

Hedgerows

Summer

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A Birder's view of Mill Pond Park



In early May I visited Mill Pond Park with Chris Steffan, our Treasurer. Our goal was to re-view the status of the trails, but for me, it was the middle of Spring Migration, and any bird might be seen. We parked and I got out of the car, binoculars in hand, gazing at the Vultures circling above Mill Pond Park.

“Turkey Vultures?” asked Chris, wondering why I even bothered to look at such a common sight.

“Yes, both Black & Turkey Vultures.” I handed her the binoculars. “Black Vultures have the shorter tails and the white at the end of the wings.” I explained. Chris is familiar with my birding obsession and is wonderfully patient with me.

“What’s that – a Red Tail Hawk?” She pointed at a different silhouette gliding overhead.

“No – Cooper’s Hawk.” I gazed at the other birds floating above. “There – that’s a Red-Tail Hawk.” From a birding standpoint we had seen four different raptors before leaving the parking lot. Excellent start!

We continued along the edge of the wood, Chris explaining that the pond ahead was really only a retention basin filled with water.

“We had so much rain this year the basin hasn’t emptied. Normally the trail goes right across the middle, but we’ll have to go around.” She smiled and added, “It’s full of frogs.”



We made our way along the spruce trees to the edge of the basin and I stopped and pointed. An unusual duck, a Hooded Merganser, was nervously paddling away with his white crest, outlined in black, fanned up in alarm from seeing us. Beyond him was two, no three, Little Green Herons searching for frogs.

“How can you tell it’s a Green Heron?” asked Chris.

I grinned. “Uh, well, by its orange legs and chestnut neck, actually. I don’t know why they call it Green.”



We continued into the woods along the various paths, reviewing the status of the trails. I was continually distracted as I heard and saw more birds. There were Yellow Warblers, Common

Yellowthroats, Blue Gray Gnatcatchers, Carolina Wrens, Catbirds, Song Sparrows, Downy Woodpeckers and more. With the diversity of even the modest size space of Mill Pond Park, the amount of birds singing and chattering was delightful.

I realized Chris was looking at me waiting for an answer to something she must have said.

“Well? It’s Spring Migration.” I said. “You can’t expect a conversation out of me until we’re indoors.” We laughed and continued on our way.

As we were leaving, we crept slowly past the basin, watching the duck and herons. To our surprise, a fox trotted out, busily searching for mice along the bank. We froze, and Chris stealthily reached for her camera.

The wind was in our favor, and she got a few pictures before the wind shifted and alerted the fuzzy fellow to our presence. As he ran off we mused about how much life and activity was happening in Mill Pond Park. It’s a very special place.

Alison Goessling

Beavers at Crystal Springs

Beavers have been busy in the ponds at Crystal Springs. I recently spotted two beaver lodges and many small trees chewed into spear-like stumps. The lodges are domed structures of twigs and saplings at the water’s edge, most likely with an under-water entrance. The multiple ponds and marshy area of Crystal Springs make a good home for Beavers. Saplings of fast-growing trees grow close to the water’s edge for food and building material. Crystal Springs is actually the headwater of the Spruce Run which runs into the Spruce Run Reservoir. The river, wetlands, and multiple ponds provide ample opportunity to locate for the kits when they leave home after spending two years with their parents. It is during this time of relocation, seeking a new home that they are at their most vulnerable to coyotes, hawks, owls, and automobiles.



Beavers are mostly nocturnal so you may not see them. However, there is plenty of evidence of their activity. If you intend to visit, at this time the streams surrounding the Crystal Springs ponds may be fairly high and Hurricane Sandy blew down many trees making access difficult. High top waterproof boots are recommended and be prepared to do some scrambling over downed trees. Since beavers live in colonies of up to 12 – parents, first and second year kits- , it is possible to see them. If you startle one, it will probably dive under water, but usually not for long. Even though a beaver can stay under water for up to 15 minutes, it will probably reemerge after a minute or two. Do not confront them. They can lunge and deliver a nasty bite.

When fully grown beavers average 40 pounds and about 3 feet in length counting the tail, but can grow to 4 feet and weigh up to 60 pounds. They can live up to 20 years and typically mate at about 3, sometimes for life. The mating period is during the cold winter months. The gestation period is about three months and the babies, called kits, are usually born between April and June.

Beavers have a broad, flat tail which serves multiple purposes. When on land the tail serves as a counterbalance, sitting platform, but is not used for plastering mud inside the lodges. In the water the tail is used for steering, like a rudder, and when startled, used as a signaling device by slapping the water. The incisor teeth are razor sharp and continually grow. The front edge is harder than the back. As the back wears away the incisors automatically maintain their razor like condition.

Acquisition of the Crystal Springs Property was a joint project of The Washington Township Land Trust, the New Jersey Water Supply Authority, the County of Hunterdon, Lebanon Township, Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance and New Jersey DEP’s Green Acres Program.

Tim Warrener



Pictures by Tim Warrener

Article is from Dave's Garden newsletter.

Japanese Barberry Linked to Lyme Disease: What Gardeners Need to Know

By Sally G. Miller ([sallyg](#)) July 14, 2014

New human cases of Lyme disease number 20,000 to 30,000 each year in the US. Lyme is not decreasing, despite our understanding major factors of transmission since 1981. A study by University of Connecticut has shown a link between thickets of nonnative invasive *Berberis* and increased risk of Lyme disease. Scientists in Maine find that various nonnative invasive species create a thick underbrush loaded with infected mice. Gardeners should know about these recent findings concerning Japanese barberry and other nonnative invasive plants plaguing northeastern forests

Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*) was brought to America as early as 1875 for landscape use. The species is naturally tidy in appearance, deer resistant, and tough as nails. Japanese barberry is now offered in dozens of cultivars, in a range of foliage colors and overall plant shapes. This shrub is practically universal in home and commercial landscaping in the eastern half of the US.

But Japanese barberry didn't stay in the garden. It escaped from New England gardens within 35 years. Birds carried barberry seeds from gardens into nearby forests. Barberry now grows in thick stands in northeastern US and eastern Canadian woodlands, and many states officially list this plant as invasive. Some states prohibit the sale of *Berberis thunbergii*. (There is a native American barberry, but it is far less common and naturally inhabits a more southern region. For the rest of this article, when I say barberry, I mean *B. thunbergii*.)

Connecticut finds itself in prime invasive barberry territory. Connecticut is also famous as the "origin" of Lyme disease. More accurately, Lyme, Connecticut is where a previously unrecognized disease was finally attributed to a [bacterium](#) carried by black-legged ticks.

The blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*) has been nicknamed "deer tick" in recent decades. Adult blacklegged ticks do feed on deer, as do some other adult ticks. But young deer ticks prey on small mammals and birds, as do the young of most other tick species found in North America. The bacterium that causes Lyme disease was identified in 1981, and young deer ticks carry the bacterium and transmit it. Deer ticks carry other diseases as well, and other ticks also spread diseases that affect humans and pets. Confirmed cases of Lyme disease in the US have ranged from 20,000 to 30,000 for over a decade. It is the "most commonly reported vectorborne illness," [according to the CDC](#). New Hampshire had the highest rate of infection last year, with neighboring states close behind. Many studies look for the most effective means of control of deer or deer ticks in order to reduce Lyme infections. Scientists in Maine found a correlation between thick growths of various invasive plants (bittersweet, barberry, buckthorn, etc.) and higher numbers of ticks carrying Lyme disease. Connecticut researchers studied barberry in particular and found it created a moist habitat that fostered both mice and deer ticks. It now seems clear that rodents are a major factor in deer tick populations. And the story of Lyme disease is really a complex tale involving forest fragmentation, invasive plant species, shifts in populations of deer, mice, and their predators, and suburban development that integrates natural areas. We love to live close to nature, but Nature doesn't always play nice.

Where do we go from here?

It's become clear that the increase in Lyme disease is a complex problem. The [Connecticut study](#) successfully demonstrated that removal of wild barberry stands greatly reduced the level of Lyme-carrying ticks. The Maine project mentioned above implies similar results with the elimination of other invasive plants that clog forest edges in northeastern US. Overpopulation of deer is linked to increased Lyme disease, but an unseen overabundance of mice and the presence of other small rodents and birds are important factors in the tick disease scenario. Forest fragmentation eliminates the predators that keep small rodents under control. Gardeners can play a part in the effort to reduce Lyme disease. Home gardeners can choose native plants over nonnatives, especially those known as invasive. Knowledgeable gardeners can help spread awareness of nonnative invasive plants, and their role in our rapidly changing suburban ecosystem. Concerned citizens can participate in park projects aimed at [controlling invasives](#), and feel good about reducing the health risks to park visitors.

Ticks are most abundant in the simulated "forest edges" that surround many backyards. Ticks do not travel far into lawn or open areas. General "tidiness" and good [landscape care](#) are recommended to reduce rodent, and thus tick, habitat. However, a [2009 study](#) found no evidence that landscape alterations effectively reduced Lyme disease. Gardeners should practice Lyme disease prevention hygiene, even after a few hours spent in one's own yard. Use personal insect repellants, shower after gardening, and

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President—Tim Warrener
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Glynda Wehring

check for ticks thoroughly within 36 hours. Use good tick prevention hygiene after spending time in any outside setting where forest meets lawn, especially where nonnative invasive plants are found in abundance

Resources

Image of deer tick, Photo by Scott Bauer. (USDA ARS) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons



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