

Counting chickadees on Matinicus isn't so bad

I really need to be more careful about what I write into this column. Too often, my own words come back to haunt me.

For instance, a month ago I extolled the virtues of joining a Christmas Bird Count somewhere far from home, just to add a little novelty to winter birding. Two sentences in that column set me up for an escapade.

When I complained about counting the same chickadees on my usual route every year, I wrote: "I need to rekindle the romance, perhaps by counting somebody else's chickadees."

And when I suggested enlisting on one of the more remote counts, I wrote, "Maybe this is the year I'll go completely nuts and join Jeff Wells for his Christmas Bird Count on Matinicus."

At 7 a.m. Jan. 2, that is how I found myself climbing into a small plane at Knox County

Regional Airport and flying out to Maine's most remote inhabited island. My companions were Jeff Wells, senior scientist for the Boreal Songbird Initiative in the Canadian forest, and Rich MacDonald, a professional naturalist and birding guide from Bar Harbor.

In the Abenaki tongue, Matinicus means "far out island." It was likely too far out for routine canoe visits by Native Americans, but French fishermen and English pirates eventually made use of the harbor. Mostly, it has been a quiet place over the centuries, at least until we got there.

I will never forget the sunrise. We leveled off at 1,200 feet just as the sun broke through the clouds over Matinicus. I will never forget the landing. We teetered through a 20 mph crosswind onto a landing strip the size of a Band-Aid. I will never forget overdressing. I was too warm by half, and my arctic boots were far too large and heavy for a long hike.

Long hike? The island is only 2 miles long. We would be thorough. We walked not only



BOB DUCHESNE

Jeff Wells, senior scientist for the Boreal Songbird Initiative in the Canadian forest, says there are always a few northern cardinals on his Matinicus Christmas Count.

the length of the island but also most of the side roads spanning the width of the island. Wells reports that his new Fitbit showed 24,898 steps taken during the day, totaling 11 miles of hiking. If there was a rare bird present, or even a common bird, we would find it.

There is plenty of good winter birding in Maine, but islands have their own intrigue. Migrants can get trapped on islands, especially if a rare bird

has wandered off course. Monhegan is a famous spot to look for lost birds. Matinicus is, too. It's just harder to get to. As we walked up the runway, Wells pulled out all of his tricks, imitating bird alarm calls and three different species of owl — anything to get their attention.

It worked. On a small island, 20 miles out to sea, we counted 44 species, totaling 610 birds. I admit that it vastly exceeded

my expectations. Certainly I expected gulls. We tallied 76. I expected crows. We tallied 25. I expected sea ducks around the island, and we tallied 63 common eiders and 65 long-tailed ducks. We spotted 20 common goldeneyes, a surprisingly high number, and we noted one red-throated loon among the 10 loons we recorded. Nine purple sandpipers on the harbor breakwater allowed us a close look.

I didn't expect that the most abundant species we would encounter would be common grackles. It's a blackbird that should have been far south by January. We were utterly shocked to come across a flock of a hundred. If I started driving toward Miami right this minute, I wouldn't expect to see the first grackle until at least New Jersey. These guys should have abandoned the frozen north long ago.

There were other birds I'd never encountered in the middle of a Maine winter. We scored two yellow-rumped warblers, one hermit thrush, one winter wren and one northern flicker. A few typi-

cally hardy birds were present, including 19 white-throated sparrows and six song sparrows. I expected American goldfinches; we encountered 15. We noted three pine siskins, but sadly no crossbills or redpolls. Wells says there are always a few northern cardinals on his Matinicus Christmas Count, but 11 was a surprisingly high total.

The usual winter residents were cooperative. We enjoyed 19 dark-eyed juncos, 16 golden-crowned kinglets, 13 red-breasted nuthatches, six mourning doves, five downy woodpeckers and one hairy woodpecker.

And we had 45 black-capped chickadees. I was right. Counting your own chickadees over and over can get rather boring. But counting somebody else's? On Matinicus? Bliss.

Bob Duchesne serves as vice president of Maine Audubon's Penobscot Valley Chapter. He developed the Maine Birding Trail, with information at mainebirdingtrail.com. He can be reached at duchesne@mid-maine.com.

Hike

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straight ahead. You will pass several side trails — Quinn, Bobcat, Grouse and Moose trails. After passing Moose Trail on your right, start looking for the North Penjajawoc Forest trailhead kiosk, set back into the woods on your left. This kiosk is located about 0.75 mile from the parking lot, according to the Bangor Land Trust.

Information: The 105-acre North Penjajawoc Forest is sandwiched between the 686-acre Bangor City Forest and the 410-acre Walden-Parke Preserve and is a part of the Caribou Bog-Penjajawoc Project, an effort by several local organizations to create a conservation and recreation corridor in Greater Bangor.

The preserve was donated to the Bangor Land Trust in 2011 by a local developer whose planned housing development intruded into the protection zone of a vernal pool elsewhere in Bangor.

Also known as "spring pools," vernal pools are shallow depressions in the forest that usually contain water for only part of the year and often are home to salamanders, wood frogs, fairy shrimp and other creatures. In 2007, significant vernal pool habitat became protected by law in Maine under the Natural Resources Protection Act.

In order to continue his housing development plans, the developer was required to conserve an unprotected vernal pool elsewhere, so he chose to do so by purchasing the 105 acres that makes up North Penjajawoc Forest and transferring the property to the Bangor Land Trust, with restrictions imposed by the Army Corps of Engineers and monitored by the Brewer Land Trust. The property contains several vernal pools and other wetlands, a stream and a mature mixed forest.

The property also includes an extensive trail network.



AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

Derek Runnells and his dog Oreo pause while exploring the trails of North Penjajawoc Forest, a preserve owned by the Bangor Land Trust, in Bangor recently.

"When we received the property, the trails were already there, and a lot of mountain bikers used them," Bangor Land Trust office manager Donne Sinderson said.

Since 2011, the Bangor Land Trust and the Army Corps of Engineers have selected sections of trails in the network to close to habitat restoration. In most cases, these sections were soggy and, therefore, not particularly suitable for recreation anyway, Sinderson said.

In 2013, volunteers constructed a wide wooden footbridge over a stream on the property with funding from the Woodard and Curran Foundation. To make navigation easier, Bangor Land Trust has posted small, green, diamond-shaped Bangor Land Trust signs on tree trunks along the preserve's main trails.

"It has an off-the-beaten-path sort of feel," Sinderson said. "It's quiet."

This summer, the Bangor Land Trust plans to mark the trails that are open to the public and create a detailed trail to post at kiosks at four entrances to the preserve. In the meantime, the land trust suggests visitors carry a compass or GPS with them

while explore the preserve trail network, as it can be confusing.

Currently, two kiosks have been erected at two entrances — one in the Bangor City Forest and one on the old Veazie Railroad Bed — but they do not display a trail map.

The preserve is open to hiking, mountain biking, wildlife watching, skiing and snowshoeing. Dogs are permitted but must be kept on leash at all times, and owners are expected to pick up their dog's waste in all seasons. Hunting, camping and fires are not permitted.

For more information, call the Bangor Land Trust at 942-1010 or visit the land trust's website at bangor-landtrust.org.

Personal note: I thought I had visited all of the Bangor Land Trust preserves, but while checking out the land trust's website last weekend I realized I'd overlooked one: the North Penjajawoc Forest. So on Sunday, my husband Derek and I went on a snowshoeing trip with our dog Oreo in the Bangor City Forest to find the mysterious preserve.

We found the entrance to the North Penjajawoc Forest easily enough, thanks to in-

structions on the Bangor Land Trust website, but my knowledge ended at the forest's trailhead kiosk.

"Is it a loop trail?" Derek asked as we slogged through the snow, breaking trail through a corridor of snowy balsam fir trees.

"I don't know," I replied. "I don't have a map."

"How long is the trail?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied. "The [Bangor Land Trust] website just said it was an 'extensive trail network.'"

The conversation reminded me of Sundays from my childhood, when my mom would take my sister and I on car rides on random roads and call it a "Sunday adventure." We truly had no agenda but to explore. Maybe she had run out of ways to entertain us, but I remember really enjoying those carefree car rides.

I won't attempt to trace all the turns and we took in the forest. We simply took the widest, clearest trails, knowing we could always backtrack out of the forest if necessary. Along the way, we examined fresh snowshoe hare tracks — some accompanied by perfectly round hare droppings — and deer tracks. However, our snowshoes were so noisy we had little chance of actually coming across any woodland creature, aside from the occasional woodpecker.

The trails eventually led us to the old Veazie Railroad Bed, where we got our bearings and turned left to walk past the Walden-Parke Preserve and back to the Bangor City Forest, noting trees stripped of bark by porcupines along the way.

While we likely had been the only people snowshoeing in North Penjajawoc Forest, we had lots of company as we navigated through the Bangor City Forest back to Kirtledge Road parking lot. With about a 2-mile walk from the railroad bed to the car, I found myself looking at the skiers with envy and wondering how Oreo would do at skijoring.

Artist

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at UMaine, Sader decided to go back to school. She earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts with a focus in printmaking; a master's degree of science, ecology and environmental science; and a bachelor's degree in arts and sciences — all from UMaine, where she taught printmaking for seven semesters.

During her studies, she developed several interests — one being soil ecology, the processes that occur beneath the surface of the earth.

"I've buried a lot of things in the soil of our backyard garden over the years, just to see what will happen," she said, laughing in her voice.

In the spring, Sader unearthed her wool bundles and was delighted in their transformation. The natural materials inside the wool, as well as bacteria in the soil, had stained the pale fabric with yellows, reds, browns and oranges. Also evident were organic patterns — the outline of a bean pod, the stamp of a crabapple.

In her home studio, Sader is using the fabric to create hand-stitched "garments" for the garden. For a birch tree, she's creating bands to wrap around its trunk, fastening with handmade maple buttons and decorated with stitching that emulates the patterns that formed in the fabric while buried.

Around a locust tree, she plans to create a Victorian-style collar of thorns and fabric, and over a granite boulder, a shelter of twigs tightly stitched together.

With a tinge of humor, Sader describes her artwork as "labor-intensive." A lot of unseen work goes into both her installations and fine art prints. But the viewer doesn't need to know about all of that, she said.

"A viewer of art is free to take from it whatever it means to them — and add to it, connect with it on a one-on-one basis," Sader said. "Art can stand alone."

This isn't the first time that Sader has worked in the UMaine gardens. In 2002, she created an art installation called "Subconscious Petals" in the gardens' crabapple orchard, hanging cotton-based canopies in the trees to record natural events, such as the falling of apple blossoms. And from that work, she also created a series of prints titled "Petal Portraits," in which she experimented with the natural pigments hidden in the apple blossom petals of 15 different cultivars, which she researched to trace back to their origin.

Sader also has created site-specific art installations at the Fields Pond Audubon Center in Holden, where she's woven together pine needles and cedar branches in the forest to talk about bird migration and the passing of time.

"I like to go and be isolated in the natural environment," Sader said.

Last May, she spent a week as an artist in residence at a dune shack in the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District on Cape Cod, where she created an installation of "wind recorders," sculptures of balsa wood and strips of cloth that she printed with designs and colors inspired by the compass grass, carpenter bees and tree swallows she observed around her dune shack.

She recorded the installation with photos and video, and when she returned to Maine, she gave a recent presentation about it called "Impressions of the Cape" at Waterfall Arts in Belfast.

In an effort to make art more accessible to her community, Sader plans to open a studio and gallery space called Dragon Echo this spring in downtown Orono. There she will host two open studio days a week, as well as public art and gardening workshops. The gallery will display her artwork, as well as the artwork of other local artists, she said.

Sader's artwork can be viewed and purchased at The Turtle Gallery in Deer Isle and The Rock & Art Shop in downtown Bangor and downtown Bar Harbor.

Things to Do Outdoors

AUGUSTA — Six-part nature-writing workshop with instructor Andrea Lani, 6-8 p.m. through Jan. 23, Viles Arboretum, 153 Hospital St. Lani has a Bachelor of Arts in human ecology, a Master of Fine Arts in creative writing and is a certified Maine Master Naturalist. \$45 fee will include Viles Arboretum membership; \$10 for members. Space is limited. 626-7989 or vilesarboretum.org.

BREWER — Brian Roth, an expert in forestry regeneration and management who has been conducting research in the field for 25 years, will talk about his work, 6:30-8 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 27, First Congregational Church, 35 Church St. Roth and team recently discovered the tallest chestnut tree in North America growing in Maine. education@amc-maine.org or www.amc-maine.org.

DEXTER, HARTLAND, ST. ALBANS — Sebasticook Valley Chamber of Commerce ice fishing derby, 7 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23, Lake Was-sookeag in Dexter, Big Indian Pond in St. Albans and Great Moose Lake in Hartland. Cash prizes awarded for heaviest brook trout, lake trout and bass. \$2 fee includes entry in grand prize drawing for 100 gallons of home heating oil. Nicole, chamber executive director, 368-4698, or our-chamber.org.

ELLSWORTH — 2016 Banff Mountain Film Festival, Friday through Sunday, Jan. 29-31, The Grand. Culture collection, 7 p.m. Friday, Jan. 29; Extreme Sports section, 7 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 30; Best of Festival program, 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 31. General admission tickets \$15. Box office, 667-9500, grandonline.org or Facebook.

GRAND LAKE STREAM — Downeast Lakes Land Trust sponsors "Allagash

Tails and Tales," 6-7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 25, Grand Lake Stream School Building, 15 Water St. Narrated by author and former ranger supervisor Tim Caverly. Music, scenic and historic photographs from Maine's North Woods. 796-2100 or cbrown@downeast-lakes.org.

GREAT POND — Sixth annual House in the Woods fishing derby, 6 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23, Great Pond Outdoor Adventure Center, 9 Dow Pines Road, Great Pond. Prizes for brown trout, small mouth bass and pickerel. Raffle prizes and 50/50. The Great Pond Rec Center will have breakfast sandwiches for sale at 5 a.m.; lunchtime offerings include chili, beef stew, hot dogs, chili dogs and sweets for sale. Judy Manzo, 584-2000.

HOLDEN — G&M Family Market Hancock County Ice Fishing Derby, Jan. 30-31, in all legal fishing waters in Hancock Coun-

ty. Weigh-in, 3-4 p.m. each day, G&M Family Market, 1024 Main Road. Tickets \$15 for adults, free for age 12 and under. Admission includes entry into the derby, door prizes and free Amato's pizza and soda feed, 3 p.m. Jan. 31. Prizes and raffle. 50/50 raffle will benefit Bald Mountain Snow Riders Club.

ORLAND — Pull on boots, skis or snowshoes for a full moon walk sponsored by Great Pond Mountain Conservation Trust, 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23, Great Pond Mountain Wildlands. Meet at the North Gate on Bald Mountain Road, 0.2 miles west of Winkumpough Road, for an easy 1.5-mile round trip to the Baker Brook Lean-to, where there will be a bonfire and marshmallow roasting. Bring your own warm drink. www.greatpondtrust.org or 974-7097.

ORRINGTON — Nature-based exploration for preschoolers, 10-11 a.m. Wednesdays, through

Feb. 24, Fields Pond Audubon Center, 216 Fields Pond Road. Maximum of three children up to age 5 per adult. \$15, \$10 center members. Registration, 989-2591.

ROCKPORT — Maine Coast Heritage Trust's Moonlight Cross-Country Ski Tour, 6:30-8:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23, in the pastures of Aldermere Farm,

ROCKPORT — Maine Coast Heritage Trust Moonlight Cross-Country Ski Tour, 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 23, in the pastures of Aldermere Farm. Meet at the main barn at 20 Russell Ave. The group will start the trail together at 6:40 p.m. Luminarias will guide the way, leading to a small bonfire with hot chocolate. Bring your own gear, including a headlamp or flashlight for skiing through the darker wooded sections. Parking is on the roadside along Russell Avenue. Free to the public but donations appreciated. Reservations required. Volunteer guides

needed and bring baked goods to share. The trails are open during daylight hours. 236-2739 or jalb bury@mcht.org.

ST. JOHN VALLEY — Long Lake Ice Fishing Derby, Jan. 30-31, on Long, Cross, Square, Eagle, St. Froid, Portage, Beau and Glazier lakes, Carr Pond and the St. John River. www.longlakeicefishing-derby.com, Paul Bernier, 227-5252, or Ryan D. Pelletier, 551-0411.

UNITY — All-terrain vehicle safety course, 6-9 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 27, RSU 3 Adult Education, College Performing Arts Center. rsu3.maineadulted.org or 568-3426.

UNITY — Snowmobile safety course, 6-9 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 26, RSU 3 Adult Education, College Performing Arts Center. rsu3.maineadulted.org or 568-3426.

For a complete listing of calendar items or to submit your event, visit www.bangordailynews.com.