



# Mattabesec Audubon Society

A Chapter of NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



# Wingbeat

Fall / Winter 2014

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“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)

### Why Birds Migrate *submitted by Alberta Mirer, Board Member*

The basic reason birds migrate is availability of food. A hummingbird needs nectar to survive and must fly to an area where flowers are blooming. Neotropical birds migrate from the tropics to Maine or further north for a longer day, and a more plentiful food supply to raise their young.

Birds find their way using several different techniques, but there are three basic tools: a sun compass, comparing the sun’s apparent position with the bird’s internal circadian clock. In effect, if the clock says it’s nine a.m. and the sun is on the left, then the heading is south. Birds are able to detect polarized light allowing

them to determine the sun’s position even on cloudy days, and for a while after sunset. Some birds use a star compass, orienting on the north star in this hemisphere which is an absolute point of reference. They also have a magnetic compass, believed to be used by long-distance migrants. It was around 1970 that this fact was conclusively demonstrated. Because the migratory feats of birds are so amazing, people found them hard to believe and folklore developed to explain how the migration might be possible, including the belief that small birds hibernated.—*John Berry and Karen Carlisle; from the Merry Meeting chapter of Maine Audubon*

### Two North American Bird Species Became Extinct in 1914

One hundred years ago, the last Passenger Pigeon and the last Carolina Parakeet died. Migrating flocks of Passenger Pigeons would leave the sky black for hours, even days. The ornithologist Alexander Wilson estimated one roosting site he visited as having over two billion birds. Just as we today may have a difficult time visualizing the size of a flock of Passenger Pigeons,

people then couldn’t imagine that within a short time there would not be one of these birds left. In memory of these birds, Water n’ Webs is offering hand-crafted Passenger Pigeon and Carolina Parakeet Dolls for \$6 each plus \$3 shipping. Donations go towards bird conservation efforts. Water n’ Webs Rehab Centre, P.O. Box 524, Northford, CT 06472

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### “The Perfect Flying Machine”

Flight demands greater intensity of effort than does any other means of animal locomotion, and so a bird’s heart beats many times per second, its breathing is correspondingly rapid, and its blood has more red corpuscles per ounce than any other creature. Just as a motor may weigh half of a small airplane, the powerful wing muscles of a pigeon have been found to weigh half the whole bird. If you want to see the ultimate in vertebrate

flexibility, you must examine a bird’s neck. More pliant than a snake, it enables the beak to reach any part of the body with ease and balances the whole bird in flight. Even the stocky little sparrow has twice as many vertebrae in its neck as the tallest giraffe: fourteen for the sparrow, seven for the giraffe.

From *Treasury of North American Bird Lore*, by Guy Murchie, Jr.



2014-15 Federal Duck Stamp

### Reminder: Buy Duck Stamps *submitted by Larry Cyrulik*

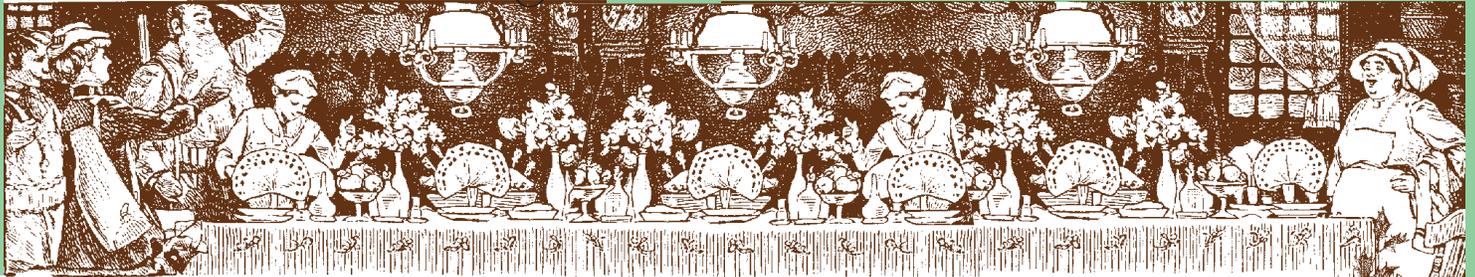
We urge everyone to buy Duck Stamps. The funds the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the State of Connecticut receive from the sale of Duck Stamps

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 2015 are valid for one year. ➡



# The 40<sup>th</sup> Annual MAS Salmon River Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 14, 2014



For 115 years, the National Audubon Society has been surveying bird populations at Christmas time. This will be the 40<sup>th</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

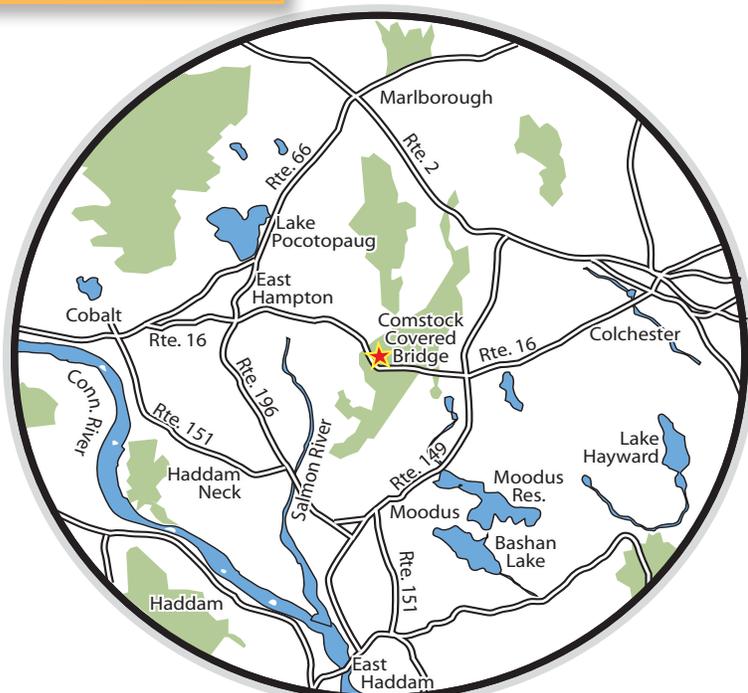
Comstock Bridge on the Salmon River (*see map*) to tally our feathered friends, who invariably provide us with some surprises.

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).

**Audubon  
Bird Count**  
[www.Audubon-MAS.org](http://www.Audubon-MAS.org)



**Mattabesek Audubon Society Count Circle**

State Parks/  
Forests Scale of Miles 0 1 2

American woodcock, 2013 Count



photo: Carrie Conrad

- 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.

From 5:00 p.m. on, we will congregate at the Cypress Restaurant on Route 17 in Middletown (going south out of the city), 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 14, 2014

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: \_\_\_\_\_

# Seasons through an Open Window

To think of time—of all that retrospection:

Walt Whitman

Through an abandoned farmhouse window,  
The winds of seasonal impermanence blow.  
The clouds of March send dripping down the sill  
Upon the floor's sheath of ice, wet snow.  
The sun, like a nervous debutante, brushes away  
The curtains on the stage and thrusts its face  
Between the clouds; arcing higher in the sky,  
It smiles on the earth with broad, white teeth.  
Lugubrious icicles silently cry,  
Diminishing with each dripping tear.  
Conjured up by the vernal equinox,  
An animated wind arises carrying leaves  
Like parchment paper missives through  
The open window frame, and files them in circles.  
The rains follow; the grey shoulders of the sky  
Soften and release their tension.  
The sun regains its place on the proscenium;  
It beams yellow light across the room  
In an expression of comforting grace,  
As if to say, "Now, easy times are come."  
The paper wasps arrive under the window ledge;  
The mud dwellers conquer the walls.  
A wizened, but proud pink lilac wafts  
Its sweet aroma through the open window  
As in former times when breathed  
There a being murmuring "Spring."  
The trill of a migrant from the South  
In the grape-entwined apple tree  
With Deergrass growing at its feet;  
The velvet pale glow of the pregnant moon  
Lies on the wide, warped chestnut floor;  
The tracks of a mouse's feet in the dust;  
And spiders form their fatalistic webs:  
Like circus performers they spread their trampolines  
Of silk, that fill with the deritis of an unsuspecting audience.  
"Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines;"  
Shakespeare's orb reaches its summer zenith.  
Through the window a deep, golden glow  
Of ineluctable light splashes off the tepid walls.  
The earth spins to the score of an unseen orchestra.  
The clouds have broken into a milliner's shop,  
And stealing bolts of colored cloth,  
Have dragged them below the horizon.  
Then salmon and vermilion ribbons hang  
Around the window's frame, heralding the nocturnal.  
The blue-black constellations stare  
At different actors scurrying there:  
With leather wings and knobby visage,  
Brown sprites in parabolic flight;



And feathered horses whinny in the trees.  
As the chest rises and falls with each breath,  
Day follows night like endless respiration.  
Then a furrowed brow obscures the stars;  
There follows the reports of cannons;  
The atmosphere revolves in a blur of torrent;  
The room unprotected, awash in moisture;  
Sent into the corners, mice and spiders cringing;  
The slowly receding peels, like the final thumps  
Of canned goods falling off a shelf. The sun  
Arises, bemused by the evening's peregrinations.  
The earth is wiped clean; the lilac shines  
With autumnal light. A stillness in the yard;  
The frenetic flow of life subsides.  
The wasps scurry around their nests  
In a grand finale; mornings cloaked in damp fog;  
Cold dew drips from the Deergrass;  
The golden rod shrivels and sets seed;  
Perspiration rises in grey tendrils  
From the balding head of the apple tree.  
The room becomes darker, more stern.  
A rainbow of leaves settles onto the floor.  
Like swords the stars flash in the window frame,  
Sharpened by the cold hands of an armorer.  
Life is suspended; in a corner of the room  
It turns up its collar and tosses in fitful slumber.  
Through the open window a leaden vapor steals,  
An inexorable frozen breath invisible  
But for the trembling motion of tattered,  
Vacant cob webs.  
And the evenings are trials of survival  
For the sparrows shivering in the junipers;  
And the day breaks as grey and cold  
As a gravestone...

## Field Trip Reports *Continued from page 2*

magnificent predator would reappear like a fatalistic dream over Griswold Point, with a similarly panicked reaction on the part of the shore bird migrants.

Paddling on between granitic outcrops, the heads of turtles were seen briefly bobbing on the waters surface—Northern diamondback terrapins gulping air. More mudflats lie exposed; there, Short-billed dowitchers, like frenetic sewing machines, stabbed for worms and invertebrates.

Great Island appeared, lying flat and rustling in the onshore wind, its green lances of *Spartina* sparkling in the sunshine. Ospreys hovered and circled or sat on their platform nests crying “cheep, cheep!”

At last a landing was made on the coarse grains of sand constituting the ever evolving remnants of Griswold Point. Disembarking, the three paddlers skirted the Nature Conservancy’s string barriers protecting the Least tern and Piping plover nest sites. Seaside golden rod nodded heads circled with yellow haloes. Beach grass thrust upwards sharp, sword-like fingers, and Beach pea grew in cork-screwed fashion along the sand.



Semi-palmated Plovers

Within a chattering and livid grouping of Common terns several young Least terns were observed. Other Least terns continually landed and burst upwards from behind the Conservancy’s string fence. Then, gratifyingly, three Piping plovers were discovered. Like animated, light-colored grains of sand, they haltingly traversed the pebbled reaches of the tide-exposed barrier beach.

On an exposed point jutting out into Long Island Sound several Oyster-catchers stood looking like tuxedoed waiters in red bibs preparing for their work shift. Ruddy turnstones busied themselves in the wavelets nearby.

The three birders in the expedition paused. They stood by the rack line gazing out over the shivering green waves of the Sound, the yellow glints of sunlight reflecting off the seaweed-laden swells. A line of blue clouds, “the chairs of the gods”, lay hyphenated on the horizon. One could almost have felt immortal, but for the plethora of empty shells that crunched beneath one’s feet: a reminder of the inevitable passage of life, and the ever turning tide.

Three participants; 16 shorebird species noted. L.C. 

The deadline for items to be included in the Winter / Spring Issue is December 26, 2014. 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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27 Washington Street  
Middletown, Connecticut 06457  
deKoven House



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