

## *Kayak Trip Visits Guilford Salt Meadow Sanctuary*

On Saturday, July 12, Menunkatuck Audubon sponsored a kayak trip up the East River in Guilford to the Guilford Salt Meadow Sanctuary. The East River is a tidal river that drains into Long Island Sound and these wetlands support specialized salt marsh vegetation and animal life.

It was a gorgeous morning, the kind we waited and hoped for all of June. Crystal blue skies and an occasional wispy cloud far, far above, greeted the 20 paddlers that congregated on the boat launch of the East River. As we launched the tide pulled us upriver away from the Sound and towards Route 1. Along the way ospreys called overhead and we discussed the hardy and fascinating spartina plants (Saltwater and Saltmeadow Cordgrass). Willets made themselves heard along the shore and fiddler crabs scurried home as we passed by, the tide pulling us gently along.

The seeming solitude of the river ended somewhat abruptly as

we came to Route 1 and passed under I-95. But the passage under 95 opened into a sweeping vista of the Guilford Saltmeadow Sanctuary, and the traffic faded into the background. We paused at a turn in the river and under a tree offering a bit of shade. We stopped here for a chat about erosion and for introductions.

Throughout the morning we discussed the plants and animals inhabiting the estuary, the river, and of course the Sound. The sun, osprey, herons, egrets, willets, and spartina kept us company along the way. We turned around after the Clapboard Hill Bridge, where the salt levels drop off and the Phragmites makes its first strong appearance. We paddled back towards the boat launch and the Sound returning promptly at noon

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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  
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## Kayak Trip

(Continued from page 1.)

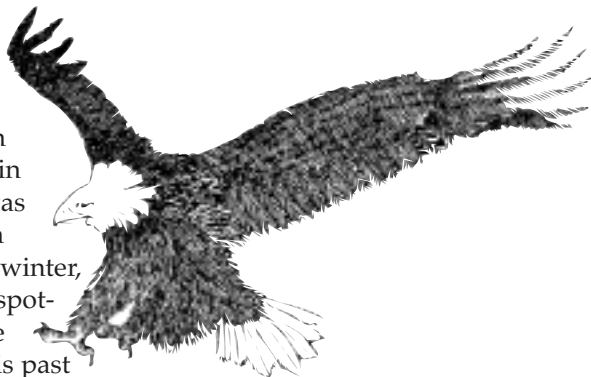
From the water we had a unique perspective of life in the salt marsh. And we explored the transition of life throughout an estuary (where fresh &

saltwater meet). It was a beautiful day and a wonderful trip.

For more info about the Guilford Salt Meadow Sanctuary visit:  
<[www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/guilford/index.html](http://www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/guilford/index.html)>.



This article is dedicated to the memory of my abuelita (grandmother), Mirta Botta. April 8, 1919 - August 14, 2003. PhD Biochemistry, Pharmacist. She was a Cuban refugee who came to the US in 1968. As an immigrant she was enamored with the American Bald Eagle. Thanks to a cold winter, the Connecticut River and a spotting scope I was able to share wild Bald Eagles with her this past winter. Mother, patriot, scientist; she lived a full life and will be sorely missed.



SuZanne Botta

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.

**Moths Will Be Topic at September Meeting**

At the September meeting of Menunkatuck Audubon, author/naturalist John Himmelman will present a slide/lecture based on his newly published book *Discovering Moths*. John is one of the foremost experts on these understudied beauties. Copies of his exquisitely written book will be available at the meeting with a book signing to follow.

This presentation was originally scheduled for last May and was postponed in order to accommodate David Sibley's lecture/book signing.

In October Julian Hough will take us on a typical fall season at Cape May in a talk entitled *Cape May: A Season at the Point*.

Situated at the southern tip of New Jersey, Cape May is the premier birding site on the eastern seaboard for observing autumn migration. This old Victorian town is a renowned tourist attraction and offers rewarding birding in a relaxing atmosphere. A diverse range of habitats in a relatively small area supports a large variety of species during migration.

From early August, under ideal weather conditions, big "flights" of songbirds occur and it is possible to see 30 species of warblers in a day. New Jersey has been dubbed the raptor capital of North America and there is nowhere better in the state to observe raptors than at Cape May Point.

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 is 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 sel-

# 2003 Calendar

**September 10, 2003**

*Discovering Moths*

*John Himmelman*

**October 8, 2003**

*Cape May: A Season at the Point*

*Julian Hough*

**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.**

dom or never see. Jim ran a hawk banding station for 18 years at Lighthouse Point in New Haven where he and raptor guru Brian Wheeler established it in 1981. Discussion is kept light however and does not get bogged down with charts and numbers. The program concludes with a presentation of favorite images set to music.

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 here, and his photos will take us to this remote state.

## USFWS to Allow Mute Swan Cull

Recent news stories have told of a decision by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to allow a mute swan cull in Connecticut. The FWS ruling is part of an effort to reduce the number of mute swans along the Atlantic Flyway. The FWS stated, "The need for the action stems from documented scientific evidence of the negative impacts that a growing population of mute swans is having on wetland habitats and native species of fish and wildlife, the threats that mute swans pose to human health and safety, and the damage that they can cause to commercial agricultural crops."

The FWS rationale for mute swan management was set forth in an environmental assessment (references omitted):

Alarmed by recent rapid growth of the population, and aware of the potential and actual detrimental impacts that exotic waterfowl such as the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) can have on native plant and animal communities, wildlife professionals have argued the need for a coordinated and cooperative program to reduce mute swan populations to predetermined and manageable levels designed to minimize ecological impacts.

The mute swan is not native to the U.S. It was first introduced to the U.S. in the late 1800's as an ornamental waterfowl to grace the gardens, pools, and ponds of the great estates of the upper classes. The importation of exotic birds, especially those familiar to recent immigrants from the "Old Country," was quite fashionable at the time. Now, one hundred years later and with mute swan populations well established along the

Northeast Atlantic Coast and in the Great Lakes Region, the mute swan is one of four naturalized species of birds to be considered invasive, the others being Rock Dove (*Columba livia*),

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

The mute swan is a frequent subject of children's books, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, literature, music, and dance because of its graceful form and beauty. Thus, it is easy for people to identify with, and form strong bonds of attachment to mute swans. Indeed, a small segment of the public harbors strong emotional, sentimental, and spiritual bonds of affection for mute swans because of their pleasing aesthetic nature. These psychological and social factors do not alter the fact that mute swans are quite destructive of wetland habitats and that their territorial behavior conflicts with other avian species and sometimes with human neighbors....

Mute swans feed almost exclusively on submerged aquatic vegetation, or SAV. SAV is a collective term used to describe a variety of aquatic plants and algae that grow in freshwater and estuarine environments. SAV support incredibly diverse communities of freshwater



These 32 mute swans gather at the boat launch in West Haven.

and marine organisms. SAV beds are the lifeblood of aquatic ecosystems. They provide aquatic nurseries, protective habitats where the young of commercially and recreationally important shellfish and finfish can live in relative security from predators while maturing into adults. Mute swans have been documented feeding on at least 23 species of SAV, including 16 species of pondweeds—sometimes referred to as "grasses" and 7 species of algae.

In coastal Sweden, [it has been] calculated that 45 mute swans consumed 8,635 kilograms (18,997 pounds) of sea lettuce (*Ulva* sp.) during a 45-day period, or about 4.3 kilograms (9.4 pounds) per swan per day. In Rhode Island, penned mute swans ate 3.8 kilograms (8.4 pounds, wet-weight) of aquatic vegetation per day.

In the Chesapeake Bay, [it was] determined that male mute swans ate 34.6 percent of their body weight per day, while females ate 43.4 percent; applying these figures to average mute swan body

weights ..., we calculate that males and females consume 3.73 kilograms (8.2 pounds) and 3.65 kilograms (8.0 pounds), respectively, of aquatic vegetation in an average day. ...

The quantity of SAV eaten by mute swans is only part of the problem. Additional losses occur through the foraging behavior of mute swans. Their consumption of immature seeds, removal of SAV biomass before plant maturation, and uprooting of whole plants may have a very negative effect on the availability of SAV with minimal consumption. Because adult mute swans tend to paddle and rake the substrate to dislodge food for themselves and their cygnets, much vegetation is destroyed and uprooted that is not eaten. Mute swans also use large amounts of vegetation for nest building.

When present in high concentrations, mute swans can overgraze an area, after which they abandon it. The findings of a recent exclosure study in Rhode Island indicated that mute swans can overgraze SAV when water depths are shallow (0.5 meters, or 1.5 feet), often reducing SAV biomass by as much as 92 to 95 percent. In Connecticut, overgrazing of SAV was most severe in the smaller ponds used by breeding pairs, but not evident in larger areas....

Mute swans increase their feeding rate during spring and summer because more food is required prior to feather molt and egg laying, which probably influences the availability of SAV to fall migrant waterfowl. During winter, mute swans probably consume nutrient storage overwintering structures (tubers) which probably has a long-term impact on macrophyte availability and species composi-

tion. Thus, mute swans can reduce the availability of certain wetland plant species, which can ultimately reduce the carrying capacity of wetlands for native waterfowl....

SAV provides important habitat for a myriad of animal species, and foraging activities of mute swans alter the structure of SAV beds in qualitative or quantitative ways that make them less suitable for the many organisms that depend on this habitat. The varied structure of the SAV beds provide estuarine-spawning fish (e.g., shad, herring, and rockfish) and other marine organisms (e.g., oysters and blue crabs) and their offspring with protection from predators. Any alteration or destruction of the SAV beds—such as can be inflicted by foraging mute swans—would diminish their value for these commercially important species. ...

Because of their strong territorial nature, mute swans occupy and defend large (up to 6-hectare, or 15-acre) parcels of wetland habitat during nesting, brood rearing, and foraging, and some pairs will vigorously defend nest or brood sites from intrusion by other species of waterfowl. Not only can they attack and displace native waterfowl from breeding and staging areas, they have also been known to kill intruding birds of other species and their young.

Mute swans have been reported to cause nest abandonment in Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*), Forster's Terns (*S. forsteri*), Least Terns (*S. antillarum*) [threatened in Connecticut], and Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*). This aggressive territorial defense by mute swans—an adaptive mechanism to ensure the availability of food resources needed to support their offspring—is clearly detrimental to

native birds and wildlife....

The FWS also described earlier efforts to control the mute swan population:

Prior to 2002, there were no mute swan population control measures underway in Connecticut. Although the hunting of mute swans is prohibited by law (Section 26-94 C.G.S.), the Commissioner of Environmental Protection has authority to implement control measures for mute swans pursuant to Section 26-3 C.G.S. The Bureau of Natural Resources has established a population objective of approximately 190 birds. This number presumes that (1) swans will be excluded from all high-quality habitats (e.g., Federal, State, and private lands) that are specifically managed for biodiversity, including but not limited to wildlife management areas and natural area preserves, and (2) limited numbers of swans will provide viewing opportunities for the public in habitats of low value to native wildlife (e.g., public parks, large lakes, and private ponds).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Assessment for the Management of Mute Swans in the Atlantic Flyway, June 2003. See <<http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/issues/muteswan/RecordofDecision.htm>> for links to the complete documentation and references.

# Biodiversity 2003

## Know your natural neighbors



### *Unique Feeding Habits of Doves*

If you provide water for your backyard birds you may have noticed that your visitors collect a small amount of it in their bills and then tip their heads back to swallow. Not so with doves. Mourning doves (*Zenaida macroura*), pigeons and others in the family Columbidae are able to drink by dipping their bills into water and sucking up the liquid. As a rule, doves require more water than other birds and this ability to sip allows them to swallow more water and to watch for predators as they drink.

#### **BIO BITS**

Mourning dove feeding habits play on this same theme. Other birds are actively catching insects and other invertebrate prey, then whacking the creatures against branches to render them edible. Or they are busily cracking open plant seedpods or hulls before consuming the nutritious seeds within. Meanwhile, the mourning dove is casually feeding as it walks along the ground, without bothering to prepare its food beforehand. It picks up large quantities of whole seed as it forages and stores the meal in its crop (a sac-like storage chamber in the throat). This permits the dove to expose itself to predators for only a short period of time. It then can fly to a sheltered area to digest its meal.

You may notice a flock of mourning doves quietly perched on tree branches in your yard or woodlands. Their previous meal is working its way from the crop to the first chamber of the stomach where digestive enzymes and acids start to break down the seed. In the second, larger stomach known as the gizzard, further breakdown continues. Birds that consume hard seeds, such as mourning doves, need the muscular gizzard to grind up the seed. To aid the grinding process, doves will ingest bits of gravel and sand, called grit. Look for doves collecting grit along roadsides and gravel drives.

With the breeding season over you are likely to see mourning doves flocking and roosting together. See if you can pick out the juvenile birds in the group. These youngsters do not possess the creamy, smooth appearance of the adults. Instead, their wing and breast feathers are edged with a pale tan, giving a scalloped effect to the feathers and a ruffled appearance to the young birds.



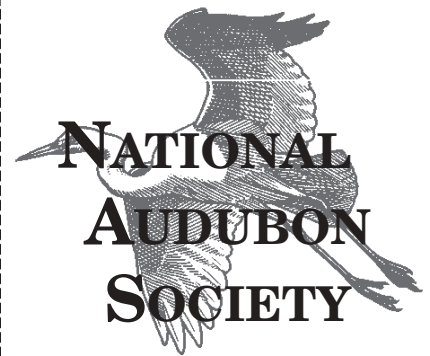
Submitted by Cindi Kobak

### Saturday Morning Birding at Hammonasset

Saturdays, beginning September 13, 2003 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.

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:** Nena S Cassedy, Christopher Howes, Robert Keating, Thomas Kroll, D Mac Donald, F C Pannill

**East Haven:** Clifford E Augur

**Guilford:** Phyllis L Baldwin, Louise Begley, Carolyn C Cooper, Nancy Czarkowski, Rochelle Dauenheimer, Mr Joseph M Dugan, Jean Getman, P Jones, Allison and Phil Maltese

**Killingworth:** Susan P Dean

**Madison:** Frances Jennings, Doreen B Milligan, John O'Sullivan, June Trocehio

**New Haven:** Janet Arterton, Jean E Barker, Richard Benoit, Margaret Brill, A M Dowser, Ruth Lord, Amelia Manna, Betsy Marshall, Marilyn Molloy, Emma Reiss, Robert Szponda, Louis Tagliatela

**West Haven:** Linda Altvater, Mrs E R Edson, Jo A Formichella, Diane Keogh, Jean W Schaefer

# Connecticut Rare Bird Alerts (203)254-3665

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**MENUNKATUCK**

September **2003**



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# **NEXT MEETING**

## **JOHN HIMMELMAN DISCOVERING MOTHS**

*Wednesday, September 10, 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  
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