

This fund raising event which is a joint project of the Natural History Society and the Island Nature Trust has entered its 5th year. As noted in the last issue of the *Island Naturalist* the event has been named in tribute to Neil Bennett, a keen birder and a supporter of both organizations. This year's team of birders consisted of Ray Cooke, Eric Marcum, Linda Thomas and myself. The team decided to cut back on the night portion of the count and got off to a leisurely start at 4 am in Sherwood. Conditions were virtually perfect, cool and still, for playing owl song tapes to elicit their calls. Off we went!



Once we were clear of the back ground light of the city, the flickering of Northern Lights was visible on the horizon and the immense canopy of the sky was a panorama of stars. Besides the Northern Lights, we were treated to a variety of shooting stars at our first stop for owls on the Red Head Road. Not one but several Northern Saw-whet Owls as well as a Short-eared Owl and a Great Horned Owl responded to the tapes. By dawn, we were watching a crimson sky as we peered east from East Point attempting to identify the variety of waterfowl that were present on the waters and in the air. As anticipated, the numbers of species started jumping quickly but not in the way we expected. The arrival of various species of migrating birds was down dramatically from previous years. While there were hundreds of Blue Jays in large swirling flocks rising in and out of the trees, the many sparrows, kinglets, gnatcatchers, and warblers were not present at the point. It was not until we moved inland to route 16 that we encountered good numbers of kinglets, warblers, and a single Blue Gray Gnatcatcher.

At East Lake we seen two immature Bald Eagles and what appeared to be more along the shore in the company of ravens. We went down to the shore. Far up the beach and in the sand dunes, there were 7 Bald Eagles (2 adults and 5 immature) and a small flock of raven feeding on the carcasses of two marine mammals, probably gray seals. As we left the beach, a Peregrine Falcon, the first of three seen during the day, flew by our group. North Lake brought hundreds of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. Vernon Laux had reported seeing Lesser Black-backed Gulls here so we were anxiously scanning the swirling birds feeding on fish parts and the flocks on the break-water and beach. Finally, the greyer back of an adult was picked out on the edge of a flock of gulls in an adjoining field.

Brian Dalzell's reports of a Baird's Sandpiper and Stilt Sandpiper the previous weekend at Souris Causeway led us there after we covered Priest Pond, Black Pond, Basin Head and other northeastern sites. No luck was encountered finding a guillemot in the pounding surf created by the stiff wind that had arisen but the tide was good at the causeway and there were lots of shorebirds present. It took some time but we were able to identify the Baird's and Stilt Sandpipers (one of each) as well as a Hudsonian Godwit. Two other birds remained unidentified but promoted much discussion. These shorebirds were about 6.5 to 7 inches, reddish brown on the back like the Least Sandpiper, they had black legs, one had a distinct eye line and one did not, the bill appeared to be between that of a Least and Semipalmated Sandpiper, in certain views there was a whitish line apparent at the top of the wing's junction with the body, and the scapular feathers were strongly fringed with white. No calls were heard and consensus on the species identity was not achieved.

Much to our surprise, by the time we reached this conclusion and started west, it was already 4 pm. We made tracks for the P.E.I. National Park to finish the day before heading back to town. A Solitary Sandpiper and a Wood Duck at Dalvay Lagoon were quickly followed by beautiful views of several drake