



Take a Second Look
42 Baker Avenue
Lexington, MA 02173

Next TASL Harbor Census:

November 20

*In 1995: January 15, February 12, March 19
for more information, call (617) 863-2392 or (617) 268-7571*

Gone Gunning

Wounded, the Red-breasted Merganser "uses all manner of stratagems to escape from the gunner," writes Edward Howe Forbush. "It dives...conceals itself in submerged water-plants, swims away with only the bill above water...clings with its bill to some object on the bottom."

Gunners helped Forbush create his three-volume classic, *Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States*, first published by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1925. Numbered among his more than 400 correspondents, they contributed

their knowledge of waterfowl behavior to his species accounts. He continues his account of the Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* citing two of their reports.

1. "Mr. Stanley C. Jewett asserts that in May, 1915, at Netarts Bay, Oregon, a wounded bird of this species dived to a submerged root in about three feet of water and died while clinging there. Several hours later when the tide had ebbed, the dead bird was found on the bare flat with its bill still fastened to the object it had seized."
2. "Mr. Alan Keniston, Superintendent of the State Reservation for the Heath Hen on Marthas Vineyard, tells me that 'twenty years ago,' while hunting the Red-breasted Merganser in a flat-bottomed boat, fourteen feet long, one of this species was shot which went to the bottom

Continued on page 4

REMINISCING

The Ticket

Back in January of 1993, the intrepid Nahant team of TASLers (Bob Stymeist, Toby and Mike Gooley) battled our way up the cold and exposed slope of East Point, Nahant, the northeastern boundary of TASL territory.

The wind was howling and it seemed as if even our 'scopes were shivering. Despite our constant and unswerving devotion to duty, we were looking forward to returning to our car and its welcoming warmth.

After about 20 minutes, we walked as swiftly as our many layers of thick clothing allowed back



Support Waterfowl Conservation Buy the "Duck Stamp"

Gunners and hunters must buy this stamp before they can go shooting. Birders should too. The income raised goes toward the purchase and preservation of wildlife habitat throughout the continent.

This stamp is also used as a "Refuge Entrance Pass" at National Wildlife Refuges in the United States. It is available at the entrance to many refuges and at major post offices.

to the parking lot. There we found, to our surprise, a parking ticket on the windshield, complete with a \$20 fine for parking without a Nahant Resident Sticker. Here we were, freezing our toes off for the advancement of science, and this was our reward? We were incensed, but accepted our fate and decided we'd tell Soheil to pay it.

Upon learning that TASL was so underfunded as to be *un*funded, we chose another course of action. I composed a polite but serious letter to the Nahant Parking Clerk explaining the nature of our project and its benefit to coastal towns like Nahant. I also pointed out that in all the years we volunteers have been crazy enough to stand on exposed cliffs in howling winter gales, we had never been ticketed before. I didn't expect much, but—in the words of my father and

Continued on page 4

Gunning (continued from page 1)

in three feet of water. The water was clear and the bottom pure sand. The boat passed completely over the bird which was seen lying motionless, flat on the bottom, with neck outstretched. It stayed there until the boat had passed over when it 'bobbed up like a cork,' alive."

People could hunt safely all along our seacoasts in Jewett's and Keniston's time. No longer, and maybe that's why we don't hear stories like theirs anymore. Scarcely anybody's left to tell them.

Or maybe people who could still tell them don't think anybody's listening. Or maybe we haven't been talking and listening to the right people.

Would we believe them?

Did Forbush, our long-time State Ornithologist?

In his Red-breasted Merganser species account, he hedges, stating that his first correspondent *asserts* while his second *tells me...* But elsewhere in *Birds of Massachusetts* he declares flatly that many species of waterfowl "desperately seek refuge from gunners" by clinging to objects beneath the surface. He cites private correspondence. He cites published sources.

I'd like to see for myself, but I wouldn't.

* * *

Anearly circumpolar species, the Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* nests in North America from Labrador in the east across Canada into Alaska on the west. Using its long, thin, red serrated bill to catch and hold fish, it winters along the Pacific coast of North America from southern Alaska to Baja California, along the Sonoran shore of the Sea of Cortes in Mexico, along the Atlantic coast of North America from Nova Scotia to Florida and along the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico from Florida to the Rio Grande.

On November 22, 1992, from Kelly's Landing in South Boston, I counted 2,200 Red-breasted Mergansers stretched out in a long thin line across the harbor to the south, most

with red heads, appearing to be females. But young males also have reddish heads early in winter. Not until January or February do they acquire their adult dark green heads and crests.

J. Barton, Cambridge



Woodcut by
Julie Roberts

Ticket (continued from page 1)

probably every other father in the Western Hemisphere—"You never know until you try."

Instead of receiving the expected "Thank you for your letter but pay up" response, I received a lovely note from Pam Motley, the Parking Clerk. She said, in part:

I have canceled the ticket so you need not worry about it any longer. I have been a "birder" since I was very young, and used to help my grandparents with the Christmas Census in Worcester, where I grew up. My grandfather, Philip Heywood, was a director of Massachusetts Audubon Society for many years. I also helped him with bird-banding. I believe that your census is very significant.

She enclosed two 1993 Nahant Resident stickers so TASLers could continue our work without fear of parking tickets. [Ms. Motley provided us with similar stickers for 1994, upon request. -ed]

I've had plenty of memorable moments in five years of TASL counts; most of them have had to do with birds and miserable weather. I'd have to say this pleasant encounter ranks right up near the top for a TASL experience.

Toby Gooley

[Toby and Mike Gooley's baby, Dana Beth, was born in February 1993. They moved to Marlborough in the past year and have been granted a sabbatical from TASL counts.]

What is TASL?

Take a Second Look (TASL) was started in the winter of 1980 by a local group of environmentally concerned birdwatchers; our primary focus has been to survey and census the bird population of Boston Harbor throughout the year, although the winter water bird censuses have been our major activity. A summer/fall series of "shorebird censuses" were initiated in 1993 and continued this year. Summaries of those censuses can be found in the center of this publication.

The 1994-95 winter TASL Harbor Census dates are listed on page 1; please mark them in your calendars. These dates are chosen to coincide with high or incoming tide during the morning. We will start each census at 8:30 AM and go until early afternoon. We are now censusing in nine separate parties: this means we really need at least 16 volunteers per census date. Unfortunately we have been losing more volunteers than gaining. Can you drag along a friend or two and break them in?

Please remember: this is an excellent opportunity to learn—and teach—about the common water birds of the Harbor. You do not have to be an expert to participate. Each area will be led by at least one competent birder. That person will need help with navigation, driving and record-keeping. So make yourselves useful and learn something in the process.

Due to our new, enlarged census schedule, we have need of additional administrative assistance. There are a number of small jobs, e.g., compiling and editing tally sheets or improving our mailing list, that should be shared among volunteers. Also, if you would like to write for or illustrate this publication, we need you. For more information call Maury Hall (268-7571) or Soheil Zendehe (863-2392H, 923-0941W).

Please mail census results to Maury Hall, 849 East 3rd St. #2, South Boston, MA 02127.

TASL (Take Second Look) is organized and staffed entirely by volunteers. TASL data is compiled by Maury Hall. This newsletter is produced by Soheil Zendehe.