

## Things to Do Outdoors

**BAR HARBOR** — Second annual Northeast Climate Bicycle Ride from Bar Harbor to Boston, fundraiser and “green conference on wheels” with more than 200 bicyclists traveling 390 miles along the coastline, Sept. 8-12. Designed to raise awareness of sustainability, renewable energy, climate change issues and bicycle advocacy. Each rider will raise at least \$2,800 to benefit one of more than 100 organizations including RAILS-to-TRAILS Conservancy, Sierra Club, 350.org, B Lab, Rainforest Alliance, Food & Water Watch, Maine Farmland Trust and others. Participants will cycle approximately 60 miles a day and hear from guest speakers who are leaders in sustainability and green innovation on topics including climate science, sustainable living, bicycle advocacy, and environmental activism. climateride.org/events/northeast.

**BAR HARBOR** — Carey Kish, veteran hiker, photographer, registered Maine Guide, author and founding member of Maine Outdoor Adventure Club who has thru-hiked the Appalachian Trail twice, will talk about his 2015 trip, 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 2, Jesup Memorial Library, 34 Mount Desert St. Part of Cadillac Mountain Sports Speaker Series. 288-4245 or kchagnon@jesuplibrary.org.

**DEDHAM** — Tyke hikes with farm and sanctuary steward Gail VanWart, 10-11 a.m. Saturdays, through August, Peaked Mountain Farm, 6 Ellerys Lane. Children must be accompanied by adult. Experience nature, do a craft, hear a story. Indoor activities if the weather is inclement. \$3, free to children.

**GEORGETOWN** — Kennebec Estuary Land Trust: Learn about edible and medicinal plants of Higgins Mountain Preserve, 10 a.m.-noon Saturday, Aug. 27, at the preserve. Free. kennebecestuary.org/sweet-summertime-events or Becky Kolak, 442-8400.

**GREENVILLE** — Friends of Wilson Pond Area photo contest in celebration of its 25th anniversary as a land trust. Rules and information at fowpa.org. Prizes include dinner for two at West Branch Pond Camps, tickets for two for a Katahdin Rock and Roll Cruise, and Indian Hill Trading Post \$50 gift certificate. Deadline for photo submissions Sept. 1.

**ORLAND** — Sing out the summer around a campfire, 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 31, Great Pond Mountain Wildlands. S'mores and musicians. Bring camp chair, beverage, marshmallow stick, bug protection and musical instrument. Enter at South Gate on Route 1 just south of Route 176 intersection and follow signs to campfire site. Drive in or hike approximately one mile. Free. Rain date, Sept. 1. 469-6929 or cheri@greatpondtrust.org.

**WINSLOW** — Hunter Safety Courses: 6-9 p.m. Aug. 31 and Sept. 1 and 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Sept. 3; 6-9 p.m. Oct. 5-6 and 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Oct. 8, Winslow Fire Department. Don Perrine at 238-0279.

**WINSLOW** — Bowhunting safety courses with Don Perrine, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Aug. 28; 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Sept. 11, Winslow Fire Department. 238-0279.

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

# Nuthatches are everywhere this summer

Nuthatches have exploded all over the place. It's been a screwy summer.

I first noticed the trend about a month ago. I've been guiding birders often this season. Once the songbirds stop crooning in early July, I have to rely on my bag of tricks to get birds to reveal themselves. It's normal for red-breasted nuthatches to be among the first birds to respond to my urgings. Chickadees soon follow. If I'm lucky, they'll get chatty and entice other birds to approach, wondering what the ruckus is all about.

Typically, one nuthatch will arrive shortly after I start making my squeaks and pishes. Perhaps another will come in 30 seconds later. Not this summer. Whole families of six or more have been descending on me at virtually every stop. Red-breasted nuthatches made an epic number of babies this year.

Nuthatches are bold and inquisitive. Fearing hawks, many birds won't perch at the top of a tree, but nuthatches will. They will come down to the lowest branches and stare you in the eye. If they don't like your tricks, they will scold. On the whole, they're tame and friendly — at least to people. They can be rather aggressive toward any bird that desires their nesting cavity,



Red-breasted nuthatch.

including house wrens, downy woodpeckers and even their bigger cousins, the white-breasted nuthatches.

At first, the multitude of this summer's nuthatches was charming. A swarm of these tiny birds all chattering at once will certainly attract the attention of other birds. That's helpful. Until it becomes distracting. Every time I look for an arriving warbler, my eye is diverted to the movement of another nuthatch.

I kid you not. Last weekend, my tour group was out on Bar Harbor Whale Watch. We were about 20 miles out, approaching a gathering of three humpbacks, when a small bird approached and fluttered around the top deck. Yup. It was a red-breasted nuthatch. Even at

sea, I can't escape them.

I can't imagine what triggered this year's population explosion. Red-breasted nuthatches are year-round Maine natives, though they may head south in some winters if food is in short supply. They primarily eat insects, spiders and caterpillars during the summer and switch to a diet of conifer seeds in the winter. Nuthatches can walk up and down tree trunks with equal abandon, often hanging upside down underneath branches. They use their long, thin bills to probe for insects in bark crevices. They also use their bills to hammer open seeds. The name nuthatch shares the same Old English root as the word hatchet.

Nuthatches are regular visitors to feeders. They

have the habit of seeking the bigger seeds, which they hammer open, and they often drop the smaller seeds to the ground. That annoys me but delights the squirrels. They are also known for caching food for the winter, jamming seeds and insects into crevices before the cold season arrives.

It's been a hot, dry summer. I'm assuming that this has produced a bumper crop of critters that nuthatches feed their young. Nuthatches are capable of flying out and catching a bug in the air, but they are mostly interested in creepy crawly things. We must have a lot of creepy crawlers this summer.

Now that Maine's weather has more in common with Maryland than Newfoundland, I'm seeing other trends

this summer. Swallows left early. During my five-day tour last week, we spied two barn swallows. That's all. Tree, bank and cliff swallows are long gone. Aside from robins, we didn't spy a single thrush. Hermit thrushes are late migrants, so I can't believe they've left. The warm, dry weather has probably altered their food supplies on the forest floor, forcing them to forage in a less conspicuous way.

I'm having trouble finding warblers. Vireos are less common than usual. Flycatchers have faded away. Not many flying insects hatch in a drought. On the other hand, anecdotally I'd say crows, ravens and blue jays did well this summer. Their family groups are bigger than average this year.

Sadly, puffins have taken a blow to their colorful chins. Biologists fear that virtually every puffin chick has already died or will soon because of malnutrition. Their parents were simply unable to find enough of their normal cold-water food fish in Maine's warming ocean.

Whatever is happening in the woods, it seems to be good news for nuthatches. Scientists estimate there are about 20 million in the world. That may have doubled in the last month.

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

## Learning to forage on a plentiful peninsula

BY NATALIE MCKEE  
CAPE COD TIMES

When Rachel Goclawski was a little kid spending her summers in Orleans, she says she was always tasting weeds.

“Other kids thought I was a little weird,” she says. “But I found some tasty weeds.”

Goclawski works full-time as a U.S. Army information technology specialist assigned to a green energy testing camp at Fort Devens. She says foraging is a hobby she combines with hiking and biking.

“I jam on my brakes when I see a big mushroom,” she says.

She got interested in foraging when she had kids of her own and was looking for ways to save money and still feed her family healthful foods. When she needed a natural solution (rather than a steroid cream) to a terrible poison ivy rash she got while she was nursing, she discovered the healing powers of jewelweed. That plant neutralizes the oil that makes humans react to poison ivy. By mixing the jewelweed with plantain, an invasive weed that grows in lawns that has great disinfecting powers, she created a salve that removed the rash. From there, she became more and more interested in the plants she could eat.

Besides things like blackberries and blueberries that people might expect, there are many wild foods unique to the Cape including beach plums, glasswort, sea beans, sea lettuce and beach roses. Believe it or not, you can make jelly out of the petals of beach roses, as well as from the rose hips which are a great source of vitamin C. But don't harvest the hips when the roses are big and beautiful — wait until after that first frost because they'll be sweeter, she says.

Boston-based Russ Cohen has been foraging for more than 40 years and leads foraging walks all over New England. He's even written a book, “Wild Plants I Have Known... and Eaten.” He says the hips are such a concentrated source of vitamin C, one cup has as much of the vitamin as 12 oranges.

And even though most suburban families hate dandelions, Goclawski says they are a very valuable wild food that helps fight all kinds of diseases from macular degeneration to digestive problems. Even the flowers have tons of antioxidants.

“I batter them up and fry them, (or) put them in pancakes,” Goclawski says. You can make decaf coffee from the roots and the best time to eat the leaves is before the flower stem grows. Just cut them from the root (the root will grow another one) and enjoy the greens in a salad.

Still, foraging on the Cape goes beyond native species: Goclawski says she loves harvesting invasive plants like garlic mustard and autumn berries that are very nutritious because she gets healthy food, can pick as much as she wants, and it helps the environment.

Dave Scandurra owns Edible



Mushrooms stand out on a tree trunk near one end of the Hemlock Trail in Unity College Forest in April.

Landscapes of Cape Cod in Brewster, which creates customized vegetable gardens and full landscapes that incorporate local food and edible plants. Although these gardens tend to use cultivated plants, he has been foraging for more than a decade.

He says one of his “all time favorite wild edible snacks” is the invasive garlic mustard. Scandurra says that if you harvest the shoots in early spring they are “succulent and juicy and tender.” He eats the garlic-flavored stems raw, but he says you could also steam and stir fry them — or throw them in a frittata.

Besides the garlic mustard, Scandurra says basswood tree leaves are edible, grow all over the Cape and are great to eat cooked when they are young and tender. When hostas put out shoots in the spring, just before they unfurl, Scandurra suggests snipping them off and sauteing them. Another fun fact? You can tap red maples for sap — you'll just have to boil it a little longer than sugar maple sap to get syrup.

### Protect the environment

But always keep the environment in mind when foraging. While foragers can take as much invasive species, like garlic mustard or green fleece seaweed, as they'd like (it actually helps the environment,) they should take care when harvesting native species. As a general rule,

Cohen says you should harvest less than half of what you find on a bush or tree.

So where do you go to find nature's bounty? Cohen suggests the first place people try foraging is in their own backyard — some weeds that grow in the garden are just as nutritious, if not more, than those folks are deliberately trying to grow, he says.

Goclawski recommends some conservation lands (check first!) and even downtown areas and unkept parking lots.

“You'd be surprised how much you'd find,” she says. “But be careful that pesticides and herbicides aren't used in the area.”

If you aren't sure, call the town DPW and ask if they spray.

### Appreciating the hunt

Besides the nutritional and medicinal benefits of foraging, Goclawski says there's a certain spiritual side to being out in nature and appreciating the incredible gifts available there. She's a Christian, but says she has friends who are New Age and Jewish who all benefit from seeing how the land gives sustenance and medicine.

### Supply vs. demand

But even if foraging is enjoyable, it won't likely become your main source of food. At most, Cohen says

10 percent of his diet is from foraged foods — otherwise he eats a fairly conventional mix of supermarket, home-grown and restaurant food.

Tamar Haspel moved to the Cape from Manhattan and writes a monthly Washington Post about food supply issues. She took a self-imposed challenge in 2012 to eat 20.12 percent of her calories from first-hand food (that which she grew, hunted, etc.). But not much of that food was foraged, even though Haspel has tried her hand at the task.

“I'm kind of a curmudgeon on foraging,” Haspel says, adding that she thinks that a lot of foraging is overrated. Still, she loves looking for mushrooms and berries. “Mushrooms are my No. 1 foraging target.”

### Marvelous mushrooms require care

Wesley Price, founder of the Cape Cod Mycological Society (a sister of the Boston Mycological Society), is interested in the study of all fungi, but enjoys foraging for edible mushrooms. His favorite mushroom to forage for is the tricholoma magnivelare, also known as the American matsutake or pine mushroom, because it doesn't appear above ground and you have to look for it very slowly and carefully, searching for bumps in the pine duff, and then carefully unearthing them.

But keep in mind that many mushrooms are dangerous to eat — don't just pull one out of your garden or yard and assume it's safe for consumption.

That being said, “No one who has ever joined a mushroom club has ever expired due to poisoning,” Price says reassuringly, adding that mushroomobserver.org is a great place to get confirmation on whether or not a mushroom is edible.

Regardless, humans should always cook edible mushrooms before eating them. Price likes to break off the mushroom stem, chop it up into fine pieces with garlic and parsley (maybe some bread crumbs and peppers) and re-stuff that into the cap. Put it on broil for 10 to 12 minutes and enjoy!

For the amateur forager, Scandurra recommends “A Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants of Eastern and Central North America” by Lee Peterson. Cohen doesn't do his walks to make money, but says a walk like his is one of the best ways to learn about what you can and can't eat. Or, of course, you could attend Goclawski's talk.

Even if foraging won't replace your weekly grocery budget, Cohen says he wants to help people connect to the outdoors through their taste buds.

“Knowing what you can nibble on makes being outside so much more interesting,” he says.

Goclawski says beach plums will start ripening at the end of summer and make a great jam or jelly. She likes this jelly recipe you can find at [spectacularlydelicious.com](http://spectacularlydelicious.com) by searching for “Beach Plum Jelly Reduced Sugar Recipe.”