

NATURALLY

THE CONOCOHEAGUE AUDUBON SOCIETY

Naturally

NEWSLETTER OF THE CONOCOHEAGUE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Above: Jay and Dove
Photo credit: Bob Keener

Below: Bird Corner Calms Students
Photo Credit: Ruth Barton



President's Corner

by Terri Kochert

Hello Fellow Nature Lovers,

Can you feel it? Spring is in the air! It is wonderful that the sun sets after 5:30 PM.

The Hawk Mountain Sanctuary is interested in mounting American Kestrel boxes before March 31, 2022, and have solicited the labor of CAS to do so. If interested, please contact Terri Kochert at ConAudubon@outlook.com.

Spring means many of our field trips will resume. Contact Eric and Rhetta Martin if you are interested in going to Middle Creek on Saturday, March 5 at 6:30 AM. There will be some good birds to see for sure. One of my favorite birds is the American Woodcock. CAS has that trip scheduled for Monday, March 7, meeting either at Heisey Orchard at 5:45 PM or at the Scotland Park & Ride to meet up with Bob and Terri Kochert at 5:40 PM. Be sure to bring your flashlights for the delightful mating "dance" in midair.

We will have another educational, informative presentation by Ron Rohrbaugh, Director of Conservation Science Forest Programs, Mid-Atlantic Audubon, on Monday, March 14, 2022, at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2695 Luther Drive, Chambersburg, PA. His topic of discussion is "Forest-Bird Restoration" and why it is important for birds, wildlife, and society.

On March 24, 2022, CAS plans to resume showing free nature films at Living Faith Chapel, 8770 Possum Hollow Road, Shippensburg, PA. That evening at 7:30 PM, CAS will show the National Geographic documentary film, *Last Stand of the Great Bear*, which takes place in the Great Bear rainforest of British Columbia. You will see Brown Bears, Black Bears, "spirit" bears, wolves and salmon fishing.

On April 11, 2022, Eileen Shader, Director of River Restoration for American Rivers, will be with us at St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church at 7 PM, giving us an overview of rivers and watersheds, and explaining why they are important to society and wildlife. She will provide examples of how we can all be better stewards of our local watersheds. Her topic is aptly named, "*The Importance of a Healthy Watershed.*"

CAS plans to show the second nature film this season on April 21, 2022, at Living Faith Chapel at 7:30 PM. This National Geographic story is not only an historical account of the jaguar, but also of the young boy with a speech impediment who grows up with a fascination for big cats and especially jaguars and their preservation. Mark your calendars now to see *In Search of the Jaguar*.

Conservation Conversation: Stormwater Basins

by Jim Hardy

Winter may be my favorite time of year for bird watching, and I did some good bird counting, but I'm ready for winter to be over. The temperatures are inching up as the days are slowly getting longer, and I've noticed the first spring migrants like the Common Grackle, Red-winged Blackbird, and Killdeer are beginning to fill the air with their calls.

This past year I have focused the Conservation Conversation on water conservation. Frankly, I have found it fascinating. I have discovered so much information regarding the science of water conservation and how easy it is to make a positive impact in our local environment, and I enjoyed sharing it with you. I believe we covered the basics.

So I'm thinking about water resources that we frequently see in our area: springs, streams, creeks, ponds, lakes, rainwater, and the unseen groundwater. These are naturally occurring. Now I'm thinking about manmade water resources. These would include water towers, reservoirs (created by dams), canals (I count birds on the C&O Canal towpath regularly) and wells. These artificial water resources are actually ways that humans use to alter naturally occurring water. These alterations and developments are generally for the benefit of everyday living.

In recent years, a new, manmade water feature has emerged – stormwater basins. We see these stormwater basins near almost every construction site, commercial building, and housing development. Some are empty bowl-shaped areas planted with grass, and some are filled with wetland plants and other vegetation, while yet others are actual ponds with water in them.

So what is a stormwater basin? Jennifer Fetter, an Extension Educator in Water Resources of Penn State Extension, writes, "Stormwater basins are the reservoirs built near developments to temporarily hold stormwater during rain and snowmelt. They prevent high volumes of water from rushing into nearby streams during storms."

How do they work? Fetter continues, "During a storm, rainwater is collected from streets and parking lots and directed into the basin. The stormwater is stored temporarily and then released slowly in order to prevent flooding and erosion. After the rain event, the stored water is released slowly, into either a nearby stream or the soils and groundwater."

Fetter also lists Community Benefits of Stormwater Basins:

- ◇ Reduce stormwater runoff
- ◇ Recharge groundwater

- ◇ Promote climate-change resiliency
- ◇ Mitigate flooding
- ◇ Reduce pollution
- ◇ Provide cost savings

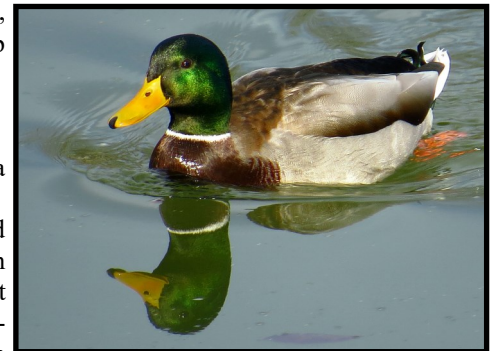


A local stormwater basin

Photo credit: Jim Hardy

These planned structures have mutual benefits for our natural water resources and our everyday living. Now we are seeing that birds and other wildlife are benefiting from these manmade habitats as well. It seems that some of these basins are rapidly becoming reliable and favorite bird watching spots. During this past Christmas Bird Count,

our group counted Mallards, Black Ducks, a Northern Pintail, and a Northern Shoveler at a stormwater basin that had water in it.



Mallard Duck

Photo credit: Dave Cooney Jr.

When these basins have water in them, they are like an oasis of nature in a desert of widespread commercial and residential development of the land.

So here is a homework assignment. In the next two months, try to visit a stormwater basin. Record the wildlife that you see there, and share your results along with photos on the CAS Facebook page. Migratory birds may visit these basins during migration.

2021 Service Recognition Awards

by Debby Hook

At the Feb. 14 meeting, two Meritorious Service Awards for 2021 were presented to youth mentors Bob Keener and Mike and Joan Duffield.

Bob Keener's mentorship of local teenager Jefferson Shank began when Bob learned of the young man's interest in building and selling birdhouses. Two years ago he invited Jefferson to help out in the local Christmas Bird Count, and Jefferson was hooked!

Bob has taken him to some favorite birding spots, and last June invited him to participate in the first Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Blitz, a 24-hour team bird-counting event. Bob and his brother Dan, Dan's son Sammy, and Jefferson traveled all day throughout Franklin County, finding 90 species.

Bob has also encouraged Jefferson's interest in photography. Jefferson said recently, "Bob shares a lot of his techniques in finding and photographing birds. He lets me know if he sees a rare bird and tells me where and how to find it. He also has taken me birding often since I don't have a driver's license. It means a lot to have friends who are glad to share their knowledge and experience with me."

Joan and Mike Duffield are fortunate to have a teenager in the family who enjoys birding. As dedicated mentors to their grand-nephew, Cash Monn, they have provided many opportunities for him to see new birds and to grow his birding life list: They have invited him along on Christmas Bird Counts and spring migration bird counts; to Antrim Commons to see various waterfowl; to Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area for the spectacle of thousands of Snow Geese; and on trips to see rare birds, such as a Townsend's Solitaire and a Whistling Duck.

The Duffields' success as mentors is evident in Cash's own words: "They have helped me organize and compile my end-of-the-year bird lists. They have taken me out for ice cream when I get a life bird, and they have helped me identify many birds. Overall, I credit Aunt Joan and Uncle Mike for getting me into birding and nurturing my love for it."

A 2021 Certificate of Appreciation recognized the contributions this year of **Jessica Ferguson**, who served for a few months as CAS Vice President until family health issues forced her to retire from those duties. Some of you may know Jessica through her fine bird photography on our Facebook page. After receiving the board's vote as vice president a year ago, she hit the ground running, preparing this year's activities list, helping to monitor our bluebird trail, and finding updated communication equipment for our field trips.

Jessica wasted no time obtaining a financial sponsor for our February program with a nationally recognized author. We are grateful and appreciative for the many ways Jessica has advanced our chapter.

Finally, an unprecedented one-year honorary membership was awarded to Newville resident **Vern Gauthier**, whose exceptional effort to carve out a new Audubon Christmas Bird Count within Franklin and Fulton counties provided a great service to our chapter.

Working with CAS member Bill Oyler and other local birding authorities, Vern coordinated the search for a suitable location that would not conflict with other counts. He scouted potential best-birding sites and recruited volunteers to act as zone captains. He provided detailed maps and mapping tools, and he ensured good communication among the team members. The easy-to-follow form Vern provided for recording our observations simplified the submission of our results.

Following the count, Vern set up a Zoom call for zone captains to discuss their teams' experiences in this newest CBC. Vern's foresight gives CAS birders another opportunity to experience citizen science.

Come to Annual Meeting

Please remember to come to the Annual Business Meeting on Monday, April 11. The program *The Importance of a Healthy Watershed* by Eileen Shader will begin at 7 p.m.

We will also be voting on officers and new directors for Conococheague Audubon. The slate includes: Valerie Barnes for President; Lisa Coombs for Vice President; Rhetta Martin for Recording Secretary; Valerie Barnes for Corresponding Secretary; Donna Hocker for Treasurer; Terri Kochert for Immediate Past President; Dave Ebbitt and Anne St. John for Director.

Your Vote Matters!

If you cannot attend the meeting, please vote in one of these ways:

- **email** your vote to ConAudubon@outlook.com,
- **call** Terri Kochert at 717-263-3692,
- or **send a note** to Conococheague Audubon at PO Box 20, Fayetteville, PA 17222.

When you submit your vote, please indicate whether you are voting for the entire slate or just part of it. We need a quorum for the election to be valid, so **your vote matters**. Thank you!

Volunteers Needed For Penn National's Bluebird Trail

by Dorian Runt

This spring some fortunate bluebirds will finally get to build their “dream homes” at Penn National Golf Course Community, Fayetteville, Pennsylvania. Some of these new winged residents may prefer a golf course view, while others will choose a more remote spot toward the mountains or even along the “Birds and Blooms Walking Trail.” The community’s trail of bluebird nesting boxes will be expanded just in time for spring.

A team of volunteers will be essential for the success of this program. Each team member will tend the same box(es) to observe and record the progress of the bluebird’s nest- building, the number of eggs laid, the number of chicks hatched, and the approximate date of fledging or leaving the nest. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove nests of the undesirable House Sparrows. This process can repeat in the same box throughout the summer.

Volunteers will be provided with a golf cart to access nesting boxes, and it is hoped that the volunteers will enjoy this experience so much that they will return to check in on their bluebird family once every two weeks.

Nesting boxes will be cleaned in advance for monitoring to begin in April. Typically, all chicks are fledged and off on their own by the beginning of September.



Bluebird nesting box

Photo credit: Dorian Runt



Two Eastern Bluebirds feeding

Photo credit: Steve and Marlene Mitchell

If you are interested in helping with the Bluebird Project at Penn National, or if you have questions, please call Lynn or Dorian Runt (717-352-4995); Ruth Barton (301-367-6968) or Jim Hook (717-262-5865). Since summers are so busy for all of us, there will be substitutes available to step in if needed. Your choice to check the bluebirds on the following days/times would not interfere with golfers: Monday, Tuesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday; anytime from 6:00pm until dusk.

The Eastern Bluebird’s numbers were once in decline due to natural causes, such as killing winters and competition from House Sparrows, House Wrens and Tree Swallows for natural nesting holes. These species have crowded the gentle bluebird out of nearly all available nesting places. The best hope for continued survival of this brilliantly colored bird seems to be nesting boxes which are monitored to keep out the intrusive House Sparrows and field mice. Tree Swallows can also “foreclose” on bluebird nesting boxes, but swallows are considered more beneficial and can actually coexist in proximity to bluebirds.

Golf courses provide an ideal habitat for these sweet singing birds as there is a plentiful food source (insects, spiders, berries) and open range in which to dive for food. Penn National’s bluebird trail skirts the Founder’s Course and the Iron Forge Course offering about 250 acres of ideal habitat. Of course, the birds will need to share this treasure with the golfers, but neither seems to mind. The birds continue with mating, nest-building, and raising their brood, and the golfers continue to hit that little white ball in various directions.

Although Eastern Bluebirds have started a comeback, most experts have emphasized the importance of an ongoing effort to provide habitat. The Bluebird Trail at

Penn National was enthusiastically supported by Patti Nitterhouse, Vice President of White Rock, Inc., who commented “Our property is a national certified wildlife habitat, so this project to encourage more wildlife is in keeping with our objectives.”

The local Conococheague Audubon Society has provided funding for an additional 12 boxes. Some chapter



Sitting pretty!

Photo credit: Steve and Marlene Mitchell

members such as Ruth Barton, who for 15 years has carefully watched over the original trail, and Jim Hook, who currently maintains a bluebird trail in another rural area of Franklin County, are great resources for all who want to learn more about bluebirds. We who love them want to assure that future generations of bird lovers can continue to delight in the sweet-singing little bird that seems to wear the blue sky on its back and the warmth of the sun on its breast

Want to learn more about bluebirds? View some of the following short videos available on YouTube: “Secret Life of Bluebirds,” “Eastern Bluebirds Nesting,” and “Eastern Bluebirds Nest Building to Egg Laying.”

Bird Corner Soothes

by Debby Hook

This fall, Ruth Barton, CAS hospitality chair, was instrumental in helping her daughter, Margie Smith, encourage Baltimore-area children toward an interest in birds. Margie, a behavior coordinator at Hilltop Elementary School near Baltimore, works with low-income, high-risk children. She was inspired to introduce feeding the birds as a means to help a pupil with an especially difficult home life. Margie told her mother that when she asked the boy if he would like a feeder near the window to watch birds, his face lit up.

Ruth gave Margie a feeder, which they set outside a classroom window. Pupils filled it with bird seed, also supplied by Ruth. Margie had to explain to them how the birds eat.

Now, a bird-centered “calm down” corner near the window features books about birds, a bird field guide, posters, and a calendar with bird pictures. Some of the items came from our CAS office library and some from Ruth’s own stash. An older pair of her binoculars hangs on the wall within easy reach of the window so children can watch the birds more closely.



CAS member Ruth Barton helped supply this calming-down “bird corner” in her daughter’s school classroom with books, posters and binoculars.

Photo credit: Ruth Barton

Chambersburg, PA Christmas Bird Count 2021 Report

by Valerie Barnes

Conococheague Audubon and friends conducted the 62nd Chambersburg Christmas Bird Count on December 18, 2021. We had an average count in terms of the number of species, with no new species added. Little of the forecasted rain appeared, except for some early and late drizzle.

Each count takes place in an established 15-mile diameter circle, and is organized by a count compiler and zone captains. Count volunteers cover specified areas in the circle, counting every bird they see or hear all day. It's not just a species tally—all individual birds are counted all day, giving a snapshot of the total number of birds in the circle that day.

Participants in the field: 58 (average is 57)

Participants at home watching feeders: 21 (average for past 11 years is 29)

Field counters spent: 64.95 hours on foot, walking 45.65 miles; 123.05 hours in cars, driving 441.25 miles; 3.25 hours listening for owls, covering 3.8 miles.

Feeder counters spent 52.1 hours watching at home (average for past 11 years is 74 hours)

Total species counted: 72 (average is 71)

Feeder species counted: 30 (average for past 11 years is 36)

Total individual birds counted: 19,275 (average, corrected for unusually high blackbird counts in 1984, is 21,889)

760 of total birds counted were seen at feeders (average for past 11 years is 1,409)

Weather conditions: about 37-48 degrees; overcast all day.



Downy Woodpecker
Photo credit: Dave Cooney, Jr.

Bold indicates high count

- Canada Goose 440
- American Black Duck 4
- Mallard 578
- Northern Shoveler 1
- Northern Pintail 1
- Green-winged Teal 1
- Wild Turkey 38
- Great Blue Heron 21
- Black Vulture 24
- Turkey Vulture 65
- Bald Eagle 5
- Northern Harrier 1
- Sharp-shinned Hawk 2
- Cooper's Hawk 15
- Red-shouldered Hawk 4
- Red-tailed Hawk 65
- American Kestrel 32

- Merlin 1
- Ring-billed Gull 8
- Rock Pigeon 1152
- Mourning Dove 1441
- Eastern Screech-Owl 3
- Great Horned Owl 6
- Barred Owl 1
- Belted Kingfisher 7
- Red-bellied Woodpecker 131
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 28**
- Downy Woodpecker 140
- Hairy Woodpecker 26
- Northern Flicker 61
- Pileated Woodpecker 18
- Blue Jay 172
- American Crow 184
- Common Raven 11
- Horned Lark 131
- Carolina/Black-capped chickadee 284
- Tufted Titmouse 127
- Red-breasted Nuthatch 4
- White-breasted Nuthatch 120
- Brown Creeper 20
- Carolina Wren 154
- Winter Wren 13
- Golden-crowned Kinglet 24
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet 10
- Eastern Bluebird 95
- Hermit Thrush 8
- American Robin 365**
- Gray Catbird 1
- Northern Mockingbird 68
- European Starling 9596
- American Pipit 89**
- Cedar Waxwing 58

- Yellow-rumped Warbler 3
- Eastern Towhee 1
- American Tree Sparrow 4
- Chipping Sparrow 1
- Field Sparrow 8
- Savannah Sparrow 4
- Fox Sparrow 2
- Song Sparrow 192
- Swamp Sparrow 7
- White-throated Sparrow 651
- White-crowned Sparrow 38
- Dark-eyed Junco 716
- Northern Cardinal 421
- Red-winged Blackbird 2
- Eastern Meadowlark 1
- Common Grackle 12
- Purple Finch 1
- House Finch 424
- American Goldfinch 206
- House Sparrow 727



Northern Mockingbird
Photo credit: Bob Keener

Comments:

The total number of species seen was one below our average. The total number of individual birds observed was about 88% of the average adjusted for large black-bird flocks that were seen in 1984. The count of individual birds seen at feeders this year was approximately 650 below the average for the last 11 years. Eight fewer feeder watchers than average participated, and the total hours spent was 22 fewer than average.

We saw new high numbers of several species, as indicated in **bold** font. The single Purple Finch was a new low record for counts on which the species was found. Unlike in recent years, Peregrine Falcon and Eurasian Collared-Dove were seen only in count week, not on count day.

For birds seen in more than 30 counts:

- Teams reported unusually low (<25% of average) numbers of American Crow, Fish Crow*, Wilson's Snipe*, American Tree Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird*, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin*, and Evening Grosbeak*. Note: species marked with * were not observed in this count.
- Teams reported more than the usual numbers (>125% of average) of Wild Turkey, Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Red-Tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Swamp Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow.

Of birds seen in at least 41 prior counts, we missed Ring-necked Pheasant, Killdeer, Wilson's Snipe, Red-headed Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Brown-headed Cowbird, and Pine Siskin.

Birds reported from all zones included: Canada Goose, Mallard, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow.

Observers in Zone 1 had a treat when they spotted a

white-headed Winter Wren, of which Gavin Anderson took a photo.

Birds reported from only one area included:

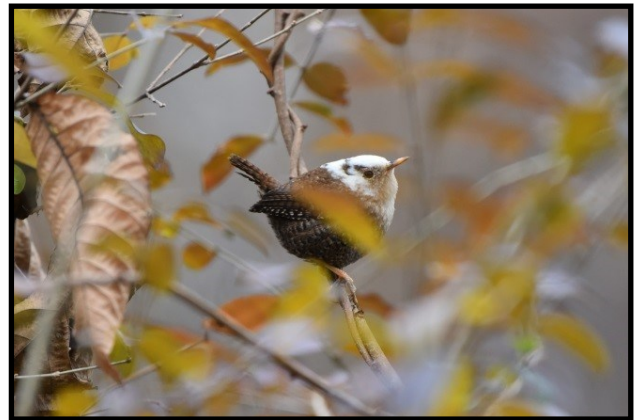
Zone 1: Green-winged Teal, Merlin, Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow

Zone 2: Eastern Screech Owl

Zone 4: Ring-billed Gull, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, American Tree Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Purple Finch

Zone 5: Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Northern Harrier, Barred Owl

Next year's Christmas Bird Count will be scheduled for Saturday, December 17, 2022. We hope you join us!



White-headed Winter Wren

Photo credit: Gavin Anderson

On the Record

by Sue Greer

On February 7th, Terri Kochert led a group of four birders to see Short-eared Owls on the Gettysburg Battlefield. Unfortunately, no owls were seen that day. The group did see both Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Hawks, American Kestrels, Northern Harriers (males and females), European Starlings, Canada Geese, Mourning Doves and a Northern Mockingbird.

Opportunity to Serve

Debby Hook is seeking a replacement as Educational Outreach chair. The position involves coordinating volunteers to handle the displays and programs we present from time to time. These include participation in outdoor events and presentations of one of our video programs to clubs, libraries, and young people's groups. If interested or for more details, contact Debby at 717-372-0228 or debbyk@pa.net.

MEETINGS – Free, held at Fellowship Hall, St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, 2695 Luther Drive, Scotland, PA 17254

FIELD TRIPS – Free, most take place on Saturdays. Contact the leader in advance if you plan to go. Times listed are departure times; please arrive early. If you cannot go on a scheduled trip, contact leader for a potential mid-week option on his/her scouting trip.

Note: Activities are tentative due to COVID-19. Check our website for updates: <https://conococheagueaudubon.org>

March 5, Saturday **FIELD TRIP**
6:30 AM Middle Creek WMA, Lancaster County auto tour for WATERFOWL. Meet at the Park & Ride, Scotland, Exit 20, I-81 northbound. Bring scopes, binoculars, and lunch. **Eric and Rhetta Martin**, 717-597-8675.

March 7, Monday **FIELD TRIP**
5:45 PM Tentative outing for WOODCOCKS at Heisey Road orchard. Meet at the Park & Ride, Scotland, Exit 20, I-81 northbound. Bring flashlights. **Bob Kochert**, 717-263-3692.

March 14, Monday **MEETING**
7:00 PM *Forest-Bird Restoration* by Ron Rohrbaugh, Director, Conservation Science and Forest Programs, Mid-Atlantic Audubon. Arranged by Terri Kochert.

March 24, Thursday **FILM**
7:30 PM *Last Stand of the Great Bear*. (National Geographic) Great Bear rainforest of British Columbia. You will see Brown

Bears, Black Bears, “spirit” bears, wolves and salmon fishing. Door prizes, one free youth binoculars prize. At Living Faith Chapel, 8770 Possum Hollow Road, Shippensburg, PA 17257.

April 11, Monday **MEETING**
7:00 PM *The Importance of a Healthy Watershed* by Eileen Shader, Director of River Restoration for American Rivers. Arranged by Bob Kochert. Annual business meeting and elections. All chapter members welcome.

CAS WEBSITE: <https://conococheagueaudubon.org/>

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Send all newsletter articles and photos to the editor.
Send all mailing changes to conaudubon@outlook.com.

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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