

# **Environmental initiatives on the northeast coast**

## **Birds I View**

### **Bill Montevecchi**



A recent bird survey on the northeast coast between Gambo and Gander gave me the opportunity to immerse in one of my favorite parts of the province. The trip also gave me an appreciation of encouraging environmental initiatives being made in some coastal communities.

#### **Deadman's Bay Provincial Park**

From what I remember of it in the not so distant past, the level of ATV traffic along this extensive and splendid stretch of sandy beach and dunes has been considerably reduced. This is likely due to public awareness and habitat protection in the provincial park.

A trail on the landward side of the dunes is used consistently, eliminating haphazard and helter-skelter traffic. As a result the dynamic sand dune habitat that is so rare in Newfoundland and Labrador has exhibited remarkable resiliency and is healthy and vibrant. On a sun drenched Sunday morning with a strong ocean breeze in our faces and mountainous icebergs offshore, my wife Janet and I were the only visitors - a priceless Newfoundland experience.

Deadmans Bay Provincial Park is worth the trip anytime of year. Doug Ballam, the provincial Program Director of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, refers to the provincial park as the "jewel of the Straight Shore of Bonavista Bay".

In marked and disappointing contrast, the beautiful sandy beach in nearby Lumsden, a community that prides itself on its sandy shore is not faring so well. The

beach and dunes are trampled by ATVs and dirt bikes. There appears to be no regulation or even regard for this needless destruction. The off-road vehicles compact the sands destroying water flow and the movement tiny life forms and crush and tear up the beach grasses that maintain the integrity of the dunes. Hopefully local residents and the town council can help guard this precious sandy beach from further damage.

### **Ladle Cove Bird Sanctuary**

The community of Ladle Cove has designated parts of its shoreline as a bird sanctuary. Ladle Cove Island provides nesting habitat for at least three species of gulls and good numbers of cormorants roost and possibly nest there. Rare black-headed gulls and Caspian terns nested on Ladle Cove Island in the past. They moved off about 15 years ago around the time a red fox that had ventured out to the island on winter sea ice took up a short-term residence. The fox is gone and so too are the black-headed gulls and Caspian terns. Keep looking.

### **Carmanville Wetlands Nature Trail**

There are many awesome nature trails in Newfoundland and Labrador and the Wetlands Nature Trail in Carmanville is one of the very best. The extensive and well-groomed trails are quiet, comfortable and extraordinarily well integrated with the natural surroundings. The locally well-crafted signage is attractive, helpful and pleasantly unobtrusive. Comfortable observation blinds and hide-aways are nestled along the trails that weave through different forested, marsh and wetland areas.

The forest warblers and chickadees and wetland ducks and loons offer stunning and fulfilling contrasts with seabirds and shorebirds of the nearby coasts. A modest investment of ACOA and other funds helped create his nature area. It has been an immensely worthwhile investment that has been made possible and enhanced by the commitments and efforts of local residents.

My only disappointment was that the interpretation centre had not opened on 9 June. Support to keep the centre active throughout the year could reap remarkable paybacks. As is being done so successfully at the interpretation centre in the Cape St. Mary's Ecological Seabird Reserve, enhanced nature programs for schools, public lectures, art exhibits, concerts are some exciting possibilities.

So my recommendation (and Janet's) for a magnificent vacation or family getaway is to spend some time on the northeast coast this summer and experience the outstanding natural environment and fantastic local communities.

### **Habitat and Endangered Species Protection**

So what are the consequences of habitat protection versus destruction and disturbance? Endangered piping plovers used to abound on the northeast coast, nesting at Cape Freels, Lumsden, Deadman's Bay and Musgrave Harbour. These delicate little dune-nesting shorebirds have not been recorded on the northeast coast for more than 15 years. If there's no habitat, there's no hope for endangered or indeed any species.

Could it be? As I was walking through the dunes at Deadman's Bay, I was unaware that I had flushed a small shorebird that flitted down to the beach. Janet called to me but I never saw the bird that she described as small, light gray with a white collar. Could it be? We live in hope.

### **Transport Canada and the *MSC Trinidad***

The *Mediterranean Shipping Company Trinidad* that is alleged to have deliberately discharged 25 tonnes of oily waste in eastern Canada waters was impounded for four days in Montreal by Transport Canada. A federal investigation is ongoing and a \$500,000 bond was secured before the vessel left port. About a month after the alleged discharge, Stan Tobin picked 3 oiled murrelets on the Cape Shore on 25 May. Whether these birds are associated with this event or another "mystery" pollution event is not known.

### **Gulls with wing-tags**

This past winter biologists in Massachusetts have been marking gulls with fluorescent wing tags. Many of the gulls were previously banded in Newfoundland. Now some of them are returning.

A conspicuously marked herring gull was seen in St. John's (Jared Clarke), and ring-billed gulls at Plum Point (John and Ivy Gibbons) and Goose Bay (Rebecca Poole, Ernest Pottle). If you see one of these gulls report the details to the Canadian Wildlife Service.

### **Birds in area and around the province**

On 22 May on a Canadian Wildlife Service seabird survey, Rob Ronconi sighted a greater shearwater, a northern gannet and red phalaropes about 2/3s of the way between Labrador and Greenland. The greater shearwater has arrived from the sub-Antarctic and the gannet is likely from a wintering site off the southern US coast. These amazing seabirds truly live a whole ocean existence. The red phalaropes are actually ocean shorebirds (how's that for a contradiction). They will soon be nesting on high arctic Canadian tundra. Phalaropes are sort of like shorebirds and seabirds all rolled into one with highly different seasonal occupations.

Murrelets and kittiwakes at Cape St. Mary's began egg-laying on 25 May, close to the average laying initiation date of 22 May (Tony Power, Paul Regular). The first gannet chick hatched on 12 June.

In the early morning of 25 May, Dave Sheppard spotted a rare upland sandpiper near the Cape Race helicopter pad. He immediately posted the sighting on the web nf.birds bulletin board. Many birders from St. John's scrambled and saw the bird later that day.

Likely travelers on the sustained northeast winds in mid-May, European whimbrels were sighted in Lumsden (Andy Gibbons) and at Bear Cove on the Southern Shore (Dave Brown, Jen Harding). Mourning doves have returned to Della DaMoss's feeder in Rodickton, where 2 young fledged last year. John and Ivy Gibbons found 6

northern wheatears in the Plum Point area during the species' storm-assisted incursion in May. This is a record count for Newfoundland to my knowledge.

In Carmanville, Ed Easton has a brood of 3 tree swallow chicks in his shed and a robin nesting under his deck. This has to be good fortune for both the birds and Ed. A white-crowned sparrow visited Gene and Karen Herzberg's feeder in St. John's in late May.

Sightings/questions – [mont@mun.ca](mailto:mont@mun.ca) or 895-2901.