



THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon Society

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

Volume XLIII Number 3

November 2013

Monthly Program

Wednesday. November 13, 2013 at 7PM

An Evening With *Wind Over Wings*

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

Wind Over Wings is an environmental organization that rescues injured birds that are no longer able to survive in the wild. By presenting these birds to us, we encounter, perhaps for the first time, birds as individuals as we learn their stories of survival

At the Western Maine Audubon program Wind Over Wings will present four special birds. You will meet Maine's largest owl, the Great Horned; a beautiful Red-tailed Hawk; a bird considered most intelligent of birds, the Common Raven; and the king of all birds, the Golden Eagle. Experience the wonder of being a few feet away from these animals.

This program is free and open to all.



President's Column

Burt Knapp

It has been a beautiful fall with dry, sunny weather, beautiful fall colors, and just enough rain to keep the gardens going. We escaped frost on the full moon, 10/18, and may not have a killing frost now until 10/24 at the earliest. Looking back at our garden log, frost hasn't come until mid-late October the past few years, hardly what one would expect for our area in Maine.

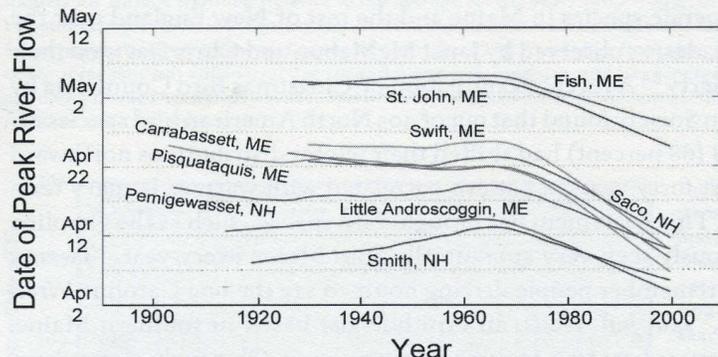
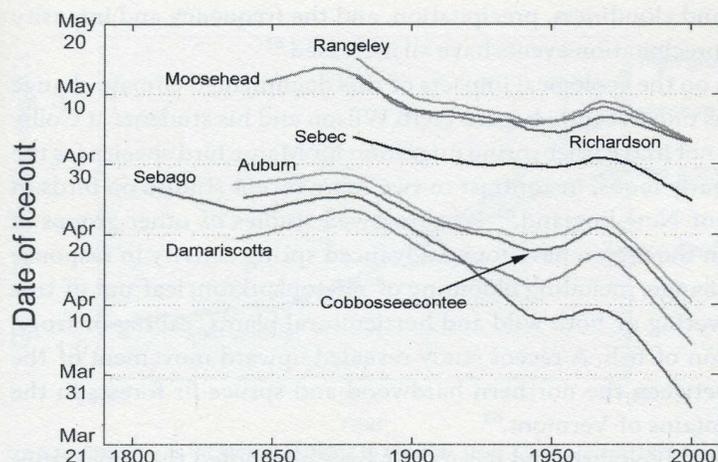


Fig 6.11 Twentieth-century advancement in the timing of (top) spring ice-out for eight lakes in Maine and (bottom) spring peak river flows in Maine and New Hampshire.

While it is tempting to attribute our warmer than expected weather to global climate change, it is “anecdotal” evidence only – i.e. one can't generalize from a few points of data at one location. Much more convincing evidence of climate change, however, is the data on “ice out” on Maine lakes. This is graphed nicely on page 215 of Professor “Drew” Barton's book, The Changing Nature of the Maine Woods.

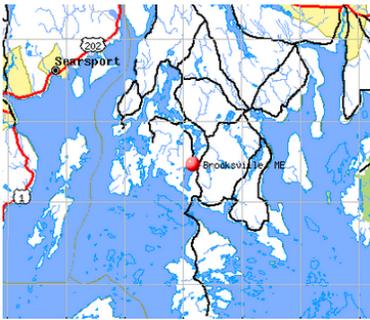
Drew gave a very interesting talk last month. For those who missed the talk, I highly recommend his book. For me, the most impressive “slide” from his presentation showed the extent of ice which covered the northern United States during the last ice age. Maine was completely covered! In fact, on his slide, Maine appears to be in the middle of the ice sheet, not just at its southern or eastern edge! Interestingly, as discussed in The American Canopy, to which I made reference in the last newsletter, the concept of global climate change, or global warming, has been in the scientific literature since at least 1938. In that year, “ a British engineer named Guy Stewart Callendar stood before the Royal Meteorological Society in London and declared that the world was indeed warming and that man was to blame.” He blamed the combustion of fossil fuels with the release of huge volumes of carbon dioxide! Prior to that it was felt that nature was a force well beyond the ability of man to change.

Global Climate change is certainly real, regardless

of how much of it you attribute to human activity. Drew discussed how climate change has and will continue to influence our forests. It will impact our fauna as well as our flora. It will impact the birds we know and love. Our next speaker, Hope Douglass, has spent the past 25 years of her life nurturing birds that have been injured. She will bring with her a few of the birds which have been saved, but are unable to be returned to the wild. She will share their stories with us as she does with other groups across the state, often introducing school children to the wonder of nature and the ethic of wildlife conservation. Come and hear her speak, see some of the birds she has worked with, including a golden eagle, and be inspired!

It will be the annual meeting for Western Maine Audubon, and as a member you will vote on the slate of officers for next year. With the recent resignation of a valued and long time board member, Vera Trafton, we have an opening on the board. Please consider joining us in the planning of Western Maine Audubon's activities and events for the coming year, and having fun while doing so!

Bald Mountain Mine



Last month I wrote about the feared impacts of the giant Pebble Mine in southwest Alaska. For my last column we are coming home to Maine to visit a project that is humbler in scope but similar in its threats. Much as the Pebble Mine could threaten Alaska's signature salmon fishery, the proposed Bald Mountain mine in Aroostook might have dire consequences for Maine's signature fish, brook trout, as well as human populations through groundwater contamination.

The common denominators here are open pit, sulfide mining. Open pit mining is hardly a new phenomenon in Maine. In the 19th century lead, silver, iron, and copper were mined from hand dug open pits that were simply abandoned when the mines were exhausted. One of these mines, the Callahan in Brooksville, was reborn briefly in the late 1960's and its modern era tells a tale that may echo in Aroostook County if we are not careful.

Brooksville Maine, population 900, is a small coastal town in Hancock County. Pretty and historic, it is best known as the last home of Helen and Scott Nearing, the current location of Elliot Coleman's Four Season Farm, and the site of one of Maine's largest Superfund Waste Clinic Sites, the Callahan Mine.



Rising copper and zinc metal prices gave the Callahan Corporation of New York the incentive it needed to rework the Brooksville mine in 1968. Their engineers and crew re excavated the old pit and then, following the ore, went on to dam and drain tidal Goose pond in order to access more rock. In so doing they created the world's only estuarine pit mine. When they were done years later they opened the dams, re flooded their pit, and wiped their hands.

Callahan took out 800,000 tons of rock and created Callahan Mountain out of the 5 million tons of waste rock they produced in the process, by the time they were done in 1972. Their tailings were mostly left in the pit which by the end was 300 feet deep. The ocean's tides returned to the pit and as a result heavy metals are now in the bay, in the fish, in the vegetation, and in the groundwater. 40 years and 23 million dollars later the clean up continues as a Superfund site. Common to ores of this type, including those at Bald Mountain, the native rock contains metals as sulfites, and these sulfites, once released and mixed with water, rapidly diffuse and travel into groundwater as highly soluble heavy metal salts. The Callahan mine also is contaminated by PCB's from accidental spills of transformer fluid. Polychlorinated biphenyls are human carcinogens and their presence illustrates a geological Murphy's Law common in mining. The copper sulfites in particular are extremely toxic to wildlife, especially fish and other aquatic animals.

Irving Paper has owned Bald Mountain for many years and is anxious to get at what is said to be a valuable copper find. At the time of Irving's purchase 20 years ago, it was known that exploration would depend on revision of Maine's prevailing mining laws. Written in 1991, they were viewed as too restrictive to allow for a commercial operation. So Irving asked the Department of Environmental Protection to re write the laws to reflect what they viewed as the advances in mining technology that would allow them to work the ground under more permissive, profitable circumstances. The DEP has done this, reflecting its 'open for business' philosophy. This is the intent of LD1853 which was passed in the closing days of the last legislative session. LD 1853 authorizes the DEP to re write those laws, and we are now beginning this process of revision.

As originally intended by the DEP, this was to be a quiet, up and shut process run by its staffers and Pierce Atwood, which represents Irving. Fortunately, the Natural Resources Council of Maine caught wind of this and now the deliberations are getting the public airing they deserve and need.

The DEP's rules as submitted would drastically loosen existing groundwater protections while weakening requirements that mine operators set aside escrow funding suitable for cleanup. It would also weaken site and groundwater monitoring requirements. Irving Paper and its legislative supporters tout the jobs and promise safeguards. They stress that mining technology and wisdom have progressed sufficiently that the less restrictive oversights will suffice to protect groundwater and wildlife.

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Frankly this is a large serving of faith to swallow. To believe it we have to ignore the sorry facts of mining history which yield the dismaying statistic that 80% of currently operating open pit mines have failed to comply with their governing regulations. Moreover, a recent report just issued by NRCM suggests that the DEP has been less than frank in sharing critical details of the Bald Mountain mine project. Irving's own consultants and engineers commented early on the inherent hazards of this mine, particularly those of acid run off and copper and arsenic leachate. Until specifically challenged to do so, the DEP did not share these details of the Bald Mountain mine engineering studies. The DEP is also not allowing any of its staff to speak publically on this issue.

The Board of Environmental Protection has convened hearings on the proposed new rules and your comments will be very important. Since similar deposits occur throughout northern and western Maine, this is an issue that portends beyond this single project in northern Maine. NRCM can forward your comments or you can send them directly to the Board of Environmental Protection at <http://www.maine.gov/dep/bep/contact.html>. In addition, Tom Saviello (R-Wilton) has been a principal in this process. Often a strong environmental advocate, in this instance he has been actively supporting the looser standards. Letting him know how you think will be helpful.



A Letter to the Editor

September 6, 2013

Re: Atlantic salmon article, Pileated Press, September 2013

Dear Mrs. Wilder:

The article about Atlantic salmon by Steve Bien was interesting and informative. However, it unfortunately perpetuates a myth dating back to 1988, which rose from an article by a UMO graduate student named C.C. Carlson. That article posited that Atlantic salmon may not have existed in significant numbers in Maine or New England during the Holocene era (7000 years B.P. to Present) until the advent of the 'Little Ice Age', circa 1450—1850 A.D. The premise was based on archeological data in which very few remains of Atlantic salmon had been identified.

The inference to be drawn was that efforts to restore Atlantic salmon in Maine are doomed to failure in the face of climate change.

However, subsequent research by UMO researchers based in improved archeological methods and chemical analysis has shown that there are in fact data which demonstrate a robust presence of Atlantic salmon in Maine throughout the Holocene period.

The article "Atlantic salmon, archeology and climate change in New England", Robinson, B.S., et al. appeared in the Journal of Archeological Science, January, 2009. It can be found on line at 'doi:10.1016/j.jas.2009.06.001'.

I think that it is also important to point out that the very innovative work being done on the Sandy River by Paul Christman and his colleagues at the Maine Department of Marine Resources has resulted in survival rates for all stages of Atlantic salmon which far exceed those in other restoration projects, and which rival such rates in wild Atlantic salmon populations in Canada.

Lastly, I'd also like to point out that there are four hydro-electric dams on the Kennebec River below the mouth of the Sandy River. It is my view that at least two of these dams should be removed in order to have a reasonable prospect of successful restoration of Atlantic salmon in the Kennebec river drainage area.

Sincerely,

Clinton B. Townsend

Nature Watch



It has been several years since we have heard from Dot Haggan, but on 9/30 we got this message; “want to report that I have a female or immature Rufus Hummingbird at my Hummingbird feeder today- I think it has been here the past several days, as the feeder kept getting lower, but I hadn't really seen it until today. The Male Ruby throats left around 9/2- females were still here the 15th. I will keep watch for the Rufus; when I had one before it stayed here even after the first snowfall.” Always good to hear from you Dot.

A few days ago we were in the yard in the evening and a Pileated woodpecker flew into a near by tree. That isn't uncommon, we see them around here, what was interesting is that instead of landing near the trunk, it lit on the end of some small branches. So we had to see why; there were a few wild grapes hanging there and we presume it was eating them! Of course, the camera wasn't handy.

Forrest Bonney sent in this mention of these interesting birds also. “I had two Pileated woodpeckers pecking away at the top of my ash tree this morning and then another one flew across Route 2 in front of me this afternoon, a distance of about 4 miles apart. Could have been one of the same birds, but still: it's unusual for me to see three in one day!”

Have heard from some folks about how much they have been enjoying the deer that come regularly in the fields behind their house. Lately they have been watching a doe and her young ones. Occasionally a buck would come out in to the fields also. During all this, their old dog will lie on the deck about a hundred yards from the deer and bark. The deer just look at her and go about their business. No one seems to concerned with the company they are keeping. They also recently saw a Yellow-rumped warbler in company with a bunch of Juncos, and were telling me how small migrating birds will hear Chickadees carrying on in their normal way and will hone in on them just to check things out.



While walking along an old road up at camp this week, I saw a partridge walk leisurely across the trail about 20 feet in front of me. By the time I got the camera out of the bag and turned on, it had disappeared into the woods. So, not to have that happen again, I carried the camera in front of me turned on and ready for the next encounter, if there should be one. Quite some time latter, another partridge flew right in front of me. I was already to take the picture but was so surprised to see the bird, that I forgot to push down on the button!

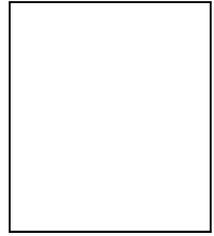


This is our last newsletter of the season. We will be back in March. If you have any tidbits you would like to share, or pictures you have taken this winter, you can reach me at aewilder@tdstelme.net. It's always good to hear from you! Thanks, and have a great winter. SW





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Dated Material

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Maine Audubon and Western Maine Audubon

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 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.

- \$25 Senior/Volunteer \$65 Contributing \$500 Benefactor
- \$35 Individual \$100 Patron \$1,000 Director's Circle
- \$45 Household \$250 Sustaining

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Questions? Call 207/781-2330 x232 or email member@maineaudubon.org.