

Amherst Garden Club's Plant Sale a Success



Gift baskets decoratively wrapped for Mother's Day



A huge crowd lined up from the entrance up and down the parking lot road at Wilkins School. The weather was perfect, and the many plants and gardening products for sale were beautifully displayed. A great day for everyone!



These Pansies are certainly Proven Winners



Hanging Geraniums were a popular item



Variety of potted plants going home



Yummy!



Even the kids had their own potting area



Herb plants grown from seed



Hanging baskets and potted plants made a colorful display



Unique planters for kids

Unexpected Sightings at Pond Parish

BY TOM SILEO

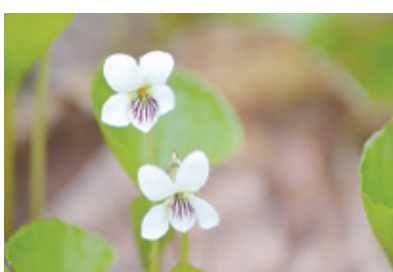
When I visit the fields and woods in Amherst, I do so without expectation, never looking for anything specific, but remaining open to whatever Nature offers. This openness often leads to thrilling but unexpected sightings. With this attitude, I entered Pond Parish Conservation Land off Pond Parish Road at 5:00 pm on Saturday, May 2, 2015. At this time of the day, the play of light and shade creates a beautiful impressionistic scene along the path.



Path winding through Pond Parish conservation land

Black-capped chickadees were moving from branch to twig about fifteen feet over my head in a red maple. These common birds are fun to watch as they flit quickly through the branches of a tree or shrub, careful to inspect every crevasse. Farther along, a tufted titmouse called out its loud, clear song from high up an oak. And, a downy or hairy woodpecker knocked against a tree from somewhere in the woods.

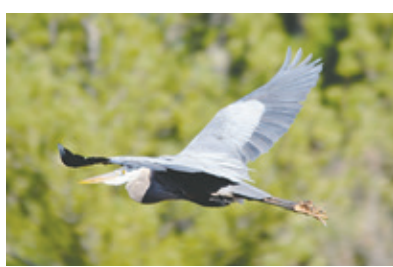
The path through this property is wide, with one side falling off to a swamp, and the other rising to an upland wood. Trailing arbutus adorns the short but steep slope that borders the path on the upland side. The blooms, out since April, still appeared fresh, most of them white, but many with a pretty pink tinge. Where the path becomes wet, sweet white violets grow abundantly. These pretty and delicate blooms are small and white with purple tracing inside to lead an insect to the nectar.



Sweet White Violets

Just beyond a small boardwalk, I turned off the main path toward the observation deck. I immediately saw the small spring azure butterfly. It looked as if a chip of sky had fallen and began to flutter about just before reaching the ground.

As I approached the observation deck, a great blue heron lifted off and flew over the marsh and into a pine tree, where it perched on an outstretched limb, about twenty-five feet up.



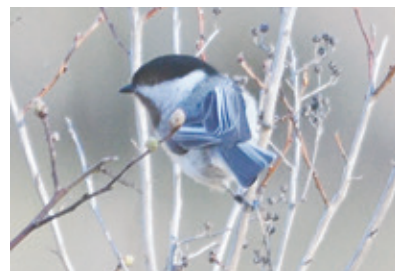
Great-Blue Heron

I wondered if its nest was within the dense pine needles, but a closer look revealed that the heron was just perching there. This was unexpected because it's unusual to see a heron perched in a tree unless it's on a nest. It landed with its neck outstretched, but then crouched amid the pine needles.

The observation deck looks over the wide marsh to the left and an open pond to the right. Leatherleaf, mulberry and red maple dominate the area between the water and the deck. I heard a noise coming from the vegetation in front of me. I turned and saw a song sparrow walking on the loose mud. It was catching insects and appeared

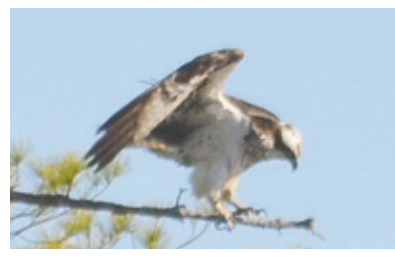
to be tap-dancing on the leaf-covered mud to expose insects, which it would then catch with its beak.

Three chickadees noisily appeared in the trees behind me as I stood facing the water. They flew to my right and congregated amid a patch of maleberry, a prominent wetland shrub. They called out incessantly, "dee-dee-dee-chickadee-dee-dee-dee..." They seemed to be playing some sort of chickadee-tag as they searched for insects, one bird taking the place of another on a branch.



Black-Capped Chickadee

While being entertained by the chickadees, I noticed a large hawk-like bird leaving the woods. It flew over the marsh, toward the pond and landed on a branch, thirty feet high in a white pine tree adjacent to the water. While perched, it raised its wings and then settled in its place. I noticed the shape of its wings, the huge talons and its down-curved beak. It was an osprey.



Osprey

The osprey looked from side to side and down at the water. I watched it for fifteen minutes. It squawked briefly at something or perhaps someone on the Spring Street boardwalk. Then it went qui-

et. Suddenly, the large bird gracefully but quickly fell toward the water, its wings open, its talons exposed. It dropped rapidly and disappeared within a large splash; then, it rose from the water with a long, dark fish in its talons. It flew into the woods behind where it was perched, as if to get its bearings. It turned sharply and flew toward me. What does its instinct tell it to do after it has caught a fish?

As the osprey neared the observation deck, I could see the fish, perfectly still, secured in the bird's sharp claws or talons. The fish was about twelve inches long with a slender body and snout and a greenish color. I saw only one fin exposed. I assumed it was a grass pickerel. I couldn't tell for sure, but that would be my best guess. The osprey flew to the opposite side of the marsh, disappeared and then appeared again before vanishing into the woods.



Osprey with Fish

I stood in awe at this unexpected experience, my heart beating a bit faster at the commanding presence of this large bird overlooking the water, the fast dive, the powerful talons splashing into the water and its ability to spear its prey with so much confidence. I wondered at the fact that from at least thirty feet high, it saw the fish under the water and timed its dive perfectly.

As it flew by, the osprey seemed to frighten the heron, which left the pine tree. The heron flew alongside the water and then over the trees. Does the osprey have a nest here at Pond Parish or is it just hunting here?

Osprey nest high in trees, similar to great-blue herons. As a matter of fact, at Horse Hill Nature Preserve in Merrimack, an osprey nests adjacent to herons, in a heron rookery. Today, it's hard to imagine that during the late 1800s, there were too few trees for osprey to nest in, so that they were forced to nest on the ground.

During the late 1940s and through the 1950s, DDT was used to eradicate mosquitoes. Unfortunately, fish ate the infected mosquitoes and Osprey ate the fish. Over time, the levels of DDT built up in the osprey. This made it more difficult for these birds to absorb calcium, and this led to thinner eggs, more prone to cracking prematurely. In 1962, Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*, encouraged the Environmental Protection Agency to look into the effects of DDT on wildlife. The EPA's study showed that DDT was directly related to the reduction in the number of osprey and eagles due to the thinning of their eggs. By 1972, the EPA banned DDT. According to NH Audubon, thirty years ago there were only a few osprey nests in New Hampshire. Today, there are probably over 100.

Just as I was leaving the observation deck, a mallard noisily took off from within some wetland shrubs in front of me and flew toward the pond. Even a relatively brief visit can be meaningful to one who is open to unexpected sightings. Each time I visit this place, I realize how spectacular it is and how important it is as a natural habitat, allowing the further comeback of such an awe-inspiring species of bird as the osprey.

A resident of Amherst, Tom Sileo is a Financial Advisor with a passion for the outdoors and local history. He has written hundreds of articles and columns on the outdoors and five books: *The Great Spirit of Horn Pond*, *Historical Guide to Open Space in Lexington*, *The Lexington Battleground*, *Rambling Through a Secular Bear Market* (on financial planning) and *Time Present and Time Past* (a novel). All photos taken on site.

THE TOADSTOOL BOOKSHOPS



BOB MANKOFF
Bedford Public Library

Thu, May 14, 7 pm.

The Cartoon Editor of *The New Yorker* magazine speaks on his life in cartoons, *HOW ABOUT NEVER - IS NEVER GOOD FOR YOU?* Books available for purchase and signing. Call the library (472-2300) for details.

LINDA REILLY
Sat, May 16, 1 pm.

Linda will present and sign her debut 'deep-fried' cozy, *FILLET OF MURDER*. Bea, of Lambert's Fish & Chips is falsely accused of murder. It's up to her friend Talia to fish for clues and hook the real killer. A mystery with recipes!

JOHN ROCKWOOD
Thu, May 28, 6:30 pm

The 'Loon Man' presents an educational and entertaining multi-media show on the state bird of Minnesota! His book about an orphaned chick, *ADVENTURES WITH GRAPENUT*, will be available for sale and autographing.

Visit our website for all the details and more!
www.toadbooks.com

M-T-W: 9-7, Th-Fr 9-8

Sat: 9-6, Sun: 11-5

Lorden Plaza, Milford
673-1734

12 Depot Sq., Peterborough, 924-3543
Colony Mill Marketplace, Keene, 352-8815