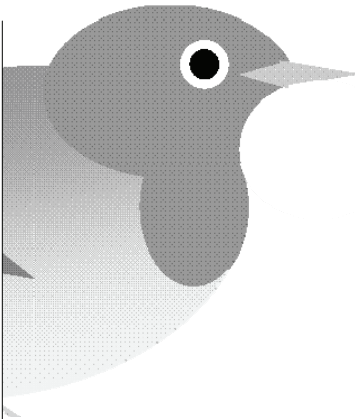
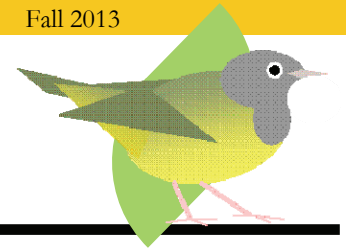


# COA BULLETIN



## EYES TO THE SKIES: THE HAWK MASTER OF LIGHTHOUSE POINT BY SARA ZAGORSKI

Stop by Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven on any Sunday from September through November and you will find The Hawk Master at his post. Either at the top of the hill by the picnic bench, or walking around the perimeter of the hill with his dog Sandy, Steve Mayo is on the job. From early in the morning until late afternoon, he will be recording the number and species of all the birds that can be seen from the official hawk watch post on the hill. Steve is the Coordinator of the Lighthouse Point Hawk Watch and sets the schedules and compiles the statistics for the volunteer counters who help staff the site.



Steve Mayo and Sandy

How does one become a Hawk Master? The short answer is that Steve has been volunteering as a counter at the site on and off since 1987, and took over the compiler duties from Ron Bell in 2007. The longer answer is more interesting. Steve grew up in Old Wethersfield and used to ride his bike into the Wethersfield Meadows armed with his trusty *Peterson Field Guide*. At that time Steve thought that only ornithologists would see all the birds illustrated in the book. His interest in birds continued as he got older and in September 1987 he was looking at shorebirds in New Haven Harbor and asked George Letis if all the birds he was looking at were Wilson's Plovers. George informed him they were Semipalmated Plovers, and invited Steve to a New Haven Bird Club event that was being held soon at Lighthouse Point. Brian Wheeler was there signing his innovative Peterson Guide to Hawks, but what interested

Steve the most was the hawk watching scene at the park. There were strong Northwest winds that day and the hawks were pouring in, soaring low over the hill. An eleven year old boy was running around pointing out Sharp-shinned Hawks in the crowd of birds. That day recorded 333 hawks, 215 of them being Sharp-shins. Steve was amazed by two things: that there were many people who seriously watch birds, and that bird identification could not be that overwhelming if kids were doing it. He was hooked and went back to the hawk watch site every weekend after that.

Lighthouse Point Park is the largest coastal hawk watch site in New England. Jutting out from the coast with Morris Creek and East Haven to the east; New Haven Harbor to the west; and Long Island Sound to the south, it creates a peninsula funnel for the migrants. Birds migrating south hit the point and are confused by all the water around them, causing them to pull back and try to fly to the west or northwest to escape crossing any of the surrounding water. Unlike inland hawk watch counts that have one September (Broad-winged Hawk) or rarely two (Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture) seasons, Lighthouse gets a wide variety of diurnal raptors during migration. The season starts out with Sharp-shinned Hawks, Ospreys,

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## Upcoming Events

**September 12 (Thursday)**

7:00 pm

**Connecticut Audubon Society Annual Meeting**

Pequot Library, 720 Pequot Ave., Southport, CT

**September 14 (Saturday)**

9:30 am

**COA Raptor Workshop**

Boothe Memorial Park, 5774 Main St. Putney, Stratford, CT 06614

**September 21 (Saturday)**

2:00 pm—6:00 pm

**BENTFEST** - the Bent of the River Festival

185 East Flat Hill Road, Southbury, CT 06488

**September 22 (Sunday)**

8:00 am—3:00 pm

**Lighthouse Point Park Migration Festival**

Lighthouse Point Park, New Haven, CT

“Celebrating Birds, Butterflies, and Dragonflies”

8:00 am - ongoing

Hawk Watching (mid field viewing area)

8:00 am to 9:30 am

Bird Walk led by Chris Loscalzo

8:30 am to 11:00 am

Bird Banding Demo w/ CT Audubon Society

9:00 am to 10:00 am

Hawk Flight I.D. Workshop

Led by CT Ornithological Association members

9:30 am to 10:45 am

Children’s Bird Walk led by Flo McBride

9:30 am to 10:45 am

Bird Walk led by Mike Horn

9:30 am to 3:00 pm

Monarch Butterfly Tagging in the Butterfly Garden

11:15 am to 12:15

Horizon Wings - Live Raptor Show

9:00 am to 11:30 am

Lighthouse Tours

1:00 pm to 2:00 pm

Lighthouse Tours

12:15 pm to 1:15 pm

Live Music by “5 in the Chamber”

11am to 2:30 pm

Ride the Historic Carousel

1:30 pm to 3:00 pm

“Skyhunters in Flight” - Falconry Demo

**Suggested Donation of \$5.00/car funds next year’s festival**

**September 28 & 29 (Sat & Sun)**

11:00 am—5:00 pm

**HawkWatch Festival & Green Bazaar**

Audubon Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT 06831

**October 19 (Saturday)**

8:00 am

**COA Sparrow Workshop**

Sherwood Island State Park and Audubon Christmas Tree Farm,  
Westport, CT



See COA's [Birding Events Calendar](#) for more field trips, workshops, hawk watches, and other bird-related events

## EASTERN BLUEBIRD HISTORY—WOODBURY/ROXBURY COUNT CIRCLE

BY ANGELA DIMMITT

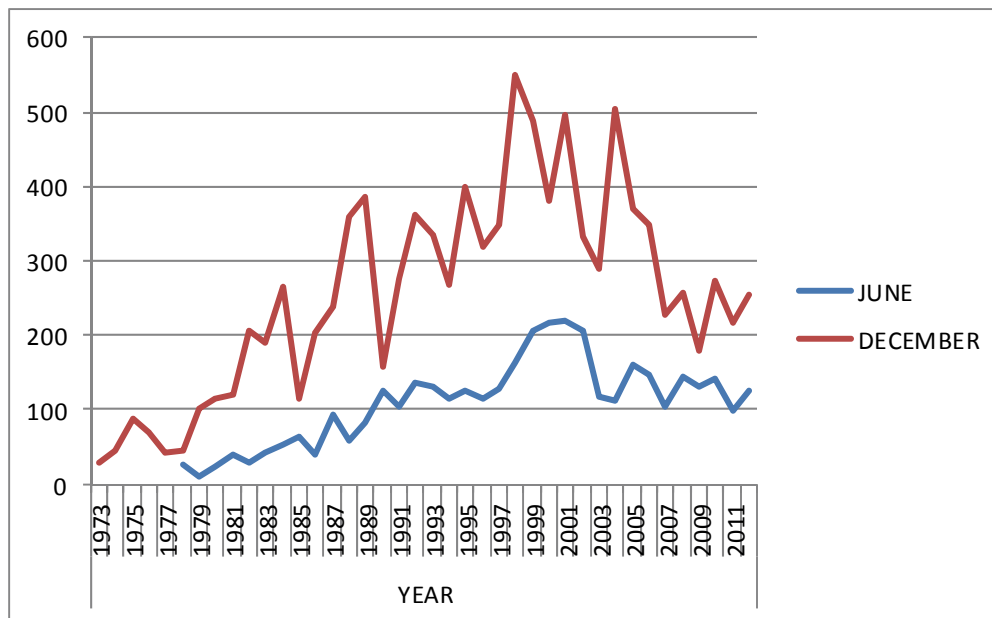
Established in 1973, the Woodbury-Roxbury, CT, (WRCT) count circle held its 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 15, 2012. The Summer Bird Count was started in June 1978, and is always held on the first Sunday in June. The circle is located at 41° 32' N; 73° 17' W, centered at the junction of Upper Grassy Hill Road and Rucum Road in Woodbury, and encompasses the towns of Woodbury, Roxbury, Bethlehem, Bridgewater and Southbury, and parts of New Milford, Brookfield, Middlebury and Washington.



Eastern Bluebird photo by Debbie McTigue

The Woodbury-Roxbury circle is famous for its high bluebird count, and the following traces the ascent and pattern of the bluebird's reestablishment there from December 1973 to 2012, and for the summer count, from June 1978 to this year. With expected ups and downs due to the vagaries of the weather on count day and preceding days/weeks, and the number of people in the field etc., there is nonetheless a remarkable increase in the number of bluebirds for both count periods, with a high count of 550 in December 1998.

Unfortunately, since December 2005, numbers appear to have been declining again. For the summer count, the high was 218 in June 2001, while this year only 94 were recorded. Whether any of this can be attributed to Man (people putting up bluebird boxes) or Nature, one can only guess. This is not a scientific study – but hopefully of interest!



Angela Dimmitt is a long-time COA member and also belongs to the Western CT Bird Club and the Litchfield Hills Audubon Society. She is an area captain for the Woodbury/Roxbury Count Circle, as well as a compiler for the Pawling/Hidden Valley, NY/CT Christmas Count and the New Milford-Pawling Summer Count. She lives in New Milford..

## CONSERVATION NEWS: CTDEEP AGREES TO CONSULT ON STATE PARK BIRDING ISSUES



Widening of this drive at the east end of the Meig's Point Nature Center parking lot at Hammonasset Beach State Park elicited a large and concerned response from the Connecticut birding community. Photo by Jack Faller

On July 24, 2013, COA President Tina Green, Vice-President Kathy Van Der Aue, Conservation Committee members Milan Bull and Patrick Comins, and Audubon Connecticut Director of Governmental Affairs Sandy Breslin met with representatives of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs (DEEP) to discuss concerns of the birding community regarding Connecticut state parks.

The meeting was prompted in part by comments posted to COA's CTBirds listserv, questioning the reasoning behind and the purpose for additional paving in the parking lot adjacent to the Meig's Point Nature Center at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. Additional actions by DEEP staff at other parks were also mentioned as disregarding or being harmful to bird habitat and nesting success. Present at the meeting for DEEP were Deputy Commissioner Susan Whalen, Bureau of Natural Resources Chief Bill Hyatt, State Parks Division Director Tom Tyler, and Policy Director Jessie Stratton. Wildlife Division Director Rick Jacobson sent his regrets and expressed his strong interest in this issue.

Deputy Commissioner Whalen said that in response to issues raised, DEEP has already put in place several processes to improve internal communications and benefit wildlife, including:

- \* Parks and Recreation Division consultation with Wildlife Division before improvements are carried out (for minor improvements)
- \* Annual planning sessions with Wildlife and Parks staff early each season to review planned improvements (for major improvements)
- \* Ensuring that a biologist is consulted and/or on site when conducting activities that have the potential to impact a particular bird or birds
- \* All the DEEP team was extremely upset and sorry about an incident involving the cutting of limbs from a tree used for nesting by a Great Horned Owl family

Continued on next page

## CONSERVATION NEWS (CONT.)

Other issues discussed included:

- \* The possibility of creating new shorebird pools elsewhere at Hammonasset. State Parks Division Director Tom Tyler and staff from the Office of Long Island Sound Programs will follow up on this
- \* The possibility of DEEP working with COA, Audubon Connecticut, and the Connecticut Audubon Society to organize workshops for Parks Division staff on topics related to natural resource management including birds, other wildlife, and plants
- \* Despite a tough budget climate, DEEP gave assurances that the agency is prioritizing the hiring of a non-game biologist to fill the position left vacant by Julie Victoria's retirement. This would increase the Wildlife Division's capacity to provide needed consultation to the Parks Division. (Note: State funding for the agency has decreased, federal support for many positions is reduced or disappearing so staffing remains a significant challenge for the agency. DEEP has also lost a significant number of staff to retirement in the past few years and is about to lose many more.)
- \* Mr. Hyatt (Chief of the Bureau of Natural Resources) stated that despite current staff levels, the Wildlife Division is completely committed to providing any needed consultation
- \* DEEP requested assistance from the birding community to address the problem of increased trash at all the Parks and requested suggestions for solutions

Longer term, the parties agreed to work together to:

- Establish a mechanism for providing park managers with current information about birds and wildlife in their parks. One idea would be to have a liaison from the birding community for each Park who would provide regular updates to the Park Manager on time tables for bird life cycles and any other areas of concern
- Explore mechanisms to address the access issue - a birding stamp, a voluntary license or pass were discussed as possible ways to allow authorized birders to enter the parks prior to their usual opening times, as some fishermen are now allowed to do
- Explore the possibility of meetings with the birding community at other parks in the state to obtain input on resources at those sites

The meeting adjourned with mutual agreements to continue communication and discussion on these topics. The next meeting will be scheduled for October.

**Ed. Note:** Thanks to Sandy Breslin for providing an excellent summary of the meeting. Content of this article is largely based on her report to CTBirds.



Hammonasset Landscape photo by Rick Gravin

## EYES IN THE SKIES (CONT.)

Broad-wing Hawks, and American Kestrels, and then peaks with Cooper's Hawks and Northern Harriers adding to the daily tally. After the peak October days the Red-shouldered Hawks and Red-tailed Hawks are seen in great numbers in November.

There is strong speculation that Professor C.C. Trowbridge's Connecticut hawk observations from 1890-1900 that were published in *The Auk*, took place at Lighthouse Point Park. In 1970 Neil Currie started visiting the park and recording hawk numbers. He was joined by George Letis and other members of the New Haven Bird Club, such as Marjie Pitcher and Arne Rosengren. The hours of coverage started to grow. In the 1980's a local forester and naturalist named Ed Shove started running the count. He had a lot of help in that period from Al Massotta, Tony Tortora, Richard English, Jim McBride, Richard Kenny, Carol Goertz, and many others. Ed Shove's other passion was for Saw-whet Owls, and he was dubbed by Julio de la Torre the "Saw-whet Kid" because of his ability to find the creatures everywhere.

Steve Mayo fondly remembers the day Ed showed Steve his first Saw-whet Owl.

In 1994 Ron Bell took over the hawk watch and actively recruited a talented team of counters who would cover every day of the week. This schedule has lasted until the present. Some of the key counters were/are Tom Bravo, Tony Hager, Tom Mason, Neil Currie, Greg Hanisek, Dana Campbell, Lynn James, Robin McCallister, Joyce Grohoski, Christine Zimmerman, Bill Banks, Steve Foisey, Randy Domina, Marty Moore, Fritz Davis, and others. Steve, after a brief hiatus from the hawk watch, came back in 2007 to assume the Coordinator duties.



The Hawk Master at Lighthouse Point  
All photos by Sara Zagorski

This kind of coverage and continuity of data made Lighthouse one of the first hawk watch sites in the Raptor Population Index (RPI). RPI sites each have over 30 years of data with plenty of statistical significance. RPI verifies statistically what the counters observe "anecdotally". For example, Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons (also local New Haven nesters and residents) are showing dramatic increases. Lighthouse is showing a steep increase in Cooper's Hawks, but significant declines in Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned Hawks and American Kestrels. The biggest hawk year was in 1993, the year of the El Nino winds, with 30,072 raptors. The biggest Broad-wing Hawk year was 1988 with 5,787 recorded. Hawk year totals used to average 18,000 to 22,000 hawks in the 1990's, now they are in the 12,000 to 15,000 range.

Steve Mayo loves Lighthouse Point for its diversity. One never knows what is going to turn up there. Brown Pelican, Eiders, Tropical Kingbird, Swainson's Hawks, Golden Eagles, almost all the Connecticut owls, the rare gulls and large terns, Clay-Colored Sparrow, Northern Wheatear, and Calliope Hummingbird are some of the unusual birds that he has seen there. Besides the big raptor migrations, Lighthouse is also noted for its passerine migration. In 2006 Greg Hanisek and Bill Banks had 450 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds pass through, and on 8/19/13 Greg had 45 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Steve enjoys seeing Merlins whipping around the hill chasing all kinds of birds, once seeing one take the hackles off a Golden Eagle. The first time he saw a Cave Swallow he watched as a Merlin swooped within 4 feet of his nose to take down the swallow. Steve enjoys being surrounded by all kinds of birds in great numbers trying to make their way on their journey south.

How does one become a hawk watcher? "Simply, an interest and a willingness to ask questions," says Steve. He has a fantastic team but he is always trying to cover hours at the daily hawk watch, and welcomes everyone to stop by and help the counters, perhaps even considering becoming a counter themselves. Steve himself works full-time at Sikorsky Aircraft as an Environmental Health and Safety Manager, is an avid runner, and a reader of classical literature, and volunteers at a local soup kitchen with his son, Dan. But he thinks there can be no better way to spend a windy autumn day than keeping your eyes to the skies and watching the migration spectacle unfold.

### Hawk sites of interest:

Hawk Migration Association of America – [www.hmana.org](http://www.hmana.org)

NorthEast Hawk Watch – [www.battaly.com/nehw/](http://www.battaly.com/nehw/)

Sara Zagorski is a member of the COA Board of Directors, and the New Haven Bird Club. She is also Vice-President of the Hartford Audubon Society, and an active and enthusiastic local and international birder. She lives in Wethersfield.

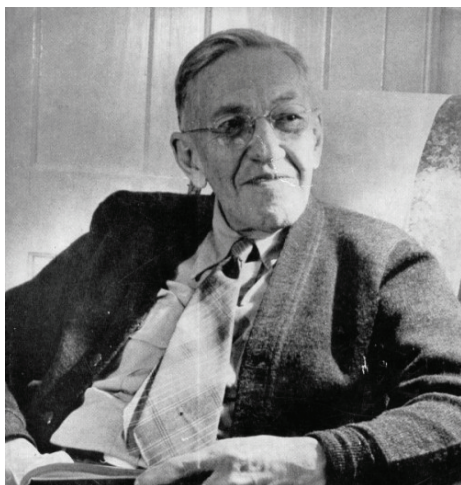
## TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO IN *THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER*

Compiled by Stephen P. Broker

*THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER*, VOLUME VIII, NUMBER 3 (July 1988)

### Aretas A. Saunders (1884-1970), by Roland C. Clement

“Human history is that record of the past we are willing to recall and pass onto future generations. There is therefore, a recurrent, generational responsibility to attempt history, lest it be lost to oblivion. The past is gone, so in the process of recalling it we always restate it anew, making it accord with our enlarging awareness.



“For Connecticut ornithology, one of the most admirable individuals of the recent past is Aretas A. Saunders. We can perhaps better appreciate him than did his contemporaries because we can now see the interconnections his creativity wove between past and present.

“Born in Avon, Connecticut on November 15, 1884, he first captures our attention because he attended one of the early classes of the new School of Forestry at Yale University. We note, also, that a young lowan named Aldo Leopold arrived at Yale in 1906, whereas Saunders was due to graduate in 1907. We have no evidence that these two good naturalists interacted, but Gifford Pinchot had induced President Theodore Roosevelt to create a permanent national forest service system in 1905, so almost overnight forestry became an appealing profession for young men interested in the outdoors. Both Saunders and Leopold went to work for this new service after graduation.

“[Saunders] perfected a method for the quick notation of song that allowed comparative evaluations. In 1929 he published a book, *Bird Song*, summarizing these innovative investigations. . . However, the advent of the parabolic reflector for sound recording, sonograms and playback equipment after World War II soon outmoded his approach to recording bird song.”

[Editorial note: Roland chronicles Saunders’ work in U.S. national forests in Montana and South Dakota, his subsequent teaching of mathematics and general science in West Haven and Bridgeport, CT, his summer field studies and resulting publications on birds, mammals, butterflies, and plants, and his family life in East Norwalk and North Canaan. Aretas A. Saunders is buried in Mountain View Cemetery, North Canaan, CT. SPB]



Gravestone of Aretas A. Saunders in  
Mountain View Cemetery, North Canaan, CT.  
Photo by John Triana

### Diet of the Common Barn-Owl in Middlefield, Connecticut, by Geoffrey A. Hammerson

“In the mid-1980s, Common Barn-Owls (*Tyto alba*) nested in a wooden box in a barn in Middlefield, Connecticut. During the nesting period a substantial amount of debris accumulated in the box and consisted almost entirely of disarticulated bones and fur. Much of the debris was the undigested remains of food items regurgitated by the nestlings, although it is probable that adult regurgitations were also included. I examined a sample of the debris and identified food items using diagnostic skull and tooth characteristics. I counted, as a single individual, any food item represented by either an intact skull or by a skull remnant with both maxillae present. Results are listed in Table 1.”

[Editorial note: Table 1 lists the following prey species (number of individuals/percentage of total): Meadow vole (456/78%), Short-tailed shrew (98/17%), Star-nosed mole (24/4%), Meadow jumping mouse (2/<1%), White-footed mouse (1/<1%). SPB]

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<i>Workshops</i>	Chris Loscalzo
<i>Annual Meeting</i>	Tina Green, Kathy Van Der Aue, Lisa Wahle
<i>Connecticut Warbler</i>	Greg Hanisek
<i>COA Bulletin</i>	Denise Jernigan
<i>Rare Records</i>	Jay Kaplan
<i>Christmas Bird Count Compiler</i>	Steve Broker
<i>Summer Bird Count Compilers</i>	Joe Zeranski and Patrick Comins
<i>Great Backyard Bird Count</i>	Patrick Comins

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 22, 2013 to:

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