



Snow Spangled Banner



Sail Rock, Maine is the easternmost point in the lower forty-eight states

Brunswick Wildlife A Birding Trip That Never Happened

Any reminder of Patriot Day or “9/11” as most of us call it also reminds me of a birding trip that was not to be. We remember where we were when.

On the night of September 10, 2001 I flew to Lubbock, Texas to work for a client. The next morning, I rounded the corner into the hotel’s breakfast room and found my colleagues and others riveted to the television watching live video of the first tower and soon to watch a plane hit the second tower. A scene none of us will ever forget.

Our hearts were not in our work that week so we hung on waiting for the airports to reopen. My experiences and grief pale in comparison to the suffering and grief of those who died and their families...and the heroes who stepped forward. My sense of loss and grief, however, was not trivial...all Americans experienced a profound loss that day.

By Thursday, I decided to drive my rental car the seventeen hundred miles back to the Raleigh/Durham airport. A colleague from Chicago also decided to drive home. I dropped her off at the Oklahoma City airport’s rental car facility to pick up a car.

Seeing the heavily armed National Guard troops patrolling the ghostly airport was a shock! It was a tangible, real world experience unlike the televised reports.

I always took my binoculars on business trips, finding time before or after work to do a little birding. The Texas Panhandle is one of my favorite birding locations. The binoculars stayed in my briefcase.

Part of my rationale for driving back to Raleigh was that I could stop at a few National Wildlife Refuges just off I40 along the way home. The birding stops just didn't happen.

There were banners and flags draped from most overpasses and heavy equipment dealers had parked cranes bearing huge American flags near the interstate. As I drove I listened to the memorial service led by Billy Graham from the Washington National Cathedral.

Though we were isolated in our metal bubbles, there was a growing realization that many of us were driving rental cars home. No matter where you pulled off the interstate, you spotted other rental cars with out-of-state license plates...with drivers sharing a silent state of grief.

I stopped only for a few hours of sleep just across the river in Memphis. Then I pushed as hard as possible to get home...needing to be home...to grieve at home.

John Ennis