

BBC PELAGIC 7.18.09

Richard S. Heil

SATURDAY, 18 JULY 2009:

Brookline Bird Club EXTREME PELAGIC: HYANNIS to WEST ATLANTIS and ATLANTIS CANYONS (0400-2115 hours)

Weather: A.M.: Mostly overcast, rain (heavy at times) until about 0830 hrs, S-SW winds 10-22 mph, 62-75 F. P.M.: Partly sunny (hazy), S-SW winds 8-15 mph, 65-75 F.
Seas: 4-6 feet in the A.M., diminishing to 2-4 feet in the afternoon.

Visibility: Mostly very good after the rain ended; light to moderate fog over cooler Nantucket Shoals waters on the return.

Leaders: Richard S. Heil, Jeremiah Trimble, and Steve "the man on the mike" Mirick; no trips would happen without the dedication and hard work of Ida Giriunas.

Approximate route aboard the "Helen H" with able Captain Joe Huckameyer and excellent attentive crew Matt and Bob: From Hyannis via Muskeget Channel south to West Atlantis Canyon, then east to Atlantis Canyon, then north across Nantucket Shoals and back into Nantucket Sound between Nantucket and Monomoy Islands.

An exact route map nicely charted via GPS by Steve Mirick can be viewed here:

<http://home.comcast.net/~smirick//BBCPelagic071809.jpg>

A nearly full boat endured moderately rough conditions in the morning on the way to the shelf edge, but were rewarded with diminished seas as the day progressed and were especially rewarded by some great pelagic birding. Proving once again the exciting possibilities in these mostly unexplored waters, we encountered our first Pterodroma petrel in the Extreme Pelagic trip history, a beautiful BLACK-CAPPED PETREL that showed for nearly five minutes, making two close passes to the boat, all the while pursued expertly at full throttle by the captain. Chasing Pterodromas is not for the weak at heart!

Other highlights included a new state high count for Audubon's Shearwaters and a nice tally of Leach's Storm-Petrels, many being well seen. The major 'lowlight' was the sad case of a Right Whale, injured and entangled in fishing gear south of Nantucket Shoals

Common Eider (5 males): just off Martha's Vineyard.

BLACK-CAPPED PETREL (1) Found in approximately 425 feet of water (surface T = 72 F), about 15 miles NW of the head of West Atlantis Canyon and 77 miles south of Martha's Vineyard, at 40 10 15 N, 70 43 90 W. In view 4-5 minutes; seen by most on board; the petrel made two close passes at the boat arcing high in typical Pterodroma fashion in wind; photographically documented; about 5th state record; spectacular bird.

Photos by Jeremiah Trimble here: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/jrtrimble>

Photos by James Smith here: <http://pioneerbirding.blogspot.com/2009/07/ma-black-capped-petrel-0718.html>

Cory's Shearwater (232) : Many identified as borealis; a couple possible Scopoli's candidates not fully documented.

Greater Shearwater (240)

Sooty Shearwater (16)

Manx Shearwater (3)

Audubon's Shearwater (19): HIGH COUNT; All in warmer (70-76 degree F.) waters near the shelf edge; many in heavy molt; New state high count! Previous high was of 17-Hydrographer Canyon vicinity-9 August 2007.

black-and-white shearwater sp. (1) : Manx/Little type not well seen.

Wilson's Storm-Petrel (475)

Leach's Storm-Petrel (58) : Most in or near deeper waters near shelf break as is typical

storm-petrel sp. (3): LESP/ Band-rumped's not well observed.

Northern Gannet (3 sub ads.)

Herring Gull (3)

Great Black-backed Gull (7)

Least Tern (2) : Near M.V.

Common Tern (4)-Natucket Shoals.

Sterna sp. (10)

Pomarine Jaeger (1) ; Darkish sub-adult; oddly only jaeger for the day.

passerine sp. (1) : Small (large warbler/vireo/waxwing) size, squat, short tailed; maybe 10-15 miles south of M.V.

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALE (1): Sadly entangled in fishing gear (ropes and flotation ball) about 42 miles SSE of Nantucket. The animal also showed old healed propeller damage on the back; the situation was duly reported and rescue efforts may be underway soon if they are not already.

Gray Grampus (Risso's Dolphin) (1)

Bottlenosed Dolphin (70)

Common (Saddleback) Dolphin (28)

Harbor Seal (2)

Blue Shark (1)

Hammerhead Shark (1): about 7 ft long

Ocean Sunfish, Mola mola (2)

a number of Flying Fish sp.

Green Darner, Anax junius (1)