

BULLETIN

The Newsletter of Connecticut Ornithological Association

VOLUME 1

NO. 3

FALL 1987

COA BOARD MEETING

The COA board met on September 1st. Among topics of importance discussed were upcoming plans for THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER, including the purchase of a new computer "hookup" system to facilitate transmittal of text, a financial report, membership report, and a review of the Rare Records Committee Status. Frank Mantlik and Todd Weintz have been elected to the Board. Next COA board meeting was scheduled for November 10th.

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RARE BIRD ALERT

Frank Mantlik and Joe Zeranski report that the new rare bird alert tape is functioning well and being called frequently. Among highlights of this summer are: Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, American White Pelican, Loggerhead Shrike, Wilson's Phalarope, Marbled Godwit and Barn Owls. Tape number is: 254-3665.

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

For anyone confused by renewal notices, late notices, and all other such correspondence you have received, now may be a good time to review COA's membership policy.

Each COA membership is based on a calendar year. You are a COA member from January 1st through December 31st and are entitled to receive copies of the journal, THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER, and newsletter, The Bulletin, during that period. All members in good standing receive notices, announcements and are invited to attend the annual meeting as well as take part in any other COA activities.

For late registration, the following policy was approved by COA's board last fall:

Applications received before October 1st will be for membership for the current calendar year. Those received on or after October 1st will be for membership for the next calendar year.

If you have become a member late in 1987's membership period (after October 1st), please do not be confused by a renewal letter when you just paid your 1988 dues. Please let us know if you are not sure of your expiration date. Write Debra Miller, 14 Oakridge Drive, Franklin, Mass., 02038. Regular 1988 membership renewals will be mailed early in 1988.

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AUTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

New Haven Bird Club presents "Hawk Watch Day with Brian Wheeler" on September 26th, 9-3, Lighthouse Park, New Haven. Brian will be on hand to sign the new Peterson Guide "Hawks" by William Clark and Brian Wheeler. Hawk guides will be on sale that day. Refreshments will be served. Call Tish Noyes, 468-6273 or Frank Gallo, 787-8020 for more information.

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NEW STATE CHECKLIST AVAILABLE

Leon Barkman, of 26 West Street, Newtown, CT 06470, has published a booklet Checklist of Connecticut Birds (\$2.60 by mail), which came out in the early spring of 1987.

This is a checklist of birds found in the State of Connecticut and its coastal waters. Included in this list are the birds that reside here permanently, transients that are going to and from their breeding grounds, those that breed here and spend their non-breeding season somewhere else, those that winter in Connecticut and are found elsewhere the rest of the year, and accidentals.

Each species that appears on a regular basis is followed by its breeding status and the approximate period when it can be seen in Connecticut. There is space after each species to record the date and location where it was observed. Including 190 accidentals, there are 400 species listed.

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GET INVOLVED

The COA has job openings for volunteers. We need an archivist, someone to keep track of our history. We also will need, someday soon, volunteers to head up research and education committees. Is there anyone out there interested in pursuing such activities through the COA? If you want to help out, contact Neil Currie, President, 10 Mountain Laurel Road, Sandy Hook, CT 06482. Phone: 426-9861.

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CONTACT YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Roland Clement, our Publicity Chairman, has initiated a monthly newspaper column, Connecticut Birds, which is being sent to all the state's dailies and some of the weeklies at mid-month. It outlines what changes in bird life (migration, etc.) are to be expected that month, and lists some of the more interesting finds made during the preceding period. It is an attempt to take the Rare Bird Alert and the COA Bulletin to the people, and of course mentions the availability of COA services.

If your local paper does not carry it, talk your editor into running this monthly feature. If you want a sample so that you may call on your local editor fact-in-hand, write or call Roland Clement, 71 Weed Avenue, Norwalk 06850 (Tel. 838-8619). Roland's home town editor was interested enough to suggest that he also be supplied with "filler" materials of various length on Connecticut birds so that he need have less recourse to the wire service fillers. These too will be provided. Roland will welcome any suggestions on how to make this monthly series more interesting and meaningful.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

Feedback from readers would be appreciated, as well as ideas for articles and comments on types of news that interests you most. Let us hear if you want more: birding/rare sighting news ... news of what members have been up to ... letters to the Editor ... "hot spot" suggestions ... out-of-state trips ... whatever. This is your newsletter and it's your forum for being heard, so let me have your input, please!

Christmas count compilers should give me their dates, together with phone numbers for contacts by mid-November. We'll try to have the next issue out by early December, in time for a useful run-down of state Christmas counts.

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OVERVIEW: THE CONNECTICUT RARE RECORDS COMMITTEE

Into the early part of this century most records of unusual avian species in Connecticut and elsewhere were documented by specimens. Today this method of verification has fallen into disfavor due to opposition by conservationists. This, combined with the great increase in the number of birders, has resulted in the majority of more recent records being based upon field reports. Obviously, unlike photos or specimens, such reports cannot be fully evaluated and corroborated later by experts. Records are frequently "established" by birders with wide varieties of backgrounds, experience and field identification skills. Often sightings are obtained under much less than ideal circumstances.

In Connecticut, as elsewhere, all this has resulted in a confusion of reports, many being circulated and published without serious review or adequate details. Some of course do have impeccable details, but all too often others are without adequate substantiation.

To add to this confusion, the state's rare bird records have for some time been in a state of disarray, so that assembling a reliable state list was next to impossible. The need for a central body to review avian reports had become imperative if order was to be created out of chaos in the state's ornithological community.

Two years ago COA established the Connecticut Rare Records Committee (CRRC) to take charge of the confusing rare records situation, and to review new sightings as they are submitted. The Committee has seven members. Current members are: George Clark (Chairman), Louis Bevier, Tom Burke, Dick English, Ed Hagen, Fred Purnell, and Frank Mantlik (Secretary).

CRCC members were chosen for their analytical skills and are in general agreement concerning which types of evidence are appropriate to support the validity of a record. Perhaps an even more difficult task is educating Connecticut's birders as to what are appropriate field marks, methods of making accurate field observations and drawings, and encouraging birders to submit adequate reports for review.

Sightings of unusual species should be submitted to CRRC either on forms provided (a copy is included in this issue) or on the observer's own form. They should include the conditions during the sightings, identifying features, and the means used to distinguish the bird(s) in question from other species. Photos or field drawings are very helpful.

Reports may be submitted either to the CRRC secretary, Frank Mantlik at 17 Seabreeze Place, So. Norwalk, CT 06854 or to COA Rare Records Committee, 314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06430. If the information seems incomplete, additional details may be requested. If adequate, a copy is provided to each member with a ballot, on which they then vote to: (a) accept, (b) reject, identification questionable, or (c) reject, origin questionable.

Seven voting members are needed for an official CRRC vote, with alternates voting in place of regular members who are absent or whose own records are being evaluated. Should a record receive six or more votes to accept, it is accepted by the CRRC. If it receives five or more reject votes, it is rejected. But if it is neither accepted nor rejected, it will be brought up at the following meeting for discussion and a second vote.

After the CRRC has voted initially to accept or reject a record, any member may request the decision be reviewed at a meeting.

After discussion, if the second vote is also inconclusive, the record is put aside for further discussion at the next meeting or after additional information is obtained. Then a third and final vote is taken. If at this vote the record fails to receive at least six "accept" votes, it is considered "unacceptable." When rejected by two or more members under the category "reject, origin questionable," it will be noted as such.

At any time one or more members may request that a record previously ruled upon be re-considered if there is new and substantial documentary evidence which may reverse the earlier decision. Any record, published or not, may be submitted by a COA member after attempting to obtain details from the actual observer(s).

The criteria for reviewing records necessarily vary somewhat from member to member and are somewhat subjective. Generally, the main considerations usually concern the quality of the observation, the observers' experiences with birds and this species in particular, and the likelihood of confusion with similar species. CRRC members bring to this evaluation their collective knowledge of the subtleties of avian plumage, behavior, seasonal distribution, and historic presence in Connecticut.

In the final analysis, the CRRC can not always establish what the observed species actually was, although members may have strong suspicions. But, using its knowledge of ornithology and the submitted documentation, the Committee will decide whether the evidence is sufficient to justify adding a report to the official list of state records.

-- Joe Zeranski

REVIEW LIST

The following is a list of bird species for which the Connecticut Rare Records Committee would like to receive information on sightings within connecticut boundaries. This Review List is updated periodically by the RRC, most recently on 2/25/87. All the species listed are currently supported on the official state list by specimen or photograph.

Any records of these, or other very unusual species, would be most welcomed for review by the RRC.

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|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Eared Grebe | Purple Gallinule | Boreal Owl |
| Western Grebe | Sandhill Crane | Chuck-will's-widow |
| Northern Fulmar | Wilson's Plover | Black-backed Woodpecker |
| Black-Capped Petrel | Black-necked Stilt | Gray Kingbird |
| Cory's Shearwater | American Avocet | Scissor-tailed Flycatcher |
| Greater Shearwater | Spotted Redshank | Sedge Wren |
| Wilson's Storm-Petrel | Eskimo Curlew | Northern Wheatear |
| Wht.-faced Storm-Petrel | Sharp-tailed Sandpiper | Varied Thrush |
| Leach's Storm-Petrel | Curlew Sandpiper | Yellow-throated Warbler |
| Northern Gannet | Ruff | Prothonotary Warbler |
| American White Pelican | Red-necked Phalarope | MacGillivray's Warbler |
| Brown Pelican | Red Phalarope | Western Tanager |
| White Ibis | Parasitic Jaeger | Black-headed Grosbeak |
| Tundra Swan | Franklin's Gull | Painted Bunting |
| Gt. White-fronted Goose | Black-legged Kittiwake | Clay-colored Sparrow |
| Harlequin Duck | Ross' Gull | Lark Bunting |
| Barrow's Goldeneye | Sooty Tern | Henslow's Sparrow |
| Black Vulture | Dovekie | Harris' Sparrow |
| Am. Swallow-tailed Kite | Thick-billed Murre | Smith's Longspur |
| Gyrfalcon | Razorbill | Chestnut-collared Longspur |
| Yellow Rail | Black Guillemot | Boat-tailed Grackle |
| Black Rail | Atlantic Puffin | Hoary Redpoll |
| Corn Crake | Northern Hawk-Owl | |

BLUE LISTING

The July 1982 issue of THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER carried one of the most thoughtful and helpful articles published so far by COA. It was by Fred Sibley of the Peabody Museum and titled, "A Preliminary Connecticut Blue List."

Fred was reacting to, and improving upon a Blue List concept originated by American Birds in 1971. The idea is simply to list those species whose status is slipping, or uncertain, thus calling attention to the need for field work directed at clarifying their status. Fred refocused the approach on Connecticut birds and made it more functional by providing specific categories of action priorities. He said, however, that his Blue List should be revised annually. That was five years ago, but no one has revised Sibley.

The new Non-Game Wildlife Advisory Committee appointed by the Governor to help the state's Wildlife Bureau extend its concerns and management to non-hunted wildlife should be particularly interested in Sibley's Blue List; as, also, of course, the DEP staff working on non-game species. We therefore remind all concerned that there are excellent opportunities for cooperative field work between DEP staff and its advisors, and the membership of COA and the several Audubon Societies.

Sibley's 1982 action categories called for (1) Population Surveys, (2) Species Studies, (3) Management Programs, and (4) Monitoring Programs. The DEP staff working on non-Game Wildlife is probably best equipped to develop cooperative approaches to fulfilling these needs, and in reminding them of this opportunity we offer our cooperation.

In the SURVEY category Sibley listed the Black-crowned Night Heron, Upland Sandpiper, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Sedge Wren, Loggerhead Shrike, Meadowlark, and Grasshopper Sparrow. The need is for someone to assemble what information exists on the status of these birds and tell us whether they require more study. The Sedge Wren and the Shrike are extraterritorial (principal populations elsewhere), so their fate cannot be decided here. However, it would be nice to retain a small population of our own if study and habitat management can ensure this.

In the STUDY category one finds American Bittern, Black Duck, Roseate Tern, Short-eared Owl, Cliff Swallow, and Golden-winged Warbler, with special emphasis on the Bittern. The Wildlife Bureau shares our concern about the Black Duck, and the Roseate Tern is being studied by Sibley and associates. Who else can we involve?

The MANAGEMENT category includes those species we have organized to do something about. The Osprey, Piping Plover, Least Tern, and Bluebird are here. The Osprey is responding so well that we can remove it from our Blue List, but the others need more help. They are all ideal projects for citizen-conservationists, since the need is not for more scientific knowledge, but for simple seasonal protection from unthinking human interference with their nesting grounds. These are problems the Audubon Societies could have solved fifty years ago if they had been more alert to habitat needs, but the problems remain. And although coastal property is now extremely expensive, we can join in educating about, and enforcing state laws. We can join together to buy development rights, forge covenants, and find other ways to give these lovely species the elbowroom they need for a mere four months of the year. Conservation Commissions in coastal communities need to be alerted to these needs. DEP is helping but we need more involvement on all fronts. It may be time to actively manage the Upland Sandpiper, for example.

Sibley's final category calls for MONITORING the status of the Northern Harrier, Sharpshinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and the Red-shouldered Hawk. Are they holding their own? Increasing? And thus ready for delisting? These species suffered from DDT poisoning, also, and may be recovering, but they require more specific assessment.

NATURALIST'S ALERT

A third Conference on Connecticut's Natural Diversity will be held on Saturday, November 14th at Dinosaur State Park, Rocky Hill (off Route 91), under the auspices of the Department of Environmental Protection's Natural Resources Center. Registration will start at 8:30 a.m.

Ornithologist William H. Drury, Jr., of the College of the Atlantic at Bar Harbor, Maine, will be keynote speaker. Dr. Drury is a student of seabirds -- on the East Coast and in Alaska -- and has written thoughtful papers on the nature of rarity in species, and on the concept of habitat succession. Les Mehrhoff of the Connecticut Geological & Natural History Survey will chair the Conference.

These all-day conferences have become an important meeting place for those with a serious interest in natural history field work. If you want to know who the experts are in almost any field of natural history in Connecticut, sit in and question and say hello. Bring your own lunch. No fee.

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NOTICE: Tell any of your COA friends who do not get this Bulletin, that if they have changed their address, to contact Carl Trichka, 65 Glover Street, Fairfield, CT 06430.

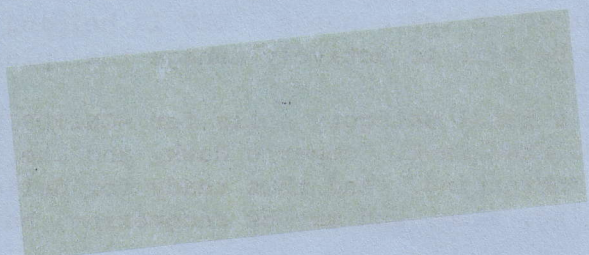
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DATE RECEIVED _____ REPORT NO. _____ STATUS _____

For use of COARRC

CONNECTICUT ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION RARE RECORDS COMMITTEE -- REPORTING FORM

Observers should include only one report with this form. Obtain as complete a description as possible during the observation and before consulting a field guide. Copies of original notes are welcomed.

NAME OF BIRD _____ DATE OBSERVED _____

Locality (town and location):

Time and length of observation:

Weather and light conditions, distance from bird, and optics used:

Description of bird

a) Number, size, and shape:

b) Color and pattern, including soft parts (bill, feet):

c) Behavior, including vocalizations:

d) Habitat, including associated species:

e) Similar species, and how eliminated:

Observer's experience (overall and with this species), and method of identification:

Other dates and times seen, and by whom:

Does any other substantial evidence (photographs, recordings, etc.) document this report?
_____. If yes, what is it and where is it deposited?

Additional comments:

Time and date of writing this report:

Observer(s) (when multiple, each is encouraged to submit an independent report):

Principal Observer

Other Observers

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Return completed report to: Connecticut Ornithological Association, Rare Records Committee, 314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06430