



# Chickadee Chatter



November/December 2024

Litchfield Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 69/Issue 6

*The mission of the Litchfield Hills Audubon Society is to protect birds, other wildlife and their habitats, through conservation, education, research, and advocacy.*

## Christmas Bird Count 2024

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in our area this year will take place **December 15**. If you want to help, email Dave Tripp at [dtrippjr@gmail.com](mailto:dtrippjr@gmail.com) and he will put you in



contact with the captain for your area. At the end of the day, we will gather at a local restaurant to compile our results and enjoy a meal. (LHAS picks up the tab!)

Begun more than a century ago, Audubon's CBC is the longest-running wildlife census in the Western Hemisphere. This citizen-science event provides vital information about bird populations and trends, data that alerts Audubon to environmental threats not only to birds but to the larger ecosystems we all depend on.

According to Audubon's website, each count takes place in an established 15-mile-diameter circle and is organized by a count compiler. (Our circle's compiler is Dave Tripp.) Count volunteers follow specified routes, counting every bird they see or hear all day. It's not just a species tally — all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day.

Birders of all skill levels are involved in the CBC. If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle, then you can stay at home and report the birds that visit your feeder on count day as long as you have made prior arrangement with Dave Tripp.

For more information about the CBC, visit [www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count](http://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count). Or join Dave at LHAS' monthly meeting on Monday, **December 2**, 7 p.m. at the Litchfield Community Center, when he will give a presentation on the history of the CBC and how to do a bird count.

See Calendar on pages 6-7 for our  
Upcoming Meetings & Field Trips

### CBC 4 Kids

LHAS Nature Explorers will sponsor the third Christmas Bird Count 4 Kids from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on December 15. Children and parents are invited to experience this wholesome family-centered citizen science adventure. For more information, see page 5.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

## President's Message

By Diane Edwards

### Fewer 'Bag Birds' — But Still Plenty of Plastic Pollution



With the Christmas Bird Count coming up, I recall past counts when a white blob in a tree would fool us into thinking it was a bird. We jokingly called it a "bag bird" — a plastic bag caught up in the tree branches. Thankfully, now that Connecticut has a law banning single-use plastic bags, we're less likely to spot a "bag bird." And real birds, as well as other wild creatures, are less likely to be harmed by them.

But plastic pollution is still rampant, posing hazards to people as well as wildlife. One recent study, reported in the journal *Nature* (9/4/24), found that the U.S. produces more than 52,000 tons a year of plastic pollution. Ominously, *Nature* also reported (3/21/24) that climate change is making plastic pollution worse, noting that "rising temperatures and

*(continued on page 3)*

**LHAS Officers**

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Wigwam Brook Sanctuary	<i>vacant</i>	

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Christmas Bird Count	Dave Tripp	dtrippjr@gmail.com
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Please email items to appear in the newsletter to **Diane Edwards** at [edwardsd68@charter.net](mailto: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](mailto:lhasct@me.com).

**NEW MEMBERS**

*By Harry Ainsworth, Membership Records Chair*

Christopher Bren	Sherman
Jeff Buck	Bristol
Abrah G. Carroll	Colebrook
Mary Guilfoile	Torrington
Jack & Beth Isler	Salisbury
Beth Kanachovski	Bristol
Jill Ksanznak	Sharon
Charlene Liner	Winsted
Jared Look	Litchfield
Priscilla McCord	Lakeville
Aaron Molitor	Torrington
Alice Mulk	Torrington
Arthur Peterson	New Preston Marble Dale
Joan Ruppel	Morris
Ann Sartori	Salisbury
Mr. & Mrs. R. Seiler	Gaylordsville
Lisa Sorce	Salisbury
Judith Soule	Kent
Winthrop Wilson	Goshen

LHAS membership is 936.

*If your newsletter is addressed incorrectly, send an email to [Harry Ainsworth at hla1@me.com](mailto:hla1@me.com).*

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Scan the QR code at left with your smart-phone to go to [www.lhasct.org](http://www.lhasct.org).

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Special thanks to **Doreen Orciari** for proofreading this newsletter!

**In Memoriam****Remembering John Baker**

We lost our beloved John Baker on September 9, ironically on the night of the LHAS monthly meeting, about a month shy of his 91st birthday. For more than 30 years, John supported and helped steer our organization in so many ways.

John and his wife, Janet, faithfully attended our chapter's meetings. John was always the first person to burst out "so moved" when the president asked for a motion to be accepted by the membership. At the September meeting there was a noticeable silence when John's voice did not ring out.

John was treasurer of LHAS for 18 years, and thanks to his expertise LHAS has maintained a strong financial foundation. He started and managed our successful Vanguard investment fund. He served as a board member and on many committees. He and Janet were instrumental in LHAS acquiring both our Boyd Woods and Wigwam sanctuaries. Since Wigwam's acquisition, John managed the sanctuary, where he worked with the Connecticut Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation to plant an experimental grove of hybrid chestnut trees with the goal of developing trees resistant to the chestnut blight. John researched everything from the type of hybrid chestnut trees to planting methodology. As a result many of the chestnut



**John Baker, left, with "Irma from Burma."**

Photo: Rich Martin

trees at Wigwam have thrived and produced nuts.

**Chestnut Orchard to Be Named for John Baker**

The chestnut orchard at Wigwam Brook Wildlife Sanctuary will officially be named in honor of John Baker. The idea was first suggested by Jack Swatt, president of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, and unanimously OK'd by our board.

***We are now looking for volunteers to take care of Wigwam Brook Sanctuary and the chestnut orchard. If you want to help, please contact Diane Edwards at [edwardsd68@charter.net](mailto:edwardsd68@charter.net) or 860-309-5139.***

trees at Wigwam have thrived and produced nuts.

An avid birder, John participated in many LHAS bird walks and weekend excursions to Cape May, NJ, and Newburyport, MA, as well as the Christmas and summer bird counts. He was noted for wearing shorts on these outings, in all types of weather. (If he wore long pants, you knew it was COLD!)

At White Memorial's Family Nature Day, John was always seen with "Irma from Burma," one of his two Burmese pythons. Irma was a gentle ambassador for snakes and the reptile world. John wrapped the large snake around his neck, which always drew a crowd of kids and adults.

John became fascinated with bees and maintained his own hives that produced award-winning honey. He understood the web of nature and the connections between plants, bees, and birds. His home landscaping displayed this connection.

We will miss John with his good nature and wry sense of humor. September is the time of year of the great raptor migration. I like to think that John is migrating as well to another place where peace and shelter prevail.

LHAS extends our sincere sympathies to Janet and his family.

— Ann Orsillo

**President's Message**

*(continued from page 1)*

moisture alter plastic characteristics, microplastic generation, and release of hazardous substances."

We all can do things to reduce plastic pollution. Here are 10 ways suggested by the Natural Resources Defense Council:

1. Avoid single-use plastics, like disposable cutlery, straws, and take-out coffee cup lids.
2. Don't buy bottled water.
3. Boycott microbeads — found in many beauty products.
4. Cook more, so you don't wind up with takeout containers and plastic cutlery.
5. Purchase some items secondhand or borrow rather than buying new.
6. Recycle. "While we can't recycle our way out of the plastic crisis, recycling is still important to reduce the footprint of our waste system."
7. Support a bag tax or ban. (Our state already has a ban.)
8. Buy in bulk and look for eco-friendly packaging.
9. Choose clothing made from natural fibers.
10. Urge manufacturers to use less plastic packaging.

# Meetings, Bird Walks and Activities

## LHAS Calendar — Fall/Winter 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: The meetings below will be in person and on Zoom. To participate on Zoom, go to the Calendar section of our website, [lhasct.org](http://lhasct.org), to register. You will be sent the login link. The meeting times shown below are when refreshments are available. A short business meeting begins at 7 p.m., followed by the presentation.*

**November 4. . . . Birdsong and Science . . . . . 6:45 PM**

Our speakers are from the Connecticut Audubon Society's Deer Pond Farm nature preserve in Sherman. Cathy Hagadorn, the farm's director, will share highlights of this preserve, including habitat enhancement projects going on in support of forest birds and other wildlife. She'll talk about the 850 acres, 15 miles of trails, pollinator garden, meadows, programs, and more reasons to visit. Lori Lichtenauer, the preserve's sanctuary manager/naturalist, will present an overview of avian singing behavior in some local birds. In playing recordings of birds, she will also review the unique anatomy of songbirds that allows them to harmonize with themselves. She will also discuss how the Merlin app can be a great tool in learning how to bird by ear. Lori is a certified forester and has been birding for about 10 years. Her avian studies and research have taken her from Colorado to Australia and back to Connecticut.

**December 2. . . . All About the Christmas Bird Count . . . . . 6:45 PM**

Want to help LHAS count birds as part of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count this year? Come hear Dave Tripp, Jr., give a presentation on the history of the CBC and how to do a bird count.

### EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

**November 10. . . Annual Duck Ramble . . . . . Sunday, 1 PM**

Noted birder Fran Zygmunt will lead LHAS' Annual Duck Ramble to help us identify the various ducks and other birds on Bantam Lake and nearby locales. Meet at the White Memorial museum parking lot. Note that we're starting at 1 PM to take better advantage of daylight! *For more information contact Fran at [fzygmunt@charter.net](mailto:fzygmunt@charter.net).*

**November 15. . . Celebrating Our Volunteers! . . . . . Friday, 5:30 PM**

Have you volunteered for LHAS? Then save the date for our first Volunteer Celebration Event! It will take place at the Litchfield Distillery. Watch your mail or email for an invitation to join the LHAS Board of Directors for an evening of food, drink, and fellowship.

**December 15. . . Christmas Bird Count . . . . . Sunday, All Day**

See page 1 for details about this year's CBC. If you're interested in helping to count birds, either all day or a part of the day, let our compiler, Dave Tripp, know by sending an email to [dtrippjr@gmail.com](mailto:dtrippjr@gmail.com).

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



## LHAS Nature Explorers — Family Fun!

### November 17.....Family Duck Ramble.....Sunday, 1 PM

Bring the kids to learn how to sight and identify waterfowl on Bantam Lake. After scanning the lake for waterfowl, we will walk around White Memorial's Point Folly, located on North Shore Road in Bantam. Bring binoculars, if you have them (LHAS may have some you can borrow) and dress for the weather conditions. Meet by the entrance to Point Folly.

### December 15.....CBC 4 Kids! .....Sunday, 11 AM-12:30 PM

Children and parents are invited to experience this wholesome family-centered citizen science adventure. We will meet at the White Memorial A.B. Ceder Room (lower floor of the museum building) for a brief orientation. Then we will walk to the feeders outside the museum and around Ongley Pond to count birds by sight, using binoculars, and by sound, using the Merlin app. Afterward, we will gather in the Ceder Room to tabulate the results and enjoy pizza, cookies, and hot chocolate. A great way to spend a winter day and help scientists capture vital information about bird populations. Wear warm jackets and boots. Binoculars will be provided. Bring your own, if you have a pair. **Any questions, call Vickie Dauphinais at 860-805-9167. Pre-registration is appreciated at [lhasjunior@gmail.com](mailto:lhasjunior@gmail.com).**

## All About Birds

### A Whimbrel on Ninigret Pond

By Karen Geitz

One of our favorite places in the world to explore is Ninigret Pond in Charlestown, RI. My husband, Jeff, and I rent a cottage there for a couple of weeks each year at the end of



**Whimbrel.**

Photo:Wikimedia Commons

August through the beginning of September. Jeff loves to clam, and I like to kayak around the channels and tide flats to observe birds. Since I've become active in Audubon, I'm much more deliberate about identifying new birds I encounter. One day I was sitting in my kayak on the side of the channel located next to the big tidal flat (see map at this link: <https://ribird.org/locations/7>). I happened to notice a bird feeding close by. At first, I thought it was a Willet, but then I observed it more carefully. It had a longer beak and the coloring was different. I turned on my Merlin app for the sound recording and said, "C'mon bird, call out." It did and Merlin confirmed what I had thought. It was not a Willet, but a Whimbrel. A Whimbrel? What is this bird's story?

How did the Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) get its name? Its name originated in England many years ago based upon its high-pitched wimpy or whimpering sound. There is also a funny story about its name, but who knows if it's true? Jebediah Whimbrel was a noted naturalist from the 1600s. As they say, Jebediah was not a handsome man because he had a long hooked nose. Hence people renamed the Hudsonian Curlew the Whimbrel because of its long hooked bill. Poor Jebediah! The Latin name for the Whimbrel is *Numenius phaeopus* or "new moon" because of the bird's crescent-shaped bill.

My first inclination was to think the Whimbrel was a Willet, but when you compare the two, there are stark differences in their physical appearance. First, the Whimbrel is more the size of a crow, much bigger than a Willet. The second distinguishing feature is the bill. The Willet's bill is shorter and straight, whereas the Whimbrel has a down-curved bill. The Whimbrel is brown, and its head has white stripes. The Willet's plumage is mottled, and its head is plain.

As I observed the Whimbrel on the mud flat in front of me, I had no idea that it had migrated from so far north and still had quite a journey to go. The Whimbrel breeds and nests in the Arctic tundra during the summer, and I happened to catch it on a break on its long migration to South America. In a "BirdNote" segment (October 4, 2021), biologists had tagged a Whimbrel named Lindsey with a GPS tracker and followed her migration south. She flew to the Alaska coast and fueled up for her long journey south. Lindsey flew out over the open ocean and encountered a storm that slingshot her southward and then she used another helpful tailwind

(continued on back page)

## Conservation News

### Money Coming to Help Hammonasset

\$2.7 million in federal funding will be used to improve the sustainability and resiliency of Hammonasset Beach State Park, states an Audubon article (go to [audubon.org/menu/press-room](https://www.audubon.org/menu/press-room)). Climate change impacts, such as coastal flooding and sea level rise, have led to rapid erosion of the park's eastern shoreline, barrier beach, and salt marsh. In the last two decades, yearly erosion rates have nearly doubled, contributing to the loss of 27 acres of salt marsh since 1934.

"Hammonasset Beach is an essential ecosystem that features a unique combination of marshland, grassland, and coast that benefits wildlife and neighboring communities alike," said Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe, director of bird conservation at Audubon Connecticut. "The park is home to Saltmarsh Sparrows, Piping Plovers, and Brown Thrashers. Restoring this site is essential to maintaining its ecological, recreational, and economic value."

Currently, Audubon Connecticut and the Connecticut DEEP are implementing Phase 1 of a multiphase project to address these issues. This first phase has involved site assessments, data collection, and developing project design plans.

In addition to finalizing planning and permitting, Phase 2 will include community events, educational opportunities for students and teachers in underserved, environmental

justice communities, and job opportunities for local youth.

A restored Hammonasset Beach State Park will reduce erosion rates and salt marsh loss along 3,000 feet of coastline, protecting not only the inhabitants of the park, but also the residents of local communities in Madison and Clinton.

### Peregrine Numbers Declining Again

One of the biggest conservation successes has been the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon from its disastrous decline in the 1960s due to DDT. But over the past two years, the number of peregrines in North America has been dropping again, according to the Audubon website ([audubon.org](https://www.audubon.org)). In several states, biologists and other raptor enthusiasts report fewer active peregrine eyries.

"Healthy raptor populations always have a good supply of floaters — non-breeding adults that are ready to step in if one or both birds at an eyrie die. But if the surplus dwindles, a species can run into problems .... This seems to be happening now," states the article. The problem appears to be worse in coastal areas.

What might be causing this? It could be avian flu, which "has been hammering waterfowl, seabirds, and shorebirds" on which peregrines sometimes prey.

### Burr Pond Paddle Trip

By Ann Orsillo

Fourteen eager paddlers launched their watercraft into the calm waters of Burr Pond State Park in Torrington in August.

Under blue skies and comfortable temperatures we glided, observing many birds, plants, and turtles. A Great Blue Heron was unfazed by our presence as he continued to preen his long feathers and then fluffed up to pose for photos. Large flocks of Tree



Photo: Ann Orsillo

and Barn Swallows were twirling over the water as they swooped for insects. The highlight of the trip was an Osprey that was clutching a fish with its talons and circled around us. He seemed to be showing off his catch. Water lilies were in full bloom and cardinal flowers graced the shorelines. Jim

reached with his paddle to pull down a prize lure with fishing line entangled in a tree. A potential hazard to birds was removed from the environment. Great job!

## In My Garden — A Journal — September 2024

By Angela Dimmitt

Watched the partial eclipse of the moon the other evening, September 17, full Harvest Moon. A few clouds scudded across but the garden was bright as day — crickets and katydids still calling, but otherwise all was quiet, no coyotes baying at the moon, even no cars passing. And no moths around the lights (motion-activated — others off per Lights Out CT!) No moths on a warm night? Likewise, no moths or other insects on the screens in the evening or in the headlights driving at night. This is a wildlife disaster happening now!

At 6:35 a.m. on September 23, I woke to an incredible sky — it changed fast, clouds and contrails all on fire, moving swiftly south. Sadly, it did not portend rain, not “red sky at dawning, shepherd’s warning” — or sailor’s.



**Fiery dawn.**

Photo: Angela Dimmitt

I had just returned from visiting family in England and found fall had arrived in the past week, definitely autumnal, while England was still much greener, gardens untouched by the drought and warmth they were also “enjoying.” No rain at all in Litchfield County since the downpour on Sept. 7 as I was driving to the airport — at times it came down so hard the traffic ground almost to a halt.

Feeders being empty, my birds had dispersed, including a large flock of House Finches, which did not return when I filled the feeders again, but the local chickadees and titmice were soon back along with Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Nuthatches. One or two female/juvenile hummingbirds were still here on September 24, feeding on salvia on my patio as well as on pelargoniums and surprisingly tithonia, which is not a native plant but has the goods. One bird had a snow-white cap which got me excited, but apparently another plant brushed the pollen off. Nature doing its stuff. No sign of migrating Broad-winged Hawks.

Now on September 29, after a little rain followed by cloudy days, a mini movement of birds — a House Wren splashing in the bird bath, a pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (a female and an immature male at the feeders), a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, towhees calling, a phoebe hawking for flies. A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers is calling back and forth; also two

Carolina Wrens are having a long conversation across the garden, a female in between them twittering quietly. They are the only birds still “singing” nowadays.

But the deer! Oh dear, the deer! They came through just before I left and noshed a few hostas (OK — less volume for me to cut down later), but while I was gone, 150 or so returned and ate everything, including a lovely little native shrub with glossy green leaves and yellow flowers I was particularly fond of, *Diervilla lonicera*. I was gonna get me a big dog but Star (my cat) said no, so it will have to be the blunderbuss! And whip up another batch of repellent.

Dogwoods are orange-brown, berries gone, maples turning, but many leaves already down, nature’s defense against the drought we are in. Oaks produced a lot of very large acorns — a good mast year should keep the deer and squirrels happy, though my shagbark hickory has no nuts. Maples? Well, I’m still pulling a gazillion seedlings from my flower beds from last year. Native spice bush leaves are hanging limp even along the stream — which is of course at a dead low, filled with fallen leaves.

The flock of 17 turkeys, hens and large poults, has not returned — I threw out some cracked corn but too late to bring the turkeys back. Probably naughty of me but I love to watch them! My Barred Owl is still calling, at 2:30 the other afternoon, sometimes around 11 at night. The resident Red-shouldered Hawks are also very vocal, but there’s no sign of their young now — one adult circles around overhead or along the stream most days. Do they catch crayfish? Someone does! I found a round lump of shelly bits about 2 inches across on the ground with over half a dozen large claws and a mess of smaller bits, in delicate shades of pink and blue — at first I thought it was a small container someone had dropped. Really weird! A Great Blue Heron also catches them, but I’ve not seen one on the stream here in a while; kingfisher ditto.



**Red Admiral in England.**

Photo: Angela Dimmitt

And here’s a small miracle — this spectacular Red Admiral butterfly, *Vanessa atalanta*, was snapped in West Sussex, England, on Sept. 12 — it’s the exact same one we have here in Connecticut! Small world!





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**DATED MATERIAL — PLEASE DO NOT DELAY**

**Whimbrel**

*(continued from page 5)*

to continue her journey. The GPS showed that it took her three days to fly 2,300 miles to Golden Gate Park in California, giving her time to rest up and refuel to continue south. The Whimbrel I encountered was probably migrating to the Caribbean or northern South America.

As they stop to eat and rest on their migration south, they feed on small crabs and invertebrates that live in the tidal flats. I happened to be on the water at low tide because that's when it's just as easy for Jeff to find the clams as it is for the Whimbrel to find its food. It was cool to watch the Whimbrel stick its bill into the mud and grab a little something to munch on. They swallow what they find whole, and their gizzard is well suited to breaking down the shells. Sometimes, they will even rinse their food to remove sand. When they are on the tundra at breeding/nesting time, the Whimbrels will eat insects and berries.

Whimbrels' nests in the Arctic are located on the ground in a dry, raised area with low-lying wet tundra. Many times, the nest is in a shallow depression, lined with lichen, moss, and grass. They have three to four eggs, and the male and female incubate them. The birds will hatch in 24-28 days.

The downy young leave the nest soon after hatching and feed themselves while the parents protect them from predators. They will fly in 5-6 weeks. Nothing like striking out on your own at a young age!

Jeff and I had a great morning at low tide on Ninigret Pond. He came away with two dozen clams, and I identified a new bird to study and share with you!

**We're Easy to Spot Now at Events!**

Thanks to Dave Tripp, Jr, LHAS now has a beautiful canopy and tablecloth — complete with a QR code that links to our website — for use at events, such as White Memorial's Family Nature Day, this year on September 28.



Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.