



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

Amherst, Massachusetts

25TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

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www.hampshirebirdclub.org

In this issue:

- the **March Program** with **Scott Weidensaul** (page 2) and the **Coming Program** schedule,
- a frank **field trip report** and upcoming trips,
- a plug for the long-suffering **Nominating Committee**,
- **Hitchcock and VEEC** programs, plus an **Atlas** announcement.

I hope you find some of it useful!

“It is sometime deep in the future. Having ended my years on this earth, I am wending my way toward the great beyond. Ahead of me I see what appear to be a set of great gates, of burnished gold with pearl inlay. A gentleman whom I take to be Saint Peter is questioning those at the front of a long line of petitioners, some of whom are being allowed to pass through. The elderly and infirm are being asked to remove their shoes, and more than one seems to be being wanded..... A sign of the times, perhaps?”

Finally it is my turn. I move gingerly into position in front of the saint. I am preoccupied with his wings, which I notice have jeweled primary and secondary coverts, and a dandy little set of platinum-tipped scapulars. The clipboard, however, appears to be a budget version from Staples. Again, a sign of the times? Though I am nervous, I am not entirely without hope. It has been an unobtrusive life, law-abiding overall (is there a heavenly Statute of Limitations?), and there was that orphaned rabbit I raised back in childhood. Saint Peter, though physically imposing, seems benevolent and patient. I begin to relax just a little, and it seems he might be going to gloss over the whole ‘attendance-at-church’ thing.

My file is clearly brief. He reviews it nonchalantly, but as his eyes travel to the foot of the page, an almost-imperceptible crease appears in the center of his forehead. My heart slows, then stops. He purses his lips, exhales theatrically through his nose, and then asks with the exaggerated nonchalance of true incredulity,

“You really couldn’t confirm American Bittern in Chesterfield Seven?”

Over the past couple of year, many of us have put our birding shoulders to the wheel of the second Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas. It’s not like the Christmas Count where a disappointing day can be attributed to bad luck or bad weather. The Atlas involves sustained effort and a much more complex skills set. It has the potential to make us feel really exposed and vulnerable alongside the experts. However, both ventures are well worth the consumption of a little (or in my case, a heaping helping of) humble pie.

Both Christmas Counts and the Atlas allow birders to become scientists, and to generate vast avian population databases, which cannot be generated by any other means. Our humble data will bear witness to habitat loss (and possibly regeneration) as well as global climate change (and, perhaps even our efforts to arrest and reverse it). Though the challenges facing bird conservation are daunting, we can take heart from at least one thing as we gear up for the home stretch of the Atlas effort. If we fail to protect and nurture critical breeding bird populations in the Commonwealth, it will not be because of lack of knowledge.

The Program Introduction is on Page 2

PROGRAMS

Monday, March 9 at 7:30 PM

Scott Weidensaul chronicles his **Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

In 1955, naturalists Roger Tory Peterson and James Fisher published their best-selling book *Wild America*, describing a now-legendary 30,000-mile trip across North America. Fifty years later, author Scott Weidensaul has retraced their epic journey, to see what we've gained and lost, and to catch a glimpse of what the future holds for wildlife and wild lands. From the great seabird cliffs of Newfoundland to the cypress swamps of Florida, from the cloud forests of the Sierra Madre in Mexico to lonely islands far out in the Bering Sea, Weidensaul searches out the wild heart of the continent - and finds it strong.

Scott Weidensaul is the author of more than two dozen books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Living on the Wind*, about bird migration, and his newest book, *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*. Weidensaul writes for such publications as *Smithsonian*, *Audubon*, *Nature Conservancy* and *National Wildlife*. He lives in the mountains of eastern Pennsylvania, where he studies the migration of hawks, owls and hummingbirds.

If you would like to have Scott Weidensaul sign copies of *Return to Wild America: A Yearlong Search for the Continent's Natural Soul* or his new book, *Birds of a Feather: A Brief history of American Birding*, you can purchase copies at Amherst Books (on the Common in Amherst). Copies will NOT be sold at the HBC meeting.

Coming Programs

April 13. John Van de Graaff. *The Galapagos Islands: A Photographic Celebration.*

May 11. Susan Smith. *Black-Capped Chickadees.*

June 8. Kenn Kaufman. *Wings of the Imagination; Why We Need Birds.*

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

Leaders Choice. January 31, 2009.

Sometimes we have to recognize sheer grit and determination, even when the outcome is a disappointment.

Geoff LeBaron and Chris Ellison found themselves not the windshield, but the bug on this day. The persistent absence of the birds they were searching for was exacerbated by wind chills in the single digits throughout the day. Geoff and Chris made two separate visits to Plymouth Harbor during the day, without finding the Ivory Gull which had been wowing observers right up until that day. In an effort to salvage something from the day, they also visited Duxbury beach (nice selection of winter ocean species including Red-throated Loon, Common Goldeneye, and Bufflehead).

Just to prove that virtue never goes entirely un-rewarded, Geoff and Chris found their way to the Charlestown Breachway in Rhode Island at dusk. They first watched a bevy of Northern Harriers plying the air over the dunes, then witnessed the changing of the guard as a beautiful Short-eared Owl took over for the night shift.

Coming Trips

Saturday, March 21. 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)

Overnight Trips

MONHEGAN ISLAND

Memorial Day Weekend (May 22-25), 2009

Spaces still open! Sign up NOW!!

If you have ever wanted to steep yourself in the spring migration, to relish every sighting, to see birds at absurdly close range, Monhegan Island is for you. This is our flagship field trip, and one you should experience if you have not yet done so, or reprise if it is has been too long.....

During the Spring, migrant songbirds moving northward up the Atlantic seaboard are sometimes pushed out over the ocean by storms, and have to fight their way back toward the safety of land. Monhegan Island lies about twelve miles off the coast of Maine and is often a haven for exhausted birds to recuperate before resuming the perilous journey northward. We will arrive on the island on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, without vehicles, and immerse ourselves in the gentle rhythms of island life. We'll find migrant songbirds throughout the tiny village of Monhegan, sheltering in the numerous apple trees, sometimes picking through the sea-wrack on the town beach for sand-fleas, or even hiding in the lobster pots piled almost everywhere. Each day will bring fresh migrants to the island, and a storm could even produce one of the fallouts of birding legend. When the birding slows down, we can venture off on any of the island's numerous walking trails to Lobster Cove, the stupendous seaward cliffs, the Seal Rocks (aptly named), or the Enchanted Forest.

We'll stay at the rustic Trailing Yew, which will lay on breakfast and dinner each day, including a local lobster dinner. This is the perfect opportunity to slow down, REALLY learn the birds, and remember what life *should* be about. This trip is open only to members of the Hampshire Bird Club. Registration is by deposit. For further details, including an estimation of costs, contact Betsy Higgins (hignik@comcast.net; 586 7585) or Andrew Magee (andrewfmagee@gmail.com; 586 1509).

Suggestions for Fall Field Trips

We want to make sure that our field trip program remains vibrant and fresh. This means we need new leaders and new destinations to add to the "old reliable" trips and leaders who have served us so well for so long. We need innovators!!

Our field trip chair, Mike Locher, is, even now, turning his furtive (should that be *fertile*?) imagination to the Fall Field Trip Schedule. If you have suggestions for field trips between September 1 and December 31, especially if you are willing to lead them, please contact Mike:

fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org. or 413 585 5864.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The HBC Nominating Committee has been formed. Its members are **Bill Benner**, **Mary Alice Wilson** and **Dave Gross**. The committee will bring forward a slate of candidates for the 2009-2010 HBC board including both officers and at-large members. If you are interested in serving on the board or if you would like to nominate someone for the board, please contact one of the committee members. The slate of nominees will be announced in the May newsletter. The election of the new board will be held at our annual meeting on May 11, 2009.

Mass Audubon 17th Annual Birders Meeting
“Birds and Birders on our National Wildlife Refuges”
Saturday, March 7, 2009.

Worcester Technical High School, Worcester, MA

This year's Birders Meeting, co-sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, offers anyone with an interest in birds the opportunity to learn more about the rich resources that comprise the National Wildlife Refuge System, along with some of the challenges and opportunities constantly facing resource managers.

Also, in recognition of the 100-year anniversary of the birth of Roger Tory Peterson – “America's greatest naturalist” – this year's Birders Meeting will feature reflections by Lee Allen Peterson, son of the late RTP. In addition, a presentation by well-known birder and author, Kenn Kaufman, will make this an event not to be missed.

For more information on the schedule or to register, go to: <http://massaudubon.org/birdersmeeting> or call Linda Cocca at 781-259-2150.

Co-sponsored by Mass Audubon and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with support from Houghton Mifflin Company and Birds & Beans Coffee.

Breeding Bird Atlas Workshop
with **Joan Walsh, Director of Breeding Bird Atlas 2 (BBA2).**
Monday, March 23, 7 PM,

Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Easthampton.

The focus of the workshop will be on using the data collected during the past 2 years to make this year's work as *efficient*, and *enjoyable*, as possible. (As I write this, I remember that 2 years ago, Joan's topic was “what is the atlas?” - how far we have come!)

Mary Alice Wilson

Directions to Arcadia

Follow anyone who looks like an intergalactic pilgrim, and, when it is apparent that you are close to the center of the universe, ask any of the helpful and entirely enlightened local residents for the way to the sanctuary.

The more buttoned-down among us may wish to try these more pragmatic instructions.

Get onto I-91 and proceed to Exit 18 for Route 5, Northampton. This will involve I-91 South if you are north of Easthampton, and I-91 North if you are south of Easthampton. At the bottom of either ramp, turn RIGHT onto Route 5 South toward Holyoke and the Oxbow. Proceed 1.4 miles and turn RIGHT onto East Street. Follow East Street for 1.2 miles and turn right onto Fort Hill Road at the Mass Audubon sign. Go 0.9 miles and bear right at the next Mass Audubon sign and turn left into the sanctuary.

VEEC PROGRAMS

Quabbin's "Green" Certification: Justification, Impacts, and Challenges in a Changing Rural Economy: *Thom Kyker – Snowman*

Tuesday, March 24 at 7:00 p.m..

Held at the Quabbin Visitor Center, Belchertown.

For more information call 413-323-7221. A \$5 donation is appreciated.

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HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

Spring Birding Course: *Scott Sumner*

Evening Classes: Thursday, February 26; Wednesdays, March 11, 25, April 8, 15, 22, May 13, 27, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Field Trips: February 28, March 21, 28, April 18, 25, May 2, 10, 16, 30, June 6; start times vary between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m.

What Would Nature Do? An Evening of Biomimicry: *Tim McGee*

Monday, March 9, 2009, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Through the Seasons with Wildflowers (slideshow): *Ted Watt*

Wednesday, March 18, 2009, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

4th Annual Salamander Soiree: A Benefit for the Hitchcock Center for the Environment

Friday, March 27, 2009, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. Lewis-Sebring Commons, Valentine Hall, Amherst College. Tickets: \$25 (\$30 at the door). Please RSVP by March 20, 2009, by calling (413) 256-6006.

Working Towards Net Zero Energy: *Mary Kraus*

Tuesday, March 31, 2009, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

"Mount Toby Poems" (reading and booksigning): by *Wally Swist*

Tuesday, April 7, 2009, 7 to 8:30 p.m. Proceeds to benefit Clara Gardner.

An Old Growth Forest Excursion: *Bob Leverett*

Sunday, April 12, 2009, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Mohawk Trail State Forest, Charlemont, Mass.

*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.*

Backyard Birds (on Strong St. in Northampton) offers a wide range of birding books, audio resources, gifts, feeders, and other paraphernalia. They also offer a 10% discount to Hampshire Bird Club Members. Remember, when you shop locally, your money stays here!

That's it for this month. I will leave you in the capable hands of Trudy Tynning, who will take us through another chapter of the HBC History.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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HAMPSHIRE BIRD CLUB HISTORY

CHAPTER Six: Sally to David and the *Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts: 2000-2004*

By Trudy Tynan

In **2000**, Mary Alice Wilson took over as president. Stacy Adams moved into the vice presidency, Mark Mount continued as treasurer, David Peake-Jones took over as communications secretary and Joanne Parker became membership secretary. The board included Sue Emerson, David Gross, Jim Marcum, Dennis McKenna, Jan Ortiz, and Scott Sumner. Marion Gorham took over as publicity chair from Nancy Buchanan.

Jan Ortiz opened the year's programs with a presentation on the "River of Raptors" at Veracruz, Mexico, followed by Brian Harrington of Manomet Observatory on the Red Knot, Becky Field of the U.S. Dept. of the Interior and UMass on "Birds and their Habitats in Tundra, Tropics, and Towns." January featured the National Audubon Society and HBC's own Geoff Lebaron on Antarctica, followed by field guide authors Clay and Pat Sutton of Cape May Observatory on "How to Spot an Owl" and David Spector of Central Connecticut State on "How to Spot an Ornithologist." Irene Pepperberg, visiting professor at MIT's Media Lab, described her research on African Grey Parrots, Al and Lois Richardson of Springfield spoke on "Birding Finland and Lapland," and charter member Peter Yaukey, currently teaching at the University of New Orleans, wrapped up the year's programs with a presentation on "Birding Louisiana."

The Rare Bird Alert policy was changed so an alert could be initiated by any member of the HBC board, the club's field trip policy and guidelines were updated and sent to members, and membership topped 230.

Bob Bieda and Harvey Allen were joined by Al Richards in their yearlong quest to see how many bird species they could see in Massachusetts. It all started as Bob's retirement gift to himself and ended (with President Mary Alice presenting the three friendly rivals with containers of mixed nuts) after a gyrfalcon on Plum Island became Bob's 318th bird, Harvey's 308th and Al's 300th.

In November, the Board of Directors of the Hitchcock Center donated \$100 to the HBC library in recognition of David Spector's years of outstanding service. HBC volunteers answered phones at WFCR's annual fundraiser and the club held its first 24-hour Birdathon in partnership with the Hitchcock Center. A potluck supper, hosted by Conservation Chair Anne Lombard, led to formation of a Communications Tower Committee chaired by Ann and Rick McNeil. And Ruffie, a female Rufous Hummingbird, spent her fifth winter in Tom Gagnon's greenhouse.

Sally reminded us in November that a turkey crossing the road is *poultry in motion* and offered this advice for catching a unique rabbit: *You unique up on it*. In May, she asked *Why did the mushroom go to the party? Cuz, he was a fungi, of course*. And *Why did the fungi leave the party? Cuz there wasn't mushroom!* She provided this cautionary tale for summer travelers in June: *Two vultures board an airplane, each carrying two dead raccoons. The stewardess looks at them and says, "I'm sorry, gentlemen, only one carrion allowed per passenger*. And then, she slipped into retirement after 165 newsletters and other HBC communications over 17 years. Or, as she put it in her graceful valedictory, *WORD BOTCHER becomes BIRD WATCHER*:

The birds and the words are calling me. Thanks all for years of encouragement, support, and terrible puns! Thanks to all those really special people who have been my teachers and have held my hand along the way! I have to admit to having mixed feelings right now. As I believe I have said before, "A pun is its own reword." But have you ever noticed that PUN spelled backward is NUP? Well ...

a nup is a nup is a nup.....I'm out of here!

Sally Venman, June 2001

In 2001, Mary Alice continued as president, Geoff LeBaron took over as vice president and program chair, David Gross became treasurer, Sue Emerson became membership secretary, Jan Howard took over as communications secretary and Stacy Adams, Dennis McKenna, Jan Ortiz, Scott Sumner, Sally Venman and David Peake-Jones serving on the board.

David also took over the newsletter and ably dunned us for our dues in the first electronic version of the newsletter: *September draws nigh. Immature humans return to the classroom, asking questions such as, "Mom, why do I have to wear this lame outfit?" ... Pretty soon, all the rest of this cicada-thrumming summer indolence will be replaced by the insistent whisperings of migratory hormones...*

His October newsletter opened on a more somber note: *On September 10, Gerry Bertrand [past president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society] delighted us with his account of birding the Peruvian Amazon. I can find little to say here about what happened the next day, and since. I hope that birding has given you, as it has me, some moments of gentleness and joy to hold onto.*

Mark and Marcia Wilson returned to present a program on Nantucket in October, followed by Sam Fried, past president of the Hartford Audubon Society, on birding Bolivia's Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, Dave Small, president of the Athol Bird and Nature Club, on birds and butterflies, and columnist Bill Danielson on bird rehabilitation. Lori Sanders, an educator with UMass Extension, discussed her natural history program on public radio, Andrew Farnsworth, of the National Audubon Society spoke on using radar to track bird migration, followed by professors Jeff Podos, of UMass on Galapagos Finches and Marta Hersek of Northeastern on Ovenbirds.

Thanks to Dave Gross, the club obtained its own URL: <http://hampshirebirdclub.org>. Sally Venman launched a program offering rides to meetings for older members and those with long-term medical problems. The club offered more than 30 field trips during the year, including five new trips, and Henry Lappen took over from long-time librarian Anne Cann. In recognition of Anne's service a copy of Sibley's Guide to Bird Behavior was donated to the library in her name.

It soon became clear that the membership could expect no respite from puns like these:

Pillage Idiot: *Viking who could never bring himself to steal.* **Intaxification:** *euphoria at getting a refund from the IRS which lasts only until you realize it was your money in the first place.* Golden-crowned Kinglets were described with no apologies to The Romantics 1980 hit:

*What I like about you, you're an easy ID.
With that wing-bar, crown stripe _ no one else you could be, YEAH.
Ah, that sibillance in my ear,
Telling me the Christmas Count is here, well it's true,
(whisper) That's what I like about you.
That's what I like about you.
That's what I like about you, HEY, HEY, HEY, HEY, HEY (a lot of times, loudly)*

When D. Peake-Jones prodded trip leaders to turn in reports with Gilbert and Sullivan, David Spector responded:

*At sunset we waited a bit
In an Amherst preserve, Podick;
A woodcock flew low
And peented "hello"
To provide our lists a nice tick:
To bring in an owl we tried—
We hooted and whistled and cried;
But no bird was fooled
Silence then ruled —
The owls in no way complied.*

Re-elected in 2002 were President Mary Alice Wilson, Vice President Geoff LeBaron, Treasurer David Gross, Membership Secretary Sue Emerson, Communications Secretary Jan Howard, while Sally Hill, Bob Zimmerman and Mike Locher joined Dennis McKenna, Jan Ortiz, and Sally Venman on the board.

Wayne Petersen of MassAudubon opened the year's programs with a presentation on Iceland followed by UMass graduate student Mara Silver on her research on Bank Swallows in Williamsburg, and Bob Askins of Connecticut College on conservation of birds of open lands. In January, Robert S. Ridgely, director of international bird conservation for the National Audubon Society, described his discovery of the Jocotoco Antpitta and bird conservation in Ecuador. Charter member Dave Stemple spoke on Scottish bird song, Paul Baisich, conservation director for the American Birding Association, on shade-grown coffee, and an April storm forced cancellation of Tom Litwin's talk on the Harriman Expedition. May brought noted field guide author Kenn Kaufmann, who discussed migration from a bird's perspective. Geoff Lebaron wound up the year with a program on the Galapagos Islands.

The post 9-11 world posed some challenges for birders as Janice Doppler reported from a field trip with Al Richards to the Connecticut marshes and Bradley Airport. In Windsor, Conn., the group *found a pair of Least Bitterns that stayed in one area of the marsh for over 45 minutes and a pair of snapping turtles locked in the conjugal act for over an hour. Rails were conspicuously less conspicuous ...*

After we left the marsh we went to Bradley. We were still on the first leg of our slow trip around the airport when we were surrounded by state police. (actually only two cruisers, but it felt scary). We still managed to locate a small flock of turkeys while we were being escorted from the airport under police guard.

Editor's note: Experience suggests it is unwise to gesticulate and yell "Turkey" in the presence of Connecticut's finest.

The club sadly noted the death of charter member Marnie Price, who served on the board from 1986-1990 and Honorary Life Member Rudd Stone. Henry Lapin established an information exchange to help vacationing members with information on birding in far-off places. Janice Doppler and Peg Army took over the HBC Boutique from long-time storekeeper Sue Fletcher. The conservation committee launched monitoring projects at the East Leverett meadow and Bull Hill and the *Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts*, written and illustrated by club members and edited by Jan Ortiz, David Spector, Pete Westover and Mary Alice Wilson, was published by University of Massachusetts Extension.

In 2003, Dennis McKenna took over as president, while Geoff LeBaron, Sue Emerson, Jan Howard and David Gross continued as vice president, membership and corresponding secretaries, and treasurer. Lisa Bertoldi, Betsy Higgins, Marcia Merithew and Leslie Scott joined Mike Locher and Bob Zimmerman on the board.

Deb DeRosier and Victorino Molina Rojas opened the year's programs with conservation of Three-wattled Bellbirds in Costa Rica. Tom Litwin of Smith gave his storm-delayed presentation on the 2001 reprise of the 1899 Harriman Expedition, and Betty Anderson, founding director of the Manomet Bird Observatory and chair of the state's Endangered Species Advisory Committee, spoke on New England's Changing Avifauna. Sam Fried gave a program on birding Kansas, and Dave King of UMass discussed on his research on wintering Golden-cheeked Warblers. Peter Alden, president of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, spoke on the impact of invasive plants on New England birds, followed by Jan Ortiz on Baffin Island, and Harvey Allen on Gambia.

Charter member Don Kroodsma received the Elliot Coues Award from the American Ornithologists Union for his contributions to the study of bird song. A Varied Thrush was spotted at the Quabbin Reservoir and a Thayer's Gull at the composting facility on Burt's Pit Road in Northampton. The mid-winter eagle survey tallied 61 Bald Eagles, including 39 at the Quabbin Reservoir, six along the Connecticut River, and a juvenile on the Westfield River,