

The Big Sit! was a Big Success!

by Gordon Smith

The 3rd annual Merrymeeting Audubon Big Sit! took place at Wharton Point on Maquoit Bay, Sunday October 12, 2014. Despite a cold, frosty start, the day turned bright and sunny providing near perfect conditions for a great bird count. When the day came to a close, 12 hours later, the team of eight Merrymeeting Audubon birders had counted a record 70 species! Visitors, as well as birders from New York and even Scotland, joined the Merrymeeting team throughout the day.

Vultures and raptors seemed to rule the day, of any group of birds, with 11 species recorded. Included were 28 Turkey Vultures migrating overhead throughout the day, and fast flying Merlins, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks. A nice looking juvenile Northern Harrier, with its cinnamon-colored underparts, put on a hunting



Sharp-shinned Hawk

show in the marsh a short distance away.

The Big Sit!, founded by the New Haven, CT Bird Club and hosted by *Bird Watcher's Digest*, takes place during the second

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Baxter State Park: wildness is the preservation of the world



Whidden Pond is just one of the magnificent examples of the beauty and wildness that Percival Baxter (Maine state senator and then governor) fought so hard, and overcame numerous obstacles to preserve what is known today as Baxter State Park.

by Ted Allen

This year my annual pilgrimage to Baxter State Park occurred during the week of the autumn solstice. Most years I go then because black flies and mosquitos are kept at bay by the colder temperatures. I especially like the park because it is ruled by the wishes of its creator, Percival Proctor Baxter.

How do one man's wishes rule the park? He tried first as a state senator to convince his fellow legislators that Maine should create a public reserve in the north woods. Failing that, he attempted many times as governor to raise money for the park. In his first year [as governor], he had given his reason for this devotion: *Maine is famous for*

its twenty-five hundred miles of seacoast, with its countless islands; for its myriad lakes and ponds; and for its forests and rivers. But Mount Katahdin Park will be the state's crowning glory, a worthy memorial to commemorate the end of the first, and the beginning of the second century of Maine's statehood [1921].

After he left government in the 1920s, he devoted the next thirty years of his life to the private purchase of land which has become the park we know today. (Side note: In 1931 Baxter donated the land to the state of Maine. In 1933, by resolve, the Maine State Legislature re-named it Baxter State Park).

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• The importance of camp scholarships

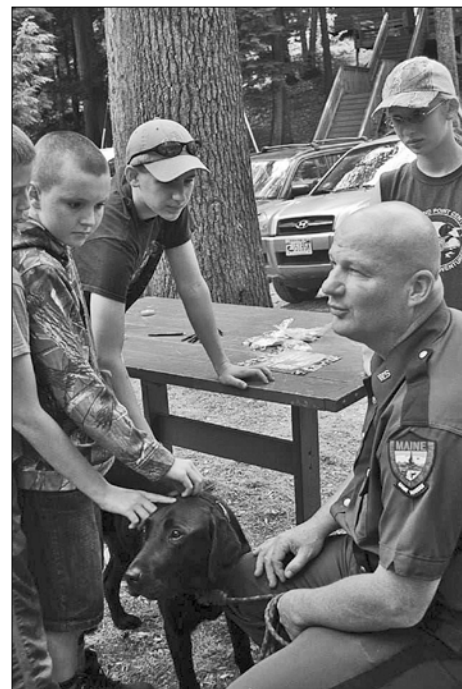
A camper's memorable experience

by Steve Spear

Thanks to the generosity of MMAS chapter members, garden clubs, and local corporate entities, 23 students were able to attend week-long programs this summer at the Bryant Pond and Tanglewood 4H camps, as well as the National Audubon Camp at Hog Island.

Students are selected on the basis of their interest in the natural world, the birds and wildlife that inhabit it, and key conservation and environmental issues. At the conclusion of their sessions they are asked to send letters, photos, and drawings that convey what their experience was like.

In his letter to MMAS, Bryant Pond camper **Tyler Andrews** explained that his career goal is to become a game warden and that "Bryant Pond is the best place to learn about the job." As a participant in the Warden Camp, Tyler learned about outdoor survival skills, search and rescue, crime scene investigation, firearms, safety, tracking, and much more. Tyler especially enjoyed meeting the search and rescue dogs and learning how they are trained to locate people who have become lost in the woods. "The most common dog they use is a black lab," he wrote, "because when they find someone they do not scare the person away." For his participation this summer, Tyler received the Bryant Pond Junior Maine Game Warden patch. Tyler wrote that he loved being at camp and hopes to attend next year as well.



Tyler Andrews (ball cap with sunglasses) listens attentively as a Maine State Game Warden discusses why they use black labs in search and rescue missions.

Birds and Baxter State Park photos courtesy of Doug Suitor. Great Blue Heron drawing courtesy of the private collection of Roy Winkelman. The Bryant Pond Camp photo courtesy of Steve Spear. The Townsend's Solitaire photo courtesy of John Berry.

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.”

Rachel Carson

Over the past 30 years MMAS chapter members have provided hundreds of students with the opportunity to explore the natural world and to pursue interests that, in many cases, lead to careers as biologists, conservationists, and environmentalists. The MMAS scholarship committee is already gearing up for the summer of 2015 and is asking, once again, for the support of chapter members. Donations in any amount are greatly appreciated and are **fully tax deductible**. If you would like to help send students to camp next summer please mail your donation to:

Merrymeeting Audubon Scholarship Committee

c/o Steve Spear

9 Livernois Drive, Topsham, ME 04086

For more information, or if you have questions about the scholarship program, please contact any of the following Scholarship Committee members:

Steve Spear	Gail Bruce	Sue Sergeant	Beth Bullock	Ted Allen
353-8863	406-4495	442-8195	729-9650	729-8661

Beginning birders want to know

by Karen Carlisle and John Berry

Question: When I listen to birds in the spring, the sounds are almost overwhelming. Now in the fall, I hardly hear any birds, and if I do, just a few chirping notes now and again. What is going on?

Answer: The sounds that we hear in the springtime are the **songs** of the birds, normally the males, and are associated with courtship and territorial claims. They also function to demonstrate overall health and fitness. Essentially they say “Here I am ladies, a healthy male looking to raise a family, and all you other males stay out of my territory.”

Since spring is when birds are establishing territory and attracting a mate, the songs are at their peak then. Territorial and mating calls are normally given from a prominent perch, or in flight to broadcast over a greater area and, thus, are more easily heard by us.

In fall and winter, we hear the **calls** of the birds. They may be used to raise an alarm, to maintain contact while in flight, or to keep a flock together while feeding. The alarm calls can either be *mobbing calls*, such as chickadees or crows making loud calls while flying near an owl and are used to recruit other birds to help drive the predator away; or they may be *high-pitched calls*, issued when a hawk is nearby, to warn others without giving away their location. *Flight calls* are normally used during nighttime migration to maintain contact with other birds moving at the same time. Most of the chirps that we hear in the fall are the *contact calls* between members of a foraging flock and do not need to be loud since they are only meant to be heard by nearby birds. ■

BAXTER, from page 1

Mount Katahdin Park was created to remain wild forever, a place in which human beings would be visitors. Baxter placed restrictive covenants on the park so that today it is governed by the Baxter State Park Authority, apart from the agency which administers the state's other parks. The Baxter State Park Authority represents both public and private sectors.

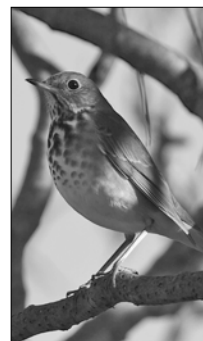
To maintain the sense of wildness, people were to be observers in order to understand what a true sharing of the earth involves, (including being bitten by mosquitos!). *An interesting side note:* Baxter loved his dogs and horse (which are buried with him in a Portland cemetery), but he could take neither into the park.

The park is a place for any species on earth by natural, not human, creation. Its expanse contains many types of habitat: alpine, deciduous forest, evergreen forest, meadow, pond and river and, of course, the marshes, perfect for breeding insects. It is this diversity and wildness which pull me to the park every year. For me, birds are paramount; but I also come to better appreciate the other forms of life which

reside there as well.

Living day-to-day without the accoutrements of human culture is not easy or convenient, but there are many rewards. In the stillness of the wild I can prepare a simple camp dinner accompanied by the song of thrushes. I learn the habits of other “cohabitants” around me, to keep my food safe from those who might detect it with noses more sensitive than mine. I prevent encounters with those who might harm me through study of their life histories. I learn the call of a mother black bear, which sends her cub up a tree at my approach. I seldom see either, but consider myself very lucky if I do.

I share with both Baxter and Thoreau that, as a human being, I am attuned to a comfort absent in the wild, but when pushed to admit what makes me tick, I know that *in wildness is the preservation of the world*. ■



Hermit thrush

BIG SIT!, from page 1

weekend in October. The event is open to every person and club in the country, and the world, and it's free.

The Big Sit! is appealing because of its simple concept. All you need to do is find a good spot, preferably with several kinds of habitats (water, field, forest, etc.), to observe the birds passing by. Then, measure out a circle of 17 feet in diameter from which your observations will be made. There's no limit to how many people can occupy the circle, but all birds identified need to be observed from within the 17 foot circle. For more information, please see the Bird Watcher's Digest website at www.bird-watchersdigest.com.

A big “Thank You” goes out to all the Merrymeeting Audubon **Big Sit!** birders for their contributions, including the comforts of chairs, cookies and apple cider. It was much appreciated. ■

“**The woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those who sang best.**”

John Audubon



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www.maineaudubon.org/merrymeeting

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Membership Form for Maine Audubon & Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter

Yes! I want to ☐ join or ☐ renew my membership with Maine Audubon & Merrymeeting Chapter, to help protect and conserve wildlife habitat and promote environmental education and advocacy in our communities.


- ☐ \$25 Senior/Volunteer ☐ \$35 Individual ☐ \$45 Household ☐ \$65 Contributing
☐ \$100 Patron** ☐ \$250 Sustaining ☐ \$500 Benefactor ☐ \$1,000 Director's Circle

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You can also join by: Phone – 207.781.2330 xt 232 E-mail – member@maineaudubon.org
Online – www.maineaudubon.org, click on "Membership"





Field Trips & Nature Programs 2014-15

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 2014



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20, 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 2015



SATURDAY, JANUARY 3, Brunswick-Freeport Christmas Bird Count

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

TUESDAY, JANUARY 6, 7:00 P.M. Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen For directions call 729-8661.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 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 Sand-

pipers, 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.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 27, 6 - 9 P.M. POTLUCK DINNER AND SLIDESHOW

➤ Location: MidCoastChapterAmerican Red Cross, 16 Community Way, Topsham

Enjoy good company and delicious food. If you wish, bring a few of your favorite slides. If you need a digital projector, call Carol Jack (729-0220). 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. FMI call Carol Jack at 729-0220.

➤ 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.

February

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 9:00 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 Short-eared Owls, Purple Sand-

pipers, 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.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 8:00 A.M. Field Trip: Pemaquid Point

We will enjoy the winter beauty of Pemaquid Point and Fort Pemaquid. Expect to see winter gulls, sea ducks and alcids. Dress warmly and wear appropriate footwear.

➤ Meet at the Bath Plaza CVS at 8:00 a.m. FMI call Doug Sutor at 841-1951.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 7:00 P.M. Public Program: The Great Blue Heron

➤ Location: The Morrell Room, Curtis Memorial Library, Brunswick

Danielle D'Auria is a wildlife biologist who works in the Bird Group of Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. She focuses on colonial wading birds, secretive marsh birds, black terns, and loons. The Heron Observation Network is a volunteer 'adopt-a-colony' program started in 2009. Join us as she talks about the Great Blue Heron and its close relatives.



March

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 7:00 P.M.

Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen

For directions call 729-8661.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 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 24, 7:00 P.M.

Public Program: Birds of Belize

➤ Location: *Curtis Memorial Library, Brunswick*

In December 2011, John Berry traveled to the Rio Bravo conservation area in Belize to participate in a bird-banding and conservation project with Massachusetts Audubon. He will share photos from that experience. John is a trustee of Maine Audubon and has birded in Central and South America.

April

TUESDAY, APRIL 7, 7:00 P.M.

Board Meeting, hosted by Ted Allen

For directions call 729-8661.

SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 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.

TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 6:00 P.M.

ANNUAL MEETING with a Guest Speaker and an Auction

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

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



This rare bird, the **Townsend's Solitaire**, was seen by members of the Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter during a field trip to Hermit Island on Saturday, Oct. 25, 2014.

115th National Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Again this year, Merrymeeting Audubon will join hundreds of other chapters around North America in surveying the winter bird population. Each count is broken into at least five groups that count all the birds they see in their areas.

You are welcome to join us. For the **Lower Kennebec Count** on December 20th, call or e-mail **Don Hudson** at 443-9795 or wdonhudson@gmail.com. For the **Brunswick-Freeport Count** on January 3rd, contact **Stella Walsh** at 807-3679 or stellawalsh@earthlink.net.

If you live in either count area, you can help out by keeping and reporting a feeder count list to the leaders above; or by opening your house to a group as a warm up, rest stop. We usually start counting around 7:00 a.m. and finish in mid-afternoon. After the count, we get together for a pizza party to compile the results and share our best sightings.

George Sergeant