

1992 CENTURY RUN WATERFOWL AND SHOREBIRD SPECIES UP -- RAPTORS, VIREOS, AND WARBLERS DOWN

by Robert P. Yunick

The Club's 47th Guy Bartlett Century Run, conducted on May 16, 1992, tallied a list of 162 species (tying 12th), thanks to the efforts of 19 observers in five field parties. The best group effort was 132 species (tying 8th), with three of the five groups exceeding the century mark. Groups were afield from 04:00 to 21:30.

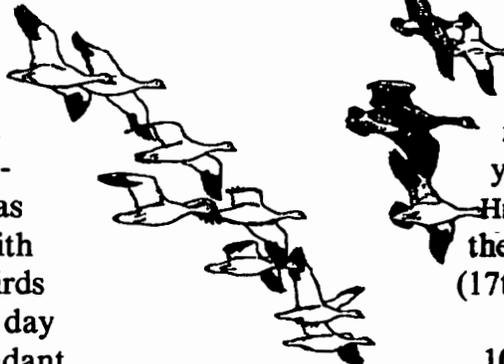
Due to a cool, late Spring (some people ventured to state we had none), leafing was retarded, allowing good visibility. The day was damp and overcast in the 50's with intermittent drizzle or light rain. Birds sang and were active well into the day due to a lack of sunshine and attendant warmth.

Thirty-five species were seen by only one group (and are noted next to each group's listing), while 36 were seen by all parties, and 41 additional species were seen by all but one party. No new species were added, leaving the composite list at 250 species, plus two hybrids.

Above average species totals were noted for waterfowl and shorebirds, while below average counts were recorded for raptors and the combined vireo/warbler list. There were 14 species of waterfowl compared to the past ten-year average of 11.6 (range 7-15). Shorebird species numbered 12 (ten-year average 10.3, range 6-14). The GREAT HORNED OWL was the only owl (and only seen by one party). Diurnal raptors numbered only seven species (ten-year average 10.5, range 8-12) setting a new low count for recent years. The combined total of vireo and warbler species was 27 (ten-year average 30.1, range 27-34). This year was the

fourth in the past five years that this count has dipped below 30.

Four pasture/meadow species went unrecorded. The HORNED LARK was missed for only the 4th time in 47 years, with the previous misses occurring since 1988. The VESPER SPARROW was missed for the 5th time in 47 years, first since 1979. The GRASSHOPPER SPARROW miss was the 6th miss in 47 years, first since 1985; and HENSLOW'S SPARROW was missed for the 4th time in the past five years (17th miss in 47 years).



10 RARE OR UNUSUAL SPECIES RECORDED FOR 10TH OR LESS TIME:

RED-NECKED GREBE	10th time
WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER	10th time
Mute Swan	8th time (4 in a row)
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER	6th time
SNOW GOOSE	2nd time, 1st in 1990
ALDER FLYCATCHER	10th time
GADWALL	5th time
COMMON RAVEN	6th time, 1st in 1986
WILD TURKEY	9th time
CONNECTICUT WARBLER	5th time, 1st since 1981

The MUTE SWAN, WILD TURKEY and COMMON RAVEN appear to be recently established regulars -- here to stay for a while. The CERULEAN WARBLER (16th record) on Spier Falls Road, Town of Moreau, was a good find so far north. First discovered May 11, it was still present for the Run. Many of the previous Century Run records for this species were of birds that appeared regularly further south in Schoharie County.

KEY TO GROUPS (compiler listed first, single sightings after each group)

Group A: Robert P. Yunick. *48 species*, 06:30 to 13:00. Banding and fishing at Jenny Lake, and return to Schenectady.

Group B: William Gorman, Monte Gruett, Mike Kuhrt and Alice Ross. *132 species*, 04:00 to 21:30. Black Creek, Cherry Plain, Columbia County, Castleton and Round and Saratoga Lakes. BRANT, NORTHERN GOSHAWK, RED-SHOULDERED HAWK, RING-NECKED PHEASANT, NORTHERN BOBWHITE, SEMIPALMATED PLOVER, SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER, WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER, COMMON TERN, BLACK TERN, GREAT HORNED OWL, EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE, YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER, ALDER FLYCATCHER, CAROLINA WREN, MAGNOLIA AND CONNECTICUT WARBLER.

Group C: Tim Colburn, Gerry Colburn, and Laura Sommers. *95 Species*, 05:10 to 19:30. Black Creek Marsh, Thatcher Park, Basic and Alcove reservoirs, Bear Swamp, Five Rivers, Pine Bush, Ann Lee Pond and Vischer's Ferry. BUFFLEHEAD, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, CAPE MAY WARBLER.

Group D: C. W. Huntley, Carl George, Robert McCullough, Jeff Nield, Nancy Slack, Carl Parker, George Shaw, Henry Stebbins and John Torgen. *121 species*, 04:00 to 21:00. Schenectady, Albany, Columbia, Rensselaer and Saratoga counties. PIED-BILLED GREBE, RED-NECKED GREBE, RING-NECKED DUCK, WHITE-WINGED SCOTER, RED-BREADED MERGANSER, YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO, COMMON NIGHTHAWK, RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, TENNESSEE WARBLER.

Group E: Barb Putnam and Bill Graham. *101 species*, 06:00 to 21:00. Saratoga and Washington counties. OSPREY, UPLAND SANDPIPER, AMERICAN WOODCOCK, RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, CERULEAN WARBLER.

**1992 GUY BARTLETT CENTURY RUN
May 16, 1992**



COMMON LOON	B D	COMMON SNIFE	B D	RED-BRSTED NUTHATCH	ABCD		
PIED-BILLED GREBE	D	AMERICAN WOODCOCK	E	WHT-BRSTED NUTHATCH	ABCDE		
RED-NECKED GREBE	D	BONAPARTE'S GULL	B D	BROWN CREEPER	BCD		
DBL-CRSTD CORMORAN	B D	RING-BILLED GULL	B DE	CAROLINA WREN	B		
AMERICAN BITTERN	BC DE	HERRING GULL	AB DE	HOUSE WREN	BCDE		
GREAT BLUE HERON	ABC DE	GRT BLACK-BACKED GULL	B DE	WINTER WREN	BCD		
MUTE SWAN	B E	COMMON TERN	B	MARSH WREN	BCDE		
SNOW GOOSE	E	BLACK TERN	B	GLDN-CROWNED KINGLET	C		
BRANT	B	ROCK DOVE	BCDE	RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET	E		
CANADA GOOSE	ABCDE	MOURNING DOVE	BCDE	BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER	BCDE		
WOOD DUCK	BCDE	BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO	CD	EASTERN BLUEBIRD	BCDE		
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	ABCDE	YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO	D	VEERY	BCDE		
MALLARD	ABCDE	GREAT HORNED OWL	B	SWAINSON'S THRUSH	BC		
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	B D	COMMON NIGHTHAWK	D	HERMIT THRUSH	ABCDE	NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH	BC
GADWALL	DE	WHIP-POOR-WILL	B E	WOOD THRUSH	BCDE	LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH	BCD
RING-NECKED DUCK	D	CHIMNEY SWIFT	ABCDE	AMERICAN ROBIN	ABCDE	CONNECTICUT WARBLER	B
WHITE-WINGED SCOTER	D	RUBY-THD HUMMINGBIRD	A DE	GRAY CATBIRD	BCDE	COMMON YELLOWTHROAT	BCDE
BUFFLEHEAD	C	BELTED KINGFISHER	ABCDE	NRTHRN MOCKINGBIRD	ABCDE	CANADA WARBLER	BC
RED-BRSTD MERGANSER	D	RED-BLLD WOODPECKER	D	BROWN THRASHER	BCD	SCARLET Tanager	BCDE
TURKEY VULTURE	B D	YLLW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER	A E	CEDAR WAXWING	BCD	NRTHRN CARDINAL	ABCDE
OSPREY	E	DOWNY WOODPECKER	ABCDE	EUROPEAN STARLING	ABCDE	ROSE-BRSTD GROSBEAK	ABCDE
NORTHERN GOSHAWK	B	HAIRY WOODPECKE	ABCDE	SOLITARY VIREO	BCD	INDIGO BUNTING	A E
RED-SHOULDERED HAWK	B	NORTHERN FLICKER	ABCDE	YELLOW-THROATED VIREO	BCDE	RUFIOUS-SIDED TOWHEE	BCDE
BROAD-WINGED HAWK	B E	PILEATED WOODPECKER	AB DE	WARBLING VIREO	BCDE	CHIPPING SPARROW	ABCDE
RED-TAILED HAWK	BC DE	EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE	B	RED-EYED VIREO	A CDE	FIELD SPARROW	BCDE
AMERICAN KESTREL	BC DE	YLLW-BLLD FLYCATCHER	B	BLUE-WINGED WARBLER	BC E	SAVANNAH SPARROWB	E
RING-NECKED PHEASANT	B	ALDER FLYCATCHER	B	TENNESSEE WARBLER	D	SONG SPARROW	ABCDE
RUFFED GROUSSE	B D	WILLOW FLYCATCHER	CD	NASHVILLE WARBLER	B D	SWAMP SPARROW	BCDE
WILD TURKEY	DE	LEAST FLYCATCHER	ABCDE	YELLOW WARBLER	ABCDE	WHT-THRD SPARROW	ABCDE
NORTHERN BOBWHITE	B	EASTERN PHOEBE	BCDE	CHSTNT-SIDED WARBLER	BCDE	WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW	CD
VIRGINIA RAIL	BC DE	GRT CRSTD FLYCATCHER	BCDE	MAGNOLIA WARBLER	B	DARK-EYED JUNCO	ABCD
SORA	B DE	EASTERN KINGBIRD	ABCDE	CAPE MAY WARBLER	C	BOBOLINK	BCDE
COMMON MOORHEN	B DE	PURPLE MARTIN	B D	BLK-THR BLUE WARBLER	ABCDE	RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD	ABCDE
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	B DE	TREE SWALLOW	ABCDE	MYRTLE WARBLER	ABCDE	EASTERN MEADOWLARK	BCDE
KILLDEER	BC DE	N. ROUGH-WG SWALLOW	BCDE	BLK-THRD GRN WARBLER	BCDE	COMMON GRACKLE	ABCDE
GREATER YELLOWLEGS	B D	BANK SWALLOW	BCDE	BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER	BC E	BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD	ABCDE
LESSER YELLOWLEGS	DE	CLIFF SWALLOW	B DE	PINE WARBLER	B E	NRTHRN ORIOLE	ABCDE
SOLITARY SANDPIPER	BC DE	BARN SWALLOW	ABCDE	PRAIRIE WARBLER	BCD	PURPLE FINCH	ABCD
SPOTTED SANDPIPER	B DE	BLUE JAY	ABCDE	BLACKPOLL WARBLER	B D	HOUSE FINCH	ABCDE
UPLAND SANDPIPER	E	AMERICAN CROW	ABCDE	CERU LEAN WARBLER	E	PINE SISKIN	AB DE
SEMIPAL SANDPIPER	B	COMMON RAVEN	B D	BLK-AND-WHT WARBLER	BCDE	AMERICAN GOLDFINCH	ABCDE
LEAST SANDPIPER	BC D	BLK-CAPPED CHICKADEE	ABCDE	AMERICAN REDSTART	BCDE	EVENING GROSBEAK	AB
		TUFTED TITMOUSE	BC DE	OVENBIRD	ABCDE	HOUSE SPARROW	ABCDE

HMBC FIELD TRIPS OCT-NOV 1992

Oct 24th (Sat): RESERVATIONS BY OCT 14TH



coord: Kate Beale 457-5427 (work)
Bob Boehm 457-5210 (work)

MONTEZUMA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

-- A HELP trip (for inexperienced birders especially).

This all-day trip to the Refuge, which is west of Syracuse, offers an excellent opportunity to study waterfowl at one's leisure, often quite close up, from a one-way auto tour road. A typical fall day at the Refuge features IMPRESSIVE NUMBERS OF WATERFOWL SPECIES and individual birds, a few late shorebirds, and specialties like BALD EAGLE and RUSTY BLACKBIRD.

Nov 8 (Sun) Coord: Bill Gorman, 477-4921

TOMHANNOCK RESERVOIR

A morning trip around the Reservoir which should yield LOONS AND GREBES; a variety of DUCKS, possible including sea ducks, and large numbers of GEESE.

Nov 21-22 (Sat&Sun) RESERVATIONS BY NOV 8
Coord: Bill Lee, 374-3426

NIAGARA FRONTIER

The Niagara River between Lakes Erie and Ontario hosts THOUSANDS OF GULLS this time of year, of a wide variety of species. In among the more common, we have a REASONABLE chance of finding LESSER BLACK-BACKED, FRANKLIN'S, LITTLE GULL, and BLACK-BACKED KITTIWAKE.



MAPES' SLIDES OF COLORADO FEATURED AT CHRISTMAS PARTY

On Monday, December 7th, HMBC will hold its annual Christmas meeting/party at 7:30 p.m. at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Road, Delmar. Details of upcoming Christmas counts will be provided. The featured program will be a slide presentation by Five Rivers' Director Alan Mapes on his two recent trips to Colorado. Al's program will highlight the birds and scenic beauty of this Rocky Mountain State. This will be the first in the club's "Birding North America" series.

PLEASE BRING SOME DESSERT TO SHARE!

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

HMBC CO-HOSTS DISTINGUISHED LECTURE ON PACIFIC NORTHWEST

The HMBC is pleased to announce its co-sponsorship of a lecture on "The Natural Northwest" in the Natural History Lecture Series at SUNY-Albany this fall. It is scheduled for Tuesday, October 20 at 8:00 p.m. at Lecture Center 7 of SUNYA. We present Mark Garland, Senior Naturalist of the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States. Mark's slide-illustrated program will include the flora and fauna of this region, and its volcanic nature, as well as the controversy over its ancient forests. Mark worked previously as a Naturalist in Olympic National Park and has led many tours to this region.

WATERFOWL AND GULL WORKSHOPS HIGHLIGHT OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER PROGRAMS

The October and November monthly meetings of HMBC, held the first Monday of the month at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Road, Delmar, will feature workshops on waterfowl and on gulls.

OCT 5 (MON) 7:30 P.M. WATERFOWL

Environmental educator Bob Budliger will coordinate a workshop on waterfowl. This workshop will cover both waterfowl identification skills and bird-finding strategies the Capitol Region, describing several local waterfowl "hotspots".

NOV 2 (MON) 7:30 P.M. GULLS

SUNY-Albany Professor Ken Able will present a workshop on gulls. Back By popular demand, this workshop will present an in-depth study of the identification of this often confusing group of birds. It will also include information on local and regional "hotspots" for gulls. With sufficient participant interest, Ken may offer a half-day field trip on Saturday November 7th. Details of this trip will be discussed at the workshop meeting.



FIELD TRIP REPORTS

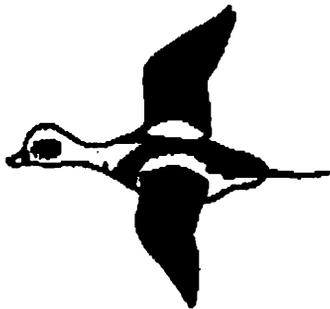


Volume 54
Page 4

CAPE COD

Feb. 15-17, 1992

Eight of us met at the Orleans traffic circle in mid-day on a Saturday of President's Day holiday weekend. We planned to bird the Outer Cape, ocean and bay sides from Chatham to Provincetown from our base in Wellfleet just down the road from the Wellfleet Sanctuary of Massachusetts Audubon. Staff at the Sanctuary had alerted me to RAZORBILLS, KING EIDER, BALD EAGLES, a PEREGRINE FALCON, BARROW'S GOLDENEYE, NORTHERN SHRIKE and ROCK WREN seen at various locations.

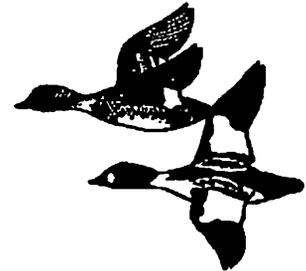


Furthermore, I had gleaned, from recorded telephone reports of WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE and EURASIAN WIGEON on the Acushnet River in New Bedford and a number of COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULLS at Wachamoket Cove in East Providence. We planned to end the trip on Monday at Sachuset Point in Rhode Island where 50 to 60 HARLEQUIN DUCKS and a SNOWY OWL were being seen regularly.

Like most birding trips, the old saw about "win some, lose some" held true. We saw no Alcids and had trouble seeing the sea ducks off Races Point because of fog. Nor did we find Bald Eagles at the whale carcass where they had been feeding regularly. Nor the Peregrine. The tide was much too high to walk to the breakwater in Orleans where the Rock Wren had been seen just the day before. First Encounter Beach, indeed, all of vantage points overlooking Cape Cod Bay looked more like Hudson Bay or the Bering Straights in winter, with huge chunks and blocks of ice jumbled as far as the eye could see.

Among the 57 species we did find were RED-THROATED & COMMON LOON, RED-NECKED & HORNED GREBE, GREAT CORMORANT, OLDSQUAW, BLACK AND WHITE-WINGED SCOTER. At Fort Hill we found NORTHERN SHRIKE and most of the trip's shorebirds - BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER and RED KNOT.

Sunday morning at Provincetown Harbor, white-winged gulls were very much in evidence with an adult GLAUCOUS GULL on the water just off the dock, another immature on a nearby rooftop, and an adult and immature ICELAND GULL also present. The rest of Sunday was anti-climatic, with ocean fog where there were birds, and no birds where there was no fog. We left the Cape on Monday, birding the Bass River at the Dennis/Harwich town line which yielded a drake BARROW'S GOLDENEYE in excellent light. New Bedford was a total loss, with no sign of either WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE or EURASIAN WIGEON.



Heavy traffic in Providence and a confusing expressway system reduced the party to one car which successfully found Wachamoket Cove and four COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULLS. For some reason known only to the gulls, this cove has a very strong attraction for them, with as many as eight present there in January and February. Despite the difficulties of finding our way around in the Providence area, all were able to find Sachuset Point which, in addition to approximately 50 HARLEQUIN DUCKS, provided us with another drake BARROW'S GOLDENEYE and the only PURPLE SANDPIPERS of the trip.

-- William J. Lee

SARATOGA SPA STATE PARK June 13, 1992

16 people attended the field trip to Spa Park on June 13, which yielded 42 species. The weather was perfect and the birds were very cooperative. Just to confirm a rumor, there are no bugs and it never rains in Spa Park.

--Sheryl Zink

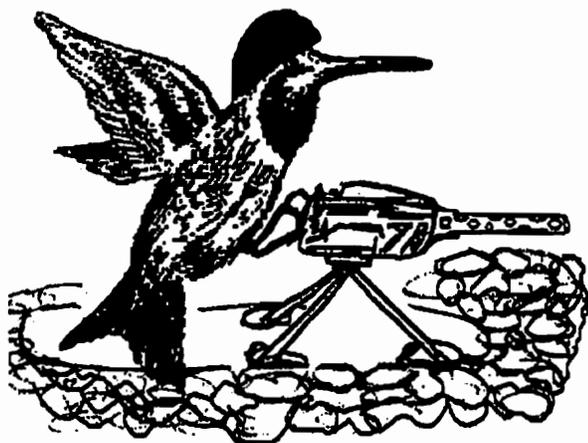
VISCHER FERRY

April 12, 1992

**SITE OF FIRST OF THREE BEGINNER
"HELP" TRIPS IN 1992.**

The Vischer Ferry Nature and Historic Preserve in Clifton Park was the site of the first of three HMBC "HELP" trips this year specifically designed for beginning birders. The weather was cold and breezy but the dozen enthusiastic participants were treated to excellent looks at a wide variety of waterfowl under the guidance of FIVE (!) leaders. We split up into several groups on this half-morning trip, giving everyone ample time on the scopes and a lot of individual help on basic points of identification. Many thanks to co-leaders Bernie Grossman, George Hanson, Tom Palmer and Ray Perry.

-- Scott Stoner



**PALMER'S RAVINE
PROVIDES A BREWSTER'S WARBLER
May 23, 1992**

On a morning field trip to Palmer's Ravine, ten birders were treated to the sight of a BREWSTER'S WARBLER which was singing a Golden-winged Warbler's song. A GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER was also seen.

Fair weather prevailed and a total of 60 species were tallied. Highlights included a view of a TREE SWALLOWS' nest, a male RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD defending his territory, and excellent views of SCARLET Tanager, EASTERN BLUEBIRD, BOBOLINK, ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK, NORTHERN ORIOLE, OVENBIRD and more.

--Tom & Carol Palmer

WOODCOCKS

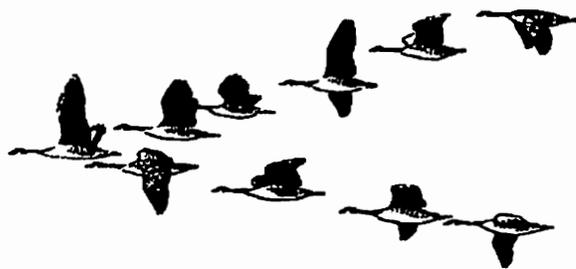
April 16, 1992

Though the American Woodcocks have been hard to find in breeding flight at Five Rivers during the past two years, this year's trip was successful in getting close looks at the "skydance" flight and even at seeing the calling male in the flashlight beam!



Not finding a bird in the usual location at the beginning of the Old Field Trail, our group went farther afield to the new acreage, purchased in 1989 to enlarge the Center. Plans are to manage the 50 acre field for grassland species, and the bird seem to be obliging so far.

Species found in the field included BOBOLINK, SAVANNAH SPARROW, SONG SPARROW, COMMON SNIBE (heard giving its winnowing call over the field), and the WOODCOCK. Flyovers were had from the customary CANADA GEESE AND WOOD DUCKS.



Hopefully, Woodcock numbers are picking up from the lows of the last two years and will again be consistent at the Center. This year's luck was encouraging, with a second male also heard calling on an adjoining property.

--Alan Mapes

A dozen members participated in this instructional workshop at Five Rivers Center in Delmar. The morning was overcast and threatened rain, but the birds were in good song. Bob



Budliger and Alan Mapes prepared the group to listen for several similar species by using tape recordings. The crew then left the visitor building for the trails, first

enjoying the song and good views of the adult male ORCHARD ORIOLE, who was feeding in trees on the Center lawn.



CHIPPING SPARROW and FIELD SPARROW were among the first calls to be worked on, since both sparrows were nesting in numbers near the main parking area. The old "sewing machine" vs. "ping pong ball" analogy seemed to work well for most people.

Other species studied in the course of the workshop included SONG AND SAVANNAH SPARROWS, BOBOLINK, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT AND YELLOW WARBLER. A highlight of the program was the unexpected chance to compare vocalizations of WILLOW AND ALDER FLYCATCHERS - the Alders are usually gone from the Center grounds by this date.



Among the resources recommended for the study of bird song were two tape sets in the Peterson Field Guide Series, #1A Bird Songs (Eastern) and #38 Birding by Ear (Eastern and Central). Both are available in the area at shops like Backyard Birds in Clifton Park or the Nature Company at Crossgates Mall (10% discount for TNC** members at the latter).

--Alan Mapes

Food and feathers have always made a good combination, so we decided to try another variation on the theme of the Black Creek Pancake Breakfast this year (we have not gotten enough church breakfasters to make that part break even in recent years and the railroad company tracks are, of course, illegal to walk, though many of us do it). Instead we met at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar, with groups going out at 6, 7 and 8:00 a.m.

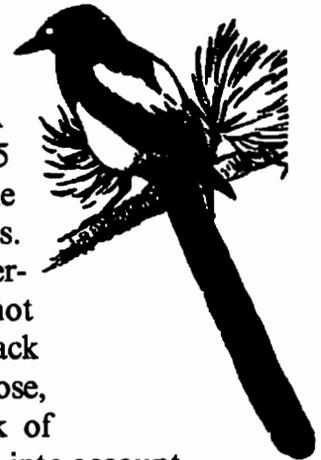


The weather was overcast, cutting down on the participants but not on the birds. Twenty five souls made the program, how-



ever, and had some good birding and

bird talk to show for it. A composite list of about 65 species resulted from the work of several groups. Perhaps our species diversity at Five Rivers was not equal to the expected at Black Creek, but it came very close, especially when the lack of migrant warblers is taken into account.



Everyone rallied at 10:00 for bagels, buns and donuts at the Birding Room in the main building. Prodigious numbers of bagels disappeared and some good birding fellowship enjoyed.



--Alan Mapes

**Note to ALL: At a previous board meeting I had announced that the Nature Company, Inc. at Crossgates had agreed to extend a 10% discount to HMBC members. The arrangement was NOT approved by their corporate headquarters. If you are member of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) you will receive the discount. ---KPM

FERD'S BOG

July 12, 1992

Sunday morning, 07:30 hours found twenty-eight members assembled on the dirt road in front of Camp Buckhorn, five miles west of Raquette Lake Village. Years of experience with this boreal bird location have shown that an early start is essential. It proved to be not early enough...

By luck, NYSDEC Ranger Gary Lee was on hand to join us. Gary has probably spent more time birding that area of the Adirondacks than any other person over the twenty years he has been on duty there. Following the narrow half-mile trail to the open bog mat, we tallied SOLITARY AND RED-EYED VIREOS, both BLACK-THROATED WARBLERS and WINTER WREN. In the bog itself, we had great looks at NASHVILLE WARBLER and YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER. An OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER appeared on his usual perch atop a 100+ foot White Pine, calling "pip-pip-pip" with an occasional "three-beers" thrown in. LINCOLN'S SPARROWS were shy, but many of us got a look.

THREE-TOED AND BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKERS did not show and have generally been hard to find this year, according to Gary. However, we met up with a maverick birding party lead by HMBC's Dick Guthrie, some of whom saw a Black-backed around 7:00 a.m. Maybe we should start at 6 next year!

BOREAL CHICKADEE was heard close by in one area, but would not come to our spishes, squeaks or Saw-whetting. GRAY JAY was the one usual Boreal specialty that made no appearance that day, though it was heard several days later by Budliger and Mapes while leading a group of teachers through the bog.

Gary speculates that the birds may be moving away from the central part of Ferd's Bog due to heavy birding pressure. The pressure certainly is intense there, and time will tell whether the so-so birding this season is a fluke or a continuing fact.



The boreal species that bring so many birders to Ferd's Bog occur, of course, in other bog and boreal forest locations in the Adirondacks. Ferd's is accessible and is written up in the birding guides, so everyone goes there. Undoubtedly, there are other less-trodden locations for boreal birds waiting to be discovered. Scouting, anyone?

As an aside, both woodpecker species were seen by Ray Perry at Ferd's the week after the club walk, including a female Black-Backed with young on a dead spruce along the trail to the bog. The boreal birds are around, but it takes some tenacity to get them.

—Alan Mapes





LEAST TERNS IN A BREEDING COLONY

Cumberland Island National Seashore

May 16 - June 18, 1992

by Jim Sotis

Member Club

During the latespring of this year I worked as a volunteer ranger with the National Park Service on Cumberland Island, which forms the southernmost coast of Georgia. With about 85% of the island federally owned, the NPS administers 16 miles of undeveloped beach and dunes, a large forested wilderness, and a modest distribution of campsites beneath the lush greenery.



While there, I developed and conducted three interpretive programs, one of which centered on a breeding colony of LEAST TERNS (*Sterna antillarum*), located about 200 yards north of the

most accessible and largest campground.

The Least Tern is the smallest tern found on our continent. It dives for fish and crustacean life, and migrates annually from coastal areas in South America, to breed along our Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf coastal bays and beaches and inland river flats.

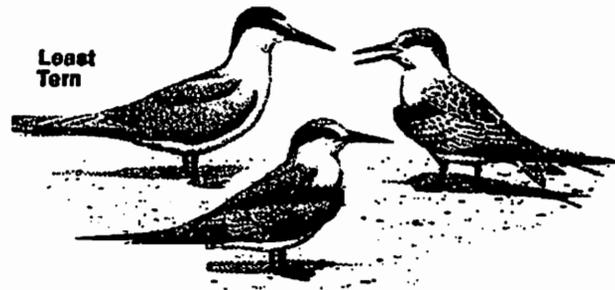
Currently, it is in serious decline and is considered an endangered species.

My program placed two twenty-power birding scopes directed at the nesting terns. The scopes were located at a distance chosen to afford clear views of parents and chicks without disturbing the colony. I tended the scopes, provided commentary, and responded to questions three evenings a week. The program began at 6:30 when brooding terns and their chicks were most active and their behavior most interesting. (The brooding of eggs and chicks during the day serve to protect them from the lethal heat of the sun.)

The colony was located behind the first dune rises, well above the highest tide line. Nesting appeared to be restricted to an area around 200 feet wide and 75 feet deep. The dunes extended from the rear perimeter about 200 feet to the forest. Dune vegetation was relatively sparse. The breeding area was marked by old shell litter and bits and pieces of miscellaneous debris.

OBSERVATIONS OF BIRDS ON THE NEST

Both parents brooded the eggs (usually two), and tended to the needs of the young. Brooding parents were observed being relieved by their partners, and also being fed at the nest on occasion. It takes the eggs about three weeks to hatch. The hatchlings must be fed until they are fully fledged and can obtain their own food from shore waters, which takes them at least into their fourth week, I assume. (Information on this matter seems to be scanty and inconclusive.)



The number of parental pairs seen attending eggs or chicks ranged from eight to two. The lower figure represents those still evident following a violent storm and deluge toward the end of my stay. In surveying the aftermath, I saw only two terns on nests. All other former nest sites were abandoned; none of the chicks previously recorded could be found. Subsequently, two more nests appeared, but only one chick was observed in what remained of the colony. It emerged four days later, just before I left.

Members who read the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club 1990 Field Trip schedule closely may have been puzzled by the tongue-in-cheek description of the Tomhannock Reservoir field trip which touted loons, ducks, geese, grebes, a Honda and other waterfowl as trip specialties. Now that some time has elapsed, I am no longer embarrassed by the story my daughter relates below; indeed I almost relish telling it in the company of other avid birders when the subject of harrowing or difficult field trip experiences comes up. So far no one has been able to top it! I would, however, strongly recommend that Hudson-Mohawk birders limit their aquatic or pelagic birding to boats.

-- William J. Lee

RECOLLECTIONS OF A BIRDER'S DAUGHTER

by Allison B. Lee

There have been many times in my life when I wondered why my father couldn't have a more orthodox recreational hobby, something dull like golf or practical like auto mechanics. But my father's passion is birdwatching.

I think I first realized that his hobby afforded me unusual opportunities when at age seven I accompanied my father to the American Museum of Natural History in New York City to meet John Bull, whose tome "The Birds of New York State" was the largest book I had ever seen. Our mission was to corroborate the first sighting in the recorded history of New York State of the Mountain Bluebird, by bringing photographs of the bird to the State's ornithological expert. While my father conferred with Mr. Bull about the bluebird, I wandered about the room, looking at the taxidermy projects in progress. I remember quite distinctly seeing a large stuffed owl, whose eyeballs were lying beside him on the table. I was transfixed, looking at the empty sockets of the owl and then down at his missing eyeballs lying there on the table. Being a child, and more curious than squeamish, I picked up one of the owl's eyeballs. We left the museum shortly after that, I with the knowledge that the first live Mountain Bluebird in New York State history had indeed been spotted by my father and his colleagues and that the animals in all the museum's exhibits must have glass eyes.

Being the child of a birdwatcher, while it has its advantages, is not always easy. Driving anywhere held potential for catastrophe; on all family outings I remember gripping the edge of my seat and fer-

vently praying that somehow the car would go on automatic pilot and remain on the road while my father peered at the sky, watching a Red-Tailed Hawk or an Osprey glide by.

In the most painful period of adolescence, around age twelve or so, when being seen in any circumstances with ones' parents is an incredibly humiliating ordeal, I had the misfortune to be walking along the South Beach of Martha's Vineyard Island with my father. Part of the South Beach is the Lucy Vincent town beach, and part of this beach is a nudist beach. My father walked along oblivious to anything that did not "bare" feathers, his "bins" focused on the ducks, geese, terns and shorebirds in the surf, while I stared down at my feet, thankful at least that my father had not brought along his "scope".

Perhaps the greatest difficulty being the child of a birdwatcher was explaining to other people what exactly it was that my father did for a hobby, or what he was doing - peering at the sky, crashing through underbrush, or trekking through feet of snow on a subzero day - not to mention his sudden disappearances to anywhere from Timbukto to Kalamazoo - having heard from the Dial-A-Bird rare bird alert that a life bird was in that vicinity. Explaining what a transportation analyst would be challenging enough for most children but I had to explain a birdwatching transportation analyst.



Terns-continued from Page 8.

Nests were invariably barren, shallow depressions about an inch deep. They were dug quickly by rapid, alternating foot scratches, and so are called "scrapes". Scrapes were deepened as needed; for instance, when chicks were being brooded, or covered, by their parents. Chicks, themselves, were seen scratching out shallow scrapes to lower their profiles while waiting for the return of parents. Though mature terns carrying fish passed close to hungry chicks, it appeared that chicks only compromised their security in response to their own parents' approaches.

Older chicks appeared to sense danger more readily than younger ones, and they responded by instinctively lying in a prostrate position (flat with neck and head extended). Younger chicks more often required a parental signal to respond that way. (John Janovy, in his wonderful 1980 book, "Yellowlegs", wrote of a newly hatched sandpiper, which, in preparation for the world it was about to enter, "had been freezing motionless *within the egg* at the sound of parental alarm for at least a day or two. (Italics mine).

Least tern chicks can move about within hours of their hatching, but generally seem to be underwing in the nest the first few days. However, in the coolness of the early evening, sometimes a brooding parent lifted off, and a chick might be seen taking some tentative steps beyond the rim of the nest.

Several times young chicks caused intense parental concern by their distance from the nest; parental coercion usually got them back quickly, but not always. On one occasion, nothing its parents could do succeeded in drawing a wandering chick back to the nest. Twice, parental calls caused it to temporarily flatten. A couple of seconds later, it was on its way again approaching

the edge of the colony, about 100 feet from its nest. Finally, one parent, after a previous failed try, quickly scratched out a scrape next to the chick and secured it there. The next morning, however, neither chick nor parents could be seen near that spot, nor were they anywhere to be found.

Least Terns do not breed until their third year, and usually remain on their wintering grounds the entire year following their birth. However, one appeared in the colony area and it seemed to be "begging" for food. Surprisingly, one of the more advanced chicks actually drove the bird out of the vicinity.

It has been suggested that ghost crabs probably prey on Least Tern young. I saw a single ghost crab within the colony only twice, and noted a crab burrow just off the perimeter only once. On one occasion, a large, mature crab, well within the colony, was challenged by a mature Least Tern and was decisively driven off.

The most likely predators on Cumberland Island appear to be raccoons, feral hogs and Fish Crows. Raccoon tracks were very few in that area; apparently they are more interested in prospects around the campgrounds within 300 yards. Feral hogs (750-1000) tend to be active in the wilder northern section and are currently being trapped for removal. Fish Crows appeared to be relatively few and showed no signs of interest during my observations.

In conclusion, the Least Tern observation program brought the wonder and the plight of these birds to the consciousness of more than 100 visitors--and to some of the NPS staff. For me, it was a most fortunate and privileged opportunity.

If you have a project, program, or field experience, that you want to share with fellow birders, write it up and send it in. All submissions will be given prompt, courteous consideration (at least until my term expires)

Kevin McGrath

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

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Kevin McGrath
212 Deerfield Ct.
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765-3623

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Betty Moon
907 St. David's Lane
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372-8330

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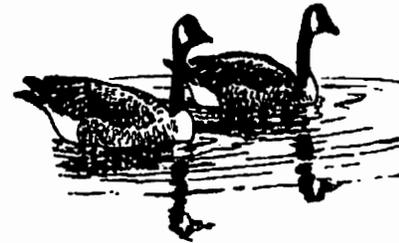
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Honda.....Continued from Page 9

My father's hobby provided me with the most hilarious personal calamity story to recount, but one birding casualty that did not leave my mother chuckling. By this time, I had left the "nest", but still needed to contact my parents occasionally, usually about my college expenses. One Saturday afternoon, I tried calling my dad, partly to discuss financial affairs, partly because I knew my mother was on a trip to New York City and my father would be spending the weekend alone. The first time there was no answer I knew exactly where he would be - out birding, of course. But after calling repeatedly into the late evening and getting no answer, I began to be a little worried. Around 11:00 pm or so (when it been dark long enough to see and exhaust all the owl prospects) I finally made contact. It seemed that our car was now at the bottom of the Tomahannock Reservoir in Troy, New York. My father had been making the usual rounds of reservoirs and landfills looking for a gull of interest, perhaps a shorebird or two blown astray from some exotic place, and had parked the car on a very slight incline by the shore of the reservoir. He proceeded to get out his scope, set it up and survey the reservoir. Needless to say, he had not set the parking brake.

He remembers hearing the sound of a car going by, seemingly very close, which puzzled him a bit because the road was a few hundred yards away. After scouring the reservoir for "lifers" and other

interesting birds, he turned to make his way back to the car - but where was the car?

Thinking that he might actually have parked the car along the road, he walked back up to the road. No Honda Civic stationwagon. Bewildered, he gazed out at the reservoir only to sight his windbraker and binocular case floating in the water. It is a hilarious misadventure indeed, and a wonderful tale to tell - but I am glad I was not the one who had to tell it to the sheriff, nor the City of Troy Waterworks Commissioner, and especially not to my mother when she arrived home from her trip. I also wonder what the insurance company thought, although I wouldn't be surprised if they decided thenceforth to charge birdwatchers a special premium.

Life with an avid birdwatcher is anything but uneventful. Now grown up and in graduate school, I can appreciate my father's avid, though somewhat unusual, hobby. I also know that if I'd like my parents to come visit all I need to do is research the nearby wildlife areas - my father always purchases the guide to the bird species of the state when I move there, of course. And if a rare bird were to appear in my backyard, my father would be sure to appear on my doorstep, "bins", scope, field guide and life list in hand.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER:



THE NEW FEATHERS: A major reorganization of the Publications Committee has taken place. By now, you should have received your first issue of FEATHERS. I hope you enjoy it. The turn-around time from bed to box was an exiguous 20 days. The new format and style is being well-received and any additional suggestions are welcome.

The bimonthly board meeting was scheduled for July 27th. The main topics on the agenda included the changes in FEATHERS and an addition to the budget for 1992-93 to pay for programs. The board accepted and approved the changes in FEATHERS as outlined in my explanatory article of the last issue. In case you missed it, they are: increasing from 4 to 5 issues per year, variable size based on material, publishing on schedule regardless of bulk, and acceptance of donations by commercial ventures in exchange for courteous mention. The modest increase in mailing costs of \$0.07 per piece incurred by said courteous mention can be defrayed by a single commercial sponsor. Additional sponsors would then defray the publishing costs of the extra issue.

BIG PROGRAM SCHEDULE FOR 1992-1993: The heavy program schedule for next season carries a price tag of \$895. Part of this cost was covered by eliminating the funding for the Rare chain that Bill Lee had diligently manned for years. The opinion of the majority of the board members is that the cost, at \$400 per year, of maintenance did not benefit enough club members to justify its continuance. It was felt that club monies could be better spent on programs and workshops. The balance of expenses is to be taken from income.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY BREEDING BIRD SURVEY: The club's breeding bird survey of The Nature Conservancy properties was completed and the reports are coming in. A full article detailing the results should be ready for the next issue. I wish to thank everyone who participated, especially the compilers. If I had an award to give out for thoroughness, it goes to Phil Johnson and his wife Debbie Ellinger for their report on Christmas Preserve. It's outstanding. Thank you all.

SEND THOSE ARTICLES, FIELD TRIP REPORTS, AND OTHER MATERIALS TO:

FEATHERS
c/o The Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY 12054

THANKS TO ALL WHO DID JUST THAT AND MADE THIS AND THE NEXT FEATHERS POSSIBLE! KEEP IT UP!!! AND WE'LL HAVE A GREAT NEWSLETTER.

-- Ann B'Rells, Editor, V54N1

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

- No. 2 Editor: Greg Recer Deadline: Oct. 1
- No. 3 Editor: Alan Mapes Deadline: Dec. 1
- No. 4 Editor: Dick Beeler Deadline: Feb. 1
- No. 5 Editor: Kevin McGrath Deadline: Apr. 1

V55N1 Editor: Open

The Publications Committee meetings are on the third Monday of the odd months at 7:00 pm at Five Rivers. All are welcome.

Send clip-art with articles and we'll try to print it.

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THANK YOU - AND BEST WISHES

An open letter to Kevin McGrath:

In April of 1991, Kevin McGrath was elected President of HMBC. He came to office with the goals of increasing programs, publicity, field trip attendance and community involvement and of modernizing our publications.

In just 17 short months of his leadership, the club has quite simply been revitalized. Programs have gone from the occasional to a monthly series of workshops and lectures; publicity is now reaching far and wide across the Capital Region. HMBC co-sponsors speakers in the Natural History Lecture Series at SUNY. The field trip offerings have been enhanced with new trips and "help" trips for beginners. Kevin would credit his committee chairs for much of these successes, but, as one, I can say that it is really *he* who deserves the accolades! Kevin had the vision and provided us with the guidance, resources and environment so that his reform agenda could grow into substantive actions.

Two of Kevin's projects deserve special mention. He conceived, organized and coordinated a massive service project in which the HMBC conducted a breeding bird survey on all the properties of the Nature Conservancy in the 11-county area covered by HMBC. Not only does this provide TNC with much needed data; but it gives us good public relations *and* ideas on new places to bird next year!

Last but by no means least is *Feathers*. Through his computer expertise and many hours of hard work, Kevin has brought our newsletter into the 21st century. It has radically evolved from an archival record of club events to a modern, lively forum of communication among club members.



Several years ago, Kevin went back to school in a career change from insurance to hydrogeology. His efforts have now been rewarded with a job offer. Unfortunately for us, it is in Philadelphia, and Kevin has resigned as President of HMBC.

Kevin, *you* have revitalized our Club - **Thank You!** - for all that you have done. We're sorry to see you go, but wish you the best of success in your new career, and (of course) good birding!



—Scott Stoner

Inside This Issue....

Skimmer Courtship Behavior

White-winged Tern Nests in New York

Bird-Banding Mystery

Bird-name Crossword Puzzle

Birding Iceland



Rare Tern Visits Wildlife Management Area

This story began June 17, 1992 with the sighting of a **White-Winged Tern** (*Chlidonias leucopterus*, WWTE) at the Department of Environmental Conservation's Perch Lake Wildlife Management Area, north of Watertown, NY. The discovery of this tern was made in the course of the Return a Gift to Wildlife (RAGTW) study on **Black Terns** (*Chlidonias niger*, BLTE). It so happened that the director of this and several other RAGTW projects was present, making an inspection, as directors are wont to do. I was informed of this sighting when the director returned to his office in Delmar.

The fact that the WWTE appeared to be paired and nesting with a BLTE seemed to indicate the WWTE would continue to be present for some time, probably three to four weeks or more. Conversations with the Watertown DEC office indicated that the presence of the WWTE should not be made known to the rare bird alerts or birding hotlines. They did not want the terns to be unduly disturbed since the terns were just initiating egg-laying. Since this seemed like the wise thing to do, I agreed not to spread the news. My enthusiasm was hard to suppress but was eased somewhat since I previously had seen a WWTE in Quebec in 1986, and it therefore would not be a "lifer". I did,

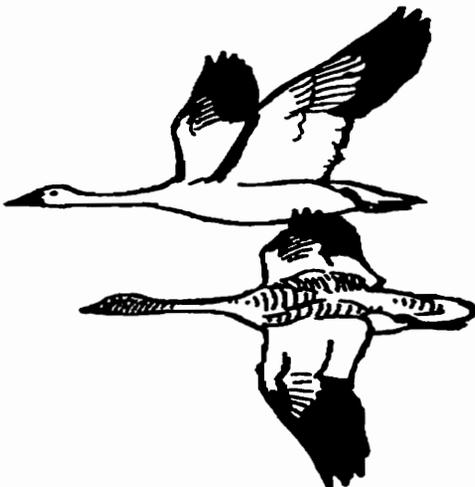
however need it for my NY state list.

For the next two weeks the only news was from conversations with the Watertown DEC office on the status of the BLTE colony. Reports indicated that the WWTE/BLTE pair had laid three eggs and that the WWTE was doing the lion's share of the incubation duties. This fact led to the assumption that the WWTE was female. At this time it is only an assumption.

On July 1, I was lucky enough to have to make a business trip to northern New York. I left home several hours early and swung by Perch Lake WMA hoping to see the WWTE. Detailed directions indicated the sought for BLTE colony was not far from a boat launch at the end of a dirt lane off Vaadi Road. Upon arrival I found the dirt lane was barricaded and locked, so I resigned myself to try to see the WWTE from Vaadi Road, about 300 to 350 yards from where the terns were nesting. Fortunately, the line of sight was clear until about the last 50 yards or so near the nesting area.

I parked on the shoulder of Vaadi Road and scanned the marsh hoping to see the WWTE. Black Terns were seen quite often coursing over the marsh, but since the temperature was in the 80's in full sun, and there was almost no wind, their flights were quite brief. However, if I had any hopes of seeing the WWTE I would have to check every tern. Since this tern colony contained twenty or so birds it became rather tiring and monotonous. This, plus the long time spent by the WWTE incubating, meant I had to be constantly on watch to be sure not to miss it when it decided to leave its incubating duties and take to the air.

Early on, I was joined by another birder. With four eyes looking it seemed like we might have a better chance of sighting what we had come for. Several times there were false sightings that could not be confirmed because the birds were seen too briefly before

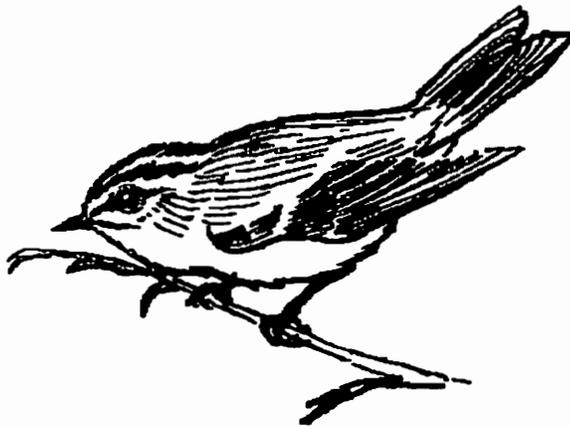


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they disappeared from view. At about 2:30 p.m. I spotted what I thought was the WWTE flying conspicuously over the marsh; this was quickly confirmed by the other observer. The WWTE was seen probably all of twenty to twenty-five seconds. In appearance it was markedly different from the BLTE and there was no doubt in our minds that we had seen the WWTE. The other observer lived nearby and had already seen this WWTE several days earlier. In fact I was shown several color photographs of this bird taken at that time. With a sigh of relief, after spending almost three hours before finally seeing the WWTE, we departed.



After the WWTE/BLTE eggs had been incubated for a week or so, personnel in the Watertown office, informed that a great number of birders would show up once the word was broadcast far and wide, constructed a platform on top of a six to eight foot high pile of dirt located near the boat launch. When this was done, the barricade was opened and birders were allowed to park off the dirt lane, climb the steps onto the platform and look for the WWTE. It was open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. with a DEC employee in attendance. A visitor's log indicated over 500 birders viewed the WWTE, coming from all over the Northeast and from as far away as California.

Shortly after the eggs hatched, two chicks were banded. It was not known what happened to the third egg. Since chicks stay

around the nest for only a few days, their fate is unknown. On July 20 the marsh area experienced a severe thunderstorm. The feeling is that it is doubtful the chicks could have survived. Subsequently far fewer BLTE were seen in the marsh and the WWTE was not seen after July 22, the day it was seen by HMBC members Samuel Madison and Kevin McGrath.

As far as this writer is aware, this is only the third WWTE sighted in New York State. The most recent sighting was in the Rochester area in June 1991 and that was only for one day. (See *The Kingbird*, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp.2-4, Winter 1992 issue.)



— Walt Sabin

STRANGE LANGUAGES

*Clouds of geese follow the wind.
They become like white sculpture
against the darkness before
joining the skein of wet reflections
below.*



*The flatness echoes with their strange
language as they decode signals
and translate the miles into fables
unintelligible to those of us who
cannot fly.*

— Bernard V. Finney, Jr. 1989



Field Trip Reports

Delmarva (May 2-3)
Letchworth St. Pk. (June 6-7)

The charge of the warbler brigade was on as Bill Lee led two groups of intrepid HMBC birders on Parulidae treasure hunts at the Delmarva Peninsula and at Letchworth State Park in Western New York. Both trips had their share of exciting birding and, of course, moments of confusion -- a parade down Main St. at Chincoteague disrupted our motorcade and gave two groups a chance to tour a formerly unseen portion of the island. Nevertheless, these two trips, one a long-standing annual rite, and the other an exploration of new territory for most of us, both provided thoroughly enjoyable spring birding.

The Delmarva trip officially began in the hotel parking lot at a "relaxing" 5:30 a.m. The highlights of the first day included good views of **Prothonotary**, **Worm-eating** and **Kentucky Warblers** and **Louisiana Waterthrush** at Pocomoke Swamp. The Kentucky was especially obliging, perched and singing incessantly in a large Rhododendron right next to the parking area. At Chincoteague most of the expected waders were found along with **American Oystercatcher**, **Black Skimmer** and a calling **Clapper Rail**. Waterfowl were scarce in the refuge but we were all enthralled to witness a battle between **Tree Swallows** and **Brown-headed Nuthatches** over a tree cavity. The nuthatches were actively feeding young in the nest hole when several swallows began blocking the adults' access to the nestlings. Each time a swallow would perch outside of the hole the adult nuthatches would wait on a nearby tree for an opportunity to dash in with a new load of food. This activity allowed us long clear views of the nuthatches as well as being very interesting in its on right. We watched for nearly 20 minutes with no resolution of the drama before deciding we had to move on.

On Sunday we returned to Pocomoke first thing and then proceeded to Trapp Pond

State Park in Delaware where we added both **Scarlet and Summer Tanagers** to our list. The return trip along the Delaware coast produced most of the common shorebird migrants along with other goodies including **Least Tern**, **Seaside Sparrow** and **Black-Crowned Night Heron**. With over 110 species on our cumulative two-day list the Delmarva proved once again to be a top notch spring-birding locale.

Expectations were running high among the participants on the Letchworth St. Pk. trip as we gathered together in the motel parking area Saturday morning. To most of us the park was a brand new birding area -- always causing some enhanced anticipation. On top of that was the Letchworth reputation of some 24 species of warblers which have bred there at one time or another -- everything from Hooded and Prothonotary to Canada and Magnolia all in the same, relatively small area! In fact there was a speculative claim



made that Letchworth has the highest number of breeding warbler species of any location in the country. We were very fortunate to have Doug Basset, a Letchworth Park Naturalist for nearly 20 years, taking us on a guided bird tour on the trip's first day. Doug further increased the expectant tension by providing a "menu" of most sought-after birds from which each member of the group could choose. "Ask for a life-bird and Ye shall receive" seemed to be Doug's policy.

Before we even entered the park we stopped along the road for our first warbler of the day -- a male **Mourning Warbler** on territory.

continued



continued from page 4

Due to a breeding warbler mapping program being carried out by park naturalists, Doug knew precise locations of many singing male birds. We continued to find birds, upon entering the park, with relative ease, quickly getting **Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Redstart and Yellow**. One of the easiest birds to get at Letchworth, at least by ear, is **Hooded Warbler**. The park staff has estimated that Hoodeds are the most common summer resident *species* -- not just warbler-- in the park! You truly can't help but hear them everywhere -- seeing them is another question, however.



Most of the first day was spent walking trails in the heavily forested portions of the park. Aside from warblers, other notable birds included **Carolina and Winter Wrens, Pileated and Red-bellied Woodpeckers**, and a remarkable seven species of flycatchers including an **Acadian Flycatcher** which, after a long search, was observed for over ten minutes collecting nest material and building the beginnings of a nest.

Day two was a non-stop chase for staked-out birds. The **Yellow-breasted Chat** at the Park was audible in a large stand of brushy shrubs but never provided us with a clear view. While we were trying to glimpse the chat, **Alder and Willow flycatchers** sang from two nearby trees -- an *Empidonax* tutorial! From the park we headed for Rochester, where a **Western Meadowlark** had been visiting for some time. On this occasion the birding network functioned

perfectly, as a local resident and birder led us directly to the field where we first heard and then saw the bird -- a state bird for most folks in the group. Despite a tire puncture while searching for the meadowlark, we were able to finish the weekend with a quick run through Montezuma NWR adding a good mix of waterfowl to the trip list and getting some very nice looks at **Cerulean Warblers** and some hazy views of the nesting **Bald Eagles** there.

- Gregg Recer

Saratoga National Historic Park (May 17)

Nine participants met at 0700 hrs. The day was overcast, 54 degrees. We walked about 3 miles which included a service road. 37 species were listed. Warblers were in short supply. The best bird of the day was a **Brewster's Warbler**. Other highlights included **Blue-winged Warbler, Ovenbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Bobolink**.

- George & Kay Hanson

Elk Lake Field (June 21)

Thirteen participants started from McDonalds at Exit 29 of the Northway on an cool, overcast day. We first checked out a swamp on Johnson Pond Road. This area had promise, but only gave us **Olive-Sided Flycatcher**.

We stopped and birded areas of activity on the road into Elk Lake. This gave us 10 species of warblers and **Boreal Chickadee**. Our next stop was Newcomb Interpretive Center - had lunch and walked Sucker Brook Trail - bird of note - **Winter Wren**.

Last stop was Santanoni Preserve Trail - lots of warbler activity, but more of same. New bird for list - **Rusty Blackbird**. The trip had 55 species with other notables including

continued on page 14



A Case of Forensic Ornithology

Birding is to some, a spirited chase for rarities, long species lists, faraway exotic places, and the like. To others, it is an opportunity to gather information that contributes to a better understanding of our avifauna.

As a bander, I devote much of my time to gather data that fall in the latter category; but when it comes to tracing information on band re-encounters, then the rare, unexpected, or exotic aspect shows its challenging face. It is always intriguing to learn about a band recovery from some distant place, or due to some extraordinary circumstance. Some of these experiences require me to play detective, and the following account is one such forensic experience.

On December 24, 1990, my daughter, son-in-law, and I went to Rotterdam to walk a portion of the hike-and-bike path along the Mohawk River which we had never previously walked. On our return home, we stopped at Collins Park in Scotia to observe the gulls and waterfowl that congregate near the park beach. The usual **Herring, Ring-billed and Great Black-backed gulls** were there, numbering about 75. Most of them stood on the hard-pack ground near the beach, facing into a stiff, chilling, NW wind. Bobbing on the waves were 20-30 **Canada Geese**, and a few gulls.

As I scanned the birds on land, I found a **Ring-billed Gull** wearing a band on its left leg. I told my daughter and son-in-law that

some people report band findings on gulls by reading their band numbers by telescope. Several of my own banded gulls have been reported this way. Sort of half seriously, I suggested it would be a neat trick to try reading this bird's band -- something I had never done.



The gulls seemed rather tame and while we remained in the car (using it as our mobile blind) we could approach quite closely, sometimes to within less than the minimum focus distance of my 10x40 binocular. I studied this bird intently for nearly ten minutes trying to piece together the numbers on its band. At any one time, I could account at most for only two or three digits.

I found a 07 combination, then a 24, then a 72, and so on. From my own gull banding experience, I knew I was looking for an eight-digit number consisting of a three-digit prefix, an hyphen, and a five-digit suffix. With persistence, I found the last digit, a 4, and the first digit a 7, because they were separated by the seam where the two butt ends of the band met.

With every movement of the gull, I tried to get another angle of view. I slowly circled the gull with my car, pausing frequently to read the digits then visible. I circled the bird at least five times, and at times had to outmaneuver it, preventing it from walking to the water and swimming away. I had to constantly corral the bird and use every

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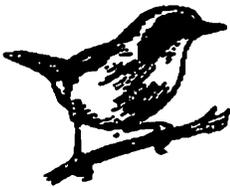


from page 6

opportunity for a new view.

But, the bird was quite cagey. It never let me get a view of the back of its leg. It always stood sideways to me, or head-on into the wind and would not allow me to observe it from behind. This became very exasperating, because by now I knew six of the digits 7__90724, but was unable to complete the band number.

My muscles were fatiguing from all the strange angles and positions and intense concentration I had to endure in the limited car space with my feet on the brake, clutch and accelerator; and with my arms, neck and back wrenching and craning about to take advantage of every new view offered by the bird's movements. My muscles were not toned for the strain of these contorted positions behind the wheel.



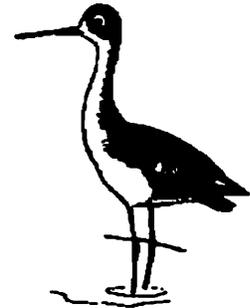
Try as I may, I could not read the last two digits of the band prefix. However, I applied two additional clues based on my experience as a bander. It is the custom

of the Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to use the last digit of the band prefix to denote the size of the band. Secondly, Having banded over 3000 Ring-billed Gulls, I knew the relative fit of a size 4A band and the larger size 5 band on the tarsus of a Ring-Bill. I could tell by the looseness of fit that the bird appeared to be wearing the larger size 5 band.

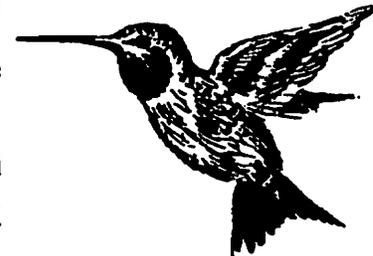
Thus, I could surmise that the number was 7_5-90724. Armed with that information, I wrote the BBL and explained how I had read the six digits and had estimated the seventh by band size. Three months later (quite coincidentally on the day before Easter; the sighting having occurred the day before Christmas), the BBL responded to tell me that Dr. W. E. Southern of Northern Illinois

University had placed band number 735-90724 on a flightless, young Ring-billed Gull on June 17, 1972 at a colony located 11 miles NW of Good Hart, Michigan. The bird was 18 1/2 years old!

Out of curiosity, I wrote again to the BBL asking them to search their records for an even looser fitting size 6 band that matched my reported numbers. I wanted to satisfy myself that the band was not so loose fitting as to be a size 6 rather than 5. Coincidentally, I asked for a search on size 4A as well.



They confirmed that no such size 6 band had been used on a Ring-billed Gull; but that a 4A band satisfying these numbers had been applied in 1988 on a Lake Champlain Ring-bill. I remained convinced that the fit of the band that I saw on this bird could not have been a snug-fitting size 4A; rather it was the looser size 5. To further dispel any possible doubt about the matter, I compared specimens of both band sizes in the hand and at a distance comparing the ratio of height to diameter, and hand no difficulty discerning the difference.



Weighing all the evidence, especially my initial

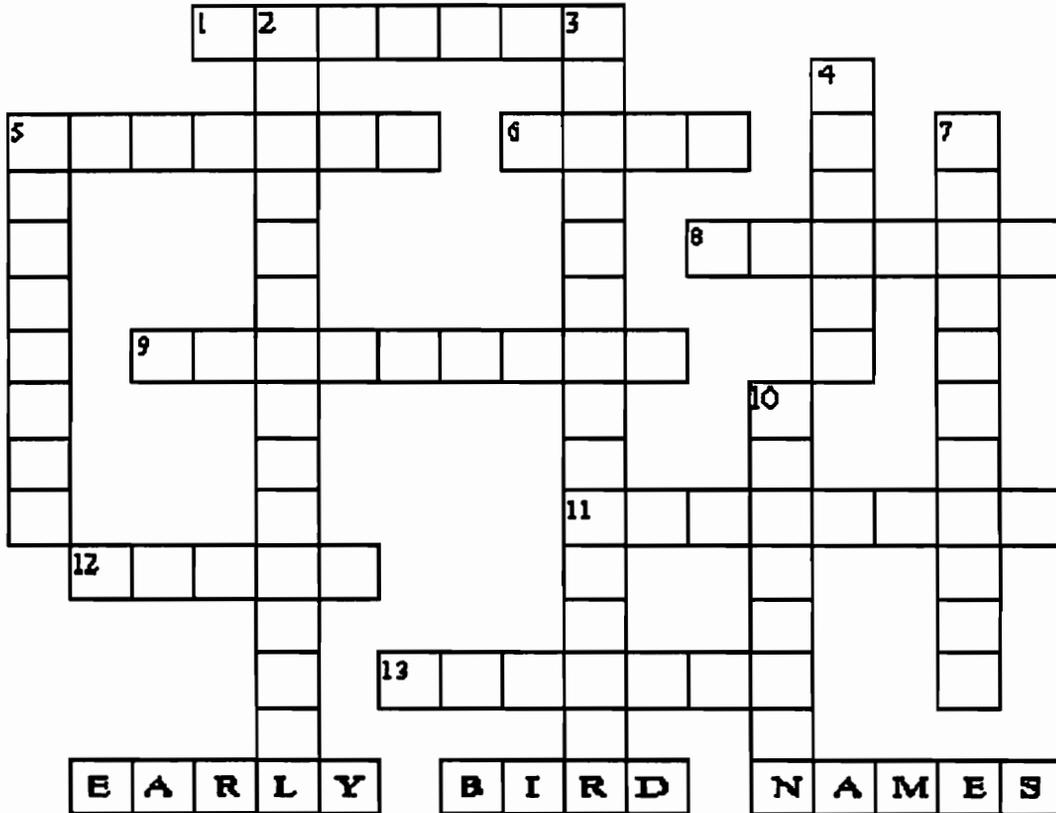
impression on the loose fit, convinced me I had seen the Michigan bird as originally reported. If you encounter a banded bird in the field, try your hand at reading its band to trace its origin.



— Robert P. Yundick



CHRISTMAS COUNT BIRD NAMES IN 1939
by Clifford Lamere



The bird names to the left of the = were used by the Schenectady Bird Club in 1939, the first year *Feathers* was published. The names to the right are currently being used.
(answers on page 15)

ACROSS

- 1. Bluebird = _____ Bluebird
- 5. Meadowlark = _____ Meadowlark
- 6. European Partridge = _____ Partridge
- 8. American Merganser = _____ Merganser
- 9. Red-wing = Red-winged _____
- 11. Red-legged Black Duck = _____ Black Duck
- 12. English Sparrow = _____ Sparrow
- 13. _____ Horned Lark (western form) =
Horned Lark [Hint: named for a mid-western US habitat]

DOWN

- 2. Sparrow Hawk = _____ (2 words)
- 3. Marsh Hawk = _____ (2 words)
- 4. American Golden-eye = _____ Goldeneye
- 5. Starling = _____ Starling
- 7. Cowbird = _____ Cowbird
- 10. Goshawk = _____ Goshawk



Feathers

V54N2
Page 9

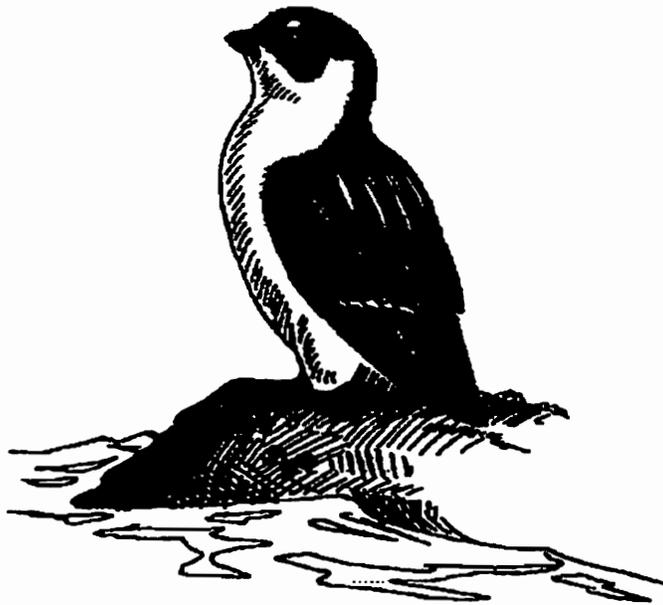
Birding in Iceland

Iceland's location in the northern Atlantic ocean makes it an excellent place to observe vast concentrations of Arctic seabirds and waterfowl as well as a range of accidentals from Europe and North America. Like all the natural wonders in Iceland, the birds are both approachable and abundant.

Three of the most impressive birding locations are around Lake Myvatn on the northeast coast, the Snaefellsnes Peninsula in the west, and the Westmann Islands to the south. Lake Myvatn, a large fresh water lake, is the breeding ground for a wide variety of northern waterfowl including one of the world's largest breeding populations of Harlequin ducks. Snaefellsnes Peninsula and the Westmann Islands are known more for the vast numbers of seabirds, particularly gannets and auks, that gather on cliffs and islands along the shore. The Westmann Islands are also the site of the world's newest island, Surtsey, born in 1963, as well as a more recent volcanic eruption that covered a large portion of the main island in the group.

Despite our best intentions, we were not able to travel about Iceland to all three of these great birding spots. The length of our stay and the rather primitive road system limited our efforts. We chose to aim for the Westmann Islands and to allow some time to see some of the other

wonders of Iceland including Thingvellir National Park, a dramatic natural amphitheater, the great glacial waterfall Gullfoss, and nearby geysers. It was a highly rewarding choice, and also gave us a chance for some very interesting birding in and around the capital city of Reykjavik itself.



As a world capital, Reykjavik is unique in its birdlife. In the center of city is small lake, Lake Tjornin. In the center of the lake is a small island which hosts a breeding colony of **Arctic Terns**. We also saw a number of waterfowl sharing the lake including **Mallards, Greyleg Geese, Tufted Ducks,**

Northern Pintail, Scaup, and Common Eiders. In different seasons of the year, the lake hosts other birds including wintering **Whooper Swans**. Where else could one see Arctic Terns competing with feral pigeons and gulls for handouts? Or in how many other cities would the most common duck be the Common Eider?

Iceland's oceanic orientation was reflected wherever we looked for birds. Backyard birding was somewhat different in Iceland. Looking out our host's kitchen window in the Reykjavik suburbs, we saw **Redwings**, but also

continued....



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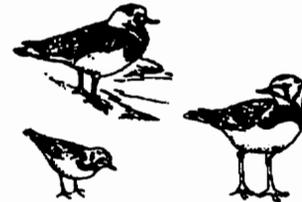
within a few yards of the house, **Common Ringed Plovers** and **Whimbrels** led newly born chicks about the sparse vegetation. Other birds were also in seemingly uncommon places. While walking through a small park within the city limits, we were able to watch a **Redshank** searching for food along a stream and **Red-necked Phalaropes** swimming in shallow pools. In the farmlands east of the city, the most common birds browsing in the fields and perching on hay bails were **Oystercatchers**. Along the windblown road to the airport at Keflavik, **Snow Buntings** were readily visible in white breeding plumage.



These sightings still did not prepare us for the spectacle of the Westmann Islands. The Westmanns are a cluster of small islands located off the southern coast and easily reached by air or by ferry. The small population makes its living from fishing and tourists that come to see the still smoldering remains of the volcano of 1973.

As the ferry left Thorlakshofn harbor for the islands, we spotted **Northern Fulmars** among the **Herring, Black-headed, Greater and Lesser Black-backed gulls** feeding near the fishing boats. A **Red-Throated Loon** swam across our wake and a **Great Skua** swung low over our heads. Soon we saw our first **Puffins** beating hard across the sea towards the islands; we felt quite good about the potential birding on the Westmanns.

Surtsey was one of our first views of the islands. It is the world's newest island, emerging from the sea in 1963 and now an ideal laboratory to document how life develops.



Soon the main harbor entrance appeared, guarded by massive cliffs crowned with grass. As the ferry drew closer, we had our first clear views of these birding cliffs, with the species arranged according to text book stratification: near the bottom, **Black-legged Kittiwakes** with a few **Black Guillemots** with their bright red feet sprinkled about; in the middle, **Common and Brunnich's Murres**, clustered along the cliff face; some **Razorbills** blending with the murres; and finally the burrows of the **Atlantic Puffins** along the edge of the grassy top of the cliff. Through the binoculars, each little white speck on the grass became a puffin. An estimated eight million Puffins, breed on the Westmanns.

On the small tourboat cruise about the island to show volcanic vistas, one began to get a feel for the sheer numbers of breeding seabirds. The cliffs near the harbor were simply an example of the breeding areas, packed with birds, that are replicated many times throughout the islands. The cruise on the boat provided many dramatic images including unperturbed murres, guillemots, and kittiwakes packed



continued....



Feathers

continued from page 10.....

together in noisy cohabitation; the sky suddenly filling with thousands of **Northern Gannets** as they rose from their colony, and rafts of puffins charging out to sea barely skimming the surface. The birds allowed us to drift close enough for us to see what parents were feeding their new offspring. Only the puffins, perhaps reflecting their continuing status as a game bird, kept their distance from the boat.

The 1973 volcano had a great impact on the main island of Heimaey, leaving black sand beaches and walls of frozen lava. These vistas provided striking settings for us to set up a spotting scope and spend additional hours studying the residents of the bird cliffs across the harbor, as well as a chance to add some other island birds to our list including **White Wagtail, Northern Wheatear, Greater Golden Plover, and Ruddy**



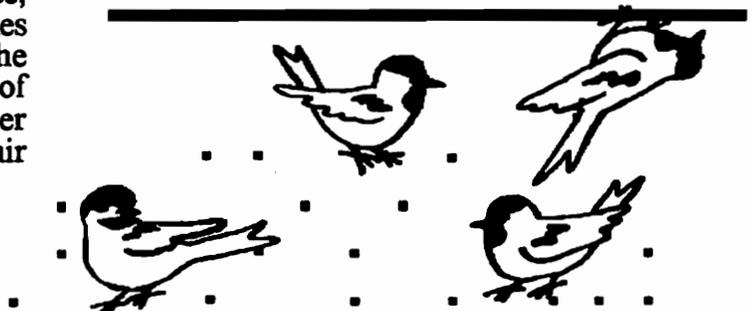
Turnstone.

Birding in Iceland in several ways reflects a different time. Incredible numbers of birds breed very close to human settlements. Without powerful optics or great endurance, many interesting species can be casually observed. But other aspects of another time also persist in Iceland that would make birders wince, including the number of puffin dishes listed on restaurant menus in the Westmann islands and the appearance of stuffed ptarmigans, puffins and other auks in shop windows and souvenir stands.

We didn't travel as far about this dramatic place as we had hoped, and the Gyr Falcon, Harlequin Duck and White-tailed Sea-eagle eluded our binoculars, but Iceland still provided us such vivid impressions of some birds and their behavior that those images will always define those species in our memories.



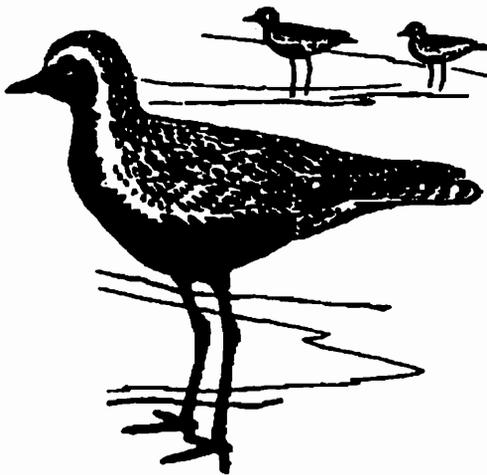
— Phillip Johnson
— Debbie Ellinger





Nuptial Behavior of a Black Skimmer Mated Pair

Cumberland Island National Seashore (Georgia), June 10 around 6:30 p.m.: I am surprised to find a pair of **Black Skimmers** in the **Least Tern** Colony I have been monitoring for the past three weeks (see Sotis, 1992; *Feathers* V54N1). One appears to be settled in a nesting position; the other stands quietly by. Apparently, they are tolerated by the terns. I find this particularly interesting, having noted their aggressive response to an occasional trespassing **Wilson's Plover**.



After about 15-20 minutes, the attending skimmer (soon confirmed to be the male) begins to wander leisurely about the breeding area. Two terns rise and begin to harass it with menacing swoops. Evidently intimidated, the skimmer retreats toward its partner, which now stands to reveal an empty, shallow depression or scrape. Both now stand together.

Abruptly, the male lifts off, flies over the beach directly behind me toward the surf, wheels and descends to a low, skimming flight paralleling the shore, its lower mandible scoring the shallows. It soon returns with a small, limp fish in its beak. It approaches and faces the female and offers the fish. There follows this sequence:

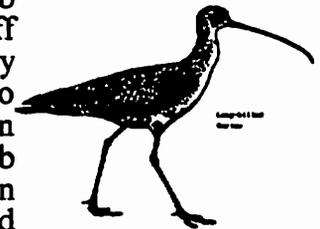
female moves to accept fish; male backs away slowly beyond the reach of the female; female again approaches, desirous of the offering;

male appears to tease female as it continues to back away shaking fish slightly to lure her on; female persists and the fish is surrendered; female, with fish now in bill, turns around and presents tail-end to male; male immediately mounts female; copulation is consummated in about five seconds (nothing short of perfection! -- I am elated) female consumes fish; male flies off -- eventually to return with another fish.

The sequence is repeated three times during the next forty- five minutes.

Shortly thereafter, and apparently because of some tern harassment, the skimmers fly to neighboring dunes to settle undisturbed. Subsequently, however, they return to the Least Tern colony, alighting where I previously discovered them. It is now 8:15. A storm is approaching from the west, so I leave intending to follow developments tomorrow.

June 11, 6:15 a.m.: a **Ghost Crab** has entered the colony. It is confronted *on the ground* by a resident Least Tern. I watch a brief standoff. The crab raises a claw to fend off persistent beak-jabs by the tern, then begins to back away. The tern presses on; the crab retreats. The tern seems satisfied and returns to its business. The crab disappears behind a dune, well beyond the colony border.



A brooding Least Tern lifts its wing to allow its mate to feed a recently hatched chick. With more than enough for the little one, the sitting parent takes a piece for itself. The Black Skimmers are nowhere to be seen. They are not observed at any time throughout the week that follows, after which I departed Cumberland Island.


— Jim Sotis



Upcoming Programs

Monday, December 7:

Christmas Party & Birding Colorado

Alan Mapes, Director of Five Rivers EEC, will present the first of the "Birding North America" programs with a slide presentation on the birds and birding hotspots of Colorado. Bring a dessert for the party.



Monday, January 4:

A Workshop on Wintering Raptors

Richard Guthrie, Jane Graves and Barbara Putnam will present a slide program discussing raptor identification, winter hotspots for raptors and birding strategies. A field-trip portion of the workshop will be led by Richard on Saturday, January 9. Details will be provided at the Monday night program.

Monday, February 1:

Birding South Florida

Bob Budliger will continue the "North America" series with a slide presentation on the birds and hotspots of South Florida.

All programs will be held at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Rd. in Delmar. Meetings begin at 7:30 p.m. with a brief review of the previous month's sightings checklist followed by the evening's program.

HMBC Field Trips: Dec., '92 - Jan., '93

1992 Christmas Bird Counts:

HMBC will sponsor three CBC's this year, as it has for more than a half-century. Coordination of these surveys of early-winter bird populations is done by the National Audubon Society and the results are published in their journal, *American Birds*.

Schenectady : Saturday, December 19
Compiler: Bill Lee, 374-3426

S. Rensselaer Co.: Saturday, December 26
Compiler: To be announced at Dec. 7 HMBC meeting and on Dial-A-Bird

Troy: Saturday, January 2
Compiler: Pat Canavan, 664-7204

Annual Duck Count

January 17 (Sun): Coord. Paul Grattan
237-0661 (office); 237-8355 (home)

Participants on the local portion of this statewide event will count waterfowl and other wintering birds on the Hudson River between Green Island and Stillwater.

Sachuest Pt. and Rhode Island Coast
January 23-24 (Sat-Sun): Coord.: Bill Lee
374-3426

Harlequin Ducks, Purple Sandpipers, and Common Black-headed Gulls should highlight this weekend trip. Also possible are alcids and Barrow's Goldeneye.

Raptors of Saratoga and Washington Cos.
January 31 (Sat): Coord.: Bill Graham
798-8038 (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

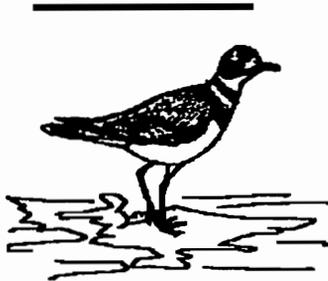
A full day trip searching for Bald Eagle, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, Harriers, Owls and open-field birds at Conklingville Dam, Hudson Falls and Fort Edward.



from page 5

**Common Loon, Broad-winged Hawk,
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker,
Golden-crowned Kinglet and Purple
Finch.**

- George and Kay Hanson



Vischer Ferry Historic
Nature Preserve (September 12)

A beautiful early fall morning and some very productive birding rewarded the 15 participants on this trip. As hoped for, **Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets** were present in good numbers, along with good assortment of waterfowl, including **Wood Duck and Green- and Blue-winged Teal**. A particular treat was the great scope views of an adult **Common Moorhen** with 5 half-grown, still downy young! Two **Sharp-shinned hawks** exhibited some interaction and two **Red-tails** were also present. Fall warblers included **Wilson's, Black-and-white, and Common Yellowthroat**. Noisy **Belted Kingfishers** were also seen. Many thanks to the assistance by Tim Colborn.

- Scott Stoner

Five Rivers Center
September 20, 1992

Nine members gathered at the Center interpretive building for a morning trip to this popular birding spot. One member who arrived early already had a "goodie" staked out for us.

An immature **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was visiting the Beaver Pond and obliged us by sitting on a log in the water for our close study of field marks. We studied and debated the head shape, beak proportions and the spotting on the back. All left satisfied that we had a Black-crowned instead of the similar Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. The former is, of course, the more likely to appear in our area.

Our tally for the morning was 44 species. **Lincoln Sparrow, Solitary Sandpiper, Black-throated Green Warbler and Eastern Bluebird** were the other birds of special interest.

Members wishing to get in on more birding at Five Rivers can join the staff Thursday morning bird walks during April, May and the first two weeks of June, 8:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

- Alan Mapes



The success of *Feathers* depends on members submitting articles, poems, reviews of books, tapes, etc. and other communications about birds and birding. If you've been to an exciting birding hotspot or have a "chase" anecdote, share it with the rest of HMBC. Materials may be submitted in any format, however, material in ASCII (DOS text) format on floppy disk is particularly appreciated. Floppy disks will be returned.

-GR

President's Corner: My friends and fellow birders: With mixed emotions I must report to you that I have accepted a position with a Geoscience Consulting Firm in Philadelphia, PA and I will be relocating myself and family as soon as possible. Unfortunately, this means I will not be able to continue in my capacity as President for the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. Effective 9-14-92, I resign my position.



In accordance with the provisions of our club's by-laws, Cliff Lamere declined to assume the position of acting President. It defaults to the board to elect an acting President to serve until the next general election in April. Scott Stoner, Program Committee chair, has been elected Chairman of the Board and has been nominated for acting president. He is expected to be confirmed at the next board meeting (Nov. 9, 1992). Catherine Graichen was elected to the Board of Directors to fill the board vacancy created by my departure, she assumes Scott's voting powers. Tim Colborn

was elected by the board to replace me as the club's delegate to the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs meeting in Oneonta.

I would like to take a moment to thank the club for bringing so many wonderful people into my life and for giving me the opportunity to serve in the many different capacities that I have enjoyed. In addition to the good birding and camaraderie of the many trips and chases, I have made some friends whom I will truly miss. I look forward to seeing many of you again so I can tell you about all the birds we've got in Pennsylvania. Goodbye Albany-Hello Blue Grosbeaks.

My new home's 2-hr travel radius will include Princeton Woods, Sandy Hook, Brigantine, Cape May, Port Mahon, Bombay Hook, Pocomoke Swamp, Susquahanna River Reserve, St. George Canal, Hawk Mountain, and the Delaware Gap. If that weren't enough, Jamaica Bay will be 1/2 an hour CLOSER than from Albany! I won't even mention the hotspots further to the south. -- I think I'll adjust.

continued on page 15.....

SEND THOSE ARTICLES, FIELD TRIP REPORTS AND OTHER MATERIAL (INCLUDING CLIP ART) TO:

FEATHERS
c/o Five Rivers EEC
Game Farm Rd.
Delmar, N.Y. 12054

It has been very gratifying to see the very positive response the new *Feathers* has received. Thanks to everyone who's submitted material -- keep it coming!!!

-- Gregg Recer, Pub. Cmt. Chair
Editor, V54N2

Publication Schedule

V54:

No. 3 Editor: Alan Mapes Deadline: Dec. 1
No. 4 Editor: Dick Beeler Deadline: Feb. 1
No. 5 Editor: Cliff Lamere Deadline: Apr. 1

V55N1: Editor: open

The publications committee meets every third Monday of odd-numbered months, 7:00 pm at Five Rivers EEC. All are welcome.

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Delmar, N.Y. 12054

