



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.
Amherst, Massachusetts
www.hampshirebirdclub.org
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Alert readers may note some firsts this month. We generally have a June newsletter but this year circumstances conspired to delay publication until now. Thus, instead of looking forward to the next program, we must content ourselves with a quick note on the program from June that has already happened. For those wondering what the point of that is, I must (with all due humility) point out that the newsletter serves not only to advertise events that are to come, but also to record those that have been.....

This is the last edition of the club year. We take a break from organized activity until September, when the next program will take place, but not all in our ranks can afford to put our feet up. Geoff is frantically working to nail down (perhaps literally) speakers for next year, and **our new Field Trip Chair, Carol, needs your commitments to lead fall field trips as soon as possible.** Please look for the September, 2018 edition and be ready to renew your membership promptly!

Also in this edition,

- A **field trip report** just to prove there were some,
- The **HBC elections** and **post-election changes** on the board,
- **Help Wanted** for the post of **Set-Up Chair**,
- A **Pot-luck Coordinator** required,
- A definition of “**HBC specialist**” and some **changes** in those ranks, too,
- **Thanks** to the club from the Griffiths family.

I hope you find some of it useful!

PREVIOUS PROGRAM

Monday, June 11 at 7:15 p.m.

Lois and Al Richardson presented

Papua New Guinea: A Birding Adventure

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

In a quest to try to see at least half the birds in the world, the Richardsons have birded in Europe, Africa, Asia, Antarctica, North, South, and Central America, and most recently in Bhutan.

This program documented a memorable trip to Papua New Guinea: home to many magnificent and diverse birds – including several Birds of Paradise. The Richardson’s presentation included insights into many of the local people (including the famous Wigmen of the Huli tribe at a Sing-Sing in the highlands), described birding the wettest place on earth, and gave a first hand account of life in a primitive camp along a tributary of the Fly River.

COMING PROGRAMS

No word yet on Geoff’s star-studded line-up for next year but you can bet it is worth waiting for.....

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

Skinner State Park. Sunday, June 3, 2018

At 6 a.m. on Sunday, June 3, **David Peake-Jones** led a small group up the road to Mt. Holyoke. The road from the gate to the summit is closed to cars now because of repaving, but the machinery wasn't out early Sunday morning, so we were able to hike the road.

Right at the gate we got a few species (Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Eastern Phoebe, American Robin). On the way to the Halfway House we heard our first **Worm-eating Warbler**, saw a Yellow-throated Vireo, and identified several other forest denizens. At the stone bridge we saw a **Hermit Thrush nest** with a pair of fuzzy hatchlings, and watched a pair of Eastern Phoebes feed a much larger chick (Brown-headed Cowbird?). We heard our first **Cerulean Warbler** not far past Taylor Notch, and spotted a Garter Snake that slid *backwards* (yes, backwards) into a hole.

In recent years, the big S-curve below the summit (where the road is currently painted with the numbers 79 and 80) has been my favorite spot on the mountain. I have consistently had great views of unusual species there, and Sunday was no exception. Just before arriving at the curve we admired the Pink Lady's Slippers that were blooming under the evergreens, but at the curve itself we were treated to an active pair of Worm-eating Warblers that came so close that I had to back up in order for my binoculars to focus. We also got good looks at a male Cerulean Warbler singing, and heard another nearby responding. On the way down at the same location we first heard, then spotted, a **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** perched in the open.

At the summit we added Dark-eyed Juncos and Indigo Buntings, and an uncooperative and unidentified Empidonax flycatcher, to the list. By my count we had a total of 37 species, including 4 Cerulean Warblers, 5 Worm-eating Warblers, 3 Yellow-throated Vireos, and 1 Yellow-billed Cuckoo, all of which afforded great views.

Mike Locher

LEADERS NEEDED NOW FOR THE FALL FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE! (An Appeal from Carol)

First, let me acknowledge Mike Locher, who has not only been leading HBC field trips for more than fifteen years, but has also been searching for leaders and organizing our birding adventures since 2001. I do wish to thank him for his time, energy, and consideration on behalf of the Club in this endeavor. He will be missed in this capacity and I will try to fill his shoes in terms of the quality and quantity of field trips you have come to expect during the four seasons of trying to observe our avian friends.

If you are willing to lead a field trip between August 2018 and December 2018, please email Field Trips Coordinator Carol Mardeusz (fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org) with the date, time, destination, types of birds you are hoping to find, and the maximum number of participants if there is a maximum. Also, please rank it as an easy, moderate, or strenuous day of birding. Finally, please also include your phone number and/or email if you would like members to notify you of their desire to attend.

Alternatively, email me your phone number and we can discuss planning over the phone.

If you would like to join the committee to help organize field trips, please email me at the address above indicating your interest and I will get back to you on a date, time and place to meet to plan for the upcoming field trips. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Carol Mardeusz

BOARD of DIRECTORS, 2018-2019

The **Annual General Meeting** of the **Hampshire Bird Club Incorporated** was held on **Monday, May 14, 2018** at the **Immanuel Lutheran Church** in Amherst, MA.

The following were elected at that meeting:

President: Scott Sumner

Vice-President/Program Chair: Geoff LeBaron

Treasurer: Stephen Baker

Membership Secretary: Lissa Ganter

Communications Secretary: Jan Howard

Board Members at large:

Bruce Hart
Mike Locher
Carol Mardeusz
Jim Lafley
David Peake-Jones
Josh Rose

Since the Annual General Meeting there have been some changes in the composition of the Board. In alphabetical order, these are:

Sharon Dombeck has been appointed to the board as a Member-at-Large,

Mike Locher has resigned, and

David Peake-Jones has resigned.

As a result, as of June 28, 2018, there is one (1) Member-At-Large position vacant.

With the changes described above, the board of the Hampshire Bird Club as at June 28, 2018 is as follows:

President: Scott Sumner

Vice-President/Program Chair: Geoff LeBaron

Treasurer: Stephen Baker

Membership Secretary: Lissa Ganter

Communications Secretary: Jan Howard

Board Members at large:

Sharon Dombeck
Bruce Hart
Carol Mardeusz
Jim Lafley
Josh Rose
(Member-at-Large vacancy).

The next scheduled Board meeting is on Thursday, August 2nd at 7 p.m. at the Hitchcock Center, 245 West Street, Amherst. The meeting is open to any member of the Hampshire Bird Club.

HBC Specialists: Departures

Our “specialists” are board-appointed folks who provide somewhat specialized support for the club. In the past month or so, three (3) of them have resigned from their former roles. In alphabetical order, they are as follows.

Mike Locher generated the Fall Field Trip schedule in 2001 and has been creating the Fall, and Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedules ever since. During this time, Mike has overseen major improvements to our process for coordinating overnight trips, including increased club supports for the trip leaders, and has pushed constantly to diversify our trip offerings as well as to hold on to the old favorites we cherish. Thank you, Mike!

David Peake-Jones is resigning as Newsletter Editor. Thank you, David!

Jaap van Heerden has been our Program Set-Up Chair since 2003 but is stepping away after 14 years of yeoman service. He oversaw the transition from celluloid slides and an ancient audio system to newer equipment, including a digital projector in 2007. It is through Jaap’s genius and unfailing presence prior to meetings that the wonderful presentations we have grown so used to at HBC have been visible and audible to all. Thank you, Jaap!

HBC Specialists: Arrivals

Carol Mardeusz, who has been on the Board and the Education Committee for a number of years, is stepping in as our new **Field Trip Chair**. Welcome, Carol!

Devin Griffiths, an active field trip leader, voice for conservation causes, and published author, will be our next **Newsletter Editor**. Welcome, Devin!

HELP WANTED: Program Set-Up Chair

The Set-Up Chair works closely with the Program Chair and is responsible for:

- In conjunction with the program chair, communicating with our program host, Immanuel Lutheran Church, regarding the annual church booking schedule and changes thereto,
- Storing club audio-visual equipment between programs and transporting the equipment to our program venue on the day of a program,
- Setting up the space for each monthly program (both furniture and computer/audio-visual equipment), in conjunction with speakers, the Program Chair, and volunteer help,
- Restoring the program space to pre-program condition (with volunteer help),
- Transporting AV equipment back to storage after the program,
- Researching, recommending and purchasing audio visual and other program-related equipment in consultation with the Board.

The tasks described above are best suited to someone with some recent experience with audio-visual technology, specifically digital projection equipment, and modern audio amplification equipment. The set-up chair needs a basic familiarity with computers (ideally Apple and PC) and software in order to be able to trouble-shoot for speakers. Please note that scheduling flexibility to be available at the program location several hours prior to the meeting is highly desirable.

Historically, our Set-up chair has donated the use of his personal laptop (Power Point enabled, and with HDMA/VGA outputs) to the club for use as a back-up for programs, or if the speaker is unable to provide their own laptop. If you are otherwise interested but would prefer not to continue this tradition, the Board will arrange an alternative back-up.

A detailed job description is available and Jaap will be able to assist with the transition.

If you are interested in this position, please contact the Board at board@hampshirebirdclub.org

Pot Luck Coordinator Needed. Christmas Count

We weren't bluffing. Sue Emerson, after years of coordinating our beloved Christmas Count Potluck, really does deserve a rest and really has moved on. We need a new coordinator. The person we seek will start working with our ever-willing but sometimes prompt-requiring membership as early as October, to get commitments for dishes and beverages. He or she, in company with assistants recruited from amongst that same selfless membership (and always referred to by Sue as her "elves") will also arrange the set-up and deliveries of dishes for the pot-luck at Hitchcock center on the day of the count and keep things running smoothly during the potluck itself. Rewards include the eternal gratitude of tired and hungry birders, a round of applause, and a bunch of stuff to clean up, in that order.

If this could be you, please contact the Board at board@hampshirebirdclub.org. If you prefer, you can also contact Sue directly at spe33@charter.net, or 413 588 6900.

Thanks from the Griffiths Family

Dear Hampshire Bird Club Members,

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to all of you for the unwavering support you have given Aidan over the years. From helping sponsor his attendance at ABA's Camp Colorado in 2014 and The Washington Youth Summit on the Environment last summer, to participating in his walks and admiring his photographs, you have been an integral part of his birding education since we joined the HBC all those years ago. As most of you know, Aidan is off to Juniata College in Huntingdon, PA to study wildlife conservation and environmental science with an interest in focusing on birds and education. It truly has meant the world to our family to have you encourage his love of birds in all the ways you do. Thank you!

Devin and Rae Griffiths

Editor's note:

I think I can speak for many in the club when I say that Aiden taught me more than I taught him!

Best of luck, Aidan, and we hope you will come back and bird with us whenever possible. Our egos can take it!

Signing Off

So this is it for the first July edition in club history.

Devin takes over as editor for the September edition.

I would like to express my sincerest appreciation to those who have helped with the assembly of the newsletter over the years. The core group includes **Sue Emerson, Helga Beatty, Sally Hills and Lissa Ganter** with some others involved from time to time. They have responded at ridiculously short notice with their time, space on their kitchen tables, good cheer, cookies, beverages and, of course, finger-numbing labor.

I would also like to thank our readers for whatever respectful uses you make of this publication each month, and for the many kind comments I have gotten over the years.

On the end pages, something I wrote in May that I just can't bear to waste.

Good luck, Devin and to all of us,

Talk softly and carry a big scope!

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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Chimney Swifts: the Disappearance of an Almost Invisible Bird

The mysterious biology and decline of the Chimney Swift

My recollections of a presentation by Margaret Rubega of UConn.

I recently attended the Avian Insectivore Conference, put on at Harvard Forest by the Ware River Nature Club on April 28, 2018. There were a series of extraordinary presentations by noted researchers and conservation professionals from throughout the region.

The keynote presenter was Margaret Rubega from UConn. Margaret is a past-presenter at our club and readers may remember the incredibly innovative research by her lab into the feeding mechanics of humming birds. Her more recent detective work on the decline of a common and seemingly unassailable bird is an inspiring story about the power of science, the dangers of accepting the conventional wisdom, and a call to action on behalf of a small and wonderful bird. With her permission I have tried to present my recollections of her talk with the hope that our readers will find it as thought-provoking as I did. I need to make it clear that this is NOT a peer-reviewed article and nor do I have the credentials to mix it up with the research community. This article is, no doubt, a self-indulgence on my part, but I hope our readers will perhaps find at least a few bits interesting enough to justify the expenditure of ink, paper and reader attention.

What is a Chimney Swift?

“A cigar with wings and a catcher’s mitt on its face...”

Chimney Swifts are part of a guild of birds, known as aerial insectivores. We are most familiar with their seemingly constant presence overhead in summer, especially in urban and semi-urban areas. Chimney swifts are superbly adapted for their singular lifestyles. Margaret describes them as carrying a “catcher’s mitt” on their faces, and showed some awesome photographs to illustrate this description. In biological terms, a Chimney Swift’s gape extends all the way to beneath the eye and, when the bird opens its bill all the way, muscles and flexible bones along the sides of the head deform the entire gape sideways, creating a prodigious maw. In all but size, they are the humpback whales of the skies. They have understandably short legs which are nonetheless equipped with a fearsome set of grappling hooks for gripping the vertical surfaces on which they rest when not foraging. They are, in fact, incapable of perching on a horizontal surface.

Singular Nesting Behavior

Prior to the arrival of Europeans in North America, these neo-tropical migrants probably nested in hollow trees in old growth forests and, perhaps, in natural “chimneys” on rock faces. Now, they are almost entirely dependent on human-built chimneys for nesting and summer roosting sites, but there are historical accounts of them using the walls/ceilings of barns and even outhouses.

A pair of swifts will select a nesting chimney and build a nest of sticks along the chimney wall, the sticks stuck together with proteinaceous swift saliva, which dries to a tenacious glue. The pair will generally defend their chimney against other swifts but, curiously, may tolerate the presence of (generally just a few) other swifts in that chimney. These “tolerated others” are probably young of the previous year, enlisted by the parents to help rear the current brood.

Summer Roosts?

Maybe, like me, you also took for granted that the spectacular communal roosts, with their dusk-time swirling vortices of returning birds, are part of the migrational and wintering biology of these birds. Not so. Throughout the northeast, Margaret and her researchers have identified summer roosts also in mysteriously chosen locations.

Who are the birds in these summer roosts? Young or otherwise non-breeding birds, perhaps, but Margaret poses the intriguing possibility that the roosts may also harbor one or the other of a mated pair, “off-shift” at the nearby nest, and choosing to spend the evening in the more thermodynamically favorable environment of a communal roost.

A Bird in Decline

Chimney Swifts, like all aerial insectivores, are in a desperate state of decline. The North American Breeding Bird Survey estimates that Chimney Swifts declined by 72% across their extensive breeding range between 1966 and 2015. Margaret, with the help of other researchers in her lab at UConn, have been asking why.

Too few chimneys? Too few bugs?

Conventional wisdom has it that shortage of nesting habitats might be to blame. Recent trends (to which I have fallen prey, I must confess) are toward capped and lined chimneys, which are less hospitable for nesting birds. However, Dr Rubega and her team found that despite the trend toward lined and capped chimneys in modern construction, there is no shortage of suitable chimneys in the parts of Connecticut she studied. Also, though there is some frightening research on changing insect abundance and diversity in North America and world-wide, breeding success for Chimney Swifts, at least in Connecticut, seems to be high, suggesting that, at least locally, food resources are adequate. Looking further afield, however, the scary but sparse data on insect abundance and diversity, and the guild-wide declines in avian aerial insectivores are a cause for grave concern.

Trouble in Paradise?

Margaret and her team were inexorably drawn toward an all-too-familiar question in conservation of neotropical species. What is happening to these birds when they disappear for the winter? Published accounts say that Chimney Swifts winter in the northern Amazon basin, in parts of Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Brazil, but precise information on their wintering grounds is hard to come by. We do know that rainforest clearing is proceeding apace in some of the Amazon basin. Stable isotope analysis of specific feather groups in Chimney Swifts found that the wintering birds consume insects that inhabit the canopies of rainforests as opposed to groups of insects that inhabit the cleared pasturelands and other anthropogenic landscapes that are replacing them. Translation: wintering Chimney Swifts need intact rainforest. It is reasonable and unavoidable to suspect that decline in Chimney Swift populations may have something to do with declining rainforests in the Amazon.

Disturbing, familiar, and for North American conservationists, news that tends to create a sense of hopelessness. But yet another in the multitude of reasons to take an active interest in conservation in the tropics as well as at home.

Post Script

As my first afterthought, I want to note that the researchers at UConn have started a unique relationship with a local business in Willimantic, Connecticut, a town which is home to two of the largest summer Chimney Swift roosts in Connecticut. As a result of this partnership, swift enthusiasts willing to travel to that town can participate in the swift story in a unique way (but you will have to wait until at least next May). If you would like to know more, take the time to peck this link into your browser.....

http://willibrew.com/event/chimney-swift-conservation-night-2018/?instance_id=27127

(if you enter Willimantic Chimney Swift Night into a search engine it will work too.)

Secondly, I am pleased to note that Chimney Swifts in my home town of Easthampton, seem to be bucking the overall decline of their species. My neighborhood is over-run with them, and their metallic chatter fills the air from dawn to dusk. It is a measure of my sadly unobservant nature that it was only this year that, for the first time, I witnessed the magical moment when several birds swirled, without warning, into the neighbor's chimney at dusk.

Lastly, keep an eye on the Ware River Nature Club. They have put on several very affordable local conferences aimed at the broader birding community and their future offerings will be well worth attending.

David Peake-Jones