

How will IBAs help Birds?

The IBA Program helps birds by setting science-based priorities for habitat conservation and promoting positive action to safeguard vital bird habitats.

By focusing attention on the most essential and vulnerable areas, the IBA Program helps to promote proactive habitat conservation. The information gathered in the process of identifying IBAs informs land-use planning and resource management decisions so that birds and their habitat needs are taken into account. This information is then summarized in a report or publication which informs statewide conservation planning.

IBAs are a natural focus of volunteer, citizen scientist monitoring projects, which can lead to positive local stewardship and advocacy. Identification of a site as an IBA is both a tool for assisting private landowners and public land managers and a rationale for preserving habitat from threats. Most importantly, the IBA program is a starting point for site-based conservation planning, involving stakeholders in a process that takes all interests into account.

Priorities

Important Bird Areas have been used as a basis for public land purchases using state open space funds. In Pennsylvania, IBAs automatically get 15 points out of 100 added to their priority ranking for public purchase. In other words IBAs are often associated with higher real estate value.

Branford IBAs

Connecticut's Important Bird Area program began in 1998. IBAs have been placed into three categories.

- Ten areas that will be announced publicly this fall (2001).
- Sites that require additional information such as mapping and/or boundary issues and landowner identification.
- More complex sites which require more mapping and analysis work to determine boundaries, or sites with multiple owners.

Branford and Guilford each have two potential IBAs. The unique geographic location of Branford lends to a wide variety of bird species that nest here or migrate through. Branford does not contain an IBA at this time because more preparation work needs to be completed; however this does not mean that the bird habit in Branford is any less critical than those already nominated, they may simply be more complex.

Below is a list of some of the birds in Branford that make it a likely candidate for two IBAs.

Northern Branford Wooded Areas	Southern Branford Marsh and Salt Marsh	Islands off the Branford Coast
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wood Thrush ▪ Catbird ▪ GreyCrested Flycatcher ▪ PeeWee ▪ Various types of Warblers ▪ Eastern Towhee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Osprey ▪ Egret - Snowy, Great ▪ Heron - Great Blue, Green ▪ Black Rail ▪ Clapper Rail ▪ Tern - Roseate, Common ▪ Saltmarsh-Sharp Tail Sparrow ▪ Marsh-Seaside Sparrow ▪ Willet ▪ Northern Harrier ▪ AmericanBlack Duck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scoter ▪ Tern ▪ Great Scoup ▪ Migratory Birds

The particular pipeline proposal raises several problems with respect to birds living in or migrating through Branford.

Pipeline construction calls for clear-cutting which raises concern of habitat destruction immediately and long-term concerns about fragmentation. Scientists are only beginning to understand the consequences of breaking up large tracks of habitat into smaller and more separate pieces of land. We as humans may not see the difference between one side of a clear-cut and the other; however animals are tied directly to the land and subtle changes to us, may be complete habitat destruction to them. It is also important to note that habitats are not solely the place in which the bird has a nest or shelter but rather where it gets everything it needs to live including food.

More research needs to be done before anyone can say this type of construction project wouldn't effect our local and transient bird species.

The Marsh specific birds will also be impacted in a similar way by the proposed pipeline. In addition to the general clear-cutting lose of habitat issue, within the marsh there is the secondary concern of erosion leading to even further habitat destruction. If the marsh erodes due to the construction process or the maintenance of the proposed pipeline this aggravates the problem by potentially reducing the number of fiddler crabs in the area. Fiddler crabs serve as food for many shoreline birds.

Another problem the proposed pipeline creates is the release of Copper into the waters off Long Island Sound. Copper is a Biocide. If the proposed pipeline passes and the Sound is dredged Copper, currently buried in the sediment will be stirred-up and become suspended. The Copper is then ingested by any filter-feeder including oysters, clams, sponges, etc. The bottom of the food-chain is made up of many of these filter-feeders. As we learned from DDT, Mercury, and PCBs when the bottom of the food-chain ingest this type of toxin it **bioaccumulates** when eaten by predatory animals and bioaccumulates further each time it moves up the food-chain.

However, at this time we do not know what the effects of high levels of Copper would have on shoreline birds.

In closing, in the past 10-15 years the shoreline has seen a tremendous resurgence of diversity in its bird populations. This is a time when Branford can position itself as an ideal place to live or vacation due to the quality of life and diversity of environment. A pipeline such as the one proposed by Islander East will not help the people, economy, or wildlife of Branford for this reason we oppose all three pipeline routes.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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[Main Page]

107th Congress
The Marine Mammal Protection Act

The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) was enacted in 1972 for the purpose of ensuring that marine mammals are maintained at, or in some cases restored to, healthy population levels. The original Act established a moratorium on the taking (under MMPA, "take" is defined as "to harass, hunt, capture, or kill or attempt to harass, hunt, capture, or kill any marine mammal") or importing of marine mammals except for certain activities which are regulated and permitted. These activities include scientific research, public display, and the incidental take of marine mammals in the course of commercial fishing operations.

Under the MMPA, jurisdiction over marine mammals under the MMPA is split between two agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (F&WS) has jurisdiction over sea otters, polar bears, manatees, dugongs, and walrus while the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has jurisdiction over all other marine mammals.

Due to a lawsuit which effectively prevented the issuance of permits to incidentally take marine mammals in the course of commercial fishing operations, the Congress amended the MMPA in 1988 to establish a five-year interim exemption for commercial fishing operations (with the exception of yellowfin tuna fishing). During this period, the NMFS was to establish a management program to govern the interaction between commercial fishing operations and marine mammals. That exemption expired on October 1, 1993, but has twice been extended by temporary measures.

During the interim exemption period, NMFS developed a three-tiered fishery classification system based on each fishery's level of interaction with marine mammals. Category I fisheries were defined as those in which it is highly likely that one marine mammal will be taken by a randomly selected vessel during a 20-day period. A Category II fishery is one in which there is some likelihood of taking one marine mammal during a 20-day period, and a Category III fishery is one in which it is highly unlikely that any marine mammal will be taken during a 20-day period.

The proposal required fishing vessel owners to register their vessels operating in either Category

I or II fisheries and to follow certain recording and reporting requirements during fishing operations and in some cases, carry observers. The Proposed Regime to Govern Interactions between Marine Mammals and Commercial Fishing Operations was transmitted to Congress in December of 1992 following public comment. Following the submission of the proposed regime to Congress, debate continued as to whether the proposal met the goals of the Act.

In 1994, in an effort to end this continuing debate, Congress reauthorized the MMPA (P.L. 103-238) and made a number of changes to the Act. Section 117 requires that marine mammal stock assessments be prepared to provide the necessary scientific basis for the new incidental take regime. This section also requires that the assessments include information on the sources and levels of human-caused mortality and serious injury, and identify strategic stocks for which take reduction plans are needed.

Section 118 establishes the requirements for the new incidental take regime for commercial fisheries. This section requires that the NMFS publish a list of commercial fisheries classified according to the frequency in which the fishery causes mortality or serious injuries to marine mammals. This differs from the 1992 NMFS proposal for classification in that it is based on mortality or serious injury rather than interaction or take of the marine mammal. The new regime also includes a mechanism for authorizing a limited incidental take of marine mammals which be listed as endangered or threatened.

Section 120 addresses interactions between pinnipeds and certain fishery resources, in particular, the interaction between the growing sea lion and harbor seal populations along the Pacific coast. This section allows States to apply to the NMFS for the authorization to lethally take pinnipeds under certain conditions. The section also requires NMFS to investigate the growing populations of harbor seals and sea lions and their effects on the recovery of salmonids and the coastal ecosystems along the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California.

A number of provisions were also adopted to modify the Act's permitting procedures including those dealing with public display, scientific research, educational or commercial photography, and included a new provision to allow the importation of polar bear trophies from Canada.

While P.L. 103-238 authorized the MMPA through

September 30, 1999, Members of the House Resources Committee will have an opportunity to examine how the 1994 amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act have been implemented by the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service and to begin discussion which will lead to the reauthorization of the Act this year. --narrative courtesy of the House Resources Committee

When they become available, introduced versions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act Reauthorization for the 107th Congress will be posted here.

The Informer is a publication of the NOAA Office of Legislative Affairs.

Digest of Federal Resource Laws of Interest to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972

Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1361-1407, P.L. 92-522, October 21, 1972, 86 Stat. 1027) as amended by... P.L. 94-265, April 13, 1976, 90 Stat. 360; P.L. 95-316, July 10, 1978, 92 Stat. 380; P.L. 97-58, October 9, 1981, 95 Stat. 979; P.L. 98-364, July 17, 1984, 98 Stat. 440; P.L. 99-659, November 14, 1986, 100 Stat. 3706; P.L. 100-711, November 23, 1988, 102 Stat. 4755; P.L. 101-627, November 28, 1990, 100 Stat. 4465; P.L. 102-567, October 29, 1992, 106 Stat. 4284; P.L. 103-238, 3, April 30, 1994, 108 Stat. 532; P.L. 105-18, June 12, 1997, 111 Stat. 187; and P.L. 105-42, August 15, 1997, 111 Stat. 1125

The 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act established a Federal responsibility to conserve marine mammals with management vested in the Department of Interior for sea otter, walrus, polar bear, dugong, and manatee. The Department of Commerce is responsible for cetaceans and pinnipeds, other than the walrus.

With certain specified exceptions, the Act establishes a moratorium on the taking and importation of marine mammals as well as products taken from them, and establishes procedures for waiving the moratorium and transferring management responsibility to the States.

The law authorized the establishment of a Marine Mammal Commission with specific advisory and research duties.

Annual reports to Congress by the Departments of Interior and Commerce and the Marine Mammal Commission are mandated.

The 1972 law exempted Indians, Aleut, and Eskimos (who dwell on the coast of the North Pacific Ocean) from the moratorium on taking provided that taking was conducted for the sake of subsistence or for the purpose of creating and selling authentic native articles of handicraft and clothing. In addition, the law stipulated conditions under which the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior could issue permits to take marine mammals for the sake of public display and scientific research.

The 1976 amendments (P.L. 94-265) clarified the offshore jurisdiction of the statute as the 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone.

The 1978 amendments (P.L. 95-316) extended the original 5-year authorization through FY 1981.

Amendments enacted in 1981 (P.L. 97-58) established conditions for permits to be granted to take marine mammals "incidentally" in the course of commercial fishing. In addition, the amendments provided additional conditions and procedures for transferring management authority to the States, and authorized appropriations through FY 1984.

The 1984 amendments (P.L. 98-364) established conditions to be satisfied as a basis for importing fish and fish products from nations engaged in

harvesting yellowfin tuna with purse seines and other commercial fishing technology, as well as authorized appropriations for agency activities through FY 1988.

The 1986 amendments (P.L. 99-659) amended section 101 of the original statute to allow the incidental take of depleted marine mammals in activities other than commercial fishing, provided that such take does not result in an unmitigable impact on subsistence harvest.

Several additional amendments were enacted in 1988 (P.L. 100-711). In addition to reauthorizing activities through FY 1993, the amendments established a process for commercial fishermen to obtain an exemption from the moratorium on incidental take of marine mammals for a five-year period. The Department of Commerce is authorized to conduct specific related tasks including the granting of exemptions, providing for observer coverage, and collecting data on the extent of incidental take.

The Secretary of Commerce is required to consult with the Secretary of Interior prior to taking actions related to species for which the Interior Department has jurisdiction. The California sea otter is explicitly excluded from the exemption process.

The Marine Mammal Commission is required to issue guidelines, by 1990, to govern incidental take associated with commercial fishing after the 5-year period, and the Secretary of Commerce is required to review and transmit recommendations to Congress before January, 1992.

Additional features of the 1988 amendments include:

- * the establishment of conditions and procedures for the Secretaries of Commerce and Interior to review the status of populations to determine if they should be listed as "depleted" (below optimal, sustainable population numbers or listed as threatened or endangered);
- * the preparation of conservation plans for any species listed as "depleted", including a requirement that such plans be modeled after recovery plans developed pursuant to the Endangered Species Act;
- * the listing of conditions under which permits may be issued to take marine mammals for the protection and welfare of the animals, including importation, public display, scientific research, and enhancing the survival or recovery of a species; and
- * a reward system under which the Secretary of the Treasury can pay up to \$2500 to individuals providing information leading to convictions for violations of the Act.

Public Law 101-627, signed November 28, 1990, establishes conditions for the protection of dolphins by ocean vessels when harvesting tuna with purse seine nets. (See entry for Dolphin Protection Consumer Information Act.)

Public Law 102-567, Title III, 306, October 29, 1992, 106 Stat. 4284, directed the Secretary of Commerce to do a study in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico on the effects of feeding noncaptive dolphins by humans.

The Marine Mammal Protection Act Amendments of 1994 (Public Law 103-238, April 30, 1994, 108 Stat. 532) reauthorizes the law for six years through

fiscal year 1999 and makes the following updates:

- * clarifies that the Secretary (of Commerce) has the authority to protect essential marine mammal habitat;
- * amends the moratorium and exceptions provisions to allow permits for photography for educational purposes and import of polar bear trophy taken from populations legally harvested before enactment of the law, April 30, 1994;
- * allows U.S. citizens to apply for authorization to take small numbers of marine mammals by harassment;
- * allows fishermen to take small numbers of marine mammals listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act;
- * allows the importation of certain marine mammal products under special circumstances;
- * clarifies the Secretary's role to issue permits for public display and research;
- * sets clear guidelines for when the Fish and Wildlife Service can issue permits to import polar bear trophy into the U.S. from Canada. Establishes guidelines for the permit process and limits importation to bears taken before enactment of the amendments from healthy populations;
- * allows monies from the Fund to be used for maintaining captive marine mammals seized under special circumstances;
- * requires the Secretary of the Interior to review the Agreement for the Conservation of Polar Bears to try to halt the decline of polar bear populations in Russia and Alaska;
- * creates a new program to manage incidental takes of marine mammals in the course of commercial fishing operations;
- * makes it clear that incidental take of southern sea otters is regulated under P.L. 99-625;
- * establishes independent scientific review groups for Alaska, the Pacific Coast, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic Coast to advise the Secretary of Commerce on managing incidental take of marine mammals by commercial fishermen;
- * requires stock assessments of marine mammals incidentally taken in commercial fisheries;
- * establishes take reduction teams for strategic stocks;
- * prescribes emergency regulations to reduce the level of marine mammal take in the event that the take has a significant impact on a stock;
- * requires commercial fishing vessels to report marine mammal take to the Secretary of Commerce and establishes a program to monitor incidental lethal take;

- * creates a Pinniped Task Force to examine impacts of seals and sea lions on fishery stocks;
- * focuses on marine ecosystem protection by directing Commerce to have a workshop on Gulf of Maine and Bering Sea ecosystems;
- * extends scrimshaw exemptions for five years; and
- * extends authorization of appropriations through fiscal year 1999.

Public Law 105-18, Title V, 5004, June 12, 1997, 111 Stat. 187 and Public Law 105-42, 4(d), August 15, 1997, 111 Stat. 1125 amend the Marine Mammal Protection Act Amendments of 1994 to allow importation of polar bear trophy into the U.S. taken in sport hunts in Canada if the applicant legally harvested the bear before April 30, 1994 or if the bear were taken after that date, the applicant harvested the bear from populations approved as sustainable by the Service.

In addition to the other activities under this Act, the Service comments under the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act on Federal projects and permits and licenses affecting sea otter, walrus, polar bear, dugong, and manatee.

Return to List of Resource Laws

Carol R. Lemmon
12 Coachman Drive
Branford, CT 06405

10 October, 2001

I am speaking tonight as a certified inland wetland commissioner in the town of Branford.

In addition, I am employed as the Deputy State Entomologist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and am currently, vice president of the Connecticut Botanical Society, former treasurer and 30 year member of The New Haven Bird Club, board member of CT Ornithological Association, member of Citizens of Branford's Environment, vice-president and co-founder of CT Butterfly Association, which additionally supports the preservation of Dragonflies, member of the CT Herpetological League, member of State of Connecticut Invasive Plant Work Group, and advisor to The Branford Land Trust.

This is a brief oral report to the Blue Ribbon Commission, which will be followed with a more detailed written report as I have not had enough time to cover all of the issues I wish to address.

First of all, I am appalled at the blatant disregard for our town's natural resources, especially our non-renewable inland wetlands, contained in Islander's East's application to the State Siting Council. These objections include, but are not limited to, the failure to provide a plan of environmental mitigation to protect these fragile ecosystems and wildlife species that occur along the Tilcon railroad.

Three of the pipeline crossings are absolutely unacceptable, as they would destroy high quality fragile wetland ecosystems consisting of wetland shrub swamps, vernal pools and forested wetlands with flowing watercourses.

The first of these proposed crossings occurs just north of Pleasant Point Road, east of the tracks, in a large red maple-tupelo forested swamp, with numerous tree buttresses often 2 to 3 feet in height to accommodate seasonal flooding. Sphagnum moss often occurred on the roots at this height, indicating long periods of standing water. Many large depressions contained gray-stained leaves that are indicative of vernal pools. On the west side of the tracks, the grassy strip that borders the woodlands is 30-40 feet from the rail line. This wooded area is not a wetland area was not even considered as a feasible and prudent alternative.

2. The second unacceptable proposed wetland infringement is at the midpoint between Route 146 and Gould Lane, on the west side of the track. This wetland occurs adjacent to the railroad track. On Sunday October 7, 2001, I observed pools of standing water of more than 1 ½ feet deep and flowing watercourses of

more than 1 foot deep within 25 feet of the tract. Looking for marbled salamander eggs, I sank into muck up to my knees and needed an overhanging tree branch to help me out and I was within 5 feet of the water. Across the tracks was a ledge, and not wetland.

The third proposed wetland crossing that failed to consider alternate routes is where the proposed pipeline crosses Route 1 on the east side of the tracks, goes around the building where Islander East has its offices and crosses the Branford River, a shrub swamp and a cattail marsh at the absolute widest point possible. An alternate route is to cross Route 1 on the west side of the track and go over a dry corn field and cross Branford River, straight on, at a 90 degree angle, and proceed to route 139 and out of the town of Branford without a great deal of environmental impact to the wetlands.

This application indicates that other wetlands would be severely impacted as well, but in these cases, there are not glaring feasible alternatives that can be utilized by merely crossing over the tracks. Possibly, some of them can be mitigated to have less detrimental impact than what would occur on these pristine properties. My written report will contain wetland maps and numbers from the wetland delineation flags.

I am very concerned with Islander East's failure to consider the impact on nesting bird and animals that breed within this green corridor that runs the length of the Tilcon tracks in Branford.

The following species were derived from twenty-three years of Christmas Bird Counts in the vicinity of Route 139, individual birding field trips by me, but mostly from personal communication from Dr. Noble Proctor who has lived and birded in Branford for 40 years. He is a Professor of Ornithology at Southern Connecticut State University, author of numerous textbooks on ornithology and natural history, has reported the following special species that feed and nest along the green corridors on each side of the Tilcon tracks between Gould Lane and the Goss Property.

American Kestral Hawks, seen on many Christmas counts near the Tilcon RR corridor near route 139.

Great-Horned Owl seen on the Goss property, these owls are territorial and do not migrate, most likely nest here.

Screech Owls 2 pairs nested last year, one south of the railroad track at Pleasant Point Road and 1 pair approximately 300 yards north of the tracks from route 146.

Species of special concern Red-Shouldered Hawk nested in spring of 2001 in the vicinity of the Tilcon tracks and Pleasant Point Road.

Species of Special Concern, Sharp-tailed Sparrow, 5 birds feeding a few yards north of the Goss property.

Species of Special Concern, Eastern Box Turtle, in uplands on the Goss property.

Threatened Species, Cooper Hawk pair nested south of Pleasant Point Road spring of 2001, frequently observed hunting.

Threatened Species , Snowy Egret, seen using pond at the Goss property pond.

Threatened Species , Least Bittern, seen yearly during migration in the salt marsh across from the Goss property.

Endangered Species, King Rail hybridizing with Clapper rail, nest 2001 seen in the salt marsh across from Goss property.

Also,

Species of Special Concern, Eastern Box Turtle, in uplands on the Goss property.

This green corridor is a migratory route for species moving south for the winter and acts a stopover for exhausted northern migrants. On my visit October 7th, I saw the first of the northern species that move into these refuges in great numbers, for the winter. They were Northern Juncos, White Throated Sparrows, and Brown Creepers. Species moving south were Phoebes, Blue Jays, Flickers, Coopers Hawks, Red Shouldered Hawks, Yellow-rumped warblers, Common yellow-throats, and Yellow warblers. Some of these migrants remain and feed during mild winters. Other migrants moving south along the corridor, included Monarch Butterflies, Red Admiral butterflies and 4 species of dragonflies.

Islander East states in the Siting council report that it plans to do the cutting of a 50' corridor of uplands and a 30' corridor of inland wetlands during the wet spring season and during migration and nesting season. This is unacceptable. The Branford Inland Wetland Commission often requires any Inland Wetland work to be done in the month of August when there will be the least amount of damage to these fragile ecosystems.

Islander East has failed to provide an environmental impact study to the town of Branford, to the Conservation Commission and to the Inland Wetlands Commission that would determine the environmental impingement of our fragile ecosystems, and especially to Endangered, Threatened or Species of Special Concern.

Many developers of wetlands choose July and August to determine wetland species. This is inadequate and not acceptable as it does not consider the spring ephemeral plant species nor the vernal pool salamanders and frogs of

which seven species in Connecticut are Endangered, Threatened, or Species of Special Concern..

My written report will cover topics of concern such as mulches, hydrostatic testing, invasive species, hydrology in swamps, soil removal and chip removal, use of non native species such as rye grass in wetlands, lack of feasible and prudent alternatives, non essential equipment, training of the Environmental Inspector, and the adoption of the current Branford Inland Wetland regulations.

In summary, I would like to suggest several feasible and prudent alternatives.

The number 1 feasible and prudent alternative is find another route, ideally through Milford, as it is already an energy route that crosses Long Island Sound.

Avoid all wetlands by crossing over the tracks if there is a non wetland alternative route.

Plan to have someone walk these routes as opposed to flying over, it can be done twice a week in about 1 and 1/2 hours across Branford. In these days since the terrorists attacks, even as a state agency, I could not use a plane for insect damage observation for a period of 2 1/2 weeks after the September attack because it was not a state emergency.

With the threat of terrorist attacks, damage to gas pipelines under I-95 and Amtrak rail lines would effectively cut New England off from the rest of the United States. As a frequent flier in Cessna planes 500 feet up, very little sabotage damage in progress can be seen even with a 10x binoculars from that distance. A great deal can be seen by walking over the actual buried pipeline. In national emergencies small non vital private planes may be grounded for months at a time. This would be unacceptable not to have this pipeline examined routinely especially during national emergencies, where it should be done more frequently.

A walking route could limit all inland wetland canopy openings to about 5 feet. If the top two feet of fill over the buried pipe were granite dust, (sold by Tilcon) this would provide an inert, weed free, non floating, non decaying, solid walking area and allow the movement of water through out it. Trails could be placed immediately 25 feet off the rail line and often up against ledges which would save money and precious habitat from blasting. My crew, at my state agency, have snow shoes and work year around in the forest. Mail carriers routinely work in all weathers. Walking trails are more visually efficient, less costly, and conserve energy, and save precious refuges..

In addition, I propose that a walking trail be cut into the freshwater Phragmites across the tracks from the Goss Property. If this pathway was 5 feet wide and a minimum of two feet were granite dust, and the operation was completed in the winter months when frozen, I don't see any serious detrimental effects to that environment. The Goss property is a classic Oak-Hickory Community with

mature trees and acts as a green corridor for wildlife. A fifty foot cut through the center, as some areas are only 250 feet wide, would fragment it to the point it would have no value for bird nesting or wildlife breeding. That now functioning land preserve serves many species of wildlife. A 50 foot swathe through it would create 4 edges and create a hostile environment for nesting and breeding species. In addition, invasive species that now only occur on the edge near the railroad line, since they are shaded out by a heavy mature canopy would quickly become monocultures in an open canopy.

will cover more of these topic in detail in my written report.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carol R. Lemmon". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Carol R. Lemmon

Connecticut Wildlife

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BUREAU OF NATURAL RESOURCES • WILDLIFE DIVISION



Sparrows of the Salt Marsh

Written by Paul Fusco, Public Awareness Program

Connecticut's shoreline tidal marshes are home to two inconspicuous species of sparrows during spring and summer. At this time of year, both birds are carrying out their breeding cycle in Connecticut's salt marshes. Each will nest in the marsh, just out of reach of the highest tides, in an attempt to raise four or five young. The birds will need to remain secretive in order to avoid such marsh predators as raccoons, gulls and herons.

The salt marsh is the only habitat used by these birds. The two birds are the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow (*Ammodramus caudacutus*) and its close relative, the seaside sparrow (*A. maritimus*).

These sparrows' heavy dependence on the salt marsh has led to significant population declines for both species over the last century as development pressures have destroyed much of Connecticut's original salt marsh habitat. Today, smaller populations of these once abundant sparrows can still be found in the remaining salt marshes of our state.

Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow

The saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow is a small brown and buff-colored bird with a streaked breast and dark crown. It is identified by a broad yellow-orange triangle on the sides of the head which surround a gray ear patch.

This uncommon to locally common species inhabits the drier portions of the salt marsh, preferring saltmeadow cordgrass areas in the "high marsh" zone. This sparrow is a skulker, seldom flying up from the ground, and, when it does, it usually flies only a short distance before coming back down into the grass. It can sometimes be seen running mouse-like through matted clumps of grass as it forages for food or hides from a predator.

Although the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow occurs at higher population densities than the seaside sparrow, it is considered to be at slightly higher risk because of its much more restricted breeding range. The entire breeding range of the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow is along the northeast coast of the United

States from Maryland north to southern Maine. Situated in the middle, Connecticut makes a critical part of this species' range.

In winter, most individual species retreat from the northern part of their range to Atlantic marshes along the southern States. They have been documented in Connecticut during winter; it is a very rare occurrence.

Among the saltmarsh sparrow's preferred food items are flies and sand fleas, making it a species very beneficial to the marsh. The bird will also eat other spiders, snails and seeds from grasses.

Seaside Sparrow

Slightly larger than the saltmarsh sharp-tailed, the seaside sparrow has a gray appearance with distinctive streaking on the breast. Notable features include a more uniformly colored breast, a very long bill and a small

in front of the eye.

The seaside sparrow is found in the wetter portions of the salt marsh. It is often found foraging along the edges of creeks and marshes. Because the wetter edges of the marsh take up less area of the marsh, this needs large marsh creeks and channels to sustain a viable population.

Tall stands of (smooth) cordgrass are the portions of the marsh that are flooded regularly during tides. Staying within these stands of grass, the seaside sparrow nests out onto the wetland, a tidal creek receives the sparrow frequently into the shallow water. It hunts for its favorite small crabs and other marine invertebrates. Its diet consists of animal life, the se



Lying in the middle of the saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow's restricted breeding range, Connecticut plays a significant role in the conservation of this small bird.

The protection of salt marsh habitat will be critical to the continued presence of these birds in our state and region.

sparrow will also eat seeds from saltmarsh cordgrass.

The seaside sparrow occurs in salt marshes from southern Maine down the Atlantic Coast to Florida, and along the Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas. It is also a short distance migrant, retreating from our area during winter.

Conservation

These two secretive birds are both listed as species of special concern in Connecticut and they are on the Partners in Flight WatchList, meaning that they are conservation priority species (see sidebar below) on a national level.

One subspecies of the seaside sparrow has already been lost to extinction in Florida. After losing its habitat to development and the failure of related attempts to rescue it, the once abundant dusky seaside sparrow (*A. naritimus nigrescens*) was declared extinct in 1987. A second subspecies, the Cape Sable seaside sparrow (*A. naritimus mirabilis*) is currently listed as a federal endangered species. It hangs on by the narrowest of margins in a tiny area of southwestern Florida, constantly threatened by wildfires and hurricanes.

As is the case with so many declining species, these small denizens of the tidal marsh need to have a healthy habitat in which to live (see article on page 11). The protection of salt marsh habitat from the pressures

of encroachment will be critical to the continued presence of these birds in our state and region.

Marsh restoration projects being undertaken by the Wildlife Division will benefit these two sparrows, as well as many other species that depend on a healthy salt marsh ecosystem.

Both of these sparrows can be seen at some of the larger coastal marshes in Connecticut, including Hammonasset Beach State Park, Charles E. Wheeler Wildlife Management Area, in Milford, and the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge/ Great Meadows marsh in Stratford.



The seaside sparrow is most commonly seen as the male sings its buzzy song from a slightly elevated perch within the salt marsh.

So, What Good Is a Salt Marsh?

aren't they just smelly, mosquito-infested wastelands with no economic value?

Not so.

Salt marshes are one of the most productive and important of all ecosystems. They serve as buffers, protecting developed shoreline areas from storm surges and flooding. They purify water by filtering out excess nutrients and pollutants that would otherwise cause water quality problems in Long Island Sound. They are incredibly productive nurseries, providing spawning and rearing areas for most of the shellfish and seafood that are harvested for human consumption, like clams, bluefish, flounder and many others. They are the habitat for many endangered and threatened species, including 27 state-listed vertebrate wildlife species just in Connecticut. They are also invaluable recreation areas for hunters, anglers, bird watchers, canoeists, photographers, artists, educators and naturalists.

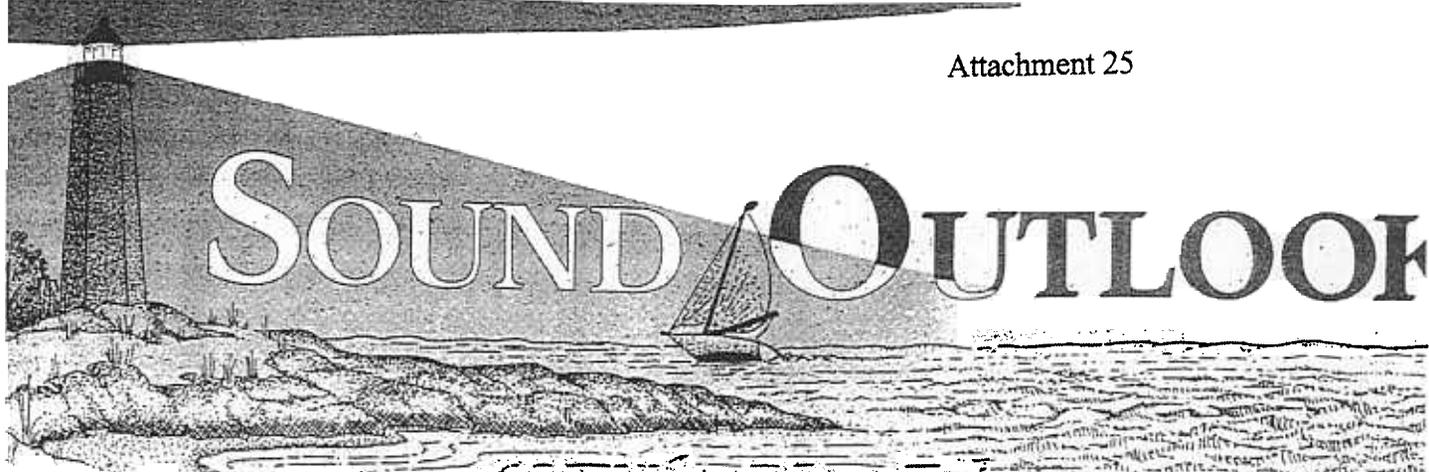
The Importance of the WatchList

The WatchList identifies North American bird species that need conservation help. WatchList species are those faced with population decline, limited geographic range and/or threats such as habitat loss on their breeding and wintering grounds. The WatchList is an early warning system that focuses attention on at-risk bird species before they become endangered.

The WatchList is compiled by Partners In Flight, a coalition of state, federal and private sector conservationists working together to protect birds of the western hemisphere. Partners In Flight updates the WatchList yearly to reflect the most current research and data.

Saving species pushed to the edge of extinction is difficult, costly and politically charged. The WatchList shifts the agenda from reactive, last minute rescue attempts to preventive action. The goal is to keep common birds common.





SOUND OUTLOOK

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION



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OCTOBER 2001
No. 8



SPOTLIGHTED Coastal Resource: LIS Gets Seal of Approval

Long Island Sound is not usually known as a vacation spot during the cold winter months, but for one group of marine mammals, LIS has been growing in popularity as a great place to catch some rays in the off-season. Seals, most commonly harbor seals and hooded seals, are showing up on rocky islands and outcrops in the Sound from late December to April. Scientists speculate that the increase in the LIS seal population may be a result of improved water quality in the Sound and diminished fish stocks in the waters off the New England coast.

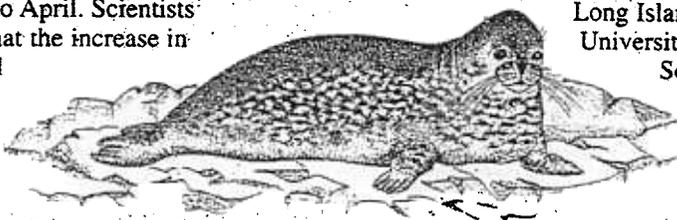
These seals spend most of their lives in the North Atlantic, migrating south to the waters off the northeastern and mid-Atlantic states during December and January. Two of the more favorite 'haul out' sites are Great Gull Island, off the 'north fork' tip of Long Island, and the Norwalk Islands offshore of Norwalk. About 4,000 of these federally protected animals winter throughout LIS before returning to spring breeding grounds off the coasts of Maine and Canada.

Counts of seals in the Sound beginning in the mid-1970s found a slow, steady increase in the population, almost all of them harbor seals. Since 1993 a sharp rise in their numbers has been

observed, and since 1997 three other species, the gray, harp, and hooded seals, have been sighted. Seals are also migrating further west into the Sound. Ten years ago seals were rarely seen in the Norwalk Islands; now about 60 are regularly sighted there annually.

A collaborative long-term seal survey was begun in 1998 by Long Island University's Southampton College, the Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island, and the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium. Partial funding for this project was provided through a grant from the CT DEP LIS License Plate research fund. It is anticipated that further data will confirm a positive trend in the abundance of wintering seal populations in the Sound.

Whatever the reason, seals seem to be giving their approval to Long Island Sound as a place to spend the winter. Interested readers may visit the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium website at www.maritimeaquarium.org/study-cruise.html and the Mystic Aquarium website at www.mysticaquarium.org for information on seal watch cruises and seal rescue and rehabilitation activities.



Harbor Seal

Long Island University's Southampton College, the Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island, and the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium.

Sound Ti Winterizing Your

It's time to think about your boat away for the Here are a few clean bo

- Clean your boat on a gravel driveway away from water. Your marina or boat have a designated upland area. Use a drop cloth to bottom scrapings and ant paint chips.
 - Wash your boat with "1 and "phosphate-free" cleaners. Avoid cleaners with bleach ammonia, lye or petroleum distillates.
 - Recycle used motor oil not mix it with other substances. Use absorbent materials to drips and clean up small spills.
 - Store lead acid batteries protected from the elements raised from the ground or wood.
 - Use a shoreside or mobile pumpout facility to flush holding tank. Use non-toxic antifreeze to winterize your
- For more information on clean boating and clean mar practices, contact Elke Sutt 424-3034 or by e-mail at elke.sutt@po.state.ct.us.

LIS Plate Money (continued)

Projects completed with License Plate funding include publication of the *Connecticut Coastal Access Guide*, creation of kayak trails on the lower Connecticut River, and planting of beach grass coastwide for stabilization and restoration of sand dunes. Information and order forms for purchasing LIS license plates can be obtained by calling 1-800-CTSOUND or by writing to Long Island License Plate, 60 State Street, Wethersfield, CT 06161-6001. For more information about the program, please contact the Long Island Sound Fund Coordinator, Kate Hughes, at (860) 424-3034, by e-mail at kate.hughes@po.state.ct.us, or visit our website at www.dep.state.ct.us/olisp/licplate.htm.

Connecticut Coastal Access Guide Newly Revised and Updated - Get Yours Today

The *Connecticut Coastal Access Guide* has been revised and updated for a new 2nd edition of this popular publication includes 16 new coastal access sites and an easy-to-use map, bringing the total number of coastwide access sites to 100. The *Guide* describes sites where the public can fish, swim, hike, birdwatch, or enjoy Connecticut's scenic and working coastline. New photographs highlight access sites, while informative facts about Connecticut's coastal environment and recreation remain. For a free copy of the *Connecticut Coastal Access Guide*, call either the Office of Long Island Sound Programs at 860-424-3034 or the DEP Store at 3692, or e-mail us at coastal.access@po.state.ct.us.

If you did not receive this issue of *Sound Outlook* in the mail and would like to be on the mailing list, please fill out below and mail to: Sound Outlook, CT DEP, Office of Long Island Sound Programs, 79 Elm Street, Hartford, CT 06106-5127; or e-mail your address to lauri.makowski@po.state.ct.us.

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