The mission of the Litchfield Hills Audubon Society 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.

President’s Message

By Maria Toth, President

I hope this finds everyone healthy and well, during this challenging time. This issue of Chickadee Chatter is briefer than usual because fewer meetings/activities are happening than normally would this time of year. Please take all the precautions you can to keep yourself and your family safe. We know it can be hard staying indoors, and that birding and being outdoors can be a great stress reliever, if handled responsibly. Make sure you are always aware of current CDC recommendations, guidelines, and protocols before heading out. The National Audubon Society has posted some great resources on their website (audubon.org) for birding outdoors or for enjoying birding while staying indoors.

No LHAS Field Trips

For the safety of all, LHAS has opted to cancel its upcoming field trips. We hope you will enjoy some time birding in your own yard or in some quiet locations you may know about.

Annual Dinner — Maybe?

The Annual Dinner is a favorite event of members and friends of LHAS alike. We would love to be able to definitively say that the Annual Dinner in June is on — but we really just don’t know. Please pencil in June 3 at the Elks Lodge in Torrington. We will send an email blast when we know more. If we are able to hold the Annual Dinner, then we will send out a separate postal mailing with a flyer so you can RSVP.

Photographing Birds in Your Backyard

Staying close to home because of COVID-19? Why not practice your bird photography skills? National Audubon has tips on “How to Set Up the Perfect Perch for Backyard Bird Photography.” Go to audubon.org/joy-of-birds.

WIGWAM WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

By John Baker, Wigwam Wildlife Sanctuary Chair

The snow and ice have melted, but Mother Earth seems oblivious to it. What does she know? Is it April Fool’s?

Wigwam will have an active season once the COVID-19 situation has eased enough for us all to resume normal activities. We’ll have 23 native plants from the Northwest Conservation District’s Earth Day Plant Sale to plant in order to nourish the wildlife and beautify the grounds. We’ll also have a new sign and bird boxes. Forester Andrew Bosse will continue working on the Forest Management Plan (FMP). The American Chestnut Foundation will be roguing (weeding out inferior trees) and removing the trees that are found to be non-resistant to the blight.

Otherwise, it’s the usual maintenance and feeding the beavers, which have, hopefully, multiplied over the winter.

Stay tuned and come out and get involved when it’s safe. Thanks.
By Doreen Orciari, Membership Records Chair

Michelle Alfandari                      Sharon Edward Banach                      Thomason
Martha Barhydt.                      Watertown
Rich Batchelder.                     Torrington
Scott Bond.                          Goshen
Carly Brunjes                        New Milford
Ethel Carr                          Bristol
Kathryn Coe*                        Washington
Peter Davis                        Riverton
Jacqueline Dedell                    Litchfield
Frances Devlin                      Litchfield
Robert Dwan                         Thomaston
Justin Ebersman                     New Milford
John Frazier                         Bristol
Paul Gallo                          Goshen
Cynthia Gorman                      New Hartford
Patrick Graham                      Watertown
Serena Granbery                     Salisbury
Cathy Hagadorn                      New Milford
Linda Hart                          Gaylordsville
Susan Hassler                       Sharon
Charles Jackson                     Roxbury
Robin Johnson                       Woodbury
Susan Katz                          Washington
Bill & Cheryl Lindquist*            Harwinton
Anne Lynd                          New Hartford
Jane McDermott                      Bethlehem
Lisa Miller                         Sharon
Mark Minear                         Bristol
Rochelle Pare                        Bristol
Elaine Pelizzari                    Winsted
Charles Perret                     Torrington
Wayne Pinkham                      Thomaston
Christine Rouleau                   Bristol
Paul Sakren                        New Preston
Linda Salamacha                    Torrington
Elizabeth Schloze                   Sherman
Steven Schriver                    Thomaston
Campbell Scott                     Sharon
Shari Speeland                      Thomaston
Peter Stephanak                   Watertown
Birgit Tolman                      Torrington
Donna Vincenti*                    New Hartford
Carol Ward                          Washington Depot
Patricia Weise                      Winsted
Jim Wexler                          Sharon
Gene Wipfler                         Bristol

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Newburyport/Cape Ann Trip Report:
A 'Frostbiter' Unfrozen

By Russ Naylor

In late February our LHAS crew winged forth on Dave Tripp's annual "Frostbiter" foray into the usually frigid north of Massachusetts, only to meet a balmy winter thaw with temperatures reaching into the 50s and ice melting all over. Blackbirds and robins passed over going north, and waterfowl engaged in courtship as a veritable abundance of winter birds was enjoyed. Salisbury Beach yielded Greater White-fronted Goose, plus two each of Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, and Northern Shrike. For the camera buffs' pleasure, West Beach in Beverly harbored an Eared Grebe, plus three Purple Sandpipers. Halibut Point produced seven more Purple Sandpipers and a pair of King Eiders.


On our last day, Plum Island treated us to Razorbills and a Rough-legged Hawk, keeping us from missing out on these two target waterfowl species. Perhaps the most spectacular sightings were the bands of Harlequin Ducks near surf-washed rocks, seen and heard in courtship between bouts of feeding.

All told, we tallied well over 70 species. Hats off, as always, to Dave for letting our bird-mad crowd "tripp" out on a three-day fix of fantastic featherquesting!
March Stratford Shorebird Trip
By Angela Dimmitt

In our own cars and keeping our social distances, we went first to Lordship’s Warehouse Pond, where Mute Swans are already nesting, having chased away other waterfowl except for Black Ducks and a pair of Green-winged Teal. Unexpected was a newly arrived pair of Boat-tailed Grackles, making their strange croaking calls. Robins and Song Sparrows were everywhere, and outside the sanctuary entrance the builders of the warehouse had planted thousands of daffodils, an incredible, heart-warming sight on a chilly morning.

Next to Long Beach, where there were a large number of delightful Brant, all clacking to each other, and still a few Long-tailed Ducks and Common Golden-eyes, but on the marsh side with a flock of Dunlin scurrying about in the mud was a single Piping Plover. What a little beauty! An area of the beach has already been roped off for them to nest. Keep your fingers crossed for them! Stratford Point treated us to Northern Gannets flying east over the sound, their long wings flashing white as they banked or were buffeted by the wind. A few Surf Scoters and Common Loons fought the quite-rough sea, also Red-breasted Mergansers. A lone Red-tailed Hawk hung out over the parking lot.

The coots were still at the Birdseye Boat Launch with only a single pair of Gadwall, also American and Fish Crows challenging each other vocally, so we headed over to Milford Point to catch the action there. Out on the beach, it was beginning to rain — we saw two pairs of oystercatchers in the distance and an Osprey carrying a fish, then went back to the platform overlooking the marsh. The tide was quite high and we saw several ducks — more Gadwall, American Wigeon, a bunch of Northern Shovelers, Green-winged Teal, scads of Black Duck (they are definitely not endangered here!) and a big thrill — a pair of Ospreys sitting on the nest platform. We like to think the male was bringing a nuptial offering to the female in that fish he carried!

Conservation News
By Diane Edwards, Conservation Chair

Sick Young Eagle Again Soaring Over Bantam Lake

In February, a man walking his dog in Litchfield found a nearly unconscious juvenile Bald Eagle on the ground. The eagle was brought to Sharon Audubon, where he was treated and restored to health. The bird apparently had eaten a plant-eating mammal, ingesting a toxin at the same time. After he had regurgitated the remains of the mammal, the eagle quickly recovered. Less than two weeks after being admitted into rehab, the bird was released back into the “wild” at Bantam Lake.

State Horseshoe Crabs in Decline

The number of Horseshoe Crabs along Connecticut’s shoreline has dropped to the point that the population is considered in “poor condition” by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The commission and other organizations, including the Connecticut Audubon Society (not affiliated with LHAS), are calling for a ban on Horseshoe Crab fishing. The crabs’ eggs are an important food source for many fish and shorebirds, such as the Red Knot. According to the CAS website, “The drastic drop in the number of horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound and especially along Delaware Bay, has led to a near collapse of the population of Red Knots, which recently were listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.”
IN MY GARDEN

A Journal — March 2020

By Angela Dimmitt

March 19 was the First Day of Spring — the grass is green, but it’s mostly moss. Now a lovely rainy day after several nice ones — I got into the garden, cleared beds, planted a few peas, and felt thankful to Mother Nature for not forgetting us in this stressful time. The veg garden is covered with lovely bright green moss — luckily it lifted off quite easily with minimal soil attached. There is moss everywhere — some absolutely beautiful, other patches less so. Is this because of the mild, snowless winter? Does a coating of moss protect plants the way snow does against the cold? Time will tell. So I planted a few peas, using up old packets since the ground is still very wet, maybe too wet. A few daffs are out on the south wall, but small early ones up against the woods are proving tasty to some critter who keeps nipping the buds off. Deer have been nibbling emerging daylilies and irises down to the ground, but daffodils are supposed to be poisonous. Chipmunks perhaps? Lots of them after the mild winter. Squirrels are very frisky — there is a pink one, well pink like the faded red of a red-haired person. Anyway, quite different from the grays. I saw a mink up near the house twice — definitely not a squirrel! It disappeared into the stone wall — hunting chipmunks perhaps? B

Birds are arriving! While I was working in the garden this week, a Barred Owl called on two days, at 3:30 and 4:30. On the 18th, six hen turkeys visited; on 3/20, the first phoebe; 3/29, the first Chipping Sparrow; Great Blue Herons have been flying back and forth — four at one time, perhaps scouting out the swamp up the road for a new heronry. One has been fishing in the stream too. On the 27th I watched a White-breasted Nuthatch busily building a nest in a hole in an old maple — yesterday a squirrel entered the hole, so I suspect that is that. The Connecticut Bird Atlas “safe date” is April 25, so that little bird was a bit early! Bluebirds have also been checking the boxes, and my Carolina Wrens have definitely been claiming territories by building in several places — the gas tank, the straw hat, a bluebird box.

And the first butterfly, an Eastern Comma, settled on my tarpaulin to warm itself on 3/26.

Garden — snowdrops were disappointing; something ate the masses under an old maple, all gone! Voles? Crocuses have popped up in my wild meadow — it’s different every year since I stopped mowing. Daffodils — picked a few but most are still emerging. Forsythia — scrappy this year. But as I write, I’m noticing the maples across the stream are hinting red; lilac buds are very fat and green. Everything else is gray-brown, trees covered with greenish lichen. Such a contrast to Stratford on 3/28 — there were magnolias out everywhere, White Stars open and the big pink ones just opening. Pink cherry blossoms too and daffodils. One amazing sight was near a birding spot — huge warehouses have been built on the marshes, and someone planted thousands of daffodils on a grass verge — few people go there, can appreciate them, but birders can!
A Welcome Sign of Spring and New Life

While walking in the woods off Prospect Mountain Road in Litchfield, Marie Kennedy flushed a female Woodcock off her nest. On the ground Marie saw two speckled eggs — an earlier egg-laying than expected for Woodcock in our area.

Photo: Marie Kennedy