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Dear reader, February is, of course, the month of Saint Valentine's Day. Valentinus, or Valentine as we know him, was martyred in the third century CE. Thus, he has the "Saint" title associated with his name. He happens to be the patron saint of Terni, Italy, as well as of epileptics and beekeepers, and he has his present-day association with romance. As goes the legend, just before he was beheaded, Valentinus sent a note to the young girl for whom he cured blindness. He signed the note "From your Valentine". Or so they say.

The reason I bring up this is that there are some other important dates in February to keep in mind. A major one is February 1, which is the start of African-American History Month. Then, on February 2, we have Groundhog Day. The Lunar New Year starts on February 10. Abraham Lincoln's birthday is February 12 and for George Washington it is February 22. And this year, we have February 29, Leap Day.

There are, of course, other truly important days in February: 10—National Cream Cheese Brownie Day; 11—National Peppermint Patty Day; 14—National Cream-filled Chocolates Day; 19—National Chocolate Mints Day; 25—National Chocolate-covered Nuts Day; 28—National Chocolate Soufflé Day; and, of course, 9—National Toothache Day. But the one I really want you to celebrate is February 17, which is National Random Acts of Kindness Day.

However, there is one more important day that bears considerable significance for the Hampshire Bird Club. That is Valentine's Day, 1984. Very close to that date, a Great Gray Owl arrived in Hadley. Local birders were excited. Crowds formed. In one of those crowds were Scott Surner and Sally Venman. They were chatting, surveying the big crowds, and right then and there the idea of a new local bird club was hatched. So this Valentine's Day celebrates the fortieth anniversary of the HBC!

NEXT PROGRAM

Tuesday, February 13, at 7:15 PM

Marco Valtriani presents

Italy

Via Zoom

Whether you're a serious observer or a casual birdwatcher, Italy holds surprises and delights for you. The old rumor, "Nothing to see but House Sparrows," is completely wrong, and more and more visiting birders are having their eyes opened to the more than 550 species, from waterfowl to songbirds, that call the peninsula home. Italy preserves a wide range of natural habitats due its different biogeographic, geomorphologic, and climatic conditions. Italy's long relationship between humans and nature has been a crucial factor for its extreme complexity of environments and landscapes. More than 20% of the Italian territory is protected, thanks to the well-managed national parks, nature reserves, and Natura 2000 sites. Marco will give you a first taste, not of pasta and Chianti, but of the most interesting birding areas and species found in Italy.

Marco Valtriani is a free-lance biologist and nature guide with extensive experience in scientific research and ecotourism. He lives in Tuscany with his family. He is a passionate hiker, birder, and field researcher who has spent years exploring wild areas in Italy and around the world, including Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America. Working as a professional birding guide and tour planner, he has created and led birding tours for international tour companies and private travelers. He has collaborated on environmental impact studies, scientific wildlife surveys, and educational efforts in ecology and environmental issues, and has guided nature lovers since 1999 in Italy and abroad. He has written scientific papers and articles on the birds and natural landscapes of central Italy, and co-authored guides to Tuscany's natural habitats, trails, and wildlife. His binoculars and scope always accompany him when he travels, during bird migration camps and, of course, on his excursions.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

- 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**. We hope.

BYLAWS REVISIONS

The bylaws revisions as reviewed in the January 2024 newsletter passed by a vote of 70-0 last month. Thanks to everyone who voted. The full set of bylaws is available at the HBC website in the "About" section.

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. Based on participant feedback, we have a new schedule! On the third Thursday of each month at 7 PM there will be a one hour online educational talk. Then, on the third Saturday, at 8:45 AM, there will be a two hour, in-person, beginner 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/2024bfe.

February 15, 2024, 7–8 PM: Learning Bird Songs (Talk)
February 17, 2024, 8:45–11:00 AM: Turners Falls Power Canal, Turners Falls (Walk)

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT AND WORKSHOPS

We had an excellent presentation in mid-January by Judy Pasko of Cummington Wildlife, Inc., on rehabilitating injured birds and wildlife. Judy works with volunteers who help to transport injured wildlife. Contact her at Cummington Wildlife at 413-695-6854 if you are interested in learning more.

February 5, 7–8 PM. Do It Yourself field trip with Brian and Lesley. Are you new to the area? Are you new to birding? Would you like to know where to go and what to look for? Or do you just want to connect with other HBC birders? Come to a Zoom meeting of the DIY field trip. Each month we select a local hot spot and five target birds that can be seen at that location. During our Zoom meeting we provide directions to the month's location and offer ID information for the target birds. Join us! **The Zoom link for this workshop is on the Education Workshops page of the HBC website.**

February 20, 7–8 PM. Merlin Sound ID with Grant Van Horn. We are so thrilled to be able to offer this workshop with the person who *developed the Merlin app* at Cornell! Grant will talk us through how to use it properly and discuss how the app helps gather important data on local bird populations. **The Zoom link for this workshop is on the Education Workshops page of the HBC website.**

An upcoming March workshop will be about Condors.

New member bird walks—open to all:

1. March 9, 2024, evening—exact time TBA—at Park Hill Orchard in Easthampton. We'll look for woodcocks.
2. May 19, 2024, 7 AM at Fort River (Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge) in Hadley, focusing on spring migrants.

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

Did you miss a workshop last year? 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 videos page to find Education workshops. If you have an idea for a workshop, email us at education@hampshirebirdclub.org. **We are looking for new members!** If you would like to join the Education Committee, please email us.

A CHAT WITH MICHEALLE LARKINS

In mid-November I sat down for a chat with Michealle Larkins, who joined the HBC Board in June 2023. Part 1 of our chat was in the January 2024 newsletter. In part 2 here, Michealle discusses her early interest in nature, as well as her take on the HBC.

Newsletter: What do you think are the best things that the club does?

Michealle Larkins: First, as I said about that Mount Tom walk, are the people. There's something that feels really cozy about it, like a community. The educational programs I think are very good. And definitely, to go along with that first thing, is that I like the picnics and the monthly in-person member meetings.

N: So, now more about you. What got you interested in nature, birds, and bird watching?

ML: Hmm. Well, I grew up in a semi-rural area of Japan. We had rice paddies right outside our door. I just liked nature. And then, when I came back to the States after high school, I went to Wheaton College. There was a running trail on campus. I didn't run. I would run if I had a ball to chase, but I wasn't going to run just to be running. What I did was to walk in the woods on that trail, and that was amazing. Nature has been part of my life since I was young.

I must say that I never really paid much attention to birds. At least it wasn't direct. Maybe there was osmosis that was happening with birds, but I don't remember focusing on birds.

I went back to Japan in May. I did some birding there, and I was thinking, "Oh, I don't know any names of these birds, but recognized the groups they were in, like hawks. I realized that I actually do know a fair amount about birds.

A lot of Japanese literature and poetry has nature as a topic. I think that nature is something that I heard about a lot when I was younger, and that soaked in.

As to birding and my interest in birds, I got really interested in birds during the pandemic. I worked mostly remotely during the pandemic. I was working in the back of the house where there's a small yard. The two houses behind us also had back yards with tall trees. One of the neighbors put food in their bird feeder, for the first time as far as I knew. During phone calls I would look out the window and I noticed all the birds at the feeder. I got an identification pamphlet and started to figure out what birds were there. Then a friend gave me a small pair of binoculars.

The food in the feeder ran out, so I went to the store and bought more. I went over to the neighbor's yard and filled the feeder. A few weeks later they moved the feeder close enough to our yard so that I wouldn't have to go in their yard to fill it. Soon after they asked me if I wanted to take the feeder, and so the feeder came to our yard.

So that's how it started. I started going to Wild Birds Unlimited where they sell all kinds of stuff. They had a podcast that I started following. They mentioned the Great Backyard Bird Count in February, which I did. That got me to practice using eBird and Merlin. And then I started to think "Jeez, maybe I should go outside and do this." What a concept. And so then I joined Mass Audubon. I went on a walk with them. Soon I met someone from the Brookline Bird Club at Parker River Wildlife Refuge. He said the club was really good and I should join so I could go with their groups. So I immediately joined the BBC.

N: Is there a favorite place you like to go bird watching?

ML: I don't think I have a truly favorite place. When I first started I went to the Boston Nature Center, which is only about a ten-minute drive from where I lived. I also like Franklin Park, which, again, is right in the city. People might not think that there's a lot to see there, but that place is amazing. Two days in a row I saw screech owls, the red morph on the first day and the gray morph on the second. They were both in the same hole. There is a small pond in the park, and I've seen Wood Ducks and Wigeons there. I now co-lead walks there.

One nice thing about these parks is that they are small and the birds are concentrated. Out in the Valley, I like Arcadia and Ashley Reservoir, but they are so much bigger that the birds are more spread out and not as easy to find.

I made a chicken salad last night for dinner. Apparently they prefer grain.

The best evidence for a murder of crows is probable caws.

THE HBC PUZZLE RETURNS!

Do you remember the quiz about birds with a local twist, created by David Spector? The first quiz questions appeared in the October 2021 issues of this fine publication. The most recent installment was in the April 2023 issue. The theme of this set of quiz questions is "species names, old and new, English and Latin". With luck, the answers will be in the next issue.

27. One doesn't have to be a student or a churchgoer to encounter a teacher or a preacher in Western Massachusetts. What are the "teacher bird" and the "preacher bird"?
28. What species commonly seen from highways in Western Massachusetts has a Latin name that translates as "buzzard of Jamaica"?
29. What gull that occurs very uncommonly in Western Massachusetts has a Latin species name that means "laughing"?
30. What locally common bird is named for its resemblance to the robes of a member of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and what locally rare bird is often incorrectly said to be named for its resemblance to the robes of another member of that hierarchy?
31. "Puffins" are now puffy seabirds with big colorful bills. What were the original "puffins"?
32. Some ages and sexes of birds have specialized names. "Hen" is a general term for a female bird, and "cock" is a general term for a male bird. To what ages, sexes, and species (or groups) do the following names (in alphabetical order) apply?

    cob, drake, eyas, gander, jake, pen, squab, tiercel, tom
33. The first edition of Peterson's eastern field guide was published in 1934 and included the following species, listed here in alphabetical order:

    Acadian Chickadee, Baldpate, Brünnich's Murre, Cabot's Tern, Duck Hawk, Hudsonian Chickadee, Hudsonian Curlew, Man-o'-War Bird, Migrant Shrike, Olive-backed Thrush, Pine Woods Sparrow, Red-backed Sandpiper, Richardson's Owl, Sycamore Warbler, Water-Turkey, Wood Ibis.

    These species still appear in eastern field guides—by what current names?

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary

The following programs are 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 Birding Series—Thursdays, February 1, 15, & 29; and March 14, 7:00–8:30 PM

With which species should winter birders familiarize themselves? Ducks are sporting their colorful plumages, but there are fewer field marks when it comes to distinguishing the different grays of winter gulls. Raptors, including owls, are year-round favorites, but winter is an especially great time to look for them, due to their early breeding behavior. And nothing marks the conclusion of winter like the American Woodcock's elaborate, spellbinding aerial courtship dance. While you may need extra layers to explore the field this winter, you can practice winter bird identification from the warmth of your home in this online series.

The four remaining sessions are available individually—February 1: Owls; February 15: Winter Raptors; February 29: Winter Waterbirds; and March 14: American Woodcocks.

Bald Eagles—Saturday, February 17, 9 AM–noon

The Bald Eagle, formerly endangered, now has a thriving population over much of the country. Arcadia has been home to Bald Eagle pairs since 2010, resulting in many offspring. Winter is a good time to look for eagles. In addition to resident birds, northern birds are coming south in search of food and the open waters provided by the Connecticut River.

Join us for an indoor presentation to learn about eagles and their success stories and history in Massachusetts, followed by a hike to the Arcadia Meadows in search of eagles and other birds.

Hitchcock Center for the Environment

The following programs are offered by the Hitchcock Center in Amherst. Sign up online.

Winter Birds with John Green—Sunday, February 11, 10 AM–noon

Have you gone on a nature walk with John Green? If not, you should, and if so, you should again! John has been studying, and marveling at, the nature of the Quabbin Reservoir area for well over 30 years. His amazement is contagious. Join John at the Quabbin to see what winter birds and other signs of wakefulness in winter you can find. Space is limited; please register now. Adventure East, collaborating with the Hitchcock Center, will provide snowshoes or microspikes, depending on weather conditions.

Spring Birding Class with Scott Surner—February 24–June 8, various times

Scott Surner offers his very popular birding class featuring both classes and field trips. See the Hitchcock Center programs page for details. The class is limited to 15 participants.

Maine Audubon

The following program is offered by Maine Audubon (maineaudubon.org).

Botany in a Winter—Wednesdays, January 3–March 27, 6:30–8:00 PM

Botany in a Winter is a free, weekly exploration of the plants of the Northeast, family by family, in taxonomic order, led virtually by Maine Audubon Field Naturalist Andy Kapinos. Over the course of thirteen weeks we will explore every vascular plant genus found in the Northeast and examine the identifiable traits common to each interrelated group. Each week we will focus on a clade of the evolutionary tree, covering between 150 and 400 species. While the programs are sequential and in taxonomic order, they can be attended individually. Those who attend every program will learn all the common groups of plants in the Northeast, and be ready to take this knowledge into the field just as the plants begin a new growing season. The structure of these programs is based on *Botany in a Day* by Thomas J. Elpel and *Flora Novae Angliae* by Arthur Haines. Details can be found at maineaudubon.org/news/events/botany-winter/.

ALL TRUE STORIES

Years ago my wife regularly had breakfast with Karen Rank and Cindy Green. They called themselves "The Green, Gross and Rank Breakfast Club."

I recently said to the wife on a dismal, dark day "Clearly it's foggy."

I saw Al Richards in the grocery store parking lot the other morning. We chatted about various things, and my long-held interest in reading the obituaries came up. Al said that he was looking forward to reading his obituary when it was printed in the newspaper.

Seen in the Sunday Boston Globe obituaries pages in 2022: "***, aged 102, died unexpectedly on ***".

Q AND A

Q: What do you get when a short psychic breaks out of jail? A: A small medium at large.

Q: What do you call a boomerang that doesn't return? A: A stick.

Q: How can I get out of my gym contract early? A: Give them your too weak notice.

Q: What kind of bird becomes fluffy and absorbent if you put tea in front of it? A: An owl.

Q: What do farmers do when they party? A: They turnip the beets.

Q: What did the Dalai Lama say to the hot dog vendor? A: Make me one with everything.