



Salem Sound Monitor - March 2008

Dear Friends of Salem Sound Coastwatch,

Ah, it's March. A time of transition. Even though it's still cold, the days are longer; the sun shines brighter; and there's a hint of spring in the air. Soon the spring bird migrations will start. Did you know that there are many species of waterbirds which migrate south to spend the winter on our "warm" coastline? Some of them come from as far as the northernmost reaches of the arctic tundra.

In this newsletter we will tell you a little bit about our winter waterbirds, and we have an lengthy calendar of interesting activities that are coming up. So read on.

The Winter Waterfowl of Salem Sound.....

These interesting ducks and birds will be here for a few more weeks—at least until the end of March. Even if you're not a "seasoned" birder, grab your binoculars on the next pretty day and head for one of these sites for some excellent viewing (actually just about any place with a good view of the ocean has the potential to provide encounters of the winter waterfowl kind):

- Marblehead: Chandler Hovey Park (Lighthouse Point) and Fort Sewall
- Salem: Forest River Park, Winter Island and Derby Wharf
- Beverly: Lynch Park and Dane Street Beach
- Manchester-by-the-Sea: Masconomo Park

Here's a sample of some of "our" ducks:



Common Eider: The Common Eider is a large colorful stocky duck that feasts on the mussel beds in Salem Sound. At 25 inches long, it is the largest duck in the Northern Hemisphere. The male has distinctive black, white, and yellow plumage.

Common Eiders - male and female, Photo by Glen Tepke

Bufflehead: The Bufflehead is a tiny black and white diving duck with a rounded head. Only 14 inches long, the Bufflehead is the smallest duck that winters in our coastal waters. In late winter, look for its lively and amusing courtship displays.



Buffleheads – male and female, Photo by Robert Buchsbaum

Red-breasted Merganser: The Red-breasted Merganser is a streamlined diving duck (about 20 - 25 inches) with a noteworthy shaggy crest on the back of its head, and a long thin orange/red bill specially adapted to catching fish.



Male Red-breasted Merganser by Glen Tepke



Female Red-breasted Merganser by Glen Tepke

Brant: The Brant is a small black and white goose that winters along the Atlantic coast. *Don't mistake it for a Canada Goose!* The Brant is smaller, has a shorter neck and only an indistinct white marking on its cheek. The Brant feeds on eelgrass and algae. Did you know that the second largest eelgrass bed in MA is located in Salem Sound, off the coast of Beverly and Manchester-by-the-Sea? The Brant is one of the northernmost nesting birds in the world, so oftentimes it hangs around Salem Sound until May, waiting for the snow and ice to clear from its Arctic breeding grounds.



Brant - Photo by Robert Buchsbaum



Canada Goose by Glen Tepke

Common Loon: The Common Loon, a bird normally associated with northern lakes, spends the winter along our coast. It is a large (up to 36 inches in length) waterbird with wingspans of more than 4 feet! The Loon is a well adapted to chasing fish underwater. Its legs are located toward the rear of its body, which gives it great propulsion while swimming and diving, but makes walking on land difficult. The Common Loon sits low in the water and it looks very different in winter than in summer. The winter plumage is black and gray without the distinctive checkerboard pattern on its back or the white band on its neck that most people associate with the Loon.



Common Loon, winter plumage by Glen Tepke



Common Loon, summer plumage by Glen Tepke

If you would like to learn more about thee and other birds, you can visit these web sites:

www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds and www.ducks.org/hunting/waterfowlgallery.aspx

A Time of Transition for SSCW too--

This is also a time of transition at Salem Sound Coastwatch. We have been busy writing grants to fund our programs and services, and we'll keep you posted when we hear about them. In the meantime here are some upcoming activities to put on your calendar:

- **Saturday and Sunday, April 5 & 6 - Eco Film Festival**

Environmental Films will be shown throughout the weekend, including some suitable for children. The festival is being held in Beverly. Tickets available on-line or by phone. More info at: www.ecofilmfestival.us

- **Saturday, April 12 - "Discover a Coastal Treasure in our Backyard" - Great Marsh Symposium**

Lots of interesting speakers on topics of historic and cultural interest relating to the Great Marsh. 8:30 am - 2:30 pm, Parker River National Wildlife Headquarters in Newburyport. Registration fee \$12. More info at: www.essexcountyforum.org/comingworkshops46.htm

- **Monday, April 14 - Earth Day at Salem State College**

The Undergraduate Student Poster Competition is always very interesting and educational. Open to the public 11 am - 1 pm, in Veterans Hall at the Ellison Campus Center. There are other Earth Day events as well, including speakers. For more information see: www.salemstate.edu/earthday/

- **Tuesday, April 15 - "Tell It Good Bye Kiddo"-- A History of the North Atlantic Fishery**

Sponsor is Northeastern University Marine Science Center, Evening Lecture Series. Presentation by Dr. William M. Fowler Jr., Distinguished Professor, Northeastern University. 7 p.m. at 430 Nahant Rd., Nahant, MA. For more information see: www.marinescience.neu.edu/outreach/lecture_series.html or call 781-581-7370 ext 321.

- **Thursday, April 24 - Beach Clean Up**

Celebrate Earth Day and join employees of the Timberland Co. for a clean-up day. We'll start by pulling trash out of the Forest River Estuary, and move on from there. We'll go from approx. 9 am - 3 pm. Feel free to pitch-in and help out for any part of that time. Call SSCW for more information 978-741-7900.

- **May 4 - 10 - North River Awareness Week**

Our annual celebration of the North River -- a river in recovery! There will be several community events and presentations. More to information to come.

- **Friday, May 16 - "Keeping the Earth SAFE and SOUND"**

A great time is had by all at our annual benefit gathering for Salem Sound Coastwatch and the Salem Alliance for the Environment. The fantastic band "A Patch of Blue" will once again enliven the evening which will be held at the Hawthorne Hotel in Salem.

What you can do this time of year to help protect the Sound--

While it's not warm enough to start our sampling programs, you can still:

Volunteer. We can use help in the office, people to work on events, or how about volunteering to develop a Salem Sound birding section for our website?

Become a member of SSCW, encourage your friends and neighbors to join, or make a tax deductible donation. Donations can be made on-line at www.salemsound.org if it's more convenient.

And, finally, enjoy the birds and hopefully it will be warm soon!

Sincerely,

Barbara Warren, Executive Director, and Susan Yochelson, Outreach Coordinator

p.s. Many thanks to Robert Buchsbaum and Glen Tepke for the use of their pictures. You can see all of Glen's wonderful bird photographs at www.pbbase.com/gtepk