

Gloucester County Nature Club

Monthly Newsletter

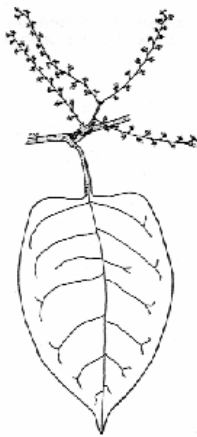
www.gcnatureclub.org

Nature Club meetings are open to the public
October 2004

Program– Invasive Plants

Thurs, October 14th at 7:00 PM at EIRC, Sewell

Program Coordinator- Bob Cassel 478-2496



If you are up on your current events you must have heard about invasive plant species such as Japanese Knotweed (left). Diane Suiter, a Master Gardener and volunteer educator at Tyler Arboretum, will educate us on the problems associated with some of the many invasive species and also on which ones that we should be most concerned about here in New Jersey. Diane is also a Master Gardener and a member of the Mickleton Garden Club. She is currently in the process of converting her own gardens from invasive species hangouts to havens for native species, and is gradually moving away from annuals and concentrating on perennials. Are you providing critical habitat for a shrinking native flora or are you adding to our local plant woes? Come to the October meeting to find out.

Field Trip – Bike/Hike on the Perkiomen River Trail, PA

Saturday October 16th, 9 AM to 1 PM

Trip Leader: Kris Mollenhauer

Co-leader: Paula Hayes

Join us on a Saturday morning on the Perkiomen Trail. Meet at the parking area in Lower Perkiomen Valley Park in Oaks, PA. There are rest rooms and picnic tables at the park. The trail follows along the scenic Perkiomen Creek. We will have a group of bikers and a group of hikers. We will meet back in the park for lunch. The trail has provided an opportunity to preserve much of the old Reading Railroad right-of-way. It passes through a rich and varied landscape, including town centers, suburban landscape and rural, remote areas. There should be some spectacular Fall colors along this riparian corridor. Pack a lunch and beverage. Bring binoculars for birding.



Directions: Take I-76 West in PA towards Valley Forge. At King of Prussia (last exit before PA Turnpike), exit onto Rt 202 South for about ½ mile to the exit to Rt 422 West. Take 422 West for about 6½ miles to the Oaks Exit. (You will see the grassy fields of the park on your right before the exit.) At the end of the exit ramp turn right. Turn right again into the parking area. Travel time from Sewell is about 50 minutes.

Reminder - Membership Dues

The Gloucester County Nature Club's memberships run from September to September. If you haven't renewed your membership, do so as soon as possible. This year we needed to raise dues for most members in order to accommodate rising costs of printing and publishing the newsletter. Please remember that your dues are the only costs associated with being a club member, we do not charge for any of our programs or field trips. Many organizations charge their members for each walk or activity they attend. We believe that the club is still an excellent value and hope the added cost will not deter any of our members. It is much cheaper for us to send the newsletter electronically to our members, and as a result those members who choose to receive the newsletter electronically will receive a discount on their membership. The new dues are \$15 for electronic mailings and \$20 for regular mail delivery. Please fill out the membership form at the end of this newsletter and bring it along with your dues to the October Meeting, or send your completed form and a check payable to "Gloucester County Nature Club" to: Karen Kravchuck, 25 Barlow Avenue, Mantua, NJ 08080.

Looking Ahead:

Programs-

November 11th – Combined meeting w/ Gloucester County Federation of Watersheds

Field Trips-

November 6th – Avalon Sea Watch and Cape May Hawk Watch with Jeff Holt

Club Notes:

- The October Executive Committee meeting will be October 10th at Deb Maka's house.
- If you'd like to receive the newsletter electronically or receive more info about the club please email Brian or Paula Hayes at pnbhayes@comcast.net or call 468-9272.
- The Nature Club is always looking for ideas for future programs and field trips. Please contact the program coordinator (Bob Cassel) or trip coordinator (Kris Mollenhauer) if you have ideas or would like to help.
- Information for the next newsletter should be sent to Barry Bengel at sharkeyes@comcast.net or 6 Greenwood Drive, Sewell, NJ 08080 by the 15th of the preceding month.

The Red-footed Falcon on Martha's Vineyard stirred up a lot of interest in North American birding circles. And believe it or not, our own Gloucester County Nature Club had a reporter ON THE SCENE!

A Trip to Martha's Place

By Jeff Holt

Many great ideas (and some not so great) got their genesis in a bar. For instance, the patriots of the American Revolution first gathered in the taverns of the colonies to formulate the plan that would lead to the demise of Great Britain's domination on this continent. Thus, on the evening of Wednesday, August 11, 2004, in the Colonial Café, did a plan, fueled by quantities of a hops based beverage, spring forth.

On Sunday, August 8, 2004, Vern Laux, a birder living on the island of Martha's Vineyard, while investigating the open fields of the Edgartown Katama airfield spied what he first thought to be a Mississippi Kite. But something about the way the bird was perched bothered Laux. On Tuesday the 11th, Laux e-mailed a photo of the bird to Harvard ornithologist Jeremiah Trimble. Immediately, phone calls were being made, e-mails exchanged and plans changed. What Laux had found was a Red-footed Falcon. A bird that breeds in Eastern Europe and winters in Africa, had inexplicably made its way to the Western Hemisphere for the first time....and therefore, the North American birding community wasn't about to allow the wealthy denizens of Martha's Vineyard to enjoy the remaining dog days of summer in peace.

Wednesday morning, upon arriving in my office, I fired up the computer and began my daily ritual...checking e-mail (deciding I didn't need a new mortgage, Viagra, or pictures of lonely housewives), looking at the climbing websites (only 2 ½ month's 'till ice season starts), checking my 401K balance (lost some more money, can now retire for only 15 days) and then moving to the birding sites, where, Paul Guris had been thoughtful enough to post information alerting Delaware Valley birders of the Falcon. While I did not immediately drop everything and race out the door, a nagging feeling began in my gut. Since I hadn't eaten, I was pretty sure it wasn't indigestion. Throughout the day, more & more reports on the Falcon were being posted. By the time I left at 4:30 to play tennis, I knew that this was a "twitch" that had to be seriously considered.

By 8:00, with tennis over, the staff of Camp Henderson was ensconced in the Colonial, replenishing vital fluids. By 8:30, Barb, my wife, had arrived. Casually, I mentioned to Scott Henderson, did you see that Colin (an old-world ex-pat, whose immigration status in this country is questionable, but otherwise a fine person, particularly since he's willing to tolerate our presence) was leaving that night for Mass. After a thoughtful pause (read: short period of silence due to slow firing synapses) Scott replied "We should go up"! At this point, a discussion ensued with the non-birding members of the staff (as well as various other patrons) where we had to explain the significance of this bird. Being helpful, the non-birding members of the staff suggested we "go for it". (Of course, it's standing staff policy to encourage any act of stupidity by another staff member if there is even the remotest opportunity to laugh at or ridicule the hapless actor.) Being now properly re-hydrated, I suggested that we leave immediately, pausing only long enough to grab our binoculars and change out of our ripe tennis clothes. In an inexplicable display of common sense and reliability, Scott quashed my suggestion, offering

instead to leave Thursday afternoon, giving him the opportunity to go to work & finish a project he had uncharacteristically elected not to complete earlier that day.

Thus, on Thursday morning, as I left for work, I mentioned to Barb that I still wanted to chase the bird. Perhaps slightly surprised, having been witness to many plans later aborted in the light (and sobriety) of day, she nevertheless gave her blessing. Upon arrival at work, the birding websites were a twitter. Luminaries such as David Sibley had seen the bird the day before. The bird was still present as of 9:15 that morning. Vineyard locals were providing detailed information on how to reach the island and use public transportation to get to the airport. The media had picked up on the story with even the venerable NY Times running a front page story. A short exchange of e-mails, and it was decided, Scott would meet me at my house at 1:00 and we'd be off.

After filling the car in Woodbury, NJ with the essential equipment (binoculars, scopes & beer), the chase began. The drive north went as well as could be expected: taking the wrong exit for the NJ Turnpike off of I-295 (give me a break, I've only made the drive from I-295 to the Turnpike about 600 times in the last 24 years); traffic at the Ft. Lee exit off of I-80 (where I redeemed myself, getting us on the Palisades Parkway on instinct and memory from having worked in Ft. Lee in the 70's); 2+ plus hours to go 50 miles from the Tappan Zee bridge to New Haven (If I EVER say I want to live in Conn., shoot me immediately as dementia will have absolutely set in); ultimately rolling into beautiful downtown Falmouth (Cape Cod) around 8:30.

First order of business in Falmouth: try and find a place to stay the night. On this issue I had concerns, being as it was the height of the tourist season. However, as we approached the edge of town, what should appear but a motel, replete with 50's décor and a vacancy sign illuminated. Finding the rate "reasonable", we checked in and consumed the consumable essential equipment. Next order of business, dinner. Deciding that shorts and sweaty T-shirts aren't a good mix in restaurants that serve haut cuisine, we elected to partake of the fare at Liam Maguires Irish Pub. Noting on tap Buzzard Bay Lager, when the young lass who served as our waitress asked if would like something to drink, I was quick to suggest that we would like a wee taste of that local brew. Arrived then did two 28 oz. mugs! While listening to Liam himself sing Irish ballads, we consumed our beer, ate our bangers and mash, and otherwise behaved in a (reasonably) civilized manner before returning to our evenings abode.

Here is where the narrator is supposed to say the next day dawned sunny & bright. Instead, in the interest of truth (if not justice and the American way) we awoke shortly after 5:00 to a monsoon. Doom for our trip was hanging over our heads like the fog that engulfed Vineyard Sound. But we'd paid our money, so we had to take our shot. A quick stop for coffee, a quicker spill of half onto my shirt and we arrived at the parking lot in plenty of time to catch the first shuttle bus from Falmouth to Woods Hole and the ferry to Martha's Vineyard. By the time we boarded the 7:00 ferry for the island, the rain had stopped, but heavy fog and clouds did not bode well. The ride to the island took about a half-hour where we bonded with others bound on the same sainted quest. Sainted our quest was, for truly did the weather Gods, recognizing the grail we so earnestly sought, did bless and smile upon us. As we disembarked, the fog lifted and the clouds began to break up and the day turned glorious with sun, low humidity and reasonable temperatures.

We'd been warned that taxis on the Vineyard were expensive and that the local bus service was the economical way to travel. Yet upon stepping off the ferry we met with Bob of Able Taxi who

implored us to use his service, as he knew exactly where the bird was. Since Bob was driving a 10-passenger van, some quick negotiations ensued. It was agreed that if we fill the van, he'll charge each person \$5.00. Bodies were easily recruited and we were off. True to his word, Bob took us right to the airport where we immediately noticed a phalanx of scopes trained on grayish object sitting atop a runway sign.

At the risk of paraphrasing Quint in **Jaws** (but apropos, given where we were), that was the time I was most scared...jogging down the road to the other birders, trying to set up my scope and get on the bird, all the time thinking that this bird will fly before I can look at him. My momentary bout of terror was ultimately unfounded as our bird would sit cooperatively preening the entire 2 plus hours we watched him.

During our time at the airport, it was interesting to step back and take in the scene. My best guess, during the period we watched the bird, approximately 250 people came by. The majority were hardcore birders. But interestingly, was a significant mix of non-birders, locals and vacationers, young and old, who had read about the phenomena and wanted to see first hand, what the fuss was about. They would hang behind the line of scopes until someone offered them a glimpse. Without exception, each and everyone appeared awed by the Falcon and the spectacle he had caused. In fact, during the entire period we were on the Vineyard and the Cape, total strangers would walk up and noting our binoculars, ask the same question, "Have you seen the bird?" The non-birders we encountered seemed genuinely interested on how the Falcon came to be on the island, when will he leave and where will he go. It may be an overstatement, but this unexpected visitor may do more to increase local public awareness of the natural environment, then 100 shows on the Animal Planet television station. (I was going to say Rachael Carson, but people don't read anymore.)

By late morning, we decided it was time to head home. After another taxi ride from the airport to the ferry terminal & a ferry ride back to the mainland, we were able to start our drive home at noon. Some more traffic jams (Is sitting in traffic the Connecticut state sport?), a minor problem with the car, and a short detour, we rolled into Woodbury at 8:00. 31 hours, 770 miles driven, 20 miles by ferry and 16 miles by taxi resulted in ceremonial shots of Yukon Jack being consumed and Red-Footed Falcon was officially ticked on our respective life lists.

I've purposely elected not to offer a description of the Falcon, as others far better versed than me have already written extensively about the bird. Furthermore, plenty of photographs have been published of the bird, and so, I'll leave it to you to decide if the twitch was worth it. Suffice it to say, that both the adventure and the goal lived up to my expectations.

WAIVER

Gloucester County Nature Club and/or its leaders, officers, members or representatives shall not be liable for any injuries, loss or damage to person and/or property, direct or consequential, arising out of any trips and/or activities of the Gloucester County Nature Club. The assumption of risk, which is inherent in this type of outdoor activity, is implied on the part of each person who attends any Gloucester County Nature Club trip, and every person participating in any of said trips and/or activities assumes all risk and liability in connection therewith.

Everyone participating in any activity of the Gloucester County Nature Club will be required to read the release of liability, protecting the Gloucester County Nature Club and/or its leaders, officers, members and representatives from liability.

Gloucester County Nature Club and/or its leaders, officers, members and representatives are not in any way responsible for the personal safety of the attendees. When walking along a road, keep to the left, facing oncoming traffic and walk in a single file. When walking along trails, do not follow too closely or move too fast for your safety and for the safety of others (avoid collisions and/or whipped branches). FOLLOW THE LEADER: If you forge ahead, you may find yourself alone. Responsible adults must accompany children under the age of 16. If you expect to drop out of the group early, please inform the leader. Report to one or more of the hikers if you discontinue on route.

<u>MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2004-2005</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper Membership(\$20) - regular mail	
<input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Membership(\$15) - newsletter via email; ***please provide email address below	
Name: _____	
Street: _____	
City/State/ZIP: _____	
Phone: _____ ***Email Address: _____	
Please note any special knowledge you would be willing to share: _____ _____	
Would you be willing to serve on a committee? If so, which committee(s): _____ _____	
Are there other ways you could participate? If so, how? _____	

Would you like to give a gift membership? If so, indicate Individual ____ or Family ____	
Name: _____	
Street: _____	
City/State/ZIP: _____	
Phone: _____	
A note will be sent informing them of your gift membership in the GCNC, thank you.	

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE WAIVER	
Signature: _____	Date: _____