



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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## May, 2006

“Concealment is a complex business.” This statement is not the prelude to an account of corruption at the highest levels of government. It is, in fact, a musing on the Ruffed Grouse.

If you are like me, you have rarely, if ever, had a good look at a Ruffed Grouse. Most of us have seen these reclusive denizens of the forest floor only in headlong flight from us: a brown blur at best. On the last day of April, Betsy Higgins and I had a rare opportunity to really see a grouse in all its glory. The bird was lurking by one of the trails at Fitzgerald Lake and, inexplicably, chose not to flush as we approached. Instead, it retreated rapidly a few yards into the undergrowth, then began a sedate, almost glacial retreat, no doubt trusting in its ability to blend into the dun hues of the woodland floor. While watching this extraordinary bird, we became aware of just how complex the plumage really is. The face is streaked, with a buffy line through the eye to break up its outline. The bird's flanks are clothed in surprisingly delicate body feathers, each with dark bands, which combine to create wide, curving dark bars across the sides of the breast and flanks. Dark striping across the upper back gives the impression that the grouse is wearing some kind of ruff. The mid-back is a subtle gray, with dark chevrons. These grade to a bright buffy hue lower down the back. The central tail feathers were a warm chestnut color, each feather barred laterally with dark bars, each of which had a pale lower border. Each feather has a strong, dark, sub-terminal band. The outer tail feathers were contrastingly grayish, with the same intricate barring.

It seems ironic that a bird whose strategy is to remain hidden must do so with such a complex plumage. Consider, by contrast, the male Scarlet Tanager, which, in quest of conspicuousness, resorts to the simplicity of pure red, with contrasting wings. It seems that in the bird world, as perhaps in politics, to blend seamlessly with the prevailing environment requires a coat of extraordinary intricacy.

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, May 8 at 7:30 PM**

**John van de Graaff** attests to the **Peregrinations of a Bird Photographer**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

In photographing birds, **John Van de Graaff** combines two life-long loves, travel and photography, with a more recently acquired one: birdwatching. This digital slide show features a selection of his best bird photos, including a wide variety of species, from common to rare. Some images are from close to home, but most were shot further afield in, for example, Florida, Texas, and New Mexico in the U.S., Ontario in Canada, France and England in Europe, and Costa Rica and Panama in Central American.

A native of Boston, John has lived in Switzerland, Germany and Canada. On retiring as a financial analyst in 2000 (last of a number of occupations), he embarked on serious bird photography, which quickly became his full-time passion. In 2003, he migrated with his wife to Northampton from Manhattan.

In the summer of 2005, John spent time on the coast at Allens Pond Sanctuary in Westport, MA, capturing images which have been used extensively by MassAudubon to support their Coastal Waterbird Program. His photos have won several prizes, and a colorful male Painted Bunting appears on the June 2006 cover of *Birder's World* magazine. His prints have been shown at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst, and a small follow-up show will begin in mid-May 2006. He is collaborating with Amherst nature poet Wally Swist on a book combining bird images and poetry. John's web site is [www.birdsbyjohn.com](http://www.birdsbyjohn.com).

## Coming Programs

**June 12, 2006. Tom French.** *Return of a Raptor: Peregrines in Massachusetts*

### Unusual Program Date in October, 2006.

We'll be having Dr. Reuven Yosef from Israel, who will be speaking about bird migration and conservation in Israel. Because of Dr. Yosef's scheduling constraints, the meeting will be **TUESDAY, October 3** (not Monday, and in the first week of the month).

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

**On April 21**, with rain brewing, a small but select group with Betsy Higgins at the helm made its way through **Look Park**. Amidst the bewildering auditory assault of a multitude of Chipping Sparrows we seemed to hear almost every combination of speed and timbre imaginable. Wandering on through the surprisingly quiet park, we encountered a strangely subdued flock of Goldfinches and Pine Siskins, feeding on cottonwood blossoms. The Mill River seemed at first devoid of interesting bird life, including the **Louisiana Waterthrush** which is usually the *raison d'être* of this trip. Not to be deterred by the singing Carolina Wren teed up *en route* to the Northampton Country Club, we followed a series of unmistakable sweet notes, and found the singing waterthrush perched cryptically above the torrent advertising himself to all who would listen. We heard tantalizing snatches of what might have been a Black and White Warbler, and finally located a beautiful Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, before, remarkably, finding our second waterthrush of the day. Our only warbler wave of the day yielded Yellow-rumped Warbler and **Solitary Vireo**, as well as a number of Ruby-crowned Kinglets. **White-throated Sparrows**, curiously absent to that point, cavorted in the burning bush by the bathrooms, and our depleted group searched in vain amidst the pines behind Pines Theater for a Hermit Thrush. As the rain began, we dispersed back to our Saturday afternoon chores, naps, and, in many cases, messages on answering machines telling us about the White-tailed Hawk.

### Coming Trips

#### **Inexplicable Vacancies on Monhegan Trip!**

#### **Approaching Warblers Feeling Unappreciated!**

Monhegan Island lies about twelve miles of the coast of Maine. It is an artist's colony, lobster-fishing port, and a legendary migrant trap in both spring and fall. Since our inception, Hampshire Bird Club has ventured out to the island each Spring, (and several times in the fall) for a gentle weekend of birding, great looks at a wonderful range of birds, and in the eternal hope of being there for "the big one". In recent years, we have had some wonderful mornings, when the apple trees and spruces of the village were rife with almost every imaginable warbler competing for space in our binoculars. But we have not, of course, been there for the truly monumental fallout every birder dreams of, and which must surely come sooner or later.

SO how can it be that we have a few spaces remaining on this year's trip? Dear birder, there is only one way to avoid the hideous possibility that you had the opportunity to be there for the fallout of '06, but missed out, and that is to sign up!! We stay at the rustic Trailing Yew and move about entirely on foot over an island devoid of major roads, which has been immortalized in the art of Jamie Wyeth, who still keeps a home there. The total cost of the weekend runs to about \$400, and it is money well spent indeed.

If you are interested in Monhegan this year, please contact David Peake-Jones (529 9541; [davidpj@the-spa.com](mailto:davidpj@the-spa.com)) IMMEDIATELY!! The trip will close on May 7

Oh, and we have a multitude of other trips this May (see next page)

### Coming Trips (continued)

**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)

**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)

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

On **Monday, May 8**, Hampshire Bird Club will hold its **Annual General Meeting at Immanuel Lutheran Church**; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst at **7:30 PM**. The meeting will occur immediately prior to our May program. The HBC Nominating Committee (Mary Alice Wilson, Betsy Higgins, Dave Gross) is happy to announce the slate of candidates for the HBC Board of Directors for the June 2006-May 2007 fiscal year. It is proposed that the 2006-2007 board be the same group which has guided us successfully through the past year. The slate is:

**President:** DaveGross

**Vice President/Program Chair:** Geoff LeBaron

**Treasurer:** Janice Jorgensen

**Membership Secretary:** Sue Emerson

**Communications Secretary:** Marcia Merithew

**At-Large Members:** Betsy Higgins, Mike Locher, Dennis McKenna, Elissa Rubinstein, Jaap van Heerden, Bob Zimmermann.

Nominations will also be accepted from the floor during the meeting.

## *A DISTINGUISHED VISITOR!*

**Saturday, April 22, 2006**

For the second time in a year, Hampshire Bird Club members were at the center of a historical event in local birding history.

It begins with Scott Sumner heading past the horse farms on an otherwise-average Saturday morning with his Hitchcock Birding class. As the group proceeded along North Maple Street about 8 AM, Scott stopped to put a scope on what he took to be a cooperative Red-tailed Hawk perched low and close to the road. As Scott noted one field mark after another, he began to realize that this was not, in fact, a Red-tailed Hawk. After some time had passed, the group was able to identify it as a White-tailed Hawk, primarily a bird of Central America, whose most northerly range is the coastal savannahs of Texas. The rest, as they say, is history!

As word spread, local birders began showing up along North Maple Street in the rain, and trooping along a track by the field where the bird had been seen. By early afternoon, the bird, after hunting a field just west of North Maple Street for much of the morning, disappeared into inaccessible woods. Having been disturbed from a late morning nap, I was one of the latecomers. Lori Rogers and I stood in the rain peering across a field into the woods which somewhere hid the bird.

Creative searchers began going further afield, and eventually found the bird in the notoriously raptor-friendly fields at the end of Hawley Road, not far from the Mt. Warner pumping station. By about 2PM, birders were massed at the end of the road gazing at the bird in a dead tree a few yards from the end of the road.

There it sat: a truly miraculous apparition. A White tailed Hawk is slightly longer and longer-winged than a Red-tailed Hawk, though marginally lighter-bodied. This individual showed second year feathering, but was very close to full adult plumage with a white front, with delicate black barring across the upper belly. It had a snowy white tail with a fairly stunning black sub-terminal band. The bird showed a dark gray cowl and had a distinctly green and extensive cere. It had a delicate and distinctly hooked bill. If there is such a color as a rich gray, then that color prevailed across the back, offset by two muted but distinctive chestnut shoulder stripes. From behind, the bird showed broad, stubby inner wings, with the secondaries ending bluntly, well short of the tail, but with slender primaries extending down well beyond the tail. When the bird took flight briefly, the full splendor of gray-whitish wing linings was briefly revealed, along with the graceful, elongated hands of this aerial acrobat. If, as seems likely based on early indications, it is of natural origin (initial word from local falconers is that they do not keep this species), it represents perhaps the bird of the decade for this region. The bird remained in the same general area for several days. A xenophobic local red-tail clashed with the hawk on Monday morning, April 24 about 10 AM and it flew off to the south-west, not to be seen again. A White-tailed Hawk in the same plumage appeared at the Pilgrim Heights hawk watch on Cape Cod on April 27 at about 10 AM.

## **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**.

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

**BUILDING HOPE: ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN AND THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE:** *Carol Vince, Architect.* Thursday, April 27, 7 p.m.

**IF ONLY THERE WERE WINGS THAT COULD CARRY ME: A READING OF POETRY REGARDING BIRDS:** *Wally Swist.* Tuesday, May 9, 7 p.m.

**BIRDING BY EAR: FOR ALL ABILITIES:** *Ted Watt, Marcy Marchello.* Wednesday, May 10, 8-10 a.m. (rain date May 12)

**TRIP TO GARDEN IN THE WOODS:** *Ted Watt, Hitchcock Center Naturalist* Thursday, May 11, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

**A SALAMANDER SOIREE:** *Amherst College Alumni House* Friday, May 5, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m.

**THE TRACKING WAY:** *Mark Elbroch, Tracker, Naturalist and Author* Friday, May 12, 7-9 p.m.

**UNDERSTANDING AND INTERPRETING FORM: A NATURAL HISTORY OF ANIMAL SKULLS** *Mark Elbroch.* Saturday, May 13, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

**CREATION CARE:** *Paul Gorman, Director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.* Tuesday, May 23, 7 p.m.

**SNAKES OF NEW ENGLAND:** *Linda Krulikowski, Author and Photographer* Saturday, June 3, 10 a.m. – noon

**ALL ABOUT BLUEBIRDS AND MORE:** *John Rogers, Bluebird Enthusiast* Thursday, June 8, 4 p.m. for children and families  
Thursday, June 8, 7 p.m. for everyone

**THE BEAUTY OF HIGH LEDGES:** *Ted Watt, Hitchcock Center Naturalist* Saturday, June 10, 9:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**THE 6TH ANNUAL BIOTHON** *Friday, May 12 through Sunday, May 14*

*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).*

## MASS AUDUBON PROGRAMS

**Early Morning Bird Walks:** *Guest Leaders;*

Saturday, May 6, 7-8:30 a.m. at Arcadia

Monday-Friday, May 8-12, 6:30-8:00 a.m. at Arcadia.

Saturday, May 13, 7-8:30 a.m. at Graves Farm

Saturday, May 20, 7-8:30 a.m. at Lynes Sanctuary

Saturday, May 27, 7-8:30 a.m. at Laughing Brook

**Bluebirds:** *David McLain*, Saturday, May 20, 10 a.m.-noon.

**Birding and a Bite Before Breakfast:** *Anne Lombard*, Tuesday, May 16, 7-8:30 a.m.

**Mass Audubon Birdathon:** Friday, May 12-Saturday, May 13,

Call Bob Bieda ,527-2623, Anne Lombard, 586-7509, or Patti Steinman, 584-3009 to get involved

*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 [massaudubon.org](http://massaudubon.org) and click on the Connecticut River Valley.*

## GREAT FALLS DISCOVERY CENTER PROGRAMS

Thursday, May 4, 7- 9 pm. **Important Bird Areas.** *Wayne Petersen*

Saturday, May 6, 1-2 pm. **Grapevines, Trees & Shrubs: What Do These Things Mean to Birds?**

Saturday, May 13 8:30am to 2pm **Birding in Northfield.** *Bob Coyle*

Saturday, May 13, 10 am and 2 pm. **Local Birding (from Great Falls Discovery Center)**

Saturday, May 13, 1-2 pm. **A Closer Look at Trees with Gini Traub of DCR**

Thursday, May 18, 7-9 pm. **Habitats, Birds, and Migration**

Saturday, May 20 & Sunday May 21 **Great Falls Art Fest**

Saturday, May 20, 1-2 pm. **Walking Tour:Geology of Turners Falls.** *Steve Winters*

Thursday, May 25, 7-9 pm. **Whip-poor-wills of the Montague Plains.** *Dave Small*

Saturday, May 27, 1-2 pm. **Birds of the Boreal Forest.**

*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*

## PROJECT ORIOLE. CITIZEN SCIENTISTS NEEDED!

Mass Audubon is asking for participants for a Baltimore Oriole census project. The objective of the project is to locate and catalog as many breeding pairs of orioles as possible. This is an ongoing project that was focused in Eastern Mass in previous years. This year Mass Audubon wants to increase participation in Western and Central Mass. Participation is simple: settle on one or more observation areas, look and listen for orioles that are breeding within the area, and send in your observations.

More information about the project and online forms for data reporting can be found at the web site <http://massaudubon.org/oriole/index.php>. Alternatively, you can get data cards to report orioles from your local Mass Audubon sanctuary.

## NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION

Appropriations for increased funding for the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Improvement Act are being considered in the House at this time. **John Olver, the representative for the First Congressional District of Massachusetts, covering much of Western Massachusetts, sits on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies. If you are interested in voicing your views, please ask Congressman Olver to support increased funding for the Fiscal Year 2007 Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program!** Letters should be written and emailed or faxed by May 4th. More information and a template letter in Microsoft Word format (courtesy of the American Bird Conservancy) can be downloaded from the HBC website at <http://www.hampshirebirdclub.org/Endangered%20Species/index.html> or from the Endangered Species link on the front page.

As you may know, this relatively small, but extremely effective, matching grant program coordinates and funds the conservation of neotropical migratory birds and their habitats throughout the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program has provided an effective framework for nations, states, local governments and other entities to work together cooperatively for the protection of neotropical migratory birds in the Western Hemisphere. Grants have gone to conservation programs in 31 states and 33 Latin American and Caribbean countries for projects that protect, research, monitor, and manage neotropical migratory bird populations and their habitats.

## Speak Out on Sunday Hunting!

Bills are before the Massachusetts legislature to remove all prohibition against hunting on Sunday. This would make it virtually suicidal to venture into many of our favorite birding locations during (at least) deer and bear season. Here is the information you need to contact your Massachusetts Senators and Representatives.

**House 4517** (completely removes the prohibition on Sunday hunting). On March 16, it was reported favorably from the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture. It should, therefore, come to the floor for a vote.

**House 1279** (allows Dept of Fisheries and Wildlife to permit hunting on Sundays). Has been referred to study committee (is still alive and well.)

**House 1325** (provides for annual two-day hunt on Saturday and Sunday immediately following Thanksgiving Day.) Like 1279, referred to study committee (is still alive and well.)

### 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)