

MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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Opportunity Knocks Opportunity Knocks

Sometimes, the money is staring you in the face for years before you realize it.



The screenshot shows the website for Mt. Washington Auto Road. At the top, there are navigation links: "Start Your Adventure", "Drive Yourself", "Guided Tours", "Kids", "Events", "News", "Blog", and a search bar. Below these are social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and RSS. The main content area is titled "Bicknell's Thrush Tours" and lists the dates: "Our Bicknell's Thrush Tours for 2012: June 7, June 9, June 10, June 12, June 18 and June 20". A photograph of a Bicknell's Thrush perched on a branch is shown. To the right, there is a "Guided Tours" section with links for "Rates", "Operating Schedule 2011", "Group Tours", "SnowCoach", "Bicknell's Thrush Tours", and "Hiker Shuttle". Below that is a "Bicknell's Thrush Lodging Packages" section with a "COMING SOON for 2012" notice. At the bottom right, there is a button that says "Book your Summer Guided Tour".

The Bicknell's Thrush is a rare bird. It breeds on mountain tops from western Maine to upper New York State. It is seldom seen below 3000 feet, and it can be hard to find even where it nests. For many years, *The Mount Washington Auto Road* in New Hampshire has been a well-known location. Besides its alpine habitat preference, the Bicknell's Thrush also has the discouraging habit of singing only at dawn and dusk. The operators of *The Mount Washington*

Auto Road have always been aware of this rare bird next to a convenient pull off on the mountain, and there have been some informal dawn trips for a long time, conducted in the off hours by freelancing employees. Recently, the company grasped the full economic potential of this resource.

Bicknell's Thrush is an extremely rare species with very limited breeding grounds. It is the rarest and most secretive of the breeding thrushes in North America and it is the only bird whose breeding is restricted to the Northeastern part of the continent. They usually breed at higher elevations, normally nesting above 3,000 ft. The unique yet harsh climate is just what the birds prefer due to the combination of low vegetation and abundant moisture, and the Mt. Washington Auto Road offers you a unique opportunity to view these rare birds.

Our Bicknell's Thrush Guided Tours leave early in the morning before the Mt. Washington Auto Road opens to the general public to cause as little disturbance as possible.

Cost: \$50 per person

Advanced reservations required.

Tours depart from the base of the Mt. Washington Auto Road at 6:00am. (Please arrive at least 15 minutes prior to departure.) Tours last approximately 2 hours.

To book your Bicknell's Thrush Guided Tour, please contact Mary Power at 603.466.3988 or [email](#).

The Mount Washington Auto Road has now formalized these tours, which take groups of birders up the mountain before the road opens in the morning. The tour rate is \$50 per person, exceeding the normal \$30 rate, and even exceeding the \$40 guided tour rate.

Imagine that. *The Mount Washington Auto Road* has found a lucrative new revenue stream, creating fresh

inventory out of previously unusable hours. And it charges a premium for the experience, all because of a little brown bird smaller than a robin that few people could even recognize.

Winter is a good time to take stock of untapped opportunities. Make a list of ten things that are unique about your region, your business, or your market. To help think outside of the box, have a friend make a list. Compare notes. Throw a bunch of possible attractions onto your web site and track the hits. What are people looking at? Several years ago, the Maine Birding Trail web site featured a substantial page on windjammers. There are many interesting birds that lie just offshore and a multi-mast schooner could be a fun way to see them. *It didn't work*. The page had few visitors. But the Puffin info remains the most clicked page on the web site, topped only at this time of year by hits on the Festival page.

Once again, there are three significant birding festivals coming up this year.

May 18-20, 2012: [Wings, Waves, and Woods](#), Deer-Isle, Stonington

May 25-28, 2012: [The 9th Annual Downeast Spring Birding Festival](#) Cobscook Bay, Whiting.

May 31-June 3, 2012: [14th Acadia Birding Festival](#): Acadia National Park

Elderhostel's Road Scholar Adventures will be sneaking into the state for a few birding adventures again this year:

May 20-25, 2012: [Acadia National Park](#)

May 21-25, 2012: [Monhegan Island](#)

May 24-29, 2012: [Downeast Spring Birding Festival](#)

June 3-June 8, 2012: [Hog Island, Bremen](#)

September 9-14, 2012: [Hog Island, Bremen](#)

Coastal Maine Botanical Garden in Boothbay jumps on the birding bandwagon this year. During the first week of July, I will be the "Birder in Residence." Besides presenting programs and leading walks on the garden grounds, I'll also be partnering with the Boothbay Region Land Trust to tour several of their reserves.