



# THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

[www.yorkcountyaudubon.org](http://www.yorkcountyaudubon.org)

Spring 2019

## Bringing Nature Home

by Monica Grabin

*Bringing Nature Home* by Dr. Doug Tallamy is a book I cannot recommend highly enough. It is also the title of an ongoing project by Maine Audubon to educate homeowners about ways they can help protect all our resident plant and animal species by using more native plants in their landscapes. Spring is the time to think about replacing ornamentals that have perhaps been damaged over the winter, or to plant our flower gardens, so I thought it might be a good time to revisit this subject. And I'll use myself as an example.

The house I live in sits on five acres in Kennebunk, purchased from The Nature Conservancy in 1984. It was a typical successional forest made up of white pine, hemlock, fir, and cedar mixed with oak, birch and a few maples. An understory of blueberries, rhodora, partridgeberry, bunchberry, and ferns becomes almost impenetrable in summer, and spring rains and runoff create a small vernal wetland that our then 5-year-old son quickly named "Dinosaur Swamp." On this land we built our home, and in doing so, disrupted the natural environment and began filling the space with lawn grasses, decorative shrubs, and garden beds containing flowers and vegetables.

The forest I intruded into, although not especially lovely and certainly not unique, was part of an exquisitely well-tuned web of interactions. The plants, animals and insects that fill the woods have evolved together to support each other. Many of the plants we introduced, however, had evolved in other parts of the world, and had no place in the web. They were often insect-free, which to me was a wonderful thing, but I've learned is not so great for the rest of the web.



Most of us at York County Audubon are deeply interested in our birds. Many of these birds eat insects. And insects rely on plants. The birds that we treasure, both migratory and resident, survive here because plants supply food or harbor insects that are essential to their existence. Non-natives do not host the insects that birds depend on. Some do provide food in the form of nectar, seeds or fruits, but often their fruits are less nutritious than those that grow in the wild. In addition, only adult birds can eat seeds and fruits. Baby birds need softer food; they need caterpillars.

In my yard, we built our house into a south-facing slope. Our windows gather as much sun as possible in the winter, but the house would be much too warm in summer if we didn't shade them. To do

this, we left two red oaks growing right off our deck. They have their drawbacks, dropping copious amounts of acorns and not dropping their leaves until late in the season. What I used to see as an additional drawback was all the little caterpillars that left droppings on our outdoor furniture, and swung down in front of my face on invisible strings. Although I hated those caterpillars, the birds didn't. An oak like mine is, in fact, the absolute best host we in Maine can have for the most possible diversity of insects. I've learned to appreciate what my trees provide for the rest of the natural community, and a few caterpillar droppings aren't the end of the world.

The lesson is to let Nature into our yards. Lawns in particular, in order to look like our idealized image, require fertilizer, weed killers, frequent mowing and watering, and provide absolutely nothing to insects looking for nectar. All those fertilizers are among our biggest problem for decent water quality, as runoff from lawns and farms adds huge amounts of unneeded nitrogen to our groundwater.

Our house, over the years, has less and less lawn, and what we do have is mostly weeds. We wait until they flower, and then we mow them, but we mow them higher than we used to, use a mulching mower, and stopped watering and using fertilizer. The lawn is green and beautiful, as long as you don't look too closely. The areas in the shade under the pines are becoming more and more woody and less and less like a lawn, and I'm fine with that.

Our yard is not a wonderland or a gorgeous garden spot. It's a mix of native and non-native species, but it leans more and more heavily to the natives, and we are more and more open to letting the spreading native plants into the yard. All our yards and gardens are works in progress, but as I learn more, I'm trying my best to Bring Nature Home.

For more information, visit Maine Audubon's Bringing Nature Home page <https://www.maineaudubon.org/projects/plants/>. Also, visit the Maine Extension Service online. They have many resources about native plants and also which plants to avoid.

## Plants to avoid and/or remove

*Hint: if the name starts with a country on the other side of the world, pass it by!*

Asiatic Bittersweet  
Japanese Barberry  
Purple Loosestrife  
Common Reed/Phragmites  
Japanese Knotweed  
Japanese Honeysuckle  
Burning Bush/Euonymous

Removal of these plants can be a challenge.

For more information, visit:

<https://extension.umaine.edu/gardening/manual/plants-for-the-maine-landscape/>

where you will find lists of best and worst plants for our state as well as information on each species. It is a wealth of excellent information.

## YCAS OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

Bill Grabin, President	985-3342
Joyce Toth, Vice President	216-4756
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Coordinator	749-2520
Mary Bateman, Publicity	646-8589
Seth Davis, Maine Young Birders Club	
Coordinator	509-339-3154

For all upcoming events and general information,

please visit our website:

**[www.yorkcountyaudubon.org](http://www.yorkcountyaudubon.org)**

And for the latest news, photos and updates, please visit us on Facebook at:

**[www.facebook.com/yorkcountyaudubon](https://www.facebook.com/yorkcountyaudubon)**



Remember, the best way to protect birds is to keep cats indoors!

## Where Have All the (Yard) Birds Gone?

We receive lots of questions via email, Facebook and on the trail, but this is probably the one we hear most often, and we encounter it year-round. Many people are understandably concerned when the birds they're accustomed to seeing in their yard or favorite spot don't appear to be showing up in winter ... or spring ... or summer.

The concern is well intentioned and natural. The general impacts of climate change, population growth and development on habitat and wildlife are significant, though the specific impacts can vary greatly.

We do have some good news to report on this front. Generally, people's concerns about what they're (not) seeing at their feeders are *not* indicative of larger trends, at least in the Northeast. Our most common species are generally doing fine, even if for some reason they're not currently appearing in your yard. For over 100 years, the National Audubon Society has been sponsoring and overseeing annual Christmas Bird Counts. Recently, they created a map tool that allows one to see the population trends for birds across the country. It's fun and fascinating to explore, and can be found at [www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone](http://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone).

The tool covers the Continental U.S., Canada and Alaska, and depicts the rate of growth or decline of species over the last several decades. Some species, such as the Bald Eagle, have done very well everywhere (denoted by dark blue on the maps). The Common Loon has also expanded its population in most states.

Some species have done well everywhere except for the Southeastern U.S. This group includes the American Robin, the Blue Jay, and the Barred Owl. The Northern Cardinal has done well from Maine to Montana, but has decreased in the Southeast and Southwest. The Tufted Titmouse has done well in the Eastern U.S. and particularly well in the Northeast and Eastern Canada, but has declined in



*The Tufted Titmouse population has increased steadily in the Northeast.*

the mid-west states. The Eastern Bluebird has done well everywhere except for Florida and south Texas. On the other hand, the Common Raven has done well everywhere except for Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. These are just some examples. Scroll down the list of species and select any of the close to 500 species that are listed. You can also choose to see the data by state or "bird conservation region."

There is one major caveat to this analysis tool. The data is drawn from the *Christmas* Bird Counts, so it's only assessing the birds that are present in December. These are generally the birds that reside here year round. It's missing (or presenting very limited information on) most of the species that migrate to Central and South America each fall, including most of our spectacular songbirds. Many of these species have been severely impacted by climate change and habitat loss, and need all the help we can provide.

But as an overview of the population trends of many of our most familiar birds, it's a lot of fun, a wonderful tool, and can provide some encouragement.



## Birding by App, Part II: Song Apps

by Seth M. Davis

It's time for another installation of birding by app, bird song edition! Technology is amazing, and believe it or not, we have the ability to record bird songs/calls and be able to identify them! That's right, it's like Shazam for bird songs (though slightly more complicated). Let's look at our two available options:

**Song Sleuth by Wildlife Acoustics** – This was the first bird song ID app that hit the market. For a \$10 app, I think it is pretty decent. The interface is pretty simple, you open the app, and you get to a recording screen. If you hear a bird in the field you don't recognize, you hold your phone out and push the record button to try and capture the song/call. You get a nice 3 second "pre-record" so if they bird starts singing and you don't have the greatest reaction time, you won't miss it. Once you have the recording, you get a very nice spectrogram with which you can isolate the song/call you heard, thus making it more likely to get a correct ID. You can even keep records so you can continue to listen and attempt to ID a bird's song/call. Once recorded and analyzed, you get a list of likely candidates for your song/call. As a secondary plus, all of the illustrations included in this app are by David Sibley, and I shouldn't have to stress how influential he is to the birding world. I have had success IDing a Northern Cardinal from across the street and several other relatively common bird songs. My only grievance with this app is that you are fairly limited by the number of species it can identify (~200 throughout the U.S.). Considering how difficult this technology would be to develop, this is actually impressive, but for the slightly more advanced birder who is trying to ID the different flycatchers, this app is not for you. You are really limited to the most common birds in your area (e.g., cardinals, orioles, and a few warblers). All-in-all, it's a great app but if you're already familiar with your local bird songs, its utility is limited. - 🐦🐦🐦

**BirdGenie** – This is the app I expected to be the leader in this field. This is from the creators of the fantastic "The Warbler Guide" book/app (which I will review later). Sadly, when it was released, I was less than impressed. For all the buildup, I found the app hard to use and a bit buggy. I tried throwing a few softballs, American Crow, and American Goldfinch, and while ultimately it made the right ID it took a lot more work and force closing/re-opening the app to get it to work properly on my iPhone 8. Admittedly it is a newly released app, so there is certainly room for development (it was updated a month ago for bug fixes). There are

many similar features to that of Song Sleuth, including a prerecord feature, a nice spectrogram to isolate the song/call, and a historical record. This is all well and good, but there are still only ~100 different species it can ID (with 200 or so variations among those species). I suppose for how fantastic "The Warbler Guide" was, I was expecting the app to blow me away. In fact, I would be super happy if they stuck to warblers and attempted to use this app just to ID warbler songs and calls, but alas, it is the more common birds that are a part of this app's repertoire currently. I am still optimistic that it will expand the number of species, but in its current state, I think Song Sleuth takes the cake. 🐦🐦

## YCA welcomes its New and Returning Members!

*December – March*

Kristi Maling	Kennebunk
Christopher Mulcahy	Shapleigh
Margaret J. Pride	Lebanon
Kevin Rooney and Victoria Foley	Biddeford
Roger and Cindy Stevens	Old Orchard Beach
Gail A. Thomas	Eliot
Kurt Winkler+Karen Moffat Winkler	Brownfield
Joshua M. Fecteau	Kennebunkport
Patricia A. Fitzgerald	York
Richard S. Harris	Saco
Barbara J. Hazard	Bridgton
Stewart E. McClure	Hobe Sound, FL
Robert F. Pierce	Eliot
Naomi Quenk	Saco
Ala H. Reid	York Harbor
Kendra L. Adams	Biddeford
Pamela Aslinger+Rick LaRiviere	Kennebunkport
Michael Bingham+Ashley Thomas	Kennebunk
Ann Bright	Limington
Ed and Amy Francis	Kennebunkport
Davelyn H. Hayes	Limerick
Meaghan and Tobin Knowlton	Limerick
Kathryn A. Schoyer	Biddeford Pool
Barbara Smith	Brownfield
John Thibeault	Kennebunkport
Katherine C. Chappell	Kennebunk
Amy L. Francoeur	Saco
Margaret Milardo	Falmouth
Fletcher Missud	Wells
Douglas S. Rogers	Arundel
Robert Sherman	Kennebunkport

## Piping Plovers are back!

2018 was a banner year for piping plovers in Maine. A record number of the endangered shorebirds nested on beaches from Ogunquit to Georgetown and produced a record number of fledglings. Maine beaches hosted 68 nesting pairs that fledged 128 birds, continuing a decade of growth.



Ogunquit Beach ended up seeing the most fledglings, with 24 produced by 11 nesting pairs. There were 15 fledglings each at Wells Beach and at Scarborough's Western Beach. Remember,

1. If signs indicate a Piping Plover or Least Tern nesting area, stay away! Don't cross fenced areas!

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.

## Maine Young Birders March Outing

*by Marion Sprague*

On Saturday, March 30, six young birders joined MYBC in the search for returning American Woodcocks. We headed to the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust at dusk. As we were getting our gear out of the cars an American Woodcock buzzed over us just above our heads. We could hear the distinctive nasal "peent" coming from multiple woodcocks nearby. We were very fortunate to have KCT's Bud Danis to join us and guide us to a prime viewing spot.

Within minutes, we heard one take off nearby. While he danced high above, we took this chance to approach his display turf by quickly jogging our way closer. Standing still just behind a cluster of apple trees, we held our breaths in the hope that he would land back on his favorite patch of field again. The woodcock did not disappoint. He descended, loudly chirping, and landed about 20 feet in front of us! We spotlighted him, and everyone got great looks through the scope and binoculars at the plump, peenting bird. A few even managed to get photos of the well camouflaged bird.

Prior to our woodcock outing, we enjoyed a pizza dinner and a sketching workshop taught by Michael Boardman of Coyote Graphics. Michael started the workshop with a quick demonstration of how to capture gesture and field marks when sketching a bird quickly in the wild. Michael brought in three bird mounts for us to practice sketching—a Bufflehead, a Black-bellied Plover and of course our target bird the American Woodcock.

As we were walking to meet everyone's parents Ian thought he heard the twittering of a woodcock in flight and called for everyone to stop. Sure enough, a lone American Woodcock had landed 10 feet in front of us at the base of a large tree on the UNE Campus. What a way to end a great outing!

The Maine Young Birders Club's mission is to provide a safe environment for youth in Maine (ages 11-18) to experience the wonder of birds and nature through birding-related events and activities. FMI: [www.maineyoungbirders.org](http://www.maineyoungbirders.org)

## Learn About the Maine Bird Atlas - May 11th in Wells or May 12<sup>th</sup> in Alfred – 9 am-1 pm

Beginning in 2018, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (DIFW) launched the "Maine Bird Atlas" - a new 5 year statewide project to document the birds that call Maine home.

This in-depth training will be focused on how to document birds during the breeding season. It will involve an overview of the project, explain various ways to participate, and take a hands-on look at how to use eBird (the database for collecting Maine Bird Atlas sightings).

We will spend time indoors reviewing materials and procedures, then finish with a short walk outside to practice "atlasing." These workshops are free but space is limited. **Advance registration for this workshop is required.** For more information and to register, please go to [yorkcountyaudubon.org](http://yorkcountyaudubon.org), click on the workshop you want under What's Coming Up on the right side of the webpage (either May 11<sup>th</sup> for Wells or May 12<sup>th</sup> for Alfred), and use the registration function at the bottom of the page.



A Maine native, Doug Hitchcox grew up in Hollis and graduated from the University of Maine in 2011. The year he graduated, he traveled to every corner of the state trying to observe as many species as possible in what is known as a 'Big Year.' He ended the year having seen 314 species in the state, a new record for Maine. Throughout college Doug worked at the Scarborough Marsh Audubon Center running their store and leading walks and tours. Doug was hired as Maine Audubon's Staff Naturalist in the summer of 2013, a long time "dream job" for him. In his free time, Doug is one of Maine's eBird reviewers, owner and moderator of the 'Maine-birds' listserv, York County Audubon board member, and voting member of the Maine Bird Records Committee.

## Saturday Morning Summer Bird Walks at the Wells Reserve - starting June 1st



Join us at the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm every other Saturday this summer starting June 1st 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 6/15 and 6/29, 7/13 and 7/27, and 8/10 and 8/24. 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



Visit us on  
**Facebook**

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](http://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 \*\*\***

***The Black Ghost: Understanding the Maine Black Bear* - with Deborah Perkins, Tuesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>** at 7 pm in the Mather Auditorium. Please come early for refreshments and social time.



Wildlife ecologist Deborah Perkins brings us an engaging, informative, and visually dramatic show for all ages! Deborah's experience as a bear biologist included studying black bears and grizzlies across North America. In Maine, she worked with the Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife's black bear program. Have you ever climbed into a bear's den? Well, Deb has!

In fact, Deb has worked on various other bird and mammal studies throughout North America including shorebirds in the Canadian Arctic, Canada Lynx in northern Maine, and seals and seabirds in Maine. In this program Deb will bring her Black Bear adventures to life with stories, science, and pictures.

FMI: [www.firstlighthabitats.com/my-story](http://www.firstlighthabitats.com/my-story) or [www.facebook.com/firstlighthabitats](https://www.facebook.com/firstlighthabitats)

***The State of Maine's Wildlife* - with Judy Camuso, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, Tuesday, June 18<sup>th</sup>** at 7 pm in the Mather Auditorium, preceded by a short Annual Meeting at 6:45. Please come early for refreshments and social time.

Judy Camuso's career began at Maine Audubon and she has been engaging people with wildlife ever since. Knowing that people will conserve and protect the things they love, her mission became to share her passion for nature.

An important opportunity led her to become Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife's first female regional biologist and later to become the Director of the Department and most recently Commissioner. This amazing woman is a licensed bird bander and an avid birder, as well as a hunter, who canoes, hikes and bikes. Camuso is a leader in protecting Maine's inland fish, and wildlife.

We hear that visitors to Maine annually contribute more than a billion dollars to our economy in their pursuit of wildlife-related activities. Governor Mills' appointment of Judy Camuso to become Commissioner of the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife gives her an incredible opportunity to spread her enthusiasm and passion.

Camuso is respected for her science-based management decisions regarding Maine's inland fish, wildlife, and non-game habitats. We look forward to hearing updates on endangered species as well as our iconic species like loons, moose and arctic char.



York County Audubon  
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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.

Thank you!

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