

March 2018

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WINTER TRAVELS



MBC members and some fellow birders search for dovekie from the Rockport Granite Pier. “Little did we know there was one on the opposite side of the parking area up close and personal,” says photographer and trip leader Donna Traylor.

If it’s February, it’s time for a trip to balmy Cape Ann, Massachusetts! This year, a combined Montclair Bird Club/Sussex County Bird Club trip took place Feb. 17-19. Fourteen intrepid birders (from N.J., N.H. and Massachusetts — extended bird club “family”) met in Amesbury, Massachusetts (on the border with New Hampshire) on Saturday morning and began the day at Salisbury Beach State Reservation.

One of the first birds of the trip was a snowy owl, the first of five to be enjoyed, sitting calmly on the tiny patch of snow that the unusually warm weather had left.

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Bill Beren on the Great Swamp Turkey Walk

Visitors to the Great Swamp in Morris County are usually limited to a few maintained trails providing access to a small percentage of the 7,800 acres encompassing the National Wildlife Refuge. On the Saturday after Thanksgiving, the Friends of Great Swamp has traditionally sponsored an informal hike from the Blue Bird Parking Lot to the impoundment adjacent to Great Brook. The easy hike along a graveled road is about 1 mile. This Thanksgiving weekend, I joined a crowd of about 80 birders to see this section of the Swamp to which I have never before had access.

Large flocks of ducks of all kinds could be seen from the road, but it helped to have a scope rather than binoculars, as the birds moved away to the other side of the open water when the group appeared. Although we didn't see any this day, the park volunteers who led the walk said that a nesting pair of bald eagles hang around the area, and I did see a pair of red tail hawks circling when we first came out of the woods to the viewing site. A northern harrier was also reported. Mute swans, black ducks, green wing teals, mallards, wigeons, and bufflehead were some of the species reported by various birders that day.

The Friends of Great Swamp hosts a number of walks and events at the Swamp. They even have a book club for nature lovers. See their calendar of events and how to support the Friends at <http://friendsofgreatswamp.org>

George Nixon on Birds in the News

OK, so we are all familiar with black birds, crows, ravens, and red-winged blackbirds to name a few. The question is how black are they?

It turns out not really.

Compare your favorite black bird with many of the birds of paradise from Papua New Guinea. Looking at their feathers is much like staring into a black hole. Scientists have figured out how they are so black. It's all in the structure of the feather. On other birds a feather starts out on a central shaft called the rachis. Coming off the rachis are barbs and off the barbs are barbules, which help lock the feather together and keep it flat. The black feathers on a bird of paradise however, are more like a bottle brush with the barbules curving upward. When light hits a regular feather some of it is reflected back producing a particular color. On a bird of paradise however, light gets lost among the barbules. In fact bird of paradise feathers absorb 99.95 percent of all incoming light. The blackest manmade substance is called Vantablack and absorbs 99.965 percent of all light. This amount of darkness renders what is being observed two-dimensional. To see how dark this is, check out this YouTube video of a bird of paradise display: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dx2CUMtZ-0> or search superb bird of paradise mating dance.

SPRING AND SUMMER FIELD TRIPS

Directions to all field trip meeting points are available on the Field Trips page at montclairbirdclub.org

Sunday, April 1: **Liberty State Park, Jersey City.** Bill Beren, leader. For birds, meet at Boat Launch Parking Lot off Morris Pesin Drive at 2:30 p.m. Beer and Brats to follow at Zeppelin Hall Biergarten.

Saturday, May 5: **Bonsal Preserve, Montclair.** Deb DeSalvo, leader. Meet at the entrance on Riverview Drive, off Alexander Avenue, between Broad and Grove streets at 8 a.m.

Saturday, May 12: **Hilltop Reservation, Verona.** Alex Bernzweig, leader. Meet in the parking lot at the end of Courter Lane in Caldwell at 7 a.m. We will follow a paved trail through wet woods, up to a newly planted meadow at the top of the hill, and into the woods on the other side. The middle of May is the peak season for spring migrants, so we hope to see many species of warblers, flycatchers, vireos, and thrushes. Around the meadow we should see both species of oriole and indigo buntings, with a chance of rare birds like blue grosbeak, Lincoln's sparrow, and bobolink. Limited physical exertion required (walking on paved trails, slight incline going up the hill).

Sunday, July 1: **Brookdale Park.** Rick Wright, leader. 7 a.m. A two-hour walk on wide paved paths in search of breeders such as red-tailed hawks, red-eyed and Eastern warbling vireos, wood thrushes, chipping sparrows, and American goldfinches. Bring a notebook and pencil, and wear a good hat and strong sunscreen. Meet in the parking lot across from the maintenance building, above the running track, reached from Bellevue Avenue.

Saturday, July 28: **Mill Creek Marsh, Secaucus.** Rick Wright, leader. 7:30 a.m. The staging of southbound semipalmated sandpipers is one of the most dramatic, and most underappreciated, wildlife spectacles in New Jersey. Every year in late July, thousands of these sturdy little Arctic breeders feed and roost at Mill Creek Marsh on the rising tide, fattening up for the long migration to their South American wintering grounds. We'll also be looking for such breeding birds as willow flycatchers, Baltimore orioles, and marsh wrens; in addition to the hordes of "semis," other early autumn migrants may include yellow warblers, indigo buntings, and a smattering of other shorebird species, Forster's terns, and perhaps black skimmers. Our pace will be slow and easy on the wide, level, mile-long trail around the marsh and impoundments. Bring a notebook and pencil, sun protection, and plenty of water. Binoculars will be helpful, but aren't necessary: as the tide pushes them to the edges of the marsh, shorebirds here often feed at very close range. Meet at the well-marked entrance to the trail next to Bob's Discount Furniture.

A note from Wayne Greenstone: The **Montclair Hawk Watch Spring count** has begun, from the south end of Mills Reservation above Edgecliff Road. Welcome counter Beth Olsen to Montclair and join her in monitoring the spring migration, through May 15.

Continuing to the water, ducks were tallied including up close views of white-winged scoters (in photo at left), black duck, greater scaup, common eider, long-tailed duck (oldsquaw to us purists) and one American wigeon (nicely discovered by Deb from our Massachusetts contingent)! This area was also good for bald eagle, peregrine falcon and northern harrier.



Absent this year was the short-eared owl that we typically watch hunting over the

dunes. In the two weeks prior to our visit, there were reports of significant numbers of alcids along the northern Massachusetts and New Hampshire coasts. We had the good luck of spotting a thick-billed murre in the morning in the inlet at Salisbury Beach and later in the afternoon relocating it from the Coast Guard station on Plum Island. At that point in the afternoon, it was being harassed by a gull that identified it as lunch. Although dive-bombed a number of times, the murre escaped the gull with a timely dive just as the gull tried to make impact. It was quite a show!

The next number of stops were along the Merrimack River in Newbury and Newburyport. Many common goldeneye enjoyed the open waters of the Merrimack — something we do not usually see in February when this area can be almost completely iced up. Four bald eagles circled in the blue skies giving us a nice show. This was most timely since it was Joppa Flats/Newburyport's Eagle Festival day and many local people were being shown eagles at strategic spots along the river.

Saturday afternoon was spent at Plum Island/Parker Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. The day was unseasonably warm and it was relatively easy to scan the ocean without being blown off our feet like in past years. However, it was pretty bird lite — additional looks at all three scoters and horned grebe but not much else. Another snowy (third of the day) was tallied along with an immature eagle hanging out on the ice. A northern harrier put on a nice show right along the road.

Sunday brought 7 inches of beautiful, cottony snow. After clearing off our vehicles, it was south to Cape Ann — Gloucester and Rockport. We modified our usual route to allow time for snow plowing, a long convoy and better lighting on the ocean. After checking out several reports of eastern screech owls in Newburyport and Essex (no luck — both were sleeping in), we made a quick stop to scan the harbor at Gloucester by the Fisherman's Monument, then headed to Rockport to allow for more of a clockwise survey of the ocean. Granite Pier was our first stop. Ocean scanning provided some of the group rather unrewarding looks at dovekies (our major target bird of the day). Maria was checking the inner bay at the pier and cautiously asked Don to identify a small bird she believed to be a dovekie. Bingo! A very close dovekie hanging out just below us paddling the quieter waters of the bay allowed very satisfactory looks for all — at our leisure and through scopes! This was an excellent find and high fives were exchanged with celebratory chocolate chip cookies!

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Stops at numerous coves and points added harlequin ducks and a distant but definitely identifiable male king eider (at the usual stop at Bass Rocks). Several brant were seen flying by — not a common bird for this trip.



The day concluded at Jodrey Pier where the light was perfect for the photographers in the group to capture images of close-up common eider (in photo at left) and red-breasted mergansers. Fairly close views of two glaucous gulls finished the day.

On Monday, we decided to venture up the New Hampshire coast to see if any new birds could be added to the trip list. Stops were made at Hampton Beach State Park, Rye Harbor and Odiorne Point State Park. Many common loons

were within photographic range at Hampton Beach along with a beautiful snowy owl sitting on the dunes framed nicely by dune grasses. Snow buntings popped up in the grasses along with one Ipswich savannah sparrow. Purple sandpipers worked the rocks in the Rye Harbor area along with another great look at a snowy owl on the ground.

Once again, our Cape Ann trip proved to be a success. The weather was extremely mild by New England standards. Life birds were enjoyed by many. The local restaurants of Newburyport were excellent as always and our hotel comfortable. Although there were some birds missing that we usually see on this trip, it proved a good weekend for alcids — notably razorbills, dovekies, and thick-billed murre. Snowy owls were abundant and easily viewed. Passerines were lacking and no winter finches were reported all winter. Iceland gulls were missed, as were short-eared owls, but other winter raptors were seen including peregrine falcons and multiple bald eagles. Our trip list was 51 species.

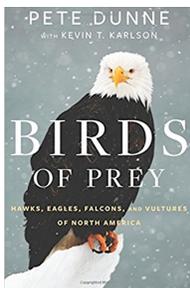
Don and I would like to thank everyone that attended and helped to make this trip the success it was.

— Donna Traylor

Field notes from all over



If you're not on Sandy Sorkin's email list for his photographic bird and travel journal, ask him about it at the next MBC meeting. Sandy takes great photos. At left is an **Antillean crested hummingbird**, which he saw in St. Lucia on Feb. 28.



At the April 11 meeting: Birds of Prey

Kevin T. Karlson, contributor to and photo editor of Pete Dunne's "Birds of Prey: Hawks, Eagles, Falcons, and Vultures of North America," will be at the April meeting for a multimedia presentation on the book, published in 2017 by Houghton Mifflin. Kevin will sign copies of the book after the program.

The MBC Bulletin Bird

Deb DeSalvo will lead a **birding hike for families** at Van Vleck Gardens in Montclair on Friday, March 23, from 3 to 4 p.m. To register, go to vanvleck.org or email

May meeting topic:
Our Fascination with
Woodpeckers

BROADWING publication schedule

The Broadwing is published five times a year: January, March, May, late summer, and October.

Send photos, field notes, or articles to the editor at oguss.editor@gmail.com or mail to Elizabeth Oguss, 200 Valley Road, Montclair, NJ 07042. Thanks!

Meetings of the Montclair Bird Club

Regular meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month at Union Congregational Church, 176 Cooper Ave. All programs are open to the public.

MBC does not meet in July, August, or December.



Photo by E.O.

Global Big Day is May 5. To take part, submit your lists for that day to eBird. Find out more at <https://tinyurl.com/yay5zj3v>

Useful links

NJAS online: njudubon.org

Hawk watch: <https://tinyurl.com/cqawsnq>



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