

Big surprise arrives at the 2015 Big Sit!

The 4th annual Merrymeeting Audubon Big Sit! took place at Wharton Point on Maquoit Bay, Sunday, October 11. The day began cool and calm, but soon the winds began to build from the south off the water. The strong, blustery winds kept the land birds down, but the water and sea birds were in their element. The



big surprise of the day occurred when those strong onshore winds blew in a *Leach's*

Storm-Petrel flying over the amazed birders in the Big Sit! circle.

Storm-petrels are sea (pelagic) birds that, except for nesting on islands, spend their entire lives at sea, usually far offshore. But strong onshore winds (especially hurricanes) will blow these pelagic species close to shore and sometimes over land.

Up to a dozen birders joined the Big Sit! throughout the day. The final tally of 55 species was very good for the blustery day, and the unexpected storm-petrel sighting made it all worth it.

A big "Thank You" goes out to all the Merrymeeting Audubon Big Sit! birders for their contributions, including comfortable chairs, donuts, cookies, and apple cider. Much appreciated!

Gordon Smith



A "swift" victory!

I've been studying Chimney Swifts for a very long time. They are a fascinating breed of avians with behavioral characteristics akin to bats and swallows, with whom they are often confused. Throughout my many years of observations I have discovered that they are extremely difficult to study due to their mercurial behavior patterns. Swifts are cavity nesters that originally built their nests in hollow trees, not in chimneys. However, with the Industrial Revolution came destruction of forests, and tree cavities were replaced by chimneys as potential roosting and nesting sites. Thus, their new moniker, "Chimney Swifts".

In our Merrymeeting area, the former Brunswick High School (now Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School) boasted the busiest roosting chimney, which had regular migration counts in excess of five hundred birds. Our chapter worked closely with the architect and builders of the new chimney in order to match the dimensions of the old chimney, and provide similar "cues" to the swifts and other migrating birds. In the post construction of the new school, trees left standing close to that location verified something known about many birds: that they return to the exact place of their earlier roosts and nesting places based on a set of environmental cues.

The first swifts arrived in early May. Twenty-three entered the chimney but remained only fifteen minutes, by actual count, and then exited not to return again. Later arrivals occasionally tried it out but soon left. During the summer, swifts continued to fly in the area, and circle the location of the old chimney; but with the construction noise and work around the site, the swifts seemed reluctant to spend much time there.

However, there is a happy ending, or should I say beginning, to this story. Finally, after five years of repeated trips to the new chimney, I personally witnessed a family of swifts that had built a nest in the chimney and successfully raised three chicks! What a wondrous reward and glimmer of hope for the future! *Ted Allen*



See how **Merrymeeting Audubon Scholarships** benefit students and teachers alike. (*Articles appear on Page 2*).

With Christmas right around the corner, what better gift could you give a child or teacher, than a positive, life-changing experience at one of our summer nature camps? Or become a member of our Scholarship Committee. FMI about camps or the committee contact our committee members listed on Page 5.

(*Emma Hanna*, Scholarship recipient, enjoyed her experiences at Tanglewood this summer)

Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter

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E-mail us at:

merrymeeting@maineaudubon.org

Merrymeeting scholarships broaden horizons for recipients

I consider myself fortunate to live and teach in a state with an abundance of natural beauty and endless possibilities for outdoor education. Last July, I was reminded of my good fortune during a week I spent at Hog Island, made possible by a scholarship from Merrymeeting Audubon.

Teachers from all over the country, many experiencing Maine for the first time, enthusiastically participated in Educator's Week, a session chock-full of workshops and outdoor explorations. In addition to practical, hands-on activities and plenty of puffins, eagles and warblers, there were other, sometimes unexpected, opportunities for learning. Although there were many highlights of the week for me, I will focus on a few of them here.

Without question, Hog Island Educator's Week's exceptional quality can be credited to its staff, led by Pete Salmansohn and several instructors, who each have their own unique style and area of expertise. I especially enjoyed Ted Gilman, a naturalist with 40 years of experience at Hog Island. I found myself captivated by how he relayed information; always sparking interest through an entertaining story, a thoughtful question, or an unusual fact. I began to realize that his effectiveness was due to his grasp of both the art and science of teaching. As a teacher, I especially appreciate the magic of his approach.

A session led by Dr. Chandra Taylor, from the National Audubon Society, became a lesson about diversity and environmental justice. Dr. Taylor explained how Hog Island has joined the movement to open its programs to a more diverse audience through education and scholarships. Several participants, who were diversity scholarship winners, shared their stories of what it is like to be a person of color who is interested in nature. For instance, Dr. Taylor told stories about traveling to national parks as a child in the 1960's, when the parks were not always welcoming to people of color. She also explained that for some African Americans, the outdoors is not considered a safe place. The National Audubon Society is now doing its part to change this perception. I had a chance

See **HORIZONS**, page 5

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL photo courtesy of Dr. John "Jay" C. Stormer; CHIMNEY SWIFT photos courtesy of Louis R. Bevier; EMMA HANNA photo courtesy of Rita Hanna; American Robin photo courtesy of Doug Suitor.

“*I never for a day gave up listening to the songs of our birds, or watching their peculiar habits, or delineating them in the best way I could.*”

John James Audubon

Scholarship Committee seeks new members

The tomatoes are in the freezer, the garlcs are drying in the shed, and the sweetness of sugar and gold corn still lingers in our memories. For those of us who till the soil in the Spring, it seems that the sowing, weeding and watering was all worth it as we now get to enjoy the fruits of our summertime labors.

Members of the Merrymeeting Scholarship Committee have another reason to appreciate the Fall season. That's when the letters of thanks come pouring in from our summer camp scholarship recipients and we are reminded how important the winter planning, fund raising, and envelope stuffing is to Merrymeeting area children who receive our scholarships.

Serving on the Merrymeeting Scholarship Committee is an enjoyable and rewarding way to help young people interact with the natural world, provide

See **NEW MEMBERS**, page 5

Beginning birders want to know. . .

Question: Why are Robins here in the winter, and how do they survive?

Answer: The American Robin is no soft suburban scrounger, but one of the most widespread and adaptable birds in North America. They breed from tundra to mountains to swamps to parks, and practically everywhere in between.

In many areas, robins reach their greatest breeding densities in proximity to people. This is due to the varied foraging and nesting spots robins manage to find in these areas, as well as greater availability of mud for nest-building, thanks to human activities like crop irrigation and lawn-watering.

How can robins live in so many different places? Because they'll eat practically anything. In the breeding season they feed their young, worms, grubs, caterpillars, snails, spiders, insects and even small vertebrates. Like plovers they hunt mostly by sight, hopping a bit and then standing watchfully still.

As high-protein prey become scarce in the colder months, robins switch to fruits and berries. This is one reason you may not know robins are still here in the winter—they've moved from our yards to woodlands and wet areas where fruit is more plentiful.

If we do see robins in the winter, we're likely to see a lot of them. When they're not nesting, robins often roost and forage in large nomadic flocks, which can reach 250,000 birds.

Robins are so-called facultative migrants; they wander around all winter looking for supportive conditions. They'll go only as far south as they need to. The further north they can stay, the closer they'll be to prime breeding territories come spring.

The American Robin is thought to be stable or increasing across its range. Partners in Flight estimate the robin's global breeding population at 310 million. Some of the best things we can do for our rugged Maine robins include planting native fruiting trees, keeping our cats indoors, and avoiding pesticides.



Scott Cronenweth

NEW MEMBERS, from page 2

them with opportunities to work and play with peers in an outdoor setting, and enable them to experience the joy of summertime in Maine. The 4-H camps at Tanglewood and Bryant Pond, as well as the National Audubon camp at Hog Island, provide structured opportunities for children to engage with birds and wildlife in a variety of habitats. Sports, arts, crafts, and socialization with peers are integrated into these programs at all levels.

Merrymeeting Audubon has been awarding camper scholarships since the early 1980's. The scholarship committee currently comprises three chapter members who meet occasionally during the winter months. We would like to expand the committee to five members and invite anyone who is interested to join us. No experience is necessary and the time commitment is minimal. Please consider helping the scholarship committee continue it's important work. FMI please call or e-mail any of the chapter members listed below.

Ted Allen, *Chapter President*

729-8661 beanallen79@gmail.com

Steve Spear, *Committee Chair*

353-8863 sspear32@gmail.com

Beth Bullock, *member*

729-9650 bbullock@gwi.net

Sue Sergeant, *member*

442-8195 suegeosergeant@comcast.net

Gail Bruce (*outgoing member*)

406-4495 gkbruce01@gmail.com

Steve Spear

HORIZONS, from page 2

to talk with several young people who are doing amazing programs in places such as New York City and Washington DC, which will forever change the complexion of environmental education.

I also had the opportunity to meet another third grade teacher from New York, and our classes have become pen pals. We hope to teach each other about our very different

environments, as we exchange emails, videos and natural artifacts throughout the year. I am sure our experience at camp will weave its way into this project.

My week at Audubon camp would not have been possible without the generosity of the members of the Merrymeeting Audubon Society and for that, I am forever grateful. Thank you.

Joan Newkirk



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Field Trips & Nature Programs 2015-16

www.maineaudubon.org/merrymeeting

Please Take Note:

- If you're planning to go on a Field Trip, please call the Trip Leader the night before to confirm.
- Inclement weather might cause trips to be cancelled. Please call the Trip Leader before venturing out.

December

Saturday, December 5, 8:30 a.m.

Field Trip: Waterfowl Walk, Giant Stairs on Bailey Island

Join the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust and John Berry for a look at the winter waterfowl of eastern Casco Bay from one of Harpswell's most scenic locations. Directions for the site are on the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust web site. The estimated time is two hours. FMI John Berry at 632-7257 or Berry.John@comcast.net.



Saturday, December 19

Bath Area Christmas Bird Count

Join one of several Merrymeeting teams in the field for this annual event, which brings together experienced and inexperienced birders alike. A pizza party will be held immediately following the count to compile the data and share any special sightings.

- FMI contact Don Hudson at 443-9795 or wdonhudson@gmail.com.

January 2016

SUNDAY, JANUARY 3

Brunswick-Freeport Christmas Bird Count

➤ FMI contact Don Hudson (as above) or Stella Walsh at 807-3679 or stellawalsh@earthlink.net.

NOTE RE both CBC events:

Join the Christmas Bird Count at home by counting your feeder birds on

the count day.

➤ Contact Stella Walsh for details by 12/16 for the BATH area or by 12/31 for the BRUNSWICK/FREEPORT areas: stellawalsh@earthlink.net or 207-807-3679.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 5, 7:00 P.M.

Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen
For directions call 729-8661.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 7:00 A.M.

Field Trip: South Coastal Birding

On this annual outing from Ogunquit to Biddeford Pool, we should see many of Maine's wintering birds including Harlequin Duck, scoters, Purple Sandpipers, and maybe a Snowy Owl or King Eider. Bring a lunch or a snack.

➤ Meet at the Bath Plaza CVS at 7:00 a.m., or at the Brunswick Hannaford at 7:20 a.m. FMI, or a meeting time and place in Ogunquit, call Maurice Dauphin at 389-2585.

NEW Sunday, January 17, 8:30 a.m.

Field Trip: Winter Waterfowl Watch from Brunswick to Harpswell

We'll search the bays and coves off Brunswick and Harpswell for winter waterfowl.

➤ Meet at Brunswick Hannaford at 8:30 a.m. FMI call Doug Sutor at 841-1951.

Tuesday, January 26, 6 - 9 p.m.

Potluck Dinner and Presentation

➤ Location: Mid Coast Chapter American Red Cross, 16 Community Way, Topsham

Enjoy good company and delicious food. If you wish, bring a few of your favorite slides. Bring a dish to share.

Please bring your own plate and utensils. Beverages will be provided.

Feel free to bring a friend. Dinner will

be served at 6:15, but you are welcome to come around 5:30 to socialize.

Call Carol Jack at 729-0220 for info about dinner or if you need a digital projector for slides.

➤ **Directions: From Brunswick or Topsham:** At the intersection of U.S. 201 and Rte. 196, go east on 196 toward Route 1. At the first traffic light turn right on Community Way. The Red Cross Chapter is on your left. **From Bath or Harpswell:** Take Rte. 1 to Rte. 196 (Topsham). Go two traffic lights and turn left on Community Way.

NEW Saturday, January 30, 9:00 a.m.

Field Trip: Cape Elizabeth Coastal Birding

We'll visit coastal birding sites in Cape Elizabeth including: Portland Head Light, Dyer's Cove, Two Lights State Park, and Kettle Cove.

➤ Meet at Brunswick Hannaford (to carpool) at 8:00 a.m.—John Berry, 632-7257; or 9:00 a.m. at Portland Head Light—Andrew Gilbert, 207-329-7525.

February

Sunday, February 14, 8:30 a.m.

Field Trip: Reid State Park, Georgetown

Reid State Park is a magnificent site in winter. Join Doug Sutor to search for coastal birds including grebes, loons, and scoters. We will also look for Purple Sandpipers, and wintering songbirds. Dress warmly. Bring lunch or a snack.

➤ Meet at the Bath Plaza CVS at 8:30 a.m. to carpool. FMI call Doug Sutor at 841-1951.



Tuesday, February 23, 7:00 p.m.

Public Program: Birding the Upper Texas Coast

➤ *Location: Curtis Memorial Library, Morrell Room, Brunswick.*

“Jay” Stormer, our presenter, will take us to the Upper Texas Coast, which extends 100 miles from Louisiana to Freeport, Texas. Barrier Islands, coastal marshes, prairies, cypress swamps, and southern pine forests are host to nearly 500 migrant and breeding bird species. On our “tour”, Jay will introduce us to several National Wildlife Refuges, State Parks, and other sanctuaries, including Houston Audubon’s High Island preserves. Don’t miss this!

March

Tuesday, March 1, 7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting hosted by Ted Allen

For directions call 729-8661.

Sunday, March 6, 8:30 a.m.

Field Trip: Brunswick Landing

Brunswick Landing has open areas and evergreen forests. We will be looking for Snowy Owls and winter finches.

➤ Meet at the parking lot inside the entrance off Bath Road at 8:30 a.m.

FMI contact Gordon Smith at 725-0282.

SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 7:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Salisbury Beach & Plum Island

Join the search for wintering birds on this all-day outing to coastal Massachusetts. First stop is Salisbury Beach State Park, where we will look for wintering ducks, loons and grebes, and Short-eared Owls. Iceland and Glaucous Gulls will be the target birds in Newburyport. Then on to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge on Plum Island to see Snowy Owls, Snow Buntings and more waterfowl. Dress warmly and bring lunch.

➤ Meet at the Brunswick Hannaford at 7:00 a.m., or call John Berry at 632-

7257 for a meeting spot and time in Yarmouth, or at Salisbury Beach.

TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 7:00 P.M.

Public Program: Vernal Pools with Dr. Thomas Danielson

➤ *Location: Curtis Memorial Library, Brunswick*

Dr. Danielson will speak to us about the importance of vernal pools to the ecosystems of Maine. Vernal pools, the beginning of spring life in Maine, provide habitat for many varieties of plants and animals. Please join us for this fascinating evening with an exceptional naturalist.

April

Tuesday, April 5, 7:00 p.m.

Board Meeting hosted by Ted Allen

For directions call 729-8661.

Saturday, April 9, 7:00 a.m.

Field Trip: Scarborough Marsh

On this annual “Welcome-to-Spring” outing we hope to see Brant and other migrating waterfowl, snipe, sandpipers, herons, egrets, ibis and sparrows. Bring lunch or a snack.

➤ Meet at the Bath Plaza CVS at 7:00 a.m. or at the Brunswick Hannaford at 7:20 a.m. FMI call Maurice Dauphin at 389-2585.

Sunday, April 24, 8:00 a.m.

Field Trip: Brunswick Landing

Among the open areas and pine forests, we can expect to find early returning migrants.

➤ Meet at the parking lot inside the entrance off Bath Road at 8:00 a.m. FMI contact Gordon Smith at 725-0282.

Tuesday, April 26, 6:00 p.m.

ANNUAL MEETING with a Guest Speaker and an Auction

➤ *Location: St. Charles Borromeo Church, 132 McKean Street, Brunswick.*

Look for more details in the Spring issue of *The Call*.

Saturday, April 30, 7:30 a.m.

Field Trip: Whiskeag Creek, Bath

Join Merrymeeting Audubon and the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust (KELT) to explore Whiskeag Creek where it empties into the Kennebec River at Thorne Head. The targets for this trip include: Canada Geese, Black Ducks, Mallards, Blue- and Green-winged Teal, Common Mergansers, as well as early arriving songbirds.

➤ Meet at the Bath CVS at 7:30 a.m. or at Sewall Woods on Whiskeag Road at 8:00 a.m. FMI call Ted Allen at 729-8661.



Leach’s Storm-petrels are oceanic birds, coming to remote islands only to breed. Weighing less than two ounces, they are about the size of a robin but with longer wings and can live up to 36 years. Silent and usually solitary at sea, they forage over the waters of the continental shelf and beyond. Much of what is known about Leach’s Storm-petrels is due to research by **Chuck**



Huntington, our Founding Director, who followed them on Bowdoin’s Kent Island Station for over 50 years. Huntington identified and banded

hundreds of birds in order to study their breeding patterns, longevity and reproductive success. For more about this bird check out www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/leachs-storm-petrel. This rare

sighting on the mainland surprised and delighted the Big Sit Crew.