

New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter

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In Search of a Barnacle Goose by Norm Budnitz

In November, 1996, I was visiting a friend in Scotland and took the opportunity to go to Islay, one of the Inner Hebrides islands off the west coast. Islay (pronounced 'eye la') in winter has at least two things going for it. Primarily, it is one of the main wintering grounds for Barnacle Geese and the Greenland form of Greater White-fronted Geese. Many hundreds of Barnacle Geese; not so many White-fronteds. Finding the geese on Islay is easy; they are everywhere. The local livestock farmers (sheep and cattle) are paid a subsidy to 'allow' the geese to feed on their pastures. The geese are grazers, just like the livestock, so there is some competition for food between the birds and the mammals, though the casual observer would never notice. On the other hand, there used to be some tension between the farmers and the environmentalists. Finally, the government stepped in and now the geese are reasonably secure.

The other really nice thing about Islay is that it is the home of Bunnahabhain, a single malt Scotch whiskey that tops off a day of goose watching very nicely.

In January, 2011, a friend of mine and I met at Boston's Logan Airport in hopes of finding a Barnacle Goose that had found its way to the New World. Barnacles are Old World geese and only occasionally stray to North America in winter. Of course, they are such beautiful geese that they are prized by aviculturalists, but that's another story. A Barnacle Goose once showed up at Lake Mattamuskeet in North Carolina, but I didn't go see it. That too, is another story. Suffice it to say, when we heard about the goose in Massachusetts this winter, my friend James Huntington (from Iowa) and I decided to give chase.

The goose had been seen for a week or two just west of Boston, so that became our destination.

Unfortunately, about a week before we left our respective homes, Massachusetts was hit by a mighty blizzard. The next day, the goose was gone and was never reported again. But we already had our airplane tickets. What to do? Fortunately, another Barnacle Goose was reported near Bridgeport, Connecticut. So all was not lost. Bridgeport was only two and half hours' drive from Boston; we could still find our bird.

This is one of those fortunately/unfortunately stories we used to tell as kids. Fortunately, there was a Barnacle Goose in MA. Unfortunately, it left. But fortunately, another one showed up in CT. Unfortunately, it, too, was no longer being seen by the time James and I landed in Boston. But fortunately, another one showed up on Long Island, New York. Unfortunately, that meant driving through Connecticut and taking a ferry across Long Island Sound. These birds were getting further and further from Boston, but once committed to the chase, what choice did we have? So, off to Long Island.

Upon disembarkation from the ferry, we immediately set out in search of our bird at its purported haunts, various cemeteries in the area. Lots of Canada Geese. Lots of headstones. Crosses, stars, sarcophagi, you name it. But no Barnacle Goose. Late in the afternoon, we drove to



Jordan Lake Nest Cam

This project originated when Army Corps of Engineers biologist, Francis Ferrell, led a class of NCSU ornithology students on a visit to an active Jordan Lake Bald Eagle nest in March 2010. We all agreed that most Triangle residents would be amazed to learn that eagles were nesting nearby. Our team of volunteer engineers, NCSU graduate students, faculty, and staff formed over the next six months. We installed video cameras at an active nest in October and began monitoring the breeding pair just before the female laid two eggs in early December. The video stream is [transmitted wirelessly](http://www.basic.ncsu.edu/eaglecam/) from the nest site to a residence across the lake where it is sent via the internet to servers at NCSU. The chicks should remain on the nest until they fledge in mid-April.

<http://www.basic.ncsu.edu/eaglecam/>



Barnacle Goose cont'd

Belmont Lake State Park, where geese from all over that part of the island came in to roost. Standing in 5 inches of snow, we saw a spectacular sight as first tens, then hundreds, then thousands of geese flew in and settled down on the water for the night. As the sun set, geese were still coming in, but, unfortunately, nary a Barnacle was to be seen.

Discouraged, but not completely without hope, we found a not too sleazy motel. We knew we had one more chance the next morning, before the geese left their roost and took off to feed.

Fortunately, we arose to a bright, cold, crisp winter day. We got to the lake and began our spotting scope search through the mass of geese. James scoped from the left; I scoped from the right. We hiked through the snow up a side creek and found three Greater White-fronted Geese and lots more Canadas.

What to do? What to do? The day before, most of the geese had left the lake by 8:30 AM, and it was now already 9:30. The geese were lingering longer, but they were getting restless. How much time did we have? We had noticed the night before that some of the thousands of geese had come in to roost behind an island on the far side of the lake. It seemed that our last chance would be to drive around to the far side and scope through those geese. Grasping at straws? What other choice did we have? So we bundled up everything and drove to the other side of the lake.

Unfortunately, it was still very cold, so we zipped up our coats and put on our hats gloves.

Fortunately, the way was clear, so we hiked down to the lake shore.

Unfortunately, it was hard to see the birds from the lake shore itself.

Fortunately, the rim of ice around the shore was solid, so we stepped out gingerly and set up our scopes.

Unfortunately, there were hundreds of geese in view, most sleeping with their heads tucked under their wings.

Fortunately, James has phenomenal eyes. He found the Barnacle Goose! Its head was tucked, but its black, gray, and white back glistened in the sunlight and stood out from the brown backs of all the Canadas. And when it raised its head, its black cap, white face, and black neck and breast were spectacular. We watched for a while as the goose preened, exercised its wings, and then suddenly took to the air with several Canadas. And it was gone.

Another fortunately. In addition to his birding prowess, James makes wonderful margaritas. Not Bunnahabhain, but nonetheless a fitting night-cap to our successful Barnacle hunt.



ADOPT A HIGHWAY PROGRAM

by Tom Driscoll

Once per calendar quarter, we gather to pick up the trash on the road and the next clean up is scheduled for March 5, 2011 at 8:00am. The Adopt-a-highway program is one of the many programs sponsored by your New Hope Audubon Society. In this case, we have "adopted" Stagecoach Road which is located in the southeastern corner of Durham County, near Chatham and Orange Counties. The road is bounded by Fearington Rd. and Highway 751. We meet in the parking lot nearer to Highway 751.

I have trash bags and orange day-glow vests for visibility. I also have "grabbers" that enable one to pick up the trash without too much bending over! Please bring gloves and sturdy shoes. This activity is not strenuous and should take 2 to 3 hours. However, if you only have one hour to spare, we could still use you! Note that I found a \$10 bill during one of our trash pickups.

If you are interested in participating, then please show up at the parking lot along Stagecoach Road or contact me at spttdrshnk@yahoo.com. You'll have fun and make a positive contribution to our environment. See you there.



FEEDER WATCH

By Tom Driscoll

You should be reading this article in mid February. This is often the coldest part of the year. Birds should be feeding greedily from your feeders. Have you been noticing the increase in the amount of bird food eaten by your birds?

During the winter, we have visitors from the north and/or the mountains. Have you noticed slate-gray black birds with pink bills and white outer tail feathers? These birds are named Dark-eyed Juncos and are part of the sparrow family. White-throated Sparrows are often common feeder birds at platform feeders or picking up the "leftovers" on the grounds. There are several plumage forms of this sparrow, but all have white throats. Another winter visitor is the Red-breasted Nuthatch. These birds look like our White-breasted Nuthatch, but have red breasts and a white stripe through the eyes. We also have Purple Finches occasionally during some winters. These birds are bigger than their cousins, the House Finch. They can be difficult to tell apart. The Purple Finch usually has more purple in its plumage. Also, the upper bill is curved in the House Finch. If you hear a buzzing call that sounds like a zipper, then you may have Pine Siskins. They are small streaked birds with some yellow on the wings and they hang out with the American Goldfinches. They both eat seeds, especially thistle or niger (also spelled as nyjer).

Often, birds, such as Brown Thrashers, Pine Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, Eastern Bluebirds, and Carolina Wrens feed on suet during February. I've even seen American Robins, Hermit Thrushes, and Brown Creepers feeding on suet. Some of these birds are migrants from the north and will usually remain through March; although some may stay through April.

Some birds, such as the Eastern Bluebird, will start pairing up to mate in March, so it is time to clean out your bluebird boxes or houses or make sure your bluebird boxes are up. Clean out your bluebird houses by removing old nests and clean out with a weak bleach solution. However, bluebirds (and other birds) will roost in bluebird houses and prefer the nests for keeping warm, so if the temperatures are still very cold wait until it warms up. If you need a bluebird house, the New Hope Audubon Society sells them for only \$15. Please contact me at the email address below if you would like to purchase one. Free delivery!

If you don't recognize these birds or the bird names, then may I suggest you pick up a bird guide that are available in many stores. I challenge you to learn the names and calls



EAGLE COUNT by Martha Girolami, Chair

The NHAS Bald Eagle Count was held at Lake Jordan on January 9, 2011 from 7 to 8:30 am. The temperature was a bitter 20 degrees, the skies were clear and there was a slight breeze. It was a bit dark for the first 15-20 minutes of the count but visibility was good thereafter and by 7:35 am the sun was shining in your eyes on the western shore.

Five teams of 9 observers counted 8 adult and 7 immature Bald eagles for a total of 15.

Our next Bald Eagle Count will be April 10, 2011 from 7 to 8:30 am.





Calendar of Activities



Thursday, March 3, **Membership Meeting** at NC Botanical Gardens. 7:00pm The speaker will be Penny Padgett on "Tick Talk: Everything you ever wanted to know about ticks but were afraid to ask"

Saturday, March 5, **Stream Watch** with John Kent 9:00am.

Saturday, March 5, **Adopt A Highway** with Tom Driscoll at 8:00am.

Sunday, March 6, 7:30am **Field Trip led by Tom Driscoll**. Meet at Mardi Gras Bowling Alley. Location to be determined. Bring sturdy shoes. Hiking will be easy to moderate. Bring water and snacks if desired. We may stop somewhere for lunch. Please contact Tom Driscoll at spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com if you plan to attend.

Saturday, April 2, **Stream Watch** with John Kent. 9:00 am.

Thursday, April 7, **Membership Meeting** at NC Botanical Gardens. 7:00pm. The speaker will be Doug Pratt on "Bird Taxonomy: Why do they keep changing and complicating my life list"

Sunday, April 10, **Eagle Count** with Martha Girolami, 7-8:30am

Saturday, April 23, **Field Trip led by Cynthia Fox**. owner of Wild Bird Center in Eastgate Shopping Center, Chapel Hill. Meet at the store at 7:55 AM and return to the store by 10:00 a.m. Carpools leave from the store.



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