The bird was lost from sight out over the marsh.

A growing band of observers searched in vain for the next few hours until, on the rising tide, Chris Elphick located the bird around 6 PM. Although distant, the bright chestnut-red breast and mantle and bill-structure, were evident. The bird was briefly seen in flight, when the striking black-and-white wing-pattern and white rump were evident. The bird spent the last hour preening and swimming short distances between islands of vegetation. Despite a vigilant search over the next two days, the bird was never seen again.

[Editor's Note: The detective story Julian Hough proceeds to tell includes a sequence of sightings of the same Black-tailed Godwit individual in Eastport, Long Island, New York, at Milford Point, and at Harkness State Park in Connecticut. The section that follows, Godwit Identification in North America, focuses on Black-tailed, Bar-tailed, and Hudsonian godwits. "Marbled Godwit . . . is unlikely to be confused with any other godwit species and is thus not covered here." Julian provides a collection of photos of godwits in considering the identification of adults and juveniles in summer and winter, their habitats and behavior, and migration and movements of these three godwit species.]

The Sharp-shinned Hawk in Connecticut, by Dwight G. Smith, Trevor Becker, and Arnold Devine

The Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) has traditionally been characterized as an uncommon migrant and a rare breeding species in Connecticut. This small accipiter hawk, has in fact, also been consistently rated as a rare species throughout most of New England except during migration. Peak numbers are observed each year during fall migration, from late August into early November, when at certain times it is often the most abundantly tallied raptor migrant.

Although breeding pairs are sometimes observed in Connecticut little is known of the nesting status and nest site selection of Sharp-shinned Hawks within the state. The Connecticut Natural Diversity Data Bank on nesting Sharp-shinned Hawks listed a 1967 New Milford site, a 1982 Canton site, and a single 1983 Hartland site. No nests were found, but fledged young and attending adults were observed by Hopkins et al. (1987) [who] also reported from Tunxis State Forest in Hartland an apparently successful Sharp-shinned Hawk nest which was active in 1986.

Herein we report our observations of nests and nest sites gathered over a period of several years but concentrated over two years, the 1999 and 2000 nesting seasons.

[Editor's Note: The authors follow with sections on Historical Status, Nesting Phenology, Habitat Selection and Nest Sites, and Food and Hunting of Sharp-shinned Hawks in Connecticut. They conclude, "The number of Sharp-shinned Hawk nests found in recent years suggests that this species is again appearing in numbers in the state as a breeding species. Observations of Sharp-shinned Hawks in May and through the summer months should be further investigated as they may indicate the presence of an active nest nearby." The Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas (1982-86) shows thirty-eight atlas blocks with breeding evidence: five confirmed, seven probable, and twenty-six possible. The posted results of the Connecticut Bird Atlas (2018-21) show twenty-nine atlas blocks with breeding evidence for Sharp-shinned Hawk: two confirmed, seven probable, and twenty possible.]

See also in this issue of *The Connecticut Warbler*: Book Review, by Jamie Meyers (Despommier, Dickson. 2001. West Nile Story: A New Virus in the New World. Apple Trees Productions); Connecticut Field Notes, Winter, December 1, 2000 Through February 29, 2001, by Greg Hanisek; Photo Challenge, by Julian Hough. Cover art of Grasshopper Sparrow is by Mark Szantyr. The July 2001 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/CTWarblerVolume21.pdf?x24940>. Scroll down to issue number 3 for pages 97-144.

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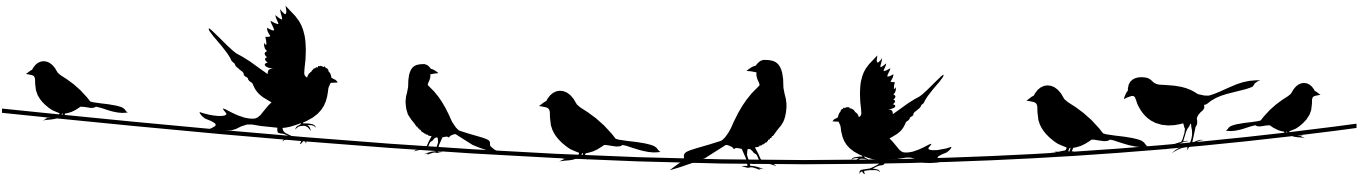
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Connecticut Ornithological Association

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

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