

# MENUNKATUCK

March 2003

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

## *Eagle, Seal Populations Are Up, But...*

With the harshest part of winter ebbing, maple buds perking-up and crocuses waiting in the wings, we begin looking to spring and an outdoor enthusiasm bubbles to the surface. This has been a great year for eagle watching in Connecticut. When describing to folks weathering the cold to catch a glimpse of our very regal, yet at one time nearly extinct national emblem, I feel a giddiness inside as I pronounce to the crew who has spotted an adult Bald Eagle perched in a white pine, "Now look two trees to the left, and you will see four, much better camouflaged juveniles. Although we think of these birds as solitary, which they are during the breeding season, this time of year they can be, (dare I say it...) quite gregarious." There is an excitement among the group, many have never seen a Bald Eagle in the wild, most have never seen one in Connecticut. It's a great day to be outdoors. Later in the day, I take a smaller group to a spot I stumbled across one day, a spot to see Harbor Seals hauled out of the water in a location easily seen from land.

These two beautiful creatures, although miles apart in appearance and lifestyle have at least one thing in common, a recovering population. At their lowest point, there remained only 400 Bald Eagles in the lower 48; today estimates put them close to 5,000. Since their reintroduction to the Quabbin reservoir in

Massachusetts beginning in 1982, the population stretching into Connecticut has grown to over 100, including three nesting pairs. Similarly, the number of Harbor seals has slowly and quietly been on the rise along our shoreline. Currently, the Thimble Islands alone have become a wintering home for about 25 Harbor Seals.

Last year one of the three nesting pair of eagles in Connecticut abandoned their nest; the reason, too many people too close to the nest. The visitors did not intend harm, they just wanted to see the pair, perhaps take a picture, and maybe if they were really lucky, find a feather. But these are wild animals with a healthy fear of people. They do not differentiate between those that would harm them and those wishing to get a closer look. An eagle can see a rabbit from over a mile away - they see you before you see them. Harbor seals are habitual creatures generally hauling out on the same rocks at low-tide, but if disturbed they will leave their rock, and not return until the following low tide, losing valuable resting time. If either population is to recover we must give them the space they need to eat, rest and breed. As the days get longer and the sun begins to feel warm again keep a few things in mind as you head out to see what wild friends are about:  
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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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MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY  
PO BOX 214  
GUILFORD, CT 06437

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**Vice-President:** .....Bill Yule  
**Treasurer:**.....Connie Mortensen  
**Secretary:** .....Catherine Ferguson

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## C.A.M.P. Volunteers are Needed

Menunkatuck Audubon Society will once again conduct spring amphibian surveys as part of the Connecticut Amphibian Monitoring Project and is looking for volunteers to assist in this important work.

The Connecticut Amphibian Monitoring Project (C.A.M.P.) gathers data on amphibian populations across the state and promotes the awareness of conservation issues surrounding amphibians. There is growing concern among scientists throughout the world over apparent declines in amphibian populations and an increased incidence of malformations and disease in frogs.

Amphibians are excellent indicators of environmental health due to a number of inherent biological and ecological factors, including permeable skin, low population mobility and a complex life cycle with both aquatic and terrestrial stages. (See Bio Bits, page 6.)

Because of annual fluctuations and natural variability, long-term studies are required to accurately assess population trends. The monitoring program will study 13 randomly selected, 1.5 square mile survey blocks throughout the state over a 15-year period.

Volunteers are trained to identify the 22 species of amphibians native to Connecticut and on how to use standard amphibian census techniques, like frog call surveys, salamander cover searches and night road transects for migrating amphibians.

Information gathered from the project will provide a baseline for analyzing changes in relative species diversity and abundance of Connecticut amphibian populations. The results may aid future conservation planning efforts by providing an indication of how various amphibian species and populations respond to different land uses.

Menunkatuck has been a partner in C.A.M.P. since 1998 and is responsible for surveying the Podunk site in Madison. MAS coordinators are Gary Cline <gary.cline@yale.edu> and John Picard <johnpicardiwcc@aol.com>. If you are interested in participating, contact Gary or John.

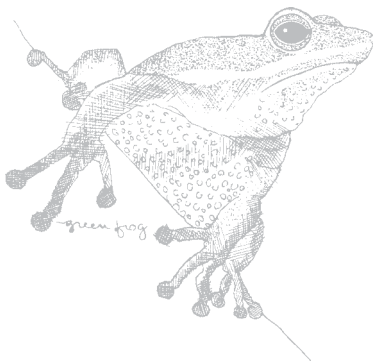
Source: C.A.M.P. website  
<<http://users.rcn.com/idavis.nai/camp/home.html>>.



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.

## March Meeting Topic Is CT Amphibians

Amphibians and the Changing Landscape of Connecticut will be the topic at the March meeting of Menunkatuck. The speaker will be Hank Gruner. Hank is Project Coordinator for the Connecticut Amphibian Monitoring Project (see page 2).



Plan to join Bill and Dorothy on May 10, 2003 for Menunkatuck's Fifteenth Annual Birdathon.

# 2003 Calendar

March 12, 2003

*Amphibians and the Changing  
Landscape of Connecticut*

*Hank Gruner*

April 9, 2003

*How to Misidentify a Bird*

*Prof. David Spector*

May 10, 2003

*Birdathon*

May 14, 2003

*Discovering Moths*

*John Himmelman*

June 11, 2003

*Birding Southeast Arizona  
and the Grand Canyon*

*Frank Gallo*

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.

### Menunkatuck Audubon Society

#### Annual Meeting

Wednesday, April 9, 2003

—Elections—

President – SuZanne Botta

Vice-president – Bill Yule

Treasurer – Connie Mortensen

Secretary – Catherine Ferguson

Directors – Henry Ferris, Dorothy Holabird

Cindi Kobak, John Picard, Dennis Riordan

## *Eighth Annual Educator Workshop Is May 17*

Menunkatuck's eighth annual Educator Workshop will take place May 17th, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in North Guilford. Chris Sullivan, from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Project SEARCH, will present a workshop on stream monitoring.

Streams and rivers play an important role in our local environment and are essential habitat for many creatures that live in Connecticut. Numerous schools across the state currently monitor their local streams

for biological, chemical and physical elements. Participants in this workshop will be armed with the skills to begin a basic stream-monitoring program in their area.

This hands-on workshop will involve a morning session discussing land use, followed by a trip to a high quality stream to collect a sampling of benthic (bottom-dwelling) macroinvertebrates and to test for temperature and dissolved oxygen. After lunch we will spend the afternoon using taxonomic keys and micro-

scopes to identify the invertebrates collected. The identity of these organisms provides a cheap and effective way to monitor the long-term health of a waterway.

Teachers of grades 6 through 12 and nature center staff are invited to join us as we explore stream water quality. For more information, or to register for this workshop, contact Cindi Kobak, Education chairperson, at 203-457-1699, or <education@menunkatuck.org>.

### *Eagle, Seal Populations Are Up, But...*

*(Continued from Page 1.)*

**Keep your distance** – Binoculars and spotting scopes enable us to see a great deal without getting too close. If you don't have binoculars/spotting scope, participate in a group field trip.

If the animal sees you and stops what it was doing, back up slowly; give it time to get used to you. If the animal runs away, you have come too close.

**Avoid eye contact** – Avoid staring at an animal, instead, gaze all around, keeping the animal in sight through the corner of your eye.

**Use the lay of the land** – Use cover provided by the hills, rocks, gullies and ridges. Sit in front of things so your outline blends in with the surroundings.

A bird that performs displays in front of you or flies over your head calling is requesting that you move away from its nest. Do so quickly, looking where you put your feet. Many birds nest on the ground and are vulnerable to trampling.

Young that appear to be

“orphaned” should be left behind. The parents are probably waiting for you to move on before they retrieve their offspring.

**View wildlife from appropriate distances** – It is critical to view an animal at a distance where it feels comfortable. Observe the animal for any warning signs such as displays, calls, freezing, raising the head or interrupting of actions of any kind. Is the animal doing something different in your presence than it was when you first arrived? If the answer is yes, you may be too close, back up slowly.

**Stay clear of nests and dens** – They are especially vulnerable to human disturbance.

**Use calls and whistles selectively** – Calls, whistles and recordings interrupt an animal's normal daily routine.

**Stay on the trail (even through mud-puddles)**

– Staying on established trails helps you walk quietly,

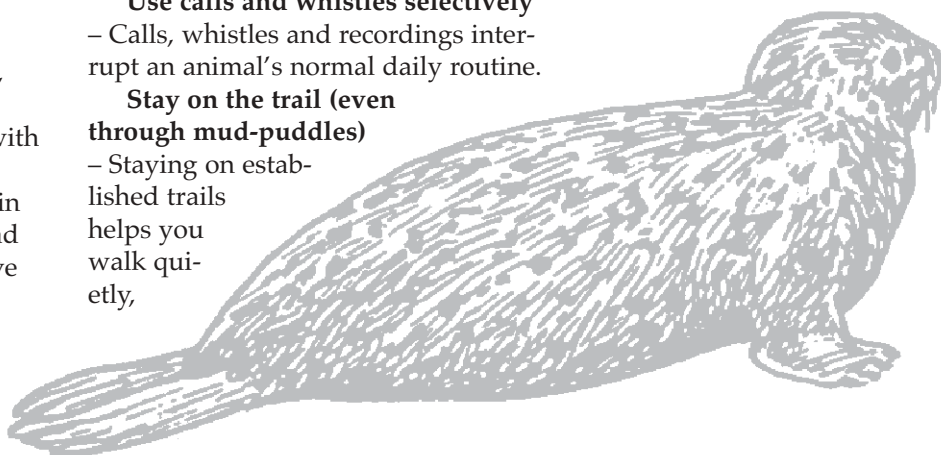
minimizes habitat trampling, and keeps the trail from spreading.

**Respect trail signs** – sections may be closed to the public for many reasons including re-vegetation and nesting sites. Obvious or not, the sign is there for a reason.

**Spread the word about appropriate wildlife viewing behavior** – Teach others, including children, about the importance of not disturbing wildlife when viewing them.

I wish you luck and good sightings.

Submitted by SuZanne Botta



# Menunkatuck Audubon Field Trips Spring 2003

**Timberdoodle Courtship Display**  
March 23 – 6:00 PM

**McKinney National Wildlife Refuge**  
Salt Meadow Unit, Westbrook

The courtship display of the American Woodcock (sometimes called the Timberdoodle) is one of the most spectacular mating rituals of all North American birds. Males perform an intricate aerial ballet all the while making a series of whistles and wing whirring sounds. We will have to limit this trip to 12 people. For more info call Bill Yule. (203) 457-1326.



**Butterflies and Wildflowers**  
April 19 – 10:00 AM  
Bluff Head, Guilford

The traprock ridge known as Bluff Head holds a population of uncommon butterflies and a unique community of spring wildflowers. This moderately strenuous hike up the Blue Trail to the ridgetop will explore this unusual habitat. Bill Yule is the trip leader.

**Spring Bird Walks I**  
Warblers and Neotropical Migrants  
May 3 – 8:00 AM  
East Rock Park, New Haven

East Rock Park is one of the premier spots in New England to see the "butterflies of the bird world," wood warblers. It is possible to see as many as twenty different species of warblers in a single morning here. John Picard is your leader. Call for info: (860) 669-3115.

**Birdathon**  
May 10

All Menunkatuck Audubon members will receive a mailing describing this important birding and fund-raising activity. Stay tuned for updates on our most important bird watching event of the year.

**Spring Bird Walks II**  
Peak of Migration Walk  
May 24 – 8:00 AM  
Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison

More quality birding for warblers, songbirds and shorebirds during the high point of migration at one of the most productive bird watching sites in Connecticut. Call John Picard for info: (860) 669-3115.

Additional walks for June-September will be announced in a future Newsletter.



# Biodiversity 2003

## Know your natural neighbors



### When Is a Duck Not a Duck?

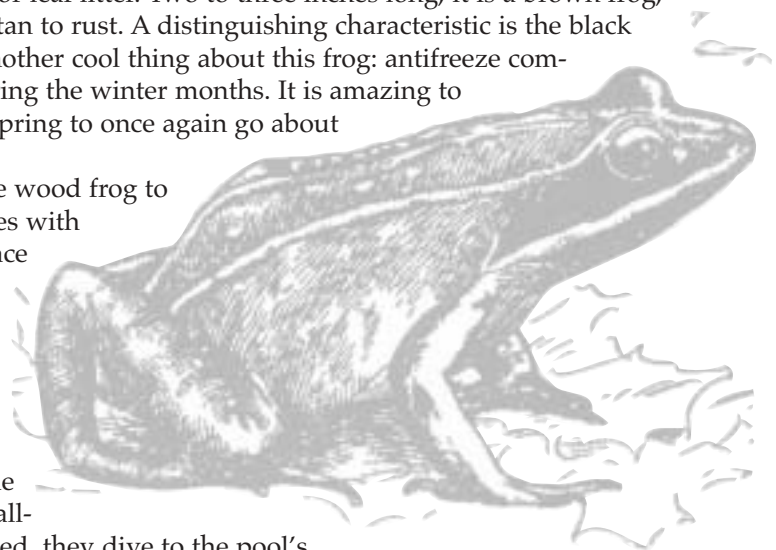
Spring fever hits just as the air begins to warm above freezing. Sunny days beg you to get out to explore your local woodlands, and you gratefully soak up the warmth through the leafless trees. As you amble along an old logging road you become aware of a sound a short distance away. You know there is a wetland up ahead, but it is far too small to hold the vast number of ducks you hear quacking. As you approach, a closer inspection reveals a seemingly empty, and now silent, vernal pool. What's going on?

#### BIO BITS

The wood frog (*Rana sylvatica*), as its name implies, lives in woodlands, not water, and spends the winter hibernating beneath logs, rocks or leaf litter. Two to three inches long, it is a brown frog, not green, and individuals vary from chocolate to tan to rust. A distinguishing characteristic is the black mask that runs through the eye – a bandit frog. Another cool thing about this frog: antifreeze compounds in its body allow it to survive freezing during the winter months. It is amazing to think that this frozen amphibian will thaw in the spring to once again go about its business.

The first “warm” rains of the season compel the wood frog to migrate to its natal vernal pool where it congregates with dozens, or hundreds, of other wood frogs. It is a race against time for these frogs to breed, their eggs to hatch and the tadpoles to develop into land-dwelling froglets before the vernal pool dries up in the summer. This is the one brief time in the year when you will find these frogs in water. While there, the males use an “advertisement call” to lure the females in. This call is very similar to the quack of a duck and when many wood frogs are calling, the sound can be deafening. But when disturbed, they dive to the pool's bottom until the coast is clear.

If you can be patient, find a dry place to sit still for a bit. Eventually the wood frogs will pop up to the surface to resume their courtship and mating. You may see a smaller, darker male clasping onto the back of a large rust-colored female. She is laden with eggs. As she lays a small gelatinous mass that contains hundreds of eggs, she attaches it to a submerged twig and the male fertilizes it. Over time the ping pong ball-sized egg mass will expand to about the size of a softball. By then the adults have left the water to resume their quiet, solitary lives among the leaf litter on the forest floor.



Submitted by Cindi Kobak

## MAS Scholarship Offered to High School Seniors

MAS will again be giving out one or two scholarships to deserving high school seniors. We are looking for students who have, during their school years, shown an interest in nature studies and intend to make a career out of acquiring knowledge about nature, the environment, ecology – in short, life on earth – and put that knowledge to good use. The scholarship(s) will be given out at the general meeting on June 11, 2003.

**The Endangered Species/Wildlife Income Tax Check-Off Fund is a fund that was created in 1993 by the legislature to allow Connecticut state income taxpayers to voluntarily donate portions of their tax refund to support efforts aimed at helping Connecticut's endangered species, natural area preserves and watchable wildlife.**

## Menunkatuck welcomes new members

Menunkatuck Audubon Society welcomes the following new members:

**Branford:** Donald Peck

**Guilford:** Ethel Jones

**Madison:** Patty and Sam Akel, Louise Cotsalas

**West Haven:** Marie Keenan

**Connecticut  
Rare Bird Alerts  
(203)254-3665**

**Menunkatuck on the Web:**

**[www.menunkatuck.org](http://www.menunkatuck.org)**



### 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

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**MENUNKATUCK**

March **2003**



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# **NEXT MEETING**

## **HANK GRUNER AMPHIBIANS AND THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF CONNECTICUT**

*Wednesday, March 12, 2003*

*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.

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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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