

## JANUARY 15 – 31, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

### **PURPLE CONEFLOWER**

When it is cold, snowy, drab outside I like to visualize in my mind's eye spring flowers, and color. It keeps my spirits up and makes winter shorter and more enjoyable.



**Purple Coneflower**, *Echinacea purpurea*  
also known as Eastern Purple Coneflower,  
© Dick Harlow

Purple Coneflower is a very colorful perennial that besides its colorful deep pink-purple bloom is also a provider of nectar for butterflies, bees and other insects needed for pollination. When it dies in the fall it becomes a favorite for finches, especially the American Goldfinch who cling to stems as they pick through the central disk for seeds.

The genus name Echinacea comes from the Greek **echino** which refers to the spiny central disk of the flower. If you remember from high school biology the starfish is put in the class of Echinoderms referring to spiny skin; thus the word for genus Echinacea was derived.

In addition to the garden, the plant in the winter doubles as a bird attraction. Goldfinches, House Finches, and other birds come to the flower heads and pick off the seeds. Even after the seeds are gone birds will come back from time to time to check to see if they missed any.

Also, you can make an herbal tea of Echinacea, or you can buy Echinacea tablets in the store, all purportedly to help your immune system.



**Purple Coneflower**, *Echinacea purpurea*  
also known as Eastern Purple Coneflower,  
© Dick Harlow

Thus, you have several uses for this popular plant. You can plant it for the enjoyable color in the garden, as an attraction for birds, as a plant source for pollinating insects or as a means to strengthen your immune system.

We have a couple of months to go before we can begin to see the beginnings of spring. Trees and native plants need winter, need the time off from growing, reproducing and growing seed in order to rejuvenate tissue and store food.

**NORTHERN HARRIER**



Diagram, Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*.  
© Hawk Mountain

The Northern Harrier used to be called Marsh Hawk when I was growing up, primarily because you could count on seeing one over a freshwater or saltwater marsh or over meadows and farm fields. But, avian taxonomists decided to separate North America from the term Marsh Hawk from Hen Harrier of Europe, Russia and Asia and use the name Northern Harrier.

## JANUARY 15 – 31, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow



**Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*,** on one of our bird boxes. Female, © Dick Harlow

If you see a long winged hawk with the wings in a shallow V hunting low over the field and it is brownish with a large white patch on its rump, you are looking at a Northern Harrier. That brownish bird is probably a female in the spring and either a female or an immature in the fall. The adult male is totally different in color. As can be seen in the diagram it is gray on top with black wing tips, has a white belly and under the wings along with the typical white rump. The male is given the colloquial name 'Gray Ghost'.

The primary food, as much as 95%, for the Northern Harrier are small mammals such as voles, mice, rats. That is not to say that Harriers will not take other food if the opportunity presents itself. Especially, male Harriers will tend to pursue open country birds like sparrows, larks even small shorebirds or young ducks. However, any food item that is available, rabbits and adult waterbirds that the Harrier can negotiate (kill), they will not hesitate to take; but, their primary food are small mammals.



**Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*.** Female, © Dick Harlow

When you see a Harrier fly low over a field the Harrier is watching and listening for prey. Harriers have excellent hearing and eyesight. They can pick out the luminescent scent trail and urine marks left by voles, mice and other rodents, as well as hear them feeding or rustling in the grass.

# JANUARY 15 - 31, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

One can understand why farmers considered Harriers a good omen. Seeing a Harrier over your field meant a check on the population of rodents that might damage your grain and crops.

## OBSERVATIONS

### MAMMALS

Coyote - heard, tracks, scat  
Fox - tracks, scat  
Gray Squirrel - 3 - 4  
Eastern Cottontail  
Meadow Vole

### Weather Tidbits

Month of **NOVEMBER 2016**

*All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).*

### PRECIPITATION

**Total Precipitation: 43.2 mm or 1.7 inches**

**Snow: 25.8 mm or 1.01 inches**

**Overcast Days: 14**

### TEMPERATURE

**Mean Temp: -1.3 C<sup>0</sup>/29.7°F**

**High Temp: 17.4 C<sup>0</sup>/63.3°F**

**Low Temp: -20.3 C<sup>0</sup>/-4.5°F**

### DAYS

**MAX <0.0 C<sup>0</sup> 10 DAYS**

**MIN >0.0 C<sup>0</sup> 23 DAYS**

**MAX <-18.0 C<sup>0</sup> 2 DAYS**