

Stay at Home host first bird walk for seniors on the Valley trail.

By Stephanie Kim

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Around this time of year, about 1,000 people visit the Norwalk River Valley Trail. The 38 miles of trail connecting Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk to Danbury is 10 feet wide and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, making it a popular resource for a large range of people, said NRVT Executive Director Charlie Taney. "We get



an incredibly wide spectrum of people using the trails," Taney said. "We get moms with baby strollers. We get lots of dog walkers, we get runners, we get walkers. We're ADA-compliant; we even get people out here in wheelchairs occasionally."

Last week, Taney led a bird walk for members of Stay at Home in Wilton, a nonprofit organization that helps seniors age in place. With his help, the group of a dozen seniors listened for blue jays, looked for woodpecker holes and enjoyed the outdoors while walking along the Wilton loop of the trail. The weekend before, Taney organized an event for volunteer birdwatchers to identify the maximum number of bird species on a particular day, known as a Big Day in the birding world. Seventeen volunteer birdwatchers came out and explored six sections of the trail and identified 87 species.

"It's such a beautiful day for a walk," said Luisa Kelso, who attended the bird walk on Sept. 21 with her husband, Bob. "We walk a couple of times a week. We go out and walk in the morning, so we like to exercise."

Peter Dodds, president of Stay at Home in Wilton, started the monthly walks last year and incorporated the bird walk for the first time to introduce more seniors to the trail. He invited state Rep. Gail Lavielle, R-Wilton, and Wilton Social Services Director Sarah Heath to engage community leaders. "I began walking on this trail when it was first built and I noticed that mostly young people were using the trail," Dodds said. "I thought that it was a shame that people who've lived in Wilton most of their lives, or for decades — I didn't really see them out on the trails."

Stay at Home in Wilton is part of the Village Movement, which started in Beacon Hill, Mass., in 2003. The nonprofit organization consists of a volunteer group of neighbors who help seniors live more comfortably in Wilton by offering an array of services, from home repairs and household assistance to social activities and rides to and from appointments.

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