



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

## Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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**April, 2010**

In this edition:

- programs and field trips,
- Monhegan 2010,
- announcing the 2010 Crown of Maine overnight trip,
- the Nominating Committee,
- Hitchcock Programs and the Salamander Soiree,
- our very own Pileated Woodpecker: an interim Bird Atlas report,
- Atlas exhortations, and
- a couple of gleanings from the scientific literature.

I hope you find some of it useful!

It's a relief that birds are not as easily influenced by screwy weather as we are. As we ventured out of our back doors into 70 degree weather on March 19, some of us were already contemplating the start of the gardening season, at a time when we would normally be praying that the snow-blower could hang on for another month. Birds, of course, have a life-or-death investment in being resistant to the siren song of short-term weather fluctuations. If this were not so, the duck migration would be already be over, and we would be greeting the first warblers. Fortunately, though they are no doubt a little bemused by the balmy conditions, the parade of Ring-necked Duck, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, mergansers, Bufflehead, and the other jewels of our early spring wetlands are, more or less, staying with their time-honored timetables. The Wood Ducks, Common and Hooded Mergansers, and a few other species manage to reproduce here in Massachusetts, but most of the waterfowl who grace our valley at this time of year are on their way to the wetter and wilder places where they breed.

These sturdy avian citizens are the first reminders of the miracle that occurs every year. Despite the fact that wetlands are, in our part of the world, tiny refuges in a mosaic of suburbs, farms, and shopping malls, the birds find them and somehow manage to find enough rest and sustenance to sustain their journey. I was well within earshot of I-91 earlier this month when I crept to the edge of a belt of trees in the East Meadows and set up my scope. There is an almost imperceptible crease in the earth there, often dry, and containing at most a few inches of water on this, a day of rain. At first, I could find only a few mallards, but as the minutes went by, the scope revealed several Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, and a multitude of Wood Ducks fossicking quietly amongst the old corn stalks.

Minutes later, as I backed out along the muddy track toward the safety of the pavement, I was forced to veer left to avoid a fellow hurtling along the road on an ATV; the same fellow who flushed every single duck from that hidden and surprising refuge. As I extracted myself from the car, and before I had time to realize that I was inextricably stuck, I watched about 350 ducks swirl and bank in the rain-soaked sky, before scattering into some other, hopefully-safe corner of the valley. Onward, you denizens of marsh and puddle, and safe journey to you all!

### **Overnight Trips: Seriously!!**

The Crown of Maine trip is announced on page 4. This is an unbeatable opportunity to look for boreal species in a wonderful area. The trip will likely fill quickly, so don't delay.

There is still time to sign up for Monhegan Island, 2010 (page 5). This trip never fails to surprise, and the bird lists can be truly stunning, so don't put it off another year!

## NEXT PROGRAM

**Monday, April 12 at 7:30 PM**

### **Brandi Van Roo sheds light on Reproductive Behaviors and Hormones in Vireos**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Birds are unusual among animals in the number of species in which males contribute to the care of their young. Although males of some species, like the hummingbirds, provide no care for the young, males of other species, such as ostriches, stand out for their exemplary dedication to caring for the young. Why does this variation in male parental behavior exist? What prompts males to demonstrate various kinds of parental care? What is physically different between males of closely related species that differ in this one key attribute? The answers to these questions involve, in part, varying levels of avian hormones. By studying several closely-related species that demonstrate a continuum of male care and comparing their hormone levels during these behaviors, we can begin to understand the physiological basis of parental care in males.

**Dr. Brandi Van Roo** is an Associate Professor at Framingham State College. She has studied breeding behaviors and hormones in vireos for over 10 years and will share her current insights and questions in this ongoing research.

## COMING PROGRAMS

**May 10, 2010. *John van de Graaff.*** Birds of the Massachusetts Coast: Piping Plovers and Much More.

**June 14, 2010. *Geoff LeBaron.*** The Route to Distant Islands.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### **Plum Island. March 13, 2010.**

**Geoff LeBaron**, Jesse Brownback, Justin Baldwin, Joan and Larry Duprey, Carol and Jim Gabranski, Joseph Nidnin, & Al Richards.

The group began at Plum Island in deteriorating weather, hoping to sneak the trip in ahead of a major nor'easter. The Pannes had a nice selection of waterfowl, and a **Snowy Owl** held vigil over the saltmarsh, visible from the Pines. We reminded ourselves what storms are all about by darting out to Emerson Rocks in rising winds! We found more waterfowl amongst the storm-ravaged chaos at the northern end of Plum Island. At the yacht club we found not one but two **Iceland Gulls**.

Just when we thought we had seen the full force of the wind, we ventured out onto more exposed territory at Salisbury Beach. The rising gales did not prevent us from enjoying some "eastern" morph (light-bellied)

**Brant**. Our remaining stops yielded up-close and personal views of driving rain and sleet.

Other highlights: American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Common Eider (350), Long-tailed Duck, Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe, all three scoters, and **Merlin**, amongst a respectable total of 58 species.

Editor, from notes by Geoff LeBaron.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE

It takes a lot of work to keep the Hampshire Bird Club flourishing, and we need people to help with this work. The good news is that you don't have to shoulder the whole burden yourself. There are a variety of things that need to be done, and you can ease into it gently. We will be announcing a slate of board members and officers for 2010-2011 in the May newsletter and voting on the slate at the May meeting. The Committee this year is chaired by Scott Sumner. If you, or someone you know (hint, hint) would like to serve on the board, please let Scott know: [president@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:president@hampshirebirdclub.org), or (413) 256 5438.

## COMING FIELD TRIPS

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 50¢ 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. Please check all information with the trip leaders.

**\*Sunday, April 11. 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)

**\*Saturday, April 17. Early 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, May 2. Connecticut River to Mt. Sugarloaf.** Half day. Dave Mako explores the fields and hills around Mt. Sugarloaf looking for migrants and a few local specialties, including Common Ravens, Peregrine Falcons, and Worm-eating Warblers. Call Dave (413-665-2999) for meeting time and place. (M)

**Friday, May 7. South Quabbin Park.** Half day. Tom Gagnon (413-584-6353) birds the southern end of the reservoir for vireos, warblers, and whatever else shows up. Meet at the Quabbin Visitor's Center parking lot at 7:00 a.m. (E)

### Erratum

In the February edition, I referred to a study which found that evolution in the Blackcap (*Sylvia atricapilla*, a European bird) was being largely controlled by different bird-feeding regimes between the two major areas in which the birds winter.

I made the mistake of saying that the Blackcap was "analogous to our chickadee."

Chris Yerlig, bright spark and expatriate denizen of Europe that he is, horse-collared me at the February meeting and pointed out that the Blackcap is, in fact, an "old world warbler", and thus in no way analogous to the chickadee. This got me wondering what an old world warbler is and to which, if any, new-world species it might be related.

Mullarney, et al. (1999), (rather unhelpfully), suggest that the old-world warblers are relatives of the thrushes, but that the group itself is "almost certainly artificial." Sibley (2001) points out that the family Sylviidae is composed of two sub-families. If these, the Sylviinae, or old-world warblers, are represented in North America, only by the Arctic Warbler (which breeds in western Alaska), and the Dusky Warbler, a rare visitor to the west coast from Asia. The other subfamily is the Polioptilinae, or gnatcatchers and gnatwrens. There is, indeed a local gnatcatcher with which most of us are familiar, but Sibley points out that the Syviinae and the Polioptilinae "may not be each others closest relatives, and might be placed in different families in the future" (page 453)

So I guess, for a purist, the Blackcap is "analogous to our Arctic Warbler." Wow, that really clarifies matters! Ed.

#### References:

Mullarney et al. (1999). Birds of Europe. Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey.

Sibley, David. (2001). The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior. Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

## OVERNIGHT TRIPS

### Announcing Crown of Maine, 2010

Thursday, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010 through Monday, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Leaders: Geoff LeBaron and Bill Sheehan (of Woodland, ME, our local expert).

You must be a Hampshire Bird Club member to go on this trip.

This wonderful HBC field trip will bird the Crown of Maine region, a wonderful area of mixed boreal and agricultural habitats. There is much boreal forest, wooded bogs, farmland, riparian woodlands, human-made ponds that attract unusual breeding waterfowl, and the Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge—the former Loring Air Force Base—complete with large expanses of grassland and shrub-land habitat.

We will spend one full day driving to Caribou, Maine, which will be our base of operations. From there we will spend one day in the New Sweden-Woodland-Caribou area, one day at Presque Isle and the Aroostook N.W.R., and the third day birding the Maine North Woods boreal timber forest lands west of Fort Kent, Maine.

**Target bird species** will include boreal forest specialties around New Sweden (**Black-backed- and American Three-toed woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided flycatchers, Gray Jay, Philadelphia Vireo, Tennessee-, Bay-breasted-, Cape May-, and Blackpoll warblers**, etc), wetland, grassland, and shrub-land species around Presque Isle and Aroostook N.W.R. (nesting **Redhead** and **Ruddy Ducks** amid a myriad of other waterfowl, **American Bittern, Upland Sandpiper, and Mourning Warbler**), and especially **Spruce Grouse** among other boreal species in the Maine North Woods. Other wildlife likely to be encountered will be moose, black bear, coyote, and voracious black flies and mosquitoes (the latter two an overwhelming guarantee). Our visit will also likely coincide with the peak of wildflowers; lupines will be in bloom everywhere, and we have a good chance of seeing up to four species of lady-slipper orchids.

**Lodging:** Participants should make their own room arrangements, and maximize sharing rooms. Preferred lodging is the Russell's Motel in Caribou (207) 493-4658. Donna Murchison, Prop. The second choice is the Caribou Inn and Convention Center ([www.caribouinn.com](http://www.caribouinn.com); (207) 498 3733). Rates will vary according to room sharing arrangements. **Russell's fills up quickly, so we need to make reservations as soon as possible.**

**Travel:** 500 miles each way to Caribou via I-95; 1000 miles round trip minimum; an additional 250-300 miles birding during the three days. Total trip milage around 1500.

**HBC Cost Estimate:** Participants will pay HBC a trip fee of approximately \$50, depending on how many people sign up. This fee covers the leader fee for Bill Sheehan, a share of leader's costs for Geoff, and the club insurance contribution.

#### **Additional Costs:**

- lodging will run from \$120 - \$200 per person for the trip, if Russell's Motel is used. Accomodation at the Convention center will be more expensive.
- meals, and
- transportation (car pooling highly recommended).

**Registration Period:** Trip pre-registration begins at 6 PM on April 1. Please call or email the Field Trip Chair (Mike Locher; [fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org) or 585 5864) to register. The trip will be first-come, first-served after registration begins, and participants after 14 will be wait-listed.

If you need further information prior to registering, please contact the following:  
Geoff LeBaron: [programs@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:programs@hampshirebirdclub.org); 413 268 9281.

## **MONHEGAN ISLAND, Maine**

### **Memorial Day Weekend (May 28-31), 2010.**

Monhegan Island lies about twelve miles off the coast of Maine and is a fabled migrant trap. HBC has visited this enchanted place every year since our inception in 1984. It is arguably the best bang for your buck of any location in the north-east!

We will travel to the island by ferry on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. 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. There is plenty of exploring to do if the birding slows down.

We'll stay at the rustic Trailing Yew, which will lay on breakfast and dinner each day, including a local lobster dinner. This is an opportunity not to be missed for birders at any level!

To sign up, contact Mike Locher ([fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org); 585 5864).

For details, including cost estimates, contact Betsy Higgins ([hignik@comcast.net](mailto:hignik@comcast.net); 586 7585) or Andrew Magee ([andrewfmagee@gmail.com](mailto:andrewfmagee@gmail.com); 586 1509).

## **HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS**

**Tracks and Sign of Insects and Other Invertebrates:** *Charley Eiseman and Noah Charney.*  
Book Release and Signing. Thursday, April 1, 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

**Salamander Egg mass Survey:** *Ted Watt.*  
A Saturday in April to be determined by the weather

**The Art of Mentoring and Nature Education:** *Frank Grindrod, Earthwork Programs.*  
Thursday, April 8, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

**Geology of Franklin County:** *Joe Kopera, Geologist at UMass-Amherst.*  
Field Trip. Saturday, April 17, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Spring Bird Walk:** *John Green.*  
Sunday, April 18, 7 to 10 a.m.

**The First Annual Amherst Sustainability Festival.**  
Held on the Town Common and around town.  
Saturday, April 24, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Celebrating Amherst Conservation Lands:** *Harvey Allen*  
Sunday, April 25, 2-4 p.m. Robert Frost Trail south from Station Road.

**Woodswalking and the Written Word: A Nature Writing Workshop:** *Wally Swist, Poet.*  
Sunday, April 25, 1 to 4 p.m.

**Low Maintenance Design With Native Plants:** *Owen Wormser, Landscape Designer.*  
Saturday, May 1, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
Held at the New England Wild Flower Society's Nasami Farm in Whately.

**Fort River Festival.**  
At Groff Park, Amherst. Sunday, May 2, 10 a.m. to 2 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](http://www.hitchcockcenter.org).*

## Atlas Block-Busting

HBC is planning two Atlas block-busting field trips on Sunday, June 13 and Saturday, June 26. Destinations and leaders are as follows:

**Sunday, June 13:** *Mike Locher*

North Adams 5 (a section of Route 2, and southward up the slopes of Mt Greylock).

**Saturday, June 26:** *David Gross*

North Adams 6 (The summit of Mt Greylock and east to the edge of Adams).

Each of these blocks will need a minimum of 20 hours (cumulative between parties) of coverage. Each trip will involve one or more parties visiting the various habitats in the block and collecting as much data as possible. This is a special part of the state, and the possibility exists for some sexy (no pun intended) records to be established! The day will conclude with a compilation session to collect all the data. There may be a mop up session or two to tidy up loose ends.

*Do join us for one or both of these fabulous opportunities to further the scientific understanding of breeding birds in Massachusetts. Further details will follow as the trips approach!*

### Need Your Block-Busting Appetite Whetted?.....

#### Second Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas

#### Interim Report #107: Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is a member of the genus *Empidonax*. This genus has five breeding representatives in the Bay State, and these birds are perhaps best known for looking incredibly similar to one another. The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is the most distinctive of the lot, due to the abdominal pigmentation for which it is named. It is also the rarest breeder - so rare, in fact, that it has yet to receive even a single Atlas confirmation. These birds were seen in appropriate habitat (shady bogs of relatively high elevation) on Mount Greylock in Berkshire County during Atlas 1. ***Atlas 2 brings us a Probable block, also on Greylock, and a few Possibles. Can we confirm Yellow-bellied Flycatcher before time runs out?***



Excerpted from Massachusetts Audubon. Atlas Blog: Distraction Displays.  
<http://massaudubonblogs.typepad.com/massbirdatlas/>

### THE FIFTH ANNUAL SALAMANDER SOIREE

A Benefit for the Hitchcock Center for the Environment

Friday, April 23, 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Lewis-Sebring Commons, Valentine Hall, Amherst College

*Hearty Hors d'Oeuvres, Wine & Beer Tasting, Vacation Get-Away Auction, Raffle, and Door Prizes. Fun, fancy, formal or informal black and yellow attire is encouraged in honor of Amherst's famous Spotted Salamanders!*

Please RSVP by April 16 to (413) 256-6006.

Tickets \$30 per person; \$35 at the door.

