

## JUNE 15-30, 2015 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES FOR EASTVIEW

By Dick Harlow

### SILVERY BLUE



***Glaucopsyche lygdamus*, (M) Silvery Blue**

Photo © Dick Harlow

This fellow is a little bigger than the end of a man's thumb, energetically flying about or over wet ground, looking for either a female or for minerals that it can access. As seen here he landed on wet garden compost. Both pictures are of the same individual. They do not tend to open their wings often when there is a strong breeze about, which, of course, we have most of the time.

Early summer is when we would see this species as they mate and lay their eggs on legumes, such as Cow Vetch, White Sweet Clover and Crown Vetch. We have plenty of Cow Vetch and White Sweet Clover in our fields and meadow. This species produces only one brood a year to co-ordinate with the flowering of its host plants.

There are two physically isolated races of this species along the East coast. The Northern race is found in all of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, part of northern New York and northern Massachusetts. Interestingly, the Northern race was observed in New England in the 1960's, and in northern NY in the 1980's. The Southern race is found on the Appalachians of Virginia, the western part of North and South Carolina, and the northern end of Georgia.



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The Northern race seems to be very adaptable to changing ecological relationships whereas the Southern race is specialized on Carolina Vetch. Adaptability survives better than do specialists and it seems that the Northern race is expanding and may take over the Southern race.

Even though the dorsal view of this butterfly is a beautiful silvery blue, the underside of the wings is just as good looking. You would think that the underside would stand out against a dark background; but being small it is quite hard to see against a dark background, in fact, this fellow is well camouflaged.

### AMERICAN BITTERN



***Botaurus lentiginosus*, American Bittern**

Photo © Brian E. Small

The American Bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus*, master of camouflage, has for three years graced our pond, meadow and marsh. Of course, in the picture above, this bird doesn't seem hidden, as a matter of fact, his brown body stands out against the green background. But, mark my word, he/she is definitely difficult to see and pick out as it stands stoically and immobile within heavy vegetation. The reason this bird is so cryptic is not just its color, but that it will stand motionless with its head straight up or if the accompanying vegetation is swaying, it will sway in unison. In early spring the male's pumping vocalization gives him away. That is done only on the breeding grounds and, in fact, that is what a male was doing here at EastView for the past two months.

The reason I have seen so few of them in my 66 years of birding, I suspect is because of their declining numbers caused by habitat loss. Wetlands have been filled in, degraded and engineered for development so severely that many wetland bird populations, like the American Bittern, have been markedly affected. I feel we can consider us here at EastView very lucky that we have at our back door the environment to attract a breeding pair of Bitterns.

### COMMON REED



***Phragmites australis*, Common Reed**

Photo © Stacy Schumacher

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Growing along many seeps, waterways and marshes you will find a large tall grass known as the Common Reed, *Phragmites australis americanus*, which is considered native. Science has shown there are 11 native varieties and one introduced European variety that is invasive. All of the varieties grow well leaving little room for native cattails, native grasses and other perennial vegetation.



***Phragmites australis*, Common Reed, flower head**

Photo © University of Wisconsin

Standing near a healthy group of Common Reeds, you could be dwarfed by its height. This plant can grow as tall as 15 feet, but usually grows around 7-10 feet, dependent on the fertility of the surrounding environment. It may look lush and beautiful, but has little wildlife food value.

### **BLACK SWALLOWTAIL**



***Papilio polyxenes*, (M) Black Swallowtail**

Photo © Dick Harlow

As can be seen in these two pictures of a Black Swallowtail, *Papilio polyxenes*, the male is distinctly different with its bright yellow dashes, he has more of them and less blue in the hind wing than the female. The male is quite striking, whereas the female is less so, although they both are striking in themselves and a delight to see when observed in the field or garden.

This female was feeding on Miss Kim Lilac in our front garden here at EastView.

Black Swallowtails, *Papilio polyxenes*, are a common occurrence in our area. This species is found in open spaces from Maine to Florida. However, this butterfly is especially interesting because it has evolved to be able to denature specific plant toxins of the Carrot-Parsley Family, an example of this family would be Queen-Anne's-Lace.

Rabbits, deer, caterpillars or any herbivore, need field, meadow, garden or any place where plants exist, to feed. Over time, plants, to aid in their survival, needed to develop a way to avoid being eaten, so that they could compete with other plants on a level playing field.

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***Papilio polyxenes*, (F) Black Swallowtail**

Photo © Dick Harlow

The carrot family of plants is one of those groups of plants that have evolved over time to produce chemicals that are toxic to herbivores. This ability benefits the plant to the detriment of herbivores.

As mentioned, the host plant for the Black Swallowtail is the Carrot-Parsley Family of plants. These plants have toxic chemicals that will disrupt the DNA transcription in herbivores. Evolution has allowed the caterpillars of this butterfly to use specialized enzymes to denature the toxins produced by this family of plants. Amazing that we are at a point in this specie's evolution to witness and understand the detriments and benefits!

### **POND DAMSELFLIES**



***Enallagma ebrium*, (M) Marsh Bluet**

Photo © Dick Harlow

Pond Damselflies are very common and diverse. However, the diversity here at EastView is limited around our retention ponds due to their newness. As these fellows are slow flyers, they tend to rest on a leaf or stick, this allows some members of this group to be easily observed.

If you sit or stand by a retention pond watching the action, you will notice damselflies on the water with the end of their abdomen in the water. You are watching a female laying her fertilized eggs. She will lay eggs by depositing them in plant material that is in the pond; or if she is with her mate she will lay them in tandem with him beside her, or with him standing guard nearby. DNA within both Damselflies and Dragonflies has evolved over time to where it seems that the most successful females are the ones who are guarded. It makes sense as a mated male is protecting his sperm from being hijacked by another male. This insures that the sperm of the guard, whose sperm is already in the female, will fertilize the female's eggs.

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***Enallagma ebrium*, (M) Marsh Bluet**

Photo © Dick Harlow

Most damselflies can't be identified to species, only to genera without catching them and analyzing their abdomen for specific identification characteristics. Notice the colorful eyes, their shape and the size of their eyespot, along with the blue teardrop on top of the head. All these characters are useful in the identification of these interesting fliers of meadow and pond.

**BULLETIN**

**FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR IN A ROW A PAIR OF PURPLE MARTINS HAVE VISITED THE PURPLE MARTIN POLE!**

**Does this bode well for the future, only time will tell!**

**JUNE OBSERVATIONS**

**MAMMALS**

- White-tailed Deer
- Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
- Striped Skunk, odor only
- Gray Squirrel
- Muskrat
- Meadow Vole
- Mouse, Deer or White-footed

**REPTILES**

- Snapping Turtle (Observed nest diggings)

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- Garter Snake

**AMPHIBIANS**

- Gray Tree Frog
- Leopard Frog
- American Toad
- American Bullfrog

**BUTTERFLIES**

- Cabbage White
- Clouded Sulphur
- Black Swallowtail
- Tiger Swallowtail
- Giant Swallowtail
- Silvery Blue
- Meadow Fritillary
- Red Admiral
- Common Ringlet
- Bronze Copper (rare)
- European Skipper
- Least Skipper
- Summer Azure

**DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES**

- Common Green Darner
- Common Whitetail
- Dot-tailed Whiteface
- Widow Skimmer

**DAMSELFLIES**

- Eastern Forktail
- Marsh Bluet

**Weather Tidbits**

**June Totals:**

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1130 EDT).

**PRECIPITATION**

**June 2015 Total Precipitation: 244.6 mm or 9.6 inches**

**Overcast Days: 13**

**WIND**

**Highest wind June 8: 31 MPH, Direction: South**

**Average Wind speed for June 2015: 2.3 mph,**

**Dominate Wind Direction: North**

**Days w/wind gusts 20-30 MPH: 12**

**Days w/wind gusts >30 MPH: 1**

**TEMPERATURE**

**Mean Temp: 20.9 C<sup>0</sup> 70 °F**

**High Temp: 34 C<sup>0</sup> 93 °F**

**Low Temp: 4.7 C<sup>0</sup> 40.5 °F**