

THE HARLEQUIN

York County Audubon

A Chapter of Maine Audubon

Autumn 2024

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

Let it Be Wild – by Rebekah Lowell

Though I love the summer-sweet aroma of cut grass, at the same time there is something about a lawnmower going over a yard that feels like a punch to the gut. I can't help but think of all the critters that don't have enough speed to get out of the way. How every flower downed is one less for a pollinator to drink from, how short grass lawns themselves are a contrived convention. Curated. Tamed. Domesticated. The exact opposite of wildness and all that wildness nourishes.

“If half of American lawns were replaced with native plants, we would create the equivalent of a 20-million-acre national park, nine times bigger than Yellowstone.” – Douglas Tallamy

It's peak Monarch season. They are actively molting, pupating and eclosing. Regardless, on a 20-minute drive between Biddeford and Arundel, I see at least six fields being actively hayed and high stocks of milkweed pummeled to the ground, shimmering in the sunlight. I know there are Monarchs on them. My heart sinks as I drive by. Habitat loss, and species loss, is everywhere.

Last spring, my yard and how it would be kept was left completely up to me for the first time ever. Most of my life, someone else has made the decision about when to mow, what to mow, and I had little or no say over it. So this year I completely embraced “no mow May” and my yard was knee high before the first mowing in June. Granted, by this point, I had to walk



through it first to be sure there were no Bobolinks or others nesting, but it was wonderful to see the American Goldfinches perched on dandelion fluff, dining on seeds. And in the following weeks, it didn't take long for my yard to sparkle at dusk with the most fireflies I've ever had. One early evening, I looked out my bedroom window and saw the biggest doe I've ever seen standing up to her knees in the middle of my lawn that now resembled a field. She twitched her ears, nibbled some grass, and after a few moments, wandered into the thicker brush, toward the woods. She felt like wonder personified.

My yard looks accidental but it's wildly intentional. I very much mean for things to be the way they are— wild and free. There's a house that I drive by daily that leaves half their front lawn un-mowed. Wildflowers and milkweed thrive in this half of their lawn. I smile at it when I drive by seeing the butterflies. This yard also reminds me of a conversation I recently had with my dentist where he proudly let me know his wife had left an area of their yard alone. She let it grow tall and turned it into a native meadow. He said they have more birds in their yard than ever before. And more fireflies, butterflies, and life in general.

Someone walked up to my door and wanted to spray my yard. I said no thank you several times before he plunged a chart into my hands showing me everything they could “protect” my yard from. This included mice, ants, ticks, and even bees. Bees! I told him no, that I don't spray for anything and never will. He proceeded to insist that their product was “organic” and safe. I told him if it's killing the bugs, it's hurting the birds too. It took another several moments before he finally realized my resolve. My heart was pounding. I hate confrontation, but on top of that, it bothered me to think that there are companies who are trying to eradicate bees, when we desperately need them.

Our yards can be a haven for the critters who are left, who are being pushed out from their homes because of “progress” and habitat loss. I'm listening to Nature's Best Hope by Douglass Tallamy on audio right now. It's both devastating and inspiring— discouraging that we've gotten ourselves to this place, heartbreaking to hear of all the tragic habitat loss we've caused, but hopeful to know we can do something about it. This take-action starts in our own circle of influence: our yards.

What can we do? We can delay mowing in the spring. (No Mow May) We can plant native plants. This has one of the biggest impacts. As you create pollinator gardens, think beyond just adding flowers and consider what kinds of plants you are adding. Maine Audubon, The Wild Seed Project, and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension are great places to start.

We can leave the leaves. Moths, insects, as well as other small critters need the leaf litter to successfully overwinter. Leaves create crucial habitat that overwintering moths need to cocoon in, as well as insulation for the permaculture and critters such as salamanders and frogs.

Don't pull milkweed. If common milkweed is overflowing your garden, you can try other species of milkweed, such as swamp milkweed or butterfly weed. Let some common milkweed stand if you do have to thin. (Check for eggs and caterpillars first.)

If we can reserve sections of our yard to wildness, we are helping to negate habitat loss. Set aside an area of your yard that you will let grow and flourish without disturbance. See what pops up, both flora and fauna alike. If we cared a little less about the careful tending and pruning of our yard and gave way to our wild side (you know you have one), the entire world would be better for it. Let your yard be wild. You just might love it.

Rebekah Lowell is an author, illustrator, designer, and educator, who helps others connect with nature through art. A homeschooling mother of two and survivor of domestic abuse, she is passionate about resiliency, freedom, and hope. She's also a member of the YCA Board. FMI: www.rebekahlowell.com

York County Audubon is delighted to welcome a new Director



Originally from northern New Jersey, David Nelson moved to Maine in 2019 and took up birding during the spring of 2020. He's interested in bioacoustics and local conservation, particularly of southern Maine's threatened grassland and freshwater wetland habitats. When he's not out looking for birds, he's backpacking and camping through the Maine and New Hampshire woods, hunting for moths and butterflies, or enjoying a good book.

YCA welcomes its New Members!

February - August

Carol and Ed Lambert	Lyman
Benjamin Liff and Yihan Zhou	Biddeford
Deborah McCarthy-Platz	Springvale
Beverley Soule	Kennebunkport
Scott Whiting and Lauren Cripps	Biddeford
Pamela B. Anderson	Old Orchard Beach

Shannon Cotter	Kennebunkport
Marilyn Seelye and Jeanne Costa	Wells
Donna Warner and Theo Rohrs	Arundel
Shannon Bennett & Patrick, Lillian and Cecelia Renckens	Saco
Susan McDevitt	Kennebunk
Nancy Wetzel	South Berwick
Joseph LeClerc	Wells
Colleen and Eric Mabry	Wells
Cassandra Lee Ericson Wolfe	Sanford
Carl Lakari	Saco
James O'Neil	York
Heather Thauer	Saco
Eli Tufts	Eliot
Emma Eicher	Wells
Richard Kelly	Old Orchard Beach
Jenna Scott	Saco
Mary Willette	Old Orchard Beach
Theo Zaralidou	Saco

YCAS OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

Bill Grabin, President	Kennebunk
Laurie Pocher, Vice Pres & MYBC	Ogunquit
Kathy Donahue, Treasurer	Kennebunk
Britney Fox, MYBC	York
Dan Gardoqui	Cape Neddick
David Doubleday, Programs	Kennebunk
David Nelson	Berwick
Doug Hitchcox	Windham
Heather Rutledge	Kittery
Marian Zimmerman	Biddeford
Marion Sprague, MYBC	Westbrook
Mary Bateman	Wells
Rebekah Lowell	Biddeford
Seth Davis	Bangor

For all upcoming events and general information,
please visit our website:

www.yorkcountyaudubon.org

And for the latest news, photos and updates,
please visit us on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/yorkcountyaudubon

For many years, YCA has annually offered the June Ficker Scholarship for Educators Week on famed Hog Island. Here's an account from our 2024 scholarship winner.

The day is cooling off as I reflect on my last night on Hog Island in Bremen, Maine. My stay on the island, run by the National Audubon Society's Seabird Institute, exceeded my expectations. In fact, it's been pretty sweet. I feel like a kid at summer camp as the staff and the volunteers from the Friends of Hog Island have created the perfect atmosphere for me during Educator's Week 2024.

Having very little background in birding or science did not stand in the way of my learning experience. Day one, I was greeted by a very enthusiastic Lindsey, a science teacher and staff member on the island, who was quick to point out a nesting osprey. After arriving on the island, we went out to explore the inner Muscongus Bay by boat. The number of bald eagle sightings was mind blowing. On the shore of a small rocky island in the middle of the bay, we spotted a mature eagle feasting on the carcass of a harbor seal. The staff leaders are very knowledgeable on their birds and helpful in getting us up to speed.

Having a background in video and photography, I had many opportunities to get fantastic images. The culture of the island and the beautiful scenery itself allows for many photo ops. On the all-day boat excursion to Eastern Egg Rock and Harbor Island, I almost filled an entire SD Card with photos and videos of puffins alone.

The workshops offered throughout the week were perfect for me. I learned the process of cyanotype print combining nature and a form of early photography printing. I learned about the rich history of the island and how it came to be what it is today. I even learned to slow myself down from my typical busy pace to a more "normal", relaxed pace.

In my time on the island, I met educators from all over the States. While our background and the age range of the students we teach varies, we all have the common goal of learning while immersing ourselves in nature. The island gives off calm vibes that almost subtly force you into living in the moment. I honestly cannot say enough of this experience. The people, the place, the things are just amazing. Reflecting on my stay, my new friends and my newly acquired serenity, I wonder if I found this place or it found me. Either way, I'm already brainstorming on how to get back here as this experience is something that will stay with me forever.



An Atlantic Puffin off Hog Island – photo by Lorraine Aromando

I teach courses in photojournalism and video production, and will be using my Hog Island videos and photos as media sources for my students. I wanted to provide some interesting footage of something that the students may not have seen before, and then have them use their critical thinking skills to put together a meaningful video as one of their very first projects. They will learn editing and storytelling skills, along with how to use the software. Overall, it was a fantastic and invaluable experience!

Lorraine Aromando teaches Video Production, Yearbook Publishing, and Photojournalism at Scarborough High School

Maine Young Birders Club Welcomes New Adventurers!

Calling all young adventurers and nature enthusiasts to discover the wonders that await you with the Maine Young Birders Club!

The Maine Young Birders Club is dedicated to fostering an interest in birding and natural history among children and young adults aged 11-18. Through bird walks, “naturalist ramblings,” workshops, presentations, and other activities, MYBC seeks to get youth outside in a fun and safe way by allowing them to learn about their natural surroundings with other like-minded youth.

Here’s the best part – **the first outing is completely FREE for new members!** It’s the perfect chance for you to get a taste of what we’re all about and decide if you’d like to join our adventurous crew.

Membership for the year is only \$20, but we invite you to experience one of our events. Registration for all events is required, so be sure to visit www.maineyoungbirders.org/join or scan the QR code to secure your spot. We’ll follow up with confirmation and logistics, including meetup and pickup times and locations.

Our next event is October 19, 2024 at the Center for Wildlife, a non-profit organization that has been rehabilitating wildlife for over 30 years. We will enjoy a fully guided field trip, where we can meet all of their non-releasable animal ambassadors and explore the interactive exhibits in the nature center.

Don’t miss out on this incredible opportunity to immerse yourself in nature, make new friends, and create lasting memories.



The 2025 Maine Birds Desk Calendar is on its way!

For many years, our former Board member, Marie Jordan, an avid birder and photographer, has produced a calendar and offered it for sale, graciously donating the calendars to YCA to support our educational programs.



It's a desk calendar in a 4" by 6" plastic case that opens into a stand to display each month. Each page features a great photo she took of a Maine bird. The cost is \$10 plus mailing costs. They're wonderful anywhere in the house, and also make great gifts! YCA tremendously appreciates your support for our programs, and Marie's continuing generosity. Please check our website for full details and to see how to place an order.



Note that images of the 2025 calendar were not yet available, but will be posted on our website.

The Christmas Bird Counts are Coming

Beginning on Christmas Day in 1900, the Audubon Society has been sponsoring Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) to help monitor the health and status of bird populations throughout North America. In that first year, there were 25 count circles with a total of 27 birders. Now, there are over 2,300 count circles each year with over 70,000 birders participating in locations stretching from Alaska to South America.

Each year, York County Audubon sponsors two counts. The Southern York County circle extends from Kittery to Ogunquit, while the Biddeford - Kennebunkport count circle reaches from Kennebunk to Saco. Each circle is carved into six or more territories. Each territory has a team that scours it during "count day" looking for all bird species, and recording the numbers seen of each. It can, at times, be a bit more art than science, as we attempt to count - but not double count - the birds we find. We also have supporters who monitor their home feeders during the day and contribute their totals.

About Covid: we had hoped that we could clearly state that covid restrictions would not be a concern this year. It seems that we can't say that. New variants are popping up which are even more transmissible, and there's no way to know at this point what the situation will be. So, we'll be urging people to take precautions, as we have since 2020.

The Southern York County CBC will be held on Monday, December 18th, while the Biddeford/Kennebunkport CBC will be on Saturday, December 30th. If you might like to find out about participating, please contact Monica Grabin at grabinmonica@gmail.com or 985-3342 for the Southern York County CBC, or Kathy Donahue at kadona11@roadrunner.com or 967-4102 for the Biddeford/Kennebunkport CBC.

Our 26th Annual Bird Seed Sale is coming! *Early Bird Pricing through 10/25*

Keep your feathered friends happy this winter by treating them to tasty and fresh premium-quality bird food and help support two of your favorite environmental organizations. Proceeds from our annual sale support programs of both York County Audubon and the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. A wide variety of types of seed and suet is available, with great pricing, especially if you order early. Additional



items this year include feeders, mealworm suet and Feather Friendly window markers to keep your birds safe. Early bird pricing is available if you place your order by 4 p.m. on October 25th. Order pick-up will be at the Wells Reserve on November 3rd (1-4) and 4th (10-1) with easy access and volunteers on hand to help load your car.

Please visit our website to view or print an order form.

***** Upcoming YCA Programs *****

There's no charge for our programs, but advance registration is required for watching via Zoom. Visit our website, yorkcountyaudubon.org, to sign up.

The Science of Watching, The Art of Seeing, and the Power of Nature Absorption – with Chris Lewey, Sharon Fisher and Jane Lounsbury - *Tuesday, October 15th at 7:00 pm – in-person at the Wells Reserve and via Zoom*

There are profound connections between humanity and our natural world, offering a refreshing perspective that can resonate deeply. We can connect



with Nature on many different levels. As Benjamin Franklin once said, “What signifies knowing the names, if you know not the nature of things?” Join us for a presentation on opening our eyes to new ways to appreciate the nature that surrounds us.

****** Please check our website or Facebook page for information on our program to be presented on Tuesday, Nov 19th ******

Remember, the best way to protect birds is to keep cats indoors!



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Join or renew online:
maineaudubon.org/join

Our community of members is integral to our success on behalf of Maine's diverse wildlife and habitat. When you join or renew your Maine Audubon membership, you ensure that work can continue.

Thank you!

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