



# Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 22

NOVEMBER ~ DECEMBER 1992

ISSUE 2

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Frank L. Caruso

As many of you are aware, December is a month which includes two important bird censuses. The Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey will be held December 5-6. Counts are made of individual species and total individuals on as many Cape Cod ponds and lakes as participants can cover. Will the ponds be frozen over like they were three years ago? Will there be any tufted ducks this year? If you would like to participate, please contact Blair Nikula. We can use your assistance. It'll get you out birding too!

On Sunday, December 27 (most probably), the Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count will be held. Territories will be covered by different teams from East Sandwich to North Dennis to Dennisport to Cotuit from pre-dawn to dusk. Total species and individuals are recorded. The day reaches its climax when the teams gather that evening to report and compile their results. Team Spokesmen will wear their poker faces as the list is covered, revealing interesting totals or rarities. Hopefully, we'll exceed last year's species total. The results will continue to reveal trends (good and bad) for certain species. If you want to join one of the teams, contact one of the board members, or Peter Trimble.

## Rare Bird Hotline

We are in the process of revising our rare bird hotline which has generally been more than satisfactory this past year. This is to enable the word to get out promptly to interested members when birds are sighted that are either not listed on the Cape Cod checklist, or are listed as rare. For example, the Northern Wheatear that was sighted in mid-September and subsequently seen by many of us. Unfortunately there was at least one person on the hotline that did not get the word. We hope to reach 100% in the future.

Members who are interested in being included on the new listing, and who have not already signed up this year, should either sign up at the November meeting or contact Mark Tuttle, PO Box 635, Barnstable, MA 02630 or call 362-3015 prior to that meeting. We expect to have the new hotline in operation shortly thereafter. If you have birding friends whom you would like to have next to you on the list so that you would either call them, or receive their call let us know.

Such a hotline can work only if every member is fully responsible in passing on the word. Further details on this will accompany the new hotline listing. Any person who does not make the necessary effort to keep the report flowing promptly will be cursed with poor birding for a minimum of one month!

## Feeder Census Report

John Redfern

As suspected, the 1991-1992 season saw a drop off in the numbers of birds observed with only 52.2 birds per feeder per month. This is the second lowest total since the census began (1982-1983 had only 44.7 B/F/M).

Interestingly, most of the discrepancy occurred in January and April. November, the first month of the census following Hurricane Bob, was normal as was February when the census week-end was during a snow storm. There were a few changes in the usual rankings. All birds in the top ten had been there before. As usual, Chickadees were seen at the most feeders.

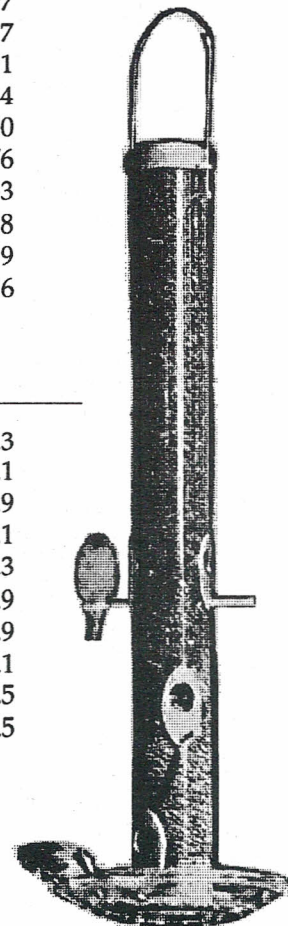
The number of species dropped from a record 60 last year to 52. Disappointing was the drop in number of reports submitted from 45 to 39. Let's get counting!

## Birds Per Feeder

1. Mourning Dove	5.97
2. House Finch	5.47
3. Chickadee	4.91
4. Goldfinch	4.84
5. House Sparrow	2.90
6. Starling	2.76
7. <del>House Finch</del> Cardinal	2.53
8. Blue Jay	2.48
9. Junco	2.19
10. Crow	2.16

## % of Feeders

1. Chickadee	96.3
2. Mourning Dove	86.1
3. Downy Woodpecker	82.9
4. Titmouse	80.1
5. Cardinal	77.3
6. House Finch	76.9
7. Goldfinch	75.9
8. WB Nuthatch	68.1
9. Blue Jay	56.5
Crow	56.5



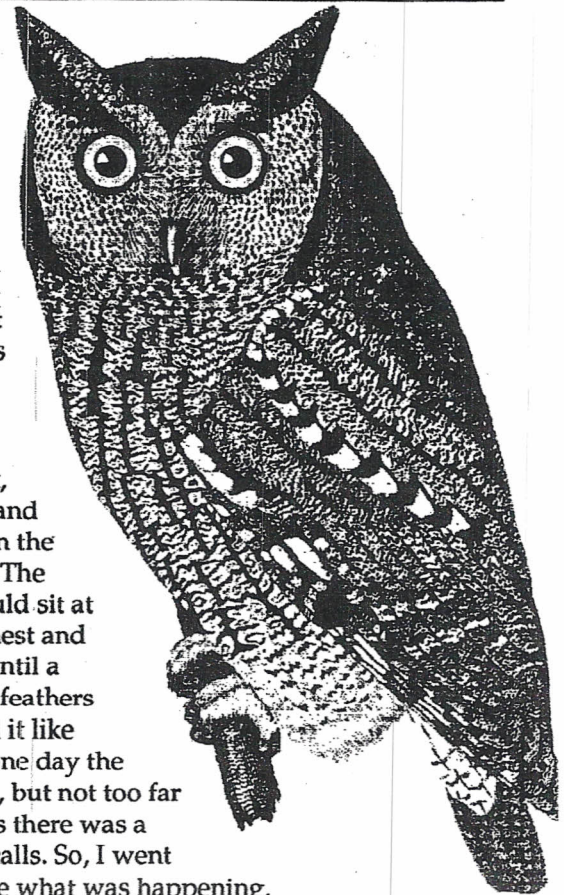
Like night and day, the conflict between crows and great horned owls seems elemental, an enmity born in their first moments of evolutionary history. It's clear why crows hate owls. Great horned owls love to eat crows, and crows resent this predation. On a walk once, I heard some crows protesting loudly in the woods, so I took a look, and when I did a great horned owl flew off, clutching the torso of a crow, and hotly chased by four or five agitated crows. On the ground under the roost of the owl, I found a pellet containing the entire head and beak of a crow, no doubt the remains of an acquaintance of those angry crows.

Great horned owls catch their crows at night, some say bumping them from their roosts and snatching them away as they fall. Yet even in daylight, crows are not safe from owls. I once heard a solitary crow grievously complaining and saw from a distance that it was perched on a limb within twenty feet of a roosting owl that appeared as immovable as the sphinx. The crow however was particularly animated. It bounced up and down as it called, but it also held its wings half extended, so that it looked like some puppet on a string. Suddenly the owl launched itself after the crow, but the reason the crow's wings were half-cocked became clear, because with one downbeat the crow took off, just a few feet ahead of the owl. The chase lasted a few moments, as the two birds veered between trees in tight synchronization. The crow knew the owl's limits, so it swerved out over a side street, and the owl gave up the chase rather than risk the daylight world of people.

Even when massing in great numbers, crows seem unable to exact their revenge on a solitary owl. I had been visiting the nest of a pair of owls one spring. A large female owlet delayed leaving the nest, and its mother and father roosted in the trees around it. The young bird would sit at the edge of its nest and beat its wings until a vortex of white feathers flew out behind it like exhaust. Then one day the owlet was gone, but not too far off in the woods there was a racket of crow calls. So, I went concerned to see what was happening.

I stopped a long way from the countless crows that swarmed through the air and filled the trees beside a prominently perched adult female owl. I gave up count-

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## EDITORIAL

Jim Talin

### Birds in a Cage

Before our ancestors tamed the land we now live on, to have and to hold for their heirs and assigns in perpetuity, some trace of wildness must have lingered in it. Perhaps the midnight hoot of the owl or the distant call of the wolf, haunting and inhuman, reminded early settlers of ancient fears and superstitions. Christian myth has it that the owl was a sweet singing bird until it witnessed the crucifixion, when its voice "turned dour, and it sought the shadows evermore," (J. Maslow, *The Owl Papers*.) after which it joined the other irredeemable creatures of darkness. Early settlers quickly civilized Cape Cod, neatly

divided it into abstract parcels; wild and unruly things being vanquished, but ironically, fear was not banished. Now, we bolt our doors and fence our yards against a human rather than a lupine threat. Wolves have yet to steal poultry from Stop and Shop or radios from our cars.

There is a parcel of woods I visit occasionally. It is home to a pair of great horned owls and their offspring. Its sides are bordered by open space, a parking lot and two roads. Songbirds sometimes congregate there too. If you step into these woods and are careful, you can get a good view of an owl roosting in a tree, nearly invisible, however sometimes you can find yourself stumbling upon an owl and scaring it from its roost, just as I did the other day. And when the bird drops from the tree and flies silently away, it can only go a short distance to the boundary of its daytime territory and stop, perhaps to circle around you, if you pursue it, to find another roost in this narrow strip of woods, like a bird caught in a wooded cage. Owls are lucky, however, because nighttime unlocks their cage. The people who have tamed the land are sometimes not as fortunate.



### 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

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*Tish Noyes*

Monday evening, **November 9** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History in Brewster, John Kricher will present a program entitled "*Where Are They Now: Long Distance Migrant Birds on Their Tropical Wintering Grounds.*" John is a professor of Biology at Wheaton College in Norton. He has studied migrants in Central and South America and is the author of books on birds and their habitat including *A Neotropical Companion*.

Monday evening, **December 14** at 7:45 at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History in Brewster, we will present our annual "*Members Night.*" Take this opportunity to share with members your artwork, needlework, carvings, photo slides, etc. This year we've added a new twist to the evening, "*Birding at Night,*" when we will share our lousiest slides of birds. We all have taken a picture of a bird we didn't know, or thought we knew until we got the slides back from being developed. Now is the time to get those birds ID'd. With the help of binoculars, it can be done (no kidding!). So share your talents with your fellow birders during this fun evening. If nothing else, bring your binoculars.

### Waterfowl Survey

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The Bird Club's 9th annual Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey will be conducted on the weekend of December 5th and 6th. This is one of the Club's more valuable projects, yet it is easy and enjoyable. We welcome all the help we can get, whether for an hour, half a day, all day or the entire weekend. If you would like to participate, get in touch with Blair Nikula at 432-6348.

### Outer Cape Christmas Bird Count

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The Outer Cape Christmas Bird Count, which covers the outer Cape from Harwich, Brewster, Eastham, Orleans, and Chatham, will be conducted on Sunday December 20th. Teams of birders will attempt to see as many species of birds as can be found in one day. The tally will be held at the house of Blair Nikula on Gilbert Lane in Harwichport. Call him if you wish to participate at 432-6348. Feeder watchers from within the circle of towns in the Bird Count are also needed.

### Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count

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The Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count, which is organized by the Bird Club, covers the towns of Dennis, Yarmouth, and Barnstable and will be held December 27th. Anyone wishing to participate can call Peter Trimble at 477-3847, or can sign up at the December 14th meeting. Feeder watchers who live within the survey towns are also needed.

## FIELD TRIPS

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*Sally McNair*

### November

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**Sunday Nov. 1st.** Eastham. 9 am. (In November and December Art's walks will be on Sunday.) Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

**Wednesday Nov. 4th.** Falmouth. 9 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

**Sunday Nov. 15th.** Mid-Cape. 8 am. Meet in the Burger King parking lot at the intersection of Routes 6 and 132. Sally Clifton. 775-4693.

**Wednesday Nov. 18th.** Orleans. 8 am. Meet in the back section of the Stop and Shop parking lot. Susan Thompson. 255-1451.

### December

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**Wednesday Dec. 2nd.** Falmouth. 9 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

**Saturday and Sunday Dec. 5th & 6th.** Land and Pond Waterfowl Survey. Sign up at the Nov. 9th meeting or call Blair at 432-6348.

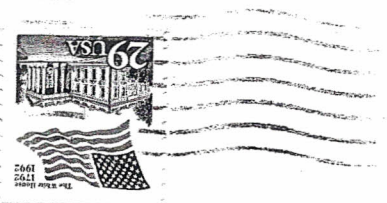
**Thursday Dec. 10th.** Backyard Birding at Bill and Harriet Dickson's house. 10 am. 176 Quanset Rd., South Orleans. Get directions at the Nov. 9th meeting or call 255-0299.

**Sunday Dec. 13th.** Eastham. 9 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

**Sunday Dec. 20th** Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count (Outer Cape). Sign up at the Dec. 14th meeting or call Blair Nikula. 432-6348.

**Sunday Dec. 27th** Mid-Cape Christmas Bird Count. Sign up at the Dec. 14th meeting or call Peter Trimble at 477-3847.

Frank Caruso  
17 Freedom Rd  
Forest Dale MA 02644



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

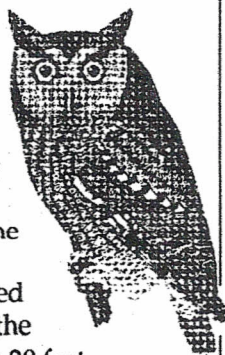


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## Great Horned Owls and Crows

*Jim Talin*

ing crows at over 65; I had never seen that many at once in this area. The owl snapped at the crows as they dived at her; and when her patience had worn thin, she took off like some pied piper with a sky full of crows after her. The crows took the bait; only two or three remained behind. The sound of the chase trailed off into the distance. Then, silently, the male owl glided up into a tree about 20 feet from me. Owls are indulgent and protective parents, so I decide to leave the scene, but when I turned, I saw the young owl, just a few feet away, brand spanking new, every feather perfect and in place, but perched on an awkward angle on a branch. It had made it about 400 yards in its first flight. The next day the owlet's mother was back at her normal roost, no worse for her encounter with crows.



## MEMBERSHIP WARNING

The mailing list will be revised very shortly. If you have not paid 1992-1993 dues by the end of the year, this may be the last newsletter you receive. We do not like to lose members, but at the same time, we do not want to have a mailing list inflated with names of those no longer interested in CCBC. So please pay promptly.

According to our records your dues for 1992-1993

have been paid

have not been paid

Dues are single \$7, and family \$10. Checks may be mailed to ...

Cape Cod Bird Club  
Mark Tuttle  
PO Box 635  
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