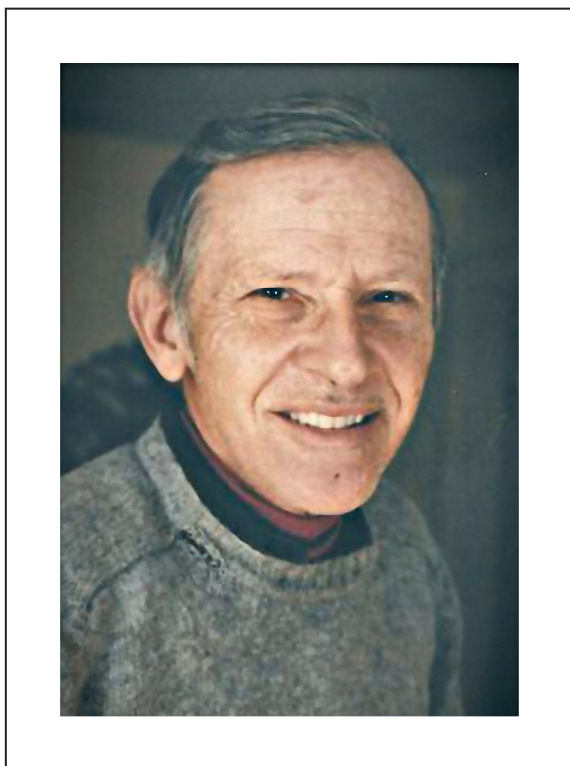




“The Mattabesek Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is committed to environmental leadership and education for the benefit of the community and the earth’s biodiversity.”



## In Memory

**JOHN MAYNARD**, FOUNING MEMBER AND PAST PRESIDENT OF MATTABESECK AUDUBON, passed away on December 10, 2014. John was a bit absent-minded. He’d sometimes take the trash to work instead of his lunch, or he might try to fill his gas tank from the vacuum nozzle, but when it came to birding, his quiet patience and persistence paid off. He was first to identify red-headed woodpeckers and clay-colored sparrows in our area.

When the property behind his house became the Middletown Nature Garden, he set out to identify all the trees, finding many less common ones.

Having grown up on the south shore of Long Island, Hammonasset was one of his favorite places. Birders got to know him and would look forward to his log entries to know which birds were being seen. John found the humor in life and was an example of a life well lived. 🐦

Alberta Mirer

## In Memoriam J. M.

If a man may be damned with feint praise,  
Can he then be honored with anonymity?  
When he was born, the Atlantic yawned  
And mechanically probed the rack line  
As it had for millennia.  
He survived to adulthood, achieved a position,  
Married and begat.  
As happens to everybody in their own peculiar way,  
He aged, became infirm, and in the end  
He did what was most sensible and natural:  
He died. That’s all...  
*But in that all lay the inner Man.*  
“To be or not to be?”  
Not Hamlet,  
He developed his actions decisively;  
He formed his relationships decidedly;  
And he trusted enlightenment unequivocally.  
Over time, his gentle voice lowered an octave,  
His words sounding like a sail  
That luffs in a dying wind,  
Barely a zephyr; yet his insights  
Blasted away like a tempest.  
His humor rolled like the surprising  
Rogue waves of the open sea.  
Avian life he loved;  
Though, as his years accumulated,  
The phrases of those feathered philosophers  
And musicians  
Listlessly penetrated his ears,  
Their curiosities never fled from his eyes.  
Astute appraisal of the human condition  
Held him upright on his steed in the lists;  
Fairness guided his lance to the mark.  
One who softly whispers the truth  
Before he dies,  
Is heard more thunderously than the one  
Who is forever shouting lies. 🐦

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# Upcoming Field Trips: Winter / Spring 2015

February 13–16 (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. [www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/)

## March 14 (Saturday 8 a.m.) “Let’s Go a-Ducking”


This replication of Dave Titus’s favorite duck migration trip will start at Bishops Ponds, Research Parkway (off East Main) in Meriden, then take Barnes Road to North Farms Reservoir (supplied good views of a flock of Coots in past). If time allows, we will back-track to Cromwell Meadows. Dress for the weather—it’s usually raw and chilling. Meet at

the parking lot at the corner of Lawn Ave. and High St., Middletown. Call Larry Cyrulik for info 342-4785 or 635-1880.

## March 29 (Sunday 8 a.m.) Wangunk Meadows

Details TBA. Larry Nichols: cell 304-5240; [lvn600@hotmail.com](mailto:lvn600@hotmail.com)

## April 18 (Saturday 8 a.m.) Wildflower Walk

Discover early-blooming wildflowers with Larry Cyrulik among the fractured basalt of Giuffrida Park. 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](http://www.audubon-mas.org) 

## Field Trip Reports

### Sparrow Crawl: October 11, 2014

An October sunrise after a period of rain is like looking at the world through a stained-glass window; the primary colors—black, grey, gold, vermilion and blue each took their turn on the leaded framework of the sky until the sun blinked, dispelling all in bright yellow. There stood five participants, four adults and a boy. Two of the more serious birders compared seasonal notes—when and where and what species were seen at this time of year, the peak of fall migration. Then off to the first stop, the field of scattered goldenrod, mugwort, and milkweed that was formerly a vegetable farm.

The field had been converted to a soccer venue and a great pile of gravel loomed ominously to one side, as if the grim reaper hadn’t quite finished the job of smothering the remaining bunch grasses so vital to migrant sparrows and warblers.

The rising sun teased the eyes unmercifully. The group was excited at its immediate discovery of several species of sparrows: Chipping, Song, Savannah. It was as if they had uncovered a chest in grandma’s attic and had opened it with great expectations of the treasures within.

Circling the mound of gravel, calling out species to one another, suddenly the cry went out, “White crown! Immature!” A particularly satisfying denizen, the White crown; the immatures are especially challenging for any beginning birder to identify.

Meandering through the wet bunchgrasses, seed heads clinging to one’s clothes, down towards a dogwood dominated wetland, Palm warblers, Song and White-throated sparrows flicked up and down in the cover as if jerked about by an unseen puppeteer.

“Swamp sparrow,” someone noted.

The trail led from the swamp back up towards the roadway. A few more avians were added to the list, picked out of the azure background of the sky as they flew by. Were those Pine siskins, that frenetic, bobbing flock in flight? Not definitively; that find would come later in the trip.

A short car hop away from the field lay the Nature center with its crushed stone trails meandering past Red maple wetlands and post agricultural habitat. Yet for the most part the group was met with a kind of Zen Buddhist silence, until suddenly, a Blue-headed vireo decided to expose itself unabashedly on a honeysuckle branch. Good find! Then came a burst of White-throated sparrows near the venerable White oak. A Ruby-crowned kinglet, hurrah!

The group left the dogwood and cedar dominated Nature gardens behind and made for a final rendezvous, the Guida Farm Preserve. Primarily a complex of mowed hay fields, it also harbored wooded margins and brushy edges. They walked, idly chattering, until, descending on a pathway beneath large oaks and black birch with crowns of catkins, the cry was raised, “Pine siskins!” There was a goodly flock of them feeding diligently. But that wasn’t the only surprise. A Black-throated blue warbler dangled from a branch of the oak, and a Northern parula flashed its blue and yellow neck feathers. Relief and congratulations on all sides, while the boy, nonplussed, merely twirled his antique binoculars around by the straps in some form of existential amusement.

Following downward on the path the birders passed a small pool of water and a thicket of Eastern cedar. A Nashville warbler

*Continued on next page*

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Wingbeat: . . . . . Pat Rasch (860-635-1880) <[pat\\_rasch@mac.com](mailto:pat_rasch@mac.com)>

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# Winter Rains

A cold...

metallic...

rain...

drained along the chipped and filthy curbs of the asphalt avenues of the town in braided rivulets, like streams of silted water running from under the black ribbons of glaciers. Numbed with cold and dampness, the man, cloaked in waterproofs that leaked, looked downward as he trudged, his footfalls splattering mud and bits of rotting leaves. There, suddenly appearing, the spoiled remnants of one whose progenitors once ate persimmons in the South. Unlucky one; it should have stayed in the wooded margins.

The man huddled on. And then, the Robin. The silt drainage flowed around its prostrate figure; the breast tarnished like oxidized copper; the wings splayed out and coated with brown sand; its beak awry; the body like a dirty feathered sponge.

The man paused a moment, a memory drifting:

A little boy tossed in bed, unwell. There was a fishing trip with Grandfather the day before, by the wide and swirling river, grey and terrible in its majesty, the demons hidden beneath its surface. The boy tossed fitfully. Rivers turned into awful viaducts filled with eels; eels writhing, wriggling obscenely in place of the water; eels squirming interminably, and then...

The boy awoke and moaned as he retched. Mama appeared in the darkened room.

“Go away,” the boy groaned, any disturbance a torture to him. He rolled in his bed and turned his face to the wall, unable to express or explain his nightmares.

“Oh, well,” Mama whispered and retreated, feeling awkward and ashamed.

The boy drifted off into his hyperactive somnambulance. By late afternoon he was allowed a moment of dreamless sleep. The rose-colored light softly probed the ruffles around the curtains by the window. Relieved, lifting his head a little, testing himself, the little boy, weakened but not vertiginous, looked around the room. He arose from bed and took unsteady steps toward the window.

Looking out onto the expansive lawn next door to the homestead he spied the numerous robins that had come to dance upon the grass at dusk. The robins of spring began to vocalize. They sang their plaintive, repetitious songs from their roosts in the trees, whose bare, brown branches had just begun to sprout green and yellow flowers. The flower’s aroma permeated the spring air and conquered that scentless void between winter’s passage and summer’s reign.


The boy listened to the chorus of avian multitudes. Inexplicable tears filled his eyes. Still somewhat feeble, but determined, he went downstairs and asked Mama for something to eat. She gratefully made him some macaroni with warm milk.

The next morning the boy was awakened by the soft tapping of the venetian blinds lifted by the warm vernal wind blowing through the bedroom window. The sun flashed and darkened and flashed again as the cottony clouds passed over its face.

And the little boy rose from his pillow with youthful expectations...

The boy receded; the man remained. He trudged on in the cold...

metallic...

rain... 

L.C.

---

## Field Trip Reports Continued

materialized as if to add an exclamation point to the outing.

The satisfied party returned to their vehicles through the open hay fields. Gazing out to the West one could see the variegated hills putting on their autumn eye makeup and winking seductively. Too soon, that eye would become a blind, grey orb and the seasons would come full circle once again.

5 participants, 38 species, 6 sparrow species.

L.C.

### Owl Prowls: November 1 & 15, 2014

Owl Prowls were disappointing again this year. The first trip was a rainout and canceled. The chances of finding owls in the rain is much lower than dry nights.

The second trip on Nov. 15th was another bust without the usual Screech Owls at Ravine Park or Crystal Lake Rd. We did hear an owl crying out along Lyceum Rd. in Middletown. It was thought to be a Barn Owl—they have frequented areas within a mile of that location in the past. It stayed in the

treetops 100 yards or more from us, so we saw only a distant silhouette. No other owls were heard or seen that night.

**Update:** A group of very experienced birders equipped with night vision went out on following nights and found a Great Horned Owl with a young yearling owl nearby calling for food at the same location—very unusual as Great Horned Owls generally nest in Feb.–March and leave the nest by June–July. To have a sub-adult still begging in November is rare. It might have been a late nester or for some other reason the young was hanging on. That solved the dilemma of the unsure ID at Lyceum Rd. The trip participants and I had discussed the possibility that it could be a young owl calling for food, but I ruled that out. We do the trip in November so we don’t disturb nesting or feeding owls. Guess this was a late bloomer.

It reminds me of something Dave Titus always said: “*Never make definitive statements about birds.*” He was right again!

*Continued on next page*

# 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. Joanne Luppi's death and Marcy Klattenberg's retirement to the Cape have left big holes. Now George Zepko, who prepares the *Wingbeat* for mailing, is retiring.

It is very important to our organization that you receive the newsletter. The job requires only a few hours of your time 4 times a year – in Jan., Apr., Sept., and Oct. Labels are printed from the National Audubon web site, brought to a board meeting, where the board applies them to the *Wingbeat*. They are

counted for the postage tabulation. Then, they are taken to the Middletown Post Office for mailing, where they are turned over to the staff in charge of bulk mailing.

Mattabeseck would also like to add a presence to social media. While there is a web page, there is no Facebook, Twitter, or other contacts with the public. Notifying others of our activities would let the world have a greater opportunity to interact with nature and gain a greater understanding of the world around us.

Please contact us (# / e-mail / slow mail) and let us know if you'd like to help. ☺

## Field Trip Reports Continued

### Salmon River Christmas Count, Dec. 14, 2014

Bird numbers were down, but so was the food supply in some of the previously good locations. While there was some winterberry and a few rose hips, there were few juniper berries, autumn olive, or crab apples. Water was almost 100% open, providing more opportunities for waterfowl to disperse—that kept our waterfowl numbers down.

Preliminary number: 76 species. After count week and feeders are tallied, this number may rise to 78 or 79.

A noteworthy sighting: Male Baltimore Oriole in its bright orange coloration was seen by Alison Guinness and her group of watchers.

An updated tally will be posted on [www.audubon-mas.org](http://www.audubon-mas.org), and on the Cornell/Audubon CBC site. ☺

Joe Morin

The deadline for items to be included in the Spring/Summer Issue is March 26, 2015. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about April 20. Please send items to Pat Rasch, 24 Elm Road, Cromwell, CT 06416, or email to <[pat\\_rasch@comcast.net](mailto: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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