

The Merganser

Mid-Coast

Audubon

Promoting long-term responsible use of natural resources through an informed membership, education, and community awareness

Mid-Coast Audubon, a chapter of...



MAINE AUDUBON

Volume 45, No. 2 - May 2021

A Shot in the Dark



Here in Maine we're lucky enough to have two species of storm-petrels that visit us— one that breeds here in summer, the Leach's Storm-Petrel, and one that summers here but breeds in the Southern Hemisphere, the Wilson's Storm-Petrel.

As a group, the storm-petrels are some of the most common seabirds in the world. But I wonder when you last saw one? Or if you have ever seen one??

Don't worry, you're not necessarily unobservant. There are good reasons you may never have seen one. **Reason 1** – These little dark birds weigh in about 40–60 g, smaller than a Robin, and are generally pelagic. That means they forage over deep waters far offshore and happily spend most of their days well out to sea beyond the shelf break.

Reason 2 – When they come to land to breed, they generally do so only on remote island colonies, offshore and away from the unwanted attention of pesky mammalian predators.

Reason 3 – At these remote island colonies, storm-petrels nest in underground burrows or deep crevices among rocks or even in walls, remaining

entirely hidden from view. And **Reason 4** – They only visit their nests under cover of darkness, coming and going in the deep dark of the wee small hours.

The majority of the Leach's Storm-Petrels in the North Atlantic breed on a few islands off of Newfoundland, and the Gulf of Maine is the southern edge of their breeding range in the Atlantic. Locally, we know that Leach's Storm-Petrels breed on a handful of islands here, and that the bulk of the Maine population breeds on just two colonies – Great Duck Island and Little Duck Island in Hancock County. Unfortunately, the large Canadian colonies have seen significant declines in recent years, driving the IUCN* to uplist the species' conservation status to Vulnerable.

So, in order to assess the population status and trend for Leach's Storm-Petrels breeding in Maine, we have to count the number of birds at our colonies. But how do you go about such a task,

Inside...

2 President's Corner
*Brown Creepers
and Spring Songs*

4 Critter Corner
The Perils of Plastics

4 Bird Feeder Project
2021 Awardees

5 Spring Shorebirds
Maine Shorebird Q&A

5 Birds in Art
*Touring exhibition
comes to Maine*

6 Calendar
Field trips return!

7 Hog Island 2021
*Camp will be open
this summer!*

7 Preserves Update
*Trail work at Nelson
Preserve*

Continued on page 3



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, and
November.**

News items and photos are welcome.
Deadline for the next issue is October 15!
Send submissions to sy@sherrieyork.com

Injured Bird?

Contact **Avian Haven**

Avian Haven accepts
all bird species year-round.
207-382-6761

avianhaven.org

President's Corner

All winter I have felt a deep kinship with the Brown Creeper. As I sat on my porch swaddled in blankets and dogs, the tiny creeper would sneak up to the suet for a nibble, then off it would fly to blend back into the forest. The perfect pandemic bird – quiet, apart, engaged in endless uphill climb. I've channeled her, cryptic behind my mask, while humming "Brown Creeper" to the tune of "Goldfinger."

But now SPRING. It brings a different sensibility as the days are long with warm light. Soft flower petals flare out from bursting buds, bright feathered birds create a bustle in the yard. All this color and chaos change the context of our little creeper. The temptation is to fling off winter coverings – sing, flap, mate, fight. It is a time when boundaries are re-set. The complexities of communication seem to peak in the spring, when messages of "come hither" and "back off!" are said emphatically and often concurrently.

Lately the welcome of generous land-owners is being strained by some visitors who aren't observing the boundaries. Straying from marked trails or allowing dogs to wander on property which is being shared is not cool! The birds communicate with tunes and talons, ballads and beaks. Listen! Don't cross the line or you will be chased away. I fear that if people don't listen and abide by the guidelines, then we all will be kept away from these beautiful spots. Likely those of you reading this newsletter are not the ones at fault – but maybe you can think of a song to sing to get the message across to someone else.

Please, stay safe – we are still in the midst of a worldwide health crisis. Don't forget the Brown Creeper – so beautiful in subtle rich tweed. Keep a little creeper close to your heart and stay steady a bit longer.

Seabird Sue Schubel wears a variety of seasonal plumages, using her skills as scientist, artist, and educator with Audubon's Seabird Institute. A unique taxonomic species, Sue's common names include (but are not limited to) Seabird Researcher, Assistant Sanctuary Manager, Conservation Decoy Painter, and Outreach Educator.



Sherrie York



with a species who's entire breeding ecology is built around not being seen? Not an easy task, that's for sure.

There are standardized methods that can be employed to estimate numbers, however. And, in 2018 and 2019, staff from the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge, National Audubon Society, and Biodiversity Research Institute, set out to do just that at the known colonies in Maine. So, let me take you on a storm-petrel survey... although you probably won't see a bird as it's all carried out in daylight.

First, you have to get there, and landing on remote island colonies is not always straightforward.

Once you are there, you establish regularly spaced, parallel transects running east-west across the colonies. Following these transect lines is not always straightforward either, and you spend most of your time clawing and pushing your way through dense undergrowth and climbing over fallen trees.

You have to keep track of your progress, however, because along the way, you stop every 50 meters and measure out a 3 m radius plot in which you have to find and count all of the storm-petrel burrow entrances – which are just tiny holes in the ground, usually hidden under roots and logs.

In the end, this gives you a count of burrows, not birds. To get closer to the number of birds using the colony, you have to estimate how many of the burrows are likely to be occupied. You do that by 'grubbing' – shoving your arm down a subset of burrows to see if you can tell if they're being used or not. Sometime you'll feel a small egg, or maybe even the soft, warm feathers of an incubating bird, or a fuzzball of a chick. This works best if you have highly flexible, boneless arms!

But, armed with a burrow density and an occupancy rate, you can ultimately calculate an estimate of the island's breeding population. It's a messy process, but the best we've got under the circumstances.

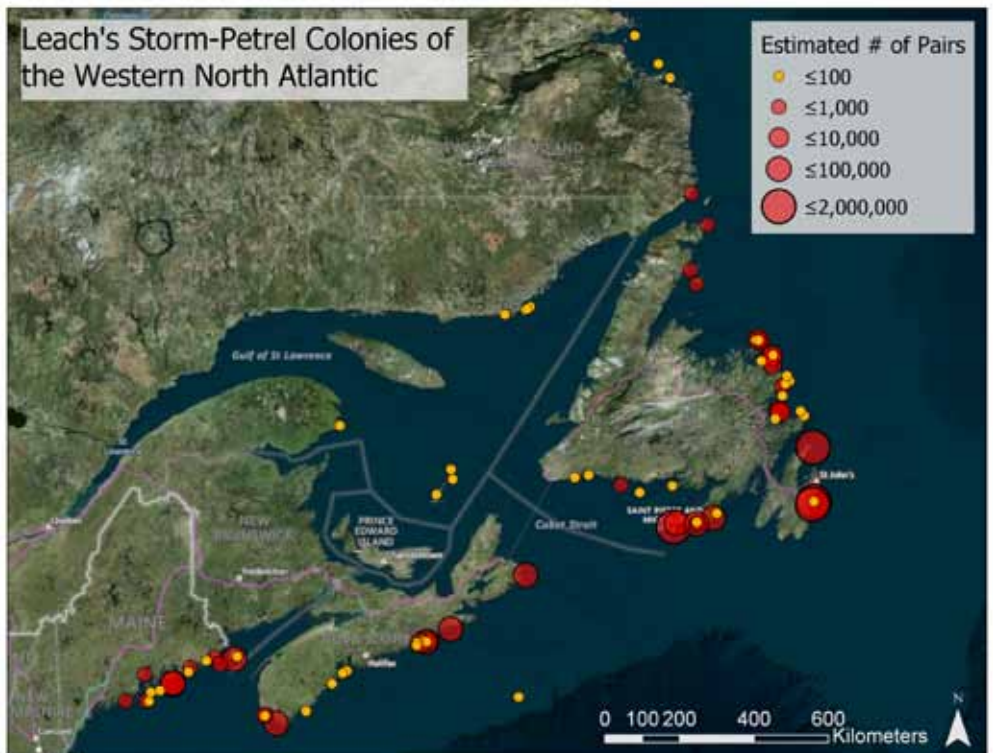
Of six colonies we have surveyed, the breeding storm-petrel population at one had declined (due to the presence of mammalian predators), two effectively remained stable, and three had increased significantly. The current estimate indicates over 53,000 mature individuals breeding on the two largest colonies in Maine, more than double the previous estimate of around 20,000 mature individuals reported in the 1990s.

Despite this apparent increase, the quality of breeding habitat on Great Duck Island appears to have declined over the long term, due to the intense grazing of Snowshoe Hares, introduced to this island in the 1950s.

So, interestingly, our results suggest that the declining trends seen in Atlantic Canada's Leach's Storm-Petrel population may not be mirrored in the peripheral colonies in the Gulf of Maine. But, in the end, it's all just a shot in the dark!

Iain Stenhouse is Co-Director of the Center for Waterbird Studies and Director of the Marine Bird Program at the Biodiversity Research Institute, headquartered in Portland, Maine. (Say THAT three times fast.) His petrel-grubbing scientific skills are enhanced by the wicked hand-eye coordination he has developed as an artist and musician.

* IUCN The International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, founded in 1964, is the world's most comprehensive inventory of the global conservation status of plant and animal species. It uses quantitative criteria to evaluate the extinction risk of thousands of species.



Critter Corner : *The Perils of Plastics*

Scanning the skies at the edge of Penobscot Bay, an approaching aerial object caught my eye. It was the right size for a large bird, perhaps an eagle. But the wingless object wasn't flapping or gliding, propelled instead by a south-westerly breeze. My binoculars soon resolved the mysterious object: a cluster of red, helium-filled party balloons. I stood pondering where it would eventually land, as the bundle moved steadily seaward. Its likely odds would favor an offshore island or some distant ocean touchdown a hundred miles beyond. Plastic items stuck in tree branches, such as single-use bags, are common sights along coastal roadways. And most any birder has probably mistaken them for birds of various species.

Occasionally we hear of tragic outcomes of waste plastics ingested by sea life, from whales and other ocean mammals, to fishes and sea turtles. And although we generally don't think much about marine debris, entanglement of animals is one of the main environmental



impacts of waste plastics. Thirty-six percent of seabirds are now known to be entangled in plastic litter. Entangling waste materials, such as six-pack rings are occasionally incorporated into nests. The issue is further compounded when bits of plastic are mistakenly fed to chicks. Fortunately, the entanglement risk is less (10%) for freshwater birds. Discarded fishing gear, such as monofilament lines, hooks and sinkers take a toll, however.

Recently I encountered a red-breasted merganser wearing a bridle of rubberized webbing around her head and throat area. An active diving bird, mergansers are susceptible to swimming into underwater obstacles. I was unable to relieve the bird's situation, but there is hope for others of its kind. With targeted mitigation measures, including proper disposal of plastic items and used fishing gear, we can reduce the danger to all wildlife.

Don Reimer is the author of Seen Anything Good? Seasons of Birds in Midcoast Maine. He's a regular visitor to a wide variety of habitats, but can be reliably spotted on the edges of Weskeag Marsh and the pages of The Free Press.

Bird Feeder Project 2021 Awardees



Wow! We had an outstanding response to our call for applications for this year's Bird Feeder Station Project. It was so inspiring to read the many ways in which schools and libraries aspire to enhance their nature and science studies with close observations of birds.

Although we are not able to provide materials to all the applicants this year, we plan to continue this project and support additional sites in the future. This year's awardees are:

Great Salt Bay Community School (Lincoln County)
Thomaston Grammar School (Knox County)
North Haven Community School (Knox County)
Whitefield Elementary School (Lincoln County)
Monhegan Island School (Lincoln County)
Carver Memorial Library (Waldo County)

Congratulations! We look forward to working with you and hearing about your ornithological discoveries.



There's always something new to learn about...

Spring Shorebirds

- 1) Typically, what is the first sandpiper to arrive in Spring?
- 2) What sandpiper is also known as the Labrador Twister, Swamp Bat, and Bog Sucker?
- 3) Which sandpiper lays its eggs in old songbird nests in trees?
- 4) How many sandpiper species nest in Maine?
- 5) Among the following sandpiper species, which does NOT nest in Maine?
Upland Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs,
Wilson's Snipe, American Oystercatcher.
- 6) Which sandpiper is most likely to be seen in midwinter in Maine?
- 7) Among the nearly 40 sandpiper species that pass through Maine each year, which is the smallest? (Hint: it is also the smallest sandpiper in the world!)
- 8) What do puffins have in common with sandpipers?
- 9) What feathers does an American Woodcock use to make its unusual twittering call?
- 10) What feathers does a Wilson's Snipe use to make its unusual winnowing call?

Answers:
1) Killdeer
2) American Woodcock
3) Solitary Sandpiper
4) Eight! (Piping Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, American Oystercatcher and Willet)
5) Greater Yellowlegs
6) Purple Sandpiper
7) Least Sandpiper
8) They are both found in the Order *Charadriiformes*, a diverse worldwide group of birds that also includes gulls.
9) Its 3 outermost primary wing feathers
10) Its outermost tail feathers



Birds in Art at the Wendell Gilley Museum

What's that you say? You're not in the mood to contend with [rain, sun, bugs, crowds, whatever] but you still want to see some birds? Why not take your birding indoors?

Birds in Art, an international, juried exhibition organized by the Woodson Art Museum of Wisconsin travels to just a few select venues each year, and this summer you can see it in Maine at the Wendell Gilley Museum in Southwest Harbor.

Birds in Art features work by sixty contemporary artists, who offer their unique interpretations of the avian world in a variety of media.

The show runs June 11- August 14.

Visit wendellgilleymuseum.org for more information.

(Above: "A Tern of the Tide," by Maine artist Sherrie York will be part of the exhibition.)



Live and Online Events with Mid-Coast Audubon!

Full trip descriptions and current information on our website: midcoast.maineaudubon.org

Program Coordinator: Will Broussard 837-9520 / Field Trip contact: Dennis McKenna 563-8439



Field Trips

The month of May is when the movement of neo-tropical migrants north begins in earnest. Accordingly, “warbler-neck,” an affliction that affects those who seek views of beautiful, tiny wood warblers high in the trees, is the condition of the day. Thrushes, singing from the forest floor, delight with their repertoires. Tanagers, grosbeaks and other species astonish with their beauty.

Mid-Coast Audubon, emerging from Covid-dictated inactivity, will recommence birding field trips in May. We welcome birders of all skill levels!

We will continue to observe health precautions:

- 1. Social distancing and mask wearing will continue.**
- 2. There will be no carpooling unless those wishing to do so have all been fully vaccinated. We will not meet at a central point and carpool to the field trip site, instead we will meet at the site.**
- 3. Sharing of spotting scopes is discouraged, so please bring your own if you have one.**

Full-day trip participants should bring a lunch.

In case of inclement weather, people interested in attending should contact the trip leader to find out if the trip is cancelled.

Spring 2021 Field Trip Schedule

Salt Bay Farm, Damariscotta

May 1, 2021 (Saturday, 7:00am-noon)

Join Dennis McKenna as he seeks early migrants at the Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust Great Salt Bay Farm property on Belvedere Road in Damariscotta. Meet at 7:00am in the parking lot. Trip Leader: Dennis McKenna, (207) 563-8439.

Sears Island, Searsport

May 10, 2021 (Monday, 7:00am-1:00pm)

During spring migration, many species rest and feed on Sears Island during their long northbound trip. Warblers galore! We will meet at the Sears Island causeway at 7:00am. For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call Trip Leader Gail Presley at (207) 975-5930.

Viles Arboretum, Augusta

May 15, 2021 (Saturday, 7:00am-3:00pm)

The 224-acre Pine Tree State Arboretum has fields, marshes, ponds, gardens, and woods providing diverse habitat for birds. Meet in the arboretum parking lot at 7:00am. In the event of inclement weather, please call Trip Leader Lew Purinton at (207) 549-5257 or cell (207) 215-1913.

Evergreen Cemetery and Capisic Park, Portland

May 22, 2021 (Saturday, 7:30am-2:30pm)

Historically our trips to these sites have been some of our most successful for finding spring migrants. We will meet at the back parking area at Evergreen Cemetery, near the turtle pond, at 7:30am. For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call Trip Leader Will Broussard at (207) 837-9520.

Pemaquid Point, Bristol

May 25, 2021 (Tuesday, 7:00am-noon)

The Pemaquid Peninsula extends well out in the Atlantic ocean, making it a great place for viewing seabirds. Meet at the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse parking lot at 7:00am. There is a parking fee. Trip Leader: Dennis McKenna (207) 563-8439.

Belgrade Lakes and Bond Brook

June 1, 2021 (Tuesday, 8:00am-3:00pm)

During this trip we will seek some regional specialties such as Sandhill Cranes, Black Terns and Purple Martins. Meet at the Belgrade Lakes Boat Launch on Route 27 at 8:00am. Trip Leader: Dennis McKenna (207) 563-8439.

Kennebunk Plains

June 8, 2021 (Tuesday, 8:30am-3:00pm)

The 1,300-acre sandplain grasslands is home to breeding grassland species found almost nowhere else in the state, including Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows, Upland Sandpipers, and Eastern Meadowlarks. Meet at the Kennebunk Service Plaza on Rt 95 (southbound) at 8:30am. Trip Leader: Dennis McKenna (207) 563-8439.



Lew Purinton

Monthly Nature Programs

Our third-Thursday monthly programs, presented in partnership with the Camden Public Library, are now on summer hiatus.

Huge thanks go out to Kit Pfeiffer, who stepped in as Interim Program Coordinator this past winter and kept us enlightened and entertained with some great online programs.

Will Broussard has taken up the Program Coordinator mantle and already has our speaker slate full for next season. We look forward to having you join us again starting in September... perhaps even in person? Until then, mark your calendars for these great upcoming presentations:

Ancient Trees of North America

with David Govatski
September 16th, 2021

Nocturnal Flight Calls

with Eric Masterson
October 21st, 2021

North American Owls

with Paul Bannick
November 18th, 2021

Hog Island Audubon Camp Summer 2021

Camp will be in session for 2021 with reduced camper numbers and covid precautions in place.

NEW THIS YEAR! Hog Island Day Trips! Not ready for a full residential camp experience? Check out the many single-day workshops and birding trips scheduled May 30-June 11.

hogisland.audubon.org



Sherrie York



Mid-Coast Audubon Preserves

Preserves Manager Keegan Kennedy has been hard at work organizing improvements and maintenance at our local preserves. In February a small-but-mighty work crew met at Mid-Coast Audubon's Nelson Preserve in Friendship to clear blowdowns and install new trail markers. New signage and updated trail information are also being developed to enhance your visit.

Mid-Coast Audubon owns and manages four refuges open to the public for quiet recreation on the trails. These refuges are natural areas and we allow nature to take its course except for the trail system. Birders are encouraged to use the refuges and the trail system in all seasons.

Davis Bog Preserve (Morrill)
Guy Van Duyn Preserve (Waldoboro)
Nelson Preserve (Friendship)
Weskeag River Wildlife Preserve (Thomaston, no trails)

Information about and directions to MCA preserves is available on our website.

Welcome, new and rejoining Mid-Coast Audubon members!

Christina Banks
Terry Beal
Margaret M. Boyajian
Annie F. Brown
Nala Cardillo and
Jennifer Williamson
Patricia Curley
Marie Erskine
Marion Funkhouser
Kristen Grant
Emily Greenberg
Laurie Jones
Donald J. Kanicki
Patrick Killoran
Mary Kubler
Lisa Liltz and
Jason Hunter
Letitia Manning
Will Matteson and
Mary Beaster
Richard B. Maxcy
Molly Marie McKellar

Erin N. McLaughlin
George McLeod
Kristi Niedermann
Virginia Noble
Bethany Oprie
Joan and Roger Panek
Charlie and Julie Perry
Jeff Philbrick
Susan and Barnaby Porter
Lloyd Roberts
Robert Roxby
Lee and Linda Schiller
Laurie Schweikert
Barbara Smith
Sherry Spaulding
Catherine Spedden
Barbara Sweitzer
Yvonne Thomas
Karin Tichy
Helen Walsh
Andrea I. Williams



Don Reimer

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Sherrie York

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Mid-Coast Chapter

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 to my credit card each month (\$5 minimum).

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Home Phone: _____ Email: _____

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☐ Check enclosed in the amount of \$ _____ (Please make checks payable to Maine Audubon.)

☐ Charge \$ _____ to my credit card # _____

Exp. _____ CSV _____

Join or renew online
maineaudubon.org/join

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

Thank you!

Checks payable to Maine Audubon, 20 Gilsland Farm Rd, Falmouth, ME 04105. FMI: 207.781.2330, ext. 230