

THE



OSPREY

Newsletter of the

Monmouth County Audubon Society

www.monmouthaudubon.org

Over **50 Years** of Birds and Conservation

Volume 57, #1 Fall 2021

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➤ Remembering Howard Mason

by Robert Henschel

Janice Mason often referred to her husband Howard as the “cookie monster”. Howard loved Trader Joe’s maple leaf cookies, and was delighted whenever the refreshment volunteer brought them to our Wednesday evening meeting. In January 2020, when he announced his retirement as Treasurer of Monmouth County Audubon after 30 years in that position, I knew these naturally flavored treats MUST be on the table at his party in May.

But then came Covid-19. A celebration of Howard’s 30-year dedication to our group had to be put on hold. “We’ll have it in the fall”, everyone optimistically planned. But that was not to be. Howard passed away that October. Sadly, I never got the chance to buy him those cookies...or to say goodbye.

The title of “Treasurer” doesn’t begin to describe the challenges and obligations Howard and Janice Mason took on as board members. Former chapter treasurers had all taken their jobs seriously and efficiently; but none really broadened the scope of that position beyond accounting and bill paying.

Howard and Janice decided they had a lot more to offer. On one hot summer weekend, for instance, they sat curbside at the Red Bank street fair distributing brochures, bird lists and environmental literature. That was the first time any of our members had taken on such a task.

Back when we had to mail the “Osprey” newsletter on our own, board members gathered every other month at the Mason family dining room table to fold, staple, stamp and bundle a thousand pieces of outgoing mail. Howard, of course, delivered them to the post office early the next day.

During Howard and Janice’s three decades as a MCAS board member, we used four different locations for evening membership meetings; one in Red Bank and three in Fair Haven. Howard not only helped

(continued on Page 6)



A red oak planted in remembrance of Howard Mason at the Parker Homestead. Photo by Bob Henschel

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The Osprey is published by the Monmouth County Audubon Society, local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Our mission is to promote the awareness, appreciation and conservation of natural resources through activism and educational outreach, and by representing the National Audubon Society in Monmouth County, NJ. Inquiries concerning the organization, newsletter, letters to the editor or material submitted for consideration are encouraged and may be sent to: P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701
E-mail: monmouthaudubon@gmail.com

➤ Items of note – local tidbits of interest

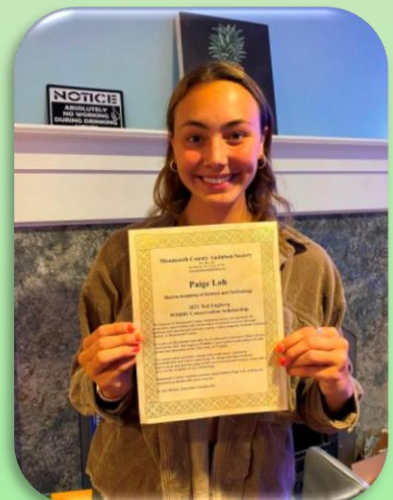
Announcing the Winners of the 2021 Monmouth County Audubon's Ted Engberg Conservation Scholarships

Monmouth County Audubon Society is pleased to announce the winners of the 2021 Ted Engberg Wildlife Conservation Scholarship. Avery Colleen Fratto of Fair Haven and Paige Loh of Middletown were selected from a pool of qualified candidates. Both graduating high school seniors will receive a \$1500 scholarship to assist them in pursuing their college degrees. Both Avery and Paige demonstrated excellent academic work, extra-curricular pursuits, community service, and an intent to pursue careers that will benefit wildlife conservation.

Avery Fratto recently graduated from Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School with Honors. She was Secretary of the high school's Environmental Awareness Club and a member of the Science National Honors Society. Avery completed an independent research project through Project Terrapin while an AP Environmental Science student. Avery will be entering the University of Southern California in the Fall to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies.

Paige Loh has graduated the Marine Academy of Science and Technology (MAST), where she excelled academically. Working with the lab at MAST and the NOAA Marine Lab at Sandy Hook, Paige completed a senior research project that studied the effects of temperature and habitat on the Diamondback Terrapin. Paige will be entering the University of Virginia in August to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science.

MCAS congratulates Paige and Avery and wishes them success in their college careers!



Ted Engberg Conservation Scholarship winners Avery Fratto and Paige Loh.

► Noteworthy Sightings in Monmouth County

by Rob Fanning

- Least Bittern: 6/4 Conaskonk Point.
- White Ibis: 1m at Sandy Hook 7/3 thru 7/8.
- Little Blue Heron: 7/14 (Colts neck); 8/22 (adult at Shark River).
- Yellow-crowned Night-heron: 9 @ Keyport 7/31.
- Wilsons Storm-petrels: scattered reports of small #s from shore July-Aug.
- Sooty Shearwater: 6/4 Monmouth Beach Cultural Center.
- Brown Pelican: 6/4 Shark River Inlet (14); 8/21 Sea Bright (4).
- Sandwich Tern 6/20 (Sea Girt).
- Roseate Tern: 8/5 (Sandy Hook).
- Black Tern: several reports @ Sandy Hook in Aug.
- Caspian Tern: 8/3 Conaskonk Point (2).
- Royal Tern: 64 on 8/4 (Port Monmouth).
- Black-headed Gull: Fisherman's Cove 6/16 and most of the summer at nearby Glimmerglass.
- Bonaparte's Gull: Fish Cove 6/16.
- Glaucous Gull: 7/3 (Avon); 7/24 (Sea Bright).
- Marbled Godwit: 6/1 & 6/2 Conaskonk Point.
- Red Knot: Conaskonk Point 6/1 & 8/3.
- White-rumped Sandpiper: several @ Conaskonk Point 6/2.
- Spotted Sandpiper: successful nests (2) at Colts Neck.
- American Golden-plover: 7/6+ Sandy Hook EARLY.
- American Avocet: 4 flyovers Colts Neck 7/14.
- Whimbrel: 8/3 Conaskonk Point.
- Pectoral Sandpiper: 14 @ Thompson Park 8/22; 5 @ Reeds Recreation area 8/23.
- Acadian Flycatcher: 7/25 Turkey Swamp.
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Freneau 7/24 (2); other reports at Turkey Swamp & Assunpink (overall quite scarce this year).
- Yellow-breasted Chat; 2 @ Big Brook 6/8+; another @ Henry Hudson Trail off Tennant Rd 6/17.
- Blue Grosbeak: pair at Freneau 6/1; other reports from Thompson, Big Brook, & Dorbrook.
- Grasshopper Sparrow: good #s reported at Dorbrook Park off Laird Rd June/July.
- Bobolink: 2 females Freneau 6/1; reports of several males/females at Dorbrook in July (possible nesting?).
- Little Blue Heron: Colts Neck on 8/26.
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper: 6 at Reeds Recreation Area on 8/29.
- Bobolink: flyover flock of 20 at Big Brook.
- Common Nighthawk: flyover of 2 in Morganville on 8/30.
- Worm-eating Warbler: Manasquan WMA on 8/30.

Most of these sightings were posted to the Monmouth Audubon Groupme text group.

To be added contact Rob Fanning (bobolink0210@yahoo.com)



A young blue jay with the mystery disease.

➤ Mystery Illness Strikes Young Birds

by Mike Davenport

During the Spring and Summer of 2021, an illness was observed in nestling and fledgling birds throughout the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast states, including New Jersey. The species being hit hardest were blue jays, common grackles, starlings, robins, and cardinals. Symptoms of this fatal disease included crusty and/or swollen eyes, and in some cases, seizures and lack of coordination. The disease did not appear to be impacting adult birds and it also hasn't affected humans or pets.

After several months of rigorous testing, researchers have been able to rule-out several common bird pathogens, but they still have not identified what this disease is. When the disease was detected in New Jersey in June, it was initially advised that bird feeders and bird baths be taken down out of an abundance of caution. And for those who left their birdfeeders out, it was recommended that they be cleaned often, thoroughly, and regularly (see Birdhousekeeping story on Page 5). It should be noted that hummingbirds have thus far not been observed to be affected by this illness, so hummingbird feeders were not an issue.

The precaution regarding birdfeeders is much like our own social distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic. When birds gather together in one place, it increases the chances of disease spreading amongst them. During the mid-1990's, when house finches were succumbing to an eye disease caused by the bacterium *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, it was shown that removal of birdfeeders helped to dramatically curb that disease.

A September 1st post by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) indicated that DFW is no longer recommending discontinuing use of bird feeders and baths for residents that had sick or dead fledglings or hatchlings on their property.

DFW recommended the following procedures for resuming use of bird feeders and baths:

- Thoroughly clean bird feeders and baths with a 10% bleach solution and clean weekly thereafter.
- Remove bird feeders and baths if sick or dead birds are observed and clean thoroughly.
- Avoid handling wild birds. Wear disposable gloves if it is necessary to handle a bird.
- If a dead bird is found on your property it should be double bagged and disposed of in your regular garbage. Report the finding using our online reporting form.
- If a sick bird is found, it is recommended that resident's report the finding using our online reporting form and contact either local animal control or a wildlife rehabilitator for further care.
- Keep pets away from sick and dead wild birds. This is a precaution as there have been no reports of pets contracting this disease in the impacted states.

➤ Birdhousekeeping – Best Practices

by Mike Davenport

Feeders & Birdbaths

Both birdfeeders and birdbaths need to be cleaned regularly to avoid spreading diseases, spoiling food, and, in the case of birdbaths, unsightly algae growth. The more often feeders or baths get used and by what types of birds may determine how often cleaning is necessary. I've found that I need to clean my wooden feeders more frequently than the plastic or metal ones since they retain some moisture and seeds sometimes get stuck inside. Frequent wet weather may make more frequent cleanings necessary

For all feeders, including suet and hummingbird, brushing with a 10% bleach solution in warm water, followed by a thorough rinse and complete air dry works well for a standard cleaning. For birdbaths, I use an even weaker bleach solution and rinse many times prior to air drying – and in the case, of birdbaths, more muscle may be required in order to scrub away algae. Cleaning may need to be more frequent during warmer weather to avoid spoilage and maggots in the case of feeders, and contaminated water and algae in the case of birdbaths. During the hottest days of the Summer, you're going to need to clean hummingbird feeders at least twice a week if not every other day.

Be sure to clean the ground under feeders as well to prevent a build-up of shells, uneaten seeds, and other waste. Keeping your birdfeeders and birdbaths clean, not only serves the health of the birds, but it will also keep your feeders look better longer.

Bird Houses & Nest Boxes

“To clean or not to clean.” It seems like a never-ending debate amongst those who love birds on whether to clean their nest boxes or not. In the wild, birds often reuse tree cavities repeatedly without our intervention in removing old nesting material or other debris, so why should we intervene when our house wrens and bluebirds finish using their homes for the season.

It doesn't appear that the argument for cleaning or not has been settled, but it does seem to leave towards cleaning them out for several reasons. First and most importantly, by removing the old material, you lessen the threat of ectoparasites (e.g. mites and blowfly larvae). Also, as nest boxes get reused repeatedly, they may become so full that the nestlings are dangerously close to the boxes opening, or worse yet, the box may get abandoned since there's little if any room left inside - evidently, some types of birds are better at cleaning-up after themselves than others. While house wrens may remove old nesting material before each brood, bluebirds do not.

My personal approach (for my resident house wrens) is to clean 2 of my 3 nest boxes every year. During the fall, I take the 2 boxes down, empty them, and scrub as well as I can with a 10% bleach solution in warm water. Those 2 boxes then get stored for the winter, while box #3 stays out in the elements all winter. My hope for box #3 is that the cold temperatures and/or predators of any ectoparasites will keep that house in check.

The answer is ultimately best approached on a case-by-case basis. What species are living in the boxes? Are ectoparasites a problem in the area? Did any young (or adults) die inside the nest box? However, given the fact that there is currently a mystery bird illness in our region (see story on previous page), it may be prudent to give bird houses a good cleaning, at least this year.

("Howard Mason" continued from Page 1)

arrange for those rooms, but he also took on the responsibilities for maintaining them. Learning the whereabouts of all the light switches, AV connections and coffee pots were his specialty. Janice faithfully shepherded the refreshment table from set up to clean up. If a presenter showed up without the right equipment, Howard often ran home to fetch things like projectors and extension cords he had at the ready. It was a rare occasion when our resident "Engineer/MacGyver" couldn't find a fix.

And, oh yes, did I mention Howard and Janice were in charge of the keys? Every second Wednesday night they were the first to arrive and the last to leave; a fact that may have gone unnoticed by many members.

So, how could we begin to recognize, and salute the contributions of the Mason family? Earlier this year board members met to discuss ideas and with help from Janice decided a type of living memorial to Howard would be an appropriate place to start.

A location for it came sort of serendipitously. Howard and Janice shared many interests; one of them, Little Silver history. Among the projects they supported has been the Parker Homestead project, just a mile or so from their home. The project aims to preserve the unique 330-year history of the Parker Family through the restoration and maintenance of the Homestead lands and buildings. As it turned out, they needed trees!

Enter project manager Keith Wells, who arranged for us to purchase a tree appropriate for the site. The species selected was a red oak, the official state tree of New Jersey. This past spring, Keith and his crew planted a sapling in a prominent location on the historic landmark's front lawn. In the near future we'll be adding a permanent plaque recognizing Howard's the life and accomplishments.

When I asked Janice how she thought Howard would like to be remembered, she came up with three words: "Dedicated, Determined and Dependable". When we eventually return to regular evening meetings, we'll share other memories of our dear friend over a few of those maple leaf cookies.



MCAS Board members at the Parker Homestead tree planted in remembrance of former Board member and Treasurer Howard Mason . From left to right: Chris Vanderstad, Colette Buchanan, Janice Mason, Keith Wells of The Friends of the Parker Homestead, Robert Henschel, and JoAnn Molnar.

MONMOUTH OPEN SPACE SPOTLIGHT

► Manasquan Wildlife Management Area

Location: Ramshorn Drive, Wall Twp. & Metedeconk Road, Brick Twp.

Acreage: 762

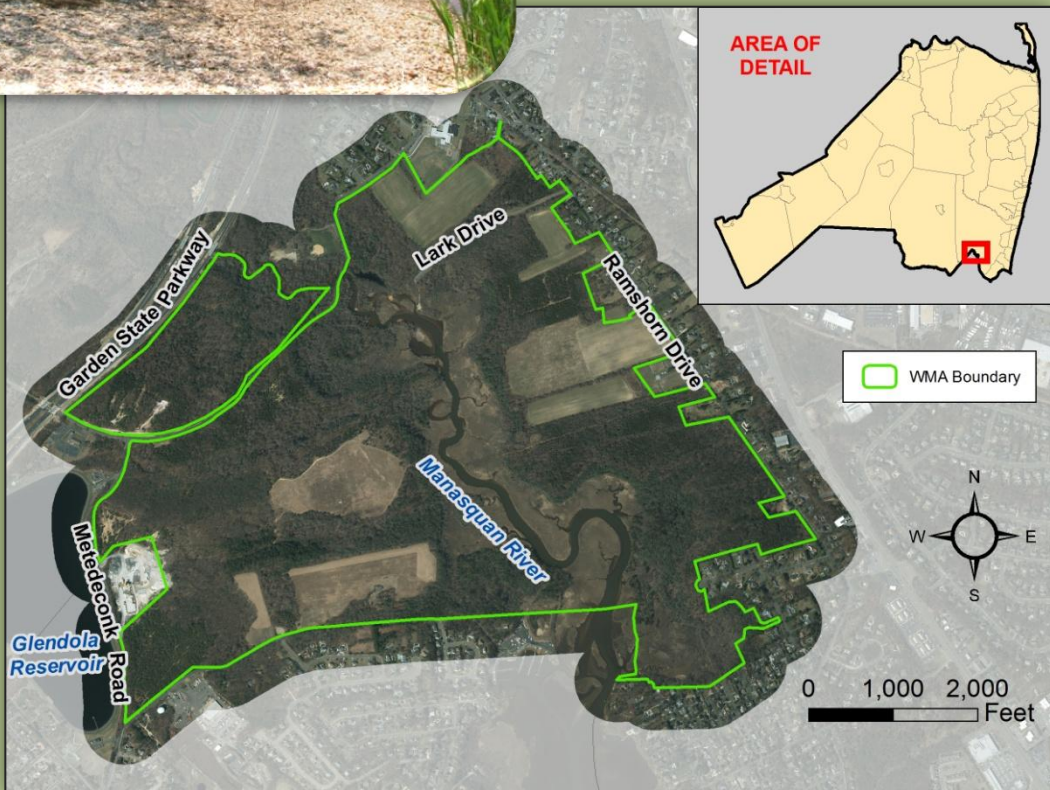
Habitat(s): Deciduous forest, wetland forest, mixed forest, tidal saltwater estuary, meadow.

E-Bird Stats*: Monmouth County portion - 153 species & 184 checklists. Ocean County portion – 189 species & 827 checklists. **as of August 2021*

Located off Ramshorn Drive in Wall Township & Metedeconk Road in Brick Township, the Manasquan Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is state-owned and managed public open space.

Wildlife Management Areas are managed by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife for fish and wildlife habitat and a variety of wildlife-associated recreation. While hunting and fishing are probably the two activities most associated with WMAs, they are also prime locations for birding, wildlife viewing and photography, hiking and mountain biking.

Bisected by the Manasquan River, this WMA is popular with kayakers. Bird species frequently observed include bald eagles, osprey, herons and egrets, and kingfishers.



➤ **Nothing in our Monmouth Backyard for Moth Week 2021**

by Lisa Ann Fanning

Much like birding, every year brings something new when you are “mothing.” For National Moth Week last year (2020), the star of the show was the Rosy Maple Moth. It seemed like a stretch of days where we would get one or two to our setup every night. This year, the star of the show was the Clymene Moth. We had multiple moths (one night we even had 11 individuals) come to the sheet, the light and surrounding areas.



*Photo on left:
rosy maple moth.
Photo by Lisa
Ann Fanning.*



*Photo on left:
Hebrew moth.
Photo by Mike
Davenport*

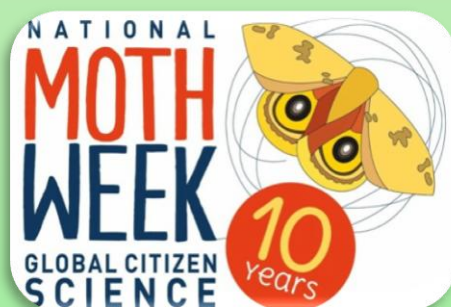
National Moth week is a Citizen Science project founded right here in New Jersey in 2012 by the non-profit organization, the Friends of the East Brunswick Environmental Commission. In the past 9 years, the event has grown to include events from all 50 U.S. states and more than 80 countries worldwide.

Their aim is to teach about biodiversity, and track sample populations (this is where the citizen science part comes in) from your own backyard, or wherever you may be.

Setting up is simple - we use a white sheet tied to and held up by tall garden stakes to keep the sheet taut. We then place a blacklight a few feet away from the sheet, and we also use our backyard porch light as well. The different light-type frequencies will attract different species. We have also found that hot, humid moonless nights seem to work better in our backyard as well.

If you want to learn IDs, don't worry, there is a Peterson field guide to help you with IDs, and community-based citizen science apps like iNaturalist that suggest IDs, and have members of the community help as well. Similarly, Project Noah is a community-based sightings app that contains a database of “825,000+ wildlife sightings in 196 countries on 7 continents.”

If you would like more information on National Moth Week and how you can participate, visit <https://nationalmothweek.org> or you can find them on major Social Media.



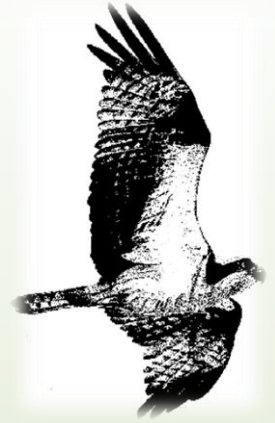
➤ **coming up (see website for more details)**

Programs - All Programs will be virtual on Zoom. Please check the MCAS website for program descriptions and Zoom access details.

Wed., October 13 8:00 pm
The Ted Stiles Preserve at Baldpate Mountain. Sharyn Magee.

Wed., December 8 8:00 pm
Hummingbirds, Jewels of the Air. Sandy Lockerman.

Wed., November 10 8:00 pm
Grassland Birds in a Dynamic Human Landscape. Dr. Michael Allen.



Volunteers urgently needed! There are currently several openings for members of Monmouth Audubon's Board and for other volunteer positions within our organization. Please consider volunteering your time to keep MCAS a vital organization, taking pride in knowing that you've made a difference to the community – and the birds!

Field Trips - Please preregister via email to monmouthaudubon@gmail.com Masks or face coverings are optional per current COVID19 recommendations for outdoor activities. Bring binoculars, water and bug spray.

Sat., October 16 10:00 am Sandy Hook Bird Walk. Meet at E lot at south end.	Sat., March 12 5:30 pm Big Brook Park. Route 520, Marlboro; meet in main parking lot.
Sat., November 6 9:00 am Sandy Hook. Meet at B lot.	Sun., April 10 10 am Sandy Hook Bird Walk. Meet at E lot at south end.
Sun., December 5 10:00 am Sandy Hook Bird Walk. Meet at E lot at south end.	Sat., May 7 8:00 am Thompson Park. Meet at Old Orchard picnic lot/ shelter.
Sat., February 12 10:00 am Sandy Hook Bird Walk. Meet at E lot at south end. (if parking lot closed use D-lot at north end)	

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