APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

TREE SWALLOW

Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor*
Photo © Dick Harlow

Skimming our retention ponds or performing acrobatics in the air chasing insects is this bird's primary daily activity. Anyone who likes to sit outside on a calm day or windy day and not be bothered by mosquitoes or other insects can thank both the wind and the swallows. Both Tree and Barn Swallows along with Purple Martins are the swallows we have here during the summer. There are other swallows that will migrate through to their nest sites, but the Bank, Cliff and Rough-winged Swallows rarely fly here at EastView except during migration.

Tree Swallows are cavity nesters. They will nest in a box that is near water or in a field as long as it is on a pole that puts the box high enough to be 'out of harm's way.' I have seen many Tree Swallows nesting in Woodpecker holes high up in dead trees, but they will gladly accept a Purple Martin gourd or a Bluebird box.

'Out of harm's way' means that the box should be high enough and have a baffle to prevent Raccoons, snakes, and other predators from attacking the eggs and young in the box.

They do have a nemesis, the old world weaver finch, introduced to the United States in 1852, called the English Sparrow or currently known as the House Sparrow. Because House Sparrows have been known to kill female swallows while they sit on eggs, or kill baby birds while the adults are out catching insects, it is important to try and provide nesting cavities that are safe for Tree Swallows and Purple Martins.

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor*
Photo © Dick Harlow

Tree Swallows migrate in late winter from Central America and parts of the southern USA as they move up into the rest of this country and Canada, moving as far north as the tree line in Alaska and Canada. They are our earliest swallow migrants, flying here when the ice is just breaking up in our lakes and ponds. They are also early in picking a nest box, consequently they are in competition with other early cavity nesters such as House Sparrows, Eastern Bluebirds and House Wrens, all vying for a cavity in which to build their nests. A positive note about having bluebird boxes on the far side of the retention pond is that they are out in the open away from trees, shrubs and high grass making it less attractive to House Wrens, and curious predators. Bluebirds will nest in boxes that are at least 100 yards from each other, so not every box will be occupied by just one species. A negative point is that as the House Sparrow population increases over time and since they are very early nesters, they have the opportunity to occupy a box early, or take over a box from another species. And, what is safe for a Tree Swallow is also safe for a House Sparrow.

The early swallow migrants sometimes run the risk of not finding enough insects when they arrive here and will die of starvation. If they die holed up in a well-located nest box, another swallow will simply build its nest on top of the emaciated dried out body. Whatever the case, once a Tree Swallow has a nest, laid one clutch of eggs successfully, and brought up the chicks to fledge, the adults and young then leave the area, start their molt and migrate south. This is not all done at the same time. Tree Swallows will be successful fledging young at different times, but most all will have fledged by the middle of August. If you are accustomed seeing these acrobats skimming the water for a drink or chasing insects in the sky, it becomes quite noticeable when they leave. But, as birds do, they need to molt, change their feather attire and dress for the winter months. They do that by gathering in large flocks, (safety in numbers), usually near the ocean. Once by the ocean, they finish their molt and begin their slow migration south.

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

TIMBER RATTLESNAKE

Black Timber Rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*
Photo © Dick Harlow

It may seem weird that I am introducing a poisonous snake in EastView's nature notes. However, I feel we all need to understand these creatures that we fear as well as those we love.

Primitive man had to learn to deal with venomous snakes and constrictors depending on what part of the planet he lived on. The Bible attests to how loathsome snakes were considered in ancient times. The Bible highlights them over 80 times; they are mentioned in Genesis 3:1, Exodus 7:12, Numbers 21:7, Acts 28:3, among others. Then and now we consider snakes as a metaphor for evil, when in fact snakes are amoral, have no evil, but are acting only in their best interest.

Have you ever walked in the woods and wondered whether you would see a poisonous snake? Not likely if you live in northern New England. Vermont is fairly safe; for that matter, northern New England is free of poisonous snakes unless you live on the border to New York. Is that a good thing? I'm sure it is to some people, but to me they have a place in our ecosystem and where they are rare they should be saved.

Do we have Timber Rattlesnakes in Vermont? On the web some spots will tell you that the Timber Rattlesnake can be found in Vermont and that it is the only poisonous snake left in Vermont. Other spots say that the Copperhead is in Vermont, but not the rattlesnake. And, then there are others that will tell you that there has been no sighting of a poisonous snake for some time in Vermont.

Yet, if you look it up on the Internet the comments are that the Timber Rattlesnake is severely threatened and endangered here in Vermont. This suggests that in a few places in Vermont one could still find the Timber Rattlesnake. Do they live in New York? Yes. Do they pay attention to state lines? No. Can you say the same thing about Copperhead snakes? Yes. Therefore, I think it wise to at least write about them. I had to go to the Poconos to find my first ever observation with the chance to take a picture of a beautiful, rare black female Timber Rattlesnake. We watched her, from 20 feet, come out from under a rock ledge so she could bask peacefully in the hot sun. We did not disturb the snake any more then what you can see in the picture. Snakes are cold blooded and thus need to come into the sun to increase their body temperature. Being cold-blooded means that reptiles have to hibernate in cold climates.

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Rattlesnakes and Copperheads prefer deciduous forests and rocky outcroppings, ledges where they can hide or lie in wait for an unsuspecting rodent or bird. They represent absolutely no threat to man if we leave them alone. They are shy reptiles, much preferring to stay hidden or slide away from human danger. But if confronted with no perceived retreat the rattlesnake will let you know that it is unhappy by the sound emitted from its rattle. The rattle is hollow, and is formed by interlocking segments of keratin, the same protein that makes your hair and finger nails. The rattle is their way of warning that you are too close and if you do not heed the warning they will strike defensively! The beautifully camouflaged Copperheads on the other hand, do not have a rattle, cannot warn you and if threatened, without possible escape, will strike.

Do we need to worry about snakes here at EastView? The only snake that has been seen on EastView property is the non-poisonous Common Garter Snake, a very useful snake feeding on insects, slugs, worms and rodent populations.

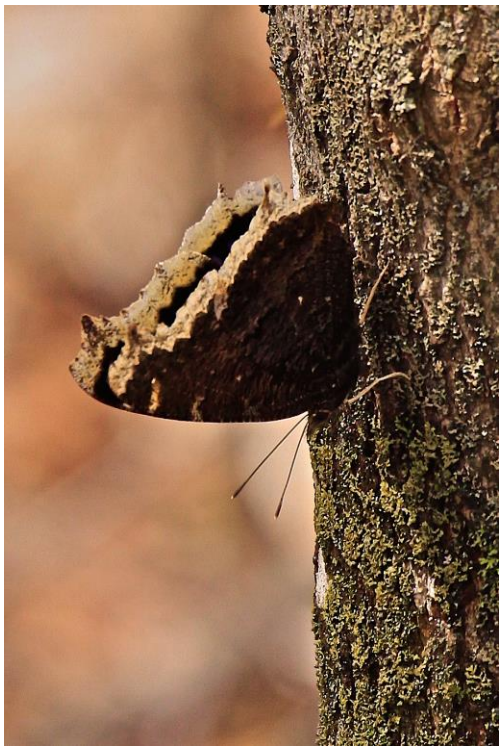
Do we need to worry about poisonous snakes? I rather think not. When walking in the woods I still would recommend however, that while strolling along a rocky ledge tree lined path, be observant of what is on the ground, not just what is above or in front of you.

April Butterfly

We don't often see butterflies flying in April, but there is one individual species that we could see. In the Northeast, one of the earliest butterflies to be observed is the Mourning Cloak. Its life cycle spans 11-12 months long compared to the shorter lifespan of other species.

Since its range tends to be in the mountains and forests of the north, it seems fitting that this butterfly is the state insect of Montana.

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow



Mourning Cloak, *Nymphalis antiopa*
Photo © Dick Harlow

The Mourning Cloak is found in the Northern Hemisphere in Europe, Asia and North America; its name in North America is thought to have been translated from the Scandinavian language meaning Mourning Cloak. This suggests that its name in the US came from Scandinavian settlers to the new world. England's name for this butterfly is 'Camberwell Beauty,' certainly different from Mourning Cloak.

The Mourning Cloak larva feed primarily on deciduous tree leaves such as willow, elm and poplar.

Mourning Cloak, *Nymphalis antiopa*
Photo © Dick Harlow

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

One reason that we would see Mourning Cloak butterflies in April is that they tend to winter over. Being a northern butterfly, this species does not migrate, and therefore, the larva pupates under peeling bark of dead trees or in the cavities of living trees to winter over. This is why the Mourning Cloak is one of the first butterflies we see in the spring.

But, being out that early with few flowers how do they survive? Mourning Cloaks feed on sap and decaying fruit and derive minerals from muddy wallows and animal "poop". Damaged limbs or other parts of trees along with past sapsucker holes will bleed sap from the tree as the sap rises in the spring. Much of the fruit from fruit trees that has fallen to the ground or is not eaten will tend to decay after the snow has melted. These are perfect early feeding spots for the Mourning Cloak Butterfly.

Procreating the species is the name of the game in the natural world, and thus being the first to reproduce without depending on migration and with fewer predators around provides a definite advantage. So, if you see one of these strong fliers lazily flying by you it would be greatly appreciated if you would let Dick Harlow know.

****

SEDGE

Droopy Sedge, *Carex crinita*
Photo © Dick Harlow

"Sedges have edges and grasses have joints, while rushes are round and other grasses abound where willows are found."

Or more simply,

"Sedges have edges, grasses have joints and rushes are round the world around."

Whichever one learns, the basic characteristic of any sedge is its triangular stem, either a rounded triangle or a sharp triangle. There are no joints in any sedge and a sedge stem is not round, so it definitely cannot be confused with grass or a rush.

One sedge, Carex crinita, (there doesn't seem to be a common name for this sedge, other than my term for it, Droopy Sedge) that is very easy to identify without having to feel the edges of the

stem, is the drooping bristly female flower or inflorescence as it hangs down from the stem. There just isn't another plant that looks like it. It is fairly common in wet areas, marshes, wet meadows or along lake and stream shores.

Drooping Sedge, *Carex crinita*
Photo © Dick Harlow

Generally, the average person looks at a sedge or rush growing in a field or marsh and passes it off as grass. Sedges and Rushes are not grasses. They are in their own individual family of plants that are found in both dry and wet environments.

****

Hummer Note

As of this writing Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are in PA and NJ. If you are planning to feed hummingbirds, please read National Audubon's note on feeding Hummingbirds, which follow.

"Choose a hummingbird feeder that comes apart completely for regular scrubbing, inside and out, with a bottlebrush and hot water. Use only a mix of **four parts water to one part plain white sugar**—never use honey, which promotes dangerous fungal growth, molasses, or brown, raw, or organic sugar, which contain levels of iron that could be lethal. Plain white sugar perfectly mimics the chemical composition of natural nectar; don't waste money on commercial mixes. It's not necessary to boil the water, but keep any extra nectar refrigerated, and empty the feeder every few days, more often in hot weather. **Never use red dye**; nectar is naturally clear, and the coloring could be harmful.**"**

****

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

MAMMALS OBSERVED

- Gray Squirrel
- Eastern Cottontail
- Muskrat

Note:

Rock Pigeon was killed by unknown species of Raptor. Only its bloody feathers remained on the ground as evidence of the kill.

Weather Tidbits

First Two-Week Totals for APRIL

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EDT).

PRECIPITATION

APRIL 2015 Total Precipitation: 26.4 mm or 1.03 inches

Precipitation includes rain and snow melt.

Snow Days: 3

Snowfall for APRIL 2015:

120 mm or 4.7 inches

Overcast Days, APRIL: 7

WIND

Highest wind APRIL 2: 35 MPH, Direction: SSW

Average Wind speed for two weeks, APRIL 2015: 4.3 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 12

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 4

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 6.1 C^0 43.0 ^0F

High Temp: 23.4 C^0 74.1 ^0F

APRIL 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

Low Temp: -7.8 C^0 18.0^{0}F

DAYS OF:

Max. Temp: 0.0 C^0/32^{0}F: 0 days

Min. Temp: 0.0 C^0/32^{0}F: 6 days

Min. Temp: -18 C^0/-0.4F: 0 days