

## Remembering the wonders of childhood

*Steve Spear served on our Chapter Board of Directors on the Scholarship Committee. This past year, he decided to step down from the Board to pursue other interests. He did an incredible job on the committee and raised the bar for scholarship donations to provide students and teachers opportunities to enjoy the various Audubon summer camps.*

*As a farewell, Steve wanted to share some of his childhood experiences with birding. Hopefully, these can serve as positive encouragement for children today, especially with the weight of COVID-19 restricting so many "normal" activities for kids.*

When I was ten years old, my friend and I were riding our bikes in Lisbon Falls. A warbler darted out in front of us and I named it a common yellowthroat. "Why do you like birds so much?", my friend asked. My answer was less than profound, "I don't know". Even after decades of birding, I still don't have a good answer to that question. Maybe I should have said, "It's in my genes"!

My childhood preoccupation with birds provided some moments of high drama. Riding in the back of my father's Jeep, I saw a flash of blue in the green roadside shrubs. It was an Indigo Bunting! I can recall hearing a high, sharp note from the tops of the hemlocks and being happily surprised to see a rose-breasted grosbeak! Other sightings that made my heart beat faster were a Scarlet tanager and a Baltimore oriole.

As a child, I was both amazed and puzzled by the Scarlet tanager.

See **CHILDHOOD**, page 2

## President's Perch

Hello to all our Merrymeeting Audubon members! It's been quite a while since our last newsletter. COVID-19's dark cloud has curtailed our ability to produce *The CALL*, as it has similarly affected so many other businesses over the past few months. But we're back now, albeit with a shorter version than what you're used to, because we cannot offer the usual collection of Field Trips, informative and entertaining Speaker programs, and the outstanding summer camp opportunities for kids.

Our Board feels as disappointed as you must be. It makes me think about Merrymeeting Audubon's 50+ years as a chapter, at first affiliated with the National Audubon Society, and now as a chapter of Maine Audubon. For these past five decades, our main focus has always been to bring the wonders of nature (particularly birds) and conservation education to our members, and introducing children to the fascinating elements of the natural world.

We miss spending the fun times with you and your families. We strongly encourage you to get out with your families, or maybe with a fellow birder—maintaining the CDC protocols, of course—and visit any of several local places to walk that are maintained by Maine Audubon or one of the local land trusts (BTLT, KELT, FOMB, CREA, Harpswell Heritage Land Trust, et al). Explore the Hamilton Sanctuary, Josephine Newman Sanctuary, Woodward Point, Bradbury Mountain, Crystal Spring, and Bradley Pond to name a few more beautiful places.

Merrymeeting, Maine, and National Audubons all have web sites to find information on important conservation issues. Also stay informed with current political candidates' views on important wildlife, environmental, and conservation causes. **Remember to VOTE!**

We are tentatively planning to do Audubon's **Annual Christmas Bird Count**. We will be following CDC protocols by requiring face masks and social distancing, and not encouraging large-group gatherings. A final go/no go decision will be made Nov 15. If it's a **go**, then the **West Bath/Boothbay Count** will be **Saturday, December 19**; the **Brunswick/Freeport Count** will be **Sunday, January 3**. For more information about these events, call me at 442-8195, or e-mail me at [suegeosergeant@comcast.net](mailto:suegeosergeant@comcast.net).

*George Sergeant*

**November 15** – Decision time for the **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS**. Stay tuned on our web site [www.merrymeeting.maineaudubon.org](http://www.merrymeeting.maineaudubon.org) for more information.



## Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter

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Our web site:

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#### PHOTO ATTRIBUTIONS:

THE GREAT BLUE HERON, THE BARRED OWL, THE GARDEN SPIDER,  
SUNRISE ON THE FIELD, THE BUCK, THE GRAY FOX: WANDA  
MCNEIL.

“Only as a child’s  
*Awareness & Reverence*  
for the *Wholeness of Life*  
are developed, can his  
*Humanity* to his own kind  
reach its *Full* development.”

Rachel Carson

### CHILDHOOD, from page 1

Though it made sense that a bird would want to blend into its natural surroundings, the tanager seemed intent on drawing attention to itself by its blazing red plumage, a kind of in-your-face statement that says, “This is who I am, get over it”! Of course, myriad other birds are blessed with striking hues, but few exhibit the unabashed attitude of the Scarlet tanager!

I kept a diary when I was eleven. One entry, dated May 20, 1958 noted: “I saw the nighthawks flying. I’m glad they’re back because I like them.” Every evening, in summer, I would don my binoculars and go outside to watch the nighthawk show off his dramatic aerial display. My excitement grew as he gradually pumped his way up to the stratosphere, a place where a small-town boy from Lisbon Falls would probably never go. Finally, at the point where the hawk became barely visible, he would tuck his wings in tight and plummet earthward.

I often wondered what speed nighthawks reach when they do this. There were no turns, twirls, no side trips to grab a snack, no second thoughts, just

a one-way rocket shot straight to the ground. Some nights I got lucky and would be standing directly below the hawk as he slammed on the brakes about fifty feet above me. I would hear the sound of his outstretched wings ripping through the air like ropes. The upward swoop that followed marked the beginning of his next slow, spiraling ascent to the heavens.

Some of the birds that populated my childhood no longer fly in the woods and fields I explored as a kid. It’s been years since I’ve listened to a whip-poor-will’s call, detected the distant drumming of a partridge, or heard the buzzy note of my high-flying nighthawks. But, since moving back to Maine in 2005, I’ve been happy to discover that eagles and ospreys are fishing the Androscoggin River, and so many avian species still fill the skies, forests, marshes, and shorelines. It reminds me that things are getting better for at least some of our birds, and it gives me hope for those that brought me so much wonder, excitement, and joy as a child.

*Steve Spear*

## Tanglewood 4-H Camp offers kids new interests, responsibilities, fun!

If you talk with **Jessica Decke**, director of the Tanglewood 4-H Camp, the main lessons campers take away from their summer experiences there reflect the staffs’ endeavors to focus on the interdependence between humans and their earth environment. The camp combines fun with “experiencing the joys of being part of the natural world.”

Jessica’s passionate goals for the campers involve important social behaviors necessary in residential camps. She fosters the principle of respect due each unique individual, and models how to be loving, kind and honorable during the 6-day sessions. One camper wrote in a post-camp evaluation, that she waits 51 weeks of the year for the next year’s camp

to begin. Why? Self-determination and self-validation are high at Tanglewood. Kids are also strongly encouraged to explore who they really are.

Campers choose their main activity for their week’s stay—archery, water sports, arts, ecology. Within the 900-acre riverside campus (where staff maintains a protective environment), kids are responsible to get to each of their activities. At meal times, they choose the foods and quantities they want to eat. Decke and her staff want to ensure that campers shed the weight of their worlds to become happy, curious, and kind, if only for that one week. MMA’s Scholarship Program is proud to support such an outstanding mission.

*Kathy Claerr*

# Maine Audubon midcoast sanctuaries offer hope and serenity during COVID times

Three Maine Audubon Sanctuaries are open to the public within the Merrymeeting Chapter area: *Mast Landing Sanctuary* (Freeport), *Hamilton Sanctuary* (West Bath), and the *Josephine Newman Sanctuary* (Georgetown). Each has experienced a robust increase in visitors (almost triple the typical numbers, based on anecdotal observations) since the COVID crisis began.

Maine Audubon's mission involves connecting people with nature and wildlife. This region is blessed with many trail options for people to enjoy the outdoors. While all the public trails issue similar "guidelines" for their trail use, the Sanctuaries have slightly different requests of their visitors. An important difference—designed to enhance visitors' chances of seeing wildlife—is that they not bring their pets into the Sanctuaries. The presence of pets, even on leashes, can leave behind scents that discourage wildlife from being more visible.

**Wanda McNeil** is a local nature and wildlife photographer. Most mornings she is the first visitor to the *Hamilton*

*Sanctuary* in West Bath, one of her favorite places. She particularly appreciates its abundance of wildlife, interesting trails to explore, and its beautiful views of field, forest, and water throughout all four seasons.

Wanda has lived and traveled extensively throughout the United States much of her life. Here in New England, she started taking pictures to let her friends experience this northeast wonderland of unique scenery and its prolific wildlife through the eye of her camera. This led to her love of photography as a medium for art.

The COVID crisis increased her drive to share the beauty of nature with others through her photography, particularly with those who are struggling or discouraged. She finds "hope and a sense of peace" in all aspects of nature and tries to capture that in her photos for others to enjoy.

*Wanda's photos were recently on display at the Chocolate Church's Art Gallery. They can also be viewed on her Facebook page "Lucky Fern Photography" <https://www.facebook.com/Lucky.Fern>. Photography.*

## SAMPLES OF WANDA'S PHOTOGRAPHY, TAKEN AT THE HAMILTON SANCTUARY, WEST BATH:



"While watching a chipmunk eat an acorn, I suddenly heard a whoosh of great wings. Looking up I discovered a magnificent Great Blue Heron on a tree limb at the edge of the water."



"Many visitors have heard, but not seen, the resident Barred owls calling in the early evening. I was able to have one perch long enough, early one morning, to take its photograph."



The magnificent webs of the yellow garden spiders can be found along the Red Trail in the meadow.



"As an early-morning person, I often visit the Red Trail when the sun is rising. One morning, the combination of sunshine and fog lifting off the field made a spectacular backdrop for a handsome buck munching on his breakfast."



"One warm, summer afternoon I walked over the top of a small hill and to my surprise encountered a beautiful gray fox hunting for field mice. It was so focused on the job at hand it didn't notice me, so I was able to photograph it for several breathtaking minutes before it trotted off."



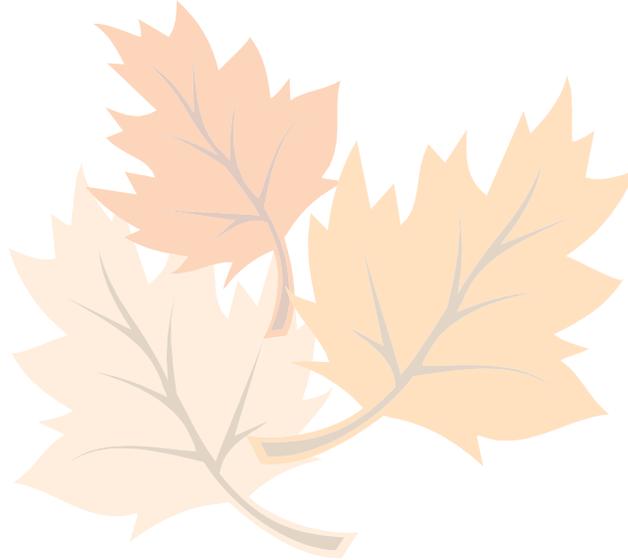
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**Thank you!**

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