



**Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.**  
**Amherst, Massachusetts**  
www.hampshirebirdclub.org  
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**February, 2010**

In this edition:

- **programs and field trips,**
- the **Hitchcock Spring Birding** course, and other Hitchcock offerings,
- **atlas exhortations,**
- an update on **Cape Wind,**
- the reopening of the **Hog Island camps** in Maine, and
- a few other bits and pieces.

I hope you find some of it useful!

**NEXT PROGRAM**

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

**Bill Benner** extols the virtues of **Birding In Thailand**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

*Every speaker we invite to the club brings us something special, but there is a special sense of pride when we host one of our own. Since he will be behind the podium at the next meeting, we managed to persuade Dr. Benner to introduce himself. Despite the self-deprecating style, there is more to Bill than meets the eye.....*

**Bill Benner** was born and raised in southeastern Pennsylvania on a small farm--and one of his first words was "mockingbird", so his mother says. He spent most of his childhood tramping through the woods and fields of his home, helping tend the gardens and his many assorted pets, from salamanders to monkeys. He then wandered through a series of jobs and adventures before deciding to return to college to study bird biology. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Delaware Valley College in 1987, then went to Cornell University to study ornithology. He maintained a captive research flock of House Finches while he was there, and through them he became involved with the Cornell veterinary community. That led to a Masters Degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology in 1991, and a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 1995. He currently practices small and exotic animal medicine in South Hadley.

Bill has traveled extensively over the years, birding in 45 of the 50 states as well as overseas locations ranging from Latin America to Russia to Madagascar to Australia. Birds and butterflies are the main focus for his photography--he is the current president of the Massachusetts Butterfly Club--but he has a keen interest in all of nature. His trip to Thailand was his first visit to Asia.

**COMING PROGRAMS**

**March 8, 2010. Kathy and Miles Conway.** Kazakhstan Exploration.

**April 12, 2010. Brandi van Roo.** Vireo Research.

**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.

## COMING FIELD TRIPS

(See also the Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule)

**Saturday-Sunday, February 6-7. Leader's Choice: Coast of Maine or Cape Cod.** Two days. Scott Sumner will lead a two-day trip to either the coast of Maine or Cape Cod, depending on which appears to be better. Overnight accommodations will be arranged by participants. Call Scott (413-256-5438) for details as the date approaches. (M)

**Saturday, February 20. South Shore: Plymouth and Falmouth.** All day. Al Richards leads birders to the coast south of Boston to find ducks, gulls, owls, and whatever happens to be around. Dress warmly. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information. (E)

**Saturday, March 13. Plum Island.** All day. Geoff LeBaron goes east to see what's around Plum Island. Dress for cold weather. Call Geoff (413-269-9281) for meeting time and information. (E)

**Saturday, March 20. 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)

### Hitchcock Center for the Environment Spring Birding Course with *Scott Sumner*

*If you are new to birding, or old to birding and in need of a pick-me-up, the Spring Birding Course is for you. Many of the club's most illustrious names (and some of us also-rans as well) are alumni of this extraordinary class experience, which will undoubtedly enrich your birding life and may even tip you over into the realm of the die-hards..... Well worth a shot!*

**Evening Classes:** Wednesdays, February 24, March 10, 24, 31, April 7, 14, May 5, 12, 6:30 to 8p.m.

**Field Trips:** Saturdays, February 27, March 13, 27, April 3, 17, 24, May 1, 8, 15, 22. Start times vary between 5 a.m. and 7a.m.

Take advantage of this opportunity to get out and really observe the pageant of our spring bird migration, the myriad colors, plumages, and behaviors. As the weeks pass, new species arrive, adding to the spectacular biodiversity of our area. Scott has taught this course for many years and is accomplished at gearing instruction for beginners and experienced birders alike. Evening classes preview species expected on the Saturday field trips using slides, stories from the field, and life history details. Field trips are planned to varied locations around the state, including two coastal trips on February 27 and May 22. Coastal trips begin at 5 a.m. and end at dusk. Call the Center for more field trip details. All field trips and classes meet at the Hitchcock Center. Registration is limited to 20. Pre-registration is required; please call (413) 256-6006.

**Member: \$180. Non-member: \$210.**

*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).*

## LIBRARY

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](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. Our librarian, **Henry Lappen**, is happy to bring items to meetings, if you give him a few days in advance. You can reach him at [library@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:library@hampshirebirdclub.org) or (413) 549 3722.

## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

(Hampshire-Franklin Counties have 143 Blocks)

*"I know it's a noble cause, but how can I help?" (we hear you cry...)*

- **Finish** one of the 13 blocks which are yet to have 20 hours time reported (total hrs. needed? 91.6), **OR**
- **Add species** to an additional 7 blocks that have 20 hours, but not yet recorded 70 species. (species records needed? 46), **OR**
- **Upgrade** levels of confirmation so that the % of **PR**obable plus **CO**nfirmed in each block = 70% (How many additional blocks need this kind of work? 26 ), **OR**
- **Start a new block** in Hampden or Berkshire County – block busting on an HBC field trip or just heading out and doing it alone or with friends, **OR**
- **Share** an account of some endless, thankless, and soul-destroying responsibility in your life with the long-suffering and much-maligned Regional Coordinator. (ed.)

*Have no idea what this is all about? Go to [hampshirebirdclub.org](http://hampshirebirdclub.org), click on Breeding Bird Atlas and follow the links. Or ask one of the 110 folks who have worked on the atlas in Hampshire and Franklin Counties during the past 3 years. Or contact your regional coordinator (Mary Alice Wilson at).*

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

**Ray Chapin** -----Greenfield  
**Henry & Shirley Atwood** -----Florence  
**Richard & Sally White** -----Northampton  
**Frank Valier** -----Springfield  
**Peg Ross** -----Shutesbury

*Join the club as a new member anytime between now and September 1, 2010, and pay no further dues till September 2011. Kinda like getting eight months for free!*

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

### **Animal Tracking Slide Show: *Alan Emond, Little Cree Spy Excursions***

Tuesday and Wednesday, February 9 and 10, 7 to 9 p.m.  
(snow date: Thursday, February 11)

### **Winter Nature Walk: *John Green***

Saturday, February 13, 8 to 10 a.m.

### **Spotted Salamanders and Amherst's Famous Amphibian Tunnels: *Ted Watt***

Thursday, February 25, 7 to 9 p.m.

### **Spring Birding Course: *Scott Surner***

Please see details in the separate blurb in this newsletter.

### **Winter Tracking Expedition: *Alan Edmond, Little Cree Spy Excursions***

Saturday, March 6, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
(snow date: Sunday, March 7)

### **The Puzzle of New England's Predators: *John Foster, New England Naturalist Training Center***

Thursday, March 11, 7 to 9 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).*

## **Bottom Up or Top Down? The Origin of Flight in Birds**

There has long been debate over how flight evolved in birds. There have been two competing theories. The "ground up" idea (which until the last few years has dominated the discussion) suggests that ground-dwelling ancestors of birds took to the air. The "trees down" idea is that bird-ancestors living in trees began gliding, much as modern gliding lemurs and lizards do.

Some fairly convincing evidence for the "trees down" possibility has recently come to light, courtesy of a high-flying collaboration between scientists from the University of Kansas, and the northeastern University in China. This group studied one of the transitional forms between dinosaurs and birds: the Microraptor, from spectacularly preserved Chinese fossils. The fossils reveal that this species was essentially four-winged, and flight tests on models prepared from casts of the fossils, suggested that it could only have glided from an elevated position, in a sprawling (horizontal) position. The other alternative: that Microraptor launched itself from the ground, with the four limbs arrayed vertically (like a bi-plane) seems impossible owing to the presence of seven-inch flight feathers on the hind limbs, hardly adaptive equipment for a running start!

You can read more here:

University of Kansas (2010, January 26). 'Microraptors' shed light on ancient origin of bird flight. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved January 26, 2010.

You can also read the story, and watch a video of the flight tests (a bit homespun, I have to say) at [www.features.ku.edu/microraptors](http://www.features.ku.edu/microraptors)

## Famed Hog Island Audubon Camp Reopens In Maine

*The National Audubon Society will reopen its legendary Hog Island for four adult ornithology sessions and one teen bird studies session during the summer of 2010. The Hog Island camp first opened in 1936, with Roger Tory Peterson as its first bird instructor.*

**Dr. Steve Kress**, Audubon's VP for Bird Conservation will direct the 2010 sessions. He will be joined by some of the country's top ornithologists, including **Kenn Kaufman**, **Pete Dunne**, and **Scott Weidensaul**. There will be two new sessions offered in association with Exploritas (formerly Elder Hostel) where participants will assist Project Puffin biologists to census gulls, eiders and cormorants at several nearby seabird nesting islands. Participants in the September session will learn about land and seabirds through bird banding and presentations and assist with a habitat management project for endangered terns and storm-petrels at Eastern Egg Rock. They will also assist a Saw Whet Owl banding project.

Participants live in authentic, turn of the century housing on the 330 acre spruce-covered island. Here, they will enjoy three superb home-cooked meals per day, served in an historic island farmhouse that overlooks Muscongus Bay. During the five-day sessions, small field groups will go on a variety of trips and boat cruises, and attend presentations on topics ranging from migration and the identification of warblers to the restoration of Atlantic Puffins and terns on nearby Eastern Egg Rock. Participants will have the opportunity to learn about bird banding, sound recording and bird photography from leaders in their fields.

Visit <http://projectpuffin.org/OrnithCamps.html> to get further details, dates, sessions, instructors, and registration for the Hog Island camps this year.

## Feeding Evolution?

Feeding birds is a common but surprisingly controversial practice. Evidence from Europe suggest that handouts for our feathered friends may even affect their evolution!

Researchers studying the **Blackcap** (*Sylvia atricapilla*, analogous to our chickadee) in Europe found that there are now two distinct and reproductively isolated populations of these birds, which appear to have developed as a result of differing wintering strategies. Some birds migrate to the northwest from Europe, and end up wintering in the United Kingdom, where bird feeding is common. Other individuals migrate in a south-westerly direction to Spain, where few people feed birds. The English-wintering birds have evolved shorter, more rounded wings, and longer, narrower bills, which seem to function well in a setting with abundant feeders, but they are less well equipped to survive longer migrations to areas where there is no provided food.

These two populations have become quite reproductively isolated within fewer than thirty (30) generations, and researchers speculate that, unless the Spanish develop a penchant for feeding birds, the two could well become sub-species or even species within a relatively short time.

Cell Press. "By Feeding the Birds, You Could Change Their Evolutionary Fate." ScienceDaily 4 December 2009. <<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/12/091203132144.htm>>.

*Note: no word yet on why some European Blackcaps show a hankering for tapas and a good cheap red wine, while others seem to prefer scones and a nice cuppa tea. (ed.)*

## Cape Wind: Decision Nears

If you are anything like me, you may have lost track of developments in the long-running debate over whether to authorize the Cape Wind power development in Nantucket Sound. In mid-January, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced that a final decision on the project is to be made within three months by the Department of the Interior. Mass Audubon has been deeply involved in the controversy, submitting highly detailed studies of the impact on birds and other elements of the Nantucket Sound ecosystem. Here is an abridged version of a recent MassAudubon press release.

### *Response to Obama Administration's Position on Cape Wind*

*In the wake of today's Cape Wind stakeholder meetings with US Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar in Washington, DC, Mass Audubon continues to encourage Mr. Salazar to make a timely **and positive** decision on Cape Wind based on the merits of the project. (emphasis mine, ed.)*

*"A positive Cape Wind decision from the Obama Administration will be a giant leap forward for America as it finally and seriously participates in reducing the effects of climate change and sends a strong message to the international community," said Jack Clarke, Mass Audubon's director of public policy and government relations.*

*"Cape Wind should begin to open up global markets for offshore renewable energy in this country and smooth the way for other offshore proposals in the Northeast, mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes," he continued. "Wind resources in these three regions alone are capable of providing 900,000 megawatts of electricity—an amount equivalent to the nation's current total installed capacity. And they are located near the country's largest centers of energy use where, up until now, little energy is produced and carbon emissions are high. This is a decision long overdue." Mass Audubon has been involved with the Cape Wind project since August 2001. We have submitted extensive review comments and independent field research and issued a Cape Wind Challenge. We have performed careful environmental reviews of Cape Wind and other wind energy projects.*

(Excerpted from Massachusetts Audubon Press Release. January 13, 2010)

Interesting stuff.....Ed.

***Backyard Birds*** (on Strong St. in Northampton) offers a wide range of birding books, audio resources, gifts, feeders, and other paraphernalia. They also offer a 10% discount to Hampshire Bird Club Members. Remember, when you shop locally, your money stays here!

That's (mercifully) all for this month.  
Until next month, talk softly and carry a big scope!

David Peake-Jones, Editor  
529 9541  
newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org

## STOP PRESS: Save the Date!

### 18th Annual Mass Audubon Birder's Meeting

A full day of workshops, speakers, wildlife updates, vendors, and more. Lunch included!

In 2009 the Department of Interior produced *The State of the Birds*, a comprehensive synthesis describing the conservation status, threats, and recovery objectives for every major North American bird group. Since birds have long been litmus for environmental change, what's happening to birds could portend what the future holds for mankind. In this not-to-be-missed event, two leading environmental organizations examine how science, technology, and birds could offer the key to some of the greatest challenges facing our planet in the future.

#### Meeting details:

Saturday, March 6, 2010

The LaCava Center

Bentley University, Waltham, MA

For complete details, visit: <http://www.massaudubon.org/news/index.php?id=917&type=news>.

# Bird Observer

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*(If you have questions, you can email the editor at [jmarsh@jocama.com](mailto:jmarsh@jocama.com))*

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