

Pesticides Still Pose a Threat to Birds

It has been over twenty years since the pesticide DDT was banned for use in the United States. And in that time we have watched the decimated populations of bald eagle, osprey and peregrine falcon make promising recoveries. Problem solved? No, not yet....

Three years ago 20,000 Swainson's hawks on their wintering grounds in La Pampa, Argentina, ate grasshoppers poisoned with the insecticide monocrotophos. The hawks died. (Monocrotophos had been banned in the United States in 1988, but was still being exported to other countries.) Biologists had observed that Swainson hawk populations had been declining prior to this documented mass poisoning, but had not known the cause. Tracking the birds as they migrated from the western United States to Argentina led to the discovery.

Diazinon, a pesticide commonly used on lawns, has been banned for use on golf courses and turf farms by the Environmental Protection Agency. This is the first time the EPA has taken action to restrict a pesticide based solely on its detrimental impact on birds. A step forward in protecting wildlife, to be sure. Yet diazinon is still legally used by lawn care companies and homeowners in their efforts to maintain expanses of the "perfect lawn". This leads one to wonder why a pesticide known to kill non-targeted

avian species is still being sold in garden centers, and even supermarkets, without the public being made aware of its dangers.

Cornell University researchers estimate that about 672 million birds are exposed to pesticides each year, not only on their wintering grounds, but here in North America as well. Methods of exposure can vary, from consuming pesticide-laden prey species, to directly consuming pesticide pellets, to absorbing pesticides through the skin, to inhaling pesticide fumes. Levels of poisoning can vary also, from immediate death, to a weakened immune system, to reproductive failure, to deformed offspring, to neurological damage. When a bird's nervous system is affected it can become disoriented, making it easy prey to predators, or causing it to abandon its nest, or preventing it from migrating.

So why don't we see all these damaged, dying, dead birds? Well, as with most animals, impaired birds will hide themselves when possible. Dead birds are found by scavengers and eaten where found or carried off. (The Patuxent Wildlife Research Center held a workshop where it was estimated that as much as 89 percent of the birds killed in a major poisoning event could be carried off by scavengers in a 24-hour period.) The evidence disappears.

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MENUNKATUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Opportunities for Nature Study Abound on Bittner-Baldwin Open Space

Bittner Park is a familiar landmark off of the scenic, meandering Route 77 in Guilford. The playing fields there are the site of many youth sporting events as well as adult softball leagues. What many people don't realize is that beyond the parking area and the towering light poles of the softball diamond is a sprawling tract of town-owned natural open space. In fact, Bittner Park represents only about 15 acres out of a total of a 150-acre expanse of open space.

An informal network of paths crisscrosses the property, inviting exploration. You can ramble northward all the way to the backyard of Baldwin Middle School and beyond, passing through a surprising variety of animal habitats along the way. Immediately behind the soccer field, a rock ridge slopes sharply upward, covered by mature hardwood forest. North of here, beyond an excavation site, one enters old pasture in various stages of succession. Along this slope dotted with cedar and juniper, there is a view out over a nearby horse farm and the West River valley. Further in, the pasture yields to dense thickets and young forest edged by wetlands, before opening up to another old field of orchard grass and cedar. A large swath of unbroken forest extends westward to Long Hill Road, with

more wetlands and an unusually dense cedar stand. At the Baldwin end of the property the hand of man is predominant, yet even here the opportunities for bird and butterfly watching abound. There is extensive frontage on the West River, and two tributary brooks provide additional riparian habitat.

Bird species known to frequent the property include Prairie Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Bluebird, American Woodcock, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet



Tanager, Wild Turkey and Red-tailed Hawk. It is my hope that more conservation-minded folks will come to know and love this property as I do. There are rumblings in the Town government concerning the future uses of this land, and it might help if they know there are a fair number of us who appreciate it the way it is. If you are interested in a guided walk, see the field trip section for details.

Submitted by Bill Johnson,
Guilford Conservation Commission

Menunkatuck on the Web:
www.audubon.org/chapter/ct/mas/index.html

IBA Protects Birds and Habitat

Habitat loss is the leading cause of the declines of many bird populations in the United States and around the world. The Important Bird Areas Program is a coordinated worldwide response – a comprehensive effort to identify and protect essential habitats for birds.

Important Bird Areas are sites where significant populations or an exceptional diversity of birds occurs. These sites include public and private lands, and may be protected or unprotected. IBAs are selected using standardized criteria. Once designated, IBAs become targets of focused conservation strategies, ranging from willing-seller land acquisition and conservation easements to working with land owners and managers to maintain high-quality habitat.

We need your help to nominate places that provide essential habitat for Connecticut birds. This will help set conservation priorities based on sound science and to focus attention on preserving wildlife habitat.

IBAs are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of birds. They may be large or small, public or privately owned, protected or unprotected. IBAs are “nominated” by birders and other volunteers and are selected using standardized, science-based criteria. The Connecticut IBA Program is co-sponsored by the National Audubon Society - Connecticut State Office and the Connecticut Ornithological Association along with other organizations.

The information packets are available through Fred Baumgarten, Miles Sanctuary, 99 West Cornwall Rd., Sharon, CT 06069-2104; email: fbaumgarten@audubon.org; phone: 860-364-0048.

The local contact person for IBA is

1999 Calendar

May 12, 1999

Caterpillars of Connecticut

Andrew Brand

May 15, 1999

Birdathon

June 9, 1999

The Art of Bird Photography

Arthur Morris

September 26, 1999

“Take Flight!” Teachers’ Workshop

Flo McBride

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

The Guilford Community Center is on Route 77 between Route 1 and the Guilford Green.

Refreshments are served.

Dori Sosensky. Dori’s email address is dori.sosensky@YALE.EDU or you can write her at Menunkatuck Audubon Society, PO Box 214, Guilford, CT 06437

Nominations Sought

Nominations are being sought for officers and directors of Menunkatuck Audubon Society.

If you are interested in serving of the Board, please call Henry Ferris at 245-4397.

The Election will be held at the June indoor meeting of MAS.

The Board meets the third Monday of each month at the Depot in Madison.

Basic IBA criteria

Sites that support

1. Endangered or threatened species in Connecticut
2. Other high priority species
3. Rare, threatened or representative habitats
4. Concentration of birds
5. Conservation research, monitoring or education

Biodiversity 2000

Madison Chosen for Biodiversity Day

The Biodiversity Committee has picked Madison as the locale for our Biodiversity Day 2000. Madison was chosen because it possesses a wide variety of habitats, ranging from sea and intertidal zone salt marsh, freshwater marshes and swamps, cold and warm water rivers, and ponds, upland forests, and high ridges. Such habitats provide an opportunity to observe a wide diversity of organisms within an easily accessible, limited area. By focusing on a single town's inventory, Biodiversity Day 2000 will have a scope that can be handled by our chapter.

The Biodiversity Committee is Dorothy Holabird, David Houston, Cindi Kobak, Connie Mortensen, and Dennis Riordan.

Any members interested in working on the Biodiversity project can call Cindi at 457-1699.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker Diners and the Wildlife That Frequent Them

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers are known to feed on the sap of over 275 species of trees, both deciduous and coniferous. By boring holes into the trunk of a tree, these woodpeckers are able to tap into the tree's

BIO BITS

sap. These holes have two distinct patterns - small round holes formed in horizontal rows, or larger square holes formed in vertical rows. Sugar content in sap varies from tree species to tree species, but research has also shown that injured and diseased trees have sweeter sap than

healthy trees. Trees girdled by foresters have shown heavy sapsucker activity just above the cut area, indicating that perhaps sapsuckers are attracted to trees with underlying health problems.

While this may be unfortunate for the tree, it is a necessary food source for the sapsucker and many other birds, mammals and insects. Yellow-rumped Warblers (and eight other warbler species), Cedar Waxwings, chickadees, hummingbirds, Red Squirrels, Flying Squirrels, butterflies, moths and many other insects all take advantage of the sapsucker's offerings. In return, the sapsucker takes its payment by consuming some of the insects attracted to the sap.

Since hummingbirds often migrate back to their breeding grounds before flowers are in bloom, the sap from sapsucker drill holes becomes an important food source for them.

Hummingbirds have been observed following sapsuckers through the forest and have even been seen driving sapsuckers from the sap holes!

In this interconnected world of ours, it makes sense that many creatures frequent the very successful dining establishments of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.



Three Field Trips Are Scheduled

Three more field trips have been scheduled in conjunction with MAS's Biodiversity 2000 project. The field trips will highlight the interconnectedness of life on earth.

Firetower Road, Killingworth

May 8, 1999

8 A.M. - noonish

Leader: John Himmelman

Fee: none

Meet at 8 a.m. at Commuter Lot at Route 80/81 Traffic Circle in Killingworth.

This trail winds through a variety of habitats in Cockaponsett State Forest; marsh, riverine, valley stream, and upland coniferous and deciduous forest. We will search the trailside for butterflies, ferns and wildflowers, the vernal pools for amphibians, and the trees for birds. At one point we will end up at the highest point this close to the coast from Canada to Mexico. Sections of the trail may be difficult for some, although we take it all pretty slow. Bring water and a snack. Wear comfortable hiking shoes. If you need more info, contact John at (860) 663-3225.

Baldwin-Bittner Town Open Space Guilford

Sunday, June 6, 1999

10am - noon

Leaders: Bill Johnson and Bill Yule

Fee: none

Sponsored by the Guilford Conservation Commission, this walk through the town's second-largest tract of open space will be slow to moderately paced, over easy terrain, (though sturdy shoes are recommended). The focus of this walk will be on both natural and cultural history, with an emphasis on land-use issues. Meet at the Baldwin Middle School, Long Hill Road, in the lower parking lot. For information call Bill Johnson, 457-0505, or Bill Yule, 457-1326. No pre-

Field Trips

Saturday, May 8, 1999

Cockaponsett S. F., Killingworth

John Himmelman

Sunday, June 6, 1999

*Baldwin-Bittner Open Space,
Guilford*

*Bill Johnson
Bill Yule*

Saturday, August 7, 1999

Timberlands, Guilford

Bill Yule

registration necessary. Heavy rain cancels.

Timberlands Guilford

Saturday, August 7, 1999

10 am

Leader: Bill Yule

Fee: none

Meet at the Guilford Lakes School

parking lot, Maupas Road.

We'll be looking for fungi and ferns, including rattlesnake ferns and grape ferns in a lovely ravine, as well as observing the biodiversity of this town-owned open space forest. No preregistration required. For more information, contact Bill Yule, 457-1326.

Tenth Annual Birdathon Saturday May 15

East Haven Land Trust Preserves Open Space

"The mighty oak tree, represented by the leaf, and a simple feather, representing all creatures large and small, are our symbols of the intricate balance that exists in nature and touches our everyday lives." - EH Land Trust

Menunkatuck Audubon asks our members in the town of East Haven to consider becoming members of the East Haven Land Trust. This small non-profit grassroots organization is dedicated to preserving open space in East Haven by working with landowners, the town, the state, and various other organizations. An individual membership is just \$10.00, a family membership, \$15.00. Contact them at: East Haven Land Trust, PO Box 120354, East Haven, CT 06512.

The following is a report submitted by the land trust's president, Charles A. Schlegel, DDS:

The State of Connecticut has acquired the Lippincott property in East Haven. This property, consisting of 46 acres, abuts the Farm River, south of Short Beach Road (State Route 146) and is mainly undeveloped land which can only be used for restricted public access and wildlife protection under the deed with the Trust for Public Land. The TPL acquired the land from the Lippincott family with funds from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, which placed restrictions on the future public use of the land. The Schooner Sound Learning of New Haven is the temporary site manager for the state and they will actively pursue a long term contract with the state to manage the property.

An adjacent property along the Farm River consisting of 15 acres will

be conveyed to the state from the TPL with the East Haven Land Trust holding a conservation easement to oversee wetland and wildlife areas.

The East Haven Land Trust will make sure that no development will infringe these areas. The Land Trust also owns 20 plus acres further up the Farm River (north of Short Beach Road) which abuts a state bird sanctuary along the river.

The East Haven Land Trust owns several other glacial ridge tracts that offer sanctuary for upland wildlife

and birds. The Land Trust is presently working with town and state elected officials in trying to preserve about

100 acres of farm land in the north "Half-Mile" section of East Haven.

The East Haven Land Trust meets the last Wednesday of each month at 7pm at the East Haven Community Center, located on Kirkham Avenue.

The East Haven Land Trust is a member of the National Land Trust Alliance and the Connecticut Nature Conservancy.



Pesticides

(Continued from page 1.)

What can we, as citizens and homeowners, do to help prevent pesticide poisonings of avian species? First, we need to ask ourselves, do we really need to use poisons in our yards to control undesirable insects, plants, animals and fungi? Is there a safer method of control, or can we learn to live with a bit of "imperfection"? (There are products out there that are safe to use, and there are lawn care companies that use only safe, organic methods.) We need to become informed and ask many questions.

Second, are the products we buy (produce, coffee, clothing, etc.) grown without pesticides? Organically-grown fruits, vegetables, coffee, juices, dairy products, packaged food, and even cotton clothing are readily available today at farmers markets, health food stores, supermarkets and in mail-order catalogs. Purchasing these products not only supports responsible, sustainable agriculture (which protects birds, humans and other

life), it also keeps our consumer dollars away from the businesses that continue to use hazardous pesticides. The choices we make today as consumers can have a positive or devastating effect on the health of bird populations tomorrow. We need to choose wisely.

Sources: *Audubon* (Sept/Oct, 1996)

Bird Conservation (Summer, 1997)

Toxic to Wildlife

The following pesticide active ingredients are all organophosphates or carbamates, which, although less persistent in the environment than DDT, are nonetheless deadly to birds:

- * Aldicarb
- * Azinphos-methyl
- * Carbofuran
- * Diazinon
- * Ethyl Parathion
- * Phorate

All are used in crop production, and as stated earlier, Diazinon is a common lawn care pesticide. All are currently classified by the EPA as restricted use products.

Connecticut Rare Bird Alerts (203)254-3665 (860)599-5195

Salt Marsh Breeding Bird Survey

Massachusetts Audubon is doing a regional survey of salt marsh breeding birds from Mid May to Mid August. They need volunteers to survey salt marshes 5 hectares plus along the Connecticut shore. The sites, protocol etc., will be available shortly. If interested please reply to winterwren@earthlink.net or call Patty Pendergast at 860-526-4686, who will be coordinating volunteers for this project.

Menunkatuck Welcomes New Members

Menunkatuck Audubon Society welcomes the following new members:

Branford: Joseph Gambardella, Helen Gerard, Mrs J Hamer, Kyle Hamilton, Valerie Spain

East Haven: Barbara Esposito

Guilford: Barbara B Angle, Len Billing, Miss Doris M Bradshaw, Linda Enright, Ms Diane Freeman, Donna Harvey, Gary La Chance, Marie Mancini, Paul W Mel, Patrick W Nye, Nancy Okie, William R Palmer IV, George Platia, Minoy Pollack, Eleanor Riley, Suzanna Rogers, Greg Standridge, Peter Susan Tattersall, Mrs Elizabeth N Theiss,

Antoinette Tyndall, Ms Charlene Whiteman

Madison: Deanna Becker, Mickey Curry, Nicole Foust, Mr Joel Glassman, Susannah Graedel, Miss Janet Kelly, Lucian Korsmeyer, Nancy Marano, Mr Peter Newcomb, Mrs Catherine D Price, Roland H Sloan, Claud Stephens, Rebecca Wells

New Haven: James Anderson, Susan Clemens, Mr Roland C Clement, Deb Finelli, Robert Forman, Gail Martino, Mr-Mrs Edward M Nove, Gilbert Rosenbaum, James Shambaugh, Michael Skrebutenas, Ms Anita C Soracco, Marc Wortman



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.
- As a senior citizen or a student, I am eligible to join for only \$15.

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
 Chapter Membership Data Center
 P.O. Box 51005
 Boulder CO 80323-1005

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Menunkatuck Audubon Society

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May 1999



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NEXT MEETING

ANDREW BRAND

CATERPILLARS OF CONNECTICUT

Wednesday, May 12, 1999

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.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ ZIP: _____

Mail to:

Menunkatuck Audubon Society

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Guilford, CT 06437