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Board of Directors

March 7, 2008

Joyce Hergenhan
Chairman

Environment Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

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Dear Committee Members:

William Cotter
Secretary

The over population of the highly adaptable White-tailed Deer in certain areas of this state have not only dramatically changed the structure of common forest vegetation communities but have had a negative effect on wildlife populations as well, particularly ground nesting birds and those dependant on shrub/scrub habitats.

Barbara Strickland
Chair Emeritus

Selective browsing has reduced or eliminated common woodland shrubs such as Maple-leaved Viburnum and Beaked Hazel. In many areas, little or no vegetation exists below a six foot "browse line". With the understory stripped, shrubland birds are unable to find suitable nesting habitat and are severely impacted.

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Bird species such as Golden-winged Warbler, Brown Thrasher and Yellow-breasted Chat, currently listed as Threatened or Endangered in Connecticut are a few of our songbirds that are impacted by deer over browsing. Over browsed forests have also reduced the populations of Wood Thrush, Hooded Warbler, Eastern Wood Pewee and Eastern Towhee and many other species.

Deer reduction and vegetation change go hand in hand and deer reduction is regarded as the most effective management technique in habitat restoration. The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection currently provides an aggressive, proactive deer management program across the state, but the effectiveness of hunting is limited by a combination of social and political factors. Land use patterns and public safety issues preclude firearms hunting in many parts of Connecticut, and it is these areas where overpopulations of deer are having the most dramatic effect on our songbirds. Public education, the expansion of bow hunting seasons and funding venison processing costs so hunters can afford to donate surplus deer meat to charitable organizations are options that should be considered.

We urge the Committee to consider H.B. 5852 as an important first step in restoring our wildlife communities. Unless there is a significant reduction of deer in those areas by identified by DEP biologists as overpopulated, deer will continue to restructure forest communities and there will be a continual decline in the diversity of birds and other wildlife in our state.

Founded in 1898, Connecticut Audubon Society conserves Connecticut's environment through science-based education and advocacy focused on the state's bird populations and habitats. Working exclusively in the state of Connecticut for over 100 years, Connecticut Audubon Society is an independent organization, not affiliated with any national or governmental group.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Milan G. Bull
Senior Director of Science and
Conservation

