



“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.”

A Raccoon’s Tale

I conceived in what the ‘two legs’ called the third month, but not underneath a full moon, as I recall. Oh, no, nothing as romantic as that. A brief scuffle, a low growl, some scratching, is all that I remember. We soon parted, my “hero” and I, going our separate ways in search of food. But since I was burdened, I sought out a secretive labyrinth in which to give birth.

I soon found one, above the hill where those that “stand on two legs” had built their incomprehensible compound of concrete, sheet metal, and asphalt. They called it a “test facility.” It consisted of tall buildings with a multitude of stories accessed by steel ladders, with landings in between floors. The buildings were topped with all variety of stacks and galvanized metal enclosures from which noise and air periodically flowed. But some of these enclosures, I noticed, were always silent. Maybe the “two legs” forgot them or they had no use for them. It was in one of these metal boxes that I found the perfect place to give my kit its birth.

The box was filled with fluffy, soft material called insulation. It was constructed above a mechanical object called a furnace. It was quiet there and I felt safe. My single kit was delivered in this artificial den and I was content. I would steal down the iron beams at night unseen despite the ever-glowing lamps that left lateral blots of black shadows where I moved with impunity, searching for food. Hunting was no problem because the “two legs” were so surfeit with food that they were sloppy and careless with it.

During the day I slept, with my little fuzzy one mewling and stumbling about beside me, and all seemed well.

Walters was called to the foreman’s office.



“I want you to open the hatch to the NVA furnace,” the foreman, Stevens, said. “They’re going to do a tear down and rebuild, and they need an insulation sample to check for asbestos.”

Walters gathered up his ratchet and sockets and climbed up the metal ladder leading to a landing where he could access the metal box with the insulation. He undid the bolts to the hatch cover and pulled it aside. When he poked a flashlight into the pitch black compartment with its piles of loose fiber, he was surprised by the sight of a female raccoon with its young sleeping nearby.

The raccoon did not growl or seem threatening.

“Well, good morning, ma’am,” Walters said amicably. “I see you’ve got a little one there with you.”

Then Walters loosely replaced the hatch to give the animals their privacy and clambered down to the foreman’s office.

“We’ve got a complication.” Walters reported to Stevens.

One day while I was dozing I heard scratching and scraping coming from outside my artificial den. It was a “two legs” who was manipulating some tools. He opened a latch and there was his face, with a look of total surprise on it. He spied my kit. Then the latch was closed and the darkness returned.

All was normal after that, at least for a few days. Then the latch was opened once more and an object that emitted this loud syncopated thumping was thrust into my den. It blared both night and day. But this noise had no effect on me. I was used to the daily clamor of the facility. I watched diligently over my kit as it grew fuller every day.



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Programs with Special Field Trips

May 17, 8 a.m.–12

Program and Field Trip: Neotropicals with Frank Mantlik

Indoor program from 8–9
at the deKoven House at
the corner of Route 9 and
Route 66 in Middletown.

A field walk at
Middletown Nature
Gardens on Randolph
Road will follow.



The program, led by bird and
wildlife photographer Frank Mantlik, is free and open to the
public. Please call 860-873-9304 or email [wjguinness@
snet.net](mailto:wjguinness@snet.net) to register.

An avid birder and naturalist for more than 30 years, Frank
has been active in many bird and nature organizations in New
England including the Connecticut Ornithological Associa-
tion (past president), and the New Haven Bird Club.

He is a popular field trip leader and has traveled exten-
sively in the pursuit of birds, leading trips to Point Pelee, Block
Island, Cape Cod, and Montauk Point. An accomplished pho-
tographer with his own stock-photo business, Avocet Images,
Frank uses his wonderful slides to illustrate lectures to vari-
ous groups. Publication
credits include *Natural
History, Audubon, Field
& Stream*, and *Ameri-
can Birds*. He is most in
his element when in the
field sharing the joys of
nature with others.



photo: Frank Mantlik

May 24, 10 a.m.–12

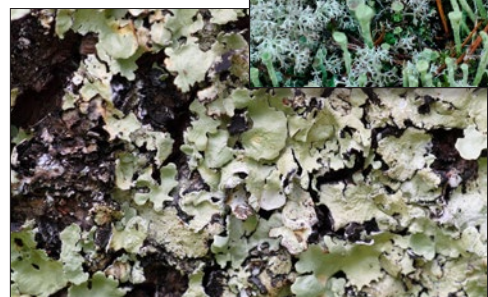
Lichens with Connecticut Gravestone Network and Connecticut Botanical Society

Indoor program from 10–12 at the deKoven
House at the corner of Route 9 and Route 66 in
Middletown, followed by field walk at a local
cemetery

The program is free and open to the public. Please call 860-
873-9304 or email wjguinness@snet.net to register.

The Connecticut Botanical Society is a group of amateur
and professional botanists who share an interest in the plants
and habitats of Connecticut and the surrounding region. The
society was founded in 1903. The society's goals are to increase
knowledge of the state's flora, to accumulate a permanent
botanical record, and to promote conservation and public
awareness of the state's rich natural heritage.

The Connecticut Gravestone Network is dedicated to
protecting Connecticut's old burying grounds and preserv-
ing their historic significance. CGN provides a communica-
tion resource with an emphasis on promoting and encourag-
ing public awareness and safe
conservation. We also support
those interested in all other
aspects of gravestone studies.



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On the web: www.audubon-mas.org



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based ink

**Mattabesseeck Audubon Society annual
meeting May 21, deKoven House, 7:30 p.m.**

Raccoon's Tale *continued from front page*

Walters was a humane man. He couldn't prove it except by intuition, but he felt that animals had a secret life all their own that humans would never understand. No, he did not try to anthropomorphize the creatures of the earth, but he sensed they had feelings, too, that should be respected.

He put a radio into the insulated box where the raccoon had its nursery, and turned it to the most raucous station. He hoped the noise would cause the mother to abandon its nest, taking its progeny back into the woods somewhere secure.

After a few days, Walters returned to the furnace and looked in. He was chagrined to find that the nest hadn't been abandoned. He removed the radio and reported back to Stevens.

"Maybe we should tell 'em to wait a couple months until the young one is old enough to walk away from the facility with its mother."

"No," Stevens replied. "They have their schedule. We'll have to call in animal control."

Soon after the intrusion of this noise box and its removal as I was climbing down an iron beam to begin my usual evening foray, I smelled the tantalizing aroma of peanut butter. I had tasted it once before and relished it. Though I found it within a bread sandwich placed inside some kind of enclosure I couldn't resist it. Throwing caution aside I entered the enclosure and greedily ate the peanut butter. Then a gate fell with a fatalistic clang. I was captured.

When the early summer sunshine finally crept around the narrow spaces adjacent to the furnace where my prison held me fast, I was alarmed to smell and see a "two legs" staring at me curiously. I was shocked and infuriated. I began to hiss and bare my teeth. Exhausted and feeling helpless, I at last settled down and began to doze off in spite of my anxiety over the separation from my kit.

I was awakened by the casual banter between the "two legs" standing by some rolling machine they called a truck. They made noises: "vector species"; "rabies"; "vicious"; and "permitted on your own property." The "two legs" then placed me into the back of this rolling machine and bounced me along to a spot along the wooded river front. There I was released. Frightened beyond my wits I burst from my prison and found the nearest refuge, a large, ancient sycamore tree with a hollowed trunk.

When Walters arrived at work that morning, he immediately noticed the occupied trap. He went over and looked in. The animal reacted violently.

Walters walked away from the caged raccoon, not wanting to stress it, and went into Stevens' office.

"Have someone call me when they come to pick up the raccoon," he said. "The baby's still up in the NVA. They'll have to keep them together somehow."

Visconti owned the animal nuisance business. That is what he called it. He was not sentimental, and killed many raccoons, possums, skunks, and squirrels. That was how he operated—kill first, ask questions later.

"If I take the 'coon off your property, I got to kill it," Visconti was saying to Shultz, who worked for plant facilities. "That's the law."

Schultz thought a moment. "Well, we could let it go. Maybe down by the river, what the heck?"

Visconti replied, "You can let the vicious things go on your own land if you want. Got to watch them for rabies, though. They are a vector species."

Schultz answered, "O.K. I think we'll just dump it down by the river. It won't come back."

Later that morning, Walters walked around the corner from X960 stand where he was working to check on the cage. He was dismayed to find it gone. Visconti and Schultz were still standing by the truck, talking. Peeved, Walters went up to them and exclaimed "Well, what are you going to do about the little one, still up in the furnace?"

Visconti glanced cursorily at Walters and snarled, "What do you want me to do about it now? The female is long gone. We're going to have to euthanize that thing up there."

Walters tried to hold his temper "You should have called me before you hauled off the mother. I told them to call me."

Schultz attempted to assuage Walters. "Maybe we can come up with something," he glanced at Visconti.

Visconti shifted his feet impatiently. He did not like to be bothered by the "small stuff". He did his job, he wanted to be paid and get out of there. But finally he said between clenched teeth, "All right. I'll see if an animal rescue outfit will take the thing, if it makes you feel better."

It's your own fault, don't feel so put out, Walters thought. Diplomatically he said, "O.K., that's fine," and he walked away distrustful of Visconti's promise.



One warm evening not far from the sycamore tree, while the bullfrogs chirruped in the nearby swamp, and the stars and glowing planets looked on dispassionately, I conceived once more. Life would continue and spread like the threads of a spider's web forming everlasting patterns upon the earth. And "the two legs", try as they might, will never succeed in halting the ineluctable spinning and weaving of creation.

But still, I can't help but ponder: what is that restless, unrequited feeling deep in my breast, and what keeps drawing me to the top of the hill, overlooking that thing they call a "facility"?

LC

Upcoming Field Trips: Winter/Spring 2014

April 12 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

Wildflower Walk

Discover early-blooming wildflowers with Larry Cyrulik among the fractured basalt of Guiffrida Park, as well as other bits of biodiversity. Meet at Cromwell Stop & Shop Plaza at 8:00 a.m. in front of the former Hollywood Video. Call Larry Cyrulik for more information at 342-4785 or 635-1880. For a preview of what we may see, choose the Wildflowers link from Field Trips page on our website at www.audubon-mas.org



Bloodroot

May 3 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

David Titus Memorial Warbler Walk

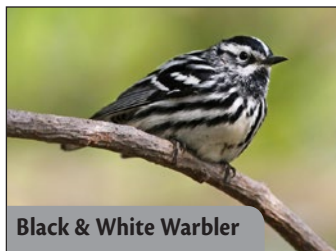
Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the River Highlands State Park parking lot on Field Road, Cromwell. This has been a premier spot for neo-tropical migrants—warblers: Pines, Blue-wings, Ovenbirds, and many more—and often some surprises. Call Larry Cyrulik 342-4785 or 635-1880 for more information.



2013, river overlook at River Highlands, looking for Worm-eating warblers

May 17 (Saturday 7:30 a.m.)

Portland Spring Migration (w/ Hartford Audubon)



Black & White Warbler

First stop will be the Portland Reservoir, with a nice variety of species. It now has a marked trail and is officially open to the public. Next we visit a nearby power line cut, looking for Blue-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Indigo Bunting. Meet at the

Brownstone Intermediate School in the parking lot on left side of school (314 Main St, Portland). Bring hiking boots and binoculars. Leader: Larry Nichols 860-304-5240 or lvn600@hotmail.com

May 17 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

Neotropicals at CFPA with Frank Mantlik See page 3

MAS 2014 40th Anniversary Year Activities

Apr. 12	Field Trip	Wildflower Walk, Guiffrida Park, Meriden
May 3	Field Trip	David Titus Memorial Warbler Walk
May 17	Field Trip	Portland, Spring Migration (w/Htfd Aud.)
May 17	Program	Neotropicals at CFPA with Frank Mantlik
May 24	Program	Lichens with CT Gravestone Network and CT Botanical Society
May 31	Field Trip	Canoe Trip (musseling)
June 21	Field Trip	Wangunk Plants with CT Botanical Society
August 16	Field Trip	Shore Birds Canoe Trip
October	Field Trip	Sparrow Crawl
November	Field Trip	Owl Prowls
December	Field Trip	Salmon River Christmas Bird Count

Watch for details in *Wingbeat* and web site: www.audubon-mas.org

May 31 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

Canoe Trip Salmon River

Bring canoe or kayak, lunch, and supplies for a day on the water. Wear water-shoes. (The shore bottom can be muddy.) Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Wesleyan's Lawn Avenue / High Street parking lot, Middletown. Call Larry Cyrulik for details 342-4785 or 635-1880.



Tidewater Mucket, a species of special concern

June 21 (Saturday 10 a.m.)

Program / Field Trip: Wangunk Plants with CT Botanical Society

This continues our habitat assessment and botanical/natural history inventory. Bring binoculars and be prepared for wet feet. Directions: Cross the CT River into Portland on Route 17/66. Continue straight through traffic light on Route 17A/Main St. Follow 17A through town to the Portland Fair grounds on the left (north). Leaders: Penni Sharp, CBS Botanist, 203 484-0134 and Alison Guinness, CBS member and MAS president, 860 873-9304.



Wild Geranium

August 16 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

Shore Birds Canoe Trip, Old Lyme, Griswold Point

Bring canoe or kayak, lunch, and supplies for a day on the water. Wear water-shoes. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Wesleyan's Lawn Avenue / High Street parking lot, Middletown. Call Larry Cyrulik for details 342-4785 or 635-1880.



Greater yellowlegs

Field Trip Reports

Eagle Watch—Machimoodus Park: Feb. 8, 2014

It had been a very uncompromising winter. When Father Frost spoke through glinting glacial teeth, the countryside was thickly coated in white powder. Icicles dangled dangerously from the gutters on the houses. Wisps of smoke and steam emanated from every crack and crevice of the brown-red chimneys in the city.

Bundled like polar bears, three individuals decided to explore a hillside above a cove framed by the convergence of two rivers. That one of these rivers was tidal had no bearing on the issue—the hardened ice that blanketed the cove stultified any effects of the ebb and flow of barely liquid water, bellowing for attention from below its burdensome, frigid cap.

The way was eased by the earlier passage of a snow machine. The depth of the overnight frost made walking on the snow an audibly crunching experience. The bare limbs of deciduous trees and the powdered shoulders of evergreens, the protruding skeletons of last summer's goldenrod and other forbs, the granite outcrops and spare gravel exposures, all took on the appearance of a winter motif sewn into a coverlet spread over a frozen feather bed.

When the three reached the summit and were able to view the cove, observing in the distance the trees of the flood plain separating the Salmon from the Connecticut River, an arctic silence permeated the atmosphere. Down to the left of the mountain, where a day before the Moodus River sent out a thin thread of dark open water that harbored ducks and swans, now was a solid opaque avenue, void of activity. Looking toward the sky, bright but warmthless, the three pilgrims scanned for the large dark wing spans of eagles. But nothing was flying. Nothing cried out “Ki-ree-ree!” Not even a Red tail hawk was seen, whose ubiquitous spirals are so much a part of the woodland horizons.

A treacherous downhill path over ice and snow led to a plateau in a field with benches. There, the three sat in a windless, sunny reverie, listening. Oh, the usual winter residents were self-evident: juncos, chickadees, white-breasted nuthatches, and various woodpeckers. But skyward—again disappointment.

After walking back to the cars it was decided to visit the Chester Ferry opposite Gillette's Castle. That had always been the go-to, reliable viewing spot for eagles.

The stillness of mid-morning along the Connecticut River was like a rifle-shot. One could, if he were adventurous, walk across the river where in summer, tourists gurgled over a three-minute trip to Hadlyme by ferryboat.

Scanning the hemlock-barren slopes beneath the castle, one of the three commented: “You could always pick up two or three eagles there.”

But a slight, sword-bearing wind, streaming down river answered, “Nevermore.”



Machimoodus Park

A scope on a tripod was set up on the hardened silver shin of the river nevertheless. What was an eagle sitting in a nest turned out to be a stick pile with a white chapeau of snow. One of the three, so frightened of mistep, crawled back to shore on hands and knees. The underbelly of the river belched its delight.

The three departed, going their separate ways. On returning to the riverside in Cromwell, however, an eagle was finally spotted alighting from Wilcox Island, that hunched like a bristling mohawk hair-do in the middle of the river, sprouting from a skull that was shaved and sheen, glittering with ice.

Bird species: 17; one eagle

Larry Cyruulik

Let's Go a-Ducking: March 15, 2014

The four gathered together at the departure point, a parking lot at Wesleyan University, looked at each other in resignation. All of the inland ponds and even the meadows surrounding the Mattabassett River were still under siege, with up to ten inches of ice covering some bodies of water. Eschewing Research Parkway in Meriden, where the ponds exhibited expectant fishermen with tip-ups rather than dabbling, diving ducks, the group headed to Haddam Meadows alongside the dark, flowing Connecticut River.

The shores were flaked with shelves of wafer crisp ice, and the slight wind wafted its cool breath over chilled, freezing water. The sympathetic sun rose out of the early morning mist, however, and shone encouragingly off the surface of the river. Common mergansers, the distinctive males looking like bits of whipped cream in a cup of dark tea, floated in the river channel. Looking up-stream towards the grey, slumbering island with its sandy flanks sliding precipitously toward its banks, Ring-neck ducks frolicked in circles.

Walking along the shores, scope and tripod slung over the shoulder, binoculars at the ready, the numbers of southern robins stalking the snow-speckled meadow were noted, as well as the Song and White-throated sparrows in the hedgerows adjacent to the river bank.

Then the first Tree swallows of the season dipped and glided over the dark river.

Stepping gingerly over crenulations of ice-encrusted, rotting-snow covered footpaths, the group surprised a pair of Wood ducks resting in a postage-stamp sized ring of open water within a bristling fortress of buttonbush. They absconded before the scope was set up that could have projected the males' intrinsic

Trip Reports continued on back page

Field Trip Reports *Continued from page 5*

beauty closer to the eye and pleasing to the imagination.

Turning away from the swamp and walking back towards the river, the group discovered a Bald eagle perching on the opposite bank. When a pair of mallards slowly drifted off, the scope was set up on the ice shelf encrusted onto the mud of the river bank. The eagles' full glory, its white head and tail, was now fully appreciated.

We took a short trip down to the East Haddam Swing bridge. Crossing over it led to a spot on Cove Road overlooking the convergence of the Salmon and Moodus Rivers. The scope was barely set up in the rutted, muddy car park when a voice cried out, "Do you see the Tundra swan?"

There it sat among the familiar and larger Mute swans with its black bill and straight neck. This was a taste of the wilderness that was the New England landscape, pre-colonial times, when thousands of Tundra, formerly "Whistling", swans migrated along the Atlantic flyway toward their arctic breeding grounds.

Awed, but nevertheless continuing with the business at hand, further scanning revealed Black ducks and Hooded mergansers. An immature Bald eagle glided low over these

waterfowl, but they were not alarmed, even when the eagle paused to alight on a nearby tree bough.

The panel of glass that was winter seemed to stand stalwart even as it exhibited hairline cracks at its edges. But the day reached a satisfying conclusion, when an afternoon walk by the river in Cromwell led one to a view of a Horned grebe, diving with impunity for prey in the dense, cold waters of the Connecticut river.

30 species total, 6 duck species



On the ice, ducking, Haddam Meadows

The deadline for items to be included in the Summer/Fall Issue is Thursday, July 26, 2014. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about August 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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