



“The Mattabesek Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, is committed to environmental leadership and education for the benefit of the community and the earth’s biodiversity.”



AUDUBON MEMBERS’ CORNER

(Feel free to send us your comments)

From Alberta Mirer, Board Member

How Birds Use Acorns

The nuthatch uses its beak to hammer the acorn shell open. The wild turkey swallows acorns whole and lets its muscular gizzard break up the nuts. The grackle has a hard ridge or keel in the roof of its mouth; using its bill, the bird rotates an acorn against this projection to slice through the nutshell. A blue jay will load its expandable throat and esophagus with several nuts, then fly back to its

home territory and there bury the acorns beneath leaf duff, soft soil, or grass to be eaten in winter and spring. Acorns that jays fail to recover, and that squirrels do not dig up and pilfer, germinate and may become new trees. Scientists believe that blue jays’ transporting and burying of acorns helped oak trees march northward after the last ice age ended, around 10,000 years ago, when the oak species remained only in the South.

The Link Between Crossbills and Spruce trees

Crossbills are birds that compete directly with red squirrels for spruce (cone) kernels. Research by wildlife biologists suggests that a crossbill needs to eat a spruce

kernel about every seven seconds, all day long during daylight hours, to survive a typical northern winter.

Both these quotes are from “Trees of New England, A Natural History” by Charles Ferguson

from Luella D. Landis, Board Member

Concerning Bobolinks

In his Journal (June 20, 1857), Henry David Thoreau records the Truro, Cape Cod child who asked about a bobolink:

“what makes he sing so sweet, Mother? Do he eat flowers?”

This is one of my favorite bird associated quotes. What can be more charming and delightful than this innocent child’s question concerning a songbird?

As a young girl, I was fascinated with bobolinks, and eager to understand more about these birds of the meadows and grasslands. When I was seven, I composed a very simple song about one of them, and I always seemed to be making bobolink drawings. Although I haven’t seen a bobolink in some years, my interest is still piqued whenever I think of these birds which were introduced to me so many years ago.

Named for the male’s bubbling “bob-o-link” songs, they nest in hayfields and open weedy grasslands.

During the mating season, male bobolinks frequently sing in a fluttering display flight. They are entirely black below, with a white rump and shoulders, and a buff-colored nape. Some birders say they are suggestive of a tux on backwards. Females are yellowish, and are heavily streaked above and on their flanks. They feed on insects, grain and seeds.



Migrating over 12,000 miles from their breeding areas in the northern United States and southern Canada, they winter in the pampas, the immense grasslands in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. They almost double their body weight for this journey, and fly at night to avoid predatory hawks. Anatomical

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Walking onwards back into the park above the Connecticut river, the Worm eating warblers, usually present, failed to arise from the slopes. But the Black and whites and the Northern Parula did not disappoint.

On returning to the gathering place over undulating gravel paths it was noted that 35 species had been seen; five were warblers.

A special side trip to the banks of the Connecticut river to observe an Eagle's nest on Gildersleeve Island left the observers perplexed. A fulsome nest that had a breeding pair of Eagles in it just several weeks earlier now sat abandoned and hollow. It would have been the first time that the nest was unused in several years. Who could speculate on the cause?

Larry Cyrulik

Lichens: May 24, 2014

Peter and Barbara Razca gave an interesting tandem program on lichens, what they are, their lives and their quirkiness in the world of biota. Did you know that lichens have one foot, so to speak, in the world of fungus and the other in algae or cyanobacteria (sometimes both). Each aspect of this symbiotic alliance contributes to the lichen's uniqueness. The fungal part houses the lichen and allows it to reproduce by spores, while the algal or bacterial part carries out photosynthesis to feed the organism.

Lichens are like the canary in the coal mine. They are sensitive to pollution in the air and are a good indication of clean air. Antibiotics are made from some of the 500 unique biochemical compounds produced by lichens. Some lichens make nitrogen in the air usable to plants. Lichens provide homes for spiders, mites, lice and other insects. Lichens can be used as a natural dye to color wool in spectacular shades. People and animals eat lichens, but some are poisonous, so don't experiment.

Lichens are classified into 3 groups: crustose, foliose, and fruticose. Crustose is just that – a crust covering its substrate, looking like paint. Foliose also looks like its name, like a leaf. Fruticose looks like small shrubs with tiny branches.

After the program, stations were set up around the room to look at different lichens under the microscope. Some look like colored dots, others little stalks with brightly colored tips, still others were rippled or in folds.

With all that information in mind, we departed for a foray in the Vine Street Cemetery where Juan Sanchez pointed out the great variety of lichens making their homes on the grave-stones. Some were like paint covering entire stones. There was an orange variety forming splotches here and there. One stone contained British Soldiers with their tiny red caps.

For more information on lichens, check out these web sites: www.lichen.com ocid.nacse.org/lichenland

Alison Guinness

Canoe Trip, Salmon River: May 31, 2014

Quietly slipping into the water where the Salmon converges with the Connecticut River, the pair of canoeists effortlessly pulled their way over the imperceptively rising tide like a leaf cast there by the wind. Numerous natural canals emanate off the main stem of the Salmon from the low flood plain. Pushing into one of them, the canoeists were immediately immersed in the bankside vegetation: Tussock sedge, Royal fern, Yellow flag and the less numerous Blue flag, and Arrowwood just beginning to flower. Cedar waxwings sat pertly in the dead branches of a ruined Green ash. The Red-winged black birds sang "kon-ka-reee" and flashed red-yellow shoulder patches. A Yellow warbler kissed the air with its voice. It was a timeless moment in a wild Venetian avenue. But the Salmon beckoned; there was more to see.

Approaching a bend in the river where the sedges stroked the shallows, the green-yellow Golden club emerged, spreading their long namesake flowering parts upon the waters surface with purpose and dignity. Then a monoculture of Sweet flag rose up and acquiesced to the touch; their broken fronds exuded a pungent, cleansing aroma.

Farther on, steep slopes ending in granitic outcrops punctuated the banks of the river. Between the rocks the wild azaleas grew, tempting the nostrils with their late spring perfumes.

Gliding across a wide exposure of muddy substrate a turtle scuttled away before the canoeists' inquisitive clutches. They entered the Moodus river, a small tributary of the Salmon. There the mussels and non-native clams lay clearly visible and easily retrieved: Eastern elliptios; Alewife floaters; an Eastern Pondmussel. Also found were the debris of civilization: pottery shards and a bottle.

Turning back to the main stem of the Salmon, suddenly the clouds, with knitted brows, shed cold spring droplets upon the canoe. The paddlers huddled patiently beneath the overhanging boughs of a Hemlock. But here was another excuse to meditate:

The sky did more in those days than to shade him and to house the spirits. Bits of the sky could be eaten. This was different from other foods. Rice and palm oil filled the belly. Sky fills the heart. With a scrap of cloud inside him, a person can float and dream and find again the peaceful, joyous feelings that filled him before High God left the earth.

Eastern Indian Hindu proverb

The sun returned, the canoe glided onward adjacent to grey granite slabs poking downwards to the black depths of the river. A return of shallow low flood plain; pebbled substrate, waters of even depth; then boulders rising to the surface; quickening waters; the rush of foam over the dam and a hurried pull-over; the Leesville Dam, with its interesting fish ladder, finally attained.

An al fresco lunch upon a picnic table was followed by an
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exploration of the dam and its ladder, designed to aid anadromous fish over the Leesville towards the free flowing riffles of the upper Salmon. Copious flows of water cascaded over the low profile of curved concrete and exposed bedrock, sounding like the steady cacophony of steam escaping from a boiler. An Osprey glided upstream and then pirouetted downward upon a hapless Bluegill.

Above the dam lay an architectural sculpture: huge blocks of concrete were spaced across the river to break up the winter ice floes before they could amass on the lawns of downstream houses built inconveniently on the flood plain. These concrete molars chewed and ground down both ice and wooded debris; as a result the teeth were in dire need of a flossing.

On the return the canoeists escaped once more into an enchanted diverticulum. Sitting quietly surrounded by Tussock sedge, Yellow flag, and Buttonbush, a diminutive, tumbling waterfall near shore lulled the senses. One felt, oddly enough, as if a dagger was being gently thrust into the breast, and one was dying both of joy and unrequited sadness.

Larry Cyrulik

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studies of their heads indicate that the olfactory and cranial nerve cells contain deposits of iron oxide. Although bobolinks navigate by a combination of the earth's magnetic field and the stars, magnetism is their primary navigational tool. Once their internal compass has been set, they rely on celestial navigation.

Bobolinks are threatened by major declines in suitable habitat, as well as by agricultural practices. Early cutting of hayfields before the young birds fledge can kill a high percentage of them. When hayfields are on conservation lands, conservation commissions can help by setting a policy to delay cutting until after bobolinks have fledged. Studies in northern states recommend that mowing be delayed until late July or early August.

(Feel free to send us your comments for our Members' Corner)

The deadline for items to be included in the Fall/Winter Issue is Sept. 26, 2014. We expect subscribers to receive their copies about October 20. Please send items to Pat Rasch, 24 Elm Road, Cromwell, CT 06416, or email to <pat_rasch@comcast.net>

The Board of Directors will meet at 7:30 p.m. on the third Wednesday of each month at deKoven House, 27 Washington Street, Middletown.

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