



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 21, No. 4

## December, 2004

Hot on the heels of a major report in Britain documenting widespread catastrophic decline in the numbers of birds across a wide range of habitats, comes a smaller, far less heralded piece of news from British grasslands. Birds such as the Grey Partridge (I am using the English spelling, because I can, and because I miss it), Yellow Wagtail, Reed Bunting, and Corn Bunting use open grasslands and cereal cropping areas, and were found widely across Eurasia. These species have virtually disappeared from Britain due to the intensification of farming practices involving grasslands. Where once farmers harvested hay, (often only once per year, toward the end of the growing season), most now fertilize their fields intensively, often for silage, which may be harvested up to four times in a single year. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds is working with the British Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to create a series of demonstration farms, modeling methods farmers can use to maintain their productivity and income with reduced impacts on grassland birds. In addition, the RSPB is helping dairy farmers, in particular, apply for DEFRA grants in order to implement such practices.

It is probably worth remembering, in a nation like this one, where we tend to think of conservation largely in terms of land set-asides, that this part of the country, at least, becomes more like Britain every day. We probably won't have the luxury of being able to afford many more large tracts of protected land in the north-east. Instead, the local survival of the Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, and others probably depends more on establishing collaborations with the stewards of multiple use grasslands. Dare I say it, with the boreal forest on the brink of greater exploitation for timber, the idea of paying resource harvesters to tread more gently is vital to many other groups of birds as well.

## PROGRAMS

*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 December 13 at 7:30 PM**

#### Members Meeting

Perhaps the most important item on the agenda is the Christmas count. Time is allocated for team leaders to meet with their respective teams and plan the count. If you haven't yet found a group for the count, please see "Christmas Count" later in this edition.

There is also a program, of sorts. The featured speaker is you! This is a chance for us to kick back and share natural history experiences from the entire season through slides and (brief) narratives. Birding tales are, of course, most relevant, but any adventures in the natural world are probably of interest to others in the club. We ask that you plan to present no more than twenty slides per person, since there may be many others who wish to present! Hope to see you there!

### Coming Up

**January 10. Mark Lynch and Sheila Carroll.** "Birds of the Blackstone National Corridor"

**February 14. Daniel J. Klem.** "Glass: A Bird Conservation Issue"

**March 14. Margaret Rubega.** "Eating at the Interface of Water and Land"

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

I have only one abiding recollection of the trip to **Dead Creek** on **Saturday, October 23**, under the tutelage of **Mike Locher**. Well, actually, make that two abiding recollections. The first is of our bemused carload of would-be goose watchers wondering why Mike was adding half an hour to the trip. When we got to Dead Creek...make that three abiding memories of the trip. I now recall that the porta-potty at the Addison General Store smelled worse than on any previous trip. At the traditional viewing area we were disappointed to find that, owing to this year's crop rotation, the geese this year were far from the road in a ploughed field to which there was no access. With the exception of a few small groups of geese in aerial transit, we did not get close looks at them.

Now we come to what was originally my only abiding memory of the trip. Scanning across the landscape, we saw a powerful, dark raptor quartering over one of the shallow gullies which are common at Dead Creek, to the consternation of all birds present. Immediately the cry of "falcon" went up. This was followed by a number of exuberant taxonomic hypotheses, engendered by size and darkness of the bird. "(Expletive deleted) HUGE" numbered amongst these extravagant outbursts. The hallowed word "Gyr Falcon" was muttered conspiratorially by at least one who knew better than to dream. As we watched, the falcon put up a shorebird which, having eluded the initial attack, flew off at great pace. To our great surprise, the falcon pursued it for almost a mile across country, in almost straight flight, painstakingly gaining on the smaller bird until contact was imminent, only to have its quarry barrel roll away from immediate harm. Again and again this desperate pursuit was repeated: the falcon slowly overhauling the shorebird in a straight line, only to lose its hard-won momentum in maneuvers at close quarters. Finally, with at least this observer puncturing his palms with his fingernails, the shorebird dived into some unseen but, apparently, safe refuge, leaving the exhausted falcon to rest in a tree for at least half an hour. In spite of this hitherto unheard-of hunting technique, we eventually concluded that our bird was an unusually large, immature female **Peregrine Falcon**.

Oh, and now make that four abiding memories of the Dead Creek trip. Perched daintily, and unmistakably in the tippy-tops of a small tree in front of us was a gorgeous **Rough-legged Hawk**, of which we saw two for the day. Oh, and abiding memory number five would have to be our umpteenth **Northern Harrier** at extremely close range on a post, looking for all the world like an owl with its beautiful cinnamon facial disc turned to peruse us. Hmm, now that I think of it there were a great many more things to remember than I remembered..... Funny, that!

David Peake-Jones



**Sunday, November 7** dawned just as you would want it to if going on a donut eating expedition to the **Berkshire Lakes** under the guise of a fall waterfowl trip. **Tom Gagnon** led thirteen birders on this annual outing. The weather was balmy and still. The donuts would be basking unsuspectingly with their sugar and cinnamon sunscreen liberally applied.

We did, of course, go through the required pretense, but the weather was just too nice for many ducks. Cleveland Reservoir showed a distant Surf Scoter and a Common Loon. The newly manicured northern end of Cheshire Lake concealed two **American Coot** and a tricky female **Northern Pintail** amongst the Mallards, and a **Brant** wandering incongruously on an impeccably manicured lawn on the far shore. Thirty one **Ring-necked Ducks** lurked at the southern end of Lake Cheshire with another five Pintail, nine **Green-winged Teal** and a **Pied-billed Grebe**. From Reilly's Pub on Rt 7, we scanned Onota Lake and found, amongst other things, four **American Wigeon**, another Pied-billed Grebe, and another Coot. Against the glare of the falling sun at the far end of Mudd Pond were at least 450 Ring-necked Ducks, with a few **Ruddy Ducks** thrown in for sport. There were seven **Common Goldeneye** on Richmond Pond.

The donuts at Bartletts, as predicted, put up no resistance whatsoever. A fine day was had by all.

David Peake-Jones (Reports continue→)

**Tom Gagnon** led a group to the eastern shores of the **Quabbin** on **November 21**. He reports 27 Common Loons, 19 Horned Grebes, one (1) Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and one (1) Northern Goshawk. The trip count was 40 species of birds and five (5) mammals.



On **Friday, November 26**, eight stuffed turkeys turkey-stuffed HBC members under the guidance of **Bob Bieda** left Sunderland at 5:30 am for the annual **Turkey Trot** to the **north shore** of Massachusetts. Our main goal was Snowy Owl since it was reported and would be a life bird and a state bird for people in our group. With this in mind we started at Salisbury State Park and worked south. It was bright and brisk. No Snowy at Salisbury but lots of **Red-throated Loons** in the harbor and **Gannets** right overhead. At Plum Island we had a nice assortment of ducks. We were talking birds with a couple who casually mentioned they had just had a Snowy Owl at the wardens (a place we had just left). Back we went and there we all got nice scope looks at a **Snowy Owl** perched on a log on the other side of the channel. Further down the island we saw a **Northern Shrike**.

At Andrew's Point on Cape Anne we were surprised by the amount of seabird activity considering the clear skies and west wind. We saw several **Black Guillemots** and groups of **Razorbills** working together with Kittiwakes at their fishing. We even had an adult **Black-legged Kittiwake** perched on the rocks right in front of us. A sight none of us can remember seeing in Massachusetts before. **Harlequin Ducks** and all three scoters were close and in great light.

As usual we balanced yesterday's turkey with seafood today. (That would be "Surf and Turk" (ed.))

Bob Bieda

### Coming Trips

**Wednesday, December 8. Mid-week Sweep of the Connecticut River Valley.** Local birding at its best with Harvey Allen. The group generally meets across the road from the Atkins Farms on Rt. 116 in South Amherst. Call Harvey (253 7963) for the meeting time.

**Sunday, December 19. Northampton Christmas Count.** I wanna say this is mandatory if you call yourself a birder.

**Saturday, January 1. Quabbin Christmas Count.** I wanna say this is mandatory if you call yourself a serious birder.

**Saturday, January 8. Plum Island and Cape Anne.** Bay ducks, sea ducks, Snowy Owls, winter raptors. Almost anything is possible. Call Bob Bieda (527 2623: [blbieda@charter.net](mailto:blbieda@charter.net)) to register and for meeting details.

### New Field Trip Ideas?

*The Winter-Late Summer Field Trip Schedule will be published in the January edition.* Wouldn't it be great to have some new offerings? In order for this to happen, dear birder, you must cast off your long-treasured misconception that leadership has anything to do with encyclopedic bird knowledge, or breathtaking organizational skills. If you know a neat place to see birds, and you can get a bunch of more-or-less competent people there and back safely, then you can be a field trip leader. **Just cast off the fear and do it!**

*The Field Trip Chair, Michael Locher-413-585-5864, [mloch@yaho.com](mailto:mloch@yaho.com) is always looking for new trip ideas and leaders. Help him to help you. Make contact!*

With the giving season upon us, it is pertinent to note that **Backyard Birds** (on Strong St. in Northampton) offers a wide range of birding books, audio resources, gifts, feeders, and other paraphernalia. They also offer a **10% discount to Hampshire Bird Club Members**. Remember, when you shop locally, your money stays here!

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

*If you have not yet made arrangements to take part this year, it is not too late! Simply contact one of the two coordinators listed below, and they will try to find a spot for you!*

The **Northampton Christmas Count** (in its 71st year) will be held on **Sunday, December 19**. Contact Jan Ortiz (413) 549-1768 [jtortiz@aol.com](mailto:jtortiz@aol.com) or Mary Alice Wilson (413) 548-9078 [mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu](mailto:mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu).

The **Quabbin Count** will be held on **Saturday, January 1**. Contact Scott Sumner (413) 253-5999 [ssurner@aol.com](mailto:ssurner@aol.com).

### **Food Donations Needed for Christmas Bird Count "Pot Luck" Meal !!**

We are in need of food (hot or cold dishes) for the Christmas Count Potluck. The potluck starts at 4:30 PM before the 6:00 PM compilation. After a rigorous day (and in some cases night) in the field, there is no better way to cap-off a successful bird count than by partaking in a good, hot meal. Your help is needed in order to make this an evening to be remembered!

*Please contact Sue Emerson (413/584-6736; [spe33@hotmail.com](mailto:spe33@hotmail.com)) before December 7 and tell us what you will be bringing. We are seeking hot or cold main dishes, salads, deserts and snack foods (This is an ideal way to test that new recipe you have always been wanting to try-out). Sue will give you drop-off details.*

Thank you, on behalf of all the Christmas Count faithful!

## CONSERVATION

### **Meadows Alert**

As active birders in both of the Northampton meadows, we need to keep aware of current events there:

**East Meadows.** A building has appeared near the airport and other potential builders are waiting in the wings to see what permits are given by the city. Even though the meadows are on the floodplain, land use regulations are vague. A "Save the Meadows" group has begun meeting with a goal of tightening up the regulations governing development. The next meeting is at the *A2Z* store on King Street at 7 pm on December 6. Birders, butterflyers, and other environmentalists who want to see open space conserved in the meadows may want to attend meetings and hearings, which will be coming up in the new year. If you would like to be on the email list to hear about these meetings, call or email Anne Lombard (586-7509) [aslombard@comcast.net](mailto:aslombard@comcast.net)

**West (Arcadia) Meadows.** The Watras parcel of 65 acres has become available for purchase by Mass Audubon and Arcadia is responsible for raising the remaining \$90,000 for the purchase. After this acquisition there will be only a 19-acre in-holding within the grassland restoration area yet to acquire. It would be wonderful if we, who spend time in these meadows, observing both rare and not-so-rare species, could make a significant contribution to this effort. Please send your checks to The Grassland Campaign for Arcadia, 127 Combs Road, Easthampton, MA 01027.

*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@comcast.net](mailto:aslombard@comcast.net)*

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor  
(413) 529 9541  
[newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org)