



Newsletter

Winter is here and marks the end of the year for the Gros Morne Beach Watch program. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to the program in our first year. In particular we would like to extend a very special thank you to all the volunteers who have been out walking our beaches collecting information and who are making a great contribution to the stewardship of our coasts. We hope you all take away special experiences that have strengthened your connection with our natural environment.



Allison Eaton, manager of the Bonne Bay Marine Station, inspecting a Blue Shark that washed up on Western Brook Beach

In total 29 families and groups including 38 individuals participated in Gros Morne Beach Watch this year. These volunteers monitored 27 beaches from May to November. Through their efforts many interesting and useful observations have been recorded. For example approximately 40 European green crabs were observed in the Bonne Bay area, tar balls were detected at Lobster Cove, and various fish including blue shark, bluefin tuna, Atlantic saury, and flounder were reported. Observers also found carcasses of six seals, as well as birds such as the Northern Gannet (6),



European Green Crab collected near Norris Point

Herring Gull (3), and Great Black Backed Gull (3). While these are all important observations none of these wildlife mortalities are cause for immediate concern. Rather they will serve as an important baseline should a more disastrous event occur or if numbers of wildlife mortalities or the incidence of oil pollution gradually increases over time.

While information gathered by beach watch members is important for understanding the health of our coasts, this program is also aimed at building stewardship and knowledge. In particular our team of volunteers includes many children who are learning the importance of



Great Black-backed Gull (Doris Sheppard photo)

conservation and volunteering while also improving their



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understanding of the natural World. These individuals are making their own important contributions too. For example, Connor Taylor was extremely observant in finding European Green crab carapaces in Norris Point this summer. Shortly after his diligent observations staff from the Bonne Bay Marine Station also found live green crabs in the same area.

Gros Morne Beach Watch says goodbye to Tracy Shears

For the past year Tracy Shears, who normally works for the Fisheries and Oceans Canada, has been taking part in an exchange program with Parks Canada. As you know one of her main activities during this time has been to spearhead the development of the Gros Morne Beach Watch program. However the time has come for her to return to her regular duties and her leadership of the beach watch program will be sadly missed. We would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her hard work and look forward to her continued participation in the program.



Since Tracy will no longer be with us Morgan Anderson will be taking over the operation of the Beach watch program in future. Morgan has worked at Gros Morne National Park for several years and undoubtedly is well known to many of you. Contact information for Morgan and the other program coordinators is provided at the end of this newsletter.

Species Spotlight: Dovekie



Dovekie photographed in front of the Bonne Bay Marine Station in late December of this year

Known to most Newfoundlanders as Bull Birds, Dovekies are regular visitors to the Gros Morne Coast during winter. These hardy little auks breed primarily in Greenland then migrate south to winter on the Grand Banks and all around the coast of Atlantic Canada. Dovekies are small, weighing about 150 grams, and eat a diet consisting primarily of crustaceans as well as some small mollusks and fish. They catch these by diving to depth of up to 35 meters and either picking them off the bottom or ambushing from below as they “fly” back towards the surface. Staying warm in cold water takes a lot of energy for a small bird though, and per gram of body weight Dovekies burn more than 40 times as much energy as a human. That’s a lot of copepods!

While still abundant Dovekies are highly vulnerable to oil pollution. Even a small patch of oil will let ice-cold seawater enter a Dovekie’s thick layer of insulating down causing hypothermia that kills it in minutes. Indeed they are the second most common oiled seabird found on beaches in eastern Newfoundland and tens of thousands may die from oiling in our waters each year.



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Beach Watch during winter?

We look forward to a successful season of monitoring again in our second year. While our regular beach watch program will resume in Spring, if you are hardy and walk our beaches during winter we encourage you to complete your survey data sheets then too. Winter is a critical time for species living along our coasts, and in particular is the time at which birds are most vulnerable to oil pollution. In the interim if you have any data sheets to return or any questions or suggestions, please feel free to contact any of the following program coordinators:

Morgan Anderson: 709.458.3567
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