DECEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

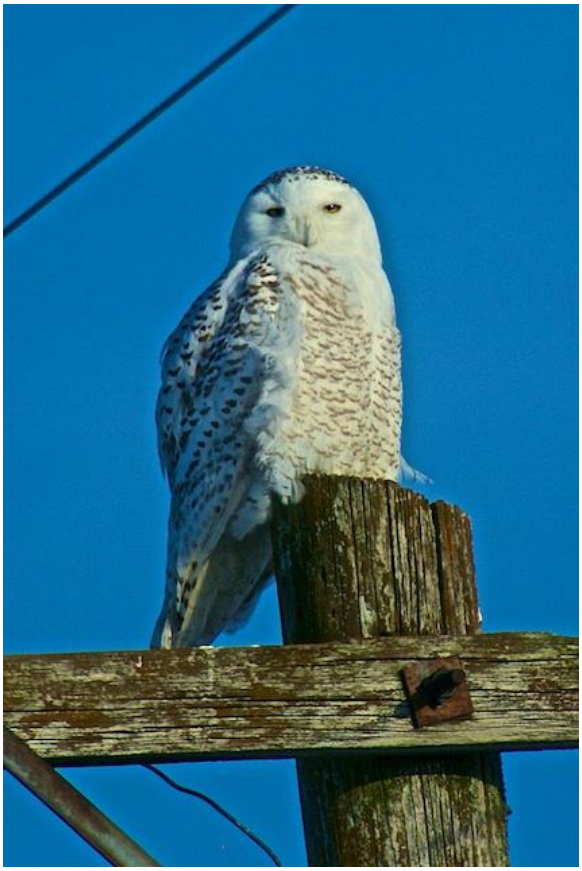
Rough-legged Hawk*, Buteo lagopus*
Photo © Dick Harlow

Tree and Barn Swallows have long, fall migrated to the southern US, or Central and South America. The sight of them flying over the meadows, fields, and retention ponds is but a memory. We now look forward to the stalwart, the tough northern birds who have migrated from Canada to hunt our fields and meadows, or our harvested corn fields where rodents feed on discarded seed. Kestrels and Northern Harriers, also known as Marsh Hawks, will be here until freezing weather moves them further south or to the coast. But, we can depend on the local Red-tailed Hawk, (JAYCO), named by EastView, Barred, Screech and Great Horned Owl to stay and hunt throughout the winter and Rough-legged Hawks who visit us from Canada during this tough time of year.

After last year's eruption of Snowy Owls and having one observed close to EastView in November, there are many who will be looking for these all white Owls this winter. Remember, these Owls are arctic Owls, normally living in wide-open tundra, so they will tend to want a wide range of open space before them. Therefore, you want to look at large open fields, plowed land, or at the edge of woods bordering a large pasture. If we are going to have another eruption of Snowy Owls, then they had to have been successful when they migrated back to the arctic last spring.

As mentioned last month, the **115th Audubon Christmas Bird Count** will begin before dawn on Sunday, December 14th and ends at midnight January 5, 2015. The Middlebury Count was Sunday the 14th.

DECEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow



Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*

Photo © Dick Harlow

Citizen scientists will brave all kinds of weather from below zero to hot temperatures, rain or snow, wind or calm, all over North, Central and South America, including the Caribbean. These individuals and groups will be out and about with binoculars, scopes, bird guides and checklists, checking off what species they have seen, along with the numbers of each species and keeping track of the weather as the day progresses. The day is a wonderful group effort to collect data on bird populations and bird species. It isn't just field observers who will be contributing to this information, but feeder-watchers also add to the wealth of information going into the database. This is an extremely large database that has been going on for 114 years. All of this data is and has been a tremendous help to understanding birds from the local feeder birds to the migrants that we only see in spring and summer. A wonderful effort by all who contribute!

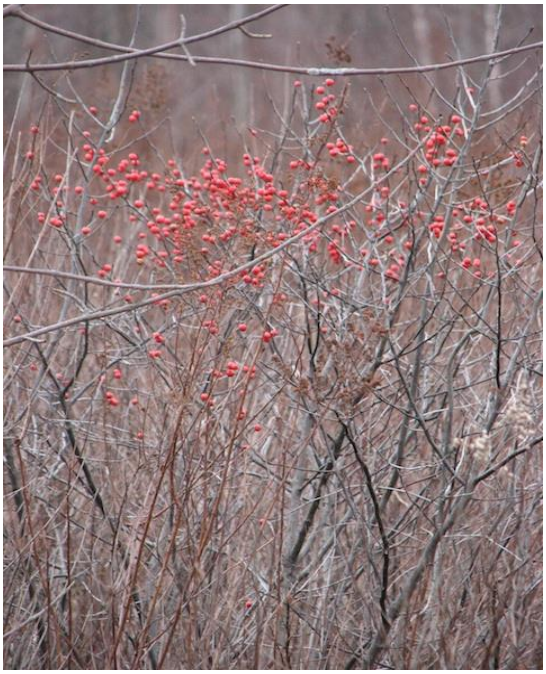
NOTICE

JAYCO was happy about finally having a name. He has been sighted 5 days this week.

DECEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

PLANTS THAT PROVIDE WINTER WILD BIRD FOOD

Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata*, is of the Holly Family of shrubs. It is deciduous, losing its leaves during the winter, but retaining its red berries. Although a native wetland species, as seen in this photograph, horticulturists have produced varieties that can do well in the garden. Beyond being an attractive shrub with its bright red berries against the white snow during winter, the berries provide sustenance to wildfowl. These berries need several freezes and thaws to be palatable to birds which, allows the berries to remain through several snowfalls, including Christmas, adding a festive look to our gardens.



Winterberry, *Ilex verticillata* Photo © Dick Harlow

******

Another mainstay for birds and animals during winter and into early spring is Staghorn Sumac, *Rhus hirta* formally called *Rhus typhina*.

When driving, you can see Staghorn Sumac along the sides of roads and highways. In the fall, Staghorn Sumac will standout with its bright red leaves and red seed heads as shown in the picture.

DECEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Staghorn Sumac*, Rhus hirta* Photo © Dick Harlow

Staghorn Sumac is an early successional tall shrub or small tree, a plant that easily moves into new ground. Early successional refers to pioneer plants and animals that will occupy new ground before more dominant plants and animals take over. Basically, this process of plants and animal communities being replaced by other plant and animal communities is referred to as ecological succession. A community of organisms is considered stable when that community is replaced by young of the occupying species. All communities of organisms large or small undergo disturbance at one time or another and the process of bringing that community back to a stable state is considered ecological succession. Since man is constantly changing the land he lives on, one can expect that there is constant ecological succession going on throughout our landscape.

If you are a gardener and leave a parcel of open land unattended, you might very well find-unwanted plants in this area. This new ground has no competing plants, and therefore, those plants and animals that do well when there is little competition will try to occupy that parcel. Thus, you might find weeds and Staghorn Sumac sprouting in your compost heap or garden or yard that is left unattended. However, if Sumac is of minimal concern, then leaving it might allow your area to provide a useful food source to many birds and wildlife, especially in the early spring.

DECEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Staghorn Sumac*, Rhus hirta,* developing seed heads. Photo © Dick Harlow

This flowering Sumac head will develop into a bright red seed head by fall and will be very beneficial to birds and other wildlife during late winter and early spring.

Early spring is a very difficult time for wildlife. Most natural seed plants are gone, berries that have not been eaten are either rotting, dehydrated or have become rancid, and insects are hard to come by at this time of year. So any surviving seed heads or fruit that needs constant freezing and thawing to become palatable will help birds and wildlife survive this period.

******

Another beneficial tree is the crabapple. There are many varieties that I will go into in more detail in my March 2015 notes, but I wanted to alert people that when you are driving or walking on South Street this winter, you could be on the lookout for birds feeding at the various crabapple trees that line the street and see if you can see Cedar Waxwings, Pine Grosbeaks, Bluebirds or Robins feeding from these trees.

DECEMBER 1-14, 2014 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
By Dick Harlow

Prairiefire Crabapple*, Malus ioensis* laden with fruit Photo © Dick Harlow

News: East View's Bird species count from July 2013 to present has now reached 90 species with 1 Fox Sparrow observed on December 7th- 9th.

Weather Tidbits for December at EastView

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

Measurements based on a 24hr clock for 14 days.

Precipitation: Includes rain and snowmelt.

December 1-14 Precipitation: 70.8 mm or 2.8 inches

Snowfall for first two weeks in December 2014: 501.4 mm/19.7 inches

Snow Days: 7

Highest wind first two weeks in December 4 & 7: 30 mph,
Direction: North.

Average Wind speed for this two- week period: 3.3 mph.
Dominate two week Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind 20 mph & above: 9

Days w/wind 30 mph & above: 2

December 1-14 Overcast Days: 8