

# The Call



*Newsletter of Merrymeeting Audubon*  
*A Chapter of Maine Audubon*

*Volume 43, Issue 3, Winter 2013/ 2014*

## The Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count has replaced what was earlier known as the Christmas 'Side Hunt.' The hunt was a contest in which groups of people tried to outdo each other in shooting the most birds and mammals. How many were killed on Christmas Day is not known, but the bags of feathers (and fur) were large and the heaviest were the winners. On December 25, 1900, Frank Chapman, an ornithologist at the American Museum of Natural History and an officer of the newly formed National Audubon Society, introduced the Christmas Bird Count. On that day, twenty-seven dedicated birders conducted counts in twenty-five areas (two locations in Canada, the rest throughout the United States). None of these sites were close to each other so it must have been a cold, lonely business (I can imagine Frank Chapman contacting all of his birding friends to cover the spread from New Brunswick to Louisiana). The birders garnered about 18,500 individual birds and 89 total species. The twenty-five sites in 1900 have become more than twenty-five hundred count areas this year.

The 114th annual CBC will take place in two count areas in the Merrymeeting Audubon catchment. Over the years the time of the count has been standardized and all are conducted between December 14th and January 5th. This year the Bath count is on December 14, and the Brunswick count on December 29. On each count, fifty or so people fan out in small groups throughout the area. The Bath count area includes Bath, Arrowsic, Phippsburg, Georgetown, Southport, and Newagen. If you are interested in participating contact Don Hudson at 443-9795 or wdonhudson@gmail.com. The Brunswick count area covers Freeport, Brunswick, and Harpswell. For Brunswick, contact Stella Walsh at 807-3679, stel-lawalsh@earthlink.net, or Don Hudson.

Instead of braving the cold and experiencing the companionship of like-minded people on either of these two dates, you can do the count from the warmth of your house. Just observe your feeder early and as often as you can. You should record your address, the weather, date, and how long you watched. For each observation write the number of individuals of each species that you see. Come back throughout the day and again count everything you see. If some are the same species you have already seen, keep only the largest number of individuals of one species seen at one time. This method prevents over counting. At the end, call or email your results to Stella or Don. Your numbers will be part of a database that shows all the birds seen in many parts of the country and the world.

More than a century of counting has produced enough information to provide useful analyses of bird distribution. For example, are Cardinals increasing or decreasing in numbers in Maine and for how long? Are southern species like Mockingbirds increasing their range? Are House Finches, which are suffering from eye disease, maintaining steady numbers or going up/down? You may also record a rare winter bird like the Yellow-rumped Warbler or an even rarer one like the Carolina Wren. Incidentally, these five birds were all seen on the first CBC.

At the end of the day all birders gather at a central place to compile the birds seen that day. If feeder watchers want to join they are welcome. Just contact Don or Stella to find out where the tally of the results will be made.

The Christmas Bird Counts are also listed in the Field Trips section of this issue.

*Ted Allen*

## Healthy Practices When Feeding Birds

Whenever birds are concentrated in a small area the risk of a disease spreading within that population increases.

1. Space your feeders widely to discourage crowding.
2. Clean your feeders every few weeks with a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach and 9 parts water) and be sure to remove the old seed and any build-up of dirt around the food openings. Allow your feeders to dry completely before rehanging them.

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**Hog Island**

*A letter from a MMA scholarship winner*

Greeted by giggly souls and bright eyes, I wasn't quite sure what to expect for my week on Hog Island. Everything was foreign: the land untouched and pristine, the cabins rustic, and the campers young. My stomach dropped as I realized I was the only senior in high school, and I would be spending the week with thirteen boys that were age fourteen. The girls were quite outnumbered with only three total. Upon first impression, I could tell I was far less skilled in bird watching than the other teens. I had never realized that there was such an interest around the country for the art of birding and felt far less superior.

The rocky start set me up for a week of adventure. My fears of spending the week with "little boys" slipped away as I soon treated them like my little brothers. Our group was very knowledgeable and my mind was overloaded by information. With my true passion being the environmental sciences, focused on marine biology, I truly lucked out. One of my group leaders, Heather Richard, was a marine biologist. The very first morning, we arose early with the birds and ploughed through the soft mudflats revealed by the falling tide. We found tunicates, blood stars, dog whelks, American lobster, rock eels, and much more amazing sea life usually hidden by the security of the ocean.

The very low tide was quite the experience, however allowing a Black-throated Green Warbler to fly free after it was banded was my highlight of the week. I had never banded birds before and did not know the precision and patience it required until waiting in the field for the birds to soar down and get caught in the net below. The person who came up with the idea of bird banding was quite the genius.

Scott Weidensaul was the instructor during this session and had us awestruck with his knowledge. Once the Black-throated Green Warbler was banded, he held the little creature to our ears so we could hear its heart beating. Then he chose me to release her. He told me exactly how to hold my hands and then placed her gently into my grasp. I removed my right hand from the top of her and she sat on my left palm shocked by all the surrounding faces staring down at her. I lightly tapped the bottom of my hand as she jetted off into the nearby tree.

The week was packed with numerous events every day. We went on a bird-watching cruise; saw the Great Blue Heron colony on Wreck Island and Puffins on Eastern Egg Rock; enjoyed a raptor visit; wrote songs; listened to fascinating lectures; hiked; and celebrated the Guillemots! All of us were exhausted by the end of the day. Each night, our eyes slowly drooped into slumber while Heather and Josh (Joshua Potter) played guitar and sang.

We left Hog Island on Friday in a heavy rain. A Snow Goose relayed us back to the mainland and safely reunited us with our families.

Hog Island opened my eyes to a whole different world and changed my life. I hope to return one day and have more unforgettable experiences. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend bird camp on Hog Island.

*Emily Cox*

# Field Trips and Nature Programs 2013 to 2014

## December 2013

*Saturday, December 14*

### **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. FMI contact Don Hudson 443-9795 or wdonhudson@gmail.com. See also the cover article.

*Sunday, December 29*

### **Freeport-Brunswick Christmas Bird Count**

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

## January 2014

*Tuesday, January 7, 7:00 pm*

### **Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen: directions 729-8661**

*Saturday, January 11, 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 am. FMI or a meeting time and place in Ogunquit,

contact Maurice Dauphin 389-2585. FMI contact Doug Suitor 841-1951.

*Tuesday, January 28, 6-9:00 pm*

### **Mid-Coast Red Cross, 16 Community Way, Topsham**

#### **Potluck Dinner and Slideshow**

Enjoy good company and delicious food. If you wish bring a few of your favorite slides. If you need a digital projector call Carol Jack.

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.

Dinner will be served at 6:15 but you are welcome to come as early as 5:30 to socialize.

FMI call Carol Jack 729-0220.

## February 2014

*Saturday, February 1, 9:00 am*

### **Field Trip - Reid State Park, Georgetown**

Reid State Park is a magnificent site in winter. Join Doug 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.

*Saturday, February 22, 8 am*

### **Field Trip – Leader's Choice**

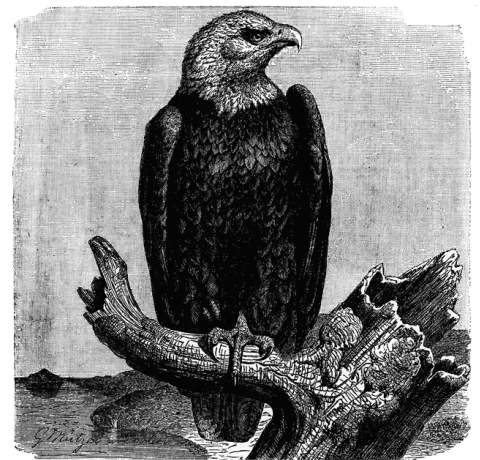
Meet at Brunswick Hannaford. Birding spots to be determined by recent bird sightings. FMI contact Doug Suitor 841-1951.

*Tuesday, February 25, 7:00 pm*

### **Public Program: Eagle Telemetry** *Curtis Memorial Library, Morrell Room, Brunswick*

Chris Desorbo is a research biologist and the Director of the Raptor Program at the Biodiversity Research Institute based in Gorham.

His talk will include discussion of research efforts focused on Maine's Bald Eagle population spanning a roughly 30-year period, from early contaminants and tracking studies to current debates over seabird predation and wind power.



## March 2014

*Tuesday, March 4, 7:00 pm*

### **Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen: directions 729-8661**

*Saturday, March 15, 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 Short-eared 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 water-fowl.

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 25, 7:00 p.m.*

**Public Program: First Impressions of Alaska**

*Curtis Memorial Library, Morrell Room, Brunswick*

Doug Sutor will share his photos from a birding trip to Alaska in the summer of 2013.

## April 2014

*Tuesday, April 1, 7:00 pm*

**Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen:** directions 729-8661

*Saturday, April 12, 7:00 am*

**Field Trip - Scarborough Marsh**

On this annual “welcome to Spring” outing, we hope to see Brant and other migrating water-fowl, 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. FMI contact Maurice Dauphin 389-2585.

*Tuesday, April 22, 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*.



### Scholarship News

Children who receive a MMA scholarship are asked to write a letter describing what they learned at camp and their favorite experiences. We post their letters, drawings, and photographs, on the scholarship board which is set up at our monthly speaker meetings at the library. In case you can't get to the meetings, we think you will enjoy reading parts of some of their letters. Also in this issue of *The Call*, there is a wonderful essay written by Emily Cox, the winner of the scholarship to Hog Island.

A Bryant Pond scholarship camper wrote, “The warden camp was the best part of my summer at camp. My favorite part was the night scenario.... I think the job for me is a game warden. I hope that I can do a camp again next year.”

Another wrote, “I had a fantastic time! I met a lot of new friends and made many things out of wood for my family. You are doing a great thing for the community by sending people here. I hope you are able to continue it!”

From a Tanglewood camper, “Thank you for sending me to Tanglewood. I've been trying to think of a favorite part, but it was all so great! Some of my favorite moments were: having late night talks in the cabin; trying new food at dinner; when we did electives. I cried when I left! The experience I had there is one to remember.”

At Tanglewood, the campers choose a focus group, as well as traditional activities. This boy enjoyed the gardening group, writing, “I learned a lot about growing good vegetables, and the camp kitchen used the vegetables from the garden in our meals. I also learned that styrofoam never ever biodegrades!”

After reading all the letters, we are enthusiastic to start planning for next summer. The MMA Board voted to offer two scholarships to *Coastal Maine Birding for Teens* at Hog Island in 2014. This program is an intensive week of learning about all aspects of birds with some of the best ornithologists in America. Early this winter we will send information packets to science teachers at the local high schools and to guidance counselors at the elementary and middle schools. At the same time, the letters to our co-sponsors go out; these generous folks donate the major portion of the funds needed to send so many kids to camp. If you would like to become a co-sponsor, the scholarship committee will welcome your call. Our telephone numbers are listed on page two.

*Beth Bullock*

## Bird Song

Now that it's fall, there is hardly any bird song in my yard. If there is any, it's quiet little "chip" notes and maybe a similar reply. Why do the birds sing such lovely songs in the spring and then it gets so quiet?

Birds communicate for many reasons: to impress and attract a mate, establish territorial boundaries, identify family, warn of a predator, and convey information about food. They draw on a variety of sounds to convey these meanings. Typically they fall into two main groups: relatively long and elaborate songs, used to attract a mate or establish territorial boundaries; and briefer calls, typically used to identify family, warn of a predator, or convey information about food.

Birds put a lot of effort into singing. They are trying to impress mates and claim territories. Songs are often loud and repetitive, so they tend to be noticed more than other bird sounds. Birds may sing their songs thousands of times throughout the day, spending more than half the day singing while establishing territories and courting females. This requires a lot of energy and also may expose the singer to threats from a predator.

Experiments have shown that songs are important "keep out" messages in defending a territory. For example, male birds respond aggressively to the recording of another male's song, sometimes even attacking the loudspeaker. When birds are using recordings to facilitate seeing birds they are playing territorial calls of a species to elicit a defensive behavior.

When they're not defending a territory or attracting a mate, birds communicate less elaborately, using calls. These are the chip sounds you are hearing in your yard in the fall.

Calls are used for interacting with family members, alerting one another to the presence of predators, keeping in touch while flying, or sharing information about food.

Birds use contact calls to keep in touch as they fly, feed, or go about their day, including during migration. Contact notes are often short and high-pitched. Birds that migrate at night may use nocturnal flight calls. Researchers use these sounds to study birds at night by monitoring the numbers and kinds of birds that pass overhead.

Many birds utter alarm calls in response to a nearby predator. Black-capped Chickadees give a chick-a-de-de-de alarm call. By using alarm calls, birds let the predator know it has been sighted. Having lost the advantage of surprise, the predator may decide to give up the attack. Alarm calls also warn other birds that the predator is there. Birds will often mob predators that are near their nests or young and when birds of many species join in, they have a better chance of chasing the predator away. Alarm calls also help by warning the caller's young, mates, or relatives to take cover.

Baby birds use begging calls to let their parents know they're hungry. Many songbirds continue to use begging calls even several weeks after they leave the nest, and their parents oblige.

*John Berry*

### *Feeding Birds continued from p.1*

3. Use only feeders that can be easily cleaned and limit the amount of seed provided in feeders to only the amount your birds will consume in one or two days.
4. Don't just top off seed in feeder. Check remaining seed and always discard any that has become wet, moldy or foul smelling.
5. Rake the area underneath your feeder to remove droppings and old, moldy seed.
6. If you see one or two diseased birds, take your feeder down immediately and clean it with a 10% bleach solution. Take your feeders in for a couple of weeks to encourage the birds to disperse.

### The Tube Feeder Debate

Tube feeders often require birds to stick their beak or head into a hole to get seeds. When the eyes of an infected bird come in contact with the opening of the feeder, the next bird to feed at that perch may pick up the infection. The key: Disinfect tube feeders frequently.

### What to Look For

Salmonellosis is caused by a bacteria. It is a common cause of mortality in feeder birds, but the symptoms are not always obvious. Sick birds may appear thin, or fat and fluffed up, and may have swollen eyelids. They are often lethargic and easy to approach. Salmonellosis is primarily transmitted by fecal contamination of food and water by sick birds, though it also can be transmitted by bird-to-bird contact.

Avian Pox appears as wart-like growths around the eyes, bill base, or legs and feet. In a second form, plaques develop on the mucous membrane of the mouth, throat, trachea, and lungs, resulting in impaired breathing and difficulty feeding. The virus can be spread by direct contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces (e.g., feeders) or by ingestion of contaminated food or water.

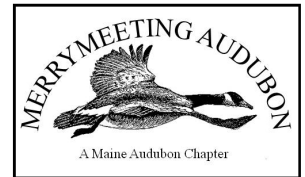
House Finch Eye Disease symptoms are red, swollen, runny, or crusty eyes. In extreme cases the eyes become swollen shut and the bird becomes blind. While some infected birds recover, many die from starvation, exposure, or predation.

*Stella Walsh*

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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.

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