

## AUGUST 15-30, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

As one can see from the bird list this month, the species count has gone down markedly from a high of 47 species in May and 37 species in July to 35 species in August. The decrease in numbers is not unusual but does show that birds are migrating away from East View, transitioning to other parts of the state or moving to the Atlantic shore, as is the case with Tree Swallows. But, since January 1st, the overall species count for East View is 74 species so far this year. That is good for a new site, with relatively little habitat and cover beyond grass, foundation shrubs a few trees here and there and perennials. Yes, there is the woods by the railroad tracks and Otter Creek on the other side of the railroad tracks, which helps our species count. But, there is little nesting habitat here at East View. Hopefully we can break 80 species by the end of next month.

Plus, be on the lookout for transient inland species! For example those species that migrate south or southeast that might be blown off course and end in Vermont instead of along the Atlantic coast.

As well, be on the lookout for raptors. This is the time that raptors, hawks, harriers and kestrels, are moving or migrating and on the way looking for space to hunt and protect as their personal hunting area come fall and winter. A Kestrel was noted the last week in August in back of upper Deer Meadow along with two Broad-winged Hawks drifting over the Inn. In the past we have had Red-tails, Northern Harrier and Kestrels hunting in our fields. They will use the standing bird boxes as launching points and resting spots as they search the immediate area for mice, meadow voles, rabbits and other possible prey items.

The indication that Fall is here is the beautiful yellow flowerets that make up a sprig of the various species of goldenrod. This Fall blooming plant will stay in flower through September when most other flowers have gone to seed.



**Rough-stemmed Goldenrod, *Solidago rugosa* Flowerets of a multisemmed plant**

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There are two predominant thistles that are growing in the fields and meadow of Kestrel Lane and Deer Meadow Drive. They are the Bull Thistle, *Cirsium vulgare*, and Canada Thistle, *Cirsium arvense*. Both of these plants are invasive nonnatives from Europe and Asia. Are they dangerous like Wild Parsnip? No they are not, but being an alien they have a competitive advantage over native plants, and can thus spread with very little adverse competition.

Bull Thistle is a biennial and Canada Thistle is a perennial. Both can be a problem if you are not prepared. My recommendation is, if you like to walk in a field or meadow, bring a walking stick or cane to move the sturdy sharp pointed stalks of either thistle out of the way. You certainly don't want to do it with your bare hands. Or, avoid these menacing looking thorny plants altogether!



**Bull Thistle, *Cirsium vulgare*** Photo © Dick Harlow

The Bull Thistle is a sturdy tough biennial plant that has sharp points on its leaves and at the apex of the leaf. Not a plant that you would like to fall into while walking. Yet, the magenta flower is quite handsome as it sits on top of short stems and it is attractive to bees and butterflies. Generally, it is a strong looking plant, and an interesting one. This thistle is now well established in North America.

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**Bull Thistle, *Cirsium vulgare*** Photo © Dick Harlow

The Canada Thistle, also known as "Lettuce from Hell", or "Creeping Thistle" is considerably more invasive than Bull Thistle as it has an underground root system that produces additional plants along the root structure, thus, making it difficult to control when it invades pastures.



**Canada Thistle, *Cirsium arvense*** Photo © Dick Harlow

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The scraggly appearance, even with flowers at the top and at the end of various branches seems to say, "walk through me at your own risk!"

However the flower by itself is quite nice as shown here.



Canada Thistle flower, *Cirsium arvense* Photo © Dick Harlow

There are 29 admiral type butterflies in North America and of those 29 there are two admiral types here in the Northeast. They are primarily made up of two species, which visit our gardens in June, July, and parts of August. The White Admiral interbreeds with the Red-spotted Purple and thus is considered a subspecies of the Red-spotted Purple. However, the recessive gene that creates the bright white stripe on the White Admiral sets it apart from the Red-spotted Purple, enough so, that many still consider the common name of White Admiral separate from individuals which have no white stripe.



Red-spotted Purple, *Limenitis arthemis astyanax* CC BY-SA 3.0 Bugguide



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**White Admiral, *Limenitis arthemis arthemis*** On Buddleia

Photo © Dick Harlow

As seen here the beautiful butterfly with white striped wings on a dark background and graces our gardens is reasonably called the "White Admiral" a primarily northern butterfly.

Because this "White Admiral" has red dots added on the end of its hind wing, which a pure White Admiral would not have, it appears that this butterfly is the result of a union between Red-spotted Purple and a White Admiral. Although the 'White Admiral's' range is more northerly, the Red-spotted Purple's more southerly, the range overlap of the two species is in New England. As mentioned before, there is some discussion amongst taxonomists about which common name to call the progeny of this mating. At present some call it the Red-spotted Admiral. Because the Red-spotted Purple has no white banding on its wings, the preferred common name of "White Admiral" is still used. To me, that bright white band on the wing is so distinctive that the name "White Admiral" will remain my standard.



**Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*** On flat rock.

Photo © Dick Harlow

The Red Admiral is also a distinctive species. You would be able to identify it from some distance. However, this butterfly is only moderately tolerant of freezing conditions, and

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therefore, some individuals in the north of its range move south during the Fall when temperatures fall close to freezing.

Here is a partial list of Butterflies observed at East View for the Month of August.

**Butterfly List**

- Giant Swallowtail - frequent
- Black Swallowtail
- Monarch - twice
- Viceroy - frequent
- White Admiral
- Cabbage White - always
- Clouded Sulphur - frequent
- Orange Sulphur

**August Total Rainfall: 4.02 inches**

**Highest wind for August was on the 12-13<sup>th</sup> Max. Wind Speed 29 mph from the South**

**Average Wind speed for the month: 2.1 mph, dominant direction: South**

All averages are based on a 24 hr. clock.