



Prime Hook Notes

Flock to Prime Hook for Spring 2009 Birding Field Trips

By Bill Jones, Visitors Service Manager

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge has excellent and diverse habitat for birds, and consequently attracts large numbers of birds of many different species. Cumulatively on previous field trips participants have observed over 200 species of birds.

Your field trip leaders are Bill and Sally Fintel, and Ed Sigda. Their goal is always to have everyone on the trips see as many of the birds encountered as possible. Additionally, they try to focus on the best birds for that time of year.

Field trips are three hours in duration. For trips after February, bring sunscreen and insect repellent. A snack and long pants are also recommended. All trips begin at 8:00 AM and originate at the Refuge Headquarters just off of Route 16. Follow signs from Route 1. Trips will go rain or shine and are free and open to the public. Please call the Refuge at (302) 684-8419 or check out our website at <http://primehook.fws.gov> for more information.

Below are the Spring 2009 Birding Field Trips:

Sunday, February 22 - Winter Waterfowl

This is an excellent time of year to observe many different species of waterfowl in their most exquisite breeding plumage. If we are fortunate, we may even see some courtship displays, and you can say farewell to many of the winter resident Snow Geese, which will now be beginning their migration back to the arctic tundra.

Saturday, March 14 - Harbingers of Spring

Today we will search for the two best Sussex County harbingers of spring - the Osprey and the Laughing Gull. Even though spring officially begins in six days and it appears to be too early for these birds, these harbingers of spring have been moving north sooner in recent years. We will also look for early shorebirds and late waterfowl.

Saturday, April 18 - Early Returning Songsters

Some of the first returning songsters are Brown Thrasher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Common Yellowthroat, and Chipping Sparrow. Plus most year-round resident birds will now be in full song. This is a great time to get out and relearn the common bird songs of spring.

Saturday, May 16 - Spring Migration Peak

In Delaware, May 16 is within the week of peak spring migration, at least in terms of diversity of species. Will we tally 100 species during this field trip? Quite possibly yes, but again our goal will be to have all participants see all the best species we encounter. This is just an amazing time to be out in the field with so many different birds, most singing their spring song.

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Cape Henlopen-Prime Hook Christmas Bird Count (DECH) December 28, 2008

Report of Birding Activity in the Prime Hook Refuge

Frank Rohrbacher

The Cape Henlopen-Prime Hook Christmas Bird Count which is designated as DECH by Audubon was run on December 28, 2008 – temperatures ranging from 44F in the morning to 73F in the afternoon. Skies were cloudy all day. The wind in the morning was 10-15 mph but by noon it was 25-35 mph from the SW. The entire count encompasses the area from Gordon's Pond SP through Fowler's Beach along the coast and as far inland as Milton. The results from the entire count are attached.

However, for this report I will be concentrating on the area and the count data that encompasses Prime Hook NWR which includes the portions of the count areas A and B east of Route 1. Six Group leaders led the birding effort in these areas and though they recorded some birds outside the boundaries of the refuge, I think that you can be confident that most of their effort was within the Refuge. I spoke to each of the leaders and they were aware of the conditions of the 'Special Use Permit' and the accompanying Special Conditions for that permit. They agreed to keep the disturbance off the trails to a minimum. A total of 19 observers worked the Refuge. Bruce Peterjohn and Derek Stoner with two others worked Area A with most of the effort around Fowler's Beach, Fowler's Beach Road, Prime Hook Beach Road and the northern side of the Refuge; Joe Sebastiani counted the impoundments on Broadkill Beach Road; Ed Sigda, Bill Fintel and Mike Smith worked Island Farm, the fields along Broadkill Beach Road and Deep Branch; Steve Collins and I split the Refuge around the Headquarters – I, with seven others, and Steve with two.

This year, Cape Henlopen-Prime Hook Christmas Bird Count totals were very good considering that the high winds made birding very difficult. The total bird list was 145 species and 92,226 individual birds counted. This was sixteen species below last years record of a 161 but sufficient to make this the third highest species count for this count and for the state ever. A new species, Lincoln's Sparrow, was added to the count and Golden Eagle, Razorbill and Clay-colored Sparrow were recorded for only the second time in the 45 years of this count.

The total bird list for the Refuge is attached and is impressive with a 127 species and 73,172 individual birds counted on December 28, 2008. This was seven species below last year's count but was still the second best all time count for Prime Hook NWR – note that the Orange-crowned Warbler was found in the Prime Hook State Lands off of Little Neck Road. No new species were found for the count in Prime Hook NWR. The best birds found on the refuge were a Golden Eagle (2nd count) at Island Farms, Iceland Gull at Fowler's and Clay-colored Sparrow at Deep Branch Road. Most of the individual birds counted were Snow Geese, blackbirds and gulls and certainly in the case the Snow Geese, more a guess than a count.

I have been coordinator of this Christmas bird Count for the past six years and have noted some changes in the birding in the Prime Hook Refuge. The first and most exciting are the changes at Fowler Beach that have made the area one of the best shore birding and saltwater marsh areas in Delaware. During this count the following were recorded there:

Most of the puddle ducks and Mute Swan – impoundment
Scoters, mergansers and loons – offshore
Black-crowned Night-Heron, Clapper Rail - marshes

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Black-bellied Plover, both Yellowlegs, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Dunlin, Wilson's Snipe, Ruddy Turnstone, Western Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Long-billed Dowitcher – wash-through area at Fowler's Beach

Common gulls, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Iceland Gull (4th year that this gull wintered there and was counted in the CBC) - beach

Snow Bunting – dunes at Fowler Beach

Fowler Beach Road is another great birding area. It was probably always good but with the increased traffic to Fowler Beach it has come into its own. All of the common sparrows and woodlot birds were found including Fox Sparrows, House Wren, Purple Finch and Brown Thrasher.

Deep Branch is always a good area but this year in addition to sparrows in the fields and common woodland species in the woods, it produced a wintering Clay-colored Sparrow for a second count record.

Broadkill Beach Road and impoundments are always good but this year it was somewhat poorer than in the past as the marsh had less birds because of the saltwater intrusion. Fair numbers of puddle ducks were tallied as well as three Ross's Geese, two Cackling Geese, Common Yellowthroat and Common Merganser.

Within the Prime Hook refuge and headquarters area, the best birds were a Brown-headed Nuthatch found on the Pine Woods Trail for the first count record of this species in the refuge and unfortunately Northern Bobwhite where only one covey of eight birds was found in all of the refuge and the count.

EVENING AT THE HOOK EVENTS

2009 LECTURE SERIES — FREE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC — GREAT FOR FAMILIES

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| February 12, 2009 | Catching Striped Bass Eric Burnley, Outdoor Writer |
| March 12, 2009 | Delaware's Fort Miles: Coastal Defense Mike Rogers, Cape Henlopen State Park |
| April 9, 2009 | Myths & Fiction of Bats Lenny Truitt, Fur & Feathers Rehabilitation Farm |
| May 14, 2009 | Current Insect & Disease Threats to Forest Health on Delmarva Glenn Gladders, Delaware Forest Service |
| June 11, 2009 | Antarctica & Seabirds of the Southern Oceans Bill Fintel, Naturalist |

WHERE: Refuge Headquarters

WHEN: 7:00 pm (6:30 pm / Light refreshments)

WARP & SAG Construction Crew

By Charles Darling

There is a volunteer group at the Refuge that wears the moniker "The Warp & Sag Construction Crew" that is a vital part of the Refuge. Some obvious items of their endeavors include the construction of various board walks, viewing platforms and trails around the headquarters area, construction of the fishing pier at Fleetwood pond and construction of the informational kiosks around the Refuge. Perhaps the most visible item today is the new pole building, to the south of the maintenance buildings, that will be used to house various pieces of equipment that are currently stored outside as a repository for various items used in daily operations and for various maintenance materials and supplies. This building was constructed by our maintenance person, the two maintenance folks from Bombay Hook NWR and the **Warp & Sag Crew**.

A significant amount of planning and labor were contributed by this crew, who worked 1 to 3 days per week, often through adverse weather of cold and wind to complete this 3200 square foot building. **My hat is off to these dedicated and dependable folks**, none of which have ever undertaken such a vast project of this nature.

What else does this crew do? With the reduced manpower at the Refuge the crew does a myriad of maintenance work. I shall list a few, both ongoing and recently completed: assist with the maintenance of trucks, tractors, trailers, mowers and other rolling equipment as well as the portable equipment used in the field such as generators, air compressors, etc.; repaired the overhead lighting in the Shop; repaired lighting in the Headquarters (HQ) building; improved the organization of the tools and supplies in the Shop; provide frequent cleaning of the Shop; installed safety equipment in both the Shop and HQ building; added a large work table in the Shop; removed trees, deadfalls and brush on various trails; repaired various boardwalks; assist with adjusting the various water control structures; repaired entrance gates; mow the trails and grass areas around the HQ building; built and repaired picnic tables; constructed and repaired duck blinds; constructed and installed blue-bird nesting boxes; painting various items such as gates, fences, etc. . . . and the list goes on and on. Some of this work is menial, but very important to maintain the assets, provide safe working conditions and provide visitors with safe and an optimal visitation experience.

This dedicated crew is composed of all gray headed folks -- folks who are retired. Ages vary, but these oldsters are remarkably agile! Some of these folks are not familiar with maintenance and construction details, but are willing learners and very trainable. To this end, the Refuge offers extended training programs such as safe chain saw use, tractor and implement training, etc., which many folks have completed.

We have been fortunate in the past 3 summers to have a Worker-Camper who has assisted with some of the above items and has made significant contributions to the maintenance of the Refuge as well.

We are always looking for new members to the crew as the workload continues to increase. If you have an interest in assisting the Refuge in this manner, give us a try.

I would be remiss in not providing credit to another work crew, organized by Chuck Wissman. This crew is seasonal, concentrating on duck blinds and deer stands. They accomplish most of the maintenance and replacement of the duck blinds and deer stands, grassing the blinds and maintaining access to these structures including mowing, brushing-out and access for parking and directional signage.

Another big **Thanks** to this crew.



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**FRIENDS OF PRIME HOOK NWR
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Remember: Membership dues and all donations are tax deductible. Mail checks to FRIENDS OF PRIME HOOK NWR, INC., 11978 Turtle Pond Road, Milton, DE 19968.

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WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service encourages Friends groups to expand and extend support of national wildlife refuges. Here at Prime Hook, the goals of the non-profit Friends of PHNWR are:

- To provide educational and interpretive material in the Friends' Store and raise awareness of the environment and habitat at Prime Hook NWR. The funds generated through store sales are used to support Refuge activities and programs.
- To seek public and private support for new and existing programs.
- To contribute time, talents and funds for construction, repair and maintenance of recreational and educational facilities and grounds.
- To sponsor activities to encourage the public to become stewards of our natural resources.
- To establish and maintain positive public recognition of the Refuge and Friends of PHNWR.

**THE FRIENDS OF PHNWR
GIVE A SPECIAL "THANK YOU!"**

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- Micki Crellin
- Glenn Garner
- Jerry & Sharon Goldsmith
- John Kramer

AND TO OUR 2009 BUSINESS MEMBERS:

- Kent-Sussex Industries
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WE APPRECIATE YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT!