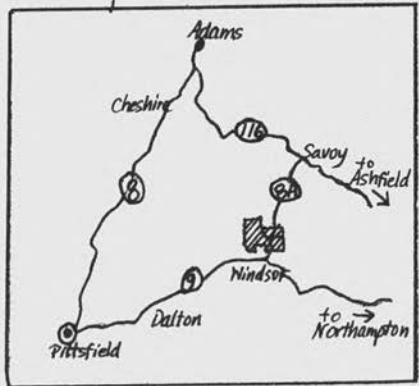


# FOBES HILL AREA



## BIRDS OF THE FOBES HILL REGION

by Douglas B. McNair, Columbia, South Carolina

The Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas Project has focused attention on nesting activity in the western portions of the state. I welcome the opportunity to present Fobes Hill as an enjoyable, rewarding, and uncrowded area for birdwatching. For those satiated with overcrowded Mt. Greylock, I invite you to Fobes Hill, Windsor, the best single locality in the state for nesting species.

Named the Eugene D. Moran Wildlife Management Area after the late director of the western wildlife district of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, Fobes Hill is the latest acquisition of land in the Berkshires by that organization. It continues a string of purchases of top-value lands for wildlife. The Fobes Hill transaction, which included land purchased from three landowners, was completed in 1977, and the public has since had free access to it though overnight camping is not allowed. The Eugene D. Moran W.M.A. boundaries encompass 1,040 acres though the area discussed here also includes land that lies roughly within a three-mile radius of the center of the wildlife area. Access is simple: at the junction of Routes 9 and 8A in Windsor, take 8A north for one mile and park at the road beside the burned-down house and farm building.

The Fobes Hill region is located on the crest of the Hoosac Plateau, an uplifted peneplain, and lies within both the Connecticut and Housatonic watershed systems. Elevation varies from 1400 to 2297 feet (Judges Hill) though most of the land is above 1900 feet. The land is forested and is dotted by homes, small farmlands, and pastures. The wildlife area is of open or semi-open character, which is scarce in the forested Berkshires. This locality is the best for birdwatching. The vegetation is in all stages of succession. The edge effect is tremendous and ensures richness and density of nesting species. There are beaver ponds, sedge and grass marshes, alder swamps, heath, scrub, brush, pasturelands, deciduous wood lots, mixed northern hardwood-softwood forest, small stands of Red Spruce, Christmas-tree-size balsam fir, and other plant species or communities. No wonder at least 99 species of birds are known to have bred here since 1970.

Fobes Hill is not for the birdwatcher who dislikes getting his feet wet or his clothes soiled. There is no maintained trail system except at nearby Notchview Reservation, but the numerous fire, logging and old homestead roads and deer paths suffice very well and ensure the fairly wild aspect of the area. The more obvious and rewarding trails are indicated on the map.

Insects can be obnoxious. There are four real insect pests here although the blackfly season is so short (May) and the flies number so few that they are no problem. The same cannot be said for the other three pests. A wide-brimmed hat to combat the deer flies is recommended when walking in the marshes and beaver ponds. The mosquitos and midges are their usual selves.

The systematic list that follows records the 171 species proven to occur since 1970. Ninety-nine are known breeders and a few more are in the probable and possible categories. Remarkably few people have visited the area within the last 50 years despite the abundance of breeding birds. Fobes Hill

does not have some of the breeding specialties of Mt. Greylock or the Savoy Mountain State Forest, e.g., Gray-cheeked Thrush (formerly at Mt. Greylock), Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Blackpoll Warbler, and Rusty Blackbird, though some of these species and the Raven are future possibilities. But I challenge anyone to record more breeding species within one small area in this state.

The accompanying map and list are self-explanatory. However, I would like to highlight some species and features.

Standing on Bosma Hill, you can hear, as perhaps nowhere else in Massachusetts, the primeval chorus of snipe, woodcock, American Bittern, and Ruffed Grouse. The morning chorus in the amphitheater of Fobes Hill is tremendous: Alder Flycatchers and Swamp Sparrows are common, and a pair of Olive-sided Flycatchers is present at the beaver pond. At the forest edge on the northwestern side of Bosma Hill, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, and Winter Wrens may be heard singing or calling. Bobolinks sing in the grassy fields and one pair of Savannah Sparrows is present. An American Kestrel wings its way home to the slender dead tree beside the stream which flows from the beaver pond where another pair of snipe nests and feeds in the grassy swale. Two pairs of Yellow Warblers are present nearby (local in the uplands at this elevation), and a Goshawk may be glimpsed darting along toward Judges Hill. This is typical of what may happen in a few minutes at Fobes Hill.

To the north of Bosma Hill and adjacent to a portion of the Windsor State Forest is a small and very rewarding stand of Red Spruce. The specialty here is the Nashville Warbler. Six pairs breed and others may be found nearby. Several Red Spruce-loving nesting species may be found here including Saw-whet Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson's Thrush (sometimes), Golden-crowned Kinglet (usually), Magnolia, Yellow-rumped and Blackburnian Warblers, and White-throated Sparrows.

The heath, scrub, and pasturelands off Route 8A near the parking lot produce Black-billed Cuckoo (one pair), Brown Thrasher, Indigo Bunting, Rufous-sided Towhee, and Field Sparrow. Raptors nest in the adjacent woodlands though a search is required to detect those of local distribution such as the Red-shouldered Hawk and Goshawk.

The summit of Fobes Hill is a poorly known hawk-watch locality though the little data we have is tantalizing. Members of the species which tend to follow the ridges closely, such as the Sharp-shinned and Marsh Hawks, appear to be greatest passing along the north-south ridge of Judges Hill, the highest point in Windsor, and one mile east of Fobes Hill summit. It is believed that more raptors follow the crest of the Hoosac Plateau than fly to the east or west of it. If an observer could find another locality nearby, then the hypothesis could be tested. Nevertheless, Fobes Hill is an average hawk-watch locality and very accessible; it is only a quarter-mile walk from the parking area. The great Sharp-shinned Hawk flight of 1977 produced record counts in the northeastern United States. On September 28, 1977, two observers recorded 400 sharpies during an eight-hour watch on Fobes Hill. It was also an explosive day for other migrants, e.g., 2875 Blue Jays. The summit is excellent for counting non-raptor migrants such as Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, and

indeed, almost any species. It is hoped that non-game birds and non-raptors receive more emphasis in the future.

Special species to be looked for which may nest in the Fobes Hill region include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Virginia Rail, Long-eared Owl, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Tufted Titmouse, Short-billed Marsh Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Parula Warbler, Mourning Warbler, Rusty Blackbird, Evening Grosbeak, and Pine Siskin. The nesting season is when the observer can best contribute to the ornithology of this area.

Aside from this region, there is another public area which is open: Notchview Reservation, approximately 3000 acres, owned and maintained by the Trustees of Reservations. It is located on Route 9 just 1-1/2 miles east of the junction of Routes 8A and 9 in Windsor. The extensive trails are well-maintained and maps are available. The acreage is primarily northern hardwoods with a good sampling of Hemlocks and Red Spruce. The Red Spruce grove near the parking area is the main attraction. Several pairs of Swainson's Thrushes and Golden-crowned Kinglets nest here as well as the other Red Spruce-loving species. A pair of Goshawks is resident. Otherwise, the birding is not very exciting, but in good weather the reservation offers miles of very enjoyable walking.

Most of the rest of the land in the Fobes Hill region is private property. Trespassing problems are usually minimal for individuals but not for groups. Obtain the Windsor U.S.G.S. Quadrangle map.

The following species have been recorded at Fobes Hill within an area that lies roughly within a three-mile radius. The list and status of species cover those proven to occur since 1970. The months of the year are indicated by using the first or the first two consonants (to avoid ambiguity) of each month. Though the four calendar seasons correspond roughly to the avifauna seasons at Fobes Hill, this correlation should not be interpreted too strictly.

Descriptive terms of status are as follows: Abundant-A, to be expected 75-100% of the time at the season or period indicated; Common-Cm, 50-75% of the time; Uncommon-Un, 25-50% of the time; Rare-R, less than 25% of the time. These terms all imply that the species concerned is to be expected on an annual basis. There is one more term used: Vagrant-V, not to be expected to occur annually. The terms of status are placed before the months concerned in each seasonal column. An asterisk (\*) indicates that the species designated has nested since 1970.

There is overlap in the seasons for certain species because one aspect of a species' biology may overlap with another aspect, e.g., the breeding population may be nesting in an area while other individuals of that same species may be migrating through that area. Hence, dates of occurrence may overlap. This list of species' status is a guide only; it is greatly simplified and errors of omission and commission may be made unintentionally.

SPECIES NAME	SPRING	SUMMER/ BREEDING	FALL	WINTER	SPECIES NAME	SPRING	SUMMER/ BREEDING	FALL	WINTER
Loon, Cm.	R: My		R: S-O		Pheasant, R-n.	R: Ap-My	V: Jn	Un: S-O	
Grebe, P-b.	R: Ap-My		R: Ag-O		Rail, Virginia	V: Ap			
Heron, Gr.-blue	Un: Ap-My	R: Jn-Jy	Un: Ag-O		*Killdeer	Un: Mr-Ap	Un: Ap-Ag	Un: Ag-S	
Heron, Green	Un: My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O		*Woodcock, Am.	A: Mr-Ap	A: My-Jy	Un: Ag-O	
Heron, Bk-cr. Night	V: My				*Snake, Cm.	Un: Ap-My	Un: Ap-Jy	Un: Jy-O	
*Bittern, Am.	Un: Ap-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O		*Sandp., Spotted	Un: My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O	
*Goose, Canada	Un: Mr-My	Un: Ap-Ag	Un: S-N		Sandp., Solitary	Un: My		Un: Jy-S	
Brant			V: O-N		Yellowlegs, Gr.			V: Ag	
Goose, Snow	R: Ap		R: O-N		Sandp., Least			R: Ag	
Goose, Blue (subsp.)	V: Ap				Gull, Herring	Un: Mr-My		Un: Ag-N	
*Mallard	Un: Mr-My	Un: Ap-Ag	Un: S-N		Gull, R-billed	Un: Mr-My		Un: O-N	
*Duck, Black	Un: Mr-My	Un: Ap-Ag	Cm: S-N		*Dove, Rock	Cm: Mr-My	Cm: Jn-Ag	Cm: S-N	R: D-F
*Teal, Green-w.	Un: Mr-My	R: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O		*Dove, Mourning	Cm: Mr-Ap	Cm: My-Ag	A: S-O	R: N-F
Teal, Blue-w.			V: S		*Cuckoo, b-b.	Un: My-Jn	Un: My-Ag	R: S-O	
*Duck, Wood	Un: Mr-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O		Owl, Screech	R: Mr-My		R: O	
Duck, Ring-necked			V: O		*Owl, Gr.-horned	Un: Mr-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: S-N	R: D-F
Scoter, White-w.			V: S		Owl, Snowy			V: N	
Scoter, Black			V: O		*Owl, Barred	Un: Mr-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: S-N	R: D-F
Merganser, Hooded	R: Mr-My	R: My-Ag	R: Ag-O		Owl, Long-eared	V: Mr-Ap		V: O-N	
Vulture, Turkey	Un: Mr-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O		*Owl, Saw-whet	Un: Mr-Ap	R: Ap-Ag	Un: S-N	R: D-F
*Goshawk	R: Mr-Ap	R: Ap-Ag	R: S-N	R: D-F	Whip-poor-will	V: My			
Hawk, Sh.-shinned	Un: Mr-Ag	R: Ag	A: S-O	R: N	Nighthawk, Cm.	Un: My-Jn		Cm: Ag-S	
Hawk, Cooper's	R: Mr-My	R: Ag	Un: S-O	R: N	*Swift, Chimney	Un: Ap-My	Cm: My-Ag	Cm: Ag-S	
*Hawk, Red-tailed	Cm: Mr-Ap	Un: Ap-Ag	A: S-N	R: D-F	*Hummingbird, R-th.	Un: My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-S	
*Hawk, Red-sh.	Un: Mr-Ap	Un: Ap-Ag	Un: S-N		*Kingfisher, Belted	Un: Mr-Ap	Un: My-Ag	Un: S-N	
*Hawk, Broad-winged	Cm: Ap-My	Un: Ap-Ag	A: S		*Flicker, Cm.	A: Ap-My	A: My-Ag	A: S-O	
Hawk, Rough-L.	R: Mr		R: N		*Woodp., Pileated	Un: Mr-My	R: Jn-Ag	Un: S-N	R: D-F
Eagle, Bald			R: S		Cm: Ap-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: S-O		
Marsh Hawk	Un: Mr-My		Un: Ag-N		*Sapsucker, Y-B.	Cm: Ap-My	Cm: Jn-Ag	Cm: S-N	Un: D-F
Osprey	Un: Ap-My		Un: Ag-O		*Woodp., Hairy	Cm: Mr-My	Cm: Jn-Ag	Cm: S-N	Un: D-F
Peregrine Falcon			V: O		*Woodp., Downy	Cm: My	A: Jn-Ag	Un: S	
Merlin	V: Ap		V: O		*Kingbird, Eastern	Un: My	Un: Jn-Ag	Un: S	
*Kestrel, Am.	Cm: Mr-My	Cm: Ap-Ag	Cm: Ag-O		*Flycatcher, Gr.-c.	Un: Ap-My	Cm: My-Ag	Un: S-O	
*Grouse, Ruffed	Cm: Ap-My	Cm: My-Jy	Cm: Jy-N	Un: D-F	*Flycatcher, Y-B.	R: My-Jn		R: Ag-S	

SPECIES NAME	SPRING	SUMMER/ BREEDING	FALL	WINTER	SPECIES NAME	SPRING	SUMMER/ BREEDING	FALL	WINTER
*Flycatcher, Alder	Cm: My-Jn	A: My-Ag	Un: S		Pipit, Water	R: Mr-My		Un: S-N	
*Flycatcher, Least	A: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S		*Waxwing, Cedar	Un: Mr-My	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-O	Un: N
*Pewee, E. Wood	Cm: My	Cm: My-Ag	Un: S		Shrike, Northern	R: Mr-Ap	R: O-N	V: Ag	
*Flycatcher, O-S.	Un: My-Jn	Un: My-Jy	R: Ag-S		Shrike, Loggerhead				
Lark, Horned	R: Mr-Ap	R: O-N			*Starling	A: Mr-My	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-N	Cm: D-F
*Swallow, Tree	Un: Ap	A: My-Ag	Cm: S-O		*Vireo, Solitary	Un: Ap-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O	
*Swallow, Bank	Un: Ap-My	R: My-Jy	Un: Ag-S		*Vireo, Red-eyed	A: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S-O	
Swallow, Rough-w.	R: Ap-My				Vireo, Philadelphia			R: Ag-S	
*Swallow, Barn	A: Ap-My	A: My-Jy	A: Ag-S		*Warbler, Bl&W.	Cm: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: Ag-O	
*Swallow, Cliff	Un: Ap-My	Un: My-Jy	Un: Ag-S		Warbler, Tennessee	A: My	V: Jy	A: Ag-S	
*Jay, Blue	A: Ap-Jn	A: Ap-Ag	A: S-O	Cm: N-F	Warbler, Orange-cr.			V: O	
Jay, Gray			V: N		*Warbler, Nashville	Cm: My	Cm: My-Ag	Cm: S-O	
*Crow, Cm.	A: Mr-Ap	A: My-Ag	A: S-N	Un: D-F	Warbler, No. Parula	Un: My		R: S	
*Chickadee, B-c.	A: Mr-My	A: Jn-Ag	A: S-N	Cm: D-F	*Warbler, Yellow	Un: My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-S	
Chickadee, Boreal			V: N		*Warbler, Magnolia	Cm: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: Ag-O	
Titmouse, Tufted	R: My		V: O-N		Warbler, Cape May	Un: My	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-O	
*Nuthatch, W-b.	Un: Mr-My	Un: My-Ag	Cm: S-O	Un: N-F	*Warbler, Pk-thr. Blue	Cm: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S	
*Nuthatch, R-b.	Cm: Mr-My	Cm: My-Jy	Cm: Ag-N	Cm: D-F	*Warbler, Yellow-rpd.	A: Ap-My	A: My-Ag	A: S-N	
*Creeper, Brown	Cm: Mr-Ap	Cm: Ap-Jy	Un: Ag-N	R: D-F	*Warbler, Pk-thr. Grn.	Un: My	Un: My-Ag	Cm: Ag-O	
*Wren, House	Cm: My	A: My-Ag	Un: S-O		*Warbler, Blackburian	A: My	A: My-Ag	Un: Ag-S	
*Wren, Winter	Un: Ap-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: S-N		*Warbler, Ch.-sided	A: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S	
Mockingbird	R: Ap-My		R: O-N		Warbler, Bay-br.	Un: My		A: Ag-S	
*Catbird, Gray	A: My	A: My-Ag	A: S-O		Warbler, Blackpoll	Un: My-Jn		A: S-O	
*Thrasher, Brown	Un: Ap-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: S-O		Warbler, Pine	V: Ap-My			
*Robin, Am.	A: Mr-My	A: Ap-Ag	A: S-N		Warbler, Prairie	V: My			
*Thrush, Wood	A: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S		Warbler, Palm	Un: Ap-My			
*Thrush, Hermit	Cm: Ap-My	Un: My-Ag	Cm: S-O		*Ovenbird	A: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S-O	
*Thrush, Swainson's	Cm: My	Un: Jn-Ag	A: S-O		*Waterthrush, No.	Un: My	Un: My-Jy	Un: Ag-S	
Thrush, Gr.-ch.	R: My-Jn		Un: S-O		*Waterthrush, Ia.	R: Ap-My	R: My-Jy		V: O
*Veery	A: My	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-S		Warbler, Conn.				
*Bluebird, E.	Un: Mr-My	Un: Ap-Ag	Un: S-O		Warbler, Mourning	R: My-Jn		R: Ag-S	
Gnatcatcher, Bl-gr.	V: My				*Yellowthroat, Cm.	A: My	A: My-Ag	A: S-O	
*Kinglet, G-cr.	Un: Mr-Ap	Un: Ap-Ag	Cm: S-N	Un: D-F	Warbler, Wilson's	Un: My		Un: Ag-S	
Kinglet, Ruby-cr.	Cm: Ap-My		Cm: S-N		*Warbler, Canada	Cm: My	Cm: My-Ag	Un: S	

SPECIES NAME	SPRING	SUMMER/ BREEDING	FALL	WINTER	SPECIES NAME	SPRING	SUMMER/ BREEDING	FALL	WINTER
*Redstart, Am.	A: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S		*Sparrow, Song	A: Mr-Ap	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-N	R: D
*House Sparrow	A: Mr-My	A: My-Ag	A: S-N	Cm: D-F	Bunting, Snow	R: Mr	Un: O-N	R: D	
*Bobolink	A: My	A: My-Jy	A: Jy-S						
*Meadowlark, E.	Un: Mr-My	R: Ap-Ag	Un: S-O						
*Blackbird, R-w.	A: Mr-My	A: My-A	A: Ag-N						
*Oriole, No.	Cm: My	Cm: My-Ag	Cm: S						
Blackbird, Rusty	Cm: Mr-My		Cm: S-N						
*Grackle, Cm.	A: Mr-My	A: Ap-Ag	A: Ag-N						
*Cowbird, Br-h.	Cm: Mr-My	Cm: My-Ag	A: S-N	V: D-F					
*anager, Scarlet	Cm: My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S						
*Cardinal	Un: Mr-My	Un: Jn-Ag	Un: S-N	R: D-F					
*Grosbeak, Rose-br.	Cm: My	A: My-Ag	A: S						
*Bunting, Indigo	Cm: My-Jn	Cm: My-Ag	Un: S						
Grosbeak, Evening	A: Mr-My	V: Jn-Ag	Un: S	A: O-F					
*Finch, Purple	A: Mr-My	A: Ap-Ag	A: S-N	V: D-F					
Finch, House			V: O						
Grosbeak, Pine				R: N-Mr					
Redpoll, Cm.				R: D-Mr					
Siskin, Pine	Un: Mr-My		Un: C-N	Un: D-Mr.					
*Goldfinch, Am.	A: Mr-My	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-N						
Crossbill, Red	R: Mr-My	V: Jn-S	R: O-N	R: D-F					
Crossbill, White-w.	R: Mr-My	V: Jn-S	R: O-N	V: D-F					
*Towhee, Rufous-s.	A: My	A: My-Ag	A: Ag-O						
*Sparrow, Savannah	Un: Mr-My	Un: My-Ag	Un: Ag-O						
Sparrow, Vesper	R: Ap-My		R: O						
*Junco, Dark-eyed	A: Mr-My	Cm: My-Ag	A: S-N	R: D					
Sparrow, Tree	Cm: Mr-Ap		Cm: O-N	R: D-F					
*Sparrow, Chipping	A: Ap-My	A: My-Ag	Cm: S-O						
*Sparrow, Field	Cm: Ap-My	Cm: My-Ag	Cm: S-O						
Sparrow, White-cr.	Un: My		Cm: S-O						
*Sparrow, White-thr.	A: Mr-My	A: My-Ag	A: S-N	R: D					
Sparrow, Fox	Un: Mr-Ap		Un: O-N						
Sparrow, Lincoln's	R: My		Un: S-O						
*Sparrow, Swamp	A: Ap	A: Ap-Ag	A: Ag-N						



## INTERESTED IN BECOMING A BETTER BIRDWATCHER?

For the past three years **Northeast Birding** has run a series of Birding Workshops in various parts of the U.S. This fall, we have scheduled our first for New England...at Monhegan Island, Maine, September 19-23 with an extension to September 25.

Birding Workshops were developed because we felt that with relatively small amounts of instruction, it was possible to sharply increase most birder's field skills and to demonstrate ways of looking at birds that accelerate the pace at which additional competence can be acquired.

Every bird displays a wealth of clues to its identification. Structure, plumage, behavior and ecological characteristics combine to produce a unique mosaic for each bird. Beginners usually focus their attention on plumage. The most experienced bird watchers simultaneously monitor all four characteristics. Using teaching techniques developed over the past three years, we feel we can help almost anyone to at least begin to make this transition.

We also feel that most bird watchers could benefit from discussions of the basic tools: binoculars, telescopes and tripods, field guides, reference works, note taking and field sketching. Workshops are designed to address these topics.

Monhegan is a small, isolated and beautiful island about 10 miles off the Maine Coast. Its size and location results in a concentration of landbird migrants, many of whom permit close approach and study. As a result, Monhegan is one of the very best places in the East to study immature and fall adult passerines, among which are the most difficult to identify birds in North America.

Cost for the Workshop will be about \$275 from Rockland, Maine. Cost includes lodging, food, transportation from Rockland and all workshop materials. Cost for the extension will be about \$100.

Workshop leaders will be Davis Finch and Will Russell, both experienced field ornithologists and teachers with previous Birding Workshop experience in New Jersey and Texas.

For more information, please call or write:

Northeast Birding  
Box 287 BM  
Seal Harbor, Maine 04675  
207-276-5077