

As I'm falling farther behind, Darlene, our trusty field program manager, reiterates, "Remember, no stragglers will be left behind." Well, that's reassuring. The alternate "hard" hike up Saddleback Mountain would not tolerate stragglers. Just what would they do? Put them out of their misery? Faye and I could just see it now: Shoot 'em, strip 'em, and toss 'em over the edge. All their belongings go on eBay. What a way to finance the next ABA Convention, in Lafayette!

But I digress. Now I am huffing and puffing like the big bad wolf in the *Three Little Pigs*. My chest is heaving not from lusting after the Bicknell's, but from basic lack of oxygen! Bottom line: I can't breathe! Bob, the other leader—the nice leader—is smart and has ski poles. He assures me and Mary Beth (another laggard) that if we just take ten steps and rest, so be it! Inch by inch, step by step, slowly we plod onward and upward. As friendly as Bob appeared, I was nonetheless afraid that those ski polls could and would be used as—gasp—cattle prods. Yikes! Nothing like a bit of fear to motivate one up this treacherous mountain.

Now what? Is that ladder-like obstacle before me going, well, up? Is it the Stairway to Heaven? Or is it Hell? All I know is that it is not level, and it is not downhill. Then, if that weren't enough, after scrambling up several of those ladders, there before us are *giant* stone steps, all 200 of them! Don't look up, just don't look up! "You can do it," those wonderful Winter Wrens were singing. Singing encouragement all during the trial, er, all along the trail. And let's not forget the Ovenbirds who yell encouragement: "Teacher, teacher, teacher, you can do it!" How do they

know I am a teacher? And how do they know I can do it? Step by step! Step by agonizing step, all uphill. Up, up, up. "Ten steps and rest," the cattle prodder suggests again. I babble, "Ten steps and rest! Ten steps and rest!"

And then finally, can it be: voices? Ah, I have made it and now I join up with my fellow Bicknell groupies, already in position and taping in this elusive thrush. Secretly, all I can think is, "How will I get down from here?" Come, little bird, please fly to us. I have come so far and have actually succeeded where I thought I would die. Ah, there comes a thrush-like bird now. It just streaked by! But did it show itself? Did it flash by, not giving us a satisfying look? Did it hide from us, skulking in the underbrush, going "Heh, I don't think so!" Yes, it did all of those things. We taped and waited, taped and waited, and waited as good little birders do since they are such patient people! Sigh, the little bugger never did show itself again. But we did have a wonderful consolation: a Spruce Grouse feeding in a tree—a female, and a lifer! We girls have to stick together.

We throw in the towel and start our descent. Step by slow step we go down. Down those 200 stone steps that really do lend themselves to an embarrassing somersault into Hell. Now, that would be a pretty sight. "You can go around me if you want," I offered to my much fitter friends behind me. "If I fall, you would have to carry me out of here." But to that they countered, "Oh, don't you know?—They don't carry anyone down this mountain, they just drag them out." I could just see it now: Bump, bump, bump, finally knocking some sense into my head. All in all, the worst was over and now pure heaven on Earth, this Moose Head Trail.



The view from the summit. Big Moose Mountain, Maine; 25 June 2006. © Doris Kretschmer.

Warblers and birds abound. Do I hear civilization? Yes!

Now that we are at the end of our most excellent adventure and safely in the van, I have to admit that maybe Ted Floyd was right about his silly theory of 2 miles in 16 minutes, or was it 14? Perhaps my story will inspire others to get in shape and not have to endure their own private Survivor Hell as I did.

But as I see it, birding is not just about seeing birds. It's about having a goal and going after it, no matter what. No matter if someone says you have to run so many miles. No matter if you're so tired you can't take another step. No matter if you feel threatened by a cattle prod every inch of the way, and no matter that you just didn't get a good look at that blasted Bicknell's Thrush! Thanks, Ted, Darlene, Bob, ABA, and all who helped me create my own little Survivor Hell Story.

I'm waiting, Hollywood!

— **Rhio Reigh, Willette**
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

The Young Birder Track at the 2006 ABA Convention in Bangor included three full-day field trips: Baxter State Park, Machias Seal Island, and Reid and Popham Beach State Parks. On Wednesday, the young birders traveled to Baxter State Park. While walking along the Roaring Brook Trail, we came to a small pond. A mother moose and her calf stood in the water, eating underwater plants. Another moose, a young male, slowly and methodically worked his way toward us along the edge of the pond. Near the opposite shore, a family of Common Goldeneyes floated by. Evening Grosbeaks called from the sides of conifer-covered mountains. A Broad-winged Hawk soared overhead, whistling shrilly. Whenever I think of Maine's boreal forests, I will remember this scene.

Later in the day, along the Nesowadnehunk Road, we suddenly found ourselves being vigorously scolded by a pair of Boreal Chickadees. As we watched them bouncing around by the edge of the road, I saw one dart into a nest hole in a birch stump. During the course of a few minutes, the chickadees made many trips to the nest hole, taking turns scolding us and bringing insects to their young. This was a great way to find a life bird, and another highlight of a wonderful trip.

— **Jeffrey Roth, Age 16**
SOUTHBOROUGH, MASSACHUSETTS

A few in our group birding the Maine University Experimental Forest saw a Virginia Rail cross the road shortly after our field trip leader Paul Lehman had passed the spot.



Willetes Rhio Reigh (left) and Faye McAdams Hands (right) at the summit. *Big Moose Mountain, Maine; 25 June 2006.* © Mary Beth Hunt.

Learning what happened, Paul retreated to the place, situated birders on the far side of the road, and called to the Rail. *And it came!* The Virginia Rail crossed “leisurely” to its original hiding place in the sodden grass. What a treat. And we all got to see it.

— **Marvin B. Woolf**
BOULDER, COLORADO

Linda Hildebrand, of Frederick, Maryland, taught me, her husband, Frank Schaff, a lesson in the value of a good wife when she pulled me from a chat fest at the back of the group to look at scope views of a Spruce Grouse. This sighting, my target bird of the whole trip, gave me 680 in the lower 48.

— **Frank Schaff**
FREDERICK, MARYLAND

When I returned home from the convention, I had new birds on my life list, had seen new places, met new people, learned new things, and had a new collection of insect bites. When non-birding family, friends, and co-workers heard about the early rises and saw the numerous insect bites all over my arms, they responded by asking, “That was a vacation?” You bet it was.

— **Mike Fialkovich**
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

It was very satisfying to have people on my trip get a life bird. Although the King Eider was a lifer for many participants, it was particularly nice when a number of people from other regions had life birds in the form of some of our more common local species.

— **Bill Townsend**
BAR HARBOR, MAINE



Many field trips had close encounters with moose. *Baxter State Park, Maine; 21 June 2006.* © Adam Nisbett.

Thanks for the opportunity to contribute some ABA Convention thoughts. I have been trying to think of something witty and funny, but I just keep coming up with a very “feel good” sensation about having 600 dedicated birders come to the town—almost a city—of Bangor. It was a huge logistical challenge to house, transport, and manage all of these people, and from all comments that I heard from participants, it was a great time. After our bus snafu on the first morning, everything seemed to run well. Maine has so many different habitats and ecosystems that support all kinds of bird life in varying backdrops of beautiful scenery. And to see moose and bears along with the birds was an added highlight. So from the top of Saddleback Mountain where the Bicknell’s Thrush was seen (teed up on a spruce, no less) to the stern of the *Friendship V* catamaran where the fish guts and herring oil flowed to attract the pelagic birds, I thank everyone for their participation in the 2006 ABA Convention.

— Margi Huber
FALMOUTH, MAINE

It was 4:30 a.m. on the second ABA field trip day and I knew it was going to be memorable for everyone. I was very nervous that morning because I was about to step on a bus that contained 45 Century Club members anxious to find all of their life birds on Mount Desert Island! Also on board the bus would be Pete Dunne and Victor Emanuel, two of the most important birders of all time.

Struggling to wake up and finding words and thoughts difficult, I settled into my seat for the trip to the island and tried to imagine all of the birds that we might see that day. After picking up long-time ABA member and co-leader Bill Townsend, we were off to Seawall to find the King Eider, a potential lifer for almost everyone. As we approached Seawall the first bus was already there but I noticed that everyone was just sort of milling about. I thought to myself, “It appears that they have not yet found the bird.” At that point it was the competition that so many of us love about birding. Who can find the King Eider first? The pressure on me was that Pete and Victor were right behind me so I needed to work fast. I set up my scope (a Bushnell Spacemaster; sorry, Pete), looked at a group of eiders, and said, “Here is the King Eider right here.” At that moment I realized a dream. I found an important bird before Pete Dunne and Victor Emanuel!

— Michael J. Good
BAR HARBOR, MAINE

I had a great time at the ABA Convention in Bangor! The beautiful Maine scenery and the cool weather made for a great vacation and a relief from the heat here in Georgia. We saw a lot of birds that appear here only briefly during migration, or don’t come this far south at all. Got good looks at Chestnut-sided and Bay-breasted Warblers, among others.

I got 20 life birds, mostly on the pelagic trip, which was



While waiting around for an opportunity to land safely at Machias Seal Island, the ABA’s young birders got nice looks at Sooty Shearwaters and **Wilson’s Storm-Petrels**. *Off contested Machias Seal Island, claimed by both Canada and the United States; 22 June 2006.* © Adam Nisbett.



Even the normally unflappable Matt Pelikan (left, green fleece) is impressed by this monster of a lobster held up by boat captain Andrew Patterson. The lobster was above the limit (duh), and released. *Off contested Machias Seal Island, claimed by both Canada and the United States; 22 June 2006.* © Lori Fujimoto.



Derek Lovitch (reposed, front) and Ted Floyd (reposed, rear), engaged in high-level thought, are plotting the next move for the young birders' pelagic trip. *Off contested Machias Seal Island, claimed by both Canada and the United States; 22 June 2006.* © Lori Fujimoto.

the highlight of the week, and my first pelagic trip. (I didn't get seasick, thanks to Dramamine.) Loved seeing the puffins, shearwaters, Wilson's Storm-Petrels, and fulmars. This was my second visit to Maine and my first time in Acadia National Park—a beautiful place. Such impressive

scenery, and so completely different from the coast of Georgia.

I came to the convention with the intention of buying a really good binocular, and on the field trips, I tried out two different binoculars from the exhibitors. On Saturday I bought my first really good binocular—a Brunton 8.5 × 43, in the Silent Auction. Thanks so much to Brunton and all the other optics companies for their sponsorship and donations; I'm really happy to own a fine binocular at a good price, as it will make birding so much more enjoyable.

The best bird of the week was a Virginia Rail at the Fields Pond Nature Center. After the leader, Paul Lehman, played a tape, we saw several birds flush and then zip by so fast they were only a blur; but then one rail actually walked across so slowly we got a

good look at all its features. I also enjoyed the Orono Bog boardwalk and was impressed by how similar it is to the Okefenokee Swamp here in Georgia—completely different plants, but a similar feeling and somewhat similar environmental conditions.

Thanks very much to all of the ABA staff and to all of the sponsors for putting on this convention. It was my second convention and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I even got to stay over in Bangor an extra day at Delta's expense when my flight got cancelled on Monday. Am looking forward to the upcoming convention in Lafayette.

— Steve Johnson
WEST POINT, GEORGIA

I am a new birder attending my first ABA Convention with my mom. This week I got more than 50 life birds. My mom has more than 600. I loved every second of this week—the people I met, the birds I saw, everything.

— Julie Robinson
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS