



A LOOK INSIDE  
the work  
YOU MAKE  
POSSIBLE

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White-breasted Nuthatch. Photo: William Dix/Audubon Photography Awards

## Strengthening Connecticut and the Atlantic Flyway

As the Connecticut Office of the National Audubon Society, our mission is to conserve and restore ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth’s biological diversity. We accomplish this through Science and Conservation; Environmental Education at our Centers in Southbury, Greenwich, and Sharon; and Policy Initiatives. These efforts play a vital role in supporting conservation in the Atlantic Flyway and building upon Audubon’s far-reaching network.

No other conservation organization matches the size, influence, diversity, and creative energy of our chapters, nature centers, volunteers, supporters, and partners. Audubon Connecticut is not just an Audubon state office within this network—we are a respected and influential voice, from town halls to the U.S. Capitol. We are a leader in science and education. Together, we are safeguarding a great natural heritage for future generations, preserving our shared quality of life, and fostering a healthier environment for the birds, other wildlife, and people of Connecticut.

**PUBLIC POLICY**—During the 2017 state legislative session, we advocated for the inclusion of Passports to Parks in the approved state budget. This program will increase public enjoyment of state parks (by way of no parking fees) while generating reliable, sustaining income (through a biennial \$10 vehicle registration fee) for state park operations, which are

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With your support, Audubon Connecticut will continue to concentrate on key issues that matter to birds, other wildlife, and people in 2018. Here is just a sampling of our goals for the coming year:

- » We will build the pipeline of conservation leaders by providing 38 urban high school students with employment and green job skills training through expansion of our WildLife Guards and Schoolyard Habitat programs.
- » We will expand the acreage of healthy forest habitat in Connecticut by 1,000 acres as part of a multi-state “Forests for the Birds” initiative.
- » We will advocate for the protection of Plum Island and other critical open spaces in our state and across the country.
- » We will launch a new effort to protect migrating shorebirds in collaboration with Audubon scientists all along the Atlantic Flyway.

Located in Southbury, Bent of the River (BOTR) was founded in 1993 through a legacy gift. Its 700 acres feature frontage on the Pomperaug River, wetlands, early successional habitats, and mixed forest, which hosts a fascinating mix of plants and wildlife, unique geology, and rich history. While our center offers educational programming, many visitors come for the quiet beauty of the sanctuary. BOTR also manages the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary and facilitates Audubon chapter networking in Connecticut.

### Infrastructure Investment

Thanks to generous donations, this past spring we were able to paint our historic barn and learning center. Several Eagle Scout projects also resulted in a new roof on the Ferrier shed; improvements to our entrance kiosk; two cedar benches made from Bent downed trees; and Eastern Bluebird box repairs and replacements throughout our sanctuary.

### Bird & Habitat Conservation

Managing and protecting wildlife habitats is an important part of the work we do. At the Guilford Salt Meadows Sanctuary, staff and volunteers (in partnership with the Menunkatuck Audubon Society chapter) worked on trail maintenance and invasive plant removal, installed a native plant garden, and mowed field sections to optimize habitat. At BOTR, we also focused on invasive plant removal to encourage native plant establishment, which provides vital food and shelter for birds and other wildlife.

Through the scientific methods of bird banding and monitoring, our volunteers (9 monitors and 30 banders) gathered data that is used to guide habitat management at the Bent and beyond. We banded or recaptured 34 species and 169 individual birds in the spring. The Blue-winged Warbler was our most common species banded, while a Blue-winged Warbler/Golden-winged Warbler cross was the most exotic. Based on banding data, we planted native forest understory plants to improve species-specific habitat.

### Education & Community Engagement

Our education and outreach efforts in 2017 resulted in excellent program and community growth. With the hiring of a part-time Assistant Educator & Volunteer Coordinator, we were able to expand our volunteer corps and our school education program to beyond spring. We connected with more than 2,500 children through our school, scout, summer camp, and special event programs—an increase of 37% over last year. We hosted 2,000 visitors at Firefly Night (doubling last year's attendance) and welcomed more than 200 people to our fall celebration—BentFest.



Audubon Center Bent of the River's historic barn and learning center with a fresh coat of paint. Photo: Liz Newman Photography



Children enjoying nature-based learning at summer nature camp at Audubon Greenwich. Photo: Eli Schaffer



An orphaned hatchling being fed at the Audubon Sharon Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic. Photo: Camilla Cerea

Audubon Greenwich (AG) encompasses 7 sanctuaries—with a total of 686 acres, including the Main Sanctuary & Kimberlin Nature Education Center on Riversville Road. As National Audubon Society's first nature education center, AG has served as a hub for local and regional conservation action and a leader in place-based education since 1943. Today, we work with communities from the Bronx to New Haven to build a network of bird-friendly habitats and engage diverse audiences in science learning and conservation.

### Infrastructure Investment

Improvements to our campus in 2017 made our Center more accessible and inviting to a wide range of visitors. Such improvements include the re-opening of the Hilfiger Children's Learning Center wing with new hands-on experiences and animal exhibits, enhancements to our Accessible Nature Trail and Nature Play Area, and creation of the Storybook Trail. With the completion of the Ketay-Asnes Barn restoration, we expanded programming and now serve as a community resource to host weddings, meetings, and other special occasions.

### Education & Community Engagement

A dynamic Public Programs Manager joined our team this year, bringing new, innovative nature education offerings for all ages—including a suite of family and early childhood programs and creation of a Teen Board. Our Fall Festival & Hawk Watch and Halloween Haunted Forest welcomed record numbers with more than 3,500 visitors at both events combined.

We engaged 350 adult and student volunteers, as well as 23 interns, in citizen science, habitat restoration, and education. Our educators connected with more than 3,000 children through school-day, after-school, and summer camp programming. They also worked with the Audubon Connecticut Bird-Friendly Communities team to train teachers across the state to use the outdoors as a living classroom, including all 3rd-grade teachers in the City of Stamford school district.

### Bird & Habitat Conservation

Managing the diverse habitats of our sanctuaries for the benefit of birds, other wildlife, and people is another top priority. Through GIS mapping this year, we improved our ability to steward the land by identifying the location of invasive species, special features, and management regimes. With help from Greenwich Garden Club, we expanded our native plant propagation program, enabling us to plant more bird-friendly plants on our sanctuaries and to provide the community with a greater selection of natives through our annual plant sale.

Audubon Sharon was founded in 1961 and consists of 4 nature sanctuaries and 3,000 acres in Northwestern Connecticut with an education center, nature store, Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic, and bird banding research projects. As a leader in nature-based education and wildlife rehabilitation, we offer school and summer camp programs and curate raptor aviaries for non-releasable birds of prey. We also coordinate Audubon's Forest conservation work in Connecticut.

### Wildlife Rehabilitation

It takes a tremendous amount of time and resources to care for sick, injured, and orphaned birds and wildlife that we admit into our Wildlife Rehabilitation Clinic. With the help of our staff, volunteers, and supporters, 2017 was a banner year.

- We had more than 50 volunteers caring for the resident and wildlife rehabilitation patients at our center.
- We treated more than 850 wildlife patients—an increase of 15% over last year.

### Education & Community Engagement

Thanks to our Education Intern in 2017, which has been converted into a full-time programming position, we broadened our community by providing adult, school, and summer camp programs. We had great success with our education programs and special events, and deepened the connection between people and nature in the Northwest Corner.

- We led 167 education programs, reaching approximately 6,000 children and 1,800 adults.
- We welcomed 248 campers to our summer program, which is a 73% increase in our camp enrollment in 2 years.
- At our annual special events, we hosted more than 110 people at MapleFest, 250 at Raptors & Riesling, 156 at Enchanted Forest, and approximately 275 at Kids' Day.

### Bird & Habitat Conservation

Stewardship is also a major part of our work. In addition to leading forest management efforts (see page 4) and workshops throughout the year, we continued to focus on plant species monitoring, annual field mowing, invasive plant removal, and routine trail clearing to keep our sanctuaries bird-friendly and open for public visitation in 2017. Our staff and volunteers also participated in community efforts to monitor and maintain 175 Eastern Bluebird and 85 American Kestrel nest boxes.

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managed by the CT Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. At the federal level, the Fiscal Year 2017 Interior & Environment Appropriations Bill provided \$8 million for the Long Island Sound program—a top conservation priority for the National Audubon Society. The federal investment is \$4 million more than the Fiscal Year 2016 level.

**CHAPTERS**—As affiliates of the National Audubon Society, our chapters enable people to meet, share common interests, and create a culture of conservation in local communities. We work closely with the 5 active chapters in Connecticut, which are collectively comprised of 8,800 members. This past summer, Connecticut chapter leaders and staff gathered with more than 430 members of the Audubon community from across the country at the Audubon Convention in Park City, Utah. All benefited from the chance to deepen connections and advance grassroots education, advocacy, and collaboration.

**IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS**—In 2017, we recognized the Great Meadows Important Bird Area (IBA), a landscape-level IBA that includes lush farmland and forested wetlands along an 8-mile stretch of the Connecticut River in Wethersfield, East Hartford, Glastonbury, and Rocky Hill. We strengthened our IBA network through stakeholder outreach and public engagement at events like the Migration Festival at the Lighthouse Point Park IBA in New Haven (with more than 500 attendees.) Our IBA Small Matching Grants Program also supported 14 conservation projects at IBAs throughout the state.

**BIRD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES**—Through our flagship Urban Oases, Schoolyard Habitat, and Plants for Birds programs, we engage people in simple actions that make our communities healthier places for birds and people. This year we connected with more communities across Connecticut than ever before, resulting in a total of 17 Urban Oases demonstration habitats in parks and green spaces and 42 Schoolyard Habitats. More than 1,400 volunteers, 256 teachers, and 8,000 students were engaged in outdoor science-based learning and habitat restoration. Through Audubon's Plants for Birds initiative and our other efforts across Connecticut, a



American Oystercatchers feeding on the beach. Photo: Rob Sabatini

total of 23,000 bird-friendly plants were planted statewide.

**FORESTS**—As a leader in habitat conservation, we have provided assessments for 114 forest owners, resulting in more than 26,000 acres assessed and more than 150,000 acres under active management influence through our “Forest for the Birds” project based out of Audubon Sharon. A 40-acre forest demonstration cut and trail were also implemented at our center in Sharon in 2017 to teach and showcase bird-friendly silvicultural and sugar maple production techniques for public programs and forester workshops.

**COASTS**—Through the efforts of Audubon Alliance for Coastal Waterbirds staff, volunteers, and partners, the number of nesting Piping Plover pairs in the state in 2017 increased to 66 pairs (a new high) and produced 100+ fledglings for the fourth time. We also tied our record high of 63 American Oystercatcher pairs and had the second highest year for productivity—63 oystercatcher fledglings. The number of Piping Plover pairs well exceeds our state goal, and the level of productivity is indicative of a growing population. Similarly, Connecticut has one of the highest rates of oystercatcher productivity across the Atlantic Flyway.

Our WildLife Guards program added to our shoreline success as 8 Bridgeport high school students and 4 West Haven high school students received training, mentoring, and 7 weeks of employment as beach-nesting bird stewards at Bridgeport's Pleasure Beach and West Haven's Sandy Point. This was the first year for the program in West Haven. Also for the first time, we were able to hire three alumni WildLife Guards as crew leaders.



**Audubon CONNECTICUT** — *A State Office of the National Audubon Society*

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