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Connecticut
Audubon Society

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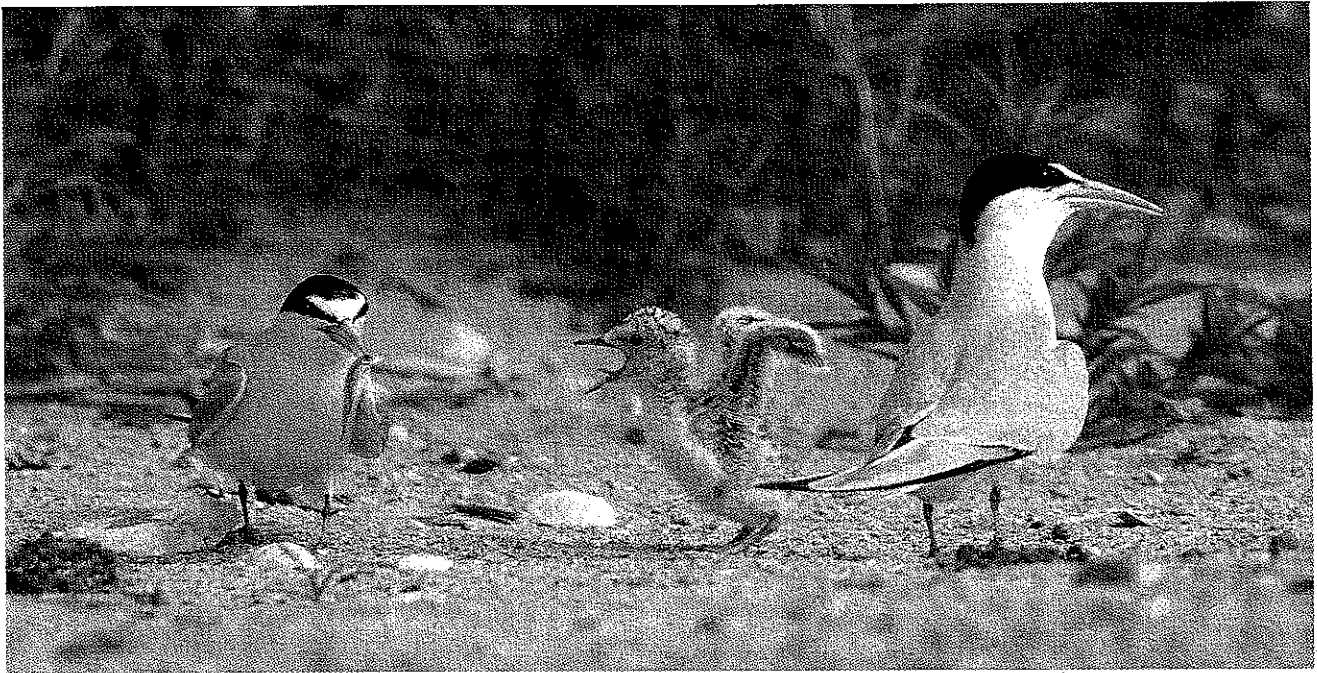
Dear Conservation Commission,

Enclosed is a copy of Connecticut Audubon Society's "Connecticut State of the Birds." This is a first-of-its-kind publication for the State of Connecticut, and it demonstrates our commitment to providing the public with a science-based rationale for conserving the state's rich biodiversity.

I hope you will find this publication useful and informative in your efforts to target, strengthen and implement your conservation work on behalf of the citizens of Connecticut. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments: 203-259-6305, ext. 113, and mbull@ctaudubon.org.

Sincerely,

Milan Bull
Senior Director
Science and Conservation



CONNECTICUT STATE OF THE BIRDS

Conserving Birds & Their Habitats



Connecticut
Audubon Society

2006

Birds Make Good Indicators of Environmental Health

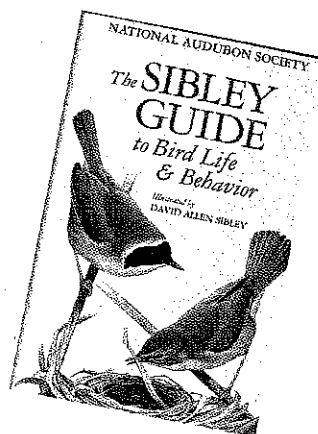
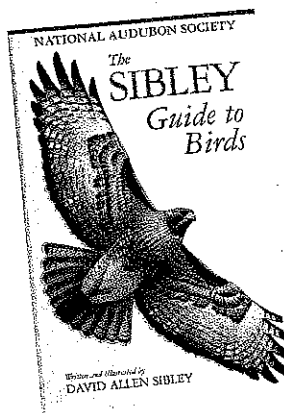
David Allen Sibley

Author and Artist, *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, 2000, Alfred A. Knopf

For a kid like me with an interest in birds, Guilford, Connecticut in the 1970s was a great place to grow up. Within a short bike ride from home I could find a wide range of habitats: woods, fields, marsh, coast, etc. A car trip on the weekends could take me to world-class concentrations of migrating birds (especially hawks) at Lighthouse Point Park in East Haven, to see the spring warblers in East Rock Park in New Haven, sandpipers and other waterbirds at Milford Point, nesting warblers and thrushes in Litchfield County, wintering gulls and waterfowl in New London, etc.

Bird populations change. Just in the decade of the 1970s I saw many changes, and with a long history of ornithological study going back to Louis Bishop and John Sage in the late 1800s, those changes are well-documented. Some species have increased in numbers, such as Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Bluebird and Black Skimmer, as a result of changes in the environment. Other species have decreased. Eastern Meadowlark, Vesper Sparrow, American Kestrel and other species found in open habitat such as farmland, have all decreased as that habitat has been developed or reverted to forest. Piping Plover and Least Tern numbers decreased as the human use of their beach-front nesting sites increased.

Because of their conspicuousness, mobility and popularity, birds make good indicators, and studying trends in bird populations is an excellent way to monitor environmental health overall. Some changes in bird populations indicate undesirable trends in land use and environmental health, not just in Connecticut but across the northeastern region. Rachel Carson was alarmed by dying songbirds and alerted us all to the dangers of DDT and other pesticides in her book *Silent Spring*. Monitoring bird populations continues to be important, not just for the birds' sake, but also for detecting and understanding broad-scale changes in our own environment. By assessing the state of the birds, therefore, we can also learn something important about the State of Connecticut.



Introduction

A primary reason Connecticut is a good place to live is its diverse and attractive landscapes and habitats that provide both visual enjoyment and places for recreation. While much of the state is urban and suburban, and growing more so, there are still shoreline beaches and tidal marshes, major rivers with accompanying grasslands, rolling farmland and forested hills.

Conserving these habitats and the biodiversity they support is critical to the future of the state as an attractive place to live and work. One of the best indicators of the health and conservation of these habitats is the state's large number of bird species that live in them.

Connecticut Audubon Society, founded in Fairfield in 1898 as the state's own independent bird conservation organization, is dedicated to protecting the state's habitats and biodiversity through integrated programs in research, education and advocacy. As part of this mission Connecticut Audubon Society is launching an annual report: *Connecticut State of the Birds*.

This first report, organized and published by Connecticut Audubon Society, is a joint effort with authors from national conservation groups, statewide organizations, Connecticut colleges and universities and state government. It is hoped that it will provide useful information and insight for both the public and its elected representatives.

Using data on bird populations to gauge environmental health is not a perfect fit. There is always the need for more data and what is available is subject to interpretation. Furthermore, in most conservation related issues there are tradeoffs to be considered and balances struck. The purpose of *Connecticut State of the Birds* is to provide the best scientific data that is currently available as well as to identify where more work is needed and use this information to make sound habitat conservation decisions and investments.

To ensure that this report is both scientifically valid and impartial we have established a scientific advisory board headed by the State Ornithologist, Dr. Margaret Rubega of the University of Connecticut. However, the publication, its articles and recommendations are the responsibility of the authors and Connecticut Audubon Society, and do not necessarily imply the endorsement of the other organizations or individuals involved.

Paul J. Fusco



The **Bald Eagle**, a Federally Endangered Species is making a comeback in Connecticut and is regularly seen on the Connecticut River in winter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Martinez'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large initial 'R' and 'M'.

Robert Martinez, President
Connecticut Audubon Society
Fairfield, Connecticut



Recommendations From Connecticut Audubon Society

Milan G. Bull
Senior Director of Science and Conservation

Elizabeth R. McLaughlin
Director of Environmental Affairs

Stephen B. Oresman
Chairman Conservation Committee

As described in this report, a significant number of bird species in Connecticut are declining due to loss of suitable habitat. This loss of habitat also affects other wildlife, including mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. This section outlines the principal conservation issues facing the state's birds and habitats and makes recommendations for action.

Three of the six major habitat types in the state, shoreline, tidal marsh and inland wetlands have been considerably reduced from their historical size and, while they now are legally protected, the possibility of expanding these three habitats is slight. Therefore the birds that use them will require special conservation attention species by species.

Two of the remaining three habitats - grasslands and shrublands - are shrinking. If this trend continues, these habitats and the bird species they support will be greatly diminished. In this situation, habitat conservation and restoration is needed to assist all grassland and shrubland birds.

As grasslands grow into shrublands, they then become forests. Thus the resulting woodlands, our largest habitat type, are expanding across undeveloped sections of the state. Therefore, many birds that use woodlands exhibit growing or stable population trends. However, a significant number of woodland species that need large tracts of mature forests to be productive are declining because of forest fragmentation. Large forest blocks fragmented by highways and development result in the reduced ability of many forest birds to breed productively due to the influx of suburban predators and nest parasites such as house cats, raccoons and Brown-headed Cowbirds. Thus, we need a strong effort to conserve large forest parcels and discourage fragmentation.

There has been widespread public opinion that many migratory songbirds are declining due to deforestation of their tropical wintering grounds, including rainforests. This is certainly a long-term conservation concern. However, as Dr. Robert Askins points out in his article, birds that require specialized habitat to breed in Connecticut seem to be able to use much more generalized habitat in their Central and South American wintering grounds. Therefore, the principal responsibility for the state's birds, habitats and biodiversity rests with us.

There will always be conflicts between habitat conservation and development, and as our population grows there will be a continuing need for healthy, attractive places to live, work, shop and recreate. It is not practical nor is it suggested that we stop development. The challenge before us is to make the land that we do conserve the highest quality habitat that supports the largest and most diverse wildlife populations.

Conservation organizations have sometimes been criticized for impractical, broad recommendations that need large amounts of public money or require new regulations that create bureaucratic burdens. The authors are sensitive to the need for practical solutions that will provide short-term progress and lead in the right long-term direction. All the recommendations stem from the findings in the articles in this report.

Continued on next page

Any program must start with an inventory of the land in these habitats. It is recommended that the Legislature fund and encourage the state to inventory and map the critical habitats outlined in this report in cooperation with the state's major non-governmental conservation organizations.

The second recommendation is to better use the land resources we currently have. There are large amounts of state, town and private lands owned by conservation organizations, private lands with conservation easements and private lands containing needed habitat. These lands should be actively managed to provide more and improved grassland and shrubland habitat. For example, the state and its partners should expand ongoing efforts to restore and develop early successional habitats. The incentives contained in the 2007 Farm Bill reauthorization and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Landowner Incentive Program should be maintained.

Five Key Recommendations

- 1. Inventory and Map Key Habitats**
- 2. Better Use of Current Land Resources**
- 3. Prioritize Species of Greatest Conservation Need (GCN)**
- 4. Review 21% Connecticut Open Space Goal to Be Sure It Includes Key Prioritized Habitats**
- 5. UCONN, in Cooperation with DEP Hold a Conference of Stakeholders to Determine Best Approach to Improve Bird Information**

Farmland is a great potential source of grassland and power line corridors (see Askins, page 30) are a major potential source of shrublands. Private landowners who own or buy farms can be encouraged to maintain or create grasslands. A good way to do this is through direct incentives to ensure necessary management that interferes as little as possible with private use.

The third recommendation is for the DEP, in conjunction with its partners and stakeholders, to further prioritize the GCN (Greatest Conservation Need) species including national and regional goals. Then, based on this integrated list, prioritize those habitats and identify areas for acquisition and management. Facilitation of these actions may be hastened if the DEP considers expanded representation on the Endangered Species Advisory Committees and these Committees meet more regularly.

Next it is recommended that the Legislature work with DEP and other partners to recommend modification of the state's 21% open space goal to be sure it includes the identified key prioritized habitats (e.g. grasslands, large forest blocks, shrublands, etc.). Finally, there is a need for better information on bird populations (see Elphick, page 8). Most bird population information gathering, with the exception of a few surveys done by DEP staff, is conducted by volunteers with an interest in and knowledge of birds. These volunteers come from local bird clubs, conservation organizations and statewide bird groups such as the Connecticut Ornithological Association. It is recommended that the University of Connecticut, in cooperation with the DEP, lead and convene a conference/workshop of the interested organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to determine the best approach and the costs of improving bird information. This conference may include discussion on conducting the next Connecticut Breeding Bird Atlas, as well as developing protocol for local land use groups to use to census birds on their respective properties.

It is hoped that the proposed conference will be a step toward energizing the state's potential conservation-oriented public and enhance cooperation between the various organizations with their diverse interests.

The Connecticut Audubon Society is committed to working cooperatively with the Legislature, DEP and our fellow conservation organizations. We will work with all interested parties to develop the specifics of our recommendations and progress toward our common goal of preserving and enhancing Connecticut's habitats and the wildlife they support.

CONNECTICUT AUDUBON SOCIETY

Founded in 1898, Connecticut Audubon Society conserves Connecticut's environment through science-based education and advocacy focused on the state's bird populations and their habitats. Connecticut Audubon Society operates nature facilities in Fairfield, Milford, Glastonbury and Pomfret as well as an EcoTravel office in Essex and an Environmental Advocacy office in Hartford. Connecticut Audubon Society manages 19 wildlife sanctuaries around the state, preserves over 2,600 acres of open space in Connecticut and educates over 200,000 children and adults annually. Working exclusively in the state of Connecticut for over 100 years, Connecticut Audubon Society is an independent organization, not affiliated with any national or governmental group. For membership and other information, please visit www.ctaudubon.org.

Connecticut Audubon Board of Directors 2005-2006

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Connecticut Audubon Offices

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CAS ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

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860-527-6750
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CAS BIRDCRAFT MUSEUM

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203-259-0416
Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-5 pm
Saturday & Sunday, Noon-5 pm

CAS COASTAL CENTER AT MILFORD POINT

1 Milford Point Road, Milford, CT 06460
203-878-7440
Hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10 am-4 pm
Sunday, Noon-4 pm

CAS CENTER AT FAIRFIELD

2325 Burr Street, Fairfield, CT 06824
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CAS CENTER AT GLASTONBURY

1361 Main Street
Glastonbury, CT 06033-3105
860-633-8402
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Saturday, 10 am-5 pm; Sunday, 1-4 pm

CAS CENTER AT POMFRET

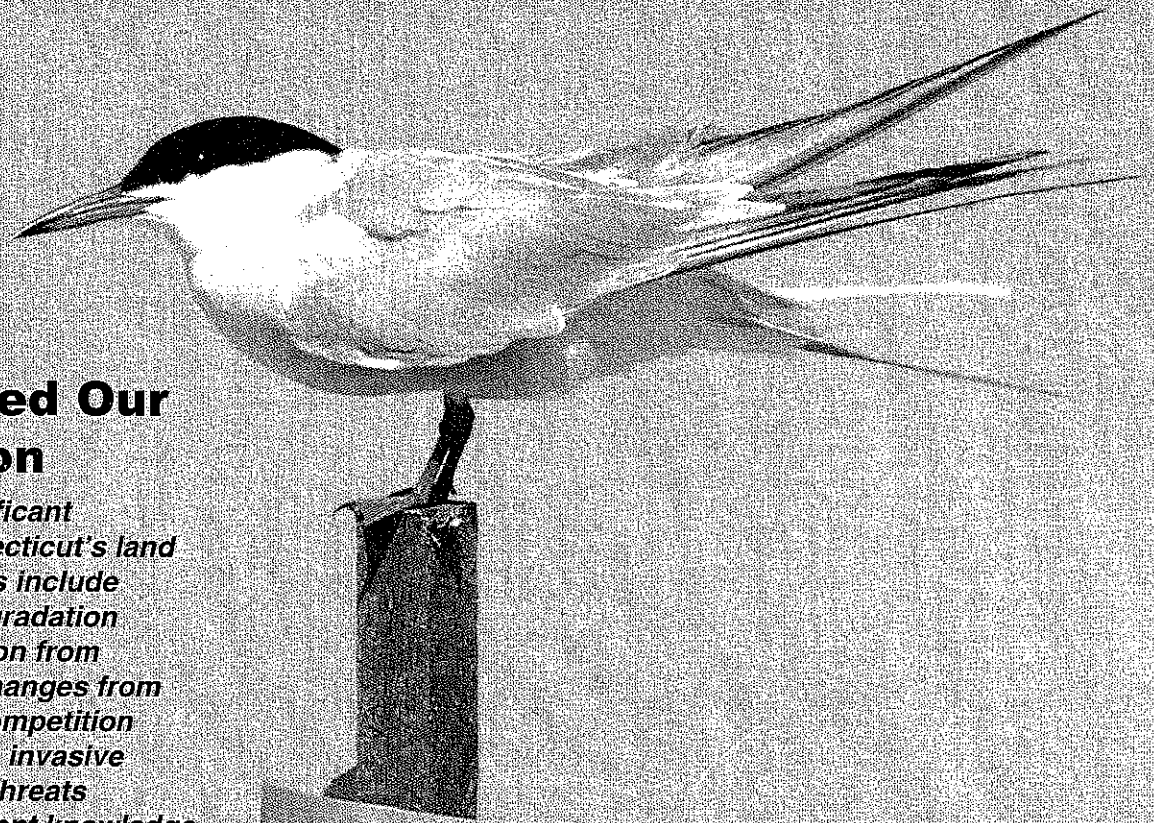
189 Pomfret Street (Rt. 169)
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Hours: Wednesday-Sunday, Noon-4 pm

CAS AT TRAIL WOOD

93 Kenyon Road, Hampton, CT 06247
860-928-4948
Hours: Dawn to dusk



Connecticut
Audubon Society



Birds Need Our Protection

"The most significant threats to Connecticut's land and waterscapes include habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation from development; changes from land use; and competition from non-native, invasive species. Other threats include insufficient knowledge regarding wildlife and their habitats (distribution, abundance and condition); the lack of landscape-level conservation; insufficient resources to maintain or enhance wildlife habitat; and public indifference toward conservation."

*- Connecticut
Comprehensive Wildlife
Conservation Strategy
(Connecticut Department of
Environmental Protection - 2006)*

**PLEASE
STAY AWAY
FROM BIRD NESTING AREAS**



**IF DISTURBED, PARENTS WILL
ABANDON NEST, SUBJECTING EGGS AND YOUNG
TO POSSIBLE DEATH.**

WILDLIFE PROTECTED BY LAW

Common Tern