



THE Clapper Rail

MARIN AUDUBON SOCIETY

Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine: Field Ornithology in a Spectacular Setting

By Susan Kelly

With early childhood and family connections to the east coast, as soon as I read the NBB posting about the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine, I was intrigued. Once I clicked on the link and saw the photos, I knew I had to go. And I wasn't disappointed. The scenery was lovely, fellow attendees were wonderful, the instructors were first rate, and even the food was good.

Here's how the Field Ornithology session was described: "Take a week of riveting field trips to habitats as diverse as offshore puffin islands, windswept blueberry barrens, lush grasslands, and sphagnum bog forests. Add some of the most respected bird experts in the country, and you have Field Ornithology on Hog Island – a layman's exploration of all things avian, from basic bird biology to nesting behavior, songs, migration and conservation." When I read it, I had visions of lolling about in fields of ripe blueberries, exotic warblers flitting all about; the reality, albeit different, was just as good.



Photo courtesy of Thomas Gansow

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Hog Island is an Audubon Sanctuary with a long and interesting history that dates back 75 years. Roger Tory Peterson and Allan D. Cruickshank regularly taught there. Our instructors were Kenn Kaufman and his wife Kimberly, Scott Weidensaul, Lang Elliott, Sara Morris, Stephen Kress, and several others. All of them were excellent field guides, accessible and knowledgeable, and genuinely nice people.

There were two groups attending that week, adults and teens. During the day we went on field trips (adult and teen groups were segregated) and each evening after dinner one of the instructors gave a presentation that everyone attended. Field trips included hikes on the island, boat rides to remote islands, and trips to the mainland.

We could literally immerse ourselves in birding from 5 a.m. until 9 p.m. each day without worrying about mundane matters like food. The chef, himself a vegetarian, made sure everyone's dietary restrictions were accommodated, including the vegetarians and vegans. When it comes to eating I'm as fussy as any Marin foodie, and even I was happy.

If you're a birder who's interested in studying ornithology and spending a week with convivial birders and outstanding instructors, you'll enjoy this immensely. If you're more interested in adding new birds to your list, it won't be particularly satisfying. I did add a dozen or so birds to mine, including **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, **Black-throated Green Warbler**, **Blackburnian Warbler**, **Ovenbird**, **Black Guillemots**, **Laughing Gull**, **Razorbills**, **Common Eider**, **Arctic Terns**, **Common Terns**, and **Roseate Terns**, but I'm afraid I forgot to make a list and have forgotten some already.

Needless to say, I really enjoyed my experience at this summer camp for bird lovers. The total cost for the session, which lasted from Sunday through Friday, was about \$1,000 (excluding transportation costs). To learn more, visit:

www.projectpuffin.org/OrnithCamps.html

Source: http://www.marinaudubon.org/pdf/ClapperRail_Feb12_Web.pdf