



THE *Crest*

NEWSLETTER OF THE HARTFORD AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

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Winter 2024



President's Message

By Al Gatti

Al Gatti was just ten years old when he was first bitten by the "birding bug." Spending numerous hours at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, adjacent to the Delaware River and the Philadelphia International Airport, Al became enthralled by the refuge's Tinicum Marsh and the myriad plant and animal species that call it home..

As so often happens, however, family life and professional responsibilities took precedence over Al's love of nature. His passion rekindled, however, as his career drew to a close, and today Al finds himself as Hartford Audubon Society's 62nd president.

The Crest recently sat down with Al to hear his views on birding, the state of HAS, and his thoughts about our club's future.

Crest: Birding has certainly changed since you were a boy. What are your thoughts about all of the new birding technology?

AG: Technology is an enabling tool that allows people, and organizations such as HAS, to achieve their goals more easily. The birding community is better off today because of technology. The advancement of various apps has been incredible over the last ten years, and it opens up birding opportunities to a larger audience.

Crest: How so?

AG: The various apps have made it easier for beginners to engage. When birders are engaged, they learn more, not only about birds, but also about critical environmental issues and conservation efforts. And that is a good because we need all the help we can get in dealing with problems such as climate change.

Crest: Some argue that various applications have taken away the challenge and made birding too easy. How would you respond?

AG: I have heard some veteran birders say that they resent the new technologies, since they had to learn the various field marks and bird calls from books and from spending hours in-the-field. Well, I congratulate them on their birding skills, and I have a tremendous amount of respect for what they did; they learned the old fashioned way. Now, however, we have new generations of birders who are tech savvy and can take birding to the next level more efficiently. Technology does assist them in finding and identifying birds. But keep in mind that we are experiencing significant declines in bird populations. Finding those declining birds with the help of technology not only makes birding more fun, but also aids in the research of those species. The more we know about them, including their whereabouts, the more we can do to save them.

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Urgent: Board and Finance Committee Members Needed

We are currently looking for two new Board members to serve beginning in May 2024. Regular Board meetings occur four times each year. The time commitment is approximately 4-5 hours per quarter. Additionally, we are looking for two new members of the Finance Committee, which meets quarterly. Financial, investment, or accounting experience is required. If you are interested in serving on the Board or on the Finance Committee, please call Fran D'Amico at 203-237-2734 (email: frandamico525@yahoo.com); or Al Gatti at 860-916-7142 (email: algatti22@gmail.com).

Welcome New Members

Jeffrey Benoit
Willington, CT

Orion and Karen Burns
New Britain, CT

Martin Espinola
Windsor Locks, CT

David Feingold and Tracey Meyers
Bolton, CT

Mark and Jennifer Fletcher
West Simsbury, CT

Drew Fowlie and CeeCee Collins
West Simsbury, CT

Bill and Laura Kelly
Farmington, CT

Tom Kilkenny
Hartford, CT

Laura and Timothy Landry
Kadyn Landry
Colchester, CT

Tom and Julie Lucey
West Hartford, CT

Ryan Oneglia and Cara Mae Cirignano
Alice Mae Cirignano
West Hartford, CT

Sherry Ostrout
Hartford, CT

Amy Paterson
Vernon, CT

Amy Rutar
Manchester, CT

Jon and Carol Widing
Danny Widing
Avon, CT

Robert and Donna Zamlowski
Wallingford, CT

President's Message

(continued from page 1)

Crest: Let's talk about Hartford Audubon Society; your thoughts on where our club is today, and where it will be in the future.

AG: The level of birding expertise among our members is phenomenal. We are a strong organization supported by many dedicated volunteers. We are a vibrant organization with a diverse program menu, offering many opportunities for our members and the general public: the birding walks and trips, monthly member meetings, the various bird counts and contests, the quarterly newsletters, etc. We offer something for everyone.

As with any organization, we have both opportunities and challenges. A few that come to mind are attracting and engaging new members, especially younger people; reaching out to the community and achieving more diversity in our membership; volunteer and succession planning; and dealing with invasive plant species management on our sanctuary properties.

Crest: What else can you tell us?

AG: This year the Board will be engaged in a planning process to develop a long-term strategic plan. Most organizations go through this exercise every five years or so. This is important, as it ensures that Hartford Audubon Society remains strong and relevant in a changing world. It also ensures that we remain focused on our mission; serving both our members and the community. I hope to share the updated strategic plan at this year's annual meeting.

Crest: What do you hope to accomplish during your tenure as President of HAS?

AG: Once the strategic plan is developed, we will have a road map for the future, and priorities will be set. In the meantime, three additional areas come to mind as to where I would like to focus my efforts:

- Member recruitment and engagement: recruiting members, with a focus on younger people, and, as I mentioned before, achieving more diversity among our members;
- Strengthening the volunteer succession planning process, and maintaining an active recruitment process for volunteers;
- Developing and managing to a balanced budget.

Crest: What is our biggest challenge?

AG: Getting members more engaged and achieving even greater participation from our community. Those members who are already engaged are doing a great job, and we should appreciate their contributions. This will be part of the conversation that our Board will be having.

Crest: Any final words to wrap up this interview?

AG: I would especially like to welcome the new members who joined Hartford Audubon Society over the last few years, and I thank you for your interest in the birds. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to go on the various bird walks and trips that HAS offers. This is the best way to improve your birding skills and to meet other members. Upcoming events are listed on page 8 of *The Crest*, as well as on our HAS website.

In the meantime, Happy Birding!



Photos by Chris Fisher

On November 12, fourteen energetic members met at Greenstone Hollow in East Granby and moved 20 cubic yards of mulch to the Wood Thrush and Kinglet Woods trails. This is the type of volunteer work that makes HAS (and our members) so strong.

My Thanks to Everyone

After completing this, my twentieth issue, I will be stepping down as editor of *The Crest*. It has been a privilege to serve in this role for the last five years, and my heartfelt thanks go to then-President Maggie Peretto for giving me the opportunity.

When I joined Hartford Audubon Society, over thirty years ago, I was living out-of-state. When I came home to Simsbury for Christmas in 1990, I read in *The Courant* about the upcoming Christmas Bird Count, and I called Jay Kaplan to ask if I could participate. Never could I have imagined the warm welcome that I received, not only from Jay, but also from other members of HAS. Later, I traveled to Gloucester for the annual Cape Ann trip that was led by the inimitable trio of Betty and Gil Kleiner, and Walter Charsky. I made many new friends that weekend, including Paul Desjardins, Carl and Catherine Ekroth, Suzanne and Steve Davis, Sam Fried, Marjorie Haley, Fran D'Amico, Peter Stephan, Jim Moore, and so many others. It was then that I decided to join Hartford Audubon Society as a life member, not only to maintain a long distance tie to my home, but also to my new birding friends.

I never expected to move back to Connecticut. But one morning in 2005, Shirley woke up and told me that after 36 years in South Florida, she wanted to move to Simsbury. Despite the long New England winters, we never regretted that decision. Nor did I regret taking on my role with *The Crest*. I am indebted to all the wonderful people who helped me along the way, including the writers, the photographers, the proofreaders, and everyone else who contributed so much of their time and effort to the cause.

Please join me in welcoming Will Bugden, who will be taking the reins as our new editor. I know that he will do a remarkable job. In the meantime, I look forward to seeing you out in-the-field, and until then, I wish you all the best in every way.

Doug Beach

2023 Hartford Area Christmas Bird Count Summary

By Jay Kaplan, Compiler

On December 17, 2023 I began my portion of the Hartford Christmas Count at Cedar Hill Cemetery. This is a great location for scarce winter birds such as **Brown Creeper** and **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**. Finding these, as well as lingering birds like **Hermit Thrush**, usually requires time and effort. So, how does one explain how all 3 species were found within two minutes of beginning the Count? The morning started cool, but not frigid, there was no snow on the ground, and water bodies were completely open. It felt like birding in early spring. Is this what we have to look forward to for future Christmas Bird Counts? Time will tell whether a changing climate will affect trends in December bird populations in the future!

Our Count Day drew 98 field observers, and we covered a total 475 miles in 202 hours. These numbers are slightly below last year, when we drew 111 observers. The 93 species was one less than in 2022 (if only one of the **Cackling Geese**, found in two places the day following the Count had been sighted on Count Day!) We tallied 53,531 individual birds on the Count, over 10,000 more birds than in 2022. The largest contributors to this difference were the 6,000 additional crows flying in to roost near the Hartford-West Hartford Town line at the end of the day.

One of the more interesting aspects of this year's Count was a ten year high count for eighteen different species. These high counts included **Greater Scaup**, **Herring Gull**, **Red-bellied Woodpecker**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Blue Jay**, **American Crow**, **Golden-crowned** and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, **Carolina Wren**, **Gray Catbird**, **American Pipit**, **Pine Siskin**, **Chipping Sparrow**, **White-throated Sparrow**, **Eastern Towhee**, **Rusty Blackbird**, **Common Grackle**, and **Yellow-rumped Warbler**. Some of these high counts, like that for the sparrows and the warbler, might be explained by a healthy food crop and the mild weather conditions leading up to Count Day. There were no severe cold snaps or storms to drive down populations of these lingering birds. The increase in Herring Gulls is directly tied to the current conditions of holding trash on Murphy Road in Hartford until it can be incinerated or shipped out of state. Blackbird flocks fluctuate from year to year. In most cases, we can postulate reasons for these increases. Four species showed a ten year low count, including **Hooded Merganser**, **Mourning Dove**, and **Sharp-shinned** and **Red-tailed Hawks**. Anyone have any thoughts on why these species have declined from prior years?!

Unusual species this year included a **Greater** and **Lesser Scaup**, swimming together with **Ring-necked Ducks** on a West Hartford reservoir; **Pied-billed Grebe** for the second time in three years; four **Iceland Gulls** feeding on the aforementioned garbage pile; and a **Brown Thrasher** in Bloomfield, last seen on our Christmas Count in 2019. Even more unusual was a male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** that was found in a large flock of Common Grackles, and four(!) **Palm Warblers**, a species that I cannot recall in the forty plus years that I have served as Count Compiler. These rarities were found in Glastonbury.

In addition to the ten year low counts, **Wood Duck** just barely made the list with a single individual seen in West Hartford. Last year, there were 9, and as recently as 2017, we totaled 26. The

Glastonbury meadows once again came through with a single **Marsh Wren**, making eight out of ten years that this diminutive species has made the list. It has now been eleven years since Northern Saw-whet Owl appeared on our Count, and this species will now come off our ten year list. Other species that went unrecorded this year included Barred Owl, for the second time in three years; Snow Bunting, last missed in 2019; and Purple Finch, recorded only three years out of the last ten. Other than the **Pine Siskins** that are being heard and seen in the area, this was not a "winter finch year!" Redpolls, grosbeaks and crossbills went unreported on all Connecticut counts as far as I know.

Finally, the Hartford crow roost is quite impressive this year. The flight paths to the roost have shifted, and incoming crows are now best seen by looking to the northeast from the Hartford Housing Authority parking lot shortly before dark. The roost size fluctuates from year to year, with an estimated 20,000 **American Crows**, and 45 **Fish Crows** tallied on Count Day, some six thousand more than last year, and double the size of the 2019 roost. The roost will likely remain into mid-February, so if you'd like to see a river of crows streaming over your head, check it out.

Count week birds are those found three days prior and three days following the Count, but not on Count Day, itself. This year, **Bufflehead** was seen prior to Count Day, and **Cackling Goose** was reported from two locations the day following the Count.

As I write this report at year's end, we still await any significant snowfall or extended periods of sub-freezing weather here in the Hartford area. This is the second consecutive year that we are still waiting for winter weather in mid-December. Will this trend continue, and how will it affect birds at this season?

As always, thank you to the area captains, without whose participation this Count would not be successful. Thank you, also, to all those field observers, owlers, and feeder watchers for giving up some time during the Holiday Season to participate in our Count. The Christmas Bird Count, begun in 1900, is the longest running of all "citizen-science" field studies.

Best wishes to you all for the New Year, and I hope to hear from many of you for the Hartford Summer Bird Count, to be held during the second weekend in June, or again for next year's Christmas Bird Count, tentatively scheduled Sunday, December 15, 2024! Happy New Year!

For a 10-year summary of the Hartford Area Christmas Bird Count, please turn to pages 9 through 11 of *The Crest*.

Mini-Grant Applications Due on Feb. 15

There are only two weeks left to apply for a Mini-Grant from Hartford Audubon Society. Our Mini-Grant program helps fund and support initiatives that directly benefit bird life within The State of Connecticut, and especially within the Hartford County area. A grant may be requested for up to \$1,000. Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on February 15, 2024. Guidelines and an application form can be found on the HAS website.

Becoming a Better Birder

By Jay Kaplan, Jamie Meyers, and Doug Beach

Birders have a fascination with owls. For many, this grows during the winter months, perhaps because they long to see owls that are not to be found in our area during other seasons. However, their appearance during a Connecticut winter is by no means certain, and some species may not appear for several years at a time.

Here, in the greater Hartford area, there are three relatively common species: the **Eastern Screech**, **Barred**, and **Great Horned Owls**. While all three are active during the winter months, they are not the ones that quicken a birder's pulse. The owl that perhaps



Snowy Owl

Photo by Martin Kaehrle

excites people more than any other is the **Snowy Owl**. These "Arctic" owls migrate southward in some winters, but not in others, and usually there is an incursion about every four years. Movements can be tied to food availability. In years, when there is a boom in the lemming population, many young Snowy Owl chicks survive to fledge and migrate south in search of food. Such was the case in 2014 when on December 1, a group of birders at the southeastern tip of Newfoundland counted 138 Snowy Owls, up from "only" 42 on the previous day! Many of these birds later appeared on the eastern seaboard as far south as Georgia. Two or three even ended up on Bermuda, traversing 1200 miles of open ocean! Here in Connecticut, birders were finding Snowy Owls along the coast, as well as on inland buildings, highway road signs, and telephone poles. Being denizens of the Arctic, these birds are not nocturnal. In the summer months, the sun never sets in the far north, and the owls cannot wait for night to return before they begin hunting. These habits make it easier to see Snowy Owls than most other species.



Saw-whet Owl

Photo by Sam Fried

Another species, the **Saw-whet Owl**, is more common than one might think. Unlike Snowy Owls, Saw-whets live in the woods but are so secretive that larger owls rarely find them. These diminutive owls nest in Connecticut. However, it is from November through March that one has the best opportunity of finding one, as that is when birds from northern New England and Canada migrate south in search of food. So, how does one find one? Saw-whet Owls prefer thick evergreen stands, and they especially like red cedar groves near water or along power line rights-of-way. Look for their "whitewash" on tree trunks or their pellets on the ground. Another way to find them is to listen to the chickadees. Much as crows will harass larger owls, smaller birds will go after Saw-whets. Perhaps the birds think that by driving a saw-whet owl out of an evergreen grove, there is less chance that the owl might eat them while they are roosting at night.



Long-eared Owl

Photo by Ken Schneider

Two other species of owl to look and listen for in winter are **Long-eared** and **Short-eared Owls**. Long-eared Owls have one of the widest distributions and are one of the most numerous owl

species in the world. That being said, good luck finding one! These owls like woodland edges, and they hunt over open fields at night.



Short-eared Owl

Photo by Bill Asteriades

In the 1800s, this owl was a relatively common nester in our state, but it began to decline in the early twentieth century. When I first came to Conn., Long-eared Owls were occasionally reported from Bloomfield and Glastonbury. In the early 1970s, there were three Long-eared Owls in captivity at Roaring Brook Nature Center that had been injured by cars. There have been very few reports of this owl in our area over the past forty years.



Boreal Owl

Photo by Rick Cech

Similarly, the Short-eared Owl also nested in Connecticut in the 1800s. As our pasturelands disappeared, it ceased to nest in the state. It is now a very uncommon winter resident, more often seen on the coast in salt marshes. So, you can imagine the excitement generated by a report of two Short-eared Owls in a large field in Bloomfield in late December 2023! The birds were still present in early January, providing an opportunity for many birders to add this bird to their life lists.

Any article on winter owls would not be complete without mentioning three other owl species that have occurred, but are not to be expected in our area. The **Boreal Owl** looks much like a Saw-whet but sports a "horn" colored bill. The last Boreal Owl in Connecticut was found in Middlebury in 1992. Zeranski and Craig mention several Hartford area boreal owls from 1932 to 1946.



Great Gray Owl

Photo by Chris Fisher

A bird on our bucket list to see in Connecticut is the **Great Gray Owl**. The "longest" of our owls, its large size is mostly feathers, and it is not nearly as heavy as snowy or Great Horned Owls. The large size, large head, dark concentric facial circles framing the yellow eyes, and the white "bowtie" are diagnostic. There are very few records for this bird in Connecticut, and we know of none in the Hartford area. They can easily be confused with the Barred Owl, and none of the reports have panned out.

The last of the rare owls is the **Northern Hawk Owl**. This is one of the few diurnal owls, as it is not active at night (nocturnal) nor at dusk or dawn (crepuscular). Being non-migratory, there are few records of this owl south of its Holarctic breeding range. On occasion, the Northern Hawk Owl is reported from northern New England or northern New York State. Of significance to Hartford area birders, the last Northern Hawk Owl report in our area comes from South Windsor in 1934. That is now 90 years ago. We would say that we are overdue for a northern hawk owl!



Northern Hawk Owl

Photo by Sam Fried

Hartford Area Field Notes by Jamie Meyers

September through November 2023

The heavy surplus of rainfall from summer continued into the period, with September featuring another 12.15 inches on top of the near record July rains that produced the lion's share of sightings noted here last time. Rain moderated later in the period, as October and November were a bit drier than usual. October was particularly warm, with average readings about 4 degrees higher than the norm.

The shorebird bonanza noted last time continued late summer and early autumn. **Black-bellied Plovers**, uncommon in our area, were oft-seen at Rocky Hill Meadows. As many as 8 were present there from September 19 – October 1. 1 or 2 **American Golden-Plovers** were there from September 19 – October 9, giving birders opportunities to see and compare both species (both MP et al.). That location produced a locally high maximum of 11 **White-rumped Sandpipers** from September 19 to October 5 as well. A **Baird's Sandpiper** was there on September 19 – 20 (JF et al.). Other goodies at Rocky Hill Meadows included a **Long-billed Dowitcher** (JF et al.) and **Stilt Sandpiper** (MK et al.), both on September 24. A **Stilt Sandpiper** was a bit late there on October 9 (JM). A **White-rumped Sandpiper** was across the river at Glastonbury Meadows on September 17 (BA). A **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** dropped into a plowed field at Farmington Meadows on September 13 and remained for a second day (JM/JK). As many as 4 **Dunlins** found refuge on some mudflats at Station 43 in South Windsor from November 10 – 16 (DB/SG).

There were some interesting water related birds later in the period. It's been awhile since a **Barnacle Goose** has been in our area, but one was discovered at a small pond in Suffield on October 28 (AWt). The bird was rediscovered on Halloween at Freshwater Pond in Enfield and enjoyed celebrity status that afternoon (JM et al.). Probably the same bird was at **Broad Brook Pond** in East Windsor on November 8 (KS). A **Pink-footed Goose** was a welcome find at Broad Brook Pond on November 2 (JF et al.). A lucky birding couple was treated to a flyover and photographed **Golden Eagle** there the following day (CW/AWx). While it was a good season north of us for **Black Scoters**, that species was hard to come by in our area. A single female was on the Connecticut River on October 31 (PD et al.). A flock of 43 was present early in the morning at Nepaug Reservoir in Canton and New Hartford on November 20 (JM/JK). A **Red-necked Grebe** was at the same reservoir from October 24 – November 2 (JM/PM/MM). A three grebe species morning there on October 26 included that and 2 **Horned Grebes** (JM). A **White-winged Scoter** was a nice find on October 30 (DB/SG). 3 **Bonaparte's Gulls** dropped into the reservoir on October 18 (JM). It was a good fall regionally for **Red-breasted Mergansers**. A female was at West Hartford's Reservoir 6 on October 27 – 28 (SG et al.). Another was at Nepaug on November 19 (JM).

There were some passerine highlights as well. A **Grasshopper Sparrow** was at Tulmeadow Farm on October 9 (BL/DL). Perhaps the same bird, hard to find, was reported on October 18 (DB). One or more **Dickcissels** were there as well, though quite elusive if it was the same bird (m.ob.). A **Nelson's Sparrow** in the corn maze at Rosedale Farm in Simsbury on October 12 was a lucky find (JM). Another was at Glastonbury Meadows two days later. A **Blue Gros-**

beak was a nice find at Glastonbury Meadows on October 13, and a **Clay-colored Sparrow** was a bit early on September 10 (all BA).

The only **American Bittern** report that I saw was from Strong Road in South Windsor on September 15 (MP). **Great Cormorant** is rarely recorded locally, but one was well documented from Trout Brook in West Hartford on October 3 (YC). 25 **Horned Larks** were a fine yard bird in a suburban Windsor Locks neighborhood on October 7 (PD). **Pine Siskins**, lately hard to find in our area, staged a large incursion mid-period. 50 birds were noted from Mills Pond in Canton on October 15 (JK). It was hard to walk in some pine areas around then and not hear their scratchy vocalizations.

Observers/reporters: Bill Asteraides (BA), Debbie Bishop (DB), Yelana Christian (YC), Paul Desjardins (PD), Jeff Fengler (JF), Sue Gowen (SG), Jay Kaplan (JK), Martin Kaehrle (MK), Brian Lombardo (BL), Debbie Lombardo (DL), Paul Mahler (PM), Barry Marsh (BM), Michele McDermott (MM), Jamie Meyers (JM), Maggie Peretto (MP), Kris Scully (KS), Alison Wilcox (AWx), Chris Wilcox (CW), Abigail Wolcott (AWt)

Please send reports to Jamie Meyers, 4 Sexton Hollow Road, Canton, CT 06019 or e-mail them to me at sunnycrted-bird@gmail.com. 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!*

A Word of Caution About Winter Owls

In case any winter owls show up this year, now might be a good time to mention some important birding etiquette for the safety of the birds. Please do not approach winter owls, as flushing them from a perch wastes the precious energy that they need to survive the winter. This is also true for eagles, hawks, and other birds. Taking a better photograph is no justification for causing these birds to fly. Similarly, one should not play tapes in order to lure in owls. Recently, someone playing a Saw-whet Owl tape in an area forest was dive-bombed by a larger owl that was looking for a Saw-whet snack. Alerting Great Horned or Barred Owls to the presence of a Saw-whet is not appropriate in order to add a bird to your list.



Photo by Tom Griswold

Is winter making you feel crabby? Well, here's a pleasant thought. Meteorological spring begins in just over four weeks, and the annual Daylight Savings Bird-a-thon arrives on March 10, just ten days later!

On Changing the Names

By John Weeks

With regard to the American Ornithological Society's decision to change the names of certain birds, I questioned whether eliminating all the personal names from the North American taxonomy in order to expunge a handful of invidious associations wasn't a case of throwing out the baby with the bath water.

But I've come around to believing that this is the best way to settle the matter. Bird names have changed constantly over the past two centuries, and personal names have been dropped from time to time. For example, the Arizona Woodpecker used to be called Strickland's Woodpecker. There was nothing unsavory about Strickland, as far as I know. Another example is Coues' Flycatcher, which, like Strickland's, was renamed decades ago (the current name is the Greater Pewee). Coues was one of the greatest early ornithologists and a founder of the American Ornithological Union (which became today's AOS). Apparently, he was a strong supporter of women's rights. His name went to the dustbin along with Strickland's, not because they were perceived as being obnoxious men, but simply because it was felt that descriptive names were preferable to personal eponyms.

In the same way, many of the other names to be dropped are anodyne. Anna's Hummingbird is named after a duchess. I know absolutely zero about her and had to look up the name to learn even this much. It is a pretty name, and I will miss it, but establishing the principle that bird names should be descriptive is long overdue. More examples: Clark's Grebe and Clark's Nutcracker are named after two different men. Everyone knows that Meriwether Lewis was, but who was the other Clark? LeConte's Sparrow and LeConte's Thrasher are also named after two different men; cousins who were both named John!

The charge has been raised that this amounts to erasing history. I disagree. The origin of so many of these names is preserved, for the most part, only in ornithological history books, and that won't change. For comparison, think of all the thousands and thousands of historical figures who bulked large in their time, but whose names today are readily known only to specialists and their graduate students. How many 19th-century vice presidents can one name? Yet they aren't "canceled," they are instead consigned to the history books. History may not be past, as Faulkner once said, but it is definitely sifted.

What should the names be? I would love to see the AOS delve into the names that Native Americans gave to the birds around them. Provided that they are suitable—descriptive and not too long—they could be translated into English. What we call the Magnolia Warbler, the Quebecois refer to as the Ash-crowned Warbler. I had never paid much attention to this feature of the bird (other field marks are the ones conventionally pointed out) until I ran across the French name. Who knows what field marks, formerly hidden behind cryptic eponyms, might be incorporated into the new names? Making the names descriptive will be a great learning aid for future generations of birders (as well as those who watch birds at their feeders). It's just we old timers who will have to struggle with these unfamiliar monikers. But then, one only has to travel outside the U.S. to experience what it is like to start all over learning bird names again. This time, we'll just have to do the same thing at home, but with only about 80 new names to absorb.

Trip Reports

Paul Carrier Hawk Watch

September 16, 2023

Seven birders gathered at Booth Hill in West Hartland, CT. Although the weather was cloudy, we recorded 1 **Osprey**, 4 **Bald Eagles**, 4 **Sharp-shinned Hawks**, 2 **Cooper's Hawks**; 100 **Broad-winged Hawks**, and 2 **Red-tailed Hawks**. Considering the weather, it was a good day for hawk watching.

-Submitted by Joan Lupacchino and Richard Nieman-

Paul Carrier Hawk Watch

September 17, 2023

It was a nice, sunny day with mild winds, perfect for viewing hawk migration. Six members gathered for this hawk watch. We were delighted to have our new president attend his first hawk watch event and witness his first Broad-winged kettle. We recorded 1 **Osprey**, 1 **Bald Eagle**, 1 **Cooper's Hawk**, 1 **Red-shouldered Hawk**, 1 **American Kestrel**, and 187 **Broad-winged Hawks**. Thanks to all who participated, and we look forward to even more members joining us next September.

-Submitted by Joan Lupacchino & Richard Nieman-

Raymond Brook Preserve

October 14, 2023

Six birders gathered for this new trip offering at Raymond Brook Preserve in Hebron. In addition to four HAS members, we were joined by two representatives from Hebron Pollinator Pathways. Soaking in the sunshine and the cool autumn air, we garnered 17 species in the parking lot in the first 15 minutes.

Starting down the trail, we made a brief stop at the new bird and pollinator garden that has been planted thanks to a HAS grant. Our Pollinator Pathway friends spoke about the variety of native plants; also about expansion and maintenance plans for the future, and the ongoing work to reduce the invasive plants growing nearby.

From there we trekked through marshy, wooded/ brushy, and field habitats, tallying 28 species, and covering about 2.5 miles in just over 2 hours.

Highlights included **Black-and-white Warbler**, **Palm Warbler**, 2 **Red-shouldered Hawks**, many **Eastern Phoebe**s and **Eastern Bluebirds**, and a nearly constant presence of **Blue Jays**, **Carolina Wrens**, and **Gray Catbirds**.

-Submitted by Gabrielle Bugden-



Thanks to HAS member Sam Fried for sending this hysterical photo of a fledgling Sandhill Crane. Although uncommon in Southern New England, Sandhill Cranes occasionally make appearances in Hartford County. Just be sure to have your camera and your sense of humor ready.

Golden-crowned Kinglets and Know-it-alls

By Abby Wolcott

Back in the day, when winter set in, we were penned in. By the time the weather turned, we had exhausted our supply of caps, which we would pound with rocks. We had dammed up every waterway, big and small, and played flashlight tag until our mother called us home. Having a whole slew of boys, and one little girl who probably was an afterthought, did not make house arrest any more appealing for her or for us. So, by and large, we set up shop in the family room. We had a record player on which I played "Sugar Sugar" by the Archies around the clock. There was a hamster in a cage who slept during all our waking hours, and a turtle in a plastic lagoon. We had an assortment of Steiff hand puppets and a big set of army men that saw a lot of action, even though at least one of my brothers would become a CO when Vietnam was happening. And then there were the usual creepy crawler machines, etch-a-sketches, silly putty and yo-yos; anything to keep us out of our mother's hair.

But the biggest attraction was the bird feeder; under the maple, and outside the sliding glass door to the family room. There we set our eyes on all the usual visitors, and also some infrequent ones like crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks. That was back when winter was winter, and the birds knew it. Since we were learning all the bird names, my mom bought a round puzzle of song birds. We had that on a card table to work on when our faces weren't pressed to the glass. The puzzle had some of our favorites: Blue Jays, cardinals, and chickadees. As thrilling as they all are, I could not take my eyes off the Golden-crowned Kinglet, which was depicted upside down on a tuft of grass. The colors, the agility, the diminutive size, and that crown; what was not to love? I made it known to my brothers that the kinglet was the best bird, and that was all good and fine until my know-it-all cousin arrived to play with the boys and announced that I was never gonna see that bird. Humpf!

And like most know-it-alls, he spoke with great authority. So decades passed, and my interest in birds ebbed and flowed in direct relation to my interest in boys. But once I had tricked one boy into buying a house with a white picket fence and having a bunch of kids, suddenly the birds gained momentum. Like my parents, we fed the birds, we hoofed it around in wild places, and we brought our binoculars with us. And, I pecked away at my life list. I was pretty happy to add the Ruby-crowned Kinglet with his tell tale eye circle, but the Golden-crowned Kinglet eluded me. Believe me, I checked out every small, flitting bird but could not get a positive id. But sometimes the know-it-alls in life get their just deserts, and that finally happened when, just a few weeks ago, a Golden-crowned Kinglet descended into our Japanese maple right outside our window. We knew he was something different, but he would not be still. Patience prevailed, however, and he did light on a branch long enough for me to see his impressive black eyebrow, and his ever-so-lovely lemon yellow crown. He didn't stay long as he had insects to catch, but his image is on repeat in my head. And I can't help but smirk when I think of him and that know-it-all cousin. It just goes to show that the know-it-alls in this world don't really know it all!

Trip Reports

Hartford Crow Roost

December 9, 2023

Participants included about 25 birders and many thousands of **American Crows**, each watching the other around the Hartford Housing Authority building at 180 John D. Wardlaw Way in Hartford. The temperature was around 50 degrees F, winds were calm, and the clouds to our west were lit orange and yellow at sunset.

Looking east from our hilltop location, between 4 and 4:30 p.m., we could see crows flying from north to south, sometimes in a dispersed line, sometimes in groups of a hundred or more. They appeared in the sky as tiny dots that became larger as they approached, and they flew on to disappear behind the trees to our south. At about 4:30, a **Red-Tailed Hawk** landed in a tree at the edge of the parking lot, and watched with us as about 800 crows flew right over our heads and into the tops of the trees to our south. We could hear the caws of American Crows, the more nasal double calls of **Fish Crows**, and the rattling calls that are likely



given only by female crows. Shortly after 4:45, the crows that had landed near us started to call even more, rose from their trees, and flew toward the trees on the west side of Newfield Ave. where we could already see clusters of other crows in the

upper branches. We could also see a dense stream of many thousands of crows flying from the southeast toward the same Newfield Ave. roost area. Periodically groups of crows rose from the roost trees, circled, calling, and re-landed in the same area. This may have been a display to attract stragglers to the roost, but twice it seemed to be triggered by honks from a truck horn, perhaps from a non-fan of the crows roosting nearby. When we left at about 5 pm, the roost trees were quite full, with more birds flying in from the southeast, although with far fewer new crows arriving than 10 minutes earlier.

Thanks to Beverly Greenspan, who helped me scout for the trip the evening before, to Sarah Faulkner, who sent out an endorsing email, and to everyone who showed up to enjoy the crow show!

- Submitted by Sylvia Halkin-

SUBMIT YOUR TRIP REPORTS

Field trip leaders: please email your reports to Sandi Jones. Her address is frogcop@cox.net

THANK YOU FOR YOUR NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS!

Please send newsletter submissions for the Spring issue by **April 1, 2024**
E-mail them to Will Bugden at cresteditor@hartfordaudubon.org

We Just Can't Get Enough of Those Eerie Owls!



Long-eared Owls
Photo by Ken Schneider



Eastern Screech-Owl
Photo by Merle Yoder



Northern Saw-whet Owl
Photo by Sam Fried



Eastern Screech-Owl
Photo by Merle Yoder

Calendar of Events

Note: Please refer to the 2023-24 Member's Handbook, the HAS website, or allHAS for additional details and/or updates.

Feb. 3-4: **Cape Cod, MA;** stay at The Cove Motel; Orleans, MA
Leader: Peter Stephan; stephraf@aol.com

Feb. 13: **Member Meeting;** St. James Church; West Hartford
Tanzania Birds with Paul Fusco
Social Time at 7:00 p.m.; meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

Mar. 2: **Stn. 43 Beginners Bird Walk;** S. Windsor (8:00 a.m.)
Leader: Jon Ward; jward88787@aol.com

Mar. 2: **Birding With Your Phone;** (10 a.m.)
Contact Sarah Faulkner to reserve space: sffaulkner@comcast.net

Mar. 10: **Daylight Savings Bird-a-thon**
Organized by Maggie Peretto; wings.mp@gmail.com

Mar. 12: **Member Meeting;** St. James Church; West Hartford
Speaker to be determined
Social Time at 7:00 p.m.; meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

Mar. 16: **Woodcocks at Nod Brook;** Simsbury (7:15 p.m.)
Leader: Brian Toal; BrianToal@SBCGlobal.net

Mar. 19: **Wildlife Series**
Peregrine Falcons with Steve Broker
McAuley Residence; West Hartford; 7:30 p.m.
Organized by Frances D'Amico; frandamico525@yahoo.com

Mar. 24: **Silver Sands State Park;** Milford (8:00 a.m.)
Leader: Maggie Peretto; wings.mp@gmail.com

Mar. 24: **Sachuest Point;** Middletown, Rhode Island (8:30 a.m.)
Leader: Paul Desjardins; Paul.Desjardins2@gmail.com

Apr. 6: **Simsbury's Great Pond** (8:00 a.m.)
Leader: Jon Ward; jward88787@aol.com

Apr. 9: **Member Meeting;** St. James Church; West Hartford
Birds and Wildlife of Guyana with Paul Cianfaglione
Social Time at 7:00 p.m.; meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.

Apr. 13: **Greenstone Hollow;** East Granby (8:00 a.m.)
Leaders: Chris and Diane Fisher; ChrisF001@aol.com

Apr. 13: **Simsbury River Walk;** Simsbury (8:00 a.m.)
Leader: Jon Ward; jward88787@aol.com

Apr. 16: **Wildlife Series**
Vultures with Katie Fallon
NOTE: This is a ZOOM only meeting that begins at 7:00 p.m.
A link will be sent to AllHAS
Organized by Frances D'Amico; frandamico525@yahoo.com

Apr. 20: **Stn. 43 Beginners Bird Walk;** S. Windsor (8:00 a.m.)
Leader: Jon Ward; jward88787@aol.com

Apr. 24: **Glastonbury's Great Pond** (8:00 a.m.)
Leader: Annette Pasek; apasek@cox.net

Apr. 27 thru May 19: **Annual Spring Census**
Compiler: Jamie Meyers; sunnycfredbird@gmail.com

Apr. 27: **Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge;** Longmeadow, MA
Leader: Jon Ward; jward88787@aol.com (8:00 a.m.)

Apr. 28: **Bird Walk; Roaring Brook Nature Center;** Canton
Leader: Jay Kaplan; jaybrd49@aol.com (6:30 a.m.)

May 1: **Lewis Farm Sanctuary;** Suffield (8:30 a.m.)
Leader: Abby Wolcott; abwol81@cox.net

May 4: **Quarry Park;** Rocky Hill (7:00 a.m.)
Leader: Larry Lunden; larrylunden@hartfordaudubon.org

May 4: **Keney Park;** Windsor (8:00 a.m.)
Leaders: Annette Pasek; apasek@cox.net
Al Gatti; algatti22@gmail.com

Hartford Area Christmas Bird Count Ten Year Results

Hartford Audubon Crest

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. of Observers	106	103	72	91	84	87	112	85	111	98
Total Hours	253.5	240	184	200	206	224	230.5	205	242	202
Total Miles	506	563	487	505.5	601	589.5	547	516.5	552.5	475.5
No. of Individual Birds	42336	47,100	37580	42602	39,414	33,985	31292	45871	42199	53,531
No. of Species	96	85	90	89	84	89	87	87	94	93
Snow Goose	1	2	4	5			1	1		
Pink-footed Goose								4		
Greater White-fronted Goose	1	1	CW	1	1	1		1	1	1
Brant						1				
Cackling Goose	1	3						CW	1	CW
Canada Goose	8317	6559	6297	10,789	5,485	6,757	3945	12,401	6552	6952
Tundra Swan		CW								
Mute Swan	14	11	10	10	2	1	7	3	10	7
Wood Duck		2	20	26	4	5	1	4	9	1
Northern Shoveler	6	10	2	1						
Gadwall	4	CW	3	6	1	2	1			
American Wigeon	5		3					5	2	2
Mallard	1190	848	851	745	1025	1062	933	603	962	922
American Black Duck	287	173	159	179	97	185	225	112	142	206
Northern Pintail	23					4	2	2	2	4
Green-winged Teal	2	9	12	5	CW	6	5	7	9	6
Canvasback			1							
Ring-necked Duck			65	15		1	21	33	179	113
Greater Scaup							1	1		2
Lesser Scaup										1
Bufflehead										CW
Common Goldeneye	4		3	7	5	5	2	3	2	3
Hooded Merganser	87	74	70	108	64	56	55	70	56	53
Common Merganser	89	24	217	129	101	170	153	116	115	161
Red-breasted Merganser	1									
Ruddy Duck	3		5	40	2	17	9	16	13	32
Wild Turkey	32	37	25	89	92	9	34	78	5	51
Ring-necked Pheasant	2		8	3	3	7	7	XXXXXX X	XXXXXX X	XXXX
Pied-billed Grebe								1		1
Rock Pigeon	1074	810	1267	1238	1024	863	1103	1084	1055	991
Mourning Dove	1016	795	796	644	862	709	749	551	764	522
Black-chinned Hummingbird									1	
American Coot		5				1		CW	2	
Killdeer	CW		CW		1				2	2
American Woodcock	2									
Wilson's Snipe		1	1			1				
Black-headed Gull									1	
Ring-billed Gull	1026	952	818	408	706	529	338	731	896	784
Herring Gull	188	133	204	74	82	136	225	111	301	360
Iceland Gull	1	1			CW		2	1	4	4
Lesser Black-backed Gull	1									
Great Black-backed Gull	53	31	87	22	19	19	11		9	14

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Common Loon	4									
Great Blue Heron	19	11	5	8	9	15	13	20	35	34
Black Vulture	22	7	58	53	54	60	137	60	70	74
Turkey Vulture	19	27	11	14	8	28	8	45	17	28
Northern Harrier	10	7	11	5	3	3	6	4	2	10
Sharp-shinned Hawk	13	10	6	6	3	5	4	3	9	<u>2</u>
Cooper's Hawk	23	8	7	19	13	17	20	14	19	8
Bald Eagle	11	6	13	6	10	16	10	16	9	15
Red-shouldered Hawk	11	5	5	3	4	6	15	7	9	11
Red-tailed Hawk	146	120	89	106	105	127	141	110	115	<u>86</u>
Rough-legged Hawk	1					1				
Eastern Screech-Owl	6	14	6	23	15	11	21	15	13	16
Great Horned Owl	6	7	<u>1</u>	13	6	5	23	1	8	5
Barred Owl	3	1	<u>3</u>	1	6	1	2		1	
Snowy Owl			CW	CW						
Short-eared Owl								1		
Belted Kingfisher	22	14	22	13	15	19	15	21	28	26
Red-headed Woodpecker		3								
Red-bellied Woodpecker	172	213	139	144	132	199	171	184	201	235
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	18	14	8	29	3	10	19	19	27	37
Downy Woodpecker	270	239	156	137	119	166	242	166	198	158
Hairy Woodpecker	61	38	33	23	34	64	54	39	58	48
Northern Flicker	112	82	119	103	63	126	50	92	136	129
Pileated Woodpecker	11	6	9	5	6	7	18	7	25	12
American Kestrel	2	1	2		1	1	3	1	1	2
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Merlin	4	5	5	4	2	3	6		8	3
Peregrine Falcon	6	<u>1</u>	5	2	4	5	2	4	4	6
Eastern Phoebe	1	CW								
Northern Shrike					1			1		
Blue Jay	611	619	539	722	491	713	775	335	653	810
American Crow	16,000	18,500	14,000	13,000	19,000	10,000	11,000	11,500	14,000	20,000
Fish Crow	12	42	24	13	17	14	7	18	46	45
Common Raven	7	10	5	5	5	15	12	18	16	16
Horned Lark	162	104	809	88	262	<u>20</u>	208	43	380	314
N. Rough-winged Swallow	4	1								
Black-capped Chickadee	688	427	460	246	333	279	455	210	493	300
Tufted Titmouse	421	422	250	399	200	217	379	133	443	191
Red-breasted Nuthatch	5	8	3	1	6		10		2	5
White-breasted Nuthatch	248	250	126	186	140	154	243	149	238	171
Brown Creeper	20	8	11	10	18	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	9	8	15
House Wren				1						
Winter Wren	17	2	2	3	4	3	7	9	8	6
Marsh Wren	1	1	1	1		2		1	2	1
Carolina Wren	112	35	53	54	62	121	139	104	175	200
Golden-crowned Kinglet	15	8	12	40	4	27	8	15	9	78
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		CW	6	3	2	7	2	2	3	15
Eastern Bluebird	84	51	15	36	25	66	43	60	106	68

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Hermit Thrush	9	2	1	7	2	2	2	2	3	2
American Robin	484	2592	632	404	388	283	253	1172	596	1090
Gray Catbird	3	1		1	3	3	2	5	4	8
Brown Thrasher						1				1
Northern Mockingbird	86	96	47	59	48	69	60	37	61	48
European Starling	2156	3744	2520	2174	3223	3752	2259	4500	3133	4401
Cedar Waxwing	24	51	55	18	3	68	6	1	5	60
House Sparrow	815	1345	702	817	1076	899	824	696	1225	840
American Pipit	1		11	16	CW		55	CW		68
House Finch	328	445	191	241	118	214	333	331	305	186
Purple Finch	3	1							2	
Common Redpoll							70			
Pine Siskin	3						2			7
American Goldfinch	558	471	332	318	335	544	295	277	345	349
Lapland Longspur			1							
Snow Bunting	3		5	20			6	2	2	
Chipping Sparrow			2	2	1	1				7
Clay-colored Sparrow									CW	
Field Sparrow		3	1	3	12	9	6	11	6	11
Fox Sparrow		8	5	4					6	6
American Tree Sparrow	399	74	78	281	294	108	492	149	120	81
Dark-eyed Junco	1785	1305	1468	1106	1098	823	1055	1196	1664	1073
White-crowned Sparrow	9	1	12	9	24	7	10	18	3	3
White-throated Sparrow	398	424	440	482	444	339	495	499	393	729
Vesper Sparrow							1	5		
Savannah Sparrow	119	5	32	21	32	17	47	8	15	30
Song Sparrow	298	274	271	500	434	285	456	370	341	355
Lincoln's Sparrow		CW	1		1			1		
Swamp Sparrow	8	12	15	11	36	36	12	27	15	22
Eastern Towhee	1	1	2		1	1			1	7
Yellow-headed Blackbird										1
Eastern Meadowlark				2						
Baltimore Oriole									CW	
Red-winged Blackbird	456	1867	1107	441	659	952	944	2029	3927	3067
Brown-headed Cowbird	6	306	19	67	2	130	83	25	406	150
Rusty Blackbird	5	CW	12	18		1	2	2	17	35
Common Grackle	1198	1952	1357	5267	47	2086	1107	4868	558	6157
Palm Warbler										4
Yellow-rumped Warbler	8	9		16	15	30		53	26	57
Black-and-white Warbler		CW								
Common Yellowthroat									1	
Northern Cardinal	355	303	304	228	355	235	314	213	347	301
CW Seen three days prior to and/or three days following the Count, but not on Count Day.										
Bold = 10 year high count,										
Unusual species										
<u>Underlined = 10 year low</u>										
<u>count in 2023</u>										
										53,531