

Natural Selections

The Penobscot Valley Audubon Newsletter



September – November 2026

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN:

Early Fall Reflections

BY SEAN TRAHAN, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY AUDUBON

As summer begins to wind down and the evenings turn cooler, there is a growing anticipation of fall and all the beauty it brings. I hope each of you has had the chance to enjoy wonderful weather and the many opportunities to spend time outdoors over the past few months.

Fields Pond has been full of activity this summer, with kayakers, canoes, fishing, swimmers, and even the occasional paddle boat drifting by. While the loons did not successfully raise young this year, the adults have remained active, curious, and very vocal. At times, swimmers at the beach could be heard offering their best loon calls, only to be answered by our local loons with far more articulate replies. It was great entertainment, and a reminder that you never quite know what you will see or hear at Fields Pond.

The pond has also welcomed its typical assortment of residents, including bald eagles, ospreys, ducks, and many visitors at the boat landing. It has been a pleasure chatting with those who stop by our lakeside camp to say hello. We even had a scuba diver surface near the end of the dock.

Penobscot Valley Audubon continues to collaborate with Maine Audubon staff to expand opportunities for community members to connect with nature. This quarterly newsletter is a great way to start exploring them. You can keep up with any changes or additions to upcoming programs and events at <https://maineaudubon.org/events/> and on our chapter website, <https://pvc.maineaudubon.org>.

This past summer, I also had the privilege of hosting both the Penobscot Valley Audubon annual Board BBQ and the Fields Pond Audubon Center staff BBQ. These gatherings have become a valued annual tradition, and each year attendance continues to grow. That growth is a wonderful reflection of Maine Audubon's strong and expanding connection with our local community.

For questions or more information about Penobscot Valley Audubon, please contact me at Sean.Trahan@gmail.com. We currently have two vacant positions on the Board of Directors, so I'd love to hear from anyone who's interested in getting involved with planning future chapter activities!

WELCOME TO PVC NEW & REJOINING MEMBERS!

Theresa Amirault, Bangor
Eisso Atzema, Old Town
Emily Brittelli, Hampden
Bangor Savings Bank (Corporate Partner)
Kathleen Coogan, Bucksport
Drew Hull, Old Town
Jeni King, Bangor
Ally Loukas, Orono
Robin Merchant, Glenburn
Mya Middleton, Bangor
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Sue & Dakota Pettegrow, Orrington
Janice Rand, Bangor
Linda Sproul, Hampden
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Karen Thibault, Old Town
Linda & Tim Thompson, Bangor
Henry Wagner & Gabrielle Jolin, Corinna
Elizabeth Wood, Veazie
Audrey Zimmerman, Glenburn

Bald Eagle, Pushaw Lake
Photo credit: Ron Logan

MAINE AUDUBON

Penobscot Valley Audubon

Natural Selections

Natural Selections is published four times a year by Penobscot Valley 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, PVCAudubon@gmail.com to sign up for these services.

Chapter Officers

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Visit us on the Web

<https://pvc.maineaudubon.org>

www.facebook.com/penobscotvalleyaudubon



FIELDS POND JOURNAL

Happy Campers

By David Lamon

Director, Northern Programs & Operations

The grounds around the Nature Center have grown much more quiet these past couple of weeks. Gone are the cheerful (and loud) voices of our summer campers who have spent their days exploring the wetlands, fields and forest at the Fields Pond Audubon Center. Their exuberant cries of wonder and surprise at every new discovery filled the landscape, and became the backdrop of our summer soundtrack. This soundtrack was also mixed with the songs of many species of birds that inhabit our sanctuary, either seasonally or year-round. Breeding birds were busy this summer defending territories, building nests, and raising the next generation of their species to take their place in the wild.

I like to think that both the birds and the Maine Audubon staff were working towards similar goals this past summer. Studies have shown that exploration and play in nature enhance the cognitive abilities of children, developing their capacity for creativity and problem-solving. During a time when so many childhood activities have moved indoors, allowing kids to enjoy sustained time in wild spaces is a necessary antidote to what has been called “nature deficit disorder.” Our next generation of humans will need to take their place on a planet that will require their stewardship and connection more than ever. I am grateful that we had the opportunity to deepen those connections this past summer.



Photo credit: Melissa Gallagher

Fingers Crossed for Finches

BY BOB DUCHESNE

Last winter was boring. The woods were far too quiet. As predicted, there was plenty of food in Canada last year, so most finches stayed there. There were exceptions, of course. Evening grosbeaks were plentiful in Maine. Red crossbills roamed in small numbers. Otherwise, redpolls stayed north, pine siskins headed south, and white-winged crossbills wandered everywhere but here. A few purple finches lingered near birdfeeders in town, but they abandoned the forest.

Every year is different. Most of the finches we see each winter breed in Canada. When winter comes, they go wherever the food is. If there is enough food in Canada, they stay in Canada. If Maine has more to offer, they come here.

Although finches primarily dine on seeds and fruit during the winter, specific food preferences differ for each species.

Pine grosbeaks are fond of fruit. Mountain ash berries and crabapples are favorites. Evening grosbeaks relish sumac. Both chow down on the buds of deciduous trees. Both visit bird feeders, although evening grosbeaks do it much more regularly.

Crossbills have bills that cross at the tip, allowing them to crack open cones and eat the meaty seedlings inside. They often wander in large flocks in winter, seeking a ripe and robust cone crop. When they find one, they settle in and devour all they can eat. The trees may take several years to recover after the crossbills move on, and the flock won't return until then.

White-winged crossbills are small cone specialists, with a preference for red and black spruces. They've been mostly absent from Maine for several years, but I've started seeing more since mid-summer. Both crossbill species will breed opportunistically at any time of year when they discover a huge cone crop, and in July I observed a pair of white-winged crossbills acting suspiciously romantic in the North Maine Woods. I suspect (at least I hope) this will be a good winter to find larger flocks.

Red crossbills can feed on a wider range of cones than their white-winged cousins. Bill sizes and shapes vary regionally in this species, allowing them to more efficiently consume the available cone crops in their preferred nesting area. Ornithologists classify these adaptations as "types" rather than distinct subspecies. Type 12 is our usual Maine variant. Unfortunately, all

types look and sound virtually identical in the field, and all are prone to wandering whenever their local food supply dwindles. The best way to positively identify out-of-area types is by recording and analyzing their flight calls on a sonogram. I expect to find lots of red crossbills this winter, as I've seen and heard them in coniferous forests all summer.

American goldfinches are dependable Maine residents in most winters, regularly visiting bird feeders. They also forage widely for wild foods, especially seedy grasses and thistle seeds.



Evening Grosbeak
Photo credit: Bob Duchesne

Redpolls are irruptive. They will invade Maine in big numbers one winter, and be totally absent the next. They particularly relish the catkins on birch and aspen. They've been scarce the past couple of years, so I hope this will be a big winter for them.

Pine siskins are iffy. Their primary winter diet is conifer seedlings. Although they nest in northern Maine, across Canada, and throughout the Rockies, they often flee their breeding grounds in poor cone crop years. If they overwinter near your home, they will happily deplete your nyger seed feeders, along with redpolls and goldfinches.

All finch species form flocks in winter, sometimes very big mixed flocks. They constantly vocalize while flying and feeding. The noise keeps the flock together, and helps roaming birds discover where others have found good food supplies. You never have to look very hard to find them. They will always tell you where they are.

FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER FALL PROGRAMS

Please register online at www.maineaudubon.org/events for all listings.

Unless otherwise indicated, all programs are offered in-person at FPAC.

BIRDING WITH A VIEW

Brewer Waterfront Park

Saturday, 9/5, 6–7:15 p.m.

FREE member / \$8 nonmember

Looking for a slower-paced birding program? Bring a lawn chair and take a seat along the waterfront to watch for migrating birds and year-round residents in action. Enjoy a fall sunset accented by bird sightings!

GARDENING FOR WILDLIFE: FALL CLEANUP WORKSHOP

Saturday, 9/12, 3–4:30 p.m.

FREE

Participants will learn how thoughtful, low-impact garden care can support overwintering pollinators, beneficial insects, and local wildlife. Discover practical ways to create beautiful, resilient landscapes that benefit both people and nature.

HOME SCHOOL NATURALISTS

*Thursdays, 9/17, 10/1, 10/15, 10/29,
11/12, 12/3, 10 a.m. to noon*

\$80 member / \$95 non-member
for six-session series; \$18/day for drop-ins

Homeschool Naturalists will enjoy exciting, hands-on adventures, exploring a new autumnal subject each session. Designed for children ages 6–14, this engaging series will start with a mixed-age group, then break into age-based investigation teams to dive deeper

into each week's curriculum. Each session combines outdoor exploration, guided hiking, and nature journaling/crafts to deepen your child's connection with the natural world. Drop-ins are welcome, but please call ahead to ensure space availability.

FALL STEWARDSHIP DAY

Saturday, 9/18, 9 a.m. to noon

FREE

Join us for a morning of stewardship activities focusing on improving the trails and public spaces. Bring work gloves and sturdy footwear. Snacks provided! Please sign up online, or call us at 207-989-2591 to let us know you're coming.

WILD MUSHROOM FORAGING

Saturday, 9/19, 1–3 p.m.

\$25 member / \$30 nonmember

Join author David Spahr to explore the world of fungi. Time will be spent both indoors and outdoors learning about mushroom identification, folklore, collecting, and cooking. David's book, *Edible and Medicinal Mushrooms of New England and Eastern Canada*, will be available for purchase. Be prepared for a moderate amount of physical activity while hiking outdoors.



Great Egret
Photo credit: Ron Logan

CURIOUS BY NATURE

Online via Zoom

*Wednesdays, 9/23, 10/21, 11/18,
9:45–10:15 a.m.*

FREE, offered to students in
Grades 3–8 statewide

Maine Audubon's newest educational program connects students with Maine's working naturalists and environmental professionals, through live, interactive presentations. Each session features a 15–20 minute slideshow about the presenter's work and its environmental impact, followed by a 10–15 minute Q&A where students can ask questions and engage directly with the speaker. Sessions will be recorded and added to Maine Audubon's growing catalog of previous programs, available statewide for asynchronous classroom and homeschool access. Preregistration required to receive Zoom link.



Amanita
Photo credit: Donne Sinderson

ECO EXPLORERS AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

Tuesdays, 10/6 through 11/10, 3:30–4:45 p.m.

(Previous session attendees, please note shift to Tuesday schedule)

\$70 member/\$85 nonmember for six-session series is preferable, for greatest educational & social enrichment; call ahead for drop-in availability and cost

Step into STEM with a Maine Audubon educator, as we turn the sanctuary into a 230-acre science laboratory for Grades 2-5! This six-week after-school club will spark curiosity, nurture a love for the outdoors, and help kids discover how to protect our planet — all while having tons of fall fun! Activities include outdoor exploration, guided hiking, and nature-based experiments to deepen your students' connection with the natural world. Space is limited, so preregister your kids today!

PRESCHOOL NATURE HOUR

Fridays, 10/2 through 11/20, 9:30–10:30 a.m.

\$80 member/\$96 non-member for 8 session series; \$15/day for drop-ins

Each Friday, little ones and their grownups will dive into nature adventures that include stories,



Barrows Goldeneye
Photo credit: Ron Logan

art, STEM activities, and outdoor play! Designed for ages 2–5, this series will spark curiosity, nurture a love for the outdoors, and help kids discover how to protect our planet — all while having tons of fun! Drop-ins are welcome, but please call ahead to ensure space availability.

FALL FOLIAGE 5K AND FUN RUN

Saturday, 10/3, 9 a.m. start

\$25 member/\$30 non-member fee for 5K

FREE Kids Fun Run at 10:30

Our annual trail-running event kicks off at 9 a.m. This challenging course takes you through our beautiful wooded trails, onto the adjoining Holden Land Trust trail system, and down scenic roads for the perfect fall foliage tour! Souvenir race T-shirt included in 5K fee, if you register by September 18.

INTRODUCTION TO WILD BASKETRY

Wednesday, 10/7, 5–9 p.m.

\$75 all-inclusive fee

Learn the craft of weaving natural materials — grasses, bark, vines, and more — into functional, beautiful baskets with Jessica Steele. This hands-on class covers collecting, processing, and weaving with locally sourced materials such as cattail, pine needle, birch bark, willow, and grapevine. Includes instruction, live demos, and take-home materials. No experience necessary.

BIRD MIGRATION WALK Jordan River Preserve, Trenton (formerly Bar Harbor Golf Course)

Thursday, 10/8, 8–9:30 a.m.

FREE

Fall is an excellent time to put your birding skills to the test! We'll explore this new Frenchman Bay



Pileated Woodpecker
Photo credit: Ron Logan

Conservancy property together, and see what turns up. This bird-focused walk is appropriate for all skill levels. Please preregister early, as space is limited.

THE BIG SIT: AN ACCESSIBLE BIRDING MARATHON

Saturday, 10/10, 7:00 am–4:00 pm
FREE

Calling all birders! Take the Big Sit birding challenge with Maine Audubon. Our goal: observe and document all the birds we can see and hear in nine hours, from one fixed location. Bring a lawn chair and a picnic lunch, and watch for birds with us! You can participate for the entire day, or just drop in for an hour or two. Co-sponsored by Penobscot Valley Audubon.

MEADOW WILDFLOWER WALK

Wednesday, 10/14, 4:30–5:30 pm

FREE member/\$8 nonmember

Goldenrods, asters, and more! Explore the fall wildflowers on the Fields Pond sanctuary grounds, while learning how meadows provide important habitat for bugs, birds, and other native Maine wildlife.

NATIVE SEED COLLECTION WORKSHOP

Saturday, 10/17, 10 a.m. to noon

\$5 member/\$12 nonmember

This field experience will focus on collecting native seeds from a

variety of fall-seeding plants. We'll also discuss collection techniques and seasonal timing for popular species that produce seed at other times of year, and best practices to collect seed ethically, without causing environmental harm. You'll have the opportunity to collect seeds yourself, and go home with seeds to plant on your own! Program is weather-dependent.

AQUATIC WILD K-12 EDUCATOR WORKSHOP

Tuesday, 10/27, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
\$30 registration fee (includes book purchase)

Aquatic WILD is a hands-on interdisciplinary STEM curriculum focused on aquatic and wetland wildlife, water resources, and ecological concepts. This experiential learning workshop introduces participants to over 50 Maine-specific activities from the exclusive Aquatic WILD K-12 Curriculum & Activity Guide, only available through these workshops. This resource serves as an integrating tool across all subject areas, making it perfect for classroom teachers seeking to meet science standards while incorporating math, language arts, and social studies. Participants will earn professional development credit hours while exploring both indoor and outdoor learning opportunities, so dress appropriately for weather conditions.

SOW IT FORWARD: A NATIVE SEED SWAP

Saturday, 11/21, November 21, 10 a.m. to noon

FREE

In gratitude for the fall harvest, join your Maine native plant community to share seeds, books, and fellowship. Bring labeled, locally harvested native plant seeds to share — whether collected at our fall Seed



Fields Pond Journal : Happy Campers
Photo credit: Melissa Gallagher

Collection Workshop, or gathered on your own — and enjoy warm beverages, snacks, and a native seed-sowing demonstration. Preregistration requested so we'll have a count. We hope to see you back this winter for our Native Plant Workshop series!

FALL TREE & SHRUB ID

Saturday, 11/21, 12:30–2 p.m.

FREE member/\$8 nonmember

Take the challenge to learn trees and shrubs without their leaves. Join a naturalist to explore the signs of plant life as species reach senescence, including twig and bark ID. Discussion will include how fallen leaves are critical for healthy winter forest ecology.

HOLIDAY WREATH CRAFTING

Saturday, 11/28, 10 a.m. to noon

\$55 all-inclusive fee

'Tis the season! In this festive two-hour workshop, you'll learn to make your own balsam holiday wreath from scratch with Jessica Steele. Working on a 12" ring, you'll build a full, fragrant balsam base, accent it with natural beauties like white pine and cedar cones, then finish it off with a 2.5" ribbon bow. All supplies are provided — balsam tips, the 12"

ring, wire, ribbon, and natural decorations to personalize your wreath. No experience necessary, just bring your holiday spirit and take home a handmade wreath ready to hang. Preregistration required, as space is limited.

HOLIDAY GNOME WORKSHOP

Saturday, November 28, 1-3 p.m.

\$60 all-inclusive fee

Get into the holiday spirit, using natural evergreens to complete a unique crafting project. In this fun workshop led by Jessica Steele, you'll make a whimsical 3-foot holiday gnome using balsam, fir, and white pine, complete with a festive hat and nose! This eye-catching gnome makes a wonderful decoration for your front porch, or a unique handmade gift. You'll also create two miniature gnomes that make charming ornaments or holiday decorations — adding a touch of woodland cheer to your home. All materials are provided. Preregistration required, as space is limited.

PENOBSCOT VALLEY AUDUBON FIELD TRIPS – FALL 2026

Penobscot Valley Audubon 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! Trips are free and open to the general public, although we hope you will consider joining Maine Audubon if you are not already a member. Your membership supports science-based education, conservation, and advocacy work for native wildlife and wildlife habitat throughout Maine, including right here in the Penobscot Valley.

FALL WILDFLOWERS AND FERNS

Saturday, September 12, 8-11 a.m.

Leaders: Laura Lewis & Bob Milardo

Join two Maine Master Naturalists for a leisurely walk through Bangor City Forest. We'll start with an overview of basic botany, followed by a quick tutorial on identifying ferns. From there we will venture down the trail to discover which native species inhabit our urban forest.

Directions: Meet at the Bangor City Forest main parking lot at the end of Tripp Road.

CARIBOU BOG CONSERVATION AREA

Sunday, October 4, 8-11 a.m.

Leader: Gordon Russell

The restored wetlands in Boulder Pond and Black Pond (formerly known as the Taylor Bait Ponds) are actively managed to attract migrating shorebirds and waterfowl. Late summer to early fall is the best time to come for shorebirds, as this is the height of their migration through our region. CBCA can often be a good spot for mammal sightings as well.

Directions: From Forest Avenue in Orono, take 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.

CARIBOU BOG CONSERVATION AREA

Sunday, October 18, 8-11 a.m.

Leader: Nathaniel Austin, Maine Audubon Staff Naturalist

Same program description as October 4 trip. A leisurely search for migrating waterfowl, warblers, sparrows and whatever the winds bring us.

FALL MIGRATION IN CENTRAL MAINE

Sunday, November 1, 8 a.m. to noon

Leaders: Bob Milardo, Val Watson, & Rachel Darling

Join three expert guides for a morning tour of productive birding hotspots in central Maine, focusing on species that rest and refuel around ponds, rivers, and lakes. Bob and Val are Maine Master Naturalists, and Rachel is a Wildlife Ecology Ph.D. student at the University of Maine. We will make multiple stops including Plymouth Pond, Sebasticook Lake-Durham Bridge, Sprague's Mill, and Corinna Bog/Corundel Lake. We're likely to spot a wide variety of waterfowl and late-migrating shorebird species - and usually find unexpected delights. Bring binoculars and/or camera, and a spotting scope if you have one; the trip leaders will also share theirs with participants.

Directions: Meet at the commuter Park-and-Ride lot east of I-95 Exit 174 (Carmel-Newburgh), directly across from the Dysarts convenience store. PLEASE NOTE: parking along the route is very limited, so carpooling is helpful.



Saw-Whet Owl
Photo credit: Ron Logan

MAINE AUDUBON

Penobscot Valley Audubon
c/o Fields Pond Audubon Center
216 Fields Pond Road
Holden, ME 04429

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Mission of Penobscot Valley Audubon:
*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.*

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

FIELDS POND BOOK GROUP

The Fields Pond Book Group meets monthly on Thursday nights at 6:30 p.m., in-person at the Orono Public Library and online via Zoom, facilitated by professional librarian Joyce Rumery. Please contact Joyce directly at rumery@maine.edu to be added to the group's mailing list and sign up for the Zoom link, which she will send out shortly before each meeting. Here are the selected titles for September through November, available through most public libraries:

September 10, 2026

Brusatte, Stephen. *The Story of Birds: A New History from Their Dinosaur Origins to Today.* 2026. 448p.

October 8, 2026

Beston, Henry. *The Outermost House.* 1928. 100p.

November 12, 2026

Dunne, Pete. *The Courage of Birds: and the Often Surprising Ways They Survive Winter.* 2024. 192p.



Photo credit: Donne Sinderson