



“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.”

## AUDUBON MEMBERS’ CORNER

(Feel free to send us contributions to this column)



Submitted by Alberta Mirer, Board Member

### How Birds Weather the Winter

Like humans, birds are warm-blooded, yet they have higher metabolic rates and therefore, higher body temperatures— 105 degrees F on average. Survival depends on both physical and behavioral adaptations when the mercury dips.

Birds’ feathers provide remarkable insulation, and many species grow an extra layer of down as part of a late-fall molt. Feathers are aligned to create tiny air pockets, and their outer layer is coated with waterproofing oil produced by a gland at the tail’s base and distributed when a bird preens. Also, legs and feet are covered with scales that minimize heat loss.

In fall when food is plentiful birds gorge to build up insulating fat. Some species switch to higher-fat diets in winter. On sunny days, birds take advantage of solar sun to allow their largest surface areas to soak up the rays. Under clouds, they may shiver which burns calories but increases body temperature.

Flocking birds, such as chickadees and titmice manage cold northern winters by roosting in groups in tight cavities. The most extreme survival strategy

is torpor: a state of lower metabolism and body temperature that conserves energy. Hummingbirds regularly undergo torpor, while other species including chickadees, do so in extreme conditions.

### Helping Birds to Stay Warm

- **Provide Quality Food:** Select seeds, suet, nuts and other items high in fat and calories.
- **Keep Feeders Full:** After a cold night, birds need ready access to meals to replenish energy reserves.
- **Leave Flower Heads and Stalks:** Birds feed on seeds and insects that dried flower and stems provide.
- **Offer Shelter:** Plant evergreen shrubs and trees, build a brush pile or add a roost box to your yard.
- **Provide Liquid Water:** Birds can melt snow to drink, but it uses energy needed to maintain body temperature.

For more wildlife-gardening tips, visit [www.nwf.org/nwfgarden](http://www.nwf.org/nwfgarden)

National Wildlife December / January 2016

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Submitted by Larry Cyrulik, Board Member

### Buy Duck Stamps

Remember to buy Connecticut Duck Stamps on the first of the year. Duck stamps generate funds that go directly towards the conservation of wetlands, which helps all species, not only ducks. Go to [www.ct.gov/deep](http://www.ct.gov/deep) to find out the various ways in which to buy stamps. Stamps may also be bought wherever hunting and fishing licenses are sold.

More Member’s Corner on page 4



# Upcoming Field Trips: Winter / Spring 2016

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/)

## March 19 (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 Street) in Meriden, then will take Barnes Road to North Farms Reservoir (the reservoir has supplied a good view 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.



Viewing a flock of Coots at Meriden’s North Farms Reservoir on a past Duck trip

## April 23 (Saturday 8 a.m.) Wildflower Walk

Discover early-blooming wildflowers with Larry Cyrulik among the fractured basalt of Giuffrida Park. Meet at at 8:00 a.m. in Cromwell Stop & Shop plaza parking lot on the side by Sleepy’s. 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)



Clockwise from left:  
Round-leaved Hepatica,  
Bloodroot, Spring Beauty

## Cicindela Sexguttata— The Six-Spotted Tiger Beetle

Sometimes we’re lucky, and we spot one of these beauties in the woods. This one posed for us on a past Wildflower Walk. Our .4" to .6" northern U.S. species of iridescent tiger beetle has 6 spots along the edges of its wings (though some specimens may lack spots.) Tiger beetles are notoriously fast, and they bite, so catching one is not easy. If caught, the beetle is reported to secrete a volatile chemical from its abdomen.



Pat Rasch

### MAS Officers:

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# Field Trip Reports

## Sparrow Crawl: October 10, 2015

Although this year's Sparrow Crawl failed to produce a White-crowned, we did get four sparrow species: Song, Savannah, Swamp, and White-throat. The day was clear and sunny, about 50–55°, with evidence of heavy mast. We started in Wesleyan's "bean field" (now a soccer field, parking, and the last bit of abandoned agricultural field) for 21 species, including both Black and Turkey vultures.



Next we visited Middletown Nature Garden, where we found another 10 species, including Hermit thrush, Ruby-crowned kinglet, Pileated woodpecker, and Purple finch.

We next walked the Guida Preserve, but did not find any additional species. 4 participants, 31 species. *Pat Rasch*

## Owl Prowls: November 7 & 14, 2015

Two Owl Prowls were held in November. Why November? It is the furthest from the nesting season and is also not too cold. Owls can be very territorial and once they set up nests it is best not to disturb them.


So the first trip on the 7<sup>th</sup> took the western route, going first to Ravine Park in Middletown and then on to other stops heading towards Middlefield. There were 10 people tagging along. An owl showed up on the last stop. We were at the bridge over the Coginchaug River on Miller Road in Middlefield. We called for some time and were about to give up, when two Screech owls called back. One came right up to the road and was 10 to 12 feet away in a small tree about 8 feet off the ground.

The second trip had only two participants. We

started at Ravine park, a favorite location. This night was much colder but we were not disappointed here as we had been the week before. As it often does, the resident screech owl came out. It flew across the road buzzing right past us, landed in a bush across the street, and continued to scream at us. We left—a short night after that surprise.

## Salmon River Christmas Count, Dec. 20, 2015

Although our 40th anniversary Salmon River CBC has not been officially compiled yet, data shows 73 total species. One new bird—never tallied in 40 years on this count—showed up in two different locations, and is increasing in overall numbers throughout Connecticut. The Black Vulture was seen by two groups: Larry Nichols, Mike Good et al., and Joe Morin, Deb Goodrich, et al. Other Count notables were Green Wing Teal and Gadwall, as well as a Tundra Swan that was seen on the day before the count and again two days after on the Connecticut River near Haddam Meadows State Park.

This was a very strange count with unseasonably warm weather for most of December. Also notable were a lack of some foods such as Juniper berries and autumn olive, and the tiny size of Rose hips. We hope to post updated tally on our website and on the Cornell/Audubon CBC site. 

*Joe Morin*

### Turkey Vulture or Black Vulture?

In flight, watch for a wobbling, or tilting motion unique to turkey vultures. Black vultures are too heavy to wobble; they just glide on wings held flat. Black vultures lack the strong V-shape dihedral wing outline of turkey vultures, and they punctuate soaring glides with strong wing flaps. Their motion is hurried, as if they have to work at staying aloft. In contrast, turkey vultures have slower, deeper wing beats, and they flap less frequently.

From below, it's easy to distinguish the short, blunt tails of black vultures from the rudderlike tails of turkey vultures. Black vultures' underwings sport a silvery white patch at the ends, whereas turkey vultures display a broad, gray, trailing edge along the length of each wing. Sitting, a black vulture's gray head and longer bill are quite different from its cousin's blunter bill and hamburger-red head. And getting close is sometimes no problem at all.

*from T. Edward Nickens, audubonmagazine.org*





Submitted by Mattabesek President, Alison Guinness

## 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the National Park Service

By the Act of March 1, 1872, Congress established Yellowstone National Park in the Territories of Montana and Wyoming “as a public park or pleasuring-ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” and placed it “under exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior.” The founding of Yellowstone National Park began a worldwide national park movement.

In the years following the establishment of Yellowstone, the United States authorized additional national parks and monuments. These, also, were administered by the Department of the Interior, while other monuments and natural and historical areas were administered by the War Department and the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture. No single agency provided unified management of the varied federal parklands.

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the act creating the National Park Service, a new federal bureau in the Department of the Interior responsible for protecting the 35 national parks and monuments then managed by the department and those yet to be established. This “Organic Act” states that “the Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments



and reservations...by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Stephen T. Mather was appointed the first NPS director in May 1917. Although Mather was born in California and had his business there, his family homestead and burial site is a National Historic Landmark in Darien.

An Executive Order in 1933 transferred 56 national monuments and military sites from the Forest Service and the War Department to the National Park Service. This action was a major step in the development of today’s truly national system of parks—a system that includes areas of historical as well as scenic and scientific importance.

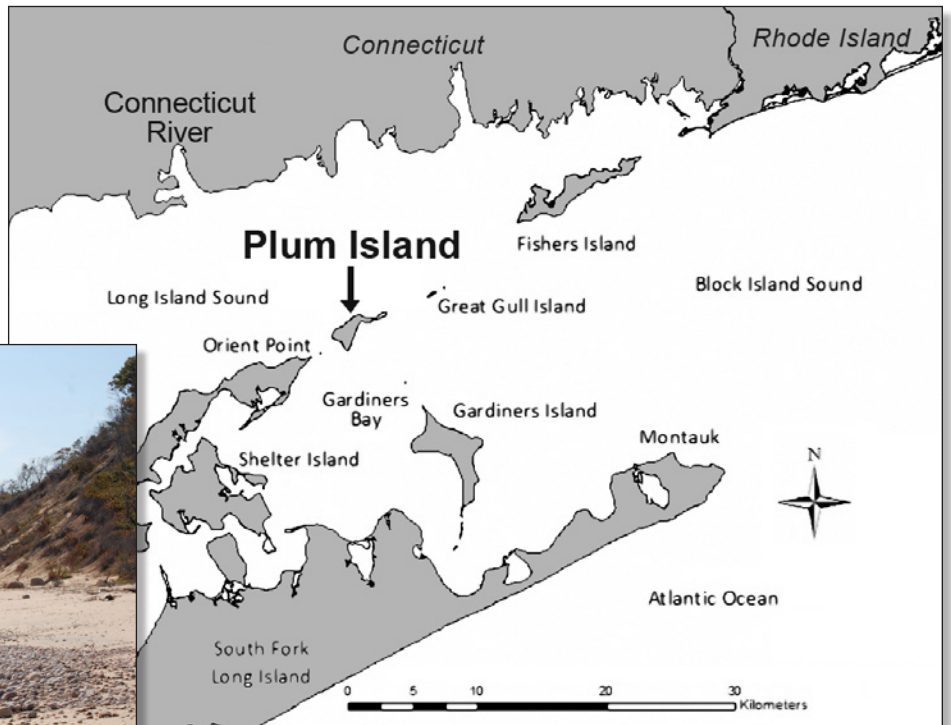
While there is only one National Park in Connecticut, the Weir Farm in Ridgefield and Wilton, there are others within driving distance. Celebrate this important milestone, by visiting one of over 400 parks in the US.

<http://www.nps.gov/aboutus/history.htm>

## MAS to Sponsor Visit to Plum Island in 2016

Mattabesek Audubon will be sponsoring a trip to Plum Island, located just off the eastern tip of Long Island. The island has been the site of military installations from the earliest days of the country and a USDA research area since the 1950s. Congress voted to relocate the research facility and sell the island.

*Continued next page*



Alison Guinness

NY Natural Heritage Program

# The Flood Plain in Winter

Foot-falls through the broken bronze sedge laced with frost, like doilies on Victorian furniture. Hardened windowpanes on the open marsh through which can be seen the black-green bulbous seeds of the pickerelweed and fronds of watercress waving in the gently shifting current. It is the flow of water, even beneath an ice cap, that is the essential characteristic of a flood plain.

Braided streams, now frothing at the surface like freshly opened bottles of silver champagne, now diving beneath jumbles of ice floes, murmuring incessantly in a deep bass voice.... The streams spread like fingers from a frozen hand, shimmering, then becoming dull as lead, as the sun either shined down upon them without warmth or cloaked itself temporarily behind a jagged fan of a cloud creating shadows.

Firmer ground; brown deglazed leaves, orphans of the forest: green ash, silver maple, sycamore. Filigrees of bright, white ice etched upon fallen branches: a baker's mixture of icing and dark chocolate. Spiraling up the grey furrowed flanks of an ash is a poison ivy vine, tendrils clinging, swarming around the trunk of the tree. And drooping from the fingers of the vine, the dried berries, a prize for the hardy winter inhabitants: woodpeckers, chickadees, cedar wax wings.


Flickering wings, shadows on the forest floor, and the tapping of beaks on wooden boughs: arms akimbo, living sculptures, mountainous maples with the girths of gargantuan Falstaffs tremble in the northwest wind. Branches scrape on branch; an appendage tumbles to the ground. Unable to pull a comforter closer to their bosoms, the maples stoically endure.

Last crackling steps, emerging from the copse of trees onto the open, silver chalice of the marsh once more. Its periphery is punctuated with a dense beard of button bush. Once through, the vast frozen plain, dense and opaque.



Sedge piles, built like miniature pyramids, the muskrat architects beneath, submerged in their lairs. Sign of beaver on the ancient ash tree trunks. Stick villages in the sky: heron nests, dormant, archaic, signifying life potential in the midst of winters coma.


And final: an eagle's meditation interrupted, the large, dark wingspan carries one's imagination away like a dream unrequited.

Emerging from the ice fields onto the corn stubble, humiliated in the fall by the plowman, bits of crumpled teeth are offered to the crows and spare pheasant. A turn onto an earthen roadway; just over the berm, the great flowing progenitor of the flood plain: the coal-colored river. Mergansers ride its black, fluid back. The sun, blinking in the grey azure, reflects off the shifting liquid skin. Squatting bankside, grasping a hand full of the cold, wet sand, fine and also grainy, someone whispers: this is what you're made of, eh lad? See, see, what you're made of... 

L.C.

## Plum Island Visit *continued*

Today, the Connecticut Fund for the Environment is leading a massive effort to preserve the whole island. Visits require a security check of all attendees and US citizenship.

MAS hopes to offer the trip in 2016. The trip is free and leaves from Old Saybrook. If interested in participating, please contact Alison Guinness at 860-873-9304 or [wjguinness@snet.net](mailto:wjguinness@snet.net). 



Plum Island's Hairy-necked tiger beetle

NY Natural Heritage Program



# Helen Carlson Sanctuary: An Update

Visitors may have encountered a bewildering array of obstacles to their edification of the sanctuary. First, due to the fluctuating water level of the bog, courtesy of the resident beavers, the viewing platform has been left inaccessible most of the time. Also, vandals have attacked the platform like hoboes on a hot dog, kicking-out boards, leaving trash, and decorating the wood work with hatchet blows. A non-descript, edgy, and unsafe cobbling of wooden skids and debris has been gifted to us leading out in a jumble of war-like trash along the berm.

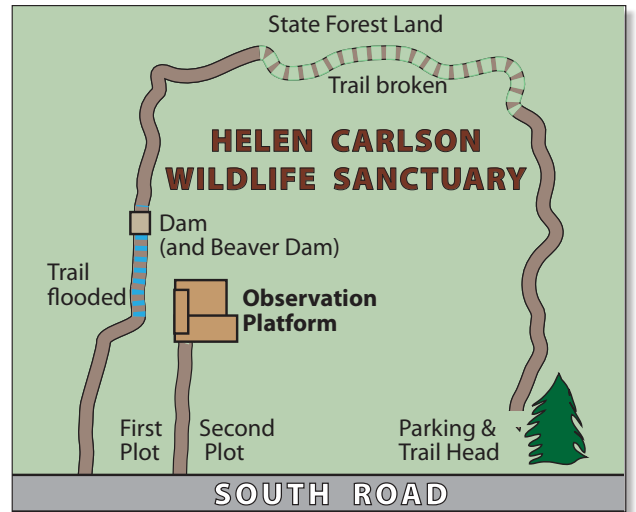
Also, a large tree has fallen by the shed and main entrance to the trail at the westerly end of the sanctuary.

What are the plans? The board of directors is receiving quotes from contractors with regards to bridging the gap to the viewing platform. A floating dock system that could adapt to fluctuating water levels is envisioned. The mess of wooden skids could then be removed. Any remaining dips in the berm could then be covered with well-constructed walkways.

A tree removal contractor has been enlisted to deal with the downed behemoth when his schedule permits.

As the saying goes: all things in due time. 🌿

L.C.



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>

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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