



# Chickadee Chatter



January/February 2025

Litchfield Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 70/Issue 1

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

**LHAS Nature Explorers Trip Report, November 17**

## Our First Family Duck Walk

By Ann Orsillo



Six eager children, aged four to eight, and their families met at Point Folly on Bantam Lake to observe and learn about ducks. With the aid of LHAS binoculars and my spotting scope, all learned to identify several species.

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

Ruddy Ducks and Buffleheads were swimming and diving just offshore. Differences between them and a lone Hooded Merganser were pointed out as they watched the ducks and looked at some pictures in my album.



**Hooded Merganser**

Photo: Ann Orsillo

Children have their own way of describing the ducks' characteristics. They were quick to see that the white pattern on the side of the head of the Bufflehead was a triangle. One child described the white shape on the Hooded Merganser's head as a "splush." Another child thought that the end of the crest of the Hooded Merganser looked like the sharp pattern of a saw.

Two Mute Swans glided gracefully

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## President's Message

By Diane Edwards

### Can You Help With Our Chestnut Trees?



Mid-winter might seem like an odd time to be thinking about the experimental chestnut orchard at Wigwam Brook Sanctuary. But we need to identify someone — or several someones — who can help us take care of the orchard, working with members

of the Connecticut Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). Our longtime caretaker, John Baker, passed

away a few months ago.

Once plentiful in eastern U.S. forests, the American chestnut provided valuable benefits to people and wildlife alike. TACF's website ([tacf.org/history-american-chestnut](http://tacf.org/history-american-chestnut)) explains: "Chestnuts are dense with calories, rich in vitamin C and antioxidants, and the leaves contain higher levels of essential plant nutrients than other local tree species. This made the chestnut beneficial not only for the humans of an ecosystem, but for every level of the food chain. Chestnut leaves were favorites of detritivore insects who, by breaking them down, enriched the forest floor with nutrients. Insects

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**LHAS Officers**

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Summer Bird Count	Dave Tripp	dtrippjr@gmail.com
Christmas Bird Count	Dave Tripp	dtrippjr@gmail.com
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**NEW MEMBERS***By Harry Ainsworth, Membership Records Chair*

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Paul Frick	Warren
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Rasina Rand	Salisbury
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Wendy Wentworth	Litchfield
John Young	Colebrook

LHAS membership is at 1,053.

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

**Condolences**

LHAS extends our sincere sympathy to Tom Reinhardt on the passing in November of his former wife, Cathy Reinhardt.

**Thank You, Annual Appeal Donors!**

If you have donated to our recent annual appeal, thank you! If not, there is still time: we keep our appeal account open until the end of our fiscal year (April 30). To donate, please send a check made out to LHAS to P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759. Or visit our website, [lhasct.org](http://lhasct.org).

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

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).

**This newsletter and other LHAS features can be seen **IN LIVING COLOR** at [www.lhasct.org](http://www.lhasct.org).**



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## Family Duck Walk

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into our view from the platform observatory. We talked about the difference between waterfowl (geese, ducks, and swans) and waterbirds (herons, egrets, and other birds that live on or near water). They understood about the webbed feet of the waterfowl and that webbed feet were made for swimming.

Walking around the Point Folly trail, the younger boys' sharp eyesight spotted a Back-capped Chickadee, a Tufted Titmouse and a Carolina Wren. The birds flew back and forth from tree to tree across the trail for all to see.

Marcia McGowan found a tangle of fishing line near the shore. Gathering the group together, we talked about how ducks and other wildlife can become entangled in fishing line. The line can cut into a leg, neck, or wing, which can result in an infection and perhaps the animal's death. Proper disposal of fishing line is the best practice to protect birds and other wildlife.

Near the end of the walk, a flock of Mallards, the most common duck species in Connecticut, flew in and landed in the water next to the trail. We observed how this species dips down with its tail up to feed as opposed to the ducks observed earlier that dive completely underwater to feed.

Back at the parking lot we reviewed the ducks that we observed by looking at the photos in my album. Everyone was rewarded for their efforts with a gingerbread duck cookie baked by me. Many thanks to Marcia McGowan and Vickie Dauphinais for accompanying the group.

I was very happy with the excitement of the group and the variety of ducks we found.



**Ann with her duck-shaped gingerbread cookies.**

## President's Message

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**An American chestnut tree growing in a botanical garden in Poland.**

Photo:Wikimedia Commons

feeding on chestnut leaves were then eaten by fish or birds, and other larger animals would feed directly on the chestnut mast like squirrels, deer, bear, and turkeys."

In addition, chestnut wood was valuable economically. European settlers found that its wood was "rot-resistant, strait-grained, and suitable for furniture, fencing, and building materials," according to TACF.

Tragically, in the late 1800s a deadly chestnut blight was introduced from Asia. Within about 50 years, the trees were decimated. The roots, though,

remained alive. That has allowed stump sprouts to grow, only to be killed by the blight.

## What's Being Done

TACF is working to restore the American chestnut to its

historic range in the eastern U.S. by developing blight-resistant trees. That is where LHAS comes in: Our orchard is one of several experimental orchards that the Connecticut chapter

maintains in our state. We work with their members to identify and remove trees that have become infected by the blight with the goal of finding trees that are resistant to it. We also get to harvest the nuts.

## Help Needed

You don't need to be an expert to help us. TACF-CT members provide the expertise. ***If you are interested in learning more about our orchard, please contact me at edwardsd68@charter.net or 860-309-5139.***



**American chestnut nuts, burrs, and leaves.**

Photo:Wikimedia Commons

**LHAS Nature Explorers Trip Report****The Spooky Side of Nature***By Vickie Dauphinais, Education Committee Chair*

LHAS Nature Explorers led a “spooky” Halloween hike at Boyd Woods Sanctuary on October 27. Ten children with their parents attended.

The afternoon was warm and sunny, perfect for a walk in the woods! The children were full of energy anticipating what might be lurking along the trail. At the bird blind, they were greeted by chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and White-throated Sparrows filling up on sunflower seeds spread out on the ground. The children and adults were delighted by the closeness of the birds — no binoculars needed! The group slowly moved along the trail to spot scary, slimy critters left behind by “nature trolls” Bev Baldwin and Ann Orsillo. Josh Szwed led the group to the picnic rocks on the magenta trail where they were able to examine the weird shapes of fungi and lichen with a magnifying glass.

The kids enjoyed exploring makeshift caves created by fallen old trees. They stopped by the pignut hickory, a favorite photo stop. This monstrous tree is still living, as evidenced by leaves on tall branches, but with a hollow trunk. Weird! This year lots of flowering witch hazel shrubs surrounded the tree. Karen Geitz shared some interesting things about this underappreciated plant. The kids were most fascinated by the yellow, spidery flowers.

As they continued along the trail, Ann Orsillo had the kids act out the life of a leaf. Silly fun! They ran through a scary “bat cave,” a spooky meadow with blackbirds flying overhead. Ghost-like milkweed seeds were sent off in the wind



**Josh Szwed (center) showed the group fungi and lichen.**

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

in hopes of new growth in the spring.

On the way back to the start of the trail, the families were treated to a close-up of a Downy Woodpecker drumming for food on a tree trunk near the trail. Everybody agreed it was the highlight of the hike. Before heading home, the group enjoyed some scary but delicious treats delivered by a good “witch,” Marie Kennedy and her “goblins,” Bill Kennedy, Donna Finn, and Terri Bianchi.



**‘Witch’ Marie Kennedy.**

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

**Focus on Birds****Great Horned Owl***By Marie Kennedy*

**Great Horned Owl.**

Photo: Greg Hume via Wikimedia Commons

The Great Horned Owl is a large owl and one of the most common owls in North America. It can be found in almost all habitats — wetlands, forests, grasslands, backyards, cities, and almost any other semi-open habitat.

Great Horned Owls, with their intimidating, yellow-eyed stare and deep hooting voice, are powerful predators. They are covered in extremely soft feathers that insulate them

against the cold winter weather and help them fly quietly in pursuit of prey. The Great Horned Owl’s earlike tufts are not ears nor horns at all but feathers. The owl’s actual ears are located under the facial disk feathers and are offset to better hear and pinpoint the direction of their prey. They can hear a mouse under a foot of snow and a mammal in the forest up to 300 yards away. These owls can take down birds and mammals even larger than themselves. However, they also dine on reptiles and frogs.

The Great Horned Owl’s eyes are fixed; they do not move in their sockets. These owls have 14 cervical vertebrae as opposed to humans, who have seven. This allows the owl to turn its head 180 degrees to look behind itself. The big eyes

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## A Visit to Stony Brook Forest in Sharon

By Vickie Dauphinais

On a sunny October morning, forester Jim Gillispie treated a small group from LHAS to a tour of his Stony Brook Forest in Sharon, Connecticut. He acquired the 123 acres in 1994. Over the years, he has helped the forest thrive by controlling erosion and invasive plants, thinning, growing good quality timber, and improving habitat for birds and other wildlife. His bird-friendly forestry practices have been recognized by Sharon Audubon Center in the "Foresters for The Birds" program.

As we started walking on the trail, Jim gave us a quick history of the property. The land was a subsistence homestead in the



**A bit of charcoal**

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

1700s and 1800s. It was used for charcoal production until the charcoal industry moved west. The Chaffee family owned the land from the 1860s until 1994, when Jim acquired it. He had worked as the family's forester, so he was familiar with the property.

Since 1994, about 90 acres have been clearcut and fenced to prevent deer from eating new seedlings. Jim used a seven-strand high-tensile electric fence powered by a solar system. The fence was removed once the new trees took hold. As Jim explained, "clearcutting" sounds scary to people but it helps create "young forests," which many species of birds and animals prefer. Another term for "young forests" is early successional forests.

As we leisurely moved along the trail in the young forest, the diversity of trees, shrubs, grasses, and open areas was evident. Jim pointed out young oaks, hickory, tulip, sassafras, flowering witch hazel, birch, aspen, and beech. The fall colors and the sunshine gave the forest a beautiful golden hue. The group was able to appreciate the quaking sound of the Bigtooth Aspen leaves in the gentle breeze. Magical!



**Jim Gillespie explaining the importance of early successional forests.**

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

We walked by the Stony Brook stream, which eventually runs into the Housatonic River. Mink, otters, and fishers have been observed in it. We didn't see many birds, as many of the forest songbirds were likely on their way to warmer grounds. We did hear a Pileated Woodpecker calling and drumming. Flocks of Black-capped Chickadees and White-throated Sparrows were searching for food among the snakeroot plants and goldenrod.

The forest will be an ideal spot to experience spring migration. Jim graciously offered to lead a spring walk in 2025.

## Great Horned Owl

(continued from page 4)

help give it great night vision for hunting, although in the winter months the owl will hunt in daylight.

The female Great Horned Owl is larger than her mate, although the male has a larger voice box and a deeper voice. Pairs often call together, with noticeable differences in pitch. They tend to stay on their territory year-round and begin nesting in February. The female Great Horned Owl will lay one to four eggs, most commonly two. She will incubate for approximately 30 days, staying on the nest while the male brings her food every night. The fledgling owlets remain with

their parents until the fall to learn the skills needed to hunt independently.

Over the years, I've had a pair near my house, and I find it captivating to hear them hooting. I've been looking for them for years with no luck. Great Horned Owls are difficult to spot due to their amazing camouflage. So, listen for them on a quiet night. It's a true delight to hear their call.

## Meetings, Bird Walks and Activities

### LHAS Calendar — Winter 2025



**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.*

### January 6 . . . . . Protecting Connecticut's Coastal Habitats and Birds . . . . . 6:45 PM

Corrie Folsom-O'Keefe, director of bird conservation for the state office of the National Audubon Society, will describe Audubon's conservation efforts along the coast. Connecticut's coastal habitats and the bird species that depend on them are facing numerous threats. For birds that nest on our beaches and offshore islands, human disturbance limits habitat use, reduces nesting success and the amount of time birds can spend foraging or resting, impacting their health. Salt marshes have suffered losses of 27% since 1900 and continue to decline despite the passage of tidal wetland legislation in the 1970s. Today, sea level rise and the increased frequency and intensity of storms is threatening coastal habitats and the birds that rely on them. From the management and stewardship of our beach-nesting birds to the implementation of strategies that increase the resilience and slow the loss of current salt marsh and associated species, Audubon and partners are working to ensure that these birds and their habitats can be found in Connecticut for years to come. Corrie also leads the Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds, which assists the Connecticut DEEP's Wildlife Division with the management of the Piping Plover and other beach-nesting birds. She also created the Wildlife Guards program, which educates, mentors, and employs Bridgeport, West Haven, and Stratford high school students as coastal bird stewards.

### February 3 . . . . . Owls in Connecticut . . . . . 6:45 PM

Join Fran Zygmont as he provides a program about owls in our region including some personal, entertaining stories about searching for owls. He'll cover the owls one would expect to see in Connecticut's habitats along with some tips to optimize the chances of having one vocally respond, or if you're lucky enough, actually get to see one. Fran will also cover the do's and don'ts of looking for owls to both protect their existence while giving you a chance to enjoy them in the wild. Fran is an expert birder, a Connecticut Master Wildlife Conservationist, a former president of LHAS, and our current vice president.

### March 3 . . . . . American Kestrels . . . . . 6:45 PM

Bethany Sheffer from Sharon Audubon has yet another superb presentation for us! American Kestrels are a species of fascination for birders and non-birders alike. Whether due to their small size, distinctive plumage, or their conservation successes in Connecticut, one can't help but find them appealing. The work of a core group of people, beginning with Art Gingert, has achieved much on behalf of America's smallest falcon. Join us in an exciting exploration of the American Kestrel, statewide conservation efforts, and the questions Audubon is asking about this species' long-term survival. Bethany is Sharon Audubon's volunteer coordinator/naturalist and works closely with its Wildlife

**The next Board Meeting will be held at 7 p.m., Tuesday, January 21 at the LHAS office, 28 Russell Street, Litchfield.**

Rehabilitation Clinic. She holds a master's degree in public administration and is a certified environmental educator and beekeeper.

## EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

### **January 1 . . . . . First Day Hike at Boyd Woods. . . . . Wednesday, 10:30 AM–Noon**

Looking forward to a fresh start in 2025? Celebrate the new year in the outdoors with a First Day Hike at our Boyd Woods Audubon Sanctuary. Kids and adults are invited to join leaders Rich and Debbie Martin for a fun, invigorating hike through the woods. They will point out hidden treasures along the way. We never know what awaits us, perhaps a Saw-whet Owl, a Red-shouldered Hawk, a Pileated Woodpecker? Wear sturdy shoes and dress for the weather. Meet at the Boyd Woods parking lot off Route 254 in Litchfield. ***For more information or questions, contact Debbie at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.***

### **January 26 . . . . . Eagle Viewing at Shepaug Dam, Southbury . . . . . Sunday, 9 AM**

Join Russ Naylor to view our national bird in suitable habitat at the Shepaug Dam at Lake Zoar in Southbury. We'll also be likely to view Common Ravens, displaying Common Mergansers and American Black Ducks, a resident Peregrine Falcon, and other visiting winter birds. As a bonus, we might be treated to a live birds of prey presentation by a raptor rehabilitator. Meet at the junction of Routes 6 (Main Street North in Woodbury) and 47 outside the Canfield Corner Pharmacy. ***If you plan to go, call Russ Naylor at 203-841-7779 and leave a message. He will make a reservation for the group.***

### **February 15 . . . . . Great Backyard Bird Count at Boyd Woods . . . . . Saturday, 9-11 AM**

Boyd Woods continues to be one of the best hotspots in Litchfield County for bird species. Join Rich and Debbie Martin at the sanctuary to participate in this year's Great Backyard Bird Count. We'll be sure to see many birds from our wonderful 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. Snow or rain cancels this walk. ***For more information, contact Debbie Martin at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.***

### **February 21-23 . Birding Around Newburyport, MA . . . . . Friday-Sunday**

Dave Tripp will once again escort LHASers around the Newburyport, Amesbury, and Salisbury areas in search of wintering northern birds. In the past, this trip has seen rare birds like Great Gray Owl, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Townsend's Solitaire, and Harris' Sparrow. Other uncommon birds encountered in the past are Short-eared Owls, "white-winged" gulls, Barrow's Goldeneye, Rough-legged Hawks, and Northern Shrike. An added bonus is a day trip to Gloucester and Rockport on Cape Ann, which may add Razorbills, Thick-billed Murres, Harlequin Ducks, Black Guillemots, and more gulls and waterfowl. ***If you are interested in going, email Dave at dtrippjr@gmail.com.*** We will stay at the Fairfield Inn in Amesbury; check websites like *kayak.com* or *hotels.com* to find the best rate.

### **March 2 . . . . . Eagle Viewing at Shepaug Dam, Southbury . . . . . Sunday, 9 AM**

See the write-up for January 26.

### **LHAS Nature Explorers — Family Fun!**

#### **January 25 . . . . . Nature Explorers Table at Fire & Ice Family Fun Fest. . . . . Saturday, 1-3 PM**

Visit the LHAS Nature Explorers table at the Litchfield Community Center's FIRE & ICE Family Funfest. Bring the whole family and enjoy fun activities for kids and adults. It will be a wonderful way to enjoy a winter afternoon! The Community Center is located at 421 Bantam Road (Route 202) in Litchfield.

## Cape May Trip Report

### A Dry Run in More Ways than One

By Russ Naylor

A dutiful dozen LHAS bird-trippers to Cape May journeyed through a sere and drought-browned land bursting with patches of brilliant fall colors. With contrary winds, the



**The 'dutiful dozen.'**

Photo: Self-timer!

fount of fall migration proved but a trickle of its usual flow of birdlife. Yet, this year's trip, led as usual by Dave Tripp, found a mother lode of stopover migrants awaiting favorable winds. We tallied 148 species — our second highest Cape May weekend count ever!

We fared well with waterfowl, sparrows, larids (an avian group that includes gulls, skimmers, and terns), and raptors, amid other winged tidbits. Each area we visited yielded its own special delights. Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife



**Boat-tailed Grackles.**

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

Refuge (Brigantine) had Clay-colored Sparrows, two or three Wilson's Snipes, about 1,600 Ruddy Ducks, and a gorgeous sunlit lineup of male Boat-tailed Grackles posing for photos. An added spice was a cross-morph Red Fox — red in front, silver in back — a rare sight!

Cape May Point had Eurasian Wigeon, Bonaparte's Gulls,

Glossy and White Ibises, plus Northern Gannets leading Brown Pelicans southward in unified flight.



**A cross-morph Red Fox.**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

The North Wildwoods seawall site teemed

with birds — more than 260 American Oystercatchers, 400-plus Royal Terns, 16 Marbled Godwits, as well as Forster's Terns and smaller shorebirds. From these birdy multitudes we ferreted out a Black Skimmer, two Common Terns, and a Sandwich Tern (a "trash bird" for this year's trip!).

South Cape May Meadows had a Common Gallinule and "western" Palm Warblers. At Stone Harbor Point we savored a Sanderling sunrise with more than 20 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Nummy Island's mixed flyby streams of Brants and American Oystercatchers preceded good looks at Seaside and Saltmarsh Sparrows. Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area har-



**Brown Creeper**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

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**Scoping things out.**

Photo: Paul G. Edwards

**Cape May***(continued from page 8)*

bored Vesper Sparrows and Winter Wrens. Altogether we witnessed a parade of autumnal avians to sate the most avian-addicted ornithophile.

Let's raise a toast to Dave Tripp for unearthing a golden treasure trove of winged delights for the camera and the eye — well done!



**Above, left: Saltmarsh Sparrow. Above, center: Swamp Sparrow.**

Photos: Dave Tripp, Jr.



**Buckeye Butterfly.**

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards



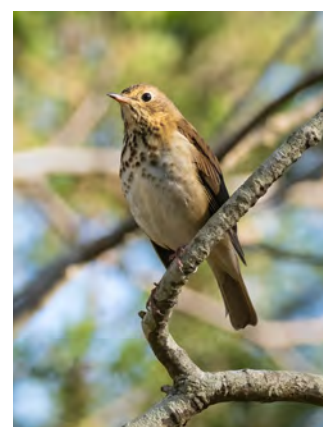
**Osprey.**

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards



**Male Harrier — a.k.a. "the gray ghost."**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.



**Above left: Juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron. Center: Snowy Egret. Right: Hermit Thrush.**

Photos: Diane Friend Edwards

## Trip Reports

### Lighthouse Point — Migrant Mecca

By Russ Naylor

Our peerless programs chair, Angela Dimmitt, led a joint LHAS and Western Connecticut Bird Club jaunt to Lighthouse Point in New Haven on October 6. She took us into the haunt of many an errant migrant bird and site of one of the Northeast's most productive hawk watches.

The day's raptor flight was slow but steady, mostly Cooper's Hawks but with a mix of Northern Harriers, American Kestrels, Merlins, and Ospreys as well. A few Peregrine Falcons added spice, including one sparring in a bout of talon-tag with a Red-tailed Hawk.

A mélange of other migrants flowed past as well — Double-crested Cormorants, Laughing Gulls, Northern Flickers, Blue Jays, and Ruby-Crowned Kinglets. In the thickets, leaf-tossing Eastern Towhees mingled with various sparrows. Special visitors we admired were a Yellow-billed Cuckoo, at least three Red-headed Woodpeckers, and a



**Long-Tailed Weasel**

Photo: David A. Mitchell via  
Wikimedia Commons

rather befuddled young Whimbrel people-watching from the park's picnic area.

As a Great Egret spied on us from the park's tidal creek, some local avian ambassadors paid us our respect — a few Canada Geese, the resident Red-shouldered Hawk, at least one calling Monk Parakeet, the local New Haven Raven pair, and Carolina Wrens a-bubble with song.

A light flight of Monarch butterflies, Green Darner dragonflies, and Black Saddlebag dragonflies added

diversity to the day's migration. We also savored a mammal sighting in the form of a Long-tailed Weasel on rat patrol.

*Merci beaucoup* to Angela for bringing us out into a splendid fall day of nature study!

### LHAS Duck Delight Enthralls Us All

By Russ Naylor

Our Bantam Lake Duck Ramble on November 10, led by ornitho-whisperer Fran Zymont, took place as fall took off toward winter. A greeting committee of Rusty Blackbirds welcomed us to Litchfield Town Beach, under the aegis of



**Looking for Ducks on Bantam Lake at Point Folly.**

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

the local pair of Bald Eagles. Here we spotted a Great Blue Heron, Pied-billed Grebes, and a clowder of American Coots. Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, a medley of assorted blackbirds, and a migratory invasion of American Robins were all around us in passage.

Point Folly brought out a late drake Wood Duck, a Red-throated Loon, and a grossly engorged Cooper's Hawk (hopefully, it had feasted on starling!). Also, Barred Owl imitations by Fran Zymont and Dave Tripp brought in a commotion of chirpers — Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Brown Creepers, both kinglets, and a Carolina Wren pair taking their bows onstage.

Bantam Lake's South Cove harbored a Double-crested Cormorant consorting with a pod of Mute Swans.

Jones Pond swarmed with Black Ducks and Buffleheads, among which we spied Ring-necked Ducks, Northern Pintails, and a flamboyant Northern Shoveler drake returning for at least his fourth full season.

Our last stop, at Cemetery Pond, brought us Green-winged Teal, American Wigeons, a Swamp Sparrow, and a group of inquisitive beavers, all within a fluttering sweep of American Robins winging hither and yon in pre-roosting flights.

Fran's "quacker quest" delivered well over 50 species of birds to brighten our binoculars — a ducky divergence to delight us all!

## Conservation News

### New Law Expands Protections for Coastal Habitats, Communities

The bipartisan Bolstering Ecosystems Against Coastal Harm Act, now signed into law by President Biden, will protect critical coastal communities and habitats that are increasingly threatened by the impacts of the climate crisis. The law will expand the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, which ensures that taxpayer funds are not spent on development in coastal habitats or areas under threat of extreme weather.

*From Audubon Connecticut*

### Saltmarsh Sparrow Research Expands at Great Meadows Marsh



**Saltmarsh Sparrow.**

Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Region

A driving force behind the restoration at Great Meadows Marsh in Stratford is protecting the rapidly declining Saltmarsh Sparrow species. Encroaching development, disposal of dredged soils, abundance of non-native plants, and flooding had previously degraded the habitat that Saltmarsh Sparrows need to nest.

The restoration prioritized creating new Saltmarsh Sparrow nesting habitat called "hummocks," elevated

mounds of soil planted with native grasses to prevent high tides from drowning their nests and chicks.

"Our project partners added the new hummocks while keeping existing habitat intact, so the Saltmarsh Sparrows would ideally return to their nesting grounds but transition to the elevated areas where nests are safer from flooding," said Franco Gigliotti, a UConn Ph.D. student who is leading the Saltmarsh Sparrow research at the marsh.

UConn team members are banding Saltmarsh Sparrows and deploying radio transmitters on some of the birds to track their movements and nesting behavior, providing valuable information that will guide work at Great Meadows Marsh and future coastal resilience initiatives at other sites.

"Our preliminary results suggest sustained use of the restoration area by Saltmarsh Sparrows three years post-restoration, with regular use of the hummocks, likely for foraging purposes or cover," said Gigliotti.

Excitingly, other birds on the marsh have started to call the hummocks home. Willets, another native species, have suc-



**Hummocks at Great Meadows Marsh.**

Photo: Courtesy of Audubon Connecticut

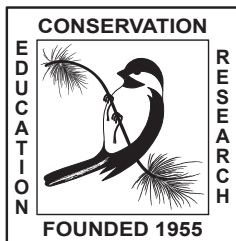
cessfully nested and fledged young from the restored area — even a Wild Turkey and Least Bittern were seen at the site. Additionally, the Seaside Sparrow has begun colonizing the restored area of Great Meadows Marsh.

Improvements to tidal creeks and the regrading of the site have made the area more accessible to estuarine turtles, blue crabs, and Atlantic silverside and menhaden fish, among others. The decrease in mosquitos has also made visiting Great Meadows much more enjoyable!

### New Coalition to Tackle Long Island Sound's Climate-Related Threats

Audubon Connecticut/New York and several other environmental groups have formed a "Coastal Restoration Coalition" that will work to advance coastal resiliency projects that preserve the ecological integrity of Long Island Sound's coastlines. The members will coordinate their conservation efforts that are currently operating independently of each other. This coalition will be critical to addressing climate-driven threats in the region. Initial objectives include building a three-year work plan that will guide priorities of the coalition, examining current resources and project sites, and identifying shared resource opportunities.

Audubon CT/NY Director of Coastal Resilience Victoria O'Neill said: "Long Island Sound salt marshes, islands, and beaches are being squeezed by rising sea levels and human development, resulting in habitat loss and alarming population declines in birds like the Saltmarsh Sparrow. Audubon looks forward to working with our coalition partners to improve and restore our coastal environment, an effort that will benefit wildlife and help protect coastal communities from flooding, erosion, and storm surge."



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## Thanking Our Volunteers

LHAS wouldn't exist without our volunteers. That's why we held a volunteer thank-you celebration on November 15. Our planning committee — Vickie Dauphinais, Marie Kennedy, Terri Bianchi, and Pam Hicks — did a wonderful job orchestrating the event, which was held at the Litchfield Distillery. We enjoyed tasty hors d'oeuvres, the distillery's beverages (as well as non-alcoholic ones), and camaraderie.

Thank you, Vickie, Pam, Terri, and Marie! And thank you, Litchfield Distillery for donating the space for the event.



Photos: Rich Martin