

Natural Selections

Newsletter of the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon



March – May 2021

Nature Notes: A Curious Encounter, and Possible Mystery

BY GLORIA VOLLMERS

I was walking in Essex Woods recently around 2:00 pm, near the pond, when I saw a fisher, colloquially called a “fisher cat,” on the side across from the pond. It was about 15-20 feet from me, and stood still for a good 10-12 seconds, giving me a nice long look. Spotting a fisher is fairly rare, and the animal is known to be secretive and elusive, so I was thrilled - especially since I am that person, who, if I am with you, ensures that you don't see



Fisher, photo credit: Mass Audubon website

a moose. Moose seem to be allergic to me.

Later that same evening, in our home adjacent to Essex Woods, I was sitting in the sunroom reading (we keep it heated) and I began to hear short-duration screams, occurring over and over. I opened the door, and the rather eerie screams continued. The animal was obviously moving through the woods. We of course went to YouTube to check out fisher screams, and we were rewarded

with recordings that confirmed that what we were hearing was indeed a fisher.

But wait! I noticed that the public comments below the recording said that those screams were NOT those of a fisher, that indeed fishers are usually quiet. The screams, according to others (including National Geographic), came from a red fox. Apparently foxes engage in screaming during mating season. Guess what? This is mating season, and there are plenty of red foxes in this area.

Many people in my neighborhood think a fisher has been responsible for the disappearance of their outside cats, and have jumped to the conclusion that the blood-curdling screams they heard must be that fisher. However it is just as possible that the cats were killed by a fox, and that that scream could be one of triumph!



Red Fox, photo credit: Rhode Island Audubon website

Life on the Pond... With My Friend

BY SEAN TRAHAN

The recent year has been one for the ages, one for the books that is for sure. However, living on Fields Pond gives one the opportunity to tune out the noise, and rather focus on the tranquility of the environment. What better way to get away from the noise then to spend some time with my friend Duke. Duke was a rescue dog, a mere 6.5 pounds who had spent most of his life in Texas, so the ice, the snow, and the crisp cold wind of a Maine spring was a first for him. With a few cautious steps, we ventured out upon the ice. He did falter a bit, however he recovered quickly and squinted as the snow blew in his face. I wondered if he perhaps was perplexed at the idea that just six short months ago, he was swimming here. Duke was always one to play ball, and of course, where better to play then on the flat, slippery ice. I took the small green felt ball and squeezed it. A loud squeak emerged, and I could see his excitement as he attempted to keep his balance on the ice, while anticipating the direction the ball was going to go. I threw the ball as hard as I could across the surface of the ice and he was off, well he at least tried. His footing was anything but stable, and he struggled to get some speed. He was laser-focused on the ball as it bounced across the frozen tundra. When he finally did catch up to it, he slipped right past it, mouth open and hitting the ball with his nose. My laughter broke through the silence of the day, and echoed across the pond. He eventually did catch up to the rolling ball, and ran back with a proud smirk on his face.

Written in loving memory of Duke, who died peacefully in Texas on January 21, aged 17. He truly was my best friend.

MAINE AUDUBON

Penobscot Valley Chapter

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.

CHAPTER OFFICERS

President.....Gordon Russell
 Vice President.....Ellen Campbell
 Secretary..... Sean Trahan
 Treasurer.....Jim Zeman
 Chapter Representative, Maine Audubon Board of Trustees..... Sandi McRae Duchesne

AT-LARGE CHAPTER BOARD MEMBERS

Bruce Bowden, Timothy Conmee, Bob Duchesne, Tim Dunlea, Sean Malone, Bob Milardo, Gloria Vollmers, and ex-officio board member David Lamon.

CHAPTER COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Programs & Field Trips.....Ellen Campbell
 Communications & Education..... Gloria Vollmers
 Advocacy.....Sandi Duchesne, Tim Conmee
 Stewardship..... Tim Conmee

Natural Selections

Editor..... Sandi McRae Duchesne
 Design & Layout..... Donne Sinderson
 Webmaster.....Bob Duchesne
 Facebook Coordinator..... Jane Rosinski

Visit us on the Web

<https://pvc.maineaudubon.org>

 www.facebook.com/penobscotvalleyaudubon

FIELDS POND JOURNAL

BY DAVID LAMON, FPAC MANAGER
 FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER

I'd like to take the opportunity to welcome a new addition to our staff here at Fields Pond, Michelle Duffy. Michelle joined us in February of this year as a part-time Program Assistant. She graduated last year from the University of Maine with a Master of Wildlife Conservation degree. In addition, Michelle has worked for the Maine State Park System as an educator, and for many years with youth populations in summer camps. We're happy to have her on board to help with our spring programming. Welcome Michelle!



Michelle Duffy

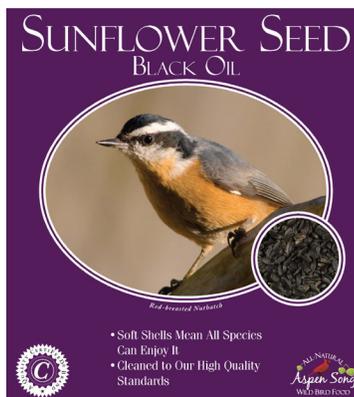
If you've been hiking the trails on the Fields Pond sanctuary recently, you may have noticed the QR code signs at our two information kiosks. By using your smart phone, you can now get E-maps of the Fields Pond trails. Enjoy your hike!

Bird seed is now available in our Nature Store for contactless purchase and pickup. Please tell all of your bird-feeding friends that we have top-quality "Aspen Song" bird seed and suet for sale at Fields Pond Audubon Center. To place an order, just call us at 207-989-2591.

Spring is a season of hope and renewal, and as we move forward into brighter days, it is my hope that we will be able to safely increase our in-person engagement with community members. Thank you for all of your support, and please continue to stay safe!

Welcome to PVC New and Rejoining Members!

- Elizabeth Allen, Orono
- Melinda Blake, Hampden
- Alan Cohen, Winterport
- Thomas Cubberley, Hampden
- Amy Damboise, Milford
- Tom Fogler, Exeter
- Laurie Fearon, Glenburn
- Ashley & Jon Forbes, Bangor
- John Heise, East Boothbay
- Amy Jones, Alton
- Chris Miles, Dedham
- Paul Nicklas, Bangor
- Lori & Michael Noyes, Levant
- Cindy Todd, Etna



BOB TALKS BIRDS:

Spring Comes Earlier Than You Think

by Bob Duchesne

Birding in Maine provides many opportunities to observe and celebrate the arrival of spring. In fact, one could argue that this spring started last fall. Many species begin their courtship rituals and form pair bonds much earlier than most people realize.

Waterfowl are among the earliest. Shortly after nesting season concludes in spring, male mallards shed their bright colors, taking on the drab, camouflaged appearance of the females. But by early autumn, they're already feeling frisky and molting back into their green heads and bright feathers, the better to woo next year's mate. Most duck species are on the same romantic timetable, even the sea ducks that only spend their winters in Maine. It's fun to watch the males court potential mates and chase away rivals.

By Christmas, the stillness of a winter morning may be interrupted by the sound of black-capped chickadees singing their territorial "Hey Sweetie" songs. Hairy and downy woodpeckers are already beginning their territorial drumming. They will all find mates and pair up, long before nesting actually begins.

Owls pair up early, too. The "Who Cooks For You?" cry of barred owls generally begins in early February. Great horned owls do likewise, and they've been known to terrorize joggers and cross-country skiers who pass too closely under their nesting sites. Many saw-whet owls fly south for the winter, but most come rushing back by March. All of Maine's raptors are early nesters, ensuring that their young will be well-

fed during the population explosion of prey species in May.

Blackbirds are among the first migrating flocks to return. Common grackles and red-winged blackbirds invade the state in March, long before their marshy nesting sites have thawed. This is the time of year when they mob bird feeders and annoy homeowners with their piggish ways. Mid-March is when American woodcocks return. Courtship starts immediately, and nesting may begin while there's still snow on the ground.

Around the first of April, American robins start singing. Some have hung around all winter, but they typically stay silent prior to April Fool's Day. Song sparrows also begin singing during the first week of April, as their courtship begins.

By the second week of April, ospreys begin to appear. By the third week, the first warblers and flycatchers arrive. Around that time, on that first clear overnight with a southerly breeze, the vanguard of palm, pine, and yellow-rumped warblers reach eastern Maine. The following morning, their voices mingle with the eastern phoebes and yellow-bellied sapsuckers that also came in with the favorable winds.

Most of the April-arriving migrants didn't have that far to travel. Hermit thrushes, blue-headed vireos, ruby-crowned kinglets, winter wrens, and tree swallows all wintered within the United States. As the big songbird migration wave begins around the first of May, most are warblers that also wintered in the US. As the May migration advances, the remaining species that wintered in

the tropics rejoin us, and the Penobscot Valley Chapter's schedule of morning bird walks kicks into high gear.

Spring is finally here. But it started months ago.

Chestnut-sided Warbler,
photo credit: Ron Logan

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN:

Keep Your Fingers Crossed for May Bird Walks

BY GORDON RUSSELL, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER OF
MAINE AUDUBON

We've decided to stick our necks out and make tentative plans for resuming our Neighborhood Bird Walks this May. We unfortunately had to cancel these highly popular bird walks last year due to the coronavirus pandemic, and we are eager to resume them this year if it can be done safely. It will depend on the anticipated progress of vaccinating the public against COVID-19 over the next few months, and the likely continued use of limited group sizes, social distancing and mask-wearing. This edition of *Natural Selections* covers the spring season, March through May, but to meet publishing deadlines we had to come up with the list of May bird walks in January. If we feel they can't be done safely according to public health guidelines in May, we may have to cancel them again this year. So, stay tuned.

Despite anticipated safety measures for this year's bird walks, we look forward to enjoying the sights and sounds that come with spring birding. May is one of the best times to bird in Maine. We are fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers who can help us spot and identify those tricky warblers and other birds that are active in May. As always, the bird walks are free to the public and open to all levels of birding experience. And, even though the size of the groups will likely have to be limited, and masks will likely be required, the bird walks are an opportunity to renew acquaintances and make new friends who share common interests. We hope you can join us on a bird walk or two. But if you're still not comfortable doing so, that's OK too. Hopefully, you'll be able to get out on your own or with others in your own household to take advantage of this special time of the year.

Dealing with the pandemic for over a year has challenged all of us. Knowing when, and how, to get back to some sense of normalcy is also a serious undertaking. We have to be ever mindful of the risks and safety considerations, while sharing our love for birding and the natural world around us. We ask for your patience and continued support, while we all keep our fingers tightly crossed.



Ron Logan

Maine Audubon
Penobscot Valley Chapter, Fields Pond Audubon Center

Neighborhood Bird Walks

May 2021

Unless otherwise indicated, all walks are from 7:00 – 8:30 AM. Rubber boots or waterproof shoes are recommended due to wet grass and occasional muddy conditions. In consideration of wildlife and fellow birders, no pets please on the bird walks. Leaders will adhere to MaineCDC COVID-19 guidance for all walks.

Friday, May 7: Indian Trail and Penobscot County Conservation Assn., Brewer

Leaders: Gordon Russell, Jane Rosinski
Meet at Penobscot County Conservation Assn., North Main St.

Saturday, May 8 (World Migratory Bird Day): Fields Pond Audubon Center, Holden

Leader: Gordon Russell
Meet in Fields Pond Audubon Center parking lot.

Wednesday, May 12: Mt. Hope Cemetery, Bangor

Leaders: Jim and Kathy Zeman
Meet in the parking area inside the State St. entrance.

Friday, May 14: Leonard's Mills, Bradley

Leader: Bob Duchesne
Meet at the junction of Government Rd and Rt. 178.

Monday, May 17: University of Maine, Orono

Leader: Sandi Duchesne
Meet up near the Arboretum in the parking lot between the Emera Astronomy Center and the Jordan Observatory.

Tuesday, May 18: Essex Woods, Bangor

Leaders: Steve Mierzykowski, Gordon Russell
Meet in the parking lot at the end of Watchmaker Rd.

Wednesday, May 19: Bangor City Forest, Bangor

Leaders: Paul Markson, Gloria Vollmers
Meet at parking lot in BCF at end of Kittredge Rd.

Thursday, May 20: West Penjajawoc Preserve, Bangor

Co-sponsored by Bangor Land Trust
Leaders: Elizabeth Payne, Bob Milardo, Lucy Quimby
Meet at the dead end of Fox Hollow Lane, off Essex St.

Friday, May 21: Saxl Park, Bangor

Leaders: Laura Levenson, Elizabeth Payne
Meet in Cascade Park parking lot, just off State St.

Saturday, May 22: Technology Park, Orono

Leader: Jerry Longcore
Take Godfrey Drive in Orono.
Meet in the parking lot behind the building (formerly Nexx-Linx call center) across the road from Black Bear Inn.

Tuesday, May 25: Kenduskeag Stream Trail, Bangor

Leaders: Hope Brogunier, Gordon Russell, Jane Rosinski
Meet in the 2nd parking lot upstream of the intersection of Valley Ave. and Bruce Rd.

Wednesday, May 26: Taylor Rd.- Caribou Bog Conservation Area, Orono

Co-sponsored by Orono Land Trust
Leaders: Bob Milardo, Gordon Russell
Follow Taylor Rd. 0.3 miles from Forest Ave., left onto Putnam Rd. (aka Orono Landfill Access Rd.) Meet at the trailhead parking area in front of the gate.

FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER PROGRAMS - SPRING 2021

Please register online at [www. https://maineaudubon.org/events/](http://www.https://maineaudubon.org/events/)

Birding Cuba

by Ron & Lee Davis and
Nancy Larson
Tuesday, March 16, 7:00 p.m.

In January 2020, Ron, Lee, and Nancy traveled through much of Cuba with a group of American birders for 13 days. They found about half of the large tropical island's 350 species. Among those seen and photographed were 22 of Cuba's 26 endemics—most of which are of concern for survival. At the same time, the three Mainers experienced a culture and economy different from ours, yet only 95 miles away. **Cost:** Free for Members, \$7 nonmembers. **NOTE: Zoom link will be available upon registration.**



Cuban Trogon, photo credit Ron Davis

**Roads, Rain, and a Couple
Thousand Amphibians -
Call it a Big Night!**
Tuesday, April 6, 4:00 p.m.

Big Nights are fascinating and unique natural events that occur every spring.

With spring rain and warming temperatures, frogs and salamanders move to their breeding grounds by the truckload. However, these miniature migrations often put them in harm's way on roads. How we can assist and protect these ancient populations will be the subject of this presentation. **Greg LeClair** is a graduate student in Ecology and Environmental Science at the University of Maine. As the creator of the "Maine Big Night" project, he coordinates the collection of statewide data on Maine's amphibian migrations.

Cost: Free for members, \$7 non-members. **NOTE: Zoom link will be available upon registration.**

Maine's Great Migration
Monday, April 26, 7:00 p.m.

Each spring, millions of adult alewives make their way up Maine's rivers and streams and into their natal lakes to spawn. Along the way, these determined members of the herring family attract the attention of a wide range of wildlife. Join David Lamon as he leads you through one of Maine's great natural history events. We'll discuss the conservation successes and challenges of restoring Maine's migratory waterways.

Cost: Free for members, \$7 non-members. **NOTE: Zoom link will be available upon registration.**

Explorers Club!

*Every Wednesday, weekly,
10:30 a.m. & 1:30 p.m.*
**(Note: if cancelled due to
weather, it will be offered
at the same times on Friday)**

Looking for fun outdoor activities to do with your kids? The Fields Pond Explorers Club invites you to stop by the Fields Pond Audubon Center for a fun-filled time exploring nature. Each week there is a different theme to explore, with activity instructions and materials provided by the Maine Audubon education staff. Participants will explore the fields, wetlands and forests of Fields Pond, safely within their own "family pod," guided by the activities and materials for that week. Activity kits will be picked up outside the Nature Center at the registered time (morning or afternoon) and may be used out on the property for up to two hours before returning. **NOTE: Due to material preparation, on-line pre-registration**
Ages: Program materials are designed for children in grades K-5, accompanied by a parent or guardian.
Cost: \$12, members, \$15 non-members. Price listed is for one family unit (up to four total individuals).

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, and to get a synopsis of each month's featured title. Here are the titles for March through May.

March 11, 2021

Juniper, Tony.

**Spix's Macaw: The Race to
Save the World's Rarest Bird.**
2003. 273 pages.

April 8, 2021

Margonelli, Lisa.

**Underbug: An Obsessive Tale
of Termites and Technology.**
2018. 320 pages.

May 13, 2021

Goulson, Dave.

**A Buzz in the Meadow: A
Natural History of a French
Farm.** 2015. 288 pages.



American Bittern,
photo credit Bob Duchesne

