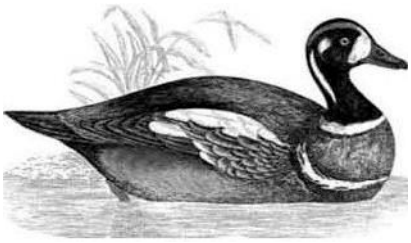

THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon
www.yorkcountyaudubon.org
Spring 2015

Sharing the Shore: Piping Plovers and People on Maine's Beaches

by Monica Grabin

It's been a long, hard winter. We're overjoyed to finally see the snow melting, the grass reappearing, and to hear birds singing in our yards. We're not the only ones taking advantage of the Spring, however. Just as we head to our beautiful beaches, with our children and pets, to spend some time outside, take a walk on the shore, perhaps feeding the gulls, the Piping Plovers also arrive.

Beginning in late March, adult Piping Plovers look for likely nesting sites on the sand above the waterline. The males make a small scrape for a nest, which they hope will be chosen by a female. She picks one she likes, adding shells or pebbles to dress it up, and then the male begins his courtship dance. With luck, the pair will soon produce a clutch of eggs in their little nest on the sand. If the nest is washed away by high tides or storms, the pair will try again. If the nest is successful, after a few weeks, the chicks will hatch. They will be tiny balls of fluff on toothpick legs. They feed themselves within hours of hatching, but will "brood" under their parents' feathers for warmth for almost a month until they fledge. At the end of the breeding season, in late August or early September, the birds will fly south to the Gulf Coast, the southern Atlantic, or the Caribbean, before returning again the next Spring. They have to pack a lot of living into the short time they are with us here in Maine.

The nest and chicks are in constant danger from predators, high tides, and severe storms. Those

dangers have existed for the thousands of years Piping Plovers have nested here. But human development, and our use of the same beaches, has made it much, much harder for the Piping Plover. Our pets, our discarded food, the gulls we feed, kites flying, and even holes left in the sand by children with spades and pails, are dangers that have placed the Piping Plover on the Threatened list of species for the United States and on the Endangered List in Maine, meaning there is a real possibility that this species could disappear from Maine forever.

There are many ways we can all help the Piping Plover. First and foremost, we need to heed any signs posted on Southern Maine beaches announcing nesting habitat. There is no reason to enter the nesting areas, ever. Dogs should always be on a leash on nesting beaches, regardless of what the beach rules might allow. Holes that have been dug in the sand can trap young birds, making them easy prey; so fill them up before you leave. Food left on the beach or provided to gulls encourages them and other creatures like crows, foxes, racoons, and skunks, to expect easy feeding there. They'll find the eggs and chicks of Piping Plovers, too.

Cats should be indoors at all times. Free-roaming and feral cats kill millions of birds each year, and small chicks on an open beach are an easy target. Finally, if you want to fly a kite, do it far away from nesting areas. To a small bird, your kite looks like a winged predator. Parents will try to scare off the intruder, leaving nests unguarded.

The Piping Plovers have many advocates here in Maine. Maine Audubon has the Piping Plover and Least Tern Recovery Project, which has worked for years to monitor, protect, and report on breeding Piping Plovers. The Maine Fish and Wildlife Service and Maine Warden Service also patrol and protect the beaches, as well as prosecuting infractions of protection statues. The Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge, part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, monitors and protects nests of Piping Plovers and Least Terns on Kennebunk's Crescent Surf Beach. The Town of Wells sponsors an effective protection program staffed by volunteers. Monitors check the beaches for nests, cordon off nesting areas, and put "exclosures" around each nest. These are wire cages with a wide mesh which allows the Piping Plovers to come and go, but keeps out large predators. If you see these boxes on the upper beach, you may look but do not approach closely.

York County Audubon has a passionate commitment to helping these birds. We have partnered over the years with Maine Audubon to educated the public about the plight of the Piping Plover, through this newsletter, and through programs for adults and children. Last summer, YCA initiated a collaboration with the University of New England and Maine Audubon that was a great success. Interns from UNE were on the beaches talking to people, answering questions and educating them about how we can help the birds. The response was almost all positive; people want to know what they can do to help. YCA covers the costs of the intern, and MA provides training. It's a win for all three organizations, and for the Piping Plovers.

For more information about how to protect Piping Plovers and other shorebirds, please visit Maine Audubon's Piping Plover and Least Tern Recovery Project website. Also visit YCA's website for more links to Piping Plover information.

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

And for the latest news, photos and updates, please visit us on Facebook at:
www.facebook.com/yorkcountyaudubon

Our Annual Birding Challenge
Friday, May 15th – Saturday, May 16th

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. It turn, we reinvest all the funds raised in environmental education, conservation and research projects within York County.

Our quest to find as many species as possible will begin at 5 p.m. on Friday, May 16th and end at 5 p.m. on Saturday, May 17th, followed by a compilation free pizza get-together. While the compilation is held at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm, the counting can occur anywhere in York County. 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 or help this important effort. For more information, please contact Pat Moynahan at 710-6311 or Linda Eastman at 286-9586.

Marsh Wren *by Marie Jordan*

Black-necked Stilt in Scarborough – *Doug Hitchcox*

YCA welcomes its New Members:

John and Debra Burrows	Waterboro
Craig Carscallen	Lyman
Darlene Dimodica	Saco
Linda Emery	Buxton
Gregory Dobrich and Patricia Fitzgerald	York
Brenda and Terry Franey	South Portland
Adrienne Gregorio	Biddeford
Elizabeth M. Johnson	Biddeford
Donna Mack	Lyman
Sheila Moore	Wells
Pamela Shangraw	Kennebunk
Sandy Whitney	Wells
Dana Bartilucci	Kennebunk
Charlene Clukey	Wells
Jane Gerrish	Hollis Center
Rich and Kristin Hogan	Ross, CA
Gregory Mulcahy	Biddeford Pool
Laureen Rogers	York
Susan Conley	Kittery
Merry Craig	Kittery Point
Gary Dean	Dayton
Nancy Desjardins	Saco
Cricket Fegan	Ocean Park
Charles F. Hale	Buxton
Margaret Nelson	Kennebunk
Christine O'Neill and Phil Rossoni	Belmont, MA
Tom Rutka	Saco
Kyle Scardino	Kennebunk
Nathan Scoville	Biddeford
Laura Sirak	Biddeford
Richard Skillin	Ocean Park
Francis Zagami	York

International Migratory Bird Day: Bird Banding *Saturday, May 9, 2015, 7 a.m. - noon*

Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day by visiting the bird banding station at the Wells Reseve at Laudholm. Weather permitting, the bird banders will be under the large old copper beech tree ready to share their ongoing avian research with you. Learn about the data they record, and also fascinating natural history information about the birds temporarily caught in the researchers' mist nets. You may even get to release one of the songbirds from your hand!

Bird Day Schedule…

7-11 Bird banding demonstrations

7:30-9:30 Bird walk to the Little River mouth

9:30-11:30 Face painting, bird craft, bird study skins, bird game

11:30 Tribute to bird bander extraordinaire Joan Ficker

About the Bird Bander

June Ficker participated in four years of ornithology seminars at Cornell's Lab of Ornithology in the 1960s, leading her to a greater love of birds. Following these experiences, June joined a weekend of birding on Monhegan Island in midcoast Maine, offered through Portland's Museum of Natural History & National Audubon Society.

In 1965, June was asked to monitor nesting Least Terns and Piping Plovers at Goose Rocks Beach in Kennebunk. All participants met during the summer to report their observations of these species in Massachusetts and Maine. Opportunity knocked once more at this meeting, where June met Jonnie Fisk, who became her mentor over the next few years. Jonnie was a licensed bird bander and one of the founders of Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, a renowned scientific research station. Jonnie made it possible for June to be trained at Manomet, where 50 mist nets are operated from sun up to sun down.

June spent three fall seasons learning the intricacies of bird banding at Manomet. This experience made it possible for June to apply for a federal license from the Bird Banding Laboratory, which she has held since 1979.

June has been banding birds in a variety of locations for more than 35 years, with her very own banding station at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm established in 1988. This station has been in operation for over 25 years, with bird banding demonstrations currently being offered every Wednesday morning (weather permitting) throughout the summer.

Yellow warbler at banding station

Birding Granite Point Road and Timber Point, Biddeford by David Doubleday

Birding along Granite Point Road and walking out to Timber Point at the end of Granite Point Road takes one to multiple diverse habitats. Because of this you will encounter many types of birds which are easy to find there.

On the way to Timber Point we usually spend some time at the woodlands, marshes, hedges, coves and beaches along Granite Point Road. Scan the open areas and listen along. Birding Granite Point Road is best an hour or so before or after high tide. The incoming tide forces geese, ducks, herons and shorebirds up out of the channels onto the marsh where they can be seen. Check the pans on the marsh as they are favored by many species. Keep an eye out for various raptors which hunt the marsh. Check these areas on your way to or from Timber Point.

To explore the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge at Timber Point, park at the end of Granite Point Road and walk the rewarding trial to the point. Timber Point Trail offers a scenic easy walk along a birdy coastal shrubland and forested landscape. Beautiful saltmarsh, river and ocean views abound. Along the way be sure to check Curtis Cove across from the parking area and the beach for ducks, shorebirds, and gulls.
The first part of the trail (an old dirt road) is handicap accessible to an observation platform overlooking the mouth of the Little River. From there, the trail skirts the end of a freshwater swamp, then cuts across the peninsula and follows the shore to the end with a view of Timber Island and Goose Rocks Beach. This is a good place to look for eider, scoters and shorebirds.

Timber Island is accessible by a rocky crossing at low tide, but be mindful of the tides as you cannot return during high tide. A tide clock at Timber Point will provide additional information for those who want to venture out to the island. The Timber Point Trail is open from sunrise to sunset daily for foot traffic only. Please stay on the designated trail as the remainder of the peninsula is either private or preserved for wildlife habitat. No pets or bikes are allowed on the trail and all refuge regulations apply. Granite Point Road is off of Route 9 in Biddeford, immediately below the turnoff for Fortunes Rocks Road.

Birding Patch: Thurston Mills – Saco Valley Land Trust by Marian Zimmerman

A little known gem tucked in the northern edge of the county, Thurston Mills, a unit of the Saco Valley Land Trust, features a pine/hemlock forest bordering the clear upper reaches of the Nonesuch River. The river has carved a gorge through which it flows over ledges and around boulders. Following the needle strewn path along the river with its muted lighting and cooler temperatures is like visiting a peaceful natural cathedral. The moving water sings brightly and quickly drowns out sounds beyond the site.

Thurston Mills is the summer home of a few bird species that select for this specialized habitat and are not typically seen in York County apart from it, most notably Louisiana Waterthrush. Other birds that also use the area are Winter Wren, Pine and Black-throated Green Warblers, Ovenbird, Wood Thrush, Veery, Blue-headed Vireo, and several woodpeckers.

From Route 1 in Saco, take Route 112 west 4.6 miles to Heath Road. Turn right onto Heath Road and proceed 3.0 miles to a three-way intersection with McKenney Road and Mast Hill Road. Follow Mast Hill Road for 0.8 miles. At the four-way stop sign at the intersection with Ash Swamp, Holmes, and Watson Mills Roads, turn left onto Watson Mills Road. Drive 0.5 miles to the pullout on the right just before a small bridge over the Nonesuch River. From Scarborough on Route 1 go west on Broadturn Road for 2.8 miles to the blinking light at Holmes Road. Turn left onto Holmes Road and drive 1.5 miles to the four-way stop at its intersection with Ash Swamp, Mast Hill Road, and Watson Mill Roads. Turn right onto Watson Mill Road and continue for 0.5 miles to the pullout by the bridge. The trail is to the right on the east side of the river.

Birds, "Birdsongs" and Mr. Barry
A Special Program

Tuesday, May 5th, 7 p.m. in the Program Center of the Brick Store Museum, Kennebunk. Presented by the Brick Store Museum and York County Audubon

William Edward Barry, who lived from 1846 to 1932, was a man of many interests. Among them were natural history and ornithology. Although an amateur, he kept careful notebooks with beautiful line drawings of the things he saw. He also collected and stuffed bird specimens which he found around Kennebunk. The Brick Store Museum has, among its collections, cases of Barry's mounted birds, many of which have never been exhibited, nor identified. A current small exhibit of William Barry's work will be ending in early May. As a closing celebration, the Museum, with the help of York County Audubon, will have a public viewing of all of Barry's birds, a quiz on bird identification, and a concert by Monica Grabin called "Birdsongs."

Before Tuesday's event, Maine Audubon staff naturalist and York County Audubon Board member Doug Hitchcox will ID the birds, and then all you local bird watchers will have a chance to test your skills. It can be tricky, since some of the specimens are faded with time. Cynthia Walker will give a brief talk about William Barry's life and the Museum's collection, and then Monica Grabin will finish the evening with "Birdsongs." The concert is a look at songs we sing about birds, and some songs she has written which poke a little fun at our efforts to get to know them better. It's entertaining, and informational, too.

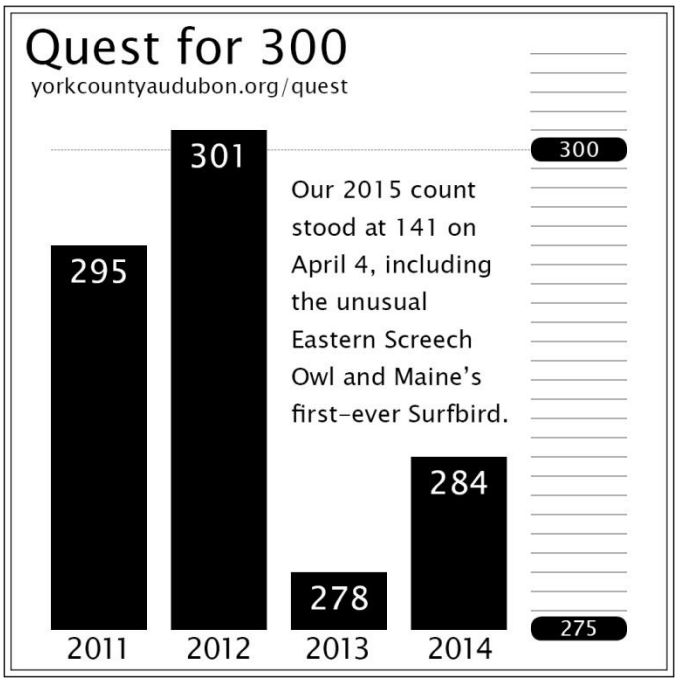
This is the first time York County Audubon has partnered with the Brick Store Museum in an event, and we're delighted to be able to do so. We hope you'll come join us!

Quest for 300 begins Year 5

By Scott Richardson

We're now engaged in our fifth "Quest for 300," York County Audubon's collective effort to find 300 bird species in the county in the span of one calendar year. It's a just-for-fun goal tracked through eBird, the maine-birds email list, and the grapevine. Anyone's sightings are welcome and most appreciated. On our website, you can see the complete lists of the species seen each year.

Together, we've made it to 300 once so far:



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

Tuesday, May 19th, 7:00 p.m. at the Wells Reserve -
Photography Through A Positive Lens.

Steve Morello has been a professional nature photographer for over 30 years and has photographed for many prestigious publications including National Geographic, The New York Times, and World Wildlife Fund. Steve is a photo instructor for Lindblad / National Geographic Expeditions and teaches at the National Audubon Society's Camp at Hog Island in Maine. Come share his images from around the world and learn how having the right attitude about your photography is just as important as knowing about F-stops and shutter speeds. Some of the topics you will explore are telling a story with your images, and making your images a reflection of your vision. This program is designed to give participants a new way of looking at photography. It is geared to all levels of photographers whether you are a seasoned photographer or just a beginner.

Tuesday, June 16th, 7 p.m. at the Wells Reserve – (Brief) Annual meeting followed by:
Birding in the Land of Midnight Sun.

Iceland abounds in natural splendor: Waterfalls and glaciers, panoramic views and otherworldly landscapes. It is a land of Northern Lights and midnight sun. And it is the realm of one of the world's most charming and iconic birds: the Atlantic Puffin. During the summer months, Iceland's round-the-clock sunlight allows us to see a panoply of birds which accompany the puffins in nesting frenzy. **Come along with wildlife photographer Shawn Carey as he shares images and stories from his recent journey across Iceland.** Along the way, we'll meet Black-tailed Godwits, Arctic Terns, Red-necked Phalaropes, Razorbills, and Black Guillemots. We'll visit fjords, mountains, grasslands, and lava fields. Join us as we explore the wildlife and wonder of Iceland and discover why it's a place no birder should miss.

Visit us on Facebook

Our Facebook page has been the happy recipient of many new posts and has experienced a steady increase in page visits. Visitors to the page have been rewarded 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!*

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