



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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Some birds just feel different. At the end of the coastal Rhode Island trip, our group was faced with the choice of whether to proceed to the east and all manner of possible coastal ducks, including Harlequins, or return to Ninigret Park for the possibility of seeing one of two reported Short-eared Owls. Without too much argument, we found ourselves propped against the cars in the twilight at Ninigret, scanning the brushy edges of the old runways. Right on cue, a ghostly form appeared in the fading light. The bird didn't seem to fly as much as to be suspended in the dusk. Its long wings and slender body created uncanny buoyancy, as though there were a wire attached to its back, controlled by some celestial puppet master. Stiff, shallow wing beats produced a totally improbable picture of ease and grace. It glided to and fro amongst the white birches of the Ninigret runways with a deceptive sense of leisure, belied by a sudden bank and drop into the snow. That spelled the end of one small mammal, and at least one other would be wrenched from its snowy safehouse before the end of the evening.

Short-eared Owls are now only winter visitors in most of our region, breeding locally only on Nantucket. There was something mournful about this bird, eking out a lonely living so close to the abodes of men, in this fortuitous, unkempt refuge. Here's to messy grasslands and all they bring us!

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, February 14 at 7:30 PM

Daniel Klem with "Glass: A Bird Conservation Issue"

Staggering numbers of birds die after colliding with glass windows. Daniel Klem will examine the implications of this mortality for bird populations in North America and possible strategies to reduce these impacts.

Daniel has a Ph. D. in Zoology from the University of Southern Illinois. He currently teaches Ornithology and Conservation Biology at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He has published extensively on various topics, including raptor migration, distribution of pelagic birds in the western Atlantic Ocean, and the conservation implications of bird-glass collisions.

Coming Programs

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

April 11. Geoff LeBaron. "From Kamchatka to Katmai: An Incredible Journey"

May 9. Susan Roney Drennan. "Pacific Albatross Biology and Conservation"

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

After delaying a day for bad weather, **Bob Bieda** led birders to **Cape Anne and Plum Island on Sunday, January 8**. We began at Niles Beach near Gloucester, where we searched in vain for the Eared Grebe. We did find Common Goldeneye, a nice group of Gadwall and assorted other sea ducks. On the frozen ice of Niles Pond we discovered a beautiful immature **Iceland Gull** standing quietly with several hundred assorted gulls and ducks, including a rather surprising **Ring-necked Duck**. There were also lovely looks at Bonaparte's Gull and a flying **Glaucous Gull**.

We thought the Granite Pier in Rockport would offer only gorgeous views of a small group of **Harlequin Ducks**, but eventually a duck with a beautiful slaty blue head materialized between the breakers. This reticent **King Eider** had eluded the group ahead of us and they greatly appreciated our communication to have another shot at it. After a rather inexplicable lack of birds at Andrew's Point, we moved on to Plum Island. Local intelligence allowed us to locate a beautiful dark female **Snowy Owl** just beyond the salt pannes. A **Rufous-sided Towhee** and a **Hermit Thrush** surprised us from the thickets by the Highway Depot. Near the rocks down toward the furthest tip of the island, we ummed and aahed over a female Goldeneye with a pale bill, only to have it mercifully upstaged by a cruising **Merlin**.

Cruising through Salisbury Caravan Park in the gathering twilight, the car in back asked via walkie-talkie for clarification of a hesitation on the part of the front-runners. Rather calmly, Al Richards replied, "Well, there was a short-eared that just flew away from the top of a tree, but I think Chris (Ellison) is onto another one."

There was indeed another **Short-eared Owl** sitting on a dead snag overhanging the edge of the saltmarsh. We watched it for a good quarter of an hour at close range before it finally decided to go look for dinner, which we were also happy to do. A fine day was had by all.

David Peake-Jones



On **Saturday, January 15**, a small but stalwart group of birders assembled at the Hitchcock Center, ready to go find **winter finches**, with the help of **Shirley Hillborn**. A quick poll (as opposed to a Redpoll) was enough to determine that there were, in fact, virtually none anywhere in the region anyone could think of. We determined instead to make a free-flowing tour of the valley in search of whatever might, in fact, be there. Our first stop was Harvey's brother's home in Shutesbury. We stood around for some time enjoying a very interesting group of Goldfinches and Bluebirds, while watching for the appearance of the **Red-headed Woodpecker**. After almost an hour it actually showed up, and is now quite a splendid sight in almost full breeding plumage. While we waited, a single **Pine Siskin**, alertly spotted by Dave Mako, justified the title of the trip. There was also a nice Red-breasted Nuthatch visiting the same feeder.

After some creative navigation northward, we arrived at the Turner's Falls Airport, where a beautiful Bald Eagle sported overhead. There was also a small flock of Horned Larks. The canal at Turners was still largely open. In addition to several nice Common Goldeneye, we were astounded to see a gorgeous male **Canvasback**. We made our way through the back-blocks of Montague encountering at least one fascinating flock of Tree Sparrows, Juncoes, and White-throated Sparrows along the roadside. We eventually found ourselves at the Northampton airport, watching a large flock of Horned Larks playing chicken along the airstrip. We were unable to find any other species amongst this cryptic group, but wended our way back to Amherst quite satisfied.

David Peake-Jones



On **Saturday, January 29**, **Geoff LeBaron** led the club to coastal **Rhode Island** to explore his old stomping ground. Geoff's Saturn led the way, followed by an embarrassing Green Ford Escort. Jim Marcum brought up the rear, presumably on the grounds that his giant SUV so deprived the atmosphere of oxygen as to make

passage of other vehicles through its wake impossible. The bay at Watch Hill was thoroughly frozen and birdless. We adjourned from there toward Misquamicut, coming across a superb adult Cooper's Hawk on station near a neighborhood feeder. On Atlantic Avenue, unusual snow cover had apparently deterred even the Snow Buntings from their usual haunts along the grassy verges of the road, but a Northern Flicker perched ornamentally on one of the summer cottages, and another Cooper's Hawk flashed past us on a hunting run. Hopefully the target was one of the numerous House Sparrows in the area, not the Carolina Wren seen briefly by Jim Marcum's crew.

Along the ice-encrusted shore at Weekapaug, we found several Brant, and a multitude of wintering Common Loons, occasioning Geoff to comment that this part of coastal RI typically hosts higher numbers of wintering loons than other parts of the New England coastline. There were also several Horned Grebes here, a species which is also well represented along this coast in winter. A Sanderling perched rather improbably on an icy rock in the surf. A small flock of Dunlin tore past, but not too quickly for Geoff to see their drooping bills. Amongst the Common Goldeneye in the bay were several interesting first year males, which resembled adult females in all respects, except that they had the characteristically male white spot on the face.

At the Weekapaug breezeway, the over-achieving Marcum group brought the rest of us to a grinding halt by observing a **Black-crowned Night Heron** sitting by the water's edge. While we looked at this superb specimen, there was a flurry overhead as a passing group of starlings was suddenly depleted by one. Said Starling had fallen prey to a **Peregrine Falcon**, which devoured it atop a light pole close by. Close examination of the saltmarsh surrounding the breezeway yielded two **Great Blue Herons**.

Entering Ninigret Park, we stopped to peruse a smallish buteo in a tree. This proved to be a beautiful **Red-shouldered Hawk**. It wasn't interested in the group of ten or so Horned Larks, eking out a living in a rare windswept patch of grass on the nearby playing field. On Ninigret Pond there was a spectacular aggregation of close to a thousand mixed ducks (mostly Bufflehead, with some Scaup, Hooded Mergansers, and Common Goldeneye with them). A **Rough-legged Hawk** made a distant and tantalizing appearance, flashing its dark wrists at us in the course of disappearing over the horizon.

At Charlestown Breachway we found Surf and White-winged Scoters, plenty of Common Eiders, and a REAL cool beach buggy with giant tires. Common Grackles seemed unconscionably at home in the treetops on the way to Moonstone Beach. Here we found a Northern Harrier harassing a young Red-shouldered Hawk in the marsh. The path to the shore from the parking lot ended in a four-foot cliff. The recent storm had simply lowered the beach by that much!

At Jerusalem, there was a Double-crested Cormorant, but neither here, nor at Galilee could we pick anything white-winged out of the packs of gulls. A Sharp-shinned Hawk flashed across the road as we departed Jerusalem, and we relocated it moments later, perched in the top of a tiny rose bush in the parking lot of Happy Jack's restaurant. It had cornered a Song Sparrow at the base of the bush, and tried to flush it from this refuge for several minutes. Eventually, the sparrow broke cover, and seemed destined for demise when the sharpie rather unsportingly plucked a spectating vole out of the snow, leaving the sparrow to fly free.

Raptors excepted, the day had been quite bland to this point. We gambled and went back to Ninigret Park in search of reported **Short-eared Owls**. An individual appeared right on cue and hunted in front of us (successfully, it turned out) for at least half an hour. The perfect end to a very good day!

Coming Trips

Please register with the trip leader(s) and check this schedule's information when a phone number is given. The Field Trip Chair (Michael Locher-413-585-5864, fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org) is always looking for new trip ideas and leaders. The Hampshire Bird Club recommends carpooling whenever possible, and suggests that all riders share equally the per-car cost of \$0.30 per mile, as well as tolls and parking. See also the "Field Trip Guidelines for Participants" (in the September newsletter or on the Website).

*Monhegan Island

Overnight Trip: May 27-May 30, 2005 (Memorial Day Weekend)

Most birding trips are strategic affairs. We pile in and out of vehicles at carefully selected locations, carefully tailoring our effort 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.

Saturday, March 5. 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. Meet at the Northampton Bowl at 6:45 a.m. (E)

Wednesday, March 16. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley. Morning. 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, March 19. Connecticut River Waterfowl. Half day. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) will scour the river and neighboring ponds from Hadley to Turner's Falls for migrating ducks and geese. Expect scenic detours. Call for details as the date approaches. (E)

***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)

QUABBIN CHRISTMAS COUNT

The Quabbin C.B.C. took place on Saturday, Jan 1 under extremely delightful conditions. Temperatures ranged from 30-48 degrees, clear skies, stiff southwest breeze and zero snow cover. In general- running water was open, beaver ponds, coves and smaller bodies of the Quabbin watershed were frozen or mostly frozen, the main body of the reservoir was wide open. Sixty-four species were tallied along with twelve species of mammals.

Species	Number	Species	Number
Common Loon	6	Horned Grebe	6
Red-necked Grebe (4 th record)	1	Canada Goose	3
Black Duck	48	Mallard	107
Green-winged Teal (3 rd record)	1	Bufflehead	2
Common Goldeneye	49	Hooded Merganser	27
Common Merganser	137	Bald Eagle – 10 adult, 9 immature	19
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Cooper's Hawk	1
Northern Goshawk	1	Red-tailed Hawk	27
Golden Eagle	1	Ruffed Grouse	15
Wild Turkey	149	Ring-billed Gull	133
Herring Gull	125	Greater Black-backed Gull	14
Rock Pigeon	184	Mourning Dove	204
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	Great Horned Owl	6
Barred Owl	6	Northern Saw-Whet Owl	6
Belted Kingfisher	3	Red-bellied Woodpecker (new high)	10
Downy Woodpecker	78	Hairy Woodpecker	28
Northern Flicker	1	Pileated Woodpecker	17
Northern Shrike	3	Blue Jay	283
American Crow	282	Common Raven	34
Black-capped Chickadee	902	Tufted Titmouse	156
Red-breasted Nuthatch	28	White-breasted Nuthatch	194
Brown Creeper	20	Carolina Wren	2
Winter Wren	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	116
Eastern Bluebird	30	Hermit Thrush (2 nd record)	2
American Robin	384	Northern Mockingbird	9
European Starling	671	Cedar Waxwing	165
Eastern Towhee	1	American Tree Sparrow	129
Song Sparrow	11	White-throated Sparrow	19
Dark-eyed Junco	267	Northern Cardinal	54
Common Grackle	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Purple Finch	14	House Finch	66
Common Redpoll	8	American Goldfinch	203
House Sparrow (new high)	1032		

Amongst the mammals recorded were five river otter, a mink, and a flying squirrel disturbed by one observer while kipping* in a bird-nesting box.

**Kipping*: Nothing to do with smoked herring, though from the same part of the world. To take a nap or short restorative sleep. Hence the protestation of the slumbering employee, rudely awoken, "Oh come on guv, I was just 'avin' a kip!"

Remembering Bill Schafer

Long-time HBC member **Bill Schafer** died on December 11, 2004 after a long battle with cancer. Bill had wide-ranging environmental interests, including old-growth forests, to which he was a frequent visitor, and conservation. Bill was a pivotal member of the Broad Brook Coalition, and was awarded their Volunteer Service Award in 2004. Birders will remember him as an enthusiastic member of the Hitchcock Center Spring Birding Class under Jan Ortiz for several years, a participant on many HBC field trips, and the leader of at least one trip to Trustom Pond in Rhode Island, near which he lived for a time. He participated with Bob Packard in the Northampton Christmas Count for several years.

Bill was known for his determination to see every bird as thoroughly as possible. Jan Ortiz recounts the following anecdote from a trip to Plum Island. Members of the (somewhat large) group were standing on the narrow boardwalk at Hellcat Swamp. From her position at the head of the column, Jan had located “a good warbler or two” in the surrounding trees, and the word of this discovery flashed back through the group. Bill was, uncharacteristically, near the rear of the line. Jan reports becoming aware of a commotion amongst the assembled birders, and says it looked like something was tunneling its way up the line, pushing some birders to one side, and some to the other. When the disturbance finally reached the front, Jan responded to a tug on her pant leg, and found that Bill had crawled on hands and knees through the entire group. Peering upward, he exclaimed something like, “This better be good!” and proceeded to locate the bird, as always.

Some of Bill’s last exploits with the club were to Monhegan Island in both 2002 and 2003. No one on either of those trips will easily forget the obvious battle Bill fought to stay ahead of his illness. Though clearly unwell and very tired at times, he showed up for most every walk, and was always characteristically near the front of the group. Thanks Bill, for the time you spent with HBC and for the enthusiasm you brought to our birding community!

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@comcast.net*

Welcome New Members

Rebecca Baronoski: Belchertown
Charles (Chuck) Horn: Westhampton
Carol Trosset: Amherst

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

HOME CHEESE MAKING: *Ricki Carroll, New England Cheese Making & Supplies*
Sunday, February 13, 1 - 3 p.m.

WINTER TREE AND SHRUB ID: *Brayton Wilson, UMass Professor Emeritus*
Saturdays, February 5 & 12, 9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

RETURN OF LARGE MAMMALS: Nick & Valerie Wisniewski, Walnut Hill Tracking
Monday, February 7, 7 p.m.

OWL PROWL: *David Spector, Central Connecticut State University Professor & Ornithologist*
Sunday, February 27, 3 a.m. (aka very late Saturday night)

MONARCHS IN MEXICO: *Jennifer Wiest, Hitchcock Center Educator*
Monday, March 7, 7 p.m.

BIRDING BY THE BOOK: SPRING BIRDING:

Wednesday Classes:

March 23, April 6 (waterfowl), April 27 (warblers), 7 - 9 p.m.

Weekend Field Trips:

March 26, TBA (To Bird Anywhere) with Scott Sumner, 7 a.m. - noon

April 9, to East Meadows (pg 174) with Scott Sumner, 7 a.m. - noon

April 16, to Lake Siog & Hamilton Reservoir (pg 289) with Bill Cormier, 7 a.m. - noon

May 7, to Quabbin Reservoir (pg 251) with Harvey Allen, 7 a.m. - noon

May 15, to Beartown State Forest (pg 79) with Myles & Kathy Conway, 7 a.m. - noon

May 22, to High Ledges Wildlife Sanctuary (pg 98) with David McLain, 7 a.m. - noon

June 4, to Tyringham Valley & Cobble (pg 71) with Edwin Neumuth, 7 a.m. - noon

THE SECRET LIFE OF BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES

Susan Smith, Professor of Biological Sciences, Mount Holyoke College
Tuesday, February 15, 7 p.m at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment

FOREST HEALTH AND THE WOOLLY ADELGID: *Bob Childs, UMass Professor & Entomologist*
Tuesday, March 1, 7 p.m at Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Easthampton

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.

PROJECT INSPIRE!

February 5 & March 5, from 1-3 PM (both days)

An **Introductory Bird Watching Program** will be offered at the **Great Falls Discovery Center** on **Avenue A** in **Turners Falls**. The program will include a brief introduction to the use of binoculars and viewing scopes, followed by an excursion by car caravan to view waterfowl, gulls, and other local birds in nearby locations along the Connecticut River. The pace of the program will accommodate all ages-- from the youngest in the family to seniors. Binoculars and scopes will be available for people to use.

People with disabilities are especially invited to attend. For further information and to pre-register, please call **413-545-5758**. The program is limited to the first 12 people who sign up and may be offered on a monthly basis if there is enough interest.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor
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