

THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

Winter 2018

A New Big Year Record for Maine!

By Doug Hitchcox – Photos by Josh Fecteau

The hobby of birding takes many forms: from passive backyard feeder watching to dropping everything and driving across the state (or further) to see a rare bird. A “Big Year” takes birding to extremes. In this contest, a birder tries to see as many species in a designated area as possible in one calendar year.

I learned this was not for the casual birder by taking up the challenge in 2011 after finishing college. That year I drove 30,000 miles across the state and tallied 314 species, a record that stood until 2017. Last year, Josh Fecteau of Kennebunkport undertook the “Maine Big Year” challenge and ending on December 31st, had bested my record

with a new high of 317! In this interview I ask Josh a few questions about the highlights, know-how, and other factors that led to his biggest year.



Painted Bunting, May 18th, Palermo, Maine (And go to our website to see this photo in color!)



Tricolored Heron, April 22nd, Wharton Point, Brunswick

D: Why did you decide to do a big year in 2017? Could you just tell in January that it'd be an exceptional year for vagrants in Maine?

J: Though the first quarter (Jan-Mar) was quite birdy, it was April's rarities that made me go all in. On the 9th, I twitched a Common Redpoll visiting a feeder in Skowhegan, and the next day I observed a Forster's Tern at the Sanford Lagoons. Those two were both birds I missed in 2016. The following week brought two first state records, and life birds for me – I joined you to scope the Vermilion Flycatcher in Bremen, and two days later, we bumped into each other in Newcastle to see a Fieldfare. The day between the latter sightings just happened to be my birthday – and I took that as a sign to keep at it.

D: I was able to share a few rare birds with you this year. A personal highlight was seeing your car come down Audubon Road in Bremen to tick (see) the Vermilion Flycatcher. That was an incredibly tight window of opportunity, the bird only visible for less than three hours. Were there any nail-biting chases or mega-rarity highlights that really stood out in your year?

J: Three life bird mega-rarities highlighted the month of June. The first was a one-day-wonder Magnificent Frigatebird first observed by researchers on Stratton Island around mid-day and then in the afternoon seen from Scarborough's Prouts Neck by some lucky birders, myself included. The very next day, I ventured to Reid State Park following reports of Maine's first Snowy Plover. I managed to photograph the bird alongside a Piping Plover for an excellent comparison shot. And the following week, I was back at Prouts Neck to twitch a Brown Pelican.

D: In my big year there were a few experiences with common species that became most memorable for me, like hearing American Pipits singing over the tablelands on Mount Katahdin. Were there any ordinary birds that you won't soon forget?

J: I really enjoyed Red Knots this year. Who would have thought I'd see at least one per month for eight consecutive months? I never tired of seeing these pale, plump shorebirds.



Snowy Plover (L) and Piping Plover – June 13th, Reid State Park, Georgetown, Maine – Josh Fecteau photo



The new record holder

D: What tools, besides your binoculars, do you think were most important to your success in seeing so many species in 2017?

J: eBird was very helpful – especially the Year Needs Alert for Maine which was delivered on an hourly basis to my email inbox. My spotting scope and superzoom camera also helped bring many distant birds into focus.

D: Maine is a huge state with lots of diverse places to bird. Did you have any favorite locations to bird or spots you felt really helped boost your count?

J: My favorite spot was Hills Beach in Biddeford, where I spent many falling and some rising tides scanning through gulls, terns, and shorebirds on the shifting sandbars. Some of my other favorite spots included California Fields Wildlife Area in Hollis, the famous Sanford Lagoons, and, close to home, Emmons Preserve in Kennebunkport.

D: Was there any downside to doing a big year in 2017? Were there any typically common or irruptive species that weren't around last year?

J: There's no downside to spending any year birding! It wasn't a huge year for winter irruptives,
(continued on page 3)

Beginning Birders Want to Know: How to Help Birds in Winter

*By John Berry and Karen Carlisle – from the
Merrymeeting Chapter of Maine Audubon*

Winter is a challenging time for birds. Days are colder, finding food can be a challenge, and unfrozen water can be difficult to find. You can help with all of these problems.

To help birds survive the cold, windy days of winter, shelter is the most important assistance. You can help by building a brush pile in an out-of-the-way corner of your property to provide a safe spot for ground nesting birds, preferably close to food sources. Start with larger limbs and branches stacked loosely and then add smaller branches, leaves and grasses. If you clean out your birdhouses in the fall, they may be used by social species, such as chickadees, as roosting boxes where they will communally roost to conserve body heat. A long-term solution is to include bushes and evergreen trees in your landscaping. These keep their cover throughout the year and provide a natural winter shelter. Many also provide seeds and berries for a natural food source.

Cold weather also increases the birds' need for food at a time when food is scarce. You can provide natural sources of food by leaving dead flowers, seed heads, and grasses in your gardens until spring. Birds will eagerly eat the seeds of large flowers like Black-eyed Susan, sedums and coneflowers. Hawthorns, crabapples, bayberry, and winterberry also provide natural fruits consumed in the winter. Another enjoyable way to help is to provide a variety of nutritious food in feeders or scattered on the ground. Suet, thistle, and Black Oil sunflower seeds are all very nutritious and enjoyed by many species. Cracked corn and white millet are good for ground feeding birds such as juncos, sparrows and doves. It is important to keep your feeders clean and have them placed in a safe location.

The third important aid you can give is to provide a reliable source of clean, unfrozen water. This can be done either with a heated birdbath or by adding a heating element to one you already have. Providing

winter water saves the birds valuable energy by eliminating the need to fly long distances to find water.

Our winter birds do quite well surviving the coldest months, but they can use help to improve their chances of survival, and attracting birds to your yard can help brighten the winter days as well.

Big Year Record for Maine! *(continued)*

but I managed to observe the whole suite of usual suspects (Evening and Pine Grosbeaks, White-winged and Red Crossbills, Pine Siskin, Bohemian Waxwing, and even a single Common Redpoll).

D: What advice do you have for anyone starting a big year?

J: Make friends with a boat captain and spend some days offshore. Thirteen species I observed were only seen by boat. Other than that, I'd say keep your vehicle's fuel tank filled and stock your back seat with food, water, various outerwear, maps, etc., for the inevitable drop-what-you're-doing-and-go chases.

D: Anything else you want to share?

J: A huge THANK YOU to the Maine birding community! I birded with so many kind and generous people this year, and relied heavily on reports of sightings from birders across the state. I couldn't have seen as many birds as I saw without all this help!

Thank you, Josh, for answering these questions and congratulations on setting the new Maine Big Year record! Josh blogged about many of his big year adventures and other fascinating natural history observations on his website: <http://joshfecteau.com>.

So everyone, 317 is the new record to beat. Good birding!

Doug Hitchcox is the Staff Naturalist at Maine Audubon and a member of the YCA Board

Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument at Risk

By Monica Grabin

There is a reason why the largest ecosystem on the planet, covering 71% of its surface, is not well-understood. It's mostly invisible. Yet we depend on the resources of the world's oceans in ways too numerous to count. From supplying oxygen to trapping carbon, feeding billions and controlling our weather, the oceans really are our planet. That's why it's so important to protect marine environments, study them, and document changes taking place within them.

In September of 2016, President Obama created the first ever Marine National Monument in the Atlantic Ocean. It's called the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts National Monument, and I first learned about it at a "Lunch and Learn" at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm. (I highly recommend this series if you've never been. Look on the Reserve's website for information.) The fact sheet issued by the White House when the designation was made contains this description:

"Today's designation will protect 4,913 square miles of marine ecosystems with unique geological features that have been the subject of scientific exploration and discovery since the 1970s. These features include three underwater canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon, and four underwater mountains known as "seamounts" that are biodiversity hotspots and home to many rare and endangered species. Scientific expeditions to this region have yielded new discoveries including species of coral found nowhere else on Earth and other rare fish and invertebrates. Additionally, the canyons and seamounts provide habitat for protected species such as sea turtles and marine mammals, including endangered sperm, fin, and sei whales and Kemp's ridley turtles. The newly protected marine area... will be jointly managed by the Dept of Commerce and the Dept of the Interior."

My husband and I have been scuba divers for over a dozen years now, and although our diving is done in warm tropical waters, I was astounded to learn of the diversity of corals off the New England

coast. There are over 70 different species, many living at extreme depths. Some colonies have been in existence for hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of years. Like tropical coral reefs, these areas are nurseries for fish, phytoplankton, and zooplankton which nourish the entire ocean ecosystem.

Although they are located south of Maine, off the coast of Cape Cod, these areas are critical sources of food for the whole New England marine region. One website about the Monument has a picture of a Puffin at the top. The Puffins that attract birders from all over the world to our coast need these marine nurseries to flourish.

So, why, other than the fact that it's interesting, am I bringing this up? Because like so much lately, this amazing, first-of-its-kind marine treasure is under threat. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke is looking into whether to open this area to oil exploration, exactly what the Monument was intended to prevent. He is also looking at changing the logging restrictions in our new Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. Katahdin Woods absolutely needs your attention, but I think very few of us are aware of the existence of the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts. For the record, there is another, called Cashes Ledge, which is only 80 miles south of Portland, and has been called "The Yellowstone of the North Atlantic," by noted marine biologist Sylvia Earle. Cashes Ledge still has viable populations of cod and pollock and should also be protected. The need is dire, the threats intense, and the ocean vulnerable. Please let your representatives know that you care about all our precious National Monuments and their future.

Days after the above was written, on January 4, 2018, this appeared in the New York Times:

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration said Thursday it would allow new offshore oil and gas drilling in nearly all United States coastal waters, giving energy companies access to leases off California for the first time in decades and opening more than a billion acres in the Arctic and along the Eastern Seaboard.

Please make your voice heard on these issues.

The 118th Annual Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is sponsored by the National Audubon Society and has been held each year since 1900. Its original intent was to counter an annual hunt in which people competed to see how many birds and other animals they could kill on Christmas day. Times have changed. Now there are more than 2,500 official CBC's, held from December 14th through January 5th, and over 70,000 people, from Alaska to South America, participate each year.



Male Red-bellied Woodpecker – 35 were seen on the Biddeford-Kennebunkport CBC, easily topping the previous record of 21. (Marie Jordan photo)

York County Audubon members have been leaders and participants in this effort for many years. There are two local counts. One covers Southern York County from Kittery to Ogunquit and is organized by Monica Grabin. This was her first year as official compiler, but it was the 45th for the count. Kathy Donahue leads the second count, covering Kennebunkport up to Saco. This count has been in existence for 58 years. A count is held within a circle with a 15-mile radius, for 24 hours. The circle is divided up into sections, each with its own leader, and each section tries to get an accurate count of the birds present on count day. This type of birding is not for everyone, and the weather can be pretty challenging, but for the hardy souls who take part



A Saw-whet Owl was a new species for the Southern York CBC. (Bill Grabin photo)

it's fun and worth the effort. The data collected on these counts is invaluable for research and scientific study.

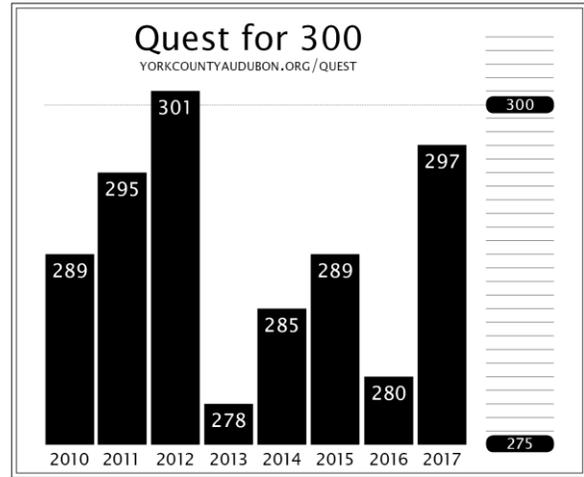
The Southern York County CBC was held on December 18th. It was snowy and cold with poor visibility, and yet 85 species were tallied, about average for this area. New high counts for Black Scoter, Northern Cardinal, and Dark-eyed Junco were reported, and there was a new count species, Saw-whet Owl! The Biddeford-Kennebunkport count on the 30th faced extremely low temps which lasted all day (minus 24, anyone?), and everyone trying to scope out the ocean had to deal with thick sea smoke. Yet our tough birders counted 78 species, and 10,779 birds. Although this was a low species total, there were high counts for Greater Scaup, Sanderling, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Eastern Bluebird.

The other great feature of the Christmas Bird Count is the compilation at the end of the day. At our two counts hot food and drink is provided, as well as snacks and goodies. It's fun to compare notes and wait to hear who found something special. Thanks to all who participated!

The Quest for 300 *By Scott Richardson*

How many bird species can be seen in York County in a single year? We do our best to answer that question each year with our “Quest for 300.”

Our 2017 tally of 297 species was the most listed since we tallied 301 in 2012. To reach that height, it helped that birders picked up rarities like Magnificent Frigatebird and Brown Pelican, as well as the continuing (and breeding!) King Rail in Wells. Other good finds included Gray-cheeked Thrush, Seaside Sparrow, and Least Bittern.



Brown Pelican, June 21st in Prouts Neck, Scarborough, photo by Josh Fecteau

But for every great find, there was a corresponding loss. Little Gull had been spotted during 6 of the past 8 years, but eluded detection in 2017. Other might-have-beens included American Avocet, Black Skimmer, and three warblers: Worm-eating, Golden-winged, and Connecticut.

We've improved our tracker at yorkcountyaudubon.org/quest. You will now find a color-coded column that shows how many years each species has been reported since 2010. How many "red alert" birds will we find this year?

The 2018 Quest has begun. We're watching eBird, the maine-birds Google group, and our inbox (quest@yorkcountyaudubon.org) for new year discoveries.

YCA welcomes its New Members!

August - November

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| JoAnne Abbott | North Berwick |
| Nancy Green | Littleton, Mass. |
| Ruth E. Johnson | Arundel |
| Andrew Proulx | Wells |
| Faith R. Wiss | Kennebunk |
| Mya and Tomas Dundzila | Eliot |
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| Jennifer and Richard Izbecki | Cape Porpoise |
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| | Kittery |
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For all upcoming events and general information, please visit our website:
www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

YCA announces June Ficker Hog Island Scholarship for July, 2018 Program



YCA is seeking an educator or community leader to participate in a one-week program on famed Hog Island off mid-coast Maine in July 2018. YCA will sponsor one participant who can benefit from the Hog Island experience and use it to teach others. **Complete info is available on our website and applications are due by March 15th.**

The program is entitled “Sharing Nature: An Educator’s Week” and will run from July 15th through July 20th. The YCAS scholarship will pay 70% of the recipient's cost for program tuition, room and board.

YCAS’s 2017 Hog Island scholarship winner was teacher Noel Leigh (Margaret Chase Smith School). She described her program experience in an article for the Autumn 2017 issue of *The Harlequin*, which can be accessed through the YCAS website. And a report from our 2016 winner, Katie Brodeur (from the Center for Wildlife) can be found in the Autumn 2016 issue.

Since 1936, some of the world’s most highly respected naturalists have come to Hog Island and inspired thousands to learn about and protect birds and the environment. Roger Tory Peterson was among the first teachers. Rachel Carson described her visit to Hog Island in her landmark book, *Silent Spring*. Kenn Kaufman, only nine years old when he read Peterson’s account of Hog Island, is now an international authority on birds and nature.

Winter Wildlife Day Returns to the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Thursday, Feb 22



For the 8th year, the Wells Reserve, the Center for Wildlife, and York County Audubon team up to celebrate the wildlife of southern Maine. Join us for lots of family fun with live animal presentations, guided walks, and crafts. If the ground is white, bring skis, sleds, and snowshoes (we have some snowshoes to share — mostly kid’s size — if you don't have your own). 10-11am: CFW presentation; 11-12:30: storybook reading, wildlife crafts, sledding, snowshoeing and family fun - plus cocoa!

YCA’s Next Evening Program at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm will be Tuesday, March 29th at 7 p.m. For the latest program news, visit us on Facebook or our Website: YorkCountyAudubon.org

Our Facebook page has experienced a steady increase in activity, rewarding visitors with “hot off the digital camera” photos of local unusual birds and other treats. Please visit the page, “like” us if you wish, and post a photo, sighting or comment of your own.

And visit our website to see the photos in this newsletter magically transformed from Black & White into Color!

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