

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

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Clarry Hill Blueberry Barren For Sale

Do you remember the first time you visited Clarry Hill in Union? When you left the asphalt road and turned onto the dirt road, it didn't seem so high up. What you did notice were large erratic glacial boulders strewn here and there or neatly lined up along the edges of fields. But upon reaching the top of the gentle walk from where you parked, the 360-degree view took your breath away – Muscongus Bay, Camden, mountains as far as you could see.

You haven't been to Clarry Hill? It's where I saw my first Upland Sandpiper, my first Vesper Sparrow, and, on a bitterly cold single-digit winter morning in my pajamas, my first Snowy Owl. You must go to Clarry Hill! Not only is the scenery spectacular but it is also one of Maine's treasured blueberry barrens that provide refuge and food for Horned Larks, Savannah Sparrows, Snow Buntings, Whimbrels, and other birds. It

is also critical habitat for nesting Upland Sandpipers. On your first visit, you may even witness an American Kestrel or Northern Harrier floating on the warm updraft, or during the autumn, a kettle of raptors spiraling up on the updrafts and soaring off as they head south for the winter. Who knows what you might see. Your visit will not disappoint.

Clarry Hill Highlands, located in Union in mid-coast Maine, is a managed wild lowbush blueberry barren. In late May, bees pollinate the bushes and in August the blueberries are harvested. It is also a notable annual hawk-watch site in autumn; several volunteers can be found counting the raptors as they head south. Besides the blueberry barrens, Clarry Hill's grasslands are essential nesting sites for

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Audubon

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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

President's Corner



Chaotic Splendor!

As the red squirrel methodically extracts stuffing from the porch seat cushion, the fat raccoons ransack the feeders, and the birds scream obscenities at one another... Tender tulip shoots are pushing impossibly through a thick mat of fallen leaves, Pink and green elderberry buds are catching diamonds from the wet sky, and woodcocks and frogs are singing evening love songs.

The season's first tick bites while I'm peeling layers on and off in the warm and cold.

So tempting to get into the gardens,
but we must leave the leaves?
watch the browntail moth hairs?
change the clocks?

Gah! It's spring! Isn't life interesting in all its
chaotic splendor!?

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 Seabird Researcher, Assistant Sanctuary Manager, Conservation Decoy Painter, and Outreach Educator.



Pileated Woodpeckers / Lew Purinton photo

Welcome, new and rejoining Mid-Coast Audubon members!

JANUARY

Karla Evans
Cheryl Cook and Barbara Spitz

FEBRUARY

Dustin and Diane Batley
Janice Darden
Dawn Griswold
Clare and Christopher Lynch
Kristina and Jeff Shula

MARCH

Karen and Jim Carson
Daniel Cassiday
Charles Lipson

Clarry Hill - from page 1

Upland Sandpiper, Vesper Sparrow, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Whimbrels, once known as “Blueberry Curlews,” have been seen stopping by.

Did you know that this birding treasure in the Mid-coast is for sale? Yes, for sale! The place where so many “firsts” have been seen; where a surreal landscape of blueberry bushes changes colors with the seasons; where those perfect giant boulders placed one by one like some giant’s toys were in fact boulders left in place by glaciers. How could this wonder of nature be sold and no longer be a blueberry barren that has been tended for generations?

Midcoast Conservancy had already secured easements on parts of Clarry Hill for a small preserve contiguous to the barren, but the remaining 263 acres were offered for sale last December for an asking price of \$1.6 million, sending shock waves through the conservation community. As you can imagine, though, once word got out, things happened rapidly. Working with partners including the Maine Farmland Trust, and seeking support from other sources, Pete Nichols of Midcoast Conservancy sought a new appraisal, and signed a \$1.05 million purchase agreement with Coastal Blueberry Service for the property, with payment due September 15, 2023 – breathing space to raise the needed matching funds of \$500,000.



Whimbrel on Clarry Hill / Don Reimer photo

To learn more about this priority conservation project visit Midcoast Conservancy’s website: <https://www.midcoastconservancy.org/> There you will find more information and maps showing the area to be purchased and other easements surrounding the sale property. (Two privately owned parcels at the summit of the hill are not included in the sale; Midcoast is in discussion with the owners, who are interested in maintaining public access.)

I’ve always believed we save what we love. Birders past and present love Clarry Hill, as will future birders if they have a chance to experience its wonders. For generations it has produced and been critical for birds. It cannot stop with us. It must continue.

We must save this piece of natural history, this piece of birding lore, this piece of Maine’s wild lowbush blueberry barren, this piece of Maine’s mid-coast. Have your company give a gift, your family, your birding friends; give a gift in honor or memory of someone. A gift no matter how humble expresses our acknowledgment that the Clarry Hill Highland property is critical – it lives in our hearts and birds need it.

Juanita Roushdy is an avid birder living in Bremen. She first visited Clarry Hill in 2007 as a camper with the Hog Island Audubon Camp. Despite being a world traveler, she was blown away by the vistas and the Upland Sandpiper peeking above the blueberries. She still visits throughout the year to breathe it all in.



Style that’s for the birds...

It’s Spring! Grab your binoculars and your field guide, put on your boots—and your new Mid-Coast Audubon hat—and go celebrate the changing season in style. Khaki hat sports our Mid-Coast Audubon merganser logo and comes in your choice of three brim colors. More information available on our website: <https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/shop/>



Vesper Sparrow / Don Reimer photo

If a gull ever plucked a sandwich from your hand or invaded your cooler at the sand beach, you've experienced theft. Gulls are skillful practitioners of this artful form of robbery. Perhaps we shouldn't feel surprised, since gulls are deeply habituated to human presences, associating us and our vehicles with low-risk, high-potential food sources.

Food stealing, or *kleptoparasitism*, is quite common in the animal world, occurring in everything from mollusks to mammals, and 197 species of birds (representing 33 families.) Birds steal from each other just about anything that isn't nailed down, including mates, nesting materials, eggs, and prey. Interestingly, research indicates that kleptoparasitism seems to require more intelligence than other methods of obtaining prey: brain size to body size was a better predictor of piracy than the sheer size of a bird.



A Herring Gull steals fish from an Osprey / Don Reimer photo

Critter Corner: *Beg, Borrow, Steal*

Avian piracy takes several forms. The stealth approach is one effective means, relying on speed and an element of surprise to grab the food item and fly off without direct confrontation with the food owner.

Aggressive stealing employs force or threats to gain a theft. The bald eagle comes to mind here. Although eagles are capable fishers in their own right, their frequent raids can deprive ospreys of their hard-earned catches. Benjamin Franklin considered bald eagles as lazy creatures, even citing their habit of stealing food as a reason not to use them as our national symbol of the United States (instead Franklin proposed the wild turkey.)

The May calendar brings an explosion of bird activity to the Georges River in Warren as groups of gulls, cormorants, ospreys, and eagles arrive for the annual feasting. Each tidal cycle brings the prospect of fish moving up river. Gulls gobble fish trapped in the shallows, swallowing them whole. Cormorants patrol the river channel for swipes at the churning bonanza of fish. Sharp-eyed ospreys circle and hover above the river, announcing their presence with high-pitched "cheeping" notes. Lurking back in huge white pines that line the river, eagles are usually less conspicuous.

When ospreys secure a fish, the commotion starts. Near water level, herring gulls jab at the osprey's catch. Eagles join the fray as ospreys gain elevation, making circling twists and turns around the protesting fisher bird. The eagle strategy is to rise above the osprey, forcing it to release its catch in mid-air. In such instances, a dropped fish is typically retrieved by the agile eagle before it hits the ground. Piracy has its rewards.

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.



The Maine Owl Pellet Project wants you!

The Maine Owl Pellet Project (MOPP) is a collaboration between the University of New England, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The project aims to better understand the diet of Maine's owls and the distribution and composition of the small

mammal community on which they prey, including the threatened northern bog lemming, to inform conservation efforts.

To do so, they are collecting owl pellets! If you live, work, or adventure in Maine and find an owl pellet, please consider collecting and sending the pellet to the project for analysis. Get more information on the project website: <https://sites.une.edu/maine-owl-pellet-project/>

It's back! September LOBSTER BAKE Fundraiser!

Bring your friends and family for an unforgettable day on a Maine coastal island! Join us at Hog Island Audubon Camp for our traditional lobster bake fundraiser on **September 2, 2023**. Members of the Mid-Coast Audubon board will display their cooking talents and be available to answer bird questions, too.

Your \$75 ticket supports bird conservation and public education in midcoast Maine.

As if that's not enough, you will also enjoy boat transportation to Hog Island from the Audubon dock in Bremen and your meal, which includes fish chowder and fire-baked lobster, clams, potato, corn, and

onion...plus lemonade, coffee, and a special bird-themed dessert!

Of course you'll have some time to explore the island and walk off some of that meal, too.

Reservations will be open in July and participation is limited, so keep an eye on our website and social media channels for more details:
<https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/event/lobster-bake/>



Q&A: Get Out There!

This issue of *The Merganser* is chock full of opportunities to enjoy and support the great Maine outdoors! Can't join us on a field trip? Take your own excursion to one of these popular recreation and birding locations in our catchment area (Waldo, Lincoln, & Knox counties), properties owned by Mid-Coast Audubon and other local conservation organizations.

1) This 40-acre preserve located in Waldo county and managed in partnership between Mid-Coast Audubon and the Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition is an easy and relatively short half mile trail out and back. A highlight of this property is its moss garden and wetland access.

2) The Todd Wildlife Sanctuary in Bremen maintains a 30-acre mainland property housing the summer headquarters of Project Puffin along with a 330-acre property home to the famed Audubon Camp where Roger Tory Peterson began his teaching career. What is the name of this 330-acre property?

3) Several trails intersect among diverse habitats including upland oak and spruce forest, field, riparian hardwoods, and tidal salt marsh in this 30-acre parcel owned by Mid-Coast Audubon along the Medomak River. Wildlife highlights include waterfowl, shorebirds, and more than 80 species of songbirds throughout the year.

4) This 500-acre Midcoast Conservancy property features a scenic hiking trail that offers views of the ocean and mountains. It is home to the region's largest commercial blueberry fields along with critical grassland habitat important to state-threatened Upland Sandpiper.

5) 95 acres of upland, mixed forest and red maple swamp along the Goose River in the town of Friendship identifies this property, which is owned by Mid-Coast Audubon. It is an excellent spring birding location for warblers and for breeding birds that prefer dense forest, such as thrushes and woodpeckers.



Mid-Coast Audubon's Nelson Preserve

6) Listed as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society, this wetland preserve in South Thomaston includes a tidal river with extensive saltmarsh that briefly attracted Maine's first Eurasian Marsh-Harrier in August of 2022.

7) This seaside property boasts a moderate, 2.4-mile trail that is a popular cross-country ski and snowshoe destination in wintertime, and excellent hiking, picnicking and dog walking opportunities in the warm season. Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust manages this former Nature Conservancy site located in Bristol at the southern end of the Pemaquid Peninsula.

8) Maine Coast Heritage Trust holds the easement to this popular, 601-acre, state-owned property with excellent, year-round birding opportunities in Penobscot Bay.

9) Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust's most exciting and beautiful protected land is this 115-acre property in Damariscotta, which includes over one mile of shoreline, extensive wetlands and rolling fields that have been worked for 200 years.

10) This thousand acre, Midcoast Conservancy property is home to an estimated 25 miles of multi-use trails including frontage along Little Dyer Pond in Jefferson. Diverse terrain, multiple freshwater ponds, and rustic overnight accommodations make this a truly unique wildlife viewing location.

- 10) Hidden Valley Nature Center
- 9) Great Salt Bay Farm
- 8) Sears Island
- 7) La Verna Preserve
- 6) Weskeag Marsh

- 5) Nelson Nature Preserve
- 4) Clarry Hill
- 3) Guy Van Duyn Preserve
- 2) Hog Island
- 1) Davis Bog Preserve

Join Us! Mid-Coast Audubon Events

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

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

Field Trips

ALL ARE WELCOME! You don't need to be an Audubon member or have advanced birding skills to join us! We simply hope to instill interest in the natural world through an understanding of how birds live and what birds live and thrive in our area.

At this time we do require that participants over the age of twelve be fully vaccinated against Covid-19.

May 11, 18, and 25, 2023 (Thursdays, 7:00-10:00 a.m.)

Pemaquid Point Thursdays, Bristol

Visiting Pemaquid Point is like going out to sea, but without a boat. The peninsula is long and relatively narrow, extending well out in the Atlantic ocean, which explains why it is such a great place for viewing seabirds. In spring, it is often a stopover for migrants. eBird reports that 203 species have been seen on Pemaquid Point!

We'll meet at the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse parking lot in Bristol at 7:00 a.m. for a couple hours of birding. There may be a parking fee. For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call the Field Trip Coordinator, Dennis McKenna at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

May 13, 2023 (Saturday, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.)

Sears Island, Searsport

Join us as we seek spring migrants at this Waldo County birding hotspot in Searsport. During spring migration, many species rest and feed on the island during their long northbound trip. Warblers galore! Some are here to stay (Chestnut-sided, Black and White, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart) and some have farther to go (Wilson's, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll). Other songbirds include Scarlet Tanager, thrushes, flycatchers, and White-throated Sparrow. The site is easy to navigate as the main trail is paved.

We will meet at the Sears Island causeway at 8:00 a.m. For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call Trip Leader, Dennis McKenna at (207) 563-8439.

May 20, 2023 (Saturday, 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.)

Evergreen Cemetery/Capisic Pond, Portland

Evergreen Cemetery and its surrounding 100-acre forest in Portland is a warbler haven in May, with owls, hawks, ducks, and herons possible at the ponds. We will continue to seek spring migrants at this, historically, one of our most successful field trips. Thrushes are vocal and common at this time of year. Capisic Pond is Portland's largest freshwater pond and can turn up two species of orioles, waterbirds, warblers and a variety of songbirds at this 18-acre site.

For those coming from the north who are interested in carpooling, we will meet at the Damariscotta Hannaford parking lot at 6:30 a.m. Otherwise, we will meet at the back parking area at Evergreen Cemetery, near the north end of the duck pond, at 8:00 a.m. For more information contact Field Trip Coordinator, Dennis McKenna at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

June 3, 2023 (Saturday, 8:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.)

Belgrade Lakes and Bond Brook, Augusta

A visit to Belgrade Lakes offers a mix of fresh water and northern hardwood forest species with highlights including Black Terns, Sandhill Cranes, Purple Martins, and many warbler species. For those coming from the Damariscotta area who are interested in carpooling, we will meet at the Damariscotta Hannaford parking lot at 7:00 a.m. Otherwise, meet at the Messalonskee Lake Boat Ramp on Route 27 at 8:00 a.m. If you see Hammond Lumber on the left going north you have gone 300-400 yards too far.

The Bond Brook Recreation Area, behind the Augusta airport, has featured nesting Prairie Warblers for years. Of the 116 species seen at this site, highlights include Field and Grasshopper Sparrows, flycatchers, and Brown Thrashers.

We'll find a place to buy lunch along the way. For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call Trip Leader, Dennis McKenna, at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

June 8, 2023 (Thursday, 6:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.)

Kennebunk Plains/Sanford Lagoons

The 1,300-acre sandplain grasslands is home to breeding grassland species found almost nowhere else in the state such as Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows, Upland Sandpipers, and Eastern Meadowlarks. The early successional stage of pitch pine barrens attracts warblers, buntings, and other forest edge species.

This trip is scheduled for a Thursday because we will include a visit to the Sanford Sewage Treatment plant, which is closed on the weekends. Known for attracting waterfowl, this site boasts sightings of 251 species!

For those coming from the north who are interested in carpooling, we will meet at the Damariscotta Hannaford parking lot at 6:30 a.m. Otherwise, we will meet at the Kennebunk Service Plaza on Rt. 95 (southbound) at 8:00 a.m. For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call Trip Leader, Dennis McKenna, at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

August 12, 19, and 26, 2023 (Saturdays, 7:00-9:00 a.m.)

Weskeag Marsh, South Thomaston

We will look for the first wave of south-bound shore birds at this Knox County hot spot. Meet at the parking lot on Buttermilk Lane in South Thomaston at 7:00 a.m. A spotting scope is very helpful.

Monthly Nature Programs

We're on summer break! Our third-Thursday monthly programs, presented in partnership with the Camden Public Library, will resume in September. Contact Camden Library or **visit the Mid-Coast Audubon Events page to see what's coming up:** <https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/events/>

Weskeag Marsh in South Thomaston is one of Maine's best birding marshes. The marsh is a mix of salt, brackish, and freshwater habitat. It supports cattails and grass, potholes and mud flats. It is a mix of brook, stream, and river. It is bordered by forest, scrubland, and hayfields. In short, the 1,300-acre complex of protected lands contains a good variety of habitats.

Directions: From Route 1 in Thomaston, turn onto Buttermilk Lane and in 0.8 miles look for the parking turnout at the marsh. For more information, call trip leader, Don Reimer, at (207) 975-5466 (cell).

September 9, 2023

(Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.)

Pine Point and Environs, Scarborough

We'll be seeking the second wave of sandpipers and plovers at this consistent lure for shorebirds fattening up for the long flight south. This area also offers fine viewing of waterfowl and wading birds. Whimbrel and American Oystercatchers will be target species. Pine Point is where the Scarborough River empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

Our intention is to be at Pine Point at 7:30am. Those wishing to carpool from the north will depart Damariscotta Hannaford's at 5:45am. We'll make additional stops at the Scarborough Marsh.

For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call trip leader, Dennis McKenna, at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

September 23, 2023 *(Saturday, 6:45 a.m.-5:30 p.m.)*

Monhegan Island

Join Don Reimer as he seeks south-bound migrants from this famous mid-coast Maine migrant trap. The Monhegan Ferry leaves at 7:00 a.m. from Port Clyde and returns at 4:30 p.m. Attendees must make their own ferry reservations in advance. Call the Monhegan Boat Line at 207-372-8848, or reserve online at <https://monheganboat.com>. Call Dennis McKenna at 207-563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891 with any questions.

Monhegan Island is 10 miles off the coast and is a magnet for migrating warblers and other songbirds. We'll also see hawks, falcons, marsh birds, and many seabirds from the boat and shore. A stop at the Monhegan Brewery is a great end to a wonderful day of birding.

We will meet at Monhegan Boat Line in Port Clyde at 6:45 a.m.

October 14, 2023 *(Saturday, 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.)*

Green Point Wildlife Area, Dresden

A former orchard and farm, the wildlife area extends down to the shore of the Kennebec River forming the upper reaches of Merrymeeting Bay. A walk along the well-maintained old road passes through old orchards (often teeming with birds), small ponds and wetlands, and leads to

a beautiful pine grove on a peninsula that provides a magnificent, expansive view of the river.

Expect a wide variety of migrant birds in the woodlands, fields, and wild-rice flats of this diverse area. Warblers and other woodland birds, sparrows and other field birds, waterfowl, and raptors may be seen on this walk. And we always have a nice lunch out somewhere!

We will meet at the wildlife area at 8:00 a.m. For those wishing to carpool, we will depart Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m. For questions, please call trip leader, Dennis McKenna, at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

Directions: On Route 128 (River Road) in Dresden, .8 mile north of the intersection of Indian Road and Route 128. Watch for a gravel parking area at a MIFW maintenance building on the west side of road.



Northern Harrier / Lew Purinton photo

November 4, 2023 *(Saturday, 8:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.)*

Sabattus Pond

Join us for a visit to Sabattus Pond as we look over the extensive flocks of south-bound ducks. Sabattus Pond is remarkable in autumn when water levels draw down, exposing extensive mud flats and large concentrations of migrating waterfowl show up. From October until freeze-up, regulars include Mallards, American Black Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, Common Goldeneye, Green-winged Teals, American Wigeons, Northern Pintails, Ring-necked Ducks, both species of scaup, and American Coots. We often see some interesting songbirds, and typically raptors.

We'll meet at the boat ramp at the south end at 8:00 a.m. For those wishing to carpool, we'll depart the Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.

We typically stop at several sites around the pond to view the whole pond. Participants should dress warmly because Sabattus Pond can be one of the coldest places on earth.

For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please call trip leader, Dennis McKenna, at (207) 563-8439 (home) or cell 207-522-2891.

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Mid-Coast Chapter

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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