



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org
Volume 36, No. 2
October 2019

Dear reader, mid-September brought reports of massive avian mortality to the mainstream media. Reports told of the loss of nearly 3 billion birds from North America since 1970. These reports were triggered by the publication in the journal *Science*, a highly respected, high-profile, peer-reviewed scientific periodical, of a relatively short but data-rich paper (“Decline of North American Avifauna”, Rosenberg et al., *Science* [2019] **366**, 120-124). I spent some time reading this paper. There are some important points that I want to share.

The first point is that the authors are very clear to point out that the data are collected for birds present during breeding season, not throughout the whole year. The authors say about this that “*our population loss estimates are conservative since we estimated loss only in breeding populations. The total loss and impact on communities and ecosystems could be even higher outside the breeding season if we consider the amplifying effect of “missing” reproductive output from these lost breeders.*” This worrisome comment is reminiscent of those about Arctic ice loss in which decreasing ice mass there enhances further ice loss.

A second point is that not all North American bird species are in decline. The data point to large increases in raptor populations, which are up nearly twofold over the past 50 years. Also up are populations of waterfowl, turkeys and grouse,

gnatcatchers and vireos. These increases are totally swamped by the large net declines in native sparrows (accounting for over one quarter of the total losses), wood-warblers and blackbirds. These three groups comprise over half of the birds that have disappeared.

As discussed by Brian McGill of the University of Maine in his blog (see the end of this article for web address) discussing his analysis of this paper, these seeming horrific losses that have produced apocalyptic reports in the press are perhaps not as bad as they seem. The very large numbers of individual birds lost come from the species that have the greatest populations. McGill notes that these species are not close to extirpation, though to be sure their numbers bear watching. He also emphasizes that the most worrisome species, the ones with small numbers of individuals, were not included in the data simply because their small numbers made for unreliable statistical analysis.

The fractional losses across all species in the US is highest in the New England region where those losses are near 5% per year between 2007 and 2017 at a number of locations. The fractional losses through the Mississippi River flyway in the US are not quite so high, but the much higher bird density there accounts for the geographic peak in Iowa of loss of birds per square kilometer. Neither the Central or Pacific flyways showed a consistent change in bird numbers.

(continued on page 2)

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you have renewed your membership this year, THANK YOU. If, however, there is a membership form included with this newsletter, we need your renewal as soon as possible. Just send it in via the post office or bring it along to the October 21st meeting. Membership funds allow the club to bring powerful programs and great trips to the valley.

NEXT PROGRAM
Monday, October 21 at 7:15 p.m.
Laura Erickson tells us about
Winter Survival

Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst

Laura lives in northern Minnesota, where winter night temperatures frequently drop to below zero, occasionally reach 20 or 30 below, and once even dropped to 60 below. What adaptations do northern birds have that allow them to survive and even thrive in those harsh conditions? And how are milder winters already hurting such species as Gray Jays and Great Gray Owls? Laura will address these and other aspects of birds' strategies that help them survive through the long winter that is coming. Note that this program is on the third Monday of the month.

[Laura Erickson](#) is one of the American birding community's most prolific writers and speakers. She has authored and co-authored a number of books including *101 Ways to Help Birds*, *The Bird Watching Answer Book*, *Sharing the Wonder of Birds with Kids*, *Birds of North America: the National Geographic Pocket Guide*, *Identifying Birds of Prey*, and several others. She is an editor and columnist for *Bird Watching* magazine as well as the science editor for the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Laura hosts the long-running radio program "For the Birds", and has won the National Outdoor Book Award and the American Birding Association's Roger Tory Peterson Award.

(Avifauna decline, from page 1)

The bird count data were collected by observer reports and by NEXRAD biomass passage, the latter accounting for the date range start in 1970. The statistical analysis of these data finds that, to a 95% confidence level, between 2.7 and 3.1 billion breeding birds have disappeared since 1970, which is a loss of between 27 and 30% of the population. These numbers are startling, and are consistent with anecdotal evidence that our local birders have noted – there just aren't as many birds around as there used to be.

An interesting aspect of the data is that non-native species like Old World sparrows and Starlings have the highest levels of decline, 75% and 50% respectively, since 1970. Though that might not be bad news for North America, the authors note that these losses mirror population declines of these groups in their native habitats. Though the thrust of the article is to report on avian population changes since 1970, the authors suggest that the reason behind these massive losses is due to

human activity. They reference other research that points to habitat losses, urbanization, and the agricultural use of toxic pesticides as likely causes. They close the article with a note of hope and a dark prediction: "*History shows that conservation action and legislation works. Our results signal an urgent need to address the ongoing threats of habitat loss, agricultural intensification, coastal disturbance, and direct anthropogenic mortality, all exacerbated by climate change, to avert continued biodiversity loss and potential collapse of the continental avifauna.*"

Should you be inclined to read more, Laurie Larson has posted on the American Birding Association website a link to Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's preprint of the paper plus links to several analyses of the paper's data, including the one by Brian McGill quoted above :

<http://birding.aba.org/message.php?mesid=1596352&MLID=BC&MLNM=BirdChat>.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

November 11, 2019. Heidi Stemple. Kids, Birding, and the Christmas Bird Count.

December 9, 2019. HBC Members' Meeting. Celebrate the season with photos of the birds we've found both far and wide and right here at home. (And plan for the CBC.) (And eat cookies.)

January 13, 2020. Brian Rusnica. Mount Watatic Hawkwatching.

February 10, 2020. Susannah Lehrman. Topic to be announced.

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, October 19, 7:30-9:30 a.m., Fort River Refuge. The entire Fort River Trail is fully accessible, including boardwalks and has occasional benches for resting. Meet George Regmund (413-255-0628), Jim Lafley and Janice Jorgensen in the lower parking lot at the Refuge, 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley to look for late Fall migrants. Easy/Medium effort (E/M)

Wednesday, October 23, 7:00 a.m., Leader's Choice. Join Scott Sumner (ssurner@aol.com) as he looks for Fall migrants. Meet at Stop & Shop (456 Russell St., Hadley). Registration required. (E)

Wednesday, October 23, 7:30-9:30 a.m., Fort River Refuge. Meet George Regmund (413-255-0628), Jim Lafley and Janice Jorgensen in the lower parking lot at the Refuge, 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley to look for late Fall migrants. (E/M)

Sunday All Day, October 27, 7:15 a.m., Turners Falls Halloween Birding Trip. Join Josh Rose as he leads his annual trip to Satan's Kingdom, Hell's Kitchen, and other birding spots in the area of Northfield to Turners Falls in his annual trek through the northern Connecticut River Valley. Meet at the parking area for the Power Canal on Migratory Way in Turners Falls. Please email Josh (jrose@hampshirebirdclub.org) to register. (E/M)

Saturday, November 2, 8:00-10:00 a.m., Fort River Refuge. Meet George Regmund (413-255-0628), Laura Beltran, Jim Lafley and Janice Jorgensen in the lower parking lot at the Refuge, 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley to look for late Fall migrants. (E/M)

Sunday, November 3, 6:30 a.m., Donut Run to the Berkshire Lakes. We will hit most of the lakes in Berkshire County. Leave Stop and Shop in NORTHAMPTON (228 King Street) at 6:30 a.m. We will try to be back about 4:15 p.m. For information and to register contact trip leader Tom Gagnon 413-584-6353. Registration required. (E)

Wednesday, November 6, 7:00 a.m., Leader's Choice. Join Scott Sumner (ssurner@aol.com) as he looks for Fall migrants. Meet at Stop & Shop (456 Russell St., Hadley). Registration required. (E)

Saturday, November 16, 7:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Chris Ellison Memorial East Quabbin Reservoir Trip. This late season trip will search for ducks, loons, and northern finches. LIMITED participation. Please sign up early. Dress for cold weather. You MUST be a member of the Hampshire Bird Club. Contact Craig Allen 413-467-3028 or allenec2@juno.com to sign up and learn the meeting place. (M)

Through the end of October there will be no public access for birders or photographers to That's A Plenty Farm in Hadley as they are conducting a bumble bee study at the location in conjunction with UMass. Please honor the request to avoid the site so that we as a group do not negatively impact the study or jeopardize access to this great spot in the future.

FIELD TRIP REPORT

Quabbin Resevation with Tom Gagnon and Craig Allen

Tom, Craig and six hardy HBC members traveled the wilds of the Quabbin reservation behind the gates on Saturday, October 5. It was a beautiful fall day, with clear blue skies all day long, if a bit cool (it was 31° F at the start of the trip, and, yes, there was frost on the pumpkins). Driving along route 202 toward our first stop, a moose cow crossed the road ahead of us and slipped off into the woods. Tom checked off one of his target species for the day. The early morning chill kept the birds down for a while, but the sun soon warmed things up and the birds came out. Two early stops on the trip were at the Quabbin reservoir shore. The warm water plus cold air produced waves of fog that glowed bright in the morning sunshine. Through the fog we found four Common Loons, one or two Double-Crested Cormorants and four Bald Eagles of the eight or more, both immature and mature, seen over the course of the day. While searching the water, the sharp-eyed Andrew Magee located a full-rack bull moose on a sand spit peninsula on the far side of the reservoir. It was quite a sight to see the moose silhouette shift from full side view to rear view through the misty fog as the moose walked about. The moose slowly disappeared through the fog and we moved on to look for land birds. Among the species we found was a **Grey-Cheeked Thrush** which was a season bird for many of us. At a nearby pond we found three immature **Red-Shouldered Hawks** moving from snag to snag along with a mature one not far away. At the Four Corners, a perfect V of 100 Canada Geese flew over heading south, where the group also located 7 species of butterflies, White-Throated and Chipping Sparrows, half a dozen Bluebirds and Yellow-Rumped Warblers. At one stop we were lucky enough to see at least three **Philadelphia Vireos** working their way through an alder loaded with seed cones, which I later learned are called strobiles. We saw a number of Blue-Headed and a couple of Red-Eyed Vireos during the day along with Palm, Tennessee, Northern Parula, Common Yellowthroat and Blackpoll Warblers and Lincoln's and Swamp Sparrows. Near the end of the day we located one **Brown Creeper** creeping up the side of a white pine. Over the course of the day we saw or heard a total of 53 avian species, 3 mammal species (moose, deer and chipmunk) and some lovely blooming wildflowers including **Fringed Gentian**, Cardinal Flower, Nodding Ladies' Tresses, and both white and blue Asters.

Dave Gross

CHRISTMAS COUNT

If you haven't already, mark your calendars now! The [Northampton Christmas Bird Count](#) is **Sunday, December 15**. It's a great day of birding followed by a wonderful feast among friends, with plenty of time to regale each other with the day's triumphs and share tales of the ones that got away. If you want to participate please contact cbc@hampshirebirdclub.org.

ASSOCIATION OF MASSACHUSETTS BIRD CLUBS

The Hampshire Bird Club is a member of the Association of Massachusetts Bird Clubs (AMBC), a group of 19 clubs state-wide. The AMBC's mission is to (1) promote club birding across Massachusetts, (2) encourage and facilitate communication among member clubs, (3) provide opportunities for exchanges of ideas and collaborative efforts that will help member clubs fulfill their respective missions, and (4) support conservation of birds and their habitats in Massachusetts.

The AMBC meets three times per year to exchange information and make plans. Any HBC club member is welcome to attend these meetings. Contact Sharon Dombeck sdombeck@hampshirebirdclub.org for more information.

MEETING SET UP HELP NEEDED

Our thanks go out to the several members who have volunteered to help set up chairs, food and equipment prior to our monthly meetings. We would love to hear from a few more of you so that the set up tasks can be shared by teams and not necessarily the same people each time.

A few basic set up functions help to make our monthly programs so excellent and enjoyable, providing us with: welcoming chairs to *sit* on, an audio system that allows us to *hear* the speaker, projection ability for all the great photographs we get to *see*, and fine comestibles for us to *eat*. The set up itself does not require technical skills.

We are still in need of someone(s) with sufficient technical expertise to troubleshoot projector-computer interface issues prior to and during the presentation. In addition, we need someone who has space to store our audio and projection equipment between meetings.

If you are willing to help with meeting and/or equipment set up, please email Lissa Ganter at membership@hampshirebirdclub.org or speak with any member of the HBC Board. Thank you!

HBC LIBRARY

Did you know that the Hampshire Bird Club has a large collection of materials related to birding? Our collection consists of hundreds of books, videos, audio tapes, periodicals, DVDs and even vinyl LPs, all housed at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst and available for loan by members.

The entire library is accessible any time the Hitchcock Center is open ([Hitchcock Center hours](#)), and you can use our honor system to borrow. If, however, your busy schedule precludes browsing the shelves at Hitchcock, you can just email our librarian, Henry Lappen (library@hampshirebirdclub.org), who will bring a volume or two of your choice to the next HBC meeting for you!

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Hitchcock Center for the Environment

Our Living Building Tour Program

with Jessica Schultz

First Fridays at 4pm: October 4, November 1, December 6

Third Wednesdays at 12pm: November 20, December 18 (no tour in October)

FREE but please [register online](#)

Come meet our newest educator – our Certified Living Building! It is designed to model systems in nature, it is net zero energy, net zero water, has composting toilets, and has been made with responsibly sourced non-toxic materials, come check it out at one of our bi-monthly tours. Tours typically last from 1-1.5 hours.

Explore an Old Growth Habitat

with Bob Leverett

Sunday, November 3, 10am-1pm

\$30/person

[Registration required](#)

Join our Valley's old-growth forest expert, Bob Leverett, on a walk at the Mohawk Trail State Forest. Come learn what old-growth trees of a variety of species really look like and how their appearance depends partly on their habitat and growing conditions. We will stroll leisurely on graded roads and trails with our eyes trained to the heights as we explore the fascination of these trees. We will visit the Elder Grove to pay our respects to some of these ancient residents. Bob will explain how he measures the trees and update us on the tallest trees. Co-founder of the [Eastern Native Tree Society](#), Bob is brimming with fascinating information!

Meet at the Mohawk State Forest Headquarters building, just off Rt. 2 in Charlemont at 10:00 am. We will finish around 1:00 pm. Dress for weather and bring snacks and water.

Landscape and Infrastructure: Re-imagining the Pastoral Paradigm Book Release

with author Meg Vickery

Thursday, November 7, 7 – 8:30pm

Light refreshments served

FREE, [registration appreciated](#)

In her new book local author and lecturer of the History of Art and Architecture Meg Vickery traces the roots and uncovers the significance of the productive activities and elements of pastoral traditions in art and designed landscapes, clearly documenting the persistent and sometimes difficult relationship of aesthetics and production. With rising demand for clean energy, clean water, and locally-grown food, this study offers a historical perspective on how such systems can be integrated into our suburban and urban areas. Vestigial elements of the pastoral tradition have long held aesthetic sway in our suburbs, cities and national parks, both in Britain and America. Now, as new energy- and water-related projects encroach on these spaces, remnants of the pastoral play a crucial role in convincing neighborhood residents, municipal leaders, and energy companies or water authorities of the benefits of a neighboring infrastructure. This book investigates the history of that tradition and highlights the advantages it brings as we re-imagine infrastructure in the twenty-first century.

Broad Brook Coalition

Annual Meeting

Florence Civic Center

November 3, 2019 at 5 p.m.

Speaker: Toni Lyn Morelli, Research Ecologist

Northeast Climate Adaptation Science Center

University of Massachusetts Amherst

Title: *Climate Change in Your Backyard*

Learn about the ways in which climate is changing in Western Massachusetts and the ecological consequences of those changes, including more pests and less maple syrup.

Dr. Toni Lyn Morelli works for the U.S. Geological Survey Northeast Climate Adaptation Science Center and is Adjunct Assistant Professor at University of Massachusetts. She uses modeling, genetics, and field methods to understand and facilitate natural resource management and conservation efforts in the face of climate and land use change, especially in New England. Previously she did work on climate change adaptation and conservation in the Sierra Nevada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Madagascar.

That's all for this month. **Please send us your membership renewal NOW if you haven't yet done so!**

Dave Gross, Editor

nnewsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org