



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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## January, 2010

### *“Think globally but act locally.”*

This axiom applies to no-one more than birders. In the past few weeks, many of us have participated in the Audubon Christmas Count, either here, elsewhere, or both! Whether by straining our frozen ears to pick up the ethereal whinny of a Screech Owl across the windswept expanses of frozen fields, or patiently watching feeders for the briefest of visitors, or searching the icebound crannies of the valley for avian jewels, we have taken ownership of these: OUR birds.

The information we have gathered since the inception of the Christmas Count has illuminated the slide northward of many species in response to global climate change. These range shifts illustrate the resilience of bird species in the face of environmental change, but they also raise the question of whether there are limits to the adaptability of species, and whether some of our birds are coming close to those limits.

The sense of ownership we feel when we count birds, and the sense of belonging we have when we venture into the wild corners of our crowded landscapes will be essential if we are to hold onto our wild heritage, and our place in it. As birders in the new year, we can enjoy the beauty and wonder birds bring to our lives. We must also be aware that our duty to conserve birds and their habitats has never been more urgent.

In this edition:

- an introduction to this month's **program**, and the upcoming **program calendar (page 2)**,
- coming **field trips**,
- **Northampton Christmas Count** highlights and thanks,
- an **Interim Report** from the **Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas**,
- an important **birthday**,
- an **Amherst Breeding Bird Survey route** in need of a volunteer, and
- pending **legislation** you might want to know about.

I hope you find some of it useful!

## COMING FIELD TRIPS

**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)

**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)

## NEXT PROGRAM

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

### **The Challenges of the Wildlife Photographer**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

The most frequently asked question of a wildlife photographer is "How did you get that shot?" This digital slide presentation addresses that question and many other issues and obstacles involved in capturing extraordinary wildlife images.

Mark discusses everything - from the use of his homemade floating blind, using portable blinds, using your vehicle as a blind, equipment selection, to just plain hard work and plenty of patience!

See stunning images of all species of wildlife: birds, reptiles, amphibians, large and small mammals, and more, all presented in their wild and natural environments with no captive or enclosed subjects. He will share his techniques and tricks with the audience while relating many interesting and personal experiences he has had while photographing wildlife.

**Mark Picard**, a self taught wildlife and nature photographer, has been capturing images for over 30 years - specializing in his exquisite work on moose. He is noted for his creativity in the field; not only in composition and lighting, but also in his use of unique equipment, blinds and knowledge of animal behavior.

His images have appeared in numerous national and international magazines, including *Audubon*, *Animals*, *Maine Scene*, *Birder's World*, *Wild Life*, *Bird Watchers Digest*, *Northern Woodlands*, *Ontario Out of Doors*, *Wildlife Conservation*, *Ranger Rick*, *Yankee* and others. He has contributed to publications by the Sierra Club, The Canadian Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, Defenders of Wildlife, Scholastic, The National Wildlife Federation, and Tidemark Press. Along with the many private collectors of his work, Mark has an impressive list of commercial clients including Ambercrombie and Fitch, the United States Postal Service, the National Wildlife Foundation and the Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Commission.

Mark leads personalized photo group workshops/tours and individual one-on-one instruction sessions in the North Woods of upstate Maine as well as local photo workshops.

## COMING PROGRAMS

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

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

**April 12, 2010. *Brandi van Roo*.** Vireo Research.

### **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](mailto:marcums@cns.umass.edu) if you are interested.

Jim Marcum.

## Northampton Christmas Count. December 20, 2009.

### Highlights (provisional)

The owling hours were windy and very cold with light snow overnight. The daylight hours were cold and mostly cloudy with moderate to high winds. Very cold weather in the weeks preceding the count resulted in a scarcity of open water.

Species shown are as follows:

- Those regarded as “**UNUSUAL**” (**UPPER CASE, BOLD**)
- Those for which **high counts** were recorded this year (**bold**), and
- Other selected species of interest.

Species	2009 Count	Previous High Count (s) and Year(s)
<b>SNOW GOOSE</b>	<b>1</b>	32 (2008)
Northern Pintail	1	10 (1991)
<b>Bald Eagle</b>	<b>9 (High Count)</b>	8 (2002, 2003)
Northern Harrier	4	10 (1989)
<b>RED-SHOULDERED HAWK</b>	<b>1</b>	4 (1957)
Red-tailed Hawk	135	139 (2008)
<b>WILSON'S SNIPE</b>	<b>1</b>	12 (1990)
American Kestrel	4	31 (1974)
Peregrine Falcon	1	4 (2004, 2006)
<b>LONG-EARED OWL</b>	<b>2</b>	3 (2004)
Belted Kingfisher	8	23 (2001)
<b>Common Raven</b>	<b>13 (High Count)</b>	13 (2006)
<b>RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET</b>	<b>3</b>	6 (1967, 1973)
<b>AMERICAN PIPIT</b>	<b>1</b>	61 (2006)
<b>YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER</b>	<b>1</b>	9 (1982)
<b>CHIPPING SPARROW</b>	<b>1</b>	11 (1974)
<b>CLAY-COLORED SPARROW</b>	<b>1 (High Count)</b>	1 (1988, 1996, 2004)
Fox Sparrow	4	20 (1943)
<b>LINCOLN'S SPARROW</b>	<b>1 (High Count)</b>	1 (1992)
Swamp Sparrow	3	23 (1992)
<b>LAPLAND LONGSPUR</b>	<b>1</b>	31 (1989)
Common grackle	(count week)	

106 participants found 78 species in total and counted 37, 348 individual birds!

We claim to have walked for a total of 175.1 (party) hours and covered 162.75 miles!

Complete results will be posted at [www.hampshirebirdclub.org/christmas count](http://www.hampshirebirdclub.org/christmas%20count).

### Nine Decades and Counting!

Barbara Tiffany turned 90 on New Years Eve.

Barbara has been a club stalwart for many of those 90 years. She participated in the annual club trip to Monhegan Island for 21 consecutive years, from its inception to 2004. She helped write the HBC club song, which is still sung on every Monhegan trip, and is a quiet but regular presence at almost every meeting. Happy Birthday, Barbara!

## Christmas Count Compilation Pot-Luck

We all enjoyed a great feast at the compilation pot luck. Thanks to everyone who shared delicious dishes with us, and thanks to everyone who helped with set-up and take-down. We could not have done it without you!

Happy New Year from Sue Emerson and her elves:

Sally, Merry, Mary Alice and Bill!

(Tolkien fans will note that Merry is, in fact, a hobbit, and Bill is a pony. The others have suspiciously ordinary names for elves....)

## LIBRARY

HBC has a substantial library at the Hitchcock Center in Amherst. **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 Saturday. Items are catalogued in the "About" section of the HBC Website and can be signed out and borrowed for a period of up to one month, or longer by arrangement. **Henry Lappen** is happy to bring items to meetings, given a few days notice! Contact him at [library@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:library@hampshirebirdclub.org); or (413) 549 3722.

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

**Winter Nature Photography:** *John Green.*

Saturdays, January 23, 20 and February 6, 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Fee.

**Energy Efficient Home Exploration and Afternoon Tea:** *Vivienne Carey and Roger Webb.*

Sunday, January 24, 2 to 4 p.m. No Fee.

**Emergency Preparedness and Household Self-Sufficiency:** *Frank Grindrod.*

Held at Sirius Community, Baker Road in Shutesbury.

Saturday, January 30, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Fee.

**Transition Towns: Increasing Community Resilience in a Time of Change:** *Tina Clarke.*

Sunday, January 31, 7 to 9 p.m. Donation Requested.

*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).*

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Jim Marcum.

## BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

The Second Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas survey period began in 2007, and is scheduled to run through the 2011 field season. You can get a sense of the results emerging from this crucial and exhaustive study of the breeding birds of the state from the atlas blog, artfully named “Distraction Displays,” at <http://massaudubonblogs.typepad.com/massbirdatlas/>. Here is another Interim Report (excerpted).

### Interim Report Number 14: Hooded Merganser

This fetching bird has long bred in the state of Massachusetts, but the arrival of European colonists rained on its parade. As the trees it nested in were felled for agriculture and development, the Hooded Merganser retreated to those few wooded wetlands in the heart of the state to await a more auspicious climate. That climate, it would seem, has come.

Hooded Merganser suffered many of the same pressures as Wood Ducks. Both are cavity-nesting waterfowl that depend on wooded freshwater wetlands to breed and raise their families. As these habitats disappeared throughout the state, the Hooded Merganser disappeared with them. As any hunter can tell you, however, Mergansers have one big advantage over Wood Ducks: they taste terrible! A diet of fish and marine invertebrates makes Merganser flesh oily and odorous, so the Hooded Merganser was spared the extreme hunting pressure that nearly extirpated Wood Duck from Massachusetts. As of Atlas 1, breeding Hooded Merganser was concentrated mostly in the central part of the state.

Hooded Merganser may have suffered the same pressures as Wood Ducks, but this relationship works both ways. When programs are put in place to protect Wood Duck territory and create Wood Duck nest boxes, Hooded Mergansers also benefit. In fact, these two species will often lay eggs in each others’ nests, and because their eggs have the same incubation time, the young all hatch together and are raised by the mother of one species. These “mixed broods” actually have a fairly decent chance for survival. With Massachusetts reforestation and beaver-created wetlands proliferating, it should come as no surprise that Hooded Merganser’s star is rising as of Atlas 2.

Hooded Merganser has consolidated its position in Worcester, Franklin, and Hampshire Counties. Berkshire County now has a decent number of confirmed breeders as well, and Hooded Merganser is creeping into western Middlesex County.

Hooded Merganser	Atlas 1	Atlas 2
% of Blocks Possible	1.6	10.4
% of Blocks Probable	0.5	3.2
% of Blocks Confirmed	0.4	10.0
Total % Blocks Occupied	5.5	23.6

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

## The Endangered Species Act In Massachusetts: Endangered

Massachusetts H.R. 4167 is currently working its way through the state legislature. The bill is deceptively simple and brief, adding just 31 words to the Endangered Species Act. These words are:

*"The director [of the Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife] shall not impose any project review or permit requirement upon any land unless such land is located within an area which has been duly designated as a significant habitat."*

The proposed legislation would radically alter the way development is regulated in this state. The reason hinges on the technical definitions of the terms "Significant" and "Priority" as applied to habitats by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), which evaluates proposed developments under the framework of the Endangered Species Act.

Currently, only the rarest and essentially irreplaceable habitat types qualify for the *potential* designation of "Significant." Examples might include barrier beaches for species such as the Piping Plover. Development would be essentially prohibited in these areas. As such, designation of habitat as "Significant" allows no room for negotiation, compensatory conservation set-asides, and other compromise measures typically used in negotiations between regulators and those wishing to develop land. The regulations applying to "Significant Habitat" are so stringent, that the NHESP has yet to designate any habitat in the state as "Significant!"

Far more widespread are areas denoted as "Priority Habitat": important for specific species which have been recorded in them, but able to be developed under some circumstances. The NHESP maintains that it negotiates with owners of "Priority" designated land, to allow some development while maintaining habitat values.

**The proposed legislation would remove the ability of the NHESP to place any restrictions on development in "Priority Habitat", thus leaving most natural habitat in the state without any meaningful protection under the Endangered Species Act.** MassAudubon calls the bill "the most egregious attack on our Endangered Species Act" that the organization has ever seen, and, along with sixty-seven other environmental groups in the state, has urged the legislature to vote down the bill.

H.R. 4167 cannot be dismissed as the work of vested interests or folks who oppose conservation in general. On the contrary, supporters seem motivated not so much by opposition to endangered species protection per se, but by widespread dissatisfaction with the way the NHESP reviews developmental proposals under the framework of the Endangered Species Act. The numerous supporters contend that NHESP applies capricious and arbitrary limitations to development in Priority Habitats, and that, in some cases, the "Priority" designation itself is made on unscientific grounds. **Supporters essentially claim that the NHESP permitting process is so biased and flawed that it needs to be abandoned.** The bill has a powerful group of co-sponsors from across the political spectrum, including a great number of legislators from Western Massachusetts.

H.R. 4167 represents the most dramatic change to Endangered Species protection in Massachusetts since the origin of the Act itself, and regardless of our individual positions on the legislation, we owe it to endangered species to understand the legislation and be involved with it.

You can read more at "Fighting for Habitat". Maureen Turner. *The Valley Advocate*: November 26, 2009.

<http://www.valleyadvocate.com/article.cfm?aid=10912>

That's all for now.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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