



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 26, No. 4

December, 2009

NEXT PROGRAM

Monday, December 7 at 7:30 PM

Members Meeting: The Members Slide Show and Refreshment Extravaganza.

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Should bad weather force a cancellation, it will be announced on WHMP 1400 AM radio.

Most months, we invite a birding luminary to entertain or inform us with the fruits of their wisdom. By contrast, the entertainment at the December meeting is, well, **us!** Everyone can be involved in one or both of the following ways:

- 1) **Please bring some sort of snack to share.** This gives our regular refreshment stalwarts a break and allows us to uncover new culinary talent from among the ranks of the club, and,
- 2) **Please bring some slides to share.** They can be of birding exploits, other adventures in natural history, or even just some scenic wonders you visited during the year. As in past years, please limit your show to 15 or fewer slides.

If You Would Like to Show Slides

Please send an email confirmation about your slide presentation to either **Dave Gross** (webmaster@hampshirebirdclub.org) or **Geoff LeBaron** (programs@hampshirebirdclub.org) by 6 Pm on Sunday, December 6 (the day before the meeting)

In your email, please tell us

- Are your slides digital or 35 mm format?
- If digital, are the images in Powerpoint format or just stand-alone images?
If you bring digital images, please have them on a memory stick or CD-ROM disk.

COMING PROGRAMS

January 11, 2010. Mark Picard. The Challenges of the Wildlife Photographer.

February 8, 2009. Bill Benner. Birding In Thailand.

March 8, 2010. Kathy and Miles Conway. Kazakhstan Exploration.

Hummingbird Frailty

In the November 2009 edition of National Geographic there is a photograph taken at her hummingbird feeder by Sharon Fulingim of Socorro, New Mexico. It shows a praying mantis capturing a hummingbird. The carcass of the bird apparently showed up beneath the feeder next morning, and the mantis lay in wait for more prey!

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

The Crown of Maine

Thursday, June 18 to Monday, June 22.

This was a new trip, and it deserves a little extra detail!!

Those taking part included Nancy and Denny Baker, Larry and Joan Dupre, Helga Beatty, Sally Hills, Anne Lombard, Marcia Merithew, Harvey Allen, Scott Sumner, Val Miller, Barbara Snook, Rick McNeill as well as Jim and Shirley Hammerschmith and David Peake-Jones.

We were guided by local enthusiast **Bill Sheahan**, but were without our intended leader, **Geoff LeBaron**, who had been forced to withdraw at the last minute. This whole adventure was Geoff's idea, and we felt a little bereft without him, but birded resolutely on anyway.

Our first morning was devoted to exploring varied habitats within the *Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge*, which abuts and includes the old Loring Air Force Base. The base was a cold war B-52 facility, with a sobering ambience, but the woodlands in these environments rang with the songs of ubiquitous White-throated Sparrows, Oven birds, Magnolia-, and Nashville Warblers, Northern Parula, and Northern Waterthrush. We strained (without success) to transform the familiar tones of Red-eyed Vireos into the more deliberate and more prized sound of breeding Philadelphia Vireo, but **Wilson's Snipe** winnowed throughout the numerous marshes.

Around an old gravel pit filled with water we found Pine Siskins, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and two gangling male **moose**. A pleasant walk toward *Button Brook* yielded a Wilson's Snipe sitting on an Osprey platform, an alder swamp full of Alder Flycatchers, and a **Common Goldeneye** leading a small flotilla of young across a beaver pond. But perhaps the jewel in the crown here occurred when a family of **mink** crossed the road just ahead of us. What a treasure! The group then crossed a grassy marsh, their progress marked by the frantic alarm calls of Red-winged Blackbirds.

Further along the main air base access road, an insistently trilling **Upland Sandpiper** fluttered from perch to perch for some time, before we realized it did not share our enthusiasm for the encounter and we moved on.

Contrasting with the eerie ambience of the old *missile storage area* with its huge bunkers and guardhouses were the intricate calls of a **nesting Lincoln's Sparrow**, which eventually peeked out at us from a thicket. After Bill's magic pickup had yielded a much-appreciated cup of morning coffee/tea, we moved on to the *Loring AFB runway*: a 2-mile stretch of blacktop which hosted distant kestrels, more Upland Sandpipers, and a Northern Harrier.

After leaving the refuge and lunching at the Par and Grill, we moved on to *Josephine Ponds*, artificially created to dispose of potato peelings from a french fry plant. The ponds were, with perhaps a touch of irony, named for the industrialist's mother-in-law. Historically, the potato peelings created a disgusting, smelly pond which, as is so often the case, attracted huge numbers of breeding waterfowl. Since the company is now required to treat the fry tailings, the pond is now cleaning up, and supports far fewer ducks than in its hay-day! Nevertheless, we observed breeding **American Wigeon**, **Northern Shoveller**, **Blue- and Green-winged Teal**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Ring-necked Duck**, Double-crested Cormorant, and the now-rare **Redhead**. Displaying **Ruddy Ducks** arched their necks jauntily backward, then pedaled madly with both feet, performing a short and frenetic dash through the water, creating an impressive display of energy and quite a shower of spray. Below the impoundment in a more vegetated wetland, we found a rare **Common Moorhen**, and a female **Great Horned Owl** with a chick.

On Sunday morning we searched in vain for Black-backed- and Three-toed Woodpeckers in the woods of *New Sweden*, but along the shores of aptly named Long Lake, we found foraging **Cliff Swallows**, nesting Common Terns, Osprey and Bald Eagles. During lunch in *St. Agathe*, we recorded a very rare species for Aroostook County: the **Northern Mockingbird**! During the afternoon, again on the miles of logging roads which traverse

this neck of the woods, we found nesting Palm Warblers and **Gray Jays** in regenerating spruce. **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers**, again difficult to distinguish from Least by call, lurked in the murky depths of a Northern White Cedar swamp.

On Sunday we traveled far to the north, through the villages of Woodland and Perham to survey an area of woods owned by the *Irvine Paper Company*. En route we quickly found a **Mourning Warbler** outside the Perham Town Offices, and were treated to a nice display by a singing **Canada Warbler**. Once inside the logging company gate we traveled a long way, pausing occasionally to ask (via tapes) who might be in residence at the time. Some birds, like the sweet-voiced **Fox Sparrow**, answered and spent time with us, but many more failed to live up to the promises they had made during Bill's reconnaissance. We finally found breeding **Cape May** and **Bay-breasted Warblers**, and **Boreal Chickadee**, all emblematic of the boreal, but which had so far eluded us. For many, the highlight of the entire trip was an **American Bittern** which fed avidly on a smorgasbord of aquatic tidbits from a drainage ditch only a few feet away from us.

For most, Monday was a day of travel, either back to familiar climes or further afield. Folks who track these things report that we saw a total of 118 species: surprising diversity for an area with no ocean.

Bill Sheahan dazzled us with the depth of his local knowledge, his impassioned love of birds and birding, his endless optimism and good humor, and the array of surprises that his aging pickup disgorged at every stop. There is no better way to see the north woods than with Bill, and if you take the opportunity to do so, you will not be disappointed. The north woods make you work really hard for birds, but as with most things, the harder one works, the greater the rewards!

David Peake-Jones



Quabbin Reservoir. November 21, 2009.

The Hampshire Bird Club trip up the east side of Quabbin began at 7am at the headquarters building. We then went in the east side through gate 45 in Hardwick. Our travels took us to the Baffle Dams, Shaft 11, fishing Area 2, Dana Commons, Pottapaug Pond, Graves Landing, and finishing up the trip by exiting gate 35. We had a total of 51 species of birds, 6 species of mammals, two dragonfly species (and many ticks!). We had some very good sightings with the highlights being a **Great Cormorant** near the Baffle Dams and two **Black bellied Plover** near gate 35. In addition we had the following waterfowl: 30 Common Loons, a Long tailed Duck, White Winged Scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, **Northern Pintail**, Wood Ducks, 55+ Ring Necked Ducks, all three Mergansers, a Scaup (likely Lesser). We also had Barred Owl, 7 Bald Eagles, Horned Lark, two Winter Wrens one of which was singing a partial song, a male Eastern Towhee, Fox Sparrow, etc. A very nice day of weather and a great day for birds.

Larry Therrien

COMING FIELD TRIPS

Please see the **Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule** attached.

Bird Note

Please consider contacting WFCR to ask that they air *Bird Note*. This is a series of two minute snippets of information about birds, published by the non-profit *Tune in To Nature.org*, and free to radio stations. They are quite eclectic and informative. They currently air to the south of us, but not on our local NPR affiliate!! If you are interested in Bird Note, you might like to visit their website at www.birdnote.org. You can listen to recent and archival editions of the series, and even sign up for an email reminder which will tell you what is coming up! Viva la Internet!!

CHRISTMAS COUNT

Several recent newsletter items (going back only a matter of few years) referred to the radius of the Northampton Christmas Count circle as five miles. The Northampton CBC Coordinator recently started out of a reverie in front of the fire, exclaiming,

“No, the radius of the Northampton Christmas Count circle is 7.5 miles.”

Since not everyone was present at the November meeting to witness the public humiliation of the abject newsletter editor, the correction is produced here for the record.

By the way, this means the **circumference** of the Northampton Christmas Count circle is 47.12 miles, and the **area** of the aforesaid CBC circle is 164.93 square miles. (Funny, my patch always seems that big on its own!) Oh, and the center of the circle is, allegedly, the old Hadley cemetery, near the Honeypot. There, now that my editorial demise is complete, I shall drown my sorrows while leafing through the red-stained remnants of my high school geometry books.

MORE IMPORTANT CHRISTMAS COUNT

Please contact the coordinators of these local counts if you would like to participate and have not yet found a group.

Northampton Count: Sunday, December 20. *Mary Alice Wilson* (413 548 9078; mwilson@k12.phast.umass.edu),

Quabbin Count: Saturday, December 26. *Scott Sumner* (413 253 5999; ssurner@aol.com)

REALLY IMPORTANT CHRISTMAS COUNT

The Northampton CBC Potluck will begin at the Hitchcock Center at 4:30 PM, preceding the compilation, which commences at 6 PM. We are in urgent need of the following:

Five (5) main dishes (preferably hot and vegetarian),

Four (4) desserts,

2 gallons of regular cider, and

2 gallons of water (not the two gallons you will be bringing into the Hitchcock Center in your footwear).

Please see **Sue Emerson** (Potluck Coordinator) at the December meeting, or email her with your pledge to help. You can find her at spe33@charter.net.

BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

The Second Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas survey period began in 2007, and is scheduled to run through the 2011 field season. Whether or not you are participating in data collection for the atlas, you can get a sense of the results emerging from this crucial and exhaustive study of the breeding birds of the state. The atlas blog, artfully named “Distraction Displays,” can be found at <http://massaudubonblogs.typepad.com/massbirdatlas/>.

At present, the atlas staff is adding interim reports on one species each week. These give a sense of what is being discovered during this atlas period and how these results compare to those discovered during the first atlas survey, conducted between 1974 and 1979. Here is an excerpt from one of the accounts.

Interim Report #20: Wild Turkey

While turkeys may have found their way onto our dinner tables since the days of the First Thanksgiving, Wild Turkeys suffered an absence of over 100 years from Massachusetts. The good news is, no re-introduction program in the history of the state has been as wildly successful as that of the Wild Turkey.

(continues next page ►)

The twin pressures of substantial market hunting and rapid loss of forest habitat caused the Wild Turkey to be extirpated as a breeder in Massachusetts in 1851. These birds may travel a dozen miles or so between their breeding grounds and wintering grounds, but they are not truly migratory, so losing the breeding population of turkeys means losing just about all of the turkeys. The loss of these uniquely American birds was more than most Massachusetts residents could bear, though, and restoration programs involving the release of domestic turkeys were undertaken as early as 1911. Finally, in the early 70s, the Division of Fisheries & Wildlife released 37 wild-trapped turkeys from New York.....established a breeding population in western Massachusetts.

As of Atlas 1, Wild Turkeys were just starting to gain a solid foothold in Berkshire, Franklin, and Hampshire counties.

Turkeys are everywhere as of Atlas 2. In less than 50 years, this bird has gone from being locally extinct to being so abundant statewide that it can again be hunted for food and sport. Although their principle natural food source is mast such as acorns and beech nuts, turkeys are not picky eaters and have benefited tremendously from fields of cultivated crops and mounds of birdseed spilled from backyard feeders. In some places, aggressive turkeys are even coming into conflict with suburban residents!

*(*Our humble publication cannot do justice to MassAudubon's graphics, but this table gives you some idea of the extraordinary resurgence of this bird. Ed)*

Wild Turkey	Atlas 1 (1974)	Atlas 2
# Blocks Possible	4	148
# Blocks Probable	1	93
# Blocks Confirmed	7	338
Total # blocks Occupied	12	579
% Blocks Possible	0.5	20.0
% Blocks Probable	0.1	12.6
% Blocks Confirmed	0.9	45.7
Total % blocks Occupied	1.6	78.2

(For a full version of this, and other interim reports, go to <http://massaudubonblogs.typepad.com/massbirdatlas/>)

Breeding Bird Survey Route Available (Amherst Conservation Department)

The Wildwood Route, consisting of twelve specified points primarily along the railroad tracks between Strong Street and Pine Street, is available for a birder with an interest in volunteering for this activity. Responsibility consists of surveying the route on two mornings between June 1 and June 17, starting between 6:00 and 7:00 am. At each point the volunteer will stop and count all birds seen or heard for exactly five minutes. Data sheets are provided for recording counts.

I have surveyed this route for the twenty years the survey has been conducted. However, since my hearing is not as good as it once was, I am seeking someone to take over the route. Please call or email me or with your questions at 413-549-1613 or marcums@cns.umass.edu if you are interested.

Jim Marcum.

The Illustrated Bird
Selections from the Richard L. Soffer Ornithology Collection
Amherst College Archives and Special Collections
November 6, 2009 – February 14, 2010

Highlights include the following:

- *L'Histoire de la Nature des Oyseaux* (Pierre Belon, 1555),
- *A Natural History of Birds* (Eleazar Albin, 1731),
- *American Ornithology* (Alexander Wilson, 1808-1814),
- *Les Oiseaux les Plus Remarquables* (Edouard Travies, 1845 – 1857),
- *Birds of America* (Double Elephant Folio, John James Audubon),
- recent photographic work by Theodore Cross of Amherst, and
- four mounted bird specimens that once belonged to Audubon.

Free and open to the public Monday to Friday, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM on the A-level of the Frost Library, on the main Quad at Amherst College.

Birth of a New Species

Observations of birds were critical in Charles Darwin's thinking on the subject that would one day be known as evolution. Darwin's "finches" (they are actually tanagers), which he observed and collected in the Galapagos, were famously pivotal in his developing the theory of **natural selection**.

Darwin found a number of populations of these birds on adjoining islands. They were subtly different in terms of size, bill shape, diet and behavior (including song). Darwin inferred that these groups had been descended from a common ancestor as a result of trans-island migrations, and the differing selection pressures which applied on different islands. We now know that the origin of new species is not only a result of evolution, but in many instances a cause of it. Thus, direct observations of **speciation** (the origin of new species) are the equivalent of capturing lightning in a bottle: the holy grail of evolutionary science.

Hence it is more than fitting that one of the few studies to actually witness and document the origin of a new species in real time involves one of the same species so critical to Darwin's vision. **Peter and Rosemary Grant** have worked in the Galapagos for almost forty years, with much of that time spent studying Darwin's finches. The Grants actually witnessed a hybrid Medium Ground Finch (*Geospiza fortis*) migrate from one island to another, and breed with another hybrid individual. The resultant offspring were sufficiently different from other Medium Ground Finches on the island to begin to isolate themselves reproductively, and when the population went through a drought-induced bottleneck after several generations, the **origin of a new species** was complete.

For the Grants, and for the scientific community as a whole, this is the kind of miraculous observation which confirms centuries of meticulous but less direct evidence-gathering. It is the smoking gun of evolution. Darwin would have been immensely impressed.

Based on the following:

Birth of a New Species Witnessed by Scientists. Brandon Kim. Wired Science (Wired.com). 11/16/2009.

Citation: "The secondary contact phase of allopatric speciation in Darwin's finches." By Peter R. Grant and B. Rosemary Grant. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Vol. 106, No. 46, Nov. 16, 2009.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor
529 9541

newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org

Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.
Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule, 2010
 (Revised. December 1, 2009)

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.*

JANUARY

***Friday, January 1. New Year's Birding.** Half day. Scott Sumner leads the first trip of the year, looking for any birds that haven't been up too late the night before. The trip departs from the parking lot at Sumner Heating (60 Shumway St. in Amherst) at 7 a.m. (Yep, that's what he said.) For more information call Scott at 413-256-5438. (E)

Saturday, January 9. North Shore: Cape Ann to Plum Island. All day. Bob Bieda leads his annual New Year's pilgrimage to the coast in search of wintering specialties like Eared Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, and much more. Dress for cold weather. For meeting information call Bob at 413-527-2623. (E)

Saturday, January 30. Leader's Choice. All day. Geoff LeBaron chooses between Coastal Rhode Island, Plum Island, and other interesting locations for his annual winter outing. Call Geoff (413-269-9281) several days before the trip for more information. (E)

FEBRUARY

Saturday-Sunday, February 6-7. Leader's Choice: Coast of Maine or Cape Cod. Two days. Scott Sumner will lead a two-day trip to either the coast of Maine or Cape Cod, depending on which appears to be better. Overnight accommodations will be arranged by participants. Call Scott (413-256-5438) for details as the date approaches. (M)

Saturday, February 20. South Shore: Plymouth and Falmouth. All day. Al Richards leads birders to the coast south of Boston to find ducks, gulls, owls, and whatever happens to be around. Dress warmly. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information. (E)

MARCH

Saturday, March 13. Plum Island. All day. Geoff LeBaron goes east to see what's around Plum Island. Dress for cold weather. Call Geoff (413-269-9281) for meeting time and information. (E)

Saturday, March 20. Connecticut River Waterfowl. Half day. Al Richards looks for waterfowl migrating through the valley along the Connecticut River. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information as the date approaches. (E)

APRIL

***Sunday, April 11. Ashley Reservoir: Early Warblers.** Half day. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) hopes to find Pine and Palm Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and other early migrants. Meet in the Friendly's parking lot, near the Holiday Inn, close to Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Rt. 91 at 7:00 a.m. (E)

***Saturday, April 17. Early Migrants.** Half day. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for migrants, starting around Look Park in Northampton. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the JFK Middle School on Bridge Street in Northampton. (E)

MAY

Sunday, May 2. Connecticut River to Mt. Sugarloaf. Half day. Dave Mako explores the fields and hills around Mt. Sugarloaf looking for migrants and a few local specialties, including Common Ravens, Peregrine Falcons, and Worm-eating Warblers. Call Dave (413-665-2999) for meeting time and place. (M)

Friday, May 7. South Quabbin Park. Half day. Tom Gagnon (413-584-6353) birds the southern end of the reservoir for vireos, warblers, and whatever else shows up. Meet at the Quabbin Visitor's Center parking lot at 7:00 a.m. (E)

Saturday, May 8. Spring Migration in the East Quabbin. All day. Tom Gagnon and Larry Therrien guide birders through the woods of East Quabbin in search of spring migrants. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members. Call Tom (413-584-6353) well ahead of time for meeting information and to register, since participation is limited. (M)

***Sunday, May 16. Moody Bridge Road.** Half day. Mary Alice Wilson and Sally Hills explore new state land on Moody Bridge Road in Hadley. The site is great for grassland birds, and according a website, it hosts "federally endangered dwarf wedgemussels and other rare species. These include the bridle shiner dragonfly and several species of state-protected turtles." Call Mary Alice (413-548-9078) for meeting time and place. (E)

Tuesday, May 18. Mount Holyoke. Half day. Tom Gagnon leads a walk up the venerable old hill looking for spring warblers (think Cerulean) and wildflowers. Meet at the entrance at 7:30 a.m. Call Tom (413-584-6353) for more information. (M)

Friday, May 28 – Monday, May 31. Monhegan Island. Overnight trip. Betsy Higgins and Andrew Magee lead the Hampshire Bird Club's annual pilgrimage to Monhegan Island. Not only is the island charming, but the numbers and variety of migrating birds can be astonishing. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call Betsy (413-586-7585) to register. (E/M)

Saturday, May 29. Poor Man's Monhegan. All day. Bob Bieda takes birders to Plum Island. Past trips have found Wilson's Phalaropes, Piping Plovers, Seaside Sparrows, Orchard Orioles, and Evening Grosbeaks. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register and get meeting information. (E)

JUNE

Saturday, June 5. Westover Air Force Base. Half day. Pending permission, Bob Bieda will lead his annual trip into New England's premier grassland habitat, looking for Upland Sandpipers, Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register and check on the date and time for meeting. (E)

Sunday, June 6. October Mountain State Forest. Half day. Ed Neumuth explores the habitat on October Mountain. Recent cutting has made the area a prime spot for Mourning Warblers, as well as a number of other unusual species. Call Ed (413-884-4961) around trip time for meeting time and place. (E)

Saturday, June 12. Hammonasset Beach State Park, CT. All day. Betsy Higgins goes to the coast of Connecticut to find sparrows, rails, and other seaside denizens. Call Betsy (413-586-7585) for meeting time and place as the date approaches. (E)

Sunday, June 13. Blockbusting trip. Half day. Join a team that spends the morning scouring one atlas block. Each trip will be led by a team leader who has already visited the block to determine prime habitats and how to divide the group for the most productive use of the morning. Detailed information on the block and team leader will be included in a later newsletter, or call Mike Locher (413-585-5864) as the date approaches. Block-busting provides both a great day of birding and a great contribution to the Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas. (E)

Saturday, June 26. Blockbusting trip. Half day. Join a team that spends the morning scouring one atlas block. Each trip will be led by a team leader who has already visited the block to determine prime habitats and how to divide the group for the most productive use of the morning. Detailed information on the block and team leader will be included in a later newsletter, or call Mike Locher (413-585-5864) as the date approaches. Block-busting provides both a great day of birding and a great contribution to the Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas. (E)

AUGUST

***Saturday, August 7. Knightsville Dam.** Half day. Betsy Higgins leads a new trip to Knightsville Dam WMA. This is a rich habitat where almost anything could turn up. Call Betsy (413-586-7585) for meeting details. (E)

Saturday, August 21. New South Beach. 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. Note: the date may change depending on the tides. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register. (M)