



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

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December, 2006

As the calendar year comes to a close, 'tis the season to expect brisk birding in land- and seascapes wiped crystal clean by the cold. Winter birding has a way of rewarding those willing to venture into the snowy wilds. Our collective global climate experiment seems to be revising our expectations of winter on a daily basis, but I for one hope there will be a few traditional winters left. The HBC board is busy as usual, planning programs far into the future, and trying to revive our slate of overnight trips, which has been a little thin in recent years. Club stalwarts are also beginning to plan for the club's twenty-fifth anniversary, which is coming up soon.

In this edition there will be:

- a description of this month's program and the slate for the next few months,
- two trip reports and a description of the last trip for the calendar year,
- last minute information on the Northampton Christmas Count,
- some gleanings from the ornithological literature,
- a welcome to some new members, and
- a directory of board members and office holders of the Hampshire Bird Club.

As always, I hope you find some of it useful!

Attached, you will find a directory of club members to facilitate birding-related communications between us all. Thanks to Sue Emerson and Mary Alice Wilson for the time and effort spent to bring the list to us.

PROGRAMS

Monday, December 11 at 7:30 PM

Members Meeting

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

First on the program is our Annual Members Slide and Photo Show.

If you have slides and/or digital images with a natural history theme from the recent, or even more distant past that you would like to share with others, please collect ten or so of these to present at the meeting. Depending on the number of people who want to present, you may be able to get away with more than ten images, but please be ready to limit the number to ten if necessary.

Please bring conventional slides or digital images on either CD or flash stick. They will be loaded into David Gross's computer prior to the show. Please be prepared to narrate your material.

In the past we have seen some unbelievably beautiful and sometimes whimsical images from the collections of our own members. It helps us recognize the depth of world experience and photographic ability that lurks within our humble bird club. Please contribute if you can!

The second item on the agenda will be planning for the Christmas Count. This is left to individual teams. Please check with your area leader to see whether you will meet at the members meeting.

Coming Programs

January 8, 2007. Geoff LeBaron.
February 12, 2007. Elijah Goodwin.
March 12, 2007. Wayne Petersen.

The History and Future of the Christmas Bird Count.
Song Learning In Icterids.
Massachusetts "Important Bird Areas" Program.

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

Berkshire Lakes. November 5.

Tom Gagnon, Bruce Callahan, Joe Wicinski, Bill Brenner, Al Richards, Bob and Lura Bieda, Lori Rogers, John Rogers and David Peake-Jones went in search of Bartlett's donuts. Just for appearance, we stopped by a number of the Berkshire Lakes and checked out the nice selection of waterfowl in evidence.

Our first stop was a rather deserted Moran Wildlife management area in Windsor, where some of the group caught distant glimpses of a **Northern Shrike**. Winding our way from there to Cleveland Brook Reservoir, we found a mid-molt Common Loon holding solitary court. Our next stop was the East Branch of the Housatonic River. This too was almost deserted, except for a couple of Mallards and a few gulls. As some of those present will remember, Tom's hope for a Wood Duck did not give rise to anything.

We made various stops along the length of the Cheshire Reservoir. Almost before we saw anything else we were treated to a **Merlin** perched at close range, first espied by Lori. The long-sought Wood Duck eventually appeared, along with one Black Scoter, a Pied billed Grebe, fifteen (15) Lesser Scaup, one American Coot and a few Hooded Mergansers.

Pontoosuc Lake was (aside from Mudd Pond) by far the most populace place for ducks for the day. There were almost 200 Hooded Mergansers, a good number of Common Mergansers, three (3) **Red-breasted Mergansers**, great looks at a **Red-necked Grebe** and two Horned Grebes, and several American Widgeon. From the cove and causeway at Pontoosuc, we had three Gadwall and watched a beautiful adult **Bonaparte's Gull** bobbing over the shallows, looking for all the world like someone was dangling it by a string.

Onota Lake was unremarkable save for more Hooded Mergansers. Bartlett's donuts were yummy. Our donut quaffing was perused (no doubt with derision) by a Bald Eagle perched in a tree nearby. From Mudd Pond we could make out over **900 Ring-necked Ducks** and **70 Ruddy Ducks** lurking at the far end of the pond. Finally, at Stockbridge Bowl we saw our only shorebird - a gangly **Greater Yellowlegs** - as well as our only Bufflehead.

David Peake-Jones



Turkey Trot to Cape Ann. November 24

Bob Bieda led a group of us to Cape Ann and Plum Island for the annual **Turkey Trot**. Harlequin Ducks abounded in the crashing surf at Cathedral Rocks. Moving from there to Andrews Point, we found a strong off-shore breeze which misted up our optics, and seemed to auger well for some inshore pelagic species. We were immediately treated to a parade of **Northern Gannets**, some quite close, in all conceivable plumages. A number of **Black-legged Kittiwakes** danced above the waves further out but did not come in close. A steady stream of Scoters, of all stripes and protuberances made their way around the point and passed in front of us. Alcids flashed past at that infuriating mid-range where it was almost possible to identify them. A solitary **Razorbill** eventually appeared amongst the rollers at close range.

The annual resident **Eared Grebe** consorted with a great number of both Horned- and Red-necked Grebes off Niles Beach. The calm waters of Niles Pond sheltered a beautiful flock of dazzling white **Bonaparte's Gulls**, which occasionally got up and wheeled across the sky as one. Here we also had an **Iceland Gull**, some **Ring-necked-**, and **Ruddy Ducks**, and a **Pied-billed Grebe**.

We made our way to Plum Island, and in the quiet calm of a gentle twilight; we struggled to pick up the muted colors of a nice band of ducks at the salt pannes. We were able to find **Green-winged Teal**, **Gadwall**, and

The Turkey Trot (continued)

American Widgeon. There was no sign of the Green-tailed Towhee that had been reported earlier in the week, but as we surveyed the evening beauty of the marsh, a passing harrier spooked a **Short-eared Owl** from the marsh, which flew in to the shelter of the dunes. Fortunately, it returned moments later and perched quite close to the road, enabling most of the group to get wonderful looks at the bird.

David Peake-Jones

Coming Trips

Sunday, December 10. Moran Wildlife Management Area. Half day. Mike Locher goes to Moran WMA to look for Northern Shrikes, crossbills, and other northern species. In the event of difficult snow conditions, the site may be changed. Wear boots, and dress for the weather. Call Mike (413-585-5864) for meeting information and details. (M)

NORTHAMPTON CHRISTMAS COUNT

Sunday December 17, 2006

IF you are organized and ready to go, great!

IF you have lost the information so carefully and personally prepared for you, go to hampshirebirdclub.org, click on Christmas Count and there will be copies of all the forms.

IF you are interested and have not yet signed up, contact **Jan Ortiz** or **Mary Alice Wilson** or come to the December HBC meeting.

Christmas Count Compilation Pot Luck Supper

There is still time to sign up to bring a delicious dish to add to the much sought after meal after a hard day in the cold field - hopefully not rainy or snowy. The potluck begins at 4:30 PM on December 17 at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment.

We are in need of salads, desserts, soups, a loaf or two of bread and butter. There will be time to sign up at the next meeting. Please see Sally Hills, Helga Beatty, Joanne Parker (my wonderful elves) or myself...Thanks, Sue Emerson.

Snake Skins Deter Egg Predators

It has long been observed that some birds use snakeskins in their nests. Experimental evidence now suggests that, at least in the case of Great Crested Flycatchers using Rat Snake skins in their nests, that this does, in fact, deter predators, especially flying squirrels. The experimenters found that 20% of artificial nests without snakeskins incorporated in them were preyed upon in the field, whereas none of those with snakeskins built in suffered predation.

Reference:

Medlin EC, Risch TS (2006) AN EXPERIMENTAL TEST OF SNAKE SKIN USE TO DETER NEST PREDATION. The Condor: Vol. 108, No. 4 pp. 963-965

Welcome New Members!!

Susy Shure:

Chesterfield

Nancy & Robert First:

Northampton

That's it for this month. Until next time, walk softly and carry a big scope!