



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 21, No. 8

April, 2005

PROGRAMS

This Month

Monday, April 11 at 7:30 PM

Geoff LeBaron brings us “*From Kamchatka to Katmai: An Incredible Journey*”

Programs are held at Immanuel Lutheran Church: 867 North Pleasant St., Amherst.

Please join us for a journey along the southern rim of the Bering Sea, as we traverse the entire length of the Aleutian Island chain from the frozen Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia to the verdant Alaska Peninsula. We'll visit Attu, Kiska, and Dutch and Geographic Harbors, as well as Petropavlosk Kamchatskii and the Valley of the Geysers in the frozen interior of Kamchatka.

Only in recent times have the political tides changed allowing such an amazing voyage to this land of incomparable scenery, astounding seabird colonies (including 16 species of alcids), and the chain of perfect cone-shaped volcanoes that makes up the northern arc of the “chain of fire.” Fabled Attu Island is once again reachable only by sea, and artifacts of the little-publicized Japanese occupation of the Aleutian Islands during the Second World War will be explored throughout visits to the “Rat Islands” of the outer Aleutians.

Geoff LeBaron graduated from the University of Miami, Florida, and completed a Masters degree in Zoology at the University of Rhode Island. He spent five years on the staff at the Academy of Sciences in Philadelphia, and currently works as the Christmas Count Director for National Audubon. In addition, he has conducted ornithological fieldwork for the state Audubon societies of New Hampshire and Rhode Island. He led whale- and seabird-watching trips on Stellwagen Bank for three seasons and has logged thousands of hours surveying marine mammals along the eastern coast of the United States. Geoff has led natural history tours to Alaska, Big Bend, the Texas Hill Country, Baja California, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, Panama and Costa Rica, the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador, Argentina, the Falkland Islands, Antarctica, Australia, and New Zealand. Geoff is a natural teacher and leader, with tremendous patience and fantastic birding skills.

Coming Up

May 9. Susan Roney Drennan. “Pacific Albatross Biology and Conservation”

June 13. Frank Gill. “The Power of Citizen Science”

Last Month

Margaret Rubega: “Feeding at the Interface of Water and Land”

Ask an elementary school kid to design a bird bill to feed on plankton, and most would come up with a filtration device like the bill of the flamingo. Most teachers would challenge a student who came up with a simple, straight, thin bill. Nevertheless, Red-necked Phalaropes have been living on the open ocean for millenia, armed with nothing more than a pair of tweezers and a marvelous technique.

The phalaropes have not resorted to filter-feeding. They visually identify individual prey items in the water column and grab them. To increase the number of available prey items, phalaropes kick water away from the body with one leg. In addition to making them spin (a side effect), this creates a “hole” in the water under

the bird's body (visible on film), which, in turn, draws water and critters up from depths of up to a foot and a half.

So far, so good! Most of us probably assume that swallowing the prey after capture is somehow simple. This fails to take account of an obvious problem. Being wet and tiny, the prey will tend to stick to the bill of the bird. Transferring it to the mouth presents a tricky challenge, which must be solved without expending precious energy or feeding time.

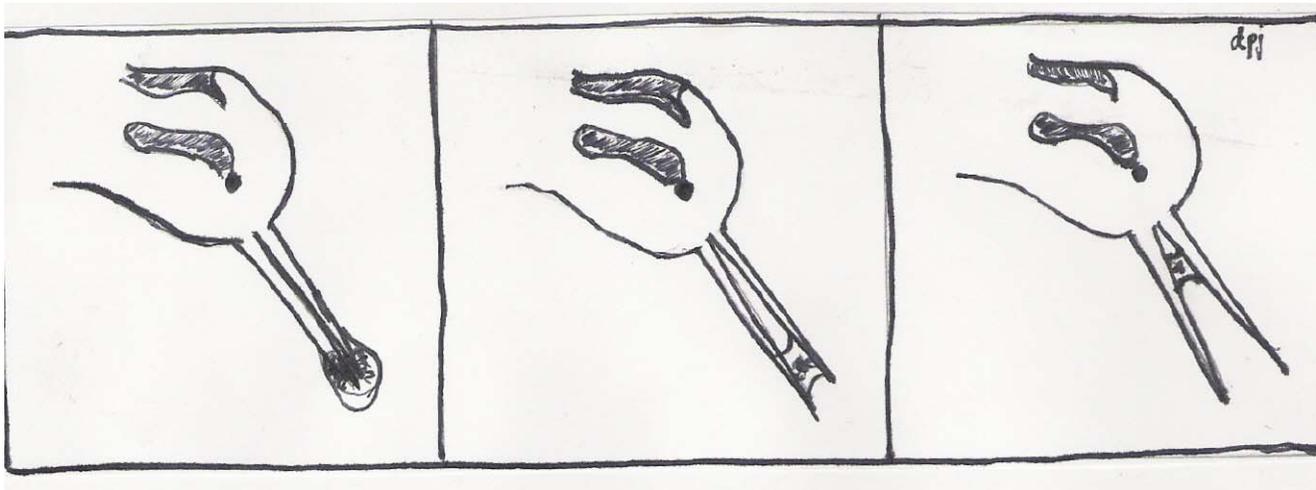
Margaret Rubega finds that phalaropes, and shorebirds in general, make use of the physical properties of their bills and water, in an elegant technique called "surface-tension feeding," presumably the culmination of millions of years of evolutionary experimentation.

The key facts are these:

- Water is adhesive (it sticks to most things, to varying degrees),
- Phalarope bills are "wetable", meaning that forces of adhesion between the bill and a drop of water, substantially overcome the surface tension of the drop itself,
- An open bird beak forms a "v" shape: the distance between the mandibles decreases toward the base,
- Surface tension tends to decrease the surface area of a drop of water. For this reason, drops will tend to assume the smallest size possible. In other words, stretching a drop of water is like stretching a spring – potential energy accumulates in the drop. Unless something keeps the drop stretched, it will tend to contract again, releasing the potential energy.

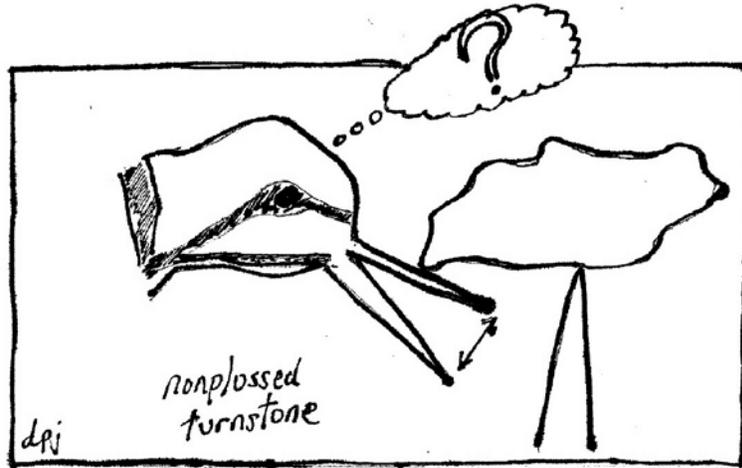
Now here's what happens.

1. The bird grabs a small creature in the tip of its bill, enclosed in a drop of water. The drop adheres to the surface of the bill, which limits its shape and size.
2. The bird opens its bill slightly, keeping the drop connected to both mandibles.
3. The drop now finds itself stretched between two rails. Migrating up the rails towards where they meet reduces the degree of stretch, the surface area, the surface tension, and the potential energy trapped in the drop. In this way, in only 100ths of a second, the water drop, and its passenger critter are transferred up the bill to the mouth for swallowing.



In addition to uncovering these gorgeous dynamics, Margaret suggests that opening the bill is a deeply ingrained motor pathway in shorebirds, which has been co-opted to serve a variety of different feeding strategies. Ruddy Turnstones, for example, begin lifting a stone by inserting the bill under it, then opening the

beak. The lower mandible bears against the ground, and the upper mandible lifts the stone. The turnstone will do this even when the stone rests on a pedestal, meaning there is nothing upon which the lower mandible can bear. Margaret suggests, mischievously, that the birds even look momentarily nonplussed when their bill opens ineffectually in these experiments.*



Margaret's website: www.eeb.uconn.edu/faculty/rubega/rubega.htm

* I can't resist pointing out that opening the mouth also appears to be a deeply ingrained motor pathway in humans. As with Margaret's pedestal-feeding turnstones, it often seems to serve no apparent purpose.

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

On Saturday, March 5, ten birders under the protective wing of **Geoff LeBaron** toured the **Plum Island/Newburyport** region of eastern Massachusetts. From Joppa Flats we looked out at an estuary alive with American Black Ducks, Mallards, gulls, and distant Bufflehead/Goldeneye/Long-tailed types, but nothing unusual. Moving upriver just a little to the Newburyport Sewerage Treatment Works we found three wonderfully cooperative adult "**Kumleins**" **Iceland Gulls**, sporting their grayish wingtips, rotund heads, and graceful lines.

Plum Island itself proved to be rather desolate. All but one of the dirty snowballs dotting the icy wastes of the saltmarsh proved to be just that. The other was a large, immature, **Snowy Owl**. For you astronomers, there were no comets in view. We wandered out to the beach twice for looks at good numbers of White-winged Scoters, the odd Common and Red-throated Loon, and Horned Grebes.

We unsuccessfully searched a section of the Newburyport residential area for a reported Varied Thrush, before visiting the chain bridge. There were five **Bald Eagles** in the area, including two striking adults. Just as we did last year, we saw Great Cormorants in unique breeding plumage. These individuals had large white flank patches, and grizzled necks. They show this plumage only during the breeding season, and mostly in places far removed from us here in New England. At Cashman Park the group got great looks at winter-clad **Long-tailed Ducks**. Toward the end of the day at Salisbury Beach State Park, we found a **Merlin** sitting on the pavilion, and got fantastic views of two hunting **Short-eared Owls**.



On **March 19**, a few optimists led by **Mike Locher** perused the **Connecticut River Valley** in search of wintering species and migrating waterfowl. The trip was notable for visiting some sites further south than we customarily do, beginning with an area just below the Rt. 116 dam in Holyoke. This region had yielded a good selection of unusual gulls a couple of weeks earlier. Despite limited access, we did catch a glimpse of an **Iceland Gull** amongst the usual complement of wintering gulls. From the Dinosaur Tracks along Rt 5 in Holyoke we saw a nice group of Goldeneye, with the males displaying avidly. Moving northward, we found two **Peregrine Falcons** hanging around the cliffs at Sugarloaf, perhaps contemplating procreation.

From there, we wended our way to the Rod and Gun Club, the canal, and Barton's Cove. These locations offered us nice but not surprising looks at Common and Hooded Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks and Lesser Scaup. Great Pond in Hatfield remained almost entirely icebound. All in all, the Connecticut Valley offered tantalizing glimpses of impending Spring, but Mother Nature is yet to deliver!

Coming Trips

***Sunday, April 3. Woodcocks.** Early evening. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) will look for displaying American Woodcocks, and then try to call out some owls on the way home. Meet at 5:30 p.m. at Mitch's Marina on Route 47 in Hadley. (E)

Saturday, April 16. Ashley Reservoir: early warblers. Half day. Bob Bieda (413-527-2623) will beat the bushes for Pine and Palm Warblers, Broad-winged Hawks, Ospreys, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. Meet at the Holiday Inn parking lot, Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Route 91 at 7 a.m. Call to register. (E)

Wednesday, April 20. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) will go where the birds are. Meet at 7:30 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, April 23. More migrants.** Half day beginner's trip. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for 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. (E)

Saturday, April 30. Graves Farm. Half day. Anne Lombard (413-586-7509) and Shirley Hilborn (413-253-6462) will guide birders through Graves Farm, looking for migrants and local specialties. Meet at the Hitchcock center at 6:30 a.m. (E)

Wildwood Walks

On a gentle rise in the heart of Amherst 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 3, 10, 17 and 24

Thursdays: May 5, 12, 19 and 26

Each begins at **6:30 am** and runs until **8 am**, though of course you may freelance a little longer if you wish. Meet the leader at the main entrance, off Strong Street. 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. Thank you.

MONHEGAN ISLAND

May 27-30, 2005

There is still space for Monhegan this year, but don't leave it too long!!!

Most birding trips are targetted affairs. We pile in and out of vehicles at strategic locations, carefully tailoring our effort to those places and times most likely to maximize our chances of seeing one of the rarer members of the world's dwindling avifauna, or of intercepting one of those migrants who bless us ever so briefly with their presence. This is all well and good, but if you have ever wanted to steep yourself in the Spring migration, Monhegan is for you.

During the Spring, migrant songbirds moving northward up the Atlantic seaboard are sometimes pushed out over the ocean by storms, and have to fight their way back toward the safety of land. Monhegan Island lies about twelve miles off the coast of Maine and is often a haven for exhausted birds to recuperate before resuming the perilous journey northward. We will arrive on the island on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, without vehicles, and immerse ourselves in the gentle rhythms of island life. We'll find migrant songbirds throughout the tiny village of Monhegan, sheltering in the numerous apple trees, picking through the sea-wrack on the town beach for sand-fleas, or even hiding in the lobster pots piled almost everywhere. Each day will bring fresh migrants to the island, and a storm could even produce one of the fallouts of birding legend. When the birding slows down, we can venture off on any of the island's numerous walking trails to Lobster Cove, the stupendous seaward cliffs, the Seal Rocks (aptly named), or the Enchanted Forest.

We'll stay at the rustic Trailing Yew, which will lay on breakfast and dinner each day, including a local lobster dinner. This is the perfect opportunity to slow down, REALLY learn the birds, and remember what life *should* be about. This trip is open only to members of the Hampshire Bird Club. For information, call Andrew Magee (586 1509) or David Peake-Jones (529 9541, davidpj@the-spa.com). To register (places assured by deposit only), call David.

DON KROODSMA: Local and Live

A Book Launch

We tend to forget that club member Don Kroodsma, during his tenure at UMass and other teaching/research institutions, established himself as a world authority on birdsong. We are therefore greatly privileged to have the opportunity to hear Don launch a copy of his latest book right here in the valley. **Hampshire Bird Club** and the **Hitchcock Center for the Environment** present:

The Singing Life of Birds: Don Kroodsma, Ornithologist & Author
Sunday, May 1, 7-9:30am at the Hitchcock Center

Don has succeeded in compiling his life's work and passion about birdsong into a work of art. This is now available to the public in his new book "*The Singing Life of Birds.*" Join the Hitchcock Center and the Hampshire Bird Club in a celebration of this book's release with Don himself leading a bird walk on the trails at the Hitchcock Center. By 8:30am, we'll come back inside and Don will be available for signing books and informal discussions. Bill Thompson, editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest* says, "*Donald Kroodsma yearns to know not just what bird species he hears singing but what individual bird it is and why it is singing what it is singing. This engaging and amazing sense-filled journey takes you inside the minds of both the author and his beloved songsters. After reading The Singing Life of Birds, you'll listen to birds with new ears.*"

PROJECT INSPIRE!

Accessible Bird Watching Open House

Saturday, April 16, 1-4pm
Great Falls Discovery Center
Turners Falls, MA

A free indoor/outdoor open house introducing bird watching as a multidimensional activity, with accessibility options for people with disabilities. Weather permitting, short excursions via carpooling to view local birdlife in and around the Connecticut River will be offered.

Advance registration is required; please call All Out Adventures at 413-527-8980.

BACHELOR BROOK BIRD WALK

Saturday, April 30 at 6:30 - 10:00 AM

The South Hadley Conservation Commission has recently purchased a beautiful section of the Pioneer Valley, between Route 47 and the Connecticut River, just to the north of South Hadley. The Commission has arranged a bird walk led by HBC's David Peake-Jones on the property:

Meet at the South Hadley Athletic Fields on Rt 47. These are just beyond Ferry Street on Rt 47 as you head toward Hadley on Rt 47, and just after Pearl Street as you come from Hadley on 47.

BILL SCHAFER CHALLENGE FUND

Longtime HBC member Bill Schafer, who died on December 11, 2004, left a generous bequest of \$10,000 to Broad Brook Coalition's Land Acquisition Fund, but stipulated that in order to receive that bequest, the organization had to raise funds to match it within a year.

Broad Brook Coalition manages the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area in partnership with the City of Northampton. Bill was a BBC board member and an active volunteer, and was presented with its Volunteer of the Year award at its Annual Meeting in November 2004.

One of BBC's priorities is preserving additional wildlife habitat adjacent to the conservation area. Since 1993, its Land Acquisition Fund has contributed over \$50,000 toward land purchases, and 383 acres have been added to the conservation area. Its contribution of \$15,000 toward the forthcoming purchase of 33.5 acres will use up the reserves the Land Acquisition Fund has built up over the past three years, so Bill's legacy is especially timely.

*If you would like to remember Bill by helping to preserve some of the area's best birding habitat, please send your contribution to **Broad Brook Coalition, P.O. Box 60566, Florence, MA 01062**, and note that it is to be applied to the Bill Schafer Challenge. All contributions to Broad Brook Coalition are tax deductible.*

ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH?

The North Pool on Plum Island

The North Pool of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge has been, in recent years, a rather non-descript and disappointing bird habitat. However, the pool is at the center of a fascinating argument about what the refuge should be and what species it should serve. The argument is part of the broader struggle we face, as inhabitants of an increasingly crowded region, over the way to "do" conservation.

Parker River NWR was created, lest we forget, as part of a national effort to protect and allow recovery of waterfowl species, largely in response to concerns from hunters. Parker River had, as its main reason for existence, the mandate to provide undisturbed salt-marsh habitat for the American Black Duck and other waterfowl. Prior to the 1950s, the entire refuge consisted of salt-marsh, with little or no freshwater habitat for breeding ducks. By dredging parts of the salt-marsh, building dikes from the resultant fill to isolate sections of the original habitat, and allowing rainwater to fill the impoundments, the refuge created the Bill Forward-, Stage Island-, and North Pools, where the salinity was significantly lower than that in the rest of the refuge. However,

by the late 1990s, years of intensive effort had failed to create dynamic ecosystems in the North Pool. Lack of circulation created a rather stagnant body of water, substantially under-used by birds by comparison with the other freshwater habitats on the refuge. In recent years invading *Phragmites* and Purple Loosestrife have worsened the problems.

In the mid-1990's, the refuge began looking at ways to improve the quality of the existing habitat in the North Pool by manipulating the hydrology. The overall aim was to increase water flow, nutrient cycling, and to control the invasives. Habitat control in the North Pool consumed 70% of the total time spent on habitat control on the refuge in 1997. Despite this, the pool stubbornly refused to live up to its potential, either as waterfowl habitat, or as a breeding ground for birds such as Marsh Wrens, Bitterns and Rails. In 1995, a consultant suggested abandoning the notion of the North Pool as an artificial freshwater habitat. Feasibility studies began on breaching the dike and returning the area to saltmarsh. These studies indicated that the North Pool could revert to something like its natural state, saving (apparently) wasted time and energy. All seemed set for the dike to be breached. Then came the summer of 2004.

Last year, five (5) state-listed species used the pool during the breeding season, some for the first time in decades. **Northern Harriers** bred, as they have done for some time, in the extensive *Phragmites* beds. **King Rails** and **Common Moorhens** were documented for the first time in over a decade. Both **American-** and **Least Bitterns** were found using the pool last year. Why was 2004 so special? It could be a function of the unusually wet spring conditions, cyclicity of the marsh-dwelling species in question, or some combination of these factors. In any case, occurrence of any of these species, let alone five in a single year, has caused many, including the refuge, to reconsider the fate of the North Pool.

We no longer live in a world where conservation land managers simply try to increase duck numbers. Ours is a region where water-birds of all stripes face critical shortages of suitable habitat. Parker River NWR, like all other places where natural habitat exists in any form, is under pressure to consider itself a custodian of rare and threatened habitats and species assemblages rather than individual species. In response, the refuge is conducting a second feasibility study, this one on the prospect of managing the North Pool as a cat-tail swamp.

Should the North Pool revert to saltmarsh, allowing the resources it currently consumes to be diverted to other things? Should we make it still more artificial in the interests of rare species which almost certainly would not have been there before the impoundments were created? Given the comparative failure of fifty years of experimentation, it would be a massive act of faith to continue actively managing the North Pool. Parker River has called for public comment on the matter. You can read the full history of the North Pool at www.fws.gov/northeast/parkerriver/news.html

To *contribute to public comment*, write or email Janet Kennedy
 Refuge Manager
 Parker River NWR
 6 Plum Island Turnpike
 Newburyport, MA 01950
janet_kennedy@fws.gov

Welcome New Members!

Steve & Carol Gehlbach Amherst, Ma.

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

The Singing Life of Birds: Don Kroodsma, Ornithologist & Author
 Sunday, May 1, 7-9:30am Presented jointly with the Hampshire Bird Club. See Page 5.

Wildlife-Friendly Landscape Design: Cindy Bright, Landscape Designer and Biologist
 Wednesday, April 28, 7-9 pm

Budding Birders (Birding for Ages 9-12): Cindy Bright, Environmental Educator
 Saturdays, May 7, 14, 21, 9 - 11am

Spring Birding By the Book

Class: Wednesday, April 27 (warblers with Harvey Allen), 7-9pm

Field Trips: Saturday, April 16, 7am-noon, to Lake Siog (pg. 289) with Bill Cormier;

Saturday, May 7, 7am-noon, to Quabbin Reservoir (pg. 251) with Harvey Allen;

Sunday, May 15, 7am-noon, to Beartown SF (pg. 79) with Myles & Kathy Conway;

Sunday, May 22, 7am-noon, to High Ledges Sanctuary (pg. 98) with David McLain;

Saturday, June 4, 7am-noon, to Tyringham Valley (pg. 71) with Edwin Neumuth;

Member: \$150 full package or \$50 for 3 field trips of your choice plus the class

Non-Member: \$175 full package or \$75 for 3 field trips of your choice plus the class.

This series began in March and continues through the spring using the definite Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts book.

Breeding Bird Walk: (Royalston) John Green, Naturalist
 Sunday, June 12, 7-10am. Meeting at New Salem. Preregistration required.

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

VERNAL POOL CERTIFICATION: *Tom Lautzenheiser, Mass Audubon Ecological Extension Agent;*
 Saturday April 16, 9:00 a.m.-noon.

GREAT BLUE HERONS: *Patti Steinman, Education Coordinator*
 Friday, April 22, 4:00-7:00 p.m.

MIGRANTS AT THE IBIS POOL: *David McLain, Ecologist*
 Saturday, April 30, 7 a.m.

EARLY MORNING BIRD WALK AT ARCADIA: *Guest leaders*
 Saturday, April 30, 7:00 a.m.

For details and registration for all Arcadia programs, please contact Mass Audubon at Arcadia at (413) 584-3009 ex 12, or visit our website at massaudubon.org and click on the Connecticut River Valley.

CAPE WIND

The information provided here is for the information of HBC members. HBC Inc. neither supports nor opposes the Cape Wind development.

Those of us who wander annually down to Monomoy or New South Beach and marvel at the avian diversity of Nantucket Sound and its immediate surroundings might want to know more about the proposed wind energy development, currently in the news. Cape Wind Associates are planning to build 130 wind turbine generators over a 24 square mile area in the Horseshoe Shoals area of Nantucket Sound to generate about 170 MW of electricity for the New England Power Grid. The electricity would be transmitted to the mainland via 102 miles of transmission cables to be laid across the floor of the sound. On February 24, both Mass Audubon and the United States Environmental Protection Agency submitted public comment to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, calling for a supplement to be prepared to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the project. Mass Audubon contends, amongst other things, that further data and analysis are needed to assess the:

- impacts on populations of Long-tailed Ducks in migration and while wintering in the sound,
- impacts on Roseate Terns during migration to and from adjacent breeding grounds,
- impacts on nocturnal passerines in migration, and
- collision-related mortality rates likely to be caused.

Mass Audubon questions the thoroughness of the data collected so far in these areas, and the methods used to analyze data collected in studies on behalf of the applicant (Cape Wind Associates). The U.S. EPA officially categorized the Cape Wind DEIS as “inadequate.” EPA suggests that the DEIS authors did not study the prospective impacts on birds and other wildlife in the manner recommended by the USFWS and other “recognized avian experts”, and that the DEIS overstates the degree to which these experts were consulted during the preparation of the document. EPA also shares Mass Audubon’s skepticism about the methods used to estimate bird traffic and mortality in the “rotor-swept” zone of the proposed project.

Both Mass Audubon and the EPA state that they generally support the development and use of renewable energy sources in New England and nationally. You can read the details of their submissions at www.massaudubon.org/news/index.php. *Cape Wind Associates* outline their proposal, including the likely impact on air and electricity-related pollution in the region at www.capewind.whgrp.com/

References:

Letter from Secretary Ellen Herzfelder, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Boston, MA) to Colonel Thomas L. Konig, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Concord, MA). February 23, 2005
 Press Release. Mass Audubon. “Mass Audubon Comments on Cape Wind DEIS”. February 24, 2005.

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!

This edition seems to be rather dense and wordy; descriptions that have also been applied to the editor from time to time!

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor
 (413) 529 9541

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