



“The Mattabesec 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.”

## Upcoming Field Trips: Fall / Winter 2015–2016

November 7 & November 14  
(Saturdays 7:00 p.m.)  
**(Two) Owl Prowls**

Meet at Stop and Shop parking lot in Middletown at 7:00 p.m. The first trip goes through Middletown and ends 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 will hear screech owls answering our calls—we may possibly see one or two, and maybe some other larger species, such as a Great Horned.

The second trip will meet at the same location except we will go through the South Farms area of Middletown and into parts of Maromas near Pratt and Whitney.

Joe Morin leads both Owl Prowls.

<joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net>

December 20, 2015  
**41st Annual MAS Salmon River Christmas Bird Count**

(See following pages for details.)



January 9, 2016 (Saturday 8 a.m.)  
**Eagles at Machimoodus Park**

Join Larry Cyruлик 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 12–15, 2016 (Friday–Monday)  
**Great Backyard Bird Count**

This annual four-day event has watchers of all ages counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. 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](http://www.BirdCount.org). For more info: [www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/)



Eastern Screech Owl



Last year's Eagle walk: skunked—rivers frozen solid



Black-capped Chickadee

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# Field Trip Report

## Shorebirds August 2015

The tide fell imperceptibly, rippling past the concrete pilings of the bridge spanning the Lieutenant River; like blue-green oil it slid along the pock-marked banks of black mud where the Fiddler crabs hid in their burrows. The *Spartina alterniflora*, with the *Phragmites* looking down over its shoulders, watched impassively the timeless exchange of waters.

The canoeists prepared to embark. A fisherman, his pork pie hat askew, stepped towards the edge of the water beneath the bridge and cast out his weighted red and white styrofoam bobber. Several flicks of his wrist...no luck. Peremptorily he wheeled away in resignation. "Water too warm," he muttered.

Indeed, it had been a warm and dry summer, the likes of which New England rarely sees. Paddling into the channel the canoeists noted the Great egret squinting into the water from its perch on an exposed lump of primeval bedrock arising from the near sea level elevation. A Turkey vulture swooped side to side over the approaching railroad bridge.

"That spread of marsh over on the right was reclaimed from the death grip of the *Phragmites*," one of the paddlers commented. "But that was a few years ago, and now it's fully choked in again."

Around a long gentle curve, a lone immature Yellow-crowned night heron stood preening and contemplating: to have life given to it, fresh and wide open; to explore the ways of survival; the challenges of constant hunger; the freedom of living in the present.

The crabmen were just sidling into hunting position. The canoeists bade them good luck. Floating past the edges of Great Island, Great and Snowy egrets gathered together patiently awaiting the lowering tide. On a grey trunk of a wayward oak sat an immature Little blue heron, one of several spotted on the trip.



A channel into the center of Great Island beckoned. There, the brisk southwest wind was tempered and the sunlight glistened off the interior plateau of *Spartina patens*, saltmarsh cordgrass, short and firm. Song sparrows arose and dropped into the cover of Marsh elder. Least sandpipers fled before the bow of the canoe. Ospreys still clung familiarly to their nests and chirped in distress and disgust at the human intrusion.

Turning back to the main flow of the Blackhall river where it dispersed itself into the Sound, the canoeists encountered Willets careening

across the mudflats that were gradually being uncovered by the falling tide. Then came a landing on Griswold Point.


Griswold Point hunches like an apostrophe at high tide, separated from the mainland by a stretch of shallow water. But when the tide falls there are hollows of mudflats and pebble-strewn substrate exposed, remnants of the Point that was divided and flattened by Nor' Easters. Shorebirds flock on them as people congregate in their city parks.

Walking on the coarse bronze sand salted generously with the shells of various gastropods and other invertebrates, the canoeists spotted several Piping plovers among a group of Semipalmated and Blackbellied plovers. Lesser yellowlegs danced in the receding waters of the Sound. Sunlight caromed off the wavelets whose heads were brushed by a steady wind.

Common terns, adults and immature, hunched in the wind like white razor blades with black and yellow beaks. Opposite them eight or nine Oyster catchers stalked the shallow pools for bivalves like a convention of ushers in an opera house with red noses and dressed in black tuxedos.

Returning to the canoe, the observers met up with the Nature Conservancy. Their naturalist was "folding up the tent" on the shorebird nesting sites, taking down the cautionary string fence. As she pulled stakes the naturalist described the season: after drowning spring tides the Piping plovers recovered and had a decent showing. But the Least terns had a poor, disastrous season throughout the Connecticut coast line.

Digesting this information, the canoeists made for their return. The wind was at their back, the tide had slacked and the return flow was in their favor. But subconsciously the plight of the Least terns, and indeed, the plight of great swathes of humankind troubled the mind. The thought arose: how like the empty shells along the sand are we?

10 shorebird species 2 participants 

LC

### MAS Officers:

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*Wingbeat*: . . . . . Pat Rasch (860-635-1880) <pat\_rasch@mac.com>

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On the web: . . . . . [www.audubon-mas.org](http://www.audubon-mas.org)



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# The 41<sup>st</sup> Annual MAS Salmon River Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 20, 2015

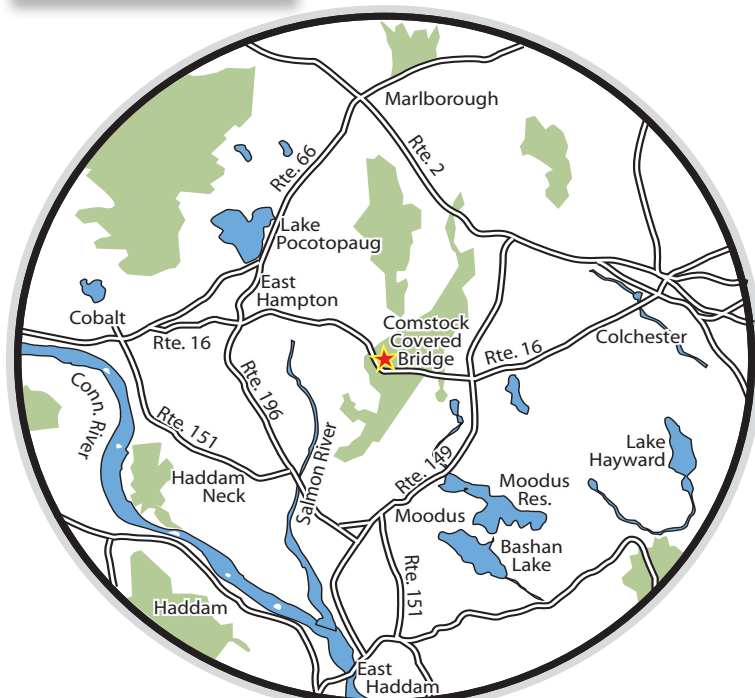
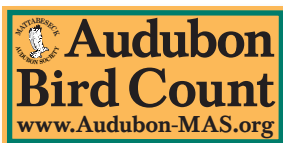


For 116 years, the National Audubon Society has been surveying bird populations at Christmas time. This will be the 41<sup>st</sup> year MAS has been part of this effort.

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 (below) 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.



Mattabesek Audubon Society Count Circle

State Parks/  
Forests Scale of Miles 0 1 2

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](mailto: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](http://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

<[joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net](mailto:joseph.mor@sbcglobal.net)>

who will be coordinating this year's count. 

# Backyard Bird Count

Sunday, December 20, 2015

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: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Common Nighthawks

It was the same thing every evening. When it was time for her bath, Ma would start complaining: “I don’t wan-to go into that filthy, god-dum shower!”, she swore. “I wan-to wash outside in the yard.”

“You can’t, Ma,” Sam patiently explained for the umpteenth time. “The neighbors don’t want to look at naked old ladies.” Sam tried to smile but her lips crumpled into a grimace.

“I don’t give a shot about any god-dum neighbors!” Ma shrieked. “I wan-to wash outside!”

“Let me just sponge you, then,” Sam coaxed.

“What’s-your-name, take me to the beach. I wan-to go to the beach,” Ma began to insist. She had lost her daughter’s name somewhere in the greyness of brain plaque and had decided to call her “What’s-your-name”.

Their small, year-round cottage was in a summer village bounded on all sides by tidal salt marshes and fronted by the restless green waters of the Sound.

Sam ignored her mother. She was the sole caregiver and at times it overwhelmed her. She couldn’t hold a job; she couldn’t vacation. She could only give care, and her mother...the anger and the vulgarisms. Every simple conversation turned into an argument. They said it would devolve into this. There were

stages. Sam tried to digest this and reason it out. But the intellect could only grasp so much. Then the emotions took control in Sam’s more vulnerable moments. This morning she arose with a headache and felt one of those moments lurking like a demon behind ash grey curtains.

“I wan-to kill those doctors,” Ma began to rant. She looked down at her foot that had been operated on and wouldn’t heal. “I wan-to kill those god-dum doctors! I wan-to cut off their...” Ma tossed her ragged uncombed head to the side, unable to focus her eyes on anything for long.

Sam tried to wipe the sponge over her mother’s sagging, exposed breasts.

“Stop it, What’s-your-name, you slut!” Ma shouted. “You’re nothing but a no-good, stinking slut!” She mumbled a few more obscenities and thrashed about with shriveled, weak arms. But then she caught sight of their black cat lurking behind a chair and asked comically, “Do you think we could milk that?”

Sam pursed her lips and pressed on with her work. Her head ached. When she turned to the basin to squeeze out the sponge her eyes involuntarily glanced at a side table where a group of shells were arranged. A knobbed whelk stood out from the others. Sam’s memory suddenly streamed like starlight traveling across infinite depths of blackened space, back to the times when Ma, an educated woman who knew marine biology, took her combing along the beach. That’s when they discovered the shells on the table. Sam especially liked the knobbed whelk.

“You stop it, god-dumit!” Ma’s crackling voice broke Sam’s reverie. “What’s-your-name, I hate your guts. Do you know that, you slut?” She shrieked and swatted the wet sponge onto the floor.


The demon spontaneously broke through the curtains. Bursting into uncharacteristic tears Sam fled the kitchen, running outside into the evening twilight. She let the salty fluid pour down over her cheeks and didn’t bother to wipe it away. Her rising and falling lungs painfully pressed against her rib cage. Sam looked up, her eyes rolling in vexation.

In the violet sky above the cottage, there suddenly appeared a gathering of Common Nighthawks. They expertly

dipped their falcon-like wings with white chevrons painted across them and circled the air stream like the most supremely confident acrobats. Round and round the cottage they circled. Each bird tumbled, twisted and then flew off, leaving the stage open for the next performer. On they came, now diving, now accelerating skyward.

Sam stood and gazed upward wistfully, appreciatively. Her throat swelled; she was almost unable to swallow. She began to fly with them, Prometheus Unbound, back into her childhood, and Ma was there, too, her body and mind unbowed. The white gulls and the surging, foaming waves glistened in the sun, and...

“What’s-your-name, where are you?” Ma screeched from the kitchen. “Get me out of this chair! Where are you?...”

The last of the migratory Nighthawks flew into the gathering darkness over the cottage and disappeared. Sam passed her hands over her face and went back inside. 





# AUDUBON MEMBERS' CORNER

from Alberta Mirer, Board Member

## We're Not Just For the Birds: What A Difference A Tree Makes

Trees planted in the right location can reduce a home's energy costs. Deciduous trees, such as oak, maple, locust, basswood and hickory planted on the west or south side of the house offer shade in the summer sun while allowing the winter sun to shine through. Evergreens planted in a row on the north or northwest side of a house will work like linebackers in winter to block the cold. If everyone planted just one tree in a location that keeps the air conditioning from doing double time, the reduction in emissions at power plants would be substantial.

Another benefit from healthy native trees is their sheer

beauty. They can increase property value by an average of 10% according to US Forest Service statistics.

An average-size tree soaks up about 50 pounds worth of carbon dioxide a year. This isn't much considering an average car spews about 10,000 pounds a year, but in the collective it's something. 🌿

*National Wildlife April/ May 2005*

“Having trees is a little like having children...they take a lot of work and have good and bad features! :)”

Liz Hurley

The deadline for items to be included in the Winter/Spring Issue is December 26, 2015. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about January 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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