

New Hope Audubon Society Newsletter

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Cruisin' for Birdin'

A Dark Petrel Crosses Our Path

By Norm Budnitz

Earlier this fall, a birding friend of mine from Alaska, Dave Sonneborn, sent me a terse email message: "Would you be interested in a repositioning cruise going from Vancouver to San Diego leaving September 29?" A nice invitation except that I had no idea what a repositioning cruise was. Knowing Dave, I was sure it wasn't going to be for the haute cuisine, massages, or general cruise happenings, but rather for some hard core birding.

After thinking about it a bit and with a little investigation, I discovered that the big cruise ship companies run routes from places like Vancouver and Seattle north along the coast to Seward, Alaska, all summer long. The passengers get to see some of North America's most beautiful coastline with boreal forests, glaciers, snow-capped mountains, whales, and puffins. Although they run these tours all summer, come winter, they need to move those ships south to warmer climes. From places like San Diego, they can run tours south to Baja California, or west to Hawaii and Tahiti. Hence the 'repositioning.'

So for the ridiculously low price of about \$250, I signed up for a four day cruise from Vancouver to San Diego—including all the food I could eat, 24/7, drinks extra. Frequent flyer miles paid for my planefare. Pretty cool, huh?

The real object of this trip for Dave and me was to do some serious pelagic (open ocean) birding from the ship. There are a number of boat operators in the US and around the world who run pelagic birding trips from places like Cape Hatteras, NC, and Monterey Bay, CA. These trips are dedicated to pelagic bird watching and serve 30-50 dedicated pelagic birders per trip. They are usually one-day trips on a small boat and generally cost in the neighborhood of \$100 per day. Though these trips offer the opportunity to see bird species that are difficult or even impossible to see from land, they also offer the possibility of an encounter with the dreaded { ~~as^A^!~~ }, aka seasickness. Small boat, large waves, upset equilibrium, much time spent leaning over the rail at the stern. For most people, once the heaving begins, the only cure is to go sit under a tree—i.e., get off the boat. Not such a problem on a giant cruise ship. Read on.

We boarded the Holland America Line ship Westerdam around noon, got settled into our cabin, attended the required safety drill, and took a tour of the ship to find the best places for viewing the ocean. On the Westerdam there were really only two viable op-

Backyard Birding on Block Island, RI By Marcia Mandel



In August, I was fortunate to go on a family trip to Block Island, Rhode Island. It wasn't a birding trip, but I took every chance I could to go birding, having heard that Block Island is one of the most important spots for migratory birds on the East Coast. The Nature Conservancy has been very active on the island and has worked to establish several preserves, including Rodman's Hollow, where the threatened Northern Harrier nests. The Block Island National Wildlife Refuge, another great birding site, sits at the northern tip of the island.

Once on the island, I realized it had been a mistake to leave my car on the mainland, as I would not be able to get to the best birding spots at the right times, though I was still able to get in some good birding. The first morning I was very happy to find a yellow warbler, a cedar waxwing, and a gray catbird in the backyard of the house we were renting. I later realized that there were many catbirds on the island. The next day, exploring the beach, I found herring and great black-backed gulls. I often saw swallows on the island but was not able to definitively identify the type of swallow. Another morning, wandering around the "neighborhood," I saw a male and female yellow warbler, a great blue heron, three great egrets, and a snowy egret, and heard an eastern towhee. Of course, I also saw robins, wrens, and crows. My last birding trip was to the wildlife refuge, a beautiful spot. The rosehips were blooming, and I saw more herring and great black backed gulls, including juveniles, piping plovers in breeding plumage, semipalmated plovers, ruddy turnstones, and least sandpipers. Part of the beach area at the refuge was roped off to protect nesting areas for least terns and piping plovers.

Block Island is 13 miles south of the coast of Rhode Island and 14 miles east of the eastern most tip of Long Island. There are several ferries to the island, but if you go during the summer and want to take your car over, be sure to book a ticket well in advance. Block Island is small (less than 10 square miles), and bicycles and motor scooters are popular modes of transportation. It has New England charm and great seafood!



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tions. We could watch port or starboard (left or right), but not straight ahead from the third deck, which was close to the water and from which the views of the birds seen were better. Or we could stand at the bow on the 9th deck, which gave us a much better view of left, right, and center, albeit from about 100 feet above the water. That's right, the 9th deck, out of 11! From this height the birds looked different and it took some practice to identify common birds. The Westerdam is a 1,000 foot long, 11 story hotel building that floats on top of the water! And stable, even in 35-40 knot winds. In addition to using our binoculars, we set up our spotting scopes. That's how stable it was. We were mostly ignored by the 1,800 other passengers and 800 members of the staff and crew, though we did get some curious (bewildered?) looks as we tromped through the lounge in our heavy clothing, carrying our spotting scopes, cameras, and binoculars.

The next morning, October 1st, we awoke before dawn, had breakfast, and went up on deck to watch birds. The birding was slow for about a half hour, and then suddenly there were birds everywhere—shearwaters, pelicans, and gulls. Unfortunately, the boat was heading into Astoria, Oregon, and we only had great birding until around 11:30, when we crossed the bar of the Columbia River and pulled into the dock. We spent 8 hours in town, did a little birding and sightseeing, and had a pleasant afternoon. We left the dock after dark and didn't get in any more oceanic birding that day.

October 2nd began beautifully with the ship over deep water. There were birds everywhere: hundreds of shearwaters, perhaps a hundred California Gulls, and lots of Black-footed Albatrosses. A beautiful adult Laysan Albatross put in an appearance, along with a juvenile Short-tailed Albatross, a critically endangered species. We thought, "This is going to be fantastic." But then, suddenly, there were no more birds. We stood on that foredeck hour after hour, scanning the ocean back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Nothing. Break for lunch. Scan the ocean. Break for the bathroom. Scan the ocean. Nothing but empty seas. Deep water has lots of empty patches.

As the day wore on, no birds. Hour after hour. Hour after hour. Discouraging. Disappointing. But what could we do? We were there to look for birds, so that's what we did. Hour after hour. Hour after hour.

And then it happened. "BIRD!" Dave yelled, and we both got on an all-dark Pterodroma or gadfly petrel as it came across the bow from the left about 50 feet or so in front of us. It passed to the starboard, made a high sweeping arc upward, soared downward and then flew off to the south, away from the ship, never to be seen again.

We knew had seen something good. Well, Dave knew; I'm much less experienced when it comes to seabirds. We immediately took notes about what we had seen, before looking at a field guide. We didn't want to taint our observations with someone's drawings or photographs until we had downloaded our memory banks to paper. Our bird had dark brown upper parts and a dark brown body. It had a small, rounded head with a short, tubenose bill (not a flattish head and longish bill like most shearwaters). When it arced up, it had white flashes on the upper surfaces of its outer wings, kind of like a jaeger. But this was no jaeger. The whole time we had it in view, it never flapped its wings. Not once. When it showed us its underside, we could see two long pale slashes along the length of each underwing, separated by a dark area. That's it. That's all we got on the bird before it was gone. Ninety seconds at most; maybe just sixty.

After we had exhausted our memory banks and after all our notes were recorded, only then did we turn to our books.



Calendar of Activities

Thursdays, Nov 1, **Membership Meeting** 7:00pm NC Botanical Gardens, The program will include two topics, "Beetles of North Carolina," and "How to Identify Wildlife by Sounds" both by Brian Bockhahn.

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

Saturday, Nov 18, **Bird Walk** with Tom Driscoll, 8:00am, birdwatching at a site to be determined. We will meet at the Mardi Gras Bowling Alley parking lot at the intersection of Highway 54 and Fearington Road at 8:00am. The hiking is easy. Please bring sturdy shoes, water, and snacks. We should be out for 2 to 3 hours. All bird watching skill levels are welcome. If you're interested in participating, then please contact Tom Driscoll at spttdrshnk@yahoo.com.



Saturday, Dec 1 , **Stream Watch** with John Kent, 9:00 am

Thursday, Dec 6, **Membership Meeting** 7:00pm, NC Botanical Gardens, The program will be "Electronic Tagging of Bluefin Tuna" by Andre Boustany

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By process of elimination, we narrowed our choices down to Pterodroma petrels. These solitary birds of the open ocean spend their lives at sea, bounding over the waters, skimming the waves, then arcing high, never (or rarely) flapping their wings. The mostly brown body of our bird helped us to narrow our search further to just a few petrels. The white flashes in the upper wings sealed the deal. We had just seen a Kermadec Petrel, perhaps the first sighting of this bird in North American waters!

The beautiful adult Brown Booby that came in toward dusk and perched on a pole at the bow displaying his bright yellow feet was nice. The Osprey and the Peregrine who circled the boat the next day were fun to see. The migrating Pomarine Jaegers and South Polar Skuas the next day were also nice. But they were just icing on the cake. The Kermadec was the bird of the trip. These birds nest on the Kermadec Islands, northeast of New Zealand. Though they have been recorded in Hawaii, there are precious few other records north of the equator. It's too bad we did not get a photograph (too little time, our reflexes a bit too slow), because without a picture or a specimen, ours was just a sight record. Interesting, but not conclusive in the eyes of the bird records committees. But our sighting might get people looking, maybe a pattern will emerge, and maybe someone will eventually get the photograph needed to establish the occurrence of this species off our west coast.

A birding trip on a giant cruise ship? For \$250? Who'd a thunk it. But we saw a Kermadec Petrel! Definitely the Bird of the Trip, and maybe the Bird of a Lifetime.

And all the food you could eat!



Membership Programs For 2012 - 2013

Time/Date	Speaker	Topic
7:00 pm November 1, 2012	Brian Bockhahn, Ranger at Falls Lake State Park	Beetles of North Carolina and How to Identify Wildlife by Sounds
7:00 pm December 6, 2012	Andre Boustany Duke University	Electronic Tagging of Bluefin Tuna
7:00 pm January 3, 2013	Allen Hartley Hurlbert Researcher at UNC	Broad-Scale Patterns of Bird Diversity and Migration: Insights from Citizen Science
7:00 pm February 7, 2013	Johnny Wilson graduate student at NCSU	Mice Eating Albatrosses at Gough Island
7:00 pm March 7, 2013	Maria de Bruyn	Birds of Kruger National Park, South Africa; Etosha National Park, Namibia; and Nairobi National Park, Kenya
7:00 pm April 4, 2013	Jeff Beane NC Museum of Natural Sciences	Snakes of North Carolina
7:00 pm May 2, 2013	John Gerwin NC Museum of Natural Sciences	Birds of Nicaragua

EAGLE COUNT

By Martha Girolami

The NHAS held its fall Jordan Lake Bald Eagle count on Sunday, October 14, 2012, from 7 to 8:30 am. The conditions were foggy and partly cloudy with no wind until a slight breeze late in the count period with a temperature of 48 degrees. The Lake level was full at 216.49 feet.

Eleven observers at seven sites around the Lake counted 9 adult and 30 immature eagles for a total of 39.



FEEDER WATCH

By Tom Driscoll

With this article, "Feeder Watch" begins its eighth year of discussing feeder birds. Although I discuss the birds I am seeing or you can see at your feeders, I am hoping to receive reports and questions about the birds you are seeing. This will make the articles more interesting. If you have ideas about topics to discuss, want to report on the birds you are seeing, or have questions about the birds you are seeing, please send me an email at spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com.

The leaves are starting to fall which will make the birds easier to spot! The days are much shorter and the temperatures are colder. All these factors make birds feed intensively at feeders. The resident birds that don't migrate remain and our winter visitors, migrants from the north, may be starting to show up.

Our year-round residents that frequent feeders include Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, and Brown-headed Nuthatch. Can you recognize these birds? Of course, the Northern Cardinal is the state bird and the male is very red, although at this time of year, they may appear scraggly as they are molting. They shed their feathers for a new set. This is a gradual process that may take several months. During the winter, the juvenile birds will molt into their adult plumage for spring. These birds are chiefly seed eaters, so you can see them at your seed feeders. Eastern Towhees, colorful black and orange birds, eat seeds as well, but usually on the ground. Sometimes, I put millet on the ground for towhees and some of our winter sparrows.

We have several species, including Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers that regularly come to the suet feeders. Other woodpeckers, including the Pileated Woodpecker, and other residents, such as Eastern Bluebirds, Pine Warblers, and Brown Thrashers, may also eat suet. Some residents, such as American Robins and Eastern Bluebirds, eat berries from the Holly Bushes, Dogwood, and juniper trees in your yard. You may not be the only one watching the birds at your feeders. Hawks, such as Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks, feed on small birds and may also be "feeding" at your feeders. Have you seen any smallish hawks?

Our hummingbirds have departed for warmer climes. However, keep your feeders up for another month or so because we sometimes have "western" hummingbirds, such as Rufous or Calliope Hummingbirds, spend the winter here. If you are still seeing a hummingbird, please let me know!

Field Trips for November and December 2012

Tom Driscoll will be leading a bird walk on Sunday, November 18, 2012. Please meet at the Mardi Gras bowling alley (south-east corner of Hwy. 54 and Fearington Rd. intersection) parking lot at 8:00am. The field trip will last about 2 - 3 hours. We will go to a local site to look for birds. There should be winter visitors and resident birds to see. The hiking will be leisurely. Please bring sturdy shoes, water, snacks (if you choose), and long pants. If you plan to attend or have questions, then please contact Tom Driscoll at spttdrdshnk@yahoo.com.

There will not be a field trip scheduled for December. Instead, there will be Christmas Bird Counts in Durham, Chapel Hill, Jordan Lake, and other areas in the triangle. If you are interested in learning more, there will be information soon on our website at www.newhopeadubon.org. All levels of bird watchers are needed, so if you're interested in participating then please contact me at the email address above.

If you have ideas about field trips or where we should go on field trips, then please let me know.





New Hope Audubon Officers for 2012-2013

Position	Name
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Vice President	Robert "Bo" Howes
Secretary	Pat Reid
Treasurer	Jill Paul
Director	Robin Moran
Director	John Kent
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Committee	Name
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Education Chair	Vacant
Field Trip Chair	Vacant
Hospitality Chair	Jim & Mary George
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Eagle Count	Martha Girolami
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