

OCTOBER 1 - 14, 2016 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

DEAD CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA



Dead Creek Kiosk, © Dick Harlow

This is a very interesting and rewarding place to explore, either by car, foot or by boat, whether you are interested in birds or nature. It makes one thankful that we have places like this to journey to and enjoy.



Wildlife Management Area Sign, © Dick Harlow

If your intent is to check on birds, migration season is the best time, either in the spring or the fall.

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Snow Geese, Dead Creek, © Dick Harlow

Of course if your journey is in the fall, then you will want to plan your trip so that it coincides with goose migration, Canada Geese and especially Snow Geese.

As can be seen in the photograph above, the Snow Geese were so plentiful last year that they completely occupied the backfield of the management area. From all reports, the Snow Geese are back again this year, 2016, up to 1200 last count on October 14.



Snow Geese, Dead Creek, © Dick Harlow

With a little patience and luck the geese might come as close as the fence beside the drive next to kiosk.

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COOPER'S HAWK



(1) Cooper's Hawk, Immature *Accipiter cooperii*,
© Dick Harlow

Cooper's Hawks are bold, arrogant, fierce, and will mantle their prey, meaning cover prey with their wings. They will only leave a kill under threat of life or limb. This hawk species was for many years called a Chicken Hawk, the main avian predator of farmyard chickens. When Cooper's are focused on possible prey, almost nothing will get in their way. They will hop, run or arrogantly walk on the ground with a purpose. If you know nothing about hawks in general, but see one on the ground, as I did in September in our back yard here at EastView, purposely looking for a bird it had missed, and allowing anyone who has the audacity to watch, it is a Cooper's Hawk.

Image #1 shows the hawk flying toward me and close to the ground. Was I surprised? You bet I was, but I kept on "shooting" with my camera! He/she obviously thought there was something to capture under our window, but to no avail.



(2) Cooper's Hawk, Immature *Accipiter cooperii*, © Dick Harlow

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Image #2 was also taken through a window and window screen, (as were all three pictures) just outside our bedroom and in front of our garden. Unfortunately, I couldn't include his/her legs and feet because he/she was too close!

Cooper's Hawks' normal winter range is throughout most of the United States and Central America. However, its summer nesting range is throughout the US and includes the southern sections of Canada. Here in Vermont, the Adirondacks, and Northern New England, the Cooper's Hawk nests, but does not stay for the winter. As a note of interest the Goshawk is the only Accipiter that makes New England and Canada its year round home.



(3) Cooper's Hawk, Immature *Accipiter cooperii*,
© Dick Harlow

Image #3 gives a sense of the whole bird. Let there be no mistake, this is a fierce avian predator. They are not interested in mice. They can kill Rock Pigeons, Mourning Doves, Robins or any bird the size of a crow or smaller. However, smaller birds, because of their size and ability to dive into shrubbery, are not easy for a Cooper's to catch. They have to use subterfuge, guile, sneak up from behind a house or a car and pounce on a bird at the feeder or on the ground. Even though immature hawks have to learn to hunt, that process can be long and hard causing many lost opportunities. However, Sharp-shinned Hawks, a smaller cousin to the Cooper's, but more timid than the Cooper's, tend to go after smaller birds, leaving the bigger ones to Cooper's and Goshawks. But, a young bird will take whatever he/she can get.

It should be noted that Accipiters are normally forest hunters. They are very agile; their short wings and that long tail acting as a rudder allows them to fly between trees and branches. They have unusual flight stability going after prey under those conditions. Forests are dwindling, birds are fewer in the forest and now species are finding shelter and food near human habitation. Therefore, man has brought Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks out of their normal hunting environment and into mans realm as a feeder raider from time to time. Thus we see these hawks more often trying for a meal at our feeders.

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Fortunately, for people who feed birds during the winter, both the Sharp-shinned and the Cooper's Hawk move further south before the dead of winter sets in. Their migration south is usually during October or November dependent on the weather fronts. Their spring migration is generally March or April. Even though I have not seen or heard of either hawk attacking birds here in winter, one can't be completely sure it won't happen.

WINTER FINCH FORECAST



White-winged Crossbill, *Loxia leucoptera* on a cone laded Spruce © Jean Iron 2016

This report is a summary of Ron Pittaway's Winter Finch Forecast 2016-2017 from Ottawa, Canada.

Winter Finches generally feed on the seeds of spruce, fir and pine cones. Other finch-like birds feed on other seed types and berries.

Each winter, bird enthusiasts, look forward to the possibility of having some of these northern birds and finches visit their feeders and fruit trees. Consequently, this very appropriate Finch Report from Canada.

Because it is thought due to the eastern draught and the below average to poor cone crops in Southern Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada, New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire, and the good to bumper cone crops in Northern Ontario, Western Canada and Alaska that finches will tend to migrate west. However, it is also thought that the dividing line between eastern populations and mid-continent populations is a line drawn from James Bay south along the Ontario-Quebec border. As it is unlikely that various species of eastern finches will all move to the west and northwest, many will move south looking for food. Purple Finches in the East are currently moving south in numbers. Therefore, because the cone crop of Canada and the

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Northeast is poor this year, the only stop finches may make in their search for food further south from Canada could be at our feeders. If feeders aren't available, they will move even further south.

Could we see all the birds listed here at our feeders? Unlikely, but we could see a few of them if we are fortunate. The following list is of the birds that could move from Canada to the US this winter looking for food. I will list the name of the bird and its seed preference according to what was provided from Canada.

Pine Grosbeak – berry crops, black oil sunflower seeds

Purple Finch – black oil sunflower seeds

Red Crossbill – black oil sunflower seeds

White-winged Crossbill – black oil sunflower seeds

Common Redpoll – Nyger (thistle) seeds in silo feeders

Hoary Redpoll – Nyger (thistle) seeds in silo feeders

Pine Siskin – Nyger (thistle) seeds in silo feeders

Evening Grosbeak – black oil sunflower seeds

Red-breasted Nuthatch – black oil sunflower seeds

Bohemian Waxwing – berry crops of Mountain-ash, Buckthorn, Ornamental crabapples.

From personal observation and 50 years of winter bird feeding, all birds feeding on black oil sunflower seed will also eat any kind of sunflower seed, whether it is hulled, in bits, gray or black. The black oil is simply the suggested preferred food that researchers of Canada have suggested.

OBSERVATIONS

BUTTERFLIES

Cabbage White
Clouded Sulphur
Orange Sulphur
Milbert's Tortoiseshell

DRAGONFLIES

Black Meadowhawk
Yellow-legged Meadowhawk

DAMSELFLIES

Marsh Bluet

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AMPHIBIANS

American Toad

MAMMALS

Coyote (yipping and howling on patio of Cottage)

Gray Squirrel

Eastern Cottontail

Muskrat

Weather Tidbits

Month of OCTOBER 1-14, 2016

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Total Precipitation: 4.6 mm or 0.18 inches

Overcast Days: 7

WIND

Highest wind gust: OCTOBER 7, 14 MPH, Direction: South

Average Wind speed for OCTOBER 1-14: 1.3 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: South

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 0

Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 0

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp: 12.9 C⁰/55.2⁰F

High Temp: 24.5 C⁰/76.1⁰F

Low Temp: -0.6 C⁰/30.9⁰F