



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.
Amherst, Massachusetts
www.hampshirebirdclub.org
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Dear reader, our lives have been upended by the rapid spread of the SARS-Cov-2 virus that causes COVID-19. We are confining ourselves to home, cancelling events, meeting and visiting each other using online tools or the phone, and generally just hunkering down. I, personally, have been working in my yard much more than I had done in in past years, and my firewood stacks are the better for it. As more and more spring migrants arrive in our fields, woods and yards I, for one, aim to be outside looking at and listening to them. By myself. And that's the rub, isn't it? Birding is, to many of us, such a social activity that it is unsettling to be out with the birds but not with our people. This spring will be very different than past springs for us. The birds won't notice much of any difference except maybe a few more people looking at them, and fewer cars that need to be avoided. My suggestion to you is to get out twice as often as you used to do. With some luck you'll see and hear more birds and you'll end the season with better identification skills that you can use in future springs.

This newsletter is also upended from its usual content. There is no April program description because it was cancelled. There are no April or May field trip descriptions, because, too, they were cancelled. At its monthly meeting on Thursday, April 2 the HBC board decided that it is just too dangerous to bring our members together through at least the end of May, perhaps longer. Of course we met via the internet, each of us isolated in our respective domiciles. There is a possibility that the club will be able to have a semi-normal May meeting if our speaker can manage to give his presentation via the internet. The cancellations go well beyond the HBC: there are no Hitchcock or Arcadia programs listed in the newsletter because they were cancelled, including the Valley Family Bird Festival. What we do have, though, is a poem by HBC member and poet Phyllis Katz, an interview with a long-time birder in the Pioneer Valley, a rebus contest from our Education Committee, and a list of candidates for the HBC Board. So, till next month, stay healthy, enjoy the newsletter, and get out there to see some avian migrants!

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

~~April 13, 2020. Ashley Green. MAPS Banding Stations CANCELLED~~

~~May 11, 2020. Matt Kelly. Trinidad & Tobago IN-PERSON CANCELLED~~

June 8, 2020. Chris Fisher. Journey to the Edge of the Earth – the Galapagos Islands

The May meeting will not be held in person at Immanuel Lutheran Church. It may be possible that Matt Kelly's presentation and some aspects of our regular meeting will be held online as a webinar. As of now the June meeting is not cancelled. That may change. There will be announcements on both the HBC website and the HBC Facebook page as our plans develop. The May newsletter will also have information about the status of our last two meetings of the year.

HBC BOARD NOMINATIONS

The HBC Nominating Committee this year is Bruce Hart (chair), Marcia Merithew, and Jim Lafley. They have been hard at work talking with current and prospective board members. They have a slate of candidates to bring before the club at our official annual meeting in May. Given that we will not be meeting in person in May, we need to conduct the 2020 election via remote ballot. The details of how that will work have not been fully worked out. It is likely that we will vote online, with the option of a mailed-in paper ballot for those who prefer not to vote online, or who cannot do so. The May newsletter will have the details about voting, and for members who have an email address registered with the club, there will be an email announcement about voting. It is likely that the vote will occur in mid-May.

In order to provide an opportunity for club members to nominate themselves or others for any of the positions on the board, names of proposed nominees can be sent to the Nominating Committee at nominations@hampshirebirdclub.org. The Nominating Committee needs to have names of alternate candidates in order to be included on the ballot by April 30. If you nominate someone other than yourself, please contact the nominee to confirm that they are willing to run.

The slate proposed by the Nominating Committee is given below. Incumbents are indicated by (I) and names of nominees who would be new to the board are in italic.

Officers

President: Bob Zimmermann (I)
Vice President and Program Chair: Josh Rose (I)
Treasurer: *Steve Winn*
Membership Secretary: Lissa Ganter (I)
Communications Secretary: Elaine Reilly (I)

Members-at-large

Laura Beltran
Dave Gross (I)
Jan Howard (I)
Amanda Kallenbach
Carol Mardeusz (I)
Helen Symons (I)

A CHAT WITH HARVEY ALLEN

In February 2020 the newsletter editor sat down with Harvey Allen, long-time Valley birder and one of the founders of the Hampshire Bird Club, to talk about the history behind the formation of the HBC and how the bird distribution in the Valley has changed over the years.

Newsletter: *What got you interested in birding?*

Harvey Allen: I grew up on a farm. My mother was interested in birding. She was a birder. She'd never think of herself as a birder, of course. She just observed birds. She made sure I knew what a Bluebird was.

N: *So pretty much from when you were a kid you were interested in birding.*

HA: I was outdoors all the time on the farm. There's nothing to do unless you wanted to become a farmer.

N: *When did you get to the point where you were identifying birds and going out looking specifically for birds?*

HA: I always knew what I was seeing, pretty much. There wasn't any formal birding – I was just outdoors a lot. I knew what birds we had on the farm. I didn't think much about the seasons; the birds came in the spring and they nested.

N: *This was in Amherst, is that right?*

HA: This was in North Sunderland – Gunn Farm. This is on route 47 about a mile and a half south of the Montague town line. It now has an agricultural preservation on it.

My grandmother lived where our bird club meets at the Lutheran Church – that was her farm. The University took it over and then they sold to the Baptists and my uncle was very mad that they didn't tell them first. The University made money on that. They kept the land on both

sides of it. At that time they were thinking about taking all of North Amherst, and now they do have most of it.

N: *Who were the influential birders in the Valley before the HBC got started?*

HA: If it hadn't been for Jerry Bozzo there wouldn't be a Hampshire Bird Club because he taught birding in junior high. He had at least 80 students interested, and out of the 80 he had 40 who stuck with it. Out of the 40 there are probably at least 20 still doing it. Scott Sumner is one of them. A lot of them have gone on to professional careers. And then the other person was Rud Stone. He came from Syracuse or maybe Schenectady – I guess it was Schenectady – to be curator of Wisteriahurst in Holyoke. He loved birds – he and his mother were birders. He taught people like Al Richards and Tom Gagnon. He didn't drive and Tom did, so Tom drove him. Tom refused to go to Peru one day with him to get a Hawk Owl. There has never been another one. He says "that's been my biggest blunder".

Steve Stann started the birding classes when the Hitchcock Center moved to Amherst. His mother Alice was my seventh grade homeroom teacher. Alice was really interested in birding – she was a birder. Steve was very smart and he went to Amherst College on scholarship. If you lived in Amherst and you carried a high B you could get into Amherst College for free. He graduated and got a job at the Hitchcock Center as a naturalist. They wanted him to be director but he didn't want to fundraise so he went over to the Hudson River and he got a job with Pete Seeger on a boat, the Clearwater [ed. note: see www.clearwater.com].

N: *You had said that he was the person who started the birding class at Hitchcock, correct?*

HA: Right. He set it up and it's still being run in pretty much the same format. Jan Ortiz took it up after he left.

N: *I sat with Jan earlier this year, talking about the beginnings of the Hampshire Bird Club. It's interesting to see the flow of how it all came about.*

HA: We started the Amherst Bird Club at the Hitchcock Center. And then it became the Hampshire Bird Club because all the other clubs kind of joined in. David Spector was one of the

original members. And there were Sally Venman, Barbara Tiffany, John Green and Pete Westover also.

N: *And you. The usual suspects.*

HA: Those were the people. The room in the old Hitchcock Center that became the reception room is where we met. And then Steve Stann's father built the addition, the larger room, onto it. Then we moved into there since it held about 35 people comfortably. Now we have 75 or more attending meetings. They must be there because of the programs because not so many go on the field trips.

N: *That's what Jan said also. What makes the club unique is the quality of the speakers.*

HA: And Sally Venman's newsletter. She was the clerk for a long time and she loved to write. She and I and Barbara were in the first class that Steve Stann taught. My son was in there too, I think. We always walked around the grounds first for his class, doing our birding right there, either on that property or on the farm next to it. We got a huge list of species on that piece of land. We went out with Scott Sumner on the first day of the year one time. We started out with a Sapsucker and we got three or four Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs right there on that piece of land.

N: *That leads into my next question. In your experience what would you say have been the biggest changes in the distribution and numbers of birds since you started watching?*

HA: I think we have as many birds, but the Starling population is way off and the warblers are way off. I think if you look at the Christmas Bird Counts over the years the numbers of Starlings have dropped considerably. There are still a lot of Starlings, but I think there used to be about 5000 underneath the Coolidge Bridge every night. Crows have done well. Wood Ducks have done well. Bluebirds, Peregrines, Turkeys, Eagles and Harriers have done well. The Red Tails are really doing well. Red Tails used to be very spooky if you ever went near them. Kestrels are down. All grassland birds are down. Other birds have come in. We started out with the Cardinal and Mockingbird and then the Titmouse came, and the Gnatcatcher and Carolina Wren. And the Raven. We had never had Ravens. The

first Ravens I ever saw I was on the bike trail during the Christmas Count in 1977. There was a pair of Ravens and they eventually nested on the hill up here [in South Amherst].

N: *Red-bellied Woodpeckers have come in.*

HA: Very recently. They got as far as the Connecticut line down there in Suffield. They were a long time in Connecticut before they got into Longmeadow and then within five years they got all the way into Canada. We used to have a lot of Red-headed Woodpeckers when we had elm trees. When the elms started dying that got rid of the woodpeckers. They liked those old, big elms. Apparently they could dig into them just fine. We had a colony on Station Road, we had a colony where the new University police station is on East Pleasant Street, there were some in Sunderland. When the elm trees all fell over and rotted, we didn't have any more.

N: *That's so interesting. It's all about the environment. The loss of grassland birds makes sense, too, since we don't have much in the way of grassland any more.*

HA: If you want to see what we used to have, just go down to Westover. On South Maple Street we used to have Upland Sandpipers, and one year we had both the Eastern and Western Meadowlark. I don't think we ever had Grasshopper Sparrows over there, but we had a lot of Savannahs. And the Sedge Wren. Not many, and you had to go out and look. They sang day and night. They like meadows that have just a little bit of water on the ground, like hay fields. We had one nesting down here in South Amherst a few years ago and we got that on the Amherst Breeding Bird Count.

Up here in the spring in the orchard in back of me I had a whole tree full of Bay-breasted Warblers and I used to get Cape Mays right out the back yard here. I used to go to Mount Greylock and get hundreds of White-throated Sparrows, and Purple Finches would sing in the morning. I first noticed the temperature and climate change up there. The foliage changed and the Gray-cheeked Thrush disappeared and

the Swainson's followed it. We had the Olive-sided Flycatcher up there at one time.

N: *I see that you have a folder with some old count records.*

HA: We used to have a bird meeting every year in March sponsored by Mass Audubon. Some of these papers are records of that.

N: *Here's an agenda from 1961, and I see that there was an afternoon talk by Alan Richards about the Mourning Dove. I know that was the topic of his graduate thesis.*

HA: Yes.

N: *And here are lists from the 1957 and 1961 Christmas Counts. In 1957 there were 43 species and the Evening Grosbeak count was 139.*

HA: This stuff probably came from Rud Stone's materials. He died and all of his stuff got thrown in a dumpster. Somebody called me up and said "You'd better come down here." I ran down and retrieved it.

N: *Here's an article from the Worcester Telegram from April 2, 1961 saying that strong action was needed to protect bluebirds.*

HA: We had that strong hurricane in 1938 that knocked everything down. The Bluebirds didn't have any trees left to nest in. The same was true for the Wood Ducks. Both the Bluebirds and the Wood Ducks were saved by people building boxes for them.

N: *Are there any particular memories of birding around here that you would like to share?*

HA: I went down with my kids on a party boat out of Provincetown with the owner of the boat. We fished, and the boat owner was complaining about losing tackle and sinkers, and having to spend the winter making more. I mentioned this to Tom Tynning – this was just when the Hitchcock Center was starting – and Tom arranged to charter that same boat for a whale watch. The boat owner said that it was cheaper to run a watch than making new tackle all the time for a bunch of drunk fishermen, so he changed his business to a whale watch. Then he hired a naturalist to be on board, and that's how Provincetown whale watching got started.

Finding the Harpy Eagles in Panama

by Phyllis Katz

They had built their nest
forty feet up on a tree
where two branches forked,
perfect place for a nest of sticks
and leaves, deep enough
for birds, eggs, and young to be safe.
For almost two hours we
had gone up a whirling muddy
river in hollowed out wooden canoes
then walked an hour more
and found the female on the nest
but we could see only the tips
of those amazing feathers
that stood upright over her head.
We waited and waited, worried,
for we would soon have leave,
to return to our boats, the bird
barely visible when suddenly
she rose in all her glory, rose
high enough for all to see her
majestic body, and we could leave
rejoicing back to our canoes
when the heavens burst open
and never closed. Raincoats
could not hold the endless pounding
water; sopped, we bailed and bailed,
agreeing afterwards we had never been
so wet and cold but, admitting it didn't matter.
We'd seen our bird, watched her mate fly down
to join her and joy and celebration warmed us all,
thankful for this gift of a Red-Letter-Day,
one we would never forget.



Photo credit: Carlos, a guide for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, on a trip to Darien, Panama in October 2018.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We welcome these new members who have joined HBC since the publication of the Directory in December:

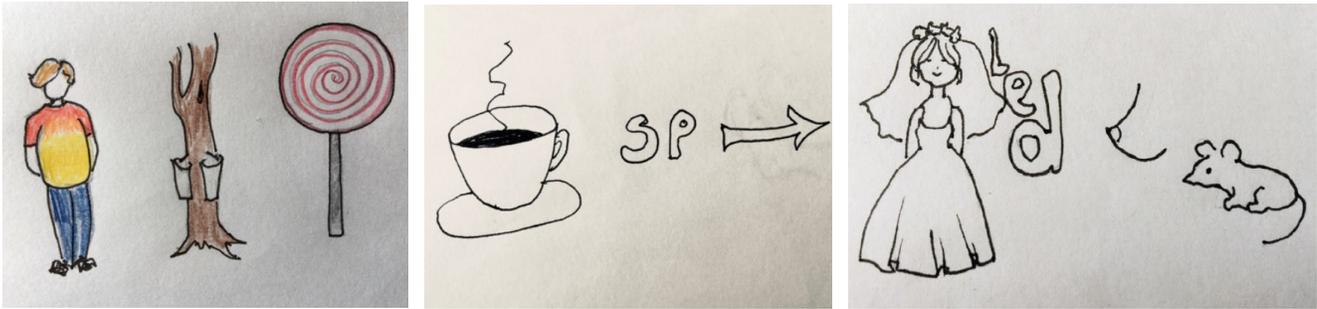
Shirley Crites, Montague; April Downey, Hampden; Robin Gurdak-Foley, South Deerfield; Jan & Thomas Hawkins, Belchertown; Bambi Kenney, Agawam; Torben Lorenzen, North Falmouth; Tom Mangan, Northampton; Susan Tyler, Amherst; Christopher Williams, Montesano WA; Sara Woodbury & Sid Siff, Amherst.

We hope it won't be long before we get to know them at meetings and on field trips!

REBUS CHALLENGE

Our Education Committee has too much time on its collective hands, apparently. Here is a PG-rated rebus challenge that they have concocted.

Looking for a diversion while sitting in quarantine? Here is a fun game we can play. Make up a bird rebus. What is a rebus you might ask? A rebus is a picture puzzle that links pictures together to come up with a word or phrase. Here are three examples. Can you identify them? (For those of you reading the black and white hardcopy edition, the shirt at the far left is red at top and yellow below.)



Now you don't have to be artistic, you can use clipart. You can do it with a buddy on the phone or as you while away the hours at home. We know that you are all clever, so let's see what you can do!!!

Rebus puzzles will be shared on the HBC website's [Education page](#) and the HBC [Facebook page](#) (and you can share yours there, too). Send your entries to: education@hampshirebirdclub.org or post on Facebook.

MAY FIELD TRIPS

All May field trips have been cancelled. Please check the HBC website or Facebook page for updates.

Included among the May field trips that have been cancelled is our longstanding Memorial Day trip to Monhegan Island, Maine. This migrant trap is amazing in the spring, and it can be just as spectacular in the fall. Trip leader Scott Sumner is planning a trip to Monhegan from Thursday, October 1 to Sunday, October 4. Members who signed up for the Memorial Day trip will get first dibs to go on the October trip. If any spaces remain once that group has decided whether or not to go, then Scott will open the trip to other club members. Stay tuned for details.

Other birding field trips throughout New England may be accessed by going to <https://www.birdingcalendar.com>

UPCOMING EVENTS OF INTEREST

Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary

Arcadia, and all Mass Audubon sanctuaries, are closed until further notice.

Hitchcock Center for the Environment

The Hitchcock Center is closed at least until April 5. An announcement will be made then about the status of the center and its programs. Given the ongoing closings throughout the state, it is unlikely that May programs will be held. Check the Hitchcock Center website for updates.

Dave Gross, Editor
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