



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

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G'day! Taking a break from deleting political fund-raising emails from my in-box to lay down the latest newsletter.

Can ants be perplexed? If so, I am pretty sure I have seen one.

On September 21, I was wandering along the surprisingly bird-less Easthampton bike-path toward Northampton. I raised my glasses (with a complete lack of enthusiasm) to check a Song Sparrow that had hopped out onto the black top. I found it battling with a large ant and, at first, thought this was a predatory encounter. Several times, the bird grabbed the ant for a split second, only to drop it again. I found myself urging the bird to just get on with it and put the ant out of its misery, but then began to be more curious. Closer examination revealed that the bird was making no attempt to kill the ant at all. Rather, it was virtually standing on its tail while shoving the ant into its tail and/or belly feathers in a movement almost too quick to discern. This happened repeatedly for about a minute before the Song Sparrow retired to the undergrowth, leaving the ant to stagger off into the grass, no doubt muttering in antish about the kinky ways of vertebrates.

A little research revealed that this was likely a case of “anting,” a behavior observed in a wide variety of birds. The goal, it seems, is to infuse the feathers with formic acid, released defensively by the ant, which apparently functions to deter lice and other feather-parasites which typically plague birds. Some birds, it turns out, actually plant ants in their feathers for extended periods, and some will sprawl out on anthills like sunbathers with the little blighters scurrying all over them! I suppose I would expect to see such things if I were birding weird and wonderful places like Ecuador or the Amazon. To see a humble Song Sparrow anting on our very own bike-path on a dreary September day reminds me, once again, what birding is all about.

But back to fund-raising for a moment. HBC will not fill your in-box with alarming adjectives to get money from you. Democracy will not end tomorrow, nor even be very badly wounded, if you fail to send us any of your hard-earned savings. BUT, (bad grammar used for emphasis) our vibrant bird club relies ENTIRELY on your membership dues and donations to fund our activities, so, if there is a Membership Form with this newsletter.....

Membership Renewals are now **OVERDUE**

Please renew RIGHT NOW if you need to.

- Your membership status is shown on the cover page. Check to see if you owe dues this year.
- Complete the **Membership Form** (including your membership contribution for this year) and its reverse side (the **Field Trip Release Form**),
- Throw in a donation for the work of the **Education Committee** if you wish,
- Mail** the above forms (with your check if needed) to the address on the Membership Form, or bring them along on September 8.

You can also pay your dues ONLINE at hampshirebirdclub.org/membership, if you like.

Psst!! Take a look at the next program and the Coming Programs on Page 2. Just take a look!

NEXT PROGRAM

Monday, October 20 at 7:15 p.m.

Bill Burt presents **Rare and Elusive Birds of North America**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

For 16 years, **William Burt** pursued a stubborn mission: to find and photograph all 20 of the continent's least known and least seen birds. He spent weeks in the field at a time, employing his own hand-built equipment and often visiting sites repeatedly - year after year and/or in the middle of the night in certain cases - to get the picture he was after. The result: his 2001 book (Rizzoli/Universe), and museum exhibition, *Rare & Elusive Birds of North America*.

Through this presentation the audience will journey to the marshes, plains and prairies, swamps and woodlands of North America, in search of the *rails*, *bitterns*, *nightjars*, and other "mystery birds" that birders long to see.

"William Burt is a perfectionist whose photographs of rails and other shy and elusive birds of our wetlands are unquestionably the finest ever taken. He has set a new standard." *Roger Tory Peterson*.

"Through his stunning visual presentation and his informed narrative, Burt takes us into the mysterious world of America's most elusive bird species - including those that few people have ever observed in the wild. His words and pictures, based on years of field work with these "mystery birds," inspire his audience to come away with newfound desire to protect and conserve the natural environment." *Jim Berry, President, Roger Tory Peterson Institute*.

William Burt is a naturalist, photographer and writer with a passion for wild places - especially marshes - and the shy birds within. His photographs and stories are seen in Smithsonian, Audubon, National Wildlife and other magazines, and he is the author of three books: *Shadowbirds* (1994); *Rare & Elusive Birds of North America* (2001); and *Marshes: The Disappearing Edens* (2007). He lectures often, and his traveling exhibitions have shown at some 35 museums across the U.S. and Canada - including The Carnegie Museum of Natural History, The New Brunswick Museum, The Calgary Science Center, The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, and the Harvard Museum of Natural History.

COMING PROGRAMS

The schedule for this year is now complete, a result of some particularly hard slog on the part of our Program Chair, Geoff LeBaron. I think you will agree it has been worth the wait!

November 10, 2014. Ian Davies. The Secret Lives of Shorebirds.

December 8, 2014. HBC Members Meeting.

January 12, 2015. Don Kroodsmas. Birdsong: The Hour Before Dawn.

February 9, 2015. Scott Surner. The Big Chicken Run.

March 9, 2015. David Sibley. The New Sibley Guide to the Birds.

April 13, 2015. John Van de Graaff. Fabulous birds!

May 11, 2015. Jonah Keane. New Visions for Arcadia Sanctuary.

June 8, 2015. Mario Cohn-Haft. What's so Special about Amazonian Birds?

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Crown of Maine: August 7 – 11, 2014

Participants: Harvey Allen, Peter Allison, Shawn Lawler, **Geoff LeBaron**, Lizz Morris, David Pritchard, Doug Wilson, with local guide **Bill Sheehan**.

Friday August 8th

After assembling at Russell's Motel the previous day, and following a civilized 6:00 a.m. departure (with coffee stop), we embarked on two-mile walk along the lovely, flooded woodlands of Muskovic road. We picked up a few goodies, including a very stealthy female Pileated Woodpecker, great looks at a shockingly rusty Winter Wren, and a noisy family of **Gray Jays**.

Next we headed off to the deep woods and bogs around Square Lake, where the hands-down highlight during our walk through a boreal bog was a pair of Ospreys dueling with a young Bald Eagle over a fish one Osprey had caught. The constantly calling Osprey circled higher and higher and higher, and finally it's mate joined it above the harrying eagle and started bombing the aquiline bigger bully—to successful effect.

After lunch at Lakeview Restaurant in St. Agatha, we perused the abundant terns, waterfowl and terns of Long Lake. We then birded our way down through the working forest lands along Blackstone Road, where, much to Bill's shock, we had a family group of **Eastern Bluebirds** in one of the recent clearcuts! We made a quick stop at a boreal woodpecker-free marsh and bog in New Sweden, then returned to Caribou for a well-deserved rest.

Saturday August 9th

Most of this day was devoted to the diverse habitats of the Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge and Limestone Commerce Park—both included in the former Loring Air Force Base.

Two unseasonably late **Upland Sandpipers** got us off to a good start, landing almost at our feet on the runways at Loring! In transit to the Weapons Storage Area, we encountered a plethora of frenzied feeding songbird migrants, including various species of warblers and Red-eyed-, Blue-headed-, and **Philadelphia Vireos**, as well as abundant Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers! The rest of the morning and into the afternoon was spent perusing the peculiarly interesting former Weapons Storage Area and its associated ponds & thickets, including former bunkers that are now set up to help beleaguered bats over-winter in the region.

Lunch found us back in Caribou at the Burger Boy (late Chimney Swifts chattering overhead), after which we birded the local sewerage ponds (both versions of yellowlegs, plus Least-, White-rumped-, Spotted-, and Solitary Sandpipers, and of course a nice assortment of ducks).

After leaving the Caribou settling ponds we birded the west bank of the river in Caribou (abundant Common Mergansers, an elusive **Gray Catbird**, and Common Loons).

Sunday August 10th

Heading south from Caribou into the scenic farmland vistas of Presque Isle, we found congregating Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows. Further on, At the Christina reservoir, we found migrants along the dike and scanned the reservoir for an array of ducks and other waterfowl. A descending dot turned out to be one of several migrating Ospreys.

Post-Christina, we headed to Lake Josephine (or "Lake Jo"), a former industrial settling pond, where we spent much of the day. A bewildering array of immature and eclipse-plumaged waterfowl covered the pond and its associated wetlands, including Mallards, **Gadwall**, **American Wigeon**, both teal, boatloads of Ring-necked Ducks, breeding **Redheads** (in their only known north-eastern location), and other species as well. In the marshy vegetation below the dike, we sighted three hatchling **Virginia Rails**, being called to security by their mother, and also found a myriad of other marsh- and water-dependent species. Our pull of unusual southern species to the region continued with a **Turkey Vulture** soaring overhead!

continues ►

(Crown of Maine, August 2014. Continued)

Even further south, we found a previously reported **Great Egret** (southern vagrant at these latitudes) and a wonderful **Wilson's Snipe** in another cluster of waterfowl. The much sought-after boreal woodpeckers (Black-backed and Three-toed) continued to elude us along another woods road in New Sweden, but we did pick up a **Black Bear** and three **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** to round out a total for the three days of 115 species.

Then it was back to Caribou for a group dinner at the Par & Grill, after which it was dark (sort of...with a full "Sturgeon" moon) and most of us headed across the road for sky-watching and to listen for nocturnal migrants. A mackerel sky occluded the moon for much of the time, but we heard a few migrants and were treated to a great satellite tally, including three "spy" satellites in polar orbit and the International Space Station with supply vessel in trail transiting west to east. It was a fitting and lovely ending for a fantastic trip!

Geoff LeBaron

Look Park. Sunday, September 14.

On September 14, nine birders led by **Betsy Higgins** set out to bird Look Park in Florence. The day looked promising, with the sun peeking over the horizon, warming the tops of trees that would soon have insects, and thus warblers and vireos, flitting about in them. Unfortunately, the warblers and vireos missed the memo.

Almost immediately we got some of the local residents (House Sparrows, Cedar Waxwings) and a few Common Grackles as well. We saw some activity high in a tree and found Chipping Sparrows, a pair of very disheveled young Eastern Bluebirds (we saw seven Bluebirds altogether), and two juvenile Pine Warblers that stumped us for a few minutes. These juvenile Pine Warblers either reappeared periodically to puzzle us anew, or the park had a large number of them, well-distributed for maximum confusion! They fed on the ground and imitated Chipping Sparrows, they did some fly-catching from low perches and resembled empids, and they sat quietly in the branches and resembled vireos. However, they turned out to be the only warblers or vireos that we saw.

As we walked the park, we found Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird, phoebes, catbirds, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, lots of resident Mallards and Canada Geese, half a dozen Common Mergansers, and even a few raptors (three Red-tailed Hawks, one Broad-winged Hawk, and one Turkey Vulture) after the sun warmed the ground. In all, we got 28 species, and beautiful late summer weather.

Betsy Higgins

Mount Holyoke Cloud-Watch. Sunday, September 21.

(or, "The Worst Hawk-Watch Ever")

When I awoke on Sunday morning before the hawk-watch I was scheduled to lead, I noted with interest that the fog was so thick that I couldn't even see to the edge of my yard. However, I set out, fortified by several cups of coffee, to my meeting spot on Route 47.

After encountering a few local resident birds, and a mostly-unidentifiable group of warblers (Black-and White being the exception) at the mist-enshrouded meeting spot, I proceeded to the top of the mountain, unencumbered by any other participants!

A few more local birds sounded off during the climb, most being entirely invisible in the stygian gloom. I flushed one thrush (unidentified) that flew a short distance off the trail, then walked into the mist. The only thing that I got a good look at on the way up was a small **Eastern Box Turtle** that was crossing the trail.

At the top, clear visibility was about 20 feet, and anything beyond a hundred feet was barely discernible. I actually got a look at a small group of Dark-eyed Juncos near the Mountain House, and a few woodpeckers (Downy and Northern Flicker), but after an hour or so of persistent mist I decided that it was time to go home. The final count was 9 species, and 0 raptors.

Mike Locher

With apologies to Mike, I threw the word "stygian" into this piece because, well, the overall tone was a little too upbeat. ed.

(field trip reports, continued)

Quabbin Reservoir. Sunday, September 28.

Our September trip into the wilds of Central Quabbin yielded very little in the way of birds. About the best of them were a Barred Owl, Common Ravens talking back to us and a few warblers. We did find a Little Brown Bat in a bat house and saw some lovely wild flowers including some Cardinal Flowers and Beechdrops plus a lovely shrub called Smooth Winterberry.

Tom Gagnon

Knightville Dam, Huntington. Saturday, October 4.

The weather report was grim.....100% chance of rain, all day. Nevertheless, at 7 AM, **Betsy Higgins**, Marcia Merithew and the intrepid Harvey Allen set out to spend the morning at Knightville Dam in Huntington. After all, it was not raining YET!

We first drove up to the top of the dam and took in the view. Even in the gray light, the autumn colors were gorgeous. We spent a bit of time peering into a big pine tree at a flock of chickadees, and then headed down the road into the river basin. Things started out slowly, as we were frustrated by poor light and elusive birds flitting ahead of us and hiding in the tall weeds. However, the farther along the road we travelled, the more and more and more birds we saw! There were **birds everywhere!** Flocks of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Palm Warblers, mixed with **Swamp Sparrows**, White-throated Sparrows and Song Sparrows filled the weeds all around us. We had beautiful up-close-and-personal looks at many of them, in addition to a number of other species including **Blue-headed Vireo**, Common Yellowthroat, Black-throated Green Warbler, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Kingfisher, Bald Eagle, Common Raven, Pileated Woodpecker and others. We had 32 species in all and in spite of the drizzle and rain that came as predicted, we were all very pleased with our morning outing.

Betsy Higgins

NORTHAMPTON CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Sunday, December 14, 2014.

The annual Northampton Christmas Bird Count (CBC), sponsored by the Hampshire Bird Club, enlists over a hundred volunteers across Hampshire County to count every bird they see and hear. For more than 80 years the CBC has been a citizen science tradition for the Valley.

This long record of data-keeping provides valuable insight into bird populations and the health of their habitats, helping wildlife organizations implement conservation strategies.

We have walkers, feeder-counters, owlers, snow-shoers: whatever is necessary to get the count done. If you are interested, contact Jan Ortiz or Janice Jorgensen at cbc@hampshirebirdclub.org. We welcome newcomers to this fun and fabulous day.

The Editor Would Like to Thank.....

.....the September newsletter assembly crew for all the work it took to get that edition to your kitchen table. They are, in approximate order of height*, **Sally Hills**, **Helga Beatty**, and **Sue Emerson**. They are all maaaa-velllous!

That's it for now.

Did you check out the Coming Programs, huh? Didja? See, told you it would be worth it!

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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*And yes, this is entirely irrelevant.