

the osprey

Monmouth County Audubon Society

www.monmouthaudubon.org

Over 50 Years of Birds and Conservation

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► Monmouth County's "hidden gems" for birds

by Bob Henschel

Monmouth County has long been a popular destination for birders in search of winter water birds. But how does it rate for finding smaller and usually more elusive land birds – sparrows, thrushes, finches, woodpeckers and the like? And are there parks, fields and woodlots where you can find them without having to trek long distances over slippery, snow-covered trails?

There are! The ones I'll mention below have several things in common. One is that in you seldom need to walk more than five minutes from your car to discover birds there (or not there, as is sometimes the case). In addition, all have nearby parking. And, most importantly, all are public properties, ensuring you can explore all day without raising suspicions.

The **F. Bliss Price Arboretum and Wildlife Sanctuary** in Eatontown is one of these compact, diverse, "birdable" locations. Within its 47 acres are evergreen groves, two small streams, wet woodlands and overgrown thickets. From the parking lot on Wyckoff Road walk straight down the wide corridor to an area of very tall pines and spruces, where your challenge will be to find the Great Horned Owl that oversees the park. Finding it won't be easy; this "boss" of all woodland birds blends in exceptionally well. This looks like a good year for Red-breasted Nuthatches, so listen for them and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers among these evergreens. It's too early to know if cone-loving birds like the crossbills will visit NJ this winter, so be alert.

When you come to the stream follow it to the right and listen for Winter Wren. Circling back towards the parking lot you'll encounter areas of impenetrable vines



Eastern Bluebirds can be found in parks throughout Monmouth County in the winter, if you look.

beside the trails. Try "pushing" here for catbirds, thrashers and Fox Sparrows. Several winters back a much unexpected Yellow-breasted Chat occupied this habitat.

Almost hidden along Creamery Road in Colts Neck is the entrance to **Freer Nature Preserve**, a small 17-acre township property along Yellow Brook. Tall trees dominate the upland portion of this very peaceful woodland. Some of them were once impressive eastern hemlocks; but thanks to the wooly adelgid, most are now dead. A few of the hemlocks show evidence of oblong cavities excavated by Pileated Woodpeckers; I've found the big guy there twice. Again, no guarantees – the species has a wintering range of several square miles. What you will also enjoy here are excellent views down into the stream valley where Wood Ducks are a

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Just one Fox Sparrow was reported during the 2015 Sandy Hook Christmas Bird Count. (rtpi.org)

➤ **In the News**

A fun way to spend a day while helping to document winter birds in our area is by participating in one of Monmouth County's three **Christmas Bird Counts**. The counts are held between December 14 and January 5 and cover count circles centered on Sandy Hook, Long Branch and Assunpink. If you'd like more information on any of our area's counts, please contact the circle's compiler:

Sandy Hook: Scott Barnes, scott.barnes@njudubon.org

Long Branch: December 31. Tom Brown, tshrike19@gmail.com

Assunpink: Roger Dreyling, roger@rogerdreyling.com

This year is almost over – now's the time to consider doing a **Big Year** in 2017!

Basically, a Big Year is a challenge to see how many different species of birds you can find and identify in one year. You can count birds you see in your town, the county, New Jersey, the United States, or North America. It's your game – you make the rules! We hope if you do embark on a Big Year, you'll report back to MCAS to let us know how your adventure worked out. You'll surely have good stories to share.

Not quite ready for a Big Year? Maybe you'd like to start with a **Big Day**. The principle is the same, but you're only committed for one day, rather than one year. Limit your search to the geographical area of your choice, as above. We know of one group of birders to embarked on a "Big Duck Day" one winter, to see how many different species of waterfowl they could find in a day. Now that's pretty specialized! Big Days are quite a challenge, because you not only need to know in advance where the birds are – and let's face it, they know how to fly and are therefore hard to predict – but you also need to know the best way to circumnavigate your area. Very challenging!

Special thanks... We'd like to take a moment to thank the following people for special donations: Katharine McCleary, David Saidnawey / Wild Birds Unlimited, Catherine Cooper, Claudette Lupton and Robert Weigand.

Now is also a good time to start planning your **2017 wildlife garden!** We'll have a feature on that in the next issue, but seed catalogs will start arriving just after the first of the year, and it's fun to plan a happy home for our backyard friends. Three elements needed by wildlife are food, water and cover, to allow them to hide from predators. It's not too early to start thinking about how your yard addresses those basic needs.

by Harden Fowler

► **MCAS conservation activities throughout the year**

Monmouth County Audubon Society does many things throughout the year, led by our dedicated volunteers. Our accomplishments include: offering guidance, writing letters and attending meetings with input on conservation concerns at Sandy Hook and throughout the area; monthly field trips and presentations at our meetings; sponsoring the December Sandy Hook Christmas Bird Count; manning an observation area during February's Great Backyard Bird Count and a display on Earth Day at the Manasquan Reservoir; fielding a World Series of Birding team in May; protecting endangered shorebirds in the summer; awarding \$30,500 in conservation scholarships since 2006; organizing our yearly activities in August; offering Audubon Adventures to elementary classrooms each school year; sponsoring and erecting Osprey platforms, along with funding shorebird information cards and roping for Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey; preparing *The Osprey* newsletter five times a year; updating our website and responding to e-mails throughout the year... all to provide our members with benefits and to offer outreach to the community. We appreciate the support of our membership and ask that you all to consider joining us at our board meetings, held prior to each monthly program, to see if you would like to volunteer to become active in our Audubon efforts.

There are also several things you can do to help our conservation efforts. Yes, our free time is valuable to us, but it is also valuable to environmental groups and public lands. Any work that is done by a volunteer is less work that needs to be done by the paid staff, suffering from reduction in budgets and manpower throughout the area.

Some of our members volunteer at Seven Presidents Oceanfront Park and Sandy Hook with their Shorebird Monitor programs each summer, protecting endangered nesting shorebirds; others help to lead our field trips or bring the refreshments to our monthly meetings.

Another way to support conservation is to contact your elected officials in support of open space funding, public parks and environmentally correct policies. If you visit our website at www.monmouthaudubon.org and click "conservation articles" we have information about how to work within the system, along with links to environmental groups and government officials. Your investment of a little time will help MCAS promote our conservation efforts.



Volunteers and visitors count flocks of ducks on the Manasquan Reservoir at the Great Backyard Bird Count. (D. Temple)

Hidden gems (continued)

possibility. At the end of the main trail is a grove of pines, another possible owl habitat. The preserve is a little less than a half mile north of Route 537. Drive slowly; the parking lot is small and easy to miss.

In Sea Girt, head to the southeastern part of town, turn left on First Avenue and follow it north. You'll shortly find yourself on an unpaved, one-way portion of the road that takes you along the eastern boundary of **The Crescent**, a thick grove of American Holly trees that provide habitat for more wintering robins than you can count. In some years they're joined by flocks of Cedar Waxwings. Many species can be seen or heard from the thick overgrowth on the left as you enter the property.

A few of my other favorite quick winter birding stops include the state property on **Riverdale Ave East** in Tinton Falls, **Fisherman's Cove** on Third Ave. in Manasquan Beach, and the undeveloped beach on the south side of the **Shark River Inlet**—the most convenient place I know to hunt for Snow Buntings.

For comfortable winter land birding nothing, of course, beats watching feeders from the warm indoors. In Monmouth County I'm aware of only two always open to the public. One is at **Huber Woods** in Middletown, the other at the **Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center** in Howell. The Huber feeder attracts its usual cast of woodland characters; and when the Pine Siskins are in the county it's the best place to look for them. At the reservoir, the feeders also attract most expected species as well as occasional Pine Siskin or Purple Finch. The added bonus here, as most of you probably know, is also having a wide view of the lake with its resident Bald Eagles and assorted visiting waterfowl. And, just to remind you, it's also the annual site for the Great Backyard Bird Count on Presidents Day weekend in February. Hopefully, we'll see you there.

Happy birding!



**Monmouth County
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➤ **Membership Application**

Please enroll me as a member of the Monmouth County Audubon Society (Q04) and/or the National Audubon Society. My check is enclosed for:

- \$10 **Regular Chapter** member
- \$20 **Chapter Sustaining member** - all funds stay in our area, helping us to support local efforts and provide services here in Monmouth County.
- \$20 **National Audubon Society** member - includes Chapter membership (rate for new members only; renewable at \$35)
- Please contact me regarding volunteer opportunities.
- Do not add my name to the mailing list; I will read the newsletter online.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Please make checks payable to MCAS and return along with application to: Monmouth County Audubon Society, P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701.

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Membership questions? Email us at info@monmouthaudubon.org.

Please check our website for updates on possible program cancellations due to weather.

➤ **coming up**

- Saturday, Dec. 10 10:00 am
Late fall birding on Sandy Hook;
meet in Visitor Center parking lot
- Wednesday, Dec. 14 8:00 pm
"Birding by Impression," Kevin
Karlson and Dale Rosselet
- Wednesday, Jan. 11 8:00 pm
**"Hurricanes and Beach Nesting
Birds: More than Meets the Eye"**
Christina Davis, NJ Div. of Fish &
Wildlife
- Wednesday, Feb. 8 8:00 pm
**"Restoring Ecological Relation-
ships Within NJ's Forested Ecosys-
tems,"** Dr. Emile DeVito, NJ
Conservation Foundation
- Saturday, Feb. 11 10:00 am
Winter birding on Sandy Hook;
meet in Visitor Center parking lot

* Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month September-May at the Knights of Columbus hall, 200 Fair Haven Road, Fair Haven. Meetings are open to the public, and refreshments are served.