

BBC PELAGIC 6.25.11

Naeem Yusuff

June 25 Brookline Bird Club Pelagic
Hyannis to Nantucket Shoals area

Weather: A.M.: Overcast, NE winds 5-10 knots, 60-75 F. Clearing throughout the day.
PM Sunny and pleasant.

Seas: 2-4 feet. Beaufort scale: 2

Visibility: Moderate to heavy fog in the AM. Visibility less than ½ mile at times. PM
Clear to horizon.

Leaders: Marshall Iliff, Jeremiah Trimble, Steve “check out my cool iPad App” Mirick;
Naeem Yusuff keeping the eBird list, and of course, Ida Giriunas.

The route aboard the “Helen H” with Captain Joe Huckameyer was nicely charted by
Steve Mirick and can be found at

<http://home.comcast.net/%7Esmirick//BBCPelagic062511.jpg>

A full boat set off from Hyannis Harbor at 7AM, with overcast skies and a thick fog. In the early going, we had only frustratingly quick glimpses of birds disappearing into the haze. The epic “one that got away” was a skua, which was viewed for 20-30 seconds before vanishing. Photos were taken by Keith Mueller of Connecticut, and all were optimistic about being able to ID the bird. Unfortunately, after seeing the pictures, the consensus expert opinion was “skua in the fog.”

The skies cleared later in the day, Captain Joe avoided the colder water over the Nantucket Shoals to minimize our time enshrouded in fog. Our first shearwater of the day was a Cory's, a smattering of Cory's were seen throughout the day, all appeared to be the expected *borealis* subspecies. Cory's Shearwater are a warmer water bird, and their numbers fluctuate greatly year to year depending on the water temperatures. Initial reports seem to suggest that this is moderate Cory's year.

Steaming east into colder waters, slick of menhaden oil mixed with beef fat and fish chum was put out at about 10AM, attracting good numbers of Great Shearwaters and Wilson's Storm petrels, as well as a handful of Sooty Shearwaters.

Steaming away from the slick, a shout of “Leach's Storm-petrel” came over the ship's sound system – a handful of birds were seen well with their characteristic nighthawk type flight. The chumming technique on the BBC Pelagic trips has really evolved; the combination of fish oil with cubed chunks of beef fat has made getting these harder to see storm petrels a little easier. Four Leach's were initially seen, with an additional handful of Leach's seen throughout the rest of the day.

Soon afterwards, a light-morph Northern Fulmar appeared behind the boat, again attracted by the chum stream. Fulmars are more common in the winter; we were quite pleased to find this bird. The fulmar lingered behind the boat making pass after pass, giving all great looks. Pausing to look at the fulmar also gave all the

chance to appreciate the ubiquitous Wilson's Storm-petrels dancing in the slick. The majority of these were in active wing molt (and therefore adults), but a few fresher birds were seen and likely represented juveniles hatched in the austral summer (our winter). Many of the Greater Shearwaters were also in active wing molt, with multiple distinctive birds seen with missing greater coverts giving them a huge white band in the mid-wing--something not shown in most field guides.

Perhaps the best bird of the day was missed by most on the boat. While steaming away, an alcid was flushed from the water and seen by a lucky few as it flew directly away from the boat. Despite dozens on cameras on board, Keith Mueller of Connecticut was the only one quick enough to get photos. His images turned out to be diagnostic, showing the brownish cast to the back, slender bill, and importantly, the streaked flanks of Common Murre. Any alcid is unusual in these waters at this time of year, but Common Murre has been increasing on the breeding grounds and now has a dozen or more June records for Massachusetts. Still, this was a great rarity and a first for us on these summer trips -- too bad it flew off before most folks could get on it.

Steaming further east, a gill-net fishing boat was encountered, with a massive entourage of birds following. A conservative estimate of 250 gulls, with an additional 100 shearwater were seen taking advantage of by-catch. We kept a respectful distance, and followed the fishing boat seeing an additional 2-3 Northern Fulmar, 2-3 Cory's Shearwater, 60 Sooty Shearwater, 40 Sooty Shearwater, as well as an cooperative Pomarine Jaeger. Rather than the typical fly-by view of the jaeger, this bird sat on the water several times, and gave several passes with great looks for all.

We next encountered one of the more impressive spectacles I've observed in MA waters-- a massive collection of bait fish had attracted tuna, stripped bass and bluefish, all actively feeding around the boat -- in addition to a huge swarm of shearwaters. I was overwhelmed by trying to count them all, Marshall Iliff estimated 1200 shearwaters, roughly 8:1 Sooty:Greater. Tuna, stripped bass and bluefish were seen breaching the surface. The crew of the Helen H got a couple of fishing lines into the water, but alas, no dinner was caught.

Next came our second jaeger of the day -- an exceedingly obliging Parasitic Jaeger was sitting on the water, then gave multiple passes around the boat. Jaegers are powerful fliers, not even the Helen H can keep up with them in full flight, so we were fortunate to find both a pomarine and a parasitic which allowed such close study. Field guides show the length and thickness of the bill of jaegers being diagnostic, with the parasitic having a long slender bill, while the pomarine's is shorter and thicker. This is the first time I've seen them well enough to study the differences.

The return trip brought us past Monomoy Island, with about 70 grey seals including many young (resembling Harbor Seals) lounging on the beach. Common Eider,

Double-crested Cormorant as well as a handful of gulls were the most common birds on the beach, and a few people espied a Piping Plover.

The list (omitting the on-shore sightings from Hyannis Harbor and Monomoy Island). Participants on the trip who would like to have the eBird lists shared with them, please contact either me or Marshall Iliff.

Common Loon 15
Northern Fulmar 2-3
Cory's Shearwater 12
Great Shearwater 376
Sooty Shearwater 1,303
Manx Shearwater 2
Wilson's Storm-Petrel 300
Leach's Storm-Petrel 8
Northern Gannet 1
Laughing Gull 2
Herring Gull 210
Great Black-backed Gull 225
Common Tern 4
skua sp. 1
Pomarine Jaeger 1
Parasitic Jaeger 1
Common Murre 1