

Extract from the book, *Flight Calls: Exploring Massachusetts through Birds* by John Nelson (University of Massachusetts Press).

Chapter 12: For Birds and People: The Brookline Bird Club

In June 1913 thirty bird-lovers gathered at the Brookline Public Library to found the Brookline Bird Club in order to “study, observe, and protect native song birds and to encourage their propagation.” A front-page *Brookline Chronicle* story reported that the club was formed “to study the ‘little brothers of the air,’ arouse a sentiment for their preservation, arrange free lectures for the people, and plan other ways of education in bird life.” The BBC wrote a constitution and set annual dues at fifty cents, twenty-five cents for “juniors”--boys and girls under fourteen but “old enough to go alone on street cars.” A highlight of club field trips that fall was a Hooded Warbler in breeding plumage at the Boston Public Garden. A 1913 *Boston Globe* photo showed a BBC group at Chestnut Hill: men in suits and ties, women in plume-less hats and bulky ankle-length dresses, and one junior birder with a tam o’ shanter in the front row.

Its tradition of nature study made Massachusetts fertile habitat for one of the country’s first bird clubs. In 1818 the state had passed the nation’s first law protecting some songbirds (“non-game” birds) from shooting. Roger Tory Peterson considered Massachusetts the cradle of American ornithology, for in 1873 the Nuttall Ornithological Club had been founded in Cambridge, and from Nuttall emerged the American Ornithologists’ Union. The Massachusetts Audubon Society was established in 1896 to fight against the plume trade. The *Brookline Chronicle*, with a little hometown bias,

boasted in 1916 that Brookline was “probably the center of bird interest in the United States.” The town had its own bird warden, outlawed the use of firearms or traps to kill or catch birds, and by 1915 it was supporting 150 bird-feeding stations. After winter storms American Crows would trail the grain-distributing sleigh from stop to stop.

One might envision the club’s progenitors as whiskered good old Yankee boys, but in fact the Founding Fathers were mostly Founding Mothers. The prime mover was a woman, Mary Moore Kaan, as was the first trip leader, Edith Andrews, and eight of the first eleven directors. Recreational birding opens a window into a period when American women, at least those with leisure time, were determined to get out into the world and become more active physically as well as intellectually and politically. They rode bicycles, went camping, danced more freely, and began to wear less restrictive clothing. Better, more affordable “opera glasses” brought more women into birding. Florence Merriam Bailey joined other Smith College girls on “bird rambles” and went on to write *A-Birding on a Bronco* and *Birds through an Opera Glass*. Field guide author Frank Chapman felt “astonishment, joy, and chagrin” when his bride Fannie mastered the art of bird-skinning on their Florida honeymoon. In 1902 teacher Nell Harrison wrote indignantly about women’s exclusion from scientific egg collecting: “Men can go freely into the fields and follow the birds everywhere, while fashion and conventionality debar women from the same privilege.” Professional ornithology remained a predominantly male domain, and some ornithological clubs barred women into the 1970s, but in 1901 Bailey, Mabel Osgood Wright, and Olive Thorne Miller became the first women elected

to the American Ornithologists' Union, and two decades later Grace Snow became the BBC's ornithologist.

Women were already a force in bird conservation. Two Boston women, Harriet Hemenway and Minna Hall, had led the Audubon campaign against the plume trade-- what Chris Leahy calls "the first successful wildlife protection movement." At tea parties they'd shame their high-society friends for gratifying their vanity at the expense of beautiful birds. Hall wrote a letter scolding first lady Mrs. Taft for wearing a plumed hat at the 1909 presidential inauguration. Poet Celia Thaxter chastised any woman who'd wear "a charnel house of beaks and claws and bones upon her fatuous head."

With the women came the children. Members of modern birding clubs often bemoan the lack of young birders in our midst, but by 1920 juniors represented almost 30% of club membership. BBC founders, the *Brookline Chronicle* reported in 1926, believed they had a "sacred obligation" to cultivate young birders. Members were urged to bring juniors on field trips, and women were especially intent on converting children into birders, for they felt that even boys who shot or stoned birds "could be made over into conservationists." Many women had joined men to set up Junior Audubon clubs, and birding books by women were often aimed at children, whose creativity and self-reliance could be nurtured through engagement with nature. This focus on children reflected the turn-of-the-century "back to nature" movement, spurred by a widespread concern that city children, and urban residents generally, had become estranged from outdoor life. Many children had never spent a night outside a city and couldn't identify even the most common birds or trees. Harvard president Charles Eliot wrote in 1914 that without the

consolation of natural scenery, “the evils which attend the growth of modern cities and the factory system are too great for the human body to endure.” Projects like Fresh Air Charity were established to help children whose parents couldn’t afford to leave the city on vacations or send children to summer camps. Eliot told a Girls’ Camp Association that the “organized summer camp” was “the most important step in education that America has given the world.”

The BBC Junior Department, with its own bulletin, was led by Horace Taylor. The *Chronicle* noted in 1926 that Taylor took “especial charge of these young people, leading them on instructive bird walks and continually counseling them in the best methods of bird study and bird protection.” He offered bike-birding trips in Cambridge and Boston, lessons in drawing birds and conducting censuses, field contests in bird identification, and visits to the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology and the new aviary at the Franklin Park Zoo. The BBC nurtured many eventual leaders of American ornithology and conservation. Maurice Broun, the first warden at Hawk Mountain sanctuary in Pennsylvania, began birding at age thirteen in the Boston Public Garden when he came across a friendly BBC group who showed him a Magnolia Warbler. Richard Pough, a founder of the Nature Conservancy, led BBC trips as a biology student at MIT. Roger Tory Peterson joined the club in the early 1930s when he taught science at the Rivers Country Day School in Brookline, shortly before he published his first field guide. Chandler Robbins, who joined at age twelve and remained a member until his death eighty-seven years later in 2017, went on to organize the North American Breeding Bird Survey and pioneer the study of how forest fragmentation displaces birds.

The BBC welcomed all comers on field trips to “know birds and enjoy them,” but BBC leaders considered bird conservation the club’s ultimate purpose. What state ornithologist Edward Howe Forbush called the Epoch of Popular Bird-Study went hand in hand with a gospel of bird protection. Edward Baker, the first president, spelled out the club’s goals as stimulation of interest in bird life but also protection of local wild birds and the establishment of a bird sanctuary. In 1913 the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the BBC followed “all legislation that would affect the welfare and culture of birds.” Its lobbying to stop the importation of feathers pitted “friends of birds” against the French Syndicate of Feather Workers.

Birds were threatened from all sides. Hundreds of thousands were killed for their feathers, used in plumed hats that were still being worn by would-be-fashionable women from art patron Isabella Stewart Gardner to factory workers like the Lowell girls. Market-hunting was at its peak. Boston’s Locke-Ober restaurant served Upland Sandpipers and now extinct Eskimo Curlews, while one Boston Harbor restaurateur boasted he could instantly produce any edible North American bird. Brochures from “naturalists’ supply” stores listed the going prices for eggs stolen from nests. At one BBC meeting, attended by two hundred people, Forbush made a case for preserving birds that eat harmful insects, though some members resented the need to prove birds’ cost-effectiveness. Winston Packard and Ernest Baynes were quoted in the *Chronicle*: “All but particularly thoughtless or particularly stupid people must be interested in birds entirely apart from their economic value, and to many they are the source of the greatest joy.”

BBC bulletins reported the club's conservation activities. The club lobbied successfully for a law to stop the shooting of Bobolinks, worked to protect coastal tern colonies, and, as members of the Federation of New England Bird Clubs, allied with Mass Audubon and the Essex County Ornithological Club to stop development on Plum Island and procure land on the island for a wildlife sanctuary. The BBC, one bulletin reported, had joined the campaign to "stop the iniquitous practice of abandoning housecats, THE GREATEST ENEMY OF BIRDS," while members became combatants in the Great Sparrow War, in which defenders and attackers of House Sparrows vilified one another--and even the sparrows themselves--as liars, traitors, and murderers. At a 1913 meeting, the *Chronicle* reported, Taylor insisted on the "imperative need of getting rid of the dirty, noisy English Sparrows." The stunned reporter noted that the sparrows "had not a friend in the company to stand up for them."

BBC membership rose quickly--to 558 by 1928—and soon spread far beyond Brookline. In December 1913 the club offered its first trip to Lynn and Nahant beaches, traveling by boat from Rowe's Wharf in Boston and then by narrow gauge railroad. The first Cape Ann trip, via a Boston-Gloucester freight boat, was in early 1916. The volunteer trip leaders weren't experts, but in a period of intense controversy over the reliability of sight records (as opposed to specimens collected), they were encouraged to be careful in bird identification and maintain exact counts of species seen, even House Sparrows. Some "walks" were long, demanding hikes, like the round-trip trek, sometimes on snowshoes, from the Ipswich railroad station along the Crane dunes to Essex Bay. A March 1916 trip report illustrated the hardiness or madness of birders: "We tramped

through the fields of snow, over the hills and around the swamps, with the wind blowing the snow in our faces . . . most enjoyable.” Club members went out again the next day and were delighted to find a Northern Shrike nabbing and eating a House Sparrow.

Fellow humans also presented challenges. A 1916 group at Jamaica Pond had to contend with children frolicking in the parkway along with “barking dogs, nursegirls pushing squeaky baby carriages, equestrians, motorists, ball-players, picnickers, and what-not.” In 1919 a BBC member named Nuthatch wrote a fanciful trip report about a group of hunters, the Jungle Klub, riding borrowed circus pachyderms, that headed to the Lynn marshes to shoot Jungle Kreature, only to be frightened off by weird, opera-glass-wearing bipeds who muttered incomprehensible things like “whatawonderfuljunco.”

Long before birdsong apps and fancy slide show presentations, early club lectures included bird mimicry by noted “whistlers” Arthur Wilson and Charles Gorst, who produced “operatic airs with Victrola accompaniment.” Club director and “dramatic soprano” Edith Torrey sang Shakespeare’s “Hark! Hark! the Lark.” Lecture topics ranged from the focused “Hunting without a Gun” to the less focused “Random Observations on Birds.” Bird conservation and field identification were regular lecture topics. In 1914 Forbush used a “stereopticon” for illustration (it malfunctioned); in 1918, “lantern slides.” By the late 1930s “Kodachrome pictures” provided the graphics.

A 1925 bulletin proclaimed that the club was flourishing, with large attendance on field trips. That year the BBC offered three-day excursions to Cape Ann and to New Salem in central Massachusetts, where a group found nesting Olive-sided Flycatchers. The first all-automobile trip, to Artichoke Reservoir in West Newbury, didn’t occur until

1930, but as early as 1918 some members had driven to Ipswich for the dunes walk. Members also went birding internationally. In the 1920s president Raymond Talbot led nature tours to Europe, a mix of birding, hiking, and sightseeing. The seventy-day 1926 tour steamed out of Montreal on the Cunard line's *S. S. Ascania* and crisscrossed northern Europe by rail and motorcar, at a cost of \$980 per person.

Closer to home, 1926 bird highlights included scarce Red-headed Woodpeckers nesting near the Brookline library, a rare Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker in Wellesley, nine Snowy Owls in three locations on one November day, and a Northern Goshawk biting off a rooster's head in a Wellesley barnyard. A 1928 *Christian Leader* article, "An All-Day Trip in Agawam," gives us a feel for a typical BBC outing of the period, to Ipswich (once named Agawam) in May. To join the group the author, one Johannes from Brookline, has to overcome "trip resistance"--the "natural human dislike of spending a few hours on company tension with strangers." Tension is eased by the friendly leader, an unnamed Waltham librarian who "put himself out" to help beginners see birds. Johannes divides participants into birding types: the convivial, talky ones; the skeptics, needing rigorous proof for each identification; the "go-alongs" who take the leader's word for any identification; and the diehards rushing headlong into bramble thickets. He notes that the group's "traditional New England reserve" is instantly dropped when they come upon a Yellow-breasted Chat. Some participants stop to play with children or dogs. Others, presumably not the diehards, stray off in search of ice cream. At day's end, while waiting for a boat on Plum Island, they get a close look at a Piping Plover. Johannes closes with the hope that sportsmen and naturalists will join hands to save this struggling species.

In a 50th anniversary address in 1963, Larry Jodrey conjured up visions of BBC trips long before his own days as a birder. Members would travel by train from Brookline to far-flung locations like Newburyport. After long days in the field, they'd eat clam chowder and warm themselves around fireplaces in boarding houses. Birding was challenging, with cruder optics and few reference books. Casual clothing was hard to come by, much less modern designed-for-birders outfits with big pockets and detachable leggings. Members wore old business clothes, the women "crowned by hats not always currently in style" but without ear-rings, ornaments considered in poor taste on birding walks. "Jewelry and finery," Jodrey said, "were reserved for the indoor meetings to which members customarily wore their dressiest outfits, rendering themselves sometimes unrecognizable to friends who were accustomed to seeing each other in birding garb."

BBC members also came to know the bitter-sweetness Jodrey expressed, "a touch of sadness in recalling pleasant trips to many once delightful places which are now, on account of their development as residential and commercial areas, no longer birding territory." In 1928 the *Brookline Chronicle* reported, "The march of civilization has ruined many of the locations which were once favorite haunts of the birds." Puttenham Meadows, a sanctuary in Brookline established in 1926, became a "huge disappointment" and was converted to a municipal golf course. Club trips to the Belmont Hills stopped in 1934. In 1930 members were among the last people to see the sole remaining Heath Hen on Martha's Vineyard, the "last specimen of its kind," one participant reminisced, and a bird seen with "great satisfaction." The BBC was also losing its founders. When she died

in 1931, Mary Moore Kaan was eulogized in a bulletin as a pioneer who'd "instigated" the club "for the sake of the birds themselves" and "for the sake of the people."

From its beginnings the club reflected our country's political and social history. Soon after the United States entered World War I, the BBC called for a boycott of "war wings," feathers sold to women by the Naval Reserve in the name of national service. Congress finally passed the ground-breaking Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918 not for simple bird conservation but partly to protect crops and ensure food to sustain the war effort. For many members the impact of war was personal. In 1918 the *Chronicle* published a letter from Army private E. Saxe, who thanked the BBC for trip reports in the newspaper and asked for identification help with a "warbler-type" gray and white bird singing at dawn just after his company in France had been gassed in trenches by the Germans. The bird had dipped and risen while "singing wildly" a series of rich notes "from bass to high C." Saxe's comrades were amazed that the warbler seemed so "unconcerned about its surroundings and unknowing of any strife." After the war some veterans returned home to go birding with a vengeance. Eventual BBC president Leslie Little "looked up the club almost the moment he got out of the army." Other young birders had been sacrificed to war. Barron Brainerd, a club director and birding prodigy, did not die in combat, but his 1919 obituary hints at a hard struggle and decline precipitated by his service in the war. It took months before his father, John, the BBC president, could bring himself to lead another bird walk.

The 1930s, the years of the Great Depression, stand out as a difficult yet dynamic decade in BBC history. Some members were forced to drop out. Others requested more

“ten-cent” trips to local spots that required no more than ten cents in carfare. BBC leaders had to point out that many once “fine birdy” local places had been ruined by development. Though there was less money for bird protection, the bulletins expanded beyond lists of trips and meetings to cover conservation issues in more depth. Bulletins also featured instructions on how to prepare “Christmas pudding” for chickadees, Grace Haskell Story’s “Italian sonnet” about birding the Ipswich dunes, and quotations from naturalists like Thoreau: “I would rather never taste chicken meat nor hen’s eggs than never to see a hawk sailing through the upper air again.”

The Depression was a period of widespread political anger and activism, when many Americans felt that their government, or capitalism itself, had failed to protect people from economic catastrophe or to safeguard the nation’s wetlands and other natural resources. Wardens were still confiscating dead birds whose feathers were intended for the plume trade. The end of the Heath Hen, once abundant in Massachusetts, aroused fears that other species, like the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, would soon become extinct. Dust storms and drought in the West not only displaced people but decimated populations of waterfowl and songbirds. There was truth behind the Texas joke: “It’s so dry that the birds are using barbed wire to build nests.”

During the 1930s the BBC fought conservation battles on many fronts. It opposed the practice of baiting ducks to shoot them, proposed a tax on bird-killing housecats, and resisted a proposed highway that would have connected Ipswich to Plum Island and fragmented prime bird habitat. It expressed outrage over damage done to shorebirds and seabirds by waste pumped overboard from oil-burning vessels. A 1930 bulletin listed by

species the many oil-soaked birds found dead at Chatham Beach and Monomoy Island. The BBC also joined state and national campaigns to stop the “wanton killing” of raptors and criticized the spreading of “prejudice and false propaganda” about hawks and owls. In 1930 it supported a federal Bald Eagle Protection bill and, the *Chronicle* reported, resolved that “the names of all hawks and owls should be omitted from the list of birds not protected by law.” In 1934, while celebrating the foundation of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Raymond Talbot defended the “much maligned” American Crow and pointed out that many “innocent” birds were victimized by crow shoots that even now are still held across our country. Many club members were hunters, but they insisted that any hunter should be able to “prove that you know the birds when you see them.” Some bulletin appeals went beyond birds altogether, such as an attack on dog racing.

The BBC also renewed efforts to nurture young birders. Guiding the way was Talbot, BBC president for sixteen years and one of its most committed leaders. Talbot had started birding at age eight during a long convalescence from appendicitis and soon became known for his toughness in the field. A Boston University professor of Romance languages, he traveled the world, sending home letters about birds in Saharan sand storms and Wallcreepers climbing cliffs in the Pyrenees. At his 1958 memorial service he was described as “outspoken in support of his moral convictions” and sensitive to “the beauty of color and sound, of landscapes and living things.”

In 1928, as a Mass Audubon field agent, Talbot began writing *Bird News for the Schools*, distributed free by the BBC to every high school and junior high in the state, with sponsored prizes for student articles on bird study and protection. “It’s always fair

weather when bird-lovers get together,” Talbot rhapsodized, even when the “mean, disagreeable” New England wind penetrates the marrow. He fielded questions from his young readers: Do birds like to live in bird houses? Do they talk among themselves? How many birds does the average cat kill each year? Why do you like hawks so much? One student asked: “Is it possible to see an Ipswich Sparrow?” Talbot answered: “Possible, though not easy.” Another asked why a “stray Arkansas Kingbird” (Western Kingbird) was still hanging around Cambridge in December. Talbot responded: some bird questions can’t be definitively answered. Talbot reached out to young birders with unflagging energy. For years the BBC conducted bird walks for school, church, and scout groups, and in 1940 alone Talbot gave thirty-two bird lectures at twenty-one summer camps.

In a 1934 *Bird News* piece on Martha’s Vineyard--a spot “almost sacred for bird-lovers”--Talbot wrote, in bold: “America must learn, before it is too late, the lesson of the Heath Hen and of those other birds which Americans have destroyed. We must protect and save the birds we have left.” He criticized the press for glorifying an estate guardian who’d killed a Snowy Owl. In one of his last pieces, about a birder indifferent to conservation, he concluded: “I have failed utterly if any large proportion of my readers really are convinced that conservation is of no concern to a bird club.”

As our nation entered World War II, the BBC reached the end of an era. The bulletin, which became the “blue book” in 1941, was reduced, listing trips and statistical reports but without the poetry and conservation appeals. Talbot stepped down as president, and *Bird News* was discontinued in 1943. The bird highlight of 1943 was a rare Arctic visitor, a Gyrfalcon, in Newburyport; in 1944, also in Newburyport, an extremely

rare White-tailed Sea-eagle, a record now questioned for insufficient documentation. That year, in 142 trips, the BBC found a record-high 236 species. Yet the war's last few years had brought security regulations, gas rationing, and restrictions on "pleasure driving." In 1944 field glasses were forbidden on the traditional boat trip to Provincetown, and all boat trips were eventually suspended, as were coastline walks. Birders wandering about with binoculars were sometimes suspected of being spies assisting German submarines. The club struggled to find trip leaders. But some members who served in the armed forces managed to get themselves stationed in bird-rich tropical areas. "Birds were the breath of life in their nostrils," wrote Roger Tory Peterson, "while some of their fellow soldiers, lacking this consuming interest, almost went mad." Servicemen overseas were not supposed to reveal exactly where they were stationed, but some birding soldiers revealed their locations by writing home to tell knowledgeable friends which species they'd found. Meanwhile, the use of diagnostic marks for birds in Peterson's field guide had become a model for plane-spotting aircraft identification.

In 1945 Douglas Sands, "just out of the Army," entertained BBC members with a slide show on the "Fauna and Flora of the Galapagos Islands." The Provincetown boat trip, with binoculars allowed, resumed in 1946. Wartime was over.

The years since World War II have brought great changes to the BBC. For a while the club stagnated. Membership dropped to a low of 325 in 1947. The 1960 statistical report notes, without explanation, that the club had undergone a "year of turmoil," and one bulletin that year listed several trips with "leader to be chosen from among those present." But there was a steady surge in membership throughout the 1960s and 1970s,

peaking at over 1600 in 1977. By its 50th anniversary the BBC had sponsored 5243 trips and seen all 282 species on the Mass Audubon state checklist, as well as 57 write-ins. By 1972 the BBC could call itself “America’s Most Active Bird Club.” It offered what the *Boston Globe* called “a feverish field trip schedule,” sponsoring 219 trips that year with 301 species seen. In 1967 *Time* ran a feature article on birding, generously estimating that over eleven million Americans were now birdwatchers. Birding had seemingly become fashionable, though birders, especially teenagers, were still mocked as nerdy or effeminate, and, as Jodrey noted, witty civilians would still roll down car windows to holler “tweet, tweet, quack, quack” at roadside birders with binoculars.

The club expanded its range to include regular trips to Boston Harbor islands and Nantucket, camping on Cape Cod and in the Berkshires, and out-of-state trips to the Isle of Shoals and the Maryland shores. A 1970 group studied specimens at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology and wryly added some extinct species to the BBC life list. Walks at Mt. Auburn Cemetery became a popular tradition. *Boston Globe* articles called the cemetery “one of the most persistently birded areas in the country” and described “bird chasers and meadow haunters” at Mt. Auburn, some with “Caution: Birdwatchers” bumper stickers and one with a PETREL license plate. BBC walks sometimes drew an “unwieldy 100 or more” participants.

One recruiting agent for the club was the “find of the century,” a Ross’s Gull discovered at Newburyport Harbor in 1975. A first record for the Lower Forty-eight, this rare pinkish Arctic gull made the front page of *The New York Times* and inspired John Updike to write a *New Yorker* article about his failed attempt to find it. The gull was seen

by thousands of birders and curiosity-seekers from across the country. The next few years brought a spectacular string of rarities: a Black-browed Albatross that swooped close to a fishing boat out of Rockport, an Ivory Gull in Salisbury watched by thousands of birders in one weekend (it “was fed bologna sandwiches but did not beg”), and a White-tailed Tropicbird found barely alive on a Byfield playing field after Hurricane Gloria in 1985. Some years were busts, like 1978, with extremes of cold and heat, drought, and dismal migrations, but in “mind-boggling” 1979 the club’s annual summary cited an “inexhaustible flow of rare discoveries.” With birding you take your chances.

The statistical reports in club bulletins also demonstrate how quickly bird distributions can shift. 1945 highlights included Common Eider, Harlequin Duck, Purple Sandpiper, and Northern Mockingbird—all species now common in our state. Shifts in distribution were also reflected in the reports of the Essex County Ornithological Society’s annual May canoe trip on the Ipswich River, often joined by BBC members and, dating from 1907, among our country’s longest running bird censuses. To modern Massachusetts birders, the canoe trip reports from the 1930s are striking for both the absence of now common species--Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Carolina Wren--and species once routine but now rare in Essex County and even in the whole state. Golden-winged Warblers and nesting Vesper Sparrows were seen every year, Sedge Wrens in most years. The canoe trip reports illustrate both the declines of wetlands and grasslands birds and the expansion of ranges by new arrivals. Eastern Meadowlarks were last found in 1986, American Bitterns in 1987. Firsts included Snowy Egret in 1968, Northern Cardinal in 1969, and Turkey Vulture in 1979.

For decades BBC outings were recorded in vivid detail by statistician Mary Lou Barnett, citing field card comments that were often “witty, poetic, and occasionally philosophical,” though she had to admonish some trip leaders--like one who’d reported 125 rare Loggerhead Shrikes--to proofread their cards. Her reports often describe “indefatigable” and “doughty” birders up against the elements: gale-blown on Crane Beach, frostbitten at Mt. Auburn, in “snow up to the knee” on Plum Island, and, in Marblehead, finding fog, heavy surf, and surfers--but no birds. In 1966 an eager “sheriff’s posse” braved ice, soaking mist, and blinding sheet, “beat the bushes and crawled in the snow,” to find “sweet Victory”--a rare Rock Wren in Rockport. One frigid morning Larry Jodrey expressed a feeling known to all Cape Ann winter trip leaders--the hope that no one will show up. His friend Jerry Soucy—bulletin editor, field trip coordinator, mentor, philosopher--swore off boat trips: “I have spent too many tortuous hours on rocking boats and so I depend on coastal storms to bring pelagics to me.”

Other challenges came from gas shortages, Plum Island hunters, civilians, and fellow birders, like the guy who tested a leader’s aural skills by joining a Plum Island auto caravan on his Harley, and the notorious Mrs. Nudge-in, who squeezed right behind the leader’s car or any caravan she joined. In Boxford a farmer sent his daughter out with a broom to scare off a rare Western Meadowlark luring birders to the edge of his land. A surly Nantucket man came out with a gun in one hand, a glass of whiskey in the other, as birders studied a Jackdaw, a rare vagrant from Europe, that wasn’t even on his property. Some members were unfazed by any obstacle. In 1969, when below-zero weather scared off everyone else from the New Year’s Day walk at Crane, the leader headed out anyway

and found eighteen species on his six-mile trudge. “Mr. Jameson,” reported Barnett, “said he enjoyed his walk.” In 1978 Herman Weissberg found a scarce Acadian Flycatcher singing in West Newbury the day before he went into a hospital for open-heart surgery.

Beasts, birders, and civilians all conspired to add comedy to Barnett’s reports. At Mt. Auburn, when the leader called out a Worm-eating Warbler, a novice birder famously asked, “*What* is that worm eating?” One overexcited leader, trying to help his comrades see a rare Cattle Egret in Rowley, set up the group’s only scope in a manure pile. In Sherborn club president Eliot Taylor whistled at dusk for a Whip-poor-will. A donkey responded. At Mt. Greylock a club member was asked to move his car so that some people could jump off the mountain. The member obliged, and six hang gliders appeared and jumped. The last glider flailed into some bushes but took flight with the assistance of birders, who carried on to find the Mourning Warbler they were after.

The last few decades have been marked by changes in communication and technology that help BBC members and other birders to find birds, identify them accurately, record findings, and share sightings. A big step in the late 1960s was The Voice of Audubon--for years the voice of Ruth Emery, also a BBC leader, known for being helpful and gracious to all callers, even the woman who swore she’d just seen an extinct Passenger Pigeon. In 1973 BBC leaders helped to found the journal *Bird Observer*, still New England’s most comprehensive source of field data. A Bird Alert Hot Line was set up to get word of rarities out quickly. Another innovation, the club’s CB radio patrol, was illustrated by a radio message in the 1985 statistical report: “Come in, Barn Owl. We’re at the salt pans. The Tundra Swan has just landed.” In 1996 Barbara

Volkle, later a club president, organized Massbird, a popular listserv for sharing sightings across the state and into neighboring states. Trip leaders now send trip lists to eBird, a joint project by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon that compiles sightings nationwide and serves as a vast resource of bird-finding information.

BBC leaders, through periodic self-examination, have found that the club remains sound. We offer, as one director put it, the “pleasures of group birding, the opening of doors on the world of nature with no strings attached.” Newcomers feel “not intimidated but welcomed.” Trip leaders, all volunteers, are friendly and knowledgeable. Current president Neil Hayward, like his predecessor, Dave Williams, continues a long line of dedicated, foresightful presidents. Members talk about the fun they’ve had on club trips and the opportunities to find new birds, birding locations, and birding companions.

Jodrey liked to reminisce about old-time trip leaders like Clara de Windt, known for her “bright scarlet snow-bunny suit” (her “winter plumage”). She “would have made a figure descending the grand staircase of the Metropolitan Opera,” but most important, she exemplified the “you show me your birds, I’ll show you mine” spirit of club birding. Past president Steve Grinley recalls the camaraderie of Mt. Greylock campouts, when groups would gather around fires to cook dinner, share wine, and relive the excitement of finding Bicknell’s Thrushes still nesting on the summit near Bascom Lodge. Some longtime members worry that, while the Internet has made it easier to find information and chase rare birds, birders might lose the spirit of sharing that has marked the BBC. Yet they’re grateful that the club has elevated their lives and introduced the delights of birding to thousands of others.

In 2013 the BBC celebrated its 100th anniversary as one of the country's oldest, largest, and most active bird clubs, still leading annual trips close to the record high of 290 in 2000. To commemorate our founders, fellow director Diana Fruguglietti and I led a walk that retraced the steps of the very first trip--around Fresh Pond, then called "the Cambridge marshes." The club retains "Brookline" for name recognition, but we long ago expanded far beyond Brookline to offer diverse excursions throughout eastern Massachusetts, across the state, and north into New Hampshire and Maine--trips for beginners and limited-mobility birders, conservation-oriented searches to document species on the state-endangered list, and impromptu chases of rarities like a Northern Lapwing in Bridgewater in 2012 and a Fieldfare in Carlisle in 2013. In the past decade, largely through the work of the unsinkable Ida Giriunas, another past president, the BBC has achieved a national reputation for leading birding boat trips to and beyond Stellwagen Bank in search of shearwaters, petrels, jaegers, and any rare seabird.

But we face challenges, especially the dwindled role of young birders in the club. In 1966 Barnett praised the "tenacity and bravado of our more youthful leaders." At a 75th anniversary gala Larry Jodrey recalled when Dick Veit, Chris Leahy, Peter Alden, and Simon Perkins--all prominent leaders in conservation and international bird touring--were young club members, "looking quite innocent in those days, full of wonderment." Yet by the 1970s adolescents had become scarce in bird clubs. But there have been encouraging developments, like the recent spread of young birders' clubs and the Cornell Lab's Young Birders' Network. The BBC now offers annual scholarships for young birders to attend National Audubon's Hog Island camp in Maine, and we donate money

to support bird study in schools. Some members, like Jim Berry, make it a point to recruit and mentor the birders, ornithologists, and conservationists of the future. Still, it will take sustained commitment and our founders' sense of mission to keep bringing new generations into the birding fold.

The BBC, like the birding community generally, also remains overwhelmingly white. We welcome everyone and offer regular trips to urban parks and nature centers, yet, like environmental groups across the country, we've struggled to appeal to an ethnically diverse population. Beyond personal preferences, there are cultural and historical reasons why few black Americans have become birders: a severance from nature after the great migrations from the rural South to cramped Northern cities, a lack of exposure to birding mentors, a reluctance to venture down trails or once segregated beaches that might be unwelcoming or unsafe. The Fledgling Birders Institute now sponsors an annual "Focus on Diversity" workshop to "promote effective outreach to more diverse audiences with birding opportunities, outdoor recreation, and conservation messages." It's a matter of inclusion and reciprocity. Birding has brought us pleasure, and we want to share that pleasure widely, as others shared their expertise and enthusiasm when we were novices. We also need a broader base to support bird conservation--people who want to protect birds because they've learned to care about them.

Conservation remains an ongoing concern. Over the years the BBC has tried to realize its founders' ambition to focus on bird protection. In the 1940s, with Mass Audubon and other bird clubs, it helped establish the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitat for migratory birds. In 1962, when

Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, the BBC joined the campaign against indiscriminate use of pesticides. In recent decades we've donated funds to protect Least Terns and Purple Martins, contributed to land trusts and initiatives to preserve habitat at shorelines targeted for dredging, and supported programs like the Birders' Exchange and research at Manomet Bird Observatory. We've also provided leaders and participants for annual Christmas Bird Counts, the nation's first Breeding Bird Atlas--sponsored by Mass Audubon--and the more recent atlas, and more localized breeding bird censuses.

Some threats to birds have moved the BBC to action, but in other periods the club has languished. For over fifty years each bulletin announced that the BBC was "open to all who are interested in birds and their protection," but in 1965 the phrase "birds and their protection" was changed to "birds and nature." In 1968 the club formed a Conservation Committee (now the Conservation and Education Committee), led by Joe Kennelly. He urged members to lobby for a state Endangered Species bill and against rescindment of the Wetlands Protection Act. The disastrous *Argo Merchant* oil tanker spill in 1977 prompted an internal debate over political activism. A group spearheaded by Soheil Zendehe and Craig Jackson wanted to circulate a petition to the Secretary of the Interior to "stop the leasing of offshore tracts for drilling of oil in the North Atlantic-Georges Banks area." But others argued that the BBC should stick to birding and not align with any political causes. Club directors permitted the petition to be circulated at the annual meeting, but they resolved that, out of fear of entanglement in seemingly endless controversies, "we should not get involved with politics."

Bird conservationists no longer have to wage attacks on the plume trade or pervasive market-hunting, at least not within this country, but there's no shortage of threats to birds. Nationwide, groups like the American Bird Conservancy work to oppose legislation or deregulation that would jeopardize birds and their habitats. In 2016, as chair of the BBC Conservation and Education Committee, and with support from state ornithologist Drew Vitz, I organized the Association of Massachusetts Bird Clubs, an alliance of around twenty clubs from the Berkshires to the South Shore. Birders, like any community, need organizations to bring people together and reach out to new people. We also hope to unite on behalf of bird conservation through citizen science projects and advocacy. If birders won't organize to protect birds, who will?

In 1975 Helen Kaan donated \$500 in honor of her mother, founder Mary Moore Kaan, to help keep BBC dues affordable. It was "wonderful," she wrote in a letter, "that the club has kept its original character and purpose through all these changing years." The BBC had fulfilled her mother's hopes. At the 75th anniversary Larry Jodrey reminded club members of their debt to their forebears and their obligation to carry on traditions of conservation and encouragement of youth. "Generations go swiftly. Others will take our place. We only share our heritage; we share the earth, for a brief bit." His wisdom still holds.