



THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon Society

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

Volume XLII Number 4

March 2013

Monthly Programs

Vernal Pool Ecology and Conservation

Wednesday, March 13 at 7 PM

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

Ever wonder who makes those quacking noises coming from the half-frozen puddle behind your house in April? Ever heard of "Big Night"? Ever seen fairy shrimp or fingernail clams lying dormant on the dry forest floor? Please join Sally Stockwell, Director of Conservation at Maine Audubon, to see and hear about these and other ecological wonders of vernal pools. Sally will introduce you to the wildlife species that live or breed in vernal pools and will share tips on how to identify and conserve vernal pools in your area.

This program is free and open to the public

Special Event

High-elevation Bird Monitoring in the Northeast: Tracking the Elusive for Conservation

Speaker Judith Scarl, Vermont Center for Ecostudies

March 27, 2013 time 7 PM

McLaughlin Auditorium, Gould Academy, Bethel,

(This is a special program we are co hosting with Mahoosuc Land Trust in Bethel.)

Breeding in the dense, almost impenetrable forests of the Northeast's mountaintops, the mysterious habits of the Bicknell's Thrush have long been shrouded in secrecy. Intensive research and monitoring over the past two decades have given scientists unique insights into the biology of this vulnerable bird. Mountain Birdwatch, a citizen-science monitoring project established in 2000 to focus on Bicknell's Thrush and other high-elevation breeding birds of the Northeast, allows us to explore trends in montane forest bird abundance and distribution. Mountain Birdwatch 2.0 is a revised monitoring program that was launched in 2010 and includes a partnership between U.S. and Canadian institutions for systematic monitoring across the entire breeding range of Bicknell's Thrush.



Copyright Jeff Nadler

Speaker Judith Scarl Judith is a conservation biologist at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, where she leads Mountain Birdwatch. This program represents a unique opportunity not only to hear more about a bird that figures so prominently in Maine conservation issues, but the wider topic of high elevation birds. Please join us. 7PM, at McLaughlin Auditorium, Gould Academy, Bethel.

Free and open to the public.

President's Column

Burt Knapp

Beaver House Photo by Burt Knapp

Spring is around the corner! We've received our seed order from FEDCO and started some seedlings on our sun porch. The winter rye has been tilled under in the green house, and shortly we'll be planting spring greens.

Needing to trim the forsythia bush hiding our LP tank in early January, I surprised myself by being able to force the blossoms by the month's end. Each season, it seems, holds surprises for us now. Global climate change? January was marked by long cold dry spells, punctuated by brief periods of thaw conditions with heavy rain. The rain at the end of January opened the rivers, filled our farm pond, and topped off the pond and bog at the end of our road. Last summer the bog was dry, but the beavers worked hard and rebuilt their dam,



re-establishing the pond. Recently, our board members enjoyed a trek to the pond as part of our winter planning meeting. We all admired the work of those industrious animals – see pictures.



We on the board are excited about our spring schedule of programs: A talk by Sally Stockwell of Maine Audubon about vernal pools and their inhabitants leads us off on 3/13. There will be an extra talk in March on the 27th about mountain-top bird species by Judith Scarl of Mountain Bird Watch. We are glad to be able to extend our reach within our Western Maine area by holding this talk in Bethel. We hope a number of you will make the effort to

Photos by Burt Knapp



hear Judith as it should be a good talk. In April we plan a talk on herons, and in May, a talk about bees. We hope, also, you will join one of two guided bird walks with us in May. On the 11th we will hold our usual spring "warbler walk" at the Whistle Stop Trail in Farmington. Later in May we plan to join up again with the Perham Stream Birding Trail group for a guided bird walk along the trail in Phillips. Details about all of these events will follow in subsequent newsletters.

Consider receiving those newsletters in electronic form with photos in full color and with active web links to further information when appropriate. The newsletter will be posted on our chapter's page at the Maine Audubon web site. You will also find links to old newsletters, and a listing of all of our upcoming events and talks. You will get an e-mail alerting you each time a newsletter is posted. You will be saving us money, as well as saving a tree in the forest! If you elect to receive your newsletter on line, please e-mail me your request; it is as simple as that!

Conservation Corner

Steve Bien

Is There Open Pit Mining in Our Future?

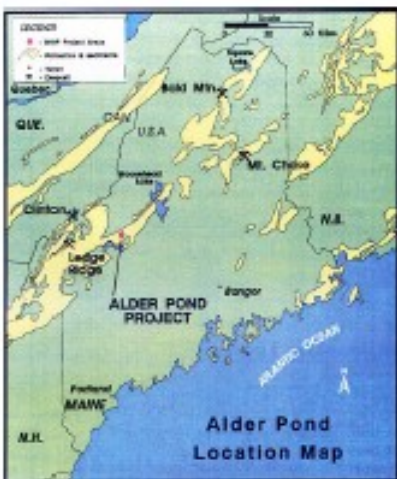
There's gold (and copper, too) in them thar hills, as they say. In this case the hill is Bald Mountain in northern Aroostook County. Its story is important in its own right but it also provides an important insight into Maine's new regulatory frame work. We should study this story well.

This is a story written at three levels: the changing culture of Maine's government agencies, the pro business bent of the legislature, and, flowing from the former two, the outsourcing of regulation. First: the government agencies. We may have enjoyed throwing tomatoes at the old LURC for its weaknesses and failings but as bad as it may have been at times, we may actually get pangs of nostalgia for the old LURC and not only because its successor, the Land Use Planning Commission, has an unpronounceable acronym.

The new LUPC and its sister organization, the Department of Environmental Protection, were reorganized under 2011's LD1, "An Act to Ensure Regulatory Fairness and Reform", and the Bald Mountain mine process shows what a powerful stroke that move was. Newly constituted as the LURC's replacement, the LUPC is now limited in its scope to projects less than 20 acres and even so plays a much smaller, zoning, role. The 600 + acre Bald Mountain mine, though in Unorganized Territory, is thus under DEP jurisdiction. Add to that the fact that the DEP, despite being handed more work, is now smaller in size and expressly charged with the promotion of development and small business interests. Reflecting this is the fact that among its reduced pool of staff is a person specifically charged with small business coordination. How can a smaller department handle bigger tasks? Outsourcing.

Maine's relatively restrictive 1991 mining rules, now being replaced, were authored by Maine based experts in mining, hydrology and geology. The proposed new rules, which are said to be necessary for the Bald Mountain project to go ahead, are not home grown. They are the commercial product of a Michigan engineering firm with whom DEP contracted for mining ordinances. Until NRCM questioned both the legitimacy of the outsourcing and the fact that the process itself was kept under wraps by DEP, this was to be the start and finish of this rule writing. No testimony by expert witnesses, or hearings. NRCM and others, calling on the department to honor the 'transparency' it promised to live by, finally shamed DEP commissioner Patty Aho into scheduling hearings, and they are scheduled for this summer.

Metallic Mineral Deposits in Maine



We need to take this process seriously. The environmental consequences of mining issues are broad and long lasting. Mining is messy. Bald Mountain sits on the edge of the Fish River, a pristine brook trout fishery that would be affected should acid mine run off from mine tailings and debris find its way into the ground or surface water. While the mountain is small, – only 1100 feet – it is part of a vast band of sedimentary and volcanic rock that is rich in metals including gold, silver and copper. Metal prices typically run hot and cold and right now they are warming, which prompted the mountain's landowners, Irving Paper, to push this through. As has happened in the past, though, the market can crash and projects can be abandoned and if you look closely, these abandoned mines are not hard to find in our landscape.

Maine has a 100+ year history of mining. There are precious gems still mined out of western Maine, old hand dug silver and lead mines in Washington County, and iron mining was once a major industry near Gulf Hagas at Katahdin Iron Works. Those were or have been small scale, confined propositions, but we have also had larger metal mine propositions. The Callahan zinc-copper open pit mine near Brooksville has been closed for 40 years but is now a federal


Superfund cleanup site whose cleanup has cost \$23 million to date. Remediation of groundwater contamination at the nearby Kerramerican mine cost \$10 million to install and monitor.

Senator Tom Saviello (R-Wilton) has been a key booster of this legislation and the mine. Tom is clearly a rising star as a Republican and is now quite influential particularly on environmental issues. But he has shown in the past and may be demonstrating again difficulties sorting out commercial interests and their environmental costs. "The metallic mining law sets forth the strongest of protections and continues to uphold our state's strict environmental laws," the Wilton Republican said. "Before a permit to develop a mine can be issued, an applicant must demonstrate that 'the mining operations will not unreasonably adversely affect existing uses, air quality, water quality or other natural resources.'" (BDN 9-27-12)


What will the groundwater protections be? Who will conduct the monitoring and for how long? What will Irving's responsibility and liability be? When a mining lawyer was asked at a hearing last spring about whether a toxic lake would be left at the Bald Mountain site following closure, he responded "I don't know". NRCM's Nick Bennett says the proposed guidelines have far too much wiggle room. The devil is always in the details.

Much is at stake here. The geologic formation of which Bald Mountain is a part runs into western Maine. There may be metals elsewhere. Beyond these local issues, there is the larger question of how we in the environmental community can watchdog processes that are less open to public scrutiny and comment than before. And this is occurring when great changes are happening in the operating cultures of the organizations we have relied upon for regulation and public protection. I have heard from more than one staffer that science is now secondary to economics and professional staff is being sidelined.

As constituents of Mr. Saviello, who also is chairman of the Legislature's Regulatory Fairness and Reform Committee, many of us are in an excellent position to let him know how we feel about ground water protection and the sort of protections you would like to see as the state approaches open pit mining. I urge you to do so.

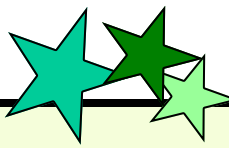


Kids Corner




Winterland Wonder


Christine Blais



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.





Today happens to be one of those great days in Maine when we are expecting a big Nor'Easter. School is cancelled and everyone is looking forward to skiing, sledding and playing in the snow. But did you know that deep snow is also important for wildlife? Even though we don't see them as often, most mammals in Maine do not hibernate. Some, like raccoons and skunks will burrow into underground dens and sleep through parts of the winter, waking on warmer days. Others, like moles, voles and weasels stay awake all winter and live in the Subnivian layer. This is a layer of air under the snow but above the ground where leaves have fallen. Here, the temperatures are warmer and the snow is grainy. These small mammals use this space to dig tunnels, make dens and to travel to sources of food. A deep layer of snow protects them from the cold temperatures above and from predators. Animals such as hawks, owls, fox and coyotes depend on these small mammals for their own winter survival. Even though the snow makes it harder for them to catch their meal, without it, they would have less food to catch. Winter is the perfect time to search for the tracks of Maine's active winter wildlife. After a fresh snowfall, put on your snowshoes and head out to see how many you can find. You might be surprised by how busy the woods really are in winter!

For a guide to Maine animal tracks go to: <http://www.lbean.com/outdoorsOnline/outdoorSports/winterSports/feature/snowshoe/index.html>

For a great article on Maine wildlife in winter go to: <http://bangordailynews.com/2013/01/09/outdoors/what-really-happens-to-maine-animals-in-the-winter/>

To see a picture of the Subnivian layer go to: <http://www.ed.mtu.edu/esmis/winter/subnivian.html>



Late last Sept. we received an interesting story from Marianne Taylor. In response to a little story we had in the Sept. 2012 issue of the newsletter. She wrote about her experience watching the dinning habits of an Osprey; also sent in some



great photos! She writes; "I had my camera with me July 22 as I was



Osprey photos by Marianne Taylor

kayaking on the Kennebec near my home in Skowhegan when I saw a large bird (Osprey) land in a tree ahead of me. The breeze was at my back taking me right towards it so I started taking photos thinking he would fly away at any moment. Instead it stayed right on the same branch with its catch. I was shooting from just beneath it and while it didn't fly it did call out and seemed distressed by my presence so I moved on up river. An hour later I checked the tree on my return trip and it was still there! The second photo confirms

your comment that they do not gobble. The fish was now half eaten. Granted, it was a large fish. This time it did lift off, with the fish, as I got close.

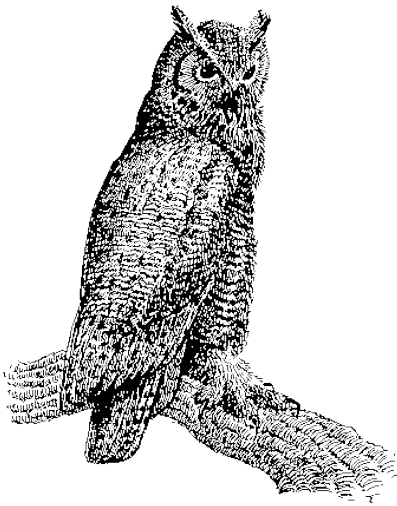
On Feb. 1 Lois Seamon from Chesterville contacted Paul McGuire with a report of seeing 7 Red crossbills from early in Dec. till just before Christmas at her feeders. Also on Jan. 29 a Snowy owl perched on a railing in Dory Butterfield's yard in Jay. There are feeders in the yard with the usual complement of red squirrels and smaller rodents' tunnels under the snow beneath them*. Paul also goes on to write that; "In our Titcomb Hill - Mosher Hill neighborhoods wintering-over robins and bluebirds are occasionally seen along road bankings and roadside thickets near old apple groves. Turkey flocks of anywhere from 12 to 30 birds have covered practically every square foot of field and woodlot in our neighborhood. One has but to snowshoe or ski over the area a few days after a snowfall to see it. A favorite turkey camping site is the manure pit at Tracy's Maple Hill Farm. Invasives such as Asiatic bittersweet and barberry could not wish for better transporters than a clan of turkeys."

*According to the description, Snowy owls will eat birds too. Years ago Paul saw one sitting on the edge of lake ice at the outlet of Upper Dam pool, watching some ducks in the open water.

Back on 11/10 Art Wilder saw two flocks of Sand Hill cranes flying while he was near a harvested corn field. There was a flock of 3 and one of 13 flying at the same time. At first he thought they were flying South, but then they didn't go in that direction. A few days earlier he saw 5 Sand Hills. Looking forward to seeing them again this Spring! He also saw a single Nighthawk flying South at dusk, another day.

Always enjoy hearing from you. You can reach us at: aewilder@dstelme.net S.W.






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Maine Audubon and Western Maine Audubon Society
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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Questions? Call 207/781-2330 x232 or email member@maineaudubon.org.