

Citizen Science Programs

Wildlife Monitoring Program

The Center at Pomfret has an extensive Citizen Science Program. In 2009, a total of 111 trained Citizen Scientists contributed 808 volunteer hours to our 5 active projects, described below. We welcome volunteers from northeast Connecticut and beyond to participate in all of our projects. Training sessions are held at the Center at Pomfret, unless otherwise noted. To register for the training sessions or the projects, or for more information, contact Project Coordinator Paula Coughlin at 860-928-4948, or pcoughlin@ctaudubon.org. (Registration is required for the training sessions and projects. Field work dates are subject to change due to weather.)

I. Rapid Bioassessment Training for Volunteers

Did you know that aquatic insects are indicators of the health of a stream? Many of us recognize these fascinating insects only during their brief time as flying adults (dragonflies, mayflies, stoneflies, and the like), but the early stages of their lives are aquatic. This rapid assessment of stream water quality provides valuable data to the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection and local conservation groups. (Visit the DEP website to view data from past years.)

In the late summer and early fall of 2011, we will offer RB volunteer training. Come dressed to muck about in the streams; we'll provide waders and nets and teach you how to do a stream assessment based on the insects we catch. Our RB volunteer data collection field trips (in streams in Woodstock, Pomfret, and Canterbury) will take place in September and October 2011.

II. Mammal Monitoring Projects in 2011-2012

Have fun hiking local forests, fields, and wetlands, while learning to recognize signs of wildlife in the Mammal Monitoring Project. Hike with program leaders Paula Coughlin and Fran Baranski to explore habitats and learn how to interpret tracks and signs of mammals, including bobcat, moose, river otter, fisher, mink, and black bear. We'll find tracks, scat, and territorial and feeding signs that tell us about the comings and goings of our local wildlife. Winter 2011-2012 marks the third season of the Canterbury Mammal Monitoring Project, a partnership with the Canterbury Public Library and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The 2010 season, 11 volunteers contributed a total for 156 hours to the Canterbury project. This year, we plan to designate a study site in Canterbury for our newly-trained volunteers to monitor. We welcome volunteers from Canterbury and surrounding towns.

Our trained Citizen Science volunteers monitor sites in Willington, Eastford, and Woodstock quarterly to document the presence of large mammals and collect data important to local land-use decisions.

We offer three levels of Mammal Monitoring Volunteer involvement:

1. Backyard Tracker, which requires 10-15 hours of participation.
2. Bafflin Tracker, which requires 20 hours of participation and trains volunteers to document mammals at the Bafflin Sanctuary.
3. Volunteer Mammal Monitor, which requires 50 hours of training and prepares volunteers to monitor a study site.

Volunteers can move from one level to another, as their interest and schedule allow.

You can train to become a wildlife monitor by attending training hikes that suit your schedule throughout the seasons. Upcoming training hikes will be posted on the Pomfret webpage.

III. Vernal Pool Inventory

Vernal pools are small temporary bodies of water that are critical breeding habitats for many amphibians and need protection. You may have a vernal pool in your backyard. There are many ways to get involved. You can report the location of a vernal pool, document vernal pools as a trained citizen scientist, or learn how your town can begin its own vernal pool inventory using our model. Vernal pool season goes by quickly, so don't miss the fun. On Friday and Saturday mornings in April and May, our trained volunteers document vernal pools in Canterbury, Pomfret, and Woodstock. We tramp through the woods, listening for wood frogs and counting amphibian egg masses. We also gather reports from residents of vernal pool locations in the three towns. The data we gather are transferred to a map to help agencies and conservation groups involved in land use decisions.

IV. Canterbury Grassland Habitat Survey

Did you hear a meadowlark this spring or see a kestrel hunting in a nearby field? Maybe you noticed an 'LBJ' (little brown job) with a yellowish eyebrow stripe in the grass – it could have been a Savannah sparrow. These are just a few of the grassland bird species whose numbers have dwindled as grassland habitat disappears. We launched this project in 2009, participated in 2010, and are planning to run it again in 2011. In June and July, our trained volunteers will look and listen for breeding grassland birds.

V. Stream Walk Project

In June, July, and August, trained volunteers join Project Coordinator Paula Coughlin on field trips to collect data, or work on selected stream segments on their own schedule, to contribute to stream conservation efforts in the Quinebaug River watershed. In one 3-hour session, we train volunteers how to report the physical characteristics of streams: depth, vegetation, and condition of the streambed.