

MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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BEST NESTS Newsletter **Volume 19 – July 2012**

No Vacancy



With more birding tours and events coming to Maine, it's no big surprise that they keep running into each other. On June 22nd, a large group from Dayton, Ohio, Audubon bumped into three vanloads of birders from Massachusetts Audubon at Scarborough Marsh. After a quick exchange of pleasantries, notes, and tips, each group went on its way – ultimately to cross paths again later. The lure of puffins brought both groups to the **Machias Motor Inn** (*Best Nest*) later that week, though not at the same time. The Dayton group first went west to seek a few rare Maine birds in the

mountains, and then spent two nights at the **Big Moose Inn** (*Best Nest*) in Millinocket while enjoying some time in Baxter State Park.

When the Dayton group finally arrived at the **Machias Motor Inn**, it was greeted by a different birding group led by Lakeshore Nature Tours of New York, which had just returned to the inn from a successful day of puffin watching on Machias Seal Island and were about to settle in for dinner and pie at Helen's Restaurant. With two birding tours camped at the inn, the No Vacancy sign was not a big surprise. But I've had private clients staying at the inn several times this summer, and the No Vacancy sign has been lit on several occasions.

Puffins are certainly a charismatic draw. Reservations for the Bold Coast Tours puffin boat out of Cutler harbor filled up very quickly this spring. Three different boats from Port Clyde, New Harbor, and Boothbay Harbor continue to serve Eastern Egg Rock in the southern Midcoast area. And, new this summer, Bar Harbor Boat Tours is now making daily trips out to Petit Manan just north of Acadia National Park. That brings the total to three boats that now serve the island. The growing number of puffin-watching opportunities is helping to fill more beds in nearby communities.



While puffins are sexy, drab little sparrows can also steal the show. The reason the two Audubon groups collided at Scarborough Marsh is that it is uniquely home to the Nelson's and the Saltmarsh Sparrow – two closely related birds that were formerly considered one species until 1996. Scarborough Marsh is the best place in the world to see both species together.

Then it was down the road to Pine Point on Scarborough Beach to witness another spectacle. As the Dayton group stood on the beach next to the breakwater, it was awestruck to find a pair of Roseate Terns sitting in front of them while a Piping Plover walked in the sand behind them. Both birds are federally endangered species, and yet there they both were. As one birder from Ontario commented, “where else are you ever going to see THAT?”

The No Vacancy sign at **Machias Motor Inn** is just one indication of a successful season so far, despite some challenging weather in June. All three of Maine's birding festivals enjoyed their best years ever. The Wings, Waves, Woods Festival in Stonington and Deer Isle drew birders from farther away this year. I had birders from Michigan and Missouri during some of my festival walks this year, and it's possibly one reason that **Inn On The Harbor** led all *Best Nests* in the number of web site visits during the first five months of this year. Meanwhile, over the Memorial Day Weekend the Downeast Spring Birding Festival in the Cobscook Bay region had its best attendance in its eight year history, and the Acadia Birding Festival that followed one week later astonished organizers with a huge jump in turnout, smashing the old record.

Web traffic at mainebirdingtrail.com also continues to climb since the use of GoogleAnalytics began in July 2010. In July of 2011, the web site began using an “Events” script on GoogleAnalytics to more closely monitor referrals from mainebirdingtrail.com to individual *Best Nests* innkeepers. By next month, we should have a year's worth of data. Overall, visiting birders seek information from the web site in the following order of priorities: puffins, maps, northern forest specialties, tours, rare birds, festivals, guide book, and *Best Nests*. This is followed by page view requests on whales, Maine regions, specific tours, personal guides for hire, general information, and travelogues.



However, there is an interesting pattern to site usage with regard to *Best Nests*. Through winter, site visitors seek general information about where and how to bird the state. As spring advances, birders pay more attention to logistics and there is a spike in visitation to the *Best Nest* pages from March through June. The trend tapers off gradually later in summer.