



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

<http://hampshirebirdclub.org>

Volume 20, No. 8

April, 2004

PROGRAMS

All programs are held at Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant St. in Amherst. Should bad weather force a cancellation, it will be announced on WHMP 1400 AM radio.

This Month

Monday, April 19 at 7:30 PM

Peter Alden on the Invasive Alien Plant Crisis in New England

Peter Alden has worn a number of hats in his career. As a public servant in the office of the Massachusetts Secretary for Environmental Affairs, Bob Durand, Peter organized the first three state-wide Massachusetts Biodiversity days. Peter has also designed and implemented innovative programs in ecotourism for various groups including Overseas Adventure Travel, Lindblad Travel, Mass. Audubon, and the Harvard Museum of Natural History. Peter is the author of fourteen books on North American and international wildlife.

Most relevant to his presentation for us, is Peter's work for the Public Works and Natural Resources departments in his home town of Concord, MA. He has advised the town on the impact of invasive plants on public safety. Under his guidance, Concord mapped the occurrence of all major species of invasive plants on roadsides throughout the town. Peter initiated intensive efforts to control invasives at Walden Pond and Old North Bridge. He also finds time to preside over the Nuttall Bird Club.

Peter's presentation will focus on the most intrusive amongst a growing "rogues gallery" of invasive plants. Few terrestrial habitats in the northeast are free of botanical villains such as introduced honeysuckles, buckthorns, Multiflora Rose, Porcelainberry, Oriental Bittersweet, and one of the latest and most spectacular invaders: Black Swallow-wort. In many regional woodlands, Norway Maple crowds out native Sugar Maple, honeysuckles and buckthorns replace the native understorey, and Black Swallow-wort carpets the ground. These species together create much deeper shade than their native precursors, preventing the regeneration of the natives altogether, and creating inhospitable habitats for native birds and other animals.

In place of the cat-tails that provided bird habitat, many local wetlands are becoming dominated by Purple Loosestrife and Phragmites, with devastating impact on bird populations.

Some of Peter's presentation will document the concerted effort made by the citizenry of Concord to control invasive plants in that community.

Coming Up

May 10, 2004. Jan Ortiz. Baffin Island.

June 14, 2004. Harvey Allen et al. The Gambia Experience.

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

On a gorgeous **Saturday, March 2004**, Hampshire Bird Club toured the **Connecticut River Valley** in search of migrating waterfowl. Despite the absence of signature leader Al Richards and persistent ice over some of the prime floodplain habitats, we did rather well. Between the Rod and Gun club in Turner's Falls, Barton's Cove, and the Power Canal, we found a nice selection of ducks, including 65 **Hooded Mergansers** (it proved to be almost the default merganser of the day), about 45 Ring-necked Ducks, and a few **American Widgeon**. A couple of flat-pated Scaup eventually convinced us they were Greaters. We perused Great Pond in Hatfield from the high vantage point of the local Highway Department lot and found it still largely iced over. It seemed, to the casual glance, somewhat unburdened with birds. However, as we scanned the tawny clumps of still-dormant marsh vegetation at the southern end, birds navigating the shallow leads between clumps betrayed themselves with the slightest movements. In this way, we conservatively estimated that 25 **Green-winged Teal**, 6 **Northern Pintail**, 35 Wood Duck, 8 **Gadwall**, and a couple of Hooded Mergansers were interspersed with the more mundane Mallards and Black Ducks.

We trekked in to Arcadia Marsh on the strength of reports of two **Greater White-fronted Geese**, which we eventually found. These would have been easier to spot, were it not for the fact that they were gatecrashing a convention of at least 1500 Canada Geese! The marsh was also host that day to impressive numbers of Green winged Teal, Northern Pintail, and yet more Wood Ducks. At our final stop alongside Hadley Cove, we had a chance to pick out yet more gorgeous Pintail, Green-winged Teal, and at least 20 more American Widgeon.



On **Sunday March 28**, in the slanted light of dusk, a surprisingly large group of the faithful assembled at Mitch's Marina to look for **woodcocks** with **Mike Locher**. The exceptional response serves to prove the old adage that the main problem with birding is the ridiculously early hours. We strolled in along the old River Road, and crossed a loop of the Fort River. A short walk brought us to several open fields, where Mike had heard woodcock the previous night. As darkness approached, and groups of Wood Ducks, Black Ducks, and Mallards settled themselves into the meandering bed of the Fort River for the night, we heard our first "peent". Shortly afterward, not one, but two woodcock careered low over our heads through gaps in the cottonwood foliage, circumscribing a wide ascending arc, before dropping again into the field where they had started. Our guess is that these were two males in competition for territory, but I suppose one of them could have been a female playing hard-to-get. More conventional male display flights went on for some time.

On the way back to the marina, we played a Screech Owl tape, and finally got a rather tentative reply from the middle distance. The responding owl did not whinny, but rather nervously repeated the monotonal tremolo part of the Screech Owl call. Apparently, this late in the season, owls generally confine themselves to this one part of the call. Still closer to the parking lot, the gathering darkness had emboldened Wood Frogs and Spring Peepers in the vernal pools, who set up a deafening chorus. Thanks to Mike for organizing this new type of trip, and doing the research necessary to ensure our success.

Aircraft Maintenance Problems and Solutions: Never let it be said that ground crews and engineers lack a sense of humor. Here are some actual logged maintenance complaints and problems, known as "squawks," submitted by QANTAS pilots and the solution recorded by maintenance engineers. Quantas, incidentally is the only international airline never to have had a fatal crash.

Pilot: "*Suspected crack in windscreen.*"

Engineer: "*Suspect you're right.*"

Coming Trips

Saturday, April 10. Ashley Reservoir: early warblers. Half day. Bob Bieda (413-527-2623) will beat the bushes for Pine and Palm Warblers, Broad-winged Hawk, Osprey, and Ruby-crowned Kinglet. Meet at the Holiday Inn parking lot, Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Route 91 at 7 a.m. Call to register. (E)

Wednesday, April 21. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) will go where the birds are. Meet at 7:30 a.m. on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst, across from Atkin's Farm. Call for more information as the date approaches. (E)

***Saturday, April 24. More migrants.** Half day beginner's trip. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for waterthrushes, in addition to other warblers and neotropical migrants. She'll start at Look Park in Northampton. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the JFK Middle School on Bridge Road in Northampton. Call for further details. (E)

New Field Trip! (not in the published field trip list)

Sunday, April 25. Early migrants in Springfield and Longmeadow.

Join Nancy Eaton (860-745-2915) in a new field trip for our club. Meet at 7 a.m. in the parking lot in front of St. Andrews Episcopal Church on Longmeadow St. (Route 5).

Wildwood Walks

On a gentle rise in the heart of Amherst lies the Wildwood Cemetery. Migrating songbirds are drawn to this little island, and each year the club hosts morning bird walks here during May, each led by a club member. This year walks are scheduled as follows:

Tuesdays: May 4, 11, and 18

Thursdays: May 6, 13, and 20

Each begins at **6:30 am** and runs until **8 am**, though of course you may freelance a little longer if you wish. Meet the leader at the main entrance, off Strong Street. Make sure you park in the designated parking areas and not on the lawn. Remain on the roads and paths in the cemetery, and respect the solemnity of the site. Thank you.

Saturday, May 1. Graves Farm. Half day. Anne Lombard (413-586-7509) and Shirley Hilborn (413-253-6462) will guide birders through Graves Farm, looking for migrants and local specialties. Meet at the Hitchcock center at 6:30 a.m., or Graves Farm at 7:00 a.m. (E)

Saturday, May 8. Quabbin Reservoir migration. All day. Tom Gagnon (413-584-6353) leads a trip into the Quabbin to track down its varied avifauna. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call to register. (M)

More Aircraft Maintenance Reports

Pilot: "*Number 3 engine missing.*"

Engineer: "*Engine found on right wing after brief search.*"

Pilot: "*Aircraft handles funny.*"

Engineer: "*Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right, and be serious.*"

LIBRARY

On a somewhat distressing note, Henry Lappen reports that *not just some but most of the club's audio and video tapes are missing from the shelves at Hitchcock!* Whether this represents a conspiracy or merely cumulative oversights, Henry asks that you contact him urgently (549 3722) if you have any knowledge of their whereabouts. Amnesty is guaranteed!

On a (hopefully) unrelated note, Henry asks that, if you need library materials brought to this month's meeting during his (temporary) absence, you contact Anne Cann (253 7753; cann@uhs.umass.edu).

Please note that the club maintains a collection of birding resources including field- and bird-finding-guides to almost every major birding destination in the U.S., and some overseas locations, natural histories, periodicals and, (until their untimely recent attrition), video and audio resources. **Hours** are 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday through Friday, and 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays. Items can be signed out and borrowed for a period of up to one month, or longer by arrangement.

CONSERVATION

If you are interested in conservation of birds and birding habitat, you may like to share information and effort with others in the club. Anne Lombard is our conservation chair. Contact her at (413) 586 7509, or aslombard@comcast.net

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The nominating committee is charged with making sure we recruit candidates for any openings which occur on the HBC Board. The nominating committee for this year consists of **Sue Emerson** (584 6736; spe33@hotmail.com), **Marcia Merithew** (584 8874; mmerithew@comcast.net), and **Mary Alice Wilson** (548 9078; mwilson@k12.phast.umass.edu). They are combing the club directory in search of those willing to devote some time and effort to keeping this august institution running. If you have an interest in serving on the Board, please contact one of them.

HITCHCOCK CENTER

Programs unavailable at press time.

ARCADIA

Dance of the American Woodcock. David McLain and Patti Steinman
Friday, April 16: 6:00 – 8:30 PM

*For more details of this and other programs go to www.massaudubon.org (select "Sanctuaries", then "Choose a Sanctuary: Arcadia") or call the sanctuary at the number below. To register for programs contact **Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary**, 127 Combs Rd., Easthampton MA 01027. Telephone (413) 584-3009.*

The Last Aircraft Maintenance Reports for this Edition

Pilot: "Target radar hums."

Engineer: "Reprogrammed target radar with words."

Pilot: "Mouse in cockpit."

Engineer: "Cat installed."

MISCELLANEOUS

Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas

Hot on the heels of “A Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts” comes yet another seminal publication for birders in the Bay State.

The “Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas” is the culmination of efforts by nearly 600 volunteers (including many members of HBC) between 1974 and 1979 to document the confirmed, probable, and possible breeding distribution of all 198 species known to reproduce in this state. Each species account also documents the history of breeding activity, song, habitat, and seasonal occurrence. There are also descriptions of nests, eggs, and songs. Watercolor illustrations of each species by Barry van Dusen and John Sill complement the text. For those interested in getting out ahead of the retail stores, bibliographic information is below.

Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas

Wayne Petersen and W. Roger Meservey (Editors)

University of Massachusetts Press, 2004.

Price (cloth bound, direct from the publisher): \$60

Available direct from University of Massachusetts Press: (800) 537 5487

More Information: (413) 545 4990; www.umpress.edu/umpress

Rip Ryder Expands Service

The club has two trips scheduled to New South Beach in Chatham, MA during the fall shorebird migration. For club members who might be considering going it alone, the “Rip Ryder” ferry service has asked that we mention its newly expanded service for 2004.

The company will now transport birders to the extreme southern tip of the beach, whence they can undertake a one-way walk back to the standard pickup point, eliminating the old “out and back” route. The fee is \$15 per person (return), or \$10 for groups of four (4) or more. In the interests of fairness, we should point out that a comparable service is also offered by the competition at Outermost Harbor Marine. Contacts for both companies are listed below.

Monomoy Island Ferry (“Rip Ryder”)

(508) 945 5450; www.monomoyislandferry.com

Outermost Harbor Marine

(508) 945 2030; www.outermostharbor.com

Club members interested in an informed and more definitive comparison of these services may contact David Peake-Jones (529 9541; davidpj@the-spa.com)

Where are the Birds?

For those who want the latest on birds being seen in the valley and beyond, the **Voice of Audubon** maintains a report on birds being seen statewide. Call **1-888-224-6444** for a synopsis of interesting birds being seen, organized by region. Seth Kellogg maintains the report for Western Massachusetts. He tries to create a comprehensive picture of what is being seen in the region, meaning all reports are welcome. Seth asks that you include the numbers of birds seen in your reports, not just the species list. He can be reached by email at skhawk@comcast.net. Alternatively, you may call him at (413) 569 3335, or leave a message in the Western Mass. section of The Voice.

Red Knot In Peril

Some stories are too important to ignore.

As we witness the return of Red Knots and other shorebirds to their breeding grounds this Spring, we should temper our delight with awareness of news from the Delaware Bay last season.

Ninety five percent of the world's Red Knots use the Delaware Bay as a refueling point in their Spring migration to the Arctic. They do so because of the extraordinary seasonal abundance of horseshoe crab eggs, which are laid in countless millions on sandy beaches in May. Despite recent widespread and growing concern over depletion of horseshoe crabs in the bay, regulations on the crab harvest, which went into effect on both the New Jersey and Delaware shores in April, 2003, were struck down via a procedural legal challenge in Delaware. This allowed unrestricted harvesting on the Delaware side of the bay, and anecdotal reports indicated that the harvesting intensity in that part of the bay increased as fishermen moved in from elsewhere.

According to counts during the migration season, the number of Red Knots visiting the bay declined by over fifty percent between 2002 and 2003. Less than 17, 000 knots passed through the Bay last Spring. Given that horseshoe crabs do not mature for nine years, even regulations imposed immediately will take years to halt the decline in available food resources in the Spring. There is the distinct possibility that the decline observed already will continue and result in the extinction of the Red Knot.

Rarely is the fate of a species so clearly and simply linked to a single resource in a single part of the world. The fate of the Red Knot rests directly with regulatory authorities in both Delaware and New Jersey, but also indirectly with concerned birders throughout North America.

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!

Welcome New Members

John McDermott: Amherst, MA

Suzanne Schuster: Florence, MA

Dan Whitcomb: Holyoke, MA

Henry Ritzer

Those who remember long-time club member Henry Ritzer may want to get in touch with him. Mr. Ritzer's daughter informs us that he still lives in the area, and would love to hear from birding colleagues. If this applies to you, please contact Susan Heinricher (susanheinricher@starband.net; phone 978 5444 6372)

That's all for this month.

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

David Peake-Jones

Editor

(413) 529 9541; davidpj@the-spa.com