



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 27

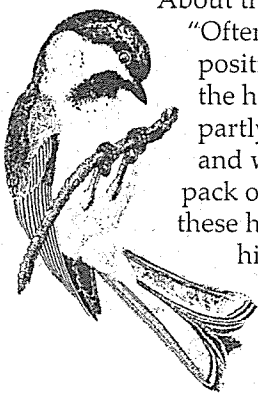
MARCH ~ APRIL 1999

ISSUE 4

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Don Scott

Nothing can lift the gloom of a bleak winter day better than reading - or rereading - the timeless descriptions of birds written by Edward Howe Forbush in the abridgement of his final work entitled **A Natural History of American Birds of Eastern and Central North America**. No particular Forbush quote is better than another, but a few of my favorites are listed below.



About the Sharp-Shinned Hawk, he writes "Often the hawk will take a commanding position in a tree where it can overlook the haunts of its prospective victims and, partly concealed behind the leaves, wait and watch for its prey. Now and then a pack of Blue Jays will gather about one of these hawks, while he is perched, and revile him. At first their noise and numbers may confuse and baffle him, but if he is hungry let them beware, for then the hawk makes a sudden dash, bearing one of his assailants to the ground. The victim fights

valiantly, but its cowardly companions retreat in disorder, leaving their comrade to its fate, which is soon settled by the impetuous little hawk."

Of the Black-capped Chickadee, Forbush writes "The little Black-capped Chickadee is the embodiment of cheerfulness, verve and courage. It can boast no elegant plumes, and it makes no claims as a songster, yet this blithe woodland sprite is a distinctive character, and is a bird masterpiece beyond all praise."

"The coming of the Baltimore Oriole to the North is always an event to be welcomed with joy. The winter is now past, April showers have fallen and May is here. Again we see the annual miracle of the spring awakening...Baltimore Orioles almost always arrive in the latitude of new England about the tenth of May, though some arrive earlier, and they continue to come and pass for two or three weeks". This Forbush passage was written some 70 years ago - time does not change in nature!

Anyone who has walked along the Cape's great beaches will quickly identify with Forbush's words describing the tiny sanderling. "Sanderlings follow the sea. They run over pale sand where storm-tossed breakers roar, for there in the wake of the storm they find their sustenance.

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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS 1998

Blair Nikula and Peter Trimble

Each year, The Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count is held in an area that extends from South Wellfleet to Harwich, and The Mid-Cape Count is held in an area that extends from Bass River through Barnstable. This year, because of the warm weather, birders had a good day on both counts.

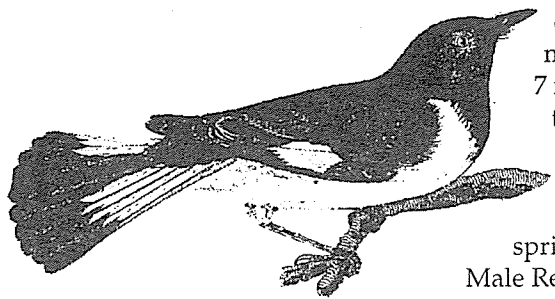
The Cape Cod Count recorded the second highest species total of 136, just behind the 142 species found in 1973 and 1976. Record high counts were established for an impressive list of 16 species: Common Loon, Black-bellied Plover, Western Sandpiper, Sanderling, Dunlin, Razorbill, Common Murre, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, and Orange-crowned Warbler. Other birds that were found in near record numbers included Red-necked Grebe, Green-winged Teal, Harlequin Duck, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, Northern Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird and American Goldfinch. Birds that were unusual for late December included Great and Snowy Egrets, the shorebirds (Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Red Knot, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper), a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, a Black-and-white Warbler and a Turkey Vulture. Other rare birds for this area included a Clay-colored Sparrow and 2 Rusty Blackbirds. Two birds that did not appear on the count were once common, the American Kestrel and Killdeer. At its lowest number since 1971, only 6 Great Cormorants were found.

One thing that united both counts was the record number of Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds. There were flocks of them, feasting on the berries on the trees and shrubs. 3741 Robins appeared on the Cape Count and an unbelievable 30,346 on the Mid-Cape Count. 61 Red-winged Blackbirds were found on each count. The Mid-Cape Count tied its previous high for number of species this year, with 126 being seen. Unusually high numbers of Virginia Rails were seen, with 35 being reported. 3 Long-billed Dowitchers, 2 Northern Waterthrush and 1 Lincoln's Sparrow were seen. A Black-headed Gull, a Long-eared Owl, a Northern Saw-Whet, a Barrow's Golden-eye, a Ruddy Duck, and a Common Yellow-throat were also seen. And in the count period a Snow Goose, a Northern Shoveler, a Killdeer, an Ash-throated Flycatcher and a Palm Warbler were spotted. While this year's Mid-Cape Count tied the previous high for number of species seen, the total number of individual birds seen this year set a new record of 62,573.

THE EARLY BIRD LINKING WINTER AND SUMMER

from *Science Magazine*

In spring migration, we have all probably seen that the brightly colored male warblers migrate first and are followed by duller colored males and by females. Yet, few people have found a way to figure out what may influence arrival time because individual birds cannot be followed over a year or a life time. An American Redstart spends 3 to 5 months on its temperate breeding grounds,



1 to 2 months on autumn migration, 6 to 7 months on tropical wintering areas, and one month on spring migration.

Male Redstarts also arrive at breeding habitats

before females, and breeding success and physical condition have been shown to decline with arrival date. The fittest birds arrive first, and early arrival is advantageous because it gives access to the best breeding sites and mates, as well as additional time to replace any lost clutches. Declining reproductive success for late arriving birds has been attributed to the poorer physical condition of these birds. Yet, what determines the arrival time and the physical condition of these birds.

Three researchers came up with a way to test birds to see how winter events influenced arrival dynamics on the breeding grounds. They studied redstarts in two habitats in Jamaica: a black mangrove forest in which males predominated (65% male, 35% female) and a drier, second growth habitat where females were more abundant (30% male, 70% female). This sexual segregation is common in redstarts during the winter, being produced by the dominance behavior of older males that forces most

females and young males into poorer habitats. After testing in autumn and again in early spring, it was found that the individual birds that remained in forest habitat, regardless of sex, maintained or gained body mass, whereas birds in scrub habitat lost up to 11% of their body mass and showed other signs of physical deterioration.

The poor physical condition of these birds in scrub habitat did not lead to lower winter survival, but it did result in a delay in departure schedules. Both males and females departed significantly later from scrub habitat, and departure time was inversely correlated with change in body mass, implying that redstarts in better physical condition were able to leave sooner. Testing for stable-carbon isotopes in tissue can also reveal where birds wintered, with C_3 being more prevalent in the scrub areas and C_4 more prevalent in the mangrove forests.

Three researchers came up with a way to test birds to see how winter events influenced arrival dynamics on the breeding grounds.

This testing allowed further tests in New Hampshire as birds arrived in the spring, and revealed that early arriving males on the breeding ground originated in the wetter mangrove habitat, while those arriving later were from drier habitats. Using body mass corrected for skeletal size as an index of physical condition, it was also found that the physical condition of redstarts arriving on the breeding grounds declined from early to later arrival.

The conclusion to be drawn from these facts, namely that quality of winter habitat influences and limits breeding success of migratory warblers, has important conservation implications for the long-term stability of migratory bird populations, many of which are declining.



Cape Cod Bird Club Inc.

The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History
PO BOX 1710, Brewster, MA 02631

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The Cape Cod Bird Club

is an organization whose members are interested in the protection and conservation of the bird life and natural resources of Cape Cod.

If you are interested in joining, please send a check for \$10 single membership, \$15 family membership to...

CCBC, Cape Cod Museum of Natural History
PO BOX 1710, Brewster, MA 02631

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Jackie Sones

December - January

If you'd like to report a sighting, you may do so in any of the ways listed at the end of this column. It's very helpful to include your name and phone number, the bird's name, the number of individuals, the date and location of your sighting, and any other information you've gathered!

Gulls. Individual Black-headed Gulls appeared in four locations: East Bay in Cotuit, Wellfleet Harbor, Sea Gull Beach in Yarmouth, and Hyannisport. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were seen at Point of Rocks Beach in Brewster and Red River Beach in Harwich. Iceland Gulls were well reported, with sightings from Coast Guard Beach in Eastham; Race Point, Herring Cove, and MacMillan Wharf in Provincetown; and Pilgrim Lake in Truro. One or two Glaucous Gulls were observed along Herring Cove Beach in late January.

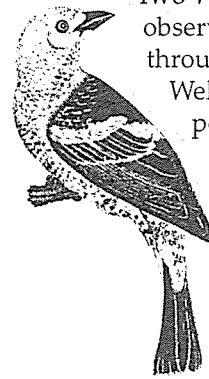
Alcids. Six species of alcids were reported during December and January, listed here with maximum numbers seen at one location - Razorbill (thousands), Black Guillemot (8), Thick-billed Murre (1), Common Murre (1), Dovekie (2), and Atlantic Puffin (1).

Waterfowl. A Pink-footed Goose was discovered by Randy and Elaine Fisher at the Dennis Pines Golf Course in mid-January. It was seen by many observers until January 29. This was the first record for Cape Cod, the second for Massachusetts, and about the twelfth for North America. The origin of the bird will probably remain a mystery, which is unfortunate as it would be nice to know whether it was a wild bird or an escapee. The Harlequin Duck count at Nauset Beach rose to fourteen by early January, a probable high count for Cape Cod. Barrow's Goldeneyes were present in a few locations this year, including Oregon Beach in Cotuit, Falmouth Heights, Bass River in Dennis, and Lake Wequaquet in Barnstable. Don and Carol Scott reported a Snow Goose at Cackle Cove in Chatham on Christmas Day and again on January 17.

Shorebirds. A Whimbrel discovered by Peter Trimble at Sea Gull Beach in Yarmouth on December 13 remained there until at least the end of January. Greater (3) and Lesser (1) Yellowlegs lingered at the West Harwich Conservation Area until at least February 5. Killdeer (max. 6) and Common Snipe (max. 5) were observed at the old fish hatchery in Sandwich and the West Harwich Conservation Area. A Least Sandpiper spent about a week at the West Harwich Conservation Area (Dec. 20-26). Two of three Long-billed Dowitchers first discovered during the Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count continued at Squaw Island in Hyannis until at least January 18.

Songbirds. As during the winter of 1997/1998, it was a relatively poor year for northern shrikes. There were three reports in mid-December: one each from Race Point and

Herring Cove in Provincetown and one from Pamet Harbor in Truro. An Ash-throated Flycatcher was discovered by Bob Pease on Dec. 20 along Locust Road in Barnstable. It was relocated by Stauffer Miller, identified by Blair Nikula, and photographed by Jeremiah Trimble.



Two Western Tanagers were seen by many observers: one in East Orleans (Dec. 31 through at least Jan. 31) and another in South Wellfleet (Jan. 2 through at least Jan. 17). A possible Townsend's Solitaire was reported by two different observers on Dec. 27 and Dec. 31 in East Orleans.

Due to the rarity of this species in this area, it would be nice to have photographic documentation! A few seasonally noteworthy warblers lingered into December, including a Nashville behind the Falmouth Town Hall, a Wilson's at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, a Black-and-white in East Orleans, and two Northern Waterthrushes (one in Barnstable and a second in Dennis). American Robins were abundant on Cape Cod this winter. We also received many calls about Eastern Bluebirds. Art King continues to observe a diversity of songbirds in his Brewster backyard; this winter's highlights included nine Chipping Sparrows!

Many thanks to everyone who contributed reports! To submit bird sightings in the future, call Jackie or Blair at 508-432-6348, send regular mail to 2 Gilbert Lane, Harwich Port, MA, 02646, send e-mail to odenews@capecod.net, or come to a bird club meeting and tell us about your observations!

A CHALLENGE

Name as many as you can of the 17 most common words used in naming the 9,948 birds of the world. In particular, what is the most common color in bird names? And what is the most common bird family name (such as loon or finch, etc)? The answer is elsewhere in this newsletter.

Answer to the Challenge:

The Most common words used in naming the 9,948 birds of the world are:

White	704 birds	Blue	224 birds
Black	620 birds	Green	223 birds
Bird	585 birds	Wren	223 birds
Yellow	335 birds	Brown	158 birds
Red	320 birds	Hawk	142 birds
Warbler	297 birds	Sparrow	114 birds
Wing	285 birds	Honeyeater	108 birds
Gray/Grey	273 birds	Collared	102 birds
Head	256 birds		

Blair Nikula
1998 Summary

The 16th annual Cape Cod Lake & Pond Waterfowl Survey was conducted on the weekend of December 5-6, 1998. The weather preceding the count was very close to normal, though December began very mild, and ice-free conditions prevailed during the survey weekend. Forty-seven observers censused 376 ponds, just four ponds less than last year's record number. Twenty-nine species of waterfowl were found, totaling a record 13,637 individuals, almost a thousand birds more than the previous high in 1987 and almost three thousand birds over the 14 year average!

Species Results

Amazingly, eight species were found in record high numbers, with another three species achieving their second highest totals in fifteen years! No species were in record low numbers, though two were in the second lowest numbers ever.

Pied-billed Grebes continued their sharp increase following their 1996 low, and set a record high this year with 204 birds, 141% over the survey average.

Mute Swans continued their recent rebound, this year's 249 birds just shy of the 14 year record and 44% above average.

Canada Geese also continued their sharp recovery from the 1996 low; this year's 1066 birds was very close to the 14 year average.

Green-winged Teal, though never numerous on this survey, established a new record with 75 birds, 127% above average.

Black Ducks also established a new high, with 2500 birds, 97% above average. They were found at 114 sites, making them the third most widespread species on the survey.

Mallard numbers returned to a bit above normal, following their sharp decline in 1996. They were found at 169 sites, making them the most widespread species on the Cape's ponds.

American Wigeon totaled 164 birds, the second highest ever and 92% above average.

Canvasbacks continued their sad decline, this year's 127 birds being the second lowest ever and less than a quarter of the 14 year average.

Ring-necked Ducks have generally been found in highest numbers during cold years, but this year's record of 374 birds, 93% above average, provides a striking exception.

Common Goldeneye is another species that is often found in higher numbers during cold years and this year's 157 birds, the second lowest ever, is consistent with that tendency.

Buffleheads totaled 2361 birds, the second highest ever, 39% above average. They were found at 154 sites, making them the second most widespread species on the survey. **Hooded Mergansers** established yet another record: 933 birds representing a 93% increase over the survey average. **Ruddy Ducks** far exceeded their previous high, totaling 258 birds - more than seven times their 14 year average! Nonetheless, they remained very local: only six sites hosted this appealing little diver.

American Coots shattered their previous high with 484 birds, more than four times the survey average. Over 80% of these were at just four sites: Mashpee-Wakeby Pond (143 birds); Ashumet Pond (107); Hinckley's Pond (77); and Seymour's Pond (70).

Black Ducks (2500 birds) outnumbered all other species, followed by **Bufflehead** (2361), **scaup** (both species combined (2217 birds), and **Mallard** (1748). These five species combined comprised about 65% of the overall total.

Among the more unusual species found this year were four **Red-throated Loons**, a **Horned Grebe** in Bourne, a **Red-necked Grebe** in Mashpee (the first ever on the survey!), a **Snow Goose** in Truro, three **Blue-winged Teal** in Yarmouth, at least four **Eurasian Wigeon** in Chatham, and a **Common Eider** in Falmouth.

Town Results

As always, Falmouth outdistanced all other towns by a wide margin, with 3553 birds or 26% of the Capewide total. The perennial battle for runner-up between Barnstable and Yarmouth was won this year by Barnstable with 1852 birds (14%), barely besting Yarmouth's 1799 birds. Three towns, Barnstable, Falmouth and Harwich tied for the best variety with 20 species each. Wellfleet, the perennial doormat, remained mired at the bottom of the heap with just 35 birds of seven species.

Pond Results

Salt Pond in Falmouth traditionally harbors a large flock of scaup and consequently takes top honors every year for the largest number of birds: This year 1201 individuals of 9 species included 1100 scaup (500 less than last year). Second this year was Hinckley's Pond, where an amazing 15 species were found, followed by Mill Pond in W. Barnstable and Mashpee-Wakeby Pond in Mashpee with 11 species each.

Participation

Participation was again superb; thanks to each and every one of the 47 people who took part. Peter Trimble again took time to organize the four Upper Cape towns, and we were joined once again by off-Cape birders Dennis Oliver and Polly Stevens.

PROGRAMS & MEETINGS

Phil Kyle

On Monday evening, March 8, at 7:30 at the Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, the Cape Cod Bird Club will host **Member's Night**. Time to dust off those slides, get out the artwork, or brush up on your bird calls! This year we are bringing back Members Night so the varied talents of our members can be shared by all. This is an evening where members and guests may show their own slides, exhibit art work or other crafts, or perhaps relate an experience that might be of interest to other members. A Silent Auction table, bird calls and refreshments will also be a part of this unique evening.

Note: Anyone interested in participating please call either Barbara Stanton (432-6027) or Susan Weliky (548-8747).

On Monday evening, April 12, at 7:30 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, Mark and Marcia Wilson will present a program entitled **Nantucket Through the Seasons**. Mark Wilson is a photojournalist with the Boston Globe. Among Wilson's other credits are a National Geographic cover as well as exhibits in Living Bird, Wild Bird and National Wildlife magazines. His wife, Marcia, is a biologist who has teamed with her husband in photography, teaching and sharing their passion for the Natural world.

SILENT AUCTION

Silent Auction To Be Held At March Meeting

Do you have any books about birds you no longer want? How about bird posters, framed pictures, audio and video tapes, birding CDs or other computer software, current bird calendars, quality bird slides, T-shirts or other clothing with a bird theme (like new, of course), or any other bird-related item? If so, bring them to the March meeting so that they can be sold to someone who wants them.

Items will be displayed on a table. By each item will be a piece of paper on which bidders write their names and the amount of their bid. Another person interested in the same item writes in a higher amount. The first bidder may return and write in a higher bid and so on until the closing of the bids. The highest bidder gets to take his treasure(s) home. The proceeds will go to an environmental cause to be selected by the Board.

Bring your items to be sold by 6:45. Bidding will take place between 7:00 and 7:30, and the highest bidders will be announced at the end of the meeting. So come early, bring lots of cash or your checkbook and, of course, your items to donate! Oh yes, elementary school teachers would like feathers and eggs with holes in them and anything else you might have (nests are illegal to possess so don't bring those in) that they could use with their classes.

WALKS & FIELD TRIPS

Stauffer Miller

March

Saturday, March 6th. Fort Hill, Eastham. Meet at the lower parking lot at Fort Hill at 9:00 AM. Leader, Dick Koeppen, 430-1822.

Sunday, March 28th. Falmouth. Meet at the Locust Street parking area of the bike path at 9:00 AM. Leaders, Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.

April

Saturday, April 3rd. Fort Hill, Eastham. Meet at the lower parking lot at Fort Hill at 9:00 AM. Leader, Dick Koeppen, 430-1822.

Tuesday, April 13th. Johns Pond area of Mashpee to look and listen for Ruffed Grouse and Virginia Rail. Meet at Dunkin Donuts, Rt. 151 and Ninigret Ave. in Mashpee (1.6 miles west of Mashpee Rotary) at 6:00 AM. Leader, Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

Sunday, April 25th. Falmouth. Meet at the Locust Street parking area of the bike path at 7:00 AM to look for warblers. Leaders, Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.

Monday, April 26th. Hardings Beach and other areas of Chatham for possible Purple Sandpiper and other early shorebirds. Barnhill Road to Hardings Beach Road to east end of beach parking lot. Leader, Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

NEBRASKA IN MAY?

Stauffer Miller

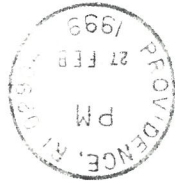
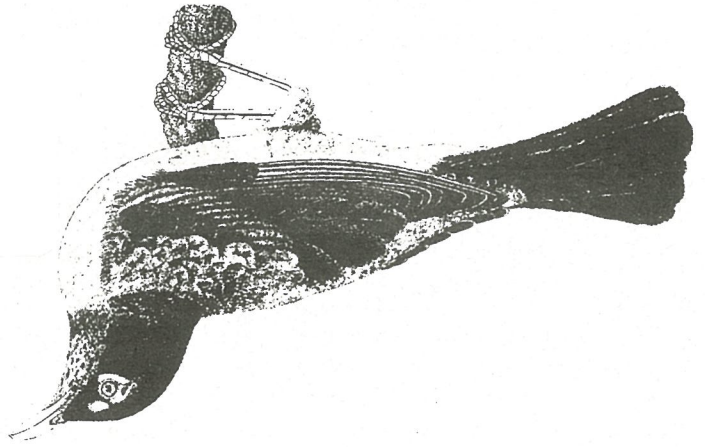
The Sandhills of western Nebraska is one of the more special habitats of North America, and bird activity there should be high in late May.

If there are 3-6 people who would be interested in seeing this area, about May 21 to 25 or so, let me hear from you (362-3384). I can do the leading and make travel arrangements. The cut-off date is about March 20.



02644-1725 02

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The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Don Scott



The turmoil of the surf stirs up the sandy bottom, and the rush of the waves throws many tiny waifs of sea life upon the shelving beach, where the backwash bears them again to the sea. Here, where breakers thunder down and flying spray obscures the scene, the little sanderlings, ever on the alert, run nimbly into the returning flood to snatch up many a choice tidbit, and then trip lightly up the slope, ahead of the incoming wave."

Forbush's book can be found in the library of the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History. Stop by some day when you need a lift - you will be delighted by his incredible ability to paint living pictures of birds.

BIRD CLUB GIFT IDEAS



- CCBC Decals \$1.00
- CCBC Checklist .50
- Birding Cape Cod \$10.00
- CCBC Hats \$15.00
- Organizer Packs \$17.00

The above items are for sale each meeting.