

Businesses, farms help Maine's beekeepers

The mild winter continues, and as spring approaches, my hopes rise for early flows of pollen and nectar from the willows and maples. Until then, I will continue to keep an eye on food levels in my hives, and feed winter patties or sugar if necessary. Once it starts to get warmer with regular days in the 50s, it will be possible to feed sugar syrup.

Very soon thereafter, it will be time to stock new hives. My plans this year will be to increase several of my beekeeping activities, and consequently, I will need more hives. The more hives you have, the more options you have.

I will be doing a lot more renting out of my hives for pollination. Normally each year I send a couple of hives to one or two small, private blueberry fields. Last year, however, I started to help out a small, organic blueberry grower in Frankfort, Foggy Hill Farm. I was only able to supply five hives at the last minute when they were let down by their normal, out of state bee supplier.

This year I have promised them 16 hives. Renting out bee hives is a great way to help local farms and to increase the revenue generated by your bees. Local farmers are all too aware of the importance of buying locally. If you can provide a good product, which means strong, healthy hives, they will rent your bees. Rental costs for bees depend upon the strength of the hive. \$100 for a hive with five to six frames of bees to \$140 for hives with eight to 10 frames of bees or more.

Personally, I am only interested in taking my hives to organic growers or those farmers who promise not to use herbicides or pesticides while my bees are present.

Once the blueberry bloom is over, I will be moving my bees to my house and one or two other yards. Here, I know they will find a lot of good forage for making honey in June



Two trial honeybee hives at Bangor International Airport.

and July and also later in the summer and fall. One of my favorite new bee yards is at Bangor International Airport. The airport maintains hundreds of acres of open land, where the plant cover is mowed about once a week, at a height a few inches higher than most lawns (4-7 inches). The plant cover is predominantly grasses but also a rich mixture of clovers, vetch, dandelions and others; all great food for pollinators such as honeybees.

In the summer I met with the airport director, Tony Caruso, and director of airfield operations, Robbie Beaton, to ask permission to keep bees there. I was met with enthusiastic support. Caruso said, "The city and airport were very pleased to help with this exciting project. With acres of clover fields at the airfield, it was a great site to support new honeybee hives."

My bees did very well there in the fall, but I think they will do even better in the spring and early summer, with all the dandelions and clover. This is a great example of how a large or small business can use the resources at their disposal to make a positive impact on the environment.

I would like to see more businesses, schools and towns doing the same thing. You don't need a lot of land like an airport, bees will travel for miles to find food. The important thing is to manage the land you have to be a food source for pollinators, and if you really want to help, contact a local beekeeper and host some bee hives.

Another Maine company set to make an impact on local bees and beekeepers is Maine Mead Works. This Portland-

based company makes "Honey-maker" mead sold in many stores in the region. Mead is a wine made by fermenting honey.

Ben Alexander, the founder of the company, was our guest speaker at Penobscot County Beekeepers Association last week, and said, "We try to source as much of our raw materials from Maine as we can."

Alexander and I have been working on a project to deliver to him thousands of pounds of local Penobscot County honey, which I will collect from local beekeepers. This will then be incorporated into his great products. Honey can be sourced much cheaper from large scale producers outside the state where hives have better weather, a longer summer and produce much more honey. But the aim here is to help Maine beekeepers, by giving them an outlet for any extra honey they can produce. This provides Maine Mead Works with a reliable source of Maine honey and local beekeepers with extra revenue to invest in their bees. This means keeping more hives and pollinating more flowers. A win-win if ever there was one!

Peter Cowin, aka The Bee Whisperer, is president of the Penobscot County Beekeepers Association. His activities include honey production, pollination services, beekeeping lessons, sales of bees and bee equipment, and the removal of feral bee hives from homes and other structures. Check out "The Bee Whisperer" on Facebook, email petercowin@tds.net or call 299-6948.



PETER COWIN

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Robert Barth, a tourist from Holland, catches up on his reading during low tide in Bar Harbor as the cruise ship Norwegian Dawn sits at anchor in 2007.

BDN FILE

Study finds the benefits of 'shoulder season' in Maine

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Statewide, hotel stays during the summer months make up more than half of all lodging business revenue in Maine.

A study released in February by the Maine Development Foundation explores the possibility of growing Maine's tourism revenue pie by picking up more traffic in the "shoulder season" of May, September and October.

"Lengthening the season could help businesses that cater to tourists sustain more consistent revenues throughout the year, and provide more reliable year-round job opportunities to hospitality workers," states the report written by University of Maine economics professor Todd Gabe.

In some of the busiest summer spots, the report suggests, an increase in May, September and October traffic could help drive new revenue without causing congestion.

The report uses lodging business revenue as a metric for tourism traffic to the state, finding revenue in those months has made up more than half of the statewide total for each year annually from 2004 to 2015.

That ratio has remained consistent across years, as lodging revenue (adjusted for price changes) rose last year to a high of \$852 million.

An increase in May, September and October traffic could help drive new revenue without causing congestion

Those sales are a small portion of the state's total taxable sales — about 4 percent — but also reflect just one touch point for tourists or business travelers who are likely spending elsewhere.

While the study found little change in the annual share of revenue from "shoulder season" tourism, it did identify the most seasonally dependent regions of the state, defined as economic statistical areas.

The report generally found that the state's urban areas have a more even spread of lodging sales throughout the year.

A Bangor Daily News analysis of 2015 sales data showed coastal destinations such as Kittery and Bar Harbor logged more than 60 percent of all lodg-

ing revenue in the summer, while urban areas such as Bangor, Portland and Lewiston had more even splits of lodging sales among summer and shoulder months.

While the report points to opportunities to increase shoulder season tourism, a closer look at specific areas of the state shows a more even distribution of those numbers isn't the only thing to watch.

The Skowhegan area, which regularly logs its busiest lodging month in September, had the highest share of tourism in the shoulder months last year, but it was among the least busy for total lodging revenues.

That plot makes clear where the areas of opportunity might lie — in places such as the Biddeford region, Bar Harbor, Damariscotta, Kittery, Camden and Sebago Lake.

All are highly ranked alongside other areas of the state for lodging sales, with nearly 60 percent of that revenue coming in during the summer months and about 30 percent during the shoulder season.

And, of course, the Maine Tourism Association pushes visits in all seasons "whether you're a leaf-peeper or a sun-seeker."

Record-breaking flights around the globe made by tiny dragonfly

BY RACHEL FELTMAN
THE WASHINGTON POST

Imagine being just an inch and a half long and flapping your wings all the way across the ocean.

According to a new study, the itty bitty dragonfly *Pantala flavescens* could take longer flights than any other known insect, putting it in the ballpark of larger migratory animals such as birds and whales.

The estimated 4,400 miles or more traveled by members of this tiny species smashes the previous record for insect migration of 2,500 miles, held by monarch butterflies.

The study, published Wednesday in PLOS ONE, couldn't rely on GPS trackers to figure out flight durations for the little bugs — they couldn't support the weight of such devices.

Instead, researchers looked at their genes. The reason *Pantala flavescens* were suspected to be such prolific fliers is that they can be found all over the globe. For this study, researchers looked at the genes of *Pantala* collected in Texas, eastern Canada, Japan, Korea, India and South America.

"This is the first time anyone has looked at genes to see how far these insects have traveled," senior au-



A dragonfly perches on a plant growing on the ridge of Tunk Mountain near Franklin and Cherryfield in 2012.

AISLINN SARNAKCI | BDN

thor Jessica Ware, an assistant professor of biology at Rutgers University, said in a statement. "If North American *Pantala* only bred with North American *Pantala*, and Japanese *Pantala* only bred with Japanese *Pantala*, we would expect to see that in genetic results that differed from each other. Because we don't see that, it suggests the mixing of genes across vast geographic expanses."

In other words, the insects are more similar from continent to continent than scientists would expect, should they mostly stick to their own regions. They must be doing a lot of long-distance dating — assuming they really are as frequent fliers as their genes would suggest.

It seems that *Pantala* is well-suited for long-haul flights, with wings designed for gliding on the wind for much of the trip, especially if they can get caught up in strong hurricane winds.

But believe it or not, crossing an ocean when you're the size of a paper clip — even if you've evolved to do just that — isn't exactly a walk in the park: Ware says the trip is "kind of suicide mission." It's good for the survival of the species, because the insects have to move from place to place to make sure they have fresh water to mate and lay eggs in no matter what the season. But many individuals will die during the trek.

Coast Guard urges public awareness of illegal fishing operations

BY RYAN MCLAUGHLIN
BDN STAFF

The U.S. Coast Guard is seeking the public's help regarding any illegal fishing operations that may be going on, according to a statement released Wednesday.

"A healthy and sustainable marine environment is an indispensable part of the economy in the Northeast," the statement read.

The Coast Guard and other agencies enforce marine resource management and protection laws to pre-

serve healthy stocks of fish and other living marine resources.

Anybody with any information about illegal fishing operations should call a confidential Coast Guard hotline at 844-847-2431. Tips can be made anonymously.

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