



THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon Society

A CHAPTER OF NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

BOX 832, FARMINGTON, MAINE 04938

Fall 2016

Monthly Programs

Wednesday, September 14 at 7:00 PM

Bogs and Fens

Room 101, Roberts Learning Center, University of Maine, Farmington

(one flight up from parking lot at rear of building - same level as Lincoln Auditorium, campus entrance.)

If you have been fortunate enough to have visited the Orono Bog Boardwalk adjacent to the Rolland F. Perry Bangor City Forest, we hope you'll be interested in meeting and hearing the man who made it possible. On September 14, Western Maine Audubon and Devaney, Doak & Garrett, Booksellers, will present Ronald B. Davis, professor emeritus at the University of Maine School of Biology & Ecology and Climate Change Institute. The author of the recently released Bogs & Fens: A Guide to the Peatland Plants of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada, Professor Davis will take us on a tour through the landforms which constitute perhaps four percent of Maine's surface. From all accounts, it promises to be an interesting evening.

Wednesday, October 12 at 7:00 PM

Of Bumble Bees and Citizen Science

Room 101, Roberts Learning Center, University of Maine, Farmington

(one flight up from parking lot at rear of building - same level as Lincoln Auditorium, campus entrance.)

Approximately 1500 agricultural crops depend on insect pollination worldwide, but a number of these same insect pollinators are in global decline. Indeed bees and other pollinators are still at the very heart of much of our food chain, so understanding their decline is of deep economic as well as ecological importance. Here in Maine our Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, in partnership with the Universities of Maine at Farmington and Orono, is sponsoring a five year, citizen science initiative to gather baseline data on bumble bee populations within the state. University of Maine Professor of Ecology Dr. Ron Butler will discuss his involvement in the project along with the biology and challenges faced by these humble servants, the bumble bees.

Wednesday, November 16 at 7:00 PM

"Recycling in Maine"

Room 101, Roberts Learning Center, University of Maine, Farmington

(one flight up from parking lot at rear of building - same level as Lincoln Auditorium, campus entrance.)

Once upon a time there was no recycling, only those hundreds of funky town dumps and personal can piles that dotted and soured the landscape with our junk. Fast forward and Maine now has but 8 landfills, three waste to energy plants, and a handful of recyclers to handle the 8 pounds per day we toss. For many of us, perhaps most, recycling has become as simple as putting out a bin of single sort trash for roadside pick up. And recycling has never been more popular. Yet with shrinking land fill space, increasing costs and declining revenues from reuse, recycling has never been a bigger challenge either.

Eco Maine is Maine's largest and most sophisticated recycler. On one side Eco Maine contracts with our towns for cans, bottles, and the rest, and on the other it is tied to world materials markets for recycling. How does all this work and what lies ahead in our future? Lisa Wolff, Communications Director for Eco Maine, will give us the skinny on how recycling works from your door to theirs- along with a more global perspective on recycling's challenges and future in Maine and beyond.

These and all our programs are free and open to the public.

President's Column

Paul McGuire



Autumn's approach is no better announced around here than at sunrise when golden light pours through the east window of the bedroom. Later on, it enters the living room from the south, inching up the wall where it has been absent since sometime in the spring. In a few months time, we will welcome the daytime warmth we still avoid at mid-day by dropping the window quilts. For the next few weeks, free heat will be welcomed in the morning, shut out at mid-day and summoned in late afternoon as the temperature drops in lengthening shadows, subtle reminders of darker days ahead.

Far different from their vernal counterparts, autumn sunrises are quiet moments. There are no twittering choruses of returnees anxious to get on with the business of the season. Missing are turf war squawks, no melodies, no trills. There are no gaudy displays of color, no strutting, no aerial acrobatics, no woodcock's "PEENT" on foggy mornings. There simply is no cadenza to spring's overture. There is, instead, a cricket monotone accompanied by dry leaves rattling in a breeze.

Yes, spring's performers have either packed and left or are about to catch their flights down the line to winter digs. Most will miss the season's last hurrah, the woodlot's finest hour, the stunning moment when its colors change from backdrop curtain to center stage.

Now on autopilot, the feathered choruses of spring will silently disappear from woods, ponds, fields and roadsides. But headed south, they encounter other seasonal migrants headed in the other direction in trains of rvs, vans and buses, also signs of the coming season. These very different travelers will have headed north for color and perhaps something else. For a month or so graying visitors will view the pretty leaves. They will also frequent farm stands, cider mills, rural villages and antique shops in a brief effort to touch a past either they or their forbears once thought eternal. "Remember when" is often the conversation starter when admiring an old hay rack full of pumpkins or a glowing Shaker cupboard. Whatever the reason, to anyone observing them, there is a search of sorts taking place for something either lost or misplaced.

Who knows? One thing is certain: at some point in anyone's life the onset of autumn becomes a time for remembering, for appreciating the good things left by the season just before and for looking even further back to decades of growing seasons, memories of which just which might be needed to keep the spirit warm in the cold, dark months ahead.

We who serve on the board of Western Maine Audubon wish one and all a fruitful autumn, one we hope will include attending the season's programs found in this edition of the *Pileated Press*.





Consider the Robin

The robin and I, probably the robin and most of us, go back a long way. It might rank as the number one first bird, as it was for me when I started my life list as a freshman at the University of Wisconsin. I am red/green color blind, so while that red breast never did much for me, once I learned the flash of those white outer tail feathers I was spot on. But I have to say, as my ornithology class moved along to the myriad shore birds, water fowl, and other migrants of the Mississippi flyway - prairie chickens, Sandhill cranes, Canada and snow geese, once a snowy owl, myriad warblers – like most I fell for the exotics. So I turned my back on robin redbreast, who I came to seem as a somewhat prissy yard bird whose “who are you, here am I” call became annoyingly monotonous to my ears.

But thanks to Don Kroodsma’s [the Singing Life of Birds](#) I am can report a newfound fondness and appreciation for the robin, especially the one who starts his day faithfully at 5 in the ash just beyond our window. If you are not enthralled by robins, I suggest you spend 5 minutes with Don or however long it takes you to read pages 13 to 36. Don will take you into his romance with the robin as songster and by extension a whole new world of bird song will open up for you. No bird may sound the same again. Hopefully some of his patience will rub off on you, as patience is necessary to parse through and learn the nuance of songs. Our friend the robin might be regaling you with 15 or 20, not the one you think you hear.

It is hardly a surprise to grasp the notion that birds sing for very real and compelling reasons, so that sequence of songs you are hearing is anything but random. And arriving at the ‘why’ will take you on a quest that will move you from bird watching to bird seeing. Most of us use bird songs to answer ‘who’ and ‘what’ questions but Don takes us to how and why. That boundless aesthetic curiosity enables Kroodsma to identify, categorize, analyze, and gush over song phrases, chips, and alarm calls. At that level of listening you are bird seeing and hearing. If you take these steps birds will become the individuals they are, animals hard at work at the living they must forge day after day. Their survival and success depends on their having and acting on a deep understanding of all that is around them, and much of that understanding comes out as song. Song then, if you are a faithful student, is a portal of entry into the bird brain, which is a surprisingly thoughtful, complex place. My dog Fern does not have to understand much to find dinner but your average bird is very much at work, evaluating habitat, predator, prey, mate, companion, friend and foe.

If I might nod again at our faithful dog, I would remind that Fern’s sleeping away a hot summer day perfectly proves the rule that animals do only what they have to, no more and no less, and for her that is not much. But for the Black throat blue warbler I hear, there is the task of shuttling grubs and insects to its nest while being ever watchful for the Coopers hawk whose staple is indeed an endless pillage of songbirds just like her.

Songbird, now just what is a song bird? Geese may have a variety of sounds, but that does not make them song birds. The blue headed vireo does not seem capable of much to my ears but he is a song bird. Broadly speaking the singing birds are all in the Passeriformes or perching bird order, but beyond that the true song birds learn songs over their lives. A song bird hatches – and only males sing - with a repertoire that gets him started but spends his first several weeks or months learning his father’s song. Later, when he leaves the home ground to strike out on his own he will learn the song language of that new neighborhood and leave his father’s songs behind. The non-song bird Passerines,

also called sub oscines, have a less developed voice box and can only sing what is programmed at birth while true song birds learn, copy, and improvise.

Jon Young, in his recent, remarkable book, What the Robin Knows, identifies 5 contexts for song: choraling (think the dawn chorus), companion calls, juvenile begging, male-male aggression and posturing, and alarm calls. Young explains how a little concentrated study of a few common birds will fairly quickly show you these variations, and with them in mind you will begin to have a vocabulary for beginning to understanding not only what you are hearing but also what you are seeing. Beginning is a key word here.

Young introduces us to an almost meditative approach to bird 'watching' that depends on a contemplative, inquisitive, receptive mood, a comfortable place to sit, and time. As we walk, even quietly, birds scatter for quite a distance around us and only return slowly as the ripples of our disturbance settle over the next 20 or 30 minutes. As you sit, ears then eyes will pick up the returning neighborhood as life returns to normal for you to witness and absorb from your perch. This is not about life lists. Quite the opposite but incomparably richer. And you can sit anywhere. I have several sitting spots in favorite places here and I encourage you to try this out at yours.

As I write this the song season is winding down to August's quiet. Most hatchlings are fledged, so there is less territorial singing and more the workaday routines of surviving and preparing for fall's migration. Spring and summer arc through a familiar song cycle. It may have started with a March black bird or song sparrow, then perhaps the ruby crowned kinglets, winter wren, the glory of the thrush trilogy (wood, hermit, and veery) interspersed with the brilliant, often relatively evanescent flashes of warblers and their elusive songs. There is in this a slow crescendo as the migration wave hits and crests in our woods with song and color, and now the wave is pulling back. Summer is now entering her last act. The robin indeed has much to teach.



Game Bird Observations

Katherine Wilder

I've heard that the outlook for ruffed grouse this year is good due to the dry spring and early summer that we've had. Of course the general outlook is usually focused on the heavily forested townships of western and northern Maine where the hunters spend their time and money hunting for partridge. Until the last few days I hadn't had a chance to get out and look around the hillside here in Norridgewock. But after a few days of wondering around the woods with the dogs I'm pleased to report that the grouse population around here seems stronger than it has in years.

Yesterday we (myself and two dogs) flushed four partridge; one by itself and then three together alongside a brook. And the day before that we flushed another three while walking in a different area. That time it was a pair near a young apple tree and a single bird tucked in a fir thicket. And a few have flown dangerously close to the vehicle during my evening commute up the hill.

As for sighting other game birds, the woodcock have been intermittent, the turkeys have been few, and the pheasant have been nonexistent. But all three seem to show up with the calendar dates for their respective hunting seasons. I look forward to seeing them all in the upcoming weeks.

Those are my game bird observations from here on Wilder Hill.



Nature Watch

Palm Warbler

On May 3rd Kate Weatherby came out to our farm for a Spring bird walk. We walked slowly down to the Beaver Pond, checking for birds every now and then. I was amazed at how easily Kate could call up birds where I saw no signs of them. This Palm warbler was among them, seen at the Beaver Pond. Also seen was a pair of Great Blue herons flying over the pond, one with a stick in its beak. Looked like a nest was in the making somewhere, but not on that pond. Young herons have been seen a couple of times this summer at the Beaver Pond and at a nearby farm pond but don't know where they had a nest. A number of years ago the Beaver Pond was home to a heron rookery, but it gradually failed, perhaps because of too many human visits and nest trees falling over. A friend put a platform on top of one of the few remaining snags last winter, but so far, there has been no interest in it's use. But we do have a Cedar wax wing with a nest rather low down in a young pine, hope they have some good luck there. Seems they raise their family late to make use of all the fruit and berries about. Went to get a picture the other day and looks like they have fledged. Nice to know.

We have been seeing a lot of humming birds flying through lately. And late summer is a good time to



keep your eyes out for Cardinal flowers that you may see along river banks. Often with white Turtlehead flowers growing near by. A

very pretty combination.

Got an interesting note from Burt Knapp about his barn activities. He writes "One day in late July the barn swallows in our barn must have fledged because my attention was drawn to a noisy scene in the upper level of the barn. Swallows were flying hither and thither, making a racket, while a Kestrel soared quietly from one end of the barn to the other. I don't know whether the Kestrel was successful in it's hunt, but all was quiet the next day."

We always enjoy hearing about what you see and do and would like to include some of your stories in this nature page. Please e mail me at aewilder@somtel.com. Have a great winter!



Photo by K. Wilder

Cardinal Flower





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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.

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