

Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME II

MARCH-APRIL 1991

ISSUE 4

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Peter Trimble

I ponder. What shall I write of in the March-April Newsletter. The recent Christmas Bird Count season, the Northern Hawk-Owl in Springfield, Vt that Jeremiah and I traveled four hours one way to check out, or the oiled Cormorant in the Persian Gulf. My emotions on these events are terribly varied. I reflect on the decrease in bird diversity (and species diversity in general) due to increased human pressure, such as deforestation of the tropics and habitat fragmentation in the Northeast, and I wonder what impact the deliberate oil spill in the Gulf will have, to say nothing of the rest of the Iraq "conflict." Hopefully, nature can rebound, and the long term effects will be minimal. Of course, I mention the damage to the environment, but my concern is as great for the people involved in the war as well.

The Christmas Bird Counts this year were conducted in warm, wet and/or foggy weather in Southeast Massachusetts. The year before (1989-90 CBC), I recall going out in 5 degree Fahrenheit, with wind chill of minus 20 degrees or lower. It seems to me that cold weather with good visibility is superior to warm weather with fog, rain and poor visibility, especially when it concerns our local counts where we scope for birds on bays, sounds, and ocean for alcids, sea ducks, and the like.

I appreciate the efforts of all those who took part in the Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count. Thank you. I'm sure most of you realize how much I enjoy these events, and how I continue to look forward to involving more club members on future counts. A summary of the compilation appears elsewhere in this newsletter.

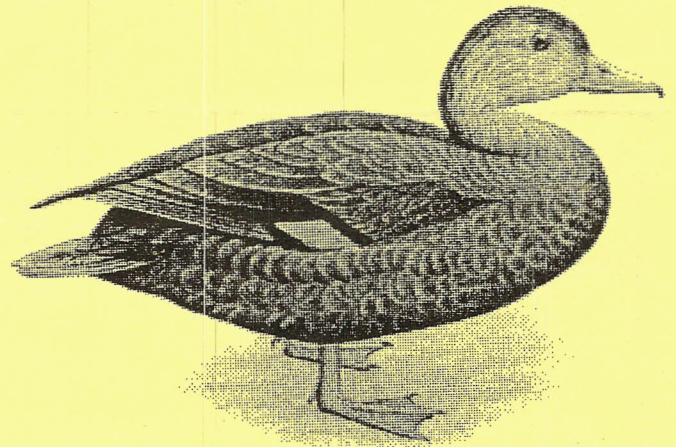
Jeremiah and I drove to Vermont at the end of January to find the Northern Hawk-Owl in Springfield. What a spectacular bird! Not to be too anthropomorphic, but did he look like a "tough" guy. Long talons, large hooked bill, and piercing eyes as he watched us and half a dozen Evening Grosbeaks that flew by. The next day we were able to track down six Barnacle Geese in Cotuit that had eluded us for a week. During our search for the geese, we scanned East, North and West Bays numerous times. On one occasion at the end of Seaview Avenue on West Bay, as I scoped the many Common Goldeneye, a drake Barrow's appeared. As I called Jeremiah over, a tug boat from the marina put all the Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Goldeneye to flight. Needless to say, Jeremiah was disappointed. We got in the car, and, as I turned the engine over, hawk-eyed Jeremiah spotted a single duck landing across the way. You guessed it. The Barrow's Goldeneye returned and allowed us to get a great look.

Well, get ready for Spring. March and April bring many of the first migrants.

Cape Cod Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey

Blair Nikula

The Cape Cod Bird Club's 8th annual Lake & Pond Waterfowl Survey was conducted on the weekend of December 1-2, 1990, with 39 observers censusing 328 ponds and recording 11,982 birds of 28 species. Both the number of observers and the number of ponds were record highs; participants somehow managed to find over 40 ponds more than ever before! In sharp contrast to last year, the weather preceding the survey was exceptionally mild and icing was nonexistent. Nonetheless, total numbers were down slightly from 1989, presumably because mainland ponds were still open, inducing many birds to linger to the north and west of the Cape. The total, however, was slightly above the 6 year (1984-89) average, though the number of birds per pond was the lowest ever.



Among individual species, four were found in record high numbers: Black Duck (2004 individuals, +63%), Mallard (1911 individuals), Gadwall (151 individuals, +265%), and Hooded Merganser (720 individuals, +168%). Five species accounted for 71% of all the birds observed: both Scaup species (24%), Black Duck (17%), Mallard (16%), and Bufflehead (14%). Rarities included Eider found in fresh water, a Snow Goose on Middle Pond in Barnstable, a Eurasian Widgeon on Lover's Lake in Chatham, a Red-throated Loon on Upper Mill Pond in Brewster, and single Common Moorhens on Perch Pond in Chatham and Rusty Marsh Pond in Cotuit.

Falmouth outdistance other towns with 37% of the birds seen. Brewster followed with 12%, Barnstable with 11%, and Yarmouth with 8%. 13% of all the birds seen this year occurred on one pond, Salt Pond in Falmouth.

Have You Seen A Golden Chisel Lately

Art King

In the last issue of the newsletter, I tried to convince you that finding the meanings of the names of birds could be interesting and fun. Now I am going to go a step further, and attempt what many may feel is impossible: I am going to try to convince you that the scientific names of birds can also be interesting and fun.

Many may feel that scientific names are difficult to pronounce and just so much mumbo jumbo. However, that is not the case; at least in so far as the latter is concerned. The words have meaning, usually tell you some-

thing about the bird, and often are quite descriptive. A scientific name consists of two words: a noun, the genus (capitalized) and a modifying adjective, the species (spelled with a lower case letter). The genus is similar to a given name. E. G. John Jones. There may be many members of the Jones (genus) family, but there will only be one John (species). Hence there may be many members of the genus *Passer*, but only one *Passer domesticus*, the House Sparrow. Here are some of my favorite scientific names and their meanings. Note how they so well fit the bird.

Scientific Names

Turdus migratorius
Colaptes auratus
Dendroica tigrina

Dryocopus pileatus
Empidonax minimus
Capephilus principalis
Myiarchus crinitus
Mimus polyglottos
Helmitheros vermivorus
Setophaga ruticilla

Meaning

migratory thrush
golden chisel
striped like a tiger
I live in a tree
a capped tree cleaver
the least king of the gnats
chief caterpillar lover
crested ruler of flies
many tongued mimic
a worm eating bug hunter
red-tailed moth eater

Common Names

Robin
No. Flicker
Cape May Warbler

Pileated Woodpecker
Least Flycatcher
Ivory-billed Woodpecker
Great Crested Flycatcher
Mockingbird
Worm-eating Warbler
Redstart

I hope that I have awakened some of you to the possibilities here, and that the next time you hear or see a scientific name, you will not shudder, but perhaps might even attempt to learn its meaning, thereby giving yourself further insight into and greater enjoyment from birding.

EDITORIAL

Be Not Proud

Jim Talin

Take a deep breath. What are the chances that you just breathed one molecule of air that was contained in Julius Caesar's dying breath? A million to one? Well no. According to the book *Innumeracy* by John Paulos, the chances are 99 in 100! So breathe again; inhale air shared by centuries of living things, by eagles and sparrows, by field mice and elephants, by the rich and the poor, famous and unknown.

When I was younger, growing up in an age of civil insurrection, of political assassination, and of war, the interconnectedness of things was made clear to me in another way by the mother of a friend. One day, in her

antique store, she went to a display case and gave me a small golden icon. It was the figure of a snake, maybe a half an inch tall and wide, a single coil of molten gold that rose to a head that could have been formed by softly squeezing the gold to flatten it. It was made by a member of a Hindu sect as an apology for having killed a snake. It seemed as amazing to me then as it does now. I carried it with me for a number of years, keeping it in my pocket. If I held it, it would become warm. It became a kind of focus point of clear thinking and sanity in a crazy world. Then, one day I lost it.

I've always missed it when I look around and see another generation's failure, see the environmental crises, the people starving, the young people dying in war, the social disappointments. It was a simple creation by a single contrite person for a single act that otherwise would have passed unheeded among thousands of comparable acts. Wouldn't it be nice, I sometimes think, if our leaders would express a similar humility, instead of trumpeting their pride and destruction.

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

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PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Monday evening **March 11** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History located on Route 6A in Brewster, Joy and Alfred Viola will speak on *Birding in Belize*. The Violas presented us with an excellent program on the National Parks in the world last year. Now they focus on the hot birding spots in Belize, with a side trip to Guatemala for parrots at the Tical and Mayan ruins. In Belize they visited Crooked Tree Sanctuary & Chanchich Lodge featured in National Geographic magazine.

The April program will be announced at the March meeting.

Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count

Christmas Bird Counts are sometimes hit or miss. It is just as likely that a bird may not be in a certain spot when a team of birders is there, as it is that a rare bird will appear out of nowhere. The counts are estimations or snap shots of the bird life in any given area. They can't pretend to be all encompassing, especially this year when the weather turned bad part way into the day. The temperature was great, 48-55 degrees F. Scoping Nantucket Sound early in the morning revealed some sea birds, but the bank of fog that limited vision even then became worse later in the day, so that only a few yards of water were visible. Those were the conditions this year when 29 observers counted 108 species in the Mid-Cape area. Some highlights were the rarities: 2 Blue-winged Teal, 1 Northern Shoveler, 1 Eurasian Wigeon, 1 House Wren, 1 Laughing Gull, 3 Chipping Sparrows, and 4 Evening Grosbeaks. High counts occurred for American Wigeon (68), Sanderling (139), Black-capped Chickadee (737), Carolina Wren (78), Marsh Wren (13), Golden-crowned Kinglet (120), and Cedar Waxwing (231).

1990 Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count

from information compiled by Blair Nikula

On one level, Christmas Bird Counts are species chases. On the Lower Cape, 32 observers saw 117 species of birds on December 16, 1990. More interesting however is the historical context. This year, there were record high counts for Northern Gannets (4 times the previous high), Mute Swans (tied), Gadwall, Great Horned Owl (tied), Red-bellied Woodpecker (2 individuals), Carolina Wren (more than double last year's record), Golden-crowned Kinglet and Northern Cardinal. Brants occurred in the highest numbers since 1976, and the Red-breasted Mergansers count was the 2nd highest ever. On the down side, the Canada Goose count was the lowest since 1943; Black Scoters, the lowest since 1964; Common Goldeneye, the lowest since 1930; Bufflehead, the lowest since 1974; Sanderling, 2nd lowest in past 40 years; Belted Kingfisher in a tie with lowest in past 20+ years; Yellow-rumped Warbler, the lowest since 1941; Tree Sparrow, the lowest since 1943; White-throated Sparrow, the lowest since 1962; E. Meadowlark, the second lowest in last 40+ years. Snow Buntings were missed for the first time since 1973.

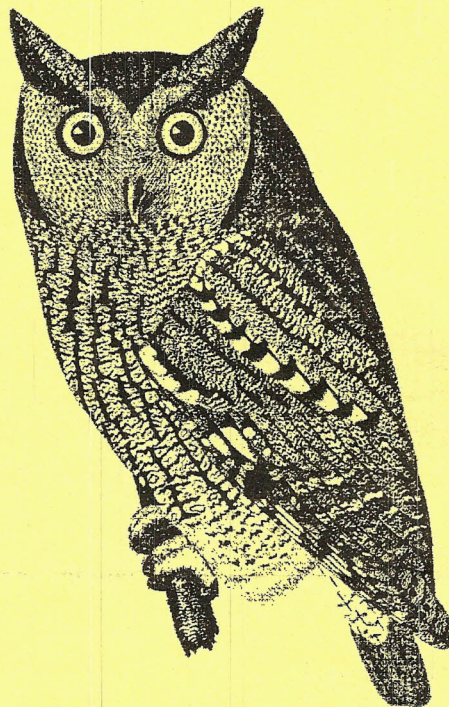
Field Trips

Sally McNair

March

Wednesday **March 6**—Falmouth, 9 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

Monday **March 11**—OWL PROWL following the CCBC meeting. Peter Trull.



Saturday **March 16**—Orleans. 9 am. Meet at the Nauset Beach parking lot. Jim Talin. 255-1710.

Thursday **March 21**—SPRING BEGINS! Swan Pond. 9 am. Meet at Corporation Beach in Dennis. Charlotte Smith. 362-6891.

April

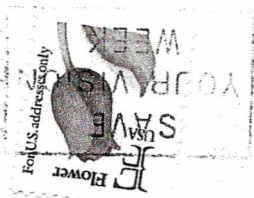
Monday **April 1**—Eastham. 8 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

Wednesday **April 3**—Falmouth. 8 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

Saturday **April 13**—Sandwich. 8 am. Meet at Angelo's parking lot off Route 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

Saturday **April 27**—Off-Cape Trip to Westport. Meet in the Burger King parking lot at the intersection of Routes 6 and 132 at 7:30 am. Bring a lunch. Dick Comeau. 432-9033.

Frank Caruso
17 Freedom Road
Forestdale MA 02644



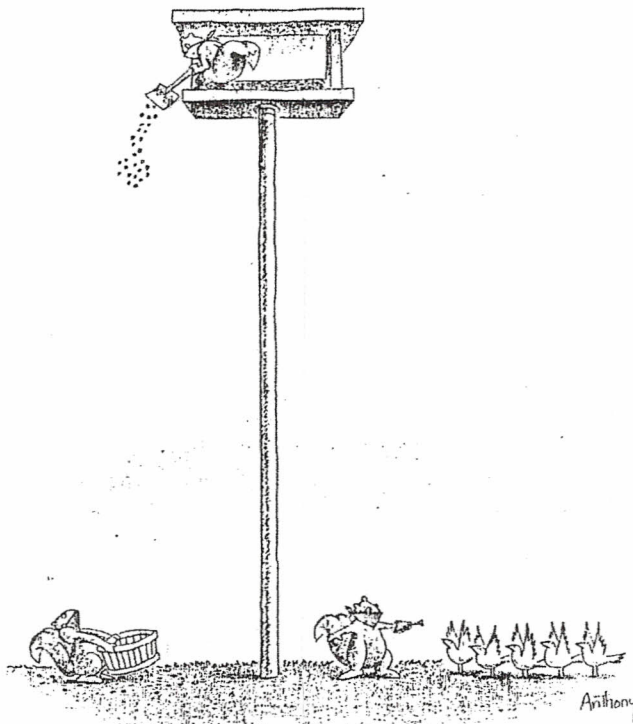
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Scoping the Market

This year the seers at Cornell have gone out into the field to test scopes. The range in price of these scopes may determine which you might choose to purchase, so we have included rough prices with the models. Send your comments.

1. Kowa TSN-4 (\$1,170.00)
2. Kowa TSN-2 (\$480.00)
3. Nikon EDII Fieldscope (\$1,100.00)
4. Optolyth TBG80 (\$1,080.00)
5. Mirador SSD (\$441.00)
6. Bausch & Lomb Elite 22x (\$576.00)
7. Questar Field Model (\$2,065.00)
8. Celestron C-90 (\$778.00)
9. Zeiss 30x60 B/GA (1,365.00) -
10. Bausch & Lomb Elite 15-45x (\$720.00)
11. Bushnell Spacemaster (\$315.00)

The two lightest scopes were the Elite 22x and the Elite 15-45x at 1.4 pounds. The only waterproof scopes were the Elites and the Bushnell Spacemaster. The best scopes for eyeglass wearers were the Kowas, the Mirador and the Elite 22x, all of which have an optional "long-eye relief eyepiece." All of the scopes except the Elites and the Zeiss have optional camera adaptors.



Drawing by Anthony Taber