



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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by Logan Parker, Biologist
Maine Natural History Observatory

In his 1949 book, *Maine Birds*, biologist Ralph S. Palmer described the American Kestrel—then called the “Northern Sparrow Hawk”—as “common throughout” the state and “the second hawk in [terms] of numbers.” Earlier accounts echoed this, noting kestrels were often seen perched on prominent dead limbs or telegraph poles, surveying the landscape (Knight, 1908, *Birds of Maine*). Today, while kestrels can still be spotted on power lines and snags in open areas across Maine, their numbers have declined significantly in recent decades. Maine’s second breeding bird atlas (2018–2022) documents that kestrels have retracted from parts of southern Maine, with a particularly notable decline in the Midcoast Region.

Despite their small size, American Kestrels are

skilled hunters, often seen hovering over fields or scanning from high vantage points before diving on prey. Their diets mainly consist of insects like grasshoppers and beetles, as well as small mammals such as mice and voles. While female kestrels incubate and brood alone, both parents feed their young. Farmers have long valued kestrels due to their preferences for many types of agricultural pests. As early as 1913, the USDA praised the kestrel’s role in controlling insects and rodents, urging that the “little falcon [...] should be encouraged and protected.”

The causes behind the decline of kestrels in Maine are not fully understood but likely include habitat loss, pesticide exposure, increased predation, and competition for nesting sites. As secondary cavity nesters, kestrels rely on natural tree cavities or those excavated by woodpeckers, but they readily use nest boxes. These boxes not only support kestrel populations but also allow

researchers to monitor breeding behavior more easily. In response to population declines, the Maine Natural History Observatory (MNHO), in collaboration with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) and Mid-Coast Audubon, is expanding kestrel monitoring efforts in the Midcoast as part of the Maine Kestrel Project. This initiative complements ongoing research in other priority areas of the state.

Beginning in 2026, MNHO staff and Mid-Coast Audubon volunteers will assemble, install, and monitor a network of kestrel nest boxes throughout the Midcoast. The first year will focus on the Palermo area, a rural town with ample open habitat and confirmed recent kestrel breeding. In partnership with Mid-Coast Audubon, MNHO will also oversee nest box deployment and monitoring on conservation

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Mid-Coast



Audubon

Organized December 6, 1969
a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization

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three times a year in February, May,
and November.**

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



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President's Corner: *The View from Cloudmarch*

Volunteers Make a Difference

by Jeff Cherry

Although there is often a lull in avian-focused activities during the winter season, two projects described in this issue have been keeping Mid-Coast Audubon (MCA) volunteers and board members actively engaged.

One is the longstanding Christmas Bird Count (CBC) and the other, the Maine Kestrel Project, is brand new. A key feature of both projects is their reliance on volunteer community scientists to collect meaningful data on the status of birds in our region.

The CBC, coordinated by the National Audubon Society, is the longest-running community science project in existence, now in its 126th year. It relies on thousands of volunteer observers, including more than 30 people who participate in the three counts that we sponsor in the Pemaquid/Damariscotta, Bunker Hill and Thomaston/Rockland areas.

In addition to contributing to long-term data about bird populations, participating in a CBC is an excuse to be out birding all day with friends, pay attention to our beloved common winter species (here's looking at you, Black-capped Chickadee), and hope to see some more elusive winter species (where are you Pine Grosbeaks?).

There are summaries of our 2025 counts elsewhere in this issue, but I want to illustrate the scientific value of the CBC with two examples. The two charts show the number of birds per party plotted by year for Tufted

Titmouse and Evening Grosbeak, combining the data from our three Midcoast Region counts.

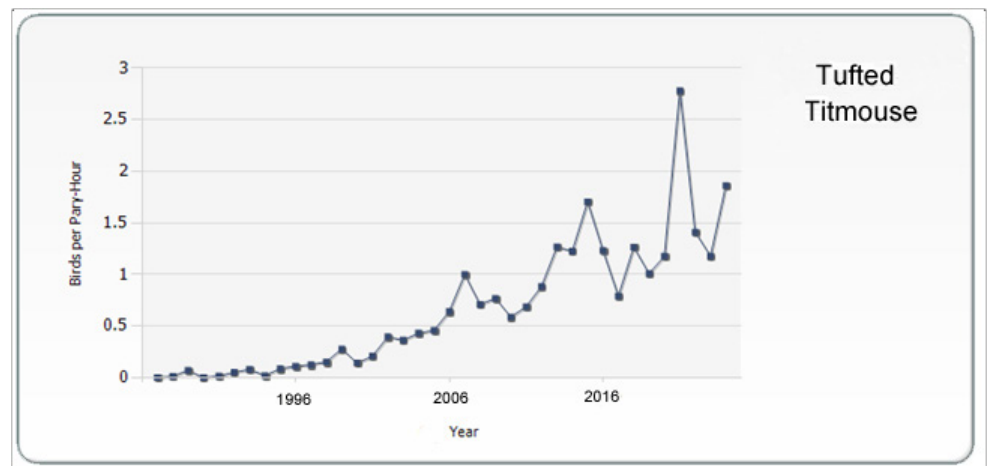
The first, single titmouse was sighted on a Mid-Coast CBC in 1979, a few were then seen most years up to 1996, then their numbers increased to several hundred documented each year. In contrast, Evening Grosbeaks were an abundant winter visitor to our region in the 1970's and 80's but their seasonal presence here has declined dramatically.

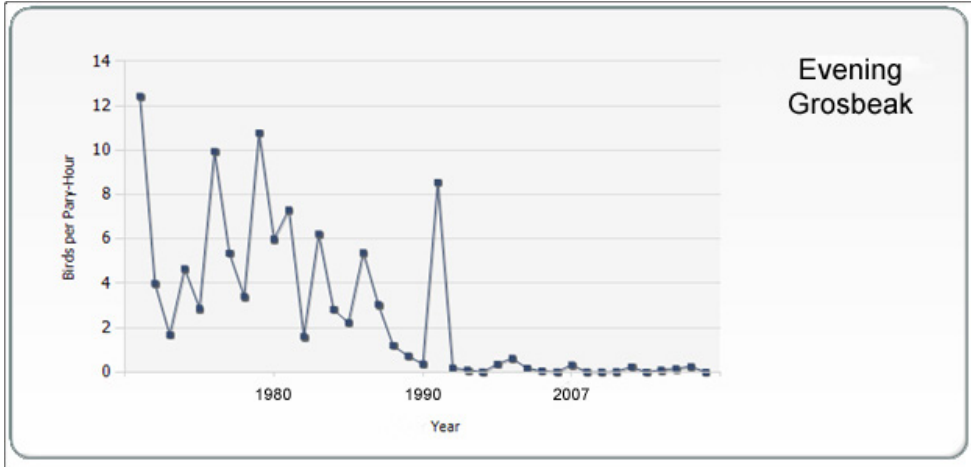
Interestingly, while only a few Evening Grosbeaks were detected on this year's December CBCs consistent with the low numbers of the recent past, large flocks appeared in the early weeks of January, and many of you are likely enjoying them at your feeders.

Although our CBC data don't explain why titmice have increased or grosbeak numbers have declined—though ecologists have intriguing hypotheses—we wouldn't have such strong documentation of these population trends without volunteers going out each year,



Tufted Titmouse (Alan Phipps photo)





following CBC protocols, and having fun along the way.

The Maine Kestrel Project is just getting started and MCA is proud to be providing funds for materials, helping locate suitable nestbox sites, and coordinating volunteers for nestbox monitoring. If you'd like to help with this project after reading more about it in the following pages, please contact me (jeffcherry57@outlook.com) to participate in the rewarding process of community science.



Male Evening Grosbeak (Alan Phipps photo)

Welcome, new and rejoining Mid-Coast Audubon members!

OCTOBER

Katherine Donahue
Barbara Grossbaum
Jennifer Kimball
Kim Shelley

NOVEMBER

Judy Anderson
Steven Baglione
Seth Benz
Ann Boover
Virginia Campbell
Ruth Jahn and Chad Holbrook
Joan Kobrinski
Sarah Tomalty
Jeffrey Tulis
Caroline Wagner
Katherine Wilbur

DECEMBER

Kristie Dodge
Jason Gottlieb
Alison Macmillan and Peter Korn
Lillian Vitelli

SAVE THE DATE!

Our Annual Membership Meeting will take place on Friday, June 26. Details to come!



Female American Kestrel (Alan Phipps photo)

Maine Kestrel Project *continued from Page 1*

lands elsewhere in the region. Data collected in 2026 will inform future expansions and guide additional volunteer involvement.

Expanding nest box efforts will benefit kestrels by increasing available nesting sites and providing researchers with valuable information about breeding success. These insights will help shape future management and conservation actions for Maine's kestrel populations. With dedicated effort and community support, we hope to slow or even reverse the downward trend of kestrels in the Midcoast.

MNHO extends sincere thanks to Mid-Coast

Audubon for their generous support, which enables swift action ahead of the 2026 breeding season. Additional updates and materials will be posted on the MDIFW and MNHO project web pages. We look forward to keeping Mid-Coast Audubon members and the wider public informed as the project progresses.

You can help support this project by sponsoring a nestbox for \$100. Your donation will be used to build and install one nestbox. If interested, please send a check to Mid-Coast Audubon, PO Box 458, Damariscotta, ME 04543 and specify that your donation is for the Maine Kestrel Project.

2025 Mid-Coast Christmas Bird Counts Report

by Don Reimer and Jeff Cherry

Mid-Coast Audubon sponsors three Christmas Bird Counts (CBC hereafter), Thomaston/Rockland, started in the mid-1970's, Pemaquid/Damariscotta (mid-1980's) and Bunker Hill (2006). These annual one-day "Christmas" counts can occur any day from December 14 to January 5.

The original CBC count was conducted on Christmas Day 1900, as an alternative to the traditional Christmas "side-hunts", where families would compete to shoot the most birds possible in a single day. That initial count took place at just 25 locations, from California to Canada, tallying 90 different species. Today, there are thousands of count circles, in all 50 states, and 20 foreign countries, with tens of thousands of participants tallying millions of birds each year! The CBC is the world's oldest and longest-running citizen-science database.

Each count circle covers a fixed, 15-mile diameter circle, which is typically sub-divided into smaller, manageable sectors for a more efficient and thorough coverage process by teams of volunteers. Scientific integrity of results is achieved through consistent methods and procedures implemented through the decades. Only birds found within the circle are counted. And, no, there is no possible way to count every bird occupying each sector, but fastidious efforts are taken not to recount or over-count birds. It goes without saying that results vary somewhat each year, due to ambient weather and travel conditions, the presence of ice on ponds and waterways, and seasonal quirks of unexpected birds.

The results for the 2025 Mid-Coast CBC's are below. Thank you to all our volunteers for another successful CBC season.

The 2026 Mid-Coast CBC dates are: Bunker Hill (December 15), Pemaquid/Damariscotta (December 19), Thomaston/Rockland (December 20). Please contact the compilers if you are interested in participating.

Thomaston/Rockland, December 14, 2025 Delia Mohlie Compiler

Four inches of fluffy snow did not hamper auto or foot travel for the 33 volunteers, who spent a combined total of 41 hours on foot, and 29 hours by car.

With below-freezing temperatures, bodies of open

water, such as Rockland's Chickawaukee Lake, had frozen. Under ice-free conditions there, the lake often hosts a variety of lingering waterfowl. The day's final tally of 84 species was a record, although numbers for land birds (particularly winter finches) were relatively low.



Snowy Owl (Don Reimer photo)

Perhaps the most significant value of Christmas Counts is recording species timelines, documenting changes in individual species numbers, and their distributions across Maine, and beyond. Red-bellied Woodpeckers are one prime example: formerly considered a rarity in these parts, but now a common breeder in southern through central Maine, 22 of these handsome woodpeckers were tallied this year.

Other up-and-coming species, 61 Eastern Bluebirds, and 131 Northern Cardinals were found across the circle. A rare Clay-colored Sparrow in Tenant's Harbor was only the second sighting for this count. This species breeds in the northern Great Plains, and winters in Texas and Mexico. And these days, we're accustomed to seeing Wild Turkeys along our roadsides: 264 were tallied this year.

Local populations of Canada Geese are wintering well in coastal harbors, and on local golf courses: 917 honkers this time around, plus a single Snow Goose. Huddled in Rockland harbor, an over-wintering group of 15 handsome American Wigeon was a treat for the eye. In recent years, these sleek, colorful ducks have seemingly adopted the winter harbor.

The Rockland Breakwater seldom disappoints at CBC time. A coterie of disciplined watchers faithfully walks the breakwater each year, safe sea-conditions permitting, for predictable sightings of

Purple Sandpipers feeding among the barnacled granite slabs. Did these dedicated seekers locate their foraging sandpipers? Yup! And did they garner any bonus species along the way? Yes, for sure! A Snowy Owl sat perched midway to the lighthouse!

Bunker Hill, December 16, 2025 Jeff Cherry Compiler

Count day started off clear, cold and calm and progressed into a very pleasant sunny winter day, ideal for a CBC—clear and sunny with temps in the high 20's and only a light breeze. The month preceding the count was considerably colder than for the previous two years. Small freshwater ponds and the bigger lakes were all iced over and even Great Salt Bay was mostly iced over. These water bodies were completely open in 2023 and 2024. Our sampling effort remained about the same as the past few years with 19 observers in 9 parties in the field for 65 party hours covering 204 linear miles within the 15-mile diameter circle.

The total species count of 61 on count day was the second highest for the circle, just beating 60 species in 2024 and surpassed by 62 species in 2023. The mean number of species for all years since 2006 is 53.9 (range 46-62). The total of 3,917 birds counted was notably less than in recent past years (5444 in 2024, 4,897 in 2023, 4,868 in 2022).

Marsh Wren was the only species new to the count circle on count day.

Rarer species (defined as species that have only occurred 2-4 times since the count started in 2006) seen on count day were Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Mockingbird, Field Sparrow, and Red Crossbill. Tallies for the following species were the highest in count history; Barred Owl (3), Red-bellied Woodpecker (30), Tufted Titmouse (164), Song Sparrow (15), House Finch (61).

Tallies for many common species were well below average. How could there only be two American Robins within the count circle that day?

The highly anticipated winter finch irruption was not evident with only a few Purple Finches, Pine Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills, and Pine Siskins detected.

Wild Turkeys (482) have rebounded from their all-time low of 11 in 2023.

Pemaquid/Damariscotta, December 20, 2025 Jeff Cherry Compiler

The skies were clear for most of the day, with relatively warm temperatures ranging from the high 20's to the low 30's, however a strong westerly wind throughout the day made it seem much colder. The count followed a day-long intense rain and wind event with strong southerly winds and temperatures in the 50's. Small freshwater ponds were all frozen but there was no ice on salt-water bays or open ocean.

Our sampling effort consisted of 17 observers in 6 parties in the field for 54 party hours covering 118 linear miles within the 15-mile diameter circle. We counted 5575 individual birds representing 79 species. The species count of 79 on count day was the highest ever for the circle, eclipsing the previous high of 76 species in 2024. The mean

number of species for all years since 1990 is 65.2 (range 51-79).

There were no species new to the count circle on count day or count week.

Rarer species (defined as species that have only occurred 2-6 times since the count started in 1990) seen on count day were, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Red-shouldered Hawk, Thick-billed Murre, Baltimore Oriole, and Red Crossbill.

Only two species had their highest tallies in count history, Ring-necked Duck (30) and Black Scoter (422). Totals for many common species were well below average.

Of the winter finches, Purple Finch and Red Crossbill were found in several locations, but only



Baltimore Oriole (Alan Phipps photo)

one lonely Evening Grosbeak was seen, and no Pine Grosbeaks or Pine Siskins were detected.

Nature and Us...

By Don Reimer

On a whim, I recently googled the subject “the fun of seeing birds,” and wasn’t surprised by the flood of positive returns. The mental health benefits of being in nature have long been acknowledged, whether through activities like bird watching, or simply taking a peaceful walk in the park. In contrast to linear shapes of buildings and man-made structures, natural settings generally consist of circular, or curved shapes, restfully pleasing to our eyes and brains. And although bird watching is sometimes portrayed as dull, passive, or boring, bird watchers know better! One study concluded that just a half-hour of watching or hearing birds can boost our sense of emotional well being.

Immersion into nature activates the “noticing genes” of our brain, inducing a state of mental absorption. This phenomenon was fully on display when a mega-rare Steller’s Sea Eagle, native to Eastern Siberia, appeared in Maine on December 21, 2021. This first-ever North American sighting of the giant wanderer drew hundreds of observers from Maine, and across the US. The wintertime economies of mid-coastal motels and restaurants peaked substantially, as well. The vagrant eagle was



There it is! (Sherry Reimer photo)

spotted at Cundy’s Harbor. And, while I don’t typically chase after “rare” sightings, I traveled there to witness the spectacle of the unique happening, enjoying the epic bird, and observing the attentive throngs of seekers. Sprawling masses of vehicles lined the narrow roadway on both sides. And toting a range of optical equipment and sophisticated camera gear, dense crowds of hopeful birders jammed the harborside wharves, as the massive bird sallied between nearby spruce-cropped islands. From our quarter-mile vantage point, the Steller’s bulbous orange bill, and gleaming white tail and shoulder plumage, were

plainly evident. Exclamations of “THERE IT IS!!” erupted with each pass. Several smaller Bald Eagles shared the airways, revealing their comparative size differences. The Steller’s surprised us when it returned to Maine for a cameo appearance the following winter, before settling in Newfoundland and, reportedly, keeping company with Bald Eagles. Successful inter-breeding between these separate species is improbable. But we needn’t wait for another mega-rarity to inspire our wonder, Nature provides notable and relaxing experiences every day!

Field Trips

Join Us!

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

Program Coordinator:
Will Broussard 837-9520

Field Trip Coordinator:
Mael Glon 801-864-2316

Mid-Coast Audubon Scholarships Available

Mid-Coast Audubon offers scholarships to programs that help people learn about and experience the natural world. Anyone can apply but precedence is given to students and teachers who are residents of Knox, Lincoln, and Waldo counties.

Scholarship funds are made possible through the generosity of the Jean Hamlin Fund and other donors, with additional funding from the Mid-Coast Audubon general fund.

Scholarships ranging from \$250-\$1000 are available for programs at camps, and other educational institutions.

Please go to the Mid-Coast Audubon website for more information: <https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/scholarships/>

From the Field Trip Coordinator

Here we are again. It's cold, the days are short, and the wood pile is getting low. Fortunately, there are still plenty of birds around, including winter finches that have been making the rounds at feeders and fruit trees. Whether you're a seasoned birder looking to catch up with birding friends or a beginner who received binoculars over the holidays, Mid-Coast Audubon invites you to join our winter and early spring bird walks at some of our favorite local sites. We'll look for seasonal birds along the coast and inland, pay attention to how things change as winter gives way to spring, and spend time learning birds in the field. Trips are relaxed, friendly, and open to birders of all experience levels.

All are welcome! You don't need to be an Audubon member (but we hope you are!) or experienced birder. For questions, or to sign up, please send an email to Mael Glon (midcoastfieldtrips@maineaudubon.org) with your name and phone number.

FEBRUARY

Salt Bay Farm (Nobleboro) Sunday, February 22, 8:00–11:00am

Join us for the next in our series of field trips we're calling Salt Bay Sundays! We'll walk the trails at Coastal Rivers Salt Bay Farm looking for ducks, sparrows, finches, and any other winter birds. Dress warm!

Meet in the preserve parking lot located at 110 Belvedere Rd, Damariscotta, ME 04543. This property has a good amount of parking available, but please consider carpooling if possible. For more information about this preserve, visit <https://www.coastalrivers.org/trail/salt-bay-farm/>

MARCH

Salt Bay Farm (Nobleboro) Sunday, March 22, 8:00–11:00am

Celebrate the changing of the seasons with a birding adventure at Coastal Rivers Salt Bay Farm. Although it may not feel like it, winter will be over and we may start to see the return of birds like Osprey, Turkey Vultures, Killdeer, and American Woodcock.

We'll meet in the Salt Bay Farm parking lot located at 110 Belvedere Rd, Damariscotta, ME 04543. This property has a good amount of parking available, but please consider carpooling if possible. For more information about this preserve, visit <https://www.coastalrivers.org/trail/salt-bay-farm/>

APRIL

Salt Bay Farm (Nobleboro) Sunday, April 26, 7:00–10:00am

Join us at Salt Bay Farm as it comes alive with the sights and sounds of spring! We'll look for the earliest arriving swallows, sparrows, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and maybe even a few warblers!

Meet in the Salt Bay Farm parking lot located at 110 Belvedere Rd, Damariscotta, ME 04543. This property has a good amount of parking available, but please consider carpooling if possible. For more information about this preserve, visit the <https://www.coastalrivers.org/trail/salt-bay-farm/>



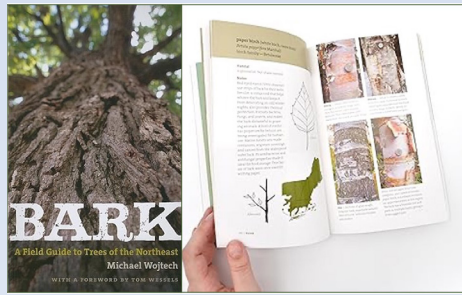
Blue Jay (Lew Purinton photo)

Monthly Nature Programs

Mid-Coast Audubon's Third Thursday programs are presented in partnership with the Camden Public Library.

Please note that some programs will be live and others via Zoom.

Visit the Mid-Coast Audubon Events page for more event details: <https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/events/>



Bark: Get to Know Your Trees

Online via Zoom

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 6:30-7:30pm

The traits typically used to describe trees—leaves, twigs, and buds—are often hard to see or seasonally absent. Join Michael Wojtech for an exploration of bark, which is always visible, in any season. As you hone your perceptive abilities you will learn about a system for identifying tree species by their bark, and discover why such a variety of bark characteristics exist. Why do some species have smooth bark, while on others it is thick and broken? Why does bark peel?

Join us online via Zoom to learn to identify trees by their bark.

Michael left a 15-year business career to pursue his love of natural history and writing, and earned his Master's in Conservation Biology from Antioch University New England. His thesis, on tree bark, became the basis for his field guide, *Bark*. Though the book's plant ID section covers trees of the Northeast, much of the material inside speaks to the characteristics and function of bark anywhere—so it's fascinating wherever you live.

Spring Bird Seed Sale!

It's time to stock up for the spring and summer bird feeding season! We have all your birds' favorite seed available – black oil sunflower seed, Meaties, Melody Mix, and suet.

Mark your calendar, online ordering will open in late February.

Pre-ordered seed will be available for pick up on Saturday, March 21, 10 a.m. to noon at the location you specify on your order form – either Plants Unlimited, 629 Commercial St (Route 1) in Rockport, OR Lincoln County Publishing, 116 Mills Rd., Newcastle.

Footprints and More! Introduction to Wildlife Tracking

Online via Zoom

Thursday, March 19, 2026, 6:30-7:30pm

Wildlife tracking is a useful skill for photographers, hunters, biologists, conservationists, and nature enthusiasts who want a deeper connection with wild creatures. It can involve much more than looking down at tracks. Interpreting trail patterns, scat, claw marks, hair snags, dens, beds, feeding sign, etc. are also useful, and often more revealing, and we will touch on all. And, since seeing is believing, we'll watch some videos of animals actually creating the tracks and signs they leave behind.

Join us for a Zoom presentation by Janet Pesaturo, who works to bring broader awareness, understanding, and appreciation of our natural world through camera trapping. Check back to register and receive the Zoom link.

Janet is focused on learning more about animal behavior by strategically placing trail cameras in “great animal spots.” Her goal is to share everything she learns about animals, animal behavior, and the techniques used to study them. All this she does through candid, compelling, often dramatic photo and video footage and interpretation.

Notes from the Hummingbird Corridor

In Person at Camden Library

Thursday, February 19, 2026, 6:30-7:30pm

In October of 2021, a month after the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds left her gardens in Maine, **herbalist and author Deb Soule** felt a compelling nudge. The hummingbirds asked Deb to follow their eastern migration route south the following autumn. Without hesitation, she said yes, and asked her friend, **poet Laura Brown-Lavoie**, to join her.

Join us in person at the Camden Library to hear about *Notes from the Hummingbird Corridor*, a record of their pilgrimage, following these small birds on their thousands-mile migration journey, and connecting with fellow humans along the way. Through poetry, prose, and practical gardening advice, Deb and Laura offer readers an invitation into relationship with these iridescent interdimensional beings who whiz from bloom to bloom across meadows, mountains, and the Gulf of Mexico.

“How lucky that the cross-pollination of Deb Soule and Laura Lamb Brown-Lavoie's thoughtful, caring, curious minds and hearts has sprouted this beautiful book. Cohesive and innovative, *Notes from the Hummingbird Corridor* is a wonderful reminder that wisdom can be found and carried in so many differently-shaped vessels—poem, prayer, essay, seed, hummingbird, cross-country roadtrip. I am so moved by this multi-modal collaboration, which is as splendid to read and look at as it is to learn from.”

—Sarah Kay, author of *A Little Daylight Left*, kaysarahsera.com



Red-bellied Woodpecker (Lew Purinton photo)

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Audubon

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Injured Bird?

Contact *Avian Haven*
Avian Haven accepts all bird species year-round.
207-382-6761
avianhaven.org

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/>

Gifts for your favorite birders...

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.



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/>



Still can't decide? How about a Maine Audubon **membership**? Details at maineaudubon.org