



# 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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April 2013

## Monthly Programs

“Monitoring Maine’s Great Blue Herons”

Wednesday, April 10 at 7 PM

Room C 23, Roberts Learning Center University of Maine at Farmington

The great blue heron is often touted as one of the most widespread and adaptable birds in North America. Here in Maine they are certainly widespread, but recent data has suggested a decline in their breeding population especially along the coast. Concerns over a population decline prompted the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to conduct a comprehensive survey of breeding colonies in 2009, and to begin a statewide adopt-a-colony program called the Heron Observation Network.

Join Danielle D'Auria, a wildlife biologist with MDIFW's Bird Group, to learn more about Maine's largest colonial wading bird, as well its close relatives.

Danielle D'Auria is a wildlife biologist who works in the Bird Group of Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Her education started with a Biology degree from SUNY at Geneseo, followed by a Masters in Wildlife Science from New Mexico State University. Her past work focused on threatened and endangered bird species. As an assistant refuge manager for USFWS in Olympia, WA, she focused on habitat restoration, conservation planning, invasive plant management, and a variety of wildlife and habitat monitoring. She now focuses on statewide populations of colonial wading birds, secretive marsh birds, black terns, and loons.

This program is free and open to the public.

### Upcoming Events

May 8th: Honey Bee Talk

May 11th: Sat. Warbler Walk in West Farmington

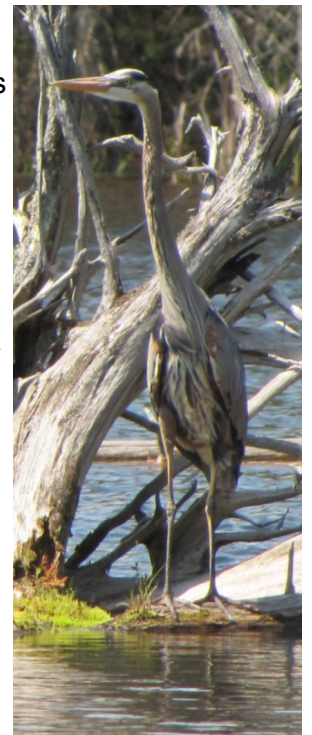
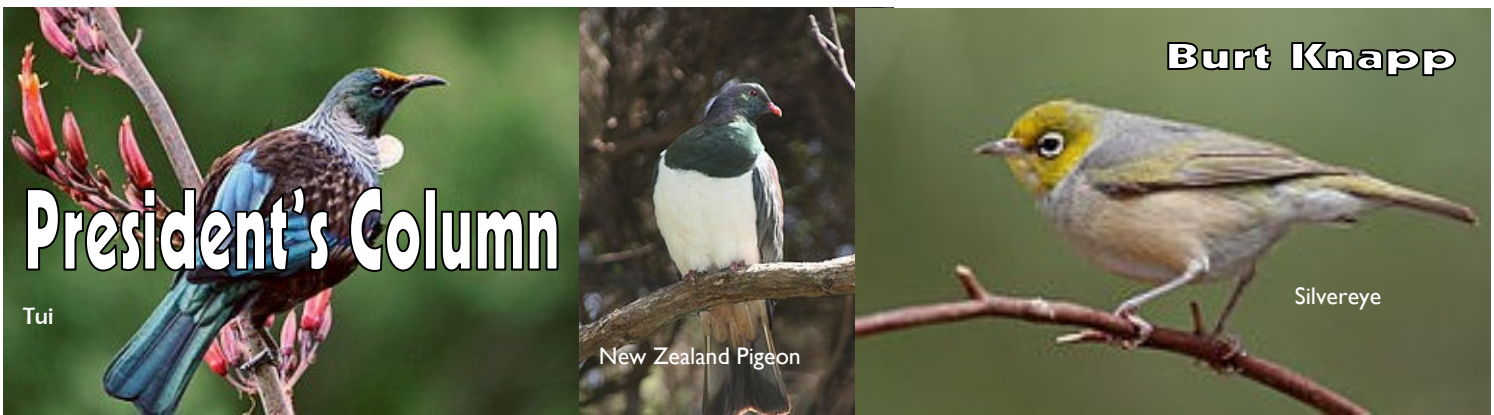


Photo by S. Wilder



# President's Column

Tui

New Zealand Pigeon

Silvereye

Last month Nancy and I traveled around the South Island of New Zealand. It was mostly an adventure with our oldest son and his young family, but, as a bonus, it afforded some time for casual birding. It was fun since most of the birds were new to us. Being so isolated, the birds and amphibians of New Zealand were unique in their development. They did not face pressure from mammalian predators, and so a number of birds were flightless. The giant Moa was a prime example. With the arrival of Western man it was hunted to extinction. Many of the other birds, especially the flightless ones, faced predation from mammals such as cats, dogs, rats, weasels and stoats, which arrived with the Westerners. Off shore islands of New Zealand, which have remained free from predatory mammals, have become refuge areas for bird populations under pressure.



Weka

Our first introduction to a flightless bird was the “cheeky” **Weka**. Chicken sized, brown, and not very attractive, it came to our campsite to scavenge for food scraps. Not nearly as endearing as our Canada Jay, it would scurry into the underbrush when challenged - more of a camp “rat” than a bird! It grabbed the bread bag as I was making sandwiches, and it scared our 1 ½ year old grandchild.



Fantail

Much more endearing was the **Fantail**, a small, friendly “show-off” which would flutter along in the tree branches in front of and above us as we hiked, never keeping still enough for a photo. Also, like our chickadee, the **New Zealand Tomtit** was quite “tame” and allowed us a few close encounters, it seemed as curious about us as we were about it. Other small birds we saw were the **Gray Warbler**, and the **Silvereye**, with its striking white ring around its eyes.

Higher in the canopy, and often heard, but seldom seen was the **Tui**, a melodious, blue jay sized bird which has quite a repertoire of sounds and songs and can mimic other birds. Walking along thru some of the temperate rain forest trails was wonderful for the symphony of bird song!



Kea

Quite common were the **White Backed Magpie** in the farm fields, the **Australian Harrier**, along the roadsides picking up carrion, the **Oyster Catchers** on the beaches, and the **New Zealand Pigeon**, a colorful large (20”) bird often seen roosting in trees even in urban areas.

Alerted by its loud call *kea-a*, we glimpsed the **Kea**, a parrot which is common on the western side of the “Southern Alps” of New Zealand. We saw it once while hiking, but later got up close when one visited the parking lot of a tourist area – they are notorious camp scavengers also.



Yellow Eyed Penguin

At the **Royal Albatross** Center, where nesting sites are protected, we saw one of the great birds soaring. The displays and films at the center were almost as impressive as the sheer immense size of this bird. Alas, we only saw a nesting area, and foot prints in the sand of the **Yellow Eyed Penguin**. They spend their day fishing at sea, and come ashore at dusk to nest for the night. Not seen, was the endangered **Kiwi**, a nocturnal flightless bird, which has become a national symbol for New Zealand.





pukeko

The most colorful bird we saw was the **Pukeko**, or Swamp Hen. I had gotten the grandchildren a cute book about a Pukeko raised by a mother hen with her brood of normal chickens. It gets into trouble with the farmer and finally finds its own niche in the nearby swamp where it belonged amidst the lizards and frogs. Finally, at the end of our stay, we saw a small group of Pukekos by the roadside in an area of farmland.

Back to Maine, and our wonderful feathered friends. Please join us for our April talk on herons. Please also consider signing up (e-mail me) for our e-newsletter rather than continuing with the print version. You will receive all the pictures in **full color**, have active web links at your fingertips, and save us on paper and postage.




Southern Royal Albatross

(Note: all but one of the pictures associated with this essay were taken from Wikipedia where you can search and also find a nice treatise on each bird. The picture of the Fantail was from a nice wildlife photography site: [http://www.glen.co.nz/photos/custom\\_fields?q=fantail](http://www.glen.co.nz/photos/custom_fields?q=fantail))



Kiwi

Since tax day is around the corner, we would like to encourage everyone to think about contributing to the Endangered and Non-game Wildlife Fund - the option is at the end of your 1040 form, this use to be the old "chickadee check off". Thanks! 



## Why do Stinking Benjamins Stink?

Christine Blais

Spring is finally here, so take a walk in the woods at the end of April and look for maple and beech trees. Now look down and see if you can find one of Maine's earliest spring wildflowers: the Trillium. You will know it by its three, large, egg-shaped leaves and the single flower, with three petals, that sits in the middle. It is a large wildflower, so it should be pretty easy to spot. This beautiful wildflower can be found in shades of dark maroon (usually), and will often grow in groups, covering the forest floor. But how did such a pretty flower get a name like "Stinking Benjamin?" If you take a sniff, you will notice that it smells a little like rotting meat. Yuck, right? But why does it smell like that? The lovely perfume of many flowers attract bees, but this flower is special, it attracts a fly that feeds on rotting meat. When the fly visits, it helps to pollinate the flower and gets a meal of pollen in return. Unlike other flowers, this flower does not make nectar, the sweet liquid that other insects crave. What's more, after the flower has gone by and goes to seed, the seeds are collected by ants and brought back to their nests as food where they will eventually sprout and become new plants. Stinking Benjamins take a long time to grow and don't do very well if dug up for your flower garden; some trillium species are endangered. So please, if you are lucky enough to have some of these beautiful and interesting wildflowers on your land, enjoy them where they live and they will reward you with their beautiful and stinky flowers each spring. For more information check out: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trillium\\_erectum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trillium_erectum)



Photos by S. Wilder



Big White Trillium

For more information check out: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trillium\\_erectum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trillium_erectum)



# Conservation Corner

Steve Bien

Photo by S. Wilder

## Pipelines Near and Far

Who would have thought that Maine would figure significantly in the Tar Sands Pipeline issue? After all, Alberta's tar sands deposits are about 2000 crow miles away. But it turns out that those tar sands deposits don't have great choices for an exit strategy and Portland is one of just three: West to Vancouver, south to the Gulf, or East to the Atlantic at Portland.

(The map is from the Christian Science Monitor)



I didn't know that Portland, plied by 22 tankers per month, is the second largest oil port on the East coast, but it is. The Montreal – Portland pipeline that would be reversed to carry bitumen from Alberta runs 236 miles from Montreal, roughly 3 feet underground most of its way. After crossing the White Mountains it skirts Sebago Lake, the water supply for 15% of Maine, before finally striking for the coast. It was built during World War II as an alternative supply route for fuel oil bearing tankers destined for Canada, then harried by submarines.

The pressure from all this comes, of course, from the need to develop an export strategy for Alberta's land locked sprawling bitumen fields. The tar sands deposits are a big deal in world energy reckoning for if they prove fully exploitable they would put Canada among the world's leaders in oil reserves. And since the deposits amount to more than twice what Canada uses, finding an export outlet is vital. Environmental opposition in Canada's west already makes the Vancouver option very unlikely, so the choices devolve ironically to the two American routes: Portland or Keystone XL to the Gulf.

Although we are rightfully concerned about tar sands running through Maine, my bet is that Keystone XL is going to happen, and the Bakken oil reserves in North Dakota are the reason why. Geologists have known about the Bakken since the 1940's but only recently has drilling technology advanced to reach it commercially. Sprawling under the northern Great Plains, the Bakken oil shale formation is thought to have about 20 billion barrels of crude and so much natural gas that they are just flaring it off right now. If true the Bakken will equal the known reserves explored hitherto. Fracking and horizontal drilling are what have brought this formation into reach, and there is no way we will leave this stuff in the ground. Part of the proposed Keystone XL route conveniently goes over the western edge of the field and a spur is planned to allow a feed line in Montana. Meanwhile the governor of Nebraska has dropped his concerns about the Oglala reservoir and last week an environmental review essentially signed off on the risk. President Obama is fighting so many brush fires these days that it seems unlikely he will resist Keystone XL when jobs, investor lobbying (Koch brothers, no less), our relationship with Canada, and energy independence are such compelling arguments.

Nevertheless, we should continue to resist this as best we can. Climate scientist Jim Hansen has calculated that use of tar sand oil will be send us over the 500 ppm CO2 tipping point that is regarded as the point of no return for climate warming. Whatever its impact, it will surely dwarf to oblivion the puny offsets we are accomplishing with wind and other alternative sources. We should give opposition to the Keystone project what resources we can, but the slog will be uphill and steeply so. Nor is it necessarily the case that the two Trans American pipeline routes are mutually exclusive. Portland would represent ready access to Atlantic shipping and the hunger for oil is only going to increase.







Turkey Vulture

Photos by S. Wilder

It was 3 days past the Vernal Equinox that Art Wilder saw our first Turkey Vulture of the Season. It is so nice to see the early signs of Spring! And speaking of early signs, it's been fun spotting the sap buckets or tubing on trees this past month. Our daughter has taped a few trees this year, so the air smells pretty nice when she is firing up her little setup in back of the old Sap House and syrup is about to be made.



Admiral Butterfly

Herb Wilson sent Vera Trafton an e mail recently. He writes; "I just received a report of the first sighting this spring of a Mourning Cloak in Vermont. We should all keep our eyes peeled for Mourning Cloaks, anglewings and other brush-foots that overwinter as adults here in Maine. A little warm weather is all it takes."

Herb also asked us to spread the word that there will be another training workshop for the Maine Butterfly Survey at Colby on April 20th – 9 AM – 3 PM, if interested, please contact him.

And Vera sent us; "No butterflies around here, though I did see how tiny, very delicate, long-limbed spiders float on the breeze and attach themselves to things like moving snowshoers in order to establish themselves far beyond where their spindly legs would carry them. And, I should mention, I have seen mosquitoes throughout the winter on sunny days near our bog/former beaver pond, and other places with plenty of snow yet on the ground. Eager devils! Though I should add the mosquitoes did not come at me aggressively, meaning to draw my blood the way they will come spring."

This last snow- while out skiing and snowshoing, it was fun to check out the tracks. Seems a very enterprising otter, traveled overland from one side of our hill over to the other. About a 1/2 mile or so. Going, as otters will do, from one body of water to another.

Marnie Bottesch has been enjoying watching the eagles return to their old hunting grounds near her home on the Kennebec in Norridgewock.

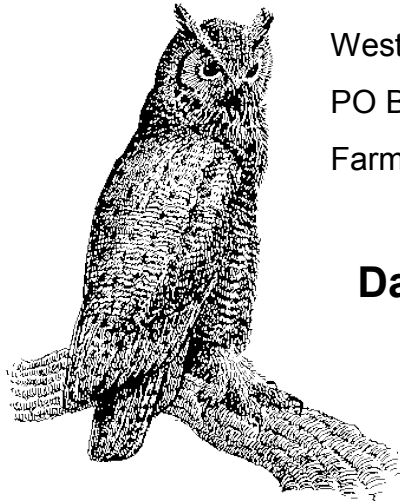
As Always, we would like to hear form you, what you are seeing, doing and enjoying in the natural world.

You can e mail me at; [aewilder@tdstelme.net](mailto:aewilder@tdstelme.net) SW

### 4-H Camp Scholarship

The Western Maine chapter of Audubon is happy to announce that we will be offering a \$300 scholarship to the 4-H Camp & Learning Center at Bryant Pond, Maine for the upcoming camping season. The scholarship will be awarded to a student between the ages of 13-17 who lives in the Western Maine region served by the Audubon chapter. The scholarship is available for programs within the Primitive and Naturalist path and is awarded on a need based, first come-first served basis. Please go to: <http://umaine.edu/bryantpond/> for detailed descriptions of camp programs and to apply; or contact the camp at (207)-665-2068 for further information.





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 Membership Form**

Yes, I want  to **join** or  **renew** my membership with Maine Audubon and the Western Maine Chapter.

**I want to help protect and conserve wildlife habitat and promote environmental education and advocacy in Maine.**

Please send me Maine Audubon's quarterly newsletter, *Habitat*, and *The Pileated Press*, the Western Maine Audubon Society chapter newsletter. I understand that if I join at the Patron level or higher or enclose an additional \$10, I will receive *Audubon*, the bimonthly National Audubon magazine. My membership benefits also include discounts on Maine Audubon programs and trips, on products from Maine Audubon's Nature Stores, and at Audubon sanctuaries nationwide.

Please make your check out to Maine Audubon and mail it to Maine Audubon, 20 Gilsland Farm Road, Falmouth, Maine 04105.

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