



THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

Spring 2018

More Bad News, but Some Good News, too - by *Monica Grabin*

In March, YCA hosted a program by Dr. Kurk Dorsey, a professor of history at UNH, called *Of Mallards and Men, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918*. It was a wonderful program outlining the convoluted path that led to one of the first international conservation treaties ever enacted. Essentially, the Act protected all migratory birds from practices which were decimating their populations, such as the annual mass killing of Snowy Egrets so that their breeding plumes could adorn ladies' hats.

For 100 years, it has been a rock-solid foundation for environmental policy, but now, unfortunately, this long-respected legislation is under attack. Last December, the Department of the Interior issued an opinion which stated: "the MBTA's prohibition on pursuing, hunting, taking, capturing, killing, or attempting to do the same applies only to direct and affirmative purposeful actions...." In other words, if you didn't intentionally try to hurt the birds, no problem. Imagine if the Deepwater Horizon oil spill did not have any consequences.



Snow geese in migration



*Geese in flight, from the incredible documentary, *Winged Migration*.*

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology put it well, in their blog, *View from Sapsucker Woods*:

Prior to this opinion, conventional interpretation of the MBTA promoted productive dialog involving industry, environmental groups, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Numerous common sense solutions have reduced the incidental, wanton killing of millions of birds by such hazards as open oil waste pits, oil spills, unprotected pesticide residues, unmarked transmission lines, and lethally situated wind farms. Under [this] new and extremely narrow interpretation, whole industries (e.g., energy, mining, chemical production) are suddenly freed from legal liability even if their actions result in predictable, avoidable, and massive killing of birds.

What can we do? What we always need to do: contact our representatives and tell them that this is not acceptable. Raise awareness in any way we can, and vote for people who will uphold our precious conservation heritage.



Great Egret in breeding plumage - Bill Grabin photo

Ok, that's the bad news. The good news is that sometimes people do listen. Paul Dest, Executive Director of the Wells Reserve, mentioned recently that he had been to meetings in Washington D.C. and returned encouraged, which surprised me. You may remember that there was talk last year of defunding the program altogether (which is also the case in the proposed budget for Fiscal 2019!). But, for now, the National Estuarine Research Reserve program is alive and well. Representatives from states that host the Reserves, including all our representatives here in Maine, know how much places like the Wells Reserve give back to their communities, and how important they are. Congress not only didn't defund them, but increased their funding in the budget just passed for Fiscal 2018. The Maine Congressional delegation deserves your thanks, and we should let them know that we're grateful.

Another example of states knowing when they have a good thing is the reaction to the Interior Department's plan to open the entire Atlantic Seaboard to offshore oil drilling. Every governor of every coastal state (except the governor of Maine!) has made it clear that they will fight this in every way possible. That's just one example of resistance; there are many individuals and organizations challenging the weakening of environmental laws, and the end of the battle is still far from certain. So, although there are reasons to feel discouraged, don't forget that you're not alone, and that not everyone is blind to the importance of protecting the air, the water, and the creatures with whom we share our world.

UNE Installs Bird-Safe Glass

In October of 2016, the Board of York County Audubon was advised by one of its members, Lena Moser, of an opportunity to advocate for our local birds. The University of New England was building a new student commons which would incorporate large windows over the Saco River. Lena is on the faculty of UNE, and realized that this was a potential death-trap for the migrating songbirds we love, in a particularly sensitive flyway. Lena championed the idea of incorporating bird-safe glass, which is treated to reflect a pattern in ultraviolet light, which humans cannot see, but which birds will recognize as an obstacle. This change would require research and be more costly, but Lena and others worked very hard to get the message across. York County Audubon's Board sent a letter to then-president, Danielle N. Ripich, advocating for bird-safe glass. There was also a student petition which garnered over 1,300 signatures calling for the change.

UNE prides itself on its commitment to the environment and scientific study, and once the facts were clear, President Ripich agreed that the University would spend what was required to install bird-safe glass. She particularly mentioned the letter from YCA as being important to her decision.

We are happy to announce that the building, the Danielle N. Ripich Commons, has been completed, and has received a great deal of positive press both for its design and its environmental contribution. You are all encouraged to visit and see not only the window-glass but the many other environmentally-conscious features of this lovely new building. The bird-safe glass covers the entire front façade of the building and both sides of the bridge. The special glass uses technology to break up the reflectivity of glass, thereby alerting birds to its presence. Its solar panels will provide enough energy to power the campus' electric car-charging station. "We proudly embrace our role as environmental stewards, and every aspect of Ripich Commons reflects that commitment," said UNE president James Herbert. "The building makes as light an environmental footprint as possible." And thanks to Lena for being one of the leaders of this important project.

Introducing the Maine Bird Atlas!

by Doug Hitchcox

Beginning in 2018, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) will be launching the “Maine Bird Atlas” -- a new statewide project to document the birds that call Maine home. Maine Audubon is helping MDIFW gather the information they need for this valuable (and fun!) project.

This project will provide a long overdue update to the “Atlas of Breeding Birds in Maine,” which was compiled between 1978 and 1983. Obviously, much has changed since then. Some species have taken up residence, such as Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens. Absent in the first atlas, these species have now become very common, especially in southern and coastal Maine. Wild Turkeys were just becoming established at that time, and were only found in a few sites.



The Carolina Wren has expanded into Maine.

Other species have experienced dramatic declines. What has happened to American Kestrels, Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks? Where can you still hear Eastern Whip-poor-wills? These species were all prevalent when the atlas was last updated. The change that has taken place in under four decades is remarkable. This is an important opportunity to document and quantify that.

To do this, we need your help! The Maine Bird Atlas is a citizen-science project, relying on the observations of people all across the state. Whether yours is just a casual interest in birds or you're a full-fledged twitcher, you can contribute. You're the only one who can report that a chickadee in your backyard is singing (possible breeding), carrying old dog hair into a birdhouse (probably breeding), or feeding their recently fledged young (confirmed breeding). That's all valuable data. If you live in a city, Rock Pigeons and House Sparrows count, too!



The Bobolink is declining in Maine.

Using the established eBird database, a citizen-science project run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Maine Bird Atlas will have its own portal for submitting observations and exploring data in real-time. You can find it at eBird.org/atlasme. For more information, visit: <http://maine.gov/ifw/fish-wildlife/maine-bird-atlas>. You can also stay up-to-date with the project on Facebook at facebook.com/mainebirdatlas.

From casual observations to “adopting a block” that you'll check regularly throughout the nesting season, any level of effort is welcome and will add valuable information for this important project. Every bird counts!

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For all upcoming events and general information, please visit our website:
www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

Piping Plovers are back again!

The first Piping Plover sighting in Maine this year occurred at a beach in Kennebunk on March 30th. Several others were spotted at various York County beaches by the first few days of April. York County Audubon is committed to working hard to increase the population of Piping Plovers on our beaches, partnering with Maine Audubon to provide monitors for Hills and Fortunes Rocks Beaches, where we teach beachgoers about the importance of protecting the birds' habitat.



Remember,

1. If signs indicate a Piping Plover or Least Tern nesting area, stay away! Don't cross fenced areas, ever.
2. **Do not let pets roam free on any beach where nests are located, at any time, for any reason.** Dogs and cats are known predators of Piping Plover chicks. **If you encounter unleashed dogs, please ask their owners to leash them.**
3. Don't leave holes in the sand that could trap a chick, leaving it open to predation or starvation.
4. Don't leave food on the beach, which attracts animals and birds which will feed on chicks.
5. Don't fly a kite near nesting areas. Shorebirds see it as a predator and will abandon their nest.
6. Notify Maine Audubon if you observe any disturbance of nesting areas.

With your help and awareness, and that of many others who work hard to protect these birds, YCA hopes that 2018 will be as good or better than 2017 for Piping Plovers on Maine's beaches. For more information, please visit maineaudubon.org and click on "Wildlife & Habitat," and then "The Piping Plover and Least Tern Recovery Project."



2017 was a good year for Piping Plovers in Maine. Thanks to many volunteers, agencies, and local advocates, the results were very good. 64 pairs of Piping Plovers nested on our beaches, and they fledged 102 chicks! The most productive location was Ogunquit, where 8 adult pairs fledged 26 birds.

As a new season begins, YCA will again sponsor a Maine Audubon intern to monitor local beaches. Our monitors will be looking for nesting birds, and talking to people on the beach, to explain and help them understand the importance of making room for the birds.

The Maine Young Birders Club

If you've seen the latest issue of Maine Audubon's Habitat magazine, you've seen an article about something of which York County Audubon is very proud, the Maine Young Birders Club. The club grew from an idea first discussed by Nathan Hall, (a teacher at Middle School of the Kennebunks and the recipient of a June Ficker Scholarship to Hog Island) and Monica Grabin. He had been working with students at MSK on an after-school nature group, and Monica and YCA were very interested in offering any help we could. Eventually, Nathan joined forces with Lena Moser, who had dreamed for years of fostering kids' interest in birds, and they created the MYBC. York County Audubon provided funding and technical support, and from a small group the club has been growing in numbers and visibility, and the article in Habitat will certainly increase their reach. At this time, the coordinators of the club are Lena Moser and Seth Davis, another YCA Board member and wonderful trip leader. YCA is so grateful for their devotion to MYBC, since it fulfills a long-cherished wish for more involvement with the future of birding.



What attracted you to birding?

The birds; being in nature; Mr. Hall's nature club; love of animals, Cardinals in the back yard; going on a MYBC field trip; just loving science and nature.

What do you like best about MYBC?

There's no need to use specific quotes here. Everyone mentioned how much they like being with other kids who share their interest, working with talented leaders, making friends, and learning more and more about birds and the natural world.



The Harlequin plans to feature pieces by young birders, and we encourage them to sharpen their pencils, but in the meantime, here are a few [edited] quotes from club members about why they joined and what they like best, from a survey taken by Maine Audubon:

YCA welcomes its New Members! *for December 2017*

Sally Blackman	Waterboro
Bea Brockman	Buxton
Laura Cromwell	South Berwick
Renee DesRoberts	Biddeford
James and Kathleen O'Toole	Saco
Samara Ray	Saco
Rosemary Swan	Berwick

Warbler Workshop with Doug Hitchcox – Saturday, May 12th



Just in time for their spring arrival, Maine Audubon's Staff Naturalist Doug Hitchcox will be holding a workshop to teach you various techniques for identifying the gems of our forests: warblers. We'll 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.

We'll meet at 6:30 a.m. for an early morning bird walk, followed by the workshop itself. A second walk will follow after lunch (please bring your lunch). The workshop will be held in the Biddeford Pool area. Check our website for the location – and to register.

An enthusiastic birder, Doug set a Big Year record for Maine birds with 314 species in 2011 (which was topped in 2017 by Josh Fecteau with 317 – see the Winter 2018 Harlequin for the

full story). In his spare time, he also runs the Maine-birds listserv, serves on the Maine Bird Records Committee and York County Audubon Board, and is one of Maine's eBird reviewers.

Advance registration for this workshop is required. To register, please go to yorkcountyaudubon.org, click on this workshop under What's Coming Up on the right side of the webpage, and use the registration function at the bottom of the page. The fee of \$10 is payable by cash or check at the workshop.



Saturday Morning Summer Bird Walks at the Wells Reserve - starting June 10th



Join us at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm every other Saturday this summer starting June 2nd for a guided bird walk around the Reserve property. Beginners are welcome. Please bring binoculars if you have them; if not, you can borrow some. These walks are free and open to the public. We meet in the parking lot at 7:30 a.m. and reservations are not required. The additional dates are 6/16 and 6/30, 7/14 and 7/28, and 8/11 and 8/25. Walks typically last about 2 hours. The photo at left shows a male Eastern Towhee, a bird regularly seen and heard at the Wells Reserve.

Our Facebook page has experienced a steady increase in activity, rewarding visitors with “hot off the digital



camera” photos of local unusual birds and other treats. Please visit the page, “like” us if you wish, and post a photo, sighting or comment of your own. *And visit our website - YorkCountyAudubon.org - to see the photos in this newsletter magically transformed from Black & White into Color!*

***** Upcoming YCA Programs at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm *****

Birding Around the World - with Becky Marvil, Tuesday, May 15th at 7 pm in the Mather Auditorium.

In 2015, Becky, her husband Josh (the pilot), and two other couples spent 30 days traveling around the world in a private plane. Their route took them from the US to Newfoundland, the Azores, Turkey, Oman, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Taiwan, Russia, and Alaska.

In addition to sightseeing and learning about different cultures, Becky's background in biology and ornithology caused her to focus on the birds, photographing and videotaping many species, and learning about their regional family variations AND similarities. From the volcanic islands of the Azores to the 106-degree heat of Oman to the chilly, drizzly coast of Alaska, she will show her beautiful photos and reveal stories of bird species from around the globe!



Becky Marvil lives with her family in Yarmouth, Maine. For the last 8 years, she has been the Executive Director of the Acadia Birding Festival, held each year on Mount Desert Island.

Land of the Prikichi: Birds of Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao with Dr. Jeffrey Wells, Tuesday, June 19th at 7 pm in the Mather Auditorium.



The sunny islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao lie just off the coast of Venezuela with a rich history steeped in both Caribbean and Dutch culture. They are well known as popular winter getaways for scuba divers and beach-loving families from the U.S., yet fewer people know of the fascinating mix of birds that can be enjoyed here at any time of year. North American birders will be intrigued by South American tropical landbirds like the vibrant green Prikichi (Brown-throated Parakeet), the bright orange “oriole on steroids” Troupial, or the shimmering jewel-like Ruby-topaz Hummingbird (photo by Michiel Oversteegen). Honking flocks of pink American Flamingos on vast salt flats are a memory not forgotten.

Jeff Wells is an author of several bird books and he is also the Senior Scientist for the Boreal Songbird Initiative and International Boreal

Conservation Campaign which are non-profit organizations working internationally for the conservation of North America's Boreal forest. In migration and winter, the islands are populated with North American waterfowl, shorebirds, swallows, warblers, and other familiar birds. Therein is a connection. “Our birds” spend part of their life in faraway places like the Caribbean. What happens there has equal importance to what happens here.

Come hear about the wonderful birding and eclectic ecology of the ABC islands and why they make an ideal, easy-to-get-to location to combine birding with other family vacation pursuits.

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Our community of members is integral to our success on behalf of Maine's diverse wildlife and habitat. When you join or renew your Maine Audubon membership, you ensure that work can continue.

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