



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

<http://hampshirebirdclub.org>

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When I heard about the Varied Thrush at Quabbin Tower, and had a day off, I just had to take a look. I got to the tower about 9:45 a.m. to find Harvey and a few others already on station. For the next hour or so, we scanned the edges of the parking lot and the bleak forest for the faintest trace of orange, and watched a growing crowd of birders pull in. I wandered off to the tower itself, surmising that the bird is always where you ain't. This turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. It showed up in the parking lot while I was gone, and promptly left again!

Finally, around noon, while contemplating imminent frostbite, I heard a soft "Chup" that I knew I didn't know. Suddenly there was a flash of orange on the edge of the lot. It was that magical moment when the thing went from an idea to a real bird, impossibly here from the west coast, and somehow staying alive against daunting odds. The bird had gorgeous pastel gray shades on the back and lower flanks, as well as gray scalloping on the upper flanks. Its belly and throat were a delicate orange, divided by a slightly faded dark breast band. The subdued upper parts were highlighted by multiple orange wing bars and primary edges, as well as a striking orange supercilium, trailing away down to the shoulder. It was just a male Varied Thrush, like thousands of others doing what they should, where they should, but I am glad it came to visit us, and I wish it well through the months ahead.

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.

Monday, February 9 at 7:30 p.m.: Don Kroodsma on Birding by Bike

Someday I'd like to..... For me, "someday" arrived during the summer of 2003, when my son and I biked the TransAm trail from coast to coast. We covered ten states: (Virginia, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon) between early May and mid-July. We were on the road for 70 days and covered 4500 miles (nearly 4,000,000 turns of the wheel). And why? To hear this continent sing, to listen to the birds tell their stories every inch of the way (except when it was raining, or hailing, or blowing big time). From the Atlantic to the Pacific, we listened to stories by grebes and geese and owls and goatsuckers and flycatchers and wrens and sparrows and vireos and thrushes and blackbirds and so many more. Come listen to some of their stories, and renew your commitment to make your someday happen sooner rather than later.

Don Kroodsma

Don Kroodsma was a chemistry major at Hope College, and discovered birds during his last semester there. Don attended the University of Michigan field station the following summer, taking "baby birds" and "big birds" courses simultaneously from the famed Sewall Pettingill. Thirty-five years ago, while in graduate school at Oregon State University, a singing wren in his backyard got Don started on what would be a life-long passion: listening to birds. Until recently, he was a professor in the biology department at UMass, but he's now out to pasture, listening full time.

Coming Up

March 8, 2004. Dave King. Golden-cheeked Warblers Wintering in Mexico.

April 19, 2004. Peter Alden. Invasive Plants of New England and their Impacts on Bird Populations.

May 10, 2004. Jan Ortiz. Baffin Island.

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

An unusual embarrassment of riches for the **winter finches** trip organized by **Shirley Hillborn** on **January 17**. We have two trip reports! They agree on some things....The weather was a balmy 10 degrees at the start and at least 20 by mid-day. This qualifies as “sunny and windless” (according to Mary Alice), or it was “cold and windy” (according to Sue). You, dear reader, decide which interpretation you prefer!!

Anyway, we were invited to a wonderful feeder in Northfield where we had excellent looks at a mixed flock of Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins, and American Goldfinch, and enjoyed the usual winter suspects. In Royalston saw more of these hardy types, this time with lots of Tree Sparrows and 4 (I think no more) **Evening Grosbeaks**, (one male and three females). And we got **HOT CHOCOLATE** in the middle of all this. What else could you want?

Sue Emerson and Mary Alice Wilson. Editorial mischief by dpj



Seven hardy souls, including **Harvey Allen**, swept the **Valley** on **Wednesday, January 21**. We braved the East Meadows first in “almost-balmy” weather. There were no field birds or hawks, but a great look at shrub birds at the southwest corner of the meadows, including one male Northern Cardinal that was just getting around to getting its adult/red feathers. The Oxbow was frozen and desolate, but Geoff LeBaron’s feeder in Williamsburg had the usual winter mix plus **Common Redpolls** and a **Pine Siskin**.

Mary Alice Wilson



On **Saturday, January 24**, three of us made our way with **Geoff LeBaron** to Westerly to begin a “boys own” trip along the coast of **Rhode Island**. Passing through Norwich, a third-year Bald Eagle promised well for the day. The weather was brutally cold, with wind-chills close to zero, especially on some of the more exposed beach settings. The birds seemed to understand the insanity of being active in such circumstances better than we did: amongst the more incredible absentees from the trip list was the Blue Jay!

During brief forays on the beaches we did find some of the expected winter ducks in good numbers, especially Common Loons. We found Hooded-, Common-, and Red-breasted Mergansers, and all three species of Scoters. Brant picked their way along some of the ice-sheathed rocky beaches, and there were one or two interesting species such as **Gadwall, American Wigeon, and Ring-necked Duck** in the few areas of open water still available. In thickets such as Ninigret, we found Yellow-rumped Warblers and Hermit Thrushes eking out an existence, and one hardy Carolina Wren responded to pishing in a brambly thicket. Toward late afternoon we came across several superb male **Northern Harriers** coursing over the corn fields, and these birds put on another impressive show at Sachuest Point as sundown approached. The anticipated Purple Sandpipers and Harlequin Ducks on the rocks at the point did not disappoint. Despite the severe loss of prime hunting habitat on the margins of the Sachuest Point reservation, as darkness fell, we were treated to two **Short-eared Owls** hunting over the grasslands right around the visitors center.

Footnote. There is a physiological phenomenon observed in gulls and probably other birds who spend long periods of time dangling their legs in cold water, or standing on ice. Circulation is drastically reduced to the extremities in order to preserve core temperature. Perhaps our bodies were similarly depriving our brains of much needed circulation, or perhaps the pressure of multiple layers around the neck was in play - who knows? But for whatever reasons, this trip featured some of the most tasteless jokes seen since Al Richards in his hey-day. Regretably, owing to my shameless use of the editorial prerogative, none of the conversation from the car during the course of the day shall be revealed in these pages.

Coming Trips

Saturday, February 7. Plymouth and Falmouth. All day. Al Richards leads this annual trip to Southeastern Massachusetts. Past highlights have included Yellow-breasted Chat, Redhead Duck, Rough-legged Duck, and both Long- and Short-eared Owls. Dress warmly. Call Al (413-665-2761) for the time and place to meet. (E)

Wednesday, February 18. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) will go where the birds are. Meet at 8:00 a.m. on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst, across from Atkin's Farm. Call for more information as the date approaches. (E)

Saturday, February 28. Plum Island. All day. Geoff LeBaron (413-268-9281) will seek out late winter specialties like Rough-legged Hawks, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Glaucous Gulls, and Snowy Owls. Dress warmly. Call Geoff for information as the date approaches. (E)

Monhegan Island

The annual club trip to Monhegan Island, is scheduled for **Friday, May 28 to Monday, May 31** (Memorial Day weekend). We will meet at Port Clyde, Maine (carpools generally available from the valley), boat to the island, and stay in rustic accommodations at the Trailing Yew. The island in May usually hosts a wide variety of migrant songbirds. An optional trip to Eastern Egg Rock allows for looks at puffins, various terns and even the odd alcid or pelagic species.

The cost will be in the vicinity of \$300, including lodging, breakfasts and dinners on the island, plus shared mileage costs if you carpool. A \$50.00 deposit is needed to save a spot. Contact David Peake-Jones at (413) 529 9541 (phone) or davidpj@the-spa.com as soon as possible to register or for more information.

CHRISTMAS COUNTS

Northampton Christmas Count Corrections (January 25, 2004)

Birds:

Red-shouldered Hawks = 0 (not 2)
 Red-tailed Hawks = 106 (not 104)
 Total number of species = 83 (not 84)

Participants

Number of participants daytime = 98 (not 96)
 Number of owlers = 33 (not 34)
 Number of feeder watchers = 14 (not 15)
 Total participant count = 117 (not 116)

An Owler's Tale

Whilst Dan Z. and I were whistling for Screech we got one to reply. Initially it was closer to Dan, but he then saw it fly towards me, about 50' from him, and he said, "Coming your way."

I continued to whistle and the owl did likewise. I was facing where I suspected it was and guessed it was in a thicket 30-40 feet away. All of a sudden I was under feathered assault as the bird was gliding quickly towards me at head height! I dropped like a sack of potatoes and narrowly escaped a certain death!! OK, the death bit might be a bit dramatic, but it makes for a better recounting of the event!! Danny was on the ground, too...laughing.

Tom Clark

QUABBIN COUNT (Scott Sumner)

The **Quabbin Christmas Bird Count** tallied 70 species under absolutely great weather conditions. The count added two new species: **American Wigeon & Hoary Redpoll**. The Hoary Redpoll was seen in a small flock of Common Redpolls around the Gold Street area of Belchertown. The birds were not going to a feeding station and departed soon after the observers confirmed the I.D.

An adult Golden Eagle was seen by four different parties along the east side of the reservoir, between roughly 9:30 and 11:00 a.m. The number of Common Ravens reached a new high of 56. Thirty-seven (37) of the 56 were reported from Graves Landing (Gate 40). Below are the rest of the totals.

Common Loon 7	Horned Lark 16
Horned Grebe 35	Black-capped Chickadee 731
Great Blue Heron 1	Tufted Titmouse 96
Canada Goose 13	Red-breasted Nuthatch 285
American Wigeon 1	White-breasted Nuthatch 190
Black Duck 242	Brown Creeper 36
Mallard 301	Carolina Wren 3
Ring-necked Duck 9	Winter Wren 1
Bufflehead 2	Golden-crowned Kinglet 111
Common Goldeneye 62	Ruby-crowned Kinglet 2
Hooded Merganser 43	Eastern Bluebird 13
Common Merganser 324	American Robin 190
Bald Eagle 27 (13 Ad/14 Imm.)	Gray Catbird 1
Northern Harrier 1 (Male)	Northern Mockingbird 8
Sharp-shinned Hawk 1	European Starling 377
Cooper's Hawk 2	Cedar Waxwing 136
Northern Goshawk 1	Tree Sparrow 88
Red-tailed Hawk 13	Song Sparrow 11
Golden Eagle 1	White-throated Sparrow 51
Ruffed Grouse 26	Dark-eyed Junco 582
Wild Turkey 20	Snow Bunting 1
Ring-billed Gull 2,500-coming into roost (gate 5)	Northern Cardinal 39
Herring Gull 500 (as above)	Purple Finch 10
Great Black-backed Gull 20	House Finch 121
Rock Dove 142	Common Redpoll 39
Mourning Dove 135	Hoary Redpoll 1
Great Horned Owl 9	Pine Siskin 1
Barred Owl 8	American Goldfinch 283
Long-eared Owl 1	Evening Grosbeak 6
Northern Saw-whet Owl 10	House Sparrow 561
Belted Kingfisher 1	
Red-bellied Woodpecker 8	
Downy Woodpecker 74	
Hairy Woodpecker 20	
Northern Flicker 3	
Pileated Woodpecker 19	
Northern Shrike 1	
Blue Jay 718	
American Crow 125	
Common Raven 56	

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**.

CONSERVATION

*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*

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

Sustainable Agriculture in Cuba, Annie Cheatham & Margaret Christie, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)

Sunday, Feb. 8, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Industry and the Environment in Holyoke, Jeffrey Hayden, Holyoke Office of Economic & Industrial Development

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 7:00 p.m.

Held at Holyoke Heritage State Park, call 534-1723

Recreational Land Users Unite! Panel: Bill Labich, Leigh Youngblood, Chris Ryan, and others TBA

Tuesday, Feb. 24, 7:00 p.m.

Held at Northfield Mountain Recreation Area, call 800-859-2960

Farmland Preservation in the Vally: Who Benefits?, Bob Rakoff, Hampshire College

Tuesday, March 9, 7:00 p.m.

Held at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, call 256-6006

SPRING BIRDING CLASS, Scott Sumner, Birder

Classroom Sessions (8): Wednesdays, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

March 3, 31, April 7, 14, 28, May 5, 12, 19

Field Trips (10): Saturdays, 7:00 a.m. - Noon

March 6, March 28 - June 5 (except May 29)

Scott Sumner will offer the Hitchcock Center's 28th year of birding classes. He skillfully continues the tradition by bringing his expertise and enthusiasm for birding. His knowledge will aid the experienced birder as much as the beginner as he emphasizes identification and distribution. The evening slides will highlight the differences between families of birds and their characteristics. The majority of the field trips will be half day trips with four all day trips to Plum Island (March 6 & May 22), Mt Greylock (June 5), and Mt. Auburn Cemetery (May 8).

This class is limited to 20 participants so registration is required.

Members: \$150; Non-members: \$180 [Register](#)

Salamander Tunnel Maintenance Day

Sunday, March 7, 1:00 p.m. - until we're done

Big Trees, Bob Leverett, Co-founder and Executive Director of Eastern Native Tree Society (ENTS) and of Friends of Mohawk Trail State Forest
Saturday, Feb. 7, 10:00 a.m. – Noon

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

Eagles at Quabbin Reservoir, Dale Monette and Patti Steinman

Saturday, February 7: 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Winter Tracking and Life Under the Snow at Graves Farm, David McLain.

Sunday, February 8: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Bark and Buds: Winter Tree Identification, Joe Strauch

Saturday, February 21: 10:00 a.m. – Noon.

Winter Ecology Snowshoe, Aimee Gelinas

Saturday, February 28: 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Winter Tracking and Life Under the Snow at M.S. Lynes Sanctuary, David McLain.

Saturday, February 28: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Winter Tracking and Life Under the Snow at Laughing Brook, Ron Wolanin.

Sunday, February 29: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Sap Moon Snowshoe Trek, Aimee Galinas

Saturday, March 6: 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Ecological Management Conference, Staff and Volunteers

(Regarding management practices at Arcadia)

Saturday, March 6: 9:00 a.m. - Noon

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

And now, an unsolicited and, some would say, inexcusable, flashback to the more humorous tenure of our founding editor, Sally Venman. “Car Talk” listeners will recognize this one.

A hit-man named Arty was hired to rub out his client’s husband. The fee was to be \$10,000, but since these funds were only to be realized from the proceeds of the unfortunate victim’s life insurance, Arty had to make do with a down payment of \$1 as a token of good faith. Arty surprised his victim at the local Safeway grocery, and strangled him in the Produce section. The unfortunate Produce Manager stumbled upon the scene and was dispatched in the same way. The headline in next day’s paper:

“Arty Chokes Two for a Dollar at Safeway”

MISCELLANEOUS

Massachusetts Birders Meeting

Mass Audubon and Essex County Ornithological Club announce the 12th Massachusetts Birders' Meeting

When: March 6 and 7, 2004

Where: Peabody Marriott

What: This meeting is entitled: "**Birding with a Purpose**" (helping to support bird conservation)

Please join us on the North Shore next March for a day of presentations and exhibits on Saturday and field trips on Sunday to Cape Ann and Plum Island led by the Joppa Flats Educational Center and Essex County Ornithological Club.

Our **Keynote Speaker** will be **Chandler Robbins**, creator of the national Breeding Bird Survey and author of the *Golden Guide to Birds of North America*. Robbins was also the senior editor of the Atlas of Breeding Birds of Maryland and D.C. and has published in many other books and journals on changes in breeding bird populations. Other presentations include "Losing Ground", Christmas Bird Counts, "eBirding", and the Important Bird Areas program.

Information on registration and program is available at:

www.massaudubon.org/news <<http://www.massaudubon.org/news>>

Rooms will be available at the Peabody Marriott.

For more information, contact:

Andrea Jones, Bird Conservation Biologist
Massachusetts Audubon Society
2000 Main Street
Marshfield, MA 02050
781-837-9400 x 7907

Backyard Birds

17 Strong St., Northampton (near Eastside Grill). Phone 586 3155

Your local source for birding and bird-feeding supplies, including feeders, optics, gifts, written and audio-materials. Ten percent discount for members of the Hampshire Bird Club. Remember, with local merchants, your dollar stays here!

That's it for this month.

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

David Peake-Jones

Editor

(413) 529 9541; davidpj@the-spa.com