

THE BANE AND THE BEAUTIFUL

NORTHERN PRICKLY-ASH



Prickly Ash stem w/thorns, Zanthoxylum americanum
© John Hilty

Northern Prickly-Ash, Zanthoxylum americanum, is the bane of many farmers in Vermont. It has strong broad-based prickles on its trunk, sharper thorns on its stems, though some thorns are short, the shrub or small tree can be very difficult to pass by or pass through when walking in the woods or trying to enter the woods from a field. It is aromatic, a native to Vermont and akin to the Citrus Family of plants. Although the wood has little value, the citrus oils have been extracted and used in alternative medicine. It does not have any photosensitive sap or juice.

The Giant Swallowtail Butterfly larva feeds on citrus family of plants, so it is understandable why this butterfly would be found in Florida. Are we seeing evolution with the advent of the Giant Swallowtail extending its range into middle and northern Vermont? Is this food supply the first step for the Giant Swallowtail moving even further north? Only time will tell, but personally I find it very exciting.



Giant Swallowtail, Papilio cresphontes
© Dick Harlow 2015

Interesting that up until 2012 the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly was local along Florida and the southeastern states. It could be found further inland from Georgia to southern New England, but not in Vermont, not even southern Vermont. But, in 2012 that changed, and now it has been recorded here in Middlebury each year for five years since 2012.

MAY 1-14, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow



Prickly Ash leaves, *Zanthoxylum americanum*

© ISU Forestry Extension

The link for the Giant Swallowtail's extension of its range is believed to be Northern Prickly-Ash.

Giant Swallowtails lay their eggs on plants in the Citrus Family of trees and shrubs. Some of these plants are Wild Lime, Common Rue, cultivated citrus and Northern Prickly-Ash to name a few. Northern Prickly-Ash belongs to Rue/Citrus Family as mentioned; and, as a matter of fact, the Northern Prickly-Ash is not a true ash tree. Ash trees that we are familiar with in our woods belong to the Olive Family and the Prickly-Ash belongs to the Citrus Family. Why was it called an ash? The leaves look like ash leaves and are arranged on the stem like an ash tree.

We, as lay people, have to remember that the naturalists who first named many of our flora and fauna were themselves amateur naturalists following the teachings of Carolus (Carl) Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist, physician and zoologist, who is considered the father of taxonomy. Taxonomy is the naming of organisms using Latin and the Linnaeus' system (binominal nomenclature) for each organism.

Many taxonomists of the 16th century believed, as did many naturalists of Linnaeus' time that God was responsible for all life on earth. Life was centered on what they knew in Europe and Asia; therefore, they weren't aware nor did they have the research to delve into the many varieties that were later found as European explorers discovered the North and South American continents along with Australia and the Pacific islands. Consequently, there are and will be changes to naming organisms as science becomes better acquainted with DNA and how organisms are related genetically.

MAY 1-14, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

AMERICAN KESTREL



American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius* female
© Dick Harlow 2016

This female came by EastView's south pond (Dragon's Pool) April 9th and 10th of this year and decided to hunt from the bird boxes. She began early in the morning and stayed till 5 PM on the 9th. This picture was taken around 1630 (4:30). It makes me wish I had a taller larger box for Kestrels as they also nest in a box or an old woodpecker hole in a tree. We had a male visit us in 2014, also in the second week in April.

The American Kestrel is our smallest falcon. It feeds on voles, mice, grasshoppers, beetles and other invertebrates and small birds. Its size doesn't represent a threat to other raptors; and for that matter as this female was across from our bird feeders, the goldfinches at the feeder didn't seem to consider her a threat. But, tame is not the word I would use to describe Kestrels. They are feisty and will protect their territory and young with aggressiveness and determination.

The American Kestrel is widely spread throughout North and South America. It used to be considered the most common falcon throughout the country. But, from 1966 to 2014 American Kestrel populations declined by 66% according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey.

I never thought that I would see so many species of birds become threatened in my lifetime. But, if you think of how human populations have grown throughout the world, let alone throughout the United States you may be able to see why.

Clearing land for houses by felling dead trees that may have woodpecker holes in them that Kestrels could use for nesting has an impact.. Kestrels depend on old woodpecker holes for nesting sites. Clean farming practices, removal of hedgerows and trees all contribute to the stress on Kestrels and other bird populations. Kestrels are an edge species nesting on the edge of large fields or meadows.

Kestrels are also losing prey! Pesticides and insecticides kill the very insects that these falcons depend on. If food isn't abundant Kestrels won't lay as many eggs, there will be less hatching success and those young that do survive will also have less of a chance to make it. Not a pleasant future. We, yes we humans, are changing the world we live in and the lives of those organisms with which we share this planet. Unfortunately, most people worldwide aren't aware of or disregard the importance, the balance that should exist between man and the life with which he shares this planet.

**MAY 1-14, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow**



American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius* female
© Dick Harlow 2016

LARGE-FLOWERED TRILLIUM



Large-flowered Trillium, *Trillium grandiflorum*,
© Dick Harlow 2014

MAY 1-14, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

This member of the lily family is another ephemeral that you might see while walking in the woods. This white trillium is very showy and blooms between the end of April and the first two weeks of May. As the flower ages its petals show a light shade of pink. This is a native and a beautiful addition to our woodland.

OBSERVATIONS

BUTTERFLIES

Cabbage White

AMPHIBIANS

Leopard Frog (south pond)

American Bullfrog (4) (south pond)

MAMMALS

Carnivora

Eastern Coyote (heard)

Ungulates

White-tailed Deer (5) Deer Meadow backyard

Rodents

Meadow Vole (garden)

White-footed Mouse (shed)

Eastern Gray Squirrel (bird feeders)

Eastern Cottontail (garden)

Muskrat (north pond)

Weather Tidbits

Month of May 1-14 2016

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

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 33.0 mm or 1.3 inches

Overcast Days: 7

WIND

Highest wind gust: May 8, 34 MPH, Direction: North

Average Wind speed for April: 2.6 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 4

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 2

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 12.4 C⁰/54.3⁰F

High Temp: 26.1 C⁰/79.0⁰F

Low Temp: -0.4 C⁰/ 31.3⁰F

DAYS OF:

Min. Temp. 0.0 C⁰/32⁰F: 2 days

Max. Temp. 0.0 C⁰/32⁰F: 0 days