

# Notes and Niches



News of Menunkatuck December 1983

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Volume 2 Number 5

ON OPEN SPACE...

"Without wilderness the world would become a cage".

David Brower

"Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the un-exploited forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic of wildness, to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk..."

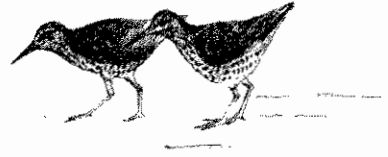
H.D. Thoreau

"Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil...it is a sustained circuit, a slowly augmented revolving fund of life. Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity".

Aldo Leopold

Our local land trusts in New Haven, Branford, Guilford, and Madison have preserved many acres for us - for recreation, education, habitat preservation, scientific research, and to balance economic development. Westwoods alone is an open space area of over 1000 acres, in both public and private ownership, and the contiguous Stony Creek Quarry Preserve, owned by the Town of Branford, adds almost 400 acres more. These and many other natural places are available to us because of the generosity of those who give land and the money to purchase land, the support of those who belong to the Land Trusts, and the hard work of those who volunteer their time and energy.

Virginia Corbière, President



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**NEW GALLERY at Greenwich Audubon Center**

The newly opened Gallery at the Audubon Center in Greenwich is now showing its first exhibit, "Images from Audubon".

This show, featuring the work of Les Line, Editor of AUDUBON, will be on display through the fall.

More than 40 large format color photographs by Line display the essence of why AUDUBON has been called "the most beautiful natural history magazine in the world".

The Gallery, located in the Audubon Center in Greenwich, 613 Riversville Road, is open from 9 AM to 5 PM daily except Mondays and holiday weekends. For further information call the Center at (203) 869-5272.

THE DINOSAUR TREE  
The Dawn Redwood Story

by Michael Pochan, Forester

The discovery of a new tree specie comes as an exhilarating bit of euphoria to a forester who has been exposed to the loss of his forest capital in the disappearance, through a blight, of the noble American Chestnut and the coming complete demise of the American Elm. The Elm is making its last stand with the heavy effusion of pesticides and fungicides. Our oaks, maples and ashes show evidence of continuing decline and these too may disappear - a totally bleak tree prospect.

The newly discovered "Dawn Redwood", scientifically *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, is not exactly a new tree, for its existence as noted in fossil remains pre-date the age of Dinosaurs by some 100 million years. It was found generally distributed throughout the northern hemisphere until the passing of the dinosaurs 100 million years ago, give or take a few 100 thousand years.

The following is an excerpt from the Save-the-Redwood League's bulletin "Redwoods of the Past", which tells of the discovery of the tree in a remote section of central China. In 1944 T. Wang, a forester employed by the Ministry of Agriculture, came upon an enormous tree near the village of Mo-tao-chi in the province of Szechuan in central China. Since he had never seen one like it, he took back to Nanking specimens of its needles and cones.

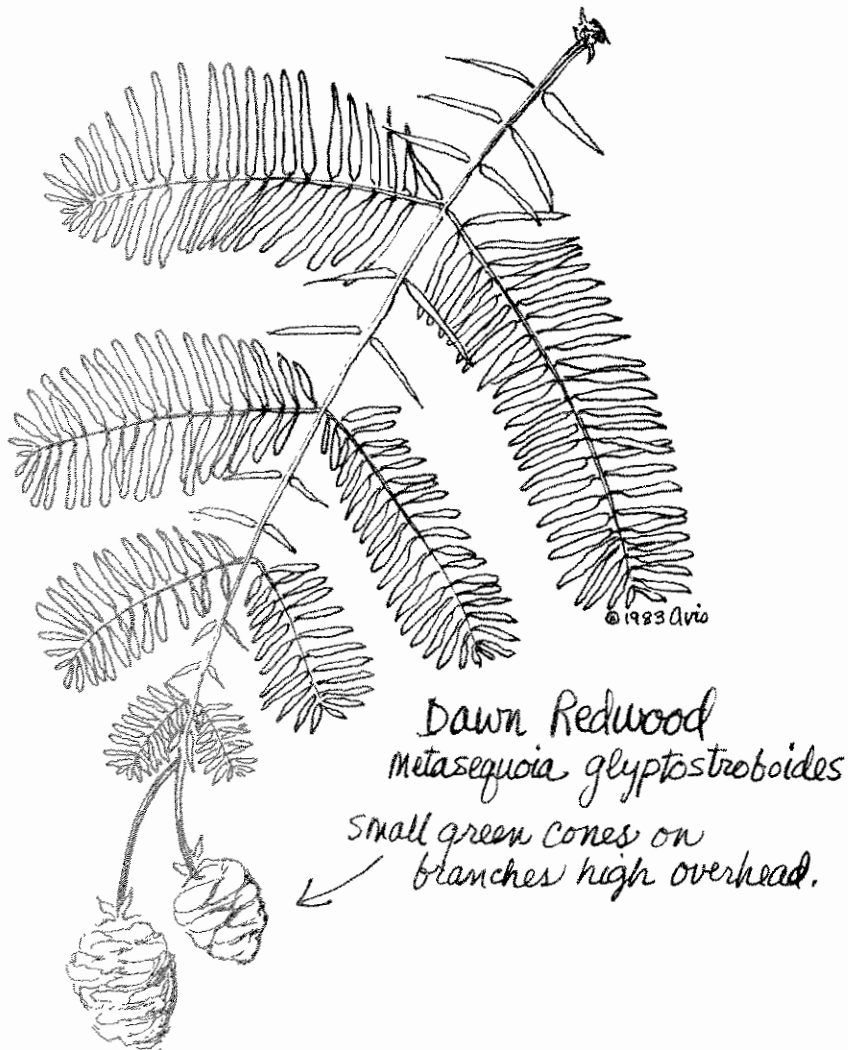
"Dr. W.C. Cheng, Professor of Forestry at National Central University realized at once that these specimens represented a tree never before recorded before by botanists in the forests of China. Consultation with Dr. H.H. Hu, director of Fan Memorial Institute of Peking, resulted in the amazing discovery that the foliage and cones of this tree were identical with the fossil specimens of *Metasequoia* from Japan and Manchuria. Here was a fossil come to life in the unexplored interior of Asia, a tree thought to have become extinct 20 million years before, a member of a race whose history is now known to extend back for a 100 million years into the past, to the days when dinosaurs roamed over the earth. Never has there been a more dramatic botanical discovery than the finding of the living Dawn Redwood by forester Wang."



An expedition to the Dawn Redwood area of China by the Save-the-Redwood, headed by Ralph Chaney, not only studied the tree and its associated species, but brought back seeds and cuttings that started a planting program of this tree that extended from southeast Alaska to the East Coast of the United States and on across Europe. The objective was to see how this new tree would fare in its old habitat in the northern hemisphere. The Dawn Redwood seems to be doing well in all geographic locations in which it was planted. There are several trees that have been planted in the shoreline area which have been doing extremely well. One planted on Dr. Porter's Whitfield Street property in Guilford in 1955 is over 30 inches in diameter at  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet from ground level and is over 65 feet in height. There is also one planted a few years ago on a property south of Route 1 in the western part of Madison that is over 2 feet in diameter and over 50 feet high. Last year, this writer saw the first trees planted in 1949 in the Weise Gardens of Philadelphia, that are the nearest thing to a Redwood grove in the eastern part of the United States. These trees are between 3 and 4 feet in diameter and tower up over 90 feet in height.

Being new in the planting areas, it has seemed to be immune from most insect and disease attacks; in fact, it was even by-passed by the Gypsy Moth scourge of the past two decades. Its growth habit is akin to that of our native Hemlock. When grown in the open without competition it forms a conical shape; however, in a competitive forest situation it tends to grow straight like a candlestick, using its reserve of energy to keep its crown near the top of the forest canopy.

Although the Dawn Redwood belongs to the coniferous tree group, it has an annual deciduous habit of losing its needles, much like our native Larch and Cypress. Here is a tree worth considering for its many merits, among which is its ability to provide shade in the summer and to allow the sun to filter through its bare branches in the winter after its needles fall.



BIRDING and FIELD TRIP notes.....

John Gaskell

On Saturday, September 24, four of us left Guilford for Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in New York. The day was clear, sunny and warm, perfect for a birding expedition in the Big Apple. The refuge is situated on an island in the middle of Jamaica Bay, directly in the flight path of jets leaving Kennedy Airport. We watched three Concorde depart in the time we were there.

The north garden is an area of woods that have been planted to draw a wide variety of migrant landbirds. We were treated to the spectacle of hundreds of warblers flitting through the brush. The species we could identify included Redstart, Yellow-rumped, Cape May, Yellowthroat, Black and White, and Parula. Others we lumped in the category of "confusing fall warblers".

The west pond, which we circumnavigated on a wide path, proved to be most productive. A summary list includes five species of duck including Ruddy and Blue-winged Teal, four species of gull, squadrons of Black Skimmers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Kingfisher, Kestrel, Gallinules Pied-billed Grebes and Black-crowned Night Herons.

Waders on the marsh included Snowy and Common Egrets and several Glossy Ibis. Our most unusual sightings were a pair of Clapper Rails swimming incessantly back and forth across a marsh ditch, and a Great Black-backed Gull that slew a Gadwall duck and began to devour it as we watched.

The rarity of the day was a single Golden Plover mixed in with the gulls and sandpipers.

A trip across the boulevard to the east pond yielded Willets on the mud flats, a Phoebe and a Savannah Sparrow sharing a fence and several Northern Water Thrushes skirting the pond edge among the reed grass. East pond itself brought us nothing new, though we added to our legions of ducks, Canada Geese and Skimmers.

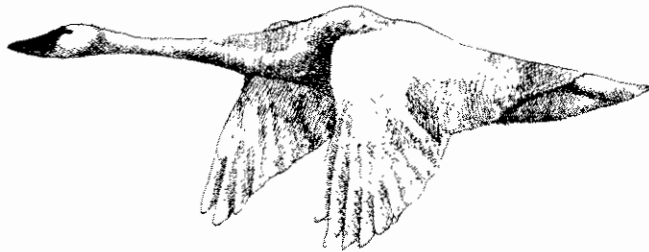
As we pulled out of the parking lot a Marsh Hawk coursed low over the field, capping our fine day of birding in New York.

Birding on the local scene has been fairly productive during September and October.

At Hammonasset, Willard's Island has been turning up a good variety of warblers, finches and other land birds. A partial list includes Brown Thrasher, Towhee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped and Pine warblers, Phoebes (50+), and even a flock of five Black-crowned Night Herons. Offshore, look for both cormorant species, scoters, and loons. Hawks can often be seen over the marshes, especially Kestrel and Marsh Hawk. On Sunday, October 2, birders spotted five Merlins, larger cousins of the Kestrel.

Wading birds have included Great Blue Heron and Snowy Egret. At the pond near the water tower a family of seven swans have taken up residence. A small flock of Canada Geese is calling the pond home, as well as ducks, Coots, the occasional Grebe and two Common Gallinules, one adult and one young. This last bird is the most unusual species present.

Another good birding area is Lighthouse Point, New Haven, where you can watch migrating hawks and ask questions of the New Haven Bird Club members who man the station every day of the week. When you need to relieve the crick in your neck, take a walk along the grassy edges of the parking lot and into the woods. A good number of land birds are found here and often an ornithologist will be netting and banding the migrants, which offers a good opportunity to see those hard to find species in the hand.



Guilford High School AUDUBON CLUB News.....

Attention GHS! The Menunkatuck Audubon Club has kicked off the new year in a meeting which 16 students attended. We've planned our first canoe trip, and have tossed up other possibilities for the year - owl prowl, x-c skiing, whale watch, and much more. Under President Susan Hosley, with Mr. Cinotti and Mr. Tardeau as advisors, we plan to make it an active, successful year. It's never too late to join, so if you're interested, contact Sue Hosley or one of the advisors. Hope to see you join up!

Andrew Sinder, Recording Sec'y

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**Audubon Expedition Institute**

The Audubon Expedition Institute, previously headquartered in New York City, now has its home base at the Northeast Regional Office in Sharon, CT.

The Expedition is a fully accredited, travelling outdoor education school that gives junior high, high school, and college credit (B.S. and M.S. degrees) with an emphasis in Environmental Education. Participants travel throughout the United States and Canada using the natural environment as a classroom.

Requests for books and information about the Expedition Institute can be sent to:

Jim Peterson  
Expedition Institute  
NE Regional Office  
Sharon Audubon Center  
Sharon, CT 06069

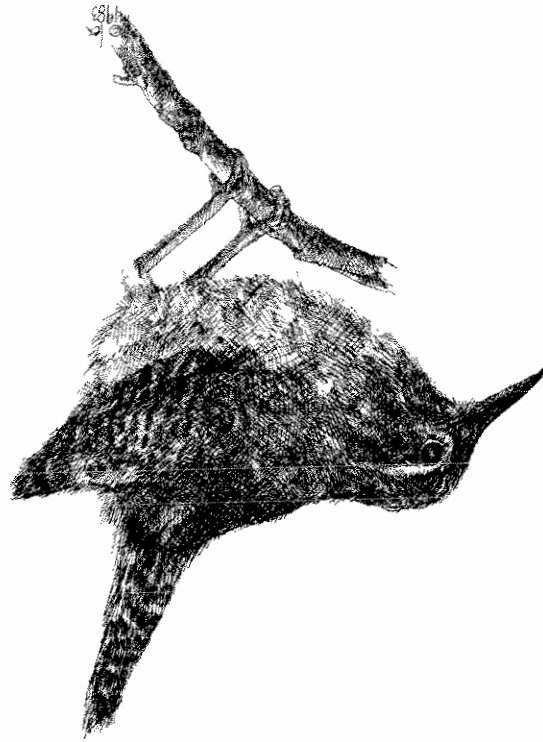
## MAJOR WATERCOLOR EXHIBITION

There will be a rare exhibition of the watercolors of the famed artist Robert Verity Clem at the New Britain Museum of American Art from Sunday November 13 through December 31.

Clem, who is best known for his spectacular portrayals of shorebirds which appeared in "The Shorebirds of North America" edited by Gardner D. Stout (Viking Press, 1967), now considered a classic, has in recent years turned his attention to landscapes with birds appearing "more naturally" - as one is accustomed to seeing them in nature.

Working in a small studio near his home in Chatham, Massachusetts, Clem's meticulous watercolor depictions of the birds he has studied over a lifetime around Cape Cod are sought after by serious collectors throughout the country, some of whom are, themselves, renowned painters of birds.

Shunning publicity and rarely exhibiting outside museums, Clem's work has become difficult to track down. Since he has allowed no reproduction of his work for more than two decades, and since the originals are in the hands of private collectors, it is only at rare exhibitions such as this that one's yearnings for these visual feasts can be satisfied. Birders and art lovers from this area will do well not to miss this one!



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