



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

[www.hampshirebirdclub.org](http://www.hampshirebirdclub.org)

Volume 22, No. 8

## April, 2006

In this edition we have, as always, an introduction to this month's speaker, a trip report reminders about coming trips, and program schedules for Hitchcock and Arcadia. We also have a call to save yet another endangered piece of habitat in the valley, some results of the Backyard Bird Count, news of a history-making HBC trip earlier this year, and one or two miscellaneous items. Finally, there is a tribute to David Stemple, who died recently, by his friend Don Kroodsma. I have placed it at the end of the newsletter, not to reflect its relative importance, but because I think many of us will be unable or unwilling to read beyond the end of it.

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, April 17 at 7:30 PM**

**Harry Vogel speaks about *The Lives, Trials and Future of Loons***

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Mr. Vogel will begin with a brief introduction to the various species of North American loons. He will move on to discuss threats to the survival of Common Loons, and the formation of the Loon Preservation Committee. Harry will talk about the work of the committee in New Hampshire, and believes the experiences there are relevant to anyone interested in preserving loons in New England.

Harry Vogel is currently the Executive Director of the Loon Preservation Committee. He has a Bachelor's degree in Environment and Resource studies and Biology, and a Master of Science degree in Zoology with graduate and undergraduate theses written on various aspects of loon research. He is a trustee and Chair of the Research Committee of the North American Loon Fund and Co-chair of the Northeast Loon Study Working Group, a consortium of government agencies and non-governmental organizations from New England and the Canadian Maritimes addressing loon issues in the northeastern United States and eastern Canada.

Prior to his current activities, he served as Project Biologist and Coordinator of the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, a self-funded project to study the effects of human activities on the presence and breeding success of Common Loons across Canada. He has captured, banded and sampled blood and feathers of loons in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and New Hampshire and undertaken detailed observational studies on several aspects of loon behavior in Canada.

## Coming Programs

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

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

## FIELD TRIPS Reports

### Plum Island, March 4, 2006

A group of eight stalwart birders joined Geoff LeBaron for a full day trip to Plum Island. The wind dominated the day, with a steady northwest gale of 20-25 mph with gusts over 35 mph. When the group arrived at Joppa Flats, the temperature was 28 °F and it rose to only 36 in the early afternoon. The only respite from the wind and cold was gotten by soaking up weak sunshine in the low spots between sand dunes. Despite the wind, we did find two of our three target birds. After spending all morning and part of the afternoon searching the tens of thousands of white lumps of ice at the Parker River NWR, we did see a lovely, very white **Snowy Owl**. In the spirit of full disclosure, we didn't locate this bird ourselves. Having given up in disgust and heading out of the NWR, we saw Scott Sumner's birding class at Joppa Flats. About 30 minutes later we received a call from Scott, who had miraculously located the bird in a sea of white. We beat a track back to the NWR and saw the owl. We did find our other target bird by our own devices.

Al Richard's keen ears picked up an unusual call near the Hellcat boardwalk. Guesses as to the bird's identity included Robin and Catbird. The bird was low in a tangle, and all eyes were straining to see it. Al said, "It's been a long time, but I think that might be a **Northern Shrike** singing." At just that moment, two groups of us saw the bird, and indeed, it was a shrike. We later saw the bird, again singing, on a more typical high, open perch.

We saw a number of other birds including Bald Eagles (8), Northern Harriers (3), a lovely Great Cormorant in high breeding plumage at the Chain Bridge, some great views of Common Goldeneye. Overall we saw a total of 51 species, not bad for such a windy day. The one that got away was the Short-Eared Owl, of which there were none at Salisbury Beach.

Dave Gross

### Coming Trips

**(Note that the April 19 mid-week Sweep has been cancelled)**

*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).*

**Saturday, April 15. Ashley Reservoir: Early Warblers.** Half day. Bob Bieda searches out the gems of spring, the early migrants. Often, the trip finds Pine and Palm Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and migrating Broad-winged Hawks and Ospreys. Meet at the Holiday Inn parking lot, Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Rt. 91 at 7:00 a.m. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register. (E)

**Wednesday, April 19. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley.** *Please note this trip has been cancelled because Harvey will be away.*

**\*Saturday, April 22. More Migrants.** Half day. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for more migrating warblers and neotropicals, starting around Look Park in Northampton (for her signature waterthrush). Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the JFK Middle School on Bridge Street in Northampton. (E)

continues next page →

**Saturday, April 29. Graves Farm.** Half day. Shirley Hilborn (413-253-6462) and Anne Lombard (413-253-7509) will lead birders around Graves Farm, looking for migrants and other local specialties. Meet at Graves Farm at 7:00 a.m. (E)

**Sunday, May 7. Spring Migration in the Quabbin.** All day. Tom Gagnon guides birders through the Quabbin in search of its varied avifauna. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call Tom (413-584-6353) well ahead of time for meeting information and to register. (M)

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

The HBC Nominating Committee (Mary Alice Wilson, Betsy Higgins, Dave Gross) is working to produce a slate of candidates for the HBC Board of Directors for the June 2006-May 2007 fiscal year. The slate will be announced at the April club meeting, so if you are interested in serving on the board, please contact one of the committee members soon.

## **LIBRARY**

HBC has a substantial library, located at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst. Hours are those of the Hitchcock Center:

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. from Tuesday through Friday, and

9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday.

The collection is catalogued on-line at [www.hampshirebirdclub.org](http://www.hampshirebirdclub.org).

The library contains birding resources in various media, including field guides, bird-finding guides to almost every major birding destination in the U.S., and overseas, natural histories, periodicals and videos. 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**.

## **Book Signing at Odyssey Bookshop**

**Friday, April 28: 7 PM**

**Odyssey Bookshop, The Village Commons**

**9 College St., South Hadley, MA**

Miyoko Chu of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology will be at the Odyssey Bookshop on Friday, April 28 at 7 pm to read from and sign her new book, *Songbird Journeys: Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds*. David Sibley writes, “*Songbird Journeys* pulls together in one readable book much of the latest research on the fascinating lives of the songbirds. Anyone who has been impressed or inspired by these tiny feathered jewels will be more so after reading this book.” This reading and signing is co-sponsored by Mass Audubon Society, Northampton Bird Watcher’s Club, the Hampshire Bird Club, and the Appledore Island Migration Banding Station. If you can’t attend, the store can reserve a signed book for you.

## Great Backyard Bird Count Results

New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, March 13, 2006-

*The ninth annual **Great Backyard Bird Count**, which took place **February 17-20**, set new records as participation soared across the United States and Canada. From backyards to wildlife refuges, bird watchers tallied a record-breaking 623 bird species and 7.5 million individual birds during the four-day event, coordinated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society. Participants sent in more than 60,000 checklists, providing a wealth of information unmatched in previous years.*

The flood of reports yielded what would have been otherwise impossible—a comprehensive snapshot of the continent's birdlife. "With more people watching birds, together we discovered amazing things," said Paul Green, director of Citizen Science for National Audubon Society. "In some places, observers described flocks of robins so large their combined calls were louder than jetliners, and good seed crops in northwest Canada caused several species of seedeaters to remain in sub-zero northern Canada rather than move to warmer areas further south."

American Robins are typically reported in greatest number by observers in the balmy southern states, but they inundated the Northwest this year, including Washington State, where flocks of 40,000 or more were seen and totals skyrocketed to 96 percent above last year's count. In contrast, tallies of robins were down to less than one-half of their 2005 numbers in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi for reasons that are as yet unclear.

Although most insect-loving birds travel south of the United States in winter, warm weather may also have enticed some swallow and warbler species to stay farther north than usual, living on a partly vegetarian diet. The number of birders who reported Orange-crowned Warblers rose by more than 50 percent compared with last year and they reported twice as many birds, some of which were eating suet and nectar from feeders. Tree Swallows, which can feed on bayberry berries during winter, have broadened their distribution from 11 states in 2001 to 20 states in 2006. Adjusted numbers were up by 134 percent compared with last year.

Complete tallies and maps are available at the Great Backyard Bird Count web site [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc), along with photos and narratives about other birds—including species in southern states hit by hurricanes, the stunning invasion of Snowy Owls in the Pacific Northwest, migratory pathways of Sandhill Cranes, regional rarities such as a Black-throated Blue Warbler in Connecticut, and continued drops in counts of American Crows, which have been plagued by West Nile virus.

## Hitchcock Center Programs

### **BUILDING HOPE: ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN AND THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE**

*Carol Vince, Architect*

*Thursday, April 27, 7 p.m.*

### **LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: THE MATING DANCE OF THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK**

*Ted Watt, Hitchcock Center Naturalist*

*Saturday, April 15, 6-8 p.m.*

### **BIRDING BY EAR: CARDIOVASCULAR HIKE**

*John Green, Naturalist and Photographer*

*Saturdays, April 29, May 6, May 13, 6:30-9:30 a.m.*

### **SPRING COMES ALIVE THROUGH BOOKS AND WALKS: ROBERT MCCLUNG DAY**

*Sunday, April 30, 1-3 p.m.*

continues next page→

**(Hitchcock Center Programs. Continued)****A SALAMANDER SOIREE***Amherst College Alumni House**Friday, May 5, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.***THE 6TH ANNUAL BIOTHON***Friday, May 12 through Sunday, May 14***REPTILES OF THE CONNECTICUT VALLEY***Tom Tynning, Naturalist and Professor**Held at the Holyoke Heritage State Park Visitors Center**Tuesday, April 11, 7 p.m.***THE SECRET LIVES OF BATS: WHAT DO WE REALLY KNOW?***John Foster, Director of New England Naturalist Training Center**Held at Northfield Mountain Recreation and Environmental Center, Northfield**Tuesday, April 25, 7 p.m.*

*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).*

**Arcadia Programs****Dance of the American Woodcock at Graves Farm:** *Nancy Childs; Patti Steinman.***Saturday, April 15:** 6:30-8:30 pm**Dance of the American Woodcock at Laughing Brook:** Kevin Kopchynski; Patti Steinman. **Sunday, April 30:** 7-9 pm**Great Blue Herons:** *Patti Steinman.***Friday, April 21,** 4-7 pm

**Mass Audubon Birdathon:** Please help the Connecticut River Valley Sanctuaries by birding or sponsoring a team. Funds raised will help habitat restoration. For more information contact Patti Steinman at 413-584-3009 ex.14.

*For more details of these and other programs go to [www.massaudubon.org](http://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.*

**Bird-a-thon, 2006**

The Bird-a-thon will be taking place this year from 6 pm on May 12 to 6 pm on May 13. Connecticut River Valley Sanctuaries Teams will be birding both locally and all over the state that during those 24 hours. If you would like to lead or join a team contact Bob Bieda (527-2623) or Anne Lombard (586-7509). If you would like a pledge form or would like to send a check to support the CRV Sanctuaries, contact Anne for information. All funds raised from the Bird-a-thon go to support maintenance and management at these sanctuaries where we bird so frequently.

## CONSERVATION

### **Help Save 151 Acres on Turkey Hill Road**

Thirty-seven homes will be built on this beautiful hilltop property with lovely views and fine birding potential if \$70,000 additional dollars are not raised privately by May 1. The land is at the western end of the city close to the existing Mineral Hills conservation area. The City of Northampton is trying to conserve this parcel of land. If successful, it will likely become a public conservation area like Fitzgerald Lake.

*Contributions should be sent to the Northampton Office of Planning and Development, 210 Main St., Room 11, Northampton, MA 01060. Make checks payable to the City of Northampton, and write "Turkey Hill Land Purchase" in the memo space. All contributions are tax-deductible. Please contribute right away so we don't lose this. Seven-hundred contributions of \$100 will do it! If the purchase does not go through, all contributions will be returned.*

For further information, contact Anne Lombard: 586 7509; [conservation@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:conservation@hampshirebirdclub.org)

## GREAT FALLS DISCOVERY CENTER PROGRAMS

### **Important Bird Areas:** *Wayne Peterson*

The history and significance of the eleven Important Bird Areas in Massachusetts.

**Thursday, May 4:** 4-7 PM

### **Grapevines, Trees & Shrubs: What Do These Things Mean to Birds?** *Center Staff*

Geared to "the child in all of us."

**Saturday, May 6,** 1-2 pm

*Great Falls Discovery Center is located at 2 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA  
Open Fridays and Saturdays from 10AM to 4 PM  
Phone (413) 683 32212*

## **Eurasian Collared Dove Record Accepted By MARC.**

### **HBC Trip Makes History!**

The Massachusetts Avian Records Committee recently accepted the report of a Eurasian Collared Dove identified during HBC's "Poor Man's Monhegan" birding trip to Plum Island and vicinity on May 28, 2005. This is the first accepted record of this species in the state! The sighting was truly a group effort. Dave Mako first heard the bird and knew it was something unusual. Bob Bieda found the bird sitting on a wire, identified it, and said it might be the first state record. Janice Doppler ran for her notebook and scribbled field marks as Bob and Al Richards named them. Chris Ellison, Gail Abbott, and Deborah Oeky also participated in the sighting.

The bird was singing as it sat on a wire next to a large salt marsh on Island Road in Ipswich. Trip leader Bob Bieda added the stop to the day's itinerary after on a tip from a birder who'd spotted Red-necked Phalaropes at the marsh. We hoped to add that bird to the Wilson's and Red Phalaropes we'd already seen. There were no Wilson's and Red Phalaropes, but we found a special bird plus a new location to visit on future trips.

Janice Doppler

## Federal Funds for America's Migratory Songbirds

(March 29, 2006. Washington, D.C.) *The House Resources Committee today passed unanimously the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act (HR 518). This is a vital step forward in the reauthorization of a bill that provides the only significant federal funding source for neotropical migratory birds.*

The original Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 2000 expired in 2005, prompting the new legislation. The new bill would increase funding from the previous \$5 million level by \$1 million each year, to reach a maximum of \$8 million by 2010. Further improvements are a reduction in the ratio of matching money that recipients must raise from three to one down to one to one, making the funds that much more accessible. The new bill also makes Canadian projects eligible for funding.

“This is an important victory along the road to securing this funding source for America’s songbirds,” said Fenwick. “This bill represents funding for real on-the-ground conservation efforts for migratory birds, and we will continue to dedicate resources to advance this important bill until it is signed into law.”

The American Bird Conservancy, of which HBC is a member, has been a key advocate for this bill. The next step for the legislation is debate in the House of Representatives. Companion legislation in the Senate (S.1410) is also awaiting floor action.

Source: The American Bird Conservancy

## Young Birders Wanted!

The editors of *Bird Observer* magazine, in response to a bequest from the widow of a former subscriber, have asked several birding organizations, including the HBC, to provide a name of a young birder to receive a free 1-year subscription to the magazine. If you know of a budding birder in the age range of 11-16 who lives in a household that does not currently subscribe to *Bird Observer*, please send the nominee’s name, address and phone or email to [president@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:president@hampshirebirdclub.org). There will be a random drawing at the April meeting for the winner.

## Welcome New Members!

**Margaret Frenkel:** Amherst.

**Carla Wirzburger & Judy Peck:** Easthampton, MA

**Corning & Tita Townsend:** Edgecomb, ME

## 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!

That’s it 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)

I leave you with Don’s words on Dave Stemple.

## Dave Stemple

### A Personal Remembrance

Many of us know exactly when and where we met Dave: a person of his wit, wisdom, and birding skills being rather unforgettable. I remember my first encounter vividly. In the spring of 1981, I had taken my ornithology class to Plum Island, a premiere birding spot north of Boston. It was the best birding I've ever seen, with warblers dripping from every branch, and who would show up, but Dave Stemp, as I introduced him to the class. "Oh, no, I'm not worthy to be a Stemp. I'm only a little Stemp, a Stemple." What he taught the class in just a few minutes was extraordinary; he saw an opening and a stage, and the class eagerly listened.

As I look back, three aspects of that encounter hint at the essence of Dave:

1. "No moss grows on Dave." It was no accident he was there at the absolute best I've ever seen it and I never saw him there again on all of the mediocre days I've been there since. He knew it was going to be a good day, by watching the weather, and there was nothing else more important than being at Plum Island that day. It's the way he lived his life, he would tell me later. Don't delay the good times. Have fun, now. Live fully, always. He was always intensely engaged, and living with no regrets.

2. What a superb teacher! He clearly loved taking what he knew and sharing it with students, of all ages, and the students were eager to listen to "the man who knew everything," as his family sometimes called him. Dave was, as Geoff LeBaron put it, the "ultimate birding companion."

3. "Mr. Language person." His way with words and ideas, not just in English but in multiple languages. I don't know how many languages he spoke fluently or passably, but it was impressive. German, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian. When we were at a remote field station, on the border between Panama and Costa Rica, he was struggling with his Russian, and he and a Russian scientist broke into a Russian drinking song. It was extraordinary. He loved words, I think, because he loved ideas, and he loved to be able to communicate with almost anyone anywhere.

I'd learn other things about Dave in the 25 years that followed that first encounter.

Firstly, as may seem self-evident with the benefit of hindsight, Dave loved owls. His owling for the Christmas Bird Count is legendary. It's said sometimes that we resemble the birds we study or love. I have a saucy friend who studies jays, but Dave loved owls. Wise, mysterious, magical. In his words, as transcribed from a conversation I recorded:

*"Owling is different. There's a certain magic about owl finding.*

*There's owls all over the country, and I've seen them all, and some you look for in the daytime, and some you look for at night, some are easy to see, Barn Owl for example, and some are difficult to see. There's the elf owl, and you say what's that sparrow doing there, and you put your binoculars on it and it's an owl, a miniature owl, unbelievable, and they go kikiki, something like that. It's been 20 years. Flammulated-, Elf-, Western Screech, Whiskered Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl, Short eared, Long-eared, Barn Owl. Ferruginous Owl, Pygmy Owl. There's 10. All in this one area, you get them all in one night.*

As Geoff wrote to me: "Dave was the Owling King. ....I think the owls came out each December to get Dave checked off on their year list... He thought he knew where they were, but they



knew when he was there.” . . . Who else would morph Super Bowl Sunday into Superb Owl Sunday, the day to go out and find some good owls?

He loved lots of other birds, too.

Suboscines. Flycatchers. When I first arrived in western Massachusetts in 1981, he took me to his favorite places in the Berkshires, showing me where the good birds were. One night while driving back from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, where he generously fixed them up with a database system for their archive, we heard bellbirds on the CD we were listening to. The Three-wattled Bellbird turned out to be the ultimate suboscine, and we had several good trips to Costa Rica together as we documented how these birds learn their songs and change them from year to year.

Solitaires. Dave got hooked on solitaires at another field station in Costa Rica. He then traveled everywhere he could find solitaires, finding some of the most beautiful singers in the Caribbean.

Ring ouzels. Dave studied this relative of our American robin throughout Europe but especially in Scotland, his second home, tape recording them and studying their song dialects, reporting annually to a research group in UK. Having retired as a computer scientist from UMass, Dave was well on his way into a second career, that of ornithology, or, more specifically, a bioacoustician.

We shared big and little moments, eureka moments and the mundane. We had good discussions, about things that most people took for granted, such as what a species is and why they are listed the way they are in our field guides.

I think my last day in the field with Dave was typical. It was at the Hatfield robin roost (just south of the Whately line, he would remind me, and therefore in *his* hometown). This was in January, and his son Jason and I helped Dave into the car about 6:30 A.M. As the robins emerged from the roost, it was no ordinary departure, I soon realized. They kept coming, and coming, and coming, boiling into the sky, layer upon layer of robins filling the sky to the horizon, easily 30,000 robins we guessed. It was as if the robins saved their best for Dave's visit. Throughout this departure, Dave stayed in the car, never complaining, yet fully engaged in the spectacle around us, wanting to get high-resolution video cameras to document this event so that we could get a good count of what was here. By watching the robins pass through his Hatfield yard morning and evening, he tried to help understand from how far the robins came to gather at this roost. Always engaged. Always thinking. Always learning . . .

Dave loved life and was so full of it. He was a good friend, and best of all a good birding friend, and it doesn't get much better than that.

Don Kroodsma