

# MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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

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# What Birders Want

There are essentially three segments of the birding market that innkeepers should know about:

- 1) Dedicated birders from far away
- 2) Dedicated birders within driving distance
- 3) Casual birders within Maine



Not surprisingly, the first group is very attractive to innkeepers. They tend to be affluent and stay multiple nights. It is relatively easy to identify what they are looking for – which are birds unique to Maine – and market to that quest. In fact, very often this group has a list of specific birds they hope to see and will select a location based on their likelihood of seeing as many of those birds as possible. The unique birds that Maine has to offer are Atlantic Puffins and other seabirds, northern forest specialists, and breeding songbirds. Inns that are near these species have an opportunity to create a marketing niche for themselves and attract this group – especially inns that are near puffin tour boats or along the rim of the northern forest, ranging from Bethel to Rangeley to Greenville to Millinocket to Machias. There are some species of interest in southern Maine, as well. Several diminutive sparrows and a handful of ocean birds are coveted from Kittery to Thomaston.



The second group is similar but the number of target birds is smaller and their length of stay shorter. These are southern Mainers traveling north within the state, or they may be from southern New England. Because of their proximity, they've seen many of the birds that are desirable to more distant birders. Also because of their proximity, they are more likely to bird Maine over a wider range of seasons and are the best bet for filling beds during the shoulder seasons. The inns that attract the first group

also attract this cohort, but more coastal inns from southern Maine through Midcoast also interest them.

Travelers in the third group are less likely to do overnight trips for birding on their own, but they are more likely to participate in guided group trips and birding festivals. They will go to a wider range of

places throughout the state so long as the adventure is organized for them. They are not very likely to have a targeted list of preferred species and merely relish seeing some of the common birds that make Maine delightful. Direct advertising to this group is not likely to be successful. Rather, getting involved with birding festivals, Maine Audubon, local land trusts, and relationships cultivated through the Maine Birding Trail may be helpful in the long run.



Tracking web traffic at [www.mainebirdingtrail.com](http://www.mainebirdingtrail.com) provides a lot of insight into what information birders are seeking. Naturally, the most-viewed page is the download page for the Maine Birding Trail brochure. Basic information on where and how to bird the state is of most interest to distant birders. The next most-clicked page: Puffins. The draw of Atlantic Puffins for birding tourists cannot be understated. It's the money bird. Future newsletters will expound upon ideas for cashing in on this opportunity, even for inns not located on the coast.

Birders often click on the Rare Bird Alert – a weekly listing of unusual sightings compiled by Maine Audubon. This is common practice for birders visiting another state. Picking up a rarity in a new state is like whipped cream on dessert. It can also mean adding a difficult bird to a life list without the expense of traveling to a more exotic, expensive location. Next on the list, site visitors are likely to click through for more information on the Maine Birding Trail guidebook, continuing their quests for information about birding the state.

There is little difference in web traffic for the next several page choices. The fifth most-visited page gives viewers information about Maine's northern forest birds. These boreal species are seldom found south of Bangor and, next to puffins, they are among the biggest draws for birders planning a trip to Maine. They represent a good marketing opportunity for northern and rural Maine. In fact, the combination of puffins and boreal species to be found in Washington County makes the Downeast region the most-visited region on the web site. Birders also seek information on tours, festivals, guides, and whale-watching.

Quite a few site visitors review some of the travelogue descriptions of past tours and field trips. It gives them a sense of what certain areas and experiences are like. Next, visitors are likely to look up the pages that describe the Midcoast and southern Maine regions, followed closely by page views of the descriptions for the Maine Lakes and Mountains, the Kennebec River Valley, and the Maine Highlands. Not surprisingly, Aroostook County gets the fewest visits of all the regions. Collectively, traffic for the various tourism regions gets only about half the web site visitation that the most-visited pages do. This suggests the conclusion that many birders have already chosen the tourism region they hope to visit before seeking information on the web site. Still, there is enough clicking on the regional descriptions to encourage the conclusion that Maine Birding Trail helps steer some visitors to regions other than the coast. Future newsletters will discuss the potential for packaging itineraries that combine Maine's coast and forest.



Although the concept is new to the web site, the **Best Nests** page is averaging the same number of page views as the most popular regions (and the page on winter birding).

Some pages get very little visitation. Although the Maine Birding Trail web site gives general information about the state, and pages that talk about seasons, pests (such as black flies), ferries, and tides, these

pages are largely ignored. Early versions of the web site contained information about Maine's windjammer fleet, but generated little interest and this info was dropped from the site.



The Maine Birding Trail site also tracks traffic clicking through to other sites. The biggest recipients of traffic from the site are guiding services, and puffin and whale-watching boats. Maine Audubon and the Maine Office of Tourism's visitmaine.com site see quite a bit of click-through traffic, followed in popularity by the birding festivals. At the beginning of the 2010, information went online about some of Maine's other trail systems. While the Appalachian Trail, the Northern Forest Canoe Trail, and the Maine Hut-to-Hut trail do well, a surprising number of people click through to the Maine Beer Trail site!

**Coming next month: The Birds That Birders Want** (and how to cash in).