

MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

BOB DUCHESNE, 478 BEECHWOOD AVE. OLD TOWN, ME 04468

BEST NESTS Newsletter Volume 11 – April 2011

A Progress Report

A pleasant surprise: Over the last several months, the most visited page on the Maine Birding Trail web site has been the **Best Nests** page. This signals an interesting trend. Typically, in early winter, site visitation reflects an interest in how to use the state for birding. Festivals, tours, and puffins receive the bulk of attention. As the season approaches, more web site attention focuses on accommodations and brochure maps as vacationers plan the details of their forthcoming visit. With **Best Nests** topping the list of pages getting the most attention, a record of success is building. But, while the success is nice, it's the patterns of site usage that reveals important information about what matters to visiting birders.



One observation has remained relatively constant over the last year. Site visitors show the same pattern of regional interest regardless of season. The Downeast/Acadia tourism region sees the most **Best Nests** visitors, which is not surprising since there is strong interest in Acadia National Park and the puffins on Machias Seal Island. The rest of coastal Maine gets a lot of attention, with the Midcoast and Southern Maine Beaches usually fighting over second place. Normally, Portland is right behind them. But since the beginning of the year, The Maine Highlands page has actually exceeded Portland in page views. An interesting statistic: Aroostook County leads the Maine Lakes & Mountains in page views.



As usual, the Kennebec Valley generates the fewest page views.

However, there are fewer **Best Nests** innkeepers in those trailing regions, so there is a greater chance of visitors clicking through to the sites of individual innkeepers. Naturally, those inns with which I do guided tour packages get a disproportionate number of hits. Big Moose Inn in Millinocket, Pittston Farm in Seboomook, and Evergreen Lodge in Shirley typically receive twice the average number of



click-throughs to their web sites. A big surprise is Eagle Lake Sporting Camps in Aroostook County. Although they've been a **Best Nest** for only a few months, they're averaging visits well above normal – something you wouldn't necessarily expect for a facility in far northern Maine. It's not a fluke. The Northern Door Inn in Fort Kent also outperforms the average. It's on par with Crocker Pond House in Bethel. Despite lower-than-average visitation to the Maine Lakes & Mountains page of the web site, the Crocker Pond House receives higher than average traffic because it is the only **Best Nest** currently listed in the region. Attean Lake Lodge in Jackman also exceeds average, even though it is listed among four **Best Nests** in the Kennebec tourism region – the region least viewed by site visitors.

Clearly, ecotourists are seeking an ecotourism experience. On the whole, mom & pop inns that are located close to birding sites outperform name brand hotels. Inns that outperform the average by at least 25% include the Machias Motor Inn, Lubec Bay Cottage, Inn on the Harbor in Stonington, Bass Harbor Cottages, Atlantic Birches in Old Orchard Beach, James Place Inn in Freeport, and Captain Lord Mansion in Kennebunkport. Nonetheless, location matters, and the Hampton Inn & Suites in Rockland is among the highest performing **Best Nests**. Mom & pops that are not closely associated with specific birding locations tend to lag slightly.

On a personal note, how much are dedicated birders willing to spend for the sighting of just one bird? For the last 30 years, I've been chasing a Mangrove Cuckoo all over southern Florida. They're not rare, but they are elusive. In my dozens of trips, I've had several close calls. When it became clear that the Maine Legislature was going to recess for the April school vacation week, my wife and I determined that THIS time, we'd get it the little twerp. On Friday, April 15th, after a daylong hearing on the Bottle Bills in my committee at the legislature, my wife picked me up in a rental car at 4pm. We drove straight through to Ft. Myers, Florida, arriving at 10pm the following evening. On Monday afternoon, at precisely 4:45pm, we pulled into the parking lot of the boat ramp at Rookery Bay, Naples, just as a Mangrove Cuckoo alighted in a tree next to us. Gotcha! That one bird added nearly \$1500 to the Florida economy. Now I have to get the Elegant Trogon in Tucson, Arizona. I may stop on the way for the Golden-cheeked Warbler in San Antonio that has eluded me twice.



Next up: Birding Festivals