



Cape Cod Bird Club

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ISSUE 3

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Frank L. Caruso

Birding in January and February is certainly considered winter birding. Although birding during these months is nowhere near as exciting or productive as birding in May or September, outing can be rewarding and memorable. I will recount one such memorable outing for me which occurred on January 14, 1987. A friend of mine from Wrentham came down to join me on a trip to the Outer Cape in search of alcids. We had done a similar outing the previous January, and, at that time, we agreed to make it an annual event.

In 1987, however, things were not in our favor weather-wise. An Alberta Clipper had gone through the night before, and when we awoke on the 14th, the mercury read two degrees, and winds were howling at 30-40 MPH. Since we had Xed out this day on our calendar for birding for weeks, we decided to give it our best shot. Armed with several layers of warmth and hot coffee in a thermos, we set out for Wellfleet, Truro, and Provincetown. The car's heater was on full blast until we reached the Orleans rotary. I will never forget our first view of the Atlantic Ocean as we attempted to get our alcids at Lecount's Hollow. By now, the temperature had risen to five degrees! The sea smoke over the open ocean was denser than any I had ever seen during my six years in Maine. Sea smoke is not very conducive for good views of razorbills or murrets riding the waves several hundred feet off shore. We reduced our number of ocean stops as a result.

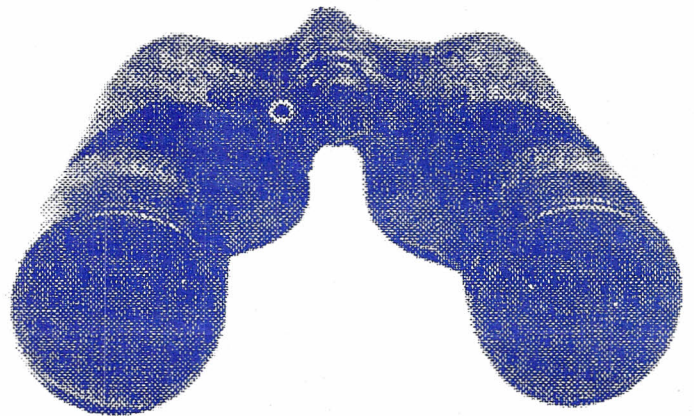
While driving up to Race Point (there's got to be some alcids there!), we watched a red-headed woodpecker fly right in front of our vehicle. The outing was now redeemed in our eyes. Still, onward to Race Point! We got out of our vehicle and the sixty below wind chills in our faces were the coldest blasts of air I had ever encountered in my life! Three black guillemots flew right over our heads as we retreated to the vehicle. A few snow buntings moved inland as well. That brief encounter with the cold air made us realize that this was an inside-the-car-type of birding day. This we proceeded to do as we worked our way southward. The eurasian wigeon in Round Cove gave us a real nice view. Other than that, the day brought no great shakes, as they say. We had some stick-to-your-ribs soup at what appeared to be the only open restaurant in Chatham, and then we headed back to Forestdale after a few stops in sheltered harbors. The day was certainly not our most productive day, but it was a day I will never forget.

Binocular Survey

from *Living Bird*

Jim Talin

In modern society, technology is the mother of invention. It seems that all products are constantly revised to improve design and function. Binoculars are no exception. It is amazing to think that just a hundred years ago birders relied at best on 3.5 magnification opera glasses and that the only real way to study a bird was to shoot it. But, not today. If you need a new pair of binoculars, consult the Autumn 1992 issue of *Living Bird*, published



by the Cornell School of Ornithology. A lot has changed since the last binocular survey we published a few years ago in this newsletter.

For instance, in \$1,000 plus category, the competition has caught up with the former top-rated Zeiss. "At the top of the heap are Bausch & Lomb Elites, Leica BA Ultras, and Zeiss 7x42s and 10x40s. You can't go wrong with any of these binoculars. Choosing among them is a matter of personal preference. Eyeglass wearers, however, did not get along with Leicas' high-tech retractable eyecups.... In the field the differences between these glasses are virtually undetectable." If you are hesitant about spending the money to purchase a set of these expensive binoculars, it is important to remember the warranty that comes with them. For instance, the Elite 7x36s come with "a lifetime 'no questions asked' warranty. If they break, they are fixed or repaired. They are truly the last pair of binoculars you'll ever have to buy."

One step down in price, the top-rated binoculars are the new Nikon E series 8x30 and the Optolyth's Touring models, with the Optolyth's Touring 10x40 comparing favorably with binoculars costing twice as much. The best buy is the the Swift Ultra Lite 8x42 at a recommended

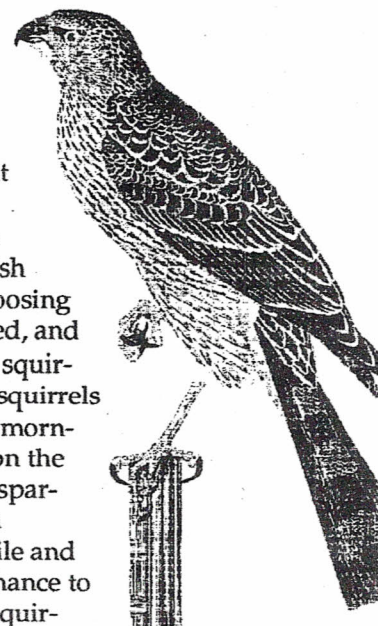
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Nothing could be simpler. Put some seed out and sooner or later a flock of inquisitive birds will discover it, devour it and return for more. But what does it take to overcome some of the problems that can limit the success of your feeders? Why are some feeders crowded with birds and others infrequently used? Why are some people spending a fortune on seed while other people are complaining about the lack of birds?

We have to begin by looking at feeders from the bird's point of view. At best feeders supplement the wild bird's diet. So unless it is starving, no bird will visit a feeder that exposes it to undue danger. Birds are not suicidal; they are unequivocally intent on survival. Of prime importance then are two simple considerations: location and protection. When I moved into a new neighborhood a year ago in November, I surveyed the new lot for a location for feeders and decided to place them along the border of an open area where lawn met underbrush. Birds came to the feeders at once, but with time I noticed fewer birds were using the feeders. Then I found mourning dove feathers on the lawn, and one day saw a sharp-shinned hawk zoom down the border. Clearly, the birds were not safe, so I moved the feeders back twenty-five feet into the bushes where there was no direct approach for a hawk and where birds could duck for cover easily. The result? A mob of birds on the ground and in the bushes, and more business for Mike O'Connor. But, my neighbors started to complain that all the birds were at our feeders. So, I looked at their feeders and found each of them exposed, with no cover nearby.

Of secondary importance to feeder success is the choice of foods and feeder types. For the seed eating birds and woodpeckers, sunflower seeds, thistle, and suet can be placed in hanging feeders, while for the cardinals, sparrows, towhees and other ground feeders, mixed seed

can be thrown on the ground. And never forget water which is in some ways more important than food to birds in the winter. So, okay, the food is out there, but then what do we do about the nuisance feeders like squirrels, black birds and english sparrows? Accept them. By choosing a food they reject, safflower seed, and by putting sunflower seed in a squirrel-proof feeders, I get around squirrels and black birds. At dawn each morning, I throw some mixed seed on the ground for the white-throated sparrows, knowing that the english sparrows won't arrive for awhile and the white-throats will have a chance to feed first. And I pity the poor squirrels. While their antics are goofy and amusing to watch, few of them seem to live more than a year. In Orleans where we lived for ten years, we attracted a number of squirrels and found that, when their population peaked, a red-tailed hawk moved in and started thinning them down.



The final ingredient to a successful feeder is a concern for hygiene. To avoid giving birds bacterial infections, water should always be clean of fecal material. Never feed birds moldy seed. Rake the ground under the feeders occasionally to prevent ground feeders from eating contaminated seed. Feeders should also be cleaned out when dirty or when moldy seed gathers at their bottom. In warm weather, suet can mat a bird's plumage, and in cold weather bird's eyes and tongues can stick to uncoated metal on suet feeds.

EDITORIAL

Hawks and Darwin

"There is no harm and much good in the occasional forays that bird-hawks make into the midst of the feeding station company. They weed out the unfit and thereby reduce the incidence of such crippling diseases as foot pox." (John Dennis, *Bird Feeding*) Other birders have made similar observations, and I have never completely accepted them. Without doubt, unfit or diseased birds perish, and there are plenty of predators out there looking for them. But it seems to me that chance, trajectory and

speed have more to do with which individual bird is killed by a hawk than the advancement of the good of the species does. One superbly adapted predator kills one superbly adapted seed eater. Do we need to say more? As Stephen Jay Gould writes, "The identification of individuals as the unit of selection is a central theme in Darwin's thought. Darwin contended that the exquisite balance of nature had no 'higher' cause. Evolution does not recognize the 'good of the ecosystem' or even the "good of the species.'" (*The Panda's Thumb*)

Yet we do feel compelled to say more, to rationalize a death in terms of a higher, general principle, in order, I suspect, to mitigate our personal ambivalence toward the act of killing and toward death in general. Unfortunately, I don't think a hawk, or for that matter a blue jay or a crow, takes into account or cares for what we humans feel about death.



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 **January 11** at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, there will be a program entitled *Birding Monhegan Island* presented by Blair Nikula. Blair is a past president of the CCBC. He is currently a member of the Massachusetts Avian Records Committee and is Regional Editor of *American Bird* magazine. Blair will present slides and will discuss Monhegan Island Maine which is located near Port Clyde. It is accessible only by ferry and is a great birding spot during migration to go for warblers, sparrows, songbirds, hawks and falcons.

Monday **February 8** at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, there will be a program presented by Simon Perkins entitled *Tropical Nature*. Simon grew up on Nantucket and is currently a Mass Audubon Field Ornithologist in Lincoln. He has led international natural history tours for the past 15 years to Alaska, Central and South America, Europe, Africa and China. He is New England Editor for *American Bird* magazine and is a contributing author of the upcoming publication *The Birds of Massachusetts*.

Editors Notes

You may have noticed the switch in the way the names of birds are capitalized in the newsletter this year. The former practice of capitalizing names was dropped, so that White-throated Sparrow, for example, has become white-throated sparrow. Let us know what you think of this change.

Don Reid will be leaving his post at Wellfleet Audubon on January 20th to become Warden/Naturalist at Bartholomew's Cobble Reservation at PO Box 128 Ashley Falls Massachusetts 01222. While he will be sorely missed here on Cape Cod, we wish him the best of luck in his new position.

Correction

In the report on the 1991-1992 Feeder Census in the last issue of this newsletter, the Birds Per Feeder contained an error. House finches were listed twice, and cardinals were left out. The correct list follows.

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. CARDINAL	2.53
8. Blue Jay	2.48
9. Junco	2.19
10. Crow	2.16

FIELD TRIPS

Sally McNair

January

New Years Day. START WITH ART! Friday Jan. 1st. 9 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill, Eastham. Art King, 255-8919.

Saturday Jan. 23rd. Birding the South Shore with David Ludlow. 9 am. Meet at the Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary in Marshfield. Fahy Bygate, (617) 934-6978.

Sunday Jan. 31st. Exploring Bird Habitats. 1:30 pm. For children with a parent/adult. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill, Eastham. Aurelle Thomas, 255-1409. Kate Wallace, 255-5095.

February

Sunday Feb. 7th. Eastham. 9 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill, Eastham. Art King, 255-8919.

Saturday Feb. 13th. Sandwich. 9 am. Meet in the Purity parking lot off Route 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

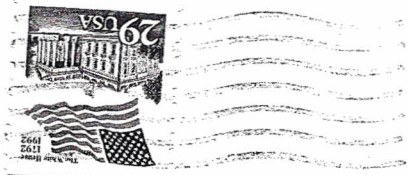
Friday Feb. 19th. Provincetown. 1:30 pm. Meet in the Race Point Parking lot. A naturalist from the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary will lead. 349-2615.

Sunday Feb. 28th. Exploring Bird Habitats. 1:30 pm. For children with a parent/adult. Meet in the parking lot at the Paw Wah Conservation Area about one mile in on Namequoit Rd. off Route 28, South Orleans. Aurelle Thomas, 255-1409. Kate Wallace, 255-5095.

Assistance Sought

Do you write about nature or birding? Do you sketch or draw? We want to add your artistic, literary or scientific reflections to this newsletter. The only restraint on material is one of space (no epic poems or novellas please). Get in touch with Jim Talin, PO Box 314, Brewster, MA 02631, at 896-7169 for more information.

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Cape Cod Bird Club



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Binocular Survey

Jim Talin

price around \$300. "Birds look bright and crisp through the Ultra Lites." The best inexpensive model is the Bushnell Birder. "Priced at only \$75, they outperform many more expensive models. Their greatest strength is the brightness of the image they provide. But handle your Birders with care; one hard jolt and they may be knocked out of alignment. Bushnell Birders are perfect for beginners (or kids)...." The best compacts were the Bausch and Lomb Custom Compacts which are small enough to fit into a shirt pocket.

Of course, the down-side to the advance of binocular technology comes when you look at the survey and discover that your tried and true binoculars aren't even listed.

Quotes and information from *Living Bird*,
Autumn 1992, Vol. 11 Number 4



Exploring Bird Habitats

The Cape Cod Bird Club is offering a monthly birding experience for children accompanied by a parent/adult. Come discover what makes birds special and learn to identify birds in a series of easy trail explorations. We'll look for their nests, food, and resting places in different habitats. Binoculars are not necessary but bring them if you have them. Most of all bring your curiosity. Cape Cod Bird Club walks are free and open to all. Walks start at 1:30 p.m. and last about an hour.

Sunday

January 31st at Fort Hill in Eastham

Sunday

February 28th at Paw Wah Conservation
Area in South Orleans

For information call 255-5095 or 255-1409