

# Bulletin



*Mid-Coast Audubon's mission is to promote long-term responsible use of natural resources through an informed membership, education, and community awareness*

**A Quarterly Newsletter**

**Volume 38, No. 1- February 2014**

**Guest Author**

*Tom Johnson tells us all about those magnificent Snowy Owls that have peppered our coast and elsewhere.*

**Page 1**

**President's Corner**

*Sue sums up the chapter's year.*

**Page 2**

**Critter's Corner**

*How much wood could a woodchuck chuck. Don knows all about woodchucks.*

**Page 2**

**Calendar**

*Make reservations for the Plum Island trip in February*

**Page 4**

*Visit our website for updates on our monthly programs.*

**Christmas Bird Count Highlights**

*A quick recap of some hits and misses.*

**Page 5**

**Feathery Fun Quiz**

*Snooze or lose.*

**Page 6**

**Letter to the Editor**

**Page 6**

**Photo Highlights of CBC**

**Page 7**

**Scholarships**

**Page 7**



## Snowy Owl Majesty!

This winter has marked a remarkable flight of Snowy Owls south into Eastern North America. At least several hundred different owls have been sighted from Newfoundland west to the Great Lakes and as far south and east as Florida and Bermuda! While Snowy Owls are nomadic and occasionally stage irruptions, this winter's movement appears to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for birders to see large numbers of these lovely and mysterious northern visitors.

I've had the good fortune to spend many hours so far this winter in the company of these hauntingly beautiful owls. Most of my field encounters have been along New Jersey's Atlantic barrier islands, where owls perch atop low sand dunes. While they might appear to be largely sedentary during the middle of the day, I've spent several late evenings in Cape May watching a Snowy Owl become very active by stretching its wings, bobbing its head up and down, and then finally

taking off on surprisingly quick wingbeats toward an ocean inlet, presumably to begin hunting prey animals, such as sea ducks, under the cover of the deepening darkness.

Some of my most memorable sightings this winter have occurred at Stone Harbor Point, a wild sand spit along the ocean just north of Cape May, New Jersey. A pair of adult Peregrine Falcons took up winter residency on the Point, presumably because of the wealth of potential prey in the area's wintering waterfowl and shorebirds. These falcons have not been terribly fond of the powerful white owls that have taken up daytime refuge in their dunes, and several times while I watched, the falcons launched incredibly aggressive attacks on roosting owls. A sedentary owl would somehow gain the attention of one or both falcons, which then raced toward the owl on sharp, rowing wingbeats, screaming all the way. The falcons would then aim straight at the owl's head, pulling up in a steep climb at the last possible second before making contact. The owl would duck and spread its wings open in a

*Continued on page 3*



**Peregrine Falcon swoops at Snowy Owl on New Jersey shore**

Tom Johnson



**PRESIDENT'S CORNER**

*SUE SCHUBEL*

To hibernate, migrate, or embrace the weather? These are the choices that face us in the higher latitudes as the light

dwindles. We have passed the yearly milestone of the shortest day and are coming into the light again, which is an excellent time to review the past year and plan for the next.

Mid-Coast Audubon has had a great year, with interesting programs throughout our membership area, and many field trips all year long. We held two birdseed sales, benefiting our birdwatchers, the hungry birds, and our chapter. We worked on the trails at the Nelson Preserve, and received a special memorial gift for enhanced signage there.

Our annual lobster-bake fundraiser was held on Hog Island over the Labor Day



The "Fireboys" tend the lobster bake. I-r: Bill, Don, John, and Lew.

weekend, and let me tell you, the Fireboys really have the system down! We also provided scholarship money for local school students to receive Seabird Education classes from Project Puffin, and worked with partners on our Davis Bog Preserve.

In 2014, we will continue to offer quality programming through our partnership with the Camden Public Library, as well as offerings at other venues throughout the area. We have great field trips planned, including the ever-popular Plum Island trip, and Ducks with Don! Join us for a preserve workday at one of our four preserves.

We invite everyone to get involved as a member or become part of the group that makes Mid-Coast Audubon happen. If you are enthusiastic, passionate about birds and nature, enjoy working with knowledgeable and fun people, and value educational experiences, then being a Mid-Coast

Audubon Board member may be for you!

**CRITTER CORNER - DON REIMER**

Woodchuck, whistle-pig and land-beaver are just some of the aliases of the familiar Groundhog. These large rodents prefer open country and woodland edges, where they excavate

burrows with 2 to 5 entrances for protection from predators. Burrows can measure nearly 50 feet in length.

All burrows follow a similar design pattern: first the animal starts digging inward for several feet, then slightly upward for several more feet before shifting to horizontal for another 15-25 feet. This design prevents flooding of the chambers. One chamber is always designated as the latrine area, while other dens are reserved for raising kits, sleeping and hibernating.

Groundhogs are one of Maine's true hibernators, going to ground in late September and remaining asleep until springtime emergence. With the clearing of colonial forest lands, today's North American groundhog population is



Don Reimer

probably higher than it was before the arrival of European settlers.

Being strict herbivores, groundhogs enjoy a wide variety of greens, grasses, clovers and fruits. At times, they also munch their way into people's flower and vegetable gardens. I have live-trapped and removed a couple dozen of these brown-coated neighborhood critters through the years. Relocation efforts should only be undertaken after the kits have fledged.

An instructive childhood encounter involved a dozing groundhog in a sunny blueberry pasture. For some odd reason, a young friend and I decided to capture the unsuspecting rodent in a cardboard box. I sneaked up and lowered the box over the slumbering animal. Loud chatters, squeals and threatening clicking of teeth ensued as I flipped the box



Juanita Roushdy

upright and hastily closed the lid. No flimsy box would hold this squirming creature, however. It forcefully exited the box and scrambled up and over my shoulder, before chasing my fleeing companion across the pasture.

## Snowy Owls - continued from page 1

threat display with each advancing falcon dive. The agitated team of falcons managed to drive the owl off of the sand dunes and into the salt marshes away from the falcons' core territory. This owl irruption has brought different predatory species into contact in unusual ways, leading to some really magical observations for me as a birder and scientist. To see video I recorded of one of the encounters, check out: <http://tinyurl.com/snowyowl2013>

Winter Snowy Owl irruptions in the south seem driven primarily by an abundance of prey in arctic breeding areas during the previous summer. A wealth of food, especially lemmings, allows adult owls to provision more chicks.

A successful breeding season then means that many more



**Leave me alone!**

young owls are around in the fall and winter, which can lead to large numbers of owls dispersing south of their normal range. The exact nature of a Snowy Owl irruption is still partly shrouded in mystery, but a collaborative effort has been launched this winter to investigate some of the unresolved details of irruptive owl movements.

Project SNOWstorm, led in part by Hog Island Audubon Camp program director Scott Weidensaul, is a research effort that aims to place GPS transmitters on Snowy Owls across the Eastern United States this winter. These transmitters are cutting-edge technology that transmit location data over GSM cellular networks. They record an owl's position at frequent intervals throughout the day and night; the information can then be used to learn more about the movements and habits of each tagged owl on a very fine scale. This type of rapidly evolving, collaborative research takes advantage of a real-time irruption of Snowy Owls on a large scale. It has the potential to answer a vast number of questions about these owls' nomadic movements, their nocturnal activities, and the overall time they spend in the

south. For more information, go to Project SNOWstorm's website at <http://projectsnowstorm.org>

Maine, being positioned right in the crosshairs of this historic Snowy Owl flight, has seen quite an influx of these striking birds already this winter. Hotspots include wide open areas (proxies for tundra habitat) like open beaches, rock jetties, marshes and open agricultural fields. For



**I still have my eye on you**

instance, many owls have been discovered in the expanses around Biddeford Pool. For up-to-date sighting maps, check out eBird at <http://ebird.org>. You can also contribute your



**Even at sunset those eyes are bright!**

sightings of any birds, including Snowy Owls.

Finally, try to get out and see a Snowy Owl this winter – watching one of these magnificent creatures surveying an open winter landscape with its incredibly piercing yellow eyes is an experience that you will always treasure.

*See box on page 7 for diet.*

*Tom Johnson, an instructor at Hog Island Audubon Camp and a former teen camper, does research on a NOAA ship in the Gulf of Maine for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. He's also a photographer and ornithologist.*

# Calendar of Events

*Bird walks and programs are free; donations are welcome to help defray costs.*

**Program chair: Kathy Cartwright 832-5584. Field trip chair: John Weinrich 563-2930**

## JANUARY

### Saturday, January 25

*Pemaquid Lighthouse*

Ducks/Seabirds - with Don Reimer

Meet at Lighthouse at 8:30 a.m.

## FEBRUARY

### Tuesday, February 4

*Cliff House - Ogunquit*

Ducks and More

Meet at Hannaford's Damariscotta 7:30 a.m.

### Tuesday, February 11 at 7:00 p.m.

Camden Public Library

*The Birds of Beech Hill*, with Brian Wilson, co-sponsored with Coastal Mountain Land Trust.

### Thursday, February 20 at 7:00 p.m.

Camden Public Library

*Primary Production in the Arctic Ocean: Will it Change?* with Paty Matrai, researcher from Bigelow Laboratory.

### Saturday-Sunday, February 22-23

*Plum Island – overnight*

With Dennis McKenna, 563-2930

Meet at Hannaford's Damariscotta 7:00 a.m.

*Overnight  
trip!*

## MARCH

### Thursday, March 20 at 7:00 p.m.

Camden Public Library

*Maine's Spring Bird Scene* with Don Reimer

### Saturday, March 22

*Biddeford Pool/Scarborough Marsh/ Pine Point*

Meet at Hannaford's Damariscotta 7:30 a.m.

## APRIL

### Friday, April 11 at 7:00 p.m.

Skidompha Public Library

*Declining Migrant Songbirds: Why and What We Can Do*, with Jodi Telfair-Richards, Ph.D.

### Tuesday, April 15

Leaders Choice – Dennis McKenna

Meet at Hannaford's 7:30 a.m.

### Thursday, April 17 at 7:00 p.m.

Camden Public Library

*Maine Wildflowers* with Wanda Garland

### Saturday, April 26

*Reid State Park*

With Dennis McKenna

Meet at Hannaford's 7:30 a.m.

## MAY

### Saturday, May 3

*Joint Walk with SVCA*

Meet at SVCA parking area 7:30 a.m.

### Tuesday May 13

*Evergreen Cemetery / Capisic Pond – Portland*

Meet at Hannaford's at 7:30 a.m.

### Monday, May 19

*Beech Hill/Duck Trap*

Meet at Moody's Diner 7:30 a.m.

### Saturday, May 24

*Monhegan Island*

Meet at Monhegan Ferry Boat Line Dock in Port Clyde at 7:00 a.m.

## JUNE

### Saturday, June 7

*Vaughn Woods/airport/Belgrade Lake/ Augusta Airport*

Meet at Hannaford's Damariscotta 7:30 a.m.

### Thursday June 12

*Kennebunk Plains/Sanford Sewage Treatment Plant*

Meet Hannaford's 7:30 a.m.

## AUGUST

### Saturday August 2

*Weskeag Marsh*

With Bill Goodwill

Meet at Marsh parking lot (time to be determined)

### Thursday August 14

Plum Island – Dennis McKenna

Meet Hannaford's 7:00 a.m.

*Check our website, [www.midcoastaudubon.org](http://www.midcoastaudubon.org) for updates on trips and programs, including a June overnighter with Bill Sheehan. Thank you.*

### For Sale

Hand-made bird boxes and more by Mid-Coast chapter board members. Visit Lois Doe Home Center or call John Weinrich at 563-2930 to order.

# 114th Christmas Bird Count Surprises

Mid-Coast Audubon sponsors three Christmas Bird Counts each year: Thomaston/Rockland, Pemaquid/Damariscotta, and Bunker Hill. Although Monhegan and Matinicus Islands are in the mid-coast, the chapter does not sponsor counts there; however counts are conducted. The weather for most counts was bracing, with fresh water ponds frozen solid as were some coastal inlets.

**Pemaquid/Damariscotta.** On December 14, the 17 hardy observers braved zero degrees and brisk winds. They found 67 species and 4,653 individual birds. These numbers compare unfavorably with last year's count of 73 species and 5,172 individual birds. An alert Pemaquid Point homeowner observed a Snowy Owl from their window. Another homeowner had a Baltimore Oriole visiting their bird feeder in Damariscotta; two Barrow's Goldeneyes were on the Damariscotta River with dozens of Common Goldeneyes; a Peregrine Falcon was spotted in Friendship and, in South Bristol, a White-crowned Sparrow.

**Bunker Hill.** On December 16, the 51 species counted by 17 observers was an average for the past six years (51). In contrast, the total individuals, 4,151, was the highest in the same time span and 1000 more than the average!

Black-capped Chickadees lead the list with 753 individuals outdoing the European Starling at 539 - the Starling was in second place for the first time surpassing the Wild Turkey.

More Eastern Bluebirds were counted, 50, which is considerably higher than the six-year average of 8. Also the Northern Cardinal has found a home in this circle, 139 individuals - 102 more birds than in the past six years.

Because of the frozen water on count day, fewer waterfowl species were seen than in other years - only 9. It was obvious to all participants that the Canadian forecast last fall of a poor year for irruptive finch species was right on target. White-winged and Red Crossbills, Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks and Pine Siskins were conspicuously absent finding ample food supplies further north of our circle.

The Red-bellied Woodpecker numbers continue to steadily increase. The numbers of Bald Eagles remain constant.

**Thomaston/Rockland.** December 21 found 20 counters tallying 79 species (one less than last year's record 80 total under more favorable ground conditions and open fresh water). Overall numbers totaled 8,579 birds. Winds were light and temperatures ran between 33 and 41 fahrenheit.

Two snowy owls were seen - it's been more than a decade since the last one was recorded on this particular count.

Hawks: Seven Red-tailed and three Rough-legged Hawks (an Arctic nester) were found in areas with open terrain. An adult Red-shouldered Hawk, another dedicated mouse-chaser, was discovered in Warren village. A roving Northern Harrier rounded out the lineup of the mouse patrol.

Gulls: at Owls Head Harbor, four white Iceland Gulls and an immature Glaucous Gull were notable finds.

Three Fish Crows were in Rockland near Lincoln Street School. Up until two years ago, these crows were generally unknown in the mid-coast, but are now apparently nesting in the city

Since winter finches are scarce this year, a flock of 25 Pine Siskins in Warren was an unexpected bonus. Other highlights included 3 Hermit Thrushes, a Baltimore Oriole, Brown-headed Cowbirds and a late Yellow-rumped Warbler. A

European vagrant, a single Black-headed Gull, was seen during the count week.

*For photo highlights of the counts, see page 7.*



Snowy Owl at Samoset during Thomaston/Rockland CBC

*Many thanks to the CBC compilers - Don Reimer (T/R), John Weinrich (BH), and Dennis McKenna (P/D) - for contributing these highlights and organizing their counts.*

*Also many thanks to the observers in the field and at home who were indefatigable in their efforts to locate birds.*

*For more information on the Christmas Bird Count, visit <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>*

*Don't forget the Great Backyard Bird Count,  
February 14-17!*



## Letter to the Editor . . .

### Alaska's Pebble Mine

There is more to conservation than Maine birds, animals and a proposed National Park.

I have been keeping abreast of what is happening in Alaska, and feel it imperative I report to our readers.

The Pebble Mine, a conglomerate of foreign investors, plan to mine an area the size of Rhode Island to open-pit extraction of gold, silver and copper. In the process they will produce and impound 10 billion tons of waste in an open retaining dam that environmentalists claim is an accident waiting to happen, just as the coal slurry dams in West Virginia did.

A breakout of a Pebble Mine's impoundment would utterly destroy Alaska's great Bristol Bay's multi-million dollar fishery, the greatest wild salmon run on the planet and depriving the very livelihood of native Alaskan Inuit peoples.

Over 600,000 letters have poured into the EPA to deny approval and one shareholder, Anglo American, has pulled out.

While Alaska is distant from Maine, we must be vigilant about this and other events throughout our world.

Joe Gray  
Interpretive Naturalist

*Editor's note: The EPA in January 2014 published its final assessment on the project (EPA910-R-14-001ES) concluding that the mine poses significant risks to the region's sockeye salmon harvest and Native groups. Another investor is considering pulling out, Rio Tinto. The Pebble Mine*

## Feathery Fun Quiz

*Snooze, split, or stick around*

1. In the 16th century people thought that swallows hibernated where during the winter?
2. Although birds don't experience true long-term hibernation, what unusual bird in the Western U.S. goes into a similar state called torpor for several weeks at a time?
3. In the early 1700s, people thought that birds migrated where?
4. Name three ways you can provide shelter to the birds who stay here for the winter.

Answers on page 7



Ruffed Grouse in the roadway during CBC, Don Reimer

### Alaska's Pebble Mine

For more information on the Pebble Mine in Bristol Bay, Alaska, explore these websites:

National Resources Defense Council:

<http://www.savebiogems.org>

Pebble Mine Company:

<http://www.pebblepartnership.com/>

Commercial Fisherman of Bristol Bay, AK

<http://fishermenforbristolbay.org/>

Editor

## Mid-Coast Audubon

Organized December 6, 1969

a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization

P.O. Box 458, Damariscotta, ME 04543-0458

### OFFICERS

Sue Schubel, President  
John Weinrich, Vice President  
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**Special Events:** Sue Schubel, 380-1370

**Bulletin editor:** Juanita Roushdy, 529-2355

The *Bulletin* is published quarterly in February, May, August, November. News items or photos are welcome. **The deadline for the next issue is April 15!**

Send to [juanitar@tidewater.net](mailto:juanitar@tidewater.net)

## Welcome New Members!

Dorothy Arseneau, Rockport  
Mr. and Mrs. William Bellows, Newcastle  
Leila Bright, Rockland  
Rebecca Clark, Newcastle  
Nancy Dickinson, New Harbor  
Jay and Evelyn Haberland, Round Pond  
Bob Olfenbittel, Camden  
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Sarah Price, Rockport  
Eileen Tucked, Nobleboro  
Brooke Williams, Thomaston

## . . . and Renewing Members

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Helen Walsh, West Newbury, MA  
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# Photo Highlights from the Christmas Bird Counts



Rough-legged Hawk

Don Reimer



Iceland Gull

Don Reimer



Pileated Woodpecker

Don Reimer



Townsend's Solitaire, *Matinicus*

Jeff Wells



Bald Eagle atop an ice-laden Spruce

Don Reimer



A "snowy" Northern Cardinal

Don Reimer

## Townsend's Solitaire

A rare visitor from the montane west of North America. The northernmost populations (Alaska, Yukon, northern British Columbia) are migratory, and presumably the source of vagrants to the east.

Louis Bevier

## Late-breaking News!

Snowy Owl found in Portland abandoned building is released near Rockland after a brief rehab at Avian Haven. She bolted from her box and powered over the field.

Don Reimer



Don Reimer

## Snowy Owls

During irruption Snowy Owls are opportunistic and will turn to available sources of food, such as larger mammal prey (e.g., squirrels, hares, raccoons) and other birds (e.g. ducks, shorebirds, pheasants, gulls).

This Snowy Owl pellet was found by Don Reimer at Samoset during the CBC.

Editor



Don Reimer

1. The bottom of a frozen lake.
2. The Common Poorwill of western N. America is a strict insectivore and goes into a state almost like hibernation (torpor) for several weeks in rocky crevices during the winter.
3. The moon.
4. Have brush piles, thick evergreen bushes, and specialized roost boxes or bird houses.

## Answers

## Summer Camp and Scholarships

MCAS has scholarship money available to help send an interested midcoast resident to the Hog Island Audubon Camp! Learn about birds from world-renowned naturalists on this island gem in Muscongus Bay. For more information about Hog Island visit [www.hogisland.audubon.org](http://www.hogisland.audubon.org), and [fohi.org](http://fohi.org). Teachers are especially encouraged to apply. To receive an application for a Mid-Coast Audubon scholarship, email [sschubel@tidewater.net](mailto:sschubel@tidewater.net) with subject line HOG I. SCHOLARSHIP.

Mid-Coast Audubon  
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M I D - C O A S T A U D U B O N

# Join Maine Audubon Today



Yes, I would like to join Maine Audubon and the **Mid-Coast Chapter** (this also includes membership in the National Audubon Society). I want to help promote environmental education and advocacy in our communities, and protect and conserve wildlife habitat. I will receive the quarterly publications *Habitat: The Journal of Maine Audubon* and the *Mid-Coast Chapter Bulletin*.

\$25 Volunteer/Senior    \$35 Individual    \$45 Household    \$65 Contributor    \$100 Patron

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Clip and send with check payable to "Maine Audubon" at 20 Gilsland Farm Road, Falmouth, ME 04015

*Did you miss the Christmas Bird Count? It's not too late to count birds!*

Participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 14-17, from your armchair, in your local park, your school, anywhere that you can see birds for as little as 15 minutes!

Visit the GBBC website: <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

