

DOWNEAST AUDUBON SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS FOR 2008

Thanks to a very successful Bird-a-thon in 2007, the board of Downeast Audubon was once again able to offer several summer camp scholarships (worth \$1,150 each) for local students to spend one free week at Maine Audubon's Hog Island in Bremen. This year we were able to provide up to four scholarships to Teen Bird Studies camp and Youth Camp. Ultimately, four middle-school students won the chance to spend a week with 50 other campers at Youth Camp learning about Maine's ecology while having the time of their lives! To be eligible for the scholarships, students from Hancock County were given the opportunity to describe in an essay their favorite bird experience. All entries were assessed anonymously by a panel of judges from the board of directors. And the winners are...

Michael Vittum, 13, is a 7th grader from Ellsworth Middle School. He is very active in Boy Scouts, a regular volunteer at Birdsacre, and enjoys nature and all types of wildlife. Summers are spent hiking, fishing and camping out. Michael plans to study biology in college and already has a collection of seven reptiles!

Melissa Smith, 12, is a nature-loving 7th grader from Dedham School. She has several pets including a cat, dog and hamster. Melissa likes to read, run cross-country and fold origami. She plays clarinet and participates in the school musical every year.

Brooklin Eaton, 12, attends Blue Hill Consolidated School as a 6th grader. She loves to be active and especially enjoys swimming, running, horseback riding and exploring with her Golden Retriever. Her favorite subjects in school are science and art and she enjoys writing poetry. Brooklin collects bottle caps and interesting coins.

Dustin Smelley, 12, is a 6th grader from Ellsworth Middle School. He enjoys everything outdoors and loves nature and all its creatures. Dustin can often be found making things such as forts, or searching for animals around his house. He plays baseball, likes to go fishing, and considers himself an artist. Dustin has been asked to go to the Junior National Young Leaders Conference this summer in Washington, D.C.

1st Runner Up went to Nichole Cochary from Bar Harbor. Honorable Mention went to Rye Murray from Southwest Harbor, Sarah Doucette from Orland, Bennie Johnson from Blue Hill, Lauren Doolittle from Blue Hill and Liam Adams from Sedgwick. Last years winners were Gavin Rogers and Chelsey Staples of Penobscot and Tessa Isis-Bahoosh of Brooklin. Thanks to everyone who participated-- we look forward to next year!

Killdeer

By Melissa Smith

Dedham School, Age 12

I spent the first few years of my life in Georgia, where the variety of animals you find is very different from the ones you find here in Maine. My family saw plenty of animals- from a family of deer in our backyard, to alligators at Okefenokee Swamp, to the time we sprayed the shutters on our windows and hundreds of tiny tree frogs that had been under them came out and jumped all over the front porch. But one encounter that I found especially interesting was with a mother Killdeer.

My family had a small rose garden in the front yard that was lined with pebbles. My mother and I were watering the roses when we discovered a Killdeer nest in the pebbles. The speckled eggs blended in nicely with the speckled pebbles. The Killdeer herself was a lovely dark brown color with a white, speckled chest. She quickly began doing what all mother Killdeer do when something threatens the nest- she pretended she had a broken wing.

The mother Killdeer called loudly and ran away from the nest to distract us and lead us away from the eggs. This is a behavior that would lead a would-be predator, like a fox, after the mother rather than the eggs, because the predator would think that the mother bird had a broken wing and would be easy prey. This behavior probably originated because Killdeer nests are on the ground and easy for predators to reach.

Even though this is instinct, I think it is amazing that the mother bird would put herself in danger for the sake of her chicks. Her protective behavior worked because after a while, there were tiny little puffball chicks following the mother around. I loved seeing the Killdeer family. Even though I was very young then, I still remember them. Though there are Killdeer in Maine, I have yet to find another nest.

The Baby Bird Rescue

By Brooklin Eaton

Blue Hill Consolidated School, Age 11

The blazing summer sun showing through the window makes me feel hot and tired. It has been a long summer for me because I just moved here and I don't know a single person to play with. As I slowly shuffle my feet to the oven to check on my mom's blueberry cobbler, I hear my dad outside yelling for me to come quick. I rush as fast as I can outside and slide to a complete stop. My golden-haired dog is carrying a little baby bird in its mouth. The bird is screeching and yelling in great panic. I yell at my dog to drop it! He does and runs off.

My eyes sparkle to see such a beautiful creature. It can't fly yet, so I don't know what to do. I quickly run inside to get a shoebox from my closet and I gently put the little bird in the box. Its fuzzy little feathers tickle the palm of my hand as I pick it up. I call my brother to go dig up a worm and of course he finds one because as you know, little brothers love to dig in the mud. I pick up the slimy little worm and hold it above the bird's head. It quickly jumps really high in the air and nips the worm from my hand and gulps it down. It was the most exciting experience. I suddenly hear what must have been its mother screeching and swooping around my house repeatedly. I sadly take the little bird behind the bush so my dog doesn't find it, and tip the box slightly. It hops out so cutely it makes me grin. I would miss that bird, but I know that it was the right thing to do. The mom suddenly swooped down to it. I walked inside, happy and grateful the bird could return home.

The Chickadees

By Dustin Smelley

Ellsworth Middle School, Age 12

It was probably last spring when I had nothing much to do so I went into the woods behind our house and decided to build a stand up on one of the pine trees.

After about an hour of so, it was finished. It wasn't much, but at least I could sit on it. I ran inside with excitement and brought my family to look at it. They said I did a good job and went back home but I decided to stay.

Well, after a while of walking around with nothing better to do, I climbed up to the top and sat down. Before long, a group of small Black-capped Chickadees landed in the tree I was in. It was quite peaceful looking at the birds and hearing their sweet chirping. They were looking at me like I was some type of foreign creature they had never thought about coming in contact with. For a long period of time they were staring at me and I was staring back. I guess they got bored because they went back to searching for food, except for one for one of the smallest of them all. It just looked at me like a little puppy looks at you for the first time, with so much interest and curiosity. With a great amount of caution, he slowly flew over just inches away from me. He sat there perched on the branch as still as a statue.

While the time lasted, it was as if I was bonded with nature- until my little brother came running out screaming my name. At that, the bird flew away out of sight. It was a magnificent experience, but also a rare one. I hope to have one like it again sometime.

My Pal Pappy

By Michael Vittum, III

Ellsworth Middle School, Age 13

This past year in my sixth grade, the students were asked to choose a certain animal to study and make a report on. My group decided on owls. I had always enjoyed all the animals. My grandfather and I spent a lot of time at our local bird sanctuary which added to my appreciation. Once we got into the project, nearly done really, I got thinking back on my wonderful trips to Birdsacre and asked my mom if they ever took the owls to schools or anything.

I called Mr. Richmond, the director of Birdsacre, to make some plans. Mr Richmond surprised me by bringing not one, but three wonderful birds for my class to enjoy. We saw the tiny but fierce Saw-whet, the intimidating Great Horned and my favorite, the gentle Barred Owl. Their stories were so interesting, and to see close-up each different species of bird made the reading we had done about owls come to life. It was amazing to see and touch these special birds in person. Studying a book is one thing, but petting a live owl was quite another.

Mr. Richmond appreciated my strong interest and gentle hand I guess and asked my mom if I might be interested in learning to how to handle the birds. This was the most awesome offer I could imagine; an opportunity to be around wildlife right in my own hometown.

Fortunately for me it was nearing spring and it would not be long before I could start my training. I am also a Boy Scout and have been involved in scouting since age five. It really ties into my love of nature too. Even before I had this great experience at school I had been thinking that Birdsacre would be my area of focus right up through the ranks to Eagle Scout.

All last summer I volunteered at the sanctuary in whatever way I could. Some parts of the job are dirty, but it is worth it. I have learned with a great teacher's help to handle my favorite owl friend, Pappy. He is at the sanctuary because he was involved in an auto accident years ago and it caused damage to his eye and brain- but he is still so very handsome to me.

It is hard to wait out Maine's long winters but I have lots to look forward to in the spring!