

## Falconry in Connecticut

by Ron Bell

The State of Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection has completed writing a regulation that will permit the practice of falconry in Connecticut. While it is not yet fully approved, approval seems assured, and the DEP intends to implement the program. Connecticut will then be the 49<sup>th</sup> and last of the continental states to permit falconry. Writing the regulation was a long process involving draft regulations, public comment periods, revisions, legal reviews and research by the writers. The COA, through its Board of Directors and Conservation Committee, provided comments to the DEP during the public comment periods. Participating in this process increased our understanding of falconry and the purpose of this article is to share some of that understanding with the COA community.

Falconry is hunting, defined as "the activity of taking wild quarry in its natural habitat by means of a trained raptor." All Connecticut hunting regulations that apply to firearms hunting, including game species and open and closed seasons, apply equally to falconry. Falconers require the same hunting licenses and permits that firearms hunters do. In addition, they require falconry-specific

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## COA Announces 2004 Annual Meeting

The Connecticut Ornithological Association will hold its 20th Annual Meeting on Saturday, March 20, 2004, at Middlesex Community College. The meeting will begin at 9:00 AM, with registration between 8:00 - 9:00. Coordinated by COA Director and Program Chairman, Jerry Connolly, this years meeting will feature renowned authors and biologists speaking on a variety of topics.

Following introductory remarks, the first speaker will be **David Spector**, whose talk is entitled *Birders, Birdwatchers, and Ornithologists - Oh My!* In this talk, David will consider the many meanings of these terms with special emphasis on "ornithologist." He'll discuss the history of their use, particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, citing examples of ornithologists from the literary works of Shelley, Emerson, and Burroughs among others. Selected New England examples of the three "species" and their field marks will also be cited. David teaches in the Department of Biological Sciences at Central Connecticut State University. He is the coeditor of the new [Birdfinding Guide to Western Massachusetts](#) and has written for publications geared to all three subjects of this

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## Watching Sparrows : DVD

by Noble S. Proctor

Scanning the low desert scrub in the Dragoon Mts. of Arizona, I pause to watch a Black-chinned Sparrow in song. Next to me, I press the key of the laptop and the DVD snaps to Black-chinned Sparrow. I am able to watch a "living field guide" with beautiful footage and song of this elusive species. The DVD *Watching Sparrows*, by Michael Male and Judy Fieth is the third in the series that brought us "Watching Warblers" and "Watching Waders." Once again, their labors have produced an outstanding work.

For many birders, and especially those who are just getting into birding, sparrows are often a difficult group to work with. The comment "they all look the same" can lead to

frustration. To others, the fun of a fall "sparrow roundup day, when we go afield to see how many species of sparrow we can find, is one of the highlights of fall. With this DVD we are presented with the ultimate sparrow roundup and a visual and sound aid to all who enjoy sparrows, or want to improve their identification skills. Nearly all of the sparrows of North America are shown with stunning photography and crystal clear songs.

Each species is presented with introductory footage, followed by scans of its habitat preference which allows an important step in understanding the species. Then, the key field marks are pointed out by concentrating on the identify-

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# COA Bulletin

## Watching Sparrows : DVD

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ing nature of the bird. If there are distinct subspecies, such as seen in Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, and Fox Sparrow, they are compared not only by field marks, but by their distinctive songs as well. In addition, behavioral biology is covered giving us a complete package for each of the species.

Many sparrows have beautiful songs and are a distinctive sound in many of the habitats we bird. The crystal clear song of the White-throats in mountain forests, the buzzy trills of Seaside and Sharp-tails in the coastal marshes, or the welcoming first songs of Song Sparrows as spring returns in the East. Add to these the elaborate flight displays of species such as McCown's Longspurs, the explosive Henslow's Sparrow song, through to the beautiful songs of Bachman's and Black-throated Sparrows, and one can fully appreciate the wide range and complexity of sparrow song. On this DVD, the songs are presented to us with no background distraction.

Access is easy via a menu scroll, so one can look at species taxonomically, or simply by skipping to any species one wishes to see, as fast or faster than using a field guide. If you have DVD capability with your laptop, then this disc will add a whole new dimension to sparrow watching.

As an added bonus, a second disc adds some most interesting footage. It isolates two of Michael and Judy's trips. One for the Black-chinned Sparrow, which ends up as their cover shot for the DVD, and another showing the difficulties of sound recording using Sharp-tailed Sparrow footage. As you watch, you appreciate to some degree the difficulty they have with filming and taping the songs. Another feature is titled 'Fun with Songs', and it is indeed fun, dissecting the pattern and style of the sparrows' songs. Slowing songs down to 50% normal speed and then to 20%, they show not only how intricate the song patterns are, but also some of the subtle beauty that our ears miss. All of a sudden that explosive "hiccup" song of the Henslow's Sparrow takes on new appreciation.

As with any work that is so well done, we always want more. In this case, immatures are not covered, but one can imagine how difficult that would have been, and one only has a lifetime to complete so much work.

The DVD is not only useful, but is simply enjoyable to listen to and watch. It will give you an entirely new view of those "little brown jobs" that all too many birders avoid, and yet others enjoy the challenge of identifying. In this case, Michael and Judy have taken the challenge and won.

## CT DEP Coastal Access Survey

*COA urges all birders to help the CT-DEP distribute recreational access funds by submitting a Coastal Access Survey*

Currently, the CT-DEP solicits input in their effort to understand the public's coastal recreation needs and to better assess the demand for recreational uses along Connecticut's coast. To this end, they are conducting a Coastal Access Survey that will be distributed to individuals involved with Saltwater Angling and Waterfowl Hunting, Coastal Boating or **Wildlife Observation**.

In essence, **this survey allows individuals to cast their votes for how the CT DEP spends recreational use funds** as the responses will be used in identifying and prioritizing both land acquisitions and recreational facility improvements along the coast. Hunting, fishing and boating groups have historically been very successful at mobilizing their members. Nationwide, birding has outstripped other

pastimes and is closing in on being the number one pastime. While some statistics show birders outnumber hunters and fisherman combined, as of yet, birders have not excelled at getting public policy and funding shifted to match birding interest. Participating in the DEP Coastal Access Survey is an opportunity for birders to change this.

Perhaps the CT Lotto slogan says it best: "You can't win if you don't play." Not participating is a vote for hunting, fishing or boating interests. Please help CT birds and other wildlife win this one by requesting and returning a Coastal Access - Wildlife Observation Survey from the CT-DEP Office of Long Island Sound Programs.

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## Step Back for Mute Swan Control

by Gerald Winegrad, American Bird Conservancy (reprinted with permission)

On September 17, 2003, the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) put a stop to the control of the alien Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) by withdrawing all permits to kill the birds or addle their eggs. The USFWS has said it will not issue any new permits pending further review of the issue. This reversal followed a federal judge's order that the State of Maryland stop killing Mute Swans in the Chesapeake Bay while a lawsuit challenging the USFWS-issued take permit, brought by the animal rights group The Fund For Animals, was still pending.

The killing of Mute Swans has been controversial for the government; supported by bird and wildlife conservation groups, but opposed by animal rights organizations and some vocal Maryland residents. In late 2002, one local Marylander successfully pursued a case in the U.S. Court of Appeals that afforded protection to the Mute Swan under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a statute designed to protect America's native species.

In early July of last year, the USFWS completed a "Final Environmental Assessment for the Management of Mute Swans," that allowed for the take of up to 3100 swans annually in the eastern United States and the issuance of depredation orders for egg addling and removal or sterilization of additional birds. The plan had been supported by 13 state wildlife agencies, 53 organizations (including the American Bird Conservancy, Environmental Defense, Wildlife Management Institute and Ducks Unlimited), and more than 2600 individuals concerned with the damage that this species inflicts on native wildlife and habitats.

Rep. Wayne Gilchrest (R. MD), acting as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife, & Oceans of the House Resources Committee, held a December 2003 hearing on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and Nonnative Species. The American Bird Conservancy (ABC) testified that the MBTA should be amended to exempt out all introduced non-native avian species. ABC urged action to allow the control of introduced non-native species such as Mute Swans, and unless the MBTA is amended, swans and 85 other non-native species will be protected indefinitely.

The Mute Swan population in the Chesapeake Bay has

grown from five escaped birds in 1962 to more than 4000 today. These birds are aggressive towards other waterfowl and have contributed to the extirpation of the Black Skimmer and Least Tern from key breeding sites in the Chesapeake. In addition, the swan population consumes 10% of all submerged aquatic vegetation in the Chesapeake Bay, an essential food source for native migratory waterfowl. The USFWS is now in a position where it sanctions the hunting of native Tundra Swans (even allowing an accidental take of the rare Trumpeter Swan), but does not currently permit the take of introduced, rapidly increasing Mute Swans.

*In Connecticut, Mute Swans have been established since the mid-1950's, growing to a current population of over 1800 (Connecticut Wildlife, Jan./Feb. 2004). For more information on Mute Swans in Connecticut, the Department of Environmental Protection has a swan fact sheet available on its web site, at:*

[www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/factshts/mtswan.htm](http://www.dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/factshts/mtswan.htm)

### CT DEP Coastal Access Survey

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The COA and Audubon Connecticut are working together to make sure that every birder in CT knows about this survey. Every opportunity to encourage and remind birders must be utilized. Thanks to those who have already requested and returned a survey.

The DEP plans to distribute the survey at the end of January with a return date of March 1<sup>st</sup>. The packets will include a survey and 2 CT Coastal Access Maps showing public access locations along the coast and along the lower CT River. Participants will fill out a survey and mark one of the maps, both of which will be returned to DEP (preaddressed stamped envelope provided). The second map, which is invaluable in finding coastal outlooks, is for the participant to keep as a thank you.

Obtain your survey by **calling 860-424-3034** or **emailing [susan.fox@po.state.ct.us](mailto:susan.fox@po.state.ct.us)**

Be sure to **request the Wildlife Observation version.**

Birder participation is crucial to the future quality of CT Birding. Please contact DEP today!

# COA Bulletin

## 2004 COA Annual Meeting

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presentation, including Birder's World, Birdwatcher's Digest, and Current Ornithology.

After a short break, **Robert S. Ridgely** will speak on *Neotropical Bird Books and Conservation*. Certainly the most prominent ornithologist on the subject of the neotropics, Dr. Ridgely is the author of such landmark works as *The Birds of Panama* (among the first of the neotropical field guides), and two volumes of *The Birds of South America*. He has most recently completed *The Birds of Ecuador*, considered to be the finest, most complete field guide to anywhere in the neotropics. Dr. Ridgely's extensive field experience in that country has spanned 25 years. He has discovered or described several species new to science including the Jocotoco Antpitta and is active in the conservation of the area of southern Ecuador where that species occurs. Dr. Ridgely has long been associated with the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences and is currently with the American Bird Conservancy.

The morning will conclude with the presentation of the Mabel Osgood Wright award, and a brief business meeting.

Following lunch, **Bill Evans** will speak on *Nocturnal Flight Calls of Migratory Birds - The New Century Ahead*. Many species of songbirds make their spring and fall migrations at night, and most of these birds give calls while doing so to keep in contact with one another. Bill's presentation will be an overview of his twenty years of studies on avian nocturnal flight calls. He will challenge the audience by playing recordings of these calls and discuss current applications of acoustic monitoring for evaluating and minimizing the impact of wind turbines and communications towers on night migrants. Bill and co-author Michael O'Brien have recently produced a CD-Rom reference guide to the flight calls of landbirds of eastern North America, which will be available at the meeting. Imagine identifying birds at night just by their chips, tweets,

or twitters. Bill and Michael's work pushes the edge of the envelope for birding in the 21st century.

**Bruce Stevenson** and **Bill Kolodnicki** will both present the final program of the day, *Terns in Connecticut*. Both Least Terns (threatened) and Roseate Terns (endangered) are declining in Connecticut. Bruce Stevenson is a COA Director and member of its Conservation Committee. He recently completed an important and timely study of Least Terns in the state. Bruce will discuss Least Tern natural history, identify possible causes for their decline in Connecticut, and recommend remedial management actions. A similar overview of Roseate Terns will be presented by Bill Kolodnicki, Director of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge whose geographic area includes Falkner's Island - one of the few nesting areas in the northeast for the Roseate Tern. A roundtable discussion with state and local representatives will conclude the program.

The **COA marketplace** will be available throughout the day - a great time to socialize during breaks and look over vendor offerings of bird-related items, including binoculars, birding gear and books. Also planned again for 2004 is the ever-popular **Raffle**, which will formally conclude the meeting at 3:15 PM. Tickets will be available all day for many prizes, including bird artwork and valuable birding equipment donated by artists and vendors.

### DIRECTIONS TO MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

From Rte 9 (north or south)  
Exit 11 (Rte 155, Randolph Rd.)  
Right onto Randolph Rd. to end.  
Left onto Saybrook Rd for .25 mile  
Right onto Reservoir Rd., continue past stop sign.  
Right onto Training Hill Rd.  
1st left into campus parking lot.  
Look for yellow COA signs to the auditorium.

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federal and state permits to possess a raptor. It is the requirements and limitations of this state permit that the falconry regulation addresses. It follows the United States Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines for this activity in that it meets or exceeds the protections provided by federal falconry standards and must be approved by the USFWS. Our regulation exceeds the requirements of the federal standards in many areas, thanks to the DEP.

A brief outline of the regulation will give an idea of how it protects the falconer's raptor: It identifies the classes of falconer (apprentice, general and master) and the experience requirement for each, training and examinations for each including sponsorship and training for the apprentice class, activity reporting requirements, raptor housing and equipment minimum standards, record keeping, banding, transportation and temporary holding requirements, and many administrative details. It restates the prohibition against taking raptors from the wild in Connecticut and lists the raptors that may be possessed when taken from the wild in another state. These are the Red-tailed Hawk, Merlin, Prairie Falcon and Harris's Hawk. Falconers may also possess captive-bred raptors and hybrids that are sterile or unable to breed with native species. These non-wild birds are marked with distinctive leg bands that positively separate them from raptors taken from the wild, which wear different bands. Apprentice class falconers may possess only one raptor, a red-tailed hawk, which must be taken from the wild, in another state, by the apprentice under the supervision of his or her sponsor.

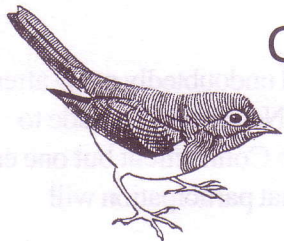
As for the size of this program, an USFWS document discussing falconry nationwide, states that in 1986, approximately 2,800 falconers possessed falconry permits, and that the number was essentially unchanged from 1974. Two years ago, at a meeting in the legislative offices in Hartford, the falconers stated that their numbers nationwide had increased from 2,800 in 1986 to 4,000 in 2000. These numbers are cited to convey a sense of the size of the sport. There are currently two falconers in

Connecticut but that number will undoubtedly grow after the falconry program is started. No attempt is made to project the growth of the sport in Connecticut but one can guess from the above numbers that participation will remain small.

Connecticut law prohibits the taking of any bird from the wild other than game birds, listing them by genus and leaving the control at the species level to hunting regulations. Certain other birds are also excepted from protection including the English Sparrow, Starling, and when in the act of depredation, crows and blackbirds. The falconers want raptors to be excepted so that they may take them from the wild. Such an amendment was introduced and attached to a bill in the 2000 session of the General Assembly but failed when the primary bill failed. At least one other amendment has been introduced since then and it also was unsuccessful. The falconers will continue to try to obtain this change. When such an amendment is introduced, it is appropriate for the COA to pay attention to the proposed method of regulation and notify legislators if it appears to pose a risk to targeted raptors. If the law is changed, it would be appropriate to follow through with the same interest during the regulation writing process. Our approach to this matter should be without bias for or against taking, but with a clear interest in the health of Connecticut bird populations.

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

# COA Bulletin



## Connecticut Ornithological Association Twentieth Annual Meeting March 20, 2004 Registration Form

Dear COA Members and Friends:

The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the COA will be held on Saturday, March 20, 2004 at the Middlesex Community College in Middletown, CT. Please refer to the enclosed Schedule of Events for directions and a listing of our speakers and topics.

We hope that you will join us for an informative and fun day of events.

The Program Committee

**Early Registration:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Persons @\$10.00 for pre-registration  
(Must be received no later than Friday, March 12, 2004)

**Registration at the door will be \$15.00.**

- Please check here if you are interested in purchasing lunch. A hot and cold buffet lunch will be available at a cost of \$12.00. **Lunch will only be available to those who prepay.** \_\_\_\_\_

Total \_\_\_\_\_

Please print the name of each registrant, as you would like it to appear on your name tag:

Please make check out to **Connecticut Ornithological Association** and send check and registration form to:

Janet Mehmel  
26 Tory Hole Road  
Darien, CT 06820

**DO NOT SEND DUES TO JANET**

# COA Bulletin

## Connecticut Grasslands Advisory Council

by Patrick Comins

In the Spring 2003 COA Bulletin, we ran an article regarding the report of the Connecticut Grasslands Working Group, entitled *Protecting Connecticut's Grassland Heritage*. This report highlighted the nine species of grassland birds that are native breeders in the state, with eight of these listed by the Department of Environmental Protection as threatened, endangered or of special concern. This report was presented to the legislature in April 2003.

Thanks to the support of co-chairs of the Environment Committee, Senator Don Williams and Representative Pat Widlitz, one of the recommendations of *Protecting Connecticut's Grassland Heritage* will soon be implemented. The Environment Committee is in the process of forming a Grasslands Advisory Council. The Council will report to the Environment Committee and be composed of

representatives from non-profit conservation organizations, including COA, universities and state and federal agencies. The council will be charged with providing recommendations for the conservation and restoration of grassland habitat in Connecticut.

The original working group was an ad-hoc committee formed in response to the development of a key grassland site in Connecticut and the endangered nature of this habitat in the state. The new group will formalize the relationship between the legislative committee and the groups concerned with the conservation of grasslands in Connecticut. Also, thanks to Senator Williams, the Committee is sending copies of the re-printed CT Grasslands Working Group Grasslands Report to all 169 municipalities in the state

### JOIN COA FOR THE BEST OF BIRDING IN CONNECTICUT!

New Member [ ] Renewal [ ] Gift [ ]

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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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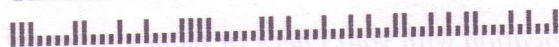
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