

Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society (MOS)

Field Trip: Saturday, May 24, 2008 Hot Spots for Red Knots 2008

Trip Leader: Schwarz, Kurt

Date of Trip: Saturday, May 24, 2008

Location: Hot Spots for Red Knots 2008

Number on trip: 3 from Howard County

Details: Co-leader: Cyndie Loeper.

May 24 dawned bright and sunny as the HowCo and MontCo chapters set out for their annual Hot Spots for Red Knots trip. The Howard contingent was small, consisting of three. Upon arrival at Prime Hook NWR, they were treated a short, but excellent look at a Yellow-breasted Chat, and somewhat longer, but just as good, one at a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. At least three Turkeys were also putting on a show.

The chapters rendezvous at the Prime Hook Visitor Center, where they met the Conservation Director of the DelMarVa Ornithological Society (DOS), Bill Stewart. Bill had already staked out a Worm-eating Warbler for us, and that was our first stop. We also heard a Northern Bobwhite here.

Broadkill Marsh proved to be a disappointment. The vagrant Wood Sandpiper that had been there, had not been seen since May 17. In addition, high water from profuse rain the previous week had eliminated most of the tasty mud. The south impoundment had a few Ruddy Ducks. What little action was on the north impoundments, but was pretty much limited to Semi-palmated Sandpipers, some Black-bellied Plovers, few Least Sandpipers, and just one Greater Yellowlegs. A few Gadwall and Black Ducks provided a little variety, and another Bobwhite was heard.

We headed north to Fowler Beach, where Bill pointed out to us the land that DOS hopes to buy with the funds raised by this years Birdathon. Last year's Birdathon raised \$28,000 which bought 7 acres just north of Fowler Beach observation platform. The intent now is to by the remaining habitat north and south right up the limit of existing developments. At Fowler we enjoyed Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Stilt Sandpipers, that initially proved elusive. Caspian Terns provided something else to look at, and the lead car enjoyed some good looks at a Least Tern.

The next stop was the newly-opened Dupont Nature Center at Mispillion Harbor. Our timing was bad, the tide was high and the birds rather distant. But Red Knots were present in numbers. Surprisingly, no American Oystercatchers were present, but we did hear a Clapper Rail.

On to Ted Harvey Wildlife Area. The north pond, site of last month's White-winged Tern, was closed for storm damage. But Cyndie had discovered the phragmites control had transformed the south impoundments into a great place to observe wildlife. We were treated to a great look at several hundred Black Skimmers. The shorebirds were largely repeats, but Cyndie did finally trick out a White-rumped Sandpiper, only to have one practically walk up and introduce itself later.

Port Mahon Road proved to be uncharacteristically good. In past years, it had been quite lackluster. But the birds were there in numbers this year. There was a staggering number of Semi-palmated Sandpipers, Dunlin, and Ruddy Turnstone. They little covered the muddy and sandy places. A few dozen Red Knots were among them, providing much closer looks than Mispillion. One knot was noted carrying a green flag, and an apparent antenna protruding from its back. Two "lucky" trip participants witnessed a Herring Gull gobble up a

Dunlin. A flagged Red Knot was also observed, which bore an antenna. I have since learned that the bird was banded at Mispillion Harbor on May 21.

Our last stop was Bombay Hook, but upon checking the log, we decided to head to Taylor's Gut/Woodland Beach Wildlife Area to chase down a Red-necked Phalarope sighting from the previous day. Alas, we found pretty much the same, but was notable as the HowCo leader made his first try, apparently successful, at picking out a hendersoni subspecies of the Short-billed Dowitcher.

A few die-hards adjourned for dinner at an Irish Bar we'd found last year. It was up to the standard we'd encountered previously, and made for a fine end to a delightful day.

There was some potential bad news, however. Bill Stewart informed us that while the horseshoe crabs had come ashore to spawn in April, the recent storms had washed much of that spawn away, and the horseshoe crabs had retreated to deep water. We saw graphic evidence of the storms' damage a Fowler Beach, where the hefty dunes of last year had been reduce to nothing. According to Bill, salt water had penetrated into the fresh water marshes behind the former dunes.

The horseshoe crabs had yet to reappear in numbers by the date we got there, though a few were in evidence at Mispillion and Port Mahon. So unless there's a sudden upsurge in spawning, the Red Knots and other shorebirds could have another blow stuck against, this time by nature. Without the horseshoe crab eggs, it may be difficult for the Red Knots to build the fat reserves they need to make the migration to the Canadian Arctic.

Birds:

(Numbers of individuals are shown if they were recorded.)

- Canada Goose :
- Gadwall :
- American Black Duck :
- Mallard :
- Ruddy Duck :
- Wild Turkey :
- Northern Bobwhite :
- Pied-billed Grebe :
- Double-crested Cormorant :
- Great Blue Heron :
- Great Egret :
- Snowy Egret :
- Glossy Ibis :
- Black Vulture :
- Turkey Vulture :
- Osprey :
- Bald Eagle :
- Red-tailed Hawk :
- Clapper Rail :
- Black-bellied Plover :
- Semipalmated Plover :
- Killdeer :
- Greater Yellowlegs :
- Lesser Yellowlegs :
- Willet :
- Spotted Sandpiper :
- Ruddy Turnstone :
- Red Knot :
- Semipalmated Sandpiper :
- Dunlin :
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo :
- Chimney Swift :
- Red-bellied Woodpecker :
- Northern Flicker :
- Eastern Wood-Pewee :
- Acadian Flycatcher :
- Willow Flycatcher :
- Eastern Kingbird :
- White-eyed Vireo :
- Purple Martin :
- Tree Swallow :
- Barn Swallow :
- Carolina Wren :
- House Wren :
- Marsh Wren :
- Eastern Bluebird :
- American Robin :
- Gray Catbird :
- Northern Mockingbird :
- Brown Thrasher :
- Yellow Warbler :
- Worm-eating Warbler :
- Ovenbird :
- Common Yellowthroat :
- Yellow-breasted Chat :
- Chipping Sparrow :
- Field Sparrow :
- Seaside Sparrow :
- Song Sparrow :
- Swamp Sparrow :

- Stilt Sandpiper :
- Short-billed Dowitcher :
- Laughing Gull :
- Ring-billed Gull :
- Herring Gull :
- Great Black-backed Gull :
- Caspian Tern :
- Forster's Tern :
- Least Tern :
- Black Skimmer :
- Rock Pigeon :
- Mourning Dove :

- Northern Cardinal :
- Blue Grosbeak :
- Indigo Bunting :
- Red-winged Blackbird :
- Common Grackle :
- Boat-tailed Grackle :
- Orchard Oriole :
- Baltimore Oriole :
- House Finch :
- American Goldfinch :
- House Sparrow :

Comments: