



# THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

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## Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week at Hog Island

*by Johanna Klein*

I first learned about Hog Island in the spring of 2012. It was embedded in an email along with other opportunities to learn about bringing nature into the classroom. The title hooked me right away: Sharing Nature: An Educators Week. Having just moved to Kittery from New Hampshire, I was in love with my new state. I had been visiting Maine my whole life, but now it was finally “home.”

I looked up the program schedule: birding . . . nature journaling . . . marine life study . . . with each activity I was more and more intrigued. Then I looked at the price, yikes! As a beginning teacher with a new mortgage it was outside of my budget. I noticed there was a scholarship so there was hope! Alas, I was past the deadline. I promised myself I would apply for the scholarship next year and marked it on my calendar. “Find out about Hog Island” was among my new year’s resolutions.

In my essay for my application I spoke about my grandmother who was an elementary teacher and loved nature, especially birds. She passed away when I was in college. One of my deepest regrets is that I wasn’t more interested as a teenager in what she had to teach me. Fortunately my father is also a “bird nerd” and he takes great pleasure in the many ways I remind him of her.

When I received the email that I was the recipient of the York County Audubon Society scholarship, I literally jumped for joy. It was well worth the wait. Hog Island is an amazing place with a devoted group of individuals who run the programs. It is a wooded island only a short boat ride from the peninsula, but it feels like you are entering another world. Trails lead you around the island with amazing views of the Muscongus Bay. Right behind the dining hall is an osprey nest with a live webcam that you can watch on [explore.org](http://explore.org). At night there are barely any lights visible on the main land. You truly feel removed from the mainstream and reconnected to nature.

I went to school for Environmental Education and I can honestly say that I learned more in my five days there than I learned in entire graduate courses. It draws people from all over the country, which allowed me to connect with a diverse group of educators. One camper, Karen First, a kindergarten teacher from Boston, connected me with the Monarch Teacher Network. In a few weeks our class will be getting monarch caterpillar eggs and my first graders will learn about their migration. An instructor, Anne James-Rosenberg from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, shared Citizen Scientist resources like eBird, Project Feeder Watch, Nest Watch and the Great Backyard Bird Count. Another instructor, Sherri York, an artist and author, gave workshops on drawing in nature and making journals. We also took a boat ride to Eastern Egg Rock where the Puffin Project started, and attended a talk by Steve Kress, its founder.



Now that I am back in the “mainstream,” I have taken many of the lessons I learned on Hog Island with me. I have big plans for incorporating birds into my general curriculum. We are only a week into school but already my students can identify feeder birds in our area. Fortunately, our school already had a “fairy circle,” a small garden, and I have added a bird feeder for year round viewing. Children are naturally drawn to and care about nature, especially animals, so it is a great way to invest them in their education. Already I have plans to go back to Hog Island as a volunteer for next year’s Educators Week. I cannot thank the York County Audubon enough for giving me such an incredible opportunity.