



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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“Gossamer-thin.” This (invented) term came unbidden into my mind recently, and, lacking any legitimate editorial material, I decided that it should be the theme of the last editorial of the year. “Gossamer” was an old English word, apparently derived from the term “goose summer.” This referred to that part of the year when domestic geese were fattest and ready for eating. Coincidentally, this was also the autumn in England, a time when the evening air over the meadows was filled with the parachute threads of baby spiders. Then, as now, baby spiders used the slightest air currents and the aerodynamics of fine silken thread to disperse from their progenitors, whose parental responsibilities had already been replaced by a rather indiscriminate hunger.

The word came to me on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend when, as luck would have it, I went to the legendary Beech Forest near Provincetown looking for a concentrated view of the tail end of the warbler migration. I found only concentrated mosquitoes, who set about draining my circulatory system, despite the best chemical deterrents Avon can market. So it was that, having encountered nothing more interesting than a Pine Warbler in an hour and a half of birding, I stopped at the restrooms, with my patience gossamer-thin.

“Gossamer-thin” also describes the toilet tissue now being used in most public restrooms, though you would be spared the following diatribe if the tensile strength of the stuff even approached that of spider silk. Not for the first time, I was forced to reach up into the dark innards of the (fortunately not quite) tamper-proof machine to manually turn the toilet roll, the paper being so thin that it would tear under the modest tension required to unroll the prescribed length. Prescribed length? Who decided that, and would it not have been better to assign the calculation to an earthling?

An age passed thus, as I gently coaxed the priceless tissue from its roll, accumulating a bare fistful of little fragments, like some giant goldfinch plundering a milkweed pod. Some avian atlaser will no doubt mark me down as “CN”. Am I, (I asked myself), actually using less tissue than I would if it was actually of functional thickness? What diabolical evil was I planning, that made it necessary to seclude me from society for this long, and don’t they realize I am much more dangerous now than I was ten minutes ago? What is the national economic and emotional cost of millions of people spending this long to achieve even a dubious level of posterior hygiene with this stuff? What must it be like for the fragments of paper spread all over the floors of bathrooms nation-wide, denied their only opportunity to be useful?

Encumbered with these (admittedly) unproductive questions, I emerged, seething, from the bathroom, ready to call it quits. Before I could stomp my way to the car, a distinctive “kowl, kowl, kowl” drew me a hundred yards or so down a side trail, where I eventually caught a glimpse of my first decent Yellow-billed Cuckoo of the year. Were it not for the delay, I’d have been long-gone when that bird betrayed its whereabouts. Gossamer-thin. Toilet tissue. Serendipity. Connect these concepts as you will over a G and T in the yard, and apply them to your own birding. It is what keeps it all going. See you in September, by which time we will be close to the gossamer-draped evenings of the fall.

This edition (if you have not already abandoned it in disgust) contains:

- a brief introduction to the last program of the year,
- a preview of next year’s program schedule,
- field trip reports and coming trips,
- an atlas update,
- formal announcement of the new HBC Board,
- changes to the Rare Bird Alert
- Hitchcock Programs (apologies to Arcadia and Great Falls Discovery Center).

I hope you find some of it useful.

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, June 11 at 7:30 PM**

**Joan Walsh** speaks about **Breeding Bird Atlas (2)**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

If you are not involved in this project (yet), the breeding bird atlas (now in phase 2, the first iteration having been in the 1970's) aims to determine the distribution of all breeding birds in Massachusetts. Unlike the Christmas count, mere observation of species during the breeding season is insufficient. Volunteers (and there are hundreds of them state-wide) must look for evidence that species are actually breeding, and compile (evolving) bodies of data from patches of territory about 10 miles square.

If you are anything like me, you have found the Breeding Bird Atlas work all-consuming, and, like any great work of public importance, long periods of tough slogging interspersed with brief moments of unique achievement and insight. My birding will never be the same, (nor will my attitudes to multiflora rose and domestic dogs).

Joan is the coordinator of Breeding Bird Atlas 2 for MassAudubon. In addition to some insight into the progress so far this year of this wonderful project, perhaps she will shed some light on just how one is supposed to confirm Pine Warbler without a chainsaw, and what might be referred to a somewhat destructive sampling technique? Come along and get some further insight into the workings of this special project.

### Next Year's Programs (Provisional)

September 10, 2007. **Larry Holt**. The Making of "Drawn from Nature"

October 15. **John van de Graaff**. Birds of the Eurasian Continent

November 12, 2007. **Susan Russo**. The Conte Refuge and Discovery Center

December 10, 2007. **Members Meeting**

January 14, 2008. **Don Kroodsmma**. Bicycle Trip 2

February 11, 2008. **Ed Neumuth**. Palmyra Atoll Research

March 10, 2008. **Scottt Hecker**. NAS Coastal Waterbird Program

April 14, 2008. **Chris Elphick**. Sharp-tailed Sparrow Nesting

May 12, 2008. **Rob Williams**. Avian Endemism in Peru

June 2008. **Bruce Beehler**. Foja, New Guinea Expeditions

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

**Mt Auburn Cemetery. Sunday, May 14**

The day dawned beautifully and stayed that way as we hurtled along the pike toward Watertown, Massachusetts. Participating this year were Betsy Higgins, Lori and John Rogers, Juliana Vanderwielen, Eileen Rutman, Bernie and Elissa Rubenstein, Rachel Greenwood, and Janet Polvino, dubiously led by David Peake-Jones.

We began, as is customary, with a stroll along the Indian Ridge path, past the grave of Henry Longfellow. There were one or two nice warblers about, including a briefly cooperative **Bay-breasted Warbler**. The characteristic "tubular-bells" chiming of a **Bobolink** was so unexpected as not to register with a good proportion of the assembled birding multitudes, but we eventually located it in the top of an oak tree. We also found several **Wilson's Warblers** by their hesitant twittering. Perhaps our best-seen bird was a gorgeous **Canada Warbler** sporting in an apple tree. From the tower later in the morning we managed to find an **Indigo Bunting**, and a **Scarlet Tanager**, and had rather unsatisfactory looks at a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Our tally of 18 species of warblers did not include some remarkable misses, including Chestnut-sided Warbler, Pine and

Prairie Warblers. Thrushes, normally a staple of this trip, were conspicuously rare, but we did have three species.

In the early afternoon we adjourned to Great Meadows NWR in Concord to try to round out our list. The cat-tails had barely sprouted in the marsh, which perhaps explained the absence of Marsh Wrens. We had icky looks at breeding water snakes, cuter looks at nesting Yellow Warblers, and a Least Sandpiper sneaking along at the water's edge but could find little else to write home about.

dpj



**Poor Man's Monhegan. Plum Island and Cape Ann. Saturday, May 26.**

Slow, slower, slowest. No that's not David Peake-Jones listing trip participants in order with me at the end. That's the bird activity on this year's Memorial Day week-end trip to Plum Island. After two outstanding trips in the past two years, this year's highlights are limited to staring at the SOUND of a Swainson's Warbler for an hour and a half, excellent views of four Wilson's Phalaropes, a wonderful discussion about a possible Long-billed Dowitcher, and mouth-watering fried clams. The weather leading up to and including the day of the trip could not produce a fallout of either land or sea birds.

When the eight of us finally got together at an area on Plum Island known as the Warden's, we found a group of fifty or sixty birders staring at a wall of green shrubs. Emanating from that wall was the loud, clear song of a Swainson's Warbler. This bird was banded at the nearby banding station two days earlier. At times it seemed that the bird was within ten or fifteen feet but never showed. To avoid a mutiny our group moved on after more than an hour. Hellcat was quiet except for a nice look at a female Black-throated Blue Warbler and a great show by singing Marsh Wrens. To a person our group wanted those wrens to teach the Swainson's a thing or two.

The state beach lot was full (it being a beautiful beach day) so we scoped some shorebirds just north of Stage Harbor. We found a single dowitcher that, based on the very long, thin bill and hunch-backed appearance, we feel was a Long-billed Dowitcher.

After leaving the island we stopped at the marsh area near Pikul Farm on Route 1A. This was our best birding of the day with Glossy Ibis, Blue-winged Teal, White-rumped and Pectoral Sandpipers, and Wilson's Phalaropes showing well. We finished the day with about 45 species, a few less than the hundred plus of the last two years.

"We bird because every year is different", Rudd Stone used to say. He also used to say: "There are long billed dowitchers and longer billed dowitchers."

Bob Bieda



**Monhegan Island. May 25 through May 28.**

Participants: Nancy and Denny Baker, Larry and Joan Duprey, Steve and Carol Gehlbach, Isabel Higgins, Bob Jones, Marcia Merithew, Elissa and Bernie Rubinstein, and Shirley Smigel. Trip leaders: Betsy Higgins and Andrew Magee.

The weather was fair, save for one pre-dawn downpour, and for this leader, often TOO WARM: how odd! Despite the birds lower numbers (quantity) than usual (except for Baltimore Orioles and especially female Blackpolls), the island slowly but steadily gave up here hidden migrants.

The birds had a tendency this year to often be furtive, zippy and "over there" (and no new "fall-out"). Things seemed to improve as the weekend progressed, our "hunting" spirit was high and we finished with 120 species, about 2 species below our highest, and (ahem) nine more than some Allen Bird Club members saw in the days leading up to our visit. (.....hmmmm- is such inter-club teasing allowed??....). Everyone probably had her or his particular bird highlights. Mine were three: 3 male Magnolia Warblers on a log at one point no more than 24 total inches apart; a **Parasitic Jaeger** all too quickly zipping *right* over our Puffin Boat, with a **Razorbill** lifting alongside and, in *one small cone-laden spruce* close by, whole families of (that's adult males, females, and striped-and-begging juvenals) of BOTH **Red-** and **White-winged Crossbills** like strange, northern upside-down hanging parrots, with the smallish tree also festooned with warblers and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Colorful? You bet!

We "worked hard", stayed cheerful, and dedicated our rousing rendition of the club song to its founder, the "retired" and dear Barbara Tiffany.

Thank you, everyone!  
Andrew Magee

### Coming Trips

**\*Saturday, June 9. West Quabbin ramble.** Half day. Dave Gross offers a trip "through his backyard" and will be listening for nesting migrants, permanent residents, and hiking through blooming Mountain Laurel. If this sounds appealing, email or call David (413-253-2897) for further details. (M)

**Sunday, June 10. Mt. Greylock.** **Cancelled** due to the closure of all roads in the park this year.

**Saturday, June 16. Hammonasset Beach State Park, CT.** All day. In a new trip for the Hampshire Bird Club, Betsy Higgins goes to the coast of Connecticut to find unusual sparrows, rails, and other seaside denizens. Call Betsy (413-586-7585) for details as the date approaches. (E)

**Wednesday, June 20. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley.** Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) leads birders through the local landscape, seeking out late migrants. Meet at 6:00 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

**Friday-Sunday, June 22-24. Connecticut Lakes, NH.** Overnight trip. David Peake-Jones and Mike Locher fill in for Tom Gagnon this year. They will be leading this trip to northern New Hampshire. Migrants, boreal specialties, and moose abound. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Contact David (413-529-9541) or Mike (413-585-5864) to register. (M)

**Saturday, July 28. New South Beach, I.** All day. David Peake-Jones goes looking for early migrating shorebirds, especially Red Knots. Bring a lunch, a jacket, water and \$20 for the boat ride. Call David (413-529-9541) to register. (M)

**Saturday, August 25. New South Beach, II.** All day. Bob Bieda leads birders in their quest for late shorebird migrants, including Curlew Sandpipers and Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits. Bring a lunch, a jacket, and \$20 for the boat ride. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register. (M)

### RARE BIRD ALERT CHANGES

Effective June 1, 2007, the club will offer an email Rare Bird Alert only. We are, reluctantly, discontinuing the phone tree because of persistent problems with its implementation. If you are currently on the email alert list, you will notice no changes.

If you are on the phone tree, and if we have an email address for you, we will automatically transfer you to the email list for the balance of the 2007 season (ending in September, 2007). There will be fresh opportunities to sign up for the Rare Bird Alert (email only) in September. The “gatekeepers” of the Rare Bird Alert are listed below. This means that if you see a bird you believe is ‘alert-worthy’ you should contact one of them immediately.

**email (all gatekeepers): [alert@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:alert@hampshirebirdclub.org)**

**Scott Surner: (413) 256 5438**

**Jan Ortiz: (413) 549 1768**

**Geoff LeBaron: (413) 268 9281**

**Bob Bieda: (413) 527 2623**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The Annual General Meeting of the Hampshire Bird Club, Incorporated, was held on Monday, May 14 at 7:30 PM at Immanuel Lutheran Church. The assembled membership elected the following Board of Directors for the club for 2007-2008.

**President:** David Gross

**Vice-President/Program Chair:** Geoff LeBaron

**Treasurer:** Janice Jorgenson

**Membership Secretary:** Sue Emerson

**Communications Secretary:** Elissa Rubenstein

**Members-At-Large:** Bruce Callaghan

Mike Locher

Dennis McKenna

Jaap van Heerden

Lisa Rock

Scott Surner

Our thanks to the outgoing members; Betsy Higgins, Marcia Merithew, and Bob Zimmermann!

## **BREEDING BIRD ATLAS 2**

In Hampshire-Franklin County there are now 89 blocks assigned and 87 folks working as primary and secondary atlasers. Lots of birders, lots of birds, lots of good stories, lots of questions.

Stories about: a chimney swift picking up fiber from the top of a stump (presumably for nesting material); a bittern in a nearby, underappreciated pond, the surprise at how much fun atlasing is - the slower, more careful observations required.

And some frustrations: how come mating birds only get a “probable” rating? How do I find the list that includes Raven? How to I tell what other folks are finding on this block? Why is every good birding site on the corner of four blocks?

Keep those stories and questions coming.

And if you aren’t already working on the atlas and have even a little time to help out, just do it. You will find all the information you need at [hampshirebirdclub.org](http://hampshirebirdclub.org) or contact Mary Alice ([mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu](mailto:mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu)).

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

**Chicopee Landfill & Methane Recapture Trip:** *Bob Magnusson, Waste Management Engineer*  
Wednesday, June 6, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

**Paddle the Watershed:** *Connecticut Watershed Adventures 2007*

*Saturday, June 16:* Canoe Instruction Clinic, Deerfield River, 413-586-8612.

*Saturday, June 23, 10 a.m.:* Otter River Tour, Baldwinville to South Royalston, 978-248-9491.

*Friday, June 29, 7 p.m.:* Eagle Watch by Boat, Barton Cove, Gill, 800-859-2960.

**Tarantulas, Whip Scorpions and Hissing Cockroaches:** *Denise Passias & Jay Whitney*  
Saturday, June 9, 10 a.m. to noon

**Citizen Science: Monarchs are Back!** *Ted Watt*  
Sunday, June 24, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

**Nature Writing Workshop: In the Lap of the Earth:** *Rema Boscov*

Session 1: Sundays, April 29, May 6: 10 a.m. to noon

Session 2: Sundays, June 3, 10, 24, July 1, 8: 10 a.m. to noon

**Quigong: Exploring Nature's Energy:** *Rema Boscov*

Sundays, June 3, 10, 24, July 1, 8: 8:30 to 9:30 a.m.

**The Soulful Landscape Writing Workshop:** *Erica Wheeler*  
Sunday, June 10, 1 - 5 p.m.

*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](http://www.hitchcockcenter.org).*

## Welcome New Members!

Sara Griesmer ---Sunderland

## 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!

That's it for this month, and till September.  
Until then, talk softly and carry a big scope!

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