



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 30 – ISSUE 4

MARCH – APRIL 2002

The Cape Cod Bird Club newsletter is published bi-monthly.

Cape Cod Bird Club meetings are 7:30 PM the second Monday of each month (unless otherwise indicated) at the Museum of Natural History, Rte 6A, Brewster.

(NEW) Website:
<http://www.massbird.org/CCBC>

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President's Message

Although the first day of spring is Wednesday, March 20th, this is mostly an end-of-winter month. The advanced guard of spring migrants appear near the end of March, such as Redwinged Blackbirds, Grackles, Phoebes, Killdeer, Woodcock, Tree Swallows, and even Bluebirds. Although you may have already heard Great Horned Owls doing their courtship hooting which primarily ended in late February, this earliest nester still vocalizes to defend its territory. At the beach, on still days, listen for the Piping Plover that arrives this month. Keep an eye out, too, for the Fox Sparrow that migrates through the area at this time.

In April, which usually is a greatly anticipated month, you might see some herons like Snowy Egrets, or Black-crowned Herons. Most Hawk migration occurs in April but is very weather dependent. During this month, impressive hawk movement is associated with the flow of advancing warm air usually followed by a cold front. The birds, to avoid storms associated with this collision, concentrate right along the northward moving boundary. Good chance you'll see some migrating

from the Pilgrim Heights area of Truro or Morris Island in Chatham. Watch for Turkey Vultures, American Kestrels, Sharp-shinned or Broad-winged Hawks.

Landbird and Shorebird migration begins by mid-April and maybe, if the weather is warm enough, you'll get to observe some usual May migrants like Warblers, Sparrows — maybe a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher or Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. So keep your eyes peeled for early arrivals.

As Blair Nikula has said many times, it's a period of hope for birders. The best thing about Cape Cod birding is that there is definitely going to be an obvious change. This winter has been one of extremes. It did hamper a few golfers and the obvious lack of snow made seeds more available to birds so they didn't spend a lot of time around your backyard feeder. Not to mention the effect of the drought on potential breeders — but the cycle goes on!

Phil Kyle



7th Annual Cape Cod National History Conference – March 16th

March 16th (Saturday) 8:30 AM – 4 PM
Cape Cod Community College
Registration deadline: March 1st
Cost: \$15 (student discounts available)

This is an all-day conference with presenters from environmental organizations across the Cape speaking on a variety of natural history topics, which include: Cape Coyote Behavior, Freshwater Turtle Inventory, Sea Turtle Conservation & Mgmt, Radio-tracking Eastern Box Turtles, Avian Diversity Project on Monomoy,

Cape Cod Ants, Birds, and Ticks, Seal Observation and Disentanglement, Field Guide to Cape Cod Protists, Post-Outfall Monitoring of Phytoplankton, Cape Shoreline Change Data, Loss of Eelgrass and Fish Communities, and Assessment of Cape Cod Salt Marshes. Migration Productions will show a video and poster presentations on many key subjects will be on display. For more info, call 508-349-2615.

CCBC Programs for March and April

March 11 – Bluebirds and The Birds Next Door

Bluebirds are among the most sought after yard birds on Cape Cod. Joey Mason maintains and monitors 130 Eastern bluebird and 33 American kestrel nest boxes on cranberry growers' properties near her home in Middleboro, MA. She'll help us learn where to place nest boxes, how to monitor them, and the problems faced. She'll also relate many first-hand experiences.

Joey graduated from Stockbridge School of Agriculture in Amherst with an Associates degree in Laboratory Animal Technology. Her bird-related jobs include official hawk-watcher during spring migration at Sandy Hook, NJ, and serving for two summers as a member of the survey and monitoring team with Colorado Division of Wildlife's Peregrine Falcon Recovery Program. She learned how to band hawks in 1985 in Cape May, NJ, and continues to band them there during fall migration.

Joey presently works as a research assistant for the UMass Cranberry Station in Wareham. Among her other agricultural duties, she is the coordinator of the Raptor Retrofit Project that she initiated in 2001. Joey has also managed the Cranberry Country Banding Project since 1989.

April 8 – Midway Atoll and the Birds that Survived the Big War

Emmalee Tarry, now living in NH, will share her birding experiences while on Midway Island in April, 2001. Midway, a key island in World War II, is the only one of the many islands that make up North West Hawaii that can be visited by ordinary people — no mountains to climb, no insects, and you can see most of the birds from a golf cart which can be rented.

We'll learn more about White Terns, Great Frigatebirds, Red-footed Boobies and Albatross. We'll get to peek into the world of the Pacific Island Wildlife Refuges and will hear about Green Sea Turtles, Monk Seals and Spinner Dolphins.

Emmalee Tarry grew up in Louisville, KY, earned degrees from the University of Louisville and Indiana University. Her careers include banking, teaching, software instructor, and programmer. Traveling has always been important to her and, in 1977, she served as a volunteer for CAREMEDICO in Afghanistan. Her birding trips have taken her throughout the U.S. and include trips to Africa, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Antarctica.

Now retired and a Grandmother, Emmalee is the webmaster for the web page New England Seabirds which encourages pelagic birding.



More Books for Auction —

Elinor Miller is again offering books and CD's for auction at the CCBC March 11th meeting. Check out these bargains:

The Bluebird Monitor's Guide, a Cornell Bird Library Guide.

Retail price \$14.95; opening bid \$5.

All the Song Birds, an American Bird Conservancy Compact Guide to Western Birds. Retail price \$8.95; opening bid \$2.

CD ROM of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Guide to Birds of North America, Version 3.

Features over 2675 color photos, more than 1200 songs, calls and chip notes and 500 flash card quizzes. Retail price \$69.95; opening bid \$25.

All proceeds go to a non-profit organization to be chosen by CCBC's Board.

CCBC Merchandise (on sale at meetings)

CCBC Decals	\$ 1.00
CCBC Checklist	.50
CCBC Patches	3.00
Book: Birding Cape Cod	10.00
Binoc/Camera Straps	12.50
Organizer Packs	17.00
CCBC Knit Hats	Reduced price
<u>New</u> CCBC Caps	15.00

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

*(Starting with this issue, we plan to publish the names of recently-joined members in the newsletter.
Ron Ayotte, Secretary)*

The Cape Cod Bird Club is very pleased to acknowledge the following individuals who have joined the Club since September.

Welcome and good birding!

- * Kenneth Burnes, Cotuit
- * Richard Coveney, Hyannis
- * Richard and Carol French, Wellfleet
- * Lillian Giuliano, S. Dennis
- * Geri Housley, Sandwich
- * Vonda Killian, S. Orleans

- * Louis & Lee Turner, Falmouth
- * James Sullivan, Eastham
- * Rose Sullivan, Waltham
- * Fred Streams, S. Wellfleet
- * David & Lori Peterman, Wellfleet
- * Gertrude Maglott, Sandwich
- * David & Lennis Maynard, Eastham
- * Ruth Moling, E. Orleans

March – April Field Trips

Stauffer Miller



MARCH

Sunday, March 10 –
Falmouth. Meet **8:00**

AM at the Locust St. parking area of the bike path. Leaders: Bob Vander Pyl & Alison Robb, 540-2408.

Thursday, March 14 – Mashpee.
Meet **8:30 AM** at the donut establishment at Rt. 151 and Ninigret Ave. (1.6 miles west of Mashpee Rotary) to visit a marsh and thicket area. Leader: Stauffer Miller, 362-3384, e-mail: emiller@seepub.com.

Friday, March 15 – Harwich Cons. Lands, Harwich Community Garden and Hawksnest Conservation Area.
Meet **9:00 AM** at the Harwich Cons.

Lands Herring Ladder (dirt road off Depot St. in Harwich). We'll be looking for early spring migrants. Leaders: Diane Silverstein & Michael Dettrey, 398-9484, e-mail mikeanddiane@hotmail.com.

Saturday, March 16 – 9:00 AM.
Meet at Corporation Beach in Dennis to look for water birds there and also visit some other waterbird sites. Leader: Mark Tuttle, 362-3015.

Thursday, March 28 – A Walk Under the Full Moon to Listen for Owls. Meet at **7:00 PM** at the bridge over the Herring River at West Harwich Conservation Area in Harwich.
Note: Wind or Overcast cancels.
Leader: Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

APRIL

Friday, April 26 (John J. Audubon's birthday!) Meet in parking lot at **8:30 AM** at Nickerson State Park, Rt. 6A, Brewster. (The parking lot is immediately to the right as you enter the park.) We'll try for early spring migrants. Leaders: Michael Dettrey and Diane Silverstein, 398-9484, e-mail mikeanddiane@hotmail.com.

Sunday, April 28 Falmouth.
7:00 AM. Meet at the Locust St. parking area of the bike path. Leaders: Bob Vander Pyl and Alison Robb, 540-2408.

Where Penguins Rule

Don and Carol Scott

After a cancellation in 2001 and three postponements in 2002, Ellie Winslow, Carol, and I finally departed on the day after Thanksgiving for our long awaited trip to the Falkland Islands, South Georgia Island and the Antarctic peninsula. And the wait was well worth it.

The sparsely populated Falklands lie some 300 miles east of the southern portion of South America and present a landscape of treeless, rolling hills. They are home, however, to an interesting variety of land birds, waterfowl and raptors. The Long-tailed Meadowlark whose brilliant red breast attracts instant attention; the Black-chinned Finch and the ubiquitous Tussock bird are most common. Kelp Geese, Upland Geese and flightless Steamer Ducks are regularly spotted, as are Red-backed Hawks and the endemic striated Caracara.

South Georgia, some 500 miles

east of the Falklands, is a spectacular mountainous island covered with huge glaciers and massive colonies of elephant and fur seals. Chilling reminders of the whaling days, which stopped functioning in 1961, are everywhere. Grytviken, the largest of several whale processing locations on South Georgia is now a crumbling ruin of what was a flourishing industry. South Georgia has one land bird — the drab South Georgia Pipit and two endemic ducks, a Pintail and a Teal.

Once the Antarctic peninsula is reached, the environment changes severely to a stark picture of mountains, icebergs, glaciers and rougher seas. The regular daily sightings of Cape and Giant Petrels, wandering and Black-browed Albatross and a variety of prions is replaced by whales, weddell seals and endless acres of pack ice.

The common thread off all of these places, however, is the incredible num-

ber and variety of penguins. On the Falklands, burrowing Magellanic Penguins and comical Rock-hopper Penguins are everywhere. At one location, we hiked to a rocky bluff where a large mixed colony of Black-browed Albatross, Rock-hoppers and Blue-eyed Shags was sight to behold.

Similarly, in Antarctica, we walked among huge colonies of nesting Gentoos, Chin-strap and Adelie Penguins, numbering in the tens of thousands. At one location, midway down the peninsula, a Gentoos nesting site was still covered with several feet of snow, the most seen at this location in over ten years.

The bewildered Gentoos, who could not find bare ground or rocks for nest building must have been wondering what happened to global warming. South Georgia, however, was the prize location for the wonders of nature.

(Cont'd on Page 5)

What's Around

Ron Ayotte

This is the third in a series of articles on birds seen on Cape Cod based on personal observations, and supplemented by information from the Rare Bird Alerts (RBAs) of Mass Audubon.

The places visited follow, roughly, the outline of Birding Cape Cod, published by the Club and Mass Audubon. (Remember, very common birds have been omitted.) Also note: my current list covers only December 2001. I was away for the month of January and so missed out on birding here.

December 3, West Barnstable:

Mute Swan, Green-winged Teal, Pintail, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Myrtle Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Common Grackle. Mass Audubon: Western Kingbird, White-winged Crossbill, Common Redpoll, Purple Finch.

December 7, Harwich, Chatham:

Common Loon, Red-throated Loon, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, White-winged Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser, Common Eider, Snowy Owl.

December 10, Yarmouth, Dennis:

Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Northern Gannet, Brant, Common Eider, Long-tailed Duck, Surf Scoter, Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Wild Turkey, Sanderling, Dunlin, Bonaparte's Gull, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Cedar Waxwing, Myrtle Warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Redwing Blackbird.

December 21, Chatham:

Common Loon, Red-throated Loon, White-winged Scoter, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Northern Harrier, Great Blue Heron. Mass Audubon: Barrow's Goldeneye, Redhead, Black-headed Gull, Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Warbler, Ovenbird.

December 28, Eastham:

Red-throated Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Gannet, Great Blue Heron, Brant, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Common Eider, White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Sanderling, Dunlin, Razorbill(?), Golden-crowned Kinglet, Myrtle Warbler, White-throated Sparrow. Mass Audubon: Northern Waterthrush, Red-

shouldered Hawk, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Iceland Gull.

For the record, in **January**, Mass Audubon reported the following rarities: **1-10:** Western Tanager, Barrow's Golden-eye, White-winged Crossbill, Black-headed Gull, Harlequin Duck, Wood Duck, Turkey Vulture. **11-20:** Western Kingbird, Bohemian Waxwing, Selasphorus (either Anna's or Rufous) Hummingbird (in Chatham), Townsend's Warbler, Pine Grosbeak, Barrow's Goldeneye, Peregrine Falcon, Iceland Gull, Black Guillemot, Black-legged Kittiwake. **21-31:** Northern Waterthrush, Red-shouldered Hawk, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, Peregrine Falcon, Iceland Gull, Snow Bunting, American Bittern, Glaucous Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Yellow-breasted Chat, Baltimore Oriole, Killdeer.

Finally, on the beaches of Treasure Island, Florida, January 12-27, I encountered the following: Common Loon, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, Great Blue Heron, White Ibis, Brown Pelican, Forster's Tern, Sandwich Tern, Royal Tern, Caspian Tern, Black Skimmer, Sanderling, Western Sandpiper, Willet, Black-hooded Parakeet (200+), Eurasian Collared Dove, and Fish Crow.

A Rhode Island Outing

Stauffer Miller

On January 17th, a group of ten of us from the bird club met in a "snow storm" (that's what the weatherman called it) and went to Rhode Island, Westport, and Dartmouth shore points. The outing began with a side trip to a field near Rochester to look for a White-fronted Goose. Instead, we found, appropriately enough, some Snow Geese.

The snow by then had abated and Dick Stacey observed that there was more of a snow accumulation on our binoculars than on the ground.

We continued on and near Portsmouth, RI, our cellphone got an urgent call from Dick Jurkowski's car that a 'rest and coffee stop' was needed — which of these needs was more urgent wasn't specified. This produced a stop at a homey sandwich and pastry shop called the "Shiver-Me-Timbers." I'd heard reports that their coffee cake was tasty. (It was!)

After leaving, we made stops at two ponds near there and saw Shovelers and the first of three Kestrels for the day.

Then it was on to Sachuest NWR

where we found a large flock of Purple Sandpipers, lots of Harlequin Ducks and several Horned Grebes. We looked for, but couldn't find, a reported Barrow's Goldeneye.

After that, we returned to the "Shiver-Me-Timbers" for a formal lunch stop, then wound through Tiverton, Tiverton Four Corners, Adamsville, Horseneck Beach, Gooseberry Neck and Dartmouth to complete a large loop.

We finished with 54 species and enjoyed a pleasant bakery and birding winter outing.

A Visit to Blue Heron Heaven

Jack Palmer

I like Great Blue Herons. They are tall, not handsome, cannot sing, wade in water, appear awkward on their long gangly legs, and eat fish. They remind me of myself. Thus, while visiting Minnesota, I grabbed at a chance offered by an ornithologist to visit a heronry he was studying. I plugged the coordinates into my GPS, jumped into to a jeep with a fellow birder, and navigated back-woods fire-roads to the rookery.

In the past, I had encountered great blues only along shorelines so I was unprepared to see them balancing at the tops of enormously tall red pines. I commented on how high up they were and my companion replied with a gulp. I seconded her gulp. The tree we would have to climb was limbless up to the crown, but ladder-rung-like slats of wood had been nailed at roughly one-foot intervals all the way up the trunk. I counted 62 of them that had to be climbed before the herons could be reached.

The young birds at the top were about ready to fledge. The adults were nowhere in sight so the colony was silent. We had been warned that young herons attempt to ward off would-be predators by regurgitating their last meals down on ascending intruders. Knowing this, we had thoughtfully brought our rain suits for protection, and donning this panoply we walked the 50 yards to the trees. But it was a very warm day and by the time we had reached the tree we decided to shed our stifling rain gear. We folded it neatly at the base of the tree we were about to climb — a double blunder we soon learned.

We looked straight up and my companion verbalized what I was thinking. "Are you sure we want to do this?" she said. For an instant, I was sure I didn't

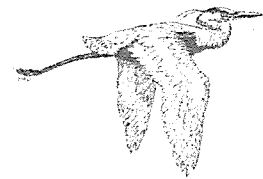
want to but then boldly suggested this would probably be the only chance either of us would ever have to see a heron rookery firsthand. So, with a 'don't look down' resolve, we began to climb. Half way up the trunk, the bombardment began. My companion, who had long blond hair, was in the lead and was the first to suffer. She was hit directly on the head by a partially digested fish and I feared there could be no shampoo miracle enough to ever rectify this annointment. Just about everything that came down was in some stage of digestive horribleness, and what missed us landed on our rain gear stashed uselessly below. Without going into unpleasant details, two very different-looking and smelly people reached the tree top.

The view was spectacular — with Lake Itasca, the headwaters of the Mississippi, off in the distance. On the outer ends of branches were standing five young herons, each close to three feet tall. There was only one ragged nest built of sticks and about three feet in diameter. The birds looked at us and we at them. Their stiletto beaks appeared threatening, but there was no way, at that dizzying height, that we were going to tightrope out on the branches to test the reality of their danger. Occasionally a bird would flap its wings but that was the only highlight of our observations. We shot a roll of film, but later found the camera lens had been smeared during the falling rain of regurgitant.

When we decided to descend, my companion looked straight down for the first time and froze. "I can't go down," she stated as she clamped onto the tree trunk with a bear hug. Curious isn't it? The most important and needed action in our immediate lives

was to descend, but we were afraid to do it. After twenty minutes of discussing, rationalizing, coaxing, begging, and some stupid statements like "at least if we fall, we'll die together" (we hardly knew each other), it was decided that we would climb down with her sandwiched between me and the trunk so there could be no chance of her falling backwards. All the way down I wondered at the wisdom of this plan because it required our combined weights to be simultaneously placed on each wobbly, makeshift, ladder rung. But we made it down and stood next to our rain suits — now decorated with a spread of gore topped with the catfish that had bopped my companion.

I won't relay what was said now that we were safely on the ground but the statement "That wasn't so bad" wasn't mentioned. The drive back to camp in the open jeep was unforgettable. During the hour drive through the woods, we had millions of flies swirling around us and feasting on our faces. Obviously, birding can have an occasional downside.



(Cont'd from Page 3)

After a day of observing massive Macaroni and King Penguins colonies from just off-shore (dangerous, breeding fur seals kept us from landing), we were able to go ashore several times and walk among King Penguin colonies numbering in excess of 100,000.

The sound, smell, and sight of these beautiful birds, which were oblivious to our presence, will never be forgotten.

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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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Newsletter

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