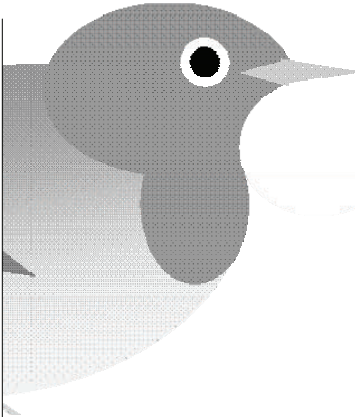
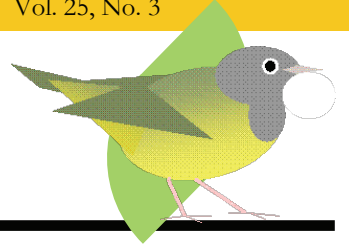


COA BULLETIN

OBSERVATIONS OF THE YELLOW-BELLIED
SAPSUCKER'S USE OF TREE BERRIES

BY PAUL CARRIER

In the spring of 2010, I had the time to monitor the travels and feedings taken by a pair of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers (*Sphyrapicus varius varius*) that were nesting in my neighbor's yard here in Harwinton CT. From mid April, I would often see this pair feeding from a very old pear tree in my yard. Here they made their usual sap well drillings and fed there, and ate many insects trapped in the wells. The most common insects eaten by far were Carpenter Ants that also lived within this pear tree. As nesting began, the pear tree became a continual visit site for both the male and female, but I observed only one bird visiting at a time.

As spring advanced, I noticed the pair feeding frequently on a Red Mulberry (*Morus rubra*) tree's berries. First seen taking mulberries was the male on May 20th, whom I assume was also feeding the female berries while she was on the nest. By mid June both male and female were still eating mulberries, but exhibited no sign of taking them to their nest. This changed on June 20th, when most of the mulberries were gone, consumed by them plus 26 other bird species.

Another early berry-producing tree in the yard was also of interest to these Sapsuckers. I have a wild Serviceberry tree (*Amelanchier* species) that this year was producing an abundance of early berries. It seemed the Mulberry tree was their first choice, but as those berries were consumed, these Sapsuckers turned to the Serviceberry tree's berries. Here I spent the most time observing these birds and their behavior.

The berries on a Serviceberry tree ripen in stages, from green to red then dark blueberry blue. However, the berries do not all change color at the same time. Throughout the ripening stage, the tree can have all three colored berries, with none at any time predominating. Twenty-one species of birds have been observed eating these berries in my yard, and it seems many species have no problem eating them in all the different color stages. Not so the Sapsucker. This pair of Sapsucker seemed to prefer the nearly ripe to all ripe berries, for I did not see them harvest any that were not deep red or dark blue.

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Recognize this sparrow?
If not, plan to attend the
COA Workshop on Oct. 3.
ID on Page 7.

COA SPARROW WORKSHOP

WHEN: Sunday, October 3
8:00am–12:00pm

WHERE: Silver Sands State
Park, Milford, CT

RAIN DATE: Sunday, October
17



Swamp Sparrow photo by
Tom Sayers

LEADERS: Frank Mantlik
and others TBA

No pre-registration is necessary. This workshop is free and open to the public. Birders of all levels and ranges of experience are encouraged and welcome to attend.

SAPSUCKERS AND BERRIES

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

By positioning a chair near the Serviceberry tree, I observed their comings and goings for the better part of three days, and here is what I discovered. It was quite apparent the babies had just fledged, for upon leaving this tree with berries in bill, both birds headed for different areas in the woods near where they nested, having on average 5 to 6 young to feed. Both parents visited the Serviceberry tree alone, but more often together. They visited at 8-minute intervals, on average, collecting berries at the tree for 8 minutes, then being absent for 8 more minutes while feeding the young. After continual visits for a half hour collecting and transporting berries, they then took a half hour break in between. I assumed these were personal breaks for each bird to relax.

Of all the species of birds seen utilizing this tree of berries, it was apparent most preferred gathering them closer to the trunk first, then as they became scarce there, traveled out further towards the branch tips. The berries near the tips were only available being taken on the wing. Most species picked the berries directly from the branch they were perched on, but interestingly, all the woodpecker species preferred to gather on the wing the outermost berries. The other woodpecker species seen gathering berries from this tree were: Red Bellied, Hairy, Downy, and once a Flicker.

The most common gathering habit the male Sapsucker used was to first pick 3 different berries on the wing and store them in a crack of the trunk, then gather another two in his throat and return to the trunk, picking up the other 3 stored there (totaling 5 berries), then flying off in the direction of the young. This berry gathering continued for these Sapsuckers daily for over two weeks, until finally the outermost berries were completely gone.

It might be surmised from these observations that Sapsuckers take full advantage of the rather easy availability of this berry food source to help, or even be the primary source of food given to their recently fledged young. Compared to searching for and finding insects or drilling for tree sap, abundant berries seem to be the perfect solution to feeding hungry and growing fledglings.

Some interesting data about what Sapsuckers eat:

On early arrival to their breeding grounds, the Sapsuckers utilize tree sap and its cambium layer as the first and sometimes only available food source. As the spring progresses, insects are added, especially ants, wasps and other Hymenoptera, some beetles, grubs and worms. I personally observed in May this year, a Sapsucker gleaning my open lawn, hopping about as a Flicker would, searching for ants and grubs. Fly catching is also documented. Curiously, data I have found suggests Sapsuckers, unlike many other woodpeckers, do not eat or search for wood-boring larvae. Fruit also provides an important source for food when available, such as berries of Dogwood, Virginia creeper, black cherry, Red Cedar, Grape, Pokeweed, Sassafras, Elderberry and Apple. From my observations, I would also like to add, Mulberry and Serviceberry to this list.

Literature cited:

Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers
Arthur C. Bent – Dover 1964

*American Wildlife and Plants:
A Guide to Wildlife Food Habits.*
Martin, Zim, Nelson – Dover 1951

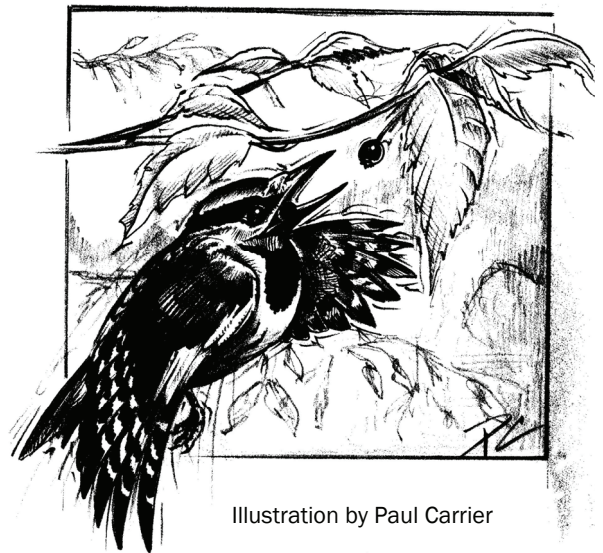


Illustration by Paul Carrier

COA Contributes \$1,000 towards Barn Island Addition

By Patrick Comins, COA President

The Connecticut DEP is currently working with partners to acquire additional parcels adjacent to Barn Island Wildlife Management Area in Stonington and is in the process of applying for funding through the USFWS North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) small grants program. Partnership is a key component of the program and more points are awarded when multiple partners contribute funds towards a project. COA's gift of \$1000 will give the DEP additional points on their grant application and should increase their chances for funding. Parcels that will be added to Barn Island are the hay-fields along Palmer neck Road, where birders often stop to see the nest-ways to or from Barn Island. In addition to the nesting Bobolinks, this parcel includes tidal wetlands that provide habitat in the nesting and migration season. Over the years this property has been a hotspot for rarities, and has hosted visits by a Barnacle Goose, a Sandhill Crane and White-faced Ibis. It regularly hosts other migrant and nesting birds, such as large flocks of foraging Glossy Ibis in the spring and migrant American Kestrels and Merlins. This parcel is also a key buffer for tidal marsh along Wequetequock Cove and offers landward migration potential for the marsh as sea levels rise.



Barn Island illustration by Catherine Hamilton

<http://mydogoscar.com/birdspot>

how proposals are evaluated and more points are awarded when multiple partners contribute funds towards a project. COA's DEP additional points on their grant application and should increase their chances for funding. Parcels that will be added to Barn Island are the hay-fields along Palmer neck Road, where birders often stop to see the nest-ways to or from Barn Island. In addition to the nesting Bobolinks, this parcel includes tidal wetlands that provide habitat in the nesting and migration season. Over the years this property has been a hotspot for rarities, and has hosted visits by a Barnacle Goose, a Sandhill Crane and White-faced Ibis. It regularly hosts other migrant and nesting birds, such as large flocks of foraging Glossy Ibis in the spring and migrant American Kestrels and Merlins. This parcel is also a key buffer for tidal marsh along Wequetequock Cove and offers landward migration potential for the marsh as sea levels rise.

White-tailed Kite at Stratford, August, 2010

This beautiful raptor, a white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*), delighted birders from Connecticut and many other states during the entire month of August. It was first sighted by Dennis Varza on August 1 near Stratford Point, and was routinely seen hunting there and over Milford Point.

If accepted by COA's Avian Rare Records Committee, it would be Connecticut's first record of this species. If you have photos or other documentation regarding this bird, please submit all data to the ARRC.

Submission details may be found at www.ctbirding.org/rare_report.htm



Photo by Mark Szantyr



23 birders showed up on a rainy Sunday morning (August 22) for COA's annual shorebird workshop, organized by new Workshops Committee Chair Tina Green. Despite some early rain, highlights of the event included a Hudsonian godwit at Sandy Point, West Haven, and four stilt sandpipers and a flyover black tern at Milford Point. Next up on the schedule is a Sparrow Workshop at Silver Sands State Park in Milford on October 3. See Page 1 for details, or check the COA Birding Events Calendar at <http://www.ctbirding.org/calendar.htm>

FESTIVAL SEASON IS HERE

Mark your calendars now for these upcoming bird-related events

Cabela's/Ducks Unlimited Northeast Waterfowl Festival

September 18 and 19, 2010

Cabela's, 475 East Hartford Blvd. North, East Hartford, CT

www.cabelas.com or www.northeastwaterfowlfestival.com

Great Stratford Bird Festival

September 24–26, 2010

Perry House, 1129 West Broad St., Stratford, CT

www.stratfordbirdfestival.com

New Haven Migration Festival

September 26, 2010 8:00am–2:00pm

Lighthouse Point Park, Lighthouse Road, New Haven CT

<http://www.cityofnewhaven.com/parks/parksinformation/lighthousepoint.asp#Introduction>

Schedule: <http://www.ctbirding.org/2010docs/2010MigrationFestSchedule.pdf>

Hawkwatch Festival and Green Bazaar

October 9–10, 2010

Aududon Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT

http://greenwich.audubon.org/Programs_SpecialEvents_AnnualFestivals-HawkWatch2010.html



Red-tailed hawk photo by
Mike Ferrari

[Invasive Plant Symposium October 14 at UConn](#)

On Thursday, October 14, 2010, COA will co-sponsor the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group (CIPWG) symposium entitled ***Challenges and Successes: Working Cooperatively to Manage Invasive Plants***. The symposium, open to the public, will take place from 8 am – 4 pm at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. Keynote speaker, Dr. Bernd Blossey, will present "The Power of Choice: New Frontiers in Invasive Plant Management and Conservation." Concurrent afternoon sessions will cover the industry perspective – what's working, early detection & rapid response, invasives management research, invaded forests, Cooperative Weed Management Areas, and local success stories. Research posters and other educational exhibits will be featured throughout the day. The registration fee, including parking, information packet, lunch, and other refreshments, is \$40 (postmarked by September 18) and \$55 if postmarked after September 18 or for walk-in registrations. Student fee, with ID, is \$25. CT DEP Pesticide Recertification and other Continuing Education Credits are available. The program agenda and registration information are available at www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg. For additional information, or to be mailed a paper copy of the registration brochure, contact Donna Ellis at (860) 486-6448.



Mile-a Minute vine
(*Polygonum perfoliatum*)



Garlic mustard
(*Alliaria petiolata*)

Find lots of birding opportunities and bird-related events by visiting the COA Birding Events Calendar at <http://www.ctbirding.org/calendar.htm>.



COA Funds Purple Martin Houses in Stratford and Milford

COA sponsored gourd trees for purple martins at Stratford Point and Milford Point this year. According to Dr. Twan Leenders of the Connecticut Audubon Society, they went up too late in the season to have martins nesting in them. However, the one at Milford Point is adjacent to an existing traditional purple martin house that has previously had two or three nesting pairs (as well as many House Sparrow nests) in it. That gourd tree has been tried and tested by the local martins and will very likely be used next year.

The gourd tree at Stratford Point has drawn in a few martins (likely from Milford Point) which came to check it out. Stratford Point is an important stopover site for swallows during their fall migration and many martins will spend some time there, or at least fly by. Dr. Leenders is hoping that a few of these scouts will return as breeders next year.

Gourd tree at Stratford Point.
Photo by Twan Leenders

The Stratford Point gourd tree suffered some significant damage in the violent storms of June. It is however upright again

and intact, but still needs to have some more concrete poured to make the base bigger and better able to withstand the 100mph winds that can occasionally occur at Stratford Point.

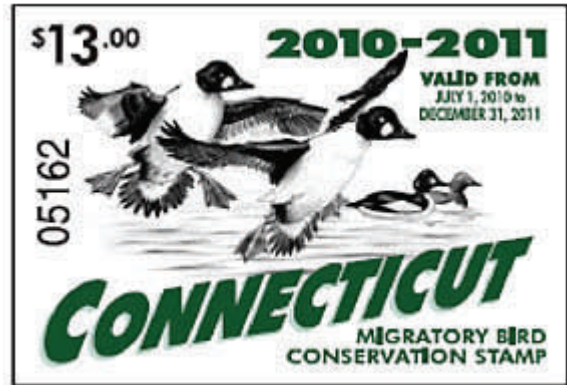
Dr. Leenders and his staff will monitor the use of these gourd trees and report back to COA on their use next year.



New and original purple martin housing at Milford Point.
Photo by Denise Jernigan

Duck Stamps Support Wetland Conservation

COA encourages birders to consider purchase of the current Migratory Bird Conservation stamp (aka Connecticut Duck Stamp.) The Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, once threatened with merger into the state's General Fund, has been re-created, meaning that all money collected from the sale of the stamps will go directly toward wetland conservation projects and improvement of waterfowl hunting access in Connecticut . Because the state is changing over to a calendar year, stamps purchased now will be good through December 31, 2011. At \$13.00, that's a bargain for birders and hunters both. Stamps are available at town halls, select DEP facilities, outdoor equipment and bait and tackle stores, the DEP's License and Revenue office at 79 Elm Street in Hartford, or on the DEP Web site at www.ct.gov/dep/sportsmenlicensing .



The 2010-2011 stamp features the Common Goldeneye by wildlife artist Clint Herdman of Beacon Falls, CT.

GIVE A GIFT OF COA MEMBERSHIP

New Member Renewal Gift

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail address* _____

COA is always in need of volunteer help. If you are interested, please check the areas below that you would like to know more about::

Computer skills Events Field trips Finance Workshops Science

Membership Category:

- Student (\$15)
- Individual (\$25)
- Family (\$35)
- Contributing (\$50)
- Donor (\$75)
- Benefactor (\$100)
- Lifetime (\$1000; payable in 3 annual installments)

Send this form with your check or money order to:

Connecticut Ornithological Association
 314 Unquowa Road
 Fairfield, CT 06824

* COA does not release its membership list to other organizations

Dues are tax deductible as allowed by law

The COA Bulletin is the quarterly newsletter of the Connecticut Ornithological Association, published in February, May, September, and December. Please submit materials for the next issue by November 1, to:

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SPARROW ID ANSWER



photo by Tom Sayers
 Lincoln's Sparrow

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<i>Connecticut Warbler</i>	Greg Hanisek
<i>COA Bulletin</i>	Denise Jernigan
<i>Rare Records</i>	Jay Kaplan
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<i>Science Advisory</i>	Milan Bull

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at www.ctbirding.org

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