



Mattabeseck Audubon Society

A Chapter of NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



Wingbeat

Summer / Fall 2016

Volume 43 • Number 2

“The Mattabeseck Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is committed to environmental leadership and education for the benefit of the community and the earth’s biodiversity.”

Mattabeseck at Feet to the Fire event

Mattabeseck participated in the *Feet to the Fire* (a major undertaking of Wesleyan University to examine critical environmental issues through multiple lenses, from science to art) Riverfront Encounter on May 7 at Harbor Park at the Connecticut River in Middletown. The festival included exhibits, music, Plein Air painters, and lots of fun activities for kids, in spite of the drizzly rain.

MAS showed off new display panels that feature our Carlson Sanctuary and its beavers and bird species, as well as our past programs, past field trips, and our history of advocacy.

At the MAS table, volunteers helped kids make peanut butter bird feeders. Kids also learned about birds through bird-coloring sheets. 



L/R: Alberta Mirer, Rob Mirer, Alison Guinness

Inside:

Members' Corner

Upcoming Field Trips

Field Trip Reports

Floodplain in Summer

Exhibits to See

100th Anniv. of Migratory Bird Treaty



Mattabeseck Audubon Needs Your Help

We need you. There is always a need for new volunteer leaders in any organization, but the past couple of years have brought losses to our board that have created even greater challenges.

We're always looking for new board members.

Please contact us (Alison Guinness 860-873-9304) and let us know if you'd like to help. 

AUDUBON MEMBERS' CORNER

(Feel free to send us contributions to this column)



Submitted by Alberta Mirer, Board Member

The Importance of Native Bees

Many of North America's more than 4,000 native bee species are declining, including

more than a quarter of native bumble bees. Creating a pollinator habitat doesn't just help the bees; it also helps fruits and vegetables. Native bees are more effective pollinators than non-native honey bees. Honey bees pack pollen into tidy baskets on their

Photograph: Bob Peterson, Wikimedia Commons



Eastern Bumblebee

legs, while most native bees are like little flying dust mops. Pollen clings to hairs on their bodies and easily brushes off, so flowers get pollinated more completely. Honey bees will visit a single fruit tree methodically, going from flower to flower, whereas native orchard bees flit from tree to tree, resulting in the cross-pollination that some trees need to set fruit. Bumble bees also do a nifty trick called "buzz pollination". They vibrate their flight muscles at the exact frequency needed to shake pollen loose from anthers.

When researchers at Michigan State planted wildflowers around high-bush blueberry fields to attract native pollinators, they saw the wild bee population double within two years and blueberry yields increase up to 20 percent.

Unlike the familiar honey bee, more than 95% of native bees live alone in small nests carved into soil or wood.

Native bees tend to be tiny, do not have queens or produce honey and rarely sting. Bees pollinate more than a third of all foods and beverages humans consume. Native bees contribute at least \$3 billion a year to the farm economy. If domestic honey bees continue to decline, native bees may play an even more important role in pollination.

How you can help: In your garden choose locally native perennials of yellow, blue or purple flowers that bloom at different times. Plant herbs, such as basil, cilantro, thyme, oregano and borage in your vegetable beds and let some go to flower for the bees. Bees drink water as well as nectar, so a water feature would be helpful. Reduce mulching, mowing and tilling that may destroy nests or future nesting sites. Avoid using insecticides (which kill bees directly) and herbicides (which kill the plants bees depend on). Steer clear of systemic insecticides. Help scientists learn more about the insects by reporting bees you see in your garden to the citizen-science project www.BumbleBeeWatch.org.



Iridescent Green Bee species

Photograph: Andres C, Wikimedia Commons

National Wildlife, April-May 2016 www.NWF.org

The Importance of All Pollinators

More than a third of all worldwide crops and 3/4s of all flowering plants depend on pollinators like bees, butterflies and even flies to reproduce. The National Pollinator Garden

Network was founded in 2014 to help conserve threatened populations through a nationwide campaign called the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge.

You can help by setting aside space, even a window box will do, for native nectar-rich plants and following sustainable practices. For a month-by-month list of native plants in your region go to www.pollinator.org/guides.

Skip double-flowered hybrids – the meager nectar they offer is hard to reach.

A range of colors, shapes, and scents will attract the greatest diversity.

Delay fall chores until spring – larvae overwinter in leaves, hollow plant stems and branches.

Better Homes and Gardens April 2016

MAS Officers:

President: Alison Guinness (860-873-9304)
Vice-President: Luella Landis
Recording Sec.: to be filled
Treasurer: Elaine Payne

2016 Committee Chairs:

Conservation: Larry Cyrulik (860-342-4785)
Education: Kim Antol (860-347-6442)
Publicity: Alison Guinness (860-873-9304)
Sanctuary: Alison Guinness (860-873-9304)
Wingbeat: Pat Rasch (860-635-1880) <pat_rasch@mac.com>

Rare Bird Alert: 203-254-3665

On the web: www.audubon-mas.org



Wingbeat uses 50% recycled paper (20% post-consumer waste) and vegetable-based ink

Upcoming Field Trips: Summer / Fall 2016

August 23 (Tuesday)

BOAT IS FULL

Visit to Plum Island The trip has filled to capacity.

August 20 (Saturday 8:00 a.m.)

Shore Birds Canoe Trip

Bring canoe or kayak, lunch, and supplies for a day on the water (bathing suit optional). Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Lieutenant River boat launch site on Rt. 156, Old Lyme. Call Larry Cyrulik for details 860-342-4785 or 860-635-1880.



Laughing gull, Lieutenant River, Old Lyme

October 8 (Saturday 8:00 a.m.)

Sparrow Crawl

Join Larry Cyrulik in visiting an old field on Long Hill Road, Middletown Nature Gardens (off Randolph Road), and Guida Farm nature preserve. Five species of sparrows may be noted, as well as other fall migrants. Meet at the parking lot at the corner of Lawn Ave. and High St. Call Larry for info 860-342-4785 or 860-635-1880. 🐦



2015 Sparrow Crawl in the "bean field"

Field Trip Reports

Wildflower Walk: April 22, 2016

First of all, there is the science of the thing: a recitation of facts, genus and species noted, weather conditions, barometric pressure and other meteorological elements. These are the necessary infrastructures, the bedrock of all that follows.

But let us go down a different, metaphysical path on our quest for the vernal experience. For how many vernal mornings do we have left in our temporal selves?

Four Botanists gathered together silently contemplated that question before descending into the basalt "rabbit hole," a la *Alice in Wonderland*, that was Giuffrida Park, .

The convoluted roots of the great tall pines and the quick lapping of the waves on the reservoir spoke as clearly as the botanist's conversation, if one was alert and willing to listen. Above, the animated Pine warblers tisk-tisk-tisked, and like falconers the trees held out their boughs and beckoned them to perch.

The dog-tooth violets lapped the acid soil with spotted tongues; they rose up flowers in a parade of yellow parasols. The trillium thrust forward from three great green collars a crimson medallion. Treading over broken talus slopes, embraced as if by old acquaintances, the botanists knelt to the dutchman's breeches and gently smoothed their lemon yellow pantaloons. Ramps, the wild leeks of the forest,

stood about in verdant circles, rising above the brown dead oak leaves that looked like orphans.

A rising path, talus slopes studded with rue anemone; then a plunge along the edges of the reservoir. The ballet began there in earnest: whirling pirouettes of spring beauty; blue cohosh; ginger with their reticent bell flowers splayed out like tutus; pink, white, and purple hepatica on pointe. Prima donnas all vying for attention.

A pair of Louisiana waterthrushes danced among the flowers. A quick pas de deux as they exchanged positions on a log. Bravo!

Climbing now, but as if on wings of anticipation, past fields of white rue anemone, suddenly a kaleidoscope of orange movement, animated petals of a different sort: red efts, the terrestrial stage of the red-spotted newt starting along the way. Watch your footfalls!



Red Eft stage of Red-spotted newt on the trail

Field Trip Reports *continued*

Achieving the summit of Lamentation Mountain: pale white clouds with moistened eyes looked lovingly over the landscape below while black ravens dove and cut through them like barber shears.

Cresses and early saxifrage were cradled in the rocky crevasses along the path. Then the botanists became as elevated as the mountain: pale and yellow corydalis, growing side by side!

*A rainbow and a cuckoo's song
May never come together again;
May never come
This side the tomb.*

W.H. Davies

Ballet, fin; rabbit hole, exeunt.

4 participants; 23 flower and flowering tree-shrub species;
22 avian species



Pale Corydalis, at top of trap rock ridge



Endangered Yellow Corydalis, along trail top of trap rock ridge

Dave Titus Memorial Warbler Walk: May 7, 2016

Scene: Court room. Wall to wall carpets. Long bench seats facing the judge's podium. Clerk's desk to left of the judge. Prosecutor stands next to the clerk's desk.

Knock, knock! The judge taps the door leading from his chambers and enters the court room.

Bailiff: All rise! Hear ye, hear ye, etc.

Mug-a-bugs scattered among the benches reluctantly stand.

Bailiff: You may sit.

Low rumbling as all half sit, half collapse into the benches.

Prosecutor: Will the defendant approach the podium?

Defendant creeps towards the judge's podium with trepidation.

Judge: You are accused of leading a bird watching field trip. Warblers. Correct?

Defendant: Yes, your Honor, sir.

Judge: The weather, was it favorable?

Defendant: No, sir, the week leading up to the trip was miserably cold and dreary.

Judge: Are you making excuses for a lousy showing?

Defendant, cowered: No, your Honor, but...

Judge: Never mind. How many warblers?

Defendant: Four, your Honor.

Judge: That's all? Do you realize there are 56 species in North America?

Defendant: I'm a little bit deaf in the ear, your Honor, so they might have been hiding from me...

Judge, sternly: How many participants?

Defendant: Five, your Honor, sir.

Judge, pontificating: Five, that's all? Why, when these birds fly thousands of miles across hostile oceans, shopping malls and such, and then, exhausted, drop down onto the countryside, don't you think they deserve a better welcome, a little recognition? Well?

Defendant, sputtering: But, the weather, your Honor, and the habitat...

Judge: More excuses! No, I see by your list of bird watchers that you had some excellent people with you. So now for your sentencing.

Defendant lowers his head to his chin.

Judge, slamming his gavel onto the podium: You are sentenced to a week-end camping with cub scouts and making bird feeders out of cardboard toilet roll tubes coated with peanut butter and sunflower seeds.

A gasp rises up from the crowd of mug-a-bugs. Chagrined, the defendant is led away by the bailiff, past a large, burly prisoner with a shaved head, a nose crooked from fighting, huge biceps covered in "Love you Mom" tattoos, and shackled head to foot in chains like sausages as thick as a man's waist. The prisoner sighs with sympathy as the defendant is led away and rolls his blood shot eyes at the severity of the sentence, thanking the stars for his own punishment – only 40 years in solitary confinement, on bread crumbs and water.

5 participants; 4 warbler species; 31 total species

LC

Trip Reports continued next page

The Flood Plain in Summer

A narrow path through the honeysuckle and suddenly the cornfield lies like an open book simmering in the mid-morning heat. A triumvirate of sycamore trees shed darkened apostrophes over the tops of the emergent blades of corn. Black chevrons see-saw through the canopies of the silver maples: crows cackling and disputing among themselves. Red-wing black birds ker-ker-ee from their vantage points in the buttonbush bristling within the shining swamp land. And above where clouds in suspended animation hovered like chalices of light: a pair of red-tail hawks in gracious, ethereal flight.

Another path as black as licorice takes you into the forested high plain. Honeysuckle, their white and yellow blossoms intoxicating the air, and spicebush presenting hard, green nodules that will blush deep red when ripened, line the way.

From somewhere in the spotted sycamore a rose-breasted grosbeak flutes its pastoral song. The heart feels inexplicably unrequited, as if a childhood sweetheart, long separated, is remembered, then lost forever.

Round a curve and there is the levee overlooking the river. A rustle in the viburnum and a woodchuck scuttles away on business. Crooked maples are on either side of you wrapped in poison ivy vines thick as a man's wrist; an American redstart flutters amongst the leaves, the bird's black and orange wings patterned against the emerald green ivy.

Green ash twigs lie underfoot. The cavernous body of a downed cottonwood gives cause for a detour. Its living companions have scattered the plain with balls of white seed like the eyebrows of old men.

The swales are dry after the spring floods and the jack-in-the-pulpit and green dragons have set seed, like fists of tiny, red marbles. The swamps are still moist with tepid, black water and black ducks dabble there.

You brush past waist high nettle and fans of ostrich fern



overlooking one of the creeks that drain towards the river: brown and muddy veins over-topped by wind throws and punctuated by beaver dams.

You stand and ponder. A dragonfly dances on your shoulder. Then a heron rises up, squawking angrily like a great, grey ghoul. And master builder beaver himself, slapping his tail with annoyance, breaks your reverie.

That and mosquitoes send you on your way. The silence returns to the flood plain. What have you had better in life than this plaintive silence... 🍃

LC

Field Trip Reports *continued*

Canoe Trip—Special Focus Areas of the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge: June 4, 2016

After a kindly well-wisher sent the two canoeists on their way, they headed up the Connecticut river against a lowering tide. The canoe tracked well, cutting through the green water plants, Elodea and Raccoon tail, lying submerged in the shallows near the bank.

Out in the open channel, the canoe gently rocked in the swells thrown up by the passing motor craft. The paddlers were plying towards the tidal inlet between Dead Man's Swamp and a flood plain peninsula, part of the National Wildlife Refuge system. The peninsula is closed to the public to protect the Puritan tiger beetle, found only in the

Connecticut river valley.

Lesser yellowlegs and Great blue herons stalked the tidal inlet. Warbling vireos sing-songed in the tall maple canopies. Observant, the canoeists spied a flaccid patch of invasive water chestnut looking like a large, deflated, lime-green balloon exposed in the mud. Unable to reach it because of the deep, gooey substrate, the canoeists had to linger until the tide reversed itself and began to refill the inlet. Then the floating mass was accessible. The pernicious invasive filled several buckets, disposed of well above the reach of

Trip Reports continued on back cover

Exhibits to Visit this Summer



Connecticut River Museum

The Connecticut River Museum's latest exhibit is *Invaders: They come by Air, Land, and Water!* The exhibit features artwork by Michael DiGiorgio, a longtime friend of Mattabesec who created all the beautiful birds on our card *Identifying Our Backyard Birds*. Mike's paintings are reminiscent of the monster movies of the 1950s and 1960s, including frightened people and large menacing invaders, such as Oriental bitersweet, Water chestnut, and Didymo, also called rock snot! The show runs till Oct. 10. The museum is located on the Connecticut River in Essex. <http://www.ctrivermuseum.org/calendarevent/invaders/>

Also at The Connecticut River Museum

If you visit on a Thursday, you may want to stay for a free concert. The Connecticut River Museum once again offers Thursdays on the Dock. This series of free riverside concerts on Thursday nights runs throughout late summer, and features a different artist every week. Guests are welcomed to bring lawn chairs or blankets for seating, as well as a picnic dinner. A cash bar serving beer and wine will be available, and Porky Pete's BBQ will be onsite with hot food for sale.



Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History

For a different museum experience, you may want to visit the Yale Peabody Museum's 150th Anniversary celebration exhibit *Treasures of the Peabody: 150 Years of Exploration & Discovery*. Just a few of the highlights include the first *T. rex* fossil ever discovered; a small liverwort specimen collected by Charles Darwin during his voyage on the *HMS Beagle*; a rifle

belonging to Buffalo Bill, one of O.C. Marsh's guides during his fossil expeditions to the American West; and a full-size *Velociraptor* model from the *Jurassic Park* film series!

On view through January 8, 2017 in New Haven at 170 Whitney Avenue.

<http://peabody.yale.edu/exhibits/treasures-peabody-150-years-exploration-discovery>

Also at the Peabody:

Come see a display of one of Yale University's most iconic objects: the Double Elephant folio of John James Audubon's *The Birds of America*. On loan from Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, two of the Beinecke's four volumes will be on view on the Museum's third floor, adjacent to *Birds of Connecticut*.

Born in what is now Haiti, John James Audubon (1785–1851) was the son of a French planter and a Creole woman. He moved to the United States in 1803 and for more than 10 years drew and painted American birds, chiefly from life. The 435 illustrated plates in *The Birds of America*—showing a total of 1,055 birds—were engraved and hand-colored. Published by subscription between 1827 and 1838, 135 of

the 175 to 200 complete sets of plates still exist today.



Illustration from AUDUBON

Third Conservation Anniversary



In past *Wingbeats*, we let you know about the beginnings of Connecticut's conservation efforts 125 years ago and the nation's first efforts at creating national parks 100 years ago.

This year also marks the 100th anniversary of the first international conservation treaty, the Migratory Bird Treaty between the United States and Canada. Twenty years later, with the addition of Mexico, this conservation effort became hemisphere wide. This was among the first environmental laws to recognize that wildlife and the environment did not recognize manmade political boundaries.



As the daughter of a Special Agent for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I grew up on this law. As children, my sister, brother, and I helped my father in his efforts to carry out the activities of his job. His first assignment was in southern New York, where my father told that the urban/suburban Canada goose came into being. He always felt that these geese escaped from the Bronx Zoo where they lived for a while with clipped wings to keep them from flying away. Once they molted, they left but having become acclimated to the lush lawns and fairways of Westchester golf courses, they stayed and stayed. As their numbers grew, they became nuisances. As migratory birds, they were protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty, which meant that they became my father's problem. He would take us with him on goose roundups.

One time in particular would have made a great You Tube video. The geese were in a neighborhood with a lake with an island in the middle. My sister and I were posted around the edge of the lake while my father and brother were in the canoe chasing the geese back and forth around the island. It was surely comical. I can't remember if we actually caught any. If we did, they were loaded into the back of the car and taken home, caged in the backyard until my father

made arrangements to send them to a wildlife refuge somewhere in the western part of the country. This process ended as the geese became too numerous. Not to mention the fact that the backyard grass disappeared.

We also helped my father during banding season. Our "conservation job" was to shinny up conifers, maneuvering through all those close branches, to Mourning dove nests, carefully hand down the baby birds to my father, who would band them and send them back up to us to return to the nest. When we moved from New York to Connecticut, my father's next assignment, we no longer banded doves. Our banding jobs moved farther afield.

One summer, we all went to Maine where my father set up traps to catch ducks, mostly on the Androscoggin River. Each day, one of us would accompany my father in the canoe to check the traps and band and release the catch. At that time, the health of the Androscoggin was highly compromised with pollutants from the paper making industry. Huge bubbles of methane would gurgle up from the bottom as we paddled along. I mused out loud to my father whether we should even be there.

Several times, my brother had the great fortune to go on banding trips to Canada, way up in the far reaches of Quebec. Once we all grew up, our participation in my father's job ended, but we had a strong foundation in supporting conservation and the Migratory Bird Treaty.

Alison Guinness

Junior Duck Stamp Contest
Sanibel, FL April 22
Connecting youth to bird conservation through the arts

International Migratory Bird Day Events
Numerous locations Throughout 2016
Celebrating one of the most important and spectacular events in the Americas - bird migration

Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management
Ottawa, ON, Canada May 16-20, 2016
Affirming international cooperation on migratory bird conservation

North American Bird Conservation Initiative/ State of the Birds Report
Ottawa, ON, Canada & Washington, D.C. May 18, 2016
Groundbreaking collaboration between the US, Mexico, and Canada to evaluate birds across the continent

North American Ornithological Conference
Washington, DC August 16-20, 2016
Pre-conference workshop, symposium planned, and other events

Federal Duck Stamp Contest
Philadelphia, PA September 9-10, 2016
The nation's most prestigious wildlife art competition

Field Trip Reports *continued*



Water chestnut seed



Water chestnut roots break easily. If pulling, use many slow, very light tugs to liquefy mud around roots. The seed's barbs can pierce skin.

the flood plain.

Around the curve of the peninsula, in the middle of the river, lay Gildersleeve Island, another special focus area of the Refuge. There was an active Bald eagle nest, with at least one chick in it, clinging to a Green ash tree disguised by thick foliage.

The canoeists glided up river to visit another special focus area, the Wangunk Meadows. They made landing on the Mattabesec Audubon preserve, an unmarked, uncharted, untamed piece of the high flood plain. Below the high bank river morphology could be plainly seen in the form of a large elongated swale, bristling with both herbaceous growth and small trees. In the not too distant past, this swale was a tidal mud flat. The river channel, in its migration, had left the

mud flat behind, and a swale developed. It was incorporated into part of the low flood plain. But don't get too comfortable! It is the river's duty to return one day and recapture what it had spawned.

The canoe turned down river and made one final special focus visit. Disembarking on Wilcox Island, where there was another Bald eagle nest, the canoeists set out through waist high Ostrich fern and insidious Poison ivy to discover the tall, lush Green dragon plant. These flood plain denizens have intriguing yellow tongues all a-glow like golden torches. These tongues are the flowering parts of the plant.

Finding the Green dragons would complete a satisfying exploration of biodiversity all within a two mile stretch of the Connecticut river.

2 participants; 26 species of birds; 3 mussel species; numerous herbaceous, understory, and canopy species. 🌿

LC



Green dragon

The deadline for items to be included in the Fall/ Winter Issue is September 26, 2016. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about October 20. Please send items to Pat Rasch, 24 Elm Road, Cromwell, CT 06416, or email to <pat_rasch@comcast.net>

The Board of Directors will meet at 7:30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month at deKoven House, 27 Washington Street, Middletown.

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Middletown, CT
Permit No. 34

Non-Profit Organization
Middletown, Connecticut 06457
deKoven House
27 Washington Street

