



Upcoming Field Trips: Spring/Summer 2019

“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.”



Worm-eating warblers are often found along the ridge-trail overlooking the river.

May 4, 2019 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

David Titus Memorial Warbler Walk

Meet at River Highlands State Park parking lot, Field Road, Cromwell. We’ll be looking for neo-tropical migrants—warblers: Pines, Blue-wings, Ovenbirds, and more, as well as other recent Spring arrivals like Rose-breasted grosbeak, Baltimore oriole and Scarlet tanager. Call Larry Cyrulik 342-4785 or 635-1880 for information.

June 1, 2019 (Saturday 8 a.m.)

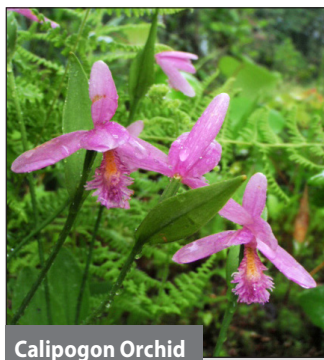
Canoe/Kayak Mattabasset River

This urban river and its flood plain have a surprising amount of biodiversity. Meet at the town launch area at the end of River Road, Cromwell.

Bring canoe or kayak, and lunch. Customize trip length to your own schedule—a few hours or whole day. Call Larry Cyrulik for details 342-4785 or 635-1880. 🌿



Green Dragon



Calipogon Orchid

June 1, 2019

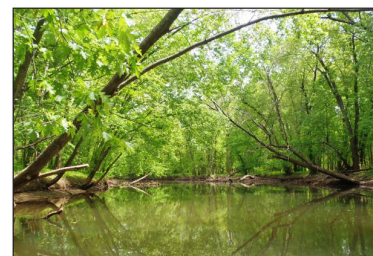
(Saturday 8–10 a.m.)
Rain date: Sunday, June 2

Pre-registration is APPRECIATED

Helen Carlson Wildlife Sanctuary

(With CT Forest & Parks)
The Sanctuary is a hot-bed of plant, amphibian, mammalian, and bird life.

Depending upon marsh water level, it may not be possible to walk the entire trail. Wear appropriate waterproof boots and bug repellent and bring binoculars. (The trip leader will have a few extra pairs of binoculars to borrow). Meet at the trail head, South Road, Portland, near the large MAS sign. Call Sharon Dellinger 860-803-1626, rsdell@comcast.net



Year 1: Breeding Bird Atlas

In spring 2018, more than 700 volunteers took to the field, adopting a block and committing to 20 hours of field work within that block.

Results of the 2018 Breeding Bird Survey are encouraging: 40% of atlas blocks have reported 30 or more total species. Nearly 20% have reported 50 species total. The South Canaan block recorded a phenomenal 94 species!

The following eight species were confirmed breeders in 2018 that did not appear on the 1982-86 survey: Common loon, Bald eagle, Common raven, Black vulture, Peregrine falcon, Sedge wren, Boat-tailed grackle, Monk parakeet. There was also the reverse: some species confirmed in the 82–96 survey have not been entered in 2018’s database: Green-wing teal, Blue-wing teal, King rail, Black skimmer, Long-eared owl, Olive-sided flycatcher, Swainson’s thrush, Vesper Sparrow. But there are still 2 more years of atlas breeding surveying. Who know what surprises await field workers?

Thanks to Steve Broker for compiling the statistics in *The Connecticut Warbler, A Journal of Connecticut Ornithology*, that were used in this article. 🌿 LC

Annual Meeting May 15

Mattabesek Audubon’s Annual Meeting will be held May 15, 2019 at 7 p.m. at the DeKoven House, to elect new members to the Board of Directors.

If you would like to serve, or if you can suggest someone who would like to join the board, please contact our Nominating Chairperson, Luella Landis, at GWLA620@yahoo.com. 🌿

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Field Trip Reports

Eagles at Machimoodus Park, February 2, 2019

Winter had risen from its autumnal somnolence, rubbed icy hands over glistening eyes with lashes like long, silvery icicles and blew cold, congealing breath over lakes, ponds and rivers. Treading the brown, crusted earth, those seeking eagles at first encountered a large mound of gravel bristling with the remnants of last summer's goldenrod and mugwort. White crowned sparrows and dark eyed juncos rose and fell among the shattered fronds; blue jays, cardinals and Tufted titmice enlivened the boughs of black locust and a thicket of stag horn sumac surrounding the edge of the mound.

The pathway led past a small frozen pond shiny as the lid of a stainless steel sauce pan. The gravel beneath the boots of the birders was like crumbled, hard brown sugar. They climbed slowly past fields being reclaimed by a succession of immigrant pioneers: various forbs such as little blue stem, and pine seedlings and black locust. A red bellied woodpecker gave a staccato exhortation; a downey tapped on a decrepit hemlock.

Breathing deepened. The exhalation drifted away like steam from a teapot. Oak trees scratched at the underside of the azure sky with their naked limbs. A white breasted nuthatch chirped as it jerkily danced head first down the side of a black birch.

The promontory reached. The climbers stood gazing down at the shining saucer that was Salmon River cove.

Someone had bent a rod of silver solder and put it in place of the river. The sky was aflame with bright blue reflection as cool as the haughty glance of a Tsar.

No eagles in view. Crows on the distant hill side cawed in unison with the guttural baritone bellowing from underneath the ice sheets as the incoming tide forced air pockets to flee before its inexorable flow.

Retreating from Mt Tom, the party arrived at Cove Road. At the mouth of the Moodus River black ducks and Canada geese slept moodily on a thin strip of open water. Swans gracefully manipulated their mud-splattered necks among submerged weeds.

From Cove Road to Gillette Castle was a short drive. There, on the familiar stone ramparts looking across the Connecticut River, mottled with ice sheets, an eagle was finally observed, a black-caped, white headed Plantagenet of the flood plain. Shrugging its wings as if to say, "No hope here" the eagle soon was off soaring farther down river towards the open coast.

By late morning the temperature rose but slightly Stand-ing chilled in the hardened mud of the landing beside the East Haddam swing bridge another dot was observed in a tree on an island in the Connecticut River. The eagle perched there conserving energy, impassive, oblivious and inscrutable.

Two participants | Two eagles | Twenty bird species total

"Let's Go a-Ducking, March 16, 2019

0830 Bishop's Ponds

The ponds are split by a blacktop thruway that weaves its way through a vast industrial complex. Above the banks of one of the ponds a steady flow of automobiles ripped along Interstate I-91. In spite of this unlikely setting, dabbling and diving in the grey, cold waters, or shyly insinuating themselves into the clumps of cattail, were ten species of ducks: Black, Mallard, Green-wing teal, Buffle-head, Ring-neck, Hooded merganser, Gadwall, Widgeon, Lesser Scaup, and Wood.

Four participants peered through spotting scopes. Eyes and noses watered as they leaned over the instruments or scanned with binoculars. A cold northwest wind pinched the cheeks and boxed the ears. Nevertheless everyone was satisfied with the diversity. An eleventh species, Common merganser, was noted in the opposite pond.

Yet there was a sense of poignancy: a Canada goose had been killed trying to walk across the thruway. Its carcass lay crumpled and inert in the half frozen grass next to the pond. Standing beside it was a companion goose, probably the dead bird's mate, left to mourn a succession of empty spring days.

0930 North Farms Reservoir

Bright sunshine, cold wind persisting, foaming waves chasing and lapping over each other, tossing Ring bill gulls into the air. Against a vast waterscape of Canada geese, Mallards and Ring-necks, tree swallows, the first of the season, formed a parabola over the waves. On an island distant, bristling with Great blue heron nests, a Bald eagle sat in its

MAS Officers:

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Vice-President: Luella Landis
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Education: Kim Antol (860-347-6442)
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Sanctuary: Rodrigo Pinto (301-768-8807)
Wingbeat: Pat Rasch (860-635-1880) <pat_rasch@mac.com>

Rare Bird Alert: 203-254-3665

On the web: www.audubon-mas.org



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The Tale of the One-eyed Screech Owl

It was in early May when the shadbush at the edge of the woods behind the fuel farm had a few white flowers still clinging to the skinny gray branches. Mild air wafted around the alleyways between test buildings. Starlings had cleaned out the holes, cracks and crevices in the corrugated steel siding of cell 4 in readiness for another breeding season. Eggs were laid and some had hatched. The sun glowed with a pleasant, yellow light. It was easy time.

Nothing was going on in the combustor stand; awaiting parts. We were gathered in the lounge, in the three-stage Dresser Clark compressor room. The lounge was a make-shift hangout. There was a desk and cabinets for magazines, a radio, a hot plate and coffee pot. In back of the lounge was a work bench.

Johnny Large was melting lead in an electric pot and pouring it into a handmade mold designed to make sinkers for fishing. Large turned his head a bit and squinted as he worked over the lead pot, its fumes rising insidiously over the bench. The Mex stood watching intently, dark eyes flashing beneath thick bushy eyebrows. He nodded his large square head approvingly. Off to the side, sitting in a lounge chair, Gramps sat rolling an unlit cigar in his mouth, every once in a while removing his greasy cap and running a thick hand over his balding pate. Junior sat next to Gramps. He was bony and angular, a conspiratorial grin on his narrow, chiseled face.

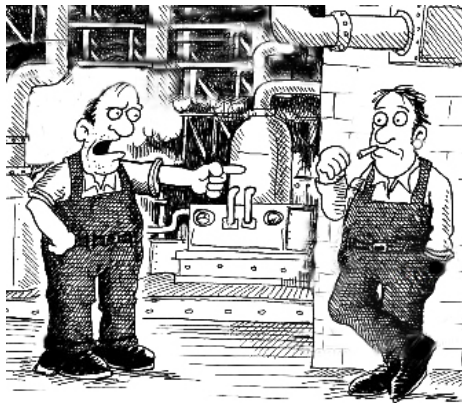
Suddenly from around the corner of the second stage cooler, the test area's supervisor, Rhein, appeared like a shadow. Short of stature, hair perfectly coiffed, and brimming with self-importance, he rapidly approached the lounge, looked around, his

eyebrows lifted incredulously, and spurted out, "What are you doing?"

Johnny Large, unperturbed, looked back over one of his muscular shoulders and replied, "Making fishing sinkers. What do you think?" His tattooed powerful forearms with meaty fists kept in motion, pouring lead.

Gramps and Junior shifted in their seats a bit. The Mex raised his eyebrows in amusement and gave Rhein a sideways quizzical glance.

Rhein was just recently assigned to the test stands from the big house up north. He might have been thinking about early retirement, or he just wasn't a competent mechanical engineer. The management did what they always did, they got the they guy out their hair by sending him to some out-of-the-way holding bin. Rhein had always dealt with other "salary pukes," he didn't know how to relate to the men on the clock, and so he was dumbfounded when Johnny Large wasn't intimidated at all by his presence. He gaped around the lounge with googley eyes, indignantly shaking his head, and stormed off with his short little legs churning angrily.



Gramps took the cigar out of his mouth and chuckled. The Mex ha-ha'd and Johnny Large shrugged, "Hey? Huh?"

Predictably, within minutes the foreman, Bud, came stalking into the lounge, shoulders tossing, his bulging cheeks and jowls jiggling.

"O.K., boys, break-time is over," he said, ignoring the smoking lead pot. "Johnny and the Mex, go out into the switch gear room and clean up. The rest of you cats, clear out and find something to do."

Continued on page 5

Field Trip Reports *continued*


own stick nursery warming eggs. Soon it took flight making the waterfowl cluck nervously. The eagle's mate then flew in and perched on a nearby tree limb.

1030 Broad Brook Reservoir

Passing through a gate and proceeding down a paved path, indiscernible beneath years of detritus, and skipping over pockets of late winter puddles formed from melting snow, the "duckers" set up scopes in the understory at the edge of the water. A flotilla of feathered galleons bobbed on the animated surface of the reservoir. Most of the species had already been noted in the previous stops. But then came the discovery of a line of Ruddy ducks dancing

almost imperceptibly in the far distance beside a causeway.

Another vantage point was reached where waves scurried into a narrow cove past white pine trees looming along the shore. Various raptors up-welled into bruised March clouds: Eagles and Red-tailed hawks. Common ravens barrel-rolled through the sky and teased the Eagles. A Sharp-shinned hawk banked over the reservoir and was lost behind a copse of oaks. Looking upwards beyond the shining horizon towards a far off promontory the dark, impassive crown of Castle Craig jutted from a trap rock ridge as if it were communing with the belly of a cloud.

Four participants | 12 duck species. 

LC

News from the Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas

Check your local swamp for herons

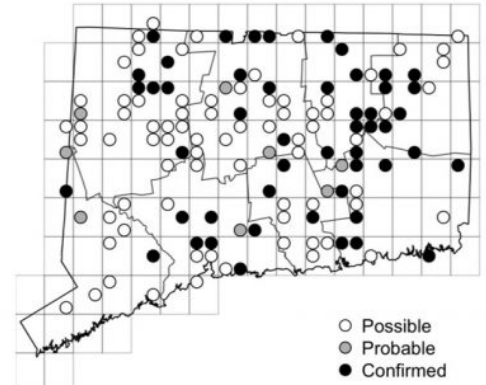
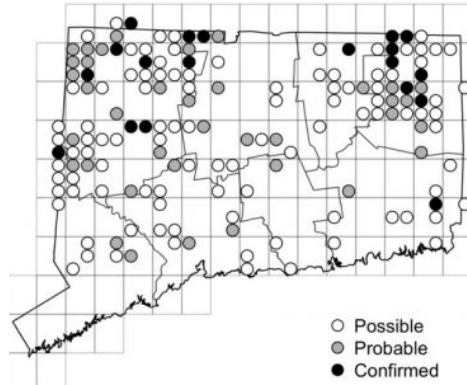
MARCH 2019 by CHRIS ELPHICK

Although great blue herons can be found in the state throughout the year, many migrate south during winter, and those that remain tend to retreat to the coast as freshwater wetlands freeze over. Several posts on the *ctbirds* listserv this week have shown that great blues are starting to return to their nesting colonies, and the next couple of weeks, before the leaves start to emerge, will be an ideal time to check all the swamps in your atlas block for active nests.

Any small wooded swamp has potential to hold a few nesting pairs. Even though birds typically nest in dead trees, the foliage on surrounding trees can make them much harder to see after leaf out begins – so it pays to get out soon and check any likely spots.

The 2018 breeding season alone has produced evidence of confirmed breeding in more atlas blocks than was found in the first atlas in the 1980s. Whether this difference represents a real increase is hard to say at this point, but ensuring good coverage of all atlas blocks will help us assess change at the end of the study.

Comparison of historical data to 2018 also suggests that there may be more heron colonies in the southern half of Connecticut now than there were during the first atlas. Simultaneously, there appear to be fewer occupied blocks



in the northern tier of the state. The northwest and northeast corners, however, have also received the least coverage so far, so this pattern might simply be a result of reduced survey work in those regions.

Comparison of great blue heron records from the first Connecticut breeding bird atlas (1982-86; left) and from the 2018 field season of the current atlas (right). Note that 2018 data are preliminary as data review is still ongoing.

To help fill out the picture, we'd encourage our volunteers to stop and check any likely looking swamp, even if it is not in their own block. For example, last year I found a heronry less than 10 minutes from my house, on a road that I've driven hundreds of times in the past 20 years. When I mentioned this to a friend of my son's, who lives right next to pond, I was told "yeah, they've been there my entire life". Sometimes all it takes is a quick scan to make a valuable discovery.

Ravens

MARCH 2019 by CHRIS ELPHICK

Over the past couple of weeks, ravens have been a regular sight at UConn. Displaying from the roof of the visitor's center, wheeling over the parking garage, and yesterday I even heard one while sitting in my office. The species has nested in a farm building near the university's Depot Campus for a couple of years and is seen throughout the area, but this is the first sign that they might nest right on the main campus.

As winter recedes, signs of breeding are everywhere, and ravens are one of the earliest nesters in the state. As reports on the *ctbirds* listserv show, many pairs are already on eggs, and confirmed 2019 breeding records have been coming in for a while.

Ravens are one of the state's birding success stories. At the time of the first atlas, they were only just beginning to return to Connecticut after being largely absent since European settlement. In the mid-1980s, probable breeding was documented in the northwest corner of the state, but it was not until 1988 (two years after the first atlas ended) that

the first confirmed breeding record in modern times was obtained from Boston Hollow in Ashford.

Data from the first breeding season of the current atlas illustrate how widespread the species now is in the state:

Maps from the first Connecticut breeding bird atlas conducted during 1982-86 (left) and from the 2018 field season of the current atlas (right) show the expansion of the common raven's range, with confirmed breeding in all of the state's counties. Note that 2018 data are preliminary as data review is still ongoing.

Although the 2018 data give us a good sense of the extent of breeding by ravens, we still want to know just how much the population has increased. The safe dates for raven breeding run from 20th March until 20th July, so this week is an ideal time to start reporting all sightings of the species (information on data reporting is here), and to start looking

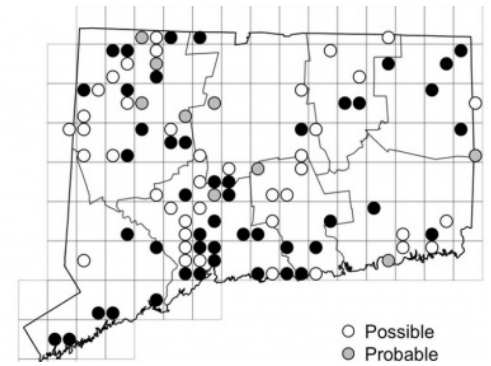
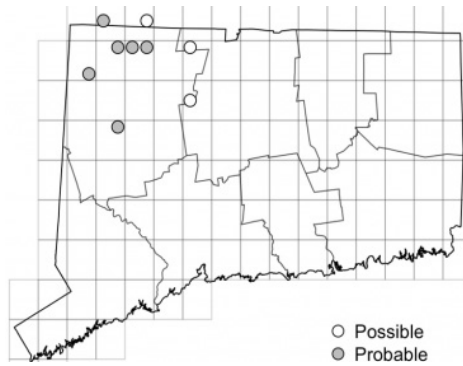



Ravens *continued*

for nests in areas where birds are seen frequently but breeding has not been confirmed.

Old buildings, dams, bridges, and radio towers, are all potential nesting sites, as well as more natural locations, like cliff faces. Birds carrying sticks (breeding code CN) also confirm breeding, but be careful using this code if the birds are seen near to a block boundary—in these cases, it is best to note the direction the bird is flying and to try to find the nest to ensure that the record is logged in the block where nesting actually occurs.

Similarly, remember that the CF (carrying food) code



should not be used for ravens or other corvids, because these birds frequently fly around with food that they will eat themselves, meaning that the behavior is not necessarily a sign of nesting nearby (more on this problem here <http://ctbirdatlas.org/blog/index.php/2018/04/25/getting-breeding-codes-right/>). 

The Tale of the One-eyed Screech Owl *continued from page 3*

With finality, Bud turned and quickly returned to his office.

I went out into the alley way by the NVA furnace with a broom. I was standing there with the broom handle under my chin, watching starlings and a house sparrow with a tiger swallow-tail butterfly in its mouth, when Johnny Large rushed up. I looked at this squat, powerful man with the arrogant attitude. “What’s up?”

“Come and see what we found.”

I followed Johnny around the corner. Next to the drive engine house was the switch gear room, loaded with breakers and cabinets filled with dangerous 440 volt, three phase electrical wiring.

I stepped inside and immediately saw a mess of starling feathers and body parts scattered all over the floor. Then the Mex brought a large white bucket over to me, filled with rags. “Look,” he pointed.

I pulled the rags apart and there, sitting quietly at the bottom of the bucket, was a Screech owl, one of its eyes damaged and shut.

“Wow!” An alarm bell instantly went off in my brain.

“I came and got you, ‘cause you know about these things,” Johnny Large said.

Looking around the switch gear room, I quickly deduced what had happened. The owl, chasing down a starling, had gotten itself locked up, for how long, who knew? Without delay or explanation I quickly grabbed the bucket and rushed into the foreman’s office.

Bud was moving a pen over some paperwork. I was in no mood for begging. This was an emergency.

“Bud, I got this injured owl here, and I gotta take it quick to a rehab guy I know. I’ll punch out for the day or whatever, but I’m leaving right now!”

Bud lifted his eyes, magnified behind the thick progressive lenses of his glasses. His eyebrows arched in surprise, bemused at my urgency. Then he said to my relief and gratitude, “No need to punch. Take the truck. Go for it, kid.”

“I’ll be back as quick as I can.” I picked up the bucket and was off.

The raptor rehabilitator was a calm, experienced man with a gray, professorial goatee. He skillfully probed the owl’s breast and said, “A bit dehydrated. Not to worry—we’ll see what we can do. Call me later.”

That night I called after work. “Ate several mice. Is doing fine,” I was told.


“What about the eye?”

“They can still hunt with the one. We’ll keep it for a week or two. I think we can set it free.”

The next day I told the boys about the owl’s recovery.


“Ah, good,” Gramps said, his cigar bobbing to the side of his mouth. “Go out back and tell Johnny Large. He’s putting up a bird house.”

Johnny had built a custom house from scrap, complete with a porch and railings. I chuckled as he stood on a ladder and nailed it to a red oak. Rhein was staring down from the windows of the upstairs office. He shook his head and gloomily went back to his desk.

We watched that bird house all through spring and summer, but the only thing that made use of it was a squirrel. Johnny Large threw a stone at it once, but then gave up. 

LC

Mattabesek Collecting Member Email Addresses

Please send an email with your preferred email address within the body of the email to: pat_rasch@mac.com, with EMAIL LIST in subject line. 

AUDUBON MEMBERS' CORNER

(Feel free to send us contributions to this column)



Submitted by Alberta Mirer

Birding — How To:

What You'll Need: Binoculars – Look for a pair that is waterproof, is comfortable in your hand and has at least 8x magnification. You can borrow some until you're ready to buy your own.

A Bird Guide like the *Sibley Guide to Birds* will help you identify what you're seeing. There's information about specific birds, bird families, migration patterns and much more. You could also try a birding app like The Audubon Bird Guide, free for Android and iOS. Visit ebird.org to see which species have recently been spotted in your state.

Why Birding?

Birding is one of the country's fastest-growing hobbies,

with more than 65 million Americans actively involved. In fact, many of the most important scientific discoveries about birds were made by amateur birders. Boy Scouts can earn the Bird Study merit badge by identifying at least 20 species of wild birds.

Heading Out:

1. Use your bird guide, or online resource to research birds you'd like to find in your area.
2. Start in your own backyard, or a nearby park, with lots of trees and open space.
3. Find a place to sit or stand that has a good view of everything around you. Look for birds.
4. Once you spot one, study it. Find the most obvious detail about it. Write down what you observe, including color, size, shape, sounds, and habits. You can also try drawing the bird. These details will help you identify the bird. As you spend more time birding, you'll be able to identify birds more quickly and easily.
5. You're officially a birder. Keep at it! The more often you go out, the more you'll discover. 🐦

Boys' Life April 2018

The deadline for items to be included in the Summer/Fall issue is June 26, 2019. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about July 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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