



Mattabesec Audubon Society

A Chapter of NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY



# Wingbeat

Winter/Spring 2018

Volume 44 • Number 4

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.

## Year of the Bird

National Audubon announced that to mark the upcoming centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act this year, National Geographic is joining Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Bird Life International to make 2018 the "Year of the Bird."

The Year of the Bird will celebrate the wonder of our feathered friends and provide an opportunity for people everywhere to recommit themselves to protecting birds today and for the next hundred years. Through twelve months of science, conservation, and

storytelling, the Year of the Bird will examine how our changing environment is driving dramatic losses among bird species around the globe and highlight what we can do to help reverse this negative trend. For each month of 2018, there will be a **theme** to inspire people to "bird their world" and take action for birds. The effort will kick-off on January 5, 2018. Watch for the Year of the Bird website for monthly themes and ideas to celebrate birds.

from Alison Guinness, MAS president



## Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas: Update

from Alison Guinness, MAS president

The new *Connecticut Bird Atlas* will map all of Connecticut's bird life, whether breeding, wintering, or migrating through our state. Starting spring 2018, birdwatchers can sign up to document the distribution, abundance, and breeding activities of birds at sites throughout the entire state. Citizen scientists will be asked to choose specified sections of the state ("blocks") and help to survey the bird life of that block. The resulting data will be used to document changes since the last comprehensive survey of the state's birds, which happened in the early 1980s; to

inform the State Wildlife Action Plan; and to determine priority areas for bird conservation and land protection. For more info or to sign up to volunteer, go to <http://www.ctbirdatlas.org/>

More information about the survey protocols will be coming later this year. The atlas project is a huge undertaking. The knowledge gains, however, will be tremendous. Again, we will be asked to go birding. It will be a great time to be a birder in Connecticut.

For questions about the atlas project, please contact Chris Elphick at [chris.elphick@uconn.edu](mailto:chris.elphick@uconn.edu)



## Upcoming Field Trips: Winter/Spring 2018

February 10, 2018 (Saturday 8 a.m.)  
**Eagles at Machimoodus Park**

Join Larry Cyriluk for a winter trip through the woods to the bluff above Salmon River Cove. In past years, Bald Eagles have swooped over close enough for birders to hear the beats of their wings. Dress warmly (especially shoes or boots). Meet at the parking lot at the corner of Lawn Ave. and High St., Middletown. Call Larry for info 342-4785 or 635-1880.

February 16–19, 2018 (Friday–Monday)  
**20th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count**

This four-day event has watchers counting birds for a real-time snapshot of where birds are across the continent. Participants submit observations online, creating an instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations. Anyone can participate—as little as 15 minutes on one day, or for as long as you like each day. Enter your list(s) online at [www.BirdCount.org](http://www.BirdCount.org). For more info: [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc)

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# Upcoming Field Trips: Winter/Spring 2018 *Continued from front page*

## March 17 (Saturday 8 a.m.) "Let's Go a-Ducking"

This replication of Dave Titus's favorite duck migration trip will start at Bishops Ponds, Research Parkway (off East Main Street) in Meriden, then will take Barnes Road to North Farms Reservoir (the reservoir has supplied a good view of a flock of Coots in past). If time allows, we will back-track to Cromwell Meadows. Dress for the weather—it's usually raw and chilling. Meet at the parking lot at the corner of Lawn Ave. and High St., Middletown. Call Larry Cyrulik for info 342-4785 or 635-1880.

## April 21, 2018 (Saturday 8 a.m.) Wildflower Walk

Discover early-blooming wildflowers with Larry Cyrulik among the fractured basalt of Giuffrida Park. Each year finds a different assortment of flower species, depending on the recent weather. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in Cromwell Stop & Shop plaza parking lot on the side by Mattress Firm. Call Larry Cyrulik for more information at 342-4785 or 635-1880. For a preview of what we may see, choose the Wildflowers link from Field Trips page on our website at [www.audubon-mas.org](http://www.audubon-mas.org) 

## Field Trip Reports

### 43rd Annual Salmon River Christmas Bird Count, December 17, 2017

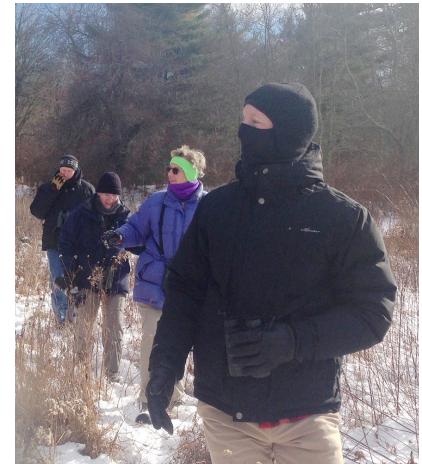
The 43rd annual Mattabeseck Salmon River Christmas Bird Count was held on Sunday, December 17th, 2017. A total of 31 participants braved the cold temperatures (temperature range of 12-33 degrees F) to identify and count birds. The ground had a light covering of snow and many of the ponds



Golden-crowned kinglet

and lakes were frozen, which reduced the number of waterfowl observed on the lakes and ponds. As of the print date of this edition of Wingbeat, the tentative total number of bird species observed was 68. This number could increase as feeder counts are received. The highlight of this year's count was a

first ever Orange-Crowned Warbler, observed at Hadham Meadow State Park. Please consider joining one of the teams next year. We are confident that any newcomers will be welcomed with open arms. All levels of birding expertise are welcome. Please contact, Sharon Dellinger, [rsdell@comcast.net](mailto:rsdell@comcast.net) or Doreen Jezek, [dajezek@gmail.com](mailto:dajezek@gmail.com) for more information. You've got a year to get ready! *Sharon Dellinger, MAS Recording Secretary*



### Sparrow Crawl, October 7, 2017

#### *The Old Bean Field*

An early autumn morning...casting aside its mottled green and yellow blazer, the season stood bare-chested as the balmy sun rose lethargically over the ragged field of goldenrod. Juxtaposed to the field the manicured soccer grid opposite was animated with a dozen Killdeer. Soon the matches would dispel them all.

A Blue-headed vireo grappled with the branches of a black locust. Over mounds of mugwort-encrusted gravel Song sparrows and a Field sparrow shyly dodged away from

the interlopers, but not before they were counted and registered in the ledger. Insinuating oneself amongst the clumps of Russian olive, bunchgrass and goldenrod caused avians to propel themselves in all directions. As if to scold, a Palm warbler stroked its tail, the underside dashed with gold.

Standing abreast of the silky dogwoods, beckoning with pursed lips produced nothing as the morning sun reflected hazily over the pale yellow sky. Further reconnaissance in the dense grass spiked with multiflora rose caused only sparse response. The lingering warmth of summer loosened the shirt collars.

#### *The Nature Garden*

Footsteps crunched on the gray crushed stone pathways that wound a serpentine course around the Nature Garden...red maple wetlands opposite fields of dogwood and eastern red cedar abbreviated by white oak, the stalwart sentinels of ancient pastureland. Here, too, it seems the leaden atmosphere slowed the pace of migration. A lingering female Scarlet tanager tumbled after berries. Flickering maddeningly, a Ruby-crowned kinglet animated a cedar's

*Continued on page 3*

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# Sanctuary

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“**Y**ou don’t have the strength of your convictions,” DaSilva said. He glanced at Walters through thick brown glasses and wagged his shiny, balding pate for emphasis.

“What are you talking about?” Walters retorted testily. Walters was the younger of the two men, slim, with ever-mobile brown eyes.

“Just what I said. You went thought the line, you’re a scab.” DaSilva jutted his wrinkled face at Walters with finality.

“Listen,” Walters began to fume. “When the boys up at the north factory decided not to strike, it was all over but the cryin’. No sense stayin’ out any longer.”

“Doesn’t matter, you’re a scab.” DaSilva walked off triumphantly. Gramps, the compressor operator, stood nearly and chortled. He rolled an unlit cigar in his mouth and his puffy red cheeks gleamed with humor.

Walters stormed off. DaSilva was forever getting on someone’s nerves, just for fun. Walters could see it coming but DaSilva’s cracks always managed to crank him up, in spite of himself.

It was winter. The gray chill wind collected billows of snow and wormed its way around the metal building of the test facility and gathered in the cold steel shadows of the NVA furnaces that heated the air flow to the test stands. Cold metal; cold asphalt; cold drafts blowing snowflakes over the ankles. But there were zones of comforting sanctuary. One such was the insulated steam pipe that wound its way along the side of the building where the door to the locker room and lavatories stood. The insulation overlapped a hanger by several inches, and a hanger bolt bisected the gap. It was there that an enterprising House sparrow spent its nights, clutching the hanger bolt, out of winters’ deadly black grasp.

When Walters came to work in the dark freezing moments before dawn, he would notice the sparrow on its perch, not yet ready to brave the day’s icy winds. Walters admired the sparrow’s survival instincts. ‘These birds,’ he

thought, ‘the junk birds of society, the starlings and the House sparrows, the Rock doves; you have to give them credit for surviving around here, with all the noise and inhospitable factory detritus.’

DaSilva noticed the sparrow too, or at least the sparrow’s droppings that splattered the concrete steps leading to the locker room. “That’s unsanitary,” he declared and he proceeded to tape up the bottom of the insulated steam line hanger assembly.

Walters predictably had a fit. “What sweat is it off of you if the bird is clever enough to provide a warm roost for itself. Didn’t you have a snug little bed to lay in last night?”

“It’s unsanitary,” DaSilva insisted.

“Just rub it away with your boot. Won’t kill you.” Walters’ face began to flush.

DaSilva smirked. He had Walters now. He proceeded to toy with him. “I’ll call the shop steward down. We’ll take this to health and safety.”

Walters began barking. “No you won’t. Well, go ahead, then, you jerk!” and he stormed up the steps and pulled the tape from the steam pipe.

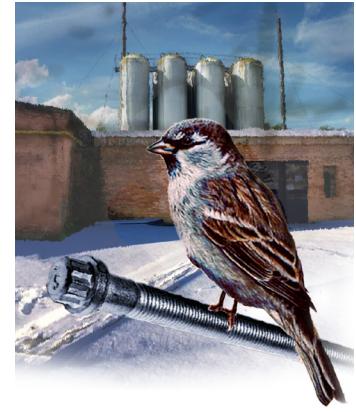
“There!” Walters shouted vehemently.

DaSilva raised his eyebrows in mock disenchantment. Then, smirking so emphatically that deep lines emerged from around his eyes, he sauntered off, pleased with himself.

Gramps brushed past Walters on his way to the locker room. Rolling his cigar, he asked, “Well, ha-ha-ha, what happened?”

“I expressed the strength of my convictions.” Walters muttered warily. He drew the hood of his sweatshirt over his small face and trudged through the snow to one of the frozen test cells. 

LC



## Field Trip Reports *Sparrow Crawl continued from page 2*

bristling branches. The dependable White-throated sparrow made its appearance known with a chirp.

The pathway forked. Rising up like the dominion of demons, a bristling ball of mile-a-minute vine; allowed to advance, this tormented alien would alter the landscape irrevocably.

### ***Guida's Farm Nature Sanctuary.***

The sky overhead, painfully bright in late morning, was dappled with the ethereal flight of Red tail and Red-shouldered hawks whose pirouettes were transected by the parabolas of coal-black Turkey vultures. The mown carpets of grass punctuated by hedgerows held their secrets to their breasts,

however, revealing nothing but reflected Indian summer.

### ***Lastly, a field by the TPA golf course.***

A field lies surrounded by green tuxedoes like a shabby beggar outside an opulent opera house. But like the beggar who turns out to be an impresario this field had more integrity than the adjacent golf course. In the hollows carved out of the gently sloping plain, an active flock of Savannah sparrows tripped alertly from forb to forb, and among them, Bobolinks flashed subtle ochre colors of the non-breeding season.

**2 participants, 4 species sparrows, 31 total species.** 

LC

## AUDUBON MEMBERS' CORNER

(Feel free to send us contributions to this column)



From Alberta Mirer, MAS Member

### The Migratory Feats of the Bar-Tailed Godwit

The bar-tailed godwit is a comparatively large shore bird. Females can weigh more than a pound. They have long upswept bills, which they use to probe the mud for invertebrates.

After nesting on the Alaskan tundra, both young and adults gather in huge flocks along the coast. A couple of weeks before



Bar-Tailed Godwit

leaving, each godwit gorges on clams and worms, so much so that its dermis bulges with the highest fat content recorded in birds. At the same time, some of the bird's internal organs shrivel up. By the time a godwit takes off, it is little

more than brains, fat and flight muscle.

Then they are ready for the longest, nonstop flight of any bird –an 8 day, 7,300 mile trek from Alaska across the length of the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand and Australia. They wait for storms of a particular strength to pass, and then use the tailwinds to help sling them south.

In the spring, when the birds are ready to fly north, a nonstop flight is no longer practical because they need extra energy to breed once they reach their nesting grounds. Flying across 22 countries, they make a few stops to feed before they get to the Russian and Alaskan Arctic regions. Many of the wetlands where they refuel are drying up, or being drained. The most crucial of these are found in the Yellow Sea region of China and South Korea, where some 600 million people have their own needs and priorities. Under the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, which was created in 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists the bar-tailed godwit of high concern. Protecting the species throughout its entire range will require an international effort. We need to do more to win the hearts and minds of people who live wherever the godwits fly. 

National Wildlife Federation December/January 2009

The deadline for items to be included in the Spring/Summer issue is March 26, 2017. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about April 20. Please send items to Pat Rasch, 24 Elm Road, Cromwell, CT 06416, or email to <[pat\\_rasch@comcast.net](mailto: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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