



THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon Society

A CHAPTER OF THE MAINE AUDUBON SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 832, FARMINGTON, MAINE 04938

Volume XLI Number 4

March 2012

Monthly Programs

Grassland Birds

Wednesday, March 14 at 7PM

Thomas Auditorium, University of Maine at Farmington

The mowing of hay fields is a common rhythm in our summer life and, for many, an essential economic activity. Making hay while the sun shines is a priority for area farmers but grassland birds have their own 'hay' to make in the short growing season: their precious clutches of eggs. Too often these are laid exactly where tractors and mowing machines run. How can we coexist with these birds and still accomplish our needs?

Noah Perlut is a Professor of Ornithology at the University of New England. His research interests include the joint ecological and evolutionary consequences of using human-managed habitats as wildlife habitat. He will lead us in a discussion of the life cycles of grassland birds and how we might bring this knowledge to our management and use of grasslands.

This meeting is free and open to the public.

Up Coming Attractions

Wednesday, April 11, Monthly Program: Tim Caverly, Allagash Tails: Writer and former Park Ranger
Tim Caverly will share some of his Allagash experience and writings.

Wednesday, May 9, Monthly Program: Professor Herb Wilson will begin with an overview of the biology of butterflies and skippers. He will then describe some of the findings of the on-going Maine Butterfly Survey, a state-wide project to map the distribution of the 115 species of butterflies in our state.

Saturday, May 12, Field Trip: Warbler walk on the West Farmington Whistle Stop Trail

Saturday, May 26, Field Trip: Orbeton Stream Warbler walk; guided bird walk up the Orbeton Stream Valley

Next Board meeting will be March 6 at the home of Nick and Cindy Rehagen at 6PM.

President's Column

Burt Knapp

Winter is losing its grip on our corner of the world. The sap is running in response to the increasing power of the sun as it strikes and warms the bark on the south sides of our sugar maples. As they said when we moved to Maine some 36 years ago, we have “survived” the winter. We have done so in comfort with wood still in the woodshed, and food aplenty still in the root cellar, chest freezer, and pantry.

The root cellars and pantries of the local “critters” have likewise seen them through their winter. “Among mammals, food hoarding can be an alternative to hibernating or migrating, but only a small percentage of the total number of species on the planet store food.” We can identify easily with the beavers that fell trees and saplings in the fall and drag them into underwater food caches near their lodges. The Gray jay, also known as the Canada jay, likewise gathers and caches food for the winter, and does so with the help of its saliva! Especially sticky as it dries, it serves as a glue to attach packets of food to tree branches, to be available to them throughout the winter. They, like us also, have discovered the value of a cozy, well insulated home. Their nests allow them to incubate eggs two months earlier than their cousins, the Blue jays who are less fastidious home builders. These interesting facts and many more are detailed for us by Bernd Heinrich in his book, Winter World – well worth reading if you are not acquainted with it.

Western Main Audubon has come through another winter as well, and is excited about our spring lecture series. The first talk on grassland birds will be cosponsored by the Franklin County Farm Bureau, and should help us all better understand these birds and how to protect them by our field management practices.

Education is a key priority of Maine Audubon. Susan Gallo, Wildlife Biologist at Maine Audubon, has with others put together a Loon Box and loon education curriculum for grade school students. They have made a box available to our area schools and libraries. It is housed in the Kalikow Collection at UMF – <http://kcmc.umf.maine.edu/at/>, or 778-7895. The curriculum book, Common Loons in the Classroom, is available with the box, or online at: <https://sites.google.com/a/maineaudubon.org/common-loons-in-the-classroom/>. Please consider this for “a classroom near you”, and make your favorite school or science teacher aware.

Likewise, we all need to continue to be aware of the political issues with which the current legislature is grappling. Keep informed by going to: <http://www.maineaudubon.org/act/index.shtml>

Hope to see you all at one or all of our spring lectures!



Conservation Corner

Steve Bien

What Price Green Energy?

The recession and the plummeting price of natural gas have turned up as speed bumps on the road to our green energy future. They may, in fact, produce a permanent detour.

We all know about the economy. Internationally the UK, Denmark, Germany, Greece, and Spain are all pulling back on their subsidies of wind to relieve themselves of national debt. Spain was the world poster child of wind energy, getting nearly 20% of its energy from wind (the US is just under 3%). But the costs to strapped rate payers and an intolerable national debt are too high to bear there as well as elsewhere in Europe. Wind turbines are not being torn down but Spain and others are turning back to imported conventional fossil fuel sources in responses to their financial travails.

Here in Maine, our governor wants to abandon the previous administration's goal of a 44% renewable energy portfolio and opt instead for the promise that cheap natural gas offers. Maine Citizens for Clean Energy has so far failed to get the requisite 57 000 signatures it needs for its referendum making one wonder whether we have cold feet about renewables.

Natural-gas prices fell 32% last year on the heels of very rosy supply forecasts and declining industrial demand due to the sluggish economy. Those prices are continuing to drop as the industry seems to defy the basic rules of capitalism. Natural gas supply and production are going up while demand falls so that prices now are half of what they were two years ago.

Cheaper Heat

Natural-gas futures fell for the third straight day Wednesday

Daily settlement price on the continuous front-month contract



Several factors operate in favor of the consumer. Supply and drilling contracts inked before the recession are being honored to maintain market share despite the poor return right now. Also, to some extent natural gas is continuously supplied as a by-product of other hydro carbon mining such as might occur for plastics, to take one example. This buoys the supply too. Here in the US, natural gas has also drawn a lot of positive attention as the next American fuel and many have entered the field betting on long, steady returns as consumers increasingly see NG in positive terms, well deserved or not. At the same time the negative press about fracking has not yet discouraged production or altered NG's reputation with the public as a relatively clean, greener fuel alternative for power and heat.

This may be a perfect set up for a market bubble and collapse, especially if the naysayers are right that reserves and profits are grossly exaggerated. Or natural gas may be the ticket to our near term energy future.

Then there is the price of renewables. How expensive is renewable energy? This simple question is surprisingly hard to answer as the numbers are loaded with caveats and hidden assumptions: the costs of subsidies, the value of added jobs, the cost of carbon and associated climate impacts, health effects, environmental costs and impacts... In what follows I did my best to find the actual 'leveled' costs of energy so that comparisons are fair. Data are from the US Energy Information Administration projections at 2009 dollars. Here they are:

Photovoltaic solar \$0.211/kWh (significantly higher in marginal solar areas, such as New England); **Offshore wind** \$0.243/kWh **Onshore wind** \$0.096/kWh **New England Ridge based wind**: \$0.144/kWh (higher installation, maintenance and operating costs) **Conventional new coal** \$0.095/kWh; **Control cycle gas turbine** \$0.0631/kWh.

As you can see, wind is relatively expensive but New England ridge based wind is especially so, about 3.2 times the cost of energy supplied by a state of the art natural gas plant.

The wind industry is exercised right now about the continuation of the Production Tax Credit subsidy, due to expire unless Congress acts soon. This subsidy is widely seen as essential to the continued development of the industry,

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especially now when wind is fighting economic headwinds. The PTC was first enacted 20 years ago during the Carter administration in an effort to get the wind industry on its feet. If this was in the spirit of startup many ask why it is still needed twenty years later.

The solar energy industry is similarly under stress although technology there is making for higher yields that may keep PV in the running.

It is hard to know how this will shake out. Will the interest in green jobs and green energy trump the hard reality of price or will we opt, as we have in the past, for the necessity of cheap energy? This debate is rolling out in front of us right now and the next few months are key. Keep your eye on Congress and its actions on the PTC. See what reception our governor gets in his courting of natural gas supplies for Maine. The energy future is now.



Places to go for Help for Injured or Distressed Wildlife

For a statewide by county listing of wildlife rehabbers follow this link:

<http://www.maine.gov/ifw/wildlife/rehabilitation/listofrehabbers.htm>

Additional contacts:

* Warden Service 287-2766

* Animal Welfare 287-3846

*Avian Haven (Freedom, ME.) Birds and turtles 382-6761

<http://www.avianhaven.org/>

They have both State of Maine and US Fish and Wildlife permits.

*Wildlife Rehab (Vassalboro,ME.) 445-4326 Don and Carleen Cote

*Wildlife Rehab 966-3222 or 841-9505 Sherry

*Center for Wildlife 361-1400 Cape Neddick

info@yorkcenterforwildlife.org

Interested in volunteering to transport injured wildlife? Follow this link:<http://www.maine.gov/ifw/education/wildlifepark/>



Invasive Insect Alert

"The emerald ash borer (EAB) beetle and Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) have destroyed millions of trees throughout the US. SWOAM is partnering with the USDA and Maine Dept. of Agriculture to ask members to participate in a Volunteer EAB/ALB Forest Pest Survey."

Apparently the ALB has been reported in four states and the EAB in 15. There could be other undetected infestations in the country.

If you want to search for signs of the beetles, go to this web site: www.beetledetectives.com and look at the fact sheets.

Other helpful sites:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Maine-Bug-Watch/286814954695063>

<http://www.telegram.com/article/20111018/NEWS/110189865/0/business>

<http://www.maine.gov/agriculture/pi/pestsurvey/pestinfo/ALB/ALBupdates.htm>



A Book Review

The World Without Us

by Alan Weisman 2007

Brief review by Nick Rehagen

The Author provides a stunning account of our planet without Homo Sapiens.

In a thought experiment, Weisman begins his narrative non-fiction with history predating human inhabitants, and describes an environment unbelievably rich and diverse in flora and fauna. After the advent of man, life on Earth still maintained a reasonable balance, until the industrial revolution, after which the natural order of animal and plant species experienced degradation in the environment, leaving life radically changed. He then describes what would happen if all humans suddenly disappeared, and how man-made structures would, over time, degrade and how the earth would heal itself. Based on well-researched science, the author explores, in fascinating detail, how the natural kingdoms would interact in reclaiming the world. Weisman provides specific examples, beginning 120 million years ago and extending forward 10 million years into the future. A captivating journey, this page-turner is disturbing in its account of man's "contribution" and yet provides hope for the planet.

Nature Watch



By now both the Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Bird Count are but statistics, but you can find all that information if you Google either of those. Herb Wilson had a nice column in the paper recently on the CBC. The Misery Gore count up around The Forks was particularly interesting to us. Twenty two species were found. We were especially happy to hear that 12 Gray jays were seen! One of our favorite birds. Also 18 Ruffed grouse, 46 American goldfinches, 340 Pine siskins, 34 Purple finches, 4 Red crossbills, 17 White-winged crossbills and 4 Pine grosbeaks. We have not seen a Boreal chickadee up there for a few years and they unfortunately haven't shown up on the CBC either.

The 2012 Maine Owl Monitoring Program begins March 3. For more information one can get in touch with Dave Potter, the MOMP Coordinator.



It is always fun to hear from Kathy McInerney, she sees the most interesting birds on her walks and kayaks in the Portland area. She has been seeing and photographing Long-tail ducks lately. She writes; "The Long-tail are just incredible - they dive to astounding depths and are the most vocal sea duck - they sound as though they are "yodeling".

Judith Scarl sent this in recently regarding the Mountain Birdwatch program, she writes;

"Love birding and hiking? The Vermont Center for Ecostudies seeks volunteers to "adopt" a mountain peak for a dawn bird survey in June! Mountain Birdwatch is a citizen science program that monitors the status and habitat requirements of high-elevation songbirds; volunteers survey eleven montane species, including the rare and vulnerable Bicknell's Thrush." For more information, visit their website at <http://www.vtecostudies.org/MBW/> or contact Mountain Birdwatch director Judith Scarl (jscarl@vtecostudies.org; (802) 649-1431 x7).

It sure has been a most unusual season. Marnie Bottesch, who lives on the shores of the Kennebec in Norridgewock, was telling me how they have been seeing Robins all winter. Also we have heard from a number of folks who have been seeing Bluebirds this winter. Not too early to start thinking about your Bluebird houses for this season.

Windfall Screenings coming to a place near YOU!

This is a movie about a town in upstate New York and how a proposal for 40 industrial wind turbines divided the residents. They were first wooed by financial incentives and then discovered the impacts that the 400 foot high windmills would have. Adrienne Rollo

Skowhegan Free Library 9 Elm Street Skowhegan, ME 04976 Thursday, **March 1, 2012** -- 6:00 pm

The Strand Theater 345 Main Street Rockland, ME Saturday, **March 3, 2012** -- 2:00 pm Sunday, **March 4, 2012** -- 3:00 pm.

Dirigo High School 145 Weld Street Dixfield, ME Sunday, **March 4, 2012** -- 2:00 pm

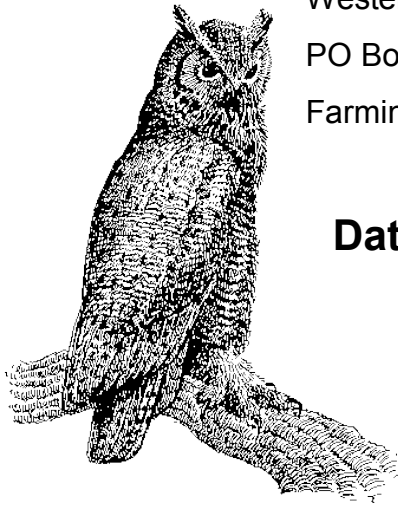
University of Maine Farmington 111 South Street, Farmington, ME 04938 Wednesday, **March 7, 2012** -- 7:00 pm

UMaine Fort Kent Wednesday, March 7, 2012 6:00 p.m.

Snowmobile Club 73 Houlton Road Island Falls, ME 04747 Friday, **March 30, 2012** -- 6:30 pm

For more info. Please contact Karen Pease at roomtomove@tds.net





Western Maine Audubon Society
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New Members

Maine Audubon

Chapter Membership Application

Yes! I'd like to join!

Please enroll me as a member of Maine Audubon and Western Maine Audubon.

Please send *Habitat* magazine and my membership card to the address below.

My Check for (\$35 Individual level or up through \$1,000 Director's Circle) is enclosed. Please check the Audubon web site for details.
www.maineaudubon.org

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please make checks payable to: **Maine Audubon**. Send this application and your check to:



Maine Audubon

20 Gilsland Farm Rd.

Falmouth, Maine 04105

K55 7XGH

Chapter Code