

# THE HARLEQUIN

## York County Audubon

### A Chapter of Maine Audubon

Spring 2021

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

#### **The Maine Breeding Bird Atlas – York County Needs You!** *by Doug Hitchcox*

We are about to start the fourth breeding survey season of the five-year Maine Bird Atlas. The atlas, a project by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, began in 2018 and has the goal of documenting the birds that are breeding and wintering in Maine. The atlas is a community science project, meaning volunteers are needed from across the state to report what birds they see, when and where, and during the nesting season to include any breeding behaviors seen. Data collected as part of this project will provide a comprehensive understanding of the distribution and use of resources by Maine's breeding and wintering birds and will be invaluable in guiding future species status assessments, priority species' needs, and identifying and conserving high value wildlife habitats.

Following international protocols for atlasing, the Maine Bird Atlas uses a system dividing the state into a grid of 3 mile by 3 mile "blocks." This breaks that state into 4080 blocks, which we know are far too many to be fully surveyed. To make this more manageable, systematically chosen blocks, called "Priority Blocks," lower the number of blocks needed to be surveyed to 974, a much more manageable chunk. It is worth clarifying that Priority Blocks don't necessarily have the best habitat or unusual species in them; instead they are distributed to give adequate statewide coverage and allow for the data to be comparable to past (and future) efforts. One of the main goals of the atlas is to have at least all of the Priority Blocks completed.



*The Red-bellied Woodpecker was considered a rarity in Maine not too long ago. Doug Hitchcox photo*

Maine's first atlas was completed in 1983 and a lot has changed since then. First of all, there are at least ten species we've confirmed breeding in Maine for the Maine Bird Atlas that were not breeding here during the first atlas. It shouldn't be surprising that most of these are species expanding their range northward into Maine, including: Carolina Wren, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Fish Crow. We've also seen species with remarkable population increases, like Bald Eagles and Wild Turkey, but there are a few that appear to be in decline, especially aerial insectivores like swallows. We've still got two years of surveying, so the results showing apparent declines are preliminary, but the trends certainly don't look good for swallows and some others.

York County is an especially interesting region to look at for the atlas, from many aspects. First, York has the greatest species diversity of any Maine county, with 146 different species confirmed breeding (as of 2020). Cumberland and Washington aren't far behind with 144 and 143, respectively. But, in York County, there are at least 10 additional species that, so far, are probable breeders, so the current total of 146 could easily be increased in 2021 and 2022.



*The Magnolia Warbler is one of the species whose breeding status in York County has not yet been confirmed. Doug Hitchcox photo*

From a volunteer effort perspective, York is unfortunately not doing so great. Despite having the second highest population in the state and being ranked third based on hours of effort by volunteers, York is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in terms of the percent of priority blocks complete. The problem is that despite volunteers spending a lot of time atlasing, they're not spreading out their effort across the priority blocks.

In York County there are 55 Priority Blocks and as of the end of 2020, 23 blocks were considered complete. To complete a block, at least 20 hours of effort needs to be spent atlasing, and 50% of all the species with some breeding behavior need to be coded as "confirmed" (You can learn more about these codes in the Maine Bird Atlas handbook on

[maine.gov/birdatlas](http://maine.gov/birdatlas).) Over 4,200 hours of atlasing has been completed in York, which if that could have been spread over the 55 Priority Blocks would have been enough to finish York County almost four times already.

So, my challenge to you this summer (and in 2022), is to journey away from the birding "hotspots" and help us complete a Priority Block. Every bird counts, so let us know about those Eastern Phoebes nesting on your porch, that chickadee in your birdhouse, or even that Rock Pigeon under the bridge at your favorite summer watering-hole. You can submit your sightings on [ebird.org/atlasme](http://ebird.org/atlasme) and find many useful tools on the "Explore" tab. Use "Explore Atlas Regions" and search for York to see results as they come in, or use the "Atlas Effort Map" to see where Priority Blocks are that still need a little effort. We need your help to make this project a success, and the benefit to birds and conservation will be much greater if we have a complete data set.

#### **YCAS OFFICERS & DIRECTORS**

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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)**



**Piping Plovers are back!** In 2020, Maine's 98 pairs of plovers fledged 199 chicks. It was only the second time in 25 years that the productivity rate exceeded 2; the previous time occurring in 2011 when there were only 33 nesting pairs! Reaching high productivity rates is one thing with a small population, but fledging so many with a record high number of pairs is an astonishing success. Locally, Ogunquit Beach fledged an incredible 30 chicks in 2020, which is more than any Maine beach has fledged since monitoring began in 1981.



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.

FMI: [maineaudubon.org/projects/plovers-terns/](http://maineaudubon.org/projects/plovers-terns/)

## **YCA welcomes its New Members!**

*September – February*

Valora Brockway, South Berwick  
 Peter Brown, Kittery  
 Marj Masse and Heidi Clark, Wells  
 Jeanne Parker, Arundel  
 Phyllis Wentworth, Cape Porpoise  
 Sally Witham, Saco  
 Judith Breslin, Kennebunk  
 Dawn Fernando, North Berwick  
 Jonathan and Patricia Gardner, Waterboro  
 Tim Halle and Mary LaClair, Kittery Point  
 Jennifer Ring, Cape Neddick  
 Susan Weill, Ocean  
 Pat Wright, Old Orchard Beach  
 Christa and Summer Henry, Kennebunkport  
 Gloria Mayo, Lyman  
 Susan Merrill, York Beach  
 Elizabeth Schoch, Biddeford  
 Yvonne Topping, York  
 Joanne and Don Anderson, Kennebunkport  
 Tim Boufford, Saco  
 Ellie Breitmaier and Diane Zamos, Kennebunkport  
 David Cormier and Karyl Lynch, Cape Neddick  
 Deborah Diquinzio and Wendell Clough, Biddeford  
 Bill and Maureen Fulford, Kennebunk  
 Martha Huestis, Kennebunkport  
 Daphne McDonald, North Berwick  
 Margaret Mills and Henry Beeuwkes, Saco  
 Linda and Jon Mitchell, Dayton  
 Sean and Stacy Theriault, Buxton  
 David Moulton, Kittery  
 Sarah Bauer, Eliot  
 Mary A. Cole, Kennebunk  
 John Cuzzo, Wells  
 Paul and Anne Dichiara, York  
 Grace Formica, Kennebunk  
 Christine and Richard Johnson, Kennebunk  
 Karin Lium, Kittery  
 Gloria Morgan, York  
 Marian and Chris Reagan, Kennebunkport  
 Bill and Janet Sherman, Kittery  
 Bobbie and David Spiegelman, Kittery  
 Eric Young, Kennebunk

## Why is Birding in Maine So Good?

by Marion H. Sprague

Those of us who live and bird in Maine know there is something truly special about spring and fall migration here. Why is that?

Maine is situated along the Atlantic Flyway—a major migration route for north south migration starting in Greenland and continuing along the Atlantic coast to neotropical wintering grounds for many long-distance migrants. The Atlantic flyway provides an important range of productive habitats including forests, beaches, and coastal wetlands. Migrating birds tend to use the same migration routes year after year, so Mainers are treated to this spectacular phenomenon each spring and fall.



*A Redwing, a European thrush, was found in Capisic Park in Portland in January – one the few times it's been found in the U.S. Marion Sprague photo*

Maine is also along a coastal plain—the flat, low-lying land along the Atlantic Ocean—provides important stopover habitat such as wetlands and saltmarshes for birds to refuel as they migrate along the coastline. The coastline also offers a migration route free of mountains.

Most birds migrate at night. This offers a advantages over daytime migration, including fewer predators, more favorable atmospheric conditions that enable steadier courses, and cooler temperatures. As the sun rises, they search for places to rest and refuel until they are ready to make the next leg of their journey.



*A Great Black Hawk, native to Central and South America, was found in Fortune's Rocks in Biddeford in 2018, and later in Deering Oaks Park in Portland. It was only the second Great Black Hawk ever seen in the U.S. Bill Grabin photo*

What about rarities? No one will soon forget the Great Black Hawk in 2018! This winter Maine has had its fair share. The Maine Celebirdies of 2020 included the Redwing in Portland, the Rock Wren in Ogunquit, and the Clark's Grebe in Augusta.

There is a lot of speculation on the reasoning for rarities. Weather systems may blow exhausted migrants off course, mirror or reverse migration is a phenomenon where birds migrate in the opposite direction of their usual path, post-breeding dispersal happens in some species where birds go off in



search of new breeding grounds. While we may not understand why they are here, rarities are known to attract birders in droves.



*This Clark's Grebe, a western bird, was found in Togus Pond in Augusta in August, 2020. It was only the second time one had been seen in New England.  
Doug Hitchcox photo*

There are over 200 species of breeding birds in Maine. That list swells to over 460 when we include migrants and rarities. For these and many other reasons, I think we can all agree that Maine is a great place to bird!

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



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## The Maine Young Birders Club



*A great turnout for the March 27<sup>th</sup> search for American Woodcock.*

The Maine Young Birders Club serves to connect youth who are interested in the natural world to one another and also to the people and the wild places around the state that will inspire them to a life of enjoyment, appreciation, and conservation of Maine's lands and waters, as well as the flora and fauna that depend on them.

FMI: [www.maineyoungbirders.org](http://www.maineyoungbirders.org)



*March 2020 trip to Parker River National Wildlife Refuge.*

### **\*\*\* Previous YCA Zoom Programs \*\*\***

**Many of the Zoom programs that we've presented are now available to stream from our website, [www.yorkcountyaudubon.org](http://www.yorkcountyaudubon.org). They include:**



#### ***Decades of Change in Maine's Birds – with Doug Hitchcox***

If you've lived in Maine for a while, you've probably noticed that bird populations have changed and continue to do so. Just a few decades ago, birds such as the Northern Cardinal, the Tufted Titmouse and the Red-Bellied Woodpecker were uncommon sightings here, if seen at all. 2021 marks the fourth year (of five) for this second Maine Bird Atlas, a project by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to document the breeding and winter ranges of Maine's birds. Data collected as part of this project will be invaluable in guiding future species status assessments, priority species' needs, and identifying and conserving high value wildlife habitats.

#### ***The Narwhal's Tusk: the ten most remarkable marine mammal adaptations – with Zack Klyver***



Have you ever wondered why a narwhal has a tusk? How sperm whales catch squid in the deep dark ocean? Which whale has the biggest tail, lives the longest, and holds the world migration record? Did you know that whale "waste" results in great plant plankton blooms in the ocean that produce the oxygen we breathe, slow climate change and help create more productive fisheries? Zack Klyver's presentation was based on a book he is writing titled *The Narwhal's*

*Tusk: the ten most remarkable marine mammal adaptations*. He was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1968 and grew up in a commercial fishing family in Eastport, Maine, the eastern most city in the United States. He is a graduate of College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine, and has worked for thirty years as a whale watch naturalist guiding whale and seabird watching tours on the Gulf of Maine and around the world. During that time, he led over 3,000 trips with 600,000 people.

#### ***The Birds-of-Paradise Project: Natural history media for science and conservation – with Edwin Scholes***



Among the most amazing creatures in the world, more than 40 species of birds-of-paradise live in New Guinea's swaths of the Indo-Pacific rainforest. Their extraordinary beauty is unlike that of any other birds on Earth, but it's their wide range of bizarre breeding behaviors that captivates audiences—from elaborate dancing and flaring their elegant plumes to shape-shifting displays that make these exotic species seem like avian transformers. Edwin Scholes is the founder and leader of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds-of-Paradise Project, and has been studying and documenting them since his first trip to New Guinea in 1999.

### **\*\*\* Upcoming YCA Zoom Programs \*\*\***

**There's no charge for our Zoom programs, but advance registration is required. Please go to our website, [yorkcountyaudubon.org](http://yorkcountyaudubon.org) to sign up.**

**Ravens, Wolves, and People - *with John Marzluff* – Tuesday, May 18 at 7:00pm.**



Wildlife professor John Marzluff will bring us an exciting program on recent work in Yellowstone National Park which looked at interactions between ravens, wolves, and people. In 2019, Matthias Loretto and presenter John Marzluff began tagging ravens in Yellowstone with radio transmitters. After tagging and following many ravens, they were able to relate raven's movements to the activities of people and wolves. For decades, John has done research on corvids - a family of birds that includes ravens, crows, jays, and magpies.

John Marzluff PhD is a professor in the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences at the University of Washington. He is the author of several books including, *In the Company of Crows and Ravens*; *Gifts of the Crow: How Perception, Emotion, and Thought Allow Smart Birds to Behave Like Humans*; and *Welcome to Subirdia: Sharing Our Neighborhoods with Wrens, Robins, Woodpeckers, and Other Wildlife*.

***Check our website or Facebook page for additional future programs.***



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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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