



Chickadee Chatter



January/February 2023

Litchfield Hills Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 68/Issue 1

The mission of the Litchfield Hills Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife and their habitat, for the benefit of the community, through conservation, education, and research.

President's Message

By Diane Edwards, President



Happy New Year! And a huge thank-you to all of you who have contributed time, talent, or money — sometimes all three! — to help LHAS pursue our mission over the past year.

As an all-volunteer organization, LHAS simply wouldn't exist without our volunteers. So, hats off to our officers and directors, committee chairs and members, field trip leaders, nest box monitors, sanctuary helpers, pollinator-garden gardeners, refreshment-bringers at our meetings, and all who worked on our recent Annual Appeal!

Speaking of the Annual Appeal, thank you to all of you who have already donated! The appeal letters went out via snail mail and email in late November. As of mid-December, we had already received more than \$7,000. We're hoping to beat last year's total of \$13,000, so we have a way to go. We keep the books open on our appeal until the end of our fiscal year, April 30. So if you haven't donated yet but would like to, there is still time. You can donate online at lhasct.org or by sending a check to us at P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759.

The appeal is our primary source of funding, aside from the rental income we receive for the house at our Kalmia Sanctuary and grant funding for our 10-year Forest Management Program. We're also looking into a couple of small grants for new projects we're planning for 2023.

Which brings me to some exciting news: Sometime in January we will move into our very first office space, at 28 Russell Street in Litchfield. The building — the old railroad station — is being restored and refurbished by the Litchfield Land Trust, which will occupy the largest amount of space. Our small office next to theirs will be our first official home since we were founded in 1955!

Meanwhile, I wish you all a healthy, happy, and birdy 2023!

See Calendar on pages 6-7 for our
Upcoming Meetings & Field Trips

Highlights of 2022 at LHAS

Thanks to our volunteers and donors, we were able to ...

- Maintain and improve our three **wildlife sanctuaries**. We added a slip-resistant surface on the footbridges at Boyd Woods. We planted pollinator gardens at Wigwam Brook and Kalmia. We had more blight-susceptible trees removed from Wigwam Brook's chestnut orchard in an effort to develop blight-resistant trees. We hired a forester to do tree thinning and brush management, partially funded by a grant, to improve the health of our forests at Boyd Woods and Wigwam Brook.



Anti-slip surface on foot-bridge at Boyd Woods.

Photo: Rich Martin

- Give **scholarships** to three high school grads now pursuing environmental studies in college. We also subsidized Torrington school kids' participation in nature programs led by Sharon Audubon staff.
- Lead fun and informative nature walks for families.
- Present fascinating **nature programs** at our monthly meetings, on topics as varied as climate change, preventing bird window-strikes, and hawk ID.
- Offer nearly three dozen

(continued on page 3)

LHAS Officers

President	Diane Edwards	860-309-5139
Vice President	Fran Zygmunt	860-689-5001
Treasurer	Mia Coats	817-691-2525
Rec. Secretary	Janet Baker	860-567-8427
Corresp. Secretary	Terri Bianchi	860-489-8821

Board of Directors

Carol Perrault	2023	860-628-1612
Carol Kearns	2023	860-307-0807
Rich Martin	2023	860-736-7714
Beverly Baldwin	2024	860-921-7075
Vickie Dauphinais	2024	860-361-9051
George Stephens	2024	860-921-7150
Michael Audette	2025	860-388-7874
Marie Kennedy	2025	914-393-6270
Karen G. Nelson	2025	860-309-9018

Committee Chairpeople

Boyd Woods Sanctuary Communications & Digital Media	Debbie & Rich Martin Rich Martin	860-819-7462 860-736-7714
Conservation	Diane Edwards	860-309-5139
Education	Vickie Dauphinais	860-361-9051
Facebook	Diane Edwards	860-309-5139
Field Trips	David Zomick	860-513-8600
Fundraising	Janice Jankauskas	203-231-2022
Historian	<i>vacant</i>	
Hospitality	<i>vacant</i>	
Kalmia Sanctuary	Irek Rychlik	860-480-6685
Membership Outreach	Beverly Baldwin	860-921-7075
Membership Records	Doreen Orciari	860-307-3102
Newsletter	Diane Edwards	860-309-5139
Programs	Angela Dimmitt	860-355-3429
Publicity	Shirley Gay	860-482-0819
Scholarships	Carol Kearns & Harry Schuh	860-307-0807
Wigwam Brook Sanctuary	John Baker	860-567-8427

Research

Christmas Bird Count	Dave Tripp	dtrippjr@gmail.com
Summer Bird Count	Dave Tripp	dtrippjr@gmail.com
Nest Box Program	Rebecca Purdy	860-485-8530

Chickadee Chatter is published in January, March, May, July, September, and November. Submission deadline for the **March/April** issue is **February 1**.

Please email items to appear in the newsletter to **Diane Edwards** at edwardsd68@charter.net or mail them to her at **68 Shingle Mill Road, Harwinton, CT 06791**.

Send other business to the appropriate chairperson at **LHAS, P.O. Box 861, Litchfield, CT 06759-0861** or lhasct@me.com.

NEW MEMBERS

By Doreen Orciari, Membership Records Chair

Brian Anderson.....Sharon
 Julie Andring* Northfield
 Elisabeth Bazin Thomaston
 Gerard & Jayne Bogucki..... Bristol
 Lexi BrandfonLakeville
 Esther Curley New Milford
 Estelina Dallett Salisbury
 Roger DanfordWashington
 Dalton Dwyer..... Norfolk
 Great Falls Brewing Co. Canaan
 Green Mountain Forest Corp..... Falls Village
 Meriel HughesLakeville
 Lisa Klonoski Torrington
 Jonica Latwynec* Barkhamsted
 Andrea Lucas* Barkhamsted
 Carla Malagutti Watertown
 Janet Mead Norfolk
 Jeanne Pagano New Milford
 Roxanne Paris* Torrington
 Violette Radomski Bristol
 Pamela Rahn Harwinton
 Lisa Roberge..... Bantam
 Otto Scholtz West Cornwall
 Joanna SeitzSouth Kent
 Sharon Land Trust.....Sharon
 Jeff Sibley..... New Milford
 Edmund UllmanLakeville
 Ethan Walker Litchfield

**Welcome back*

LHAS Membership is at 1,057.

If your newsletter is addressed incorrectly, send an email to Doreen Orciari at doreen.orciari@gmail.com.

This newsletter and other LHAS features can be seen **IN LIVING COLOR at www.lhasct.org.**



Scan the QR code at left with your smart-phone to go to www.lhasct.org.

Follow us on Facebook:
[facebook.com/LitchfieldHillsAudubonSocietyLHAS](https://www.facebook.com/LitchfieldHillsAudubonSocietyLHAS)

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Special thanks to **Doreen Orciari** and **Janet Baker** for proof-reading this newsletter!

LHAS Nature Explorers Trip Report**The Spooky Side of Nature**

By Vickie Dauphinais, Education Committee Chair

The LHAS Education Committee led a “spooky” Halloween hike at Boyd Woods Sanctuary on October 30. It was a beautiful autumn day; spectacular colors abounded! About 10 families with children attended. We started our journey by the bird blind. Kids and adults had fun watching and calling



Amelia Bender of Litchfield shows a "rat" found in the tree to Phoebe Szwed of Litchfield and Levi Gagnon of Terryville.

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

nature trolls were seen all over the rock ledge. Leader, Josh Szwed, pointed out all the living things growing on the ledge, including lichens, moss, and ferns. He explained that the Egyptians stuffed lichens in cavities of mummies, and that moss, the earliest plant on Earth, is very popular in Japan



Group doing a leaf activity led by LHAS member Ann Orsillo.

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

out all the birds feeding at the feeders: Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches, Downy Woodpeckers, lots of Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, House Finches, Mourning Doves, and a pair of cardinals. The children, ranging in ages from 1-12 years, were amazed by all the little critters camouflaged in the landscape around the bird blind. A few slithering snakes were seen — spooky!

The group moved on to the picnic rocks via the magenta-blazed trail. Colorful rocks left behind by

nature trolls were seen all over the rock ledge. Leader, Josh Szwed, pointed out all the living things growing on the ledge, including lichens, moss, and ferns. He explained that the Egyptians stuffed lichens in cavities of mummies, and that moss, the earliest plant on Earth, is very popular in Japan — it's used in many of their jewelry pieces. Next, we moved on to visit the spooky Pignut Hickory tree. On the way, a Red Salamander was spotted resting under a tree bark. Everybody crowded around to take a closer look and gently touch its slimy red-orange surface. Once at the spooky tree, kids lined up to take pictures.

A couple of particularly sharp-eyed hikers noticed a big, black "rat" hiding in the tree's large hollow cavity. Spine chilling!

We went back on the trail. Many beech trees, known as the “elephants of the forest” due to their elephant-like skin, lined the path. I pointed out one with a large bear claw mark on its bark. The bear likely tried to climb to get a nice meal of beech nuts. Yum! After walking a short distance, we got to the blue-blazed trail. Two piles of rocks welcomed us. Everyone was curious as to their meaning. I explained the stacked rocks, also called cairns, sometimes are used to mark the hiking routes in parks. In our case, somebody built them for fun. Ann Orsillo explained the life of a leaf and encouraged the kids to mimic the leaf through the seasons. Great fun for kids and parents! We stopped by the “Happy Tree” for more photos. A tiny tree frog was spotted hopping in the leaves. Josh was able to hold it in his palm so all the kids got a close look. Nice treat!

We continued down the blue-blazed trail to the pond. The adults were amazed by all the flowering witch hazel bushes. The pond was quiet; no waterfowl seen. The kids made their way through the “bat cave” and walked to the open field. They had lots of fun spreading milkweed seeds for next year's plants. We ended our journey by the picnic table where everyone enjoyed well-deserved snacks and cool drinks. All in all, it was a most memorable afternoon. Everyone seemed to enjoy the spooky side of nature!

Special thanks to Rich and Debbie Martin for making sure bird feeders were filled before the event, Debbie Mane for helping with setup, and Terri Bianchi for picking up the props along the trail and baking delicious treats.



Jack Davidson of Thomaston and Levi Gagnon of Terryville by the "Happy Tree."

Photo: Vickie Dauphinais

Highlights of 2022*(continued from page 1)*

field trips for birding, walking, paddling, and garden tours.

- Provide citizen science **research data** from our Christmas and summer bird counts and American Chestnut orchard to scientists.

Conservation News

By Diane Edwards, Conservation Chair

Record Number of Active Osprey Nests in Connecticut in 2022

Of the 825 Osprey nests mapped in our state last year, 606 were active — 48 more than in 2021, according to Connecticut Audubon (a separate organization from National Audubon and Audubon Connecticut). Four hundred thirteen of those nests successfully fledged young — the first drop in the number of confirmed fledglings from one year to



Ospreys in Guilford

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

another since CAS' Osprey Nation volunteer citizen science project started, in 1998. The actual number of fledglings in 2022, though, was probably higher, because CAS only counts confirmed fledglings. Some nests had inconclusive reports because the nests were inaccessible or hard to view.

Contribute Data to DEEP's Natural Diversity Data Base

The CT DEEP wants to obtain new and updated information for the Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDDB) from Connecticut's citizens. Please submit field notes, photographs, and a map with detailed locations of species listed by the state as endangered, threatened, or of special conservation concern (see portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Wildlife-in-Connecticut; scroll down to Featured Links and click on Endangered Species). Submitted information will be reviewed, and verifiable reports of species or communities will be added to the NDDDB. Include your address and telephone number on information sent to the NDDDB. For more information about

the data base and to access forms for submitting information, go to <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/NDDDB/Natural-Diversity-Data-Base-and-Environmental-Reviews>.

New Study: Climate Change Threatens Birds in National Wildlife Refuges

Left unchecked, warming temperatures and increased climate threats could affect environmental conditions for half of the birds throughout all of our country's National Wildlife Refuge System, says National Audubon. In a survey of all 525 refuges, Audubon scientists found that half of the birds throughout the system will see changes in the environmental suitability of their habitats if global temperatures are allowed to rise unchecked. The result could be a dramatic change in up to 25% of the species present in the system as some birds either leave for other regions or are pushed out.

The findings show that climate change is accelerating habitat changes at rates that may not be sustainable, so birds that move out of one region may not be able to find the resources they need elsewhere, and the system may not be able to accommodate any new species. The change is particularly notable in northern latitudes and high altitudes, where birds seeking cooler temperatures may run out of places to go. The result will be a refuge system that looks very different than it currently does, as emblematic species of some regions shift. Some species, like the Tundra Swan, Rufous Hummingbird, Yellow-billed Magpie, and Blackburnian Warbler may fully disappear from the system.

Audubon has made science briefs for all 525 refuges available that detail what specific climate threats are affecting each refuge, what species will be climate-vulnerable, and how precipitation and temperature may change in the next 30 years absent any preventive action. Audubon is working with decision-makers and land managers to ensure the National Wildlife Refuge System has adequate funding, and to expand the system to meet the needs of birds and people as they adapt to a changing climate. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is also using the data to support expansion and acquisition for the refuge system.

Will NY's Plum Island Become a National Monument?

The Preserve Plum Island Coalition, including Audubon

Conservation News

By Diane Edwards, Conservation Chair

Connecticut and Audubon New York, is urging President Biden to declare the island a national monument. This small island, near the tip of Long Island's North Fork, is home to hundreds of species, some rare and endangered. At least 228 bird species —nearly a quarter of all bird species found in North America north of Mexico — have been sighted at Plum Island and surrounding waters. No wonder Audubon NY has designated it an Important Bird Area. The island also is one of the most significant seal haul-out sites in southern New England and the largest one in New York state. The federally owned island has hosted the Plum Island Animal Disease Center since 1954. But the center is scheduled to close in 2023. The government had planned to auction the island off to the highest bidder, but that plan was scrapped after an outcry from environmental groups. **For more information, visit preserveplumisland.org.**

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Now Listed Under the Endangered Species Act



Lesser Prairie-Chicken

Photo: Dan Wundrock. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The U.S. FWS has listed two distinct populations of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken as Endangered. The species is managed separately in the northern and southern parts of its range, which includes portions of five states (Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, and New Mexico).

“This decision is essential if we hope to save the Lesser Prairie-Chicken from extinction,” said Jon Hayes, executive director of Audubon Southwest and vice president at the National Audubon Society.

Since formal nationwide bird monitoring began in the 1960s, Lesser Prairie-Chicken populations have declined by 97% across their range. This decline is one of the most precipitous among all bird life in the U.S. and will ultimately lead to extinction if not addressed.

Please, Don't Feed Deer!

In winter, you might be tempted to feed deer, but this practice is actually harmful, says CT DEEP's Wildlife Division. Their website says that deer acquire specifically adapted microbes over a period of time that digest specific food material. When deer eat food that has not been part of their diet, such as large quantities suddenly placed out during severe winters, the specific microbes are not present to help with digestion. Deer will eat any readily available handouts during winter; thus they may fill their stomach with indigestible material. It has been documented over several years that deer have died with stomachs full of food (hay and corn) that was placed out during harsh winters as an emergency food source when limited natural foods were available. Food sources rich in carbohydrates have been known to cause acidosis (grain overload) and enterotoxemia (overeating disease), which can be fatal.

Deadly Virus Killing Rabbits

An invasive virus that causes Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) poses a deadly risk to wild and domestic rabbits. In Connecticut the disease has been detected in rabbits in Hartford County. (Previously, the disease was also found in deer carcasses in Kent and Washington.) The disease poses a significant threat to the conservation of our native wild



Cottontail Rabbit

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

rabbit and the New England Cottontail, which already faces many conservation challenges and declining populations throughout much of its range. The state Department of Energy and Environmental Conservation is monitoring the wild rabbit population, while the

Department of Agriculture is overseeing domestic rabbits. *Each agency is asking the public to report suspected cases.* Clinical signs include sudden death; fever; lack of appetite; respiratory signs; internal bleeding, which can show up as a blood-stained nose; and anemia.

Meetings, Bird Walks and Activities

LHAS Calendar — Winter 2023



NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, **General Meetings** are held on the first Monday of each month. When the first Monday of the month falls on a holiday, the meeting is held on the second Monday. Meetings are held at the Litchfield Community Center, 421 Bantam Road (Route 202), Litchfield, and/or via Zoom.

Board of Directors Meetings are held the third Tuesday of every other month at 7 p.m.

GENERAL MEETINGS

Note: The following meetings will be hybrid — in person and via Zoom. If you want to participate via Zoom, go to the Calendar section of our website, lhasct.org, to register. You will be sent the meeting login link.

January 9 **All About the American Bittern** **Monday, 7 PM**



Sam Merker's fascinating and entertaining presentation will focus on the life history of the American Bittern, knowledge gaps, the state of the current research in Connecticut, and what researchers hope to learn in the future. Sam is a postdoctoral researcher at UConn, working with Chris Elphick and Morgan Tingley using data collected for the Connecticut Bird Atlas to estimate population sizes for as many birds as possible in the state. Sam is very interested in studying understudied birds like American Bitterns. He spends his free time bird watching, hiking, wood-working, and generally tinkering with things. Although new to Connecticut, Sam is originally from New Hampshire and is happy to be back in New England after 7 years in Georgia.

February 6 **Ecuador — The Magic Birding Circuit** **Monday, 7 PM**

Michael Audette will present a photographic overview of his and his wife Fabienne's trip to Ecuador's San Jorge Magic Birding Circuit Botanical Reserves — Quito, Tandayapa, and Milpe. His photos were taken in three diverse ecosystems in the Andes Highlands, upper tropical rainforest, and cloud forest. The area is home to some 1,600 bird species and over 100 species of hummingbird, wild orchids, waterfalls, and observation decks overlooking the canopy. Michael, an LHAS board member, is a former food marketing executive, now Christmas tree farmer (assistant to wife Fabienne), chair of Flanders Nature Center's Photography Club, and VP and treasurer of the Connecticut Wood Carvers Association. He is a novice birder, outdoor enthusiast, and nature and wildlife lover. *Note:* Michael is going back to Ecuador in March — and you're invited to join him! See page 7 for details.

BIRDING EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

January 1 **First Day Hike at Boyd Woods Sanctuary** **Sunday, 10:30 AM - 12 PM**

Looking forward to a fresh start in 2023? Celebrate the new year in the outdoors with a First Day Hike at Boyd Woods. Kids and adults are invited to join leaders Rich and Debbie Martin for a fun, invigorating hike through the woods. They will point out hidden treasures along the way. We never know what awaits us, perhaps a Saw-whet Owl, Red-shouldered Hawk, a Pileated Woodpecker? Wear sturdy shoes and dress for the weather. Meet at the Boyd Woods parking lot off Route 254 in Litchfield. *For more information or questions, contact Debbie at barnowl524@hotmail.com.*

The next Board Meeting will be at 7 p.m., Tuesday, January 17 at the Litchfield Community Center.

January 15 Shorebirding in Stratford. Sunday, 8:30 AM

January is always full of surprises — once again, let’s see what unusual birds are showing up at the shore. We will meet in Stratford (exit 30 off I-95 north) at the Dunkin Donuts on Route 113/Lordship Boulevard at the corner of Honeyspot Road. We will check out the local birding hotspots, including Long Beach, where the ice piles up in huge mounds on the sand; Stratford Point (if open) to watch for gannets and maybe even alcids out on the Sound; and the Birdseye Boat Launch. Let’s hope for Snowy Owls! King Eiders? Harlequin Ducks? It probably will be cold and windy, so come prepared! **To register or for more information, contact Angela Dimmitt in advance: 860-355-3429 or angeladimmitt@aol.com.** Snow date: January 22.

January 29 Shepaug Bald Eagle Observatory, Southbury Sunday, 9 AM

Weather permitting, Russ Naylor will lead a trip to the eagle viewing site to see the first northbound migrants not only of our national bird but also Black Ducks and Common Mergansers. Other likely treats are bluebirds, ravens, Red-tailed Hawks, various ducks, and possibly a rarity or two, such as Peregrine Falcon and Vesper Sparrow. Group size is limited to 10, on a first-come, first-served basis. The group will meet at the Canfield Corner Pharmacy, at the junction of Route 6 (Main Street North) and Route 47 in Woodbury at 9 a.m. **To stake your place, call Russ at 203-841-7779 and leave a message; he’ll get back to you.**

February 18 Great Backyard Bird Count at Boyd Woods Sanctuary. Saturday, 9-11 AM

Boyd Woods continues to be one of the best hotspots in Litchfield County for bird species counted over the four-day period of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Please join Rich and Debbie Martin at the sanctuary to participate in this important annual event. We’ll be sure to see many birds from our wonderful bird blind at the well-stocked feeding station, but we’ll also venture out to explore a variety of other habitats as we search for unusual species. Meet at the Boyd Woods Sanctuary parking lot on Route 254 in Litchfield. Bring binoculars, dress warmly, and wear appropriate footwear for slippery, snowy trails if necessary. Snow or rain cancels this walk. **For more information, contact Debbie Martin at barnowl524@hotmail.com or 860-819-7462.**

February ~~17-19~~ 24-26 Birding Around Newburyport and Cape Ann, MA. Friday-Sunday

Dave Tripp will once again escort LHASers around the Newburyport, Amesbury, and Salisbury areas in search of wintering northern birds. In the past, this trip has seen rare birds like Great Gray Owl, Boreal Chickadee, Varied Thrush, Townsend’s Solitaire, and Harris’ Sparrow. Other uncommon birds encountered in the past are Short-eared Owls, “white-winged” gulls, Barrow’s Goldeneye, Rough-legged Hawks, and Northern Shrike. An added bonus is a day trip to Gloucester and Rockport on Cape Ann, which may add Razorbills, Thick-billed Murres, Harlequin Ducks, Black Guillemots, and more gulls and waterfowl. **If you are interested in going, email Dave at dtrippjr@gmail.com.** We will stay at the Fairfield Inn in Amesbury; check websites like kayak.com or hotels.com to find the best rate.

Ecuador Adventure

The Magic Birding & Photography Circuit for Nature Lovers, Bird Lovers & Photographers!



Crimson-rumped Toucanet

Photo: Michael G. Audette

Join Michael Audette on a nature lover's trip to the East and West Andes slopes, cloud forests, tropical Amazonian rainforest and Paramo — all within five different ecosystems. Visit three private San Jorge nature reserves and three beautiful newly built

eco-lodges inside the reserves. The region is home to 1,600 bird species, an abundance of hummingbirds, mammals, seasonal butterflies, and diversified flora and fauna. Feeders, observation decks, a tower overlooking the canopy, hides (blinds), pristine hiking trails, a manakin lek and a Cock of the Rock lek are all on-site. The trip includes group airport transfers, lodging, delicious cuisine, and guided walks. A trip of a lifetime!

TOUR DATES: March 16-23, 2023 — 7 nights/8 days

COST & ITINERARY DETAILS CONTACT: **Michael Audette — mga911c4@gmail.com.**

American Crows: Love 'em or Hate 'em

By Vickie Dauphinais, LHAS Education Chair

Last spring a family of crows took up residence in my backyard. They made themselves at home among the pine and birch trees. They foraged on the lawn and brush piles, and drank from the water fountains. There was a lot of cawing in the mornings and late afternoons. I often saw a pair or two perched on dead tree branches intently looking on as I went about my gardening chores. I tried looking for a nest but did not see one. It occurred to me I didn't know much about crows, other than that they are common, all-black birds. Some people dislike them because they are noisy, sometimes destructive, and a little sinister looking. I decided to get to know them better as a result of their invasion of my peaceful sanctuary. In my research, I came across some fascinating facts about American Crows.

American Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) are often associated with trickery and death in folklore, but research has shown they are pretty smart, with their intelligence on par with that of chimpanzees. They make and use tools to get hard-to-reach food. Crows have amazing memory. They never forget a face. If treated badly they can hold a grudge for a long time. Amazingly, the grudge can be passed on to other crows and future generations. They can count up to six objects and imitate any sound, including human sounds and words.

The crows are not picky eaters. They eat pretty much anything: seeds, fruit, frogs, lizards, human trash, eggs of other birds, and even baby birds! But take heart, research shows this is infrequent. (The usual killers of baby birds are chipmunks and snakes.) These crafty corvids are known for quickly adapting to new situations and food sources. In Japan crows place walnuts on roads so cars will crush the

shells, then wait for the traffic light to change so they can safely collect the opened nut.

Crows are particularly social and family-oriented with human-like attributes. American Crows start to nest in early spring. They build great, strong, stick nests, hidden very well up high in White Pines. Crows mate for life, but some lead a "double life," splitting time between their families and big communal roosts. It's common for juvenile crows to stay at home for a few years to help their parents raise their younger siblings. Crows are known to hold "funerals." When a dead crow is found, a flock of crows gathers around the remains, often making a raucous noise. It is believed the behavior helps crow communities learn about potential threats, so they know which locations and predators to avoid in the future.

American Crows' intelligence and adaptability has served them well over the centuries. They've been getting more numerous in recent decades, especially in urban centers. These brainy birds have figured out city life is not so bad. There is plenty of food, no chance to get shot at, and few predators to deal with. Life is good!

So, instead of colorful songbirds, I was honored with a flock of brainiacs this year. Other than their loud cawing, they didn't bother me much as long as the water in the fountains was fresh and clean. My cat didn't fare as well. As soon as

(continued on page 9)



American Crow

Photo: Diane Friend Edwards

American Crow? Or Fish Crow?

These two species look pretty indistinguishable. But listen to their calls: the Fish Crow (*Corvus ossifragus*) has a more nasal voice. To hear what it sounds like, go to audubon.org/field-guide/bird/fish-crow.

American Crow? Or Common Raven?

From a distance, these large black birds might look alike. But listen to their calls: crows caw or make a purring sound; ravens produce a harsh, low-pitched croak. Hear their calls at www.audubon.org/news/how-tell-raven-crow.

Here are other clues to tell them apart:

- Ravens are larger, about the size of a Red-tailed Hawk. They have bigger beaks and shaggier throat feathers.
- Ravens ride thermals and soar, while crows do more flapping.
- In flight, the end of the raven's tail is wedge-shaped, whereas the crow's tail has a rounded, fan-like shape.



Common Raven

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

*Cape May 'Tripp' Report***Raving and Rapping to a Migratory Beat**

By Russ Naylor

**Western Willet**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

Our LHAS friends initiated four fledgling birders into that grueling winged marathon known as Cape May weekend, October 14-16. We got off to a cloudy start ahead of rains at Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge (a.k.a. Brigantine). But we were treated to lots of Caspian Terns, Bald Eagles, Saltmarsh Sparrows, a White Ibis (seen by a lucky few), plus clowders of American Coots, dips of Pied-billed Grebes, and several American Bitterns playing hide and seek.

Dodging fall rains, we then birded the Cape May and Stone Harbor areas intensively. In so doing we picked up goodies like American Oystercatcher, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Northern Gannet, Yellow Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Brown Pelican, Common Nighthawk, Seaside Sparrow, Willet, Bobolink, Clay-colored Sparrow, and other fine fare.

American Crows*(continued from page 8)*

he stepped out on the deck, the scolding started with loud cawing, tail flickering, and wings flapping until he quietly retreated indoors.

For more facts about American Crows, see the CT DEEP's Wildlife Fact Sheet at <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Fact-Sheets/Crow> or the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website at allaboutbirds.org/guide/american_crow.

A swirl of Chimney Swifts graced Lily Lake, and a hummingbird zipped over our heads. We even briefly dipped our toes into astronomical waters by watching Jupiter rise with her Galilean moons (Io, Europa, Ganymede, and Callisto).

**Red-breasted Nuthatch**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

The award for best birding spot goes to a major migrant sandbar stopover that hosted a Marbled Godwit, more than 250 Black Skimmers, 250-300 Royal Terns, and a horde of over 350 Forster's Terns. Some of these birds as well as a gathering of Oystercatchers

**Female Red-winged Blackbird**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

were banded, giving us a chance to identify their places of origin. We finished up back at Brigantine, with more ducks, loons, and at least a half dozen American Bitterns. Everywhere we went, we enjoyed a tasteful melange of regular migrants — flickers, robins, Blue Jays, Cooper's Hawks, cormorants, Tree Swallows, and others.

**Palm Warbler**

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

Our mad dash into fall passage was celebrated at the very end with a rapping rhythm of dance done with birdcalls by "The Brown Thrasher" — our own creative ornithomaniac Elliot Ashe.

We left our birders' Elysian Fields to the hooting of Barred Owls and the customary final salute of Bald Eagles.

As always, let's hear a hearty huzzah for a "Tripp" extravaganza led by Dave Tripp and Fran Zygmunt.

Great Backyard Bird Count: February 17-20



Three of the LHAS members taking part in last year's GBBC at our Boyd Woods Sanctuary.

Photo: Rich Martin

Help contribute citizen-science data about birds by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count. This four-day event is a partnership among National Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Birds Canada.

Participating is easy: Decide where you will watch birds (you can do that outdoors or through the windows of your

home!). Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days. Count all the birds you see or hear within your planned time/location and share your bird sightings by uploading a checklist through the Cornell Lab's Merlin app or eBird. You will find step-by-step instructions on how to do that at birdcount.org/participate.

Each submitted checklist will become a "glowing light" on the birdcount.org sightings map, so you can see observations from around the world.

Note: LHAS members Debbie and Rich Martin will lead a GBBC walk on Saturday, February 18 at Boyd Woods Sanctuary. See page 7 for more details.

Audubon's Website Has 'A Beginner's Guide to eBird!'

If you have yet to try using eBird because you've heard it's complicated, fear not: National Audubon's website now has "A Beginner's Guide to eBird." It explains how you can explore data shared by other birders or submit a checklist of your own sightings. Find the guide at audubon.org/news/a-beginners-guide-ebird.

If you want a more in-depth guide to using eBird, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a free online "eBird Essentials" course at academy.allaboutbirds.org/product/ebird-essentials.

Participate in 'Discover Outdoor Connecticut'

Do you enjoy being a "citizen scientist" by participating in bird counts like the GBBC and other types of nature research? Then here's another one you might enjoy: Discover Outdoor Connecticut iNaturalist. A collaboration between CT DEEP and iNaturalist, the project lets you share your observations of Connecticut's wildlife to help identify as many plants and animals as possible from across the state. The project aims to engage every level of naturalist across Connecticut and help residents learn more about the plants and animals that share the land, water, and air with us. Not sure what you have found? Post your photo of an unknown species to the project, and everyone else taking part can help identify it. Go to inaturalist.org/projects/discover-outdoor-connecticut.



Shepaug Bald Eagle Site Opens

This winter the Shepaug Bald Eagle Observation Area in Southbury will be open for visitation from December 24, 2022 through March 12, 2023 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Prior registration is required. To make a reservation online, go to firstlightpower.com and click on "Reservations." Then scroll down to "Shepaug Recreational Area," then scroll down again to "Click here to make a reservation."

Note: LHAS member Russ Naylor will lead a trip to the eagle viewing site on Sunday, January 29, weather permitting. See page 7.

Bald Eagle (photographed at Cape May, NJ)

Photo: Dave Tripp, Jr.

In My Garden — A Journal — November 2022

By Angela Dimmitt

It was kind of like March in reverse: in like late summer, out like winter. Fall was over in one weekend storm, all the leaves falling together, leaving everywhere deeply covered. White frosts every morning, birds suddenly very hungry — smaller numbers than usual, eating twice as much. Everyone I've spoken to echoes that — and yet people are hesitant to put out their feeders in case the bears are still up and about. Well, they should be snug in their dens by the end of November, the females ready to give birth, the males taking a long nap before waking for a snack on a warm day in January or February. The last visit here was November 11 when one knocked over the compost bin out back — luckily it found nothing very tasty and only made a small mess.

Four months of looking at bare gray trees — well, one can now see the bones of one's garden — mine has wonderful rocks and ledges, many hidden much of the year. I have more or less put the garden to bed, most of the flower beds cleared of dead foliage, fallen leaves and debris, others left with standing Goldenrod stems, Black-eyed Susan seed heads and other things we are told we should leave for the critters that appreciate them. On the other hand, most gardeners feel strongly that leaving leaf litter only provides a nice warm cover for the critters like mice, voles, and chipmunks which eat plant roots over winter, safe from predators who would see them on the open ground. Whole flower beds can be noshed down over a winter!

The stream is a little higher — we are still in that drought — although today it is raining hard, hopefully giving the ground a good soaking before it freezes. Recently the heron visited and left a big calling card. Hopefully it



A Wild Turkey hen

Photo: Angela Dimmitt

will visit throughout the winter.

A few "good" birds have visited this month — Purple Finches (male and female), a Hermit Thrush, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a big flock of robins, and Common Grackles (with amazing iridescence). This past



Common Grackles

Photo: Angela Dimmitt

This past week I had turkeys, initially two hens, I think the same ones that were here in the spring and dropped by occasionally through the summer, noticeably without young (women's lib, turkey-style!). They recognized me and came running when I threw corn under the feeders. Then a flock of 12 came by — not so tame. But I had some fun: I was up near the road and heard scuffling and clucking — they were slowly heading towards the road and traffic was flying by. So I stood by the road and when they started

to cross, I went to the middle, waved my arms and stopped the traffic. Of course, one idiot pulled out and roared past me, luckily not hitting any birds. But I wished I had the blunderbuss I keep threatening to get for the deer! Speaking of deer, two big bucks are around, one with 10 points — small trees bear witness to their use, bashing the trunks to remove any remaining velvet and marking their territory.

The other sign winter is here is that Star no longer howls to be let out in the morning. And we are slowly adjusting to the time difference after the clocks jumped back — no-one can tell a cat to wait an extra hour for breakfast!



A rafter, or gaggle, of Wild Turkeys

Photo: Angela Dimmitt



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Duck Ramble Trip Report

A Bevy of Birders Bids Fall Bon Voyage

By Russ Naylor

As the last golden hues of fall's larches and Norway Maples shone in afternoon sun, our annual Duck Ramble on November 13, led by bird whisperer and LHAS Vice Prez Fran Zygmunt, toured the environs of Bantam Lake for late fall migrants. This year, our generous group of 30-plus birders enjoyed a brisk pre-winter itinerary. We started off at the Litchfield Town Boat Launch with a Brown Creeper working tree branches for insect fare, as a gathering of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls watched Buffleheads and Great Blue Herons foraging for provender.

Point Folly produced a Pied-billed Grebe and both Common and Hooded Mergansers plus a fluttering of robins and waxwings harvesting winterberry fruit. A jaunt out to the

end of the point brought us a trio of Bonaparte's Gulls as well as a group inspection of our ranks by a flyover resident Bald Eagle — hope we passed muster!

At the south end of Bantam Lake were some fishing Double-crested Cormorants, plus two pretty little Redhead hens that posed for photo ops. As always, Jones Pond in Morris proved a ducky destination. Amid the Hooded Mergansers and Ring-necked Ducks was a bonanza of Buffleheads bouncing in display to potential mates. We capped off this visit with a splendid drake Northern Shoveler in full color, back for the third consecutive year at this migratory stopover site.

Our trip ended with the brilliance of a technicolor sunset — a fitting finale to a featherly foray that tallied some 50 species. Kudos to Fran Zygmunt for helping us dive into the world of web-footed wonders, and perhaps baptizing some of our beginners into some serious quackery of their own!