



# Hampshire Bird Club, Inc.

## Amherst, Massachusetts

www.hampshirebirdclub.org

Volume 24, No. 4

**December, 2007**

This edition is mainly devoted to our regular monthly information on programs and field trips, with a nod to the **Christmas Count**, and a smattering of general interest information from the ornithological literature. Also included is the **club membership list**. This is provided to help us stay in touch with one another, and the personal information it contains is for personal use only. Please keep the list at home and safe from prying eyes! Thanks!

## PROGRAMS

### **Monday, December 10 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 flashstick. They will be loaded into a laptop 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. Please share if you can. It helps us recognize the depth of world experience and photographic ability that lurks within our humble bird club.

In keeping with my own level of technical expertise, I will be bringing some images from a recent vacation to Uzbekistan, hand-engraved on clay tablets, which you may peruse at your leisure.

**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 Up

January 14, 2008. **Don Kroodsmma.** More Fun With Bird Song: Local Heroes

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

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

## FIELD TRIPS

### Reports

#### **Sunday, November 4. Berkshire Lakes and Bartletts**

Leader **Tom Gagnon** and all but this participant remembered to set their clocks back for the end of daylight saving. We made our way up Route 9 into the Berkshire hills with the anticipation of waterfowl and donuts or, in my case, donuts and waterfowl. At windswept Moran NWR we found one very distant **Northern Shrike**. Notwithstanding its personal attributes, it was a long way off, too. Wending our way further, we found the northern end of Cheshire Lake fairly quiet, with only five **Ring-necked Ducks** enlivening the resident

compliment of mallards and a few gulls. At the central isthmus, we found a scattering of Pied-billed Grebes, and at the southern end of the lake there were nine **Green-winged Teal**.

From Cheshire Lake we made our way to an undisclosed location in Pittsfield to look for a male *Selasphorus* hummingbird which had been frequenting a feeder. The very-kind home-owners allowed us into their porch to view a feeder, to which the bird came right on cue. It was a bright individual, with prominent streaks on the throat, and remnants of a necklace on the breast. The flanks were a pronounced rufous colour, and the mantle was largely greenish-rufous. We left after good looks, and Scott got nice photographs. The bird was banded and measured later the same day, and confirmed as an immature male **Rufous Hummingbird**.

At Pontoosuc we found a good number of American Coot, a couple of Brant, and a Lesser Scaup. A **Merlin** perched briefly overhead. From the nice vantage point of the Onota causeway, we got nice views of a pair of **Northern Pintail** at close range, along with 24 Hooded Mergansers and a Common Goldeneye.

At Bartletts, the donuts sat helplessly awaiting consumption and we were only too happy to oblige. Perhaps because of the consequent hyperglycemia, my only memory of Stockbridge Bowl is that there was a **Wood Duck** there, along with other distant things. Thanks, Tom and all!

David Peake-Jones

### **Sunday, November 18. East Quabbin with Tom Gagnon and Larry Therrien.**

Wood Duck 8	Ruffed Grouse 5	Brown Creeper 4
Gadwall 3	Common Loon 27	Eastern Bluebird 5
American Black Duck 145	Pied-billed Grebe 2	Cedar Waxwing 213
Northern Pintail 2	Horned Grebe 23	Yellow-rumped Warbler 1
Ring-necked Duck 87	Bald Eagle 10	American Tree Sparrow 15
Bufflehead 12	Northern Harrier 1	Field Sparrow 1
Common Goldeneye 6	Barred Owl 1	Pine Grosbeak 1
Hooded Merganser 241	Pileated Woodpecker 2	Common Redpoll 67
Common Merganser 50	Northern Shrike 2	
Red-breasted Merganser 2	Common Raven 1	

Tom Gagnon and Larry Therrien

### **Friday, November 24, 2007. Turkey Trot to Royalston, Salisbury and Plum Island.**

**Al Richards, Bob Bieda** and David Peake-Jones resisted the temptation to camp out overnight at the mall, and instead opted to go birding. On a raw morning, with winter making its presence clearly felt, we started in Royalston. The crab-apples across from the library were rather deserted when we first arrived, but on our second go-around, we found a nice collection of **Pine Grosbeaks** perched in a nearby dead maple. Between cracks at the crabapples, we explored nearby roads, and came across a gorgeous group of **Evening Grosbeaks** staking out a feeder.

We drove on to Salisbury State Park, where crossbills had been reported. We drove first to the boat launch where, for the first time in the collective memory of those on the trip, we saw several immature **Northern Gannets** plying the biting winds over the Essex estuary, along with scattered sea ducks. A large group of **Dunlin** squatted at the edge of the saltmarsh. Elaine Pourinski joined us briefly as we scoured the stunted pines of the park by car and on foot. After almost an hour, it seemed the crossbills must have left, but another group led us to a male and a female **Red Crossbill** feeding quietly in a cone-laden pine. The waters off the breakwater were scattered with a good number of graceful Red-throated Loons.

Sustained with remnants of turkey, we proceeded down Plum Island. The Hellcat boardwalk provided little joy, except a close encounter with a Golden-crowned Kinglet that briefly took pity on us. Al had a group of redpolls fly over the parking lot, but we reluctantly decided that these birds had moved on, and left for down-island. Fortunately, the birds flew over us and alighted in a white birch not far from the road, where we were able to

view them at close range. Despite at least one somewhat frosty individual, we were forced to find them all **Common Redpolls**. What a delight to again watch these determined foragers creating a gentle rain of birch seeds in the frosty air.

Further down the island, we found scattered scoters and other sea ducks, plus a few grebes off the rocks, and a large number of Northern Pintail in the Stage Island Pool. As dusk fell, we finished off at our favorite fried fish place. Thirty-seven very good quality species for the day, and not a cheap piece of electronics to be seen!

David Peake-Jones

### Coming Trips

**Sunday, December 9. Moran Wildlife Management Area: Feast-or-Famine Winter Birding.** Half day. Mike Locher goes to the almost-boreal habitat in 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 warmly. Call Mike (413-585-5864) to register, and get meeting information and details. (M)

**The Winter-Spring-Summer Field Trip List will be coming with the January newsletter.**

### HBC Christmas Count Pot Luck Supper.

A plea for food donations for the HBC Christmas Count pot luck on Sunday, December 16 th. The following items are needed:

- three (3) main dishes (preferably hot and vegetarian if possible),
- three (3) salads,
- three (3) desserts (cookies or cake),
- bread & butter,
- one or two hot soups,
- two gallons of water, and
- two gallons of cider.

That should about do it. You don't have to volunteer for all the above items! Please email Sue Emerson ([membership@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:membership@hampshirebirdclub.org)) or let me know at the club meeting on the 10th. All will be very much appreciated by all the counters. Thanks...

### Barred Owls in the “Burbs”?

It is easy to get discouraged by the preponderance of bad news concerning native species and their future amidst a mounting series of threats including habitat loss and fragmentation, introduced species, and a myriad of human influences.

In amongst this gloom and doom, there are stories of animals holding their own, and even some surprising discoveries of species which adapt to and thrive in habitats shared with humans. We are all familiar with raccoons, skunks, and coyotes, but who would ever imagine that Barred Owls might thrive in human cities? Apparently this is happening in Charlotte, North Carolina. Rob Bierregard, of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, has been conducting the largest-ever study of Barred Owls in the city, and has found that, ecologically, the city resembles the old-growth forests traditionally favored by Barred Owls. There are plenty of mature trees with nesting holes, and the manicured understorey provides the clear sight and flight lines required by these “perch and drop” hunters. In fact, as the city has expanded, overtaking surrounding farmland, habitat is becoming available where previously there were open farmlands. These were inhabited by Barn Owls, but virtually devoid of suitable habitat for Barred Owls. The study is beginning to flesh out the private lives of urban Barred Owls, revealing surprising dietary adaptability, and the fact that, not surprisingly, the major source of mortality for these owls is collisions with cars.

*Reference:* University of North Carolina at Charlotte (2007, October 18). Ecologists Discover City Is 'Uber-forest' For Big Owls. *ScienceDaily*.

## Rare Bird Alert Sign Up

It is not too late to join the RBA. Please contact Sue Emerson at [membership@hampshirebirdclub.org](mailto:membership@hampshirebirdclub.org) if you would like to be part of it. The list allows for email notification only.

## HITCHCOCK PROGRAMS

### Panel Discussion: Living With Solar

Chris Riddle (*Kuhn Riddle Architects*), Aaron Hayden (*Amherst College*), Tom Hartman (*Coldham and Hartman Architects*)

Thursday, December 6, 7 - 8:30 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).

## Winter Finch Superflight

In case you hadn't noticed, we are experiencing the biggest winter finch irruption since the "superflight" of 1997-1998, when many boreal finches went well beyond their normal ranges. The cause is the largest tree seed crop failure in a decade across more than 3200 km (2000 mi) of boreal forest from Saskatchewan into Quebec. Here in western Massachusetts, we have had good numbers of Pine Grosbeak, Evening Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins and Purple Finches. Enjoy!!

## ARCADIA PROGRAMS

**Winter Birds and Citizen Research:** *Anne Lombard, Patti Steinman*

Thursday, December 6; 7-9 p.m. and Saturday December 8; 9-11 a.m.

**Pre-Winter Walk at Laughing Brook:** *Kevin Kopchynski, Patti Steinman*

Sunday, December 9, 10 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

**Solstice Celebration, Saturday, December 22; 5:30 p.m.**

*For more details of these and other programs go to [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org) (select "Sanctuaries", then "Choose a Sanctuary: Arcadia") or call the sanctuary at the number below. To register for programs contact **Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary**, 127 Combs Rd., Easthampton MA 01027. Telephone (413) 584-3009.*

## Watch Your Mouth, Saint Nick!

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 Woodpecker on its next meeting agenda.

That's it for this month.

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

David Peake-Jones, Editor

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