



Chickadee Chatter



March/April 2024

Litchfield Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 69/Issue 2

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.

Flying Together for Birds

Reflections on the National Audubon Society Leadership Conference

By Vickie Dauphinais, LHAS Board Member

At the beginning of November, I had the privilege of attending the National Audubon conference in Estes Park, Colorado. The conference was attended by chapter representatives from across our country, as well as partners from Canada, Latin America, and the Caribbean — all united by the common vision of a future where birds will thrive. In all, there were 350 people in attendance from 42 states, 20 campus chapters, and eight countries. It was refreshing to see all the young people actively participating in discussions. They injected fresh energy and optimism in the conference. One young lady shared, “I was introduced to birds in 4th grade. The seed was planted; now in my 20’s it’s flourishing.”

The primary topic at the conference was National Audubon’s exciting, new five-year strategic plan to “bend the bird

See Calendar on pages 6-8 for our Upcoming Meetings & Field Trips

curve,” aptly named, Flight Plan. The stated goal of the plan is to “...orient all of Audubon toward achieving a singular Guiding Star: halting and ultimately reversing the precipitous decline of birds across the Americas.” The plan focuses on three core strategic drivers: a hemispheric approach to bird conservation, finding climate crisis solutions, and ensuring all people feel included and empowered in the movement to protect birds.

Multiple panels at the conference focused on providing tools to local chapters to ensure the success of this initiative. I came with a few main takeaways from the various discus-

(continued on page 3)



CT/NY council members at the conference with the impressive peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park in the background.

Photo: Sidney Walsh

Mark Your Calendar for Give Local — April 24-25

Your donation can help us raise bonus funds!



The Give Local campaign for Waterbury and the Litchfield Hills is a great way to support causes that matter to you. We hope that includes LHAS! During the

36-hour online campaign, LHAS and other nonprofits will earn bonus dollars for every donor we secure and will have an opportunity to vie for cash prizes. The campaign is sponsored by the Connecticut Community Foundation and the Ion Bank Foundation. For more information or to donate, visit givelocalccf.org.

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Wigwam Brook Sanctuary	John Baker	860-567-8427

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Summer Bird Count	Dave Tripp	dtrippjr@gmail.com
Nest Box Program	Rebecca Purdy	860-485-8530

Chickadee Chatter is published in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submission deadline for the **May/June** issue is **April 1**.

Please email items to appear in the newsletter to **Diane Edwards** at edwardsd68@charter.net or mail them to her at **68 Shingle Mill Road, Harwinton, CT 06791**.

Send other business to the appropriate chairperson at **LHAS**, **P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759-0861** or lhasct@me.com.

NEW MEMBERS

By Doreen Orciari, Membership Records Chair

Michael Ackerman	Litchfield
Kathy Amiet	Sharon
Tabitha Brewer	Canaan
Carl Brightman	New Preston
Christopher & Diana Bryant	New Milford
Jennifer Cadrain	Barkhamsted
Amy Cady	Cornwall
Robert Campana	Bristol
Sharon Charde	Lakeville
Ronald Chepurna	Thomaston
Jonathan Chesler	New Milford
Cynthia Doran	Washington Depot
Larita Freedman	Norfolk
Him Huku	Sharon
Carolyn Jones	Winchester
Margaret Kelehan	Winchester
Michael & Maura Kelly	Sharon
Trudy Kramer	Lakeville
Susan Macdonell	Northfield
Paul Mahler	New Hartford
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Lynda Nielsen	Torrington
Elizabeth Rahilly	Northfield
Jennifer Rocca	New Milford
Jean Saliter	Salisbury
Ann Sartoni	Salisbury
Katherine Schultheis	Warren
Mary Scrittorale	Bristol
Jarrold Sisk	Lakeville
Curry Walker	Litchfield

LHAS membership is at 999.

If your newsletter is addressed incorrectly, send an email to Doreen Orciari at doreen.orciari@gmail.com.

Condolences

LHAS wishes to express our deepest sympathies to Marcia McGowan, whose mother passed away in January.

Flying Together for Birds

(continued from page 1)

sions. First, the importance of forging partnerships. We can all achieve more by joining arms. Second, in order for us to continue enjoying birds, we need to get involved in policy-making at the local and national levels. Marshall Johnson, chief conservation officer at National Audubon, said it well: "We are what hope looks like to a bird." Finally, for conservation to be successful, all voices need to be at the table, including those of minorities. We have some work to do in this area.

The conference was not all business meetings. Folks had plenty of opportunities to join field trips around Estes Park, including Bear Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park, Rocky Mountain Arsenal Wildlife Refuge, and Lake Estes. The YMCA resort, where the conference was held, offered easy hiking trails for people who weren't accustomed to elevation or weren't able to walk long distances. Given the time of year, not many birds were around, but I was thrilled to see a few lifers: magpies,

Steller's Jays, Mountain Chickadees, and a Clark's Nutcracker! The small focus groups and birding hikes offered the chance to connect with individuals from different states and countries. A number of us decided to stay in touch and share

ideas, challenges, and resources from our home chapters. Just like that, the Cross-Pollinator Group came to be. We meet monthly on Google; Amelia Kaiser from Mississippi Headwaters Audubon Society is spearheading this. I am looking forward to learning from others' challenges and successes. Overall, the conference was an amazing experience!



Black-billed Magpie.

Photo: National Audubon Society

This newsletter and other LHAS features can be seen **IN LIVING COLOR** at www.lhasct.org.



Scan the QR code at left with your smartphone to go to www.lhasct.org.

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Special thanks to **Doreen Orciari** and **Janet Baker** for proof-reading this newsletter!

President's Message

By Diane Edwards



Earth Day might officially fall in April, but as far as I'm concerned, every day is Earth Day. If you love nature — wild birds and animals, trees and wildflowers, rivers and oceans, the night sky and the air we breathe — you no doubt agree.

It might be easy to get discouraged by the the barrage of bad news about the environment, but remember: there's *good* news too, and hope for the future.

As Vickie Dauphinais points out in her article on page 1, National Audubon has released its **Flight Plan** — a "bold strategic plan [that] will achieve new levels of impact for birds, people, and the planet." I encourage you to take a look at the plan (it's quite impressive!) by visiting audubon.org/about/welcome-flight-plan.

Among other things, the plan encourages us all to "take action." What can we do?

For one thing, now that migration season is here, keep "**Lights Out**" at night. In Connecticut, most migrating birds

(continued on page 11)

Join Us!



LIGHTS OUT CONNECTICUT

Flip the Switch

Join the growing community of CT residents, businesses, schools, churches, and nonprofits pledging to turn off unnecessary outdoor and indoor lighting from **11pm to 6am** each night during peak bird migration to reduce the risks of light pollution to migratory birds.
SPRING: Apr 1 - May 31. FALL: Aug 15 - Nov 15.

Why Lights Out?

Artificial lighting can attract and disorient migratory birds that travel at night, navigating by cues in the night sky. Excessive lighting can lure them off track into unsafe areas where they are at higher risk of exhaustion, predation, and building collisions. Nearly 1 billion birds are killed each year in building collisions.



LHAS Christmas Bird Count Results

By Dave Tripp, Jr., Compiler

I want to start this year's summary by thanking everyone who participated in the Litchfield Hills CBC on December 17, 2023. It was an amazing feat, with nearly half the count areas adding a species that no one else found. Additionally, every area was covered, and every area with one exception had 30 or more species. I cannot recall that ever happening.

Waterfowl was greatly represented this year, with the open water on the mid-size lakes (Woodbridge Lake) and smaller ponds and marshes like Cemetery and Jones Ponds. Bantam Lake, as usual, was the mecca for our wintering waterfowl on count day and added some waterfowl during count week. The few species that had been there leading up to the count were found on nearby Jones Pond (Gadwall) and Cemetery Pond (American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal). We did miss Wood Duck and Northern Pintail this year. The more uncommon birds, high counts, and "saves" are in bold below in the list. (A "save" is a species only seen by one area but has been recorded regularly on the count over the years.)

Even with the rainy, foggy wet afternoon, a whopping 56 participants assisted in the field or at feeders, an increase of 14 from last year. Thank you to all those Captains who recruited or took on new volunteers. Their results presented a total of 14,839 individual birds (13,038 in

2022) representing 82 different species, just above the average. Five additional species were observed three days before or after count day. An incredible combined total of 162.25 hours was spent owling, watching feeders, and in the field via foot and car. These hours covered a total of 578.5 miles



The dreary weather for the LHAS CBC made for bad photo conditions. The Winter Wren above was photographed during the Woodbury-Roxbury count on December 16.

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

CBC Species Totals (CW = Count Week. Bold = uncommon birds, high counts, saves.)

Canada Goose	2,633	Killdeer	1	Carolina Wren	60
Mute Swan	18	Ring-billed Gull	149	Golden-crowned Kinglet	23
American Wigeon	8	Herring Gull	3	Eastern Bluebird	263
American Black Duck	79	Rock Pigeon	139	Hermit Thrush	15
Mallard	324	Mourning Dove	172	American Robin	865
Mallard x American Black Duck	1	Eastern Screech Owl	5	Gray Catbird	6
Northern Shoveler	2	Great Horned Owl	2	Northern Mockingbird	4
Green-winged Teal	1	Barred Owl	13	European Starling	1,560
Redhead	cw	Northern Saw-whet Owl	6	American Pipit	3
Ring-necked Duck	14	Belted Kingfisher	9	Cedar Waxwing	208
Greater Scaup	cw	Red-bellied Woodpecker	91	American Tree Sparrow	78
Lesser Scaup	11	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	19	Chipping Sparrow	1
Bufflehead	110	Downy Woodpecker	121	Field Sparrow	9
Common Goldeneye	17	Hairy Woodpecker	41	Fox Sparrow	1
Hooded Merganser	282	Northern Flicker	25	Dark-eyed Junco	1,198
Common Merganser	1,100	Pileated Woodpecker	23	White-crowned Sparrow	2
Red-breasted Merganser	3	American Kestrel	1	White-throated Sparrow	627
Ruddy Duck	19	Merlin	1	Song Sparrow	126
Wild Turkey	206	Blue Jay	303	Swamp Sparrow	22
Red-throated Loon	cw	American Crow	679	Northern Cardinal	134
Common Loon	1	Fish Crow	4	Red-winged Blackbird	244
Great Blue Heron	3	Common Raven	44	Rusty Blackbird	2
Black Vulture	2	Black-capped Chickadee	545	Common Grackle	39
Northern Harrier	cw	Tufted Titmouse	447	Brown-headed Cowbird	761
Sharp-shinned Hawk	cw	Red-breasted Nuthatch	24	House Finch	131
Cooper's Hawk	4	White-breasted Nuthatch	212	Purple Finch	7
Bald Eagle	16	Brown Creeper	15	Pine Siskin	25
Red-shouldered Hawk	24	House Wren	1	American Goldfinch	262
Red-tailed Hawk	19	Winter Wren	14	House Sparrow	147



This Ruby-crowned Kinglet was photographed during the Barkhamsted count on December 23.

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

by foot and car, all within a 17-mile diameter circle.

Marie Kennedy arranged this year's compilation at Patty's Restaurant where 17 of us shared the day's stories over a plethora of food. We had the place to ourselves. This is the first year that every area submitted

their bird data for the compilation. Thankfully, technology and cell phones have allowed for that to happen.

The 56 participants (c = area captain): John Anderson, Savanna Arcuri, John Baker (c), Janet Baker, Bev Baldwin, Bob Barbieri (c), Ray Belding (c), Gail Berglund, Terri Bianchi, Nancy Chere, Jay Coles, Eileen Cooper, Melissa Craig, Vickie Dauphinais, Angela Dimmitt (c), Michael Doyle, Celeste Echlin (c), Diane Edwards, Paul Edwards, David Emond (c), Eileen Finnan, Kevin Finnan, James Fisher, Karen Geitz, Cathy Glasner, Ed Goodhouse, Nicki Hall (c), Dennis Hannon, Colleen Harrak, Matt Harrak, Judy Herkimer, Kim Herkimer, Janice Jankauskas, Marie Kennedy, Bill Kennedy, Paul Maher (c), Bill Martha, Denise Martha, Debbie Martin, Michele McDermott, Scott Mills, Russ Naylor (c), Ann Orsillo (c), Patty Pickard, Gary Pitcher, Robert Rimkowski, Pam Rothacker, Sam Slater, Donna Rose Smith (c), Carrie Szwed (c), Josh Szwed, David Tripp Jr (c), John Wagenblatt (c), Sam Walker, Tom Zissu, and Fran Zygmunt.

LHAS Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids

By Josh Szwed, LHAS Education Committee Member

On Sunday, December 17, 2023, members of the LHAS Education Committee hosted a Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids at White Memorial Conservation Center in Litchfield. Even though last year's event brought only a small number of families, the birding, camaraderie, and goodies were excellent! This year's edition was even better, with more than 15 attendees all eager to spot some winter birds!

After a brief introduction to Connecticut wintering birds, basic binocular use, and a crash course in the Merlin Bird ID and eBird apps, the group was ready to depart from the A.B. Cedar Room.



Josh Szwed teaching the kids some birding basics before heading outside.

Photo: Karen Geitz

As we circled around the White Memorial Museum back deck, we heard and spotted a multitude of species at the feeders and in the surrounding shrubs. Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, chickadees, juncos, and White-throated Sparrows abounded, with a special sighting of a Red-bellied Woodpecker at the top of a tall sugar maple tree.

As we next headed along the trail around Ongley Pond, many of the young birders were eager to sprint ahead of the group, which presented the perfect opportunity to learn about both birding



Vickie Dauphinais (in blue jacket) shows how to use a birding app.

Photo: Karen Geitz

and trail etiquette! After completing the pond circuit and spotting even more birds, including a Northern Cardinal and American Goldfinches, we all warmed back up in the Cedar Room with some hot chocolate, pizza, apple cider, and delicious cookies made by LHAS Education Committee member Beverly Baldwin!

The final tabulation showed 49 total birds, over 12 species! These data were forwarded to Carrie Szwed, White Memorial area captain for the Christmas Bird Count. Several families stayed for a minute after the program to share how much they had enjoyed the experience of birding in the winter, and of participating in a citizen science project. Their enthusiasm and the significant increase in attendees this year is a good sign for the future success of this LHAS tradition!

Meetings, Bird Walks and Activities

LHAS Calendar — Winter/Spring 2024



NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, **General Meetings** are held on the first Monday of each month. When the first Monday of the month falls on a holiday, the meeting is held on the second Monday. Meetings are held at the Litchfield Community Center, 421 Bantam Road (Route 202), Litchfield, and/or via Zoom.

Board of Directors Meetings are held the third Tuesday of every other month at 7 p.m. at 28 Russell St., Litchfield, CT.

GENERAL MEETINGS

Note: Meetings will be in person and on Zoom unless otherwise noted. To participate on Zoom, go to the Calendar section of our website, lhasct.org, to register. You will be sent the login link.

Meeting times: Refreshments at 6:45 PM. Business meeting at 7. Program around 7:30.

March 4. Chimney Swifts: Mystery and Magic Revealed Monday, 6:45 PM

In her talk, Bethany Sheffer from Sharon Audubon will answer the conundrum: Bats? Birds? Minions of the Underworld? If you have found strange-looking birds in your fireplace or heard a deafening cacophony of sounds from inside it, congratulations! You likely have Chimney Swifts! Once numerous, these birds have experienced sharp declines in their range across the eastern U.S. due to habitat loss during the last century. Tonight we unravel the mystery behind these unique and fascinating birds while giving you behind-the-scenes footage of Sharon Audubon's work with them through its Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic. Bethany, Sharon Audubon's volunteer coordinator/naturalist, holds a master's degree in public administration and is a certified environmental educator and beekeeper. She also served as an AmeriCorps member as an environmental educator.

April 1. Beavers, Otters, Muskrats, and Minks. Monday, 6:45 PM

You're walking along a riverside path when you hear a splash in the water. You're expecting a jumping fish when you see a furry creature paddling along. You watch as it gets closer to shore. But what is it? A beaver? An otter? Or... something else? The suspect list includes Beaver, Muskrat, Otter, and Mink. Connecticut is home to all four of these semiaquatic mammals — those species adapted to freshwater habitats — which are also found around the globe. In North America, these are among the most enjoyable wild animals to observe. But many people find identifying them confusing, especially as they look like a swimming blob of fur. Join Master Wildlife Conservationist Ginny Apple as she discusses these fascinating mammals, which are all uniquely suited for their semiaquatic environments.

May 6 Wood Warblers in Connecticut — and Elsewhere Monday, 6:45 PM

Chris Wood will give a presentation on one of our favorite bird families, the wood warblers. Photos and descriptions will highlight the presentation, which will offer tips for finding and identifying the colorful and engaging warblers that nest here in Connecticut or that visit during migration periods. Chris will also illustrate some of the warbler species from the western U.S. and the neotropics to emphasize the fantastic diversity among the 111 species that make up the *Parulidae* family. Chris has been an active birder for over 45 years and has traveled around the U.S. as well as several Central and South American countries. He is currently president of the Connecticut Ornithological Association. He is a regular contributor to COA's journal, *The Connecticut Warbler*, and contributes photographs and commentaries to birding and conservation organizations.

The next Board Meeting will be at 7 p.m., Tuesday, March 19 at the LHAS office located at 28 Russell Street, Litchfield.

EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

March 3 Shepaug Bald Eagle Observatory. Sunday, 9 AM

Weather permitting, come visit the observatory in Southbury to view our national bird in action, plus Black Ducks (a species of special concern), Common Mergansers, Common Ravens, Eastern Bluebirds, and other winter birdlife. Perhaps, a Peregrine Falcon, a Northern Harrier, or other notable visitor might show up. As a bonus, we might see a presentation by raptor rehabilitators with live birds of prey. Meet outside Canfield Corners Pharmacy at the junction of Route 6 (Main Street North) and Route 47 in Woodbury. Snow or rain cancels. *For more information, call Russ Naylor at 203-841-7779; leave a message for a return call.*

March 25. Creating Pollinator Pathways Monday, 6:30 PM

Help bees, butterflies, and other pollinators thrive! Find out how at the Harwinton Public Library's Pollinator Pathway program. LHAS is collaborating with the library, the Harwinton Land Trust, and the Harwinton Garden Club to create a pollinator garden outside of the library and to present this program. You will watch a short PBS program, "The Importance and Function of Pollinators," and learn how you can create a pollinator garden. You will also hear about the pollinator gardens at LHAS sanctuaries and at Indian Meadow, a Harwinton Land Trust property. The library is located at 80 Bentley Drive, Harwinton.

April 11. Garden Clean-up at Wigwam Brook Sanctuary, Litchfield. . Thursday, 10 AM-Noon

The Red-winged Blackbirds will be arriving to announce spring! Time to start thinking about getting the gardens ready for the migrants and other pollinators. Mark your calendar for this clean-up event. We will cut down dead plants and grasses, and remove visible weeds and other plant debris. We can also decide on new perennials needed to complement the existing plants. Bring gloves, your favorite gardening tools, spray for ticks, and lots of energy! *To sign up, email Vickie Dauphinais at vdauphinais1@gmail.com or call her at 860-805-9167.*

April 12 Garden Clean-up at Kalmia Sanctuary, Harwinton Friday, 10 AM-Noon

See the write-up for April 11.

April 13 Daffodil Walk Saturday, 2 PM

Between our Boyd Woods and Wigwam Brook Sanctuaries lies a lovely open woodland that features grassy hilltops, stone walls, mossy rocks, spooky hollow trees, and wetlands. Several years ago, to connect our two sanctuaries, a 3/4 mile loop trail was created over hill and vale, through this scenic habitat. Last fall, when 3,500 spring flower bulbs (mostly daffodils) became available to Debbie Martin, she thought, "I know exactly where to plant them!" And..... she did! If you'd like to see the fruits of her labor, please join her for this easy 2-mile walk, which will start at, and pass through, Boyd Woods. Boots are suggested, as trails can be quite wet in spring. A "bird list" will be kept, so bring binoculars if you have them. Be prepared for ticks and other biting insects. No dogs allowed!

(continued on page 8)

Earth Day Plant Sale!

Calling all bird lovers to the plant sale April 19-21 at the Goshen Fairgrounds. You will find a plethora of plants that are excellent sources of food for birds, including Chokeberry, Buttonbush, Silky Dogwood, Densa Inkberry, Winterberry, Juniper, Pussy Willow, Elderberry, Kinnikinnick, and many more! Peruse the selections in person where Master Gardeners will be on hand to help you pick out the perfect plant for your needs. NWCD will also have educational materials from their environmental partners, including LHAS. You may also pre-order plants online; visit nwcd.org/shop for more information.

Weekly Spring Birding

Please join us for weekly jaunts to birding hotspots as taught to us by our famous former leader, Ray Belding. Depending on birder schedules and the weather, you will be notified of the day, meeting place, and time. If you would like to join, contact Pamela Hicks (coordinator) with your email or texting number at smilesmyles@yahoo.com or **203-922-2684**.

Calendar

(continued from page 7)

Meet at the Boyd Woods parking lot on Route 254 in Litchfield. **For additional information contact Debbie Martin at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.** Rain date: Monday, April 15, 2 p.m.

April 19-21 NWCD's Earth Day Plant Sale Friday-Sunday

See page 7 for details.

April 20 Celebrate Earth Day with LHAS Nature Explorers! Location and Time TBD

Stop by our table at Sustainable Litchfield's Earth Day Celebration. We will offer fun activities for children, including seed sowing and bird ID challenge, along with prizes. We'll have information for families on bird-friendly plants, pollinator gardens, spring migration, and ways to help a safe passage for our feathered friends. Plus, information on local hikes, programs, and all that LHAS' sanctuaries have to offer. A fun event for the whole family! Volunteers are needed to staff our table. **To sign up, email Vickie Dauphinais at vdauphinais1@gmail.com or call her at 860-805-9167.**

April 20 Annual Woodcock Walk at Boyd Woods Saturday, 7 PM

Our walk will begin with a check of Margery's Bird Pond, where the Wood Frogs should be out and about (and very noisy!). Next, we'll head to the Monarch Meadow to await "the dance of the woodcock." Year after year, the woodcocks (sometimes as many as seven or eight) have performed their mating ritual overhead and are easily viewed from this vantage point. Also, close-by, we're likely to hear our resident Barred Owls hooting back and forth. If there's enough interest, we can walk through the nearby conifers with the hope of seeing them. Sanctuary managers Rich and Debbie Martin will guide you on this walk. Bring a flashlight. Wear boots, as trails are soggy in spring. Dress warmly. No dogs allowed! Meet at the Boyd Woods Sanctuary parking lot on Route 254 in Litchfield. **For additional information, contact Debbie Martin at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.**

April 28 Spring Bird Walk at Bent of the River Audubon Center Sunday, 8 AM

See mid-spring woodpeckers, waterfowl, sparrows, swallows, and other birds in passage as we hike part of Bent of the River's trails, sampling a variety of riparian and upland habitats. We will have a good chance to spot warblers, vireos, orioles, and other first-arrival neotropical migrants. Meet at Bent of the River's parking lot, 185 East Flat Hill Road, Southbury. **For more information, call Russ Naylor at 203-841-7779; leave a message for a return call.**

May 4 Bird Walk at White Memorial. Saturday, 7:30 AM

Meet at the White Memorial museum parking lot at 7:30 for a casual walk to view spring birds. **Contact Ann Orsillo at spoonbill@optonline.net if you plan to attend.**

May 12 Spring Swift Swirl Sunday, 8 PM

Come see newly arrived Chimney Swifts as they return from winter sojourns in South America, to enter a well-known spring roost site (and recognized Important Bird Area, or IBA) at Mitchell School in Woodbury. This is a spring/fall staging roost site for migrants as well as an established nesting site for these masters of aerial living. Other sky-feeding wayfarers, such as Night Hawks and swallows, plus the occasional bat, are also possible visitors. Meet at the Canfield Corner Pharmacy, at the junction of Route 6 (Main Street North) and Route 47 in Woodbury. **For more information, call Russ Naylor at 203-841-7779; leave a message for a return call.**

There's Still Time to Donate to Our Annual Appeal!

We won't close the books on this year's appeal until April 30. So, if you haven't already donated, there's still time. (*If you have, Thank You!*) Your donation will help us work toward protecting birds and other wildlife at our sanctuaries and elsewhere through education, conservation, and research.

If you would like to donate, please send a check to Litchfield Hills Audubon Society, P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759 or visit our website, lhasct.org. If you prefer to donate through the Give Local campaign, please see page 1 for details.

Conservation News

By Diane Edwards, Conservation Chair

CT Shorebirds Did Well Last Year

Audubon Connecticut reports that, while the numbers are not yet finalized, it looks like Piping Plovers and American Oystercatchers did incredibly well in 2023! In fact, Connecticut was home to the highest recorded number of pairs ever monitored in our state. Unfortunately, Least Terns did not do so well; productivity is still being calculated, but is expected to be low as a result of predation and human disturbance. Seventy-nine pairs of Piping Plovers are projected to have had a productivity of at least 1.33 fledglings per pair (1.2 indicates a stable population). Of the 115 pairs of oystercatchers monitored, 92 pairs were confirmed breeding and fledged an estimated 80 chicks for a projected productivity of 0.87 (well above the recovery plan goal of 0.5 fledglings per pair).



American Oystercatcher.

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

DEEP Seeks Public Input to the New State Wildlife Action Plan

CT DEEP is now revising the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) for 2025–2035 and is looking for citizens' input. Are there any plants or animals in the state you feel are in greatest need for conservation? Let DEEP know by going to <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/CT-Wildlife-Action-Plan/Provide-Input-to-the-CT-Wildlife-Action-Plan>.

A SWAP identifies species of greatest conservation need and their affiliated habitats, and the threats they face. The SWAP then prioritizes conservation actions and research needs to address problems facing these species and habitats. Importantly, creating a SWAP that is approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service allows various organizations to apply for specific forms of federal funding to implement conservation actions outlined in the plan.

First-ever State of the Bats Report

The first-ever State of the Bats Report was published last year by the North American Bat Conservation Alliance (NABCA), a multinational coalition from the U.S., Mexico, and Canada. According to the report, experts believe that up to 82% of bat species in North America will be impacted

by climate change in the next 15 years, especially by severe drought and temperature extremes. The other top threats to bats in North America include habitat loss, the white-nose syndrome disease, and mortality from wind turbines. The report highlights the importance of bat conservation, not only for their biodiversity value, but for the ecosystem and economic services bats provide in terms of pest control, pollination, seed dispersal, ecotourism, and their utility to innovation and science. To read the report, go to digital.batcon.org/state-of-the-bats-report/2023-report.

Assessing Wildlife and Roads in CT

The Connecticut Department of Transportation, CT DEEP and The Nature Conservancy will examine wildlife passage-ways that intersect with roadways. The DOT is receiving \$360,000 to develop a statewide assessment that identifies areas with the most frequent collisions between vehicles and wildlife, as well as informational resources for the public. As the project manager, TNC will gather research and data, and bring together stakeholders, to inform future state projects and safety improvements.

"We're so pleased that federal funds can support this first-ever statewide examination of wildlife movement across the state, as it's been a long-term goal for many agencies in Connecticut," says Shelley Green, TNC's director of conservation programs in Connecticut. "We're hopeful it will lead to improved safety for people and wildlife and that it will provide much-needed information for a state wildlife action plan being developed by DEEP."

From CT DEEP: Great Meadows Marsh Restoration Shows Promise

Nearly two years ago, work began to restore Great Meadows Marsh in Stratford, a part of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. This marsh is home to many state-listed species, including Saltmarsh Sparrows, Snowy Egrets, and the marsh pink — a beautiful flowering plant. In addition to U.S. Fish and Wildlife, many conservation partners are involved with this effort, including CT DEEP, Audubon Connecticut, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Beardsley Zoo, and many volunteers. The marsh is showing promising signs of recovery and regeneration. It is more resilient to sea-level rise and climate change and has renewed potential to support rare plants and animals for years to come.

Focus on Birds

My Close Encounter with a Red-Bellied Woodpecker

By Karen Geitz, Education Committee Member

It was New Year's Day and I decided to celebrate by participating in a First Day Hike at Boyd Woods Audubon Sanctuary. I arrived early and walked down to the bird blind area to see what bird action was going on there. Debbie Martin was on the far side of the pond close to the bird blind putting out bird food and I was opposite her on the other side of the pond. There was a pile of bird food about 10 feet away from me. I stood quietly and watched to see which birds would appear. Lots of juncos and chickadees flew back and forth from the bushes nearby. All of a sudden this bigger bird with magnificent colors of bright red on his head and black and white stripes on his back landed in front of me. I had never seen this bird before. I knew it was a woodpecker, but not a Downy or Pileated. Debbie came over and we talked about what I had just seen and she found a picture of it on her phone. A Red-bellied Woodpecker (*Melanerpes carolinus*)! Boyd Woods gave me a New Year's Day bird to study when I returned home.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker is about 9 inches tall and looks like a giant when it's among the juncos and chickadees. The red or scarlet on his crown and nape is a flaming color. His black and white barred back also stands out. I didn't understand why he was called a Red-bellied Woodpecker because he had so many other characteristics that stood out. But, when I looked at the photos of the belly, I saw that it has a red blush. I wondered why a birder concentrated on the belly for the bird's name (see box below). I also noticed the excellent camouflage the Red-bellied has. When you look at photos of this bird, his black and white barred back blends in well with the tree bark, and the red on his head and nape looks like the inner bark that is exposed in tree holes.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker has a varied diet of insects, fruits, seeds, and small vertebrates including lizards, frogs,

fish, and bird nestlings. It can also remove food from the crevices in trees with its long, sticky barbed tongue. This woodpecker has the ability to store food for the winter by hammering it deep into the bark and tree crevices for future retrieval. The Red-bellied has its own pantry!

Any bird study involves examining the differences between males and females in their appearances and behavior. The first thing you note with this woodpecker is the difference in how much scarlet color the male and female have. The female only has red on her nape while the male has it on the neck and head. The male is bigger than the female. They also feed in different ways so that they can forage without competition in the same area. The female feeds on limbs and branches, whereas the male prefers the lower part of the main trunk of a tree.

As far as mating goes, the male and female form a seasonal monogamous union. They make their nest in a hole in a dead tree or limb. If that's not available, they have been known to put their nest in a fence pole or utility pole or even use another woodpecker's hole. The male and female take turns incubating the three to eight white eggs. The female sits on the eggs during the day, and the male takes the night shift. Both parents feed the young — a couple that shares in the child rearing!

I hope you enjoyed learning about the Red-bellied Woodpecker with me. The excitement of seeing this bird up close was a great experience for this beginning birder! Who knows which others I'll discover during the year?

Happy birding to all!

Sources:

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Note the blush of red on the bird's lower belly.

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

Why Isn't the Red-bellied Called the Red-headed Woodpecker?



Because another bird has that name! The bird at left is the Red-Headed Woodpecker, which is listed as endangered in Connecticut.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Our Office Now Offers Indoor Space for Nature Learning

The first of what LHAS hopes will be many classes on birding and nature was held January 13, when Debbie Martin led an "Introduction to Creative Nature Journaling" class at our office at 28 Russell Street in Litchfield.

Debbie, who is also co-chair of our Boyd Woods Audubon Sanctuary, led the class and provided supplies free of charge to participants. *Thank you, Debbie!*

Possible future classes include nature photography, bird photography, and how to use eBird.

Is there a nature-themed topic you would like us to offer? Let Diane Edwards know by contacting her at edwardsd68@charter.net or 860-309-5139.

Below, from left: Debbie Martin, Vickie Dauphinais, Jeff Martin, and Terri Bianchi. Other photos: some of the "students'" work.

Photos: Rich Martin



President's Message

(continued from page 3)

travel at night, according to LightsOutCT.org. Artificial lights can cause birds to become disoriented and crash into buildings. (Scientists have recently discovered that the same thing happens to night-flying insects, including moths!) That's why we should turn off unnecessary outdoor lighting between 11 p.m. and 6 a.m. during peak bird migration times: April 1–May 31 in the spring and August 15–November 15 in the fall. (Turning off unnecessary lights can also help *you* by reducing your energy usage and saving you money.) As for necessary lights, be sure they're downshielded so the light shines downward, not up.

Now that spring is almost here, our thoughts turn not only to migration but also to our gardens. Planting native plants will benefit birds, pollinators, and you! Birds rely on insects for food for themselves and their babies. Our native insects

have co-evolved with native plants; they aren't enticed to eat the leaves of exotic plants. As National Audubon's website notes, "planting insect-proof exotic plants is like serving up plastic food. No insects? No birds." Visit audubon.org/plantsforbirds to learn more, including which plants will attract which birds in our area. If you want to buy some native plants, go to the Northwest Conservation District's Earth Day plant sale; see page 7 for details. That's where LHAS gets many of the plants for our sanctuaries and pollinator gardens.

Happy spring!

Diane



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January 28 Trip Report

Finally, a Bright Sunshiny Day!

By Russ Naylor

After nearly two weeks of rain and clouds, our LHAS binocular-toting group set out on a sunny morning to visit Shepaug Dam and its Bald Eagles.

Starting at Bent of the River Audubon Center, a local raven stirred up a chorus of first-of-the-season songsters — Red-bellied Woodpeckers, cardinals, Carolina Wrens, and House Finches — celebrating the sun's return. On the way to the dam, an obliging Northern Harrier flew overhead of us, leading us right up to the Shepaug Dam.



Female Northern Harrier.

Photo:Wikimedia Commons

Here we viewed young eagles at play in the air, while adults shared a discreet pre-Valentine's Day tryst, trying to establish bonds with potential mates. Overhead, Red-tailed Hawks soared along territorial boundaries or sky-danced in incipi-

ent courtship, as local raven pairs flew wingtip-to-wingtip — heralding the start of mating time.

Black Ducks and Common Mergansers displayed to prospective partners, fished below the Shepaug Dam, or winged upriver in migration. Bluebirds sang from sunny perches, while a Sharp-shinned Hawk briefly scouted the air for sparrowy fare. On Lake Zoar, a wintering Great Blue Heron displayed growing nuptial finery.



Killdeer.

Photo:Wikimedia Commons

Next, we took a scenic tour of brush and field habitat at Southbury Training School farm — vital habitat for open-space species. A quick stop at the Training School's Lake Stibbs brought us Hooded Mergansers, Mute Swan, and a skulking overwintering Killdeer, before we returned to Bent of the River. Here, streams of northbound juncos and a salute by a Brown Creeper's calls hinted at a change of seasons. Both Punxsutawny Phil and Connecticut's own Chuckles agree we might have an early spring. May it be so!