

Take a Second Look
42 Baker Avenue
Lexington, MA 02173

Next TASL Harbor Censuses:
January 24 • February 21 • March 21

About Those Doldrums...

Do you treat winter as a time of dormancy, a time to snuggle deep under a heavy comforter, only to emerge after the vernal equinox promises returning warmth and songbirds? If so, you don't know what you're missing. In late fall the "other" migration begins: arctic birds heading south for the winter. For them—the Snowy Owls, Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Eiders and many others—Boston *is* the tropics.

From November through March, our coastal waters abound in species that reside farther north during our more comfortable bird-viewing months. From large Black Scoters to miniature Horned Grebes, the water birds bob and dive in frigid local bays. If you are properly clad, searching them out can be just as rewarding as a May quest for warblers.

Do you thrill at seeing a new species—not just a quick glance, but a chance to really see the bird, check your field guide, look again and notice the shape of the head or the length of the bill, watch the feeding behavior, and imprint the species on your brain? Winter water birds are the answer to your dreams. (How often has a Northern Parula been so accommodating?)

Look to your heart's content. First, there are the numbers: thousands of eider congregate together, the crisp white-backed males mingling with the rich chestnut-brown females. Second, no trees get in the way. Granted, waves sloshing around the birds impede viewing, but on a calm day your view is clear: the whole bird, not just a flash of yellow or a hint of red. There's much less of the now-you-see-it, now-you-don't problem. Third, water birds often stay in one place for an extended time as if they really *want* to be identified.

While it's great to have cooperative subjects, it's even better to have helpful colleagues. A core group of hardy souls have been monitoring Boston's winter water bird population since the late 1970's, and they are eager to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with less experienced censusers. One Sunday a month throughout the winter, the shores of

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REMINISCING:

Early Days

It was at a *Bird Observer* party that Leif Robinson, Craig Jackson, and the rest of the gang hatched this project. It was the summer of 1978, and we were celebrating the publication of *BO's* first Where-to-go-birding book. All the authors of the various where-to-gos were there; naturally, Craig had to make trouble.

"Why," he wanted to know, "Should we be going birding to all sorts of different places when we don't even know what's in our back yards? Or take behavior: Why do we have to chase new birds all the time when we could study great behaviors in common birds?"

"There he goes again," I thought to myself. Craig had recently got deeper and deeper into behavior studies, primarily after reading Joseph Hickey's book *A Guide to Bird Watching* (Dover Publications; New York, 1975) and talking a lot with Ruth Emery, then dean of Massachusetts birder-watchers. I expected the reaction of the group to be bored yawns. Instead various people began to throw around the idea of a field project group, and eventually one was born, in a foggy sort of way. Craig and I were to set it up.

Then the discussion turned to what we should name this amorphous project. *Field Studies Committee* was initially seen as too pretentious. *LA* (for *Listers Anonymous*) was thought too alienating to the listers we wanted to enlist. Finally Leif, who had only recently completed a five-year survey of Weston birds, came up with the name *Take a Second Look*, immediately shortened to *TASL*. (The next wag down the line proposed *SIFT*, for *See It the First Time*, but he was shouted down.) And so there we were, with a new organization, and lots of organizing to do.

In fall and winter of 1978-79, Craig arranged for eight *TASL* trips, scheduled through the end of 1979. These "in depth" field trips ranged from checking out the Charles River, to studying breeding birds of the Boston Harbor Islands, to "Sparrows and Weeds," a John Andrews specialty.

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Doldrums (Cont.)

Boston Harbor sprout binocular-clad, scope-toting adventurers off surveying which birds are out and about. They call themselves *TASL*ers. (*TASL* stands for *Take a Second Look*.)

Do you want to learn the differences between Double-crested and Great Cormorants? Accompany a *TASL* volunteer to Fort Point Channel where the two perch side by side. Do all gulls look alike to you? Enjoy a lecture on Iceland, Bonaparte's and Little Gulls while watching them. Do you know where to find Peregrine Falcons in the city? Check out the Custom House tower or Belle Isle Marsh.

Learning isn't limited to the birds. If you've never been to Castle Island, the outskirts of Logan Airport or the shores of Quincy, this is your chance. Discover obscure ponds where Great Blue Herons lurk or Green-Winged Teal pass the time. Learn interesting bits of bird history (e.g., early

explorers of Canada's Northwest Territories relished Buffleheads, then known as "butterballs"); or the reasons for bird migration (the number of Snowy Owls wintering here is greatly affected by conditions in the Arctic).

Cast aside those winter doldrums! Throw off the blankets! Fix a thermos of coffee, grab an extra pair of gloves and head for the shore. Smell the briny air; feel the wind that combs the headdress of the merganser; watch the black ducks meander through the shallows. Farther out, you can see the sun flash on the white breast of a Common Loon. The goldeneyes float lightly on the waves. If you listen, you can almost hear the birds calling you: "Come on in; the water's fine."

Pat Randall

[Pat, a Cambridge resident, has been a faithful *TASL*er since the 1988-89 season, and has spent the most time censusing *Winthrop*.]

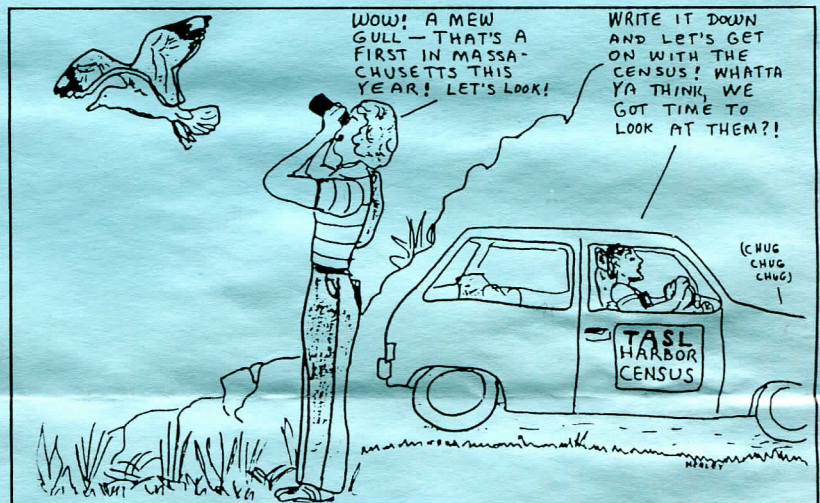
Early Days (Cont.)

But the field trip that stamped *TASL* with a definite identity was organized by me on March 25, 1979: "Waterfowl movements in Boston Harbor." This was the pilot harbor census out of which all the others sprang.

A *Field Studies Committee* did form, under the auspices of *Bird Observer* magazine, and over the years it organized such projects as an inland lake and pond waterfowl census in November, organized by Lee Taylor; a Screech Owl survey masterminded by Ollie Komar; and a whole series of harbor island summer camping trips, undertaken by Katie Durham and Polly Stevens (who are still active in that project) intent on establishing bird breeding records from the islands.

But after 1979 *TASL* came to mean harbor water bird censuses. Leif was asked to be the strategist for the project. An astronomer and mathematician, Leif is the editor of *Sky and Telescope* magazine, and is always ready to launch a new birding project as long as the data generated is well-documented and self-consistent. He promptly drew lines through Boston Harbor dividing it into five sectors, each of which was to be censused by a separate party. Censusers were asked to count all the water birds and raptors, and sex and age them as well, if possible.

The areas to be covered were huge and time for each census was short. A combination of these factors, plus Craig's insistence on looking at common birds and Leif's



Nancy Henley

emphasis on data-gathering, meant that chasing rare birds on *TASL* counts was frowned upon.

We invited two birders to be co-leaders for each harbor sector and were off and running in the winter of 1980.

[To be continued...]

Soheil Zende

[This is the best I can remember these events. Please don't hesitate to send in corrections or amendments. Anecdotes relating to *TASL* counts are also welcome.]

Participants in the November 1992 *TASL* Census:

Nahant: Todd Ongaro, Margery Rines, Bob Stymeist
Winthrop: Wayne Barron, Ted Mara, Jane Nalwalk, Pat Randall, Ed Sullivan, Fay and Peter Vale

Boston: Jim Barton, Joan Campbell, Mike Fager, Kathy Foley, Susan Paczosa, Jim Powers, Soheil Zende

TASL (Take Second Look) is organized and staffed entirely by volunteers. Please mail *TASL* census data to Maury Hall, 849 East 3rd St. #2, South Boston, MA 02127 (268-7571). This newsletter is produced by Soheil Zende (863-2392H, 923-0941W).

Squantum: Ron Donovan, Steve Ells, Paul FitzGerald, Mike McInnis

Hough's Neck: Mimi Murphy, Dave Petrie

Weymouth: Maury Hall, Kenton Griffis

Hull: Dennis Oliver, Dave Lange, Polly Stevens

Results of November 22, 1992, TASL Census

SPECIES	Nahant	Winthrop	Boston	Squantum	Hough's N	Weymouth	Hull	11/22/92 Totals	11/24/91 Totals	11/18/90 Totals
RED-THROATED LOON		9		2				11	23	1
COMMON LOON	1	2		1		1	1	6	5	10
PIED-BILLED GREBE										1
HORNED GREBE	5	60	11	29	74	25	39	243	164	64
RED-NECKED GREBE	1	24					3	28	5	1
NORTHERN GANNET									1	6
GREAT CORMORANT	11	2		6	17			36	71	37
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT		10	22	25				57	90	120
CORMORANT (SP.)					7		2	9	22	49
GREAT BLUE HERON		9	4	9	4	2		28	31	20
BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON									1	
MUTE SWAN						9		9	12	
SNOW GOOSE									1	
BRANT	52	725		222	228	33	256	1516	1959	1387
CANADA GOOSE			1	35		98	7	141	67	1
GREEN-WINGED TEAL										3
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	212	42	454	195	97	246	130	1376	1282	1502
MALLARD	29	58	13	6		46	3	155	117	103
NORTHERN PINTAIL									1	
AMERICAN WIGEON			2					2		
GREATER SCAUP		44	15	80	308	1		448	1059	176
COMMON EIDER	1147	3614	2	255	29	1	390	5438	9497	2419
OLDSQUAW					36			36	23	35
BLACK SCOTER				3				3	14	6
SURF SCOTER	1			120			38	159	8	2
WHITE-WINGED SCOTER	117	4		290	12		17	440	421	389
SCOTER (SP.)				1250				1250		
COMMON GOLDENEYE	5	84	221	91	252	18	327	998	618	317
BUFFLEHEAD	391	627	465	394	193	800	294	3164	1916	2924
HOODED MERGANSER									15	16
COMMON MERGANSER									5	
RED-BREADED MERGANSER	183	245	1564	135	170	282	402	2981	2378	2634
COOPER'S HAWK				1			1	2		
RED-TAILED HAWK				1				1	3	
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK										1
AMERICAN KESTREL									2	2
LARGE FALCON	1							1		
BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER	7				6			13	27	47
KILLDEER		1						1		
GREATER YELLOWLEGS		3	4					7	2	12
RUDDY TURNSTONE									13	4
SANDERLING	324							324	100	206
WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER									1	
PURPLE SANDPIPER	13							13	25	1
DUNLIN	246		7	15	4			272	313	95
LAUGHING GULL										30
LITTLE GULL									1	
COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL		4						4	4	15
BONAPARTE'S GULL	72	560	80	5	19	77	50	863	1497	859
ICELAND GULL									1	
SMALL ALCID										1
SNOWY OWL		2	3					5	3	1
HARBOR SEAL	6	1	1	4				12	4	4
WEATHER								<i>Cldy, rain PM</i>	<i>Cldy, rain AM</i>	<i>Cldy</i>
WIND								<i>SW 5-10 mph</i>	<i>E 7-10 mph</i>	<i>NE 20-35 mph</i>
TEMP								<i>55-60F</i>	<i>65F</i>	<i>40F</i>
HI TIDE								<i>9:00 AM</i>	<i>12:30 PM</i>	<i>11:30 AM</i>

Frequency and Abundance of Birds in Boston Harbor Based on TASL Censuses 1980 to 1992

SPECIES	NOV-DEC		JAN-FEB		MAR-APR		SPECIES	NOV-DEC		JAN-FEB		MAR-APR	
	SIGHTINGS (MAX=9)	AVG	SIGHTINGS (MAX=18)	AVG	SIGHTINGS (MAX=9)	AVG		SIGHTING (MAX=9)	AVG	SIGHTINGS (MAX=18)	AVG	SIGHTINGS (MAX=9)	AVG
RED-THROATED LOON	7	18	10	1	1	0	BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER	8	50	6	1	2	0
COMMON LOON	9	8	14	2	6	1	WILLET	1	0	0	0	0	0
RED-NECKED GREBE	6	3	9	3	6	16	GREATER YELLOWLEGS	7	8	2	0	3	3
HORNED GREBE	9	153	18	50	9	77	LESSER YELLOWLEGS	0	0	0	0	2	0
PIED-BILLED GREBE	3	0	1	0	1	0	DOWITCHER (SP)	1	0	0	0	0	0
NORTHERN GANNET	3	5	1	0	2	19	COMMON SNIBE	0	0	0	0	1	0
GREAT CORMORANT	8	249	18	165	9	275	RUDDY TURNSTONE	6	4	2	0	0	0
D-CRESTED CORMORANT	9	83	16	22	7	36	PURPLE SANDPIPER	8	96	16	93	7	159
CORMORANT (SP)	4	17	5	3	4	38	RED KNOT	2	0	0	0	0	0
AMERICAN BITTERN	1	0	0	0	0	0	DUNLIN	9	268	13	18	6	20
BK-CR. NIGHT-HERON	4	2	0	4	4	10	SANDERLING	9	60	11	47	2	20
LITTLE BLUE HERON	0	0	0	0	1	0	WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER	1	0	0	0	0	0
SNOWY EGRET	0	0	0	0	2	3	PECTORAL SAND	0	0	0	0	1	0
GREAT BLUE HERON	9	14	13	3	7	2	RUFF	0	0	0	0	1	0
MUTE SWAN	3	2	4	1	2	0	SANDPIPER (SP)	0	0	1	0	1	0
SNOW GOOSE	2	0	0	0	0	0	BOONAPARTE'S GULL	9	620	16	136	1	0
CANADA GOOSE	8	52	16	141	9	37	C. BLACK-HEADED GULL	8	4	15	5	3	1
BRANT	9	1321	18	1623	9	1923	LITTLE GULL	1	0	0	0	0	0
MALLARD	9	131	18	232	9	97	MEW GULL	0	0	1	0	0	0
AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	9	1620	18	2071	9	1110	GLAUCOUS GULL	1	0	3	0	4	1
GADWALL	1	0	2	0	0	0	ICELAND GULL	1	0	9	1	4	2
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	3	1	3	0	3	3	LAUGHING GULL	5	56	0	0	1	0
AMERICAN WIGEON	1	8	6	1	2	6	LESSER BLACK-BACKED GUL	0	0	4	0	1	0
EURASIAN WIGEON	0	0	1	0	0	0	BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE	0	0	5	1	0	0
NORTHERN PINTAIL	1	0	4	1	2	1	FORSTER'S TERN	1	0	0	0	0	0
SHOVELER	1	0	0	0	1	0	RAZORBILL	1	0	0	0	0	0
RUDDY DUCK	1	0	0	0	1	1	THICK-BILLED MURRE	1	0	2	0	0	0
CANVASBACK	2	1	9	3	4	5	BLACK GUILLEMOT	1	0	2	0	3	0
REDHEAD	1	0	0	0	0	0	BALD EAGLE	0	0	0	0	1	0
GREATER SCAUP	9	810	18	2089	9	1549	NORTHERN HARRIER	4	1	11	2	6	1
LESSER SCAUP	0	0	1	0	0	0	SHARP-SHINNED HAWK	0	0	2	0	0	0
COMMON EIDER	9	4817	18	4458	9	4870	COOPER'S HAWK	3	0	3	0	1	0
KING EIDER	1	0	7	1	4	1	RED-SHOULDERED HAWK	1	0	0	0	0	0
BLACK SCOTER	5	8	6	1	3	1	RED-TAILED HAWK	5	2	16	3	4	1
WHITE-WINGED SCOTER	9	566	17	187	9	111	ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK	1	0	3	0	1	0
SURF SCOTER	8	8	16	10	3	3	GYRFALCON	0	0	1	0	0	0
SCOTER (SP)	3	13	4	27	1	4	PEREGRINE	0	0	1	0	1	0
HARLEQUIN DUCK	1	0	2	0	3	0	MERLIN	1	0	4	0	1	0
OLDSQUAW	6	41	6	1	4	2	AMERICAN KESTREL	4	1	13	2	5	2
BARROW'S GOLDENEYE	2	0	2	2	5	2	COMMON BARN OWL	1	0	1	0	0	0
COMMON GOLDENEYE	9	451	18	1206	9	731	SHORT-EARED OWL	1	0	1	0	1	0
BUFFLEHEAD	9	1959	18	1601	9	1378	LONG-EARED OWL	1	0	0	0	0	0
COMMON MERGANSER	2	1	11	22	6	26	GREAT HORNED OWL	2	0	2	0	1	0
RED-BREASTED MERGANSER	9	1694	18	956	9	1392	SNOWY OWL	2	0	8	1	4	1
HOODED MERGANSER	8	8	10	1	6	2	EASTERN SCREECH OWL	1	0	0	0	0	0
AMERICAN COOT	1	0	0	0	0	0	HARBOR SEAL	6	4	9	9	5	10
SEMIPALMATED PLOVER	1	0	0	0	0	0	MINKE WHALE	0	0	1	0	0	0
KILLDEER	2	0	2	0	5	3							

NOV-DEC is the last week of November and all of December. MAR-APR is all of March and the first week of April.

SIGHTINGS shows how many times a species has been seen out of the total number of sampling days. AVG shows how many of each species you would expect to see on the average day.

(Table by Maury Hall)