

JULY 1-14, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

SWEET CLOVERS

Yellow and White Sweet Clovers are two of the plentiful clovers we have growing in our fields, meadows, by our ponds, and on the side of the road, but especially in the field in back of the Inn or down by 'Dragon's Pool', Deer Meadow Retention Pond.

YELLOW SWEET CLOVER



Yellow Sweet Clover, *Melilotus officinalis*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

Yellow Sweet Clover, *Melilotus officinalis*, was originally native to Europe and Asia. Now it is found in North America and the rest of the world. It grows from 4-6 feet and flowers during the spring and summer. It is the first of the sweet clovers to flower.

Sweet Clovers contain coumarin that converts to dicoumarol, when the plant is moldy. Dicoumarol is a powerful anticoagulant toxin. Even with these toxic characteristics it is grown in hay fields and cut for food despite its toxic characteristics. Since it is high in nutrition for livestock the key here is that hay containing sweet clover must be well dried, otherwise the livestock might get sick! Another benefit that yellow sweet clover has is that it is an excellent green manure and is a major source of nectar for honeybees.

WHITE SWEET CLOVER



White Sweet Clover, *Melilotus albus*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

All the characteristics of Yellow Sweet Clover can also be attributed to White Sweet Clover, *Melilotus albus*, except the color of the flower. However, White Sweet Clover is considered more of a major source of nectar for bees.

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White Sweet Clover was introduced to North America and Canada in the 17th century as a primary food for cattle. Since that time it has been used for nitrogen fixing and recovery of poor soils. The only disadvantage of either of these clovers is that it has become invasive and can out compete native plants.

GIANT SWALLOWTAIL

On June 5, 2015 the first Giant Swallowtail, *Papilio cresphontes*, showed up to feed on our Miss Kim Lilac here at EastView. This is the FOY (first of year) for this butterfly and the earliest I have recorded it in the three years I have observed this species here. Please understand this species had not been seen consistently in Vermont before 2010.



Giant Swallowtail, *Papilio cresphontes*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

As mentioned last year this species has moved from its normal range of the coastal Carolinas to Florida and the Gulf Coast to sometimes being observed in the inland Carolinas north to southern New York and Massachusetts. However, it is now here in Vermont and has been here for the past 4 years. It is exciting to witness the evolution of an organism as it extends itself beyond its normal range.

In the south the Giant Swallowtail's primary host plant are citrus trees. Elsewhere, such as in Vermont, the host plant might be Northern Prickly-ash, *Zanthoxylum americanum*, which is an aromatic shrub or low tree, or the Wafer Ash, also known as Common Hoptree or just Hoptree, *Ptelea trifoliata*. Interesting that the Prickly-ash's berries, when squeezed have a marked citrus odor.



Giant Swallowtail, *Papilio cresphontes*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

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GREEN HERON



Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

This is one of the fellows that visit our two ponds during the summer, the Green Heron. The Great Blue Heron, and American Bittern are the two large sized heron species that also enjoy a visit, as well, to our retention ponds. Although I have seen these three at the Deer Meadow Retention Pond individually, I have not observed them there at the same time.

As herons go the Green Heron is fairly small, about 16-18 inches total body length. Because the Green Heron has a couple of look-a-likes taxonomists are refining their craft and have separated these look-a-likes. There is uncertainty whether the Green Heron of North America is the same as the Green Heron in Central and South America. For us birders, a Green Heron seen is still a Green Heron observed.

Any small wetland could find Green Heron hunting during either at dusk or dawn. The primary reason for this is that they are generally nocturnal, although if you were to visit Florida, you could see them during the day. That is not to suggest you would never see them during the day here, it really depends on how hungry and stressed they are.



Green Heron, *Butorides virescens*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

Green Herons have the interesting behavior of using tools to get food. They will pick up a piece of bread discarded by a human and drop it into the water. If it is not bread it could be an insect or anything the heron has determined will entice small fish to come close enough so that the heron can either grasp one or spear it with its bill.

This heron is very observant of its surroundings and has shown that it will take advantage if it leads to food. This behavior has been documented, video taped, shown on TV as a sign of an animal's ability to pick and use items it knows will help it catch food. Thus, the Green Heron is considered a tool using species.

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FLEDGLINGS

This is the time of year when you will see many young birds flying about! We have been very fortunate here at EastView. I have not seen any major predation of the bird boxes or gourds other than a Common Grackle venturing too close and being run off by the tenants. Crows have been at a minimum and there hasn't been to date any evidence of Raccoons marauding boxes. Therefore, we have the good fortune of seeing many young swallows and evidence of other young birds flying about our campus!

Young birds when they first leave the nest are called fledglings; after several days they are young immatures and move to just immatures in a week. However, all immatures have their own species-specific plumage. Besides seeing an increase in the numbers of birds as we did the end of June and into July, the immatures do not pose a threat to either sex of their species; therefore they will fly with the adults, using this time on the breeding grounds to learn as much as possible by watching, mimicking, flying, feeding and just following the lead of the adults. Sometimes you can tell a newly fledged bird because the parent will continue to feed it when the fledgling leaves the box or nest. But shortly after they are out and about, they develop their independence and go about learning to feed themselves. Also, young birds look different than the adults. Robins still have spots on their breasts, young swallows will not have the bright plumage of their parents and will be slightly drab, young starlings are brown not blackish. Then there are the young of wood warblers who have plumage colors all their own; combine that with the changes in plumage of the adults into their winter plumage and we have a mix that is difficult to identify!

For now just enjoy the fact that we have a plethora of young birds which means that this year, even with all the rain we have had, has been a very successful year for nesting birds. And, remember, this is the time of year when the young and adult Tree Swallows start to move to the coast. Once the young Tree Swallows have fledged, they will begin their slow migration to the coast and then south.

AFRICAN IRIS

Interesting iris, the African Iris also called the Fairy Iris is a rhizomatous perennial plant. Considered a weed in Africa, it is still grown in many public gardens. Cutting the seed heads off before they split and throw their seed about prevents its spread.



African Iris, *Dietes grandiflora*,
Photo © Dick Harlow

This Iris' blooms are white with yellow at the center where the petal is attached and has light violet petals.

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OBSERVATIONS

FIRST TWO WEEKS IN JULY

MAMMALS

- White-tailed Deer
- Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
- Muskrat
- Meadow Vole

AMPHIBIANS

- Gray Tree Frog, heard
- Leopard Frog
- American Toad
- American Bullfrog

BUTTERFLIES

- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Red Admiral
- Least Skipper

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

- Common Green Darner
- Common Whitetail
- Widow Skimmer
- 12-spotted Skimmer

DAMSELFLIES

- Eastern Forktail

July Two Week Weather Tidbits

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EDT).

PRECIPITATION

JULY 2015 Total Precipitation: 30.6 mm or 1.2 inches

Overcast Days: 5

WIND

Highest wind first two weeks in JULY: 28 MPH, Direction: North

Average Wind speed for first two weeks in JULY 2015: 0.6 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: South

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 4

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 0

TEMPERATURE

Temperature First Two Weeks in July

Mean Temp: 23.7 C⁰ 74.7 °F

High Temp: 34.1 C⁰ 93.4 °F

Low Temp: 15.8 C⁰ 60.4 °F