

Every time they get in the boat

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



American Avocet visited Clarke's Beach in August. (photo: Gene Herzberg)

Now – 10 August 2011

With the white water crashing on the rock face below and with mountains of surging wave force surrounding the island, I had deep concerns if April, Paul and I would be able to get off the island. Owing to persistent easterly winds and relentless roaring seas, our departure was delayed for five days. There was no getting around this rather accepted Funk Island experience.

When the longliner *Lady Easton* arrived, Skipper Larry Easton and Skipper Emeritus Edison Easton had very serious reservations about being able to retrieve us. Larry and I had discussed local circumstances by satellite phone earlier in the day, and he indicated that the effort to get us would be “touchy”.

Along to help were fisher Jeff Chaulk and whale release expert Wayne Ledwell and his trusty zodiac. After going around the island and sizing up the situation for some time, they stopped off a ways and heaved the zodiac over the side. As I watched them climbing over the side of the longliner and into the zodiac, I realized the risks that they were taking.

They feathered the boat near the rock and picked up the gear that we tossed off the island. In the course of numerous trips between the white water around the island and the longliner with our field gear, they considered ways to get us.

Larry had us to secure a long rope on the island and toss the end out to them. Then to steady the zodiac in the swirling erratic surf, Wayne put the zodiac in reverse

while Larry pulled forward on the rope secured on the island. Then assessing a lull in crashing waves, they would move the zodiac in close to the rock and when the sea rose up yell to each of us in turn to jump into the zodiac.

It worked like a charm, a carefully reasoned more so than a lucky one. A brief youtube video of the Funk Island visit is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nctT1zv-gSc>.

Then – 17 June 1977

It was one of my initial research visits to Baccalieu. Transport to the island was provided by the lighthouse keepers. Eric Blundon of Bay de Verde was my contact.

At the island help was provided by light-keepers – Raymond Hyde, Linus Walsh, Pat Rice and Felix Noonan – who lowered a ladder to the bobbing boat where a handhold allowed a scramble straight up a rock face to the wharf, keepers and winch above.

My assistant Bruce and I had camped below the cliffs of Gannet Head to study the vertical distribution of the seabirds on the cliffs. During the morning I could see Felix atop a high cliff about a kilometer away flagging a jacket over his head. It was immediately clear that something was wrong – but what?

After a long run to the lighthouse, I learned that my father had called Eric to inform him that my grandfather had died. Eric then reached Linus by CB radio who sent Felix to find me.

I needed to get off the island to head home. But how? A big sea was “on”, and it was too rough for Eric’s speedboat to cross the white-capped Baccalieu Tickle. No one in Bay de Verde wanted to make the trip until Eric floated the idea to Tony Broaders who’s boat was not running well but said “sure”.

The sound of Tony’s make-and-break Acadia engine was reassuring as the trap skiff plowed across the tickle. With the help of Linus and Felix, it was down the latter and a leap into the boat. Plunging our way back, I opened a bottle of Screech that I had saved for a special occasion with the keepers – this was one.

Tony produced a delicate bone China tea cup into which we poured a good measure of rum topped with water from a Javex bottle, and passed the cup around. It was about this time that the Acadia sputtered out. And it was wave over bow, as the engine was uncovered and pliers applied to the fuel line, and the cup made its way around.

Soon it was but-but-but-but-but on a steady course to Bay de Verde with a passing tea cup for all hands. Before driving off to St. John’s, I thanked Eric and Tony for everything, not having realized at the time but mostly for their journey through the Baccalieu Tickle and the resolution of my grandfather’s passing.

Beach site at Neary's Pond

The picnic tables and mowed lawn at the Neary's Pond swimming site are a nice environmentally friendly approach. Most folks are keeping the site neat, and there has been no damage to the tables. If it can only stay this way and other developments in our community could be so modest and user-friendly.

Birds in the area

In mid-August, flocks of mostly sooty and some greater shearwaters along with humpback and minke whales and white-sided dolphins were pursuing capelin in Greenspond (Dave Jenkins).

In late August and September, the gannets on Baccalieu Island and at Cape St. Mary's were delivering Atlantic saury (billfish) to their chicks. Saury move into the region in late summer during warm water years and indicate good conditions for mackerel and squid.

Philip Hillyard has been watching flocks of gannets fishing close to shore in Black Tickle, Labrador and reports similar flocks are also being seen in Makkovik. These gannets are likely associated with the colony on Funk Island.

Following strong hurricane associated winds, a half dozen dead adult gannets were seen floats alongside Bird Rock at Cape St. Mary's (Tony Power, Gioia Montevicchi). They likely were injured in collisions with the cliffs during high winds.

On 3 August at the beach near Worsley Park in Manuels, Roy Ficken photographed a ruddy turnstone with a lettered identification tag on its leg. I am trying to track down where the bird was tagged. Gene Herzberg captured the image of the stunning American Avocet at South River/Clarkes Beach in late August.

David Artiss reported that the spotted sandpipers of Neary's Pond were visited by a lesser yellowlegs in early August. Lesser yellowlegs have also been seen in Collinet and Musgrave Harbour. Red phalaropes have feeding around the ice island in the Baie Verte area (David Hayashida).

In September 15 red knots were seen at Argentia (Tony Power) and nine at Musgrave Harbour (Janet and Nick Montevicchi, Katie Arnot).

Three great blue herons and four ospreys were seen at Cape Ray in late August (Gioia Montevicchi), and many osprey were feeding on flat fish in Tilting (Kathy Colombe).

It's boom year for northern harriers with sightings of adults and juveniles in the Avalon Wilderness Area (John Lewis), at Musgrave Harbour (Janet Montevicchi) and Rushmere Farm on the Argentia Access Road (Dick Whitaker).

Keep looking up – it's just the way it is.

Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 895-2901 (h), 864-7673 (w).