



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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This edition brings you a bewildering mélange of information including an introduction to the club's annual flagship trip to Monhegan Island in Maine, the chance of a life-time to experience the *Rio de Rapaces* in Mexico, an important note about our trip to Westover in June, a call to arms over the endangered Endangered Species Act, some good news about shorebirds. There is also information about the annual Northeast Hawkwatch conference right here in our own backyard, and finally, a report on habitat management at Arcadia. I hope you find some of it useful!

PROGRAMS

Monday, March 13 at 7:30 PM

Dave Spector recounts the story of one birdwatcher's library:

“Buy, Buy, Bird Book!”

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

David Spector discusses his thoughts on collecting bird books and some of the books in his collection. In keeping with the theme, there will be a table of natural history books for sale to benefit the Hitchcock Center.

David Spector, a member of the Hampshire Bird Club since its first meeting, has given several talks to the club. David is a former president of the Hitchcock Center for the Environment and teaches biology at Central Connecticut State University. He is a co-editor of the *Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts*.

Coming Up

April 17. Harry Vogel. Common Loons.

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

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

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

On **Wednesday, February 15**, **Harvey Allen** and eight others swept south through the Connecticut River Valley to **Thompsonville, CT**, in search of the reported Cackling Goose. Despite picking through about 2,000 Canada Geese, there was no sign of the diminutive version. A hunting Cooper's Hawk helped relieve the monotony a little.

On the way home, the group stopped at Fannie Stebbins Refuge in Longmeadow. They found three Pintail, a Belted Kingfisher, and good comparative looks at American Black Ducks and Mallards.

Coming Trips (see also Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule)

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).

A Special Note on the Westover Trip: Saturday June 10 or 17. Westover AFB is one of the most significant grasslands in the northeast. It regularly hosts breeding populations of Grasshopper Sparrows, Upland Sandpipers, and Eastern Meadowlarks. The trip will run this year on Saturday, June 10, with a rain date on June 17. Westover has promised to do all they can to make the trip accessible to people with disabilities. **If you are interested, you MUST pre-register before May 15.** Call Bob Bieda: 527 2623.

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)

***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)

MONHEGAN ISLAND

Memorial Day Weekend (May 26-29), 2006.

The Monhegan announcement is late this year, owing to negligence on the part of the editor, who also happens to be a co-leader. Please review the details below and sign up as soon as possible!

Most birding trips are targeted 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, sometimes 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. Registration is by deposit. *For further details, including an estimation of costs, call Andrew Magee (586 1509), or speak with Andrew and David at the February meeting.*

River of Raptors – A Birding Trip to Veracruz, Mexico

October 4-12, 2006

The Hitchcock Center for the Environment is proud to offer a special travel program to Veracruz, Mexico in partnership with Pronatura, a nonprofit conservation and education organization in Mexico. It is no wonder that raptors get top billing in Veracruz. The *River of Raptors* can produce tens of thousands of hawks and vultures on a “slow” day and a 100,000 on a “good” day! In addition, millions of passerines, butterflies, and dragonflies use this coastal migration corridor. It is an area strikingly rich in natural history.

Our 9-day Veracruz *River of Raptors* tour specializes in witnessing the greatest raptor migration in the world. In 2005, approximately 5.6 million birds of prey passed through Veracruz from late August to mid-November. In addition, an estimated 8 million passerines funnel between the mountains and the coast at this time of year. Over 25 species of raptors are possible on this trip with about 240 additional waterbirds and passerines rounding out the list.

Hitchcock Center birding instructor, **Scott Sumner**, will co-lead this trip with a bilingual birding guide from Pronatura. For more information call the Hitchcock Center at 256-6006 or go to www.hitchcockcenter.org.

Hampshire Bird Club Morning at WFCR

Once again HBC members can spend 3 hours answering phones at WFCR during their fund drive in March. We will be taking calls at the station (in the studio with the on-air hosts) on Saturday, March 11, from 7-10 AM. It's easy (training is provided). It's fun (you get to see radio behind-the-scenes). Breakfast is provided; all you need to do is bring yourself (and friend if you wish) and answer pledge calls as they come in. If you'd like to join the fun, sign up by calling or emailing Dave Gross at 253-2897 or dgross@biochem.umass.edu.

Date: *Saturday, March 11*

Time: *7-10 a.m.*

Location: *WFCR studios, Hampshire House, UMass campus*

Regional Hawk Migration Conference

The **Northeast Hawk Watch** is holding its eighth quadrennial **Regional Hawk Migration Conference** on **Saturday, March 18, 2006**, at **Holyoke Community College in Holyoke, MA**. The conference is from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The program includes presentations on:

- Peregrine Falcon in New England
- American Kestrels in New England
- Raptor Population Trends (Broadwinged- and Sharp-shinned Hawks)
- Goshawk Nesting Studies in New Hampshire
- Saw-whet Owl Migration
- Live Birds of Prey, and a whole lot more!

For complete information and a registration form, visit:

<http://www.battaly.com/nehw/conference>

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

Sustainable Sundays: Maple Syrup and the Simple Life: *Jeff Field and Family*
Saturday, March 11, 1-3 p.m.

Spring Birding Course: *Scott Surner, Instructor*

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

He's back! We are pleased to announce that Scott is back from his sabbatical and ready for another season of birding with both new and experienced birders. This is the fastest growing recreational activity in the country and with good reason. Spring is the time for great zest as the migrants flow into our region full of song and color. Waves of migrants offer new excitement and new learning opportunities for all levels of birders. The evening classes will include slides, stories and examples of identification techniques. The field trips will be mostly local, with 2 trips planned for the coast and another for the Berkshires (the longer trips have a 5 a.m. start time). The first meeting begins at the Hitchcock Center on March 1, at 6:30 p.m. as a pre-meeting prep for the field trip to Plum Island on March 4. All are welcome to share in Scott's enthusiasm for birding and his decades of experience. Space is limited to 20.

Living With Wildlife: Coexisting With Coyotes: *Trina Moruzzi, MassWildlife Biologist*
Thursday, March 9, 7 p.m.

A Visit to Harvard Forest and Fisher Museum: *John O'Keefe, Museum Director*
Sunday, March 19, 2-4 p.m.

Big Night With Commander Salamander: *Bob Winston, Co-founder of Henry Street. Salamander Tunnels*
Thursday, March 30, 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.

ARCADIA PROGRAMS

New England Forests Through Time: John O'Keefe

March 7, 7-9 pm

Winter Walk at Laughing Brook: Kevin Kopchyncki and Patti Steinman

March 12, 1-4 pm

Dinosaurs, Dunes and Drifting Continents: Richard Little

March 14, 7-9 pm

For more details of these and other programs go to 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**.

"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.

This Month

The Impact of Holyoke Dam on Connecticut River Shortnose Sturgeon: Boyd Kynard, USGS

March 14 at 7 PM. Great Falls Discovery Center, Turner's Falls; 413- 863-3221. Please call to register

Uncommon Loons: Rose Maconi, Mass Aquatic Conservation Society

March 28 at 7 PM. Quabbin Visitor Center, Belchertown; 413-323-7221. Please call to register.

GREAT FALLS DISCOVERY CENTER PROGRAMS

Art in Nature (Photographic images by Tom Whalen).

On display in March and April

Spring Birds Arrive: Center staff

Saturday, March 4, 1 pm-2 pm:

St. Patrick's Day is for the Birds! Susan Russo and Gini Traub

Friday, March 17: 10am-11am and 11am – 12pm

Geared to 3-7 year olds

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

Kudos for Kroodsma!

It was announced recently that **Don Kroodsma** has been awarded the **Burroughs Medal** for his latest book, "*The Singing Life of Birds.*"

Each year the Burroughs medal is awarded to the author of a distinguished book of natural history, with the presentation made during the Association's annual meeting on the first Monday of April. Fortunately, there is an equal, if less tangible reward for those who purchase and read the book: that benefit which always accrues when one rubs up against genius.

CONSERVATION

National.....

Endangered Species Act Under Attack!

Last September, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill deceptively titled the Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act (HR 3824) which will virtually destroy the Endangered Species Act of 1973, effectively dismantling the nation's safety net for plants and wildlife on the brink of extinction. The bill will come up for action by the Senate within the next couple of months. The National Audubon Society is coordinating a campaign to convince the Senate to uphold the Endangered Species Act of 1973. If you wish to add your voice to this effort, please consider communicating your opinion to Senators Kerry and Kennedy. While consideration of the House bill in the Senate has not yet been scheduled, it will be useful to write as soon as possible. A sample letter and contact information will be available at the February 13th HBC meeting.

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, the Threatened and Endangered Species Act of 2005:

- Disallows the designation of “critical habitat” for endangered species. Without these provisions in the Act, protection of key areas for species survival is not possible.
- Makes the Secretary of Interior (a political appointee), rather than the scientific community responsible for determining what information will be used in decisions involving endangered species.
- Removes regulatory weight from plans made to ensure the recovery of endangered species. These plans, under the new bill, would have to take account of the interests of involved industry and commercial interests, rather than being expressly designed to avert extinction.
- Allows the Secretary of Interior to exempt any federal agency action, or any “category of actions” that may harm endangered species from the oversight of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Mandates federal compensation to any commercial interests which would be inconvenienced by what fragile protections remain in the legislation. Hence, a precedent would be set whereby taxpayers become responsible for subsidizing commercial interests for even the most basic environmental responsibility. There is potential for industry to specifically design the most environmentally disruptive proposals possible, in order to reap the compensation payments.

You can find the bill and more complete analysis at
www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/Programs/policy/esa/atax.HTML.

Good News for Shorebirds!

The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) - a program administered by the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences - has announced that three international sites in Argentina, Mexico and the state of Texas will join the international partnership dedicated to the conservation and protection of migratory shorebird species and their habitats.

The 20-year-old WHSRN - with 63 global partners in eight countries that comprise over 20 million acres - is the only group of its kind in the Western Hemisphere working to protect the hemisphere's 1-2 million migratory shorebirds.

The site at **Rio Gallegos, Argentina** is a large estuary with mud flats and marshes, owned by the municipality of Rio Gallegos on one shore and the Province of Santa Cruz on the other. The estuary at the mouth of the river attracts a number of North American species including the Red Knot and a locally-occurring bird called the Magellanic Plover which has a world population smaller than 2,000 birds.

Llano de la Soledad, Mexico is a grassland area of great importance to the Mountain Plover and the Long-billed Curlew.

(Continue next page→)

Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge near Houston, Texas is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Long-known for waterfowl, new management priorities recognize the importance of the area as a crucial migratory stopover for the Whimbrel.

Source: The Nature Report at www.manomet.org/naturereport

Manomet Looks at Shorebirds in ANWAR

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge received its most recent reprieve from oil drilling in September 2006. In addition to its mammalian wildlife, the refuge contains critical breeding habitat for shorebirds, whose natural history and conservation needs on the North Slope have hitherto been largely unknown. Manomet Observatory, based here in Massachusetts, is setting out to change this situation.

Fourteen species breed on Alaska's North Slope, which includes the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska, where drilling is already underway. Seven of these 14 species of shorebirds are listed as species of high conservation concern, including **American Golden-Plover, Whimbrel, Bar-Tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Buff-Breasted Sandpiper, Dunlin (arctic subspecies), and Red-Necked Phalarope.**

Manomet Observatory is involved in three major projects to enhance understanding and protection of species nesting on the arctic North Slope. Firstly, Manomet is helping Subhankar Banerjee, author of "*Seasons of Life and Land*," with a new book about the birds of the Arctic Refuge. This book will help make the case for protection of the coastal plain by illustrating the bird habitat values of this remote wilderness for the general public. Second, the observatory is collaborating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to complete the first study of breeding shorebird and waterbird distribution throughout the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain. This study will show which habitats within the Refuge are most important for breeding birds. Finally, Manomet is playing a lead role in the development of a new shorebird monitoring effort called the Program for Regional and International Shorebird Monitoring, or PRISM. The Arctic surveys will determine the actual population status of the shorebird species currently thought to be in serious decline.

Source: The Nature Report. www.manomet.org/naturereport

.....And More Local

Arcadia's Ecological Management and Natural History Conference: March 4, 2006.

As well as simply conserving habitat in the Pioneer Valley, Arcadia Sanctuary maintains numerous ecological monitoring programs, and is increasingly interested in active management of habitat. David McLain, John Burk, Connie Parks, David King, and others described some of this work in detail at what has now become an annual event to spread the word about Arcadia's research and habitat management efforts.

Ned's Ditch: More Than Mosquitoes and Button-Bush!

Ned's Ditch, despite its rather unassuming name, is the remains of an oxbow, last connected to the Connecticut River about 800 years ago. John Burk, Marjorie Holland, and David McLain are the latest in a diverse group of local biologists who have monitored the flora of the ditch since 1973. Oxbows, after they are cut off, tend to fill-in and evolve toward a more terrestrial fauna. Oxbows in various states of this transition can be observed throughout the valley; the Whately Oxbow being an example of advanced change.

Interestingly enough, by contrast, the ditch flora seems to be in a state of *dynamic equilibrium*, or *pulse stability*. It oscillates between a more "upland" kind of flora, and a more "wetland" kind of flora, without moving permanently in the direction of either state. Since 1973, during dry times, Silver Maple seedlings increase in the ground-storey, along with two species of ferns, and various members of the *Bidens* (or "sticktight") genus. Unchecked, these changes would eventually result in an essentially terrestrial ecosystem. However, during periods of high and/or prolonged flooding from the Connecticut such as last year, water-loving

species such as Yellow Water Buttercup and Common Duckweed thrive instead. Buttonbush stands seem to expand during these wet periods.

Presumably because of the continuous flip-flopping of conditions in the ditch, invasive species have almost entirely failed to take hold in the ditch, though they are painfully evident on all sides. Oh, and since this is a birding magazine, there were 19 pairs of Great Blue herons in the Ned's Ditch heronry last year, a slight decline from a recent high of 27 species, but a healthy number by historical standards.

Of Blue-Winged Warblers and Eastern Towhees

Amongst the species of most conservation concern nation-wide are early-successional shrubland birds. These include Blue-winged Warblers, Eastern Towhees, Prairie Warblers, White-throated Sparrows, Indigo Buntings, Willow Flycatchers and a number of others. The overall abundance of early-successional shrublands has declined markedly during human history, giving rise to widespread argument over how to address the conservation needs of these birds.

On the theoretical side, Dave King presented a comparison of clearcutting versus maintenance of wildlife openings as conservation tools for early successional shrubland birds. Wildlife openings are generally areas kept open by periodic removal of mature shrubs and tree saplings, either by hand, or using machines such as the infamous 'brontosaurus'. Clearcuts generally result from timber harvesting methods which are currently confined (in the Northeast) mostly to paper pulp concessions in Maine. Maintaining wildlife openings is generally done with less drastic immediate impacts on the landscape, but has the disadvantage of being prohibitively expensive, since there is no direct economic return from the process. Clearcutting, by contrast, generally pays for itself through the sale of harvested timber.

King and other researchers asked whether habitat use and breeding success varied between clearcut areas and wildlife openings. Not surprisingly, they do! Some early successional shrubland species such as the Song Sparrow, did better in wildlife openings. Other species, such as the Chestnut-sided Warbler, did better in clearcut areas. The differences probably reflect the fact that wildlife openings tend to have well developed grass and forb communities in the ground-storey, whereas clearcut areas have more shrubs and less grass/forbs. The conclusion would seem to be that, cost and public-relations concerns notwithstanding, both wildlife openings and clearcutting should be part of regional conservation efforts on behalf of early-successional shrubland species.

Habitat Management at Arcadia

Visitors to the West Meadows this winter and spring will note immediately the efforts being made to maintain a mosaic of early-successional shrubland habitats in the west meadows. Around the margins of the Arcadia grasslands, shrublands have, in recent years, been tending further toward maturing forest, with consequential declines in their value to early successional birds. Approximately fifteen acres of this habitat were cleared in January of this year, and another fifteen will be cleared in the same way in the future. Both fifteen-acre parcels will then continue to be cleared on a ten-year rotation, maintaining a mosaic of shrublands.

Fans of the weedy fields at the Ibis Pool will be pleased to see that, after years of slow takeover by Goldenrod, the areas adjacent to the pool (tilled in 2004) are sporting increasingly healthy stands of weeds that favor fall migrants!

That's all for this month!

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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