

MENUNKATUCK

January 2004

THE NEWSLETTER OF MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY, A CHAPTER OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

Menunkatuck Audubon Summary of Activities 2003-2004

Preface

This has been a busy and exciting year for Menunkatuck Audubon. From education programs and field walks to biological inventories, to advocating for the land we love and what we believe to be right, Menunkatuck Board members and volunteers can be seen hard at work throughout the chapter area and all year long. Menunkatuck continues to collaborate with our long-standing friends in the environmental community. Additionally, we are reaching out to other groups and organizations within our chapter area and beyond. Menunkatuck is blessed with active board members and volunteers – but the dramatic reduction in the dues-share weighs heavily on all our minds.

Two thousand four promises to be another great year of interesting speakers with beautiful presentations, exciting field trips and a continuing battle of the proposed development of Griswold Airport.

Below is a brief description of each of Menunkatuck's 2003 activities. The width and breadth of the projects and programs, the dedication of board members and volunteers, and the particulars of each accomplishment fill me with a great sense of pride and joy. I hope you will feel the same way as you see

what Menunkatuck has done with 2003.

Education and Outreach

The Annual **Birdathon** was held May 10, 2003. The day was a wonderful success. Several groups were led throughout the chapter area. Menunkatuck and the New Haven Bird Club participated together and a total of 185 species were counted. Please note, this serves as a fundraiser for Menunkatuck.

Menunkatuck participated in the **Great Backyard Bird Count** with Cornell University in February. The chapter publicized the event locally and submitted data for people that did not have online capabilities.

Menunkatuck participated in **Connecticut Audubon's Eagle Festival** in February. A group of board members and other volunteers manned the Chester Ferry dock, one of the designated sites along the Connecticut River with binoculars and scopes. When the public came to the site, Menunkatuck volunteers pointed out the location of eagles and other birds in the area. Board members and other Menunkatuck volunteers manned the site Saturday and Sunday from 10:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. That weekend was one of the coldest all winter. Hats-on to the volunteers.

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MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY

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General Public Meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month. Menunkatuck hosted a particularly large meeting (approximately 120) in May with a program by David Sibley.

The **Eighth Annual Teachers Workshop** was held on a gorgeous May 17, 2003. The workshop was led by Chris Sullivan of Project SEARCH. The workshop instructed teachers (and community members that signed up for the workshop) on a variety of methods to test water quality. The methods included: observational assessments, collecting chemical data, and using biological sampling (by collection plus identification of fresh water macroinvertebrate and performing the metrics on the collected sample). There were eight participants.

This has been a year of expansion for Menunkatuck's **field programs**, thanks to the leadership of Vice-president and trip leader Bill Yule as well as other trip leaders John Picard, Dorothy Holabird, Dennis Riordan and Suzanne Botta. In 2002, two field walks were held. In 2003 Menunkatuck held the following eight programs:

Eagle-Duck Hop: January 26, led by Bill Yule with a second group led by Board Members Dorothy Holabird and Dennis Riordan
Eagle watch for a Hamden Boy Scout group, held at the Shepaug Dam, February 1, led by Suzanne Botta
Dance of the Timberdoodle (Woodcock): Westbrook Salt Meadow Unit,



March 23, led by Bill Yule
Butterflies and Wildflowers of Bluff Head, April 19, led by Bill Yule (in conjunction with the Connecticut Butterfly Association)
Spring Warbler Migration East Rock, May 3, led by John Picard
Spring Warbler Migration Hammonasset, May 24, led by John Picard
Dragonflies and Butterflies, Bauer Park, June 14, led by Bill Yule
Paddling the East River, July 12, led by Suzanne Botta
Additionally, at the request of Fred Hill, Guilford Salt Meadow Sanctuary Manager, Suzanne Botta has twice provided field walks of the Anne Conover Nature Trail to the local residents.

Menunkatuck hosted two **Audubon Council meetings** in 2003 and Suzanne Botta provided a field walk of the Anne Conover Trail to council members.

Jerry Connolly (Program Coordinator) of the Audubon Shop leads **Saturday morning bird walks**. During the months of January and February he also leads **eagle-sighting trips** along the Connecticut River.

The **Annual Scholarship** of \$500 was awarded to a graduating senior in our chapter area who plans to study marine biology.

The **Know Your Natural Neighbors** natural history article is written by Cindi Kobak and printed weekly in several local papers including *The Sound* (Branford), *The Guilford Courier*, the *East Haven Courier* and the *North Haven Courier*.

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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.

January, February Meetings

On January 14, Bob Askins will return to Menunkatuck to update us on *The Annual Cycle of Migratory Birds*.

And on February 11, the always popular Sam Fried will take us to Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. The Monument exhibits an extraordinary collection of plants of the Sonoran Desert, including the organ pipe cactus, a large cactus rarely found in the United States. Sam will show us the birds and wildlife of the Sonoran Desert's oases and springs.

Field Trips

Duck Eagle Hop Sunday, January 4, 2004 Lower Connecticut River

Bill Yule will lead a trip along the Connecticut River from Old Saybrook north in search of wintering ducks and eagles. Meet at Dock and Dine at 10:00 A.M. For more info call Bill (203) 457-1326.

The Bird Collection Saturday, January 17 and 24, 2004 Peabody Museum, New Haven

Kristof Zyskowski, ornithology collection manager at Peabody Museum, will take us behind the scenes to view the bird collection of skins, eggs, nests, and mounted birds. The Peabody collection includes about 70% of the world's species. There is a limit of ten people per session and preregistration is required; call Dennis Riordan (203) 387-2167. Meet in the main lobby of the museum at 10:00 A.M. The collection is kept at 59°F; dress warmly. There are two opening for January 17 and one for January 24.

2004 Calendar

January 14, 2004

There and Back Again:

Bob Askins

The Annual Cycle of Migratory Birds

February 11, 2004

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

Sam Fried

Indoor meetings are at the Nathanael Greene Community Center and begin at 7:30 P.M.

**Directions to the Nathanael Greene Community Center:
I-95 to exit 58 in Guilford. South on Route 77 for 8/10 miles.
The Community Center is on the right between Route 1 and the Guilford Green.**

Refreshments are served.

Visit Menunkatuck Audubon at the

Connecticut River Eagle Festival

February 14-15
Essex, CT

Presented by Connecticut Audubon Society

Menunkatuck will have spotting scopes at Chester Ferry Dock.

For more information about the
Eagle Festival call
1-800-714-7201
or visit www.ctaudubon.org

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Long Island Sound Secondary Research is a project in which Menunkatuck is collaborating with Project SEARCH to obtain water quality monitoring equipment for Project SEARCH staff to utilize during site visits with high schools across Connecticut as well as for Menunkatuck's use.

At the request of the Hammonasset chapter of Trout Unlimited President Steve Butcher, Suzanne Botta presented a program on **Establishing a Volunteer-based Water Quality Monitoring Program** for the Hammonasset chapter of Trout Unlimited. The program was very well received and hopefully we will collaborate with our local Trout Unlimited chapter in the future.

Chris Sullivan, Coordinator of Project SEARCH and Suzanne Botta ran a **Watershed Education Day** program for the eighth grade class at Our Lady of Mercy School. This four-hour program and covered watersheds, groundwater and water quality testing.

Branford Biodiversity Day was held September 12–13, 2003 and was a fantastic success. Over 80 biologists, naturalists, educators and their students participated in this 24-hour bio-

logical survey of the Town of Branford.

The slide show for Branford Biodiversity Day is in the process of being assembled. A special meeting will be held for the slide show with a target audience of Guilford and Branford. The meeting will be hosted by the Branford Land Trust March 24, 2004 as part of the Land Trust Blackstone Lecture Series.

Advocacy

Henry Ferris continues to work diligently on **Griswold Over-Development**. Menunkatuck provided testimony regarding the economic value of birders and other ecotourists. Last year the developer withdrew its application and the coalition to stop the development used the time to regroup. A new application has been submitted and Menunkatuck is once again filing for intervenor status. Additionally, Menunkatuck continues to work with Stop Griswold Over Development (SGOD) – supporting printing costs, etc.

Regarding the **Islander East Natural Gas Pipeline**, Suzanne Botta has been and continues to work closely with CT Stop the Pipeline to get the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to deny Islander East permits to construct a natural gas

pipeline that would go through the chapter area, into and across Long Island Sound. Menunkatuck has provided testimony on the impact to wetlands, birds, biodiversity, marine mammals, and erosion con-

cerns in potentially impacted wetlands (inland and coastal). Menunkatuck has intervenor status with the Connecticut Siting Council. To date Menunkatuck has provided testimony opposing the pipeline to the Branford Blue Ribbon Commission, the Connecticut Siting Council, as well as Federal Secretary of Commerce.

Newsletter

The **newsletter** is printed six times per year. In addition to informing our members (as well as gratis recipients) about Menunkatuck's activities and events (advocacy, education, workshops, general meetings, etc.) we include **BioBits~Know Your Natural Neighbors**, information on generally local flora and fauna. We also include relevant upcoming events and announcements in our chapter area, i.e., land trust walks, biking, and DEP and National Audubon calls for volunteers.

Board member, Dennis Riordan is currently overhauling the Menunkatuck **website**.

Conservation

One of our new board members, John Picard, is currently receiving training on organizing volunteers to monitor amphibians in pre-specified areas as part of the **Connecticut Amphibian Monitoring Project**, a statewide monitoring program run through the DEP and West Hartford Science Center.

Cindi Kobak, representing Menunkatuck Audubon, was invited to participate in a **Community Landscape Analysis** of the Town of Guilford. The town has partnered with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in a lengthy study that will "enhance the town's decision-making capability in the area of land use management and natural resource conservation." After two pilot projects in smaller towns in



Wisconsin and Ohio, the Guilford study will be the first in the nation conducted in a larger town.

Menunkatuck volunteers continue to provide **conservation services** in the chapter region. These services include cleaning out Tree Swallow nest boxes and maintaining the Birders' Log at Hammonasset State Park

The **Branford Fish Ladder Project** is in the early planning stages and Menunkatuck is keeping in contact with the Branford River Project and Branford Land Trust regarding this

project.

2004 UpComing Projects

Board members Dennis Riordan and Dorothy Holabird recently returned from a birding trip to Scotland refreshed and with some wonderful new project ideas:

Build an extremely large **sand barrel** to be home to bank swallows in the chapter area

Work with school children to create an illustrated **trail map**. The children will draw the pictures for the map and Menunkatuck will provide the text.

Menunkatuck will continue last year's full calendar of field walks.

Menunkatuck will continue to fight the over development of Griswold as well as the proposed pipeline.

Menunkatuck will create and show the Branford Biodiversity Day presentation, as well as compile the collected data into a publication to be distributed to Branford's commissions, environmental organizations, schools, and libraries.

Submitted by: Suzanne Botta, President

C.A.M.P. Volunteers Are Sought for Surveys

Expectations are always high. We would all like to find an amphibian under each and every rock and log that we flip. We also know that it is not that easy. More often than not the flip/find ratio is quite low. However, that does not deter the volunteers that come out to help with the Connecticut Amphibian Monitoring Program surveys. C.A.M.P., now in its sixth year, is designed to monitor the populations of amphibians that live in several 2.5 square kilometer areas across the state.

One such site, the Podunk site, is located in the area of Opening Hill Rd. in Madison.

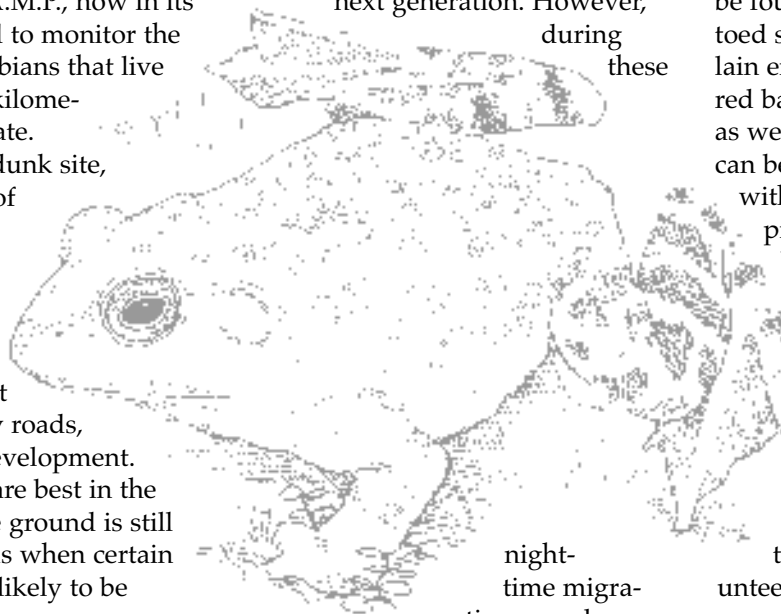
Data is collected from the surveys and then used to identify population trends that are affected by nearby roads, housing, and other development.

C.A.M.P. surveys are best in the early spring when the ground is still cold and damp. This is when certain amphibians are most likely to be found.

A good time to look for evidence of amphibian presence is at night. After the first rains of spring spotted salamanders and wood frogs are on the move. Migration is a strong

instinct and undaunted by the presence of oncoming traffic and too preoccupied by the urge to reproduce, amphibians cross roads that lie between them and their place of origin: vernal pools. Time is of the greatest essence. The sooner they can get to the pool, mate, and lay eggs, the better their chances of ensuring the next generation. However,

during these



night-time migrations, road mortality

is always a threat. The data sheets that are used by the volunteers have a section that notes DOR and AOR - dead on road and alive on road. All too often DOR is checked.

Other obstacles that lie before them often come in the form of streetlights that make them easy targets for predators, vast expanses of lawn that offer little in the way of cover, curbs, and catch basins.

Daytime surveys often reveal other types of amphibians. Both dusky and two-lined salamanders can be found along the streambeds. Four-toed salamanders (with their porcelain enamel-looking underparts) and red backed salamanders are common as well. Marbled salamander larvae can be found in vernal pools along with spring peepers, green frogs, pickerel frogs, gray tree frogs, bullfrogs, and toads.

Becoming a C.A.M.P. volunteer is not for the faint of heart. The requirements include the ability to flip objects that lie on the forest floor and along the streambeds, always being careful to return the objects to their original positions. And most important, a volunteer must have a sense of humor. If you would like to be included on the list of volunteers, contact Gary Cline at, gary.cline@yale.edu or John Picard at, johnpicardiwcc@aol.com.

Submitted by John Picard

Biodiversity 2004

Know your natural neighbors



Seals Visit Long Island Sound in Winter

For the past ten years or so an increasing number of seals, mainly harbor seals (*Phoca vitulina*), have been seen spending their winters in Long Island Sound.

BIO BITS They migrate down from their breeding grounds in Canada and Maine, arrive along our shores in December, and remain until March. Harbor seals can grow to about 5 or 6 feet long, and weigh from 175 to 225 pounds, the males being slightly larger. Their fur is gray or silver with dark spots. They feed mainly on fish, squid, crabs and lobster, and can stay underwater for as long as 28 minutes.

Seals will haul out onto exposed rocks at low tide, lounging about in groups. Sometimes, though, an adult female will leave her pup on a shoreline beach while she feeds underwater. Upon finding such a pup, well-meaning humans believe it is injured or abandoned and requires their help. Unfortunately, more harm than good often results from such a “rescue.” If you spot seals in Long Island Sound this winter, enjoy them from a distance. Since they are federally protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, it is illegal for anyone to harass them, and only licensed experts are allowed to handle them. If you truly believe you have found an animal that requires help, call the experts at the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium or the Mystic Marinelife Aquarium.

Submitted by Cindi Kobak



Saturday Morning Eagle Watches

Saturdays, January 10, 17, 24, and 31, and February 7,
21, and 28
7:45 A.M.

Leader: Jerry Connolly
Meet at the Audubon Shop, Madison

See Bald Eagles from a variety of locations along the Connecticut River. There is a limit of 35 and pre-registration is required. The price is \$20 and includes soup and sandwich lunch at Oliver's Tavern in Essex. For complete details call The Audubon Shop at 203-245-9056.



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:

National Audubon Society
700 Broadway
New York, NY 10003

LOCAL CHAPTER

Menunkatuck Audubon Society
D63/7XCH

Menunkatuck welcomes new members

Menunkatuck Audubon Society welcomes the following new members:

Branford: Donald Crockford-Peters,

Mr Nathaniel Silverstein
East Haven: Alexander House
Madison: Arthur P Anseron

Connecticut
Rare Bird Alerts
(203)254-3665

Menunkatuck Audubon Society
PO Box 214
Guilford, CT 06437

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MENUNKATUCK

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NEXT MEETING

BOB ASKINS
THERE AND BACK AGAIN:
THE ANNUAL CYCLE OF
MIGRATING BIRDS

Wednesday, January 14, 2004
7:30 PM
Guilford Community Center
Route 77
Guilford

Are you on our mailing list?
If not, send in this form with \$10.00 to cover
costs to be sure that you are informed about
our activities.

Please add me to your mailing list.
Enclosed is \$10.00 to cover the costs of the
newsletter for one year.

Name: _____

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