If I close my eyes, I can still see my very first Brown Creeper. It was the middle of winter and I was driving through the older part of a small northern Colorado town, where large old cottonwood trees lined the wide snow-covered street. The movement of a tiny brown sprite caught my eye as it flew from partway up one tree down to the base of its neighbor. If it hadn’t flown with such deliberate intention, I might have mistaken it for a small leaf blowing in the wind, but I saw it clearly enough to identify it as a creeper.

From the base of the second tree, the creeper jerkily worked its way around the tree, probing for insects while gradually spiraling up the trunk, using its stiff tail as a brace in the manner of a woodpecker. Upon reaching the lowest branches, which were about 10 feet above ground, the creeper flew down to the base of the next tree in line, and started its spiraling upward hunt again.

The Brown Creeper is one of the smallest birds in North America, weighing in at a mere 7–10 grams — about the same as half a dozen paper clips. Yet this tiny forest dweller is found only where the trees are big and old. Why does such a small bird need the largest trees? The answer, not surprisingly, is related to its lifestyle — its feeding and nesting.

Large old trees have bark that is deeply furrowed. Spiders and insects find a home within those complex furrows, and Brown Creepers feed on those spiders and insects. This abundant food supply is especially critical in winter, when the creeper is one of the smallest birds to brave northern winters — in fact, it’s one of the smallest vertebrates to do so. Smaller even than the diminutive, seed-eating chickadee, the creeper must find enough insect prey to keep its internal furnace stoked. Like all small animals, creepers are at a distinct disadvantage in cold weather, as they have a relatively greater surface area through which to lose heat. creepers cope by spending most of their day gorging on bugs, then
Oh to be Mowgli, living in the jungle in concert with snakes, bears and panthers. In Kipling’s classic tale, *The Jungle Book*, a young child is left alone in the forest after Shere Khan the tiger kills his father. A family of wolves adopts him. After seeing the recent Disney remake of this story, we discussed the intriguing concept of being raised in the wild by other species.

There are at least six documented cases of children being “raised” by monkeys, goats, cats, dogs and wolves. It turns out this care sometimes just consists of companionship through forced co-housing or providing warmth because they seek it too.

The desire to be accepted, or recognized by other species is powerful for many people - one reason we fill our houses with pets! Not everyone who taps on a zoo window is trying to harass - some just want to be acknowledged and see a glint of kinship in another’s eyes. We’d love to fit in with those athletic animals so savvy at fishing or weaving nests or tracking a scent.

We at Project Puffin have just started our spring visits to the seabird islands, prepping the field camps for our research season. On the islands, we live in the midst of thousands of birds. We try to understand them. They tolerate us - but the warm feelings are mainly shots of tern guano aimed at us from above. We are not accepted as part of the flock. Although the occasional fish gets dropped, it’s not because we look hungry.

Despite their antagonism, we can learn a lot about how and what they forage, how they interact and raise their young. They recognize us as individuals, more easily than we recognize them; we rely on numbered bands applied to their legs. Since they live more than 25 years, we have a history together. We share a place and time.

The largest and most widespread of the true foxes, the ruddy Red Fox spans the entire Northern Hemisphere from North America to North Africa and Eurasia.

Despite living in harsh winter climates, foxes do not hibernate. They hunt year round and den up after mating in late winter. Apart from the mating season, adult foxes are solitary creatures. Foxes are omnivorous and will consume a wide variety of foods. Their main diet consists of small mammals such as mice, moles and squirrels but larger prey items can include woodchucks, young skunks and raccoons, birds, turtles and snakes. In season, insects and vegetable matter such as berries, fruits and nuts are chosen. Carrion is always a potential menu option.

Hunting mostly at night, sunset and dawn, foxes have an exceptional sense of smell, with hearing sensitive enough to detect underground digging, gnawing and movement sounds of small prey. Once prey is pinpointed down below, the fox will excavate the earthen hideout.

I watched a fascinating encounter as a neighborhood house cat was chased by a stalking fox that had crept up close to the unsuspecting feline before making a headlong pursuit. The fleeing cat narrowly evaded the fox by scrambling onto an elevated porch railing. In their own right, foxes have few natural predators – only man and possibly some hawks and owls.

Dens are often located in elevated sections of field with a commanding view of surrounding terrain. Sometimes woodchuck holes, hollow logs and rock piles are used. The main den entrance is approximately three feet wide, with several escape holes. The den is lined with grass and dry leaves.

Fox litters can contain anywhere from one to ten pups. Upon reaching about seven months of age, the pups will leave the den to pursue an independent lifestyle.
roosting communally at night in cracks or scars of trees or other protected sites, huddled together in groups to conserve heat.

The creeper nest is another clue to its need for large trees. Not a true cavity nest, nor a true open-cup nest, the creeper cradle is a delicate affair built behind a piece of loose bark — a cozy hammock of moss, conifer needles, and spider silk, lined with feathers and supported between the loose bark and the trunk. It is only the largest, oldest trees — often dead or dying — that have these sloughing slabs of bark needed by creepers for nest sites.

The Brown Creeper not only needs large trees, it also needs large stands of large trees. Like other birds that are adapted to continuous forests, creepers are sensitive to forest fragmentation. Stands that are smaller and more isolated, due to removal of trees, support fewer creepers. The smaller the stand, the smaller the creeper population.

Once a critical stand size threshold is crossed, the creeper population disappears entirely, even if the stand is dense with mature trees and snags. That size threshold varies with the forest type, but to give an example it has been found to be 27 acres in hardwood forests of New Brunswick. The reasons are not clear, but some evidence suggests that creepers need a moist habitat (perhaps because their insect prey thrive in moist conditions), but small, isolated stands are more susceptible to drying winds, eliminating the moist conditions. This may also explain why creeper nests are more successful when placed at least 100 meters from the stand’s edge.

Although Brown Creeper populations are stable overall, their narrow habitat needs leave them vulnerable to habitat loss. The key to creeper conservation is protecting large, continuous stands of mature and old-growth forest, including dead and dying trees. This will ensure that future generations will be able to marvel at this easily overlooked little bird in the big trees.

Scott Gillihan is the Managing Editor of the North American Bluebird Society’s Bluebird. He has done a lot of work with Brown Creepers in the Rocky Mountains.

How to Spot a Tiny Brown Creeper in a Big Tree Stand

Have you had a hard time spotting a Brown Creeper? Take heart. As you see in the photo at left, they blend into the tree bark. They move rapidly around the tree, up and down and from tree to tree. Look for movement and a little white, as in the photo above. Listen for high-pitched thin notes lasting a second or so. Remember you are looking for movement, something clinging to the bark, and a slender, camouflaged body around 5 inches long - tail tip to beak. Be patient and good luck. In winter, they can often be found with flocks of Golden-crowned Kinglets gleaning insects. To hear the song, visit https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brown_Creeper/sounds

Editor’s note
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: Friday, May 13
Sears Island, Searsport
This site provides spring habitat for many warblers and other land birds. It is also a good spot to see raptors and gulls. Easy terrain and paved roadway.
Meet at Reny’s in Belfast at 7:30 a.m.

Field trip: Tuesday, May 17
Evergreen Cemetery and Capiscum Park, Portland
Both locations are iconic destinations for warblers, orioles, thrushes, and other unusual land bird species.
Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.

Field trip: Tuesday, May 24
Viles Arboretum, Augusta
Bluebirds, Wrens, Warblers, Eastern Meadowlarks, flycatchers and more are expected species. We may stop at Vaughn Woods to check on the Louisiana Waterthrush which is often seen there.
Meet at Viles Arboretum at 7:00 a.m.

Field trip: Saturday, May 28
Monhegan Island
Expect up to 60 species of spring migrating birds. Bring a lunch; food is available on the Island. The Monhegan Boat Line ferry leaves Port Clyde at 7:00 a.m. and leaves Monhegan at 4:30 p.m. Contact the boat line for ferry reservations.
Contact John Weinrich at 563-2930 for further details.

JUNE

Field trip: Thursday, June 2
Belgrade Lakes and Augusta Airport
Belgrade Lakes is a Sandhill Crane nesting site and one of the few breeding sites of the Black Tern. Purple Martin, Bank Swallow, and Bluebirds will cap the day.
The Augusta Airport is usually a wonderful opportunity to observe Prairie Warbler, Indigo Bunting and Brown Thrasher.
Meet at Damariscotta River Association at 7:00 a.m.

Field trip: Thursday, June 9
Kennebunkport Plains/Sanford Sewage Treatment Plant
Kennebunk Plains is a unique geological feature of Maine and summer home of Eastern Meadowlark, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow, Prairie Warbler and many more field birds. The Black Racer snake also resides at this location.
The Sanford Sewage Treatment plant settlement ponds attract a long list of birds including Ruddy Ducks, Horned Grebes, swallows, nesting Killdeer, and sandpipers.
Meet at Damariscotta River Association at 7:00 a.m.

NOTE: A possible pelagic trip may be scheduled for the month of June – stay tuned.

AUGUST

Field trip: Tuesday, August 16
Plum Island/ Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
Join Marblehead native Dennis McKenna for a day of birding one of the east coast’s premier birding sites.
Meet at Damariscotta River Association at 6:00 a.m.

Field trip: Thursday, August 25
Pine Point
Meet at Damariscotta River Association at 7:00 a.m.

SEPTEMBER

Program: Thursday, September 15, 7 p.m.
Camden Public Library
Jack Boak will present History of Ocean Garbage Dumping Practices and Relevant Regulations and how it impacts various ecosystems. Jack is a retired Master Mariner who served 35 years on various US-flag merchant ships and a Nautical Science Specialist. He volunteers for Courtesy Boat Inspections, Lake Smart, the the Planning Board and Fire Department in Bremen.

Field trip: Saturday, September 24
Monhegan Island
Join Mid-Coast Audubon for a day on the island seeking fall migrants and occasional vagrants. The Monhegan Boat Line ferry leaves Port Clyde at 7:00 a.m. and returns leaving Monhegan at 4:30 p.m. Contact the boat line for ferry reservations.
Contact John Weinrich at 563-2930

Hummingbird Quiz

1. In the eastern U.S., the only breeding hummingbird is the Ruby-throated. Are other hummingbirds found all over the world?
2. How many species of hummingbird are there?
3. How far do Ruby-throats migrate?
4. How does a hummingbird hover?
5. What do Ruby-throats eat besides nectar?
6. What does a male hummingbird do to help with reproduction?
7. With what does a Ruby-throat camouflage her nest?
8. Hummers are especially attracted to flowers in the red spectrum. Should the nectar in a feeder be tinted red?
9. What is the best recipe for hummingbird nectar?
10. With a high metabolism, how does a hummingbird survive night and cold weather?

Nancy Dickinson, MCAS Quizperson
Calendar . . . cont’d

**OCTOBER**

**Field trip: Thursday, October 6**
*Popham Beach*
This site usually provides spring habitat for many warblers and other land birds. The island is also a good opportunity to see raptors and gulls. Traveling this terrain is easy and one need not leave the paved roadway.
Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 8:00 am.

**Field trip: Saturday, October 15**
*Green Point Preserve, Dresden*
These two locations are iconic destinations for warblers, orioles, thrushes, and other unusual land bird species.
Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 am.

**Program: Thursday, October 20, 7 p.m.**
*Camden Library*
Hope Douglas from Wind Over Wings will present a live bird program *Birds of Prey & a Cockatoo, Too!* Experience the wonder of being a few feet away from one of Maine’s most elusive owls, the little Eastern Screech; a beautiful Red-shouldered Hawk; Maine’s largest owl, the Great Horned; and for humor, an Umbrella Cockatoo.

**NOVEMBER**

**Program: Thursday, November 17, 7 p.m.**
*Camden Library*
Dr. Howie Nielsen will present a program on *Bird Life in the Kingdom of Cambodia.* See camera trapping new species for this area and coastal survey work for conservation of endangered species, done over the last 10 years, 8 months each year.

**Field trip: Saturday, November 5**
*Sabbatus Pond*
This central Maine pond is known to attract Ring-necked Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, Lesser and Greater Scap, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes. Mergansers and raptors. Dress warm!
Lunch at the Old Goat in historic Richmond.
Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:30 am.

Check our website, www.midcoastaudubon.org for updates and more details on trips and programs. Thank you.

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Join Us for
**Annual Lobster Bake**
Saturday, September 3, 2016
at Hog Island Audubon Camp

**Boat departs Audubon dock in Bremen at 10:00 a.m. or 12:00 (reserve your time).**
**Return trip from island is at 3:30 p.m.**

**Fresh local lobster, clams, potato, corn, onions, lemonade, special Puffin dessert**

$40.00 per person

**Free parking and boat transportation**

This annual fundraiser helps us fund all the free programs and field trips we offer throughout the year.

RSVP by e-mail to sschubel@tidewater.net, in subject line put LOBSTER or call 207-380-1370

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**Quiz Answers**

1. No, only in the Western Hemisphere
2. Over 300
3. Some migrate between Costa Rica and southern Canada.
4. The wings beat in a figure-8 pattern.
5. Small insects and spiders
6. He attracts the female with showy colors and a “pendulum” flight display.
7. With bits of lichen and dead leaves
8. No, that is unnecessary and unhealthy.
9. 1 part white cane sugar to 4 parts water, heated to dissolve sugar
10. It goes into a state of torpor, with slowed respiration and heartbeat.

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In the swirling steam that rises from your coffee cup could be the ghosts of warblers flitting among the orchids, orioles sipping nectar from spectacular bouquets in the treetops, and thrush flipping up leaves on the forest floor.

*Silence of the Birds* by Bridget Stutchbury

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Are you drinking shade-grown coffee?

Learn more at the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center

[https://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/coffee/](https://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/coffee/)

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**Editor’s note:** Check out the Ruby-throated Hummingbird article in *The Merganser*, May 2015
New, Renewing, and Rejoining Members!

Robert E. Anderson, Tenants Harbor
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Mary Balbo, South China
Christina Banks, Thomaston
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Andrea Williams and Charles Dewer, Denver, CO
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Gratian Yatsevitch, Camden

Mid-Coast Audubon
Organized December 6, 1969
a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization
P.O. Box 458, Damariscotta, ME 04543-0458

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The Merganser editor: Juanita Roushdy, 529-2355

The Merganser is published three times a year in February, May, November. News items or photos are welcome. Deadline for next issue is October 15! Send to juanitar@tidewater.net

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Yes! The Warblers Are Coming!
Here are some warblers to watch out for at your feeder or in your back yard habitat.

Don’t forget - clean your feeders and nest boxes.

1. Common Yellowthroat
2. Black and white warbler
3. Palm Warbler
4. Black-throated Blue Warbler
5. Chestnut-sided Warbler
6. Blue-winged Warbler
7. Pine Warbler

Go Birding in One of Our Preserves

We have four wonderful preserves that are perfect for spring birding. Our biggest, 95-acre Nelson Preserve in Friendship, 1 mile from Friendship Village on Rte. 97, goes down to the Goose River. On Rte. 220 is the 30-acre Van Dyn Preserve, 1.5 miles from Waldoboro; it fronts the Medomak River. The 40-acre Davis Bog Preserve is in the Town of Morrill; access is a 10-foot right of way on Higgins Ridge Road, 1 mile from Rte. 3 and east of the state’s Ruffingham Meadow Preserve. The 3-acre Weskeag River Preserve is on Waterman Beach Road, just past Snowdeal Road, 0.1 mile from Rte. 73. Tell us the birds you saw on your walk. Be part of the volunteer team that keeps these trails maintained, contact Bill Goodwill at 207-354-0669.
Hog Island Audubon Camp still has a few spaces left in its summer sessions. Check it out at http://hogisland.audubon.org/

Save the Date

Annual Lobster Bake

Saturday, September 3, 2016

10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

See page 4 for details

Membership Form

Mid-Coast Chapter

YES! I would like to protect and conserve wildlife and habitat in my community and
☐ join  ☐ renew my membership with Maine Audubon and the Mid-Coast Chapter:

Name(s):______________________________

Address:___________________________________________City/State/Zip:_________________________

Home Phone:_________________________Email:______________________________

Seasonal Address:____________________________from ________ to ________

City/State/Zip:_

☐ I'm enclosing an additional $10 to receive Audubon, National Audubon's magazine
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☐ Check enclosed in the amount of $_______

☐ Charge my monthly Frequent Flyer gift of $_________ to ☐ Visa  ☐ MC  ☐ AMEX  ☐ Discover

☐ Charge my annual membership of $_______ to ☐ Visa  ☐ MC  ☐ AMEX  ☐ Discover

Card #:_________________________Exp._________CSV

Membership Level

Annual:
☐ $25 Senior/Volunteer
☐ $35 Individual
☐ $45 Household
☐ $65 Contributing
☐ $100 Patron
☐ $250 Sustaining
☐ $500 Benefactor

Monthly:
☐ Frequent Flyer ($5 min.)

Checks payable to Maine Audubon, 20 Gilsland Farm Rd, Falmouth, ME 04105. Join/renew online at maineaudubon.org/join or call 207-781-2330 ext. 232