

# The game is on

by Todd Eskelin

There is a secret competition going on in the woods and swamps around the Kenai Peninsula. Only a handful of players are playing and when all is said and done, there is no winner. It all started when I went to Homer on October 20, 2007 to look for a Cedar Waxwing that had been reported at a residence out East End Road. Yes, that was before gas prices reached \$4.00 per gallon. I found three Cedars after a 1 1/2 hour search and wait on a cold blustery day. That was the 200<sup>th</sup> bird species I have documented on the Kenai Peninsula. There is already an Alaska 200 club, but I wondered if there are any other Kenai Peninsula 200 club members out there.

After a few posts to the various list serves I have determined there is at least one other out there and several that are closing in on the mark. What this also did was allow us to draw from all the local birders out there and compile a new checklist of all the birds ever seen on the Kenai Peninsula. So far we are up to 273 species. It is hard to believe that number is just for the Kenai Peninsula. If you want to get in on the game, you have to brush up on your birding skills and there is no better way than attending our local birding festival next weekend.

The Kenai Birding Celebration has passed a milestone in its brief but successful history. It began as a couple of people who wanted to help others get better at bird identification. Staff from the Kenai Watershed Forum, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, and Soldotna Birding Club organized an event that had classroom-style discussions and field trips so local birders could experience a shorebird festival without traveling and without the intimidation of “professional” birders.

Many birding festivals come and go. There is usually lots of good attention the first year or two and then things die off. This has not happened with the Kenai Birding Festival and in fact it has grown and continues to grow, marking the fourth year for this event. If I remember correctly we had about 25 people that first

year and last year we had over 60 people at most of the talks and field experiences. Fortunately, it is still small enough to ask that nagging question that you always thought was too silly to ask.

We also recognized that the kids of our community are our future and the future of birding, so last year we added a kid’s component and this year it has been expanded. We received tremendous response from the idea of having a bird related art competition. How better to understand what kids see than asking them to draw, paint, photograph or sculpt their impressions. The kids have submitted incredible pieces and this will likely be an annual event. Judging will be done by the public, so come over to the Kenai Visitor and Cultural Center and show your support for their efforts.

Also new on the schedule this year, is a birding float trip on the Upper Kenai River. Each boat will have an expert birder on board to help with identification and since we are going in drift boats, there is limited space. There is a fee for the float trip and advance registration is required, so contact the Kenai Watershed Forum or check out their web page at the end of this article. How better to hone your waterfowl skills than to float on the river with your own personal guide?

The Kenai Birding Celebration will be May 2, 3, and 4. Come to one event or come to several; all ages are welcome and encouraged. For a complete list of activities check out the Kenai Watershed Forum web page at: <http://www.kenaiwatershed.org/shorebird.html> You may also call the Watershed Forum at (907) 260-5449.

*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 Previous Refuge Notebook columns can be viewed on the Web at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.*