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ATTU, A BIRDER'S PARADISE FOR THE HALE AND HEARTY

BUT IS IT FOR YOU?

Sam Madison

On May 18, 1990 Jim Kuethe and I took off from Albany for three weeks of birding in Attu. We landed at Anchorage where we joined the Attour, Inc. trip. The next morning we arose at 4:30 a.m. to catch a 7:00 a.m. chartered flight via Reeves Airlines. About 40 of us boarded an Electra turbo prop plane with all our luggage, and the gear, food and supplies we would need for three weeks. Attu is about halfway between Anchorage and Tokyo. The weather reports were good and we were informed that a scheduled refueling stop at Adak would not be necessary so our flying time would be 4 hours and 30 minutes, non-stop. We had a smooth flight, but ran into heavy winds and were in the air about 5 1/2 hours. Presumably the heavy winds would shorten the return flight (with no load) and the refueling stop at Adak was still unnecessary. There is no fuel at Attu, you fly in with the fuel you need to fly back.

At about 7:35 we flew over Redoubt Volcano, passing just slightly to the north of its spewing mouth, which was sending a long column of dust and debris skyward. A few weeks earlier Anchorage airport had been closed due to the huge quantity of dust sent up by Redoubt.

Not many people know much about the outer Aleutians, and few have visited them voluntarily. In 1942 the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor and had captured and fortified many Aleutian Islands, including Attu. When the Americans attacked in 1943 the fiercest battle was fought at Attu. (See The Thousand Mile War by Brian Garfield, Ballantine Books, New York.) The building we slept in was on one of the beaches where the Americans launched their attack. Another such beach led to Henderson Marsh where we did much of our best birding. Even today Henderson is a quagmire to travel in. Still visible are the foxholes on the slopes of the sides of the valley where the American soldiers dug in for some protection. After the Japanese were routed the island was extensively fortified both for defense and for launching attacks upon Japan. When the war ended, Attu was abandoned. Today no one lives on Attu, not even Eskimos. The Coast Guard maintains a Loran navigation station with a crew of 24, on one-year assignments. A few naturalists visit it. And once a year, about 40 crazy birders.

Thousands of telephone poles still stand and uncountable thousands lie on the ground covered with decades of vegetation. Miles and miles of barbed wire fences still stand, but most of the wire has rusted to the ground. Piles of oil drums are everywhere, here a few hundred, there a thousand -- some still leaking oil after 45 years. Dozens of huge oil storage tanks are rusting away. Fragments of naval shells lie around, plus a few shells still

unexploded (do not kick!). Rusting vehicles of all sorts, landing ships and wrecked airplanes are scattered about. Discarded military equipment and stores are everywhere, especially at Debris Beach which is covered with layers of materials and equipment of all kinds, from a pick axe (the head is still in good shape) to bundles of barbed wire (rusted but recognizable), with piles of nuts and bolts of all sizes and kinds. One huge chain runs from some point high on the land, across the beach and out into the ocean. It is a monster which has links that I estimate weigh about 200 pounds each. It was not rusted, but had a slight patina on its surface. I couldn't guess what metal it was made of.

After we landed we picked up a sandwich and took off (most of us) on a 6-mile hike over rough terrain. In many places the surface was spongy, our boots sinking in three inches at each step. It looks like but is not true tundra, because there is no permafrost. Sometimes we struggled through two- to three-foot tall dried grasses growing out of tussocks on the ground. There were many small streams or rivulets to ford or leap over. At places there were deep crevices in the ground, some visibly 10 feet deep. You had to watch out for holes that were here and there. Sometimes you stepped in a particularly soft spot and sank in over your boot tops. You also had to keep a watchful eye for boards with protruding rusty nails, deceptively grown over with vegetation, to say nothing of metal spikes that sometimes protruded out of the ground.

Attu is both the easternmost and westernmost place in the United States, the result of the placement of the international date line. It has snow-capped mountains which come right down to the sea. Many rocky shoals are offshore. The beaches are mostly piles of rough stones. There are roads for bike riders with surfaces of sand, mud, and rough stones, with some gravel and dirt stretches. We covered only one end of the island but we went 13 miles to Alexai Point (and 13 miles back), 9 miles to the end of Henderson marsh (and 9 miles back), 6 miles to South Beach (and 6 miles back) and 7 or 8 miles to Temnac Valley (and 7 or 8 miles back).

At the end of the second day I wondered at the physical mess I had gotten into. The few miles of biking on smooth macadam which I had done in preparation for the trip were of slight help. The pounding on my crotch caused by the bumpy terrain is something I will never forget. Sore posteriors were a common complaint. But I had come here for unusual birds, once-in-a-lifetime birds, and somehow I stuck it out. On my best birding day, in which I got 5 spectacular lifers, I covered 38 miles by bike and foot and arrived at base at 10:45 p.m. too exhausted to eat dinner. If it's fun you want, come to Attu for birding.

The Attu "Hilton" in which we slept looks completely uninviting. Not one of the fifty states would allow their homeless to sleep in it. It was an old concrete building with peeling walls and exposed rusting pipes which had once been part of a heating system. The floors which weren't wet were damp. I slept in an upper bunk with seven other men in one small room with one

chair. The bunks sagged, but we propped them up somewhat with scrap lumber lying about. We had air conditioned privies -- outside ambient air. For all this we paid luxury hotel prices!

But we did have plenty of good water, both hot and cold. There were three wash basins and two showers. We also had a drying room with a propane burner in it, which was very welcome at the end of the usual wet day. We also had one washing machine which was operating constantly.

Birding at Attu is possible due to the determination of Larry Balch, a birder from Chicago. He organized Attour, Inc. and the birding trips. Somehow he obtained permission from Fish and Wildlife for the use of the old dilapidated buildings called base. He also got permission to land at the Coast Guard's runway and has managed - so far - to charter planes that can make the long flight, carry the necessary load, and still land and take off on the limited runway.

Larry has the birding well organized. He and 5 leaders led trips each day to different locations. All the leaders were exceptionally well qualified and experienced with Attu, and went out of their way to try to find birds and assist everyone in seeing them. The leaders carried Questars and CBs and maintained contact with base at half hour intervals. Religiously. At each location we could all overhear the conversations and knew what was being seen (or not) and where. Everyone had the option to instantly leave his group and hasten to another location where an interesting bird had been reported.

But birding at Attu is work, hard work, have no misconceptions about it. The distances are great, the terrain is rugged, the wind is strong and the rain is not just wet, it is cold. The biking and hiking are energy draining.

You get lifers, but you must persevere. Most of us are used to seeing shorebirds by the hundreds and thousands on Atlantic beaches. Spotting a reported rarity is a matter of scoping through a flock or flocks of birds until you pick it out. In Attu the Asiatic birds are few and hard to find. Just try to find a Wood Sandpiper in Henderson Marsh. In order to get him a group forms a line and sweeps the marsh, hoping to raise it and follow it to where it lands. But you must sweep, and sweep again. For in the vast Henderson Marsh there may be a lone Wood Sandpiper or none at all. If the sweeps are unproductive, you head home wearily, hoping for better luck next day. Someone said: "Attu, where the birds come to you." Forget it!

Nevertheless one afternoon's hike to South Beach produced Lapland Longspur, Song Sparrow (maxima), a resident which is much larger and dark gray, vastly different from the bird we know (and evidence that Attu is a part of North America), Mew Gull, Harlequin and Tufted Duck, Ancient and Kittlitz' Murrelet, Tufted and Horned Puffins and Red-faced Cormorants.

During our first full day at Attu word came at about 4:30 p.m. that a Bean Goose was at Alexai Point, 13 miles distant. A few hardy souls took off

but I was already tired from the day's activities and announced that in a few weeks my wife expected to meet me at Albany Airport and I was certain she preferred that I not arrive in a box! So I missed the Bean Goose. It made a short stopover and was never seen again.

But after a night's rest, word came of a Long-toed Stint at Henderson, and a Mongolian Plover at Alexai with a Brambling along the way. That was too much! A group of us took off. We swept and re-swept the swamp at Henderson --no Stint.

So we headed for Alexai. Sand, mud and stones made the biking tough. Many streams rush down from the mountains, cutting deep ravines on their way to the sea. We carried our bikes through some of the streams and some had a plank to cross on. Three miles short of our destination, I was forced to abandon my bike. So I ate lunch and proceeded on foot, only to learn that the Mongolian was an additional 2 1/2 miles out on the point. With so much energy invested, you had to continue on. Two miles of it was over an abandoned runway made of Marston metal, flat pieces of steel with two inch diameter holes laid out on the ground. Various plants were growing through the holes but it provided good footing. The last half mile the beach consisted of rock and loose sand. After two hours of searching several of us got the Mongolian.

At 5:15 p.m. we started the long trek back, resting frequently. When we were about 3 miles from base, dog tired, peddling slowly (me, at least) word came of a Gray-tailed Tattler at Casco Point. Instantly tiredness vanished, we changed course and peddled on furiously. We came to the end of the runway, clambered down a 20 foot embankment with our bikes and reached a rugged trail. After a short distance we were forced to abandon our bikes and hiked a difficult half mile across the point and found our indefatigable leader, Pete Isleib with a Questar on the Tattler. We limped home, Brambling-less and Stint-less but with two good lifers under our belts as we enjoyed a satisfying 9:00 p.m. dinner.

On the 20th I was writing a letter to Audrey (it would go out on the Coast Guard service plane) when word came that a Terek Sandpiper was seen flying toward Casco Beach. The papers got swept into a folder, on came the warm clothing and I biked at top speed (for me, that is) down a short hill and through a 5 inch pool in the road. And I remained upright -- this time. I caught up with our ever smiling leader Gerry Rosenband and a few others and we scoured the beaches for hours. No Terek. But we did get a Wood Sandpiper in excellent plumage.

Then the radio reported an Olive Tree Pipit way over in Navy Town. We arrived at the Pipit's reported locale and worked and worked to get a good look at it. It insisted upon disappearing in the tall grasses. After an hour, we succeeded. Then we kept it in sight for an hour longer to help later arrivals get it.

Then back to roaming the beaches for the Terek. Hours and miles later

the radio reported that it was close to where the Pipit had been. So back we raced and found Mr. Terek feeding on the beach in close view. Full colored. Beautiful. The illustrations do not do him justice. I wanted to pick him up and bring him home. Then back to another 9:00 p.m. dinner.

Incidentally (but not too incidentally when you are constantly out in the cold, wet, and wind) the food was consistently good and excellent quality, and plenty of it. Two cooks from Anchorage did a good job of planning and preparation. Porridge time was 7:15 a.m. (coffee, tea, oatmeal, dry cereals, canned fruit, orange and grapefruit juice). At 7:30 we had a full breakfast: bacon, eggs, pancakes, refried beans, Canadian bacon. We then cleared out of the dining room which was a separate building a few hundred yards from our "Hilton", to return at 8:30 to find the tables loaded with lunch makings. We made our sandwiches of cheese, ham, sardines, turkey, cold cuts, and filled our bags with apples, candy bars, raisins and granola bars. The 7:00 p.m. dinner hour was very flexible and was postponed until 8:00, 9:00 and once to 10:30 p.m., depending upon the excitement level of our birding. And dinner was substantial. We always had a tossed salad, the entrees consisted of frozen halibut or salmon, meatloaf, pork chops, and even a great seafood and green spinach concoction, garlic flavored -- excellent. One of the workers liked to fish and we had fresh Dolly Vardin Trout for breakfast several times and one day he caught enough for dinner for all.

On the 28th it rained all day. Not heavily, but steadily. But when you're spending over \$5,000 to bird for a few weeks you can't let that stop you even though it's a cold rain. So we started out in Henderson Marsh and got several good birds, but late in the morning came a report of a Siberian Rubythroat at Murder Point. Fifteen minutes later it was confirmed so we traveled 7 1/2 miles to Murder Point where we hiked along to where Pete Isleib had seen the bird. We soon flushed it to the top of a tree (bush size in Attu), in full and resplendent view. It was a male, probably in its second year, with a bright orange-red chest, not scarlet-red.

By now it was 1:30 p.m. and we were tired and hungry. So we sat down in the rain on old dead reeds and ate a sandwich quickly, before it got soaked. Then back to base, hoping to rest for the balance of the day, for by now the steady long days of birding were catching up with some of us. But soon the radio reported a possible Pechora's Pipit near Bib Lake so out we went again over the spongy trail. When we got to the lake over 30 of us formed a long sweep line, stretching from the lake to halfway up the mountain. We flushed a bird several times but it turned out to be another Siberian Rubythroat.

You can confidently expect the unexpected in this part of the world. And not just with bird sightings: the Coast Guard celebrated its 200th anniversary at San Francisco while we were in Attu. A Russian ship, Volga, commanded by an admiral who is the head of the Russian equivalent of our Coast Guard, participated in the California ceremonies and had brought along a 24-piece marching band. On the return voyage they ran into one of the heavy storms that birders like because they blow Asiatic species our way. The

Russians got permission from Washington to anchor at Holtz Bay, which was in the lee of Attu, for two days. In the cause of international goodwill, the admiral radioed the Coast Guard Commander and offered to send his 24-piece marching band ashore to perform for the entertainment of the residents. When this was announced at dinner the room exploded with laughter! Imagine the band on the runway, which would be the only place to perform, with a few Coasties and birders looking on! The admiral's offer was well meant, but just a little bit out of place. The diplomatic niceties were taken care of by Larry Balch and the Coast Guard Commander who hiked over Jarmin Pass to Holtz Bay for lunch aboard the Volga with music by a portion of the band.

On the 29th the wind was fierce, 40 mph with rain. A lot of us stayed at base catching up on laundry and field notes. But at 4:15 came the report of a Gray Wagtail 8 miles distant. A few went for it -- successfully -- but neither Jim or I did. We were hoping for better weather on the morrow.

On Wednesday the 30th the wind had died down. It had been a favorable wind, mostly from the west, so at breakfast I confidently announced that I would get 5 lifers before the day was out. We started out early for the Gray Wagtail and found it at Gilbert Ridge where it had been the day before. An Eye-browed Thrush was reported by Terry Savaloja, the leader in that area, but a lengthy search was to no avail.

Then came the radio report of a Brambling at the end of the runway, 6 miles back toward base. So back I headed, and when about halfway there, ran into a group sweeping for a Bluethroat. I've seen both subspecies of the Bluethroat in Gambell and in Germany, but it is a pretty bird and I could use a reprieve from biking, so I joined the search. Just as we found the Bluethroat a Black-tailed Godwit flew low overhead, giving us a very good, but short, view.

On I went for the Brambling. Dan Gibson had it at the end of the runway and it was a piece of cake to get lengthy and good views of it. I then returned 4 miles to Henderson to see what good things were there, but several hours of searching proved fruitless. It was dinner time when the radio reported a Common Rosefinch back where the Brambling had been. I had seen that bird at Gambell and Fair Isle, but it's a nice bird, and almost on a direct route to dinner, so I went for it.

When I arrived, Dan Gibson greeted me with the news that Gerry Rosenband had just reported a Siberian Flycatcher deep in Henderson Marsh. I told Dan that I was too tired to try for it -- it meant going at least 6 miles out and 9 miles back to base. Dan looked me hard in the eye and said, "Sam, you just can't not try for it. I'm the only one on the island who has ever seen it. And that was at Shemya, years ago. It has been seen just once at Attu but never on an Attour trip. Larry Balch has never seen it. It will probably hang around until dark so you have an excellent chance of getting it. You must go." Thus spoke the healthy vigorous male decades younger than **TIRED, HUNGRY ME.**

But of course Dan was right. Hadn't I come all this way for the opportunity to see unusual Asiatics? And the Siberian Flycatcher certainly was one. I could readily explain my failure to carry on to my grandchildren, who are not birders, but what would I be able to tell myself years hence? And what about my announced target of 5 lifers? So I never bothered with the Rosefinch but turned around, forced myself to Henderson, only to learn that the flycatcher was a very rough 3 miles further down the marsh.

But word of the Siberian Flycatcher had electrified everyone. Back at base, Larry Balch wanted it for a lifer, and got both of the camp's Hondas in the effort. The cooks and all 5 workers left camp. Even the Coast Guard got in the act. When I could go no further on my bike, the Coast Guard Commander came along on his motorcycle, and invited me to hop on back. My first motorcycle ride! We proceeded about a half mile through the mire when the cycle could go no further. So out we got and sloshed, sloshed, sloshed. After a while Larry came along with a four wheeler Honda with a tow cart that had room for one more. With pushing and shoving we made some progress but then got hopelessly stuck.

So on we trudged with tired me bringing up the rear. Eventually we got to where leader Noble Proctor was trying to keep the bird in sight. It was moving about frequently and rapidly and it was very difficult to get a positive identifying look at it. Before I could get the Siberian, word came from a mile deeper in the marsh of an Eye-browed Thrush!

After about 10 minutes of trying I got the Siberian well and headed for the Thrush. Once I managed to get there, alive, it was easy to get. He was feeding on the ground like any sensible robin. My target of 5 lifers had been reached. Big Wednesday it was! Wearily I wended my way baseward, with only a short ride on the motorcycle to my muddy bike. I arrived at base at 10:45 p.m. too tired for dinner, and settled for a beer and a cup of instant soup. And on to bed.

There were other special days. Like the day we hiked to Temnac Valley, an 18 mile round trip through the mountains, and scaled a 90-foot cliff to see the White-tailed Eagle, a Eurasian species and the only one in North America. (See "Four Eagle Species in One Birding Trip", Feathers, Vol. 52, No. 3, Summer 1990).

After Big Wednesday birding quieted down. The weather turned pleasant, warm, and mostly sunny. That's bad news for birding on Attu. On Saturday, June 9th, our last day of birding, I went with Dan Gibson and another birder for one last try at Henderson. On the road in, a little brownish bird flew up on the left, and disappeared ahead on the side of a hill. We followed it, by eye, up the hill and down again, where it landed on a small shrub (tree). Rustic Bunting!

No waiting for the half hour call for this one. Only three of us were present and everyone would want it. Dan immediately pulled out his radio and

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sent a flash call to base, and called for a general alarm to all parties. He said we would not move in on the bird for a closer look until the others could arrive, and asked all leaders afield in other areas to advise of the numbers coming. And come they did, all except for one individual who elected to stay at base. Oh well, it does take all kinds. It took about 1 1/2 hours for everyone to arrive and then we moved in, and even though it kept flitting about, all got a good look at it in the Questar. It was a young male intermediate in coloration between the male and female illustrations in the National Geographic Field Guide. What a way to end birding on Attu.

But to return to the question raised by the title, is Attu for you? It all depends. Attu is expensive. Attu can produce fantastic birds, birds which you will get nowhere else on North America, but you have to work hard to get them. And endure nasty weather. And a severe test of your physical endurance. Expect very poor housing, the worst there is short of a concentration camp. No matter how good a biker you are, be prepared for rough riding and a sore bottom. It can be one birder's paradise, but another person's hell.

I won't answer the question, that's up to you. I loved it!

NOTICE: Hawk Watch scheduled for September 14th will be held on September 15th instead. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Key Bank, Star Plaza Shopping Center, intersection of Routes 20 & 155
Coordinator: Arthur Long 1-758-9283.

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BIRD WATCHING IN THE FORTIES

Dick Patrick

Back in the 1940's, at least in our house, you were expected to amuse yourself quietly indoors on a Sunday afternoon.

One Sunday, my brother Lee suggested that we look at "The Birdbook". I didn't suspect anything and went along with the idea. Then he said, "Let's cover up the names and see how many we can guess." I fell right into his trap. For some reason he had been studying the names of the birds. I believe his short-term objective was to show up his older brother -- which he certainly accomplished! I can still sense the dumbfounded feeling I had as he reeled off "Arctic three-toed woodpecker" and I desperately waited for a Blue Jay or Crow to show up on the page.

Rather than gloat over humbling me, he mentioned that bird study was really enjoyable. Back in those days, I recall that we wanted to know everything. So why not learn the birds?

Let me tell you how hard it was for us. Dad obliged us by giving us free use of his binoculars. The glasses were certainly better than nothing, but they had been dropped on their head once too often. You can picture what they were like.

Don't ask me where "The Birdbook" came from. It was always in the family. Gramma must have sensed its importance, as she covered it in the red and white oilcloth with little Indian and buffalo patterns that was her trademark.

The book is Birds of America, copyright 1917 and 1936, and contains 106 plates by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Let me digress; I have as well Wild Animals of North America, published by the National Geographic Society in 1930, also containing plates by Mr. Fuertes, and also covered in the red and white oilcloth reserved for only the most important volumes to enter the house, (which to my knowledge, were only those two books). There is no mystery as to the origin of this book, as hand-written in the front is my name and "December 25, 1939". Pretty heavy reading for a kid born in '37. On the other hand, the book is still one of my most valued possessions, so I guess a kid is never too young for quality.

Let me get back to how hard it was for us to be birdwatchers back in that bygone age. Birds of America was our Bible, which is a good term, as the book has 887 pages. Though it was copyrighted in 1936 as well as 1917, it is my opinion that the Fuertes plates were added in '36 and the text dates from '17, since you don't see any dates in the book past then. It has some interesting observations: "You need a good opera glass, pencil and pad to note down everything about the bird and a museum is a great advantage to help you identify the birds. They can best be observed by driving along country roads with horse and carriage and it is often easier to get close to birds while on horseback."

The introduction offered several reasons for publishing the book. At about that time the first laws protecting birds and the first wildlife preserves were established. It also mentioned that literary magazines are constantly publishing articles on birds. This suggests that there weren't the plethora of bird magazines that we enjoy today. It gave these reasons as well as the constant improvement of photography as the time to prepare this "final repository of this vast treasure of scattered information." And it still is a treasure.

Unfortunately, it has a few drawbacks for kids learning the birds in the field. The size (8 1/2 by 11 by 2 1/2 inches), the plates are scattered through the book, and, although it really is the birds of America, the color plates are all eastern birds.

Let me give you one last observation about Birds of America. It states that 800 distinct species and 400 additional subspecies have been recorded north of the Rio Grande. the current National Geographic Society field guide states "more than 800 species of birds breed in North America, or visit the continent regularly or drop in occasionally." Interesting that the 800 number has stood up so long.

So we haunted the library in Oneonta, New York, which had a number of other large birdbooks of various quality, though it was the paintings of Audubon which really made our hair stand on end and stirred our blood. So many of Audubon's paintings were right at eye level, especially the waterfowl, with a wild sea and ice flows in the background. Roseate Spoonbills, Cinnamon Teals, Poorwills, and Barrow's Goldeneyes were just beyond our dreams! We never really even expected to see a regular Goldeneye. Forget about Barrow's. Still, it was fun to contemplate that somewhere out there, in a wild, inaccessible place, these fabulous birds existed. We always had these books checked out, and spent every spare minute studying them. It didn't seem to bother anyone else in Oneonta. We were the only customers for the three or four books.

Dad's full time job was as a cop, but as he worked the night shift, he had time to be an electrician in the daytime. He used to load us all up and drive us out to a new house being constructed in the country. He had the idea that we could help him with the wiring, learn the trade, and perhaps share the

business with him. For better or worse, it wasn't to be. We were out in the fields or surrounding woods and gone each day like shots. I think Dad was content that we were enjoying ourselves. Don't expect too much of your kids and you will be all the more pleased when they occasionally do something commendable. The most exciting day was in West Oneonta, where we came upon a Screech-Owl about ten feet up in a pine tree. We walked around it with its head turning, following us. Since then, I have seen Whooping Cranes as part of bird watchers' tour. Believe me, discovering the Screech-Owl by ourselves is still the bigger deal! We had some other big discoveries, a Bobwhite on her nest, and a flock of Black-throated Green Warblers that invaded our short street one noon. By and large though, we had to be content with White-breasted Nuthatches, Nighthawks, Bobolinks and Flickers as our rewards.

Then one summer Dad took us camping near Raquette Lake, up in the Adirondacks. We had heard tell that birds get up early in the morning, and if we did likewise we would be rewarded. So at daybreak there we were on the edge of a stream. I can still hear one of my brothers saying in an awed voice "It's just like a page from a birdbook!" The first one to appear was what we called then a Maryland Yellowthroat. Some of the others we were not sure of. Lee had suggested that each of us look at a separate part of the bird and we could combine the parts when we had access to a birdbook. So we compiled our notes and hiked down to the tiny library to determine just what hour of the week during the summer it was open.

Imagine our anguish! When the door of our destination finally was unlocked, the only birdbooks in the library were a two volume deluxe set of - - are you ready? -- the birds of Chile and Argentina. It had a dedication in the front as a gift from someone. The things you remember for 35 or so years.

Dad also took us on several expeditions to the West. Again, I can recall the excitement in Yellowstone of seeing an Osprey and Clark's Nutcrackers for the first time. The Osprey was called out by Dad, to our amazement. The Nutcracker was identified by a sign at the Grand Canyon area. I still think of all the birds we must have seen with no way to identify them.

Back in the forties, on those trips, we were thrilled to see Mockingbirds, Cardinals, and Turkey Vultures, birds that are now everyday birds in New York State. In my memory's eye, I can see each one as we discovered it for the first time. When I see an unusual bird now, I often fantasize what it would be like if my brothers, as little boys, could be with me, and the excitement we would feel at the sighting. Otherwise, to me, it just ain't that much fun. To be out in a cow pasture with a couple of guides with tapes and a spotlight scaring up a Poorwill, it ain't quite like we pictured seeing the bird as a kid. And then, in a little reservoir in the Sawtooth Range near Stanley, Idaho, again with a professional guide, we saw a couple Barrow's Goldeneyes floating by. After the initial excitement (which I will admit), I thought, "Well, that's it". I don't think there are any bird "superstars" left for me to see.

If bird watching had been as easy in the forties as it is now with the 'scopes and tripods, the bird-call tapes, the field guides, the bird clubs and the professional tours where you knock off maybe fifty new birds a week, would it have provided the memories and the thrills? Would I still even be doing it? Interesting to ponder.

But hey, I haven't told you about the Pygmy Nuthatch I saw on the North Rim last week! Wow, I never thought I'd see one of them!

CORMORANTS, 1991

The best kept secret on the East Coast is what goes on these days at the "Reef of Norman's Woe" -- among cormorants, that is. If you want to peep, take your stand behind the arches of the Hammond Museum outside Gloucester. There, within telescope view of shore-bound spectators, the colony members "tryst". It's easy to see tail-spreading and cocking between two birds, but harder to spot them necking (head-up display). On April 6, when I peeped, they may not yet have paired, as the respective two-somes left off their displays with little ado and blended in with the colony inconspicuously.

And to think that fifty years ago I had to sail about five miles out into Muscongus Bay to see cormorants en famille!

Sally Kelly

CURLEW SANDPIPER HIGHLIGHTS DELMARVA TRIP

May 3-5, 1991

Seventeen HMBC members made this year's visit to the Delmarva Peninsula with the usual stop at Brigantine. Many members were taking their first overnight out-of-town HMBC trip and were very pleased with getting a large number of lifers. Despite a dismal forecast, the weather cooperated, except for a strong wind on Friday.

At Brigantine we observed many warblers. The ride around the dike produced many of the expected species including Whimbrel, Peregrine, Caspian Tern and at least 8 Gull-billed Terns. On the ferry from Cape May to Port Lewes we saw a dozen Northern Gannets and a small flock of Red Knots.

Saturday morning at Pocomoke Swamp we got an unusual number of Blue Grosbeaks -- eight -- and the beautiful warblers that make it their home: Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Hooded, Kentucky, and Northern Parula.

As we drove through Maryland and Delaware on Saturday and Sunday, we spotted a Bald Eagle in each state. Saturday afternoon at Chincoteague we saw a Tricolored Heron, more Whimbrel and Northern Gannets and a much discussed and well observed female duck which resembled a cross between a Ruddy and a Bufflehead, but remains unidentified.

On Sunday we went to Ocean City, Maryland, only to be disappointed by the presence of a vintage car rally which occupied all of the available parking spaces. Later on at Little Creek we saw thousands of shorebirds, mostly Dunlin, and a sole Black-necked Stilt. A flock of 20 Black Skimmers made a pleasant sight.

Late Sunday afternoon at Bombay Hook we got the bird of the trip, a breeding plumaged Curlew Sandpiper mixed in with thousands of other shorebirds. It was difficult to observe and several missed it, unfortunately. It was a fitting end to a most enjoyable trip which should remain in our field trip schedule for years to come. The total species count was 128, which is lower than usual.

Samuel R. Madison

GIZZ, ZEN AND THE CURLEW SANDPIPER

Birders on Sam's Delmarva trip (means "the Marvelous" to birders) applied both these techniques to make his sighting of the bird their own. (I did and got a "lifer"!) Early on, there were rumors -- at the last stop in a marathon drive from Salisbury to Bombay Hook via Ocean City and other coastal resorts. Quick stops to see the Turnstones, a bypass of Prime Hook (and easy viewing of the Blue Grosbeak the next day), a worthwhile search of Little Creek to find Skimmers, Dowitchers, the Stilt, and gulls gorging on Horseshoe Crab eggs. At each stop, zen was practiced by one or more individuals ("must get on to see the sandpiper") or reverse zen ("the sun will be on the wrong side"). Finally, at about 3:30 pm, we reached the Visitors Center and a group of departing birders. We heard that the bird had been seen at Raymond Pond within the hour. Sam, armed with his new optics, searched each flock diligently and finally came up with a cinnamon bird.

Those of us who "needed it" (zen) saw it; the skeptics who didn't, missed it. Some of us even sighted it ourselves later, when we had the gizz

of it. Finally, all sightings were confirmed by a call from the tower, "Curlew"! We all traipsed up to see it in two positioned 'scopes: Each sighting was similar to Sam's bird -- gizz and zen!

Fantastic, Sam!

Sally Kelly
May 27, 1991

PALMER'S RAVINE FIELD TRIP

May 25, 1991

The Palmer's Ravine field trip began at the 6:45 am meeting place at Schenectady County Community College parking lot. Before departing, a Belted Kingfisher flew over, a Savannah Sparrow was heard singing nest to the college warm-up track and many Rock Doves were seen feeding in the parking lot.

We arrived at our destination under the threat of a rain shower at about 7:10 am. The temperature was a humid 69 degrees Fahrenheit. Toward noon, the clouds thinned and a Westerly wind helped east the humidity. There were 21 birders participating and all had a good time.

A total of 54 species were tallied and are as follows: Great Blue Heron, American Kestrel, Ring-billed Gull, Rock Dove, Mourning Dove, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Kingbird, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Willow Flycatcher, Eastern Wood Pewee, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Gray Catbird, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Veery, Eastern Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, European Starling, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Ovenbird, Louisiana Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Red-winged blackbird, Northern Oriole, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Scarlet Tanager, Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Savannah Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, and Song Sparrow.

Tom Palmer

GOLDEN-CHEEKED WARBLER

(Dendroica chrysoparia)

The golden-cheeked warbler is a small, insectivorous bird that breeds only in parts of central Texas. It has very specific ecological requirements, occurring only in mature Ashe juniper (*Juniperus ashei*) and oak woodlands. Habitat destruction is the primary reason this species is threatened. Urban development and widespread clearing of juniper for range management have occurred throughout the warbler's range. In 1990, it was estimated that no more than 263,750 acres (105,750 hectares) of suitable habitat remained.

The golden-cheeked warbler and its habitat continue to be threatened by juniper clearing and the construction of highways, water reservoirs and delivery systems, and private developments. Habitat fragmentation also may be promoting the spread of the brown-headed cowbird (*Molothrus ater*), a more adaptable bird that parasitizes the warbler's nests. Long-term successional changes in the forests also may be reducing the amount of suitable habitat for the warbler. If current trends continue, it is estimated that the golden-cheeked warbler population will decline more than 50 percent by the year 2000. The warbler's wintering habitat in the pine-oak forest highlands of southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua is also being destroyed and degraded. The [U.S. Fish & Wildlife] Service conducted an extensive review of the status of the golden-cheeked warbler and determined that emergency action was needed to protect the species. An emergency rule listing the species as Endangered and a proposal to provide long-term Endangered Species Act protection was published in the May 4, 1990 Federal Register. After considering the best scientific evidence available and the threats facing this species, the Service determined the species should be listed as Endangered. The final rule was published December 27, 1990. The Service found that Critical Habitat for the warbler cannot be determined at this time, but additional information on habitat requirements is being collected. Critical Habitat for the warbler must be designated by the Service by May 4, 1992, unless such a designation is found not to be prudent.

(from Endangered Species Technical Bulletin, Vol. XVI No. 1, January 1991, published by the US Fish & Wildlife Service.)



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Sec: Bette Moon 907 St. David's Lane, Schenectady 12309 372-8330
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Samuel Madison 439-4753

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Membership Chairperson: Daniel Ruge, 128 Chestnut St., Albany, NY 12210
Write or call (518)449-1087 (evenings).

D I A L - A - B I R D 4 3 9 - 8 0 8 0



VOL. 53
No. 3

SUMMER
1991

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.

CENTURY RUN ACHIEVES ITS QUARTER-MILLENNIUM SPECIES

Robert P. Yunick

For two consecutive years, a gull species, rare to the area, has set a Century Run mark. A Laughing Gull, seen on the Mohawk River at Cohoes on the Club's 46th Guy Bartlett Century Run on May 18, 1991, became the 250th species, plus two hybrids, recorded on the count. Last year's gull rarity was a Westerner -- a Franklin's Gull -- and this year's was a Southerner -- can a Ross' Gull be far behind?

The bird was a black-headed adult, seen about 150 feet in flight below the dam at the car rental lot. Six members of the 13 member Group A saw the bird, and noted its particular wing-tip pattern.

The count total was 149 species -- a poor showing ranking 27th on the composite list, compared to a record 188 in 1986, and 177 last year. The last occurrence of a total of less than 149 species was in 1973. The five groups of 25 observers also ranked below the usual observer turnout.

The best group tally was 121 species (even with a conspicuous miss on Hairy Woodpecker). Four of the five groups had lists of 94 to 121 species. Field coverage ran from 0400 to 2200.

The count was preceded by a rather warm, dry Spring that brought out vegetation at least two to three weeks ahead of schedule. On the day before the count, uncomfortably warm, humid air was violently displaced by a cooler air mass that brought rain and an approximately 40-degree drop in air temperature from the high 80's to high 40's in less than four hours. The night sky was overcast, the wind light from the north, and on the day of the count there was a cool northerly wind that led to clearing through the day, and to a chilly evening. Temperatures ranged from 44 to 69 degrees Fahrenheit.

Waterbirds were fewer in kind having either passed through earlier due to warmer than usual weather, or lacked suitable habitat due to the dryness. Only eight species of waterfowl were recorded compared to 15 in 1989 and 13 in 1990. Those that were recorded were the usual, expected species. Only six shorebird species were noted, with no rarities or surprises. Marsh birds were the ordinary, expected one; and except for the Laughing Gull, the gull list was quite routine.

The second-best bird of the count was the second-ever White-eyed Vireo-- first reported in 1976. Due to its sighting, and that of the first Philadelphia Vireo in five years, the Century Run for only the second time produced a list of all available Northeastern vireo species.

Warbler species numbered 21, which was lower than usual. Winter finches were poorly represented, and there were no Henslow's or Lincoln's sparrows noted. Orchard Oriole was missed, Ring-necked Pheasant was not found for the third time since 1988, previous to which it had been reported in all 43 years of the Century Run. Barred Owl was missed for the first time since 1986, having been recorded in 3 previous years.

Other rarities, beside the White-eyed Vireo, recorded for less than the tenth time were:

Common Raven	5th time since 1986
Mute Swan	7th time since 1966
Wild Turkey	8th time
Alder Flycatcher	9th time since 1975

All of these are species which have established a recent presence in the area (the Alder Flycatcher by virtue of AOU name change in 1974) and appear to be establishing a longterm foothold. We can hopefully look forward to their continued future presence.

There were 35 species reported by all parties, and 32 by all but one party. Thirty-eight species were seen by only one party, and those species are listed by group in the following key. those single species ranged from one to 19 per group, and included the normally common Brown Thrasher.

KEY TO GROUPS

- Group A: D. Blais, E. Blais, C. George, C. W. Huntley*, R. McCullough, J. Nield, C. Parker, S. Shaw, N. Stack, H. Stebbins, J. Tergam and C. Wheeler. 104 species, 0400 to 2130. Schenectady, Albany, Greene, Rensselaer and Saratoga counties. Red-breasted Merganser, Wild Turkey, Laughing Gull, Tennessee Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, and White-crowned Sparrow.
- Group B: Robert P. Yunick* and James C. Covert III. 48 species, 0500 to 1000. Bird banding at Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher.
- Group C: W. Gorman*, M. Gruett, M. Kuhrt and P. Connor. Black Creek, Cherry Plain, Columbia County, Castleton, Saratoga. 121 species, 0400-2130. Mute Swan, Red-shouldered Hawk, Sora, Common Moorhen,

Common Snipe, Bonaparte's Gull, Common Tern, Black Tern, Whip-poor-will, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Purple Martin, Fish Crow, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Brown Thrasher (!), White-eyed Vireo, Blackburnian Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Vesper Sparrow.

Group D: Ron Harrower*, William Graham and Barbara Putnam. 96 species. Saratoga County. Common Merganser, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Woodcock, Red-headed Woodpecker, Swainson's Thrush, Philadelphia Vireo, Pine Warbler, and Grasshopper Sparrow.

Group E: Ronald Calkins, Chris Cameron, Jocelyn Cole* and Peter Butryn. 94 species, 0400 to 2200. Black Creek Marsh, Thacher Park, Five Rivers, Kenrose Estates, Basic Creek, Cohoes and Saratoga. Cooper's Hawk, Black-billed Cuckoo, Alder Flycatcher, and Horned Lark.

* Asterisk denotes the group compiler.

1991 GUY BARTLETT CENTURY RUN

May 18, 1991

Common Loon	a c	Virginia Rail	a cde
Double-crested Cormorant	a c	Sora	c
American Bittern	cd	Common Moorhen	c
Great Blue Heron	a cde	Killdeer	a cde
Green-backed Heron	a cde	Solitary Sandpiper	a d
Mute Swan	c	Spotted Sandpiper	a cde
Canada Goose	abcde	Least Sandpiper	a cde
Wood Duck	a cde	Common Snipe	c
American Black Duck	a c e	American Woodcock	d
Mallard	abcde	Laughing Gull	a
Blue-winged Teal	a c e	Bonaparte's Gull	c
Common Merganser	d	Ring-billed Gull	abcde
Red-breasted Merganser	a	Herring Gull	abc e
Turkey Vulture	abcde	Great Black-backed Gull	a cde
Osprey	ab	Common Tern	c
Bald Eagle	a e	Black Tern	c
Northern Harrier	de	Rock Dove	abcde
Sharp-shinned Hawk	d	Mourning Dove	abcde
Cooper's Hawk	e	Black-billed Cuckoo	e
Red-shouldered Hawk	c	Great Horned Owl	a c e
Broad-winged Hawk	a c	Common Nighthawk	a c
Red-tailed Hawk	a cde	Whip-poor-will	c
American Kestrel	cde	Chimney Swift	abcde
Ruffed Grouse	cde	Ruby-throated Hummingbird	a cd
Wild Turkey	a	Belted Kingfisher	a cd

Red-headed Woodpecker	d	Warbling Vireo	a cde
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	c	Philadelphia Vireo	d
Downy Woodpecker	ab de	Red-eyed Vireo	a cde
Hairy Woodpecker	abc e	Blue-winged Warbler	a cde
Northern Flicker	a cde	Tennessee Warbler	a
Pileated Woodpecker	cde	Nashville Warbler	cd
Eastern Wood-Pewee	a de	Yellow Warbler	abcde
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	b	Chestnut-sided Warbler	abcd
Alder Flycatcher	e	Magnolia Warbler	bcd
Willow Flycatcher	a c e	Black-throated Blue Warbler	a cd
Least Flycatcher	abcde	Yellow-rumped Warbler	abcde
Eastern Phoebe	a cde	Black-throated Green Warbler	a cde
Great Crested Flycatcher	a cde	Blackburnian Warbler	c
Eastern Kingbird	abcde	Pine Warbler	d
Horned Lark	e	Prairie Warbler	a c
Purple Martin	c	Bay-breasted Warbler	c
Tree Swallow	abcde	Blackpoll Warbler	a c e
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	a cd	Black-and-white Warbler	a cde
Bank Swallow	abcde	American Redstart	a cde
Cliff Swallow	a c e	Ovenbird	abcde
Barn Swallow	abcde	Northern Waterthrush	a c
Blue Jay	abcde	Louisiana Waterthrush	a
American Crow	abcde	Common Yellowthroat	abcde
Fish Crow	c	Canada Warbler	abc e
Common Raven	a e	Scarlet Tanager	a cde
Black-capped Chickadee	abcde	Northern Cardinal	abcde
Tufted Titmouse	abcde	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	abcde
Red-breasted Nuthatch	a cd	Indigo Bunting	bcd
White-breasted Nuthatch	abcde	Rufous-sided Towhee	a cde
Brown Creeper	a c e	Chipping Sparrow	a cde
Carolina Wren	c	Field Sparrow	a cde
House Wren	abcde	Vesper Sparrow	c
Winter Wren	a de	Savannah Sparrow	cd
Marsh Wren	a c e	Gra'sshopper Sparrow	d
Golden-crowned Kinglet	c	Song Sparrow	abcde
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	cd	Swamp Sparrow	a cde
Eastern Bluebird	a cde	White-throated Sparrow	cd
Veery	abcde	White-crowned Sparrow	a
Swainson's Thrush	d	Dark-eyed Junco	a c e
Hermit Thrush	cde	Bobolink	a cde
Wood Thrush	abcde	Red-winged Blackbird	abcde
American Robin	abcde	Eastern Meadowlark	abcde
Gray Catbird	abcde	Common Grackle	abcde
Northern Mockingbird	a cde	Brown-headed Cowbird	abcde
Brown Thrasher	c	Northern Oriole	abcde
Cedar Waxwing	ab e	Purple Finch	a c e
European Starling	abcde	House Finch	abcde
White-eyed Vireo	c	American Goldfinch	abcde
Solitary Vireo	cde	House Sparrow	abcde
Yellow-throated Vireo	a cde		

\\ \\ \\ B O O K R E V I E W \\ \\ \\

There are two kinds of birders - those who've been to Cape May and those who are going. You'll have company. Paul Kerlinger of the Cape May Bird Observatory estimates that 90,000 of us visit each year, and we drop about six million bucks into the local economy. Why Cape May?

Cave Swallow. Brown Booby. Fork-tailed Flycatcher. Pretty esoteric stuff. There are more common birds, and in great numbers - thousands of hawks, tens of thousands of shorebirds. This is Cape May!

I've been a Cape May fan for a few years now, visiting at least twice each year. Some of you have been on the HMBC fall trip to observe hawk migration at the Point, warblers at Higbee Beach, and shorebirds at the Meadows. You know the attraction.

So, it was with great pleasure that I read Jack Connor's recent Season at the Point, and I urge you to do so as well. Connor is a writing teacher at Stockton State College who spends more than a little time in the field at Cape May. He also wrote The Complete Birder, an excellent "guide to better birding". Connor's a very engaging story-teller.

In Season at the Point, Connor follows the 1988 hawk watch season through its 100 days from mid-August to Thanksgiving. Events of this season are springboards into broader discussions of hawk watching, hawk banding, and warbler counting as they relate to our understanding of migration. I found some of the most understandable explanations of migration in this book. I also found more questions than answers.

But, the real stories in this book are about people. Connor has skillfully woven the tales of the watchers into his discussions of the birds. He traces the history of Cape May hawk watching through the activities of the participants. I'm particularly impressed with the way Connor writes about differences of opinion, debate, and even feuds among the watchers. I came away without picking sides, which illustrates the writer's skill in exploring these areas of contention.

The science is well-done. You'll read about current migration theory, the value of and controversy over banding, and even the economics of birding. Though concentrating on the hawk watch, there are chapters on warbler counting and owl banding.

I can't wait to get back to Cape May, and I'm sure you'll be ready to jump in the car and head south as soon as you put this book down.

Bob Budliger

**BIRDERS and BIRD RECORDS NEEDED
for NATURE CONSERVANCY PRESERVES**

The Eastern New York Chapter of the Nature Conservancy maintains nearly 30 preserves in the local area. The HMBC is undertaking a project to provide the Conservancy with data on the occurrence of birds in their preserves.

As part of this project, HMBC field trip coordinators are being asked to keep preserve-specific bird lists for Club trips that include Conservancy preserves. However, this will only provide part of the information. Therefore, your help is needed in the following ways:

- (1) Bird records you may have from your own visits to Conservancy preserves;
- (2) Bird records you make upon future visits to Conservancy preserves;
- (3) Your participation in specific trips to census the birds at Conservancy preserves.

If you have or make any lists from Conservancy preserves, please send them to:

HMBC Records Committee
Cliff Lamere
15 Saradale Avenue
Loudonville, NY 12211

If you can participate in censusing birds at preserves, or would like further information, please call Scott Stoner at 464-0492.

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Dial-A-Bird:	Al Mapes	439-4086
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	Betty Callanan	372-8806

WINTER BIRD FEEDING with
Project FeederWatch

Many people enjoy feeding birds, especially during the cold, winter months. But is winter feeding actually good for them? Here are some arguments, both for and against.

Against

Some birds may be expanding their ranges farther north because of bird feeders.

Feeding can keep birds from migrating to warmer climates when they should.

Winter feeding prevents birds from foraging for natural food sources and makes them highly dependent upon feeders.

Bird feeders concentrate populations above natural levels and can increase disease and predation.

Birds can be injured when their feet freeze to metal parts of bird feeders.

For

Some birds' ranges appear to be expanding, but this is likely due to a combination of warmer urban areas and habitat changes.

Migration is triggered by photoperiod (length of day) and complex interactions of hormone levels and environmental factors. By itself, feeding cannot override the urge to migrate.

Birds will continue to eat their normal food. However, individual birds do become dependent on feeder food. Therefore, if you start feeding, it is important to continue feeding, especially during winter storms.

Concentrating birds around feeders can increase the risk and spread of contagious diseases if feeders are not kept clean and food kept fresh and free of mold. (The ground beneath feeders should be cleaned, too!) To prevent excessive predation, feeders should be placed in an area with a wide view of the surroundings, and no more than five feet from cover.

Birds' feet do not have sweat glands, so there is no danger of this.

So there you have it! It appears that feeding can affect individual birds, but probably does not cause major impacts on a species or a population.



However, if you decide to feed birds, be prepared to make a commitment to it for the entire winter.

Project FeederWatch, a joint venture of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the Long Point Bird Observatory, is a continent-wide survey of birds at backyard feeders. Project FeederWatch has 8,000 volunteers, but welcomes new participants. People who can accurately identify birds at a feeder can join the organization for \$12. Write: Project FeederWatch, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road; Ithaca, NY 14850.

(submitted by Walton Sabin)

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D I A L - A - B I R D 4 3 9 - 8 0 8 0



Help

Kevin McGrath, President HMBC

A year ago I accepted the responsibility of being President. The outgoing President who recruited me said the job was mostly facile. "You don't (have to) do much, the committees run the club. You just appoint chairpersons and set the agenda for the board meetings. You don't even vote.", she said. I'm now uncertain if it was my naive desire to believe her or her skillful con-job that sold me. The truth however did not live up to the expectation (in terms of being easy). I have enjoyed being president, so much so that I stayed on another year. In that time, I believe that I have tried to act responsibly and do what's best for our collective interests. I am, however, quite certain that, as a group, we need to become more aggressively and progressively active both internally and externally.

For many years we have allowed a small, dedicated group of our members to shoulder the burden for us all and we owe them a great deal of thanks for their efforts. Many of our committee chairs, committee members, trip leaders, and board members have been rotating responsibilities for so long that they would be eligible for retirement benefits if we offered them. It is true that they have done much of this out of their genuine interest but it is also likely that their sense of responsibility and feeling that 'there's no one else' plays a role. One of the peculiar paradoxes of volunteerism is that the more you're willing to do, the more you're asked to do. The more you are asked, the less you are willing to commit. Many of our volunteers have been asked to do so much for so long that they, in fairness, must be feeling they've done enough. If we all enjoy the benefits, we should all take some of the responsibility.

I also find myself being drawn into that mind set, that 'there's no one else'. I went from committee member to President in four years. Now, I find myself on the board, acting chair for one committee, sitting on two committees, and responsible for ALL of the committees. And I'm not alone. It's all the same group of 20 or so doing EVERYTHING. I enjoy it but I'm concerned (and over extended). Who do I find to replace me? Who do we find to replace any of our most active members? The answer of course lies within us; within our own membership. The answer is YOU.

In this issue of this old periodical; a Relic, the icon of the malaise that we're trying to shed, I urge you to become an active member. It's your club. Make it what YOU want it to be. All club members are being urged to participate by donating their time to assist with field trips, workshops, programs, and publications. Volunteers are needed. If you're interested in;

- ⊂ developing birding workshops,
- ⊂ leading field trips or suggestions for new trips,
- ⊂ programs, or
- ⊂ writing articles or reporting for FEATHERS,

WE NEED YOU!!! Call me (Kevin McGrath) at 765-3623 or leave a message on Dial-a-Bird and I will get back to you. Our club works only when we do. Any ideas and/or suggestions are welcome.



Dial-A-Bird: 439-8080

We will soon have new equipment on line that will allow you to BY-PASS the outgoing recorded message (that you've heard five times already) and leave your sighting reports. The club's "Rare Bird" phone chain begins with Bill Lee. Unusual sightings, even if not important to you, should still be reported.

If you wish to get a sighting report out to the club FAST, use the phone chain and not Dial-a-Bird. Persons wishing to be included in the chain should notify Bill or K. McGrath and we will work you in somewhere.

Federation News:



The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs will be holding its annual meeting in Oneonta, NY on September 25-27. For additional information, contact Bill Lee at 374-3426.

Individual club members who wish to join the Federation may contact Mrs. Myrna Hemmerick, PO Box 2203, Setauket, NY 11733. Dues are a scant \$15 per year.

This year's meeting, being so close to home, should be well represented by HMBC members.

HMBC Field Trip Schedule for Aug-Sept:

Aug 16 (Sun): Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge Coord.: George & Kay Hanson

A long day trip (6am-8pm) to this shorebird Mecca in New York City is a must for upstaters. See peeps by the hundreds (all species are usually present), plovers, Avocet (maybe), Terns and other shore/near shore specialties. The lucky rarity is a common occurrence on this trip. Call 885-5467, 9 am-1 pm for details.

Sept 12 (Sat): Vischer Ferry Preserve Coord.: Scott Stoner

An easy morning stroll in search of migrating passerines and the usual herons, egrets, waterfowl, etc. Call Scott at 464-0492 for details.

Sept 20 (Sun): Five Rivers Coord.: Alan Mapes

Meet at 8 am at the center on Game Farm Rd. in Delmar. A morning walk about the center should yield a good variety of lingering residents and fall transients. This is a good chance to practice those confusing fall warblers (also a good chance to play STUMP THE LEADER). For additional information or directions call Al at 439-4086



Patches of the HMBC logo are available for \$3.00. They're suitable for sewing to jackets, hats, field bags, etc. and are very durable.

We also have a good supply of Federation checklists (\$1) and our own club lists (10 cents).

They are available at any club meeting, program, or workshop.

H M B C B O A R D F O R 1 9 9 2

Officers Elected April 1992

Pres: Kevin McGrath
212 Deerfield Ct.
Voorheesville, NY 12186
765-3623

Sec: Betty Moon
907 St. David's Lane
Schenectady, NY 12309
372-8330



Puff in

VP: Clifford Lamere
15 Saradale Ave.
Loudonville, NY 12211
462-9827

Treas: Bernie Grossman
7 Nott Rd.
Rexford, NY 12148
882-9837

COMMITTEE	<u>CHAIRPERSONS</u>	
Conservation:	Walt Sabin	439-7444
Dial-A-Bird:	Raymond Perry	475-0291
Programs:	Scott Stoner	464-0492
Field Trips:	Robert Taylor*	587-1275
Membership:	Daniel Ruge	449-1087
PR:	Tim Colborn	438-1874
Publications:	Kevin McGrath	765-3623
Records:	Cliff Lamere	462-9827
Sanctuary:	Betty Moon	372-8330
Hospitality:	-OPEN-	

Term	<u>DIRECTORS</u>	
1993	William Lee	374-3426
1993	Samuel Madison	439-4753
1994	Scott Stoner	464-0492
1994	Raymond Perry	877-8915
1994	Tim Colborn**	438-1874

* Robert Taylor is a new (returning) club member.
 ** Tim Colborn is our newest board member . He is also the new Public Relations committee chair (and sole member).
 Welcome aboard Tim.

Anyone who wishes to volunteer to work on any of the committees may contact the chairperson directly, call the president, or leave a message on Dial-a-Bird. No reasonable offer refused.

Programs Revitalized

by: Scott Stoner

Beginning in Sept. 1991, the HMBC kicked off a series of nine special programs. Programs held in fall '91 included: Past-president, **Robert Marx**, presenting a top-notch home video of area birds, **Robert Miller** of NYSDEC spoke on "Colonial Nesting Birds of New York, nesting habits, habitats, and trends", and the annual Christmas Party/Member's slides night. (Guess what THIS bird is??)

For the Winter/Spring series, we got very ambitious.

In January, a slide show of *TNC* properties in Eastern NY was presented by **Stephanie Gebaur** and **Brenda Hunt** of the Eastern NY Chapter of the Nature Conservancy. **Dr. Carl George** of Union College hosted an ornithological workshop at the college library/museum in February. For March, Ms. **Helen Hays** of The American Museum of Natural History presented a lecture and film/slide program of her work on Great Gull Island. The lecture was co-sponsored as part of the Natural History lecture series at SUNY Albany and was very well attended. In April, at the club's annual meeting, our one and only **Richard Guthrie** gave a slide show presentation of "familiar backyard birds of the Hudson-Mohawk region". Jim Briggs, a traveling interpreter for Cornell Cooperative Extension gave us our final spring program with a beautifully orchestrated slide presentation titled, "*Birds of the Adirondacks*".

A Program Committee has formed, consisting of myself (chair), Bob Budliger, Tim Colborn, Alan Mapes, and Ray Perry. A new series of programs based on birding North American regions has been scheduled for the coming year. Each program will focus on a specific region of the US or Canada and feature film/slide presentations from memorable expeditions. Both the birds and the hotspots in the regions will be examined. This is good way to scout out your own potential trips for next year without dropping a bundle on books, guides, etc.

The series opens with Alan Mapes and "COLORADO" then moves on to "**BIRDS OF SOUTHERN FLORIDA**" with Bob Budliger. Future programs will focus on **ARIZONA, TEXAS, ALASKA, and the Pacific Northwest**.

A series of bird identification and local birding strategies workshops has been planned. These will focus on specific families of birds that many of us, even seasoned birders, have trouble with. Look for Waterfowl in October, Gulls in November, wintering Hawks in January, and Sparrows in March. Future workshops on Warblers, Herons, and Owls are also planned.



Special Program Announcement:

Sept. 9 (Wed); 7:30 pm

Join us at Five Rivers for Art Newkirk's "**A TOURIST IN THE ANTARCTIC PENINSULA**". A Slide show and discussion of a recent Cornell expedition to the Southern continent in search of resident fauna.

Jamaica Bay Field Trip Report

August 10, 1991

by: Kevin McGrath



The weather forecast was not good and torrential rains the evening before the trip prompted a rash of inquisitive phone callers seeking confirmation of my intentions. I instructed each caller to decide for themselves whether or not to meet as planned. I assured them that I would be at the scheduled rendezvous as long as the bridge over the Hudson remained standing.

In the pre-dawn sky it was difficult to gauge the thickness of the overcast and judge its portent. We met as scheduled and decided as a group to push on for The Bay. Taking our chances, I was fully prepared mentally to swing about 180 degrees and head for the barn at the first sign of heavy rain. As the light in the sky grew, it became apparent that the overcast was but a thick haze that was burning away quickly under the rising sun. Our two car caravan (7 attenders) were delighted by the appearance of direct sunlight as we neared Lake Taghanic.

We weren't the only ones out that morning enjoying the unexpected sunshine. A large flock of Wild Turkey came out to the side of the road to forage and wave to passers by (well, Okay, they flew away but it looked like waving to me). We would not worry about the weather turning sour again this day. As it turned out, one could not have asked for a more pleasant day.

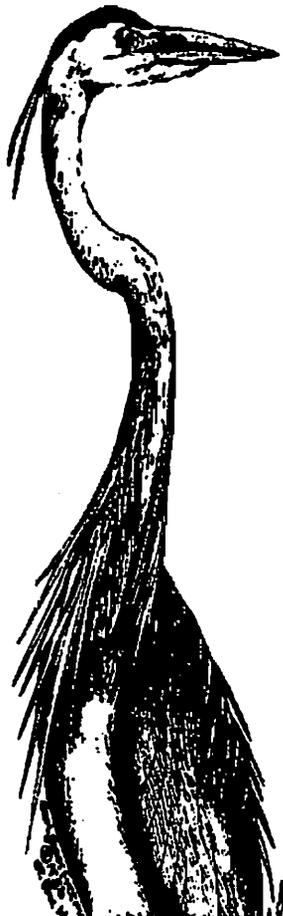
Arriving at the bay at 9:30, we went directly to the log book and were thrilled to see that the previously reported Curlew Sandpiper and the American Avocet had both been seen that morning. Since the tide was high we went directly to the east pond hoping to catch all the shorebirds that the tides had concentrated there. We were immediately rewarded with a Marbled Godwit.

Working our way around the north end and then south, we collected the common peeps (Least, Semipals, and Pecs) and worked very hard not to miss the Baird's Sandpiper that we were assured was there. We never did see that bird even though EVERYONE we talked to did. The White-Rump was hard to find but eventually he succumbed to our persistence.

As we neared the Ront (the area of pilings in the center of the East Pond) we could see the entire area was teeming with shorebirds, at least 2000 individuals. We closed to close range for our scopes when as if on cue they ALL burst into the air. Silently damning our ill fortune I tried as quickly as possible to identify what I could with my field glasses before they got away. As I trained in on a flock of Black Bellies, my mind suddenly riveted on thought, "hey!.., what put 'em up? Where's that Peregrine?" Even as the thought struck me, I lowered my glasses, raised my head and shouted "HEADS UP, PEREGRINE FALCON". Straight over our heads at 80 mph and 100 ft up an adult Peregrine Falcon raced out over the ront. Banking hard to the right, cutting straight through and scattering a flock of peeps, this magnificent raptor turned back and came over us again, even closer! We watched for five minutes as the bird banked and dove, spun and turned hard on groups of panicking peeps trying to escape. Either the prey was too wary or the falcon wasn't hungry. That Peregrine went away with empty talons.

Within minutes the Ront was again teeming as flock after flock returned to this place. Peeps, Plovers, Turnstones, and Terns were the mainstay here, and there were a lot of them. After some time we pushed south. Braving the muck and mire where the water level had swallowed the mudflats we pushed south. We were rewarded when we came upon a large group of birders, telescopes all aligned and focused, viewing the Curlew Sandpiper and the Avocet. From our vantage point on the west shore, they were 150 yds away on the East shore, well within range of the club's powerful Questar telescope (made me wish I had brought it along!). Luckily, some of the other people had Kowas and Questars to look in. The Curlew Sandpiper had lost much of its breeding plumage but there was still a trace of it, especially in the breast. A great life bird for me (only 3 more for NY300). The club has done well with this species this year, 3 sightings on three separate trips. I hope it's a sign of increasing population for the species.

After the Curlew Sandpiper and the Avocet the rest of the day was a little dull. The typical gaggle of mal-mute ducks and geese were on the west pond and one Black Skimmer was seen. By days end we had listed 75 species, not bad considering the lack of Passerines. The weather cooperated, the birds cooperated, and we had a very nice day.



HMBC is Molting its FEATHERS:

Article by: K. McGrath

Recent events have made it necessary for the club to reexamine its commitment to FEATHERS and to redefine the role this publication has within our club. I hope that this issue gives you an idea of what we hope to accomplish in the future.

For a long time, FEATHERS has been an archival record of the events and activities of the club. Frequently, it has contained information which, though interesting, was far from timely. All too often, the publication has been so far removed from real time that reading it was akin to reading last year's newspapers. Indeed, many have remarked that they didn't bother to read FEATHERS when it arrived.

Since the publication and distribution of the newsletter is one of the larger expenditures of the club on an annual basis, it doesn't make any sense to publish something which isn't going to be read by our membership. Other clubs and Libraries receive the magazine also but WE are the people we publish this thing for. If we don't want to read it, WHY DO IT?

The obvious choices are to either stop publishing the thing, or create something that people want to read.

We choose the latter. Commencing with Volume 54, number 1, to be published in September 1992, you will note the following changes in FEATHERS:

- 1) The production schedule has been changed from quarterly to bi-monthly. You will now receive 5 issues of FEATHERS per year on or about the first of Feb., April, June, Oct., and Dec. You will note the absence of the Aug/Sept issue. The submission deadline is 45 days prior to arrival. We will publish on time, with whatever is on hand at that time. The size of the issue will be determined by the quantity of material available. Field trip leaders are encouraged to send in their reports.
- 2) The address for FEATHERS has been changed to: FEATHERS, c/o The Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Rd., Delmar, NY 12054. All letters, comments, articles, requests, etc. should be directed there.
- 3) An editorial committee consisting of five members of the publications committee will act as editor with each of the members taking responsibility for one issue in a given year. Any club member willing to accept editorship of a single issue and/or work on the committee may do so. We currently need editors for issues after the Sept. 1993.
- 4) Several new features are being added. These include: The President's Corner, Program Announcements and Reports, Environmental News, Other Club's, Book reviews, and Birding Equipment and Software reviews. We currently seek a reporter. The reporter will be responsible for generating the Other Club's and Environmental News features by scanning magazines, newsletters, newspapers, etc.... Anyone? ...Call! Books and equipment reviews from members will be published on an as-received basis (irregular). Field trip and program announcements for the period between issues will be included in every issue.
- 5) The space age has finally arrived at HMBC. Everything you see in this issue was generated by computer or with computer assistance. If possible, you are requested to send your materials in on computer disks (DOS format-Ver. 5.0 or less). We can accept and convert almost any DOS based word processing code. MAC user's MUST convert their files to DOS or send in hard copy. Hand written and typed materials are still acceptable but please send it in EARLY if you want it to make the next issue.

If you have any nice black and white clip-art you would like to see printed, send it along. Clip-art can be paper (clipped-art) or computer files in *.BMP, *.TIF, *.PCX, and several *.PIC codes. If you are uncertain, send it anyway, I'll try to use it.

- 6) We are *considering* allowing limited advertising within FEATHERS to help defray increasing costs. Only companies whose products/services are primarily designed or intended to enhance or facilitate an appreciation of the natural environment, as determined by our editorial committee, will be accepted. Ads would be carefully screened and limited in size and content. The total space devoted to ads in any issue would also be restricted.

A complete policy statement and analysis of the legal and financial ramifications will be submitted to the Board of Directors for review and approval before any ads are accepted. People with STRONG feelings about this are welcome to contact the board members and espouse their position. You're also welcome to contact the President (me).

The Presidents Corner:



Events at the last board meeting were typically exciting. A motion was made and passed that prohibited club members from serving on more than nine committees at a time. Additionally, the numbers of committee members had to be curtailed to stave off the enthusiastic wave of volunteerism that has swept through the club and return functional order to the committees.

The Treasurer reported that our investment strategy has paid off so handsomely that dues were superfluous. We now have enough interest income to the run the club forever and with the spare change we purchased the town of Wilton to be used as a nature preserve. The townsfolks agreed to stay on as caretakers.

A request by the National Audobon Society to join our club was turned down.

The annual club meeting will be held at the Knickerbocker Arena and do to limited seating, reservations should be made at least a year in advance.

Volume 54 publication schedule:

Oct/Nov 1992, no. 1.	Editor; Ann B'Rells,	Deadline; August 1.
Nov/Dec 1992, no. 2.	Editor; Greg Recer,	Deadline; October 1.
Jan/Feb 1993, no. 3.	Editor; Alan Mapes,	Deadline; December 1.
Mar/Apr 1993, no. 4.	Editor; Dick Beeler,	Deadline; February 1
May/June 1993, no. 5.	Editor; Kevin McGrath	Deadline; April 1.



The ABA and AFO are sponsoring their first ever joint meeting October 2-4, 1992 at Connecticut College in New London, CT.

For information concerning the meeting, registration, agenda, field trips, etc. contact:

ABA/AFO Connecticut Meeting
 c/o Robert Askins
 Dept. of Zoology
 Connecticut College
 270 Mohegan Ave.
 New London, CT 06320

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