

July 15-31, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

On a bird box between Kestrel Lane and Deer Meadow Drive, a female Scarlet Tanager was observed. As migration continues through August and September and as birds drift south from Canada and east from the mid-west we will see different species of birds. Weather and storms as well can bring various oddities and rarities.

The seed heads of the Canary Reed Grass and Fescue grasses are waving in the wind. Although the clover bloom has diminished, the asters, Black-eyed Susan and Queen Anne's lace are in bloom and the young birds are learning skills to help them survive the upcoming migration.

As reported at the July 14th VIVA meeting it has been a very successful year here at East View. So far this month there were eight broods of Tree Swallows and three broods of Eastern Bluebirds that were successful. That is considered a very good year. There was little immediate visible predation of nest boxes, although there was competition for nest box space. However, that competition took place before there were established eggs or young in the various boxes.

In the first two weeks of July the only mammal observations were White Tailed Deer, a Black Bear, Eastern Cottontail Rabbit and a Muskrat. Although there have been reports that Skunk, Raccoon, Fox and Coyote are possibly in the area, it was not apparent that they had left scat, track or hair evidence and were not visually brought to my attention. However, at the end of the second week of July there were loud yipping and calls by Coyotes close to Kestrel Lane. From experience it might have been a pack of young coyotes chorusing with their parents.

Although rodents, or a deer, are not the type of mammal that nesting songbirds need to be terribly wary of, a Black Bear is another story altogether. On the other hand, birds favoring egg predation were around. Blue Jays, Crows, and Ravens, were not observed raiding nest boxes or gourds and no snakes were seen. Even the killer House Sparrow seemed to stay complacent, even though a male House Sparrow made an attempt to intimidate nesting swallows. After the young swallows and bluebirds fledged it became apparent that both a swallow and two killdeer chicks were on the menu. Observations came in that either a hawk or a falcon was responsible for killing two Killdeer chicks and a Barn Swallow.

In the second two weeks, the lack of swallows flying over field and water is evident as the mosquito population has grown. Red-winged Blackbirds have diminished down to a few and young bluebirds can be seen developing their food gathering skills.

Although most people think of bird migration occurring in September, it has been going on this month and will continue off and on during August as well, before major migration occurs in September! The movement of young and mature songbirds continues for several weeks after fledging and we all should see unusual or different species fly through our area.

Starlings, and to a lesser extent blackbirds, are beginning to flock up into larger groups of blackbirds. But, it is the Starlings that are the first to congregate into large masses as the young birds learn from their elders. These large flocks become more apparent in the late fall.

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In the months of July and August, we will see butterflies visiting flowers that are in various shades of red and purple. They will visit other colors, but it is the reds and purples that is the primary attractant. There is a large group of butterflies known as skippers that can be very confusing to identify. They are a lot like those "little brown jobs" known as sparrows that also give people a difficult time. The best way to overcome this visual agony is to focus on the easy ones first and then move to more difficult ones, one by one, as you see them so you will become more proficient. However, there is one that is fairly easy to ID. This character is called the "Silver-spotted" Skipper. Its bright white spot on the underwing make this otherwise camouflaged butterfly an easy identification.



Epargyreus clarus, Silver-spotted Skipper, on Bee Balm.

Photo © Dick Harlow

If you are out and about, or walking through gardens be sure to be on the lookout for the Hummingbird Moth, also known as Clearwing Moth. They are considered a hummingbird mimic because they so closely resemble and have the maneuverability of a hummingbird.



Hemaris thysbe, Hummingbird Clearwing Moth, on Buddleia

Photo © Dick Harlow

And, also be on the lookout for the Giant Swallowtail, a beautiful example of a southern species extending its range. This is just one example of a species range

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extension as the world's climate warms and the result changes our New England species' dynamic.



Papilio cresphionides, Giant Swallowtail, on Million Belle Petunia.

Photo © Dick Harlow

Here are partial lists of Butterfly, Dragonfly and Damselfly sightings observed at East View for the Month of July.

Butterfly List

- Giant Swallowtail
- Black Swallowtail
- Canadian Tiger Swallowtail
- Pearl Crescent
- Dunn Skipper
- Monarch
- Viceroy
- Red Admiral
- White Admiral
- Common Wood Nymph
- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Orange Sulphur
- Silver-spotted Skipper
- Least Skipper
- Common Ringlet
- Eyed Brown

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A characteristic Dragonfly that is out and about in meadow and field and far from water is the White-faced Meadowhawk a small red and black mid-summer to late season dragonfly.



Sympetrum obtrusum, **White-faced Meadowhawk**, on a Winterberry leaf.

Photo © Dick Harlow

Dragonfly List

- White-faced Meadowhawk
- Widow Skimmer
- 12-spotted Skimmer
- Dot-tailed Whiteface
- Common Green Darner
- Black Saddlebags
- Canada Darner

One very common Damselfly that you might see along the border of our retention ponds or marsh, and even away from water is the Eastern Forktail.

The Eastern Forktail is a good example of damselfly confusion. There are three-color phases during this specie's life that you might see along a pond, pool, or in the field. However, once you learn the color phases, confusion fades and they become fairly easy to initially identify. More positive identification with many other species of Damselflies can't occur without more specific identification by checking out their genitalia.

The male Forktail has green shoulder stripes dark abdomen and the blue band at the end of its abdomen.

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***Ischnura verticalis*, Eastern Forktail, Adult Male**

Photo © Dick Harlow

The orange shoulder stripes and dark abdomen represent the immature females;



***Ischnura verticalis*, Eastern Forktail, Immature Female**

Photo © Dick Harlow

And, the dull powdery grayish-blue damselflies are mature females.



***Ischnura verticalis*, Eastern Forktail, Adult Female**

Photo © Dick Harlow

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Damselfly List

- Marsh Bluet
- Eastern Forktail
- Familiar Bluet

All pictures were taken at EastView at Middlebury.