

# Shorebird workshop aims to improve your identification skills

by Todd Eskelin

Finally, after what seems like an endless winter, spring has actually driven the snow from our yards. The greenhouse supplies are flying off the shelves at the local stores, and everyone is uncovering their boats and trying to get those darn trailer lights working before their trip the next morning. As for me, I am dusting off the clubs and preparing for another fabulous season on the golf course.

This is also the time when the avid and enthusiastic bird watchers dig out their optics, start thumbing through their field guides and stare inquisitively at the bird in the back yard. It looks similar to a robin, same size as a robin, but then it makes this funny ringing call that is nothing like what the book describes. Eventually, after a few moments of study the light comes on. The memories are jogged and you belt out “Varied Thrush.” It is almost a euphoric state as you float above everyone in the room with your knowledge.

Your cloud rapidly dissipates when a friend says, “Hey, you know your birds. Lets head down to the Homer Shorebird Festival and watch the shorebird and waterfowl migration.” Horror overwhelms you at the thought of fumbling through the guide looking for a non-descript shorebird. “It is a purple sandpiper,” you proclaim. No, they are only found on the East Coast. “It looks like an Eskimo Curlew.” Guess again, they were last on this planet in 1963. If this is you, I have a proposition for you.

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge and the Kenai Watershed Forum are sponsoring the second annual shorebird identification workshop. This is a great opportunity for birders of all levels to watch an enlightening presentation on shorebird identification as well as a brief section on using your typical point and shoot

digital camera through a spotting scope to capture pictures of birds up close. The best part is that the entire program is free. The workshop starts with a classroom portion where we discuss the finer points of how to actually identify that short, squatty, long legged, grey bird, with a long bill. After that we will break up into smaller groups and head out to the field with 4 prominent birders from the local area where we can apply some of the skills discussed in the classroom. The program will be on Wednesday May 10<sup>th</sup> and Saturday May 13<sup>th</sup>. The programs will be very similar, but there is no guarantee that the same birds will be spotted both days. Attendees are welcome to attend both sessions.

Last year we were able to spot 14 different shorebird species while out on the field trips. With the late migration this year we are hoping to add a couple more species. There are also ample opportunities to ask the experts questions about other groups of birds like waterfowl and songbirds. Please RSVP with Josselyn Burke at the Kenai Watershed Forum if you are interested in attending. Call Josselyn at 260-5449 or email her at [josselyn@kenaiwatershed.org](mailto:josselyn@kenaiwatershed.org).

This is your chance to broaden your skills and ease that helpless feeling you get when the identification of an entire group of birds eludes you. Please remember this program is aimed at birders of all skill levels. We learn through teaching and one is never too old to learn.

*Todd Eskelin is a Biological Technician at the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. He specializes in birds and has conducted research on songbirds in many areas of the state. Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*