



THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

Spring 2014



Eastern Screech Owl: Photo by Greg Hume Red-bellied Woodpecker: Photo by Marie Jordan

Birds “From Away” at a Feeder Near You

By Doug Hitchcox

There is a joke among birders that field guides are updated so often as a scam to get them to keep spending money on the newest versions. The argument is that the birds are not changing but our understanding of families and relationships within birds is frequently changing. For example, with the latest in genetic testing, who knew that falcons were more closely related to parrots than hawks?! While a new taxonomic order may not be a good enough reason to upgrade to the latest in printed field guides, there is another more relevant change occurring: range expansion (or contraction).

Flipping through the pages of an old Peterson

Field Guide to the Birds, there are a few species that are becoming more and more common in Maine. Some of these were considered rare or accidental even within the past decade.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers are one of my favorite examples. About six years ago, when I was just getting into birding, I remember a morning at Evergreen Cemetery in Portland. From across the back ponds someone yelled “RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER!” and anyone in earshot went running. Every week Maine Audubon’s RBA (Rare Bird Alert) listed the sightings of these woodpeckers, most of these reports restricted to York and Cumberland Counties. Fast forward to

2013 and I had a pair nesting in my yard in Hollis and reports from across the coastal areas of the state.

Carolina Wren was described in the old Peterson Guide as being “resident in Rhode Island, south.” Since then, they have been expanding their range northward, especially along the coast. In 2013 one was even recorded singing all the way in Presque Isle. It is unlikely that one will be able to survive the winter that far north but that was also the thought when they first arrived in southern Maine.

Northern Cardinal is an easily recognized species that should be visiting everyone’s feeders. My parents often remind me that when they were growing up they seldom saw any cardinals, and if they did it might only be a couple times per year. Now they are everywhere! According to eBird.org, throughout York County, Northern Cardinals are being reported on 25-40% of all checklists being submitted. Furthermore, in areas between Biddeford and Wells, where there is an abundance of humans and thus feeders, this number jumps over 40% and in some places reaches 100%. There are dozens of reports from the past year of 15+ cardinals being reported from a single yard in York County.

The Eastern Screech-Owl is a charismatic little pint-sized owl that we should expect to see marching into southern Maine. There are few enough confirmed records of this species that all reports are still being reviewed by the Maine Bird Records Committee but it won’t take long for this to change. As soon as you cross over the Piscataqua River into New Hampshire, birders report being able to find ‘into the double-digit’ screech-owls in a single night. In 2011 there were at least three birds found around Kittery during the York County Christmas Bird Count. One has to wonder if the lack of reports in Maine is due to the lack of birders or especially the lack of effort at night. If you live in southern Maine, try putting a large birdhouse out and let us know if one shows up.

In contrast, there are a few species that are less common on the Maine landscape today than in years past. Evening Grosbeaks are an irruptive species in Maine. In some years, typically driven by a lack of food in their northern range, they head south in search of sustenance. During the 1980s a breakout of spruce budworm, a great food source, allowed Evening Grosbeak populations to swell. Unfortunately, in the past 30 years their population has fallen by over 50% across their range. What was previously a common bird at our feeders is now a rare visitor. It appears we may be headed into another budworm outbreak. Yet with foresters now more prepared to manage it, we can only wonder how grosbeaks will be impacted and if we will ever see those large flocks again.

Doug Hitchcox is the Staff Naturalist for Maine Audubon. In 2011, he set the Big Year record for Maine with 314 bird species.



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Piping Plovers Have Returned And They Can Use Your Help

While its plaintive call is easily recognized, the six-inch-tall Piping Plover can be difficult to spot against a sandy backdrop. Viewed from a distance they can look like seaweed washed up onto the beach.

After wintering on beaches from North Carolina to Florida, and occasionally south to the Bahamas and West Indies, Piping Plovers migrate north to breed, some as far as Canada. Arriving in Maine by

early April, they remain until September, when they migrate south again for the winter. The Piping Plover's nest - or "scrape" - consists of a small indentation made in the sand above the high tide line and may be lined with seashell fragments or small stones. Sometimes the birds choose to shelter their nests under a tuft of vegetation.

During courtship, a male bird makes numerous scrapes before his mate chooses one in which to lay her clutch of four eggs. Usually, she will lay one egg each day or two, incubating the clutch only after laying the fourth egg. Piping Plover chicks hatch after approximately four weeks and are already covered in downy feathers and able to probe the sand and wrack line for invertebrates. They fledge (begin to fly) in 28-35 days and, if they are lucky, may live as long as fourteen years.

All beachgoers and beachfront landowners along the coast should be aware of nesting plovers, but particular caution is required at beaches where pairs are currently active, including Fortunes Rocks Beach (Biddeford), Goose Rocks Beach (Kennebunkport), Ogunquit Beach, Wells Beach and beaches in Kennebunk.

Piping plovers are listed as an endangered species. Plovers are vulnerable to natural predators, roaming pets, storms and human disturbance. Maine Audubon encourages beachgoers and landowners to reduce human-caused mortality of plovers by leaving your pets at home when you go to the beach, staying away from roped off plover areas and to watch where you are walking on the beach, to avoid stepping on nests.

These endangered birds need our help. Would you be willing to walk a beach and talk with other beach walkers about the Plover's plight? York County Audubon is looking for volunteers to spend a few hours a week walking the local beaches to protect the nesting habitat of Piping Plovers. You would be talking to others on the beach about the needs of these beautiful and endangered birds. In particular, walkers should be alerted to the effects that pets can have on plovers and other nesting shorebirds, and be aware of the local leash laws. Maine Audubon has offered to train volunteers on the birds' needs and what to say. If you're interested in this very worthwhile endeavor, please call Pat Moynahan at 284-5487. Thanks.

Native Plants for Wildlife: Blue Berries for Your Landscape by Ann Hancock

No, I'm not talking about blueberries, which can be a bit tricky to grow if your soil is not acid and lacks organic material. The subject is plants with blue berries, and these plants are all proven attractors for birds. They also support native insects, critical for our local breeding birds. Included are two shrubs, and a tree. All are very simple to grow if planted according to their preferences. If you have been thinking about incorporating some native species into your landscape, give one of these species a try. They are all available at area nurseries.

Viburnum dentatum: Arrowwood Viburnum. I'm really surprised more gardeners do not grow this shrub. It is almost trouble free and extremely winter hardy (something to remember after this year's Polar Vortex). The stems are smooth, straight and are said to have been used by Native Americans for arrow shafts. The leaves are a glossy mid green, and toothed on their margins. Flowering is in late May, with flat topped clusters which are a creamy white color. They have no fragrance. The resulting berries are bright blue and a favorite of birds. The shrub in our front yard is quickly harvested each year. I've mostly noticed bluebirds, catbirds and waxwings on ours but have also seen robins and mockingbirds feeding on them. On the weekly bird walks at Gilsland Farm, the arrowwood viburnum thicket adjacent to the south meadow is usually a hot spot in the fall, with many migrants feeding in the dense stand.



Bluebird on Arrowwood Viburnum: Photo by Bill Dunson



Pagoda dogwood berries: Photo courtesy of Powell Gardens.

This can be a large shrub; ultimate height may reach 10 feet. Fall leaf color of the straight species is yellow to greenish and not terribly exciting. However a dwarf cultivar called 'Blue Muffin' is listed as having red orange coloring. Arrowwood makes a great hedge or backdrop for a flower border. It is best grown in full sun but will tolerate partial shade. Any good garden soil suits it. It may need supplemental water during long periods of drought.

Viburnum cassinoides: Wild Raisin or Witherod. This is another great viburnum. It too has straight long stems, and glossy mid-green leaves, but the leaves are more oval and not toothed. Flowers are similar to Arrowwood viburnum with creamy white flat topped clusters. It is very hardy, rated zone 3, and has no serious disease issues. It is native to areas with moist soil but will thrive in ordinary garden soil if given sufficient water. Full sunlight results in the best flowering and fruit set.

The berries of Wild Raisin are its most ornamental attribute. They begin green, turning pink and then blue. A cluster of berries will have fruit in all stages of development, which makes each bunch like a basket of Easter eggs. Birds really love this fruit. After the most recent Audubon Pelagic, Marie Jordan and I went birding and were looking for Wood Ducks in the ponds at the back of the Bar Harbor HS property. As we were walking down the hill to the pond, I saw a very large Wild Raisin shrub by the side of the trail. It was just full of ripening berries, and overflowing with a variety of birds. Thrushes, catbirds, waxwings, a thrasher, and robins were all gorging on the fruit. This plant has good fall color, with orange to purple foliage. It can grow up to 12 feet so the straight species is not a plant for small landscapes.

Pagoda dogwood: Cornus alternifolia. Despite its oriental- sounding common name, the Pagoda Dogwood is a native of Maine. As its name implies, it has alternate leaves and branches which is the exception in a genus that otherwise has opposite leaves and/or branches. It is a hardier tree than the commonly planted Flowering Dogwood and found in more northerly locations. It is an understory tree with a layered habit, which led to its common name "Pagoda" dogwood. It does far better in a somewhat shady habitat; it is one of the best trees for growing beneath dense canopied trees such as Beech and Sugar Maple, and actually suffers if grown in full sun in exposed locations. The individual flowers are tiny, held in flat topped clusters that resemble Queen Anne's lace. The berries are deep blue with brilliant red pedicels, and are very decorative. However, they are relished by birds so the display does not last long! The fall color is very handsome, ranging from reds to reddish purple. This is one of the finest small native flowering trees for a shaded or partially shaded area. Just remember to water newly planted dogwoods consistently until established if you plant them beneath a large tree.

A native of Falmouth, Ann Hancock has worked with plants in one way or another all her life. She was the Horticulturist for the Judith DeLapa Perennial Garden at Michigan State University, and now splits her time between Michigan and Maine.

New Members:

Gary Asperschlager	Bar Mills
Paula Nadeau	East Waterboro
Kerry Waters	Kittery
Carl W. C. Beckman	West Newfield
Laura Benjamin and Mark Wartenberg	Hiram
Christy Bergland	Baltimore, MD
Shelley Larain	Kennebunk
Sandy Sherry	Buxton
Elizabeth D. Smith	Kennebunkport
Mike and Wanda Rodden	Lebanon
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon B. Stewart	Biddeford

Welcome Back:

Susan Higgins	Eliot
Larry F. Burkett	Saco
Andrew J. Dumsch	Saco
James P. Gloriant	York
David J. McGonigle	Concord, MA
Marie A. Pike	Buxton
Carol Carey	North Waterboro
David C. Hardy	Orlando, FL
Murray Swindell	Alfred

Winter Wildlife Day Report *by June Ficker*

February 20th dawned a bright sunny day with plenty of snow on the ground, most appropriate for the third annual Winter Wildlife Day, an event co-sponsored by the Wells Reserve, the Center for Wildlife and YCA. Eileen Willard and I set up our equipment around 9:30 and on the dot of opening at 10, adults and children poured into the Mather Auditorium. I had provided a mounted Snowy Owl for our "display." We had both Owl and Merlin silhouettes for the youngsters to cut out, supplied them with two suction cups and screws to install the black raptors on the outside of their windows to prevent window kills. Lucky break as I decided to have a few extras this year and we used every last one. CFW again delighted everyone with their "wildlife ambassadors." Over one hundred attended, with 40 borrowing snowshoes from Laudholm to explore! We'll see you again next February!

“I Don’t Know” or a Report on the Gull Workshop *by Pat Moynahan*

No matter how we measure it, our first Gull workshop, presented by Derek Lovitch, was a great success! In fact, it exceeded all our expectations. The event sold out, we stayed in our chairs well beyond the advertised length on Saturday, and stayed afield beyond the planned time on Sunday. We were all encouraged to admit that, at times, when looking at immature Gulls, “I don’t know what bird this is” is the only correct answer.

Twenty individuals registered for this first YCA Workshop. Thanks to Scott Richardson most registrations were computer generated, another first. Derek’s power point presentation showed us yearly plumages for our regularly occurring 3-5 year gulls. His quip-filled New Jersey style kept the audiences’ attention as he discussed plumage cycles, filoplumes, feather tracts, apical spots, windows, mirrors, and plumage progression.

On Sunday morning we met at the Back Bay of Portland and focused on drawing the Gulls close enough to identify. Derek supplied the stale cheese popcorn that did the trick. We identified all plumages of Herring, Ring-billed and Great-black Back Gull. We moved on to the Portland Fish Pier where we observed and discussed our Winter White-Wing Gull visitors, Glaucous and Iceland Gulls.

We were not “gulled out” and some went on to Westbrook to look for the “I do not know Gull” which we did not find. We did find a pair of Ring-neck ducks; however. You, the membership, made this workshop a success. Thank you!

We will continue to offer workshops. A Spring Warbler Workshop is listed in Upcoming Events and we are considering Sparrows as a topic this Fall. Keep checking our website for future listings. If you have any suggestions on other bird families to study or Field Trips to observe our birds, please contact Pat Moynahan or Doug Hitchcox.

Birding Patch: Duck Pond, Buxton *by Joanne Stevens*

Duck Pond is a small pond bordered by mixed woodlands with patches of marsh interspersed along the shoreline. While much of the year it supports avifauna widely occurring in York County, spring migration is a time when a few surprises may be found here.

Bank Swallow is one spring migrant that spends time here refueling on its way to breeding sites. Along with Tree and Barn Swallows, Bank Swallows crisscross the pond back and forth feeding on emergent insects. They magically appear in early-mid May, stay a few days to a week, and then vanish. While present, they are a wonderful study.

Spring migration also brings a variety of flycatchers, warblers, vireos, and other perching birds. Great Blue and Green Herons can be found in the shallow marsh areas. Belted Kingfishers can often be seen circling the perimeter of the pond. In 2009, a Least Bittern made Duck Pond its summer home and there was a report of a Common Moorhen that same year.

Following Berry Road up the hill to the south of the pond leads to open grasslands with wooded margins. Here there are often American Kestrels, Eastern Bluebirds, Bobolink, and a variety of sparrows.

Duck Pond is located in the southeast corner of Routes 202 and 22 in Buxton. It can be accessed from Route 202 by turning east on Pease Road and then north (left) onto Berry Road or from Route 22 by turning south onto Berry Road. There is a small boat launch area about 100 yards from Route 22 that offers good viewing possibilities.

While Duck Pond is not a birding destination to occupy your whole morning, it is well worth a spring visit to check on birds that may be hard to find elsewhere in York County.

***** Upcoming YCAS Events at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm *****



Saturday, May 3rd - 2 pm Warbler Workshop with Doug Hitchcox

Just in time for their spring arrival, Maine Audubon's Staff Naturalist Doug Hitchcox will hold a two hour workshop to teach you various techniques for identifying the gems of our forest: warblers. We will look at the diversity of the family, keys for identifying each species, and even spend time learning the songs and auditory cues to take your birding to the next level. Please check our website or Facebook page for additional information, including how to register for the workshop.

Friday May 16th - Saturday, May 17th - YCAS Birding Challenge (5 pm Friday through 5 pm Saturday)

Come one, come all! You're invited to join a team and participate in our fourteenth annual Birding Challenge. We are looking for team members, team captains, and fundraisers. In the past, we've been supported by many generous individual and business donors. In turn, we reinvest these funds in environmental education, conservation, and research projects within York County.

Our quest to find as many species as possible will begin at 5 pm on Friday, May 16 and end at 5 pm on Saturday, May 17, followed by our compilation get-together. While the compilation is at Laudholm, the counting can occur anywhere in York County. And you can join a team for all or just part of the 24 hour period. If you can't join a team, please consider making a donation.

Last year, we tallied 159 species; we hope to find more this year with the help of your eyes and ears. Please consider how you can join this important effort. Contact Pat Moynahan at 284-5487 or Linda Eastman at 286-9586 for more information.



Tuesday, May 20, 7pm - An Introduction to Wild Food Foraging with Josh

Fecteau. Are you interested in incorporating wild plant foods into your life but don't know where to start? In this presentation, naturalist, wild food forager and blogger Josh Fecteau will cover essential guidelines and tips for safe, successful and satisfying foraging in your backyard and beyond. He'll share photos of many of his favorite wild foods and bring a sampling of his preferred foraging books.



Tuesday, June 17 – Our Annual Meeting will be held this year at the Wells Reserve. Please join us for a short meeting at 6:45 pm to elect Officers and Directors, followed by a wonderful program at 7:15 pm:

Bird Songs by Monica Grabin. Bird songs? No, not the songs birds sing, the songs we sing about birds! From cuckoos to owls to ravens, birds have long been the subject of story and song in cultures throughout the world. Monica is a well-known, talented local musician. She will accompany herself on guitar and banjo in her presentation of an evening of songs and stories about birds, some of which you may know, and some of which might surprise you.

All YCAS events at Laudholm Farm are held in the Mather Auditorium.

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OR CURRENT RESIDENT

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

The genus name of our speedy swallow is from two Greek words: "tachys" or "swift" and "kineter" from "kino", meaning "to move." The species name is from the Latin, meaning "two-colored."

Maine Audubon Membership Form

Yes, I would like to join the Maine Audubon and the York County Chapter of Maine Audubon (this also includes membership in the National Audubon Society). I want to help promote environmental education and advocacy in our communities, and protect and conserve wildlife habitat. I understand that membership benefits include *Maine Audubon 's Habitat: The Journal of Maine Audubon*, *The Harlequin* newsletter, and discounts on field trips and tours, children's programs, and at Maine Audubon nature stores and Audubon sanctuaries nationwide. For a subscription to Audubon, the magazine of the National Audubon Society, please add \$10.

- Senior/Volunteer \$25 Individual \$35 Household \$45 Contributing \$65
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