

# Momma bears, early spring lead to adventures

I've been trying to hold back spring, fighting a losing battle. I only hoped that winter would linger long enough to get me through last Monday. It was the day I was due to join biologists from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife on a visit to a bear's den. I was sore afraid that the bear and her cubs would shake off slumber and wander off before we could get there.

And that's exactly what the birds were telling me. Spring was early. For two weeks, I've been waging war on a pair of mourning doves whose amorous cooing indicated an intent to take over my deck again. Last year, I was too soft on them. I let them raise several broods, while respectfully denying myself the use of my own lounge chair until August.

Ever since the last snow — January, was it? — hairy woodpeckers around my house have begun each day with territorial drumming. They are mating early. Most of the year, my local white-breasted nuthatches confine themselves to one or two vocalizations. This time of year, they unleash their entire romantic repertoire. A barred owl has been hooting above my roof for a week. They're pairing up, too.

When I arrived at IFW headquarters in Bangor at 8 a.m., a house finch was cir-



Bob Duchesne got an up-close look at baby bears when he joined biologists from the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife on a visit to a bear's den.

cling and singing its romantic invitation. A hairy woodpecker landed in the tree by the building, calling and drumming. From the back side of the fields, red-winged blackbirds were conk-a-reeing. My feeling of dread grew. Spring was here. The bears would be gone.

It got worse. Our little caravan of bear-seekers stopped at a convenience store in Eddington. Some of us went for coffee. One biologist gassed up the truck and an all-terrain vehicle. I

stood on the edge of the parking lot, drinking in the cacophony of bird sound. More red-winged blackbirds called from a nearby wetland. Bunches of grackles flew over. A goldfinch sang. A chickadee intoned its territorial love song. Spring.

I am happy to report that the trip was successful, sort of. Our objective was a bear called Shield, named after the white shield-like pattern on her chest. She was orphaned as a cub, raised by rehabilitators and released

Down East. Even as a small cub, she was a feisty little scamp, asserting dominance over other cubs on the refuge. As it turns out, she carried that trait into adulthood.

IFW biologist Randy Cross and his crew have tranquilized and handled 300 bears this winter. Shield turned out to be the toughest. Now 5 years old, she was a first-time mom with two cubs and a bad attitude. Worse, she had picked the perfect den site: a deep tunnel with a bend.

Whoever would tranquilize this bear would have to squeeze face first into this den, confronting a wide awake and irritable momma bear protecting two cubs, without enough room to get the long tranquilizing jab stick around the corner.

Lisa Bates was the first to try. Lisa isn't much bigger than a bear cub herself, but she's used to challenging angry momma bears. However, after crawling on her belly to within inches of the perturbed sow, she managed only a glancing blow, bend-

ing the needle with little effect. Longer arms were needed. Mitch Jackman took the next turn.

By now, Shield was pretty annoyed. After long minutes of squeezing deeper into the hole, Mitch watched helplessly as Shield lunged and angrily knocked the syringe right off the end of his pole. Nervous but undaunted, he attached a third needle and removed a final section from the pole. He would take his last jab with a pole that was only 2 feet long.

It worked. Eventually, Shield and two beautiful cubs were brought out, measured, and weighed. Which brings us back to birds, the forgotten purpose of this column.

The drama unfolded slowly. Though the bear was snuffling loudly, we were whispering. I could hear the birds around us. I was in the woods, somewhere around Mopang Stream in Beddington. It was sunny, warm, and snowless. If not spring, it was spring-like. An eagle flew over, followed shortly by the croaking of a raven. At any other time of year, the raven may not have cared. But it was spring and ravens can't tolerate eagles in an area where they plan to nest. I never saw the chase, but I could hear it all the way to the horizon. Spring is not a good time of year to annoy mothers.

Bob Duchesne serves as vice president of Maine Audubon's Penobscot Valley Chapter. He developed the Maine Birding Trail, with information at [mainebirdingtrail.com](http://mainebirdingtrail.com). He can be reached at [duchesne@midmaine.com](mailto:duchesne@midmaine.com).

## Hike

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show us why we should be grateful; second, they inspire us to emulate the examples memorialized; and third, they beckon us into the future."

The campus and mission of Good Will-Hinckley has changed of the years, but it has always been a place of learning and outdoor activity.

Today, the 1,000-acre campus includes several schools and learning centers, cottages that house staff and students, and a natural history museum.

The L.C. Bates Museum was constructed in the early 1900s by Hinckley, who was an avid collector of natural objects. One of the highlights of the museum is the unique dioramas painted by Charles D. Hubbard, an avid outdoorsman and plein air painter. These dioramas display a variety of taxidermied animals that are native to Maine. Hubbard aimed to depict specific areas of the state in the dioramas and went on-site to paint the backgrounds for each.

The museum comprises several rooms of collections. One room is devoted entirely to a collection of rocks, minerals and fossils. Another room is filled with taxidermied birds, eggs and bones. Exhibits also include Native American artifacts, interactive nature displays, an old printing press, whale bones, seashells and mounted fish. At the museum gift shop, visitors can pick up brochures, trail maps, scavenger hunt lists and complete a small craft project.

Admission to the museum is \$3 for adults and \$1 for children 17 years old and younger.

The L.C. Bates Museum and the trails are open to the public year-round. During the winter, museum is open by appointment or by chance. Staff members usually are at the museum 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and from 1 to 4:30 p.m. most Sundays, but it's best to call ahead to ensure someone will be there. Visitors should dress warmly during the winter because the museum will be chilly.

The trails are open to walkers and leashed dogs. Bikes, motorized vehicles, fires, smoking, alcoholic beverages and camping are not permitted.

For information about the L.C. Bates Museum and the Good Will-Hinckley Trails, visit [gwh.org/lcbates](http://gwh.org/lcbates) or call 238-4350.



A plaque displaying a quote by Chaucer was donated by Wavus Camps in Jefferson to be placed in one of the many stone monuments located along the Good Will-Hinckley Trails.



A stone seat sits by a fire pit at the head of a natural amphitheater in the forest near the Good Will-Hinckley Trails. The seat was originally constructed in 1912 by Ernest Thompson Seton, the "Black Wolf" and Chief Scout of Boy Scouts of America.

**Personal note:** I wasn't sure the L.C. Bates Museum would be open March 8, when I arrived at Good Will-Hinckley to walk the trail network with my dog, Oreo. But I was there, so why not give it a try?

I walked around the side of the giant brick building to a small wooden door. To my surprise, it gave way, swinging into a dim, cold room. I stepped inside. Staring down at me was an antelope. It stood on a glass case, which was filled with wood blocks and

pressed leaves. My focus widened, taking in rows of such displays, bleached animal skulls and turtle shells and animals frozen in time through the art of taxidermy. There were black bear cubs wrestling, a bobcat baring its teeth and a snake poised, ready to strike.

As I processed the odd surroundings, I almost tripped over a wooden chair placed just before the door. On it sat a bell and a sign instructing visitors to ring upon arrival. I

picked it up, breaking the silence with a timid "ding ... ding." A cheerful young woman walked around the corner almost instantly, and I explained to her my reason for being there. I wanted to use the nature trails, and I was wondering if they had a map.

I soon was placed into the hands of museum curator Deborah Staber, who gave me a quick tour of the museum and told me about the museum's many public nature programs. Nighttime program moths and meteorites sounded like it would be especially interesting. I signed up for the museum's email list as Staber grabbed me a trail map and several other brochures. She then led me through the daily craft: a pipe cleaner bracelet adorned with clear beads that turn colors in the sun. It shows kids when UV rays are present and opens up a conversation about wearing sunscreen, she explained.

I could have spent hours in the museum, but I was there for the trails, the sun was shining and Oreo was waiting.

Our exploration of the trails took about three hours. In that time, we managed to visit almost every stone monument listed on the trail map brochure. Oreo climbed up onto the property's famous stone throne and sniffed around the Granite House. We walked down the Avenue of Pines and sat on a bench of an outdoor classroom for a snack. And the whole time, we saw not another soul, save for many chickadees and nuthatches and one pileated woodpecker that flew so close overhead it seemed a "hello."

For more of Aislinn Sarnacki's adventures, visit her blog at [actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com](http://actoutwithaislinn.bangordailynews.com). Follow her on Twitter: @1minhikegirl.

## Things to Do Outdoors

**AUGUSTA** — State of Maine Sportsman's Show, April 1-3, Augusta Civic Center, 76 Community Drive. Tickets \$5 each if ordered before March 20 at [show.mainesportsman.com](http://show.mainesportsman.com) or by U.S. mail to 183 State St., Station 101, Augusta 04330. Full price, \$8.

**DOVER-FOXCROFT** — The Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District has cancelled its Welcome Spring Equinox Celebration scheduled for Saturday, March 19, at the Law Farm because of wet weather conditions predicted for this week. 564-2321, ext. 3, [info@piscataquisswcd.org](mailto:info@piscataquisswcd.org) or [www.piscataquisswcd.org](http://www.piscataquisswcd.org).

**FREEPORT** — "Sailing from San Francisco to Labrador with the Kids" with Ben Zartman, 7-8 p.m. Friday, March 25, L.L. Bean camping department, 95 Main St. Zartman and his wife, Danielle, sailed with their three kids in a boat they had built themselves, stopping in 12 different countries and many regions. Free. 877-755-2326.

**GRAND LAKE STREAM** — Downeast Lakes Land Trust celebrating Maine Maple Sunday with traditional "backyard boildown" and pancake brunch, noon Sunday, March 20, Grand Lake Stream School. 796-2100 or [cbrown@downeastlakes.org](mailto:cbrown@downeastlakes.org).

**LUBEC** — Full moonrise with a hike to the summit of Klondike Mountain Preserve, Wednesday, March 23. Meet in the parking area at the preserve, 6:15 p.m. Sunset, 6:44 p.m.; moonrise, 7:04 p.m. About ¾-mile round trip. Bring hiking stick and flashlight. [Facebook.com/DowneastCoastalConservancy](http://Facebook.com/DowneastCoastalConservancy) or 255-4500.

**MACHIASPORT** — Maine Coast Heritage Trust free guided Ides of March hike, 10 a.m.-noon Saturday, March 19, Long Point Preserve. Meeting in big parking area on left near end of East Side Road. From East Machias, take Willow Street across from the fire station; right onto Route 191 at stop sign; right onto East Side Road; parking lot on left 1.8 miles. Learn how to identify local tree species by their bark and buds and look for tracks and other sign of local animals along the trail. Deirdre Whitehead, 271-7701.

**ORONO** — All-volunteer Orono Land Trust to celebrate 30-year anniversary at annual membership meeting, Friday, April 1, Keith Anderson Community House, 19 Bennoch Road. Social gathering, 6:30 p.m.; short annual membership meeting, 7 p.m.; followed by guest speaker professor David B. Field on "The Appalachian Trail in Maine — What is it Supposed to Be?"

**For a complete listing of calendar items or to submit your event, visit [www.bangordailynews.com](http://www.bangordailynews.com).**

## Caswell club to hold breakfast, bake sale

**CASWELL** — A breakfast and bake sale fundraiser will be held 7-11 a.m. Sunday, April 10, at the Pleasant

Ridge Riders Snowmobile Clubhouse, 17 Pleasant Ridge Road.

The cost of the breakfast is \$7 for adults, \$3 for children.

Proceeds will benefit the groomer fund.

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