



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 22

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ISSUE 1

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Frank L. Caruso

This is the first of five newsletters you will receive during my tenure as your new president. I want to thank Peter Trimble for a "job well done" during his three years term. Peter will continue to be an active club member, although from now on he'll probably be doing Bronx cheers with Mike, Fahy, etc. in the back row while I try to keep things under control up in the front of the room.

I'm the guy who introduced our program speakers during the past three years, and who sometimes had to scramble and round up an alternate speaker at the last minute. I hail from Forestdale, a community on the Cape which very few people can point out on a map. For those of you about to reach for the atlas, it's part of Sandwich. My family consists of my wife, Barbara, and two children, Emily and Nicholas. Some of you may have met the later two at Beech Forest last May. I am a plant pathologist, and work at the Cranberry Experiment Station, a branch of the University of Massachusetts in East Wareham. I try to solve disease problems affecting cranberry (and to a lesser extent, blueberry, strawberry, bramble, and grape) plants, and to offer control strategies for the diagnosed problem. We moved to the Cape from Maine in 1985.

I have been birding since I was approximately eight years old, and I try to get out as often as I can, which isn't nearly as often as I would like. There was a very important lesson in the presentation Peter Trull gave to the Club last April. He said that you need to get out and bird, and try to relax and not feel under pressure to identify everything. You'll never appreciate our feathered friends if you don't get out. You need to make a concerted effort sometimes. When I listened to Peter that evening, I had not been out birding once in 1992. On my way home, I decided that I would rearrange my "priorities" and get out several times during the exciting month of May. On four separate excursions, I saw four warblers which had always avoided my binoculars; palm (I had never been in the right place!), cerulean, Connecticut, and prothonotary. Thank you, Peter, for your encouragement!

I am very interested to know what you feel the Bird Club should be doing to improve itself. If you have a suggestion for a speaker, program, walk, special event, the newsletter, let me or one of the Board members know. Tell us what you like and what you dislike. Our club is a very informal one, and nothing is etched in stone. My address is 17 Freedom Road, Forestdale, MA 02644 (Home: 477-9807; Work; 295-2213).

Please join us at the first meeting on September 14.

Songs of the Warblers of North America

A review by Jim Talin

My vaulting ambition, like Macbeth's, overleaped itself. I decided last winter to learn the songs of warblers. I know a few of them, but I've always been impressed and envious of those birders who can with serene confidence name the different songs of these tiny specks of tropical splendor. So I went to a singing school of sorts by purchasing the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's two tape *Songs of the Warblers of North America*. Coincidentally, our old car died, so we updated to a 1986 model with a tape deck. Great, I thought, everywhere I go, I'll listen to this tape, and then we'll see what happens in May.



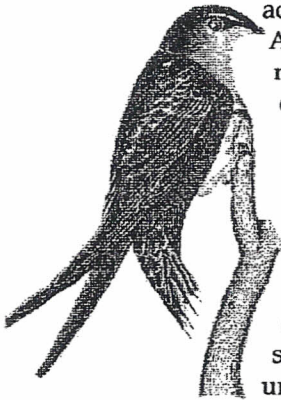
But I should talk about the two tapes that covered all the warblers of North America. My immediate goal was not to learn the MacGillivray's or the fan-tailed warbler, so I duped the tapes, eliminating the exotic birds. It was hard, without listening to understand the organization of the birds on the tapes: parula followed by yellow, chestnut-sided, and magnolia for instance. But when I listened, it became clear that the songs were organized by sound type, almost as if each bird were a variation on a theme. So far so good, but what followed was confusion. We have all looked in the bird books to find the verbalizations for bird song, like the chestnut-sided's *pleased, pleased to meet'cha*. I've never found these verbalizations to be of much use, but the tape reveals the source of the difficulty. It plays six different chestnut-sided songs. Eighteen different yellow warbler songs! Seven different redstart songs! And some of these songs are so different that I would never guess that the birds were of the same species! One warbler even picks up the cadence of a white-throated sparrow singing in the background! All in all, the two cassettes contain 281 samples of songs of 57 species, and each song is different. Clearly, there is more to this than I had dreamed of in the stillness of winter.

It would have helped if the tapes had come with some sort of documentation. There is a page that lists the order of the birds on the tapes, and on its back there is a note saying: "For a small fee plus shipping, a detailed booklet including sonagrams and descriptions is available..." , etc, etc. I think the tapes cost enough for Cornell

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On Swifts and Avian Adaptations

We had not quite left civilization behind. A half mile back on Route 9, we could still hear the motorcycles as they returned from a meet in Laconia and roared up a steep incline on the way to Bennington. We pulled over to let Northeast Utility trucks jolt down the dirt road past us. Perhaps that is why we did not notice the swifts at first when we stopped to walk across a meadow to the bank of the Deerfield River. We heard and finally saw the Willow Flycatcher before we even looked at the swifts, and then our first thought was: What are they doing out here? We know swifts as a species of bird that thrives because of its adaption to humans and urban life.



After all they are called chimney swifts, not hollow-tree-trunk swifts. But how dull we were, since these birds had been nesting like this for thousands of years. And why not chose this spot over a brick and mortar chimney? If this were exile, it was a paradise for exiles.

Birds have baffled us and defied our expectations many times, which shows not only how narrow our understanding can be but also how resourceful birds are. Like most birders, for good reason, we've repeated the mantra of the time, bemoaned the loss of this bird, wondered if this bird or that would reappear, or if this would be its last year. And then a bird will challenge us to reconsider. Wood thrushes used to be common on Cape Cod, and still are in a few places where acres of woods stretch unbroken by subdivisions. About the same time in May each year, a wood thrush appeared in the three acres of woods behind our former house in Orleans. It was something to anticipate, that one morning of full throated ethereal song. It was enticing too because it kindled a desire to go north as well, to hear the songs of the wood and hermit thrush and the white-throated sparrow echo through the luxuriant summer forests. But at least it was one morning with a wood thrush. Then, one hot July morning when the temperature and humidity soared, and unable to sleep, we were out of bed at 5 am, just in time to hear 15 seconds of song from a wood thrush in the woods behind the house. The thrush had nested in silence right next to our house!

It seems that our knowledge of the world is narrowed foremost by the comforting confines of habit and expectation that nature luckily confounds and banishes.

Some Writings about Chimney Swifts

Most people are surprised to learn that swifts (*Apodidae*) and hummingbirds (*Trochilidae*) are two related families. They comprise the order *Apodiformes*. Both are characterized by small feet, short legs and similarities in bone structure, plumage, and flight muscles, all contributing to greater mobility. They differ in these respects from all other birds...Hummingbirds are believed to be descended from a swift-like ancestor. *Margaret Whittemore*

The wind was blowing a gale, clouds were rolling in black portentous billows out of the west, the peals of thunder were shaking the heavens and big drops were just beginning to come down, when, on looking up, I saw three swifts high in the air, working their way slowly straight into the teeth of the storm. They were not hurried or disturbed; they held themselves firmly at anchor in the air till the rage of the elements should have subsided. I do not know that any other of our land birds outride storms in this way. *William Burroughs*

Some European swifts, *Apus apus*, ascend to great heights in sky to spend night on wing...swifts are so adapted to aerial life that all food gathering, courting, drinking, bathing, gathering of nest materials, and even copulation (are) accomplished while flying. *John Terres*

Sycamores of a gigantic growth and having a mere shell of bark and wood to support them, seem to suit them best; and wherever I have met with one of these patriarchs of the forest rendered habitable by decay, I have found the swift of the forest breeding in the spring and summer, and afterward roosting until the time of their departure. *John James Audubon*

In rounding a curve or making a quick turn in pursuit of an insect, the bird might work one wing faster than the other. Just as a boatman takes stronger strokes with one oar when turning in the water, so the swift may ply one wing more energetically when changing direction in the air. *Margaret Whittemore*

After a great many feints and playful approaches, a stream of them, as if drawn down by some power of suction, would pour into the opening. Then, as if the spirit of frolic had again got the upper hand of them, the ring would rise, and the chipping and circling go on. In a minute or two the same maneuver would be repeated, the chimney, as it were, taking its swallows at intervals to prevent choking. It usually took a half-hour or more for the birds all to disappear down its capacious throat. *William Burroughs observing a flock of 10,000 Chimney Swifts taking refuge in a 50 foot chimney.*

The various Indian tribes had picturesque names for their friends, the "bird people." A term applying appropriately to swifts was Wakishaka, meaning "one who never tires." *Margaret Whittemore*



Cape Cod Bird Club Newsletter

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

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PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Tish Noyes

Monday **September 14** at 7:45 p.m. at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, Bob Prescott will present a program entitled "*Baja: Mexico's Galapagos*". Bob is Director of the Mass Audubon Sanctuary at Wellfleet Bay and leads trips around the world for that organization. At our September meeting he will give us a preview of one of his upcoming trips to Baja California and will share the beauty of the birds and other fascinating wildlife found in this wonderful location. The slide presentation will include sea birds such as pelicans, boobies and frigatebirds, as well as the spectacular blue, gray and humpback whales that Baja is noted for. This program will be a great preview for anyone planning to take the trip as well as a great adventure for the armchair traveler.

Monday **October 12** at 7:45 at the Museum of Natural History, Bob Scott will present a program entitled "*Birding Manitoba*". Bob will narrate a collection of slides by various participants of this year's CC Bird Club trip that took place in late June and early July and that was led by Blair Nikula. Well known to Club members, Bob has been birding since his youth. He studied ornithology at Cornell University and is a former treasurer of the Club. Slides included will be of Parasitic Jaeger, Phalarope, ducks and CCBC members! A great night to learn or to reminisce.

ABA-AFO Conference

The American Birding Association and the Association of Field Ornithologists will sponsor their first joint meeting Friday to Sunday **October 2-4** at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. Non-members are welcome to the weekends activities which include field trips, book signings, a neo-tropical symposium, an AFO paper session as well as keynote addresses by Noble Proctor and Stephen Kress. For more information, get in touch with ABA/AFO Connecticut Meeting, c/o Robert Askins, Dept. of Zoology, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Ave, New London, CT 06320.

BIRDATHON

The Annual Birdathon will be conducted on Saturday, **September 19** and Sunday, **September 20**. Bird alone or join a team. But most of all enjoy a day of birding while you help the Manomet Bird Observatory, the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History and the Bird Club raise much needed funds for their research, education and conservation programs. There will be more information about this important event at the September meeting.

FIELD TRIPS

Sally McNair

September

Wednesday **September 2nd**. Falmouth, 8 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes, 548-6086.

Saturday **September 12th**. Morris Island. 9 am. Meet at the Monomoy Wildlife Refuge parking lot. Tom Noonan, 385-6858. Jim Talin, 896-7169.

Monday **September 14th**. Eastham. 8 am. Meet in lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King, 255-8919.

Wednesday **September 23rd**. Harwich. 8 am. Meet at the Conservation Area on Bell's Neck Road in West Harwich. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

Saturday **September 26th**. Hawk Watch. 9 am. Meet in the Pilgrim Heights parking lot, North Truro. George Martin, 896-8798.

October

Saturday **October 3rd**. Sandwich, West Barnstable. 8:30 am. Meet in the parking lot at Sandy Neck. Bob Pease. 790-1351.

Monday **October 5th**. Eastham Ponds. 9 am. Meet in lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King, 255-8919.

Wednesday **October 7th**. Falmouth, 8 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

Thursday **October 15th**. Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. 9 am. Meet in the parking lot. A naturalist will lead. 349-2615.

Sunday **October 25th**. South Cape Beach. 8 am. Meet in the State parking lot at the end of Great Oak Rd. From Mashpee rotary follow signs to South Cape Beach State Park. Peter Trimble, 477-3847. George Martin, 896-8798.

Orenda Wildlife Trust

The Orenda Wildlife Trust needs volunteers to help them with the feeding of baby birds. If you have a few spare moments (or a lot of spare moments), and would be interested in helping, please call 362-8452 or 896-5273, and you can get more information. They need volunteers very badly.

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Cape Cod Bird Club



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Songs of the Warblers of North America

to slip in a few pages of printed material at no extra charge. A further problem comes with the medium itself. Tapes are not a great way to learn bird songs. Taped bird songs don't tell you how forcefully a bird sings in comparison with other birds, or whether it sings from high up in the trees, half way down or near the ground. It's like listening to one instrument and trying to identify the symphony.

I persevered as best I could, trying to sort out the birds, to find ways to differentiate the ones I did not know. When May came, my biggest disappointment was the lack of warblers to practice on, but when we traveled north this summer, I found myself identifying birds in the same old way, by connecting the image of the bird to its song. The real learning school is out in the fields and forests.

Invitation

This summer's clock is winding down.
The days, abbreviated, fly
Like terns, in wind-whipped flocks. The marsh
Goes russet, ochre stippled brown,
While loosestrife, violet, spartina,
Vibrant green, and goldenrod just opening,
Sun-bright, bewitch the eye.

So will you come? Will you too see
Dense autumn light lie horizontal
On phragmites, cattail, shifting dune,
Long shadows walking closer now?
Say when. Rude katydids converse at night,
Unwitting. Orion all too soon
Will stalk on high.

R. Pease