

MAY 1 - 14, 2018 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

GREAT EGRET AT EASTVIEW



(1) Great Egret, *Ardea alba*, © Dick Harlow

Amazing what the warm weather will bring to our campus. On May 2, 2018, the day the temperatures hit 78+ we had a visitor, a Great Egret that was new to our area. I had not been told nor had I seen a Great Egret on either of our two ponds until this date.

Shortly after seeing this fellow perched in the trees across from the cottages on Deer Meadow Drive, Deb Venman had a Great Blue Heron fly over her head that landed on the far bank of South Pond.

I was interested whether this Egret was a breeding adult or non-breeding. That fact can be determined by the skin just around the eye and in back of the bill.



(2) Great Egret, *Ardea alba*, © Dick Harlow

Notice in the cropped picture above, that the area in back of the bill and by the eye is a light shade of lime green and not yellow. In a non-breeding adult it would be yellow. So, this fellow is a breeding adult. That is pretty neat that we get to see a breeding adult Great Egret here at EastView.

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The Great Egret is found in marshes and wetlands from the East Coast to the West Coast and in most states of the United States. A field guide range map shows that it is present along the shores of Lake Champlain, but nowhere else in Vermont. Maybe this fellow stopped here on his way to Champlain.

At the same time this Egret was finding our South Pond interesting to explore for food, a Great Blue Heron decided to take a look as well. The picture of the Great Blue Heron was taken at the same time as the Egret and was very interesting watching these two herons doing their best to avoid each other. I would have loved to capture them together in the same shot, but that was not going to be.



(3) **Great Blue Heron**, *Ardea Herodias*, South Pond.
© Dick Harlow

GARTER SNAKE/RIBBON SNAKE



(1) **Garter Snake**, *Thamnophis* sp. © Stream Team, Puget Sound.

Some residents have had questions about snakes. Not everyone is a fan of snakes in general and poisonous snakes makes some shudder and look away.

However, this snake above (1) is a good example of a **non-venomous** snake that is extremely beneficial to have around your garden. Probably why it is also called a garden snake.

This species is found in many different habitats. The one ingredient its habitat needs is water. Therefore, one can find this species in practically any area whether in the mountains, gardens, urban, suburban or desert as long as there is water and some form of cover nearby. The cover they need are rocks, logs, brush etc. Although Garter Snakes are solitary, sometimes one can come across several together. They will on occasion congregate to conserve body heat either at night or during winter.

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This snake has a wide range of color patterns; the fact that it has black and yellow ribbons along the length of its body maybe why in some parts of the country they are called Ribbon Snakes.

Garter snakes will feed on mice, voles, worms, frogs, slugs and insects. It has a varied diet, but one that is helpful to the gardener.

All snakes are cold-blooded, called ectotherms, regulating their body temperature by basking in the sun. If it is too hot, they will find shade. They will begin to look for a rodent burrow, pile of rocks or a hollow log as it finds a place to hibernate around October. They will start to appear in the Spring, dependent on the weather, at the end of March to the first part of April.

Garter Snakes bear live young; this fact is known as being ovoviviparous. Once birth occurs the young snakes are on their own. Obviously, a young Garter Snake is small and can't tackle a mouse or vole, so its diet is primarily insects, worms, and slugs until it is big enough to tackle larger food.

If you notice the shape of the snake's head, it is elongated rather than triangular. This elongated head is for the most part characteristic of a non-poisonous snake.

Notice in photograph (2) below, the head is expanded out near the neck, and when alert or excited this snake would definitely have a triangular head. This is a characteristic of most poisonous snakes. The reason for the triangle is so the two large fangs have a place to be housed when the snake is at rest. In the picture below both the rattle and the decreased triangle can be seen.



(2) Black Timber Rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*. © Dick Harlow

Picture (2) was taken in PA. Does Vermont have Timber Rattlesnakes? Yes. However, they are protected and are found in select places in Vermont.

The colors are normally various shades of tan with black markings, but you should identify only partially by color because Timber Rattlesnakes can vary in color. Accordingly, a black Timber Rattlesnake is considered rare.

When walking in the woods, on paths or roadsides always be aware of where your feet are going and always look ahead as well as at the scenery. If you hear a funny sounding rattle noise **STOP** and look around you on the ground, near you, ahead of you, by a log, or by some rocks, but certainly take the time to look at the ground. It could very well be just leaves rustling. If by chance you are walking in one of those selected areas you might want to step back away from the ground noise.

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OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

COYOTE FAMILY - 5/13

BUTTERFLIES

CABBAGE WHITE - 2

AMPHIBIANS

Leopard Frog - 2

Weather Tidbits

Month of APRIL 1-14, 2018

[All Measurements taken at solar noon \(1230 EST\).](#)

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 9.8 mm or 0.4 inches in two weeks. We Need Precipitation!

Overcast Days: 4