



Cape Cod Bird Club

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ISSUE 3

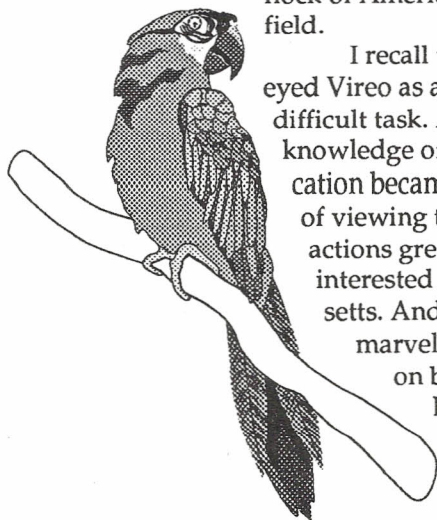
PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Peter Trimble

Happy New Year! The annual Christmas Bird Counts are being completed, and it is time to sit back and relax. I would like to thank everyone who participated in the Mid Cape Cod CBC, especially Charlotte Smith and Sue Talin for providing the location and refreshment for the compilation. I understand that the tally "goodies" often are as important as the birds. I will report on the success of the the Mid Cape Cod CBC in March-April newsletter.

November and December birding was exciting. Townsend's Warbler, Blackpoll, Orange-crowned Warbler, Palm Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat all in the same thicket in Falmouth; Ash-throated Flycatcher at Wellfleet; Tufted Duck in Brewster; and Snowy Owl and Eurasian Widgeon in a number of other locations. Wow! I know why bird watchers come to Cape Cod all year. These sightings coupled with an article written by Pete Dunne, "The Devil List," *Living Bird* Autumn 1991, evoked some interesting sentiments. The article, which is wonderful both for its content and style, discusses many ideas related to bird watching versus bird listing. As bird watchers become skilled at identification or if they accompany a skilled observer, their interest in birds, common and uncommon, may become blurred with their list of birds. A list of birds may be perceived as a measure of skill. This list may fuel someone's interest, but as the list lengthens, the enthusiasm shown when observing their first cardinal may be lost, and their only concern will be to add to the list. Although I truly enjoy finding, identifying, and adding a Lark Sparrow or a Blue Grosbeak in Forestdale to my list, it would be time to hang up my field glasses if I did not find beauty and pleasure in a flock of American Goldfinch in the same field.

I recall trying to identify a Red-eyed Vireo as a youngster. That was a difficult task. As I developed a greater knowledge of birds in the area, identification became easier, but the delight of viewing these local birds and their actions grew. I will always be interested in the birds of Massachusetts. And after watching the marvelous December program on birds of South America by Bob Clements, the boundaries of my interest for birds appears to be limitless.



Why Do We Feed Birds?

Jim Talin

Different people in different times and places have had different reasons to feed birds. In medieval Europe, migratory birds were fed to keep them in the yard and fatten them up so they could be eaten. Even in Europe today, where up to 40% of birds can be listed as threatened, migratory birds end up on dinner plates all over the continent, usually offered as traditional regional specialties. Italian wildlife officials stop at restaurants and order dinner in order to apprehend poachers, frequently uncovering thousands of robins in coolers, or discovering dishes that might consist of charred chaffinches or other protected migrants. In the United States today, at least 25% of all households feed birds millions of pounds of seed at a cost of nearly \$200 million, and it's clear that North Americans feel altruistic about bird feeding. But can we say that all our efforts and all our seed are doing birds any good?

Christopher Leahy, in *The Bird Watchers Companion*, suggests that several myths have arisen about feeding, namely that "feeding has increased bird populations," that "feeding is responsible for the northward extension of the range of the Northern Cardinal and the Tufted Titmouse," and that "birds are forsaking their normal habitat and becoming hooked" on bird food. Are these perceptions true?

Research by Margaret Brittingham, reported in "Living Bird" Winter 1990, showed that, during winter weather in Wisconsin, feeding helped Chickadees survive severe weather. Overall, 69% of feeder birds were still alive in the spring, while only 37% of birds without access to feeders survived the winter. However, during mild winters the effect was slight: 96% of feeder birds survived, while 92% of nonfeeder birds survived. To see if birds required feeder food, she removed feeders that had been up continuously for 30 years in order to see if feeder birds would survive in the same numbers as wild, nonfeeder birds. Comparing survival rates, she found that feeder birds survived at the same rate as wild birds. Birds, in other words, use feeder food "to supplement a mostly natural diet."

Ranges of a variety of plants and animals are heading north. Researchers at the University of Michigan have documented that "ferns, fish and mammals common to the southern mixed hardwood forests of the Middle West and East are moving into northern Michigan, some of them at a rate of 10 miles annually. Meanwhile, small mammals, trees and orchid plants of the north that once were plentiful at the southern edge of their range in

Continued on Back Cover

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I agree with your editorial that something has to be done about cats, and agree with all of your proposals except the last one. If people are serious about keeping their cars indoors and are responsible, then limiting their numbers wouldn't really affect wildlife populations.

Last year we were having an awful time with neighboring cats killing birds, and I called everyone from Mass. Audubon, to Mass. Fish and Wildlife, and the Animal Control Officers. When I explained my problem, each one suggested that I stop feeding the birds! I answered that I make my livelihood from Wildlife Art and don't believe that I should have to make the change in my life when someone else's "pet" comes into my yard and kills birds and chipmunks, rabbits, etc.

If someone's horse or goat comes into my yard and destroys flowers or shrubs, I can call an Animal Control Officer, and it will be taken care of. If someone's dog

comes into my yard and starts to dig up or destroy my yard, I can call an Animal Control Officer, and it will be taken away. Cats have been domesticated and should be controlled too. I also approached the owner of two of the cats doing most of the killing, and he couldn't have cared less.

The Animal Control Officer in Dennis suggested fencing off the feeders with three foot rabbit fencing. It was an expense we didn't need, but it worked tremendously. Unfortunately, the cats are still killing birds outside of the fences, they are simply not able to pick them off from or under the feeders any longer. Mass Audubon told me the only hope that they have for licensing cats is the spread of rabies from Conn. Everyone I spoke with said the control would be impossible to enforce. I don't agree it is impossible. If dogs can be controlled, then cats should not be a problem either.

I hope your editorial brings response, and that the Bird Club as a unit can get something done about irresponsible cat owners.

Elaine Fisher Decorative Bird Carver

EDITORIAL

Jim Talin

Hunting: Old and New

Hunting was a rite of passage where I was young in upstate New York. I lived on an old farm whose barns were slowly collapsing and whose pastures were slowly filling in with birch and alder. It was clear that the world of my elders had been more full of wildlife. Men had killed bears and foxes and deer in places where houses now stood. Walking in those woods, I never saw the wildlife that people from a previous generation said had once been there. And when I went hunting, there usually wasn't anything but tin cans to shoot at in an old gravel pit that was frequented by beer drinkers and lovers.

I went duck hunting once in Northern Vermont by Lake Champlain. So far as I could tell, most of what went on was nocturnal and human. Men stayed up drinking and playing cards, gambling for real money that was really lost and won. Some nights, semi-inebriated, we went out 'coon hunting. We stood amid the corn stubble, shivering while the 'coon dog treed a raccoon that was carefully shot in the head so that its fur was not ruined because the sale of 'coon skins paid some men's way. I remember debating with a local man about whether the North Star was or was not the moon. I ceded the point when I realized that I was perilously close to getting into a fistfight. The raccoon was taken back and hung on the porch where it was skinned.


The last morning we were up early, because no one had killed any ducks, except for a local man who used illegal deer shot. We trashed our way through fields

of corn stubble, trying to sneak up on some geese who were long gone before we arrived within gun's range. I remember being tired and glad that it was the last day, and for the first time in my life feeling happy that I hadn't shot anything. A teal came flying in fast to the small waterhole where I stood, so I dutifully aimed my gun and then diverted it to miss. But it didn't. The teal crumpled in mid-flight and crashed into the water. The dog that was supposed to retrieve it, got confused, so a hunter waded out and drew it in with a branch. I was congratulated for having made "a great shot." Except what was supposed to be a great moment for a young hunter wasn't; it will stand as one of the most disappointing moments of my life. It was the last shot I fired from a gun.

Needless to say, I don't understand hunting. Most of the rationales used seem spurious to me. None of the men I ever hunted with needed the food, indeed few shot anything to take home, let alone enough to pay for the trip or even the shells or guns. None cared about keeping the numbers of certain species down. Most were interested in a "good time" away from home.

In colonial times people relied on the food and saw wildlife as competition for meager resources. Indeed, at a town meeting in Barnstable in 1714, along with the important business of locating a meeting house and getting a minister, appointing a Hog Constable, a Sealer of Leather, a Clerk of Ye Market, and various Fence Viewers and Tithingmen, it is also recorded: "At ye same town meeting it was voted that every House Keeper be as much obliged to kill and bring in birds heads as ye townsmen were by ye Last Act of ye Town." Similar meetings in Eastham record efforts by town officials to curtail the slash and burn method of clearing land for farming that was used by new settlers in town.

But times have changed, and hunting is an anachronism on Cape Cod and in most of New England.



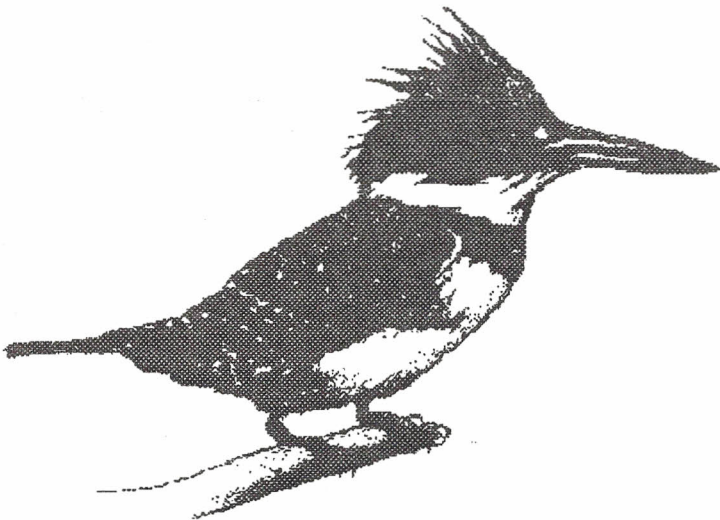
Cape Cod Bird Club Newsletter
The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History
RR 1, Route 6A, Brewster, MA 02631
Editor - Jim Talin
Design - Tom Noonan
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PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Frank Caruso and Mark Tuttle

Monday evening **January 13** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History located on Route 6A in Brewster will be our annual "Members Night." This is the opportunity for you to share your most significant sightings / visitations / achievements during the past year with the Club. We need to get more individuals to share their slides with us! You will **not** be graded. The more, the merrier, as they say. This is a good meeting for members to share information on optics (scopes and binoculars), other birding devices, field guides, camera, lenses, etc. We can have a discussion after the slide show if there is interest.

Monday evening **February 10** at 7:45 at the Museum, Gus Ben David from Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary on Martha's Vineyard will speak about "Managing For Ospreys, Barn Owls, and Kestrels on Martha's Vineyard." We have recently had programs on two of these avian species. Gus will give us some historical perspective on what has been done to allow these three species to co-exist with the significant population increase which occurs on the island during the late-spring until early fall. Tasty refreshments will be served afterwards as always!



Decals

Don't forget to checkout the updated club decals. The existing logo was visually slightly modified and made to be adhered from inside your car window. They will be for sale as usual at the next meeting.

Trivia

Last November, the Cape Cod Bird Club celebrated its 20th anniversary. Did you know why the bird club meets at 7:45 pm? Well it seems that half of the people at the first meeting wanted to meet at 7:30 and half wanted to meet at 8:00. So, the compromise was 7:45.

FIELD TRIPS

Sally McNair

January

New Year's Day-Let's Go With Mary!
Wednesday **Jan. 1st.** Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. 9 am. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

Thursday Jan. 16th-Backyard Birding at Charlotte Smith's house. 10 am. 20 Fortune Road, Yarmouthport. Call for directions 362-6891.

Saturday Jan 25th. Birding the South Shore with David Ludlow. 9 am. Meet at the Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary in Marshfield. Fahy Bygate (617) 934-6978.

February

Saturday Feb. 15th. Sandwich. 9 am. Meet at the Purity parking lot off Route 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

Sunday Feb. 23rd-Provincetown. 1:30 pm. Meet in the Race Point Parking lot. A naturalist from the Wellfleet Wildlife Sanctuary will lead. 349-2615.

Winter Birding. If you would like to go on unscheduled outings, call Sally McNair at 349-6043. Let weather conditions determine when and where.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CONTINUED

Dear Editor,

In my opinion, this is a most ridiculous statement. Dogs are not being controlled around here let alone cats!

Rita Boissonneault

P.S. I do not own any pets.

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the proposals regarding cats. For years I have felt that these regulations should be in place—not only for each town but every state. Animals are wonderful, but I do not want another person's pets. Many thanks for speaking out.

Nan Waldron

Frank Canuso
17 Freedom Rd
Forestdale MA 02644



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

Cape Cod Bird Club



END OF FEBRUARY 1991

*In the marsh at Squaw Island
a greater yellowlegs
bobs in the ditches.
Has he lingered here
through our coldest nights
and balmy days
this strange winter,
or is he the first returnee?*

*I could be that bird
probing mud runnels,
looking and finding,
intent on my search,
just staying alive.*

*Would it be better that way,
wings for escape,
senses sharper than claws,
no awareness of future or past,
seeking and feeding,
forever alert?*

Bob Pease

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Why Do We Feed Birds?

Jim Talin

Michigan are rapidly slipping back into Canada, their major range." (NY Times, 8/13/91) Here on Cape Cod, two non-feeder birds, the Mockingbird and the Carolina Wren, have extended their range into our area. Global warming is probably responsible, and not bird feeders.

Should we despair of bird feeding, as Christopher Leahy suggests when he observes that "supplying birds unnecessarily with tons of grain that might go to truly starving people is morally ambiguous at best"? It is more likely that most of us will agree with Margaret Brittingham when she concludes her research by observing "that chickadees do profit sometimes from feeders. Still, I think bird feeding probably has less impact on birds than is popularly assumed. Greater benefits of feeding go to people. As our society becomes more urbanized, feeding and observing birds fulfills our need to have contact with the natural world."