



# Philadelphia Larus

Winter 1999

Vol. 26 No. 3

## Christmas Bird Counts

How and where you can help:

### Saturday, December 18

- \* Western Gloucester, NJ: Bob Cassell, 609-478-2496
- \* Delaware County, PA: Skip Conant, 610-544-0871
- \* Elkton, MD: Joel Citron, 302-475-8773
- \* Oceanville, NJ: Brian Moscatello, 201-871-7226 (h) or 201-568-6093 ([bmoscat@ix.netcom.com](mailto:bmoscat@ix.netcom.com))
- \* Southern Bucks, PA: Bob Mercer, 215-785-1177
- \* Wyncote, PA: Martin Selzer, 215-233-9090 (eves) ([mselecter@prius.jnj.com](mailto:mselecter@prius.jnj.com))

### Sunday, December 19

- \* Cape May, NJ: Louise Zemaitis, 609-898-9578 ([obrienn@algorithms.com](mailto:obrienn@algorithms.com))
- \* Middletown, DE: Bruce Lantz, 302-378-8469
- \* Pinelands, NJ: Bob Confer, 609-859-2973 ([rjconfer@netzcro.net](mailto:rjconfer@netzcro.net))
- \* Salem, NJ: Jerry Haag, 609-358-3039 ([haagj@algorithms.com](mailto:haagj@algorithms.com))
- \* Upper Bucks – Montgomery County: Hart Rufe, 215-257-8677 ([wrufe@tradenct.net](mailto:wrufe@tradenct.net))
- \* Wilmington, DE: Howard Brokaw, 302-655-8076

### Sunday, December 26

- \* Elverson, PA: Bob Cook, 610-286-9919 ([dunlin50@aol.com](mailto:dunlin50@aol.com))
- \* Valley Forge, PA: Tony Fernandez, 610-647-7868
- \* Belleplain, NJ: Paul Kosten, 609-861-5827
- \* Bombay Hook, DE: Andie Ednie, 302-792-9591
- \* Central Bucks, PA: Ken Kitson, 610-847-2968
- \* Moorestown, NJ: Tom Bailey, 609-268-5169 or (w) 973-490-7100 x 4855 ([hanrac@aosi.com](mailto:hanrac@aosi.com))

### Monday, December 27

- \* Seaford, DE: Bill Fintel, 302-645-5561 or 302-645-8643

### Wednesday, December 29

- \* Elmer, NJ: Jerry Haag, 609-358-3039 ([haagj@algorithms.com](mailto:haagj@algorithms.com))

### Saturday, January 1

- \* Rehoboth Beach, DE: Joe Swertinski, 302-292-1592 ([swertinski.j@christianacare.org](mailto:swertinski.j@christianacare.org))

### Sunday, January 2

- \* Cape Henlopen, DE: Frank Rohrbacher, 302-475-5771
- \* Cumberland County, NJ: Clay Sutton, 609-465-3397

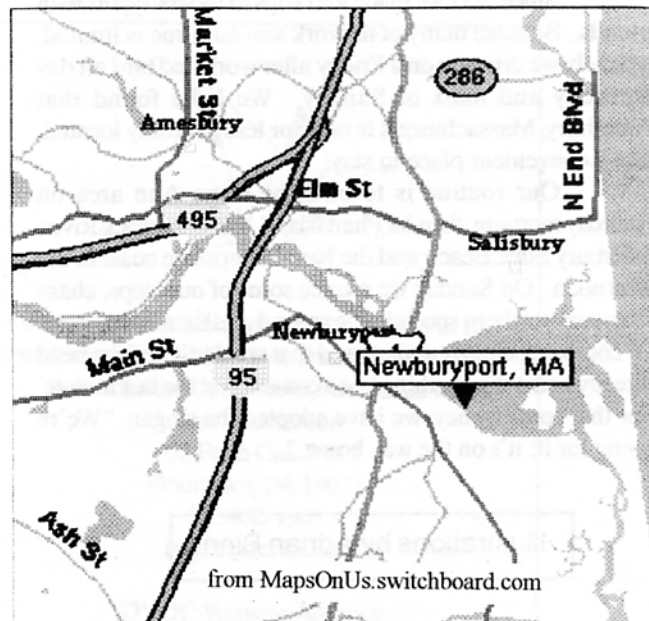
## Winter Birding in Coastal New England: Some Cold Weather Hot Spots

By Martin Selzer

If you are willing to head north to coastal New England in January or February instead of going south, you can enjoy some wonderful winter birding. Newburyport, Massachusetts, for instance, has been a winter destination for many birders ever since the Ross's Gull was found there in the winter of 1975. Even without this wondrous visitor from Siberia, which at the time was dubbed the "Bird of the Century," Newburyport can offer many other rewarding birds for the soul hardy enough to venture north at that time of year.

In birding the Merrimack River in Newburyport and nearby Plum Island/Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, as well as Salisbury State Beach, Cape Ann and coastal New Hampshire and Maine, you can put together a rather impressive bird list over just one weekend. While this may sound like a lot of territory to cover over two to four days, it can actually be done quite easily. It is actually a rather small geographical area. Remember, the entire Atlantic coastline of New Hampshire is only about 45 miles long. Once you've arrived in Newburyport, most of the prime birding areas are only minutes away.

Two outstanding bird finding guides to the region: *Birding in New England* by Richard Walton and the ABA's *A Birder's Guide to Eastern Massachusetts* provide detailed directions for reaching all the best cold weather hot spots.

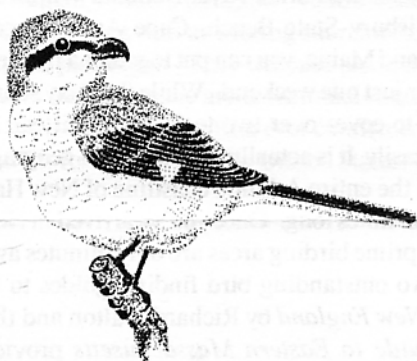


In addition, all the New England states have great rare bird alerts which can be accessed either on-line or by telephone. Finally, you are bound to run into many other birders in the area who will be happy to share sighting information with you, whether you are standing on the rocky outcroppings of Halibut Point or enjoying a warming bowl of seafood chowder.

You might really need the chowder after a day like this (from "The Wreck of the Hesperus," by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, set in nearby Gloucester):

*Colder and louder blew the wind,  
A gale from the North-east;  
The snow fell hissing in the brine,  
And the billows frothed like yeast.*

Gloucester is also the setting of the best-selling true story, *The Perfect Storm*, by Sebastian Junger. While the weather generally isn't as harsh as that described in the book or the Longfellow poem, you will need to pack clothes that will keep you warm and dry in cold, blustery conditions.



Since '93 I've made four trips to Newburyport with friends. Because many of us work and our time is limited, typically we drive up on a Friday after work and bird all day Saturday and most of Sunday. We have found that Amesbury, Massachusetts is more or less centrally located, and a convenient place to stay.

Our routine is to bird the Cape Ann area on Saturday morning, then hit Plum Island, the Merrimack River, Salisbury State Beach and the New Hampshire coast in the afternoon. On Sunday we retrace some of our steps, chase whatever northern speciality is around and then head home. Of course, you must understand that we don't always head directly home if something good comes up at the last minute. For that contingency, we have adopted the slogan, "We're going for it; it's on the way home."

Illustrations by Adrian Binns

This has resulted in some rather circuitous routes home that only a birder would understand and appreciate. For example, in '97 we came home via Portland, Maine after going for the Ivory Gull that was making Portland's harbor its home that year. In '98, our route home took us to Plymouth, Massachusetts in search of the Bar-tailed Godwit that was wintering at the Nelson Road beach. Although we were in the right spot and had a favorable tide, the godwit did not choose to appear while we were there. Fortunately, an adult Common Black-headed Gull that had been frequenting the Nelson Road soccer field condescended to make a lengthy appearance for our benefit, and helped ease the pain of missing the godwit.

We then headed to Great Herring Pond (15 miles south of Plymouth off Route 3A) for a Tufted Duck. Our friendly local sources had told us that this duck had been seen on this pond for three to four years. We found the pond and the duck with no trouble at all before finally heading back to Philadelphia.

Every year offers something different, depending on the weather and your own good fortune. Both white-winged gulls, Snowy Owl and Barrow's Goldeneye are strong possibilities. If you time your trip just right, you could get all of them. Huge rafts of scoters and eiders may be feeding close by in the surf. Or you could catch a winter finch invasion. The warm feeling you get standing at Salisbury Beach looking eye to eye at a flock of White-winged and Red Crossbills busily feeding in the pine trees has to be experienced to be believed.

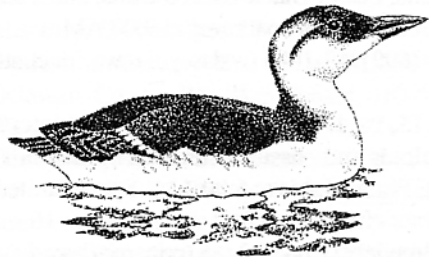
Cape Ann just after a nor'easter offers some of the best seabird watching imaginable from dry land. Quoting Longfellow again:

*And ever the fitful gusts between  
A sound came from the land;  
It was the sound of the trampling surf,  
On the rocks of the hard sea sand.*

In '99, we had four species of alcids in less than two hours of birding. We had Black Guillemots from several locations, a Common Murre from the Bearskin Neck jetty (without even having to get out of the van!), and Thick-billed Murres and Razorbills at Halibut Point. That day, we also had a raft of about 50 Harlequin Ducks in the surf at the Point.



As we watched the Murres, Razorbills and Harlequins, a few Dovekies somehow slipped by us undetected. We got the Dovekie news from a fellow birder who was just down the shoreline from us. I don't think he necessarily had to share that piece of news with us right then as we were rejoicing in the murres *et al*, but then again, maybe he did. Hey, it's a big coastline to scan and we needed to leave something for next year, didn't we?



So this winter, why not consider heading north to Newburyport? Maybe you'll finally get a Northern Shrike or Bohemian Waxwing for your life list. Maybe you'll just get to see eiders, white-winged gulls and all the other "northern" species that only occasionally make it down to our area. And maybe, just maybe you'll get to enjoy some good New England seafood and that beautiful rocky coastline that has inspired birders and artists alike.

Or this could happen:

*"Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,  
In the midnight and the snow!  
Christ save us all from a death like this,  
On the reef of Norman's Woe!"*

May places like Norman's Woe, Rafe's Chasm and Emerson Point be kinder to you in your pursuit of birds than they were to the crew of the Hesperus! Good birding.

#### **DOS Bird Book Auction Set For December 15**

The Delmarva Ornithological Society is hosting a silent and vocal auction of used books and other bird-related items. Proceeds will benefit conservation activities. The auction will take place starting at 8:00 PM at the Delaware Museum of Natural History on Route 52 in Greenville. Rumor has it that home-baked goodies from some of DOS's finest bakers will be available as well! Please attend and see if you can pick up a "find" for some last-minute holiday gift-giving. Questions? Call Susan Peterson at 302-369-0574.

#### **CORRECTION**

Bob Schl's name was incorrectly spelled "Seal" in the Autumn 1999 Larus.

## **A Raptor Tale**

by Jane Henderson

Around 10 o'clock on the morning of September 19, 1999 I was inside my house helping my three grandsons pack up and get ready to return to their mom and dad after spending the weekend with us. I had just found three-year-old Sam's favorite blue toy dog under the bed when the phone rang. It was Martin Selzer, our neighbor and birding friend. He knew I had been busy with baby sitting duties all weekend.

"Go outside and look up," he said.

"O.K." I said, and hung up.

So, with Sam in tow I went out in the yard to see what was up.

The sky was totally filled with broad-winged hawks. They were lifting up out of the trees in our neighborhood and starting to kettle right over our house. Mostly adult birds, they were flying so low I could see every feather. I started counting them as they streamed overhead. There were hundreds.

I asked Sam how many birds he thought there were. Sam, you have to understand, has mastered colors, and is pretty good with letters. But he's still a little shaky with numbers.

"Five," he said. "Maybe four."

I've seen a lot of broad-wings over the years. I've seen kettles that were much much bigger than the ones I saw that day. But I've never seen those birds so close, in such wonderful light, and in my own neighborhood.

Sam's a kid who remembers everything. When he visits next time, he'll want to go out and look for birds again. By this time next year, he'll be able to help me count.

And, by the way, thanks, Martin, for calling.



Please submit announcements, pieces to be considered for publication, schedules and other information for *Philadelphia Larus* to:

Jane Henderson  
202 Penn Oak Road  
Flourtown, PA 19031  
215-836-1965  
tugene@aol.com

DVOC Website Address:  
<http://www.acnatsci.org/dvoc>

## Programs

December 2 – **Living on the Wind: The World of Migratory Birds** – Speaker: Scott Weidensaul Join our naturalist and author on an exploration of how and why birds migrate, and the conservation challenges that face them, based on his new book, “Living on the Wind”. The program ranges from the doorstep of the Aleutians and the frozen edge of Hudson Bay through the rainforests of Central and South America to the grassy pampas of Argentina, where hawks and shorebirds gather in multitudes.

December 16 – **A Vast Wilderness, A Tiny Bird** – Speakers: Clay and Pat Sutton The Suttons, long-time DVOG members, present a program of their private tour with Wilderness Birding Adventures to Alaska’s remote Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. On an eleven-day wilderness float trip, they were surrounded by such avian goodies as Arctic Warbler, Yellow Wagtail, Smith’s Longspur, Yellow-billed Loon and Arctic Tern, as well as nesting shorebirds, jaegers, and ptarmigan. They will also share their adventures with the many arctic mammals and a special thrill of finding the first ever confirmed nest of Siberian Tit for Alaska and the United States.

DVOG Larus  
c/o Jane Henderson  
202 Penn Oak Road  
Flourtown, PA 19031

## Field Trips

**Sat, Dec. 4, 5:00 AM to 7:00 PM:** Pelagic out of Brielle, N.J., going as close as possible to the Hudson Canyon in search of Great Skua, Manx Shearwater, alcids, kittiwakes and fulmars. Leaders: Armas Hill (302)529-1876 (armas@wittnet.com) and Paul Guris (215)234-8557 (pguris@money.net.com)

**Sat, Jan. 8:** Florence, NJ for great gull watching in the east: “white-wing” gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and a search for Yellow-legged Gull. Meet at boat ramp at 9:00 AM. Call Ward Dasey (609)953-1685 (w.daseyiii@worldnet.att.net)

**Sat - Mon, Jan. 15, 16, 17:** Montauk, LI, NY for winter finches, eiders, scoters, alcids and possible Eurasian accidentals. Carpool from NE Philadelphia at 6:00 AM. Space limited due to lodging constraints - first come, first served! Max. 16. Leaders: Erica Brendel (215)844-3456 (ericamb@prodigy.net) and Chris Walters (215)642-6862 (ckwalter@rsm.com)

**Sat, Feb. 19, 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM:** Pelagic out of Cape May, NJ on “Miss Chris,” looking for alcids, skuas and fulmars.

Call Field Trip Chairperson Bill Murphy (1999) at 215-885-2488 or Adrian Binns (2000) at  
for additional field trip information.