



Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon
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For Immediate Release

EARLY SNOWS

The first dustings of snow have come and gone leaving behind winter's anticipation and it's companion to-do list. Number one: snow tires. Number two: split wood. Number three: go see the snow geese at Dead Creek. This month's snow-on-foliage events coincided with the annual arrival of the snow geese at Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in the Champlain Valley. Not exactly in the Northeast Kingdom, but no less important to the birding, Dead Creek offered up an exciting list of birds for our NEK Audubon annual snow goose trip on Oct. 24.

This 2,858-acre waterfowl refuge in the towns of Addison, Panton and Bridport is a marshland magnet for birds. Water levels are actively managed in the seven impoundments that create cattail-dominated wetlands. Surrounding uplands are a mix of active agricultural lands, old fields and clayplain oak-hickory forests. Dead Creek WMA is owned by the State of Vermont and managed for hunting, fishing and trapping by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

The viewing area on RT 17 west of the refuge headquarters provided the best vantagepoint, but driving around the entire area produced a nice variety of other migrants. During my visit I noticed the light and dark color phases, or morphs in the flock. These are called the white and blue color morphs, but are the same species. Here is what our NEK Audubon trip leader, Tom Berriman, had to say about the Oct 24th visit. "Some of the best birding can be in the rain. At Chimney Point a massive cloud of black scoters so thick and widespread was for a few minutes mistaken for red-winged blackbirds. A few spotting scopes revealed this "awesome" spectacle to be the largest concentration of black scoters many of us had ever seen. The waves of red-winged blackbirds at the snow goose viewing area were also impressive as thousands of these migrants flew in waves in and out of the fields." Along with the snows, the group listed: 300 Canada Geese, 12 Green-winged Teal, Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2 Pileated Woodpeckers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Cardinals and 6 White-throated Sparrows. Not bad for a rainy day, Tom.

Snow geese also stop at Missiquoi National Wildlife Refuge at the north end of Lake Champlain. Both of these stopover sites are situated along a major migratory route from their breeding grounds along the Greenland coast to the Chesapeake Bay area. Using northeastern waterways as their navigational aids, they follow the St. Lawrence Valley (west), then turn left (south) and follow the Champlain Valley to the Hudson and the Atlantic coast. Because snow geese have mastered field feeding including many field grains, the survival of wintering geese has improved. Some biologists think that this has led to the over-abundance of the geese. The large populations of geese now degrade the wintering and migration areas with deep digging into the soil for the root of the plants leaving swaths of ruined land. Scientists have studied this species more than any other to determine how to best manage a potentially unsustainable population.

Bird watching at Dead Creek can be very rewarding with over 200 birds listed there. You can find out more about the area with a nice color map by searching on www.vtfishandwildlife.com.

Happy Snow Watching!

Carolyn E. Boardman is a board member of NEK Audubon living in Brownington, Vermont.

NEK Audubon is one of 8 chapters of Audubon Vermont and part of the National Audubon Society. NEK Audubon is a non-profit organization that encourages people to enjoy birds, wildlife and natural habitats through field trips, programs and publications. For more information about meetings, field trips and special events visit www.nekaudubon.org. Find us on Facebook at Nek Audubon. Art work by Robin Rothman.



Photo: USFWS