Fall Convention Features Frosty Field Trips, Fosters Climate Change Dialogue

I attended the fall convention’s Saturday field trip to Bona Dea Trails and Sanctuary, and it was especially memorable because seemingly ordinary birds and their habitat exuded an almost otherworldly beauty. For example, we stumbled upon an unassuming stand of dried forbs that, upon closer inspection, revealed glistening, bulbous masses at the base of some stems. These peculiarities turned out to be frost flowers, intricate ice ribbons formed from water freezing within plant stems. A distant and drab bird foraged among some shrubbery, but this one was worth a long look through binoculars: a male Ruby-crowned Kinglet sporting its seldom-seen, neon-orange crown. Too, I’ve never been quite so taken with the Northern Shoveler’s cornflower-blue wing patch as I was on this trip; how had I not meditated on this striking feature before? Clearly, our beloved birds and their environment are not to be taken for granted, and as fall convention-goers learned, climate change is threatening their existence as we know it. However, we also learned that hope exists in the powerful medium of story-telling, and thus, simply sharing our concerns for the birds we love can go a long way toward fostering a greater awareness of climate change’s effects and, in turn, raise support for work that protects birds amid a changing world. Learn more at http://climate.audubon.org/article/talk-turkey.

Lastly, this convention was captured beautifully through photos, so be sure to see highlights on page 3, courtesy of AAS members.

-Samantha Scheiman, newsletter editor

*Brown-headed Nuthatches delighted convention-goers at the Lake Point Conference Center.* | Photo: Mitchell Pruitt
Mark your calendars! May 1-3, 2015, the Arkansas Audubon Society will hold its spring convention at the Holiday Inn City Center in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Spring migrants will be streaming north, heading to their breeding grounds, which means great birds and exciting field trips. For a special bonus, the Oklahoma Ornithological Society (OOS) will be meeting jointly with AAS! This is the first time since 1991 that the two groups will have met together. Members of AAS and OOS have fond memories of that convention in Mena, AR: getting acquainted with birders from their neighboring state and swapping tales of birding adventures.

Plans are in the making for terrific guest speakers, informative student presentations, and excellent field trip locations. Don’t miss this opportunity to meet our next-door OOS birders and catch up with our own AAS members. Complete details will be in our March newsletter.

-KAREN HOLLIDAY
President, Arkansas Audubon Society

Newsletter and Membership Information

The Arkansas Audubon Society Newsletter is a quarterly publication of Arkansas Audubon Society, Inc., a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization, P.O. Box 313, Pangburn, AR 72121. Issue dates are March, June, September, and December.

PLEASE NOTE: Announcements, articles, information, and/or photographs to be considered for an upcoming edition of Arkansas Birds should be submitted to the editor no later than the 15th of the month prior to publication.

The newsletter is provided to those who pay membership dues to AAS.

Send newsletter submissions to samantha.scheiman@gmail.com.

Membership renewals are due Jan. 1 of each calendar year.

Please enter my membership in the Arkansas Audubon Society as a:

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*New Memberships paid in the last quarter (Oct. - Dec.) will include full membership for the following calendar year.

SPECIAL MEMBERSHIPS

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Draw check to Arkansas Audubon Society and send to: Terry Butler, Treasurer, P.O. Box 313, Pangburn, AR 72121
Snapshots: AAS Fall Convention in Russellville

Dr. Chris Kellner led a field trip at the Bona Dea Trails and Sanctuary, where he pointed out ducks, sparrows, a secretive Winter Wren, and more.  |  Photo: Michael Linz

The convention wouldn’t be complete without good food and fellowship!  |  Photo: Cindy Franklin

Lynsy Smithson-Stanley shared the effects of climate change and how we can take action to save the birds we love. She met Halberg Ecology Camper Nathan Vestal after her talk.  |  Photo: Pam Stewart

Birders were treated to late Scissor-tailed Flycatchers.  
Photo: Michael Linz
News of Members: Birders Explore Coastlines

By DOTTIE BOYLES
News of Members Editor

Doris and Dottie Boyles birded Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia in 11 days from May 29-June 9. The goal was to see 100 species in each state. Doris spent weeks planning the trip and mapping key locations to visit. Unfortunately, the best-laid plans often go astray, and such was the case after they arrived. However, in the short amount of time they had, they still managed to tally 144 total species for the trip and three life birds. In two of the states they did reach their goal: DE (107) and MD (106). They fell short in NJ (73), VA (66), and PA (60). Highlights included Dupont Nature Center and Bombay Hook NWR, DE; Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, NJ; Middle Creek WMA, PA; Susquehanna State Park, MD; and Chincoteague NWR, VA. Best species were Red Knot, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Ring-necked Pheasant, and Cerulean Warbler.

Bill Shepherd visited Oregon, August 27-September 3, spending most of his time around Bend and Sisters, both in Deschutes County. The first day was spent mostly east of the Cascade in the sagebrush plains. He also took a two-day trip over to the coast and back. Bill tallied 92 species for the trip. Highlights included Sooty Grouse, Wandering Tattler, Vaux’s Swift, Cassin’s Vireo, Hermit Warbler, and Sagebrush Sparrow.

In September, Dan and Samantha Scheiman volunteered their services at the annual Hummingbird Migration Celebration at the Strawberry Plains Audubon Center in Holly Springs, MS. They led bird and butterfly walks and interpreted for the crowd. Each year the festival teaches visitors all about hummingbirds, native plants, and more. In October, Dan attended a work-related meeting at the Schlitz Audubon Nature Center in Milwaukee, WI. That’s where they were married in 2010. In addition to reminiscing about his wedding day and discussing business, Dan birded with his fellow Auduboners. Migration was in full swing; the trees were dripping with Yellow-rumped Warblers, mixed with Black-throated Blue, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Palm, and other warblers. He and Samantha flew up in advance of the meeting to visit her parents. They enjoyed the fall foliage in scenic Door County and birded a preserve her father helped create in Ozaukee County, the Lion’s Den Gorge Nature Preserve. Dan picked up 11 state birds.

Kathleen and Allan Mueller birded the Northeast in October, starting with a visit to their son in Virginia. Other stops were Cape May, NJ (a quick half-day visit), Long Island, NY (three days), Niagara Falls, and Presque Isle in PA on Lake Erie. They drove 3,814 miles, not a record, but a long way for old folks in a Prius. Highlights included Red-necked Grebe, Eurasian Wigeon (two—one at Cape May and one at Pymatuning State Park, PA), all three scoters, Merlins and Peregrines, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Clay-colored Sparrow.

During the BBB (Bikes, Blues, and Barbecue) held in Fayetteville each September, Joe Neal planned a quieter BBB (Bison, Birds, and Botany) at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in OK, September 25-28. He was joined by David Oakley, Mitchell Pruitt, and others. They enjoyed wildflowers, migrating monarch butterflies, bison, and a variety of birds.

In September, Don Simons, Jay Schneider, and Shea Lewis birded in California. They took two pelagic boat trips on the Pacific Ocean. Their first trip was out of Half Moon Bay with Alvaro’s Adventures. Interesting lifers included: two albatrosses, Horned Puffin, storm-petrels, shearwaters, and Rhinoceros Auklet. Their second trip was with Debi Shearwater out of Monterey. They experienced encounters with orcas, sea lions, fur seals, and sea otters. For land birds they visited Presidio, Muir Woods, Point Reyes, Pinnacles National Park, Big Sur, and Pacific Grove. Don said, “It was a great trip with great companions and good memories.” Jay added 54 species to his life list, Shea over 30, and Don 17. A Laysan Albatross was Don’s 600th species in the lower 48 states.
Three Arkansas birders—Jacque Brown, David Oakley, and Mitchell Pruitt—ventured into No Man’s Land, the Oklahoma Panhandle, for four days in mid-October. They started with a stunning Costa’s Hummingbird in Tulsa and ended with Burrowing Owls in Texas. Their time in-between was well spent at and around the Black Mesa in Cimarron County, a rugged place filled with buttes, canyons, mesas, cacti, and no shortage of adventure. The area is a magnet for western species of both scrub and high Rockies. Over the course of the trip, they tallied 97 species, many of which aren’t usually options found in Arkansas. Jacque was able to get one life bird, David two, and Mitchell reeled in nine! These included Sage and Curve-billed Thrashers, Western Screech-Owl, Burrowing Owl, Scaled Quail, Ladder-backed Woodpecker, and several canyon species. Mitchell stated it was quite a trip!

### Conservation Corner

**By MAUREEN MCCLUNG**  
Conservation Chair

I am excited to present the first Conservation Corner, an addition to the newsletter that highlights recent conservation actions taken by AAS. Our activity often involves signing on to letters supporting or opposing legislation. Sometimes we draft the letters ourselves.

**Letters to which we signed:**
- Authored by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and addressed to the Senate in opposition of S. 2363, the “Bipartisan Sportmen’s Act of 2014,” which would roll back protection of public lands, remove the EPA’s authority to regulate lead ammunition, and allow the import of polar bear trophies.
- Authored by the American Bird Conservancy and others and addressed to President Obama to ask for a presidential proclamation on the centenary of the extinction of the last passenger pigeon.
- Authored by the Center for Biological Diversity and addressed to the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration officials to improve the proposed definition for “destruction or adverse modification” of critical habitat in the Endangered Species Act.

**Letters we authored:**
- Submitted a resolution to the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission supporting the prohibition of future permits for confined animal feeding operations near the Buffalo River.
- Asked President Obama, BLM, and Forest Service to adopt conservation measures for the Greater Sage-Grouse that will limit fossil fuel development in critical habitat and to create protected areas.
- Encouraged the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission to improve the scientific methods of determining water needs for streams in the Arkansas Water Plan in order to protect water resources for wildlife.

In the future we will make these letters available on the website. If you have conservation concerns you would like to bring to the attention of AAS, please email mcclung@hendrix.edu.
A Sunken Island of Habitat: St. Francis Sunken Lands Wildlife Management Area, Important Bird Area

By DAN SCHEIMAN, Ph.D.
Bird Conservation Director, Audubon Arkansas

As an island of habitat in a sea of agriculture, the St. Francis Sunken Lands Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a prime area to be during spring migration, especially if you want warblers. The conditions that make it hard for humans to penetrate also make it a harbor for healthy bird populations and an Audubon Important Bird Area (IBA).

Site Description
St. Francis Sunken Lands was created by the New Madrid Fault earthquakes of 1811 and 1812. Strung out over roughly 30 miles through the St. Francis River Floodway and within the levee system of the St. Francis River, this IBA contains extensive bottomland-hardwood forest. The Arkansas Game & Fish Commission (AGFC) manages the St. Francis Sunken Lands WMA for hunting and recreation, but extensive flooding often renders most of the area inaccessible.
Thus, much of the land is undisturbed habitat where bird life flourishes. There are several access points, most of which are boat landings.

Ornithological Summary
The size and inaccessibility of the St. Francis Sunken Lands make it a haven for forest-interior species, especially bottomland-hardwood specialists such as Prothonotary and Swainson’s Warblers. It is an important migration stopover as well as breeding habitat for several species of conservation concern including: Mississippi Kite, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Wood Thrush, and Painted Bunting. The site supports long-term avian research efforts by graduate students at Arkansas State University who have worked on woodpeckers, Red-shouldered Hawks, Wild Turkeys, Swainson’s Warblers, and West Nile virus. Migrants captured during mistnet classes include numerous warblers, even rarer species such as Bay-breasted, Palm, Cape May, and Connecticut! The Payneway and Snowden Waterfowl Rest Areas harbor tens of thousands of ducks, plus shorebirds and wading birds.

Conservation Issues
The disjunct and widely scattered distribution of AGFC ownership combined with extensive and persistent flooding limit habitat management options. Frequent flooding and no thinning have resulted in reduced cover of natural understory vegetation. Canebrakes, once relatively common in the Sunken Lands, have been diminished as well.

NEW ARKANSAS AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERS
Lance Runion, Little Rock
Holly McDonald, Pine Bluff
Paul McDonald, Pine Bluff
Nathan Vestal, Jonesboro
Chuck & Ruth Anderson, Little Rock
Paula Pellham, Clarksville

DONATION TO GENERAL FUND
Pat Moore

DONATION TO AAS IOLA REA FUND
Norman and Cheryl Lavers in memory of Nao Ueda

AAS TRUST DONATIONS (AUG. 15-NOV. 17, 2014)
Chuck & Penny Preston
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Ann Gordon

Memorials & Honoraria
Steve Noland in memory of Mary Virginia Ferguson
Harriett & Jerome Jansma in memory of Mary Virginia Ferguson
Laura & David Timby in memory of Mary Virginia Ferguson

An Important Bird Area (IBA) is a site that provides essential habitat for one or more breeding, wintering, and/or migrating species of bird. Arkansas has 29 IBAs. Learn more about the state’s IBA program here: http://ar.audubon.org/important-bird-areas-arkansas.
Distribution and Abundance of Arkansas Birds
The Spring Season: March 1 – May 31, 2014

By KENNY NICHOLS
Member, Bird Records Committee

A single Black-bellied Whistling-Duck on Beaverfork Lake, Faulkner 11 Apr (Michael Linz) was a county first.

Very late, 9 Snow Geese were spotted near Beebe, White 16 May (Patty McLean).

A Trumpeter Swan on Wirth Lake, Sharp 21 Mar (LeeVi Haas) represents a county first.

Rare in spring, Long-tailed Ducks were reported from three locations: 3 on Lake Dardanelle, Yell 8 Mar (Kenny & LaDonna Nichols), 2 on Lake Chicot, Chicot 23 Mar (Mary & Cham Mehaffey), and one on Beaver Lake, Benton 17 Mar (Joe Neal).

Rare and late, a female Common Merganser was identified near Cabin Creek Rec Area, Lake Dardanelle, Johnson 30 Apr (Leif Anderson).

Uncommon in spring, 4 American Bitterns were flushed at Frog Bayou WMA, Crawford 2 May (Joanie Patterson, David Ouellette).

Rare anytime, lone Sandhill Cranes were observed at Bayou DeView WMA, Craighead 30 Apr (T&EB) and Scatter Creek WMA, Greene 3 May (Jim Dixon, Norm & Cheryl Lavers, Jack Stewart, Allan Mueller).

Uncommon in spring, a good count of 20 Willets was tallied at Treadway’s Minnow Farms, Prairie 25 Apr (K&LN).

Considered uncommon to rare in spring, there were three reports of Franklin’s Gull: 2 at Frog Bottoms WMA, Craighead 29 Mar (JN, Mike Mlodinow) and 6 May (Ryan Risher).

A Western Kingbird photographed at Holla Bend NWR, Pope 9 May (RR) was a nice find and one of only a handful of records for the refuge.

Four Brown-headed Nuthatches were recorded
near Shores Lake and Fern, *Franklin* 29 Apr (Bill Beall, Jim Neiting, JN, m.obs.). This is the only place in the western Ozarks with a known population of these birds. A scouting trip two weeks earlier found 16 birds, an all-time high.

A *Brown Creeper* identified at Cameron Bluff Campground, Mount Magazine, *Logan* 29 Apr (John & Sharon James) was late.

The excellent count of 33 *Swainson’s Thrushes* was made at Devils Den State Park, *Washington* 11 May (JN).

A “*Brewster’s Warbler*” was photographed at Bald Knob NWR, *White* 3 May (Ron & Linda Howard). This is a hybrid between Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warbler and very rarely seen in the state.

The good count of 8 *Palm Warblers* was made at Lake Frierson, *Craighead* 25 Apr (TB, Doug Raybuck, m.obs.). A county first *Lark Sparrow* was photographed near Birdeye, *Cross* 17 Apr (R&LH). This species is very uncommon in the eastern third of the state.

About the sixteenth occurrence for the state, a first-spring male *Lazuli Bunting* was photographed at Devils Den State Park, *Washington* 4 May (Adam Leslie).

Rare transient *Yellow-headed Blackbirds* were recorded from five locations: 3 near Highfill, *Benton* 14 Apr (JN, MM), 3 near Atkins, *Pope* 24 Apr (L.A), 4 near Holla Bend NWR, *Yell* 30 Apr (K&L.N), 10 at Palarm Creek, *Faulkner* 30 Apr (Bill Tranum), and 1 at Nimrod Lake, *Perry* 3 May (Mike Miller).

*Great-tailed Grackle* is rare and very local in the extreme northwest and southwest corners of the state, so the 17 at Prescott, *Nevada* 31 May (Karen & Ray Holliday) were not only a county first but an indication of recent eastward expansion.

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**Donate to the Arkansas Audubon Society Ecology Camps and Trust, Support Conservation in Arkansas**

By BARRY HAAS, Ecology Camp Treasurer

As this is written in mid-November, we are in the midst of our Annual Fall Appeal. Most of you received this once-a-year appeal to support our youth ecology camps that are held each June and July. To date, we have received a total of $5,835 in all Appeal donations with $1,360 from known camper parents and grandparents and $4,475 from Arkansas Audubon Society members and others.

The 2014 camp sessions were our 35th year, and the second session of the Halberg Ecology Camp this summer was our 50th such session. We also held our eighth Johnson Advanced Camp for third-year campers. Ever since 2001, when the Arkansas Game & Fish Commission provided some scholarship funding, we have held two annual Halberg Ecology Camp sessions. We also had two sessions one year in the mid-1990s when we had a backlog of camper applicants.

If you would like to help support the youth camps financially, we always welcome donations of any size.

Donations are tax deductible and are acknowledged in writing by letter or email (emails save on camp postage expense). Checks should be made payable to “AAS Halberg Ecology Camp” or “Arkansas Audubon Society” and mailed to me at 804 Konrad Court, Little Rock, AR 72223-9201.

The ‘90 for 90’ Trust fundraiser to honor Doug James, Thurman Jordan, and Art Johnson in association with their 90th birthdays is going strong. This fundraiser was announced at the spring meeting last May in Jonesboro, and the Trust has received 32 ‘90 for 90’ donations totaling $8,090.

If you would like to help us honor Doug James, Thurman Jordan, and Art Johnson, or make a donation for any other purpose, please make your checks payable to “AAS Trust” or “Arkansas Audubon Society Trust” and mail to 804 Konrad Court, Little Rock, AR 72223-9201. All donations to the Trust are tax deductible, and are acknowledged by letter or email (email to save on postage).
Bird-watching in Alaska: A Change of Climate

By DAN SCHEIMAN
AAS Trust Chair

Alaska is a part of the country that feels like a foreign land. Birds characteristic of Asia wander and breed there. Familiar winter residents of the Lower 48 display unfamiliar breeding behaviors. And western dialects of widespread species sound just as strange as Bostonians do to Arkansans. Yet even those born and bred in that cut-off corner of the country are witnessing a change to the very nature of their home.

Last year Samantha and I birded Ecuador with High Lonesome Bird Tours (highlonesometours.com). Yet owner/operator Forrest Davis’s specialty is Alaska, with a variety of destinations offered each May and June. The Nome tour’s bird list, five-day duration, and timing appealed to us; its scheduled departure from Anchorage a few days after Memorial Day meant we could take advantage of the three-day weekend to extend our vacation and explore on our own before meeting the group. Anchorage is like many other American cities except the eastern horizon is dominated by the breathtaking Chugach Mountains. It was overcast when we arrived, which I expected in the Pacific Northwest, but our B&B hosts informed us it was haze from one of the largest wildfires ever recorded on the Kenai Peninsula, burning nearly 300 square miles. Though we never saw the flames, a sparse coat of ash contrasted with the red of our rental car. A trend of unseasonably warm spring temperatures is leading to less snowpack and more drought. Drought-stressed spruce are more susceptible to spruce beetles, which are spreading northward as temperatures rise. This combination of conditions is leading to more frequent and larger fires as more trees die and fall. Formerly spruce-dominated areas are being replaced by hardwoods, altering the ecosystem. One dramatic sign of climate change.

At our B&B overlooking Turnagain Arm fjord, Varied Thrushes whistled their single electronic notes while Hermit and Gray-cheeked Thrushes sang more complex songs. Fox Sparrows were Sooty, not Red, but surprisingly the Yellow-rumped Warblers were Myrtle, not Audubon’s. Neither species sounded like what I’m used to in Arkansas, nor did the White-crowned Sparrows. I added Orange-crowned and Townsend’s Warblers to my aural library as well.

Hiking the Wolverine Peak Trail in Chugach State Park, we never made it to the eponymous peak, and it turned out to be too late in the season for ptarmigan, but Sam got her life Golden-crowned Sparrows and (from a safe distance) Moose. Before the trip we studied butterflies as well as birds, so we instantly recognized our life Arctic Skipper and Arctic White. Back on the coast at Potter Marsh, Mew Gulls, Herring Gulls, and Arctic Terns tended nests. Violet-green and Tree Swallows foraged together. A Merlin zipped by.

The next day we drove to the end of Arctic Valley Road above the treeline to try again for ptarmigan. Another miss. But butterflies were a hit—Old World Swallowtail, Canadian Tiger Swallowtail, Large Marble, Mormon Fritillary, and Mountain Fritillary. That evening, after treating us to dinner, Forrest took us to the Elmendorf Fish Hatchery to treat us to an American Dipper at its nest.

To see seabirds, we booked a six-hour wildlife cruise out of Seward to Kenai Fjords National Park. Before leaving the harbor we were wowed by Wandering Tattlers, Marbled Murrelets, Pigeon Guillemots, Harlequin Ducks, hundreds of Black-legged Kittiwakes, and sea otters! Out further into Resurrection Bay and into Aialik Bay were Pelagic Cormorants, Common Murres, Rhinoceros Auklets, and Horned and Tufted Puffins. Surfbirds huddled at the foot of Holgate Glacier, which calved chunks of ice as we stared, frozen in awe. Rain made visibility poor but didn’t stop us from seeing mountain goats climbing cliffs, Steller’s sea lions resting on rocks, Dall’s porpoises riding our wake, and humpbacked whales diving deep.

After drying out overnight, we drove to the end of Lowell Point Road to pick up Steller’s Jay, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, and Rufous Hummingbird; the hummer entertained us with his J-shaped courtship dive ending in a buzz. Because we weren’t yet satiated for seabirds, we visited the Alaska Sea Life Center (www.alaskasealife.org), an aquarium that features only native species, and breeds and rehabilitates them, too. I purchased a puffin-produced painting.

On day six we were Nome-ward bound with Forrest
and six other birders. Situated on the edge of the Seward Peninsula, Nome is a modern-day frontier mining town. Each summer many try their luck sifting gold dust dredged from beaches. Instead, Sam and I panned for Golden Eagles, Pacific Golden-Plovers, and the rest of the rich abundance of bird life breeding on the true tundra. The region is renowned for its concentrations of waterfowl and shorebirds that feed along the coast before dispersing inland to breed. While there was certainly no lack of birds to enjoy, Forrest repeatedly despaired at the lowest numbers and diversity he’d ever seen. Spring had arrived two weeks early (another sign of climate change?), and many birds had apparently already flown off to the inaccessible interior. Yet Red-throated Loons laid on nests next to the road. Semipalmated Sandpipers hovered and trilled like mad wind-up toys. Lapland Longspurs fluttered and bubbled with joy. Along Safety Sound, Common Eiders were common. But Common Redpoll was not as common as Hoary. A common loon was Pacific, though we missed the rare Arctic.

Each day we set off along one of the roads leading to smaller settlements. On the way to Teller, Willow and Rock Ptarmigan turned out to be easy to see. Bar-tailed Godwit, Northern Wheatear, and Eastern Yellow Wagtail were three of my most wanted-to-see. What we didn’t see at Teller was the sea ice that should have been along the seashore but instead was out to sea with Spotted Seals in the heat shimmers.

On Kougarok Road, dreary, wet weather didn’t dampen the bright colors of two brilliant Bluethroats, one of those Asian species that also breeds in Alaska. Though it was with apprehension that we approached the hallowed hillside at mile 72 known as THE spot to see Bristle-thighed Curlew on the peninsula: it was shrouded in fog. Would we see the bird? COULD we see the bird? A group that was just leaving had seen one, but they had to walk a ways. Walking a ways is not easy on sloped, hillocked tundra, akin to ambling over wet bowling balls. Forrest was not deterred. He had ALWAYS seen curlews, even if the group had to search for hours, but, he admitted, he had never searched in the rain. Water flowed down the narrow, uphill path carved by birders before us to the closest spot for curlews.

When we reached the top we were unable to see far, but seemingly from afar a haunting whistle pierced the fog. And then there it was! A large shorebird with a decurved bill. Even through the mist we clearly saw its buff rump, confirming our curlew. It was all downhill from there, literally, not figuratively.

Now let’s do the numbers. Of the 115 species seen, 25 were life birds for Sam and 12 for me. Also 8 life butterflies and 7 life mammals (including grizzly bear). Plus the fourth warmest winter on record, a 40% decline in sea ice cover, and 98% of the state’s glaciers are shrinking. From our static snapshot we couldn’t tell anything was wrong. Only through the long-term lens is climate change glaringly obvious. Yes, Alaska is a strange state to us of the Lower 48, but what kind of state will it be in 40+ years?