



THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

Winter 2012

FOR THE SAKE OF THE BIRDS

Marian Zimmerman

The dark cold days are upon us. Many of our feathered friends have headed to warmer climes and we are settling in to tackle that pervasive "To Do List" that has continued to grow since last winter. Short of a brief foray in search of a Snowy Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, or Dovekie, the temptation is to assume that birds do not need much of our attention. Fill the bird feeders for the "winter hardies" and wait until spring when the rest return north to their summer home.

Would that that were true! My "To Do List" would certainly shrink more rapidly. But in reality, our avian residents need us to be active on their behalf, even in their winter absence. You see, this is a time when we need to be preparing for their return to insure that the place they left will still be there intact when they arrive. The need for conservation never takes a vacation nor does it take the winter off.

Last year the Maine State Legislature passed a bill that legalizes the sale and use of fireworks in Maine, delegating their regulation to local municipalities. This inaugurates another area of concern for conservation. As of this writing several communities including Portland, Augusta, Lewiston, Bangor, South Portland, North Yarmouth, Freeport, Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Yarmouth, Wells, and Hollis have all decided to implement local bans. Buxton and Kennebunkport have scheduled votes to decide the question while Biddeford has a moratorium as it deliberates its response. Hopefully other municipalities, especially those with shorebird beach habitat, are similarly visiting the matter.

The issues around the sale and use of fireworks revolve around four main concerns: personal safety, fire safety, quality of life, and protection of shorebird habitat, particularly that of the endangered Piping Plover. Data on fireworks related personal injuries and property loss document the damage while conversations with

permanent residents in beach areas delineate quality of life concerns. The weekly or even nightly use of fireworks during a one-week vacation is often repeated by the next set of visitors, resulting in an endless spring-summer-fall of fireworks that compromise quality of life.

Finally, there is the concern of impact on our wildlife, in particular for shorebirds and the endangered Piping Plover. The latter are also seasonal residents, but for them their visit is not about resting and relaxing, but rather the very serious matter of survival. They come out of necessity, the need to nest and raise their young in a safe and secure place. And the place they rely upon is the very place that draws so many of our human visitors: the coastline. Further, all come at the same time.

For shorebirds, beach areas, where so much of the use of fireworks occurs, is vital. The beach is their home. This is where they breed, feed, learn, and grow. This is the place to which they have adapted and going elsewhere is not an option. So despite the ever-increasing human pressure on their home, they persevere in going about the business of living, hanging on as best they can.

Unfortunately the use of fireworks is often the straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back, making living on a beach untenable for Piping Plovers. What for human residents degrades beach life, making it unpleasant or less desirable, is a death knell for the birds. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has studied endangered species in an effort to establish protection plans. The USFWS *Guideline for Fireworks* states specifically that "Fireworks are highly disturbing to Piping Plovers. The plover will often abandon their nests and broods during fireworks displays, exposing the eggs and chicks to weather and predators."

Such was the case on Hills Beach this last summer when extended fireworks usage the night of July 3rd resulted in the nest abandonment of chicks hatched early in the day. (See *The Harlequin*, Autumn 2011.) Just one night of "celebration" meant the loss of an entire year's nesting.



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The Harlequin, the newsletter of the York County Audubon Society, is published quarterly in spring, summer, autumn & winter. Spring deadline: March 10th.



The Harlequin is printed on 50% post-consumer recycled paper.

For the Piping Plover, struggling to maintain a viable population in Maine, this is a heartbreaking loss, one that seems entirely unnecessary and all too avoidable. There was not much to celebrate.

This brings us back to the State Legislature and the legalization of the sale and use of fireworks. As those who care about birds and our natural environment, we have an opportunity to advocate for what we value. Get involved in the deliberations taking place in your local community. Speak up for sensible regulations that make for quality living. And as the conversation unfolds, make sure that the dialogue is broadened to include more than what people want or think is good for them and them alone. Be the voice of the creatures that cannot speak for themselves. Work to restrict fireworks usage on beaches, especially where Piping Plovers are nesting. Do it please, for the sake of the birds.

HELP YCAS GO GREEN!!!

Can you help us Go Green? Receiving your copy of *The Harlequin* by email can help stem the waste stream while eliminating postage and printing costs. We will send you an email alert when the new issue is posted on our web site so you can download it. If interested, please contact Linda Eastman at islndr@myfairpoint.net

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

email: _____

NEW MEMBERS:

Libby Blackman	Old Orchard Beach
Connie Hanley	York Harbor
Dick Matheson	Wells
J. J. Barnum	York Beach
Mr. & Mrs. John Duffy	Kittery
Brian Hill	Kennebunk
Rev. & Mrs. Samuel M. Johnson	Wells
Thomas Klak	Saco
Torbert Macdonald Jr.	York
Gary Mitchell	Kittery
Mr. & Mrs. Robert A. Murray	Saco
Gretchen West	North Berwick
Emily Baisden	Biddeford
Scott Dalrymple	Old Orchard Beach
Tracy Dorgan	Kittery
Larry Lapointe & Diane Lapointe	Old Orchard Beach
Kyle McCormick	Berwick
Ian Munger	North Berwick
Brittany Nesbitt	York Beach
Eleanor Kruger	Kittery
Richard Levy & Dana Asbury	Albuquerque, NM
Mary L. Ross	Ogunquit
Tish Toussaint	South Berwick

WELCOME BACK:

Philip Bender	Biddeford
Linda J. Lyman	Kennebunk
Andrew P. Aldrich	North Berwick
Jason Clemons	Biddeford
Timothy Cluff	Sanford
Dianne Fallon	Kittery Point
Peter McPheeters	Biddeford Pool
Martin Smith	Wells
Eileen Willard	Kennebunk
Arthur Lutton	Biddeford
Jill Barrett	Kittery Point
James W. Georgitis	Kennebunkport
Lawrence Tirrell	Scarborough
Kathren M. Wilcox	Barrington, NH

FINAL QUEST FOR 300*Scott Richardson*

The inaugural "Quest for 300" is at its end. Our collective attempt to record 300 bird species in York County during a single calendar year is just shy of that goal, with 295 species on the list. Latest additions are Cackling Goose, Barnacle Goose and Red-headed Woodpecker. Keep watch on our website, under "Birds and Birding," and get ready for resetting the 2012 list and launching a new Quest for 300.

WINTER WILDLIFE DAY**Thursday, February 23rd, 10:00am to 2:00pm, Free***Monica Grabin*

Perhaps you were one of the lucky people to join York County Audubon, The Center for Wildlife, and the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm for a day of fun last year. Well, you and anyone who missed it are in luck, because we're making this an annual event. On Thursday, Feb. 23rd, which is during February school vacation week, families are invited to join us all at the Wells Reserve for indoor and outdoor activities.

The Center for Wildlife will bring live animals for you to meet at 10 a.m. and 12 p.m.; a Maine guide will take us on walks around the center to look for signs of winter residents at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.; and there will be hot chocolate to warm you up when you return. There will also be handicrafts, touch tables, and people to answer your questions about how to find our animal neighbors during the winter months.

If you have snowshoes (if there's snow!) bring them along. If not, there will be some there for you to borrow. Sleds or skis might also be fun. No reservations are needed, and, perhaps best of all, the event is FREE! So join us for fun and adventure at the beautiful Wells Reserve and find out what your furry and feathered friends are doing this time of year.

KENNEBUNK SAVINGS BANK COMMUNITY INVESTMENT BALLOT

Kennebunk Savings Bank will be mailing its annual Community Investment Ballot to its customers in February. Each year the bank commits a sizeable portion

of its earnings to area non-profits through this program. The amounts given by the bank are based on customers' votes.

If you are a Kennebunk Savings Bank customer, look for your ballot along with your February statement or in a special mailing. Please take advantage of this opportunity to support York County Audubon by casting your vote for YCAS.

**BIRDING CHALLENGE SPONSORS**

The York County Audubon Society thanks the following businesses who helped make the 2011 Birding Challenge a success

Alfredo's Italian Pizzeria	Wells
B & B Burner Service	Biddeford
Blooms & Heirlooms	Kennebunk
Bob & Mike's Mini Mart	Saco
Brady Construction, Inc.	Biddeford
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Green Mountain Transplants, Inc.	Arundel
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Kennebooks	Kennebunk
Kennebunk Hardware	Kennebunk
Kennebunk Village Pharmacy	Kennebunk
Lo Ink Specialties	Kennebunkport
Ray's Auto Tech	Biddeford
Saco & Biddeford Savings Bank	Saco
Saco Valley Autocare, LLC	Saco
Shady Book Farm	Biddeford
Simply Painters	Kennebunk

BIRDING CHALLENGE DISBURSEMENTS:*Stratton Island Internship: \$1500**The Center for Wildlife: \$750**Cappy Springer, Bird Rehabilitator: \$250*

PROGRAMS

York County Audubon programs begin at 7:00pm at the Mather Auditorium of the Wells Reserve. Come early for light refreshments and social time. FMI: www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

March 20: "Maine Seabird Islands: the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge." Speaker: Stephanie Martin. Stephanie is the Programs Coordinator for the non-profit Friends of Maine Seabird Islands. Learn how volunteers work with the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge in its efforts to conserve, protect, and enhance the rich diversity of coastal habitats, seabirds, and other wildlife.

April 17: "Birding in York County." Speaker: Marie Jordan. Marie is a popular presenter of bird programs. She is an enthusiastic York County Audubon board member who spends hours in the field with binoculars, telescope and camera. Marie travels extensively ~ just back from a trip to Cuba, she will tell us of birds she has seen all over the world but she will also help us learn more ways to enjoy local birds and birding.

FIELD TRIPS: Please call the Contact Person for the time and place of meeting. This will help with car pooling and last minute changes.

February 11:

David Doubleday: White-winged Gull Chase.
CONTACT PERSON: David Doubleday 967-4486.

March 10:

Chuck Homler: The Saco River in Winter.
CONTACT PERSON: Joanne Stevens 883-6475.

WEDNESDAY BIRD WALKS

The Wednesday Birding outings are continuing year-round. During the winter months the frequency may decrease. Interested persons should send David Doubleday an email (davidd@roadrunner.com) requesting information about the Wednesday Bird Walks. He will add them to the elist and they will receive notice of upcoming trips.

eBird WORKSHOP

Are you feeling left behind by the tech world? Struggling to keep up on the news of where to find the latest hot sightings? Wondering how to share your own

with others in the birding community? If so, you are a perfect candidate for attending a free eBird Workshop to learn the ins and outs of using eBird to communicate bird sightings.

Doug Hitchcock is willing to offer a free workshop to get us up to speed. We are considering a Saturday in March. If interested, please contact Pat Moynahan at PMMoynahan@maine.rr.com. Once we have an indication of interested participants, we will firm up a date and location. Don't miss out on this unique opportunity. Please reply early.

BIRDING PATCH: KENNEBUNK BEACHES

Monica Grabin



Three Scoters ~ Photo by Marie Jordan

I'm not an expert birder. Yes, I know a fair number of species, but when faced with a mixed flock of shorebirds or sparrows, they usually become LBJ's for me (little brown jobs). I love looking, though, and I'm fortunate to live about a mile and a half from Kennebunk Beach. Not exactly a hot spot in the birding world, I'll admit, but actually a pretty good place for birds, especially in the fall and winter.

People are always strolling along the beachfront between Mother's and Gooch's Beaches, but I'm usually the only person with a pair of binoculars. Sometimes I have a spotting scope, and I'm seeing lots of birds, which you could see too.

First you'll see the gulls. Many gulls. If you want to learn the difference between ring-billed and herring gulls, you'll have lots of opportunities. You'll see both in many stages of plumage, from juvenile to adult. It's challenging to learn the differences. You'll also see Greater Black-backed Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, and last year a Glaucous Gull was found nearby.

In the fall, the shorebirds start to come through. Again, the numbers are not great, but that makes it a bit easier

for the novice. There are usually Semi-palmated Plovers, Sanderlings, Least Sandpipers, and on one memorable occasion I had an American Golden Plover. You might also see White-rumped Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plovers, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstones, and other migrants and winter residents.

Beginning in the fall and through the winter the area known as Middle Beach is a great place to look for winter ducks. Look out beyond the rocky shore and you might find all three scoters, Long-tailed Ducks, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes, Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Loons in winter plumage, Great Cormorants, and many, many eiders.

In 2009, lots of people did come to Kennebunk Beach when a Lark Bunting, a Midwestern and Southwestern bird, spent weeks visiting a feeder at 179 Beach Avenue. In late October, I had my first Mother's Beach encounter with an unknown species of jaeger which was harassing the gulls. Like any oceanfront area, you never know.

Here's where to look: starting at Mother's Beach, park at the very farthest spaces on the right, along Lord's Point road, just past the KBIA pool. Look toward Strawberry Island on the right, where you'll see gulls and ducks, and at the tide pools and rocks on the left where you might find shorebirds. I've seen a Ruddy Duck here as well as a large group of Brant. From there, walk along the beach for gulls and peeps, and keep looking out beyond the surf for ducks.

Walking along Beach Avenue toward Gooch's Beach, there's a small area with a staircase down to the beach (across from Valley Avenue). There are often shorebirds here among the rocks, sand, and seaweed. This is where the American Golden Plover was found.

You'll walk by some houses which block your ocean view; look to the beach rose bushes and you might very well find sparrows to i.d. When you can see the ocean again, look both close to shore November 16, 2011 and further out where the buoys are. This is the best spot for scoters, mergansers, goldeneyes, loons, and grebes.

Keep looking to the sea all along the walkway until you come to the point. You can climb out onto the rocks and look at the waves around the point. Here you will often find Long-tail Ducks, and more scoters. These rocks are also a good spot in winter for Purple Sandpipers. I've never seen a harlequin here, but they're often found just a short way up the coast near Walker's point, so I think they could definitely be there occasionally.

There will be more shorebirds and gulls in the water and on the sand as you walk toward the breakwater which looks over the Kennebunk River between Kennebunk and Kennebunkport. This is another great place to look for ducks, loons, grebes, and cormorants.

For a place no one seems to think of when they think of birding, there's a lot to see. Plus, it's a gorgeous walk in almost any weather; if you're a Kennebunk resident, you may very well see some of your neighbors; and without a doubt someone will ask you what you're looking at with your binoculars, and you can tell them about all the cool birds to see at Kennebunk Beach.



*American Pipits ~ Photo by
Marie Jordan*

SANFORD SEWAGE PONDS

Scott Richardson

Ten people joined leader Andy Aldrich on October 16th for a busy 3 hours of birding under mostly cloudy skies. It was breezy but warm as we ambled around the property, first searching for land birds then getting in position to identify ducks. Highlights included American Pipits in the scope, a large movement of robins, several Pectoral Sandpipers, a remarkable 31 coots, and a basic-plumage scaup that challenged everyone to determine "greater" or "lesser." We tallied 39 species with Green-winged Teal at the top of the abundance chart. For directions, current open hours, and site rules, visit our website.

RARITY ROUNDUP

Pat Moynahan

On November 13, twelve birders joined Derek Lovitch as he led his annual enthusiastic Rarity Roundup of Southern York County. We laughed and enjoyed the very warm day while finding 49 species of birds that are typical for late fall. The best birds were a Peregrine Falcon, Eastern Bluebird, and Winter and Carolina Wrens. Rarities, however, were not to be found.

The most difficult part of the day was getting two separate groups together because our web page, flyer, and newspaper publicity did not agree on meeting times. We finally all gathered at Fort Foster and continued on our way. Unfortunately, we had to skip some spots because, without carpooling, we could not find enough parking spots. Southern York County can be busy on lovely days. We apologize for the confusion. This is just another reason to check with the Contact Person when you plan on joining us.



Most of the participants enjoyed our traditional vegetarian chili compilation. The social aspects do complete the day. Thanks to all who participated. I will forward the summary when the Audubon Database allows. And a special thanks to Gillian Graham for a very nice article in the local press. See you all next year.



YORK COUNTY 2011 CBC

Pat Moynahan, Compiler

Photos by Gillian Graham

The York County Christmas Count (YCME) was held on December 19, 2011. Twenty-five bird watchers and one reporter, Gillian Graham, from the Biddeford Courier, covered the six sections of the count circle. This circle begins at Moody Point in the north and extends south through Gerrish Island. The weather was a balmy 38 degrees in the afternoon after a low of 11 degrees in the morning. The 10-15 miles per hour wind did drive some inside and may have hindered the seawatch folks.

Species counts were well within the usual range and we added three new species. We totaled 85 species for the day plus 2 count week birds (Barred Owl, and Mute Swan). Our new species were Eastern Screech Owl found by Derek Lovitch and Luke Seitz, Red-headed Woodpecker reported by



Red-headed Woodpecker
Photo by H. Henson

by and documented with photos by the Adams Family of York, and Cackling Goose identified by Bob and Ann Watson. Written documentation on these species, available photos and feathers of the Red-headed Woodpecker (A Cooper's Hawk took the bird from the feeder the afternoon of the count) have been submitted to our Regional Editor. New count highs included Brant, Harlequin Duck, Bufflehead, and American Robin. There were no new lows.



Photo by Kate Wilcox

BIDDEFORD/KENNEBUNKPORT 2011 CBC

Marie Jordan, Compiler



Bonaparte's Gulls
Photo by Marie Jordan

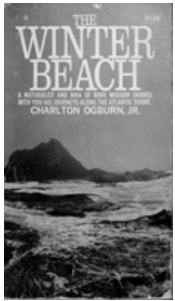
After a weather delay because of the freezing rain on Saturday, we held our Biddeford/Kennebunkport Count (MEBK) on Monday, Jan. 2 with clear skies, warm temps, but strong winds most of the day which was in part most likely responsible for the low land bird count. Was that strong wind partly responsible for the very high count of Bonaparte's Gulls, Kittiwakes, and Razorbills off Eastern Point or were those numbers great only because of a plentiful food supply near the coast? Either way, we blasted a couple previous high counts! Bonaparte's Gulls (previous high 54) this year 306 and Black-legged Kittiwakes (81) 705.

We also had high counts for Gannets (45) 47; Great Cormorants (66) 83; Razorbills (375) 483; Eastern Bluebirds (13) 31 and Baltimore Orioles (1) 3.

The high Bluebird count is exciting - is this a result of those folks who have been building and maintaining Bluebird House trails? Are we beginning to see the results of their efforts to help this species? Hopefully, the answer is YES!



Eastern Bluebird
Photo by Marie Jordan



I'VE BEEN READING . . .
Pat Sanborn

**"The Winter Beach" by
Charlton Ogburn**
(New York: William Morrow,
1966)

This wonderful book is undeservedly out of print, but still can be found second-hand. The richness of Ogburn's discoveries on the winter beaches from Mount Desert Island to the Outer Banks may be no surprise to dedicated beach walkers. In fact, though, it has new things for all of us. Nothing is too insignificant for the author--be it types of sand, a Herring Gull working on a clam, or the way that waves break. He also includes a riff on what large cities and destroyed landscapes do to our spirits. Since I have discovered this book, I read it every year, come December. And as I re-read Ogburn's book, it all comes back to me how once the crowds disappear, the winter beach in its stark beauty, provides an experience of the complexity and wonder of our natural world.

KIDS CORNER
Pat Moynahan

**"She's Wearing a Dead
Bird on Her Head!"**
by Kathryn Lasky &
David Carrow



Relating the beginnings of the Audubon Society, this children's book tells an important story, appropriate for any age group. Feathers on ladies' hats were becoming more and more popular in 1896 when two empowered women recognized that fashion was killing millions of birds and driving them towards extinction. At the same time it was also eliminating women's chance to be heard

and to have the right to vote. After all, who would listen to a woman with a dead bird on her head? And so the Massachusetts Audubon Society was born. Marvelously illustrated, *She's Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head!* provides a light-hearted way to introduce the very serious topics of conservation and responsibility for the natural world.

NEW 2012 BIRDER BANDS AVAILABLE

The Maine Birder Band is available for a contribution of \$20, and it can be purchased through DIF&W's online store at www.mefishwildlife.com. Bands are suitable for attaching to binoculars, cameras, sunglasses or any other outdoor gear.

Maine Birder Band participants get "banded" and receive an officially registered and individually numbered band. Just like a migratory bird band, each band has a phone number so that someone finding the band, and the misplaced object that the band is on, can call DIF&W and locate the birder who lost the band and gear.

To date, Maine Birder Band funds have supported DIF&W efforts to study distributions and abundance of coastal marsh sparrow species; update population assessments of grassland birds and launch Maine eBird. Maine Birder Band contributions provide a vital source of match that allows the State of Maine to access federal conservation funding.

For more information on the Maine Birder Band or any of DIF&W's ongoing projects, please "Like" us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/mainefishwildlife or call us at (207) 287-8000.



HAVE YOU SEEN A SNOWY OWL YET?
It's an irruption year and there are quite a few Snowy Owls around. Keep your eyes open!

York County Audubon
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ETYMOLOGY

Pat Sanborn

Brant ~ *Branta bernicla*

The origin of "Branta" is unclear, but the word gradually came to be associated with "brand" or "burnt." This may be a reference to the color of the bird. "Bernicla" is a Latin version of "barnacle." There was a legend that Brants breed in the shell of a barnacle, dropping out as they mature.