

DECEMBER 15-31, 2019 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

Wildlife Review of 2019 at EastView

Briefly, 2019 gave us a cold winter, wet cool spring that transitioned into a cool and wet beginning of summer. In June that weather morphed into the hottest July the planet has seen since humans have been recording weather data. August returned to having generally cool and warm days here in Vermont with very average temperatures, but rather wet for the month reaching more than two inches above average rainfall for Middlebury. September turned out to be slightly drier than normal and October started off wet. By the eighth of October we had had three quarters of our monthly rainfall. November was also quite overcast and wet with over an inch of rain above the November average for Middlebury.



White-crowned Sparrow, adult male, 2014.
© Dick Harlow

If we didn't have previous years' data to learn from, we might think that this year was just an anomaly. However, that is not the case. Our bird sightings this year are the second lowest since my coming here in 2013, considering I didn't begin generating records until late summer of 2013. Therefore, I am not including the sightings for 2013. I find it interesting and somewhat disconcerting that 2014 is our record year. I believe that was partially due to the late winter flooding of the far South Street field where several species of ducks were identified from EastView property.

We have seen and recorded more than 100 species here at EastView over combined years, but we have never seen that many in one year, 2014 being our biggest year. It is understandable that fewer species would take up residence in an area that is newly constructed, where the landscape is developing. However, one would think that as the landscape matured the avian population would increase slowly year by year until it leveled off at a constant number. Either that doesn't seem to be the case, or the numbers are going to level out to a lower number than expected. Robins have been more numerous this year, but then there are other species that have not been seen.

If we are just going by numbers relative to groups of animals the fewer numbers per year stayed constant. For example, this year there have been fewer sightings of mammals, pollinators, etc. Should we be concerned? All I can say is yes, I am concerned. Is there anything we can do but observe? I think that depends on your viewpoint, energy and interest as to what one can do. What we can do is take heed and let others know our concern!

This does not mean that certain bird species have been extirpated from EastView. It might mean there are generally fewer numbers of particular species; and the few that are out there have not been observed or noticed.

For example: Only a single Barn Swallow was sighted or reported from EastView property this year. Only a single Phoebe was observed, later than usual, this year. Spring sightings of warblers during spring migration was nonexistent. We know from the

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internet and other communications that there were many warbler sightings throughout the state, but not here. It is too early to make any negative comments concerning this information, only personal concerns.

BIRD SPECIES DATA AT EASTVIEW

2014 - 81
2015 - 69
2016 - 73
2017 - 68
2018 - 57
2019 - 61

As you can see from the data 2014 was our best year. However, the caveat is that the data for 2014 was skewed by the afore mentioned flooded field that held several duck species. Could the other years be influenced by the same situation if it had occurred? Yes. Are we seeing a decline in bird species? Yes!

Newspapers and the internet has produced data that over 3 billion birds have been lost world-wide since 1970.

Birds are not the only wildlife showing a decline at EastView.



Muskrat, in South Pond. © Dick Harlow

Mammals – are another anomaly! We had a muskrat family in South Pond for three years. Nothing since, not even a hint of an investigation by a single muskrat.

There is some history here. The muskrat family did have two youngsters. They, with one adult, were observed for the Spring of 2015; and one muskrat was seen from time to time during the early summer. Then all sightings became non-existent, other than a floating dead muskrat at the end of the summer. Since that time, I have not observed a single muskrat in the pond.

However, South Pond has been home to at least three species of frogs: Bull Frog, Green Frog and Pickerel Frog. We have American Toads in our garden and since toads need water to lay fertilized eggs and for tadpoles to develop, we must assume that the pond is home for that process. A total of 4 Amphibian species.

What about White-tailed Deer?

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White-tailed Deer, doe in the field back of South Pond. © Dick Harlow

White-tailed Deer is another animal that we saw close to EastView every year. We saw them as close as across Deer Meadow Drive to on the berm by South Pond. Or they were seen in back of the cottages adjacent to South Pond. Not in 2019! Other than a yearling deer seen this fall moving west in front of the Kline's apartment window, deer have been witnessed, but only from a distance.

Another question I am asked: are we seeing more or less pollinators than in the past? Again, I can only answer that anecdotally since the only data I currently have is with butterfly species. I am trying to learn species of Bumble Bees, so the results of Bumble Bee attrition will have to wait a few years. Science says we are losing particular species of Bumble Bees. Of course, it is known that there are many pollinators not just bees and butterflies. However, bees and especially butterflies are more noticeable when we visit a garden.



Monarch, on Buddleja (Black Knight/Night).

© Dick Harlow

Because of their general visibility, at least for the larger butterflies and some actual perusing around the campus for the smaller varieties, butterflies represent a good species to monitor. Why?

Butterflies feed on nectar and in so doing they pick up pollen. By picking up pollen they will transfer pollen to like flowers, thus being a pollinator along with bees and other insects. It is a lot easier to track butterflies than bee species or for that matter any other insect. Even moths are a problem since many are nocturnal.

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Initially, due to our cold and wet spring and the general concern for butterflies with a changing climate, I was concerned that butterflies would be scarce this summer. We did see less butterflies than in previous years, but we had a banner year with two species, Painted Lady and Monarch.



Pearl Crescent, on Coreopsis. © Dick Harlow

We did have a brief glimpse of Pearl Crescent and a few of Giant Swallowtail.



Giant Swallowtail, nectaring on Lilac.
© Dick Harlow

The abundant Painted Ladies and Monarchs were a delight for my camera lens!

BUTTERFLY SPECIES DATA AT EASTVIEW

2014 - 19
2015 - 19
2016 - 17
2017 - 13
2018 - 08
2019 - 14

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Painted Lady, on Buddleja. © Dick Harlow

As can be seen from the data, the population numbers go up and down in what could be considered fairly normal. Not having any idea what **IS** normal for our campus, I can only collect the data for several more years before deciding to come to some form of an opinion. It is duly noted that the last four years have not reached the numbers of the previous two. Does this mean anything? I don't know yet.

I did not see as many dragonflies or damselflies as I have in past years. Consequently, I can't simulate any viable data at this date other than being slightly concerned that their populations are down as well.

I think the report we received the end of August about the 3 billion plus birds that the world has lost since 1970, along with the cold wet spring and the lack of warblers sighted during spring migration here at EastView, all this observable data has acutely raised our awareness! Yet, it is not just these circumstances, but many individuals have told me they feel they are seeing fewer birds in general.



2019 – South Pond berm and field, end of November beginning of December 2019.
© Dick Harlow

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Let us review some other nationwide observations of this year.

- More destructive storms, causing loss of life, and massive flooding.
- Destructive fires in California.
- Excessive heat in the middle of the country.
- Shortage of drinkable water in parts of the US.
- Concern for ocean fish stocks, an important source of our food.
- Warming of northern ocean water changing habitat for ocean fish and invertebrates.

Obviously, this will affect wildlife as it also affects us.

Even though the data is discouraging, I am looking forward to 2020 to see what interesting and rare sighting possibilities we all might witness!

Weather Tidbits

Month of DECEMBER 1-31, 2019

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

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 58.2 mm or 2.3 inches

Overcast Days: 17