



The Flood Plain in Autumn

“The Mattabesek 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.”

When yellow leaves, or few, or none, do hang....

—Shakespeare

Like the large purple palm of a hand, the clouds wipe the sky clear of any remnants of the warm and vital season, exhausted by its constant blushing. Black ink rises from the roots of trees, outlining the branches held akimbo. A spotted moon rises in the diffused purple dusk. The air becomes as chill and pellucid as fine crystal.

Dawn arrives, clothed in grey cotton robes, as silent as a sepulcher. A sinuous ribbon of white mist clings to the river meanders, twisting as the river twists. The rising fog is the soul of the past season dissipating into the heavens. The sun, yellow and tentative, gradually swallows the lachrymose beginnings of the day and assumes a contented position on a blue imperial throne.

The cottonwoods silently discard their scarred orange leaves upon the dusty path. The fruit of a grape vine entangled in the green ash canopy exudes an aroma of sweet fermentation. The spice bush is freckled with red nodules; squeeze them and smell a citronella-like perfume.

On all sides of the path obsolescence reigns: The crumbling of leaves, the fading of once glorious flowers. Sensitive fern lean against each other like withered, fallen soldiers. The goldenrod and joe-pye weed brush the pollinators from their scalps and offer their seed to Ruby-crowned kinglets.

Downy woodpeckers dance through the trunks and boughs of poison ivy-covered maples, sizing up the

crop of berries. On the high flood plain the squirrels mob a shag-bark hickory. Ducks congregate on the black tanin-soaked waters of the marsh studded with flaming maples; they’ll soon be playing a fatal game of hide and seek with the muzzles of waterfowler’s guns.

Over the levee the tide has dropped along the bronze banks of the river. As you walk beside the quietly lapping waters, gaze deeply into the strands of tape-grass undulating there. The mus-sels will soon bury themselves in preparation for a long sleep.

From the grasses growing at the high tide zone a brave but ultimately impotent chorus of grass-hoppers chirp, their rising and

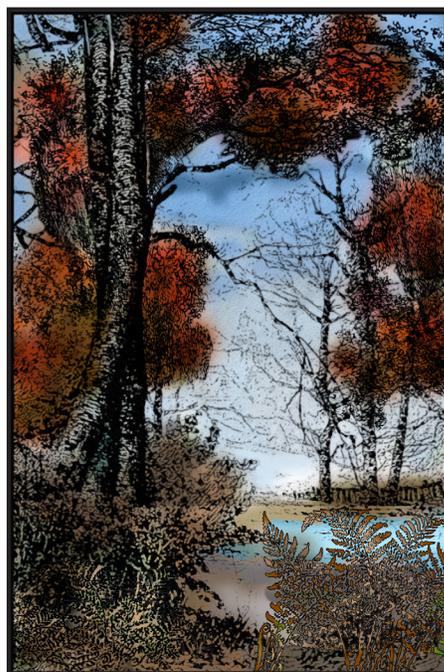
falling crescendo enabled by the merciful sun. (Their voices will soon be put into abeyance by the earth’s first frost.)

Late afternoon and suddenly a passing cloud makes the sun blink. You put on your shirt and turn up the collar as you follow the rutted path homeward.

The flood plain lies like a russet-colored blan-

ket. Again a purple dusk. Again the black ink rises up from the roots of trees. Again the white, splotched moon ascends; it shines with a frosty heart. From somewhere in the black shadows a Great horned owl hoots moodily as if to echo Shakespeare’s phrase: Death’s second self, that seals up all in rest. 

LC



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In memoriam: Jim Mockalis



It is with great sadness that we say farewell to Jim Mockalis. He will be especially missed at our Salmon River Christmas Bird Count. Jim had started that data collection for National Audubon in the 1970s, along with Dave Titus and John Maynard. His passing is a great loss for the birding community in Connecticut. 

Upcoming Field Trips: Fall / Winter 2016–2017

Tentatively scheduled for November 2016
(Saturday 7:00 p.m.)

Owl Prowl

Details and dates were not available at *Wingbeat* print time. Please check our website (www.audubon-mas.org) or call or email Joe Morin for more information.

Trips usually meet at Stop and Shop parking lot in Middletown at 7:00 p.m., and caravan through Middletown, ending in Middlefield. Dress warmly, bring a flashlight, and have gas in your car, or carpool—no gas stations along the route. If we are lucky we can hear screech owls answering our calls—and we may possibly see one or two—and maybe some other larger species, such as a Great Horned.

Please put Owl Prowl in subject line of emails.
<joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net> 635-2786

December 18, 2016

42nd Annual MAS Salmon River Christmas Bird Count

(See following pages for details.)



Field Trip Reports

Shorebird Trip—Barn Island/Sandy Point: August 20, 2016

Little Narragansett Bay: a veneer of summer sunlight shimmering on a shifting surface of green sea. The low profile of the camouflaged canoe split the restless waves and rounded the Spartina-bristling shelves of tidal marsh. Great egrets squawked and tumbled impatiently with one another while awaiting the change of tidal flow. Cormorants on gnarled rock outcrops spread their wings to dry and Barn swallows traced parabolas above their heads.

A narrow mosquito ditch: the canoe's bow sliced forward. Gazing downward one could see that the black paste on the floor of the ditch was embedded with the pale white skeletons of generations of gastropods and bivalves.

The ditch merged with a tidal creek, Great egrets standing in attention along either side. The tide was still coming

January 7, 2017 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

Eagles at Machimoodus Park

Join Larry Cyrulik for a winter trip through the woods to the cliff above Salmon River Cove. In past years, Bald Eagles have swooped over close enough for birders to hear the beats of their wings. Dress warmly (especially shoes or boots). Meet at the parking lot at the corner of Lawn Ave. and High St., Middletown. Call Larry for info 342-4785 or 635-1880.



February 17–20, 2017 (Friday–Monday)

20th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count

This annual four-day event has watchers counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where birds are across the continent. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded. Anyone can participate—as little as 15 minutes on one day, or for as long as you like each day. Enter your list(s) online at www.BirdCount.org. For more info: www.birdsource.org/gbbc/ 



MAS Officers:

President: Alison Guinness (860-873-9304)
Vice-President: Luella Landis
Recording Sec.: Sharon Dellinger
Treasurer: Elaine Payne

2016 Committee Chairs:

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

Rare Bird Alert: 203-254-3665

On the web: www.audubon-mas.org



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in carrying ragged bits of brown algae and a small purple Lion's mane, the jelly fish completely passive and abandoned to the will of the inevitable.

Where the Marsh elder crowded the edge of the creek, Song sparrows and a Marsh wren played hide and seek. Several Green-backed herons clucked at the intrusion and Spotted sandpipers, tails dipping frenetically, took wing as the canoe pushed forward, crowded by narrowly constricting banks. Shadows played over the flat, green plain: Ospreys wheeling down from ethereal heights.

Of a sudden, slack tide and, all in due time, not to be rushed, a reversal, and the beginning outflow of green-blue water to the sea. The canoe turned also and floated past Black gum tupelo trees with a hint of scarlet blush and a lavender-pink Seaside gerardia flowering through the light emerald green strands of Spartina.

Out into the open bay around an island rising from the bedrock, the agitated water lifted and tossed the canoe forward and aft, port to starboard. A harrowing passage; vehement thrusts of waves; and a hurried landfall onto a barrier beach.

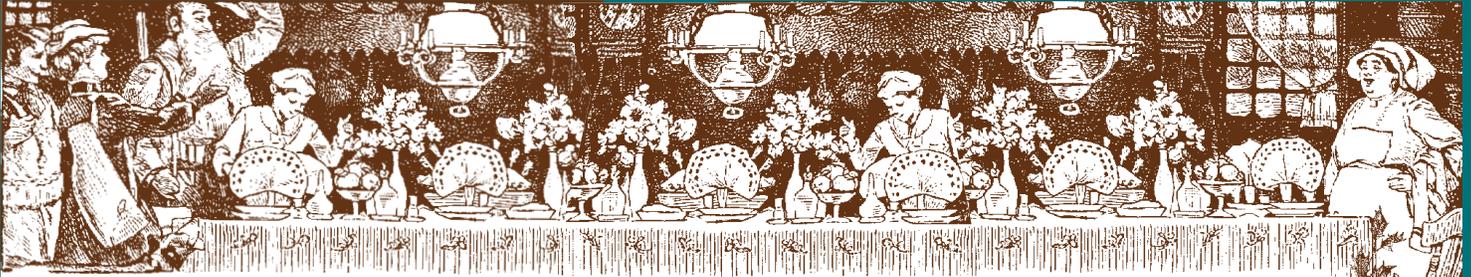
There the rack line thick with layers of jetsam became enlivened with the subtle movements of birds: Least



Seaside gerardia

Trip Reports continued on page 5

The 42nd Annual MAS Salmon River Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 18, 2016



For 117 years, the National Audubon Society has been surveying bird populations at Christmas time. This will be the 42nd year MAS has been part of this effort.

There is no fee for participating. Stats and stories will be available online for this and previous years.

MAS team captains will distribute magnetic signs for our cars (and arm-bands for walkers) to identify ourselves as Audubon Bird Counters. Our teams and their captains will scour the countryside in our 15-mile diameter circle centered on the Old Comstock Bridge on the Salmon River (see map) to tally our feathered

friends, who invariably provide us with some surprises.

We encourage any and all newcomers, experienced birders or not, to participate in this oldest citizen-led science project in the world. Contact Joe Morin joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net

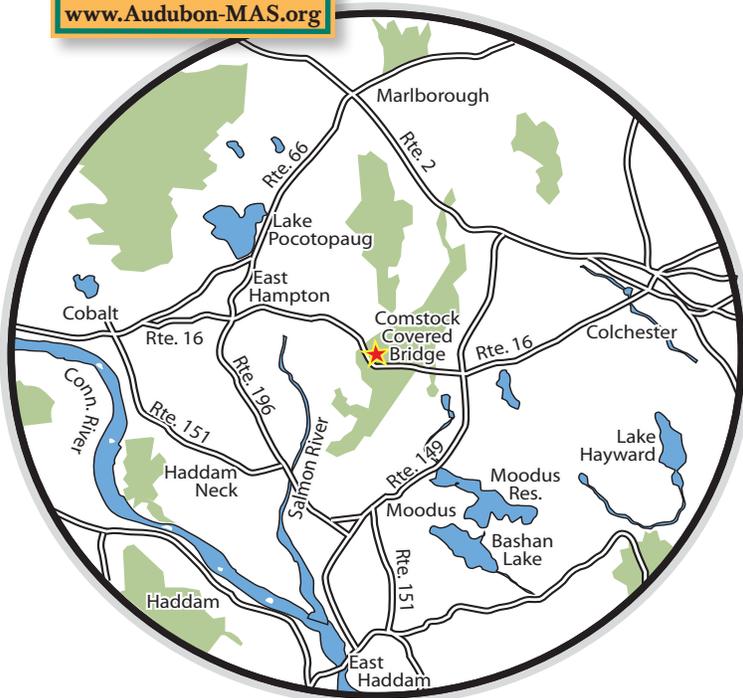
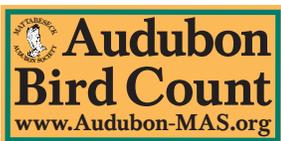
Any amount of time spent in the field or observing a feeder in the circle is appreciated. Send Joe Morin an email and put CBC in the subject line.

- Please keep bird lists in **taxonomical order**.
- A blank list form is available on www.audubon-mas.org.
- Please provide details for any rare, strange, or unusual bird—a **photo** is always good.
- Those of you who have **feeders within the circle** are urged to use the **form** on the reverse side to report birds that come to your feeder. Feeder watchers not only contribute to the total bird tally; they have almost always tallied birds that those of us in the field have not found.

NOTE: This year, from 5:00 p.m. on, we will congregate at **Farrell's Restaurant** on Route 66 in Portland for fellowship and the excitement of the tally. Every year has produced a few spectacular sightings—either for the count day or the count week—and sometimes unusual numbers of species.

Anyone wishing to participate please contact Joe Morin who will be coordinating this year's count
<joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net>

Please type "CBC" in the subject line. 



Mattabeseck Audubon Society Count Circle

 State Parks/
Forests

Scale of Miles 0 1 2

Backyard Bird Count

Sunday, December 18, 2016

Open to anyone within the count circle:

Please tally all bird visitors (the highest number at any given time of each species — do not add birds cumulatively during the day) to your backyard feeder, and mail this form to:

Joe Morin, 8 West Street Terrace, Cromwell, CT 06416 (Telephone: 635-2786) e-mail: joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net



_____ Mourning Dove

_____ Brown-headed Cowbird

_____ Yellow-shafted Flicker

_____ Cardinal

_____ Red-bellied Woodpecker

_____ House Finch

_____ Hairy Woodpecker

_____ Goldfinch

_____ Downy Woodpecker

_____ Slate-colored Junco

_____ Blue Jay

_____ Tree Sparrow

_____ Crow

_____ White-throated Sparrow

_____ Black-capped Chickadee

_____ Fox Sparrow

_____ Tufted Titmouse

_____ Song Sparrow

_____ White-breasted Nuthatch

Others

_____ Red-breasted Nuthatch

_____ Mockingbird

_____ Starling

_____ House Sparrow

_____ Red-wing Blackbird

_____ Purple Grackle

HOURS AND MINUTES WATCHING YOUR FEEDER: _____

YOUR NAME: _____

YOUR ADDRESS: _____

YOUR TELEPHONE: _____

Field Trip Reports continued

Continued: Shorebird Trip—Barn Island/Sandy Point: August 20, 2016

sandpipers, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Semi-palmated and Black-bellied plovers. A pair of Oystercatchers, like tuxedo-dressed maestros in an orchestra pit tapping their podiums before a concert, calmly preened their feathers with distinctive orange bills.

The sun was fanned by a kaleidoscope of dun-colored clouds. The green sea erupted from the swash zone and foamed at the feet of the Black-back and Herring gulls restlessly gathered. And a wandering, solitary gull with a

useless, drooping wing aimlessly traversed the arid, Jimson-weed studded spine of the barrier beach.

“Every day is alone itself.”

—Lobotomy patient Henry Molaison

After a succession of damp tomorrows the migration will fly ahead leaving behind in silence the grains of sand, the bones and feathers of birds...

2 participants; 8 shore bird species; 18 bird species. 

LC

Plum Island Trip: August 23, 2016

Mattabesek's trip to Plum Island began with a warm sunny day and ferry ride across Long Island Sound. As we arrived at the Orient Point Light, numerous cormorants and terns greeted us. On our walk from the harbor to the main administration building, we visited the grave marker for Col. Thomas Gardiner who is the only permanent resident of Plum Island. Our guide Jason Golden introduced us to the history of Plum Island first as a military installation used to protect the American coast for many years.

On the bus tour around the island, we visited some of the artillery installations from that period. When the Army left after World War II, the US Department of Agriculture moved into the old Army buildings and used the island for the study of agricultural diseases, particularly hoof and mouth disease. After lunch, we took a bus trip around the island where we saw osprey and egrets in the largest freshwater wetland in New York state. We also visited the spot where seals have a large haul out especially in the winter. There were three sunning themselves on rocks while about a dozen others swam around watching us. We also visited a beautiful beach where bank swallows nest, but they had already left. At the very end of the ever narrowing island, we could see the Gull Islands that are the nesting places for terns. A pair of eiders swam between the rocks in the swirling water that protects the island in many places from any boat landings.

We missed the monarch butterflies that had been nectaring on a large patch of milkweed, but several seed pods were covered with the very interesting red beetles that feed on the plant. Altogether, a day filled with nature and history. 

Alison Guinness



MAS Board News

MAS would like to thank Kathy Chase for her many years of service to Mattabesock Audubon as board member and secretary. She and her husband spent many hours taking out the beaver dam when the sanctuary needed draining. Kathy is retiring and we wish her well on new adventures.

New to the board is Rodrigo Pinto. He is Systems and Assessment Coordinator at Eastern Connecticut University's Center for Community Engagement with expertise in international relations as they pertain to the environment. He comes from Brazil and now resides with his family in Glastonbury. Rodrigo is taking over as Sanctuary Chairperson. Welcome to the board. 🌿

AUDUBON MEMBERS' CORNER

(Feel free to send us contributions to this column)



Reminder: Buy Duck Stamps

submitted by Larry Cyrulik

We urge everyone to buy Duck Stamps. The funds the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the State of Connecticut receive from the

sale of Duck Stamps go directly to conservation of habitat that supports not only waterfowl but many other species of birds, other animals, and indigenous plants.

Purchase Federal Duck Stamps at the Post Office or <http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/>

Purchase State of Connecticut Duck Stamps at your local town hall. Stamps bought in January are valid for one year. 🌿



2015-16 Federal Duck Stamp features Trumpeter swans, art by Joseph Hautman — USFWS

The deadline for items to be included in the Winter / Spring Issue is January 26, 2017. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about February 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.

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