Stepping Up for Maine Audubon

BY GORDON RUSSELL, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER OF MAINE AUDUBON

Despite its being closed to the public due to coronavirus over the past several months, Fields Pond Audubon Center (FPAC) continues to attract many visitors who are looking to walk the trails, paddle the pond, and otherwise get outdoors to enjoy nature. Many are visiting FPAC for the first time this summer. Although it is only a 15-minute drive from Bangor, FPAC remains largely unknown as a local environmental and recreational resource. We hope that many outdoor enthusiasts will continue to visit Fields Pond and become dues-paying members of Maine Audubon, if they are not already.

We also hope that you’ll take an additional step and consider becoming a volunteer. Environmental organizations, like Maine Audubon, do best when the public gets involved, whether it’s helping to build and maintain trails at its nature facilities, assisting with educational programs, or volunteering to lead bird walks or field trips. The rewards can be substantial, not only for Maine Audubon, but also for the individuals who donate their time and energy to help get the job done.

The Penobscot Valley Chapter is one of several regional chapters of Maine Audubon that help to provide member services, create public awareness, and assist in carrying out the organization’s mission. Chapter officers and board members serve as volunteers, meeting regularly throughout the year to plan the walks and talks enjoyed by the public. We also offer a research scholarship each year to enrolled students at the University of Maine, helping not only to accomplish valuable academic research, but furthering ties between Maine Audubon and the University of Maine. Natural Selections is written, edited, and published by chapter volunteers, as is the chapter’s website and Facebook page.

Many people think they lack the time and talent to serve on the board of a non-profit organization. It does require time and commitment to serve on a board; however, most of our board members tend to contribute more within their areas of interest and somewhat less to other projects, so the workload is generally both predictable and manageable. In terms of talent, you may have more to offer than you think. Like a healthy ecosystem, the Penobscot Valley Chapter requires a sustainable diversity of members in order to fulfill its mission. So, if you’re interested in helping to plan events, review research proposals, or write a short piece for our newsletter, we’d love to have you on board. Check out Penobscot Valley Audubon on Facebook, or e-mail me at penobscotvalleyaudubon@gmail.com, and let us know if you’d like to join us.

Canada Warbler photo by Ron Logan
As we all continue to face the challenges of living through a pandemic, it’s been heartening for me to see so many of you finding a bit of solace and refuge here at Fields Pond. Whether it’s families with children heading out to solve the week’s “Mystery Animal Trail,” individuals looking for relief from the heat in the pond, nature photographers trying to capture that “magic moment,” or community science volunteers collecting data for our phenology trail, it’s nice to know that although the building’s doors are temporarily closed, the community continues to embrace Fields Pond Audubon Center as an essential place in their neighborhood.

I hope that you’ll continue to find reasons to engage with FPAC this fall season. We have a number of programmatic options that offer both virtual and in-person (practicing necessary safety precautions) educational opportunities. Our trails are always open from dawn to dusk and provide a beautiful glimpse into the variety of wildlife habitats protected in this sanctuary. Research studies have shown that time spent in nature reduces stress levels, and enhances our well-being. So I invite you to take a walk this fall, and step through our “doorway” into the ever-changing landscape of nature.
NOTE: Some of these events are contingent on COVID-19 restrictions. Please call FPAC at 989-2591 for more information. To register, please go to www.maineaudubon.org.

**Foraging Wild Edible and Medicinal Plants in Maine with David Spahr**  
Thursday, September 24  
7 p.m.  
(Online via Zoom; registrants will be sent online access information.)  
Learn about wild plants, mushrooms and other natural treasures that can be foraged for food, medicinal use, and other purposes.  
Presenter: David Spahr, author of *Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms of New England and Eastern Canada*  
Free for members; $7 for nonmembers

**Mushroom Walk**  
Saturday, September 26  
10 a.m. to noon  
A journey through the world of fungi! Join Maine mushroom expert David Spahr for outdoors learning about mushroom identification, folklore, collecting, and cooking. Be prepared for a moderate amount of physical activity.  
Group size is strictly limited, and COVID-19 safety precautions will be followed.  
Presenter: David Spahr, author of *Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms of New England and Eastern Canada*  
$25 for members; $30 for nonmembers

**Fall Stewardship Day**  
Saturday, October 17  
9 a.m. to noon  
Join the FPAC Staff for a morning of stewardship activities focused on improving our trails and public access spaces. Bring work gloves and sturdy footwear. Snacks provided!  
Call 989-2591 to register.

**Fall Native Seed Sowing Workshop at Fields Pond**  
Saturday, November 21  
10 a.m. to noon  
(Live and/or Zoom, TBD near time of presentation)  
Grow your own native plants from seeds! Propagating your own plants is the cheapest and most sustainable way to restore habitat for birds and other wildlife at home.  
This hands-on workshop (yes, your hands will get dirty) will introduce participants to the plants, practices, and perks of sowing native plants in small outdoor pots over the winter.  
In the live presentation, each participant will go home with several pots sown with native seeds.  
Please call 989-2591 for more information.

**Backyard Spiders of Maine with Dana Wilde**  
Friday, October 23, 7 p.m.  
(Online via Zoom; registrants will be sent online access information.)  
Join us for fascinating facts about spider families found in Maine and the Northeast.  
Presenter: Dana Wilde, author of *Backyard Book of Spiders* and the “Backyard Naturalist” column for the *Kennebec Journal* and *Morning Sentinel*.  
Free for members; $7 for nonmembers

**Backyard Book of Spiders**  
Saturday, October 17, 6:30 p.m.  
Join us for a “perfect foliage tour”! For this adventure through the woods and fields, we’ll follow leaves and flowers to catch a glimpse of the creatures beneath.  
Snacks provided!  
Call 989-2591 to register.

**Backyard Spiders of Maine**  
Saturday, October 17, 7 p.m.  
Join us for a journey through the world of fungi! Join David Spahr for an outdoors adventure from seeds to sowing your own plants!  
Snacks provided!  
Call 989-2591 to register.

**Popcorn Pots**  
Saturday, October 24, 9 a.m.  
Join us for a fun and easy workshop for creating your own pop corn pots using native plants!  
Call 989-2591 to register.

**Workshop at Fields Pond**  
Saturday, November 21, 10 a.m. to noon  
Join us for a morning of stewardship activities focused on improving our trails and public access spaces. Bring work gloves and sturdy footwear. Snacks provided!  
Call 989-2591 to register.

**Fall Foliage 5K Fun Run at Fields Pond**  
Saturday, Oct. 3, 9 a.m.  
Join us for our second annual Fields Pond 5K fun run/walk. This challenging course will take you up through our beautiful wooded trails and down scenic backroads for the perfect foliage tour! For registration information please call 989-2591.

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**FIELDS POND BOOK GROUP**

The Fields Pond Book Group meets monthly on Thursday nights at 6:30 p.m. At press time, all meetings were still being conducted via Zoom, facilitated by professional librarian Joyce Rumery. Please contact Joyce directly at rumeryj9@gmail.com to be added to the mailing list for the Zoom meeting links and any in-person meeting updates. Here are the titles and synopses for September through November.

**September 10, 2020**  
Williams, Terry Tempest.  
*Erosion: Essays of Undoing*.  
2019. 336 pages.

Williams’s fierce, spirited, and magnificent essays are a howl in the desert. She sizes up the continuing assaults on America’s public lands and the erosion of our commitment to the open space of democracy.  
She asks: “How do we find the strength to not look away from all that is breaking our hearts?” Williams explores the many forms of erosion we face: of democracy, science, compassion, and trust. She examines the dire cultural and environmental implications of the gutting of Bear Ears National Monument—sacred lands to Native Peoples of the American Southwest; of the undermining of the Endangered Species Act; of the relentless press by the fossil fuel industry that has led to a panorama in which “oil rigs light up the horizon.” And she testifies that the climate crisis is not an abstraction, offering as evidence the drought outside her door and, at times, within herself.

**November 12, 2020**  
Gaudet, John.  
*Papyrus: The Plant That Changed the World: From Ancient Egypt to Today’s Water Wars*.  
2014. 271 pages.

From ancient Pharaohs to 21st Century water wars, papyrus is a unique plant that is now the fastest growing plant species on earth. It produces its own “soil”—a peaty, matrix that floats on water—and inspired the fluted columns of the ancient Greeks. In ancient Egypt, the papyrus bounty from the Nile delta provided not just paper for record keeping—instrumental to the development of civilization—but food, fuel and boats. Disastrous weather in the 6th Century caused famines and plagues that almost wiped out civilization in the west, but it was papyrus to the rescue. Today, it is not just a curious relic of our ancient past, but a rescuing force for modern ecological and societal blight. In an ironic twist, Egypt is faced with enormous pollution loads that forces them to import food supplies, and yet papyrus is one of the most effective and efficient natural pollution filters known to man. Papyrus was the key in stemming the devastation to the Sea of Galilee and Jordan River from raging peat fires, and the papyrus laden shores of Lake Victoria—which provides water to more than 30 million people—will be crucial as the global drying of the climate continues.
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.

Ordinarily we would be using this space to invite you to join us in exploring Maine’s natural history and environmental concerns, with a focus on the abundant wildlife and diverse ecosystems that exist within the Penobscot Valley region. However, due to the COVID-19 crisis, we are declaring a temporary moratorium on all in-person presentations and field trips for this fall. The PVC Board of Directors is currently discussing alternative ways to serve our membership and increase public awareness, while continuing to wait patiently for that wonderful day when medical researchers announce the availability of a safe, affordable, and effective treatment or vaccine.

In the meantime, we encourage you to explore the greater Bangor region on your own this fall, using our website and previous newsletters – available at www.pvc.maineaudubon.org – for inspiration on good spots to check out for birding and general outdoor recreation within the Penobscot Valley.

Also, please check out our parent organization’s website, www.maineaudubon.org/events for upcoming Zoom presentations and webinars that will appeal to all Maine environmentalists. Most are free, and you can always trust Maine Audubon to provide you with science-based perspectives on issues that affect Maine’s native wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Stay safe out there! We will all get through this, together!

Silene latifolia is a common wildflower that blooms mid to late summer in fields and on roadsides. Another name for it is white campion. This photo shows the fancy striped calyx underneath its white petals. Photo by Donne Sinderson