

DECEMBER 15 – 31, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

- 2017 SUMMARY -



First Fall snow November 2017, cottage backyards showing large meadow and fields. © Dick Harlow

This year has been an interesting wildlife year, for that matter, every year is interesting to me. If you take the land we are on, disrupt it with construction, put it back together with buildings and rudimentary landscaping then we could consider EastView to be five years old. As the landscape matures the wildlife will increase to make use of the landscape. There still isn't a great deal of cover for animals to use unless you consider the gardens around the cottages and the few trees that have been planted.



Eastern Chipmunk, Early Summer, © Dick Harlow

The large field and meadow in back of the cottages is **Meadow Vole** heaven. Gardens are just extension of this heaven. **Eastern Cottontail Rabbits** and **Eastern Chipmunk** have decided to add our gardens, our out buildings and raised beds to their territory. **Deer Mouse** and the **White-footed Mouse** have been seen in the past, but not this year for this report. However, we do have a **Brown/Norway Rat**, a new rodent for EastView, that has done some diggings in one garden that I know of! The size of its holes is fairly large, doing some damage to perennials in the garden, which I am sure will be remediated next spring! **Gray Squirrels** were eager harbingers of our bird feeders during winter, but have not been back since May.

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White-tailed Deer, Spring 2017, © Dick Harlow

White-tailed Deer make use of the new grasses and unmowed berm meadow in the spring and summer and whatever pickings they can garner from the gardens during winter nights. During the hunting season, late fall, deer remain a mystery trying to stay out of sight.

At night, usually late at night, in the meadow and sometimes closer, cottage residents can hear the howling and yipping of an **Eastern Coyote** family. Recently, one resident observed two Coyotes standing on the mowed berm between the Inn and Deer Meadow Drive. An omen to any free roaming small dogs and cats.

Those residents out walking have noticed both the **Red Fox** and **Gray Fox** visiting our campus. The Gray Fox this year was the first recorded observation.

Footprints and fecal matter give evidence that we have been visited by at least one **Raccoon**, likely more. But, we have limited cover for Raccoons to take up any form of permanent shop.



Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, cottage lawn,
© Dick Harlow

A **Striped Skunk** was not seen, but its odor was apparent early this past spring. I have been asked about whether we have been visited by **Opossum**; all I can say is no observation or indication of its presence as yet.

Realistically, mammalian predators like a Coyote, Fox, Raccoon, Skunk or even a Bobcat are not interested in areas that have a low population of prey or little cover to hide within. Too much energy expended for a meal with all the competition that exists for the same food source. And, that doesn't take into account the avian predators such as Owls, Cooper's, Red-tailed Hawk or other winter hawks or falcons hunting for similar food sources.

Therefore, even though Meadow Voles or rats are a gardener's foil, headache, and desire for removal from his/her garden, they represent a vital source of food for those animals we enjoy viewing. Yes, they are out in the meadow and field, but it is unrealistic to think we can force them to stay only in the meadow or field. Are they a pain to have in the garden? Yes! However, I like the fact that when I hear a coyote, see a fox or watch a hawk scanning the fields or my backyard for a meal, I have enabled those animals to be here thru my gardening philosophy.

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Of course, as our campus matures other subtle wildlife will make their way onto our campus. For example, a young **Garter Snake**, which is non-poisonous has been observed close to the meadow; but this is the first time one was seen actually moving across the front walk of a cottage.



Bullfrog, *Rana catesbeiana*, South Pond
© Dick Harlow

A **Green Frog** was observed next to a cottage. Toads have been observed before, but this is a first for Green Frog.

Bull Frogs, and **Pickerel Frogs** still make up the bulk of amphibians in the ponds although **Peepers** have been heard, but not seen.

The newcomer to the South Pond, a body of water that previously had no fish, now all of a sudden, this past spring fish were seen. A **Goldfish** and a small group of **baitfish** were observed. Obviously, this is not a case for "Spontaneous Generation," but of someone releasing their aquarium members into the pond. Type of baitfish was not determined. Is this a problem? Not for the herons or kingfisher, but certainly for the fish.

We didn't see evidence of a female **Snapping Turtle** laying eggs as we did in 2016. Nor was there any evidence this year that the young snapping turtles released into the south pond survived the 2017 winter.

We have seen an increase in **Eastern Cottontail Rabbits** during the spring of this year, which would be natural. As evidence that something is thinning the rabbit population, there have been no sightings for the past two months this Fall. However, once the first snowfall fell in December a few rabbit tracks were observed.

It is the feeling of many people within our community that we as a community, are privileged to be able to view wildlife around our campus. Therefore, it is hoped that as a community we will strive to maintain landscaping introductions that will benefit wildlife.

2017 MIDDLEBURY CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

After fairly mild temperatures leading up to the end of the second week of December we were brought back to reality by a hard freeze at the end of the second week into the third week of December. The snow and freezing temperatures along with the possibility this might be either a finch or Snowy Owl year created a feeling of optimism.

The Middlebury Christmas Bird Count is usually conducted between the 17th to the 19th of the month. This year it was conducted on Sunday December 17th.

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Cooper's Hawk, *Accipiter cooperii*, Adult,
EastView cottage backyard © Dick Harlow

ONE YEAR IT WAS THE YEAR OF THE SNOWY OWL, ANOTHER YEAR IT WAS THE YEAR OF FEW BIRDS BECAUSE OF THE SNOW COVER AND FROZEN WATER COURSES. ANOTHER YEAR IT WAS A FINCH YEAR. WHAT WILL '17 BE?

HARD all-day fieldwork with friends that have a similar interest in trying to find bird species in a prescribed area of observation is the goal for the day. This is basic fieldwork conducted by citizens and scientists alike for the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count and has been going on for more than 90 years.

December 17th for the Middlebury count turned out to be a beautiful, cold, -4F in early AM, not getting above 18F all day, but a windless day with abundant sunshine and about 4-6 inches of snow on the ground. Some might consider that too cold to go out, but for a birder it was a grand day! Now, all we needed were the birds to feel the same.

From the other team reports along with our team's day in the field and from past records it was an average to slightly above average bird count. Although the lakes and rivers were mostly frozen solid, thus a lack of waterfowl to count, there still remained some very interesting and noteworthy observations.

Because of the lack of wind those hearty folks who went owling from 12 midnight 'til early morning were able to hear, see, or both Great Horned, Barred, Screech, Saw-whet, Short-eared, Long-eared and later in the day Snowy Owls.

For hawks, the Accipiters, Cooper's and Sharp-shinned along with Buteos, Red-tailed and our winter arctic visitor the Rough-legged Hawk were seen in good numbers.

Passerine land birds were visible, with the most abundant being Robins, especially flocking up in preparation to roost at dusk.

Most notable observations were: a Yellow-throated Warbler and Brown Thrasher both of whom should have been long gone from Vermont. Sparrows, Snow Buntings and Horned Larks were in abundance. Although Evening Grosbeaks have been seen in Vermont this year, none were recorded for this count. It was notable, although expected, that there were few arctic finches. Most neighborhoods visited had either no feeders or the feeders that were up had little to no bird food. I don't know whether that is a sign of the times or of poor financial status.

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In brief, these are some of the highlights of 2017 Middlebury CBC. There will be a more professional report that will be out in the future.



An EastView Sunset © Dick Harlow

A comment from Jim and Kris Andrews, Middlebury Count organizer and compiler, sums up the Middlebury Christmas Bird Count: "A Christmas Bird Count is a team effort between field teams and feeder watchers. This year we had an excellent number of field birders (39) but our reports from feeder watchers still need to be increased. Consequently, we are looking for additional people who live within the count circle, can identify the birds they are seeing, and who are interested in reporting what they see at their feeders. If you are interested in reporting your feeder birds or participating on a field team next year, contact Jim or Kris Andrews at 352-4734."

2017 EASTVIEW OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS - 11 Species

White-tailed Deer - both male and females have been seen and photographed on both sides of the Deer Meadow cottages.

Red Fox - spotted just past the entrance to EastView.

Gray Fox - observed this past spring crossing the dirt road of South Street next to EastView.

Eastern Coyote - observed on berm between the Inn and Deer Meadow cottages. As well, they have been heard from time to time howling and yipping at night.

Gray Squirrel - regular feeder visitor during the first half of the year, they have not been back yet this Fall or Winter.

Brown/Norway Rat - digging large burrows in garden, feeding under bird feeder - new mammal to EastView 2017.

Eastern Chipmunk - regular visitor in gardens and has been photographed.

Meadow Vole - quickly going along tunnels and popping up here and there in garden.

Eastern Cottontail Rabbit - seems to be a regular in Deer Meadow Cottages backyards and gardens.

Raccoon - Tracks and fecal remnant suggest that at least one Raccoon has visited EastView.

Striped Skunk - Odor only.

AMPHIBIA - 5 species

American Bullfrog

Leopard Frog

Green Frog

American Toad

Peepers - heard

REPTILES - 1 species

Garter Snake

BUTTERFLIES - 17 species

Black Swallowtail

Tiger Swallowtail

Giant Swallowtail

Cabbage White

Clouded Sulphur

Orange Sulphur

Pearl Crescent

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Slivery Blue
Mourning Cloak
Great Spangled Fritillary
Painted Lady
Red Admiral
Viceroy
Monarch
Common Ringlet
Silver-spotted Skipper
Milbert's Tortoiseshell

DRAGONFLIES - 10 species

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

DAMSELFLIES - 4 species

Common Spreadwing
Marsh Bluet
Northern Bluet
Eastern Forktail



Acadian Hairstreak, *Satyrium acadica*,
© Dick Harlow

Weather Tidbits

Month of DECEMBER 1-31, 2017

PRECIPITATION

Total December Liquid Precipitation: 62.6 mm or 2.5 inches

Overcast Days: 17