



# Cape Cod Bird Club

MARCH - APRIL 1990

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Peter Trimble*

March and April in Massachusetts tend to be months of transition. The weather may be cold, windy, rainy and snowy; or warm, dry, and spring-like. The "birds" of winter (sea and bay ducks, alcids, winter finches, etc.) will start to leave us and migrants from the south (various shorebirds, herons, egrets, blackbirds, etc) will begin to arrive. Birding the Falmouth Ponds, the beach and marsh at Sandy Neck, the ocean at Race Point, or the coastal thickets and marshes of South Dartmouth and Westport are a few of the fine "spring" spots to check. For those who don't believe that there are good and enjoyable birding experiences in March and April, remember that May is just around the corner.

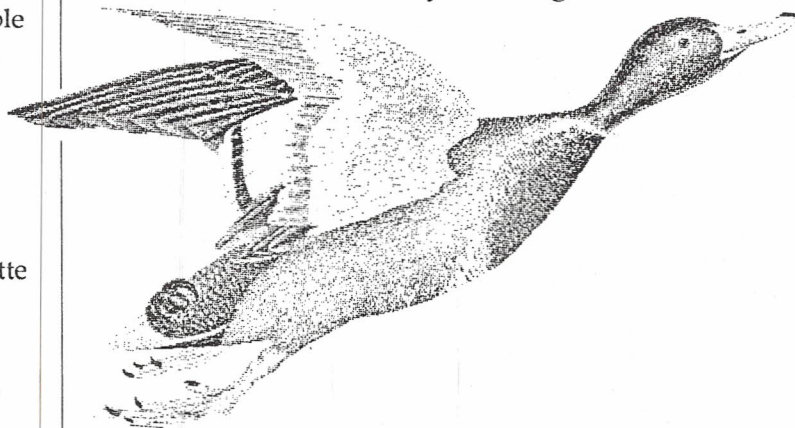
I personally thank all those who participated in the Mid-Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count. Whether you actively "beat" the thickets and scoped the bays or supplied refreshments, your contribution was appreciated for this important project. Special thanks to Charlotte Smith and Sue Talin for coordinating the superb buffet.

I would like to pay tribute to Jonnie Fisk. Jonnie was involved with many projects and organizations dealing with conservation, the environment, and of course the study and enjoyment of birds. Her insights and efforts were appreciated not only by local groups such as the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, the Association for the Preservation of Cape Cod, and the Cape Cod Bird Club, but they also reached more widely known groups such as the Manomet Bird Observatory, The Mass Audubon Society, National Audubon, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the Nature Conservancy. Whether on the East Coast, in the South West, or on Trinidad and Tobago, Jonnie contributed in a concrete and direct manner that showed she was deeply concerned for people and the environment. I recall an early meeting of the writers of *Birding Cape Cod* at her home. I was overwhelmed with the number of far-reaching contacts she had. Of course, she was very helpful in getting us started on our book, offering a warm atmosphere, other bird-finding books, coffee and cookies. My last memory of Jonnie was her raising a hand to volunteer to make something for the Christmas Bird Count Compilation. Whether it was so simple as living in the wilderness while conducting research, Jonnie Fisk was a doer who actively participated in life. Jonnie will be missed by many; yet we'll cherish her vibrant memory.

## 1989 Lake & Pond Waterfowl Survey

*Blair Nikula*

On the weekend of December 2-3, 35 observers censused 285 ponds on Cape Cod and recorded 12,384 birds of 25 species. For the first time in the survey's short history, almost half of the ponds were completely frozen over, while many others were partially frozen. Obviously, such conditions affect the distribution of the birds, but what effect they had on the total numbers is difficult to say. Indeed, the total number is the second highest in the seven years of the survey, only 2% less than the 1987 record and 11% above the 6-year average.



Despite the conditions a surprising 11 species were found in record high numbers: Common Loon, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Black Duck, Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Common Golden Eye, Common Merganser, and Red-breasted Merganser. In contrast, three species established record lows: Green-winged Teal, Canvasback, and Ruddy Duck. Scaup (both species combined) again led the species charge with a total of 3345 birds, comprising 27% of the total. Following, in descending order, were Mallard (1901; 15%), Canada Goose (1696; 14%), Black Duck (1461; 12%), and Bufflehead (1362; 11%). These five species combined accounted for 79% of the species.

Falmouth, thanks in particular to its attractiveness to scaup, retained its position as the premier duck town on the Cape with 5479 birds, or 44% of the total. Provincetown brought up the rear, without a single bird, due to its few ponds being all frozen. Sider's Pond in Falmouth regained its preeminence among the Cape's ponds with an impressive 2297 birds of 15 species. Other top ponds included Cedar Lake in Falmouth and Cliff Pond in Brewster.

## BIRD COUNTS

### 1989 Mid Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count

Sanderlings flying back and forth along the frozen edge of Nantucket Sound, ducks crammed into pockets of icy water; —the 28th was the same as most days in December: There was snow until 10:30; the temperature ranged from 17-26 degrees; there was a brisk wind, and the water was mostly frozen. Despite these conditions, 27 people in 8 groups completed the 9th Mid Cape Christmas Count. They covered an area from East Sandwich to W. Dennis. Even with these conditions, species were seen in record numbers, including Mourning Dove, Horned Lark, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Hermit Thrush, Mockingbird, Cardinal, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and Junco. In the nine years of the count, the total number of species has ranged from 93 in 1982 to 110 in 1985 with an average of 102. This year we were below the average with 98 species and 20,692 individuals sighted. Highlights included 1 Osprey, 2 Rough-legged Hawks, 5 Greater Yellowlegs, 1 Glaucous Gull, 1 Fish Crow, 42 Carolina Wrens, 3 Eastern Bluebirds, 11 Hermit Thrushes, 1 Clay-colored Sparrow and 8 Fox Sparrows. Common Loons were scarce, only two were seen, and only one American Coot defied December's freeze.

**Further Reading.** The Winter 89/90 issue of The Cape Cod Museum of Natural History's, *The Cape Naturalist*, contains an article by Blair Nikula on Christmas Bird Counts. The Volume 3 Number 1 (Spring/Summer 1989) issue of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Birdscope* contains a review of efforts to computerize Christmas Bird Counts in order to track bird populations.

## MYSTERY BIRDS

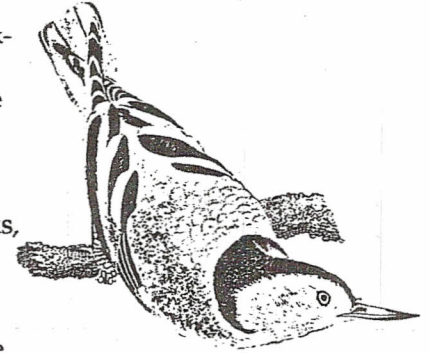
*Art King*

Have you ever seen a Carbonated Warbler? or a Hemlock Warbler? Does your life list contain a Small-headed Flycatcher? John J. Audubon's did.

In May of 1811, near Henderson Kentucky, Audubon collected two male warblers that he named Carbonated Warblers. These birds are now considered to have been first year Cape May Warblers. The Small-headed Flycatcher, probably an insect-hawking warbler, rather than a flycatcher, was seen and painted by both Alexander Wilson and Audubon. Wilson said he discovered it in New Jersey, while Audubon claimed Wilson copied it from his picture of the one he shot in

### 1989 Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count

Bird counts provide a lot of interesting facts. This year's Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count, held on December 17, was no exception. There were the rare birds sighted, a Piping Plover, a Western Sandpiper, a Lesser Black-backed Gull, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. There were record high counts for Great Cormorants, Greater Scaups, Coopers Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Carolina Wrens, Yellow-breasted Chats, Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles. There were low counts for Common Loons—lowest since 1943; for Black-crowned Night Herons—lowest since 1966; for Canvasbacks—lowest since 1971; for Ring-billed Gulls—lowest since 1972; for Herring Gulls—lowest since 1977; for Starlings—lowest since 1962; and for Yellow-rumped Warblers—2nd lowest since 1945. The total of individual birds seen was the lowest since 1968. For the first time since 1961, no Coots were seen. More Carolina Wrens were seen (24) than either the White-breasted Nuthatch (18) or the Red-breasted Nuthatch (16). The most common birds were Herring Gulls (6955), Canada Goose (2230), Common Eider (2098), Black Duck (1916), Red-breasted Merganser (1763), Dunlin (1556), Bufflehead (1483), and Great Black-backed Gull (1413). 34 observers gave 81.5 hours of time and traveled 356 miles to find 119 bird species.



Kentucky in 1808. What the bird was, no one seems to know, and none has been reported since.

Another mystery bird is Wilson's Blue Mountain Warbler. Both Wilson and Audubon pictured it, but no one seems to know what it really was. Cuvier's Kinglet, collected and named by Audubon, is another bird known only from his description and his plate.

Even more fascinating, however, is a bird shot by John K. Townsend near Philadelphia, Pa., and presented to Audubon who named it Townsend's Bunting. The skin of this bird still exists in The National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D. C., and it is still a mystery. It has the general form of a Dickcissel, and the plumage pattern is similar to that of a female Dickcissel, but Townsend's description indicated the bird was a male.

Should you come across a Cooper's Sandpiper, or a Cincinnati Warbler, be sure to report it. They may be new to you, but they too are mystery birds waiting to be rediscovered.

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Cape Cod Bird Club Newsletter

The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History  
RR 1, Route 6A, Brewster, MA 02631

Editor - Jim Talin

Design - Tom Noonan

## PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Monday evening **March 12** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History located on Route 6A in Brewster, *Roger Everett from Brewster will show his latest slides*. Well-known to Club members, Roger's work has been collected in two books and is published in such magazines as *Birder's World*, *Am. Birds*, and *Wildlife Art News*. He will be donating his speaker's fee to the Manomet Bird Observatory in memory of Jonnie Fiske.

Monday evening **April 9** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History located on Route 6A in Brewster, *Alvah Sandborn from Richmond Mass will speak on Wild Florida*. Alvah Sandborn lectures for the National Audubon Society and is former director of Mass. Audubon's Pleasant Valley Nature Center and Sanctuary. He will survey the major habitats found in the state as well as their wildlife, such as Florida Panther, Wild Turkey, Limpkin and Burrowing Owl.



### Bird Feeders

Do you need a new bird feeder? Did you come home to find that a squirrel had converted your favorite feeder into a seeder spreader? Are you more baffled by the array of bird feeders than your squirrels are by the feeder you choose? The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has come to the rescue by rating 28 models of feeders. Here are their top rated feeders.

1. Droll Yankee Big Top-Model BT (dome type-virtually squirrel-proof)
2. Droll Yankee Seed Saver-Model X-1 (dome type-virtually squirrel-proof)
3. Aspects Twin Tube 038 (tube type)
4. The Mandarin (dome type-virtually squirrel-proof)
5. Audubon Workshop Super Ball (bubble type)
6. Droll Yankee Basic Tube Feeder-Model A-6
7. Hyde's Super Silo No 114 (tube type)
8. Duncraft Satellite (bubble type)
9. Hyde's Squirrel's Dilemma No 104 (tube type)
10. Duncraft Cling-a-wing (bubble type)

The best window feeder was the Aspects Buffet 002.

### NOTES ON QUESTIONNAIRE

*Fahy Bygate*

Nearly one-third of those who responded to the questionnaire asked for more weekend walks, so I am trying to set them up. Others said that too much to do or infirmity prevented their joining bird walks. Thanks so much for such a good response.

**APPEAL** I hope to have a leader at the Beech Forest each Saturday and Sunday morning in May. That means eight willing leaders. Please call me to volunteer at 617 934-6978.

## UPCOMING WALKS

*Fahy Bygate*

### March

**Monday March 5**—Eastham. 9 AM. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

**Wednesday March 7**—Falmouth. 9 AM. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

**Thursday March 15**—Yarmouth. 9 AM. Meet at intersection of 6A and Union Street. Charlotte Smith. 362-6891.

**Saturday March 17**—Sandwich. 9 AM. Meet at Angelo's parking lot of 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

**Wednesday March 21**—Wellfleet Bay Audubon Society. 9 AM. Meet in parking lot. A staff naturalist will lead.

**Thursday March 22**—Harwich. 9 AM. Meet at Conservation Area on Bell's Neck Road in West Harwich. John & Ginny Redfern. 432-6426.

**Special Walk—March 10**—Birding Marshes in Orleans. Meet at the north end of the Nauset Beach parking lot at 9 AM, start on the beach, then stop at landings around Nauset Marsh, and finish on Town Cove. Jim Talin. 255-1710.

### April

**Monday April 2**—Eastham. 9 AM. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

**Wednesday April 4**—Falmouth. 9 AM. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

**Wednesday April 18**—Wellfleet Bay Audubon Society. 9 AM. Meet at parking lot. Naturalist will lead.

**Thursday April 19**—Yarmouth. 9 AM. Meet at intersection of 6A and Union Street. Charlotte Smith. 362-6891.

**Saturday April 21**—Sandwich. 9 AM. Meet at Angelo's parking lot of 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

**Thursday April 26**—Harwich. 9 AM. Meet at the Conservation Area on Bell's Neck Road in West Harwich. John & Ginny Redfern. 432-6426.

**Special Walk—April 28**—Off Cape Trip to Westport, highlighting Ospreys. Meet at the intersection of Route 6 and Route 132 in Hyannis in the Burger King parking lot. Bring a lunch. Dick Comeau.

## Back From Extinction II

Jim Talin

Birds coming back from the brink of extinction have been in the news. Massachusetts took the Osprey off its endangered species list. The Bald Eagle is being taken off the national endangered species list, and the Peregrine Falcon is on the rebound. Roger Tory Peterson has said that humans "emerged from the shadows of antiquity with Peregrines on their wrists." Yet, as with the Osprey and the Bald Eagle, by 1970, humans were responsible for the near extinction of the Peregrine. DDT, like most toxins, accumulates in higher doses the higher an animal is in the food chain. Birds of prey are at the top of the food chain, and DDT caused their eggs to become thin shelled and to break under the weight of nesting. In 1970 Peregrines had disappeared east of the Mississippi. Since then, intervention has changed the outlook for Peregrines. DDT is banned in the US; Peregrines have been bred in captivity and reintroduced to the wild. The Peregrine Fund predicts a complete recovery by the year 2000, a recovery that is proof that "we can correct many environmental mistakes." Falcon fever has even gripped major cities such as Boston and Philadelphia. Stephen Grabowski who oversees repair work on New York bridges is happy to see a return of the Peregrine. "Since the falcon's arrival, we've lost 95% of our pigeon population, and we no longer have a starling problem."

## Field Notes

Art King

**December** - A Catbird has been seen at Fort Hill in Eastham. A rough-legged Hawk was also seen in Eastham, as well as two Field Sparrows, a White-crowned Sparrow and a Northern Oriole at a feeder there. In Brewster, there was a Palm Warbler and a Red-bellied Woodpecker. A Cooper's Hawk was at a feeder in Falmouth.

**January** - A Fox Sparrow was at a feeder in Osterville. The Eurasian Wigeon is now at Round Cove in Chatham. An Iceland Gull was seen in Harwich, and the Red-shouldered Hawk is back at Town Cove in Orleans. A flock of 70-80 Snow Buntings has been seen on the marshes at Great Island in Wellfleet.

The Catbird continues at Fort Hill in Eastham, along with Black-crowned Night-Herons and a flock of Meadowlarks. Two Bald Eagles were seen over Route 6, in the vicinity of Fort Hill. At Nauset Beach in Orleans, a male King Eider has been seen since Christmas, in a raft with Common Eiders. Tree Sparrow and White-throated Sparrows were at a feeder in Cummaquid, as were Carolina Wrens in Falmouth.

The predicted outbreak of Winter Finches does not seem to have taken place.

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