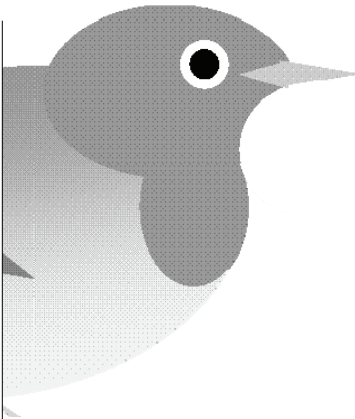
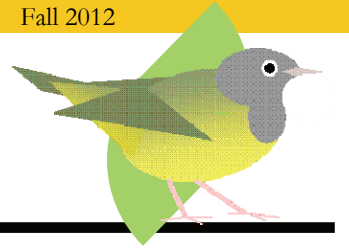


# COA BULLETIN



## CAN A LOCAL BUNNY HELP SAVE SHRUBLAND BIRDS ?

By Lisa Wahle and Shannon Kearney

Most of us have known a patch of young forest where Blue-winged and Chestnut-sided Warblers, Eastern Towhees and Indigo Buntings were reliably found for several years. Over time the avian composition changed, and the area became quieter. As the forest matured, it no longer offered adequate food and cover for these shrubland species. This natural act of forest succession plays out across the state continually .



Young forest and/or shrubland is a type of early successional habitat (ESH) characterized by woody vegetation less than 15 feet in height. Before humans were on the landscape, young forest patches grew in canopy openings created by severe storms, fires, insect outbreaks, blown down trees and beaver activities. Land clearing by Native Americans and European colonists created more opportunities for this ESH. From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, a relative abundance of shrubland appeared on former agricultural lands that were left behind by farmers who moved westward for better soil. Land abandonment largely ended by the 1940s, and as these lands and existing forest continued to mature during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the seedling/sapling (young forest) component of timberland in CT fell from approximately 29% to 5%.



Today, dwindling shrubland habitat persists through natural processes, but is primarily preserved through active management. Scrub-shrub wetlands can be self-maintaining, as can the few coastal shrublands that have not been developed. Fields and field edges are still occasionally abandoned, and vegetation within powerline rights-of-way is generally managed to maintain a shrubland condition. Forest cutting using even-aged management techniques, namely seed-tree, shelterwood and clear cuts, supplies most of CT's young forest and shrubland. While many birds use shrublands at some point in their lives, about 40 shrubland specialists rely specifically on these areas for breeding; 80% of these species are in population decline.



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Long and Short-billed Dowitchers at Stratford Marina. Photo by Bill Asteriades

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## Upcoming Events

**September 8 & 9 (Sat & Sun)**

9am–5pm

**Northeast Waterfowl Festival**

hosted by Cabela's

475 East Hartford Blvd. North, East Hartford, CT 06118

**September 15 (Saturday)**

4:00 pm–8:00 pm

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

185 East Flat Hill Road, Southbury, CT 06488

**September 22 & 23 (Sat & Sun)**

**HawkWatch Festival & Green Bazaar**

Audubon Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT 06831

**September 23 (Sunday)**

**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 Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe

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 the Blue Trail Road

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**

For additional information contact the East Rock/Trowbridge Environmental Center at (203) 946-6086

or the Lighthouse Point Park Ranger at (203) 946-8790.

**October 5– 7**

(Friday–Sunday)

**Great Stratford Bird Festival**

various locations throughout the town of Stratford, CT

**October 13&14 (Sat & Sun) HMANA Conference** (Hawk Migration Assn. of North America)

Audubon Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT 06831

**October 25 (Thursday)**

8:00 am–4:20 pm

**CIPWG Symposium** – CT Invasive Plant Working Group

Lewis B. Rome Commons, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT

## COA WORKSHOPS



Chris Loscalzo, COA Workshops Chair, conducted a Long-legged Waders Workshop at Barn Island WMA in Stonington on July 21. It began with an overview of the herons, egrets, and ibises which can be found or hoped for in our state, and continued with a field trip onto the area's trails where several of the target species were seen and studied.



Classroom and American Oystercatcher photos by Patrick Comins; photo of birders on Milford Point by Frank Mantlik



The ever-popular Shorebird Workshop was held at the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point on August 19. Patrick Comins and Frank Mantlik led a classroom session first, and then accompanied the 30 workshop participants out onto the shore and coastal bars to put their studies to the test. The rising tide and light cloud cover made for ideal conditions to observe a wide range of shorebirds. Among the notable species seen were one red knot and an American Golden Plover.

**UP NEXT ; RAPTOR WORKSHOP !**  
**Saturday, September 15th, 2012 at 9:30am**  
**Rain date: Sunday, September 16th, 2012**  
**Boothe Memorial Park, Stratford**  
 See [COA website](#) for details

# HawkWatching for Fun and Science

By Luke Tiller

As we head into September it's definitely time to start thinking about getting out to your local hawk watch. As well as being able to witness one of Connecticut's most amazing bird migration spectacles (the southbound movement of Broad-winged Hawks) there is plenty more to see at hawk watches. As a full-time hawk watcher, the last couple of years I have been able to witness some incredible birding spectacles and to see a number of really stunning and uncommon birds migrating over my watch. These rarities have ranged from Sooty Terns to Mississippi Kites in Connecticut to White-winged Doves, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and American White Pelicans in New York State.

All of the data that is collected at Connecticut's main hawk watch sites, Lighthouse Point, Quaker Ridge and new kid on the block Boothe Park, is collated on the Hawk Migration Association of North America Hawkcount (HMANA) website ([www.hawkcount.org](http://www.hawkcount.org)). This fantastic public resource allows birders to view what has been showing up at their local hawk watch, even down to an hour by hour breakdown of what has been seen on any one given day. Most counts even provide an educated forecast on what is likely to happen the next day, allowing birders to plan their trip to the watch more successfully. The site allows one to view historical data, as well as information about peak flights and other informative tidbits about specific sites in order to make your potential birding trip more 'profitable'.

In addition to providing the Hawkcount website, HMANA is the driving force behind the Raptor Population Index (RPI) which promotes the scientific analysis of hawk count data. Hawk watches allow us to monitor the general health of our raptor populations and in my opinion a healthy population of raptors, as apex predators, is indicative of the health of the environment overall. As well as RPI data the HMANA website <http://hmana.org/> also has lots of other interesting articles and information for those interested in hawkwatching at any level, including local birder and artist Paul Carrier's excellent silhouette guide to hawk identification.

Why are hawk watches important, you ask? Obviously the population monitoring is the number one goal of any count. A friend of mine who was involved in the early

stages of the Veracruz (Mexico) Hawkwatch relayed to me the story that people were initially skeptical of their count numbers, as they showed more Swainson's Hawks flying over the site than were previously imagined to exist by scientists. After a couple of seasons monitoring however it was ascertained that it was the previous population estimates that were in error not the hawk watch numbers. As well as allowing us to monitor raptor populations successfully they are also a great way to experience the wonder of bird migration and to try to see a number of uncommon birds. Try, for example, to locate Golden Eagles in Connecticut almost anywhere beyond a hawk watch site. You can read more on my thoughts on hawkwatching basics in the state on my blog

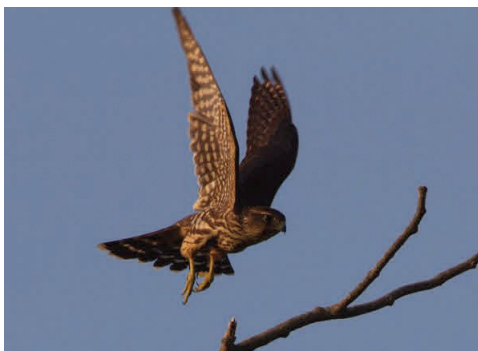
<http://underclearskies.com/connecticut-hawkwatching-basics/>

Almost as important as the monitoring, in my opinion, is the fact that they are also great places to educate the public about birds and birding. It's hard not to get a pretty visceral response from neophyte or even non-birders when you show them their first Bald Eagle or a kettle of soaring raptors, and as much as I love them, you are not guaranteed quite the same response when you point out their first White-crowned Sparrow. A visit to the watch at Quaker Ridge is an integral part of the educational work that naturalists undertake at Audubon Greenwich.

Raptors are also one of the few areas where we have some real environmental success stories to share with the

public. The recovery of the Bald Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon are prime examples of where we have made a positive difference to the plight of the natural world.

As Connecticut's only employed full-time hawk watcher I was excited to learn that the HMANA Conference for 2012 "Counting for the Future" is being held in Connecticut and at my home count. Audubon Greenwich is the perfect location for the event as it both hosts the Quaker Ridge Hawkwatch and is home to the tremendous facilities of the Audubon Greenwich Nature Center (visit <http://greenwich.audubon.org/> for more information). It looks like being a fantastic event and one that will gather hawk watchers, counters and birding aficionados from across the country for this two-day event.



Merlin photo by Luke Tiller

Continued on page 6

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

Compiled by Stephen P. Broker

*THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER*, VOLUME VII, NUMBER 3 (JULY 1987)

### Population Densities of Forest Birds in Northeastern Connecticut, by Robert J. Craig

"The goal of this study is to provide quantitative population data on forest birds in northeastern Connecticut that will help to characterize the regional avifauna. . . Dowhan and Craig (1976) reported on the biophysical regions of Connecticut, termed ecoregions. I chose to investigate the Northeast Upland Ecoregion, a sparsely populated area of hilly topography and cool temperatures centered around the town of Union. This area contains the southernmost extension of mixed hardwood-conifer forest in eastern Connecticut, and I studied only tracts with this predominant cover to make my findings as typical of the region as possible. The tracts varied in factors such as conifer density, moisture regime, stand age, understory density, and extent of selective logging, however, so my observations represent average regional conditions rather than those of a single microhabitat. I examined ten sites that included nearly all extensive hardwood-conifer tracts present, and chose census routes that generally followed old logging roads or dirt roads through the forest interior."

### Record Broad-winged Hawk Flight, by Elsbeth S. Johnson

"On September 14, 1986 a total of 30,535 Broad-winged Hawks (*Buteo platypterus*) were observed from the Quaker Ridge Hawkwatch site in Greenwich, CT. This represents a one day eastern North American record. . . Quaker Ridge is a north-west ridge (el. 511') on the grounds of the Greenwich Audubon Center in southwestern Connecticut and lies about six miles northwest of Long Island Sound. . . Weekend counts at Quaker Ridge have been held since the 1960s with daily autumn coverage begun in 1985.

"September 1986 began with a low pressure system, followed by a high that produced a few hundred early Broad-winged Hawks. From September 10-12 only five Broad-wings were sighted as a low pressure system with 70 degree temperatures held sway. Late on September 12 a cold air mass cleared the skies and brought a sharp drop in temperature. . . Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> the skies were clear at 7am with a temperature of 53°F and a NW wind at 10 mph. Between 7 and 10am EST 1,500 Broad-wings were recorded.

"At 2:20 an enormous kettle of Broad-wings was spotted to the NE at the limit of binocular view. Birds were streaming out over the field at different levels in a band that became twenty birds wide. . . Shortly after 3 pm another huge kettle, none of the birds visible to the naked eye, appeared to the southeast and was estimated at 5,200. Four more kettles following this one totaled another 10,700 birds. At 3:40 pm a large group of hawks appeared south of the ridge and then came in closer and lower to produce a canopy of hawks in kettles and streams over the awed observers. This last major flight of the day raised the total to 17,301 hawks for the hour and, with another 792 hawks between 4 and 5 pm, to 30,535 for the day."

### Connecticut Field Notes. Winter: December 1, 1986 to February 28, 1987, by Dennis Varza

"Many considered this winter dull with few good birds. Overall, the winter was milder than normal with coastal marshes and major rivers freezing over a few days at a time. The best birds reported didn't stay long and few people saw them. These included two Eared Grebes, Gyrfalcon, Tundra Swan, Barrow's Goldeneye, American Oystercatcher, Boreal Chickadee and Boat-tailed Grackle.

"Two Eared Grebes made brief visits; one by the outer breakwaters of New Haven Harbor January 6 (David Sibley, Ray Schwartz) and another in Guilford February 2 (Noble Proctor). . . A Tundra Swan was found at the base of Stevenson Dam in Monroe February 20 (Noble Proctor). . . The talk of the winter was a Northern Shelduck observed at Sherwood Island State Park the entire period. Was it an escape or a bonafide vagrant? . . An unusual inland occurrence was a Gyrfalcon at Storrs December 11 (Louis Bevier). . . A single Boreal Chickadee was located in Killingworth February 2 (Noble Proctor). . . The Lark Sparrow that was found on the Westport CBC was last seen January 14.

"Winter finches were widely reported throughout the state, particularly Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins. Evening Grosbeaks were less common, but still widely reported in small numbers. Crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks were scarce with occasional sightings occurring across the northern half of the state."

## COA INCREASES THE MONEY AVAILABLE FOR MINI-GRANT AWARDS

Due to the enthusiasm generated last year by the new Mini-grant program, COA is pleased to announce that the total sum available this year for Mini-grants has been increased to \$1,500.00. This increase will allow us to provide several small grants to assist more projects that directly benefit Connecticut birds. Information and application forms are available from the [COA Home Page](#). Applications are due January 15, 2013 and Mini-grant Awards will be announced at COA's Annual Meeting on March 23, 2013.

## COA BOARD ENDORSES BIRD-FRIENDLY COFFEE

In keeping with its mission of "disseminating the best available scientific information on the status of Connecticut birds and their habitat" the COA Board of Directors has researched and discussed the loss of migratory songbird habitat due to the intensive farming methods and use of pesticides by some Central and South American coffee plantations. At its August 2012 meeting, the Directors voted to approve the following statement endorsing bird-friendly coffee that meets the stringent certification requirements of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and the USDA:

**In support of its mission to protect birds and their habitat, the Connecticut Ornithological Association recommends shade-grown coffees bearing the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's "Bird-Friendly®" certification. This certification is given only to coffee which is also certified as "organic" by the USDA and which is grown on coffee farms which meet comprehensive standards for shade cover, thereby sustaining wintering habitat for North American migratory birds including thrushes, tanagers, warblers and vireos.**

**Most coffee is grown in the sun on lands which have been stripped of their forest cover and**

**which provide no meaningful bird habitat for migrant birds. In contrast, shade-grown coffee is grown under varying degrees of shade. Coffees bearing the "Bird-Friendly®" certification must be 100% shade-grown and must be grown on farms which meet the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's requirements for canopy height, foliage cover, diversity of trees and shrubs in the cover, and structure of the various foliage layers.**



**These standards for habitat protection are recognized as more comprehensive than those applicable to other shade-grown coffees.**

**In its 2011 recommendation of the "Bird-Friendly®" certification, the American Ornithologists Union stated: "the certificate is science based and independent, and enhances conservation by coffee growers to provide habitat critical to birds."**

See the [Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center](#) website for locations where coffee having the "Bird-Friendly®" certification may be purchased in Connecticut.

### HawkWatching – continued from page 4

Speakers range from hawkwatching expert and author of the superb *Hawks in Flight*, Pete Dunne, through those participating in some of the latest research on tracking migrant raptors (including New England Ospreys and East Coast Golden Eagles) to photography experts who will run classes on how to best capture birds in flight. The conference will also include field trips to Lighthouse Point and naturally Quaker Ridge, and Swarovski Optik will be running workshops on getting the most out of your optics whilst hawkwatching.

I'm really looking forward to meeting fellow hawk watch fans and showcasing for them what Connecticut has to offer in terms of great birding and hawkwatching opportunities.

The event is open to the general public as well as to HMANA Members. For those interested in attending you can hear Julie Brown, Monitoring Site Coordinator for HMANA on BirdcallsRadio <http://birdcallsradio.com/> on September 30th talking more about the work of HMANA and hawkwatching in general as well as about the event itself. The conference takes place on October 13 and 14. Further details, speakers and how to book can be found on the Hawk Watch Migration of North America website at <http://www.hmana.org/Conference2012/>

Luke Tiller is a fulltime hawkwatcher for Audubon Greenwich, a National Audubon Society environmental education center in Greenwich, CT.

## Bunnies for Birds

Continued from Page 1

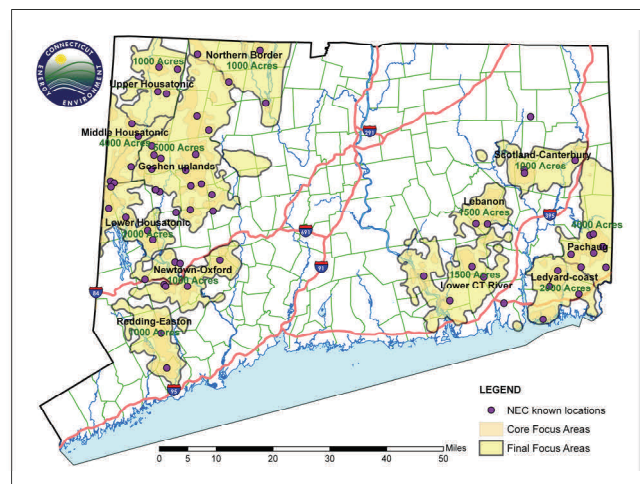
This group includes the state-listed Golden-winged Warbler, Brown Thrasher, Whip-poor-will, and Yellow-breasted Chat, as well as other regionally declining species of Greatest Conservation Need such as Blue-winged Warbler, Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, and Prairie Warbler. For many of these species, population decline is linked almost exclusively to the decline in shrubland habitat.

Because early successional habitat is ephemeral and natural disturbances such as beaver activities and fires are often suppressed, maintaining adequate shrubland requires active management. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CTDEEP) Wildlife Division manages for shrublands and grasslands on a number of state lands through forest cutting, mowing, and herbiciding of invasive species. The Forestry Division creates the most suitable shrubland bird habitat through regular forest cutting. Still, according to a study conducted in 2009, all of CTDEEP land management provides only 10-20% of the habitat needed to meet population goals for shrubland-dependent bird species. Without dedicated funding, the effort to preserve and create enough habitat to stop shrubland bird population declines appeared bleak.



Recently, however, this effort received a boost due to the plight of Connecticut's native bunny, the New England cottontail (NEC). Since the mid-1900s, the range of NECs has contracted in the northeast by 85%, and it is now a candidate species for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). NECs are very similar to introduced Eastern cottontails (ECs), which were brought here from the Midwest in large numbers by hunting clubs during the late 1800s and early 1900s. While ECs do quite well on our fragmented landscape, in backyard bushes and overgrown hedges, NECs require large patches (10- 25 acres) of shrubland/ young forest to maintain viable breeding populations.

In order to pre-empt listing the NEC under the ESA, there is a regional initiative to restore NEC populations and habitat throughout its original range (CT, RI, MA, ME, NH and eastern NY; it is believed to be extirpated from VT). A cadre of biologists, land managers and foresters from state and federal agencies is working to create and enhance NEC habitat, while preserving intact forest blocks. The effort is being concentrated in 12 Focus Areas (see map) in CT that have been identified as having excellent potential for supporting NEC populations. CTDEEP will continue habitat work on state lands and offer technical assistance to private landowners, while the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service can offer financial incentives to private landowners as well. CTDEEP biologists are also studying NEC population densities, dispersal rates, predator effects, response to habitat management and interaction with ECs. A captive breeding program is underway to support reintroduction efforts, as is a project to estimate total shrubland acreage, patch distribution and changes over time using remote sensing data. Through all this effort to save the bunny, shrubland birds and other shrubland wildlife will be finding new places to live and breed.



Lisa Wahle is a Board member of COA and contractor to the Wildlife Management Institute, working with CTDEEP and NRCS to create NEC habitat. For more information about the NEC initiative and opportunities for land owners, contact Lisa at 860-395-9523, [Lisa.wahle@ct.gov](mailto:Lisa.wahle@ct.gov)

Shannon Kearney-McGee has worked for CTDEEP since 2005 focusing on birds of Greatest Conservation Need. For information on migratory bird studies and conservation, contact Shannon at 860-675-8130, [Shannon.kearney@ct.gov](mailto:Shannon.kearney@ct.gov)

Bird photos by Paul J. Fusco, CT DEEP; New England cottontail photo by Linda Cullivan, US Fish & Wildlife Service.

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Visit COA on the web  
at [www.ctbirding.org](http://www.ctbirding.org)



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