Lynde Point Land Trust

Bird Nest Enhancement/Monitoring Project

2023 End of Season Report

Hello Fenwickians!

The **2023 Nesting Season** has now concluded, Purple Martins and Osprey heading their way south to warmer climes, following the food. We'll just have to sustain ourselves with vivid memories of active birds gracing the skies with spectacle and sound. What a wonderful world it is with their animation.

Purple Martin Status

The colony had a total number of 68 nests but only fledged 139 young, not a great ratio relative to years past. The west end of the borough was the leader in martin production this year, likely a result of less impact by marauding House Sparrows.

Houses at sites that received new pulley system poles over last winter, will in this off season receive second houses to allow expansion of the colony. The new pole design allows for more effective monitoring and removal of House Sparrow nests.

Purple Martin Biology

Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) are fascinating birds known for their unique behaviors and interactions with humans. One interesting aspect of Purple Martins is their strong association with humans and their total dependency on nesting in man-made structures. They have a long history of nesting in artificial structures provided by humans, such the as specially designed birdhouses or gourds found in the borough. This relationship is mutually beneficial: humans provide suitable nesting sites, and in return, Purple Martins help control insect populations around human habitation, as they are voracious insect eaters.

Purple Martins are highly social birds and often nest in colonies. These colonies can consist of several pairs of birds, the communal nesting behavior thought to provide protection against predators. The birds engage in complex social interactions within these colonies, including vocalizations and aerial displays.

Purple Martins are known for their impressive long-distance migration. They breed in North America during the summer and migrate to South America for the winter, their migration route covering thousands of miles.

Purple Martins are known for their varied and melodious vocalizations. Their songs and calls are distinct and can be a delightful part of the natural soundscape. The vocalizations are used for communication within the colony and serve to establish territory and attract mates.

Purple Martin (female) © Peter Chen

Martin Nests	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23
1. Riggio	3	1	0	3	0	3	9	8
2. Ryder Course	3	3	7	5	7	5	9	11
3. Keeney	0	2	2	7	6	5	4	5
4. Christensen	0	0	0	1	4	3	4	5
5. Bulkeley	0	1	3	4	0	6	2	3
6. 2nd Fairway W.	3	3	3	4	2	5	2	0
7. 2nd Fairway E.	3	3	4	5	5	7	5	5
8. Neely	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	6
9. Davis	3	3	1	0	5	7	7	3
10. 4th Fairway	0	1	4	1	4	6	0	3
11. Gay	3	5	4	1	5	5	2	4
12. Sequassen	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3
12. Webster	5	6	6	7	7	6	14	10
13. Patterson	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	2
Total Nests:	26	30	37	42	47	66	61	68

Osprey Fledged	'16	'17	'18	'19	'20	'21	'22	'23
1. West End	0	1	1	2	2	1	1	2
2. Hepburn	3	3	3	1	0	2	0	2
3. Neely	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	0
4. Staniford	1	1	3	0	2	2	3	2
5. Schmitt	NA	NA	NA	0	0	0	0	0
6. Sequassen	4	3	3	0	1	2	0	0
7. Hastings	0	0	1	3	3	2	3	1
8. Webster I	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	3
9. Webster II	NA	0	2	0	1	2	1	3
10. Gosin	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	3	0
Totals	14	14	18	10	13	16	17	13

Observing Purple Martins and learning about their behaviors can be a rewarding experience for birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts. Their reliance on human-provided nesting structures and their role in insect control make them a unique and beneficial species to have around human habitats.

Osprey Status

The platform located on Hepburn Pond will be removed from the area over the winter, so that it will no longer act as a feeding station for Great Horned Owls, the likely predator here. One of the adult Ospreys was killed, the other then abandoned the nest. There was a second adult Osprey fatality at the Sequassen nest and numerous young across the "garden" lost to the owls. We hope at some point the owls will move on, which may be encouraged by activity in The Grove with invasive plant removal and by the Eighth Tee's reconstruction, both places the owls frequent.

The Schmitt Platform, which has never hosted a nest, will be given another chance in 2024, since two birds were seen roosting near it in the early summer of 2023, likely young birds who've not yet figured it all out. If again unsuccessful in attracting a pair, the platform will be considered for relocated.

Nest Boxes

All blue bird and wren boxes were occupied this season, mostly by House Sparrows. Desirable species like Tree Swallow will use the blue bird houses, but are easily run off by the undesirables. Enhancement of nesting box offerings is on the slate for the future.

Why birdwatching?

Birdwatching or birding, is a popular and rewarding hobby and among the top three hobbies in the United States, alongside hunting/fishing and gardening.

Birding allows people to connect with the natural world. Observing birds in their natural habitats provides a sense of serenity and a break from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

Birding can be done almost anywhere, from urban parks to remote wilderness areas. It doesn't require expensive equipment or extensive travel, making it accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. Compared to many other hobbies, birding is relatively affordable. All you really need is a binocular and a field guide to get started. Bird feeders and bird baths can enhance your birding experience by attracting birds closer.

Birding encourages outdoor activity, good for physical and mental health. Spending time in nature has been proven to reduce stress and improve overall well-being. Birds are incredibly diverse, and always offer something new to learn. Identifying different species, understanding their behaviors, and studying their migrations can be intellectually stimulating and satisfying.

Birding can be a social activity. Many bird enthusiasts join local bird clubs or participate in organized birding events. This provides an opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and share experiences. Birders often become advocates for conservation. By observing and appreciating birds, people become more aware of en-

Martin Pair (c) Storm

Osprey © Unknown

Osprey © Gary Leavens

Young Birder © Adnil B.

vironmental issues and take action to protect natural habitats and species.

Birders often travel to various locations, including national parks and wildlife reserves, to see specific bird species. This can lead to a deeper appreciation of different ecosystems and cultures. Bird photography is a popular sub-hobby within birding. Many birders enjoy capturing the beauty of birds through photography, painting, or other forms of artistic expression.

Successfully spotting and identifying a rare or elusive bird can be extremely rewarding. Birders often keep lists of the species they've seen, which can create a sense of accomplishment and motivation to continue exploring.

Birding is a great way for families to spend quality time together in the outdoors, fostering an appreciation for nature in the younger generation.

A binocular and identification field guide make a wonderful gift.

Why set land aside for birds and other wildlife?

Often referred to as protected areas or wildlife reserves, these natural areas hold significant ecological value for several reasons. Protected lands provide a safe and undisturbed habitat for a wide variety of plant and animal species, promoting biodiversity by allowing these species to thrive, reproduce, and maintain healthy populations. Conserving biodiversity is essential for ecosystem stability and resilience.

Protected areas can serve as critical tools for habitat restoration and the reestablishment of native flora and fauna. They often act as refuges for species facing habitat loss and habitat fragmentation. These areas can also serve as stepping stones to maintain ecological connectivity, allowing species to migrate, disperse, and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

Wildlife reserves provide a range of ecosystem services that benefit both nature and humans. These services include pollination by birds and insects, nutrient cycling, water purification, and carbon sequestration. Protecting these areas helps ensure these services continue to be available to support agriculture, clean water, and climate regulation. Forests, wetlands, and other protected habitats can act as carbon sinks, absorbing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. This helps mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas concentrations.

Isolated populations within protected areas can help preserve genetic diversity within a species. This genetic diversity is crucial for adaptation to changing environmental conditions and the long-term survival of species.

Protected areas offer opportunities for scientific research and environmental education. Researchers can study natural processes, monitor species, and gather data on ecosystems, contributing to our understanding of the natural world. Education programs in these areas help raise awareness about conservation and foster a sense of stewardship among the public.

Wildlife reserves offer recreational opportunities for people to

© Dara Miles Wilson

© June Mita

View Between the Two Lighthouses © Unknown Photographer

connect with nature, enjoy outdoor activities like hiking and birding, and promote physical and mental well-being. Additionally, these areas can hold cultural and spiritual significance for indigenous communities and others with deep ties to the land. Protected areas can boost local economies through nature-based tourism, which generates income and job opportunities for nearby communities. Well-managed wildlife reserves can contribute to sustainable economic development while preserving natural resources.

Many bird and animal species in protected areas play vital roles in controlling pest populations, helping to maintain the health of ecosystems and agricultural lands.

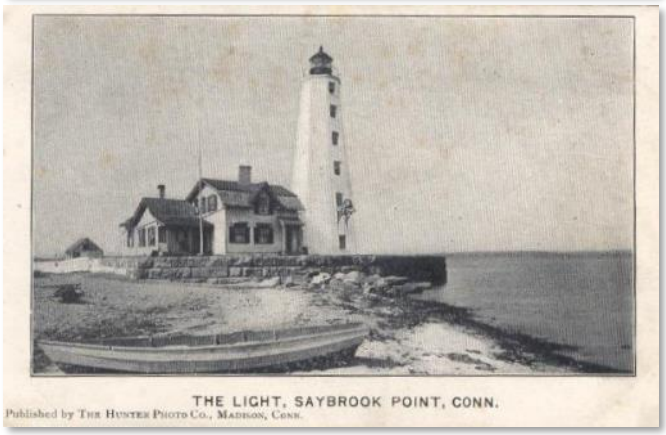
In summary, land set aside for birds and other wildlife holds immense ecological value by conserving biodiversity, providing ecosystem services, supporting research and education, mitigating climate change, and offering a range of cultural, economic, and recreational benefits. Protecting these areas is crucial for the health of our planet and future generations.

Mouth of the CT River © USDA

Birds in the Borough

Northern Harrier

Periodically seen in Fenwick during the fall, winter, and early spring, the Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) is a medium-sized raptor that belongs to the harrier subfamily. Below are some key aspects of the biology of the Northern Harrier.



Physical Characteristics:
Northern Harriers are medium-sized hawks with a length of about 18 to 24 inches and a wingspan of 3.9 to 4.9 feet. Adults have distinct plumage. Males are gray above and white below (referred to as "Gray Ghosts" by some birders), while females are brown with streaked or mottled plumage.

Northern Harrier (male) © Andy Reago

Habitat:
Northern Harriers are often found in open habitats such as marshes, grasslands, meadows, and agricultural fields. They are known for their low, slow flight over these areas as they hunt for small mammals and birds.

Diet:
The primary diet of Northern Harriers consists of small mammals like mice, voles, and other rodents. They are skilled hunters and often use their keen sense of hearing to locate prey in tall grass or under snow.

Northern Harrier female © Frank Schuleburg

Hunting Behavior:
Northern Harriers have a distinctive hunting style characterized by low, quartering flight over open areas. To help locate prey, they are assisted by their facial disks funneling sound to their ears, similar to that of an owl. Harriers have long wings and a buoyant flight, which allows them to hover briefly and maneuver effectively while hunting.

Breeding:
Northern Harriers breed in North America, usually in open areas with suitable nesting sites. The female typically builds

a nest on the ground, hidden in tall vegetation. The nest is often a shallow depression lined with grass and other plant materials. They usually lay a clutch of four to six eggs, and both parents participate in incubation, which lasts about a month.

Migration:
Some Northern Harriers are migratory, with populations in northern regions flying south for the winter. Migration patterns vary, with some birds moving only short distances and others undertaking longer journeys.

Conservation Status:
This species is not globally threatened, its population considered stable. However, like many raptors, they face threats from habitat loss, pesticide exposure, and human disturbance.

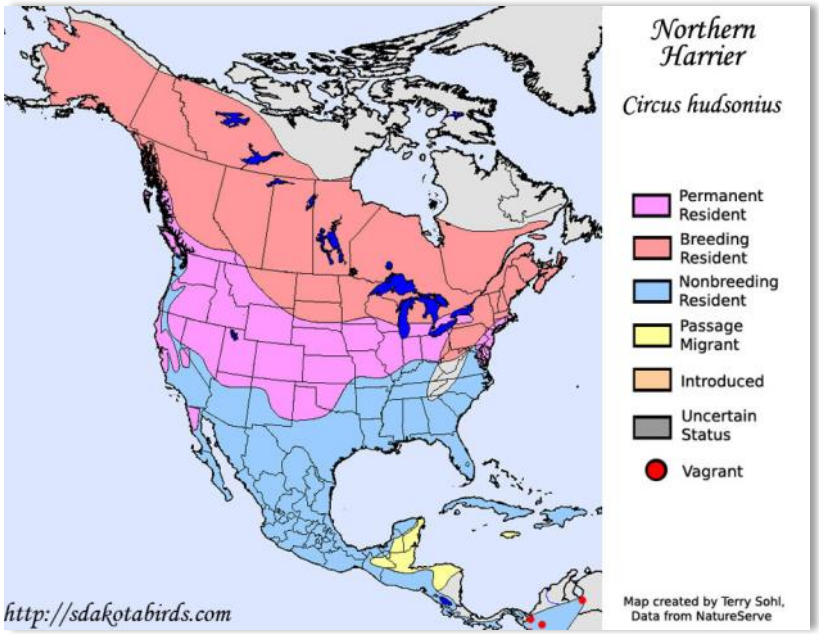
Understanding the biology of the Northern Harrier is crucial for its conservation, as it helps in identifying and addressing potential threats to its population and habitats.

Long-tailed Duck

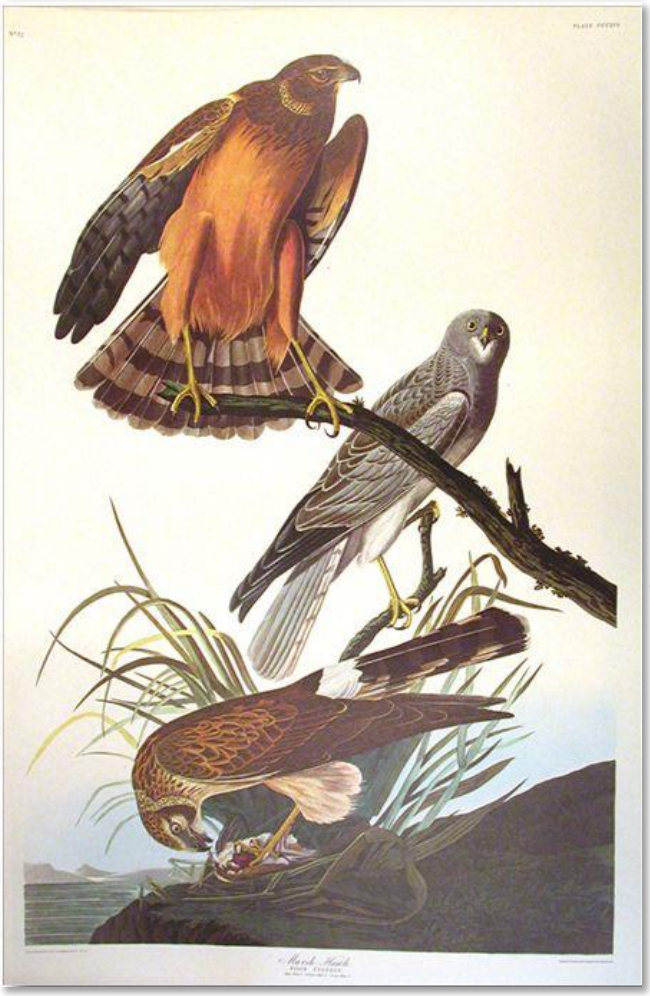
The Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) is a species of sea duck that inhabits northern oceans and is seen frequently throughout the winter at the mouth of the Connecticut River. Below are some key aspects of the biology of Long-tailed Ducks.

Appearance:
Adult males, also known as drakes, have striking breeding plumage with a distinctive long, slender tail, which gives the species its name. Females and non-breeding males have a more subdued appearance, with a mottled brown and gray body.

Distribution:
Long-tailed Ducks are circumpolar in their distribution, meaning they are found in northern regions around the world. They breed in the Arctic tundra and coastal areas of North America, Europe, and Asia. During the winter, they migrate to more temperate coastal waters.



Northern Harrier male © Becky Matsubara



Northern Harrier sub-adult (top) © John James Audubon

Habitat:
Breeding Long-tailed Ducks typically nest in shallow depressions on the tundra, lined with down feathers for insulation. They are commonly found in coastal habitats, including both salt and freshwater environments. During the non-breeding season, they may be found in a variety of marine habitats, including bays, estuaries, and offshore waters.

Behavior:
Long-tailed Ducks are strong swimmers and divers, using their wings for propulsion underwater, where they primarily feed on aquatic invertebrates, such as mollusks, crustaceans, and insects, obtained while diving. Long-tailed Ducks are known for their characteristic courtship displays, which involve head-bobbing and vocalizations.

Migration:
Long-tailed Ducks are highly migratory. They undertake long-distance migrations between their breeding and wintering grounds. Migration routes may vary among populations, but many individuals migrate from their Arctic breeding grounds to more temperate coastal areas during the winter. There are large numbers wintering just off of Nantucket.

Conservation Status:
The conservation status of Long-tailed Ducks varies among populations. Threats to their populations include habitat degradation, pollution, and climate change, which can impact their breeding and wintering habitats.

Vocalizations:
Long-tailed Ducks are known for their distinctive vocalizations, including a variety of quacks and whistles. Vocalizations play a role in courtship and communication within flocks.

Understanding the biology of the Long-tailed Duck is important for conservation efforts, as changes in their habitat and climate conditions can have significant impacts on their populations. Conservation initiatives often focus on protecting critical breeding and wintering habitats, as well as addressing broader environmental issues affecting these sea ducks.

Enjoy your wonderful bird garden!

Cheers,

Andy

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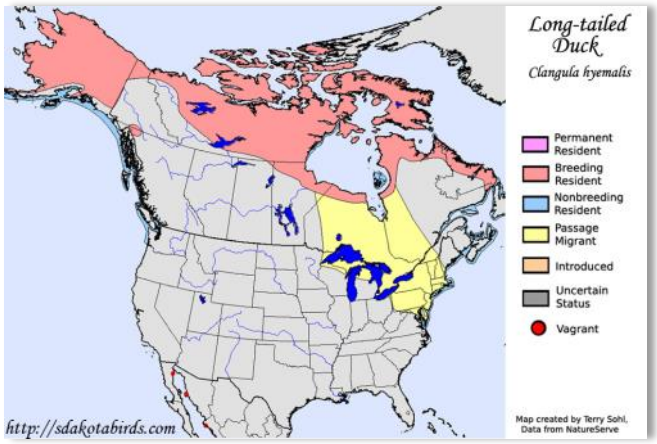


Long-tailed Duck male © Wolfgang Wander


Long-tailed Ducke female © Unknown


Long-tailed Duck pair © Ken Billington

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