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birding the triangle . . . and beyond, for over half a century

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Next Meeting: Monday, 24 September

When/where: 7:15 pm refreshments;
7.30 pm meeting. The lounge, Olin T
Binkley Baptist Church, corner of
Highway 15-501 Bypass and Willow
Drive, behind University Mall, Chapel
Hill.

Dr Brian O'Shea will speak about **Building an avian library**

Dr Brian O'Shea is the collections
manager for Ornithology at the
North Carolina Museum of Natural
Sciences. He is responsible for the
growth and maintenance of the
museum's collections of avian
research specimens. He will describe

what the collection is used for and
why we still need it. Dr O'Shea is also
interested in many aspects of the
ecology and conservation of birds,
particularly tropical forest passerines.
His main area of expertise is the
Guiana Shield in northeastern South
America, one of the largest intact
blocks of tropical lowland forest
remaining on Earth. Much of his
recent work has been in Suriname
where he partners with local
students, NGOs and consultants to
provide a scientific foundation for
ongoing baseline survey work in
remote areas of the country's
interior.

Saturday Field Trips

Trips are led by **Doug Shadwick** and
depart from Glen Lennox Shopping
Center parking lot off Highway 54
promptly at 7.30 every Saturday
morning. All skills are welcome. Trips
are usually over by noon. Dress for
the weather and for walking.
Details? Call Doug at 919 942 0479.
It's useful to call Doug the night
before in case the field trip is not
local and leaves from another
location.

Why Pelagic Birding?

I just returned from a five day (four
night) pelagic birding trip out of San
Diego.¹ As always, I ask "why do I do
this to myself?" I'm feeling slightly
queasy, I have a big bruise from an
inelegant descent from the top
bunk, and I can barely tell a petrel
from a shearwater.

¹ On the vessel Searcher and run by SoCal Birding;
www.SoCalBirding.com

As I start to feel better, I remember why. First, 132 of the ABA's 990 birds are pelagic, that's 13.3%. True, many of them can be seen on (or from) land, especially the alcids, gulls, terns and cormorants. But the 800+ Dov-

Albatrosses	6
Petrels	13
Shearwaters	15
Storm-Petrels	10
Alcids	21
Gulls	28
Terns & Noddies	19
Tropicbirds	3
Frigatebirds	1
Boobies	5
Cormorants	6
Jaegers & Skuas	5
Total	132
ABA	990

kies I saw off Hatteras one winter weekend were far more thrilling than the single one I saw imperfectly — and much less conveniently — in Alaska.

Second, a day on the ocean can be exhilarating. There are whales, flying fish, mola-molas, and most especially the dolphins which ride the bow wave and really behave as though they are happy to see us. I remember one winter day out of Hatteras when we saw *thousands* of birds — gulls (including some unusual ones), terns, alcids and even skuas. Never a dull moment that day. Off San Diego one day last week we had hundreds of dolphins leaping out of the water, and half a dozen Baird's Beaked Whales breaching.

The third reason I (usually) enjoy pelagic birding is the challenge. I find seabirds really hard to identify,

particularly the petrels and shearwaters. They are drab colored birds against a drab colored sea. An artist's composition of gray, white and brown. Furthermore, they are difficult to get your binocular on without landmarks to start from; it's "two-thirds of the way to the horizon," "just left of the glare," "above the horizon going right." "in the trough and out of sight." Fortunately most pelagic trips have experts to identify the birds and help you get on them, and gradually (very gradually in my case) you learn how to distinguish the various genera and species.

Although other states have infrequent or irregular pelagic trips off their coasts, in North Carolina we are lucky to have one of the world's greatest seabirders running regular trips off our coast throughout the year (though more frequently in the summer).² No other state has as many opportunities as we do. And because of our geographic position projecting out into the Atlantic, the seabirding is especially good — remember that albatross in February this year!

Tips to avoid *mal-de-mer*: take your seasickness prevention the night before — it gets it into your system and avoids you feeling sleepy all day and missing the birds. And, as one guide told me as I was hanging over the stern, "bring junk food; keep eating junk food; if you lose it, it doesn't matter, it's only junk." My favorite junk food is ginger snaps, but others like pretzels, saltines, or potato

² On the vessel Stormy Petrel II, www.patteson.com

chips. It really does help. Also, if you have them, use a lower powered binocular (7X or 8X), this not only makes it easier to locate a bird, but I think it helps a bit with seasickness.

Take advantage of North Carolina's assets and sign up for a pelagic this year.



Dovekie

Coming Meetings

22 October 2012. **Bill Majoros**, photographer, author and instructor at Duke University will discuss *Warbler photography at Magee Marsh*.

26 November 2012. **Kent Fiala**, PhD in Zoology, Editor of *The Chat*, and webmaster of the Carolina Bird Club will describe his *Birding Brazil: the Southeast and the Northeast*.

28 January 2013: **John Gerwin**, Curator of Birds at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences will describe his research on Painted Buntings. *Painted Bunting in the Southeast: Merging traditional science and citizen science*.