

MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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Web Stats
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Happy New Year.

The fourth quarter of 2010 featured several enjoyable outings, including a presentation to the Maine Innkeepers Association annual meeting at the Cliff House in York and a large crowd for the annual meeting of the Mahoosoc Land Trust in Bethel. The Maine Birding Trail also welcomed the addition of a few more Best Nest inns.



Maine Birding Trail web traffic is generally slowest in the fourth quarter. Typically, I see a lot of people researching tours, puffin boats, and festivals this time of year as they begin to plan vacations in Maine. Then web traffic on lodging, ferries, and other entertainments begins to pick up in 1st Quarter as people refine their plans. Most innkeepers already know, people don't plan their vacations as far in advance as they once did and I typically see traffic begin to spike at the beginning of 2nd Quarter. There were some interesting surprises over the last three months. Some inns that are not located in the heart of obvious tourism regions got more traffic than I expected. These included The Brewster Inn in Dexter, the Milford Motel On the River in Milford, and the Northern Door Inn in Fort Kent. As expected, inns with whom I have actual tours planned for this spring showed the most traffic. These would be the Big Moose Inn in Millinocket, Evergreen Lodge in Shirley, and Pittston Farm in Seboomook.



Tracking web traffic is a valuable tool, but there are hazards. For instance, in order for me to track the traffic that is clicking on the links on the mainebirdingtrail.com pages, the links are coded with a redirect script. This means that traffic going from the mainebirdingtrail.com site to innkeeper sites first goes through a special server that counts the hits. Unfortunately, for innkeepers who use tracking tools such as Google Analytics, the traffic coming from the mainebirdingtrail.com site is not identifiable. It shows up in

Google Analytics as Direct traffic. It's a Hobson's choice. If I use the redir, I see where the traffic is going but the recipients don't see it. If I don't use the redir, the recipients see it and I don't – which makes it

difficult to adjust listings to achieve the best results. I'm still trying to find a way where both the sender and receiver can see the link traffic, but so far, no luck.

Google Analytics

I recently started tracking incoming traffic to mainebirdingtrail.com using Google Analytics. This is in addition to



Webalizer, which I have been using for many years. The two systems produce wildly different results. In my case, Webalizer shows ten times the amount of traffic coming to the site as does Analytics. The difference is

due to methodology. Webalizer counts everything, including crawlerbots used by search engines. Much of the web traffic monitored by Webalizer is not human, so its numbers tend to be inflated. On the other hand, Google Analytics is very stingy in what it counts. It can only count hits from visitors who have enabled javascripts on their computers. It is also stingy on how it treats repeat visitors and page reloads, and it might not work well with some browsers. In short, Webalizer errs high, Analytics errs low. Webalizer is helpful in spotting unusual activity that might be attributable to mischief. Analytics is better at showing trends. Both are valuable tools when understood properly.

How do people find your web site? Most tracking tools record the phrases people have entered into a search engine that produced a visit to your site. It can be very revealing. The search engine phrase that produces 10-15% of visits to the mainebirdingtrail.com site is – naturally – “maine birding trail.” But you’ll never guess what phrase produces the second most number of visits. “**Ugly Moose.**” It turns out that I have a photo of an ugly moose labeled on a travelogue page for a tour near Moosehead Lake in 2008. If you Google “ugly moose” images, it’s the first photo that comes up. That ugly moose is producing at least ten visits a month to mainebirdingtrail.com. Make sure that photos on your site are named in a way that might be entered in a search engine.

