



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org
Volume 37, No. 1
September 2020

Dear reader, I am pleased to welcome you back to the 37th year of operation of the Hampshire Bird Club. I believe that the fact that you are reading this suggests that both you and I have survived another year, which, to my mind, is a substantial accomplishment for the both of us given the state of the world. I'd suggest that we sit down over a beer (or tea or whiskey, depending on your current outlook on life), but of course that's not going to happen until the pandemic is no longer a pandemic.

I want to relate to you the tale of the poor bluebird. We have two nest boxes in our north yard that usually attract attention in the spring. The yard is a bit too small to make it highly attractive, but we always get Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows surveilling and nest-building. Both species have found mates and produced offspring in past years. This year, Mr. Sialia sialis fended off some aggressive Tree Swallows to the point that they decamped from their nearby nest box. He spent most of the months of May and June sweetly singing atop his box. Alas, no Ms. Sialia sialis took him up on his crooning. Then, around the first part of July, Mr. Troglodytes aedon (the true troglodyte that he is) showed up and began to harass our hero. After a week of relentless chiding and poking into nest box holes by the wren, the bluebird departed for less stressful accommodations and the wren set up housekeeping. It took him a few weeks to convince a female to join him and they are now the parents of a brood of young wrens. I know there must be a moral buried somewhere in this tale, but it eludes me. Now if it was a morel, I'd spend more effort to find it. Those are tasty.

As with the last set of HBC newsletters from last club year, this newsletter is not typical of those from past years. We have neither in-person meetings coming up nor field trips scheduled for the rest of the year. We are still hunkering down, trying to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus that has changed so many aspects of our lives. We had some interviews in the newsletter last year with some of the founders of the HBC – Jan Ortiz, Harvey Allen and Scott Sumner. There will be more interviews, but there isn't room this month for one. If you are itching for one, you might look at Katie Koerten's chat with John Green about his life choice as a naturalist, photographer, birder and mentor. I highly recommend it. You can find it at <https://www.hitchcockcenter.org/blog/a-conversation-with-naturalist-john-green/>.

Please Join or Renew Your Membership NOW

- Your **membership status** is shown on the back of the cover page if you received this newsletter via the USPS. **Check** to see if you owe dues this year.
- Complete the **Membership Form (both sides)** either online or on pages 3 and 4 inside. We need your contact details, dues level (if owed), newsletter delivery preference, participation interests, Field Trip Agreement, and Rare Bird Alert sign up (the last being optional). Don't forget to complete both sides.
- Use the **Online Renewal procedure** should you owe dues this year or wish to donate money. Go to the secure HBC website, <https://hampshirebirdclub.org/shop/>, select your dues level, and proceed to checkout where you will complete the Membership Form and make payment, **or, alternately,**
- **Mail Form** from the newsletter with your check enclosed for dues and/or donation (if applicable) to the address on the Membership Form.
- And then **congratulate yourself** on a job well done!
- For those joining HBC **for the first time**, you can have one year free! Fill in the online form at <https://forms.gle/1SG72gx5DVXW2y819>.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

We will not be having in-person meetings for a while. Program Chair Josh Rose put together two terrific online programs for our May and June meetings last year. Susan Myers talked about Borneo and Andrew Digby gave a presentation on the Kakapo of New Zealand. Both of those were delivered via Zoom, and that is the plan for our meetings starting with September. As of press time, the speaker and date for the September meeting are not finalized. Please watch for an announcement about the speaker, topic, date and access information on the HBC website, HBC Facebook page, and via an email announcement. Also note in your calendar that the October meeting will be on the third Monday of October on the 19th due to the Indigenous Peoples' Day holiday on the 12th.

HBC BOARD UPDATES

The HBC board membership for 2020-2021 is

Officers

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

Members-at-large

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

The board meets from 6 to 8 pm on the first Thursday of each month from August through June. You are welcome to attend these meetings on Zoom or via telephone. Contact any board member to get the connection information.

At its June meeting, the Board adopted a statement about inclusion in response to the Black Lives Matter outrage at the killing of George Floyd and the many dead and abused Black Americans who preceded him. The statement is below and it can be found on the HBC website home page.

The Board of Directors of the Hampshire Bird Club want all people who bird with us to feel warmly welcomed, included, and safe. Like many, we are deeply disturbed and saddened by the racial harassment of a Black birder in Central Park, NYC; the horrific death of George Floyd in Minneapolis; and the persistent racism that afflicts our society. Birdwatching is a joyful activity that can bring people together across all differences. We commit to supporting efforts that increase diversity in birding and, indeed, within our own club.

A group from Virginia Tech recently offered a webinar on *Social Science Perspectives on Ethno-racial Diversity in Wildlife Viewing and Conservation*. A closed-captioned recording of the webinar is available online at https://video.vt.edu/media/0_4ng4izoa. Bob Zimmermann attended the webinar and found it to be excellent and very relevant to inclusivity in the birding community.

The Board received a recommendation from the Education Committee about facilitating more inclusivity in the HBC, and the Board has begun to implement some of those suggestions. See the Book Discussion Group article on page 8 for more about this.

Mass Audubon has summarized the most eye-opening moments that were brought forward as a result of Black Birders' Week (<https://blogs.massaudubon.org/distractiondisplays/black-birders-week/>). The American Birding Association has made recent and ongoing efforts to make the birding community more equitable, diverse and inclusive (<https://www.aba.org/the-aba-and-equity-diversity-and-inclusion/>). The Mass Audubon blog is quite good as it provides links to many of the talks that were given throughout Black Birders' Week. The ABA statement is rather dry though it provides some guidelines about what organizations – especially large organizations – can do to encourage under-represented birders.

FIELD TRIP NEWS

Please check the HBC website or Facebook page for updates.

Out of an abundance of caution regarding the various effects of the coronavirus on individuals who contract the disease, the fact that it presents asymptotically in some individuals, and that mask wearing is not 100% effective, as well as the unpredictability of cases as the autumn months progress, the HBC Board has decided by majority vote to forego scheduling field trips until further notice. The Board will reevaluate this decision on an ongoing basis and will schedule some get togethers as soon as possible.

If you would like to lead a field trip please use the membership form to volunteer to do so or call or email the Field Trip Chair, Carol Mardusz (413-467-7279 [leave a message if necessary]; fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org). You don't need to be an expert to be a leader, just a willingness to bring fellow birders with you when you go out. With any luck, spring will find us together again.

Carol Mardeusz
Field Trip Chair

Other birding field trips throughout New England may be accessed by going to www.birdingcalendar.com.

FALL BIRDING SPOTS

The HBC Board thought that it would be nice to have a list of local birding areas for those of us who would like to go out on our own to look for fall migrants and those confusing fall warblers. One source for local sites is the *Bird Finding Guide to Western Massachusetts* from 2003 that was edited by Jan Ortiz, David Spector, Pete Westover and Mary Alice Wilson. Another source is a growing compilation curated by Cory Elowe of Western Massachusetts birding areas. Cory posted a link to the Google doc with the list on the HBC Facebook page. Other suggestions from this fall are below.

Larch Hill & Bramble Hill Farm-Amherst

This area seems forgotten, but it has consistently produced birds over the years. Parking is available at the past home of the Hitchcock Center, located at 521 S. Pleasant Street. The area is easy to bird. Just follow the boardwalk and trails through the forest and thickets around Larch Hill. Larch Hill will be your best bet for those frustrating fall warblers and vireos through September into early October. As sparrow migration heats up, Larch Hill can attract loads of White-throated Sparrows and the agricultural fields at Bramble Hill Farm can be quite productive. Look for Chipping, Field, Vesper, White-crowned, White-throated, Song, Savannah, Lincoln's and Swamp Sparrows. Bramble Hill Farm is located behind Larch Hill and can easily be accessed from the trails at Larch Hill. As you make your way to the agricultural fields, keep an eye to the sky for migrating hawks.

Scott Sumner

Hadley Dike

Park at the Alexandra Dawson Conservation Area lot (18 North Lane, Hadley). Walk up the dike and look for ducks in the river, waders along the shore, and shorebirds along the opposite bank if the water is low. Turn left and walk along the top of the dike toward the Honey Pot. Check the brushy edge of the river for sparrows, and the trees, when you get to them, for warblers. When you get near the Hadley Transfer Station start looking for sparrows in the fields. (As of September 1 the long grass field just past the Transfer Station had lots of Bobolinks.) Continue onto the dike as it juts inland (looking for sparrows, buntings, and possibly a Blue Grosbeak). If time and energy permit, take a right onto the dirt road (Cemetery Road) at the end of the dike and explore the fields and wires for migrating swallows, American Kestrels, sparrows (including the local specialty, the Vesper Sparrow), and warblers (especially Palm Warblers in mid-September). Continue as far as you want, then backtrack (or continue out the dike to the bike trail, then loop back to Hadley Commons and your car).

Huntington Road River Access

This is where the Pacific-slope Flycatcher was. There is a small parking area opposite Huntington Road along Route 47. (There is an additional small parking area at the southern intersection of Huntington Road

and Route 47.) It is a short walk to the river, but the brushy edge holds sparrows and Common Yellowthroats, and the trees have migrating warblers and vireos as of early September. When the water in the river is low, the bank can be good for shorebirds, and later in the fall and through the winter, this is the most reliable location in Hadley to find Common Goldeneyes.

Mount Holyoke

This is definitely an under-birded hawk-watching site. Truth be told, I would rather go to Goat Peak; it has better northern views and seems in general to produce more hawks. However, in the current pandemic, the Goat Peak tower can fit perhaps 2 birders (and you know Tom Gagnon will be there before you on a good day), and it's moderately difficult to get to. On weekends you can drive up to the Summit House on Mount Holyoke, find lots of space to hawk-watch, and enjoy better views of the valley.

Meadow Street Fields

This is the collection of agricultural fields in North Hadley bounded by Route 47, Comins Road, Meadow Street, Roosevelt Street, and Stockbridge Street. While this can be a very productive area for shorebirds (depending on whether the fields are clear and the amount of standing water), I've found that it's typically less interesting in the fall than the spring. However, it's worth an occasional quick circuit looking for Golden-Plovers and other species that prefer dry fields. As waterfowl migration begins in October, this area is typically a Mecca for geese. The vast majority will be Canada Geese, but if you can find an unobtrusive place to park, and have the patience to scope through a huge flock, many unusual species can be found. In the past five years this area has produced both Ross' Goose and Pink-footed Goose, and back in 2008 there was a Barnacle Goose.

Mike Locher

ONLINE BIRDING WORKSHOPS

The Hampshire Bird Club Education Committee is offering on-line workshops using Zoom. For the workshops about apps we will discuss basics of how to use each app, what we like about it, and any challenges. Please have the app already installed on your phone prior to the workshop. To register (space is limited), e-mail virtualbirding@hampshirebirdclub.org with the workshop you are interested in.

Tuesday, September 15, 7 p.m. – 8 p.m. Hawks and Hawk Watching with Dan Russell

This introductory hawk course will feature the more common hawks in our area and how to identify them. Dan will describe the methods he uses for telling these birds apart. He will also share some places in the area where hawks can be seen migrating this time of year.

Tuesday, September 22, 4 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. Hearing Aids for Birders by Tim Walker

Tim is an Electrical Engineer by training, but would rather be birding. He started back in 1985 trying to identify what was coming to his feeder. Tim and Nancy have birded all over the US, but currently just stay in Essex County. In recent years he has grown jealous of his wife's hearing, so decided to do something about it. This seminar details some of what he found out. Tim's *Bird Observer* article: <https://www.birdobserver.org/Issues/2020/August-2020/hearing-aids-for-birders>. You will need to be a subscriber to read it.

Tuesday, September 29, 7 p.m. – 8 p.m. eBird Hotspots and Alerts with Janice Jorgensen and Sara Griesemer

Janice and Sara use eBird extensively to explore hotspots and alerts when they are planning a local bird walk or traveling to places farther away. Learn these tips and tricks so you can use eBird more effectively, especially if you are looking for those unusual species.

EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

The Education Committee held a haiku writing contest in August. There were 17 entries. Although there will not be any individual winners declared we hope to publish many of the entries in the HBC newsletter throughout the year as space permits. One of the entries is below.

A weekly *Birding in Your Backyard* series was held virtually during May and June with HBC members attending. We saw some birds and a wide variety of bird attracting options from bird feeders, such as fruit, seeds, suet, meal worms and nectar, as well as plantings and bird baths. Members also shared their birding adventures.

We offered virtual birding app workshops July and August and are beginning to offer virtual workshops on other bird topics like hawk watching, feeding birds, bird house construction and birding equipment. Please check the HBC website or Facebook page periodically to learn about these upcoming programs.

A very successful Book Discussion Group was led by Education Committee members Jeremy Spool and Meghadeepa Maity. They focused on J. Drew Lanham's book *The Home Place*. It was so popular that they are offering a discussion on the same book this fall.

The Young Birders Club progress has been slowed by the pandemic, but they are proceeding on administrative and financial matters while developing a plan and contacts for the future.

We have also discussed creating a New Members session before the regularly scheduled membership meeting, a Beginning Birders Walk program, and a mentoring program once we are able to meet again in person. The mentoring program could take the form of similar "Birding Buddies" programs elsewhere or just be a listing of HBC members who are willing to take others on bird walks.

If you are interested in helping the Education Committee implement any of these ideas or if you have ideas or topics you would like the Committee to consider please either share them or join the Committee by contacting Jim Lafley at jimlafley@gmail.com or education@hampshirebirdclub.org. You can also join by indicating your interest on the HBC membership application.

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP REPORT

This summer, alongside the horrific killings of Black citizens by US police, a video showing a White woman calling the police on a Black birder made national news. The incident kicked off a national conversation about the experience of Black and other non-White birders in the US. It's led many birders here in Western Massachusetts to examine inclusion within our own birding communities.

In June I proposed a book club, with the support of the Education Committee, to read *The Home Place* by Dr. Drew Lanham to begin conversations about Black experiences with birding and nature. Meghadeepa Maity joined me to facilitate the book club. Nineteen participants drawn from the HBC and the surrounding community were drawn to the prose and the depth of the writing of Dr. Lanham. We met three times via Zoom to discuss the themes of the book, which at its heart focuses on the intersection of family, land, community, and personal passion in the author's love and respect for birds.

The group brainstormed an initial list of ideas for what the HBC could do to foster an inclusive birding environment. Ideas included intentionally diversifying invited speakers, a mentorship program to increase participation of new birders in the club, and an updated resource to describe the accessibility of local birding hotspots. Meghadeepa drafted a set of starting resources for the book club members and beyond, which can be found at the following link: <https://bit.ly/32XchMf>.

Jeremy Spool

Vulture protection
with projectile vomiting
predator deterred

Haiku by Laura Beltran

Dave Gross, Editor
newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org