

CAPE COD BIRD CLUB NEWSLETTER
JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1989

It's no secret that our bird club has a diverse range of active bird watchers or birders. Some members would travel far and wide to observe a new species or add to their life list. Others bird particular areas of the cape or go out on weekends without fail. We all enjoy and appreciate birds. I like to photograph birds as well as look at them through binoculars, as do several other members whose patience has truly paid off. Lots of us have active feeders and our bird watching hobby may not extend past the back yard, where close looks, territorial behavior, courtship and feeding habits and pecking orders can all be observed and studied at close range. Let's face it, watching birds is great and we need only to enjoy it to a degree that suits our lives or particular situations. The Outer Cape Christmas Count was held this past weekend (Dec 19) and although numbers of species or individuals (birds) wasn't as high as in past years, lots of people got out to count birds. One particular species that was found on Saturday (out of the count area) by Jan Smith and identified by Rick Heil, both of Peabody, was a Sprague's Pipit. This represents the first record ever in Massachusetts of this mid-western species!! That's what I call exciting!! The Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) breeds in Montana, North Dakota and the central Canadian provinces and migrates south in winter to the southern United States and Mexico. What then, is this small sparrow sized, ground dwelling, seed and insect eating Missouri Skylark doing on a point of land 30 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean?? Good Question Peter... Early Monday morning (12/19) Peter Trimble, Vern Laux and I headed for the P-Town airport where the bird had been discovered feeding along the edge of the taxiway in the short grass. As one would expect, Blair N. was already there watching the bird and saved us the time of finding this incredibly cryptic pipit. Looking at a bird like this - not brightly colored, not big and powerful, nothing flamboyant or exciting at all - gets to the roots of why we look at birds. I saw so much more than just a lost bird. It was a bird I had never seen before and I watched a behavior characteristic of so many species of buffy brown, secretive, ground dwelling birds. As it walked amongst the short grasses, stretching its neck to look over the tussocks, I saw the distinct pale buffy feathering of the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, despite a distinct white eye-ring. Suddenly it became an Upland Sandpiper, long neck, small head... certainly the habitat the right. Dick Forster, who mosied along with Wallace Baily shortly after we arrived looked up and said, "Hey, it's no more than a fledged Horned Lark." I agreed and thought to myself - That's probably what I would've called it if I discovered it. I mean, this was an LBJ (little brown job) if there ever was one. It walked in short steps, head down, and became a field sparrow. I was fascinated, we all were, we wondered if it would survive and decided it was a perfect set-up for a Merlin, the next one that came tooling down the runway, looking side to side would probably hammer this lost soul without missing a wingbeat. But then, whenever this pipit stopped moving it became invisible, at least to us humans. The Sprague's Pipit has a streaked crown and a creamy buff face with a distinct white eye-ring. Its beak is not conical like a sparrow but thin, acutely pointed. This pipit has white outer tail feathers that flash when it flies. Its breast and belly is creamy brown, light colored with fine brown streaking under the throat. The back and wings are brown with darker streaking down to the rump and a faint wing bar is evident. For some reason, this small seemingly oblivious bird had a great impact on me. I'll probably never see another one in Massachusetts again. It was truly a life experience which I'll never forget.

P. TRULL

UPCOMING PROGRAMS:

January 9, 1989 - 7:45 PM - Cape Cod Museum of Natural History. Norman Smith of Mass Audubon's Blue Hills Sanctuary will share his expertise of the Snowy Owls of Massachusetts, most notably Logan Airport. We search the cape for snowys while Norman is catching and banding dozens of them at Logan. I'm serious!! His slides and stories will amaze you. Bring a friend.

February 13, 89 - 7:45 PM - Cape Cod Museum of Natural History. YAAAAAY It's Members night - But come on everybody, lets not just have a few people's pictures. Last year was great!! Lets keep it up. Birds, wildflowers, scenery, mammals - I know you closet photographers are out there. You're good - show your stuff.

WALKS:

Wed. Jan. 4, Falmouth - 9:00 AM. Meet at town hall, Falmouth center. Mary Ropes, 548-6068

Mon. Jan. 9, Eastham - 9:00 AM. Meet at lower parking lot at Fort Hill. Art King, 255-8919

Tues. Jan. 10, Wellfleet - 9:00 AM. Meet at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. 349-2615.

Thurs. Jan. 12, Yarmouth - 9:00 AM. Meet at the intersection of Route 6-A and Union Street. Charlotte Smith, 362-6891.

Thurs. Jan. 26, Harwich, 9:00 AM. Meet at Saquatucket Harbor. Peter Trull, 945-9506

Off Cape Trip to Marshfield - Scituate Area. David Ludlow, property Mngr. for the South Shore Sanctuary, will lead us around the Daniel Webster Farm in Marshfield, "The Glades" in Scituate and other south shore hotspots to search for Harlequin Ducks, Roug-legged Hawk etc. Meet to car pool at Exit 6 Route 6, 8:00 AM. David will meet us at 9:00 AM. in Marshfield.

Sat
Jan 14

All day trip - Bring your lunch

Wednesday, February 1, Falmouth. Same as January. 9:00 AM

Monday, February 13, Eastham - 9:00 AM. Same as January

Tuesday, February 14, Wellfleet - 9:00 AM. Same as January

Thursday, Februar 16, 9:00 AM. Yarmouth, Same as January.

Thursday, February 23, 9:00 AM. Harwich, Leader to be announced.

SALLY'S MYSTERY WALK for February will be to an untoherefor unannounced HOT SPOT on FEBRUARY 4, . Maybe P-Town for northern Gulls, Wood's Hole for Purple Sandpipers, or Maybe Corporation Beach for King Eider. Eider way, it should be great! Details to be amnounced at the January meeting.

Mike and Karen We Love Ya!!!! Congradulations on the birth of your beautiful daughter, SANDY BLOOM O'CONNOR.....



Frank Caruso

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