

WHAT WE CAN SEE ALONG OUR BYWAYS



Farm buildings and silos Photo © Dick Harlow

Before the weather deteriorates too far I thought it would be interesting, especially for those who are interested in agriculture and who drive our Vermont back roads, to talk about some of the visible farming practices viewed on our byways.



Baling hay Photo © Dick Harlow

First, let me preface my comments. I have been interested in farming practices ever since college. One of my treasured readings in the 50's was Louis Bromfield's *Pleasant Valley* and *Malabar Farm* when he preached ethical conservational practices as they apply to soil and the farm. How, in his mind and experience, he showed how farms can be productive by using common sense conservational practices and hard work to increase soil productivity. This can also be applied to meat, egg and milk production. Obviously, he was ahead of his time and his broad practical knowledge and understanding of the interrelationships of nature have stayed with me for a long time.



Baled hay on field Photo © Dick Harlow

He was the first one I had read, to recommend **not** using commercial fertilizers. He believed animal manure spread on plowed fields or fields of grass returned nutrients lost from the previous growing season. He felt commercial fertilizers were a detriment to the soil rather than adding to it and that they only added chemicals rather than long lasting humus and organic matter to soil. Once applied to land, the commercial fertilizers forced plants to take not only those applied chemicals, but also whatever was left in the soil leaving no organic matter to decompose and therefore no backup for plant sustenance. This resulted in the deterioration of the soil to the point where very little could grow on it unless more commercial fertilizer was applied. Thus the farmer was forced to buy commercial fertilizer the following year. Although cynical, you can see where this could have been a marketing strategy for the chemical companies. We can see both the use of spreading manure

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on fields as well as some farms use just commercial fertilizer and the difference that exists between those farms. We also see nothing being done to some fields and the poor result when planted with the same crop the following spring.



2015 Plowed with no manure

Photo © Dick Harlow

Bromfield felt rotating crops, pastures, and hay fields made practical sense. He felt green manure (the planting of a cover crop over the winter) was an answer to soil erosion and the capturing of nutrients rather than the leaching of those nutrients due to water and wind erosion. Manure laden soil with organic matter helped build up the soil so that it was the most productive part of a farm's investment. This allowed for the rest of the farm to produce abundantly.



2015 Field of corn stalks planted with nutrient saving green manure, Winter Rye.

Photo © Dick Harlow

In some pictures you will see farm fields with a green manure cover crop, Winter Rye, others with no cover crop. Some plowed areas have no visible evidence that the field has been spread with manure and in others both the plowed and hay fields have been covered with liquid manure. By keeping track, you can drive by next spring and see whether the farmer is careful on spreading manure or not, or whether he might be using commercial fertilizer. Then next summer and fall you can follow up whether this farmer is having a good or poor harvest. You can see whether Louis Bromfield made any sense!



2015 Field of corn stalks not plowed, unattended until spring. Photo © Dick Harlow

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If you were to "Google" Louis Bromfield and look at the many books that he wrote, you would see that the New York Times said they think that his *Out of the Earth* will prove well up among the most useful books on agriculture ever published.



Pasture fertilized with liquid manure.

Photo © Dick Harlow

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

The end of November is the time of year when birders start thinking of Christmas Bird Counts, and Northern visitors that will be coming to our countryside. All Christmas Bird Counts throughout the country are in December running into the first week of the new year.



Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*

Photo © Dick Harlow

December 20th is the start of the Middlebury Christmas Bird Count. As of 2014-2015 there are 20 registered CBC's in Vermont. The closest ones to EastView are the Middlebury CBC and the Ferrisburgh CBC. I have given below 5 counts in the surrounding area including Middlebury, but you can Google Audubon Christmas Bird Counts to see the others in Vermont.

The Christmas Bird Counts have become a popular citizen science endeavor throughout North and South America. It is the longest running citizen science project in the world, beginning Christmas Day in 1900. Before 1900 the traditional Christmas Day event was called a "side hunt" with a shotgun.

It was Frank Chapman, a well known birder who proposed to count birds rather than hunt them with a shotgun. Many birders congregate at each count throughout the count period to count birds. Decades later the accumulated data has helped scientists in understanding changes in bird populations relative to changes in our climate.

The protocols are simple; a circle that is 15 miles in diameter is covered by birders of all ages for 24 hours on a specific day. All bird species, their numbers and location are recorded by teams. New birders are paired with experienced birders; data is taken throughout the day and tabulated at the end of the day during a social gathering after sunset for libations, and data recording. Each count has a

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compiler who is responsible for gathering all the data from the count circle during that day and sending that data to National Audubon. All the data from 1900 to the present is carefully tabulated for population trends, species movement over time and the general health of the wild bird population in North America.

SOME VERMONT COUNTS NEAR MIDDLEBURY:

Burlington
Dec. 20, 2015
Contact: Shirley Johnson
rjsj489@comcast.net
Compiler: Eric Lazarus
ericlazarus@myfairpoint.net

Ferrisburgh
Dec. 19, 2015
Contact: Mike Winslow
mikekira@myfairpoint.net

Hinesburg-Huntington
Jan. 3, 2016
Contact: Paul Wiczoreck
mgcpw@gmavt.net

Middlebury
Dec. 20, 2015
Contact: Jim Andrews
jandrews@middlebury.edu

Rutland
Jan. 2, 2016
Contact: Roy Pilcher
shamwariVT@aol.com or
birding@rutlandcountyaudubon.org

I have to comment on the fact that several individuals have told me since the first of the month that birds are not coming to their feeders, or they have not seen the birds that they normally see. Why?

As many know from my comments at VIVA meetings, I have had the same experience at my feeders from the end of October to the first week in November. Very few birds during the end of the third week, the beginning of the fourth week in October and into November, very few birds have visited my feeders.

However, by the third week of November we are back to normal. Many goldfinches have visited my feeders along with Chickadees, Nuthatches, and Titmice. So, it looks like the wild bird food was plentiful for awhile. Pigeon numbers are still quite low, so I don't know whether to be concerned about that fact. Part of me says don't worry and another says it is natural for a commercial establishment like EastView to have flocks of pigeons on their roofs.

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Downy Woodpecker, M, *Picoides pubescens*

Photo © Dick Harlow

Normally, I do not feed birds during the summer, but start up my bird feeders by the third week in September. At that time my hulled sunflower and nija feeders were visited by anywhere between 4-12 American Goldfinch, Rock Doves and Mourning Doves on the ground picking up the spillage, with an occasional Song Sparrow and House Sparrow. The suet feeder had a pair of Downy Woodpeckers each day. By the end of the second week in September the bird count went down to one or two at the feeder with an occasional visit to the suet feeder. I kept telling myself that there must be plenty of wild bird food somewhere else to keep them away. They'll be back once it gets cold. I wrote this comment on the 24th of October and on that day I saw 1 goldfinch, 1 starling, 1 crow. No pigeons, no doves, it was just weird. I also kept telling myself they will be back.

Well, now we know that various species are OK and that their absence was either due to finishing their molt (goldfinches tend to molt later than other birds) or there was plenty of wild bird food for them to prefer. Even the Rock Doves, AKA pigeons, are back. I counted 18 on the roof of Porter Hospital and 11 on our cottage roofs.

We all need to remember that if native food is plentiful birds will go there. If there has been a hawk, or any raptor in the area, even though we don't see it, birds will be very careful about showing themselves in the open. If they feel it is a sincere threat, they will move away to another area until the threat passes. If your feeders have little protection, then that might be a hindrance to not having many birds at your feeder. If there is a Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawk, birds will not show up. If a bird 'freezes' on your feeder that is a tell-tail sign that it has sighted a falcon or hawk. EastView is a new area for birds to get used to and to feel safe around. There needs to be places they can go to hide, such as trees and shrubs.

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Weather Tidbits

November 2015

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Precipitation was: 19.2 mm or 0.8 inches.

Overcast Days: 14

WIND

Highest wind: 38 MPH, 19 Nov. Direction: South

Average Wind speed: 3.5 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: South

Days w/wind gusts 20-29 MPH: 12

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH or greater: 5

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 7.2 C⁰ 45 °F

High Temp: 25.0 C⁰ 77 °F

Low Temp: -9.3 C⁰ 15.3 °F