



THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon
www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

AUTUMN 2012

A FEW WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT: TRANSITION

Paul F. Wells

It is with a great deal of pleasure and a strong sense of anticipation that I write my first column for The Harlequin as president of York County Audubon Society. It seems appropriate that I do so at a time in which the seasons are changing along with our organization's administration.

As I write I'm pleased to note that the birdlife in the trees outside my home office window has become not only more active in recent days but a good deal more varied as well. During the summer months our visitors were pretty much limited to Phoebes, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds ("buzzy birds"), the faithful Chickadees, Goldfinches — lots and lots of Goldfinches! — and a few of the other usual suspects. But things have picked up noticeably this week. We've been graced by several oxymoronic yellow Scarlet Tanagers, a Red-eyed Vireo or two, our first Wood Pewees, one or two female Chestnut-sided Warblers, the occasional small flock of Cedar Waxwings, a single Red-breasted Nuthatch, and the usual lot of things that we don't see well enough to manage a visual ID and whose voice(s) we don't recognize. Those elusive unknowns are part of what keeps birding interesting though, aren't they? No startling changes, really, just a welcome, gradual transition from one season to the next.

As for YCAS, I am hopeful that the transition of leadership will flow with similarly seamless ease. Our board—your board—recently held its summer meeting. I had asked folks to use this opportunity to help me set priorities for the two years in which I will occupy the president's chair. We tossed around numerous ideas and I am working now on shaping them into something resembling a strategic plan.

My overall goal is to raise awareness of YCAS and all of our activities, in the eyes of both the general public and

our own membership. We are looking at ways in which we might communicate news of our programs and activities more effectively, especially via digital means. Scott Richardson has done an excellent job of re-vamping the YCAS website, and keeping it up-to-date with news of field trips and other programs. If you have not visited it recently I invite you to do so! Find us at: www.yorkcountyaudubon.org.

And did you know that we have a small, but steadily growing, presence on Facebook? Look for us and "like" our page there! Feel free to contribute comments there with news of your own interesting sightings, or with questions or comments about YCAS activities. I am always happy to hear ideas from members about what you think we should be doing, or not doing, or doing differently. You can reach me via e-mail at: president@yorkcountyaudubon.org. Spread the word! Get involved!

To tell you just a bit about myself: I am a relative newcomer to Maine, having moved to Kennebunk in April, 2010. I am a Massachusetts Yankee by birth, but have lived much of my life away from New England. California was my home throughout most of the 1970s, and then I lived in Tennessee from 1985 until my move to York County two years ago.

In my professional life I have always been involved with American traditional and popular music. While in Los Angeles I worked for CMH Records, an independent label devoted to bluegrass and traditional country music. For the past 25 years I was director of the Center for Popular Music, an archive and research center at Middle Tennessee State University. It was my pleasure to guide the development of CPM from empty rooms and a concept into one of the country's largest archives and libraries devoted to the study of American popular music (broadly defined), one with an international constituency and reputation. Although retired, I remain professionally engaged, and enjoy the luxury of having more time to devote to my own



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The Harlequin, the newsletter of the York County Audubon Society, is published in spring, summer, autumn & winter. Winter deadline: December 15, 2012.



The Harlequin is printed on recycled paper.

NEW MEMBERS:

Dorothy & John Andrews	West Kennebunk
Leona Blatt	Kennebunk
Carolyn Myers	Fryeburg
Rebecca & Bill Peterlein	New Gloucester
Jennifer Shack	Kennebunk
Kathy Slatlery	Old Orchard Beach
Rachel C. Smith	Dayton
Jeffery Wilford	York

WELCOME BACK:

Alan W. Hayes	Eliot
Edward Stewart	Eliot

research and writing. A highlight of this past summer was traveling to Derry, in Northern Ireland, to participate in an international conference devoted to traditional music, primarily on fiddle and flute.

I credit my father, Francis Wells, with instilling in me a love of birds. My dad was a farmer, one with a keen sense of observation and appreciation of the natural world around him. Birds were, of course, a large and integral part of this world. The idea of "going birding," making a special effort to travel some place just for the sake of seeing something different, would never have occurred to him. Rather, he enjoyed and learned about the birds that he encountered as he went about the business of "farmering," as he sometimes referred to the way he made his living. Every summer he would delay mowing the hay in the meadow above the farmhouse until the Bobolinks had finished nesting—an extraordinary display of sensitivity to the needs of birds, and one that resulted in a good bit of ribbing from his fellow farmers!

I carried this birds-as-a-part-of-daily-life approach into my own interest in birds. I was an enthusiastic non-joiner of bird clubs until some musician friends in Tennessee talked me into signing on to the local chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society. Participating in a few seasonal counts with those folks was very eye-opening in terms of a) how much I didn't know and b) how much I could learn from other birders. So now I'm in. I'm thoroughly enjoying working with some of the great birders that we have here in York County, and living in a part of the country with great birding. I'm still not much of a lister and do not enjoy the competitive aspects of birding. I do keep a life list, but have no idea how many species are on it — though I get as excited as anyone when I see something new!

Through YCAS I have begun to lead a few bird walks myself, and find that I really enjoy the opportunity to teach people about birds and to open their eyes to creatures in the world around them that they might otherwise overlook. For these trips I have adopted as my mantra a quote that I've seen attributed to Kenn Kaufman: "The best birder is the one who has the most fun." I threw this out to folks at the start of a walk I led at the Wells Reserve back in the spring; then at the completion of the walk I asked who had had the most fun. Every single hand went up! I went away a happy man. Come to think of it, using Kaufman's criteria, I think maybe I was the best birder that day. Happy birding!

BIRD FEEDING

Jeannette & Derek Lovitch

Are you new to bird feeding and need some direction on how to get started? Or, do you have a feeding station that could use a little makeover? Here are a few of the basic elements of feeding birds.

The key to a successful feeding station is diversity – of food, feeders, and habitat...and the quality of each. If you take away anything from this article, it is that not all seed is created equally. Bird seed needs to be fresh, just like anything we eat. Seed that has been sitting around for several months (even in the bag) loses nutritional value, and thus will be shunned by the birds visiting your yard. Black Oil Sunflower packs a punch, but is not the only option. Nyjer, safflower, hulled sunflower, peanuts, and White Proso Millet are also excellent options to attract particular species of birds. And, bird seed mixes run the gamut from wasteful to excellent. Inexpensive mixes are full of fillers, particularly milo, that our birds simply do not eat. A good quality mix, on the other hand, is the easiest way to bring a high diversity of birds to your yard. But also be aware of things added to add to cost, but don't add to birds at the feeders.

And don't forget about the non-seed eaters. They actually constitute the majority of birds. Suet is a great source of fat, but can also act as a vehicle to present other food sources, such as insects and fruit. Mealworms, either live or dried, are fantastic for bluebirds, but everyone loves bugs! Put out a handful in a mealworm feeder, or dish and see what happens. During migration, suet and mealworms can attract a whole new cadre of birds, from tanagers to warblers to kinglets. Many of us know that oranges (particularly with grape jelly) attract orioles, but they are enjoyed by tanagers and catbirds as well.

A couple of the pervasive myths in the bird feeding world are that birds will go hungry if you feed don't them year-round, or start a feeding station then go on vacation. It is also a long-debunked myth that feeding birds in the summer is bad because it reduces how many insects they eat. Simply put, birds know what they need, when they need it, and your feeder is just one of many food sources exploited by them. In actuality, our local wildlife will almost always choose natural food sources over anything we give them; our feeding stations are only a supplement. That also explains why we see fluctuations in activity levels at

feeders seasonally, and even annually. (If there was dependency, diversity and frequency of birds visiting feeders would never change). For example, the winter of 2011-2012 was one of superabundance of certain tree seeds, bringing activity at most feeders to a virtual halt!

This is also where backyard habitat comes into play. Creating a haven (it doesn't have to cover a lot of space) with a diversity of native trees, shrubs and perennials goes a long way in attracting more birds to your yard for feeding and nesting. Consider Mountain Ash and Winterberry (waxwings and robins), Butterfly Bush and Bee Balm (hummingbirds and butterflies), and Coneflower (goldfinches). Even a brush pile of fallen branches can go a long way in adding extra cover in a yard. Reducing chemical use, adding decals or BirdTape to windows to reduce collisions, and keeping cats indoors are all extremely effective ways of helping our backyard denizens.

Now that you have your feeding station all ready to go, make sure to keep up on the maintenance. Dirty, moldy feeders are an excellent way to spread disease. Simply let your feeders run dry of seed before adding more. And, a periodic scrubbing with a solution of 1 part white vinegar : 4 parts water goes a long way in keeping your feeders clean and healthy! And while you are at it, don't forget to clean up the ground underneath the feeders so seeds and shells prone to mildew do not accumulate.

Bird feeding is one of the most popular outdoor hobbies in the country, and continues to grow. Armed with a little knowledge and some quality products, we can increase the number of birds around us all year long, and give them a real helping hand. And yes, we can keep squirrels off of bird feeders, so there's no reason why backyard bird feeding can't be the enjoyable, helpful, and relaxing hobby that it can be.

PROJECT FEEDER WATCH

Project Feeder Watch is a way for citizen scientist volunteers to contribute to bird distribution data in North America. You simply record the birds that come to your feeders during the months of November to April. You may sign up online at www.feederwatch.org, call 800-845-2473, or write Project Feeder Watch, 150 Sapsucker Woods Rd., Ithaca, NY 14850. There is a \$15 cost for materials. Join in the fun!



HOG ISLAND

Kate Gerwig

This summer York County Audubon sponsored me for five glorious days on the famed Hog Island at a session of grown-up camp for educators. I was this year's recipient of YCAS teacher scholarship to the Hog Island summer programs. Grown up camp was actually called Educators' Week, but the days and evenings were filled with just what you'd expect from a summer camp, family-style meals, guitar-accompanied sing-alongs, hikes, boating excursions, and practical jokes. There was even a synchronized swimming performance and a flash-mob song of appreciation to the tune of We Will Rock You! Get together a bunch of teachers and they act just like children!

I'm a visual arts teacher at Biddeford Intermediate School and JFK Kindergarten Center in Biddeford. I applied for YCAS scholarship because I'm an artist who is distinctly inspired by nature and my relationship with nature. As many of my students are spending their childhoods in an urban environment, some of them never leave the city to venture into the abundant nature of Maine. But, while they may not have access even to our own Biddeford Pool, I know they could still find nature all around them. From spiders on the window screen, to weeds forcing their way through cracks in the sidewalk, to song birds in the trees that line the city streets, the children of Biddeford encounter nature every day. I want to teach them to take notice of the nature around them. I went to Hog Island with ideas about taking my students on urban nature walks and having them keep nature journals, recording their observations there. I came away with not only new information and ideas, but with a deepened desire to introduce children to the natural world.

Hog Island is an amazing place to be. It is a 330-acre wooded island in Muscongus Bay. There's a simple system of trails that make exploration of the woods, bogs, and fields of fern accessible. The whole place is absolutely teeming with plant and animal life! Quaint early 20th century buildings on the northern end of the island provide a meeting space, dining hall, laboratory, and accommodations for campers. A pair of Osprey were actually nesting right there! The staff at Hog Island, however, are what make it the most special of places.

Describing the talent and expertise of the Hog Island staff would take multiple pages of this publication! You can read about them all at The Puffin Project website, www.puffinproject.org. Let me just say that everyone, from fun-loving camp director, to inspired chef, to adroit caretaker, was an integral part of the Hog Island experience. Instructors were experts in the fields of ornithology, marine biology, entomology, geology, photography, art, education, and more.

We watched puffins on Egg Rock and harbor seals lounging on ledges in the bay. We crawled through brush in the dark looking for spiders with a flashlight and caught beetles for observation through a magnifying glass. We tromped through bogs and pulled seines through the intertidal zone looking for any and all life that could be found. Instructors shared ideas for teaching children to use their five senses to observe the world around them. We had the honor of meeting superstars of the conservation movement including Steve Kress, director of the Seabird Restoration Program, (the man responsible for saving the puffins and Hog Island camps too!) Lynn Cherry, author/illustrator and champion of childrens' environmental activism, and Olivia Boulter, 13-year-old artist and aspiring ornithologist who raised over \$200,000 for Gulf Coast recovery efforts since the 2010 oil spill. It was an all-star cast and I came away with memories that will last a lifetime.

Preparing for the upcoming school year, I've been reflecting upon my time on Hog Island. I'm pleased to say that I've established a nature resource area in my art room, that includes books, posters, and other visual resources as well as collections of natural objects such as bones, feathers, and plants. I look forward to welcoming my students to add their own specimens to the collection as we begin exploring the world outside our school. I'm also excited to clean up and expand our school flower garden with the help of YCAS Monica and Bill Grabin, who have offered to consult with me and my students

about the best ways to attract more birds to our back yard. The artwork my students do this year will be inspired by their budding interest in the natural world and will be on display at Biddeford's District-Wide Art Show this March.

I strongly recommend the Hog Island experience to any teacher with an interest in natural history. I thank YCAS for giving me the opportunity to make such valuable use of my time at Hog Island's Educators' Week!

Look for YCAS' Hog Island Scholarship for teachers/conservation leaders for Summer 2013 at www.yorkcountyaudubon.org or in the winter edition of *The Harlequin*.

**BIRDING PATCH:
SANFORD SEWER DISTRICT**
Andy Aldrich

Sanford Sewer District consists of approximate 150 acres of open water ponds bordered by marsh and grassy edges that support a diversity of birds reflecting the variety of habitats on the property. The ponds are surrounded on three sides by woods and the Mousam River, which runs for about one and half miles around the ponds. The north side has open land surrounding the buildings which provides grass and shrub habitat. The area offers good birding particularly during spring and fall migration, with fewer species remaining to nest or over winter.

The ponds can be one of the best places in York County for viewing waterfowl. Typically Canada Goose, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Ruddy Duck, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Hooded and Red-breasted Merganser, and Pied-billed Grebe occur. Less frequently Northern Pintail, Redhead, Blue-winged Teal, and Barrow's Goldeneye may also be found here. In 2006 and again in 2009 an Eared Grebe was sighted, while five Black-bellied Whistling Duck made an appearance in 2010. The Mousam River supports nesting Wood Duck and Mallard.

The reedy marshes provide habitat for several nesting birds including Common Grackle, Red-wing Blackbird, and Song Sparrow. Sora, Virginia Rail, and Common Moorhen nest here as well. The woods are home to vireos, thrushes, and other passerines. Red-tailed Hawk and, in some years, Red-shouldered Hawk are seasonal residents.

Warblers, sparrows, and other passerines come thru in spring and fall migration as do raptors such as Northern Harrier, Merlin, and Peregrine Falcon. Many species of herons visit in the spring and in the fall. In August, swallows come through in large numbers, as well as shorebirds and sparrows. Osprey can be seen most any time and Bald Eagle shows up most often in September.

Directions: Take Gavel Rd. east off of Rte. 4 at blinking light, 3.7 miles south of junction of Rtes. 4 and 111, (in Alfred) or 0.7 miles north of junction of Rtes. 4 and 109, (in S. Sanford). Birders are welcome during posted hours: 6-4:30 Mon-Fri; 7-8:30 Sat-Sun. **Please stop at the administrative building to sign in so that the staff is aware of your presence. Also make sure you are out of the facility by closing time.** You don't want to get locked in and we do not want to inconvenience the staff by delaying their closing. By practicing good birding etiquette we will all be able to continue building rapport with the facility staff and enjoy fine birding at this one-of-a-kind spot in York County.

BEJEWEL & BEDAZZLED
Pat Moynahan



Twelve adults and two young folks (Sue Bickford's grandchildren) met at 9:00am at the Savage Preserve in South Berwick for our bejeweled and bedazzled July 14th walk. Thank goodness for the young folks who caught the majority of the butterflies and dragonflies for Sue to identify.

The Calico Pennants amazed us with their orange saddlebags, red faces, and wing dots. The butterflies of the day included Cloudless Sulphurs, American Copper, Monarch nectarizing milkweed, one of the Blues, Common Wood Nymphs, and Silver Spotted Skipper. Birds included Chipping Sparrow, American Goldfinch, Common Yellowthroat, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, a family of Eastern Wood-Pewees, American Crows, and the endless sound of summer, the Red-eyed Vireo.

Thanks to Sue for a most informative walk and I look forward to next year's bejeweled and bedazzled. This is a great walk for children --- they use up lots of energy.

EARLY MIGRATION AT SCARBOROUGH MARSH & PINE POINT

Doug Hitchcox

A dreary morning on August 11th deterred many from birding Scarborough Marsh, but those who attended were in for a treat. Scarborough Marsh, Maine's largest saltwater marsh, has a bounty to offer anytime of year. We were treated to a variety of shorebirds that had begun their fall migration - yes, fall is well underway for these migrants by early August.

A "fresh-out-of-the-wrapper" Semipalmated Plover, with its beautifully scalloped feather edging, gave a great contrast to the more worn adult birds that were on the mud banks of the river. Another highlight was some of the last Willets of the year in their spartina homes across the marsh. As the only shorebird species to nest in Scarborough Marsh they can be early to leave our area.

With so many peeps moving through, predators were sure to be on their tails. Near the tree-line where the largest salt pannes and the greatest avian concentrations typically occur, we heard the cries of a young Cooper's Hawk as it flew over the trail and perched in a maple. The young bird clearly had a lot to learn about catching shorebirds, but we enjoyed scope filling views that allowed us to study the finer points of accipiter identification.

Shorebird migration will continue until early November so go and see what you can find moving through!

BIRDING CHALLENGE SPONSORS

YCAS thanks the following businesses who helped make the 2012 Birding Challenge a success

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BOOK REVIEW

Paul Miliotis

The Ocean of Life by Callum Roberts

Some 50 years have passed since Rachel Carlson's *Silent Spring* was published sounding an alarm about the presence of chemicals and pesticides being used in the environment. Her seminal work focused on chlorinated hydrocarbons and their effects upon our oceans and the bird life dependent upon them, particularly water and oceanic birds. Today our oceans and estuaries, as well as the birds that depend on their resources, are faced with a whole host of threats to productivity and health.

Callum Roberts attempts to explain how research is progressing into the multiple factors threatening fisheries and changing the ocean's fauna and productivity worldwide. The first 15 chapters, including *Fewer Fish in the Sea*, *Winds and Currents*, *Rising Tides*, *Corrosive Seas*, *Dead Zones*, *Unwholesome Waters*, *The Age of Plastic*, and *Pestilence and Plague* describe these threats and what research is finding. Part Two of the book, *Changing Course*, gives suggestions about what can be done to help our oceans survive.

The book is well written and readable, with references for each chapter. It makes a strong case for acting now on the problems and should be read by everyone interested in conservation. For a sneak preview, a chapter of the book was published in *Newsweek* May 21, 2012, under the title of *The Sorrow Beneath the Sea*.

RECENT DONATIONS

York County Audubon recently received donations from local businesses. In late June, Bob's Clam Hut, on Route 1 in Kittery, sent a check for \$594.20. This money was collected from their patrons through a unique policy of gathering small donations for specific local charities and non-profits. During the week of June 17, YCAS was the designated recipient. Also in June we received a check in the amount of \$250.00 from Kennebunk Savings Bank. This was a result of customers' votes for YCAS in the bank's annual Community Promise program.

We extend our heartiest thanks to these businesses and their customers! It is extremely gratifying to know that our work matters to members of the the York County community.

EVENING MEETING PROGRAMS

Tuesday, October 16, 7:00pm: Epic Journeys. Speakers: Shawn Carey & Jim Grady.

Migration Productions' newest video, "Epic Journeys," looks at three shorebird species: Red Knot, Piping Plover and Semipalmated Sandpiper and the challenges of their annual treks. Co-sponsored by the Wells Reserve, this will be an outstanding program.

Tuesday, November 20, 7:00pm: Mercury in Ecosystems of the Northeast: Songbirds as Sentinels of Contamination.

Speaker: Evan Adams, Migratory Bird Program Director at the Biodiversity Research Institute.

We know mercury is a pollutant, but what are its effects on wildlife? The BRI has recently summarized a decade's worth of research on mercury contamination in songbirds and bats in the northeast.

YCAS FIELD TRIPS

For information, updates or cancellations, please call or email the **Contact** or check our website:

yorkcountyaudubon.org

Saturday, October 27 at 8:00am to noon: Sabattus Pond

Leader: Jay Adams. Meet at the small utility building on the Riley Road, off Route 126 (just north of the south end of Sabattus Pond.) **Contact: Pat Sanborn (sanborn@ghi.net)**

Sunday, November 18 at 7:30am to noon. Rarity

Roundup in Southern York County. Leader: Derek Lovitch. Meet at the southbound Kennebunk Rest Area on I-95. **Contact: Pat Moynahan (284-5487)**

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Portland ~ December 15

Bill Hancock (wph@maine.rr.com)

York County ~ December 17

Pat Moynahan (254-5487)

Biddeford/Kennebunkport ~ December 30

Marie Jordan (799-1408)

The CBC is now FREE!

After two years of decision-making, two major changes will come to the Christmas Bird Count program effective with the 113th Count in December, 2012. The CBC is now a free program. Audubon will no longer charge participants \$5.00 and **American Birds** will move to an online delivery of the summary results.

BIRDING CHALLENGE FUNDS

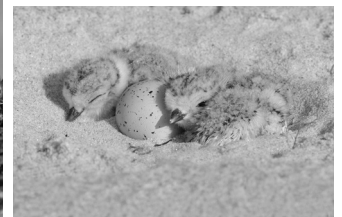
Pat Moynahan

Thanks to each and all who contributed to the York County Audubon 2012 Birding Challenge. We raised a total of \$2600.00 this year. Funds distribution includes Stratton Island Puffin Project \$1500, and The Center for Wildlife \$1,000. Thank you for your support.

KIDS & PIPING PLOVERS

Pat Moynahan & Monica Grabin

Photos by Jim Fenton



As an organization we have organized "Kids and Piping Plovers" educational outreach for several years. We started and continue at the Biddeford YMCA where we have played games, sang songs, made cotton ball plovers, and most importantly have taken the children to the beach to watch plovers and chicks in their natural habitat. Thanks to Monica Grabin we added an additional program at the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust this year. And so a total of 18 children in York County experienced the wonder of our very special summer resident. Can you contact your local recreation department and help us expand our offering next year? Please call me. Pat 207-284-5487

HELP YCAS GO GREEN!!!

Can you help us Go Green? Receiving *The Harlequin* by email will eliminate postage and printing costs.

We will send you an email alert so you can download the new issue from our website: **yorkcountyaudubon.org**

To sign up please contact Linda Eastman at:
islndr@myfairpoint.net

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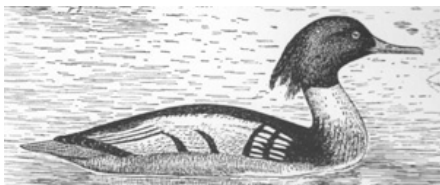
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ETYMOLOGY

Red-breasted Merganser: *Mergus serrator*

The common name and genus name for this bird come from the Latin verb "merger," meaning "to dive." "Serrator" is also a very apt species name. "Serratus" is a saw, "serrator", a sawyer. Part of the elongated bill of mergansers is serrated. This feature helps the birds grip fish and invertebrates.

OR CURRENT RESIDENT

Maine Audubon Membership Form

Yes, I would like to join Maine Audubon & the York County Chapter of Maine Audubon (this also includes membership in 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 Audubon nature stores and sanctuaries nationwide. For a subscription to *Audubon*, the magazine of the National Audubon Society, please add \$10.

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