



Endangered sedge wrens find a home in Pomfret

By John Penney

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POMFRET — In late June, Andy Rzeznikiewicz was walking through a slice of land on the Connecticut Audubon property in Pomfret when a bird caught his eye.

“It wasn’t the usual song or chipping sparrow,” said Rzeznikiewicz, the Audubon group’s Eastern Connecticut sanctuary manager. “But it was in an interesting spot in the Bafflin Sanctuary and I had a couple of hunches. Then, I heard it singing and boom; I knew it was a male sedge wren. I couldn’t believe it.”

It was the first reported sighting this year of a sedge wren in Connecticut, a small, endangered bird that rarely nests in the state.

“I called our group’s president and he could hear the bird singing through my phone,” Rzeznikiewicz said. “I went back out and saw the male foraging and singing – only the males sing. A couple days later I saw the female, whose babies must have hatched, flying back and forth cleaning the nesting area and bringing back food.”

Rzeznikiewicz also saw the male moving to a second suspected nesting site across the street from the first field. Soon after, the Pomfret group decided to let the public in on the find.

“The nesting area was clearly visible from an observation area and there was no danger in disturbing the birds,” Rzeznikiewicz said. “The birds drew in hundreds of people from all over the state and beyond. One older gentleman said he’d seen 280 birds in Connecticut, but never a sedge wren.”

In addition to being endangered in Connecticut, the sedge wren is listed as endangered in Massachusetts and threatened in New York.

At a glance

What: Connecticut Audubon Society Center at Pomfret

Where: 218 Day Road, Pomfret Center

Hours: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday-Friday; noon to 4 p.m., Saturday and Sunday

Contact: (860) 928-4948; www.ctaudubon.org/pomfret-home

The Connecticut Audubon has been managing the 700-acre Bafflin Sanctuary specifically for birds like the sedge wrens, though it took some work to make the space more attractive to the grassland nesting birds.

“The field where the birds were found nesting used to be full of wildflowers, shrubbery and other woody vegetation,” Rzeznikiewicz said. “Three years ago, a local farmer came out and killed off the woody stuff, plowed it and replanted it with grasses and here we are seeing these birds now. I think this shows how that how we manage this property makes a big difference.”

Woodstock resident Jorie Hunken, an avid bird watcher and member of the New Roxbury Land Trust, said she was particularly impressed with the sanctuary’s land management skills that made the area attractive to the rare wrens.

“They made these simple changes and suddenly you have a habitat for several birds,” she said. “The sedge wrens are the big star that people are focusing on, but it’s the work that was done out there that makes the area attractive to a host of insects, animals and plants.”

Unlike many other species, sedge wrens are summer nesters and the migratory birds are expected to fly off by the end of the season.

“There’s no guarantee they’ll be back,” Rzeznikiewicz said. “But the hope is they’ll use the area for three or four years and build up a population. We’re still learning their habits and will likely adjust some part of the area to keep it open.”