



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

Amherst, Massachusetts

<http://hampshirebirdclub.org>

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Looking back on the Northampton CBC, I am reminded of an experience which cast a (much needed) warm glow over my whole day this year. On the way to my area, I was discomfited by the realization that I had forgotten to speak with a home-owner through whose farmyard I had to walk to reach my first owling site. Despite the fact that the household have been absolutely supportive for several years, I was therefore somewhat torn as I tiptoed past the sleeping animals to the top of the hill.

No sooner had my amateurish Saw-whet whistles rung out tinnily over the bleak landscape, than a snarl came from the adjacent woods. I continued to play the tape, and heard another frustratingly iffy response. While rewinding the tape, I moved a few feet to the right. As I did so, a tiny, pale shape fluttered away from the intended touchdown site for my large and heavily-booted right foot. Resorting to a flashlight, I found a Saw-whet Owl blinking shyly at me from a low sapling. Feeling intrusive, I turned everything off, and sat to wait for any other responses. I couldn't resist tooting few more times toward the owl, and was astounded when it flew right back and took up its post on the ground, this time about six feet away. He or she probably did not share my absolute delight and sense of privilege. However, I like to think my owlish companion might at least have felt mildly amused by his oversized, lone impersonator, with its garish bright eye, and atrocious dialect.

PROGRAMS

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

Monday, January 12.

Sam Fried demystifies "Birding in Kansas."

Half of the shorebirds passing through North America on the way to their breeding grounds make a "refueling" stop at the vast marshes of central Kansas, making this improbable interior state the premier shorebirding spot in the USA for a week or two in early May each year. About 30 shorebird species are recorded, along with countless waterfowl, wading birds, passerines, and the raptors that follow them north, through Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, each of which has been recognized as a Wetland of International Importance. We'll also pay a visit to the southwest corner of Kansas, to witness the courtship displays of the Lesser Prairie-chicken on its lek as well as other prairie birds and migrants that can be found along the old Santa Fe Trail.

Sam Fried has published hundreds of photographs and many articles in field guides, books and magazines worldwide, including *National Audubon*, *Wildbird*, *Birder's World*, *Bird Watcher's Digest*, *Birding*, and *Living Bird Quarterly*. He wrote several chapters in the new Insight Guides book on birding, published by *The Discovery Channel*. Sam's most recent articles were "Hawkwatches in Connecticut" (in *Birder's World*), and "Golf Courses and Conservation" (in *WildBird*).

Sam is the co-founder of "Flights of Fancy Adventures, Inc.," offering small-group, low-cost birding and natural history trips to North-, Central-, and South American destinations. The company offers the only combined birding/golfing tours in the world. He is also a Past-President of Hartford Audubon.

Coming Programs

February 9, 2004. Don Kroodsma. Bird by Bike.

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.

FIELD TRIPS

Coming Trips

(See also the Winter-Late Summer trip list enclosed with this newsletter)

Saturday, January 10. North Shore. All Day. **Bob Bieda** will look for wintering sea ducks, alcids, stray pelagics, and other seasonal specialties along the balmy shoreline north of Boston. Call Bob (527 2633) for details and to register.

Connecticut Lakes, 2003

The headwaters of our beloved Connecticut River lie in the extreme northern tip of New Hampshire. This is a mysterious boreal wilderness replete with northern bird specialties, wildflowers, butterflies, and, of course, moose. Tom Gagnon and Scott Surner will be co-leading a trip to the region over the weekend of Friday, June 18 to Sunday, June 20. Participants will stay in cabins on Back Lake, NH. The trip is limited to "about 15 people", and fills fast. Talk to Tom (tombwhawk@aol.com; 584 6353) or Scott (ssurner@aol.com; 253 5983) for further information. Please contact Tom to register.

CHRISTMAS COUNT RESULTS, 2003.

December 14 began dank and threatening, and made good on its word. Here are the official results of the somewhat-curtailed Northampton count. New record numbers are accompanied by a (*). The old record number and year are also shown.

Given the (brief, but unforgiving) periods of harsh weather earlier this winter, the species representation is rather spare. Note, for example, that Nashville Warbler returned to it's historic average occurrence of zero!* I suppose the highlights would be the record numbers of Bald Eagles, Great Horned Owls and Saw-whet Owls. Sue's Baltimore Oriole is a rarity at this time of year. The count week Long-eared Owl, though not technically countable, is also a great bird. The number of observers, especially owlers, was exceptional.

* Readers may note that, since we had a Nashville Warbler in 2001, the average occurrence is actually greater than zero, and that the bird was actually under-represented this year. To this I would reply that there are lies, damned lies, and then there are statistics.

Species	No.	Record	Year	Species	No.	Record	Year
Common Loon	1			Northern Pintail	2		
Great Blue Heron	5			Common Goldeneye	11		
Snow Goose	0			Hooded Merganser	5		
Canada Goose	2120			Common Merganser	82		
Mute Swan	5			Bald Eagle (adult)	6*	8 all age	2002
Wood Duck	2			Bald Eagle (imm.)	5		
American Wigeon	1			Northern Harrier (adult)	2		
American Black Duck	155			Northern Harrier (imm.)	0		
Mallard	897			Sharp-shinned Hawk	8		

Species	No.	Record	Year	Species	No.	Record	Year
Cooper's Hawk	7			Carolina Wren	17		
Northern Goshawk	1			Winter Wren	0		
Red-shouldered Hawk	2*	1	(var.)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	127		
Red-tailed Hawk	104			Ruby-crowned Kinglet`	0		
Rough-legged Hawk	3			Eastern Bluebird	129		
American Kestrel	1			Hermit Thrush	4		
Merlin	0			American Robin	711		
Peregrine Falcon	2			Gray Catbird	1		
Ring-necked Pheasant	4			Northern Mockingbird	100		
Ruffed Grouse	5			European Starling	4549		
Wild Turkey	103			Cedar Waxwing	918		
Wilson's Snipe	0			Nashville Warbler	0		
Ring-billed Gull	266			Yellow-rumped Warbler	1		
Herring Gull	244			Eastern Towhee	1		
Iceland Gull	0			American Tree Sparrow	1776		
Great Black-backed Gull	171			Chipping Sparrow	1		
Rock Dove	1551			Field Sparrow	2		
Mourning Dove	1457			Savannah Sparrow	13		
Eastern Screech Owl	53			Fox Sparrow	1		
Great Horned Owl	48*	38	1998	Song Sparrow	330		
Barred Owl	5			Swamp Sparrow	4		
Long-eared Owl	CW			White-throated Sparrow	506		
Northern Saw-whet Owl	5*	4	1998	White-crowned Sparrow	6		
Belted Kingfisher	15			Dark-eyed Junco	1948		
Red-bellied Woodpecker	84	67	2002	Oregon Junco	1		
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1			Lapland Longspur	0		
Downy Woodpecker	326			Snow Bunting	34		
Hairy Woodpecker	81			Northern Cardinal	528		
Northern Flicker	35			Red-winged Blackbird	94		
Pileated Woodpecker	17			Eastern Meadowlark	0		
Northern Shrike	3			Rusty Blackbird	2		
Blue Jay	1288			Common Grackle	0		
American Crow	3606			Brown-headed Cowbird	0		
Fish Crow	0			Baltimore Oriole	1		
Common Raven	11*	11	1991	Purple Finch	7		
Horned Lark	391			House Finch	471		
Black-capped Chickadee	1308			White-winged Crossbill	0		
Tufted Titmouse	397			Common Redpoll	266		
Red-breasted Nuthatch	67			Pine Siskin	3		
White-breasted Nuthatch	304			American Goldfinch	1470		
Brown Creeper	22			Evening Grosbeak	11		
				House Sparrow	1054		

Northampton CBC Potluck Thanks!!

Grateful thanks to all of you who willingly cooked a "pot of food" for the Northampton Bird count "pot luck" dinner and even though all we hungry souls never had a chance to taste it. It sure was appreciated by us. Sue and Helga

LIBRARY FREE BIRD FINDING SERVICE

The HBC has an information exchange of person-to-person advice on birding in various locales. If you know about the avian life in some near or far-off place and want to share it, please call me to get listed.

If you are traveling to:

Northeastern Vermont
Monhegan Island
Connecticut Lakes
Cape May
South Texas

Southern California
Baffin Island
Veracruz, Mexico
Queensland, Australia
Java

Or Southeastern Arizona,
just call me and I will hook you up with the friendly club member who has birded there!

Henry (your trusted librarian): 549 3722

NEW BOOKS

The bird club has some money for new library books Any ideas on how to spend it? No, we won't buy you a new Swarovski scope. Call Henry with book ideas.

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*

ARCADIA PROGRAMS

Winter Raptors at Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary, Marshfield. Dan Furbish
January 10: 2:00 – 6:00 PM

*For more details of this 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.*

GLEANINGS FROM THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

Gullible Parents

French researchers have found that Black-headed Gull chicks cooperated with one another to increase the effectiveness of their begging. Nicolas Mathevon and Isabelle Charrier noted that the frequency of begging decreased as the number of chicks in Black-headed Gull nests rose from one to a maximum of three. The birds instead, coordinated their efforts in intense bursts to increase the pressure on the parents to regurgitate food. Key to this strategy, is the fact that most gulls deposit regurgitated food on the floor of the nest, allowing each nestling an opportunity to take advantage of it. In birds like warblers, by contrast, nestlings are fed individually, meaning there is no individual advantage in ganging up on mum and dad. It would be interesting to see what would happen in families where fast food is purchased for each individual child, as opposed to those where a bag of chips is simply slung into the back seat.

Coevolution

“Coevolution” is the theoretical concept that, when two species exist in close relationships such as parasitism, or when one relies exclusively on the other as a source of food, they should evolve in what amounts to an arms race. Evolutionary theory notwithstanding, actual cases of coevolution have been difficult to substantiate.

From southern Australia and the journal *Nature* in September of last year comes some striking evidence of animal behavior changing as coevolutionary theory predicts. Several species of Australian cuckoos are nest parasites, much like the Brown-headed Cowbird. The Horsefield’s Bronze Cuckoo’s favored victim is the Superb Fairy Wren, a jewel-like bird which nests in Australian forests. The cuckoo observes a potential victim carefully, and inserts a single egg into the nest just after the wren lays her clutch. As is typical with nest parasites, the cuckoo egg hatches before the wren eggs do, and the cuckoo nestling pushes all other eggs and nestlings out of the nest. Like most victims of nest parasitism, the wrens are notoriously unable to identify alien nestlings, and typically feed them as they would their own chicks.

Rebecca Kilner of Cambridge University has been monitoring these insidious proceedings for a number of years, and has found exciting changes in behavior. Firstly, the wrens appear to be increasingly able to identify the foreign chicks, and now abandon 40% of parasitized nests, before trying again. She has found that the cuckoo chicks, perhaps in response to this heightened security, are becoming better audio-mimics of wren chicks, and appear to be able to override parental reluctance to feed them, with persistent and strident calls. In natural arms races, as with human ones, there is no guarantee that things will remain in balance.

Source: Nature News Service: MacMillan Magazines, 2003. www.nature.com

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS !!

Mark Allaire: Cambridge, MA

Cassidy and family Ruge: Belchertown, MA

Blanche Orrell

Blanche Orrell, a founding member of HBC and one of the authors of the 1984 book, *Birds and Their Habitats in Amherst, Massachusetts*, has been unwell since early December. For a number of years Blanche coordinated HBC's Rare Bird Alert telephone tree. Cards can be sent to her at her home address, available in the club membership directory.

Please remember to get the Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule, which can be reached via the “Field Trips” link on the Home Page.

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

David Peake-Jones

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