

OCTOBER 15-31, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

Here we are at the end of the middle month of the Fall Season. Thoughts reflect on seeing White-tailed Deer in the field and meadow here at EastView. But, since hunting season began Oct 4th, I really doubt the deer will come out and show themselves. So, we have to be content with views from this past spring and summer.



White-tailed Deer, Odocoileus virginianus standing in the field eating clover and grass.

Photo © Dick Harlow

During these seasons we regularly see White-tailed Deer somewhere in our field and meadow. Yet now, in October, they are not out and about; they are hardly ever seen. These two deer pictures were taken in July and no antlers are seen covered in velvet. If this were a buck you would see nubbins or larger encased antlers in velvet providing nutrients to the developing antlers. Basically, antlers are extensions of the skull in the deer family. So, obviously, these two are does.

I feel it means a lot to the people here at EastView to have wildlife venture forth and be viewed.

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White-tailed Deer, Odocoileus virginianus

Photo © Dick Harlow

When you look at these two pictures, you will notice a light reddish-brown or dark tan coat, which is the summer coat of the White-tailed Deer. Sleek and light, no undercoat, a much cooler looking animal, both literally and figuratively.



White-tailed Deer, Odocoileus virginianus

Photo © Dick Harlow

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Come fall, White-tailed Deer grow a thicker more insulating dark undercoat; this makes them look gray, like the above picture of the doe running away in its winter coat.

Another interesting fact about the White-tailed Deer is that deer grow antlers not horns. Horns are not shed on an annual basis, like antlers. The number of spikes on an antler is **NOT** the age of the deer. A yearling buck can grow more than just a spike, it can grow 4, 8 or more points. It all depends on genetics and nutrition.

The reason these images are of a female deer or doe is that bucks, during the summer, are staying out of harms way by staying in the woods, generally unseen. At this time of year they are protecting the velvet that surrounds and brings nutrition to the developing antlers, as antlers start out as living tissue. If the velvet is damaged it could deform the developing antler and be a detriment to the buck during breeding season. By early September the blood supply at the base of the developing rack constricts, cutting off the blood supply, and the velvet begins to dry and fall off. To hasten getting rid of the dried velvet the buck removes the rest of the velvet by rubbing his antlers on a tree, stump or branch; this removal of dried velvet issues in the beginning of the rut, or breeding season, for White-tailed Deer. After the rut is over, usually by early winter, the deer shed their antlers; these are called "drops". This event sets into motion the development of a new set of antlers from the skull of the male.

The rut can mean simple jousting or out and out combat by males. These mating rituals are happening every year about this time, interrupted only by hunters making use of the bucks' unwariness of man because of the bucks' increased testosterone. Bucks are looking to defend their harems, as they are so obsessed with protecting their breeding rights from an interloping buck.

Canada and Snow Geese are in the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, called the Addison Goose Viewing area, on Rt. 17, feeding in the various cornfields and will remain until the weather turns cold and nasty. Not until we have hard frosts and the ground freezes will true dormancy take over in plants, and true hibernation in animals.

By then the geese will have left Vermont for the Chesapeake Bay area. And, then we will have to deal with ice, snow, freezing rain and cold weather, as does the rest of the wildlife community around us.

Winter bird feeding

Most birds depend for their survival on finding food during winter. Not all birds that are here throughout the year move south when the weather gets tough. But, all birds and other wildlife that do stay in the north during winter depend on finding readily available food. And, not all birds that are here during winter eat seed or come to the feeders. They will go to farms, manure storage areas, seed heads in fields and meadows or berry trees or the like to find food.

Many people like to see a nice neat garden both in spring and in the fall. That is fine in a formal garden enclave, but when it comes time to neaten a home garden some thought might

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be given to the needs of birds. That is, of course, if your focus is to have wild birds around your place during the winter. Birds will eat the seeds of Purple Cone flower, False Sunflower, Asters, or Liatris. Yes, the stalks are dead and to some might look unsightly, but the birds will be forever grateful. Therefore, it is extremely important that food such as plant flower heads, berries on trees and shrubs, both in the wild and in yards is available. Goldfinches have been coming to standing Coneflower stalks since the second week in October gleaning for seeds.

If it is a good berry year or a good conifer cone year north of us, we might not see certain visitors from Canada. But, if the boreal forests of Canada had a poor cone or deciduous/berry year, then we could be the beneficiaries of an influx of transients from Canada. That of course is every bird feeder's wish!

If you want to see finches and native birds rather than House Sparrows (English Sparrows) and pigeons dominating your bird feeders, then I strongly suggest that you invest in thistle seed, sunflower seed and sunflower hearts rather than various types of millet and other ground seed that is sold at Agway or Home Depot or most any hardware store. If you lived in the country away from apartment buildings, retirement communities or building concentrations you might not have to worry about House Sparrows or pigeons or even starlings for that matter. In the previous 10 years living in Vermont in a secluded area, I didn't have a single pigeon or House Sparrow at our feeders. But, once we moved to EastView we could expect these three non-native birds to come begging for a handout. True, most other sparrows will be discouraged if no millet is available, but more importantly the non-native House Sparrow, European Starling and common pigeon will not be dominating the feeders. Yes, these opportunists will still come around and try to partake from your feeder, especially if it is the only fare in town. Although they will lurk around the feeders while your finches are feeding and may even try to dominate them, dependent on the type of feeder you have will depend on how successful they will be. If it is one they cannot attach to they will pick up whatever they can from the ground. So far this month the pigeons are cleaning up the ground under our feeders what the finches have dropped from the feeder. You might be able to get away with throwing some seed on the ground outside your apartment window or patio, but before the winter is over you will have these bad guys expecting more food. If your neighbor doesn't heed the advice and you do, then they will have the disadvantage of a hoard of pigeons and House Sparrows more often, and you will be left with the pleasure of chickadees, nuthatches, cardinals, woodpeckers, finches and a few of the good sparrows.

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White-throated Sparrow, *Zonotrichia albicollis*

Photo © Dick Harlow

Winter Birds we could see here at EastView:

Stalwart Northerners

Black-capped Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
American Goldfinch
Purple Finch
Blue Jay
Cedar Waxwing

Fairly Recent Vermonters

Tufted Titmouse
House Finch
Northern Cardinal
Red-bellied Woodpecker

Transients from Canada

Pine Siskin
Common Redpoll
Hoary Redpoll
Pine Grosbeak
Red Crossbill
White-winged Crossbill
Bohemian Waxwing

Top 7 Visitors to your Bird Feeder and their favorite food

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Black-capped Chickadee - sunflower
Downy Woodpecker – suet, sunflower
Hairy Woodpecker – suet, sunflower
Mourning Dove – ground seed
Wh-breasted Nuthatch – sunflower, suet
Dark-eyed Junco – ground seed
Tufted Titmouse – sunflower, suet

If your life depends on finding food then you can understand that 'birds beget birds'; when birds see other birds feeding, regardless of species, they will go to investigate. Of course this list of top 6 all depends on what you are putting into your bird feeder. I am not counting the introduced birds that have been established for some time, e.g. the House Sparrow, European Starling and the Rock Pigeon. As mentioned if ground feed makes up the bulk of the food you are feeding, you will definitely see two of these three introduced birds, and if you add suet to the mixture you will eventually see the European Starling. However, I must admit that here at EastView, there may be no way of limiting these three introduced species from visiting your feeder. But, if you stay firm and don't give in to feeding ground food you will be rewarded.

Suet

Suet, beef suet is beef fat; usually the best quality is the fat that lines the kidneys. Fat is energy having twice the calories of protein or carbohydrates. Birds have a high metabolism rate, thus fat helps to sustain the bird's ability to keep warm, gather food, and conserve energy and the energy necessary to stay away from predators, especially in the winter months. They also need both protein and carbohydrates, which, they can receive from the seed, berries and an occasional insect that they eat. The best places for a suet feeder is on a pole at least five-six feet above the ground, or put the pole near a tree, or attach the suet feeder on the trunk of a tree 5-6 or more feet above the ground. Remember when placing your pole or suet feeder, that winter snow, areas prone to snowdrifts or those areas that are wiped clean by the wind, can be difficult for birds around EastView. Birds, once they find the suet and also find protection nearby such as a tree, or sturdy shrub, they will use the suet on a regular basis. Be ready to fill the suet feeder often. Hannaford's or Shaw's sell beef suet, but they have to see a demand if they are going to stock it regularly. Also, make sure you change the suet if the weather warms since extended warm spells or hot weather can cause suet to become rancid.

Starlings seem to love suet, especially as the winter transitions into March. However, Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Blue Jays and woodpeckers will be your most frequent guests at the suet feeder until the starlings find it.

All bird feeding advice is primarily my own developed from 50 years of wild bird feeding experience.

Enjoy the birds and let Dick Harlow know what you are seeing.

October: Last Two-Week Sightings:

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Butterfly List

- Clouded Sulphur
- Cabbage White

Dragonfly List

- No sightings

Damselflies

- No sightings

Amphibian/Reptiles

- No sightings

Mammal List

- Eastern Cottontail
- Eastern Coyote (h)
- Meadow Vole
- Mouse, either White-footed or Deer
- Opossum (tracks)

October Total Rainfall: 124.0 mm or 4.9 inches

Highest wind for October was on October 8, and 14th.

Maximum Wind Speed and Direction: 31mph/South South West (SSW)

Average Wind speed for October 2014: 3.4 mph,

Dominate direction for the month: South

Total Overcast Days: 16

All Measurements based on a 24hr clock for 31 days.