President’s Message
By Marie Kennedy, President

It’s time to say goodbye to 2020 and bring in the new year. Many of us take this time to pause, reflect, and reset. A fresh start, a new beginning. We need that as we’ve all been forced to give up our normal routines. This past year has been devastating to many and has caused worry and fear. I try to live by the well-known saying: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Let’s take a lesson from that sweet little stowaway owl, Rockefeller, who warmed the hearts of so many people around the country. This Northern Saw-whet Owl, not much bigger than a softball, hung on to that Norway Spruce for days of disruption and travel. Rockefeller was truly out of her comfort zone. Fortunately, caring people rescued, then rehabilitated, her until she was well enough to be released back into the wild. So, if you are feeling lonely or isolated, think of Rockefeller and know there are good people out there and they truly do care.

Looking ahead, here’s what’s happening in January and February:

Some of our members enjoy doing a “Big January” bird count. This is a month-long count for the species found in the state of Connecticut. Although some birders do the count competitively, you can do it just for your own fun. You can record your counts on eBird.

The Great Backyard Bird Count takes place Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15. This global event is sponsored by the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Birds Canada. To participate, you only need to count birds in your backyard or any other location for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as you wish) on one or more days of the four-day event. You can record and submit your counts either with the Merlin bird ID app (merlin.allaboutbirds.org) or on eBird’s mobile app or website (ebird.org). You will need a free Cornell Lab account to participate. If you already have an account, use the same username and password for submitting your bird list for the Great Backyard Bird Count. For more details, visit bird-count.org or audubon.org/conservation/about-the-great-backyard-bird-count.

LHAS member Debbie Martin counts birds at our Boyd Woods Sanctuary over the entire four days of the Great Backyard Bird Count. She invites you to join her there on Saturday, February 13, from 9 to 11 a.m. For more details, see the Calendar on page 6.

I encourage you to visit any one of our three sanctuaries. The trails are maintained for your pleasure. The bird feeders at Boyd Woods are full, and the new viewing blind is a great

(continued on page 3)
NEW MEMBERS

By Doreen Orciari, Membership Records Chair

Peter Barbero ........................................... Torrington
Briana Boutot .......................................... Riverton
Tricia Brewer .......................................... Winsted
Holly Clark .............................................. Warren
John Corbiere .......................................... Salisbury
Joseph Damiano* ...................................... Thomaston
A. Fleming .............................................. Winsted
Eileen Fox ............................................... Canaan
Gordon Griswold ...................................... Barkhamsted
Tom Konopka .......................................... Terryville
Elaine Lindenfeld* .................................. Torrington
John Lintner* .......................................... New Preston
E. Marshall* ............................................ Goshen
Eleanor Miller .......................................... Salisbury
Kris Mulhare ............................................ New Milford
Francis O'Rourke ................................. Sherman
Roger Payne* .......................................... Bethlehem
Caroline Rees .......................................... Roxbury
Michael Rokosky ...................................... Watertown
Christine Salmon ...................................... Warren
Gail Silvernail-Blood ............................. New Hartford
Mary Somers ........................................... Canaan
David Spinelli* ........................................ Terryville
Helen Starwalker* ..................................... Torrington
Kathleen Sullivan .................................... Torrington
Paul Sweeney .......................................... Salisbury
Chilton Thomas* ..................................... Norfolk
Hayden Unger* ....................................... New Hartford
David Willcox .......................................... Kent
Lynne Williamson .................................. Torrington

*Welcome back

LHAS Membership is at 818.

If your newsletter is addressed incorrectly or if you fail to receive one, send a postcard to LHAS, P. O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759-0861 or send an email to Doreen Orciari at doreen.orciari@gmail.com.

Thanks, Mia and Beverly!

Mia Coats has volunteered to take on the role of Treasurer as of January 1. And Beverly Baldwin is now our new Membership Chair, focusing on outreach to prospective new members. Doreen Orciari will continue keeping our membership records. Many thanks, ladies!
Happy New Year, everyone!

I first would like to thank everyone who visited LHAS’ three wonderful sanctuaries this past year during such challenging times. I hope you enjoyed your visit. With such an increase in foot traffic, we noticed that most visitors were abiding by our sanctuary guidelines, following the rules of social distancing while walking the trails, and above all, for respecting the wildlife and its environment.

Activity levels at Boyd Woods Sanctuary have slowed down considerably now that the winter months are upon us. The past year, similar to most, was busy with the maintenance of the nearly 4 miles of trails, especially after Tropical Storm Isaias blew through the area. Coordinating the work required for our Forest Management Program and other projects, such as the construction of an extraordinary bird blind, also kept us busy.

When the cool fall weather arrived, we added a couple of bird feeding posts, for hanging feeders and suet, in front of the new bird blind. Within a day the feeders were already empty. A more permanent, bear-proof (if there is such a thing) feeding post, with a number of hangers attached to

place to photograph birds or enjoy all the bird activity up close. It’s also a great way to introduce children to birding.

I’m a gardener as well as a birder, and I spend much of the winter drooling over plant and seed catalogs planning for the spring and summer. If you, too, do gardening, consider planting for birds and wildlife this coming year. National Audubon has a native plants database (Audubon.org/native-plants) that will help you find the best plants for birds. This is a really good tool for identifying the plants, shrubs, and trees for your particular geographical area. It will show you which plants will support the wildlife you desire as well as what will grow well.

The new year may bring new challenges but, more importantly, it brings new opportunities.

Wishing you all health and happiness in the new year!

Marie

PS. Don’t forget to put out bird seed, suet, and water to help our feathered friends through the cold months of winter.
Interior Department Going Ahead with Gutting Bird Protections

In November, the U.S. Department of the Interior released its Final Environmental Impact Statement in one of the last steps in its effort to strip away critical protections in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA).

The rule change would overturn decades of bipartisan precedent that held businesses responsible for taking measures to avoid unintentional bird deaths from their activities.

Interior’s new rule will extend the MBTA’s protections only to activities that purposefully kill birds, exempting all industrial hazards from enforcement. Any “incidental” death—no matter how inevitable, avoidable, or devastating to birds—becomes immune from enforcement under the law.

The change is being made despite the fact that a federal judge in New York this past August rejected the administration’s view that the MBTA did not apply to “incidental take,” a term for the unintentional but foreseeable and avoidable injury or killing of birds, often through industrial activity.

“We will continue to fight these changes in court, but we need Congress to pass the Migratory Bird Protection Act to reinforce this vital law,” said David Yarnold, president and CEO of the National Audubon Society.

Introduced in Congress last year, the act’s purpose is to “amend the Migratory Bird Treaty Act to affirm that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act’s prohibition on the unauthorized take or killing of migratory birds includes incidental take by commercial activities, and to direct the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to regulate such incidental take, and for other purposes.” The bill will likely be considered by Congress again this year.

Study: More than a Billion Birds Saved by Clean Air Act

A news release from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology states that U.S. pollution regulations meant to protect humans from dirty air are also saving birds. So concludes a new continentwide study published in November in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. Study authors found that improved air quality under a federal program to reduce ozone pollution may have averted the loss of 1.5 billion birds during the past 40 years. That’s nearly 20% of birdlife in the United States today. The study was conducted by scientists at Cornell University and the University of Oregon. To read the complete press release, go to birds.cornell.edu/home/news.

Pandemic Hurt Efforts to Protect Beach-Nesting Birds in Connecticut

Every summer, field staff and volunteers for the Audubon Alliance help protect beach-nesting birds, especially Piping Plovers, American Oystercatchers, and Least and Common Terns, from people and predators on Connecticut beaches. Last summer, though, the pandemic severely hampered those efforts. Fewer field staff and volunteers were available to erect fencing around nesting areas. And increased use of beaches by the public during the sweltering summer wreaked havoc. According to Connecticut Audubon's “Connecticut State of the Birds 2020” report, "Littering, bonfires, illegal fishing, kiteboarding, fireworks, drones, ATVs, and boating significantly increased; dogs roamed in areas where none are permitted; and people walked into and damaged sensitive areas or species.” Even people who should know better caused problems. The report says, "Photographers of all levels of experience entered string-fenced areas, spent many days in the same tiny patch of beach, and posted photos on social media encouraging others to do the same.” Some birders and photographers “routinely pursued, harassed, and disturbed birds to the point that nests and young were lost.”

As of mid-August, 58 pairs of Piping Plovers fledged 58 young. "That was the lowest productivity rate in Connecticut since 1993," stated the report. Oystercatchers fared a little better: Their productivity rate of 0.85 chicks per nest was slightly above average. And nesting Black Skimmers, with seven pairs producing nine chicks, were discovered in West Haven — the first time this species has nested in Connecticut in more than 20 years.
GENERAL MEETINGS

The meetings below will be held via Zoom. To receive an invitation to participate, send your email address to lhasct@me.com.

January 4 .......

"Madagascar — Mysterious Island with Amazing Wildlife" ........ Monday, 7 PM

This little-known island’s flora and fauna are so different from anywhere else on earth it is often called the 8th Continent. Over 90% of its wildlife is found nowhere else, endemic to the island! Here are Lemurs, charismatic primates, and Baobab trees with their huge trunks. LHAS member Angela Dimmitt travelled to this remote island in October 2019. Everything about the island is fascinating, including the people, with their own unique language.

February 1 ......

"Looking for Owls" .............................................. Monday, 7 PM

Gina Nichol of Sunrise Birding is back with another informative and beautifully photographed presentation. Owls are much loved in the bird world, and seeing any owl is indeed a thrill. The secretive lives of owls are part of their mystique and can make them very difficult to find in the wild. This program explores how to look for them. Through field experiences and knowledge about the life histories of owls, we will embark on a continuing expedition in search of owls and in the process reveal strategies for finding owls in your backyard, your local patch, and beyond. Preparation, ethical field practices, special considerations, and skills and tactics for success will be discussed and illustrated with anecdotes and experiences from the field.

BIRDING EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

January 1 ......

First Day Hike — Serenity and History ...................... Friday, 9 AM

What better way to start the new year than with a hike in the outdoors! Join Marie Kennedy for a Serenity and History Hike at Boyd Woods Audubon Sanctuary on Route 254 in Litchfield.

January 17 ......

Shorebirding for Waterfowl and Rarities ..................... Sunday, 8:30 AM

January is always full of surprises — once again, let’s see what unusual birds are showing up at the shore. We will meet in Stratford (exit 30 off I-95 north) at the Dunkin Donuts on Route 113/Lordship Boulevard at the corner of Honeyspot Road. We will check out the local hotspots, including Long Beach, where the ice piles up in huge mounds on the sand; Stratford Point (if open) to watch for gannets and maybe even alcid out on the Sound; and the Birdseye Boat Launch. Let’s hope for Snowy Owls! King Eiders? Harlequin Ducks? It probably will be cold and windy, so come prepared! To register or for more information, contact Angela Dimmitt in advance: 860-355-3429 or angeladimmitt@aol.com.

January (date TBD) ....

Shepaug Bald Eagle Observatory, Southbury .............. Time TBD

Maybe this trip will take place; maybe not. Join us if we visit the observatory. The main focus will be our national

MEETING CHANGES OR CANCELLATIONS

Bad weather? Meeting and event cancellations or postponements are broadcast on WFSB TV Channel 3 in Hartford and on radio station WZBG at 97.3 FM. Notices are also emailed to members on our email notification list; if you want to be added to our email list, send an email to lhasct@me.com.
bird, the Bald Eagle, but we'll also likely see an abundance of Common Mergansers and Black Ducks, with various other avian visitors to add spice to the mix. Reservations are required (Russ Naylor will make the reservation for our group). Group size is limited to six, so call soon to sign up. **Call Russ at 203-841-7779.**

**February 13 . . . . Great Backyard Bird Count at Boyd Woods Sanctuary. . . . . . . . . . Saturday, 9–11 AM**

Boyd Woods continues to be one of the best hotspots in Litchfield County for bird species counted over the four-day period of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Please join Rich and Debbie Martin at the sanctuary to participate in this important annual event. We’ll be sure to see many birds from our new bird blind at the well-stocked feeding station, but we’ll also venture out to explore a variety of other habitats as we search for unusual species. Meet at the Boyd Woods Sanctuary parking lot on Route 254 in Litchfield. Bring binoculars, dress warmly, and wear appropriate footwear for slippery, snowy trails if necessary. We will follow COVID rules as they apply at the time, which may require social distancing and wearing a mask. Snow or rain cancels this walk. **For more information, contact Debbie Martin at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.**

**Thanks to Annual Appeal Helpers — and Donors!**

*By Diane Edwards*

Each November we usually get a group of LHAS volunteers together at the Litchfield Community Center to stuff and stamp about 800 envelopes for our Annual Appeal mailing. But this past November, COVID-19 meant no get-together. So a few of us each took home a big bunch of letters, photo pages, response envelopes, outer envelopes, and stamps, and did the stuffing and stamping by ourselves.

A big thank-you goes to our stuffers: Marie Kennedy, Beverly Baldwin, Debbie Martin, and Paul Edwards (and me). Many thanks, also, to Janet Baker for passing along her many years’ worth of knowledge to me about how to coordinate the Annual Appeal. And, thanks to Harry Ainsworth for volunteering to handle the back end of the process — picking up the checks from the post office, recording them, and depositing them in the bank, and then sending thank-you notes to the donors.

**But the biggest thanks of all goes to you, our donors!**

Without your generous contributions we would not be able to fulfill our mission, which is “to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitat, for the benefit of the community, through conservation, education, and research.”

There's still time to donate, if you haven't already done so. Please send your check, made out to LHAS, to Litchfield Hills Audubon Society, P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759.

*Thank You!*
Seeds 'n' Suet

A Stellar Fall Fling A-wing

By Russ Naylor

As we witnessed challenging times this past fall — between the pandemic and politics — the natural world went its way unfazed in normal patterns, providing us with much-needed relief. Lots of active weather patterns brought both a flamboyant flourish of fall foliage and the best migration season we’ve had in many years. Here are a few snapshots of the season’s highlights.

Early frosts and fickle winds quickly whisked us into mid-fall. Drought-depleted blooms were supplanted by profuse flowering of later species — asters, late goldenrods, Ladies’ Tresses, and Witch Hazel. Fall aphid flights fed the last Darners, Saddlebags, and other dragonflies, plus more than 23 species of warblers — such as Hooded, Bay-breasted, and Connecticut — all seen up close and personal.

As the last Monarchs winged south, later actors took the stage. Throngs of Canada Geese in wave after migrant wave brought along cousins by the dozen — Wood Ducks, mergansers, Cackling Geese, and even a trio of Blue-winged Teal in Woodbury. Flocks of Purple Finches swarmed our feeders — often 50 or so at a time, luring in Pine Siskins and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Sparrows a-moving showed a diverse mix, such as a dozen Lincoln’s Sparrows on September 27 at Southbury Training School farm, a Fox Sparrow on October 17 (Southbury), and an American Tree Sparrow on November 11 (Woodbury), plus a scattering of Vesper Sparrows. Sweeping throngs of American Pipits swarmed open fields, attracting the first Horned Larks of fall.

On October 21, an Evening Grosbeak at Janie Pierce Park in Woodbury heralded a major spectacle to come. Nature played trick-or-treat on us — snow squalls on October 30 (a white Halloween! Did you remember your Halloween carols to get treats from the Great Pumpkin?). Next came two days of freezes, then two snowstorms on November 2 in Woodbury. This was followed by a week of record warmth with temperatures in the 70s — real Indian Summer. As this happened, Evening Grosbeaks by the dozen came with the north wind! We had our best flight of these jumbo finches in at least 40 years — I witnessed 53 birds in Woodbury on Halloween, with 35 in one flock alone. These visitors lit up our summer-like days with a charismatic presence.

With these and other migrants passing through all season in extra-great variety, looks like our Christmas counts might turn up some tantalizing tidbits.

As all this seasonal passage took place, our feeders were kept busy with crowds of finches, nuthatches, woodpeckers, and others. On the ground, at least five chipmunks (yes, folks, it was Chip, Dave, Simon, Theodore, and Alvin!) bounced around, brawling over feeder rights between stuffing cheeks and dens with seed for the winter. In the air above, brash Blue Jays battled each other over access to sunflower and safflower seeds, when not stuffing their faces with seeds to hoard away for leaner times to come. Only our feisty Red-bellied Woodpeckers could shoo them away from the feeders to get a share — colorful visitors who don’t take no for an answer! This winter promises to be an entertaining one so long as the feeders can stay filled.

One more bird is of note: On August 18, a young Great Egret came to Orton Lane Pond in Woodbury, on the Pomperaug River. This fishing hole proved so appealing, he stayed and stayed and stayed. As of November 12, he was still there catching finned dinner alongside mergansers, Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, a resident kingfisher, and other piscivores — not snow, nor early freezes, nor long dark nights stop him from his appointed rounds (is he looking for a gig with the USPS?). Throngs of Canada Geese, Evening Grosbeaks, junco, or other late migrants don’t faze him at all, even when he gets restless and temporarily wings off, sometimes flying in circles in indecision as if pondering “Do I migrate to Florida or save the airfare and stay put?” So far, he has always come back. It will be interesting to see if he stays for Turkey Day, or even for our Christmas count. One can always hope!
IN MY GARDEN — AND BEYOND!
A Journal — November 2020

WINTER! How suddenly the weather changed from fall to winter! That one big storm which did so much damage, downing huge trees, etc., blew all the leaves off in one day. Every year we say “never seen so many leaves before!” — only this year it was true. I am so lucky to have woods to drag tarps of them into. Mostly oak leaves on top, maples below, they are that warm, rich caramel color compared to gray trunks and a steely gray sky today. I just saw a mosquito — huh?

BIRDS! What an incredibly birdy time! The migrants have mostly moved on now, the “exotics,” the Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, occasional warbler — but it was a feast. Now just the locals come to the feeders, and White-throated Sparrows and juncos (sadly, Evening Grosbeaks did not visit me). Yesterday a Yellow-rumped Warbler was foraging on the patio, turning over still-green violet leaves for insects, and today a super little Fox Sparrow is scratching under the feeders. Last week, a pair of Brown Creepers chatted as they worked their way up tree trunks, then flew down to the next tree. But for a few glorious weeks, flocks of siskins squabbled over the nyjer seeds along with goldfinches, and Purple Finches pushed House Finches off the sunflower seeds, competing with a large family of titmice for dominance. The pair of Hairy Woodpeckers has returned — they did not bring their young to the feeders this year (tough love?), likewise the Red-bellied Woodpeckers. From two to eight cardinals chase each other around, and a bunch of Mourning Doves on any given day — recently, one looked “different” — a late fledgling? A few dove feathers may indicate the Red-shouldered Hawk might have caught one. The heron and the kingfisher have also visited the stream; and the Barred Owl, which spent the summer with its family across the road in the tall White Pine stand, continues to call out late afternoon and again around 11 p.m. And my favorite Carolina Wrens are still here together, he singing and she chattering in response, often at dusk before they go to roost.

BEARS! Had a great recent experience! Typing away, I saw one outside the window, so went to get my camera. Then there were two waddling quickly (is that an oxymoron?) across the lawn, and suddenly there were four! — Momma, two girls and a slightly bigger boy (I presume) under the feeders. Mom stood on her hind legs but could not reach the hanging feeders, and when I tapped on the window the two smaller cubs dashed up trees — Boy stayed close to Mom. Not seen them since — wonder if they are hibernating in the lovely little cave a short distance into the woods where I would certainly bed down if I were a bear!

DEER! A few have passed through, the bucks thrashing the trunks of saplings to rid their antlers of velvet. I’ve put chicken wire round some more precious saplings, but there are plenty to go around. And I’ve finally more or less finished putting the garden to bed — those deer “helped” by eating any remaining green leaves on daylilies and hosta, leaving less for me to cut down. They have since been noshing anything green, or at least interesting: I had planted several native azaleas and a couple of hydrangeas, and their stalks apparently taste like asparagus or something equally yummy

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he really is alone in the house, not just king of the roost — and he’s a little lonely.

So winter is almost here and we hunker down, watch the feeders, and count the months till spring — and be thankful for what we have!

**Duck Ramble Report, November 15**

**If It Quacks Like a Duck ...**

By Russ Naylor

On a blustery Sunday, a band of field-trip-famished feather aficionados gathered at White Memorial for a wild duck chase, when an odd "drake" joined them — attempts to identify this individual proved him to be our own jaegermeister Fran Zygmont, "quackily" masked (it looked like a duck bill) and ready to lead us on a tour of Bantam Lake.

The previous week's Indian Summer weather kept many late-season migrants north, so we had less than our usual variety of water birds — no Black Ducks, Common Goldeneyes, Loons, or Horned Grebes. Still, we spotted a nice mix of aquatic avians — Ring-billed Gulls, bands of Bufflehead, Ruddy Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Pied-billed Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, and even one lone Common Merganser. Our resident ravens and Bald Eagles honored us with flyovers, a young Northern Harrier patrolled the marshes, and American Tree Sparrows accompanied us at Point Folly. Red-breasted Nuthatches were everywhere in the pines — part of an ongoing major irruption currently underway.

Our day of more than 45 species was capped off by a drake Northern Shoveler at Jones Pond in Morris, with a fast flyby sortie over our heads by an errant Peregrine Falcon cruising along Point Folly — a top-flight finish to a ducky day! To top our luck off, the wind and rain storm bearing down upon us held off until the trip was done.

Accolades aplenty go to Fran for whetting our starved appetites for birding, just in time for dreams of Christmas Count bounty awaiting. As always, well met and well played.

(they are now wrapped in burlap). Mother Nature’s way of pruning, though the shaping is perhaps less artistic than I would have liked. There must be another reason for deer to be put on this earth besides looking cute.

This month my little Lucy left me. Her behavior had been a bit odd, but in a good way, like jumping on my chest at 6 a.m. and purring in my face “it’s breakfast time!” which she had not done in years; or several occasions coming for a walk with me around the garden, never done before, finally peeling off to get a drink from the stream as old Putu used to do. She was 16 — maybe a stroke. It was Sunday, so we had to go to a wonderful vet down in Newtown. Her ashes are joining Pooh and Tiggy up in the woods, near where she used to catch chipmunks, thinking they were lost kittens. Now, a couple of weeks later, Star is just beginning to realize
Update

LHAS Bluebird Nest Box Monitoring

Each nesting season, several LHAS volunteers monitor the nest boxes every 10 days to two weeks at our three sanctuaries. It’s part of an American Bluebird Restoration Project.

Here are our 2020 results:

- **Boyd Woods Sanctuary** had four bluebird nests with fledglings. Tree Swallows and House Wrens also nested in some of our boxes, and a phoebe nested at the kiosk.

- **Kalmia Sanctuary** experienced some damage to the boxes in June. There was at least one bluebird nest with a fledgling. Other birds nesting in our boxes were chickadees, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens.

- **Wigwam Brook Sanctuary**’s nest boxes were relocated and repaired. We still need to relocate two more. We had three bluebird nests with fledglings, plus House Wrens and Tree Swallows.

- Between the three sanctuaries, 24 bluebirds hatched and fledged the nest boxes.

Many thanks to Rebecca Purdy for overseeing this project and to the 2020 monitors: Janice Jankauskas and Irek Rychlik at Kalmia, Beverly Baldwin and George Stephens at Wigwam Brook, and Rebecca Purdy at Boyd Woods.