



Philadelphia Larus

Vol. 27 No. 4

Christmas Count Issue 2000

Christmas Bird Counts How and where you can help:

Saturday, December 16

- * Oceanville, NJ: Brian Moscatello,
- * Elkton, MD: Joel Citron,
- * Wyncote, PA: Martin Selzer,
- * Seaford, DE: Bill Fintel,
- * Rehoboth Beach, DE: Joe Swertinski,
- * Glenolden (Delaware County), PA: Nick Pulcinella
- * Southern Bucks, PA: Bob Mercer,

Sunday, December 17

- * Cape May, NJ: Louise Zemaitis,
- * Middletown, DE: Bruce Lantz,
- * Upper Bucks, PA: Hart Rufe,
- * Cape Henlopen, DE: Frank Rohrbacher,
- * Salem, NJ: Jerry Haag,
- * Pinelands, NJ: Bob Confer,

Saturday, December 23

- * Elverson, PA: Bob Cook,
- * Moorestown, NJ: Ted Young,

Wednesday, December 27

- * Elmer, NJ: Jerry Haag,

Thursday, December 28

- * Belleplaine, NJ: Paul Kosten,

Off-shore Pelagic, September 10 - 11, 2000

by Alan Brady

4:00 P.M. Stopped at bait store in Forked River, N.J. for bunker oil for chum. Closed. It's Sunday.

5:45 P.M. Barnegat Light. Boat out with group in bay.

6:00 P.M. Bunker oil in fish store nearby, but realized I didn't bring sufficient money.

6:15 P.M. Miss Barnegat Light returns, unloads about 100 bay watchers. We, 29 tuna fishermen and I, hustle aboard. Fishermen all have assigned bunks in the cabin on the main deck. It's the narrow, padded bench on the open upper deck for me. Some of the fishermen look jealously at my sleeping bag out on the spacious upper deck.



Greater Shearwater © Adrian Binns

Cont'd on Page 3

Saturday, December 30

- * Wilmington, DE: Howard Brokaw,
- * Valley Forge, PA: Tony Fernandez,

Sunday, December 31

- * Bombay Hook, DE: Andie Edney,
- * Cumberland County, NJ: Clay Sutton,
- * Central Bucks, PA: Ken Kitson,

Note: Information on Western Gloucester, NJ count not available as of this printing.

**Black Vultures Nest in Burlington County, N.J.
September 2000 Report**
by Augie Sexauer

The site chosen by these Black Vultures was a very large, dead tulip poplar tree stump measuring 27 feet in circumference, and consisting of two separate sections joined at the base. It is located on the front lawn of John Stevens Four Winds Farm in Tabernacle, N.J., only fifteen feet from a busy road. The tree had to be cut down some years ago because it was in danger of falling on overhead electric wires and the nearby house. It was cut off where the two hollow sections separated, leaving a large stump about twelve feet high.

The female vulture chose to lay her eggs in one section of the hollow stump which was open to the sky. Because of the height of the stump, observers needed to use a ladder to look directly down into the stump. Although in the beginning we were not able to see the eggs or the very young chicks because of the debris piled at the bottom of the hollow, we felt sure that the vultures were nesting there. Last year, John Stevens and Nels Anderson reported seeing Black Vultures sitting on the stump or perched nearby. No further observations were noted that year.

This spring, the Black Vultures were again seen hanging around the stump. On June 1, 2000, using a ladder and approaching the stump quietly, we were able to view the chicks briefly before they hid themselves in the debris. Although we checked on the progress of the young periodically, we very seldom saw the adult birds. We were not able to determine when they entered the stump to feed the young. According to Bent's *Life Histories*, the incubation period can last from 28 to 39 days, and the fledgling period can be another 67 to 74 days.

On July 25, two young were finally spotted on top of the stump. They were fully feathered, but with bits of down still clinging to the backs of their heads and parts of their bodies. For the next eight days, the young were observed on top of the stump, exercising their wings.

Their first flight was noted on August 2. They were seen in the vicinity of the nesting site for the next five days. Sometimes they perched on the television antennae on the farmer's house or in nearby trees. Once, John Stevens spotted all four on the ground where the adults may have been feeding the young. On another occasion, an immature bird and an adult were seen grooming each other high in a tree.

An interesting aspect of all this is that Four Winds Farm is a pick-your-own type of farm. There is frequently a lot of human activity within 100 feet of the nesting site during the entire nesting period. Apparently the vultures were able to overcome their shy and reclusive nature when there was no perceived danger to themselves or their young.

The last sighting was on August 7, when two Black Vultures were seen riding a thermal high in the sky over Tabernacle, N.J.

Observers were John Stevens, Nels Anderson and Augie Sexauer.



Black Vulture © Adrian Binns

Programs

December 7: Annual Banquet. "Birding in the New Millennium." Kevin Karlson, one of the foremost bird photographers in the country, has traveled around birding hot spots in America. He will explain what it will take to preserve these places for the generations to come. (Banquet details and reservation form on Page 5.)

December 21: Memorable Moments. In keeping with the holiday season, this program will feature thought-provoking and/or humorous stories and anecdotes from members. Rich experiences while birding, most memorable moments in the field, dump or sewage pond, items of interest/concern from the media. Anything you know the audience will enjoy. If you wish to contribute to this little pot pourri, let Colin Campbell know well before the date.
302-792-2506 (colin.campbell@cibasc.com)

January 4: Annual Meeting. Election of Officers and Council for 2001. Christmas Bird Count reports. Informal *soiree* with wine, beer and munchies.

January 18: "Timing of Breeding and Climate Change in the Florida Scrub-jay." Bob Curry, Villanova University.

February 1: "Megaexpedition to Borneo."
Doug Wechsler, Vireo

February 15: Books, Art, Birders' and Birding Things Auction. Bring your bird-related auctionable goods to the February 1 meeting or early on the evening of Feb. 15. All proceeds go to our Conservation Fund.

March 1: To be announced.

March 15: "Bird Singing: The Ecology of Birds' Songs and Identifying Them by Ear." Daniel Edelstein, Freelance naturalist and science writer.

6:30 P.M. Captain's terse command, "If you haven't paid for the trip, get off the boat," and we're off. Several squadrons of Brown Pelicans escort us through the inlet, past the lighthouse and into the ocean. I note that we're not heading due west toward Hudson Canyon. We turn southeast, I supposed toward Wilmington Canyon. Wrong, it's Baltimore, quite a run even at twenty-five knots.

11:00 P.M. With no watch, and just the moon to guide me, I guess at the time; fishing lights go on. We're looking for the magic spot. The anchor goes over, fishermen are at their locations at the rail. The moonlight is shimmering, and then it's, "Lines in." A white tern-sized bird appears off the port side out of the dark, and I'm up. What was it? The mate is chumming, or rather chunking, with cut up butterfish. Even though it's not bunker, there is a good slick.

1:00 A.M. Wilson's Storm Petrels begin to appear out of the blackness. Maybe a Leach's. I try some flash shots on Audubon's shearwaters and Greaters. Then back to the sack. Tuna being hoisted aboard flap on metal deck below.

6:00 A.M. Awake to a most special daybreak, all rosy and pink. Down to the galley for a cup of the constantly flowing free coffee from Don, chief cook and money taker. On my way up the ladder I look back at our wake where the slick is drifting, and can hardly believe my eyes. Storm-petrels blanket the ocean as far as I can see. The slick extends for at least a mile and a half, and petrels are sprinkled over it like grains of pepper. Estimate, minimum, five thousand. I catch sight of a Band-rumped sliding through, the only different storm-petrel of the trip.

7:00 A.M. Really bright now, and have noticed Greater Shearwaters in similar number and still growing. They are coming in from the south, all over the slick, all around the boat, diving at the fishermen's bait. A few Audubon's join in as the flock grows rapidly. My estimate, at least ten thousand, with many just passing through, going north.

7:15 A.M. First South Polar Skua, also from south to north over the boat. Sort of flies like John Wayne walks - with a purpose. First Cory's Shearwater in the wake, then two more. Suddenly they begin appearing in earnest, then come in by the hundreds, apparently only feeding in daylight, as opposed to the other shearwaters and storm-petrels. By now, the bulk of Greaters have passed through, and the number of Cory's is staggering. They continue streaming in for an hour, reaching a peak of five thousand birds.

8:00 A.M. Another South Polar Skua with his golden hackles comes cruising by and lands to our north with some shearwaters.

8:30 A.M. The great Wilson's Storm-petrel flock has now diminished to about thirty birds. The sun is up, and plankton is down. Their major food, previously on the surface, is now out of reach, and the petrels just disappear. Bait fish are also gone from the surface, and the shearwater numbers are down to scattered individuals.

9:00 A.M. Captain declares, "Lines up. We're heading home." We pass a large flock of Cory's, resting on the water, and they slowly flap off as we pass. Suggestion: Be out before dawn and set the slick early. Ours was out six hours before daybreak. The big show may be over by 8:30 or 9:00 A.M.



Wilson's Storm-petrel © Adrian Binns

Total counts:

Yellow-fin Tuna	46
Blue Shark (7') at night	1
South-polar Skua	2
Wilson's Storm Petrel	5000
Band-rumped Storm Petrel	1
Greater Shearwater	10,000
Cory's Shearwater	5000
Audubon's Shearwater	12
Fin-back Whale	1

Water temperature: 76F

Inside Baltimore Canyon, due west of Ocean City, MD.



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

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

Field Trip Reports

by Frank Windfelder

Tuckerton and Brigantine

The annual DVOC trip to Tuckerton & Brigantine was held on Saturday, October 7th, 2000. Participants were Tom & Margot Sutherland, John Danzenbaker, Mike & Jim Lymon, Cele Deemer, Bill Haber, Kate Sommerville and leader Frank Windfelder.

For the fourth consecutive year, we saw Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows, along with both Salt-marsh Sharp-tailed and Seaside Sparrows. However, we had only three Nelson's. They were of the race *subvirgatus*. Because of the low numbers, it was felt that the trip should have been run a little later in the season. Perhaps the best bird of the day was a Clay-colored Sparrow, which everyone saw definitively.

There were at least six Tri-colored Herons in the Tuckerton marsh area, which is unusual for such a late date. We also had an American Bittern in the sparrow area at the end of the road. Other good birds included three Caspian Terns for the day, and a drake Ring-necked Duck at Brigantine (Forsythe Division).

Bake oven Knob

The trip to Bake Oven Knob was blessed with conditions which were comfortable for humans, but less than ideal for hawk migration. Winds were basically WSW all day. Nonetheless, we had a number of great birds.

Early on, a Winter Wren put on quite a show. It was not only seen well, but was also heard both calling and singing.

The first good raptor was a first-winter Bald Eagle, which passed almost directly overhead. We heard a Raven calling, but were unable to spot it. Later in the day, we did get a good look at one.

We also saw two Red-shouldered Hawks, 32 Red-tails, and ten Sharp-shinned Hawks.

Colin Campbell was unable to keep his mind on the birding, because he was absolutely enthralled by the skydiving activities in the area. He was afforded "crippling views". All kidding aside, the sky divers really put on quite a show. The last group to jump even performed some intricate tandem aerial maneuvers.

At 2:15 P.M., everyone was getting ready to leave when the best bird of the day showed up. The adult Golden Eagle was a thrill to see.

The participants were JoAnn Raine, Margie Keefe, Pam Cessario, Bill Haber, Chris Walters, Brad Whitman, Ellen Short, Dick Bell, Bill Tucker, Joe Canilli, Jean Gutsmuth, Bob Mercer, Eileen Crouse and Allison Ellicott, in addition to Colin and myself. Bob Mercer even made a cameo appearance. My apologies if I left anyone out.

Upcoming Field Trips

Saturday, December 9: Pelagic out of Brielle, NJ, going as close as possible to Hudson Canyon in search of Great Skua, Manx Shearwater, alcids, kittiwakes and fulmars.

Leaders: Armas Hill 302-529-1876
(font@focuson nature.com or armas@wittnet.com)
Paul Guris 215-234-8557 (pguris@money.net)

Saturday, January 6: Florence, NJ, for some of the best gull watching in the East. "White-wing" gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gulls.

Leader: Ward Dasey 609-953-1685
(w.daseyiii@worldnet.att.net)

Saturday - Monday, January 13-15: Montauk, Long Island, NY, for winter finches, eiders, scoters, alcids and any Eurasian accidentals. Car pool from N.E. Philadelphia at 6:00 A.M. Space is limited due to lodging constraints: first come, first served! Maximum 16.

Leaders: Erica Brendel 215-844-3456 (ericamb@prodigy.net)
Chris Walters 215-642-6862 (ckwalter@rsm.com)

In Memoriam

John LaVia

September 2000

Annual DVOC Banquet

Thursday, December 7, 2000

Cocktails 6:00 PM Dinner 7:00 PM

Dugan's Ilona Keller Restaurant
7900 Roosevelt Boulevard
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 333-7900

Speaker: Kevin Karlson

“Birding in the New Millennium - What Will the Future Bring?”

Banquet Reservation Form

The annual DVOC banquet will be held on Thursday, December 7, 2000 at

Dugan's Ilona Keller Restaurant
7900 Roosevelt Boulevard
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 333-7900

6:00 PM: Cocktails 7:00 PM: Dinner

I (we) wish to order #___ Prime Rib @ \$25 #___ Salmon @ \$21 #___ Turkey @ \$21

Name _____ Street Address _____

Town and Zip _____ Phone () _____

Please send your order and check, made out to DVOC, by November 30, 2000 to:

Bernice and Joe Koplin
DVOC Banquet

Militia Hill Hawkwatch 2000: Broadwings, Eagles and Butterflies
By Jane Henderson

14,526 Broad-winged Hawks, 35 Bald Eagles, 2 Golden Eagles, as well as Pipevine Swallowtail and Variegated Fritillary butterflies combined to make 2000 a “wonderful year” at Militia Hill Hawkwatch, according to founder Marylea Klauder.

September 22 was the biggest broad-wing day this season, with 4613 birds identified and counted. September 25 was next with 3711. On September 21, Bird #125,000 for MHHW migrated over the platform. Appropriately enough, it was a broad-wing. The year 2000 turned out to be the third biggest broad-wing year in the history of MHHW.

On October 30, when a cold front passed through after several days of unseasonably warm weather, a Rough-legged Hawk and a Golden Eagle were recorded. As of those sightings, all of the anticipated northeastern species of raptors had made an appearance. When all the numbers were in at the end of October, MHHW had logged over 135,000 birds since the site was established in 1988.

Raptors were not the sole attraction. A skein of Snow Geese, a flock of Brant and a few loons were sighted flying over, and a Yellow-breasted Chat was spotted in the brush pile near the bird feeders. Chimney Swifts filled the sky nearly every day. There were always Monarchs, too, but this year their numbers were significantly down.

Last spring, for the first time, Great Horned Owls nested on the platform that Charlie Wonderly had put up in the pine woods five years ago. They raised one chick. The owls were back again at the end of the hawk watching season, and it is hoped that they will once again decide to nest there.



Broad-winged Hawk © Adrian Binns

DVOC Larus