



THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

Summer 2013

A Few Words from the President - *Summer?*

by Paul F. Wells

In my previous column I noted that spring was late in coming this year. Now summer seems to be playing the same sort of coy game. In spite of a brief spate of unseasonably hot weather earlier in the month, as I write in mid-June we're still getting a preponderance of cold, wet weather, with daytime highs barely venturing past 60. Ah well, we're Mainers, aren't we? We can just put on another layer of clothing when we venture out to our favorite birding spots to check on late migrants and interesting visitors.

In early May I had the pleasure of representing the York County Audubon Society at the Spring Chapter Congress of Maine Audubon. These congresses are twice-yearly events in which leaders from the seven constituent chapters of the state-wide organization meet to discuss matters of common interest and, yes, to brag to each other about our chapters' accomplishments. This congress was held waaaaay Down East in Lubec, the easternmost point in the United States. The gathering was hosted by the Fundy Chapter of Maine Audubon, which has the distinction of being the smallest of the regional chapters. As still a relative newcomer to Maine, this was my first opportunity to visit this part of the state. Make no mistake—it's a long haul up there! It was eye-opening to realize that had I gone in the opposite direction from York County I would have ended up nearly in New York City.

It was a pleasure to get to know some of the other folks from around the state, and to share stories of life in our respective trenches. It was not too surprising to learn that others are grappling with

many of the same issues as we in YCAS are: how to attract and keep members; how to get more of the general membership involved in chapter activities; and how best to communicate with our members in a rapidly evolving media environment. This last topic occupied a good portion of the afternoon's discussion time. Do we all continue our print newsletters or move to an electronic format? Are newsletters even still a relevant tool these days or is an active website a more effective means of getting out the word to people about chapter activities? How many of our folks live in areas that have limited or no Internet access? What do our members expect in the way of outreach from the chapter? We reached no earth-shattering conclusions about the best way to proceed, but it was heartening to learn that others share the same challenges that we do. It was beneficial to get the discussion underway, and no doubt the conversation will continue in the future.

However, it is a conversation in which I will not be taking part; this is my final column as President of York County Audubon. For a variety of mostly personal reasons I have decided to step aside after a year (and a year as Vice President). I am pleased to let you know that Bill Grabin will be taking my place; indeed, by the time you read this the change will already have been formalized as part of the business at the Annual Meeting on June 18. Serving on the YCAS Board has been a valuable experience, but I look forward to being able to devote increased time and energy to matters that are more central to my life and work. Perhaps I'll run into some of you out birding—I certainly hope so!

Thank You YCAS Retiring Officers and Board Members! And Welcome to the New

YCAS has been blessed with many dedicated Volunteers who have served for years in leadership positions. Without their individual and collective contributions, YCAS would not be the vital and relevant organization that it is. And so it is with a huge sense of gratitude to each of them that we say thank you as they depart their respective positions.

Marie Jordan served as president for two years after several years as a director on the board. Since then she has been our chapter representative to Maine Audubon. She has also been the compiler for the Biddeford/Kennebunk Christmas Bird Count and assisted with *The Harlequin* newsletter including providing photographs and assisting with preparations for mailing. Further, she has presented many programs, not only for our monthly speaker series, but also to service organizations throughout York and Cumberland Counties.

Julie Suchecki has been key to keeping us all connected in a variety of ways. She has done the lion's share of *The Harlequin* for over 13 years, setting up and laying out the articles, working with the printer, and preparing for mailings. She was also manager of the web site and the primary source of email alerts for unusual bird sightings until Maine birds and ebird were up and running.

As secretary, Pat Sanborn has provided efficient and timely reports of meetings and chapter business in her quiet and unassuming way. She has been a regular and reliable contributor of book reviews and the etymology column to the newsletter. And she was the one who regularly took the newsletter to the post office and negotiated the perils of bulk mailings!

Lyman Page worked as YCAS' liaison with the York Land Trust in the acquisition of Highland Farm and the development of a management plan that incorporated bird habitat and birding trails to provide viewing opportunities. He has also helped with a variety of chapter activities including the Birding Challenge.

And finally Paul Wells has led us this past year as president, helping to forge closer ties with Maine Audubon. He has also endeavored to move us along in the digital age.

YCAS is a great organization because of what each of these leaders has contributed. We would not be where we are without you. We will miss you but know that you are nearby and still prepared to help out in other ways. Thank you!

Fortunately, we welcome Ken Janes as a new board member. Ken is an up and coming birder with a great eye for photographing them. He presented our May program, giving us just a taste of the many talents that he will bring to us. We are grateful for his willingness to serve in a leadership capacity. So welcome Ken!



YCAS OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

Bill Grabin, President	985-3342
Anne Watson, Vice President	251-1135
Linda Eastman, Treasurer	286-9586
Monica Grabin, Secretary	985-3342
Ellen Doubleday, Membership	967-4486
June Ficker, Education	967-3258
Doug Hitchcox, Field Trips	671-0185
Ken Janes, Director	967-2955
Pat Moynahan, Birding Challenge	284-5487
Scott Richardson, Web Manager	698-4461
Joanne Stevens, Volunteer Coordinator	883-6475
Bob Watson, Publicity	251-1135
Marian Zimmerman, Birding Trail	284-5487

The Harlequin, the newsletter of the York County Audubon Society, is published spring, summer, fall, and winter. Autumn deadline: September 10, 2013.

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

and visit us on Facebook!



The Harlequin is printed on 50% post-consumer recycled paper.

Birding Patch: Kennebunk Plains *by Marian Zimmerman*

The Kennebunk Plains, jointly owned by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy, is a glacial marine delta consisting of open grasslands and adjacent Pitch Pine/Scrub Oak woodlands. The grasslands are maintained by controlled burns to keep the habitat in an early successional stage which, in turn, supports flora and avifauna found nowhere else in the state. The location of associated species may vary from year to year, depending upon which portions of the Plains have been most recently burned. There are two main sections: the north on Route 99 and the south on McGuire Road.

Healthy populations of Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows as well as Upland Sandpipers breed on the Plains. Other grassland species include Eastern Meadowlarks, Bobolinks, Savannah and Field Sparrows, Eastern Towhees, and Brown Thrashers. Some years, including this summer, a Clay-colored Sparrow has been present. American Kestrels frequent the plains, particularly in spring and early summer while Whip-poor-wills can be heard calling at dawn and dusk. The wooded margins support a variety of warblers, especially Prairie Warblers, as well as Scarlet Tanagers, Least and Great Crested Flycatchers. Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos and small passerines can be found near the pond in the north section off of Route 99.



Mid-May to mid-July is the best season to bird the Plains by walking the dirt roads and listening and watching carefully. It is easiest to hear the soft buzzy calls of the sparrows early in the morning before traffic intensifies. Remember to stay on



the roads as the grassland habitat is sensitive and the eggs and young of these ground nesters can be crushed by walking off the road. In August, after the young are fledged, blueberry picking is a popular activity.

Directions: From Route 1 in Kennebunk, take Route 9A west for .3 miles. At Route 99, turn right and continue for 4.2 miles where the Plains occur on both sides of the road. There are small parking lots on both sides of the road. To access the southern section of the Plains, continue on Route 99 for another mile. Take a sharp left onto McGuire Road where the Plains open up after a short stretch of wooded, private land. The Plains are open year round, free of charge. There are no facilities.

Moonbird Tracks Red Knot B95

I've been reading *Moonbird* by Phillip Hoose, a Portland author of national note. This is a book for young adults that all of us can benefit from reading. It follows the hypothetical journeys of the now famous Red Knot, B95, on his extraordinary migration each year from Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic Circle where he breeds. Hoose covers a lot of ground in the book--from details on knot physiology to profiles of some of the many researchers and volunteers trying to save this species. By now the environmental challenges that Red Knots face are well known. What this impressive short book adds is the larger picture, helping the reader understand how the birds manage as well as they do and what is necessary for their survival. First banded in 1995, B95 has lived for an amazing 19 years and possibly even longer. Hoose's book is a well written, moving account of its story. -Pat Sanborn

Factors Affecting Bird Nesting Success

by Doug Hitchcox

Incredibly, most of our resident birds and returning migrants have already accomplished what most of us try to do in a lifetime. They've moved around to find a perfect piece of land, they've found a mate, built their house, and even raised and fledged their young! What is even more amazing, they will do it again next year and likely every year for the rest of their lives. But it is becoming harder. There are many factors impacting our birds: short-term factors like the current weather and long-term factors like a warming climate.

2013 was an especially hard summer for a number of birds nesting in our area. The high amounts of rainfall through June made it very difficult for them because the wet, colder temperatures may require birds to spend more time incubating. It was also hard for birds to feed their young because of less food availability, especially the protein rich insects that babies need.

The high accumulation of rainfall combined with the 'super-moon' caused an unusually high tide at the end of June. A 'super-moon' event, better known as perigee, occurs when the moon is at its closest point to the earth and therefore has a stronger gravitational pull. This produces higher tides that wash out many of the nests of our salt marsh-nesting species, like saltmarsh sparrows and Willets. Both build their nests low in the spartina grasses covering salt marshes.

There are also several long-term trends adversely impacting our nesting birds. Both a warming climate and over fishing in the Gulf of Maine are causing the quantity and quality of fish in our waters to diminish. This had an especially hard impact on our nesting seabirds. Terns and Atlantic Puffins rely on an abundance of small fish like sand lance



(*Ammodytes* sp.) or herring (*Clupea harengus*) to feed their chicks. This year puffins were instead observed bringing in a different kind of fish that was more abundant: the butterfish (*Poronotus triacanthus*). Butterfish are too large for puffin chicks to eat and this caused wide starvation.

These are just a couple examples of the perils our birds faced this year but it is getting worse. The extreme tides will be nothing compared to the impact rising sea levels will have on our salt marsh-nesting species. Where will the Willets go? The change in fish in the Gulf of Maine could take years or perhaps decades to repair. Can our puffins wait that long?

My intention for this article was not to cause widespread depression. Rather, I want spark a flame for change. There are endless ways that you can make a difference but awareness needs to be the first step. Now try to think of the ways you can help our nesting birds for next year when they try again to build a house, find a mate, and raise their young, all on their own. Here are some hints: volunteer for an Important Bird Area survey, buy shade-grown coffee, eat a more sustainable fish, or reduce your carbon footprint. Every change is important and they all add up for the good. Together we can make a difference.