



Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 24

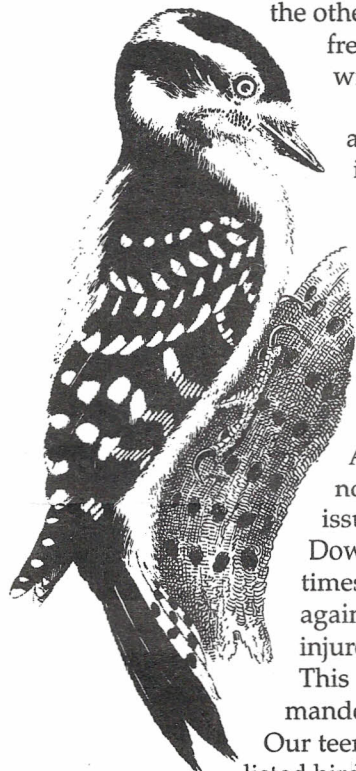
JANUARY ~ FEBRUARY 1995

ISSUE 3

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Richard D. Hall

The Woodpecker was Gregory's first bird. Long before he could walk or talk, Greg would ball up his tiny fist and rap sharply on the nearest surface whenever I asked him "What does a Woodpecker do?" By the age of two, he had no difficulty distinguishing this species from the other two dozen or so which frequent our backyard in the winter.



It was Christmas Eve, a year ago, when the Woodpecker also introduced our toddler to one of life's harsh certainties. Near dusk a young Sharp-shinned Hawk surprised a female Downy Woodpecker at the suet feeder. The Downy's distress cry brought us to the window. Both birds were on the ground tossing about.

Apparently the initial hit was not clean, and for a while the issue appeared in doubt. The Downy broke loose a couple of times only to be pounced upon again. Exhausted and mortally injured, the bird finally succumbed. This ten minute drama now commanded the whole family's attention.

Our teenager, Jared, who has never listed birding as a favored activity, was thoroughly engrossed. Little Gregory, who still didn't grasp the notion of Santa, much less Darwinian survival, caught the drift. "Hawk eat Woodpecker. Woodpecker crying," an observation which seemed as precise as it is economical.

As the Sharpie began methodically plucking feathers, there was a noticeable pause between pulls as it looked right and left. Despite its conquest, it seemed wary of falling prey to a more powerful hunter in the dwindling light. Great Horned Owls abound in the Cape's piney woods, and Cooper's Hawks are on the increase. No sooner had the hawk begun eating when we were in for another surprise. A Mourning Dove landed less than four feet from the Sharpie, followed almost immediately by a female Cardinal. Both newcomers nonchalantly picked at the cracked corn and ground feed as they do every evening at this time. The hawk took no apparent notice. A Junco and a White-throated Sparrow joined the threesome but didn't linger long. Cardinal, Hawk and Dove continued to feed side by side for several more minutes until enveloped in darkness.

Continued on Page 5

BIRDING BASICS

Kathleen Casey

Each month this column will address topics of interest to novice birders, those people who love birding, but still consider their knowledge of birds to be at a basic level.

Let's begin the New Year by discussing one of Cape Cod's most common birds, the gull (not *seagull*, since many species live inland). Gulls can be observed at beaches, marshes, landfills, parking lots, and almost any place.

The **Herring Gull** is a year rounder. Adult plumage is achieved in four years: a white head (streaked with brown in the winter), a white tail and underparts, a gray back, black tipped wings, flesh-colored legs, and a yellow bill with an orange spot, which helps young feed.

The **Ring-billed Gull** resembles the Herring Gull, except it is noticeably smaller in length: 20" compared to 26". Their legs and feet are yellow-green. Look closely and you'll see the black ring around its bill, hence its name. They are most frequently seen in the fall, winter, & spring.

The **Great Black-backed Gull** is the largest gull on the Cape, a 31" majestic bird found year round. Its back and wings are slate. The wing tips are black. Its legs and feet are yellowish or flesh-colored, and its eyes and beak are yellow. This gull has a red spot at the tip of the bill.

The mottled and dusky brown gulls that you see are immature species. Identification can be tricky, so study their adult companions or your bird guide.

Listen for common gull calls. A loud *keew* indicates that the gull is ready to attack a predator. A hoarse *hahaha* is an alarm call, warning other gulls to flee. A plaintive *mew*, given with the neck stretched forward, is a courtship call.

Here are some interesting gull facts. There are 44 species of gulls. Gulls divide up their time by breeding, foraging, preening, sleeping, resting, migrating, and escaping from predators. They're usually monogamous and return to the same breeding places each year. Both the male and female incubate. Gulls can drink salt water, since they have a gland just above their eyes which flushes out salt to the nasal cavity. Each toe on a gull has sharp claws, which help it walk on rocky surfaces. Their legs don't freeze in icy water, because of tiny valves, which shut off blood in the warmer parts of their feet and pump it to the coldest parts. Most gulls can live well into their twenties.

Your patient observation of these social birds can lead you to discover their interesting behaviors. For an in-depth study and/or enjoyable reading during the winter, get Niko Tinbergen's 1953 classic, [The Herring Gull's World](#).

EDITORIAL

Jim Talin

The New Look

Starting with this newsletter, we add an extra page to the newsletter. In the past we have lacked the space to cover many of the Club's activities, such as bird counts and censuses. Now we will be able to devote space to them. We also are adding two regular columns, one which will discuss bird identification and another that will respond to questions about feeding birds. We also invite all club members to submit articles, art work, letters to the editor, reflections on birding or just comments. We hope to make sure that this newsletter reflects the activities and concerns of all club members.

Animal Rights

We trivialize the intelligence of animals. We value our ability to count more highly than we value a bird's ability to navigate during migration. We elevate opera over a whale's ability to communicate through song. We value our mechanical sonar more highly than we do a bat's natural abilities. I've often wondered what we would do if one of our space probes ever returned signs of life from outer space. Would we treat life there any differently than we have treated it here? I doubt we would, unless, of course, it was ruled by a democracy and spoke English. Yet, I have never been comfortable with the animal rights movement and its pictures of miserable-looking animals caged or wired for experiments, followed in the text by appeals for animal rights. They have always seemed hypocritical to me. Why not get the bull horn out for the meat section at the local market, rather than the fur show downtown? Over 95% of the animals killed in the US are killed for food. After that, the next most frequent cause of animal death is euthanasia in animal pounds of unwanted pets. Then, comes hunting. Then comes lab experiments. Those pictures of caged animals being used for experiments advance a cause effectively. Telling meat eaters to become vegetarians, or people to neuter their pets, while more effective at saving animals, just won't bring in contributions.



Cape Cod Bird Club Inc.

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

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LETTERS

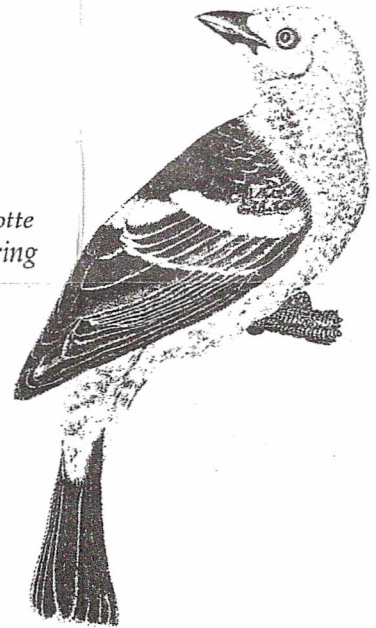
Dear Members of the Bird Club,

I greatly enjoyed the November meeting. I had not made plans to come, although I wanted to, because my short visit home had been pretty full of problems that had to be taken care of. However Fahy was so insistent that she would pick me up, I had to agree. And I'm grateful to Tom for letting her know I was home. I enjoyed the meeting and seeing so many people, although I knew very few of them since the club has grown so. The cover-let Fahy made is beautiful. I shall enjoy it.

I also am grateful to the Bird Club members for the many years I enjoyed the privilege of serving the group in various capacities. Birders, I think, are very special people, at least the Cape Cod Bird Club people are. The trips with Blair, the Breeding Bird Census, Water Fowl counts, Christmas counts were all fun. I do miss them and all of the members. I thank the club for many happy times.

Sincerely,
Charlotte J. Smith
5446 Reynolds Road
Lakeworth, FL 33467

I received this letter from Charlotte after the November meeting during which we honored Charlotte's service to the Bird Club. We presented her with a beautiful lap quilt that was created by Fahy Bygate and that illustrated numerous landscapes of Club trips from Churchill to Africa that Charlotte had taken. Charlotte has been a Bird Club mainstay for nearly a quarter of a century. She became a charter member when the Club was founded in 1971 and served as President in the 70's. Until last spring, Charlotte hand-addressed every newsletter five times a year, often writing personal messages in the margins. For the past year, a family illness has required her to spend increasing time in Central Florida. —Richie Hall



The Cape Cod Bird Club

is an organization whose members are interested in the protection and conservation of the bird life and natural resources of Cape Cod.

If you are interested in joining, please send a check for \$10 single membership, \$15 family membership to
CCBC, Cape Cod Museum of Natural History,
PO Box 1710, Brewster, MA 02631

October and November 1994

Cory's Shearwater - One individual was reported from Wellfleet Harbor on 6 November by A. Thomas, J. Sones, and various observers. A second shearwater seen during the same cruise was thought to be a Greater Shearwater, but the view was too brief to confirm this identification.

Waders - American Bitterns were well reported during the past two months. The following are the highest counts: four at Fort Hill on 6 October by the Millers; two at WBWS on 9 October by R. Prescott; and two on North Monomoy Island on 12 October by B. Nikula. Two Cattle Egrets were observed at the Barnstable County Farm on 22 October by S. Miller. What were presumed to be the same two birds were seen at the Barnstable High School a few days later by P. Kyle and other observers. The first Wood Stork ever to appear on Cape Cod was reported on 16 November near Rushy Marsh Pond in Cotuit by Arthur Hughes. The stork was still being seen in Cotuit as of 12 December.

Ducks and Geese - Snow Geese appeared in the following three places: three at Fort Hill on 6 October by the Millers; 34+ flying overhead in Chatham on 11 October by R. Hall; and one in E. Dennis on 6 November by the Robbs and other observers. There seemed to be quite a few Eurasian Wigeons around this fall. The highest counts were as follows: three on South Monomoy on 30 October by W. Harrington; and two in Chatham Port on 22 November by J. Sones. Single individuals were reported from the following four locations: Marstons Mills Mill Pond, West Barnstable Mill Pond, Sea Street in Hyannis, and Scudder Bay in Centerville. Two Harlequin Ducks first seen 10 November at the Wellfleet Town Pier by R. Everett were seen by various observers up until 30 November.

American Coot - There seemed to be more coots around this year than in recent years. The highest count was 590 from South Monomoy Island on 30 October by W. Harrington. This count is a record high for Cape Cod.

Clapper Rail - Three reports: one at WBWS on 10 October by the Millers; one at Fort Hill in Eastham on 6 November by B. Nikula; and one at Fort Hill on 27 November by B. Lochran.

Shorebirds - One late Lesser Golden-Plover was reported from North Monomoy Island on 5 November by B. Nikula. The highest count ever of Marbled Godwits on Cape Cod (14 individuals) was recorded by B. Nikula on 15 October on North Monomoy Island. This is also a record high count for the entire New England region. R. Hall observed 13 of what were assumed to be the same individuals (minus one) in Nauset Marsh on 9 October.

Forster's Tern - Two late reports: 10+ in Wellfleet Harbor on 4 November by J. Sones and various observers; and 35 in Barnstable Harbor in early November by K. Hamilton.

Alcids - Five Dovekies were spotted on Stellwagen Bank in late October by S. Highley. The highest count of Razorbills so far this season was of 40+ individuals in Wellfleet Harbor on 27 November by J. Sones and various

observers. One Black Guillemot was reported in Wellfleet Harbor on 27 November by J. Sones and A. Thomas. Two Thick-billed Murres were observed on 24 November at MacMillan Wharf in Provincetown by G. Martin.

Red-headed Woodpecker - One individual was noted on Morris Island in Chatham on 2 October by W. Bailey.

Western Kingbird - The following two individuals were reported: one at the Marstons Mills Airport on 6 October by the Millers; and one at Fort Hill on 3-4 November by R. Everett.

Ash-throated Flycatcher - One individual was seen in Sandwich in early November by P. Trimble. Although appearing only briefly, this bird was seen well enough for probable identification as an Ash-throated Flycatcher.

Sedge Wren - One individual was observed at Fort Hill in Eastham on 26 November by W. Petersen. This bird was also seen on 27 November by various observers. From the records I can dig up, there appear to be fewer than 10 records of Sedge Wren for the Cape.

Northern Shrike - Two early reports: one adult from North Monomoy Island on 11 October by R. Clem; and one immature on South Monomoy Island on 12 October by B. Nikula. The earliest date for Massachusetts is 6 October.

Warblers - One Prothonotary Warbler was observed on Morris Island in Chatham on 3 October by W. Bailey. One Yellow-rumped 'Audubon's' Warbler was seen at WBWS on 17 October by J. Sones. One Orange-crowned Warbler was reported from Truro on 29 October by S. Clifton and other observers.

Blue Grosbeak - Two individuals were seen in Truro during the first half of October by various observers. One individual was seen at the Barnstable County Farm on 4 November by M. Tuttle.

Indigo Bunting - Indigo Buntings were numerous in Truro this year. Up to 12 individuals in one day were recorded during October by various observers.

Painted Bunting - For the third consecutive year, a male Painted Bunting showed up at the same feeder in Brewster during November!

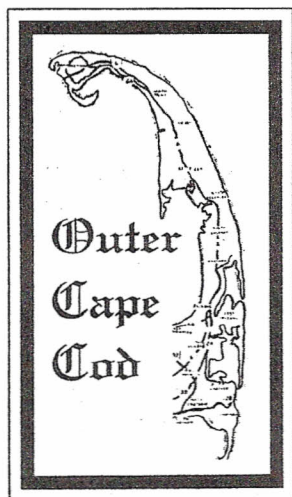
Sparrows - At least 10 species of sparrow put in appearances in Truro this season. Highlights included the following: one Grasshopper Sparrow, two Clay-colored Sparrows (through the end of October), up to twenty-five White-crowned Sparrows, and at least fifty Swamp Sparrows. One Lark Sparrow was reported from Brewster on 12 October by A. King. One Clay-colored Sparrow was reported from Sandwich in early November by J. Trimble.

Dickcissel - One individual was seen near the Orleans County Courthouse on 4 November by the South Shore Bird Club (fide E. Winslow). Two or three individuals were reported in Truro during the first half of October by various observers.

George Martin's Guided Car Tour

Editor's Note: What follows is the text of a letter that was written in 1994 by George Martin to a friend who was curious about winter birding, but who hated the cold.

Here is a relaxing and scenic way to winter bird from the comfort of your car from Orleans to Provincetown in a trip lasting 3 or 4 hours.



The first stop is the Hole in One donut shop across from the Cape Cod Five on 6A in Orleans for a coffee and a fat pill (a donut). A good place to start birding is Fort Hill. Take the first road in (Gov. Prence Rd), and check the ditches on either side of the road for ducks and herons. Then, check the feeder in the first yard on the left, and proceed to the upper parking lot, scanning the fields, tree tops and marsh for anything from Northern Shrikes and Meadow Larks to raptors, ducks, or herons.

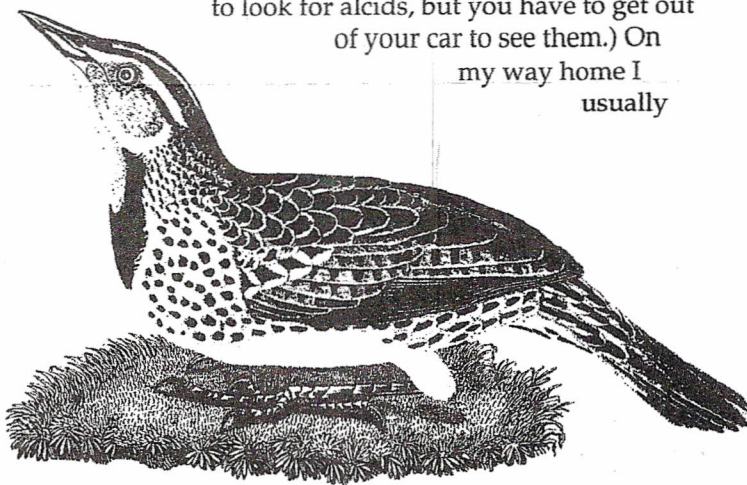
Then it's off to Coast Guard Beach, still in the comfort of your car. Scan the backside of the beach and marsh for gulls, Harriers, Peregrines, Dunlins, Greater Yellow-legs, Sanderlings, and Black-bellied Plovers. If you have a sudden burst of energy, go on the front porch of the building; and scope for loons, sea ducks, alcids, Gannets, and Portugal. Next go back out to Route 6 and head for LeConte's Hollow, once again looking for sea birds and Iceland Gulls. Then after leaving the overlook, take the first right onto Ocean View Drive, looking at the wires and tree tops for Shrikes. Next take a left on Long Pond Road, checking out Long Pond for Common Mergansers and other ducks. Moving along Long Pond Road, you will come out on Commercial Street in Wellfleet Center. This will take you to the Town Docks. I usually go down the left side, checking for anything that swims or flies. Then, I return on the right side, doing the same. The harbor could have anything from Dovekies, loons, grebes, to Barrow's Golden-eye. Also be on the lookout for harbor seals.

Leave Wellfleet heading for Truro. Just past Corn Hill on the left is Great Hollow Road. Go to the end to the overlook. There has been a King Eider there mixed in with a flock of Commons along with other sea birds. Also keep an eye out for seals and spouting pilot whales. Leaving here, keep heading down Cape for Head of the Meadow on the right. Look here for alcids, ducks, loons, grebes and

Gannets. Then get over to Route 6A at the next exit, and check out the gulls on the roof tops on the way into Provincetown. Look for Iceland Gulls, or whatever may be there. Upon entering Provincetown, bear left of Commercial Street. Turn into St. Mary of the Harbor's parking lot to check out that end of the harbor. Next stop at the parking lot by Northern Lights Leather Shop for another look at the harbor. Continue on to Macmillan Wharf, checking both sides on the way out the wharf. There are usually a variety of sea ducks, and an occasional alcid about the dock. Also check out the boats and buildings for unusual gulls. Be sure to look over any birds in the main parking lot on the way out. Taking a left after coming off the dock will bring you to the public rest rooms which are very clean and open year round.

Leaving town and heading west on Commercial or Bradford Streets, you run into Province Land Road which will take you to Herring Cove Beach which is a good place to look for sea birds and Harriers hunting the dunes and moors. (Race Point Beach is also a good place to look for alcids, but you have to get out

of your car to see them.) On my way home I usually



take the back roads between Corn Hill in Truro and Wellfleet Center, and I look for Cedar Waxwings and Robins in the thickets of winter berry along the road. It's always worthwhile to take a look at Pamet Harbor. After leaving Pamet Harbor, take your first right onto Mill Pond Road. The old railroad track bed washed through a couple of years ago and turned Mill Pond back into a salt pond. Mill Pond Road will take you out to County Road which will take you back to Wellfleet. A stop at the WBWS's new visitor's center and their bird observation room is warm and worth a visit. Then, I go to the Bird Watcher's General Store for a dose of verbal abuse from the proprietor.

On this trip, binoculars are fine, but a scope with a window mount and a tripod is even better. A Cape Cod atlas is always handy. Good birding.

PROGRAMS/MEETINGS

Ruth Connaughton

On Monday evening **January 9th** at 7:45 pm at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, Mark Lynch and Sheila Carroll will present a program entitled, "*Birds & Wildlife of Argentina*." Mark Lynch is a lecturer at the Worcester Art Museum and teaches courses at Mass Audubon. Sheila Carroll is head of a human relations firm in Boston.

On Monday evening **February 13th** at 7:45 pm at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, Bob Finch will present a program entitled, "*The Mysteries of Birds*." Bob Finch is a well known author, conservationist, and travel writer. He has published numerous books and articles about Cape Cod and is editor of the Norton Anthology of Nature Writing.

Continued from Page 1

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Richard Hall

What could account for this rapprochement between Hawk and Dove? What signal rendered the hunter harmless? Doesn't instinct demand flight in the presence of danger? Or is danger relative, dependent upon context? If so, is this evidence of some cognitive choice making, a weighting of alternatives? Are bird brains capable of this? After the birds departed, I grabbed a flashlight and went outside. Despite what looked like a lot of plucked feathers and mayhem when viewed from the house, the Woodpecker was almost entirely intact. Only a small portion of the upper back, right shoulder and wing had been eaten. I felt a flash of anger.

It has always been an article of faith with me that nature, though harsh, is at least efficient. That which is killed is eaten, in entirety, or so I thought. Clearly this was nothing of the kind. Now it was up to the raccoons to finish the job the Sharpie had so fecklessly begun.

For our family dinner, fresh Chatham mackerel was on the menu. I know I'm not supposed to, but I tossed the fish heads and entrails into the backyard. Maybe this would spare the resident Bobwhites by providing the local four legged predators with an easier meal. I had seen enough backyard killing this Christmas eve. Morning revealed a light dusting of snow, leaden skies and evidence Santa had visited during the night. Before gifts could be opened, however, feeders had to be checked. The fish heads were gone, but the Downy carcass was undisturbed by nocturnal scavengers. Instead, standing astride the remains was an immature Sharp-shinned Hawk finishing the job it had begun the night before. (What does ornithology know about bird memory?) As our two-year old and I watched this denouement, the Hawk, startled by a squirrel, flew off clutching what little was left of its meal. Turning to the gifts, Gregory softly muttered the final benediction, "Bye-bye Woodpecker."

FIELD TRIPS

Jinks Keil

January

Sunday, January 1st. Happy New Year! Start with Art at Fort Hill. 9:00 am. Meet in the lower parking lot. Art King, 255-8919.

Thursday, January 5th. Yarmouth. 9:00 am. Meet at the playground parking lot in Yarmouthport on Route 6A. Mark Tuttle, 362-3015

Wednesday, January 18th. Harwich Conservation Area. 9:00 am. Meet off Bell's Neck Road near the canoe ramp along the shoreline. Co-leaders: Marian, 432-0988 and Ruth Connaughton, 432-1580.

Wednesday, January 25th. Saquatucket Harbor to Chatham. 9:00 am. Meet at Saquatucket Harbor across from Thompson's Farm Market on Route 28. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

Saturday, January 28nd. Hit the hot spots at Quabbin Reservoir with Jeff Johnstone. Look for crossbills, finches, grosbeaks, eagles etc. Plan one long day or possibly an overnight. Participation is limited so call early. Trip arranged by Richie Hall, 945-4882.

February

Sunday, February 5th. Fort Hill. 9:00 am. Meet in the lower parking lot. Art King, 255-8919.

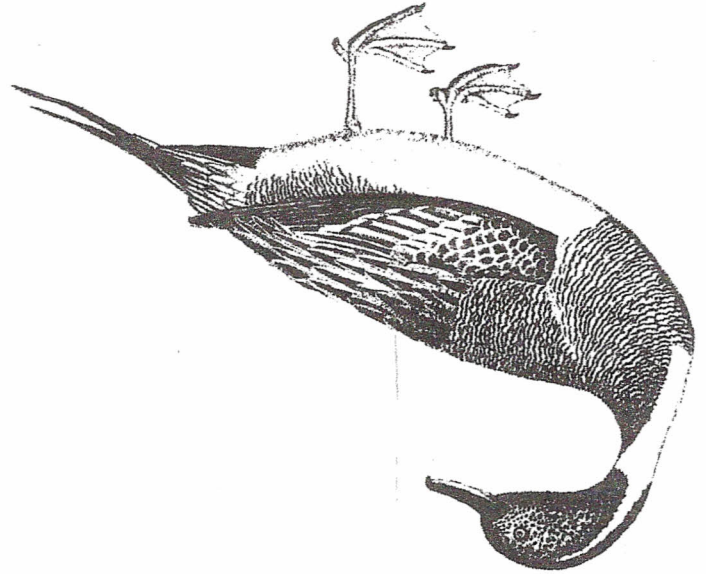
Sunday, February 12th. Hatches Harbor, Provincetown. 9:00 am. Meet at Race Point Beach Parking Lot in Provincetown. George Martin, 896-8798.

Wednesday, February 22nd. Saquatucket Harbor to Chatham. 9:00 am. Meet at Saquatucket Harbor across from Thompson's Farm Market on Route 28. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

Wings Over Wing Island. Every Saturday until the end of March at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, a member of the bird club is available from 10-12 in the morning for inside birding. With their view of feeders and the marsh in the distance, these sessions provide an excellent introduction to birding on Cape Cod.

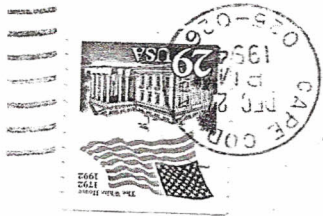
New Members

Since our last newsletter, the following people have joined the Cape Cod Bird Club. **Richard and Marylea Sullivan** of Northboro; **North Cairn** of Hyannis; **Frank Kelly** of Yarmouthport; **Jeanne & Peter Leather** of Eastham; **Charles and Frances Szeglin** of Orleans; **Linda Decker** of South Boston; **Mary Ann Dooley** of Eastham; **John Himmelman** of Killingworth, CT; **Mr. and Mrs. Robert McKenney** of East Dennis.



Frank Caruso
17 Freedom Rd
Forestdale, MA 02644

Cape Cod Bird Club
The Cape Cod Museum Of Natural History
PO BOX 1710, Brewster, MA 02631



BIRD WATCH

Why don't I have any birds at my feeder? They were around until the end of November. Did they all go south for the winter?

Some of the birds may have migrated south, but chances are that your feeder has begun to attract Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawks. Both of these hawks prey on the small birds that are attracted to feeders. There are probably two things at work here. First, your feeders may be exposed. Typically, birds will continue to frequent feeders despite hawks only when there is cover near the feeder. Feeders that are out in the open, in the middle of cleared lots of land, leave small birds exposed for too long. If the threat is too great, they will stop going to feeders. Second, the food birds get at your feeders is only a supplement to their diets. Except in the harshest of conditions, they are capable of surviving without it. The only solution to the problem that I know of is to move your feeders to an area that affords the birds more protection. Try putting the feeders up against a hedge or in among some bushes. It may be harder to see the birds feeding, but more of them will be attracted to your feeder. My feeders are in behind some bushes and trees,

and despite daily visits by Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, small birds continue to feed. Trying to chase the hawks away does no good. The hawks are only doing what they were born to do.

Does this year's abundant crop of acorns mean that we will have a cold winter?

The old adage that says lots of oak acorns means a cold winter isn't necessarily true. According to Dr. Peter Smallwood, who wrote an article "What Are Squirrels Hiding?" in Natural History magazine, there is no correlation between bumper acorn crops and cold winters. "Trees and shrubs produce nuts and berries on a cyclical basis." His research also shows that squirrels don't recover about 74% of the acorns they bury. Squirrels eat 85% of the white oak acorns they find, while they bury 60% of the red oak acorns they find. White oak acorns are tastier, spoil sooner, and lack the high tannin level of the red oak acorn. Of course, the fact that there is no correlation between bumper acorn crops and cold winters doesn't mean that this winter won't be cold; it just means acorns don't predict a cold winter.