

The Call

Newsletter of Merrymeeting Audubon
A Chapter of Maine Audubon

Volume 42, Issue 3, Winter 2012



Maine Audubon Annual Pelagic Trip

September 30, 2012

To paraphrase the words of a traveler on an infamous journey, when summer fades and winter approaches and a birder finds it a dark drizzly November in their soul, it is high time to sail about and see the watery part of Maine. Maine Audubon's annual pelagic trip to the Gulf of Maine offers just that opportunity.

Birders from around the state gathered before dawn with the excited anticipation only a pelagic trip can bring. Pelagic birding trips, more than any kind, deliver a sense that almost anything is possible. Will the trip reveal great flocks of seabirds, pods of marine mammals, schools of feeding tuna, sharks, or boatloads of birders green around the gills? Today's trip added a nervous hope that the weather would cooperate.

Things started rather slowly because we left Bar Harbor in thick fog

which made it difficult to see birds. Our excitement began to shift to feelings of desperation as after a few hours and close to 80 miles into the journey we had little to show for our trip. Near Grand Manan all that changed, the fog lifted, and birds were sighted on the horizon. We motored ahead into a flock of over a thousand Great and Sooty Shearwaters. Mixed into the group were 20 to 30 Pomarine Jaegers, a couple of Parasitic Jaegers, Red and Red-necked Phalaropes, Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, a Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and Gannets. The birds were hunting an area likely rich with Atlantic Herring, based on the number of feeding Fin Whales and fishing boats also in the area. We enjoyed the show for over an hour before the rain and fog drove us back into the cabins. We ended our day with a wet trip back to Bar Harbor pondering another year's trip, not the best pelagic in memory, but a decent day at sea and as another famous sailor was fond of saying, "there really is nothing half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."

Doug Sutor

Photos also by Doug. Upper : Pomarine Jaeger Lower: Lesser Blackbacked Gull



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Species Profile: Red-breasted Nuthatch

A bundle of energy at your feeder, Red-breasted Nuthatches (*Sitta canadensis*) are tiny, active birds of the northern coniferous forests. These long-billed, short-tailed songbirds travel through tree canopies with chickadees, kinglets, and woodpeckers, but stick to tree trunks and branches, where they search for hidden insects. Their excitable yank-yank calls sound like tiny tin horns being honked in the treetops. Red-breasted Nuthatches are blue-gray birds with strongly patterned heads: a black cap and stripe through the eye broken up by a white stripe over the eye. The underparts are rich rusty-cinnamon, paler in females and juveniles. They move quickly over trunks and branches, probing for food in crevices and under flakes of bark. They creep up, down, and sideways without regard for which way is up, and they don't lean against their tail the way woodpeckers do. Flight is short and bouncy.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is the only nuthatch that regularly migrates. Do you notice larger numbers of them at your feeder in winter than in summer? Perhaps a pair or two bred near your house this summer and may still be here. But their numbers may have increased due to some new individuals migrating in. Red-breasted Nuthatches are also irruptive, which means they move southward in unusually large numbers during **some** winters. Unlike migration, irruptions are irregular events. For the Red-breasted Nuthatch they **may** occur every 3 to 4 years on average. These irruptions are probably closely tied to the extent of the cone crop in the bird's breeding area. A widespread irruption began in mid-summer, indicating a cone crop failure in Canada. See this winter finch forecast link for more information and predictions. <http://10000birds.com/winter-finch-forecast-for-2012-2013.htm>

Red-breasted Nuthatches rely on seeds from conifers as a staple during the northern winter. Young birds are fed insect protein from their parents in the summer, but when winter comes their diet switches to seeds. The cause for this year's irruption was partially initiated in 2011. Then cones were abundant nearly everywhere in their range, they had plenty to eat, and thus did not have to travel great distances to find food, eliminating the most dangerous undertaking for a bird, especially a young bird. Their breeding and survival success in 2011 through to the spring of 2012 meant there were a lot more nuthatches around to breed. Thus their high numbers and the crop failure compounded the problem and led to the irruption southward into the US.

Feeders are a great way to attract Red-breasted Nuthatches to your yard. They particularly like large seeds like sunflower and peanuts, as well as suet and peanut butter. And in this winter of relative seed scarcity in parts of Canada you may have more of them and other boreal seed eaters here to feast.

John Berry

Red-breasted Nuthatch photo also by John.

HELP WANTED!

There are opening on the scholarship committee. Please contact Beth Bullock if you are interested or want more information.



Field Trips and Nature Programs 2012 -2013

December 2012

Saturday, December 15

Bath Area Christmas Bird Count

Join one of several Merrymeeting teams in the field for this annual event, which brings together experienced and inexperienced birders alike. A pizza party will be held immediately following the count to compile the data and share any special sightings. For additional information contact Don Hudson at 207-443-9795 or wdonhudson@gmail.com.

Count area includes Bath, Arrowsic, Phippsburg, Georgetown, Southport, and Newagen.

Saturday, December 29

Freeport-Brunswick Christmas Bird Count

For information contact either Don Hudson (as above) or Stella Walsh at 207-807-3679, or stellawalsh@earthlink.net.

Count area includes Freeport, Brunswick, and Harpswell.

January 2013

Tuesday, January 8, 7:00 pm

Board Meeting, hosted by Ted

Allen: directions 729-8661

Saturday, January 12, 7:00 am

Field Trip - South Coastal Birding

On this annual outing from Ogunquit to Biddeford Pool, we should see many of Maine's wintering birds including Harlequin Duck, scoters, Purple Sandpipers, and maybe a Snowy Owl or King Eider.

Bring lunch or a snack. Meet at the CVS parking lot in the Bath Plaza at 7:00 am, or at Brunswick Hannaford at 7:20. For additional information or a

meeting time and place in Ogunquit, contact Maurice Dauphin at 389-2585.

*Tuesday, January 22, 6-9:00 pm,
Mid-Coast Red Cross, 16 Community
Way, Topsham*

Potluck Dinner and Slideshow

Enjoy good company, delicious food, and a brief slide show by Francis Joyce on his hippo research and birds seen while at the Mpala Research Centre in Kenya this past summer. If you wish bring a few of your favorite slides. Both slide and digital projectors will be available.

Bring a dish to share. Feel free to bring a friend. PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN PLATE AND SILVERWARE. Beverages are provided.

Directions: From the intersection of US 201 and Rte. 196 go east on 196, towards Bath. Turn right (south) off Rte 196 onto Community Way, at the first traffic light and sign for The Highlands (NOT north to Highland Green Homes & Golf). The Red Cross is almost immediately on your left.

Call Carol Jack at 729-0220 for more information.

February 2013

Saturday, February 2, 9:00 am

Field Trip - Reid State Park, Georgetown

Reid State Park is a magnificent site in winter. Join Andrew to search for coastal birds including grebes, loons, and scoters. We will also look for Short-eared Owls, Purple Sandpipers, and wintering songbirds.

Dress warmly. Bring lunch or a snack. Meet at CVS parking lot at Bath Plaza at 8:30 am to carpool. For more information contact Andrew Gilbert at 329-7525.

Saturday, February 16, 8 am

Field Trip

Meet at Brunswick Hannaford. Birding spots to be determined by recent bird sightings. For more information contact Doug Suitor at 841-1951.

Tuesday, February 26, 7:00 pm

Public Program: Grassland Birds Curtis Memorial Library, Morrell Room, Brunswick

University of New England ornithologist Noah Perlut studies the ecology and evolution of birds nesting in grassland environments. He is especially interested in how human-managed habitats such as hayfields affect the life histories of rare sparrows, Bobolinks, and Meadowlarks. His other projects include urban roof-nesting Herring Gulls, evaluating Saco River marsh bird communities, and exploring what the ideal farm looks like in terms of maximizing farm production as well as biodiversity.

March 2013

Saturday, March 2, 7:00 am

Field Trip - Salisbury Beach and Plum Island

Join the search for wintering birds on this all-day outing to coastal Massachusetts. First stop is Salisbury Beach State Park, where we will look for wintering ducks, loons, and grebes, as well as Shorteared Owls. Iceland and Glaucous Gulls will be the target birds in Newburyport. Then on to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge on Plum Island to see Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings, and more waterfowl.

Bring lunch and dress warmly. Meet at the Brunswick Hannaford, 7:00 am or contact John Berry (725-2051) for a meeting spot and time in Yarmouth or at Salisbury Beach.

Tuesday, March 5, 7:00 pm
Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen: directions 729-8661

Tuesday, March 26, 7:00 p.m.
Public Program: The Russian Far East: In Search of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper
Curtis Memorial Library, Morrell Room, Brunswick

Join Derek and Jeannette Lovitch as they recount their epic journey cruising the Kamchatka Peninsula in search of the critically endangered, and charismatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper. From the breathtaking seabird cliffs of the Commander Islands, to close encounters with Brown Bear and herds of Walrus, this was truly an experience of a lifetime. They will share with you photos and video of the journey, including spectacular landscapes and many of the Russian birds that North American birders dream about (like Steller's Sea-Eagles!)

April 2013

Tuesday, April 2, 7:00 pm
Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen: directions 729-8661

Saturday, April 13, 7:00 am
Field Trip - Scarborough Marsh

On this annual "welcome to Spring" outing, we hope to see Brant and other migrating waterfowl, Snipe, sandpipers, herons, egrets, Ibis, and sparrows.

Bring a lunch or a snack. Meet at the Bath Plaza CVS at 7:00 am or at the Brunswick Hannaford at 7:20 am. For additional information contact Maurice Dauphin at 389-2585.

Wednesday, April 24, 6:00 pm
ANNUAL MEETING, AUCTION, and SPEAKER

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, McKeen Street, Brunswick

Details will be in the next issue of The Call.

The spring issue of *The Call* should reach you in late March. Contributions to that issue are due by March 5th.

Birding Q&A

As I was taking notes as secretary at a recent Merrymeeting Audubon Board Meeting, we arrived at the point in the agenda where members report their personal bird sightings. I realized how much expertise there was in the room and how my knowledge and experience paled in comparison. So I decided to start a column where I would ask a board member a birding question. My question to Ted Allen, MMA President, was "How do you use binoculars to locate a bird?"

Allen responds: In other words, when you see a bird in the bush or high in the sky how do you find them with your binoculars. My memory of the first time I used binoculars is lost in the dim ages of pre-school years. I don't think I saw much through them, partly because each eyepiece had to be focused separately. Luckily my favorite birds were colorful big ones: Blue Jays, Great Egrets, and Robins, which didn't require binoculars.

Locating an object: Practice using your binoculars before you go bird-watching and start by locating objects that do not move. Don't try to locate a tree (or later a bird) with your binoculars. First find the object with your unaided eye, then keep your eyes on it while you raise the binoculars to your face. Then focus and enjoy.

Focusing: Get to know your binoculars well. Does a counterclockwise turn of the focus knob move the focus away from you or closer? Different brands of binoculars differ in this regard.

Field of view (FoV): This spec tells you the width of the area (usually in feet) that you can view at a glance, 1,000 yards from where you stand. A binocular with wide FoV is best to find moving objects such as birds. Usually a higher magnification power results in a narrower field of view. Binoculars have a FoV of about 8 degrees, while with our naked eyes we can see about 180 degrees. Therefore when you raise the binoculars to your eyes your FoV de-

creases sharply. It is easy for a bird to fly out of your FoV. As you learn more about different birds you will be able to anticipate where they will go, and thus find them more easily. And you can share your new binocular tips with beginning birders.

Adjusting the diopter: Fine-tuning your focus - Most of today's binoculars will allow you to separately adjust the focus on one eye with a diopter. This is done to compensate for differences between your eyes so you see the clearest image possible through your binoculars. To keep this article short we will assume you already know how to find your diopter setting. If not you can ask another birder or go to this Eagle Optic website and watch their video.

<http://www.binoculars101.com/bindesign-diopter.html>

Karen Carlisle and Ted Allen

Wildlife Rehabilitation

If you have questions about injured birds, contact one of the two organizations listed below. They can also refer you to an organization that they trust who may live nearer to you.

Avian Haven: birds and reptiles
418 N. Palermo Rd., Freedom, Maine
207-382-6761

<http://www.avianhaven.org/>
Volunteer drivers can often take the injured creature to Freedom. Drivers and donations are appreciated.

York Center for Wildlife: birds, small mammals, and reptiles
Cape Neddick, Maine
207-361-1400
<http://www.yorkcenterforwildlife.org/>
Transportation is by the individual.
Donations appreciated.



Build on what these Campers Have in Common:

Independence and Energy

A Growing Love of the Outdoors and Nature

Continue to build on their new connections

Increasingly make the outdoors a vibrant part of their lives

Please Help to Send a Developing Mind to Camp

See the reverse for details

**Scholarship Committee
Merrymeeting Audubon
A Chapter of Maine Audubon
36 Federal Street
Brunswick, Maine 04011**

December 1, 2012

Summer Camp Scholarship Fund Needs Help

HOG ISLAND ORNITHOLOGY PROGRAMS

Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens in Grades 9-11

BRYANT POND 4-H CAMP, Bryant Pond, Maine

Campers age 10-15

Conservation, Primitive Skills, Rivers and Rapids, Fishing, Fly Fishing, Arts and Photography

TANGLEWOOD 4-H CAMP, Lincolnville, Maine

Campers now in grades 3-4-5

Hiking, Swimming, Creative Arts, Canoeing, Drama, Biking, Balancing on the Challenge Course

We have met Faculty and Counselors at these camps. For the teens at Hog Island, the Faculty provides the kind of stimulation that builds upon the past experiences of these high school students. At least one is in environmental studies in college. For the younger campers, any discomfort about going away from home is quickly dispelled by the thoughtful and sensitive guidance shown by Counselors. In most cases the bottom line evaluation of their experience is: "I want to come back again next year."

We provide full and half scholarships to roughly 25 students each year. We would like to send more kids to camp and hope that you might help. Half scholarships range from \$200-300, full scholarships from \$400-550. Because of higher tuition, we currently send only one applicant to Hog Island which is staffed by nationally and internationally recognized conservationists and ornithologists. We would like to send more campers to that program.

Anything which you can provide to our scholarship account will contribute to this valuable way to bring conservation and nature studies into the lives of young people. What one cherishes as an adult very often began in childhood. We will personally respond to any tax-deductible gifts sent to the above address.

For more information please call or email a member of the scholarship committee:

Beth Bullock bbullock@gwi.net 729-9650

Sue Sergeant suegeosergeant@comcast.net 442-8195

Ted Allen beanallen@myfairpoint.net 729-8661

Barbara Tucker 729-3343

Trip Reports

Green Point Farm - October 6, Jane Robinson

The generally low vegetation of this site provides easy viewing of birds. Diverse watery habitats included a stream, marsh, pond, and the confluence of the Eastern and Kennebec Rivers. We passed through several large fields which are kept low for sparrows and other grass lovers. We saw 50 species including great views of four Wilson's Snipes (on the ground and flying) and more than fifty American Crows harassing an immature Bald Eagle.

Big Sit!, October 14, Gordon Smith

The 1st annual Merrymeeting Audubon Big Sit! was held at Wharton Point on Maquoit Bay and eight intrepid birders observed 18 species from within the 17' diameter circle by 7:30 AM. But heavy wind and rain soon caused everyone to depart or retreat to their cars.

Three cold, wet Sitters, Jane Robinson, John Berry, and Gordon Smith were rewarded for sticking out the weather. At 8:45 AM, the group observed an American White Pelican on Maquoit Bay. For the next four hours, after the word spread far and wide, the pelican provided an additional ten birders with a rare sight.

Other observers joined the Big Sit! throughout the day, contributing to the final tally of 52 species. In addition to the pelican, 29 Great Blue Herons were observed at low tide (a one-time count), and 17 juvenile White-crowned Sparrows entertained the Sitters with their constant calls and attempts at singing (practicing for Spring, perhaps).

Green Point Wildlife Management Area - October 17, Doug Suitor

Weather-wise the time leading up to our midweek trip to Green Point had been overcast and drizzly, with evening rains, a perfect situation to keep the birds grounded. It seemed that for the previous week large number of sparrows had been building up at Green Point. In preparation for our morning walk to Green Point I woke early to check the radar hoping for no real changes only to find that a massive flight of birds appeared to have left the state under clear skies with healthy tail winds. Not only had they left, it looked as if there were no reinforcements from the north. Adding insult to injury, the thermometer was reading below freezing! With less than lofty expectations we met and headed for Green Point. Things started slowly, with much admiring of the fall colors and frost patterns on the grass. To our relief the birding picked up as we rounded the corner to the orchard. We found large groups of sparrows and Robins moving along the woodland / field edge. Mike Fahay spotted an American Pipit with the crowd of White-throated Sparrows and we soon added Clay-colored, Chipping, Song, White-crowned, Swamp, Savannah, Lincoln's and dozens of Juncos. The surprise of the day was a Black-throated Green Warbler with the Yellow-rumped and Western Palm warblers. The walk through the orchard and out to the river added a pair of cooperative Wilson's Snipes and a Red-bellied Woodpecker among the usual suspects. A fine time was had by all and once again Green Point did not disappoint.

Hermit Island - October 27, Carol Jack and John Berry

Saturday started out extremely foggy but 16 optimistic birders met by the dunes at Head Beach. We could see only a short way out over the ocean but the fog began to lift by 10. Our optimism was rewarded as the sun appeared and we enjoyed a mild, blue-sky day. This was the calm before the superstorm Sandy which hit Monday.

Highlights from the 49 species seen included hundreds of Common Eiders, 53 scoters, 16 Red-breasted Mergansers, 10 Common Loons, 1 Red-throated Loon, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks, 2 Bald Eagles, 5 Black-bellied Plovers, 1 American Woodcock (surprised us by zipping low over the marsh), 4 Black Guillemots, 1 Peregrine Falcon, 2 Golden-crowned kinglets, 1 Gray Catbird, 1 American Pipet, 6 Cedar Waxwings, 40 Yellow-rumped Warblers, and 35 White-winged Crossbills.

Waterfowl of Sabattus Pond - November 3, John Berry

Twenty birders shared a sunny warm November morning at Sabattus Pond, a great spot for migrating waterfowl in the fall. Eleven species of ducks were observed, with large flocks of Lesser Scaup, Mallards, Black Ducks, and Green-winged Teal. Good looks were also had of Hooded Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks, Black Scoters, and American Coots. Land birds included a flyover American Pipit, and a concluding great look at three Eastern Bluebirds. Upon return to Brunswick many members of the group continued to Pennellville Road to observe the Cattle Egret located there mid morning by Mike Fahay.

Merrymeeting Audubon
A Chapter of Maine Audubon
36 Federal Street
Brunswick, ME 04011

Note Change of Address ↗

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Yes, I want to join or to renew my membership with Maine Audubon and Merrymeeting Chapter.

I want to help protect and conserve wildlife habitat and promote environmental education and advocacy in our communities.

Please send me Maine Audubon's quarterly newsletter, *Habitat*, and Merrymeeting Audubon's chapter newsletter, *The Call*. If you join at the Patron Level, or enclose an additional \$10, you will receive the bimonthly National Audubon magazine (*Audubon*). Membership benefits also include discounts on programs and at Maine Audubon's Nature Stores.

\$25 Senior/Volunteer \$35 Individual \$45 Household \$65 Contributing \$100 Patron
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You can also join by:

Phone – 207/781-2330 x232 or **Email:** member@maineaudubon.org

or **Online:** www.maineaudubon.org, click on 'Join Now'