



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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This month:

- An irreverent introduction and biography for this month's **program and speaker**,
- Two long-overdue **field trip reports** and some **coming trips**,
- **Hitchcock Programs**,
- Results of the **2014 Northampton Christmas Bird Count**, and
- One or two other odds and ends.

I hope you find some of it useful.

NEXT PROGRAM

Monday, February 9, at 7:15 p.m.

Scott Sumner recounts the **Big Chicken Run**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Weather-related cancellations announced via the HBC email list and local media.

What do Marshawn Lynch (running back for the not-obviously-cheating Seattle Seahawks) and our speaker for this month have in common? No, it is not their physique or athletic ability. Neither are fond of talking to the media....

Notoriously self-effacing and overworked, our speaker for this month has, perhaps unwisely, encouraged me to "write whatever I want" about his talk and him. With thanks to Geoff LeBaron, (who is, however, blameless for the following) I shall do just that.

In my world, a "Big Chicken Run" might be a desperate search of local grocery stores for something to feed a larger-than-anticipated family gathering. However, for those who like to visit the wilds of America in search of *living* birds, it is one of many nicknames for a "journey in search of as many members of prairie-dwelling grouse as can realistically be fitted into a single trip."

Otherwise known as the Grouse Grand Slam, the trip Scott will be describing generally takes about ten days, spent quartering the windswept prairies in Colorado and Kansas for Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens, Greater and Gunnison's Sage Grouse, and Sharp-tailed Grouse. These are all lekking species, meaning that males display in mysteriously well-defined areas, where their (often bizarre) displays are perused by visiting females. The trips involve grueling travel itineraries and a lot of huddling in blinds near the leks in the pre-dawn. A trip to make (or break) friendships.....

Scott Sumner is a founding member of the Hampshire Bird Club and has had more terms as president than the Bush and Clinton families combined, (though the math may need to be re-checked in 2016.....). He has lead wonderful trips both locally and across the country for HBC and is the current teacher of the annual Hitchcock Birding Class, which brings many new people to birding every year. He can presently be found holding forth at the beginning of every HBC meeting, in which capacity he is indistinguishable from the Field Trip Chair on the basis of plumage (but Scott generally talks for longer). Scott is a long-time valley resident (actually grew up here), small business owner, master-birder and, recently, star of local radio. This is only the latest of a number of programs he has presented for us, all enlivened by his genial style and great photos. Hope you will come along!

COMING PROGRAMS

March 9, 2015. David Sibley. The Psychology of Bird Identification.

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

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

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

East Quabbin. Saturday, November 15 with Craig Allen

On Saturday November 15, we began our trip into Quabbin at the Windsor Dam. At 7am it was about 20 degrees Fahrenheit with a slight breeze from the NW. Ten of us headed into Gate 45 and drove along the east side of the reservoir, stopping at beaver ponds and along different parts of the reservoir. It was a cold, clear day with a warm sun, making for quite an enjoyable outing. It was a successful day with 49 species of birds, 5 species of mammals, 2 dragonflies, and 2 moths.

Highlights included:

63 Hooded Mergansers,
55 Common Mergansers,
1 Wood Duck,
11 **Green-winged Teal**,
21 Black Ducks,
10 **Bald Eagles**,
1 **Northern Goshawk**,
2 **Black-bellied Plovers**,

11 Common Loons,
2 Horned Grebes,
1 **Red-necked Grebe**,
3 **Ruffed Grouse**,
3 Hermit Thrushes,
3 American Pipits,
1 **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, and
30 Pine Siskins.

There were also 35 **Snow Buntings**, 1 White-winged Scoter, and 3 **Long-tailed Ducks** at the Windsor Dam. We saw one large buck on a sand bar at the fishing area at Gate 43. We ended the day close to 4pm at Gate 35. Josh Rose a few others drove to Gate 41 where they saw the **Gray Jay** just as daylight ended. It was a good trip from start to finish.

Craig Allen



Sunday, November 16. Dead Creek WMA and Lake Champlain with Mike Locher

Four HBCers (David Peake-Jones, Andrew Magee, Arn Krugman, under the tutelage of **Mike Locher**) gathered at the Goose Viewing Area of the Dead Creek WMA in Addison, Vermont early on November 16. Reports from the previous several days indicated that there were still geese in the area, with sightings of a Rough-legged Hawk and even Tundra Swans to sweeten the pot. We got out of our cars and started to scan the fields, with a stiff cold breeze in our faces.

The Snow Geese were visible, but sitting in a field far to the south. Even at a distance, though, it appeared that there were many more than the several hundred that had been reported two days previously. However, we were treated to an astounding five Rough-legged Hawks (3 dark morph, 2 light morph) hunting over the fields on both sides of the road, as well as a lone male Northern Harrier on the prowl.

From the end of Gage Road we hit the jackpot. There were about 4500 Snow Geese milling about, and we set to with our scopes, looking for the elusive Ross's Goose that had been sighted several days earlier. While we didn't find any Ross's Geese, we saw Snow Geese in all their glory: pure white Snow Geese, Snow Geese with orange chests and necks, blue phase Snow Geese with white heads and dark bodies, and young Snow Geese wearing various plumage combinations of white and slate gray. Again the raptors were out: here we saw five Northern Harriers, including both richly-colored immatures and gray males.

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(Sunday, November 16. Dead Creek. Continued)

From Gage Road we moved toward Lake Champlain. We saw a few Black Ducks and Mallards at the Brilyea Access, along with Canada Geese and two more Rough-legged Hawks. At Turkey Lane, where the Tundra Swans had been reported, we got a number of small foragers (Black-capped Chickadees, a Brown Creeper, a Red-breasted Nuthatch, several White-breasted Nuthatches, and a Carolina Wren), as well as a Belted Kingfisher, many Black Ducks, Mallards, and six Horned Grebes, the latter only a taste of what was to come.

We next drove north to the Button Bay overlook, where we spotted two Common Goldeneyes, our first Common Loon of the day, and at least 28 Horned Grebes. I've had winter days at the eastern shore when I've trained my scope on the gray waves and found dozens of loons and grebes bobbing contentedly in the water, but this seemed altogether excessive. It was difficult to find a view that didn't contain a Horned Grebe. I began to doubt myself as I counted: I thought I was slowly panning my scope from left to right, but every view had a grebe in the middle of a patch of gray-green water. With no landmarks on the water, I couldn't tell whether I had really moved, or just imagined it. I was at 23 when David Peake-Jones announced 28, so I took his word for it and packed up my scope.

At the Tri-Town Water Utility Company we found more Horned Grebes, along with a single Red-necked Grebe and a Long-tailed Duck off in the distance. I happened to make the comment that the regional eBird moderator would never accept our numbers for Horned Grebes, and the birder next to us said that he thought he would accept our numbers, since he was right there witnessing it. Thus we met Ian Worsley. As it turned out, we agreed on the Horned Grebe counts, but not the final Snow Goose tally, so read on.)

We made a final stop at Gage Road, and as we arrived the geese began to move to a plowed field right at the end of the road. We were able to stand within 30 yards of the birds as they filtered down by the hundreds. David counted almost 4300 right in front of us, and it seemed clear that there were many, many more in a grassy hollow just out of sight. eBird finally accepted 4300, along with 200 in the air, and another 300 I could see in a more distant field, but we reckon there were at least 5000 birds in reality. I had never seen so many Snow Geese in Dead Creek at one time (and neither had anyone else, this time of year, according to eBird). As we admired the birds in the waning light and in response to some unknown provocation, the entire flock took flight. It sounded and felt like a jet taking off. Every time I see the Snow Geese, I am left in awe of these birds, and of nature.

On the way home, we discussed the pros and cons of dates for this trip. Do I opt for the more colorful setting of October, with more ducks on the lake, or the starker, more elemental setting of November, with the increased possibility of Rough-legged Hawks (and, apparently, Horned Grebes)? I'll let you know my decision on the next fall field trip schedule.

Mike Locher

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.

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 or (413) 549 3722.

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.

***Monday, February 16. Fort River Refuge: Really Early Spring Migrants.** Morning. Stephen LaValley, George Regmund, and Janice Jorgensen explore the trails of the Fort River Refuge in what Janice assures me will be a walk that might have a spring migrant or two. If that kind of bold prediction doesn't get you out, nothing will. Meet at the main refuge parking area (69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley) at 8:00 a.m. (E)

Saturday, March 7. Plum Island, Newburyport, and Salisbury. All day. Geoff LeBaron looks for migrants and residents at one of Massachusetts' premier birding locations. Call Geoff (413-268-9281) to register. Meet at Northampton Stop & Shop (228 King St.) at 6:30 a.m. (E)

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

FrogWatch USA Citizen Science Training: *Brittany Gutermuth and Patti Steinman*
Friday, February 6, 6:30pm-9pm
Held at Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, 127 Combs Road, Easthampton

The Winter Landscape from the Animals' Perspective: *Alcott Smith*
Saturday, February 7. Field Walks from 9am-12pm OR 1-4 pm

Family Musical Event: *Sarah Pirtle*
Saturday, February 7, 1:30 pm
(Snow date Sunday, Feb. 8)

How Much Arsenic Do We Eat? *Julian Tyson*
Wednesday, February 11, 7-8pm

Winter Quabbin Nature Walk: *John Green*
Saturday, February 14, 9am-12pm

Wildflowers, Orchids and Wildlife in Manitoba & Minnesota: *Nancy Goodman*
Thursday, February 19, 7-8:30pm

Salamander Citizen Science: *Tim Zimmerman and Ted Watt*
Sunday, February 22, 1:30-3:00 pm

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(Hitchcock Programs. Continued)

Salamander Tunnel Maintenance: *Hitchcock Center Staff*

A date in March dependent on weather and salamander activity
Call to be put on our to-be-called-list.

Tour of Amherst Wastewater Treatment Facility

Saturday, March 7, 10am-11:30am OR Wednesday, May 20, 10am-11:30am

Nature Drawing for the Complete Non-Artist: *Elizabeth Farnsworth*

Sunday, March 8, 10am-12pm

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.



Bird Observer

The New England Birding Journal

Bird Observer is a bi-monthly journal about birding in New England. Articles include detailed location and bird-finding guides, historical musings, book reviews and a welter of other content found no-where else.

If you are interested in *Bird Observer*, please visit www.birdobserver.org where you can find subscription information for both the printed and on-line versions of the magazine.

Included with this edition are the results of the 2014 Northampton Christmas Bird Count.

That's all for this month.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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Species	2014	High Year	High Count	Species	2014	High Year	High Count
Pileated Woodpecker	34			<i>Clay-c'd Sparrow</i>	0	n.a.t.	
Eastern Phoebe	0	n.a.t.		Field Sparrow	4	1982	58
Northern Shrike	2	1995	15	Vesper Sparrow	0	n.a.t.	
(White-eyed Vireo)	0	nrr		Harris's Sparrow	0	n.a.t.	
Blue-headed Vireo	0	n.a.t.		Savannah Sparrow	22	2000	46
Blue Jay	1,722	1977	1,686	Fox Sparrow	1	1943	20
American Crow	4,486	1997	5,836	Song Sparrow	415	1992	559
Fish Crow	0	2008	6	Lincoln's Sparrow	0	n.a.t.	
Common Raven	7	2010	13	Swamp Sparrow	10	1992	23
Horned Lark	864	1993	2,504	White-t'd Sparrow	525	2009	1,008
Black-c'd Chickadee	1,893	2005	2,096	White-c'd Sparrow	26	1999	9
Tufted Titmouse	742	2006	894	Dark-eyed Junco	3,079	2006	3,585
Red-b'd Nuthatch	10	1993	295	Oregon Junco	0	n.a.t.	
White-b'd Nuthatch	571	2005	489	<i>Lapland Longspur</i>	3	1989	31
Brown Creeper	27	1973	53	Snow Bunting	9	1989	706
Carolina Wren	175	2013	139	Northern Cardinal	786	2004	649
House Wren	0	n.a.t.		Indigo Bunting	0	n.a.t.	
Winter Wren	9	2013	9	Dickcissel	0	n.a.t.	
Golden-c'd Kinglet	46	2001	332	Red-winged Blackbird	130	2008	304
<i>Ruby-c'd Kinglet</i>	2	1973	6	(Eastern Meadowlark)	0	nrr	
Eastern Bluebird	539	2006	474	Rusty Blackbird	0	2008	100
Hermit Thrush	33	2005	9	Common Grackle	0	2006	501
American Robin	1,188	2013	9,899	Brown-h'd Cowbird	11	2006	876
Gray Catbird	1	2005	5	Baltimore Oriole	0	n.a.t.	
N. Mockingbird	173	1999	238	Pine Grosbeak	0	n.a.t.	
Brown Thrasher	0	n.a.t.		Purple Finch	1	1976	221
European Starling	5,369	1985	94,630	House Finch	665	1994	2,215
American Pipit	2	2010	66	Red Crossbill	0	n.a.t.	
(Bohemian Waxwing)	0	nrr		White-w'd Crossbill	1	n.a.t.	
Cedar Waxwing	156	2007	2,194	Common Redpoll	0	1959	1,069
<i>Yellow-r'd Warbler</i>	3	2000	5	Hoary Redpoll	0	n.a.t.	
<i>Palm Warbler</i>	0	n.a.t.		Pine Siskin	17	1993	372
<i>Eastern Towhee</i>	0	n.a.t.		Amer. Goldfinch	1,019	2006	2,094
Amer. Tree Sparrow	839	1992	2,637	Evening Grosbeak	9	1969	3,000
<i>Chipping Sparrow</i>	2	1974	11	House Sparrow	2,020	1961	2,662

In the event of equal high years, the most recent is shown.

For High counts in 2014, the previous high count and year are shown.

n.a.t. = **now and then.** Recorded in fewer than five (5) years between 1999 and 2014.

Some species seen extremely rarely have been excluded in the interests of space.