

Natural Selections

Newsletter of the Penobscot Valley Chapter of Maine Audubon



January-March 2018

New Year Brings Opportunity

BY GORDON RUSSELL, PRESIDENT
PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER OF MAINE AUDUBON

Welcome to 2018! Do you have special plans or resolutions for the new year, perhaps a “bucket list” birding trip or other adventure? Or will you get more engaged in your favorite environmental issues and organizations? The Penobscot Valley Chapter is looking forward to new opportunities at the Fields Pond Audubon Center, an important asset in our chapter area. We are pleased that Maine Audubon recognizes the role Fields Pond can play in making the organization stronger and resilient, and is planning to embark on a rebuilding program at the facility. We encourage you to become involved in helping to make Fields Pond an important focal point of our chapter area.

Maine Audubon received the 192-acre Fields Pond property in Holden and Orrington in 1994 in a bequest from Katherine Curran. The property had been part of a larger farm used to raise cattle, cut wood from surrounding forest, and harvest ice from Fields Pond. The newly acquired property included 1600 feet of lake shore, fields, and forest, with unique features such as ravines, streams, wetlands and a 22-acre island in Fields Pond.

In 1998 Maine Audubon opened its newly constructed L. Robert Rolde Nature Center, a green-designed, energy efficient building, on the Fields Pond property. The founding director was Judy Kellogg Markowsky. She managed a small but dedicated staff that carried out educational programs for local schools, and offered a variety of nature-related activities for the public. Members of the Penobscot Valley Chapter were instrumental in the creation of the Fields Pond Audubon Center, and have volunteered over the years with educational and nature programs. However, despite these volunteer efforts, staffing levels at Fields Pond have declined, making it difficult for the facility to meet its broader goals for serving the public.

Recent changes in leadership at Maine Audubon may result in an expanded role for nature facilities such as Fields Pond to meet the demand for wildlife conservation in the state. Andrew Beahm, a former senior executive at L.L. Bean, became Maine Audubon’s Executive Director this past June. His vision for the organization includes an expanded reach and appeal to all parts of the state, attracting the public to a variety of conservation-related activities such as festivals, educational programs and field trips. Fields Pond Audubon Center is well-positioned to be a destination or jumping-off point for those seeking to experience the natural world in

a large part of central and northern Maine.

Expanding the opportunities at Fields Pond will take a dedicated effort. Additional investment by Maine Audubon is needed to ensure adequate staffing and maintenance. A larger contribution by volunteers also will be required to help implement future plans for the facility. The Penobscot Valley Chapter looks forward to helping refine the vision for Fields Pond, and to implementing actions that will enhance its visibility and attraction as a world-class nature destination for all. We look forward to your ideas and input on Fields Pond and involvement in its future. Please let us know what you are thinking.

Track Stories by Jane Rosinski

Animals have no choice but to be outdoors and active in winter. Exploring where creatures go and what they are doing is awesome winter fun! Snow is the perfect surface for recording track stories. The best time to look for stories is 24-48 hours after a snowfall. During a snow event, animals mostly sit and wait to see what the weather will bring. They hunker down to keep warm, and leave few tracks. Falling snow fills in any tracks which might be there. So wait for the snow to stop. Be patient, shovel your driveway and enjoy the fresh air. After a day or two go outside and see who has been active while you were sleeping.

When you first find a track, determine that you have an actual animal track. Trees, wires and branches accumulate snow which falls when it becomes heavy or off-balance. These snow “plops” may look like tracks, but animal tracks form a trail which comes from somewhere and goes to somewhere. Determine where the animal went. Up a tree, down a hole, under low-lying branches? How is it moving? Did it stop to rest and leave a body print in the snow? Is it hopping or bounding with paired tracks, or is it walking with alternating tracks? Are the tracks close together or far apart? Close together, the animal is moving slowly. Far apart means the animal is moving fast. Look for the best track to determine what the animal was. Walk parallel to the trail, being careful not to step in any of the tracks. You wouldn’t want to destroy the best track. Close examination of the overall size and number of toes will help you identify who was here. Birds leave tracks too, so don’t be fooled! The depth of a track indicates weight. The bigger the animal, the deeper the track.

In addition to tracks, look for chewing or claw marks, hair, blood from a kill, scat or urine marking. If it was a bird, did it leave wing prints? Did the animal drink at a stream or eat snow? Did the trail you are following cross another animal trail?

Winter track stories abound after a snowfall, and they are just waiting to be read. Go forth and enjoy the mystery!



Snowshoe Hare & Squirrel Tracks
Photo Credit: Jane Rosinski

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:

\$45 household; \$35 individual
\$25 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

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Natural Selections

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FIELDS POND JOURNAL

BY STAFF

FIELDS POND AUDUBON CENTER

Winter has clearly descended upon Maine. At places like Fields Pond Audubon Center, the season is marked with animal tracks in fields of snow, increased visibility through the woods, and the return of birds from our North. Visit Fields Pond on your own, or join us for a program or snowshoe walk!

Other updates from Maine Audubon include:

NATURALIST HQ LAUNCH

With the unveiling of Maine Audubon's new website in September, we have also rolled out a new initiative to advance our presence as "Maine's Naturalist." We strive to be your source for timely information related to natural history, especially wildlife and habitat.

We have created a dynamic and interactive hub for this content in the tab of our website entitled "Naturalist HQ." There you will find frequent blog posts, photos, and alerts intended to keep you current on what is happening and what you should (or shouldn't) be seeing out there. You will also find the popular new "Nature Moments" video series we developed with our friends at

Bowdoin College. Please check it out, and leave us your comments and questions.

NEW MEMBERSHIP MANAGER

Maine Audubon has welcomed several new staff over the fall and winter. Of special note to readers, Danielle Maheu is the new Membership & Annual Giving Manager. Danielle is your contact at Maine Audubon regarding your membership. She also manages our Corporate Partners program, which we seek to expand and grow as it pertains to Fields Pond. Danielle can be reached at dmaheu@maineaudubon.org or 781-2330 ext. 230. Please drop her a line to say hello.

ACTION ALERT!

Maine Audubon also welcomed Eliza Donoghue as our new Senior Policy & Advocacy Specialist in the fall. Eliza and many of our peer organizations are gearing up for what looks to be a very busy legislative session, at both the state and federal levels. As always, your voice and input is critical to this work. Please sign up for regular action alerts from Maine Audubon to stay up-to-the-minute on how you can and should get involved. Visit maineaudubon.org/advocacy to learn more and sign up.



Meadow Vole Leaves a Story
(See article on Page 1)
Photo Credit: Jane Rosinski

FIELDS POND CENTER PROGRAMS

Please note that all programs with fees require pre-registration and payment via the Maine Audubon website, www.maineaudubon.org. Updates on March programs will be listed on the website by mid-February. If you can't access the website, please call FPAC at 989-2591 or e-mail fieldspond@maineaudubon.org for assistance.

Wednesday, Jan 10 through
Wednesday, Feb 21

Family Fun at Fields Pond

Seven-week program for pre-schoolers with parent or guardian on Wednesday mornings.

10 to 11 a.m.

\$84/member family or

\$105/non-member family

Designed to cultivate a love and understanding of the natural world in children aged 2-5; younger siblings also welcome, up to a maximum of three children per adult. Advance registration strongly encouraged, but drop-ins are welcome if space is available.

Saturday, January 20

Family Discovery Series: Snowshoe Tour

1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

\$16/member family or

\$20/non-member family

Join us for a ramble through the meadows and woods of Fields Pond Audubon Center. We will search for tracks and stories in the snow. Gentle pace; all ages welcome. Snowshoes available in limited quantities. Please bring your own if you have them.

Wednesday, January 31

Blue Moon Snowshoe

6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

\$8/member,

\$10/non-member

Come roam the meadows and woods of Fields Pond under the light of the second full moon of the new year, followed by a hot drink back at Fields Pond Audubon Center to warm up. Join us for a little exercise and natural history, along with some great company. We have snowshoes to rent, or bring your own. Unlike the family-oriented January 20 snowshoe tour, this evening trek is NOT recommended for children.



Saturday, February 17

GREAT MAINE OUTDOOR WEEKEND EVENT:

Winter Family Day of Play

10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

FREE and open to the public. Join us for a fun day of outdoor exploration and hands-on activities for all ages. Learn how you can become a citizen-scientist and help protect wildlife and habitat in Maine. Outdoor activities include a scavenger hunt, sledding, and more! Snowshoe rentals are available for those who wish. Indoor activities include winter arts & crafts, plus warming refreshments.

FEBRUARY VACATION CAMP AT FIELDS POND

Tuesday Feb 20 and Thursday, Feb 22,
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Members \$48 per day,

Non-members \$60 per day

Appropriate for campers ages 5-10.

Enjoy your February vacation in Maine the way it should be – by celebrating the many ways Maine Audubon takes learning outside. We have packed each day with exciting opportunities to learn how humans and other living things survive during our wonderful winter months. Each day includes outdoor time, stories, games and hands-on explorations of the natural world. Visit for one day or both! Please ensure that campers are dressed for cold weather.

Tuesday Theme:

Snow Science. We will explore the world of snow and ice in the field, forest and streams. We will make our own crystals and discover the insulating power of snow, while learning how life on earth survives and thrives when it is cold.

Thursday Theme:

Travel and Survival in Nature. Fly, hop and crawl your way across the grounds at Fields Pond, while learning how seeds and animals move. Campers will perform hands-on experiments to discover how plants and animals survive the Maine winter.

PENOBSCOT VALLEY CHAPTER PROGRAMS

The Penobscot Valley Chapter offers FREE monthly programs on natural history and conservation topics that reflect the interests of our membership. We hope you will be able to join us each month for an evening of camaraderie, learning, and fun with like-minded people. All programs are open to the general public, so please feel free to bring a friend! All programs take place at Fields Pond Audubon Center.

THE MAINE BREEDING BIRD ATLAS – AND HOW YOU CAN HELP!

Friday, January 19, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife is conducting its periodic update of the statewide Breeding Bird Atlas, and your help is needed! The purpose of the atlas is to document the current distribution of breeding birds across the entire state, including the vast, mostly undeveloped forestlands in northwestern Maine. This particular update will also include an inventory of non-breeding bird species that spend their winters in Maine, starting in the winter of 2018-19. Most of the immense human effort required to complete this five-year project will come from birder citizen-scientists, who will report their personal observations of bird species and evidence of breeding activities. Whether you can "adopt" and monitor remote blocks of land during the five-year survey period, or just report a chickadee inhabiting your backyard birdhouse, your individual contributions can help to make this project a success! Doug Hitchcox, Staff Naturalist for Maine Audubon, is also the Maine Bird Atlas Outreach Coordinator. He will describe the purpose, goals, and expected outcomes of the atlas – along with the many ways that birders in the Penobscot Valley Chapter region can participate.

HOG ISLAND REFLECTIONS

Friday, February 16, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Hog Island Audubon Camp is a residential learning center, located just a quarter-mile off

the Maine coast in Bremen. Founded in 1936, it featured Roger Tory Peterson as its first birding instructor. Many well-known naturalists serve on its current staff, including Stephen Kress, Charlie Duncan, Pete Dunne, Laura Erickson, and Maine Audubon's own Doug Hitchcox. Hog Island offers programs for families, teens and adults throughout late spring and summer, focusing on different aspects of environmental awareness, education, fieldwork, and artwork related to Maine's coastal species and habitats. Sandra Mitchell, a Registered Maine Guide, skilled outdoorswoman, and avid birder, enrolled in a Hog Island session on bird migration last year. She will present a slide show describing the history of the camp, its diverse program selection, and highlights from her own learning experience on Hog Island.

WEASELS OF MAINE

(rescheduled from Oct. 2017)

Friday, March 18, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

There are six species of weasel (Mustelidae) that breed in Maine, ranging in size from the long, sleek river otter to the tiny short-tailed weasel. None are listed as rare or endangered in our state. Yet many Mainers who spend considerable time outdoors have never seen a mustelid in the wild, although it's easy to find their distinctive tracks in winter. All weasels are shy, solitary, largely nocturnal carnivores with reputations for being fearless, ferocious, and bloodthirsty: they will kill more prey than they can eat, and cache the rest for later. Cory Mosby, wildlife biologist and mustelid specialist for Maine Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, will present a fascinating program that explores the facts, fiction, and confusing nicknames for these widespread, relatively abundant Maine mammals that are often so very hard to spot.

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 FIELD TRIPS – WINTER 2018

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!

SNOWY OWLS ON SARGENT MTN.

Saturday, Feb. 24, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Weather contingency date:

Sunday, February 25

Snowy Owls typically inhabit Acadia's highest peaks in winter. They can be observed or photographed above tree line under more natural conditions, away from buildings and other structures. Multiple sightings of owls are often possible. Gordon Russell and Jane Rosinski will once again lead a snowshoe hike up Sargent Mountain, the second highest peak in Acadia, in search of Snowy Owls and scenic winter vistas. This is a rigorous snowshoe outing, two miles from the parking lot to the summit, including 0.8 miles up a steep slope until you get above the tree line. Participants should be reasonably fit and experienced on snowshoes; poles are recommended. Meet at Fields Pond Audubon Center at 8:30 a.m. to carpool to the Parkman Mountain parking pull-off area on

Routes 3/198 in Mt. Desert, or arrange to meet us there at 10:00 a.m.

Cost: Free (\$5 donation to FPAC optional). Limited to 12 people. Please call 989-2591 to pre-register.

SCHOODIC IN WINTER

Saturday, March 3, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Weather contingency date: Sunday, March 4

Join Bob and Sandi Duchesne for a trip to the less-traveled mainland tract of Acadia National Park. We will meet at Fields Pond and carpool to the scenic Schoodic Peninsula to look for winter birds on sea and land. This is a great trip for novice birders and new residents who want to learn more about Maine's winter birds and good places to look for them along the Downeast coast. More experienced birders can help us scan for unusual visitors among the large flocks that gather here in winter, and everyone will enjoy the scenic natural vistas as we travel along the rugged wave-swept coastline. Bring a brown-bag lunch and dress in warm layers, including boots or water-resistant shoes, that will allow you to comfortably stand outside and do some short-distance hiking. Please call 989-2591 to pre-register. Cost: Trip fee of \$10 member/\$20 non-member benefits Fields Pond Audubon Center.

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. Here are the titles that the group will read and discuss during February and March. There will be no book group meeting in January. Please visit www.maineaudubon.org or call FPAC at 989-2591 to read a short overview of each book.

February 9, 2017

Wires, Linda R. *The Double-Crested Cormorant: The Plight of a Feathered Pariah*. 2014. 368pp.

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Childs, Craig. *Apocalyptic Planet: A Field Guide to the Future of the Earth*. 2013. 368pp.