

Swim deep, fly fast: Birds do some incredible things

Maine's Bird Olympics are upon us, and it is time to award the gold medals.

The gold for fastest bird goes to our peregrine falcon, the swiftest of all animals. In a stoop, it can hit speeds over 200 mph. The fastest dive on record was 242 mph. Surprisingly, red-breasted mergansers are among the fastest flying birds in level flight. They can reach 139 mph. Other ducks are nearly as fast.



BOB DUCHESNE
GOOD BIRDING

I guess you have to be fast if there's a falcon in the neighborhood.

The gold for highest flying bird goes to the Ruppell's griffon vulture — a bird of central Africa that is so remote from Maine that I had never heard of it until I looked it up. It was documented flying at 37,000 feet when it collided with an airliner. I had presumed that bald eagles fly the highest in Maine, but I was mistaken. If you can believe it, mallards have been known to reach 21,000 feet, though they normally tend to stay under 5,000. Eagles seldom go higher than 15,000 feet. I suppose they don't have to.

Often, mountain ranges determine how high birds can fly. Migrating birds need to get over the Rockies, Alps, Himalayas, etc.

Our bald eagle does win the gold for largest nest, at least among tree nesters. Some Australian birds build mounds on the ground that weigh hundreds of tons. Some colonial nesting birds in Africa build huge nests that accommodate many birds at once. But no bird can compete with the eagle when it comes to stick nests in trees. Eagles use the same nest every year, adding new sticks each season. Old nests can be larger than 10 feet around and weigh up to 2 tons. Sooner or later, that becomes more weight than the tree can hold, especially in an icy winter, but a good nest can last decades.

For deepest diving bird, the gold goes to the thick-billed murre, at least among birds that can fly. It can reach depths of nearly 700 feet, grab prey and return to the surface in less than three minutes. It is so good at diving, it swallows its prey underwater in order to minimize time at the surface. I confess, the thick-billed murre is barely a Maine bird. It does not breed here, preferring to nest in colonies off the coast of Newfoundland, but it does wander into Maine waters in winter.



BOB DUCHESNE

Arctic terns win the gold medal for longest migration. Some terns may fly 56,000 miles yearly.

In the flightless competition, the emperor penguin of Antarctica can dive deeper and stay down longer than the thick-billed murre, but there is a remarkable evolutionary convergence in these two unrelated species. Flight feathers are an inefficient encumbrance for diving birds and the prehistoric birds that became penguins gave up flying altogether. Members of the alcid family

have also evolved to become better divers. This family includes puffins, razorbills, dovebies, guillemots and murrelets. All have extremely short wings, inefficient for flying but excellent for diving. The thick-billed murre's wings are so stubby that it can barely fly. Its extinct cousin, the great auk, was completely flightless like modern penguins.

The gold for longest song

goes to Maine's winter wren. These wrens sing the longest song in North America, and we've got a lot of them in our woods. They may raise multiple broods in a season. After a period of silence in early July, I was amused to hear a chorus of wren songs around the state in midsummer as males got ready to be daddies again.

The gold for longest migration goes to the arctic

tern. We have several nesting islands along the Maine coast. When they leave here, they head for the Antarctic. However, they don't fly there directly. They can meander from Maine to Europe and Africa, then back to South America, and so on. Arctic terns that nest in Iceland and Greenland average 44,000 miles during their annual round trip. Some terns in the Netherlands may exceed 56,000 miles in one year.

The competition for smartest bird is too close to call, but the gold medal winner will likely be a member of the corvid family, which includes crows, ravens, jays and magpies. Crows have demonstrated more intelligence than apes, dolphins and Congress. They can make and customize tools. They can rationalize cause and effect, working out solutions to puzzles if the there is a morsel of food to reward them. They can count. They can remember human faces. If I were totally honest, that's more than I can do on some days.

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. He can be reached at duchesne@midmaine.com.

Portland author and native Ron Romano reflects sunlight with a mirror, illuminating the work of Bartlett Adams, the city's first stone carver at the Eastern Cemetery on Monday. Romano just published a book about Adams, detailing his life, art and importance in Portland's boom times of the early 19th century.



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

Book highlights tombstone carver

Art showcased all over Portland, but few people know anything about artist

BY TROY R. BENNETT
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Closing his eyes, Ron Romano can see Bartlett Adams walking up the Portland peninsula and gazing across the Eastern Cemetery for the first time.

It was September, in the year 1800. Adams, 24, fresh from an apprenticeship in Boston, was setting up shop as Portland's first professional gravestone cutter. City dwellers died at the rate of one person every three days and the burial ground must have been pocked with fresh graves. Resting places, if noted at all, bore rough-carved markers of rock or wood. A few slate stones, purchased and hauled to town via packet ships from the south, also stood.

"He shows up, and he's like, 'You know what? I can make this work,'" Romano said.

And make it work he did. Over the next three decades, Adams' shop produced nearly all the headstones under which Portlanders were buried. When he died, 28 years later, the Eastern Cemetery was bristling with 700 elegantly carved stones from Adams' shop on Federal Street, just a few blocks away.

"We don't see many — if any — stones from the Boston shops after Bartlett arrives," Romano said, looking out over the sea of markers at the foot of Munjoy Hill. "Especially in this cemetery."

Though he left behind a mountain of monuments, Adams himself is largely a mystery. No likenesses of him survive. Almost all his work is unsigned and anonymous.

To remedy that and to reveal Adams' importance to Portland's early days, Romano has written a new book about the prolific and unknown carver called "Early Gravestones in Southern Maine: The Genius of Bartlett Adams" for The History Press.

"He was really an unsung hero, in my view," Romano said. "He was an integral part of this community."

As evidence, Romano points to Bartlett's monetary pledge for construction of the First Parish Church in 1825, his early investment in the Portland Observatory and his place on the board of the Charitable Mechanics Association. He also was a family man, having seven children, though only one survived to adulthood. Plus, he was good at what he did.



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

A rising sun motif, symbolizing the soul's ascension to heaven, shines on Lucy Pierce's gravestone in Portland's Eastern Cemetery on Monday. The city's first full-time stone carver, Bartlett Adams, created the image when Pierce died in 1802.

"He was a smart business guy," Romano said. "He was rocking this area with stones. He was just pumping them out like crazy."

Though prolific, Adams also was an artist. His slate stones always bear precise inscriptions and clear images. Graceful willows bow over classical urns. Rising suns poke symmetrical rays over chiseled horizons. Winged faces, frozen in stone for nearly 200 years, flutter skyward.

It was those icons that drew Romano, 58, to Adams' work.

Romano, grew up in town and graduated from Deering High School in 1976. After a career in Boston's insurance industry, he retired back home in 2011. That's when he entered the Eastern Cemetery for the first time, researching a genealogy project and first saw Adams' work, which still stood out.

"I came in one day, and I walked around, and I was like, 'holy smokes, they're all over the place,' and I loved the look of them," Romano said.

His fascination led him to join Spirits Alive, a group that looks after the cemetery. It also spurred him into leading a massive, stone-by-stone survey of the Eastern Cemetery in 2013, looking for Adams' unsigned work.

"I spent the summer doing that," he said. "And at the end of that exercise, I had 700 grave markers that I could at-

tribute to Bartlett Adams' shop — he and the guys working with him," Romano said.

Eventually, Romano went afield, to surrounding cemeteries and towns in a 30-mile radius, finding even more stones from Adams' shop. From Buxton to Harpswell to Gray, his work still stands. Romano even uncovered a batch of stones in Nova Scotia.

"We're up to about 1,800 stones now," he said.

But he's not done. "I know there's way more out there that I haven't seen yet," he said.

Romano knows it took two or three days to cut an average stone. Adams had two or three men working for him once he got established, and he was in business in Portland for nearly 30 years. That leaves thousands more stones to discover, Romano figures.

If he had a time machine, Romano said he would skip meeting with famous historical characters like Abraham Lincoln and go straight to Adams.

"I've got a slew of questions for him," he said.

Ron Romano will host a book launch event at the Maine Charitable Mechanics Association at 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 18, at 519 Congress St. A list of his upcoming talks can be found at the [Spirits Alive](http://SpiritsAlive.com) website.

Things to Do Outdoors

BANGOR — Bangor Land Trust wildflower walk focused on pollination, led by Grace Bartlett, 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 13, West Penjacob Grasslands.

BEALS — Ninth annual Shellfish Field Day, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 13, Downeast Institute for Applied Marine Research and Education, 39 Wildflower Lane, Great Wass Island. Clam flying contest with cash prizes, free boat rides for the first 40 who register, shellfish hatchery tours, research displays, guided walks of the rocky shore, Great Wass Clam Shucking Showdown. Food for sale; free samples of hatchery raised mussels. www.downeastinstitute.org.

DEDHAM — Drawing from Nature Workshop with Gail VanWart, 1-3 p.m. Sundays, Aug. 14, 21 and 28, Peaked Mountain Farm, 6 Ellerys Lane. Participants must bring their own art supplies. \$80 and includes copy of the anthology. Registration required. 249-5002 or peakedmtfarm@aol.com.

GRAND LAKE STREAM — Twelfth annual West Grand Lake Race for nonmotorized watercraft, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 14, 4, 6 and 12 miles. T-shirt and a cookout lunch after race.

Registration, 9:15 a.m. \$25, \$15 age 12 and under; if registered by Friday, Aug. 5, \$20, \$10 children. Downeast Lakes Land Trust, 796-2100 or cbrown@downeastlakes.org.

GREENVILLE — Blue Ridge Hike and Bike Trail and maintenance day, 9-4:30 p.m. Friday, Aug. 12. Meet at Greenville Consolidated School to car-pool to trailhead. Rain date Saturday, Aug. 13. Erica Kaufmann, erica@fsmaine.org.

GREENVILLE — Maine Forest Heritage Days, Aug. 12-14. Bus tour through Maine's working forest requiring tickets, a craft fair, carriage rides, chainsaw carving, murder mystery cruise aboard the Katahdin with tickets available at katahdincruises.com, and a woodsmen dem-

onstration featuring chopping and ax throwing, a supper 5 p.m. Friday, Aug. 12, Greenville Masonic Hall; and a woodsmen breakfast, 7-10 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 14, American Legion Hall. www.forestheritagadays.org.

GREENVILLE — Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District and Friends of Wilson Pond Area hosting Maggie Shannon of Maine Lakes Society presenting free workshop LakeSmart Program, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 17, Greenville town office. In-class and field portions of the workshop presented. Register with Piscataquis County Soil and Water Conservation District, 564-2321, ext. 3, or info@piscataquisswcd.org.

LUBEC — Full moon rise hike to summit of Klondike Mountain Preserve, Thursday, Aug. 18. Meet in parking area at the preserve, 6:30 p.m. Start up the mountain by 6:45 p.m. Sunset at 7:30 p.m.; moon rise at 7:38 p.m. Be prepared to hike over uneven terrain in low light conditions. Bring hiking stick, flashlight, if desired. 255-4500 or info@downeastcoastalconservancy.org.

OLD TOWN — Summer family day event "All About Fish!" 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 13, Hirundo Wildlife Refuge, Hudson Road. Participants encouraged to bring fishing licenses and rods. \$10 per vehicle; free to members. hirundomaine.org or 394-2171.

ORLAND — Craig Brook National Fish Hatchery, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 13, at the hatchery, 306 Hatchery Road. Tours, live Atlantic salmon, presentations, displays, fly tying and barbecue. 469-7300 or chris_domina@fws.gov.

SEDGWICK — Blue Hill Heritage Trust rise and shine hike up new Bluff Head Trail, 7 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 13. Meet at Rope Ferry Road parking area. Refreshments provided. Advance registration, 374-5118 or info@bluehillheritagerust.org.

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

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