

Natural Selections

Newsletter of the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon



October-December 2019

The Herons of Eastern Mark Island

BY GORDON RUSSELL, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER OF MAINE AUDUBON

As mentioned in a previous column, my wife and I are volunteer monitors for the State of Maine's Heron Observation Network. This citizen science initiative, now in its tenth year, helps wildlife biologists keep track of great blue heron colonies in Maine. Jane and I have been primarily responsible for two colonies, located in beaver flowages in Brewer and Otis. Both continue to be successful rookeries, with the numbers of nests and fledged young increasing in the past few years. This year we took on another heron colony, located on Eastern Mark Island in Stonington. This 10-acre island contains the only known offshore great blue heron rookery in Penobscot Bay, with close to 40 nests recorded in past years.

The number of nests and production of young on the island have not been actively monitored for several years. Access is difficult; it involves landing on a wave-swept rocky shoreline, then trekking through dense forest to reach the nests, which are located in live birch trees. (Heron reportedly nested elsewhere on Eastern Mark in the past, leading some to conclude that they were no longer using the island.) While it's possible to see adult herons flying to and from the island in the spring, it is so heavily wooded that you actually have to get to the birch trees before you can see the nests. Not only would you disturb the nesting process by tromping up to do this, it's difficult to see inside the nests if you're standing directly underneath them – unlike the usual situation, where binoculars and spotting scopes allow you to monitor heron rookeries and count the chicks in the nests from a safe distance. In fact,

public access to the island is restricted until after September 1 to minimize disturbance to the herons, long after the normal nesting period. Bald eagles are regularly observed on Eastern Mark and may be nesting there, raising additional doubts about the ability of herons to successfully fledge their young on the island.

We did manage one visit to Eastern Mark Island in August. We did not see any live adult or young herons, but we counted 25 nests. We observed empty hatched egg shells on the ground under most of the nests, and spotted some skeletal remains as well. It was clear that herons had indeed nested this year, but uncertain how many young were produced and fledged. We can only hope that the birds will return next

year to nest again, and help sustain the population.

Great blue herons face many challenges in Maine and elsewhere. These include habitat loss, increased predation and disturbance, and diminished food supply. Add to these the effects of climate change, and uncertainties in levels of environmental protection at all levels of government. Herons are not alone in dealing with natural and human-induced environmental challenges. We all confront them every day. The herons on Eastern Mark Island appear to have adapted; they are displaying a resiliency that will help them survive and thrive. Hopefully, we too can recognize the challenges and opportunities facing us, and make intelligent choices to ensure our well-being long into the future.

PVC Annual Benefit Auction, November 1 to December 6

It is almost time for the Penobscot Valley Chapter's Annual Benefit Auction! Bidding will be conducted online at <https://pvc.maineaudubon.org>, starting on Friday, November 1, and continuing through 12:00 p.m. EST on Friday, December 6. Successful bidders can pick up their items at the annual PVC Holiday Party, starting at 6:00 p.m. on December 6; for remote bidders and those unable to attend the party on December 6, we will arrange an alternative pickup or delivery time. Additional items will be offered for live and silent auction during the Holiday Party. Please share the auction website link with family and friends far and near, so they can join in the fun!

Chapter board members are currently soliciting auction donations from local merchants, artisans, and nature lovers in our community. If you have items or services you would like to contribute to help promote grass-roots environmental outreach and programming in eastern Maine, please call Auction Chair Ellen Campbell at 843-5858 or e-mail her at ellenrc@myfairpoint.net. If you itemize on your federal tax return, we will gladly provide you with a receipt on PVC letterhead so you can document the estimated fair market value. Thank you for your support!

Natural Selections

Natural Selections is published four times a year by the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon. Maine Audubon members living in the Penobscot Valley region automatically become chapter members and receive Natural Selections at no additional charge. Membership in Maine Audubon costs per year:

\$50 household; \$40 individual
\$30 senior / volunteer

Membership benefits include a discount on programs and purchases at all Maine Audubon stores as well as a subscription to the quarterly periodical *Habitat*.

The chapter offers a weekly email service to remind members about upcoming events in our region plus electronic delivery of this newsletter upon request. Please email Jim Zeman, kjzeman@hotmail.com to sign up for these services.

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Natural Selections

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 <https://pvc.maineaudubon.org>
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FIELDS POND JOURNAL

BY DAVID LAMON, FPAC MANAGER
FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER

It is hard to believe that it's been just over a year since starting my position here at Fields Pond -my, how time flies! I've now had the opportunity to witness the changing of each season and the annual ebb and flow of activities at Fields Pond. The summer season was certainly a busy one, and with the help of many volunteers, a productive one too!

Earlier in the summer we had a work crew of young adults from the Maine Conservation Corps, joined by Fields Pond volunteer Paul Halvachs, who worked to replace old, worn-out foot/bog bridging along the Fern Trail. If you haven't walked this section of trail recently, please put that on your to-do list this fall.

The summer is always a busy time down along the waterfront of Fields Pond. This area sees more public use during a concentrated period of time than any other part of our property. We had a number of volunteer Boy Scouts, led by Levi Peterson and Abbott Valentine, build and install a new information kiosk next to the boat landing plus a new storage rack for our fleet of canoes. The Boy Scouts were helped in their work by Fields Pond volunteers Jerry Smith, Sean Trahan, and Paul Halvachs. Speaking of the waterfront, volunteers Meg and Mary McElroy have helped us keep a check on invasive purple loosestrife along the shoreline of Fields Pond this summer.

Volunteer Nancy Swanson helped manage our increased summer visitation by keeping the Nature Center open for more hours on Saturdays. Staffing the information desk, helping to keep the building clean, answering phone

calls, completing Nature Store sales, interacting with visitors; Nancy has done all that, and more!

We had a wide array of well-attended program offerings this summer. Moonlight canoe paddles, field botany programs, an insect bio-blitz, kids' summer camp, and family fun programs were part of the mix. Volunteer Chris Stevens helped us spread the word by distributing program flyers throughout the greater Bangor area, and volunteers Alyssa Soucy and Jean Adamson helped to deliver programs and events for children and families.

As we transition into the fall season, there are still many more opportunities to volunteer here at Fields Pond. A new event this fall is our "5K Fall Foliage Fun Run" (or walk), on Saturday, October 12th. We will need a good number of volunteers to help ensure that it's a fun and safe time for all. Our annual "Volunteer Stewardship Day" is coming up on Saturday, October 19th, and we need lots of strong hands (and backs) to help with trail work and other projects on the sanctuary property. If you'd rather work indoors, then consider helping us staff the Fields Pond Nature Center on weekends.

Whether it's as a volunteer, a program participant, or a hiker out on the trails, we hope to be able to greet you this fall here at Fields Pond!

Fields Pond Wish List:

- Black-oil sunflower seeds for the Fields Pond bird feeding stations
- Taxidermy assistance
- Canoes and canoeing equipment
- Hand pruners/shears/loppers/pruning saws
- Cordless drill
- Other tools

Members of the Maine Conservation Corps worked this summer to replace aging bog-bridges along the Fern Trail.



FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER PROGRAMS - FALL 2019

Please note that all programs with fees require pre-registration and payment via the Maine Audubon website, www.maineaudubon.org. If you can't access the website, please call FPAC at 989-2591 or e-mail fieldspond@maineaudubon.org for assistance with pre-registration.

Saturday, Sept 7, 1-4 p.m.

Foraging: Finding Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants

Members \$20, Nonmembers \$30
There is an abundance of wild plants, mushrooms and other natural treasures in Maine that can be foraged for food, medicinal use, and other purposes. We will learn about what you can find, how to differentiate the safe from the toxic, and different ways to use what you forage. Trip leader: David Spahr, author of *Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms of New England and Eastern Canada*. Space is limited, pre-registration required.

Saturday, September 21, 4 p.m.

Harvest Picnic and Paddle on Fields Pond

Members \$8, Nonmembers \$10
Pack a picnic dinner, and paddle out onto Fields Pond to enjoy the final days of summer. Your journey will include an exclusive reservation: dining out at our island oasis on Fields Pond! Space is limited!

Tuesdays starting October 1, 4-5 p.m. (five weeks)

Healthy Hikes at Fields Pond - FREE

Join neighbors and Maine Audubon staff for a weekly brisk walk this fall season, along one of our beautiful Fields Pond trails. Bring appropriate footwear and meet at the Nature Center Headquarters. No cost and no pre-registration required; drop in as your schedule allows.

Tuesdays starting October 1, 6-7 p.m. (five-week session)

Discussion Course: "Change is Our Choice, Creating Climate Change Solutions"

Course Fee: \$35
The science has long been settled: climate change is real,

and it's happening all around us right now. Our five-session discussion course on climate action will help you take action to increase resilience and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Presented in an interactive eBook, this new discussion course experience integrates video, audio and printed content with action plans that help you roll your sleeves up and get started taking action toward a better tomorrow.

NOTE: Advanced registration is required in order to get the eBook materials.

Saturday, October 5, 1-4 p.m.

Mushrooms of Maine

Members \$20, Nonmembers \$30
Join local favorite David Spahr as he takes you on a journey through the world of fungi. Time will be spent both indoors and outdoors learning about mushroom identification, folklore, collecting, and cooking. David's book will be available for purchase. Be prepared for a moderate amount of physical activity while outdoors. Leader: David Spahr, author of *Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms of New England and Eastern Canada*. Space is limited, pre-registration required.

Thursday, October 10, 7:00 p.m.

Plants Out of Place: Ecology and Identification of Invasive Plants of Maine

Members Free, Nonmembers \$8
Invasive plants can overrun habitats, change soil ecology, reduce the abundance of food for beneficial insects, and become an eyesore on the landscape. Come learn how these aggressive species got to Maine, which ones are of top concern, and what you can do to make a difference. Presenter: Nancy Olmstead, Invasive Plant Biologist, Maine Natural Areas Program, Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

Saturday, October 12, 9 a.m.

Fall Foliage 5k Fun Run/Walk at Fields Pond

Registration Fee: \$20
Join us for our first annual

Fields Pond 5k fun run/walk. Course will take you up through our beautiful wooded trails and down scenic roads for the perfect foliage tour. Call 989-2591 for more details.

Saturday, October 19, 9 a.m. - noon

Fields Pond Stewardship Day -

Join the Fields Pond staff for a morning of stewardship activities focused on improving our trails and public spaces. Bring work gloves and sturdy footwear. Snacks provided!

Wednesday, October 30, 7 p.m.

The Future of Extreme Heat in Maine: Scenarios, Mitigation, and Adaptation

Members Free, Nonmembers \$8
Join environmental studies professor Misa Saros of Unity College as he uses climate science and sociology to discuss a community response to extreme heat in Maine.

Friday, November 8, 7:00 p.m.

A Birding and Wildlife Adventure at the End of the World

Members Free, Nonmembers \$8
Early in 2019, Ron and Lee Davis traveled due south from Maine to Patagonia at the southern tip of South America. There, they boarded a small ship that took them to Cape Horn and through the Strait of Magellan and Beagle Channel, after which they drove to Tierra del Fuego, Sierra Baguales and Torres del Paine to observe and photograph birds and other wildlife under a backdrop of spectacular peaks and glaciers. This illustrated talk will provide you with a vicarious experience of birding this remote and wild place at the end of the world.

Saturday, Nov 16, 1-2:30 p.m.

Maine Deer:

Winter Weather Warriors

Members Free, Nonmembers \$8
Learn about wintering deer in Maine, and efforts by the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) to monitor wintering deer. Learn in the field how winter severity is measured, and see what gear is used to capture and collar

deer. See deer movement and mortality data gathered from the MDIFW deer collaring project. Presenter is Nathan Bieber, Wildlife Biologist and Deer Specialist with the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

Saturday, December 7

Two showings: 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

Owls Of Birdsacre

Members: \$8 individual/\$12 family. Nonmembers: \$12 individual /\$15 family.

Come meet the owls from the Birdsacre wildlife sanctuary in Ellsworth, up close and personal. Hear their stories of personal and species challenges, and learn how we can help in the work of owl conservation. Choose the time that works best for you; both presentations are identical. **ADVANCE RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED** since this program always maxes out our room capacity. Please call 989-2591 for more information.

FIELDS POND BOOK GROUP

The Fields Pond Book Group meets monthly on Thursday nights at 6:30 p.m. at the Orono Public Library, facilitated by professional librarian Joyce Rumery. Here are the titles that the group will read and discuss in October and November. Please note, there will be no book group meeting in December. Please visit or call FPAC staff at 989-2591 to receive a short overview of each book, preferably via e-mail if you cannot pick it up in person.

October 10, 2019

Brown, Jeremy. *Influenza: The Hundred Year Hunt to Cure the Deadliest Disease in History*. 2018. 272 pp.

November 14, 2019

Ackerman, Jennifer. *Birds by the Shore: Observing the Natural Life of the Atlantic Coast*. 2019. 224 pp. (revised edition)

MAINE AUDUBON

Penobscot Valley Chapter

c/o Fields Pond Audubon Center
216 Fields Pond Road
Holden, Maine 04429

Mission of the Penobscot Valley Chapter:
*Conserving wildlife and wildlife habitat by
connecting people to our regional natural heritage,
through enjoyable and meaningful activities
that educate and promote greater environmental
awareness.*

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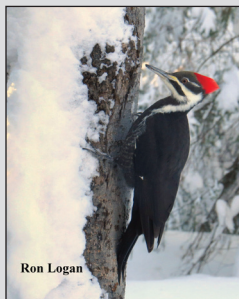
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER PROGRAMS– FALL 2019

*The Penobscot Valley Chapter offers monthly programs on natural history and conservation-related topics that reflect the interests of our membership. We hope you will be able to join us each month for an evening of camaraderie, learning, and FUN with like-minded people. All programs are *FREE* and open to the general public, so we invite you to bring a friend or an out-of-town guest!*

Friday, October 18, 7:00 p.m. CLIMATE IS CHANGING NATURE'S CALENDAR

Elizabeth "Libby" Orcutt is an ecologist at the Schoodic Institute in Winter Harbor, where she leads the Downeast Phenology Trail Project. Phenology is the study of plant and animal lifecycle events and their timing. For example, the flowering and fruiting of plants, the emergence of insects, and bird migrations all tend to occur on predictable schedules, and each event depends on the others to ensure that all species will survive and thrive. It is Mother Nature's crucially synchronized calendar. Libby will outline the current status of phenology research in Downeast Maine, and the important role that volunteer citizen-scientists play in ongoing data collection and site monitoring efforts. She will discuss how climate change has already affected Maine's coastal flora and fauna, potential impacts as their natural lifecycles continue to be disrupted, and the ways that interested individuals can help researchers achieve a science-based understanding of how rapidly the Downeast coast is changing.

**Friday, November 15, 7:00 p.m.
SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW MAINE**
Discover the birthplace of Disney's Bambi, along with the locations of northern forest ice caves, abandoned railroads, ancient pictographs, and oceanic whirlpools. Learn where and why there is a cove in Washington County called Bailey's Mistake, and hear the story of the Maine battle that came to be known as the "Lexington of the Seas." Our speaker, Tim Caverly, spins tales that can only be described as Classic Maine. Working as a ranger for over three decades in Maine's state park system, Tim became well-acquainted with remote parts of Maine that many people never get to see. For the last 18 years prior to his retirement, he served as the supervisor for the Allagash Wilderness Waterway. In recent years, he has written and self-published books for children and adults about Maine's woods and wildlife, most of them set within the Allagash region that he knows



so well. Copies will be available for purchase following his presentation.

Photo credit:
Ron Logan

Friday, December 6, 6:00 p.m. ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY & NATURE PHOTO EXPO

Tis the season for PVC's annual Holiday Party! "Heavy" (supper-worthy) hors d'oeuvres will be served, along with an assortment of party beverages to put everyone in the holiday spirit. Winning bidders in PVC's Online Auction can pick up and pay for their items, and additional items will be offered at the party for silent and active auction bidding. Early birds can visit the Fields Pond Nature Store for Double Discount Day, when Maine Audubon members get a double discount (20 percent!) off retail prices for unique nature-related gift items, including an assortment of holiday merchandise brought up from the larger Falmouth store especially for this event. The evening's highlight will be our annual nature photography expo. Professional and amateur photographers will have the opportunity to showcase and describe some of their favorite wildlife and outdoor travel photos from 2019. Bring along your own digital photos and movies on a thumb drive (or your own laptop) if you'd like to participate in the expo, or just come to appreciate the natural wonders captured on camera by your fellow PVC members.