



Tree Sap and Birds - In what way and to what degree does tree sap play in the lives of passerines?

By: Paul Carrier

Much has been written on the dependence and use of tree sap by Sapsuckers; but do other species of birds also take advantage of this abundant and nutritious food source? This question presented itself to me several years ago when I observed 5 species of passerines sampling sap oozing from a cut in a white birch tree.

It was early March, and from my house, I spotted a Black-capped Chickadee sipping sap from a birch tree I had trimmed the spring before. A branch was dripping sap at a good rate, and this bird seeing the drip, positioning itself just below the wound, drinking the sap as it oozed out the branch. Shortly after, a Cardinal did the same, followed by several Goldfinch, a Junco and a Downey woodpecker.

This March, 2002, on a warm sunny day, I again observed a flurry of activity up in a Red Maple tree that was dripping sap. This tree branch was dripping at the rate of 3 drips a second, and there to take advantage were several Titmice, four Black capped Chickadees, two White-breasted Nuthatches and a lone Blue jay. Similar to the previous sighting, all birds came and went in less than several minutes, leading me to believe the first bird discovered the site, and the following birds observed this birds discovery, and took advantage of it.

All trees produce sap throughout the summer through photosynthesis as a nutrient for growth and life. Tree sap contains many minerals and sugars necessary for the tree's life processes. After spending the winter stored unfrozen deep within the roots, warm days and cool nights summons this stored life blood up into the many branches to renew life once again. As it travels upwards, some will bleed out any cuts or wounds that have occurred during the winter.

While researching this subject in many books, I found numerous references to the Sapsuckers use and

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2001 Grassland Survey

By Greg Hanisek

COA and Audubon Connecticut have formed a Grasslands Working Group to assess the status of grassland birds and grassland habitat in the state, the reasons for the decline of this habitat, and to create a strategy for conservation and enhancement of Connecticut's most endangered habitat type. Formed in response to the planned development of Rentschler Field, a key grassland area in East Hartford, the group includes representatives from many of the state's conservation organizations, several universities, and State and Federal agencies.

As part of the Group's discussions, member Greg Hanisek proposed field work done in conjunction with members of the Connecticut Ornithological Association. A study was organized using the Breeding Bird Atlas model, and COA members were solicited to report occurrences during June and July 2001 of the following species: American Kestrel, Upland Sandpiper, Horned Lark, Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark.

Because of the quickly conceived nature of the study and the reliance on a broad base of volunteers, the protocol was not rigid. Participants were asked to look for the above species in their hometowns, and in some cases one of more neighboring towns. They were asked to record species found, numbers of individuals and evidence of breeding, if any. They were also asked to provide brief habitat descriptions and precise locations. Specific sites examined were left up to the local knowledge of the participants, and no specified number of visits per site was required. About 60 individuals agreed to participate, and data have been received from nearly 50 of those who said they would help.

The data eventually will be organized in chart form. It will also lend itself well to mapping. While a full analysis has not been completed, a number of general observations can be made on a species-by-species and a geographical basis.

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COA Bulletin

Migratory Bird Project

By J.T. Stokowski

Research Assistant, CT DEP Wildlife Division

The spring of 2002 marked the beginning of the Wildlife Division's three year Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat Project in Connecticut. Little information exists on critical stopover habitats used by migrating birds. Loss of these critical habitats can result in greater distances between "refueling" stops for migrating birds, which can significantly increase their mortality. Identification of such areas throughout the country has been identified as an important priority by Partners In Flight. This project parallels the previous Silvio O. Conte Stopover Habitat Surveys that were performed along the upper Connecticut River (From Hartford North to Massachusetts, Vermont, and New Hampshire) but will highlight additional areas along the Housatonic, Naugatuck, Thames, and mid to lower Connecticut Rivers. The Wildlife Division will use these surveys to help identify Connecticut's priority sites and help guide conservation efforts at state and local levels.

A few highlights from this year's spring surveys include Spotted Sandpiper, Warbling Vireo, displaying Turkeys, Worm-eating, Blackburnian, Hooded, Bay-breasted, Cerulean, Blackpoll, and Yellow-throated Warbler. The exciting sightings weren't just of the avian variety though. A couple of non-feathered reports from volunteers include a newborn fawn stumbling away into the cover of the forest as well as a coyote finishing up a night of scavenging.

Although the surveys have been a success thus far, many more volunteers are needed to conduct the surveys. Future plans for the project include a fall warbler identification workshop for volunteers as well as an annual banquet with a presentation of the year's findings. This is an excellent opportunity for birders to take an active role in conservation research.

The fall survey component will begin at the end of August and will run through September. On each of the five scheduled days, volunteers are asked to make one visit to each of ten points and conduct a ten minute survey at each point. The surveys require participants who are familiar with bird identification by sight and sound. Once you are assigned to an area, surveys can be conducted by an individual or a small team. You may also choose to split up the surveys of one area between individual surveyors. Those who only have time to do a couple of surveys are also encouraged to take part and fill in for volunteers with other commitments.

For more detailed information on this and other volunteer opportunities, please visit www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/geninfo/volunteer.htm or call J.T. Stokowski or Geoffrey Krukar at 860-675-8130.

Ornithologists Explore Approaches to Endangered Bird Conservation

How are decisions made about designating bird species as regionally endangered? How do such decisions drive regional conservation efforts? Are there flaws in how endangered species conservation is practiced at the local scale? Is it time for a fresh approach to bird conservation, and if so, what should it be? Join Drs. Robert Askins and Robert Craig at www.birdconversationresearch.org for an exploration of these questions, and for consideration of alternate approaches to North American bird conservation. Click on Publications to view their thoughts.

The host of this exchange is Bird Conservation Research, Inc., a Connecticut-based research foundation that conducts

applied research into open space design for bird conservation. All of its current publications may be viewed at the web site. Its present major research effort involves developing an atlas of the distribution, population density, and habitat affinities of forest birds in southern New England. This National Park Service-funded project is described in the last several newsletters, which also may be viewed at the web site. Click on Newsletters, and then choose the issue you wish to view.

Barbara A. Lussier, Publicist
Bird Conservation Research, Inc.

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2001 Grasslands Survey

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American Kestrel — This survey was not effective in finding nesting pairs of kestrels, primarily because it was conducted too late in the season to find this species courting and establishing territory. The few breeding birds reported were pairs under observation before the survey started. A few others were found during the survey in situations that suggested breeding nearby, but because of the mobile nature of this species inferences about nesting were hard to draw.

Upland Sandpiper — This species was found only at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, its only known breeding location in the state prior to discovery of territorial birds at the Rentschler Field property in East Hartford in 1999. Access could not be gained to Rentschler for this study.

Horned Lark — The survey was not effective in locating this species because of its early nesting season. The only Horned Lark reported during the survey was a fly-over bird in marginal breeding habitat. Access could not be gained to Rentschler or Bradley for this study.

Bobolink — The survey was very successful in locating breeding colonies of Bobolinks, a conspicuous species that nests during the survey period. Apparent breeding Bobolinks were widespread and easy to locate in appropriate habitat, primarily hay fields. The exact size of colonies was more difficult to determine, because males, while conspicuous singers from high perches and in flight, disappear into the grass between bouts of song. Only a portion of a colony's males tend to be visible at a given time, and the females can be quite secretive. Nonetheless, surveyors found multiple birds at each location. The viability of individual colonies remains in question because of the timing and effects of hay-cutting. A number of surveyors noted cutting of hay that displaced colonies during the survey period.

Savannah Sparrow — The survey was successful in finding Savannah Sparrow, even though it is an inconspicuous species with an unobtrusive song. This species was found to be widely distributed in suitable habitat, primarily hay fields, but also in smaller grassy areas such as parking fields at

outdoor venues (fairgrounds etc.) and places where turf is kept fairly short (airstrips). Some larger tracts supported multiple territories. Pairs were usually associated with a habitat edge that provided some kind of song perch such as a post, a wire or even in one case a piece of rusty farm machinery. The recruiting of surveyors known to be knowledgeable field birders contributed to the survey's success in finding this easily overlooked species.

Grasshopper Sparrow — The survey largely confirmed impressions of this species' range in the state already established by field birders. Because of the Grasshopper Sparrow's scarcity in Connecticut, birders have made a special effort for a number of years to find it. For the most part, the survey confirmed the presence of Grasshopper Sparrows at known sites in the upper Connecticut River Valley and in the Northeast Corner. Two previously undisclosed sites were found, both in Hartford County. No suspected breeding sites were found in Fairfield, Litchfield, New Haven, Middlesex or New London counties. Access could not be gained to Rentschler for this study.

Vesper Sparrow — No known, confirmed breeding sites existed for this species in the state prior to the survey, and none was found during the survey.

Eastern Meadowlark — Meadowlarks were generally found in the same sort of situations that supported Savannah Sparrows. However, they weren't found at as many locations, and pairs were generally more thinly distributed. Sites that held two or three pairs of Savannah Sparrows tended to support at most one pair of Meadowlarks in most areas.

Geographical Distribution

Fairfield County — This heavily suburbanized county appears to have the least amount of grassland habitat in the state. Most of the remaining habitat is in public areas such as Sikorsky Airport in Stratford (Savannah Sparrow and possibly Horned Lark), and Fairfield Hills State Hospital in Newtown (Bobolinks).

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2001 Grasslands Survey

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New Haven County — Little appropriate habitat remains. Parts of Southbury, especially the area including the Southbury Training School farms, support Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks. Some sections of eastern Wallingford have potential but were not adequately surveyed.

Litchfield County — This largely rural area, which sits directly above both Fairfield and New Haven counties, holds some of the state's best grassland habitat, contained in both working farms and country estates. There is essentially a clean break between Litchfield and its more heavily populated neighbors to the south, with at least some habitat occupied by grassland birds in all of the towns forming Litchfield's southern border. Bobolinks are especially well distributed, with colonies in appropriate habitat throughout the county. Savannah Sparrows were widespread, and Eastern Meadowlarks were well-scattered among the larger open tracts. A few confirmed and possible pairs of nesting kestrels also turned up.

Hartford County — Although lacking habitat in its heavily populated core, Hartford County occupies a key position in the well-being of the state's grassland breeders. Bradley International Airport is a documented population center for multiple species, including Upland Sandpiper, and most of the state's known breeding sites for Grasshopper Sparrow are in the county's portion of the upper Connecticut River drainage. The more lightly populated northwestern part of the county is heavily forested, but scattered farms there and more extensive farmland in the valley support Bobolinks, Savannah Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlarks. Access could not be gained to Rentschler for this study.

Middlesex County — Middlesex clings to some farm habitat, mainly in the Durham area. American Kestrel, Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark were all found in small numbers, but the habitat has shrunken well below that found in the northern tier counties.

Tolland County — Tolland holds one confirmed Grasshopper Sparrow site, and some of the most extensive farmland in the state. Its sparse population is reflected in a small

and scattered group of birders, resulting in coverage that was disproportionately low in relation to the value of this area to grassland birds. The core species — Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark — maintain a solid presence.

Windham County — Windham's situation closely mirrors that of Tolland. There is a confirmed Grasshopper Sparrow location and a good amount of farmland supporting American Kestrel, Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlark. Some vigorous survey work turned an especially heartening number of meadowlarks.

New London County — New London received the least amount of coverage of any county. In the southern tier, habitat is mainly specialized, such as Savannah Sparrow at Groton-New London Airport and Eastern Meadowlark at a golf course in North Stonington. Good potential habitat exists in the towns bordering Tolland and Windham counties and merits further survey efforts.

Ideas for further study

A. Probably the effort that would produce the most tangible results would be a study of Bobolink nest timing. More precise information on egg and fledging dates are needed so that conservationists can speak very specifically to farmers about adjustments to mowing cycles that would be both economically feasible and advantageous to the birds. This type of study would probably require sponsorship of some kind.

B. Surveys conducted earlier in the season would present a clearer picture of the status of American Kestrel and Horned Lark.

C. Repetition of the 2001 breeding survey, with an emphasis on areas inadequately covered, would broaden our picture of the status of Connecticut's breeding grassland species.

COA Bulletin

Trips & Events

New Haven Bird Club

September 1 to November 30, 2002, Daily Hawk Watch at Lighthouse Point

Lighthouse Point on New Haven Harbor is one of the premier locations in southern New England for watching migrating eagles, hawks and falcons as well as good numbers of songbirds. The watch starts at 7:00 AM daily and continues as long as the hawks keep flying. Stop by anytime.

Coordinator: Ron Bell, 203-387-3815

Sunday Oct 13, 2002, THE BIG SIT!!

This event, established by the New Haven Bird Club, is an international event. The object is to record as many species of birds as possible from one 17-foot diameter circle. The circles are strategically placed at a number of birding hotspots throughout the state. Join other birders in one of these circles or create your own. Contact John Triana for forms and information at 203-758-7203 or jtriana@mindspring.com

Saturday Oct 19, 2002, 8:00 AM Hammonasset State Park, Madison

Visit one of Connecticut's best fall birding spots. In recent years some highlights of this trip have been Northern Gannet, Little Blue Heron, Brant, Peregrine Falcon, Vesper and White-crowned Sparrow (as well as many other sparrow species), Lapland Longspur, and the abundance of Yellow-rumped Warblers and kinglets. The walking is easy, almost all on level ground. Meet at the park entrance (I-95 Exit 62) at 8:00 A.M. Leader: Florence McBride 203-288-6777

Housatonic Audubon Society

Saturday, October 26, 2002 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Bird Walk at Hammonasset State Park with Michael DiGiorgio Location: Meet at the Sharon Audubon Center at 8 am or at Hammonasset S.P. at 10 am Join wildlife artist and birder Michael DiGiorgio for a day of birding in a unique coastal habitat with a wide variety of birds. Participants should register by calling Laurie Fortin at (860) 424-3963 or sending an email to scottandlaurie1@msn.com.

Hartford Audubon

Saturday, October 5, 2002, Simsbury River Walk, Simsbury

A fall walk at Simsbury's River Walk, behind Drake Hill Mall, to search for autumn sparrows, hawks flying over and various ducks on the Farmington River. Meet at 8:00 AM at the boardwalk (Helen's Way) off Iron Horse Boulevard.

Leader: Stephanie Lovell (860) 521-2621

Saturday, October 12, 2002, Station 43, South Windsor

A good area and time of year to search for Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrows and raptors. Meet at the corner of Newberry Road and Main Street at 7:30 AM. Leader Carl Ekroth 860 872-6372

Sunday, October 13, 2002, Hammonasset for Beginning Birders Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison

This trip offers beginners another location at which to sharpen their skills. Emphasis will be on bird identification techniques. More advanced birders who are willing to help are encouraged to join us. Take exit 62 off I-95, head south to the park entrance gate. Meet at 8:00 AM. Leader: John Gaskell (860) 669-1862

Sunday, October 13, 2002, "BIG SIT" at Station 43, South Windsor

Join other members of HAS for a day of fun at Station 43. We will count all the species we see and hear from a 17 foot circle at the south end of the marsh during a 24 hour period. Can we beat last years count? Call for details in the Crest. Coordinator: Betty Kleiner (860) 658-5670

COA Bulletin

Trips & Events

Saturday, October 19, 2002, Birding and Maintenance Party, Lewis Farm, Suffield, CT

Bring your work gloves, binoculars and lunch, and help the Sanctuaries Committee keep Lewis Farm beautiful and clear of brush. Meet at Lewis Farm at 8:30 AM. Leader: Jon Smalley (860) 561-0195

Saturday, November 2, 2002, Jamaica Bay Bus Trip, New York City

Enjoy this annual bus trip where upwards of 90+ species are possible. The bus will leave the Connecticut Historical Society parking lot at 7:15 AM and will return at approximately 6:00 PM. Bring warm clothing and lunch. This trip can fill up quickly, so get your reservations as soon as possible. Make checks (\$18.00) payable to Hartford Audubon. Mail to: Jamaica Bay Trip, c/o Roaring Brook Nature Center, 71 Gracey Road, Canton. Put your return address and telephone number on your check so you can be notified of any changes. Leader: Jay Kaplan (860) 693-0157

Saturday, November 9, 2002, Rhode Island Shoreline

Check out Rhode Island's south shore from Point Judith westward to Connecticut. Look for waterfowl, Northern Gannets, hawks and wintering birds. Meet at Point Judith at 8:00 AM. Leader: Paul Desjardins (860) 623-3696

Saturday, November 16, 2002, Bantam Lake Area

Explore the White Memorial Foundation and Bantam Lake area in search of migrating ducks, Coot and other early winter birds. Bring lunch and warm clothing and be ready for fun on this possible all day trip. Meet at the Litchfield Green at 8:00 AM. Leaders: Patsy Mason (860) 673-3713; Paul Carrier (860) 485-9654

Sunday, December 8, 2002, Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison

Meet at the park entrance at 8:00 AM to begin a search for Lapland Longspurs, possible Snowy Owl, Snow Buntings, Horned Larks, and other winter species. Dress warmly for this morning trip. Leader: Louise Tucker (860) 749-8968

Saturday, December 28, 2002, Christmas Bird Count, (Blizzard date: Sunday, December 29)

Call for details.

Chairmen: Patrick Comins (203) 238-3715, Steve Davis (860) 242-2135 and Jay Kaplan (860) 693-0157

Hartford Audubon Wildlife Series

Tuesday, October 15, 2002, Wildlife Series, 7:30 PM, McAuley Residence Auditorium, 275 Steele Road, West Hartford

"Panama Birding Bonanza" The tiny nation of Panama hosts almost 1000 bird species, far more than the entire continent of North America! This program will also journey to the high cloud forests of Chiriqui' Province along the Costa Rican border. Sam Fried, past President of Hartford Audubon, is an avid birder, photographer and a lively speaker. Call Fran D'Amico for directions (203) 237-2734

Tuesday, November 19, 2002, Wildlife Series, 7:30 PM McAuley Residence Auditorium, 275 Steele Road, West Hartford

"Snowy Owls to Saw Whet Owls" Norman Smith will narrate using slides from over 20 years of research on snowy owls. From the tundra of Alaska to the tarmac at Boston's Logan Airport, learn about the natural history of these magnificent creatures. Norman Smith is the Director of the Blue Hills Trailside Museum and Chikatawbut Hill Education Center in Milton, MA, for the Mass Audubon. Call Fran D'Amico for directions (203) 237-2734

The Newsletter of the Connecticut Ornithological Association is published quarterly in February, May, September, and December.

Please submit materials for the next issue by November 15, 2002 to Manny and Teri Merisotis at tmerisotis@earthlink.net
Or at 93 Ripley Hill Rd., Coventry, CT 06238

COA Bulletin

Tree Sap and Birds

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dependence of sap, but little else. I learned that the Sapsuckers dependence for sap is one reason this bird, unlike many of its resident relatives, migrates south. In fact, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is so dependent on sap for early food, it times its arrival north with the arrival of the Sapsucker.

The Sapsucker removes the outer green bark of trees, than the inner bark (phloem) down to the wood layer. Sap will than flow into these openings, but will also quickly heal itself stopping the flow. The Sapsucker alleviates this by visiting his excavations often, and continually injures the phloem layer to keep the sap flowing. Some other creatures that are also dependent on this woodpeckers workings are; Hairy woodpecker, Orange-crowned, Cape May and Prairie warblers, Tachinid flies, Yespid Wasps, Hornets, Chipmunks and other rodents.

Other species of passerines that numerous books describe the use of sap as a food source are: Goldfinch, Orioles, Grosbeaks, Waxwings and Kinglets. Many other Passarines

are mentioned as feeding on flowers and nectar. Flower nectar is also quite similar in makeup to tree sap, and it would seem to be safe to say most of these birds might also use tree sap as well.

One could also assume the drinking of nutritious tree sap might be a better choice than plain water. Tree sap contains much needed calories in the form of sugars for heat production and energy. An added benefit would also be the mineral content, making the choice of sap over water a wise one for the bird.

Literature Cited:

Bernd Heinrich -97 - The Trees in my Forest

Harper/Collins

Ken Kaufman -96 - Lives of North American Birds

Houghton/Mifflin

plus many others with partial information.

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Computer skills Events Field Trips Finance Workshops Science

Membership Category Individual \$18 Family \$25 Contributing \$30 Sustaining \$50

Send this application with your check or money order to:

Connecticut Ornithological Association, 314 Unquowa Road, Fairfield, CT 06430

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