

# MAY 15-31, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

## GREAT BLUE HERON



**Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias***

Photo © Dick Harlow

What a neat sight on the banks of "Dragon's Pool", the Deer Meadow Retention Pond, May 1<sup>st</sup> of this year! A Great Blue Heron, relaxed, preening, enjoying a sunny spring day, stood for 5-8 minutes before fixing himself up and taking flight!

The Great Blue Heron is the largest North American heron usually found on the shores of lakes, ponds, or marshes, in fact any wetland shore, fresh or salt that might provide a fish, frog or vole for food. The only exception to its size would be the various heron subspecies found in different parts of the continent, including Mexico and Canada. Primarily, the all white subspecies *Ardea Herodias occidentalis* that lives in Florida and is found primarily near saltwater, is considered the largest subspecies. However, David Sibley has suggested that even though there are intermediate looking Great Blue Herons, the all white one that only lives in Florida could be a separate species. The Great Blue Heron with an all white head, is called **Wurdeemann's Heron**, and is considered a subspecies of the Great Blue. The taxonomic debate has been raging for years and is still going on.

The Great Blue Heron we see here in the northeast nests in colonies near or next to ponds or

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lakes. A colony is called a heronry. Usually a great blue heronry has only Great Blue Herons nesting, with maybe other species on the periphery. Heronry is a more specific term than rookery. A heronry may have as few as 5 or 6 nests, to as many as 500 nests with an average of 160 stick nests in the colony; whereas a 'rookery' accommodates different species rather than primarily one species. There is safety in numbers! Even though the Great Blue Heron is a large bird with a formidable beak and presence they still fear predation while nesting. Although they will feed on almost anything alive that is small to medium size either aquatic or not, they do have to leave the nest to feed. At that time, even with the din of other herons in the colony, their eggs and young are vulnerable.

There are many predators that see a heronry as easy "pickings" during the nesting season. Crows, hawks, ravens, vultures, raccoons and bears. However, there is one predator that can and will attack Great Blue Herons in all phases of its life cycle from egg, young in the nest, fledgling to adult, and that is the Bald Eagle. Of course this is not a constant, but evidence has shown that if a predator is hungry enough it will take chances to survive.



**Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias***

Photo © Dick Harlow

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### CATTAILS

There are two major cattails that can be found in our state. The Narrowleaf Cattail, *Typha angustifolia* and the Common Cattail, *Typha latifolia*. In some instances just looking at the width of the leaf might be enough to tell what you are looking at; however the sure way is to look at the flower. The female part of the flower (**pistillate**) is of course the one that will develop seed. Its color starts off as green developing into a deep brown. The male part of the flower (**staminate**) is just above the female flower on the same stalk colored light tan gray maturing to a beige light brown or mottled gray-brown.



**Narrowleaf Cattail, *Typha angustifolia***

Photo © calphotos.berkeley.edu

The picture above shows the Narrowleaf Cattail, *Typha angustifolia*, the matured brown female flower with the male section above, separated from each other by a portion of the stalk. The separation can be short or long, but as long as there is a definite separation you are looking at a Narrowleaf Cattail.

The interesting observation about Narrowleaf Cattail is that it is brackish tolerant. Common Cattail can be found growing in freshwater seeps along the coast, but Narrowleaf Cattail can

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withstand being inundated by brackish water and still survive. Narrowleaf can live in both worlds and therefore has the ability to develop in a broader ecological environment.



**A) Common Cattail, *Typha latifolia***

Photo © Dick Harlow

These two pictures of the Common Cattail, *Typha latifolia*, show both the width of the leaf and the lack of separation between the pistillate and staminate parts of the flower.

When looking from a distance the width of the leaf can be deceiving. Looking at the first picture (A) of Common Cattail the leaves appears narrower than what is seen in the second picture (B). In the second picture the leaves really appear wide to my eye, and I can say, without looking at the flower that this cattail must be a Common Cattail. Not sure I could do that with the first picture, (A), by just using the leaf as a guide even though it may look wide to the eye. However, the flower definitely tells the truth, that this is a picture of the Common Cattail. Interesting fact here is that the first picture was taken here in the Deer Meadow Drive retention pond whereas the second picture was taken in a bog in Vermont. Also notice that in EastView's cattail the pistillate and staminate parts seem narrower in appearance than do the same parts in the second picture. Does the growing conditions have an effect on the size of flower parts? Should flower parts be affected by these conditions of less light and more competition with different plants? An educated guess would say yes, but I have no proof or research to back up that comment.

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**B) Common Cattail, *Typha latifolia***

Photo © Dick Harlow

It is still an interesting observation that the leaf width and flower parts appear different and that each was growing in a different type of environment.

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### WHITE CLOVER



**White Clover, *Trifolium repens*, wild type,**

Photo © Dick Harlow

When walking along our paths in back of the Inn have you looked at the different clovers and wondered which ones you are looking at? There is White Clover, Alsike Clover and Red Clover. Most people can tell the difference between red and white clovers by looking at the flower or leaf. But, varieties of Alsike and White Clover can have a similar appearance. And, without the flower as a guide the leaf fringe or the design on the leaf of some varieties can be quite vexing.

Most of us don't realize that there are several different types of White Clover, *Trifolium repens*. Tri- means three and folium- means leaf. Repens in Latin refers to the creeping nature of White Clover. White Clover is also called Dutch White Clover, White Dutch Clover, Patriot White Clover, New Zealand White Clover and Ladino Clover. Basically, these names refer to the different sizes of White Clover. Yes, these names are arbitrary based on the size of the plant; each type of clover is either small, intermediate or large. If the clover is small it is usually considered "wild" and weedy, and will have "wild" in the name or on the label.

Intermediate sized varieties of White Clover, such as various Canadian types can tolerate a low soil pH. The New Zealand White Clover is an improved version of White Clover and is used in pastures. The intermediate sizes of White Clover tend to be more tolerant of heat.

The large type is Ladino Clover, a large variety, also known as the giant in the group. Ladino is cold tolerant, doesn't tolerate heat, and does well in optimum soil and weather conditions.

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**White Clover, *Trifolium repens***

Photo © Dick Harlow

Notice that the blossom, although it has a reddish base to each petal, the blossom itself does not have any red showing on the individual petal, a blush of pink, but not red as seen in Alsike Clover.

## **Have You Noticed**

Compared to last year, it is interesting to note how many days our plants are behind their flowering from last year.

### **Beginning flowering dates:**

#### **Small Rhododendron**

2014 – April 15

2015 – May 5 = +20 days

#### **Crabapples**

2014 – April 30

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2015 - May 10 = +10 days

## **Yellow Lady Slipper**

2014 - April 20

2015 - May 21 = +31 days

## **Frothegila**

2014 - April 30

2015 - May 8 = +8 days

**These dates suggest 2015 is behind last year by as little as a week to as much as a month. This shows what a hard winter we had. It will be interesting to see whether other garden plants can catch up or will their flowering lag behind into summer. I'm sure by fall most everything will be where they are supposed to be.**

## **ALSO OBSERVED IN MAY**

### **Mammals**

- Muskrat

### **Amphibians**

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

### **Butterflies**

- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Meadow Fritillary (FOY)
- Silvery Blue (FOY)
- Tiger Swallowtail (FOY)

### **Dragonflies**

- Dot-tailed Whiteface



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**Weather Tidbits**

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EDT).

**MAY PRECIPITATION**

**MAY 2015 Total Precipitation: 78.6 mm or 3.1 inches**

**MAY Overcast Days: 7**

**MAY WIND**

**Highest wind: 38 MPH, Direction: S**

**Average Wind speed for MAY 2015: 3.7 mph,**

**Dominate Wind Direction: South**

**Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 22**

**Days w/wind gusts >30 MPH: 4**

**TEMPERATURE**

**Mean Temp: 18.9 C<sup>0</sup> = 66.0 °F**

**High Temp: 34.4 C<sup>0</sup> = 93.9 °F**

**Low Temp: -0.6 C<sup>0</sup> = 30.9 °F**

**DAYS OF:**

**Min. Temp. 0.0 C<sup>0</sup>/32°F: 1 day**