



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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February, 2011.

During January, I was approached repeatedly at work with questions about the bird kill in Beebe, Arkansas. On New Year's Day, dismayed residents of that town found thousands of dead birds (mostly Red-winged Blackbirds) scattered over several square miles. I was as bemused as those asking me for an explanation, but I found myself mildly irritated, not by what was being asked, but by what was not.

Bird kills are nothing new. They can be caused by anything from weather events to mass poisonings. This one appears to have resulted from New Year's fireworks, which apparently caused a massive icterid roost to panic and fly into structures such as homes and power lines. It must have been a bit frightening for those who witnessed the aftermath, and, of course, it was the ultimate disaster for the birds killed and injured. But these events are not the real issues facing wildlife on our planet at present. I haven't been asked any questions about the gulf oil catastrophe, global warming, vanishing meadowlarks, or the fast-disappearing American Kestrel, or the 30 acres lost every day to development in Massachusetts alone.

The real threats to our biological diversity and the ecological integrity of our planet are invisible to most people, even to those of us who "know". If only all the birds slowly succumbing to habitat loss, pesticides, global climate change, our addiction to oil, and our predilection for expansive glass windows were to be found on our doorsteps, we might be doing a much better job of conservation than we are.

NEXT PROGRAM

Monday, February 14 at 7:30 PM

Scott Sumner presents

Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons: Not Just a Birding Destination!

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

In July of 2009 the Hampshire Bird Club traveled to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks in Wyoming. During the ten day trip the club not only encountered 118 species of birds, but twenty three species of mammals, thirty species of butterflies, and unforgettable scenery.

Scott Sumner is a founding member and current president of the Hampshire Bird Club, past member of the Massachusetts Avian Records committee and for sixteen years was the voice of Audubon for Western Massachusetts. Scott travels have taken him to Alaska, California, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, and too many of the Canadian Provinces.

COMING PROGRAMS

March 14. Don Kroodsma. Our Favorite Birdsongs.

April 11. Shawn Carey. The Gulf of Mexico Oil Disaster.

May 9. John Kricher. Speciation of Birds in the Neotropics.

COMING FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, March 5. Connecticut River Waterfowl I. Half day. Joshua Rose scours the Connecticut River and environs for migrating waterfowl. Call Josh (413-835-0093) as the date approaches for meeting information. Rain date will be Sunday, March 6. (E)

Sign Up Now for

Monhegan Island, 2011.

Memorial Day Weekend (Friday, May 27 to Monday, May 30)

You can see the spring migration almost anywhere, but if you have ever wanted to steep yourself in the glorious warblers of May, while losing yourself in the gentle rhythms of an idyllic island, Monhegan is for you.

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.

To sign up and/or for a cost estimate: contact the Field Trip Chair:

Mike Locher (fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org; 585 5864)

To learn more, contact one of the leaders:

Betsy Higgins (hignik@comcast.net; 586 7585), or

Andrew Magee (andrewmagee@gmail.com; 586 1509).

This Month's Field Trip Courtesy Pointer

Please call the trip leader at least a few days before the trip. It helps the leader plan the trip and you learn about any special arrangements or any change of plans.

Erratum

Many of you received the January newsletter which was wishfully dated "2010," but it was not until our Webmaster made a gentle remark that I became aware of it.

Either:

- a) the entire bird club is extraordinarily tactful, or
- b) no one is actually reading this thing anyway.

Regardless of the reasons why this error went (almost) unchallenged, I can only say in my defense that I was hearkening back to a halcyon time before the November 2010 elections, and for just a few moments, I could almost believe that they had not occurred. Ah well, reality bites!

MassAudubon
19th Annual Massachusetts Birders Meeting
Saturday, March 5 at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts

The program this year includes a cadre of speakers that should appeal to birders of all levels of interest and birding experience. Among some of the familiar names on the program this year are:

Jeff Gordon (*President, American Birding Association*),
Alvaro Jaramillo (Author, tour leader, and expert birder),
Trevor Lloyd-Evans (Ornithologist, Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences),
Sy Montgomery (Acclaimed author and lecturer),
Dr. Mark Pokras (Tufts Veterinary Clinic),
Don and Lillian Stokes, as well as lunch, vendors, and a variety of tantalizing raffles.

In recent years all proceeds from the Birders Meeting have gone toward supporting the Massachusetts Important Bird Areas (IBA) Program, a program that is part of an international initiative working to identify, prioritize, and monitor bird habitats which are essential to one or more species of breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds in Massachusetts. To see full program details and obtain registration information, visit:

<http://www.massaudubon.org/birdersmeeting>

Record-Breaking Massachusetts Eagle Count

On Friday, January 7, 2011, sightings of at least 107 individual bald eagles were reported from Pittsfield to Plymouth as part of a concentrated 1-day effort by state wildlife biologists, volunteers and other eagle enthusiasts, breaking the record count of 81 birds seen in 2009. This event is part of an annual national bald eagle survey conducted over a 2-week period from late December into early January.

“We thank National Grid, our long time partner in the eagle restoration program, which flew agency biologists by helicopter to survey the Quabbin and Connecticut River,” said Dr. Tom French, Assistant Director of Natural Heritage and Endangered Species. French also noted that citizen interest in the eagle survey has been very useful. “With higher numbers of eagles dispersing throughout their range, we can’t possibly cover the entire state. Citizen spotters play an increasingly important role in our survey efforts. This year, we received 61 emailed reports from people who saw eagles during the 2-week survey period.”

The annual Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is a nationwide event coordinated by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The nationwide total of bald eagles counted during this annual event ranges from 13,000 to 16,000 birds.

Excerpted from a press release by MassWildlife

Sallymeandering

The Wit and Wisdom of Sally Venman

“WARNING: Take special care all month because November is National UFO Abductions Month (We would hate to lose you, even though we have your dues)....

In closing, as I mark off the days leading up to the holiday season, I can’t help but look back over the eventful election year. I note in particular the Red Sox bid for last place and Dagwood’s courage to quit his job, go to work for Blondie in her catering business, only to be fired by Blondie for eating up the profits. The country chose the young Elvis over the old Elvis for a place in postage stamp history, and the new talking Barbie told us that “math is hard” and “let’s go to the mall.” Makes you pause in sheer wonderment, doesn’t it? LET’S ALL GO BIRDING!!!”
(November 1992).

HITCHCOCK CENTER PROGRAMS

For anyone new to the club, the two birding courses offered by Hitchcock are the absolute BEST way to get into birding!

Spring Birding Course: *Scott Surner*

Classes: Wednesdays, February 23, March 2, 23, April 6,13, May 11, 18, June 8, 6:30-8 p.m

Field Trips: Saturdays, February 26, March 12, 26, April 9, 23, May 7, 14, 21, June 4, 11

Start times vary between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m.

Members: \$200 /Non-members: \$220

Take advantage of this opportunity to get out and truly observe the pageant of our spring bird migration and the myriad of colors, plumages, and behaviors. Scott has taught this course for many years and is accomplished at gearing instruction for beginners and experienced birders alike. Evening classes preview species expected on the Saturday field trips using slides, stories from the field, and life history details. Field trips are planned to varied locations around the state, including Cape Ann, Plum Island, Amherst, Hadley, Turners Falls, Hatfield, Quabbin Reservoir, Southern Berkshires, Northern Berkshires, and Mount Greylock. Call the Center for more field trip details. All field trips and classes meet at the Hitchcock Center. Registration is limited to 20.

Winter Tracking Expedition: *Alan Emond, Little Cree Spy Excursions*

Saturday, February 26, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. (Snow date: Saturday, March 12). Fee.

Introduction to Birding: *Jan Ortiz*

Classes: Wednesdays, April 27, May 4, 11, Thursday, May 19, 6:30-8 p.m.

Field Trips: Saturdays, April 30, May 7, 14, 21, 7 a.m.-noon

Members: \$90/Non-members: \$105.

Do you ever wonder about the birds you see in your yard, on your way to work or on your favorite walk? What are they? What are their songs? Where have they come from? These questions and many more will be explored while being introduced to the world of birds. Join Jan Ortiz, long time birding instructor and founding member of the Hampshire Bird Club, for this four week class that will be taught at a leisurely and comfortable pace. During the evening sessions at the Hitchcock Center, among the topics covered will be instruction in using binoculars and spotting scopes, how a field guide is organized, and of course, how to identify birds.

Lens on Outdoor Learning *Virginia Sullivan, Author/Educator*

Thursday, March 3, 6:30-8 p.m. Free

Family Tracking Along the Fort River: Saturday, March 5th (first in a series).

Find out more about the entire Fort River Series at www.fortriverdiscovery.org.

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.

Sallymeandering

Dear Friends,

Isn't this great weather? I have Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at my feeder and Common Yellowthroats at my birdbath. Each morning the northern Oriole wakes me, singing outside my window. Major hallucinations, creative visualizations, spiritual enlightenment? -- Only my analyst knows. Oh the plight of the aging, snow-bound, winter-weary birder.

On to March: March On!"

(March, 1994)

Migrating Ospreys: A Correction

In a recent newsletter we gave a Website address where you can follow the migration routes of Ospreys. Merry Cushing informs me that the Web address we published has changed.

If you are interested in spying on migrating Ospreys, you can do so at

<http://www.bioweb.uncc.edu/bierregaard/migration10.htm>

The Keystone Project

Are you a community leader interested in learning more about land conservation and management?

The UMass Keystone Project invests education and reference materials in important, keystone people, those in a position to influence forest conservation decisions. Applicants can own woodlands, be involved in the care and stewardship of a property, or be an involved community leader.

Participants in the program are provided an intensive 3-day training and a bag of take-home resources. Topics covered at the training include historical perspectives on land use, forest succession and ecology, forest and wildlife management, land protection tools, and community outreach. In return for the training and take-home resources, graduates of the program, called Keystone Cooperators, agree to return to their communities and advance forest conservation through a project of their choosing.

This year's training will be held April 14th - 17th, 2011 at the Harvard Forest in Petersham. The Keystone Project is a competitive program. Applications are due March 3rd, 2011.

Learn more about the program and download an application at: www.masskeystone.net

Thanks to the Athol Bird and Nature Center for this information

Conservation Restriction Law Changes

Placing a Conservation Restriction, or CR, on your land is one way to permanently conserve important natural resources you care about. With a CR, you still own your land, and typically you can continue forestry, recreation, farming and other activities. But development is permanently restricted or curtailed in the area of your land encumbered by the CR.

A new law increases the tax incentives for a landowner who donates a CR to a land conservation organization or agency. The incentives, which apply to CR donations in 2010 and 2011:

- Raise the federal income tax deduction a landowner can take for donating a conservation restriction from 30% of their income in any year to 50%;
- Allow farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100% of their income; and
- Increase the number of years over which a donor can take deductions from 6 to 16 years.

For information about land conservation organizations and agencies in your area that can help you take advantage of this benefit, go to Masswoods.net and plug in your zip code in the box titled "Find a Forester or Land Trust in Your Town".

Thanks to the Athol Bird and Nature Center for this information.

SallyMeandering

One of our members, whose "nom de plume" is a deep, dark secret sent me the following:

A large pizza chain opened a franchise in northern New England. Unfortunately, the grain used to make the pizza dough was infested with an insect pest. Surprisingly, though, the Mainers enjoyed the antics of the frolicsome insect, so that now – drum roll –

Uno's wheat weevil larks in the hearts of Maine.

(April, 2000)

Gleanings from the Technical Literature

A Lousy Topic!

Studies of feather lice across a wide variety of birds reveal that these lice are closely associated with particular species, and that they are almost always cryptically colored; i.e. they are blend in with the typical plumage of their hosts. This makes sense since birds typically deal with lice by preening, and lice which stood out against their feathery backgrounds would be more easily seen and picked off.

The exceptions to cryptic coloration in feather lice are those which specifically target the heads of birds. In these species, the lice are randomly colored with respect to their hosts, presumably because birds have to locate head lice by feel, and cannot see them anyway!

Reference:

Evolution of Cryptic Coloration in Ectoparasitic Lice.

Bush, S.E.; Kim, D.; Reed, M. and D.H. Clayton.

Am. Naturalist 176 (4) pp 529 – 535.

Sallymeandering

“It was dusk in Newfoundland’s Gros Morne National Park. We were camped on one of the planet’s oldest geological treasures, in eye contact with a family of soon-to-be-fledged, extremely raucous ravens on the next-door cliff. I was occupied defending myself against giant mosquitoes and black flies bent on carrying me off as sacrificial meat to the great god ITCH when a “who-who-who” broke through all other sounds. It was repeated. The ravens quieted. Seeing no other HBC’ers around to make fun of my vocal attempts,, I ‘who-who-who’ed back. Surprise of surprises, my “who-who-who” was answered. A conversation ensued. I knew from the call that that the “who-who-who”-er was moving toward me, but no movement, no sight confirmed this. Being a graduate of many Hitchcock Birding courses, I declared it to be an OWL! But which one? The field guides and an ancient Newfoundland bird list helped me to narrow the field down to two possibilities.

Every night the conversation was repeated. I spent much of one night outdoors bathed in citronella, flashlight at the ready carrying on a conversation with my rapidly improving “who-who-who”-ing. The owl was there, but not to my eyes.

The next camp site we visited had two of the “who-who-who”-ers to torment me. Same story. By now, with help from a ranger, I knew I was being haunted and teased by the elusive Boreal Owl – a bird I have searched for unsuccessfully when it has wintered in our area. I can still answer the call in my sleep. I know they saw me but no, I never saw them. LIFE BIRD. Do I count it?”

August, 1998.

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.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

529 9541

newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org

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You have been spared further suffering