

Gordon Smith retires from Merrymeeting Audubon—our dear friend and consummate birder

by Donna Salko

On any given day, preferably in the early morning hours, you can often spot an intense lone birder prowling Brunswick Landing, Wharton Point or Crystal Springs Farm. It's **Gordon Smith** who retired this spring from the MMA board of directors after nearly 15 years of service.

No one knows birds better than Gordon. He knows who they are, where they can be found, and when they can be expected. His "ear for birding" is unmatched in the area. One summer, driving along Pleasant Hill Road in Brunswick, with the car windows down, Gordon picked up a rare bird song he identified as a Henslow's Sparrow. Many a Maine birder added this very rare vagrant to their "Life Lists" thanks to Gordon.

Gordon's contributions to Merrymeeting Audubon showcase the depth of his love for and knowledge of birds. He was the premiere leader of the Guided Bird Walks sponsored by Merrymeeting Audubon. He was a dedicated lead contributor to the Christmas Bird Count at Brunswick Landing and Popham Beach, and worked tirelessly on the **Maine Breeding Bird Atlas** published this year. He also worked with the Stanton Bird Club on their Christmas Bird Counts and Guided Bird Walks.



Since April 2012, the pre-dawn hours in early October would find Gordon marking his 17-foot circle in the parking lot of Wharton Point, in time for **The Big Sit!** Arriving before 6:00 a.m. and leaving more than 12 hours later, he orchestrated the bird count with the come-and-go birders who volunteered to help spot and listen. Also for 15 years straight, Wharton Point has been the site of Gordon's *Shorebird Saturday*, a late summer count of the various shorebirds migrating south.

Gordon is responsible for a bluebird box initiative in several local areas. Boxes built by Maurice Dauphin, a fellow MMA member, were established on farms, cemeteries and marsh areas throughout the Merrymeeting catchment area. Volunteers continue to monitor them during the summer breeding season.

When Gordon retired from the Board and as bird walk leader, he decided to travel the country with his wife Mary Beth and their dog Maizie. Those who benefitted from his energy, knowledge and camaraderie wish to applaud and celebrate our wonderful friend and consummate birder. Thank you, Gordon. You will be missed!

Sandhill Cranes: a must-see experience for your birding bucket list

by Karen Carlisle

A visit to the Crane Trust along the Platte River in South Central Nebraska in spring is a must on a birder's bucket list. Beginning in late February and lasting until early April, one of the greatest bird migrations in the world takes place along 80 miles of the river.

Up to a million Lesser Sandhill Cranes arrive from Mexico and states along the border. They settle in the shallow Platte River at night and then fly out in the daylight to fallow farm fields to fatten up on grain, snails, amphibians and insects for up to six weeks. They gain up to 20% of their body weight before flying at 50 mph for 500 miles a day, for a total of up to 5,000 miles.



CRANES, See page 7

Merrymeeting Audubon Chapter

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PHOTO ATTRIBUTIONS:

GORDON SMITH: **DEE MISKILL**; FLOCK OF SANDHILL CRANES: **JOHN BERRY**; DUO FLYING CRANES: **DONNA SALKO**; MOTHER AND CHICKS: **KAREN PANAGOS**; CRANE WITH WING SPREAD: **JAMES FRENCH**; MEADOWLARK, NESTLINGS, BLUEBERRY BOBOLINK: **LAURA SUOMI-LECKER**; PHILLIP DEMAYNADIER, **PHILLIP DEMAYNADIER**; BUTTERFLY: **BRYAN PFEIFFER**; EARTH DAY FESTIVAL PHOTOS: **DONNA SALKO**; HARPSWELL GUIDE, MT. WASHINGTON, SEAL ROCK: **DEE MISKILL**.

Injured Bird?

Contact **AVIAN HAVEN**

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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

Scholarship Committee News

Audubon camps change “there’s nothing to do” to “wow, I never knew”!

by **Peggy Page**

Another wonderful summer camp season in Maine comes to a close, and Merry-meeting Audubon is delighted that we were able to make it a memorable one for seventeen youngsters, two teens and four local educators!

This year, two enthusiastic new birders spread their wings at National Audubon’s Hog Island Camp on a Merry-meeting Audubon scholarship. Lauren, who attends Lisbon High School, told us about an experience that any veteran birder would envy:

“Going out on the boat and being able to see all of the Atlantic Puffins, razorbills, terns and even the Manx Shearwater was wonderful. It felt like we were just one big team as everyone scanned the water, called out the different birds we saw and then everyone whipping their heads around to see the birds. We even saw dolphins. I didn’t even know they lived in Maine and I’ve been here my whole life!”

When asked to describe a favorite experience from Hog Island, Mia of Mt. Ararat High School said:

“While it’s impossible to pick just one activity as the ‘best’, I would have to talk about the hands-on bird-banding experience conducted by Emma Rhodes. It was amazing to be able to see that up close, be able to participate and learn so much in a really special place with people who cared so deeply about the same things I do. I learned so much from [Hog Island staffers] Emma, Nathaniel, and Josh and I was so glad to be able to put that knowledge into something that makes a difference. Getting to hold a Nuthatch was also a highlight!”

Merrymeeting Audubon’s scholarships for teens attending Hog Island, are funded by a bequest from a longtime member, the late Stella Walsh, who would have been thrilled to know she helped provide these young people with the types of experiences she so enjoyed.

Our scholarship fund also provides opportunities for educators in our chapter area to attend a special week-long program at Hog Island. This year the following educators attended: Sarah Cowperthwaite, an art teacher at Mt. Ararat High School, Megan Phillips, who teaches 3rd and 4th grade at Brightfield School in Bath, Emma Everett, a 3rd grade teacher at Pownal Elementary School and Gretchen Feiss, a science teacher at Mt. Ararat Middle School.

Our scholarship fund also enabled seventeen eager kids from all over our chapter area—Brunswick and Topsham to Georgetown, Bath and Arrowsic—to attend the UMaine 4H camps. The UMaine camps offer week-long residential programs that focus on nature, leadership, and outdoor recreation. Watch for our next issue of **The Call** for stories about the campers’ experiences.

Every year our scholarship fund provides youth and educators wonderful experiences and lifelong memories, made possible by donations from our members and community supporters. This year, generous contributions came from: the Davenport Foundation of Bath, the Bath Garden Club and the Harpswell Garden Club. If you or your organization would like to contribute, please send your check (made out to **Maine Audubon**, with **MMA Scholarship on the memo line**) to Merry-meeting Audubon, PO Box 51, Brunswick, ME 04011. Thank you for your continuing support! Also, **new** this year, we are sponsoring a few need-based scholarships for day campers at Brunswick/Topsham Land Trust’s nature based CREA Camp.

CRANES, From page 1

Some end up as far north as Siberia. On a side note, “our” Sandhills that travel to Maine, migrate from Florida.

Along with the cranes there are American White Pelicans, Trumpeter Swans and sometimes Whooping Cranes. Cranes can live up to 30 years and they mate for life. When they mature to 5 years, the pair begins breeding. The males (“roans”) and females (“mares”) produce up to two “colts” and keep them through the next migration north. Cranes can form family groups of up to 1,000 individuals for the migration. In the mornings, before heading to the fields to “fatten up” for their arduous journey, the family group must await the signal from a matriarch or patriarch to fly into the fields. A lowered and thrust-forward head is the signal to take flight.

The Crane Trust began in 1978 and currently manages 10,000 acres or 16 miles of the 80-mile section of the Platte River where the cranes come during migration. The cranes are wary of predators and will only land in the river if both sides are clear of any brush and trees a distance from the water.

The Crane Trust has a campus, set back from the river, that includes a dorm and cottages for staff and overnight visitors. There is also a classroom building and a nearby visitor center open to the public. Overnight visitors get to spend time in the heated blinds around sunset when the cranes return, and in the morning, when the cranes are ready to return to the fields. It is almost a sacred experience to watch and listen to thousands of them returning in the sunset and settling in for the night. Come sunrise, visitors watch them grow restless and “dance” in anticipation of rising again into the air.



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Merrymeeting Chapter

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Join or renew online:
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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!



MERRYMEETING
AUDUBON

Guided Bird Walks Fall 2026

Merrymeeting Audubon invites you to join 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, breathing fresh air and enjoying nature is welcome. Walk leaders will identify and comment on birds seen and heard. Participants are encouraged to ask questions and shout out sightings (Bird!)—it's a group effort.

Don't have your own binoculars? We've got you covered with two pairs available to borrow. Reservations are not required unless otherwise noted.

AUGUST & SEPTEMBER

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29 8:00 a.m.–10:00 a.m.

Shorebird Saturday at Wharton Point, Brunswick

Leader: Gordon

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5 8:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Curtis Farm Preserve/Mitchell Field, South Harpswell

Leader: Luci

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12 8:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m.

Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge (southern coastal Maine)

Leader: Glenn

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 8:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Androscoggin River Trail, Lisbon

Leader: Travis

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19 8:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Green Point WMA, Dresden

Leader: Travis

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26 8:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Brunswick Landing Perimeter Trail, Brunswick

Leader: Luci

OCTOBER

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3 8:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

Fitzgerald Conservation Area/Bay Bridge Landing

Wetland Park, Brunswick

Leader: TBD

Contact Walk Leader for more information

Peggy Page

mpage815@gmail.com

(207) 650-0549

Luci Timblin

ltimblin@gmail.com

Travis Sparks

travismsparks@gmail.com

Glenn Evans

evans.glenn243@gmail.com

(207) 443-9652

Gordon Smith

(207) 449-8206

John Berry

berry.john@comcast.net

(207) 632-7257

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11 (weather date Saturday, Oct. 10)

Dawn to Dusk (come anytime during the day, stay as long as you want)

The Big Sit! Brunswick

Leader: Gordon

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Hermit Island, Phippsburg

Leader: Peggy

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Waterfowl at Sabattus Pond, Sabattus

Leader: John

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6 8:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m.

Waterfowl Walk at Giant's Stairs/McIntosh Lot, Bailey Island

Leader: John

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13 Coordinator: Doug Sutor

Phippsburg/Arrowsic/Georgetown Christmas Bird Count

Contact Luci for more information.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27 Coordinator: Peggy

Brunswick/Harpswell/Freeport Christmas Bird Count

Contact Peggy for more information.

PLEASE NOTE:

♦ Visit our Events Page at merrymeeting.maineaudubon.org for directions to locations and to sign up for "Remind Me" emails for current information about walks/events.

♦ You may leave the walk early, but please notify the leader.

♦ Inclement weather (rain/snow/strong winds/extreme temperatures) might cause the walk to be rescheduled or canceled. Visit our web site or contact the trip leader before venturing out.

♦ Ticks might be present at any site we visit. Please take appropriate precautions.

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 co-sponsored by the Topsham Public Library in Topsham, where the Events are held from **6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.** unless otherwise noted.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 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 the

Kennebec and Somerset County Soil and Water Conservation Districts.



Special Events



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2026

Phillip deMaynadier, Wildlife Biologist, Ph.D.

Keeping Track of Scaled Jewels: Biology and Conservation of Maine's Butterflies

In this talk, wildlife biologist **Phillip deMaynadier** will introduce the public to the biology and diversity of Maine's butterflies, highlight results from a recent statewide butterfly atlas and offer conservation measures that can be taken to protect these beautiful and important animals.

Phillip has worked as a wildlife biologist for Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for 27 years with a focus on nongame and endangered species. He currently supervises the Department's Wildlife Diversity Section. Phillip received his doctorate in Wildlife Ecology from the University of Maine where he serves on the graduate faculty. Having authored over 50 scientific publications, Phillip focuses much of his attention now on helping narrow the gap between conservation science and policy.



Welcome New MMA Members January - May 2026

Sara Allen & Deb Cabanas
Michael Chalmers
Christine Hastedt
Bridget McDonough
Becky Smith
Pearl & Justin Bennett
Bob & Louise Bowditch
Ashleigh Burskey & Micah Burskey Gaines
Nicole Conroy & Jon Lerner-Lewis
Norman Harnby
Michelle LaRue
Sydney Sansouci & Austin Bragdon
Frances & Tom Gilfoyle
Richard Hemond
Lynne Holland
Susan & Steve Palumbo
Linda Wolfe
Jane Baxter
Nancy Biggs
Dorothy Mathes
Christina & Frederick Edelen
Mary Kelley
Nancy MacPhee
Allison Neilson
David & Janet Rivard
Ed Slattery
Erik Zavasnik
Put & Karen Armstrong
Kelley & Brian Chick
Kevin & Emmett Heinfeld
Laurie LaBar
Matthew Stuart & Emily Austin

Hidden Hotspots: Otter Brook Preserve

by Peggy Page

Harpswell, Maine, is a birder's delight at any time of the year. From the shores of Bailey Island to the meadows of Curtis Field, an incredible variety of easily accessible habitats offers hundreds of species year round. But I enjoy the less traveled path. That brings me often to Otter Brook Preserve, a jewel of the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust system.

Otter Brook offers woodlands, wet meadows, ponds, wetlands and quiet streamside habitats along freshwater Otter Brook. Its 1.7 miles of easy trails are accessible year round (with snowshoes or skis in winter, of course). My usual routine is to follow the South Trail from the parking lot to the Marsh Overlook Trail (well marked). I then backtrack to the South Loop, circle the North Loop and return to the parking lot via the South Loop. A few hours on this circuit in spring can easily produce fifty species.

As you go downhill from the parking lot, you pass through a wet meadow and regenerating woodland that teems with warblers during the first weeks of May. Nashville and Magnolia Warblers nest here, and Northern Parula buzz from the canopy. Black-throated Green, Pine and Palm Warblers almost outnumber the insects. All of the more common warblers are present too. Continue down to the end of the Marsh Overlook Trail, where a small pond offers Swamp Sparrows, Alder and Willow Flycatchers and kingfishers. The reeds around the pond offer rare glimpses of Sora and Virginia Rail. As you resume your streamside meander on the South Loop, listen for singing juncos and creepers, and both kinglets abound. Just past the junction of the South and North Loops, nesting Blackburnian Warblers can be easy to find. The views along Otter Brook invite you to rest a while to see what may show itself.

The denser woodlands along the western arms of the North and South Loops are often very birdy, especially with thrushes. Hermit, Wood and Swainson's are present in season. Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos love these wooded areas, as do six species of woodpecker. In winter, you will probably encounter Red Crossbill, their jeep-jeep calls ringing above you.

Summer is quiet along the trails as the birds concentrate on raising the next generation, and the insects are fierce in June and July, so plan accordingly! I have found the preserve to be less "tickly" than other woodlands in the area. Fall offers almost as much variety as spring, especially in late September when migrating warblers abound. By October, residents will be your targets but keep your eye on the sky for migrating raptors.

Any time of year, this charming preserve offers a pleasant hour or two of birding. The dirt parking lot is located at 429 Harpswell Neck Road in Harpswell, Maine. Otter Brook Preserve is an **eBird Hotspot**.

SPECIAL EVENTS, From page 5

FEBRUARY 16, 2027

Stacey Huth & Noah Gibb

An Experiment in Birding: A Presentation and Book Signing

Stacey Pazar Huth, a scientist and Noah Gibb, an avid birder, photographer and birding tour guide, embarked on a Maine Big Year. What started as an occasional bird walk at the local marsh grew into the concept of an Integrated Birding Process and "The Experiment." They combined top-notch birding expertise with remarkable strategic planning. The outcome resulted in a new state of Maine record of 332 species of birds seen in a calendar year!

2026 Christmas Bird Count is revving up

by Peggy Page

Believe it or not, it's almost time for the 127th edition of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Merrymeeting Audubon organizes two counts in our chapter area, and we encourage you to get involved.

The Georgetown-Phippsburg count will be held on **December 13**. The coor-

dinator for this count is **Doug Suitor**, who can be contacted at dougsuitor@gmail.com. The Freeport-Brunswick Count will be held on Sunday, **December 27**. If you are interested in helping with this count, please contact **Peggy Page** at mpage815@gmail.com.

Rachel Carson honored with a new visitor center in southern Maine

by Glenn Evans

On Wednesday, May 27, the National Wildlife Refuge System paid homage to Rachel Carson, renowned naturalist, by dedicating a new Visitor Center at the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in southern Maine. They formally dedicated the new Visitor Center, bearing her name, on what would have been her 99th birthday.

The Rachel Carson Refuge's Center for People and Wildlife includes a public multipurpose room, displays, and a nature store. All will enhance public understanding of the environment, the wildlife it supports, and its connection with human health. The new facilities also allow for future expanded programming.

Located off Brown Street in Kennebunk along the southern side of the Mousam River, the Visitor Center's grounds include field, forest, salt marsh, freshwater marsh, and river estuarine habitats. The varied environments support equally diverse wildlife. A planned, soon-to-be-built handicap accessible, multi-use trail will allow all visitors to easily view these areas.

Rachel Carson wrote bulletins, brochures, booklets, and radio scripts for what was to become the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the late 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. She eventually became the Service's Chief Editor. This supported her penning several well-known, published books including *"Silent Spring"*, her most famous. *"Silent Spring"* led people to question the indiscriminate use of pesticides, helped to make ecology a household word, and propelled the environmental movement that continues today.

While born and raised in Pennsylvania, Rachel Carson summered in Maine. To honor her, the Fish and Wildlife Service renamed the Coastal Maine Wildlife Refuge to the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge in 1970. Today the Refuge encompasses thousands of coastal wetland and upland acres in southern coastal Maine, spread among several "divisions" that extend from Kittery to Cape Elizabeth. Its protected habitats are particularly important to shorebirds and their migration.

Merrymeeting Audubon plans a field trip to the new Visitor Center, its nearby habitats, and other parts of the Refuge in search of migrating and resident birds on Saturday September 12. See the Guided Walk list in this newsletter and also on our web site for more information.

First Earth Day Festival a grand success!

by Donna Salko

Several hundred people from midcoast and beyond celebrated Brunswick's first Earth Day Festival on Saturday, April 25 at the Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School.

This free, family event was sponsored by Sustainable Practice, an organization promoting various sustainable practices to help our environment. More than 60 exhibitors participated featuring live music, food trucks, an animal costume parade, some interactive activities and wheelbarrow races.

Merrymeeting Audubon offered their own games and prizes along with free educational materials and informational chat groups. Our Board members hung life-sized bird decals around the gym and halls while other members handed out a quiz sheet to identify those birds. The attendees, both kids and adults, who returned completed sheets were entered into a drawing for prizes. Coloring sheets of backyard birds were free for the taking as were assorted candies. Dr. Nirav Shah stopped by our MMA booth to chat with our Board members, gathering insight on issues of environmental concern.

Due to the outstanding success of this event, Sustainable Practice committed to producing the Festival for at least the next three years. The next event is scheduled for April 24, 2027.

Earth Day Festival 2026

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT:
MMA Board members Susan Fenn, Ann Manson,
Peggy Page and Dr. Nirav Shah

Children filling out bird identification quiz sheets

MMA Board members manning our booth (back
row): Luci Timblin, Dee Miskill, Ann Manson; (front):
Donna Salko, Peggy Page





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

E-mail:

merrymeeting@maineaudubon.org

Web Site:

www.merrymeeting.maineaudubon.org

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ATTENTION MEMBERS!

If you would like to receive *The CALL* newsletter by **email only**, please send an email to Merrymeeting@maineaudubon.org with your name, mailing address and email address so we can correct our records accordingly. Thank you.

Did you know?

The Town of Harpswell in collaboration with the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust have created 16 Trails to delight birders and hikers alike, in addition to various year round, family-friendly outdoor recreational activities.

The Trails offer views of nature at its best, while navigating the gamut from easy to challenging walks including some ADA accessible: Mitchell Field, part of the Cliff Trail and the Giant's Stairs.

A definitive example of one trail is beautifully outlined in Peggy Page's article ***Hidden Hotspots: Otter Brook Preserve*** on page 6 of this newsletter. Peggy is an avid birder, and from her experience at Otter Brook, you can gather it's a birder's paradise!

If you've traveled around Harpswell you might have noticed blue and white or rustic wooden signs designating a

Trail's site. Parking is available at each location though the shorter trails might have limited spaces.

The Town of Harpswell Parks, Recreation and Community Services department publishes an updated ***Harpswell Guide to Outdoor Recreation*** when-



ever new trails are created. The ***Guide*** contains a treasure trove of information about each Trail and Preserve—including maps, descriptions, lat-longs, Trail rules and symbols of Trail-specific activities. It also covers Harpswell's Islands, boat launches, historic landmarks, play areas and more.

Copies of the Guide are available at the Town Office on Mountain Road, Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. **except Thursdays 1:00 - 6:00 p.m.**



Top: Mt. Washington, NH as seen from Mitchell Field on a sparkling clear day.

Bottom: Seal Rock, from the Devil's Back Trail East, usually at mid-tide.

Scan the QR code and download a PDF copy of the *Harpswell Guide to Outdoor Recreation*