



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 21, No. 7

## March, 2005

Canadian biologist Jim Duncan, quoted in an article in the February edition of *National Geographic*, says that being attacked by a nesting Great Gray Owl is rather like “being hit with a two-by-four with nails sticking out of it.” Scores of visitors, from diehard migrant birders, to photographers armed with mice and obscene optical equipment, to curious local families walking their dogs, got an opportunity to see these birds in quite a different light on Ile Bizard, just to the north-west of downtown Montreal this past month. Herman Staengle’s account of his encounter comes later in this edition. By contrast with Duncan’s image of fierce familial protectiveness, the Great Grays on Ile Bizard were very tolerant of people and almost oblivious even to the snowmobiles howling by only feet from their perches. A marvelous gift from the boreal wilderness!

Oh, and by the way, **SIGN UP FOR MONHEGAN!!!** (page 4)

## 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, March 14 at 7:30 PM**

**Margaret Rubega** speaks about “**Eating at the Interface of Water and Land: the Evolution of Feeding Systems in Aquatic Birds.**”

Aquatic birds are faced with an interesting set of problems while trying to secure food in a dense, fluid medium like water, while they themselves are largely operating in air. Shorebirds are particularly interesting because they display an array of lifestyles that vary from almost fully aquatic to completely land-based. This talk will address the interaction of form and function in the feeding systems of aquatic birds, with a focus on phalaropes, a group of shorebirds that have evolved a highly aquatic way of life, and a planktivorous feeding habit.

**Margaret Rubega** received a B.S. in Biology from Southern Connecticut State College in New Haven, CT, and a Ph. D. in Biology from the University of California at Irvine. She did postdoctoral work at the University of Nevada, Reno, on waterbirds. She is currently Assistant Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Connecticut, and the Connecticut State Ornithologist. Dr. Rubega works primarily on the ecology, evolution, functional morphology, and biomechanics of feeding in birds, particularly aquatic species. She is also interested in avian conservation, especially the interactions of birds and invasive plants.

### Coming Programs

**April 11. Geoff LeBaron.** “From Kamchatka to Katmai: An Incredible Journey”

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

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

## **Last Month's Program**

*On a trial basis, and subject to the ever-variable motivation of the editor, come some scholarly water-wings for those of us who fall asleep in meetings, or for whatever forlorn reason, fail to attend altogether. Yes, dear reader, we shall attempt to summarize the presentation of last month's speaker for the edification of the HBC faithful.*

**On February 14, Daniel Klem spoke on "Glass: A Bird Conservation Issue."**

Twenty five percent of North America's bird species experience significant mortality due to collisions with glass. Even using conservative assumptions, glass-related mortality rates dwarf those due to cats, pesticides, and navigation/cell phone towers. Contrary to popular belief, birds rarely die of spinal injuries, but rather of brain injury. The extent of the problem is masked by the fact that foraging omnivores such as raccoons, cats, and even chipmunks, remove and conceal killed birds, often before they are observed by people.

This mortality, especially in rare species with certain types of migratory and foraging behavior can be devastating. The Swift Parrot, native to South-eastern Australia, is a case in point. Of about 1,000 breeding pairs, 1.5% annually are killed by collisions with window glass.

Mortality can be reduced at a given window by using any means to either make the window space look obstructed, or by physically preventing birds from hitting the glass. In the latter category, mesh screens (using horticultural bird-excluding plastic mesh) can be fitted over windows. In order to make the glass detectable, opaque shapes can be attached to it. Dr Klem has conducted studies of this popular technique, and found that dark silhouettes of hawks etc. can be effective, but only inasmuch as they deter the birds from flying through that section of the window space covered by the silhouette. In other words, the birds do not interpret the shape as that of a real hawk, merely as a physical obstruction. In order for any opaque pattern to deter birds from trying to fly through a window space, the space between elements of the design must be no more than 2-4 inches. Unfortunately, this severely reduces the functionality of the window.

Glass can also be made visible to birds by frosting it, using nanoparticle coatings to create visible interference patterns, or by hanging strings of beads or bamboo strips in front of the glass, all of which are techniques with narrow potential applications.

Sadly, but not surprisingly, there has been virtually no effort on the part of organized conservation groups to change public awareness and behavior on this issue. All the currently available methods of reducing glass-related mortality involve significantly reducing the area and aesthetic effectiveness of windows. There is no simple change homeowners and commercial property owners can make that helps significantly, without making their windows less effective, or their buildings less attractive. The greatest hope for major advance in this field comes from the fact that many species of birds are sensitive to ultraviolet light. If materials can be incorporated in glass to create high-density patterns of UV reflectance, the space might appear obstructed to birds, but still admit visible light, as desired by people. Sadly, the architectural and glass industries are loathe to investigate these possibilities in the absence of widespread pressure from the consuming public.

As an interesting sidelight, there is a counterintuitive relationship between bird feeders and glass-related mortality in birds. Feeders located ten (10) yards or so from a window, will contribute to more death and injury than feeders located closer to the window, because at the larger distances, birds are (a) less able to pick up subtle clues like dirt on the pane before launching into flight toward the glass, and (b) build up greater momentum before a collision. If feeders are to be anywhere within 15 yards of window glass, particularly large expanses which reflect nearby habitat, they should be immediately adjacent to the window (range less than 1 yard). Window screens can be viewed and bought at [www.birdscreen.com](http://www.birdscreen.com)

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

Three intrepid souls attended the trip to **Plymouth and Falmouth**, on **Saturday, February 5**, which observed a total of 47 species of birds and a pair of River Otters. As will be apparent below, **Al Richards** exercised considerable poetic license in selecting the locales visited.

The weather was unbelievably mild and pleasant. While many of the ponds we normally visit were either completely, or at least mostly, frozen, we were able to observe seventeen species of waterfowl including very nice looks at Harlequins. Some of the best observations were at Provincetown Harbor where we saw **Thick-billed Murres, Red-necked- and Horned-Grebes**, and a **Black Guillemot** right below us in amongst the boats. Sharp-eyed Herman Staengle spotted two otters playing peek-a-boo at the edge of the ice at Marston Mills Pond which strangely had nary a single duck despite much open water. A very enthusiastic Dhyana Miller (a junior at Hampshire College) was a pleasant representative of new young birders in the area.

Al Richards

### 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](mailto: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).*

**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)

### Fall Field trip Suggestions

Even with Spring only a vague possibility, Mike Locher (585 5864; [mlocher@yahoo.com](mailto:mlocher@yahoo.com)) is assiduously thinking about the Fall Field Trip Schedule. Please contact him with suggestions and requests for future trips. If you are willing to lead the requested trip/s, so much the better.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Annual General Meeting, including the election of the Board for 2005-2006 will take place before the program on Monday, May 9. A slate of nominees will be presented to the membership at the April meeting, and in the April newsletter. The **Nominating Committee** for this year consists of **Sue Emerson, Betsy Higgins, and Mary Alice Wilson**. Please contact any member of the committee if you would like to serve on the Board, or if there is a club member you feel would serve well in any position.

## OVERNIGHT TRIPS

*There are still vacancies for:*

### MONHEGAN ISLAND

**May 27-30, 2005**

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](mailto:davidpj@the-spa.com)). To register (places assured by deposit only), call David.

## OWLS IN MONTREAL

*Though the massive numbers of Great Gray Owls reported in Minnesota have not materialized this far east, there have been elevated numbers of these birds just north of the St. Lawrence river for much of the winter. Here is an account of one extra-curricular jaunt to see these remarkable birds by a group of freelancing HBC birders.*

On **Saturday, February 12**, Al Richards, Shawn Smolen-Morton and I headed north across the border in hopes of observing several of the **Great Gray Owls** reported on **Ile Bizard near Montreal**. The driving time (one way) was about 5.5 hours. Watching for large gray shapes while walking the trails and driving the roads on Ile Bizard, the owls were surprisingly easy to find. Al observed two birds from the parking lot and we were fortunate to come face-to-face with these amazing creatures. Remarkably, the owls appeared completely undisturbed by the presence of humans, providing wonderful observations. Apart from their striking appearance, we found their hunting behavior, with the owls diving into the snow to catch voles, particularly memorable. Sometimes the owls perched on fairly thin branches which seemed too fragile to support their apparent weight.

Continues over →

After observing at least six Great Gray Owls on Ile Bizard, we moved on to St-Eustache where a **Northern Hawk Owl** had been sighted. Hardly had we arrived when Al, from the driver's seat, spotted the bird perched atop a tall tree. We scoped the bird and enjoyed a great look.

Our third owl stop took us to Boucherville where several species of owls had been reported. We found a **Saw-Whet** napping in a cedar rather close to the road and a pair of Great Horned Owls perched in a spruce. We enjoyed nice looks at both species. The Boreal Owl had not been seen for several days and remained elusive. Additional notable sightings included two Pine Grosbeaks and several mixed flocks of Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs.

In summary, we had a fine day indeed and highly recommend the trip!

Herman Staengle

*Please consider writing a report of any unusual birding trips you may do: whether under the auspices of the club or not. It all helps inspire others and provide future fodder for the field trip committee. Ed.*

## LIBRARY

Your mom always said “Neither a borrower or a lender be.” Right?

**WRONG!!!!!!** HBC has a substantial library, located at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst. Henry Lappen maintains a collection of birding resources including field guides, bird-finding guides to almost every major birding destination in the U.S., and some overseas locations, natural histories, periodicals and videos. Why *buy* for that once-in-a-lifetime trip to the Rio Grande valley, when you could *borrow*? 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 is happy to bring items to meetings, if you give him a few days in advance. You can reach him at **(413) 549 3722**.

### *Remembering Jennifer Pinkham*

On February 1, 2005 we lost a friend, fellow birder and HBC member, Jennifer Pinkham. Jennifer had been very ill for two and a half years, but all the while she kept her zest for life, sense of humor and love of birds. We will miss her.

Jennifer grew up in Northern Maine where her lifelong interest in the natural world developed. As she continued her education at Bowdoin College, Yale and MIT, she found time to pursue other interests, and bird life was among them. Jennifer met and married Martin Weinberg and settled in the Pioneer Valley. Her favorite birding spot may have been her back yard in Pelham, given her regular reports of Barred Owl, Sharp-Shinned Hawk and the U-flight of Ruby-Throated Hummingbirds. Jennifer loved visiting Block Island, including the birding it afforded.

Some club members remember Jennifer for her gift of conversation. She was a regular at the HBC Saturday evenings during WFCR fund drives. Jennifer was always the first volunteer for the “hot seat” where half the calls arrive. Anyone who met Jennifer would remember her quick wit and her gift for puns, which were sometimes groaners, often sarcastic, and always funny. I only wish I had a good one now to do her justice. Farewell, Jennifer.

Theopholis Punoal

## **PROJECT INSPIRE!**

Programs: Spring 2005

These gentle paced bird watching opportunities are open for people of all ages and abilities. Some optical equipment and birding gear is available to use during the open houses and with advance notice on the field trips.

**Accessible Birding Programs at Turners Falls** continue on  
**Saturday, April 2, 9 – 11am & Saturday, May 7, 8 – 10am**

Join Jan Ortiz in search of spring arrivals. We'll carpool to local sites and bird at a pace that accommodates all ages. These outings are for anyone interested in birds -- for people both with and without disabilities. Advance registration is required; please call All Out Adventures at 413-527-8980.

**Accessible Birding at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area**

North Farms Road entrance

Northampton, MA

**Saturday, April 9, 9 -11am and Wednesday, May 4, 8 -10am**

Join Shirley Hilborn and Anne Lombard as they leisurely look and listen for early migrants along the accessible walkway that leads out to the lake. See what species will turn up in the varied habitat between the parking area and the water. These walks are for anyone interested in birds -- for people both with and without disabilities. Advance registration is required; please call All Out Adventures at 413-527-8980.

## **HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS**

**WIND POWER IN NEW ENGLAND:** *Walton Congdon & Sally Wright*  
*Sunday, March 13, 1 - 3 p.m.*

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

**BIRDING BY THE BOOK: SPRING BIRDING**  
*Wednesday Classes and Weekend Field Trips till summer*

**DINOSAURS IN THE PIONEER VALLEY:** *Paul Olsen, Columbia University* *Tuesday, March 15, 7 p.m.*  
*Held at Heritage State Park, Holyoke*

**HERPS AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH:** *Al Richmond, UMass Professor*  
*Tuesday, March 29, 7 p.m.*  
*Held at Northfield Mountain Recreation Area, Northfield*

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](http://www.hitchcockcenter.org).

That's all for this month.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor  
(413) 529 9541

[newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org)