



# Cape Cod Bird Club

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Frank L. Caruso

We just went through all of the hoopla (with a capital "H") of the inauguration, and seen innumerable reruns of the highlights of John F. Kennedy's speech in 1962, in which the basic message was "you can make a difference." This will be the take-home message of this column in this newsletter.

When I was growing up as a young birder in New Jersey in the 1950's and 1960's, and then when I was a graduate student in Massachusetts and Kentucky, I never saw a single bluebird. Some of my elder peers told me how common they used to be in the Northeast. The decline of the eastern bluebird was due to several contributing factors: 1) the introduction of house sparrows and European starlings which both competed for territory and became enemies; 2) the removal of unsightly dead trees in the clearing of land and subsequent use for firewood; 3) extensive logging of practices further decimated nesting sites; 4) wooden fenceposts were replaced by longer lasting metal fenceposts; 5) prior to the establishment of integrated pest management techniques, farmers indiscriminately used pesticides to cope with pest problems.

Concerned people got involved in the late 1970's to try to reverse the downward spiral in populations. The North American Bluebird Society was formed in Maryland in 1978, and other more local groups were set up to deal with the problem on a more regional level. Many state agencies got involved as well.

When I came on board the faculty at the Cranberry Station in 1985, I was immediately impressed by those cranberry growers who had constructed and set up bluebird nesting boxes adjacent to their producing bogs, and in the adjacent woods or uplands. They were having amazing success at attracting the birds, and the birds were producing a significant number of nestlings. In my first winter talk to the growers in 1986, I talked to them about the bluebird's plight, and urged them to get a set of house plans from me, and to give it a try. The response was overwhelming, and in the years since, I have seen bluebirds in more than two dozen locations (and heard of numerous others).

You can have the same impact. If you have an appropriate habitat (an open area is essential), put up several boxes and see what transpires. My Cub Scout den put up eight boxes at Windstar Farm last spring, and we are hoping this will be the year we have our first successes.

You can make a difference!

## 1992 Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey

Blair Nikula

The 10th annual Cape Cod Lake & Pond Waterfowl Survey was conducted by the Cape Cod Bird Club on the weekend of December 5-6, 1992. Thirty-seven observers censused 305 ponds and recorded 8,466 birds of 28 species. The total number was not only down for the third straight year, but was the lowest in the history of the survey!

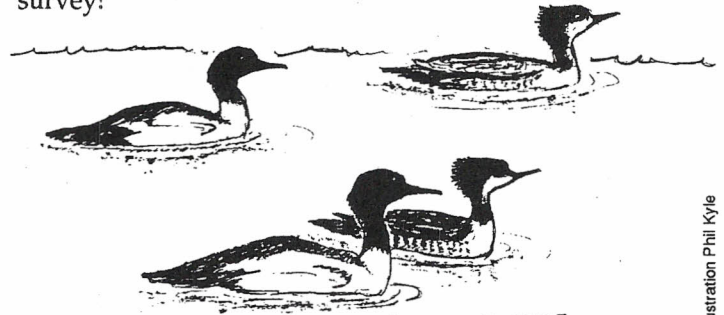


Illustration Phil Kyle

For the third straight year, the weather preceding the survey was warmer than normal, and only the very smallest of ponds had any icing at all. Although the weather may have induced many birds to linger to the north and west of the Cape, it is still hard to understand why the numbers should have dropped so sharply compared to the previous two mild years. The decline was across the board: of the 20 species that have been recorded every year of the survey, 16 were found in below average numbers this year.

In sharp contrast to last year, when eight species established all-time high counts, there were no record highs this year. Mute Swans, although down somewhat from last year, were still in the second highest numbers yet recorded. Likewise, the Bufflehead total was the second highest ever, though down from last year. On the downside five species were found in the lowest numbers yet on this survey. Three of these are typically among the most common and widespread birds on the Cape: Canada Goose, Black Duck and Mallard. It should be noted that Canada Goose and Black Duck winter extensively in saltwater habitats which, for most part, are not covered in this survey; it simply may be true that we are seeing a recent shift away from freshwater habitats, though such a shift would seem more likely to occur during colder weather. Also in record low numbers were Ring-necked Duck and American Coot. The alarming drop in coot numbers on this survey since 1984 mirrors a trend noted elsewhere across North America. As usual, scaup were the most numerous birds, comprising almost a third of the overall total.

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There are almost as many types of bird lists as there are species of birds. There are serious lists: life, North American, Massachusetts, yard, year, first sighting; and factitious lists: birds seen on the Interstate flying north, birds seen on the left side of the road, birds seen performing various bodily functions, birds seen in dreams, birds seen on TV or in movies. I don't keep lists, so I asked club members why they keep lists and what lists they keep. Even if everyone I spoke to made fun of listing fanatics, most birders do keep lists of some sort, and many keep more than one list.

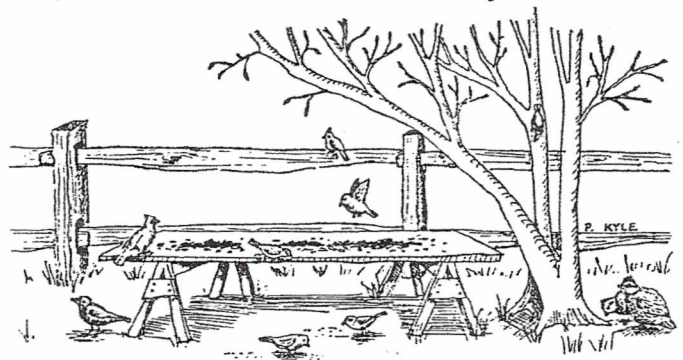
### Listing.

The competitive branch of birdwatching in which one competes against oneself and/or others for the greatest number of species seen in a given place and/or time.

*Christopher Leahy*

For birders like Bob Scott or Art King, keeping a list can be an important measure of their involvement in the natural world around them. Art King's first list as a teenager was a list of "Birds That I Know." He now keeps a life list and a yard list because they add interest and bring back memories. Bob Scott keeps a list of the birds seen in the bog near his house. He was always interested

by a list he kept for years of first sightings of birds, so that he could look under common yellowthroat and see that in 1980 he first saw one on May 12th and that in 1981 it was May 14th, and that in 1982 it was on May 13th.



George Martin keeps a similar list. Unlike competitive lists, these sorts of lists are a measure of a birder's search for inclusion in and understanding of the cycles of the natural world. They are a spur to learning. Fahy Bygate keeps a Massachusetts list because it helps her understand what is going on in the state, and because it also forces her to go places and to find out about habitats she might not visit normally. Dick Comeau finds the history of recent birding written in his list. He can look back and see how hard it was 15 years ago to find a

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## EDITORIAL

Jim Talin

### The Fine Print

Most everyone supports the opening of frontiers and the permitting ideas, goods and services to pour through closed borders such as the Iron Curtain. Yet, some aspects of the free trade agreements that are now being considered by the United States could negate decades of progress in environment standards. Our government is negotiating a global free trade proposal called Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade or GATT, and a North America Free Trade Agreement or NAFTA. What most of us don't know is that these agreements would limit the scope of laws such as the Endangered Species Act and the Migratory Bird Act, which protect species by outlawing imports of products that threaten or use endangered species. If national laws are found to restrict or distort trade in any way, they can be ruled illegal by either of these agreements. For instance, using the 1988 Free Trade Agreement, Canada challenged the

US EPA's ban on asbestos. (Quebec produces a lot of asbestos.) In 1991, the US Court of Appeals upheld that challenge because the EPA had rejected alternatives that were "less burdensome to industry." A Thai ban on the import of tobacco products was overruled by GATT on the grounds that measures that restricted trade less were available. Similarly, The European Court of Justice struck down a Danish law requiring deposit and returnable bottles because it "limited the quantity of products that can be marketed." A GATT dispute panel, taking up a complaint by Mexico, overturned provisions of the US Marine Protection Act that banned the sale in the US of tuna caught in purse-seine nets that also kill dolphins. The panel ruled that the ban was an illegal, extra-territorial application of US law. And finally, GATT calls for the 'harmonization' of US laws that regulate pesticides with lower international standards, and the committee that will draft GATT standards on pesticides supports the use of DDT. Any national, state or local environmental standard more stringent than those approved by these treaties would be considered an unnecessary barrier to trade and thus could be found illegal if challenged.

Hopefully the Senate will read the fine print on these agreements before they vote to approve either GATT or NAFTA.



### Cape Cod Bird Club Newsletter

The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History  
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## PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

*Tish Noyes*

On Monday, **March 8** at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, there will be a program entitled "*Identifying Spring Hawks in Flight*," presented by Paul M. Roberts of Medford. Paul is former editor of *Bird Observer*. In 1976 he founded Eastern Mass. Hawk Watch. He has served as President of Hawk Watch Association of America and Chairman of New England Hawk Migration. He is currently Chairman of New England Hawk Watch. He has lectured and taught courses on hawks and other birds for the past 15 years. Few birders realize that the Cape is a great location to find migrating hawks in April and May, especially accipiters and falcons. Paul will share some of his expertise on identifying hawks and where to find them. Don't miss this one.

On Monday, **April 12** at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, there will be a program presented by Henry Barbour entitled, "*Coastal Water Bird Protection on Cape Cod*." Henry, a life-long Cape Codder, received a Master's degree in Biological Conservation from the University of London and University College. For the past two years, Henry has been working simultaneously for Mass. Audubon and the Mass. Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, as a field biologist coordinating the Cape Cod tern and plover recovery programs. He is also working for the Natural Heritage Program in Boston coordinating the Vernal Pool certification program and assisting in environmental review. Please join us as Henry updates us on the current status of these birds and their fragile habitat.

*Continued from previous page.*

*LISTS Jim Talin*

Carolina wren on Cape Cod. Yet for some people, lists can impede rather than illuminate. "They can make birders feel jaded," Mike O'Connor says. People go out to fill in their lists and not to appreciate and enjoy birding for its own sake. Listers come into Mike's store frequently to find out what is being seen, and they often say, "I've already seen that." Mike stopped keeping a life list. "I'd rather go for a walk in the woods, and come across a loon in a pond than chase after a wheatear." Bob Scott likes to see new birds just like anyone else, but he has put a limit on how far he will go out of his way. "I wouldn't go further than Wellfleet for a life listing." He got talked into going to Newburyport once to see a rare bird, and while the trip was enjoyable, he never did see the bird.

As a non-lister, I can value the types of lists that most members of the club make. They measure a commitment rather than a competition. Few of the birders I spoke with would fully accept Christopher Leahy's definition of listing. I think we would have to modify it to say: Listing: The record of a commitment to the observation of birds and their habitats.

## FIELD TRIPS

*Sally Branch*

### *March*

**Wednesday March 3rd.** Falmouth, 9 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

**Saturday March 20th.** Harwich, 9 am. Meet at Saquatucket Harbor across from Thompsons Farm Market on Rte. 28. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

**Thursday March 25th.** Orleans Hot Spots, 9:30 am. Meet behind the Bird Watcher's General Store on Rte. 6A Orleans. Mike O'Connor. 255-6974.

**Sunday March 28th.** Exploring Bird Habitats. 1:30 pm. For children with a parent/adult. Harwich Conservation Area. Meet at Bell's Neck Road in West Harwich. Kate Wallace, 255-5095. Aurele Thomas, 255-1409.

### *April*

**Monday April 5th.** Eastham, 8 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King. 255-8919.

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

**Saturday April 17th.** Sandwich, 8 am. Meet at the Purity Parking Lot off Rte. 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

**Sunday April 25th.** Exploring Bird Habitats. 1:30 pm. For children with a parent/adult. Meet in the Pilgrim Heights parking lot, North Truro. Kate Wallace, 255-5095. Aurele Thomas, 255-1409.



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The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History  
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## Name Changes

*Eirik Blom*

Slowly but steadily the effort by American and British ornithologists to reach an agreement on the English (common) names of birds moves forward. . . . Two groups of birds are likely to cause the greatest disagreement. The birds we call loon the British call divers, and our jaegers are their skuas. Both sides recognize the special status these names have achieved and admit that they make total agreement unlikely. In the meantime, don't be surprised if some of the following changes are adopted: white-winged scoter to velvet scoter; common merganser to goosander; gryfalcon to gyr falcon; boreal owl to Tengmalm's owl; American pipit to buff-bellied pipit; northern shrike to great gray shrike; hoary redpoll to arctic redpoll; white-winged crossbill to two-barred crossbill.

from *Bird Watcher's Digest*

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## 1992 Lake and Pond Waterfowl Survey

Following well behind were Bufflehead and Mallard. These species accounted for 66% of all the birds recorded.

Falmouth, as always, far out-distanced all the other towns with 3705 birds or 44% of the Capewide total. In second place was Yarmouth with 1065 birds (13%) followed by Barnstable with 744 (9%). Greatest variety was also in Falmouth with 18 species, followed by Yarmouth with 17 species and Barnstable with 16 species. Regaining its coveted (?) position at the bottom of the list was Truro with only 47 birds of three species. Honors for the best individual pond totals are invariably determined by where the large scaup flocks decide to settle, and this year was no exception. Top pond was Salt Pond in Falmouth where 1978 birds were counted, over 1800 of which were scaup. A very distant second was Cedar Pond in Falmouth. The best variety, 12 species, was also found on Salt Pond, while three ponds in Yarmouth: Long, Mill and Follins, each hosted 10 species.