



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 24, No. 5

## January, 2008

### In this edition:

- our **program** for this month, (which barely needs introduction),
- one lonely **trip report** from the pre-Christmas lull,
- a reminder about our **library**,
- news from the **Anniversary Committee**, and musings on the **Northampton Christmas Count**,
- program details from **Hitchcock** and the **Broad Brook Coalition**, and
- some **bird lore** from central Africa.

Included with the newsletter this month is the **Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule**, courtesy of Mike Locher, and all those leaders who so graciously donate their time and expertise.

I hope you find some of it useful!

### (An Imminent Trip!)

**Saturday, January 5. North Shore: Cape Ann to Plum Island.** All day. Bob Bieda will head to the coast in search of wintering specialties like Eared Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, and much more. Dress for cold weather. For meeting information call Bob at 413-527-2623. (E)

## PROGRAMS

**Monday, January 14 at 7:30 PM**

**Don Kroodsma has "More Fun with Bird Song: Local Heroes"**

Immanuel Lutheran Church; 867 North Pleasant Street, Amherst.

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

It is one thing to marvel at Don Kroodsma writing about the evolution of song in Sedge Wrens, or in the intricate biogeography of voices amongst the Song Sparrows of Seattle. It is quite another to have Don speak, in person, about "our" birds. At this talk, Don brings his unique understanding of bird communication to the local dawn chorus. I believe no further introduction is necessary!!

**Don Kroodsma** was a chemistry major at Hope College, and discovered birds during his last semester there. Don attended the University of Michigan field station the following summer, taking "baby birds" and "big birds" courses simultaneously from the famed Sewall Pettingill. Thirty-five years ago, while in graduate school at Oregon State University, a singing wren in his backyard got Don started on what would be a life-long passion: listening to birds. During much of this time, Don taught right here in Amherst, at the University of Massachusetts. In 2005, many of us were thrilled to get a first-hand introduction from Don to his critically acclaimed book "The Singing Life of Birds." Many of us are still trying to read it!!

### Coming Up

February 11, 2008. **Ed Neumuth.** Palmyra Atoll Research

March 10, 2008. **Scottt Hecker.** NAS Coastal Waterbird Program

April 14, 2008. **Chris Elphick.** Sharp-tailed Sparrow Nesting

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

**Sunday, December 9, 2007. Moran WMA and Environs.**

**Mike Locher** led Joyce Merriam, Janet Merriam Cornell, Barbara Snook, Rick McNeill and David Peake-Jones into this snowy region of the Windsor Plateau. The icy marsh and bare deciduous woods close to the road seemed pregnant with the possibility of a shrike, and the big skies overhead did, in fact give up several unidentified winter passers-by. However, we found little but a few Black-capped Chickadees on our way to the spruce woods. Much to our dismay, we found the woods, too, silent and apparently deserted. We had to content ourselves with musing over tracks in the snow, which included those of fisher.

By the time we returned to the cars, it seemed the trip would be distinguished by the stunning absence of birds. However, soldiering on down North Road, David and Mike found **Common Redpolls** feeding in the verge, followed shortly afterward by nice groups of **Pine- and Evening-Grosbeaks**. We struck out at Notchview, but screeched to a halt to marvel at a **Barred Owl** on a road sign in Plainfield. To round out the day, we had more Pine Grosbeaks along Spruce Corners Road in Plainfield. Perseverance pays!

David Peake-Jones

### Coming Trips

*Please see the enclosed "Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule."*

## LIBRARY

The HBC Library is 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](http://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**.

## ANNIVERSARY

*The anniversary committee is toiling away, in preparation for our banner year in 2009. Here is what they would like you to know about early progress.*

- The committee would like to acknowledge the financial investment you, our members, have already made in this event. Following the request for funds with this year's membership drive, **we have already accumulated \$1, 333 in dedicated anniversary funds**. Thank you!!
- Sue Emerson and Janice Jorgenson are planning the **Big Sit\*** and will organize a committee to thrash out the details of time, location, etc.
- Anne Lombard and Elissa Rubinstein will coordinate a **club book discussion**. The title in question is "**A Return to Wild America**" by Scott Weidensaul.
- The afore-mentioned **Scott Weidensaul**, a noted naturalist and author, will speak at our meeting in March, 2009.
- We are working hard on the selection of some **outstanding long-distance trips**. Stay tuned!

\* Never have my limited proof-reading skills been so critical. Ed.

## A Grain of Truth

The lives of the Mofu people of the Mandara Mountains in Cameroon are intimately interwoven with the millet and other grain crops that sustain them, the insects which both imperil these crops and supplement their diet, and the seasons, upon which all depends. Amidst the extraordinary ecology of man and insect there is at least one interesting sidelight. Amongst the Mandara villages lives a small yellow bird, locally called the millet bird\*. The Mofu have observed that, following the torrential seasonal rains, certain species of ants will bring the contents of their underground granaries (mostly millet and other grains filched from the Mofu's fields) above ground to dry. This presumably avoids moisture-related spoilage and/or germination underground. Following the long dry season, these drying seeds provide one of the few seed sources for birds and other wildlife.

Not surprisingly, millet birds tend to congregate near the nests of the ant species concerned, and the Mofu believe they even prefer to nest in close proximity to the ants. The Mofu have also noticed that the millet birds take a proportion of the ants' grain to tide them over till the rains give rise to another seed crop. A bargain is made to return the favor at the next harvest. Sure enough, as the Mofu have pointed out to their children for generations, when the millet ripens again, the millet birds shake a proportion of the ripened grain to the ground in payment of their debt to the ants.

*Reference:* "Master of the Killer Ants". Nova. Aired on PBS; November 20, 2007. For more details, go to PBS.org

\* I can find no reference to this common name amongst the official bird lists for Cameroon.

## MUSINGS ON THE NORTHAMPTON CHRISTMAS COUNT

As of New Year's Eve (the newsletter deadline, hmmm), the compilation is not quite complete. Some reports on rare/unusual species and some time/mileage data are still missing. By the time you are reading this newsletter, you should be able to go on [hampshirebirdclub.org](http://hampshirebirdclub.org) to read the final tallies - maybe.

The most important news: the count was moved to the 15th for the safety of participants (and the ice and snow really did arrive on the 16th as predicted). Folks switched work days, abandoned families, failed to get those last, crucial presents, and waded into the snow. Of course, lots of good field participants had other obligations, including to counts already scheduled for the 15th, but others covered their areas and some excellent birders were talked/bribed/cajoled into joining the count teams. There are some pretty persuasive team leaders out there.

The most impressive total was **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (22, previous high was 3 in 2001)**. There were many "my best look ever" notes on the compilation forms. The other big winner was **Cedar Waxwing (2194, previous high 1647 last year during a mild day in a mild, snowless month)**. **Sharp-shinned Hawk matched the previous total of 22**, and **Cooper's Hawk at 18 almost matched the previous high of 19**. **Pine Grosbeaks were a special treat, although at 160 not a record (previous high 217 in 1954)**.

Robin numbers were down, perhaps because of the snow, but also changes in the Whately Christmas Tree Farm where oversized trees have been replaced with young stock. Keep a dawn/dusk eye out for possible new roosts. The pigeon and starling numbers were down, probably because folks did not have time to get to the best spots at the end of the day. Herring Gull numbers were really down (19, with last years count of 88 being the previous low in recent decades). Again, that might have been snow or available-time related.

As those of you know who have completed the Unusual Species Form, it takes time and energy. Traditionally folks have done a excellent job. Unfortunately, the bar has been raised (see next page). We were only given permission to publish this catterel (not up to doggerel standards) if we responded in kind. The coordinators' life is not an easy one.

Mary Alice Wilson  
(continues next page)

## **A Dozen Not-So-Common Redpolls on the Northampton CBC, 15 December 2007**

*With red caps and streaks  
And triangular beaks,  
Some had pink on breast  
But not all, not the rest;  
Paler than siskins,  
Feeding on catkins,  
They were a dozen cute finches,  
Not big, in length just a few inches,  
That found a dozen slender perches  
On just one, not a dozen white birches.*

*None, alas, so frosty,  
No rumps so streak-free  
As to suggest Hoary--  
A dozen Commoners they be,  
But not so common to me,  
Living from redpoll view southerly,  
Delighted to see  
Every few years  
These charming dears.*

*Well, my compilers and editors worthy,  
There's my write up in few words pithy.  
I know details are weak,  
From tail end to beak--  
No tarsal scutellation noted,  
No rictal bristles counted,  
Just impressions of a quick, happy view;  
I hope that they'll pass, I hope that they'll do.*

David Spector

### **Coordinator's Response**

*There once was a redpoll description  
That met every Rare Bird restriction.  
The words they did rhyme,  
It was snail mailed in time:  
Your report is accepted as written.*

Mary Alice Wilson

## **BROAD BROOK COALITION**

Animal Tracking at Fitzgerald Lake Conservation Area: *Molly Hale*

**January 12, 10:00 a.m. Meet at the North Farms Rd. entrance. Information 584 4176.**

**WELCOME NEW MEMBERS** (well, returning actually!)

**Chris Yerlig and Colleen Jennings, Amherst**

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

**Winter Botany** (*Co-sponsored with the NEWFS*): *Dr. William Kuriger*

Saturday, January 19, 9 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

**A Window Into the Past: Primitive Studies Program:** *Neill Bovaird*

Saturday, February 2, 1 - 2:30 p.m.

**Nature Drawing for the Complete Non-Artist:** *Dr. Elizabeth Farnsworth*

Sunday, February 3, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

**Water Use and Conservation:** *Amy Vickers*

Tuesday, February 5, 7 - 8:30 p.m.

**Spring Birding Class:** *Scott Surner*

*Evening Classes: Wednesdays, 6:30 - 8 p.m., February 13, 27, April 9, 16, 30, May 7, 14, 21*

*Field Trips: February 16, March 1, 22, 29, April 12, 19, May 10, 17, 24, 31.*

*Start times for field trips vary between 5 a.m. and 7 a.m. (Owling on February 16 is at 3 a.m.)*

**Darwin's "Descent With Modification," Vernadsky's "Biosphere," and Lovelock's "Gaia":** *Lynn Margulis*

Thursday, January 3, 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](http://www.hitchcockcenter.org).*

### 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!

### Real Thanks for the Virtual Potluck!

Thank you all for your generous offer of "pot-lucks" for all we Northampton Christmas Counters to enjoy. It was sad that the weather turned against us but we will be back again next year --Have a wonderful birding 2008.

Sue Emerson and her "elves."

\* I screwed up the punch line of this tidbit last month. Here it is as it was intended. Ed.

News this past month from a Santa training school in Australia. The would-be 'strine Santas are being forbidden to use the time-honored Clausian exclamation "Ho!, Ho!, Ho!" This is because, in our increasingly coarse and historically disconnected society, people interpret this as a reference to prostitution.

In related news, the AOU Checklist Committee has the Hoary Redpoll on its next meeting agenda.

A brief personal note. Contrary to the Gazette, I have not changed my name to Beake-Jones, though this might be kinda appropo for a birder. The above is all I have to offer this month.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor  
(413) 529 9541

[newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:newsletter@hampshirebirdclub.org)

## Hampshire Bird Club, Inc. Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip Schedule, 2008

*Please register with the field trip leader(s) and check this schedule's information when a phone number is given. The Field Trip Chair (Michael Locher – 413-585-5864) is always looking for new trip ideas and leaders.*

*The Hampshire Bird Club recommends carpooling whenever possible, and suggests that all riders share equally the per-car cost of \$0.40 per mile, as well as tolls and parking. See also the "Field Trip Guidelines for Participants" (September newsletter or on the Website).*

*Some trips have been marked with an asterisk (\*), which indicates that they are good trips for beginning birders. All trips have been coded as Easy (E) or Moderate (M) to give a rough indication of the pace and/or terrain, while an (A) indicates that the trip is accessible. Please check all information with the trip leaders.*

### JANUARY

**Saturday, January 5. North Shore: Cape Ann to Plum Island.** All day. Bob Bieda leads his annual New Year's pilgrimage to the coast in search of wintering specialties like Eared Grebes, Barrow's Goldeneyes, Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, and much more. Dress for cold weather. For meeting information call Bob at 413-527-2623. (E)

**Saturday, January 26. Coastal Rhode Island.** All day. Geoff LeBaron leads birders through the coastal nooks and crannies of our petite southern neighbor. Dress for cold weather. Call Geoff (413-268-9281) for meeting information and further details. (E)

### FEBRUARY

**Saturday, February 16. South Shore: Plymouth and Falmouth.** All day. Al Richards leads birders to the coast south of Boston to find ducks, gulls, owls, and whatever happens to be around. Dress warmly. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information. (E)

### MARCH

**Saturday, March 1. 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)

**Saturday, March 22. Connecticut River Waterfowl.** Half day. Al Richards looks for waterfowl migrating through the valley along the Connecticut River. Call Al (413-665-2761) for meeting information as the date approaches. (E)

### APRIL

**\*Saturday, April 12. More Migrants.** Half day. Betsy Higgins (413-586-7585) looks for migrants, starting around Look Park in Northampton. Meet at 6:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the JFK Middle School on Bridge Street in Northampton. (E)

**\*Sunday, April 13. Ashley Reservoir: Early Warblers.** Half day. Mike Locher (413-585-5864) hopes to find Pine and Palm Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and other early migrants. Meet in the Friendly's parking lot, near the Holiday Inn, close to Exit 15 ("Holyoke Mall") off Rt. 91 at 7:00 a.m. (E)

**\*Sunday, April 13. Woodcocks.** Evening. Mary Alice Wilson (413-548-9078, or mwilson@k12s.phast.umass.edu) invites you to come listen to Leverett Woodcocks and other sounds of a spring evening. The listening will commence at 7:30 p.m., with the location to be determined (by the woodcocks). Contact Mary Alice Wilson for directions. (E)

## MAY

On the first three **Tuesdays** in May, we will offer guided walks at Wildwood Cemetery (E) in Amherst from 6:30 - 8:30 a.m. Meet in the small parking area just outside the entrance on Strong Street. On the first three **Thursdays** in May, we will offer guided walks along the rail trail (E/A) from 6:30-8:30 a.m. Look to the newsletter for leaders and more details as the time approaches.

**Friday, May 9. South Quabbin Park.** Half day (until about 1 o'clock). Tom Gagnon (413-584-6353) birds the southern end of the reservoir. Meet at the Quabbin Visitor's Center parking lot at 7:00 a.m. (E)

**Saturday, May 10. Spring Migration in the Quabbin.** All day. Tom Gagnon guides birders through the Quabbin woods in search of its migrants. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members. Call Tom (413-584-6353) well ahead of time for meeting information and to register. (M)

**Sunday, May 11. Mt. Auburn Cemetery.** All day. David Peake-Jones goes to Boston's most historic cemetery, which is also one of the Eastern Massachusetts' birding hotspots, to see what happens to fly in. The numbers and variety beggar the imagination. Call David (413-529-9541) for meeting information. (E)

**Saturday, May 17. Coastal Rhode Island.** All day. Geoff LeBaron heads to our southern neighbor in warm weather to track down migrants and other seasonal specialties. Call Geoff (413-268-9281) for meeting information and further details. (E)

**Friday, May 23 – Monday, May 26. Monhegan Island.** Overnight trip. Betsy Higgins leads the Hampshire Bird Club's annual pilgrimage to Monhegan Island. Not only is the island charming, but the migrating birds can be astonishing. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call Betsy (413-586-7585) to register. (E/M)

**Saturday, May 24. Poor Man's Monhegan.** All day. Bob Bieda takes birders to Plum Island. Past trips have found Wilson's Phalaropes, Piping Plovers, Seaside Sparrows, Orchard Orioles, and Evening Grosbeaks. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register and get meeting information. (E)

**Saturday, May 31. Tyringham Cobble and Tyringham Valley.** Half day. Ed Neumuth leads this new trip into a beautiful part of the Berkshires looking for migrants and local specialties. Call Ed (413-623-0186 or 413-884-4961) for meeting information. (E)

**Saturday, May 31. Westover Air Force Base.** Half day. Pending permission, Bob Bieda will lead his annual trip into New England's premier grassland habitat, looking for Upland Sandpipers, Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Eastern Meadowlarks. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register and check on the date and time for meeting. (E/A)

## JUNE

**Saturday, June 14. Hammonasset Beach State Park, CT.** All day. Betsy Higgins goes to the coast of Connecticut to find sparrows, rails, and other seaside denizens. Call Betsy (413-586-7585) for meeting time and place as the date approaches. (E)

**Sunday, June 15. West Quabbin ramble.** Half day. Dave Gross offers a trip from Pelham into the Quabbin and will be birding and hiking through blooming Mountain Laurel. Contact David (413-253-2897) for further details. (M)

**Saturday, June 21. October Mt. State Forest.** Half day. Ed Neumuth goes where no HBC trip leader has gone before (at least, in recent memory). Recent work in the area has provided excellent habitat for Mourning Warblers. Call Ed (413-623-0186 or 413-884-4961) for meeting information. (E)

**Friday, June 20 - Sunday, June 22. Connecticut Lakes, NH.** Overnight trip. David Peake-Jones and Mike Locher head to the boreal forests of northern New Hampshire. Migrants, boreal specialties, and moose abound. This trip is limited to Hampshire Bird Club members only. Contact David (413-529-9541) or Mike (413-585-5864) to register. (M)

## **JULY**

**Saturday, July 26. New South Beach, I.** All day. David Peake-Jones goes looking for early migrating shorebirds, especially Red Knots. Bring a lunch, a jacket, and \$20 for the boat ride. Call David (413-529-9541) to register. (M)

## **AUGUST**

**Saturday, August 23. New South Beach, II.** All day. Bob Bieda leads birders in their quest for late shorebird migrants, including Curlew Sandpipers and Marbled and Hudsonian Godwits. Bring a lunch, a jacket, and \$20 for the boat ride. Call Bob (413-527-2623) to register. (M)