

The Southbury Training School Farm

Birds of Interest

2003 – 2013

Lawrence B. Fischer, Jr.

Federal Banding permit #23426

State Banding Permit#0013009

Long-eared Owl:

Long-eared owls have been present in a cedar grove on the eastern edge of the farmland every winter from the winter of 2003/2004 to the winter of 2012/2013 inclusive. The number of owls varies each winter from three to five individuals. In April of 2004 a long-eared owl was exhibiting territorial defense during a daytime visit. On a visit one week later, a long-eared owl was observed flying from a partially constructed nest. The site was again visited in May but the nest had been taken over by American crows. A long-eared owl was observed in the near vicinity but no other nest was found. To put this in perspective, this was only the third recorded attempt for this owl species to nest in the State of CT in the last 60+ years. See the report for the year 2004 submitted to DEEP as part of the state banding permit requirements. In the spring of 2005, during a nighttime observation, a long-eared owl was heard giving courtship calls. Attempts to find a nest during the day were fruitless. No serious attempt has been made since then to find a nest for these owls but it is at least possible that they attempt to nest every year. The approximate coordinates of this site are N 41 30'8" X W 073 16'20"

American Kestrel:

A nest box placed on a tree along a small stream west of Cassidy Road, approximate coordinates N 41 30'6" X W 073 16'59", was occupied by American Kestrels but abandoned before eggs were laid in the spring of 2004. See the above mentioned report. American kestrels again used this box successfully in 2009 and again 2011. Eastern screech owls have used the box in alternating years; 2008, 2010, and 2012. It is not known where the owls or the kestrels nest when the other species is using the nest box and perhaps another box or two should be placed in the near vicinity.

A nest box placed at approximately N 41 30'0" by W 073 16'41" was used successfully by American kestrels in 2006. See report submitted to DEEP for the

year 2006 and the "Species of Special Concern" report submitted to the Natural History Diversity Data Base.

Bobolinks:

Significant numbers of bobolinks have been present in the upper meadows and fields every breeding season since 1982 for the Woodbury/Roxbury June Bird Count.

Meadowlarks:

Small numbers (2-5) have been observed most summers for the Woodbury/Roxbury June Bird Count. This species lingers on site until early winter. In early December of 2012, five (5) individuals were observed in the meadow on top of the hill to the east.

Fall and Winter Hawks and other Birds:

During the fall and winter northern harriers, American kestrels, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, American rough-legged hawks, and northern shrikes can be observed hunting the fields and meadows. Usually a flock of white-crowned sparrows and the occasional snow goose can also be seen.

Respectfully,
Lawrence Fischer

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lawrence Fischer".

Raptor Banding Activities-2006
Lawrence B. Fischer, Jr.
Federal Permit # 21499-B
#23426 as of 05/03/06
State Permit # 0006009

January thru March

Saw-whet owls were rare in the study area (southern Roxbury, southern New Milford, and Bridgewater south to Easton and Redding) with only three (3) owls being found. A formerly productive sight in Bridgewater was lost to house construction. At the Quinnipiac River State Park, four (4) owls were found in the southern half of the park.

More than twenty (20) active Red-tailed hawk nests were located while attempting to find breeding activity by Great-horned owls. No Great-horned owl nests were found but adults were observed during the day in suitable habitat in Newtown, Redding, Easton, Southbury and New Milford.

April thru July

American kestrels were again trapped banded and released at Flirt Hill (Aspetuck Valley Orchard). Numbers were decent although not exceptional and the species in general continues to decline. **IT CAN NOT BE EMPHASIZED ENOUGH HOW IMPORTANT THIS AREA IS AS A FORAGING AREA TO MIGRATING KESTRELS (AS WELL AS MANY OTHER RAPTOR SPECIES). NO OTHER SITE IN THE STATE IS KNOWN FOR SIMILAR CONCENTRATIONS OF FORAGING RAPTORS. ALL GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT POLICIES SHOULD REFLECT THE NEEDS (SHORT TO MODERATELY LONG GRASS) OF FORAGING KESTRELS (AND OTHER RAPTORS).**

*Might
also be
true for
STSF*

All active red-tailed nests were revisited and all contained young. Banding of nestlings was done at nine (9) sites as time allowed.

Red-shouldered hawks continue to become more common as adults were seen or heard throughout the study area. Four active nests located in residential yards [two (2) in Newtown, one (1) in Southbury and one (1) in Trumbull] were observed to fledged young. No banding of nestlings was done. This hawk continues to become a "backyard" bird in older neighborhoods with large deciduous shade trees and wetland areas.

See page 3

One (1) new Goshawk nest was found at the north end of the Easton reservoir in Trumbull. This nest failed of unknown (suspicious) causes.

Seven (7) Cooper's hawks nests were found with one (1) of them being new. See species of special concern report. Banding of nestlings occurred at five of the sites. One site was in a backyard setting and the other was located too late and as such, there was a high risk of premature fledging if disturbed.

One (1) Sharp-shinned hawk nest was found in Easton. This site was reported in last year's report. This year's nestlings were not banded as time constraints did not allow a visit during optimal banding age.

Five American kestrel nest boxes were occupied by breeding birds. Although two of the boxes failed, this is a record number of occupancies to date. Two (2) boxes at Sunny Valley Farm (TNC property) in New Milford were occupied. One failed due to the removal of nesting shavings by starlings prior to occupancy by the kestrels. This creates a situation where the eggs cannot be incubated properly because they roll around on the wooden floor. This situation can be rectified if discovered after the clutch is started but before incubation begins. One (1) box at Iron Ore Hill Road Farm (TNC Property) in Bridgewater fledged young. This box has been successful in prior years. A box at Wewauka Brook Farm (TNC Property) in Bridgewater, occupied in the past, went unoccupied but approximately a half mile away; a box on Bridgewater Land Trust Property was occupied. This breeding attempt failed apparently from being raided by a quadruped. The tree is not protected with a predator guard. A box on the Southbury Training School Farm Property (CT State Land) was occupied for the first time and fledged young. See species of special concern report.

73° 16' 41"

September thru December

X 41° 30' 0"

From mid September thru mid November hawk trapping and hawk migration counts were carried out at Flirt Hill (BHC property referred to locally as the Aspetuck Valley Orchard). Trapping/counting on average was one two days a week. Migration numbers were typical with the exception of a high count of more than six hundred (600) broad-winged hawks on September 20. Twenty-three (23) kestrels banded represents a four (4) year high but is considerably lower than the forty (40) caught in the fall of 2002 and is the fifth highest total since 1994. Three (3) merlins banded is a new record for that species. As merlin populations in the northeast increase, more and more individuals use Flirt Hill as a migration stopover. A hatching year female peregrine falcon, while not caught, was observed to spend time at Flirt Hill foraging.

Perhaps, the highlight of the season was the capture of a hatching year golden eagle as it attempted to pirate a lure bird (starling) from a northern harrier. It was released without a band (I now have eagle bands). Flirt Hill and the surrounding watershed and reservoir system has always been foraging area for migrating and wintering bald eagles but in recent years golden eagles have been observed foraging and spending at least part of the winter at Flirt Hill.

Winter searches for saw-whet owls have been fruitless to this point. However long-eared owls have been found in Southbury, Brookfield and Easton. White-footed mice have been observed to be plentiful as they can be seen scurrying underfoot, peaking out of nests built in old warbler nests, peeking out of bluebird boxes and occupying kestrel nest boxes.

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Raptor Banding Activities -2004

Lawrence B. Fischer Jr.
Federal Permit # 2149-B
State Permit # 0006009

January thru March

Saw-whet owls were for the third winter, numerous throughout the study area in Western CT. Most sites harboring owls had two or more individuals throughout the period. The highest concentration of Saw-whet owls in the study area was once again on BHC properties (see last years report) in the Aspetuck River Valley. Fourteen owls were found in the study area and of these eleven were caught, banded and released. Interestingly all but one owl, a hatch year male, were females with a high percentage of those birds being in their third winter or older.

Quinnipiac River State Park was checked for saw-whet owls in March and only one bird was found, caught, banded and released. Based on pellets found, it was apparent that there had been very little owl activity through the winter. A section of pines at the very northern end of the park was surveyed for the first time. No owls were seen, but it was obvious from pellet accumulations that this grove of white pines had been used extensively by small owls of unknown species.

Once again, searches for great horned nests in the study area proved fruitless with one exception. A successful nest of one owlet was found in an old red-tail nest in woodland adjacent to the Southbury Training School Farm (STSF) property.

Three ~~long-eared owls~~ were observed occasionally roosting in a hemlock grove along the entrance road near the entrance to the Ralph C. Waldo State Park in Southbury on Purchase Brook Road. Also in Southbury at the STSF, 3-4 long-eared owls were observed throughout the winter in a cedar grove along the eastern edge of a meadow on the eastern edge of the property. In April an owl, presumably a male, was exhibiting territorial defense during a daytime visit. On a visit a week later, an owl was observed flying from a partially constructed nest in a tall cedar tree. The site was again visited in May and the nest was taken over by common crows. One owl was seen but no other nest was found. After that no evidence of owls or nesting was detected.

~ 073° 16' 30"
X 41° 30' 8"

April thru June

Banding of migrating American kestrels at the Aspetuck Valley Orchard on Flirt Hill in Easton began at the end of March and continued to early May. The migration peaked in the middle of April as is typical. On nine (9) visits a total of twenty-seven (27) kestrels were caught. The AVO continues to be a significant foraging/migration staging area for both Spring and Fall migrating kestrels. Many more individuals were seen than were banded. Banded birds represent about one tenth of individuals seen. Of special note was an extremely erythristic female that was seen but not banded. Nest boxes for American kestrels were used at Sunny Valley Farm (TNC), Wewauka Brook Farm (TNC), and Flirt Hill (BHC) (see enclosed reports). A nest box at STSF (State of CT) was occupied briefly but abandoned before eggs were laid.

~ 073° 16' 59" X 41° 30' 6"

Twelve (12) former nesting territories of Cooper's hawks were surveyed. Breeding was confirmed at six (6) sites. One (1) of the six active sites was new to the study area. Banding was done at five (5) of the sites (see enclosed forms). At the sixth site permission to access the property was denied and the outcome of the nest was not determined. This pair formerly nested in the Ralph C. Waldo State Park.

The resident Red-tailed hawk population continues to decline and that is likely due to continued housing development. At the same time the red-shouldered hawk population appears to continue to increase. The red-shouldered hawk forages over a significantly smaller area than the red-tailed hawk and the red-shouldered hawk is much less disturbed by human activity in the vicinity of its nest. One active nest was observed in a yard in Southbury. No attempt was made to band the young.

Three recently occupied and one formerly occupied nest woods of northern goshawks were surveyed. Only one active nest was found. This nest woods is located at the northern end of the Saugatuck Reservoir in Redding. This nest failed from unknown causes.

Several barred owl nests were found but all failed and the cool wet spring may have been the cause.

September thru November

Migration banding/counting began at the AVO on Flirt Hill in Easton on September 13th and ended on November 14th. Banding/counting was done on ten (10) days. A dramatic change in mowing practices appeared to have a negative impact on foraging raptors. In the past a gradual sectional mowing began in the middle of the summer and ended in late October. This practice produced a patchwork of different grass lengths and habitats for prey species. This past fall a single mowing was done at the middle of October and created a mono culture of short grass. In the past Northern harriers stopping over to hunt, typically spent several hours to all day foraging. Last fall they were observed to make a single unsuccessful foraging pass then leave the AVO. American kestrel captures were way down for the same reason. Foraging was poor and the birds moved through quickly. It remains to be seen how northward migrating American kestrels will behave in the spring. Raptor observations and banding have been going on at this site for twenty (20) years. The site is outside the coastal migration corridor yet attracts many raptors because it is prime foraging habitat. Many raptors are seen coming in from the south rather than the northeast as they change course to stopover and hunt. **THIS AREA NEEDS TO BE RECOGNIZED AS AN IMPORTANT FORAGING AREA FOR MIGRATING RAPTORS AND MANAGEMENT/MOWING PRACTICES NEED TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE.**

November thru December

Preliminary searches for saw-whet owls would indicate the owls will be very scarce in the study area this winter (04/05).

Wintering red-tailed hawk numbers in the study area are considerably lower than last winter. Red-shouldered hawks wintering in the study area, while no where near the number of red-tails, are none the less significantly higher than in past years. Most birds being observed are adults and may represent the growing resident population.

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