Dear reader, I write this from Central Illinois, on a visit to in-laws. We are staying with my mother-in-law, about half a mile from the Sangamon River. This morning I walked over to the Rock Springs Conservation Area and Nature Center, about a mile away, along fields of brown soybean plants ready for harvest. Not much doing there. But when I turned the corner to the nature center, the world changed. There is a reconstructed tallgrass prairie, mostly made up of Little Bluestem which now is all brown. The prairie pieces abut on dense mixed hardwoods that slide down to the Sangamon. The first birds I saw were a couple of immature Indigo Buntings immediately followed by a flyover Great Blue Heron. A short distance down the trail two White-tailed Deer bounded away. As I walked the trails I saw large numbers of Eastern Phoebes and more Indigo Buntings. I got a great look at a male Black-throated Green Warbler and heard Red-Bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. It took me a while, but I finally confirmed the juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker that posed just long enough for a decent look.

In all I saw 20 species in about an hour and ten minutes. By the numbers, the most of any one species that I saw (no surprise) were 36 Canada Geese. The second highest species was Indigo Bunting of which there were lots of juveniles. On my walk back to the house I passed a pond where there were two tame white ducks settled down on the lawn with a wild (I presume) American Black Duck in between them. There was also a Trump 2020 sign. Seemed like a theme going on, though I wasn’t quite sure what.

NEXT PROGRAM
Monday, October 18 at 7:15 pm via Zoom
Roy Rodriguez presents
Real or Perceived Barriers to Birding – Inclusion, Messaging and Mentoring

When it comes right down to it, birding is about people and their deep connection to the resource. The future of birding and conservation of wild spaces falls on all of us. How do we reach and cultivate new birders and naturalists who maybe don’t look, or sound like us? Join Texas Park Ranger, Roy J Rodriguez for a discussion on the optics and the reality of reaching out and connecting with new audiences and visitors.

Roy J. Rodriguez is a natural resource interpreter, consultant and environmental educator, working out of South Texas. He is an outspoken advocate fostering diversity among birders and is involved in numerous regional and international conservation endeavors. Roy’s twenty years as an international tour operator and birding guide has taken him across North America and from the Arctic Circle to the shores of the Yellow Sea. He is Lead Instructor for the National Hispanic Environmental Council’s Environmental Training Institute Scholarships, Presenter for the Changing the Face of American Birding Diversity Conferences and sat on the Diversity Committee with the US Fish & Wildlife Service’s Birder’s Initiative. Roy lives in Pharr, Texas with his wife Marisa Oliva and their two young naturalists: Alex, 9 and Julia, 7. He works for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department as Lead Interpreter out of Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park & World Birding Center in Mission, Texas.

COMING PROGRAMS
December 13, 2021. HBC Members’ Meeting.
EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT AND WORKSHOPS

The Education Committee held 2 very successful virtual sessions in September. We had a total of 77 participants combined for the workshops.

On September 8th, Scott Surner gave a very informative talk on warblers a birder might see locally and in migration this fall. Members learned a lot and enjoyed Scott’s presentation style which is always educational and entertaining. He then led a Warbler Field Trip for the Club a week later.

On September 16th, Dan Russell, former professor at Springfield College and hawk watching enthusiast, led us through the process of identifying those migrating raptors. He covered the similarities and differences between the buteos, accipiters, falcons, eagles, osprey, and vultures. The timing was perfect as many members followed up with a trip to Skinner or Mt. Tom.

Our programs are now recorded and available at the Hampshire Bird Club website at https://hampshirebirdclub.org/program-videos/

Upcoming program

Wednesday, October 6, 6:30 p.m. – 8 p.m. Sparrows with Scott Surner

Once again Scott is presenting on sparrows as we prepare to identify them in the field. Some of us remember most of what he shared last fall, but, of course, not all the wonderful field marks that help us tell these little, brown birds apart from each other. The photography alone is worth attending this workshop.

Do-It-Yourself Field Trips

On Tuesday, September 7, 12 Club members shared their findings from their exploration of Nonotuck Park in Easthampton in July and August to report on their successes in finding the target birds for the summer: Chipping Sparrow, Cedar Waxwing, Tree Swallow, Northern Flicker, and Pileated Woodpecker. If you would like to participate for the current site or next month’s site, see the note in the Field Trip section below.

News from the Education Committee

I have thoroughly enjoyed working as the Education Committee Chair for the last year and a half as the members have been very helpful and hard-working. I would like to thank Laura Beltran, Lesley Farlow, Bruce Hart, Janice Jorgensen, Sebastian Moreno, Jan Ortiz, Halie Parker, Hannah Schwartz, and Jeremy Spool for all their ideas, contributions, and work on the committee. I think we provided an essential service to the membership during the pandemic, and I am sure the work will continue. I recently joined the HBC Board and became the Field Trip Chair so I don’t feel I can continue with the Education Committee. Janice Jorgensen and Lesley Farlow have agreed to finish out my term as Co-chairs of the Committee. Jim Lafley

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Please join me in welcoming these first-time members: Melissa Aldrich, Holland; Todd Allen, Shelburne; Emily Breon, Amherst; Tammis Coffin, Lenox; Deirdre Curran & Wayne Duke, Florence; Frances D'Amico, Meriden CT; Kristen Elmes & Lucy Leete, Ashfield; Nancy Flam, Northampton; Beth Goldstein, Northampton; Kalpesh Krishna, Amherst; Louise Levy, Amherst; Dianne McLane, Easthampton; Cynthia Monahan, Florence; Kelly R. Novak; Amherst; Jessica Plaut and Steve & Callum Dunn, Amherst; Abigail Rogers-McKee, Great Barrington; Hilary Russell & Ken Pransky; Marlene Sauer, Amherst; Devon Whitney-Smith, Conway; and Valerie Woodring, Kirk Woodring, Ashley Telega & Matthew Telega, South Deerfield.

A question to all members: would you be interested in joining a list serve of HBC members who either need, or can offer, the occasional ride to club events? Or are you someone who knows how and would be willing to set up such a listserve? We’re not meeting in person yet, of course, but field trips are
happening now and eventually we can indeed resume in-person meetings. It would be nice to have a rideshare program in place when the time comes. Thank you.

And thanks to the many returning members who have already sent their renewals. If you’re not among them, I hope you will renew soon! Best, Lissa.

Lissa Ganter, membership@hampshirebirdclub.org

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Field trips remain for **HBC members only** and are **limited to 10 participants and up to 2 leaders**. Members are no longer restricted to only 1 trip this fall so please review the list and contact fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org if you are interested in signing up for a trip. The following additional rules apply this fall due to the continuing Covid situation: 1) All field trip leaders and participants must be fully vaccinated and required to wear a mask when asked (possibly in carpool situations) and be aware of maintaining a safe social distance during the event, 2) field trips are for **Hampshire Bird Club Members only** and 3) participants will receive specific information about their trip directly from the leader once registration has been completed.

**Saturday, October 16, 7:30 to 9:30 am. Arcadia Meadows.** Jim Lafley and Derek Allard will be searching for late migrants, sparrows, and raptors. We will meet at the parking lot on the Northampton side of the bridge in the Arcadia Meadows. (easy)

**Sunday, October 24, 8:00 to 10:00 am. Pine Grove Conservation Area, Northampton.** Laura Beltran and Jim Lafley will be searching for sparrows, finches, thrushes, raptors, and late warblers in this recently acquired Conservation Area. Meet along Old Wilson Road at the sign for the area. (easy)

**Sunday, October 31. Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area and Lake Champlain Valley.** All day. Mike Locher, (413) 585-5864 or mlocher@yahoo.com, will be leading this trip into Vermont in search of Snow Geese, ducks, and raptors. Meet at the Stop & Shop in Northampton (228 King St.) at 5:00 am. (easy to moderate)

**Saturday, November 13. Chris Ellison Memorial East Quabbin Trip.** All day. Craig Allen leads our annual trip to the reservoir’s east side looking for waterfowl and winter finches. Dress warmly. This will be a carpooling event and you will be contacted once you are registered. (easy to moderate)

**Saturday, November 27. Plum Island or Cape Ann.** All day. Scott Surner is leading this trip to the coast for late fall and wintering birds including seabirds, waterfowl, and raptors. Dress for windy, cold weather and pack water and lunch. Meet at Surner Heating, 60 Shumway St., Amherst at 5:00 am for carpooling. (easy)

Our next **Do-It-Yourself Field Trip** will be on Monday, November 1, 7 p.m. on Zoom. Each month, an area is chosen, and the leaders describe the location and 5 target species for that area. Anyone interested has a month to visit the area on their own, record the species they see, and report back at the Zoom event the following month. For October, the location is Pine Grove Conservation Area in Northampton. The target birds are White-throated Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Dark-eyed Junco. If you’d like to join the October 4 Zoom and learn of the upcoming field trip, e-mail education@hampshirebirdclub.org.

If you have any questions, please contact Jim Lafley at jimlafley@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS COUNTING

It’s never too early to think about the annual Audubon Christmas Counts. This winter the MANO (Northampton) Christmas Bird Count will be held Sunday, December 19, 2021 and the MAQB (Quabbin) Christmas Bird Count will be held Saturday, January 1, 2022. More information will be forthcoming.

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

On Sept. 10th Ted Gilliland led a trip to Fort River for 10 members. He shared his extensive knowledge of identifying birds in the fall including small details to separate fall warblers. He learned some this from his past banding experiences. His patience and observation skills helped us find difficult to identify warblers. Two of the special birds were a Canada Warbler and a Philadelphia Vireo. It was a splendid trip with lots of information about the birds, their feathers and molting.

– Janice Jorgensen

The Wednesday Sept. 15th HBC trip had more of an August feel than a September one. It was muggy and a little buggy, but the 8 observers and I still managed to pull a few things out of the bushes at the West Meadows and Arcadia. The highlights for the morning outing were the 8 species of warblers, (Black & White, Tennessee, Nashville, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Magnolia and Yellow). All put on a good show except for the Nashville. Other highlights included Red shouldered Hawk, American Kestrel, a distant Merlin, Least Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireos, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Bluebirds and a heard-only Dickcissel. We ended the morning with 50 species of birds and very little loss of blood! I want to thank everyone who came out for the trip, Lori Williams, Lesley Farlow, Harlee Strauss, Sally Crawford, Susan Lewandowski, Steve Winn, Eric Morrissette and Marianna Massed.

– Scott Surner

BIRDABILITY WEEK

Birdability Week is October 18 – 24, 2021 (see https://www.birdability.org/birdability-week-2021)! Many birding groups throughout the Valley are offering various field trips throughout the week. Birdability Week is a celebration of birders with disabilities and other health concerns, and an opportunity to share resources and ideas to help the birding community be accessible, inclusive, and welcoming to everyone and every body! The Hampshire Bird Club is partnering with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to offer a birding field trip on Monday, October 18, 8 am – 10 am at Fort River in Hadley, which is part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish & Wildlife Refuge. Beginner birders are welcome, and binoculars will be available to those who need them. We will walk slowly for 1.1 miles on a path that alternates between crushed stone and wooden boardwalk. Strollers and wheelchairs are welcome. Benches and pull offs are available along the entire trail. The gravel parking lot is large with accessible parking spots towards the beginning of the trail. Here is a description from the USFW website: “The mile-long, fully accessible trail at Fort River allows visitors an up-close and personal look at diverse wildlife and habitats. The trail meanders through a series of successional habitats from grasslands to upland forest and provides important habitat for fish, grassland birds and a variety of herps and mammal species. The Fort River Division is located at 69 Moody Bridge Road, Hadley, Massachusetts. Please note, visitors can access the trail via the intersection at Bay Road. The South Maple Street intersection with Moody Bridge Road is closed to through traffic.” Additionally, Everyone Outdoors did a blog about visiting Fort River’s accessible trail, and you can read more here for a detailed description: https://everyoneoutdoors.blogspot.com/2020/06/revisiting-fort-river-accessible-trail.html. Space is limited to 10 participants, so please register by e-mailing fieldtrip@hampshirebirdclub.org.

A CHAT WITH LAURA BELTRAN

I spoke with Laura Beltran, who is on the HBC Board and Education Committee, in mid-September. We talked about her educational work, her interests and her childhood introduction to nature.

Newsletter: I know that you work at the Arcadia Mass Audubon sanctuary. What is it that you do there?
Laura Beltran: My title is Teacher/Naturalist and, being part of the education staff, I teach people of all different ages about the outdoors. I have subbed in with the preschool that we have. I go into elementary schools as well as middle and high schools. I do field trips, in-class teaching and adult programming like bird walks and other similar things. I do all sorts of things, including helping with big a big events like our folk festival is that is coming up this weekend.

N: Has your work always been at Arcadia?
LB: I've been at Arcadia for almost six years. When I started, I worked part time, and the other part time work I did was at Northfield Mountain helping with elementary school field trips there. It was a really long drive for me to get to Northfield Mountain, and, since I got more hours at Arcadia, I just stayed there. In 1995 I started at Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary in the Berkshires. I worked there for seven years as their education coordinator and then my husband switch careers and we ended up moving to Maine. We moved back to Massachusetts six years ago and I thought “Oh, I’m going to introduce myself to the neighbors,” so I went and knocked on my neighbor's door. I introduced myself, and we got talking about what I like to do. I found out that she was at the time working as one of the office people at Arcadia. I had forgotten that Arcadia was in Northampton. I think I mixed it up with Laughing Brook which is down in Hamden County. She suggested that I volunteer at Arcadia so the next day I went and volunteered. Patti Steinman was there. I had known Patty from years before, and so that's how it all got started. I started the first few months as a volunteer and then I was eventually hired.

N: You said that you visit elementary schools. Which ones do you usually visit, or is it all over the place?

LB: It's all over the place. I've gone into Littleville Elementary in Huntington, an elementary school in West Springfield, and elementary schools in Northampton and Easthampton, so we're all over the place. I have taught in high and middle schools. I did a middle school program this summer in Springfield. I have also taught in middle school in Northampton and at Hampshire Regional in Westhampton. I've also taught high school students.

N: The Hitchcock Center also does similar programming. Do you ever interact or collaborate with Hitchcock staff?

LB: I don't so much, although my co-workers definitely do. We've collaborated on certain things, especially when they have to do with the older grades. We also have collaborated on various events with Hitchcock.

N: Clearly, your whole career has had a nature focus and your work with HBC shows that you are interested in birds and bird watching. What is it that got you interested in nature and started you down this path?

LB: Oh gosh, I don't even remember.

N: You were born that way.

LB: I'm the third and youngest child. Years ago parents would have baby books to keep track of first words and all that sort of stuff. Because I was the youngest, the only thing that was written in my book was the time of day I was born and my birth weight. And it said “Laura loves animals.” The rest of the book has nothing in it, unlike my brother's that is completely full because he's the oldest and my sister's that is halfway full.

I can remember that I've always loved the outdoors. I grew up in the late 60s/early 70s when the trend was for families to go camping in the national parks. It was a big thing then – people would just pack up their station wagons and go. My family did. And so I grew up in the outdoors by hiking and camping and doing all that stuff, so I think my love of nature was really nurtured by my parents.

And then birding. My dad had a woodworking shop in our basement – it was his hobby. After reading Ranger Rick magazine where there were instructions to create a bird feeder, I went down into my dad’s woodworking shop and I built a one. I nailed it to the side of our house, right outside our kitchen window. I'm surprised my parents let me do that. I must have been about 10 years old. My mom bought bird seed and my whole family was totally amazed by the number of birds that we had in our yard. We had no idea. Ever since then I have been hooked. It was from years and years of just watching birds at bird feeders.

In college I did a whole project on birds at a feeder. I had this huge bird feeder that my brother had built that had different platforms and levels for the seed. My study in college was to see which birds would come to the highest platform, the middle platform and the ground feeders and compare them. I really didn't get into birding actively – out walking with binoculars – until my 20s. That happened because I was...
hiking with a friend and right in front of us landed a male Indigo Bunting. We said “What's that?” We just couldn't believe it. So then, then I knew that I had to look beyond just the feeders and look at birds that are migrating through.

In graduate school I took ornithology. That was totally fascinating, especially aerodynamics and flight, we did a lot of that. I have to admit that I wasn't a great graduate student. I didn't really have direction for where I wanted to go. One day in that class our TA announced that he was doing a research project in South America for his PhD, and if anyone would like to apply to join him… I applied that day. The work involved mist netting of birds in the tropical rainforest of Venezuela. I took a whole semester off just to do that. Since I had no direction of where I was going, I thought I might as well just go and do something fun. It was an incredible experience. It was phenomenal to mist net everything from hummingbirds to hawks. We were trying to find out the diversity of bird species in correlation with logging practices. It was great.

It also was interesting because I was the only woman living in a logging camp. The men just loved that I was there. They worshiped the ground I walked on. They would give me little gifts all the time and they just couldn't believe that a woman could go out and hike in the woods and survive. That was so culturally different than what they expected. We would cut our own trail with our machetes, and every night we'd have to sharpen them to make sure they were ready to cut trail the next day. I never had to sharpen mine because all the men said “No, no, that's not woman's work. Men have to sharpen the machete.” Meanwhile the TA that I went with just groaned and had to sharpen his own.

N: You've had more introduction to birding than many people who are asked about their start in it. For a lot of people their hook was the first time they saw a particular bird.

LB: I call them gateway birds. I think for me it is the Black-capped Chickadee. It is so charming. I think that the first time I saw a Black-capped Chickadee I thought “Oh my God. Birds are so cool.”

N: The virtual birding series that the Education Committee has been doing seems like it's pretty much your baby. Is that right?

LB: I feel like it was an idea from all of us. Jim [Lafley] took over the Education Committee and then Janice [Jorgensen], Jim and I just got to talking. Janice is so full of ideas and she said “We really need to connect. Maybe we should try to connect with each other once a week.” This was at the point during the pandemic when we were all supposed to stay home and only go to the grocery store.

Doing online workshops wasn't yet a thing, and so that was the idea that sparked the first get togethers. At that point HBC didn't have Zoom account so our sessions lasted only 40 minutes. Four or five people would log in from their back yards and report what they were seeing, like a woodpecker that had just come to a feeder or the Bluebirds that were nesting nearby. It was just a weekly event where we connected. One thing led to another, and the Education Committee decided to do these workshops. That's how it came to be.

I have to say it's been very helpful for me. Hosting the Zoom workshops and learning Zoom happened in a low stress environment. It was good practice for me for work where I now have to present virtually, and I have to know how to use these platforms. Being able to do all these workshops and learning the glitches and stuff has been great.

N: I listen to the public radio program Living on Earth on WAMC on Saturday mornings. The host Steve Curwood lists the associate producers at the end of each show, and one of them is Paloma Beltran. I have to ask: is she any relation to you?

LB: Beltran is a Spanish name. In some countries it is almost like Smith is here. Beltran is my husband's name, though he's not of Latin American or Hispanic descent. And I don't know of any relationship to Paloma.

N: What are the kinds of things do you do to keep yourself amused when you aren't working or birding?

LB: I've been learning the guitar. I take lessons every week. I'm trying to play electric blues, but I also do a little bit of acoustic. I spend a lot of time doing that because I love playing the guitar,
but that does not mean I’m good at it. It has been a really nice way to use some creative energy. I use Garage Band a lot to jam and create music that way.

I do a lot of that, and then the other thing I do is digital storytelling. I make short – two or three minute – nature videos every once in a while. I have a YouTube channel where I put them up, and I also post them up on Facebook sometimes.

They are on whatever's happening that I notice out in nature. I record it and then I do a two or three minute video on some fun nature facts about you know, whatever it is. I did something on Hooded Mergansers one time. Subjects might be a flower that's blooming or an insect I see. This started through Mass Audubon early, early on in the pandemic. People were putting out educational videos, and I did it a few for Mass Audubon. They decided to do something different, so I just continued on my own.

I am on the HBC Board and also the board of the Broad Brook Coalition that oversees the Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area in Northampton. I'm thinking of doing videos for them for their social media presence to show what the coalition is doing.

N: I bet that our readers would like to find your work. How would they locate it?
LB: For YouTube just search “Nature Investigations” or “Nature Investigations with Laura Beltran.” That should get you there.

N: Do you have a favorite birding spot in the valley or elsewhere?
LB: That’s a hard question. It really depends on what types of birds I’m looking for.

N: What about beyond the valley?
LB: I would say anywhere in Maine. I’ve traveled all across the country, and I would say there are two favorite places I love to go, whether it's birding or not. They are Maine and the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. I love those places. Gettysburg was pretty cool too. I went to Gettysburg one spring, and that was amazing both for birding and for history. I was on eBird at the time and I saw that Mike Locher was also in the area posting bird sightings. It turns out he goes to Gettysburg every spring. Small world.

THE HBC QUIZ
Did you know that the Hampshire Bird Club has an official quizmaster? Neither did I until about 5 minutes ago when I decided that we need one. Our Official, Okey-dokey, Grand Pooh-bah Quizmaster is Professor David Spector. He has produced a substantial and challenging set of quiz questions that you can use to exercise your mind, amaze your friends and pass along to unsuspecting strangers. Here are the first set of questions from the category “Field Marks and Identification”. The answers to these questions will appear in the November newsletter if you are lucky. You will get more questions as space allows in future newsletters. Enjoy!

1) By carefully looking at an American Robin here in Western Massachusetts one can be reasonably confident that one is not on the West Coast. What feature provides this information?
2) What local wood-warbler sings “Trees, trees, murmuring trees”?
3) Two species that one might see in Western Massachusetts, if one is extremely lucky, share the field mark (admittedly not the most obvious field mark on either) of a white tail with gray central tail feathers. What are they?
4) If in March I see an American Robin with an all-dark throat and very dark head and back, where might I guess that bird is headed to breed?

Please renew your membership now if you intend to do that and haven’t gotten around to it yet. And choose the online newsletter option to save the club some dough and to get the newsletter within 15 minutes of its publication on the club website rather than waiting for printing, mailing and delivery.

Spoil a good walk: go birding!          newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org          Dave Gross, Editor