



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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THIS MONTH WE HAVE AN INTRODUCTION TO A MOST INTRIGUING PROGRAM, COMING FIELD TRIPS, AND A HOST OF CONSERVATION-RELATED MATERIAL TO GET YOU INSPIRED ABOUT THE PLANET AND ITS FEATHERY DENIZENS.

PROGRAMS

Monday, February 13 at 7:30 PM

Gregor Yanega speaks about Hummingbird Bills

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

Should bad weather force a cancellation, it will be announced on WHMP 1400 AM radio.

Eating is essential to the survival of any animal, so it is not surprising that birds may change over time (evolve) based on how they feed. Amongst other things, Gregor studies how the feeding machinery of a bird changes according to what it feeds on, and how it feeds on it.

Hummingbirds are nectarivorous birds whose narrow beaks are famously thought to have evolved to match the shapes of the flowers they pollinate. Yet, because the floral nectars they consume are lacking in the amino acids hummingbirds need for protein synthesis, hummingbirds must also consume small animals such as insects, spiders, and other arthropods. Gregor studied whether beak shape affected how successfully seven different hummingbird species captured insects. He began with two questions.

Firstly: *"How do hummingbirds catch and transport arthropods?"*

Secondly: *"Given that most aerial insectivores have short beaks with wide gapes, is a hummingbird's long, narrow, curved bill the wrong tool for catching arthropods?"*

Gregor will reveal the answers to these questions and more dark secrets about some of the world's tiniest killers on February 13. See you there!

Here, in the first person, is Gregor's biography.

"I was born in Cape Canaveral, Florida on April 9, 1970 while Apollo 13 was stuck up in the sky. My dad was working for the space program at the time and he said it was a really nice week, as he puts it, when both payloads arrived home safely. Since then I've been interested in biology. I grew up in the Pacific Northwest and I received my BS from the Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington. In the eight years following the completion of my undergraduate degree, I studied seabirds, shorebirds, land birds, sharks, monkeys, bats, and reef fish in seven countries and on four continents. I also took up printmaking and bookbinding. Alas I yearned for the trappings that come from a steady job, so I went to graduate school. I am currently finishing my doctoral dissertation research at the University of Connecticut where I have studied the biomechanics of insectivory in hummingbirds with Dr. Margaret Rubega for six years. 'Ad astra per aspera' ('to the stars through our labors')."

Coming Up

March 13, 2006. David Spector. Buy, Buy, Birdbook!

April 17, 2006. Harry Vogel. Common Loons.

May 8, 2006. John Van de Graaff. Peregrinations of a Bird Photographer.

Editorial

There is (fortunately) a curious tension in birding between objectivity and caring. During the wee small hours of the Christmas count this year, I stopped to play a screech owl tape at a traditional spot. No owls had responded a week earlier, and now here I was broadcasting intruder-like calls into the habitat again. But there was a Christmas Count to be done, and like a dutiful citizen scientist I had numbers to collect. I was asking, "Is there an owl here?"

I played the tape twice, each time sifting through the ever-more-pervasive human background noise for a response that did not come. I got back in the car. One less owl for the count, and no time to waste. I set off toward the next location, but now I was worried about the owl. Had it failed to make it through the previous year? Had it fallen victim to a Great Horned cousin while wailing its mournful response to last year's tape? I went back and played the tape one more time. This time, I was not looking for data, I was asking, "Are you alright?" And this time, an owl answered. I turned off the intruder, and listened awhile to the gentle voice of a Screech Owl that had made it through another year.

Owlers will tell you that owls are notoriously reticent, and frequently withhold their responses for many minutes. That would be the rational explanation of what happened. I prefer to wish it was because I changed the question.

FIELD TRIPS

100% of this month's **Reports** were not written by the editor!

Cape Ann

On **Saturday, January 7**, nine members had a delightful day on **Cape Ann**. Unlike many past years, the weather was perfect. Temperatures ranged around thirty degrees with sun and clear blue skies and light wind. We began the day a Dunback Meadows in Lexington. **Long-eared** and **Saw-whet** owls had been reported there. We saw both! The Saw-whet thanks to the amazing spotting by Sally Hills. We're all still shaking our heads that she could spot that bird. At Cape Ann we ran a counter clockwise route around the edge of the Cape. In Gloucester we saw Iceland, Glaucous and Black-headed gulls at the Fish Pier. We then had Black Guillemot at Bass Rocks and Harlequin Ducks and two(!) drake **King Eiders** at Cathedral Ledges. At Andrews Point we observed a distant bird that most observers there called a non-breeding Common Murre. It was a bit beyond my abilities so we left it **Murre sp.** In the wooded section of Halibut Point we saw some **Bobwhite** below some feeders and, perhaps the highlight of the day a pair of **Bohemian Waxwings** in the afternoon sunlight side by side with Cedar Waxwings. We saw and heard these birds thanks to the efforts of the Bill Drummond group. Thanks everyone for a great day.

Bob Bieda

Coming Trips

Please see also the Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule sent with the January newsletter.

Saturday, February 11. South Shore: Plymouth and Falmouth. All day. Al Richards veers south of Boston to find winter's ducks, gulls, and owls. Dress warmly. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information. (E)

Wednesday, February 15. Midweek half day in the Connecticut River Valley. Morning. Harvey Allen (413-253-7963) scours the local area in search of birds, and shows off his favorite birding sites along the way. Meet at 8:00 a.m. across from Atkin's Farm (on the corner of Rt. 116 and Bay Road, Amherst). (E)

Saturday, March 4. Plum Island. All day. Geoff LeBaron will seek out late-winter specialties like Rough-legged Hawks, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Glaucous Gulls, and Snowy Owls. Dress warmly. For meeting information, call Geoff (413-268-9281) as the date approaches. (E)

LIBRARY

HBC has a substantial library, located at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst.

Hours are those of the Hitchcock Center:

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. from Tuesday through Friday, and

9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday.

The collection is catalogued on-line at www.hampshirebirdclub.org.

The library contains birding resources in various media, including field guides, bird-finding guides to almost every major birding destination in the U.S., and overseas, natural histories, periodicals and videos. Items can be signed out and borrowed for a period of up to one month, or longer by arrangement. Henry is happy to bring items to meetings, if you give him a few days in advance. You can reach him at (413) 549 3722.

POT LUCK THANK YOU! (belated, but that is purely the editor's fault)

The HBC would like to thank everyone who worked so very hard to help make our annual Pot-Luck Compilation Supper such a great success. This year there were approximately 60 birders present to partake in the goodies and to contribute their sightings. Although the 'beak' count may have been down from last year, it still was a good year to be birding. With the continued assistance of dedicated birders such as **Sally Hills, Helga Beatty, Mary Alice and Bill Wilson, Christa Glatter, Joanne Parker, Bruce Callahan** and **YOU**, I am sure that our 06 Pot-Luck Compilation Supper will see an even greater turn out, and the subsequent compilation will feature even better birds. During the coming year the HBC will be soliciting all of its members to take an active role in supporting this worthwhile annual project so, as they say, it will really 'take wings and fly'.

Sue Emerson, ad hoc 'Pot Luck Coordinator'

JOIN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT!

FEBRUARY 17-20, 2006!

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) returns for its ninth season February 17-20, 2006. Sponsored by National Audubon Society, the Cornell laboratory of Ornithology and Wild Birds Unlimited, the GBBC is part of an effort to assess the abundance, distribution and dynamics of North American winter bird populations and to provide answers to such questions as:

- the influence of snow and cold temperatures on bird populations
- the location of winter finches and other irruptive species
- the late winter movements of songbird and waterfowl species.

In 2005, participants sent in more than 52,000 checklists, with a record-breaking 613 species and more than 6 million birds counted. When these data are combined with those from the Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch, they provide a broad source of scientific information about North American winter bird populations. Each year these data are collected makes them more important and valuable.

Each participant (or team) in the GBBC tallies the highest number of each bird species they see together at one time on one or more days of the count. No fee or prior registration is required. Reports can be made from public lands, local parks and backyards, but the results from each site should be reported separately. Whether you report the species coming to your feeder, or to some more exotic location, your data will help. At the end of each day, participants tally their totals online at: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>, where sightings maps, lists, and charts can be seen as the count progresses. Information and tally sheets will be available at the upcoming HBC meeting on February 13. This year for the first time, Audubon and the Laboratory of Ornithology are launching an element of friendly competition: awards will be given to localities that submit the most checklists, record the greatest number of species, or count the highest number of birds.

For more information on participating in the GBBC, see www.birdsource.org/gbbc/howto.html

CONSERVATION

The HBC board and the Conservation Committee would like you to be aware of the following news.

Endangered species Act Under Attack!

Last September, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill deceptively entitled the *Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act* (HR 3824) which will virtually destroy the Endangered Species Act of 1973, effectively dismantling the nation's safety net for plants and wildlife on the brink of extinction. The bill will come up for action by the Senate within the next couple of months. The National Audubon Society is coordinating a campaign to convince the Senate to uphold the Endangered Species Act of 1973. If you wish to add your voice to this effort, please consider communicating your opinion to Senators Kerry and Kennedy. While consideration of the House bill in the Senate has not yet been scheduled, it will be useful to write as soon as possible. A sample letter and contact information will be available at the February 13th HBC meeting.

HELP FOR SICK BIRDS

American Goldfinches and **Pine Siskins** have been showing evidence of disease in New England this winter. Typically, sick birds will show **reduced activity** and **will fluff up their plumage** in an attempt to save energy. Birds examined by Tufts Veterinary School have been dually diagnosed with **avian conjunctivitis** and **Salmonella poisoning**. Avian conjunctivitis is typically spread when infected birds with weeping eyes leave infectious exudates around the windows in tube feeders. Uninfected birds then come into contact with the exudates when feeding. *Salmonella* bacteria are typically spread through fecal material in tray-type feeders.

If you observe sick birds using or near your feeders, please do the following:

- 1) *Take down all seed feeders and keep them down for two weeks. Suet feeders may be left up. When the feeders are put back up, it is best to use dish-type feeders for the balance of the season. Stock the feeders with small amounts of seed and clean them regularly.*
- 2) *Stop using tray feeders where fecal material may accumulate.*
- 3) *Make sure your birdbath is cleaned regularly and always has fresh water.*

ARCADIA PROGRAMS

EAGLES AT QUABBIN: *Clif Read, Patti Steinman.*

Saturday, Feb.4, 10 am-2 pm.

CHANGES IN MASSACHUSETTS BIRD POPULATIONS:

Wayne Peterson. Tuesday, Feb.7, 7-9 pm.

WINTER BIRDS : *John Green Jr.*

Saturday, Feb. 25; 10 am-2:00 pm.

For details and registration for all Arcadia programs, please contact Mass Audubon at Arcadia at (413) 584-3009 ex 12, or visit our website at massaudubon.org and click on the Connecticut River Valley.

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

TAMING THE BEAST: REDUCING ENERGY USE AT HOME: Peter Talmage, Energy and Design
Thursday, February 9, 7 p.m.

SUSTAINABLE SUNDAYS: CRAFTING A SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE: Ted Watt: Naturalist/Educator
Sunday, February 12, 1-3 p.m.

THE ENERGY PROBLEM AND SCIENTIFIC SOLUTIONS: Dick Stein, UMass
Thursday, March 2, 7 p.m.

SUSTAINABLE SUNDAYS: MAPLE SYRUP AND THE SIMPLE LIFE: Jeff Field and Family
Saturday, March 11, 1-3 p.m.

VERACRUZ RIVER OF RAPTORS SLIDE SHOW
Jan Ortiz and Scott Surner, River of Raptors Trip Coordinators
Thursday, February 2, 7 - 8:30 p.m.

ENGLEWINDS ENSEMBLE PERFORMS BUTTERFLY MUSIC
McCulloch Auditorium at Pratt Hall, Mount Holyoke College
Friday, February 10, 8 p.m.

NATURAL HISTORY OF CHOCOLATE: Bob Heiss, "*Cooks Shop Here*" (previously *The Coffee Gallery*)
Wednesday, February 22, 7 p.m.

TRACKING TURKEY AND GROUSE: Alan Emond, Little Cree Spy Tracking and Farmer
Saturday, February 25, 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

SPRING BIRDING COURSE: Scott Surner, Instructor
Evening Classes (9): March 1, 8, 15, 22, April 5, 12, 26, May 3, 10; 6:30-8:30 p.m.
Field Trips (10): March 4, 25, April 8, 15, 22, 29, May 6, 13, 20, June 3; 7 a.m. – noon

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE: CO-EXISTING WITH COYOTES: Trina Moruzzi, MassWildlife Biologist
Thursday, March 9, 7 p.m.

A FLY IN THE OINTMENT: WHEN BIOCONTROL MEETS BIODIVERSITY
George "Jeff" Boettner, UMass Entomologist
Also part of the **Valley Environmental Educational Collaborative (VEEC)** program series.
Held at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, Amherst
Tuesday, February 28, 7 p.m.

For details and registration for all Hitchcock programs, please contact the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, 525 South Pleasant St., Amherst MA 01002. Telephone (413) 256 6006, or on the web at www.hitchcockcenter.org.

OPERATION BACKYARD RECOVERY

On the Mississippi Coast

Our Treasurer, Janice Jorgensen, through her work with FEMA last year, came across little-publicized ecological devastation in the gulf region, in addition to the now well-documented human losses from Hurricane Katrina. She described entire landscapes apparently devoid of birds, and bird habitats wiped clean. She also came across **Judy Toups**, of the **Mississippi Coast Audubon Society**, who sent us this report on grass-roots efforts to restore bird habitat through the efforts of individual home-owners.

*"The catalyst for **Operation Backyard Recovery** (that name came later) was the overwhelming number of migrating Ruby-throated Hummingbirds that arrived in the gulf counties on the day following Katrina's passage. By then, most nectar feeders had been destroyed by the wind, and flowering plants were non-existent. Moreover, there were no retail outlets at which a feeder could be purchased.*

As soon as phone service was available, I made calls to friends and associates in areas like Jackson, Mississippi. A flood of used feeders followed. As soon as there were feeders to offer, I spread the word via my weekly birding column that these were available, and this set the stage for subsequent events.

Through the generosity of a great many people and businesses, upwards of 700 feeders were distributed, along with field guides and other feeding accoutrements to feeders set up in people's backyards. Boards from uprooted fences are ideal for making nesting boxes. "Birdhouse clinics" run by Mississippi Coast Audubon Society and Audubon Mississippi are instructing homeowners on how to construct birdhouses to put in their backyards. These are helping restore some nesting habitat for cavity-nesters, most of whose natural woodland cavities have been lost to the storm.

Operation Backyard Recovery plans to continue, with installations of Purple Martin nesting boxes in public areas traditionally inhabited by the species. In February, an Arbor Day giveaway of native trees is scheduled, and a flowering/fruitletting/berry-bearing plant swap/sale/giveaway is being planned. Donations have come from all over the nation, and further funds are urgently needed."

To find out more, you can visit Mississippi Coast Audubon at www.mscoastaudubon.org. There are links there to the Mississippi Audubon website, which is collaborating in Operation Backyard Recovery.

To contribute to Operation Backyard Recovery, send a check made out to "Audubon Mississippi" to:

Audubon Mississippi

285 Plains Road

Holly Springs, MS 38635

Annotate the check "Operation Backyard Recovery"

Good News!

Manomet Conservation Efforts Extend To South Texas Salt Lakes.

Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences is a jewel of ornithological research and conservation in Massachusetts. The observatory is a key player in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN).

One of the newest sites to join the WHSRN encompasses the South Texas Salt Lakes. These lakes are the **winter home of more than 2,000 Long-billed Curlews**, by some estimates as much as 10% of the world's entire population of this species. Long-billed Curlews are a highly imperiled species. The South Texas Salt Lakes are partly contained in the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge complex that runs along the U.S.-Mexican border. The remaining lakes are privately owned by a cooperating landholder.

Source; Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences: The Nature Report. www.manomet.org/naturereport/

(Maybe) Good News

Teetering Knots Being Considered for Endangered Species Listing!!

Need a reason to support the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (see "Conservation" on page 4)? Read this!

Every fall, when we venture out onto New South Beach, birders alone (amongst the teeming hordes of clammers, power boaters and beach-goers) pay attention to dumpy, robin-sized shorebirds with fading apricot breasts. We pay attention because these unassuming creatures are on their way from the furthest reaches of the Arctic to their wintering grounds in Tierra del Fuego, at the extreme southern tip of South America. Recently, our attention is sharpened because the subspecies *Callitris canutus rufa* is teetering on the edge of extinction.

If the good luck resurrection story of the century is the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, then the "Chance to Get It Right" story has to be that of the Red Knot. This is one of those rare cases where we can watch a species sliding towards the edge, but we know precisely what has to be done, and we have some very heavy hitters going in to bat for the birds.

The *rufa* subspecies of Red Knot migrates northward in the spring. Birds have only a few critical stopovers to feed on their way to the northern extremes of North America. The last of these stops is Delaware Bay on the mid-Atlantic coast, "chosen" (through generations of trial and error by the knots) because of its abundant but singular food supply. Horseshoe crabs congregate in huge numbers at the high water mark during spring tides to lay their eggs in the sand. These fat-rich packages provide the concentrated source of fuel needed by the knots to sustain the result of their long flight.

Unfortunately, Horseshoe Crabs are also used as bait by fishermen in the bay, and have been seriously over-harvested over the past decade as a result. **Red Knot numbers have declined by 80% in the last ten years**, and the science points to the dwindling food resources along the shores of Delaware Bay as the culprit. Despite short-term moratoria and increased regulation of the crab harvest on both sides of the bay, the alarming decline continues, as it is projected to do for several years even if crab populations begin to recover. **Some models predict extinction by 2010 if the current rate of decline continues.**

The really big recent news is that a coalition of groups including New Jersey Audubon, National Audubon, Defenders of Wildlife, and the American Bird Conservancy (amongst others) petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in July, 2005 to grant an emergency **Endangered Species** listing for the Red Knot. The petition is currently under review, and, if the listing occurs, much needed regulatory muscle and funding will be brought to bear. ***This presumes the continued existence of an effective Endangered Species Act!!***

If you want to help or simply remain better informed, you can sign on to New Jersey Audubon's Online Action Alert network (a free on-line communication network) for the latest news and suggestions for action. Visit www.njaudubon.org, and click on the "On-line Action Center" link. They will send you lots of their publicity materials as well as the knot alerts, but I hope you agree it is worth the slight inconvenience.

Sources: New Jersey Audubon Quarterly Conservation Report: Nov. 2005. www.njaudubon/conservation/
Bird Conservation Alliance: www.birdconservationalliance.org



Well, I have done all the disseminating of information I am going to do for this month. I hope at least someone finds it useful.

Until next time, talk softly and carry a big scope!

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