

The Merganser

Mid-Coast
Audubon



Mid-Coast Audubon's mission is to promote long-term responsible use of natural resources through an informed membership, education, and community awareness

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 41, No. 1 - February 2017

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Winter Ducks

Winter is a joy here in Maine, especially if you live near the water, like I do, or if you participate in the Christmas Bird Counts. For me, winter has arrived when I look out the window and see the first Bufflehead or Hooded Merganser - these are my favorite winter ducks. Well, then there is the Red-breasted Merganser, Common Goldeneye, and Surf Scoter - they're favorites too! They all amaze and inspire.

Birding is an ongoing learning experience. Sparrows, gulls, warblers, sea ducks, winter ducks, shorebirds, not to mention raptors, water birds - the list goes on. How can you ever learn to identify each bird and tell one from another? Often they seem to look alike, but by looking longer and closer, you begin to see subtle differences. It's a slow, steady continual journey well worth taking. Let's have a look at a few winter ducks - Buffleheads, Mergansers, Goldeneyes, and Scoters.

Looking out the window at the cove, I see four tiny specks on the water. I suspect they are Buffleheads because of their

tiny size and habit to visit this cove. Binoculars up and sure enough they are two pairs of Buffleheads. If you have good eyesight, you can spot the white on the birds, another clue to identifying them. Spotting the white on a number of ducks is a key step to their identity.

For example, in the Bufflehead photo on the left, the white brush stroke behind the eye of the female contrasts with the dark body. The seeming black and white pattern of the two males is similarly striking *but not* the same or similar to the female. The white and black juxtaposition lead to Bufflehead, confirmed by binocular or scope views.



Six female and two male Bufflehead ducks



A female and a male Hooded Merganser

body and chest is white while the Hooded Merganser's is brown, with a black and white striped front and side chest. The black and white pattern is not the same.

Applying the "white rule" to the photo of the Hooded Mergansers, you could, at first glance, say the white and black pattern of the male is similar to the male Bufflehead. But hold on, the Bufflehead's lower

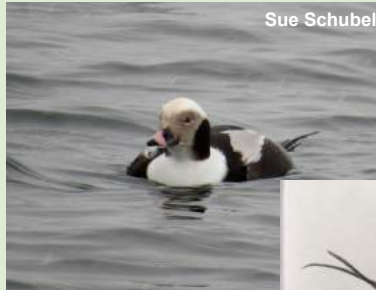
Continued on page 3



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

SUE SCHUBEL

At the moment a sharp January cold is biting at the window panes, feeling extra-cold after the exceptionally warm bouts of heavy rain. It's shaping up to be another warm January overall, perhaps a record-breaking warm. Still, it is winter, and the "ahwoos" of the Common Eiders, and the "oodle oo's" of the Long-tailed Ducks come floating over the bay. Amazing to think of floating all winter out there on the cold, salty sea, moving out to avoid the disturbance of hunters, moving back in to access the near shore food. The Eider is the largest duck in North America and the Long-tailed Duck is one of the most "underwater" of the ducks - able to go down 200 feet, and staying under 3-4 times as long as it is up!



Long-tailed Duck



are so pleased to have Gail and Steve joining us. As you will see in their bios - they are talented folks and devoted to birds.

I love the middle-of-winter opportunity to have a fresh start on things, and always choose a resolution or two for the new year. The best ones are the "daily do's" - something that takes just a few minutes, can be done anywhere, and should be done every day. Something for learning or

connection or meditation. The most successful ones have been "Appreciate the Weather" and "Ukulele." "Bird A Day" was great too - but after a couple months finding a new bird every day while still working proved a challenge. This

year's "daily do" is to doodle. Just a few moments of putting pen or pencil to paper. Anything, anywhere. Doodles which are sketches based on life give the opportunity for observation, distillation and interpretation. A great way to pay attention to the natural world! And so,

a daily do, of an oodle oo —

2017. A new year and new Board members to welcome! We

Don't forget to participate in the 20th Annual Great Backyard Bird Count - great fun for the whole family or class, or friends - February 17-20, 2017.

Visit <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> for more information!

CRITTER CORNER - DON REIMER

The largest of the passerines (songbirds), the Northern Raven is a perpetually fascinating creature. You may have noticed pairs of these thick-beaked, fantailed birds patrolling paved highways in search of road-killed birds and animals. Frequently these are mated adult pairs that maintain and defend the same territory year round.

Ravens are great opportunists that will eat practically everything including carrion, rodents, insect, grains, small reptiles and birds, berries, and garbage including paper, colored glass and plastic. They also have been known to prey on sick and injured animals.

During the colder months, Ravens, Crows and Jays rely on cached food items that are strategically hidden for later consumption. A super-sized hippocampus of the raven

brain serves as a powerful long-term memory center. Some studies indicate that these birds can successfully recover cached items 80-90% of the time. Ravens also raid the caches of other species.

Despite their thick shaggy coat of feathers, ravens must boost daily caloric intake to survive and stay warm under frigid conditions. Ravens also have a unique ability to raise their metabolism slightly when temperatures drop.

Over a period of several days, I watched a huge male raven as he methodically consumed a road-killed Barred Owl corpse. Grasping the owl tightly, the raven's early menu choice was the fat- and nutrient-rich brain. Next he focused on the owl's breast and backsides. With overnight temperatures in the low teens, the carcass was rock-hard, requiring sustained effort to chisel away bits of frozen flesh. When the Raven's feeding cycle ended, the owl's bones were left to support other winter dwelling animals.



Northern Raven feasting on road-killed Barred Owl



The remains . . .

Winter Ducks. . . cont'd.

For winter ducks, beside the “where’s the white” rule, which is fully detailed in a series of laminated brochures, *Waterfowl ID Series*, by Kevin McGowan of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, there are other hints to identification to consider. Size, bill, shape, color, diving versus dabbling, habitat or location, and behavior.

For example, using the Bufflehead and Hooded Merganser photos that we looked at, check the beaks. The Hooded has a long, thin beak while the Bufflehead has a short, flattish beak - see photo below.



Bufflehead - female

Continuing on with Mergansers, on the Bunker Hill Christmas Bird Count, I always look forward to seeing Common Mergansers in the St. George River in Warren. Compared to the Hooded Merganser the Common is tank-like and vastly different in

color but note that both have the long, slender bill. Also note the white and dark shapes and their contrast.

The photos at right and the ones below are good examples of “where’s the white.” Start with the head, then the neck, body and tail. As you can see from the photos, the Common Merganser and Red-breasted Merganser males can look similar - both dark heads, both long slender red bills, both large bodied with white. But on the Common the white goes down the neck without interruption to the chest; the Red-breasted’s does not. Try yourself on the Goldeneye photos - think of the shape of the white and where it is.

For the Scoters below, white is key, though there is not much of it, especially on the Black and the White-winged Scoters. Even in the female Surf and White-winged, the white in the wing is key; one has it; the other does not.

Head out to your favorite lake, river, or coastal body of water and practice this “where is the white” and see how you do.

Juanita Roushdy, an avid birder, wishes she had more time to watch and study birds.



Common Merganser - female, top and male, bottom



Red-breasted Merganser - male, left, female, right



Barrow's Goldeneye - male, left and female, right



Common Goldeneye - male, left and female, right



White-winged Scoter - left: female; right; male.

Photos are from Google images unless indicated otherwise.



Surf Scoter - female, left and male, right



Black Scoter - female, left and male, right



Compare the white shapes and locations on these two male Mergansers.

Keith Carver

Calendar of Events

Free bird walks and programs; donations are welcome to help defray costs.

Program chair: Kathy Cartwright 832-5584. Field trip chair: John Weinrich 563-2930

MARCH

Field trip: Saturday, March 18

Biddeford Pool

Depart Hannaford's parking lot in Damariscotta at 7 a.m.

Program: Thursday, March 16 at 7 p.m.

Camden Public Library

Imagine the Maine Woods National Park - The award-winning photography team of Lee Ann Szelog and Thomas Mark Szelog guide you on an extraordinary journey to one of the last, great, unprotected wilderness areas in the country. The multimedia presentation features the music of folk singer Pete Seeger.

APRIL

Field trip: Saturday, April 15

Local birding/Damariscotta River Association/local area.

Meet at Damariscotta River Association Farm at 7:00 a.m.

Program: Thursday, April 20 at 7 p.m.

Camden Public Library

Local birder, photographer and *Free Press* columnist Don Reimer celebrates the corvid family, which includes Ravens, Crows and Jays - some of Maine's most intelligent and resourceful birds. Illustrated by Don's original photos, the talk will focus on corvids' unique traits, life habits and intriguing behaviors.

Field trip: Saturday, April 29

Popham Beach

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford's parking lot at 7 a.m. or at the Park

MAY

Field trip: Saturday, May 13

International Bird Day

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford's parking lot at 7 a.m. or bird alone.

Field trip: Tuesday, May 16

Evergreen Cemetery/Capisic Pond

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford's parking lot at 7 a.m.

Field trip: Friday, May 19

Sears Island, Searsport

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford's parking lot at 7 a.m. or Reny's in Belfast one hour later.

Field trip: Wednesday, May 24

Viles Arboretum, Augusta

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford's parking lot at 7 a.m.

Field trip: Saturday, May 27

Monhegan Island Spring Trip

Make ferry reservations through Monhegan Boat Lines, prior to trip.

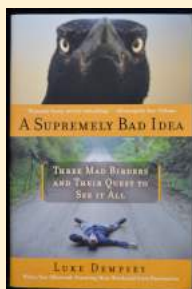
Meet at Monhegan Ferry dock, Port Clyde at 6:45 a.m.

Check our website, <http://maineaudubon.org/midcoast/calendar/> for updates on trips and programs. Thank you.

READING CORNER - GAIL PRESLEY

Just as gardeners spend the winter reading seed catalogs, the colder months are a good time to read about exotic birding adventures. I recently went birding vicariously through *A Supremely Bad Idea*, *Three Mad Birders and Their Quest to See it All* by Luke Dempsey.

This travelogue follows three birders from New York on their comical adventures to six of the birding meccas in the southern 48 - Arizona, Florida, Michigan, the Pacific Northwest, and Texas. This type of book will help you build your birding bucket list of places you *need* to go, and Dempsey does it with endearing playfulness. He and his friends have a way of turning every trip into a sitcom while making us laugh at the stereotypical birder in all of us.



In their quest to see some of the rarest birds in the country, Dempsey and friends did their homework and put together some amazing trips. Despite all their funny antics you'll learn about good birding resources, the value in contacting local bird experts, and how generous bird aficionados are in sharing their knowledge and excitement (and sometimes their kitchen windows and backyards).

The book will have you chuckling all the way through, from their lost-in-translation interactions with locals, eclectic lodging experiments, and their bicker and banter over driving directions and bird identifications. Dempsey's cynical view of his fellow humans is balanced with his wonder and awe of birds and wild nature. This not-so-serious book will have you asking yourself "Where next?"



Subtle Sparrows Quiz

1. What is our most common and widespread sparrow?
2. How are House Sparrows related to other American sparrows?
3. What other birds are included in the Sparrow family, Emberizidae?
4. What habits do all sparrows have in common?

5. What sparrow visits Maine only in the winter?
6. Name our three most similar sparrows (genus *Melospiza*).
7. Which large sparrow has a rich, whistled song in the springtime?
8. What is the habitat preference of a Field Sparrow?
9. Which shy sparrow is often heard but seldom seen, in the undergrowth of woods?
10. Which sparrow prefers altered landscapes such as parks and gardens?

Oh, Those Die-Hard CBCers . . .



Annual Christmas Bird Counts have been held since 1905 and are intended, with other studies, to gauge the health of North American birds. Mid-Coast Audubon conducts three - Bunker Hill, Damariscotta-Pemaquid, and Thomaston-Rockland. In 2016, despite driving snow and wind, 56 hardy souls counted every bird they saw!

Pemaquid-Damariscotta CBC, December 17

The Pemaquid-Damariscotta count was held during a heavy snowstorm. Nineteen observers toughed it out from dawn to dusk. Weather withstanding, 63 species and 4832 individuals were recorded, average for this count.

Seabird numbers were way down. Only one Red-necked Grebe was seen during count week; the historic high was 164 in 1996.

Don Riemer and Steve Barnes found three Wood Ducks and eight Ring-necked Ducks in open water on Muscongus Bay. The only Wood Duck previously found in count history was a single bird in 1955; Ring-necked Ducks have been found only twice before.

For raptors, only one Bald Eagle was found versus the usual 10 to 15. One Merlin was in the Friendship portion of the count circle, only the second record on the count. Five Barred Owls represent a new high.

Passerine numbers were average. Tufted Titmice, Robins and Dark-eyed Juncos recorded new highs. Two Fox Sparrows and an Eastern Towhee, found by Tom Arter and Jeff Cherry, were unusual - the Towhee only the second in count history. The most unusual bird was a leucistic Blue Jay, almost all white with a few blue highlights, found by a feeder watcher in Bremen.



Snow Bunting

4,782 individuals, a circle record in both categories.

Rivers, streams and larger bodies of water were mostly frozen over with the Great Salt Bay providing minimal open water for waterfowl and gulls. Along with many other species seen, the

Common Goldeneye was the most plentiful duck recorded. A single elegant Gadwall, an uncommon duck usually seen in migration, remained in the open waters of the Great Salt Bay and Oyster Creek feeding with other dabbling species.

The perky Blue Jay, with tight family bonds, was the most plentiful species in the circle. Eleven Red-bellied Woodpeckers continue to expand their territory in the area. Upper East Pond Road provided ample food for a flock of 100 plus Tree Sparrows, located by Dennis McKenna, out of the 266 counted. Winter finches were scarce. However, a flock of 11 Evening Grosbeaks was found in Whitfield.

The raptor count remains relatively constant - highlighted by 19 Bald Eagles and a single Northern Goshawk.

A single Hermit Thrush and Lapland Longspur were also recorded this day.



Lapland Longspur

Tenth Annual Bunker Hill CBC, December 19



Eastern Towhee

December 19th was the 10th anniversary of the Bunker Hill CBC that began in 2006. It was a blustery cold day but clear; travel by foot and car was pleasurable. Seventeen birders nevertheless bucked the cold to record 59 species and

Thomaston-Rockland, December 31, 2016

Despite a general scarcity of winter finches, the Thomaston-Rockland Count produced a record high tally of 76 species and 6,268 individual birds. Eleven species were represented by only a single specimen. No waxwings were found, but strong numbers of American Robins (420) were taking advantage of local crabapples, berries and rosehips. Six Eastern Bluebirds were also recorded. *Continued on page 7*

We're so happy about our new board members Stephen Barnes and Gail Presley!

A warm welcome...



Steve grew up in Rochester, NY. Although educated as a biologist, he could not tolerate the politics of academia. So, he became a

potter. He and his wife worked together as studio potters for 30 years, 10 in Pennsylvania and then moved to Tenants Harbor in 1990. They continued doing craft fairs and mail order while keeping their showroom stocked. Steve has been a birder and naturalist his whole life. He also serves on the board of the Jackson Memorial Library in Tenants Harbor.



Gail Presley came to love nature and the outdoors at an early age. She earned her B.S. in

Environmental and Systematic Biology at California Polytechnic State University where she also started birding. She began working as a wildlife manager in California, joined the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and over a 22-year career served as a wildlife biologist, environmental scientist and environmental program manager.

After moving to Maine in 2008, Gail became the Executive Director of the Rockland-based Georges River Land Trust. Upon retiring in 2015, Gail decided to spend more time exploring the beauty of bird life everywhere. Her bird bucket list for 2017 includes Everglades National Park, Cozumel, and New Zealand.



Welcome New, Renewing, and Rejoining Members!

Chris and Anne Frost, Round Pond
Linda G. Mills, Newcastle
Diane E. Goddard, Friendship
Wesley Hutchins, Swanville
Paul Mazur, Northport
Kathleen Nordstrom, Alna
Brooke Pacy, Waldoboro
Martha B. Shaw, Owls Head

How many birds will you find?



Quiz Answers



1. Song Sparrow, "probably not far from where you are right now." - Pete Dunne
2. They are unrelated, in a completely different family, Passeridae, Old World Sparrows. Introduced to the U.S., it is abundant worldwide, almost always found near manmade structures.
3. Towhees, Juncos, some Buntings, and Longspurs
4. They live and feed mostly on the ground, and have thick bills adapted for eating seeds in winter and insects in summer.
5. Tree Sparrow
6. Song, Lincoln's, and Swamp
7. Fox Sparrow
8. Brushy, weedy but not mown fields
9. White-throated Sparrow
10. Chipping Sparrow

Mid-Coast Audubon

Organized December 6, 1969

a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization

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The Merganser is published three times a year in February, May, November. **News items or photos are welcome.**

Deadline for next issue is April 15!

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A Monhegan Birding Legend Remembered



Tom and his wife Josephine



A Tribute to Tom Martin - by Don Reimer

For six decades, expectant birders debarking from the *Laura B* ferry at the Monhegan harbor dock would utter a common refrain: "I wonder what's in Tom's yard?" They referred to Tom Martin, a lively, bigger-than-life New York City guy who spent about a month on the island each spring and fall.

Tom was the unofficial grandfather of birding on Monhegan. His narrow-framed yard was heavily scattered with bird seed and halved oranges on bush tops to greet spring-arriving Baltimore and Orchard Orioles. He was a master film photographer who set up photo blinds on the premises. Tom provided 27 bird photo plates for the three-volume *The Audubon Master Guide to Birding*.

In real ways he alerted the birding public to the many rare sightings that have graced Monhegan. His definitive photos of Clay-colored Sparrows and assorted out-of-range species became a revelation to folks that had previously questioned his unusual reports. Along with Peter Vickery and iconic Maine ornithologist Ralph Palmer, Tom initiated the first Monhegan Christmas Bird Count in 1978.



Tom on his 90th birthday with balloons!

He was a pioneering developer of macro photographic techniques as well, capturing intriguing images of the delicate inner structures of flowers and grains. Tom was also a lifelong student of wild mushrooms and other island plants.

Working as a highly skilled tool and die maker in his younger years, Tom had made it clear to his city boss that he would need time off each May and September for extended stays on Monhegan. Tom added that, if this arrangement was not possible, he would simply seek a different job! Thankfully, his boss responded favorably.

When Tom passed at age 94 in December 2016, he left a legacy of deep friendships and generous hospitality to those who ventured into his island domain. Sharing knowledge of nature was his true life passion. Tom

recounted a time once in Manhattan when he sat on a park bench and noticed a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that had landed on a nearby tree trunk. Turning toward the lady sitting next to him, he pointed to the tree and exclaimed, "Sapsucker!" She replied, "Get away from me, you pervert!"

Tom's ashes will travel to Monhegan this June. He will finally be back at the place he loved and where he belongs.


Die-Hard CBCers - cont'd . . .

Although most fresh water surfaces were frozen, participants discovered 15 species of dabbling and diving ducks along some riverfronts and ocean bays. Highlight waterfowl included 3 Northern Pintails, 2 Green-winged Teal, and single Greater and Lesser Scaup. An expanding population gap between Mallards and Black Ducks continues: 692 Mallards to 93 Black Ducks. A vagrant Snow Goose was found among a flock of Canada Geese in Rockland. On January 2, two far-flung Pink-footed Geese joined the growing flock. As for count protocols, these geese were designated as a "Count Week Only" species –

i.e., any species not recorded on the Count Day, but seen within 3 days before or after the count date. Nesting in Greenland and Iceland, Pink-footed Geese generally cross the Atlantic to winter throughout Britain and northwestern Europe.

Other count highlights included 20 Evening Grosbeak, 5 Rusty Blackbirds, and 20 Snow Buntings and a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. We appreciate the volunteer effort put forth to sustain the 117-year legacy of the Christmas Bird Count, the world's longest running bird database.

Dennis McKenna, John Weinrich, and Don Reimer

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Evening Grosbeak



Don Reimer

14th Annual Down East Spring Birding Festival

May 25-29, 2017

Cobscook Bay Area

<https://www.cclc.me/page/2-1314/birdfest-registration>

19th Annual Acadia Birding Festival June 1-4, 2017

Mount Desert Island
Bar Harbor, Maine
(Acadia National Park)

Keynote Speakers 2017

[Pete Dunne](#), [Laura Erickson](#), and [Luke Seitz](#)

<http://www.acadiabirdingfestival.com>

Don't forget . .

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 17-20, 2017

M I D - C O A S T A U D U B O N



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