



# Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 28

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1999

ISSUE 2

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Phil Kyle


*"Teach your children what we have taught our children -that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons and daughters of the earth."*

### CHIEF SEATTLE - Leader of The Suquamish

You'd think we would have figured it out by now — how to solve the problem of making less of an impact on the natural world. But we haven't. Different solutions are there as examples for us, such as house sparrows hovering in front of automatic door sensors to go inside bus stations to search for food; ospreys opening conch shells in Florida by dropping them; raptors using their ultraviolet sense to see the liquid waste of meadow voles to help the hawks better track down their next meal; or mallards at the end of a row of ducks keeping one half of their brains alert and the corresponding eye open so the other half of their brain can sleep safely. Where there's a will there's a way. All of them have solved the particular problems at hand.

Humans, a.k.a. *Homo sapiens* (the Latin literally translated meaning MAN the INTELLIGENT) must have problem-solving fatigue. Warnings of species being endangered very often fall on deaf ears. For example, and there are many, the Roseate Tern is number 10 on the Endangered Species list. Passage of Bill 1180 would weaken the Endangered Species Act.

Here's another example of not problem solving when all the warning signs are there. The last mass extinction was millions of years ago. The next one, scientists say, will occur in less than 150 years, this time caused by humans clearing too much land on the surface of the earth. Amazing but true.

The point of Nature has always been to solve the problem simply by employing what you know about the problem and by being unafraid of what you don't know. Then it's possible that one might just find a good solution! 

*Please read the editor's note on back page!*



## NOVEMBER

No warmth; no cheerfulness; no healthful ease

No comfortable feel in any member


No shade; no shine; no butterflies; no bees

No fruit; no flowers; no leaves No birds.

November

## Shade-grown Coffee Aims to Protect Tropical "Hotspots"

Coffee drinkers are being given a chance to help change the way coffee is grown. Conservation International and Starbucks have begun a joint venture to promote coffee grown in the shade, a technique that also preserves ecosystems by not clearing out forests.

Nearly all the world's coffee was grown in the shade until the advent of "technified" or sun-grown coffee in the early 1970s, which promised far higher yields. But the method, which accounts for about half the world's production, also has resulted in destruction of biologically rich forest habitat and increased use of fertilizers and pesticides. Environmentalists, alarmed by a sharp decline in migratory songbirds and other species over the past 25 years, have launched an increasingly vocal campaign to increase sales of organic and shade-grown coffees. "It benefits a more natural landscape and habitat in Central and South America, which is a real critical zone for migratory birds," said John Bianchi, spokesman for the National Audubon Society. "Habitat destruction is the No. 1 problem, and shade-grown coffee could have a positive impact." 

### DID YOU KNOW ...

that Alaska, with about 170 million acres of wetlands, has more wetland habitat than the other 49 states combined?

## FIELD TRIPS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 1999

Stauffer Miller

### November

Saturday, November 6: 9 a.m. Fort Hill, Eastham. Meet at the lower parking lot. Leader, Dick Koeppen, 430-1822.

Friday, November 12: 9 a.m. Gulls and seabirds of Wellfleet area. Meet and carpool at Friendly's near rotary in Orleans. Scope helpful. Leader, Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

Sunday, November 14: Falmouth, 9:00 a.m. Meet at the Locust Street parking area of the bike path. Leaders: Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.

*(continued on page 7)*

### December

Tuesday, December 7. 9 a.m. West Barnstable and area — a waterfowl-oriented outing. Meet at the Old Train Station in West Barnstable along Rt. 149. Leader: Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

Saturday, December 11. 9:00 a.m. Fort Hill, Eastham. Meet at the lower parking lot. Leader, Dick Koeppen, 430-1822.

Sunday, December 12. Falmouth, 9:00 a.m. Meet at the Locust Street parking area of the bike path. Leaders: Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.



### SPECIAL DATES:

**Annual waterfowl count:** Saturday and Sunday, December 4 and 5. Sign up with Blair Nikula at the November meeting or call 432-6348

**Annual Cape Cod Christmas Count**  
Sign up with Blair Nikula at the December meeting or call 432-6348.

**Annual Mid-Cape Christmas Count**  
TBA at December club meeting or call Peter Trimble, 477-3897



## BIRD CLUB MEETINGS

All meetings, unless otherwise indicated, are held the second Monday of each month, September through May, at 7:30 p.m. at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster.



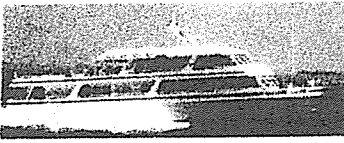
On **November 8th**, Stauffer Miller will present his program, *The Sparrows of Cape Cod*. His slide lecture will feature those birds in the different habitats and seasons of our diverse peninsula. Stauffer has been a very active birder since 1972. In 1994 he and his wife moved to the Cape from Maryland, where he was a veterinary pathologist. He and his wife, Ellie, often travel to other countries birding. Two of his many interests include researching his family history and studying the Spanish language. He now serves on the Board of Directors for the bird club and is in charge of Field Walks and the Breeding Bird Census.

On **December 13th** Peter Trull will speak to the club on the breeding and staging areas of the Roseate Tern. Peter is currently the Education Director and Seabird Researcher for the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown. He has been in the field of biology and education for 25 years and worked for the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History as the Education Director for three years. At Massachusetts Audubon he worked as Colonial Seabird Coordinator for 10 years. Peter has written two books and has done a regular natural history report on the radio for the past 12 years.



## A WHALE OF A DAY

Ned Handy

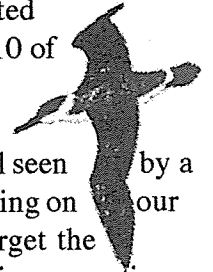


What a glorious sunset we had cruising home from Stellwagen Bank, just one of many superlatives!

Others included, without limitation: The good company of fellow birders; the threatening marine squall on the outbound trip punctuated with dramatic squirts of lightning; emerging into warm sunshine and calming seas at Stellwagen Bank; and, of course, the star performers, a multitude of birds and whales.

On Sunday, October 3rd, 42 Bird Club members and friends departed from Barnstable at 2:30 PM with Hyannis Whale Watcher Cruises and returned to port four hours later. Former Club president Richard Hall, a crew member, kept us well informed with well-spaced bites of history, natural history and whale-watching data. Other crowded boats sharing our sightings testified to the sport's popularity. In our group were Brian Cassie, co-author with Peter Alden of National Audubon Society's Field Guide to New England, Bob Stymeist and Marj Rines, both well-known Massachusetts birders. They and our resident experts generously shared their sightings and skills with those of us less well-versed.

And we were blessed with extraordinary sightings of whales (Finbacks, Humpbacks and perhaps the largest number of Minkes seen this season) and birds galore. There were an estimated 500 shearwaters (mostly Greater with 10 of both Manx and Sooty and 3 Cory's), 100 Gannets, mature and immature, fine looks at Parasitic Jaegers, a Sabine's Gull seen by a lucky few, and always the whales intruding on our lush birdwatching. Few of us will forget the nearby Humpbacks huffing and breaching, sometimes with the evening light catching the whitened undersides of their great vanishing flukes. The splashing of the feeding Gannets and Shearwaters added a rich note to the special day.



We have Hyannis Whale Watcher Cruises and an aborted television project to thank for the trip. The boat had been chartered (and paid for) by an Italian television crew for a live broadcast to home audiences via satellite, and 50 Bird Club members were invited as free guests — perhaps as extras to beam to the envious Italian audiences. Satellite problems at the last moment spoiled the TV project causing the Italians to withdraw, but Hyannis Whale Watcher Cruises generously and graciously volunteered to honor its commitment to the Bird Club. The logistics, including arrangements and time changes, were complicated but thanks to the telephone, e-mail, Linda Miller at Hyannis Whale Watcher, Blair Nikula and Stauffer Miller, everything fell into place and 42 of us were the beneficiaries.

We should add one or more pelagic trips to the Club's agenda for the year 2000. This one was unforgettable.



### 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 at each meeting.*

### FACTS ABOUT FREE-RANGING FELINES ...

The superb hunting abilities of unhoued house cats make them a threat to native species as well as a source of disease for wildlife and people, says a Washington Post article. Feral cats kill "probably over a billion birds every year," Gerald Winegrad of the American Bird Conservancy told the Post. Some groups seek to manage feral cats by trap-ping and neutering them, but other animal advocates contend that the core problem is too few people care properly for their cats.



Since the annual waterfowl count that surveys the 100s of ponds and lakes on the Cape will take place on December 4 and 5, here are a few ducky facts for you:

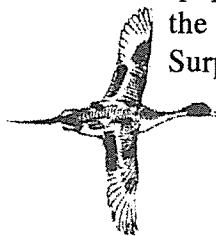
Ducks Unlimited reports, "The good news for all of us is that North American waterfowl experienced a truly great 1999 on the breeding grounds. In the 44 years of government surveys, this year marked more ducks in the survey area than ever before recorded — 32 percent above the long-term average." That surely is good news for all of us who are duck devotees! For more info on waterfowl, check out [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org), the home of Ducks Unlimited.

**QUIZ:** What popular duck is named for its diet of wild celery? (Answer at bottom of page.)

**DID YOU KNOW ...** that in 1998, federal duck stamp sales totaled \$1,608,730 for a revenue of more than \$24 million for waterfowl habitat conservation?

**DO YOU KNOW** where on Cape Cod you can expect to find several pintail ducks? The most reliable site, year after year, is Mill Pond in Yarmouthport, reached by turning north off of Route 6A onto Mill Lane diagonally across from the Christmas Tree Shop / the end of Willow Street. If you cannot find them near the road, search carefully toward the west in a far-distant cove.

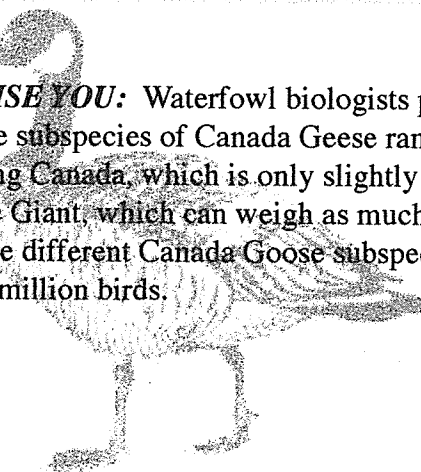
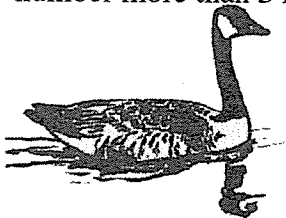
With its long, swanlike neck, and the drake's needly-tapered tail, this species is fairly easy to identify in flight or on the water. Pintails are fresh water, non-diving ducks and avoid the open sea. The Eastern population's winter range is the Chesapeake, throughout Florida and around the Gulf of Mexico.



Surprisingly, no other North American wild duck has a larger nesting range than the graceful pintail. It extends across the northern Plains States from Iowa to the Pacific and over most of Canada north to the Arctic Ocean. Hunters favor pintails for their swift, adroit flight, their merit as a table delicacy and their powers of endurance.

**CAN YOU IMAGINE THAT** more than 5 million waterfowl, as well as even greater numbers of other migrating birds, pass through the Great Lakes region in the fall and spring?

**THIS MAY SURPRISE YOU:** Waterfowl biologists presently recognize 11 separate subspecies of Canada Geese ranging in size from the Cackling Canada, which is only slightly larger than a mallard, to the Giant, which can weigh as much as 20 pounds. Together, the different Canada Goose subspecies number more than 5 million birds.



**SOMETHING TOLD THE WILD GEESE**  
by Rachel Field

Something told the wild geese  
It was time to go.  
Though the fields lay golden  
Something whispered, "Snow."  
Leaves were green and stirring  
Berries, luster-glossed  
But beneath warm feathers  
Something cautioned, "Frost."

All the sagging orchards  
Steamed with amber spice  
But each wild breast stiffened  
At remembered ice.  
Something told the wild geese  
It was time to fly—  
Summer sun was on their wings,  
Winter in their cry.

**Answer:** Canvasbacks, reportedly one of the tastiest of all waterfowl, have the Latin name *Aythya valisineria*. Valisineria translates into "wild celery," a term given to the ducks from their favorite food of wild celery buds. The Canvasback totals for the past 5 years on the Cape have been (1994 - 1998): 115, 175, 506, 221, 127. The 14-year average is 550; the maximum was 1169 in 1985.

Southbound migrant shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds are typically a feature during the late summer/early fall, and this year was no exception. However, seabirds stole the show. An abundance of baitfish, in particular sandlance, attracted large numbers of both whales and seabirds offshore, reminiscent of the boom years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The remnants of Hurricane Floyd blew some extra spice into this pelagic stew.

**Tube-noses:** Hundreds of Greater Shearwaters were seen on whale watching trips to Stellwagen Bank, and on a couple of occasions in late August, thousands were counted from shore, flying past Provincetown. Unusual numbers of Cory's Shearwaters, occasionally exceeding 100 birds, were also present during August, their ranks diminishing by the end of the period. Lesser numbers of Sooty (maximum = 43) and Manx (maximum = 20+) shearwaters were also present. A few Northern Fulmars had joined the shearwaters by late September. Thousands of Wilson's Storm-petrels were present on Stellwagen in August, at times nearly blanketing the water; as is typical, they had vacated the area by Labor Day. A few Leach's Storm-petrels were seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd.

**Hérons:** Great Egrets continued their dramatic increase locally, as indicated by Don Scott's report of 24 at Cackle Cove in Chatham on 8/27 and Terry Gavin's count of 21 in W. Harwich on 8/29. An adult Yellow-crowned Night-heron seen by Stauffer Miller in W. Barnstable on 8/6 was the only reported during the period. A few Glossy Ibis were in the N. Monomoy - South Beach area, and Sally Clifton saw three flying past in Hyannis on 8/21.

**Raptors:** A young Bald Eagle frequented S. Monomoy on 9/19. Peregrine Falcons were widely reported, particularly from the Monomoy - South Beach area where as many as three per day were noted.

**Shorebirds:** By far the rarest shorebird of the season was a Red-necked Stint on South Beach in Chatham from 9/5-13 (Glenn d'Entremont et al), only the second record for Cape Cod. South Beach in Chatham has become the shorebird capital of Cape Cod; over 12,000 birds there on 8/4 included 1200 Black-bellied Plovers, 1600 Semipalmated Plovers, 130 Willets, 105 Hudsonian Godwits, 1800 Red Knots, 3200 Sanderlings, 2200 Short-billed Dowitchers, and 1800 Semipalmated

Sandpipers. The recovery of the Piping Plover population locally was reflected in a count of 85 at South Beach on 8/4, while a flock of 161 American Oystercatchers on Monomoy, 9/2, was a striking sight. Whimbrel flocks numbered 150+ birds in Wellfleet and 200+ at First Encounter Beach on 8/5. As many as seven Marbled Godwits were present on N. Monomoy - South Beach during the period; six flew past Cackle Cove on 9/19; and one or two were seen in the Nauset area. The only Baird's Sandpipers all appeared on 9/19: three on S. Monomoy and a single at Hatches Harbor in Provincetown. A Ruff was a rare find at Fort Hill on 9/12 (Dave Larsen). Always a treat to see, single Buff-breasted Sandpipers were found at South Beach on 8/29, at S. Monomoy on 9/19, and as many as three were on N. Monomoy during the period 9/3-11. Red-necked Phalaropes numbered as many as 55+ on Stellwagen Bank and 86 were found 10-15 miles off Chatham on 9/19. Six Red Phalaropes were on Stellwagen, 9/11, and a single was off Chatham, 9/19.

**Jaegers:** A few Pomarine Jaegers were seen on Stellwagen Bank but were generally outnumbered by Parasitics. Parasitics were also reported frequently from South Beach from mid-August onward, culminating in a count of 20 on 9/18. An adult Long-tailed Jaeger flying past Race Point, Provincetown, 9/16 (Rick Heil), was an exceptional find.

**Gulls:** Common Black-headed Gulls were seen at Great Island in Wellfleet in late August; at South Beach, 8/18-19; on N. Monomoy, 8/31; and at Outermost Harbor in Chatham, 9/17. Lesser Black-backed Gulls were reported from Provincetown, South Beach (at least three different birds), S. Monomoy, and Stage Harbor (two birds). An exceptional number of Sabine's Gulls included several reports from Stellwagen, where as many as 3+ were seen, as well as singles at South Beach in late August, Race Point on 9/16, and First Encounter Beach on 9/17.

**Terns:** Hurricane Floyd blew a sprinkling of tropical terns our way. Six Sooty Terns were found on 9/18: three at First Encounter Beach (various observers); two at Skaket Beach in Orleans (Blair Nikula et al.); and one at Cackle Cove in Chatham (Blair Nikula et al).


*Continued on page 7*

Thanks to Jim Talin for contributing the following from Today's MailBits.com Trivia Question:

### How do birds find worms in the ground?

If it were necessary for birds to stick their beaks into every single hole in the ground in hopes of finding a worm, they'd likely starve to death before finding a snack. Fortunately for the birds, worms do everything short of hanging neon "Eat Here" signs over their holes.

The worms' fatal mistake begins before the sun rises. Worms usually crawl up to the earth's surface to cool in the early morning dew before the sun heats up the ground. Further hurting worms' chances are birds' super-sensitive feet, which can feel the earth vibrate when a worm moves.

If the worm continues to crawl, the bird will use its low frequency hearing to target the worm's exact location in the dirt. One quick jab of the beak and the early bird wins again. 

Source: *How A Fly Walks Upside Down* by Martin Goldwyn; <http://mailbits.com/Trivia/Source/22.htm>


### ON A LARK OR TWO, A SPECIAL PROGRAM

On Tuesday, November 30, at 3:00 p.m., Wesley E. Dawson will present a multimedia program on his work with meadowlarks. Dr. Dawson, Lark Curator of Birds, Emeritus, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, will enlighten the audience via slides, tapes, and photos concerning the decades he spent breeding, hand-rearing, and studying vocalizations in the species.


The public is invited free of charge to watch, listen, and learn about this "exaltation of larks" in the Leonard Room at the South Yarmouth Library, co-sponsored by the library and the Massachusetts Audubon Society. For information telephone Carol at the library, 508-760-4820.

### BIRDING THE GREATER NEW YORK CITY AREA

*Susan Weliky*


When New England birders visit New York, they are probably aware of the great birding at the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge or Central Park, but there are other good spotting locations. As a former member of the Brooklyn Bird Club, I still get their newsletter and was reminded of the excellent possibilities for birding in New York. Prospect Park in Brooklyn provides pathways through the forested edge of the terminal moraine and around the lake in a 526-acre park. Floyd Bennett Field, a former airfield also in Brooklyn, provides habitat for grassland birds. During the spring and summer, the grasslands are full of wild flowers and grasses as well as Grasshopper Sparrows, Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, Upland Sandpipers, Northern Harriers and American Kestrels. It is also a good place to look for wintering hawks and owls. 

The other boroughs also have a lot to offer. Fort Tilden in Queens is notable for autumn hawk, passerine and waterfowl migration. Clay Pits Ponds Preserve, Wolfe Pond Park, Great Hills Recreation Area, William Davis Preserve, Pratt's Island and the Greenbelt's High Rock are located on Staten Island. Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx has 2,764 acres of shoreline and wooded areas.


If one has the time for a trip out to Long Island, Fire Island and Jones Beach can't be beat. Democrat Point, Fire Island's westernmost location, offers beautiful views into the inlet and its abundant seabird activity. The inlet pulls in some remarkable birds and acts as a trap during fall migration. Don't forget to visit Captree State Park and Oak Beach to look for larks, buntings, sparrows, rails and owls. 

## BALD EAGLE STAMP PROGRAM



Bring your commemorative postage stamps to pass on to Bessie Tirrel at each meeting. She sends them down to Florida, where they are resold and the proceeds go toward the Bald Eagle restoration project. 


## OUR PRESIDENT SAYS ...

The 100th Christmas Count for the National Audubon Society is this year! The aim is to spot and record the number and species of birds in a count circle. This year, as in many years past, both Blair Nikula and Peter Trimble have volunteered to be in charge of the Lower Cape count and the Mid-Cape counts respectively. As someone put it so eloquently, the Christmas Count is the "canary in the coal mine" for the environment. So please volunteer your time and effort for these very worthwhile events. 


## Field Trips, Continued

Saturday, November 20: 9 a.m. Waterfowl of Dennis and nearby areas. Meet at Corporation Beach, Dennis. Leader, Mark Tuttle, 362-3015

## ANNUAL FEEDER COUNT


Enclosed with this issue of the newsletter is the bird club's annual feeder census form. In case you haven't participated before, please look at the form and its instructions and try to be a participant this winter 



*Here's a thoughtful gift for someone whose eyes are not what they used to be. The large, easy-to-read edition of Roger Tory Peterson's classic field guide makes bird identification easier than ever and includes 390 newly-updated range maps.* 

## Sightings, Continued

Additionally, one Bridled Tern was also seen at First Encounter Beach. Two Caspian Terns, not necessarily storm-related, were on S. Monomoy, 9/19. A Royal Tern was at Coast Guard Beach, 9/11; another at Stage Harbor, 9/17, and two off Morris Island 9/18 were probably blown up by Hurricane Floyd. Exceptional counts of Black Terns included 26 at Sippe-wissett Marsh in Falmouth, 8/28; 100 counted by Jackie Sones on S. Monomoy, 9/2; and 140+ at various locations in Chatham, 9/17. Several reports of 1-3 Black Skimmers came from the Nauset area and Monomoy - South Beach.

**Songbirds.** Red-breasted Nuthatches appeared in numbers in late August and visited many bird feeders throughout the Cape. The best wave of migrant songbirds occurred on 8/30 when Dick Comeau and others found 5-6 Philadelphia Vireos and 17 species of warblers on Morris Island. Stauffer Miller found a Golden-winged Warbler with some hybrid characteristics in Wellfleet on 8/19. Stauffer also found some unusual warblers at the county farm in Barnstable: a Mourning, 9/13; Connecticuts, 9/13 & 24; and a Yellow-breasted Chat, 9/13. Also at the county farm on 9/14 were a Blue Grosbeak and a Yellow-headed Blackbird. Another Yellow-headed Blackbird was in Provincetown, 8/31. 

PETERSON FIELD GUIDES

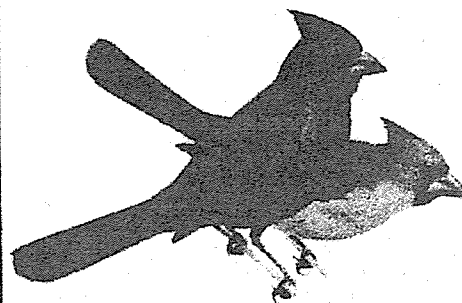


## Eastern Birds

Leave  
your reading  
glasses at  
home!

LARGE FORMAT EDITION

America's best-selling Field Guide now features new, larger type, bigger illustrations, and updated range maps for more than 400 species — redesigned for quick, easy field identification.



Roger Tory Peterson



Dues are single \$10.00, family \$15.00.  
Checks may be mailed to ...  
Cape Cod Bird Club  
Ellie Winslow - Treasurer  
24 Charles St.  
Sandwich, MA 02563

have not been paid


have been paid

According to our records your dues for 1999-2000...  
So please play promptly.  
We do not like to lose members, but at the same  
time, we do not want to have a mailing list inflated  
with names of those no longer interested in CCBC.  
The mailing list will be revised very shortly. If you  
have not paid 1999-2000 dues by the end of the  
year, this may be the last newsletter you receive.  
We do not like to lose members, but at the same  
time, we do not want to have a mailing list inflated  
with names of those no longer interested in CCBC.

**DUES ARE DUE**

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



**Greetings from your editor:** Thanks to all of you who conveyed kind words about the last newsletter. Thanks, also, to the various contributors who helped make the job much easier. I hope every member will want to write an account of a bird observation, a bird trip, a good bird book or anything else that would interest the club's readers. I'm planning on giving some of the issues a theme, sort of like the "ducky" nature of this one. **For January - February, I'd love anecdotes, observations and facts about owls.** However, I ask that all submissions be sent to me electronically — no need to format your article, as email serves the purpose just fine. If you don't have a computer or email of your own, your public library can help you with this task. All submissions must be in my hands by the 15th of the month prior to the next issue. Don't hesitate to get in touch with me if you have any questions. *Elinor Miller, emiller@seepub.com; 362-3384* 



## The Cape Cod Bird Club Inc.

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

### Officers

Phil Kyle *President*  
Barbara Stanton *Vice President*  
Ron Ayotte *Secretary*  
Ellie Winslow *Treasurer*

### Newsletter

Editor ~ Elinor Miller, email: emiller@seepub.com  
Circulation ~ Ron Ayotte

### Directors

Betty Erickson  
Marge Marion  
Stauffer Miller  
Dick Stacey  
Bob Vander Pyl  
Susan Weliky

*Nominating Committee Chair*  
Don Scott