In this edition:

- programs and field trips including two new trips,
- last chances for Monhegan and Crown of Maine,
- a pelagic trip opportunity,
- the official AGM announcement,
- Hitchcock programs
- Atlas exhortations, and a happy progress report, plus
- a few items of general interest.

I hope you find some of it useful!

**NEXT PROGRAM**

**Monday, May 10 at 7:30 PM**

John van de Graaff presents Birds of the Massachusetts Coast
(Piping Plovers and Much More)

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Here is John’s program introduction, in his own words.....

This presentation draws on the thousands of images that I have captured on the Massachusetts coast in the last few years. I hope you enjoy them, learn from them, and above all end up caring more about the welfare of the birds portrayed. The main focus of this show is on piping plovers and least terns, but it also includes various other shorebirds and terns, gulls, ospreys, and some passerines. Most of the shots are from Mass Audubon’s Allen’s Pond Sanctuary in Westport, my favorite coastal spot, which I’ve visited regularly since 2005. Some twenty pairs of piping plovers nest there each season, cheek by jowl with up to 200 pairs of least terns. Both species are listed as threatened—the plovers at the federal level and the terns by the state. I’ve tried to show especially the birds’ characteristic activities, including courtship, nurturing and feeding behaviors.

I began photographing birds seriously in 2001, and it has been at times an all-consuming activity, with frequent travel. I’ve made frequent digital slide presentations to birding and photography groups, including the CCBC and other major bird clubs in Massachusetts. My images have been widely used by Mass Audubon in support of their activities. The Burnett Gallery in Amherst hosted a key exhibition of my bird photos in 2007. Some images from this presentation hung at the Fish and Wildlife Service in Hadley last summer. I’m a member of the Hampshire Bird Club and the Pioneer Valley Photographic Artists (PVPA). My website is easily remembered: [www.birdsbyjohn.com](http://www.birdsbyjohn.com). In addition, I recently joined blipfoto, a site where I post one (and only one!) current photo per day; it serves me as a kind of blog, at [www.blipfoto.com/vandegraaff](http://www.blipfoto.com/vandegraaff).
COMING PROGRAMS

June 14, 2010. Geoff LeBaron. The Route to Distant Islands.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Early Migrants at Ashley Reservoir. April 11, 2010
This year’s trip to Ashley Reservoir was noteworthy both because of the birds that were present, and because of some that weren’t. Among those present were all the target warblers. Pine Warblers were frequently heard, and we even got a few good looks at several individuals. We found one large group of Palm Warblers high in the trees that had a beautifully-colored Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler tagging along. And for me, the highlights of the trip were two or three Louisiana Waterthrushes, singing loudly.

Other notable finds were a patch of woodland with all our common woodpeckers (Pileated-, Downy-, Hairy-, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers). We had glimpses of a few raptors (Broad-winged Hawk, Osprey, Turkey Vulture), and other small woodland species (Brown Creepers, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets).

Waterfowl were missing. We saw only a few Mallards and Canada Geese, and heard a single Wood Duck. There were only a handful of Tree Swallows over the water, and not a single flycatcher in the woods. All-in-all, though, a great morning of birding!

Mike Locher

I did not want to disappoint anyone by breaking with tradition, so I conjured a bit of rain for my Look Park early morning walk. Six of us set out to find some spring birds. We had 33 species, including Hermit Thrush, Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-rumped Warbler, a pair of Common Mergansers and last but not least, the Louisiana Waterthrush. The Waterthrush sat and sang beautifully for us. We were able to find him in the scope and watch until we'd had enough (if that is possible), at which point we left him singing and went happily on about our business. A nice morning of birding in good company.

Betsy Higgins

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The HBC Annual General Meeting will occur at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Amherst at 7:30 p.m. on May 10, 2010. Alert readers will note that this is immediately prior to the scheduled program on that date. HBC members present at the meeting will be asked to elect the HBC Board for 2010-2011. The search committee nominates the following slate of officers:

President – Scott Surner
VP/Program Chair - Geoff LeBaron
Membership Secretary - Sue Emerson
Treasurer - Janice Jorgensen
Communications Secretary - Elissa Rubinstein

Members-At-Large (in descending order of hirsuteness)

Jan Ortiz▼  David Peake-Jones▼  Joe Wicinski▼
Bruce Hart►  Jaap van Heerden►  Mike Locher

I hope you will all join with me in thanking Larry Therrien for his service on the board!
COMING FIELD TRIPS

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)

New Trip
Sunday, May 16. Groovy New Place. Half day. Mary Alice Wilson and Sally Hills explore a new addition to the Sylvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge on the north side of Moody Bridge Road in Hadley. The site is great for grassland and shrubland birds and according to 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.” Meet at the site (69 Moody Bridge Road, formerly Bri-Mar Stables) at 8 a.m. Contact Mary Alice, mwilson@umassk12.net, 413-548-9078 (home) or Sally shills44@aol.com, 413-549-5550 (home) to register. (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)

Overnight Trip
Friday, May 28 – Monday, May 31. Monhegan Island. See the blurb later in this newsletter.

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)

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)

New Trip
Wednesday, June 9. Birds and Fishes
Let's check out the Connecticut River at the Holyoke Fish Ladder for some fish eating birds and check in on the Shad Run. Hopefully, if we are real lucky, we will get to see an Atlantic Salmon. Meet at the "Park and Ride" parking lot in Northampton on Bridge Street near the Northampton Airport at 12:30 p.m. and car-pool from there. Questions? Please call Tom Gagnon at 413-584-6353.
Visions of Greatness

When we encounter birds at the dinner table, it is usually we that are sitting at the table, and the birds which are upon it. Whatever the reasons for this situation, it is certainly NOT because we have better vision.

Researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis have confirmed, based on studies of the humble chicken, that birds have far better color vision than we do. We have only three (3) kinds of color sensitive “cone” cells, which detect red, blue, and green wavelengths, respectively. Birds are also able to detect violet wavelengths directly (including some ultraviolet), and have unique “double cone cells” which seem to be involved in the detection of motion. In addition (the humiliation continues), the color-sensitive cells of birds are arrayed to maximize color vision across the entire field of vision, whereas humans see color primarily in the center of the field of view. Our peripheral vision is mostly confined to detecting light, dark, and motion, (which perhaps explains why I failed to see the bright red Mini Cooper I backed into the other day).

The authors of this and other related studies theorize that mammals (including humans) fell behind relative to birds and dinosaurs in color vision because, when we were at the bottom of the food chain during the Mesozoic, mammals were largely nocturnal. As such, there would have been less selection pressure for color vision, which is useless at night.

Washington University School of Medicine (2010, February 17). Chickens 'one-up' humans in ability to see color. ScienceDaily. (online)

OK, maybe we don’t have double cones in our retinas, but we definitely got dibs on the ice-cream double cone! Next time I’m enjoying a double-barreled hit of Ginger Supreme at Mt. Tom Dairy, I will be less inclined than ever to share any with the local House Sparrows! Ed.

OVERNIGHT TRIPS

Last chance for………..

Monhegan Island

Monhegan Island lies about twelve miles off the coast of Maine and is a fabled migrant trap. HBC has visited this enchanted place every year since our inception in 1984. It is arguably the best bang for your buck of any location in the north-east!

We will travel to the island by ferry on the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. 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. There is plenty of exploring to do if the birding slows down.

We’ll stay at the rustic Trailing Yew, which will lay on breakfast and dinner each day, including a local lobster dinner. This is an opportunity not to be missed for birders at any level!

The trip is almost full. To sign up, contact Mike Locher (fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org; 585 5864). For details, including cost estimates, contact Betsy Higgins (hignik@comcast.net; 586 7585) or Andrew Magee (andrewfmagee@gmail.com; 586 1509).
Last chance for...............

The Crown of Maine
Thursday, June 24th, 2010 through Monday, June 28th, 2010
Leaders: Geoff LeBaron and Bill Sheehan (of Woodland, ME, our local expert).
You must be a Hampshire Bird Club member to go on this trip.

This wonderful HBC field trip will bird the Crown of Maine region, a wonderful area of mixed boreal and agricultural habitats. There is much boreal forest, wooded bogs, farmland, riparian woodlands, human-made ponds that attract unusual breeding waterfowl, and the Aroostook National Wildlife Refuge—the former Loring Air Force Base—complete with large expanses of grassland and shrub-land habitat.

We will spend one full day driving to Caribou, Maine, which will be our base of operations. From there we will spend one day in the New Sweden-Woodland-Caribou area, one day at Presque Isle and the Aroostook N.W.R., and the third day birding the Maine North Woods boreal timber forest lands west of Fort Kent, Maine.

Target bird species will include boreal forest specialties around New Sweden (Black-backed- and American Three-toed woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided flycatchers, Gray Jay, Philadelphia Vireo, Tennessee-, Bay-breasted-, Cape May-, and Blackpoll warblers, etc). We’ll seek out wetland, grassland, and shrub-land species around Presque Isle and Aroostook N.W.R. (nesting Redhead and Ruddy Ducks amid a myriad of other waterfowl, American Bittern, Upland Sandpiper, and Mourning Warbler), and especially Spruce Grouse among other boreal species in the Maine North Woods. Other wildlife likely to be encountered will be moose, black bear, and coyote. Our visit will also likely coincide with the peak of wildflowers; lupines will be in bloom everywhere, and we have a good chance of seeing up to four species of lady-slipper orchids.

HBC Cost Estimate: Participants will pay HBC a trip fee of approximately $50, depending on how many people sign up. This fee covers the leader fee for Bill Sheehan, a share of leader’s costs for Geoff, and the club insurance contribution. Additional costs include lodging, meals and transportation.

Registration. The deadline to sign up (including paying the HBC fee) is Friday, May 21. We need to know who is going, in order to facilitate planning. Please call or email the Field Trip Chair (Mike Locher; fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org or 585 5864) to register.

If you need further information prior to registering, please contact Geoff LeBaron: programs@hampshirebirdclub.org; 413 268 9281.

ATLAS BLOCKBUSTING

“You want me to bust a block?”

We do. Join us for a day of focused birding in a gorgeous place. Each day teams will complete the 20 hours required for an Atlas block, compile a great bird list, and have a good time. Pre-register for one or both of the days by contacting the leader:

Sunday, June 13th, North Adams 5 (route 2 and south up the slopes of Mt. Greylock), contact David Gross, dgross@biochem.umass.edu, 413-253-2897 (home).

Saturday, June 26th, North Adams 6 (top of Mt. Greylock and east to edge of Adams), contact Mike Locher, mlocher@yahoo.com, 413-585-5864 (home).
HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

Celebrating Amherst Conservation Lands: 2 to 4 p.m.
May 16 -- Lawrence Swamp with Caroline Arnold.
June 20 (Father’s Day) -- Holyoke Range Conservation Area with Elisa Campbell.
July 18 -- Wentworth Farm with John Green.
August 15 – Eastman Brook with Harvey Allen.

Low-Maintenance Design with Native Plants: Owen Wormser
Saturday, May 1, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Held at the New England Wild Flower Society's Nasami Farm in Whately.

Landscape Drawing In the Field: Lorna Ritz, Teacher and Painter.
Saturday, May 1, 1 to 4 p.m.

Fort River Festival: At Groff Park, Amherst.
Sunday, May 2. 10 a.m. to noon: Guided Canoe Trip. Noon to 2 p.m.: Festival.

Falconry Up Close: Chris Davis.
Saturday, May 8, 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Chocolate Pies and Tiny Flies: A Natural History of Chocolate: Faith Deering.
Thursday, May 13, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Biothon 2010.
Any 24-hour period during May 14-16 or May 21-23.

Saturday, May 15, 10 a.m. to noon.

The Dynamic Landscape: Creating Powerful Photographs: Michael Zide.
Thursday, May 20, 7:30 p.m.

Birding By Ear: John Green.
Saturdays, May 22, June 12 & July 17, 7 to 9 a.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.

Welcome, New Members

David Brown Warwick.
Joanne Dwyer Leeds.
Ilana Schmitt Amherst.
Rama Janaswamy Amherst.
Todd Wiley Turners Falls.
Bobbin Young & Eric Weber Williamsburg.
Nidhin Joseph Amherst.
Seabird & Whale Tale Trip
Sunday, June 13th.  8 am - 4 pm
Departing from Plymouth Town Pier, Plymouth Harbor, MA
This is an all day (rough or smooth) marine excursion aboard a 110’ whale-watching vessel to view seabirds, whales, dolphins, basking sharks and ocean sunfish along the Mass coast. It is an annual fundraising event for the non-profit organization, the New England Coastal Wildlife Alliance (NECWA). All proceeds go to support marine wildlife research and education.

There will be guided wildlife commentary by David Clapp (Natural History Services), Jim Sweeney (South Shore Bird Club) and Joanne Jarzobski (Capt. John Boats). During the trip, there will be a plankton tow and demonstrations, and chumming for seabirds.

Costs
Tickets are $90 till May 31 and then $100 after May 31, 2010.

Further Information and Registration
You can go to www.necwa.org, and look for the link to “Seabird and Whale Tales Excursions”. For yet more trip information, you can call Krill Carson at NECWA directly at 508-566-0009. You will have to download the registration form and mail it to NECWA with your payment. No online registration.

Special Hotel Offer. Stay at Hampton Inn & Suites in Plymouth on Saturday night for only $89 plus tax. Included is an "On the House Hot Breakfast" on Sunday morning as well as shuttle bus service to the boat! If you want to take advantage of this offer, you should call the hotel directly (1-508-747-5000), and make a reservation. Mention the NECWA trip to get the discounted rate.

Broad Brook Coalition Programs
Gentle Bird Walk.  Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area.
Sunday, May 9, 7:30 – 10:30 a.m.
David Peake-Jones leads this walk, aimed primarily at those starting out in birding. We will focus on basic identification of birds by appearance and song. Bring binoculars if you have them, and dress for the weather. Meet at the North Farms Road entrance.

LIBRARY
The HBC Library is located at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst.
Hours are those of the Hitchcock Center:
  9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. from Tuesday through Friday, and
  9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday.
The collection is catalogued on-line at www.hampshirebirdclub.org. The library contains birding resources in various media, including field guides, bird-finding guides to almost every major birding destination in the U.S., and overseas, natural histories, periodicals and videos. Items can be signed out and borrowed for a period of up to one month, or longer by arrangement. Our librarian, Henry Lappen, is happy to bring items to meetings, if you give him a few days in advance. You can reach him at library@hampshirebirdclub.org or (413) 549 3722.
Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2
Interim Report #124: Common Raven

Whatever Common Raven populations may have been in Massachusetts prior to European settlement, the bird was almost entirely extirpated from the state in short order. During the first Breeding Bird Atlas in 1974, ravens were found in only two blocks (both in Berkshire County), and there was no confirmation of breeding. Considering the Common Raven's less-than-appealing habits of stealing grain and pecking the eyes of newborn livestock, their persecution by farmers in bygone days is perhaps understandable.

The first modern confirmation of breeding Common Raven did not come until 1982. Parents feeding newly fledged youngsters at Quabbin Reservoir confirmed that Common Raven was returning to the state. Now, as Atlas 2 surveys proceed, Common Ravens are a regular sight in the western part of the state and are expanding eastward. Berkshire County, the Upper Connecticut River Valley, and Worcester County are all flush with breeding ravens. Essex and Middlesex counties are beginning to see significant activity, as well.

The nests of Common Ravens can usually be found on cliffs and steep escarpments, but they also nest in tall trees on occasion. The nests are composed mainly of twigs, but may also include metal wire, mammal fur, and any number of other interesting additions. Nests may be reused from year to year, either by the same pair or by different birds. After a nest is built or repaired, between three and seven (typically five) eggs are laid and incubated for about three weeks. The chicks develop fairly slowly, and typically do not fledge for five to seven weeks. The fledglings may stay with their parents and receive food from them for as little as one week, or the family may remain together through the winter, sometimes with a yearling assisting in the rearing of next year’s brood.

When searching for Common Ravens, tell them apart from crows in flight by their wedge-shaped tails and characteristic soaring flight. Their voice is a deep, hoarse *crawk*, quite unlike the strident *caw* of the American Crow. Ravens are also noticeably larger than crows, but this is not always a reliable character, particularly at a distance.

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http://massaudubonblogs.typepad.com/massbirdatlas/

That’s all for this month.
Until next month, talk softly and carry a big scope!

David Peake-Jones, Editor
529 9541
newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org