



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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**April, 2014.**

Oh, g'day. Now that we are done dodging the darn things, it's worth a moment to reflect on perhaps the largest invasion of winter Snowy Owls in living memory.

Reading up a bit about the event, I discovered that this invasion did not result, as many irruptions of arctic species do, from a crash in food resources. To the contrary, the birds moved south in response to a SURPLUS of prey in the northern summer of 2013. There was an explosion in lemming numbers in a relatively small area of northern Quebec. Snowy Owls converged on the region from all over eastern Canada and embarked on a breeding frenzy, rearing clutches of up to 12 eggs, in contrast with the 1-3 young they raise in a "typical" arctic summer. There are several photographs from this area of the tundra showing owl nests surrounded by, in some cases, dozens of lemming carcasses, awaiting the emergence of young from the eggs. Almost all the Snowy Owls seen in the north-east this winter were young birds from this (suddenly overcrowded) area of Quebec. Researchers using satellite tagging have found that some owls move northward in the winter, prowling open polynas in the sea ice of Baffin Bay for wintering sea ducks. WOW!

I hope you had a chance to see at least one of these remarkable birds this year. But don't take too long to savor the experience. It is April and there are already any number of other remarkable migrations in progress. Get out there and see what turns up in your neck of the woods!

In this edition,

- Our **next program** and the remaining programs for this spring.
- The Plum Island **field trip report** and **coming field trips**,
- The **Mount Mansfield trip** draws nigh,
- The **AGM** announcement (including the antics of the Nominating Committee),
- The **library** awaits you.....,
- A chance to help the **Fort River Refuge** and take out your latent frustrations on a nasty weed,
- **Hitchcock Programs**, and
- A few other tidbits.

I hope you find some of it useful.

## **NEXT PROGRAM**

**Monday, April 14 at 7:15 p.m.**

**David Spector** presents **Amherst's Ornithologist: Margaret Morse Nice**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Which woman was born in Amherst in the 19th century, attended Mount Holyoke College, and went on to world-wide fame in the 20th century? For ornithologists the answer is clear: Margaret Morse Nice, a key pioneer in the study of bird behavior. This overview of her life gives glimpses of bird watching in the Connecticut River Valley over a century ago, the foundations of ethology (the study of behavior in a natural and evolutionary context), and of classic studies of behavior, including warbler nesting studies done in Pelham.

David Spector has been a member of the Hampshire Bird Club since its first meeting, is a former board president of the Hitchcock Center, and teaches biology at Central Connecticut State University.

## COMING PROGRAMS

**May 12, 2014. Joan Walsh.** Birds and Agriculture.

**June 9, 2014. Steve Kress.** Puffins and Other Seabirds

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### Saturday, March 1. Plum Island

**Geoff LeBaron** led Peter Allison, Jesse Brownback, Tim Carter, Stephanie Chapco, Devin & Aidan Griffiths (with friend Andre), Marcia Merithew and George Regmund to the birding jewel of Massachusetts on a bright, chilly morning.

From Cashman Park, the group enjoyed ogled shamelessly at courting Bufflehead and Common Goldeneye. A **Wilson's Snipe** skittered off after being flushed by a hunting Northern Harrier.

Lot 1 afforded beautiful views of the ocean. Scoters dashed past along with **Long-tailed Ducks**, **Snow Buntings** buzzed the boardwalk at close range and Wild Turkeys (clearly with ties to Northampton) asserted their pedestrian rights over the traffic on the road.

A partially albino (leucistic, ed.?) American Robin provided interest at Hellcat, and two **Rough-legged Hawks** hunting at Wardens were well worth the price of admission. Crossing the causeway toward the chain bridge, the group got a good look at one of the multitudinous **Snowy Owls** that visited coastal Massachusetts this winter.

As always at this time of year, Great Cormorants sported their under-appreciated breeding plumage by the Chain Bridge. Also in flamboyant spring attire, a wonderful Great Blue Heron. Completing the picture was a host of mergansers, featuring both Common and Red-breasted varieties.

Despite a disappointing absence of owls on the way in to Salisbury State Park, there was a nice variety of sea ducks, including a visiting **Eurasian Wigeon** at the Merrimack River breakwater, which was a life bird for some of the group. Shorebirds, in the form of Dunlin and Sanderling, scurried around in the intertidal, but the day was rounded out by not one, not two, not three, but four **Snowy Owls** on the way out of the park, one of which called: a first for leader Geoff, and, one assumes, most of those present.

Geoff LeBaron/Ed.

## COMING FIELD TRIPS

*See also the Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) now at our Website.*

**\*Saturday, April 12. Ashley Reservoir: Early Warblers.** Half day. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) looks for early migrants like Pine and Palm Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Northern Waterthrushes. Meet in the Holyoke Elks parking lot (250 Whitney Ave.), near Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Rt. 91 at 7 a.m. (E)

**\*Sunday, April 13. Northampton Migrants.** Half day. Marcia Merithew (mmerithew-at-comcast-dot-com) and David Peake-Jones (newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org) (subbing for Betsy Higgins) go to Look Park to find waterthrushes and other early migrants. Meet at the JFK Middle School parking lot (100 Bridge Road, Florence) at 7 a.m. (E)

**Wednesday, April 23. Spring hawk watching at Goat Peak.** Half day. Tom Gagnon climbs the tower on Mount Tom State Reservation and looks for northbound raptors. Meet at the old park headquarters building at 9 o'clock for a 20 minute walk to the tower. Please call Tom Gagnon (413-584-6353) or email tombwhawk-at-aol-dot-com. (M)

## OVERNIGHT TRIPS

### Mount Mansfield. Bicknell's Thrushes in Vermont. Overnight trip.

Tuesday, June 17 – Wednesday, June 18.

**Mike Locher** and representatives from the Vermont Center for Ecostudies will look for **Bicknell's Thrush**, **Blackpoll Warbler**, **Sandhill Crane** and **Black-billed Cuckoo**, amongst other species in the area of Mount Mansfield.

Bicknell's Thrush is a species that looks almost identical to Gray-cheeked Thrush, but whose closest relative is actually the Veery. The species breeds in balsam fir forests across south-eastern Canada, and is still found in shrinking pockets of high-altitude habitat in northern New England. The species is also experiencing severe habitat loss in its winter range in the Caribbean, and numbers are declining sharply. Research demonstrates that this species has a fascinating life history structure which reflects its tenuous grip on existence.

Mount Mansfield is one of a few "sky islands" in northern New England which still support breeding populations of Bicknell's Thrush. Our VCE guides will be helping us not only look for this species in its breeding habitat, but also allow us to spend time with researchers banding and studying the species. We may get to see individuals in-hand.

We will leave the valley early on the first day and bird through the Champlain Valley on the way north, stopping in the area of Dead Creek WMA, in Addison, Vermont, and hoping for breeding Sandhill Cranes in the area of Bristol Pond, Vermont. Upon arrival at Mt Mansfield, we'll check into accommodations in the village of Stowe, and make a late afternoon visit to the banding and research area before retiring for the evening.

The second day will begin before dawn as we meet our VCE guides and travel up the mountain for a morning at the banding station, hoping to encounter Bicknell's Thrush and other species of the high altitude fir forests.

We will check out of our lodgings around the middle of the day and proceed home, with the possibility of some stops along the way.

Participants will book and pay for their own accommodation and meals. Mike is compiling a list of accommodation options and can share them with you. The club will ask participants to pay a fee to cover the leader's accommodation and travel, club insurance, and a contribution to the work of the VCE. This cost is likely to be in the range of \$40-50, and the overall cost (depending on accommodation availability and choice) is likely to be in the range of \$225 – 275 per person. Please contact **Mike Locher** (fieldtrips-at-hampshirebirdclub-dot-org); 413 585 5864 if you are interested.

## 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.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The **Annual General Meeting** of the **Hampshire Bird Club Incorporated** will be held on **Monday, May 12, 2014** at the **Immanuel Lutheran Church** (867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst) at **7:15 p.m.** The meeting will immediately precede the May program.

The agenda for the meeting is to elect the Board of Directors for the year from May 12, 2014 to May 12, 2015.

The **Nominating Committee** comprises:

**Bruce Hart** (Chair), (bhart-at-hampshirebirdclub-dot-org; 584 4176)

**Jan Ortiz** (jortiz-at-hampshirebirdclub-dot-org; 549 1768), and

**Marcia Merithew** (mmerithew-at-comcast-dot-net; 584 8874)

The committee has prepared the following slate of nominees, which is subject to change prior to and at the AGM.

**President:** Scott Surner

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

**Treasurer:** Stephen Baker

**Membership Secretary:** Sue Emerson

**Communications Secretary:** Sharon Dombeck

**Board Members at large:**

Bruce Hart

Mike Locher

Jan Ortiz

David Peake-Jones

Josh Rose

Jaap van Heerden

Hampshire Bird Club WELCOMES and encourages other nominations for ANY and ALL of the above positions. These may be sent to any member of the Nominating Committee or presented from the floor at the Annual General Meeting. At-meeting nominees must be present at the meeting so as to verify their consent.

### **There and Back Again: Satellite Studies of Osprey Migration**

**Dr. Rob Bierregaard, noted raptor researcher**

**Monday, April 17, 7:00 p.m.**

**Putney Community Center, 10 Christian Square near the center of Putney.**

Formerly a professor of ornithology and ecology at the University of North Carolina, Dr. Bierregaard is currently a research associate at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University. Dr. Bierregaard has always had a passion for birds of prey and for much of his life has conducted research on ospreys, barred owls, and other raptors. During the 1980's he studied the effects of habitat fragmentation on tropical forest ecosystems. Currently, he focuses his research on the ecology and migration of ospreys in eastern North America.

The Putney Mountain Association is sponsoring this event as a fund-raiser to help PMA acquire and conserve a 144 acre parcel of land in Putney.

There is a suggested donation of \$10. Refreshments will be served.

For more information, call (802) 387-5387.

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

**Citizen Science: Henry Street Salamander Egg Mass Survey:** *Ted Watt*

A sunny afternoon in April, date determined by the weather.

**Vernal Pool Exploration:** *Charley Eiseman*

Saturday, April 12, 9:30am-12:30pm

**Earth Day Film Screening: Green Fire – Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic for Our Time**

with USFWS at Hadley Regional Headquarters.

Tuesday, April 22, 7pm-9pm

**The Nez Perce National Historic Trail:** *Pete Westover*

Thursday, April 24, 7pm-8:30pm

**5th Annual Sustainability Festival**

Saturday, April 26, 10am-4pm on the Amherst Town Common

**Wildlife Conservation in Kenya:** *Steve Upton*

Wednesday, April 30, 7pm – 8:30 pm

**Birding By Ear at Quabbin:** *John Green*

Saturday, May 3, 7am-10am

**Spring Ephemeral Wildflowers:** *Ted Watt*

Sunday, May 4, 9:30am - 12noon

*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).*

## Friends of Fort River Refuge

### Garlic Mustard Pull

Place: Fort River Division: Silvio Conte National Fisheries and Wildlife Refuge  
Moody Bridge Road, Hadley

Date: Saturday, April 27

Time: TBA

Help with removal of invasive plants that are bad for native plants.

Email: [FriendsofFortRiverRefuge@gmail.com](mailto:FriendsofFortRiverRefuge@gmail.com) for more info. and to volunteer.

Stephanie Chapko  
George Regmund

### 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!

## **Athol Bird and Nature Center Programs**

**“From Valley to Wildlife Havens: The Transformation of the Swift and Ware Rivers”**

**John Burk**

**Wednesday, April 6, 2014, 7:00 p.m.**

**Free and open to all 7:00 PM at Millers River Environmental Center: 100 Main Street, Athol.**

When the Swift and Ware River Valleys were taken for water supply during the 1930s, a secondary benefit was the creation of extensive wildlife habitat. John Burk will show past and present images of these areas, including rare historic photos and discuss the wildlife that are now thriving in these areas. John has authored several books and guides related to New England, including Quabbin Reservoir: America Through Time and The Wildlife of New England: A Viewer's Guide.

### **Caw-ny**

The Massachusetts Turnpike Authority received a large number of anecdotal reports to suggest that crows were being struck by big-rigs along the Massachusetts Turnpike, but seemed to be avoiding smaller vehicles. It took years of painstaking observation and several generations of graduate students before the reason for the discrepancy became apparent. It turns out that crows, when feeding on road kill along the sides of the road would always post a lookout, whose job appeared to be to alert its companions to oncoming traffic. When faced with an approaching passenger vehicle, the crows nearly always managed to shout “Caw!” but were struck dumb when it became necessary to yell “Truck!”

My thanks to co-worker Mike and the collective creativity of the internet for this item.

## **Mass Audubon Volunteers to Work for Wildlife**

**Statewide Volunteer Day!**

**Saturday, April 26, 2014, 9 am to noon**

Find out more and sign up at [www.massaudubon.org/get-involved/volunteer](http://www.massaudubon.org/get-involved/volunteer)

## **Board Meeting**

The next meeting of the HBC Board of Directors will be held at the Hitchcock Center in Amherst on Thursday, May 15 at 7:00 pm

## **Hog Island Camps**

National Audubon offers 11 different 6-day birding and natural history camps in an idyllic island setting off the coast of Maine from June to September.

Learn more and sign up at [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org)

That's it for now.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

529 9541

[newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org)