

THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

A Chapter of Maine Audubon

Spring 2025

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

Where Do We Go From Here?

by The Board of York County Audubon

For those who love nature, it comes as no surprise that it's in trouble. Regularly we hear of endangered species like Piping Plovers, the biodiversity crisis with diminishing occurrence of grassland species like Eastern Meadowlark, and climate change with coastal erosion and streamside flooding that puts species and humans at risk. Farther afield, severe drought, desertification, and raging forest fires are occurring both nationally and abroad. It's a distressing time for nature. The earth is calling for help. What can we do, both individually and collectively?

This is the question we have been pondering as a York County Audubon Board. There seem to be so many needs and no clear path forward. And yet move ahead we must. Paralysis is not an option.

Our Conservation Successes

After years of effort, Piping Plover populations are growing throughout coastal Maine, with great success in York County. Field monitoring and education of beach goers have been rewarded with increased numbers of nesting pairs, successful fledging of young, and expansion of breeding areas.



A pair of Purple Martins at YCA's gourd structure – photo by Kathy Donahue

We also find hope in our efforts to support Purple Martins. In 2017, we recognized a threat to them and invested in a gourd structure to add to the one thriving Purple Martin colony in the county. It took seven years for the birds to finally come and use the structure in 2024, but now our structure is on the birds' radar!

We have begun work with the Wells Reserve at Laudholm and the York Land Trust to install Kestrel nesting boxes on their properties to support a species being seen less often in the county. Great Works Land Trust has invited us to contribute to the development of a management plan for a new property in South Berwick.

In the last year, we have begun conversations about other declining species in York County, particularly Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, and other grassland species. We are working to

identify available habitat in the county and local partners who could work with us.



A male Bobolink

How You Can Help

As a York County and Maine Audubon member, your membership fees and donations already contribute to support our efforts, and we greatly appreciate it! While you may not be able to assist with specific projects, there are other ways you can contribute:

- Sign up for Action Alerts advocating for environmental stewardship at <https://maineaudubon.org/advocacy/action-alert/>
- Attend YCA's or the Wells Reserve's educational programs or even become a docent at Wells Reserve at Laudholm,
- Join a local land trust or your municipal conservation commission
- Participate in Maine Audubon's Community Science programs: <https://maineaudubon.org/communityscience/>

Beyond Maine, important conservation organizations like Natural Resource Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, and Earth Justice work for clean air, water, endangered species, and a livable environment. Their work

benefits us right here in Maine. Support them by contacting Congressional representatives or writing letters to the editor. 5calls.org can make placing such calls easier.

Are you more hands-on? You can build bird or bat houses using online directions and erect them on your property. There are also great benefits to landscaping with native plants and shrubs to help counteract habitat loss due to development.

Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants by Douglas Tallamy is a wonderful reference to get started.

We all can do something to make a difference. No one of us can do it all. But together we can work to preserve the quality and livability of the place we call home. What's your part? Let's get on with it!

YCAS OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

Bill Grabin, President	Kennebunk
Laurie Pocher, Vice Pres & MYBC	Ogunquit
Kathy Donahue, Treasurer	Kennebunk
Tova Mellen, Secretary	Portland
Britney Fox, MYBC	York
Dan Gardoqui	Cape Neddick
David Doubleday, Programs	Kennebunk
David Nelson	Berwick
Doug Hitchcox	Windham
Marian Zimmerman	Biddeford
Marion Sprague, MYBC	Westbrook
Mary Bateman	Wells
Rebekah Lowell	Biddeford
Seth Davis	Bangor

For all upcoming events and general 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

Success in the 2024 York County Quest for 300! *By David Nelson*

Today, in late February 2025, the total number of bird species that have ever been observed within York County, Maine (per eBird) sits at 385. The actual number of species that have passed through the region is likely far higher. Since 2011, York County birders have added almost 40 birds, or over 10% of the former total, to the overall list. During that same period, they have reported an average of 293 species per year, a number that has been steadily climbing.

Why is that number rising? Part of the answer may be that there are simply more birders. There are more experts, more knowledgeable amateurs and citizen scientists, more eyes looking up and asking, “What is that bird?” There are more fingers snapping photographs and then sharing what they find.

Another piece of the answer complicates things a great deal more. The rare birds are doing something, too: they’re moving. They’re drifting due to weather events; they’re mis-oriented; they’re ‘overshooting’ their expected range in spring or fall; they’re migrating with locally common relatives (think here of wading birds like Little Egrets that travel with Snowy Egrets); or they’re dispersing or irrupting, like finches in late fall, in search of food. Whether it’s the red-bellied woodpecker that, from its first confirmed nesting record in 1996, has expanded since then almost to Aroostook County, or the Great Black Hawk that abracadabra’d itself into Biddeford in early August 2018, birds are always wandering and showing up where they “should not be.” Some species that were rare fifteen years ago are annual now, and some of the county rarities today may be common to our woods and fields by midcentury.

In both 2023 and 2024, birders observed 300 species within York County – the first years we had reached this total since 2012. During those two years, nine birds were added to the county list. From the **Common Ringed Plover** found by Tom Aversa in late January 2023 to the **Tropical Kingbird** that Tara Yeackel and her husband discovered June/July 2024



Long-eared Owl at Fort Foster – photo by Ariaah Lowell

at Skelton Dam in Dayton, these two years were packed to the gills (or the air sacs) with some of the most exciting birding in York County history.

Some of the highlights in 2024 included: a **Townsend’s Warbler** (Ogunquit, L. Seitz, Dec ’23 and persisting well into Jan ’24); a **Common/Kamchatka Gull** (*Larus canus kamschatschensis*) (Cape Neddick, R. Garrigus, Jan); a **White-winged Dove** (Appledore, Isles of Shoals, SML Tern Conservation, June); a **Bridled Tern** (Stratton I, B. Becker et al., July); three (!) separate observations of **Franklin’s Gull** (a relative of the Laughing Gull that breeds in the upper Midwest, and was first recorded in York County in 2021); a **Long-tailed Jaeger** (offshore, Sept); a **Golden-winged Warbler** (Eliot, R. Dixon, Sept); a **Long-eared Owl** found by Ariaah Lowell with the Maine Young Birders Club at Fort Foster in November, and a **Spotted Towhee** reported by M. Weber that same month (the second county and state record, one year after and two miles away from the first).

What new birds will we see in 2025?

How Did Piping Plovers do in Maine in 2024? *Here's a summary from Maine Audubon's Coastal Bird Project*

Despite severe winter storm damage on the beaches, Piping Plovers started to arrive in Maine in mid-March, right on schedule. Hardy little birds, they weathered a snowstorm and started staking out their nesting territories by mid-April. Although some of the nesting habitat was altered, we saw birds choose creative nesting locations and scope out some newer sites this season.

For the past seven seasons, Maine's Piping Plover numbers have been on the rise, breaking records year after year. After seeing a record high of 157 pairs in 2023, breeding pairs decreased to 143 in 2024, but 237 chicks were fledged for a productivity rate of 1.66 chicks per pair, surpassing the state's recovery goals of 1.5. In 2023, plovers had fledged 201 chicks for a productivity rate of only 1.28. Knowing that our productivity numbers are back on track is reassuring, even with fewer breeding pairs. Many of those fledged chicks will return to beaches and help grow our breeding population for future years.

We had plovers nest at yet another new site this season: Timber Point, Biddeford. The first report came from Susan Kline, Wells Plover Monitor. The nest was unsuccessful but the expansion to new nesting sites over the past two seasons bodes well for the species. Three beaches in Scarborough fledged the most chicks since monitoring began: Pine Point with eight, Scarborough Beach State Park with ten, and Western Beach with 27.

Over the years, we have seen predator and dog pressures in these areas, but with continued community awareness and rising support, we were able to get a lot of chicks off the ground. Nine beaches along the coast, on average, fledged more than two chicks per pair including Wells, Goose Rocks, Goosefare Brook, Pine Point, Scarborough Beach State Park, the Hook, Popham Beach State Park, Hunnewell, and Indian Point.

The success of the plovers would not be possible without our amazing volunteer coordinators, landowners, and government partners. Partnerships with town, state, and federal employees like town managers, state park rangers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife biologists and wardens, town lifeguards, and beach association members have been essential for the growth of the Piping Plover population in Maine.



Piping Plover chick. Laurie Pocher photo

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.

YCA welcomes its New Members!

September – January

Troy and Jane Clark	Saco
Brooke Baerman and Erik Hanson	Wells
Kathryn and Ross Medeiros	Kennebunkport
Janice Wilkins	Kennebunkport
Andrew and Lesley Wood	Kittery Point
Candace Karu	York
Susan Kline	Wells
Bedelia Moran	Kennebunkport
Katherine Hagel and Dana James	Shapleigh
Anita Haskell	York
Tom LeTourneau	Wells
Cynthia Torres	Saco
Melanie M. Almeder	Kennebunkport
Staci Burbridge	Waterboro
Scott Carter	Old Orchard Beach
Nora and Patrick Cochrane	Biddeford
Kendall Hinkley and Connor Hildum	Dayton
Carolyn Lambert	Kennebunk
Courtney and Garrett Laws	Arundel
Kathryn Leffler	Kennebunkport
El and Al Rotsko	York Beach
Dan and Heidi Walker	Wells
Linda Guerra	Saco
Rachel Lukens	Saco
Victoria and Charles Parker	Alfred
Kyle and Megan Roemer	Hollis

York County Audubon is delighted to welcome Tova Mellen as a new Director and Secretary



Originally from Western Massachusetts, Tova's desire to explore new places and see new creatures has taken her to five continents, including work at wildlife sanctuaries in Thailand and South Africa. She graduated from the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, where she also had the opportunity to work for Allied Whale as a researcher and for Acadia National Park as an interpretive ranger. Tova is a certified nature-based teacher and received an MA in Arts and Heritage: Policy, Management and Education from Maastricht University in the Netherlands. She was excited to begin her role as executive administrator at Maine Audubon in December of 2024. When Tova isn't birding, she can usually be found at a playground with her family or watching Star Trek.

We're looking forward to seeing spring migrants soon, like this beautiful Canada Warbler – photo by Britney Fox Hover >>>>>>



Our Christmas Bird Counts had some great results

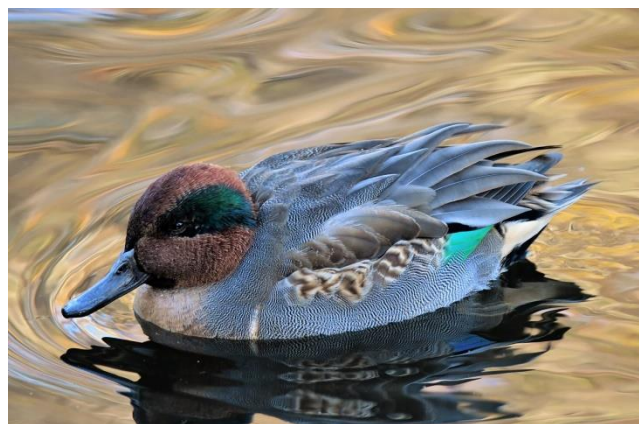
Each year, York County Audubon oversees two of National Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts. Dozens of birders participate in each one. The Southern York County CBC is held in mid-December and covers a circle that extends from Kittery up to Moody. In this, our 52nd year, we had 93 total species with a total of 12,535 total birds.



A rare-to-Maine Spotted Towhee was seen again at Fort Foster in Kittery - Bob Duchesne photo

We had 7 species with new high counts, some dramatically so. There were 1187 Mallards and 1764 Black Scoters. We had 9 Barred Owls (previous high was 2!), and they were all seen in daylight. We had 56 Red-bellied Woodpeckers (up from 39 last year), 47 Carolina Wrens (one more than last year), and 7 Hermit Thrushes. Although not a new species, a Spotted Towhee (the same one?) was seen again this year.

It was not that many years ago that both Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens were unusual sightings in Maine. Not any more!



A Green-wing Teal – Phil Stone photo

The Biddeford/Kennebunkport CBC is held at the end of December, and covers a circle that extends from Kennebunk to Old Orchard Beach. This was our 65th year. We identified a total of 90 species (with 15,008 total birds counted).

We had new high counts for 11 species: Green-winged Teal (3), Black Scoter (937), Common Merganser (36), Wild Turkey (233), Northern Harrier (10), Red-shouldered Hawk (3), Barred Owl (8), Belted Kingfisher (9), Northern Flicker (12), Peregrine Falcon (4), and Carolina Wren (27).

Uncommon birds seen were Canvasback, Winter Wren, Common Yellowthroat, and Palm Warbler.

Four birds were added during count week: Gadwall, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Iceland Gull, and Evening Grosbeak.



A Northern Harrier – photo by Ken Janes

*** Upcoming YCA Programs ***

There's no charge for our programs, but advance registration is required for watching via Zoom. Please go to our website, yorkcountyaudubon.org to sign up.

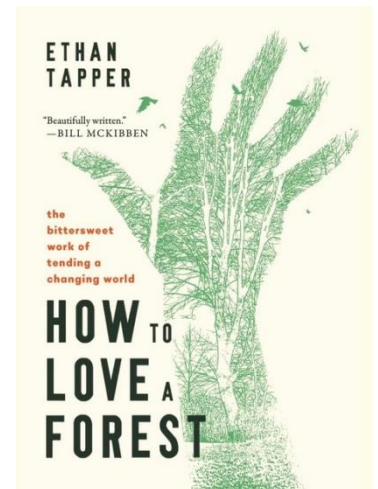


The Yellowstone River Osprey Project – with Marco Restani – Tuesday, April 15th at 7 pm - live at the Wells Reserve and via Zoom

In 2009 a few members of the Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society in Billings, Montana initiated a field study of Ospreys. Today over 40 volunteers monitor nearly 100 nests there. Marco Restani began birding with the Seacoast Chapter of New Hampshire Audubon in the late 1970s and the mentorship he received launched him on a lifelong journey with birds. Following post-doctoral research at the University of Washington, Marco was Professor of Wildlife Ecology for 15 years. He is now a Biologist at NorthWestern Energy in Montana responsible for developing and implementing the company's avian protection program. He has studied raptors for over 35 years.

How to Love a Forest – with Ethan Tapper – Tuesday, May 6th at 7 pm - live at the Wells Reserve

What does it mean to love a forest? In this talk, Ethan Tapper, a forester, author and content creator from Vermont, will draw from his work as a forester and his bestselling book -- How to Love a Forest: The Bittersweet Work of Tending a Changing World -- to discuss what it means to care for forests and other ecosystems at this critical moment. In a time in which many believe that “protecting” ecosystems means protecting them from ourselves, Ethan argues that humans must take action to help ecosystems heal and to move into a more abundant future. ur



York County: Birds, Birders and Birding – with Britney Fox Hover – Tuesday, May 20th – live at the Wells Reserve

Join us as we explore local birds and where to find them! York County is a spectacular place to bird. In this program, Brit and friends will be discussing some of the recent local birding highlights, and featuring some of the best birding hotspots. We'll talk about some of the incredible species of birds that visit York County from the far reaches of the globe. There's always something new to discover and learn from our local birding community.

York County Audubon
P.O. Box 201
Kennebunkport, ME 04046-0201

US Postage Paid
Kennebunk ME 04043
Permit #69

OR CURRENT RESIDENT



Frequent Flyers are a group of dedicated supporters who make monthly gifts to sustain Maine Audubon and York County Audubon.

For more information, visit:
maineaudubon.org/support/frequent-flyer/

MAINE 
AUDUBON

MEMBERSHIP FORM

York County Chapter

YES! I want to protect and conserve wildlife and habitat in Maine as a ☐ **new** ☐ **renewing** member.

Annually ☐ \$30 Senior/Volunteer/Student ☐ \$40 Individual ☐ \$50 Household ☐ \$100 ☐ \$Other _____

Monthly ☐ Enroll me in the Frequent Flyer Program and charge my credit card *each month*:
____ \$5 ____ \$10 ____ \$15 ____ \$25 Other \$ _____

View all member benefits online by visiting maineaudubon.org/memberFAQ

Name(s): _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Email: _____

Seasonal Address: _____ from _____ to _____

☐ Check enclosed for \$ _____ ☐ Please charge \$ _____ to my credit card (below)

Card # _____ Exp. date: _____ / _____

Join or renew online:
maineaudubon.org/join

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!

Please make checks payable to Maine Audubon | 20 Gilsland Farm Rd, Falmouth, ME 04105 | 207-781-2330 ext. 230