

# 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 40, No. 1 - February 2016

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## Bobolink – the Meadow Bird of Summer

Bobolinks are iconic birds of verdant meadows and hayfields across a narrow latitudinal band from the Canadian Maritimes west to British Columbia and eastern Oregon. Forest clearing by colonists no doubt increased the available habitat for Bobolinks in New England, and haying fields once a summer with horse-drawn equipment meant a crop of both Bobolinks and hay could coincide. In recent decades, pressure to reap hayfields earlier when they are more protein-rich and more frequently has meant a decline in the Bobolink.

If we know one thing about Bobolinks it is their affinity for grass, particularly rice, both the wild kind (*Zizania*) and cultivated varieties (*Oryza*). Hence we have their scientific name *oryzivorus*, meaning rice eating. When David Gulack

and Ben Rooney of Wild Folk Farm in Benton told me about plans to grow organic rice in central Maine, my first thoughts were how their hayfields and sustainable farming practices had already set the stage for this crop of rice eaters.

In 1731, Mark Catesby wrote: *In the beginning of September, while the Grain of Rice is yet soft and milky, innumerable Flights of these Birds arrive from some remote Parts, to the great detriment of the inhabitants.*"<sup>1</sup>



Female Bobolink with "milk mustache" from eating rice.

Catesby's "inhabitants," rice farmers in the Carolinas during the 1700s, and the inhabitants of an organic farm here in central Maine were about to collide with one of New England's favorite birds. As predicted, Bobolinks found the newly ripening rice at the Wild Folk Farm to their liking last fall, as attested by this female with a "milk mustache." (see photograph).

Greening grass is so important to Bobolinks that they essentially follow the peak of primary productivity from one hemisphere to another. They have one of the longest annual migrations of New World passerines (almost 13,000 miles

*Continued on page 3*



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

SUE SCHUBEL

I'm writing in mid-January and the snow is sweetly falling at last. The forest is gray, green, and brown out the window with Goldfinches and Chickadees arguing with squirrels over the bird feeder. Nice to see the forest. Studies have shown that just seeing nature out a window can improve the health and well being of people. Momentarily I'll go out into the forest though, to get the added benefits of "forest bathing" called "Shinrin-yoku" in Japan. Basically a gentle walk, with time to focus on trees and even stop for tea or to read a book, this practice increases vigor, and decreases depression, blood pressure, anxiety and anger. It also boosts ones NK cells ("natural killer" white blood cells to fight cancer and disease). Phytoncides (wood essential



A hiker enjoys the health benefits of a walk in the woods.

oils) released by oaks, pines and cedars are an essential part of the cure. Dr. Li, of Japan took people on 3 day / 2 night forest visits and tested their blood before and after to find that the positive effects lasted 30 days. A day trip to the woods can benefit you for a week!

Perhaps it is the lack of trees that is affecting the angry ranchers who seized Malheur NWR in the high desert of Oregon. This area is important for resident wildlife and one of the key stops on the Pacific flyway. Teddy Roosevelt

recognized this in 1908 when he set aside the area to help birds decimated by plume-hunting. Now some armed militia trying to "take back" the public land for ranchers have holed up there. Birders have often been relegated to a pretty tame image, so I think this is an exciting moment for the birders who are determined to stand against the Oregon group.

Keep your cool, and make it part of your plan for 2016 to take a "forest bath" in a MCAS preserve.

## CRITTER CORNER - DON REIMER

Finding the chunky remains of a dead Meadow Vole lying atop a crust of January snow is not out of the ordinary here in Maine. Some predator had removed the rodent's head and left the tiny body intact. In Nature, decapitation is a fairly common happening, since predators will sometimes consume only the nutrient-rich brain during periodic cycles of plentiful food reserves.

My detective instincts kicked in, however, in trying to decipher who might have actually killed the vole and left it within a foot of its shallow snowy burrow? To be sure, voles have no shortage of potential predators: coyotes, foxes, feral and domestic cats, bobcats, hawks, Northern Shrikes and several species of owls.

Let's study this Who Done It case together. We can probably eliminate coyote, fox and bobcat since these large predators would have swallowed their undersized victim whole. Likewise, Great Horned and Barred Owls gulp down small prey animals on the spot. Domestic cats are more likely to chew portions of the body or simply deliver the trophy to a nearby home doorstep.

The remaining suspect possibilities include Saw-whet Owl and Northern Shrike. Saw-whet Owls will sometimes eat portions of their prey and reserve the rest for later. Dealing

with frozen prey, Saw-whets will reportedly sit on the prey to defrost it with their own body heat. It remains unclear why this vole carcass was left abandoned to open view.

Northern Shrikes apply a different storage strategy for captured prey, hanging it on a thorn or branch for a future meal. The "Butcher Bird's" diet consists mainly of small mammals and birds. I have witnessed shrikes carrying

rodents for short distances. In this case, it seems odd to think that a shrike would not remove its kill from the immediate scene.

Giving birth to 5-12 litters per year, the meadow vole is believed to have the highest reproductive rate of any mammal in the world. In addition to being a foundational species in the natural food chain, voles play a passive role in determining the makeup of emerging evergreen forests. Since voles



Dead Meadow Vole in snow

prefer the seeds of spruce trees, and will reject eating balsam fir seeds, balsams are more likely to predominate in areas of transitioning forest scapes.

Who killed the vole? You are now the final judge.



Meadow vole with head.



# Bobolink – the Meadow Bird of Summer . . . cont'd.

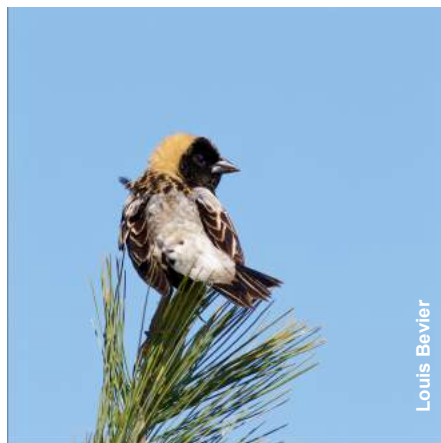
round trip) and are unique among that group of birds in molting their entire feather coat twice a year.

Their molt into spring plumage begins on the wintering grounds in South America in mid-January and continues through mid-March. In 1893, Frank Chapman first described this unusual, complete molt based on a March specimen from southwest Brazil, but their spring molt remained little known otherwise until 2011

when detailed by Rosalind Renfrew of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies and colleagues. The molt turns the male into something truly stunning, but only for a short time. By late summer all Bobolinks begin to molt again, and young and old of both sexes take on a similar appearance, the yellowish buff “rice-bird” plumage.

After breeding, Bobolinks move south and east, often migrating over open ocean, passing through the Caribbean and arriving at ripening rice fields in the llanos of Venezuela. There they remain October through early November, departing southward once again to visit the greening fields of eastern Bolivia. Some overwinter there; others continue south to the pampas of northern Argentina just as primary productivity is peaking there.

These movements have only recently been mapped by a team of researchers, including Rosalind Renfrew and Noah Perlut (University of New England). The research showed that birds from disparate populations—Oregon (Malheur), Nebraska, and Vermont—timed their migrations to reach all the nonbreeding localities at roughly the same time. These concentrations and large aggregations have conservation implications, including threats from insecticides (monocrotophos) toxic to birds used in some areas of the wintering range.



A male Bobolink in breeding plumage.



In the fall, sexes and ages are similar; immature (left) and adult (right).

Here in Maine, the bubbling song of males displaying over meadows begins in early May - males arriving before females. Males have several mates. Females build nests on the ground, preferring fields with a richer litter layer (e.g., older hay fields are preferred). Bobolinks return close to their natal fields; so consistency of field management year to year is important. To raise young, Bobolinks need at least 65 days, meaning *the time to cut should be delayed until late July or early August*. But some reproduction can occur if a field is cut early, by late May, and then allowed to rest for nine weeks, according to research by Noah Perlut and Allan Strong (University of Vermont). There are now programs to pay qualifying farms with enough acreage to delay cuts or follow the early-and-late method.

Changes in mowing schedules may help maintain Bobolinks in New England where the acreage of hayfields has been steadily declining with reforestation and

urbanization. But the fields Bobolinks use two-thirds of a year while migrating or wintering is under threat too. Thankfully, our knowledge of this spectacular bird is much richer now and provides us with the tools to manage land to their and our benefit.

<sup>1</sup>Mark Catesby, 1731, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* volume 1, page 14, “Rice-Bird”)



Another view of the male in breeding plumage. Note the contrasting dark face with light back of head.

Louis Bevier is a 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/>

# 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**

## FEBRUARY

**Thursday, February 18 at 7:00 p.m.**

*Camden public Library*

Maine Coast Heritage Trust steward and naturalist Kirk Gentalen presents *Owls Are Easy; Otters Are Easier - Year-round Animal Tracking on Vinalhaven*. Kirk edits a popular nature blog "Vinalhaven Sightings Report: <http://vinalhavensightings.blogspot.com>

**Saturday and Sunday, February 20 and 21**

**Plum Island and Coastal Cape Ann**

Join Mid-Coast Audubon and Massachusetts native Dennis McKenna for two days of birding at Plum Island, Ipswich, Rockport and Gloucester for Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings, Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, Cedar Waxwings, Purple Sandpipers, raptors, ducks and scoters and other birds.

**Overnight arrangements can be made by contacting Dennis McKenna at 563-8439.**

*Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 6:00 a.m.*

**Overnight!**

## MARCH

**Thursday, March 17 at 7:00 p.m.**

*Camden Public Library*

Doug Hitchcox, naturalist at Maine Audubon at Gilsland Farm, will give a presentation on *Bringing Nature Home*.

**Saturday, March 19**

**Biddeford Pool**

A day trip to Biddeford Pool Beach, East Point, Point Point and Scarborough Marsh

*Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.*

## APRIL

**Saturday, April 16**

*Damariscotta Area*

Meet a Mid-Coast Audubon leader for a morning of birding around The Great Salt Bay and Bass Falls in Alna.

*Meet at the Damariscotta River Association on Belvedere Rd. at 7:00 a.m.*

**Thursday, April 21 at 7:00 p.m.**

*Camden Public Library*

Jack Boak, a Nautical Science Specialist and Master Mariner, will give a presentation on *Garbage in the Oceans*.

**Saturday, April 30**

**Popham Beach**

*Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.*

## MAY

**Friday, May 13**

*Sears Island, Searsport*

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 Reny's in Belfast at 7:30 a.m.*

**Tuesday, May 17**

*Evergreen Cemetery and Capisic Park, Portland*

These two locations are iconic destinations for warblers, orioles, thrushes, and other unusual land bird species.

*Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.*

**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.*

**Saturday, May 28**

**Monhegan Island**

For spring migrants join us on this regular spring trip. Expect up to 60 species of 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.

*Check our website, [www.midcoastaudubon.org](http://www.midcoastaudubon.org) for updates and more details on trips and programs. Thank you.*

## Join Us

*Mid-Coast Audubon Board meets the first Thursday of each month, 6-7 p.m. at Waldoboro Library.*

*Public welcome.*



Don Reimer

Black-headed Gull, Rockland

# The 2016 CBC Was Not Your Usual Count

Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count is the nation's longest running citizen-science project and fuels Audubon science throughout the year. Birders nationwide look forward to this annual census.

Whether avid birders in the field or watching from feeders at home, all contribute to the count and find great joy in the discovery of birds in their area. Birders in Maine are dedicated souls and do not let a little rain, a little blizzard, a little snow, a little wind, or single-digit temperatures deter them from discovering that lone American Tree Sparrow having the sense to shelter in a dense growth of forsythia!

The 116th CBC took place from December 14, 2105 to January 4, 2016. It gave a snapshot of the birds in a given count circle, which is 15 miles in diameter and divided into sections that teams explore.

In our area, we have three local counts, Damariscotta/ Pemaquid, Bunker Hill, and Thomaston/Rockland. Here are some highlights from the compilers.

## *Damariscotta/Pemaquid - Dennis McKenna, compiler*

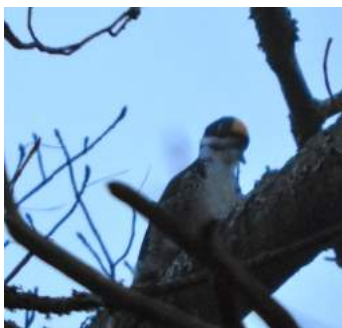
The Pemaquid/Damariscotta CBC was held on December 14, 2015. Our able team of observers located 64 species. The total species count was lower than previous years despite the nearly ideal weather conditions.

No new species were found. However, six species high counts were recorded: Sharp-shinned Hawk 2; Red-tailed Hawk 7; Hairy Woodpecker 28; Tufted Titmouse 61; Red-winged Blackbird 3; and Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1 (equalled on seven previous counts). Other highlights were: 8 Eastern Bluebirds in a single flock apparently surviving, to that point, in a hollow tree; the aforementioned 3 Red-winged Blackbirds found for only the third time on the count and the single Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

## *Bunker Hill - John Weinrich, compiler*

The Bunker Hill count was held on December 21, 2015. The teams found 53 species, down 5 from last year, and 4,271 total individuals which is about the same as last year but higher than the average.

The highlight was a count week Black-backed Woodpecker seen for several months in North Newcastle.



Black-backed Woodpecker in Newcastle - note yellow patch on head. Dreary day, far away, and through a scope!

Scholarships available from Mid-Coast Audubon. Contact Sue Schubel for more information. E-mail [sschubel@tidewater.net](mailto:sschubel@tidewater.net) with SCHOLARSHIP in subject line.

## *Thomaston-Rockland - Don Reimer, compiler*

The Thomaston-Rockland CBC was held on December 19, 2015. The count tallied 74 species and 6532 individual birds. With bare ground conditions and open water sources, birders had full access to the 15-mile circle's eight sectors. The relatively mild temperatures and open water were not as favorable or decisive as expected, since most waterfowl had not concentrated into winter flocks. A lingering group of 100 American Coots was the highlight at Rockland's Chickawaukee Lake.



Yellow-throated Warbler gleans insect debris from porch furniture at Samoset in Rockland.

With the exception of 251 American Goldfinches, 7 Purple Finches and a single Pine Siskin, winter finches were virtually absent. Three species of warblers were noteworthy sightings. A rare Yellow-throated Warbler discovered at Rockport's Samoset Resort provided a significant first record for this count. A Yellow-breasted Chat and Pine Warbler were additional winter bonuses.



Yellow-breasted Chat also at Samoset in Rockland.

A Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and 5 Brown-headed Cowbirds were rather unusual sightings. A Snowy Owl and Turkey Vulture were not seen on the actual count day, but

were recorded during the week of the count.

## Did You Miss the CBC? It's not too late to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count!

Take 15 minutes with friends, family, co-workers, students and count the birds that come to the feeders in your backyard, a neighbor's yard, the local park, or schoolyard.

Visit the website: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/> for details. Have fun and help us count bird populations and movement.





## Welcome New Members!

Darcy Barnard, Camden  
Marda Barthuli, Boulder, CO  
Burke Family, Belfast  
Linda H. Coombs, Newcastle  
Katherin Eickenberg,  
Liberty  
Dr. and Mrs. Jonathan  
Fielding, Los Angeles, CA  
Greta and Gary Gulezian,  
Lincolntonville

Wendy Kasten and Charles  
Easley, Belfast

Alfred and Marie  
McMonagle, Searsport

Libby and Paul Miner,  
Waldoboro

Loree Niola, Damariscotta  
Deborah Orne Kalloch,  
Rockland

Emily Sapienza, Lincolntonville  
Elizabeth Townsend, Belfast  
Waldo County Soil &  
Conservation District

## ... and Renewing,

## Rejoining Members

Joanne Boynton, Belfast  
Mary Ann Hayes, Thorndike  
Thomas A. Ingraham, Hope  
Kathy Leeman, Round Pond  
Barbara Ouradnik, Belfast  
Harry Smith, Camden  
Kathleen Thornton, Union  
Jeanne Titherington, Bremen  
Mariellen Whelan,  
Newcastle

Thomas Williams, Spruce  
Head  
Barbara Worcester, Liberty

## Bird-Feeding Quiz



1. What is an easy and cost-free way to attract birds to your yard year-round?
2. How can you make your garden more attractive to winter birds?
3. Where should bird feeders be placed to minimize the chance of birds hitting windows?
4. How often should seed feeders be cleaned with soap, hot water, and bleach?

5. What is Nyjer (Niger) seed, and why is it so expensive?
6. What common birdseed ingredient is a waste of money?
7. How should seed be provided for sparrows and juncos?
8. What unusual birds might be attracted to a suet feeder?
9. What new program from Cornell will help you plan a bird-friendly yard?
10. On mild late-winter days, what feeder bird sings "fee-bee"?

Nancy Dickinson, MCAS Quizperson



John Weinrich and Dennis McKenna help at the chapter's annual Christmas birdhouse sale at Damariscotta's Wrap-It Up Day. John also makes the birdhouses with Lew Purinton.



MCAS board members, Sue Schubel, Dennis McKenna, Kristin Pennock, and Lew Purinton, admire pumpkins carved as a Black-capped Chickadee with eggs!

## Thank You!

For 2nd year, The Torreys have offered hot soup and dessert for cold Bunker Hill CBCers!

The Torreys with Tom, Kristin, and Sue



## Mid-Coast Audubon

Organized December 6, 1969

a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization

P.O. Box 458, Damariscotta, ME 04543-0458

## OFFICERS

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John Weinrich, Vice President  
Phyllis Coelho, Secretary  
Lew Purinton, Treasurer

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Bill Goodwill, Friendship  
Dennis McKenna, Damariscotta  
Kristin Pennock, Whitefield  
Lew Purinton, Somerville  
Don Reimer, Warren  
Juanita Roushdy, Bremen  
Vacant

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**Nest boxes:** John Weinrich, 563-2930  
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**Preserves:** Bill Goodwill, 354-0669  
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**Scholarship:** Sue Schubel, 380-1370  
**Speaker Bureau:** Joe Gray, 563-3578  
**Special Events:** Sue Schubel, 380-1370  
**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. **The deadline for the next issue is April 15!**

Send to [juanitar@tidewater.net](mailto:juanitar@tidewater.net)

## Injured Bird!

## Avian Haven

Accepts all bird species year-round

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Only seabirds and shorebirds

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# What is a Wildlife Tree?

For all creatures, including, humans, the basic needs are food and shelter, year round. It's easy to see that these needs are abundant in lush forests and landscapes. But would you believe that dead trees can provide more habitat for wildlife than when they were alive.

A dead or dying tree to some is unsightly; to a birder or naturalist it is glorious because it can be home to a number of cavity-nesting birds. For a birder, it is a SNAG full of promise and surprise. You never know what you might be atop or on the side of a snag.



Black-capped Chickadee finds shelter in old woodpecker hole in a snag.

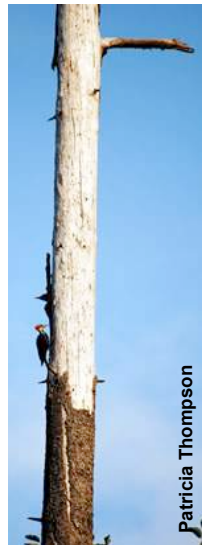
Nuthatches, Brown Creepers, Northern Flickers, Owls, Ospreys, Eagles, Great Blue Herons, and more.

Not only do birds depend on snags but mammals such as squirrels, raccoons, bats, and chipmunks use them for foraging, shelter, and nesting. For wildlife, there's nothing like coming upon a dead tree and chowing down on the insects and larvae between the bark and cambria or in the heart of the tree. Lots of protein.

Snags add texture and interest to a landscape. Take a walk in the woods and see how many snags you notice. Check them out; notice their differing stages of decay; look at the holes. Maybe something will peek out at you. Did a Pileated make the hole? Is there a nest on the top? Are there wood chips or droppings at the base of the snag?

When the snag finally succumbs and collapses, it then becomes a nurse log for seedlings, fungi and eventually becomes part of the forest floor.

Next time you see someone cutting tree down ask them to leave the trunk for wildlife. Visit the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife website: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/snags/> for more information.



A Pileated drilling for insects in a snag. Note perch for raptors to keep watch.

Patricia Thompson



Bald Eagles enjoy the view from this snag.

Louis Bevier

## Calling all Youth Birders

### Late-breaking News From Hog Island

News Flash!

Do you enjoy taking nature photographs? Would you love to come to Hog Island Audubon Camp and learn tips from the nation's leading nature photographers?

Then, don't wait. Enter National Audubon's Photography Awards and you may win a trip for you and one parent to attend a session in 2016 - <http://hogisland.audubon.org/>

Visit <http://www.audubon.org/photoawards> for details.

**Deadline:**

**February 19, 2016**



Great Egret by Melissa Groo, 2015 Grand Prize Winner. Melissa is also an instructor at Hog Island Audubon Camp.

#### Quiz Answers


1. Build a brush pile of large and small branches and clippings, not far from your feeders. Add your used Christmas tree!
2. Rake leaves into them as mulch, and leave flower heads standing.
3. Place them less than 3 feet, or more than 30 feet, from windows.
4. Sterilize every two weeks; also rake underneath them.
5. It is not related to thistles, but is from a yellow daisy, Guizotia abyssinia, grown in Africa and Asia, where it is sterilized, then shipped.
6. Birds do not like milo seed, the large reddish kernels in some seed mixtures.
7. Throw seed, especially white millet, on the ground or a low platform.
8. Carolina Wren, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Brown Creeper
9. YardMap.org
10. Black-capped Chickadee



Mew Gull, Owl's Head

Don Reimer



Mid-Coast Audubon  
 P.O. Box 458  
 Audubon Damariscotta, ME 04543-0458  
[www.midcoastaudubon.org](http://www.midcoastaudubon.org)

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**Buy bird seed from Mid-Coast Audubon**

Check the *Free Press* or our website for details. Send e-mail to [sschubel@tidewater.net](mailto:sschubel@tidewater.net) with BIRDSEED in subject line. Pick-up date is Saturday, March 5.

**Order Deadline: February 28, 2016**

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



Maine Audubon

# MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mid-Coast Chapter

Mid-Coast  
  
 Audubon

**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  
 (free for Patron members and above)

☐ Check enclosed in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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## 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](http://maineaudubon.org/join) or call 207-781-2330 ext. 232