

# Everyone’s got leftovers this time of year. Even birders.

I’m getting rid of my Thanksgiving leftovers. These are all of my left-over observations that didn’t fit into columns this year. Take what you want and pass the gravy.

The prettier the bird, the less likely it will sit still for a photo.

The rare bird I am looking for will turn up moments after I leave.

Birding generates more vanity plates than any other hobby.

If I can still hear golden-crowned kinglets, I’m not deaf yet.

No matter how clever I think my bird feeder protection strategy is, the squirrel has all day to prove me wrong.

Really, I should be more excited about gulls than I am.

Is there anything sadder than a bald eagle with a combover?

Maybe I shouldn’t admit this, but I know what a ruffed grouse looks like, sounds like and tastes like.

When a mockingbird steals the song of another bird, he invariably sings it better than the bird he’s mocking. They fool me even when I’m watching them do it.

I crossed a parrot with a

woodpecker. It only talks in Morse code.

Chicken soup is good for your health, unless you’re the chicken.

Purple finches and purple sandpipers aren’t purple, but they’re close enough.

What if we named birds like we name hurricanes? Instead of naming it a red-eyed vireo, we’d just call it Alice.

One vulture says to the other, “Does this clown taste funny to you?” Old joke.

Birds fly south for the winter because it’s too far to walk. Older joke.

An African swallow could carry a 5-pound coconut, but a European swallow couldn’t. Monty Python joke.

Ninety percent of birders walk underneath 90 percent of birds without knowing they’re there. Bird noises matter.

The active ingredient in Dove soap is not what I thought it would be.

No two sparrow species are alike, even though they’re all brown. Honestly, they’re not that hard.

Whenever I stop on an abandoned roadside in the wilderness to listen for an unusual bird, a car will come along.

Whenever I’m watching a bird in the North Woods, tourists assume I’m looking at a moose.

Whenever I tell nonbirders what I am actually doing, they will tell me where they recently saw an eagle.



**BOB DUCHESNE**  
**GOOD BIRDING**



BOB DUCHESNE

Among Bob Duchesne’s 2015 observations: “This was the year that I decided the spruce grouse is my favorite bird. Every spruce grouse has a distinct personality.”

This was the year that I decided the spruce grouse is my favorite bird. Every spruce grouse has a distinct personality.

If a train leaves Chicago going west at 25 mph, and another train leaves Sacramento going east at 30 mph, a raven is smart enough to know where they meet.

Owls aren’t as wise as college graduates, but they’re not \$35,000 in debt either.

Yes, some robins are here in winter.

Many of today’s cheaper binoculars are better than yesterday’s expensive ones. Time to upgrade?

The influx of northern birds into Maine is different every winter, including this winter. I can’t wait to see what wanders in.

There is almost no difference between the length of the bills on a short-billed dowitcher and a long-billed

dowitcher. That annoys me.

I’m surprised at how many people don’t know how their binoculars work.

Global warming will eliminate puffins from Maine, maybe during your lifetime.

It may take a couple of years longer, but the same is true for lobsters.

Somebody will comment on this column, asserting that climate change is a myth.



COURTESY OF GAYLE ZYDLEWSKI UNDER ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PERMIT 16036

Graduate student Catherine Johnston holds a shortnose sturgeon as part of research being conducted on the species by a University of Maine team.

## Sturgeon

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sturgeon in the Penobscot with a series of graduate students. After discovering the presence of sturgeon in 2005, researchers sought to catch and tag fish, then figure out how many sturgeon might be living in the river.

They’ve identified a population of about 1,000 fish that spend their winters here, and have seen their wintering area change from year to year.

But those fish haven’t been spending their entire lives in the Penobscot.

“In the early days, we were putting tags [on fish] and expecting them to stay in the Penobscot,” Gayle Zydlewski said. “And then they started turning up in the Kennebec.”

One possible reason: The spawning habitat in the Penobscot, especially before two dams were removed as part of the Penobscot River Restoration Project, was not as attractive as the spawning habitat in the Kennebec.

“We’ve been trying to follow a fish [by monitoring tagged fish] in the Penobscot for 10 years,” Kinnison said.

That monitoring has been unsuccessful.

Graduate student Catherine Johnston, who has been working on the project since the spring of 2014, is the latest grad student to handle those monitoring chores. Among other tasks, Johnston spends a couple nights a week in May and June tending nets designed to catch eggs and larvae that spawning sturgeon would leave behind ... if they’re spawning in the river.

All of those researchers have come up empty: No evidence of spawning sturgeon has been found.

“I’m only maybe the fifth grad student who’s done that — look for eggs and larvae and not [find] them,” Johnston said. “We know that it’s a worthy cause, but it’s a lot of hours fishing on a boat, at night, because we think that would be the most likely time to have success if there were

larvae in the river.”

Gayle Zydlewski is optimistic that eventually, the crew will find that evidence. She has even planned ahead.

“About three [grad] students ago, a bottle of champagne was bought. It’s sitting in [an office] waiting to be popped,” she said.

The latest discovery is important for a few reasons. First, only one out of every 50 sturgeon living in the river is tagged. The presence of three fish above the former Veazie Dam site could mean that 100 or more sturgeon have actually staged upriver.

“That’s the sort of number that you think about if spawning’s going to happen,” Kinnison said. “You could have fairly dramatic changes to the system pretty quick.”

Second, though Johnston is still researching possible spawning sites in that area, the scientists think it’s likely that there’s much better spawning habitat in that stretch of the river than there is below Veazie.

“In order for the population to persist, you need two types of habitat,” Kinnison said. “You need the spawning habitat, which is where they need to put their eggs ... but what they really need, too, is when those eggs hatch, they need juvenile habitat.”

Optimal juvenile habitat exists in a place where the fish can settle down before they reach saltwater, Kinnison said, and with head-of-tide in the Penobscot at the Veazie Dam site, areas above that former dam are likely the most attractive to spawning sturgeon.

Come May, Johnston and others will be back on the river, looking for evidence of that spawning. The bottle of champagne has been waiting for years to celebrate just such a discovery.

And Kinnison said the relatively short movement of the tagged fish will help fuel the research crew when they head onto the water in 2016.

“It’s a lot easier to have hope now that we know that there are fish up there,” he said. “It’s going to provide some new energy for the field work [next] year.”

## Hike

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gently descends to the water, where there’s an interpretive display about mudflats, some to soft-shelled clams, marine worms, periwinkles and a variety of crustaceans. This location is a great place to look for wading birds, such as sandpipers and lesser yellowlegs, picking through the water and mud for food.

The interpretive displays along the trail were illustrated by Logan Parsins, a woman from California known for her detailed and colorful depictions of the natural world. Parsins works part-time as a high school art teacher and freelance illustrator. In addition to Acadia National Park, her clients include Yosemite National Park, Scientific American magazine and UC Berkeley College of Natural Resources.

In each display along the Ship Harbor Trail, Parsins has illustrated the surrounding environment, including many of the creatures and plants you might come across.

Eventually, the trail will lead to the center of the figure eight, a four-way intersection. There you can either head back to the trailhead on the forest portion of the easy loop, or you can continue on to the second loop, which travels over uneven terrain to some stunning outlooks on the rocky shore. On this section of the trail, small children may need assistance while walking over rocks and narrow bog bridges.

At the far end of the figure eight, you’ll come to an interpretive display about tide pools and the many creatures living there-in. Nearby, just beyond a ledge of rosy granite, are several tide pools to explore.

The Ship Harbor Trail is accessible in the winter and makes a good snowshoeing destination, but keep in mind that ice often makes the trails dangerous. Wear



AISLINN SARNACKI | BDN

Ship Harbor Nature Trail in Acadia National Park.

snowshoes or ice cleats when necessary, and factor in the short daylight hours. Always bring a headlamp, just in case.

The park asks that hikers stay on trail; enjoy wildlife from a distance; leave plants, rocks and sea animals where you find them; and dispose of human waste in a cathole that is at least 6 inches deep and 100 feet from water sources or trails — or use the outhouse at the trailhead. Bikes, horses, camping and fires are not permitted on or near the trail.

Dogs are permitted if kept on leashes no longer than 6 feet and are attended to at all times. Carry out all dog waste.

All Acadia National Park visitors are required to pay an entrance fee upon entry May through October, regardless of whether they pass a fee collection gate on their way to the trailhead parking area. The cost of park passes varies. To learn about where to purchase a park pass, visit [www.nps.gov/acad/planyourvisit/](http://www.nps.gov/acad/planyourvisit/).

For information, visit

[www.nps.gov/acad](http://www.nps.gov/acad) or call 288-3338.

**Personal note:** It was a surprise to see an empty parking lot on Saturday morning at Acadia National Park. It seemed a luxury to have the popular Ship Harbor Nature Trail all to ourselves — at least for a little while.

After about 15 minutes on the easy trail, my husband, Derek, and I, paused to photograph a view of the grey-blue ocean under an overcast sky. As I fiddled with my camera settings to pick up the glow of sun filtering through the clouds, Oreo barked to announce a small group of hikers coming up behind us. We waved and let them pass.

They were the first of several hikers that ended up passing us on the trail that day. We were moving slow, trying to capture the beauty of the rosy granite shore. And we came to a screaming halt when I spotted a group of buffleheads — shy sea ducks that I rarely have the opportunity to observe. From our vantage point on a

small cliff, I watched a bufflehead twist his big white head around to groom the dark iridescent feathers on his back. He then thrashed around in the water, flapping his wings and rolling on his side to groom his white chest with his salmon-colored feet. I say “he” because the females and males of the group were easy to tell apart — the females having a different pattern with less white and none of the purple-blue iridescence to their dark feathers.

The cold air turned my fingers pink, reminding me that mitten season has begun. Nevertheless, Oreo wanted to go swimming. I allowed him to wade into a tide pool, but when he started drinking the salt water, I pulled him back to dry land. Briny vomit is on the list of things I don’t want on the backseat of my car.

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

## Holyoke

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amount of time you spend in the woods without seeing anything, let alone a giant, that makes them so majestic,” Slezak said in an email. “Many people that don’t hunt think you just walk through the woods and ‘Oh, here comes a deer,’ and you blast it. Not so.”

My own hunting buddy Chris Lander of Orrington grew up hunting, and he had an interesting take on the matter. Lander grew up hunting with his dad and

older brothers, and he said that as a youngster, he always had one goal in mind: He wanted to shoot a 12-point buck.

“My emphasis was always on the rack,” Lander said. “I didn’t care if the deer was 150 pounds, if it had a big rack, I was in. [My dad’s] response always was, ‘You can’t eat the rack.’ I guess he was brought up in a different time with different priorities. He was always focused on how heavy the deer was.”

Lander said when he looks at photos of deer and moose, he still focuses on the antlers first. And he admits that sometimes, he finds himself hoping to en-

counter a similar animal.

“I think as hunters we all have in the back of our minds we want to harvest a big-racked buck,” he said. “It gives you the trophy on the wall and bragging rights for years to come.”

Rob Speirs of Cumberland is 67, and he said he’s been hunting for years. He said that stories about successful hunts that end with a big buck being taken matter to him because he knows how hard the feat can be.

“[A big buck] makes for a great story, eliciting strong interest from others in how it came to be harvested, because it is such a cautious and wary animal, and we

learn from each other’s stories,” Speirs said. “That is why I always click on big buck stories. I enjoy hearing how others came to shoot a big deer, and to hear their stories. It puts me right in the woods with them, and at their sides as the story unfolds. I can see it, hear it and smell it! I can imagine it as they tell it, transporting me to my own experiences and the thrill and rush of fleeting moments with big bucks.”

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