



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME II

MAY - JUNE 1991

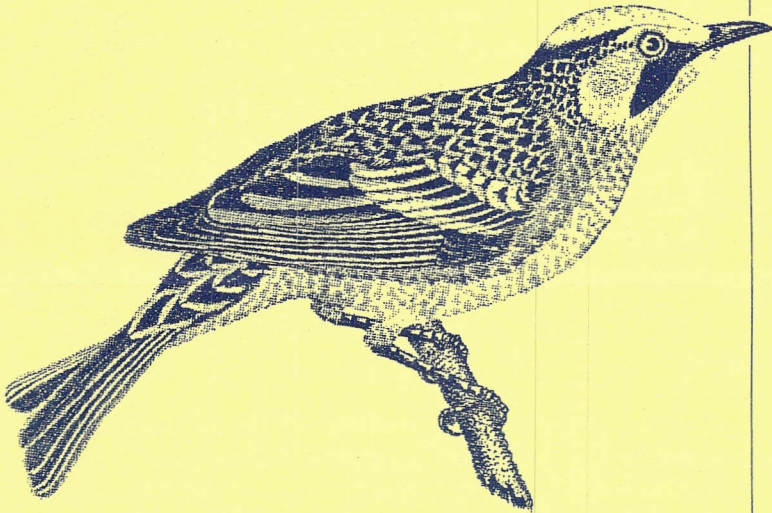
ISSUE 5

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Peter Trimble

"March Madness." As I write the May-June message, I consider its many meanings. For the athletically inclined, the NCAA tournament is in full swing. My favorite, the University of Connecticut, was bumped out by Duke for the second consecutive year. Oh, well. Little League Baseball and Spring Soccer are starting up, and these will keep us moving.

For those anxious to get outside to do yard work or to bird, "March Madness" may be related to the weather. Beautiful days sprinkled amongst rainy, windy



days wet our appetite for many outdoor activities. The "madness" in this case stems from the fact that today is Saturday, and it is raining and blowing.

Maybe the true meaning of "March Madness" has to do with birding. March and April tend to be months of transition. "Winter" birds such as sea ducks and alcids are heading North, and "summer" birds for the most part have not arrived. The treasures of Spring, the colorful warblers, won't arrive in force until late April and May. Remember "March Madness" will pass so be prepared and check out your local birding.

The Annual Cape Cod Breeding Bird Census will take place June 15, the same day as the club picnic. We hope to involve more members in both events. The Breeding Bird Count will start early, with owling before day break and with "normal" birding about sunrise. It will end before lunch at Gray's Beach in Yarmouthport. The area of the census is in the Mid-Cape (the same area as the Christmas Bird Count), and as always, your help is requested. If you have any questions or would be able to help, please get in touch with me at 477-3847 or

22 Somerset Rd, Mashpee, MA 02649. This is one more great opportunity for new birders or birders new to the area.

Well, what a difference one day can make in the Spring. It's Easter Sunday, and what a day! The Trimbles traveled to Hyannisport for Sunrise Service, and, while enjoying the fellowship, listened to the early morning bird song. Watching the bright, orange-red sun burst over the horizon, as a Northern Cardinal whistled his tune, was special.

I look forward to warbler migration, the breeding bird census, and summer birding on Cape Cod, and I encourage all to venture outside and enjoy. As a school teacher who needs to do some work in the summer, I have made efforts to work in such dreaded places as Stellwagen Bank, Monomoy Island, and Cuttyhunk. Oh well, somebody has to do it.

A FRIENDLY REMINDER

Please mail in your feeder census reports to the club care of the Museum of Natural History in Brewster, or bring them to the May meeting. John Redfern will soon be compiling the statistics, so be sure your feeder is included.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT

This is the proposed slate of Directors for 1991-92 to be voted upon at the May 13th meeting of the Bird Club.

Peter Trimble, *President*
Jim Talin, *Vice-President*
Sue Thompson, *Secretary*
Mark Tuttle, *Treasurer*

Sally McNair, Tom Noonan, Carl Bergfors,
Frank Caruso, George Martin, Richard Hall

BIRDING BY EAR

Art King

"What was that?" How often have you said that upon hearing a bird song from the top of a tree or the depths of the bushes? If you know these songs, it makes birding easier and more productive. Learning some songs or calls is easy, others more difficult. We all can quickly tell the "Chickadee-dee-dee," or the "drink your tea" of the Towhee, but what about the songs of the different Warblers or the Sparrows?

Much of birding is done by ear, especially during Christmas counts, bird-a-thons, etc., and knowing songs is often very helpful on just an ordinary birding trip, saving time and enabling one to cover more territory. Being familiar with the songs and calls of at least the common birds helps one separate the usual from the unusual or uncommon. The unusual can then be searched out when heard.

As we know from such birds as the Chickadee, the Whip-poor-will, and the Phoebe, connecting bird songs to words often makes it much easier to remember. However, most birds do not "speak English" as clearly as the birds mentioned above. Therefore, we have to stretch our imaginations some. Take the familiar song of the Robin: can we accept that he sings, "cheer up, cheer up, cheer up?" Now if you hear a Robin that seems to have a cold, or to be a hoarse Robin, you have a Scarlet Tanager. Whereas a sweet voiced Robin in a hurry is a Rose-

breasted Grosbeak. Continuing in this vein, the Red-eyed Vireo seems to say slowly and deliberately:

"cherries....cherries....cherries." A hoarse Red-eyed Vireo is a Yellow-throated Vireo. Among the Warblers, the Redstart says: "sweet, sweet, sweet;" the Chestnut-sided says: "sweet, sweet, sweet, I'll switch you;" and the Yellow Warbler says: "sweet, sweet, sweet, so-o-o-o sweet."

As you can see, the possibilities are endless, and once you connect words to a song, you will find it much easier to remember that song. The next time you hear a Song Sparrow, see if it doesn't say: "Madge, Madge, Madge, put on you teakettle-ettle-ettle." One that always seemed to get the attention of my students was the Olive-sided Flycatcher's: "Quick, three beers."

Some connections do seem to strain the imagination, I'll admit. The late Dr. Arthur A. Allen at Cornell was good at putting words to songs, and one of the most difficult must have been the one he came up with for the Warbling Vireo. As the bird works its way through the tree branches searching for insects, it sings a melodious warble, the last note of which rises abruptly. Dr. Allen's translation: "If I could see it, I would seize it, and would squeeze it til it squirts!" Keep an ear out for that this Spring! Try putting your own words to songs to help you remember them.

EDITORIAL

Jim Talin

BIRD SONG


Putting words to music is a uniquely human trait, even human words to bird song, as Art King discusses elsewhere in this newsletter. It is a simple impulse to organize what we perceive. I own a book which identifies bird songs not just by words but by writing them down in musical notes and tempo markings so that they can be performed on a piano. The author also discusses the best singer he has heard in each species. It's clear, however, that our human perceptions are not enough to understand bird song. "Birds are using the same sensory apparatus we use to process sounds, but they are using it to build a completely different universe than we live in." A recent article in the NY Times quotes Dr. Jeffrey Cynx of Rockefeller University. "From his studies of bird songs," The Times reports, Dr. Cynx "has come to believe that each animal lives in its own sensory and perceptual world. Thus what we hear in the bird's song may only

dimly resemble what the bird hears." The article goes on to say that humans have "overrated the uniqueness of human language and the ability to communicate through sound."

Researchers have also found that it works both ways. Birds are listening to us. Behavioral scientists have taught birds to distinguish between types of classical music. A bird is taught, through reward and punishment, to distinguish Bach from Stravinsky, and then to classify subsequent pieces as belonging to one or the other style. "The birds correctly classified Buxtehude and Scarlatti as Bach-like and Eliot Carter and Walter Piston as Stravinsky-like. The only 'mistake' the birds made, if misjudgment it was, lay in grouping Vivaldi with Stravinsky." (NY Times)

Adding to this complexity, birds have a vocabulary of sorts, with primary and secondary songs, songs to attract mates and songs to defend territory. Birds are also able to identify the songs of familiar, neighborhood birds, so that they can react to intruders. Humans clearly make a mistake when they think of bird song as something out of context, something absolute that can be learned from a record or tape and whose sole use is to help us classify species.

This spring, when birds are singing all around us, we should stop and wonder just what birds are saying.



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
Circulation - Charlotte Smith

PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Frank Caruso

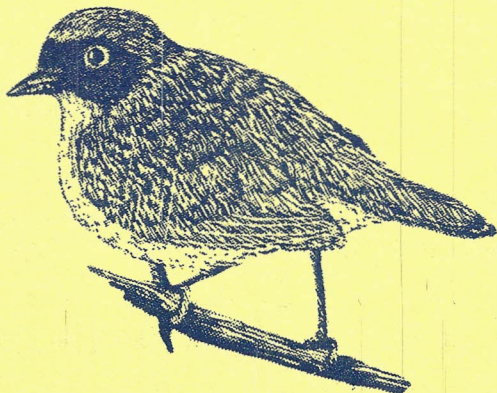
Monday evening **May 13** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History located on Route 6A in Brewster, Leonard and Grace Korngold from North Eastham will give a program entitled "*Birds and Beasts of the Galapagos.*" They will present many of the birds, reptiles, and pinnipeds of the various islands including those of Tower Island. There will be mating displays of Frigatebirds and the Waved Albatross, as well as much scenery to enjoy. The importance of the Galapagos fauna will be discussed with respect to Darwin's theory of evolution. Len is a retired immunologist, and Grace is a retired biochemist. We hope to see you there.

Mid-Cape Breeding Bird Census And The Bird Club Picnic

This year the club has decided to merge its two June events. The Mid-Cape Breeding Bird Census will be held on Saturday June 15th from sunrise to noon to be followed immediately by the Bird Club picnic. The census takes only half a day and is not an endurance trial. Birders will cover the same territory as they did in the Mid-Cape Christmas Count, but the pace is more leisurely. Birders of different skills are matched, so it is a good opportunity for beginning birders to learn bird calls and to become acquainted with different areas. The weather is usually warm, and the count ends at lunch time.

Following the count, the annual Bird Club Picnic will take place starting at noon at Gray's Beach in Yarmouthport. You can get to Gray's Beach by going north toward the Bay off of Route 6A where it intersects Union Street. Take Old Church Street to Center Street to the beach.

Call Peter Trimble at 477-3847 if you would like to help with the Breeding Bird Census by either becoming part of a birding team or by calling in reports of birds seen at feeders and yards within the census area. If you can't help with the count, come to the picnic. Bring a dish and enjoy the company.



Field Trips

Sally McNair

May

Wednesday **May 1st.** Falmouth. 8 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes 548-6086.

Monday **May 6th.** Eastham. 8 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

Wednesday **May 8th.** 5:30 pm. Blair's evening walk at the Harwich Conservation Area. Meet on Bell's Neck Rd in West Harwich. Bring a picnic if you like. Blair Nikula. 945-2153.

Thursday **May 16th.** Yarmouth. 8 am. Meet at the intersection of Route 6a and Union Street. Charlotte Smith. 362-6891.

Thursday **May 21st.** Provincetown. Beech Forest, 8 am. Meet in the parking lot. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

Wednesday **May 29th.** Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. 8 am. Meet in the parking lot. A naturalist will lead.

Beech Forest Weekends.

There will be a leader at the Beech Forest parking lot every Saturday and Sunday during May. Meet at 8 am.

June

Saturday **June 15th.** Mid-Cape Breeding Bird Census followed by the annual CCBC picnic at Gray's Beach. (Directions in column at left.) Peter Trimble. 477-3847.

Summer

Saturday **July 20th.** Great Island, Wellfleet. 8 am. Meet in the parking lot. Bring a lunch. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

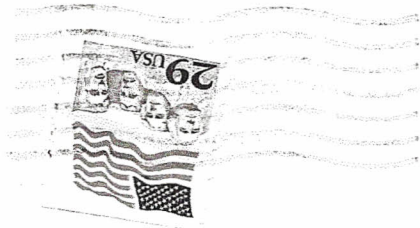
Saturday **August 17th.** Great Island, Wellfleet. 8 am. Meet in the parking lot. Bring a lunch. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

MA. 02644

FOREST DALE

17 FREEDOM RD.

FRANK CARUSO



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



When ornithologists are mutually attracted

Cookie Contributors

September-1990 to May-1991

September

Sally McNair
Sue Talin
Mary Field

December

Fahy Bygate
Jean Cook
Ginny Redfern

March

Bobsie Whitlock
Pat Bergfors
Barbara Godard

October

Peggy Wert
Janet Judd
Mary Field

January

Charlotte Smith
Kay Walcott
Harriet Sears

April

Marcia Tuttle
Dick Houghton
Harriet Dicksin

November

Lois Tillson
Anne White
Mary Ropes

February

Dee Forst
Jean Buchanan
Bessie Tirrell

May

Lillian Marchant
Janet Silverio
Mary Eagan

*We wish to thank
the anonymous individual who has more than once
contributed toward the cost of refreshments,
because he "does not bake".
In recognizing him
we hope others may follow his example.*