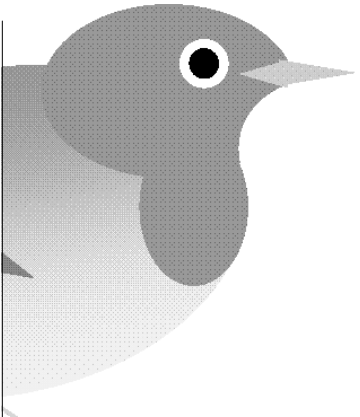
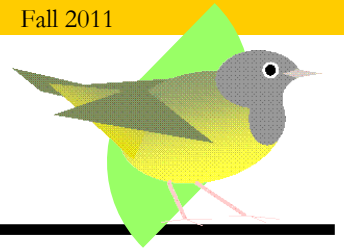


COA BULLETIN



Autumn Hawk Watching in Connecticut By Steve Mayo

Autumn hawkwatching begins with a trickle of Sharp-shinned hawks, Osprey and Kestrels in late August and ends with early December vigils for the occasional migrant Red-tailed hawk. The inland count season peaks on north winds, around September 12-26, when tens of thousands of Broad-winged hawks migrate through Connecticut. They are on their way to Corpus Christi, TX, Veracruz, MX, Panama, and beyond. At inland sites, over 90% of the hawks are of this species.

Broad-wings need all the help they get during this perilous month-long journey. They use deflective updrafts along mountain ridges, as well as thermals. A thermal occurs when a large mass of warmer air rises and assumes an invisible, enormous, bubble-like shape. The difference in temperature between the thermal and surrounding air can be very slight, but there is plenty of energy to generate an updraft. Hundreds of Broad-wings can form a non-social flock, often entering and exiting the thermal as a group. As the thermal cools and dissipates these hawks can be seen gliding in long lines, sometimes to the base of another nearby thermal.

When winds are from the North or Northwest during this period in September, these flights can be spectacular. It is not uncommon to see several thousand Broad-wings in a few hours, and, on September 14, 1986 at Quaker Ridge, 30,535 Broad-wings were tallied. Any northern or northwestern CT hilltop with open fields of view may yield kettles of Broad-wings. Popular sites include Booth Hill (West Hartland), Botsford Hill (Bridgewater), Chestnut Hill and White Memorial (Litchfield), Johnnycake Mountain and Taine Mountain (Burlington), Middle School (Torrington), Waveny Park (Greenwich) and of course, Quaker Ridge (Greenwich).



Juvenile Sharp-shinned hawk
Photo by Rick Gravlin

Quaker Ridge is a glacial drumlin with views of northern Greenwich. This "full-time" watch is held near the Audubon Center building, from the third week of August through the third week of November. In addition to the thousands of early season Broad-wings (4,334 were counted on 9/15/10), Quaker Ridge counters tally accipiters, falcons, vultures, harriers, osprey and other buteos. Significant counts in 2010 included 345 Sharp-shinned (9/18), 64 Osprey (9/11) and 54 Red-shouldered Hawk (11/2). Lately, the site is famous for eagles; 236 Bald Eagles were tallied last season. On September 15, 2010, 30 Bald Eagles were counted. On November 6, there were 4 Golden Eagles, and on November 3, 3 Golden Eagles.

There are other "hybrid" watch sites that offer the spectacle of Broad-winged flights as well as the longer/later season species diversity expected at a coastal hawk-

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Autumn Hawkwatching	1, 4
Upcoming Events	2
Cooper's Hawk Diet	3, 6
25 Years Ago in the Connecticut Warbler	5
Autumn Grasspipers	6
COA membership	7

Continued on page 4

Upcoming Events

- September 10 & 11 (Sat & Sun)** [Northeast Waterfowl Festival,](#)
 9am–5pm sponsored by Cabela’s and Ducks Unlimited
 475 East Hartford Blvd. North, East Hartford, CT 06118
- September 25 (Sunday)** [Lighthouse Point Park Migration Festival](#)
 8am–3pm “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
 10:00 am to 1:00 pm Monarch Butterfly Banding Demo & Activities (Butterfly Garden Area)
 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
 12:30 to 1:30 Live Music
 11am to 2:30 pm Ride the Historic Carousel
 1:30 pm to 3:00 pm “Skyhunters in Flight” – Falconry Demo

Please park in paved parking lots and walk to the mid-field area
Suggested Donation of \$5.00/car funds next year’s festival

- September 30-October 2** [Great Stratford Bird Festival](#)
 (Friday–Sunday) various locations throughout the town of Stratford
- October 16 (Sunday)** [COA Sparrow Workshop,](#)
 Starts at 8 am Silver Sands State Park, Milford
 Led by Frank Mantlik, Frank Gallo, Chris Loscalzo, and others tba
- November 6 (Sunday)** COA eBird Workshop
 Audubon Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road, Greenwich, CT
 Led by Marshall Iliff and Jeff Cordulak
 Check the [COA Website](#) for details to come



The Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*): What Do We Really Know about its Diet? Text and Illustration by Paul Carrier

For many years we have been taught that Accipiters were primarily bird hawks, with the vast majority of their diet consisting of birds. The Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*), the largest Accipiter, is said to take the largest birds of the three species, with the Cooper's and Sharp-shinned taking smaller prey. But not much is mentioned about the Accipiter family taking other prey such as Mammals or Amphibians. Then a question came up when I observed the local nesting Cooper's Hawks showing a different scenario.

For years, a pair of Cooper's Hawks have nested in the woods behind my home. I would often see them flying about, or perched in a tree observing the yard searching for prey. But the prey they were mainly pursuing at these times of breeding were not birds, but instead the noticeably abundant Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*). So off to the books I went to see if I could find any information to verify what I had been seeing.

In the book *Raptors of the World* (Houghton/ Mifflin 2001), it is stated, "The Cooper's Hawk's prey is medium sized and exclusively birds, so far as is known." This I can now dispute for sure.

In the book *Raptors* by Scott Weidensaul, (Lyons & Burford, 1996), the picture is a bit different. In a study at a Cooper's Hawk nest site, the following information was taken from the observation of the prey presented to the young at the nest. Here is a sampling of that study:

Prey brought to the nest:

Birds of 13 different species were observed,
but along with birds were the following of mammal prey -

Rabbit - 7
Gray squirrel - 7
Fox squirrel - 7
Eastern Chipmunk - 6 [!]

Also - the percent of bio-mass of prey brought to the nest by weight :

Birds - 64.8 %
Mammals - 33.8%
Reptiles - 1.4%



Looking up the diet of another Hawk of the Northeast that also nests within the same wooded habitat of the Cooper's, the Broad wing Hawk; here is what I found :

Of all the varied prey and species this hawk has been observed taking to its nest, the largest portion by far was mammals, and of the prey species taken was, the Eastern Chipmunk was the most frequent at 36.7%.

I have finally found some documentation of what I have been seeing for years, that being the taking of the Eastern Chipmunk as a staple food for the Cooper's Hawk. I will describe below two examples of these past sightings I have observed, but certainly not the only ones.

On May 12th, 2011, I heard Blue Jays harassing something in the yard. Looking out I saw three jays scolding a female Cooper's Hawk. This hawk was in a Mountain Ash tree with the jays scolding as they flew and jumped

Hawkwatching (Cont. from page 1)

watch. Boothe Park (Stratford) overlooks the Housatonic River and boasted two Northeastern US record flights in 2010. In addition to an impressive September Broad-winged flight, on November 1, local watchers counted 249 Red-tailed hawks and 190 Turkey Vultures. East Shore Park (New Haven) is just a couple of kilometers north of Lighthouse Point, but most of the hawks spotted here, are never seen from Lighthouse. Although it receives little coverage, it could, on ideal September days, yield many Broad-wings as they form kettles around the New Haven Harbor area.

Hammonasset Beach State Park (Madison) had enough of a hawk flight to host a banding station during the early 1990s. However, the most important coastal site is at Lighthouse Point Park (New Haven). Unlike hilly inland sites, the Lighthouse hawkwatch is held in a parking lot, just a few feet above sea level, overlooking Long Island Sound, on some dusty, Late Proterozoic, pink, granitic gneiss. Sharp-shinned Hawks peak in late September. Their larger "cousins", Cooper's Hawks, peak in early October. Lighthouse Park is the place in Connecticut to hone your skills at sorting these confusing accipiters. On 9/20/10, 1,326 "Sharpies" darted past and on 10/3 there were 161 Coopers Hawks. In 2010, the first nine record days for "Coops" in the Northeast US, were held by Lighthouse. The peak Lighthouse hawkwatching event is a cold front around the Columbus Day weekend. At that time, New England Hawkwatchers congregate at Lighthouse (after their Broad-wing counting obligations are fulfilled). Other 2010 high counts included 301 American Kestrel (9/20), 36 Merlin (10/2), 76 Osprey (9/10), 44 Harrier (10/3) 3 Golden Eagle (10/29), and 108 Red-shouldered Hawk (11/12).

Of course, along with hawks, watchers at these sites (especially Quaker Ridge, Boothe Park and Lighthouse), enjoy thousands of other passing migrants. In September, Nighthawks, Bobolink, and Cedar Waxwings pass through. At coastal sites such as Lighthouse Park, Blue Jays, Bluebirds, finches and Robins pass through in the thousands. During November dawns, Blackbird totals often reach the tens of thousands. The long hours at sites such as Quaker Ridge and Lighthouse, result in many rarities. A very incomplete list for these two sites include Northern Gannet, Western Grebe, Common Eider, King Eider, Anhinga, Parasitic Jaeger, American Bittern, Sandhill Crane, Whimbrel, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Royal Tern, Swainson's Hawk, Gyrfalcon, Short-eared Owl, Barn Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, Cave Swallow, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Tropical Kingbird, Western Kingbird, Calliope Hummingbird, Northern Wheatear, Blue Grosbeak, Kentucky Warbler, Connecticut Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Clay Colored Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Dickcissel, and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

Anyone can provide a significant contribution to an existing hawkwatch, or even start their own. To find a contact person for the sites mentioned, simply refer to the Hawk Migration Association of North America website, www.Hawkcount.org. Here, there are descriptions of many other historical Connecticut sites. These could be revisited, or you may want to choose your own local watch site. A long duration effort (more coverage hours, many days of observation over the season, several seasons) yields the most significant data, so choose a new site wisely. Detailed guidance on how to report hawk totals, as well as all historical hawk count data, is provided at the HMANA site. Another excellent resource is the Northeast Hawkwatch (NEHW). NEHW promotes the systematic study of migrating hawks in New England, New York and Northeast New Jersey. Visit www.bataly.com/nehw/ for more information.

If like most volunteers, your time is limited, make sure you watch the weather. Hawk migration is best after a passing cold front. A cold front is the leading edge of a large mass of cooler, dryer air. Most cold fronts originate in Canada, track eastward, and are associated with west and northwest winds. These are the ideal winds for hawkwatching. Websites such as Weather Underground and the National Weather Service provide excellent guidance as well as archival weather data.

Hawkwatching is one of the most rewarding forms of Connecticut birding. This season, try to get out to your favorite site, enjoy the season, and enjoy this amazing natural spectacle.

Steve Mayo is a member of COA's Board of Directors, and a regular hawk counter at Lighthouse Point Park.



**TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO IN
THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER
 Compiled by Stephen P. Broker**

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER, VOLUME VI, NUMBER 3 (JULY 1986)



President's Message, by Neil Currie

"Roland Clement was our first president and has since presided over all of the organization's work. . . [including] the difficult steps of launching and establishing the COA and as a result of his success the Warbler is now entering its third year under COA sponsorship. All of us who served as officers, board members, or committee chairmen during these years are grateful to Roland for his energy and leadership and for the inspiration he provided to us.

"During Roland's tenure the editorship of the Warbler changed hands twice. Carl Trichka, one of that small group of founding fathers and editor since issue one, turned over the editorship to Anthony Bledsoe with the October, 1984 issue. When Anthony's work took him to the University of Wisconsin, Betty Kleiner became editor. Anthony made several innovative changes that increased the quality of the journal. Betty has built on these and, by increasing the number of editorial assistants, brought the Warbler back on schedule."

Connecticut Birds: The Piping Plover, by Julie Zickefoose

"This paper deals with historical fluctuations in Atlantic coast populations, current population size and nesting success in Connecticut, and the implications for and management of this imperiled shorebird." . . . The period 1884 to 1913 represents perhaps the lowest known ebb of Atlantic coast Piping Plover populations. Overhunting was the major culprit as spring gunners shot both adult and young Piping Plovers on the breeding beaches. . . Rhode Island's birds dropped to less than 6 pairs from 1908 to 1912 (Raithel 1983), and we must assume a similar reduction, if not total extirpation, for Connecticut. . . In 1938, the 'Great Hurricane' came to the Piping Plover's aid, sweeping the northeast coast nearly clean of its cottages. The bird enjoyed a brief renaissance . . . By the 1950s development and the increasing human use of beaches had caught up with the bird, sending it into another cycle of decline. . . If the Piping Plover is to maintain a viable population, its breeding and wintering habitat must be protected from development and its nesting beaches protected from human disturbance. Posting is essential and effective . . ." (Least Tern/Piping Plover Recovery Program, The Nature Conservancy)

Western Myiarchus in Bethany, Connecticut, by Mark Szantyr

"On October 6, 1984, while birding along a roadside in Bethany, Buzz Devine, Dennis Varza, and I spotted a Myiarchus flycatcher as it landed in the top of a large white ash tree (*Fraxinus americana*). [A description of the bird follows.] . . . We observed the bird for only a few minutes before it flew away. A review of our observations suggested the Ash-throated Flycatcher (*Myiarchus cinerascens*). Later study of Myiarchus skins at the Peabody Museum in New Haven confirmed our belief and plumage characteristics suggested the Ash-throated Flycatcher rather than Nutting's Flycatcher (*M. nuttingi*). . . The date of the Connecticut record, October 6, fits neatly into the timetable of expected occurrence in the east. . . This would be the first recorded occurrence in Connecticut. Any *Myiarchus* flycatcher observed in the east from October on should be closely scrutinized for this species."

[Editor's Note: The Second Report of the Connecticut Rare Records Committee accepted this record in 1987.]

Cooper's Hawk Diet —continued from page 3

around the hawk. The hawk was looking down onto the lawn where chipmunks often cross. Shortly, the three jays' chatter drove the Cooper's Hawk into the woods with 3 jays on its tail. I found this a strange behavior in that the Cooper's Hawk did not divert its attention by grabbing one of the jays, a prey species for sure.

Back in April, I again watched as this same female Cooper's hawk came out from the woods and snatched a chipmunk off the stone wall that rings the woods. It was a silent and non-struggle affair for the hawk. I have seen this same mode of attack on chipmunks several other times in past years.

On another observation back in the spring of 2001, I observed a Cooper's hawk jumping about on the open ground within the woods. On closer observation I noticed this hawk was jumping after a chipmunk. The hawk finally succeeded.

I believe from these observations that the Cooper's Hawk species in fact might just change its bird prey preferences to small mammals during the spring and summer months. Could this be for the reason of a change in diet, or maybe the fact small mammals (especially chipmunks) are at this time of year more prevalent and active, or might even be a much easier prey to catch ?

Paul Carrier of Harwinton is a keen observer of his local landscape and a frequent contributor to the *COA Bulletin*



Baird's Sandpiper at Rocky Hill Meadows
Photo by Rick Gravlin

Autumn is the perfect time to look for the less common shorebirds at inland sites such as farm fields and wetlands. Possibilities include buff-breasted, pectoral, upland, and Baird's sandpipers, as well as American golden plovers. Don't forget that COA has posted the site guide to one of the best of these venues, Rocky Hill Meadows, on its website at

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

Check it out for complete descriptions of the site and directions to its location along the Connecticut River.

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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 []

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*Email address used for delivery of the COA Bulletin

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Note: Annual membership renewals are due in January of each year.

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 15, 2011, to:

Denise Jernigan
COABulletin@cox.net
618 Hopewell Road
South Glastonbury, CT 06073



This Marbled Godwit was photographed by Bill Batsford at Sandy Point, East Haven, on August 21.

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