

Brookline Bird Club Extreme Pelagic Adventures, 2010

Ida Giriunas

It has been another exciting and successful year out on our offshore Massachusetts waters. Our AUGUST trip is consistent in finding the White-faced storm Petrel. Several people on board had made more than four failed previous attempts to see that bird and we got to see 22 of them this year. We came across Great Skua and another unidentified Skua in August. We saw two BLUE WHALES in June. They are rarely seen off the New England coast.

The weather for the June trip out to the continental shelf was calm with light seas and balmy weather. It was on this trip that we spotted seven species of whales (Blue, Pilot, Sperm, Minke, Fin, Short-beaked, Common dolphin, Risso's dolphin and a very rare green sea turtle which was attacked by a shark while we were watching.

Even though we did not find any "mega-rarity" birds in June, we saw 137 Leach's Storm-petrels many of which came in right behind the boat to our chum and fed on it from the water surface. There were four species of Shearwaters and two species of Storm-petrels around our boat all the time we were in the far offshore waters. At one time we had 450 Common dolphins with all the shearwaters completely surrounding the boat.

Many fish were also seen. The crew caught two Yellow-fin Tuna and one Blue-fin Tuna. All the participants went home with fresh tuna steaks! Other fish seen included 2 species of shark, 2 Mola-mola and one Portuguese Man-o-war.

The July trip was cancelled for lack of participation.

The August boat was filled with 50 happy participants and leaders. Hurricane Danielle was coming up the coast. On Saturday, we sailed into choppy seas but in balmy temperatures. The seas flattened out on Sunday to almost a mirror surface along with warm temperatures making it easy to find and see the birds. Two highlights: A GREAT SKUA seen along the Nantucket Shoals, in only three hours after the boat sailed then another unidentified Skua on the return trip. A total of 22 WHITE-FACED STORM-PETRELS were seen (several on both days). We had good looks at Band-rumped Storm-petrels which came to the chum and fed on it near the boat. A Yellow-fin tuna was caught by the crew. Fresh steaks were given again to the participants.

There are five reasons why these trips are so successful.

First; we have a great Captain in Joe Huckenmeyer,

Second; his boat, the Helen H which is comfortable, fast and safe.

When a rare bird is spotted, Joe steps on the throttle,

Steers the ship in the direction of the bird, often catches up

With it, then is often able to position the bird along side, away

from the sun where most people aboard are able to study it.

Third; when a bird is spotted by Rick Heil, Steve Mirick, Jeremiah Trimble

or Marshall Iliff (our highly knowledgeable and skilled leaders),

excellent directions are given to where the bird is located and the

field marks are pointed out.

Four: Our enthusiastic participants with their knowledge and cameras and,

Five: They photograph the creature. Often birds and mammals are identified

only after studying the digital photos taken of them.