



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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## January, 2006

In this edition:

- An introduction to this month's program,
- A very self-deprecatory field trip report by Mike Locher
- Highlights of the Northampton Christmas Count
- The **Winter-Spring-Summer HBC Field Trip Schedule**
- Programs by Hitchcock, Arcadia and VEEC
- A number of general interest stories from the world of birds

I hope you find this information useful!

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, January 9 at 7:30 PM**

**Nancy Weiss** speaks about **The ABC/Bird Conservation Alliance**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

*Should bad weather force a cancellation, it will be announced on WHMP 1400 AM radio.*

With the growth of interest in birds, many diverse groups have become concerned about bird conservation issues. Nancy believes that, if more is not done, there won't be any birds for us to watch. She will be speaking about the Bird Conservation Alliance. It is a network of organizations focused on bird conservation, education, and observation that represents millions of birdwatchers and concerned citizens, united for the conservation of birds. It seeks to promote birds as an important biological, aesthetic and economic resource for the future. It hopes to reduce bird mortality due to human activities and help protect and manage habitats to conserve the diversity of bird species and the abundance of bird populations. It supports bird conservation throughout the Americas.

Nancy Weiss has lived and worked as a physician in the valley for over thirty years. She has a life-long interest in conservation and has bought and donated over 450 acres of land in Massachusetts to 3 different conservation organizations. She loves to watch birds and admires them greatly. Not only does she work to protect bird habitat but, as a vegetarian, she doesn't eat birds either.

### Coming Up

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

**March 13, 2006. David Spector.** Birds and Books

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

### Near Miss

Shortly after World War 2, **Brown Tree Snakes** (*Boiga irregularis*) were accidentally introduced to the island of Guam. Over the past fifty years or so, the snake has devastated the ecology of the island, causing the extinction of the half the bird species. To prevent further spread, departing planes and ships are generally checked carefully for stowaway snakes. This did not prevent an individual from making its way late last year in a military cargo container to the McAlester Ammunition Plant in southeastern Oklahoma. The animal survived without food or water for about three months.

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

On Saturday, **December 10**, two handfuls of HBC faithful accompanied Mike Locher in his search for spectacular sunsets. The trip was mislabeled as an **owling** excursion. We got the sunset off the flanks of Mount Warner.

Mike finally scared up one little Screech Owl off Moody Bridge Road, at a low spot in the road henceforth to be known as "David's Dingle," in honor of our newsletter editor. This site will no doubt soon be as well known as Ned's Ditch, Bartholomew's Cobble, and Tom's Mount as a birding hotspot. Other birds we saw included a dozen Canada Geese, ten Mourning Doves, and a solitary Song Sparrow. Maybe next time I'll offer hot chocolate.

Mike Locher

Editor's Note; I don't mind having a dingle named after me, if Mike really thinks I earned it. I just don't want my name associated with any berries that might be found there.

### Coming Trips

Please see the attached "Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule"

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

**Sustainable Sundays: Natural Homes and Healthy Lifestyles:** *Tina Clarke and Myriam Laura Beaulne.*  
Sunday, January 22, 1 - 3 p.m.

**Taming the Beast: Reducing Energy Use at Home:** *Peter Talmage.*  
Thursday, February 9, 7 p.m.

**Holyoke: Origin of Water Power City:** *Ed Klekowski.*  
Tuesday, January 31, 7 p.m.

**Veracruz River of Raptors Slide Show:** *Jan Ortiz and Scott Surner.*  
Thursday, February 2, 7 - 8:30 p.m.

**Spring Birding Class:** *Scott Surner*

*Evening Classes (9): March 1, 8, 15, 22, April 5, 12, 26, May 3, 10; 6:30-8:30 p.m.*

*Field Trips (10): March 4, 25, April 8, 15, 22, 29, May 6, 13, 20, June 3; 7 a.m. – noon*

*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).*

## 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**.

## ARCADIA PROGRAMS

**Owl Moon Family Program:** *Nancy Childs, Patti Steinman.*

Saturday, January 14. 5-7 p.m.

**Tracking and Animal Signs at Laughing Brook:** *Kevin Kopchynski.*

Saturday, January 21. 10-11:30 a.m.

**Winter Crows:** *Patti Steinman.*

Sunday, January 22. 2-6 p.m.

**Winter Birding on the South Shore and Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary:** *Dan Furbish.*

Saturday, January 28. 11:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.

**Changes in Massachusetts Bird Populations:** *Wayne Peterson.*

February 7, 7-9 p.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 [Mass Audubon.org](http://MassAudubon.org) and click on the Connecticut River Valley.*

## VEEC PROGRAMS

### "Tides of Change: Wildlife Population Trends in the Valley"

**Valley Environmental Education Collaborative** is composed of state, federal, and private conservation and educational organizations along with like-minded individuals. VEEC is sponsoring a series of workshops, each addressing a different local population that has changed or been monitored over time.

#### **Stemming the Decline of Shrubland Bird Populations in Western Massachusetts.**

Jill Liske-Clark, Upland Program Coordinator, Mass Wildlife

January 24, 2006 at 7 PM. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Hadley; 413-253-8303. Please call to register.

#### **Flown the Coop: Changes in Massachusetts Bird Populations. Wayne Peterson, Mass Audubon**

February 7 at 7 PM. Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Easthampton; 413-584-3009. Please call to register.

### **Preening as a Way of Life**

*Why do so many male birds and other animals maintain costly attractive features like breeding plumage long after they have formed pair bonds?*

In a study led by Rebecca Saffran at Cornell University, female Barn Swallows formed clear and robust social pairings with single male birds, but mated and bore offspring by a variety of other males. Saffran found that males with the brightest reddish-chestnut hues on the breasts were most likely to father children by females from other pairs. Females did not form fixed opinions on the reproductive fitness of give males, but constantly re-evaluated the pool of prospective mates throughout the season. Changes in brightness translated immediately into changes in desirability. On this basis, it is clear that male Barn Swallows will be most reproductively successful if they can maintain their reddish color well into the breeding season. The authors surmise that "fitness" may depend not just on genetic and environmental good fortune, but also on the fastidiousness of male preening and other strategies for feather maintenance, a fact that gives this author something to think about. The research is published in the September 30, 2005 edition of *Science*. You can read a more comprehensive summary of it at [www.birds.cornell.edu/pr/swallows.html](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pr/swallows.html).

**NORTHAMPTON CHRISTMAS COUNT**  
**Sunday, December 18, 2005**

**Species**

85 on count day  
 2 additional species observed in count week

**Individual birds**

32,485

**High Counts**

**Wild Turkey** (162, previous high 127 in 2001)  
**Sharp-shinned Hawk** (22, previous high 19 in 1994 and 1995)  
**Red-bellied Woodpecker** (101- they hit a new High Count every year),  
**Black-capped Chickadee** (2096, previous record 1970 in 1994. Susan Smith says this is an irruption year)  
**Tufted Titmouse** (681, previous high 633 in 2004)  
**White-breasted Nuthatch** (489, previous high 478 in 2004)  
**Hermit Thrush** (9, previous high 7 in 2001)  
**Gray Catbird** (5, previous high 4 in 1996)

**Unusual Species**

American Pipit (4)

**Other interesting numbers**

**Red-breasted Goose** (first observation) is officially listed as "origin unknown" since it probably escaped from a breeder who is surely sad to have lost this elegant European bird.  
**Red-tailed Hawk** (123, the record set last year was 124)  
**Red-breasted Nuthatch** (120, unusually high - one of 6 spikes since the 1930s)  
**Cedar Waxwing** (1540, the record set in 1998 was 1567)

**Total participant count**

109 people spent time in the field this year, and there were 16 feeder watchers. The total (125 participants) represents a new record.

**Potluck Count**

59 people ate, 33 households contributed food, including 15 main dishes. Of these, the newsletter editor sampled 12, a new high. The group consumed 2.5 gallons of hot cider.

A **Summary Report** with lots and lots and lots of data is online at [www.hamshirebirdclub.org](http://www.hamshirebirdclub.org), click on Christmas Count). You can also review the records for this count since 1934 at ([www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc) - the name of this count is MANO). You can also look at the records for any other count that interests you for as many years as that count has been held (some have more than 100 years of data.)

Mary Alice Wilson

**First Bell's Vireo Banded in Massachusetts**

**Tuesday, October 24** was a red-letter day for the Manomet Bird Observatory. Their banding program captured, banded, and released the first ever **Bell's Vireo** banded in Massachusetts. The bird showed up again in the mist nets two days later.

## CONSERVATION

### “Think Globally and Act Locally”

If you subscribe to this adage, there are a couple of opportunities in local conservation to think about.

#### **The “Watras Parcel” at Arcadia.**

Arcadia Sanctuary in Easthampton is administered by Mass Audubon. It already protects 725 acres, including 168 acres of grassland around our beloved “ibis pool” in the west meadows of Northampton. The sanctuary has been working hard to restore native grasses to this grassland, and to address the encroachment of forest around the margins. Amongst other things, this promises to encourage breeding of ‘large grassland’ specialists. Kestrels have bred in the vicinity of the Ibis Pool in recent years. Meadowlarks bred in 2003, and seem to be on the verge of a comeback here. Grasshopper Sparrows may be next.

Currently, the 65-acre “Watras” farmlands are almost completely surrounded by existing sanctuary property. Their protection is key to a broad vision, which is to manage the largest possible area of contiguous grassland. The good news is that, with a loan from Mass Audubon, Arcadia Sanctuary closed on the Watras parcel in January of 2004, at a cost of over \$240, 000. Even better news is that, through grants from the Frank Stanley Beveridge Foundation, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Xeric Foundation, and the George H. and Jane A. Mifflin Memorial Fund, only \$16, 000 of the loan repayment remains to be raised as of December 15, 2005. An anonymous donor will match \$8, 000 from local donors.

So, in a nutshell, Arcadia needs \$8, 000 from people like us! What better way to use our conservation dollars than by contributing to a large local conservation area, where most of us bird on a regular basis? Please join me in contributing! Checks should be made out to “Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary” and annotated “Grassland Appeal”. Mail to: Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, 127 Combs Rd., Easthampton, MA 01027.

#### **O’Neill Hill Property. Williamsburg**

Mass Audubon is urgently seeking funds to purchase and permanently conserve the O’Neill Hill land parcel in Williamsburg. This 26-acre property on Depot Road adjoins the Graves Farm Sanctuary, and provides a link between it and an 80-acre conservation property just east of the town center. The land has also been identified as a priority for protection by the town of Williamsburg in its recently completed Open Space and Recreation Plan. The rich habitat of the land supports wildlife such as moose, black bears, and bobcats, and rich plant life, and helps maintain the water quality of Joe Wright Brook.

The project received a boost in December, when the state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) provided \$35, 000. It remains for the campaign to raise around \$76, 000 by March 31, 2006, in order to permanently save the parcel.

The success of the O’Neil Hill Conservation Campaign will help advance protection of wildlife habitat at Graves Farm Wildlife Sanctuary and will also further a broader landscape-scale conservation initiative in an area stretching from Williamsburg Center to the Conway State Forest. This area includes some of the largest undeveloped tracts of forest in the Commonwealth. To make a gift to the campaign, download a pledge form from [www.massaudubon.org/pdf/OHCCPledgeForm.pdf](http://www.massaudubon.org/pdf/OHCCPledgeForm.pdf), or send a check to Connecticut Valley Sanctuaries, 127 Coombs Rd., Easthampton, MA 01027. Attention: O’Neill Hill Campaign. Annotate the check accordingly.

*For further information on either of these land conservation efforts, contact Arcadia at 584 3009, or email the sanctuary director, Mary Shanley-Koeber at [mshanley@massaudubon.org](mailto:mshanley@massaudubon.org)*

*I would like to be able to announce how much members of HBC have donated to each of these campaigns. If you donate, please email me at [newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org) or leave a message at (413) 529 9541. It is not necessary to reveal how much you donated. I will not reveal names of donors in the announcement.*

**PUBLIC NOTICE**  
**PUBLIC ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE: QUABBIN RESERVOIR**  
**WATERSHED SYSTEM**  
**DRAFT**

The Department of Conservation and Recreation, Division of Water Supply Protection, Office of Watershed Management Quabbin Section has completed a draft *Public Access Management Plan Update: Quabbin Reservoir Watershed System* for public review and comment. A public hearing regarding the draft Plan is scheduled for January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at 7:00pm in the Quabbin Visitor Center, Belchertown, MA. Please call the Quabbin Visitor Center (413) 323-7221 for directions or possible snow cancellation.

The draft Plan will be available on the DCR website by January 3, 2006. It can be viewed and downloaded at the following website location: <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/waterSupply/watershed/quabaccess05.htm>. In addition, copies will be available at the local watershed libraries, the Quabbin Visitor Center, and upon request from the address or email listed below.

Written comments may be submitted until 5pm Friday, February 3, 2006 to:

**Public Access Plan Update Comments**

485 Ware Road

Belchertown, MA 01007

Or

[Quabbin.publicinput@state.ma.us](mailto:Quabbin.publicinput@state.ma.us)

**Piping Plovers Down, Other Nesting Seabirds Steady.**  
**2005 Census Data from MassWildlife**

**Piping Plovers**

In 2005, a total of 475 pairs of **Piping Plovers** nested at 109 sites on Massachusetts coastal beaches. This represents a 3% decline from last year's 490 pairs. Dr. Scott Melvin, Senior Zoologist for Mass Wildlife, noted that the average number of chicks fledged per pair was only 1.0; below the minimum reproductive success needed to sustain Massachusetts' breeding population of Piping Plovers. "This year's low reproductive success is due in part to two spring coastal storms that destroyed many nests," said Melvin. He also said that loss of eggs and unfledged chicks to a variety of avian and mammalian predators continues to be a primary factor limiting productivity. Beach management practices to protect beach-nesting birds from disturbance, mortality and habitat degradation remain effective conservation tools. Piping plovers are classified as "Threatened" on both the federal and state endangered species lists.

**Nesting Shorebirds**

Since the last census in 2004, numbers of nesting **Common Terns** declined 6% to 15,417 pairs. Numbers of nesting **Roseate Terns** (1510 pairs), **Least Terns** (2625 pairs), **Arctic Terns** (4 pairs), and **Black Skimmers** (6 pairs) were remarkably stable. Despite stable numbers of Roseate Tern in Massachusetts this year, the entire Northeast population of this endangered species appears to have declined substantially since 2000. Storms in May delayed nesting and caused nest failures for many coastal waterbird species.

***Backyard Birds*** (on Strong St. in Northampton) offers a wide range of birding books, audio resources, gifts, feeders, and other paraphernalia. They also offer a 10% discount to Hampshire Bird Club Members. Remember, when you shop locally, your money stays here!

**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)

Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.  
Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule, 2006

*Please register with the field trip leader(s) and check this schedule's information when a phone number is given. The Field Trip Chair (Michael Locher – 413-585-5864) 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 \$0.40 per mile, as well as tolls and parking. See also the "Field Trip Guidelines for Participants" (September newsletter or on the Website).*

*Some trips have been marked with an asterisk (\*), which indicates that they are good trips for beginning birders. All trips have been coded as Easy (E) or Moderate (M) to give a rough indication of the pace and/or terrain. However, check all information with the trip leaders.*

### JANUARY

**Saturday, January 7. North Shore: Cape Ann to Plum Island.** All day. Bob Bieda will head to the coast in search of wintering specialties like Eared Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, and much more. Dress for cold weather. For meeting information call Bob at 413-527-2623. (E)

**Saturday, January 14. Winter Finches and Whatnot.** Three quarters of a day. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) will venture to the west to look for winter finches, Northern Shrikes, Bohemian Waxwings, or whatever else seems to be around. Meet at the Hadley Elementary School (on Route 47, half a mile north of Route 9) at 7:30. (E)

### FEBRUARY

**Saturday, February 11. South Shore: Plymouth and Falmouth.** All day. Al Richards veers south of Boston to find winter's ducks, gulls, and owls. Dress warmly. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information. (E)

**Wednesday, February 15. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley.** Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) scours the local area in search of birds, and shows off his favorite birding sites along the way. Meet at 8:00 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

### MARCH

**Saturday, March 4. Plum Island.** All day. Geoff LeBaron will seek out late-winter specialties like Rough-legged Hawks, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Glaucous Gulls, and Snowy Owls. Dress warmly. For meeting information, call Geoff (413-268-9281) as the date approaches. (E)

**Wednesday, March 15. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley.** Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) leads a local trip to find seasonal specialties, probably migrating waterfowl. Meet at 7:30 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

**Saturday, March 25. Connecticut River Waterfowl.** Half day. Al Richards will follow (more or less) the course of the mighty Connecticut, seeking out her migrating denizens. Ducks, that is. Lots of 'em. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information as the date approaches. (E)

## APRIL

**\*Sunday, April 9. Timberdoodles.** Early evening. Mike Locher looks, and mostly listens, for displaying American Woodcocks and other crepuscular creatures. Call Mike (413-585-5864) the week before the trip for meeting information. (E)

**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.** Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) looks for the early migrants Bob missed. Meet at 7:30 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

**\*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)

**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)

## MAY

**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)

**Saturday, May 13. Mt. Auburn Cemetery.** All day. David Peake-Jones goes to Boston's most historic cemetery, which is also one of the city's birding hotspots, to see what happens to fly in. The numbers and variety can be astonishing. (PS-If you peed in the Quabbin the week before, don't use the water fountains.) Call David (413-529-9541) for meeting information. (E)

**Wednesday, May 17. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley.** Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) shows off his favorite birding spots. Meet at 7:00 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

**Saturday, May 20. Coastal Rhode Island.** All day. Never fear, Geoff LeBaron just moved his trip to the coast of our petite southern neighbor into the warm season (in response to member requests). Call Geoff (413-268-9281) for meeting information and further details. (E)

**Friday, May 26 – Monday, May 29. Monhegan Island.** Overnight trip. David Peake-Jones and Andrew Magee guide birders through a long weekend on this exquisite Atlantic isle in search of migrants and deer ticks. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call David (413-529-9541) to register. (E/M)

**Saturday, May 27. Poor Man's Monhegan.** All day. Bob Bieda guides the rest of us to Massachusetts' less artsy, but no less birdy, isle. Past trips have found Wilson's Phalaropes, Piping Plovers, Seaside Sparrows, Orchard Orioles, and Evening Grosbeaks. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register and get meeting information. (E)

**JUNE**

**Saturday, June 10 or 17. Westover Air Force Base.** Half day. Pending permission, Bob Bieda will lead his annual trip into New England's premier grassland habitat, looming for Upland Sandpipers, Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register and check on the date and time for meeting. (E)

**Wednesday, June 21. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley.** Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) leads birders through the local landscape, seeking out late migrants. Meet at 6:00 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

**JULY**

**Saturday, July 29. New South Beach, I.** All day. David Peake-Jones goes looking for early migrating shorebirds, especially Red Knots. Bring a lunch, a jacket, and \$20 for the boat ride. Call David (413-529-9541) to register. (E/M)

**AUGUST**

**Saturday, August 19. New South Beach, II.** All day. Bob Bieda leads birders in their quest for late shorebird migrants, including Curlew Sandpipers and Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits. Bring a lunch, a jacket, and \$20 for the boat ride. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register. (E/M)