

NOVEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

THANKSGIVING TURKEY



Flock of Eastern Wild Turkey hens, Meleagris gallopavo silvestris. Photo © Dick Harlow

These pictures of the Eastern Wild Turkey were taken in our back yard when we lived in Milton, Vermont, **not** here at EastView.

The Eastern Wild Turkey is a subspecies of the Wild Turkey found in many parts of the United States. There are five (5) distinct subspecies of Wild Turkey. The link below will take you to a website that will show you all the sub-species of Wild Turkey.

<http://gaanderson.hubpages.com/hub/North-America-Wild-Turkey-Species#>

Tom Turkeys, males, have subtle characteristics that make them visually different from the nearly similar hens, the females, of the species. Obviously, when all plumped up and displaying for females, a male is easy to distinguish. However, when walking around feeding, males could be difficult to pick out from the hens that are also milling about. If you were to see a bird with a long bristly beard that hangs down from the chest, surrounded by other birds that do not have this characteristic, then you are looking at a male, a tom, or gobbler. Although some females may have some kind of beard, there is a marked difference in the length, in the iridescence to the wing feathers and the blue and pink skin on the head and neck that identifies the male.

NOVEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

As much as it would be nice to see Wild Turkeys here at EastView, at this time it is less likely, as there isn't the protective cover they need, nor available food for them to venture into our view. However, there is always the chance they might visit the hay fields near South Street.

I can't look at pictures of Wild Turkeys without conjuring up childhood memories of the pictures and drawings I was introduced to as a child of the New England Pilgrims and their Thanksgiving celebration.



Eastern Wild Turkey, Toms, Meleagris gallopavo silvestris Photo © Dick Harlow

Imagine, such a ubiquitous bird of our woods, almost eliminated from Vermont. Of course, in the 1800's most of Vermont and the rest of New England settlers had cleared much of the landscape for farming. With cleared land and hunting pressure, the Wild Turkey became extirpated from our landscape. However, with a decrease in farming toward the end of the 20th century and reforestation of the land, along with old abandoned fields and apple orchards, there was hope that there would again be suitable habitat for turkeys. In 1969 the Wild Turkey was reintroduced to Vermont. Citizens can now see flocks of Wild Turkeys feeding in cut cornfields beside wood lots during winter, or out and about in field and meadow during the spring. What a thankful success for one of the Pilgrims' mainstays!

NOVEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

MYTH DEBUNKED!

WOOLLY BEAR CATERPILLAR

The Woolly Bear Caterpillar is the larval stage of the Isabella Tiger Moth, *Pyrrharctia isabella*. There are about 11,000 moth species in the subfamily Arctiidae where the Woolly Bear resides and 6,000 of those are Neo-tropical representatives with only 260 species of the original 11,000 tiger moths that reside in North America.

Woolly Bears feed on grasses, dandelions, and other plants of field and meadows as well as nettles. They molt six times before pupating and their color changes each time they molt. Each molt is called an instar stage. At each molt a portion of the black setae (hairlike projections covering the body) at each end is replaced by red setae, thus the caterpillars with the widest red band represent the older individuals, or the last instar before pupating.

Debunked folklore! As much as I would like to believe the myth that a Woolly Bear caterpillar can predict a winter's severity by checking out either the length of the black joining the red of the caterpillar or the size and dimensions of the caterpillar itself, this myth is just not fact! The caterpillar's color is dependent on how well and how long the caterpillar has been feeding. If it has been feeding well, it will be large, round and fuzzy. If the caterpillar has been feeding in rough times, poor plants or poor conditions, it will be smaller and less robust. But, the actual color differentiation between black and red is simply a matter of the age of the caterpillar, i.e. which instar it is in. Sorry folks!

These three pictures of the Woolly Bear caterpillar were taken October 2014; they are different caterpillars, and within days of each other. You can see that picture #1 is of an instar caterpillar that is a relatively new instar Woolly Bear with a small amount of red. The large amount of black setae and the small center red setae suggest the age of this Woolly Bear.



1-Woolly Bear Caterpillar, *Pyrrharctia isabella* Photo © Dick Harlow

NOVEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow



2-Woolly Bear Caterpillar, Pyrrharctia isabella Photo © Dick Harlow

Looking at Instar Caterpillar #2 notice that the red setae are getting larger and thus the red color is wider until you get to #3 with a still wider section of red setae. If the folklore were true, the caterpillar for a particular year would look very similar during the fall. These pictures show that these separate caterpillars look quite different. Therefore, even though the fiction is interesting, it is not reality.



3-Woolly Bear Caterpillar, Pyrrharctia isabella Photo © Dick Harlow

However, scientists do not know why Woolly Bears wander. We do know that when the weather becomes colder they will move looking for spots where they can find shelter and pupate. But we don't know why they wander over hill and dale, over roads and rock to find such shelter, when that shelter could actually be very near to them. Their wanderlust is still a mystery!

Supposition: One hypothesis to explain their wanderlust is that it is in their DNA as an evolutionary advantage. Evolution has opted that wandering for the Woolly Bear was more successful for the species than staying in one place, being local. This means that over time, before man, roads, cars, etc., came on the scene, caterpillars that moved out of their home range were more successful breeders than those that stayed in one place and did not wander. Thus that type of behavior became more successful and thus the dominant behavior of the species.

NOVEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Residents of EastView have submitted names for our Red-tailed Hawk that visits and hunts the fields and meadows adjacent to EastView. These names will be put into a hat and a staff member will draw from the hat to determine what this fellow will be named henceforth. If there are any further suggestions please give them to Dick Harlow.



Red-tailed Hawk, Buteo jamaicensis Photo © Dick Harlow

The submitted names are: Red Baron; Big Red; Boris; Brutus; Harvey; Jamia; Jayco; Kelsey

Weather Tidbits

First 2 Weeks in November

Rainfall: 14.6 mm or .65 inches

Snow amount: 0

Highest wind for this two-week period was on November 2, 2014

Max Wind Speed and Direction: 39mph/North

NOVEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Average Wind speed for this two-week period: 4.3 mph,

Dominate 2-week wind direction: North

All Measurements based on a 24hr clock for 14 days.