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THE TRAVELLING BIRDER: GASPE'

by
Scott Stoner & Denise Hilton

Note: This article recounts some impressions of our trip to the Gaspé in mid-July of 1998, a couple of weeks earlier than the Club trip.

The Gaspé. THE GASPE!! The very name brings a sense of excitement, of a visit to the end of the world, or land's end as it is called. It is a place where the Appalachian mountains fall into the sea, the very eastern tip of land at the south side of the St. Lawrence River. It is a rugged, sparsely populated land, a land of rocks, whales, lighthouses, hardy people and, of course, seabirds. Many readers of *Feathers* have experienced the Gannets of Bonaventure, either through the program of John Green last year, or perhaps in person. We visited Bonaventure, in fact we spent two full days there, but the Gaspé is a lot more as well.

We drove the northern route, through the outskirts of Montreal and Quebec City. Our first major stop was a whale watch out of Rivière du Loup, a medium-sized city on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence. On this very cold and windy half-day trip across the St. Lawrence River, we saw fin and minke whales (la baleines), but missed the elusive, white beluga. The next day we continued out along Rte. 132, along the northern edge of the Gaspé peninsula, with a half-day venture into the Gaspé Provincial Park in the center of the peninsula. Up in the Chic-Choc mountains, this park with its glacial lakes, woods, scenery, waterfalls and breeding warblers, was worth several days on its own, but the Gaspé, the tip, awaited, and we had to move on.

Arriving at Cap des Rosiers, the northern tip of the peninsula just outside Forillon, we spent two nights at a delightful motel right on the mouth of the St. Lawrence. This was a great base from which to explore the magnificent Forillon National Park. Forillon has a north and a south sector; from the north

we could look east to the actual tip, the Cap de Gaspé. It is here that the land truly meets the sea, where the rugged northeastern end of the Appalachians sharply drop off into the rough waters.

One highlight of Forillon was a boat trip from the north sector to the Cap de Gaspé; viewing cliffs with nesting double-crested cormorants and black-legged kittiwakes; we also saw razorbills, black guillemot and gray seals nursing pups on the rocks. We went to the tip, to the end of the land, and had a good view of the lighthouse at Cap de Gaspé. From the south sector we hiked out to the lighthouse at Cap de Gaspé; few birds, but the scenery was fabulous.

The final part of our visit to Forillon was a two-mile hike to the Penouille area along the south side of the peninsula, where we enjoyed panoramic views

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of daisy-covered fields, close looks at mosses and lichens, and beautiful ocean views.

We then headed south to our final destination, the avian highlight, Bonaventure Island. Bonaventure and the famous and much-photographed Perce Rock, together comprise another Provincial park. Both are accessed from the resort village of Perce, which is much like any coastal resort area in the U.S. Between Forillon and Perce however, is the village of Gaspé itself, which is not. Gaspé appeared to be the economic and governmental center of the Gaspesian region. While there, we visited the Musée de Gaspé (museum of the Gaspé) and the Jacques Cartier monument, dedicated to the European "discoverer" of the region. Along with an excellent and detailed exhibit on the human history of the region, the museum included many fine paintings of birds and moose ("l'original"). We also enjoyed a video of how the artist got so close to the moose, including donning antlers, dressing all in brown, and "browsing" with the moose!

Arriving at Perce, we stayed at a nice motel at the edge of town with a fine view of the Rock, Bonaventure and, to our pleasure, a non-smoking section in their restaurant! (This was unfortunately hard to find at times in Quebec, perhaps the there). Another note about visit-primarily French-speaking; TV weather channel) are all in and most business names are as shops, restaurants and motels ple are more fluent than others studied French in school 20-plus were able to regain enough of it find the businesses we needed, money or order something in a speak it enough to convey a re-campground to photograph a to converse with a motel desk common background in the vol-understanding less English and than we realized; when the word man suddenly jumped up and parently thinking we were re-him, saying no,no, no and ex-eter, who spoke more English. ing to things on the menu!



one negative aspect to tourism ing is the language. Quebec is and radio (including a TV French, road signs are in French well. Many people in the gift speak some English, some peo- as we found out! We had both years ago, and found that we to read most of the road signs, and, in a pinch, try to change restaurant. Denise was able to quest for permission to enter a lighthouse (le phare); Scott tried clerk one evening about their unteer fire/EMS service. He was less of the attempted French "ambulance" was mentioned, the excitedly ran down the hall, ap-questing one! Scott chased after plained things to the other propri- After that we went back to point-

There are several boats that one can take to Bonaventure. You can go directly there on an early boat, or take a later one that goes past Perce rock and circles Bonaventure before docking. Bonaventure is larger than we had expected; the gannet colony is on the east (sea) side; the boats dock an the west (land) side and it is a half-hour plus, climbing hike by the shortest trail to reach the colony. We took the boat ride around on the first day; we recommend this for first-time visitors because it gives a good perspective on the size of the colonies and where they are located, as well as a nice view of Perce rock. Persons prone to seasickness should be forewarned however that the waters on the sea side of the island are not calm; a queasy stomach from the boat ride can later be compounded by the odor at the gannetry! Despite the odor, the flies, the heat and humidity, we enjoyed it so much that we returned for a second, full day at the colony. The second day we took the early, direct boat, After leisurely land-birding the island, and listening to a loud but elusive winter wren, we were still the only two people at the colony for the first hour and a half. That was a special experience, which we highly recommend.



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Words alone cannot describe a visit to the gannet colony. There are 70,000 adult northern Gannets, with nests regularly spaced about 2 to 3 feet apart, or just beyond the the beak's reach of their nearest neighbor. Thousands of gannets are in the air all day, coming and going, circling round and round looking for their own nest in that sea of (to us) identical birds and minimally constructed nests of grass and other tidbits. Parents take turns on the nest, one sitting while the other is out fishing. When one finally does land, he or she must run a gauntlet of razor-sharp beaks as it makes its way through to its nest. Recognition by the mate is verified by the male biting the female's neck, followed by "bill-fencing." Another interesting behavior is when the adult lifts its head and flutters its throat while filling its air sacks to help cushion the impact when it dives into the water. We watched once as a gull tried to take some tasty (?) morsels from the edge of the colony; it took a few chances, a few pecks but eventually was rewarded.

Human visitors can approach the colony as close as the fence, or about 6 - 10 feet from the closest nest. The gannets closest to the fence are the low ones on the pecking order; the more choice sites are nearer the cliff edge. the colony is growing 2 percent each year, from about 50,000 around 1970 to the 70,000 today. Every year, the staff have to move the fences back farther from the cliff as the nesting area increases.

The gannets were breeding; we saw the process from eggs to 2-3 week old chicks. Although gamely sitting on the eggs, they were too late to make it to maturity this year. The newly hatched gannets are completely helpless, and lie beneath their parents or across their rocky nests, looking quite lifeless, until feeding time when it tries to stand on its wobbly legs to take some fish from its parent. We also saw a dead young gannet; the staff told us that if a young falls out of its nest, it is considered an intruder and may get pecked to death, even by its own parent. By about Labor Day, the young would fly off the cliffs; the whole colony would be vacated for the year by mid-October. Young would not return to breed for several years. For their first year or two back at the colony, they would observe adult behavior and practice at the edge of the colony. There is a tall observation platform quite near the colony, where the sheer number of gannets, as well as the relative placement of their nests, can best be appreciated.

Other places worth visiting in Perce include the rock itself, and the park HQ and visitor center and its surrounding woods. Perce Rock is an island at high tide and connected to the mainland for a few hours each cycle at low tide. Although well-viewed from the land, and worth seeing in various lights, a walk actually out to it is also worthwhile. Bring your scope and look at the Great and Double-crested Cormorants high on the cliff face, Razorbills were a little lower and Black Guillemots were nesting in cavities in the side. Stay close to the rock though as pieces are always falling off.

The Bonaventure park HQ is high atop a hill overlooking the village of Perce, the rock and Bonaventure island. The movie on gannets is from the early 1970's, but still excellent. Just add 20,000 to the number of gannets! Walk the woods below it as well, for a nice variety of breeding boreal species including northern parula, American redstart, and yellow-rumped, and magnolia warblers, and Swainson's thrush. The wooded interior of Bonaventure Island itself offers good birding, if you can contain yourself from hurrying on the gannetry.

We returned along the southern side of the Gaspé, then through New Brunswick and Maine, departing on a very foggy morning that would have precluded all boat trips to the island. Either route, it's a long, long drive, about 18-19 hours. It was well worth the trip, one of the greatest birding experiences we have had. We recommend it to anyone who hasn't been (those who have know what we mean and will want to go again as much as we do)!



A REMARKABLE NEW STATE BIRD BOOK: *Bull's Birds of New York State*

The "bible" of the state's birders since its publication in 1974, *John Bull's Birds of New York State* has now been completely revised and updated by the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. This eagerly awaited survey of bird life in the state today provides new and thorough accounts of all 451 species on the official New York State checklist. The book features 7 new maps — 4 in full color — and 30 striking sketches by bird artist Dale Dyer.

Birders will find chapters covering topics from the prehistoric birds of the region to contemporary bird habitats and the ways in which current classification is being affected by DNA data and research. The species accounts themselves pay particular attention to date parameters and frequency of occurrence, details that are important to the active birder. Where applicable, full subspecies discussions are included.

Meticulously prepared by the editor, Emanuel Levine, and the more than 70 members of the Federation who served as authors, this book will prove invaluable to birdwatchers statewide — whether backyard feeder watchers, casual birders, or dyed-in-the-wool enthusiasts.

SUPERLATIVE BIRDS: A *Bull's Birds of New York State* QUIZ

by
Ray Perry

All the following are direct quotes from *Bull's Birds of New York State*, 1998. Can you identify the bird species referred to by each quote? Answers to appear in the next issue (April, 1999).

1. Of all the hawks, this species' status has been most affected by the proliferation of hawkwatch sites stimulated by the HMANA.
2. Easily the most adaptable of our native breeding species....
3. The most widespread and numerous woodland breeding bird in NY....
4. It is the earliest nester of any native NY songbird....
5. It nests later than any other breeder in the state...
6. It is more frequently parasitized by the Brown-headed Cowbird than any other species in NY.
7. This is the only warbler whose summer and winter ranges lie entirely in North America.
8. It's distribution is unique. It breeds from eastern LI to timberline on Mt. Marcy...
9. It is the most widespread and numerous of our breeding grassland sparrows....
10. Recorded in more Atlas blocks than any other species....
11. ... this is the most abundant breeding bird in NY....



BICENTENNIAL BIRDS

by
Dick Patrick

In the High Desert Museum at Bend, Oregon there is a modest display case which contains just two stuffed birds along with portraits of their discoverers. The birds are Lewis's Woodpecker and Clark's Nutcracker. I don't have to tell you the discoverers.

I believe that in less than six years these two birds will be minor celebrities. In 2004 the whole United States will be celebrating the marvelous accomplishments of the Corps of Discovery in their 1804-6 expedition to the Pacific Ocean and back. Those fortunate enough to live along the 4142 mile route know that the Corps and their leaders are celebrated daily. If you have the opportunity, visit Fort Clatsop, Oregon; Cape Disappointment, Washington or Pompey's Pillar, Montana. These are the locations I have been privileged to see. There are, of course, many more.

I see in *Birds of America* (Garden City Publishing Company, 1936) that the Nutcracker was discovered by Captain William Clark near the site of Salmon City, Idaho on August 22, 1805. William Finley, the author of this section of the book, shares with us his observations of the Nutcracker around the hotel on Mt. Hood. He says "these birds have learned to come about the hotel for their daily meals during the summer and have become so tame that they will eat from the hand."

That was not the case this summer, at least to my observation while vacationing at Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood. Clark's Nutcrackers were present in the nearby evergreens but appeared much too busy to drop down to say "Hello." The same was true of their brethren at Crater Lake. At both places they were completely wild birds.

This was some change from the bird I remember at Bryce Canyon or Yellowstone only ten or so years ago who always was glad to see you, always had time to "do lunch" as long as you were buying. For better or for worse with the ethic of not feeding wildlife being rigorously enforced by park rangers, we will have to find ourselves other luncheon companions.

Regarding the other occupant of this display case, while on a guided tour to see the mating dances of five species of Colorado grouse we happened to lunch in Cottonwood Canyon in extreme southeastern Colorado. There we were hosted by several very accommodating Lewis's Woodpeckers. They were dining at a separate table - in a cottonwood - but we couldn't have had better views of their metallic greenish-black backs and pink bellies. They were perfect hosts. They stayed as long as we were there to enjoy them.

On the night of September 19, 1805 (from *Undaunted Courage* by Stephen E. Ambrose, Simon and Schuster, 1996) Captain Meriwether Lewis resumed writing in his journal. To set the scene for you, the party had been traveling through the Bitterroots on horses obtained from the Shoshone. They were hoping to make the entire trip by water, but the Missouri did not run into the Columbia leaving them stranded without transportation in the Rockies until Sacagawea guided the party to her tribe. The Corps were in a steep, rocky, wilderness, without trails and struggling through an early snowstorm, probably the absolutely most difficult ordeal of the entire journey. In fact they were so weakened by hunger and dysentery they were having serious doubts that they could even survive.

Captain Clark had gone on ahead with a party of hunters and writer Ambrose tells us Lewis had just discovered a most welcome sight "the greater part of a horse which Capt. Clark had met with and killed for us."

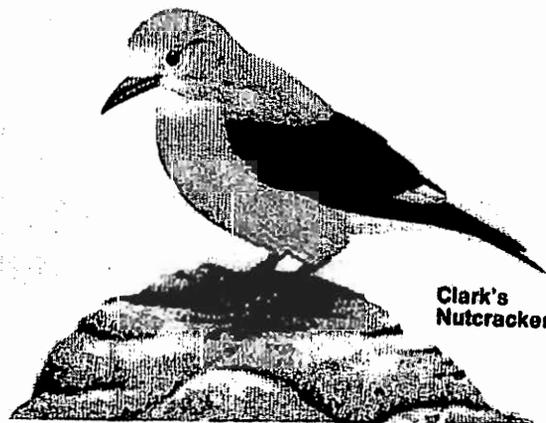
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After having eaten the horse, sitting around the campfire, cold, hungry, exhausted, and miserable, Lewis summoned the energy to work on his journal for the first time in two weeks. He described the Varied Thrush, Steller's Jay, the black woodpecker (Lewis's Woodpecker), the Blue Grouse, the Spruce Grouse and the Oregon Ruffed Grouse. For good measure he also described the mountain huckleberry, the Sitka alder, and the western red cedar. The author tells us all but the thrush were unknown to science at that time.

I just have to compare Captain Lewis adding to his "life list" five completely unknown birds with our Colorado grouse tour. At the end of a day, after our beauty rest, we would retire to the best restaurant in town, order whatever struck our fancy (horse was never on the menu), complain a little about the service and then congratulate ourselves on whatever birds our guides had brought into our view to be proudly added to our life list. But to be fair we could have spent our time and money in much worse ways and I can't wait to go on another such trip. But from hereon Captains Lewis and Clark have certainly put our minor discomforts and our glories in perspective.

On May 27 of the following year when the Corp were retracing their steps back through the Bitterroots one of the men brought Lewis a "black woodpecker." He had seen the bird the previous year; but this was the first time Lewis had actually held one in his hand. He wrote a 500 word description of the black woodpecker. This Lewis's Woodpecker's preserved skin is at Harvard University, the only surviving zoological specimen from the entire Lewis and Clark expedition.





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GREBE RESCUE

by
Jeff Marx

Eds. Note: Jeff Marx, former "Voice of The Birdline" recently took a job at the University of Oregon in Eugene. He's started to settle in there, working on his life list and getting accustomed to the West Coast lifestyle. He recently had the following experience.

My mother was here for the holiday and Friday we went to the shore. The surf had been really rough and the winds quite high in the days prior to our trip. When we arrived at the parking lot to walk out to the beach, I noticed four Western Grebes in a puddle of water just off the parking lot (100 yards or so from the ocean) no deeper than 4 or 5 inches and about 10 to 12 feet in diameter. In order to take flight, grebes, like loons and some other waterfowl, need to run along the water to gain speed before becoming airborne. I suspected the grebes were stuck and doomed, and my suspicion was confirmed when I was able to walk right up to them and all they could do was make funny little squawking sounds. While my mother and I walked down to the surf, I began to formulate a plan to get the grebes into the Pacific. I had a cardboard box in my trunk (recycling stuff) and figured I could pile the grebes into the box, cover it, and haul them down to the ocean. Simple.

When we got back to the parking lot, there was another guy and his parents slowly approaching the grebes to take their picture. I informed them why there was no need for caution and told them my plan. As it turned out, the son had worked as an intern at a bird sanctuary (obviously not a sea bird sanctuary) and his father had some experience handling animals (no details). They liked my plan and we put it into action.

Catching grebes isn't nearly as easy as it sounds! The closer your hand gets to their fish-catching-fast-reflex heads the bigger and bigger they're sharp, pointy, dagger-like bills look. And once the former intern mumbled something like, "Try not to let them bite you because they may be carrying pathogens," these simple little birds seemed to transform into pit vipers before my eyes. I changed my plan. Instead of grabbing a grebe, I simply dropped the box on top of one, scooped it up with the lid, and walked it down to the ocean.

On my way to the tidal zone, I was thinking that this bird was certainly going to stab through the box and nail me right in the hand. It didn't, and we made it to the water without incident. But now the real fun started.

I knew I couldn't just let the bird go in an inch or two of water, so I walked out to where the water was just over my feet (I had removed my shoes and socks and rolled up my pants earlier), waited for a wave to come, and tipped the box to free my new friend. That's when the big wave came in -- putting me in deep water (over my knees), knocking the box out of my hand, trapping the grebe and pushing him to shallower water, and soaking my one and only box. As the grebe was washed away, I could hear him crying out and for a split second I worried about it drowning. I worried about a bird, that can remain underwater for several minutes, drowning! Anyway, I finally reached the box and lifted it off the grebe. I then suffered from the romantic vision of the grebe paddling off into the surf and giving me one look back just before diving into a wave and swimming off to freedom. What actually happened was I had one ticked-off grebe on my hands, which was now perfectly capable of swimming -- quickly, I might add.

I tried to get my box back, but I was blocked at every turn. The grebe just kept coming at me, using the box as a sort of home base from which he staged every sortie. By then, several waves had come in. I was soaked and into water well up over my knees. All I wanted to do was to recover the box, which was getting farther and farther from shore. Finally, with the riptide tearing at my feet, I gave up the box to the briny deep and headed back to shore -- the grebe mocking and taunting me the whole way.

"Three more of these! Jeez!"

Luckily, the other folks had a different idea. The father and son each finally managed to snag a grebe by hand and brought them down to the water's edge. Witnessing my follies, they determined it would be best to release the grebes in really shallow water and see what would happen. Grebes on land are, indeed, helpless. The best they could do was rear-up and run about four or five steps before crashing back down (much like their courtship display). That was good enough for us though. We just kept the pressure on by standing behind them, forcing them out into the sea. It worked, eventually. The father went back for the last grebe and we got all four out where they belong.



FROM CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY:

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You decide how much time you spend monitoring your nest box.

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bluebird by
Sam J. Morris



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

NOTE: The March programs will be held at COLONIE TOWN LIBRARY (Albany Shaker Rd. and Maxwell Rd, off 1-87 Exit 4). In order to complete meetings by the library's 9 PM closing time, programs will start promptly at 7:30 PM. Announcements will be at 7:15 PM. In May, program meetings will resume at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center.

Mon Mar 1, Bob Budliger on "A Birding Odyssey - A New York Big Year"

Can you find 300 species of birds in New York in one year? Bob made an attempt to do just that a few years ago, and threatens to do it again this year. This slide-illustrated talk will explore the strategies and the planning involved in this bit of birding madness. You'll find out where to go, when to be there, and what to expect.

Thurs Mar 11, Jeff Wells, on "A Blueprint for Bird Conservation: The New York Important Bird Areas Program"

SPECIAL JOINT PROGRAM with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region. Colonie Library, 7:30 PM, The concept of identifying and conserving sites that are especially important for birds through the use of objective criteria was the cornerstone of Birdlife International's Important Bird Areas (IBA) program, initiated in Europe in the 1980's. The program's success led to the start of similar efforts in the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas. National Audubon's New York State IBA program used a committee of state bird experts to step-down international and national site criteria to the state level. These IBAs include one of the world's largest gull colonies, North America's largest Roseate Tern colony, and a Bank Swallow colony of more than 3000 pairs. More than 80% of the state's breeding Piping Plovers occur within IBAs, and at least 7% of IBAs support breeding Cerulean Warblers. Conservation initiatives at IBAs and evaluation of conservation success will also be discussed.

Wed April 14, HMBC Annual Meeting and Banquet, Shaker Ridge Country Club, speaker John Green on "Nature's Beauty and Nature's Will to Survive"

Mon May 3, Kevin Berner on the History, Ecology and Management of the Eastern Bluebird. Location at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Rd. Delmar.



PROGRAM REPORTS

by
Denise Hilton & Scott Stoner

Alaska's Aleutian Islands

At the Club's annual Christmas Party, member Lisa Meehan gave a fascinating account of her summers spend on remote islands in Alaska's Aleutian chain, monitoring seabirds for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge are more than 2,500 islands, including the Aleutians and the Pribiloffs. The mission of the refuge is to protect seabirds, and Lisa's job over several extended summers was to monitor them.

She and several other volunteers, led by one paid USFWS staff person, were dropped off at the island of Buldir by the research vessel Tiglax, with all the provisions they would need for 3 - 4 months. Food had to be packed very securely to prevent rats from accompanying them to the islands. The people lived in a primitive cabin left over from W.W.II on the island that was 6.4 by 3.2 kilometers. They did maintain radio contact twice a day with other islands. The weather was not what one would wish for, in that it was raining or had dense fog 95% of the time. There were 3.5 million seabirds on their 4 square mile island, affectionately (?) known as a "flying fertilizer factory." The vegetation was dense and there was always a risk of earthquakes and landslides.

Birds present on the island included red-legged and black-legged kittiwakes, thick-billed and a few common murrelets, least, crested, parakeet and whiskered auklets and horned and tufted puffins. To monitor breeding populations, they selected a small area of a colony, and mapped it to know which nest was which. They used a mirror on a pole to check the inside of the nests for reproductive success. In some cases, they had to stand at a cliff face and lean back to conduct their monitoring; they also studied cavity nesters such as the auklets and puffins. They also collected food from the birds that fed at different levels. Murrelets dive deep, auklets and puffins dive to medium depths, and kittiwakes and petrels feed at the surface.

Another project they were involved with concerned the Aleutian Canada goose, a small goose that has been extirpated from some islands due to the fox. It is being reintroduced onto other islands where the foxes have been removed.

Although not an experience that all of us would necessarily wish to have personally, Lisa did give a detailed picture into not only the avian life on a remote Aleutian island but the human aspects as well! We know that the research is important and that those folks who spend their summers there certainly get a unique experience and some incredibly up-close opportunities to study some really interesting seabirds. It did make for a most interesting and educational evening and we thank Lisa for sharing it with us.

Shorebirds

On January 4th, 1999 HMBC offered the first of its winter programs to be held at the Colonie Town Library, where about 45 people enjoyed Bill Gorman's excellent film presentation on shorebirds. Bill's bird films are always a treat, providing both entertainment and educational appeal, and this was no exception.

One of the advantages of film, of course, is motion, and Bill's audience was treated to delightful views of shorebirds in action. Among the birds included in this presentation was Killdeer nesting near a railroad tie and displaying its feigned broken wing to avert would-be interference with its nest. Other plovers on the film were Wilson's, Semi-palmated, Piping, Snowy, and Black-bellied.

Some larger shorebirds in the film included Whimbrel and Bristle-thighed Curlew, Marbled Godwit, Willet, Dowitcher, shown with its "sewing machine" feeding style, Common Snipe, shown very well camouflaged in a grassy area, and both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, which to me seemed much more easy to differentiate on film than in life!

Many sandpipers were represented, including nice views of Least, with its very brown coloring, Semi-palmated, Western, White-rumped, Pectoral and Dunlin. Both Ruddy and Black Turnstones were represented, as well, as was



the Wandering Tattler, shown feeding along the rocky coast. A very close view of about 30 Purple Sandpipers were also shown feeding in a similar setting.

Rounding out the film presentation were Upland Sandpiper, Sanderling, and Spotted, Terek and the European Common Sandpipers.

This was a program packed with great viewing, with close looks at birds in motion, and was enjoyed by all in attendance.

Crossword Puzzle Answers

Below are the answers to the crossword puzzle which appeared in the last issue of *Feathers*. - Ed Sessa

1	I	2	D	3	O	4	L		5	B	6	L	7	A	8	S	9	T		10	R	11	A	12	K	13	E
14	N	O	V	A					15	E	I	G	E	R						16	A	N	I	S			
17	K	N	E	W					18	A	R	E	N	A					19	V	O	T	E				
20	S	E	R	R	21	A	T	E	D					22	I	R	E	N	E								
					24	E	L	I						25	P	L	A	N									
26	A	27	S	28	K	N	O	T					29	P	A	I	N				30	B	31	U	32	T	
33	L	A	N	C	E				34	S	H	I	N							35	E	R	A				
36	B	R	I	E					37	S	T	I	N	G					38	E	L	A	N				
39	E	A	T						40	H	A	L	T					41	S	T	I	L	T				
42	E	S	S					43	C	O	G	S					44	C	H	E	E	S	E				
					45	D	O	V	E								46	O	E	R							
		47	P	48	R	O	B	E					49	A	S	W	A	N	51	D	52	A	53	M			
54	R	E	E	D					55	L	E	G	A	L					57	I	O	N	A				
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HMBC Website *by Barb Putnam*

A few months ago, the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club board of directors approved a website for the club. Our website is located on a free server called xoom.com (there is no advertising on our site). The URL (web address) is: <http://members.xoom.com/hmbc/> If you have internet access, please drop by our webpage.

There is a **welcome** page which includes two paragraphs about the club, a special announcements area, an Albany weather link, and navigation areas to the rest of our site. Our site is divided into three major sections: club information, bird reports, and web links. There is also a page called "feedback" from which you can email a note.

The **club information** area includes a "people" page which holds a listing of all officers, board members, and committee chairs with some email addresses. There is a programs page that gives a listing of upcoming programs. The field trip page includes a link to the ABA code of ethics, a page with links to lyme disease websites, a summary of HMBC field trip guidelines, and a brief listing of our yearly field trip schedule. There is a Reist sanctuary page that has a description of the site, directions, and a partial bird list. The publications page mentions our newsletter and our book.

The next section is about **bird reports**. This area of our website includes a page with recent birdline sightings (usually updated on Thursdays). You may email your personal sightings if this is more convenient than phoning them in to the birdline. There is a link to a page that helps you learn how to take field notes. One of our pages holds a list of NYS birds that are considered rarities. These birds should be documented. There is a link to area RBAs (Rare Bird Alerts). This site has transcripts of many of the RBAs from neighboring states. Another link will take you to a listing of the phone numbers for the RBAs all over the country. Lastly, there is a link to the NBHC (National Birding Hotline Cooperative) which has listings of all of the transcripts for RBAs throughout the country as well as some discussion groups such as "birdchat".

No website would be complete without a weblinks area. There is a featured site that is changed approximately monthly. Other pages point to sites that are specific to New York State or the whole country. Lastly, there is a page with sites that has extensive links for anything you may be looking for regarding the birding world.

The HMBC website was created using Netscape Navigator — it works well with Internet Explorer, also. The Club's email address is hmbc@xoom.com Please visit and give us some feedback: additions or changes you might like to see, links that don't work, whatever... Thanks.





Bird Records

by R. Budliger, Records Committee Chair

"The Record" is the basis of every publication you, as a birder, use that shows ranges, distribution, abundance, seasonal occurrence, vagrancy, etc. The range maps in a field guide, the calendar graphs in a site guide, and a checklist depend on "the record." It must be based upon a large enough and reliable sample of published and documented information. Each of us has an opportunity to contribute to "the record."

The HMBC Records Committee wants you to help by contributing reports of the birds you find in your jaunts around the Capital Region. For purposes of developing "the record" for this area, we are using the Federation of NYS Bird Clubs' *Kingbird* Region 8 delineation — that is the 11 counties of the Hudson Mohawk region: Warren, Washington, Saratoga, Rensselaer, Columbia, Greene, Schoharie, Albany, Schenectady, Montgomery, and Fulton.

We encourage you to keep notes of your observations, and send highlights to the Records Committee each month. These can then be compiled and published in these pages to become part of the permanent record of the region's avifauna. We are particularly interested in :

- 1 **species of note, a "rarity"**- these are birds that are not commonly seen.
- 2 **early or late dates**- outside the normal period of occurrence
- 3 **unusual numbers**- higher or lower than expected
- 4 **unusual breeding evidence**
- 5 **unusual or interesting behavior**

Every report should have, as a minimum, the date, the location, and the number of birds of each species mentioned. We all keep some kind of "tick" list of birds seen, and the simple addition of numbers seen makes your report so much more valuable. We would like you to keep track of your observations and send a summary of them each month. Send these reports to me at **36 Groesbeck Place, Delmar, NY 12054** or **rbudliger@aol.com** by the 10th of the month following the month of observation. Of course, if you find something really out of the ordinary call *Birdline* (439-8080) or one of the Records Committee members right away.

We all use field guides, site guides, and calendar graphs. You can help make these more precise and useful with a little effort. Besides, keeping notes will enhance your birding pleasure.

Monthly Big Days

by R. Budliger, Record Committee Chair

Several of us were chatting about inducing more birders to report observations to the Records Committee. We offer the following challenge — do a Big Day each month and submit a summary that would include observers name(s), date, location, number of species, and short list of species of interest. You might do a single county — Ray Perry does a monthly Big Day in Schenectady County only. You might rove several counties in the *Kingbird* Region 8.

You may want to do a Big day at the beginning of the month, and later try to top your total. We'll try to publicize a winner each month for the Region and for each county. Begin anytime, but send summary reports to me by the 10th of the month following the month of your Big Day.



APR 25
Sun

UTICA MARSH

Coordinator: Doug Steele

477-7254

Reservations by April 21 by leaving a message on Birdline (439-8080) after 4/17/98

This productive wetland is about 1 1/2 hours west of Albany. There are many trails plus a tower overlooking the two main marshes. We will be looking for rails, waders, waterfowl and early passerines. American Bittern is likely and Least Bittern is possible. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at Executive Park behind Stuyvesant Plaza in Albany for carpooling. Make reservations by calling BIRDLINE (518-439-8080) after April 17.

APR 28
Wed

AN EVENING AT VISCHER FERRY

Coordinator: Bernie Grossman

399-9159

Join us for a pleasant spring evening walk to look for Waterfowl, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Swamp Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird. Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the main entrance.

APR 29
Thur

WOODCOCK AT FIVE RIVERS

Coordinator: Al Mapes

439-4086

During a meandering walk out to the Woodcock site, we will look for other early spring birds. Woodcock flight time is expected around 8 p.m. Bring binoculars and flashlight. Meet at the Five Rivers Interpretive Building at 7 p.m.

Club ANNOUNCEMENTS

Coffee Night

Do you have a favorite poem or essay (or song, if you're musical!) you'd like to share with fellow Club members? We're tentatively planning a "coffee night" for sometime next fall or winter, where people can share readings or music — either original or not — in an informal setting. Please contact Denise Hilton, Social Committee Chair, at 785-6760 or Denise0352@aol.com if you're interested in participating!

— Denise Hilton

HMBC Rare Bird Phone Chain

Long-time Club member Bill Lee maintains a telephone chain system for rapidly disseminating information on rare bird sightings that are of interest to HMBC birders. The Rare Bird Chain needs periodic updating and re-organizing and Bill would like to re-do the chain soon. If you would like to be included on the new phone chain, please call Bill by the end of March at 374-3426 to make sure you're included.

— Bill Lee



AN EXTRALIMITAL REPORT: COBSCOOK BAY, MAINE, AND ENVIRONS

by
Robert Reilly

Eds Note: This is a re-printed version of an article that first appeared in the December, 1998 issue of *Feathers*. Due to a printing error, portions of the original article were mixed up resulting in part of one paragraph missing and parts of two other paragraphs being repeated. To correct this error, the article is re-printed here in its entirety. Sorry about the confusion.

My wife Alex and I spent September 5 through 12, 1998 vacationing near Cobscook Bay in Edmunds, Maine. The vacation mostly was spent visiting with family and friends (a.k.a., non-birders), but we did actively bird wherever we went. However, it was not specifically a birding trip. Still, the list tallied 54 species by the time we packed the car to head home and it included species from al-cids to warblers. Lifers for me included Dovekie (from shore) and American Golden Plover. And, even the non-birders among our group enjoyed spectacular views of Bald Eagles. Everyone, birders included, also delighted in seeing seals, porpoises, the chance to see whales from shore, and the impressive tides occurring at that latitude.

Edmunds, Maine, on Cobscook Bay is one of the easternmost towns in the United States (Lubec, a few miles away, claims to be the easternmost town and Eastport across the mouth of the bay claims easternmost city status). Cobscook Bay State Park and the Edmunds Unit of the Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge are located within town lines. From Edmunds, we went on day trips to the cliff trail at Quoddy Head State Park, the pier in the City of Eastport, the mud flats in the Town of Lubec, and all over Campobello Island in New Brunswick, Canada. They are all excellent birding spots. And, that is not just my opinion; I suggest reading about the area in *A Birder's Guide to Maine* (Pierson, Pierson and Vickery 1996). You may be familiar with Campobello Island as the summer home of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, whose "cottage" is still there and is open to the

public. It also boasts two points from which, if you are lucky, you can see whales from shore.

Cobscook Bay is a body of water that opens into the Bay of Fundy. It is comprised of many long fingerlike coves and is fed by many tidal streams running through many tidal ponds. The surrounding forest appeared to be dominated by conifers with some deciduous trees mixed-in.

The area is well known for its impressive tides, which average 20 feet. As you might imagine, at low tide extensive mud flats are exposed. The scene was entirely different at high tide. For example, there was one rock that we easily could walk to most of the time, however, at high tide it literally was an island and cormorants not only swam but also dove over the very place where we would walk at low tide. One thing was consistent at both high and low tides, the birding was good.

Early morning birding along eastern facing forest edge as the sun hit the trees produced good numbers and varieties of warblers. As usual, the chickadees were the tip-off; find the chickadees and you find the warblers. There were lots of Black-capped Chickadees present each day, and this week they had a number of friends. (Although, I did not get the Boreal Chickadee I was hoping for.) Quite a few tail-pumping Palm Warblers were present most mornings. One morning I was treated to an adult male Blackburnian in its yellower fall plumage, singing a short song as he flitted from tree to tree. Also singing sporadically



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was a Black and White Warbler. In the same spot, an adult male Black-throated Green Warbler and an immature Yellow-rumped Warbler quietly flitted about. On another morning in a different spot, in a line of conifers, a large flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets called as they actively flitted from branch to branch. Common Yellowthroats were indeed common, calling and occasionally singing from the thickets.

Other song birds were plentiful as well. A life bird for me, of which I heard and saw many this trip, was the White Winged Crossbill. A family of Golden-shafted Flickers was nearby. An Olive-sided Flycatcher sat atop a dead snag along a trail up to Crane's Mountain (just outside the wildlife refuge) where Dark-eyed Junco and an unidentified thrush flushing to a low perch (Hermit?) were found. On the same hike we enjoyed the musical accompaniment of Red-breasted Nuthatch. Along the bay, White-throated Sparrow sang halfheartedly and Song Sparrows called from low shrubs. Belted Kingfishers were abundant, chattering loudly as they flew over the bay and the ponds. American Goldfinch were active and American Robins were still present. Mourning Doves were heard from perches in trees and utility wires. Curiously, on the first day, I saw one Chimney Swift, but I saw it only for a moment and it did not return. On Campobello Island a Hairy woodpecker called vociferously (they do sound different from Downy woodpeckers!) as it checked-out a tree. Quoddy Head State Park produced Cedar Waxwing. In many areas, there were Black-capped Chickadees, as mentioned above. And, for the sake of completeness, I suppose I have to include the Starlings and Pigeons seen.

Corvids were well represented, regardless if they called, cawed or croaked. What would have been another life bird for me, had I a much better view of it, was the Gray Jay I got a fleeting glimpse of (did I?) as it rapidly flew

by, calling. Blue Jays were easily seen and heard, as were American Crows. More enjoyable for me, since I rarely see them, were the Common Ravens I heard and saw flying overhead, sometimes flapping, sometimes gliding and sometimes soaring; they were fun to watch.

The hawk watcher in me also was pleased or, more accurately, thrilled. (You would be too!) I already mentioned the adult Bald Eagles flying right over head. Word has it that they fledged a chick on an island across from Cobscook Bay State Park this year. An Osprey caught a fish as all of us watched. An adult Broad-winged Hawk soared over me, showing the wide band on its tail nicely; apparently, the bird was not migrating yet as it was soaring in a northerly direction. Both adult and immature Sharp-shinned Hawks were out and about in the mornings, no doubt looking for warblers as I was. Also active were Merlin, which chased almost anything in their path. For instance, while canoeing along the shore of the Cobscook Bay I watched a Merlin chase a Belted Kingfisher - I am not sure which bird was bigger. In addition, a raptor with a steel-blue back shining in the sun (I am guessing a Merlin) flew out from the forest on Campobello island to chase shorebirds over the ocean. Also on Campobello island was an adult female Northern Harrier hunting and, yes, more adult Bald Eagles.

Did I mention shorebirds? There were shorebirds aplenty, flying in huge flocks back and forth, this way and that. Identified were Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, and American Golden Plover, although, no doubt, there were many more species about. The Least Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers were found at several locations including Campobello Island and Cobscook Bay. Greater Yellowlegs were common all around the bay. I listened for their three-noted whistle since I often did not have



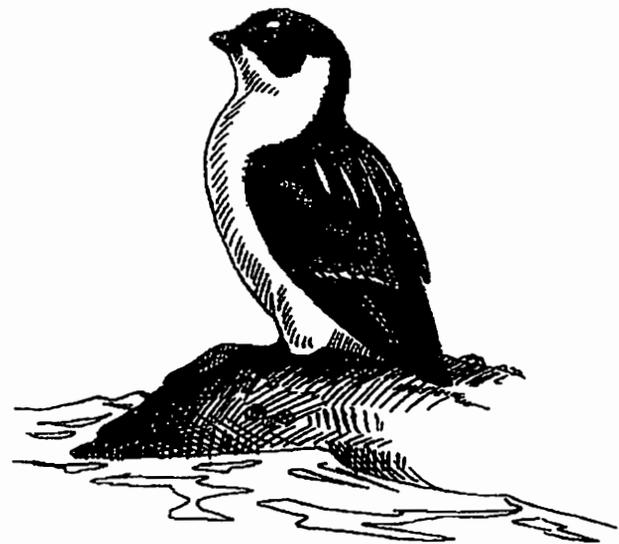
another bird to compare size. I found the American Golden Plovers on the Lubec mud flats; the adults were molting between their summer and winter plumages, while the juveniles were in fresh plumage with conspicuous superciliums. Many, many enjoyable hours could be whiled away in Lubec, scoping shorebirds in early September.

The gulls and terns were good as well. I particularly enjoyed the large flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls, which I could almost mistake for terns as they flew low over the water of the bay. Herring Gulls were everywhere, sometimes interspersed with Ring-billed Gulls. Greater Black-backed Gulls more usually were found near the headlands, as opposed to the wooded cores of Cobscook Bay. Gulls by the hundreds (if not thousands) were seen from Eastport, near a phenomenon called the Old Sow, a whirlpool between Eastport and nearby Deer Island, New Brunswick (Pierson); many more hours could be spent here, no less enjoyably. Common terns (a passing birder from Boston questioned if they were Arctic) were found throughout the area.

And, alcids, ducks and geese were seen, too. Canada Geese and American Black Duck were around Cobscook Bay each day and would fly out to the deeper water of the bay to spend the night. (What with the coyotes howling at night, I thought it was a good idea that they did!) Common Loons could be heard and seen regularly. Hooded Mergansers were present on Cobscook Bay. Double-crested Cormorant were abundant and Great Cormorant were present on the rocks on the headlands. Also from the headlands, I saw Black Guillemot and, to my great delight, Dovekie; little tuxedo-wearing birds with no necks and the funniest little wings. I saw the Dovekie from East Quoddy Head on Campobello island, near the East Quoddy Head lighthouse, which you can get to only at low tide - you actually cross the sea bed (two different sections of it,

climbing up and down ladders) to get there. Common Eiders were found in rafts just off the beach on Campobello island. And, somewhere in there a White Winged Scoter flew by.

Now, in what category (pigeon hole?) do I put the Great Blue Heron that was often near the bay? Well, regardless of where I put the heron, it clearly fits into a much larger picture of fantastic birding at Cobscook Bay. No matter whether you specialize in squinting at the colorful little birds flitting about the trees until the warbler-neck becomes disabling, or in straining every sense to catch the jizz of a passing raptor before it heads over the trees, or in staring bleary-eyed through a scope for hours at probing shorebirds until the tide comes in and swamps your tripod, Cobscook Bay and environs has a spot for you.





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Send articles, clip-art
photos, artwork to:

Feathers
c/o Cathy Graichen
23 Scotch Mist Way
Ballston Spa, NY 12020

or via e-mail to:

recerg@crisny.org

(MORE) Club ANNOUNCEMENTS

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee is currently working on developing a slate of candidates for the April Annual Meeting Elections. If you are interested in serving on the HMBC Board of Directors, please contact Bob Budliger (Nominating Committee Chair).

DEC Camperships

If you know of a 12 - 14 year old NY resident who is interested in the out-of-doors, consider nominating them for a HMBC-sponsored campership to one of the DEC summer camps. HMBC sponsors two young people each year at one of the camps. If interested, please contact Ann B'Rells as soon as possible for consideration.

Reminder!!

All HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Board meetings take place the second Monday of every odd-numbered month. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center at 7:00 PM.



(MORE) Club ANNOUNCEMENTS

Call for Speakers

Anyone who would like to give an HMBC program, knows someone who would like to give a program or has a suggestion for an outside speaker, please contact Scott Stoner, Program Committee Chair, at 785-6760 or sjstoner@aol.com.

— *Scott Stoner*

Field trip leaders

Remember to send your field trip summaries/reports to Feathers for publication!! The length and depth of field trip reports is up to you, but they need not be lengthy or contain extensive lists of bird sightings. A brief, lively summary noting the birding highlights will be much appreciated and will hopefully help inspire future field-trip participation. Send reports to **Cathy Graichen, Publications Committee Chair, at 23 Scotch Mist Way, Malta NY 12020** or email at [re-
cerg@crisny.org](mailto:re-
cerg@crisny.org). Plain text (ASCII) on 3.5" IBM diskette or in email is highly encouraged, but not necessary. WordPerfect or MS Word is also acceptable. If submitting paper versions, a cleanly typed or printed copy will be appreciated for ease of scanning. Thanks!!

— *Cathy Graichen*

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THE TRAVELLING BIRDER: NORTH DAKOTA!!

by
Scott Storer

Sparsely populated, little visited and relatively unknown to most, is a scenic and birding treasure waiting to be discovered. In the northern Great Plains, it has farmland, far-subzero winters -- and -- badlands, wetlands and rolling prairie replete with waterfowl, yellow rails, Baird's sparrows, bison, pronghorn and lots, lots more! North Dakota was the site of an extensive tour I went on in Mid-June of 1998, with the Audubon Naturalist Society. With leaders Hal Wierenga and Lynn Davidson, we spent 10 days traversing the central and western portions of this fascinating state. Although the accommodations and restaurants at times left something (a lot, even!) to be desired, the birding, wildlife and scenery were great, and I'm really glad I had the chance to experience it.

When the ice sheets retreated from the plains 15,000 years ago, there remained thousands of marshes lakes and ponds. More ducks nest in this "prairie pothole" region than in any other habitat. North Dakota, in the center of this region, has 62 national wildlife refuges, more than any other state. The Missouri River flows through the heart of the state; to the west of the river are the vast badlands, carved by its tributary, the Little Missouri. Theodore Roosevelt National Park preserves some of the finest badlands scenery in its two units.

Not only is North Dakota sparsely populated, but it is also difficult to get to, with few airlines serving its "major" cities of 30,000+. On June 11, after dodging some thunderstorms, I arrived into Bismarck in south-central ND, the State Capital and 3rd largest city at 49,000. Joining the rest of the group, we immediately headed about 40 miles east, past more storms, toward the small town of Steele. Birding that early evening near Lost Lake turned up a sampling of the species we would encounter in the

next few days, including American avocet, American white pelican, Swainson's hawk and [western - likely to be split--] willet.

After a 4:30 breakfast, we drove to the area of nearby Horsehead Lake. The terrain was rolling hills and prairie. At least most of the prairie there was short-grass, about 6-to-12 inches tall. It had rained that early morning and the roads were wet, and we got into the midst of a major salamander crossing. These beasts were about a foot long and an estimated 30 of them were making their way across the paved rural farm road. Despite the rainy, then cloudy and windy weather, the birding was good, including white pelican, black-crowned night-heron, western meadowlark, Wilson's phalarope, snipe, marbled godwit, Franklin's gull, bobolink,

continued ...

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Upcoming Field Trips & Programs

Field Trip & Program Reports

Auditing Committee Report

Albany Pine Bush Spring Survey

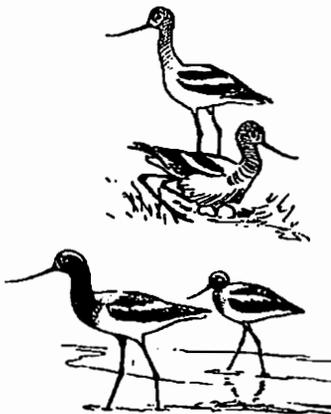


vesper, clay-colored and Le Conte's sparrow, chestnut-collared longspur and a ferruginous hawk on a nest. Non-avian attractions included Northern leopard frog and a close-up view of a red fox.

After a mid-day break, we visited similar habitat in the afternoon. In addition to many of the same species, we had a look at a singing Baird's sparrow through the scope, upland sandpiper and yellow-headed blackbird. The phrase waves of grain took on true meaning as the wind coursed endlessly through the fields of short grass prairie like ever-renewing waves upon water.

The next day began with another early start, back out the Horsehead Lake area, but this time a beautiful, calm and sunny morning. We got good looks at Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow and heard, fairly close, a yellow rail! We made a good effort to see it, but it was well-concealed in a wet area of higher grass. It was a privilege just to hear this secretive bird, and I was glad that we did not disturb it.

After a lunch stop back in Bismarck, we drove north along the Missouri River to the Knife River Indian Village National Historic Site, along the route of the Lewis and Clark expedition. A walk around the grounds turned up ring-necked pheasant, black-headed grosbeak, black-billed magpie and another clay-colored sparrow. A stop at Garrison Dam, a huge earthen dam on the Missouri that forms Lake Sakakawea (the young Indian woman guide for Lewis and Clark), produced both bank and cliff swallows.



Our last stop on this busy day was the Audubon National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), one of many refuges in the state. Birding was excellent here; a few highlights were bufflehead, lesser scaup, California gull, purple martin, redhead, horned grebe in breeding plumage, marbled godwit and black-crowned night-heron. We also had 13-lined and Richardson's ground squirrels. Home for the next two nights was in Minot, a mid-sized (34,000) bustling city that was a welcome change from the facilities in Steele!

The next morning we drove northeast to the delightful J. C. ark Salyer NWR, the first of our two visits there. Just before we got there, we were treated to a view of 2 gray partridge in a field! Near the headquarters of Salyer, we had a variety of species including ruddy duck, eared grebe, yellow-headed blackbird, American bittern, Swainson's hawk and a Cooper's hawk on its nest! The rains of the day before altered our plans as some of the desired locations get impassable when muddy. So, we headed further northeast to the Turtle Mountains. There, at Lake Metigoshe State park we found red-necked grebe, veery, northern waterthrush, warbling and red-eyed vireos and painted turtle. At this point we were close to the International Peace Garden, a beautiful park that spans both sides of the U.S and Canadian border. We convinced our leaders that a brief stop there would be in order; the famous flowers were not yet in bloom but the monument was interesting and we did hear mourning warbler. On the way back to Minot we made another non-birding stop, this time at the geographic center of north America. The requisite pictures of people at this monument in Rugby were taken.

The next day saw us again out early at Salyer; this time the conditions enabled us to drive the grassland trail. We literally followed two tire tracks through the prairie, great for birding but not for the allergic! We did pick up savannah, clay-colored and Baird's sparrows along with bobolink, northern harrier and killdeer. The 22-mile wildlife drive that afternoon at Salyer encompassed a number of habitats and offered good looks at a variety of species. Highlights included grassland sparrows, waterfowl, American coot with young, male ruddy



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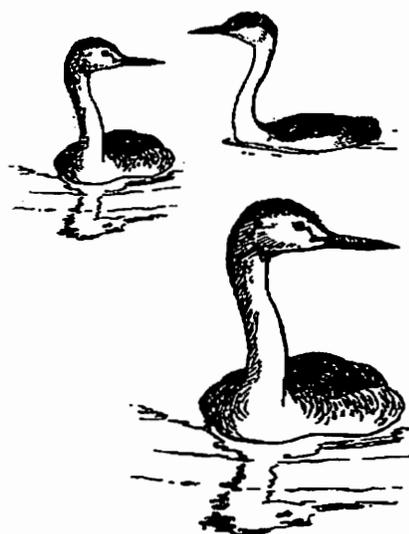
ducks displaying, black tern, sedge wren, some distant sharp-tailed grouse and what sure looked like moose tracks. We drove west of Minot that evening, having dinner on the way and arriving at our motel in Kenmare about 8:30.

The next morning had us out at the famed "Longspur Pasture" west of Kenmare. In addition to great looks at chestnut-collared longspur, we had more sharp-tailed grouse, displaying Sprague's pipit, upland sandpiper, marbled godwit, horned lark and other birds; we also had jackrabbit and coyote. After a second breakfast at 10 AM, we moved on to Lostwood NWR, about 20 miles west of Kenmare. In this refuge where 70 percent of the land is virgin prairie, we found a good variety of both water birds and passerines. Highlights of Lostwood's diverse avifauna included mountain bluebird, piping plover along the shore of an alkali pond, northern harrier, American white pelican, canvasback and bufflehead.

From Lostwood we drove south and then west, crossing the Missouri River (Lake Sakakawea) over the Four Bears Bridge near New Town, enroute to Watford City. Although it turned rainy (again!), we could see the scenery change dramatically as we moved west of the Missouri, from rolling grassland plains to the "western" landscape of mountains, buttes and hills. We were excited to see two pronghorn at the outskirts of Watford City; these had been much sought after on this trip.

Bad weather had seriously set in, with torrential rains that evening and fog the next morning. We were able to see the grain elevator in the morning; every town in ND seems to have at least one. We headed south after breakfast to the North Unit of the Theodore Roosevelt National park (TRNP). The fog was thick, and we could only imagine the scenery Hal told us we were passing on the ride down. We began birding around the visitor center of this smaller, little-used unit of TRNP; the fog began to lift enough to hint at the scenic views. The habitat was semi-desert like, with rabbit brush and silver sage; birding was good with lazuli bunting, common nighthawk, spotted towhee, grasshopper sparrow and lark sparrow. As the fog continued to lift, we began to see badlands!! -- again, all caused by the Little Missouri River, or

"Little Mo." As we explored the park by vehicle and foot, we saw longhorn cattle, mule deer and bison!! At a lunch stop at a picnic ground, we enjoyed fantastic scope views of red-headed woodpecker. On the drive back out of the park, we encountered a large bison on the left side of the road. Not wanting to miss such a great opportunity, I quickly used my last two pictures. Then, as luck would have it, the buffalo crossed the road to our side, and began rubbing against the post that supported the guardrail!



Continuing south from the Park, we made a stop for good scope views of lark bunting and horned lark (singing), we also picked up another 5 pronghorn. We stopped for a while at the Painted Canyon Visitor Center of the south unit of TRNP along 1-94; here (after restocking with film) we saw (more) bison, as well as elk and some more great vistas. We then continued south to Bowman where we would spend the night, in the far southwestern corner of the state. On the way, we passed the highest point in North Dakota, White Butte at 3506 feet.

Unfortunately, rain once again altered our plans; a trip the next morning to the dry sagebrush and short-grass prairie habitats for sage grouse and McKown's longspur was aborted due to impassable roads; we made an alternate stop at Haley Reservoir, but the torrential rain made even that



unproductive. The good news was that we got an earlier start back north to TRNP, but we had to use the main roads and miss a splendid scenic back-road route. We spent the afternoon driving the extensive loop road of the south unit of TRNP; although it rained the whole time, we did see a golden eagle nest with three young, 4 wild mustangs, about 25 bison and two prairie dog colonies! The prairie dog "towns" are fascinating. These mammals are in the squirrel rather than the dog family; the only species that is in the Park is the black-tailed prairie dog (one of five species). We spent a lot of time this day and the next observing both adults and half-grown young in their extensive towns. We also got a hint at the kind of scenery we would see the next day! That night (and the next) was spent in Medora, a mostly seasonal small town serving the Park.

The next day made up for all the days of rain; it was as perfect a day one could hope for, with sun and just enough clouds to make the photos interesting. It was a great last full day of the trip. We spent the entire day in the Park, driving the main loop road, studying prairie dogs, mule deer, bison and pronghorn and elk. Birds were not overlooked, as we saw golden eagle, prairie falcon, lazuli bunting, red-headed woodpecker, spotted towhee, black-billed magpie and many more. We visited Teddy Roosevelt's Maltese Cross cabin and (in town) had a farewell dinner that included buffalo (quite dry). The next day we drove back to Bismarck to meet departing flights; it was a busy 10 days in a state that I would encourage all lovers of natural history to visit.





THE GUNNISON SAGE GROUSE *by Bill Gorman*

The Sage Grouse [*Centrocercus urophasianus*] is the largest grouse in North America. They are entirely dependent on sagebrush, especially big sagebrush, for food in the winter and for cover throughout the year. Originally, Sage Grouse were found in 16 western states and 3 Canadian provinces. These original Populations have undergone significant declines this century and, Sage Grouse have now been extirpated from five states and one province. The population decline has been approximately 45-80% since the early 1950's and much of the decrease has occurred since 1980. These declines are mostly attributed to human-caused changes in sagebrush habitats. Current estimates suggest that the total population of Sage Grouse now amounts to about 142,000 birds.

Since sagebrush habitats were naturally fragmented by deserts, forests, mountain ranges, river valleys, etc., the original distribution of Sage Grouse was not contiguous. Human disturbances and geography have caused further splits in sagebrush continuity and further splits in the continuity of Sage Grouse distribution. Since individual birds are not likely to cross between populations due to the lack of available sagebrush, insular populations of Sage Grouse were thus formed. Such isolated populations have the potential for morphological divergence.

It was recently observed that the wings of Sage Grouse, shot by hunters in the Gunnison Basin of southwestern Colorado, were smaller than those of other populations. Further investigation found the Gunnison Basin Sage Grouse [Gunnison Sage Grouse] weighed less than birds from other populations. These differences were significant, averaging 27% less for adult males and 28% less for adult females and yearling males. Carpal lengths for Gunnison Sage Grouse averaged 10% shorter, tarsus lengths were 7% shorter and culmen lengths were 23% shorter than those of other Sage Grouse populations. These differences suggested that the subspecies status of the Sage Grouse should be reevaluated.

Slow motion video tapes of Sage Grouse showed that the Gunnison Sage Grouse exhibits differences in strut display and the choreographies of head, air sac, wing and filoplume [specialized neck feathers of the male] movements. Acoustical components, within the display of the Gunnison Sage Grouse, differed significantly in frequency and duration and had little resemblance to those of other populations. Gunnison Sage Grouse had whiter retrices [tail feathers] and the filoplumes, which extend from the sides of the upper throat back over the white collar of the air sacs, were thicker and much more noticeable. Male Gunnison Sage Grouse displayed at a significantly slower rate than other populations, their filoplumes were tossed above their heads through out the display, the air sacs were compressed more often [approximately 4 times more often] and they ended their display with a tail-wag during which the Gunnison Sage Grouse shakes his tail vigorously while standing upright.

Most of the distinguishing attributes of the Gunnison Sage Grouse are male secondary sexual characteristics including traits that correlate with mating success. Divergence in traits that are likely to be influenced by sexual selection potentially leads to speciation. These and other studies indicate that isolated populations of Sage Grouse in





the Gunnison Basin of Colorado show differences in size, appearance and behavior as well as genetic variances and therefore represent a distinct and as yet unnamed species which has been designated in this review as the Gunnison Sage Grouse.

It is highly probable that the Gunnison Sage Grouse, by whatever name it finally acquires, will be recognized as a new species by the American Ornithologists, Union [AOU] this year or by the year 2000 at the latest.

The Sage Grouse that were extirpated from New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arizona and at least 9 counties of Colorado were part of the original Gunnison

Sage Grouse population. The Gunnison Sage Grouse population has further declined over the past 40 years in areas where the sagebrush has been manipulated. At present, the Gunnison Sage Grouse is found only in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah. While I have no real data of the total population of the Gunnison Sage Grouse, a fair estimate might be less than 5000 birds and possibly even much less. Therefore, it is expected that once the Gunnison Sage Grouse becomes a recognized species, it will also be placed on the endangered species list.

FNYSBC Quiz Answers

Here are the direct quotes and answers from *Bull's Birds of New York*.

Red-eyed Vireo -- most widespread and numerous woodland breeding bird in NY

Horned Lark -- earliest nester of any native NY songbird

American Robin -- easily the most adaptable of our native breeding species

Red-winged Blackbird -- estimates of relative abundance from breeding bird surveys indicate that this is the most abundant bird in the state

American Goldfinch -- it nests later than any other breeder in the state

Savannah Sparrow -- it is the most widespread and numerous of our breeding grassland sparrows

Song Sparrow -- recorded in more Atlas blocks than any other species

Black-and-white Warbler -- Its breeding distribution is unique. It breeds from eastern LI to timberline on Mount Marcy

Pine Warbler -- this is the only warbler whose summer and winter range lie entirely in North America

Yellow warbler -- more frequently parasitized by BICO than any other species in NY

Swainson's Hawk -- of all the hawks, this species status has been most affected by the proliferation of HWANA

Spotted Sandpiper -- unique among NY's Breeding birds, the female of this species will take more than one mate whenever there is a surplus of males.

Let me know if you have any questions.

- Ray Perry



REVISED OFFICIAL STATE CHECKLIST

By Linda Parr

A newly revised official NY state checklist has just been published by the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. Three species have been added to the list, changing the total species from 451 to 454. The additions are broad-billed sandpiper, Anna's hummingbird, and lazuli bunting.

A significant change has been made in the order of species. This revised checklist follows the Seventh Edition American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) Checklist. For example, vultures are now just before swans, geese and ducks. They used to be grouped with the hawks. The English names of the species have also been updated. So if you want to find the bird you've known as solitary vireo, you'll need to look for blue-headed vireo on this list.

The publications committee has done more than just make our state list match that of the AOU. They have also made major changes in the notation describing the guidelines for submitting documentation of a sighting to the NY State Avian Records Committee (NYSARC). A species does not appear on the list until NYSARC accepts the reported sighting. All birders are encouraged to report all unusual sightings to NYSARC, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY, 14850. Note: Ken Able, a Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club member, serves on NYSARC.

Copies of the Checklist of the Birds of New York State may be ordered from, and checks payable to FNYSSBC, Inc., P.O. Box 440, Loch Sheldrake, NY 12759. Price depends on quantity ordered: 1-9 copies are \$1.00 each; 10-24 copies \$0.75 each; and 25 or more copies are \$0.60 each.

As you're considering the adjustment to a new order for some species, you may be saying, "When will there be a field guide that matches the new orders" The answer is -- soon. National Geographic has announced a June, 1999, publication date for the Third Edition Field Guide to the Birds of North America. Ads for the new field guide describe the guide as having completely revised text, maps and art. So presumably the editors have done more than switch the species descriptions. The list price is \$21.50.

Advance orders may be placed with your local book store or with the American Birding Association (ABA). The ABA is offering a substantial discount off the list price (the advance ABA price is \$16.80), but remember to consider they add on \$5.50 for shipping and handling.



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

NOTE: Starting in May, program meetings will resume at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center.

Mon May 3, Kevin Berner on the History, Ecology and Management of the Eastern Bluebird. Location at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Game Farm Rd. Delmar. There will be slides describing the changes in bluebird populations over the last 150 years and what caused the rises and falls in the populations. There will also be information on nest box habitat selection and monitoring, control of predation, different styles of nest boxes, and results from banding work.

Mon Jun 7, Bob Miller, The Double-crested Cormorant in NYS: Pariah or Scapegoat?

The cormorant has increased dramatically in population over the last two decades in New York, particularly in the Great Lakes region. With increases in local populations of this efficient fish-eating bird have come complaints from fishermen that cormorants are depleting local game fish. Wildlife managers also are concerned about competition with other colonial nesting birds, such as the state-threatened common tern. This talk will trace the growth of cormorants in the state, and the management issues being addressed on Lake Ontario, Oneida Lake and other parts of the state.

Bob Miller is the Nongame and Habitat Unit Leader of the DEC's Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources, located at the Wildlife Resources Center in Delmar. Bob has degrees in wildlife biology from Univ. of California at Berkeley (B.A.) and Cornell University (M.S.), and has been with the DEC as a game biologist, urban wildlife biologist, and nongame biologist, now focusing on colonial waterbirds and songbird conservation and management.

HMBC PROGRAMS FALL 1999

Mark your calendars for these programs, and stay tuned to future *Feathers* or check the HMBC web site (<http://members.xoom.com/hmbc>) for further details.

Wed Sept. 8, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Dan Welch on the Himalayas and Lowlands of Nepal.

Thurs Sept 9, 7:30 PM, Colonie Town Library, joint program with Audubon Society of the Capital Region, Julio de la Torre on OWLS (new and updated program, better than ever!).

Monday Oct 4, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, David Martin on Birding on Tropical Islands.

Monday Nov 1, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Dale and Lilian Samuelson on Argentina.

Monday Dec 6, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Ken Able on Circling South Africa: Birds and Mammals.



PROGRAM REPORTS

by
Denise Hilton & Scott Stoner

New York Big Year

On March 1, 1999, our Club's Bob Budliger offered a very informative and entertaining program to about forty people entitled, "A New York Big Year." In this program, Bob described his quest to sight 300 of New York's birds this year. In his discourse, Bob offered Club members who may be interested in a similar pursuit, some tips on reaching this goal themselves.

A good way to begin a Big Year, suggested Bob, is to take part in a New Year's Day count, gathering as many common species as possible at local spots and at feeders early in the winter.

As the year progresses, Bob said that it is important to remember to be aware of time and place, traveling to different areas of our State as the birds arrive. Sometime during the winter, then, it will become necessary to travel to Long Island's Montauk Point for wintering sea birds and ducks, as well as keeping abreast of locally occurring owls, hawks and winter finches.

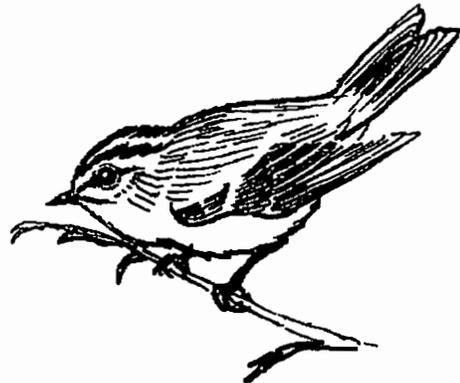
Organization, as it is in so much of life, seems to be key to a successful Big Year. Planning visits to State hot spots at just the right time will maximize the number of species. Birding guides to different areas of the State, as well as phone calls to various birdlines and visits to web sites will help determine the appropriate time to travel, as will experience with birding sites statewide. So, a trip to the bogs of the Adirondacks in the early summer will add Black-backed Woodpecker to the lucky birder's list and one to Jamaica Bay in late summer may add many shore birds and waders.

The last time Bob took on this project he ended up with a year's total of 301 bird species. We certainly wish him luck as he pursues the quest once more, and hope for an update at the end of 1999!

Albany Pine Bush

On February 1, 1999, Neil Gifford with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission (APBPC) gave a most interesting presentation on the ecology and management of this globally rare local ecosystem! This unique and readily accessible fire-dependent ecosystem is famous for the Federally endangered Karner blue butterfly, but also contains many more plants and animals to study, appreciate and protect.

[Note- this article was prepared from a combination of notes from Neil's presentation and from materials from the APBPC.]



The pine bush as we know it today was formed from glacial Lake Albany; a glacial moraine deposited a sandy delta. As one might expect, the spoil is sandy and well drained; dunes there are created by wind. The ecosystem is described as a pitch pine - scrub oak barrens, with the pitch pine being the dominant canopy species. Open areas within the Pine Bush sustain grasslands and are host to the wild blue lupine, critical to the survival of the Karner blue butterfly. Within the preserve are also pine barren temporary vernal ponds that host spotted turtle and Eastern spadefoot toad. This toad emerges and sings for one night each year, at a time of torrential rain and extremely low pressure!

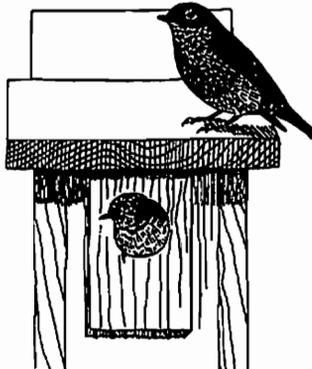
Feathers



Originally the pine bush covered much of the upper Hudson River Valley, in an area that extended from Glens Falls to Newburgh. Now it is reduced to only about 4,000 acres, about 2,400 of which are within the Preserve.

Threats to the ecosystem include 1) development, 2) the exclusion of fire and 3) fragmentation of habitat. These three factors together bring in the fourth: invasive plant species such as black locust and aspen.

The Commission was created by the NYS legislature in 1988, to protect and manage this unique and endangered ecosystem. The goal is to protect 3950 acres, of which 2,000 are to be fire-manageable. Members of the Commission include The Nature Conservancy, the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the City of Albany, the Towns of Colonie and Guilderland, Albany County and four private citizens.



We mentioned above that this is a fire-dependent ecosystem. The pitch pine cones are sealed with wax, fire melts this wax and opens the cones and allows the seeds to fall. Fire also prepares the seed bed, by releasing nutrients from the vegetation into the soil.

The Commission has been conducting controlled burns for 8 years, in the early spring during a 10-week window. This year's goal is about 20 acres, out of about 400 that are burn-ready. There are very strict, limited conditions under which a burn can be conducted. Each burn unit is between

2 and 30 acres, each unit has its own "prescription"; smoke management is the biggest concern. They only burn under carefully selected conditions and make concerted efforts to notify local residents beforehand and to follow up with them afterwards to make sure there was no impact.

Another tool used to control the vegetation is a hydroax, a huge mower borrowed from the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Girdling is also used to control the aspens which kills the tree after 2 - 3 years without resprouting. They are conducting research on ways to control the locust trees.

The pine bush host a number of bird species including Eastern towhee, brown thrasher, prairie warbler and pine warbler. They conduct an annual breeding bird census and seek HMBC's assistance with the event for this year, scheduled for May 8, 7AM. (See page 40 for details.)

** Readers are reminded also of the upcoming HMBC field trip to the Pine Bush on June 6. The Commission hosts a number of lectures and trips; for information call 785-1800. We thank Neil again for his fine presentation, and look forward to exploring the Pine Bush this spring and summer.





HMBC Region Important Bird Areas

On Thursday, March 11, 1999 over about 25 people attended this first joint program of the HMBC and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region to hear National Audubon's Dr. Jeff Wells give an update on the Important Bird Area (IBA) project in New York State. A joint meeting was most fitting, given the extent of cooperation among many groups that was fundamental to the success of the IBA program in the state.

After giving us an overview on the IBA program both internationally and nationally, Jeff brought us up to date on the progress thus far in New York. From a thousand application forms nomination forms sent out, about 250 to 300 sites were formally nominated. Of these, 127 met the rigid scientific criteria needed to be officially designated as IBAs. Jeff was quick to point out, however, that some key areas that did not meet the criteria this time may actually have the species and numbers that would warrant IBA designation, but simply lacked adequate documentation of the birds that occur there. One such local area is the Albany Pine Bush. Because there may be a second "round" of nominations in another year or two, birders whose favorite site was not among the 127 designated, are urged to continue to bird that site and keep records of both species and numbers of individuals of birds in preparation for future nomination.

The 127 IBAs in New York from the first round are described in National Audubon's book, Important Bird Areas in New York State, compiled by Dr. Wells. Copies are available from Audubon's NYS office, for information call 869-9731. This book reads like a who's who of birding hotspots around the state, and includes several sites from the greater Capital Region such as Black Creek March, Thacher Park, Vischer Ferry, Carter Pond, Rensselaer Forest Tract, Saratoga National Historic Park and the Fort Edward Grasslands.

Jeff recounted some lesser known, interesting

facts about some of the IBA's around the state, such as the 150 peregrine falcons that pass by Fire Island Light every year, that piping plovers used to breed along the Great Lakes and that the Adirondacks have the highest concentration of breeding black-throated blue warblers in the U.S.



While designation of a site as an IBA does not in and of itself convey any legal protection of the land, it can and does in some cases facilitate actions that do result in increased protection of the habitat. Jeff gave several examples including local groups working on land acquisition, and pressures that can change planned management of a site.

More bird data are still needed on certain existing IBAs, including Fort Edward, Vischer Ferry, Black Creek Marsh and the Rensselaer Forest Tract (including Grafton Lakes State Park and the Capital District Wildlife Management Area). A new, simple reporting mechanism has been created whereby sightings can be reported electronically to an IBA web site. The address for this site is:

<http://birdsource2.ornith.cornell.edu/checklists/nyschecklist/>



Field Trip Reports

Rhode Island Coast

This trip was scheduled for the last weekend of February. Earlier that week a major nor'easter clipped southeastern New England dumping about a foot of snow in Providence, RI and over two feet in some locations on Cape Cod. As our intended target area for the weekend was in the heart of the affected area, the small contingent of trip participants, other than Cathy and myself, chose discretion as the better part of valor and opted out of the trip. Cathy and I thought long and hard about whether to go and finally decided Friday evening that we'd try it. We figured that at worst we'd just take a very relaxed pace and avoid any particularly snowed-in areas. As it turned out, the snow pack was already nearly gone by the time we started birding Saturday morning. As a result, we enjoyed a pleasant weekend with relatively comfortable weather and a good mix of wintering coastal birds.

We started off Saturday morning at Sachuest NWR outside of Newport. The only real sense we got on the entire trip of a recent, significant snow storm was on a couple of trails at Sachuest where the snow had drifted up against the bushes to the point where I easily sunk down to above my knees. Our three-year-old Bryce might have disappeared in there! Fortunately there were easy detours to get around these few drifts. We got our sea-duck list off to a good start here, as usual, with several groups of **HARLEQUIN DUCK** leading the list. The Harlequins were spread out along most of the southern end of the Sachuest Peninsula and provided a lot of good close-up views. **PURPLE SANDPIPERS** were evident on several rock outcrops and we had some of the best views of these "rock-pipers" — close in and in excellent light — that we've had anywhere.

After a morning on the Peninsula, a drive through the heart of Newport to Breton Point State Park and a leisurely lunch, we spent the afternoon covering several bays and reservoirs along the eastern side of Narragansett Bay that are often productive for gulls and waterfowl. We were un-

able to visit Colt State Park and the tiny town park on Sabin Point, not because of the snow, but because the bridge to Bristol Island was closed that weekend while the toll booths were being removed. However, we did check out Watchemocket Cove in East Providence and after studying a lot of **BONAPARTE'S GULLS** eventually found 3 adult **COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULLS**, one of which was beginning to come into alternate plumage. Aside from the diagnostic bill color seen on the three perched birds, we were able to get a short glimpse of the dark underwings on one bird as it flew out of the back cove and out toward the bay. We didn't turn up any other particular rarities that afternoon (**Eurasian Wigeon** seems to have abandoned Watchemocket for the last few years now), but we did add a nice assortment of waterfowl including **GREAT CORMORANT**, **GREATER SCAUP**, **CANVASBACK**, **RING-NECKED DUCK**, **RUDDY DUCK**, all three **MERGANSERS** and **AMERICAN COOT**.

We had originally contemplated a dash Sunday morning over to Denis, MA on Cape Cod to look for a **Pink-footed Goose** that had been hanging out with a group of **Canadas** there for several weeks. However, we figured the chances of the birds still being in place after the huge amount of snow that part of the Cape had picked up were very slim. So, we decided to chase another hotline tip that was much closer — a **WESTERN GREBE** had been reported from earlier that week at Fort Getty State Park in Jamestown. After figuring out the route and picking our way through the park





grounds we came upon a group of birders with scopes in place on a floating dock looking out toward the Jamestown/Newport bridge. Sure enough the grebe had been seen that morning, but it was actively feeding, moving great distances under water and was at quite a distance from the dock. Cathy and Bryce chose to spend a little time combing the shingle beach next to the dock. Meanwhile, in-between fleeting attempts to get on the bird each time it surfaced, I was regaled with stories of "you should have seen it here yesterday, sitting up on the surface only 25 feet off the dock!" from the other birders present, who were all locals. Anyway, the grebe did eventually stay up on the surface for at least a minute or two at a time and Cathy and I both had good, although somewhat distant, looks in the scope. This was a first for us for this bird east of their breeding range. On the last clear look I took at the bird I made a point to look for marks to distinguish the bird from Clark's Grebe. The black head feathering did extend well down below the eye. That seemed fairly satisfactory. It was hard to judge much about the bill color — the bill seemed mainly dark and the tip was practically invisible at the distance from which we were viewing the bird. Some of the local birders did confirm that the Western/Clark's issue had been thoroughly visited earlier in the week at times when the bird had been much closer and photographs had been taken. No one there seemed to have any doubts of the identification.

We tried several other coastal spots as we headed west including Beavertail State Park, Pt. Judith, Wheeler State Beach and the docks at Galilee. We didn't add much new to the trip list, though. We did pick up a few RED-THROATED LOONS, NORTHERN GANNETT, BRANT, a surprisingly low number of COMMON EIDER, KILLDEER, TURKEY VULTURE, AMERICAN KESTREL, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK and an EASTERN MEADOWLARK. However, a very strong wind had picked up making viewing at the open-ocean sites quite challenging. We studied the gulls at Galilee for quite a while and had one bird that might have been a white-winged flying out over the channel, but we lost it in a large flock of birds perched on a sand bar and couldn't relocate it. By that time it had begun to rain, which seemed like a good

signal to begin the drive home.

The two-day species total was 53, which is probably on the low side of average for this trip. A glaring gap in the list was the complete absence of any Scoters all weekend — they simply were not anywhere to be found. Nevertheless, we came up with a few interesting birds and had a nice weekend of birding on what was, in reality, a weathered-out field trip.

— Gregg Reecer
— Cathy Graichen



Southern Hudson River

Not so cold this year but no eagle for the first time. Instead we had a nice view of a first year plumage ICELAND GULL at the Coxsackie Boat Launch. It was decided that the best description of the plumage was "caramel ice cream". Under the Rip Van Winkle Bridge some of us caught a glimpse of a pair of PEREGRINE FALCONS engaged in courtship flight. As far as waterfowl were concerned there were only ten species seen and that was including the common stuff like CANADA GOOSE, MALLARDS and BLACK DUCKS. Perhaps the best of the waterfowl were the many GREATER SCAUP or the large flock of CANVASBACK only a few feet away at Dutchman's landing in Catskill. Eight people attended: Joan Cipriani, Jocelyn Cole-Calkins, Bill Cook (leader), Audrey Fishburne, Richard Guthrie, Dawn Love, David Tekian and Erin Willsey.

— Bill Cook



Feathers

V61N2
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MAY 14-17
Fri-Mon

DELMARVA PENINSULA
Coordinator: Bill Lee
Reservations by May 1

374-3426

This trip to Delaware, Maryland and Virginia provides excellent opportunities to see southern breeding specialties, including Blue Grosbeak, Summer Tanager, Brown-headed Nuthatch and hopefully Swainson's Warbler. We will visit Brigantine (NJ), Chincoteague and Delaware coastal refuges. Herons, egrets, terns and spring-plumaged shorebirds are also features of this trip. (Monday is optional for those returning early.)

MAY 15
Sat

BIRDS AND BREAKFAST AT FIVE RIVERS
Coordinator: Denise Hilton

785-6760

Our annual celebration of the arrival of spring will be held at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center on Game Farm Road in Delmar. The Center has an excellent trail system through a variety of habitats. You can expect to see and hear a number of resident species and migrants, including Canada Geese with their newly hatched goslings, Eastern Bluebirds feeding their young, and a number of different warblers. The Interpretive Building (visitor center) will be open, with coffee flowing, from 6 a.m. Birding groups will leave from there at 6, 7, and 8:00 a.m. Join a group or go out on your own as we try to find as many species as possible. We'll rally at 10:30 a.m. for coffee, doughnuts, bagels, fresh fruit (approx. \$3.00 donation) and a list compilation.

MAY 22
Sat

CENTURY RUN
Compiler: Bob Yunick
1527 Myron St., Schenectady, NY 12309

377-0146

See how many species you can find in 24 hours in the 11-county Hudson-Mohawk Region. Join a group or form your own and cover all your favorite locations. Each group must stay together and jointly identify species reported. Reports must be mailed to the compiler by May 31 in order to be counted. Also, please call Birdline with the total species and highlights for your group.

MAY 23
Sun

ALBIA POND-DESOLATION ROAD
Coordinator: Susan Duggan

584-9324

Desolation Road and Fox Hill Road are back country dirt roads that connect Saratoga with the Sacandaga. Albia Pond is nestled in there on State land. This wonderfully unique habitat in the Adirondack foothills hosts many northerly nesting birds such as Winter Wren, Common Snipe, Alder Flycatcher, Nashville, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Magnolia and Blackburnian Warblers, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Common Raven and many others — and Susan has remarkably sharp eyesight. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Middle Grove Post Office (don't blink) where Desolation Road meets Middle Grove Road.

Feathers



MAY 29
Sat

GRAFTON LAKES STATE PARK
Coordinators: Philip and Marjorie Whitney

477-9050

By now most of the migrant songbirds will be on territory and singing. Expect up to a dozen warbler species, plus thrushes, vireos, Scarlet Tanager and the resident woodland birds. Take route 2 east from Troy to the main entrance and go from there to the parking lot at Long Pond Beach where we will assemble at 8:00 a.m.

JUN 5
Sat

SARATOGA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK (BATTLEFIELD)
Coordinators: Cathy Graichen & Gregg Recer

899-2678

This morning visit to the Saratoga Battlefield will begin with a walk in the area of the Visitor Center. We will then drive the tour road through the Park hoping to see many of the Park's sparrows (Henslow's, Savannah, Field, and Grasshopper) as well as many other breeding species. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the flagpole in the Visitor Center parking lot. A small entrance fee is required.

JUN 6
Sun

ALBANY PINE BUSH
Coordinator: Gregg Recer

899-2678

This morning trip will sample a portion of the pitch-pine/scrub oak habitat of the Pine Bush. Among the regular breeding species in this area are Chestnut-sided, Blue-winged, Pine and Prairie Warblers, Bank Swallow, Eastern Towhee, Indigo Bunting and Brown Thrasher. In the recent past locally uncommon species including Golden-winged Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat have also been seen here. Meet at 7:30 a.m. behind the State Employee's Federal Credit Union (SEFCU) building on SR 155, roughly 1 mile south of Central Ave (SR 5).

JUN 12
Sat

STERLING FOREST STATE PARK - ROCKLAND COUNTY
Coordinators: Dr. John Confer, John Yrizarri, Bill Lee
Reservations by June 1

374-3426 (Bill)

Join Dr. John Confer (Biology Department of Ithaca College, in his second year of ornithological research), John Yrizarri and Bill Lee in this pristine and relatively unbirded warbler hot spot with spectacular scenery. Only recently opened to the public, this addition to New York State's open space was saved from private development after a long struggle by environmentalists and a funding compact between the U.S. government, New Jersey and New York. Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Hooded, Worm-eating Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chat are some of the warblers which bred here last year. Other migrant warblers and Black Vulture should be seen. This will be a joint trip with the Federation of New York State Bird Club. Call Bill Lee for reservations.

JUN 13
Sun

NORTHERN SARATOGA COUNTY
Coordinator: Barbara Putnam

792-7542

On this morning trip, we will explore varied habitats along the road on the way to the Hadley Mountain trailhead. Due to the narrowness of the road, we will need to car pool. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in or near the village of Lake Luzerne (call coordinator for the exact meeting spot).



JUN 19-20
Sat-Sun

ADIRONDACK ADVENTURE WEEKEND

Coordinators: field trips — Gregg Recer & Cathy Graichen
picnic — Denise Hilton

899-2678

785-6760

Reservations by May 28

The area of the north-central Adirondack Park near Paul Smiths contains numerous birding locations that can provide a wide variety of breeding species. The Buck Pond State Campground will be the center of operations (motel arrangements can also be made). Half-day birding walks are possible at a number of close-by spots including Bloomingdale Bog (possibilities include Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee, both Crossbills, Black-backed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided Flycatchers, Lincoln's Sparrow and perhaps Spruce Grouse), Buck Pond, Osgood Pond, the Floodwood Rd area, Black & Long Ponds and the Paul Smiths Visitor's Information Center (at least 15 species of breeding warblers including Nashville, Bay-breasted, Canada and N. Waterthrush and numerous other breeding flycatchers, thrushes, vireos and "winter finches" such as Evening Grosbeak and Purple Finch). Birding by canoe is also a possible aspect of this trip, especially on the Deer River flow (nesting Bald Eagles and waterfowl such as Hooded Merganser), Osgood Pond and River and parts of the St. Regis Canoe Area. This trip will be run in a "self-paced" fashion where multiple groups may be birding different locations at the same time, depending on group size and interests. The weekend will also feature a group picnic Saturday evening at Buck Pond. Contact Denise if you would like to contribute something.

JUNE 27
Sun

GRAFTON LAKES AREA

Coordinators: Dan Welch & Lynn Huntington

477-2980

Join us for this morning walk at Dunham Reservoir, which is the part of Grafton Lakes State Park on the south of Route 2. Expect to find Sapsucker, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Black-Throated Blue and many other warblers along the trails of the mixed forests surrounding the Reservoir. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Tamarac (Brittonkill) High School on Route 2, east of the intersection of Route 2 & 278. Plan to carpool.





AUDITING COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Ann B'Rells, President
Hudson Mohawk Bird Club

From: Janet Betlejeski
William Beckman

Subject: Financial Statement Audit

Date: July 13, 1998

We have examined the balance sheet and income statement of the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club. We find them to be in good order, and commend the treasurer for being accurate and thorough. Records were readily available, clear, and it was not difficult to identify and reconcile stated balances.

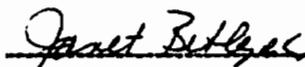
We briefly examined internal controls. While adequate for the purpose, it is recommended that two signatures be required for checks written over \$500. There are very few of this magnitude, so it would not present a significant burden.

Bank balances were confirmed, as were accounts payable balances. Bills are being paid promptly. The income statement checked with the inventory of bird club books. Expenditures are identified clearly. Receipts were randomly audited and found accurate.

The year 2000 issue was addressed. The hardware Greg is currently using is Y2K compliant. It is assumed that Fleet Bank, the bank that handles the operating account, will be compliant but that was not verified.

We also recommend that investment policies be reviewed. The HMBC has a cash on hand that is significant, and could be getting a better return if the Board would be willing to take on more risk. The Audit Committee is not recommending this, only suggesting that it be re-evaluated.

In doing this audit, we set out to be able to express our opinion on the financial statements presented. Generally accepted standards were used, though no attempt was made nor represented as to an exhaustive audit. Our goal was to determine if there was a material misstatement, and we found none. We believe that the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Hudson Mohawk Bird Club.


Janet Betlejeski


William E. Beckman



HMBC BOARD FOR 1998 - 1999

Officers

President: Ann B'Rells 3187 Woodhaven Dr. Schenectady, NY 12303 355-5615	Vice-President: Denise Hilton 6 Knob Hill Rd. Loudonville, NY 12205 785-6760
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Jr. Activities:	Elle Dietemann	766-7045

BIRDLINE of E. NEW YORK: (518) 439-8080

Send articles, clip-art,
photos, artwork to:

Feathers
c/o Cathy Graichen
23 Scotch Mist Way
Ballston Spa, NY 12020

or via e-mail to:

recerg@crisny.org

Reminder!!

All HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members.
Board meetings take place the second Monday of every
odd-numbered month. Meetings are held at Five Rivers
Center at 7:00 PM.



Are you an Early Bird?

Spring Migration Bird Survey Saturday May 8, 1999 7:00 AM Are you an early bird? If you are, join us for our 4th annual spring migration bird walk in the **Albany Pine Bush**. Wendy Borden and Neil Gifford will guide you on a walk to observe such species as the prairie warbler, American redstart, scarlet tanager, rose-breasted grosbeak, and northern oriole. People of all ages and skill level are welcome. Remember to bring your binoculars, field guides, hiking boots and water. Please call Wendy at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Office, (518) 785-1800 for registration and location information.

If you are interested in any of our other field trips, please send us your address and we'll mail you a copy of our winter-spring 1999 schedule. Email: APBPC@aol.com

Sincerely, Erin Donnelly

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A LEAST TERN BREEDING COLONY AND THE ERRANT EGG. CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

by Jim Sotis

The longer I stayed, the more eager was I to know this coast and to share its mysteries and elemental life.
— Henry Beston, *The Outermost House*

A powerful thunderstorm rocked the island during the late afternoon of June 4th. It lashed the dunes with torrential fury, and I wondered how the Least Tern colony could possibly have survived.

Surveying the breeding site that evening, I found only two solitary terns still sitting on nests, or scrapes. In the morning there had been eight sitting birds — two or three with hatchlings underwing. I had also seen a few chicks lying low or wandering about, awaiting the return of parents to feed them. Not a single chick could I find after the storm!

Two days later there were four brooding Least Terns, still with no chicks in sight. However, one of the nesting birds raised its wing briefly. Revealed in the nest was the barest hint of a downy head! However, I couldn't be sure, given the blending of natal plumage with the sandy ground. But, a few moments later the chick's head appeared above the nest rim as the nestling pushed its way out to emerge on open ground.

There it took a few steps around the nest site. (Being semi-precocial, Least Terns can walk within hours of hatching.)

Those observations just about concluded my National Park Service Volunteer Ranger duties, which I had been assigned. The next day I was free of all obligations but that of cleaning my quarters and preparing for departure the next morning. That being done, after supper I walked the trail through the oak forest and the palmetto understory back to the ocean shore to experience one last time its "elemental life" and the connection which had se-

cured its place so deeply in me.

Fringed as it was with the lush greenery of trees and shrubs, the path held avian delights. Among them my last evening were a Yellow-throated Warbler probing Spanish moss; a White-eyed Vireo; a couple of Great-Crested Flycatchers; a Summer Tanager and a pair of Painted Buntings foraging beneath dense shrubbery.

Out on that great beach I scanned the stretch of sand north and south. Hardly a soul about: a couple strolling in the distant mist; a lone figure exploring the tidal exposure for seashells; a few others dispersed and solitary.

continued ...

■ This Issue...

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Spring Field Trip Reports

New Crossword Puzzle

Upcoming Field Trips



Shorebird life was sparse—not unusual for this time of year. A cluster of immature gulls probed the damp shore edge accompanied by a couple of Willets and a pensive Oystercatcher. A few Least Terns were hovering off shore, splashing down for fish while a line of four Brown Pelicans hung suspended, gliding effortlessly on seven foot wingspans, skimming ocean swells. I was heartened to learn they had recovered from deep decline in the southeast caused by the deleterious effect of pesticides on their eggs

I walked north along the beach for about 200 yards. Approaching the tern breeding ground, I was unprepared for what caught my attention. High on the incline of a large dune, where the two terns had maintained their nest positions during the storm, was another Least Tern on its nest. This one, however, seemed befuddled. Evidently, one of its eggs had been dislodged and had rolled about a foot and a half down the slope. The tern was fretfully considering both eggs, locked in indecision. It continued to eye its exposed egg, then abruptly slipped off the nest egg, and walked down to mount the errant egg. There it had difficulty maintaining both balance and composure. It dropped off that egg and returned to the nest egg, settled upon it, but seemed unable to find ease in either option.

Neither could I! The plight before me was not a memory with which I could leave Cumberland Island.

I walked directly onto the tern colony nesting grounds, heading straight for the separated eggs. Immediately, the sitting tern flew off as other terns gathered above me, shrieking their outrage at my trespass. Single-minded determination held fast. Beneath head-threatening swoops and shrill clamor I picked up the dislodged egg, considered it briefly, and placed it back in the shallow nest. So shallow, in fact, that 1/3 of each egg appeared above the rim of the nest. I was momentarily beset with concern for its adequacy.

Beneath those unrelenting, swooping forays to within inches of my scalp, I wheeled and returned to the beach beyond the "boundary" of the tern nursery. There I remained, watching the flight and behavior of Least Terns in the area, waiting to see what would follow. The brooding tern returned presently, approached the nest cautiously, eyed the eggs, mounted them, wiggled a bit and settled into an incubating position, and there it remained.

I lingered for awhile, observing the flight and activity of terns and the few chicks about the area. As shadows lengthened, a seamless tranquility settled over the dunes and beach. It absorbed all that might have remained of the avian stress my action had provoked.

When I turned to leave finally, I reflected on how extraordinary these last few weeks had been.

An Evening of Treats for Body and Soul

A small number of Club members have expressed interest in this late fall or winter dessert/literary event. If you have a literary piece related to nature to share (either original or not), please contact Denise at 785-6760. Price of admission? One small dessert to share.



Lake Taghkanic State Park A "NEW" Birding Site

by
Scott Stoner and Denise Hilton

While visiting the park in late May for a family picnic, we "discovered" that it also holds great potential as a birding site. Lake Taghkanic State Park (LTSP) is in southern Columbia County, just off the Taconic Parkway. Not to be confused with Taconic State Park (also in Columbia County!). LTSP includes deciduous woodlands, streams, open brush and field areas, and Lake Taghkanic itself, with a marshy area along one shore and a beautiful fern-walled stream at the other end. Below is an abbreviated birding guide report based on our limited exploration of this site; we hope to write a more detailed guide in the future following additional visits. Also, if anyone in the Club is familiar with the site and would like to provide input, please contact us.

The deciduous woodlands and picnic grounds along the lake produced American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo, Baltimore Oriole, Warbling Vireo, Common Yellowthroat, Veery and Yellow-throated Vireo and other songbirds. Canoeing the lake we found American Coot, Great Blue Heron and Spotted Sandpiper. Just west of the entrance station on the eastern ("back") side of the park (away from the Taconic Parkway) is the Lakeview trail, a wide mowed path through brush habitat with a markedly different avifauna; an evening walk here produced Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Blue-winged, Yellow, Prairie and many Chestnut-sided Warblers, the latter frequently flying back and forth across the trail and affording excellent looks.

To reach Lake Taghkanic State Park take the Taconic Parkway south from the Berkshire Spur of the NYS Thruway (I-90) and please let us know what you find.





UPCOMING PROGRAMS

NOTE: Program meetings will be at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center unless noted otherwise.

Note: There are no program meetings in July or August

Wed Sept. 8, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Dan Welch on the **Himalayas and Lowlands of Nepal**. Dan Welch will share travel experiences from the Himalayas. Through his business, Dan has had the opportunity to travel through many mountainous regions of the world. The Kingdom of Nepal offers varied habitat, from deep jungle to the highest peaks. There are exquisite birding sites that are short distances from the stunning capital of Katmandu. Dan will tell us how easy it is to travel in and around Katmandu. He will encourage each of us to go there ourselves to see the sights he will share in his slide show. There are wonderful birding, rafting and other outdoor activities in Nepal. Please join Dan for an evening journey through wonderful Nepal.

Thurs Sept 9, 7:30 PM, Colonie Town Library, joint program with Audubon Society of the Capital Region, Julio de la Torre on **OWLS** (new and updated program, better than ever!).

Monday Oct 4, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, David Martin on **Birding on Tropical Islands**. Tropical islands have charms beyond golden beaches and soft breezes -- they have endemics. HMBC member David Martin will relate the experiences he and his wife Sandy have had on three very different tropical islands: Palau, one of the most biologically interesting small island groups in the world; Grand Cayman, where natural areas still exist but are threatened by development; and Guam, where birds have almost disappeared.

Monday Nov 1, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Dale and Lilian Samuelson on **Argentina from Top to Bottom**. The program will cover Argentina from its northernmost extremes high in the Andes a few miles from the Bolivian border in Jujuy and Salta states to Ushuaia at the southernmost tip, 2500 miles south, just 600 miles from Antarctica. Tierra del Fuego at the bottom, then Trelew, the Valdes Peninsula and Punta Tombo, midway along the east coast, and finally, the Pampas near Buenos Aires, also will be covered in this program of birds, scenery and botany.

Monday Dec 6, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Ken Able on **Circling South Africa: Birds and Mammals**.

Monday Jan 3, 7:30 PM, location TBA. Gregg Recer on **Birding the National Parks of the Cascades and Olympics**. This program will be a slide presentation of Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen's travels from Lassen Volcanic National Park to Olympic National Park, and should be highlighted by western breeding birds and other wildlife, volcanic geology and fantastic mountain and coastal scenery.

Audubon Soc. of the Cap. Region Program

Thurs 14 Oct, 7:30 pm, Colonie library, Gary Lee, DEC Forest Ranger:
Loons and Other Adirondack Wildlife



PROGRAM REPORTS

by
Scott Stoner & Denise Hilton

Annual Meeting Program

On April 14, we were treated to a wonderful Annual Dinner program by naturalist and artist, John Green. In his skillful and artistic blend of photography and music, John is a seemingly endless source of entertainment and knowledge. We have enjoyed several of his earlier programs, and this one was no exception.

The evening's program was actually a "double header," including "Nature's Beauty," and "Nature's Will to Survive." In "Nature's Beauty," John presents a magnificent program encompassing many of nature's moods and seasons, from the delicate fiddleheads of early spring, through the goldenrod of late summer, through the leaves and berries of fall, and the icy flash of winter. The night sky was also represented, as well as several species of animal and plant life. All was accompanied in a very artistic way by music.

In "Nature's Will to Survive," John led us to the knowledge that, as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins once wrote, "nature is never spent." In picture after picture we saw nature's own salvation through the force of its own energy. In the viney tendrils over-growing the junk yard cars, in the violets growing through the sidewalk cracks, even in the gulls circling the landfill, we were witness to the resiliency and buoyancy of the natural world.

As always, John left us with thoughts of our seemingly frail world, its well of inner strength, and the question of its future. We thank him for a beautiful, and thought-provoking program.

Bluebirds

On Monday May 3, Kevin L Berner of SUNY Cobleskill gave an interesting and informative program on the ecology and management of the eastern bluebird. Kevin is research Director for the North American Bluebird Society, as well as on the SUNY faculty, and has spent many years studying New York's State Bird. Living in neighboring Schoharie County, proudly described as the "Bluebird Capital of NYS," Kevin described the human history as well as the natural history associated with this popular species.

Importantly, the bluebird is one species in which the individual effort can make a difference. When NYS was first settled, it was heavily forested and there were few bluebirds. Bluebirds like open country, so did well after the deforestation of the state around the turn of this century. The downturn in their population came due to the introduction of the house sparrow and starling, both, like the bluebird, cavity nesters.

In the 1970's, Ray Briggs, recently honored by Governor Pataki for his efforts to restore the bluebird, began inspiring his high school agriculture students to put out bluebird nest boxes. Recall that an individual can make a difference! The program grew, the bluebirds thrived, and today 10 - 15 percent of the households in Schoharie County have nest boxes.

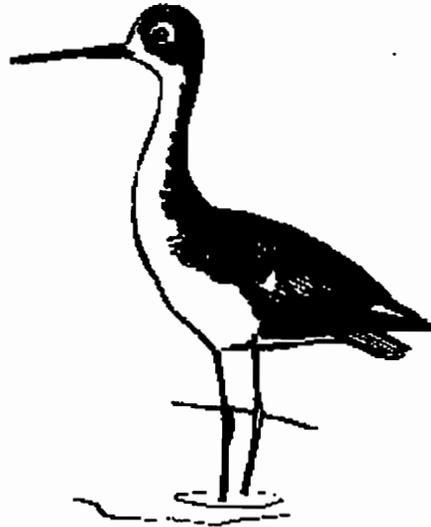
95 percent of bluebird eggs are blue with 5 percent being white. After a 14 - day incubation, the naked, altricial young are hatched; growth is rapid and the young fledge within 17 - 20 days. House sparrows (not protected) will use bluebird boxes; these introduced birds peck the heads of the bluebird. Kevin expressed the opinion that putting up bluebird boxes and allowing house sparrows to multiply only



exacerbates the problem caused by this species. House wrens (protected) also compete with bluebirds for the boxes; these wrens will puncture bluebird eggs and build a new nest right on top of the bluebird nest!

Blowfly larvae can be a problem, but one should not add rotenone. It does no good against the blowfly but does affect the beneficial jewel wasp. Raccoons prey upon bluebird nests, by sitting on top of the boxes and reaching down into the nest and pulling it out. Extending the roof to the front helps keep them out, as does greasing the pole. There are a multitude of nest box designs on the market, as Kevin described; with varying advantages and success rates.

There is a great bluebird trail along Route 20 all across NYS, with about 1500 nest boxes from the Mass line to PA. Persons interested in assisting with monitoring can contact the HMBC President, VP or Program Chair for contact information.





Field Trip Reports

Utica Marsh March 25, 1999

The early morning trip to Utica Marsh was a success for the 8 people looking for marsh species.

We got great looks at **VIRGINIA RAIL**, it stayed out in the open for a good 5 minutes. Also seen was a **SORA** that was calling and walking in the reeds. The most unusual bird had to be the **GREAT EGRET** in breeding plumage. April is not the month that they are normally seen in NY. Other birds of interest seen were **PURPLE MARTIN**, **OSPREY**, **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER**, **BARN SWALLOW**, **GADWALL**, **NORTHERN SHOVELER**, **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET**, **AMERICAN TREE SPARROW**. A total of 50 species made it a good trip for all.

— *Doug Steele*

Vischer Ferry April 10, 1999

The rain held off as about 20 people met for an early spring morning's exploration of Vischer Ferry. Although billed as a waterfowl trip, a combination of an early spring migration and very low water levels precluded finding the wide variety of duck species enjoyed several years ago at this time of April. Splitting into two groups, we did collectively see several waterfowl species including both **BLUE-WINGED AND GREEN-WINGED TEAL**, **AMERICAN WIGEON AND WOOD DUCK**. We fared better with passerines, recording **HOUSE WREN**, **GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET**, **AMERICAN GOLDFINCH**, **AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** and a very early **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER**. We also found **RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER**, now seen regularly at Vischer Ferry. We tallied a total of about 35 species. Many thanks to co-leaders Denise Hilton and Gary Goodness. Concern was expressed that the lowered water level may be negatively impacting both the avifauna and birding potential of this fine site. Club members are urged to monitor this location, now an Important Bird Area, for changes due to human activity.

— *Scott Stoner*

Vischer Ferry April 28, 1999

Sixteen people had a pleasant trip at Vischer Ferry Nature Preserve. The weather was beautiful for the early evening expedition. The only annoyance was the presence of helicopters over the nearby Northway for most of the time, making it difficult to hear bird calls. Highlights of the 36 species trip were a late season **AMERICAN TREE SPARROW** and a **LEAST BITTERN**. Other species: **AMERICAN BITTERN**, **GREAT BLUE HERON**, **CANADA GOOSE**, **WOOD DUCK**, **AMERICAN BLACK DUCK**, **MALLARD**, **BLUE-WINGED TEAL**, **GREEN-WINGED TEAL**, **RED-TAILED HAWK**, **WILD TURKEY**, **LESSER YELLOWLEGS**, **HERRING GULL**, **MOURNING DOVE**, **DOWNY WOODPECKER**, **NORTHERN FLICKER**, **BLUE JAY**, **AMERICAN CROW**, **TREE SWALLOW**, **BARN SWALLOW**, **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE**, **TUFTED TITMOUSE**, **MARSH WREN**, **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET**, **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER**, **AMERICAN ROBIN**, **EUROPEAN STARLING**, **CHIPPING SPARROW**, **SAVANNAH SPARROW**, **SONG SPARROW**, **SWAMP SPARROW**, **RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD**, **RUSTY BLACKBIRD**, **COMMON GRACKLE** and **AMERICAN GOLDFINCH**.

— *Bernie and Christine Grossman*

Vischer Ferry May 9, 1999

A large contingent met on a foggy Mother's day morning in hopes of encountering a large variety of passerine migrants as well as breeding marsh birds. This trip has been plagued by rain in the past few years and as people assembled, it began to appear that we might be washed out again as steady rain began to fall. However, the forecast was for only lingering scattered showers and so we started off with the hope that the weather would abate sufficiently to allow a full morning of birding. We started off with a pair of **YELLOW-THROATED VIREOS** singing and chasing each other among trees across from the main parking lot. This species has nested right in this area in the past. The walk down the main road produced relatively few songbirds, but we did find a number of water birds including **GREEN AND GREAT BLUE**



HERONS, WOOD DUCK, LESSER YELLOWLEGS, LEAST AND SOLITARY SANDPIPERS AND SEMIPALMATED PLOVER. MARSH WRENS AND SWAMP SPARROWS were seen and heard in the cattails and we had an excellent show put on by a **VIRGINIA RAIL**. By now the rain had ceased and we started adding some interesting woodland species including **RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH, ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK, WARBLING VIREO, BALTIMORE ORIOLE AND BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER**. We decided to take the loop out to the west toward the towpath trail at Lock 19. As we made our way through the woods we picked up a few migrants including numbers of **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS, BLACK-THROATED BLUE, BLACK-THROATED GREEN AND BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLERS, AMERICAN REDSTART, OVENBIRD, LEAST FLYCATCHER AND VEERY**. The return along the towpath was fairly uneventful but we did hear **LEAST BITTERN** calling from the cattail marsh a few hundred yards west of the footbridge. The morning walk ended up totaling a respectable, although not spectacular 62 species.

— *Gregg Recer & Cathy Graichen*

Birds and Breakfast May 15, 1999

At long last! A lovely morning in May on which to enjoy the birds of Five Rivers, and a nice breakfast with HMBC friends. On Saturday, May 15, about 30 members and friends scoured the Five Rivers grounds for the morning, and compiled a list of 76 species. Among them were 12 new seasonal species for the Center. The magnificent weather added to the air of celebration, and after several years of 45 degree drizzles, this was a wonderful Birds and Breakfast indeed.

Among the highlights were nesting **BALTIMORE ORIOLE, NESTING GREEN HERON, BOBOLINK, WILLOW FLYCATCHER, SCARLET TANAGER, RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD**, as well as the following warbler species: **YELLOW, BLUE-WINGED, BLACK-THROATED GREEN, YELLOW-RUMPED, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT, OVENBIRD, MAGNOLIA, AND CHESTNUT-SIDED, LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH AND WILSON'S!**

Special thanks are due to our group leaders, including Jocelyn Cole-Calkins, who graciously agreed to take out the 6 am group on short notice, Scott Stoner, and Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen. Thanks to all, leaders and participants!

— *Denise Hilton*

Grafton Lakes State Park May 29

Leaders: Philip & Marjorie Whitney.
Present: Cathy Doran, Lynn Hill, Frank and Hope Murphy, Ron and Linda Pushee, Diane Sepovia, and Marian Zimmerman.

Ten birders enjoyed a perfect late-May morning at Grafton Lakes State Park. Early arrivals heard an **AMERICAN BITTERN** in the cattail marsh south of Route 2 make a few brief attempts to get his engine started. Later, the full group saw splendid performances by **GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER, HERMIT THRUSH, BALTIMORE ORIOLE, BOBOLINK, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT, CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, and BLUE-HEADED VIREO**. Briefer or more distant sightings included **LEAST FLYCATCHER, RED-EYED VIREO, CEDAR WAXWING, RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD, SWAMP SPARROW, YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER, CANADA WARBLER, BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, and nesting EASTERN PHOEBES** with young. The group spent a long fifteen minutes trying to spot a lustily singing but perfectly concealed **NASHVILLE WARBLER**; other heard-not-seens included **WINTER WREN, SCARLET TANAGER, EASTERN MEADOWLARK, WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, PURPLE FINCH, NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH, BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER, VEERY, ROSE-BREADED GROSBEAK, and the ubiquitous OVENBIRDS** that were rarely out of earshot. As we were compiling our list at noon, last-minute sightings of **COMMON RAVEN** and **BROAD-WINGED HAWK** brought the trip total to 58 species.

— *Philip & Marjorie Whitney*



Saratoga Battlefield June 5, 1999

About a dozen participants toured portions of the Saratoga National Historical Park looking for grassland specialties and other breeding species. The Henslow's Sparrows that had been a fixture for several years at the Battlefield were not present there in 1998 and were not found there again this year. However, nearly all of the other typical breeding birds of the area were found and seen well by most participants. We covered portions of the Wilkinson Trail on foot and then proceeded around the park tour road by car later in the morning. Raptors highlighted the trip with several **AMERICAN KESTRELS**, a high-soaring **NORTHERN HARRIER** seen in the area where they have nested in the past, **SHARP-SHINNED HAWK** AND A **RED-SHOULDERED HAWK**. Most of the species associated with grasslands or scrubby second-growth were found including numerous **BOBOLINKS**, **EASTERN MEADOWLARKS**, **INDIGO BUNTING**, **EASTERN TOWHEE**, **FIELD SPARROW**, AND **BLUE-WINGED AND PRAIRIE WARBLERS**. **BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO** was heard while trying to spish up a **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT**. An especially interesting discovery was a pair of **OVENBIRDS** and the nest containing several eggs.

— *Gregg Reecer & Cathy Graichen*

Albany Pine Bush June 6, 1999

Sunny, warm weather was on tap for a large group of birders who spent the morning searching two sections of the Pine Bush for local breeders. We found many species associated with the scrubby pitch pine/scrub oak habitat such as **PRAIRIE AND CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLERS**, **FIELD SPARROW**, **INDIGO BUNTING**, **EASTERN TOWHEE** AND **BROWN THRASHER**. Other species found were more indicative of the surrounding (or encroaching in some cases) mixed hardwood forests including **SCARLET TANGER**, **WOOD THRUSH**, **EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE**, **ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** AND **BALTIMORE ORIOLE**. Toward the end of the walk through the Blueberry Hill section we skirted an area of young second-growth birches and aspens and were able to hear

(although not to see) **BLUE-WINGED WARBLER** AND **WILLOW FLYCATCHER**. Unfortunately, as was the case the day before at Saratoga Battlefield, Golden-winged Warbler eluded us.

— *Gregg Reecer*

GRASSLAND SURVEY

This summer I am conducting a survey of Grassland birds within the state of New York, as part of a larger project taking place throughout New England. We are very interested in learning of areas to census that currently have; or have had historically, **GRASSHOPPER**, **VESPER**, and **HENSLOW'S SPARROWS** as well as **UPLAND SANDPIPERS**. Since my survey areas are located throughout the state, any insight local birders could provide would be invaluable.

Please post any relevant information to my e-mail address directly. Thank you in advance for your helpful knowledge and cooperation!

Best Regards:

Matt Victoria
324 Westbrook Hills Dr.
Syracuse, NY 13215
(315) 492-7522
Fickity@aol.com



Upcoming HMBC Field Trips

(Consult your field trip schedule or Birdline (439-8080) for trip details)

Field Trip Schedule Erratum: Doug Steele's phone number is mis-printed on several of the field trips he is coordinating in the 1999 Field Trip Schedule. The correct number is 477-7254.

Note — Field Trip Change: The Vischer Ferry evening trip scheduled for Sunday, August 29, 1999 has been re-scheduled one week later to Sunday, September 5, 1999. See details in the list below.

Also Note — The reservation deadline for the August New Hampshire/Newburyport weekend trip has been moved back to July 23, 1999.

JUNE 27 GRAFTON LAKES AREA
Sun Coordinators: Dan Welch & Lynn Huntington 477-2980

Join us for this morning walk at Dunham Reservoir, which is the part of Grafton Lakes State Park on the south of Route 2. Expect to find Sapsucker, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Black-Throated Blue and many other warblers along the trails of the mixed forests surrounding the Reservoir. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Tamarac (Brittonkill) High School on Route 2, east of the intersection of Route 2 & 278. Plan to carpool.

JUL 10 BEAR SWAMP
Sat Coordinators: Jocelyn Cole-Calkins & Ron Calkins 768-2911

This morning trip to southern Albany County, at a time when the rhododendrons should be in the peak of bloom, will be in search of Canada, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warblers, as well as Veery, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren and other summer residents. Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the Bethlehem Central High School parking lot on Delaware Ave. (Route, NY 443) in Delmar.

JULY 11 CHERRY PLAINS STATE PARK/CAPITAL DISTRICT WILDLIFE MGT AREA
Sun Coordinators: Dan Welch & Lynn Huntington 477-2980

This area on the Rensselaer Plateau ranges from 1300 to 2000 feet and hosts a fine variety of higher elevation species. We'll look for Winter Wren, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Mourning, Blackburnian, Canada and a host of other warblers, as well as Broad-winged and Red-Shouldered Hawks. Meet at 7 a.m. at the entrance to Cherry Plain State Park on Miller Rd. between routes 42 and 43 in the Town of Berlin, Rensselaer County.

AUG 4 AN EVENING AT FIVE RIVERS
Wed Coordinator: Doug Steele 477-7254

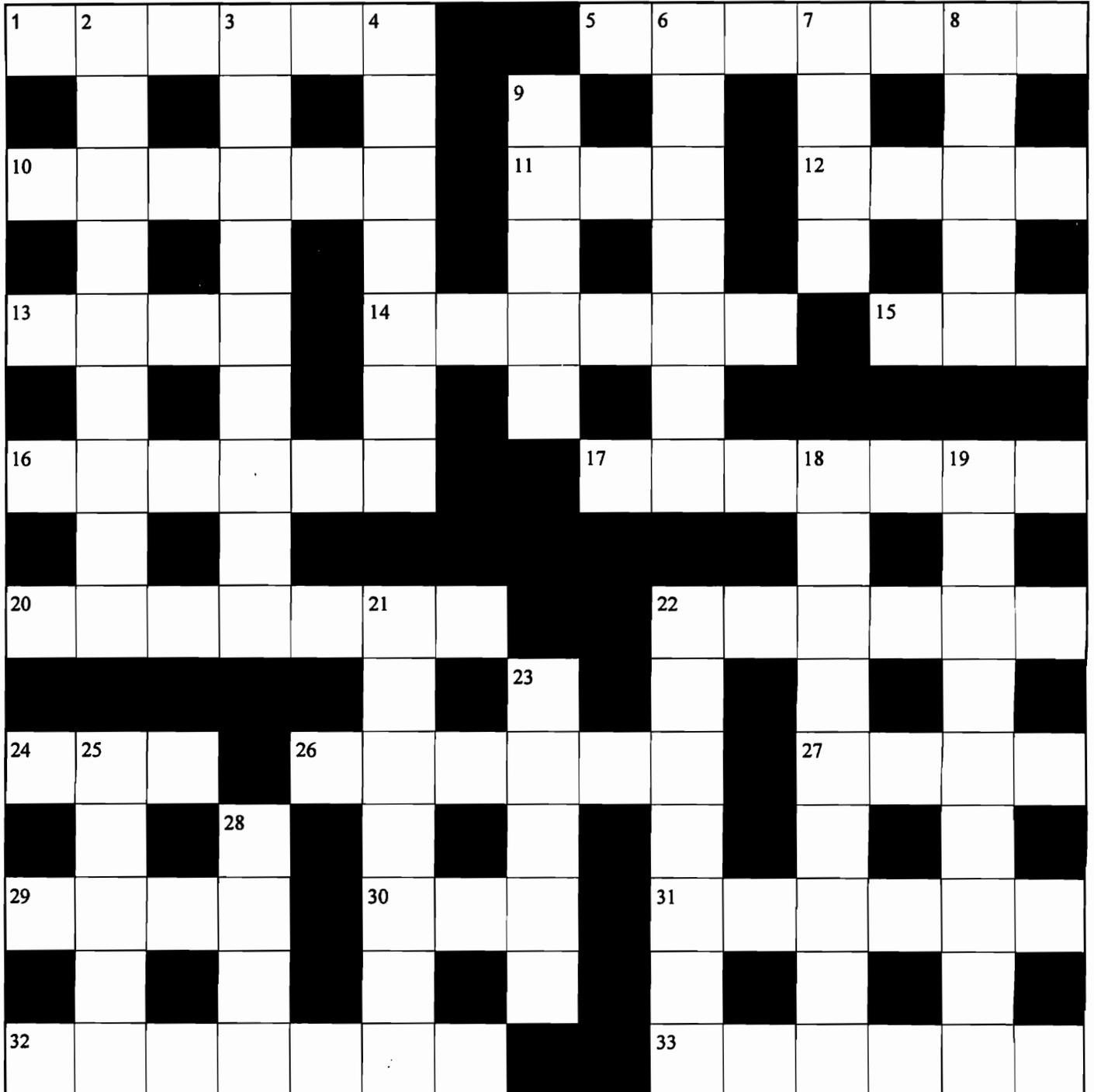
Join us for an enjoyable summer evening as we search the grounds for Five Rivers' summer residents, including flycatchers, orioles, warblers, thrushes and perhaps a Screech



A FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS

by
Edward M. Sessa

(bird clues in italics are puns, anagrams and word play)





Across

- 1 *bird hides in thornbush (bon voyage!)* (6)
- 5 *we spread seed around the wall for a bird* (7)
- 10 *sounds like Dan and Marilyn are running again?* (6)
- 11 *salmon for a bagel* (3)
- 12 *this bird is a lunatic liar* (4)
- 13 *rent, i.e. tattered, becomes this bird* (4)
- 14 *take away no narcotic from this loony bird* (6)
- 15 *is that a cat I hear or a bird?* (3)
- 16 penny _____ (6)
- 17 *a bird appears in a flash of light* (7)
- 20 *more like a serpent* (7)
- 22 *tipsy escort leads you to a bird* (6)
- 24 *word with easter or white* (3)
- 26 *after this fruit dropped out, a bird appeared* (6)
- 27 *crazed auks ran backwards into this bird* (4)
- 29 *our oars smashed into this bird*
- 31 *fruit found "in the sun"*
- 32 *he sets stones*
- 33 *Thoreau's pond* (6)

Down

- 2 *we use horn to excite a bird*
- 3 *national flag of the U.K.* (5, 4)
- 4 *a "crisis" of the Carter years* (7)
- 6 *gradually increase charge for a bird* (7)
- 7 *a carefree diversion for this bird* (4)
- 8 *I love to mix this thrush's color* (5)
- 9 *a dark frontside to rails, polls and other birds* (5)
- 18 *a very unhappy Clinton has a bird* (9)
- 19 *a type of suite or decision* (9)
- 21 *exhale or give forth* (7)
- 22 *warps wraps or a bird*
- 23 *huckster peddles birds* (5)
- 25 *catch this bird in a "wild chase"* (5)
- 28 *a wise moniker for a grumbly bird* (4)



1999 ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

The 1999 annual business meeting of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club was held at Shaker Ridge Country Club in Colonie on April 14, 1999. The meeting began with a report from the Board of Directors by President Ann B'Rells. Among significant actions taken by the Club were a donation of \$1000.00 for the building acquisition fund of Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks. The Association plans to buy the Paul Schaefer House in Niskayuna and make it into its library and meeting location. The property abuts HMBC's H.G. Reist Sanctuary. The Board believes that the Association plans will enhance use of the Sanctuary. The Board also reported that an audit committee of Janet Betlejeski and William Beckman did a financial audit of HMBC and reported their findings on July 13, 1998. A copy of this report appeared in the April, '99 issue of *Feathers*.

Treasurer Gregg Recer gave a report on the financial position of the Club. The Club continues to be financially sound. The Club's assets at the beginning and end of the 1998 - 1999 fiscal year were as follows:

	<u>4/1/98</u>	<u>3/31/99</u>
Checking	\$4441.46	\$2800.33
Savings	\$9276.92	\$4421.90
CD	\$26,343.82	\$32,619.20
Total	\$40,062.20	\$39,841.43

The Club nearly broke even during the fiscal year, and would have made a small net increase in assets except for the \$1000 donation made to the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks that was not included in the original fiscal-year budget.

After reports from Committee Chairs, President Ann B'Rells asked, Robert Budliger, nominating chairperson to offer a slate of nominees for election to the 1999 - 2000 Board. Scott Stoner, committee member reported in Bob's absence:

Officers for a one-year term:

President: Gregg Recer
Vice President: Denise Hilton
Secretary: Lynn Huntington
Treasurer: Dan Welch

Directors for a two-year term:

Joan Cipriani and Carl George

President B'Rells requested nominations from the floor. In their absence the nominations were closed. The members then voted to direct the secretary to cast one ballot to elect the entire slate. After completing the formality of election of new members the business meeting was closed.





HMBC BOARD FOR 1999 - 2000

Officers

Directors:

President: Gregg Recer 23 Scotch Mist Way Malta, N.Y. 12020 899-2678	Vice-President: Denise Hilton 6 Knob Hill Rd. Loudonville, NY 12211 785-6760
--	--

William Lee	374-3426
Linda Parr	478-9219
Carl George	393-0629
Joan Cipriani	374-3729
Sunny Gooding	446-9370

Secretary: Lynn Huntington 329 N. Schodack Rd. East Greenbush, N.Y. 12061 477-2980	Treasurer: Dan Welch 329 N. Schodack Rd. East Greenbush, N.Y. 12061 477-2980
--	--

Committee Chairs

Conservation:	Walt Sabin	439-7344
Birdline:	John Saville	399-5959
Programs:	Scott Stoner	785-6760
Field Trips:	Joan Cipriani	374-3729
Membership:	Daniel Ruge	449-1087
Publicity:	Ann B'Rells	355-5615
Publications:	Cathy Graichen	899-2678
Records:	Bob Budliger	439-0006
Sanctuary:	Joe Coticchio	374-2449
Social:	Denise Hilton	785-6760
Jr. Activities:	Elle Dietemann	766-7045



BIRDLINE of E. NEW YORK: (518) 439-8080

Send articles, clip-art,
photos, artwork to:

Feathers
c/o Cathy Graichen
23 Scotch Mist Way
Ballston Spa, NY 12020

or via e-mail to:

recerg@crisny.org

Reminder!!

All HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Board meetings take place the second Monday of every odd-numbered month. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center at 7:00 PM.

PLEASE NOTE!!: The July, 1999 HMBC Board of Directors meeting will be held on Monday, July 26, 1999 (rather than July 12) due to scheduling conflicts (i.e., birding trips!). The meeting will be held at Five Rivers EEC at 7:00 PM.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER: It's June and that means warm (at times very warm) weather and breeding birds to find. It also means that a new Board of Directors has been elected for Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Nominating Committee and the membership in general for electing me to the position of President. My over-arching goal as President will be to continue and build upon the strong and steady leadership the Club has had from my predecessors. Cathy Graichen and I have been Club members for 10 years now, and I've always been impressed by the dedication of people in the Club, who are all volunteers, to making the Club an effective resource for members in support of the one thing we all have in common — a passion for wild birds and birding in all its various forms. My desire as President is to continue to strengthen the Club's

*role as a resource to its membership by promoting the functions that are the Club's main strengths: field birding, birding programs, communication among members and with the public and conservation. The other board members — Vice President Denise Hilton, Secretary Lynn Huntington, Treasurer Dan Welch and Directors Bill Lee, Linda Parr, Sunny Gooding, Joan Cipriani and Carl George — along with the committee chairs, represent a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience both within the Club and outside of it, and I think we all share a desire to maintain and enhance the strengths of the Club and to keep it responsive to its members. I would encourage all members to contact me or any member of the Club leadership with suggestions, problems, questions or concerns. Let me also give a reminder that Board meetings are open to anyone who would like to attend and are held the second Monday of odd-numbered months at 7:00 P.M., usually at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center (an exception will be the July Board meeting which will be held on 7/26/99 due to scheduling conflicts). Any deviations from this schedule will be announced in *Feathers* and on Birdline.*

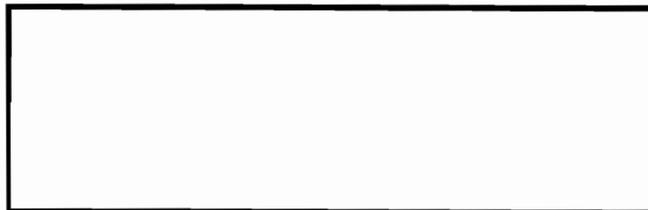
Thank you for doing me the honor of electing me President. I hope to see you out in the field!

Gregg Recer

FEATHERS
Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club
c/o Five Rivers EEC
Game Farm Rd.
Delmar, N.Y. 12054

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FEATHERS

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THE TRAVELING BIRDER: Birds of Nome

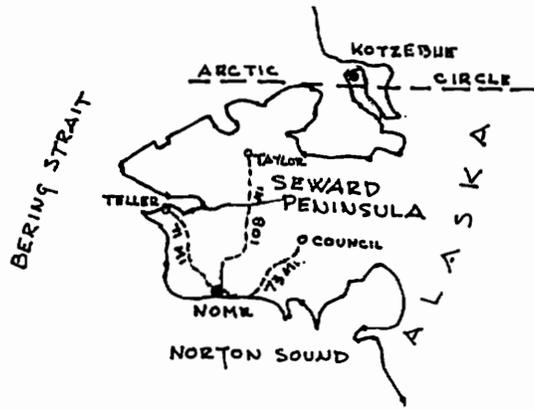
*Text & Artwork by
Dick Patrick*

A blind bird watcher! I was sharing a row on the plane between Anchorage and Nome with Morgan Jones, a college professor from New Paltz, who is blind and a bird watcher. His life list by necessity is based on the bird calls and songs that he has identified. My family and I met him and his wife Emily the night before in Anchorage at the WestCoast International Inn as they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Aside from being their anniversary, it was a get acquainted dinner for the six members of my family, Morgan and Emily, eight other birders and our guides Barry Zimmer and Barry Lyon. We were beginning a Victor Emanuel Nature Tour of Alaska.

As we flew over some of the most desolate terrain imaginable I kept up a running line of chatter to let Morgan know what I was seeing from the plane window.

An unexpected horror when you fly to Nome is a stop in Kotzebue, the second largest Eskimo village in Alaska. I can't tell you what it looks like from the air. Alaska Airlines just sneaks up on the village of 2,800 people 25 miles north of the Arctic Circle and the next thing you know you are in a grit storm blowing off a fog covered ocean lashing a collection of brightly painted shacks hugging the airstrip and you are hoping the plane can get back into the air before you are stranded there.

We were all picturing the plane to Nome as being some small two engine propeller driven job with



perhaps twenty seats tops. It is a full size jet, six seats across, except the front half is freight. And it, like every flight in Alaska, is full. Loading, you can see Eskimos getting on with their microwave ovens just purchased in Anchorage, cage after cage of dogs (coming from a trip to the vets) and ice chests of all the food which will be served in Nome. You can't drive to Nome and you

can't yet get a ship through the pack ice. A lot of things to tell Morgan about and birds haven't even come up in the conversation.

CONTINUED ...

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Crossword Puzzle Answers

Five Rivers Limited Info

Hearing Assistance for Birders

Field Trip Reports



Eventually the captain announces our descent into Nome. What's this - suburbs? I see houses out here in the waste land. Next I see a row of tents along the Bering Strait and now I see Nome. Maybe 15 blocks long and five blocks wide along the ice caked Strait.

The travel guide says Nome, with a population of 3,500, is the judicial and commercial center of Northwestern Alaska and the main supply point for mining districts and Eskimo villages.

Our guides have reserved two beat-up vans (the best available) and take us to the Aurora Suites. These are as good a collection of suites as you could reasonably expect to find anywhere. Strangely, there is no office on the premises so if you want extra towels you leave a note on your kitchen counter and they appear the next day. The view from any window is about the same - slums! To us anyway; but probably not to the people living in them.

We have supper, in Fat Freddy's, overlooking the Bering Strait. I had the salad bar (a very limited variety of fresh vegetables that came in on the same plane from Anchorage - not that Anchorage grows vegetables either) and the reindeer sausage and cabbage soup. Reindeer is served like a mildly spiced hotdog. I liked it.

It is about 10:30pm when we get through eating and the guides think we would like to go out bird watching. Of course it is broad daylight just as it would be for the whole two weeks we were in Alaska. My wife, older son and myself figure the birds will still be there tomorrow so we set out to see the town.

Nome is a collection of brightly painted, one and two story frame houses set on posts raising them above the permafrost. All the streets are dirt. There are no trees, shrubs or flowers anywhere. There is a short row of saloons and lodgings along the Iditarod finish line, bordering the Bering Strait and some big judicial buildings. There are also two souvenir shops, a general store and a Honda dealer. There are plenty of cars and trucks in Nome but the Honda showroom has only boxes of

snowmobiles and all terrain vehicles (ATV). Each shanty has a mixture of two, three, a half dozen of these vehicles scattered around the yard.

In our stroll through town we pass a teen center with a mob of Eskimo youth milling in front of the building. Slender, extremely good-looking people, polite "Good evening. Welcome to Nome.", friendly, happy, people. And buzzing around the youths were others going every which-way on their ATV'S. There were a few adult drunks staggering out of bars; but they too welcomed us to Nome. My last memory of the first day in Nome was looking out over the Bering Strait at midnight (4:00am Albany time) and saying to my son "We don't even know who won the playoff game." and hearing this Eskimo that we hadn't even noticed say "San Antonio." I will always wonder about that.

Next morning; breakfast at six and out to explore one of the three roads on the Seward Peninsula, each one starting from Nome. The first day we start up the 73 mile Nome-Council "Highway." The road begins along the shore and we see that the tents we saw from the air belong to gold prospectors in wet suits operating small floating gold dredging and screening craft maybe 100 feet offshore. If we were there by ourselves we could have visited and found out what that was all about; but not on a bird trip. Next the "suburbs" we saw from the air are Eskimo hunting and fishing camps, complete with drying frames holding fish and seal meat. Also surrounded by basketball goals, swing sets and tricycles.

Now about the birds. The first day out of Nome the two birds that really touched my heart were the Long-tailed Jaeger and the Pacific Loon. The Jaegers nesting on whatever dry tussock they could find. The black cap, the white throat, the long tail looking oh so confident and regal. Lords and ladies of the tundra. And the Pacific Loon with that red eye and the ghostly, shimmering silver neck. Who designed such a bird? Other notables were Red-throated Loons, Harlequin Ducks, Bar-tailed Godwits, Willow Ptarmigan (the State bird), Black Turnstones, Yellow Wagtail, Arctic Warbler and Grey-cheeked Thrush. We also saw Pintails and Old Squaws, Red-necked Phalaropes, Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs. I mention these



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five birds separately as we were fortunate enough later in the trip to continue on to Barrow and these were the common birds on the Arctic Ocean. Our Pintail; as far north as a duck can go! And Longspurs and Buntings (even living in bird-houses) the common and only street birds in Barrow (northern most city in America).

The raptors on the Seward Peninsula, at least along the Council Highway were huge Rough-legged Hawks and Short-eared Owls. And of course we saw Common and Hoary Redpolls and if your imagination was good enough you could maybe tell them apart.

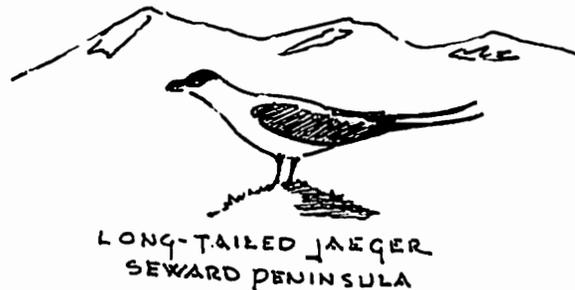
Yes, the birds are great; but to me the real interest is the different ways of life; gold mining, seal hunting camps; seeing these huge abandoned gold dredges, the abandoned locomotives in the middle of nowhere. And the tundra with all of its wildflowers - Arctic Willow (2" tall trees), Alaska Cotton, Alpine Azalea, Woolly Lousewort (more beautiful than its name). Laying there on the oh so soft tussocks eating lunch with the Bering Sea with its ice floes and pack ice only a few yards away. Such a different world.

The next morning breakfast at six in the guides room. They have been up until a few hours ago shopping for groceries and checking on the birds for today. With this organization you know you are being led by the best in the world.

Today it is the central highway leading out of Nome, 108 miles called the Kuugguarab Highway. The leaders have two birds in mind; the Bluethroat and the Bristle-thighed Curlew. The first thing we see is a herd of caribou crossing the highway all ages and sizes. Did you know that other than the limited range of the Sitka Deer there are no deer or elk in Alaska? Evidently to sell a new edition of the National Geographic Bird Book - which everyone carried - someone decided to make two

species out of the Golden Plover. I think there is now an American Plover and a Pacific Plover depending on how far the white comes down the breast. There were a lot of these handsome birds. We were seeing them in the breeding plumage. My younger son who said he could do without the birds; he just wanted to see Alaska, to everyone's amusement and amazement became an expert on which Plover was which. Before that his lifelist consisted of a robin, a seagull and a chicken.

The Bluethroat was uncooperative; but the next sight had even the hardened birders forgetting about feathers - a herd of musk oxen. You know they are alleged to live in the Arctic; but who would expect to see one? There they were.



Riding along later, some woman in the party has the nerve to sing out that she saw a Bluethroat flying along aside of the road. The van stops and she really did. If you don't know the bird - and why would you? - look it up. What a little beauty? I think he knew it as he "teed himself up" as one of the guides

would say and let us admire him to our hearts content.

The next order of business was the Bristle-thighed Curlew. The guides advised that this part of the trip involved a fairly difficult hike and that the chances of finding the bird were slim. Here I think they made a mistake as they took us all the way back to Nome for lunch and a blessed nap-and those who wanted to could repeat the trip back out the Kuugguaraq Highway. Most did. There wasn't that much to do in Nome and the scenery is so magnificent. On the way we did see Gryfalcons. So we get to the hillside where the Curlew may be found. But it has warmed up just enough that the mosquitoes have come out. There is nothing in New York State to compare that experience to. I hate bugs so I went to Schaeffer's on Central Avenue before we left and purchased bug hats with netting down to the shoulders for our whole



family and of course we had long sleeve shirts and long pants, being Alaska. Still it was an experience. We start out I notice the leaders have removed there "bear spray" canisters from their holsters. The tundra here is wedge shaped so that it rocks as you step on it and you can slip down a foot or so between the wedges into water. Every step is an adventure and it was up hill. Being of a certain age and of uncertain health I turned around and went back down to the vans. My wife had stayed by the road to do some sketching. She reported that a large, curve-billed bird had landed in the road as soon as we had started up. Our leaders cautioned us on the way out that other parties have seen Whimbrels here, called them Bristle-thighs and have added one more bird to their list. So who knows what Patsy saw? An hour and a half later the rest appear strung out across the top of the hill, loath to return to the vans. The Curlew had eluded them. I don't think the rest of my family cared one way or the other. They were happy just seeing Alaska, but even those who cared the most were good sports about it. If we succeeded every time what fun would it be? The mosquitoes had retired for the night - even though it was broad day light, We had a gourmet supper out of the back of the vans then mounted up for a hellish long and dusty ride over a twisting gravel road back to Nome. We got back around midnight and even with a nap that is a long day. My brother and sister-in-law went right back out to the street with their camcorder and photographed all the citizenry walking around doing their business under the midnight sun. I went to bed.

The next morning we sleep-in until 6:30. I ask my family if they want me to lean on the leaders to lighten up the pace as this isn't exactly a vacation. They all say they can take it so I keep my mouth shut.

Our last day in Nome we head out the 71 mile Teller Highway. We are going all the way to Teller because it has been reported that the only known White Wagtail nest on the Seward Peninsula is in Teller. The leaders advise that the female will be on the nest so we will be looking for one bird. It is a beautiful day. The mosquitoes must still be looking for the Curlew because they are not both-

ering us. The first thing we see is a huge bull moose in a hellofa hurry. He appears to have urgent business any place but there. We spot the reason. Our first grizzly - just minding his own business. I would say he was a quarter mile from us and even though he was just sitting there we could see why the moose wanted no part of that neighborhood.

The only bird I have recorded on the Teller Road was the Black-bellied Plover. Again, in breeding plumage. What a beautiful bird! So many of the Arctic birds are so stunning in just black and white.

Eventually we come to Teller, a tiny Eskimo village on a spit of land in the Bering Sea 120 miles from Russia. I should mention that there is a lot of drift wood and some building materials all along the peninsula coast; all of it from Siberia. There are no trees on the Seward Peninsula; but it is still an odd circumstance.

We get out of the vans and the White Wagtail is right there to greet us. He flies overhead, lands in the street a couple times to tease us and then perches on a shed roof and stays until we have to get back into our vans to catch our Alaska Airlines trip back to Anchorage.

At the end of our trip we each selected our three favorite birds. I chose the Red-necked Grebe, because he seemed to be a one species welcoming committee our first days in Anchorage; the Long-tailed Jaeger because when you see it on land it is so regal and the White Wagtail because it symbolized to me the hospitality and friendliness of Alaska.



Essex County Reference Available

A completely revised edition of *Birds of Essex County, New York*, by the late Geoffrey Carleton of Elizabethtown is now available from High Peaks Audubon Society, Inc. First published in 1976 and last revised in 1980, the new Third Edition lists all 310 species recorded in the county through April 1999.

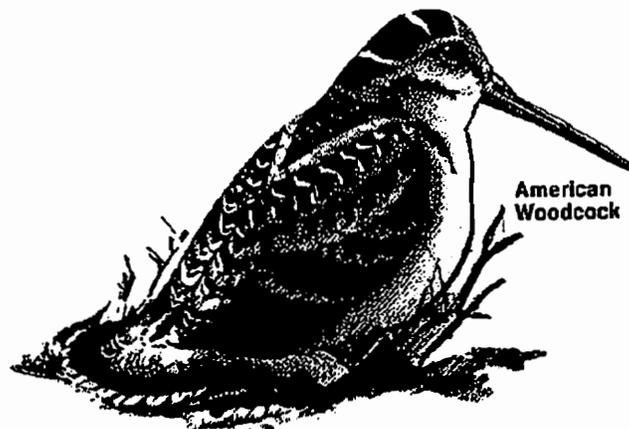
In addition to the species list, Carleton provides concise information on rarity, seasonality, abundance, and other history for each bird. All records are documented by place, date, and observer.

Essex County includes both the High Peaks region of the Adirondacks and the lowlands of the Champlain Valley. The county holds the highest mountain in the state-- Marcy (elev. 5,3441)-- and borders the sixth largest lake in the United States-- Champlain (95, above sea level). All of Essex County lies within the boundaries of the Adirondack Park.

Geoffrey Carleton (1909-1998), past-president of both The Linnaean Society of New York and High Peaks Audubon Society, began gathering records of Essex County birds in 1930. This latest edition of his work was edited by John M.C. Peterson of Elizabethtown, Adirondack-Champlain regional editor of *The Kingbird*, the state ornithological journal.

Copies are available for \$10.50 postpaid from High Peaks Audubon Society, RR 1, Box 230, Elizabethtown, NY 12932-9721.

For information, contact: John M.C. Peterson (518) 873-2052





UPCOMING PROGRAMS

NOTE: Program meetings will be at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center unless noted otherwise.

Wed Sept. 8, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Dan Welch on the **Himalayas and Lowlands of Nepal**. Dan Welch will share travel experiences from the Himalayas. Through his business, Dan has had the opportunity to travel through many mountainous regions of the world. The Kingdom of Nepal offers varied habitat, from deep jungle to the highest peaks. There are exquisite birding sites that are short distances from the stunning capital of Katmandu. Dan will tell us how easy it is to travel in and around Katmandu. He will encourage each of us to go there ourselves to see the sights he will share in his slide show. There are wonderful birding, rafting and other outdoor activities in Nepal. Please join Dan for an evening journey through wonderful Nepal.

Thurs Sept 9, 7:30 PM, Colonie Town Library, joint program with Audubon Society of the Capital Region, Julio de la Torre on **OWLS** (new and updated program, better than ever! — see next page).

Monday Oct 4, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, David Martin on **Birding on Tropical Islands**. Tropical islands have charms beyond golden beaches and soft breezes -- they have endemics. HMBC member David Martin will relate the experiences he and his wife Sandy have had on three very different tropical islands: Palau, one of the most biologically interesting small island groups in the world; Grand Cayman, where natural areas still exist but are threatened by development; and Guam, where birds have almost disappeared.

Monday Nov 1, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Gregg Recer on **Birding the National Parks of the Cascades and Olympics**. This program will be a slide presentation of Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen's travels from Lassen Volcanic National Park to Olympic National Park, and should be highlighted by western breeding birds and other wildlife, volcanic geology and fantastic mountain and coastal scenery. (*Eds. Note:* The previously scheduled program by Dale & Lillian Samuelson on Argentina had to be cancelled, but will be given as part of the Capital District Audubon program schedule; see next page.)

Monday Dec 6, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Ken Able on **Circling South Africa: Birds and Mammals**.



Audubon Soc. of the Cap. Region Programs
All programs are Thurs. nights, 7:30PM, Colonie Town Library

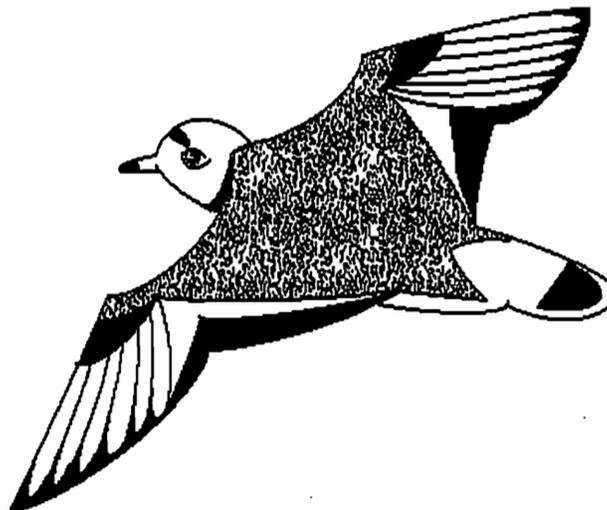
Thur. Sept. 9 Julio de la Torre on **OWLS**. Renowned owl expert, author and entertaining speaker Julio de la Torre will give a visual and audio presentation on the owls of North America. Program is jointly sponsored by the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club. This will be both highly entertaining and educational, an evening not to miss!

Thu Oct. 14. Gary Lee on **LOONS AND OTHER ADIRONDACK WILDLIFE**. Dept. of Environmental Conservation Forest Ranger Gary Lee is an expert on the birds, mammals and plants of the Adirondacks. His entertaining and informative slide program has always drawn a big crowd, so come early to get a good seat.

Thu Nov. 11. Dale and Lillian Samuelson on **ARGENTINA FROM TOP TO BOTTOM**. These Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club members will cover Argentina from its northernmost extremes high in the Andes to Ushuaia at the southernmost tip, 2500 miles south. Come and enjoy the birds, plants and scenery of this fascinating and varied land.

Thu. Dec. 9. Erin Donnelly on **THE ALBANY PINE BUSH: A LOCAL AND NATIONAL TREASURE**. Located within the Capital District Region of New York State, the Albany Pine Bush represents one of the best remaining examples of an inland pine barrens ecosystem left in the world. This rolling sand plain is home to an unusual and unique variety of rare plants and animals including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. Join Erin Donnelly, Director of Education and Outreach with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission for an evening program on the Albany Pine Bush and how this fascinating landscape manages to survive amid the congested tangle of roads, highways and building complexes.

Erin Donnelly is the Director of Education & Outreach with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission. She holds a B.S. in Natural Resources from Cornell University and a Master's degree in secondary science education from the University of NY at Albany. Prior to working in the Albany Pine Bush, Erin worked as a Summit Steward in the High Peaks Region of the Adirondack Park.





Help for Birders with Reduced Hearing Ability

by Carl George

In the company of my hearing-gifted colleagues during the last Century Run I became ever more aware that my ears are not what they used to be, especially for the higher frequencies. Making an effort to keep up, I have just visited my local Radio Shack and have bought a "Stereo Amplified Listening Set" for about sixty dollars. The tiara-type device includes two comfortable ear pillows, each with its own microphone and balance and volume controls on the left side regulate the stereo effect. In addition, there is a "three-band equalizer" on the left phone allowing control at sound frequencies of 900 Hz, 3 kHz and 6kHz. The on-off button (right phone) and other controls are easily reached by the thumbs with the set perched on one's head. Power is provided by two AAA batteries which, if of good quality, will last about 20 hours. Although a bit ostentatious the set is designed for use in theaters and recital halls; I have elected to try it for birding out-of-doors.

I made my first field test on a pleasant evening with a mild breeze not exceeding ten miles per hour, but just enough to produce leaf movement on the nearby trees. I quickly discovered that even gentle air movement produces a lot of background sound but that I could greatly reduce this by setting the 900 Hz and 3 kHz controls at rock bottom and the 6 kHz control at maximum; much of this background on a day with gentle air movement is of low frequency - and much of this can filtered out by proper use of the equalizer. Next, I was reminded that we live in a world filled with the sounds of man-made devices, the roar of aircraft, lawn mowers, chain saws, cars, trucks and trains, the squeals of ambulances and police cars, the honking of cars, trucks, buses and trains and all the rest. The best bird listening will thus occur at dawn, dusk and weekends when the birds are busy and there is reduced human activity. Wilderness, of course, will be ideal - most of the time.

But, most exciting of all, was the fact that I could again hear birds, and the details of bird song, that I have been missing for years and, that I could tell their general direction for sighting with binoculars or spotting scope. Distant birds were suddenly close at hand. There were many of them and, with ten to twenty minutes of accommodation, the background of moving leaves and other low-frequency sounds became relatively unimportant. I also learned that it's better to stand near trees such as the sugar maple with more firmly attached leaves than near overly busy trees like the quaking aspen; I now think of the aspens as especially garrulous and nervous creatures fully deserving their name. Some may suggest standing away from trees altogether but perching birds are involved here!

I accounted twenty kinds of birds during my first hour of

listening and among this list only one warbler (Yellow Warbler). The others were also strong vocalists; I have yet to try for the more delicate singers such as the Brown Creeper, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Black and White Warbler, Black Poll Warbler, et al. but I bet the set will help. I asked my aide at Radio Shack about the ability of the set to amplify frequencies above 10 kHz and he said that the 6 kHz control did not mark the upper limit but that it was best read as 6 kHz and up - but I couldn't get a more definite statement indicating just how high - and how well.

Gusts of wind were a problem creating a deafening hiss but I was able to reduce this by placing black plastic sponge muffs over each microphone - the kind that are given out when you request earphones in theaters. I had obtained my pair from Proctors Theater and I suspect that most Radio Shacks have them, so mention this need if you elect to invest. Wind roar can be reduced by facing away from the wind, standing in more sheltered places and, of course, avoiding windy times for birding. Sniffing, sneezing, coughing, talking, clearing one's throat and scuffing one's feet all become acoustic adventures, and also reminding one that such activities can really be a nuisance for those seeking a quiet background. Amphibian calling and mammalian sounds such as the clicking of chipmunks and the barking of dogs are a more pleasant challenge. One can talk to another person nearby but this is best done most softly!

Some birders enjoy avian voices while watering the lawn early in the morning or at vespers. The set will make you realize that the old-fashioned brass nozzle is much quieter than many of the modern ones! Such is one's expanding acoustic universe when your hearing is turned up.

The set fits over the top of a bill cap nicely. Glasses can be worn as well but if removed while using binoculars it's a bit of a challenge to slip them back on under the arching arms. I suspect that the set is not waterproof but I predict that it will be an ear-warming asset during the Christmas Count.

I think it is about time for the HMBC to give us hearing-impaired birders a bit of tender, loving care and thus I propose that we welcome a few more articles on how the various hearing aides now available work for avian audition - along with some guidance on cost. I would also enjoy any reaction of those who are willing to try the Stereo Amplified Listening Headset. If you don't like it for birding it will be a real show piece for the theater. And, NO, I don't own stock in Radio Shack!



Field Trip Reports

Northern Saratoga County June 13, 1999

Seven birders met at the parking area on the Luzerne Rd. While "collecting ourselves" we had **COMMON RAVEN**, **INDIGO BUNTING**, **CHIPPING SPARROW**, **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER**, AND **PILEATED WOODPECKER**.

At Eddy Rd/Tower Rd we had good looks at 3 more **PILEATED WOODPECKERS**, **ALDER AND LEAST FLYCATCHER**, **PRAIRIE WARBLER**, 2 **HOUSE WRENS**, **YELLOW WARBLER**, **CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER**, **FIELD SPARROW**, AND **BROAD-WINGED HAWK**. Most of us saw a **WILD TURKEY** with young and a few of us saw a **RUFFED GROUSE** with young. We heard **WILLOW FLYCATCHER**, **SCARLET TANAGER**, **ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK**, **EASTERN TOWHEE**, **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW**, **FIELD SPARROW**, **BLACK-THROATED BLUE**, **BLACKBURNIAN**, **BLACK & WHITE**, **OVENBIRD**, AND **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT**. There were 59 species heard or seen during this part of our trip.

After returning to our cars, we decided to go to Fort Edward to check out the recent sighting of a rare bird in the area. We added 11 more species, including: **SHARP-SHINNED HAWK**, **BOBOLINK**, **EASTERN MEADOWLARK**, **HORNED LARK**, **SAVANNAH SPARROW**, and the rarity (a singing male **DICKCISSEL**).

— Barb Putnam

Adirondack Adventure Weekend June 19 - 20, 1999

This was a new trip focusing on the central Adirondack region in the area north of Saranac Lake and Lake Placid. We hoped to expand the Club's coverage of the Adirondack Park beyond the traditional areas of Ferd's Bog and Moss Lake. Nine Participants had an enjoyable weekend of birding focusing on nesting boreal and northern hardwood-forest species.

The first day covered Bloomingdale Bog and the Adirondack Visitor's Center in Paul Smiths (Franklin County). Highlights of the Bog included **BROAD-WINGED HAWK**, **OSPREY**, **YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER**, **WILLOW FLYCATCHER**, **BOREAL CHICKADEE**, **WINTER WREN**, **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET**, **BLUE-HEADED VIREO**, a good mix of warblers including **MAGNOLIA**, **NASHVILLE**, **BLACKBURNIAN**, **BLACK-THROATED GREEN** AND **BLACK-THROATED BLUE**, **LINCOLN'S** AND **SWAMP SPARROWS** AND **PURPLE FINCH**. At the visitors center we added **AMERICAN BITTERN**, **BELTED KINGFISHER**, **HERMIT** AND

WOOD THRUSHES, **BROWN CREEPER**, **RED-EYED VIREO** and more warblers including **CHESTNUT-SIDED** AND **NORTHERN PARULA**. We ended the day with a group cook-out at Buck Pond campground combining a gourmet meal with close-up looks at **BLACKPOLL** AND **CANADA WARBLERS** and a pair of **OVENBIRDS** and their nest.

The next morning was spent at Silver Lake Bog, north of Lake Placid in Clinton County. A Black-backed Woodpecker nest, with nestlings about to fledge, had been found there earlier in June and we had hopes of finding the birds. Some navigational confusion resulted in our getting a somewhat late start into the bog. However, it is a very nice and accessible example of this habitat including a beautiful boardwalk trail through the bog and white-cedar swamp and a nice climb to a ridge lookout over Silver Lake. Before we got to the bog we had fly-overs of **GREAT BLUE HERON**, **PURPLE FINCH** AND **EVENING GROSBEAK** at our rendezvous point near Buck Pond. Unfortunately the boreal specialties eluded us in the bog, but we again had a good mix of nesting passerines including **WINTER WREN**, **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET**, **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER**, **VEERY**, **HERMIT** AND **SWAINSON'S THRUSHES**, **CEDAR WAXWING**, many of the same warblers as the previous day, plus a **NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH**, **SCARLET TANAGER**, **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** and more **EVENING GROSBEAKS**. Two members of the group split off early and had a calling **BARRED OWL** and **YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** on their way out of the bog. **BOBOLINKS** AND **EASTERN BLUEBIRDS** rounded out the list that morning on the drive back toward Lake Placid. 74 species were totaled on the trip including 18 warbler species as well a number of boreal species.

— Gregg Reecer
— Cathy Graichen





Dunham Reservoir June 27, 1999

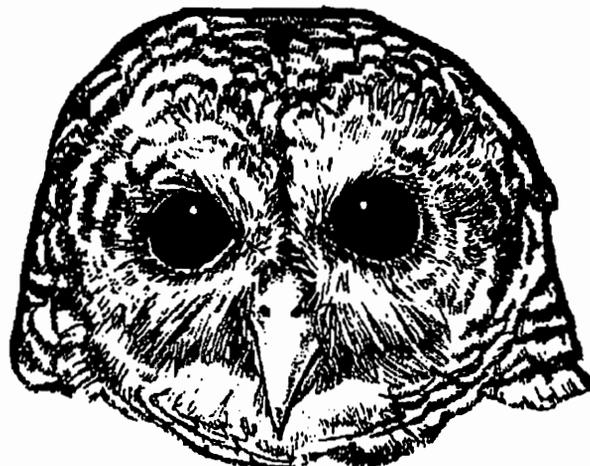
Seven of us met at Tamarac School at 7:30a.m. We enjoyed the parking lot and its residents while waiting for the group to assemble. We were treated to a **PURPLE FINCH** and **CHIMNEY SWIFT** at the school as well as several other species. The sunny morning was cool in the wooded area surrounding the Dunham Reservoir, making for a pleasant walk that offered up **GREAT BLUE HERON**, **EASTERN WOOD PEWEE**, **EASTERN PHEOBE**, **HAIRY WOODPECKER**, **BROAD-WINGED HAWK**, **GRAY CATBIRD** and **RED-EYED VIREO** and an excellent and unbelievably long look at an **OVENBIRD**. After a bit of time at the boat launch and immediate environs, we headed a little ways down the road and just pulled off to the side of the road where we spotted **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT**, **YELLOW WARBLER** and great looks at **CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER**. We heard **BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER**, **VEERY** and **WOOD THRUSH**. **CEDAR WAXWING** flew overhead and gave us a quick glimpse. We headed to the North side of Grafton State Park where we had another great look at the **BROAD-WINGED HAWK** and four **COMMON RAVENS** chasing each other and sharing their raucous call for all to hear. The day had started to heat up at this point, so at about 11:15 we headed back to the school having counted thirty-four species for the morning.

— Lynn Huntington
— Dan Welch

Bear Swamp July 10, 1999

Nature put on her own twist for this particular bird watching trip. The rhododendrons, that Bear Swamp is famous for, had reached full bloom about 2 weeks before the trip, but the blueberries, that line about a quarter of the trail, were beginning to ripen. Boy, they were very delicious! With the thunderstorms clearing away to a brilliant, sunny morning, our group was rewarded with discovering a **BROAD-WINGED HAWK** nest with two young broad-winged hawks. One of the young had managed to fly to a nearby snag, while the other watched us intently from the nest. Later on in the walk we heard and saw a "parent" **BROAD-WINGED HAWK**. While being serenaded by **VEERIES** and **OVENBIRDS**, a male **SCARLET Tanager** made a grand debut, flashing his brilliant scarlet plumage in an oak tree. Many birds that our group expected to see or hear were not found. I am not sure why this phenomenon is happening. Is this due to the unusually dry weather? A change in habit? Or perhaps a decline in the bird populations that we all have been reading about lately? If anything, I feel that by continuing to conduct bird trips to this area and carefully recording the species seen, maybe this data can be used in the further study of bird populations.

— Jocelyn A. Cole-Calkins





FIVE RIVERS LIMITED

56 Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY 12054

Eds. Note: Five Rivers Limited is the not-for-profit service organization supporting Five Rivers Environmental Education Center Professional Staff. The following information is provided to acquaint Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club members with the organization.

Your acquaintance with Five Rivers Environmental Education Center (FREEC) may have made you aware of Five Rivers Limited (FRL), the not-for-profit support group that has provided people power and financial support to the superior professional staff at FREEC for more than 25 years.

The volunteers of FRL provide services such as field trip experiences for over 17,000 school and youth group visitors annually, staffing the Center's information desk and maintaining wildlife plantings at the Center. It also funded a \$40,000 nature trail for the mobility-impaired, provided funds for land acquisition and provides funds for seasonal internships.

FRL is now in the middle of a membership drive. We are hoping that those of you who are not already members will join FRL and support the many fine programs FREEC offers the public. Dues are modest and the membership brings with it a 20% discount on purchases from the FRL Bookstore, discounts on family summer programs, free snowshoe rental, receipt of FRL mailings, and the Center's quarterly mailings reflecting a number of programs in which individuals and families may participate.

As members of the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, you surely appreciate the protection FREEC gives not only to birds but to all wildlife. If you are not already a member of FRL, please consider becoming a member and help us help FREEC continue its outstanding work.

If you are interested in joining Five Rivers Limited, please send your name and address along with a check payable to Five Rivers Limited (\$10 Individual, \$15 Family Membership) to Five Rivers Limited, 56 Game Form Road, Delmar, NY 12054. All memberships and contributions are tax-deductible. For further information call Leda Loux, (518) 475-0295.

Five Rivers Limited is the Citizen Support Organization
to the **Five Rivers Environmental Education Center**



Upcoming HMBC Field Trips

(Consult your field trip schedule or Birdline (439-8080) for trip details)

Field Trip Schedule Erratum: Doug Steele's phone number is mis-printed on several of the field trips he is coordinating in the 1999 Field Trip Schedule. The correct number is 477-7254.

Note — Field Trip Change: The Vischer Ferry evening trip scheduled for Sunday, August 29, 1999 has been re-scheduled one week later to Sunday, September 5, 1999. See details in the list below.

Sept 5 VISCHER FERRY BIRDING AND PICNIC
NOTE!! — NEW DATE! (was August 29) — ALL OTHER DETAILS REMAIN THE SAME
Sun Coordinators: Scott Stoner & Denise Hilton 785-6760

Post-breeding herons and egrets should still be numerous at this time of year; breeding Common Moorhens and migrating shorebirds should also be present. Join us for this late afternoon and evening exploration, to take advantage of the best light for some of the key areas. Bring your own picnic supper if you wish (and insect repellent!). Cold drinks will be provided. Meet at 3:00 PM at the main entrance. (see page 2 for directions) terns.

SEP 11 or 12 HAWK WATCH
Sat or Sun Coordinator: Arthur Long 758-9283

This should be the peak migration for Broad-winged Hawks. In 1996 we had a record-breaking day with over 800 hawks -- better than famous Hawk Mountain in Pennsylvania! Join us for the morning, the date of which will be decided and announced on Birdline at the last minute since hawk migration is so dependent on weather. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Key Bank in Star Plaza at the intersection of Routes 20 & 155 in Guilderland.

SEP 18 NOTT ROAD PARK AND ANN LEE POND
Sat Coordinators: Philip & Marjorie Whitney 477-9050

A late summer morning at these favorite stopovers for migrant songbirds should provide good views of a variety of warblers, vireos, sparrows and ??? Meet at 7:00 a.m. in the parking area next to Dunkin Donuts in the 20 Mall, at the intersection of Routes 20 and 155 in Guilderland.

SEP 19 VISCHER FERRY NATURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVE
Sun Coordinator: Frank Murphy 373-1933

Mid-September is good birding at Vischer Ferry. Herons and egrets are still present and a good variety of shore birds (Ruff in 1995) and migrant songbirds are on the move. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Main entrance for this morning trip. (see page 2 for directions)



Feathers

V61N4
Page 69

SEP 26
Sat

WILSON POWELL BIRD SANCTUARY

**Coordinators: Elle Dietemann
Jackie Bogardus**

**766-7045
283-6603**

The Wilson Powell Sanctuary, located in nearby Columbia County, is owned and maintained by the Alan Devoe Bird Club. The diverse habitat of the sanctuary provides an opportunity to look for a great variety of birds. Join us for this morning walk with ADBC members and expect to see geese, ducks and herons on the pond; sparrows, finches, kinglets and waxwings in the trees and hedgerows along the field's edge; and songbirds and migrating warblers as we hike the trails through the beautiful woods of the sanctuary. We'll complete our walk on the trail that leads up to "Dorson's Rock", where we can sit and enjoy the passing raptors as we look out upon the beautiful Hudson River Valley and the Catskill Mountains. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the small parking area on Rt. 9 about a mile south of Exit 12 of I-90.

OCT 6
Wed

A FALL EVENING AT FIVE RIVERS

Coordinator: Doug Steele

477-7254

As we walk the grounds of Five Rivers, we will be searching for late warblers migrating through, waterfowl and heron on the ponds and, depending on the water level, shorebirds. There is also a chance for White-crowned Sparrow and Rusty Blackbird. Picnic tables are present if you would like to use them before we begin. Meet at 6:00 p.m. in the parking lot by the Visitor Center. (see page 2 for directions)

OCT 16

MONTEZUMA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

**Coordinator: Doug Steele
Reservations by OCT 9**

477-7254

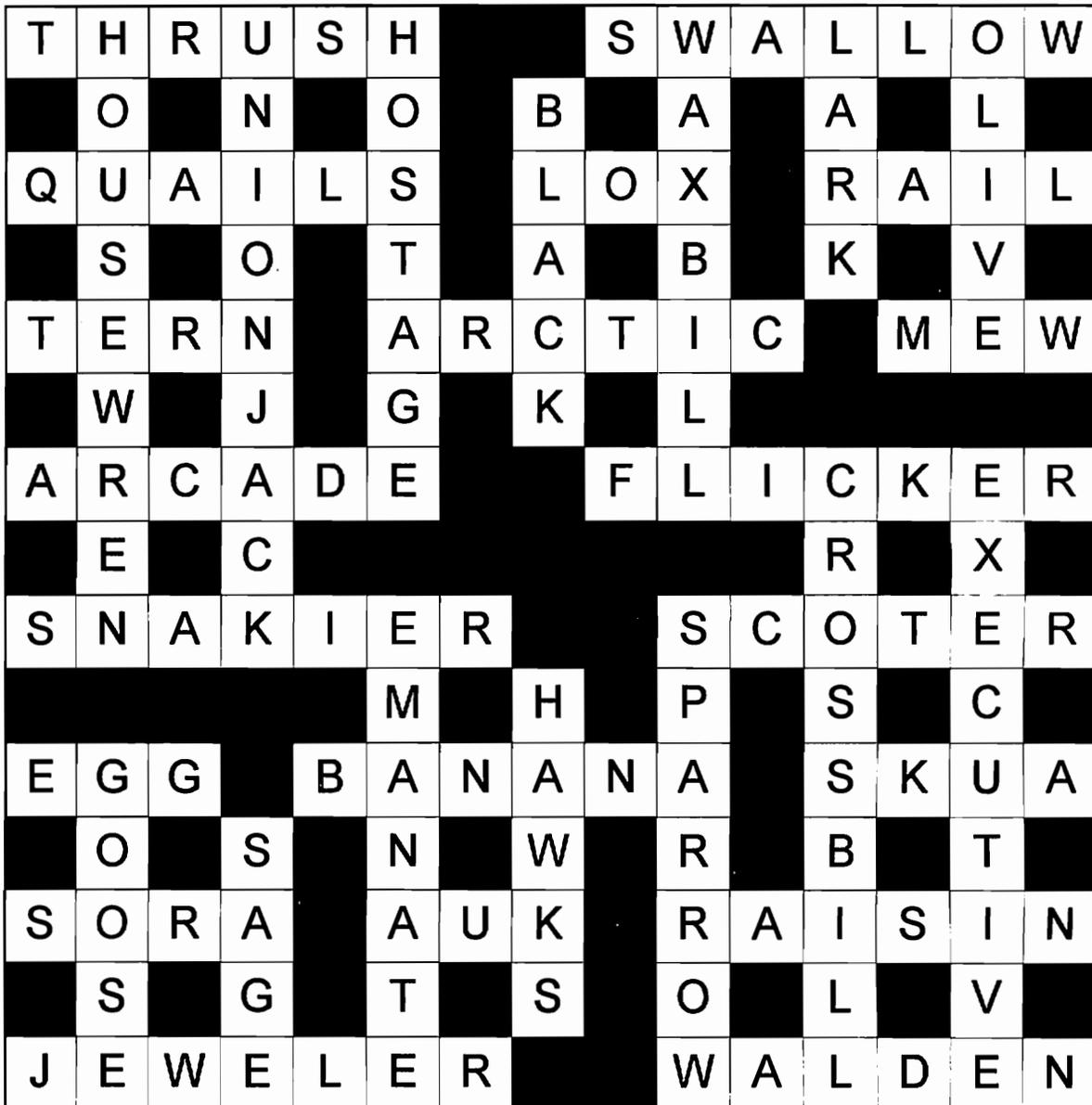
This 6,432 acre refuge has a widely diversified habitat with extensive marshes and is best during spring and fall migrations when tens of thousands of birds pass through. We can expect to see waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and possibly Bald Eagles. We may even be treated to one of those occasions when a rare bird appears. This will be a full day trip so bring a lunch. We plan to meet at 6:30 a.m. Call the Coordinator for reservations and the meeting place.



A Field Guide TO THE Birds

by
Edward M. Sessa

(Answers to puzzle appearing in June, 1999 Feathers)





CENTURY RUN FEATURES SOME GOLDEN OLDIES

by
Robert P. Yunick

The three best birds of the Club's 54th Guy Bartlett Century Run were species seen for only the second time in Century Run history: Caspian Tern, Glossy Ibis and Hooded Warbler. The Caspian Tern was found by Groups e and g at the confluence of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers. Its original sighting was as recent as 1986 with reports from the Hudson River at Catskill and the Mohawk at Crescent.

Original sightings of the latter two species, however, took place way back 47 and 51 years ago, respectively. The ibis was found on the Mohawk River just west of Crescent, not far from the Vischer Ponds where it was first recorded in 1952. The Hooded Warbler was at the Holt Preserve in New Scotland distantly from Collin's Lake, Scotia where first seen in 1948. Credit for both latter finds go to Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin who also tallied this year's high of 139 species, eighth highest to 156 in 1986.

This year's Century Run was held on the record late date of May 22, resulting in more foliage than usual. It was a gorgeous day warmed by a southerly flow of air from high pressure to the south. Albany Airport recorded temperatures of 46 to 80 deg. F, plenty of morning sun, no precipitation, and clouding in the afternoon.

Seven groups of 19 observers were afield from 0300 to 2100 (Group a) or portions thereof. The total list for the day was a very respectable 173 species, ranking sixth to the record 188 in 1986. Six of these groups each tallied well over 100 species - a goal more formidable many years ago, due to then poorer field optics, less sophisticated and fewer field guides, and less leisure time for birders to hone their birding skills. This year's

Run was a great success.

Sixty-two of these 173 species are ones recorded on all past 54 Century Runs. There were 50 species reported by all parties. A total of 89 was seen by all but one party; and 20 by only one party, a record eight of those by Bill Gorman and Bill Lee. These species are listed in the group key.

In addition to the Caspian Tern, Glossy Ibis and Hooded Warbler, there were four other rarities recorded for less than the tenth time in 54 years. They are:

American Wigeon	Mohawk River at Crescent - eighth time, last in 1984
Ruddy Duck	Saratoga Lake - seventh time, last 1989
Peregrine Falcon	Albany - ninth time, last 1997
Short-billed Dowitcher	Mohawk River at Crescent - sixth time, last 1988

While most attention is normally directed at rarities and spectacular finds, Century Run data also afford an opportunity to assess declines in some species previously more common. Black-crowned Night-heron was again missed for the third year, and has been seen only twice since 1989, previously occurring on average every other year. Scaup have gone unrecorded for 12 years, when previously they also averaged an appearance every other year. Ring-necked Pheasant, which had occurred every year for the first 42 years to 1987, has been logged only three times since then, and not at all since 1993. Yellow-billed Cuckoo has been missed since 1992, and seen only twice since 1983, while previously it averaged one out of two years. Lastly, Common Night-hawk, previously recorded in 40 of the 51 years to 1996, has been missed for three consecutive years.



My thanks to all who participated. I look forward to your report from May, 2000; beyond that, we begin the new millennium.

Key to Groups (asterisk denotes compiler):

Group a - Steve Chorvas, Frank Murphy*, Joe Cary and Hope Murphy (part time). 0300 - 2100. Saratoga Co. including Vischer Ferry, Cold Spring Rd., Battlefield, Saratoga L., Tower Rd., Conklingville Dam, Saratoga Co. Airport, Ballston L., Peebles Island and Waterford Flight. 129 Species: Brant, Green-winged Teal, Ruffed Grouse, Whip-poor-will, Tennessee Warbler and Mourning Warbler.

Group b - N. Slack, H. Stebbins, K. Weiskotten, G. Shaw and C. George*. 0400 - 2100. Black Creek Marsh, Thacher Park, New St., Vischer Ferry, Saratoga L., Basic Creek and Alcove reservoirs, Stanton Pond and Crescent. 114 Species: Homed Grebe and Red-breasted Merganser.

Group c - Barb Putnam*. 0515 - 2100. Ft. Edward, Hadley Mt. area and Vischer Ferry. 116 Species: Hooded Merganser, Northern Harrier and Swainson's Thrush.

Group d - Lee* and Lenny Thomas. 0700 - 2000. Albany Co. 55 Species.

Group e - Bill Gorman and Bill Lee*. 0430 - 1900. Black Creek and Tygert Rd. marshes, Thacher Park, Bear Swamp, Basic Creek and Alcove reservoirs, Stanton Pond, Blossom Hill Rd., Port of Albany, Schodack Marsh, Mohawk R. Cohoes to Crescent, Cold Spring Rd., Saratoga L. and Airport. 126 Species: Blue-winged Teal, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Pectoral Sandpiper, Northern Parula, Bay-breasted Warbler and Worm-eating Warbler.

Group f - Alan Mapes and Jocelyn Cole-Calkins*. 0400 - 2045. Albany Co. including Alcove and Basic Creek reservoirs, Black Creek Marsh, Tygert Rd., Thacher Park, Coeyman's Landing, Berne, Cohoes Falls and Albany Airport. 118 Species: Bald Eagle and Orchard Oriole.

Group g - W. G. Ellison* and N. L. Martin. 0420 - 2100. Guilderland, Meadowdale, Black Creek Marsh, Thacher Park, Holt Preserve, Alcove and Basic Creek reservoirs, Cohoes, Crescent, Vischer Ferry, Saratoga Co. Airport, Saratoga L. and Ft. Edward. 139 Species: Glossy Ibis, Short-billed Dowitcher, Eastern Screech-owl and Hooded Warbler.

Common Loon	a	b	c	e	f	g
Pied-billed Grebe		b		e	f	g
Horned Grebe		b				
Double-crested Cormorant	a	b		d	e	f
American Bittern	a		c	e	f	g
Least Bittern	a	b	c	e	f	g
Great Blue Heron	a	b	c	e	f	g
Green Heron	a	b	c	d	e	f
Glossy Ibis						g
Brant	a					
Canada Goose	a	b	c	d	e	f
Wood Duck	a	b	c	e	f	g
Green-winged Teal	a					
American Black Duck	a	b	c	d	e	f
Mallard	a	b	c	d	e	f
Blue-winged Teal				e		
American Wigeon	a					g
Hooded Merganser			c			
Common Merganser	a		c			g
Red-breasted Merganser		b				
Ruddy Duck	a	b				
Turkey Vulture		b	c	d	e	f
Osprey		b		e		
Bald Eagle						f
Northern Harrier			c			
Sharp-shinned Hawk				e		
Cooper's Hawk				e		
Red-shouldered Hawk				e	f	g
Broad-winged Hawk	a			e		
Red-tailed Hawk	a	b	c	d	e	f
American Kestrel	a	b	c	e	f	g
Peregrine Falcon		b		e		
Ruffed Grouse	a					
Wild Turkey		b	c	e	f	g
Virginia Rail	a	b	c	e	f	g



Feathers

Sora		e f	Northern Flicker	a b c d e f g
Common Moorhen		e g	Pileated Woodpecker	a b f g
Semipalmated Plover	a b	e f g	Olive-sided Flycatcher	a e g
Killdeer	a b c d e f g		Eastern Wood-Pewee	a b c e f g
Greater Yellowlegs	a b c d e g		Alder Flycatcher	a c f g
Lesser Yellowlegs	a b c d g		Willow Flycatcher	a b c e f g
Solitary Sandpiper	a b c d e g		Least Flycatcher	a b c e f g
Spotted Sandpiper	a b c d e f g		Eastern Phoebe	a b c d e f g
Upland Sandpiper	b c		Great Crested Flycatcher	a b c e f g
Semipalmated Sandpiper		e f	Eastern Kingbird	a b c d e f g
Least Sandpiper	a b c	e f g	Horned Lark	a b c e g
White-rumped Sandpiper		e g	Purple Martin	a b c e g
Pectoral Sandpiper		e	Tree Swallow	a b c d e f g
Short-billed Dowitcher		g	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	a b c d e f g
Common Snipe	a b	e f g	Bank Swallow	a b e f g
American Woodcock	a	e f g	Cliff Swallow	c f g
Bonaparte's Gull	a b	e g	Barn Swallow	a b c d e f g
Ring-billed Gull	a b c d e f g		Blue Jay	a b c d e f g
Herring Gull	b c	e f g	American Crow	a b c d e f g
Great Black-backed Gull	a b c d e f g		Fish Crow	c f g
Caspian Tern		e g	Common Raven	a e f g
Rock Dove	a b c d e f g		Black-capped Chickadee	a b c d e f g
Mourning Dove	a b c d e f g		Tufted Titmouse	a b c d e f g
Black-billed Cuckoo		f g	Red-breasted Nuthatch	a b c g
Eastern Screech-Owl		g	White-breasted Nuthatch	a b c e f g
Great Horned Owl		e f	Brown Creeper	a b c e f g
Barred Owl	a	g	House Wren	a b c d e f g
Whip-poor-will	a		Winter Wren	a b e f g
Chimney Swift	a b c d e f g		Marsh Wren	a b c e f g
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	a b c	e f g	Golden-crowned Kinglet	a c f g
Belted Kingfisher	a b c	e f	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	e g
Red-bellied Woodpecker	a	g	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	a b c e f g
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	a c	e f g	Eastern Bluebird	a b c d e f g
Downy Woodpecker	a b c d	f g	Veery	a b c e f g
Hairy Woodpecker		e g	Swainson's Thrush	c



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Send articles, clip-art,
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Feathers
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23 Scotch Mist Way
Ballston Spa, NY 12020

or via e-mail to:

recerg@crisny.org

Reminder!!

All HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Board meetings take place the second Monday of every odd-numbered month. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center at 7:00 PM.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER: It's the dog days of summer and the relative low point of the birding year in our area. That doesn't mean there aren't birds to be seen out there, but there's a lull before southbound migration really gets going, and the nesting season has been pretty much done since early July. Normally Cathy and I say that "We'll sleep in July", having spent a lot of early mornings out in the field in May and June. However this year we and Bryce escaped the July doldrums by travelling to the northwest for almost 3 weeks. We were rewarded with terrific scenery in the Cascade and Olympic Mountains and on the Oregon and Washington Coasts. The birding was also very enjoyable ranging from Tufted Puffins, Black Swifts and Black-backed and White-headed Woodpeckers to Clark's Nutcrackers, Lazuli Buntings, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Black-throated Grey Warblers, Cassin's Finches and Red Crossbills. To top all that off we enjoyed several close encounters with Orcas, Black Bears, Mule Deer and some very aggressive campground Raccoons!

Back home, as August rolls along we can start looking forward to the appearance of southbound shorebirds and then the last best chance to see wood warblers and most other migrant passerines until next spring. All of this anticipation has to be tempered this year by the big "but" — the drought. Local shorebirding areas, relatively moderately productive in normal years, may be so dry this year as to attract no birds at all. On the other hand, some locations that normally would be entirely underwater most years might have productive mud flats this year. It's not easy to guess what's going to happen. The best strategy is to get out in the field and check out as many likely areas of good habitat as possible. The birds have to go somewhere, so who knows? The strange weather and dry conditions could just end up sending some rarities our way that might not otherwise have turned up. Or, we could end up with a below-average migration. Regardless, getting out and looking is at least half of the fun — so enjoy!

Gregg Recer

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Two Eskimo Curlews Appear at Union College!

Carl George and Robert P. Yunick

Yes, we thought this title would attract your attention. Indeed, two Eskimo Curlews, *Numenius borealis* (Forest, 1772), the extinct or nearly extinct American bird, have arrived at Union College - but they are mounted specimens, a recent gift to the College from Mr. and Mrs. Keith Mickel, of Schoharie, New York. Mr. Mickel, a former wildlife biologist with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, was given the mountings nearly forty years ago by Mr. Anton Reif, a chicken farmer of the Middleburg area. Mr. Reif had brought the mounted birds with him when he and his wife left New York City in the early 1930s to settle in the Schoharie Valley. The appearance of these two specimens increases the number available in the world's museums and academic institutions to c. 380.

The birds stand upon a vegetated surface, one (the "upper bird"), three or so inches higher than the other (the "lower bird"), on an artificial, glistening rock - all of this supported by a black-painted semi-oval wooden base 13" by 10 1/2" by 1 1/8". (Has anyone seen taxidermal base boards of this description?) The base carries no textual clue as to origin but Mr. Mickel suspects that the specimens were "market birds" found on the tables of a commercial wildbird merchant and prepared by a NYC taxidermist. The bell jar originally covering the preparation was broken a few years ago and has been replaced with a vitrine.

The identity of the two specimens is well determined. Dr. Edward M. Reilly of the New York State Museum offered the first identification

many years ago and this has been affirmed by other specialists. Using a good range of authoritative works we are convinced as well. Diagnostic traits: bill down curved, dark for the distal third, and amber-yellow for the proximal two-thirds; size about that of a small pigeon, i.e. about two-thirds the size of the related Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus*; primaries brown to light brown throughout but tips of inner primaries narrowly edged with buffy white; wings extending beyond the tail c. 10 mm; chevron-shaped and "Y"-shaped dark brown spots on the lower breast and flanks (thus setting it apart from the Eurasian Curlew, *N. arquata*); crown of head with weakly developed, centrally placed stripe; mantle and upper wing coverts dark brown but with wide margin of dull, buffy

continued

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white — this margin severely eroded in our two birds — often to the darker (melanin) pigment. Overall, the plumage of both specimens is in good condition, though somewhat faded; however, each bird has one damaged leg.

Several Measurements (mm)

Specimen	Lower Upper	
	Bird	Bird
Length	295	302
Height	205	233
Exposed Wing (bill-tail)	54.6	56.5
Culmen Chord	206	209

The Eskimo Curlew was another of the glories of avian migration. Members of the species overwintered in South America as far south as the pampas of Argentina and then moved north over Central America and the grasslands west of the Mississippi River to northern Canada to nest on the coastal plains of the Arctic Ocean. The southward migration passed

through northeastern U.S. and eastern Canada. Our birds were thus most likely collected during this phase of their 19,000-mile-long annual, round trip. This also explains the worn condition of their plumage because, strangely, the molting occurs on the overwintering grounds and the wear of their northern adventures is evident.

As the glorious flocks gathered in Nova Scotia for their taxing transatlantic flight they were heavily laden with fat - earning them the name of "Dough Birds", one of some forty common names once used for the species. Berries, grasshoppers and crickets, insect eggs, cutworms, grubs, snails and other small invertebrates served to build this energy store.

The demise of the Eskimo Curlew is another of the sad natural history stories of the western world: from an abundance once approaching that of the Passenger Pigeon it is extinct - or nearly so. Several reasons are given for this dreadful decline: the loss to cultivation and overgrazing of essential grassland feeding areas of Argentina, Venezuela and central North America; extreme tameness and flock cohesiveness leading to excessive hunter harvest during both the spring and fall migrations; exceptional market demand (the Eskimo Curlew was claimed as one of the most — delicious of game birds.); and natural mortalities due to storms during the southward flight from Nova Scotia across the North Atlantic to northeastern South America — a non-stop passage exceeding 2,500 miles for the more easterly lane of their flyway.



Hope springs eternal in the human breast and reports of Eskimo Curlew sightings appear almost annually, however David Sarkosi and Greg Lasley in a report on the Birds of the Upper Texas Coast (<http://texasbirding.simplenet.com/birdseskimo.htm>; 8/25/99) shed much cold water on the prognosis. "The accepted Eskimo Curlew records in Texas are all in the 19th century except for 1-2 birds that were on Galveston Island between 24 March - 15 April, 1962. That is the ONLY accepted 20th century record in Texas." Photographs by Donald Bleitz provide impeccable evidence for this record. Lesley even challenges the published report of Blankinship and King (1984) claiming that the description was insufficient. More inland, the news is also bad: "The last recorded shooting of an Eskimo Curlew in North America occurred in Nebraska on April 15, 1915. Only a single bird was shot.", (Barry Kent MacKay, 1996).

The word from the Nova Scotia Museum of





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Natural History (Nova Scotia is the jumping-off place for the southward migration.) is even darker (<http://museum.ednet.ns.ca/mnh/nature/nsbirds/bnsO135.htm>): The "Latest definite record of occurrence in Nova Scotia is a fragmentary specimen from Sable Island marked "? fall of 1902". Another bird was on sale in Halifax Public market on 11 September 1897."

Our only hope may rest on the sighting of a single bird on March 24, 1987, in northwestern Canada, by Tom Barry of the Canadian Wildlife Service and his Inuit guide and assistant, Billy Jacobson. The location is kept vague, of course, to protect the region from an implosion of birders!

It is profoundly depressing to view the lifeless remnants of an extinct species. Its voice, its nimble, abundant spirit is gone and all that is left are the skins and the stark, white pages with their accounts of its existence. Perhaps the mounts will prompt us to care more fully about the lives of others species still remaining and the great potential for their loss. Let us not be so ignorant, so heedless, so unaware of the consequences of our actions.

Mr. and Mrs. Keith Mickel's greatly appreciated contribution will be displayed in the Biology Department of Union College. Please contact Carl George (388-6330, georgec@union.edu) if you need further information or guidance on the new birds in town.

References

Blankenship, D. R., and K. A. King. 1984. A probable sighting of 23 Eskimo Curlews in Texas. *American Birds*. 38:1066-1067

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Gollop, J. B., T. W. Barry, and E. H. Everson. 1986. *Eskimo Curlew, a Vanishing Species*. Sakatchewan Natural History Society.

Hahn, Paul. 1963. *Where is that Vanished Bird?* Royal Ontario Museum. University of Toronto Press.

MacKay, Barry Kent. 1996. The Eskimo Curlew. *Bird Watcher's Digest* 18(4):22-33

Reading is for the Birds (or About Them!)

Our literary/dessert event "An Evening of Treats for Body and Soul," has been scheduled for April 3, 2000 at Five Rivers, at 7:30 PM. Quite a few Club members will be sharing their favorite nature-related reading, in poetry or prose. We will also be sharing our favorite desserts, in what promises to be a fun-filled evening!

Please contact Denise Hilton, at 785-6760, if you would like to read. The material does not have to be original, and please feel free to attend whether you read or not! Please bring a treat to share!



Fill-In Puzzle by Cathy Graichen

Use the clues to identify birds or part of bird names. The clues are grouped by number of letters required for each word. Use the words to fill-in the puzzle. Answers will appear in next issue of *Feathers*.

3 Letters

Florida specialty
Gull

4 Letters

Secretive marsh bird
Voice like a _____
Color or duck
Family Troglodytidae

5 Letters

Fairly common woodpecker
Uncommon short-billed
marsh one
Sandpiper or flycatcher

6 Letters

Dives in streams
Large migrant
Butcher
Northern or Tropical one
Sought-after raptors
Cap, crown, back or side

7 Letters

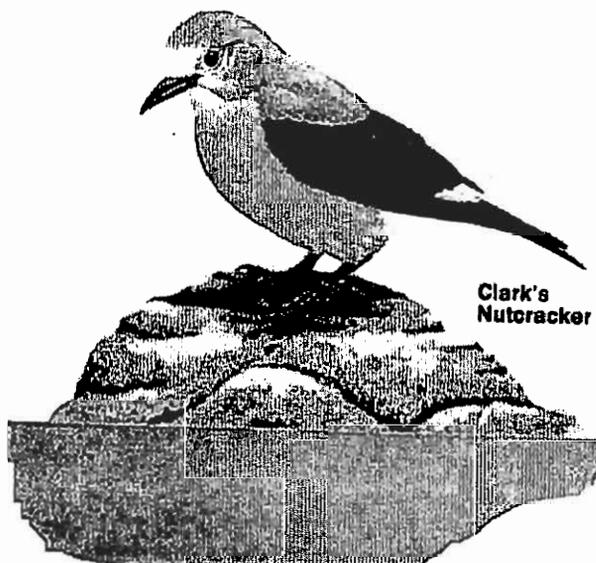
Hoverer and tail-pumper
Colorful local breeder
Insect-eating aerialist

8 Letters

Heavy-billed sparrow relative
Sought-after winter visitor
Impressive carpenter

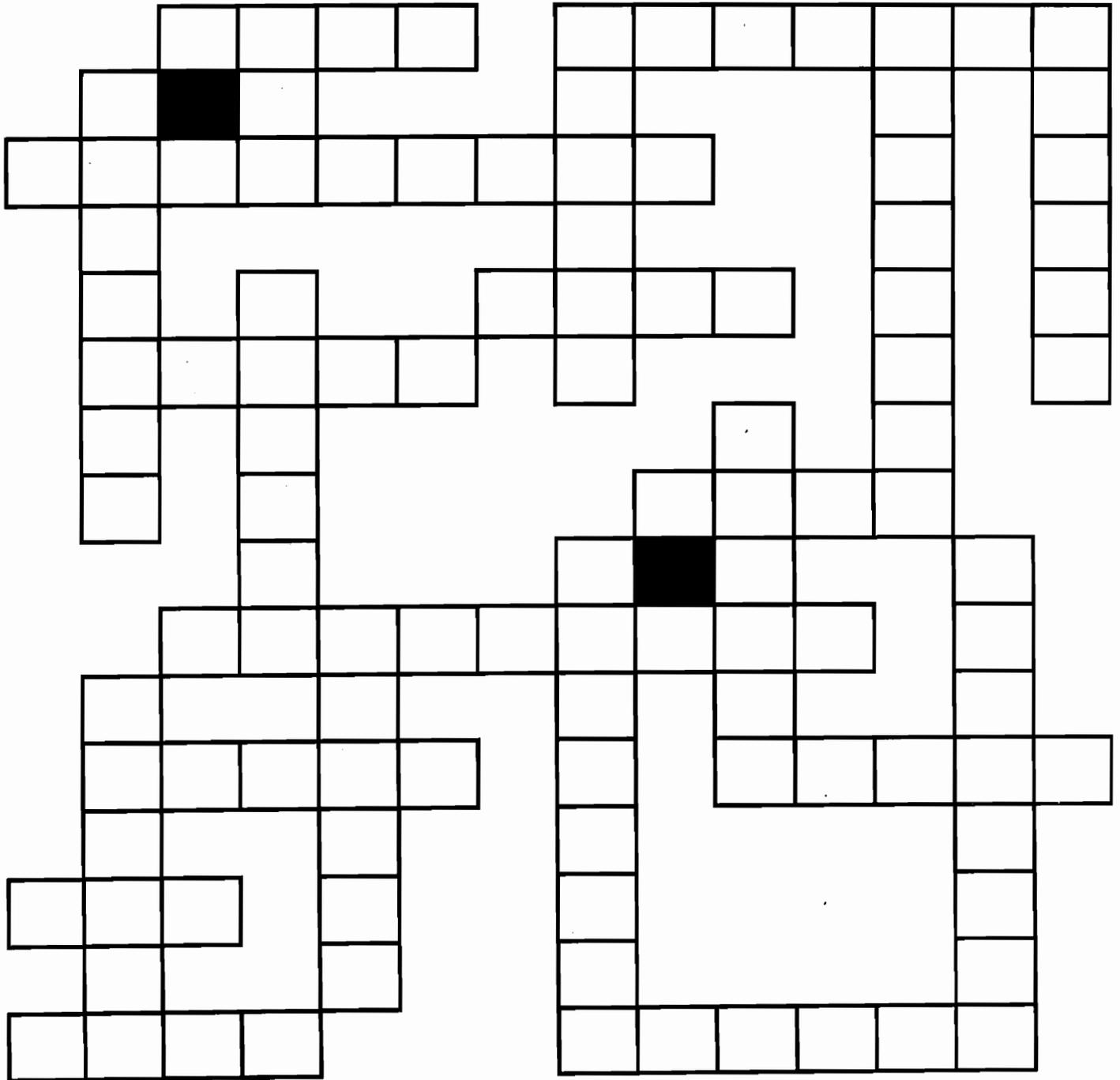
9 Letters

Thrush or hawk
Southern-named warbler





Feathers





UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Please Note:

- **Program meetings in November & December will be held at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center and will begin at 7:30 PM.**
- **Program meetings in January, February & March will be held at the Colonie Town Library and will begin at 7:00 PM (Note earlier start time!)**

Monday Nov 1, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Gregg Recer on **Birding the National Parks of the Cascades and Olympics**. This program will be a slide presentation of Gregg Recer and Cathy Graichen's travels from Lassen Volcanic National Park to Olympic National Park, and should be highlighted by western breeding birds and other wildlife, volcanic geology and fantastic mountain and coastal scenery. (**Eds. Note:** The previously scheduled program by Dale & Lillian Samuelson on Argentina had to be cancelled, but will be given as part of the Capital District Audubon program schedule; see below)

Monday Dec 6, 7:30 PM, Five Rivers, Ken Able on **Circling South Africa: Birds and Mammals**.

Monday, Jan 3, 2000 - **7:00 p.m. at Colonie Town Library**, Bill Gorman on **Seabirds**. Bill will show movies of some of the elusive seabirds of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. You will see birds, such as: albatross, shearwaters, petrels, fulmars, storm-petrels, boobies, tropicbirds, jaegers, frigatebirds, noddies and terns, including the alluring Fairy Tern. His movies include birds in flight, as they might be seen on a pelagic trip, birds at close range and birds engaged in nesting. Please join Bill as he presents a unique look into the fascinating world of seabirds.

Monday, Feb 7, 2000 - **7:00 p.m. at Colonie Town Library**, Graham Cox of National Audubon on **Belize**.

Monday, Mar 6, 2000 - **7:00 p.m. at Colonie Town Library**, Sue Adair on **Alaska**.

Audubon Soc. of the Cap. Region Programs

All programs are Thurs. nights, **7:00PM**, Colonie Town Library

Thu, Nov. 11. Dale and Lillian Samuelson on **ARGENTINA FROM TOP TO BOTTOM**. These Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club members will cover Argentina from its northernmost extremes high in the Andes to Ushuaia at the southernmost tip, 2500 miles south. Come and enjoy the birds, plants and scenery of this fascinating and varied land.

Thu, Dec. 9. Erin Donnelly on **THE ALBANY PINE BUSH: A LOCAL AND NATIONAL TREASURE**. Located within the Capital District Region of New York State, the Albany Pine Bush represents one of the best remaining examples of an inland pine barrens ecosystem left in the world. This rolling sand plain is home to an unusual and unique variety of rare plants and animals including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly. Join Erin Donnelly, Director of Education and Outreach with the Albany Pine Bush Preserve Commission for an evening program on the Albany Pine Bush and how this fascinating landscape manages to survive amid the congested tangle of roads, highways and building complexes.



PROGRAM REPORTS

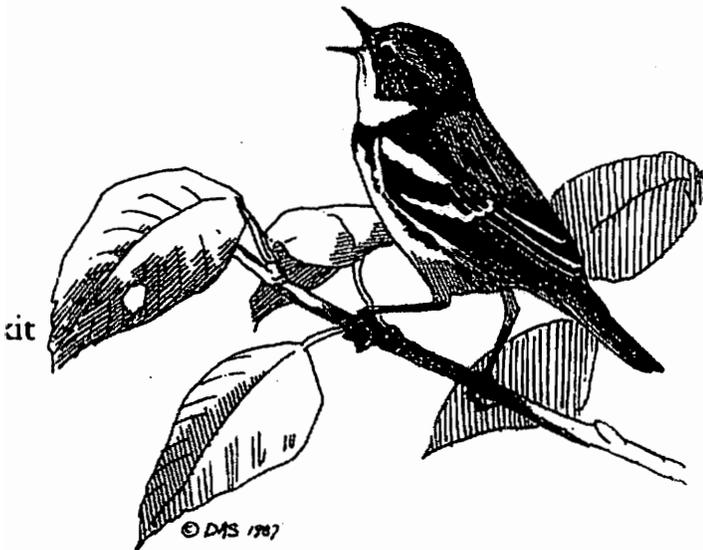
by
Denise Hilton, Scott Stoner & Gregg Recer

Lake Ontario Cormorants

HMBC's final program for the 1998 - 1999 season was presented on June 7 by DEC wildlife biologist, Bob Miller. Bob's subject was: "Double-crested Cormorant in New York State — Pariah or Scapegoat?" The talk focused on the State's involvement in a controversial program aimed at controlling Cormorant populations on Lake Ontario.

The population of these birds has risen dramatically since the 1980's, due to many factors including the ban of DDT and other harmful pesticides, little or no persecution by humans, and an abundance of forage fish such as alewives and rainbow smelt, due to over fishing of lake trout and other predators. On the small, 35 acre island on Lake Ontario called Little Galloo, there are 8,500 active nests, with a total of 10-15 thousand pairs all told. This represents a sharp increase in recent years, and is now possibly the largest colony in North America, and surely in the U.S.

As each adult Cormorant consumes about a pound of fish per day, and spends about 100 days feeding young, the large population is seen by many in the fishing industry as a threat, especially to stocked fish. It is estimated that Cormorants consume about .5% of the forage species, and this may indeed affect the success of predatory fish. They have also been known to take a small number of small-mouth bass. The extreme response by some to this perceived threat was tragically evidenced by last season's extermination of up to 2,000 Cormorants on Little Galloo, mostly unfledged young.



DEC has become involved in this situation after considering studies which show that even the small impact on small-mouth bass may adversely influence the success of fishing towns and their tourism. DEC asked permission from the US Department of Fish and Wildlife to be-

gin a population control program which would consist of oiling all ground nest Cormorant eggs, leaving only the small number of tree nest eggs to survive, and shooting 300 adult birds. Fish and Wildlife granted permission only for the oiling, and only for this year. The eggs were oiled in May, and DEC plans to seek permission to repeat the process for 5 more years, in order to reduce the Cormorant population and measure this effect on the population of small mouthed bass.

The plan is quite controversial, partly because it is not even known for certain that the reduction of the Cormorant population will rescue the bass. Other influences, such as the introduction of zebra mussels, or the clean up of the Lake, or the increase in stocked fish, may play a part in the decline of the small-mouth bass.



Birding Nepal

Fifty people turned out at Five Rivers on September 8 to enjoy an engrossing program offered by Club treasurer, Dan Welch. Dan presented beautiful slides and fascinating insight into the distant and exotic Kingdom of Nepal. Dan has visited and worked often in Nepal, and his knowledge of its natural history and culture added an intimate feeling to this entertaining program.

Divided into three distinct geographic areas, Nepal offers a wide variety of habitat, from the tropical weather of the Southeast Asian jungle, to the hot and more arid climate near India, to the high elevations in the Himalayas, offering an Alpine habitat. This geographic diversity helps make Nepal the "Birding Paradise" that Dan described so well.

In the beautiful Katmandu Valley, there are many opportunities to bird on the many mountain trails outside of the city. Many of these now public areas were formerly held by royalty, as refuges of the king. They are now held publicly as national parks, and offer visitors and inhabitants alike a chance to hike and view wildlife, including many birds. A difficult one day bus ride from Katmandu will deliver the visitor to Pokura, a lush park set along a river that offers great rafting, as well as bird watching. The Royal Chitwan National Park, in the rolling hills of Southern Nepal, offers transportation in the form of elephant to the intrepid guest.

Some of the many outstanding birds of Nepal include: Purple Sun bird, Egyptian Vulture, Indian Roller, Bee Eaters, Blue throat, Buibul, Rose-ringed Parakeet, and Blossom-headed Parakeet.

The glimpses into the culture of Nepal, with its beautiful temples, prayer flags and sculptures, was a fascinating treat. We thank Dan for getting our program year off to such a fine start!

Owls

In a joint event with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region, the HMBC's second part of its double-header kick-off for the 1999 - 2000 program season featured noted author and owl expert Julio de la Torre. Attendance at this meeting at the Colonie library was at least 100, and people were treated to a fine show.

Julio's knowledge of owls, from calls to recent developments in ecology, is unsurpassed, as is his ability to relate the biology, behavior and sheer fun of owling to novice and expert birder alike. Overcoming poor health, Julio combined Art Wolfe's superb slides and his own vocal ability to give a program all who attended will always treasure.

Owls are described as cats with wings- "flying felines," and the Barn Owl as the greatest flying mouse-trap in the world! Owls can distinguish the type of prey by simply hearing their footsteps in the forest. But they have other tools besides hearing. Close off the Astrodome, put a mouse at one end, a Barn Owl at the other and a single candle in the middle, and the owl can see the mouse!

With their light coloring, silent flight, blood-chilling cries, and a clicking that sounds like the dragging of chains, barn owls are undoubtedly the source of many a ghost story! To compound this, they sometimes pick up luminescent material!



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The Flammulated Owl is the lightest weight owl in the U.S., although slightly longer than the Elf Owl. A Flammulated, the common small owl of dry pine in the Rockies, can catch a sphinx moth in mid air. The Whiskered Screech Owl of the mountains of southeast Arizona has tiny feet and long filamentous hairs that stick out beyond its facial disk-, it eats mostly arthropods.

Julio played a tape of a dueting pair of Great Horned Owls, the male deeper lower pitched. The female makes an "aah" call, a modified food-begging call that is a pre-copulatory indication. Great Horned Owls are not only in the forest, but in the suburbs and even the cities as well. In fact, they have been moving out of the forests allowing barred owl (which are eaten by great horned) to expand. Barred Owls have moved, where their population has bumped up against that of Spotted Owl. First, Barreds killed the Spotted, but now they are hybridizing! Interestingly, the hybrid offspring are even fertile, lending credence to the notion that they are really conspecific. We may be losing the Spotted Owl to genetic swamping by the Barred, just as is happening to Golden-winged Warbler by Blue-winged and the Black Duck to the Mallard.

The Snowy Owl nests in the Alaskan tundra. It builds up a layer of feces with plants (that grow nowhere else) growing in it, up to 40 feet high. Lemmings actually dig burrows in this mound, providing the owls with a ready source of food,

Scientists look at something called the cephalic index, the amount of brain per body weight as an indication of intelligence. This is as high in the Snowy Owl as in the raven, well known as a bright bird, Snowy Owls eat Snow Buntings and Horned Larks in flight.

The arctic is a relatively young ecosystem. The Hawk Owl evolved relatively recently, from the boreal owl.

The Pygmy Owl Julio described as a "flying dynamite stick." All owls have ear tufts and can raise them if needed, although some rarely show them. The Ferruginous Pygmy Owl has 14 unfused vertebrae; we have 7; this allows it to turn its head nearly 360 degrees. Elf Owls live in saguaro cactus of the southwest desert and catch flying insects. Burrowing Owls lives in abandoned prairie dog burrows. This is one of the oldest owls from an evolutionary standpoint, and eats arthropods of the desert. Great Gray Owls nest in stumps of large trees, largest owl but lighter than great horned. Julio described it as a "flying parka."!



Near the end, Julio spoke sadly of the loss of our grasslands, with their avifauna including sparrows, Meadowlark and Bobolinks. I think of a time when I met Julio looking for Short-eared Owls up at the Fort Edward grasslands, now both an Important Bird Area and critically threatened by development, and hope that we can do something to protect this habitat that this wonderfully skilled and learned man cares so deeply about.



Tropical Islands

David Martin gave a very interesting talk on October 4, describing birding and other natural history features of three "tiny" tropical islands — Grand Cayman, Guam and Palau. Some themes are common to all of these islands: small land area and remoteness from mainland areas makes for relatively low species diversity and a relatively high proportion of endemics. Another common theme was the exaggerated threat that development and introduced species can pose for bird species on small islands where habitat areas are very limited to begin with and where bird species may be unadapted to the presence of any terrestrial predators.

Grand Cayman was a surprise. The west end of the island is what I expected of this tourist destination and off-shore banking mecca: high-density resort hotels and high-rent vacation homes stretched out along Seven-mile Beach. However, much of the central and eastern island is only moderately developed or undeveloped and includes extensive areas of Mangrove swamp along with a couple of wildlife sanctuaries. Vegetation varies from typical palms and tropical hardwoods with numerous epiphytes and orchids to sparse scrub habitat to cactus. A guided walk on the Mastic trail through some of the relatively undisturbed central forest can produce a good variety of Caribbean specialties including Cuban Bullfinch, LaSagra Flycatcher, Caribbean Dove, Thick-billed Vireo, and even birding around the western end of the island can turn up goodies such as Stripe-headed Tanager, West Indian Grackle, West Indian Woodpecker, Yucatan Vireo, Caribbean Elena, Loggerhead Kingbird and Rock Dove (a hot bird in the Caymans!).

The story of the two islands in the western Pacific were a contrast — Guam's native avian fauna is largely extirpated, due in large part to the unintentional introduction of the Brown Tree Snake after World War II; while the habitats and avifauna of Palau are largely intact due to a fairly small population, relatively little development pressure, and probably a certain amount of luck. David and his wife only spent one day on Guam and tallied a grand total of 9 bird species. The two rarest, but still extant, species — The Guam Rail and the Micronesian Kingfisher — are now only present in captivity with some attempts at re-introduction on nearby non-snake-invaded islands. Palau was another story. Really an archipelago of numerous tiny, and even tinier, islands that are the uplifted tips of huge submerged mountains. A larger variety of native species were found here including White-tailed Tropicbirds, Swiftlets, Rufous Night-heron, Banded Rail, Rufous-necked Stints, Siberian and Wandering Tattlers, Collared Kingfisher, Nicobar Pigeon and several tern species. The underwater tropical wildlife was equally fascinating and even more varied. David ended the talk with amazing pictures from one of the Palaun saline lakes. The lakes are cut-off chunks of ocean isolated as small atolls are uplifted forming a sheer wall surrounding the salt-water lake. Physically, they are very interesting, with less-salty, lower-density water in the upper reaches and warmer, but saltier and hence denser, anaerobic water rich in hydrogen sulfide in the lower part of the lake. An extensive layer of purple photosynthetic bacteria is found at the boundary between the two parcels of water (fascinating if you're a microbiologist!). Even more amazing, the lakes are populated with incredible densities of jellyfish, as well as other invertebrates and marine fish.

David's talk was very well received and I'm sure many folks left thinking about when they would be jetting off to do some birding on a tiny tropical island themselves.



Field Trip Reports

Vischer Ferry NHP

A small group of HMBC members enjoyed a late walk at Vischer Ferry over Labor Day Weekend, in a nice end-of-summer outing.

As widely reported, the ponds along the main entrance route were bone dry and overgrown with vegetation. We proceeded to the east and walked along the route at the next entrance where there was plenty of water. No wading birds were sighted here, although participants did enjoy looks at **WHITE-BREADED NUTHATCH**, **CEDAR WAXWING**, **RED-EYED VIREO**, **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT**, **FLICKER** AND **PILEATED WOODPECKER**.

Along the main route we observed Purple Finch and Redstart.

Walking west from the Ferry Drive parking lot we picked up at least 1000 gulls (mostly **RING-BILLED**) flying west along the River, along with **BELTED KINGFISHER**, 3 **GREAT EGRETS** and 5 **GREAT BLUE HERONS**. As darkness was about to overtake us we spotted, appropriately enough, 2 **COMMON NIGHTHAWKS** fly above us.

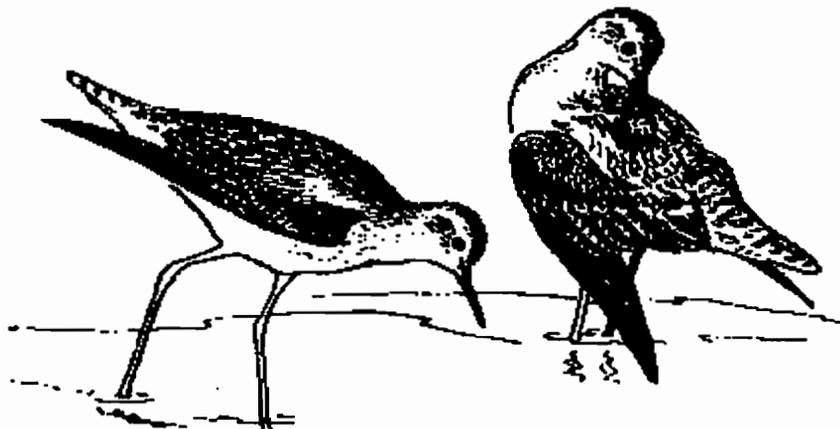
— *Denise Hilton & Scott Stoner*

Pinnacle '99 Hawkwatch

For me, the fall hawk watch, as greatly as I anticipate it and pleasurable though it be, is no more important than the people connections that are such a vital part of the trip. Thus it was that I was delighted to welcome and meet eight brand new hawk-watchers at 8:30 AM at the meeting point on Sept. 12, 1999. All were ready and eager to look for raptors.

When our caravan emerged upon the Pinnacle at 9 o'clock, I was considerably surprised to see no one else. Normally, a few intrepid and experience hawk-watchers precede me and my crew. Was the lure of the Cape May trip that weekend too strong? Anyhow, I was happy to note fairly soon the arrival of Bob Budliger and Paul Connor (especially since no hawks were arriving!). Ultimately, of course, a lone bird did appear — a **BROAD-WING** — but of all the unexpected appearances, it came in low from the south and shot over our heads out towards the valley in front.

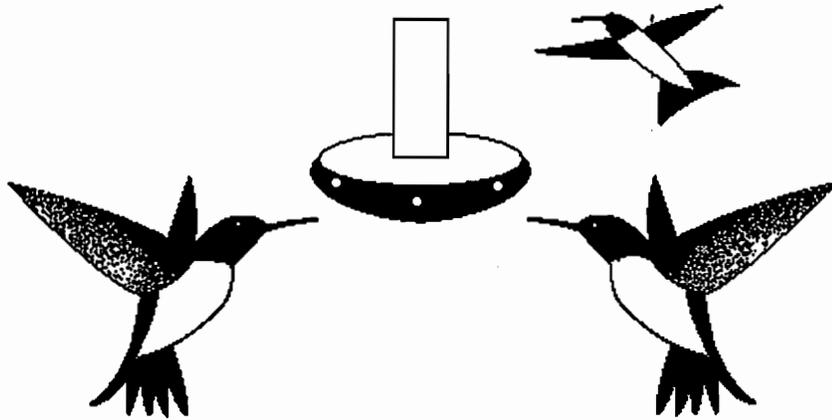
Well, you guess, things heated up after that. No they didn't. We observed only 77 birds for the day, but at least we felt some satisfaction in tallying 10 different species, including **BALD EAGLE** AND **MERLIN**. After the successes of '97





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and '98, I cringe to report a mere 33 **BROADWINGS**, with the biggest kettle consisting of 7 birds. Naturally there was a mild degree of disappointment, but on the whole the 26 observers had a good time and were glad to be out enjoying the day at this beautiful spot.

The former acuity of these old eyes has diminished appreciably in recent years, causing me to rely heavily on the keen sight of the younger people. I therefore close this brief account by offering heartfelt thanks to Will Aubrey, Bob Budliger and Larry Federman.

— *Arthur Long*

Vischer Ferry , NHP

Participants: Donna Zimmerman, Kay & George Hanson, Bill Gorman, Melanie McCormack & Jeff Rose, Alan Via, Tina Markopoulos, Jack Alexander, Bryce Recer, Catchy Graichen & Gregg Recer, Joan Cipriani, Joe Carey, Frank Murphy

Vischer Ferry had once again returned to wetland status following the heavy rain from Hurricane Floyd three days before. The shorebird/heron/egret ponds out back that were bone dry a week ago were now filled but no birds were using them yet. The group walked clockwise around the three-mile long west loop, aka the jungle loop. Highlights of the walk included a close up view of a **MARSH WREN** along the trail just across the whipple bridge - the same spot where it was seen last year this time; a few **RUSTY BLACKBIRDS** just arrived from the north; great looks at **PILEATED AND RED-BELLIED WOODPECKERS**; and a small assortment of warblers including **CHESTNUT-SIDED, MAGNOLIA, AND BLACKPOLL**.

— *Frank Murphy*



Federation of NYS Bird Clubs

53rd Annual Meeting

Presenting keynote speaker

Julie Zickefoose

award winning artist, author and lecturer. A Contributing Editor for Bird Watcher's Digest and a writer and illustrator for other publications, Julie will capture your imagination with her observations of the natural world as seen through the eyes of an artist.

The meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn, Route 414, Waterloo, NY, just minutes from Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. With shorebird migration at its peak, this will be a meeting you won't want to miss! Over 170 species can be seen in and around the Refuge at this time.

September 8-10, 2000

Hosted by the Eaton Birding Society, Geneva, New York

For additional information, contact Charles A. Rouse, PO Box 928, Geneva, NY 14456; phone: 315.789.5194; e-mail: carouse@lynnet.com.

For paper presentations, contact John VanNiel, 1697 Gravel Rd., Seneca Falls, NY 13148; phone: 315.568.4690; e-mail: vanniejj@snyficc.fingerlakes.edu.





HMBC BOARD FOR 1999 - 2000

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Jr. Activities:	Elle Diemann	766-7045



BIRDLINE of E. NEW YORK: (518) 439-8080

Reminder!!

All HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Board meetings take place the second Monday of every odd-numbered month. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center or other local venues at 7:00 PM. The November, 1999 meeting will be held at Treasurer Dan Welch's place of business, The Sweater Venture, on Rt. 9 in Latham.

Send articles, clip-art,
photos, artwork to:

Feathers
c/o Cathy Graichen
23 Scotch Mist Way
Ballston Spa, NY 12020

or via e-mail to:

recerg@crisny.org

HMBC Contact Information

BIRDLINE of E. NEW YORK: (518) 439-8080

Email:

hmhc@hotmail.com

HMBC website:

<http://members.xoom.com/hmhc/>



PRESIDENT'S CORNER:

It's the first week of October. It frosted last night, and is predicted to frost again tonight. and Juncos were swarming around our feeder this morning — suddenly it's winter! As I write this we are planning to visit family and attend a big cook-out in the White Mountains in central New Hampshire over Columbus-day weekend. I'm looking forward to a little more pleasant fall weather for the weekend, before the real winter weather comes.

However, after that, if it's going to be cold we may as well have some exciting winter birding. It's too early to guess what sort of winter birding this year might bring, but it seems like the last couple of years have been somewhat lack-luster in the area over the winter, so I'm

hoping for a little more excitement this year — a big winter-finch incursion (it's been quite a few winters since we've had a big crowd of siskins at our feeders all winter) or maybe a few snowy owls or hawkowls settling in at Fort Edward for the winter. While I'm musing, I'd really like a Gyrfalcon to spend the winter in the area! Alright, I guess I shouldn't go too overboard, but winter birding in this area is interesting mainly because, beyond the two-dozen or so widespread wintering species, it's so unpredictable, so I'll cross my fingers and hope for some hot winter birds!

Gregg Recer

FEATHERS
Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club
c/o Five Rivers EEC
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December
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AMERICA'S PLAINS - Birds, Badlands AND Bison

by
Scott Stoner

In late June, Denise and I undertook a 17-day, 5,100-mile driving trip, exploring the human and natural history of America's plains, from Indiana to Wyoming. Below is an account of some selected aspects of our journey.

Renting a car to avoid wear and tear on our 13-year old model, and to reduce the risk of breaking down 80 miles outside of Laramie, WY, we set forth with the goal of seeing something every day, even the days of mostly driving, and of seeing some places well.

Our first significant break from 1-90 was Presque Isle State Park, a peninsula into Lake Erie, near Erie, PA. Quite scenic, it has a lighthouse and large areas of milkweed. Although birds were few, it holds promise for fall migration. The next day we visited Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, along Lake Michigan. With a combination of nature trails and sandy bathing beaches, this is somewhat similar to coastal areas along the Atlantic

seaboard. It includes bird-filled marshes, high dunes, dunal ponds, woods and even a bog! We hiked the "dune succession loop trail" which took us through both both coniferous (including Jack pine) and deciduous forest. We did see Eastern Towhee, Eastern Kingbird, Field Sparrow and Indigo Bunting. There are many separate visitor points in this National Park Service area, including a bog only accessible by guided tour. Our two-hour visit barely scratched the surface; this place is worth a full day ... or several.

Continuing west then on 1-80, we crossed the mighty Mississippi River, quite wide and slow near the Quad Cities of Davenport (IA), Bettendorf (IA), Moline (IL) and Rock Island (IL). We

continued ...

Error in Last Month's Puzzle

An inadvertent error occurred in the clues of last month's puzzle. The clue "Tail pumper and hoverer" was listed as a 7 letter word. The actual word in the puzzle has only 6 letters.

For those of you who are stumped, hopefully this helps! The complete solution appears on page 100 of this issue.

I apologize for the error!

- Cathy Graichen

In This Issue...

Carter Pond Update

Records for the Millennium

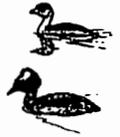
Archives Project

New Crossword Puzzle

Campership Announcement

Upcoming Programs and Field Trips

Program and Field Trip Reports



experienced our one and only rain storm of the trip in Eastern Iowa. After a night in the Des Moines area, we continued west on 1-80, crossing the Missouri River on the other side of Iowa, into Omaha, NE. The Missouri was narrower and much swifter-flowing than the Mississippi. After a visit to Boys Town; NE, we continued west to stay in North Platte, NE.

The next morning we finely got off the interstate onto US 30, the old Lincoln Highway. Partway between North Platte and Ogallala, the scenery began to change. Up until now it had been quite flat with crops such as lush green corn (much of which would later fall prey to the drought), but suddenly we began seeing grass-covered hills. Soon we were in quite hilly country with exposed rocks. We had arrived in "The West."

Angling northwest towards Scotts Bluff, NE, we began following along the old Oregon Trail. Beginning at Mile 0 in Independence, MO and ending at Oregon City, OR at mile 1930, from 1841 through 1869 at least 350,000 people began their journey west along this route. faced with hardships such as violent winds, floods, disease, steep hills, quicksand, Indian attacks and even buffalo stampedes (before people nearly drove them to extinction), many turned back and many died.

Ash Hollow State Historical Park, NE , mile 504 on the trail provided our first look at trail ruts in a steep hillside, along with both Lark Sparrow and Spotted Towhee.

Getting away from the interstate brought us through many small towns in Nebraska, which we found fascinating. Common features often included a short, 1-2 block main street, a fire house, gas station, church, bar, railroad tracks and grain elevator. Larger ones might also have a farm equipment dealer. Sometimes



the main street would be so wide that it had a parking lot in the center. Colorful murals were common on sides of buildings. In one, we noted the Longhorn Bar and the Rodeo Bar, next to each other, both beautifully adorned. Between these small towns would be ranch land for 10-20 miles, until the next little town.

As we continued west alongside the Oregon Trail , we got better and better views of Chimney rock, a single narrow spire that served as a milestone to weary travelers. Near its base, we found both Eastern and Western Kingbirds, Lark Sparrow, Lazuli Bunting and Ring-necked Pheasant. Just 35 miles beyond Chimney Rock is Scotts Bluff, which at mile 596 represented completion of about a third of the Oregon Trail and for us, our first major destination.

Scotts Bluff is the name of the geological feature; it is contained within Scotts Bluff Na-



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tional Monument - the city of Scottsbluff, NE (yes, one word!) lies across the North Platte River from the City of Gering, which is the address for the monument.

Our three days at Scotts Bluff there got off to an interesting start when I had a (very) close encounter with a Prairie Rattlesnake on a paved trail near the visitor center! Soon, a ranger captured it with a snake stick and moved it to a more remote location, rattling madly all the way. The top of the bluff is 4,649 ft. in elevation, which is about 800 ft. above the surrounding landscape. One can hike or drive to the top and from there, see Chimney Rock in the distance. The rock formations were spectacularly scenic, and the trail offered a good chance to study arid land vegetation as well. After my close encounter with the rattler (followed by seeing a huge bull snake), we were very careful to look where we were going! Thus, we saw a lot of plants including yucca and prickly poppy, but there were also some few interesting birds. Lazuli Buntings were around the visitor center; we also had Indigo Bunting, Western Meadowlark, Spotted Towhee, Western Kingbird, Rock Wren, White-throated and Chimney Swifts, Violet-green and Cliff Swallows and Black-billed Magpie.

Western Nebraska contained some of the most scenic lands I've ever experienced. This state is NOT just many hundreds of miles of cornfields to speed through on 1-80!

Still paralleling the Oregon Trail, we continued west into Wyoming. At Guernsey is the "Register Cliff" at trail mile 658, where travelers had carved their names into the sandstone. Unfortunately, this site also had many more recent "autographs" as well. Three miles west of this was a highlight for us: an opportunity to stand in 5-foot deep ruts of the Oregon Trail! We stood in awe, barely able to imagine

the kinds of hardships those early settlers had endured.

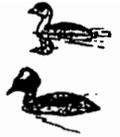
We turned south on 1-25, in the plains of eastern Wyoming, through grassy hills and some rocky outcroppings, with a speed limit of 75 and nothing but the snow fences to block the ever present wind.

Night found us in Cheyenne, Wyoming, the state's capital and largest city at 50,000. Cheyenne is a mix of the new and old west, with modern buildings along with historic looking ones such as an old movie theater with a Humphrey Bogart mural. Tonight we had bison (referred to as Buffalo in Wyoming) for the second time, but had yet to see one except on the dinner table. Nor had we seen any pronghorn, although we had certainly been looking.

We got our pronghorn the next day, the first was along 1-80 heading west from Cheyenne. About an hour out of Cheyenne we entered Albany County, home of Laramie, WY and the University of Wyoming. Even more confusing to us was that Cheyenne, the capital, is in Laramie County!

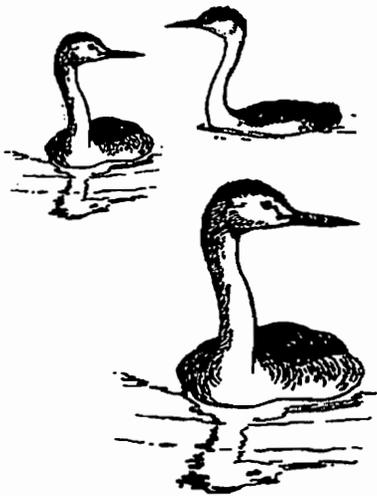
From Laramie, we headed north to somewhere referred to in the ABA/Lane guide as the old Laramie River Road. This was our first good chance to find some of the plains species and it really paid off. First we encountered not one but a whole family of Mountain Plovers along the road. Also present were Swainson's Hawk, Horned Lark, Northern Shoveler, Killdeer, American Avocet, Vesper Sparrow, prairie dog and more pronghorn! A highlight for both of us was the male McCown's Longspur in the road (my one life bird for the trip)!

Continuing north towards Casper, we passed through the small town of Medicine Bow. On



one side of the street was the Virginian Hotel, where the novel *The Virginian* had been written; Medicine Bow was the starting point of the book. Across the street, near a little railroad museum, was a wooden display showing hundreds of different cattle brands. Along the route to Casper we saw (more!) pronghorn, Brewers Blackbird and a lone American White Pelican.

We spent the night in Casper, a modern city of about 46,000, the second largest in Wyoming. (You can see how we wouldn't want to break down on the back roads!) This is petroleum country and from the size of the petroleum club in town, business was going well. As we drove around the city, we surmised that the mansions in the eastern part were where the petroleum executives lived!



The next morning we headed east, beginning the return leg of the trip. In eastern Wyoming we passed the Salt Creek Oil Field and the twin small towns of Midwest and Edgerton. The former apparently housed the oil workers and the latter sold oil field supplies.

We enjoyed a full afternoon at Devils Tower,

viewing the main attraction from every conceivable angle and observing and photographing the many black-tailed prairie dogs. Birding was good here too, with Western Tanager, White-throated Swift, Pine Siskin, Western Wood Pewee and Red-headed Woodpecker.

We then moved on to South Dakota's Black Hills-, where we visited both Jewel Cave and Wind Cave. Jewel Cave featured mostly below-ground activities. First explored in 1900 and named for its jewel-like formations, at well over 100 miles Jewel Cave is one of the world's longest. Our brief, guided tour revealed formations known as flow stone, cave bacon and soda straw stalactites along with the predominant nailhead spar.

Nearby Wind Cave National Park has much to explore both above and below ground. The cave itself was discovered in 1881 and named for the noise of air rushing in and out of its 2 X2 foot natural entrance. The tour showed us a delicate feature known as cave popcorn, the similar "frostwork" and large amounts of the formation know as "boxwork." On the surface, Wind Cave NP offered a fine preserve of mixed grass prairie, with our first bison! The first animal was a single one, a long ways off, then a followed by a herd, then finally two right on the road! The Park has a herd of several hundred of these magnificent beasts, back from the brink of extinction and doing quite well. Birding was good too, including Yellow-breasted Chat (long sought by Denise), Spotted Towhee, Western Wood Pewee, Back-headed Grosbeak, Brewer's Blackbird and Western Meadowlark. Among the many plants in the prairie were grasses, sage, prickly poppy, yucca, prickly pear and barrel cactus, yarrow and thistle. We capped off our two busy days in the Black Hills with a late afternoon stop at Mt. Rushmore. Annoyed at the exorbitant parking fee to see our national



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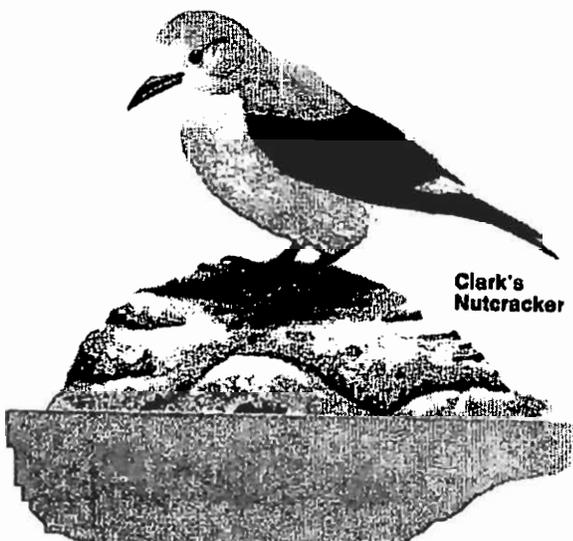
monument, we opted for the limited, free parking down the hill. We enjoyed the new Trail of Presidents; this takes one right under the sculptures; where a family of mountain goats and a vociferous Canyon Wren were unexpected treats!

Continuing east, now on 1-90, we entered Badlands National Park after the obligate (?) stop at Wall Drug! For three days we explored this fascinating land of contrasts. Its buttes, multi-colored layers, fossils, birds and prairie made for plenty to absorb. Like Wind Cave, Badlands preserves a sizable chunk of mixed grass prairie. One can hike anywhere and even climb the buttes, which are eroding due to rainfall at about one inch a year on their own. Climbing is not advised however, as it is the cause of many injuries each year. We visited a prairie dog town, photographed the scenery in different light (early and late day are best) hiked and birded. Of particular interest was the "Big Pig Dig," a site discovered by visitors in 1993 and which is still being actively excavated. Early pigs, rhino, horse, deer and rodents have been unearthed to date from this ancient watering hole that dried up and trapped perhaps 100 animals. An interesting feature as well were the "armored mud balls,"

fist-sized pieces created by plant material washing down silty creek, collecting mud and stones along the way. Birds were not prevalent in the badlands, but did include Western Meadowlark, Lark Sparrow, Black-billed Magpie, Brewer's Blackbird, Rock Wren, Say's Phoebe, Indigo Bunting, Spotted Towhee, Field Sparrow and Cliff Swallow. We stayed in the park itself for three nights, in small but very adequate and inexpensive cabins; food there was good, service was fast and the price was low. We recommend it!

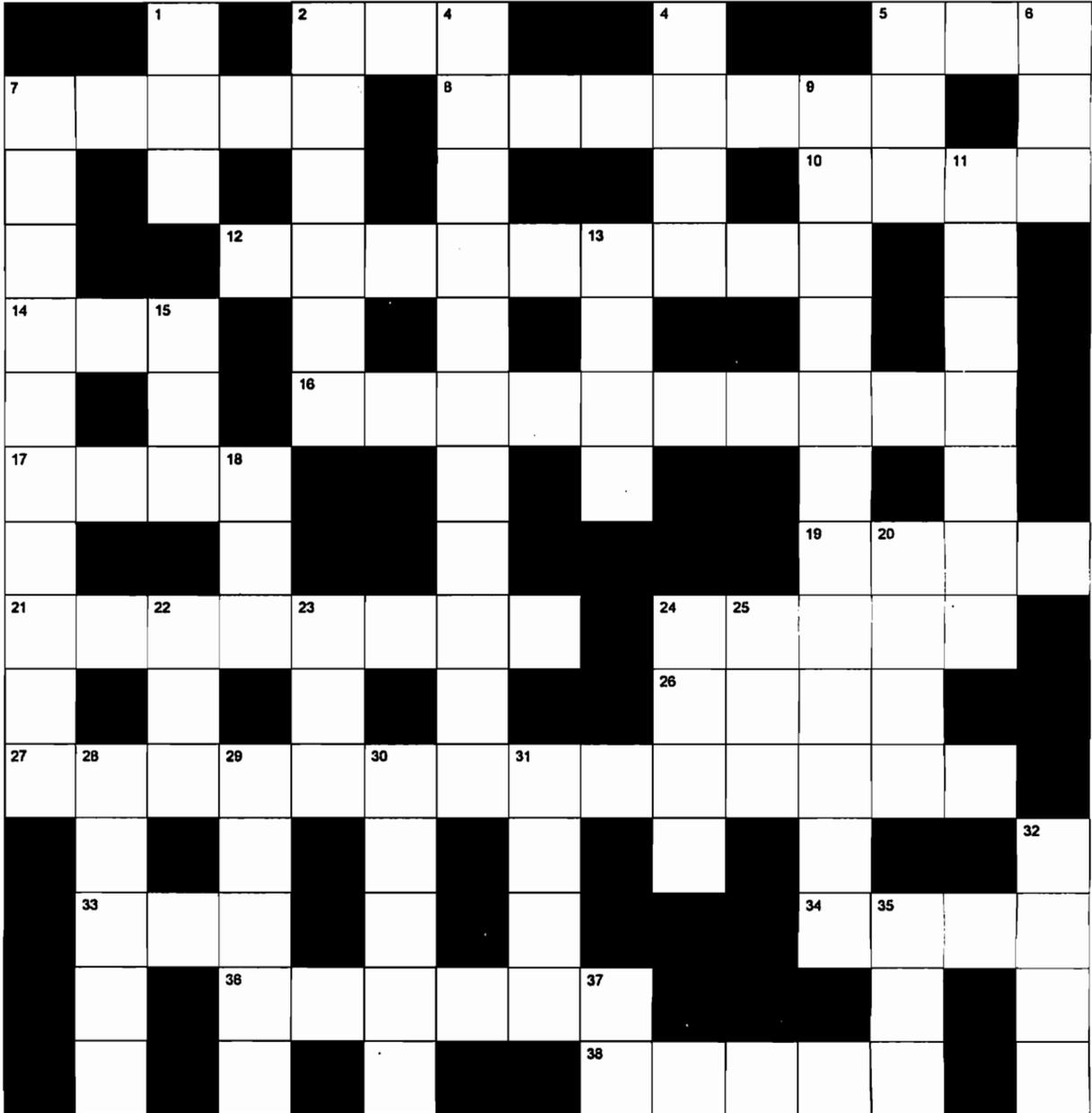
Our last major stop was Valentine, Nebraska, home to Valentine National Wildlife Refuge in the sand hills of Nebraska. This is the large roadless area on the map in north central Nebraska; the sand hills are mostly vegetated and interspersed with ponds and marshes. The sand was blown there from the badlands. We spent an afternoon at the refuge, enjoying Black Tern, Yellow-headed Blackbird (another species long-sought by Denise), Common Nighthawk and a pair of American White Pelicans swimming and apparently feeding, in perfect symmetry!

Exploration of DeSoto NWR along the Missouri river on the way back was limited by extensive high water, but we did see Orchard Oriole and other eastern birds! It actually seemed strange to experience an "eastern" landscape once again! We had only been "Out West" for a short time but the extensive and intensive experience made the west seem both familiar to us and a place we want to return to again and again.





Christmas Bird Count *by Edward M. Sessa*





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Across

- 2 winged mammal (3)
- 5 ____-bird (Baltimore Oriole) (3)
- 7 French swan
- 8 "to take ____" (resent) (7)
- 10 water pitcher (4)
- 12 1 (9)
- 14 race distance (3)
- 16 3 (10)
- 17 tibia or tarsus (4)
- 19 not taped (4)
- 21 guest for Xmas? (8)
- 24 word with princess or amazing (5)
- 26 toy on a string (2-2)
- 27 7 (14)
- 33 not even (3)
- 34 laughing bird (4)
- 36 going out (6)
- 38 woodpecker-oak link (5)

Down

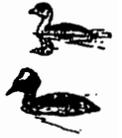
- 1 first birdhouse (3)
- 2 "on ____ of" e.g. agent of (6)
- 3 2 (11)
- 4 waterless (4)
- 5 church bench (3)
- 6 nickname for Jordan (3)
- 7 4(10)
- 9 6 (12)
- 11 evasive (7)
- 13 another type of 3 down (4)
- 15 female 27 across (3)
- 18 women's rights bill (3)
- 20 religious image (4)
- 22 pastureland (3)
- 23 Angela's Ashes sequel (3)
- 24 workout places (4)
- 25 computer term (3)
- 28 cinematic woodpecker
- 29 sooty tern relative (5)
- 30 big blood channel (5)
- 31 word with house or winter (4)
- 32 "alle ____" (dovekie) (4)
- 35 stash for ashes (3)
- 37 state of the Braves (abbr.) (2)

Reading is for the Birds (or About Them!)

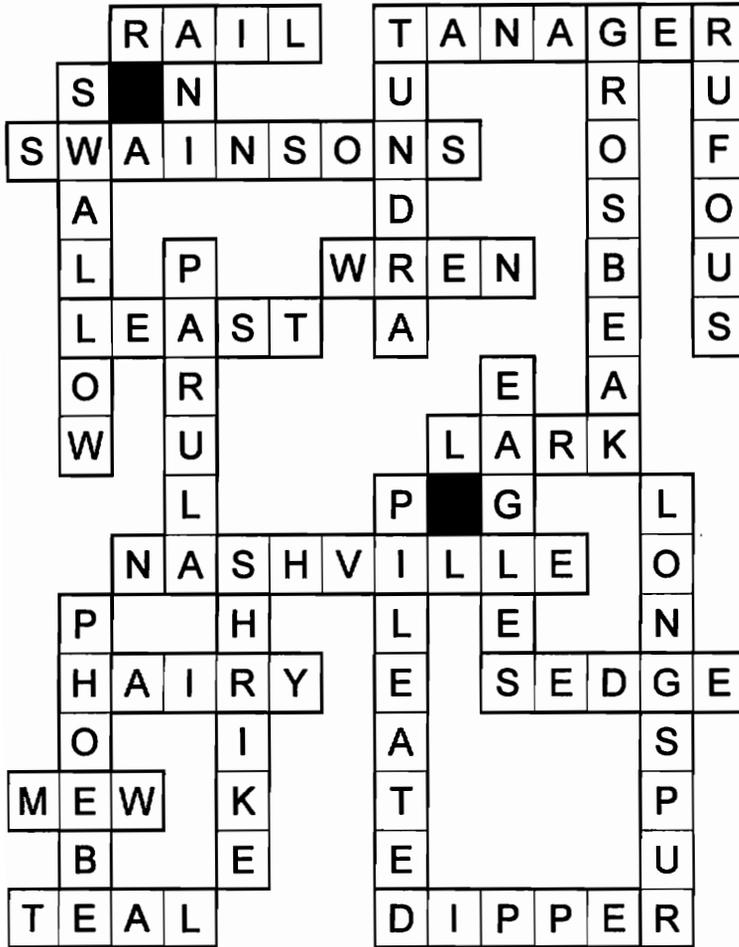
Our literary/dessert event "An Evening of Treats for Body and Soul," has been scheduled for April 3, 2000 at Five Rivers, at 7:30 PM. Quite a few Club members will be sharing their favorite nature-related reading, in poetry or prose. We will also be sharing our favorite desserts, in what promises to be a fun-filled evening!

Please contact Denise Hilton, at 785-6760, if you would like to read. The material does not have to be original, and please feel free to attend whether you read or not! Please bring a treat to share!

Feathers



Fill-In Puzzle by Cathy Graichen



3 Letters

- Florida specialty ANI
- Gull MEW

4 Letters

- Secretive marsh bird RAIL
- Voice like a _____ LARK
- Color or duck TEAL
- Family Troglodytidae WREN

5 Letters

- Fairly common woodpecker HAIRY
- Uncommon short-billed marsh one SEDGE
- Sandpiper or flycatcher LEAST

6 Letters

- Dives in streams DIPPER
- Large migrant TUNDRA
- Butcher SHRIKE
- Northern or Tropical one PARULA
- Sought-after raptors EAGLES
- Cap, crown, back or side RUFIOUS
- Hoverer and tail-pumper PHOEBE

7 Letters

- Colorful local breeder TANAGER
- Insect-eating aerialist SWALLOW

8 Letters

- Heavy-billed sparrow relative GROSBEAK
- Sought-after winter visitor LONGSPUR
- Impressive carpenter PILEATED

9 Letters

- Thrush or hawk SWAINSONS
- Southern-named warbler NASHVILLE



HMBC ARCHIVES PROJECT

by Linda Parr

10/30/99

The board has decided it's time to clean out the cabinets and cupboards. Actually, what we're doing is putting the Club's important documents into an archives. Sunny Gooding and I have begun going through files and contacting present and former board members to centralize our records. So far, all of the records from the Treasurer and in the club's cabinet at 5 Rivers have been sorted. One insight has already come to light. We should put a date on all documents!

We have a virtually complete set of the Treasurer's records, including the ledger from the 1939 start of HMBC. The set of *Feathers* is also complete. The Schenectady County Library maintains the newsletter collection. Unless we unearth a new stash, minutes go back only as far as 1963. Any long time member with information about when keeping minutes began should tell Sunny or myself.

Also, we'd especially like to locate the following items: the original articles of incorporation, the IRS and NYS documents granting us non-profit status, a complete set of both Membership Directories and the Field Trip Schedule, as well as any checklist that can be dated

If you have items that you think belong in the archive and we haven't contacted you, please call Sunny at 473-7465 (days) or Linda at 478-9219 (before 9 p.m.). Thanks for your help.



Nature Enthusiasts Age 12 - 14 Needed

HMBC sponsors two campers for DEC's summer environmental camps. If you know of a 12 - 14 year old who would be interested, please contact Gregg Recer at 899-2678 by February 1, 2000 for more information. Campers must be NYS residents.



Send articles, clip-art,
photos, artwork to:

Feathers
c/o Cathy Graichen
23 Scotch Mist Way
Ballston Spa, NY 12020

or via e-mail to:

recerg@crisny.org



UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Please Note:

- **Program meetings in January, February & March will be held at the Colonie Town Library and will begin at 7:00 PM (Note earlier start time!)**

Monday, Jan 3, 2000 - 7:00 p.m. at Colonie Town Library, Bill Gorman on Seabirds. Bill will show movies of some of the elusive seabirds of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. You will see birds, such as: albatross, shearwaters, petrels, fulmars, storm-petrels, boobies, tropicbirds, jaegers, frigatebirds, noddies and terns, including the alluring Fairy Tern. His movies include birds in flight, as they might be seen on a pelagic trip, birds at close range and birds engaged in nesting. Please join Bill as he presents a unique look into the fascinating world of seabirds.

Monday, Feb 7, 2000 - 7:00 p.m. at Colonie Town Library, Graham Cox of National Audubon on Belize. Belize, a country about the size of the Adirondack Park, on the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, is famous for two things: its Mayan culture and history and its spectacular nature watching. Off its 150 mile Caribbean coast is the longest coral barrier reef in the western hemisphere. On land are mountains, tropical rainforests, coastal marshes and several nature preserves run by the National Audubon Society's Belize chapter on behalf of the national government. And there is great birding from one end of the country to the other.

This talk will explain that the Mayan culture did not disappear in 900 A.D. when the empire's rulers were swallowed up by their neighbors. But without some careful, loving attention from its rich neighbors to the north, its forests, marshes and wildlife, along with its barrier reef, could become victim to today's "progress" as new highways push through the forests and as outside influences from Mexico, Guatemala and the USA overwhelm what is still a lightly populated Caribbean country.

Graham Cox, forest and wetland program coordinator for the National Audubon Society of New York State, visited Belize last winter for a short break, but found that it's tough to concentrate on a vacation when the land you are visiting seems destined to succumb to the very development pressures which have overwhelmed the countries to the north. Imagine Florida before the turn of the century, said Cox. Now imagine what we would do if we could do it over again, but with nature conservation and cultural preservation at the top of our agenda instead of profits from real estate, cattle ranching and industrial development. That is the challenge for Belize and for all of us, said Cox.

Monday, Mar 6, 2000 - 7:00 p.m. at Colonie Town Library, Sue & John Adair on Alaska. From the bird cliffs of the Pribilofs to the majesty of Denali, from the sea birds and mammals of Resurrection Bay to the tundra at Nome, our two week tour took us to some of the scenic and birding hot spots of the 49th state. We tried to capture it all on film and will share an hour's worth with you. Please join us for a summer trip to the great state of Alaska -- where all the days are long, all the snow and ice is good looking and all the birds are above average. Sue has been birding for about 14 years. She is the current treasurer, Federation NYS Bird Clubs and past president, treasurer, secretary, newsletter editor of Onondaga Audubon Society. A sometimes



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wildlife illustrator for Onondaga Audubon, Federation, etc. John has been *resisting* birding for about 14 years. He is a past treasurer and board member of Onondaga Audubon Society. Takes most of the photographs and works the slide projector to slow Sue down!

Annual Meeting

Tuesday, April 11, 2000 - **Shaker Ridge Country Club**, Wayne R. Petersen, Field Ornithologist from Massachusetts Audubon Society. **Shorebirds: A Profile Incredible**. Shorebirds are one of the most spectacular groups of birds in the world. Their variety, wide distribution, interesting breeding biology, and their extraordinary migration strategies combine to make them outstanding subjects for study, both by birders and ornithologists alike. During the past century many shorebirds were persecuted for market and sport; some, like the Eskimo Curlew, never recovered. With full protection from hunting during the 20th century, many species have made a remarkable recovery. However, once again many shorebirds are facing even greater survival challenges as our environment rapidly changes.

Highlighted by specific examples, this program will provide a brief overview of some of the more important elements in the natural history of shorebirds, and will underscore the more important conservation issues facing Western Hemisphere shorebird biologists in the new millennium. Thoughts on how to recognize a few of the more common shorebirds in the field will also be in the presentation.

6:00 p.m. Dinner

7:30 p.m. Business Meeting

8:30 p.m. Program

Monday May 8 (note - special date - NO MEETING FIRST MONDAY) Daniel Edelstein on Warblers, 7:30 pm, Five Rivers

Mon June 5 Don and Donna Traver on Chile 7:30 PM, Five Rivers.

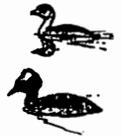
Audubon Soc. of the Cap. Region Programs.

All programs are Thurs. nights, **7:00PM**, Colonie Town Library

Thursday, Jan. 13, Kathleen O'Brien on the **Biology of the Karner Blue Butterfly**. The Karner blue an endangered butterfly once found in several areas of New York. The only area they are now found in the state is a narrow sandbelt between Albany and Glens Falls. The presentation will discuss the biology of the Karner blue and protection and management programs currently underway in New York. Kathy O'Brien has been with DEC for 15 years, initially working on the peregrine falcon and bald eagle release programs. She is now a permanent wildlife biologist in the Endangered Species Unit and specializes in invertebrates.

Thursday, Feb. 10, Frank Knight on **Rare and Protected Plants of NYS**

Thursday, Mar. 9, James Beemer on **The Wildlife of West Point - all 16,000 Acres**



CARTER POND -- THE DECLINE OF AN AUDUBON DESIGNATED IMPORTANT BIRD AREA (IBA)

by Jim Sotia

"A man's first care should be to avoid the reproaches of his own heart." — Joseph Addison (1711)

When the Region 8 Audubon designated Important Bird Areas (IBA's) were announced during the the 1997 annual HMBC meeting, the speaker inadvertently failed to mention Carter Pond. As he was returning to his seat he noticed me, realizing, suddenly, he had omitted that habitat! The irony was that he had asked me to submit the application on behalf of that flourishing bird sanctuary, nestled within a DEC Wildlife Management Area! He recovered quickly and apologized for his oversight in not citing the wetland as the fifth of five designated IBA'S.

It is now rather alarming to be witnessing a decline of the habitat since the formal upgrading of its status. The heretofore productive breeding marsh appears to be in a state of collapse! The compelling feature prompting its designation as an IBA was that it annually hosted two State-listed, endangered species: Least Bittern and Pied-billed Grebe. Neither, however, had been confirmed as producing progeny in Carter Pond the past two years. While the Bittern presence had been confirmed, successful nesting had not been. Only a single, rather frail Grebe appeared for a short stay in the early spring. As far as I know, breeding Grebes were neither seen nor heard in the habitat subsequently. If I were asked to offer a reason, I would be inclined to suggest the intimidating presence of Snapping Turtles. Pied-billed Grebes tend to be very wary of these tenacious predators. Unfortunately, no publicized investigation by DEC of their numbers has been reported during the past decade. The impact of their presence, however, takes its toll on breeding waterbirds, particularly their young.

Soras(rail) also seem to have been absent the last two years, and there has been a significant reduction in the presence of Common Moorhens. Previously, a diligent search would turn up at least a

dozen nesting pairs! The current breeding presence of Virginia Rails reflects a similar fate; during this spring, the best I could estimate were three or four pairs, based upon sightings and calls.

Marsh Wrens, were once commonly seen, probing the Giant Bur-reeds and other favored, floral species widely rooted there. They have not been reported, however, the past three years! My own searching has been particularly frustrating. I suspect their disappearance to have been the result of retaliatory, egg-piercing responses of Red-winged Blackbirds. Both that species and nesting Least Bitterns are believed to be the objects of such depredatory Marsh Wren propensities. Red-winged Blackbirds are known to respond in kind, and it is not unlikely that the Wren's ravaging behavior may have provoked the disappearance of the Bitterns.

Three floral species of importance to waterbirds-- Soft Rush (*Juncus effusus*), Broad-leafed Cattail (*Typha latifolia*** and Water Smartweed (*Polygonum amphibian*) are no longer to be seen in the habitat. Rootstocks of the Rush and Cattail are known to be consumed by muskrats and, occasionally, by beavers. Cattail rootstocks and tubers are also relished by Canada Geese during the spring, the breeding presence of which has increased in recent years.

I view Carter Pond as the crown jewel of the 446 acre, Wildlife Management Area (WMA)! That opinion, however, prompts the realization that there has not been, during the years of my experience in the habitat, any indication of appropriate DEC concern or presence regarding sustained viability of that unique habitat. When I informed the agency (in writing) of the IBA status accorded the Carter Pond habitat by New York Audubon, my letter was greeted with hollow silence, which continues unbroken,

The only presence of DEC seems to be a periodic, large mowing machine, with its operator splitting



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the stillness as he plies the riotous grasses and mixed flora.

The .6 mile, nature trail was once an engaging passage through a heavily wooded, deciduous-conifer habitat with an understory of mixed shrubs, flowers and ferns, including Royal Fern and an array of other species. Currently the trail is cared for periodically by members of the WIA (Waterfowl Improvement Association). They have also placed Wood Duck breeding boxes in and around the perimeter of the habitat, cleaned them annually, and banded nesting, Wood Duck hens. I have worked with them in their efforts, much to my satisfaction and learning pleasure. Two years ago we banded a nesting hen, which already had a band, recording her presence in that very box three years previously!

The tragic collapse of the habitat appears to be the consequence of questionable DEC, bureaucratic priorities.

** Subsequent to the writing of this essay I discovered a small ragged patch of Cattails in the distant reaches of the upper marsh. Their continuing viability remains questionable.





PROGRAM REPORTS

by
Denise Hilton & Scott Stoner

Birding the National Parks of the Cascades and Olympics

About 50 Club members and friends attended this fine program, as Gregg took us on a photographic tour of the National Parks of the US Northwest.

Our tour began in northern California, at Lassen Volcanic National Park, where the Cascades rise to about 10,000 feet at Lassen Peak. We were treated to views of ash and mud flows from the most recent eruption, between the years of 1914 and 1921, of these most certainly non-extinct volcanoes. We also enjoyed seeing pictures of some of the interesting thermal features of the Park, such as the "Sulfur Works." After the unusually snowy winter of 1999, many areas of the Park were impassable even in the first half of July! Because of these poor conditions, it was impossible to view one of the Park's most famous thermal spots, "Bumpus Hell."

The Recers were lucky to visit Lassen during the height of its season for forest birds, and even with the difficult viewing caused by the dense coniferous forest, they shared great pictures of White-headed Woodpeckers at nests, which were very conspicuous on dead snags at eye height. Also viewed were Red-breasted Sapsucker, Western Scrub Jay, Cassin's Finch, Western Tanager and Golden Eagle.

After stopping at Burney Falls — MacArthur State Park near Lassen, where we enjoyed views of beautiful mountain scenery and Falls, behind which were nesting Black and Vaux's Swifts, Gregg moved our tour along, up to the area northeast of the Cascades, to the western part of the Great Basin Desert. At the semi-arid, sage-brush covered Ash Creek Wildlife Area, with its spectacular views of Mt. Shasta, we saw pictures of White Pelican, Pronghorn, pheasant, Western and Clark's Grebe, Eared Grebe and Cinnamon Teal.

Straddling the border of California and Oregon is the Klamath area, so good for nesting waterfowl and shorebirds. We were treated to views of Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's and Red-necked Phalarope, Common Snipe, and Sand Hill Crane, among others.

Near the southern part of the Klamath area lies another volcanic area, Lava Beds National Monument. We enjoyed pictures from this active volcanic area, with its cinder cones, chimney formations, lava tubes and lava and basalt flows.

Into the state of Oregon, to the beautiful blue gem called Crater Lake, we enjoyed many views of this nearly 2,000 foot deep lake, caused by the collapse of a 15,000 foot volcano. Unfortunately, again due to the extremely heavy snows of 1999, it was impossible for the Recers to circle the Lake, but the pictures they were able to share were magnificent. The wildlife at Crater Lake included the Golden-mantled ground squirrel, Mountain Bluebird and the ever present Clark's Nutcracker.

Over to Coastal Oregon, to the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, we enjoyed pictures of sea stacks, a lovely rocky coast and sandy beaches. The conifers grow right down to the shoreline in many areas of this mostly publicly owned coast. The sea stacks serve as breeding grounds for gulls and other sea birds, like Tufted Puffin, Common Murre and Pelagic Cormorant. The tide pools were full of anemones, sea stars and urchins. The forest hosts Roosevelt Elk and California ground squirrel, among



others.

Our next stop on our photographic journey was along the Olympic Peninsula, home of the Olympic Mountains. Uplifted by the collision of the Pacific and North American Plates, these non-volcanic mountains are truly grand. Glacial activity has carved them into sharp peaks and steeply carved valleys. They are home to Gray Jay, Blue Grouse, Black-tailed Deer, Elk, Olympic Marmot, and Black Bear, one of which was spotted by Bryce! The areas around mountain streams are dotted with Dippers, California Quail and raccoon.

In the Olympic Rainforest, where 120-150 feet of rain falls each winter, the multi-storied forest, from its moss and fern understory to its towering canopy is home to abundant life. We enjoyed pictures of Wilson's Warbler, Winter Wren, Stellar's Jay and yes, the lowly but very interesting Banana Slug!

Our tour ended in the glorious Olympics, and an appreciative audience asked many questions of our guide, who graciously answered all our queries.

Bird "ACCOUNTING" ACTIVITIES FOR THE MILLENNIUM

Records for 2000 -- A New Year's Resolution for the Millennium Bob Budliger, Records Committee Chair

Most birders keep lists—life lists, year lists, state lists, county lists, yard lists. Someone even has a list of lists! No doubt you keep some kind of list. We'd like to encourage list-keeping. The trip list for the 1983 vacation to Texas brings back fond memories of the boat ride with my kids to the marshes that hold the world's Whooping Cranes. Their most vivid remembrance of the trip was watching people dodge poop from the attending gulls they'd drawn over the boat with bread. Each list is a reminder of good times, good birds, good company.

Keep making lists. But please, report to the appropriate Records Committee some of the more unusual birds you see. Our understanding of bird populations depends upon your records. Certainly, we want to know about the rare—Larry Alden's Western Kingbird is a good example. We also want to hear about the common species found in unusual numbers, or early and late dates for migrants, out of the ordinary behavior. Take Larry's kingbird. Over the Columbus Day weekend Larry saw an unusual kingbird on his property in Meadowdale. He identified it as a Western Kingbird, and knew that was highly unusual. He could have noted it on his yard list and said nothing. Larry put out the word so a number of us would get the chance to put it on our lists—state, county, year. But, he went further than that. Larry and I both, independently sent a report form to the NYS Avian Records Committee to document the appearance of this bird. Now, this will become a record, a documentation of this bird in Albany County. HMBC's Records Committee encourages you to send reports. We want to compile the record of birds in the Capital Region, and periodically publish this record in these pages. The more of you that participate, the better will be our understanding of bird presence in the area. Take a little time at the end of each month and summarize what you've seen in the region. Pay particular attention to low numbers, high numbers, early dates, late dates, unusual behavior. Send it to me e-mail, snail mail, Pony Express. If you find a really rare bird, don't wait—phone me, Birdline, somebody and pass on the word. Larry Alden's Western Kingbird is now part of the record.



Challenge- as an inducement for you, we'd like you to keep a Year List for the Capital Region. What is the record for this? We've no idea. We do know that there are 334 species on the Federation of New York State Bird Club's Region 8 list. Region 8 includes the counties of Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, and Washington. Send in your tally monthly or quarterly and we'll keep you posted.

Bob Budliger
36 Groesbeck Place,
Delmar, NY 12054
439-006 rbudliger@aol.com



Atlas 2000

WANTED: BIRDERS OF ALL SKILL LEVELS!

If you enjoy being outdoors and watching birds, we have an activity that will enhance your enjoyment and make an important contribution to the ornithology of New York State.

The New York State Breeding Bird Atlas is set to begin in January, 2000. Its purpose is to map the status of each bird species that breeds in New York State. Birders who participate will be asked to visit specific areas of the state to find evidence of breeding within those areas.

This five-year project is sponsored by the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in cooperation with the Cornell University Department of Natural Resources, the New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

If you are interested in participating in the Breeding Bird Atlas, please contact:

Jane Graves
133 York Avenue
Saratoga Springs, NY. 12866
(home) 518-587-8992 before 6 pm, (work) 518-580-5512
e-mail: jgraves@skidmore.edu



Field Trip Reports

Cape May, New Jersey September 11th-13th

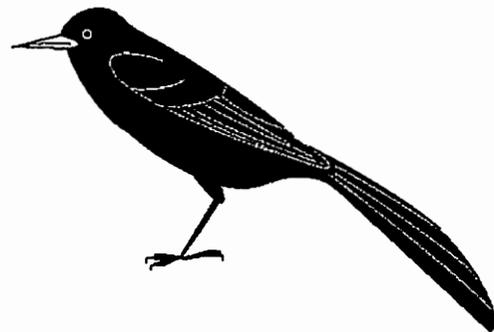
After a series of rainy days in the northeast, we were graced with three days of sunshine for our trip to southern New Jersey. The morning of the 11th found us at Higbee Beach Wildlife Management Area just before sun-up. From the moment we left our vehicles, warblers were flitting about. As we left the parking area for the various trails, it became obvious that we were in the right place at the right time. Warblers seemed to be everywhere and yet, at that early hour, it was still too dark to see any of them clearly. As the sky lightened our frustration passed as we were finally able to make out an **AMERICAN REDSTART**, then a **BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** and soon, **MAGNOLIA**, **BLACK-THROATED GREEN** and the other warblers that were moving about in good numbers.

Other passerines also began to become apparent. **BALTIMORE ORIOLES**, **ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAKS** and many **SCARLET TANAGERS** moved among the tree-tops overhead. **SHARP-SHINNED HAWKS** soared in good numbers, occasionally darting after songbirds, often passing right in front of the many birders at Higbee Beach.

Further exploration of the Wildlife Management Area revealed **YELLOW** and **BLACK-BILLED CUCKOOS**, **WHITE-EYED VIREOS**, **INDIGO BUNTINGS**, **BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHERS**, **CEDAR WAXWINGS**, an immature **LITTLE BLUE HERON** and a variety of raptors overhead. **RED-BREASTED NUTHATCHES**, apparently an irruptive species this fall, were seen well by all. By the time we left Higbee Beach WMA, it was just after nine. The day had gotten off to a good start with our group seeing 18 species of warbler including **GOLDEN-WINGED**.

Our next stop was the Nature Conservancy's South Cape May Meadows. A quick walk to the ponds revealed **AMERICAN AVOCET** and **STILT SANDPIPERS** as well as both **YELLOWLEGS**, **PECTORAL**, **SEMI-PALMATED** and **LEAST SANDPIPERS**. Two members of our group saw a **CLAPPER RAIL** lift above the grass tops and drop down a few feet away. Also in the ponds were both **TEAL** and a small group of eclipsed-plumaged **SHOVELERS**. **GREAT** and **SNOWY EGRETS** and **GREEN HERONS** waded about the waters edge and we added **PALM WARBLER** and **NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH** to our growing warbler list. As at Higbee beach, raptors were always overhead. We had seven species of raptor before we even reached the hawkwatch with many in the group seeing a **MERLIN** in the meadows. Following the loop trail to the beach, we turned up **CASPIAN TERN**, **SANDERLINGS** and a few pods of dolphins not too far off shore.

Cape May Point State Park was our next stop. The new hawk-watching platform was already standing room only. Accipiters were moving through in abundance, mostly **SHARP-SHINNEDS** but a good number of **COOPER'S** as well. The number of **AMERICAN KESTRELS** counted at the hawkwatch would be close to 900 that day.





We saw many of these as well as a **PEREGRINE FALCON**, a **BALD EAGLE**, many **NORTHERN HARRIERS**, **TURKEY VULTURES** and **OSPREY**. A few **BROAD-TAILED HAWKS** rounded out the several hundred raptors we saw that afternoon.

In the Bunker Pond there were **CASPIAN**, **ROYAL**, **COMMON**, and **FORSTER'S TERNS** as well as several shorebird species including a handful of **WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS**. The avocet we had seen earlier had moved over from the meadows.

After a well deserved siesta, the group headed for Stone Harbor Point. Along the way we stopped along the causeway across Nummy Island where we had looks at waders, terns and osprey carrying prey.

At Stone Harbor Point, we walked down the beach to the extensive flats at Hereford Inlet. Upon the flats we added **SEMI-PALMATED** and **BLACK-BELLIED PLOVERS**, **RUDDY TURNSTONE** and several **AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHERS**. On nearby Champagne and Sedge islands, we saw a large flock of **BLACK SKIMMERS** take to the air as a peregrine falcon swooped at them.

From Stone Harbor we moved on to Avalon to check the rookery at Armacoast Park. This new rookery was established by birds that abandoned the famous Stone Harbor Heronry to the south. Although not as active as the old heronry was, the new one in Avalon did allow us to add **YELLOW-** and **BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERONS** to the trips list. Migrant passerines were also at the park. An **OLIVE-SIDED FLY-CATCHER** posed for the group to see and a half dozen species of warbler were identified as well. So much for day one.

Day two began with a tad less urgency but no less anticipation than day one. The morning

started again at Higbee Beach WMA. Although the flight was not as impressive as that of the day before, it was still a good flight, even by Cape May standards. Our group added **BLUE-WINGED**, **CAPE MAY** and **CANADA WARBLER**, and **OVENBIRD** to bring our trip warbler total to 24 species.

Then it was back to the hawkwatch where accipiters and kestrels continued to pour through. In the Bunker Pond, the avocet remained and the terns were joined by a **SANDWICH TERN**. Along the boardwalk trails, two of us saw **PHILADELPHIA VIREO**.

A quick rest and we headed for Brigantine NWR. The Brig was hopping with waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors and terns. Among the many herons were several immature yellow-crowned night-herons. We were able to find **WESTERN** and **WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPERS** among the abundant least and semi-palms. We found pectoral sandpiper and good numbers of stilt sandpipers. Among the terns we found a sin-





gle **BLACK TERN** and watched a **GULL-BILLED TERN** hunting and feeding a juvenile. **BOAT-TAILED GRACKLES** were along the roadside and on the way out we managed to get fleeting looks at **SALT-MARSH SHARP-TAILED SPARROWS** and long, satisfying scope views of a very cooperative clapper rail.

We slept in on day three, not rising until 8:00 AM. We made our way to the hawkwatch for a leisurely morning. The raptor flight continued and the Bunker Pond provided a regularly changing selection of shorebirds and terns. The avocet continued as did the white-rumped sandpipers. A western had joined them and pectoral and stilt sandpipers put in appearances as well.

We spent the afternoon at the Brig seeing most of the species we had seen the previous day. New species seen were **NORTHERN PINTAIL**, **CATTLE EGRET**, **HUDSONIAN GODWIT** and a single **YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD** that had evaded us the day before. This marked the end of the HMBC's fall trip to Cape May. Participants tallied a total of 136 species. Most got lifebirds. All were actively involved in the spotting and identification of birds and all had a great time. We look forward to next years trip.

- Gerry and Tim Colborn

Nott Road Park and Ann Lee Pond Sep. 18, 1999

Two days after Hurricane Floyd, three birders visited Nott Road Park, where debris entangled in a fence three feet off the ground marked the height of the Normanskill flood. The most visible birds were a flock of about 40 **CEDAR WAXWINGS**. **NASHVILLE** and **BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLERS**, **RED-EYED** and **PHILADELPHIA VIREOS**, **EASTERN PHOEBE**, and **EASTERN WOOD-**

PEWEE were occasionally seen amidst the waxwing mob; **MALLARDS** and a **PIED-BILLED GREBE** were present on the wastewater ponds, and numerous **KILLDEER** on the athletic fields. Later, at Ann Lee Pond, **BLACK-THROATED BLUE** and **BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLERS**, **NORTHERN FLICKER**, **AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** and **RED-TAILED HAWK** made appearances. The trip total of 29 species was notable only for the complete absence of any sparrows, swallows, or gulls.

- Philip and Marjorie Whitney

Wilson Powell Sanctuary Sunday, September 26, 1999

Eight people joined me for an early morning walk at Wilson Powell Sanctuary in northern Columbia County. The day dawned cool and misty, but as the sun rose higher in the sky, the mist burned off and the air warmed to a pleasant temperature. There was no wind to speak of, which limited the raptor movement, but not the Monarch Butterfly migration. We saw at least fifty of these beautiful creatures, definitely one of the highlights of the day.

With its diverse habitat, the Sanctuary is an excellent place to find songbirds, waterfowl and raptors. We began our trip with a walk through the field to the pond. Along the way we found a few very vocal **GRAY CATBIRDS**, and a quiet but very active **BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER**. Several **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES** announced themselves, and a pair of **HOUSE FINCHES** hung out in the top of a somewhat distant tree. We also saw a **HAIRY WOODPECKER** on another distant tree, and a pair of **DOWNY WOODPECKERS** allowed us a closer look as they poked around on the small trees right in front of us.

When we arrived at the pond, we were greeted by a pair of **BELTED KINGFISHERS**, rat-

Feathers



ting loudly and diving into the water to snatch up their breakfast before returning to perch in the tall dead trees along the water's edge. We watched through the scope as a **GREEN HERON** slowly waded through the shallow water in search of its morning meal, and we found two **PIED-BILLED GREBES** and a pair of **HOODED MERGANSERS** paddling around and diving for food on the far side of the pond. As we scanned the pond for other waterfowl, a **GREAT BLUE HERON** flew over and landed in a tree on the far side of the pond. It was almost impossible to pick out the heron so excellently camouflaged among the tree's dead gray branches. If we hadn't seen the bird fly in, we might not have seen it at all. Closer to us in the grasses and brush, we found a **SWAMP SPARROW**, a **SONG SPARROW** and a **COMMON YELLOWTHROAT**. We also had a nice look at an **EASTERN PHOEBE** sitting on a small snag, pumping its tail and lunging at insects.

Walking back along the road to the Sanctuary parking area, we found a small flock of **YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS** flitting back and forth across the road, while several **WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS** hopped around and scratched in the leaves along the roadside. We also saw a **DARK-EYED JUNCO** and a **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET**, and two of us caught a glimpse of what was probably a Vireo but we

didn't see it well enough to identify it. As we wandered further up the road, we got good looks at first one, then two **YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKERS** chasing each other through the trees. A **PILEATED WOODPECKER** called loudly and flew across the road further ahead of us, and our woodpecker species count was capped off at five when we spotted a **NORTHERN FLICKER** a short time later.

We returned to the parking area, then took the short trail up to "Dorson's Rock", an outcropping of rock that overlooks the Hudson River Valley and the beautiful Catskill Mountains. We perched ourselves on the rocks and relaxed in the glorious sunshine while we waited to see if the resident **RAVENS** would appear. We were disappointed to not see them, but the **TURKEY VULTURES**, the small kettle of **BROAD-WINGED HAWKS**, and the immature **BALD EAGLE** that soared overhead more than made up for the absent Ravens.

Other birds seen included **AMERICAN ROBIN**, **BLUE JAY**, **AMERICAN CROW**, **WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** and **AMERICAN GOLDFINCH**, for a total species count of 32. It was a day of good birds, great weather and terrific birding companions.

-Jackie Bogardus

HMBC Contact Information

BIRDLINE of E. NEW YORK: (518) 439-8080

Email: hmbc@hotmail.com

HMBC website: <http://members.xoom.com/hmbc/>

Reminder!!

All HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Board meetings take place the second Monday of every odd-numbered month. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center or other local venues at 7:00 PM. The January, 2000 meeting will be held at Treasurer Dan Welch's place of business, The Sweater Venture, on Rt. 9 in Latham.



Upcoming HMBC Field Trips

(Consult your field trip schedule or Birdline (439-8080) for trip details)

1999 Christmas Bird Counts

Schenectady:	December 18 (Sat)	Bill Lee, compiler 374-3426
Southern Rensselaer County:	December 26 (Sun)	Jackie Bogardus, compiler 283-6603
Troy:	Jan 2, 2000 (Sun)	Larry Alden, compiler 456-7115

JAN 1 NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD COUNT AT FIVE RIVERS

Sat **Coordinator: Scott Stoner** **785-6760**

For the past 19 years, Five Rivers has been welcoming in the New Year with an organized effort to identify all the bird species present on January 1. Groups will go out at 9:00 a.m. from the Interpretive Building (visitor center), but birders are welcome to arrive earlier to get a head start. (See page 2 for directions.)

JAN 2 TROY CHRISTMAS COUNT

Sun **Compiler: Larry Alden** **456-7115**

JAN or FEB WINTER RARE BIRD TRIP

Coordinator: Bill Lee **374-3426**

Reservations by January 15

If any especially rare bird is reported in our general area, we plan to take a trip to look for it. This is usually a day trip, but sometimes requires an overnight stay. To get on the notification list for alert and trip details, call the coordinator.

JANUARY 15 - RESERVATIONS DUE FOR WINTER RARE BIRD TRIP (Jan or Feb)

JAN 15 GALEVILLE AIRPORT, SHAWANGUNK GRASSLAND UNIT, WALLKILL RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, ULSTER COUNTY

Sat **Coordinator: Bill Lee** **374-3426**

Co-sponsored with the FNYSBC

Snow Date: Jan 22

This "Important Bird Area," closed to birders in recent years, has been a wintering location for Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Harriers, Snowy and Short-eared Owls and Northern Shrikes. This is a joint trip with the Federation of the New York State Bird Clubs. Call coordinator for meeting place and time.

JAN 16 ANNUAL STATE WATERFOWL COUNT

Sun **Coordinator: Gary Goodness** **272-5830**

On the local segment of this statewide event, participants will count waterfowl and other winter birds on the Hudson River between North Troy and Hudson Falls. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the parking lot of the Hannaford Supermarket on the east end of the North Troy-Waterford Bridge (Route 4).



JAN 23 MOHAWK RIVER, COHOES TO CRESCENT
Sun **Coordinator: Gary Goodness** **272-5830**
This area, including Cohoes Falls and Simmons Island, offers a great opportunity to study the gulls and waterfowl that winter along the Mohawk River. We will leave at 8:30 a.m. from the Golden Krust Bakery at 180 Ontario St. in Cohoes (on Route 470 about 1/8 mile east of Route 787, across from the U-Haul).

JANUARY 31 - RESERVATIONS DUE FOR CAPE ANN & PLUM ISLAND TRIP (Feb 19-21)

JAN 29 LAKE CHAMPLAIN WESTERN SHORE
Sat **Coordinator: Bill Lee** **374-3426**
The Lake Champlain Valley offers spectacular winter scenery with views of the Adirondack and Green Mountains and Lake Champlain. Many winters, Bohemian Waxwings, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, winter finches, longspurs, shrikes and wintering raptors are readily found. Call coordinator for meeting place, time and a backup snow date.

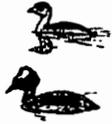
FEB 12 BIGELOW ROAD - BLOOMINGDALE BOG
Sat **Coordinator: Bill Lee** **374-3426**
This Adirondack hot spot is readily accessible and home to Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay and Red and White-winged Crossbills. Three-toed Woodpecker is also often seen here. Call the coordinator for meeting time and place and an alternate weather date, if necessary.

FEB 19 - RESERVATIONS DUE FOR FORT EDWARD GRASSLANDS TRIP (Feb 26)

FEB 19-21 CAPE ANN & PLUM ISLAND
Sat - Mon **Coordinator: Bill Lee** **374-3426**
Reservations by Jan 31
Our popular winter trip to the Massachusetts coast will focus on the north shore from Nahant, just north of Boston, to the New Hampshire coast. Join us in search of alcids, white-winged gulls, Purple Sandpiper, Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, Eiders, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspur, Short-eared and Snowy Owls and other raptors on this three-day weekend.

FEB 26 FORT EDWARD GRASSLANDS (WASHINGTON COUNTY)
Sat **Coordinators: Brad & Beth Bidwell** **632-5692**
Co-sponsored with the FNYSBC
Reservations by February 19

This large agricultural grassland complex is a hot spot for wintering raptors, Rough-legged Hawks, Peregrine Falcon and Snowy and Short-eared Owls; and Lapland Longspurs have been here in recent winters. This is a joint trip with the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. Participation may be limited so call the coordinator for reservations, meeting time and place.



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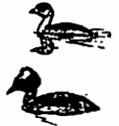
President's Corner continues.....

There are several other end-of-year items to mention before closing. The other item that you should have found in your Feathers mailing is your 2000 HMBC membership renewal form. I realize how hectic things are at this time of the year, but I would urge everyone to try to fill out your renewal and mail them to Treasurer Dan Welch as soon as possible. Aside from getting one little chore out of the way, you'll be assured of no interruption in your Feathers subscription and you'll help the Club remain on sound fiscal ground and able to support the various member services that are the heart of what our Club does. Your continued support is appreciated.

A highlight of our December/January social calendar is participating in one of the Club's Christmas Bird Counts. Our three counts this year are Schenectady on 12/18, S. Rensselaer on 12/26 and Troy on 1/2. These are always fun and I would encourage anyone who hasn't already volunteered and is interested to contact any of the CBC compilers to get hooked up with a field party. One other field-birding item of note is the annual New Year's Day field trip at Five Rivers EEC (details in the field trip schedule and in this Feathers). Start your Millennium-list off with a bang (alright, I guess I fell into the trap!). Anyway, if the power's out at home you may as well go birding.

Hard to imagine that with all that birding activity, some people actually find time to celebrate the holidays at this time of year too! So, let me close by wishing everyone a great holiday season — I hope to see you out in the field in 2000!

Gregg Recer



PRESIDENT'S CORNER:

By the time HMBC members receive this issue of *Feathers* December, 1999 will be about half gone and you-know-what (Y2K!) will be looming. At the risk of bucking the cultural and marketing tidal wave, I'll avoid focusing on birding in the new "Millennium," since, as Stephen Jay Gould has noted, the entire calendric exercise is essentially arbitrary. Anyway, there has been and continues to be a lot going on within HMBC during these couple of months leading up to the cataclysm, uh, I mean New Year. Primary among them is the compilation of another very ambitious field trip schedule for 2000. The sheer quantity of high-quality and varied field trips that is organized year after year by HMBC rivals and sometimes exceeds what many larger clubs put together. This consistent quality is a real credit to the hard work of the people who recruit field trip leaders, to the effort and creativity of the leaders themselves and to the dedication of all the active field birders in HMBC who make each year's schedule a success. Each December a new schedule of trips for the entire upcoming calendar year appears with your *Feathers*, almost as if by magic. Of course, behind the scenes a great deal of hard work has gone into assessing which trips are consistently successful, researching new birding locales that might be worth exploring, matching up dozens of trips with trip leaders, juggling scheduling details and so on. A group of volunteers undertakes this task every fall and I want to express my thanks to all of them for doing another great job this year. I want to single out our Field Trip Committee Chair Joan Cipriani for special thanks. This is Joan's third year heading up the Field Trip Committee and she has done an outstanding job each year organizing the Committee's efforts and following through with a first-class product. Cathy and I first joined HMBC because we wanted regular opportunities to get out into the field with other birders, so for me a quality field trip schedule needs to be one of the Club's top priorities. Joan's hard work has made that a reality.

CONTINUED ON P. 117.....

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Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club
c/o Five Rivers EEC
Game Farm Rd.
Delmar, N.Y. 12054

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