



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 23

MARCH ~ APRIL 1994

ISSUE 4

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Richard D. Hall

BOHEMIANS....

What a Winter! While the good citizens of the Nancy Kerrigan Nation are preoccupied with the latest tabloid headlines about Team Tonya, the Bobbitts, and the ever dangerous Michael Jackson, members of the Cape Cod Bird Club know first-hand what this Winter's big news story really is: Bohemians . . . Bohemians . . . Bohemians everywhere. Braving temperatures and snow drifts only an ice fisherman could love, hardy Cape birders find themselves checking every flock of Waxwings to see if there might actually be a few Cedars mixed in among all those vagrant Bohemians.

This unprecedented avian event is accompanied by record numbers of Winter irruptives reported from the mainland as well. Jeff Johnson, the Club's Quabbin correspondent, reports tripping over large flocks of docile Pine Grosbeaks eating the fruit of ornamental crabapple trees in downtown Athol, Hardwick and Greenfield. My mother, a dedicated backyard birder, called excitedly in mid-January to report a flock of 20 Redpolls at her feeders just outside Boston. Good numbers of uncommon winter finches continue to be regularly reported from various Cape locations as well. Blair Nikula put all of this in historical perspective at the Club's January meeting. (That's the meeting when the gremlins in the Museum's heating system amused themselves trying to match the single digit temperature outside. They nearly succeeded.) Blair noted that in some twenty plus years of birding the Cape, he had only seen two individual Bohemian-Waxwings prior to this year's irruption. So in this Olympic Winter, it may be too early to award a gold medal to the Bohemians as bird of the year. But their arrival by the hundreds will surely rank as worthy of a silver or bronze when Cape Cod's top three avian events of 1994 are finally sorted out.

... AND BIRDS WITH 4 EYES

Late one Sunday afternoon a few weeks ago as I strolled through the AM dial looking for a news program to listen to while preparing dinner, I happened upon a one hour call-in show devoted to birds. Apparently the show is a weekly event on WBZ. What a revelation it turned out to be. The show is hosted by radio veteran Dave Maynard and Hugh Wiberg, the author of a recent book on hand feeding wild birds. Wiberg introduce himself as a naturalist who had spent many years in the field observing bird behavior, thus enabling him to claim a certain degree of expertise.

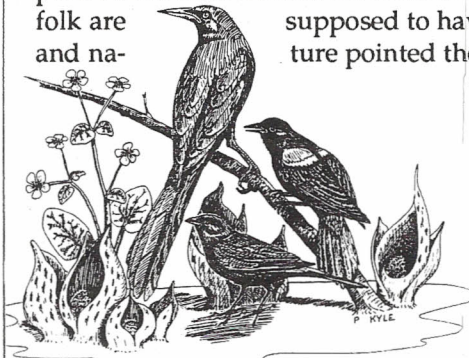
The first caller told of a hawk flying into her window, breaking its neck. A neighbor had identified it as a "Red Hawk". The caller wondered why the hawk flew into glass.

BIRD LADY

Blair Nikula

If you notice something missing from this month's newsletter, it is the fine hand of Charlotte Smith. With this edition, Charlotte retires from her job as the bird club's unofficial membership chairman, mail clerk, and pen pal.

Fresh out of a career as a school teacher in New Jersey, the "bird lady", as she was affectionately known by one of her young friends, arrived on the Cape in the late 60's and settled into her present home in Yarmouthport. Faced with what to do with all the spare time retired folk are supposed to have, her love of birds and nature pointed the way. Travel?



Certainly, as her desire to learn through experience led her to join fellow bird club and Audubon members on trips throughout North America as well as to such exotic locales as

Costa Rica and Africa. She also contributed much of her time and talents to volunteering at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, where her enthusiasm and innate teaching skills have enriched many. Her insatiable fascination with the natural world and overt delight at each new discovery invariably infects those within her reach.

In November of 1971, the bird club was formed, and Charlotte was quick to become one of the charter members—a lucky day for us all! In 1979, she was elected club president and served with distinction in that position for three years. Since then she has continued to teach, guide, encourage, and—when appropriate—admonish us, freely offering her frank and respected opinions. Always quick to welcome newcomers and take them under her wing, she has earned the undisputable title of "Heart and Soul of the Cape Cod Bird Club". She also long-ago assumed the tedious, thankless task of folding, stapling, addressing, and stamping the newsletter, a job that will now be performed by a computer. We will miss her personal touch—and the gentle reminders when we are late paying our dues.

So what now? Spry and alert as ever at 85, she'll remain active and very much involved you can be sure. Meanwhile, we will be forever in debt to the "Bird Lady". Thank you Charlotte for serving us so well and, more importantly, for being our friend. Happy birding!

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Pacific Loon. One individual, first seen at Herring Cove on 5 December by Gene Billings, was seen by various observers through 11 December.

Sea Ducks. The King Eider first seen on 24 November at Corn Hill was still there on 11 December. One female Harlequin Duck was seen from Great Island in Yarmouth on 26 December by Peter Trimble and others. Four Barrows Goldeneyes were observed: one in Wellfleet Harbor on 16 December (through 9 January) by Seward Highley; one in Osterville on 26 December by George Martin; two on Bass River in late January by various observers.

Yellow Rail. George Martin was lucky enough to spot this bird flying across Route 6A in West Barnstable on 16 December. Attempts were made by various others to find this uncommon rail to no avail.

Common Moorhen. Two individuals were reported from Lover's Lake in Chatham on 7 December by Nancy Israel and Jackie Sones.

Semipalmated Plover. One individual was reported from First Encounter Beach on 12 December by Dick Forster. An unusual sighting in December, the plover stayed until at least the 19th. **Pomarine Jaegers.** Jaegers were seen from the First Encounter Beach on various days during December. Blair Nikula recorded 48 on the 6th and 19+ on the 12th. Art King and others had 7 on the 13th. The latest sighting I heard about was a single bird on the 22nd seen by Kyle Jones.

Alcids. Large alcids reached maximum numbers on 13 December (100s) and 17 December (350); both counts were from First Encounter by Blair Nikula. Several days during December brought sightings of Dovekies; the highest count was 11 on First Encounter Beach on 16 December by Wallace Bailey. One Black Guillemot was reported from First Encounter Beach on 13 December by Jackie Sones. Two Atlantic Puffins were observed from Head of the Meadow Beach on 22 January by Bob Stymeist.

Snowy Owls. Six Snowy Owls have been reported so far this winter: one from Great Island in early December; one from First Encounter Beach in mid-January; two from Wellfleet Sanctuary on 29 January; one on Little Sipson's Island on 30 January by Harriet Dickson; and one from Harwichport on 29 January by Eddie Banks.

Northern Shrike. One individual was seen at High Head in Truro on 6 January by Carl Goodrich.

Bohemian Waxwings. Definitely the highlight of January! The first sighting of 1994 was of at least 6 birds at Wellfleet Sanctuary by Chris Brothers. The counts rose to a maximum of 200+ at Bound Brook Island on 14 January by Jim and Sue Talin. Flocks of 1 to 100 were still being seen at the end of January.

Northern Vagrants. From 1 to 6 Pine Siskins have been at the Wellfleet Sanctuary feeders since early December. One White-winged Crossbill was seen at the Wellfleet Sanctuary on 1 December by David Small. Common Redpolls have been seen along the beaches and at feeders. Bob Scott saw 25 at West Dennis Beach on 10 December. Peter Trimble noted about 30 from Navigation Road in Barnstable. A maximum of 200 was recorded from Hardings Beach on the Cape Cod Christmas Count 19 December. From one to a dozen have been at the Wellfleet Sanctuary feeders up until 31 January.

Christmas Count Birds. Three Painted Buntings were recorded this winter: one male in Brewster from 1 November to late December; one female in Eastham on 19 December by Chris Neill; and one female in Barnstable on 26 December by Dick Forster. One Red-headed Woodpecker was seen in Marstons Mills on 26 December by Rodney Jenkins. One Townsend's Warbler was seen in Barnstable on 26 December by Dick Forster. (This was the 2nd record of Townsend's Warbler for the Cape and the fourth record for the state.)

To report sightings during February and March, please call Jackie Sones at 349-2615 or Blair Nikula at 432-6348. Thanks!

EDITORIAL

Erosion

Jim Talin

Because erosion is a fact of life on Cape Cod, I should not have been surprised when a walk on Nauset Beach earlier in the winter ended a quarter of a mile from the parking lot. A storm had leveled the dune to my left and had pushed it eastward into the marsh at the foot of Nauset Heights, and a brand new stream six feet wide and six inches deep flowed from the brackish pond in the marsh into the Atlantic, blocking passage down the beach. The high tides were deepening this cut in the beach and flowing directly into the marsh. Every winter, I told myself, Nauset Beach takes a beating, but somehow its wounds heal up, and probably by summer little scarring

would remain to outline this vulnerable spot on the narrow spit of sand. But it seemed clear to me that this breach was worse than usual.

In the 1840's when Enoch Pratt wrote *The History of Eastham*, in his description of the town, erosion was as prominent a fact as it is today. "Large stumps of trees," he wrote, "are seen nearly a mile from the shore." Some of the features he described are now lost to the sea; one such spot is Billingsgate. "About 6 miles from the main land, with which it was formerly connected...for many years it has been an island—the sea having broken over and washed it away in two places, where is sufficient water for small vessels to pass through. It is a mere sand beach." Stone walls would not have saved Billingsgate any more than bringing the mountains to the sea will stop erosion in Orleans or Chatham. But, perhaps because of the force of habit, it is hard not to see a personal loss in such sudden transformations, as if that part of Nauset Beach, cut off from me by a small swift flowing stream, represented many of life's other losses and denials.



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

Circulation - Charlotte Smith

PROGRAMS/ MEETINGS

Tish Noyes

On Monday evening **March 14** at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, Dennis Murley will present a program entitled "*Planting for Wildlife*." Dennis will discuss the many native plant species that will attract wildlife to your yard. Dennis Murley is a native of Cape Cod and formerly was a naturalist at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History and is currently a naturalist for Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary.

On Monday evening **April 11** at 7:45 pm at the Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster. The program will be announced at that time.

Bird Counts

There is not enough space in this newsletter to give a full account of the results of the three bird counts completed by Club members during December. What follows are short summations of results. The Cape Cod Lake & Pond Waterfowl Survey on December 4-5 covered a record number of ponds but turned in the second lowest number of birds per pond. The Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count on December 19 covered from Chatham to Eastham. Record highs were set for Coopers Hawk, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Winter Wren, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow and Common Redpoll. On the down side, there was the lowest number of total individuals since 1962 and the second lowest species total since 1968. The Mid-Cape Cod Christmas Bird Count was held on December 28. (See Jackie Sones' article on Bird Sightings.) On this count, 117 species of birds were seen, tying the highest total ever. New birds to the count were Harlequin Duck, Bald Eagle, Townsend's Warbler, Vesper Sparrow, and Lapland Longspur. If you would like copies of the complete results of any of these bird counts, get in touch with Jim Talin at 896-7169.

Colorado Trip

Blair has put together a trip to Colorado, tentatively scheduled for June 29th-July 9th. For details call him at 432-6348.

Spur of the Moment Birders

Ashbaugh, Carolyn—349-7300
Connaughton, Ruth—432-1580
Keil, Jenks—771-8421
McGinley, Kathy—255-4740
Pease, Bob—790-1351 (Call between 4 and 7 am)
Silverio, Janet—430-1712
Tirrell, Bessie—432-9248
Whalen, Carol—349-2087

If you would like to go birding, call any of these people; or if you would like to join this list, call Ruth Connaughton.

FIELD TRIPS

Ruth Connaughton

March

Wednesday, **March 2nd**. Falmouth, 9 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes, 548-6068.

Tuesday, **March 8th**. Yarmouth. 9 am. Meet in playground on Route 6A. Bob Scott, 362-4866.

Thursday, **March 17th**. Harwich, 9 am. Meet at Saquatucket Harbor across from Thompson's Farm Market on Route 28. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

Saturday, **March 26th**. Brewster-Punkhorn Hike to Seymour's Pond, 9 am. Meet in the parking lot where pavement ends on Run Hill Road. Jim Talin, 896-7169.

Sunday, **March 27**. Hatches Harbor, Provincetown, 8:00 am. Meet at Race Point Parking Lot. George Martin, 896-8798.

Monday, **March 21st**. Orleans Hot Spots. 9:30 am. Meet behind the Birdwatcher's General Store. Mike O'Connor, 255-6974.

April

Monday, **April 4th**. Eastham, 8 am. Meet in the lower parking lot, Fort Hill. Art King, 255-8919.

Wednesday, **April 6th**. Falmouth, 8 am. Meet behind Town Hall, Falmouth Center. Mary Ropes, 548-6068.

Sunday, **April 10th**. Bound Brook, Wellfleet, 8 am. Meet at P. J.'s on Route 6 just before the traffic light at road going left into Wellfleet Center. Kate Wallace, 255-5095.

Tuesday, **April 12th**. Yarmouth. 9 am. Meet in playground on Route 6A. Bob Scott, 362-4866.

Tuesday, **April 12th**. Chatham Woodcock Walk. Meet in Town Offices Parking Lot on Main Street in downtown Chatham opposite the Eldredge Library. Meet one half hour before sunset as published in the Cape Cod Times. This one hour walk is an opportunity to watch and hear male Woodcock's spectacular courtship flight and song. Rich Hall, 945-4882.

Thursday, **April 14th**. Sandwich. 8 am. Meet in Purity parking lot off Route 6A in Sandwich. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

Saturday, **April 23th**. Brewster-Punkhorn Hike to Seymour's Pond, 8 am. Meet in the parking lot where pavement ends on Run Hill Road. Jim Talin, 896-7169.

Sunday **April 30th**. Dennis Pond in Yarmouthport, 8 am. Meet at Pond on Summer Street off Route 6A just before you get to Barnstable.

New Members

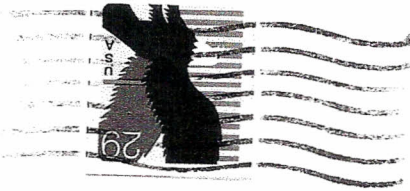
The Club extends a warm welcome to the following new members who have joined during the past two months.

Barbara Stanton, Harwichport; **Eugene & Sherry Sabo**, Birmingham, AL; **Valery Palmer**, Chatham; **Bill & Clothide Farrell**, East Dennis; **Dick Koeppen**, Brewster; **Phyllis & Al Lemack**, Brewster; **Jane Lea**, Truro; **Heinz Praeger**, Marstons Mills; **Linda & Eric Zettler**, Teaticket; **Debra DeJonker**, Provincetown; **Jane Lea**, Truro.

We hope we did not goof up too badly as we transformed the mailing list onto a computer. So how did we do? If we have misspelled your name, gotten your address wrong, made any mistake large or small, please let us know.

OOPS. Check Your Mailing Label

Frank Caruso
17 Freedom Rd
Forestdale, MA 02644



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



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Wiberg noted that the hawk was probably a Red-tailed or a Red-shouldered Hawk and was likely chasing a small bird when it died. Then our host remembered an earlier caller who mentioned most bird-eating hawks were Accipiters. The woman commented on how small this hawk was. In that case announced the author, it could be a Goshawk, Coopers or Sharp-shinned. He suggested she needed to consult a field guide to be sure. The old proverb "Doctor, heal thyself" crossed my mind.

After a few more calls about Blue Jays eating chipping paint and one from a lady who shooed-away a hawk which had "landed on" a pigeon in her backyard (after she retreated to her house in fear, she claimed, of raptor retribution), the show hit the call-in jackpot. A listener had been thinking a lot about last week's caller who had seen a bird which had an "extra set of eyes".

Such an event, he reasoned, would give this bird a survival and reproductive advantage. He knew his Darwinian theory, and spoke easily of genetic variables and adaptive traits. "Could we be witnessing the birth of a new species?" he wondered.

By now I had nearly forgotten what I was cooking, so absorbed had I become with this startling possibility. Apparently this had been on our host's mind as well, for he quickly asserted he had asked not one, but several bona fide ornithologists about such a bird. Alas, none had ever encountered a bird with four eyes. Having cited the experts, Wiberg nonetheless earnestly invited the woman to photograph the rarity, if she could, and send it in. Roger Everett, listen up: such a photo could catapult one to the big time. For more real life adventures in hawk-watching and scientific theory, tune into WBZ on Sundays after 5:00 pm. It's the perfect counterpoint to a weekend in the field.