

# MENUNKATUCK

May 2005

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

## *Thanks, Charlie Rafford, for Building, and Maintaining Nest Sites at Hammonasset*

In 1990 Charlie Rafford, former Menunkatuck Wildlife Chairman, began a MAS project to enhance the habitat for birds at Hammonasset Beach State Park. Observing the lack of suitable tree holes for cavity nesting birds and snags ospreys, Charlie got Park approval for Menunkatuck to install nest boxes throughout the park and to erect three tripod-style osprey platforms.

During the winter of 1990-91 Charlie worked in his woodshop building boxes for tree swallows, flickers, kestrels, owls, titmice, and chickadees, and making the parts for the osprey platforms. In late winter, he gathered a crew together to install the nest boxes and raise the platforms.

Charlie also built the Birder's Log container at the Meig's Point Nature Center.



**Charlie makes repairs to one of the osprey platforms after a winter storm toppled it. For fifteen years Charlie watched over the Menunkatuck's nest sites at Hammonasset,**



**Charlie Rafford installs one of the osprey nest platforms at Hammonasset in 1991. The platform and assorted nestboxes were built by Charlie.**

Since then he has maintained the nest boxes, cleaning them out every winter and kept records of the nesting activity at the boxes and platforms, as well as the martin houses at the park. With his wife Shirley he transferred the Birders' Log sightings to a database that now reflects fifteen years of records.

Now he has relinquished his role and turned his duties over to Bill Yule. Menunkatuck is grateful for Charlie's fifteen years of diligently managing the Hammonasset nest box project.

### INSIDE...

*Nest Box Clean-out*  
Page 2

•  
*Calendar*  
Page 3

•  
*Field Trips*  
Page 4

•  
*Bio Bits*  
Page 6

•  
*Membership Form*  
Page 7

# MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY

is a chapter of National Audubon Society. The newsletter is published bi-monthly by Menunkatuck Audubon Society.

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## Hammonasset Nestboxes are Cleaned for Spring

Bill Yule led a team out into the marshes at Hammonasset Beach State Park to clean the tree swallow nest boxes in preparation for the breeding season. Found in the boxes were the nests of tree swallows, house sparrows, and mice. Some of the nest boxes have been damaged by ravages of the weather and will be replaced. Others needed only minor fixes.

Bill will be joined by John Picard and Dorothy Holabird in doing weekly surveys of the boxes and evicting house sparrows so that tree swallows have an improved chance of successfully breeding.



**John Picard and Bill Yule examine nesting material removed from one of the tree swallow boxes.**

**Bill Yule installs a nest tree swallow box with the help of Bill Kobak.**

**Photos by Cindi Kobak**

**Visit Menunkatuck's web site: [www.menunkatuck.org](http://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.

### Stone Walls Will Be Topic of May Meeting

The May 11 meeting of MAS will feature Robert M. Thorson, Professor of Geology at the University of Connecticut. Professor Thorson writes a weekly Thursday column for *The Hartford Courant*, and coordinates the Stone Wall Initiative. He is the author of three books on stone walls: the award-winning illustrated children's book *Stone Wall Secrets*, *Stone by Stone*, the 2003 Connecticut Book Award (non-fiction) winner, and *Exploring Stone Walls*, published last February.

Professor Thorson's slide-show –*Exploring Stone Walls* – will lead us to the most interesting stone walls in the Northeast, most of which are in public parks and preserves. With attention to stone wall geography, taxonomy, and chronology, he will help us be able to identify and appreciate the walls in our yards and neighborhoods, and in the woods of the Northeast, and show us how “wall watching” can be a companion to bird watching.

On June 8, Guilford naturalist and MAS Wildlife/Conservation Chair Bill Yule will lead us on a photo safari exploring the plants, animals and fungi of a Connecticut town with his

# 2005 Calendar

<i>May 11, 2005</i>	
<i>Exploring Stone Walls</i>	<i>Robert Thorson</i>
<i>June 8, 2005</i>	
<i>The Natural History of Guilford</i>	<i>Bill Yule</i>

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.

presentation the *Natural History of Guilford*. Bill will take us on a journey through the town to see some of the incredible biodiversity in our own backyards and public spaces.

**Stormwater Management Program**  
**Wetlands, Groundwater and Long Island Sound Protection**

Do you fertilize your lawn? Most lawns need, at most, two or three measured applications of fertilizer a year to remain healthy. Additional or excessively heavy applications pollute both surface and groundwater, waste your money and can damage your lawn. Please apply lawn products sparingly and if you have a lawn care company apply them for you, insure that they are doing the same. If you leave the grass clippings on your lawn you can cut your application of fertilizer in half.

Stormwater runoff is not just water

**Birders' Log at Hammonasset**

**The Birders' Log has been moved to the rear porch of the Nature Center at Meig's Point, still facing the field and parking area. Ann Levenduski has taken on the responsibility for maintaining the log. Thanks, Ann.**

# Winter-Spring Field Trips

## Spring Wildflowers and Early Butterflies

**Sunday, April 24, 2005 - 10 A.M.**  
**Giuffrida Park, Meriden**

Explore Giuffrida Park, Westfield Road in Meriden for fantastic spring wildflowers and early butterflies of trap rock ridges. This is a joint field trip with the Connecticut Butterfly Association. For complete directions and further information call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326 during the day Monday - Friday 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. If there is any question about the weather, call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326.

## International Dawn Chorus Day Sunday, May 1, 2005 - 5 A.M. North Guilford



Join the early birds of Menunkatuck Audubon Society for a celebration of International Dawn Chorus Day, an annual celebration of the world's oldest wake-up call 'the dawn chorus' and the beauty of bird song. The day is an international event, celebrated as far away as France, Italy, Pakistan, South Africa and New Zealand. Meet on Beaver Head Road at the turn-around at entrance to Lane's Pond Road (private gated dirt road) in Guilford at 5 A.M. (sunrise is at 5:48 A.M.). For complete directions and further information call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326 during the day Monday - Friday 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. If there is any question about the weather, call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326. For more information on International Dawn Chorus Day, go to: <http://www.idcd.info>

## Birdathon

**Saturday, May 7, 2005**

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.

## Warblers and Neotropical Migrants Saturday, May 14, 2005 -7:30 A.M.

**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. Meet at parking lot of Eli Whitney Museum. For further information call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326 during the day Monday - Friday 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. If there is any question about the weather, call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326.



## Peak of Migration Spring Bird Walk

**Saturday, May 28, 2005 7:45 A.M.**  
**Hammonasset Beach State Park**

Start Memorial Day weekend with a morning trip to Hammonasset. We'll look for warblers, songbirds and shorebirds during the high point of migration at one of the most productive bird watching sites in Connecticut. The park charges a parking fee unless you have a season pass.

Meet at the I-95, Exit 61 (Route 79) commuter lot (north of the highway) to car pool at 7:45 A.M. or at the park entrance at 8 A.M. If there is any question about the weather, call Gina Nichol at 203-453-6724.



## Butterflies and Dragonflies June 12, 2005 - 9 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. Bauer Park, Madison

Explore the rolling meadows and farm ponds of Bauer Park in Madison with Bill Yule and Cindi Kobak as we search for butterflies and dragonflies. This trip is for beginners, families and children of all ages as well as more advanced naturalists. No special equipment is needed but binoculars are strongly suggested. The emphasis is on field identification and natural history. Nets are optional. Some specimens will be netted and proper handling techniques demonstrated so the insects can be viewed and released unharmed. The trip is from 9 - 11:30 AM with an option to bring a lunch to enjoy by one of the ponds as we watch dragonflies. Bauer Park is located on Copse Rd. in Madison a short distance off route 95 at exit 61 (Route 79). Go north on Route 79 and take the first left, Hunter's Trail to the end and right onto Copse Rd. For complete directions and further information call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326 during the day Monday - Friday 10 A.M. to 3 P.M. If there is any question about the weather, call Bill Yule at 203-457-1326.

# Menunkatuck Audubon Society Birdathon 2005 Saturday, May 7

Your Birdathon contribution helps  
support the projects of  
**Menunkatuck Audubon Society.**

Menunkatuck Audubon Society and the New Haven Bird Club invite you to join us on Saturday, May 7, 2005, for the seventeenth MAS annual Birdathon. With your financial backing, our birding teams will cover the state to count as many species as possible within the 24 hour period taking particular note of the birds on the Audubon WatchList for Connecticut.



To support the 2005 Birdathon, please mail your pledge or donation to:

Menunkatuck Audubon Society  
PO Box 214  
Guilford, CT 06437

To participate in Birdathon, e-mail your  
May 7 bird list by May 14 to  
[HOLABI@cs.com](mailto:HOLABI@cs.com)

# Biodiversity 2005

## Know your natural neighbors



### Wood Duck – Denizen Of Wooded Wetlands

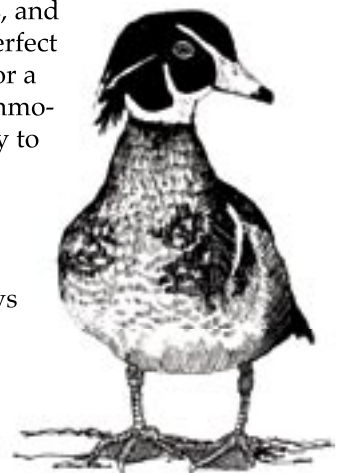
The flashy, little male wood duck (*Aix sponsa*) sports his colorful plumage from September to June. Bright red eyes; a red bill highlighted with black, white and yellow; an iridescent green head trimmed with milky white lines that follow the contours of the duck's throat and drooping crest; a rusty breast; a golden flank – the combination of these separate parts creates a truly beautiful duck. *Aix sponsa* is Latin for “waterbird in bridal dress,” a reference, no doubt, to the bird's showy plumage. The female is lovely as well, though considerably more subtle than the male. She has the same shape, with her drooping crest and short bill, but is covered in shades of soft brown, and bears a white, teardrop-shaped eye patch. In flight both are dark above with a contrasting white belly.

### BIO BITS

The male wood duck's brilliant markings help him to attract a mate in early autumn, before they migrate south for the winter. Our Connecticut wood ducks spend the winter months from North Carolina to Florida and return to our state in mid-March. Paired ducks begin the search for a nest site in the female's previous nesting area. These “perching ducks” have well-developed claws on their feet that enable them to perch in trees – a handy adaptation for ducks that live in wooded swamps, flooded forests, beaver ponds, and wooded riverine habitats. They rely on these wooded areas to provide them with the perfect nest site: a tree cavity. Whether a natural cavity, an old pileated woodpecker nest hole, or a man-made nest box, the entrance must be at least three-and-a-half inches wide to accommodate the female's body. (On occasion a female will enter a hole that is large enough, only to find herself trapped as she drops down into someone's chimney.)

The female lays ten to fifteen eggs in a nest lined with soft down plucked from her breast. She will incubate the eggs for about a month. Some nests can contain twenty to forty eggs; evidence that one or more other females “dumped” their eggs there. Common among wood ducks, “egg dumping” is a form of intraspecies parasitism that allows females to spread their eggs around.

Within 36 hours of hatching, the wood duck ducklings will heed the call of their mother and leave the nest cavity. Instinct takes over as they claw their way up from the nest to the cavity's entrance hole and free-fall to the ground or water below. The young will follow the female to a densely vegetated area of water where they can feed on aquatic invertebrates (e.g. insects, snails) and plants, such as duckweed, smartweed, and wild rice. When necessary, the tiny ducklings are able to dive to avoid predators. In less than two months time they will be on their own and able to fly, sporting plumage similar to the adult female.



Submitted by Cindi Kobak

Saturday Morning Birding at Hammonasset  
Saturdays, starting April 16

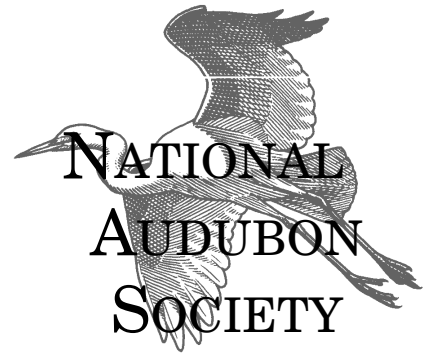
7:50 A.M.

Leader: Jerry Connolly

Meet at the Audubon Shop, Madison  
Every Saturday morning through June,  
Jerry will lead birders through  
Hammonasset to see returning sea birds,  
shore birds, birds of prey, and songbirds.

There is a \$4.00 fee.

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

MAS Scholarship Offered to High School Seniors

MAS will again be giving out a scholarship to a deserving high school senior. 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. See your guidance counselor or write for an application to Menunkatuck Scholarship, PO Box 214, Guilford, CT 06437.

Menunkatuck welcomes new members

Menunkatuck Audubon Society welcomes the following new members:

**Branford:** Nancy Bohan, P Cantales, Alicia Capasse, Edward Day, Bruce Gullans, Martha S Hettinger, Ainsley Highman, Joyce Lyons, Ms Barbara T Neal, Edwin Nichols, Jean Patrie, Susan Spear, Barbara Vietzke

**East Haven:** O R Laplante Blan, Margery Mills

**Guilford:** Donna Criscenzo, William Green, Marilyn Leslie, Barbara Letts, Barbara D Riley

**Madison:** Denice D Chandler, Charles

B Feldman, Michael D Johnson, Barbara G Longo, D&P Mullen, Joann Murner, Annie Murray, Paulette Niehoff, William Pfefferle, Richard J Schiess, Malcolm S Smith, William W Cain

**New Haven:** Kate Harrison, Paulette Pasquaretta, David A Valone, Flora Chi Ying

**West Haven:** Georgiana Beckwith, Sally Feldman, Cindy Gilbane, Carol Morrison, Thomas Skibitcky, Frank Winters

Connecticut  
Rare Bird Alerts  
(203)254-3665

LOCAL CHAPTER

Menunkatuck Audubon Society

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May 2005



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## NEXT MEETING

EXPLORING STONE WALLS  
Robert Thorson

Wednesday, May 11, 2005  
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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