

## *Menunkatuck Hosts Branford Biodiversity Day*

Threats of weekend rain did not dampen our spirits as Connie Mortensen and I arrived at Killam's Point Conference Center in Branford on Friday morning, September 12th, to set up our Biodiversity Day headquarters. This rustic house with high tide waves lapping at its rocky foundation would be our home base for the next two days. It was a gloriously sunny day along the shoreline, and I began to wish that our 24-hour biological survey of Branford was to start at noon rather than the appointed 5 p.m.

With the help of the Biodiversity Committee and Menunkatuck board members we were ready to welcome the participating teams when they began arriving at 3 p.m. to sign in and receive their team packets. Included in the packets were species checklists, road maps, topo maps with survey sites highlighted, site lists and permits for access to Regional Water Authority property.

Guides from the Branford Land Trust were scheduled to lead teams to sites and Coastal Camera Club volunteers would follow the teams to record their findings.

The mammal

team had scoped out the town the week before and knew exactly where they wanted to place their live-traps for rodents. They set some of their traps in coastal areas in the hope of discovering a new population of the state endangered least shrew (*Cryptotis parva*). The down side is that 24 hours is usually too short a time for traps to be in place to work successfully, and Biodiversity Day was no exception. The up side: the mammalogists have located several potential sites where they will return to study. Several of the more common mammals were seen, but others, including river otter, were identified from their tracks and scat (droppings).

The insect team set up its various traps throughout town and would be back in the morning to collect their  
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**A team signs in at the registration table. Photo by Pat Anderson.**

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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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## Branford Biodiversity Day

*(Continued from page 1.)*

samples. The forecast was a bit disappointing for many insects – a full moon would compete with insect lights overnight, and the projected clouds for Saturday would limit the butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies in flight. Hopefully, the rain would hold off so the team could continue to collect other types of insects.

Noble Proctor’s team (generalists, who identified everything they saw) returned to Killam’s Point at 9:30 p.m. (after starting at 5 p.m.) to regroup and share in their findings. I was handed a stem of Queen Anne’s lace. The flowerhead was going to seed and had closed into a lacy cup. Inside an amazing sight - several tiny metallic-green cuckoo wasps snuggled into this communal shelter for the night.

The aquatic invertebrate team, led by Chris Sullivan from the DEP’s Project SEARCH, had dropped by HQ to leave their yet-to-be-identified samples in the lab. At 10 p.m. they left to visit one more beach site with their seine net and plankton sampler. Such dedication!

Noble’s team of Earthplace staff and junior naturalists also departed, planning to check the insect lights set up in Carol and Gary Lemmons’ backyard. The junior naturalists wanted to stay awake for the full 24 hours this year, knowing that they had slept through some exciting finds in Guilford two years ago.

Sleeping in one of the upstairs bunks at Killam’s Point, my alarm sounded at

5 a.m. Time to start the coffee. The bagels would be arriving soon. As I walked quietly down the staircase I saw that every sofa in the main room contained a sleeping body. (The kids from Noble’s team had faded and were able to catch about two hours sleep before they were roused for breakfast.)

By 6 a.m. the birding teams had checked in and were on their way to such sites as Lake Saltonstall and the Stony Creek Quarry. Another team spent the morning on Horse Island. Bald eagle, peregrine falcon, red-throated loon, northern gannet, American oystercatcher, and orange-crowned warbler were some of the bird highlights for the day.

The fish team, with assistance from members of the Hammonasset Chapter of Trout Unlimited, surveyed the freshwater streams in town, while the herpetology teams found over 20 species of reptiles and amphibians in their travels to streams, ponds, swamps, ridges and woodlands. The Sound School team of teachers and *(Continued on page 4.)*



**Alberto Mimo, from the DEP, and Menunkatuck President, SuZanne Botta, use lab set up at Killam's Point HQ. Photo by Mark Janke.**

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.

## Birds of Prey Are Topic at November Meeting

November 12 will find Jim Zipp leading us *In Search of Birds of Prey, a North American Journey*, a program on birds of prey from hawks and eagles to owls and vultures based on experiences and photographs taken over 30 years in the field. We will travel from Florida to Alaska with stops at many points in between to see not only the raptors that call Connecticut home but those we seldom or never see.

On December 10, Tom Paul will be giving a slide show and presentation on the *Tsongas National Forest*, located in southeast Alaska, below Juneau. Mr. Paul has gained an appreciation for the Bald Eagle through his visits there, and his photos will take us to this remote state.

### 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 9:00 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.

# 2003 Calendar

November 12, 2003

*In Search of Birds of Prey,  
a North American Journey*

*Jim Zipp*

December 10, 2003

*Tsongas National Forest*

*Tom Paul*

**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.**

## Give a Gift Membership to National Audubon Help Menunkatuck Audubon

If you are looking for a holiday gift, make it a membership in National Audubon. If you use our form, Menunkatuck receives the full \$20.

Please enter a gift membership in the National Audubon Society and in the local chapter. Please send AUDUBON magazine and membership card to the address below.

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Send this application and your check to:

National Audubon Society, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003

LOCAL CHAPTER

Menunkatuck Audubon Society

D63/7XCH

## Branford Biodiversity Day

(Continued from page 2.)

students visited shoreline beaches and rocky intertidal areas, using seine nets to collect, identify and release marine creatures.

A botany team turned in their list of two sites they had surveyed – almost 200 species of plants were found in these special sites owned by the town and the land trust.

Several teams collected fungi for our mycology expert, Bill Yule, to identify back at HQ. Though conditions had been dry recently there

were a few sites within town that offered a wealth of mushrooms and other fungi.

At the celebration dinner, a mystery species awaited John Himmelman, member of another generalist, “identify-everything” team. The aquatic invertebrate team had found

an amazing cricket in their travels. It was red with brilliant yellow racing stripes down its sides. No one was able to identify it, so they saved it for John, a cricket enthusiast. He identified it as a restless bush cricket (*Hapithus agitator*), a species he had not previously seen in Connecticut. We’ll have to wait to hear from the experts as to whether it’s a new state



Sound School students seine for marine creatures off Limewood Avenue beach. Photo by Anita Tellier.

record.

It will be months before all the species lists are collected and compiled into a database, but we estimate that over 1500 species will be documented. Not bad for a 24-hour period



Herpetology team found a Black Rat Snake. Photo by Mark Janke.



Bill Hyatt, DEP Fisheries Division (Center) and volunteers from Hammonasset Chapter of Trout Unlimited survey stream. Photo by Archie Stone.



Noble Proctor's team takes a short lunch break at Killam's Point before heading back into the field. Photo by Joanne Volage.

in September. Stay tuned for the final count.

The biological diversity of Branford was exciting to behold, but equally thrilling was the diversity of people participating in our Biodiversity Day. All ages (from 10 to senior citizen), from many countries (including Denmark, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Russia, Poland and Uruguay), with various interests (land preservation, hiking, photography, birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, crustaceans, larval insects, beetles, dragonflies, crickets, butterflies, moths, plants, mosses, algae,

fungi), came together for a common cause – to document the diversity of life in Branford. Branford owes many thanks to this dedicated group of people.

Final note - It began to pour as the volunteer cleaning crew closed up the Killam's Point house and ran to our cars. I couldn't help but smile. What perfect timing.

Submitted by Cindi Kobak



Bill Yule identifies fungi. Photo by Pat Anderson.

## Thank You

The Biodiversity Committee – Cindi Kobak, SuZanne Botta, Tom Cleveland, Bill Horne, Joan Merrick and Connie Mortensen – would like to thank the following individuals, organizations and businesses for helping us to make Biodiversity Day a success. We couldn't have done it without you.

Thanks to...

The Branford Land Trust for their generous financial support, their advice and guidance in determining sites to be surveyed, and obtaining landowner permission to survey private properties. Thanks to members Chet Blomquist, Peter Borgemeister, Beth Dock, Harry Merrick, Rich Radune, Martha Rice and Chris Woerner for guiding and/or participating on various teams.

The Coastal Camera Club members, Pat Anderson, Terri Ashley, Julianne Derken, Mark Janke, Sharon Staniforth, Archie Stone, Anita Tellier and Joanne Volage for capturing the day for us on film.

Chris Sullivan, Project SEARCH educator, for setting up a temporary lab at Killam's Point HQ for teams that required microscopes.

Headquarters volunteers Catherine Ferguson, Dorothy Holabird, Bill Kobak, Harry Merrick, John Picard, Dennis Riordan, Astrid Swanson and Ron Swanson for running last minute errands, making vital deliveries of ice and food, as well as cleaning up at the end of the day.

Branford Conservation & Environment Commission member Art Howe for remaining on call in case we needed an additional guide.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection for donating copies of its Vascular Plant checklist; Harbor Publications in Madison for a donation of Branford street maps; the Regional Water Authority for donating cases of bottled water; the Audubon Shop in Madison for a contribution of shade-grown coffee; Bagelicious Bagels for donating bagels; Stop and Shop for contributing a portion of the lunch sandwiches; and Shoreline Foods for donating a portion of the dinner menu.

The Regional Water Authority, Yale University, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other private landowners for allowing access to their properties.

Our other financial donors: Guilford Savings Bank, Lenny & Joe's Charity Carousel, Citizen's for Branford's Environment, Branford Conservation & Environment Commission, Branford Park & Open Space Commission, Audubon Council of Connecticut and New Haven Savings Bank.

Special thanks, of course, go to the 80 or so biologists, naturalists, students and volunteers who actually performed the biological survey of Branford. Your tireless dedication and good humor were much appreciated. It was a pleasure working with all of you.

# Biodiversity 2003

## Know your natural neighbors



### *The Ancient Loon Struggles With Modern Threats*

There are only five species of loon on our planet and all five can be found in North America. They belong to an order of primitive birds that dates back over 70 million years; fossil records show that loon relatives lived during the latter part of the Cretaceous period. Since they are so ancient you will find the loons on the first page of all avian field guides and natural history books that organize the birds in taxonomic order.

#### **BIO BITS**

The common loon (*Gavia immer*) breeds on large lakes in Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Iceland and the northeastern U.S. states. (It does not currently breed in Connecticut.) Its gorgeous black head, throat and bill contrast sharply with a collar of thin white lines and a black-and-white checkerboard back. But in the fall it will molt from this distinctive summer breeding plumage to a drab gray head and back with white undersides. Its daggerlike bill will pale. You may observe loons sporting this duller plumage in Long Island Sound during the fall and winter months when they migrate to our coastal waters.

Both the common loon and the red-throated loon (*Gavia stellata*) inhabit the cold waters of our shoreline over the winter. You may see a loon lower its face under the water as it searches for its next meal. Once it spots its prey, it will dive and give chase. (Fish are the main course of a loon's diet, but crabs, shrimp and other aquatic creatures are also eaten.) Don't be surprised if the loon stays submerged for a minute or so.

On occasion they are also found on wet road pavement. Since loon legs are placed so far back on their bodies, it is very difficult for them to walk on land, and impossible for them to take flight from it. A loon, mistaking a rain-slicked road or parking lot for a body of water, becomes helpless if it lands. Human assistance is usually required, first to treat any possible injuries, and second to transport the bird to either a large lake or the ocean. Loons may require up to a quarter-mile of open water to become airborne.

A more serious problem faces these magnificent birds. Studies have been conducted in Canada and the northeastern United States that document an ongoing problem with mercury poisoning in loons breeding in northeastern lakes. Much of the mercury originates from coal-fired power plants to the west. It reaches New England's northern lakes on the wind, or in rain or snow, and accumulates in the lakes' fishes and other aquatic creatures. Those at the top of the food chain, such as loons, receive the highest accumulations of mercury and over time show signs of mercury poisoning. Mercury affects the nervous system, especially in young loons, and has been associated with loon reproductive failure.

Other very real threats to loons include acid rain, which kills off the plankton that is the base of a lake's food chain, and lead poisoning, another cause of mortality when loons ingest carelessly discarded lead fishing sinkers.

Submitted by Cindi Kobak



### Saturday Morning Birding at Hammonasset

Saturdays through November 22

7:50 A.M.

Leader: Jerry Connolly

Meet at the Audubon Shop, Madison

Every Saturday morning through November, Jerry will lead birders through Hammonasset to see migrating shore birds, hawks, and song birds. For information call 203-245-9056. There is a \$4.00 fee.



#### 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.

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*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 welcomes new members

Menunkatuck Audubon Society welcomes the following new members:

**Branford:** Lynn Johnson, Rodney Oppel, P Brill Piscitell, David Snow

**East Haven:** Joanne Root Ushchak

**Guilford:** Denise Angers, Karen Bernhard, Richard M Boutilier, Steve Bunney, Susan Byck, Victoria Cianciolo, David Damer, William Etter, Elizabeth Fox, Betty Freeborn, Paul Grace, Louise Graver, Thomas Hanson, Pamela M Helwig, Lee Henderson, Merle Levy Hornstein, L Anne Horrath, Joseph Kaufman, Wendy Kravitz, Robert Lang, Rob Latta, William Lee, Forest Levin, Michael Loyd, Thomas MacCauley, Nora MacRoberts, Laura L Malis, Robert Massey, Linda McGuire,

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**Madison:** Richard Amerling, Julianne Derken, Mrs E F Eadie, C Hopkins-Winche, Annette Kilbridge, William Lee, Harriet Levesque, Bruce & Renee McIntyre, Lisa Miksis

**New Haven:** Alana Arnold

**West Haven:** Frank Lewis Jr, June Slovesky

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# MENUNKATUCK

November **2003**



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## NEXT MEETING

### **JIM ZIPP** **IN SEARCH OF BIRDS OF** **PREY, A NORTH AMERICAN** **JOURNEY**

*Wednesday, November 12, 2003*  
*7:30 PM*  
*Guilford Community Center*  
*Route 77*  
*Guilford*

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