

AUG. 1982

# TASL News

TAKE A SECOND LOOK IS A  
PROJECT OF BIRD OBSERVER  
OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS



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## FALL

Migrating hawks approach us from the northeast. Two kettles merge. They form a majestic double helix whose apex rises nearly out of sight. The hawks pass by to the east, moving southward into the full light of a high September sun. We must lower our eyes.

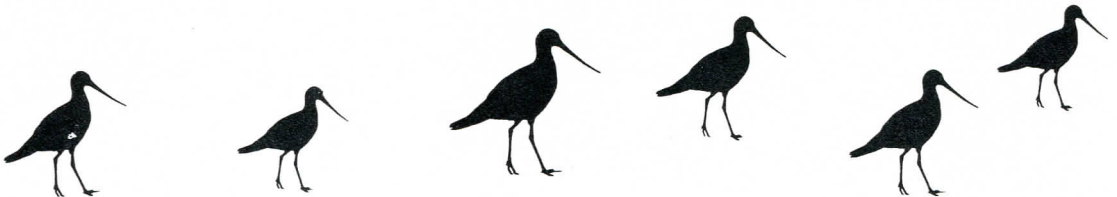
We continue to look eastward from the top of Wachusett. Hawks flow into the base of the helices, circling against the clock as well as with it. I search for an image that will help me remember.

A Maypole. The hawks hold streamers; they are beginning to weave the Maypole. Or perhaps the dance is ending.

An incoming tide mirrors the setting sun at the north end of Monomoy. The water surrounds a sandbar slowly, where godwits are standing. Two phalaropes run in and out among them. They lance at mites between the long legs of the larger birds.

The wind rises. The birds vanish in the brilliance of small waves, then reappear in outline, black as lacquer from the China Trade, among flashes of silver and gold. The wind falls. The water turns to raw white silk, then to a panel from a silk screen, transforming the birds of the shore into the sacred cranes of Japan. Drawn fine.

Fall is a time of lines. We do not perceive them easily in spring, when bright colors and sharp contrasts fill our eyes. But the colors of fall are soft. The lines stand out. We can see that the ducks differ in shape of bill, slope of forehead and length of neck. We can see that the shorebirds differ in shape and size, in elegance of form, in precision of motion - in the response they each make to the demands of wind and water which they must meet the year round.





Fall is a is a time of imagery.

A few summering eider ride the waves close to shore off the southern end of Monomoy. On the beach, a few hundred gulls sit. Above them, at the edge of the beach grass, a large falcon stands darkly on a post. She is still. But we can sense her eyes from far away, and her power that long ago was freed from stone by the sculptors of Horus.

Behind her, the air is dark with swallows for as far as we can see. Beyond count, above the grass and the sand. They fly like page upon page of Arabic calligraphy, the Islamic lace of the Taj Mahal, the vines of the Book of Kells, set to turning on a carousel.

J. H. Barton

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Since 1973 BIRD OBSERVER, a bimonthly magazine, has been publishing records of Eastern Massachusetts bird-sightings. Each issue features an article on where to find birds in this state (and elsewhere). "The August 1982 issue features an article on Hawk Mountain. Other pieces on field problems, ornithological research and bird behavior appear in the magazine.

Annual subscription to BIRD OBSERVER is \$7.50. If you are interested in subscribing, please mail your check to: Bird Observer, Inc., 462 Trapelo Road, Belmont, MA 02178.

## ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT IN PERIL

The Endangered Species Act is in serious trouble in Congress. It is up for renewal this year and a group of conservative and pro-business congressmen intend to kill or cripple it as a favor to their political supporters.

Another proposal is to limit the act to vertebrate animals only and remove protection for plants and invertebrates. According to biologists, this proposal ignores the fact that plants and invertebrates may be just as important as vertebrate species.

A major issue concerns the listing process itself. The anti-ESA forces are looking for ways of preventing new species from being added to the list as they are driven to extinction. One proposal in this regard is to require a determination that the listing of a species would cause no future economic hardships. Biologists supporting the ESA counter that listing should be based upon biological criteria - that is, a species is endangered if it is endangered. Compromises with economic considerations can occur after the species is recognized as endangered.

Finally, there is an attempt to eliminate the concept of critical habitat. It is argued that permissible forms of economic activity that would not harm the species would be easier to carry out if the designation of critical habitat were scrapped. Supporters of ESA feel that without designation of critical habitat, many detrimental activities would be approved before they were properly evaluated.

Opposition to the ESA seems to be more a matter of political ideology and opportunism than serious consideration of the nature of the Act. In over 9,600 consultations with the Fish and Wildlife Service concerning possible endangered species conflicts, only 1.5 percent resulted in an opinion that endangered species would be jeopardized by the economic activity. In virtually all these cases, reasonable and prudent alternatives were found which allowed the proposed activity to proceed.

Barring a major reversal in the political climate, the pro-business faction is likely to succeed in their attack on the ESA. But a coalition of environmental groups is working hard to limit the damage. Their concerns were eloquently expressed in Senate testimony by Dr. E. O. Wilson of Harvard University:

The worst thing that can happen - will happen - is not energy depletion, economic collapse, limited nuclear war, or conquest by a totalitarian government. As terrible as these catastrophes would be for us, they can be repaired within a few generations. The one process ongoing in the 1980's that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us.

Additional information on the ESA reauthorization struggle can be obtained from Ken Berlin, Chairman, Endangered Species Act Reauthorization Coordinating Committee, P.O. Box 50771, Washington, D.C. 20004. The Coordinating Committee urges those supporting the ESA to write their representatives now since only a show of public support can keep the ESA intact.

Have you ever sat and watched shorebirds and gulls feeding? Have you wondered -- "What is it they're eating, and how can there be so many things to eat on the beach?"

I will be leading a Brookline Bird Club (BBC) trip August 21, which although not an official TASL walk, will ponder these and other similar questions. We will spend approximately six hours at Point of Pines, Revere, observing half of a tidal cycle. Our focus will be on the food that a mud flat such as Point of Pines provides for shorebirds and gulls and the inter-relationships between tide, predators and prey.

Our probable starting time will be 5 A.M. so we can finish the trip before it gets too hot. If you would like further information or would like to participate, give me a call (Craig Jackson -- 321-4382 -- evenings until 10:30 P.M.).



If you happen to be hiking in the mountains or woods, you might be interested in the following observations:

Recently while I was hiking in the Taconic Mountains, a Ruffed Grouse flushed from my right across the path and off into the woods to my left. I naturally followed the flight of the bird until it disappeared and then returning my attention to the trail I moved toward the area from which the Ruffed Grouse had flown. Immediately one and then two more young Ruffed Grouse sprang into the air. Thinking that there might be more young in the area and focusing my attention again toward the right side of the path, I peered more closely into the bushes. Within a minute ten more young birds flushed from almost the same location from which the original bird had flown.

What I only realized then was that the first bird and only the first had flushed across the path. (Every other Ruffed Grouse I can recall has flushed away from me.) Clearly, the first bird, an adult had flushed across my path to draw my attention away from its young.

So, if you're ever hiking in the woods and a Ruffed Grouse flies across your path, TAKE A SECOND LOOK! There may be a covey of young birds almost at your feet!

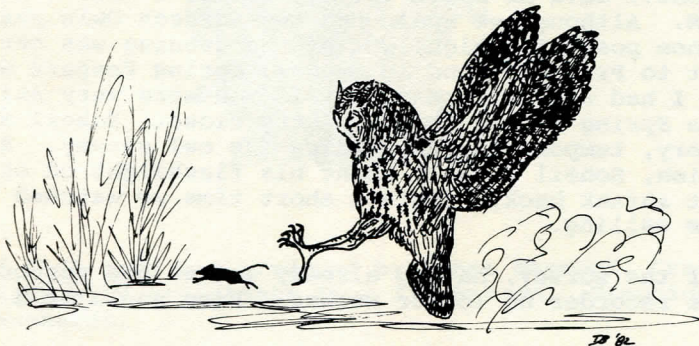
Ed. note: The following is an account of one person's participation in the Screech Owl Survey announced in the last issue of TASL News. Apparently many of you forgot about the survey since there was minimal participation, and we know a 2:00 A.M. starting time would not deter a true TASLer!

As the first days of the Screech Owl survey approached, I expectantly pored over my topographic and road maps, planning the routes I would take, where my stops would be, etc. Although I had often owled in the Saugus area for Christmas and breeding bird counts, I had always played it safe. I had gone to the same areas in Breakheart Reservation and probably called out the same owls every year! This survey was going to be different, however. The purpose was to find new owls, and to estimate how many Screech Owls there might actually be in a semi-urban environment.

Unfortunately, strong northwest winds and a storm front canceled the first evening of the survey. I therefore made plans with my friend Soheil to go out the following night, despite the fact that I might have to leave a party early and certainly would not be able to get any sleep beforehand. The weather was again horrendous - very strong northwest winds but this time no rain. With some regret I left the party at 12:30 A.M., since I knew that our survey results would likely be nil due to the weather. But negative data is more important than no data at all. At least that's what every survey coordinator tells those naive enough to believe them. Anyway there was no way that I could call Soheil to cancel at that hour.

Of course, soon after I got home Soheil called and said he wasn't going to do it, and once more I was faced with the decision of whether to do it alone in that sort of weather. Again I decided against it; after all, negative data gathering can be fun with a friend but by oneself it can become a real drag.

The next day I called Ollie, one of the survey coordinators, to suggest that the survey be extended another week since the first two weekend nights of the Screech Owl Survey (out of a total of four) had been so horrendous and people could not do the survey on weekday nights. He was quite adamant that the survey should not be extended and insisted that people could do it on weekday nights. In fact, he was planning on doing it that night even though he had to go to school the next day - so what was my problem? Having been thus shamed, I also made plans to begin my survey that night.



As I understood the survey directions, every 0.4 mile I was to stop the car, get out, play a tape recording or give a vocal imitation of a Screech Owl call for two minutes and move on another 0.4 mile if there was no response. If there was a response, I was to note if possible the color phase of the owl and any interesting behavior. Since my plan was to follow Main Street through Malden and Melrose and into Wakefield, I obviously did not expect a large number of responses. I did have hopes, however, that the beginning of my run at Pine Banks and the end at the Vocational School entrance to Breakheart Reservation would produce some owls.

At 2:25 A.M. I made my first stop at Pine Banks Park, one of the two places on that night's route where I reasonably expected to get a response. However, my efforts to entice a Screech Owl proved futile despite playing the tape recorder longer than the prescribed two minutes. Oh well, it was going to be a long night!

Having driven 0.4 mile up the road, I found out that my next stop was in front of a bank in Melrose Center. Not expecting a response because it was dark, I left my binoculars in the car. (Besides, binoculars might look suspicious in front of a bank!) I proceeded to play my tape recorder with, of course, no response. Now I understood a very practical reason for the "two-minute rule." By the time the police could respond to a call about a suspicious character making strange noises in the bank parking lot, I would be another 0.4 mile down the road!

Several shopping center parking lots later, I stopped near Crystal Lake in Wakefield, an area with woods that I thought might be productive. Again no response. My next stop, at Round Park on Main Street, did not seem very promising. After all, Round Park was probably 0.1 the size of Pine Banks! Nevertheless, to my pleasant surprise, from trees right above me a Screech Owl answered. One hour after I had started I had my first response, a Screech Owl calling from a tree that was probably no more than 50 feet from Main Street! A subsequent response in Breakheart was, of course, anticlimactic.

I found out the next day that the 0.4 mile limit was a minimum not a maximum. I was not supposed to have any sites less than 0.4 mile from each other, but distances could be greater. More importantly, I was supposed to stop at places that conceivably could have owls; not in front of banks in the center of town! However, I doubt if I would have stopped at Round Park either, and thus would have missed my most exciting moment that night.

The next night Soheil said he would go, but not at 2 A.M. - he insisted on starting at 8 P.M. Although we again had two Screech Owls respond, one from a nearby fence post, the highlight of the evening was entirely different. When we got to Prankers Pond in Saugus, Spring Peepers were making quite a racket. I had recently read that if you were very still, you could actually locate a Spring Peeper that was very close. Soheil and I decided to test this theory, temporarily suspending the owl survey. After a great deal of frustration, Soheil finally shone his flashlight on one. Although the frog at first shrank back, within a short time we watched it expand its throat and resume calling.

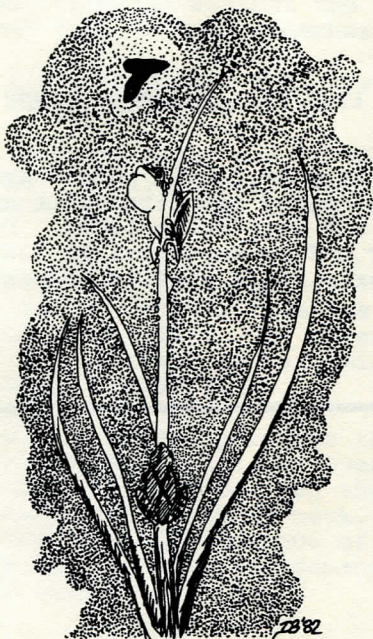
The last night of the survey, having already gotten one response, I discovered that my tape recorder no longer worked. Here would be a true test of

my own Screech Owl imitation. I had enticed Brown Creepers with it on occasion, and I had even been able to carry on extended "conversations" with Screech Owls after I had first called them in with a tape recorder. But I had never before gotten a response on my own. Thus, when an owl responded to my imitation later that night, I was really gratified even if I did call longer than the prescribed two minutes.

Not bad - six owls in three nights (four of which I neither knew about nor suspected their presence); a singing Spring Peeper seen!; and the realization that in a pinch I could actually call out a Screech Owl without a tape recorder. Sign me up for next year's survey - hope you'll join in the fun.

Ed. note: A full account of the survey results will be published in the October issue of Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts.

Craig Jackson



This issue of TASL News was produced by Janet Heywood, Craig Jackson, and Barbara Phillips with assistance from Jim Barton. Graphics were contributed by Denise Braunhardt.

## BIRD OBSERVER PELAGIC TRIP

Bird Observer will sponsor a pelagic trip this summer. The trip will be aboard the Captain John and Son, and is scheduled for Saturday, August 28, from Plymouth leaving at 4:30 A.M. and returning about 6:00 P.M. Our destination will be the Cox's Ledge area of Nantucket Shoals. This will be a unique opportunity to observe seabirds in the productive waters southwest of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. In late summer, water temperatures are considerably warmer here than north of Cape Cod, thus attracting certain pelagic species which require these conditions. Audubon's Shearwater and South Polar Skua are possibilities in addition to most of the more regularly observed species with the remote chance of an albatross. There is a greater chance to observe a good variety of fish and marine mammals than on more traditional Stellwagen Bank trips. Wayne Petersen will provide narration and information while at sea. If you have any questions about this trip, contact Wayne at 22 Hutchinson Terrace, Whitman, MA 02382. The price of this trip is \$30 for subscribers and \$35 for others.

Reservations for this trip can be made by sending your check payable to Herman D'Entremont, 358 Tappan Street, Brookline, MA 02146.

### COMING UP: 1982 FALL SPARROW SURVEY

Everybody is encouraged to participate in the second annual "improved" sparrow census. It will happen around the first week of October. It will be fun, exciting, challenging, and very educational. For information, please call Nick or Ollie Komar before September 20 (332-5509). This is another project of Bird Observer's Field Studies Committee.

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