

Natural Selections

Newsletter of the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon



June – August 2021

Nature Notes: Enjoying the Outdoors

BY GLORIA VOLLMERS

Friluftsliv is the newest word we're getting from Norway, denoting the physical and psychological benefits of open-air living. Another Scandinavian self-help concept that's hitting newsfeeds everywhere is Hygge – deep coziness and comfort. But let's stick with friluftsliv for today. It is something we Mainers can appreciate – and not just Maine Audubon members. We love to go outdoors, inhale the fresh air, feel the sun. We take time to observe the stars, the seasons, the woods, the sea, the wildlife. How best to enjoy the outdoors, of course, is a matter of personal opinion – so I'll offer mine. What is the best speed for enjoying the finer points of nature? Zero. Stop and observe and listen – then move a bit more, and stop again. What is the best speed for birdwatching? Very close to zero. Walk till you see or

hear something, and then stop and try to identify it. You're 15 minutes late for a 7:00 guided bird walk? Have no fear. Birds seem to enjoy hanging out near parking lots, and the group is probably still there. If not, you'll catch up to them.

Birdwatching is not about exercise. You'll burn more calories tossing and turning in bed. An ambling walk is about 2-3 miles per hour – enjoyable, but you can't observe ferns and flowers closely. When my spouse and I go out together, we agree to bring or not to bring binoculars – that determines whether we will exercise or bird. If I want to observe nature, I go out by myself. Going out to exercise? A brisk walk is about 3-5 mph, a jog, 4-6 mph, and a run faster yet. Cross-country skiing is great exercise in the winter, as is snowshoeing. If you are out for exercise,

you won't be able to study nature, but you'll still be comforted by its presence. And if you pause under a tree or by a brook, you'll feel cozy. So enjoy your Friluftsliv and Hygge!!



Great Blue Herons, photo credit: Sherrie Tucker

Wild Turkeys: Rural vs. Urban

BY GLORIA VOLLMERS

If you're out in the countryside and spot a flock of wild turkeys, stop the car and just watch them disappear. That's why hunters like them – they are quick and elusive. However, in my front yard, I will often get 20-30 turkeys happily poking at the grass or bushes. If I go outside, they just meander over to the next yard. I don't bother them very much – certainly they're not spooked, but they don't let me get close. I had a very different experience in Boston, in a highly populated area near a park. I walked outside, and found myself sharing the sidewalk with several turkeys! They passed within five feet of me – not even the COVID-19 recommended social distance. I wish I had been able to get a picture of me with the birds, but here is a close second: my daughter taking a selfie with a turkey on her car. Birds (some, not all) adjust to the density of their environment; these urban turkeys are not at all skittish around people.



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.

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<https://pvc.maineaudubon.org>

 www.facebook.com/penobscotvalleyaudubon

FIELDS POND JOURNAL

BY DAVID LAMON, FPAC MANAGER
FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER

If last summer was any indication, we are likely to see a steady increase in the use of the Fields Pond property this summer. We're glad that so many people are getting outdoors and spending time connecting with their natural surroundings! Visitors to the Fields Pond Sanctuary who plan on hiking the trails will find it easier to navigate, due to new signage and a wayfinding system. Working in concert with the Holden Land Trust's Hart Farm trail system, each trail post will now have a specific number or letter that is indicated on our trail maps. This way visitors can know exactly which trail juncture they are at, on both adjoining properties. With the new connecting trails between the properties, we have opened up more miles of continuous hiking to our visitors. Please be aware that Holden Land Trust and Maine Audubon have differing rules and guidelines for trail use, and both organizations appreciate your compliance with all posted signage.

Fields Pond Audubon Center not only offers hikers a place for exercise and nature exploration, it also serves to further Maine Audubon's education and conservation initiatives. This spring and summer, we will be resuming our on-site school and camp programs to encourage area children to learn more about Maine's environment. University of Maine students will be conducting research projects here this summer on bobolinks and butterflies, making use of the new Motus Wildlife Tracking Station that was installed at Fields Pond earlier this spring. We'll be continuing to regularly monitor water quality parameters out on Fields Pond, as well as deploying an artificial nesting raft to help our local loon population. Our public education series will continue to offer a number of programs for

families and adults throughout the summer.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Fields Pond has remained a busy place with a variety of projects serving our community in many ways. Whichever way you're engaged with Fields Pond, we're glad that you have chosen to be part of Maine Audubon's mission - to conserve Maine's wildlife and wildlife habitat by engaging people in education, conservation, and action.

Welcome to PVC New and Rejoining Members!

Michele Benoit, Bangor
Rebekah and Chad Campbell, Brewer
Arlene Campoli-Anderson, Orrington
Susan Cheff, Glenburn
Katie Doyle, Nashville, TN
Karen Eliason, Old Town
Tonia Gilkey, Bangor
Alexandra and Brian Hinrichs, Bangor
Jennifer Hodgins, Brewer
Laurel Lockett, Tampa, FL
Marilyn Martin-Schwan, Orono
Steve Mierzykowski, Orono
Paula Nickerson, Bangor
Chris Percival, Frankfort
John Schuster, Orono
Sharon Smythe, Bangor
Suetta Tenney, Stockton Springs
Adam and Joanna Toothaker, Orono
Lee White, Hampden

The Subtle Sounds of Summer

by Bob Duchesne

Spring is a time of frenetic birding. Maine's migrant songbirds return and erupt into song. We don't even have to look hard to find them. They're serenading their locations, wooing mates and warning rivals. All we have to do is eavesdrop. The cacophony persists through June, then slowly wanes through the first two weeks of July. After that, things get quieter.

Birds with chicks are faced with a difficult choice. On the one hand, they no longer want to announce their whereabouts, for fear of attracting predator attention. On the other hand, they're raising a family, with lots of little mouths to feed. Once off the nest, the fledglings are likely to follow their parents around, raising a fuss until fed. The result is a lot of quiet chatter in the treetops that most people would not notice. Ah, but YOU will.

Songs are only one way that birds communicate. They also have call notes, flight notes, and alarm notes. In midsummer, you can hear the families talking to each other. Listen for the little "chit" notes, as parents work to keep the family together, and babies beg for food. If you take time to look for the source of those whispered vocalizations, you can bet there will be a lot of movement in the leaves. Summer is not a time for sitting still on a branch and singing.

Much of the noise is subtle. Some of it isn't. Red-eyed vireos are particularly vocal. They can sing sporadically right through summer - a three-syllable robin-like phrase repeated endlessly: "Here I am. Where are you?" They have an even louder call that is hard to miss - a downward "ZHRreeee." Red-eyed vireos are abundant throughout the state,

wherever there are relatively mature deciduous trees. You've very likely got them in your yard.

"ZHRreeee" seems to be the vireo's conversational tool for all occasions. They use it to keep the family together. They use it to announce danger. I can tell when blue jays have entered my yard, because the adult vireos consider them a threat to the kids. They unleash a chorus of warning ZHRreeees that persists until the jays go away.

Sometimes, people are the threat. Ground-nesting birds, particularly sparrows, complain when we unwittingly get too close to the kids. Dark-eyed juncos make a sharp "click" noise by snapping their beaks. White-throated sparrows utter loud "peeks." Song sparrows do something similar. Chipping sparrows chip.

These are the sounds to follow for a closer observation, when you go out birding in the doldrums of midsummer. If territorial singing is the first act in this annual breeding festival, family chatter is the second.

There's even a third act. In late summer, many songbirds form mixed-species foraging flocks. They move through the treetops in groups. It's likely that flocks of birds spook insects into moving, making them easier prey. It's certain that there is more safety, when there are multiple eyes watching for danger. These flocks also chatter a lot, keeping themselves together.

It's easy to enjoy the songs of spring. It's equally rewarding to learn to recognize the other sounds that birds make over the rest of summer. Lend them an ear.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN:

Enjoy the Summer

BY GORDON RUSSELL, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER OF
MAINE AUDUBON

The glorious months of summer are upon us. This is the time of year we look forward to all year long - bird watching, gardening and barbecues. Given what we've all been through these past months, I'd say we are due for some enjoyment. COVID-19 has kept us all on our guards, avoiding crowds, keeping friends and family at a distance, and living with heightened stress. With luck, as more people get vaccinated and restrictions are eased, we can all start to breathe a collective sigh of relief, and resume some of the activities we've dearly missed.

These times have also been difficult for the Penobscot Valley Chapter. A large part of what we do involves face-to-face contact, whether it's programs at Fields Pond Audubon Center or bird walks at Essex Woods. As with everywhere else, we've attempted to cope with virtual offerings and limited walks and field trips. Maybe you've been able to take advantage of some of them. Hopefully, we soon will be back to normal in all respects, and can fully interact with our chapter members and the general public.

Until we receive the all-clear signal from the public health experts, please continue to go out on your own, or with a close friend or two, exploring trails, looking for familiar and rare birds, and keeping in touch with nature. The natural world around us has not been on pause as we have during the pandemic, so if you haven't done so already, it's time to re-engage with your surroundings. With luck, we will be able to be there with you. But in any case, enjoy the wonderful months of summer.



Left: Gordon Russell leads a Fields Pond bird walk. photo credit: Michelle Duffy

Right: Socially-distanced birders explore Fields Pond photo credit: David Lamon



Seven Simple Actions to Help Birds

Adapted from a pamphlet distributed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

1. Make Windows Safer. Up to one billion birds die each year after hitting windows in the US and Canada. By day, birds perceive reflections in glass as habitat they can fly through. At night, migratory birds are drawn by city lights and collide with buildings. You can help birds avoid collisions by installing screens, or breaking up reflections using film, paint, or string spaced no more than two inches apart.

2. Keep Cats Indoors. Each year, outdoor cats kill about 2.4 billion birds in the US and Canada. Many are young birds that are still in, or just out of, the nest. It's the top human caused reason for the loss of birds, after habitat destruction. Outdoor cats live 2-5 years on average, while indoor cats may live for more than 15. Please save birds and keep cats healthy by keeping your cats indoors.

3. Plant Native Species. Lawns and pavement reduce available food and shelter for birds. With more than 63,000 square miles of lawn in the US alone, it's getting harder for birds to survive migration and raise their young. You can support birds, pollinators, and other wildlife by replacing lawn with native plantings. Native plants add beauty to your yard and garden, while providing shelter and nesting areas for birds. The nectar, seeds, berries, and insects will attract and sustain hungry birds and other wildlife. Add native plants, and watch the birds come in!

4. Avoid Pesticides and Herbicides. More than one billion pounds of pesticides are used in the US each year. Common household weed killers can be toxic to wildlife. Birds are harmed by these chemicals through direct contact, or by eating contaminated seeds or prey. Pesticides also reduce the density of insects that birds need to survive and raise their young. You can help birds survive and breed successfully by purchasing organic food, and reducing pesticide and herbicide use.

5. Drink Shade-Grown Coffee. Three-quarters of the world's coffee farms destroy forest habitat to grow coffee in the sun – forests that birds and other wildlife need for food and shelter. Shade-grown coffee preserves a forest canopy for migratory birds to survive the winter, but consumers must create a greater demand for it. Over 40 species of North American migratory songbirds are known to winter in coffee plantations.

6. Use Less Plastic. About 4,900 million metric tons of plastic have accumulated worldwide, harming seabirds and other wildlife that try to eat plastic, or become entangled in it. Plastic takes over 400 years to degrade, and 91 percent of plastics are not recycled. At least 80 seabird species mistake plastic for food. By 2050, scientists estimate that 99 percent of seabird species will have eaten plastic. Reduce plastic use wherever you can, and try to avoid single-use plastics. Reuse or recycle household plastic to keep it out of landfills and the ocean.

7. Engage in Community Science. Monitoring birds is essential to help protect them, but tracking the world's 10,000 bird species is an immense challenge for researchers. When you

and others take the time to report the birds you see and hear, in Maine and around the world, you become key contributors to a massive scientific research effort. You are helping to compile data that ornithologists will analyze to show when and where bird species are declining. Join Cornell Labs' eBird (www.ebird.org) or Project FeederWatch (www.feederwatch.org) to record your bird observations. You'll provide valuable information to show where birds are thriving, and where they need more help.

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. At press time, Joyce was still scheduling FPBG meetings online via Zoom. If you would like to participate, please contact Joyce directly at rumeryj9@gmail.com and she will send you the Zoom link shortly before the meeting.

After the June meeting, the Fields Pond Book Group will take a summer break and resume meeting monthly in the fall. Enjoy your summer, and keep reading!

Here is the June book selection:

June 10, 2021

Lightman, Alan.

Searching for stars on an island in Maine.

2018. 240 pages.

A lyrical meditation on religion and science that explores the tension between our yearning for permanence and certainty and the modern scientific discoveries that demonstrate the impermanent and uncertain nature of the world. As a physicist, Lightman has always held a scientific view of the world, he was impressed by the logic and materiality of a universe governed by a small number of disembodied forces and laws that decree all things in the world are material and impermanent. But one summer evening, while looking at the stars from a small boat at sea, Lightman was overcome by the overwhelming sensation that he was merging with something larger than himself. This book is his exploration of these seemingly contradictory impulses. He draws on sources ranging from Saint Augustine's conception of absolute truth to Einstein's theory of relativity, from the unity of the once-indivisible atom to the multiplicity of subatomic particles and the recent notion of multiple universes. What he gives us is a profound inquiry into the human desire for truth and meaning, and a journey along the different paths of religion and science that become part of that quest.

FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER PROGRAMS - SUMMER 2021

NOTE: Some of these events are contingent on COVID-19 restrictions. Please call FPAC at 989-2591 for more information. To pre-register, please go to www.maineaudubon.org.

Explorers Club

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. Pick your own topic or theme to explore, with activity instructions and materials provided by the education staff at Fields Pond. Participants will explore the fields, wetlands and forests of Fields Pond, safely within their own "family pod," guided by the activities and materials provided in the Audubon Explorers backpack. Backpack kits can be picked up outside the Nature Center at the pre-registered time (morning or afternoon) and may be used out on the property for up to two hours before returning. **NOTE:** to allow time for kit preparation, you must pre-register no later than 8 a.m. on the day of the program at <https://maineaudubon.org/news/events/fields-pond-explorers-club/>. Explorers Club materials are most appropriate for children in Grades K-5, accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Time:

Wednesdays and Saturdays
(book times online)

Cost: \$12 member
family / \$15 non-member
family (up to 4 individuals)
per weekly session.

Motus Wildlife Tracking Tower
at Fields Pond

The Story of Avian Wildlife Rehabilitation Datasets

"Nest was discovered in the exhaust manifold of a truck," "bird stuck to a glue trap," "caught by cat," and "found flopping in a kiddie pool" are just a few examples of intake notes on birds sent to wildlife rehabilitation centers. Just as these intake notes describe the fate of individual birds, wildlife rehabilitation datasets tell the story of bird injury and mortality on a larger scale. Join Staff Educator Michelle Duffy as she discusses her graduate research project on avian wildlife rehabilitation datasets. This talk will cover topics such as: What bird species are being brought into wildlife rehabilitation centers? What are the most common injuries? And what you can do as an individual, to mitigate these bird injuries?

NOTE: Zoom link will be provided following registration.

Time:

Online, Thursday, June 17th, 7 p.m.

Cost: Free for members, \$7 non-members.



Landscape Photography Workshop

Whether you're using a DSLR or your phone, this workshop will go over techniques to make your landscape photography pop. Join Staff Educator Michelle Duffy on a walk around FPAC, where we will use the diverse landscapes of the sanctuary as scenic backdrops to further develop our landscape photography skills.

NOTE: This program takes place outdoors. Group size will be limited, and Maine Audubon's COVID-19 protocols will be followed for the safety of all our participants.

Time: Saturday, July 10th,
8 - 10 a.m.

Cost: \$12 members, \$15 non-members.

Family Fun: Scavenger Hunt at Fields Pond

Hit the trails and join the hunt! Families will compete to complete a series of challenging and fun natural history tasks on the FPAC sanctuary.

This is a free event for the whole family.

Time: Saturday, July 10th,
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Full Moon Hike at Fields Pond

Explore Fields Pond after dusk! The sanctuary is normally closed to all visitors after the sun sets, but it comes alive at night with a unique group of

nocturnal wildlife. Join the Maine Audubon staff for a memorable nocturnal wild walk. **NOTE:** This program takes place outdoors. Group size will be limited, and Maine Audubon's COVID-19 precautions will be followed for the safety of all our participants.

Time: Friday, July 23rd,
8 p.m.

Cost: \$7 members,
\$10 non-members.

Fields Pond Butterfly Festival

Butterflies play a vital role in the ecosystem as pollinators, and they are an important source of food for our native bird species. With over 20 species of butterflies recorded, FPAC is the perfect setting to celebrate the beauty and diversity of butterflies. Ongoing events will include monarch tagging, Insect BioBlitz, butterfly crafts for the kids, and more. Come dressed as your favorite butterfly, and join the Butterfly Parade at 1 p.m.!

This is a free event for the whole family.

Time: Saturday, August 28th,
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

American Lady,
photo credit Donne Sinderson



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 AND FIELD TRIPS, SUMMER 2021

Penobscot Valley Chapter field trips are fun ways to meet like-minded people, while enjoying the rich natural heritage of our region. We hope you will come outside and join us! Please note that trip leaders will be following whatever public health guidelines are in effect at the time of each trip, depending on the status of COVID-19 in Maine at that time.

SEAL ISLAND PUFFIN CRUISE

*Sunday, June 20, 12:30-6:00 p.m.,
rain or shine
Cost: \$80 adults/\$45 under 12
Leaders: Sandi and Bob Duchesne*

Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge offers ideal habitat for a large colony of Atlantic puffins. Razorbills, black guillemots, common and Arctic terns, and common eiders also nest here, and it's the southernmost breeding colony for the great cormorant. Northern gannets and common murre are occasionally seen diving for fish in the rich waters that surround the island. Periodically, a hungry merlin or peregrine falcon will make a pass in search of a seabird meal. We also expect to have good views of harbor seals and gray seals with their pups. Meet your trip leaders at the ferry terminal in Stonington at 12:30 p.m. The boat leaves promptly at 1:00 p.m., and this will give us all enough time to park,

gather our gear, use the restroom, and scan the harbor together before departure. Dress warmly, and please bring your binoculars and/or camera!

Note: Space is limited, and this trip often fills quite early. Please make your reservations directly with the Isle Au Haut Boat Company, 207-367-5193, and tell them you are with the Penobscot Valley Chapter group. The trip is unlikely to cancel for bad weather, since the boat has an enclosed, heated cabin with large viewing windows in addition to plenty of open-air deck space. However, if the trip is canceled by the Captain for any reason, you will receive a full refund. You can also obtain a refund by calling to cancel any time prior to departure.

FIELDS POND PADDLE PARTY

*Saturday, June 26th, 9 a.m. start / Sunday,
June 27th rain date, same start time
Cost: FREE
Leader: Sean Trahan*

This group paddle will take a leisurely route around Fields Pond, highlighting the natural and cultural features of the area. Sean Trahan, a PVC board member, Maine Audubon Trustee, and long-time resident on the pond, will guide the tour while discussing the local conservation efforts that have protected and maintained this area for wildlife habitat

and public enjoyment. The program is free, however pre-registration is required and donations will gladly be accepted. Please call 207-989-2591 for more information and to register. Bring your own canoe or kayak and gear, and meet at the Fields Pond public landing in Orrington at 9 a.m.

CRUISING THE CARIBOU BOG CONSERVATION AREA

*Saturday, August 28, 8-11 a.m.
Cost: FREE
Leaders: Shane Barker and Sharon Wilson Barker*

Please join us for a leisurely bird walk through portions of this extensive Orono Land Trust property, looking for ducks, shorebirds, and late summer migrants. CBCA can often be a good spot for mammal sightings as well, including North American river otters that swim in the ponds and cavort along the banks. Directions: From Forest Avenue in Orono, follow Taylor Road (aka the "Dump Road") 0.3 miles to a slight left onto Putnam Road. We will meet in the trailhead parking area in front of the gate. Please call 207-989-2591 to pre-register.