



Shawn O'Sullivan Photos



Members of the Sasqua Garden Club of Southport will be spearheading the landscape restoration of the grounds at Connecticut Audubon Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary. Seated are June Eichbaum, Eliz Bates, Sarah Essig, Peggy Stuart and Beth Rhame. Standing are Sharon Blackburn, Linda Tors and Jane Cary.

# Audubon getting centennial facelift

By Shawn O'Sullivan  
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Connecticut Audubon's Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary honored its past, present and future during its annual Holiday Tea Saturday, Dec. 7.

While honoring staff, supporters and volunteers, the organization gave a look at changes currently in the works.

Located at 314 Unquowa Road, the six acres are only a stone's throw from Fairfield Center, and are home to the bird sanctuary, museum and a caretaker's cottage. The museum is currently closed during renovations, but the sanctuary remains open to visitors.

Throughout the holiday, Director of Operations Nelson North gave preview tours of the bare bones of the museum, which is in the first phase of the planned renovation.

Because the Birdcraft Museum is a National Land-mark, renovations must be done without changing the exterior of the building.

The museum, which celebrates its centennial in 1914, is one of the first private bird sanctuaries in the United States. Founded by Mabel Wright, it was originally planned as a refuge to attract and feed migratory and resident birds. To date, more than 120 bird species have been recorded on its grounds.

"We had to stabilize the museum because of its condition," North said. "We want the museum to last for another hundred years. We had very good architects in J.P. Franzen Associates and our builder, Tyler Luciani. It was a good marriage."

Both companies are from Fairfield. "We stayed local," North said. "We have a wonderful community that supports us and we try to support them when we can."

Much of the external facelift will involve the gardens and fauna surrounding the build-ings. Landscaping will be done in partnership with the Sasqua Garden Club of Southport.

"We are both removing the invasives and planting native species directly around the museum area quarter-acre," Peggy Stuart, civic chairman of the Sasqua Garden Club, said.

The work is an educational opportunity. "We want to show homeowners and visitors what they can do with their own yards," Stuart said. "Birds love it."

Several gardens are planned, she explained: One with a meadow, one that is native wood-land edge, and one that is more formal.

The gardens will be designed to support insects and birds, and will be cared for without pesticides and herbicides, Stuart added.



Jolicia Cheng views a barn owl held by Jillian Maher, teacher/naturalist with Connecticut Audubon, during Birdcraft's annual Holiday Tea.

"Sasqua Garden Club is excited to be a part-ner with the Connecticut Audubon Society in the restoration of the Birdcraft Museum, a little gem in the middle of Fairfield which provides habitat for birds and other wildlife," Jane Cary of the Sasqua Garden Club said. "The museum complements our mission for education and conservation and we feel it is a great asset for the town."

The renovated museum will house a state-of-the-art environmental education center.

"We want to honor the historical significance of Connecticut Audubon and Mabel Osgood Wright," North said. "We have gone out and looked at a lot of museums. It is a work in progress."