



THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon Society

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

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October 2011

Monthly Programs

Bird Migration in the Gulf of Maine

Wednesday, October 5 at 7:00

Room C23, Roberts Learning Center, University of Maine at Farmington

Rebecca Holberton, Associate Prof. at UM Orono, is a native New Englander with long family ties here in Maine and Massachusetts. Her interest in birds began while growing up hearing bobwhite quail calling back and forth in the late afternoons from the edges of farm fields where she worked, and watching seabirds out on the ocean while her family fished.

She completed her undergraduate degree at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York, then went on to complete a doctorate degree at the State University of New York at Albany studying the hows and whys of bird migration. Her work generally focuses on integrating ecology, behavior, and physiology of birds - any birds - in order to understand how well they are doing in our environment and why. Her work has taken her to the northern and southern polar environments working with albatrosses and penguins during the austral winter, and dodging polar bears in the Arctic while studying how the Blackpoll warbler makes the longest non-stop flight of all of our songbirds.

Currently, with her collaborators, she is bringing together their respective expertise and resources to understand bird migration in the Gulf of Maine region and the potential risks birds face now and in the future. Here is a website that features a lot of the work she will be talking about.

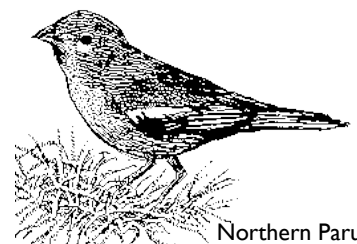
<http://umainetoday.umaine.edu/past-issues/spring-2011/songbird-superhighway/>

Next Month

River Otters in Maine

Nov 9th, Room C23 Roberts Learning Center, UMF, Farmington.

Robert Cordes of Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife will be our speaker.



Northern Parula



President's Column

Burt Knapp

Just a mite of frost on the grass in the field this morning was a reminder that summer is over. The chickens are now foraging where the earliest stand of corn had been. They delight when I scavenge the last ears and throw the partially filled out ones to them.

We've been busy now attending to all the myriad tasks which accompany the change of seasons: cleaning up garden plots, cover cropping with winter rye, digging potatoes and other root crops for the root cellar, picking apples, and, of course, filling the wood shed.

Fortunate we are to live on the land and to enjoy the bounty of tended gardens, benignly neglected old apple trees planted years ago, and a wood lot large enough to provide fuel aplenty for cold winter nights. Maine once was the "bread basket" of New England, and through the enthusiasm and energies of many young and not-so-young farmers, it may once again be able to provide most foods, locally grown, to us in the state and perhaps beyond. It is certainly a vision of MOFGA – Maine Organic Farmers and Growers Association.

We may take for granted our fields and open spaces, our lakes, mountains and wild places, but they are treasures in short supply in much of the rest of the country. However, the face of Maine is changing; the traditional fishing, forestry and dairy farming industries are in decline. While the Maine Farm Land Trust, the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and many smaller local land trusts are helping preserve and protect some of our farmland, scenic coastal areas, and local natural areas, what about our vast north woods wilderness areas? Governor Baxter was ahead of his time in protecting and preserving for all of us the wilderness area he most loved, now Baxter State Park. But the future of much of the remainder of the great north woods is in question. Large tracts of land have changed hands, often broken up, and are now more subject to development in one fashion or another. The continued existence of an over-reaching agency, LURC, to coordinate development/preservation in the north woods is also in question. (Make know your views on LURC to your state senator and state representative. Maine Audubon is strongly against the weakening or dissolution of LURC.)

It is in this setting that Roxanne Quimby's offer of the gift of her land to us the people for protection, preservation, and enjoyment, takes on renewed interest. She spoke compellingly to Jennifer Rooks on MPBN recently about her vision and her proposed gift of 70,000 acres to establish a North Woods National Park adjacent to Baxter Park. At a time when the local economy in Millinocket is in collapse, and the future of Maine seems more and more to be in tourism and eco-tourism, it is an idea we in the state need to take seriously and with appreciation. A North Woods National Park would bring tourism dollars to a depressed region of the state, but, more than that it would showcase the beauty of this magnificent, undisturbed natural wilderness area. A national park would draw visitors from here and abroad and both introduce them to the beauty and subtle interconnectedness of life forms in the north woods wilderness, and educate about the need for the preservation of such areas. Only by instilling a sense of awe and appreciation in many, can we hope to divert human "civilization" from overwhelming and displacing the essential elements of our natural world. Thoreau's words ring true yet today: "In wildness is the preservation of the world." We need undisturbed natural areas to allow us to connect with nature and with that core essence within each of us which makes us at once one with our mother earth and with each other.

The first step in the creation of a National Park is to have the US Congress approve a feasibility study. For this to happen local support is needed. The residents of Millinocket seem to be looking more favorably on the concept of a National Park since the size has been reduced from more than 3 million acres to just the 70,000 acres owned by Ms. Quimby. Only one of our congress persons, Chellie Pingree, has stated her support. Maine Audubon has come out in favor of the study. We all need to encourage Susan Collins, Olympia Snowe, and Michael Michaud to support the study as well!

CONSERVATION CORNER

Steve Bien

Is Natural Gas Really the Energy of the Future?

The past year has been one of sobering reminders that our energy choices are imperfect at best, frightening at worst. First, The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf last summer reminded us that oil production is a dirty, dangerous business that will increasingly threaten fragile areas. The Fukushima reactor disaster in March showed how a sophisticated nuclear power plant and its fail-safe systems could collapse in the face of the unexpected. What's left? Coal is an old bad story, but there was always clean burning natural gas. In fact, these disasters seemed a perfect if back handed endorsement of natural gas since it has had the reputation of being clean to both obtain and use. But if recent reports are an indication, Houston we may have a problem.

Natural gas has for a long time been an energy source that the business and environmental communities could feel good about. What's not to like? We don't hear about natural gas spills, it seems clean when we use it, and we don't have to fight wars to protect it. Indeed, we are the Saudi Arabia of natural gas, with trillions of cubic feet of it under our feet, enough to last 70 years at current levels of consumption. We are well poised to replace coal and even oil with it, little by little, and it is often seen as the necessary bridge that will carry us to the energy future of nuclear and renewables. Just today the Bangor Daily News carried an article about the Governor's desire to increase Maine's reliance on natural gas for just these reasons. He is proposing major conversions from oil to gas fired power plants to draw increased piping capacity to Maine.

Natural gas typically occurs in shale that is sandwiched between impervious layers of limestone. Most of the readily available subsurface deposits of NG have already been tapped so to reach the waiting abundance of the deeper fields, which lie a mile or more down, special drilling techniques have been developed, most notably hydro-fracturing or fracking. This is the use of high pressure water in combination with solvents and sand to fracture gas bearing shale and drive gas up the well. Water in, gas out. Sort of. 90% of current natural gas production is based on this process.

According to the industry, hydro fracking is safe, well established, and in need of neither scrutiny nor increased regulation, thank you. The industry line is that since the fracturing of rock strata occurs thousands of feet below groundwater sources, there is a built in protection from any ground water pollution. Industry and EPA representatives frequently cite a claim of zero water pollution incidents in more than a million fracking procedures in the US.

Not everyone sees it this way, however. After freedom of information probes, a case of a contaminated well was identified in Wyoming, although the company and the EPA are still tight on the specifics. Off the record, though, EPA staffers say that dozens of instances have probably occurred but the details seem under wraps. But direct contamination from fracking is only one vehicle for pollution and others may be far more common.

Here in the east, where drilling is occurring in more densely populated areas, another kind of water pollution seems to be the risk. Pennsylvania and New York sit over the Marcellus shale formation, a 700 mile long stretch of Ordovician rock that has been hailed as a gold mine for the industry. Some estimates run as high as 500 trillion cu feet of gas worth a trillion dollars at the well head. So while drilling over the Marcellus is still in its infancy with only 2000 wells in operation, the race is on,

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and drilling companies are tripping over each other to get drilling rights in towns throughout the region.

Now, in the hydro fracking process between 10 and 40 % of the water sent down comes back up along with mud and drilling waste all of which must be disposed of. This sludge is a mixture of solvents, like benzene and toluene that is part of the fracking mix, along with radon rich sand and gravel driven up from below. Some of the effluent can be recycled in the drilling process but the bulk is being sent to water treatment plants which may or may not be up to the task of processing huge volumes of industrial waste. If not, plant overflows occur and in several instances large quantities of contaminated waste water have made their way into rivers and streams as effluent bypassed the plant. Even the successfully treated waste can be a problem. This sludge has been spread as land fill or even fertilizer, creating another opportunity for toxic drilling waste to have access to our food supply or surface waters.

How common is this problem? The New York Times team studied 200 wells in Pennsylvania and found 50 instances of improperly handled waste with high levels of radon. Unlike western drilling, Marcellus shale exploration is occurring in residential neighborhoods and in and around public water supplies. Some of the formation runs under sensitive areas like Chesapeake Bay, the Delaware watershed, and New York City's own aquifer in the Catskills so this is a pressing issue for communities in the region.

The health effects of this are largely theoretical right now. After all radon and carcinogenic solvents in the water supply can take a long time to translate into health effects if the health effects appear at all in a discoverable way. And when the industry and the higher levels of the EPA seem disposed to minimize the issue, one is not comforted.

It is hard to know if natural gas is the Golden Goose it currently appears to be or whether it is yet another investment bubble on its way to popping. Independent geologists suggest that industry estimates of gas yields are exaggerated. The brief track record of Pennsylvania natural gas drilling is so far one of disappointing yields and unanticipated extraction expense. But the next big find or technical breakthrough is just around the corner. What is clear is that with energy prices and the future poised the way they are, these deposits will not be ignored whatever it takes and we will pay the bill.

"We're burning the furniture to heat the house," said John H. Quigley, who left last month as secretary of Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. "In shifting away from coal and toward natural gas, we're trying for cleaner air, but we're producing massive amounts of toxic wastewater with salts and naturally occurring radioactive materials, and it's not clear we have a plan for properly handling this waste."

Much is uncertain, but as usual there is no free lunch. We all support the development of clean energy but every choice, be it clean fossil fuels like natural gas or renewables, is problematic in its own way. Conservation looks better all the time.

A blue starburst graphic with the text "Kid's Corner" in bold black font centered within it.

Kid's Corner

The "Flying V" of Fall Christine Blais

In the north, the changing colors of the leaves are a sure sign that Fall is here. Another can be seen in the sky in the shape of a "V." Listen for the sound of honking Canada geese and look up to watch them head south for the winter. Did you know Canada geese can fly as many as 1,500 miles in 24 hours? It is believed they fly in the "V" to help save energy on their long trip. Along the way, these large birds eat grasses, grains and berries. Some subspecies of Canada geese can weigh almost 20lbs. It takes a lot of fuel to migrate and they can spend ½ of their day just eating! Imagine the fuel you would need to make a trip like that! To learn more about Canada Geese check out:

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/canada-goose/> or
<http://www.ducks.ca/resource/general/wetland/geese.html>



The days are getting shorter and cooler! Hope you all are finding time to get out to enjoy this fine Fall weather.

A few weeks ago our family took a little canoe/kayak trip down the Kennebec. Six adults a 13month old, and two dogs. Lots of fun! We put in at Old Point, paddled down to Bombazee Rips, saw no rips as the water was high, but had a nice picnic lunch on the rocks; some of the crew, including the youngest, went for a swim. Then on to Norridgewock's Oosoola Park, where we took out. We were delighted to see a Bald eagle along the way.

On 9/19 Steve Ellis sent us some of his observations, "I hiked a couple of small mountains in the Kennebec Highlands in the Belgrade region today, including Roundtop and Vienna Mtn. Actually Vienna Mtn. is still owned by Allen's Blueberries, and is not yet part of the Highlands. It's expansive summit has 300 acres of blueberry fields on it. I saw a kestrel flying around those barrens this morning, so they haven't all left yet. I also saw 3 Sandhill cranes in a field next to Rt. 27 near Hammond's in Belgrade. I think they've summered here for several summers. I also saw a couple of lady's slippers with seed pods on the Roundtop Mtn. trail. They should be almost ready to open and disperse seed with the first frost. I saw another bird I didn't expect to see on Saturday up in the Bigelow area. There was a cormorant sitting on a stump in a small pond just south of Flagstaff Lake next to the East Flagstaff Road a short way south of the AT crossing. It seemed out of place to me, but maybe I'm not observant enough."

We think it is interesting that Steve is still seeing kestrels! Guess they haven't all left, the ones around here seem to be gone now though.

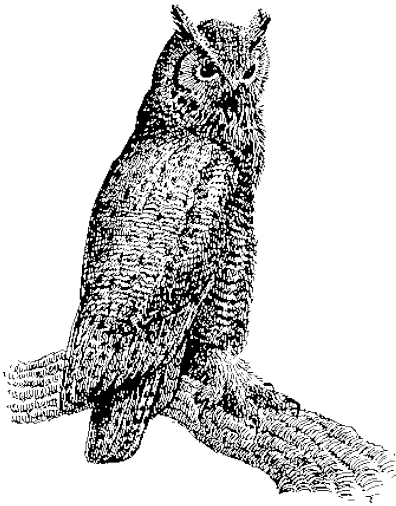
Al St. Germain from Lovell was telling us this morning, the last day of Summer, about the Phoebe's around his place. He has been for years keeping track of their goings and comings and they have always been gone by the 25th of July. This year all but one left, and that fellow is still around. Maine Audubon has assured him that this little guy will soon be on his way too. Sure hope he has a good trip and will return in the Spring.

We have one more newsletter before our winter break, so if you have something you would like to contribute, please send it to me at: aewilder@somtel.com by the middle of Oct. Please write Audubon newsletter or something like that in the subject box to get my attention! Thanks. SW



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New Members
Maine Audubon Society
Chapter Membership Application

Yes! I'd like to join!

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

— My Check for \$45 is enclosed.

Name _____

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

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