

MARCH 15-31, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

KILLDEER



Adult Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*, © Dick Harlow

Killdeer belong to the Plover group of shorebirds. One would think that a shorebird would be a bird that lives next to either a lake or saltwater; but not the Killdeer, they are known as a dry land shorebird. They are found on golf courses, backyards, on gravel rooftops, etc. Their nests with 2-4 eggs are laid in a depression made by the male in gravel or small cobbles.

Below is a picture taken last year of a nest with two eggs laid in our gravel path that is on the periphery of the EastView Inn property.



Killdeer Nest w/eggs © Dick Harlow

Killdeer like to build their nests in dry open areas with minimal, but some short vegetation nearby. Their nest is a scrape in the ground, just shallow enough to keep their eggs from rolling out and about as the mother settles down to incubate them next to her warm body.

The young are precocial when they hatch, which means they can get up and move around soon after hatching. This allows for quick action of the chicks to feed on insects beside their parents without having to stay in the nest. However, when there is perceived danger by the parent it will go through its injured wing act to try and distract the predator or remove what it perceives as a

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danger to the chicks. Since the young will freeze in place when they hear the danger call from the parent, they have no protection from non-living predators like a power lawnmower, or a living unattended or unleashed dog.

Killdeer are found throughout the United States, most of Canada, Central America and a small section of South America depending on whether they are breeding or non-breeding. The Killdeer's breeding territory is the United States and Canada, while wintering in most of the southern US.

Once the breeding season is over and while the chicks are still unable to fly, the male will leave and enter a non-breeding status. This is the same status that the female and young will become once the young are able to fly. Killdeer can be found during this non-breeding period along the shoreline of ponds, lakes, and seashores feeding on insects, or small crustaceans.

The key to a Killdeer's identification is its double black band, which includes a black ring around its neck and just slightly under that a black band on its chest; use this along with its Killdeer call and you know what you are looking at. We are fortunate to have this striking bird nest at EastView.

BIRD MIGRATION

Be ready for the peak spring migration of birds in the next two months. For the last three years April and May have had the most species of birds per month passing over or staying here at EastView.

3 BASIC PINE TREES OF NEW ENGLAND

There are many different coniferous trees than what I will write about here. This is simply an introduction to our more common pine trees that are native to New England. They are White Pine, Pitch Pine and Red Pine. If you are new to trees in general, there is a simple way to determine which pine you are looking at. Use the needles until you become familiar with the bark and the look of a mature tree. If you look at a stem of a pine you will see that the needles are in bundles. White Pine has a bundle of five needles. Pitch Pine has a bundle of three needles and Red Pine has a bundle of two needles. One way to remember Pitch Pine is through baseball, three pitches or three strikes and you're out.

The bark is also a way to determine what you are looking at or to reinforce what species you think you have.

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WHITE PINE



**White Pine, *Pinus strobus*, with typical new
White Pine cones © Dick Harlow**

The White Pine seen here has long narrow and pointed pinecones that hang pendulously. These cones are unlike the two other pine tree pinecones whose cones are rather short and stout.



White Pine, *Pinus strobus*, © Dick Harlow

Notice the pine stem and the projections on the stem. These are bundle scars of past years. Now notice the needles emanating from this bundle, which is attached to the tree branch. In this case there are five needles coming out of one bundle. White Pine trees are noted for having a total of 5 needles emanating from a single bundle. If you want to test this fact make sure you look at more than one bundle of needles, as it could happen that a needle or two were taken from a bundle by a squirrel.

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Various conifers have different lengths of time that they hold on to their needles (leaves), anywhere from two to five years. In the case of Eastern White Pine, needles are held for two years. Because needles are shed in the fall and new needles develop in the spring, this process can be confusing. However, under normal circumstances, older white pine needles in sets of five will drop each fall.

Generally, coniferous trees are considered the source for **softwood**. Softwoods are noted for being easily used for paper and lumber. About 80% of the world's production of timber uses softwood. Traditional centers of lumber production for softwoods come from the Baltic region of Europe (including Scandinavia and Russia), North America and China.

PITCH PINE



Pitch Pine, *Pinus rigida* © W.D. Brush,
hosted by the USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database

Pitch Pine has three needles to a bundle and the cones are short and plump. You will find Pitch Pine growing in sandy soil found mostly along the coast, although there are Pine Barrens inland here in New England. The bark of a Pitch Pine is creviced, gnarly, rough and rugged looking. Along the coast, for instance Cape Cod in MA, you will find that Pitch Pine is fairly salt-tolerant and resilient to fire. As a matter of fact, Pitch Pine depends on fire to eliminate plant competitors. Once the competitors are eliminated due to fire, Pitch Pine will regenerate by sending up new shoots.

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Pitch Pine is a dense wood that is very resinous, good for shipbuilding and other rough construction. There is a reason why its specific name is rigida!

RED PINE



Red Pine, *Pinus resinosa* © Dick Harlow

This pine grows tall and beautiful. It has cones similar to a Pitch Pine but its bark is reddish and flaky, a dead give away! Reddish, flaky bark and long needles in twos suggests you are looking at a Red Pine.

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PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

'PERVASIVE INVASIVE'

Looking at this plant and its showy flowers in July along our highways and waterways give color and vibrancy to our landscape. BUT, this plant is highly invasive. Unless people accept the problems that invasive plants, insects and animals impact on native populations, we will continually see the degradation of native species and native ecology.



Purple Loosestrife, *Lythrum salicaria* © National Park Service

According to invasiveplants.net - "By the 1830's, *Lythrum salicaria* was well established along the New England seaboard. The construction of inland canals and waterways in the 1880's favored the expansion of the plant into interior New York and the St. Lawrence River Valley. The continued expansion of *L. salicaria* coincided with increased development and use of road systems, commercial distribution of the plant for horticultural purposes, and regional

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propagation of seed for bee forage. As of 1996, *L. salicaria* is found in all contiguous states (except Florida) and all Canadian provinces."

With the spread of this beautiful flowering semi-shrub you can see that it might have been difficult to enlist help in its control. However, there is a definite problem in that as a population of Purple Loosestrife becomes monotypic (all one species) it alters the wetland structure that it is a part of, and threatens endangered and other wetland plants. Unfortunately, there are no natural enemies or natural biological controls that exist in this country.

This basically means that as the plant becomes monotypic in the landscape, it out competes other native plants. By doing this it also threatens other wildlife by eliminating native foods, nesting sites, cover for birds and other wildlife; and in wetland sites it traps water, thus slowing water flow and even preventing water flow. This changes the ecology and the dynamics of the wetland.

Weather Tidbits

Month of March 2016

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 67.4 mm or 2.6 inches

Precipitation includes rain and snow melt.

Snow Days: 2

Snowfall for March 1-31: 0.22 mm or .9 inches

Overcast Days: 11

WIND

Highest wind gust: March 24, 30 MPH, Direction: North

Average Wind speed for March: 2.2 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 15

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 1

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 2.8 C⁰/37 °F

High Temp: 27.7C⁰/81 °F

Low Temp: -15.7 C⁰/3.7°F

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DAYS OF:

Min. Temp. 0.0 C⁰/32⁰F: 19 days

Max. Temp. 0.0 C⁰/32⁰F: 8 days