



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

Amherst, Massachusetts

25TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 25, No. 2

October, 2008

In this edition:

- Our **program** and **field trip information** for this month. Please note that there is an addition to the Fall Field Trip Schedule. **Geoff LeBaron** will be going to **coastal Rhode Island on October 25**. Please see the "Coming Trips" section.
- **Reports** on our outings to Hammonasset, Connecticut Lakes and New South Beach.
- **Sign-up** announcement for a special trip to **Yellowstone** next summer.
- The first installment of a **club history**, written in honor of the anniversary year by Trudy Tynan.
- News about the **anniversary raffle, book read, and big sit**.
- **Christmas Count** reminder.
- **Hitchcock Center** programs.
- Some other items of interest.

I hope you find some of it useful!

NEXT PROGRAM

Monday, October 20 at 7:30 PM

Chan Robbins on Wintering with the Neotropical Migrants

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Dr Robbins will summarize 20 years of field-work in Central America and the West Indies (primarily Belize, Mexico and Guatemala) by the U S Geological Service, through the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. USGS ornithologists and volunteer banders visited eight tropical American countries to study habitat use by wintering neotropical migrants, including the effects of habitat fragmentation on migrants and on resident species. They trained local biologists and students to continue these studies on their own and ultimately protect important wildlife habitats.

Chan Robbins retired recently from the USGS Patuxent Research Center in Laurel, Maryland after 60 years of work in ornithology and conservation. Chan has devoted his life to the study of migratory birds. A senior author of "The Field Guide to Birds of North America", Robbins is also credited with organizing the North American Breeding Bird Survey, assisting with the Maryland and District of Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas, and writing and editing hundreds of articles in journals and other publications. In addition to his work in Maryland, Robbins has done extensive work in Latin America, studying the many species of birds that migrate thousands of miles annually. Chan is also known for his critical research on the effects of forest fragmentation on bird populations. There is a Website devoted exclusively to this champion of migratory birds. You can visit it at www.pwrc.usgs.gov/whatsnew/events/robbins/.

Coming Programs

November 10, 2008. Norman Smith.

December 8, 2008.

January 12, 2009. Don Kroodsma.

From Snowy Owls to Saw-whet Owls

HBC Members' Meeting—Club Remembrances

Book II, or more birdsong, or...

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE BY SEPTEMBER 30!

Send yours in via the membership form which came with the September issue. If you need another form, please visit our Website at www.hampshirebirdclub.org. If you have already renewed, thank you!

Don't forget the **Release** on the back of the membership form, and sign up for the **Rare Bird Alert (RBA)** if you wish. The form also came with the September issue or is available on the Website.

HBC Newsletter Available On-Line

The club offers an on-line (or "electronic") version of the newsletter, as an alternative to the "hard copy" delivered via USPS.

"How does that work?"

The newsletter is posted on the HBC website. Participants receive an email notification, whereupon they can view and/or download the newsletter from the website at their leisure. You need to give us an email address on the membership form in order to get the on-line version.

"What's the point?"

You can archive our publication electronically, without accumulating paper files. You reduce postage costs for HBC, which keeps dues down for all of us.

What if I encounter technical difficulties?

Most users last year had no difficulty. In the event that you find the system does not work for you, a simple communication with the Membership Secretary will get you back on the "Hard Copy" mailing list.

What are the computer/software requirements?

The newsletter will be posted on the Website in PDF format. This means you will need to have Adobe Acrobat Reader software (version 5.0 or later) on your system. If you do not have it already, this software is available FREE via a link at the club Website

How do I sign up?

Sign up in the upper right hand corner of the Membership Form.

I signed up last year. Do I need to sign up again?

We ask all members to decide each year how they want to receive the newsletter. Regardless of how you got the newsletter last year, please make your choice of how to receive the newsletter this year on this year's membership form.

LIBRARY

We now have Scott Weidensaul's "*Return to Wild America*" in the collection.

The HBC Library is 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.

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**.

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

Hammonasset Beach State Park: Saturday, June 14.

Betsy Higgins (leader), Joyce Merriam, Janet Merriam Cornell, Elaine Pourinski and Elissa Rubinstein set out under threatening skies for the Connecticut coast where the day remained sunny and warm enough for an after-birding swim in Long Island Sound.

Good views of **Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow** and **Seaside Sparrow** (our target birds), a singing **Marsh Wren**, and **Glossy Ibis**. Other highlights were a flock of **Monk Parakeets**, American Oystercatcher, Least Terns nesting on beach, a lone Piping Plover, Surf Scoter, Common Goldeneye, **Little Blue Heron**, many pairs of nesting Osprey, and hordes of Willet (one parent with three babies). Total species seen: 54.

Elissa Rubinstein



Connecticut Lakes. June 20 – 22, 2008.

Betsy Higgins, Isabel Higgins, Devorah Levy, Rick McNeil, Elizabeth McAnulty (auxiliary), Janet Merriam Cornell, Joyce Merriam, and David Peake-Jones made their carbon-polluting way to Powderhorn Lodge on picturesque Back Lake in Pittsburg, New Hampshire on a sultry but pleasant Friday morning. Without further ado, we set off up Perry Stream Road. This day, perhaps more than any other, reminded us that birding the north country is as much an auditory as a visual experience. **Northern Waterthrushes** sang from the marshy environs of the stream, and, time and time again, we searched for singing Nashville and Magnolia Warblers, only to continue on with naught but the sound to keep with us. Late this first day, a sound like a House Wren on steroids heralded our first local specialty. We finally tracked the sound to a boisterous family of **Gray Jays** scuffling in a grove of spruce. As evening fell, we heard “Quick, three beers!” and knew this was more than the local bar calling. Again, we had to make do with an audio record of **Olive-sided Flycatcher**.

On Friday evening, we patrolled Moose Alley, and had a wonderful close encounter with a young **moose** that passed very close to the cars before heading off to more secluded habitat.

Saturday morning started well when the Higgins mobile spotted a **Common Snipe** sitting obligingly in a mown section of the Perry Stream fields, right by the road. Two more Gray Jays greeted us as we made our way over East Inlet bridge, but the mornings prize was sitting regally beside the Scott’s Bog road, where the lead car passed it by without a sighting. Luckily, car two were looking in the right place at the right time. A spectacular adult **Great Horned Owl** left its perch by the roadside and flew across the road to a vantage point in a spruce from whence it surveyed us balefully for at least five minutes. We, for our part, surveyed it rapturously, but this seemed to have little effect on the owl.

From mist-enshrouded Scott’s Bog, we car-shuttled back a couple of miles along the road, thus immersing ourselves in the song of Winter Wrens, Purple Finches and other breeding birds from the marsh on the right. We had a close encounter with a soaring raptor which failed to conclusively identify itself clearly. Northern Goshawk remained an intriguing but hypothetical possibility. We searched the brushy old clearcuts of East Inlet Road in vain for unusual woodpeckers, and ended up at a muddy track into what has, in recent years, been the most promising local spot for Spruce Grouse. Flooding over the track made it impossible to penetrate more than a few hundred yards into this mysterious wood, but it did not stop us performing some rather rudimentary grousy calls and wing-claps. To our surprise and delight, there was an answer: three clear and close wing claps. There was no other response to our efforts, but we remain convinced that this was, indeed, a **Spruce Grouse**. We feel privileged to have had even this evidence of such a reclusive bird.

(continues on page 4) ►

Connecticut Lakes (continued)

Some lovely habitat on Smith Bog Road failed to produce anything new, though we repeated our hilarious grouse pantomime, compete with hiding routines, at some likely looking spruce regrowth. On the way home, we stopped to look at **Cliff Swallows** under the eaves of the Moose Alley icecream shop. On Sunday morning we toured Indian Stream Road which, though it yielded no new birds, was a quiet and scenic. After pack-up and compilation we searched vainly for some further sign of a **Boreal Chickadee** Betsy had located on Beach Road, near the cabins. We had to settle for a pair of loons, one of which carried a dark, downy chick on its back: an iconic and entirely suitable farewell to the lakes for another year. We worked really hard for our **seventy eight species**, and I for one, have been drifting off to sleep in the intervening days with the sound of three wing-claps firing my imagination for next year.

David Peake-Jones



New South Beach. Saturday, August 2.

David Peake-Jones, Andrew Magee, and Chris Ellison made their way (at a remarkably civilized hour) to meet Sally Hills, Helga Beatty and Priscilla Moor at Outermost Harbor Marine for this year's first shorebirding trip. Having met and donned whatever outlandish level of sun protection each preferred, we climbed aboard one of the sturdy water taxis for the short trip down to the extreme tip of the beach. As we alighted in the shallows, we found the sandy sea bottom covered in tiny, fragile horseshoe crabs. As one who has always wondered why there were so many crab carcasses on the beach, but so few living crabs, it was inspiring to see evidence of these beleaguered animals actually reproducing!

We quickly set about brushing up on the (always rusty) suite of skills required to identify shorebirds, wrestling with the complex variables of size, shape, plumage and behavior. Some peeps lined up cooperatively, allowing us to compare the smaller, warmer-colored, delicately-billed and yellow-legged Least Sandpipers with the larger, grayer, dark-legged Semi-palmated version. We also set ourselves to the task of picking out Tree-, Barn- and Bank Swallows in various stages of development from the numerous swallows plying the air over the grassy flats.

Thus it went, as we patiently picked through the shorebirds arriving on the rising tide. There were portly, sword-billed **Hudsonian Godwits**, sporting the remnants of their barred chestnut waistcoats, and among them, a conspicuously cinnamon **Marbled Godwit**. In amongst the myriads of Short-billed Dowitchers sewing their way along the ever-changing tide line, were some stocky, medium-sized birds with apricot breasts. Though unremarkable, these represented a good proportion of the remaining embattled eastern race of the **Red Knot**. Now, with legislative relief from the over-fishing of horseshoe crabs in Delaware Bay, this tiny band of survivors must literally begin to rebuild the race almost from scratch. It is sobering to reflect that even with the situation in New Jersey improved, these and all shorebirds are still critically threatened by the consequences of global warming.

As we went, we found numerous opportunities to wrangle some less usual birds from the masses of the mundane. A number of sandpipers showed russet highlights on their backs, and, when they obligingly stood next to others, showed longer, more drooped bills than the surrounding Semi-palmated Sandpipers. Thus we exultantly marked down at least three **Western Sandpipers**. Several **Dunlin** were betrayed by dark bellies, and White-rumped Sandpipers were just a little big and long-sterned to hide successfully amongst the other smaller birds. We were treated to close looks at petite Least Terns plying the waters, and, in one case, chasing a Greater-Black-backed Gull away from nesting territories. Amongst our other highlights were sightings of a single **Black Skimmer**, one **Black Tern**, and a **Pectoral Sandpiper**. With nineteen species of shorebirds to our credit, and forty-three species for the day, we retired to the Cream 'n' Cone to dine and wrap up a wonderful day.

David Peake-Jones

Coming Trips

Please note: The HBC Field Trip Policy is currently under review. For now, the 2007-2008 policy applies.

Saturday - Sunday, October 11 – October 12. Cape Cod. Two days. Join Scott Surner to find shearwaters, jaegers, shorebirds, and migrating landbirds from Chatham to Provincetown on Cape Cod. Participants will need to make their own lodging reservations. This trip is limited to twelve participants, so call Scott (413-256-5438) soon to reserve your space and get further information. (M)

***Saturday, October 18. Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area: Snow Geese.** All day. Al Richards will lead birders to the annual spectacle of thousands of Snow Geese (and a Ross's Goose or two, with any luck) fueling up for their migration, then explore the shore of Lake Champlain. Call Al (413-665-2761) to register and get meeting information. (E)

Newly Announced Trip

***Saturday, October 25. Coastal Rhode Island.** All day. Join Geoff LeBaron on this trip to Rhode Island to see what's flying along the coast. Meet at the Northampton Stop & Shop at 6:30 a.m. Call Geoff (413-2689281) to register as the date approaches. (E)

***Saturday, November 8. Berkshire Lakes: Migrating Waterfowl.** All day. Al Richards goes to the lakes and ponds of western Massachusetts to find ducks and other migrating waterfowl. Call Al (413-665-2761) to register and get meeting details. (E)

OVERNIGHT TRIP

Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Trip to Wyoming and Montana

Tuesday, July 21 to Friday, July 31, 2009

Co Leaders: Tom Gagnon and Scott Surner

Limit of 20 Hampshire Bird Club members on this trip.

This will not be just a birding field trip. We will be looking at big game mammals, wild flowers (should be at their peak), butterflies and photo options, and visiting 2 or 3 small museums. In fact, we'll time for a couple of photo opportunities and anything else that tweaks our interest. The cost should be approximately \$2,000 PLUS to cover 10 nights of motels (double occupancy) airfare, car rental, gas, leadership fee, club insurance, and a couple of incidentals such as a float trip on the Snake River, and an evening at the theater. Airfare is the hardest to estimate and we have to keep that in mind. We will need to make motel reservations by mid November so we will need a deposit by the end of October to reserve our motels early. Motels fill up VERY EARLY in Jackson. We will be renting cars, four people per car so everyone has their own door to get in and out. We will need to have two drivers per car.

To register for this trip, please call Tom Gagnon, (584 6353) STARTING on SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13th, 2008. This should give everyone time to receive their newsletter or read their email and to call me about any questions. If I am not home, please leave your name and telephone number. Tom Gagnon.

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!

25TH ANNIVERSARY

RAFFLE RAFFLE RAFFLE RAFFLE RAFFLE RAFFLE

To raise money toward our anniversary year, the HBC will be conducting a raffle. The prize, donated by an HBC member, is a **rare print after John James Audubon by J. T. Bowen: Townsend's Cormorant, Plate 418 from *Birds of America***. This hand colored lithograph, circa 1845, was part of a series by James Bowen who received permission from Audubon to reproduce his engravings in lithography in a smaller size than the original series. A representative from Christie's has valued this print at \$500.

Raffle tickets will be on sale for \$10 each at our Sept., Oct., Nov. and Dec. meetings. The print will be available for viewing at each of these meetings. The drawing will take place at our December 8th members' meeting. If you would like to purchase tickets at other times or have any questions, please contact Betsy Higgins at 586-7585.



HBC BOOK DISCUSSION: *Return to Wild America* by Scott Weidensaul.

In 1953, Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher made an epic journey around the United States and published their classic account of that adventure, *Wild America*. Fifty years later, Scott Weidensaul followed in their footsteps to observe changes in bird populations and habitats, and to see if "Wild America" still exists. The result is his book: *Return to Wild America*. We are excited to welcome Scott as our speaker in March, 2009. In honor of that event, we've planned a series of book discussions and look forward to generating some good questions to ask him!

You are welcome to attend any or all of the three sessions outlined below. During each session, we will focus on a specific issue using material from both books, in addition to sharing personal experiences and observations. *Return to Wild America* is recommended reading. All sessions are scheduled for Mondays at the Hitchcock Center, at 7 PM.

Session 1: Monday, November 3. *Habitat Change and Conservation (Florida)*.
(Chapters 4 and 5 in Weidensaul, Chapters 10-12 in Peterson/Fisher)

Session 2: Monday, January 5. *The Border (Texas and Arizona)*.
(Chapters 7 and 9 in Weidensaul; Chapters 17, 19, and 20-21 in Peterson-Fisher)

Session 3: Monday, March 2. *Species Conservation (California)*
(Chapter 10 in Weidensaul; Chapter 26 in Peterson/Fisher)

For further information or to sign up, please contact group leaders Anne Lombard (586 7509) or Elissa Rubenstein (549 5078).



ANNIVERSARY YEAR BIG SIT

SAVE



MAY 17, 2009

CHRISTMAS COUNT, 2008

Northampton Count: Sunday, December 14

Quabbin Count: To Be Announced.

For further information, watch coming newsletters, or contact Mary Alice Wilson (413 549 1768; mwilson@k12.phast.umass.edu, Northampton Count) and Scott Surner (413 253 5999; ssurner@aol.com, Quabbin Count).

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

Fall Birding Sampler: *Scott Surner.*

Saturday, September 20, 5:30 a.m., all day, Plum Island

Saturday, October 4, 7 a.m. to noon, Local birding

Saturday, November 2, 6 a.m. to 1 p.m., Berkshire Lakes / Worcester Reservoirs

Amherst Renewable Energy Fair: *Amherst Energy Task Force.*

Saturday, October 4, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Amherst Town Common

How To Be A Tourist In Your Own Hometown: A Workshop In Place-Based Writing: *Kathryn Good-Schiff.*

Sunday, October 5, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Going Towards Green: A Small Business Struggles with Sustainability: *Dean Cycon of Deans Beans*

Tuesday, October 7, 7 p.m.

The 4th Annual Larch Hill English Style x-Country Classic: A Benefit for the Larch Hill Collaborative: Sunday, October 12 at Bramble Hill Farm, Amherst. Start at noon. Kids' Fun Run (one mile): 11:30 a.m.

Changing Views of Earth History: Edward Hitchcock and the Dinosaurs: *Steve Sauter.*

Thursday, October 16, 7 p.m. at the Amherst College Museum of Natural History

A Glimpse into the Sustainable World Of Two Papua New Guinea Tribes: *Ziji Beth Goren.*

Saturday, October 18, 2 to 3:30 p.m.

Solar Energy for Homes or Small Businesses: *Center for Ecological Technology (CET). Co-sponsored by Amherst Energy Task Force.*

Thursday, October 23, 6 p.m. at Amherst Town Hall

Autumn on Cape Cod: A Photographic Excursion: *John Green and Mark Haffey.* Friday, November 7 to Sunday, November 9

Evergreens Waiting for Snow: *Ted Watt.*

Sunday, November 9, 9:30 a.m. to 4 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.

That's all for this month.

I will leave you in the skillful hands of Trudy Tynan, who has put together the first chapter of an HBC history! Until next time, talk softly and carry a big scope!

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org

HAMPSHIRE BIRD CLUB HISTORY

CHAPTER ONE: HATCHING

By Trudy Tynan

It all began with a bird, and what a bird! A Great Gray Owl swooped into Hadley around Valentine's Day 1984 and hung around Huntington Road for six weeks. It was featured in local newspapers and became so popular that one local real estate agent even used a photo of *Strix nebulosus* in his display ad with the caption, "I highly recommend HADLEY. I really enjoyed my stay here ... "

"Sally Venman and I are standing there and people are just coming out of the woodwork," Scott Sumner recalled. "We were just chatting. Then we thought: Look at all these people. We should be able to start a bird club and have it be viable and last. Of course, some were non birders, (everyone loves an owl), but there were a lot of birders."

"Sally and I talked about it right there in the field, and it happened quickly," Scott said. The first organizational meetings were all at Sally's house. "I remember the discussions about what to call ourselves," Scott said. "We picked "Hampshire" because we wanted to be inclusive of all the surrounding towns."

Within a few weeks, they had a flyer:

HAMPSHIRE BIRD CLUB

An area bird club (replacing the former Amherst Bird Club) is being organized. Plans are to have monthly programs of interest to birders, both beginners and seasoned; to plan field trips; to form a rare bird alert telephone tree; and to swap bird stories.

The plans are to meet on the second Monday of every month during the school year. There will be two meetings this spring – April 9 and May 14 at 7:30 p.m. at the Hitchcock Center. Meetings will resume in September. There will be membership dues of \$7.00 to cover cost of programs, mailings, etc. Included in the \$7.00 is a year's subscription to Bird News of Western Massachusetts.

Please pass the word to people we may have missed in trying to throw together a mailing list. Questions or suggestions? Call Scott Sumner at 253-5983 or Sally Venman at 549-1098.

Hope to see you on April 9!!!!

Scott and Sally

And we were beating the bushes. David Spector recalled being out in the field when a car pulled up and Sally leaned out the window and reeled him in with: "We're starting a bird club ..."

University of Massachusetts graduate student Dave Nelson gave the first program on "Quabbin Eagle Reintroduction" at the April 9 meeting. Scott followed on May 14 with a presentation on his trip to Churchill, Manitoba. Five days later, Scott led the club's first field trip - to Plum Island on May 19, 1984. By August, the club had 75 charter members; the beginnings of a logo featuring the Pileated Woodpecker, a bird of western Massachusetts; the first of Sally's witty newsletters, and a telephone hotline, the Hampshire Bird Voice, launched with equipment donated by Tom Arny. The club's first annual trip to Monhegan Island was Oct. 6-8, 1984.

Scott was elected president; Cliff Read, vice president; Sally formally became secretary, and Jan Tolhurst, treasurer. Natalie Drake, Jan Ortiz and Marge Tauer rounded out the board. After the September barbeque and party, Don Kroodsma of UMass opened the first full year of programs on Oct. 15 with "Tuning in to the Sounds of Birds," followed by Susan Smith of Mount Holyoke College, with "Flock Switching in Black-capped Chickadees, Jim Cardoza of MassWildlife with "Wild Turkey Restoration," Cliff Read on "Birding Tanzania", Scott on "Birding the Rio Grande" and John Green, naturalist and photographer, on "Birds, Alligators and Habitat of the Everglades." December saw the first annual members' party and slide show.

"We decided early on that our niche was going to be programs," Scott said. "We weren't going to be a club that had dozens and dozens of field trips. We were going to specialize in great programs." **(More Next Month)**



Great Gray Owl. Photo taken by Juan Anthony Roberts

Hampshire Life 4/26/88
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CHARTER MEMBERS

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 Natalie Drake, Amherst
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 Marilyn Gonter, Amherst
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