



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

<http://hampshirebirdclub.org>

Volume 19, No. 8

April, 2003

PROGRAMS

All programs are held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant St. in Amherst. Should bad weather force a cancellation, it will be announced on WHMP 1400 AM radio.

This Month

Monday, April 7. Tom Litwin retraces the Harriman Expedition of 1899.

One day in March 1899, Edward H. Harriman strode briskly into the office of C. Hart Merriam, chief of the U.S. Biological Survey. Without appointment or introduction, Harriman outlined a grand plan for an expedition along the coast of Alaska. Remarkably, within less than three months, the two men were ready to embark on an ambitious voyage of scientific discovery from Alaska's panhandle to the Bering Strait. A crowd of onlookers cheered the departure of the vessel *George W. Elder* from Seattle on May 31, 1899. Newspapers all over the world featured the story on their front pages.

One hundred twenty-six passengers and crew traveled with Harriman and Merriam. The expedition boasted John Burroughs (the best selling nature writer of the day), and John Muir, the much-admired father of the American conservation movement. With them traveled an eminent assembly of nature artists, geologists, botanists, foresters and zoologists.

The expedition returned with over one hundred trunks of specimens, more than 5000 photographs and colored illustrations, and thirteen volumes of data that took twelve years to compile. The voyage produced a few, major new scientific discoveries - a previously unknown fiord and glacier, for example - but its value as an assessment and survey of an Alaskan environment in flux is unparalleled. The collections included thousands of shellfish, birds and small mammals, and even a small number of large mammal specimens.

The expedition took place when Alaska's patina of pure coastal wilderness was beginning to tarnish from heavy use of its natural resources. In many instances, the expeditioners observed and catalogued the flora and fauna of a pristine, idealized wonderland. Yet the signs of civilization and progress were difficult to ignore. The Harriman Expedition chronicled an Alaska on the cusp of inevitable - and, in some instances, devastating - change to the environment. It provided a benchmark by which we can assess one hundred years of change along the Alaskan Coast.

The Harriman Alaska Expedition Retraced.

On July 22, 2001 over two dozen scientists, artists, and writers left Prince Rupert, British Columbia on the Harriman Expedition Retraced. The *Clipper Odyssey* followed Harriman's original route, sailing through the Inside Passage, the Gulf of Alaska, the Aleutian Archipelago, and northward through the Bering Sea. Four weeks later, on August 20, the travelers made their final stop in Nome.

Tom Litwin directed the "Harriman Retraced" expedition in 2001. He is the director of the Clark Science Center at Smith College in Northampton, MA and the founding director of the Smith College Science and Policy Program. His research interests include the relationships between bird populations and ecosystem health.

PROGRAMS (CONTINUED)

Coming Up

May 12: Kenn Kaufmann speaks on “*Migration from the Bird’s Point of View.*”

June 9: Geoff LeBaron sails to the *Galapagos*.

FIELD TRIPS

The harbingers of Spring are here! Male Red-winged Blackbirds are perched on every available vantage point in our turgid wetlands, their little bodies thrumming with hormonal urgency. Waterfowl in full breeding plumage glint like jewels in the drab coves and ox-bows of the Connecticut, en route to the vast breeding grounds north of the border. Now is the time to dust off the gear and get out there. They are all coming! Good luck! **WILDWOOD WALKS, see page 6**

Reports

For **Harvey’s mid week sweep of the valley on Wednesday, March 12**, the river was still frozen but the group did find early Red-winged Blackbirds. There were two Bald Eagles on the nest next to the Mass Turnpike in West Springfield, along with Hooded Mergansers and Ringed-necked Ducks. Two **Red-necked Grebes** and a Wood Duck also found space amongst the ice floes of the Connecticut.



Dense fog blanketing the landscape during **Al Richard’s March 22 tour** of likely waterfowl spots attested to the rapid demise of our thick snow pack. At the Rod and Gun Club there were over **60 Ring-necked Ducks**, more than 30 Common Mergansers, two pairs of Hooded Mergansers and a Common Goldeneye. At the Migratory Way Canal there were more Common Goldeneye, and a **Pied-billed Grebe**. At Great Pond in Hatfield, there were numerous Wood Ducks, lots of Black Ducks and a Carolina Wren, as well as several species of Sparrows. On the way to the Sugarloaf, the group encountered Bluebirds (always welcome). Near the Sugarloaf bridge there was an early **Phoebe**, and a **Peregrine Falcon** hung around the cliffs below the summit.

Coming Trips

Wednesday, April 9. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) will look for ducks and anything else worth seeing. Meet at 7:30 a.m. on the corner of Route 116 and Bay Road, Amherst, across from Atkin’s Farms. Call Harvey for more information.

Saturday, April 12. Ashley Reservoir: early warblers. Half day. Bob Bieda (413-527-2623) will beat the bushes for Pine- and Palm Warblers, Broad-winged Hawk, Osprey, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Meet at the Holiday Inn parking lot, Exit 15 (“Holyoke Mall”) off Route 91 at 7 a.m. Call to register.

Saturday, April 19. Leisurely and Local. Half day. Shawn Smolen-Morton (413-863-4569) will see what’s on or near the water between Barton’s Cove and Great Pond in Hatfield. Meet at Family Dollar/Food City parking lot at 7 a.m. Call him to ask where that is.

Saturday, April 26. More migrants. Half day. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for her signature waterthrushes, in addition to other warblers and neotropical migrants. She’ll start at Look Park in Northampton. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the JFK Middle School on Bridge Road in Northampton. Call for further details.

Saturday, May 10. The Quabbin Reservoir: Spring migration. All day. Tom Gagnon (413-584-6353) will go in search of neotropical migrants at this regional hot spot. You must be a member of the Hampshire Bird Club to go on this trip. Register by calling Tom. Quabbin may not be open when the trip is scheduled.

HELP WANTED/HELP FOUND

At HBC there have always been folks willing to step forward to keep the diverse activities of the club running. In this vein, please welcome the new proprietors of the **HBC Boutique: Janice Doppler and Peg Army**. Peg and Janice will be charged with making sure we are suitably attired in t- and sweat-shirts, and that we are never short of field guide labels and checklists when we most need them. **Sue Fletcher** still has a short time with us before leaving the area for points south, so don't miss any opportunity to thank her for her years of sterling service to the club.

HELP KEEP BIRDERS' TUMMIES HAPPY

Fact: Birders LOVE to eat

Fact: Birders expect to find food on the table at HBC meetings.

Fact: Someone needs to be sure that the expected food IS on the expected table.

Sally Venman has been that someone for the past two years and she is lonely. She wants company. Many, many people express their willingness to provide goodies for meetings on the membership form, so that is not a problem. Sally would like help in contacting these willing people. She would also welcome help in set up and clean up.

If this sounds like just the HBC job you have been waiting for, call Sally at (413) 549-1098 or email her at sgvenman@attbi.com.

CONSERVATION

The club has, for some years, contributed to bird surveys conducted region-or nation-wide by several research organizations, including Cornell. We are now looking at the possibility of establishing one or two **monitoring programs** under our own auspices.

The **East Leverett Meadow** is a local area of considerable conservation value. A group of local birders have been monitoring the bird populations and vegetation of this area for several years, and have already published the results in a form accessible to land owners and management authorities. To build from this basis could result in a really valuable long-term study. Protocols for monitoring the bird fauna include stopping at set locations for set lengths of time, recording species seen and heard, and sending data to a compiler. You might choose to be involved at any time of the year. The more people are involved, the better the coverage is likely to be. The results will likely be shared with the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust.

Bull Hill is also an area of critical habitat for birds. Many of us have birded there over the years, but there is no lasting record of bird populations. Given interested participants, the club would like to look into establishing a long-term monitoring protocol similar to that in place at East Leverett Meadow.

For further information, please contact Mary Alice Wilson (413-548-9078, mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu).

*If you are interested in conservation of birds and birding habitat, you may like to share information and effort with others in the club. **Anne Lombard** is our **Conservation Chair**. She is looking for ideas on how we can contribute to the conservation of species in our area. Contact her at (413) 586 7509, or aslombard@attbi.com*

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee will present a slate of nominations to the membership at the April meeting, in preparation for a vote at the Annual General Meeting in May. If you, or someone you know has/have an interest in serving on the Board, please contact one of the committee:

Scott Sumner (413 253 5983; ssurner@aol.com)

Sue Emerson (413 584 6736; wle33@aol.com)

Mary Alice Wilson (413 548 9078; mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu)

HITCHCOCK CENTER PROGRAMS

BIOTHON

The Hitchcock Center's fundraising Biothon will be held Friday, May 16 and Saturday, May 17. Anyone wanting either to participate or to pledge a per-species donation should contact David Spector (413-323-4885; spectord@ccsu.edu).

SPRING BIRDING CLASS: Scott Sumner, Birder

Wednesdays, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. on March 26, April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, May 7, 14

Field Trips(10): Saturdays, 7:00 – Noon on March 29 - June 7 (except May 24)

FOOD AND LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCTS: Annie Cheatham, and Ann Carter(CISA)

Sunday, April 13, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

SWIMMING WITH SALMON AND FLYING WITH EAGLES: Mickey Novak, Ralph Taylor

Tuesday, April 15, 7:00 p.m. at the Hitchcock Center, Amherst.

ART AND SCIENCE IN ANTARCTICA: Bob Marstall

Monday, April 28, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

2ND ANNUAL NATIVE PLANT SALE

Saturday, May 3, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Held on the Amherst Common (rain location: Hitchcock Center)

THE SPELL OF THE SENSUOUS: David Abram,

Wednesday, May 7, 7:30 p.m. Stirn Auditorium in Mead Art Museum, Amherst College

Reception at Hitchcock Center 3:30-5:30 p.m.

FOXES AND COYOTES: Alan Edmond

Saturday, May 10, 1:00-5:00 p.m.

COMPOSTING TOILETS: Tad Montgomery, Engineer

Sunday, May 11, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

For details and registration for all Hitchcock programs, please contact the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, 525 South Pleasant St., Amherst MA 01002. Telephone (413) 256 6006, or on the web at

www.hitchcockcenter.org.

ARCADIA PROGRAMS

Bird-A-Thon

Massachusetts Audubon Bird-A-Thon will take place between 6 PM on **Friday, May 16** and 6 PM on **Saturday, May 17**. This year the Connecticut River Valley Sanctuaries will have a team. If you are interested in participating, please contact Arcadia.

The Dance of the American Woodcock: Patti Steinman
Friday, April 11, 5:30 – 8:00 p.m. Fee.

Big Trees and Old Growth: Bob Everett, Old Growth Expert
Saturday, May 3, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Fee

Spring Hike on the Appalachian Trail to Finerty Pond: Aimee Galinas, Naturalist
Sunday, April 27, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Fee

Floodplain Ecology Canoe Trip: Aimee Galinas, Naturalist
Sunday, May 4, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. Fee

Beavers: Mike Callahan (Beaver Solutions)
Wednesday, May 7, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Laughing Brook Sanctuary

Early Morning Bird Walks: Guest Leaders: Saturdays, 7:00 – 8:30 a.m.
April 26 (Arcadia); May 3 (Graves Farm); May 10 (M.S. Lynes); May 17 (Arcadia); May 24 (Graves Farm);
May 31 (M.S. Lynes).
May 12, 13, 14, 15, 16: 6:30 – 8:30 a.m. Meet at Arcadia.

*For more details of these, and other programs go to www.massaudubon.org (select “Sanctuaries”, then “Choose a Sanctuary: Arcadia”) or call the sanctuary. To register for programs contact **Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary**, 127 Combs Rd., Easthampton MA 01027 Telephone **(413) 584-3009**.*

BERKSHIRE NATURAL HISTORY TOURS

Birding Southeastern Arizona: Rene Laubach and Simon Geary
May 3-11, 2003. Pre-registration required, space limited.

Puffins and Peatlands: Exploring the Upper Coast of Maine. Gail Howe and Laura Tate Beltran
June 20-23, 2003. Pre-registration required, fee, space limited.

For further details and/or to register for **Berkshire Natural History Tours**, and other Mass Audubon programs to the west of us, contact the **Berkshire Sanctuaries** at 472 West Mountain Rd., Lenox MA 01240. Phone **(413) 637 0499**; berkshires@massaudubon.org

LIBRARY

HBC has a substantial library at the Hitchcock Center in Amherst. **Hours** are 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday through Friday, and 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Items can be signed out and borrowed for a period of up to one month, or longer by arrangement. **Henry Lappen** is happy to bring items to meetings, given a few days notice! Call him at **(413) 549 3722**.

WILDWOOD WALKS

Not far (but just far enough) from the keg- and furniture-strewn wasteland of the frat district, lies a gentle, wooded rise, upon which lies the Wildwood Cemetery. Migrating songbirds are drawn to this little island, and each year the club hosts morning bird walks here during May, each led by a club member. This year walks are scheduled for the following:

Tuesdays: May 6, 13, and 20

Thursdays: May 9, 16, and 22

Each begins at **6:30 a.m.** and runs until **8:30 a.m.**, though of course you may freelance a little longer if you wish. Meet the leader at the main entrance. Make sure you park in the designated parking areas and not on the lawn. Remain on the roads and paths in the cemetery, and respect the solemnity of the site.

Please note: there are no walks in the last week of the month. Thank you.

HBC DIRECTORY

April, 2002

President: Mary Alice Wilson: (413) 548 9078; mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu

VP/Program Chair: Geoff LeBaron; (413) 268 9281; glebaron@attbi.com

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BIRDS IN THE NEWS

Not From Around Here, Then?

Most of us are familiar with the havoc wreaked by species introduced outside their natural ranges. In the United States for example, there are now species such as the Green Tree Snake, which arrived in Hawaii by military aircraft, and now threatens much of the Hawaiian bird fauna through egg and nestling predation. Closer to home, cavity-nesting birds are severely threatened by enormous populations of adaptable and aggressive European Starlings, which in many regions monopolize available nesting cavities. More subtly, the genetic integrity of American Black Ducks is threatened by interbreeding with the introduced Mallard.

Unfortunately, it goes both ways. North American Ruddy Ducks were introduced into reserves in Great Britain (ironically by waterfowl enthusiasts), from whence they promptly escaped. By the late 1980s they had saturated available habitat in Britain, and males were regularly showing up in Western Europe. Being American, and therefore indecently brash, the interlopers are more attractive to females of the rare and endangered White-headed Duck, than White-headed males. The White-headed Duck is consequently severely imperiled.

Such is the concern in Spain, that the military are instructed to shoot any and all Ruddy Ducks on sight. Recently, under pressure from Spain, English wildlife authorities have proposed a program to eliminate the entire English population, estimated at some 6,000 individuals. Needless to say, this prospect has outraged many concerned with the humane treatment of animals. When it comes to wildlife, the balance of trade should be set at zero.

Oldest Known Bird

If I remember my college zoology classes at all, the mortality curves for most species of birds are rather different from those of other animals. For most animal species, large numbers of very young animals die, and there is another period of increased mortality when individuals reach "old age." By contrast, the mortality rate for most birds, after getting through the perils of youth, is remarkably constant. There is no increase that might be attributed to "old age". From this, ornithologists conclude that predation, weather, starvation and accident claim almost all birds before they can approach their physiological life span.

The limits of longevity, such as they may be, have just been pushed back a little for at least one species. In 2002, U.S. Geological Survey scientist Chandler Robbins banded a nesting albatross (no mention of the species) on Midway Island in the Pacific, and discovered that he had banded the same bird there in 1956. Since, in 1956, the bird had just laid an egg, it must have been at least five years old then. Hence the minimum age of this bird in 2002 was 51 years. It is the oldest known wild bird. Incidentally, the albatross was brooding a healthy chick at the time of the most recent encounter.

MISCELLANEOUS

Internet Birding

For those interested in migration, a site called www.badbirdz.com shows the National Weather Service NEXRAD radar readings from Key West, Florida, for each night during the Spring when a noticeable signature from migrating birds is detected. Birds leaving Cuba show up as a pronounced shadow on the radar image. The most recent heavy flight, at the time I write this, occurred on March 19.

For eagle fans, the Barton's Cove nest is shown at <http://www.nu.com/eagles/>. Links to both sites are also available from the Hampshire Bird Club website: www.hampshirebirdclub.org



That's it for this month.

Until next time, talk softly and carry a big scope!

David Peake-Jones

Editor

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