



## Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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### December, 2010.

Our bird club reflects every person who has ever been a member of it. Over the past month we have lost Sally Venman and Marion Gorham. Each, in different ways, helped create the bird club we have today.

**Sally Venman** died unexpectedly on November 13. She was one of the founders of the Hampshire Bird Club and her contribution to the organization we are today was immeasurable. It was at the site of the Great Gray Owl in Hadley in 1984 that Sally and a few others considered starting a local club. Sally was a natural organizer; serving as communications secretary and newsletter editor, she helped guide and build the club to make it the friendly, active organization it is today. For 18 years Sally wrote the HBC newsletter. It reflected her quick wit, playful sense of humor and love of birding. Sally's run down of the birding news was laced with jokes, puns and tongue in cheek fun. A local columnist once said that it was worth the price of an HBC membership just so one could get Sally's newsletter.

We remember sharing birds with Sally, in Hitchcock Center birding classes, on Christmas Bird Counts in Amherst, at Plum Island, on Monhegan, and at many other locations in the Connecticut Valley and beyond. Sally enjoyed watching birds, appreciated their beauty, and did not hesitate to express her awe at nature. She was not one to feign indifference to common birds, but always maintained the sense of wonder that goes with a beginner's enthusiasm.

Conversation with Sally meant laughter with Sally. Even the most serious moments never seemed far from laughter. We recall her description of feeding a couple of dozen different skunks, and one raccoon, at her house, and keeping careful track of her striped visitors. We remember her enthusiasm for a joke, even those at which others might groan, and her inclusion of many in the club newsletter. Sally and Bill were among the very few to laugh at the punch line, "No soap, radio."

Whether it was writing the club newsletter, chasing a rare bird or spending a leisurely day in the field, Sally attacked all with enthusiasm and a sense of playfulness. She loved the natural world and the world of birds and birding. It was our honor to call her friend and to have had the opportunity to spend many, many hours in the field with her. She will be dearly missed.



Long-time club member **Marion Gorham** passed away on Friday, November 26 after a prolonged illness. She was an artist, and perhaps best known to many of us as an accomplished and fearless cyclist. She, in fact, authored "Bicycling the Pioneer Valley and Beyond," and, with her husband Al Shane on their trademark tandem bicycle, was a familiar site on the highways and by-ways of Leverett, and in the Pioneer Valley in general.

Marion served as publicity chair for HBC for a time, helping bring our activities to public notice. She and Al presented a program on cycling in Iceland for the club some years ago which was enough to convince us that for anyone but this intrepid duo, there may be less arduous ways of exploring that volcanic landscape, but few that would impart the same intensity of experience. Marion and Al participated in number of HBC trips and I well remember enjoying the unique perspective she brought to birding while strolling the highways and by-ways of Monhegan. We will miss her dynamic personality and the vigor she brought to our club.. We send our condolences to Al and others in Marion's family.

## NEXT PROGRAM

**Monday, December 13 at 7:30 PM**

**Members Meeting: Members Slide Show**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

*This month the entertainment is US!!*

Here's how to participate:

1) **Please bring some sort of snack to share.** Sally and Helga are taking a well-earned break this month.

If we don't bring stuff, we will go hungry!!

**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. Please contact either **Jaap van Heerden** ([jvanheerden@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:jvanheerden@hampshirebirdclub.org)) or **Geoff LeBaron** ([programs@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:programs@hampshirebirdclub.org)) by 6 p.m. on Sunday, December 12. Please let them know:

- 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

**Jan 10, 2011. Joanna Bailey-Hodgman/Jo Miles Shuman.** Birds in the Poems of Emily Dickinson.

**Feb 14, 2011. Tom Bancroft.** White-crowned Pigeons in Florida

**Mar 14, 2011. Don Kroodsm.** Does the topic matter?

***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!

## CHRISTMAS COUNT POTLUCK

There is going to be a fantastic potluck supper for Hampshire Bird Club members and other birders at the Hitchcock Center on Sunday, December 19 at 4:30 p.m.

The committee is in need of several salads and main dishes (some vegetarian).

Please contact Sue Emerson ([membership@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:membership@hampshirebirdclub.org) or 413-584-6736 ) for donation suggestions or to sign up. Sue will be at the center at 3:30 Sunday for drop off.

Oh, and by the way, in order to participate in the potluck we ask that you first participate in an obscure international citizen-science event called the Northampton Christmas Count. It just requires a few hours out in the balmy fields near Northampton, counting birds. Well, actually, it runs for twenty-four hours starting at midnight on the 18<sup>th</sup>, but some folks only count till they lose their first major extremity. If you are interested in this, contact Mary Alice Wilson ([mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu](mailto:mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu); 413 548 9078) and she will put you in touch with a group of fellow crazies enthusiasts.

### Sally's Legacy

There is no better way to pay tribute to Sally than to revisit her writings, which graced the monthly newsletter for so many years. It is my intention to revisit these for over the balance of this club year, and in doing so, I have been searching for a title which will help identify her inimitable offerings. I found the title in a musing Sally wrote while closing the newsletter in April, 2001.

*"So, that should about do it for this month. I hear that we are going to be treated to a nice gentle rain tonight sometime around midnight. I think I might meander up to Henry Street and see what's happening at the salamander tunnel. I need to make sure that the spotted salamanders get safely across the street, especially the wild and crazy ones that opt not to use the tunnels. I call this **sallymeandering**."*

So I hope you will enjoy a little **sallymeandering** with me between now and June of next year.

## FIELD TRIP REPORTS

### Saw Whet Owl Banding.

#### October 29, 2010. Northbridge, MA.

Despite what promised to be a cool fall evening, fourteen hardy birders led by **Sue Emerson and Janice Jorgensen** piled into a van for a trip to Lookout Rock in Northbridge, Mass to observe the banding of saw-whet owls by Strickland Wheelock and Beth Milke.

Upon our arrival the evening was cool and quite windy, leaving some in our group to wonder if we would be lucky enough to witness the capture and banding of any owls.

After our hosts had provided us with background information on the number of owl 'captures' in the area, the 'technique' of netting owls, and the importance of record keeping, we were led along a leafy path in the woods to examine some capture nets that had been previously erected. Although the nets were empty on our first visit, on the second visit we were rewarded with a hatch-year female saw-whet. This diminutive owl was easily banded and silently disappeared in the darkness when it was released.

On the next visit we found that the nets had captured another female saw-whet. This tiny owl was quickly banded, we all having an opportunity to hold her, stroke her soft feathers and the owl apparently so much enjoyed the attention of the group that it was reluctant to fly away. Instead of immediately taking flight, to the amusement of the group it chose instead to remain perched on Ian Davies' arm for several minutes. As all good things must come to an end, in the wink of an eye (pun intended), she too silently glided off into the night. A perfect ending to a perfect day.

Janice Jorgensen

Field Trip Reports (continued)

### **Berkshire Lakes. Saturday, November 7.**

**Tom Gagnon** and *too many participants to name* followed the scent of cider donuts into the Berkshires on a brisk but clear fall day.

Moran was scenic but shrike-less. The gated expanses of Cleveland Pond supported only one elegant **Red-throated Loon**, floating in serene solitude with its bill raised in oh-so-hoity-toity a fashion toward the blue skies. However, three Hooded Mergansers and one Great Blue Heron were eking out a living from the more blue-collar beaver marsh on the other side of the tracks.

The northern end of Hoosac Lake in Cheshire was disappointing, but three Pine Siskin flew over our heads as we shivered on the breezy causeway, watching a line-up of American Coots on a log. The real perpetrator was obviously a lone Bufflehead, floating surreptitiously in the southern half of the lake, far from scrutiny. At the Summer Street crossing, we found a series of Black Ducks among the mallards, and a couple of beautiful **Northern Pintail** dipping their elegant necks into the muck with the rest of the hoi-poi.

The crowd of birds visible from Murphy's Bar on Pontoosuc included the customary hordes of Canada Geese, Mallards, as well as Common- and Hooded Mergansers. The more skilled amongst us were able to pick out four sturdy Gadwall, one American Wigeon, a Pied-billed Grebe, and the truly blessed could make out a distant **Red-necked Grebe**.

From the Causeway on Narragansett Ave we added a beautiful, if distant group of **Green-winged Teal** on the mudflats, and some more Bufflehead.

At the Onota Causeway we found some splashy Wood Ducks and another tardy Great Blue Heron, and from Burbank park we could just make out a distant raft of **Black Scoter** and, yes, more Bufflehead.

By the time we marched down through the woods to Mudd Pond, I was starting to drift off. By now, the atmosphere was a miasma of donut aroma. Ian Davies' Lesser- and Greater Scaup fell into the 'take your word for it' basket. There may well have been thirty or so **Ruddy Ducks** silhouetted against the far shore, and I think someone called out **940 Ring-necked Ducks**. Finally we pulled into Bartletts and hungrily wolfed down the sacred comestibles. Anticipation and salivation gave way to blessed satiation. Revitalized, renewed, and resurgent, we tore off down to Richmond Pond to find a lone **Common Goldeneye**, more Coot, and a surly Loon.

The last leg of the journey was over-hill and down dale to the rarified environs of the Kripalu Yoga center, Tanglewood, and the Stockbridge Bowl. The lake was almost deserted save for another Ruddy Duck and yikes, some Bufflehead. However as we paused at the Lily Brook inflow on the eastern shore, we found a couple of birds worth writing home about. There in amongst the spent cattails were two dazzling **Common Snipe**, delicately striped and barred, miracles of russet, buff and brown: striking yet disruptively colored to the point of invisibility. This species is normally seen only in headlong retreat after flushing from some anonymous and distant divot in a cow pasture, but here they were, up close and personal, defying the season, delighting the crowd. The bird of the day for this humble observer.

It is always a fall delight, this sojourn amongst the Berkshire Lakes, never predictable, always entrancing.

David Peake-Jones

*"Today was a spring rain, and in my backyard, a Robin was giving an earthworm an object lesson in food chain position." Sally V. editorial, March 12, 1985.*

## Field Trip Reports (continued)

### **Quabbin. November 20.**

**Tom Gagnon and Larry Therrien** only sent me a trip list. OOH goody!

- 10 Common Loons cruising cautiously.
- 1 Horned Grebe hopefully hornswoggled.
- 19 **Tundra Swan** titillating Tom (off Gate 5)
- 1 (female) Wood Duck wallowing wonderfully.
- 83 Black Duck bantering belligerently.
- 32 Ring-necked Duck roiling the ripples.
- 10 Black Scoter being bawdy.
- 1 (female) **Surf Scoter** seriously smutty.
- 78 Hooded Merganser (hip headgear).
- 21 Common Merganser clutching cutthroats.
- 1 Ruffed Grouse retiring rapidly.
- 18 Wild Turkey wandering willfully
- 1 Barred Owl barking brazenly.
- 1 Northern Flicker nursing gnarled noggins.
- 5 Red-breasted Nuthatch not nonplussed.
- 8 Golden-crowned Kinglet gallivanting gleefully.
- 2 Fox Sparrow foraging fiercely.

## **COMING TRIPS**

December has been set aside for shopping, Christmas Counts and watching the last gasps of our democracy.

Enjoy!!

The Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule should be here soon!

*"It happened again! I woke up this morning and discovered that it is THE MIDDLE OF AUGUST! No-one warned me, no-one even suggested to me that the summer days were nearing an end. The shock of this realization was quickly followed by the booming voice of reality (sounded amazingly like Scott) saying "Write the bird Club letter!" So I guess I'll put aside my bathing suit, trash novel and wine cooler (for the moment) and get on with it."*

Sally, from the editorial, August 20, 1986

## **THE LIBRARY IS EXPANDING!**

If you are travelling, the HBC library has got something for you. Check out (literally) the following new books:

*A Bird Finding guide to Costa Rica*

*Birds of Peru*

*Birds of southern Africa, and*

*Stalking the Ghost Bird* (the search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker).

Plus many more! Call or email Henry Lappen (who can bring titles to meetings) or visit the Hitchcock Center (open Tuesday - Saturday 10-4) to take out a book.

## **Anticoagulant Rodenticide Exposure in Birds of Prey in Massachusetts**

*Tufts Wildlife Clinic in Eastern Massachusetts is sounding an alarm about anticoagulant rodenticide poisoning in birds of prey in New England, and presumably, throughout North America.*

Anticoagulant rodenticides are used to control rodent populations in various settings, including urban, suburban, and agricultural areas. These rodenticides disrupt blood clotting pathways, specifically those involving vitamin K, resulting in excessive bleeding and death. These poisons can also cause mortality in non-target species of mammals and birds that ingest the bait (primary exposure) or ingest poisoned animals (secondary exposure).



Brodifacoum is a second-generation anticoagulant rodenticide that is currently available for household use in a variety of forms, including bait blocks and pellets. This compound presents a high risk for unintended poisoning of wildlife due its long persistence time in liver tissue, and has been found in numerous birds of prey suffering from anticoagulant rodenticide toxicosis that have been treated at Tufts Wildlife Clinic (TWC). These birds are suffering from uncontrolled and persistent bleeding and bruising. Treatment can be effective, but protecting the birds from further exposure is impossible, assuming the rodenticides continue to be used.

The most frequent species treated at TWC for anticoagulant rodenticide toxicosis is the Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), which predominantly feeds on small- to medium-sized mammals but will also consume birds. Barred, Great-horned- and Eastern Screech Owls are also presumably at high risk and are included in a long-term study being conducted through the clinic. Obviously, the risk of anticoagulant toxicosis is a factor we need to consider when planning rodent control in residential, industrial, and agricultural situations.

### **Peering over the shoulders of migrating Ospreys**

On a clear morning in early September 2008, a three-month-old female Osprey named Penelope pushed off from Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, and flew, alone, 2,700 miles to French Guiana in 13 days. She touched down in coastal Maryland and North Carolina for three days, lazed along the Bahamas for four, then blew through the Dominican Republic in 29 hours. At dusk she launched out over the Caribbean, flying all night and the next day to a tiny island off the coast of Venezuela. A week later she was exploring rainforest rivers in French Guiana, her home for the next 18 months.

We know this because Penny is one of 150 Ospreys which have been tracked via satellite transmitters over the past ten years by Mark Martell at Minnesota Audubon and Rob Bierregaard at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

The data, not surprisingly are providing a unique window into the vicissitudes of migration for Ospreys. For example, like many adolescent raptors, juvenile Ospreys wander, loiter, and even get lost, crossing open ocean when they don't have to. Adults fly faster and more direct routes, more sure of where they're headed. Key threats for Ospreys are fish farms throughout the Americas, where they are often shot by farmers trying to protect their stock.

If you would like to see detailed maps of Osprey migration routes for birds from several tracking years, you can visit <http://www.bioweb.uncc.edu/Biorregaard/migration.htm>.

## OTHER GROUPS WHO ARE ALL ABOUT BIRDS.

This list focuses on groups who provide programs and/or field trips on birds and birding in Massachusetts, and list these on active websites. Addresses given are those for current programs and/or trips. Only monthly programs or special events are listed here (\*\*\*\*).

**Arcadia Sanctuary.** Easthampton, MA. Field Trips/Programs.

Programs/trips at [www.massaudubon.org/PDF/newsletters/Arcadia\\_117.pdf](http://www.massaudubon.org/PDF/newsletters/Arcadia_117.pdf)

**Cape Cod Bird Club.** Brewster, MA. Field Trips/Programs. [www.massbird.org/ccbc](http://www.massbird.org/ccbc)

Programs held at 7:30 PM at Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, 869 Rte. 6A, in Brewster, MA.

\*\*\*\***December 13, 2010. Members' Night - Members' Slides, Silent Auction, Door Prizes.**

**Brookline Bird Club.** Brookline, MA. Field Trips. [www.brooklinebirdclub.org](http://www.brooklinebirdclub.org)

**Athol Birding and Nature Club:** Athol, MA. Field Trips/Programs. [www.millersriver.net/events/index/html](http://www.millersriver.net/events/index/html)

\*\*\*\* **"Who's in Your Back Yard--and Beyond?"** (Wildlife of Local Woodlands) Bill Byrne.

Thursday, December 9, at 7:00PM at the Unitarian Church in Petersham.

**Allen Bird Club:** Springfield, MA. [www.massbird.org/allen](http://www.massbird.org/allen)

Meetings held at the Tolman Wing of the Springfield Science Museum (The Quadrangle).

\*\*\*\*Program information not available.

**Hoffmann Bird Club.** Berkshire County, MA. [www.hoffmannbirdclub.org/events/html](http://www.hoffmannbirdclub.org/events/html).

\*\*\*\* **Monday, December 6, 2010 at 7 p.m.** Berkshire Life Insurance, 700 South St., Pittsfield

Members Meeting and Christmas Count Preview.

*"I have a new toy. It's a bird feeder with one-way glass that fits in a window, inside the room. The birds can feast without being aware that I am watching their every move, just a few inches away. This is a mixed blessing. I have it set next to my desk and all I want to do is watch the birds. There hasn't been a bill paid since the feeder was installed. It is by sheer agonizing discipline that this letter is being written at all. My cats are on the verge of nervous breakdowns; my husband is claiming desertion, and I suspect that Christmas night may not happen at the Venman's this year...."* Sally, from the editorial, November 28, 1986.

That's all for this month.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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