

# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

*A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*



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# The Connecticut Warbler

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## ON THE COVER

### Red Crossbill

Mark Szantyr could have been conveying a New Year's wish for Connecticut birders with his elegant Red Crossbill. Who doesn't start off the year hoping that a significant flight of boreal finches develops? Here's hoping for crossbills, grosbeaks and redpolls before winter 2015-16 ends.

# THE IMPORTANT BIRD AREA PROGRAM

*Protecting Birds and Their Habitats Across the  
Globe and in Connecticut*

**By Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe (Audubon Connecticut)  
and Ben Olewine (Birdlife International)**

## **An International Perspective**

Birdlife International's Important Bird Area (IBA) Program is the largest and most comprehensive global network of important sites for bird and biodiversity conservation in the world. The program has produced the only global, site-based, spatially explicit set of information on biodiversity and, as such, has been recognized by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as the basis of a worldwide network of priority sites for conservation.

The IBA program got its start back in 1979 when the European Commission (EC) was pondering how to implement the newly adopted Birds Directive, a groundbreaking piece of environmental legislation. BirdLife International proposed



*Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe photo*  
*The bird banding crew hard at work at Bent of the River Audubon IBA in Southbury.*

a model for identifying sites as “Special Protection Areas” under the directive. The approach developed for the (then) nine Member States used standardized criteria to identify sites of international significance for birds. The idea was for sites to be identified nationally, using data collected locally and applying criteria agreed globally. Important Bird Areas were born.

In the early 1980s, work with the EC began to identify priority sites for conservation of European migrant birds in Africa. This study was the first to promote the idea that IBA work beyond Europe was possible. In the early 1990s, the program was extended first to the Middle East and then eventually to the rest of the world. For example, in the Americas, 2,345 “globally important” IBAs in 57 countries/territories were identified in the 2009 Americas IBA Directory.

There are now more than 12,000 “globally important” IBAs in the world and it is expected that there will be about 15,000 when the identification work is completed, covering about 7% of the world’s land surface. And while the program was originally land-based, it has now been expanded into the marine realm. Specifically, BirdLife published the first Marine IBA “e-atlas” in 2012 which details 3,000 IBAs in coastal



*Katie Blake photo  
Wildlife Guards from Bridgeport  
improving bird habitat at the Stratford  
Point IBA.*

waters as well as those on the high seas.

The IBA Program is obviously not just about site identification, which is only the first step. It most importantly is about action on-the-ground to conserve these sites and the birds that use them. BirdLife International's 2014 assessment of all sites worldwide revealed that 80% of IBAs are inadequately protected (including one-third without any protection) and even worse, there were a terrifying 356 "priority sites for immediate action" across 102 countries. As a result, the BirdLife Partnership has launched the "IBAs in Danger" initiative to promote action at these threatened sites.

Given the importance of IBAs in conserving birds, partnership is key. Birdlife has 119 partners around the world. The National Audubon Society is BirdLife International's partner for the United States.

The National Audubon Society launched its Important Bird Areas initiative in 1995, establishing programs state by state. State-based IBA programs provide conservation leaders with the flexibility to tailor the program to their individual state needs, and they also give Audubon members and local volunteers the greatest opportunities to protect sites in their communities. These statewide IBA programs have produced more than 2,755 recognized IBAs, encompassing over 417 million acres of habitat (National Audubon Society, 2015).

To qualify as an IBA, a site must meet at least one of a set of standardized criteria. These criteria address the population sizes, distributions, and habitat uses of certain species. All sites that meet the criteria qualify as an IBA, regardless of size, current level of protection, or landownership. The generalized categories for the criteria are as follows:

- Species of global, continental, or state conservation concern.
- Species with restricted ranges.
- Species that are concentrated in one general habitat type or biome.
- Species, or groups of similar species, that form congrega-

tions.

You can download criteria specific to Connecticut at <http://ct.audubon.org/conservation/conservation/important-bird-areas>.

### **Connecticut's Important Bird Area Program**

Audubon Connecticut, the State Office of the National Audubon Society, recognized 27 IBAs between 2001 and 2008.

Recognition of these sites has led to conservation planning, habitat protection, restoration and stewardship. The following are just a few examples of conservation successes at IBAs.

Hammonasset Beach State Park is a globally Important Bird Area for Saltmarsh Sparrow, a species listed as near threatened by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Salt Meadow Park, the site of the former Griswold Airport, is just to the north of the IBA. This 42-acre parcel contains the abandoned runway (now a walking path), coastal grasslands, recreational fields, an intact dry coastal forest, and adjacent tidal wetlands. In 2010, Audubon Connecticut worked with the Town of Madison, the Trust for Public Land, and the landowner, LeylandAlliance, in negotiations that led to the town acquiring the property (Carlin, 2014). Voters approved the purchase by a vote of 3,275 to 2,444, a solid expression of the community's commitment to preserving the site's natural features, including Saltmarsh Sparrows and their habitat.

An example of habitat restoration at an IBA is the Cove Island Park Bird Sanctuary. This part of the park used to be called the "stump dump" because the city used it as a dumping ground for brush, logs and trees. Audubon Connecticut brought this section to the attention of then Mayor Dannel Malloy in the process of publically recognizing and developing an IBA conservation plan for the park. The City of Stamford commissioned Mathew Popp of Environmental Land Solutions (and an Audubon Greenwich board member at the time) to design the bird sanctuary (Maguire Group Inc., 2007) and in 2006, used a \$500,000 state grant in honor of Stamford



*Bruce Finnan photo  
Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison is a globally important IBA because of its extensive critical habitat for Saltmarsh Sparrows.*



*Scott Vincent photo  
Hundreds of birders enjoyed the long stay by this stunning Forked-tailed Flycatcher at Cove Island Wildlife Sanctuary IBA in Stamford.*

resident and former speaker of the state House of Representatives Moira Lyons to build the sanctuary (Jaksic, 2006). The area was cleaned up and now has 5 acres of meadow, 2,000 feet of stone dust pathways and more than 1,000 trees and shrubs that attract an amazing variety of birds. Rarities discovered at the Cove Island Park Bird Sanctuary include Painted Bunting, a Fork-tailed Flycatcher and a Rufous Hummingbird.

Another instance of habitat restoration at an IBA is the removal of 37 unoccupied and deteriorated cottages from Long Beach, the 35-acre stretch of barrier beach in Stratford that is part of the Stratford Great Meadows IBA (FWS Video: Long Beach West Restoration Project, 2012). Using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and project partners removed the cottages in 2010. The area is an important nesting location for federally threatened Piping Plover and state threatened Least Tern. Removal of the cottages also allows for more natural shifting of sand dunes.

Stewardship is exemplified just over the Stratford line at Bridgeport's Pleasure Beach, where 20 local high schools students, a.k.a. the WildLife Guards, have received hands-on training in bird monitoring and identification, coastal ecology and public outreach. For the past two summers, these youth have been employed as the official monitors at Pleasure Beach, tasked with tracking the reproductive success of state threatened Piping Plovers, Least Terns, and American Oystercatchers, and sharing their knowledge with visitors. The Guards first observe and then work together to deliver public programs. From setting up a touch tank to making marshmallow piping plovers with kids to leading bird walks, the Guards help Bridgeport residents come to value Pleasure Beach's natural resources and take actions to protect them. In the process, they have an opportunity to work in conservation; gain confidence, knowledge, and job skills; and come to understand that they have the power to make a difference in their communities. The program is coordinated by Audubon Connecticut in partnership with the City of Bridgeport and



the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History.

## Identification and Public Recognition of a Second Round of IBAs

In the spring of 2014, the Audubon Connecticut IBA Technical Committee, charged with determining whether sites meet IBA criteria, was reconvened. Committee members include ornithologists; representatives from CT Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), the USFWS, and not-for-profit bird conservation organizations; and well respected birders. In the past two years, the committee has identified 24 new IBAs of which seven provide habitat for Long-tailed Duck, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Semipalmated Sandpiper and Chimney Swifts, species considered globally vulnerable or near threatened by the IUCN, and are of global importance. Others are sizable forest blocks identified through a National Audubon Society effort to identify the largest, most intact forested areas along the Atlantic Flyway (Maine to Florida) that support the highest richness and abundance of birds of regional conservation responsibility. These IBAs are focal areas for Audubon Connecticut's forest stewardship and



*Bruce Finnan photo  
IBAs such as Stratford Great Meadows and Sandy Point  
in West Haven support the state's imperiled Piping Plover  
population.*

protection efforts.

Identification of IBAs is an essential first step to protecting habitats crucial to birds in Connecticut. A second, vital step, is public recognition of these sites. Public recognition benefits IBAs by increasing landowner, local community, and visitor knowledge on the value of the site to birds. Once engaged, these people make efforts to prevent disturbance to birds and their habitat, and partake in stewardship.

For example at Sandy Point in West Haven, local residents have provided input on an IBA Conservation Plan, worked with Audubon to engage visitors about beach-nesting birds, and implemented two IBA Small Grants (<http://ct.audubon.org/support-our-work/iba-small-matching-grants-program>) to improve habitat and signage. Recognition of IBAs can build and strengthen community pride and can also provide leverage in attaining funding to support monitoring and habitat management efforts at IBAs.

Public recognition can also spur collaborations that benefit IBAs and the bird species they protect. Collaboration between the DEEP Wildlife Division, Audubon Connecticut, RTPI, and the USFWS in stewardship of Piping Plover at IBAs in 2014 resulted in the highest number of fledglings since the state began keeping record. The IBA Advisory Committee, commissioned by Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, is another example of a collaboration that benefits IBAs. Working together the State, Audubon Connecticut, the Connecticut Ornithological Association, the Connecticut Audubon Society, and others are identifying and recognizing critical bird habitats, exploring opportunities for conservation action and natural resource education, and promoting bird conservation and bird watching statewide.

Public recognition can lead to the creation of IBA Conservation Plans which identify avian resources present on a property, summarize strategies to protect and enhance those resources, and outline opportunities to engage the landowner and other interested parties in conservation, monitoring and

outreach activities.

Recognized IBAs also have the support of Audubon's network of state offices and sanctuaries, chapters, and constituents.

IBA designation carries no regulatory authority and conveys no legal status, instead encourages successful natural resource stewardship. It is Audubon Connecticut's policy to seek the consent of landowners before we publicly recognize an IBA (something we are working on right now). This gives the landowner(s) the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns.

### **How You Can Help**

The IBA Technical Committee met in December 2015 to review 9 potential IBAs and will be meeting twice more to consider additional sites. The following sites have been suggested for consideration:

#### Sites that may be important for migration landbirds:

Oswegatchie Hills (East Lyme) and Sleeping Giant State Park (Hamden)

Sites that may have large numbers of waterfowl or shorebirds in migration and/or winter:

Durham Meadows (Durham), Cromwell Meadows and Deadman's Swamp (Cromwell), Pratt/Post Cove (Deep River), the mouth of the Salmon River and Machimoodus State Park (Haddam/East Haddam), Poquetanuck Cove (Preston, Ledyard); New Haven Harbor (New Haven), the Thimble Islands (Branford) and other sections of Long Island Sound

Sites that may be important to forest nesting birds:

Mt. Riga (Salisbury), Nepaug State Forest (New Hartford), Lake Gaillard and Sugarloaf RWA Recreation Area (North Branford)

#### Other sites to explore:

Belding and Tankerhoosen Wildlife Management Areas (Vernon) and Sunny Valley Preserve (New Milford).

As identification of IBAs requires supporting data, checklists (ideal with number of birds of each species) that you submit to [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org) are very valuable. If the readers of this article bird these sites or are looking for new sites to bird, it would be very helpful to have additional observations entered into eBird.

If there is a place that the reader thinks meets IBA criteria, consider nominating the site (contact Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe ([cfolsom-okeefe@audubon.org](mailto:cfolsom-okeefe@audubon.org)) for a nomination form).

Lastly, volunteering is a great way to support the IBA program. From getting out the word about beach-nesting birds, to helping with habitat restoration, participating in shrubland and forest nesting bird monitoring efforts, there are many ways that you can contribute to the IBA Program.

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# THE HISTORY OF CONNECTICUT AUDUBON SOCIETY'S BIRDCRAFT SANCTUARY AND MUSEUM



**By Kathy Van Der Aue**

It's impossible to understand Birdcraft without knowing something of its founder, Mabel Osgood Wright and her great contributions to ornithology and conservation. She had aspired to become a physician but respected her father's advice: "If young women wish to be lawyers, preachers, physicians or merchants we would put no harsher obstacle before them than our honest opinion that such is not their providential career." Or, in her own words: "I intended to go to Cornell to study medicine, but I married instead." She

married but turned her passion toward the conservation of birds, a lifelong commitment. In her first book, *The Friendship of Nature: A New England Chronicle of Birds and Flowers* (1894) she described the local Fairfield, Connecticut area flora and fauna in a series of essays which she enhanced with her own photographs. At the time people worshipped the grandeur of nature, but Wright's book was written to connect people intimately with the wonders of the environment in their own backyards. The book was reviewed favorably in *The Auk* (scientific journal of the American Ornithologists Union) and a number of other publications including the New York Times.

Wright's scientific knowledge of birds came through her friendship with Joel Allen, curator of the American Museum of Natural History, and Frank Chapman, his assistant. She studied with them in 1894-95 and in 1895 she published her second book, *Birdcraft*, which gave identification information for each bird, its song and habitat along with her personal observations of their behavioral characteristics. This inexpensive book filled a void for American birders and was praised by the likes of John Burroughs. It was reprinted nine times and served as the most popular bird guide until Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds* was published in 1934. In 1895 she followed with a bird book for children, *Citizen Bird*. She published many other books (27 in all) including a field guide to plants, *Flowers and Ferns in Their Haunts* (1901) and wrote innumerable articles on conservation issues throughout her life.

Her passion for birds and concern for the degradation of the environment led Wright to found the Connecticut Audubon Society in 1898 where she espoused a mission of education and legislation. Under her guidance the Connecticut Audubon Society proposed bills and backed legislation on a wide range of conservation topics including regulating hunting (1907), protecting birds and their eggs from collectors (1911), protecting sandpipers (1912), the International Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918) and against a bounty on Bald Eagles (1919). They supported the creation of national parks and forest reserves including the White Mountain National For-



*Courtesy of Connecticut Audubon Society  
Mabel Osgood Wright*

est. She was elected to the American Ornithologists Union, and when the National Association of Audubon Societies was formed in 1905, she joined as one of its founding Board of Directors. This confederation of state organizations was incorporated as the National Audubon Society in 1940, however the Connecticut Audubon Society remained independent as did Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey and several other Audubon Societies.

Wright became associate editor of *Bird-Lore*, (later the official publication of the National Audubon Society), a bi-monthly publication founded in 1899 by Frank Chapman which was devoted to the study and protection of birds. She held this post for 11 years until 1910 and was then a contributing editor for the rest of her life.

*Bird-Lore* gave Wright a platform to educate the public on

conservation issues with her scientifically accurate and often humorous articles. In her first article she stated what may have been the first seeds of a dream for Birdcraft: "To introduce people to the bird in the bush is the way to create a public sentiment to keep it there..." She pushed a conservation legislative agenda, and after the laws were passed, she tirelessly lobbied for their enforcement. Becoming increasingly alarmed by the loss of bird habitat from cutting firewood and construction, one of her frequent topics was the need to set aside land for "songbird reservations." She was successful in this effort on a local level when she founded Birdcraft with financial help from her birding friend, Annie Burr Jennings, an heir to a Standard Oil fortune.

Wright's resolve to found a "songbird reservation" became action after she and some friends went to see a play called "Sanctuary; a Bird Masque" concerning a feather hunter who became a bird conservationist. The play was written to celebrate the opening of the Meriden, New Hampshire Bird Sanctuary. Declaring, "Connecticut must have a sanctuary and you must make it," Jennings gave her a free hand in the selection of property. Eventually two parcels were under consideration; a parcel of 100 acres located four miles from town and a ten acre parcel which was close to the center and a short walk from the train station. The smaller parcel won out. It had been a pasture but it had a number of bird friendly trees; pepperidge, wild cherry, oak, maple and cedar and the slopes contained lots of berry bushes. Its location across the street from Mosswood (Wright's home) and so near public transportation (better to accommodate visitors) were deciding factors.

As soon as title passed, they set to work. They constructed a "cat-proof fence" around the property, cut trails, planted bird friendly shrubs, built seats, observation shelters, bird baths, a caretaker's cottage and other amenities. Stones from the property were gathered to make rustic gate posts containing nest holes, walls and a fireplace for a room in the cottage which was to serve as the place for the Connecticut Audubon Society to hold its meetings. They dredged out a pond which



was fed by several springs and in early October the pond attracted a Black-bellied Plover, its first record. On October 16, 1914 Birdcraft Sanctuary was opened to the public.

Wright's original plan was to have the sanctuary be a refuge for birds but also to serve an educational purpose, to allow the public in to observe them and to hold children's classes. It became so popular with nearly 1,000 visitors in the first month, that the birds disappeared. The next meeting of the Board was a depressing affair. What to do? The public proved unschooled in the ways of bird watching. They rushed about in squads and the children were impatient, playing tag and hide and seek. This was the fall. What would spring be like when the birds were trying to nest? The Board of Governors decided to limit admission and require some sort of qualification for entry, but a different solution soon became evident.

People began bringing in dead birds that they found and wanted to learn about them. The caretaker they had hired, Frank Novak, was not only a gifted birder but also a taxidermist and he stuffed the donated specimens so they could be displayed. After a few weeks of seeing how eager the public was to learn from the mounted specimens, it became clear that the best way to introduce people to the birds was to teach identification from the mounts.

They planned a one-room museum, 25 x 16 feet, constructed in the same style as the cottage. The walls would have seasonal dioramas populated with the smaller birds that would be seen locally at each season of the year. Larger birds would be displayed on shelves over the dioramas. Again Annie Burr Jennings provided the funding. Work began in late November 1914. A talented board member painted the backgrounds for the dioramas, the accessories for the foregrounds were found objects from the area; portions of fences, small shrubs, etc. Frank Novak mounted the appropriate specimens in life-like poses and they were placed in the dioramas. They decided not to clutter the scenes with name labels and Frank Novak (who had come initially as a construction

worker) was to become guide and curator, sharing his vast knowledge of birds, nesting strategies and food preferences.

The museum opened in March and was an instant success. By July 1 1,300 people had visited, ranging in skill from professional ornithologists to eager school children. Wright also visited the schools and was a familiar sight lugging smaller versions of the dioramas, back and forth from the museum. Nesting was undisturbed as visitors viewed the birds from the museum or in carefully monitored groups with 52 nests discovered that first year.

The "cat proof fence" proved not to be so cat proof after all and Wright walked the trails daily in search of cats, accompanied by her spaniel, Lark. Frank Novak displayed yet another skill, as a marksman, and the cat population dwindled. Records show that 107 cats were taken in the first three years of its operation. The practice of the era was to remove "problem species" including not only invasives like House Sparrows but also such predatory birds as Cooper's Hawks and Northern Shrikes. Such practices have long been discontinued and modern conservationists would be horrified.

Putting aside this unfortunate aspect of Birdcraft's history, it became a nationwide model, described in *Bird-Lore* by Frank Chapman as "an object lesson in conservation and museum methods...Ten acres cannot harbor many birds nor a little museum in the country be seen by a large number of people, but the idea which they embody can reach to the ends of the earth." Visitors came from all over the country to examine this educational model. It became the inspiration for the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Sanctuary in Oyster Bay after a visit by his widow, seeking a fitting memorial.

Wright died in 1934, but the educational programs continued, the little sanctuary next to the railroad tracks inspiring generations of birders with its intimate displays of the birds of Connecticut. Additions over the years included more dioramas of habitats and a wing donated by the Bedford family to display a collection of African animal mounts. Major

change arrived in 1957 with the siting of I-95. Plans called for it to bisect the sanctuary with the highway taking nearly half the land for the highway and a rest stop. Appeals were futile with the state refusing to recognize the land's value as a sanctuary. The initial offer of \$20,000.00 was eventually settled at \$42,000.00, no compensation at all for the enormous loss.

Now nestled between the highway and the railroad, it remains a surprising bird magnet, especially during migration when exhausted birds see the little pond and the dense shelter in the midst of all the asphalt. The bird banding program begun in the early 1970's continues today under the leader-



*Photo courtesy of the Connecticut Audubon Society/Jennifer Prat*

ship of master bander Judy Richardson with 124 different species banded to date. Educational programs linked with current state curriculum standards are offered to thousands of regional school children annually at the sanctuary.

Birdcraft Sanctuary and Museum was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 and registered as a National Historic Landmark in 1993. It is a stop on the Connecticut Women's Heritage Trail. The Connecticut Ornithological

Association was founded there in 1981. Its annual Mabel Osgood Wright Award, which recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the study and conservation of birds in Connecticut, was instituted in her honor.

In 1999 Connecticut Audubon added much needed educational space to the former caretaker's cottage and restored the building, which was in need of repair. Restoration of the museum itself is underway at this time. Thanks to a major gift, the shell of the building has been stabilized and brought up to code. Funds are being sought to install modern educational exhibits inside, while retaining some of the historic features. The Sasqua Garden Club has adopted Birdcraft's grounds. Native plants now enhance the exterior in the immediate area of the buildings and Mabel Osgood Wright's fountain in her beloved wildflower garden has been restored. The commitment to conservation continues.

Birdcraft is located at 314 Unquowa Road, in Fairfield. More information is available at <http://www.ctaudubon.org/birdcraft-museum>.

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# CONNECTICUT FIELD NOTES

Summer, June 1 to July 31, 2015

By Greg Hanisek

As in past reports, the short but complex summer season has been divided into four components to facilitate analysis (or at least make educated guesses). These consist of northbound and southbound migration at either end of the season, the breeding season itself, and the always intriguing roster of lingerers, wanderers and strays.

## Northbound Migration

Although any of the scoters can be found summering on Long Island Sound, a White-winged Scoter on June 2 at Wethersfield Cove on the Connecticut River was probably waiting out a rainy day before moving north (PCi). Common Loons continued to push northward on soggy June 2, with a flyover in Southbury (GH), two on Lake Waramaug in New Preston (GH) and four at Batterson Pond in Farmington (PDe). A Red-throated Loon was still present June 3 at Milford Point (PDe). Nesting Soras are difficult to detect. A flurry of three calling birds June 3-5 in Goshen, Cornwall and Southbury, some of them in what appeared to be marginal habitat, seemed

more like a migratory fallout than evidence of breeding (TG, GH, BB). Typical June shorebird migration included a Red Knot and a White-rumped Sandpiper on June 1 at Milford Point (BB), and five Red Knots the same day at Griswold Point in Old Lyme (NB). Seven Red Knots were at Milford Point on June 6 (DM). Rain brought down a Black Tern and a Forster's Tern June 2 at Bantam Lake in Litchfield (GH et al.). A Black Tern may still have been northbound June 14 in the Norwalk Islands (MSO).

A late group of 21 Common Nighthawks moved from southwest to northeast over New Hartford on June 5 (DRo). One to two Blackpoll Warblers were reported from five locations on June 7 (DRt



*Bill Gridley photo*

*This Common Loon family at Benedict Pond in Norfolk confirmed breeding in Connecticut.*

et al.), with one the next day at both Milford Point and the Farmington Canal Greenway in Hamden (MSc et al). One was at the latter location as late as June 14 (MSc). A Mourning Warbler, typically a late migrant, was in Cornwall on June 13 (GH).

### **Southbound Migration**

A probable American Golden-Plover appeared at Milford Point on the early date of July 25 (CB). This raised the possibility that it could be the nearly identical Pacific Golden-Plover. (One of this species was reported in Newfoundland July 16). However, the brevity of the observation made the question moot. Three Whimbrels were at Hammonasset Beach

State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) on July 3 (RR), and two were flybys July 14 at Stratford Point (FM, PCo). A high count of up to five came from the East River marshes in Madison on July 24-30 (KM et al.). Other singles were in Old Saybrook on July 26 (GH, JH) and at Sandy Point, West Haven, on July 29-30 (TK et al.).

The season ended with two seen from the New London-Orient, N.Y., ferry on July 31 (PW). The first Pectoral Sandpiper appeared at Milford Point on July 17 (NB), and one was at Windham Airport, North Windham, on July 21 (PR). On July 21 at Milford Point nine species of shorebirds included a "western" Willet and 800+ Semi-

palmated Sandpipers (FM). On July 30 the Semipalmated number reached 4000 (PCo). Juvenile Bonaparte's Gulls typically make a first appearance along the coast in mid-summer. The first report was of a first-summer bird on June 27 at Milford Point (CL, MV), followed by an unusual number of adults. Two adults in full alternate plumage were at Long Beach, Stratford, on July 16 (FM), and one to two including some adults were at various coastal locations through period's end (TM, FM et al.). A Black Tern was at Griswold Point, Old Lyme, on July 31 (HG).

The area north of Hartford and west of the Connecticut River has developed into a significant southbound staging area for Northern Rough-winged Swallows. "Hundreds" were reported from Windsor Locks Canal State Park on July 19, without a single Tree Swallow detected (PDe). A small flurry of Red-breasted Nuthatches produced singles July 23 in New Haven (GH) and Seymour (ES) and July 24 at two locations in Watertown (GH, JMa), but a major flight never materialized. The

well-defined mid-summer movement of Red-winged Blackbirds produced a flight of 2800 at Lighthouse Point in New Haven on July 23 (GH, BB).

### **Lingerers, Wanderers and Strays**

Lingering waterfowl included two Brant at Milford Point on July 22 (FM), a Blue-winged Teal June 15-17 at HBSP (MK), a Ring-necked Duck June 7 in East Haddam (AD), one Black Scoter June 7 and two June 30 at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford (FH, FM). In recent years Long-tailed Ducks have been the most numerous summering seaducks in Long Island Sound; the trend continued with a high of eight on June 12 at Milford Point (FM et al.) and one to three at various other locations through the season (RM et al.). A Ruddy Duck was found June 10 at HBSP (JCa), and a pair of Ruddys were in Old Saybrook on June 15 (AO). Perhaps these same two were at Harkness on July 5 (TC). Those were followed by an adult male July 21-24 on the Hockenum River in East Hartford (PCi).

A Red-necked Grebe was late June 9 at Milford Point (JCo), and possibly the same bird was quite unexpected as late as June 16-17 off Stamford (WS et al.). Three Wilson's Storm-Petrels were noted from the New London ferry July 12 (JSt). Three **American White Pelicans** on the move June 4 in East Haven were a seasonal highlight (LJ). The best post-breeding heron aggregation was at Shell Beach on July 30: 150 Snowy Egrets, 35 Great Egrets and two Little Blue Herons (JOs). Ten Great Egrets were inland the same day near the Connecticut River in Hartford (PDe). The only inland report of Snowy Egret was one on July 17 at Wethersfield Cove (PCi). An immature Little Blue Heron was inland

July 9 at Hop Brook Lake in Naugatuck (GH), and an adult was in Wilton on July 10 (MW). The season's only Cattle Egret was at Maynard's Pond in Old Saybrook July 25-30 (DC et al.). It's hard to make it through a season without a **Sandhill Crane** anymore. This spring one stopped off in Wallingford June 20-22 (GS, SZ), and three flew over Meriden on July 18 (PCo).

A post-breeding group of 103 Killdeer was at Windham Airport, North Windham, on July 21 (PR). A top seasonal rarity was a male **Ruff** present June 29-30 at Plum Bank Marsh in Old Saybrook (AO, FM et al.). A **Gull-billed Tern** photographed at Harkness on June



*Julian Hough photo  
This Cattle Egret, shown here on July 26, 2015 in  
Old Saybrook, paid one of the species' increasingly  
infrequent visits.*





*Jeri Duefrene photo  
This Gull-billed Tern's June visit to Harkness  
Memorial State Park in Waterford marked one of the  
species' less than annual appearances.*

20 (JD) highlighted an excellent tern season with eight species reported. Three of the unpredictable Caspian Terns flew over Branford on June 25 (GN); other singles were at Shell Beach in Guilford on July 3 (JMa) and at South Cove, Old Saybrook, on July 26 (JOg). Single Royal Terns, more often seen post-breeding, were good finds June 10 at HBSP (CE) and June 11 off Wesport (JW). Black Skimmers made a notable appearance, with nine at Milford Point on June 1 (GH et al.) and 12 there two days later (PDe), but no breeding was detected anywhere. One cruised around Norwalk harbor on June 14 (NB), and another was at Stratford Point on July 27 (PCo). The most

spectacular rarity, the state's third record of a **Burrowing Owl**, was photographed June 27-29 at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, in an area closed to the public (RT). A Dickcissel sang in appropriate breeding habitat on June 7 at Pond Grassland on the Woodbury-Roxbury line (RB), but it could not be relocated.

### **Breeding Season**

Of special interest was the discovery of four small Common Eider ducklings at Avery Point in Groton on June 14 (TG). Despite its increased summer presence (nine were off Harkness June 30 – FM, TG), this species has yet to be confirmed as a state nester. The ducklings suggested

local breeding, but lacking a nest it couldn't be certain they hadn't originated in New York or Rhode Island. Common Mergansers are well-established as nesters in Northwest Connecticut, but nine juveniles on the Salmon River in East Haddam on July 19 were a good find east of the Connecticut River (HG). Away from Litchfield County, a Ruffed Grouse in Chaplin was a noteworthy find (PR). The observer noted that logging in the nearby Natchaug State Forest may have created the successional habitat this species favors.

The season's most significant find was the state's first confirmed nesting of Common Loons in historic times, with two downy young closely monitored at Benedict Pond in Norfolk (BG et al.). Goose Island in Westport held a nesting colony of 400 to 500 Double-crested Cormorants on July 2 (LF, LM). At least one Least Bittern was in suitable nesting habitat in Old Saybrook June 22 (FM et al.). A Great Blue Heron rookery in Simsbury held 39 chicks on June 12 (PCi). A Sharp-shinned Hawk was in appropriate nesting habitat June 23 in Morris (PCa); this

is a sparse and elusive nester anywhere in Connecticut. On June 8 three Upland sandpipers were on breeding grounds in East Hartford, but unfortunately this site is slated for development (FM et al.). A boat tour through the Norwalk Islands on June 4 netted 35 American Oystercatchers, indicative of a healthy breeding population in Long Island Sound (LF). A repeat on July 2 yielded an impressive 57 (41 adults and 16 juveniles), along with 150 adult and young Great Black-backed Gulls on Goose Island in Westport (LF, LM). Three Roseate Terns, presumably from the small Faulkner Island breeding colony in Guilford, were at Milford Point on June 11 (FM). Scattered Roseates in late July in the eastern end of Long Island Sound were probably from breeding sites in New York (m.ob.)

A Common Nighthawk on June 4 in downtown New Haven may represent the last breeding site in the state (LB). One in Killingly on June 8 was not reported thereafter. A DEEP survey of managed forest cuts in Naugatuck State Forest in Naugatuck turned up two Whip-poor-

wills on June 7 (Jsw). Among the state's scarcer nesting songbirds, Acadian Flycatcher and White-eyed Vireo seem to be holding steady or increasing somewhat. A Yellow-breasted Chat was on territory through June in Southbury (RN et al.), but no evidence of a mate was found. Another was at Bluff Point in Groton on June 7 (TG). These instances show a potential for breeding, but no pairs have been confirmed in many years.

Suffield Wildlife Management Area in West Suffield, maintained in part to compensate for bird-rich grassland habitat lost to development in East Hartford, held at least two Grasshopper Sparrows and three Eastern Meadowlarks during June (JMa et al.). Seven Eastern Meadowlarks in two family groups were at Windham Airport on June 27 (PR). Pine Siskins persisted into June with some breeding likely. Small numbers continued to visit feeders in Canaan (TS) and Bent of the River Audubon in Southbury (KE). As many as 14 were still at the Canaan site on June 4, and 12 were there the next day (TS). One showed itself in Harwin-

ton on July 11 (PCa).

Exotics – Three Egyptian Geese were present for about three weeks in June at Old Saybrook (JOG). It's worth looking for signs of breeding for this species, which is now established as a nester in Florida and in western Europe.

Observers – Renee Baade, Bill Banks, Larry Bausher, Nick Bono-mo, Jim Carr (JCa), Paul Carrier (PCa), Paul Cianfaglione (PCi), Dan Cimbaro, Patrick Comins (PCo), Tom Cordock, Jim Cortina (JCo), Andrew Dasinger, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Buzz Devine, Jeri Duefrene, Patrick Dugan (PDu), Ken Elkins, Chris Elphick, Mike Ferrari, Larry Flynn, Frank Gallo, Hank Golet, Tina Green, Bill Gridley, Greg Hanisek, Fran Holloway, Tom Holloway, Julian Hough, Lynn James, Thomas Kelly, Jay Kaplan, Mickey Komara, Chris Loscalzo, Frank Mantlik, John Marshall (JMa), Luis Martin, Deborah McTigue, Jamie Meyers (JMe), Keith Mueller, Tom Murray, Robert Miller, Russ Naylor, Gina Nichol, Anders Ogren, John Ogren (JOG), John Oshlick (JOs), Robert Reginio, Dave Rosgen (DRo), Dan Rottino (DRt), Phil Rusch, Ed Sadowski, Tom Schaefer, Will Schenk Jr., Mark Scott (MSc), Gini Selvaggi, Russ Smiley, Michelle Sorensen (MSo), J. Stepenoski (Jst), Jack Swatt (Jsw), Mark Szantyr, Rollin Tebbetts, Marianne Vahey, Mike Warner, James Winklemann, Paul Wolter, Sara Zagorski.

# NOTES ON BEHAVIOR, STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION

## An Encounter at Cockenoe

While doing an American Oystercatcher survey of the Norwalk Islands by boat on July 31, 2015, Luis Martin and I came across a spectacular encounter. On the Cockenoe Island sandbar in Westport, 200 or so Common Terns suddenly flushed, with 100 flying west and another hundred flying east.

At first we saw no cause for the flush, but in a few seconds, Luis shouted "Peregrine Falcon!"

Sure enough, we saw a young peregrine chasing the eastern group of terns, and it had one weak lone young tern plastered against the water. The falcon stooped and stooped from low distances on the tern, which could no longer take flight. It was looking really bad for the young (now possibly injured) tern.

Out of nowhere the tide changed. The entire eastern tern flock that had been fleeing the scene now turned course and attacked the peregrine!

This was one incredible moment as we followed the tern colony actually drive the falcon out of the area and off toward Compo Beach. Wow! The terns eventually settled down and went back to business.

Other interactions were several Double-crested Cormorants surfacing with fish only to be immediately pirated of their catch by Great Black-back Gulls. One cormorant had a large eel, which the gulls divided among themselves.

It's just incredible how life plays out...out there. National Geographic at it's best! It was simply magical that Luis and I were there to catch a small glimpse of some of those theatrics today.

Larry Flynn

Norwalk

## Turning The Tables On An Osprey

During late summer I saw the coolest Osprey interaction that I have ever witnessed. Sitting on a cottage front deck in Madison, I was watching an osprey circle and make several diving attempts at a small school of bunker.

On the sixth circle and dive it made the classic plunge into Long Island Sound. After the typical splash the osprey popped up to the surface. With a few thrusts of its wings it just cleared the surface of the water, slowly going airborne with a small Menhaden. Just as the Osprey cleared the water, another huge splash from below the spot where the osprey broke the surface erupted as a Double-crested Cormorant that I never saw appeared.

The cormorant took off after the departing Osprey, following closely behind. The cormorant began chasing the Osprey! It then caught up to the Osprey and made attempts at stealing the Menhaden from the talons of the raptor.

After many attempts and a distance of 50 yards, the Osprey rolled over in flight and bit the cormorant! The cormorant apparently figured that this was not a good place to be, so it broke off the chase, circled back and landed on the water in the menhaden school.... probably a smart move. That was the most amazing osprey encounter I have ever seen.

**Keith Mueller**

**Killingworth**

## PHOTO CHALLENGE



*There's no reason to be coy about this bird. It's an especially challenging Challenge Photo because no one is positive about its identity. Sparrows prove daunting for many birders, but careful notation of size, shape and plumage usually reveals an identification once any initial sense of confusion subsides. This bird has features of a Nelson's Sparrow, but the yellowish area in and around the lores is suggestive of a Seaside Sparrow. Is it a hybrid of those two species? It's possible but not easily confirmed. Steve Spector photographed this bird in mid-October 2015 at Milford Point.*



Photo Challenge No. 92

# THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Send manuscripts to the Editor. Please type double spaced with ample margins, on one side of a sheet. Submit a copy on a computer disk, if possible. Style should follow usage in recent issues. All manuscripts receive peer review.

Illustrations and photographs are needed and welcome. Line art of Connecticut and regional birds should be submitted as good quality prints or in original form. All submitted materials will be returned. We can use good quality photographs of birds unaccompanied by an article but with caption including species, date, locality, and other pertinent information.

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