

Menunkatuck Is Awarded Grants for Native Plant Restoration Projects

Menunkatuck Audubon Society has been awarded four grants for native plant restoration at Hammonasset Beach State Park and the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary.

After three years of Free Willy! Invasive plant cutting, the Willard Island area of Hammonasset is ready for native plants to be installed. With a generous grant of \$8000 from the Unilever United States Foundation, Inc., Menunkatuck will be able to plant approximately 200 native trees and shrubs, as well as wildflowers and grasses from a local nursery. The native plants being considered are shadblow, beach plum, high and low bush blueberry, winterberry, bearberry, clethra, mirica, viburnum, and bayberry. Deer-resistant fencing and protective mulch will be placed around the new native plantings as a preventive measure to increase the probability of success in re-establishing the area with native plants. A horticulturist is acting as a consultant in determining the most appropriate native plants for the area. Park staff and Menunkatuck Audubon volunteers will clear the area; plant the native trees, shrubs, wildflowers, and grasses; and erect deer fencing around the plantings. Volunteers will continue to water the plantings until they become established and can survive on their own.

An Audubon Collaborative grant of \$750, with matching funds from the Friends of Hammonasset, will be used for native plants in another area of Hammonasset. The staff at Hammonasset has cut and treated invasive plants that had surrounded a pond between the rotary and the new Visitors' Center. This pond is used by numerous wading birds. The park staff will move the bird blind that is on the

opposite side of the Visitors' Center access road to a location overlooking the pond. However, people approaching the blind at the pond would be completely visible to birds on the pond and possibly scare them away. Menunkatuck proposes to use native shrubs and trees to create a screen to keep people using the blind less visible as they approach it. Approximately 50 native species will be planted. Deer-resistant fencing and protective mulch will be placed around the new native plantings as a preventive measure to increase the probability of success in re-establishing the area with native plants. Plants under consideration include fruit-bearing shrubs, so that in addition to forming a screen, the plants will provide food for birds from summer through winter.

Two other grants will be used for the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary. Menunkatuck has gotten \$1000 from the Guilford Foundation and \$3750 from the Audubon Connecticut Small Matching Grants program for an invasive plant project at the Sanctuary. The objective of this project is to eliminate the invasive species that currently dominate the forest edge as it transitions into the open field meadow to promote a natural, native habitat of low density shrubs and herbaceous ground cover. This shrub buffer zone between the meadow and forest is predominately invasive species, most notably Autumn Olive, Asiatic Bittersweet, Multi-flora Rose, and non-native Honeysuckles. The removal of non-native vines will open the area to sunlight to support the native plant understory. Native trees and shrubs will be planted to supplement the native plants that are already growing in the border of the meadow.

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MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY

is a chapter of National Audubon Society. The newsletter is published bi-monthly by Menunkatuck Audubon Society.
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Chimney Swift Tower Installed at Hammonasset

As part of the DEP's research into the status of chimney swifts in Connecticut, Menunkatuck has installed an artificial chimney at the bird blind near the wetland at the end of the Meig's Point Nature Center parking lot.

Chimney swifts are regularly seen foraging over Hammonasset and it is hoped that they will either nest or roost at the new site.

The 12-foot tower was built by John Picard based on plans from the Driftwood Wildlife Association's book *Chimney Swift Towers*. It sits on a platform supported by posts set into the ground.

When preparing the blind for the tower, it was discovered that the blind had settled and was very much out of square. In order to properly support the tower, the supports under the blind



were replaced. Two coats of paint were also applied to help preserve the exterior of the blind. It was also determined that the blind needs a new roof.

Assisting John were Paul Bukowsky, Cindi Kobak, Cpl. Stephen Petrosky, John Pfitzner, Dennis Riordan, Shannon Schiesser, and Mike Sexton.

betterworldclub

Better World Club is offering Menunkatuck Audubon Society Members a 10% discount on nationwide roadside assistance coverage. They will also donate a portion of your Better World Club membership fees back to Menunkatuck.

Better World Club is the environmentally friendly auto club providing 24 hour nationwide roadside assistance, travel and insurance services.

Sign up at www.betterworldclub.com and enter the Menunkatuck Audubon Society code **MKAS2121**. Please mention code when signing up via telephone at 1-866-238-1137.

Visit Menunkatuck's web site: www.menunkatuck.org

Menunkatuck Audubon Society is committed to work locally to preserve our natural ecosystems for the benefit of people and the earth's biodiversity. Through education and conservation activities within our communities, we raise public awareness of environmental issues and connections to the natural world.

September Program Will Take Us to Nepal

We open our new season of programs on September 8 with Julian Hough's, *Nepal: Birding the High Peaks*.

A plethora of birds, engaging culture, and a chance to experience some of the most breathtaking scenery in the world is an unforgettable experience. Julian Hough takes you on his high-altitude birding expedition to the Nepalese Himalayas. From the lowland grasslands, home of the majestic Tiger, you will travel via the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu to the heart of the world's most impressive peaks. Among a long list of species to be seen, Nepal is the place to seek out skulking pheasants and specialties such as Ibisbill and Stolickza's Tit-Warbler.



Originally from England, Julian has been interested in birds since the age of six and as a teenager spent all his spare time birding around the British Isles in the pursuit of rare birds. Julian is a talented artist; his work has been published in many books and periodicals, notably the recently award-winning *Rare Birds Where and When* by Russell Slack. Julian is also an accomplished photographer and his work has been widely published in numerous European and American publications.

Our favorite snowbird, Sam Fried is back on October 13 with another entertaining program, *Winter Birds of Florida*. Traveling along the east coast of Florida from St. Augustine to the Everglades, Sam visited some of the

2010 Calendar

September 8 2010

Nepal: Birding the High Peaks

Julian Hough

October 13, 2010

Winter Birds of Florida

Sam Fried

November 10, 2010

Humpback Whales

Scott Tucker

Indoor meetings are at the Blackstone Memorial Library in Branford and begin at 7:30 P.M.

Refreshments will be served.
Free and open to the public.

best birding spots in the state and came up with a bundle of excellent photographs of our feathered buddies that make Florida their winter home. A few rarities are also included. Join us and sit back to enjoy the splendor of Florida's winter wildlife.



Sam is co-founder of Flights of Fancy Adventures, Inc., a birding, photography, and natural history travel company.

Join us on November 10 as local environmentalist and videographer,



Scott Tucker, shares video clips and his experience swimming eye to eye with *Humpback Whales* "eighty miles out to sea" off the coast of the Dominican Republic with Conscious Breath Adventures. Scott will discuss the life cycle of the Humpback Whale and its conservation status on the planet, as well as the issues surrounding increased pressure to step up the quota on hunting.

Scott is the producer and host of the very popular *Expedition New England* TV documentary series, and has recently created a non-profit organization, Expedition Earth Productions, Inc., with hopes of broadcasting his nature programs throughout Connecticut.

Connecticut Birding Spot: Audubon Center at Bent of the River, Southbury

Connecticut Birding Hotspot:
Audubon Center at Bent of the River,
Southbury, CT

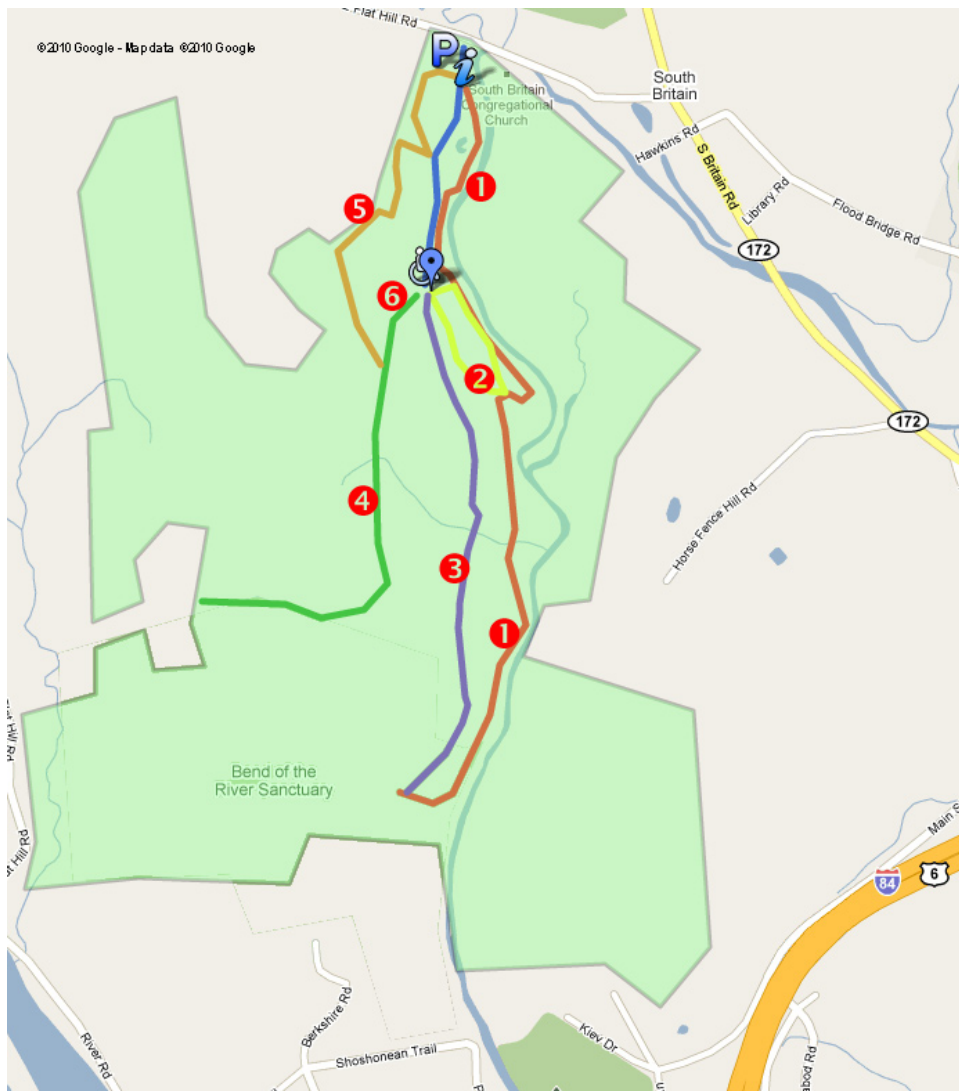
Bent of the River in Southbury, CT is an Audubon sanctuary and recognized Important Bird Area (IBA), and a wonderful spot for observing birds, plants, and other wildlife.

The sanctuary property comprises approximately 700 acres of varied habitats including sandy riverbanks, floodplain, wetlands, vernal pools, a variety of upland forest types, grasslands and one of the largest managed early successional scrubland habitats in the state. The sanctuary property abuts over 700 acres of other conservation lands, which together provide an excellent variety of habitats for migratory and seasonal resident birds. About 175 bird species have been recorded at Bent of the River, including 27 species of warblers, and numerous species of high conservation priority. Early successional habitats found at Bent of the River provide nesting habitat for species such as blue-winged warbler, prairie warbler, American woodcock, orchard oriole, and eastern kingbird.

A nature center provides opportunities for environmental education, and 15 miles of walking trails provide access for birdwatching and other exploration. In addition to being an excellent birding spot, Bent of the River also provides habitats for numerous species of insects, reptiles, amphibians, and plants not commonly seen in Connecticut.

Audubon Center at Bent of the River can be accessed by exit 14 off Interstate 84. Proceed north on Route 172 for 1 mile to the village of South Britain. At the General Store make a left onto East Flat Hill Road. The entrance to the sanctuary is 0.4 miles along on the left at the green mailbox.

Have a look at the Field Trips section of the newsletter for an upcoming



Parking is at the entrance to the Sanctuary. ❶ River Road follows the Pomperaug River for about 1¼ miles along rolling terrain. Common mergansers frequent the river. ❷ Althea's Meadow Loop Trail circles a former hay field that now has a diversity of wildflowers and insects. ❸ The Cedar Field Trail passes through an old meadow habitat that is increasingly rare in Connecticut. It is an ecosystem for several species of birds and mammals that will live nowhere else. ❹ Pootatuck Road is an extension of the Sanctuary driveway. The trail extends about ¾ mile with a moderate climb through mixed forest. ❺ The ½ Cascade Trail climbs moderately to a seasonal waterfall then descends to circle the North Meadow back to the parking lot. ❻ The circa 1870 barn has a trail log, exhibits, and a balcony that overlooks a bird feeding area. The western parts of Bent of the River have numerous trails that climb to ridges that run in a general north-south direction. Along the way are important wetlands and vernal pools. Altogether, Bent is home to at least 45 species of reptiles and amphibians (12 salamanders, 10 frogs, 8 turtles, 1 lizard, and 14 snakes) that find the diverse ecosystems and habitats the perfect place for foraging and breeding.

walk at Bent of the River. And check back with us after the walk at www.menunkatuck.org for photos and lists of sitings.

Submitted by Nina Levenduski
Reference used: <http://ct.audubon.org>

Summer Field Trips

Bird Watching at Bent of the River Sanctuary

Southbury, CT

Saturday July 31, 8:30 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.

Bent of the River is an approximately 700-acre Audubon sanctuary which offers 15 miles of trails and a variety of habitats such as sandy riverbanks, meadows, wetlands, vernal pools, early successional scrublands and upland forests. The sanctuary is an excellent place to observe birds, butterflies, plants, and wildlife, and to simply enjoy nature. Join Nina Levenduski for a morning of bird-watching and walking to explore the variety of this preserve. Beginning birders and nature lovers welcome! Bring binoculars, hand lens, camera, and field guides (birds & whatever else interests you), and a picnic lunch and water bottle. Insect repellent is also recommended.

Meet at 8:30 A.M. at the parking area just inside the entrance to the sanctuary. Directions to the sanctuary: Take I-84 to exit 14, then proceed north on Route 172 for 1 mile into



Photo: Patrick Comins

the village of South Britain. At the General Store, make a left onto East Flat Hill Road. The entrance to the park is 0.4 miles along on the left at the green mailbox.

Optional carpools can be set up by registering or contacting the trip leader.

For questions or to register for this trip, e-mail nina@menunkatuck.org, or call Nina at 860-301-1547 (after 5:30 P.M. on weekdays).

Bird Watching, etc. at Topsmead State Forest

Litchfield, CT

Sunday August 15, 9:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

Back by popular demand! Formerly the summer estate of Miss



Photo copyright Jerry Dougherty

Edith Chase of Waterbury, CT, Topsmead State Forest consists of acres of meadows, wooded lanes, woodlands, wetlands, and maintained gardens. The park has numerous walking trails, picnic areas and viewing blinds, and is a great place to see nesting Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, sparrows, hawks and other birds in summer. Beginning birders welcome!

We will spend the morning birdwatching and walking the park's trails, and will conclude with an optional picnic lunch and guided tour of Miss Chase's summer house (now maintained by DEP).

Please bring binoculars, at least one water bottle and a picnic lunch/snack. Field guides and insect repellent are recommended. Please note

that there are rustic bathroom facilities, but no water fountains/faucets or other facilities within the park. There are no admission fees for entry into the park or the mansion.

Meet the leader at 9:00 A.M. at the commuter parking lot at exit 42 off Route 8 in Litchfield/Burlington, CT. Optional carpools can be set up by registering or contacting the trip leader.

For questions or to register for this trip, e-mail nina@menunkatuck.org, or call Nina at 860-301-1547 (after 5:30 P.M. on weekdays).

Regional Water Authority Walks

The South Central Regional Water Authority maintains recreation areas in the towns of Madison, Killingworth, Guilford, North Branford, East Haven, West Haven, and Bethany. These recreation areas are great spots for observing birds, wildlife and other natural features, and require an RWA recreation permit for use. Menunkatuck Audubon has obtained an organizational recreation permit from Regional Water Authority in order to lead group walks in the RWA-owned recreation areas.

Check the Field Trips section of the newsletters for upcoming walks in the RWA recreation areas.



Orrin Jones, 2005 Scholarship Winner, Reports on His Activities

[Editors note: Orrin Jones was awarded the Menunkatuck Scholarship in 2005 on the basis of an outstanding high school career and a compelling description of his career goals. We met Orrin again last month on a bird walk at the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary. When he related his experiences since 2005, we asked him if he would write a brief description for the newsletter.]

In 2005 I was fortunate enough to be awarded a scholarship from the Menunkatuck Audubon Society. At that time I was entering my freshman year at the University of New Hampshire majoring in Wildlife Ecology. I had a great experience at UNH; in addition to coursework I was involved in several wildlife research projects during my time there. I worked as a technician on research projects studying wild turkeys, black bears, and moose. In addition to these experiences as a technician I was also awarded two undergraduate research grants. My first undergraduate grant looked at the influence of supplemental food sources on the winter dispersal and movement of wild turkeys surrounding Pease Air Force Base. With my second undergraduate grant I studied the success rate of black bear hair traps in northern New Hampshire. Through the UNH Department of Natural Resources EcoQuest Program I traveled to New Zealand during the spring of 2008 where I studied applied ecology. In 2009 I graduated from UNH Summa Cum Laude with a B.S. in Wildlife Ecology.

In addition to my education I have also gained experience outside the world of academia. During the summer of 2008 I worked as a biological intern for the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. I was stationed at Falkner Island, where my daily duties included banding and monitoring common and roseate terns. Upon my graduation from UNH I was

hired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a Biological Science Technician, stationed at Stewart B. McKinney NWR under a Salt Marsh Integrity Program. My responsibilities included conducting marshbird surveys, vegetation surveys, nekton monitoring, and I continued to be active at Falkner Island. I have returned to McKinney in 2010 continuing as a Biological Science Technician. My main responsibility this year is the daily management of Falkner Island.

I am currently a graduate student at the University of Delaware, where I am pursuing a Master's of Science degree in Wildlife Ecology. I am responsible for a collaborative research project with the University of Delaware, New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The project seeks to incorporate nocturnal behavior into estimates of energy demand of American black ducks wintering in coastal New Jersey. Working a crew of technicians I quantify the 24-hour behavior of black ducks and equate that into an estimate of daily energy demand. We are specifically interested in determining whether behavior differs between day and night and what might influence nocturnal behavior. I have completed one field season of research and one semester of courses, leaving one field season and two semesters of courses left to finish.

It is my career goal to become a wildlife biologist with either a state or federal wildlife agency. The generous scholarship provided by the Menunkatuck Audubon Society not only provided a welcome financial break but perhaps more importantly, encouragement. If there is anything personally or professionally I can do to help the society, please feel free to let me know.

Thanks again,
Orrin Jones

Project *Limulus* Update: Hundreds of Horseshoe Crabs!

The Project *Limulus* horseshoe crab monitoring project has been a rousing success. Following a story in the *Guilford Courier* about Menunkatuck Board member Judy Knowles' role as an area coordinator, over 40 people, including several children, volunteered to participate in the project.

Horseshoe crabs come ashore to mate during the lunar high tides of May, June, and July. Following the project protocol, surveyors check area beaches at both day and night high tides on three alternate days before, at, and after full and new moons. Last year the Menunkatuck group tagged about 70 crabs. As of early June, more than 100 crabs have been tagged this year. Survey volunteers have recorded well over 300 crabs, including several recapture of tagged crabs.

With June and July survey periods still ahead, 2010 will be a banner year for Menunkatuck's Project *Limulus* team.

Go to www.menunkatuck.org for updates and more photos.



Tagging a horseshoe crab.
Photo by Jim Murtagh.

Citizen Science —A Swift Night Out

A *Swift Night Out* is a continent-wide effort to raise awareness about and encourage interest in chimney swifts and Vaux's swifts (in the West).

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts!

Here is how it works: Keep your eyes to the skies at dusk in late July and watch for areas where swifts are feeding. Look for a tall shaft, chimney, or similar structure to locate where chimney swifts go to roost in your area.

This year, on one night over the weekend of August 6, 7, 8, and/or September 10, 11, 12 observe the roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. When you have your number, e-mail the data to DWA@austin.rr.com. That's all there is to it!

Include the following information:

- Number of swifts counted
- Time
- Date
- Location
- Broad description of the site, e.g. school, warehouse, resi-



- dence, chimney swift tower, etc.
- Weather conditions may also be reported.

Numbers Up for Nesting Tree Swallows and Purple at Hammonasset

John Picard reports that tree swallow and purple martin nesting at Hammonasset looks favorable in early June. Tree swallows are using 30 nestboxes and have laid 150 eggs of which 25 have already hatched. Purple martins have 27 nests with 135 eggs, an increase of 15 over last year.

Also, all four osprey platforms at Hammonasset have nesting ospreys as does the new platform at the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary.



A tree swallow (above) tries to hide the record eight (!) eggs (right) laid in this nest. Tree swallow eggs have a mass of about 2 g (roughly the same as a plain M&M). Female tree swallow have a mass of about 20 g. This female laid the equivalent of 80% of her mass. She had to have been one busy bird feeding herself during her egg-laying week.

One of the purple martins eyes John Picard as he inspects the nest apartment (left).

Photos by John Picard.



Biodiversity 2010

Know your natural neighbors



The Misunderstood Snapping Turtle

The largest freshwater turtle in the Northeast, the common snapping turtle (*Chelydra s. serpentina*) can be found throughout our state. Notice the large head with its hooked beak, and at the other end, a very long tail with triangular protrusions. The snapper's large size and prehistoric appearance often frighten people who encounter it.

BIO BITS

This aquatic turtle prefers permanent bodies of water, such as lakes, ponds, rivers, bogs and marshes. It will also visit the salt water and brackish habitats of salt marshes and tidal creeks.

Mostly active at night, the snapping turtle spends its days in warm shallow waters where it will bury itself in the soft, muddy bottom, leaving only its head exposed. Or it will float at the water's surface to bask in the sun to regulate its body temperature. Sometimes a snapper can be seen hauled out onto a rock or log to bask. As evening falls the turtle will feed on aquatic plants, such as pondweed and water-lily, as well as fish, crayfish and carrion. Its reputation for feeding on ducklings is a bit overstated, though it will partake of an occasional meal of waterfowl.

The snapping turtle also has a reputation for being an aggressive monster on land. But consider this: most turtles are able to withdraw into their shells when threatened. The snapping turtle cannot because, although its top shell, the carapace, is large, its bottom shell, the plastron, barely covers its underside. While this type of shell works fine for the aquatic, mud-dwelling snapping turtle when in its normal pond or swamp habitat, it does not protect the turtle when it travels over land to find a new pond or a site to lay eggs. An "aggressive" snapping turtle is only being defensive and will bite when cornered. Obviously, it does not actively seek out humans to attack.



If you encounter a snapping turtle on land it is most likely a female searching for a sandy or gravelly spot in which to lay her eggs. If you keep your distance you may be able to observe her as she digs several false nests and then a final one in which she deposits her eggs. There are typically 20 to 40 one-inch, perfectly round, white eggs laid, but sometimes over 80 eggs are deposited. The female then scrapes sand over the nest to cover it, tamping it down with her body. Her responsibility to her offspring ends there as she then heads back to her pond. The eggs will hatch in September or October in our area. The one-inch hatchling turtles may spend the winter in their underground nest, or they may emerge and head for shallow water.

Snapping turtles can live up to fifty years or longer and their shells can reach 12 to 15 inches in length. Weighing in at 45 pounds or more, the snapping turtle is often killed for its meat. But since these turtles accumulate concentrations of chemical toxins in their flesh, including PCBs, it would be wise to consider the health risks before partaking in a meal of snapping turtle soup.

Submitted by Cindi Kobak

Photo by Cindi Kobak

Birdathon Records 104 Species

Teams were out at Menunkatuck Chapter area birding spots from dawn through dusk on May 15 counting birds. While sea- and shorebirds were no more difficult to see than during any other spring, perching birds like warblers were a challenge. The early leafing of southern Connecticut's trees made spotting flitting birds in the treetops difficult. Nonetheless, Menunkatuck birders recorded 104 species during the 22nd Birdathon.

As of early June, 58 donations totalling almost \$3000 have been received. Birdathon funds will be used for Menunkatuck projects for the coming year, including

- Installing a fifth Osprey platform (\$1400) at Hammonasset, ten interpretive signs (\$1400 each) describing the role Hammonasset plays in the lives of both migratory and resident birds.
- Removing non-native invasive plants from the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary and planting native

species (\$6000). We received matching grants for part of this project.

- Supporting field trips to science centers and museums for the King/Robinson Magnet School students (\$3000). We are applying for matching grants to help.

If you would like to contribute to the Menunkatuck Birdathon, send your check to Menunkatuck Audubon Society, PO Box 214, Guilford, CT 06437.



22ND MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY
BIRDATHON

Help save Menunkatuck Audubon Society money by getting your newsletter by e-mail.

Mailed paper newsletters cost Menunkatuck about \$6.00 a year.

Go to

<http://www.menunkatuck.org/index.php/about1/subscribe/>
to subscribe to the Menunkatuck mailing lists.

Thank you.

Connecticut Rare Bird Alerts

www.virtualbirder.com/bmail/ctbird/200508/w2/index.html



Chapter Membership Application

Yes, I'd like to join.

Please enroll me as a member of the National Audubon Society and of my local chapter.

Please send AUDUBON magazine and my membership card to the address below.

My check for \$20 is enclosed.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____

STATE: _____

ZIP: _____

Please make all checks payable to the National Audubon Society.

Send this application and your check to:

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P.O. Box 422250
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250

LOCAL CHAPTER

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C9ZD630Z

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MENUNKATUCK

July 2010



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NEXT MEETING

NEPAL: BIRDING THE HIGH PEAKS

JULIAN HOUGH

Wednesday, September 8, 2010

7:30 PM

Blackstone Library
758 Main Street
Branford

*Become a member of Menunkatuck Audubon Society.
Send in this form with your \$20.00 annual fee to help
support our projects and activities.*

Please add me to your mailing list. Enclosed is \$20.00
to support Menunkatuck Audubon Society.

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