

Birding Close to Home

“Although the search for rarities does bring personal enjoyment, I find that regularly monitoring a single site is just as rewarding, if not more so. Becoming familiar with a location and watching the avian life change, both seasonally and over many years, adds considerable information to my understanding of the life of birds. What’s more, ornithology is very dependent on data gathered by amateurs, and thus the information collected is quite valuable to the scientific community.” — John Liller


A bright beginning to what some of us think of as the “true” new millennium could mean simply opening the door and stepping outside to take stock of the feeder birds, or driving to a local patch to look for the birds within. Taking stock of the locals is not just a form of building one’s year list but of creating an intimacy with our immediate surroundings — getting acquainted with the resident species as well as seasonal visitors, nesters, and sometimes, with a sharp rush of adrenaline, coming upon the unexpected.

The feature articles in this issue of *Bird Observer* were brought together around the idea of birding close to home, something that we all can do whether we have an hour to spare or a day to splurge, and we hope that they will enrich the local birding experience.

Marj Rines is out and about a lot, poking around a fairly extensive area which, defined by a topographic map, she calls her “quad.” Her “Quadding 2000 Diary” provides a representative (and fascinating) sampling of discoveries and observations throughout the year.

What do we really know about our favorite patch? John Liller gets down to the nitty-gritty: “Do we know that the Gray Catbird in late October is an unusual occurrence? Do we know that the large number of Golden-crowned Kinglets in November is an exceptional number, or that it actually corresponds to counts typically found in the area? Do we know what birds use our patch to breed in and what birds only use it as a place to feed while raising young elsewhere?” In “Data Collecting at Your Favorite Local Birding Spot,” Liller describes the censusing methods used at Broad Meadow Brook Sanctuary that can be applied to your own local spot.

How about a Big Day by bike? Make that a rusty old Schwinn. New Hampshire resident Tony Federer, inspired by a birder who had flown from Washington State to tick Little Egret “all in one day!” introduces the ecological merits of Human-Powered Birding. The Big Day results? Ninety-Eight species. In “Zero-impact Birding,” he describes a few simple rules for counting species in a human-powered year list.

And finally, in place of a Where to Go article, we offer a selection of Pocket Places, favorite local spots of some of our readers in Franklin County; northwest Middlesex County; Essex County; suburban Boston; Tiverton, Rhode Island; and Rochester, New Hampshire. Enjoy. 

Brooke Stevens, Managing Editor