



Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org
Volume 23, No. 3

November, 2006

In this edition:

- an introduction to our **programs** for this month and the immediate future;
- **field trip** reports and coming trips
- a plug for the **Christmas Count**
- a recap of **Reuben Yosef's talk in October**
- **Hitchcock, Great Falls, and Broad Brook Coalition** programs
- news of a **major local land conservation effort** and a **tragedy in the Great Lakes**
- **an appeal from the librarian** and one or two other snippets.

I hope you find it all useful!

PROGRAMS

Monday, November 13 at 7:30 PM

Greg Budney: The Origin of the Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

By presenting some of the most spectacular animal sounds in the natural world, this program explores strategies of animal communication. We will explore the role that sound plays in the lives of creatures as diverse as tree-hoppers, whales, and birds.

Greg Budney is the curator of the Macaulay Library (formerly the Library of Natural Sounds) at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. He has been at the Lab of Ornithology since 1980, first as an archivist, later as the assistant curator, and, beginning in 1989, as the curator. Mr. Budney has collected audio recordings for the Macaulay Library in Africa, Antarctica, Australia, Central America, South America, and North America. In 1984 he began an in-depth field course in techniques for recording wildlife sounds. Today the course is a popular annual workshop that attracts students from as far away as Australia, Ghana, India, New Zealand, and Switzerland.

Greg is a producer on many of the Macaulay Library audio guides. In his spare time, he records wildlife. He and his wife and son live in Trumansburg, New York where he occasionally mows the lawn.

Coming Programs

December 11, 2006. Members' Meeting. *Members' Slide Show.*

January 8, 2007. Geoff LeBaron. *The History and Future of the Christmas Bird Count.*

February 12, 2007. Elijah Goodwin. *Song Learning In Icterids.*

FIELD TRIPS

Reports

Lighthouse Point

Andrew Magee, Betsy Higgins, Marcia Merithew, Laura Davenport, Kenley Clark and David Peake-Jones departed in the pre-dawn dark toward **Lighthouse Point** on **Sunday, October 8**, anticipating that the forecast

north-west winds would bring a multitude of raptors to the tip of the point. We had some fine early luck as a **Merlin** and a Sharp-shinned Hawk sparred energetically for well over half an hour, periodically coming to rest in one or other of the trees which dot the park. We also had a smattering of other hawks, including Coopers Hawks, American Kestrels and one or two Northern Harriers. We did our share of conjecturing about the borderline accipeters, the “default” accipeter, the changing ratios of sharpies to coops, and other such esoteric matters. However, as the morning wore on it became clear that we would not be blessed with many hawks today. The plughole was indeed open, but the tub had already drained over the preceding few days.

We wandered for an hour or so through the scrubby part of the park, encountering a nice selection of sparrows, including **Field Sparrow**, Swamp Sparrow, and a **Vesper Sparrow**. We also remarked on the good numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets flitting amongst the willows. A bird which looked, from the rear, like a Red-headed Woodpecker vanished before anyone could get a decent look. In the deeper woods by the park entrance, we had a nice look at Swainson’s Thrush and Red-bellied Woodpecker as well as a few warblers and vireos.

Departing from Lighthouse Point, we made our way to the much-touted Sandy Point on the other side of New Haven Harbor. The windswept tidemarsch and samphire flats looked ripe with opportunities for Seaside or Saltmarsh Sparrows, but aside from a few Brant, we could find nothing that would stay long enough to be seen. From here we made our way eastward to Hammonasset State Park. We searched the tidemarsches here too, for the elusive coastal sparrows. It was not until we reached the Meigs Point trail system that we eventually encountered a bedraggled **Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow** near the nature trail.

As we surveyed the dozen or so Great and Snowy Egrets hunting the tidal flats, two **American Bitterns** flew up from the sand dunes and loped across the marsh before alighting in the inscrutable grassy flats and disappearing.

It seemed this would be the totality of the day. Some nice things, but nothing special. Just as we prepared to leave, a group of birders alerted us to a rather special occupant of a dense stand of cedars by the trail. Working our way in, we encountered a gaunt, shadowy form surveying us imperiously from the shadows of the canopy. It was a **Long-eared Owl**, located by the other group earlier in the day. After spending some time with this bird, and searching fruitlessly for others in the extensive cedar stands, we set off for home, greatly satisfied.

David Peake-Jones



Dead Creek

Three intrepid birders (including **Al Richards**) left Sunderland at 6:00 AM on **October 14** to travel to **Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area** in Addison, VT. The first amazing sighting was that of Tom Gagnon leaving the Connecticut River Valley and traveling to a "foreign state".

When we arrived at Dead Creek I contemplated offering people double their money back since there were no Snow Geese to be seen. Though a few small flocks appeared, they all seemed headed toward Lake Champlain. As I talked to Ted Murin he suddenly exclaimed "Here they come!" Following the line of Ted’s out-flung arm, we beheld a huge flock of some four to five thousand birds outlined against the mountains of New York. This flock came directly over our heads and gave us spectacular views against a clear blue sky. We were able to pick out several “blue geese” amongst the Snow Geese. Unfortunately, the geese landed well away from the viewing area and because of the wind they faced away from us, thus precluding a search for Ross's Geese.

We also saw three species of grebes, two species of loons and a total of eight species of waterfowl. Surprisingly there were NO shorebirds. We had five species of raptors including Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk and several Northern Harriers, including one beautiful "gray ghost."

We finished off at Herrick's Cove where we added a few passerines to bring our list total to 56 species.

Al Richards



Coastal Rhode Island

Geoff LeBaron led a trip to his old stomping ground of coastal **Rhode Island on October 21**. The group consisted of Helga Beatty, Bob Bieda, Chris Ellison, Sue Emerson, Bruce Hart, Sally Hills, Ilene Goldstein, Elaine Pourinski, Elissa Rubenstein and Sol Satin. Between them, they encountered 89 species.

Stops & Highlights:

1. **Avondale Farm Preserve, Westerly:** windy and cold, but clear and pretty. Hard to find sparrows or any landbirds, but a constant stream of raptors overhead.
2. **Napatree Point:** even windier and colder—but great looks at a few raptors including a **Merlin** and the “mother of all” Coops!
3. **Ninigret NWR:** Great views of the “pet” Lesser Black-backed Gull, plus passing Peregrine and Bald Eagle (both with id discussions...), tons of cormorants, and a lonely pair of Bufflehead.
4. **Carolina Management Area and Richmond Turf Farms:** great views of lingering Pectoral Sandpipers with Killdeer in the turf farms, and a nice variety of dabbling ducks at the White Brook fish hatchery.
5. **Trustom Pond NWR:** spectacular looks at a wide variety of waterfowl, including two stunningly ruddy Ruddy Ducks, point-blank looks at an Eared Grebe, and a lingering **Blackpoll Warbler**.
6. **Point Judith:** the race to catch sunset paid off—rising Earth shadow to the east, glowing sunset (with green flash) to the west, and a constant stream of gulls and ducks (and even a few distant gannets) going by. Plus we learned a bit about the nocturnal fishing habits of some Rhodies.

Geoff LeBaron

Coming Trips

(see also the **Fall Field Trip Schedule**)

Saturday, November 4 and Sunday, November 5. Cape Cod. All day. Scott Sumner goes to Cape Cod for late migrants. Join Scott for one or both days (lodging is on your own). Call Scott (413-256-5438) for meeting information and details. (M)

Sunday, November 5. Berkshire Lakes: Migrating Ducks. All day. Tom Gagnon searches out the productive lakes of western Massachusetts. Meet at Stop & Shop in Northampton (228 King St.) at 6:30 a.m. Call Tom (413-584-6353) to register and for further details. (M)

***Wednesday, November 15. Midweek in the Connecticut River Valley.** Half day. Harvey Allen introduces birders to his favorite local spots. Meet at 8 a.m. across the street from Atkins Farm, at the corner of Route 116 and Bay Road in Amherst. Call Harvey (413-253-7963) for details. (E)

Sunday, November 19. East Quabbin. All day. Tom Gagnon leads his annual adventure to the other side of the reservoir. You must be a Hampshire Bird Club member to go on this trip. Bring snacks, warm clothes, and a lunch. Call Tom (413-584-6353) to register and get meeting information. (M)

Friday, November 24. Cape Ann: Turkey Trot. All day. Bob Bieda and Al Richards help you work off all that stuffing by seeing what they can find along the coast. Usual sightings include sea ducks, Purple Sandpipers, and a few alcids. Bring snacks and warm clothing. Call Bob (413-527-2623) or Al (413-665-2761) to register. (E)

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)

CHRISTMAS COUNT, 2006

How could you keep track of changes in bird populations and distribution across the entire continent of North America? The annual Christmas Count aims to do just this. Birders all over the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean, Latin America and Pacific Islands come together every holiday season to count birds. It is one of the world's finest examples of citizen science.

The Northampton and Quabbin circles are divided up into smaller areas, each counted by an experienced leader or leaders, with assistants. Groups plan who will participate, for how long, and how to divide up the count area. This is basically a fine day of birding, with every observation becoming part of the longest-running database in all of ornithology. Both local counts end with a compilation session when the entire count group combines observations to create the data that's will be submitted to National Audubon. Interestingly enough, our numbers ultimately end up on the desk (metaphorically, of course) of our very own Geoff LeBaron who is the national Christmas Count coordinator for Audubon. If you want to contribute to bird conservation and the greater understanding of bird populations on this continent, there is no more satisfying way to spend a day.

Here is one of many possible itineraries for the Northampton Count:

12:01 AM: Commence Owlning.

3:00 AM Experience first motivational crisis of the day. Nap in car

4:30 AM: Wake with a start. Owl frantically till dawn

Dawn onward: Daylight birding. Could that have been a Merlin?? Am I supposed to count all these crows??

1 PM. Second motivational crisis for the day. Nip home for a quick shot of some medicinal beverage.

Everything seems temporarily warmer and more optimistic.

4:00 PM. Stagger in to the Hitchcock Center for the Potluck. Consume vast quantities of hot food.

6:00 PM: Compilation begins.

6:30 PM: Fall asleep in front of dozens of witnesses. Wake with a start and claim some outlandish bird for your area.

9:00 PM Finally get to fall asleep for real.

7:00 AM on Monday morning: Call in sick (for those of us who still have to concern ourselves with such things).

You may, of course, be the very epitomy of organization and endurance, and have a day free of any of the tribulations depicted above. In this event, please keep it to yourself! Information packets will be distributed to leaders at the November meeting or in other ways for those leaders not at the meeting.

Wanna Be A Part of This?

Northampton Count: Sunday, December 17.

Quabbin Count: Saturday, December 30.

Further Information or to Sign Up for a Team

Northampton Count: Jan Ortiz (413 549 1768; jtortiz@aol.com) or Mary Alice Wilson (548-9078, mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu).

Quabbin Count: Scott Sumner (413 253 5438; ssurner@aol.com)

Christmas Count Compilation Pot Luck

Please, all counters and friends, don't forget the pot luck starting at 4:30 pm -- just before the compilation!!

We would appreciate any and all donations of food to make this meal another great success.

There will be a sign up sheet at the next meeting. Thank you all for your assistance!

Sue Emerson: Pot Luck Coordinator: 413-584-6736 spe33@hotmail.com

Reuben Recap

On October 3, Dr. Reuben Yosef spoke to the club about the work of the International Bird and Research Center in Eilat, Israel.

The center nestles amongst the remnants of a saltmarsh on the extreme eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The marsh has been almost entirely “reclaimed” (what an ironic term that is) from its natural state and is now a patchwork of residential and agricultural land. The center was established on a former refuse tip. This location is a crucial stopover along one of the most significant migratory flyways in the world. Millions of birds breed in Eurasia and winter in Africa. In order to avoid trying to cross the full width of the Mediterranean, they resort to one of three routes: via the narrows of Gibraltar to the west, via Italy, Sicily and Tunisia in the central Med., or by skirting the sea altogether via its eastern margin. Particularly in the Spring, this takes millions of birds through Israel and its neighbors. Even if these birds had migrated through favorable environments on their way north, Eilat would likely be an important stopover. However, Dr Yosef pointed out that, because of the geography and climate along the migratory path, *Eilat is the difference between life and death for most of the birds which reach the region in the spring.* With its re-established wetlands and natural habitat, the center is one of the most important migratory stopovers in the world.

Dr Yosef began by pointing out some fascinating facts about the biogeography of Africa. The well-known Sahara desert forms a foodless barrier to migration stretching from the northern coast of Africa to its southern margins, where pure desert gives way to the slightly more hospitable savannahs of the Sahel. These occupy most of the mid-latitudes of the African continent. The Sahel is itself quite bleak during the southern winter (dry) season, but spring rains in August, September and October bring a temporary greening of the northern Sahel, just in time for the arrival of European migrants. This greening is temporary, and by late October, the northern Sahel dries again, forcing birds to migrate further to the southern Sahel. Sixty (60) percent of wintering birds fall prey to predators in this crowded environment.

The nuances of climate are such that, when the songbirds need to make their way back to the northern hemisphere for the northern spring, they find the northern Sahel dry and foodless. Hence the Sahel and the Sahara together form a 2,000 mile barrier for migrating birds in the northern spring. This coincides with the absolute limits of endurance for most migratory species and individuals. *Consequently, birds arrive at their first Eurasian stopovers (including Eilat) in a debilitated state, in urgent need of rest and recovery.*

The rigors of migration for songbirds are illustrated by a grisly adaptation to which many species resort in order to complete the spring journey. *Many reabsorb much of their digestive system in transit,* which both provides nutritional resources and reduces weight.

Dr Yosef and his colleagues have demonstrated that birds arriving at Eilat must first regenerate their digestive system, then feed to regenerate their musculature. Male birds do little more than this before resuming the northward journey. They arrive at breeding territories with no fat reserves, and thus little insurance against starvation. Females spend longer at Eilat, regenerating gut, musculature, and some fat reserves before continuing northward.

Dr Yosef described some other fascinating aspects of his work in Eilat, including a *collaboration with beekeepers*, whose winged pollinators are crucial to the intensive agricultural enterprises in the Eilat region. Exhausted bee-eaters of several species, tend to congregate to feed at beehives around Eilat as they seek to recuperate from the migration over the Sahara. Volunteers from the center capture these birds with mist-nets and relocate them away from the agricultural regions.

It is worth recognizing that Eurasian songbirds are affected by various precariously balanced environmental influences, any of which could tip catastrophically against them. Climate change models suggest that rainfall in

the Sahel hinges on a delicate balance of factors which may change with global warming. If the ephemeral resources birds rely on in the northern Sahel each northern fall were not available, birds would be facing even longer foodless migrations to their wintering grounds. Birds on all three major flyways must traverse densely populated human habitats where stopover resources are ever-dwindling. Eilat is an example of a place where the lives of millions depend on a few acres of conserved and regenerated natural habitat. We can see similar phenomena affecting new-world shorebirds in Delaware Bay. *At a smaller scale, the valley has its own Eilats and its own Delaware Bays, whether they be Echodale Farm in Easthampton, the Northampton Meadows, or Rattlesnake Gutter in Leverett. It's up to all of us to hang on to them.*

LIBRARY

Our library is missing two books. Please call Henry (549-3722) if you have leads to their whereabouts.

"Bird Finding Guide to Ontario"

"The National Parks of Costa Rica"

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**.

HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

A New England naturalist Goes West: Thoreau's Trip To Minnesota: Corinne Smith

Thursday, November 9: 7 p.m.

Biomass, Wind and Photovoltaics in Action: Rob Rizzo

Saturday, November 18: 8:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Poetry Reading: If Only There Were Wings That Could Carry Me: Wally Swist and John Van de Graaff

Thursday, November 30: 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.

New Voice of Audubon Number: 781 259 8805

On Wednesday, November 1st, Mass Audubon changed the phone number for the Voice of Audubon to (781) 259-8805. The toll-free number is no longer in service, but all four recorded reports from throughout the state continue to be accessible through the new number, and the transcripts will still be available anytime on their website (www.massaudubon.org/voa).

GREAT FALLS DISCOVERY CENTER PROGRAMS

2006 Junior Duck Stamp Exhibit

November 17-December 23

Animal Preparedness Winter Survival Series

Every Saturday in November (10:30 - 11:30 am)

Bat Program

November 10 (10:30 - 11:30 am)

Turkey Talk

November 17 (10:30 - 11:30 am)

Bird Walk along the Power Canal

November 18 (2pm-3pm)

Connecting Creatures

November 24 (10:30am – 11:30am)

Friends Coffeehouse Series

November 29 (7pm)

Great Falls Discovery Center is located at 2 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA

Open Fridays and Saturdays from 10 AM to 4 PM

Phone (413) 683 3221

Broad Brook Coalition Programs

Discovering the Eastern Forest: *Robert Leverett*

Saturday, November 11: 10 a.m.- 1 p.m. at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area
North Farms Rd. entrance.

Further Information: Call Bruce Hart; bhart2000@aol.com; 584 4176

HBC Smart-Alecks at Hitchcock Trivia Night!!

The second annual Hitchcock Trivia Night took place this year at the Harp in Amherst, and featured a number of contestants from the ranks of HBC.

Scott Sumner, Val Miller, Jan Ortiz and hubby **Carlos** abandoned the now apparently extinction-ridden title of the “Ivory-billed Woodpeckers”, and ran under the watershed-related moniker of the “River of Raptors”.

Despite this grandiose appellation, their second run at the title ended (like the first) with disappointment. The more life-experienced “Oldies but Goodies” (**Sally and Bill Venman, Bob Wilce and Joanne Parker**), did a little better, taking home a placing.

However, the really stellar performance of the evening came from a nameless team assembled hastily at the bar prior to the event. Joining the team progenitor, (my brother-in-law **Ira Band**), were **Patti Steinman** from Arcadia, **David Peake-Jones** (of nowhere in particular), and a gentleman who proved to have an encyclopedic brain, **Mr. Jim Laffley** (from the DCR). Defying the odds, this rag-tag bunch actually came out on top of the standings, and took home a couple of nice prizes for our troubles.

Save Echodale Farm!

We have an opportunity to help save the most significant remaining area of open space in Easthampton, and one which is of valley- and state-wide significance. Park Hill has long been one of the scenic and agricultural gems of the town, with a superb mix of open farmland, orchards, and forested land (including a section of Bassett Brook). Several farms historically formed the core land use in the area, two of which are already protected by Agricultural Protection Restrictions. However, the largest remaining agricultural property in Easthampton, Echodale Farm, is currently up for sale and in danger of being developed.

The Trust for Public Land, the City of Easthampton, and locally based Pascommuck Conservation Trust have launched an ambitious plan to purchase the property. Funds have already been promised from the Easthampton Community Preservation Fund and a number of trusts and foundations. The conservation partners are actively seeking state and federal funding as well. Over half the 2.85 purchase price needs to come from private donations, and this is where we come in.

Please join me in donating toward the conservation of this beautiful and precious area!

Some Facts About Echodale

Size: 164 acres

Location: Between West Street and Park Hill Road, Easthampton.

Designations: 75% of the property is designated as Biomap Core Habitat associated with the Manhan River by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.

If Saved: Will form part of an unbroken parcel of 550 acres close to the city of Easthampton.

Current Private Funds Raised (November 4): About \$75, 000

To donate and/or for more information, visit www.pctland.org (Pascommuck Conservation Trust) OR www.tpl.org (The Trust for Public Land). Local telephone enquiries to Marty Klein (PCT) at 413 529 9594.

Birds and Bees

Did anyone else happen to notice the bird-related word that appeared in the final rounds of the National Spelling Bee earlier this year? OK, back up one question: Is anyone else willing to admit to having *watched* the National Spelling Bee?

Well, those of us who did may have noted that the eventual winner: a delightful little over-achiever from New Jersey, only won the title after getting by the word “**Towhee.**”

More surprising to me was that the judges recited the word with *three different pronunciations*, and even cited a *synonym* for the name of the bird. News to me!! And no, I can't remember any of these snippets of info. We never had a National Spelling Bee in my home country. We can't even agree on a National Anthem!

Backyard Birds

17 Strong St., Northampton (near Eastside Grill). Phone 586 3155

Your local source for birding and bird-feeding supplies, including feeders, optics, gifts, written and audio-materials. Ten percent discount for members of the Hampshire Bird Club. Remember, with local merchants, your dollar stays here!

Gleanings from the Technical Literature

Men are from Tamaulipas, Women are from Oaxaca!

It has long been observed that, in song-birds which winter in temperate regions (such as the southern part of North America), males tend to winter further north than females. This observation has now been extended to birds wintering in Mexico. In Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Swainson's Thrush, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black and White Warbler, Ovenbird, and Wilson's Warbler, males stayed further north than females. Indigo Buntings bucked the trend, with males further to the south.

Reference: **Olmar, K.; B.J. O'Shea; A. Townsend Peterson and A.G. Navarra-Siguenza. 2005**
 Evidence of Latitudinal Sexual Segregation in Migratory Birds Wintering in Mexico.
Auk: Vol 22, #3. pp 938-948

Loons Imperiled in Great Lakes

Loons have been dying at a terrifying rate this fall in the Great Lakes, and an insidious new threat seems to be the root cause of the die-off.

It seems that several introduced aquatic organisms, including zebra mussels and quagga mussels harbor the bacterium that produces botulinum toxin. This toxin is released by the mussels and sinks to the bottom of the lakes, where it is absorbed in low concentrations by bottom-dwelling invertebrates. Round goby fish then concentrate the toxin when they consume large numbers of the invertebrates, and the toxin is further concentrated when loons consume numerous round goby fish.

Outbreaks of botulism amongst loons and other aquatic animals have been occurring for a number of years. The numbers of dead loons this year seems certain to match or exceed the worst year on record. In 2002, at least 25, 000 birds died in Lake Erie alone.

Welcome New Members!

Marjory Ackerman: Amherst

Nancy Leonard: Amherst

That's it for this month!

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

(413) 529 9541

newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org