THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon Society

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

Volume XLIII Number 1

September 2013

Monthly Programs

Wednesday, September 11 at 7PM

"INVESTIGATING UNUSUAL WILDLIFE OCCURENCES

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

Recently the teenager who does our office lawn breathlessly told us that he had seen a bobcat on our office lawn. Later that day I saw a tabby prowling around the birdfeeders. Is this the fate of unusual wildlife sightings or is there more to those glimpses of mountain lions, wolves, and other notables? Wildlife Biologists **Chuck Hulsey** and **Bob Cordes** will answer this question with a review of a case study from winter of 2013. With the use of game cameras at multiple bait sites in Wilson's Mills they used their wildlife sleuth techniques and tools to solve some mysteries. We will see how they do it and learn the do's and don'ts of collecting and sharing physical or photo/video evidence. This program is free and open to the public

Wednesday. October 9, at 7PM

"The Changing Nature of the Maine Woods: The Past, Present, and Future of our Forests"

Room C 23, Roberts Learning Center, University of Maine at Farmington, 7PM.

Professor **Drew Barton** is a forest ecologist and conservation biologist. His research focuses on how forests change over time in response to climate change and natural disturbances, such as fire. His recent book, *The Changing Nature of the Maine Woods*, was a 2013 Maine Literary Award winner. Using a diverse range of historical and ecological evidence, Professor Barton will discuss the past, present, and future of the Maine Woods. Drew will show photos, read narrative selections from his recent book, and discuss the natural and human-caused changes over the past 15,000 years. He will then peer into the future to assess how key ecological forces such as climate change, insects and disease, nonnative organisms, and changing land use are likely to further alter the forests of Maine. Join us for this exciting talk about the woods around us. This program is free and open to the public.

Field Trip

Wednesday, September 25 Program and Walk, Edible Wild Mushrooms

David Spahr is a naturalist, photographer, forest farmer, and author of Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms of New England and Eastern Canada. He is presently writing a foraging book as well. David will draw on his 40 years of collecting experience to show us what we might find and eat (or not!). He will start with a PowerPoint presentation that will give us an overview of edible and medicinal mushrooms and then lead us on a walk. It will be held at **noon,** Thomas Auditorium, UMF with a mushroom walk to follow. Plan on an hour for the walk from 1:15 to 2:15.

This program is jointly sponsored by Western Maine Audubon and the UMF Natural Sciences Department.

What a summer it was! With frequent rain for most of the summer, farming was a challenge! Finally a dry spell mid -August allowed us to cut hay.


Bobolink

Early in the summer we kept our eyes on 3 male Bobolinks who were frequent visitors to the field adjacent to our gardens. We enjoyed their melodious song, and did not want to disturb their nesting. While I had planned to mow "their field" late, the weather ensured it, and 3 families of young Bobolinks fledged successfully! Being uncertain about a safe date for mowing, I contacted Noah Perlut, Assistant Professor of Biology at UNE. He gave us the talk last year on grassland birds, and confirmed 7/15 as the earliest date to mow with reasonable confidence that Bobolink nests would not be disturbed. He offered two other options for mowing: 1) mow before 5/31, with a second mowing 65 or more days later, or 2) mow just a 50 yard wide perimeter strip early, leaving the center of the field, where Bobolinks are most likely to nest, uncut until after 7/15. Hopefully, next year we can be successful again in having Bobolinks nest in our field, and safely fledge their young because of a carefully planned mowing schedule rather than because of Mother Nature's "gift" of continuous early summer rains!

This fall we are pleased to have an interesting line up of activities planned for you – see the detailed listing on the first page of the newsletter.

Having been reading American Canopy, by Eric Rutkow, a 2012 release, I am eager to hear Prof. Drew Barton's talk on the Maine woods. Most inspiring as highlighted Rutkow's book was the critical role the American woodlands played in the development of our country. Verrazzano in 1524 called the heavily forested land Acadia, "idyllic place." The English, of course, were interested in our trees for the construction of their great naval fleet, hence the marking of our great white pines, ideal for masts, with the broad arrow. Indeed, wood was the universal building material, and the universal fuel. Quoting Rutkow, "The creation of every horseshoe, wagon, carriage, gun, bottle, ship, train, and early airplane required trees. Every mine, corral, stockyard, tannery, mill, refinery, dock, barge, telegraph and telephone line, and early oil derrick required trees." Further, "the transition to inexpensive wood-pulp paper … in the 1860's allowed for an explosion in written material … that would forever alter the culture of the country… They also provide sustenance: sap into sugar, seeds into nuts and fruits. Their foliage bring life to desolate landscapes, their roots stability to shaky soils. Finally, on a hot summer day, there are few pleasures that rival hiding in the shade beneath the boughs of a noble oak."

Sad were the tragic deaths of whole forest species - think American chestnut and the mighty American elm, each brought down by a related invasive fungus which landed on our shores from across the seas. Most depressing, however, are the stories of the lumber barons and the relentless exploitation of this natural resource - think Bogalusa, Louisiana, the Great Southern Lumber Company, and the near total harvest of the vast, first growth longleaf pines in the southern states.

Perhaps it is human nature to see a great resource, profit from it, and then exploit it without restraint until it is exhausted or, worse, extinct – think North American bison and Passenger Pigeon. Could the same be happening now? Think natural gas!

Yes, there continues to be a need for Maine Audubon's science based analysis and thoughtful voice for the conservation of, and now also, the rebuilding of our natural heritage. Please continue to support Maine Audubon in its work.

See you at one or all of our fall events!

Are Atlantic Salmon Coming Back?

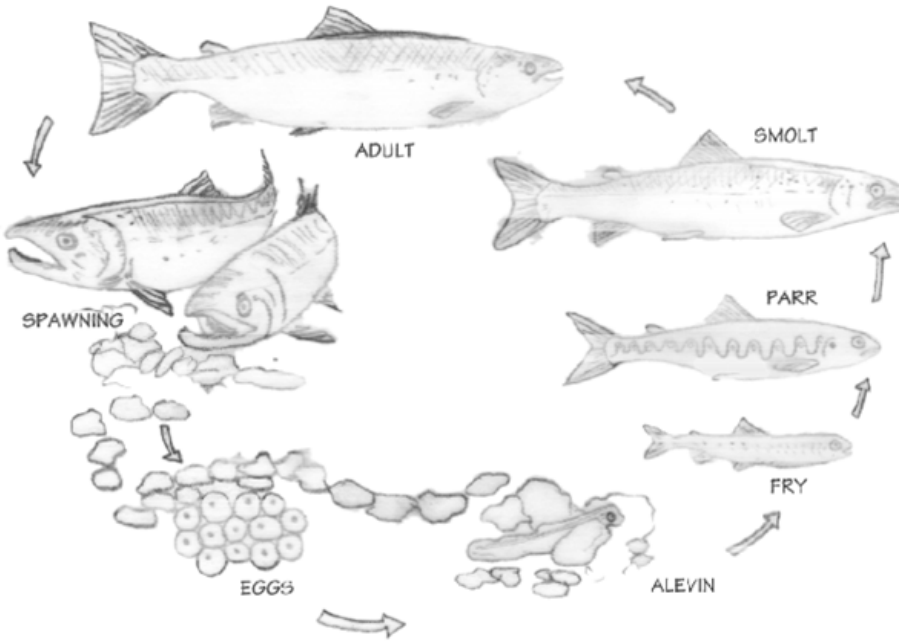
This summer marked a milestone in Penobscot River history, the breaching of the Veazie Dam in July opening the river once again to fish migration. The decommissioning of the dam has been the hard and complicated work of the Penobscot River Restoration Trust, a consortium that includes the Penobscot Nation, Maine Audubon, Trout Unlimited, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Natural Resources Council of Maine, American Rivers, and the Nature Conservancy. Just the breadth of its membership gives you an idea of what brain and money power this took. Forbes Magazine justifiably described it as a veritable hat trick, since two dams now have been removed, the Veazie and Great Works Dams, yet more electricity is being generated. Win/ win.

"To the Penobscot, this river is our very soul, a place where we truly hold hands with our history and our ancestors," Penobscot chief Kirk Francis said. "This river is simply who we are; it's at the very core of our identity as a people." The Penobscots can rejoice in their reconnection with the river's flow and all of us can celebrate the return of the river's ecosystem. As part of this, the opening of the waterway is expected to restore historic salmon, alewife, and shad runs.

When the Veazie dam went up in 1834, there were 250 sawmills along the river. But lumbering was giving way to paper making and power was needed for the new mills. Fishing had always been a close second to lumbering, though, and the cities of Bangor and Bucksport at that time were centers of salmon, alewife, and shad fishing and processing.

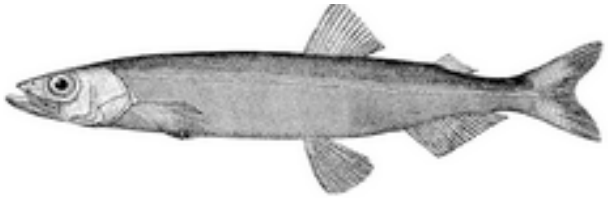
Soon, however, the Veazie dam was joined by the Great Works and Howland dams and the river fisheries quickly collapsed from the impoundments. No one knows with certainty how many migrating salmon traditionally traversed the river at their peak but 50 000 fish per year is a good, educated estimated. These days the Penobscot fish traps capture a few thousand per year at best. Over the year of 2011, 3,000 were caught in the salmon trap at Veazie but the following year only 624. While it is hoped that the breaching of the dams will bring this fishery back to life this is not a sure bet. Evidence is accumulating that the Atlantic salmon's problems may be more complicated than open/closed waterways. While their overall numbers are much higher, Canadian rivers on the Atlantic shore, rivers that are open, tell a similar story of decline. The complex salmon life cycle, spanning both fresh and salt water, leaves them particularly vulnerable to disturbances in a variety of environments.

Atlantic Salmon Life Cycle



Adult Atlantic salmon spawn in the fall, laying their eggs in the gravel of cold, well oxygenated water. The fry hatch out the following spring and then spend the next 4-5 years in fresh water, maturing first to parr and then to the smolt stage. Smolts, which are 6-12 " in length, develop the adaptations to marine water and descend the rivers to spend 2-5 years at sea before returning as adults to their ancestral waters. And it is that return that seems to be suffering. Hatchery programs are an attempt to increase the upstream supply but the results have been frustrating and disturbing. Out of 10,000 smolts perhaps 20 return. Naturally

reared smolts such as those in the Narraguagus fare better; so tinkering with the stocking strategy may help. Recall the work of Paul Christman planting eggs in the Sandy and its tributaries right here in Franklin County.



However, research done this summer by Katherine Mills, J. Pershing, Timothy F. Sheehan and David Mountain at the University of Maine suggests a deeper problem – loss of ocean prey species. In the North Atlantic, off Greenland and Labrador Atlantic salmon feed heavily on small fish, especially capelin. Beginning in the early 90's the capelin schools seemed to have left this area, perhaps chased out by a tongue of historically cold water that summer and they have not returned. Other feed species may also be low, perhaps because of ocean warming. It may be no coincidence that puffin numbers are also in serious decline since they also feed on these fish. So the answer to the salmon puzzle may not be under our control.

We shall soon see how Christman's approach will perform. He has now planted almost 2 million eggs over the four years he has been at it, and next year we should see how many of his fish return to make their trip up the Kennebec.

As a final twist to this story, it is a curiosity that salmon bones rarely show up in Abanaki middens. Were salmon a part of their diet, were there salmon here at all in any numbers, or does this just mean they don't preserve well in middens? This does raise the possibility at least that salmon numbers were low then, too, and if that is the case, it could be that the storied Atlantic salmon runs of the early years of settlement were a blip in salmon biology and history.

Next month, I'll write about our other wild salmon, the Pacific salmon. Bristol Bay, Alaska, may now have world's the largest salmon fishery, numbering in the tens of millions of fish or more, but its future hangs in the balance against what would be the world's largest strip mine. Stay tuned.

Kids Corner

Here is a simple recipe you could make for the birds that come to your feeder this winter. I am sure they will appreciate this!

Bird Peanut Butter Cups

3/4 c. hard fat (suet, bacon drippings, beef drippings or a combination)
1/4 c. peanut butter
1/2 c. wheat germ
1/2 c. chopped unsalted peanuts (available at the pet store or farm co-op)
1/4 c. honey
2 c. bird seed mix, preferably one containing black oil sunflower seed.

You can add raisons or dried fruit if you wish.

In a large microwave-safe bowl, combine fat and peanut butter. Microwave for 1 - 2 minutes or until melted, stirring every 30 seconds to prevent scorching.

To the melted mixture, stir in wheat germ, peanuts, honey and bird seed.

Line a muffin tin with cupcake liners. Using a wooden spoon, pack the muffin cups with seed mixture. Chill until firm. about 1 hour.

Since we have been hearing so much about bat problems and their declining numbers, we were very happy when Art Wilder saw a dozen or more fly out of our barn the other evening. We used to see bats every evening around here and have put bat houses up over the years. One could almost count on a few hanging over the door to the cellar, but not any more. So it is very encouraging to see a few this year. Also was fun to spot a small flock of chimney swifts in Norridgewock last week. Have no idea which chimney they were interested in, but sure hope they do well. Every year we seem to see them flying around town. And speaking of seeing, we have not seen one Monarch butterfly this season! They use to be so very common around here and we try hard to maintain our milkweed crop for them. Did see a few last year. Also have not seen a Cliff swallow in many years, they used to use our barn.

Burt Knapp sent this in. 'Lois Seamon of Chesterville reported that a long tailed 11" bird had broken it's neck by flying into her plate glass picture window. Not sure what it was, she called me, and Nancy and I went out to investigate. By the time we arrived she had correctly identified it as a Black-billed Cuckoo and I documented this beautiful bird with a photo – see picture. The Audubon Field Guide states that both the Black-billed and the Yellow-billed Cuckoos "are adept at hiding and skulking in dense vegetation, and are more often heard than seen… Cuckoos are extremely beneficial to the farmer and horticulturalist, consuming enormous quantities of destructive hairy caterpillars… and are most numerous in years of tent caterpillar infestations." They range from southern Canada to South Carolina and west to Kansas. They winter in northwestern South America. Thank you, Lois!'

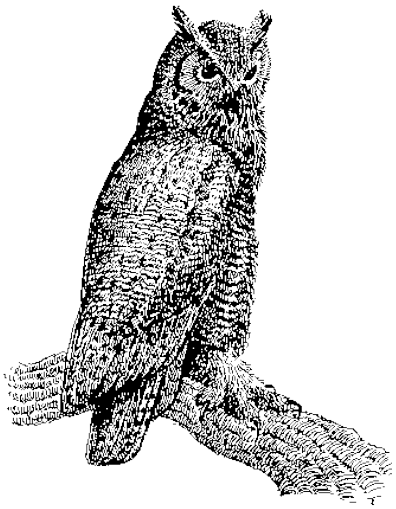

Photo by Burt Knapp


Baby Cuckoo in nest
Photo by Art Wilder

Was just talking with good friends who live along the river in Norridgewock. They were telling me about seeing the young eagle flying near their house. We think this must be one of the ones that fledged last year. It is always fun watching for the Norridgewock eagles as we go past their favorite tree!

We are now starting our new year for the Newsletter. There will be 6 issues, Sept., Oct., Nov. And again in March, April and May. If you have anything you would like to share, you can e mail me at aewilder@tdstelme.net. We always enjoy hearing about what you are doing and seeing in the Natural world. Thank you SW

Photos by S. Wilder unless otherwise



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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 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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