



“The Mattabesec Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is committed to environmental leadership and education for the benefit of the community and the earth’s biodiversity.”




Upcoming Field Trip: Fall 2019

October 12 (Saturday 8:00 a.m.)

Sparrow Crawl

Join Larry Cyrulik in visits to an old field on Long Hill Road, then Middletown Nature Gardens (off Randolph Road), and lastly, the

Durham fairgrounds. Five species of sparrows may be noted, including the elusive White-crowned sparrow, as well as other fall migrants.(Last year we were graced by a Meadow lark.) Meet at the parking lot at the corner of Lawn Ave. and High St. Call Larry for info 860-342-4785 or 860-635-1880. 

Field Trip Reports

Wildflower Walk in the Park, April 20, 2019

April’s showers brought forth April’s flowers, for there was little sunshine to succor the more than twenty species noted amid the traprock crevices and woodlands of Giufridda Park.

Low hanging clouds like beards of Biblical patriarchs trickled beads of moisture down upon the shoulders of the botanists as they tread over the gnarled roots of the white pines punctuating the path beside the reservoir. Asters patiently awaited their spotlight on the stage—late summer. Surrounding them were Canada lily-of-the-valley in bud and the spotted, lime-green leaves of Dog’s-tooth violets, from which buttery yellow blossoms nodded in an expression of obeisance. Under the chaff of pine boughs plucked from the trunks of trees by the icy hands of winter, Nodding trillium emerged with their signature purple flowers lending hopeful color to the gloom of the wet understory. They stood in clumps, shoulder to shoulder; silent, regal, and self-aware.

A damp chill breeze flowed over the undulating path and the lapping, grey, cold water along the shores of the reservoir. Chipping sparrows materialized as if by magic from the pine needed floor of the earth. Higher up came the feint chitterings of pine warblers.

Rising to a plateau lying below talus debris falling from trap rock cliffs, the botanists discovered Ramps (wild leeks) surrounded by Bloodroot and Dutchman’s breeches. Stalks of Rue anemone topped with rays of white eyelash-like

flowers arose between blocks of broken, grey basalt. Making their way along the slippery jumbled talus between which flowed rivulets of rain water, the botanists puzzled over some specimens, or positively ascertained others. There were the reliable Spring beauties; the Blue cohosh in bud; the Ginger with its endearing, shy bloom; and the Hepatica with its fuzzy, clover-shaped basal leaves. Both white and purple Violets were noted.

A difficult but rewarding climb to Lamentation mountain added Early saxifrage, Pussytoe, and fields of Rue anemone to the list of wonderments. Moisture fell from the lachrymose sky, then relented. Following the accordion-like trail of Lamentation led to the site of Yellow and Pale corydalis. The Yellow corydalis held its tube-shaped flower demurely to its breast, but the Pale was still in bud. There, too, the Columbine deigned to tarry, and would blossom on a future day.

Looking down from the promontory on an open field, a pair of Turkeys were seen dancing in a timeless rite of spring: the male displaying, the female pecking the grass in an expression of practised nonchalance. The spell was rudely dissolved by an intrusion in the guise of a golf cart whose operator inexplicably drove straight at the romancing Turkeys, driving them from the field. And the earth’s progeny, though seemingly mute, spoke as vociferously as if they were blaring trumpets: how to explain the incongruousness of mankind?

Two participants | 21 flower species

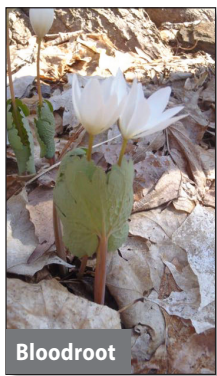
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New Exhibit at Florence Griswold Museum



Bloodroot

Field Trip Reports *continued*

Dave Titus Memorial Warbler Walk, May 4, 2019

...and at my back I always hear, time's winged chariot hurrying near... Andrew Marvel

There is no time now; it drips away like the shadows from the trees as the May sun struggles through the obscuring clouds. Oak leaves unfurl from buds, supple and unblemished in a skin of lime-green chlorophyll. Flowers emerge and droop in grape-like clusters. The inch worms dangle from gossamer threads defying gravity, but become vulnerable to the arriving neo-tropical migrants. Tentatively, the birds alight singly at first; then in determined waves, unimpeded by walls or barriers.

There is no time now; in the stillness of early morning the birders gather to partake in the rite of spring. Vicariously, they too have survived the immense flight over the Gulf of Mexico; relished the bountiful offerings of the coast; or suffered the paucity of surcease in the suburbs. They have, like their feathered compatriots, staved off the confusion of blaring midnight suns emanating from cities, and seen companions flail against reflective walls of glass, an ignominious end to their journey. The avian-within-human became as light as a twenty-five cent piece, and alighted on the limbs of welcoming oaks.

Proceeding down the now-active railroad bed, it is "Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears," for it is with those organs that many of the "objects of desire" are discerned. The Wood thrush sings, first voice of spring, and resuscitates youth and hope in the breast. Then a Scarlet tanager vocalizes somewhere off in the canopy; it flies forth in a surprising display, a black and red note upon a green symphonic score. The staff is suddenly filled with two more Tanagers. A hidden Baltimore oriole's bright warble lends a sense of harmony; if only it would come down from the canopy and take a bow at the podium!

There is no more time now. A golf course comes into view. White balls on an emerald carpet take the place of the Killdeer that have been seen there in the past. Tree swallows dip at a manicured pool of water, bubbling like grey

champagne under the influence of an oxygenating pump. A Blue bird materializes on a branch of a Red maple.

Turning away from the rail bed, the group ascends to an overlook of the Connecticut river. The freshet continued, and the river dutifully performed its work, that of transporting silt. The sloping trail dips and rises, levels off. Oak and hickory trees leaf out, towering above and suffering one to crane the neck uncomfortably. A Great-crested flycatcher called: "Can you see me? Here I am, or maybe I'm over there".

At the edge of an eroding bluff underlain with soft gravel, a whispering Worm-eating warbler stealthily moved through the understory. The steep slopes are a preferred habit for this specie.

The familiar sound of a squeaky wheel reached the ears, and a Black-and-white warbler wound its way around a trunk of a Black birch. Teacher-teacher-teacher! The Ovenbird is loud, but its corporal presence is indistinct.

The trail becomes as precipitous as a camel's back. At last it reaches a plateau with a view of the yellow waters of the rapidly flowing river. There is no more time. Bicyclists hurry past with determined, pumping strokes, breaking the spell, but only for a moment.

The call of a Screech owl emanates from a machine. Another Worm-eating warbler replies, and then two Barred owls, woken from their diurnal meditations, hoot in the far distance: "Who beckons us from sleep, who beckons us from sleep, who-wa?" The conjurer with the recorder smiles.

The trail bends seductively; a flurry of activity comes with it: a Black-throated green warbler dashes forward; then a Red-eyed and a Yellow-throated vireo make an appearance. There is a multitude of Yellow-rumps! Necks are aflame, but breasts are required.

A slow progression takes the group to the starting point of their trip. Sighs of satisfaction. There is no more time now; it cannot be grasped, it cannot be captured. The golden sun moves through the canopy of trees like a scythe.

Four participants | 43 bird species total | 9 warblers

Mattabassett River Canoe Trip, June 1, 2019

A warming June sun endowed the riparian trees and shrubs with a crown of gold. The camouflaged canoe with its shining teak-oiled gunwales slid into the Connecticut River over tan and black shoreline deposits, and felt the pulse of the current, tame now after the recent spring freshet. Passing by Wilcox island, home to a Bald eagle's nest, the paddlers glided easily with the curvature of the channel, and entered

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Field Trip Reports *continued*

the mouth of the Mattabassett that lapped at the concrete bulwarks of the Route 9 highway bridge.

The paddles silently dipped and broke the dark surface of the stream, and a succession of coordinated strokes brought the canoe around a curvature of verdant riverbank. It was an emerald contrast to the nervous machinations of the adjacent highway whose intrusive noise never fully relented, but became an increasingly distant distraction as the canoe plied farther up the Mattabassett's meanders.

Fishermen made paths through the Ostrich ferns along the banks. Smoke gently rose from fires. Someone was pulling in a large fish; there were excited shouts. The sun glowed golden on the supple green ferns and radiated from the green scales of the capitulating fish.

The canoe soon passed the confluence of the Coginchaug and Mattabassett rivers, notably marked with a beard of pickerel weed and sedge. A Great egret stalked the shallows, standing out like a white exclamation point among the lime-green fronds. Great blue herons arose around every bend, squawking displeasure.

The Mattabassett has a 68 square mile watershed. It is a low-gradient river with a u-shaped channel. Its banks are varied, with numerous avenues lined with tussock sedge leading away from the main stem of the river into the interior of a wet meadow. This meadow was once the glacial Lake Middletown.

Past an abandoned eagle's nest, D.C. Cormorants rose up, and Red wing blackbirds kir-ker-eed from their vantage points upon active beaver lodges. Great crested flycatchers chirped in the silver maple canopy. Rounding curves where wind fallen trees stretched their denuded branches into the tea-colored water, the canoe penetrated farther up stream.

Helen Carlson Sanctuary Trip, June 1, 2019

Sharon Dellinger, secretary for MAS, led a guided bird walk through our Helen Carlson Sanctuary on June 1st as part of CT Forest and Parks Association's annual Trails Day Weekend. Rodrigo Pinto, board member, who has been helping to prepare the trail, also led the way. Seven additional people attended, including a very young birder and two millennials on their first bird walks! Hikers came from Hamden, Marlborough, Wolcott, Berlin, and Rocky Hill.

We observed 35 species during the two hours spent in the field. Highlights include two Yellow-billed Cuckoos, several American Redstarts and Warbling Vireos. Before 8 am Sharon heard two Barred Owls caterwauling behind the bog. After the group dispersed, Chris Howe and Sharon observed a Red-Shouldered Hawk getting mobbed by a united force

The black banks glistened in the sun. The tide slowly rose. Cottonwood trees shed their seeds like snowflakes that didn't melt; they filled the air and punctuated the surface of the river and gathered in great white balls of fluff. The canoe glided underneath highway overpasses where Pigeons brooded and nested on iron support beams, and past urban intrusions along Route 72, but just as quickly floated away from them.

The quickening of the current and the visible bottom of the river coming up to meet the hull of the canoe denoted an imminent end of navigable waters. The canoe pulled up to a muddy disembarkation.

Avoiding the poison ivy monoculture, the canoeists noted numerous *Arisaema dracontium*, Green dragon plants. They are members of the arum family with a long, dull yellow spadix, or tongue of flowers, that make the plants so unique and interesting. Impatiens, or touch-me-nots, grew to phenomenal heights in the moist, rich substrate. A Yellow swallow tail butterfly kept its proboscis imbedded in the wet sand extracting liquids and minerals.

The river rapidly flowed over chunks of Portland arkose, the brownstone bedrock of the river. In shallow pools invasive Asian clams and native mussels, mostly *Elliptio* and Alewife floaters, lay submerged in sandy deposits, shells awry. From the shaded banks a Phoebe flitted from shrub to shrub, and an Eastern wood Pee-wee called again and again, reminding one of the persistence of life along one of our most urban waterways.

Two participants | 34 species birds

LC



Green Dragons, emerging and with with spadix

of Common Grackles and a male Baltimore Oriole. A Yellow-throated Vireo made itself known and with a little persistence they were able to see the beautiful male singing its slow, repetitive "3-A" song. We were thankful for the good weather and insect repellent (the mosquitoes were fierce!). The Helen Carlson Sanctuary is a sight to behold.

Nine participants | 35 species. 🌿 Sharon Dellinger

Please email MAS with your Email Address

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. 🌿

Not to Be Missed

The Florence Griswold Museum's summer exhibit is not to be missed. *Fragile Earth* showcases the diverse approaches taken by ecologically concerned artists, illustrating the powerful role they play in advocating for environmental causes.

The museum commissioned artists Jennifer Angus, Mark Dion, Courtney Mattison, and James Prosek to create a unique experience for the Flo Gris, as the Old Lyme museum is known locally. Each artist has used traditional and non-traditional materials to inform the viewer about the role of

humans in the transformation of earth's ecology from an artist's point of view, which just may change the way you've visualized your role as naturalist, scientist, researcher, or plain old observer.

This exhibit is not to be missed, and you may find yourself revisiting it over and over. 🌿

<https://florencegriswoldmuseum.org/fragile-earth/>
Florence Griswold Museum, 96 Lyme Street, Old Lyme, CT
Alison Guinness, MAS President



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