

Wild Times At Pine Hill Park Summer, 2018 Summary

On the first day of summer I took a walk through the forest and saw a wonderful variety of birds including indigo buntings, American redstart, robin, American goldfinch, song sparrow, osprey, chestnut-sided warbler, red-eyed vireo, yellow-throated vireo, Eastern peewee, cardinal, hermit thrush, ovenbird, veery, scarlet tanager, and least flycatcher. To see an indigo bunting and scarlet tanager, two of the most beautiful forest birds, on the same day, is always such a special treat. Just as my walk was coming to an end, I saw a cottontail rabbit scurry through the underbrush on Crusher Rd. It's the only place in the park where I've ever seen cottontail rabbits every year.

An uncomfortable heat wave descended upon the region the last week of June and first week of July. I left for a trip to Oregon the day before the heat wave, and returned to Vermont the day it ended. The heat wave was a daily news item on the Oregon television stations. It was so bad I had to contact Pine Hill Park Partnership members Shelley Lutz and Lauren White and ask them to water the 50 American chestnut trees while I was away in Oregon. I have no doubt that 3 newly planted chestnuts would probably not have survived the heat wave if they hadn't been watered. I arrived back in Vermont just after midnight on July 6th, and that morning made sure all the trees were thoroughly watered. While watering one of the trees near trail marker #16, I found a hermit thrush nest at the base of the tree very close to where a hermit thrush nest was made last year. 3 blue eggs were in the nest.

Now, for the BIG NEWS! On July 8th, a single osprey chick was observed on the newly built osprey nest on the far side of Muddy Pond. The nest was built upon an old, abandoned great blue heron nest. They nested unsuccessfully atop a power pole at the same pond last year. Shelley, Lauren, and I had been observing osprey flying around the pond and building up the nest for weeks, and we were pleasantly surprised to see the chick.

On July 11th, I observed that 2 of the blue hermit thrush eggs at the base of the chestnut tree had been destroyed and the third was missing. That same day I saw swallowtail, silver-spotted skippers and sulfur butterflies, Eastern garter snake and a few "new" birds including Eastern towhee, cedar waxwing, and ruby-throated hummingbird.

Five days later, I noticed a new, single blue egg in the hermit thrush nest in a VERY DRY forest and a Monarch butterfly sipping red clover nectar. I saw more monarch butterflies this season than I have in the 6 years I've been visiting Pine Hill Park. Local students plant more and more milkweed seedlings every spring in the park, and have actually established an area near Rocky Pond as an official Monarch Butterfly waystation. Maybe it's starting to have a positive effect upon the Monarch butterfly population?

By mid-July, the forest was already starting to become noticeably more quiet during the day. Bird eggs had been laid, chicks were hatching, and adults were doing what they could to keep their location quiet. Courtship singing had ended for the most part. And that single blue hermit thrush egg was found to be broken at both ends and its contents emptied.

On July 27th, 3 osprey chicks and one adult were seen at the osprey nest!!!!!!!!!!!!!! This could be a historic event. Is this the first time osprey have been known to successfully nest in Rutland, Vermont? After this observation, the nest was pretty much observed every day by either Lauren, Shelley or myself. On a typical day this time of year, one would likely see an Eastern phoebe, pileated woodpecker, red-eyed vireo, hermit thrush, northern flicker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, bluejay, least flycatcher, American goldfinch, black-capped chickadee, Eastern peewee, crows, garter snakes, Eastern chipmunks and gray squirrels.

At the end of the first week of August, osprey chicks were seen jumping along the edge of the nest, exercising their wings and preparing for the time they would soon fledge. The forest floor was covered with a large variety of mushrooms due to the recent rains, and high temperatures. Perfect conditions for the growth of mushrooms. Acorns were starting to fall from oak trees,

By August 11th, all the osprey chicks were flapping their wings looking like they would fledge at anytime. The forest had become very quiet, blackberries were ripe, and white-tailed deer were seen increasingly more common in the lower parts of the park at dusk.

Osprey starting leaving the nest the second week of August. They fledged one at a time over a number of days. I noticed more and more robins starting to migrate south through the forest this time of year, also.

During the third week of August, at Muddy Pond you could see two young osprey on their nest, double-crested cormorants, wood ducks, great blue heron, and spotted sandpipers. American toadlets were crawling throughout the mushroom covered forest floor. And most noticeable was the reduced numbers and kinds of birds seen on a typical hike.

The last week of August found many birds migrating through the forest, especially robins and small songbirds. August 31st was the first time in months NO osprey were seen on the nest. Schools of brown bullheads were seen along the shores of Rocky Pond, and even a gray treefrog was heard croaking.

The first week of Sept. saw temperatures in the 90s. On Sept. 5th, I saw red-eyed vireo, hairy and pileated woodpeckers, robins and a belted kingfisher, and 3 osprey at the Muddy Pond nest. Barred owls could be heard "hooting" near the top of the rock quarry on Crusher Rd. and a bullfrog was croaking at Muddy Pond. A cold front moved through the area the end of the week bringing much cooler temperatures. One couldn't help but feel that the hot, humid

weather was now behind us. Leaves were beginning to change color and a young bear was seen near the intersection of the Carriage Trail and the Redfield trails.

The last day of summer had a cold brisk wind coming down from the north and moving south through the region. Many warblers, including black-throated blue warbler, black-throated green warbler and yellow warbler were migrating south through the forest. Other birds seen this day included blue jay, crow, white-breasted nuthatch, black-capped chickadee, belted kingfisher, a single osprey near its nest, double-crested cormorant, spotted sandpiper, wood ducks, solitary vireo, and a few Canada geese at Muddy Pond. Typically, this time of year Muddy Pond will have hundreds of Canada geese resting there a few days as they fly south. Two large black water snakes were seen sunning themselves at Rocky Pond. All 50 American chestnut trees made it through the hot, dry summer. One of the trees is now 8ft. in height.

That's it for this summary. Please remember to stay on the trails, and enjoy your time at Pine Hill Park.