



The Call

FALL-WINTER 2023-24

Sanctuaries: natural escapes from stress

The term "sanctuary" elicits feelings of refuge, protection, freedom. Yet, today's world seems rife with ample reasons for people to seek out sanctuaries to counter such stress overloads.

If you happen to be seeking solitude in nature, Merrymeeting Audubon maintains three splendid sanctuaries within our service area: Hamilton Sanctuary in West Bath, the Josephine Newman Sanctuary in Georgetown, and the Mast Landing Sanctuary in Freeport.

Each Sanctuary emits its own special "personality" based on the unique environs comprising it. However, what these three happen to share in common, is that they offer beautiful trails, views, myriad avians, occasional wildlife, and quietude—a genuine respite from the noise of daily life.

MMA takes great pride in keeping these sanctuaries well-maintained for the enjoyment of all. We rely on the help of volunteers to care for the grounds, ensure the various animal and avian habitats are protected and attractive to potential "residents" after the former "nesters" have gone. Where amenable, the sanctuary manager has added innovative items to track events such as migration, breeding, and changes in avian populations.

These Sanctuaries take their responsibilities seriously, to provide safe havens for birds and wildlife, as well as offering people opportunities to relax and refresh their spirits.

President's Perch

I am sitting on my front porch, this early July morning, in a light rain—an extension of a mostly cloudy, cool and rainy June. Our gardens are starting slowly, but the birds are very busy here. Most of our birdhouses have Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens or Chickadees busily nesting. Our wonderful *MERLIN* app informs us of at least 20 cheerful singers in our yard every morning, some that we were unaware of being here.

As I consider the vast multitude of problems our world faces every day, I am grateful to live here in coastal Maine, with its friendly small communities, a varied and rugged coastline, the many small farms and gardens producing great food for the local communities and preserving the land.

We are especially fortunate to boast a variety of local land trusts and organizations working diligently to preserve local land gems, and making them available to the public. Maine Audubon's Hamilton Sanctuary and the Josephine Newman Sanctuary are just two of over 30 places in our locale where you can take a quiet walk on their numerous trails. Many land trusts also host guest speakers, as well as offer various educational programs to the general public. Keeping in touch with our local natural world can be a rewarding and uplifting experience.

Speaking of keeping in touch with our natural world, Merrymeeting Audubon prides itself on the variety of Field Trips we offer throughout the year. Each trip is led by an expert birder, the destinations—local or somewhat distant—are beautiful and worth exploring for birds and other wildlife, plus they attract beginner and veteran birders alike. Please check out the Field Trip section of this newsletter for details, you won't be disappointed!

George Sergeant

If you haven't visited any of the Sanctuaries in a while, or at all, we invite you to take some time to do just that. You won't be disappointed. If your volunteer spirit is seeking an outlet,



Hamilton Sanctuary in West Bath offers many places to enjoy the serenity of nature away from the fast pace of daily life. Hope to see you there.



you are more than welcome to join our occasional work parties. Please contact Glenn Evans, Sanctuary manager, at 443-9652. Work party events are scheduled and will appear in the Field Trips section of this newsletter, as well as on our web site.

Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter

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The Call

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PHOTO ATTRIBUTIONS:

HAMILTON SANCTUARY PHOTOS: GLENN EVANS; BLACK GUILLAMOTS, BALD EAGLE, AND OVENBIRD: ILSA TUCKER; NICK LUND: MAINE AUDUBON.



I'm an Audubon summer camp mascot. The MMA Scholarship Committee wants you to know that they are now accepting donations for the 2024 camping season. It costs roughly \$600 to send a student to one of our four U Maine /4H camps and about \$1000 to send a student or educator to Hog Island. The committee would be so grateful for a donation of any size. Checks should be payable to Maine Audubon, and on the memo line: MMA Scholarship Fund. Send your gift: c/o Sue Sergeant - 84 Hard- ing Road - Brunswick, Maine 04011.



Scholarship Committee News

A new perspective of Hog Island

I attended the Hog Island *Field Ornithology Week* 20 years ago, and the *Educator's Week* 15 years later. Merrymeeting Audubon sponsored both experiences, for which I am grateful.

This past June, I spent a week on Hog Island as a volunteer during the *Field Ornithology* and the *Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens, Session Two*. I was able to experience camp from a different perspective, a behind-the-scenes look at what is involved in keeping the camp humming. I quickly found out that it involves tenacity and hard work. There were 70 campers on the island that week, and about 30 staff to make it all happen. Everyone worked diligently to ensure the campers were fed, busy, and happy.

In addition to camp duties, I enjoyed some time off. Tuesday afternoon I joined the teen group for a boat ride around the area. Quite a few of the participants lived well away from the coast and it was heartwarming to see them so excited about seeing eagles, Ospreys, Eiders, terns, and Guillemots. On Wednesday, my co-volunteer and I had a pleasant walk around the island on the five-mile perimeter trail. We saw a flock of common terns diving for fish, and listened to the sweet sounds of Northern Parula and Black-throated Green Warblers. I also attended two of the evening programs, Scott Weidensaul's presentation on migration and Sara Morris's talk about bird behavior. Both were engaging and informative speakers.

Hog Island is a special place with undeniable positive energy. The instructors and staff are passionate about what they do and about their love of nature. Their enthusiasm envelopes the campers, who had incredible experiences. It was gratifying to see, firsthand, the campers' reactions, especially the teens who were sponsored by Merrymeeting Audubon.

Joan Newkirk
Scholarship Committee member

Building a dream

Thank you so much to everyone at Merrymeeting Audubon for giving me the opportunity to go to Hog Island Audubon Camp! I had so much fun, and will remember the many activities I participated in! I am so thankful to have attended the *Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens, Session Two*! Going out onto Eastern Egg Rock to see the Puffins, terns, and Guillemots up close was amazing. So was learning what the biologists, who stay on Eastern Egg Rock, study, and what the chicks of these seabirds are fed. The fish the chicks are fed can reflect what is happening in the Gulf of Maine.



Black Guillemots

I enjoyed learning more about birds. The first night, the camp instructors talked about seabirds, then about bird migration and then about bird vocalization. All were very interesting! It was also really fun to have a demonstration of bird-banding the first day we were on the Island, and to go down to the beach looking in tidepools when we

BUILDING A DREAM continued on page 5



Field Trips & Nature Programs 2023

www.merrymeeting.maineaudubon.org

Please Take Note:

If inclement weather (rain/snow/ice/strong winds/extreme temperatures) is predicted, the Field Trip may be cancelled. Please check our website (<https://merry-meeting.maineaudubon.org>) or call the Trip Leader before venturing out.

SEPTEMBER

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3,
7:30 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Curtis Farm Preserve/ Mitchell Field, South Harpswell

We will explore Curtis Farm Preserve for fall land migrants, as well as shorebirds in Basin and Curtis coves. Expect to walk on easy trails. Following, at Mitchell Field we will walk a gravel woods path and view Middle Bay.

◆ Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Curtis Farm Preserve lower parking lot off Basin Point Road. **FMI** Gordon Smith 449-8206.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9,
8:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.

Field Trip: Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge (southern coastal Maine)

The Rachel Carson Refuge was established to protect estuarine and salt marsh habitat in southern coastal Maine for migrating birds. We will search for fall migrants at several Refuge Divisions.

◆ Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Rachel Carson Administrative Headquarters parking area, 321 Port Road in Wells. After walking the Carson Trail, we will drive to several locations. There will be some walking on level ground.

◆ Directions: Take I-95 to Exit 19 (Wells). From Exit 19, turn left onto Route 9/109. At the stop light, turn left onto Post Road (Route 1 North). Just past the Maine Diner, turn right

onto Port Road (Route 9) and follow for approximately 3/4 mile. Turn right into the refuge entrance. **FMI** Glenn Evans 443-9652.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10,
8:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Androscoggin River Trail, Lisbon

We will walk an easy paved path (up to 3 miles) along the river to observe fall migrants.

◆ Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Sabattus River boat launch parking lot off Rt. 196 at Frost Hill Avenue. **FMI** Gordon Smith 449-8206.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17,
8:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Brunswick Landing Perimeter Trail, Pine Street Entrance

We will be on the lookout for fall woodland and grassland migrants. Also, we'll be searching the skies for southbound raptors. We'll walk paved/gravel roads and easy paths (up to 3 miles).

◆ Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Brunswick Landing Perimeter Trail, Pine Street entrance. **FMI** Gordon Smith 449-8206.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24,
8:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Green Point Farm WMA, Dresden

We will search for fall migrants in the woodlands, fields and wild rice flats of this diverse State Wildlife Management Area. We will walk paths, farm roads and open fields (about 2 miles). The grassy fields may be wet/dew-covered.

◆ Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Green Point Farm by the green shed off Rt. 128. **FMI** Gordon Smith 449-8206.

OCTOBER

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 1,
8:00 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Capt. William Fitzgerald Recreation and Conservation Area/ Bay Bridge Landing Wetland Park, Brunswick

We'll explore these two Town-owned properties for fall migrants. The "Fitzgerald Preserve" is one of the few sandplain grasslands remaining in Maine. We'll walk easy sandy paths (up to 2 miles) exploring this unusual natural area. Following, we'll visit the nearby Bay Bridge Landing Wetland Park on the Androscoggin River.

◆ Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the iron gate at the end of Lindbergh Crossing Road (off Old Bath Road), 1.3 miles northeast of the Bath Road/Old Bath Road intersection. **FMI** Gordon Smith 449-8206.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8,
DAWN TO DUSK

Field Trip: The Big Sit!, Wharton Point (Maquoit Landing), Brunswick

Join Merrymeeting Audubon for this fun event. We will be staking out a 17 foot diameter circle, and from within the circle we will attempt to observe/hear all birds in the surrounding area. Observation/listening will begin at dawn and continue until dusk. Anyone is welcome to join The Big Sit! at any time during the day and stay as long as desired.

◆ Meet at Wharton Point (head of Maquoit Bay) at the intersection of Maquoit and Woodside roads. **FMI** Gordon Smith 449-8206.

Please note: If the predicted weather for October 8 is not favorable, this event will take place the previous day, on Saturday, October 7. Please check our website for updates.

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SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14,
9:00 AM. - 12:00 P.M.

Field Trip: Work Morning at Hamilton Sanctuary, West Bath

As conditions allow, we will be pruning, removing invasive plants and doing trail maintenance.

◆Directions: Take the New Meadows exit off US Route 1 in West Bath. Turn left onto New Meadows Road and go straight ahead to the traffic signal at Bath Road. Proceed across Bath Road onto Foster's Point Road and follow it nearly to the end. You will see the Sanctuary sign and a parking area on the right. If you plan to participate, please contact the Sanctuary manager, Glenn Evans at 443-9652 prior to the day, for planning purposes.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 15,
8:30 A.M. - 11:00 A.M.

Field Trip: Androscoggin Riverwalk, Topsham

Join us as we walk an easy paved path along the Androscoggin River. We will be looking for fall migrants along the river and surrounding woodland. Our walking route (up to 2 miles) will take us from the Black Bridge and Swinging Bridge, past overlooks of the hydroelectric dam and Fort Andross, to the Bowdoin Mill and overlooks of the lower Androscoggin River.

◆Meet at the parking lot at the entrance to the Swinging Bridge off Bridge Street in Topsham. If this space is full, there are alternative small parking areas, one on the Brunswick side of the Swinging Bridge (off Mill Street) and the other in Topsham off Summer Street (overlooking the hydroelectric dam). FMI Gordon Smith 449-8206.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 22,
8:30 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.

Field Trip: Hermit Island, Phippsburg

Join co-leaders John Berry and Gordon Smith as we explore this birding mecca, where the current count is at 236 species. We will be walking (up to 3 miles) in a variety

of habitats, from sandy beaches to rocky headlands to woodland paths.

◆Directions: From Bath, take Rt.209 (High Street) south into Phippsburg. Continue south on Rt.209 (also known as Main Road) until the Rt.209/Rt.216 intersection. Continue south on Rt.216 (Small Point Road) for approximately 3 miles. Turn right onto Head Beach Road at the Hermit Island sign. Proceed for approximately ¼ mile to the Hermit Island parking lot (on the other side of the fence). Please do not park along Head Beach. FMI John Berry 632-7257 or Gordon Smith 449-8206.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 23,

Board Meeting: 5:30 P.M. - 6:30 P.M.

Location: Curtis Memorial Library, Morrell Room, Brunswick

Public Program: 7:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

Guest Speaker: Nick Lund, Bird Safe Windows and Legislative Updates.



Nick is Maine Audubon's Advocacy and Outreach Manager, a co-founder of the BirdSafe Maine project, and author of books including the *"American Birding Association's Field Guide to the Birds of Maine"*.

SUNDAY OCTOBER 29,
8:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

Field Trip: Waterfowl at Sabattus Pond, Sabattus

John Berry will lead this trip to Sabattus Pond. In the Fall, this pond hosts concentrations of migrating

waterfowl, including hundreds of Ruddy Ducks, as well as scaup and mergansers.

◆Meet at Martin's Point Park in Sabattus. From the intersection of Rt.9 and Rt.126, take High Street north approximately .4 mile to Elm Street. Turn right on Elm Street and proceed .2 mile to Lake Street. Turn right on Lake Street and proceed to the Park at the end of the street. FMI John Berry 632-7257.

DECEMBER

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2,
8:30 A.M. - 11:30 A.M.

Field Trip: Waterfowl Walk, Giant Stairs, Bailey Island

Join John Berry for a look at the winter waterfowl of eastern Casco Bay from one of Harpswell's most scenic locations.

◆Directions: From Harpswell Islands Road (Rt.24), turn left onto Washington Avenue. Proceed approximately .1 mile to a small parking area for 4 or 5 cars at All Saints by-the-Sea Chapel. If this lot is full, proceed down Washington Avenue to additional parking at Harpswell Heritage Land Trust's McIntosh Lot Preserve. FMI John Berry 632-7257.

Winter is Coming... maybe?

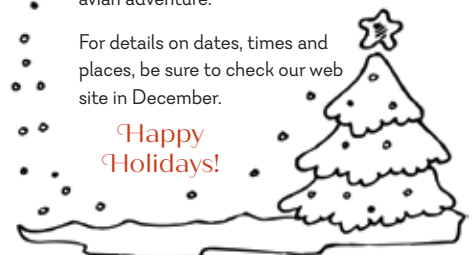
It's time for the
**The Annual Christmas
Bird Counts**

The sunbirds head south and the snowbirds linger, waiting to see what winter will bring.

Hopefully, throngs of birders will don their layers, ready their binocs and scopes for another avian adventure.

For details on dates, times and places, be sure to check our web site in December.

Happy
Holidays!



Beginning birders want to know. . . .

Q: Could you please describe and explain the term *murmuration*?

A: Starling murmurations are a spectacular sight, moving in beautiful ways that captivate and intrigue an observer. It is one of nature's most magnificent shows, thousands of birds swirling in the sky as if they are thinking with one mind. But what exactly is a starling murmuration, and why do they do it? And why is it called a murmuration?

Murmuration is a term used to describe the gathering of thousands of European Starlings, where they take to the sky, swirling and drawing together, performing dazzling aerial displays. These groupings are named for the low-murmur sound their wingbeats make as thousands move. They all move together as one entity, creating lines and shapes as they blacken the sky. While many bird species form flocks, starlings are the only ones that make these unique formations. But other than the entrancing sound, starling gatherings are different than typical flocks. They are much denser and more significant than other groups of species.

Starling murmurations are not random. It is believed that their sole purpose is to limit predation. When starlings see others forming a group over a roosting site, they are more likely to join because there is safety in numbers. While it seems as though the group moves as one, starlings exhibit collective animal behavior while still being very aware of themselves individually. Each starling is aware of its position in the formation, and without colliding into each other, they attempt to get into the group's center where it's the safest. The shape-shifting lines and curves are determined by a selfish motivation, get to the center and avoid being hit. So yes, they move as a collective, but it's fueled by self-preservation.

These breathtaking shows can last anywhere from a few minutes to close to an hour before ending suddenly as they nestle into their roosting sites. This spectacle takes place above their communal roosting sites just before dusk.

Scientists have determined that Starlings are able to form the dense flocks by consistently coordinating their movements with those of seven of their nearest neighbors, but have not determined how such a collective response is achieved.

Starling murmurations occur once the birds arrive on their wintering grounds in Autumn and Winter. Autumn roosting sites can contain upwards of 100,000 starlings, all swooping and diving in the setting sun. European Starlings are one of the most abundant bird species in North America, with over 200 million individuals. You can see starling murmurations anywhere, but they are most common in open spaces outside of big cities.

John Berry & Karen Carlisle

“

If there is one thing clear about the centuries dominated by the factory and the wheel, it is that although the machine can make everything from a spoon to a landing-craft, a natural joy in earthly living is something it never has and never will be able to manufacture.

HENRY BESTON

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had free time. Just being with a group of young birders who love birding and Ornithology as much as I do was so amazing.

Ilsa Tucker
Brunswick High School student

Birding has long been a passion of Ilsa's since childhood. "Observing birds is my favorite thing to do". Ilsa's passion spans extensive researching, data collection through highly-regarded Maine resources, and participating in several camp programs and science projects. Her favorite avians are Warblers. "I hope to study birds and more natural sciences in college, studying and learning more about how these subjects can make a difference".

Below are samples of Ilsa's Hog Island photography:



Bald Eagle



Ovenbird



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Thank you!