

# Feathers

## In Memoriam

# Tom Palmer, Master Birder of Montgomery County *by Bob Yunick*

I met Tom Palmer via a Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> telephone call in March 1987 when in his usual curious way he reported he had a banded Common Redpoll at his feeder and wondered how the bird could be identified as to place of origin. Next day I was at his front yard with two mist nets set at his feeders and it took 100 redpoll captures to finally catch the bird in question. After about 2 ¼ hours of net time, I took down the two nets to leave, having caught and banded 176 birds, 166 of which were redpolls. At home, mystery solved: my records indicated the band on the bird was one of mine applied in my yard in Schenectady about 15 miles ESE on January 24, 1987.

This was the first of what would be many banding adventures with Tom either on the family farm on Langley Road where he grew up in the Town of Florida, or elsewhere in the far reaches of Montgomery County which he knew so well. He was a very skilled birder with keen eyes and ears, as well as an extraordinary set of identification skills.

Tom was born October 13, 1943 in Amsterdam, NY, lived most of his life in the area, except for naval service in Viet Nam which he never talked about (Tom was more a listener than a talker). He retired after 30 years with Niagara-Mohawk, and all his life was an avid birder who probably knew more about the birds of Montgomery County than

any other person, past or present.

As an HMBC member, he served on the board, was a dedicated Century Runner and Christmas Bird Counter focusing on Montgomery County, the turf he loved. Many times, the Club's field trip roster listed a trip to Palmer's Ravine on Langley Road. It was a deep ravine on his property through which Terwilliger Creek flowed toward the Mohawk River. Elsewhere on his property were fields of hay, corn and timothy, as well as wood lots that made his property so attractively biologically diverse. It was something he talked about proudly when Club members came to visit his Ravine.

Sadly, in recent years he began to develop symptoms ultimately diagnosed as ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). At first it impaired his speech such that he could not converse on the phone, then his swallowing, while leaving his arms and legs functional until near the end when he died November 9, 2009 in the loving care of his nephew Brian Alling and wife Becky in the Town of Glen. He lived his last two weeks with them.

Following that March 1987 banding experience with Tom, I spent many additional times at his front yard feeders banding birds. He was always curious about what we would catch next, and seemed to relish every new finding. By time he died, I had banded over 10,600 birds on his property, including over

1900 Tree Swallows from the 25-30 nest boxes he monitored.

In 2001, we began a new banding effort in the agricultural meadows south of his house, leading to some extraordinary findings of rare birds lurking in the weeds. This became an annual September to November ritual. The first surprise came on September 24, 2002 with the banding of two Connecticut Warblers, followed by nine American Pipits on October 9, 2002. The pipits required a spirited chase out into a very newly plowed corn field, planting five mist nets in the ground, then herding the flock of about 20 toward the nets three times to catch the nine birds.

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## President's Corner



Dear Members,

The trees have lost their leaves, the birds have filled their flocks, the CBC census takers have their calendars marked and the feeder watchers have their checklists ready to go. I want to thank all of you for participating in these counts. A special thanks to Liz Neill, a HMBC member, for contributing to the article in the Sunday Gazette on Project Feeder Watch. Special thanks also goes to Donna Zimmerman and her Field Trip Committee for

40 very fine trips this year. Also special thanks to Scott and Denise Stoner for a year of great programs at the library.

Your board is busy working on a number of projects. Our website HMBC.org is being upgraded- we expect it to be more user friendly and more interactive. We have taken delivery on the wood in order to rebuild all the bridges in the Reist Sanctuary. This Spring we will have a "new" uniform look and better safety.

The HMBC Board would like to extend our condolences to the family and friends of Tom Palmer. Tom was a true friend of the birds and the birding community. He graciously opened his home and the ravine to our membership so we could enrich our love of the birds. Tom made us better and he will be missed.

The Board would like to express a Happy Holiday greeting to all its' members. Although it will be cold this winter, get out and bird, not just bird, bird every bird.

Best Regards,

— Gary Goodness 

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**HMBC Contact Information**

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**HMBC website:** <http://hmhc.net>

**HMBC Board Meetings**

HMBC Board meetings are open to all Club members. Meetings are held at Five Rivers Center or other local venues at 7:00 PM, usually on the second Monday of odd-numbered months.

**Newsletter Contributions Desired**

- Have anything you think other birders would be interested in?
- Have a favorite birding spot you want to share?
- Are there any stories or photos that would inspire others?

Share them with the HMBC membership by submitting them to the addresses below:

Please send all *electronic* submissions *via e-mail* to: Chris Grossman at [bgrossman@nycap.rr.com](mailto:bgrossman@nycap.rr.com)

Send **all** paper submissions to:

*Chris Grossman*

*7 Nott Rd.*

*Rexford, NY 12148*

This past June found us exploring the Northern portion of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. A big goal of this journey was to see one of the rarest birds in the world, the Kirtland's Warbler. By joining a birding party led by an employee of Michigan Audubon, we not only got a good look at this energetic and colorful little warbler, but also had the opportunity to learn its tumultuous history. We credit the Forest Management team, including Michigan Audubon Society, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, for providing thorough information about the Kirtland's Warbler, much of which is reflected in this article.

The story of the Kirtland's Warbler is reminiscent of classic melodrama, in which the defenseless maiden is tied to the railroad tracks, with the train approaching at full speed. The hero dashes in at the last moment, freeing the young woman and saving the day. In the case of Kirtland's Warbler, the heroes are many, and the rescue has taken decades, and will need to continue for decades more, but there was a time when the future of this species was uncertain, to say the least.

A very particular bird in terms of nesting requirements, scientists believe that numbers of Kirtland's Warbler were never very high. The Warbler will only nest in forest of young jack

pinus. They are ground-nesters, so they rely on the low overhanging branches of trees between the ages of 6 and 22 years, which stand from 5 to 20 feet tall. They require young forests that are about 80 acres or larger, and which have small, grassy openings with emerging vegetation such as blueberry bushes.

Before the days of fire suppression, large swaths of forest were frequently burnt out, allowing for young trees to emerge, along with young grasses and other vegetation. The advent of logging in the area added many acres available for re-growth as well. However, once the lumberjacks left Michigan and forest fires were routinely suppressed, the forests of jack pine matured to the

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Trap for Cowbirds

point where they offered few nesting opportunities for the Kirtland's Warbler. Adding to this sad situation is the fact that the Kirtland's Warbler is very susceptible to nest parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds.

The resulting decline of the population of Kirtland's Warbler became apparent to scientists and birders in the 1950's, when organized counts began to be taken. By 1971 the total population of male and female Kirtland's Warblers had fallen to about 400 birds. In 1974, the number of singing males counted was 167. In the early 1970's the US Fish and Wildlife Service joined with Michigan Department of Natural Resources, US Forest Service, US Geological Survey and interested citizens to form the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team. The Team was tasked with saving this bird

from certain extinction by identifying conservation priorities. Scott's late uncle, Dr. Nicholas Cuthbert, a professor in the Biology Department of Central Michigan University, was a key part of this team. Dr. Cuthbert played an integral role in identifying the negative impact of the Cowbirds on the Warbler by setting up a plot in which Cowbirds were removed while leaving a control plot where the Cowbirds were allowed to remain. When the warblers in the control plot produced no young, unlike the warblers in the environment with no Cowbirds present, it became clear the extent of negative impact Cowbirds played on the Kirtland's Warbler. These early advances in knowledge about the species appear to have saved the Warbler from extinction, allowing further advances in forest management

to sustain its population. As a young boy, Scott remembers being taken by his Uncle Nick to one of the nest areas of this much endangered bird and learning about the steps being taken to avoid losing it altogether.

Through the efforts of these early heroes and a continued collaboration of state and federal agencies in addition to Michigan Audubon, a successful combination of forest management and Cowbird population control have brought the numbers of Kirtland's Warblers up beyond their recovery population goal to 1803 singing males in 2008, a remarkable story of inter-agency cooperation and the tenacity of a small, colorful bird with very particular tastes!

— Denise Hackert-Stoner 

## Fall on Monhegan

**M**y son and I have developed a tradition over the last 6 years or so. Having gotten into birding at about the same time (thanks to the excellent Thursday morning fall and spring programs at Five Rivers) we found that we quite enjoyed birding trips to various parts of the country (no brainer there). Deciding to do one birding trip per year was an obvious tradition to establish and so starting some years ago we have managed to pull off a trip every year – until this one. His schedule at college and mine at work did not seem to coincide. So we decided two things – firstly, that we would try to do something extra special next year (Jackson is planning a spring semester in Cameroon – sounds like a plan!), and secondly, we would try to squeak in something short this year.

In view of the latter, we had about 2 days free between Jack's last summer commitment and his required presence on campus. His college is in central Maine so we canvassed our possibilities. I had heard of Monhegan Island, the incredible migrant trap 10 miles off the central coast of Maine and it seemed like a good bet. I was a little worried – the books say anytime early September to early October is great and we had basically most of August 31<sup>st</sup> and the first half of September 1<sup>st</sup>. I mean August 31<sup>st</sup> really is early September right?? To make sure I emailed an acquaintance who is one of the top birders in New Hampshire and he wrote me back saying it should be fine. As the departure date got closer we realized that two days before we were due to arrive the second Maine hurricane of the season was to pass through the region and that was an exciting prospect as well.

We had to drive separately and we were leaving from different places on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Our plan was to hit the NH coast for a couple hours of afternoon birding before driving up to a B+B on the Maine coast. We were also hoping to see the MISSISSIPPI KITE family that has successfully fledged a juvenile in southeastern NH (who would have thought of that a couple years ago!)

Unfortunately both Jackson and I got off late, and we both got stuck in traffic so we had to partially abort our plans. We decided we would both head for the kites. I got there about an hour before sunset but Jackson was at least an hour behind so I set out to find them – hoping that I could locate them and Jackson could have a look just before dark. I had excellent directions and their nest is in a tree by the road in a residential area but

alas they were nowhere to be found. I think I caught a quick glimpse of one of them flying high above the road for about five seconds but was not actually sure as I was unable to get my bins on him. Jackson arrived closer to a half hour after dark so it would have been hopeless for him even if I had located them. Not a very encouraging start to the trip!

After dropping his car off at college, we went on to the Maine coast arriving a little after midnight. Up at six and down to the dock we were happy to see a BONAPARTE'S GULL as the first official bird of the trip. Lots of COMMON EIDERS in the harbor as well as an excellent look at an OSPREY as we were steaming out. The books say that you can see pelagic species on the trip out to the island as well as from the east coast of the island itself and we were not disappointed. We saw several NORTHERN GANNETS — on the way out — including some that were plunge diving not too far from the boat. We also had one WILSON'S STORM-PETREL. No shearwaters or phalaropes though.

We sailed into the small harbor at Monhegan at about 8 am and walked up to the Island Inn to drop of our stuff. Monhegan is a very interesting place — the only transport available are a few pickup trucks owned by locals. There is no way to rent a car but the island is only a little more than one square mile! There are 17 miles of public trails across the island. The entire population of the island lives in the small village of Monhegan situated right at the harbor. The rest of the island consists of various habitats all permanently preserved.

August 31<sup>st</sup> did not turn out to be early September and there was no evidence that there had been a hurricane. As a matter of fact we pretty much just saw the local resident birds and a pretty limited selection of those. The only highlights were the Gannets we had

already seen, prolonged views of one or more MERLINS and A FOX SPARROW. We had only two warbler species during the entire day of beating the bushes up and down the island. A sea watch on the east coast netted not much at all. Total for the day — only 36 species.

So we missed the NH coast, the kites, the hurricane and any migrants. We joked at dinner that night that it really wasn't early September yet so everything was likely to be arriving overnight to be there on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. Fortunately we had had great weather, it was a fascinating place and we always manage to have a pretty good time whether the birds show up or not.

We went to bed early, since we knew we had to get the 12:30 ferry the next day, and got up early. Amazingly enough everything did arrive overnight. It was not a fallout but we added 24 new species to the trip list in the few hours we had including 8-9 more warbler species (9 if you count the ORANGE-CROWNED SPARROW that we were unsure of), a RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (seemed late for that far north), and a CAROLINA WREN (which we were told was pretty unusual that far north). It seemed that everywhere we went there were mixed flocks flitting around. It made for a very nice morning.

We did not see much on the ferry back. In fact one of the disappointments was the lack of seabirds. A lot of the literature in the place makes a big deal about seeing Shearwaters from the island and we did not see anything more remarkable than what we saw on the first ferry out — despite spending a fair amount of time on the eastern coast doing a sea watch.

In general we had a great time, though I would recommend going a bit later than we did and spending a little more time, or going in the spring (they say the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> weeks of May are best).

Another little travel tip — take a lot of cash. Many establishments do not take credit cards. I do not usually have a lot of cash and I was running out by the end of the first day. We actually had to eat in one of the most expensive restaurants our one night there because they would accept a credit card — we actually did not have enough cash left for anywhere else! But overall I strongly recommend Monhegan Island for a short trip. It is a fascinating place not only for the birds but for its classic New England coastal architecture, its beautiful preserved natural spaces, its artist community (which probably consists of half the population in the summer) and getting a taste of the low tech lifestyle that is lived on the island year round. If anyone wants to go and would like some advice, feel free to call or email me.

— Steve Mesick

## Reist Sanctuary

An order of custom-cut hemlock for use in building new/additional footbridges in the Reist Sanctuary was delivered on Nov 8th. The wood is stacked behind the Kiosk at the Adirondack center for the time-being. This wood was ordered in connection with a "Capital Improvements Plan" I developed for the Reist, with Gary Goodness's encouragement. It will be utilized to build new footbridges on; (1) the Northern Blue Trail, (2) the St. Davids Lane Entry (red) Trail, and (3) the Southern Blue Trail.

— Mike Gann

**Five Rivers Environmental  
Education Center**

*Saturday, October 10, 2009*

About 23 birders showed up at Five Rivers on a chilly Sunday morning for the HMBC field trip this morning. There was noticeably less bird activity than there had been on Saturday, but the group managed to tally 36 species. Shortly after we set out, an accipiter was sighted flying quickly overhead. We felt confident that it was a SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, as the head appeared tiny and did not project as far forward as the “wrists”. The only other raptors were A KESTREL and several TURKEY VULTURES. BLUEBIRDS were heard and seen in several areas, and YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLERS and WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS were also seen in multiple locations. We also had one PALM WARBLER, ONE RUBY-CROWNED

KINGLET, and one BLUE-HEADED VIREO. A HERMIT THRUSH, a SWAMP SPARROW, and a RUSTY BLACKBIRD were seen by some members of the group. We all got looks at WINTER WRENS along the Vlomankill, with help from John Hershey who is familiar with their call notes from his experience with them at Vischer Ferry. They were calling continuously, but I wouldn't have recognized it. I saw two of them there yesterday as well, along with Tom Williams (the one from Berne, not the one from Colonie). Tom saw and heard them there in the summer this year, which is surprising since they are usually limited to the higher elevation areas around here during the breeding season. They seem to be pretty dependable along the Vlomankill in the fall, and easier to see than they are during the breeding season.

Some of the species I saw there yesterday but not today:

WILD TURKEY  
YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER  
EASTERN PHOEBE  
BROWN CREEPER  
GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET  
PINE WARBLER  
COMMON YELLOWTHROAT  
EASTERN TOWHEE  
FIELD SPARROW  
PURPLE FINCH

— John Kent 

## Upcoming HMBC Programs

***HMBC Holiday Party and Program***

***Grassland Birds in New York State – Status and New Conservation Efforts***

**Paul Novak**

Monday December 7, 2009

7:00 PM at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar

Feel free to bring a dessert or drink (non-alcoholic only in this State building) to share with the group. We will celebrate the conclusion of another great year with the HMBC, and discuss upcoming Christmas Bird Counts.

Paul Novak will review the status of our declining grassland birds and talk about some of the new conservation efforts being undertaken, including efforts for wintering raptors, with emphasis on short-eared owl.

Paul Novak is a Wildlife Biologist with NYSDEC Region 4 responsible for Wildlife Diversity work in the Upper Hudson Watershed. Paul received his BS and MS in Wildlife Biology from Cornell University, and his MS focused on Loggerhead Shrikes. He previously spent 15 years as a Zoologist with the NY Natural Heritage Program where much of his work involved rare animal inventories of NYS Wildlife Management Areas and NYS Parks. He has had a lifelong interest in birds and participated in both NYS Breeding Bird Atlas projects.

### ***Bird Quiz: A Test of Your Identification Skills***

**Bill Danielson**

Monday, January 4, 2010

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Bill Danielson is the author of the “Speaking of Nature” column in the Albany Times Union. This interactive and entertaining program will include birds ranging from easy to a few to challenge the experts.

Bill Danielson grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts, and earned a BS and an MS in Wildlife Biology and a minor degree in Forestry at UMass - Amherst. In his 22-year career as a naturalist and environmental researcher, Bill has worked as a Law Enforcement Ranger for the National Park Service, a Wildlife Biologist for the US Forest Service, a Preserve Steward for The Nature Conservancy, a Field Biologist for several research projects throughout the eastern half of North America, and as a Park Interpreter and Park Ranger for the Massachusetts DEM. For the past seven years he has taught Biology, Chemistry, and Physics at Pittsfield High School. Bill has worked as a freelance nature writer, photographer, and artist since 1997 when he started writing his popular column *Speaking of Nature*. In 2001 Bill published his first book - a compilation of some of his readers' favorite essays entitled “Speaking of Nature.” In 2008 Bill contributed to another book entitled *The Bedside Baccalaureate*. Bill lives with his beautiful wife Susan (Arbetter) in Altamont, NY.

### ***The Galapagos Islands***

**Richard Naylor**

Monday, February 1, 2010

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

Library Director Richard Naylor will describe his trip to the Galapagos Islands in January of 2006, using photos and video he and his wife took during the trip. Trips to Galapagos differ according to the time of year and the general weather conditions; however each time provides its special interest.

The program will trace the islands, their flora, and fauna from the fresh lava of Isabella to the more developed and heavily populated (with birds) Genovesa. Some of the ravages of man will also be described from the massive taking of giant turtles to the introduction and eradication of goats and dogs.

Richard has been Director of the Library since June of 2008 but was Assistant Director from 1984 to 2008. He has an MLS from Indiana University and an MBA from UAlbany and especially enjoys travel, photography, and of course, reading. He lives with his wife, Edelgard, and two cats in Delmar.

### ***The Recovery of the Bald Eagle in New York***

**Pete Nye, NYSDEC**

*Joint Program of HMBC and the Audubon Society of the Capital Region*

Tuesday, March 2, 2010

7:00 PM at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar

*Details coming soon*

### ***Alaskan Adventure: In search of the Last Chickadee***

**Bernie Grossman, Past President, HMBC**

Monday, May 3, 2010

7:00 PM at the William K. Sanford (Colonie) Town Library

*Details coming soon*

### ***75 Years In The Bird Business***

**Craig Thompson, Director, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center**

Monday, June 7, 2010

7:00 PM at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar

*Details coming soon* 

Unless otherwise specified, all programs to be held at:

William K. Sanford Colonie Town Library

629 Albany-Shaker Road, Loudonville, NY 12211

2nd Thursday Of Every Month, Monthly: September - June, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

***The Recovery of the Bald Eagle in New York***

**Pete Nye, NYSDEC**

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Tuesday, March 2, 2010

7:00 PM at the Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar

Save the date; program details to follow 

## Red Phalarope in East Greenbush

Looking for rare birds, or just chasing after ones that have already been found, can be a lot of fun. I check the postings on the HMBC-sponsored HMBirds website quite frequently because you never know when something really interesting will be reported, such as on Saturday, 10/17. Late that morning, Phil and Margie Whitney reported a phalarope they thought was a Red-necked or, possibly, a Red Phalarope in a small, obscure pond on Best-Luther Rd. in the Town of East Greenbush. They did not get a clear look with just binoculars to be really sure of the identification. Phalaropes of any kind are what I would call a “rare bird” for our region. In August 2006 I found a phalarope in the Vischer Ferry area which I believed was a Red-necked Phalarope but I was never able to prove it, though a few others had seen it too, because I didn’t get a photo. Looking at a search of phalarope reports on HMBirds since its inception in 1999 reveals only one other Red-necked Phalarope (in September 1999) besides the one I reported in 2006. There was one Wilson’s Phalarope in May 2002 and no Red Phalaropes other than one reported by Gordie Ellmers just 2 weeks prior to the Whitney’s sighting. Gordie had gotten an excellent, close-up photo

of “his” RED PHALAROPE in Fort Miller. I, and many other birders I’m sure, had planned to take a trip to Fort Miller to find it the next day, but early that day word went out that the bird was gone, and it has not been reported since.



*Red Phalarope showing “thick bill”, by John Hershey, East Greenbush, 10/17/09*

So, after seeing the Whitney’s report around lunchtime on Saturday, I decided to drive over to East Greenbush to find it before it was gone like the one in Fort Miller. I got there around 2:30 pm and had to park my car initially ¼ mile away and walk to the pond because of the lack of a shoulder on the road to park safely. I quickly spotted the phalarope

which was moving very hyperactively, swimming, bobbing its head up and down, and spinning in the water to stir up food, as phalaropes do. It was in gray-and-white, non-breeding plumage with a fading, dark cap and mask over the eyes. With my scope and point-and-shoot camera in hand, I was determined this time to get an identifiable photo. I wasn’t so interested in getting a good-looking picture, just one that was good enough to identify the bird. The picture-taking was challenging because foliage often obscured the bird, it was impossible to get closer to the bird without trespassing on private property, and it was so hyperactive that it was prone to move out of the field of view just as I pressed the shutter button.

I eventually left the phalarope and rushed home to look at my digital photos on the computer screen. I had two that I thought were clear enough to post on HMBirds. Biased in part by what I had read that the “Red-necked” is much more likely to be seen inland than the “Red”, I assumed that the bird was probably a “Red-necked Phalarope”. Both species look very similar in non-breeding plumage. After posting my photos, others began weighing in on what species they thought it was. The votes seemed to be heavily in favor of

RED PHALAROPE. The main reason given by other birders was the thickness of the bill, since, they reasoned, a Red-necked Phalarope would have a thinner, more needle-like bill. Early on Sunday morning, just like with the Fort Miller Phalarope, word went out on HMBirds that the bird was gone, and so my digiscoped photos turned out to be the best record available. Besides HMBirds, one birder had placed my photos (with attribution) and his on an international birding forum. Altogether, informed opinions favoring RED PHALAROPE came in, not just from the local area, but also from Western New York, Pennsylvania, Nevada, and Thailand (!). I was persuaded by these opinions and saw that the thickness of the bill in the RED PHALAROPE was very evident in all of my field guides as well as my one “head-on” photo, in particular. Phil Whitney and at least one other first-hand observer, I might add, were also persuaded by the photos to go with “Red”.

I had seen my first RED PHALAROPE only a little more than a year earlier in June 2008 on a birding tour in Nome, Alaska. In Alaska they are much easier to identify in their red breeding plumage than in the gray/white plumage seen on this bird. After seeing this phalarope I was prompted to bone up a little on my phalarope knowledge. One book that was especially helpful was Kenn Kaufman’s [Lives of North American Birds](#). Also, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology online <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/>, including Birds of North America online <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/> were very useful. Besides being rare in our area in migration, phalaropes are, indeed, a very quirky and unusual bird. What I found was that RED PHALAROPES breed on the Arctic tundra, but most of them spend the rest of the year over the Southern Hemisphere oceans. I don’t think we can really know exactly

where our East Greenbush bird was headed to, but from my research I learned that a common destination for RED PHALAROPES breeding on the eastern North American tundra would be one hundred miles or so off the coast of western Africa. Here RED PHALAROPES are often associated with whales and are known to pick parasites off the backs of whales. Phalaropes are shorebirds with lobes on their feet which allow them to be good swimmers (for shorebirds, at least). In my research I was reminded that phalaropes exhibit a reversal of the usual sex roles in birds. It is the female, not the male, which is the larger and more colorful. The females chase the males (literally, either in the water or air), and then leave the males to incubate the eggs and care for the young while the female sometimes moves on to pursue another male.

It was too bad that so few people actually got to see this RED PHALAROPE. Much easier to have seen it in East Greenbush than on the Arctic tundra

or on an African whale watch! But, its moving on so quickly certainly did solve some very real safety problems with parking along the road in East Greenbush. In looking over the flurry of 20 or so messages posted on HMBirds about this bird, one message that I think is now worth repeating is by lucky birder, Brian Smith, who obviously enjoyed seeing the phalarope on 10/17. He remarked online: “The way it swam around in circles and chugga chugged as it swam was so funny and charming. What a funny little character! I hope it made its way home okay.”

— John Hershey

## Swainson’s Hawk

John Hershey photographed this Swainson’s Hawk in the town of New Baltimore on 10/08/09. The bird was located by Rich Guthrie.

*Swainson’s Hawk by John Hershey,  
New Baltimore, 10/08/09*



The year 2007 was an especial banner year starting off with opening day on September 5. I arrived a little after 0530, Tom had already opened some nets which we had erected the day before. As I opened some additional nets at 0545 in semi-darkness (sunrise at 0623), Tom saw a bird hit a net I had just opened, removed it and told me it was a Hermit Thrush. My response was, "Not likely, too early." With all the nets open, I looked at the bird back at the banding table at 0610 and confirmed it was no Hermit. It was one of the very few times I ever saw Tom err on an identification (it was semi-dark after all), but it pleased him no end to find out with measurements and appearance in slightly better light that the bird was a Bicknell's Thrush!

At 0620, sun still not risen, Tom came back with another bird in hand, saying, "Look at this!" He knew what it was... our third ever Connecticut Warbler! On September 13<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> we accounted for three Mourning Warblers, and also on the 21<sup>st</sup>, one of the neatest of all: a Clay-colored Sparrow which was recaptured again on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Also on the 25<sup>th</sup>, we captured 36 Lincoln's Sparrows, a new NYS record, 23 Palm Warblers (eight Yellow and 15 Western) and a Philadelphia Vireo among the 191 birds banded of 25 species. We ended the 2007 season with 1193 birds banded.

Other neat catches that thrilled Tom were single Dickcissels on October 11, 2003 and October 4, 2008. The last neat bird he saw on his property was a Grasshopper Sparrow banded on September 23, 2009. It became species number 93 banded on his land (plus one race and one species, Ruffed Grouse, released unbanded). Tom was late in arriving because the progression of his disease was taking its toll on him, but he was in time to see this sparrow before release. He was too ill to attend the last banding session on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the

first one he ever missed, five days before his death.

He was always up for the challenge of identifying a new bird as to species, age and sex. Identifying hand-held birds requires a different set of skills compared to viewing them with a binocular. There were many lively identification discussions at the banding table among Tom, Roger Miller, Laurie Freeman, Ted Hicks and Carol Stack who were frequent helpers at the nets.

I could tell by the wry smile on his face when at times he brought back a gathering case with some "goodie" in it which he had extracted from a net, and whose identity he knew. The fun was about to begin. He stood back and waited for the bird to be taken from the case for banding, and then the chatter began with field guide pages flipping rapidly. "It's this...no it's a that, but it lacks these marks, etc." He loved it. The longer it took for the contestants to come to a decision, the more the arguing, the more he loved it. It was his mildly mischievous side showing with a smile.

But, the biggest smile I saw on Tom, captured on film, involved a raptor captured and banded in Montgomery County. I began winter raptor trapping with him in March 2001. Thereafter, he, Roger Miller and I would visit the back roads of Montgomery County, of which there were many, each winter from November through April. We learned that to find winter raptors, go where the cows are. The agricultural practices on the dairy farms, of which there are also many in Montgomery County, are conducive to supporting large populations of voles on which the raptors feed.

On a raptor trip on January 10, 2006 while on Snooks Corners Road, Town of Florida, a wide open stretch of farm country with wintering Red-tails and

Rough-legs, we came upon a raptor perched back to us on a power pole crossbar. It looked from afar like a Red-tail. As Tom made the trap drop as I drove past the bird, I gave a quick glance up at it and knew immediately it was no Red-tail, too skinny, too streaked on the front. All three of us had misidentified the bird from the back, but then again one is not allowed the luxury of stopping and glassing an upcoming bird; to do so would flush the bird.

I drove several hundred yards past it so as not to hamper its concentration on the lure in the trap, only to encounter an oncoming school bus. I turned the car, stopped, and watched the bus approach the bird as the bird launched for the trap, with its wing shape and flight giving away its identity. The passing bus caused the bird to flair off from hitting the trap. "Oh no!" I thought, what a disappointment given the celebrity status of the bird!

Within minutes, bus gone, the bird came again, landed on the ground near the trap, then on it. The smile I caught of Tom on film was while he held this bird in hand: his first ever, live, wild Peregrine Falcon.

Back to Tom's property, I mention some of the banding highlights above to make the point that Tom was a dedicated steward of that property. He knew it intimately, having grown up on it, and he cared for it passionately. Our banding experiences there, as well as those birding experiences of Club members who attended field trips there, proved over and over again the value of maintaining diverse habitat for the benefit of wildlife, which in turn benefited us as watchers of that wildlife.

That wildlife and we watchers lost a devoted friend with Tom's passing. 

*He was thumbs up  
And hands down  
A friend to life.  
He named each bird in one note  
Or the single wiggle of a wing.  
I swear he tucked in each downy at night  
And said prayers with the titmice.  
I'd watch;  
His hand appear from his hoodie;  
His gentle fingers  
Finesse feathers from the net;  
His joyous eyes and ear-to-ear grin;  
The warbler in his palm;  
His palm like the sun,  
Warmth that wrapped around  
The body  
Making the breast brighter.  
He taught me;  
To cradle a cardinal's wing,  
To hold a sparrow  
Like a song,  
To keep a bluebird next to my ear.  
He was thumbs up  
And hands down  
A friend.*

## Upcoming Field Trips

### DECEMBER

#### CAMPFIRE & OWLING AT FIVE RIVERS (Late Fall Social)

Saturday, December 12  
(late afternoon - evening)

Coordinators: Scott Stoner &  
Denise Hackert-Stoner  
785-6760  
scottjstoner@aol.com

Joint program with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region

Great Horned Owls are often heard calling around dusk at this time of year in the deep pine woods at Five Rivers. In this special joint program, we will meet at 4:00 pm at the visitor center at Five Rivers for a brief introduction, then walk about 1 mile out to a woods that has been productive for owls in the past. Along the way or on the way back, stop around our blazing campfire and enjoy a hot dog and a cup of hot chocolate. The owls are never guaranteed, but a good time is nearly a certainty in this popular event returning to the HMBC schedule. Reservations are needed in advance (so we know how much food to buy) by contacting Scott or Denise.

#### SCHENECTADY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 19

Coordinator: Bill Lee

#### SOUTHERN RENSSELAER CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Saturday, December 26

Coordinator: Philip Whitney

### JANUARY 2010

#### NEW YEAR'S DAY BIRD COUNT AT FIVE RIVERS

Friday, January 1 (morning)

Coordinator: Craig Thompson  
475-0291 (daytime)

This year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual New Year's Day Bird Count at Five Rivers. The goal of the count is to identify all the bird species present on January 1<sup>st</sup>. This also marks the start of the annual bird list. HMBC joins the event again this year and encourages members to participate. Groups will go out at 9:00 am from the Interpretive Building (visitor center), but birders are welcome to come earlier to get a head start. Call ahead to Five Rivers in case of inclement weather.

#### TROY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2010

Saturday, January 2

Coordinator: Larry Alden

**RESERVATIONS DUE FOR  
BIRDING BY SNOWSHOE  
AT FIVE RIVERS**

Wednesday, January 6

**RESERVATIONS DUE FOR  
WINTER RARE BIRD TRIP**

Saturday, January 9

**WINTER RARE BIRD TRIP**

January or February

Coordinator: Bill Lee  
374-3426  
bileej@hotmail.com

If any especially rare bird is reported in our general area, we plan to take a trip to look for it. This is usually a day trip, but sometimes requires an overnight stay. To get on the notification list for alert & trip details, contact the coordinator. In recent years, participants have seen Northern Hawk Owl, Boreal Owl, Eared Grebe & Thick-billed Murre.

**BIRDING BY SNOWSHOE  
AT FIVE RIVERS**

Saturday, January 9 (morning)

*Joint trip with the Audubon Society of the Capital Region*

Coordinator: Craig Thompson  
475-0291 (daytime)

***Reservations due by January 6***

Join Five Rivers Director Craig Thompson for a special outing of birding by snowshoe. Meet at the Visitor Center at 9:00 am for a brief introduction to snowshoeing, then strap on the waffle stompers and go over the meadow and through the woods in search of winter specialties. There is a good chance of seeing Eastern Bluebirds. We will go afoot if there is insufficient snow. We will do a compilation over hot chocolate afterwards. Snowshoes are available at Five Rivers for those who need them. Please call the center by January 6 to register.

**ANNUAL STATE  
WATERFOWL COUNT**

Saturday, January 16 (morning/all day)

Coordinator: Gary Goodness  
862-9680  
goodness@nycap.rr.com

On the local segment of this statewide event, participants will count waterfowl and other birds on the Hudson River between North Troy and Hudson Falls. Meet at 8:30 am in the Hannaford parking lot on the east end of the North Troy-Waterford Bridge (NY Rt. 4).

**FEBRUARY 2010****RESERVATIONS DUE FOR  
CAPE ANN & PLUM ISLAND**

Monday, February 1

**MOHAWK RIVER/  
COHOES TO CRESCENT**

Saturday, February 6 (morning)

Coordinator: Bill Lee  
374-3426  
bileej@hotmail.com

This area, including Cohoes Falls & Simmons Island, offers a great opportunity to study gulls and waterfowl that winter along the Mohawk River. We will look for Glaucous, Iceland & Lesser Black-backed Gulls often present in small numbers in the winter. This trip will be a good introduction to the many fine vantage points along the Mohawk. We will leave at 8:30 am from the U-Haul parking lot on Ontario St. (NY Rt. 470 1/8 mile east of I-787) in Cohoes.

**CAPE ANN & PLUM ISLAND,  
MASSACHUSETTS**

Saturday, February 13 -

Monday, February, 15 (weekend)

Coordinators: Bill Lee  
374-3426  
bileej@hotmail.com

Bernie Grossman  
399-9159  
bgrossman@nycap.rr.com

***Reservations due by February 1***

The revival of our popular winter trip to the Massachusetts coast will focus on the north shore from Nahant, just north of Boston to the New Hampshire coast. Join us in search of alcids, white-winged gulls, Purple Sandpiper, Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, Eiders, Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspur, Short-eared & Snowy Owls and other raptors on this three-day weekend.

**NORTH COUNTRY GRAY  
PARTRIDGE HUNT****(Clinton or Franklin County)**

Saturday, February 20 all day)

Coordinator: Bill Lee  
374-3426  
bileej@hotmail.com

Small numbers of Gray Partridge may be making their last stand in NY State In Chazy near Plattsburgh and just south of Malone. Cape Vincent and Massena populations have apparently been wiped out by a succession of severe winters. With snow cover, the birds may be visible from road edges. Call the coordinator for details.

## **FORT EDWARD & FORT MILLER**

Sunday, February, 28  
(afternoon through dusk)

Coordinator: Gregg Recer  
899-2678  
gregg.recer@verizon.net

Short-eared Owls are seen most winters in the Fort Edward Grasslands, an Important Bird Area in Washington County. Snowy Owls have also been seen here in the last two years. Wintering hawks, including Rough-legged, Red-tailed, Northern Harriers and perhaps a Bald Eagle or Peregrine Falcon are another feature of this area, as are wintering field birds such as Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, and possibly Lapland Longspur or Northern Shrike. Depending on conditions on the river, we may also search for waterfowl along the Hudson in Fort Miller.

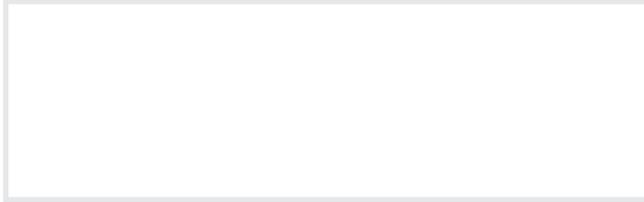
Meet at 12:30 pm in the Park-and-ride lot in the Malta Business Park. Coming From the south on I-87 (the Northway), take Exit 12 and stay to the right, heading east on Rt. 67 toward Rt. 9. (From the north, go  $\frac{3}{4}$  around the traffic circle to head east on Rt. 67) At the next traffic circle after the highway, take the first right into the business park and turn right again to the parking area. This trip will be practically all car birding, but access can be limited in places, so we will need to carpool in as few cars as possible. 

**Feathers**

Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club  
c/o Five Rivers EEC  
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THANK YOU!

Please make check payable to: **Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, Inc.**  
and mail with this form to:  
**HUDSON-MOHAWK BIRD CLUB, INC.**  
Dan Welch, Membership Chair  
c/o TSV  
700 Columbia Turnpike  
East Greenbush, NY 12061

Any number of household  
members may be included in a  
single membership

Student \$ 6.00  
Active (Household) \$ 20.00  
Sustaining \$ 30.00  
Life \$ 250.00 (payable in two annual payments of \$125.00 each)

**Membership Category**

(Please circle one category)

We wish to apply for a membership in the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club Inc., as indicated below:

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Have you borrowed this copy of *Feathers* from someone else? Why not become a member? Or, are you a member who has overlooked your membership renewal?

**Join HMBC/Renew Your Membership**