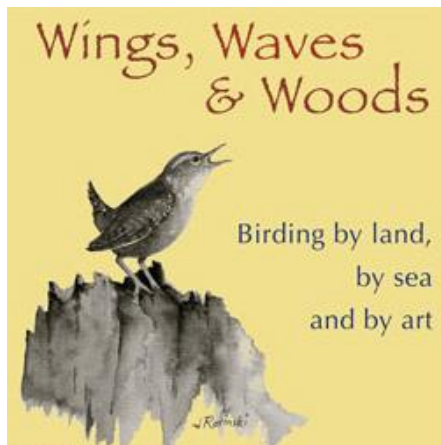


MAINE BIRDING TRAIL

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BEST NESTS Newsletter Volume 12 – May 2011 Birding Festivals

Maine now has three multi-day birding festivals and a handful of single day events. All of them occur during the pre-summer height of tourism season when innkeepers could use a few more heads in the beds. Here's a quick rundown:



The ***Wings, Waves & Woods Festival*** enters its fifth season this year on May 20-22. Visitors to Deer-Isle/Stonington have a variety of bird walks and activities to choose from. Major highlights include daily boat trips to Seal Island to enjoy the Atlantic Puffins just as they are returning to nest. Because this festival is so early in migration season, many wintering sea birds and the delightful Purple Sandpipers have not yet returned north to their summer breeding grounds, making it possible to see birds of both summer and winter. Great Cormorants (right) are hard to find in summer, but they nest on Seal Island in good numbers.



The local foods chowder supper on Saturday night is a sell-out every year. This year's festival has more instructional events than ever, making it particularly attractive to beginning birders.



THE ANNUAL
DOWN EAST SPRING BIRDING FESTIVAL
Memorial Day Weekend in May

The **Down East Spring Birding Festival** is eight years old and going strong. Once again, puffins are a highlight as Andy Patterson's Bold Coast Tours makes daily trips to Machias Seal Island. This festival was designed from the beginning to be an economic boost to Washington County. Activities are spread over a wide area, headquartered first around Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in Baring, and then moving to the Cobscook Community Learning Center in Trescott for the second



half of the Memorial Day Weekend. Field trips and tours wander all over the county, from beyond Grand Lake Stream through Eastport to Lubec, and even onto Campobello – making it an international festival of sorts. The festival strives to take advantage of as much of the downeast tourism opportunity as it can. Besides birding, there is canoeing, there is a medicinal and edible plant walk, there is a dinner and evening lecture at the Maine Indian Education Center in Calais. Maine Audubon will be on hand to demo new binoculars and scopes. There are live raptor presentations during the day and owl prowls at night.



13th Annual
Acadia Birding Festival
*Mount Desert Island
Bar Harbor, Maine*
June 2-5, 2011

Featured Speakers:
Pete Dunne
Kevin Karlson




The **Acadia Birding Festival** is now a teenager – 13 years old this year. Most of the activities over the weekend of June 2-5 are centered on Mount Desert Island, but some tours will venture farther afield this year. This festival has drawn nationally famous experts in recent years, delivering a high caliber of lectures, workshops, and field trips. Maine's top birders from all over the state serve as guides for many of the walks.



Each of these festivals has its own economic development model. The Wings, Waves, & Woods Festival is a relatively local, low-cost event. Walks and lectures are free. Only boat trips and dinners require a charge. Art and local culture are blended into the weekend. The primary intention of the festival is to beef up the calendar of events for the Deer Isle/Stonington Chamber of Commerce. It creates a noteworthy event very early in the summer season, before most tourists normally arrive. Many locals take advantage of this festival,

which makes the area a more attractive place to live and invest. The Down East Spring Birding Festival is truly designed to lure visitors from away. There is a modest registration fee and an additional charge for certain events. There is no additional charge for most walks. The Acadia Birding Festival is more upscale. There is a different charge for every event, from which visitors may choose ala carte. Or they can pay a flat \$350 registration fee and take their pick of all events over the four day festival.



Maine's state parks are also getting into the act. Aroostook State Park is Maine's first state park, established in 1939. Today, it is still leading the way, founding its own birding festival in 2009. Saturday, June 19th will mark its third year. This year, two more parks launched a joint birding festival. "**Feathers Over Freeport**" clearly wins the award for being the earliest festival in the state, as Wolfe Neck Woods State Park in Freeport and Bradbury Mountain in Pownal held two days of events over April 30-May 1. Although this is before many songbirds have returned, it actually coincides with a significant hawk migration over Bradbury Mountain. The success at these three state parks has encouraged other state parks to consider local festivals, perhaps starting next year.

So what does this mean to **Best Nest** members? For starters, if there is a festival near you, make sure you are getting some of the action. The festivals provide a lot of promotional material to registrants. Some festivals may offer opportunities to advertise so that you can attract their overnight participants. Invariably, most out-of-state visitors will decide on which festival to attend before they've given any thought to accommodations. Though the festivals generally have small advertising budgets, the Maine Office of Tourism has been able to fund ads in several national birding magazines.

There is potential for other birding festivals in the state. A recently published book is entitled "*Fifty Places to Go Birding Before You Die – Birding Experts Share the World's Greatest Destinations.*" Site #27 is Scarborough Marsh. Southern Maine has several significant birding locations within a short drive of each other. Southern Maine also has several whale-watching tours and other site-seeing boats that could be included in a festival to take advantage of some nearby nesting islands and certain sea birds that can be found offshore in Casco Bay. A completely different experience can be found in northern forest areas where festival-goers might chase Maine's unusual boreal birds. A festival in Rangeley would offer a chance at these species, and it could take advantage of the rare Bicknell's Thrush that nests on the ski slopes of Saddleback Mountain. Saddleback already offers packages for Lupines & Wildflowers and for Moose Mania. All of the tourism infrastructure needed for a festival is present and the area boasts a suite of desirable bird species. Perhaps it's only a matter of time.

