



# Cape Cod Bird Club

VOLUME 24

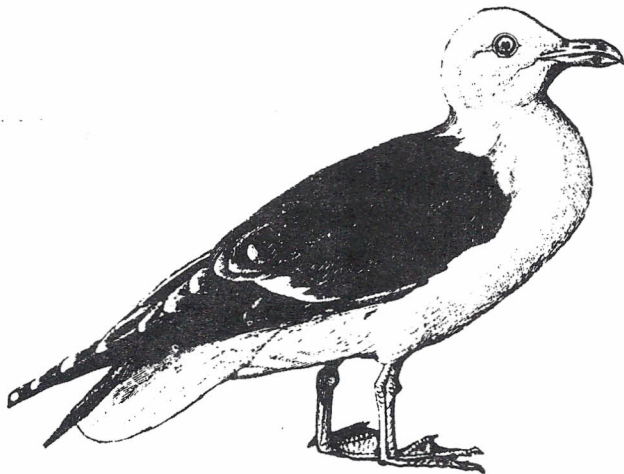
SPRING ~ SUMMER 1996

ISSUE 5

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

*Richard D. Hall*

If you've ever wondered what most of Southern New England looked like 150 years ago, you can do no better than to visit the Cumberland Farms fields in Middleboro and Halifax. I recently investigated this area with a small group of birders in late March, and we were rewarded with a Bald Eagle upon arrival. It is a vast and largely empty landscape of cleared pasture and cornfields which extend for miles. If you didn't know better, you'd think you were in Nebraska. It is truly amazing that this place exists halfway between the Cape and Boston, just north of Route 495.



It is also the scene of what must be one of the great local environmental crimes of the last quarter century. Prior to 1970, these fields were one of the last and largest white cedar swamps in eastern Massachusetts. Some 1500 acres of pristine wetlands were cleared and drained to create pasturage for the Cumberland Farm herd despite environmental opposition. One member of the Club who was along said she hasn't purchased so much as a quart of milk from the chain since then for what they did.

Standing in these fields, listening to the discussion and drinking in the sweeping vistas, I couldn't help but feel a welter of conflicting emotion. We were in a truly magnificent place, quite unlike any I had ever experienced locally. Large grassland habitats, like wetlands, are among the most endangered in the Northeast. Many argue that grasslands are, in fact, our most threatened ecosystem as old farm fields are either sub-divided or revert to woodland. It is no secret that Bobolinks, Meadowlarks, Short-eared Owls and Grasshopper Sparrows are declining as their habitat disappears. What, then, is one to conclude when confronted with such a paradox? An environmental crime

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## NIGHTBIRD NOCTURNE

*Stauffer Miller*

Several of us had a birding experience in May of last year at the Marconi portion of the National Seashore that we thought was extraordinary. I am writing about it here in the hope that others may share it this May.

Acting on information obtained from the bird-a-thon that Saw-Whet Owls were calling at Marconi, Ellie, Mark and Marcia Tuttle, and I journeyed up there the evening of May 22. We arrived about 8:30 pm when it was not fully dark. No birds were calling. We walked the Cedar Swamp trail about one half mile till we were quite close to the Swamp itself. Only when it was almost fully dark, at about 9:00 pm, did the soft, repetitive toot-toot-toot call of the Saw-Whet begin. This was a nice enough experience but to enhance the moment, a Great Horned Owl and a Whip-Poor-Will began to call, so that all three were vocalizing simultaneously.

Mid-May would appear to be the optimum time to have this trio in chorus. The calmest, most wind-free of nights is of course best. Also, a week night is better so that less traffic noise from Route 6 will have to be tolerated. Bring a flashlight.

## WILD CARE

*Jim Talin*

Like many people on Cape Cod, when I find an injured bird or animal, I think immediately of taking it to Wild Care, Inc. of Brewster. Known for its generosity in helping injured animals, Wild Care works to lessen the pain and suffering created by human impact on the environment. To a large degree, caring also involves understanding. For instance, this winter, along with a Saw Whet Owl, and a Common Murre, Wild Care had an Atlantic Puffin in residence. Here are some notes by the director Karen Von den Deale about feeding a Puffin. "I learned a little about myself yesterday as I watched the Puffin take a piece of herring in its bill. The fish seemed to be a bigger piece than it could handle. But after watching repeated attempts to swallow it, I was sure the Puffin would put the fish down and choose another of more convenient dimensions. No Way! From the Puffin's point of view, one never lets a meal go-it might swim away. On the next try, after much stretching and heavy breathing, the fish was devoured, and the bird almost seemed to show a grin of satisfaction."

Wild Care needs our help to continue nursing wild creatures back to health. It relies upon volunteer labor and upon financial donations to pay its bills, to make ends meet, and to continue nurturing sick and injured creatures back to health. For information about how you can help, get in touch with Wild Care at 896-5273.

## SANCTUARY OF SOUND

*Jim Talin*

It is a late June morning in the woods of Northern Vermont. To the right of the logging road you walk, there lies a marsh with a beaver dam where a Swamp Sparrow, a Red-winged Blackbird and a Northern Waterthrush sing. To the left a small clear-cut in the woods opens. Contrary to what you assumed, birds congregate in these clear-cuts, along their edges and in the short, brushy trees that begin to fill up the clearing. In the hemlocks and spruce trees around the logged clearing, a chorus of birds sings. You hear Red-breasted Nuthatches, Chickadees, Cedar Waxwings, a Black-throated Green, and a Blackburnian Warbler. In the woods at the far end of the clearing a Veery's song spirals, while at a low point toward the right you hear a Winter Wren's chattering, bubbly voice. Then, you are surprised as you glimpse a Mourning Warbler in the shrubs that grow up in the clear-cut. You try to learn its song.

Painted Ladies, Tiger Swallowtails, damselflies, and dragonflies pump their wings as they warm where the sun dries the churned-up soil. Then, further into the deepening woods, where the hillside begins to rise toward a peak that draws your attention upward, you hear the haunting song of the Hermit Thrush echo through woods that remain untouched because they are too hard to cut and clear. Around you, the sounds seem inseparable from the golden light filtering in visible columns through the remaining trees.

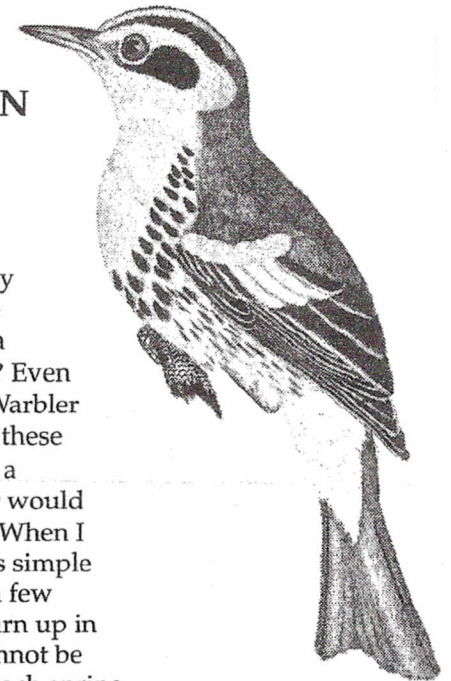
To get here, you drove through the cacophony of Boston, up '93 and across Northern New Hampshire into an isolated part of Vermont. Windows rolled up, inside the car it was too noisy to listen to the radio. Here, you have escaped from the noise. You do not hear any vehicle. No jet plane flies overhead. You stand in a sanctuary of

natural sound, something that does not exist on Cape Cod, except perhaps on the barrier beach where the surf drowns all traces of human-made noise. In this forest, there is something curative in leaving human noise and its attendant bustle behind. There is something tranquil in listening and enjoying a world of natural sound that is more fragile than the forests and the birds. While there probably may not be any urgency to protect these green hills from contamination by human noise since no person lives here now, and none probably ever will, it would not take much to destroy this oasis of natural sound. It should be protected.

## THE BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER

*Jim Talin*

Each spring, I judge my success birding by one measure: Have I seen a Blackburnian Warbler? Even if I saw the Cerulean Warbler that has eluded me all these years, but failed to see a Blackburnian, the year would not feel like a success. When I lived in Orleans, it was simple because every spring a few Blackburians would turn up in our yard. The same cannot be said for Brewster. So, each spring I set out to find a Blackburnian.



The naming of the Blackburnian Warbler was an act of inspiration, not like the naming of other warblers, in apparent compromises concocted by committees of academic ornithologists. Oddly enough, the Blackburnian was named after a person, a Mrs. Blackburn "who collected stuffed birds and was a patron of ornithology." (Bent) Certainly, no more descriptive name could have been found for a black and white striped bird whose throat and head burn with an intense orange flame, like an ember at night. No matter how bright some warblers may be, something in this combination of orange and black make the Blackburnian stand out, like the one that I saw in a budding birch tree in Beech Forest, burning a bright orange against the white bark, the new green leaves and the distant pale blue sky. A Hooded or a Wilson's Warbler are brighter seeming on paper, but their colors blend into the yellowish green of foliage, and they are surprisingly not as bright seeming as a Blackburnian.



### Cape Cod Bird Club Inc.

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

#### Officers

Richard Hall ~ *President*  
Don Scott ~ *Vice President*  
Sue Thompson ~ *Secretary*  
Mark Tuttle ~ *Treasurer*

#### Directors

Ruth Connaughton ~ Ron Hindman  
Jinks Keil ~ Dick Koeppen  
Janet Silverio ~ Barbara Stanton

#### Newsletter

Editor ~ Jim Talin, email [jtalin@capecod.net](mailto:jtalin@capecod.net)  
Design & Prepress ~ Tom Noonan  
Circulation ~ Barbara Stanton

## NAME THAT SPRING MIGRANT

Jim Talin

Try this before you head out for Beech Forest. What follows is a listing of 20 spring birds identified by description and not name. Most of the birds are warblers that you will see on Cape Cod during migration. See how many of them you can identify. (Most of the text is taken from the National Geographic Field Guide.)

1. Olive above, with faint chestnut streaks on back; bright yellow eyebrow, yellow patch below eye; bright yellow below, streaked with black on sides of neck and body. Two pale yellow wing bars.
2. Male's black throat, cheeks, and sides separate blue upper parts, white underparts. Bold white patch at base of primaries. Female's pale eyebrow is distinct on dark face; upperparts brownish olive; underparts buffy.
3. Tiny, short-tailed, gray-blue above with yellowish-green upper back, two bold white wing bars. White eye ring broken by black eye line. Throat and breast bright yellow, belly white. In male, reddish and black bands across breast.
4. Bold white eye ring, gray head, olive underparts. Throat and underparts yellow; white area between yellow belly and yellow undertail. Male's small reddish crown patch is seldom discernible in the field. Female is slightly duller than male.
5. Blue-gray crown; white eyebrow bordered above and below with black. Dark olive back, darker wings and tail; white underparts. Lacks wing bar. Ruby red eye visible at close range.
6. Tiny and plump. Orange crown patch of male is bordered in yellow and black; female's crown is yellow with black borders. Upperparts grayish-olive; underparts whitish; two wing bars. Broad white eyebrow, striped crown.
7. Olive above; yellow below. Tail is all dark above and below. Male has yellowish face, small black cap. In female and immature cap is dusky or olive, forehead yellowish. Lack of white tail.
8. Adult male's broad black mask is bordered above with white, below by bright yellow throat and breast; belly is whitish, undertail coverts yellow. Upperparts dark olive.
9. Male is blue-gray above, female grayer; long tail is black above with white outer feathers; mostly white below. Underparts grayish-white.
10. Bold white spectacles; two bold white or yellowish wing bars. Bluish gray head contrasts with greenish back; underparts are white with greenish-yellow flanks.
11. Fiery orange throat conspicuous in adult males; broad wing patch. Females and immatures have paler throat, two wing bars. Orange or yellow crown stripe and white in outer tail feathers.
12. All plumages have yellow on face, the color extending to sides of neck. Short tail; yellow rump, thin bill. Breeding male's chestnut ear patch and tiger striped underparts distinctive. White wing bars.
13. Breeding male has chestnut crown, throat and sides;

black face; creamy patch at each side of neck; two white wing bars.

14. Yellow overall; reddish streaks below, distinct in male, faint or absent in female. Back, wings, and tail yellowish olive, with yellow wing bars and tail spots.
15. Male glossy black, with bright orange patches on sides, wings, tail; belly and undertail coverts white. Female is gray-olive above, white below with yellow patches.
16. Male has bright yellow crown and underparts, white or yellowish-white undertail coverts, black eye line, blue-gray wings with two white wing bars.
17. Adults in spring have bright yellow crown, black eye line, black whisker stripe; chestnut on sides. Boldly streaked back; two pale yellow wing bars.
18. Olive above. Yellow face with greenish ear patch. Underparts white, tinged with yellow on undertail coverts and often on breast. Male has black throat and upper breast and black streaked sides.
19. Black necklace on bright yellow breast identifies male; note also bold yellow spectacles. Male is blue gray above, females duller.
20. Upperparts vary from brown-olive to gray-brown; tail always reddish; whitish eye ring always conspicuous. Breast buffy or whitish. Slowly raises tail several times per minute.

## THE HARWICHPORT PEAHEN

Jim Talin

The story of this Peahen was almost legend by the time that I saw it grazing on a lawn on South Street in Harwichport this spring. Ten months ago, the Peahen just showed up at a house on South Street. The owner tried to figure out where it had come from; he got in touch with people who might have owned the bird, but no one wanted to admit ownership. So, the bird stayed, wandering around the neighborhood, integrating itself into life on South Street.

Sometimes it would be perched on top of a car, in a tree, or even on a deck, but it chose one house in particular upon which to center its activities. It survived the winter with some help with food during the coldest months, but its biggest problem has been a den of local foxes who are determined to make it into a meal. So far it has eluded them. To date, no Peacock has appeared to mate with this misplaced bird.

## ANSWERS

1. Prairie Warbler 2. Black-throated Blue Warbler 3. Northern Parula 4. Nashville Warbler 5. Red-eyed Vireo 6. Golden-crowned Kinglet 7. Wilson's Warbler 8. Common Yellowthroat 9. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher 10. Solitary Vireo 11. Blackburnian Warbler 12. Cape May Warbler 13. Bay-breasted Warbler 14. Yellow Warbler 15. Redstart 16. Blue-winged Warbler 17. Chestnut-sided Warbler 18. Black-throated Green Warbler 19. Canada Warbler 20. Hermit Thrush

## A BIG "THANK YOU"

Jinks Keil

On my behalf and on behalf of all Bird Club members, I wish to thank the walk leaders this past year. All of them, when asked to lead a walk, responded graciously, enthusiastically and cheerfully. They made my job so much easier, and those who went on these walks were enriched.

*Again, many thanks to:*

Frank Caruso, Ruth Connaughton, Debbie Fitton, Art King, Bud Marchant, Marge Marion, Kathy McGinley, Stauffer Miller, Blair Nikula, Tom Noonan, Bob Pease, Bob Prescott, Alison Robb, Mary Ropes, Jim Talin, Sue Thompson, Bessie Tirrell, and Mark Tuttle.

## DEPARTURES

*Organizations are only as strong as their members, especially those who give time, energy and talent to keep them running smoothly.*

This club owes a debt of gratitude to three directors who are stepping down at the end of June, and who have collectively contributed 15 years of service.

Treasurer **Mark Tuttle** has for the past five years collected the dues, paid the bills, and patiently and accurately balanced the books without so much as losing a penny as far as we know, even though he is fond of boasting that he has financed a half dozen foreign birding trips due to his position.

As Secretary, **Sue Thompson** has somehow learned to make sense of often chaotic Board meetings, and she has produced timely and informative minutes. To do so, she had to survive the administrative antics of three different presidents which she did with uncomplaining good humor and grace, whatever her private thoughts may have been.

Lame-duck President **Richard Hall** thoroughly enjoyed his five years on the Board. He acknowledges that he has pushed the Club in directions some may question, but hopes he has pleased more members than he has offended. Of nominee Don Scott, Richie says that he enthusiastically supports him despite the fact that Don is a life long Republican.

The Club thanks Mark, Susan and Richie, and wishes them well.

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

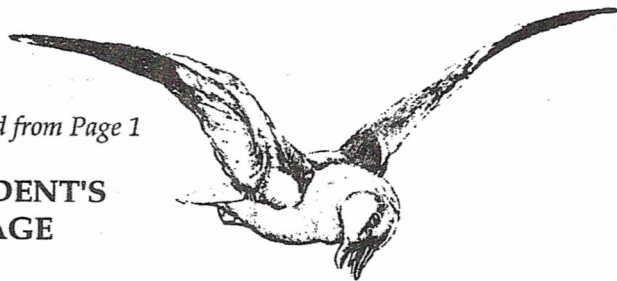
*Richard D. Hall*

creates an important new habitat, which, in turn, might be lost in succeeding decades to suburbanization or commercial development. How ironic that a bumper-sticker may someday read "Save The Cumberland Fields!"

Nature and humankind are inextricably bound. Our presence alters nature's balance in ways we don't always anticipate. Surely this is the case with the gulls of Monomoy. In 1961 there was one pair of Herring Gulls nesting on Monomoy. There were no Great Black-backed Gulls there at all. By 1985 forty thousand gulls overwhelmed the Refuge to the detriment of other less aggressive species. The conventional explanation for this population explosion was the presence of open landfills and fish waste. These conditions were not new and could hardly account for such an increase by themselves. Often overlooked is that Monomoy had only just broken away from the mainland to become an island, and wasn't declared a Federal Wilderness Area until the end of the 60's. This enabled Refuge managers to tinker with nature's balance by removing four-legged predators, and severely limiting human access, either of which may have exercised some limits on gull nesting. It seems likely that geological forces, human behavior, and official policy created a scenario wherein gulls gained an advantage causing nesting shorebirds and terns to suffer a severe decline. This was hardly the intended result, especially on a managed refuge.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife plan to reverse this by eradicating part of the nesting gull population with poison makes historical and biological sense, however emotionally unpalatable it may be for many nature lovers. Monomoy is a "wilderness" in legislative name only. It is not intended to be a place where nature runs its course. The Refuge is a tool in the government's arsenal of weapons to ensure the preservation of threatened and endangered species.

Given the unpopularity of the proposal, it may be abandoned. Because of the limited scope of the effort, it may not work. But I sincerely believe that the goal of restoring a measure of avian diversity is both sound wildlife management and a morally defensible action. There are, in life, only so many things we can do. Even if we knew how, which we don't, we're not about to get back that destroyed cedar swamp. On Monomoy we can get a second chance to correct our mistake, however inadvertent. Shouldn't we at least try?



## PROGRAMS / MEETINGS

Richard Hall & Ruth Connaughton

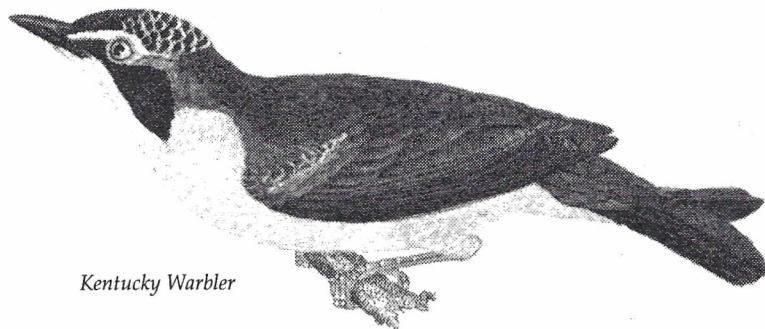
On Monday evening **May 13th** at 7:45 pm at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History on Route 6A in Brewster, educator and naturalist Brian Cassie will present a slide lecture "*The Butterflies of Massachusetts.*" Mr Cassie is the author of the soon to be published atlas on the butterflies of this state, and he is a recognized expert on birds and rare ornithological books. This meeting will be the last of our program season.

To kick off the Club's 25th Anniversary Year, on next **September 9th**, Peter Trull of the Center for Coastal Studies will give a slide lecture on the "*Birds and Marine Mammals of Stellwagon Sanctuary.*" The meeting will be at the Museum at a time to be announced.

## BEECH FOREST ACCESS

Richard Hall

Despite the closing of Race Point Road in Provincetown, access to the Beech Forest will not be a major problem. The Road is open for about 100 yards off Route 6 to allow access to the town landfill. National Seashore Park staffers Claude Phipps and Nora Martinez advise Club members to park along the shoulder of Race Point Rd. on the landfill side, or along the landfill entry road itself. Birders should then follow the bicycle path, paralleling the closed portion of the road, past the parking lot to the pond and walking trails. Depending upon where you actually park, the walk in should only take 5 to 8 minutes, unless you encounter a warbler wave, in which case you may never get to the Forest at all!



Kentucky Warbler

## BEECH FOREST WALKS

The following people will be at the Beech Forest parking lot at 8:00 am during the month of May.

**Sat. May 4:** Jim Talin

**Sat. May 11:** Blair Nikula

**Sun. May 5:** Tom Noonan

**Sun. May 12:** Sue Thompson

**Sat. May 18:** Frank Caruso

**Sat. May 25:** Stauffer Miller

**Sun. May 19:** Jim Talin

## WALKS & FIELD TRIPS

Jinks Keil

### May

**Friday, May 3:** Sandwich, Ryder Conservation Area. 8:00 am. Take Route 28 north (west, really) to the stop-light at the intersection of Route 130 in Cotuit. Turn right on 130. Continue to where 130 bears left and Cotuit Rd bears right. Turn on Cotuit Rd, and watch for Ryder on the left. The distance from Route 28 is 2.7 miles. Frank Caruso, 477-9807.

**Sunday, May 5:** Eastham, Fort Hill. 8:00 am. Meet in the lower parking lot. Art King, 255-8919.

**Wednesday, May 8:** Harwich, Blair Nikula's Evening Walk. 5:30 pm. Meet on Bell's Neck Rd, Harwich Conservation Area. Bring a picnic if you'd like. Blair Nikula, 432-6348.

**Sunday, May 12:** Hatchville, Falmouth. 7:00 pm. Take Route 151 to Ranch Rd, opposite the movie theatre. Turn on Ranch Rd and go south to Boxberry Hill Rd. Turn right to Coonamessett Resevation. Alison Robb, 540-2408.

**Wednesday, May 15:** Beech Forest, Provincetown. 8:00 am. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

**Monday, May 27:** Orleans, Sea Call Farm. 8:00 am. Farm is on Tonset Rd. Parking is on lot at farm. Jim Talin, 896-7169.

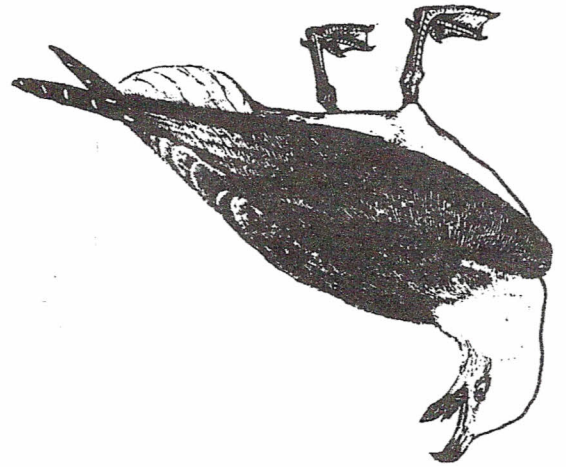
### June

**Saturday, June 1:** Evening Whip-poor-will Search. 8:00 pm. Trip contingent on obtaining a proper viewing vehicle, ie. a pick-up truck. Meet at Cefalo's Restaurant parking lot on Route 130 in Mashpee. Call Stauffer Miller, 362-3384.

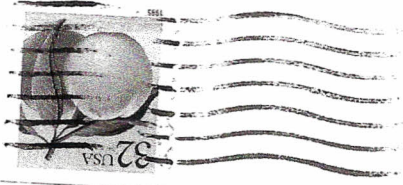
**Saturday, June 9:** Waquoit, South Cape Beach. 8:00 am. From the Mashpee Rotary, take Great Neck Rd south 2.8 miles. Bear left onto Great Oak Rd. 2.1 miles to South Cape Beach State Park. Enter park, go straight onto dirt road. Park in lot right near old trailer. Bring a lunch and a windbreaker. This walk in cooperation with Waquoit Bay National Estuary Research Reserve. Alison Robb and Bob Vander Pyl, 540-2408.

**Thursday, June 13:** Fort Hill. 8:00 am. Meet in lower parking lot. Bessie Tirrell, 432-9248.

The **June Breeding Bird Census** is to be announced.



Frank Caruso  
 Barbara Steller  
 17 Freedom Rd  
 Forestdale, MA 02644-1725



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



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## THE BLACKBURIAN WARBLER

Jim Talin



While the Blackburnian may be visually startling, it is hardly known for its song. Variouslly described as weak, high, buzzy, slurred, "with a thin, wiry quality, rather unmusical, and not loud but penetrating." (Bent) "Song, zip zip zip zip titi tseeeeeee, ending on a very slurred note (inaudible to some ears)." (Peterson) "Variable song of thin, high notes; commonly a short series of *seet-say* notes followed by a very high trill." (National Geographic) But, I don't go out to listen to the Blackburnian Warbler; I go to wake my winter eyes from their slumber by looking at one. So, if you meet me birding, pausing for a long time to look at a bird, it may be that I have found this year's Blackburnian.

## Report From The Nominating Committee Mary Chesnut, Chair

The following slate of candidates for Cape Cod Bird Club Directors has been proposed for ratification by the membership at the May 13th meeting.

### Officers for 1996-1997

<b>President</b>	Don Scott
<b>Vice-President</b>	Jinks Keil
<b>Treasurer</b>	Ellie Winslow
<b>Secretary</b>	Barbara Stanton

New Board Members for three year terms:  
 Phil Kyle and Kathy McGinley

Nominating Committee Chair for 1997  
 Richard Hall