

Thank you for your year as Pres. You did a very good job -
Charlotte



Cape Cod Bird Club

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ISSUE 5

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Frank L. Caruso

Finally, there are signs that there, indeed, may be a spring in 1993 (although today Boston set a March snowfall record!). The ever-increasing numbers of grackles, redwings, and cowbirds in my yard, plus assorted sightings of other early migrants on the Voice of Audubon, get me excited thinking about the upcoming northward migration of birds to the Cape. I don't get out birding nearly as much as I like, but May is a month I have certain "ritual" trips I cram into my schedule. These include Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, a truly amazing stopping point for migrants in the midst of civilization, and with the Boston skyline in easy view. Another worthwhile site is Wildwood Cemetery in Amherst. I have to make periodic trips to the UMass campus, and this is within easy reach of the campus.



In addition to numerous warbler species, last year's treat of the day at Wildwood was seven scarlet tanagers (six males) on one branch! Last but not least, there is the infamous Beech Forest (not a cemetery). I don't need to tell any of you about the Beech Forest. If you're a newcomer to the Cape, or have never sampled the Beech Forest's treasures, make it a must-see in May.

I hope many of you will be able to participate in the (Mid-Cape) Breeding Bird Census scheduled for Saturday, June 12. This covers basically the same territory which is covered by the Christmas Bird Count in December. We can see what birds are nesting here, and compare the numbers with the data from previous years. Will this be the year we find red-bellied woodpeckers are breeding on the Cape?

This concludes my "administration" as President of the Bird Club. I have truly enjoyed it, but must go on to other activities (although you'll still see me at most meetings). I want to thank the Board members for their hard work. We have an excellent newsletter, have had scintillating programs with yummy eats afterward, are in decent financial shape, and have an ever-growing membership. I wish especially to thank Sally (McNair) Branch who is rotating off the Board, and who has put together a fantastic walks schedule during the past three years. Good job, Sally. I wish our new President and the new Board members success as they carry on the CCBC tradition.

I'll see you at the Beech Forest!!!

REDWINGS

Jim Talin

The first blackbirds of spring seem misguided. I usually see flocks of them as I drive down Route 6A. They perch in groups, high in trees, facing the wind, looking as if they too wonder what they are doing on Cape Cod in March. A few days later, the first Redwing is staking out territory along the Quivett marsh near the Brewster—East Dennis line. It must be a dismal sight that only the most reckless alchemy of hope could transform: a brown marsh, still frozen in places, with little food to sustain a weary migrant. Yet Redwings know, as surely as we do, that within a few weeks this barren marsh will be fragrant, green, and bursting with life.

"Swamps, morasses and bogs are not considered very cheerful places, but a veritable Slough of Despond would lose its gloom in the presence of one of this feathered optimist with his sleek black jacket and smart red epaulets, and his persistent and jolly *o-ka-lee*." Since F. E. Beal wrote these words in 1917, we have lost our fear of moist, damp places, and now people compete for the Redwing's habitat. But Redwings have been unaffected; they seem able to turn any ditch or gully into home. All that is needed is water, and dense vegetation in which they can conceal their nests. "Marshes or sloughs supporting extensive growth of cattails, bulrushes, sedges, reeds or tules are their favorite breeding haunts; but where similar types of vegetation, or water-loving bushes or small trees, grow in ponds, around the shores or lakes or along the banks of sluggish streams, the redwings find congenial homes" (Arthur C. Bent).

Redwings belong to the Troupial family, derived from the French word *troupe* in a reference to their habit of flocking. In addition to the blackbirds, this family includes meadowlarks, bobolinks, cowbirds, grackles and orioles. Redwings have been known over time as Swamp Blackbirds, Marsh Blackbirds, Red-shouldered Blackbirds, Red-shouldered Starling, Red-winged Starling, and Red-winged Oriole. Redwings breed in closed groups or colonies, and they flock together during the nonbreeding season, unlike their close relatives the orioles which prefer solitude and the cowbird which is a parasitic nester.

Essential to any Redwing territory is a singing perch. The first Redwing I see each year uses suspended utility lines where they cross over the marsh side. Each male will venture out from his perch to various points in the marsh, until a territory is established. Other males will make their presences known, and in giving and taking, advancing and retreating, will set up contiguous territories, with "mutual boundaries." Redwings are mostly polygynous. "Polygyny in the Redwing is related to the

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fact that first-year males do not usually breed, whereas first-year females do, thus providing a population with a surplus of females" (Robert W. Nero).

Almost every birder will know the most prominent displays of male Redwings on their territory. The first is the song. The following jingle is called the "Ballad of the Bog". It describes the Redwing song and is found in Pearson's *Birds of America*.

O-ka-lee, cong-quer-ree, You chootea, Olong tea!
Gi-oogl-ee, Conk-a-tree Quange-se-tea, Shoo-chong tea!

Many times the song is accompanied by a song-spread display. "The behavior of a bird giving a song-spread display typically involves the spreading of the wings and tail out fully, thrusting the head forward and upward. All the body plumage is raised. At the onset of the song, the spread tail is brought down, the wings extend to maximum spread, and, in extreme display, the red epaulet feathers or wing coverts are raised. It is a stunning effect" (Robert Nero). When Redwings first arrive in the spring, the distinctive red patches on their wings are hidden and only the buff lower edge of the epaulet shows. In flight and on its breeding territory, the red patches show prominently. Another display of note is the male flight-song. "The full call, always given in flight, consists of a long, rapid series of notes something like 'tsee...tch-tch-tch-tch...chee-chee-chee-chee,' the middle phrase, often nasal in tone, sometimes rendered as 'tank'" (Robert Nero).

Female Redwings are about 2/3's the size of the male. They are brown (almost black) streaked, and the amount of red tint to their plumage increases with age. The female Redwing sings and also does a song-spread

display; and while her song is different from the male's song, her display of plumage is identical. The female's whistling song is frequently given in response to the male's song. Her song is described as "pee-chee-ta-chee-ta-che-ta". Females arrive in the breeding area after the males, and they almost immediately settle into a territory, and pair formation takes place. Courtship, symbolic nest building, chasing and finally mating occur. The nest of the Redwing is not as elaborately woven as the oriole's, but it does have a woven base, being suspended on "a kind of hammock of plant fiber between closely crowding, stout stemmed stalks, upon which foundation the nest itself is constructed" (William Beecher). Once eggs are hatched, the females do most of the feeding (about 7 times more than the male), leading the brood off the territory to areas where they can forage. Many times the male will remain behind on his territory, because he may have another mate there with another brood of young birds.

Redwings migrate south after a molt at the end of July. On their wintering grounds, they gather with other blackbirds in flocks and in large communal roosts. Roosts can contain as many as 23 million birds! In Kentucky alone, upward of 77 million blackbirds occupy 59 known roosts, and in adjoining Arkansas, 40 million birds occupy 54 roosts. When these birds descend in the millions onto fields to feed on local grains (corn, peanuts, rice, wheat), as well as wild seeds and insects, they devastate crops and lead farmers to attempt to control blackbird depredation. "Control measures in the past have included shooting (not very effective), dynamiting roosts, floodlights, noise makers of various types, chemical repellents,

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EDITORIAL

Surviving A Birdless May

It has become a frequent May occurrence. You're in the right place to see migrating birds. You're there at the right time, but there aren't any birds. What can you do? Go home? Come back the next day? Give up birding?

Don't despair. Here are a couple of books that will partially mollify these birding disappointments. Each of the four following books gives a glimpse of a unique world of wonder. The first three books work together. They are Ginger Carpenter's *Dragonflies and Damselflies of Cape Cod*; The Audubon Society Pocket Guide on *Familiar Butterflies, North America*; and the Golden Guide *Butterflies and Moths*. I can enjoy just browsing through *Familiar Butterflies* and looking at Tiger Swal-

lowtails, Great Spangled Fritillaries, Sulphurs, Blues and Painted Ladies. Spotting an actual one is as rewarding as seeing a favorite warbler. Dragonflies and damselflies are harder for me to identify, but the rewards of watching them are worth the effort. The poetic names are enough to dispel winter's gloom all on their own: Ebony Jewelwing, Violet Dancer, Sand Dragon, Swift River Cruiser, and Ruby Meadowfly. The final book is Newcomb's *Wildflower Guide*. Identification of flowers using this book is virtually a botany lesson in itself. You don't just skim through page after page of yellow flowers, hoping to spot the one you have in hand; using a simple guide, you count the number of parts in the flowers, identify the plant type, and the leaf type, and use these identifying marks to find the flower in the book. Some people think that wildflowers are weeds, but the miracle of even the tiniest flowering plant rivals anything under the sun.

With a butterfly book in one pocket, Newcomb in another, and Ginger Carpenter's book in your car for ready reference, it may take you all day to walk around Beech Forest.



Cape Cod Bird Club Newsletter

The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History

RR 1, Route 6A, Brewster, MA 02631

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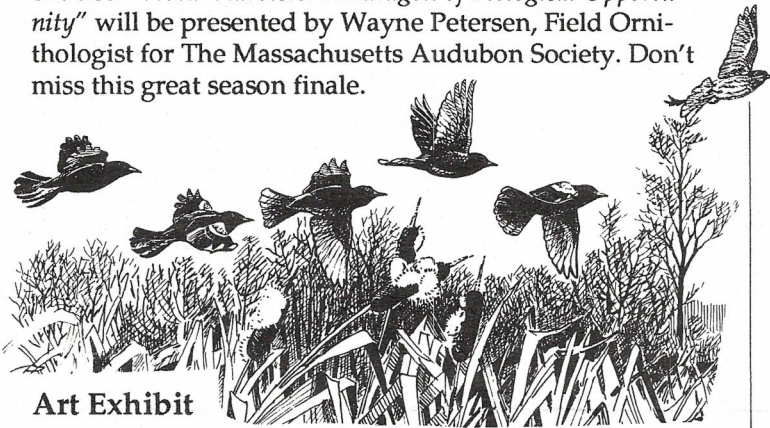
PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Tish Noyes

I would like to thank all of our excellent speakers who entertained and informed us throughout the year. I would like to give special thanks to Blair Nikula, Roger Everett and Rich Hall for all their help with the speakers and assistance in keeping the programs running smoothly. I really appreciate all your help!

But most of all, I'd like to thank all of you—the members—for attending the programs, giving such a warm welcome to the speakers and making my position as program chairperson so enjoyable.

On Monday, May 10 at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, a program entitled "Wood-Warblers: A Paragon of Biological Opportunity" will be presented by Wayne Petersen, Field Ornithologist for The Massachusetts Audubon Society. Don't miss this great season finale.



Art Exhibit

Mark your calendars. Bird Club member Martha Hughes will be exhibiting painting and sculpture of birds at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History from May 29 to June 25th.

Vesper Sparrows

Tish Noyes is currently working on a research project with Massachusetts Audubon Society. Her focus will be on Vesper Sparrows. If anyone sees one, or knows of any nesting pairs, she would appreciate it if you would let her know. Tish can be reached at 255-9810.

Scholarship

One of our young birders, Jeremiah Trimble, has an opportunity to attend one of Victor Emanuel's Nature Camps for young birders this summer. Victor has generously granted Jeremiah a \$300 partial scholarship to attend Camp Cielo in Mexico this August for 10 days. Vineyard birders and Felix Neck Wildlife Trust will contribute \$300, and the Cape Cod Bird Club will make a contribution towards the total cost of \$1100. If you wish to make a contribution toward this worthy cause, please make out your check to "Jeremiah Camp". This is an excellent opportunity to help a young person who is very interested in birding, and give him an opportunity he will never forget.

FIELD TRIPS

Sally Branch

May

Wednesday May 5th. Falmouth, 8 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes. 548-6086.

Saturday May 8th. Open Option Off-Cape Trip with Dick Comeau. 7 am. Meet in the Burger King parking lot at the intersection of Routes 6 and 132. Bring a lunch. 432-9033.

Wednesday May 12th. Blair's evening walk at the Harwich Conservation Area. 5:30 pm. Meet at Bell's Neck Rd. in West Harwich. Bring a picnic if you like. Blair Nikula. 432-6348.

Thursday May 20th. Provincetown. 8 am. Meet in the Beech Forest parking lot. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

Sunday May 23rd. Exploring Bird Habitats. 8 am. For children with a parent/adult. Harwich Conservation Area. Meet in the Beech Forest parking lot. Kate Wallace, 255-5095. Aurele Thomas, 255-1409.

Friday May 28th. Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary. 8 am. Meet in the parking lot. A naturalist will lead. 349-2615.

Beech Forest Weekends

There will be a leader at the Beech Forest in Provincetown every Saturday and Sunday during May. Meet at 8 am in the parking lot.

June

Saturday June 12th. Mid-Cape Breeding Bird Census followed by the Annual CCBC Picnic at Flax Pond Picnic Area. The picnic starts at noon. If you can't help with the census, come to the picnic and listen to the tally. Get to the Flax Pond Picnic Area by taking Exit 8 off the Mid-Cape. Go south to the traffic light. Then go east on Whites Path to Great Western. Turn right on Great Western until N. Main (a short distance). Take right on N. Main until Flax Pond entrance on right, just prior to Windsor Nursing Home. From Route 28, go north at traffic light just west of Bass River. This is N. Main. Proceed past Windsor Nursing home to Flax Pond entrance on left.

Saturday June 19th. 6 am. Crane Wildlife Area and Mashpee River. Meet in the shopping center parking lot at the New Seabury rotary in Mashpee. Blair Nikula. 432-6348.

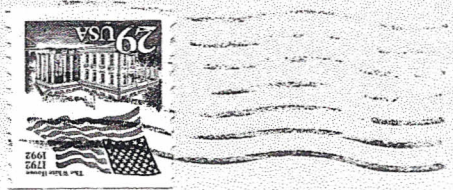
Summer

Saturday July 17th. Fort Hill, Eastham. 8 am. Meet in the lower parking lot. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.

Saturday August 21st. Fort Hill, Eastham. 8 am. Meet in the lower parking lot. Bessie Tirrell. 432-9248.



Frank Caruso
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Cape Cod Bird Club
 The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History
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**1992-93
 Nominating Committee Report**

Blair Nikula

This is the proposed slate of Directors to be voted on at the May 10th meeting.

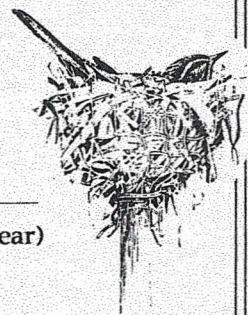
Officers

- President*—Richard Hall
- Vice President*—Tom Noonan
- Secretary*—Susan Thompson
- Treasurer*—Mark Tuttle

New Board Members

- Ruth Connaughton (for one year)
- Bob Scott (for three years)
- Kate Wallace (for three years)

Head of the 1993-94 Nominating Committee Frank Caruso



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REDWINGS *Jim Talin*



poisons, detergent sprays followed by cold water, and removal of some of the trees in the roost site (the latter method being fairly successful)" (Nero). However, none of these efforts have made a dent in the blackbird population, which seems to have remained high through the years. Audubon claimed to "have myself shot hundreds in the course of an afternoon, killing from ten to fifteen with each discharge." In colonial times, a bounty was put on blackbirds.

Here in New England, our opinion of Redwings is colored by the fact that they are among the earliest migrants and are harbingers of fair weather. It is the song of the Redwing, more than its appearance alone that conjures up images of warmth among the winter-bound, cabin-fevered, snow-weary population of the Northeast. On a cold day, when we open our car door, or leave the house on an errand, and hear that first *o-ka-lee* as it cuts through the late winter air, it sounds like the promise of spring.