



## Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

### Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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We are on New South Beach in Chatham, Massachusetts in mid August. The beach is a huge mudflat, wreathed in mist. It is a world dominated by a single, planar, fluid interface between water, sand, and air. Dowitchers, sandpipers, knots, oystercatchers, and plovers of many stripes stand upon the sand as if they had sprung from it. Occasionally, as if we were in one of those Christmas snow globes being shaken by some vast hand, the birds leap into the air and swirl like smoke in a breeze, shuffling themselves into some new formation before drifting again to earth.

We interlopers struggle over this alien landscape and set up our scopes to look at resting peeps. We pick away visually at the massed birds, each with a unique plumage, and begin to try to force these subtle ranges of characteristics into something that gives us a label. At first, the salient questions for some of us are of the most embarrassingly broad variety. Struggling to calibrate our sense of size, we ask, "Is that a Least-Sandpiper, or a Pectoral-?" Later, if we are lucky enough to get beyond that point, we can start to ask, "Are those scapulars bright enough for a Western Sandpiper?" and "Is that bill 'relatively longer and heavier than a Semipal's?'" "Just where is a bird I can conclusively call a Semipal?"

A long-suffering field trip leader points out some birds in the group that are slightly larger, with brighter eye-lines, longer sterns, more orderly streaking on the throats, and subtle chevron-streaking down the flanks. At first, we have to force ourselves to focus on one or two characteristics at a time, coaxing certainty from the daunting subtlety of feather and bill. At some point, these tentative comparisons may coalesce into the seeds of a *gestalt*, a sense of the overall *jizz* of the birds, the beginnings of *knowing* the bird. With a gentle wash of satisfaction, we realize that we can begin to pick the White-rumped Sandpipers from their semi-palmated cousins! For just a few moments, we are there. We are shorebirders! This hard-won observational toehold tends to erode over time – in my case, before reaching the next group of shorebirds. However, with the years of patient peering the *knowing* gradually increases, incorporated into the brain, and, in more important ways, into the soul. Birding is a journey with no end point. It keeps us coming back year after year.

HBC goes all over New England throughout the birding year to witness the marvels of bird migration and breeding. We even venture out into the winter chill to share moments with those birds that hunker down in these latitudes year round. Our monthly speakers spur us toward new birding horizons. Won't you sign up again this year, or try it for the first time? You won't be disappointed! **Our first program happens on September 12 when Don Kroodsmas pays a visit.** See page 2 for details.

### **MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE BY SEPTEMBER 30!**

**YOU CAN DOWNLOAD A MEMBERSHIP FORM VIA THE LINK ON THE HOMEPAGE. THIS CAN BE MAILED TO THE CLUB, OR TURNED IN AT THE SEPTEMBER MEETING.**

Also in this edition:

**The HBC Rare Bird Alert form**

**The Fall Field Trip Schedule**

**Coming Programs**

and more.....

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, September 12 at 7:30 PM**

*at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant St. Amherst*

### **Don Kroodsma: “The Singing Life of Birds”**

“Somewhere, always, the sun is rising, and somewhere, always, the birds are singing.” So begins “The Singing Life of Birds,” by noted local ornithologist Don Kroodsma. Don, perhaps the most erudite exponent of the sonogram ever to grace the pioneer valley, will personally elaborate on his groundbreaking book “The Singing Life of Birds.” The book blends science, mystery and poetry, and, not surprisingly, has been received with critical acclaim.

Don has recently been featured on [Fresh Air with Terry Gross](#), Morning Edition’s [Radio Expeditions](#), the [Leonard Lopate Show](#), and [Kojo Nnamdi Show](#). The book has also been featured in [Audubon Magazine](#), [Scientific American](#), [USA Today](#), [Entertainment Weekly](#), [Outside Magazine](#), [E Magazine](#), and elsewhere. You can hear and read these sound-articles via links from Don’s Website: <http://thesinginglifeofbirds.com/>

Don Kroodsma’s early birding in the 1950’s was down the sights of a double-barrel 12-gauge shotgun, at a small crossroads in southern Michigan where the pheasant hunting was extraordinary. Discovering real birds his last semester in college, he took his ornithology courses from Sewall Pettingill the following summer, then headed out to Oregon State University for graduate school, where he got hooked on wrens. A few decades later, he’s retired from an academic career and is rediscovering birds all over again.

### **Coming Up**

**October 17, 2005. Andrea Jones.** *Namibia.*

**November 14, 2005. Blair Nikula.** *Antarctic Seabirds.*

**December 12, 2005.** *Members' Meeting (Slide Show).*

**January 9, 2006. Nancy Weiss.** *The ABC/Bird Conservation Alliance.*

**February 13, 2006. Gregor Yanega.** *Hummingbird Bills.*

**March 13, 2006. David Spector.** *Birds In Literature and Literature About Birds.*

**April 17, 2006. Harry Vogel.** *Common Loons.*

**May 8, 2006. John Van de Graff.** *Peregrinations of a Bird Photographer.*

**June 12, 2006. Tom French.** *Return of a Raptor-Peregrines in MA.*

### **www.hampshirebirdclub.org**

As always, the HBC web site has information about upcoming programs, postings of current and past newsletters, and useful links to other birding sites.

All **club officers and activities** chairs can be reached via email that ends in @hampshirebirdclub.org. For example, to ask a question of the president, mail goes to president@hampshirebirdclub.org. All of these new addresses are listed on the “about” link at the HBC web site.

Don’t forget the **club bulletin board**. There are sections about the Rare Bird Alert, local birds seen that don’t quite merit the full-blown RBA, and information about upcoming (and past) field trips. Anyone is welcome to post sightings, links or other items on the bulletin board. . If you have comments or suggestions about the web site, please send them to [webmaster@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:webmaster@hampshirebirdclub.org) (who else?).

## HBC NEWSLETTER AVAILABLE ON-LINE!

You can choose to get the newsletter on-line via the club website, instead of through the mail. We ask that if you have Internet access and are even moderately comfortable online, that you consider selecting the on-line option.

### “How does that work?”

The newsletter is posted on the HBC website. Participants receive a monthly email notification, whereupon they can view and/or download the newsletter from the website at their leisure. You need to give us an email address in order to get the on-line newsletter reminder.

### “What’s the point?”

You can archive our publication electronically, without accumulating paper files. You reduce postage costs for HBC, which keeps dues down for all of us, and you reduce the labor involved in distributing the newsletter.

### “What are the computer/software requirements?”

The newsletter will be posted on the Website in PDF format. This means you will need to have Adobe Acrobat Reader software (version 5.0 or later) on your system. If you do not have it already, this software is available FREE via a link at the club Website.

### How do I sign up?

Please sign up in the upper right hand corner of the **Membership Form** and make sure you include your email address.

### “What if I encounter technical difficulties?”

Most users last year had no difficulty. In the event that you find the system does not work for you, a simple communication with the Membership Secretary will get you back on the “Hard Copy” mailing list.

### I signed up last year. Do I need to sign up again?

We ask all members to decide each year how they want to receive the newsletter. Regardless of how you got the newsletter last year, please make your choice of how to receive the newsletter this year on this year’s membership form.

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

**On July 30**, Sally Hills, Helga Beatty, Hermann Staengle, David Mako, Chris Ellison, and Mike Locher, under the dubious leadership of **David Peake-Jones** traipsed our way onto **New South Beach** in Chatham, MA in search of early shorebirds. People in both cars busied themselves during the ride down there, feverishly poring over Sibley’s descriptions of Little Stint, and Wilson’s Plover, both of which had been reported recently. We enjoyed mild weather and good birds all day. As we alighted at the far end of the beach, Dave M. alertly spotted a male **Northern Harrier** directly overhead at considerable altitude. Shortly afterward, he repeated this neck-craning feat in spotting the first two of our three **Whimbrels** for the day. Despite adverse tides, we steadily accumulated a handy list of shorebirds, gulls and terns, including a **Black Tern** (which Hermann picked out of a flock we were about to give up on), goodly numbers of Roseate Terns, a **Dunlin**, about 10-12 **Hudsonian Godwits**, and numerous Piping Plovers. We did find about 120 **Red Knots**, a number which, though low by comparison with several years ago, gives more cause for optimism than the paltry handful of birds we found last year. The innumerable Semipalmated Plovers all remained steadfastly just that, with nary a hint of Wilsonism amongst the lot of them. The Little Stint/s had either gone or were overlooked in the masses of Semipalmated-and Least-Sandpipers.

On a sad note, we discovered that Barnacle Bill’s, our traditional dinner venue on the ride home, has changed formats, and will no longer be suitable for the group. Let the scouting begin!



**Saturday, August 20** dawned overcast with mild temperatures, presaging a comfortable time on **New South Beach** for **Bob Bieda**, Al Richards, Shawn Smolen-Morton, Elissa Rubenstein, Bernie Rubenstein, Chris Ellison, Hermann Staengle, and David Peake-Jones.

If you are one to look around the parking lot, or to sneak a peek over the far side of that birdless cove, you’ll know that checking the least likely places rarely seems to pay off. This doesn’t mean that good birds are not in unpromising locations, but rather that they are not in very many places at all, and we tend to get

irrationally discouraged by this. So, as we set off with Outermost Harbor Marine toward the beach, it was with rather mechanical expectation of disappointment that we scanned the narrow mudflats bordering the marina. We might have been satisfied with our only **Whimbrel** of the day, but as we motored past scattered shorebirds, someone caught a fleeting glimpse of a slightly-too-big and pale Semipalmated Plover with an oversized schnozz. Surely this was just early trip over-enthusiasm, or the well-documented size calibration errors that plague shorebird identification for some of us. We tentatively begged the indulgence of our fellow passengers, just to be sure. Our driver obligingly veered around for another pass. There on the mud, with that “I-have-been-here-all-the-time” complacency that shorebirds always seem to have, was an unmistakable **Wilson’s Plover**, a bird that had eluded the previous HBC trip three weeks earlier!!

Such an auspicious start might have boded poorly for the rest of the trip, but with an ideal tide and mostly good visibility, we sifted our way through huge numbers of terns (including Roseates in all plumages), and impressive flocks of shorebirds, including reassuring numbers of Red Knot. Our first Godwit for the day was a never-to-be-taken-for-granted **Marbled Godwit**, and the overall tally of five for the trip beats most days on the beach. We later found 35 **Hudsonian Godwit** in a single group.

Sifting through large numbers of Sanderlings and Semipalmated Sandpipers resting on the dry sand, we found a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**, and, with help from another group, located the telltale rusty belly of a **Curlew Sandpiper**, trying its best for anonymity amongst the local peeps. Good numbers of White-rumped Sandpipers tantalized us with their streaked flanks, long sterns, and subtly different throat markings. It is amazing how, after a couple of hours in expert company, one can get the whole gestalt of a subtle bird like a White-rumped Sandpiper, only to have this knowledge vanish by the next fall. There were some **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** scattered about, and we tried in vain to find a Golden Plover amongst the mobs of diverse Black-bellied Plovers. By the time fog and fatigue beset us at around 2:00, we were ready for the long trudge back to the pick-up point, knowing that it had already been one of the better days in recent memory. As if to punctuate this conclusion, Bob managed to pick out not one but two fast-fading **Black Terns** from the multitudes, and we found a most unlikely **Red throated Loon** swimming amongst the boats in the marina. We toasted the day with a profusion of greasy seafood at the Cream ‘n’ Kone before heading home.

Those with long memories will recall a long-standing wager between Shaun Smolen Morton and Al Richards, stipulating that, should Al find/see a Curlew Sandpiper on a New South Beach Trip, Shaun would carry him up the stairs to Morris Island. While Al undisputably saw the bird, the protagonists are deadlocked over whether or not he had to be the finder of the bird. Given that Mr. Smolen-Morton appears several years older and not quite so spry as he was when this virtually suicidal pact was first made, this desperate splitting of hairs is perhaps forgivable.

## Coming Trips

*Please see the enclosed Fall Field Trip Schedule.*

## Welcome New Members!

**Cyndy Chamberland:** Amherst  
**Julie Abramson:** Northampton  
**Lynne Cherry:** Thurmond, Md.

**John P. Joyal:** South Hadley  
**John & Linda Riehl:** Boston, Ma.

No space this month for Project Inspire (please see the link at [www.hampshirebirdclub.org](http://www.hampshirebirdclub.org)), Arcadia programs, Hitchcock Programs, our gorgeous library, or the conservation committee. Ah well, more for October!  
Until next time, talk softly and carry a big scope!

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