Mexico, state of Nayarit, San Blas, May 31, 1980, time 06:15–09:30—my notes say I am exploring mangrove swamps near this small town on the west coast of Mexico where it is “sunny and calm, 80°–90° F.” On that trip over thirty-eight years ago, I saw my first Great Black Hawk. That area is about as far north as the species ranges, the steamy northern edge of the subtropics. Thinking back, I can still picture iguanas in the mangroves and the thrill of my first Bare-throated Tiger-Herons, Boat-billed Herons, Mangrove Cuckoos, trogons, and parrotlets. Subtropical and tropical lowland woods near water is the expected habitat of the Great Black Hawk. They are resident along both coasts of Mexico south through Central America and South America to northern Argentina. As far as known, they are resident and do not migrate, unlike the Common Black Hawk, which does have migratory populations in the northern part of its range. They can be seen on spring migration, for example, along the Santa Cruz River in southeastern Arizona.

Why am I telling this story? Because last year a Great Black Hawk showed up in Maine and decided to adopt an urban landscape with large white oaks, planted spruces trees, and alleyways as home. Great Black Hawks are generalist predators, preying on fish, frogs, lizards, and small mammals. The adopted daily diet of Eastern Grey Squirrels, introduced rats, and the occasional Rock Dove stolen from another hawk made sense for this Great Black Hawk now that it was in Maine. Ironically, I was in west Mexico not far south of San Blas when this hawk was found in Biddeford last August. The news first came via social media about an unidentified immature hawk. Identification of immature black hawks, Common and Great, was not something bird guides forty years ago explained well. The very long legs of Great and its short primaries, extending only a short way on the folded wing, were, however, noted by Alexander Wetmore and Robert Ridgway decades ago as key differences from Common Black Hawk.

Continued on page 3
Soup, Sea Ducks, Surprises

Hot soup – just right for a cold day. And sea ducks – a splashy condiment on the winter seas. A perfect pairing. What a nice surprise to find a food truck in Rockland selling soup, parked right next to a lovely harbor view, with quackers. Today – white bean and sausage soup, with a side of American Wigeon, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser, Long-tailed and Black Ducks.

And the surprise of it! Finding out that a soup truck was in Rockland was good, but then discovering all these birds while supping – even better! According to the book, *Surprise: Embrace the Unpredictable and Engineer the Unexpected*, being surprised intensifies our experiences by about 400%. Because it is unexpected, our biology perceives it as a possible threat and causes us to freeze for an instant. This pause and focus may seem insignificant, but it gives one an opportunity to be curious and notice new things. It may make us more adaptable to change, and even allow us to shift perspectives. Of course, not all surprises are good, but providing more opportunities for good surprises is definitely beneficial! A friend and I finally went to see the Great Black Hawk. Imagine the surprise of finding that buteo from Central and South America for the first time. We weren’t certain it would be there in Portland’s Deering Oaks Park, where it has been since November, but there it was, with attendant photographers and birders. Very cool, lovely long legs. We appreciated it on an icy January day. But surprising? Not so much.

At Two Lights State Park though, we walked out over the frigid rocks and were quite astonished to see Harlequin Ducks and Common Eiders with a perfect blush; the sun just right for amazing colors. That separation between expectation and reality (surprise) gave us an excellent dose of dopamine for the pleasure centers of our brains, and a strong memory to boot. Grab a buddy and your bins (another perfect pairing), and go outside! Travel a new route, or even the same loop in the opposite direction. Enrich your life, as you let yourself encounter the unexpected. Here’s hoping you’ll be surprised, too.

CRITTER CORNER

Don Reimer

The view through my living room window looks directly at several bird feeders suspended on thin metal wires from overhanging tree branches. Beyond a few bounding chickadees and nuthatches grabbing sunflower seeds, a frustrated grey squirrel stares intently back at me, pumping his tail defiantly and issuing chittering challenges under his breath.

I’m a seasoned veteran of the squirrel campaigns though, with some meager wins and notable losses. Like the time I tumbled off a stepladder while repositioning a feeder, breaking my right wrist. Through the years, I’ve attached any number of creative but ineffective contraptions to my feeders, including slinky metal springs, beverage bottles, kitchen funnels and vinyl photograph records. I’ve applied red pepper flakes, greasy Crisco shortening and sticky WD 40 lubricant to feeder poles, baffles and domes. I admit to chasing and pitching a broomstick at fleeing squirrels on various occasions.

For a time, I owned an expensive battery-powered feeder that spun when a squirrel mounted it, slinging the offending rodent straight into the shrubbery! Those brief glory days ended abruptly when a rocketing squirrel snapped off the feeder’s ringed spinner mechanism.

Does anything actually work to minimize squirrel contacts with your feeders? Certain feeders equipped with weight sensitive perch closures generally work. Since birds weigh far less than squirrels, they can eat comfortably without causing the feeder compartment to close. Or you might consider the patented Squirrel Stopper Pole that features an inverted cone-shaped baffle that is suspended on springs. When touched it begins to bounce, allegedly preventing squirrels or raccoons from climbing any further. Squirrels are prodigious jumpers, capable of reaching feeders located 10 feet or less from any tree branches, decks, roofs or power lines. Try positioning feeders further away from any such strategic launching pads.

Remember that placing certain food types directly on the ground, such as nuts, sunflower seed, corn and fruit will coax potential scores of squirrels and other rodents into your yard. It may seem hard to fathom, but I know of folks who genuinely enjoy watching the ingenious antics of squirrels around their home feeders. And that’s okay too!
Great Black Hawk . . . cont’d

Once established that the unidentified bird was a Great Black Hawk and that it was indeed in Maine, the hunt was on. Thanks to Doug Hitchcox, who found it again, many others got to see the bird at Biddeford, where its opportunism was on display as it wolfed down eggs of small passerines. Sadly, the bird was gone a couple of days later. Then in late October, while I was corresponding with Bill Bunn, he casually asked about a raptor he had photographed. I told him it was the Great Black Hawk, assuming he had photographed it back in August. No! It was on October 29, on the Eastern Promenade in Portland. Searches failed to locate the bird; we all assumed it was gone again. A month passed, and by now snow was on the ground. Then another post to social media asked about an unidentified hawk in Deering Oaks Park, Portland. It was the Great Black Hawk, still here. The bird stayed and was widely enjoyed. After a severe storm in mid-late January, the bird was found a bit weakened and on the ground. The decision was made to rescue it, and Avian Haven, with Diane Winn and Marc Payne at the helm, are nursing the bird, which is healthy except for potentially serious frostbite that may affect the viability of the feet. Nevertheless, its future is an open question. Where does one release the bird? Where did it come from?

Before the bird showed up in Maine, a juvenile Great Black Hawk was photographed on April 24 at South Padre Island, Texas. That was a little over three months before the Maine sighting. The Texas record was the first thought to be of natural occurrence in the United States. Independently, John Schmitt and Tom Johnson noticed that the unique pattern of dark blobs on the under wing coverts matched on the Texas bird and the Maine sighting. Incredibly, the same bird had flown from Texas to Maine. This far outstripped expectations of vagrancy in an otherwise sedentary species.

Some limited wandering is known. For example, in the state of Sonora, northwest Mexico, there are five records (up to 1995) north to the Rio Yaqui. Two are from March and April; three are from November and December (The Birds of Sonora by Stephen Russell and Gale Monson, 1995). Could the species sometimes wander? The latitude of those northwestern records and the spring occurrences are of interest because they might presage the Texas occurrence.

When the bird showed up in early August, it had started molt on its inner primaries and some tail feathers (rectrices). This first wave of molt usually occurs when a juvenile Great Black Hawk is about a year old. They pass through a couple of immature plumages before attaining the all-black adult plumage. In adults, populations from Mexico south to Panama show a narrow white bar across the base of the tail (subspecies ridgwayi), whereas birds to the south have only one broad white bar across the tail (the nominate subspecies, urubitinga). As far as known immature plumages do not differ.

An oddity about the Maine-Texas bird is that its first generation of new tail feathers show two different patterns. The new tail feathers on the left side are typical of the earlier immature stage, being finely barred with a broad black band at the tip. Some finely barred juvenile (called basic I by some) tail feathers remain, as is typical in large birds. On the right side, however, the new tail feathers are broadly black with two wavy white bars, one broader and one narrow nearer the base. This matches the pattern of the third generation of tail feathers, i.e., more adult-like. The pattern of these black and white feathers does match samples of ridgwayi, but it is still uncertain whether any South American birds show a similar pattern. It would make most sense for a natural vagrant to originate from Mexico and thus be an example of ridgwayi. But it is better left undetermined for now. This complicates ideas of where, if at all, one would repatriate the Maine hawk. Maine or Texas make sense if we respect the bird’s free will to have flown to those locations, if it can be released into the wild again.

Louis Bevier is a research associate, Biology Department, Colby College, and is on the Maine Birds Records Committee.

Note: Florida had some long-staying Great Black Hawks that were the nominate (S.Am.) form. These have been regarded as escapes.
FREE bird walks (no pets please) and programs; donations are welcome to help defray costs.

Program chair: Kathy Cartwright 832-5584. Field trip chair: Dennis McKenna 563-8439

FEBRUARY
Program: Thursday, February 21, 7 p.m. Camden Library
Join us for a panel discussion of the environmental considerations for the Penobscot Bay Watershed as it relates to land-based salmon farms proposed for Belfast and Bucksport. Panelists include: Andrew Stevenson, a Belfast resident recently retired from a career in environmental protection; Dr. Nichole N. Price, Senior Research Scientist Director, Center for Venture Research on Seafood Solutions, and Eric Sanders, Councilor Ward 3, City of Belfast. Moderator: John Morrison, World Wildlife Fund, Director of Conservation Planning & Measures. Detailed information can be found at our website.

Field Trip: Thursday, February 28
Cliff House and Perkins Cove, Ogunquit
Looking for sea ducks, alcids and other seabirds. Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.

MARCH
Field Trip: Thursday, March 14
Biddeford Pool, Pine Point and Scarborough Marsh Sea ducks, raptors, and early migrants. Meet at Damariscotta Hannaford at 7:00 a.m.

Program: Thursday, February 21, 7 p.m. Camden Library
Eric Topper, Maine Audubon’s Director of Education, presents Bringing Nature Home, expanding native plants into our backyards to improve the habitat for Maine birds. He’ll discuss what you can plant and how to manage and maintain your garden for its full ecological benefit.

APRIL
Field Trip: Thursday, April 11
Damariscotta River Association and Salt Bay Farm
Early migrants and holdover winter passerines. Meet at Farm parking lot on Belvedere Rd. at 7:00 a.m.

Program: Thursday, April 18, 7 p.m. Camden Library
Mike Shannon, a lifelong naturalist, storyteller, educator, and Maine Guide will tell us about Romantic Antics – The Sky Dance of the American Woodcock. He’ll describe the annual courtship cycle; the woodcock’s aerial technique, bizarre and mysterious, places him up front as a strange suitor.

MAY
Field Trip: Saturday, May 11
Migrating seabirds and passerines. Meet at Pemaquid Point Lighthouse parking lot at 7:00 a.m.

Field Trip: Saturday, May 25
Monhegan Island day trip to see spring migrants, Make reservation through Monhegan Boat Line prior to trip. Meet at Ferry Dock, Port Clyde at 6:45 a.m.

For updates and detailed information about our events, visit our website https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/ or e-mail midcoast@maineaudubon.org!

Summer Fun and Learning with Scholarships

Hog Island Audubon Camp in Bremen, Maine
Can’t afford to go to camp? The Mid-Coast chapter has given scholarships to its local community for over 50 years. Scholarships for 2019 are available thanks to our Jean Hamlin Ornithology and Joe Gray scholarship funds.

Hog Island offers sessions for teens and adults. For example, “Sharing Nature: An Educator’s Week” – mingle with fellow educators, be reinvigorated and learn new things for the classroom, a new session with David Tallamy “Creating Bird Friendly Habitats,” or “Raptor Rapture” – learn about ospreys and other raptors. Explore: http://hogisland.audubon.org/ But don’t wait too long.

For information and application visit our website: https://midcoast.maineaudubon.org/ or contact Sue at sschubel@audubon.org.
Dawning of the 119th Annual Christmas Bird Count

Pemaquid/Damariscotta (MEPD) Christmas Bird Count, Friday, December 14, 2018. Twenty-six participants fanned out over the 15-mile diameter count circle, in part to ascertain whether the local populace was correct when they asked: “where are all the birds”? In this count, there were 4,393 individual birds counted, nearly 2,000 fewer than last year’s count.

Despite the low numbers, 65 species were found by the hardy birders, which is about average for the MEPD count circle. A Baltimore Oriole, visiting a feeder in Bremen, was found during the count-week. Four species: the Red-bellied Woodpecker, Double-crested Cormorants, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Bald Eagles experienced record-breaking high counts. A Gadwall, a duck found for the first time last year, was again sighted this year.

Irruptive winter finches, predicted and eagerly anticipated this year, failed to show; with only one Pine Siskin spotted.

Thomaston/Rockland, Saturday, December 15, 2018. This year’s 68 species was considerably lower than last year’s record-setting 83 species, with overall numbers also down by roughly a thousand. Factors such as weather and travel conditions on count day, the amount of snow cover and whether fresh water bodies are unfrozen influence the count totals. Food availability (natural sources and at feeders) is always a chief factor.

Despite well-stocked feeding stations, bird activity was limited in many instances. Did this mean that, with bare ground conditions, birds were feeding in the local woods and fields? Or were fewer birds lingering at the mid-coast? Fresh-water lakes were solidly frozen, reducing waterfowl numbers and diversity.

One noticeable trend is the progressive northward expansion of species in response to generally milder and shorter winters. Red-bellied Woodpeckers, for example, now nest and winter in Maine – 6 were found on count day. Cardinals (49 this year) and Mourning Doves (205) are abundant. Northern Mockingbirds and Carolina Wrens became relative newcomers to New England in past decades and are found regularly in Maine. Increases of Mallard duck populations (558) and decreases of Black Ducks (65) continue, as hybridization between the two species favors the former.

Perhaps this year’s biggest surprise was a virtual absence of the irruptive winter finches we had anticipated. No cross-bills, siskins, purple finches or redpolls. Waxwings also went unrecorded this time. One saving grace was a cluster of 4 Pine Grosbeaks at Clark Island. Blue Jay numbers were down (56 individuals), as portions of jay populations vacate the region in years with poor acorn crops.

It is no secret that Wild Turkeys are doing well, however. With populations reestablished in Maine woodlands in the 1970s, fields and commercial gardens (and select bird feeders of lucky homeowners) now contain the foraging flocks. Five Great Blue Herons and Belted Kingfishers were found on count day. A single Northern Shrike at Tenants Harbor was a welcome addition to the count.

Photo: sunrise at Pemaquid Lighthouse on CBC day 2018 by Juanita Roushdy

Continued on page 7.
Bird Quiz — Fun with Flocks
To call a flock of crows a “murder” is unfair, but some traditional terms for flocks are simply descriptive, such as a “murmuration” of starlings. See if you can name the type of birds in the following flocks:

1. A cotillion of _______.
2. A herd of _______.
3. A raft of _______.
4. A huddle of _______.
5. A shimmer of _______.
6. A confusion of _______.
7. An exaltation of _______.
8. A scold of _______.
9. A squadron of _______.
10. A charm of _______.
11. A kettle of _______.
12. A college of _______.

Fun with Flocks Quiz Answers
1. Terns
2. Cowbirds
3. Ducks
4. Penguins
5. Hummingbirds
6. Warblers
7. Larks
8. Jays
9. Pelicans
10. Finches
11. Raptors
12. Cardinals

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The Merganser is published three times a year in February, May, November. News items and photos are welcome. Deadline for next issue is April 15! Send to juanitar@tidewater.net

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Fun with Flocks Quiz Answers
1. Terns
2. Cowbirds
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5. Hummingbirds
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8. Jays
9. Pelicans
10. Finches
11. Raptors
12. Cardinals

Maine Audubon and its 7 chapters are active in preserving and conserving Maine’s wildlife and habitat. Did you know that Maine enacted its own Endangered Species Act in 1975, concerned that fish and wildlife were disappearing from the state.

Eliza Donoghue, Senior Policy and Advocacy Specialist for Maine Audubon, spends a lot of time in Augusta. This legislative session will see her and Maine Audubon striving toward:

2. Climate and Energy. Setting bold targets for reducing emissions and transitioning to a low-carbon economy.
3. Plastics Pollution. Developing policies to decrease the amount of plastic that pollutes our land and water and harms wildlife.
4. Habitat Connectivity. Securing at least $75 million in new funding for Land for Maine’s Future. LMF is a 30-year success story, conserving over 600,000 acres of working forests, farms, and waterfronts.
5. Wildlife Stewardship. Rebuilding core functions of the Bureau of Parks and Lands with focus on conserving older forests. Maine’s Public Reserved Lands contain some of the oldest trees in the state – prime habitat for boreal and migratory forest birds of high conservation value. The balance between sustainable forestry, outdoor recreation, and wildlife habitat has been lost.

Coming soon is a new report on transitioning to renewable energy. Conservation Biologist and GIS Manager Sarah Haggerty and the rest of the Maine Audubon Conservation Team are finalizing the report. It will contain best practices to reduce wildlife impacts from solar, on- and offshore wind, and transmission lines.

Visit Maine Audubon’s website: https://www.maineaudubon.org/. Sign up for Action Alerts or even volunteer to help.
Bunker Hill (MEBL) CBC, December 17, 2018. Sixteen keen birders in eight sections bucked a very snowy day counting birds in the 13-year old Bunker Hill Christmas Bird Count circle. Counters were in the field from daylight to dusk while four additional counters counted birds at their feeders from the warmth of their homes. The 53 species seen this year was within 2 of the 13-year average of 55, but the actual number of birds counted, 3,288, was close to 1,500 below the average seen over the life of the circle. Poor weather was a major contributor for the low numbers of birds seen. Higher numbers of species were expected after the winter finch report out of Canada predicted a heavy eruption of finches this winter. Ten Evening Grosbeaks were seen in the Nobleboro area.

Think about Your Spring Garden!

What will go in your garden this year to attract birds and pollinators? Although many hybrids and cultivars are attractive to our feathered friends, wouldn’t it be better to have plants and flowers native to Maine consumed and spread rather than nonnatives?

Not sure what to plant? A number of resources can help. Ask local garden shops that have native plants. The Wild Seed Project is a Maine nonprofit dedicated to saving Maine’s native seed bank and encourages gardeners to use them: https://wildseedproject.net/. National Audubon’s program Plant for Birds provides photos and information on plants suitable for your zip code: https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds Even better, visit Maine Audubon’s native plant sale in Falmouth in June. Your local extension office is another helpful resource and often has plants for sale later in the spring; for example, Knox County has a Plants for Maine Landscape program that gives details about native plants.

Native plants provide more food for birds and wildlife, require less water, are used to Maine weather, and are not aggressive. Enjoy the bounty and beauty of Maine!

Not Able to Do a Christmas Bird Count . . . Then the Great Backyard Bird Count is for You!

Get a steaming hot cup of bird-friendly coffee, your binoculars and sit down and watch the birds coming to your feeders, either at home, at school, at the office, or, hey, even, the gym!

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is free, fun, and an easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations.

Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part, from beginning bird watchers to experts. You can participate from your backyard or anywhere in the world.

Your reported sightings will help researchers at Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon learn more about birds.

So, take 15 minutes to share with your friends watching birds and contributing to the citizen science. Be part of the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 15-18. You may be surprised at what you see!

Take someone birding, share the fun!
Teens Head to Costa Rica for Tropical Teen Week!


Love is in the air for this Wood Duck and female Mallard in Rockport Harbor!

22nd Annual Great Backyard Bird Count
February 15-18, 2019
See page 7