

**JANUARY 15-30, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW
BY DICK HARLOW**

Common Redpoll

Each winter here in the East birders always look forward to or hope to see Common Redpolls at their feeders. Common Redpolls breed in the Canadian tundra and forests of the subarctic including the coast of Greenland. Unless they come to your feeder, it is unlikely you would see them unless you travel across the Canadian border. It is always a delight to see these visitors at our thistle feeders with their red topknot, and the reddish wash on the chest of males. Both these images of Redpolls were taken here at EastView. The image below is of a male Common Redpoll. Notice the rosy chest and the streaking along the sides.



Common Redpoll, *Acanthis flammea* Photo © Dick Harlow

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The female below looks very similar, but doesn't have the rosy chest. You will not see pink or any reddish color except for the red topknot.



Common Redpoll, *Acanthis flammea* Photo © Dick Harlow

A flock of Common Redpolls presents the opportunity that we might also view a Hoary Redpoll in the mix. The Hoary Redpoll looks very similar to the Common Redpoll in shape and some markings, but its color is much lighter, a slightly shorter bill and a much paler overall appearance. The breast of the Hoary is white, with very minor to hardly any streaking along its side. The reds of the chest of the male are pale pink against this lighter, whiter overall look. It must be emphasized that the dark feather stripes found on the sides of the Common Redpolls are almost nonexistent on a Hoary.

Now the Greenland race of Common Redpoll looks very similar to its Canadian cousin, but is 10% larger than the Common; so if you see a larger Redpoll beside a smaller one, please let Dick Harlow know.

The influx of large flocks of Redpolls since the middle of January has allowed us at EastView the good fortune to observe these arctic visitors for the last three years! I hope you all have a chance to see these denizens of the arctic.

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Eastern Cottontail Rabbit out competes the New England Cottontail.



Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus*, Photo © Dick Harlow

The Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, *Sylvilagus floridanus*, is relatively new to the New England landscape. It was primarily a mid-west rabbit and now, because it has been introduced to New England, is in competition with the rare New England Cottontail, *Sylvilagus transitionalis*, a smaller version. It is the Eastern Cottontail that is the rabbit that is seen here at EastView nibbling on your garden plants.

In the late 1930's and early 1940's the New England Cottontail seemed to be prevalent. When playing in the fields in back of our house I can remember seeing them regularly as a youngster.

Today, the New England Cottontail is only found in a few particular places in Vermont, partially due to disappearing thickets. New human construction and the disappearance of thicket habitat, along with the territoriality of the Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, are reasons for the dwindling population of the New England Cottontail. The New England Cottontail is particular about what types of cover it likes, whereas the Eastern Cottontail is able to use most any habitat that is available. Meadows, fields, woods' edge, denning under sheds, porches, etc., are the varied habitats of the Eastern Cottontail. The Eastern Cottontail has learned to adapt to human habitation.

The New England Cottontail requires thickets that are thick with vegetation and interwoven vines. This type of habitat, that tends to be associated with early successional woods, before more dominant trees take over, are the mainstays of the New England Cottontail. Once trees have replaced thickets and succession has started to become a young forest, the thickets disappear and so does the New England Cottontail. In the 1950's you could see thickets between pastures and along farm roads, perfect habitat for the New England Cottontail. Today, you have to hunt for thickets that are thick enough to support a population of New England Cottontails.

Construction for human housing or town and city development eliminates fields and thickets. Once a housing development replaces a field and thickets, the New

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England Cottontail is extirpated from that area simply because their thickets are gone. These are the primary reasons for the disappearance of the New England Cottontail.

This cottontail has now been put on the endangered species list. We have put another check mark for man's influence on the disappearance of a species from a locale and probably the ultimate disappearance of another species from North America!



New England Cottontail Rabbit

Photo © <http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us>

Notice that these two rabbit pictures are very similar. The New England Cottontail is smaller, with shorter ears, but other than that, there is little visual difference. Yet, there is a significant difference in the habitat preferred by each.

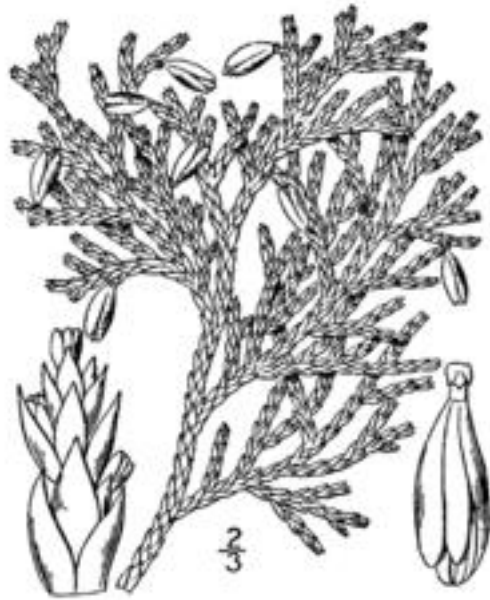
Where is the balance between what we, humans, want and what wildlife requires to survive?

White Cedar

Northern White Cedar, *Thuja occidentalis* is a tree of northern swamps and wetlands, not to be confused with Pacific Red Cedar, *Thuja plicata*. Northern White Cedar is a small tree growing only to 60 feet with a trunk diameter of one foot plus. This tree was highly sought after by farmers to use as fence posts. As land was cleared for farming, swamps and wetlands filled in, this tree has become rare and protected.

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Unfortunately, White-tailed Deer love the soft, flat scale-like leaves and will ravenously feed on them during the winter. This becomes a problem when deer herds are large in number. Other than deer, man has found uses for this tree. The tree has been important in the tradition of the Ojibwa Indian culture, using it in medicine and construction. White man has used the lumber in construction of fence posts, log cabins and uses where weather and water damage can be offset by using its wood. This is why this tree is rare today and protected as best we can.



Botanical illustration from 1913

Weather Tidbits

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

January 2015 Total Precipitation: 36.8 mm or 1.4 inches

Precipitation includes rain and snow melt.

Snow Days: 9

Snowfall for January 2015: 412.9 mm or 16.3 inches

Overcast Days, January: 14

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WIND

Highest wind gust: January 27, 37 MPH, Direction: North

Average Wind speed for January 2015: 4.8 mph,

Dominate Wind Direction: North

Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 23 Days w/wind gusts 30 MPH: 10

TEMPERATURE

Mean Temp. -7.9 C⁰ (17.6⁰F)

High Temp. 13.7 C⁰ (57⁰F)

Low Temp. -26.2 C⁰ (-15.2⁰F)

• DAYS OF:

Min. Temp. 0.0 C⁰/32⁰F: 30 days

Min. Temp.: -18 C⁰/-0.4F: 10 days

Max. Temp. 0.0 C⁰/32⁰F: 21 days