

President's Message

by Steve Oresman

The COA is an organization largely made up of birders. Birders spend a lot of time in the field and many keep lists of different sorts, work their local areas as the seasons change and even look for rare and unusual birds around the state. They keep lots of records. With all this time in the field, what is the relationship between birding and conservation?

Certainly most birders are conservationists and support various conservation organizations. However, what the COA is interested in is in how field birding activities can directly support conservation. Preservation of habitat is a primary requirement for conservation and in Connecticut there are numerous pressures that reduce or degrade desirable habitat such as grasslands, salt marshes, large tracts of woodland and the like.

When development threatens, the first line of defense includes regulations protecting various species of birds and thus their habitat. But how does anyone know what birds are present? The State of Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection maintains the Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB), the principal scientific and legal evidence regarding rare species and habitat when State permits are required for a project. This data is an important resource for local Town boards and should be referenced regularly by land use commis-

sions. However, the State does not have the resources to do regular breeding bird surveys, and so looks to volunteers to provide input. Unfortunately, with all the hours birders spend in the field, the input to the NDDB has been sparse. The COA has been pushing for more participation and while the results are improved, less than 50 useable breeding records of state listed species were submitted for the 2003 breeding season.

You can help. All the information to participate is on the COA web site www.ctbirding.org (click on the

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COA Announces Publication of Least Tern Report

by Bruce Stevenson

The Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*) appears to be in trouble in Connecticut. In the 1980's, Connecticut had a healthy breeding population of Least Terns. However, the population of nesting Least Terns has declined significantly since that time, according to surveys conducted by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection. For example, the number of breeding pairs dropped from approximately 1,000 in the mid-1980's to 225 in 2002. *Connecticut lost an average of 45 Least Tern pairs per year over this 17-year period.*

Breeding success declined significantly over this same period and, presently, rates of reproduction among Connecticut's Least Terns appear to be inadequate to sustain a stable population. The Least Tern currently is on the Connecticut list of Threatened species and, if current trends continue, it will join a growing list of species considered Endangered in the state.

This deterioration has prompted the Connecticut Ornithological Association to write a report that highlights the current status of Least Terns in our state, outlines the probable causes of its decline, and recommends actions to reverse this species' decline. *This report will be published in an upcoming edition of COA's journal, The Connecticut Warbler.* Reduced breeding success and shrinking populations are most likely due to disturbance of nesting sites by humans, sub-optimal nesting habitat, and predation. At each of its major nesting sites, the Least Tern must compete with humans and their use of Long Island Sound, which is concentrated in the summer months when Least Terns are nesting.

The COA concluded that a recovery program for Least Terns in Connecticut should consist of five elements:

- Immediate actions, to be adopted before the 2004 breeding season, that are designed to stabilize and restore Connecticut's Least Tern population.

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COA Bulletin

104th ANNUAL NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

CONNECTICUT CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2003-2004 SCHEDULE

Compiled by Stephen P. Broker

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2003:

Greenwich-Stamford, CT (GS-CT) Compiler: Gary Palmer, 34 Field Road, Cos Cob, CT 06807, mrobbins@audubon.org, 203-661-4897

Westport, CT (WE-CT) Compiler: Jim Hunter, 19 South Bulkley Avenue, Westport, CT 06880, Wstkingbrd@aol.com, 203-227-7253.

Lakeville-Sharon, CT (LS-CT) Compiler: Bob Moeller, P.O. Box 1119, Sharon, CT 06069, bob.moeller@snet.net, 860-364-5936

Litchfield Hills, CT (LH-CT) Compiler: Raymond E. Belding, 1229 Winsted Road #30, Torrington, CT 06790, hoatzin1@optonline.net, 860-482-4046

Quinnipiac Valley, CT (QV-CT) Compiler: Wilford Schultz, 93 Harrison Road, Wallingford, CT 06492, wilfordschultz@aol.com, 203-265-6398

Salmon River, CT (SR-CT) Compiler: Alison Guinness, 418 Tater Hill Road, East Haddam, CT 06423, 860-873-9304; David A. Titus, 278 Court Street #108, Middletown, CT 06457, dtitus@mail.wesleyan.edu, 860-346-3735;

Storrs, CT (ST-CT) Compiler: Steve Rogers, 75 Charles Lane, Storrs, CT 06268, sdrogers@snet.net 860-429-1259

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2003:

New Haven, CT (NH-CT) Compiler: Chris Loscalzo, 67 Wepawaug Road, Woodbridge, CT 06525, closcalz@optonline.net, 203-389-6508

Woodbury-Roxbury, CT (WR-CT) Compiler: Chris Wood, 6 Orton Lane, Woodbury, CT 06798, wood.family@charter.net, 203-263-5331

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2003:

Barkhamsted, CT (BA-CT) Compiler: David Tripp, Jr., 53 Country Lane, Canton, CT 06019-3407, dtrippjr@comcast.net, 860-693-6524

Napatree, CT-RI Compiler: Shai Mitra, shaimitra@aol.com. Contact the compiler for details.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2003:

Hartford, CT (HA-CT): Compiler: Jay Kaplan, 71 Gracey Road, Canton, CT 06019, jkaplan@sciencecenterct.org, 860-693-0157

Stratford-Milford, CT (SM-CT) Compiler: Steve Mayo, 27 Tuttle Court, Bethany, CT 06524, smayo@sikorsky.com, 203-393-0694

THURSDAY, JANUARY 1, 2004:

Pawling (Hidden Valley), NY-CT (HV-NY) Compilers: Sibyll Gilbert, 41 Game Farm Road, Pawling, NY 12564, 845-855-3266; Angela Dimmitt, New Milford, CT, BADimmitt@aol.com, 860-355-3429

SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, 2004:

New London, CT (NL-CT) Compiler: Robert Dewire, 9 Canary Lane, Pawcatuck, CT 06379, rcdewire@snet.net, 860-599-3085

SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2004:

Old Lyme-Saybrook, CT (OL-CT) Compiler: Patty Pendergast, 112-1 Main Street, Chester, CT 06412, winterwren@earthlink.net,

Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood (EW-CT) Compiler: Marilynn Higgins, Hammond Hill, Hampton, CT 06247, msamh@snet.net, 860-455-0063

UNKNOWN:

Oxford, CT (OX-CT) Information on this count was unavailable prior to printing this edition of the Bulletin.

COA Bulletin

A Christmas Count Poem

Twas the night before my Christmas count, and all through house,

*I was thinking great thoughts of woodcock and grouse.
Would my wetlands and woodlands still be there this year?
Or has the shrub layer habitat been eaten by deer?*

*Binos and bird books out and ready to go,
it will be hard to get owls if we have heavy snow.
And it better not rain, since the birds hunker down,
a lack of "good birds" might give me a frown.*

*And while warmth in the 60's is good, it can also be feared,
do you remember the fog was so thick, the Sound disap-
peared?*

*But in the dark, after that Screech trills a good morning
hello,
bird number one gets us ready to go.*

*Maybe a Catbird (or Chat!), searching thickets on a hunch,
I wonder if 9:00 AM is too early for lunch.
The coffee's still warm now, but losing its heat,
"Hey, Bald Eagle!!" Wow, that was neat!*

*The day continues, the species come fast,
"remember those redpolls the year before last?"
We saw 'em once, so we'll obviously see 'em again,
"What's by that stone wall? Cool! A Winter Wren."*

*By afternoon we're tiring, cursing the Waxwings not found,
Waiting for a new species to hop up from the ground.
And the day is not over, the list not quite right,
without at least one Red-tail before the onset of night.*

*So at the compilation we'll met, exchange stories and wait
for someone's report on a bird that's so great.
A bird we'd have seen (if only we'd poached),
Where on the finer points of i.d. we might need to be
coached.*

*But the time spent birding with family and friends
is why we're out there freezing our ends.
So come chickadees, titmice and lbj's under dead flowers,
All are welcome in the next 24 hours.*

*It's Christmas count time, and I just can't wait,
the annual trek for species, a day pretty great.
So look for the count area in a town that's nearby,
and go out and watch our feathered friends fly.*

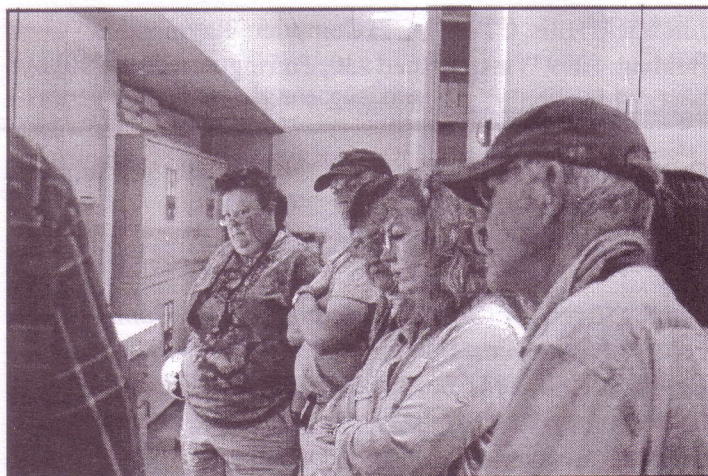
Sparrow Identification Seminar

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RESOURCES:

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

Parking Lot W at the UCONN Campus can be reached as follows. Take interstate I-84 to exit 68 and then follow Rte. 195 south to a point 0.75 miles south of its intersection with Route 44. Turn right when you see the low University of Connecticut sign and turn right again after the informa-



Seminar attendees learn about sparrows at the UCONN lab

tion booth. The parking lot ahead of you is Lot W. Parking is strictly regulated at UConn and generally enforced Monday to Friday 7am-4pm. See the following for a map of the campus <http://www.park.uconn.edu/mappage.htm>. If you plan to be on campus during these times you are advised to park in a parking garage and walk or take a bus to Lot W. Check the UConn web site (<http://216.87.181.147/home.asp>) for authoritative information.

See the CT Vertebrate Bird Collection online at: <http://collections2.eeb.uconn.edu/collections/birds/birds.html>

The Sparrow Seminar handout is available by email from tkilroy@compuserve.com

COA Bulletin

Dueling Turkeys

by Roy Harvey

[While at work, most of us readily welcome those interludes where birding can provide a momentary break from the rigors of the day. Perhaps an Indigo Bunting outside the window in spring, juncos roosting in the hemlocks outside the window every winter, or even the distant flight of a Red-tailed Hawk. For Roy Harvey, a COA Board member, the following is his account of one such memorable interlude.]

“The last turkey in Connecticut was seen in 1813...Audubon had far better opportunities for observing the wild turkey than can ever be had again.” Or so wrote A.C. Bent in his *Life Histories of North American Birds* (1912). Unbeknownst to Mr. Bent, however, would be the success of the State of Connecticut’s Wild Turkey reintroduction program, begun in 1975. Turkeys are now present in all 169 Connecticut towns, and can regularly be seen by the attentive birder. This includes my workplace outside of Danbury, where the building is situated quite close to the adjacent woods. Several weeks ago I had the fortune to witness a major dominance contest between two male turkeys.

I was working at my desk when one of my co-workers saw the birds going at it out the window and called me over. I quickly grabbed my “work” binoculars, which I keep at my office for just such occasions, and then watched the fight for about 25 minutes. And there’s no telling how long they had been going at it before it came to my attention. When I began my observations, the birds were fighting out in the open, moving between a gravel driveway and the lawn immediately outside the building.

With heads locked together, it was a shoving match with neither bird clearly dominating the other. After 10 minutes, the birds moved into the nearby woods, where they remained for the duration of the struggle. Though still a shoving match, the footing appeared both uneven and uncertain in the woods, with trees, saplings and fallen branches getting in the way. Before long, one turkey seemed to have the other pinned with its neck twisted around a branch coming up off the ground. This lasted for

a minute before the shoving match continued, both birds pushing each other down the slope. Neither bird was dominant, and it was becoming harder to see.

Throughout much of the fight, their mouths were locked together, and it appeared at one point that one bird had its beak inserted into the open mouth of the other. When the mouths did break contact, it was only briefly before they went back at it and joined again. Another interesting behavior noticed after these short respites was that the turkeys would twist their two necks together when reestablishing contact. Throughout it all, the birds had their tails raised, though not quite in full display mode.

These two males seemed to be about the same size, perhaps a similar age, though one showed more prominent red coloring on its neck. Neither had the stature of a mature tom one might see displaying in the spring. The fight ended after a protracted neck twisting event and both birds appeared exhausted. The bird with the brighter coloring carried its head higher, while the other showed a submissive behavior with its head very low. Both were breathing heavily. In addition to the energy needed to engage in the fight, it may be possible the neck twisting cut off the air supply of the combatants.

Soon enough, another post-fight pattern emerged. The winner’s tail was in full display, head held high, and breast feathers puffed up. The submissive bird kept its head low and wandered slowly with the dominant bird crowding close by. This continued for another 10 minutes, by which time I stopped my observations.

Surprisingly, 45 minutes later, the two birds appeared immediately outside my window, no more than 10 feet away. The submissive bird was almost crouching, while the dominant turkey remained in full display – bright red neck, with bulging sacks at the bottom, blue face, tail at maximum spread, body feathers raised and wings spread out with primaries flared. More than following, it seems the dominant bird was herding the submissive one.

Fortunately, this exciting event and other occasional bird opportunities from inside my building are a reality because

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COA Bulletin

COA Announces Publication of Least Tern Report

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- Additional analysis on a site-specific basis to determine local viability and reproductive success at key nesting sites.
- Creation of a long-term management plan for Least Terns in the state by a Least Tern Working Group and developed in the context of regional programs for the preservation of this species.
- Site-by-site conservation plans for key nesting sites in the state, including listing of the most significant ones as Important Bird Areas.
- Formal scientific study to address needs for general knowledge of Least Terns as well as specific management actions to promote its viability in the state and region.

The COA further recommends isolating the most productive nesting sites from humans and their pets to the greatest extent possible. Least Tern nesting colonies at Sandy Point in West Haven, Milford Point in Milford, Pleasure Beach in

Bridgeport and Long Beach in Stratford should be isolated from humans to the greatest extent possible. In short, taking action is essential.

Sandy Point, in particular, should receive immediate attention. It is the single most important nesting site in the state. Over the period 1985 to 2002, Sandy Point accounted for more than half of the state's nesting pairs of Least Terns and nearly two-thirds of its fledged young. Remedial actions taken to protect Least Terns at Sandy Point will go a long way to ensuring the survival of the species in Connecticut.

Further, long-term studies should be undertaken to better understand the ecology of this species and the factors leading its diminished breeding success in Connecticut. In fact, the report recommends remedial management actions be formally incorporated into these studies, to determine which methods are most beneficial to Least Terns.

President's Message

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"Natural Diversity Data Base" link on the web site's main page). The information collected is now limited to 13 species on the State Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species list, but if we can get more participation the list can be expanded.

The NDDDB is most useful for state-listed species representing a small subset of the birds in the state. What about birds not currently listed but are declining because their habitat is diminishing? One of the good ways to measure this is a breeding bird atlas. The last one in Connecticut was published in 1994 based on data collected earlier. That effort involved 515 people. That is about 50 times more people than submitted records to the NDDDB this year. Birders, there is a lot of opportunity to contribute to conservation as you pursue your avocation.

Dueling Turkeys

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as much of the surrounding woods as possible were preserved when the building was constructed. Where I sit, on ground level, the corner of the building has two large windows, and turkeys are not uncommon, with as many as 17 seen at one time. Though this was the first fight I have ever witnessed between two turkeys, we have observed males coming up to the glass door of our emergency exit, to pound on the door with their beaks, challenging their own reflection.

The Newsletter of the Connecticut Ornithological Association is published quarterly in February, May, September, and December. Please submit materials for the next issue by February 15, 2004 to Manny and Teri Merisotis at manny@merisotis.com or at 93 Ripley Hill Rd., Coventry, CT 06238

COA Bulletin

Give the Gift of Membership

With the holiday season upon us, please consider giving a gift to be enjoyed all year round - a membership in COA. For a limited time, **all new memberships** are available at a discount: individuals can join COA for only \$12.00 (a savings of \$6.00 off regular membership dues), and a family membership is available for only \$20.00 (a \$5.00 savings). If you've considered joining COA in the past, but haven't yet, now's the time! And if you have a friend or family member interested in birds and the natural world around us, it's the perfect gift.

Each member receives COA's quarterly journal, *The Connecticut Warbler*, featuring informative articles on bird behavior, current research conducted locally, seasonal field notes and the always fun Photo Challenge. Members also receive the quarterly *COA Bulletin*, with a schedule of events, reviews of COA bird identification seminars, and current news of bird-related conservation.

So if you want to keep up to date with Connecticut's birding news and get in touch with the greater statewide ornithological community, don't miss out! **These discounted dues apply to new memberships only, and will be available through January 31st, 2004.**

JOIN COA FOR THE BEST OF BIRDING IN CONNECTICUT!

Gift / New member, Individual \$12 [] Family \$20 [] (discount available until 1/31/04) Please Print or Type

Name(s) _____

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Email Address* _____

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 []

Renewal Membership, 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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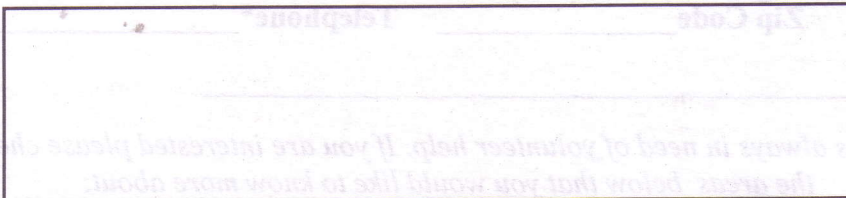
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CONNECTICUT ORNITHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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