



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 29

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2000

ISSUE 1

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Phil Kyle

Shorebirds are simple amazing. Whether you consider their extremely torturous migration or their leaving young behind on the the tundra to feed for themselves while they head southward on their fall journey, or you if look at shorebirds' bill-lengths or their foraging behaviors, they're definitely in a class by themselves.

Being a retired biology teacher, I find it an evolutionary marvel that different shorebirds have different feeding behaviors to avoid competition, thus leading to some "serious" speciation (dividing the groups into different species). Yes, many behaviors are passed on genetically!

Whether it's going to Cuttyhunk (last of the Elizabeth Islands) every Sunday during the summer or spending every Friday/Saturday on South Monomoy Island off Chatham, I get a weekly look at the relative abundance of shorebirds and their behaviors.

All shorebirds at this time of year are trying to eat an abundance of food that they can convert into fat and use as fuel during their long flights south. Seeing Ruddy Turnstones, Short-billed Dowitchers and Semipalmated Sandpipers on a fairly regular basis made seeing a pair of American Avocets a couple of years ago at the Powder Hole on South Monomoy Island, a Black-necked Stilt at the same place this summer, a male Ruff with some brilliant red breeding plumage in West Harwich Conservation area many springs ago very special experiences. These extremely unusual occurrences also made me curious about shorebirds' feeding strategies.

Shorebirds hangout together at high tide because they have to, but as the water recedes, they separate into their different feeding niches. Least Sandpipers remain on the drier mud to feed; below them Red Knots and Dunlin are on the bare wet mud. Short-billed Dowitchers move rapidly and probe the mud underneath with their bills working like "sewing-machines," often accompanied by Greater Yellowlegs skimming prey from the water or swinging their bills back and forth to catch small fish. Ruddy Turnstones use their bills like small spades in a

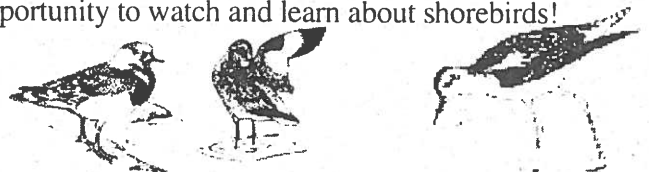
tossing motion to dig for their prey, or most times they use their bills like small crow-bars to flip over shells and small rocks to look for food — just like their name implies. Oystercatchers are larger birds; therefore, they have larger chisel-like bills which they use to sever the muscles that hold mollusk shells closed.

Many of the shorebirds are small sandpipers, that range in behavior from the fast-paced probing of the Least Sandpiper to the slower probing of the Red Knot. The Semipalmated and Western Sandpipers look for prey in the seaweed left by the most recent tide. Dowitchers poke more deeply and often this maneuver is accompanied by a shaking motion that allows the bird to detect small clams and amphipods in the sand more easily.

Willetts, godwits and Whimbrels, even Avocets, use their bills in very different ways. Respectively they chase their food down the beach after a wave breaks; feed on deeply buried lugworms or small razor clams; drag out fiddler crabs from their burrows; or skim the surface layer of mud for the larvae of benthic organisms. This is how shorebirds avoid any kind of competition.


From early July through late October, you'll see many shorebirds if you go to the right habitat. Nauset Marsh in Eastham is a good place to see them, 3 hours after high tide, from the Coast Guard Station parking lot, especially if you have a scope. Seagull Beach in Yarmouth is another great spot to see shorebirds but mainly when the mudflats are exposed, 3 hours after Boston's low tide.

Shorebird migration is past its peak by mid-September, but September 20 through October 20 provides some good opportunities for Western Sandpipers, Marbled Godwits, Long-billed Dowitchers. Look for these birds at South Beach in Chatham, Wellfleet Bay Audubon Sanctuary, West Dennis Beach or South Cape Beach in Mashpee. Don't miss this opportunity to watch and learn about shorebirds!



BELIZE TRIP 2001

Phil Kyle

From February 15 until February 24, the Cape Cod Bird Club will visit Belize. This small country is known for its Mayan ruins, unspoiled rain forest and its strong conservation efforts to set up national parks and preserves. We will sample some of Belize's richness and diversity with our own naturalist leader, Rafael Campos, recognized as one of the finest naturalists in Central America. He has been a tour leader for more than 20 years and is extremely knowledgeable about birds, primates and plants. We hope to see Jabiru, Snail Kite, Crested Guan, Red-capped Manakins and the Lovely Cotinga along with a host of trogons, parrots, toucans and antbirds. If we're lucky, we'll find tracks and maybe even sight these forest jungle cats: jaguar, ocelot, jaguarundi and margay. Our trip will conclude with a stay at Chan Chich Lodge set in a Mayan Plaza rich in wildlife. For more details, please call me at 508-495-0196. 

Report of Breeding Bird Survey

Stauffer Miller

The annual breeding bird census took place June 10 in portions of the towns of Barnstable, Dennis and Yarmouth. About 17 people covered 6 different sectors in the count area. A total of 103 species was found, a figure which was probably buoyed by pleasant weather. This is the highest number of species in the four years in which I have co-ordinated the count.

In the afternoon, Kanoi Roberts, Ellie Winslow and I went to Sandy Neck, thanks to Ned Handy and his boat, and did more counting there. I now have data for the past 4 years so each count now assumes more value for comparison and trend-watching. Following are some observations on this year's count and also the past 4 counts combined.

American Oystercatcher, five all in Barnstable Harbor, was found for the first time this year. What this represents, nobody knows, but it will be something to watch. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds numbered 4; no previous year has had more than one. Great Crested Flycatchers for whatever reason were well over the usual number. Also, Tree Swallow sightings were greatly below the usual figure. These birds may have been casualties of the cold spring weather. The most unusual bird of the count was a Purple Martin found by Peter Trimble and his group at Sea Gull Beach in West Yarmouth.

I wish to thank all who helped with the count and I think everybody had a good time. Also, I hope more of you will be available to help next June.


THE BEECH FOREST, MAY 2000

Stauffer Miller

If a single word describes the birding at the Beech Forest in Provincetown this past May, that word would be "coping". Birders there seemed always to be coping with clouds, wind and rain of varying amounts and intensity. As a result, there were a number of not-so-stellar days, especially on the weekends.

The bird club sponsored 11 trips at the Beech Forest in May. The first trips were May 6 and 7, and were preceded by cool, rainy weather. Jim Talin's May 6 trip had 44 species, with lots of Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-Crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers and White-throated Sparrows. May 7 was cooler; Blair Nikula had fewer species but more warblers.

Ruth Connaughton and Nancy Reider coped with poor weather May 9, but Frank Caruso had good conditions May 13 with 15 warbler species and 49 total species. Conditions deteriorated for Sue Thompson on the 14th, however. The last trips, led by the Erickson-Leary-Maguire team on May 20, Don Scott May 21, Sue Weliky May 27 and George Martin May 28 were also beset by unfavorable weather and counts were not so good.

A total of 24 warbler species was seen on one or more trips. Scarcest of these seemed to be Bay-breasted and Tennessee. No Blue-winged, Cape May, Worm-eating or Hooded Warblers were seen. A Kentucky Warbler was found on one or two days but not by a bird club field trip. A total of 78 species of birds were tallied by the various field trip circuits around the Beech Forest in May. Despite the making do, it was a pleasant season and I appreciate the efforts of our leaders. As for the warblers, we'll see you in September. 

SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER FIELD TRIPS

September

Thursday, September 7: Barnstable County Farm and Nearby Areas in Cummaquid. We will be walking in some tall, wet grass. Meet at Cummaquid Cemetery by railroad tracks, Mary Dunn Road off of Rt. 6A at 6:45 am. Leader, Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

Sunday, September 10: Crane Wildlife Area, Rt 151. Turn north opposite Ranch Road, go to last parking lot. Leaders: Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.

Sunday, September 10: Morris Island, Chatham. Meet at the Monomoy NWR headquarters parking lot at 8:00 am. Leaders: Jim Talin, 896-7169 / Tom Noonan, 385-3193.

Saturday, September 16: Morris Island, Chatham. Meet at the Monomoy NWR headquarters parking lot at 8:00 am. Leader, Mark Tuttle, 362-3015.

Saturday, September 25: Morris Island, Chatham. Meet at the Monomoy NWR Headquarters parking lot at 8:00 am. Leader: Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

October

Sunday, October 8: Falmouth. Meet at the Locust Street parking area of the bike path at 8:00 am. Leaders: Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.

Tuesday, October 10: Meet at the west end of West Dennis Beach parking lot at 9:00 am. Co-Leaders, Ruth Connaughton, 432-1580, and Nancy Reider, 398-8296.


Saturday, October 14-15: Trip to Freeport, Maine, to visit a Saw-whet Owl banding station Saturday evening. Three spaces left. If interested, call Stauffer Miller, 362-3384


Saturday, October 21: Fort Hill, Eastham. Meet at the lower parking lot at Fort Hill at 9:00 am. Leader: Dick Koeppen, 430-1822.

Friday, October 29: Marstons Mills area to walk a cranberry bog. Meet at the Marstons Mills post office in Marstons Mills at 7:30 AM. Leader, Leader: Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

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 Monday evening September 11, Ted Davis will present his slide /lecture "New Zealand birds: Conservation problems and solutions." Ted is a professor of biology at Boston University. He is a past president of the Field Ornithologist Association, Nutall Ornithological Society, Bird Observer, and is President-elect of the Wilson Ornithological Society. Ted has written a biography of Ludlow Griscom, the founder of Massachusetts birding. 

Our speaker on Monday evening October 16th,* is Brian Cassie who will describe "How to find birds and other wildlife." Brian is interested in many fields of natural history, including mollusks, wildflowers, butterflies and birds. He is author or co-author of eleven nature books for adults and children. This past spring he talked at the Natural History Conference at Cape Cod Community College. Not only has Brian spoken to the Cape Cod Bird Club before, but he has also participated in many Christmas Counts for the Club even though he lives in Foxboro. 

HAVE YOU NOTICED ...when a whole group of hawks rides a thermal together, they seem to swirl upward like the steam rising from the spout of a boiling tea kettle? That's why a bunch of hawks is called a "kettle." From *Everything You Never Learned About Birds*


DID YOU KNOW ...that despite the success of government conservation programs, North America continues to lose several hundred thousand acres of wildlife habitat each year?

5 * Note change this month!

The 3rd Annual Ludlow Griscom Award was presented in May to Peter Trimble in recognition of his contributions to Cape Cod birders and to national birding activities as well.

Since joining the Cape Cod Bird Club, Peter has been an active and interested participant. In 1985 he was elected a Trustee, at the same time volunteering to chair the Walks Committee on which he served until 1987. Peter was elected Vice-President in 1987 and in 1989 became President. Peter remained President until 1992 and then was elected Chair of the Nominating Committee in January 1993.

As a well respected leader in the world of birding on Cape Cod, Peter has been the coordinator of the Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count and the Breeding Bird Survey. In addition, Peter has also been instrumental in conducting breeding bird censuses at the Mass. Military Reservation for most of the past decade.

Peter is an educator who mentors those around him. Since graduating from the University of Connecticut, he has been teaching, first at Cape Cod Academy in 1980 and for the past 16 years in the Sandwich school system. As an enthusiastic teacher, he instills his students with a love of birds and the environment, encouraging them to participate in birding surveys in the Sandwich area. 

BIRD CLUB FIELD TRIPS OF 1999-2000


Stauffer Miller

The bird club had 34 field trips from September 1999 to May 2000, led by some 20 leaders. The total species list for all trips was 172, which was a few less than last season.

The trip with most participants (by far!) was the McGinleys' September 5 trip at Coast Guard Beach in Eastham which attracted 28 people. And the people number matched the species number! The trip with most species was one led by the author to Eastham and Wellfleet November 12, which had 50 species, including standouts such as Bohemian Waxwing and Snow Bunting. A very different "field trip" was the one to Stellwagen Bank October 3 led by Blair Nikula and Ned Handy. Let's hope this one can be run again.

Some unusual species seen on field trips were the Eurasian Wigeon on the "ghost trip" which a

leaderless group (your author missed his own trip) took October 29 in Marstons Mills, the White-Winged Crossbill found by Dick Koeppen and group October 31 at Fort Hill, the Caspian Tern seen beside Zachary's Pub in Mashpee April 27 and the Olive-Sided Flycatcher found by Sue Weliky and group at Provincetown May 27

Some relatively common birds not seen on any trip were American Kestrel, Piping Plover, Whimbrel, Least Tern, Chimney Swift, Bank Swallow, Scarlet Tanager and Sharp-Tailed Sparrow. I wish to thank all the leaders for being so generous with their time and knowledge. Also, I'm looking for more leaders. Don't hesitate to volunteer for fear you don't know the birds. That doesn't matter. You might be a better leader than you think. Hope to hear from you. 

DID YOU REALIZE...that although more than 70 percent of the earth's surface is covered with water, only one percent is available for human use?

REMINDER:

October 9th is part of the Columbus Day holiday, so the CCBC's meeting is October 16th.

OVERTONES

by William Alexander Percy

I heard a bird at break of day
Sing from the autumn trees
A song so mystical and calm,
So full of certainties,
No man, I think, could listen long
Except upon his knees.
Yet this was but a simple bird,
Alone, among dead trees.



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

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



bird club gift ideas

CCBC Decals	\$ 1.00	CCBC Hats	\$ 15.00
CCBC Checklist	.50	Binocular/Camera Straps	12.50
Birding Cape Cod	10.00	Organizer Packs	17.00

These items for sale at each meeting

From your editor: I want to various Board members for their contributions to this issue, especially Phil Kyle for his artwork. Contributors like these help make my job much easier and also make the newsletter enjoyable reading. During the year, I hope every member will write an account of a bird observation, a bird trip, a good bird book or anything else that would interest the club's readers. 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 email yourself, 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. Please 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

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Nominating Committee Chair
Don Scott