

# **Birder's Certificate Program**

## ***Take your birding to a higher level***



### **About the Program**

The Joppa Flats Education Center and Massachusetts Audubon Society are pleased to announce the seventh year of our Birder's Certificate Program. This program is offered annually as a key component in our on-going efforts to provide the finest educational programs that inform and excite the public about the nature of Massachusetts. This program is also an ideal mechanism for personal and professional development of Mass Audubon staff.

We developed the certificate program in collaboration with college faculty, experienced birders, and professional ornithologists. The program is equivalent to an undergraduate level ornithology course, with the addition of extensive field time and the opportunity for self-directed study.

The program covers a wide range of subject matter including avian systematics, biology, physiology, behavior, ecology, biogeography, and conservation. Each module (12 in total) combines classroom and field experience, and student comprehension is evaluated through homework assignments. The program can be completed within one calendar year, and must be completed within three calendar years. Students who successfully complete the program receive a certificate of achievement.

### **Goals**

The program's primary goals are to:

- develop the ornithological knowledge base of birders,
- demonstrate ways birders can contribute to the scientific study of birds,
- encourage closer collaboration between birders and professional ornithologists,
- develop a cadre of skilled program and trip leaders,
- provide professional development opportunities for Mass Audubon staff, and
- contribute to the conservation of birds and to the protection of the nature of Massachusetts.

### **Who Should Take This Course?**

The audience for this program includes birders who want to go beyond simple field identification, nature enthusiasts who want to gain an in-depth knowledge of bird life, and natural history program leaders who want to gain scientific insight into their work.

### **Structure of the Program**

The Birder's Certificate Program consists of eleven required modules and one of two elective modules. All required modules are presented at the Joppa Flats Education Center. Independent study modules and elective courses are offered at various locations, including Joppa Flats.

Each required module is designed to include classroom (3-4 hours) and field (4-5 hours) components to be completed within one day, and a self-study assignment to be completed within two weeks after the module. The required modules are presented by instructors, drawn primarily from Mass Audubon staff, who are responsible for the lectures, field work, and the design and grading of take-home assignments.

## Required Modules

1. Avian Classification and Nomenclature (Systematics)
2. Evolution and Speciation
3. Biogeography
4. Anatomy and Physiology
5. Feathers and Flight
6. Field Identification
7. Feeding Ecology
8. Bird Conservation
9. Migration
10. Breeding Behavior – Part 1: Courtship and Mating
11. Breeding Behavior – Part 2: Nests, Parental Care, and Modes of Development

In addition to the eleven required modules, each student is also required to complete one independent study module: either a self-directed project, or a series of elective courses. In either case, the student must submit a report on the project or courses for evaluation by the faculty.

## Independent Study Modules (select one)

- 12a. Elective Courses (five required):  
Electives must be selected from a list of natural history courses, or must be pre-approved by the Birder's Certificate Program director. A list of pre-approved courses will be made available upon request. All electives must be taken within the three-year program limit.
- 12b. Self-directed Project:  
The self-directed project is an independent research project wherein the participant can apply knowledge gained in the formal part of the Birder's Certificate Program to an area of individual interest.

## Schedule of Modules

Modules will be presented approximately monthly, on Saturdays. In order to take advantage of seasonal changes in avian activity, the course year begins on August 8, 2009, (Module 1) and ends in June 2010 (Module 11).

## Instructors

Taber Allison: Vice President for Conservation Science and Ecological Management at Mass Audubon

Bill Gette: Sanctuary Director at Joppa Flats Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary

David Larson: Director of the Birder's Certificate Program and Education Coordinator at Joppa Flats Education Center

Chris Leahy: Bertrand Chair of Natural History and Field Ornithology at Mass Audubon and former Director of the Mass Audubon Center for Biological Conservation

Simon Perkins: Mass Audubon Field Ornithologist

Wayne Petersen: Director of the Important Bird Areas Program at Mass Audubon

## Registration

The Birder's Certificate Program Director is Dr. David M. Larson. The office is located in the Joppa Flats Education Center and Wildlife Sanctuary in Newburyport, Massachusetts. All registration queries and applications should be directed to that office.

Class size is limited to 18 participants.

Birder's Certificate Program  
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## Tuition

Mass Audubon Members: \$1100  
Nonmembers (includes individual membership): \$1200

Those registering for the entire certificate program receive priority. Individuals wishing to participate in the certificate program on a per-module-basis may do so, if space is available. The tuition per module is \$100. All prerequisites must be observed.

Checks should be made payable to the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Credit card payments can be taken by telephone at 978-462-9998.

## What the Tuition Includes

The program fee includes:

- eleven modules with classroom and field trip experiences,
- consultation on, and evaluation of, individual study projects,
- instruction by Mass Audubon and other qualified teacher/naturalists,
- syllabus,
- classroom and interpretive materials, and
- evaluation of take-home assignments.

Costs for elective courses and costs incurred while performing a self-directed project are not included. Personal expenses, meals, and transportation to Joppa Flats or other instructional sites are not included.

## Payment and Refund Policies

Payment: Payment is due in full at the time of registration.  
Refunds: If you decide to drop the course, we will issue a refund, prorated by your participation in modules, and subject to a \$100 administrative fee.