



President's Message

by Steve Oresman

Our members may think of COA as primarily a birding organization because they know us through the electronic Rare Bird Alert and our publication the Connecticut Warbler. Of course we are a birding organization but we are others things as well. One the objectives in our charter is to promote an interest in and an appreciation of birds. One way we accomplish this objective is to run an active program of field workshops that help improve bird knowledge and identification skills. Tom Kilroy is the Chairman of the Board Committee that organizes these efforts.

Elsewhere in this issue of the Bulletin you will find a description of successful shorebird workshops at Milford Point and a sparrow workshop to be held on October 11, 2003 at Bafflin Sanctuary, Pomfret. Of course these workshops would not be possible without the efforts of many of our Board members who contribute their time and skills.

Another important objective of the COA is the protection and preservation of important birds habitats. The COA has been concerned about the long term decline of Least Terns in the state and to this end started a study of the possible causes. Of course there are a limited number of breeding sites of Least Terns in Connecticut and probably the most important of these is Sandy Point in West Haven. Sandy Point is a busy area in the summer with fisherman, bathers, dog walkers and the like. It is also a breeding site for Black Skimmers and endangered Piping Plovers. The state is promoting a "coastal birding trail" similar to ones established in Texas and other states. COA Board member Bruce Stevenson is working cooperatively with West Haven town and business leaders to see that the trail not only enhances the tourist experience but also makes the location more attractive for nesting and migratory birds.

When the report on Least Terns is completed it will be released and publicized to "further the understanding between the ornithological community and the general public." This is also on the list of COA's stated objectives. In the last year we actively participated in the development of a Grassland Bird report that was submitted to the State Legislature.

Sparrow Identification Seminar

Connecticut Audubon and the Connecticut Ornithological Association will jointly sponsor a Sparrow Identification Seminar at Connecticut Audubon's Bafflin Sanctuary in Pomfret on October 11, 2003. Where, you say? Pomfret, in the usually unexplored Northeast corner of the state, will be the meeting place for this interesting Seminar.

The Connecticut Audubon Center at Pomfret will be the starting point for activities that will consist of an indoor session in the Center and a field identification trip on the Bafflin Sanctuary grounds, followed by a trip to UCONN Storrs and the famous Parking lot W.

Ken Elkins and Andy Rzeznikiewicz will lead the attendees around the sparrow locations and food plots on the 700 acre Bafflin Sanctuary and then turn the group over to Chris Elphick and Jamie Meyers for a tour of the famous parking lots at UCONN. We can expect to see a variety of sparrows at Bafflin that may include Song, Swamp, Savannah, Vesper, Field, Fox, White-throated, White-crowned and who knows what else.

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Visit the COA Web Page

Want to know the latest in Connecticut birding news? Want to see a photo of the rare species recently found in a local park? Want to share that list of backyard birds you've accumulated over the years? Then it's time to check out the COA Home Page on the Internet! Go to www.ctbirding.org and you'll find all this and more.

Coordinated by past COA President Dave Provencher, the web page is a resource for all Connecticut birders, regardless of your level of experience. Did you know Connecticut has a state checklist of over 400 birds? All 407 species accepted by COA's Avian Records Committee of Connecticut (ARCC) are compiled in the official checklist of Connecticut birds, and this checklist can easily be found at the ARCC link, front and center on the Home Page.

Another excellent resource is the photos page, "Connecticut Bird Photos." 131 species are represented by several hundred photographs, all of which were taken in

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Sparrow Identification Seminar

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Chris Elphick and Jamie Meyers will then lead us to parking Lot W at the UCONN campus that has over the years produced a very regular stream of interesting sparrow species. The Lot W area is composed a variety of habitats including wetlands, a small pond, brushy areas, cultivated fields, and woodlands. Willows, brush and weedy areas around the pond next to the parking lot are good for sparrows and warblers. Brown Thrasher and Savannah Sparrow nest in the area. Vesper Sparrows are often found during migration. Large flocks of Bobolink use the cornfields in late summer. Raptors are common in all seasons. In late fall look for Killdeer and American Pipits. In winter Canada Geese, Horned Larks and Snow Buntings are regularly found in the adjacent fields and in some years Northern Shrike. Walking the field edges and woodland road, you can see a wide variety of species. Some of the more unusual birds that have been found here include Northern Wheatear, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Lark Sparrow.

Following the morning field trips and lunch, we hope to join Chris Elphick for an interesting "bird in the hand" presentation using the new collections facility at UCONN where the bird skin collection is held. Arrangements for use of this new facility are now in progress. This part of the day should provide a good look at the new facilities and at the same time let us see the sparrows and "sparrow like" specimens in the skin collection.

Plan to Join us.

As our final plans are firmed up, more information will be posted on the COA "News and Events" page at www.ctbirding.org.

The **Connecticut Audubon Center at Pomfret** is at 189 Pomfret Street (Rt. 169), Pomfret Center, CT 06258. For more information or directions, call 860-928-4948 or see <http://www.ctaudubon.org/centers/pomfret/pomfret.htm>. This area of the State is very scenic so look at <http://www.ctquietcorner.org/>.

"Finest Wild Coastal Area in Connecticut" Gains 144 Protected Acres *Barn Island Has Been Conservation Priority for Three Decades*

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STONINGTON - Three decades after a renowned wetlands scientist named Barn Island "the finest wild coastal area in Connecticut," The Nature Conservancy has partnered with the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to acquire 144 more acres at the site, increasing its size by almost 20 percent.

The land, bound by the Amtrak right-of-way on one side and the state-owned Barn Island Wildlife Management Area on the other, contains a variety of important wildlife habitats including tidal salt marsh, forested swamps, and upland coastal forest. As one of the last undeveloped large tracts of coastal land in Stonington and with frontage on both Greenhaven Road and Palmer Neck Road, it has been eyed by both conservationists and developers for years.

The Nature Conservancy and the DEP attempted to purchase part of the property in the 1980s. More recently, the entire tract had been approved by the town for development as a golf course.

The Conservancy purchased the land for its fair market value – \$1.4 million – from Palmer Neck Associates of Wethersfield, and will convey it to the state Department of Environmental Protection as an addition to the wildlife management area later this year, creating a protected area of 1,014 acres.

The Conservancy is contributing \$150,000 toward the purchase price with partial use of a bequest from the estate of the late Jess T. Adkins, who lived for many years on Mason's Island in Mystic. Adkins willed these funds to the Conservancy specifically for protecting coastal land in

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COA Bulletin

Stuck in Traffic? Look for Wildlife! Connecticut Gets a Wildlife Conservation License Plate

by Sandy Breslin, Audubon Connecticut

Starting this winter, the best wildlife viewing along Connecticut's highways may not be the raptor perched on the nearest light pole, but the license plate on the car in front of you — thanks to new legislation promoted by Audubon Connecticut.

With only minutes to spare before the midnight deadline ending the 2004 Connecticut General Assembly, Public Act 03-265 received final approval from the Senate. Tucked quietly inside this legislation were a few short paragraphs that created a wildlife conservation license plate for the state, aimed at providing much-needed funds for the Department of Environmental Protection's wildlife programs. These funds are sorely needed as evidenced by the fact that Connecticut has been ranked 48th in per capita spending on wildlife programs. Revenue from past sources such as the income tax check off and the Duck Stamp is declining. Current staff and funding levels are insufficient to meet the diverse needs of a comprehensive Wildlife Diversity Program.

For the past three years, Audubon has worked to increase funding for the management of state wildlife resources only to see it cut during final budget negotiations. This year, the organization came up with a new strategy: a license plate that will carry an initial charge of \$50.00, plus a biennial renewal fee of \$15.00, all intended to provide a predictable and steady source of off-budget revenue for wildlife conservation and management.

Across the nation, 38 states have such specialty wildlife plates that generate millions of dollars per year for wildlife programs. In fact, specialty license plates are the second largest funding source (after general funds) for wildlife programs nationwide according to a 1998 survey by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

The funds generated by the sale of the plate will provide Connecticut with a match for federal State Wildlife Grants - monies which left unmatched would revert to other states. For FY 04, the amount recently appropriated by the House and Senate is \$75 million, making approximately \$679,000 available to Connecticut with a required match of between

25 to 50 percent depending on the type of project. DEP already plans to use some of the funds to help develop the federally mandated 10-year State Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan due by 2005. Work is currently underway on a resource assessment and inventory that will identify gaps in available data and help guide development of the plan.

The wildlife license plate is targeted to the thousands of state residents who participate in wildlife activities, whether through hunting, fishing, birding or other wildlife viewing activities. According to published reports, birding and other non-consumptive uses of wildlife are among the most popular and fastest growing pastimes in the United States. Programs that conserve and support wildlife for such activities are becoming increasingly popular with the general public.

A 2001 study by US Fish and Wildlife Service determined that nearly one million Connecticut residents enjoy watching wildlife in one form or another, spending in excess of \$225 million in the course of pursuing these activities. Connecticut DEP reports that 175,000 individuals hold hunting and fishing licenses in the state.

If 10% of the hunters, fishermen, birders and wildlife observers in the state purchased a new wildlife license plate, approximately \$3.5 million could be generated in the first year for state wildlife programs. With this volume of sales, the \$15 renewal fee that would be charged with each motor vehicle registration renewal could generate over \$1 million every 2 years to help support DEP's wildlife programs.

During the next few months, Audubon Connecticut will be working with the DEP and the DMV to create a design for the wildlife plate and to draft regulations implementing the program. Audubon has promised to lend a hand publicizing the plates once production begins. The plates could go on sale as early as January 2004 so the next time you are stuck in traffic, look around you for some wildlife.

COA Bulletin

“Finest Wild Coastal Area in Connecticut” Gains 144 Protected Acres

Barn Island Has Been Conservation Priority for Three Decades

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Connecticut. The Conservancy used part of the bequest in 1995 to acquire a 47-acre conservation easement on Mason's Island. The DEP will reimburse The Nature Conservancy for the purchase price less the \$150,000 contribution and the DEP will take title to the property.

“The DEP commends the Nature Conservancy for their interest in preserving coastal wetlands in Connecticut,” said David K. Leff, Deputy Commissioner of the DEP. “Our partnership with the Conservancy, will enable the Department to protect one of the great natural features of our state for future generations.”

The late Connecticut College botany professor Dr. William Niering, an internationally recognized wetlands expert, referred to Barn Island as “the finest wild coastal area in Connecticut” in his 1972 “Report on Barn Island Marshes.” The property contains habitat of at least nine birds listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern by the DEP, and has been named an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. Salt marshes not only support “salt marsh specialist” species such as the Willet and the Clapper Rail, but also help sustain the productivity and biological diversity of offshore waters. For example, Killifish feed on small snails in the saltmarsh, and in turn provide food for larger fish and water birds. Killifish, one of the most abundant small fish, also lay their eggs in saltmarshes.

“It's a spectacular system, a real jewel in a the state as a conservation holding and research site,” said Dr. Scott Warren, a professor of botany at Connecticut College in New London, who studied Barn Island extensively with Dr. Niering. “What's important is that the watershed of the marsh is relatively intact, and to have expanded the protection of the watershed is critically important. I don't think that we have anywhere else in Connecticut that much marsh with so much contiguous undeveloped uplands, and protecting those uplands is important to the long term integrity of the system.”

“It's important that this area is kept as nearly intact as possible,” said Dr. Richard H. Goodwin of East Haddam, a colleague of Doctor Niering's at Connecticut College and a former president of The Nature Conservancy.

“Development right next to a wetland would have an impact on the wildness and integrity of the whole package.”

To aid with the purchase, DEP has applied for a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant. These grants are provided to “acquire, restore, and enhance wetlands of coastal States and the Trust Territories.” To date, the Fish & Wildlife Service has awarded \$121 million to 25 coastal states and one U.S. Territory, which has gone toward acquiring, protecting or restoring more than 148,000 acres of coastal wetland ecosystems.

“Meaningful habitat conservation requires three things: good science, good relations with landowners, and good partners,” said Nature Conservancy Connecticut Chapter Director Dr. Lise A. Hanners. “We salute our partners, particularly the Connecticut DEP, for what they've done to save this coastal property.”

Visit the COA Web Page

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Connecticut. Generously donated to the COA web page by many of Connecticut's most able nature photographers, the birds and photos alike are stunning. Have you ever encountered a ground-roosting Whip-poor-will, or watched a Prothonotary Warbler sing from a perch? Want a better look at those distant, backlit peeps you saw at the shore? These photos will give you a front row seat. And the “Birds in Hand” page provides photos of birds at banding stations, with close up views that are impossible in the field, with even the best binoculars. Do be sure to find time to browse the photos page, you won't be disappointed!

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, 2003 to Manny and Teri Merisotis at tmerisotis@earthlink.net or at 93 Ripley Hill Rd., Coventry, CT 06238

COA Bulletin

Trips & Events

Sparrow Identification Seminar To Be Held At Bafflin Sanctuary

The upcoming Sparrow Identification Seminar, sponsored by COA and the Connecticut Audubon Society, will be held on October 11, 2003, at Audubon's Bafflin Sanctuary, located in Pomfret, CT. The focus of the Field Day will be sparrow identification, as the Fall migration for these often difficult to identify species will be in full swing. This 700-acre sanctuary adjoins the Connecticut Audubon Center at Pomfret nature center, which offers hands-on environmental education classes, lectures, teacher workshops, and natural history exhibits. The Center uses the Bafflin Sanctuary as its outdoor "classroom without walls," and interested birders will find it an excellent place to visit at any time of year. In addition to Audubon's 700 acres, adjacent open space also includes 366 acres owned by the Wyndham Land Trust and 220 acres of State Forest.

The Bafflin Sanctuary is open year-round and offers a variety of habitats, including grasslands and early successional fields, wet meadows, a beaver pond, a hemlock ravine and several perennial streams. Breeding birds of interest include Brown Thrasher and Purple Martin, both listed by the State of Connecticut as species of special concern. Taking advantage of the early successional habitat, other breeders include Blue-winged and Prairie Warbler, American Woodcock, Black-billed Cuckoo and Orchard Oriole. Regular grassland breeders include Savannah Sparrow, American Kestrel, Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink. Come winter time, Northern Harriers can regularly be seen hunting the sanctuary's grasslands.

And while not regular nesters, both Pied-billed Grebe and American Black Duck have been known to breed in Bafflin's wetlands, where Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warbler are both more commonly seen. If you're lucky, a visit during Fall could reveal a migrating American Bittern.

Moving into the sanctuary's woodlands, the State-threatened Cooper's Hawk breeds, as do many birds of high conservation interest, such as Canada and Worm-eating Warbler, Purple Finch, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Louisiana Waterthrush. The woods are quieter in the winter time, but mixed flocks of foraging birds are likely to be encountered, with the familiar Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse and perhaps a Golden-crowned Kinglet.

There are trails throughout the Bafflin Sanctuary, including some with interpretive signs. Cared for by resident Connecticut Audubon staff, there is no fee for entry into the sanctuary, and it is open throughout the year during daylight hours.

Please join us for the COA and Connecticut Audubon Sparrow Identification Seminar, October 11, 2003, where you will have an opportunity to explore the diversity of habitat and bird life at Connecticut Audubon's own Bafflin Sanctuary. For further information on the Sparrow Identification Seminar, please see article on page 1.

New Haven Bird Club

Daily Hawk Watch at Lighthouse Point
September 1 to November 30, 2003

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

Farmington Canal Greenway
Saturday Sept 27, 2003, 9:00 AM

Walk the Greenway in search of fall migrants, such as warblers, vireos, thrushes, and sparrows. Meet at 59 Brooksvale Ave. off

Whitney Ave. (Rte.10) in Hamden.

Leader: Andy Brand 203-230-1718 or andrew.brand@snet.net

Bird Walk for Kids at Lighthouse Point

Saturday October 4, 9:00 AM (Rain Date Sun Oct 5)

Children, accompanied by adults, should meet Flo McBride at the hawk watch parking lot at Lighthouse Point Park on New Haven Harbor at 9:00 AM. This is a leisurely field trip and is a nice opportunity for the young birder to learn how to identify migrating hawks and passerines. Please bring bird books and field glasses if you have them.

Leader: Florence McBride 203-288-6777 or j.mcbride@yale.edu

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Trips & Events

New Haven Bird Club

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THE BIG SIT!!

Sunday Oct 12, 2003

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. You don't have to be hard core to join in the fun. This is rapidly becoming one of the stellar events of the Club year.

Contact John Triana for forms and information at 203-758-7203 or jtriana1@mindspring.com

Hammonasset State Park, Madison

Saturday Oct 18, 2003, 8:00 AM

Visit one of Connecticut's best fall birding spots. This is a relatively easy hike on the trails and walkways of the park with one of the best trip leaders in the entire area. Flo always manages to find the great birds. Meet at the park entrance. (I-95 Exit 62) at 8:00 AM

Leader: Florence McBride 203-288-6777 or j.mcbride@yale.edu

NHBC 11th Annual Winter Feeder Survey

November 1, 2003 through March 31, 2004

This is a yearly census to determine the number and frequency of birds visiting feeders in the Greater New Haven area. You are invited to watch and record the activity at your feeder at least once a week for the entire time period. For forms and information, contact: John Triana 203-758-7203 or jtriana1@mindspring.com

Fargeorge Wildlife Preserve, Quinnipiac River, New Haven, CT

Sunday Nov 2, 2003, 9:00 A.M.

The New Haven Land Trust recently acquired 23 new acres from the Regional Water Authority. Last year's trip was great with snow geese and an eagle as highlights. Some birds expected are snipe, woodcock, wintering ducks and more. It is a varied habitat. Directions: Go South on Quinnipiac Av from RT 80. Make a right just past the R.R. overpass. Go through the open gate onto the property.

Leader: Lauren Brown: 203-481-0377 or newhavenlandtrust@juno.com

Bombay Hook NWR, Leipsic, Delaware and Eastern Neck Island NWR Rock Hall, MD

Sat Nov 8 through Tues Nov 11, 2003

Veterans' Day Weekend

Birding and Photography - Snow Geese and Tundra Swans
Last year's trip was great. The highlight will be on Sunday Nov 9th when we enter the main gate of Bombay Hook NWR at 7:30 AM and tour the many ponds, pools and fields where you may see and photograph as many as 100,000 Snow Geese as well as many other fall migrants from raptors to shore birds. We will also visit other spots in the area including Eastern Neck Island NWR where we will hopefully find tundra swans. There are loads of motels in Dover and there are Bed & Breakfasts in the area close by. Please contact the trip leaders for details.

Leaders: Mike and Pat Horn 203-288-1891 and mhorn@rcn.com

Fresh Meadows Tract, Cheshire Land Trust, Cheshire, CT

Saturday, December 6th, 2003, 7:00 AM

Take an early winter look at this Cheshire Land Trust property. Once slated for development, the area now sports wet and dry early successional habitats. Bring waterproof foot ware. Parking is in a small lot on the North side of Cook Hill Rd a few hundred yards east of the Elm Park Home. Cook Hill Rd is at the first light on Rt 10 North of the Hamden line.

Leader: John Triana 203-758-7203 or jtriana1@mindspring.com

Dec 10, 2003 through Dec 16, 2003 is the 104th annual Christmas Count Week

New Haven 104th Annual Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, Dec 20, 2003

Join other NHBC club members in this fun event, steeped in tradition. Participate for a few hours or the entire day. The results of the count are sent to the National Audubon Society and included in an international census of early wintering bird populations. The compilation dinner is at the CT Ag Station starting about 5:00 PM. For details, call Chris Loscalzo at 203-389-6508

Shorebird and Tern Seminar I

by Tom Kilroy

Finally, a Seminar scheduled on a day without rain or unbearable cold. The first of two shorebird and tern seminars was a rousing success and in spite of the low numbers of birds due to the seemingly late migration, the diversity of species was reasonable.

Miley Bull, Senior Director of Science and Conservation for Connecticut Audubon, conducted a pre-field slide show at

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Shorebird and Tern Seminar I

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the CT Audubon Coastal Center on Saturday July 26 to introduce the species that were potential sightings during the field portion of the seminar. An eager group of birders absorbed Miley's species descriptions and posed very pertinent questions. Immediately after the classroom instruction Miley and Clay Taylor led the group to the tower above the center to survey the flats as the tide receded from the salt marsh.

Small mixed flocks of Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers increased in size as the tide receded. There were several Short-Billed Dowitchers, Willet, and Yellowlegs grazing the mud. Plovers were noticeably absent except for a small group of Semipalmated Plovers. The resident Oystercatchers were on the bars and the Least, Common and a flyby Forster's Tern gave the group good identification practice.

Following the tower phase of the seminar, portions of the group migrated to Sikorsky airport across the Housatonic River in Stratford in a hunt for a reported Upland Sandpiper. After scanning the field Northeast of Lordship Boulevard near the entrance to the airport, where we saw a Boat-



tailed Grackle, we proceeded to the runways in the airport and voila, there it was. The group had great looks at the Upland Sandpiper from about 75 yards.

An added bonus for those that traveled to Stratford was a great "in the open" view of several members of the Least Bittern family that resides near the pond at the end of Longshore Boulevard.

JOIN COA FOR THE BEST OF BIRDING IN CONNECTICUT!

New Member Renewal Gift

Please Print or Type

Name(s) _____

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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

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

**COA does not release its membership list to other organizations. Dues are tax deductible as allowed by law.*

COA Bulletin

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