



the ***Pileated Press***

Western Maine Audubon, a chapter of Maine Audubon

Box 832, Farmington, ME 04938

- Our Spring Talks 2022 -

COVID UPDATE: We are trying to keep our talks in person so: masks are required by the University, social distancing is encouraged and we request that all attendees be vaccinated. **THANK YOU** for helping keep us ALL SAFE.

All talks will be as usual, 7:00 PM on the second Wednesday Evening of March, April, and May. This Spring they will be in Lincoln Auditorium, Roberts Learning Center, UMF. Talks will be recorded as usual.

March 9th - Invasive Plants in Maine

Speaker: Hunter Manley

Hunter will be discussing invasive plants in Maine with a focus on their impact on wildlife and forestry. The growing prevalence of any of these species threatens the health of their host ecosystem, so identifying them early and planning for treatment is essential for maintaining productive habitat and forests. For the most common invasive plants in Western Maine photo examples of infestations and treatment will assist attendees in learning to identify and prevent the spread of these species.

Hunter is a consulting forester and pesticide applicator living in Old Town where he operates Legacy Woodlot Services. He graduated from the University of Maine with a bachelor's degree in Forestry in 2017, and has been working on invasive plant control, NRCS cost-share programs, and other forestry projects. He has worked with Maine Natural Areas Program, towns, and land trusts on restoring natural communities affected by invasive plants.



Invasive Plants, by Hunter Manley

April 13th - Gardening to Please the Birds and the Bees Speaker: Gary Fish, Maine State Horticulturist



If you have read Dr. Doug Tallamy's books *Nature's Best Hope*, *Bringing Nature Home* and *The Living Landscape* you understand the importance of incorporating native plants into our landscapes. Many of our gardens are filled with plants from Asian and Europe which our native insects do not recognize as food sources. The lack of these insect resources impacts the ability of our birds to raise their young. Gary will give an overview of these concerns and provide resources and ideas on how to incorporate native plants into our gardens.

Gary received a B.S. in Forest and Wildlife Management from University of Maine, College of Forest Resources in 1982. He has been the State Horticulturist since 2015 and Manager of Pesticide Programs for the Board of Pesticides Control. He has been a practicing Licensed Professional Forester since 1985 and is the former chair of the Arborist Board.

Gary grew up in Farmington, Maine. He classifies himself as an "entomologist from birth" and he was inspired to love plants by his Mother who always grew beautiful roses and rock gardens. He is also a landscape and nature photographer. (Phish Photography on Etsy)



Photos #1-4 by Gary Fish Photo #5 by Dr. Doug Tallamy

1. Hummingbird Moth on Bee Balm
2. Monarch Butterfly Caterpillar on Milkweed Leaf
3. The Butterfly
4. Joe Pye Weed Bumblebee
5. Chickadee With Caterpillar



May 11th – Maine’s Damselflies and Dragonflies

Speaker: Dr. Ron Butler

This presentation will begin with a general overview of the evolution, ecology, and behavior of damselflies and dragonflies (Order Odonata). This will be followed by a brief survey of some of Maine’s 161 known odonate species. Finally, conservation concerns for this important group of insects will be discussed, and resources to facilitate contributions by community members interested in furthering our understanding of Maine’s odonate fauna will be explored.

Dr. Ron Butler retired in 2021 as Emeritus Professor at the University of Maine at Farmington after 40 years of teaching. He has published papers on the ecology and behavior of mice, beavers, gulls, petrels, guillemots, skuas, penguins, damselflies, dragonflies, and bumble bees, and he is presently co-authoring a book entitled Butterflies of Maine and the Canadian Maritime Provinces. For over twenty years, Ron has helped plan and coordinate statewide community-science projects focused on Maine insects, and he remains active in research and conservation initiatives in collaboration with MDIFW.



Ovipositing and Blue Dasher, By Ron Butler



- President’s Column -

Photo Credit: Burt Knapp

Greetings in cold and gray mid-January,

We have just raised the bird feeder one more time after watching the gray squirrel cleverly jump from the window sill. Hence the article below!

Our spring talks this year lean towards plants. The first, which is being given by Hunter Manley in conjunction with the Farmington Conservation group, will address invasives in the area and what we can do as citizens to help control this menace. The second will be presented by our state horticulturist, Gary Fish, and will focus on what we should plant in our yards to support bees, birds and butterflies. This is so important now. Bring your pens to take notes! The third is by well known retired UMF Professor Emeritus Ron Butler teaching us all about something different: Dragonflies and Damselflies.

Looking forward to seeing everyone out and about once again this spring.

Nancy Knapp, President

Squirrels – by Nancy Knapp

Watching one of our resident gray squirrels try determinedly and repeatedly to reach our hanging bird feeder it occurred to me that I really didn't know much about them except they seem to be everywhere and constantly in motion. There are in fact many members of the squirrel family. Locally there are tree squirrels, both the gray and red ones, flying squirrels, and the ground varieties, both chipmunks and groundhogs. There are many more varieties across the country including prairie dogs, golden squirrels in the far west, etc. The word squirrel, first noted in 1327, comes from the Anglo-Norman "esquirel" which can be traced back to ancient Greek "Skiouros," or "shadow-tailed." A group of squirrels is called a "dray" or a "scurry."

Squirrels live in almost every habitat, from tropical rainforests to semi-arid deserts although they are not found in the high polar regions or very dry deserts. As we all know they are mostly herbivorous, eating seeds and nuts although some of the larger species eat insects or small vertebrates. They have excellent vision and a good sense of touch.

Squirrels mate either once or twice a year and the young are born naked, toothless and blind and are cared for exclusively by the mother. Many juveniles die within their first year of life, some by falling from nests, but adults can live for 5 to 10 years. Tree dwelling varieties are mostly solitary while ground dwellers are more social and some in the west have recently been studied looking at particular personalities which seem to favor survival. Squirrels cannot digest cellulose so rely on foods rich in protein, carbohydrate and fats. Early spring is the leanest time of year because the nuts they have buried are sprouting which means they are no longer digestible.

Squirrels thrive from interactions in human environments where they lose their inherent fear of humans. It is in these same environments where they become social problems, eating wires etc. They were apparently almost completely eradicated during the Industrial Revolution in New York and were later reintroduced to "entertain and remind" humans of nature.

Why the big bushy tail? Stated purposes which benefit the animal include:

- A signaling device
- Use as a parachute when jumping
- To keep rain, wind or cold off itself
- To cool off when hot by pumping blood through the tail
- To serve as a counter balancing device when jumping from branch to branch
- As a protective ruse to hide from predators when seen from behind

One other fun fact: They can rotate their ankles 180 degrees enabling the hind feet to point backwards gripping the tree bark from the opposite direction allowing them to go headfirst down a tree.



Gray Squirrel raiding the feeder, by Burt Knapp

It seems these clever and resourceful little critters have been with us for millennia and hopefully will continue to be part of our environment for a long time to come.

Reference: Wikipedia, "Squirrel". Resources included at the end of that article.

- Article -

House Sparrows – by Burt Knapp, board member

Yikes! We have had them now for the first time. We have often seen as many as 5-6 females at a time on our feeder. They are in the barn and we hope they will not displace the Barn Swallows. The swallows are a joy to watch as they skim over the fields doing ariel acrobatics while catching insects. The swallows are seasonal, but the House Sparrows can be year-round.

The House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), also known as the English Sparrow, was released in New York City from England in 1852. At that time, it was thought that it might help control the “ravages of the linden moth”. Since then, and through other successful introductions, it has spread widely across the US and, in fact at this time, is the most abundant bird in North America, and the most widely distributed wild bird in the world. There are a number of subspecies.

The House Sparrow is considered a pest in agricultural areas of the country where it feeds on seeds, preferring wheat and oats. It is gregarious and adaptable, often living right along with humans in cities and suburbs. It may nest in the eaves of buildings and may even breed in buildings like factories and warehouses. In the wild it may nest in cavities and may displace other cavity nesters like the American Bluebird. Its diet is quite diverse, easily adapting to what is available, whether it be grain, insects, berries, earthworms, crustations, or even lizards and frogs! In cities it may forage in garbage cans, or frequent restaurants on the lookout for crumbs. It may even be found in supermarkets, apparently having mastered the skill of using the automatic door!

It flies, it hops when on the ground, and it has even been observed to dive and swim. It is monogamous but not without common ‘extra marital” affairs. It faces a mortality rate of up to 75% during its first year, and 50% yearly for adults. Nevertheless, a banded bird in Denmark lived almost 20 years, and the oldest recorded captive House Sparrow lived for 23 years!

Good luck if you have House Sparrows associated with your dwelling; while cute, they are frequently at our feeder “eating us out of house and home”.

References: Wikipedia, and The Audubon Society, Field Guide to North American Birds, Eastern Region.



Male House Sparrow from TheCornellLab, All About Birds



Female House Sparrow, By Burt Knapp

- Nature Watch -

Nature news from Porter Hill Farm - article and photo by Burt Knapp

I want to give you an update to my Nature Note about “Window Attacks” posted in the Fall 2021 Pileated Press. The attacks by a male Cardinal in the early summer were attributed to high testosterone levels which can occur in male birds as they establish and defend a territory, and during the breeding season. The levels usually drop once the bird transitions to nest tending activities and other fatherly duties. We expected, therefore, to have the attacks on our windows stop midsummer, but they didn’t. In fact our male Cardinal has continued his repetitive attacks now into the winter. He is very sensitive to movement within the house and will immediately cease his attacks on that window, but usually resumes his attacks at another window. An imitation owl, whom we call Elmer, was effective initially, but needing to move the owl from window to window has defeated its deterrent effect. Being a year-round species now that Climate Change has brought him and other more southern species our way, we don’t expect the attacks to cease anytime soon):



Cardinal Looking In Window, Burt Knapp

- May Bird Walks -

All are welcome! Beginning birders, don't be shy, all you need are binoculars and a love of being outdoors and of watching birds.

- 1) Whistle Stop Trail, 7 AM, May 7th, rain or shine. Meet in the parking lot at the trail head across the street from the West Farmington Post Office. Drive in a short distance to find the parking area.
- 2) Perham Stream Birding Trail, 8:00am, May 14th. This walk will be led by Nick Ledley and is cosponsored by the Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust. For further information and directions go to: www.mainetrailfinder.com/trails/trail/perham-birding-trail

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Thank you!



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