



FAR AFIELD BY CHUCK JAKUBCHAK

Hog Island

AUDUBON CAMP

Hog Island Audubon Camp, located in picturesque Muscongus Bay in Bremen, Maine, is the perfect place to develop and improve all of your bird-watching skills, while having the opportunity to view an amazing array of species. Every summer, the camp for adults, teens, and families offers various programs that educate, entertain, and generally inspire bird watchers who enroll. Programs vary in subject and include everything from seabird biology and conservation to a program incorporating arts

and birding. Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned veteran, a week on the island will not only enhance your abilities, but it will also strengthen your bond with nature and probably add a few species to your life list.

Black River Audubon in Elyria, Ohio, agreed to sponsor my trip to the camp, so that I could improve my ornithological skills and learn more about the camp's offerings. I selected field ornithology from the class list, because it promised to combine workshops with field trips, and the five-day program

JEANNE JAKUBCHAK (2)



Inset: Seeing Great black-backed gulls up close was amazing. Typically, you can view them only through high-powered optics, but on Ross Island, you walk among them.

Background: Sunrise on Hog Island.



best aligned with my varied interests. The daily itinerary begins before dawn and concludes shortly after dusk, giving campers a full day of activity. Campers can choose to attend as many of the workshops, field trips, and lectures as they like, but most participate at every possible opportunity because of the fascinating content.

From the time I arrived on the island via *Snow Goose III*, the ferry to Hog Island, I was thrilled with the remote setting and excited about the birding possibilities. Adjacent to the dining hall was an active osprey nest, complete with youngsters and protective parents, along with a remote camera that continually streamed live images of the family to the dining room's television so we could watch during mealtimes. A merlin perched behind my living quarters, purple finches visited the bird feeders, and red-breasted nuthatches hung out in the evergreens. Great birds were all around—and I had just arrived!

Mornings on Hog Island were reserved for field trips, and I especially enjoyed traveling to Ross Island to see nesting great black-backed and herring gulls in a pristine setting. Seeing the active nests, finding broken eggs and spotting young gulls hiding among the vegetation were a special sight for even a seasoned

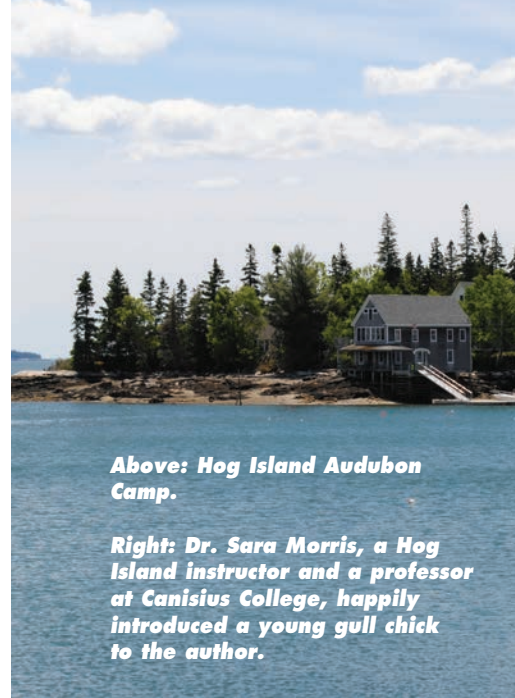
bird watcher like me. During the 40-minute boat trip to Ross Island, we were able to spot three species of scoter, common eiders, black guillemots, and bald eagles—along with harbor seals sunning themselves on uninhabited islands.

One of the inland trips was to Great Salt Bay Wildlife Preserve, where excellent views of sora and black-billed cuckoo were the highlights. Bobolinks continually flew through a meadow, and my optics did not get a rest. Another trip to a quiet old county road yielded Blackburnian, black-throated blue, and black-throated green warblers, along with winter wrens, thrushes, and an incredible ruby-throated hummingbird nest meticulously adorned with lichen.

The undisputed best part of Hog Island Audubon Camp is the boat trip to Eastern Egg Rock, an island home for nesting Atlantic puffins and the focal point of extensive research by famed ornithologist Dr. Stephen Kress, director of Hog Island and the man behind Project Puffin.

Beginning in 1973, puffin chicks were relocated to Eastern Egg Rock from Newfoundland, with the hope that they would mature and return to the island to breed. Through Kress' innovation and persistence, the plan

JEANNE JAKUBCHAK (2)



Above: Hog Island Audubon Camp.

Right: Dr. Sara Morris, a Hog Island instructor and a professor at Canisius College, happily introduced a young gull chick to the author.



worked, and Eastern Egg Rock serves as a monument to that success. Similar restoration for Arctic, roseate, and common terns also brought these species back to the island. I was delighted to view the terns and puffins as they flew overhead and perched on the rocky shore. I doubt those images will ever leave my head.

Ornithology classes were informative and included topics such as anatomy, physics of flight, taxonomy, and bird evolution. The bird-banding workshop allowed campers to practice setting up mist nets, illustrated how to obtain critical anatomical measurements, and emphasized care in data

STEPHEN KRESS

Atlantic puffins.



accuracy. A sound recording workshop allowed me to record a winter wren as it sang in the nearby woods, and I now have a new appreciation for the difficulties associated with recording bird sounds.

Evening lectures focused on improving bird identification skills (especially female warblers), conservation, migration, and Project Puffin. The speakers were entertaining as well as informative, and they gladly shared their knowledge with the campers, answering questions and adding personal stories to enhance their message.

In addition to the great birding and amazing faculty and staff, part of the joy of attending Hog Island Audubon Camp is the serenity of Muscongus Bay and the opportunity to fully immerse oneself in nature. At the recommendation of Scott Weidensaul, director of the field ornithology program, I turned my cell phone off and never checked email during my five-day stay. The absence of televisions, radios, and newspapers on the island was a blessing as I disconnected and became absorbed in nature. Forgetting about technology for a few days made the Hog Island experience even richer.

Every waking hour is dedicated to watching and learning about nature, even if you

choose to recline in one of the Adirondack chairs facing the waterfront. Just when you think things are calm, a harbor seal or porpoise surfaces and draws you back into nature. The magic of Hog Island goes beyond the birds and deepens your emotional ties to nature. That is why the camp has been successful for 79 years—but not without struggle.

Originally founded as a Nature Study Camp in 1936 under National Audubon, the camp got off to a great start under the direction of Carl Buchheister. Early staff members included Roger Tory Peterson, esteemed naturalist and inventor of the modern field guide (and longtime *BWD* columnist), and Allan D. Cruickshank, a pioneer in bird photography. Buchheister established a philosophy that continues today: to develop a sustained interest in our natural world and inspire campers to support wildlife and nature conservation.

Early camp teachings focused on the interdependence of living things, and the Hog Island philosophy became the foundation for what today is called environmental education. Simply said, the history of the environmental education movement in the United States had one of its origins on this 330-acre island



Atlantic puffins on Eastern Egg Rock.

off the coast of Maine in 1936.

In 2000, Maine Audubon assumed control of the camp, but the financial downturn of 2008 and mounting costs forced the camp to close for the 2009 season. But Dr. Kress, who served as camp director from 1982 to 1986, believed that the Hog Island Camp was too valuable to lose.

After countless hours of negotiations and strategizing, Hog Island was reopened in 2010 as part of Audubon's Project Puffin program, and Kress stepped into the role of camp director for the second time. The original philosophy of utilizing expert instructors and focusing on teachers was resurrected. Notable ornithologists,

birders, artists, and naturalists, including Pete Dunne, Kenn Kaufman, John Kricher, Sara Morris, Pete Salmansohn, Bill Thompson III, Peter Vickery, Scott Weidensaul, Julie Zick-efoose, and many others agreed to teach or assist with the camp.

Juanita Roushdy, a nature enthusiast and former Hog Island camper, deserves recognition, too. She relocated to Bremen, Maine, from North Carolina as a result of her love for the camp and played a key role in its resurrection. She also revived the defunct "Friends of Hog Island" (FOHI) group and obtained 501(c)3 tax-exempt status for FOHI.

Working with Kress and a newly energized FOHI board,

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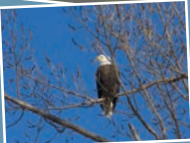


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she established a business plan for the camp and initiated ambitious fund-raising campaigns to provide a consistent revenue stream and establish sustainable financial stability for the camp. Roushdy and her team also recruit an annual corps of nearly 100 volunteers to support the camp.

Although Hog Island Camp hasn't reached all its financial goals, it is on stable footing. Stephen Kress is best known for his work in restoring nesting Atlantic puffins to the shores of Maine, but equally important is his work in restoring the Hog Island Audubon Camp.

Reservations for 2016 programs began in October 2015. Some scholarships are available through Hog Island and sometimes through local Audubon chapters. Volunteer opportunities are also available, and FOHI will gladly exchange labor for room and board—plus volunteers can participate in field trips, space permitting.

Visit hogisland.audubon.org for additional information. For volunteer opportunities at the Hog Island Camp or to help with a donation, visit the FOHI website: www.fohi.org

Chuck Jakubchak is a certified volunteer naturalist and enjoys conducting nature programs throughout northeastern Ohio.

SCHEDULE FOR 2016 PROGRAMS AT HOG ISLAND AUDUBON CAMP:

- **Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation:** May 29 to June 3
- **Arts and Birding:** July 10 to 15
- **Breaking Into Birding:** May 29 to June 3
- **Raptor Rapture:** July 10 to 15
- **Joy of Birding:** June 5 to 10
- **Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week,** July 17 to 22
- **Field Ornithology:** June 12 to 17
- **Family Camp:** August 7 to 12 (ages 8–12); August 14 to 19 (ages 8–13)
- **Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens:** June 12 to 17
- **Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation:** September 4 to 9
- **Hands-on Bird Science:** June 19 to 24
- **Living on the Wind: Fall Migration and Monhegan Island:** September 4 to 9; September 11 to 16
- **Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens:** June 19 to 24

See hogisland.audubon.org.

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