



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

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In this edition:

- an introduction to the **program** for this month,
- **coming field trips**, including **Monhegan** and **Connecticut Lakes**, scheduled for late-spring-summer,
- a primer for the **second year of Atlas 2**, and yet another new dimension to the **Christmas Count**,
- **“Birds of North America”** (online) at a discount?
- **Hitchcock Programs**, and
- a snippet from the rarified air of research ornithology.

I hope you find some of it useful!

PROGRAMS

Monday, March 10 at 7:30 PM

Scott Hecker speaks about the NAS Coastal Waterbird Program

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

The efforts that have been made over the last two decades to protect and promote recovery of the Piping Plover have resulted in a four-fold increase in the population in Massachusetts. In addition, the number of locations with breeding pairs has doubled. Even more important than the fate of this charming bird is the fate of our barrier beaches in general, which have definitely been helped by the measures taken to protect the plovers. National Audubon have used the strategies applied to Piping Plover conservation as the basis for the nation-wide Coastal Bird Conservation Program. Scott Hecker will outline for us some of the challenges this program has taken on, how it is faring, and what the future may hold.

Scott Hecker is the Director of the National Audubon Society's Coastal Bird Conservation Program, an effort he launched in 2003 for the Audubon Science Division. The Coastal Bird Conservation Program aims to increase the on-the-ground protection of North America's most endangered plovers, terns, and other threatened coastal birds throughout their breeding and non-breeding ranges in the Western Hemisphere.

From 1984 to 2003 Mr. Hecker worked for the Massachusetts Audubon Society where he directed the Coastal Waterbird Program, co-directed the Massachusetts Important Bird Area Program, and assisted with the development of the Programme for Belize. In 1987 he completed a Master of Sciences degree in Resource Management from Antioch University, which focused on the conservation of wetlands in Belize, Central America. In 1998 his work in Massachusetts was recognized with a “Coastal Visionary Award” from the Gulf of Maine Council. His articles, photographs, and artwork have appeared in the publications of Audubon, the National Geographic Society, and the National Park Service. He lives in Duxbury, Massachusetts.

Coming Up

April 14, 2008. Chris Elphick. Sharp-tailed Sparrow Nesting.

May 12, 2008. Rob Williams. Avian Endemism in Peru.

June 9, 2008. Bruce Beehler. Expeditions to Foja, New Guinea.

FIELD TRIPS

Coming Trips

Saturday, March 22. Connecticut River Waterfowl. Half day. Al Richards looks for waterfowl migrating through the valley along the Connecticut River. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information as the date approaches. (E)

***Saturday, April 12. More Migrants.** Half day. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for migrants, starting around Look Park in Northampton. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the JFK Middle School on Bridge Street in Northampton. (E)

***Sunday, April 13. Ashley Reservoir: Early Warblers.** Half day. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) hopes to find Pine and Palm Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and other early migrants. Meet in the Friendly's parking lot, near the Holiday Inn, close to Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Rt. 91 at 7:00 a.m. (E)

***Sunday, April 13. Woodcocks.** Evening. Mary Alice Wilson (413-548-9078, or mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu) invites you to come listen to Leverett Woodcocks and other sounds of a spring evening. The listening will commence at 7:30 p.m., with the location to be determined (by the woodcocks). Contact Mary Alice Wilson for directions. (E)

Overnight Trips

Monhegan Island Memorial Day Weekend (May 23-26), 2008

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, contact **Betsy Higgins** (hignik@comcast.net; 586 4948) or **Andrew Magee** (586 1509).

Overnight Trips (continued).....

Connecticut Lakes, New Hampshire.
Friday, June 20 – Sunday June 22, 2007.

Our ever-popular trip to the “Great North Woods.”

Less than a mile south of the Canadian border in extreme northern New Hampshire, our beloved Connecticut River begins as a stream one can almost literally step over at Fourth Connecticut Lake. From here, the river flows through the progressively larger Third, Second, and First Connecticut Lakes, and Lake Francis, before hurrying through Pittsburg, New Hampshire, and on to points south. The streams, lakes, swamps and spruce woods of the Connecticut Lakes are superbly scenic, and provide the closest large tract of boreal forest for us in New England. We will stay in comfortable cabins at Powderhorn Lodge, and make our way daily along Rt 3 (part of which is aptly nicknamed Moose Alley) and adjacent logging roads to visit the various habitats which make up the lakes experience.

There should be great opportunities to observe nesting warblers, including Bay-breasted and Blackpoll, perhaps even the rare Cape May Warbler. Winter finches like Evening Grosbeak and Pine Siskin should be around, along with boreal specialties such as Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, Olive-sided Flycatcher and White-winged Crossbill. If we are really lucky, we might come across jewels like the Spruce Grouse or Black-backed Woodpecker.

Please contact **David Peake-Jones** (413 529 9541; davidpj@the-spa.com), or **Mike Locher** (413 585 5864, mlocher@yahoo.com) for further information or to sign up.

BREEDING BIRD ATLAS 2

Reminder

Atlas Workshop with Joan Walsh, Tuesday, March 4, 7 PM, Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary. (snow date March 5). Hear about data from the first year, changes in procedures and better ways to plan your strategies (habitat and species).

Here's the flow chart:

Plan

Get codes and safe dates

Get block maps

Plan block strategy ► **Bird**

Habitats (ideally all types in each block)

ID

Behavior ► **Code**

PO (inside safe dates)

PR (inside safe dates and behavior)

CO (behavior only)

► **Enter**

Paper/computer

Time spent, Date, Code

Map/Description (rarities)



► **Enjoy**

Birds

Helping birders

Helping birds

(No excuses for confusion now).

Volunteer Opportunities

Don't forget the following opportunity for HBC members to contribute time and effort to the Amherst conservation community.

Spring Trail Maintenance along the Amherst Rail Trail.

HBC in association with the Amherst Conservation Department.

Initial efforts will focus on improving the trail to the bird-blind. Other projects to follow.

For more information on this volunteering opportunity, contact Dave Gross at president@hampshirebirdclub.org.

Another Remarkable Story from the Christmas Count!

As part of the Northampton Christmas Count, team #15 always walks the Barstow Farm in Hadley. The team leader, Sally Hills, visits the dairy farm in the week preceding the count to ask permission to walk the fields and sends a thank you note each year which includes the summary of the results both on the farm and of the entire count circle.

The Barstow Farm is a good place to be on those cold (or snowy, or rainy) Christmas Count mornings. The farm buildings border the edge of Mt. Holyoke and the Skinner State Park. The fields extend west to the Connecticut River. The day begins with the spectacular flight of crows headed from their Springfield roost to the open fields to the north. There are Bald Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, Common Ravens, the expected forest, edge, and open-meadow birds — and occasionally Rough-legged Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hermit Thrush, Horned Lark, or Common Redpoll. One year there was even a Nashville Warbler.

Last year, the Barstow Farm, like every other dairy farm in the northeast, faced a financial crisis. Milk prices were so low that none of the farms could cover their costs. Massachusetts was very close to losing both an important source of locally produced food and also the agricultural habitats so important to wildlife (and to the beauty of our communities.)

Because the Barstows knew about the Christmas Count and the data we collected and because they thought that data might make more of an impression on decision-makers in Boston than appeals to their conscience, they asked if we had any information on the birds that use the farm. We did and were able to send lists that could be presented at the legislative hearings.

This week the Hampshire Bird Club, as sponsor of the Northampton CBC, received a letter from Paula Barstow.

"We love hearing from the bird club with the bird tallies. Thank you for your notes and information. We especially wanted to take this time to say thank you for all you do for the bird population and for us with your notes and communication.

"Just to let you know, we had asked for your help and support a while back when the Department of Agriculture was considering helping out the dairy farmers - well: it worked! We are getting a good and fair price for our milk and we were able to receive some funds to help tide over the bad year in 2006. We wanted you to know that it's your support and support of folks like you that did the trick!"

Ever wondered why you are out there with hands so cold you can't hold your binoculars? Now you know.

Mary Alice Wilson

Birds Of North America Discount?

Cornell University provides an online guide to the natural history of North American birds, called, appropriately enough, "Birds of North America." This is arguably the premier resource of its kind for this continent, and quite possibly the only thing standing between some of us and a subscription to the service is the \$40 annual fee!

The indefatigable Mary Alice Wilson is preparing to negotiate with Cornell to establish a discounted subscription fee of \$32 that would be available to HBC members, as it is already available to members of some other bird clubs. Mary Alice will be announcing this in more detail at the March 4 Breeding Bird Atlas Workshop at Arcadia. In case you do not plan to be there, stay tuned!

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

Tracking White-tailed Deer: *Alan Emond*

Saturday, March 8, 2008, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

One Hundred native Plants for Your Home Landscape: *Sue Reed*

Thursdays, March 13, 20, 27, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Amherst Breeding Bird Study Presentation: *Douglas Hutcheson*

Thursday, March 27, 2008, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Quabbin Exploration: *Ted Watt*

Saturday, March 15, 2008, 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

From Land to Landscape: A Writer Looks At the World: *Jane Yolen*

Wednesday, March 26, 2008, 7 p.m. at the Quabbin Visitor Center, Belchertown.

The Third Annual Salamander Soiree: A Benefit for the Hitchcock Center.

Friday, March 28, 2008, 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Amherst College Alumni House

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.

Head Starts in Redstarts

The migration of neotropical birds is becoming understood at an increasingly fine level. It has been known for some years that migrating male warblers arrive on breeding grounds before females and it was often thought that this in itself was an adaptive trait: the males needing to have established territories in order to successfully attract mates.

New work suggests the possibility of an alternative explanation.

A University of Maryland/National Zoo study of American Redstarts shows that the lifetime migration patterns in these birds are profoundly affected by the quality of their first wintering grounds. The study examined redstarts that spent their first winters in one of two adjacent Jamaican habitats. Some birds spent the winter in mangrove swamps, a relatively rich habitat with abundant insect diversity and adequate water. Others had to deal with adjacent arid lands, with less food and limited water. (continues over ►►)

(Headstarts in Redstarts, continued.....)

The following interesting patterns emerged:

- a) the birds from the mangrove habitat maintained condition better, bulked up in preparation for spring migration earlier, and departed earlier. (continues over ► ►)
- b) these birds tended to establish territories in the southernmost areas of the breeding range. This meant a shorter fall migration and, on average, their arrival on the wintering grounds earlier. Being early arrivals, they were again able to establish and hold winter territories in the prime mangrove habitat.
- c) 70% of the birds in the mangrove habitat were mature males. The majority of young males and females had to make do with the arid lands.

Hence, while the study confirms that males tend to migrate earlier, it also suggests that this may be because they have the advantage of better condition, rather than a “need” to arrive early in the north.

Reference: *University of Maryland (2008, February 25). Early Experience Affects Where Birds Breed For Life: What Happens If Habitat Changes?. Science News.*

Welcome New Members!

Craig Goff,	Amherst
Casey Ravenhurst,	Hatfield
Leanne Ksiazek & Sandra Leiser,	Westhampton

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 all for this month!

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

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