

MARCH 15 - 31, 2017 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

EASTERN BLUEBIRD



Eastern Bluebird, Male, *Sialia sialis*,
On a winterberry shrub © Dick Harlow

I've previously written about how if you plant Winterberry as a bird attractant that you could have Eastern Bluebirds, *Sialia sialis*, come and visit. However, at the time that I saw them at our Winterberry bushes, I didn't have any pictures to prove it. This winter they gave me the chance to take a few rather quick photographs through a window, the reason why the images are a tad soft.

Bluebirds are here all winter and are looking, as do other fruit loving birds, for various trees that will provide favorable fruit for them to eat. Interestingly, some of these fruit trees, Winterberry, and various varieties of Crabapples provide favorable fruit at different times throughout the winter.

Some berries are fine for birds shortly after they ripen. Other varieties need to winterize, in other words, go through a few freezing and thawing cycles, while still others don't really become palatable to birds until near the end of winter when fermentation of the berry sets in.



Eastern Bluebird, Male, *Sialia sialis*,
Feeding on winterberries © Dick Harlow

Bluebirds nest in old woodpecker holes or in bird boxes with holes that are at least 1.5 inches in diameter. As others at EastView have noticed bluebirds have been investigating the various boxes we have around campus. Even though they have been investigating them, this does not mean they will necessarily choose that particular box.

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Eastern Bluebird, Female, *Sialia sialis*,
On a winterberry shrub © Dick Harlow

Bluebirds have a great deal of competition for nesting sites. Tree Swallows, European Starlings, and the invasive Old World Sparrow, the House Sparrow, or what used to be called the English Sparrow, are major competitors, primarily because they nest slightly earlier than bluebirds.

The first ones on the nesting scene are the House Sparrow, Starling and Tree Swallow. The problem here is that these birds could out compete Eastern Bluebird for nesting boxes. We will see this spring just how successful they will be.

The three pictures above look like they are all males. But, if you look at the last one you will notice the blue on the crown and wings and the rusty breast is muted compared to the crown and wings of the first two pictures. Thus, we surmise this to be a female.

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AFFECTS OF A WINTER STORM ON WILDLIFE



Sunrise, © Dick Harlow

The morning sky behind my cottage the day after the March 14th mega snow storm. A week before this storm the atmosphere changed to make ready for the upcoming storm. The weather had been prematurely warm; Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Grackles were returning earlier than in the past and we all were thinking we were going to have an early spring.

Not so McGee, the weather gods had other plans. "Stella," the named 1000 mile long mega low with the imbedded snowstorm, was heading to the Northeast coast to intensify, which accounted for the prediction of a snow making Nor'easter. The forewarning was for a potential of a storm covering over 1000 miles that could produce a record snowfall in many areas and cities.

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View facing Northwest over our garden,
© Dick Harlow

High velocity wind blowing snow in blizzard like conditions makes it very difficult for humans and wildlife alike to move about. We have plows, cars and shovels to help us under these conditions. Wildlife has none of these tools to aid them.

Deep snow is tough to walk through and even tougher for wildlife to find food. Individuals in a White-tailed Deer Group walk about to form deer-yards, usually in relatively thick tree stands so they can be protected and move from food source to food source; deep snow makes it more difficult for them.

Birds who are seedeaters will be gleaning as many dead seed heads that they can to find sustenance. A good reason **NOT** to cut down your flower seed heads in the Fall!

It is extremely important that we humans realize that when feeding birds so that we can enjoy their company during winter months, we also need to be sure they are fed after storms. Birds tend to depend on bird feeders. They will adjust when feeders are taken down in spring; but during tough times after a winter storm when food is extremely scarce, it is important that bird feeders continue to be filled.



View facing Northeast over our cottage patio after storm.
© Dick Harlow

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However, there are wildlife that will enjoy the deep snow. As mentioned in earlier notes Meadow Voles and other small rodents will scurry along runways and tunnels or make additional ventures into forbidden territory when there is deep snow. Two days after the storm on March 14th, an Eastern Chipmunk poked its head out of a large snowdrift surveying his landscape. Deep snow is particularly difficult on predators such as foxes, coyotes and rodent hunting raptors. Keep the feeders filled and enjoy the birds with a good conscience!

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK



Rough-legged Hawk, *Buteo lagopus*,
© Dick Harlow

EastView's Arctic visitor, 23 March, top of the trees this side of the railroad tracks, opposite our cottage on Deer Meadow Drive seen at EastView second time this year, 2017!

Rough-legged Hawk, *Buteo lagopus*, also known as a 'Roughie', has a normal summer range in the high Arctic favoring open tundra-like habitat. Its winter range tends to be northern United States in prairie-like country or open farmland, fields and meadows. Its primary food during summer months are lemmings in the Arctic and voles and mice as well as any rodent it can find in its habitat during the winter.

There are two plumage (color) morphs, the normal light morph and the lesser-known dark morph. The flying picture of this Roughie looks to me like it is either an intermediate or a dark morph individual.

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Rough-legged Hawk, *Buteo lagopus*,
© Dick Harlow

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Eastern Coyote (Coywolf) – Heard, tracks
Red Fox – scat, tracks
Gray Squirrel – 5+ individuals
Eastern Cottontail – individual, tracks, scat
Meadow Vole – runways, sub-surface tunnels
Eastern Chipmunk – 2 individuals, heard

Weather Tidbits

Month of MARCH 1-31 2017

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 38.6 mm or 1.5 inches

Overcast Days: 13

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: -3.4 C⁰/25.9°F
High Temp: 15.5 C⁰/60.0°F
Low Temp: -20.1 C⁰/-4.2°F

DAYS

MAX <0.0 C⁰ 12 DAYS

MIN >0.0 C⁰ 27 DAYS

MAX <-18.0 C⁰ 3 DAYS