

The Merganser

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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Black skimmers

Have you ever been to the beach between Massachusetts and Florida and seen a mostly black and white bird with long wings skimming along the surface of the water? If you have then you have seen one of the coolest and most unique beach birds in the world. The Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*).

While not a common sight in Maine, Black Skimmers in the United States nest on beaches from Massachusetts to Florida, along the Gulf Coast and in some locations on the West Coast. They are black above and white below, have long, slender pointed wings and a long orange and black knife-like bill. These birds are often seen in large groups and their call resembles a bark.

The long, pointed wings of Black Skimmers make them powerful and agile fliers. During hurricane Irma in SW Florida in 2017, a large group was seen on the beach as the storm approached. The birds stayed on the beach until the winds reached 90 mph, then took to the sky. Winds reached 150 mph for several hours and when the winds subsided, the birds returned to their resting place on the beach. The powerful flight capability of the birds allowed them to ride out the storm on the wing, an impressive feat.

The genus *Rynchops*, which includes Black Skimmer, African Skimmer, and Indian Skimmer, have a couple of characteristics not seen in any other bird. One of these characteristics is the long, knife-like bill, with the lower mandible longer than the upper mandible. They fly low over the water with the lower mandible skimming just under the



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Mid-Coast



Audubon

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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 May 15!
Send submissions to sy@sherrieyork.com

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

The publication schedule for *The Merganser* will be slightly wonky this spring, as your editor will be off on an adventure.

The next issue will be mailed in June rather than May. *But never fear!* You can always keep track of field trips, lecture programs, and other events via our website and social media channels!

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President(s') Corner(s)

Stormy seas and peaceful transitions

Even as I lamented the wee one being blown into the entirely unsuitable habitat of Barb's tomato plants, I couldn't help but feel a little thrill to see a real live Dovekie up close! A solid little bird with clean black and white markings, this smallest Atlantic Alcids is a high Arctic species which nests in colonies of millions of birds. In the winter, they migrate south

of the pack ice, and sometimes go even farther south when seeking scarce food. Strong easterly winds can then blow the birds ashore, especially if they are weak from lack of copepods.



Dovekie / Sue Schubel photo

A sighting of *Alle alle* swimming in Damariscotta Lake during the CBC in December was noteworthy, a time when many Dovekies were stranded along the coast and taken to wildlife rehabs for recovery.

The grounded bird we had in Bremen came during the first of the January tempests, and was healthy

enough to be released back into the calm backwaters of Muscongus Bay. The storms were epic, causing tremendous damage to human coastal structures and possibly serious changes to seabird nesting habitat. With climate change promising more such events, was this little bird from the North a messenger with a warning?

Between the raging storms, your Mid-Coast Audubon Chapter accomplished a peaceful transition of power. Many years ago, I was called up to lead the MCA Board as President, and am grateful for the opportunity. Many thanks to all the members of the Board for humoring me and doing such good work for the benefit of birds and the people who love them! Now, at last, we have another who will take a turn at the helm.

Jeff Cherry is relatively new to the Board, but fully entrenched in his love of birds. A fellow explorer of the wild edges of suburbia since childhood, he really discovered birds in college through an Ornithology class at Bowdoin College. His tapestry of life is richly embroidered with avian research, community science, woodworking, small business ownership, and natural history threads. Soon he and his wife will close the chapter on their antiques business, and he will have time to focus more completely on his heart journey of birds.

It's interesting how things come around. Jeff told me that his first Ornithology field trip in college was to Damariscotta Mills and Pemaquid Point. After time working in different places, this is where he ended up living and birding! Closing circles seems auspicious somehow. Congratulations, Mr. President!

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... and Mid-Coast Audubon President Emeritus.





Incoming President Jeff Cherry is sworn in by Sue Schubel at our January meeting of the Mid-Coast Audubon Board. Will Broussard / photo

Thank you to Sue for her many years serving as president of Mid-Coast Audubon. I am just realizing now, as I discover the many and diverse tasks associated with the job, how much she did. On behalf of the board and members, Thank you! Fortunately for all of us, Sue will stay on the board and help with many of our programs. (And yes, that means continuing to create cream puffs for the lobster bake!)

Thanks also to **Dennis McKenna**, our long serving leader of the field trip committee. He is stepping down from that position, but will still be an active participant in our trips. We offer at least one trip a month throughout the year and our upcoming schedule can be found in this newsletter and on the website. I am excited about our two new offerings in February to Rockland Breakwater and Clarry Hill. I'll be participating in some of these trips and I hope that I'll get to meet many of you.

I'm looking forward to my role as President of Mid-Coast Audubon, so that I can share my interests with others and help preserve our birds for the future.

Jeff Cherry and birds are often found lurking in the same places, fancy that! But fancy or not, Jeff is a strong advocate of getting to know the birds in one's own area.

The board is lucky to have two new members, **Adam DiNuovo** and **Mael Glon**. Adam is currently the Volunteer Coordinator for Friends of Hog Island and has been affiliated with Hog Island and the Seabird Institute since 2012. He has been working with seabirds and shorebirds for more than 20 years with positions including Research Coordinator for the California Least Tern and Western Snowy Plover Program at San Diego Zoo Global Institute for Conservation Research and Shorebird Program Manager for Audubon Florida. His current research is looking at survival, diet and movement of Black Skimmers nesting in Florida. Mael is a recent arrival to the mid-coast area, and an avid birder and photographer. He has worked as an endangered species biologist for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for the past two years and is starting a new job within the USFWS as a biologist for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

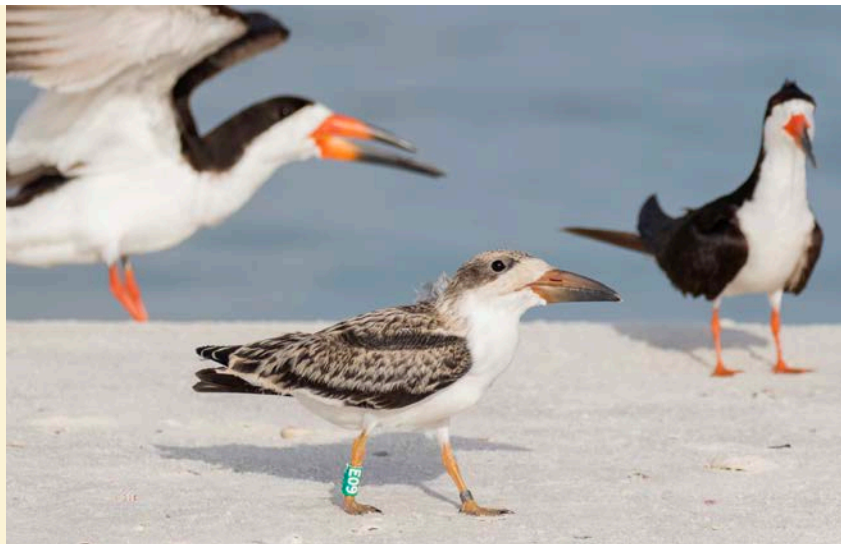
Skimmers

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surface. When prey is detected by feel, the bill snaps shut. This feeding strategy allows the birds to feed day and night.

Another unique characteristic of Black Skimmers is the large pupil that can narrow down to a slit, similar to a cat's eye. This adaptation has not been described in any other bird and is used to reduce glare from the water while they are skimming during the day. Their pupil being large also allows them to see better at night, a favorite foraging time of Black Skimmers, especially while they are raising and feeding chicks.

Now that I have you all fully convinced that Black Skimmers are one of the coolest birds in the world, I have to unfortunately tell you that their populations are declining. While that is not good news,



Adult and young Black Skimmers / Jean Hall photo

there are simple things you can do to help them. First, if you see a nesting colony, keep a safe distance away. This also applies to your four legged friends. Leave your dogs at home when you go to the beach. Disturbing the birds at this time of year leaves eggs and chicks exposed to predators and the elements. Outside of the breeding season, Black Skimmers can often be seen resting in large flocks on the beach. In my many years working with these birds it seems running through the flocks for a cool photo op is a

favorite pastime of beach goers. This is also an activity that should be avoided. The birds need to rest in order to build up reserves for migration or breeding and this continuous disturbance negatively impacts the fitness of the birds.

I encourage all of you to get out on the beaches this summer and look for Black Skimmers. If we give them a little space and observe from a

safe distance, these amazing birds will be around for us to enjoy for many years to come.

Adam DiNuovo has been plumbing the secrets of seabirds for more than 20 years. We don't really know how he is at other forms of plumbing, but he definitely has skills with a stew pot over an open fire.

Critter Corner: *Winter Robins*

Traditionally regarded as harbingers of Spring, American Robins form nomadic flocks in winter, moving together in search of food. These are not routine migration patterns; instead, these wanderers concentrate at available food resources. Flock sizes vary, and can contain hundreds of hungry robins. The majority of a robin's summer diet consists of invertebrates, including many earthworms, but fruit accounts for about 60% of diet year-round. Ornamental fruit trees, patches of winter berry and sumac are popular winter staples.

You've probably noticed robins hopping across summer lawns, then halting abruptly and cocking their head, as if listening. The obvious question arises of whether robins locate their prey by sight or sound? Experts in such matters state that robins hunt by sight alone. These particular head movements may relate to triangulation strategies. Some birds, such as hawks, bob their heads from side to side, turning their heads in circles, or almost upside down. This process allows triangulation of an object, to better determine its distance away. Birds also bob their heads to maintain clear vision while moving. Unlike humans, birds have large eyes that are fixed in the sockets, so they cannot rotate eye positions. Instead their heads move to compensate and stabilize the visual field ahead, assisting the food-finding process.

Genetic predispositions may partially explain where certain robin populations winter. A slightly larger, darker subspecies, Newfoundland

robins, breeds from coastal northern Quebec and Labrador to Newfoundland. These huskier birds are more uniformly blackish on the head, with dark gray back and deeper red underparts. However, this is not to say that all wintering Maine robins originate from this northern strain of birds. Only twenty-seven robins were recorded on this year's Christmas Bird Count around the general Rockland area. Locating out-of-season robins can be dicey, since their distribution is spotty and irregular in winter.

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.



Winter Robin / Don Reimer photo

SPRING BIRD SEED SALE!

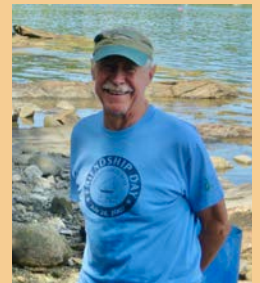
Winter still has us in its grip, but migrating birds will be on the move before we know it. You can keep their wing-side restaurants open and feel good about supporting your local Audubon Chapter at the same time! You must **pre-order seeds by February 24 for pick up on March 2**; the order form is on our website: <https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/event/spring-bird-seed-sale/>

We have **TWO PICKUP LOCATIONS** – Plants Unlimited in Rockport, or Lincoln County Publishing in Newcastle. Be sure to select your pickup location on your order form.

Goodwill for Clarry Hill

When Mid-Coast Audubon board member Bill Goodwill passed away in 2022, we were grateful recipients of donations in his memory.

Bill's enthusiasm for birds and their habitats made it an easy decision to pay that generosity forward in support of Midcoast Conservancy's campaign to preserve Clarry Hill. We will always think of Bill's smile and delight when we visit there, and hope others will, too.



2023 Christmas Bird Count Results

It was another exciting and successful year for the three Mid-Coast Audubon sponsored Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). The weather conditions were excellent for the Pemaquid/Damariscotta count on December 16, and for the Thomaston/Rockland count on December 17. Luckily there was no count scheduled for December 18 when a powerful wind and rain storm pummeled our region, but the weather improved nicely for our Bunker Hill count on December 19. Perhaps the following reports of our count results will entice you to participate in a local CBC next year — the tentative 2024 dates are December 14, 15 and 17.

Pemaquid/Damariscotta Compiler Dennis McKenna

Held on a beautiful, early winter day, the Pemaquid/Damariscotta CBC produced sixty-eight species, about average for this count. Another two species were found during count-week. Highlights were a Green-winged Teal on Lower Round Pond Road, a Red-shouldered Hawk, an Iceland Gull, Merlin, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and, for the first time on the count, two Ruddy Ducks in South Bristol. Notable misses were Horned Grebe and Purple Sandpiper.

Total number of birds seen by the nineteen observers who fanned out over the 15 mile diameter count circle was 3972 which continues the downward trend. Reasons? We will leave that answer to the scientists, but perhaps the answer is as simple as too large an area and too few observers.

Finally, this last question: Where were all the Wild Turkeys? Only fifteen were found on the count, even though during breeding season these huge, non-migrants were in everybody's back-yard.

Thomaston/Rockland Compiler Delia Mohlie (account by Don Reimer)

Twenty-five participants spent approximately 67 combined hours, traveling 24 miles on foot, and 233 miles by car. Feeder watchers added 7.5 hours of effort to the cause. Weather and travel conditions were ideal.



Dark-eyed Junco / Mael Glon photo

Generally sunny, with moderate winds and bare ground. Open-water conditions were a definite boon. With the south end of Chickawaukie Lake ice-free, birders tallied an impressive list of unusual waterfowl there, including Greater and Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, and American Coot. Nineteen Bonaparte's Gulls were another welcome treat. A very late-season Gadwall was spotted at another location. And we mustn't forget those hardy Purple Sandpipers that winter along the Rockland Breakwater.

Tallies of land birds were in the average range. Except for roadside patches of winterberry and yards with ornamental crab apple trees, stores of wild foods appeared slightly scarce. Activity at feeders was also spotty. Some unexpected songbird finds included a lingering Baltimore Oriole, Pine Warbler, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Seasonally late raptor sightings included an American Kestrel and two soaring Turkey Vultures. A Fish Crow was found in-town in Rockland. This small species of crow has shifted northward in recent decades and now nests locally. By day's end, participants had tallied 79 species that included 6,486 individual birds.

Bunker Hill Compiler Jeff Cherry

The count occurred the day after a powerful storm with strong sustained southerly winds and heavy rain. Fortunately the weather on count day was considerably better. It was unusually warm both during the storm and on count day. There were numerous inland reports of Dovekie

throughout Maine on count day and two were found on lakes within our circle.

This year we had 22 field observers split into ten groups for a total of 66 party hours, covering 21 miles on foot and 198 miles by car, plus an additional eight hours of feeder watching by two people. On Count day we had 62 species and 4897 individual birds.

There were six species new to the count: Northern Pintail, Lesser Scaup, Turkey Vulture (2), Dovekie (2), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Peregrine Falcon. Rarer species (defined as species that have only occurred 2-3 times since the count started in 2006) were: Swamp Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Northern Mockingbird, and Red Crossbill.

With the high number of new/rare species, it's not surprising that the total of 62 species seen on count day surpassed the previous high of 59 species (2020/2021). For comparison, the median number of species for the previous 17 counts was 52.6 with a low of 46 and a high of 59.

New high counts were: Canada Goose (334), Greater Scaup (28), Red-breasted Merganser (49), Red-tailed Hawk (22), Bald Eagle (26), Ring-billed Gull (207), Northern Flicker (7), Golden-crowned Kinglet (41), Eastern Bluebird (153), White-throated Sparrow (70), and American Goldfinch (638). Eleven Wild Turkeys was the lowest number seen since the count started in 2006. Compare that with 708 within the circle in 2018/2019!



Dovekie / Mael Glon photo

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: Jeff Cherry (914) 489-7870

Monthly Nature Programs

It's Program Season again! Join us for one of our third-Thursday monthly programs, presented in partnership with the Camden Public Library. **Please note that some programs will be live and others via Zoom.** Contact Camden Library or visit the Mid-Coast Audubon Events page to see what's coming up: <https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/events/>

Welcome to the Pyrocene *Ecological Implications for a Planet on Fire* February 15, 2024 6:00 - 7:00 pm ONLINE PROGRAM

Pyrocene is a term used to describe the human use of fire and how it impacts our planet. Fire can be a friend or foe. Author and naturalist David Govatski will describe how humans first harnessed fire and eventually switched to burning fossil fuels. Along the way he will discuss forest fire ecology, zombie forests, prescribed fire, fire weather, and related topics to better understand the ecological implications of a planet that seems to be on fire.

David Govatski worked for the US Forest Service for over 30 years, and served as a fire management officer on a national interagency incident management team for eight years. David's first job in the Forest Service was as a fire lookout on the Devil's Head Lookout on the Pike National Forest in Colorado. He worked on numerous large forest fires, including the 1988 Yellowstone Fires. David has maintained a strong personal interest in the study of fire ecology.



Go birding in style!

Grab your binoculars, put on your boots and your new Mid-Coast Audubon hat – and come birding with us! 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/>



All About Screech Owls February 20, 2024

6:00 - 7:00 pm
With Jim Wright
ONLINE PROGRAM

Screech owls are the owl most likely to nest in a backyard, but few people know how to entice them to move in—or how to thwart those pesky squirrel interlopers. Jim Wright, author of *The Screech Owl Companion*, from Timber Press, will tell all. Jim thinks the photos alone are worth the price of this entertaining compendium, but see for yourself.

Jim Wright is also the author of *The Real James Bond*, a biography of the author and birdman who summered on Mount Desert Island and fell prey to the world's most famous case of identity theft. The *Wall Street Journal* called it “slim and elegant” — like Bond himself. Jim's other books include large-format books about Central America's largest rainforest, Pennsylvania's legendary Hawk Mountain, and the New Jersey Meadowlands.

The Growth of Trees March 21 6:00 - 7:00 pm With Michael Wjtech ONLINE PROGRAM

No single view of a tree is a fixed snapshot in time that tells the complete story. Join us on Thursday, March 21, to learn about *The Growth of Trees*. Michael Wojtech will talk about how trees grow, reproduce, and interact with their environment across days, weeks, seasons, and years. He'll discuss varying scales—from the intricate details of buds, flowers, leaves, and bark that we use for species identification to the collaborative roles of trees in ecosystems. Learn more about the function and experience the beauty of characteristics such as overwintering buds, lobed or toothed leaves, flowers by the thousands, and seeds that fly on the wind.

As a naturalist and educator, Michael Wojtech strives to share the science and wonder of trees in an accessible and compelling fashion. He writes, photographs, illustrates, and presents programs about the structure, growth processes, and ecology of trees. Michael has a Masters degree in Conservation Biology from Antioch University New England, and lives and works in western Massachusetts.

Natural Sound Recording April 18 6:00 - 7:00 pm With Laura Sebastianelli ONLINE PROGRAM

Field Trips

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 thrive in our area.

Rockland Breakwater, Rockland February 10 9:00am - 12:00pm

The Rockland Breakwater is an inviting place to bird in winter if temperature, tides, and wind cooperate. In winter, it is a great spot for Purple Sandpipers, loons, grebes, scoters, Common Goldeneyes, Black Guillemots, and sea ducks.

Navigating the uneven and widely spaced granite blocks of the Breakwater requires concentration, so we highly recommend you be stable on your feet for this walk, and wear sturdy boots.

Trip leaders Gail Presley and Kristen Lindquist will meet you in the Breakwater parking lot at the end of Samoset Road at 9 am. Depending on time and interest, we may continue our walk onto the adjacent Samoset grounds. For questions, you can reach Gail Presley at 207-975-5930.

Clarry Hill, Union

February 24 10:00am - 12:00pm

Clarry Hill is a hilltop blueberry barren and grassland that has been conserved by Midcoast Conservancy. This picturesque landscape has stunning views in all directions, and provides habitat for uncommon grassland birds, including Upland Sandpipers. Clarry Hill has been regionally renowned as a prime spot for birding for generations, especially during migration. But even in winter Clarry Hill attracts notable species including Eastern Bluebird, Snow Bunting, Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, and Snowy Owl.

Trip Leaders Gail Presley and Kate Doiron will meet you at the parking lot at the trailhead at the end of Elmer Hart Lane at 10 am. For questions, you can reach Gail Presley at 207-975-5930.

lot at 110 Belvedere Road. For more information, please call the trip leader, Mael Glon, at 801-864-2316.

Sears Island, Searsport

May 11 8:00 am - 1:00pm

Join us as we seek spring migrants at this Waldo County birding hotspot in Searsport.

During spring migration, many songbird species rest and feed on Sears 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 am. For more information, please call trip leader, Will Broussard at 207-837-9520.

Monhegan Island, May 25 8:00am - 4:30pm

We will take the Hardy Boat from New Harbor to this migration hotspot. Jeff Cherry and Mael Glon will lead. **Watch for more details on our website: midcoast.maineaudubon.org.**



Surprise! This rare-to-Maine hepatic tanager has been entertaining viewers in Stockton Springs for several weeks this winter.
Lew Purinton / photo

Welcome, new and rejoining Mid-Coast Audubon members!

OCTOBER

Donna Broderick
Jay Mauri
Thomas O'Donovan
Helen Rasmussen

NOVEMBER

William and Marti Balicki
Peter and Cynthia Camplin
Mark DiGirolamo
Jacqueline Gage
Terry Goodhue
Robin Patton and Alice Cahn

DECEMBER

William W. Alcorn
Thomas H. Armbrrecht
Stanley C. Allain
Luci Craib
Cynthia R. Dunham
Shannon Landwehr
The Green Store, Belfast
Karin Tichy
Kathy Toubman

Damariscotta Mills, Newcastle

March 16 8:00 - 11:00am

Join us for a late winter/early spring tour of the Damariscotta Mills area. We will check the pools above and below the famous fish ladder and also look out over Great Salt Bay. Expect to see a good representation of our overwintering ducks including: Hooded, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Goldeneye, and Bufflehead. We'll sort through them looking for less common species like Barrow's Goldeneye, Scaup, and Ring-necked Duck.

We'll meet in the parking area at 384 Mills Road at 8:00 am. For more information, please call trip leader Jeff Cherry, at (914) 489-7870.

Salt Bay Farm, Damariscotta

April 13 7:00 - 10:00am

Join us as we seek early migrants at the Salt Bay Farm in Damariscotta. we'll walk the meadow looking for Savannah and other sparrows, scan the pond for ducks and geese, investigate the forest edges for early migrating warblers and songbirds, and then scan the Great Salt Bay for gulls, ducks, Osprey and Belted Kingfishers.

To start the day, we'll meet at 7:00 AM at the Coastal Rivers Conservation Trust parking

Mid-Coast



Audubon

Mid-Coast Audubon

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Damariscotta, ME 04543-0458

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Black Guillemot in non-breeding plumage
Mael Glon photo

MAINE AUDUBON

Mid-Coast Audubon is a chapter of Maine Audubon.

If you live in Lincoln, Knox, or Waldo County, your Maine Audubon membership will automatically make you a member of the Mid-Coast chapter! If you live outside our catchment area and would still like to be "assigned" to the Mid-Coast, you can indicate this when you submit your Maine Audubon membership.

New membership and membership renewal information can be found online at <https://maineaudubon.org/support/donate/>

If you hang it they will come!

While many species of birds are able to hide their nests in dense foliage or grassy meadows, many others require holes for nesting. Although most birds prefer natural cavities, with the correct design a nesting box can serve as a good replacement.

And yes, it might seem early to be planning for nesting season, but did you know some species will use nest boxes as cozy winter roosts, too?

Mid-Coast Audubon builds nest boxes tailor-made for a variety of bird species including bluebirds, swallows, titmice, nuthatches, chickadees (\$25); Saw-whet Owl and American Kestrel (\$30); and Wood Duck (\$35). We also make bat boxes (\$20). Nest boxes can be purchased at Louis Doe Home Center on Route 1 in Newcastle, or by calling Lew Purinton at (207) 549-5257.



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At the end of the year, Birds and Beans will donate 5% of sales using this code to the Friends of Hog Island, the volunteer organization providing support to Hog Island Audubon Camp in Bremen. Win-Win!