

Natural Selections

Newsletter of the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon



March–June 2022

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN:

Looking Forward to Spring Birding

BY GORDON RUSSELL, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER OF MAINE AUDUBON

This past winter has been disappointing for outdoor activities, to say the least. Instead of skiing, snowshoeing and ice skating, I spent most of my time sanding the driveway and dealing with icy conditions. There were some highlights, including a trip to Boothbay Harbor to view (from a great distance) the Steller's Sea Eagle, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. But as this winter begins to wind down, it's time to shift thoughts to spring birding, and what has become an annual tradition of morning bird walks in the greater Bangor area.

This year the Penobscot Valley Chapter is offering 11 bird walks. Most of these will be familiar to those who regularly join us, including Essex Woods and Mt. Hope Cemetery. But we've added a couple of new ones to spark your interest as well. One of the objectives of these Neighborhood Bird Walks is to show people where they can go to see and hear a variety of birds, and we hope you will be satisfied with the mix of familiar and new locales. As always, these bird walks are free to the public, and designed for all levels of experience. These birding outings

are also a great way to meet old friends and make new acquaintances with people who share a love for the outdoors and our natural world. Making personal connections is especially important as we continue to emerge from the isolation brought about by the coronavirus. A list of the bird walks is included in this issue of Natural Selections. Please keep it handy.

Spring is one of the most enjoyable times to bird in Maine.

We hope you can join us on a bird walk or two. We'll do our best to keep you informed of upcoming bird walks and other events. Follow us on Facebook, sign up for our listserv on Page Two, or check our website (www.pvc.maineaudubon.org) for details. We also welcome your feedback on the bird walks, and other issues that may be on your mind. Let us know how we can better serve you.

FIELDS POND BOOK GROUP

The Fields Pond Book Group meets monthly on Thursday nights at 6:30 p.m. At press time, the Book Group hoped to invite members to participate either on Zoom or in-person at a location TBA, 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 the location of in-person meetings, and to get a synopsis of each month's featured title. Here are the titles for March through May.

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| March 10, 2022 | Schmitt, Catherine. <i>The President's Salmon: Restoring the King of Fish and its Home Waters</i> . 2015. 240 pages. |
| April 14, 2022 | Weidensaul, Scott. <i>A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds</i> . 2021. 400 pages. |
| May 12, 2022 | Fortey, Richard. <i>Horseshoe Crabs and Velvet Worms; the Story of the Animals and Plants That Time Has Left Behind</i> . 2012. 384 pages. |

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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Natural Selections

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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 you're receiving this newsletter, then you have already made a commitment to support Maine Audubon's mission as a member. Thank you! If your interests and life circumstances allow, have you ever considered volunteering some of your time to Maine Audubon? We have a number of ways that individuals can support our mission through activities here at the Fields Pond Audubon Center. Volunteers who enjoy hiking our trails can help be our eyes, ears and feet on the property by serving as volunteer trail stewards. This can be as simple as sending us an email when you've walked one of the trails at Fields Pond sanctuary, and reporting on the condition of that trail. If you're a people person, you may enjoy helping to greet visitors at our reception and sales area in the Nature Center. We're currently looking for individuals who can commit to a regular weekly shift of a few hours at a time. If you're someone who enjoys working alone, on your own schedule and at your own pace, we can offer you a selection of wish-list projects that are just waiting for a volunteer to take them on. If you prefer to work outdoors as part of a team, we can always use more volunteers for seasonal stewardship work days. Helping to connect people with the natural environment at Fields Pond is another way to share your talents. Whether your expertise covers birds, insects, plants, or managing groups of kids, our environmental education programs and community science outreach projects could all use your skills.

Whether you consider it "giving back" or "paying it forward," volunteering to help an organization you already



"I am happy to give back to the organization that enabled so much hands-on environmental discovery and fun for my students..."

Nancy Swanson, retired middle-school science teacher and Fields Pond volunteer.

Photo credit David Lamon

support can be empowering. As an added benefit, volunteering can expand your circle of local friends in just a short time!

WELCOME TO PVC NEW AND REJOINING MEMBERS!

Claire Ackroyd, Orono
Yellow Light Breen, Holden
Larry Clifford, Hampden
Danielle Coutu and Andy Hurtt,
Brewer
Megan and Taylor Dube, Hermon
Sarah Farrand, Beaver Cove
Fred and Marilyn Kaye, Orrington
Janet Moran, Bangor
Matt and Serina Morgan, Bangor
Bill and Mary Phillips, Bangor
Bruce Porter, Veazie
Sue Reed, Newburgh
Gillian Schiller and Andrew Isabel,
Holden
David Sewall, Orono
Pilar Thibodeau, Brewer
Melinda Thompson, Verona Island
Shellie Tourtilotte, Orrington
Shane Trahan, Raleigh, NC

Spring Birding Season is Already Here! No, Really!

by Bob Duchesne

Saturday, May 14th is International Migratory Bird Day. That's when the birds really start to flood back into Maine. It's when the trees come alive with bird song. It's when the Penobscot Valley Chapter organizes volunteers to lead its increasingly popular spring bird walks. I applauded the celebration, but frankly, the real excitement for me starts about two months earlier.

Spice up your early-season bird viewing by watching for the vanguard of returnees. Common grackles and red-winged blackbirds arrive around the third week of March. So do turkey vultures. You may not see them, but you might get to hear American woodcocks and northern saw-whet owls in the evening and pre-dawn hours, also starting around mid-March.

The first week of April belongs to song sparrows and robins. Both should start singing around April Fool's Day. Eastern phoebes come back about the second week of April, and they are instantly noisy. Tree swallows and most ospreys also arrive around this time.

Around the third weekend of April, the initial trickle of warblers commences. Pine, palm, and yellow-rumped warblers are all due on the first good-weather day abutting that weekend. They'll be joined by the first wave of ruby-crowned kinglets. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers and northern flickers should start to appear shortly thereafter. The sapsuckers get wicked noisy to let you know they are back. Hermit thrushes and winter wrens arrive that week too, but they often forage quietly for several more weeks before we get the privilege of hearing their ethereal songs on our springtime walks in the woods. Broad-winged hawks fly in from South America around the third week of April as well.

Migrating bird arrival dates depend in part on far they have to fly from their wintering grounds. Of all the birds I've mentioned so far, only the broad-winged hawk is a long-distance migrant. The rest spent their colder months in the southern or mid-Atlantic states, so they didn't have far to go. Most of our later-arriving species wintered in the tropics.

Some birds barely had to budge. Song sparrows may have gone no farther than southern Maine for the winter. The winter territory for turkey vultures starts just below the Maine border, and some are now turning up on Christmas Bird Counts in York County. Hermit thrushes, bluebirds and robins don't go far, and some didn't go anywhere. They are all hardy members of the thrush family, capable of overwintering in cold climates if they have access to a reliable food supply. My wife observed a healthy overwintering hermit thrush, in company with 60+ robins, in Skowhegan on a frigid day in late January.

Mallards and American black ducks overwinter in large flocks in Maine's open rivers and coastal

harbors – almost anywhere it doesn't freeze over. Common loons spend most of their winter in saltwater on the Maine coast, then fly inland the moment the lake ice opens to set up their breeding territories. Living on a lake, I've been awakened for over 20 years by a loon call around 2:00 a.m. to announce that ice-out is now official.

Belted kingfishers are also waiting impatiently for open freshwater, and they waste no time getting back in late April. With climate change and lakes opening earlier, the kingfishers are also arriving earlier. In fact, some now stick around all winter in Maine's sheltered saltwater coves. While staking out the vagrant Steller's sea eagle in Georgetown in January, I wasn't at all surprised to spot a kingfisher diving in the harbor.

The point is that spring birding season comes much earlier than most people think. Inbound migration is well underway by mid-March. Waterfowl have already paired up and started their comical courtship rituals. Owls and eagles are already nesting. Not everybody notices. But I do...and now I'll bet you will, too.



Fields Pond Audubon Center Nature Store

In stock now!
Steller's Sea Eagle Shirts
with Maine Audubon Logo



Save the Date: **Saturday, May 14th**

Annual Binocular Sales Event

10% off binoculars by Zeiss, Nikon, Vortex
Custom Swarovski packages available –limited supplies

PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER PROGRAMS SPRING 2022

We invite you to join us as we explore Maine's natural history and environmental concerns, with special emphasis on the abundant wildlife and diverse ecosystems within the greater Penobscot Valley region. Free monthly programs that follow the school year calendar (September-May, no January) are one of the many benefits of your membership in the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon. All chapter programs are open to the general public, so feel free to bring a friend or an out-of-town guest!

The March and April programs will be presented via Zoom, due to the continuing need for social distancing and limited attendance at indoor meetings as of our press deadline. We hope to be able to hold the May Annual Meeting and its related "mini field trip" at Fields Pond Audubon Center, our first in-person program since March 2020. However, if the Bangor area is still considered a high-transmission risk for COVID-19 at that time, we will also switch to Zoom for the May program.

ETHICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE OUTDOOR NATURALIST

Friday, March 4, 7:00 p.m.

Zoom webinar; pre-register at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84858485848>

Birding and other wildlife-watching activities have skyrocketed in popularity in recent years, and especially during the pandemic. Doug Hitchcox, Staff Naturalist at Maine Audubon, will talk about the ethical issues that often confront well-meaning birders and wildlife-watchers, and dispel some of the myths that exist in our evolving relationship with nature. Topics include:

- Does bird-feeding actually help birds survive?
- Why are so-called "bird-friendly" yards often more deadly for birds?
- Should you chase after a rare bird, like the Steller's sea eagle this winter?

- Why do cats need to be kept indoors?
- When should you let nature take its course, and when should you intervene?

Many of these questions raise ethical or social dilemmas. Doug will provide science-based answers that put the birds first, and also apply them to other human-wildlife encounters.

KATAHDIN-REGION HISTORICAL AND PRESENT-DAY CONSERVATION

Friday, April 1, 7:00 p.m.

Zoom webinar; pre-register at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84858485848>

Join Elise Goplerud, Program Associate for the Friends of Katahdin Woods and Waters (KWW), and Jeanne Roy, National Park Service Interpretation and Education Manager for KWW, for an inside look at conservation in the Katahdin region, past and present. Goplerud and Roy will describe the history of conservation in the area, and delve deeper into the creation and history of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. They will also discuss what is currently happening in the region, and future conservation projects that are in the planning stages.

PVC ANNUAL MEETING & IBERA LECTURE: PROTECTING AT-RISK NEARSHORE BIRDS, IN ACADIA NATIONAL PARK AND ELSEWHERE

Friday, May 7, 6:30 p.m.

Planned to present live at FPAC; we will switch to Zoom and post updates on the listserv, Facebook, and website, if CDC guidance changes on inside meetings in COVID-19 high-transmission areas.

The nearshore ecosystem in Maine supports resident and migratory bird species that rely on intertidal and subtidal zones for roosting and

foraging. Mechanical rockweed harvesting along Maine's coast has focused increased concern on species that depend on rockweed for food and shelter, and whether prime habitat for multiple species should warrant closure of those areas to commercial harvesting. Abigail Muscat, the recipient of PVC's Inez Boyd Environmental Research Award (IBERA) for 2021, will present her research on winter and late-summer use of the intertidal and subtidal zone across multiple species of nearshore birds in Acadia National Park. She also studied whether rockweed closures to benefit state-threatened harlequin ducks or purple sandpipers could benefit other bird species that roost and forage in the same region – thus making one or both species an "umbrella species" that could protect many rockweed-dependent species and help ensure their long-term survival in Maine. Her research in Acadia National Park is expected to serve as a pilot project for similar studies in other areas along the Maine coast, and as the basis for a long-term bird monitoring program in Acadia National Park.

This is the Penobscot Valley Chapter's Annual Membership Meeting. If you are a dues-paying member of Maine Audubon and affiliated with the Penobscot Valley Chapter, we invite you to join us to elect new officers and board members. We'd also love to hear your ideas for future programs, field trips, and regional environmental actions you would like our chapter to prioritize.

Following the Annual Meeting and IBERA presentation, we will offer a mini-program on the natural history of the American woodcock by FPAC Manager David Lamon, followed by looking and listening in the FPAC parking lot for male woodcocks calling and flying in their territorial "sky dance" breeding display shortly after dusk. Please come out and join us!

FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER PROGRAMS - SPRING 2022

Please pre-register for all programs at www.maineaudubon.org/events.

Roads, Rain, and a Couple Thousand Amphibians - Call it a Big Night!

Friday, March 25, 7 p.m.

(online)

Big nights are fascinating and unique natural events that occur every spring. On a rainy spring night with warming temperatures, huge numbers of frogs and salamanders will swarm out of their overwintering aquatic habitat and head for their breeding grounds in the forest. However, these mini-migrations often put amphibians in harm's way, as they hop and skitter their way across our busy road system. How we can assist and protect these ancient populations will be the subject of this presentation. Join us to hear how you can get involved in this important work. 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.

Fields Pond Young Birders Club (ages 11-16)

Saturdays, March 26, April 23,
and May 21, from 9-11 a.m.

Learn the ins and outs of birding, including equipment use, bird biology & behavior, creating bird-friendly landscapes, scientific data collection, sketching/journaling, and local field trip locations. Binoculars and birding field guides will be available for use.

Loon Nesting Raft Workshop: Building and Sighting

Saturday April 2nd, 10 a.m.
- 1 p.m. Preregistration is
required.

A Virtual Tour of Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery

Tuesday, April 26, 7 p.m.
(online)

Craig Brook is a conservation hatchery located in East Orland, Maine. The hatchery raises Atlantic salmon, protected under the Endangered Species Act, for seven distinct Maine river populations. Atlantic salmon travel annually to the Gulf of Maine each fall, and find their way back to their home rivers each spring. This tour takes a look at the natural history of Atlantic salmon throughout their time at the hatchery, and also explores related aspects of the recovery effort to save Maine's only native salmon species. Intended for all ages.

Bird Migration in the Classroom: Using MOTUS technology with your students

Wednesday, May 11, 4-5:30 pm

Teachers and Administrators are invited to this professional development workshop that introduces activities and resources to engage your students with real-time data analysis that will bring bird migration into your classroom. Workshop is free. Please register online to save your space.

Celebrate World Migratory Bird Day at Fields Pond!

Saturday, May 14

Free activities include:

7:30 a.m. Fields Pond birding walk with Penobscot Valley Chapter volunteers.

9 a.m. - 4 p.m. Annual binocular sale and demos.

11 a.m. - 2 p.m. Bird wood carving demonstration with Steven Valteau, Artist-in-Residence at the Wendell Gilley Museum in Bar Harbor.

Read & Ramble

Spring Session:

March 2 - April 13

Weekly on Wednesdays,

10:00-11:00 a.m.

Join us for an interactive storytime in the outdoors, geared towards children ages 2-5 and their grown-ups. After the 30-minute story is read aloud, we'll set you up with a related, self-guided activity to enjoy on the trails. We encourage each family to "ramble" at its own pace, and for as much time as feels comfortable. The Visitor Center will be open beginning at 10 a.m. for those who wish to warm up, use the restroom, or shop in the Nature Store.

Advanced registration is encouraged! Drop-ins are welcome IF space is available.

Family Fun at Fields Pond

Spring Session:

April 27 - June 8.

Weekly on Wednesdays

(7 weeks), 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Young children and their grown-ups are invited to spend an hour exploring nature together through stories, songs, art, and play. Each week will include outdoor activities and adventures designed to foster a connection to nature, encourage stewardship,

and provide an introduction to group learning settings. Advanced registration is encouraged! Drop-ins are welcome if space is available.

April Vacation Camp at Fields Pond

April 18-22

Please visit www.maineaudubon.org/camps for more information.

Family Tree Identification Walk

Saturday, May 21, 10 a.m. to
noon

Join us for a family-friendly walk around the Fields Pond sanctuary to discover the trees that live here. You'll learn how to use leaf, bark, twig characteristics, and more to identify our local trees.

Northern Leopard Frog
Photo credit Donne Sinderson



PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER FIELD TRIPS— SPRING 2022

Penobscot Valley Chapter field trips are fun and FREE ways to meet like-minded people, while enjoying the rich natural heritage of our region. We hope you will come outside and join us!

Participants are responsible for their own safe transportation and any personal safety concerns regarding COVID-19. Out of consideration for others on the same trip, we recommend socially distancing as much as practicable. Masking is optional, but appreciated if close contact with others is likely to occur. We do require that if you are feeling at all unwell or running a fever, you stay home and wait for a better day – as will your trip leader(s).

DOWNEAST WINTER BIRDFEST

Saturday, March 18/Rain Date Sunday, March 19, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Leaders: Sandi and Bob Duchesne, both fully vaccinated and boosted. We will carpool via Ellsworth and then follow Coastal Route 1 to the Schoodic Peninsula, stopping at numerous hot spots along the way to check for wintering seabirds, bald eagles, unusual gulls, finches, and other winter specialties. We'll take a few short walks (all optional), including the opportunity to climb down the shelf-like rocks at Schoodic Point to get closer to the water, but no long hikes. Meet at Fields Pond Audubon Center at 8:00 a.m. to carpool, or call Sandi at 735-5436 to arrange to meet us along the route.

Please bring your own brown-bag lunch and snacks.

EARLY SPRING BIRDING IN ESSEX WOODS

Saturday, April 23/Rain Date Sunday, April 24, 8-11 a.m.

Leader: Bob Milardo, fully vaccinated and boosted. Bob prefers to call this Bangor hot-spot "Little Penjajawoc Marsh," since it is part of the larger Penjajawoc-Caribou Marsh wetlands ecosystem that covers a huge swath of the greater Bangor region. No matter what you choose to call it, this is always a lively place to look for puddle ducks, marsh species, year-round residents, and early-returning migratory species in April. Meet at the Garden Way entrance; best to park in the adjacent commercial building parking lot, since this is a residential neighborhood and parking space is limited on the street.

SEDGEUNKEDUNK MARSH PADDLE

Saturday, April 29/Rain Date Sunday, April 30, 8-11 a.m.

Leader: Gordon Russell, fully vaccinated and boosted. Cartop your own canoe or kayak to the Sedgeunkedunk Dam parking lot on the Brewer Lake Road in Orrington, and arrive early enough to unload your boat and gear and be ready to put into the water at 8 a.m. We will look and listen for marsh birds such

as Wilson's snipe, sora, Virginia rail, marsh wren, pied-billed grebe, and American bittern, as well as for great blue heron, bald eagle and osprey. We may get to see a few aquatic mammals, freshwater-breeding duck species, and common loons as well. We'll paddle down to the Red Bridge on the Brewer Lake Road before turning around and heading back to the put-in point. The pace will be very leisurely, but all participants should be experienced in basic flatwater paddling skills so we can stay together as a group.

Lots of FREE Morning Bird Walks Throughout May!

Please check out the complete listing on page 7 of this newsletter. Penobscot Valley Chapter volunteers lead these walks to introduce novice birders and newcomers to the wonderful array of birds and wildlife habitats in the greater Bangor area, and to help introduce birders of all experience levels to potential future "birding buddies." New residents and visitors in the Penobscot Valley region are always welcome – and if you enjoy these walks but have not yet joined Maine Audubon, we invite you to join us as a member of the Penobscot Valley Chapter this spring! It's easy – just sign up at maineaudubon.org/support/membership/.



A couple of favorites
at FPAC,
Common Loon and
Tree Swallow.
Photo credit Donne
Sinderson

Penobscot Valley Chapter, Fields Pond Audubon Center

Neighborhood Bird Walks

May 2022

Unless otherwise indicated, all walks are from 7:00 – 8:30 a.m. 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.

Monday, May 9: Indian Trail and Penobscot County Conservation Assn., Brewer

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

Wednesday, May 11: Bangor City Forest, Bangor

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

Saturday, May 14: (World Migratory Bird Day): Fields Pond Audubon Center, Holden

Leaders: Gordon Russell, David Lamon
Meet in FPAC parking lot. **Note: this walk starts at 7:30, not 7. Hit the snooze button and sleep in!**

Tuesday, May 17: Essex Woods, Bangor

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

Wednesday, May 18: Brewer River Walk, Brewer

Leader: Gordon Russell
Meet in large parking area next to the river, across from Cowan's Service Station (146 S. Main St., Brewer)

Thursday, May 19: Mt. Hope Cemetery, Bangor

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

Friday, May 20: Saxl Park, Bangor

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

Saturday, May 21: Technology Park, Orono

Leader: Jerry Longcore
Meet in the parking lot behind the former Nexx-Linx call center building on Godfrey Drive in Orono, across the road from Black Bear Inn.

Tuesday, May 24: West Penjajawoc Preserve, Bangor

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

Wednesday, May 25: Taylor Rd.- Caribou Bog Conservation Area, Orono

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

Thursday, May 26: Kenduskeag Stream Trail, Bangor

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

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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NATURE NOTES: Pandemic Ponderings

BY GLORIA VOLLMERS

Sherlock Holmes said to Dr. Watson, “You see but you do not observe.” A complementary comment would be “You hear but you do not listen.” The peculiar times we have been living through have meant more time staring out the window and, for many, more time spent out on walks. I’ve noted and appreciated many Facebook posts by friends out in the field, from trees to sunsets to mushrooms to birds.

I’ve noticed—observed!—watching my birdfeeders—that chickadees dash to the feeder, quickly pluck a seed from it, and flash back to the protection of the trees. There is no pausing. These frenetic little creatures are wary of lurking danger. On the other hand, if we are nearby—even filling the feeders—they don’t care about us, and continue their diving runs for seed. Indeed, with enough patience we can feed them from our hands. I think of chickadees as friendly. They’re not afraid to be seen or to approach people, but they don’t like to stay still out in the open.

Paul and I spent part of the winter, you may recall from the last newsletter, in Hilton Head, South Carolina. There you find the Carolina chickadee, a different

species than our black-capped chickadee. If Carolina chickadees’ markings differ in any way from ours, I could not see it. Why? Because they are shy, and harder to see. I was surprised by this very different chickadee behavior. We could not get a close look at one. Do they flit, as ours do? Yes, but at a distance and in concealed places.

In contrast, and getting back to Maine, watch the goldfinches. They are lazy and unconcerned. They will sit at the feeders for long periods, enjoying one seed after another. They drift off when satisfied. But do they like people? Not so much. They are not particularly friendly. Chickadees and goldfinches show very distinctive behaviors around humans. Learned, or instinctual? I don’t know.

Here are a couple of listening observations that I expect few others have experienced. Once, up at Hirundo, a very quiet preserve, Paul and I came across a pileated woodpecker very close to us—I’d say 10–15 feet. When we moved closer, it would fly to another tree but stayed close to us. As it hopped up a tree, it would repeatedly and quickly extend its tongue to the bark searching for insects, but as it

did so, it made a quiet sound each time. Whether that was the sound of its tongue extending or if it issued from its throat, I can’t say—but the point is, this was a sound I had never heard before. Paul couldn’t hear it. He can’t hear very soft or high-frequency sounds, although he’s a far superior bird spotter. I haven’t found anyone who can confirm my observation, nor could I find anything written about it.

My second curious listening observation happened at Essex Woods. I was alone, looking for a sora or a Virginia rail. I got down on my knees, looking down at the marshy area where I knew they liked to hang out. Sure enough, right below me at the water’s edge came a sora ambling along, oblivious to my presence above. But the interesting observation was that it was making a quiet noise as it took each step. Like: hmm, hmm, hmm. Humming along? Moving to the sound of different drummer? Who knows. Once again, no authoritative confirmation available.

These are small consolations for living through a pandemic. But there you go.
