

BULLETIN

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

Dear COA Members:

Connecticut Birds, written by Joseph Zeranski and Thomas Baptist, is now available. The enclosed yellow flier describes the book and provides information on the discount offer made available to COA members. Several book signings are planned. Check announcements from your local bird club for signings in your area.

Response to our annual meeting (held March 24th at the University of Connecticut, Storrs) continues to grow. The official attendance was tallied at 144. Much of the success for this year's annual meeting came as a result of Chairperson Winnie Burkett's efforts. Winnie was able to arrange for co-sponsors for the meeting, which greatly reduced our costs.

On campus, we were co-sponsored by The Connecticut State Museum of Natural History. Press releases were sent out by the museum's public relations department, which helped to increase attendance. In addition, xeroxing machines and kitchen facilities (equipment) were also made available for our use. Also co-sponsoring the meeting was the Natchaug Ornithological Society, which provided some of the refreshments and assistance during the day. Thank you all.

George Zepko did a phenomenal job with the raffle. He has found a new talent - asking people to donate goods and services. The following donations were greatly appreciated: Bill Gaunya, shorebird carving; Ray Schwartz, Piping Plover photograph; Jerry Connolly of The Audubon Shop, \$25 gift certificate; Sam Fried, Northern Fulmar photograph; Dwight Smith, shorebird book; Edna and Donald McBournie of Wild Birds, Unlimited, Wood Duck box; and last but not least -- a Space Master Telescope donated by Bushnell. Again, thank you all.

Sam Fried provided some great slides for the afternoon bird quiz, along with informative comments. Sam had slides for every level of birder. The quiz was challenging, interesting and fun.

Ray Belding (Harwinton), Neil Currie (Sandy Hook), Dwight Smith (New Haven), and Joe Zeranski (Greenwich) have completed their terms as Directors. We thank each of them for their service and hard work. Fred Sibley's term was also complete, but he was "recycled" for another term (still isn't safe to answer the phone, Fred).

Also elected to the board for three year terms ending in 1993, were Tom Baptist (Redding), Louis Bevier (Storrs), Frank Gallo (New Canaan), Jay Hand (Old Lyme), and Patricia (Tish) Noyes (New Haven). We are happy to have each new director on the board and look forward to more hard work.

Officers were reelected to another term: Debra Miller, President; Frank Mantlik, Vice-President; Carl Trichka, Treasurer; and Alison Olivieri, Secretary.

Steve Mayo (Milford) answered my plea for a chairperson of the Membership Committee. Work has already begun on a new design for our flier and on a membership drive planned for this fall. Anyone wishing to help on this committee is encouraged to call Steve at 877-0445.

The Executive Committee has established the following schedule of meetings: July 11th, September 5th, November 7th, January 9th (1991) and March 6th (1991). Meetings will be held at Birdcraft Museum at 7:00 pm. Anyone who would like to become more involved with COA, discuss an idea or proposal, air concerns, criticisms, problems -- please feel free to attend these meetings.

The Board of Directors will meet at Wesleyan University at 7:30 pm on the following dates: August 7th, October 2, December 4th and February 5th (1991). Please notify Deb Miller regarding any items you feel the Board should be concerned with for any of these meetings.

CONNECTICUT RARE BIRD ALERT -- UPDATE

Frank Mantlik

Vice-President, Connecticut Ornithological Association

The Connecticut Rare Bird Alert (CT RBA) is a tape-recorded message, reachable by phoning 203-254-3665, 24 hours a day, that informs interested birdwatchers of recent rarities in the state. In addition to giving details and directions to the birds, the message also includes information on the more expected species, as well as announcements of upcoming meetings and lectures open to everyone.

This service, now in its fourteenth year, is co-sponsored by the Connecticut Ornithological Association and the Connecticut Audubon Council, at no cost to the caller other than the toll call. Based in Fairfield at the Birdcraft Museum of the Connecticut Audubon Society, the message is updated weekly, usually on Wednesday evenings.

The "voice" of the CT RBA is that of CT Audubon Director (and well-known bird expert) Milan Bull. The service receives 100-200 calls per week, depending upon the season and on the nature of the rarities. With the purchase of a new "corporate-strength" telephone answering machine three years ago, technical difficulties have been kept to a minimum.

Reports of rare bird sightings are funneled into the RBA via an existing COA network of experienced birders throughout the state, who screen and try to confirm exceptional sightings. However, anyone can report sightings of rare or unusual birds by contacting either Milan Bull (259-6305 or 255-8837), Tom Rockovansky (222-7777) or Frank Mantlik (838-1694). (NOTE: The key to continued success of this service is that we can only report information that we receive, so don't assume someone else will call us. Phone in your sightings on a regular basis.)

During the past year, May 1989 - April 1990, 150 species have been reported on the tape, many of these uncommon or locally-rare species. The rarities generating the most excitement have included: Eared Grebe, American White Pelican, Tricolored Heron, Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose ("blue morph"), Eurasian Wigeon, Harlequin Duck, Black Vulture, American Swallow-tailed Kite, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Hudsonian Godwit, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Ruff, Wilson's Phalarope, Little, Common Black-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Caspian, Forster's and Black Terns, Townsend's Solitaire, Lawrence's, Prothonotary, Kentucky, Connecticut and Mourning Warblers, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Dickcissel, LeConte's Sparrow, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Boat-tailed Grackle, and Red and White-winged Crossbills. How many of these did you see?

Many people have already realized a number of "life" birds and/or "state" birds due to the existence of this service. Response continues to be positive. Again, the key to the continued success depends on the prompt (immediate) reporting of rarities to the RBA, which can then be updated in a matter of minutes.

NOTE: The new, business-card size RBA card included in this newsletter has been redesigned by Frank. We hope you find it useful. Let us know if you need additional cards.

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

ROSEATE TERNS are being color banded and/or color marked at several colony sites in New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Maine as part of a cooperative study of the population dynamics of this endangered species. Chicks are being given either an incoloy or stainless steel Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) band on one leg, and a colored plastic band denoting their natal colony on the other leg.

In addition, chicks from some colony sites will be marked with a 3-dot color combination on their wings and neck/back region so that they can be individually recognized at a distance. Adult Roseate Terns are being given a FWS band and three color bands (two bands per leg) in a unique combination, for recognition of individuals over a period of several years.

Adults from some colony sites will be marked with a 2-dot color combination on their wings and neck/back so that they can be individually recognized at a distance for behavioral studies. Colors being used on the color bands include: black, brown, dark (royal) blue, dark (emerald) green, light (lime) green, medium ("apple") green, orange, pink, purple (mauve), red, white and yellow.

Some bands being used on birds from Great Gull Island, New York, may be bi-colored or fine striped. Colors to be used to color mark the feathers include: black, brown, dark blue, dark green, light green, orange, pink, purple, red and yellow.

If you have seen any of these birds, please note the color of the upper and lower band on each leg, and if possible, the order from front to back of any color markings. Observations may be reported to JEFFREY A. SPENDELOW, USFWS, Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD 20708 USA, (301-498-0373).

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

SESSIONS WOODS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Julie Victoria

The property known as Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington, Connecticut was owned by the Sessions family in the 1920's and left undeveloped to preserve natural settings. The property was sold to the United Methodist Church in the 1950's for use as a religious summer camp and left relatively undeveloped by the Church group as one of the conditions for the original sale.

The State has committed to purchase the 455 acre tract in 1981 and took ownership with the seller's understanding that the site would be used for a Conservation Education Center as proposed by the DEP Wildlife Division in 1980. The area is adjacent to New Britain Water Company and contiguous with Nassahegon State Forest.

Future developments will include a Conservation Education Demonstration, and Recreation Site Center with exhibit areas and education programs, a system of demonstration trails, and improved wildlife habitat areas. The Center building has been designed but budget restrictions have delayed construction.

Currently, there is no hunting allowed on the property, no horseback riding, and the area is not open to the public after sunset. There are two un-maintained trails which exist along with the blue trail. There is also an active beaver marsh which can be viewed from the trail. In 1983 an existing building was converted to offices for the Non-harvested Wildlife, Small Game, Furbearer and Conservation Education and Firearm Safety Programs.

Rough sketched maps for the two trails are available at the Sessions Woods office (Monday-Friday from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm) or by writing Sessions Woods WMA, PO Box 1238, Burlington, CT 06013.

BUSHY HILL NATURE CENTER

Philip Miller, Naturalist/Director

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The Bushy Hill Nature Center is the general public, non-sectarian program division of the Episcopal Camp and Conference Center (Incarnation Camp, Inc.). In addition to running a summer Day Camp for children to learn about the environment, the staff teaches 26 weeks of Elderhostel each year. Over 4,000 elementary and junior high students in both in-school or in-the-field programs are also provided service.

The 650 acre property is open to the public every day during daylight hours for hiking on the trails and other nature-related activities. There is no charge to visit the Bushy Hill Nature Center or to bird watch. It is an excellent warbler area.

Take Route 9 south to exit 5 (marked Route 80, Deep River). turn right onto Route 80 and drive one mile to the stop sign. Turn right again (still on Route 80) and drive 2 miles to the traffic light. Turn left and drive 1/2 mile to the first intersection on the left. Turn left again and drive one mile to the Conference Center entrance, marked with a sign on the left.

Trail maps are available at the information center.

Member Jerry Connolly offers a 10% discount to COA members in his bird store, The Audubon Shop, located at 871 Boston Post Road, Madison (245-9056). 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.

A TERN FOR THE WORSE

Sam Fried

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I passionately enjoy photographing birds. My obsession is no casual affair and leads me through some wonderful and weird experiences.

I had the opportunity to visit a tern breeding colony. Who could resist the chance to spend time on an island with 150 pairs of rare roseate terns and 7000 common terns for extra measure? After being ferried to the island by the head of the tern study team, I clambered up the dock ladder, pushed my gear through the ternstile, and entered the colony. As the birds began their welcoming rounds, I quickly realized that I was past the point of no return.

Suddenly, hot semi-liquid slime was slowly sliding from my cheek to my chin. Normal reaction would have me look up for the skyward source of the bombardment, but I knew if I raised my gaze, the odds of taking another direct hit would increase dramatically. Glasses splattered, fearful of confronting my attackers, I kept my eyes riveted on the rocky beach -- following my leader, while trying to separate tern chicks and eggs from the mottled stone at my feet.

Meticulously picking my way among the rocks, I stayed with the tern study team making its daily rounds of all the nests on the island -- walking below the high tide line wherever possible to avoid nesting areas. Wherever we went, we were dumped on. The birds continued to hammer out a tattoo on our helmets, forcing me to make U-turns on many occasions to avoid repeated attacks. The tern study team was used to this abuse, but I was completely terned off. Chicks scrambled beneath our feet, while fortunately eggs did not.

Blue shirt rapidly turning to gray, I brought out my photo gear with much trepidation. Would my viewfinder become a vile mess, my focus fouled, my shutter smeared? What about changing film? Would my opened camera take a tern for the worse, exposing innards to the raw roughage raining from the sky?

Letting the chips fall where they may, I mounted camera to tripod, hard hat to head and tried to settle unobtrusively on a large rock to patiently wait. I could not, however, turn a deaf ear to the incredible racket the birds were making. Thinking clearly, much less concentrating on my task, became nearly impossible. Visions of Hitchcock's "The Birds", came instantly to mind. The adult common terns attacked endlessly, swooping into my face with a screech, sharply pointed blood-red bills agape.

Just before whacking me in the head with its bills, each tern would spray me with excrement, adding insult to injury. As I tipped my head to the side to peer through the viewfinder, a tern made its bombing run. Getting an earful from a common tern doesn't only describe the noise it makes. One bird stood on my head for a time, contemplating what punishment could be heaped upon me for my unwelcome intrusion. Another bird wheeled and shot me in the eye. With the yellow-gray sauce running down my face, I tried to shift my position, but perfectly camouflaged eggs and chicks lay like litter underfoot and I was terrified of crushing one or the other with every step. So many nests were on the rocks there was virtually no stone left unturned. Terrorized from above, terrified by what was below, I tried to focus while continually being hit in the head. I was completely intimidated by the situation, but nonetheless resisted the urge to turn tail and run.

As day turned to evening, nocturnal activity commenced, the noise never pausing to allow the island's human occupants a brief respite from the din. My boat slipped away from the island, leaving the sound and the fury to be absorbed by the sea. Peacefulness blanketed me as we cut through the smooth and darkening water, leaving the eternal process of life to carry on.

For current bird information as you travel throughout New England, keep these numbers handy.

Connecticut: (203) 254-3665

Maine: (207) 781-2332

Massachusetts: (617) 259-8805 (Eastern)
(413) 569-6926 (Western)

New Hampshire: (603) 224-9900

Rhode Island: (401) 231-5728

Vermont: (802) 457-2779

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**Connecticut Rare Bird
Alert Tape:** (203) 254-3665

To report sightings: Tom Rockovansky: (203) 222-7777
Milan Bull: (203) 259-6305 or 255-8837

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