



# THE *Crest*

NEWSLETTER OF THE HARTFORD AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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Winter 2017



Maggie Peretto

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I know we are all thinking of spring. We can hear it, feel it and smell it. But winter birding can also be challenging and rewarding. Many of you took on the challenge of participating in the second HAS Hartford County "Big January." Congratulations to all participants. After returning from Florida, I have enjoyed some CT winter birding. Loving the challenge and learning winter gull identification. I

have learned that Iceland Gulls have big eyes with a rounded head and a gentle expression compared to a Glaucous Gull that has a more fearsome look, the



eye looks much smaller on the face with a sloping forehead. Isn't this a gentle look? I witnessed this look at the Mouth of the Oyster River last week. I was also lucky to get the less seen Eared Grebe



next to the Horned Grebe in Stonington Harbor. This year, high up on our commitment as a

group needs to be "The Connecticut Bird Atlas Project". Our own Sara Zagorski is one of the leaders for this project. We will keep you involved and informed. We are counting on your participation! I am also very pleased to hear that some of you have been planning your bird costume for our **Annual Banquet on May 1<sup>st</sup>**. How much fun this banquet will be whether you decide to wear a costume or not. Please, give me call or text at 860-604-4903 if you have any questions, suggestions or would like to get involved in decorating the Pond House. Make the best of every season and every opportunity to bird. It will make your heart sing! See you around the birding trails. Maggie Peretto

## BIG JANUARY RESULTS 2018

For most Connecticut residents, January is a cold, blustery time to stay indoors, curl up in a warm spot, and await better weather. But for Connecticut's birdwatching community, January offers the opportunity to seek out our winter bird species. This year the Hartford Audubon Society (HAS) offered its Second Annual "Big January" birding challenge: to identify as many species of wild birds in Hartford County as possible. HAS was pleased with the excitement and varied ages of participants in this year's challenge. As one birding participant put it, "It was a lot of fun! The camaraderie amongst the birders was great! Everyone was helping each other." Several birders were surprised they didn't "get" common species such as Cooper's Hawk, Mute Swan, or Cedar Waxwing, which often seemed plentiful for other birders, but the search was part of the excitement. As an organization, we witnessed wonderful sharing of species sightings – from White-fronted Goose to a Red-headed Woodpecker. Postings on ebird and the ctbirds listserve helped many birders see and enjoy a variety of rarities. Sharing also helped introduce birders to new locations. One hot spot this year was Desmond's Pond in South Windsor – who knew it could have so many interesting species! With the final counts in, HAS is delighted to announce the winners from this year's challenge. HAS awards prizes in these categories: Youth (ages 4-10): 25 species; Teen (ages 11-17): 35 species; Adult (ages 18+): 65 species. It should be noted that finding 65 species in Hartford County in January is no easy feat. Special congratulations go to Sebastian Lawton, aged 8, who found more species than many birders decades older than him! And an awe-filled congratulations to John Weeks, who birded every, single day in January. Way to go, John!

Youth, Ages 2-10 (25 needed):

Sebastian Lawton, age 8, 48 species

Adults, Age 18 -? (65 needed)

Bill Asteroides, 83 species

Jamie Meyers, 80 species

John Weeks,, 80 species

Jay Kaplan, 79 species

Sarah Faulkner, 75 species

David Funke, 75 species

Annette Pasek, 73 species

Chris Chinni, 72 species

Congratulations to everyone who entered.

Sarah Faulkner, HAS Vice President

## HARTFORD AREA FIELD NOTES

### October — December 2017

From a meteorological perspective, this period was a tale of two weather patterns. October was one extended Indian summer, featuring temperatures that averaged an astounding 7.8 degrees warmer than usual. It was also twice as rainy as usual, which was good for stressed water tables in the area. When the going got cold, though, it got cold. November was a couple degrees below normal and featured only about 30% of the usual amount of precipitation. The year's final month was well colder (4 degrees under the norm) and featured a record amount of snowfall for the month. A six inch snowfall on December 9 was followed by a sharp freeze that turned most open water to ice for the Hartford Christmas Count the following week. **Snowy Owl** irruptions occur only a couple of times a decade, but when they do, they attract a great deal of attention in the birding community. Most Connecticut birds are reported from salt marshes on the coast, but some find refuge in our area. Gresczyk Farms in New Hartford played hosted to a **Snowy Owl** that was seen by many for a few days starting November 18 (JK et al). Unfortunately, this bird was struck by a car on busy US 202 and did not survive. A post-mortem showed that this young owl was thin, strongly suggesting that it was struggling to find food. This is not an uncommon circumstance. Hopefully, another individual that was seen and photographed atop the Wadsworth Atheneum in downtown Hartford on December 15 (MC) fared better. Several reports of a member of this species, perhaps the same bird, came in from the general vicinity during the following couple of weeks. Another white species has made headlines recently, as this winter has seen an unprecedented movement of **Ross's Goose**. This diminutive goose was represented by perhaps less than a half dozen records prior to this winter in the state. There were probably almost that many individuals in the state at one time in early January. One of those was a bird reported from Farmington Meadows on New Year's Eve 2017 (MA/DL). Some discussion ensued about whether this bird might be a hybrid Ross's x Snow Goose, but even the experts seemed inconclusive on that and most local birders have likely tallied it as a Ross's. Staying on the theme of white birds, an unusual movement of **Snow Geese** occurred during mid-December, likely in response to the snow and sudden freeze noted in the intro. A night walking birder was surprised to hear a high flying flock of this species in his neighborhood in the early evening of December 11 (JM). Perhaps these same birds were noted an hour or so later in Torrington in several skeins of about 100 geese apiece (DTr). Two nights later, a flock of 45 – 50 Snows glowed ghostly in the lights of the UConn Medical Center in Farmington as they passed low overhead just after dusk (JM). Many such flocks were noted during this period throughout southern New England, metro New York and New Jersey. Switching to (mostly) non-white geese, the period also featured an unusual number of inland reports for Brant, a species that tends to favor the coast much more in our area. A single bird was a one-day stopover in a small pondside field on November 1 (PCi). Another was found at

Union Pond in Manchester on November 29 (DF). Yet another was long staying and seen by

many at Fisher Meadows Park in Avon starting on November 17 through mid-December (DL et al.). The **Brant** was often reported by birders seeking out a fairly cooperative **Barnacle Goose** that frequented the Fisher Meadow's Spring Pond from December 6 through December 10 (PM/VM fide BK et al.). A **Snow Goose** at small Spring Street Pond in Wethersfield on December 5 was a first for this locale (SZ). The warm October was inviting to birds and birders alike, leading to some nice passerine observations. A **Sedge Wren** at weedy Lower Greenwoods Road in Barkhamsted on October 2 was a great find (DR). An HAS walk at private Glastonbury Meadows on October 1<sup>st</sup> yielded goodies such as a **Dickcissel**, 2 **Marsh Wrens** and a **Philadelphia Vireo**, among others (BA). Big Sitters at the same location on October 7 recorded an **Orange-crowned Warbler**, another **Dickcissel**, a nice 6 **Soras** and a **Marsh Wren** (BA et al.). As usual, October featured too many uncommon sparrow reports to note here, but **Vesper Sparrow** is a standout. Individuals were noted at Holcomb Farm in Granby on October 11 (PD) and Glastonbury Meadows, along with yet another **Dickcissel**, on October 22 (BA). As winter approaches, birders often speculate about the possibility of winter finches irrupting. Despite inviting forecasts of potential outbreaks of these welcome and erratic visitors from the north, practically none made it to our area. As such, 3 **Red Crossbills** noted in Canton on November 5 proved to be the exception, not the rule (JK/SF). Reasonably placid conditions prior to the December 9 storm made it possible for a few late lingerers to persist. A **Swainson's Thrush** on November 25 was a nice sight for a Granby birder (JW). The woods lining Union Pond in Manchester hosted a late **Black and White Warbler** on December 1 (DF). Two days later, Station 43 in South Windsor yielded a **Common Yellowthroat**. Hopefully these birds winged their way to warmer climes shortly thereafter! 5 **Eastern Meadowlarks** at Suffield WMA on December 15 (JW) were hardy indeed, but not quite so hardy as a **Virginia Rail** found in Barkhamsted on the Christmas Count of December 23 (FZ). One wonders about – and marvels at – the survival skills of a bird like that under such harsh conditions.

Observers/reporters: Mark Aronson (MA), Bill Asteroides (BA), Doug Beach, Paul Carrier, Mona Cavallero (MC), Paul Cianfaglione (PCi), Jan Collins, Paul Desjardins (PD), David Funke (DF), Jay Kaplan (JK), Sarah Faulkner (SF), Brian Kleinman (BK), David Lawton (DL), Paul Margiott (PM), Vicky Margiott (VM), Jamie Meyers (JM), Dave Rosgen (DR), Dave Tripp (DTr), John Weeks (JW), Sara Zagorski (SZ), Fran Zygmunt (FZ)

Please send reports to Jamie Meyers, 4 Sexton Hollow Road, Canton, CT 06019 or e-mail them to me at sunnycetred-bird@gmail.com for January – March 2018 by April 10, 2018. While I review some statewide rare bird reports to augment these notes, the best way to ensure your sightings are recorded and attributed correctly are to send them directly to me. *I do not comb through eBird!*

# CALENDAR



## Sunday, March 17, 2018 - 7 pm Woodcocks at Nod Brook

Leader: Brian Toal 860-677-7156/[briantoal@sbcglobal.net](mailto:briantoal@sbcglobal.net). View the unique mating display or "sky dance" of the American Woodcock on a relatively short evening trip. Meet at the back of the first parking lot of the Tower Office Park, 82 Hopmeadow St (Route 10) in Simsbury, 1.4 miles north of Route 44.

## Sunday, March 25, 2018 – 8 am Western Connecticut Shoreline

Leader: Maggie Peretto 860-604-4903/[wings.mp@gmail.com](mailto:wings.mp@gmail.com). Take a morning tour from Sherwood Island to New Haven looking for late wintering birds and early spring migrants. Bring lunch. Meet in parking lot at Sherwood Island State Park in Westport.

## Saturday, March 31, 2018 – 8 am Stratford Hot Spots Tour

Leader: Patrick Comins [203-405-9115](tel:203-405-9115) /[pcomins@audubon.org](mailto:pcomins@audubon.org). A morning of birding on the Stratford coast depending on "where the bird action is" in what is one of the best birding towns in CT. Meet at Stratford Point, 1207 Prospect Drive, Stratford.

## Saturday, March 31, 2018 – 8:30 am Sachuest Point, RI

Leader: Paul Desjardins 860-623-3696 [paul.desjardins2@gmail.com](mailto:paul.desjardins2@gmail.com). Visit the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge and other Rhode Island locations on this all day trip. View Harlequin Ducks and seabirds that are harder to see in CT. Bring lunch. Meet at the refuge Visitor Center parking lot in Middletown, RI.

## Saturday, April 7, 2018 – 8 am Greenstone Hollow

Leaders: Chris and Diane Fisher 860-658-2903 [chrisf001@aol.com](mailto:chrisf001@aol.com) This Hartford Audubon sanctuary has shrub, swamp, marsh, wet meadow, pond and wooded habitats. The main entrance is at the guardrail end on Ridge Blvd in E Granby.

## Saturday, April 14, 2018 – 8 am Great Pond State Forest

Leader: Jon Ward - 860-416-3958/[ward88787@aol.com](mailto:ward88787@aol.com). Great Pond is a beautiful state forest. Expect a nice assortment of birds, with some about to leave and others arriving, on this morning walk. Meet at the parking lot off Great Pond Rd in Simsbury.

## Saturday, April 28, 2018 – 7:30 am Audibles and Edibles

Leaders: Kat Conte & Ernie Harris. This unusual trip will ID both birds and edible wild plants. This beautiful area has diverse habitats. Meet at 3006 Hebron Ave, Glastonbury at Longo Farm Open Space. Please RSVP to [pdlqlt@mac.com](mailto:pdlqlt@mac.com)

## Saturday, April 28, 2018 – 8:00 am Station 43 Beginners Birdwalk 4

Leader: Jon Ward 860-416-3958 [ward88787@aol.com](mailto:ward88787@aol.com). Meet at corner of Newberry Rd & Main St, S Windsor. Don't miss this walk, but wear boots!

## HAS REGULAR MEETINGS

St James's Episcopal Church, 1018 Farmington Ave, W Hartford  
7:00 PM – Refreshments 7:30 PM – Meeting

## Tuesday, March 13, 2018

### Owls of Western Connecticut Speaker: Larry Fischer

This talk will focus on owl behavior, nesting habitat requirements, and other interesting facts while showing close-up photographs of the owls in our state.

## Tuesday, April 10, 2018

### Life on the Edge — Sparrows of the Salt Marsh Speaker: Walter Berry

Seaside and Saltmarsh Sparrows live really different lives in the same New England salt marshes. One nests above the ground in a defended territory, with bi-parental care; in the other, non-territorial females are ground-nesting single parents with multiple mates.

## WILDLIFE SERIES

MCAULEY RESIDENCE AUDITORIUM  
275 STEELE RD, WEST HARTFORD, CT

## Tuesday, March 27, 2018\*\*\*

### Speaker: Corey O'Hern Strength of Bird Nests

Why are physicists interested in birds' nests? Come listen to this fascinating talk.

\*\*\*Please note date change. This will be held on the 4th Tuesday!

## Tuesday, April 17, 2018

### Speaker: Shawn Carey

### Tanzania: A Photographer's Journey

In a region abundant with wildlife, perhaps no country is as celebrated as Tanzania. Home to the world famous Ngorongoro Crater and Serengeti National Park, Tanzania is a nature/wildlife photographer's paradise.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Sandra Gifford  
New Britain CT

Doug & Cheryl Murray  
West Hartford, CT

Joan Heffernan  
Suffield CT

Jim & Cathy Watso  
Granby, CT

Roger and Candace LaFleur  
Canton CT

Hannah Schwartz  
Simsbury CT

## TRIP REPORTS

Please send your reports to Ernie Harris at [pdlqlt@mac.com](mailto:pdlqlt@mac.com) for the HAS record and  
HARTFORDAUDUBON@YAHOO.COM  
for the Website and Newsletter  
Darlene J Moore editor

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS!**  
SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED **30 DAYS** BEFORE EACH ISSUE DATE ARE INCLUDED AS SPACE ALLOWS.

Send submissions for the Spring issue by  
**April 10, 2017 to**

HARTFORDAUDUBON@YAHOO.COM

Peregrinations: [nozzle100@aol.com](mailto:nozzle100@aol.com)

Membership: Marcia Reno (860) 232-4352

## Hartford Christmas Bird Count Summary 2017

Compilers' Note: This year's Christmas Bird Count is dedicated to the memories of Rick Macsuga, Roger Preston and John Smalley, long-time CBC field observers, who passed away in 2017. Their contributions to this Count are greatly missed. Every Christmas Count is different. Our findings are influenced by the weather leading up to the Count not to mention Count Day weather itself; food supplies including abundance of seed and fruit; and the success of the breeding season for a variety of species, both those that breed here in Connecticut and those that migrate from the north to winter in our area. Count Day weather also determines our number of field observers. Unlike 2016, when the day began with ice and fog, and the afternoon brought rain, this year's Count featured dry, although somewhat colder weather with highs never getting out of the low thirties. Participation improved markedly with 91 field observers, 19 more than in 2016. More birders, however, did not translate into greater effort as both party hours and party miles increased only slightly over last year. Perhaps a number of our birders had to do some holiday shopping in the afternoon? It was an unusual Count in many respects. In spite of early reports of winter finches moving southward and what appeared to be a good cone crop, not a single winter finch was reported on the Hartford count. Temperatures well below freezing for a full two weeks prior to the Count froze most ponds and even portions of the Connecticut River held ice. In spite of the lack of open water and a 2" snow cover on many fields and other open areas, Canada Geese reached a ten year high count with over 10,000 – more than 2,000 over the previous high total from 2014. Other waterfowl also hit new ten year highs – Wood Duck (26) with over half of the total packed into a tiny patch of open water at Hartford's Goodwin Park, and Hooded Merganser (108) and Ruddy Duck (40), found in the early morning at the open north end of West Hartford's Reservoir #6. Ten year highs were also established for Wild Turkey (89) and, surprisingly, Great Horned Owl (13). The most surprising bird of the Count was a House Wren reported from Manchester. The report came with a credible "Rare Bird" description. In these instances, the compilers often consult with leading Connecticut birders prior to arriving at a decision. House Wren was last reported on our Count in 2006. Other birds of note included a single Gray Catbird and 2 Eastern Meadowlarks, both from the former Hartford Landfill site. Meadowlark has not been reported on our Count since 2013. At the other end of the spectrum, ten year low counts were tallied for eight species. The lack of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls is directly attributable to the closing of the landfills. It may require more research to explain the paucity of Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird and American Goldfinch. Might food supplies have some bearing for some of these species? Birds absent from this year's list included American Kestrel, last missed in 2013 and Eastern Towhee, last missed in 2012. Long-tailed Duck and Glaucous Gull have not been seen on our Count since 2007, and these two species have now been removed from our ten-year list. We usually pick up some Count Period (CP) birds; meaning species seen three days prior to or three days following the Count, but not on Count Day. In 2016, a Snowy Owl was seen in downtown

Hartford the day following the Count. This year, this species was seen on both the day preceding and the day following the Count, but not on Count Day itself. How doubly frustrating! No Hartford Christmas Count would be complete without mentioning the crow roost on the Hartford-West Hartford line. The crows are still there! Anyone who wants to see a lot of crows should take a ride over the ShopRite Plaza on the corner of Prospect and Kane Street in West Hartford or to the Stop and Shop parking lot just down the road in Hartford. It is a pretty impressive scene at dusk! Total species for the Count stands at 89, one less than last year, but in line with a ten-year average of 90.3. On behalf of the compilers, thank you to all the captains, field observers and feeder watchers whose efforts made the 2017 Hartford CBC a success. This was the 118<sup>th</sup> edition of the Christmas Bird Count, the longest running of all citizen science-based research projects. We hope to see many of you next year. A ten-year spreadsheet for Hartford Christmas Bird Count results will be available at upcoming monthly meetings of the Hartford Audubon Society. It is also available by sending an email request to [jaybrd49@aol.com](mailto:jaybrd49@aol.com). A few photos are also available for those who may be interested. Jay Kaplan & Steve Davis, Co-Compilers

## Trip Reports

### Hammonasset Beach State Park

- December 3, 2017

We had 21 birders including: Adrian and Beth Nichols, a member of NH Bird Club and two young women from Glastonbury (future members). 42 species, especially: surf and white-winged scoters, both loons, Bald Eagle, N. Harrier, Coopers, Red-tailed Hawk, Purple Sandpiper, SNOWY OWL, Horned Lark, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-rumped Warblers (many), Swamp Sparrow. Before: 4 of us had a Red-shouldered Hawk; After: 8 of us had many Hooded Mergansers on the swan pond. And good fish at the Tale. Ernie Harris

### Cape Ann/Newburyport. Jan 20 & 21, 2018

Nine HAS members and friends set out in hopes of moderately cold weather and lots of birds. On Saturday morning we explored the upper reaches of Cape Ann. The rewards included fabulous looks at **Harlequin Ducks, Thick-billed Murre, Barrow's Goldeneye, Razorbill, Red-throated Loon, Northern Gannet**, and the scoter trifecta – **Black, White-winged, and Surf Scoter**. A small flock of **Purple Sandpipers** were found on Bass Rocks in Gloucester. The bis highlight was the sighting of two **Peregrine Falcons**. Sunday in Newburyport: The Government shut down, but Plum Island was open for birding. Sightings of **Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier** (Gray Ghost), a close-up view of a **Rough-legged Hawk**, and distant looks at **Snowy Owl** were the raptor delights. Salisbury Beach State Park offered closer looks at 2 more Snowy Owls. The day ended with 12 Sanderlings. Total species: 44. - Fran D'Amico

### Hartford County Boat Launch Tour. Feb 2, 2018

The highlights of this years boat launch tour included Cackling and Snow Goose at Donald Barnes boat launch in Enfield, Common Raven, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon at King's Island boat Launch in Enfield, great looks at a Bald Eagle nest at the Dexter Coffin Bridge launch in Windsor Locks, five Bald Eagles at Riverside Park in Hartford, another Bald Eagle nest at Charter Oak Landing in Hartford. We also visited the Rocky Hill Ferry, which had a lot of ducks, but nothing unusual. By the time we were done, we turned Super Bowl Sunday into Super Bird Sunday! Go Eagles! You know, the ones that wear white helmets! Paul