

# 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 48, No. 2 - June 2024

*Not just another pretty auk....*

## Appreciate the Guillemot!

It's summertime in Maine, and for a lot of bird-appreciating folks that means it's puffin season. Puffin snacks, puffin shirts, puffin tours (and tourists), puffin this, puffin that. We love our clownlike, brightly beaked, rotund little auk.

But puffins aren't the only auk in our seas. Razorbills are quite dashing. Common and Thick-billed Murres are no slouches. Dovekies? They're just plain adorable.

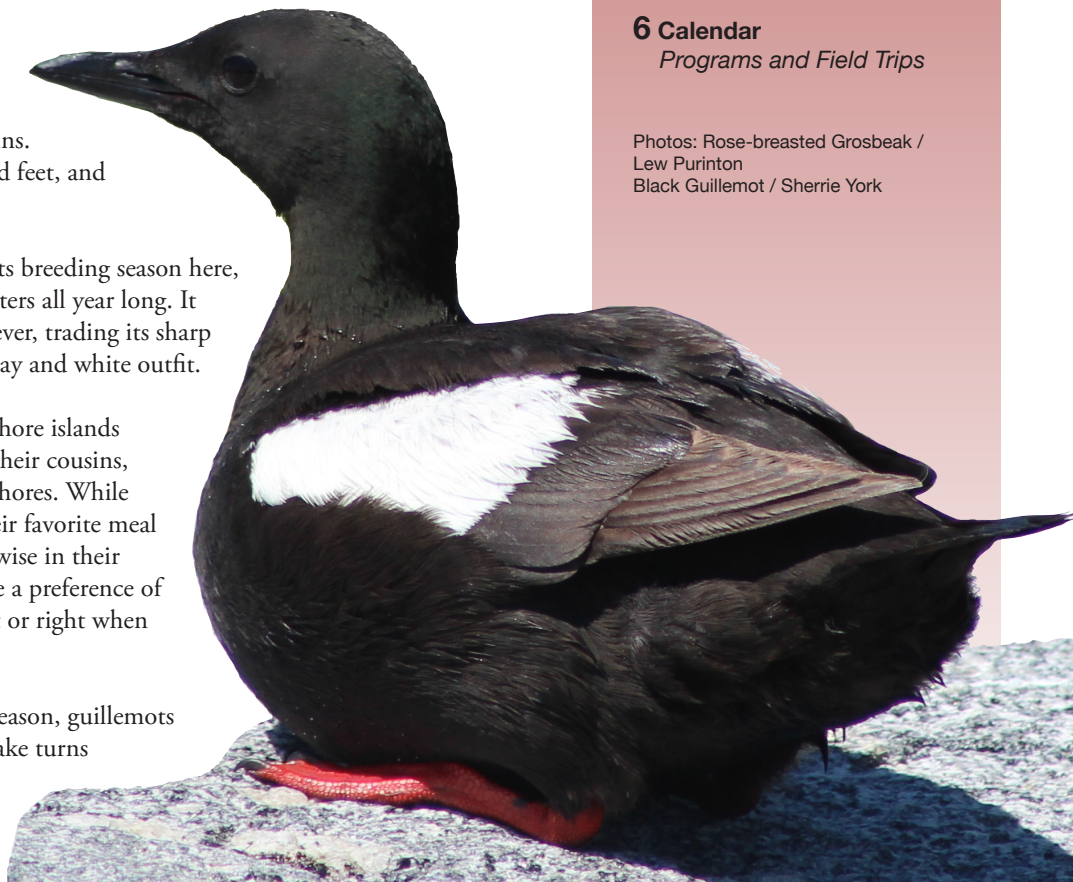
And then there's the Black Guillemot. Round and black with a fat white epaulet, it's often overshadowed by its bold and charismatic cousins. But let's shine a light on the "guillie's" bright red feet, and discover some of their charms!

Unlike the Atlantic Puffin, which only spends its breeding season here, the Black Guillemot can be found in Maine waters all year long. It looks considerably different in the winter, however, trading its sharp black and white plumage for a more mottled gray and white outfit.

Maine's Black Guillemots nest on the same offshore islands as puffins, and in greater numbers. But unlike their cousins, guillemots will often forage close to mainland shores. While they eat mostly small fish and invertebrates, their favorite meal is the red Rock Gummel, which they carry crosswise in their bills. Some studies suggest individual birds have a preference of whether the head of their lunch faces to the left or right when carried!

Unlike most auks, which only lay one egg per season, guillemots often have two young to care for. The parents take turns guarding the nest and foraging for food.

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Lew Purinton  
Black Guillemot / Sherrie York

## 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 October 15!  
Send submissions to sy@sherrieyork.com



midcoast.maineaudubon.org  
instagram.com/midcoastaudubon  
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# President's Corner

## *The View from Cloudmarch*

My home property along the Dyer River in Newcastle is called Cloudmarch, a name it's had since long before my tenure. Its acreage includes fields, woods, and saltmarsh, making it ideal for multi-habitat birdwatching.

I try to spend time experiencing the birds here every day of the year, usually with a 1.5 mile walk that encompasses the landscape diversity, but sometimes just by watching the activity at our feeders. Daily immersion in these familiar settings has been a great way to learn deeply about and appreciate our common birds, and occasionally find a rarity.

eBird has been an invaluable tool for keeping records of these daily sightings—since 2014 I've submitted 2185 Cloudmarch checklists and documented 179 species within the property's borders. I encourage everyone who isn't already an eBird user to start the rewarding process of accumulating and sharing your own checklists on the platform, and I'd happily assist anyone who'd like to get started.

As I write this note in late May, spring migration is winding down. While boreal breeding songbirds are still moving through, most of our local breeders are starting their nesting process. This is when I take down feeders for the season and shift my attention to something equally captivating—nest box activity!

Many of our local breeders are cavity nesters, including Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds. Most don't excavate their own cavities, but use old woodpecker holes or natural cavities, so the number of available nest sites can be a major limiting factor on the population of these species. Providing nest boxes is a good way to help them, with the incidental bonus of receiving free entertainment.

Several years ago, I built a fancier-than-necessary birdhouse as a backyard garden ornament, but with hopes that it might eventually house a tenant. I didn't get the birdhouse set up until the first week of June that year, not expecting any birds to find it in time to begin breeding there.

Yet the very day we set the birdhouse up on its pole, a pair of Tree Swallows started investigating, quickly moved in, and successfully raised a brood over the next six weeks.

We've been thrilled that the birdhouse has been occupied every year since by pairs of Tree Swallows pulling off successful broods



Cloudmarch luxury bird condominiums. Jeff Cherry photos



A female Tree Swallow surveying her domain

while providing us with hours of enjoyment as we watch them arrive in early spring, pair up, stuff a hole with nesting materials (including white feathers that we've seen them exchange in mid-air), and ceaselessly come and go as they trade off incubation and feeding duties.

Last year something unexpected happened at the Cloudmarch bird condo: a pair of House Wrens colonized the lower south side while a pair of Tree Swallows took up residence on the upper north side. After a few minor conflicts (such as during early nest building when one of the House Wrens entered the Tree Swallows' hole and started chucking white feathers out the opening), the two species proceeded to ignore each other and successfully went about their breeding business.

It's always a bittersweet day when the young birds fledge and they all abandon the birdhouse. The Tree Swallow family does stay nearby for a few days however, gathering with other swallow families on the salt marsh.

With so much fun to be had while promoting breeding bird success, consider giving nest boxes a try on your own property if you haven't already. Build and they will occupy! The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology provides detailed plans and useful information about nest boxes at [nestwatch.org](http://nestwatch.org).

Turning to human news at Mid-Coast Audubon, we'll be offering several new types of field trips over the summer, including our first local pelagic outing, which is open to all (see details elsewhere in this issue). To cap off the summer, our annual Lobster Bake fundraiser is scheduled for August 31st on Hog Island. I hope to see and meet many of you at one of these events!

*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.*



*In July, recently fledged swallow families congregate on the Dyer River Marsh. This photo shows mostly Tree Swallows, along with some Barn, Cliff, and Bank Swallows. Jeff Cherry photos*



*After seeing the success of the Cloudmarch condo, I built several single-family homes like this one occupied by a pair of Eastern Bluebirds.*

## *If you hang it they will come!*

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). Boxes can be purchased at Louis Doe Home Center on Route 1 in Newcastle, or by calling Lew Purinton at (207) 549-5257.



## *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/>

# Two Crows

Perhaps Maine's crow population deserves a closer look. The ubiquitous American Crow is found across the state in a wide variety of habitats throughout the year. They are recorded in 43% of summer checklists and 48% of winter checklists submitted by bird watchers for the state. Their omnivorous diet includes most things on the ground from earthworms and insects to seeds, and fruit. They also eat fish, young turtles, mussels, and clams, and will even eat eggs and nestlings of many species of birds.

Although they aren't very common here, Fish Crows are making gradual inroads within coastal and southern portions of the state. They are most prevalent from Brunswick and south, but have been reported as far north as Bangor. A small resident population occurs in the Rockland area, where they have nested and been recorded on annual Christmas Birds Counts. Favored habitats includes beaches, rivers and, marshes. Fish Crows look very similar to American Crows. However, there are subtle differences: Fish Crows are about two inches smaller than American Crows, with a smaller head, longer wings, and tail, as well as shorter legs. Both species have glossy black coloring and sturdy bodies. The Fish Crow's slightly rough throat feathers are often puffed out when calling.

The only reliable way to distinguish between American Crows and Fish

Crows is by their calls. American Crows have a loud "caw" that many Mainers are familiar with. They also make other sounds, including a rattle. Fish Crows, on the other hand, have a simpler, more nasal tone to their voice. Their sounds are higher-pitched, and more nasally, often being a paired "unh-unh," which sounds like they are denying their identity.

*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.*



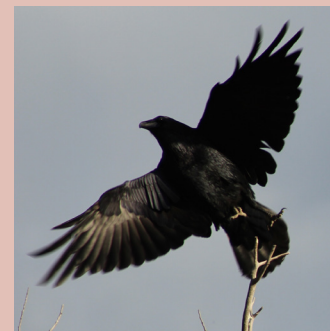
*Fish Crows are resident along the east coast from Texas up to Maine. They will occasionally move short distances in winter. Don Reimer photo*

## Did you know?

Crows and ravens are among the most intelligent animals in the world, on par with chimpanzees. They are particularly adept at problem-solving and using tools— wild crows have been known to rip splinters of wood from a fence to try to spear a tasty morsel in a hole.

They are very social and family-oriented, with up to five generations remaining together in a close and cooperative group.

They can also recognize individual humans and will hold grudges for years if mistreated.



# Guillemots, *from page 1*

With so much going for them, why are guillemots so often overlooked? That's the question posed by a handful of seabird researchers in Maine back in 1991. They designated June 27th as International Guillemot Appreciation Day (IGAD), and its celebration has indeed spread around the world.

For 33 years IGAD has honored the Black, Pigeon, and Spectacled Guillemots. "Guillie" fans put on their red shoes and black shirts, don their guillemot hats, sing guillemot songs, paint guillemot portraits, and hold guillemot treat-making contests.

Perhaps until now you've been unaware of both the birds and their special day, but there's no time like the present to join in! IGAD has a Facebook page... why not stop on by and share in the celebration? <https://www.facebook.com/groups/43280647827>



Black Guillemot (*Cephus grylle*) / on Metinic Island, Maine. Brette Soucie/USFWS photo / CC by 2.0



Guillemot hat designed by Sue Schubel, IGAD bean dip appetizer by an anonymous celebrant. Sherrie York photos

## 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 **August 31, 2024**.

Your \$85 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/>



# Join Us!

Full event descriptions and current information on our website: [midcoast.maineaudubon.org](http://midcoast.maineaudubon.org)

*You don't need to be a Mid-Coast Audubon member or have advanced birding skills to join us!*

Program Coordinator:  
Will Broussard 837-9520

Field Trip Coordinator:  
Mael Glon 801-864-2316



Chestnut-sided Warbler / Lew Purinton photo

## Field Trips

Spring is finally here, and while it may be a tad early to look ahead to late summer and fall, we want to give you plenty of time to plan for what's coming next! We've been encouraged by great attendance and participation at field trips so far this year and hope to keep the momentum going. Here's a fresh batch of field trips, combining beloved classics with exciting new adventures. Join us as we continue to discover and learn about our local birds!

**IMPORTANT!** Unless otherwise indicated, all field trips are free, but we do request that you sign up so we have an idea of how many people are coming. Please note also that some trips also have limited capacity. For more information about these field trips, head over to [midcoast.maineaudubon.org/events](http://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/events). To sign up for any of these field trips, please email Mael Glon at [midcoastfieldtrips@maineaudubon.org](mailto:midcoastfieldtrips@maineaudubon.org) with your name and phone number. See you out there!

### Whale Watch and Puffin Pelagic

Saturday, July 6  
1:30 - 5:30PM

Is that a buoy? Maybe a piece of flotsam? No, it's a Yellow-nosed Albatross! You never quite know what you're going to find in the open ocean. Join trip leaders Mael Glon and Jeff Cherry as we embark with Cap'n Fish's Cruises in search of puffins, shearwaters, storm-petrels, and maybe even an albatross!

Join us on the July 6th Whale Watch & Puffin Combo Cruise that leaves from Boothbay Harbor at 1:30 pm and returns at 5:30 pm. After departing Boothbay Harbor, the boat will sail to Eastern Egg Rock, where you will see Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, Common Terns, Arctic Terns, Roseate Terns, and many others whizzing in all directions. After great looks at the island denizens, the boat will sail offshore, usually to a location where whales have recently been observed.

Even though the cruise doesn't leave until 1:30 pm, we highly recommend that you arrive in Boothbay harbor by 12 pm. Paid parking is available in the vicinity of the dock, but these spots fill up quickly so give yourself plenty of time! Even if you find a parking spot right away, we'd like everyone to **be at the dock by 12:30 pm** so that we can get organized and have first dibs at the best viewing locations on the boat.

If you've never been on a pelagic, we recommend that you do a little bit of research ahead of time to learn about proper attire, ways to avoid seasickness,



Indigo Bunting / Lew Purinton photo

and to become familiar with pelagic birds. We'll also send out much more detailed advice and information as we get closer to the trip.

We are not capping the number on this trip, but we still ask that you sign up by sending an email to Mael Glon so that he can provide updates and information. **Once you've signed up, we highly recommend that you purchase your tickets ASAP by going to: <https://www.boothbayboattrips.com/cruises/>.** Due to limited offerings of this particular cruise, we are not scheduling a rain date.

### Weskeag Marsh, Thomaston

Saturdays - August 10, 17, and 24  
7 AM - 9 AM

Join us as we explore this 1,300-acre marsh to witness the first wave of south-bound shorebirds. If you own a scope, this would be a good place to use it! This field trip will involve minimal walking.

## Field Trips

### Rabbit Path at Power Line Crossing, Alna

Saturday, September 7  
6:30 AM - 9:30 AM

This location looks like many other power line right-of-ways, but has a unique tendency to attract impressive of migrating warblers and other songbirds. We'll start bright and early to catch the fallout of birds, then spend some time birding in the adjacent blueberry barren.



Bohemian Waxwing / Lew Purinton photo

### Sabattus Pond Saturday, November 2 8 AM - 2 PM

Join us for a visit to Sabattus Pond as we look over the extensive flocks of south-bound ducks. Regulars include Mallards, American Black Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, and more. Interesting songbirds and raptors are also often seen.

### Monhegan Island

Saturday, September 21  
6:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Join us for a birding adventure on Monhegan Island, located 10 miles off the coast of Maine. This renowned mid-coast migrant trap is a magnet for migrating warblers and other songbirds. We'll also spot hawks, falcons, shorebirds, and many seabirds from the boat and shore.

We'll be traveling to and from the island using the Monhegan Ferry which departs from Port Clyde at 7:00 AM and returns at 4:30 PM (the trip takes about one hour each way). **Attendees must make their own ferry reservations in advance by calling the Monhegan Boat Line at (207) 372-8848 or reserving online.** Please plan on meeting at the Monhegan Ferry dock in Port Clyde by 6:30 AM.

We are capping this trip at 15 participants because the roads and trails on Monhegan Island are often packed with tourists and shuttles, making it difficult to lead a big group. For more information or to sign up, please send an email to Mael Glon (midcoastfieldtrips@maineaudubon.org) with your name and phone number.

### Salt Bay Farm Preserve, Damariscotta

Saturday, October 5  
7 AM - 11 AM

Salt Bay Farm is widely viewed as an excellent destination for birding in spring, but it has a lot to offer in Fall as well! Join us as we explore this preserve's varied habitats looking for migrating sparrows, blackbirds, pipits, and warblers.

### Green Point WMA, Dresden

Saturday, October 12  
8 AM - 1 PM

This wildlife management area is a former orchard and farm extending to the Kennebec River. Expect a variety of migrant birds in woodlands, fields, and wild-rice flats, including warblers, sparrows, waterfowl, and raptors.

### Welcome, new and rejoining Mid-Coast Audubon members!

**JANUARY**  
Cheryl Cook

**FEBRUARY**  
Mary Ann Cook  
Shannon Pelletier  
Amy Smereck  
Sharon Thompson

**MARCH**  
Rose Bensen  
Hildy Ellis  
A. G. Foltz  
Holly O'Shea  
Chris Sprague  
Michelle Staundinger and Josh Snyder  
Morton Strom

**APRIL**  
Laurie Knowlton  
Karen Mastrian  
Steven McAllister  
Jonathan Smith and Tiffany Tunno

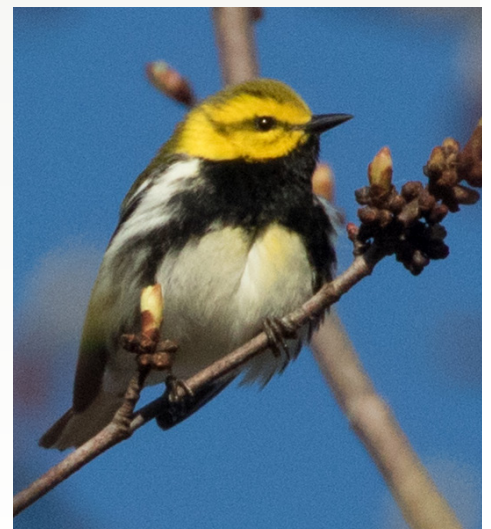
## Monthly Nature Programs

*Our Third Thursday lecture series is on summer break.*

Mid-Coast Audubon's monthly programs, presented in partnership with the Camden Public Library, will resume in September.

**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/>



Black-throated Green Warbler / Lew Purinton photo

Mid-Coast



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Mid-Coast Audubon

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Baltimore Oriole / Lew Purinton 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/>



Nashville Warbler / Lew Purinton photo

**Injured Bird?**  
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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!