

# the osprey

Monmouth County Audubon Society

www.monmouthaudubon.org

Over **50 Years** of Birds and Conservation

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## ► Winter: More than just waiting for spring

by Colette Buchanan

Welcome to February. To many of us, this is the point where we are tired of winter as the cold and sometimes snowy weather drags on, but spring seems a long time away. Many birders are restless and longing for the colorful songbirds to return in spring migration. Yet there is much of nature to enjoy in the late winter.

As a birder, I have come to notice the more subtle changes of the seasons. While it may still be cold, the days are growing longer, and as they do the birds react. This is the time of year when the birds in my yard begin singing or vocalizing. The Dark-eyed Juncos that have been mainly quiet since they set up residence in December can now be heard softly trilling. The White-throated Sparrow starts practicing his whistled song, frequently represented by the pneumatic "Oh sweet Canada, Canada, Canada."

Beyond the yard other birds signal the changing seasons. Some of the seaducks that winter along the coast of Monmouth County can also be heard singing during February and March. If you visit Sandy Hook or other beaches and see a raft of Black Scoters, listen for their ethereal song.

*This photo, taken off Sandy Hook last winter, shows a large flock of mostly Greater Scaup. Patient birders may find other species and even rarities in a flock like this. Closer inspection (inset) shows Black Scoter in the foreground.*

Watch for courtship behavior as well from scoters and other ducks. Long-tailed Ducks can be particularly entertaining to watch as the male stretches out its neck to show the bright pink on his bill while singing.

The numbers of seaducks and other waterfowl along our coast can increase in late winter, as species begin to stage here as they head north. During the late winter of 2015, hundreds of thousands of Black, White-winged and Surf Scoters, Greater Scaup, and other seaducks could be seen along Sandy Hook. While we don't always witness such high numbers, large flocks of these species are usually present along the coast at this time of year. If you are a patient person, search through the large rafts of ducks for a rarity such as a Tufted Duck.

The number of freshwater ducks in Monmouth County can also rise in late winter. Lake Assunpink is often a good place to look for increasing numbers of Ruddy Ducks and other freshwater species such as Hooded Merganser and Lesser Scaup. Assunpink Wildlife Management Area is also a spot to look for an uncommon Rusty Blackbird during March.

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➤ **In the News**

**JCP&L protects Ospreys in 2017**

In 2017, Jersey Central Power & Light will expand its efforts to protect ospreys, the bird of prey that loves to nest near power lines and on tall electric poles. Ospreys nesting on electric poles is a serious problem: One single utility pole near Beaton’s Boatyard in Brick killed four ospreys this past year, according to a report in the Asbury Park Press.

Going forward, JCP&L will survey all their electric poles and other equipment where ospreys have started nesting, or given indications of future nesting, the company says. The power company will then identify and build new nesting platforms for the birds — not near electrical equipment. In addition, specialized equipment will be installed to divert and discourage ospreys from nesting in potentially hazardous locations, the company said.

“To an osprey, a utility pole near the coast seems like an ideal spot to perch or build a nest, but it could jeopardize their health,” said Ben Wurst of the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey.

In 2016, JCP&L was able to successfully move two osprey nests – one in Brick Township and the other in Union Beach – to new, safer nesting platforms that were built nearby. In the past, JCP&L, along with several wildlife groups, helped move an Osprey nest in Oceanport that had been built too close to power lines.



JCP&L crew moves an Osprey nest in Oceanport off a power pole to a new, safer platform.

➤ **Count the Birds for Science**

Audubon and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology will host the annual Great Backyard Bird Count over Presidents Weekend. Participants are encouraged to tally the birds they see in a local park or at their own feeders, then submit their data online.

MCAS will host the count at the Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center, as usual. Stop by, say hello and check on our progress!

**How many birds will you find?**

**20th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count  
February 17-20, 2017**



**Join in!** Count birds in your backyard, local park, or wherever you spot a bird, and submit your observations online.

[birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org)

American Robin  
Photo: Shayne Marchese/GBBC

Visit MCAS at the Manasquan Reservoir Environmental Center all 4 days

by Harden Fowler

## ➤ 2017 Ted Engberg Conservation Scholarships available March 15



For 12 years, the Monmouth County Audubon Society has awarded scholarships of \$1,500 to two qualified Monmouth County high school students continuing their education in a field related to conservation. The Board has approved these scholarships as an important part of our mission “to promote the awareness, appreciation and conservation of natural resources through educational outreach.” The scholarship is awarded in memory of Ted Engberg, who was on the MCAS Board and a generous donor for decades. Since 2006 we have awarded 22 scholarships totaling \$30,500 to worthy students throughout Monmouth County. We are delighted to support their interest in wildlife conservation and the environment, and we’re thankful to our members who have supported the program thorough World Series of Birding pledges.

Applications must contain contact information, school grades, proof of acceptance to a college or university majoring in the field of conservation, and an essay, “Why wildlife conservation is important to me,” highlighting their conservation activities and future goals. The MCAS Scholarship Committee will review the applications, make their final choices and award the certificates along with the \$1,500 checks to the winners by June 15, 2017.

Full information on the scholarships is available on our website, [www.monmouthaudubon.org](http://www.monmouthaudubon.org), and the application will be available after March 15. The application will also be available through Monmouth County high school guidance offices or by requesting the form at: MCAS, P.O. Box 542, Red Bank, NJ 07701. Completed applications must be postmarked by May 1, 2017.

## ➤ Climate change: a real threat

The Audubon Report “Birds and Climate Change” states, “Audubon’s new science sends a clear message about the serious dangers birds face in a warming world.” The evidence shows that among the many perils, climate change is having a dramatic effect on the migration, nesting sites and survival of most species of birds, and Audubon will take a more aggressive role combating this destruction.

The report highlights a few important things we can do on the local level: create a bird-friendly yard; get involved with Important Bird Areas; reach out to leaders and groups about why it is important to protect our environment; and support candidates and policies that are environment-friendly. The long-term rewards of conservation are far more important than a policy promoting immediate financial gain for a few.

For more information about what you can do to protect the future of birds and get involved with the Audubon species protection visit [www.audubon.org/climate](http://www.audubon.org/climate).

## Winter Birding (continued)

March is the month when male American Woodcock begin their courtship display. The ritual is a visual and auditory delight as the bird makes several “peent” calls on the ground, then flies into the air for a sustained fluttering display flight. Typically this happens at dusk, so the display flight can be hard to see, but fun to hear. To experience this display, join Monmouth County Audubon for a Woodcock Walk at Big Brook Park on Saturday, March 11, 2017 at 5:30 p.m.

Late March brings the return of one of my favorite birds, the Osprey. I watch for the pair to return to the platform at Spermaceti Cove, Sandy Hook. Another summer resident that will begin to arrive in March is the endangered Piping Plover. While most people don’t think of shorebirds in our area in March, this hardy little shorebird gets to our beaches early, before the crowds. Volunteers will be preparing our beaches for their arrival by roping off nesting areas and posting informative signage explaining the reason for the boundaries.

One sure sign that spring is coming is the song of the Red-winged Blackbird. When I begin hearing his loud call of “Conqueree” I know we are turning the corner from the dark of winter to the light of spring.



Red-winged Blackbird





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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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Q04**

**Membership questions?** Email us at [info@monmouthaudubon.org](mailto:info@monmouthaudubon.org).

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

## ➤ **coming up**

- Wednesday, Feb. 8\* 8:00 pm  
"Restoring Ecological Relationships Within NJ's Forested Ecosystems," Dr. Emile DeVito, NJCF
- Saturday, Feb. 11 10:00 am  
**Winter birding on Sandy Hook**; meet in Visitor Center parking lot
- Wednesday, March 8\* 7:00 pm  
"Family Night" **The Lizard Guys**  
(Please note early start time)
- Saturday, March 11 5:30 pm  
**Woodcock walk** at Big Brook Park, Rte. 520, Marlboro; meet in parking lot
- Wednesday, April 12\* 8:00 pm  
"Understanding the Silent Flight of Owls," Justin Jaworski, Lehigh University
- Saturday, April 15 10:00 am  
**Spring 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.