



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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November 2023

Dear reader, on October 16, 2023, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delisted 21 species from the Endangered Species Act list. This was not good news. The reason for delisting was due to, in the judgement of the Fish and Wildlife experts, the extinction of species on the list. The listed species included several mussels, two fish, a bat, and ten birds, including Bachman's Warbler and several Hawaiian species.

Last November I wrote about Native American Heritage Month and my great-great-great-grandmother Eady who likely was familiar with the massive flocks of Passenger Pigeons in North America of the nineteenth century. This year I draw your attention to the May-June 2014 issue of *Audubon* magazine in which is an article by Barry Yeoman about another Native American who told of his Passenger Pigeon observations.

In May 1850, a 20-year-old Potawatomi tribal leader named Simon Pokagon was camping at the headwaters of Michigan's Manistee River during trapping season when a far-off gurgling sound startled him. It seemed as if "an army of horses laden with sleigh bells was advancing through the deep forests towards me," he later wrote. "As I listened more intently, I concluded that instead of the tramping of horses it was distant thunder; and yet the morning was clear, calm, and beautiful." The mysterious sound came "nearer and nearer," until Pokagon deduced its source: "While I gazed in wonder and astonishment, I beheld moving toward me in an unbroken front millions of pigeons, the first I had seen that season."

These were passenger pigeons, Ectopistes migratorius, at the time the most abundant bird in North America and possibly the world. Throughout the 19th century, witnesses had described similar sightings of pigeon migrations: how they took hours to pass over a single spot, darkening the firmament and rendering normal conversation inaudible. Pokagon remembered how sometimes a traveling flock, arriving at a deep valley, would "pour its living mass" hundreds of feet into a downward plunge. "I have stood by the grandest waterfall of America," he wrote, "yet never have my astonishment, wonder, and admiration been so stirred as when I have witnessed these birds drop from their course like meteors from heaven."

That passage and the quotes from Pokagon should give us pause and invigorate us to do everything we can to slow and reverse the havoc we've caused to our environment. See the Conservation Committee article later in this newsletter for some concrete things you can do here and now.

NEXT PROGRAM

Tuesday, November 14, at 7:15 PM

John Nelson presents

Funny Bird Sex: Stories Birds Tell About Birds and People

Wesley United Methodist Church, 98 North Maple Street, Hadley; also via Zoom

BYOB (non-alcoholic) to the meeting if you want a beverage

John's presentation will blend science, literature, and personal observation to explore the distinctive lives of seven bird species in Massachusetts and beyond. It will feature the stories they tell us about sex, family life, song, dance, and adaptability in birds and humans.

John Nelson is the author of *Flight Calls: Exploring Massachusetts through Birds*. His essay "Funny Bird Sex" in the *Antioch Review* was awarded a 2018 Pushcart Prize, and his narrative "Coming of Old Age in Samoa" in *The Missouri Review* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. A professor emeritus at North Shore Community College, John was the 2021 Visiting Writer at the college. He chairs the Association of Massachusetts Bird Clubs as well as the Conservation and Education Committee of the Brookline Bird Club. He lives in the woods on a hilltop in Gloucester.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

- December 12, 2023. 7:15 PM. **Annual Members' Meeting.**
- January 9, 2024, 7:15 PM. Scott Weidnesaul. **Motus Towers.**
- February 13, 2024. 7:15 PM. TBA.
- March 12, 2024. 7:15 PM. Al and Lois Richardson. **Bhutan.**
- April 9, 2024. 7:15 PM. Ethan Clotfelder. **Tree Swallows and Chickadees.**
- May 14, 2024. 7:15 PM. Kurt Griffin. **Botswana.**
- June 11, 2024. Time TBA. **Club picnic.**

JAAP VAN HEERDEN

I am sad to report that longtime HBC member Jaap Van Heerden died on September 18, 2023 after a long illness. Jaap was a constant presence at member meetings with his irrepressible smile and joyful attitude. He was the guiding light for the club when it came to making speakers and their slides seen and heard at our meetings. He brought the club's audio/visual hardware into the 21st century and he was a steadfast member of the meeting setup committee. You can find out more about Jaap's life at www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/gazettenet/name/jacobus-vanheerden-obituary?id=53223660. Enjoy the symphony as you watch the birds, Jaap.

BIRDING FOR EVERYONE

The Birding For Everyone (BFE) program is geared toward beginner birders and those who, historically, have not been included in the birding community: people young in age, from underrepresented minority groups, or who have disabilities that make birding difficult. A one hour online educational session (half presentation, half discussion) is held prior to a two hour, in-person bird walk at an accessible location. All events are free and open to the public. Please help spread the word! The online presentation requires no registration (check the HBC website for the Zoom link). Those interested in attending the walk can register at bit.ly/2023bfe. Upcoming sessions are:

November 17, 2023 10 to 11 AM: Owls (Presentation)

November 24, 2023: TBD (Walk)

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

This year's Northampton (MANO) Christmas Bird Count will occur on Sunday, December 17. Counts have been very productive over the last few years (take that, Covid!). We're hoping for another winner and, once again, we need your help. Even if you haven't participated before, please consider joining the longest running community science project in the world and have fun doing it! Let us know via email if you'd like to take part or if you have questions: CBC@hampshirebirdclub.org.

If joining one of the count groups isn't your cup of tea, you can still count birds in your yard or on a walk around your neighborhood! We're delighted to welcome feeder-watchers and new count participants, explain how the CBC works, and answer all your questions. We'll have Zoom orientation meetings for leaders, participants, and feeder-watchers in the coming weeks. In these pre-count sessions, we'll cover everything, including instructions on filling out the forms.

Activities for compilation of the bird counts are to be announced. If you have thoughts or suggestions about that, give us a shout at the above email address.

For updates, continue to check the CBC page on the HBC website (hampshirebirdclub.org/northampton-christmas-bird-count) and the HBC Facebook page (www.facebook.com/groups/HampshireBirdClub). The Northampton (MANO) count circle map can be found at the CBC link above.

Join the CBC team of folks doing the work behind the scenes. We need helpers as we continue to expand and look to do succession planning. What does that mean? Tasks include entering data, working with feeder watchers, leading a small group of families with children on 12/17, helping a retirement center do a feeder count or walk on 12/17, and more. Email Janice or Amanda at CBC@hampshirebirdclub.org.

FIELD TRIPS FALL 2023

Please contact leaders (if a phone number or email is listed) at least two days in advance of the trip to register, and if you have any questions. It's always wise to bring snacks and dress appropriately. If you want to keep a list of birds seen during the field trips, Mass Audubon has checklists for each of their sanctuaries and these can also be used as trip lists (see www.massaudubon.org/places-to-explore/wildlife-sanctuaries/arcadia/programs-activities/go-birding). Whether with or without a leader, please follow our guidelines for ethical birding (hampshirebirdclub.org/hbc-code-of-birding-ethics-and-conduct) and those on our website regarding field trips (hampshirebirdclub.org/field-trips/guidelines).

Remember that we encourage carpooling. We ask that riders share costs with drivers as a matter of courtesy. The HBC recommends the current federal mileage reimbursement rate, shared by all occupants, but the rate for a vehicle is entirely up to the driver and passengers and should be determined before leaving.

October–November. Winsor Dam. Larry Therrien will be hosting impromptu birding trips to Winsor Dam depending on weather conditions. We will update the posting on the HBC's website and HBC's Facebook and Instagram accounts the day prior to the trip if conditions look good for seeing migrating waterbirds at Winsor Dam the next day. Times will be dependent on weather conditions. A scope will be helpful for seeing birds on the reservoir. Conditions are often windy, rainy, and cold, so wear appropriate clothing.

Sunday. November 5. Berkshire Lakes. 6:30 AM to 3:00 PM. Join Tom Gagnon as he heads to the Berkshire Lakes and joins the Hoffman Bird Club for their annual water bird census. The trip will also stop in Windsor to look for Northern Shrikes. The trip will require little walking. Dress appropriately for standing in potentially cold and wet conditions depending on the weather. A spotting scope is recommended if you have one. We will meet at the JFK Middle School in Northampton at 6:30 AM and carpool from there. To sign up, call Tom Gagnon at (413) 584-6353. (E)

Wednesday, November 8. Unity Park, Turners Falls. 8 to 11 AM. Meet at Unity Park in Turners Falls for a tour of places in the area including Barton Cove, Turners Falls Power Canal, Turners Falls Airport, and other locations in search of waterfowl, sparrows, and other migrating birds. There will be very little walking as we will be birding in parking areas near the cars. Scopes will be especially helpful. Contact Jim Lafley if interested at jimlafley@gmail.com. (E)

Sunday, November 12. Dead Creek WMA and Lake Champlain Valley. All day. Mike Locher heads north for the spectacle of hundreds of Snow Geese rising into the sun as a Rough-legged Hawk cruises by them. In addition to the geese and raptors, we'll look for ducks, grebes, gulls, and loons on Lake Champlain. Meet at Stop & Shop in Northampton (228 King Street) at 5:00 AM for carpooling. Bring a lunch if you wish (we'll stop for food) and bring a scope if you have one. Contact Mike (413-585-5864) for further details; there is no need to register, just show up on time. (E/M)

Sunday, November 12. New Member Walk—Arcadia Marsh and Oxbow. 8 to 10 AM. Members of the HBC Education Committee will lead a walk out to Arcadia Marsh and the Oxbow in search of migrating waterfowl. This is not a long walk and is on fairly flat terrain. We will meet at the Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary visitor center parking lot. (E)

Monday, November 25. Cape Ann or Plum Island. All day. Join Scott Sumner on an all day trip to either Cape Ann or Plum Island where we will look for alcids, waterfowl, and more. We will depart at 5 AM and return in the late afternoon. The trip is limited to ten people. Contact Scott Sumner at ssurner@aol.com for more information and to register. (E)

Field Trip designations:

- (E) – Easy walking conditions, fairly accessible for most, usually flat terrain on improved trails or roads.
- (M) – Moderately difficult, more challenging trail conditions, short steep sections, longer hikes involved.
- (S) – Strenuous conditions, muddy or rocky trails, steep sections, difficult footing in part.

I guess that you know that the opposite of wrinkly is irony.

FREE STUFF

David Spector has some bird and natural history books and a portable blind suitable for observation or photography at a nest or pond available for free. If you are interested contact him at spectord [at] ccsu.edu. He will bring these items to the November meeting.

THE HBC LIBRARY

The HBC has a library! It is stored in the Hitchcock Center for the Environment on route 116 in south Amherst. Any club member can take books out. As the librarian, I bring a selection of books to club meetings and will bring books that you request if you contact me ahead of time. Traveling somewhere and we don't have a guide for that area? I can buy it! The collection includes bird guides for many countries around the globe, how-to books, natural histories, ID guides, bird whodunnit novels, and more. Check it out! The complete list of books can be seen on the HBC website at hampshirebirdclub.org/resources/Documents/HBC-Library-2020-July-PDF.pdf. I generally do not accept book donations due to space limitations, I but will look over any list of books you send me to see if a few would fit our needs.

Henry Lappen, HBC Librarian, library@hampshirebirdclub.org

THE CBC CORNER

Rush Hour and Christmas Count Sparrows

by David Spector

Before considering birds, imagine a rush hour drive into a city. The traffic is much worse today than yesterday—why? Maybe I left five minutes later today and the traffic is always bad at this time; maybe there is a major sporting event in the city today; maybe, by chance, several people on this road have flat tires; maybe I forgot about the box of nails I left on the roof of my car while working on a carpentry project in my garage, and that box fell off yesterday resulting in today's multiple flats. What about the driver of the car next to me? I guess that she is another commuter heading to work—until I notice the out-of-state license plate and the stack of suitcases in the back—a vacationer who happened to be caught in this rush hour en route to a distant destination. Questions have answers, although the correct answer(s), among many plausible ones, might not be easy to determine.

As a birdwatcher and ornithologist I often get questions about bird behavior and abundance. I can sometimes answer these questions with some confidence, but often, as with the rush hour example, I can think of multiple plausible answers. Distinguishing among possibilities is often difficult, and more than one might contribute to an observed pattern, just as several flat tires and a major sporting event might contribute to one morning's traffic jam.

I have been asked why sparrow numbers were down on the 2022 Northampton Christmas Bird Count as compared with the 2021 count, a simple question with potentially complex answers. First I looked at some numbers. Ten species in the New World sparrow family were seen on the 2022 count; their numbers totaled 3341 individuals, down about 13% from the previous year.

Of those ten species, four account for over 98% of the sparrows seen on the 2022 count, and I decided to concentrate on those four. For three of those species, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Song Sparrow, the count was indeed down in 2022 compared with 2021; Dark-eyed Junco numbers, though, increased slightly between those years.

Are the changes from 2021 to 2022 within the normal range of fluctuation for the Northampton count? I looked at the last three decades of the count, and the numbers for this question are based on individuals per party hour of effort. Junco* numbers for those two years were well within the typical variability of the count. For Song Sparrow the 2022 count was the lowest in three decades; for White-throated Sparrow the third lowest; and for American Tree Sparrow the second lowest. The American Tree Sparrow low count is not surprising, though, given its steady decline.

Were the trends seen between those two years on the Northampton count peculiar to that count? No. For Massachusetts as a whole, trends matched the local count.

Why? All of these species are “short” distance migrants, remaining in North America without long flights to the tropics. Such species are often facultative migrants, adjusting migration to food availability, snow cover, temperature, and/or winds. Maybe “our” sparrows stayed north a bit later in 2022. I looked at count numbers in New Hampshire, and the counts per hour of effort for Song, White-throated, and American Tree Sparrows were indeed up compared with 2021, while the counts for juncos were down. Québec numbers were similar to those for New Hampshire (except that the small numbers of Song Sparrows counted there went up slightly). Thus, it seems likely that some of the sparrows we might have hoped to see on the 2022 Northampton count remained north of us, at least until later in the winter. I leave it to others to look at weather and seed availability in northern New England and southern Canada for those two Decembers.

I’ve pursued only a few approaches to analyzing these numbers and a limited number of possible explanations. I hope that I’ve given an idea of how complicated even starting to answer a simple question can be, but also given some ideas of how to pursue the answers.** Whether or not you choose to dig deeper into the numbers and the biology, I hope that everyone will enjoy participating in this year’s Christmas Counts.

*Junco numbers on this and other area counts are sometimes reported as “Dark-eyed Junco” and sometimes as “Slate-colored Junco”; it is necessary to combine the two.

**See my article in the March 2023 bird club newsletter for suggestions of websites to find some of the relevant numbers.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT AND WORKSHOPS

Our big news this month is the new recurring Zoom link for our workshops. No more registration forms! The new link is both on the Education Workshops page, below the photo, and in the workshop description. Simply click on the link when it is time to attend a workshop.

The **Do-It-Yourself (DIY)** field trip is back with Brian Zylich and Lesley Farlow. Join us on Monday, November 6, 7-8 PM. You can use the Recurring zoom link on the Education Workshops page to attend!

Upcoming workshop:

Tuesday, November 15, 7-8 PM—**Woodpeckers, Woodpeckers, and more about Woodpeckers with Dana and Bob Fox**

Come and hear Dana and Bob tell a fascinating story about the Woodpecker family of birds. With 233 species in the world, woodpeckers are found almost worldwide where trees are abundant. We will see how this family evolved, its special biology, and how its members live in difficult locations. We will have some interesting stories about many of the more interesting species, stories that might surprise you.

New member bird walks—open to all:

1. November 12, 8 AM at the Oxbow/Arcadia. We’ll be looking for waterfowl.
2. March 9, 2024, evening—exact time TBA—at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton. We’ll look for woodcocks.
3. May 19, 2024, 7 AM at Fort River (Silvio O. Conte) focusing on spring migrants.

More details will be available on the Education webpage, and we’ll send out reminder emails.

Did you miss a workshop last year? Well then, you are in luck. Our recorded programs are available on the [Hampshire Bird Club website](#). You can find the links under PROGRAMS or on the EDUCATION page.

Scroll down to the bottom of the page of videos to find Education workshops.

We are looking for new members! If you would like to join the Education Committee, please email education@hampshirebirdclub.org. If you have an idea for a workshop, email us.

All the old-timers in New England know well the four seasons:
almost winter, winter, still winter, and construction.

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE CORNER

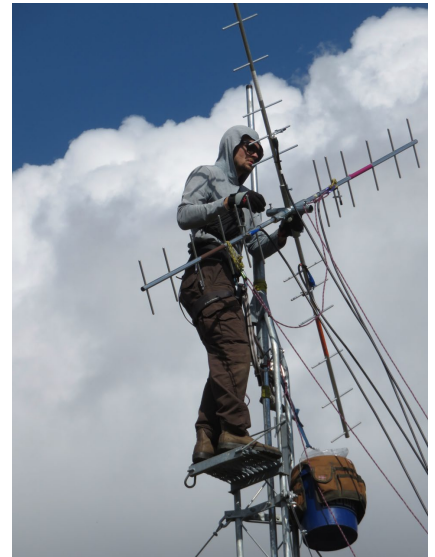
This offering continues a series from the Conservation Committee.

It has been a phenomenal year of birding in Massachusetts, with a number of vagrants spotted in some of our favorite birding hotspots. But as the woods and fields grow increasingly quiet this fall, it's a reminder that these birds are not to be taken for granted. Nationwide, birds are in trouble. And in Massachusetts, a state with great bird diversity, a whopping 22 birds are in decline and many more are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. It is a frightening prospect that the excitement of our favorite birding pastime might wane as birds disappear.

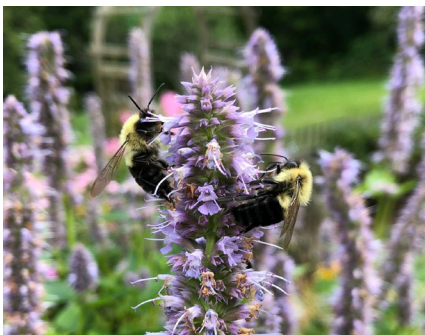
Fueled by an interest in bird conservation, the HBC re-established the Conservation Committee last spring to provide additional focus to the growing needs of birds in our area. The conservation challenge is daunting because of the many social, political, and economic factors that must be navigated to get meaningful conservation projects off the ground. However, the committee has identified several conservation opportunities that are within reach and that could produce conservation dividends. Here's an update on a few of our leading opportunities.

Motus Wildlife Tracking System—Miniature radio transmitters, called nanotags, are revolutionizing our understanding of bird, bat, and even insect movement. One might think that placing a tag on a bird could interfere with flight, but these tags are incredibly lightweight. There are fifteen receiver towers that pick up the signal of these nanotags in Massachusetts. That might sound like a lot, but their detection range is limited to roughly ten miles and there are gaps right here in our area. In collaboration with the Northeast Motus Collaborative, the committee is investigating the potential for sponsoring the construction of a receiver in the hilltowns between the Connecticut River Valley and the Berkshires so that bird movement and habitat usage can be more readily understood. Two committee members observed the installation of a tower at October Mountain State Forest last month to get a sense of what is involved.

Chimney Swift Nesting Tower—One of the great spectacles in a summer evening is the swirling flock of nesting Chimney Swifts returning to their roost. New England has an abundance of old mills and brick buildings which often serve as Chimney Swift roosting or nesting habitat. But as these structures age, it isn't uncommon for communities to remove the buildings and repurpose the land, thereby eliminating the Chimney Swift colony. As a result, and because of old growth forest loss, Chimney Swifts are on the decline and are on a list of birds that could one day go extinct. Intervention is necessary. Designs for nesting towers are readily available, and Bruce Hart is looking into the construction of a tower in Williamsburg to replace a roosting site in the chimney of an old school building that has recently been demolished. While finding suitable locations and willing recipients of a tower is challenging, several locations have been suggested for consideration and the discussion is ongoing.



Working on a Motus tower. Photo credit: Bob Zimmermann.



Bees at work. Photo credit: Bob Zimmermann.

Pollinator Gardens—A vast majority of the world's flowering plants rely on pollinators (insects, bats, and birds) for reproduction. Many birds in our area rely on those very same insects for food. Unfortunately, key pollinators such as wild bees and some butterflies are on the decline owing to habitat loss, climate change, and the indiscriminate use of herbicides, creating concerns for the persistence of our insectivorous birds and natural communities. One option to help reduce this decline, promoted by state and federal agencies and conservation groups, is the expansion of pollinator gardens. Not only do flowering milkweed, sunflowers, coneflower, and lavender produce pollinator benefits, they are colorful and easy to maintain. The committee is promoting the use of pollinator

gardens as an affordable and effective conservation tool in our area. Several committee members have registered their pollinator gardens with HomeGrownNationalPark.org and have eliminated their lawns in favor of low maintenance pollinator gardens.

Grassland bird monitoring—Isabel Bronson, Land Stewardship Coordinator with the Trustees of Reservations, joined the Conservation Committee to discuss the plight of grassland birds and opportunities to assist in monitoring them on Trustees' properties. Point count surveys during the breeding season on these properties are helping managers and scientists answer key unknowns such as whether timing of migration is changing due to climate change, whether grassland bird arrival coincides with food availability, and what are effective management regimes. The program expanded to include 28 properties this year, and several committee members assisted with point counts on four of them in western Massachusetts. We aim to have the HBC be part of the larger effort to conserve grassland birds such as the Bobolink, which has experienced a significant decline due to habitat loss, and stands to benefit from this program.



Male Bobolink. Image credit: Creative Commons, photo by JanetandPhil.

If you have an interest in making a difference to birds in our area by participating in any of these activities, we welcome you to join the HBC Conservation Committee. Please contact Bob Zimmermann at raz@umass.edu.

Will Duncan, HBC Conservation Committee Member

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

A warm welcome to our new members! This month we launched our brand-new membership software and everyone who set up a new account appears in the system as a new member! Thank you to all who have renewed or joined and set up profiles. The new system has streamlined our membership process and it is much easier to manage! A note about your family members—anyone at the Family Membership level or above can add family members after you set up your own profile. The software calls your family members "bundle members" and you, the primary member, are the "bundle coordinator". Let me know if you need help with this. Profiles—the basic contact information in your profile forms the new online and password protected Membership Directory. You may share your contact information (nothing more) or you can opt to keep your profile hidden. We won't be mailing a membership directory this winter. You can log in and get up-to-the-minute contact information on the website under the member tab. You can also get a new password and update your information and preferences at any time.

So far, the feedback has been that it's easy to join and renew, if you haven't already, I hope you use this note to remind you to renew your membership.

Donna Lee Ubertalli, Membership Secretary, membership@hampshirebirdclub.org

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary

The following program is offered by Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary in Easthampton. Sign up online. More programs can be found at www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/arcadia.

Winter Birds and Bird Feeders—Saturday, December 3, 9 AM–noon

Bird feeding is a popular winter activity and a great way to learn to identify backyard birds. View an indoor presentation on the wintering birds of our area. Learn about the different types of bird feeders, what to put in them, and when to put out food. We will also discuss community science projects and what you can do to help birds thrive. After the indoor presentation we will head outdoors to look for birds. Fall is a great time to take a closer look at all the ways plants ensure their next generation successfully develops and thrives. We will explore the inner workings of seeds, nuts, berries, drupes, and more as we review how native plants prepare for winter and the subsequent spring in this online program.

Spoil a good walk: go birding!

newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org

Dave Gross, Editor