

THE BULLETIN
Volume 4, Number 1, Winter 1990
February 1, 1990

The newsletter of The Connecticut Ornithological Association is published quarterly, in February, May, August, and November. Please submit material for the next newsletter by April 15, 1990.

Dear COA Members:

Just a quick reminder to send in your membership renewals for 1990. It is easy to put renewal forms aside and forget about them. So please take a moment to send it along to us.

Thank you to all of you who have renewed already.

TIDBITS ABOUT CONNECTICUT BIRDS
By Tom Baptist and Joe Zeranski

With our book Connecticut Birds about ready to be released, we thought it might be fun to share some of the interesting things we've learned about the state's birds. The first list of Connecticut birds was compiled by Rev. James Linsley in 1843 and, according to C. Hart Merriam, contained 239 species with adequate evidence. Dr. Merriam listed 291 species in his book published in 1877, and Sage, Bishop and Bliss listed 334 species in their 1913 assessment. What birds have been added to the state list since 1913?

<u>Species</u>	<u>Date</u>
Eurasian Wigeon	January, 1920
Western Kingbird	November, 1921
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	April, 1922
Caspian Tern	June, 1928
Am. White Pelican	October, 1928
Ruff	October 1934
Black-necked Stilt	September, 1938
Black-capped Petrel	October, 1938
Townsend's Solitaire	May, 1939
Greater White-fronted Goose	1940
Gray Jay (H)	December, 1944
Harris' Sparrow	December, 1945
Tricolored Heron	June, 1947
Atlantic Puffin	November, 1947
Wood Stork	June, 1949
House Finch	1951
Black-headed Grosbeak	January, 1953
Little Gull	February, 1955
Tufted Duck (H)	November, 1956
Cattle Egret	April, 1957

Varied Thrush	February, 1960
Eared Grebe	December, 1964
Common Black-headed Gull	December, 1964
Northern Wheatear	September, 1965
Black-throated Gray Warbler (H)	October 1967
Smith's Longspur	March, 1968
Chestnut-collared Longspur	August, 1968
Spotted Redshank	November, 1969
Curlew Sandpiper	June, 1971
Franklin's Gull	June, 1972
White-winged Dove (H)	November, 1972
Greater Shearwater	July, 1973
Mew Gull (H)	November, 1973
Gray Kingbird	October, 1974
White-faced Storm Petrel	August, 1976
Cory's Shearwater	August, 1976
Hermit Warbler (H)	May, 1977
Razorbill (H)	April, 1978
Lark Bunting	October, 1978
Western Grebe	December, 1978
Manx Shearwater (H)	May, 1980
Sandhill Crane	September, 1980
Burrowing Owl	December, 1980
Painted Bunting	May, 1982
Band-tailed Pigeon	November, 1982
Barnacle Goose	November, 1984
Swainson's Hawk	September, 1985
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	September, 1985
Boat-tailed Grackle	October, 1985
Fulvous Whistling-Duck	May, 1987
LeConte's Sparrow	December, 1987
Eurasian Jackdaw	February, 1988

Species marked with an (H) are hypothetical -- their occurrence in Connecticut has not been verified by a specimen or photograph.

The New England Hawk Watch will present a one day conference on raptors and raptor migration on Saturday, April 7th at the Holiday Inn in Holyoke Mass, just off I-91. For information and reservations write to HAWKS, PO Box 212, Portland, CT 06480.

GREAT CONNECTICUT BIRD CHALLENGE

The Potapaug chapter of the National Audubon Society announces the first annual **Great Connecticut Bird Challenge**. This is an event where birders may pit their skills of locating and identifying birds against each other in a friendly competition. The team that can find the greatest number of bird species in a twenty four hour period will win the challenge.

The **Great Connecticut Bird Challenge** will take place from 7:00 pm Friday, May 18th to 7:00 pm Saturday, May 19th. All are invited and encouraged to put together a team and to enjoy this exciting event. Prizes will be awarded to the top three teams and certificates of participation given to all.

To enter send your name, address and phone number to:

Great Connecticut Bird Challenge
c/o Potapaug Audubon Society
PO Box 591
Old Lyme, CT 06371

For additional information please contact Andrew Griswold at (203) 443-2491. (Note: COA has donated its Connecticut Field List for participants to record sightings.)

The Peabody Museum of Natural History, 170 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, displays more than 2,000 objects from the Museum's vast collection including several mounted skeletons of dinosaurs, dioramas of North American flora and fauna, artifacts from ancient Egypt, the native cultures of North and South America, and from the islands of the Pacific, plus birds, shells and more. The Museum sponsors programs for families, special events, lectures, tours, and films. For the InfoTape: 432-5050; the EventsTape: 432-5799.

COA member John Triana is a junior at the University of Massachusetts where he is pursuing a degree in Wildlife Biology. He is looking for a summer job in the field of environmental or wildlife conservation. If you are looking for someone or know of a position, John may be contacted at 102 Fairview Avenue, West Haven, CT 06516.

When you are in the Madison area, stop in to see new COA members, Janet and Jerry Connolly at their shop, The Audubon Shop. It is located at 871 Boston Post Road, Madison (245-9056) a short hop west of Hammonasset State Park. You will find COA's Connecticut Field List for sale at the shop as well as many other interesting items - seed and feeders - binoculars - books and more.

ROARING BROOK NATURE CENTER
Jay Kaplan

Roaring Brook Nature Center is located in Canton, Connecticut, about 15 miles northwest of Hartford in the Farmington Valley region. Founded by Canton resident, Una Storrs Riddle in 1948, as the Canton Children's Nature Museum, the

Nature Center has grown steadily over the past 40+ years and now serves residents from the greater Hartford area and beyond. In 1989, the Center received over 25,000 visitors and reached thousands more with outreach programs to schools, garden clubs and area Scout groups.

Located on about 12 acres, the Nature Center is part of the Science Museum of Connecticut, with which it merged in 1973. The Center is adjacent to the 100+ acres Werner's Woods, bequeathed to the State in 1964 as a wildlife sanctuary that was to be left in its natural state for nature study, passive recreation and educational pursuits.

The Nature Center maintains an interpretive center, constructed in 1966, that houses exhibits and dioramas pertaining to the natural history of southern New England as well as displays concerning current environmental issues. The Nature Center also maintains a model of an eastern woodland Indian longhouse, a small collection of live animals, a gift shop and a small reference library.

The Nature Center's primary focus is on education and over the course of the year, a wide range of education programs is offered for all ages. Additional services include dissemination of information, making reference materials available to teachers and students, and assistance to area residents who may have wildlife-related or environmental problems. The Nature Center is also actively involved in wildlife rehabilitation and holds State and Federal permits to take in injured and orphaned native animals. In 1989, almost 400 animals, including almost 200 wild birds were brought to the Center for care.

The Nature Center also maintains almost 6 miles of trails in the adjacent Werner's Woods property, serving as stewards. Werner's Woods contains a variety of habitats including mixed deciduous forest, hemlock woods, two small ponds, one permanent and several intermittent watercourses, fields in various stages of succession and a small wooded wetland area. The area immediately adjacent to the Nature Center is planted with various wildlife attractants and a feeding area is maintained from October through mid-May. All this makes the facility a worthwhile stop for birding at all seasons of the year as over 160 species have been sighted on the property.

Spring is perhaps the most productive time to visit and a two hour early morning bird walk in mid-May can net almost 70 species including most of the woodland warblers, vireos, thrushes and other common spring migrants. Nesting species include Wood Thrush and Veery, Eastern Bluebird, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting, to name a few. Barred Owl can usually be heard calling in the evening and a Sharp-shinned Hawk was confirmed breeding during the Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas Project. During fall migration, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Gray-cheeked Thrush have been observed and Philadelphia Vireo has

been seen for each of the past four years. During the winter months, the feeding area has attracted winter finches such as Pine Siskin and Common Redpoll; and woodpeckers including Pileated and Red-bellied. A Northern Shrike has appeared twice in the fields.

A trail map and checklists of birds, mammals and reptiles is available in the gift shop at a nominal charge. Admission to Roaring Brook Nature Center is \$2.00 for adults; \$1.00 for children and senior citizens. There is no charge to walk the trails in Werner's Woods and members are admitted free. Hours are Tuesday - Saturday 10:00 am - 5:00 pm; Sunday 1:00 - 5:00 pm. Trails are open daily from dawn to dusk. For additional information call the Center at 693-0263.

While in the area, birders might also want to check out several nearby birding spots. These might include Nepaug Reservoir, where Common Loon has nested in summer and Bald Eagle has been seen in late fall-early winter; Nod Brook Management Area along the Farmington River in Simsbury has produced at Loggerhead Shrike; and of course the Nature Center is only 20 minutes from the overlook at Barkhamstead Reservoir.

BIRDING AT THE WHITE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION Gordon Loery

The White Memorial Foundation is a 4,000 acre sanctuary located north and east of Bantam Lake in the towns of Litchfield and Morris, Connecticut. The main entrance is off Route 202 about half way between Litchfield and Bantam. It leads into the Conservation Center Museum where you may purchase a trail map and a guide to birding. The map will help you find your way around the over thirty miles of trails and wood roads most of which are closed to motor vehicles. The guide lists the 244 species of birds that have been recorded on Foundation property and tells you how abundant each one is by season. One hundred fourteen of the species listed have been found nesting on the sanctuary. The other 130 are either winter visitors or migrants.

Good birding requires good habitats. The White Memorial Foundation is an unusually large sanctuary, about three quarters of it forested, contiguous with another large wooded tract of Waterbury Reservoir property. It is consequently an especially good place to look for arboreal birds particularly forest-interior species. The Foundation has been conducting several breeding bird censuses annually since the mid-1960's. They indicate that a number of neotropical migrants, that have been reported declining in recent years on smaller sanctuaries in more fragmented landscapes, have actually been increasing at the White Memorial. Bantam Lake, of which two thirds of the shoreline belongs to the Foundation, is another big attraction for both birds and birders at certain times of the year. It is a large,

rather shallow, eutrophic body of water which produces great quantities of plant food for migrating waterfowl. Late November and early December is the best time for observing the latter.

The old Litchfield sewer beds, now owned by the Foundation, were once a very specialized but productive man-made habitat. In late summer they used to be covered by large flocks of migrating shorebirds apparently feeding on insect larva in the exposed sludge of partially drained filter beds. Unfortunately for the shorebirds, but fortunately for Bantam Lake downstream, these beds are no longer in use. One type of habitat, open fields, is in shorts supply at the White Memorial. Do not visit the area expecting to see Meadowlarks or Grasshopper Sparrows.

There are a number of ways to begin exploring this large, diverse sanctuary. The Lake trails which begins at the Center's parking lot and leads down to an observation platform on the north shore of Bantam Lake is a good introduction to the area. There is another observation platform at the entrance to the Point Folly camp grounds, also on the north shore of Bantam Lake, and a raised boardwalk around the north shore of Little Pond in what used to be known as the Wild Garden. The boardwalk takes you out over a button bush marsh which serves as nesting territory for such birds as Virginia Rails and both Willow and Alder Flycatcher. Leon Gorski conducted the field work, which resulted in the latter being classified as separate species, from this boardwalk. The old sewer bed end of it needs repairing at the present time but you should have no trouble if you approach it from the South Lake Street entrance. There is also a side on the Bantam River near the Center from which you can launch a canoe and paddle upstream to Little Pond and its marshes or downstream to the marshy delta created by the river as it enters Bantam Lake. For those less adventurous, the most accessible point from which to observe water and marsh birds is Cemetery Pond at the junction of Constitution Way and White's Woods Road. Here you need only park your car by the side of the road and roll down your windows.

A new trail, which starts across the road from the entrance to Marsh Point and runs up over Laurel Hill and across to Apple Hill, is a good one for observing a variety of warblers, vireos and other land birds. It also offers a panoramic view of Bantam Lake. Another good site for terrestrial birding is Catlin Woods, a mature forest north of Webster Road with many large white pines and hemlocks. It is one of the best locations for finding northern birds near the southern limit of their range. Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers are usually among its most abundant nesting species. Another nearby tract of mature white pines has been the site of several recent Northern Goshawk nestings. Finally, if you are looking for even more northern birds, there is a spruce plantation at the corner of Alain White Road and East Shore Road in which you might find nesting Golden-crowned Kinglets and wintering Boreal Chickadees.

Two books, 25 Birding Areas in Connecticut (The Pequot Press, 1978) by Noble S. Proctor and Bird Finding in New England (David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc., 1988) by Richard K Walton, contain chapters describing some of the above areas in more detail.

"OWL TALES"
by
Julio de la Torre

Owls are addictive. They radiate an aura of archetypal mystery. No doubt this is an atavism. The owl's humanoid stare, erect stance, and bone-chilling hoots and shrieks have entranced and horrified man since the dawn of history. But even stripped of their preternatural aura owls continue to enchant. The most tough-minded empiricist succumbs to the charm of a saw-whet owl.

Finding owls in the wild--at first the purview of a few strixine addicts, but now a burgeoning passion among birding enthusiasts--has given rise to an enormous stockpile of stories about strange, exciting, comical, and sometimes revelatory encounters with these "wildcats with wings".

As the Connecticut Ornithological Association prepares to coordinate its first "Owl Event", we felt that a brief potpourri of strixine tall tales might be appropriate. Twelve species of Owls have been known to occur in the state. Of these, the screech, great horned, and barred owls are widespread and well-known to owl prowlers.

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (Otus asio)

Screech-owls are feathered Toby Jugs. They are unflappable and curious. One, hearing its love trill played on a high-fi set, flew in through a window, landed on the record, and wreaked havoc with spindle, tonearm, and turntable, not to mention the scratches its needle-sharp claws left on the disc. Another one heard a whinny coming from a parked van. It winged its way into the vehicle, perched on the steering wheel, and took a look at the driver's mug (mine!). It took little Otus less than a second to see that I was neither attractive nor edible. So it flew back to the safety of its woodland home.

The screech-owl (badly named, since it almost never screeches) is our most abundant breeding owl. It typically nests in abandoned woodpecker holes.

GREAT HORNED OWL (Bubo virginianus)

Great horned owls are the Nimrods of the tribe. Fearless and fearsomely strong, they have talons capable of cracking the

neck of a groundhog as if it were a pretzel. They often hunt by stealth. Hiding in a conifer, they wait for an unwary grouse to come waddling along. Or they "freeze" in a thicket and wait for an edible tidbit to come within striking range. One such morsel is the pudgy screech-owl. (Hornies eat screechies with relish; screechies know this and mob hornies with gusto.)

Once I pulled in a mated pair of screech owls. With me were thirty happy owlers. The month was March, a Friday night; snow still on the ground, but signs of Spring everywhere--including teenage joy riders. A bunch of teeny boppers whizzed by and scared off the owls. I trilled and whinnied and brought them back again. A carload of hopped up hippies came clanging along; goodbye screechies; more trilling and whinnying; more coaxing with squeaks. Diffidently, the owls answered, a bit more distant. All of our faces brightened with eager expectation. Suddenly, as God is my witness, a third vehicle came careering down the road, this time a station wagon packed with giggling girls. Once I had scared them off (by telling them, in a Bela Lugosi accent, that I wanted to offer one of them up as a sacrifice to the owl god), I came back, dejected, to my customers. No use trying to bring the owls back again, I said. But I had one more trick up my sleeve--a piercing squeal (I try to sound like a baby rabbit being murdered).

We were standing at the edge of a culvert about 20 feet above a bramble patch. Craning my neck forward, I let out a squeal. None of us reckoned on the possibility of a great horned owl crouching in the thickets, below our feet. One of them was. In fact, it probably had been there all along, watching the screech-owls as they flew back and forth from woods to road. At any rate, when Bubo heard my squeal she shot up in the air faster than you can say "jugged hare", wings unfurled, talons aimed at my head--a bolt out of the black. Thirty flashlights beamed in on an adult horned owl about six feet above our faces, frozen in mid-air with fully spread wings, like an angel/demon lit up against a background of pitch black sky. Unforgettable!

Great horned owls are our earliest nesting birds. They can sometimes be seen shielding nestlings from a mid-February snowfall. Two owlets make up a typical brood. Great horned owls usually take over the abandoned nests of hawks (especially the red-tailed hawk) or crows.

BARRED OWL (Strix varia)

Barred owls are hams. They are weaker than horned owls and try to make up for it by pretending to be the opposite. To do this they put on one of the best acts in birdom. They will glide straight at you, swoop up seconds before a direct hit on your face looks just about inevitable, and land on a nearby perch, the more uncomfortably close to you the better. They will then glare menacingly, swell their necks, puff out their bellies and let

loose a flood tide of barks, hoots, growls, gurgles, and wails. During the day this is guaranteed to startle the toughest dude that ever toted a six-shooter, let along a pair of binocs; at night it can unhinge just about anyone. Especially unnerving is a peculiar call which we shall refer to shortly.

First the typical song of the barred owl should be described. It is often represented as "Who-cooks-for-you? Who-cooks-for-you-all?", which is all right as far as it goes, but it misses the essential beat and timbre. The call consists of two groups of four hoots each, delivered emphatically, with a vigorous rhythm: howWHO-haWHOO!..howWHOOAahh! It sounds like a deep-voiced dog trying to imitate an owl and, disgusted at the poor quality of its effort, barfing at the end. This is the song an owl prowler hopes to hear, especially on a Birdathon or a Christmas Bird Count (CBC).

It was indeed on a CBC that I had my first taste of true nocturnal terror--thanks to this most vocal of all owls. Two young friends of mine, both strapping athletes, were owling with me along the west bank of the Connecticut River, upstream from Essex. We had been enjoying a marvelous night: a dozen screech-owls, no less than six great horneds, and a delightfully demonstrative pair of long-eared owls. But no barred owls. Around 4:30 AM we were just about to pack it in for a one-hour nap before a day of frenzied birding.

I tried one last whinny for good measure. Eureka! Our thirteenth screechie popped out of an evergreen copse and flew across the road, almost through our bodies. As this baker's dozen bird dove into a stand of oaks and beeches, a startling thing happened. From the depths of the most profound silence rose a moan that swelled and swelled, becoming a long agonized scream of the most blood-curdling intensity. My two young friends stood rooted to the ground, trembling with terror. Both of them grabbed me (father figure?)--a good thing too, because my legs had turned to limp spaghetti. I was too petrified to speak. Had I been able to say anything it would have been "Unhand me, you louts! How can I run with 400 pounds of meat clinging to my body?" As it happened, a typical barred owl gurgle almost instantly followed the end of the scream. All three of us giggled, a bit hysterically. One of my friends then asked, "If the critter hadn't identified itself as a barred owl, what would you have called it?" Unhesitatingly I said, "A pterodactyl!"

Barred owls breed in the cavities of hollow trees. They are most often found in swampy habitats, which they share with the red-shouldered hawk. The owls will also use abandoned nests of the latter species, and have been reliably reported both to alternate with the hawk in the use of the same nest and, in one instance, to nest comensally with them.

Reviewed by Michael Harwood, October, 1989

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