Beginning Birder Workshop 2014

The 2014 Beginning Birder Workshop, held on June 7th at Caledonia State Park, was Conococheague Audubon Society’s sixth annual event for persons interested in becoming birders. We were again fortunate to have excellent weather and special thanks go to the volunteers who helped organize and participate in the event. Staff at Caledonia was also very helpful in making our workshop a success.

We were pleased with the turnout of 29 participants, including several children. One of these young bird enthusiasts, Eliana, was at the workshop for her third year and brought her younger sister this year. She again had her field guide with tabbed pages to help identify familiar birds. We provided instruction on the use of binoculars and field guides, viewing of birds in their habitat during three different bird walks and a slide presentation on the birds found in Caledonia. We identified 40 species, including two new ones this year; the Olive-sided Flycatcher and Common Raven. Thanks again to all of our volunteers and the staff at Caledonia for making another successful workshop.

Conway Bushey and Dave Cooney Jr.
We left early July 4th to drive the ten hours to North Conway, NH. On the way we stopped at New Market, NH for the nesting Mississippi Kites which I had seen a couple times before, but it was raining and we struck out. We finished our drive to North Conway to my nephew Mik’s home for weekend hiking in White Mountain National Forest.

Saturday we day-hiked 10.5 miles in the Crawford Notch area, part of which included the Appalachian Trail from Zealand Hut to Route 302 near Crawford Notch. Best bird was a pished-in Boreal Chickadee as well as warblers--Nashville, Tennessee, Blackburnian, Blackpoll, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Black & White, Common Yellowthroat, Ovenbird, a couple Purple Finches, and lots of Winter Wrens and Swainson’s Thrushes--all on their breeding territories.

Sunday morning we drove to Jefferson Notch at 3,000 feet and hiked up Caps Ridge trail that goes all the way up to Mt. Jefferson at 5,700 feet. We hiked to about 4,000 feet to elevations suitable for Bicknell’s Thrushes and heard several at close range, but weren’t able to see any as they kept buried in the thick spruce-fir krumholz forest. On this hike’s elevation there were Blackpoll, Magnolia, and Yellow-rumped warblers, Winter Wrens, Swainson’s Thrushes, Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated Sparrows. We left the Whites for the New Hampshire-Maine border and the Mahoosuc range, which is one of the most challenging parts of the Appalachian Trail.

The objective in the Mahoosuc was to help my sister hike the 16 miles that she needed in the Mahoosuc in her quest to complete the entire Appalachian Trail in section hikes (and to find some birds while we were there). Due to questionable weather expected later in the day Monday, we decided to do a shorter than planned for seven mile hike that included side trails in and out and about two miles of the AT. This included an ascent of 2,000 feet to the AT, and then a like descent to get out. We used these side trails to access the AT for both hikes we did in the Mahoosuc. Birds like Red-eyed Vireos and Hermit Thrushes are common at the lower elevations, Blue-headed Vireos and Swainson’s Thrushes at mid-elevations, and Bicknell’s Thrushes, Blackpoll, Yellow-rumped, and Magnolia warblers, Dark-eyed Juncos, and White-throated Sparrows at high elevations where there was dense stunted spruce-fir. We had our first Yellow-bellied Flycatcher calling during this hike.

Tuesday was a huge day of hiking in some of the toughest terrain the AT has to offer, and I did not take my bins because of the difficulty of hiking and risk of banging up the bins. We hiked up Mahoosuc Notch trail to Mahoosuc Notch, up Mahoosuc Arm and down to Speck Pond, and up to Old Speck Mountain before a big long descent to Grafton Notch. Due to the difficult terrain, we needed 12 hours to hike 11 miles, and included was three hours to hike the one-mile long Mahoosuc Notch which is strewn with car and truck size boulders piled against each other in the deep notch in a dense spruce-fir forest. There was still snow and ice at the bottom of some of these boulders.

We birded by ear and heard (and saw) many of the boreal nesting birds we had been finding on the previous hikes, including several Bicknell’s Thrushes and the normal boreal warblers. I pished-up Bicknell’s Thrushes two different times when I heard them call close to me on the trail. The bonus bird of this hike was a Spruce Grouse on the AT on Old Speck Mountain, but unfortunately only Kevin and Stephen saw the bird.

While accessing the side trails to get to the AT in the Mahoosuc, we used and birded Success Pond Road, which is a timber company forest road with good birding habitat. Our highlights here were frequent Chestnut-sided Warblers, Alder Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Merlin, and Ruffed Grouse with young. A cow moose and her calf crossed the road in front of Kevin’s car, and he watched the calf trying to figure out what to do to get off of the road.

While on a rest and recuperate day Wednesday, Kevin and I went to the AT parking lot at Grafton Notch State Park, ME which is a known nesting site of Philadelphia Vireos. After hearing legitimate candidates sing, we observed a Philadelphia Vireo singing its song on a dead snag of a birch tree. We also had
very active Least Flycatchers all around the parking lot. Thursday was also a recuperate day, and while doing a mild hike back in the White Mountains of NH, we had flyover Red Crossbills calling at Great Glen below Mt. Washington.

Friday, we left my nephew Mik’s home early and drove to Rockland, ME to catch a morning ferry to Vinalhaven Island, a large coastal island with 1,200 year-round inhabitants and lots of summer visitors. We had reserved John Drury for a 2 p.m. boat birding voyage out about ten miles to Seal Island. John can take 6 birders on his small lobster type vessel. Mik, Kevin, myself, and a retired professor from U. of Vermont who made the drive when Mik put out the word about the trip, were John Drury’s birders. It was well worth the four of us splitting the $400 fee.

On the way out we began seeing Black Guillemots frequently and Great Cormorants as we passed by small rocky islands. When we reached the area of Seal Island we began to see Razorbills and Atlantic Puffins in good numbers. As we began to circle Seal Island we found a Common Murre floating with a Razorbill for good comparison, and all the while puffins were coming and going all around us. We eventually put down anchor and observed Common and Arctic Terns in good numbers, and eventually after a lot of study found a couple Roseate Terns in the mix.

A big reason for the boat trip chosen was that Seal Island is the site where a Red-billed Tropicbird has been summering for the past five years. The bird has a habit of coming out of a cave on the island early in the morning and then again late afternoon. At about the time expected by the boat captain, the bird appeared and flew crazily around for 30-45 minutes exciting the hundreds of terns. The bird had one long cock-eyed tail feather streaming behind it, and called loudly and often with terns chasing it like kids on a playground. After watching and laughing at the antics, we pulled anchor heading back toward the coast.

Mik spotted two birds on the water at a distance and suspected shearwaters, and Drury turned the boat back and we got real close looks at two Manx Shearwaters floating on the water. They eventually flew after we got real close, and we watched the low flying birds occasionally bank upward over the water and then return to flight just above water level. The boat was back into Vinalhaven harbor after about four hours of very enjoyable weather and awesome birds with a very knowledgeable and totally flexible captain/guide Drury.

Saturday early morning we took the ferry back to the mainland and birded the coast. First stop was Weskeag Marsh just outside of Rockland. We spent an hour watching Nelson’s Sparrows in a grassy marsh. We then moved down coast to Scarborough Marsh. On Pine Point Road just before getting to the coast, we studied both Nelson’s and Saltmarsh Sparrows, finding them on both sides of Pine Point Road. It took a lot of looking, studying, and patience to confirm the Saltmarsh ID as these birds don’t sit up readily. Final coastal destination was the Biddeford Pool area, where we saw a couple Whimbrel and Red-necked Grebes as well as other shorebirds.

Sunday we were back in the White Mountain NF and hiked a tough 6 miles circuit out of Crawford Notch with a lot of ascent and descent including Mt. Toms and Mt. Field. We pished-in two Boreal Chickadees, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and had several Bicknell’s Thrushes on this hike as well as a lot of warblers including Northern Parula. The highlight, though, was the two Gray Jays on Mt. Field that appeared through the thick spruce-fir, and took peanuts out of our open hands.

Monday July 14th was head home day. On the way out of New Hampshire, Kevin and I stopped at New Market again and after walking Gonet Road for a half hour we gave up on the Mississippi Kites and started to head out. Then high in the sky was an adult Mississippi Kite soaring over us. A good way to exit New Hampshire and head back home. Final tally of species was 148 for the trip.
Conservation Corner
Climate Change: For the Birds

by Valerie B. Barnes

I’ve been wrestling with the topic of climate change, trying to understand the debate about whether climate change is actually happening as a result of human activity, what the indicators of climate change are, what policymakers have done or are trying to do, and what we as ordinary citizens can do. I’ve scanned many reports, including material prepared by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the 2014 U.S. National Climate Assessment, and annual State of the Birds reports from 2009-2013. The volume of information is daunting. As an organization of folks interested in conservation in general and birds in particular, let’s try to understand this issue as it relates to birds.

The IPCC Working Group I’s contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report (AR) Summary for Policymakers states that

“Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased....

Human influence has been detected in warming of the atmosphere and the ocean, in changes in the global water cycle, in reductions in snow and ice, in global mean sea level rise, and in changes in some climate extremes... This evidence for human influence has grown since AR4. It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.”

Working Group I of the IPCC focuses on the physical science basis of climate change. The collaborative group of scientists includes 259 authors from 39 countries. The IPCC explains that the term extremely likely indicates assessed likelihood of an outcome or a result is 95-100%.

According to the U.S. National Climate Assessment, the average temperature in this country has increased 1.3 to 1.9 degrees Fahrenheit since 1895. Long-term studies suggest that some warblers are now migrating to their breeding grounds in the spring too late to find peak food resources. This seems to be because temperatures at their wintering grounds are changing more slowly than at their spring breeding grounds. Christmas Bird Count data over the past 40 years reveal that higher numbers of many species of birds are now found at more northern ranges. These include Brant, Ring-necked Duck, and American Goldfinch.

The 2010 State of the Birds report indicates that birds dependent on oceans and birds of Hawaii are highly vulnerable to climate change. Generally, birds in other habitats are not as vulnerable to climate change. However, species that are already of conservation concern such as the Golden-cheeked Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, and Whooping Crane are more vulnerable to climate change than species not threatened by other factors. Changes in rainfall and temperature are likely to reduce habitat for arctic, alpine, and wetland birds (e.g., White-tailed Ptarmigan, Rosy-Finches, Northern Pintail, Arctic Loon). Increased drought conditions in arid lands and grass lands may degrade those habitats as woody plants and invasive plant species increase. This may affect vulnerable birds that breed in those regions (e.g., Greater and Gunnison’s Sage Grouse, Bendire’s and Crissal Thrasher, Lesser Nighthawk, Bobolink, Northern Bobwhite).

Continued next page . . .

“... To really save the birds, we need to slow or reverse climate change itself. We can reduce our carbon footprints . . .
**On the Record**

By Donna Hocker

**Conococheague Spring Field Trips**

**APRIL**

Letterkenny led by David Cooney added the Bald Eagle to the trip list. A total of 130 species are on the list. Seven birders saw 57 species.

Dale Gearhart led the trip to Little Cove. The 13 participants saw 60 species.

**MAY**

The Path Valley trip was led by Bob Keener. Seventeen birders saw 86 species. The Great Egret was added to the trip list that totals 135 species.

Rhetta and Eric Martin led the evening trip to Edenville. The 9 observers saw 47 species including first time birds to the list; Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Chimney Swift, Chestnut-sided Warbler and Blackpoll Warbler. A total of 83 species are on the list.

The Black-throated Blue and the Yellow-rumped Warblers were added to the list for the State Game Lands #249 trip led by Mike O’Brien. Three birders saw 57 species. The trip list is 102.

**JUNE**

The Michaux IBA trip was led by Rhetta and Eric Martin. The 8 observers saw 40 species.

**MIGRATION COUNT**

One thousand five hundred and forty three (12,543) birds were counted on the May Migration Count by 80 participants in Franklin County. A total of 163 species were seen. New to our Migration list is the Summer Tanager seen by Earl Nollenberger. Species with new high counts were the American Black Duck, American Woodcock, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Raven, Northern Parula, American Redstart and Ovenbird. The European Starling came in with the top number of 1095.

**Climate Change continued . . .**

Conservation efforts can slow the effects of climate change to some extent. Landowners and governments can protect crucial habitats, minimize further human-induced stresses on breeding grounds of vulnerable species, and monitor trends of both vulnerable and common species of birds.

But to really save the birds, we need to slow or reverse climate change itself. We can reduce our carbon footprints by using more renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind), turn up the thermostat in summer and turn it down in winter. We can use fans instead of air conditioning and replace energy-hogging appliances with more efficient models, especially refrigerators. If we plant native trees, they’ll provide cooling shade and help to clean carbon dioxide and pollutants from the air. We can use energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulbs. We can help to preserve native forests by using recycled materials (e.g., paper for our printers and toilet paper). We can reduce transportation impacts on the environment by buying locally, walking or bicycling instead of driving, and using fuel-efficient motor vehicles. We can encourage planners to consider the effects of decisions made today on tomorrow’s climate.

This fall Audubon plans to announce “major new science on global warming and its effect on birds.” I’ll keep you posted!
Coming Up--September & October

**THE HAWK MIGRATION WATCH AT THE PULPIT STARTS IN SEPTEMBER AND CONTINUES DAILY INTO NOVEMBER. CONTACT DALE GEARHART 860-5799**

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**MEETINGS**
7 p.m., Community Center, Norlo Park, 3050 Lincoln Way East, Fayetteville, PA

**SEPTEMBER 8**
The regular monthly meeting features Kisha Pradhan, a student at Wilson College, presenting an overview of her South Mountain environmental research.

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**FIELD TRIPS**
**PLEASE CONTACT LEADER IN ADVANCE**

**SEPTEMBER 13**
Field trip to **Creekside at Menno Haven**, 2011 Scotland Ave., Chambersburg, for fall migrants. Meet at 6:45 am at the pond at the rear of nursing home. Moderate walking in wet grass. Following the walk at Creekside, carpool to Michaux. Contact Bill Oyler 261-5727.

**SEPTEMBER 20**
Auto trip to the **Ned Smith Nature Center**. Meet at 7:00 am in the parking lot behind Perkin’s Restaurant off Rt. 30. Costs - museum entrance fee and meals. Contact Dale Gearhart 860-5799

**OCTOBER 4**
Three mile walk along **Big Spring for Fall Migration**
Meet at 7:30 am in the parking lot at upstream end of the Big Spring – 300 yards north of the old fish hatchery near 844 Big Spring Rod, Newville. NO RESTROOMS
Contact Linda and Bill Franz 776-4463

**OCTOBER 11**
Level hike along the **C&O Canal**. Leave from Green-castle Sunnyway Foods parking lot at 7:30 am.
Contact Shirley Fenstermacher 264-8344

**OCTOBER 25**
Kings Gap for **Northern Saw-whet Owl banding**
Special evening of banding with Scott Weidensaul’s team. Meet at Kings Gap Environmental Education Center, 500 Kings Gap Rd., Carlisle, at 6 pm.
Pre-register with Val Barnes 352-4397.

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Send all mailing changes to the assistant editor.

**COPY DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 15 FOR NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER.**

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