



# *the* **Pileated Press**

Western Maine Audubon, *a chapter of Maine Audubon*

Box 832, Farmington, ME 04938

## **- Our Spring Talks -**

All talks take place on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 at the Robert's Learning Center, UMF, Room C23. They are free and open to the public.

### **March 13 – Patterns of Fall Departure and Spring Arrival Dates of Maine Migratory Breeding Birds: A Citizen-Science Project**

Speaker: Herb Wilson

With the aid of over 400 birders across the state, Herb Wilson coordinated a program to track the arrivals of 109 species of Maine migratory breeding birds from 1994 through 2017. He examined location, spring-time temperatures and broader climate variables on the year-to-year variation in arrivals. Using eBird data, he examined the fall departure dates for the same species, testing for latitudinal variation in autumn departures.

Herb Wilson is a Professor of Biology at Colby College where he teaches Ornithology, Evolution and Diversity, Marine Ecology and Marine Invertebrate Zoology. His primary research interests are the impacts of global climate change on bird migration and the foraging behavior of winter birds in Maine.



Photo Credit: Pam Mauzaka



### **April 10 – Weasels of Maine**

Speaker: Shevenell Webb

Weasels represent a diverse group of small, carnivorous mammals that live in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems all over the world. Species in the weasel family tend to have bodies that are long and thin, secrete smelly odor to mark their territory, and can kill prey much larger than themselves. Six species in the weasel family live in Maine, varying in size from the short-tailed weasel (weighing 5 oz.) to the river otter (weighing up to 30

Photo Credit: Shevenell Webb

lbs). In the presentation, you will learn about weasel ecology, status, and natural history, as well as handle pelts and skulls of the various species.

Shevenell Webb is a wildlife biologist for the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife in Bangor. Her primary duties include research and management of a wide variety of small and medium-sized mammals, including bats, northern bog lemmings, beavers, bobcats, fishers, and coyotes. Before joining the Department in July 2018, Shevenell worked in western Canada for 10 years, where she was involved in researching wolverines, conducting aerial surveys on moose and elk, and restoring wildlife habitat. Shevenell received her Bachelors in Wildlife Ecology at the University of Maine in Orono and her Masters in Environmental Biology and Ecology at the University of Alberta. Shevenell lives in Mt Vernon with her family and loves to spend her free time gardening, birding, picking berries, raising chickens and pigs, making maple syrup, hiking, and canoeing.

## May 8 – ALL ABOUT SEAWEED

### Susan Hand Shetterly Discussing and Reading from her New Book: *Seaweed Chronicles, A World at the Water's Edge*

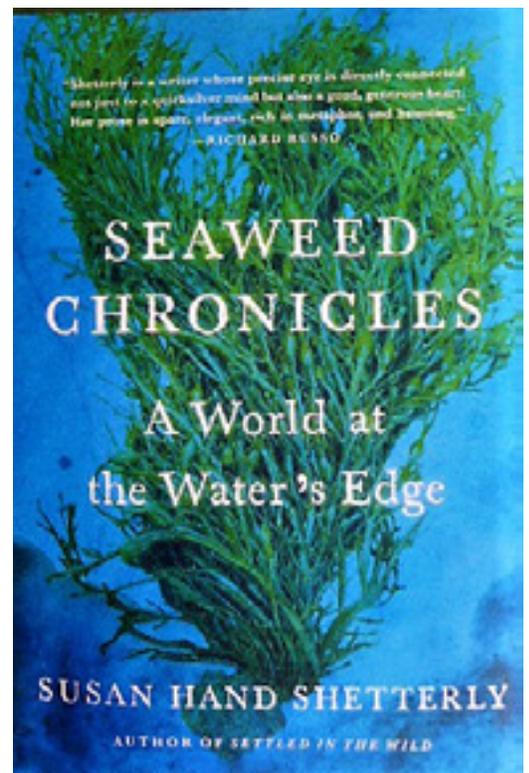


Susan studies all aspects of seaweed, a valuable natural resource., including the history, biology, natural habitat, and commercial uses. Seaweed also acts as a wildlife sanctuary and she will inform us about the challenges of proper management of growing and harvesting it. Seaweed is becoming a global food source and is used as an ingredient in many products ranging from cottage cheese to shampoo . Her book tells the seaweed story in an engaging and entertaining narrative. The book will be available at the talk and she will be happy to sign your copy.

Susan grew up in New York City and Connecticut, and lived with her family for two years on Mallorca. She received a Master's degree in Education from Harvard University and a Master of Fine Arts from Goddard College. She has been a writer in residence at the University of Maine at Orono, and was given a summer residency at Yaddo in Saratoga Springs, New York.

The author of nine books, Susan has written for several magazines, including *Down East*, *Yankee*, and *Audubon Magazine*. She was a contributing writer for **Maine Times** for many years, writing essays and articles on wild lands and wildlife, and the people who work with them.

Susan's book **Settled In The Wild** won the The Maine Literary Award for Best Nonfiction from the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance in 2011. Susan has also been awarded two Maine Arts Commission grants and a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts. In 2017, she received an Alfred P. Sloan grant to complete her newest book, **Seaweed Chronicles: A World At The Water's Edge**. In December 2018, *Seaweed Chronicles* was announced as a longlist finalist for the 2019 PEN/E.O. Wilson Literary Science Writing Award.





# - President's Column - Nancy Knapp

*Photo Credit: Burt Knapp*

As I write this column it is gray and very cold with a high temperature of 0 degrees today on our hill and the wind is blowing. Thoughts go back to mid-summer this past year when the thermometer read above 90 degrees and the sun's heat seemed relentless. It always amazes me that our local plants and animals can thrive in an eco-system with a 100 degree temperature range. Peaches may not survive an extremely cold spell but all of our other bushes and trees, bulbs and perennials continue stalwartly on. Each of the living plants and creatures who share our environment has had to adapt to these extremes of temperature, some in quite impressive ways.

I recently read that ruffed grouse make holes in the deep snow where they roost and stay warm as much as 18" beneath a fluffy snow pack. They grow feathers that completely encircle their legs. Their toes produce modified hairs which double the surface area of each toe. These hairs function like a snowshoe allowing this bird, which frequently walks, to stay on top of the snow to search for berries, twig tips and nuts for food.

In the plant world the skunk cabbage is thermogenic. In early spring it produces a strange looking structure called a spadix which actually produces heat, enough to melt its way through snow. It does this through a complex process of respiration which produces heat; this is different from most plants. Thermogenesis was actually quite common during the age of the dinosaurs and is thought to have evolved to attract early pollinators. Plants now find nectar to be a more efficient way to attract pollinators.

Herb Wilson who teaches ornithology and biology courses at Colby will be our March speaker. He has written 3 columns about the Christmas Bird Count and the amazing diversity of birds seen in Maine in December. Blue birds were found in York County as late as 12/17/18! His web site has lots of information covering the count as well as many other topics: <http://web.colby.edu/mainebirds/about/>

In April we will learn from IF&W speaker Shevenell Webb about the weasel family in Maine, and in May, about seaweed which is much in the news now as a source of food, farming and much more. Our Speaker, Susan Hand Shetterly has a new book, **Seaweed Chronicles**, covering this topic and we will have books available which she will sign if you wish. We hope to have you join us for all three talks this spring.

*Nancy Knapp*

PS – Remember to turn off your outside lights to keep our sky dark and to minimize your use of plastics! The environment thanks you.

## - Citizen Science -

### **Plant Conservation Volunteer Program**

As we reach the depths of winter and the warm weather seems like a dream of so long ago, the New England Wild Flower Society is already gearing up for the 2019 field season with its **Plant Conservation Volunteer Program**.

The Plant Conservation Volunteer Program (PCV for short), has been running for over 25 years and is the oldest rare plant monitoring program in the United States. As a subset of the New England Plant Conservation Program

(NEPCoP), the PCV Program utilizes Citizen Scientists to help monitor, collect seed, and manage rare plant populations across New England.

The need for such a volunteer program became apparent in the 1990s when the status of rare plant occurrences (another way to say “population” without any biological connotation associated with it) that needed to be updated by monitoring was more than what a small group of professionals could handle. Each state has only one Botanist, and the New England Wild Flower Society only a handful of Conservation Staff. The PCV program allows for significantly more monitoring work to be completed from year to year. The program has grown to a consortium of over 120 professional botanists and over 400 amateur botanists. Volunteers have been essential on-the-ground field botanists for both the New England Wild Flower Society and each of the six New England State’s Natural Heritage Programs, and play a critical role in rare plant conservation for the region.

One of the most important things we can do to help conserve rare plants is to get a better understanding of their vitality and survival across the region. Volunteers receive assignments of plants to go out and survey, but occasionally they send us reports of plants on the landscape we may not be aware of. The efforts and passion of volunteers out looking for rare species (or just botanizing) is a boon to conservation efforts, because we cannot protect species if we do not know where they are or how they are!



**Photo Credit: Burt Knapp**

give an educational or entertaining talk. This is also a time we invite the State Natural Heritage programs to come and talk directly with the volunteers; an effective way for volunteers to ask questions of the Natural Heritage programs too.

The contributions of our volunteers over the past 25-years and in the future will help direct conservation biologists in management and protections of rare plant species. Running a regional rare plant monitoring program is a huge endeavor, and without the help of volunteers it would not exist at the scale it does today. The value our volunteers bring to the success of plant conservation in New England is exceptional. Their efforts clear the path for volunteer participation in plant conservation for the future ahead.

For more information go to:

[NewEnglandWild.org/conserve/saving-imperiled-plants/plant-conservation.html/](http://NewEnglandWild.org/conserve/saving-imperiled-plants/plant-conservation.html/)

*-Laney Widener*

The program attracts and retains passionate volunteers committed to conservation and the study of botany. With all the work the volunteers do, the program works hard to give back to them. Every year field trips are planned for the volunteers. These trips are led by a professional botanist to a site of botanical interest which may include areas where certain rare species are found, or areas with limited public access. As a result, volunteers can learn from a professional botanist about a particular species or site. At the end of the season we also hold “Wrap Ups” as a volunteer appreciation event. Wrap Ups provide a space for volunteers to share stories and photos of their field season, reflect on areas needing improvement, and see all the other volunteers – all while sharing a potluck meal. At their spring training sessions (refresher sessions for returning volunteers) we have a guest speaker come and



**Photo Credit: Burt Knapp**



## - Nature Watch -

### Have you heard about The Great Black Hawk?

The Great Black Hawk, usually a bird of Central and South America, was first spotted in Maine on Oct 9th in Biddeford and since had apparently taken up residence at Deering Oaks in Portland. Nancy and I, being in Portland, stopped by Deering Oaks to see if we could see it. There we found a dozen people looking in the direction of a large oak tree, some with telephoto lenses



Photo Credit: Doug Hitchcox

and others with binoculars. We had not planned a birding expedition and did not have binoculars with us. While simply staring at a “distant bird” in a tree, a sympathetic birder came over and lent us his binoculars. The bird was indeed in the tree, and was one we had never seen before. It looked more brown than black, but is felt to be a juvenile. How and why it ended up in Maine is a mystery.

The same bird, as judged by its markings, was probably first seen in Texas on August 9th. The hawk usually feeds on reptiles, crabs, fish, rodents, and eggs. Deering Oaks abounds in grey squirrels and so our visitor seemed quite happy. Being from the tropics, however, the hawk was not prepared for winter in Maine. It was found on Jan 20th, following a snow storm, on the ground and clearly in distress. It was transferred to Avian Haven for treatment. Avian Haven in Freedom, is a nonprofit wild bird rehabilitation center which treats about 2,500 birds a year. While eating and healthy appearing there was concern about frost injury to its feet and legs, and ultimately the bird was euthanized.

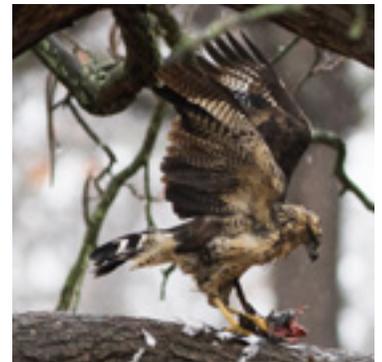


Photo Credit: Doug Hitchcox

Many have asked why the bird had not been captured earlier in the winter and relocated to someplace within its native range. Our naturalist at Maine Audubon, Doug Hitchcox, thinks “ the best way to look at it is that the hawk \*chose\* to be here. “Vagrancy” is a natural phenomenon and one way that species can expand their range. Most of the time birds are probably not successful, as in this case, but it is not something that humans should try to correct by capturing and relocating the vagrant.” Also, such relocation efforts have a very low rate of success.

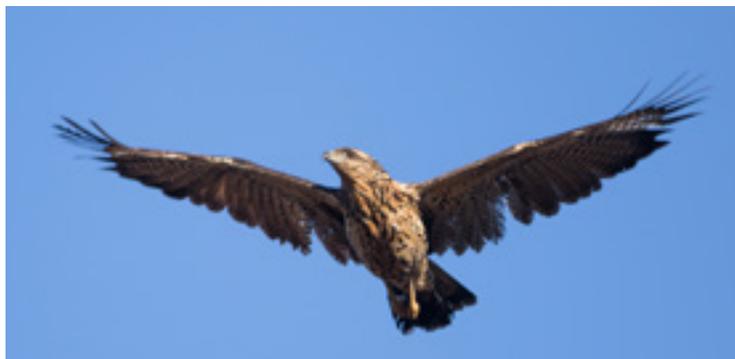


Photo Credit: Doug Hitchcox

It has been exciting, however, as this has been the first spotting of a Great Black Hawk in Maine and possibly in the United States. More can be found out about this bird in Cornell’s book on Neotropical birds:

[neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/Species-Account/nb/species/grbhaw1/overview](http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/Species-Account/nb/species/grbhaw1/overview)

-Burt Knapp

## - Notes -

### National Geographic’s Five Shocking Facts about Plastic:

1. Estimates for how long plastic endures - range from 450 years to forever
2. Worldwide, 73% of beach litter is plastic: cigarette butts, bottles, bottle caps, food wrappers, grocery bags ,and polystyrene containers.
3. By 2050 virtually every seabird species on the planet will be eating plastic.
4. More than 40% of plastic is used just once, and then tossed.
5. Half the plastic ever made was produced in the past 15 years.



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**Thank you!**

