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Rockport birding circle area's first

By Abigail Curtis
BDN Staff



BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY ABIGAIL CURTIS

Birders train their eyes on the skies at Saturday's Big Sit Birding Circle on Beech Hill in Rockport. Participating are (from left) Ava Goodale and Kristen Lindquist of the Coastal Mountains Land Trust and James Lea of Rockport. The birders looked and listened for birds from within the confines of a 17-foot-diameter circle.

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ROCKPORT, Maine — It's a new kind of birding: Make a circle. Sit in the circle. Let the birds come to you. Count and repeat.

"It's fun. It's kind of an unusual thing," Kristen Lindquist of the Coastal Mountains Land Trust said Saturday from the 17-foot-wide circle on the summit of Beech Hill Preserve.

The nonprofit land trust was sponsoring the area's first Big Sit Birding Circle, and Lindquist, an energetic sparrow of a woman who describes herself as an "avid and passionate" birder, said that despite a torrential downpour or two, the dawn-till-dusk sit was going

well.

"Basically, birders are nuts," she said, laughing. "It's a lot of fun to spend the day with them."

Though bad weather in the early morning had kept away all but the hardiest of bird-watchers — and kept birds themselves under cover — the sun emerged by noon and it was a beautiful late spring day. Bumblebees buzzed, grasshoppers whirred and the humid air was redolent of flowers. Far below, schooners sailed around Pe-nobscoot Bay and the islands peeked in and out of layers of mist.

"What a great day," said Patrick Keenan of the BioDiversity Research Institute in Gorham.

Keenan had set up an example of a mist net, which his agency uses to monitor bird populations. Birds fly into the fine netting and can't get out, and so are able to be identified and banded by institute staffers.

That day, a confused bumblebee was demonstrating exactly how the mist net works, while Keenan worked to free it.

He told the interested crowd about the institute's "bird cams," which are set up in secret locations around the state. The cameras allow Internet viewers to see birds such as eagles, osprey, finches and loons in the wild.

"There was even a mating on the loon cam," he said.

Meanwhile, birders in the circle opened their ears to birdsong and trained their binoculars on faraway specks.

Glenn Jenks of Camden, a birder who was scheduled to speak later that day, heard a field sparrow singing and spotted a mated pair of sharp-shinned



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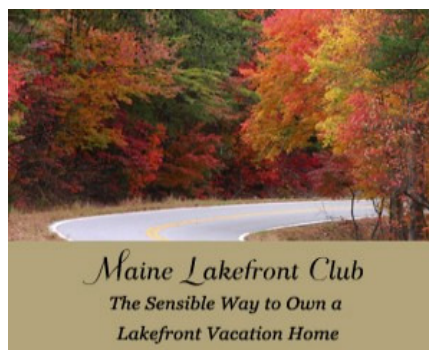
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hawks wheeling high in the sky.

"I've been doing this since I was 12," he said of birding. "I got hooked, thanks to a family friend. First of all, it's a great excuse to get out. It doesn't cost anything, and you can do it anywhere. Plus, there's the whole fascination with this other layer of life that's out there."

Bob and Mary Blenk of Cumberland decided to make the trek up to the hill's summit in part because of a nonfeathered draw: the chance to see the restoration of the historic stone hut on top. The Beechnut Hut was built in 1915 for the John Gribbel family of Philadelphia, which owned the hill and a summer residence on Rockport Harbor. It is now owned and managed by the land trust.

"To see the restoration is wonderful," Mary Blenk said. "And my mother was a good birder. She tried to teach me quite a bit about birds. You hear them, but you can't always see them."

Lindquist said the birders were limiting their count to what species they could see or hear from within the circle. The bird list included Eastern towhees, field sparrows, alder flycatchers, wood thrush and catbirds — which periodically wailed unnervingly from nearby trees.

"You just don't know what's going to turn up," she said.

The bird cams may be seen at <http://briloon.org>.

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