



17th ANNUAL MASS AUDUBON BIRDERS MEETING

PROGRAM ABSTRACTS & SPEAKER PROFILES

Morning Programs

North America's Avian Eden: Our National Wildlife Refuges

By Jon Andrew

National Wildlife Refuges (NWRs) are home to more than 700 species of birds and 800 species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, including over 170 threatened or endangered species. At least 55 Refuges have been set aside specifically to protect species that are faced with extinction. For birders, NWRs offer spectacular destinations where birds and other wildlife can often be found in lavish abundance or in spectacular diversity. Some Refuges like Parker River and Monomoy afford some of the best birding to be found anywhere in New England. Others like Aransas, Ding Darling, Santa Ana, Salton Sea, Malheur, and Yukon Delta are justifiably world famous. To quote Russell Butcher, "*The National Wildlife Refuge System offers valuable insight into what Native Americans have known for thousands of years: how critically important it is not to lose sight of the interconnectedness of all life on Earth.*" He adds, "*How well we are managing and protecting this heritage of America's National Wildlife Refuges is ultimately an indication of how well we are protecting ourselves.*" (*America's National Wildlife Refuges: A complete guide* (Taylor Trade Publishing, 2008). In this presentation the audience will hopefully answer this question itself.

Supporting Our National Wildlife Refuges (Part I and II):

Refuge Friends Organizations & How to Engage

By Desiree Sorenson-Groves and Barbara Volkle

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) helps to harness the power of volunteer Refuge Friends Groups to benefit wildlife and conservation at the landscape level. This presentation will provide a basic understanding of the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) initiative, which the NWRA chairs. There will also be a description of how CARE utilizes the power of Friends Groups to increase advocacy efforts on behalf of what Refuge Friends groups do at both the local and national level. The presentation will also underscore the importance of why birding organizations should consider partnering with Friends Groups to benefit wildlife conservation at National Wildlife Refuges around the country. During

the afternoon program Desiree and local Friends Group president, Barbara Volkle, will ensure that the audience knows what the Massachusetts Friends Groups are and how to contact them.

The National Wildlife Refuge System's Birding Initiative: Connecting Birders to Refuges and Refuges to Birders

By C. Dwight Cooley

Since nearly 50 million Americans identify themselves as birding enthusiasts, in 2006 the USFWS launched the National Wildlife Refuge System Birding Initiative. The initiative appointed a Birders Team of well-known individuals representing different sectors of the birding world including authors, editors, educators, conservationists, and members of the business community. The Team was charged with exploring ways to strengthen the relationship between the birding community and the Refuge System, and is actively developing ideas about how Refuges can involve more Americans in the work of conserving America's native birds.

Birders: Making Connections and Making a Difference

By Kenn Kaufman

An essential part of birding skill is the ability to see beyond the obvious, and to make connections that might not be apparent to non-birders. For example, we look at weather maps and see connections between today's storm front and tomorrow's migration. We look at habitat and see connections between this season's flowers and next season's arrival of seed-eating birds. But some connections are less direct, and may involve several steps. This presentation will be a wide-ranging journey that goes from the quirks of Teddy Roosevelt's childhood to the future of family farms in Central America, and from the twists in modern marketing to the flight habits of ducks – all making connections along the way, and all demonstrating why these things are vitally important to Massachusetts birders today.

Roger Tory Peterson: His Beginnings, the Field Guides, and His Legacy

By Lee Allen Peterson

This presentation will begin with an abbreviated biography of Roger Tory Peterson's (i.e., Lee's father) early years – growing up in Jamestown, NY, his days in art school in New York City, and his time working on the original *A Field Guide to the Birds* while teaching at the Rivers School in Massachusetts. The main focus of the talk will be on the many formative people and events that influenced his father's life. Along the way, Lee will discuss the field guide concept (i.e. "The Peterson Identification System"), its origins and its global ramifications. The presentation will conclude by describing his father's enormous legacy – both from the perspective of how we view our world today, and about some of the people who have followed in his footsteps. He will also provide some insight about the most recent *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America*.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Managing for Birds on Local National Wildlife Refuges: Meet the Managers

By Michael Brady, Andrew French, Libby Herland, Janet Kennedy, and Graham Taylor

Massachusetts NWRs are part of a United States network of lands and waters which are administered for the conservation, management, and (where appropriate), restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. Managing these habitats for birds is the main purpose of most Massachusetts Refuges. In this presentation attendees will have a chance to meet the folks who are making the decisions about how these lands are managed with regional and national conservation goals in mind. The presenters will highlight specific management actions and explain why refuges are managed as they are. This will also be an opportunity to ask questions about your favorite Massachusetts Refuge!

Refuge Friends Organizations & How to Engage (Part II)

See the description above describing **Supporting Our National Wildlife Refuges**. Participants in this session will have ample opportunity to ask questions about both the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the Birding Initiative.

The Explosion of the Tea Kettle, the Crash of the Bullbat: A Personal View of the Trends and Changes in Worcester County Birds and Birding in the Last 50 Years

By Mark Lynch

The largest county in Massachusetts and containing a wide diversity of habitats, Worcester County has seen dramatic changes in bird populations in the last half century. Concomitant with avian ups and downs have been several important changes in the avocation of birding in the County. These fluctuations include an ever-changing roster of birding hot spots, a growing focus on avian monitoring schemes, and a greater appreciation of the entire County as a premier birding destination at all seasons of the year. This presentation will provide a brief introduction to the dynamics and rewards of birding in the vast and meaty solar plexus of Massachusetts.

Climate Change and the USFWS: Approaches, Actions, and Issues

By Dr. Richard (Rick) O. Bennett

This presentation will provide an overview on climate change within the context of the predicted impacts of climate change on the landscape. Also, impacts on wildlife will be discussed along with issues needing addressing and approaches that can be taken to minimize the predicted impacts of climate change. For example, what influence will climate change have on existing and future management actions, landscape scale conservation efforts, and land conservation strategies? Restoration and recovery efforts will also be explored, and there will also be information provided about approaches that the USFWS is taking to respond to the impacts of climate change, specifically those approaches that focus on adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Invasive Plants and Birds: Food for Thought

By Derek Lovitch

The proliferation of invasive plants in our region has both direct and indirect impacts on both birds and birding. With a focus on invasive, fleshy fruit-producing invasive plants, this presentation will address the question: *Are invasive plants good for birds?*

Although it is well known that many species of birds consume the fruits of a myriad of invasive plant species, there may be more going on than meets the eye. When a seemingly simple question was asked: *How have invasive plants affected birding and bird populations?* The answer proved to be more complex than the presenter expected. Are some actually birds eating the equivalent of “Avian Doritos?” Questions focused on nutrient content, presence of toxic compounds, assimilation rates, and broader ecological consequences suggest that our observations about birds consuming the fruit of invasive plants may be more problematic than one would suppose. Following Derek’s presentation there will be time allowed for a discussion of the complex topic of invasive plants and birds. For more information on the topic of invasive species and birds see, “*The Changing Seasons: Foods for Thought*” by the speaker and Marshall Iliff that appeared in *North American Birds* (61: 208-224).

eBird: Maximizing the Value of Your Observations and Improving Your Birding Skills

By Marshall Iliff

This presentation will describe the online bird checklist entry program, eBird. It will specifically describe the many rewards of using the system, along with demonstrating how this amazing resource is accessible to anyone with internet access. At its core, eBird provides birders with records management and list-keeping functionality. Personal bird data is integrated into a giant database (i.e., 20 million records and counting) in order to generate range maps, seasonal bar charts, migration arrival and departure tables, list reports, and other output that can help us to better understand bird occurrence patterns and bird sighting history. Reference to these tools within the eBird context can help birders better understand the birds of their local area, or learn something about the next exotic destination where we plan to travel. Not just for recreational birders, eBird data are also shared with birding journal editors, scientists, and conservationists. Every entry contributes to the efforts of these people, and each new participant strengthens the program. Whether you are an experienced eBirder or have yet to enter your first list, attend this presentation if you wish to learn more about this essential new tool, its many features, and what developments are lie ahead.

Worcester County and the Breeding Bird Atlas: Early Results

By Sheila Carroll

Worcester County represents the largest of the 14 regions covered by Mass Audubon’s Breeding Bird Atlas II project. Covering 179 blocks from the New Hampshire to the Connecticut and Rhode Island borders, this area represents diverse habitats that have historically supported breeding birds found in both northern and southern areas of New England. The substantial changes in the landscape of the state can be dramatically seen throughout Worcester County, and this ambitious five-year project makes it possible to take a definitive look at the impact of those

changes on our birdlife. After just two years into the project there is enough data to begin drawing some tentative conclusions. This presentation will provide a brief overview of the Breeding Bird Atlas II project and highlight the efforts of scores of volunteer Atlas workers. The primary focus will be on what we are learning about the current state of breeding birds in Worcester County.

Research on Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuges (Part I, II, III):

Quantifying Shorebird Migration at Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge

By Stephanie Koch

Monomoy NWR in Chatham, MA, annually provides stopover habitat for tens of thousands of migratory shorebirds and has been designated a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site of Regional Importance. The Refuge also hosts large numbers of human visitors including birders, anglers and shellfishers during peak shorebird use periods; however, no studies have attempted to specifically survey the distribution of foraging shorebirds and people on the intertidal mudflats. In a partnership with the University of Rhode Island surveys were conducted on permanent study plots to quantify the spatial and temporal distribution of shorebirds and people from April-November in 2006 and 2007. Experimental trials were also conducted to determine flushing distances for the most common shorebird species using the area as a basis for establishing minimum buffer distances required to reduce disturbance to foraging shorebirds. This presentation will provide preliminary results from this work, and management implications for Monomoy NWR will be discussed. Because of the importance of southeastern Massachusetts to southward migrating Red Knots – a species added to the list of Federal Candidate Species in 2006 – the speaker will also highlight field work being conducted in collaboration with the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences for this species.

Mercury bioaccumulation in Plum Island Sound and Potential Effects on Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows

By Nancy Pau

The Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, an obligate salt marsh passerine with ~95% of its global population breeding in the Northeastern United States, is a high priority species for conservation in coastal New England. Since discovering high levels of mercury in this species at Parker River NWR in 2004, ongoing studies have been conducted to determine (1) potential impacts of mercury on reproductive success, (2) the trophic pathways for mercury bioaccumulation, and (3) possible impacts on nesting and foraging ecology. Findings to date will be presented, and thoughts on future research needs will be described.

Bird Banding at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

By Alison O'Hare

In April 1998, through the combined efforts of Mass Audubon and the USFWS, a songbird banding station was opened at the Parker River NWR. This presentation will provide a brief

overview of the banding process followed by a look at some of the more interesting data that has been collected during the first ten years of operation of the station.

Birds Asleep: Where and How They Do It

By Wayne Petersen

Considering the amount of time and energy that birders spend looking for birds, both locally and around the world, it is remarkable how little most of us know about how birds sleep. When it is remembered that most birds spend at least half their lives sleeping or resting, it is ironic that we so seldom see them asleep or know so little about where they spend the night. In this session various aspects of avian sleep will be considered, including where and how birds rest, how their sleep habits may change throughout the year, where they go to spend the night, how often and for how long they sleep, and some of the behavioral and physiological considerations associated with sleep in birds. Numerous examples will be cited as these various considerations are addressed.