

THE CALL



MARCH - AUGUST 2026

2025 Christmas Bird Count ends year on a high note

Another Christmas Bird Count is in the bag — or should we say, in the database? For the past 126 years, the national Audubon organization has sponsored an annual count of all the birds that counters observe, in defined circles all over the nation. It is the oldest “citizen science” project in the world and was started in reaction to the bird-slaughtering Christmas Shoot popular with hunters in the early 20th century. The data is invaluable to science, revealing population and distribution trends long before the advent of **eBird**.

Merrymeeting Audubon organizes two counts in our chapter area— Freeport-Brunswick and Georgetown-Phippsburg. The Freeport-Brunswick count took place on December 28, 2025. In the chilly early hours, more than thirty observers in fourteen groups launched the 45th edition of this MMA count.

They searched icy shores, coves, snowy forest trails, roadsides, parks and home feeders, recording every bird they could see or hear. By dark, 6,333 individual birds of 69 species had been spotted.

Some were singletons: only one Gray Catbird, one Green-winged Teal, one Northern Saw-whet Owl, one Peregrine Falcon for example. One team was delighted to find an out-of-season Baltimore Oriole at a private home on Harpswell Neck.

Some species were found in the expected large numbers, like 816 Mallards (the highest number of individuals recorded for any species this year). This was in sharp contrast to the 2024 count, when pea soup fog shrouded ocean-going birds from view. In 2024, only 84 Long-tailed Ducks were recorded. In 2025, clear viewing brought the number back up to 498. Last year, 293 Common Eider were counted; this year there were 654. Bald Eagles continue to be common, with 14 recorded.

One of the most surprising species was the American Robin, often plentiful in MidCoast Maine in winter. Only 3 individual birds were reported from three separate locations, compared to 454 last year. The highest number ever recorded for this variable population was 722 in 2012.

Many thanks to the hearty souls who made the 2025 count a success! For details about the 2026 count, check the Merrymeeting Audubon website this fall.

Sunrise at Reid State Park



Here's lookin' at you, kid.



Red-Tail Hawk

I think I'm late for MLB spring training!



Baltimore Oriole

Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter

Officers

Ann Manson, *President*
Dee Miskill, *Vice President*
Donna Salko, *Secretary*
John Berry, *Treasurer*
Susan Fenn, *Ass't. Treasurer*

Board of Directors

Karen Carlisle • Glenn Evans • Susan Fenn
Peggy Page • George Sergeant
Gordon Smith • Luci Timblin

The Call

Dee Miskill, *Editor*

Scholarship Committee

Peggy Page (chair)
Karen Carlisle • Ed Caswell • Glenn Evans

Coordinators

Peggy Page, *CBC, Brunswick/Freeport*
Doug Suitor, *CBC, Georgetown/Phippsburg*
Glenn Evans, *Hamilton Sanctuary*
Donna Salko, *Social Media*
Ed Caswell, *Webmaster*
Susan Fenn, *Membership*
Luci Timblin, *Marketing*

Summer camp just keeps getting better and better

by Peggy Page, *Chair Scholarship Committee*

Over the years, Merrymeeting Audubon has sent dozens of grateful kids to summer camps here in Maine. This year we continued that mission, thanks to the generosity of our donors and to ongoing legacy funds.

In 2025, donations surpassed \$12,000! Those welcome funds helped us to send 15 campers to sleep-over programs at the four UMaine 4-H camps: Bryant Pond, Blueberry Cove, Tanglewood and Greenland Point. Programs like “Mountain Scramblers”, “Wilderness Survival” and “Hooked on Bass” brought campers into nature, challenged them to learn new skills and helped them create lifelong memories. Kids came from all over the area served by our Chapter— Brunswick to Georgetown and Bowdoinham to Phippsburg.

A pair of sisters from Topsham were thrilled by their experience. Penelope “loved swimming, canoeing, kayaking, hiking, singing and doing skits around the fire.” Her sister Lily told us that “we got to do lots of cool stuff like paddle-boarding, using the rifle range and climbing the rock wall.” Their mom reports that “they both had a blast, made new friends, tried new activities and enriched their summer just being kids in the outdoors.” Donors like YOU made that possible.

A generous bequest from the estate of Stella Walsh, allowed two area teens to experience the unique treasure that is National Audubon’s Hog Island Camp in Bremen. A camper from Harpswell wrote us to say “It was such an extraordinary experience, filled with kind, enthusiastic people who love sharing what they know and helping others learn. That sense of wonder and excitement hasn’t left me, and I don’t think it ever will.” Her thank you letter came in an envelope embellished with an incredible ink drawing of an Arctic Tern. We know her time at Hog Island will be a bright memory that continues to nurture her passion for birds.

The 2026 camp season will be upon us in no time! Do you know a child who would enjoy a week at camp, or a nature-loving teenager who might enjoy Hog Island? Please encourage them to check our website for details about how to apply for a scholarship. Hog Island also offers excellent programs for educators, and MMA offers scholarships for these as well. Pass the word to any teacher you know in our Chapter area! Our website lists the towns our Chapter serves.



Why not make this summer a special one for your kids, grandkids, or even a neighbor’s kids! Your generosity can help a child create lifelong memories and skills in a truly fun learning environment! Checks, made out to **Maine Audubon**, can be sent to **Merrymeeting Audubon, P. O. Box 51, Brunswick, Maine 04011.**

PHOTO ATTRIBUTIONS:

SUNRISE AT REID STATE PARK, RED-TAIL HAWK, BALTIMORE ORIOLE: LUCI TIMBLIN; BUSHNELL SCOPE: PEGGY PAGE; MEADOWLARKS AND BOBOLINKS: LAURA SUOMI-LECKER; DR. LIAM TAYLOR AND MANAKIN: DR. LIAM TAYLOR; CARDINAL AND GOLDFINCH: DONNA SALKO.

Summer Camp Scholarships

Running out of gift ideas for kids who have everything? or who don’t have everything? Give ‘em a scholarship for a week at a terrific summer camp, sponsored by Merrymeeting Audubon! Your donations can make that happen for some lucky kid, trust us, we know it works!

The Scholarship 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: P.O.Box 51 Brunswick, Maine 04011.

Sunflowers: food and entertainment in one package

by Donna Salko

Bird feeders! There are tube feeders, hoppers, tray feeders, cone feeders, window feeders, suet feeders, hummingbird feeders. I believe the birds in my yard are quite satisfied. This year, however, I became the most sought after, year around food source in the neighborhood. **I planted sunflowers!**

I took my feeding station to the next level for just a few dollars and a little effort. In no time at all these seeds turned into six-foot plants with a variety of seed head sizes and colors. I watched in delight as migrating birds alighted on the large stems, congregating in this new staging area before flying to the nearby feeders.

Once the heads opened, revealing their seed smörgasbord, the bird traffic to the feeders was diverted to these beautiful sunflowers. Then came late summer and fall. Seed heads dried and were readily consumed by the ever-growing number of birds attracted to this magnificent food pantry.

The frost came, followed rather quickly (this year) by the snow. Juncos came in flocks landing on the flower heads now bowed down under the weight of the snow. The contortions made by visiting goldfinch and cardinals were amusing to watch as they grappled with the upside-down seed heads.

As winter nears its end, I wonder if the new seed packets will include a new warning advising the buyer to beware of the extreme beauty, bounty and boundless entertainment that will be found in a sunflower patch.



MAINE 
AUDUBON

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Merrymeeting Chapter

YES! I want to protect and conserve wildlife and habitat in Maine as a **new** **renewing** member.

Annually \$30 Senior/Volunteer/Student | \$40 Individual | \$50 Household | \$100 | \$Other _____

Monthly Enroll me in the Frequent Flyer Program and charge my credit card each month:

___ \$5 ___ \$10 ___ \$15 ___ \$25 Other \$ _____

View all member benefits online by visiting maineaudubon.org/memberFAQ

Name(s): _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Email: _____

Seasonal Address: _____ from _____ to _____

Check enclosed for \$ _____ Please charge \$ _____ to my credit card (below)

Card # _____ Exp. date: _____ / _____

Join or renew online:
maineaudubon.org/join

Our community of members is integral to our success on behalf of Maine's diverse wildlife and habitat. When you join or renew your Maine Audubon membership, you ensure that work can continue.

Thank you!

MMA Scheduled Events: Spring - Summer 2026

Guided Bird Walks—March-August 2026

Merrymeeting Audubon is pleased to continue our **Guided Bird Walks**. All walks are free and open to everyone, beginning naturalist to advanced birder. Walks are held in a variety of interesting and diverse habitats. Anyone interested in exploring new (and old) places, making new friends, and enjoying nature is welcome. Walk leaders will identify and comment on birds seen and heard. Please yell out your observations (Bird!) and questions—it's a group effort. *Reservations are not required unless otherwise noted.*

MARCH and APRIL

Reid State Park

Saturday, March 21 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Georgetown Leader: Luci

Scarborough Marsh/Biddeford Pool Reservations required

Saturday, April 18 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
(various locations) Leaders: Peggy/John

Special Event: Earth Day Festival

Saturday, April 25 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School, Brunswick

Brunswick Landing Perimeter Trail

Sunday, April 26 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
(no rain date)
Pine St. entrance Leader: Luci

MAY

Fitzgerald Conservation Area/Bay Bridge Landing Wetland Park

Saturday, May 2 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Brunswick Leader: Travis

Viles Arboretum

Saturday, May 9 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Augusta Leader: Peggy

Green Point Farm WMA

Sunday, May 17 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
(no rain date)
Dresden Leader: Travis

Kate Furbish Preserve—East

Saturday, May 23 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Brunswick Leader: Luci

Androscoggin River Trail

Saturday, May 30 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Lisbon Leader: Travis

JUNE and AUGUST

Birds & Butterflies—Mitchell Field/Curtis Farm Preserve

Saturday, June 13 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Harpwell Neck Leaders: Luci and Jack

Auburn Lake Nature Trail

Saturday, June 20 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Auburn Leader: Peggy

Shorebird Saturday at Wharton Point

Saturday, August 29 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.
Auburn Leader: Gordon

Contact the walk leader for more information

Peggy Page mpage815@gmail.com 207.650.0549	Travis Sparks travismsparks@gmail.com
Luci Timblin ltimblin@gmail.com	John Berry berry.john@comcast.net 207.632.7257

Injured Bird?

Contact **AVIAN HAVEN**
Bird rescue, rehabilitation, release
Accepts all bird species year round
207.382.6761 avianhaven.org

Avian Window Collisions?

If you find a window strike victim,
please send date, address and
photographs to
BIRDSTRIKE@MAINEAUDUBON.ORG

Merrymeeting Audubon hosts guest speakers whose topics offer unique perspectives, based on personal experiences in nature. These events are **free and open to the public**, no registration required. These presentations are held at the **Topsham Library** in Topsham. The presentations run from **6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.**

MARCH 17, 2026 Laura Suomi-Lecker

“Spectacular Bobolinks: Implementing conservation measures for our imperiled grassland birds”

Bobolinks and meadowlarks are two of the most charismatic and iconic species of our grasslands. They, along with other grassland species, have suffered the steepest losses of North American birds in recent decades, facing threats on several fronts simultaneously. Come learn about the birds of our grasslands, challenges they face and how we, as landowners, can help conserve these wonderful species!

Laura Suomi-Lecker is the Technical Director and Manager of *Ag Allies*, statewide grassland bird program and Kennebec and Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation Districts.



Special Events

APRIL 21, 2026 Dr. Liam Taylor

“Behavior, Society, and Sex in Adolescent Birds”

Most birds have some growing up to do before they start to breed. Although they reach full adult size within weeks of hatching, many birds will not raise offspring for years, or even decades. Dr. Liam Taylor explores the strange things that young birds need to do before they can reproduce—from developing a territory on a rocky island to finding a dance partner on the rainforest floor. Looking back through millions of years of evolution, we will uncover how society and sex create new challenges and opportunities for adolescent birds.

Dr. Liam Taylor is an evolutionary ecologist and ornithologist, studying how social structures influence the ecology, evolution and conservation of birds. They are currently working as the Doherty Postdoctoral Scholar in Biology at Bowdoin College, Maine, and the Bowdoin Scientific Station on Kent Island, New Brunswick, Canada. Their field studies have ranged from shorebirds in the subarctic to tropical, dancing manakins in the Amazon rainforest.



Bluebird Boxes: good maintenance practices

Donna Salko

Bluebird numbers have rallied from the startling low numbers of the 1970's and their comeback is applauded. Their return is attributed to the dedicated work of volunteers who have established and maintained bluebird trails. Backyard birders have added bluebird boxes to suitable landscapes. While establishing bluebird nesting sites is commendable, it is the maintenance of these boxes that assures the success for nesting birds.

Box maintenance follows a simple routine: In fall, nest boxes should be inspected for any structural flaws. Make sure drainage holes in the floor are clear. Just before spring, recheck the box as mice will overwinter in unused boxes.

Bluebirds may have four "clutches". Remove the old nest as soon as chicks fledge. Parasites remain in old nesting material and bacteria and mold may have formed.

House sparrows compete for nesting sites and can smash eggs and kill young. Safely open a box to monitor for predators but stop when the young reach twelve days to prevent premature fledging. Diatomaceous earth on the floor of the box will deter mites and ants. Make sure you wear gloves when cleaning out your box.

2025: Hamilton Sanctuary welcomed an increase in wildlife activity

Glenn Evans, Sanctuary Caretaker

Bird boxes can be a good measure of avian activity in an area. Each spring, at Maine Audubon's Hamilton Sanctuary, about 20 bird boxes on poles are cleaned and readied as temporary homes for birds to raise their young in the fields and meadows of the sanctuary. While the boxes are sized for bluebirds, a variety of bird species take advantage of them. According to the Sanctuary Caretaker, Glenn Evans, 2025 was a banner year for bird box use. All boxes had nests almost entirely from birds.

While some birds build nests that are never used, Evans found more nests than ever, built, suggesting more activity and success. At the end of the season, the boxes contained 7 bluebird nests, 6 house wren nests, 3 tree swallow nests, and 2 chickadee nests. The only box that was not used by birds, housed a wasp's nest! In addition, a larger woodpecker box attached to a tree appeared to have been used by a red-bellied woodpecker.

Why so much success this past year? Evans speculates that the numerous weekends of rain in the spring, followed by relatively cooler summer temps may have lent a helping hand. Sometimes higher temperatures can overheat a bird box discouraging nest building, forcing abandonment, or killing the young.

Over the years Evans has seen a change in the numbers of bird species using the boxes. Several years ago, black-capped chickadees were the most common species followed by tree swallows. Over the past couple years, eastern bluebirds and house wrens have become the dominant residents. Blue bird box programs, such as the one sponsored by Merrymeeting Audubon, have played a major role in increasing the eastern bluebird population.

The Sanctuary also welcomed two unusual, charismatic wildlife species—a family of barred owls and a black bear! The parent barred owl and its two fledglings were easier to hear than see. The eerie wheezy screeches of the young ones are very distinctive, but difficult to visually pinpoint. With the help of friends and their camera, we were able to capture a young owlette flitting from tree to tree, creating a special photo op and a special wildlife moment.

Another day, a small black bear was sighted on the Sanctuary two or three times. A visitor saw it briefly near some apple trees from the Red Trail, perhaps feeding on some fallen apples. The bear, being more afraid of the visitor than the visitor was of it, quickly moved away, hopefully to another part of Maine with a more amenable habitat. Hamilton currently looks forward to Spring's renewal and more wonderful wildlife sightings in 2026.

Volunteer Opportunity: Editor/Graphic Designer for The CALL

After 12 years of producing *The CALL* newsletter for MMA, Dee Miskill has decided to retire, effective April 2027.

"I have deeply enjoyed the creative work involved in growing *The CALL* over the years, moving it from black and white to four-color, learning new

ways to improve this important communication piece for our members, and working with the best team of Board members an Editor could want!

They have supported the production with suggesting/researching topics, writing articles, providing professional-grade photos and stepping up when I needed something "yesterday", close to a deadline".

An interested candidate should be reasonably current in graphic design software (I use Adobe InDesign, Photoshop, Illustrator for MAC), have good writing/editing skills, and be able to work with a professional pre-press printing firm. If you happen to have any birding experience, all the better!

For more information contact Dee Miskill at clrdlune30@icloud.com.

Dear Donors, thanks to you, mission accomplished (again)!

The Scholarship Committee

Without the dedication and generosity of our donors, new and regulars, Merrymeeting Audubon could not offer the life-changing programs and opportunities that we do to the young generations in our communities. Camper after camper sends us such enthusiastic feedback from their experiences, we know that our mission is working. Yet, our donors are the real driving force behind our success. So, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

Scholarship Donors from 2025

Ellen Asherman

Bath Garden Club

Zdenek Bazant

Edward Caswell

Catherine Chase

Davenport Foundation

Diane and George Delaney

Glenn Evans and Marianne Warner

Kathryn Flannery

Bruce and Elizabeth Found

Karin Frazer

Harpwell Garden Club

Susan and Thomas Hayward

Jane John

Jennifer Kahr (in memory of Nancy Bliss)

Gretchen and Dexter Kamilewicz

Ann Manson

Diana Miskill

Bronda Niese

John and Karen Parker (in memory of Nancy Bliss)

Michael Perry and Christine Wolfe

Karen Robbins

James and Joyce Spencer (in memory of Nancy Bliss)

Barbara Trafton

Susan and G. Mark Wild

Enhancing your birding experience

Peggy Page

Talk about the generosity of donors, we would like to thank **Kathryn Flannery** of Arrowsic for her recent donation of a Bushnell scope and tripod—both in excellent condition!

She told us that she and her late husband, Jim, took it along on their road trips and admired many interesting birds with it.

She donated the scope in Jim's memory, and hopes a young birder will use it to admire as many wonderful birds, as she and Jim did.



The Joys of Volunteering

Are you retired, or about to retire and haven't given much thought to "what's next"? Your horizon is full of opportunities, and just because you're retired doesn't mean that you retire all those years of skills and experiences you've acquired. Yes, you're probably looking forward to relaxing, traveling, spending time with family, pursuing hobbies, etc. Have you thought of sharing your treasure trove of talents with others who would benefit from your life lessons? Maybe you might be ready to experience the "Joys of Volunteering".

The Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter offers myriad ways to get your volunteer juices flowing. Become a **Board member** to help the Chapter explore new ways to accomplish our mission; join our **Scholarship Committee** to expand our community outreach for educating and recruiting youngsters, teens and educators to apply for our fabulous summer camps, or help raise funds to offer scholarships to deserving applicants; if you have **Communications** skills, you can volunteer with Marketing, Web site, Facebook, Instagram, or **THE CALL** (Chapter newsletter), or identifying speakers for special public presentations; if you're a **Birder**, we could use expert Guided-bird walk leaders, bird-house builders, bird-house monitors, and helpers for the Christmas Bird Counts.

Feel free to check our web site and other social media to learn what MMA's currently doing or whom to speak with about particular interests.

Be the Change!

The MMA Scholarship Committee invites you to join them in creating positive opportunities for young people to enjoy nature, make new friends, learn new skills and responsibilities which can carry them through life.

There are several ways to volunteer your skills and talents on our committee. For more information, please contact **Peggy Page** at mpage815@gmail.com or 207.650.0549.



Merrymeeting Audubon
P.O.Box 51
Brunswick, ME 04011

E-mail:

merrymeeting@maineaudubon.org

Web Site:

www.merrymeeting.maineaudubon.org

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/MerrymeetingAudubon

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/merrymeetingaudubonmaine>

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
US POSTAGE

PAID

PORTLAND, MAINE
PERMIT NO. 92

Earth Festival 2026!

Saturday, April 25, 2026 Rain or Shine 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School, McKeen Street in Brunswick

Please join us, and over 20 other “Earth-friendly” organizations to celebrate **Earth Festival** at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School in Brunswick. The participating organizations will bring a wide variety of information regarding what’s happening with our environment (naturally, socially, politically), and what you can do to help, some will have interactive activities, projects, and crafts. This promises to be a fun day!

www.EarthDayInBrunswick.com