

DECEMBER 15 - 31, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

END OF YEAR SUMMARY

For all extensive purposes EastView, bird-wise, is a pretty non-descript, lackluster habitat for birds. We like and appreciate the broad views of mountains in the distance, and locally wide-open fields; but only a few species of birds consider this kind of habitat likely for a stop over or to nest. Then there is the wind. Being situated in a valley near Lake Champlain. EastView is located where there is a tremendous amount of wind at times that "hollers" from south to north or from north to south. It becomes very apparent in winter when snowdrifts climb high in the lee of the wind.



October 5, 2015 Sunrise here at EastView.

Photo © Dick Harlow

However, there are a few extenuating circumstances that favor EastView. We are fortunate because we have Otter Creek just to our east, the Middlebury College compost heap and golf course to our west, and farm fields, marsh, and meadows to our south. Even though the north is commercialized with a hospital, college campus, suburban homes and the town of Middlebury, there is still enough old habitat that could be interesting to birds during all four seasons. For that matter, 2015 had birds nesting in the Maple and Elm trees along Deer Meadow Drive.

The caveat about birding at EastView is that all bird count numbers are based on birds seen on or from EastView property. The **30 acres** of EastView property represent a boundary for our bird reports that are reported on the EastView webpage. Also, binoculars or a scope can be used, as long as the observer is on EastView property. For example the two times I have seen a Pileated Woodpecker from EastView it was flying over our property. It helps that for now or until more trees are planted to restrict our view, the unrestricted views we have allow us to see many birds investigating our campus.

The total bird species observed at EastView since **July 2013 is 98 species**. Several species are birds we see only during their trek north in the spring or south in the fall, or birds we see during the winter looking for a better food source. Sometimes we will see some young birds as they explore their new surroundings or ones that lose track of where they are supposed to be. And, also we have raptors that will investigate from time to time our area for a possible meal. Whatever the case, in my mind, seeing **98 species** in a new human oriented development without a lot of protective cover is quite remarkable.

This year, 2015, we have had **70 species** visit us or fly over EastView property. As the yearly records expand we will be able to see how the changing EastView landscape and the changing Northeast climate will affect our avian visitation and population.

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Killdeer on nest, Photo © Dick Harlow

We must not forget our one nesting shorebird, the **Killdeer**! A pair of Killdeer has nested in EastView's backyard for three years. It has been a wonderful experience watching the female lay her 3-4 eggs then watch her incubate them, followed by the hatch of the precocial chicks (young born in an advanced state able to feed themselves almost immediately), but still needing protection by both parents. Finally, we watch the chicks grow until they migrate south. One big plus for the Killdeer is that we have a leash law in Middlebury as well as here at EastView. Without folks observing the leash law, we would not see the Killdeer be as successful as ours have been. However, we must keep in mind that as our wishes for all kinds of landscape projects develop here at EastView, these projects may adversely affect the Killdeer habitat. So, in our wide-open space, our area here at EastView, we need to come to some sort of consensus as to how much we want to enclose this habitat with trees and shrubs, thus resulting in the possibility of causing the Killdeer to move to more favorable locations.



Killdeer chick, Photo © Dick Harlow

2014 - 2015

The month of **May** was the number one month with 47 species in 2014 and 43 species in 2015. The second highest was **April** with 37 species in 2014 and 39 species in 2015. The biggest year so far was **2014** with 83 species, due in part because we had spring rains that flooded the fields in back of Deer Meadow causing several species of waterfowl to be seen that otherwise would not have been observed at EastView. That was also the year we had migrants that stopped by here on their way north. This gave us views of a beautiful male **Scarlet Tanager** on a bird box between Kestrel and Deer Meadow, **Chimney Swifts** flying over the Inn and beautifully adorned male warblers stopping to feed on their way to spring nesting grounds in Canada. This year, 2015, fall immature warbler migrants such as **Yellow-rumped** and **Blackpoll Warblers** checked out our shrubs for insects as they moved south. Then, the winter influx of **Redpolls** and **Purple Finches** this past winter that came down from Canada to visit during those lackluster cold winter days in January and February. What a great attractive spot this is! What a wonderful chance for us to see this many species.

VISITORS

If you have a bird feeder then you may see a **Gray Squirrel** attempting to gather food from it. Or, if you are up early you might see an **Eastern Cottontail Rabbit**

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chewing on one of your garden plants or shrubs. Other wildlife is more discrete in their travels around our campus. If you have a shed like I do, or raised beds, then you undoubtedly have **White-footed** or **Deer Mice** and **Meadow Voles**, either living in them or under them. If you are a gardener you may see tunnels or holes in the soil or plants eaten, by voles or moles. Although these fellows might be cute, and they do some damage, if we take it in our stride we can look upon it as providing food for raptors and other predators. By trying to eradicate the mice, moles or voles we also affect the raptors and foxes looking for a meal. However, if it really gets bad, use your best judgment.

In early spring we have **White-tailed Deer** visiting the lush grasses and emerging vegetation. After the does give birth we might be lucky to see a doe and her fawn. This past summer we were lucky enough to see a doe and her teenage twin fawns on Deb Venman's back lawn.

Our Retention Ponds, although the Inn's pond is filling in considerably since it was formed, the Deer Meadow Retention Pond (Dragon's Pool), is still close to its original shoreline. Dragon's Pool got its name from the abundant Dragonfly array that uses the pond. These ponds have added a great deal to the wildlife sightings and investigations. Even though these ponds are depositories for toxic runoff, there still seems to be a supply of food for **Tree** and **Barn Swallows** who enjoy the insects. In the summer the ponds represent, as well, a breeding ground for Dragonflies and Damselflies. Butterflies visit our meadow and our gardens. And, the Giant Swallowtail, normally a southern butterfly is still frequenting lilacs in the spring and petunias and Buddleja in the summer and fall. This is a real treat for those of us who enjoy these fluttering beauties.

But, the interesting observation this year is that I found where a **Coyote** had lain or bedded down on the berm that surrounds Dragon's Pool and Coyote scat at the edge of our lawn. And, anyone who is awake during fall or winter and early spring evenings will hear the Coyotes barking and howling in South St. field and meadow.

Now add the **American Bullfrogs**, **Green Frogs** **Leopard Frogs** and **Tree Frogs** to the mix and we have a chorus of interesting sounds from late spring to late summer.

Scat, the fecal droppings of animals, is evidence that we have both **Opossum** and **Raccoon** visiting our campus at night. No fox scat, but Buzz Brumbaugh did have a **Red Fox** run from EastView across South St., and a Striped Skunk sprayed his and Angelika's Golden Retriever. The only **Black Bear** was one observed in 2014 on its way to the Middlebury compost heap. There has been some concern this warm December that bears might visit our feeders.

I feel we have just scratched the surface of the wildlife we will see and that lives in our area. I hope we will be able to uncover more interesting and knowledgeable information about our shared surroundings in the future. If the meadow, marshes and uncut fields along with the woods beside Otter Creek are left alone we should have a good chance of seeing and hearing a symphony of plant color and wildlife visiting us from time to time throughout our stay at EastView.



Sunset on the Green Mts. Photo © Dick Harlow

The above view is of the Green Mountains seen from the Goose Viewing area in Addison on a cold January day.

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Although I keep a weekly list of observed bird species, I will simply list the Species seen at EastView during 2015.

BIRD SPECIES SEEN 2015 AT EASTVIEW

Canada Goose

Mallard

Hooded Merganser

American Bittern

Great Blue Heron

Green Heron

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Turkey Vulture

Northern Harrier

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Cooper's Hawk

Broad-winged Hawk

Red-tailed Hawk

Merlin

Wild Turkey

Black-bellied Plover

Killdeer

Ring-billed Gull

(Rock Pigeon)

Mourning Dove

Short-eared Owl

Common Nighthawk

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Belted Kingfisher

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Pileated Woodpecker

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Eastern Wood-Pewee

Eastern Phoebe

Great-crested Flycatcher

Eastern Kingbird

Blue Jay

American Crow

Fish Crow

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Common Raven

Purple Martin

Tree Swallow

Barn Swallow

Black-capped Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

White-breasted Nuthatch

Eastern Bluebird

American Robin

Northern Mockingbird

(European Starling)

Cedar Waxwing

Snow Bunting

Yellow-rumped Warbler

Nashville Warbler

Common Yellowthroat

Blackpoll Warbler

American Tree Sparrow

Field Sparrow

Savannah Sparrow

Song Sparrow

White-crowned Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

Northern Cardinal

Red-winged Blackbird

Brown-headed Cowbird

Common Grackle

Bobolink

Baltimore Oriole

Purple Finch

House Finch

Common Redpoll

American Goldfinch

(House Sparrow)

Birds in red and in parentheses are not indigenous to North America.

Leaving out the more common birds that are fairly regular at feeders, it might be interesting to see the number of weeks the most and second most frequently observed visitors were observed on our campus. The numbers you see are based on weekly records for the year.

For example a Turkey Vulture was seen for 25 weeks and a Northern Harrier was seen for 9 weeks in 2015.

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Raptor:	1. Turkey Vulture – 25	2. Northern Harrier – 9
Heron:	1. Great Blue Heron – 21	2. Green Heron – 12
Shorebird	1. Killdeer – 14	2. Bl-bellied Plover – 1
Woodpecker:	1. Downy - 52	2. Hairy – 8
Flycatcher:	1. Eastern Phoebe – 9	2. Eastern. Kingbird – 5
Thrush:	1. Eastern Bluebird – 25	2. American. Robin – 21
Swallow:	1. Tree Swallow – 15	2. Barn Swallow – 10
Warbler:	1. Yellow-rumped – 3	2. C. Yellowthroat – 3
Blackbird:	1. R-wing Blackbird – 23	2. Common Grackle - 18
Sparrow:	1. Song Sparrow - 26	2. Dk-eyed Junco – 21
Finch:	1. Am. Goldfinch – 52	2. House Finch – 18

Generally we are familiar with some, but the most significant visitor this past year in my mind was the Dark-eyed Junco. Primarily because it is a winter migrant that has consistently been here each year arriving from October to December, staying with us until March or April, all dependent on the weather. It has been with us every week during the winter and arrives and leaves near the same time each year.

Although the Common Redpoll, rated third in the Finch category, being observed for 12 weeks, I feel having a visitor from northern Canada from the second week in January to the first week in April is also significant.

We do have 5 species that can be seen every week of the year, guaranteed!

Rock Pigeon
American Crow

Mourning Dove
American Goldfinch

Downy Woodpecker

MAMMALS - 10 Species

Eastern Coyote
Red Fox
Striped Skunk
Raccoon
Opossum
Eastern Gray Squirrel
Meadow Vole
White-footed Mouse
Deer Mouse
Eastern Cottontail Rabbit

REPTILES - 2 Species

Garter Snake
Snapping Turtle

AMPHIBIANS - 5 Species

American Bullfrog
Green Frog
Leopard Frog
Gray Tree Frog
American Toad

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SPECIFIC INSECTS

BUTTERFLIES - 25 species

Canadian Tiger Swallowtail
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail
Black Swallowtail
Giant Swallowtail
Cabbage White
Orange Sulphur
Clouded Sulphur
Bronze Copper
Eastern Tailed Blue
Summer Azure
Silvery Blue
Meadow Fritillary
Pearl Crescent
Mourning Cloak
Red Admiral
Painted Lady
Viceroy
Common Ringlet
Common Wood-Nymph
Monarch
Silver-spotted Skipper
European Skipper
Least Skipper
Delaware Skipper
Dun Skipper

DRAGONFLIES – 11 Species

Common Green Darner
Canada Darner
Twelve-spotted Skimmer
Common Whitetail
Widow Skimmer
Eastern Pondhawk
White-faced Meadowhawk
Ruby Meadowhawk
Yellow-legged Meadowhawk
Black Meadowhawk
Dot-tailed Whiteface

DAMSELFLIES - 3 Species

Northern Bluet
Marsh Bluet
Eastern Forktail

DECEMBER SOLSTICE

December 21 in the Northern Hemisphere and December 22 in the Southern Hemisphere is considered the December Solstice. The characteristic of the December Solstice is that we will have the longest night and see the shortest day, the least amount of daylight. This is just the opposite in the Southern Hemisphere where they will have the shortest night and the longest amount of daylight.

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This year, 2015, has been quite a year astronomically. We have had a blue moon, a blood moon, a super moon and now a full (cold) moon on December 25, Christmas! Add lunar eclipses to the mix and we can say that this has been an astronomical year! The last Christmas to have a full moon was in 1977, and the next will be in 2038. Certainly most of us will probably not make the next one, so I hope the weather cooperated and you got outside to view this full moon on Christmas night.



First year **Red-tailed Hawk**, *Buteo jamaicensis* on December 20, 2015. Photo © Dick Harlow

FROM Dec 1-14

THE ANSWER TO WHAT IS MY NAME?



Photo © Dick Harlow

White-faced Meadowhawk

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Weather Tidbits

DECEMBER Totals

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EDT).

PRECIPITATION

DECEMBER 2015

Total Precipitation: 100.6 mm or 4.0 inches

SNOW

121mm 4.75" = 25.2 mm of water or just under one inch.

Overcast Days: 23

WIND

Highest wind DECEMBER 24: 29 MPH, Direction: South

Average Wind speed for DECEMBER: 2.6 mph

Dominate Wind Direction: South

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 12

Days w/wind gusts >30 MPH: 0

TEMPERATURE

Unusually warm temperatures for this time of year.

Mean Temp: 9.3 C° 48.7 °F

High Temp: 26.6 C° 79.9 °F

Low Temp: -7.1 C° 19.2 °F

0.0 C° - Temperature Days: (32°F)

MAX <= 0.0: = 6

MIN <= 0.0: = 1

FULL MOON/COLD MOON



December 24, 2015 Christmas Eve Full Moon,
AKA Cold Moon Photo © Dick Harlow