



THE PILEATED PRESS

Western Maine Audubon

A CHAPTER OF MAINE AUDUBON

BOX 832, FARMINGTON, MAINE 04938

Spring

2017

Wednesday, March 8 at 7PM

Native Plants- Irene Barber

Roberts 101, Roberts Learning Center University of Maine at Farmington.

For this month's program, we take a break from animals to explore our native plants. Botanist Irene Barber will highlight some selected, readily identifiable local plants, focusing on their ecology, pollinators, and bird companions. As part of this she will help us learn about which plants might attract which birds to your property. Irene teaches horticulture at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens; for more information about this program and about Irene please look on pg. 4.

Wednesday, April 12, at 7 PM

Wavelengths of Change in the Gulf of Maine

William Balch PhD; Senior Research Scientist at Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences

7 PM at UMF, Roberts 101 Roberts Learning Center

Our own Gulf of Maine is the site of some of the most dramatic changes attributable to climate change, and these are happening now. Acidification from atmospheric CO₂ is already causing devastation of mussel and oyster beds. Ocean temperature rise is driving away the favored prey of puffins, whose populations may be crashing.

The Gulf's vulnerability in part stems from its complexity. We are lucky indeed to have been able to get William Balch, senior Research Scientist at Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, to guide us through the Gulf's dynamics of tide, currents, and marine ecology. So if coccolithophore mixotrophy is something that stumps you, join us for this talk. We can't promise that he will bring his jazz trombone, but he will bring you an interesting evening nonetheless.

Wednesday, May 10, at 7 PM

Wind Over Wings - Hope Douglas

Roberts c23, Roberts Learning Center, University of Maine at Farmington

At the Western Maine Audubon May program, Wind Over Wings will present four special birds that have been under their care. Wind Over Wings rehabilitates injured birds; those animals that cannot be returned to the wild are kept as long term residents. Because they are accommodated to captivity and human contact, these birds become ambassadors to the avian world, birds that are brought to meetings like ours for you to meet and listen to. As Director Hope Douglas so often says, every bird has a story to tell. In addition to hearing about and meeting these birds, you will have a chance to be up close and personal to the evening's feathered guests.

Field Trips on Pg. 2

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

President's Column



What an unusual winter we have had so far, and at our recent Audubon Board Meeting many of us were wondering how it was affecting the animals. Our farm has a large area designated as a "deer yard" and usually we see many tracks in the winter. Since the heavy crust developed on the snow we have not seen any. Did the deer simply stay put in the woods or were they, as we were, able to walk on the crust? With their sharp pointed hooves this seems unlikely. How well they survive this winter may be clearer come spring. Owls, with their extremely sensitive hearing that allows them to hear small creatures under the snow, may also be suffering because of the icy crust. They may not be able to hear their prey or penetrate the crust to catch them. How does the crust impact the little creatures who run beneath it? They may be hungry as well although it may keep them a bit warmer.

With temperatures hovering around zero, when your hands and feet are freezing, have you ever wondered how birds keep their feet warm? Actually, they don't. Since it is more important for them to conserve body heat they have a system of heat exchange with arteries and veins in close proximity in their legs so they can keep the heat in their bodies and their feet stay cool. The tail of the beaver works on the same principle. Birds shiver to remain warm but actually decrease the amount of shivering on a cold night allowing the body temperature to drop up to 10 degrees to save energy. Many animals have unique adaptations to help them survive the cold and snow of our winters.

So, put "cabin fever" aside and come enjoy our 3 talks this spring starting March 8th when we will slip into spring and talk plants and gardens and things green and growing. See you there!



Western Maine Audubon Field Trips

Saturday, May 6, Warbler Walk

We will again be hosting our annual spring warbler walk along the railroad tracks in West Farmington. We will meet at the Whistlestop Trail parking lot at 7AM. Our walk usually lasts about 2 hours and is a rain or shine event, so dress accordingly. All birders' eyes and ears are welcome. For further information call Steve Bien at 897 5215.



Saturday, May 20, Bog Walk

10 - Noon on the Orono Bog Boardwalk. Led by Ronald Davis, retired professor of biology at the University of Maine at Orono, and author of Bogs & Fens. He spoke to us last fall at one of our evening talks.

Directions: Once you arrive at the Tripp Drive Parking Lot at the northern entrance to the Bangor City Forest you'll need at least 10 min. to walk the East Trail to the beginning of the boardwalk where we'll start the walk at 10 AM. Suggest that you arrive a few minutes early at the beginning of the boardwalk so we can all get acquainted.

For more information call Nancy or Burt Knapp at 778-6285.



Cranberries



Conservation Corner

Steve Bien

The Future of Mining in Maine. And More

Heavy metal surface mining will again face this legislature, probably for the last time. This is after all our fourth go round and perhaps mining's last hurrah in Maine. If he cannot bring the parties together around legislation that will pass, Senator Tom Saviello says he will propose an outright ban. That would settle the issue if successful, but, like any hail Mary effort, it is not so good if it fails. For in that case, mining development might enjoy an open season in what might then be a regulatory vacuum.

The center of all this is Bald Mountain in Aroostook County where there are extensive gold, silver, and other heavy metal deposits. Bald was first geologically explored in the 70's and since then at least three owners have laid claim to the mountain and researched its deposits, before the current owner but each folded their cards, finding the combination of geology and legislation unworkable. No one until the current owner, DJ Irving, believed they could profitably mine and stay within the statutes.

As with their predecessors, Irving too found the governing statutes impossibly restrictive but they pressed on with their efforts with the legislature and the DEP. Essentially at their behest in 2012 the legislature passed legislation ordering the Department of Environmental Protection to rewrite the governing rules to make them more 'practical'. It is that task that has now confounded the legislature through three sessions and now is in Tom Saviello's hands once again as Chair of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Open pit, heavy metal mining is a fraught enterprise because the chemical nature of the deposits leads to the generation of toxic, acidic wastes. In porous deposits, such as the ever-prevalent glacial till of Maine, ground waters are easily contaminated by released arsenic, lead, and other water-soluble sulfites, all of which are highly toxic to wildlife. These contaminants spread rapidly and far through ground water. Since toxic mining tailings have traditionally been stored under water, their storage adds to the jeopardy, particularly later when the tailings pit is de-watered for final processing.

The Natural Resources Council of Maine has put together its 'must do' list if it is to support mining in any form:

- No mining on public land
- No mining in, adjacent to, or under ponds, lakes, streams, or wetlands
- Sufficient financial set asides escrowed to cover damages and disasters in perpetuity.
- A ban on ore removal, ore processing, and mining waste disposal in floodplains
- Dry mining waste and tailings management

Tom has yet to put together the specifics of his proposal but has pledged to meet these criteria fully, but the reactions of legislators and the interests groups behind them are unpredictable.

Some in the environmental community would just as soon have this issue die a death of attrition. To that end there is a hint of moving goal posts in the legislative deliberations, according to some. The strategy is that if the proposal dies in committee and leaves the old, restrictive rules place what's the harm?

This argument hangs on a belief that since the highly restrictive rules of 1991 are still on the books we can rest easy. But Tom and Attorney General Janet Mills say that this is not the case.

Continue on pg. 4

The old rules may still be in place but they are superseded by the statute calling for their revision, and this statute passed the legislature. Statute trumps rules they say. Reasonable legal minds may differ but if Mills is correct, this posture could leave Maine wide open to essentially unregulated mining if the legislature does nothing concrete.

So, there we stand. You could look at this and proclaim; what an exasperating, time consuming mess. But you could also see the beauty of a system of laws and science at work, a system operated by committees of citizen legislators and citizen environmentalists who are putting in the elbow grease of trying to make something happen. And they are doing this for us. In its own way, this is wonderful. Stay tuned.

I can't help but compare this earnest, well intentioned effort to what we are seeing at the national level. The other day the White House pulled mention of climate science off its web page. Governor Scott Pruitt, proposed to head the EPA, does not even believe in that department's mission. The man being asked to chair the nation's immunization committee has said he does not believe much of the science of immunization. We have all heard the President campaign on the notion that climate change is a Chinese hoax and he is moving forward with plans to bring back the yesteryear of coal plants and dirty air.

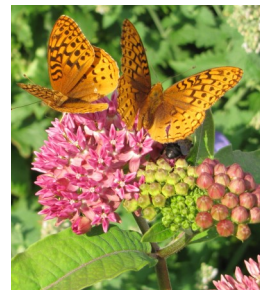
He was elected, after all, and apparently large parts of the electorate do not prioritize, care about or believe in the importance of some of these issues. Worst of all, the very importance of 'facts' are in question. Are we at risk of becoming somehow 'post factual'? Will we or have we arrived at a place where everyone has the privilege of their own set of 'alternative facts'?

Friends; all, and I mean all, that we hold dear depends on this not being the case. What makes government work, what makes public servants like Tom Saviello work, what makes our advocacy work, are the rule of law and a shared belief in evidence based government. Until now we have been lucky to take this mostly for granted, but this may be changing particularly at the national level. We may have a President and administration that will disregard and overturn laws and rules with remarkable abandon and ignorance of tradition, the rigors of due process, and consequences. Environmental laws that relate to clean air and clean water, and the pollution and warming of the planet will be chief among these. The only check on these actions may be you and me being attentive, vigilant, and *involved*.

Call me an alarmist or, better yet, prove me wrong, but I fear our democracy and many aspects of the country as we know it may be in grave jeopardy. Only citizen attention, diligence, and activism will keep us on track.. Be as informed as you can be and call or write your Congress people at every opportunity to let them know what you think. In ways that could not be more critical to our welfare and that of our descendants, much is at stake. Indeed, in my mind enough is at stake to for me to break with tradition in the sort of partisanship I allow myself on this page. My views are only my own, not the views of our chapter or board, and they come from the compelling urgency I feel about where we are.



Irene Brady Barber works at Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens as Horticulture educator and coordinator of the Therapeutic Horticulture Program. Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens offers an Ecological Certificate Program where Irene teaches two of the topics; Ecological Landscape Design and Sustainable Landscape Practices. Irene also is principal of Greenscapes Design LLC for which she designs ecologically considerate and therapeutic landscapes for private residential and non-profit public projects.



The lecture that Irene Barber will present called, "Native Plants for Native Winged Companions" will highlight an introductory visual list of native plants to grow in the Maine home landscape setting that are used for both attractive properties and ecosystem services. In every region of the world there are native plants that provide food and sanctuary for native animals, insects and other living organisms which in turn help to sustain the vigor of a native plant's life. A large number of these plants can also be grown for human well-being including to eat, to use medicinally or to observe their wondrous beauty and the wildlife that occurs on, in and around the plants. The winged companions of the the native plants play a significant ecological role as well as adding to the entertainment of the natural world that we can see year round.

Nature Watch

On this very snowy day 2/9/17, Nancy Wright called us to say she had six robins in her rose bush! Those little birds are amazing!

Last fall, just after this newsletter went to press, I got a couple of calls about back yard birds. One from Sonny Corson in Skowhegan who writes; "The following is going to be hard to believe as it certainly surprised me as I watched it happen. After viewing the picture of the partridge in your fall issue. It took me back to last winter. I was feeding ground birds, doves, turkeys, and others, beside a stump in my back yard. This feeding spot was about 10" from my back porch. After a light fluffy snow I noted tracks from under my porch to the feeding spot. Closer inspection and I could not figure what animal made the tracks, out and back under the back porch. Next day again the small trail out and back under the porch. This got me very curious. With daily watching, I was finally able to see a partridge come out from under the porch, feed and then run back under the porch. This went on the remainder of the winter. Others also witnessed this bird out to feed and back. Must have felt safe under the porch, probably hiding in an overturned bucket or something else under the porch. Come spring the partridge was viewed around our home for a couple of months. This was certainly a first for me."

And on 9/9/16 Dick Brooks in Phillips ME called with news about the Barn swallows in his barn every year. Sometimes they have 2 nesting's. This past season he kept closing the barn doors a little more every evening so the swallows got use to going through a small opening after a while. This kept the larger birds (hawks) and other predators from the nesting birds. He also saw a massive invasion of dragon flies in his field, thousands, all a powder blue. Very pretty to see. Also about 7 or 8 years ago he counted 33 different species of birds at his feeder. There are always a lot, but most years he doesn't bother to count. He said this was during the Spring migration.

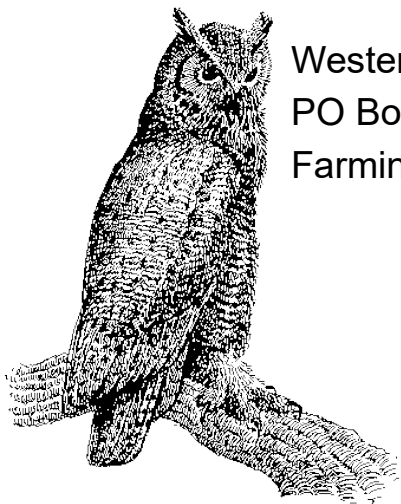
Back in late Fall the dogs here were putting up quite a fuss which caused Art to look out the window. He saw a Fisher chase our daughter's cat into our front yard and catch him. The cat was a big healthy male. Art ran out and tried to kick the fisher off the cat with no luck and the fisher dragged the cat under our car. We let the dogs out and with their incessant barking, were able to chase the fisher away. Had to roll the car back to be able to get to the cat, who was in very bad shape. Took him right into the vets, but they were unable to save him. This is the second time a fisher has gotten one of our cats, So...if you should be unlucky enough, or lucky enough, to spot a fisher, it's a good idea to keep the cats inside for a while till hopefully the fisher moves on.

Also in early December, we were surprised to see four Sand Hill cranes still hanging out here on Wilder Hill Road. They were wandering about the old corn field in low snow where we often see them in the spring (see photo).

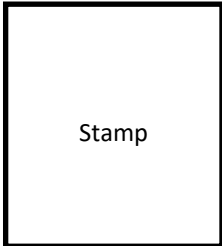
Nancy Knapp was telling me that Pileated Woodpeckers will hammer away at a hole near the base of a tree to attract a mate. So when you see the holes way down low, you will have an idea why that spot may have been picked. We have been watching one in our yard working on an old mostly dead maple tree this past week.

As always, we enjoy hearing about what you see and do in the natural world. You can email me at: aewilder@somtel.com Thanks.





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Maine Audubon and Western Maine Audubon

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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.

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