

COA Bulletin



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

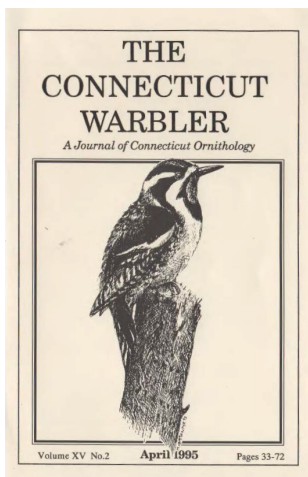
MOW Award p. 1-2
 Betty Kleiner Award p. 3
 Summer Bird Counts p. 3
 CT Bird Atlas Status p. 4-7
 COA Virtual Annual Mtg p. 7
 Mini Grant Report p. 8
 G.W. Zepko Hog Island p. 8
 Photo Gallery p. 9
 20 Yrs Ago in TCW p. 10-11

A Note from the Editor

This edition of the Bulletin is intended to partially fill the gap left by the unfortunate but necessary cancellation of this year's Annual Meeting. In particular, we are recognizing this year's recipients of the Mabel Osgood Wright and Betty Kleiner awards, who did not get the in-person celebration that they deserved. In addition, you'll learn about the COA Mini Grant recipients and their projects, and get introduced to the young birder who received the George W. Zepko Hog Island scholarship. In this issue, we provide a somewhat earlier than normal list of Summer Bird Counts being held in the month of June, giving birders more time to plan their participation in these important data gathering events. Chris Elphick's update on the Connecticut Bird Atlas announces that we'll have another breeding season in which to fill in remaining gaps in coverage and in confirmed breeding status.

Mabel Osgood Wright Award: George W. Zepko Steve Broker

The Connecticut Ornithological Association annually bestows its highest honor, the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, on an individual who has made significant contributions to the study and conservation of birds in Connecticut. This year's recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award is George W. Zepko. George's lasting contributions to bird study and conservation in Connecticut fall into three broad, complementary categories: (1) essential work with the first Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas; (2) field studies of a state endangered species; and (3) support of



COA is an all volunteer organization with the mission of promoting interest in Connecticut birds, and collecting, preparing, and disseminating the best available scientific information on the status of Connecticut birds and their habitats. While COA is not primarily an advocacy organization, we work actively to provide scientific information and to support other conservation

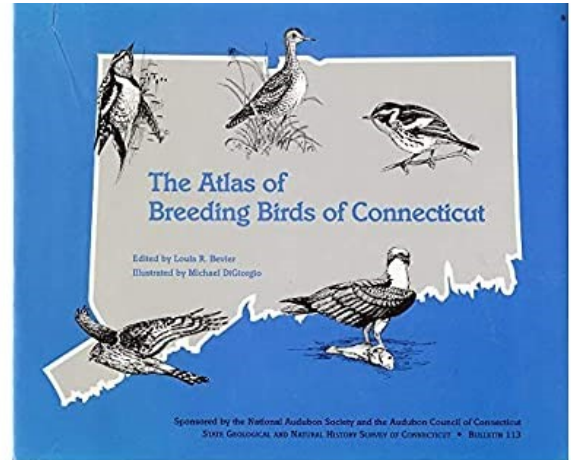


George Zepko in the field with butterfly net

ornithology education.

Mabel Osgood Wright Award (continued)

In October 1981, a group of twenty interested Connecticut citizens, birdwatchers, and ornithologists met at Wesleyan University to consider launching a scientific breeding bird study. This was one of the first such comprehensive surveys of breeding birds conducted in the United States. More than 500 field volunteers gathered 42,629 records around the state and submitted them on field cards. In charge of computer programming for the Atlas, George Zepko coordinated all of the data processing and moved this monumental state ornithological project from field cards to data entry, printing, and proofreading, and on to the contributing authors for species accounts. This handling of the field data was repeated for each of the five atlas years. The results eventually saw the light of day with the publication in 1994 of *The Atlas of Breeding Birds of Connecticut*, edited by Louis R. Bevier.



George was instrumental in managing the vast amount of data collected under CT's first Atlas

The Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas Project produced only four confirmed nesting records of Barn Owls in its first three years of field work. Barn Owl is listed as an endangered species in Connecticut. Three of those four nests had been monitored by George over the previous five year period as he observed and banded Barn Owl nestlings in the towns of Middletown and Middlefield. George's banding records, numbering some 150 nestlings, have been submitted to the Federal Bird Banding Laboratory in Maryland. His unpublished writing

BARN OWL INFORMATION WANTED

George Zepko is still interested in receiving information on sightings or nesting locations of the Common Barn Owl in Connecticut. If you have any information, please send it to: BARN OWL NESTING PROJECT, BOX 966, MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457

This request for information on Barn Owls appeared in the Summer 1987 issue of the Bulletin

about Barn Owls includes descriptions of known Barn Owl nesting habitat, nesting and banding results, interviews with a dozen of the state's most active owl field observers, guidelines for installation of Barn Owl nest boxes, and recommendations for further study.

George Zepko's most lasting contribution to the study of birds is the direct result of the life changing experiences he had as a young man at the Hog Island Audubon Camp in mid-coastal Maine. The National Audubon Society established its first educational camp in 1936, a Nature Study Camp for teachers and adult students. In the 1950s, the Westport Audubon Society awarded a scholarship to then nineteen-year-old George to attend the Hog Island camp. This was a new and exciting experience for a teenager who had never been anywhere. George reminisces that one day at camp he went wandering around the island alone, then sat on a rock to observe Osprey and gulls flying by - "a solitude I never had before."

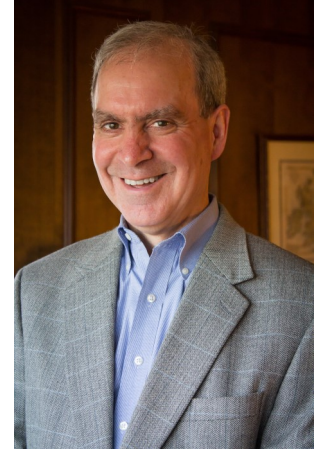
For the past three years, George Zepko has made significant monetary contributions to the Connecticut Ornithological Association in order to establish a permanent endowment for future recipients of the George W. Zepko Audubon Camp Scholarship. Just as he benefited immeasurably from his Hog Island experiences, George is pleased to pass on this opportunity to other teenagers.

For these and many other contributions that he has made during a lifetime of dedication to Connecticut birds and conservation, the Connecticut Ornithological Association takes great pride in recognizing George W. Zepko as the recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.

Betty Kleiner Award: Bruce Stevenson

The COA Award Committee selected Bruce G. Stevenson as this year's Betty Kleiner Award recipient for his article in the *Connecticut Warbler*, Volume 39, No. 3 : "Population Decline of the Least Tern: An Update" for his impeccable research, clear writing, extensive graphics, and obvious importance of the topic to CT birding. Although there were other strong candidates, the Committee felt that this article typifies the kind of research that COA was established to generate and support. It also takes note of the fact that, when the originating article was published in the *Warbler* (2004), the Kleiner award did not yet exist.

Denise Jernigan, Maureen Wolter, Chris Wood, and Doug Warner



Summer Bird Count Schedule

Compiled by Tom Robben

FIRST WEEKEND: JUNE 6-7, 2020

- **Woodbury-Roxbury.** Contact: **Russ Naylor**, 44 Church St., Woodbury, CT 06798; 203 841-7779. (both June 6 & 7 are ok, but June 7 is preferred).

SECOND WEEKEND: JUNE 13-14, 2020

- **Greenwich-Stamford.** Contact: **Thomas Burke**, 235 Highland Rd., Rye, NY 10580; 914 967-4922, thomaswardburke@gmail.com, and **Gary Palmer**, 34 Field Rd., Cos Cob, CT 06830; 203 661-4897, geilpalmer@yahoo.com
- **Hartford.** Contact: **Jay Kaplan**, 71 Gracey Rd., Canton, CT 06019; 860 693-0157, jaybrd49@aol.com
- **Litchfield Hills.** Contact: **David Tripp Jr.**, 97 Hunter Court, Torrington, CT 06790; dtrippjr@gmail.com
- **New Haven.** Contact: **Steve Mayo**, 27 Tuttle Court, Bethany, CT 06524; 203 551-1707, rsdmayo@sbcglobal.net

THIRD WEEKEND: JUNE 20-21, 2020

- **New Milford / Pawling.** Contact: **Angela Dimmitt**, PO Box 146, Sherman, CT 06784; 860 355-3429, angeladimmitt@aol.com
- **Storrs.** Contact: **Steve Morytko**, 288 Varga Rd., Ashford, CT 06278; 860 680-5728, smorytko@yahoo.com

FOURTH WEEKEND: JUNE 27-28, 2020

- **Barkhamsted.** **John Marshall** and **Dave Rosgen.** Contact: John Marshall, 60 Wilson Dr., Watertown, CT 06795; 203 232-4393, johnmarshall47@gmail.com

NOTE: the excellent SBC report created by Patrick Comins for "The Connecticut Warbler" has been delayed this year (for 2019 SBC data) due to the time it took to create the new consolidated central SBC database, and the absence of Joe Zeranski to help us with the outputting and complex formatting of all that information. We miss you Joe, for so many reasons.

Connecticut Bird Atlas Extended for Another Year

At the start of 2020, one of the big decisions the atlas team faced was whether to extend atlas field work for a fourth year. Doing so would certainly allow us to fill data gaps, but whether that would increase our understanding was less clear. Given the use of modern statistical methods as a way to understand and describe species distributions, we concluded that the incoming flow of data would likely suffice, and that – especially, since we didn't have funding for an additional year – we would proceed as originally planned.



But then came SARS-CoV-19, the newly discovered coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19. Although it is easy to go birding without engaging closely with other people, we concluded that encouraging anyone to travel beyond their home would potentially put them and others at risk. In that context, we decided to add the extra year so that volunteers could follow the state's stay at home guidelines in the knowledge that there would be opportunities to fill gaps in block lists next year.

Right now, the plan is to add a fourth year of summer field work, so that the breeding atlas includes data from 2018-2021. We have not yet determined whether to extend the winter atlas beyond the 2020-21 season – and we probably won't make that decision until we see how the pandemic and the response to it plays out later in the year.

To assess where we are at with atlas field work, we developed a measure of block completion for the breeding portion of the atlas (Figure 1). To be considered "complete" a block should have at least 20 hours of survey effort, at least 80% of the number of species found during the previous breeding atlas, and at least 50% of detected species should have been confirmed as breeders. The resulting map is both very encouraging and highlights a lot of work still to do.

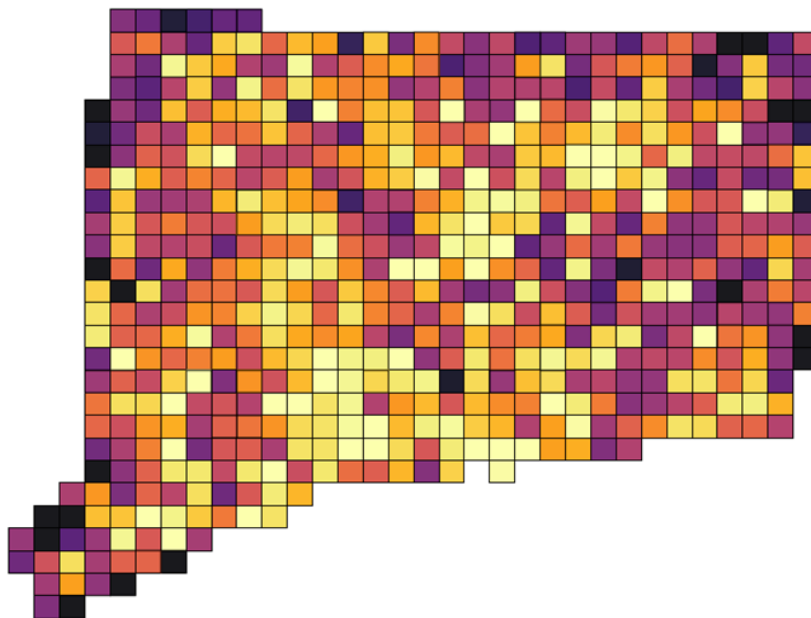


Figure 1. Block completion at the end of the 2019 breeding season. Pale yellow blocks indicate 100% completion, while black blocks are those that have received little or no survey effort.

Connecticut Bird Atlas (continued)

Not surprisingly, blocks in heavily-birded, and heavily-populated areas are either complete, or close to it. Blocks farther east, farther north, or at the periphery of the state, are most likely to need substantial work. None of this will be a surprise to anyone who has been tracking our updates of where atlas data are being submitted from, the latest version of which is shown in Figure 2.

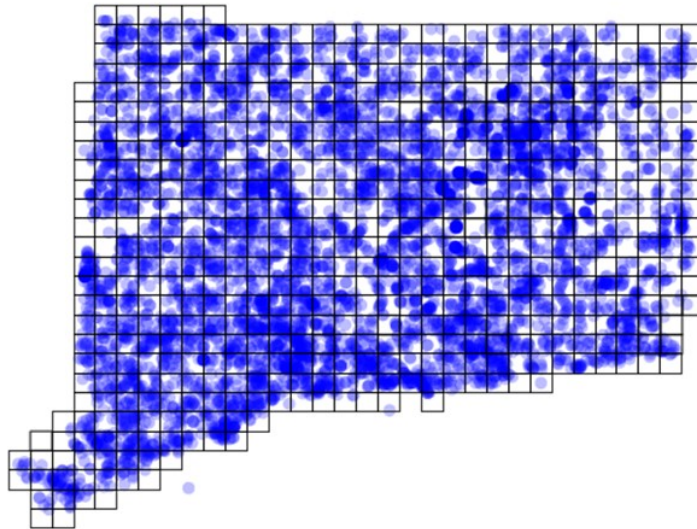


Figure 2. Updated distribution of breeding season checklists shared with the Connecticut Bird Atlas between the start of the 2018 breeding survey and March 2020. Each blue dot represents a location where at least one checklist has been submitted.

Priorities moving forward will be to ensure that blocks with few hours of survey effort get visited, to focus attention on confirming breeding by species, and to fill species gaps wherever possible. The first of these goals may be hard this summer, and is not something we would encourage until there is clear evidence that virus spread has slowed substantially and there is much better testing and contact tracing in place. Fortunately, contributing to the other two goals is quite possible, even without leaving your home.

First, although spending more than about 20 hours in a block produces diminishing returns, this applies mostly to the species count. Figure 3 shows that the number of breeding species found in a block increases rapidly

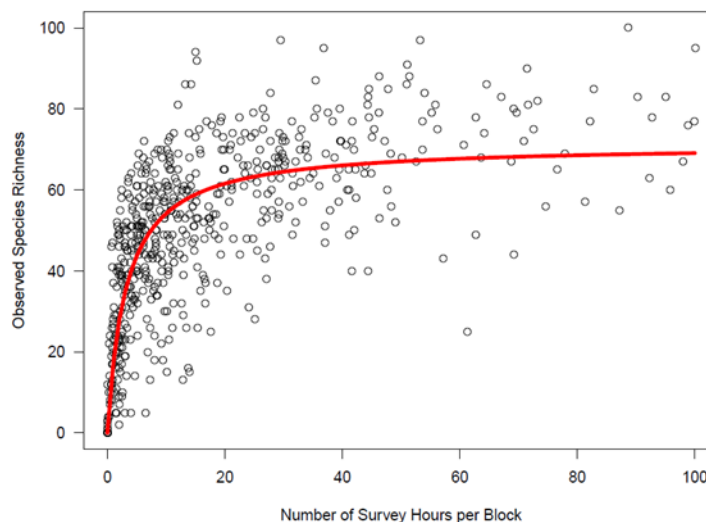


Figure 3. Number of species seen during the breeding season relative to the time spent surveying. Each dot represents a different block; red line shows the average relationship.

Connecticut Bird Atlas (continued)

during the first 10-15 hours of survey work, then slows rapidly, increasing very little after getting to the 20-hour mark. This is why we encourage people to move to a new area once they have spent 20 hours in a block.

Similar data for breeding confirmations, however, show a much more gradual accumulation (Figure 4), which will be no surprise to anyone who has spent time trying to find exactly where the hawk they see every day is nesting. This figure also shows the dense accumulation of data points with less than 15-20 confirmed species, and low confirmation rates are probably the main reason why blocks are not considered complete.

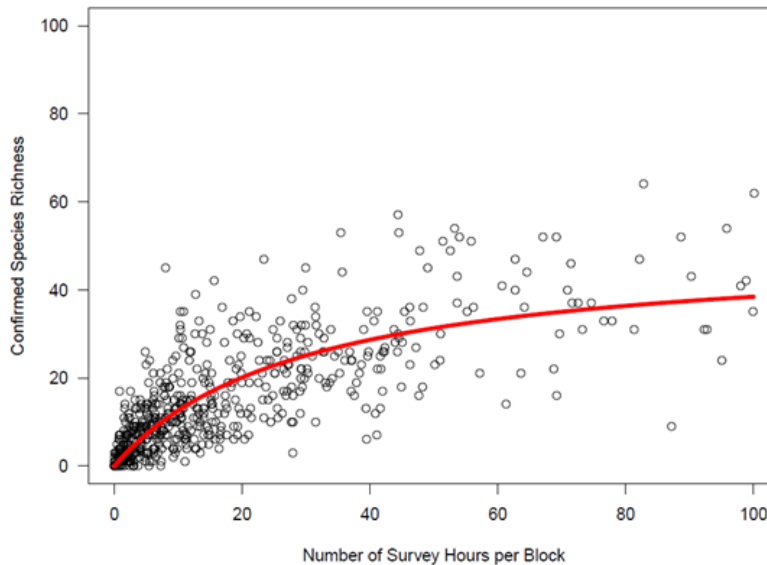


Figure 4. Number of species confirmed as breeding in a block relative to the time spent surveying. Each dot represents a different block, red line shows the average relationship

The key to confirming species then, is partly spending time in the field. But, it is just as much about sitting in place and watching patiently. To date, I've confirmed almost as many species from my yard in Storrs as I have in the rest of the block my home sits in; I've confirmed more than 10 species just from my office window. While this is partly a disturbing measure of how much time I spend sitting at my computer (and how much of that time I spend staring out the window), it is also a sign that we can probably all add confirmations just by watching the birds near our homes more carefully.

Doing this will also help to fill gaps. Although, we have good coverage in many areas, we are still missing key species from blocks where they almost certainly occur. And these gaps apply to common species as much as rarer ones. For example, even species like house sparrow and black-capped chickadee remain unreported from many blocks all over the state (Figures 5 and 6, following page). So, if you're at home and feeling bored, take the time to watch your yard birds, not just to see what they are, but also to see if they're carrying nest material, or engaging in courtship display. And, then please report your observations to the atlas.

Chris Elphick

Connecticut Bird Atlas (continued)

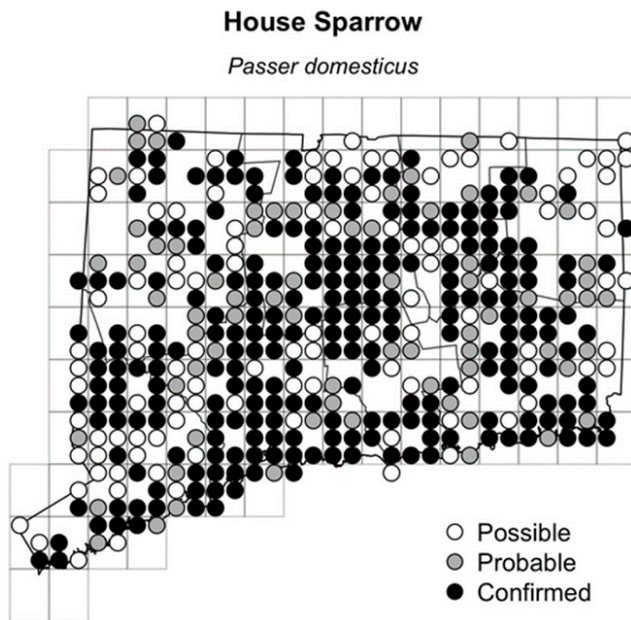


Figure 5. Preliminary breeding atlas reports of house sparrows in Connecticut during 2018-19. Note that additional data are constantly being added and data review checks are ongoing, so minor inaccuracies may persist until we publish final maps.

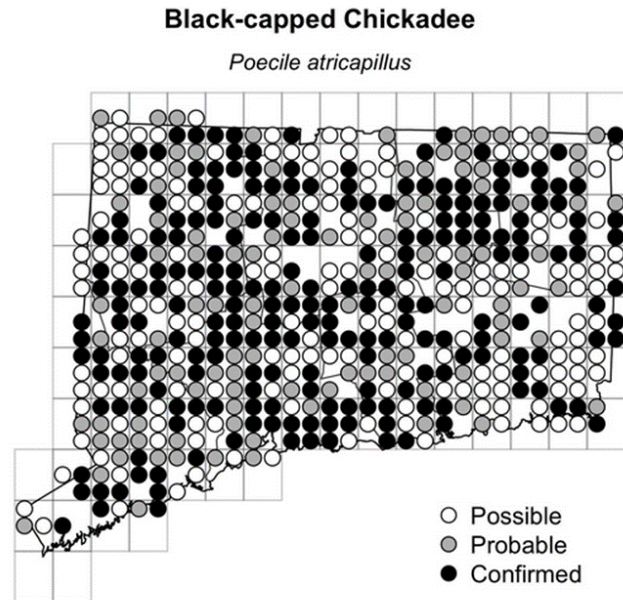


Figure 6. Preliminary breeding atlas reports of black-capped chickadee in Connecticut during 2018-19. Note that additional data are constantly being added and data review checks are ongoing, so minor inaccuracies may persist until we publish final maps.

COA Virtual Annual Meeting

The COA Board of Directors met electronically the morning of March 21, 2020, in lieu of the annual meeting that we would have held at Middlesex Community College if not for the coronavirus outbreak that has impacted our local community and the world. We voted in the new slate of officers and board members (after voting in a new provision to the bylaws permitting us to take this action). The officers for COA for the coming year will be:

- Chris Loscalzo, President
- Tom Robben, Vice-President
- Paul Wolter, Treasurer
- Denise Jernigan, Secretary

The new board members are: Allison Black and Larry Reiter.

The recipients of the President's Award are: Christine Howe and Tom Robben. Christine received her award for her tireless and excellent work maintaining the COA Calendar and for her contributions as a board member. Tom received the award for his dedicated and effective work as chairperson of the COA research committee and his willingness to help with IT issues. He has also volunteered to be Vice-President of COA.

We observed a moment of remembrance to the two giants of the CT Birding Community that we lost in recent months: Joe Zeranski and Neil Curry.

Chris Loscalzo,
Woodbridge
COA President on behalf of the COA Board of Directors

COA 2020 Mini-Grant Report

COA received 18 applications for Mini-Grants requesting a total of \$16,446. The change in our protocol reducing the maximum request from \$2,000 to \$1,000 and eliminating optics as an option doubtless kept the number down. We had enough funds to nearly fully fund all of the projects we believed to be directly related to helping Connecticut's birds, plus a smaller amount to two other projects we felt worthy for other reasons. For the majority of applications, we awarded something less than what was requested in order to support a greater number of projects.

Three bird friendly gardens/habitat improvement projects (Allen's Meadow, Deer Pond Farm, East Granby Middle School, and Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center) each were awarded \$775. A fourth project proposed by Avalonia Land Trust was awarded \$750.

The two requests for food for rescue/educational birds were awarded as follows: Horizon Wings was awarded \$475, and Fairfield Nature Center received \$575. We awarded the New Haven Land Trust \$725 for an Osprey nesting platform. This left us with \$500 to either spread further around the projects already mentioned or award to less directly bird friendly projects which appealed to us for other reasons.

We decided to give \$250 to an Eagle Scout toward his project of building a bird blind on property of Litchfield Hills Audubon. The other \$250 we awarded to Vickie Dauphinais of Litchfield Hills Audubon to help with her planned program of educational events: "Making Windows Safe for Birds."

Respectfully submitted:

COA Mini-Grant Committee: Kathy Van Der Aue, Angela Dimmitt, Chris Wood and Terry Shaw

Meet COA's 2020 George W. Zepko Hog Island Award Recipient: Eli Horton

"I grew up in Lichinga, Mozambique, where my brother became interested in birds, and while I was not yet interested in birds, I learned to love the outdoors. We left when I was seven years old and moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where after seeing a Greater Roadrunner streak across the road in front of our car, I began to develop my passion for birds. We moved again when I was 12 to Hamden, Connecticut, and this was the place where my passion grew exponentially. I remember visiting East Rock Park during spring migration and being amazed at the amount of birds there. I started to bird every day at local spots such as Lake Whitney and East Rock Park and convinced my parents to drive long distances to go birding at places like Hammonasset and Milford Point. I found out about eBird and began chasing rare birds. I eventually reached out to an expert birder (Tina Green) I met in the field and asked her if she would be willing to teach me even more about birds. I joined the Young Birder's Club, New Haven Bird Club, and American Birding Association and participated in birding events such as Migration Madness and the Mega Bowl. I applied for the Hartford Audubon Mini-Grant and was awarded it to plant native plants for birds in Edgerton Park to create a habitat for birds. I am now 14 and see Hog Island as a continuation of my interest with a specific focus on conservation. I am always looking for more opportunities to extend my passion and have even modeled my schooling (I am homeschooled) around birds, as I am about to start a bird anatomy course and am writing a research paper about vultures."



Photos of Some Early Spring Rarities



Eurasian Wigeon at Jones Pond, Morris (Larry Master, 12 April 2020)



White-faced Ibis at Wequetequock River, Stonington (Dave Provencher, 17 April 2020)



Townsend's Warbler at Cedar Hill Cemetery, Hartford (Linda Olsen, 19 April 2020)
Discovered by Paul Desjardins on April 17, this represents a long-overdue 1st state record!



Yellow-Throated Warbler at Mondo Ponds, Milford (Chris Wood, 25 April 2020)



Harris's Sparrow at Hammonasset Beach SP (Jim Carr, 28 Feb 2020)



Harris's Sparrow at Hammonasset Beach SP (Gary Hodge, 3 May 2020)

Twenty-Five Years Ago in *The Connecticut Warbler*

Compiled by Steve Broker

Volume XV, No. 2 (April 1995)

The Mabel Osgood Wright Award [1995], by Tom Baptist

Our organization established the Mabel Osgood Wright Award in 1990 to focus attention on, and to recognize, those individuals who have made significant contributions to the study and conservation of birds in Connecticut.

The first Mabel Osgood Wright Award was presented in 1991 to Ann Gaylord, and the Award has been presented subsequently to Roland Clement, George Clark, and Don Hopkins - all exceptional persons who have had remarkable careers in the study of birds and made outstanding achievements in ornithology. Robert Askins is also one of those distinguished few who has made truly important contributions, of far-reaching significance, to Connecticut ornithology.

Bob has compiled a long and impressive list of accomplishments and achievements. He has become one of Connecticut's, indeed the country's, leading authorities on bird populations and forest fragmentation, and has initiated and performed research into the effects of human land use on bird habitats and numbers. Bob's research and studies have shed light on the decline in certain neo-tropical migrants that have resulted from the phenomena of the division of forests into smaller and smaller tracts. Bob's research and efforts have put the need to preserve large forest tracts, both in temperate and tropical areas, in the forefront of today's conservation movement.

[Ed's Note: see Bob Askins' book, *Restoring North America's Birds: Lessons from Landscape Ecology*. 2000. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 320pp.

Tom Baptist, the presenter at the 1995 COA annual meeting, is himself a recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award, presented to him in 2014.]

Migration of Diurnal Non-Raptors at Lighthouse Point, Autumn-1994, by Greg Hanisek

Lighthouse Point in New Haven, Connecticut, is well-known for its autumn hawk flights, which are monitored annually by the New Haven Bird Club. This raptor migration is spectacular and draws large numbers of observers to the site at the southeastern corner of New Haven Harbor. The hawks are accompanied by a variety of other diurnal migrants, ranging from cormorants and waterfowl to passerines. These flights are at times large and noteworthy, but long-term records have not been kept in an organized and comprehensive manner. This is understandable because of the daunting magnitude of such an undertaking.

As a participant in the 1994 hawk watch, I attempted to record flights of non-raptors as accurately as possible each Monday, which was my assigned day as a hawk counter. I also made non-raptor counts on some other days and received information from other volunteers who agreed to record non-raptors when possible. This effort produced about 250 hours of coverage.

[Ed's Note: Greg Hanisek discusses the methods and limits of counting non-raptor migrants and lists the five most numerous species counted at Lighthouse Point Park, all of them flocking birds. Other migrants and their peak migration counts include Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Eastern Kingbird, American Pipit, and Bobolink. Ron Bell compiled weather data for this study. Greg has authored or co-authored the season Connecticut Field Notes for TCW for more than twenty-five years. He is the 2009 recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.]

Connecticut Field Notes: August 1 - November 30, 1994, by Jay Kaplan

WOW! What a fall season. Birders raced from one end of Connecticut to the other to look for exciting finds such as Eared Grebe, Gull-billed Tern, a *Selasphorus* hummingbird, Northern Wheatear, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Lark and Le Conte’s sparrows! Many of these birds were quite accommodating, remaining on location for several days and affording easy viewing for those who made the effort to see them.

[Ed’s Note: Jay Kaplan authored Connecticut Field Notes for seven years. He is the long-time chair of the Avian Records Committee of Connecticut, and the 2004 recipient of the Mabel Osgood Wright Award.]

[See also articles on the 1994-95 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count, by Stephen P. Broker, and Answer to Photo Challenge 12, by Louis R. Bevier. Cover art of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is by Mark Szantyr. The April 1995 issue of *The Connecticut Warbler* can be seen in its entirety at the following link to the COA website. Download Volume 15, and view pages 33-72.

<http://www.ctbirding.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CTWarblerVolume15.pdf>

Eastern U.S. Occurrences of Townsend’s Warbler in Spring 2020

Given the apparent first state record of Townsend’s Warbler, I thought it might be interesting to look at other occurrences in the East. To date this spring (March 1 - May 4) there have been 10 reports of Townsend’s Warbler in the “eastern” United States (east of the Mississippi plus eastern TX). eBird shows eight other records in addition to CT (Florida (3), eastern Texas (2), Illinois (1), Minnesota (1), and New Jersey (1)). In addition, MassBird had a report on 4/19 from Newton/Wellesley MA, that’s not in eBird. During the previous 10 years in the March to May time frame, a high of 8 Townsend’s were reported in 2014 and low of 0 in 2017, with an average of 2.4 reports per year.

Andrew Dasinger, South Glastonbury



These Burrowing Owls display an admirable understanding of proper face mask protocol, but are clearly not observing the 6-foot social distancing guidance!

CONNECTICUT ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

314 Unquowa Road
Fairfield, CT 06824
www.ctbirding.org



COA OFFICERS

President	Chris Loscalzo, Woodbridge, CT
Vice President	Tom Robben, Glastonbury, CT
Secretary	Denise Jernigan, South Glastonbury, CT
Treasurer	Paul Wolter, Branford, CT

COA CHAIRPERSONS

Annual Meeting	Tina Green, Maureen Wolter, Terry Shaw
Conservation	Craig Repasz
Finance	Paul Wolter
Membership	Larry Reiter
Avian Records	Jay Kaplan
Research	Tom Robben
Workshops	Chris Loscalzo
The Connecticut Warbler	Greg Hanisek
COA Bulletin	Andrew Dasinger
Christmas Bird Count Compiler	Steve Broker
Summer Bird Count Compilers	Patrick Comins, Tom Robben
Great Backyard Bird Count	Patrick Comins
Mini-Grants	Kathy Van Der Aue

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 August 15, 2020 to:
Andrew Dasinger, Editor
amdasinger@gmail.com