

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

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Vermilion Flycatcher Visits Hog Island!

Imagine you're a remote camera operator in England with your eyes peeled on your screen watching every move on a nest and its surrounding area in Maine. You have millions of people depending on you to catch every breathing moment of the recently arrived returning pair of ospreys, Rachel and Steve.

They come and go busy housecleaning and fishing. You've been watching the screen for hours and *wait a minute* what's that tiny blob of red in the corner of the screen. You haven't seen that before. You zoom in with your high-definition remote lens. You keep the camera on this sparkling jewel. What is it? You keep watching. It stays for 46 seconds, looking around, trying to get its bearings. Then, poof, its gone!

The two cameras that monitor the two osprey nests at Hog Island, one on the island and one on the mainland - 24

hours, 365 days a year - are operated remotely by volunteer camera operators worldwide through a generous donation by the Annenburg Foundation. They can be seen at www.explore.org.



The tiny blob is, to the delight of Maine birdwatchers, a Vermilion Flycatcher, normally found no closer than the southwestern United States. It is a tiny bird - 5 to 5 1/2 inches. It perches 90 percent of the time sallying out to catch flying insects and returning to its perch. This is the second record of a Vermilion sighting, but the *first*

photo/video record of one. The other sighting was in 1994.

But wait, as if the Vermilion Flycatcher was not exciting enough, a few days later another rare sighting for Maine birders - a Fieldfare, found by keen birder Jeff Cherry on his way to work!

Continued on page 4



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

SUE SCHUBEL

Oh, the wood frogs are wildly quacking their come-hithers, day and night. Joined in the velvet dusk by spring peepers and woodcock, and in the day by returning songbirds! What an exciting time of year to come together for fun and profit. I am in a frenzy to finish up the social attraction tools we now offer through Audubon. These decoys and sounds will hopefully sway birds to come to safe habitat through the power of peer pressure.

Seabirds are particularly drawn to be in the company of their kind. Put up a mirror and a male cardinal will drive himself crazy

trying to drive away the intruder. Put up a mirror and a murre will snuggle right up to be next to its reflection; a puffin will try to bill with this new friend. The sights and sounds of an active colony tell a newcomer that this is a good place to be. Group living provides many eyes and ears to watch for predators and also to search for highly mobile food in the



vast ocean around the colony. Data sharing without the internet!

Audubon received a donation of the Mad River Decoy Company this winter – they were the

pioneers of lightweight, durable decoys made with roto-molding canoe technology. We moved ovens and molds from Vermont in a snowstorm and installed them in our Bremen barn. So far orders have included Crested Terns to Australia; Common Terns to New York, Netherlands, and Switzerland; Least Terns to Louisiana; Aleutian Terns to Alaska, and Black-footed Albatross to Oahu! It is thrilling to help projects around the world to succeed!

If you seek company for yourself, might I suggest coming on one of our chapter field trips? Our leaders are quite attractive, and will provide valuable information. See our field trip listings on page 4.



Don Reimer and Dennis McKenna



CRITTER CORNER - DON REIMER

Of Moose and Men

Let's face it: it is always a special treat to see a moose. Maine is fortunate to support the largest population of moose in the lower 48 states – about 76,000 animals in a 2012 census. Beyond their obvious iconic appeal, moose serve the dubious distinction of being prized as quarry for hunters, tourists and Nature observers alike. In recent years, the Maine moose herd has faced mortal challenges from a tiny parasitic insect – the winter tick.

As they brush through forest vegetation, moose become easy hosts for ticks that lie in wait on fall vegetation. Ticks can number into the thousands on a single moose, and adult female ticks can expand to the size of a grape and engorge themselves with up to four milliliters of blood. Moose calves are most susceptible to "exsanguination," the total loss of blood volume. Annual tick mortality for Maine and



Don Reimer



New Hampshire moose calves is estimated at around 70%. Biologist teams from both states have captured a total of 123 moose cows and calves, attaching GPS and other electronic monitoring gear. Vermont plans to collar about 60 animals. Maine IF&W biologists have reduced the fall 2017 moose harvest limit to help compensate for tick-related mortalities.

Scientists have attributed rising tick populations to globally warming temperatures and shorter winters that promote longer-term survival of ticks. Humans also suffer from tick bites and related bouts of Lyme disease. Some tick avoidance tactics: avoid wooded and brushy trails; walk in the center of pathways; bathe or shower after coming indoors (within 2 hours if possible); after outings, conduct a full body check for ticks; examine your outdoor gear and outside pets thoroughly; tumble clothes in a dryer on high heat for 10 minutes to

kill ticks on clothing.

To learn more about ticks found in Maine, including a map of their expansion, explore <http://www.ticksinmaine.com/ticks>

In the Beak - *Louis Bevier*

Let's take a look at bird's beaks and how they use them. An astonishing array of bill shapes have evolved in birds from heavy and blunt seed crunchers on finches to hypodermic needle-like projections on hummingbirds for probing flowers, from paddle-like spoons for filtering muck on a spoonbill to Swiss-army knife can-openers on parrots that can peel and pry almost anything. There are spears, meat-ripping hooks, and asymmetrical and crossed-prying devices (crossbills).

Take some time next outing to study the variety of bills on birds and how they use them. The photographs in this article are a sample that I hope will inspire you to look more closely at beaks and bird behavior. Here is one in-depth look at the bills of a common Maine bird, the crossbill.



Red Crossbills with left-handed cross (foreground, yellower bird) and right-handed cross (red bird).



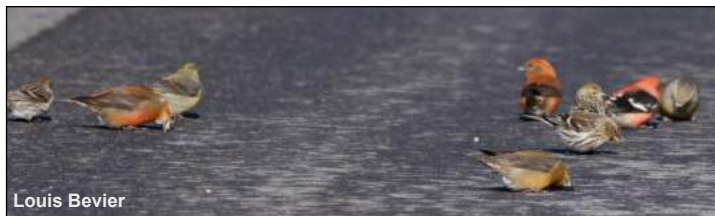
Red Crossbill showing its spoon-shaped tongue tip after licking salt. This bird has a left-handed cross and that is the side of its head that is turned to the ground for licking the surface.

because most body traits (morphological traits) exhibit continuous variation, e.g. a range of curvature from more to less or a range of length from shorter to longer in a population. In crossbills, the lower mandible crosses either to the left of the straighter upper mandible (left-handed) or crosses to the right (right-handed). It is true that crossbill beaks vary in size depending on the size of the cones they favor wherever they occur, and that is widely across the northern hemisphere wherever pines also occur. This has led to some fascinating research on the types of crossbills (flight calls link forms) and even a recently split species, the South Hills Crossbill (*Loxia sinesciurus*) described by Craig Benkman. These birds inhabit two

Crossbills and their crossed bills are something unusual among birds, unusual because they exhibit a discrete dimorphism. That is they come in two forms showing left or right handedness. This is unusual

mountain ranges in southern Idaho and look like standard Red Crossbills.

Red Crossbills and White-winged Crossbills are the only two species in Maine. As can be seen in the photo of Red Crossbills, the ratio of left to right crossing bills in that species is about even. But in White-winged Crossbills the ratio is 3:1, with about three times as many regardless of sex having bills that cross to the right. Why? Nobody is sure.



Red Crossbills licking the pavement. Also Pine Siskin, Common Redpoll, and White-winged Crossbill.

Last year, I watched a group of both crossbill species and other finches bending over and "picking" at the dry, clean pavement along the Long Falls Dam Road. A closer look revealed they were licking at the whitish encrustations left from salt

treatments. These finches have a well-known attraction to salt. Grit and clays off to the side of the road are also used by finches, but the main attraction is salt along treated winter roads. Salt licks put out for livestock have attracted these finches and have been used to bait them for trapping. I'm not sure why they go for the salt (aid in digestion?). These birds do not need excess sodium chloride for normal health according to some studies; so the attraction remains uncertain. One interesting observation was that the birds appeared to always tip their head to the side that their bills crossed as they lapped at puddles and salts.

Continued on page 5.



Black Guillemot with its favorite prey, Rock Gunnel (*Pholis gunnelus*).



Black-billed Cuckoo with a Spring Fishfly (*Chauliodes rastricornis*).

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

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/Capisc 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.

JUNE

Field Trip: Thursday, June 8

Belgrade Lakes/Augusta Airport

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford at 7 a.m. or meet at Airport Cemetery

Field Trip: Thursday, June 15

Kennebunk Plains

Depart Damariscotta Hannaford at 7 a.m.

AUGUST

Field Trip: Thursday, August 31

Pine Point and Biddeford Pool

Leave Damariscotta River Association at 7 a.m.

SEPTEMBER

Annual Lobster Bake at Hog Island, Saturday, September 2, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Boat leaves boathouse at 10 a.m. or noon. Return boat leaves Hog Island at 3 p.m. \$50 per person. This is our fundraiser for the year.

Program: Thursday, September 21 at 7 p.m.

Camden Public Library

"Bat Exceptionalism: Prepare to Be in Awe of Bats" presented by Annie Kassler of Maine Bat Education. Bats not only make vast ecological contributions to the health of the planet; their remarkable abilities and unique physiology may help unlock an assortment of medical mysteries that might one day benefit humans



Field Trip: Saturday, September 23

Monhegan Island

Leave Port Clyde on 7 a.m. ferry.

OCTOBER

Field Trip: Thursday, October 5

Popham Beach

Leave Damariscotta Hannaford at 7 a.m.

Program: Thursday, October 19 at 7 p.m.

Camden Public Library

"Owls: Life After Dark in the Avian World" presented by Tom Arter. This program is an introduction to the owls of Maine and explores their many adaptations that allow them to survive here. Tom is currently serving on the board of the Damariscotta River Association.



Field Trip: Saturday, October 21

Green Point Preserve

Leave Damariscotta Hannaford at 7 a.m.

NOVEMBER

Field Trip: Saturday, November 4

Sabbatus Pond

Leave Damariscotta Hannaford at 7 a.m.

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

Camden Public Library

"The Art of Science: Building a Field Guide"—presented by Jonathan Alderfer, art instructor at Hog Island. For ten years he was National Geographic's resident birding expert at their headquarters in Washington, D.C. Join co-author and co-illustrator of National Geographic's newest edition of *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*.



Vermilion Flycatcher - continued from page 1

The Fieldfare is the first documented sighting in Maine. It has been most obliging, foraging with a group of American Robins and coming out often enough into the open that all with scopes had good views. Fieldfare is a member of the thrush family and is a European and Asian bird, wintering in the United Kingdom. A real treat, indeed to see it here in Maine. Thank you, Jeff.

Fieldfare



Jeff Cherry

We have no field trips or programs during July.

For updates on trips and programs, check our website,

<http://maineaudubon.org/midcoast/calendar/>

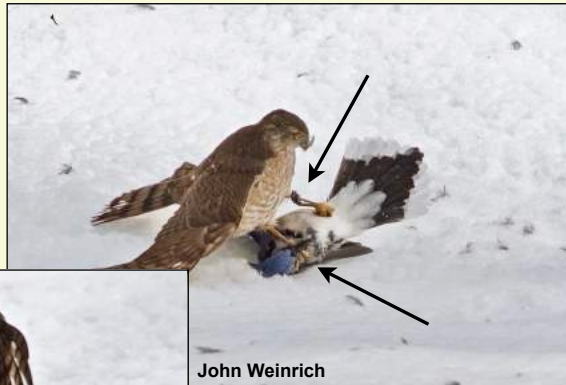
Thank you.

Struggle for life and death - predator and prey



John Weinrich

Note in all three photos, the blue jay never lets go of the sharp-shinned hawk's legs. In the photo at right, the blue jay holds one foot with his foot and the Sharpie's other foot is held in the jay's beak even to the end!



John Weinrich



John Weinrich

Many's the time, while looking at our feeders or out birding, we've witnessed the life and death struggle between predator and prey. Sometimes it happens so fast, there is no time to take a photo, let alone a video.

But as they say, timing is everything. Here are a few photos capturing this moment forever and giving us additional information on strategies used to survive or kill. Needless to say in the three struggles captured here none ended well for the prey! Send us your shots of such struggles.



Keith Carver



Keith Carver

A Merlin in mid-air snaps the neck of the snow bunting and continues on its way with its now lifeless prey.



Louis Bevier



Louis Bevier

A northern shrike comes in for the kill of a hapless vole, then proceeds to drag it out of its hiding spot and fly away with the vole in its beak

In the Beak - continued from page 3

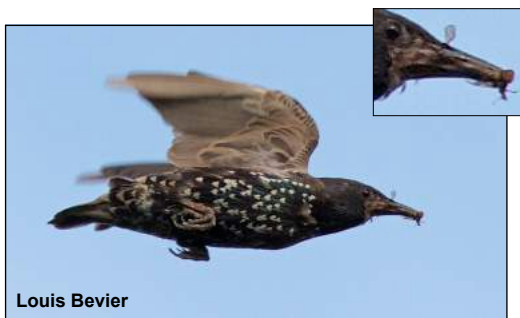
A few other examples of bill use and adaptation are shown here. Next time you look at a bird through your scope or binoculars focus on the bill. What do you notice?

Louis Bevier is research associate in the Biology Department of Colby College and is on the Maine Birds Records Committee. To report rare birds visit <https://sites.google.com/site/mainebirdrecordscommittee/official-list-of-maine-birds>



Louis Bevier

Semipalmated Sandpiper with *Alitta virens* (= *Nereis virens*) a large and jawed polychaete worm.



Louis Bevier

European Starling captures flying cornfield ants (*Lasius* sp.) in mid-air.



Louis Bevier

Eastern Kingbird tossing a dragonfly (*Aeshna* sp.). The dragonfly appears to be a male and may be a Black-tipped Darner (*Aeshna tuberculifer*).



Vermilion Flycatcher and Fieldfare range maps

As you can see from the map at right, the Vermilion Flycatcher at Hog Island was well out of its normal range. So, too the Fieldfare; the pink shading in the map above indicates rare/accidental. Both are a long way from home. Who knows you may sight either as they continue their journey.



Welcome New, Renewing, and Rejoining Members!

Pamela and Loren Brown, West Rockport
Greg Detmer, Bremen
Carmine DeStefano, Rockland
Regina Knox, Alna
Michael Moore, Naples, FL
Terri Sebring, Brooks
Benjamin Vail, Tenants Harbor
Michele Walsh, Bristol

Ospreys Rachel and Steve

A new family has moved into the Hog Island neighborhood right across the water on the mainland from Hog Island old-timers Rachel and Steve. The newcomers have been dubbed Mr. and Mrs. BH (boathouse) by the remote camera operators who monitor the nests. Visit www.explore.org to watch them.



Peter Vickery, 1949-2017

As mentioned in the eulogy, friends are finishing Peter's book *Maine Birds*. Gifts can be made for book design and art work costs to:

Birds of Maine Book Fund
Camden National Bank
111 Main Street
Richmond, ME 04357

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Deadline for next issue is October 15!

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Peter Vickery Remembered

Eulogy - by Scott Weidensaul

It was my great joy and privilege to work with Peter as an instructor at Hog Island for the past 15 years or more, and so my memories of him are bound tightly together with that place -- daybreak bird walks helping enthusiastic beginners learn to use their binoculars and tell herring gulls from great black-backs, boat trips to Egg Rock, watching Peter pull a Virginia rail out of the marsh and, like a magician, parade it among the feet of delighted campers . . .

Some of my richest memories are of our annual migration sessions on Monhegan Island, a place Peter knew intimately -- so much so that even when the birding was poor, you could count on his group to pull some wonderful rarity out of the thickets at the Ice Pond or the meadow at Lobster Cove, even though the rest of us had thrashed those places thoroughly and barely stirred a feather.

On such trips he was always Field Marshall Vickery, dividing and deploying the troops where the birds would be best -- and barking orders when necessary. (Returning from one excursion, everyone dozing on the boat -- including Peter, I thought. But he snapped to and singled out one odd gull from the zillion that were on the water. With a quarterdeck bellow that could be heard by lobster boats a mile away, he roared, "*Sabine's gull!* Turn this bleeping boat around *now!*" And by heavens, we did. . . .

It is a great grief to me that he did not live to see the completion of his magnum opus, *The Birds of Maine*, on which he worked until literally his final days. I am honored to be part of the team of friends and colleagues who, with Barbara, are seeing the project through to completion -- a team he assembled when it was clear his time was limited

This past year, the distance between Maine and Pennsylvania has rarely seemed greater, but Peter and Barbara were often in my thoughts. His voice on the phone, or his email in my in-box, was always a reason for celebration, even when the news was hard. And even when the news was bad . . . every email, every phone call,

was an occasion for Peter to share something lovely and wild he'd seen -- the rich late-day light at Seawall Beach on a walk with Barbara, Bohemian waxwings in the yard, the first bird song at the end of winter, or a peregrine over Scarborough Marsh snatching a Bonaparte's gull from the air "like picking an apple," he told me. There was no self-pity, no complaints. "I don't feel depressed or as if this is all unfair," he wrote last fall. "It's just a reality, not someone else's fault. Helps being a biologist, I guess."

Although we were in touch by phone and email up to the end, my last time with Peter was this past September, when together we led a week-long Hog Island migration session. Peter's energy was flagging a bit, though I doubt most people noticed. The birds were good, but not epic, and we had a happy group of campers. You could see Peter almost visibly swell when we pulled into the

wharf at Monhegan, and damned if for the next 24 hours his group wasn't always the one to find the best birds on the island.

Back on the mainland, we drove the group to the blueberry barrens at Clarry Hill, hoping for a few raptors, and hit a huge wave of broadwings, kettles all over the sky, hundreds and hundreds of birds streaming south. Peter was ecstatic, vibrating like a plucked string. . .

A few days later, camp was over and we were all in Bar Harbor for the Maine Audubon pelagic . . . It was my last day in the field with Peter, and a memory I will cherish, especially the sight of him up at the bow of that ridiculously fast whalewatch boat, racing over the waves at 35 knots chasing down a skua, Peter's hair whipping in the wind, and an absolutely ferocious grin of excitement and delight on his face.

A few days later, when his doctor cautioned him against overexertion, Peter told him, "That's the tonic I need."

For all those who knew him and loved him, Peter *was* the bracing tonic. Let me say one more time what we could never say often enough: Peter, we love you, and the world, for all its birds, is a less joyful place without you.


See box on page 6.



Peter under the apple tree at Damariscotta River Association



Peter and Scott at Weskeag Marsh in September 2016

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Annual Lobster Bake at Hog Island

Save the date

Saturday, September 2, 10 - 3

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>

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