

OUTDOORS

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Maine Sunday Telegram

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Seeing the Lighthouse on such a worthy ride



Pat McCarver of Prescott, Ariz., takes part in the 20th annual Maine Lighthouse Ride at Fort Williams Park.

Nearly 800 riders took part in the 20th annual **Maine Lighthouse Ride** along the southern Maine coast, with proceeds benefiting the Eastern Trail Alliance.

BY LAINA MOLEY
Dinner-trail
SOUTH PORTLAND — There were about 700 of us, and we were the sort of morning that makes you want to stay in bed. Not so for the riders gathered by Spring Point Light, chattering, adjusting helmets, and talking friends as they waited for the go-ahead at 7 a.m. last Sunday to begin the 20th annual Maine Lighthouse Ride.

"We're going to go off in groups of 50," a volunteer instructed by megaphone. "Don't be shy. Feel free to come right up."

Nearly 800 bicyclists took part in the event — coming from as far as Ontario and ranging in age from 7 to 89 — to ride routes of 25, 40, 60 or 100 miles along the southern Maine coast. About half of the riders were from Maine.



Richard Ahmeyer of Plymouth, Mass., takes a photo as his wife, Anita, waves to fellow bicyclists as they take part in the 20th annual Maine Lighthouse Ride at Fort Williams Park.

Day is the owner of Lighthouse Bikes in South Portland. She left a 23-year career in counseling to start the company after riding cross country with her son in 2011, when he was in high school. She did the 100-mile ride Sunday with a group of women from Peaks Island, one of whom said she hadn't ridden that far since before her children were born.

The Maine Lighthouse Ride is an annual fundraiser to support the Eastern Trail Alliance, a nonprofit founded in 1998 with the aim of learning lessons of the old Eastern Railroad Corridor into a continuous route for hikers and bikers. The Eastern Trail now covers approximately 40 miles, from the Piscataqua River in Kittery in South Portland, with 80% of off-road.

Why shop for meat when you can hunt?

With proper care, in the field and at home wild game is pure protein with so many benefits.

"Why do you hunt?" is a question often asked of those who preserve the time-honored tradition. In more recent years, motivations for hunting, and even for asking the question have changed slightly. In the former case, it has more to do with knowing what you put on your table. In the latter, it's more curiosity than confrontation. Many of the widespread anti-hunting prejudices are fading away and hunting is gradually making its way into the mainstream.



BOB HUMPHREY HUNTING

A good deal of that stems from an increasing trend toward locally sourced foods and greater self-sufficiency, which was accelerated during the pandemic when grocery stores became less reliable. Much as it pains me to admit it, reality TV has contributed as well. Where once it would have been unbecomingly prime-time shows are now depicting hunters' lives, and hunting for both plants and animals and the general public is eating it up. Hunting for your own food is now cool.

Game is pure protein with no preservatives or additives. Venison has one-third the fat of grass-fed beef, and only one-third of that is saturated fat. It has a greater amount of iron than any other meat. It's a great source of B vitamins and complete protein, containing all 10 essential amino acids.

Debate about whether a young, early-season deer is tastier and more tender than a mature buck taken during peak rut will wage on without end. In truth, it largely comes down to how the animal is handled in the field and at home. Quick, clean field dressing and cooling the animal will make any deer taste better, and aging can take it to a whole other level. But deer isn't the only animal on the menu.

Some hard-core wild game lovers might argue, until they've tried it. Once they have, most will agree that moose is better than deer. It has the flavor and consistency of lean beef, without the slightest hint of "gameiness" sometimes found in deer. If it could taste a moose every couple years, I'd never shoot another deer.

Wild turkey tastes like grouse or pheasant, which doesn't tell the non-hunter much. Think tame turkey with just a hint of cranberry sauce. Care must be

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A great blue heron, left, and a snowy egret.

ASK MAINE AUDUBON Bet it's an egret, or starin' at a heron?

Your wildlife questions are answered by Maine Audubon Staff Naturalist Doug Hitchcox.

As a science communicator, sometimes one of my biggest challenges is making sure we are all talking about the same thing. This is especially true when we don't use standard names, and when colloquial names are used. Of course we can all learn Latin and start using binomial nomenclature, but it is a lot easier to say "great horned owl" than "Bubo virginianus," no matter how funny the latter is.

In June, in this column, I took a deep dive into the confusion around



DOUG HITCHCOX ASK MAINE AUDUBON

what a "sea eagle" was, and with a recent email from Ruth in Gorham, I thought it'd be worthwhile to go over the difference between an egret and a heron. Is there really a difference? Ruth's question was primarily about distinguishing between egrets and herons, as she sees them on walks along the Eastern Trail through the Scarborough Marsh. I cut my teeth with Maine Audubon leading bird

walks on that trail for six summers and can definitely give it a plug as one of the best places in the state for seeing those herons and egrets, plus lots that nest nearby and many shorebirds that are now migrating south. More than 200 species have

been documented along that stretch of trail through Scarborough, putting it in the top 10 "birding hotspots" in Maine based on biodiversity. A good place to start with herons versus egrets is recognizing how similar they are. The family Ardeidae includes all of the herons, egrets, and ibis, which worldwide covers 48

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SPORTS

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TURF

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fully for those."

Gross teams need to a more strength piece also have to accommodate to speed-up game when they play on an artificial surface. But for a skilled team, that's less daunting of an adjustment.

"It's not as difficult. I guess it just depends on the team and the personnel," said Gorham Coach Becky Manson. "For us, we're a very fast team, so we can adjust to turf quite quickly."

Gross used to be the standard surface in Maine field hockey. It was only a handful of turf fields available in the state. That's changed in recent years. At least 27 programs now play their home games on artificial turf fields, including 10 who have made the switch to turf since 2011. Ten have done so since 2021.

Twenty-six of the 36 coaches in Class A and B play on turf, which makes going through the regular season a matter of constant adjustment between the surfaces and the kinds of games they allow.

"Every little part of your individual, tactical game changes when you change surfaces," said Haddam Coach Caitlin Tremberth, who guided the Tigers for four years on grass before Water-

house Field installed turf in 2018. "To teach high schoolers that and teach them in a team sense to beat a grass team is about 24 hours. It's pretty hard."

On turf, the sport has changed into a faster and more athletic game. Scoring quick passes, evoked stick skills, and the possibility for a scoring threat to develop in an instant. What Stowhegan Coach Paula Doughty calls the "90s game" of big hits to send the ball upfield and hoping it finds its way to a player near the goal has phased out.

"Coaches like myself who have coached a long time, 10 years ago, we had to return how to coach," Doughty said. "It is not a grass game anymore. Most of my kids, for 10 months out of the year, play on turf (with club teams). It is a turf game. It's a skilled game."

On grass, that evoked game becomes regulated. And for players who honed their skills on turf, they have to be ready to play a different way.

"It's definitely hard. The ball speed goes down so much and you definitely have to acclimate to it," said Haddam junior back and midfielder Ella Boyce. "On turf, you don't really have bumps and ruts. You just have to be able to do it in the grass. That means you have to be able to move your feet a lot more power into the passes, which we don't usually have to do on turf."

From passkeeping requires a different approach on grass.

"I like to do a lot of backchecks and go the other way, but ... a lot of times I'll go and get stuck on the grass where I wouldn't be," said Haddam senior goalie Catherine Gould. "It's a different type of kick. If I'm kicking on grass, I use my hip. If I'm kicking on turf, I use the inside of my foot. It's totally a different angle."

Turf teams have to prepare as best they can.

"We try to practice on grass, but our grass (practice) field can't get short enough, so I kind of makes it hard to even practice at all," said Prospect Coach Marcia Wood. "You can't really get anything accomplished if you can't move the ball at all."

Wood said teams that use grass often have an advantage over those that don't.

"Oh yeah, definitely. We have to spend part of our warmup just getting used to the grass and figuring out how that grass works," she said. "Footing on grass definitely gives you that advantage. You're used to it and you know how to play on it."

Every team takes on a different dimension when going from grass to turf, but not so much, because they're throwing it around in the field every day, all except for maybe just overall foot

speed you might have, it doesn't affect the ball as much," said Greely Athletic Director David Shogren. "But just how it affects the ball, and everything is on the ground in field hockey, it's a huge difference."

Cape Elizabeth boys' soccer coach Ben Raymond agreed.

"In soccer, I don't think it's a huge impact on the game and on the way it's played," he said. "I would think field hockey should only be played on turf fields. It probably gets slowed down an awful lot on a grass field, unless it's a really maintained field that's cut really short, really tight grass."

Even teams that play some games on grass can find themselves needing to adjust. Stowhegan's field has gained a reputation for being as close to turf as a grass surface can get. And when River Hawks players — many of whom play on club and out-of-state teams on turf in the offseason — have a game on a shadier field coming up, Doughty changes practice to make sure her players are ready.

"I have to teach two games," she said. "I say 'OK, today we're doing a grass practice.' And a turf practice. You've got to be the defender, look up and you see it. And on turf, you use sticks. You are passing and little short passes and side feeds, and you can't do that on grass

because you can just pick it right off. It's two totally different games, and it's confusing for the kids."

For that reason, some grass teams believe they have an advantage when they host a turf team.

"When Thomas (College) first got its turf, a lot of people were going and playing some of their regular-season home games there," said Winslow Coach Mary Beth Bourquin, who guided the Black Raiders to the Class B title in 2019. "I was asked more than once, 'How come you're not moving your home games to Thomas?' I said, 'Because I like my home-field advantage.' I like my field, it's grass, people have to come here and play on grass. I don't want to give up my home field."

Manson, the Gorham coach, said it's not always easy for a turf team to find a grass field in good enough condition for practice.

"If you're a turf team and you have to then go find a spot of grass to practice on before you play a grass game, that is in my opinion, a huge disadvantage," she said. "I think it's worse for turf now and don't have a good turf area that's practice on. They see you and play a grass game."

Photo by David Thompson

OUTDOORS

RIDE

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construction bid, but officials don't anticipate breaking ground until early next year.

However, Bob Hamblin, vice president of the board of the Eastern Trail Alliance and former city planner in Bangor, said he feels "more positive than ever" about the progress of the trail. "We may be in a bit of a holding pattern for the Class D Gap project, but we know that that will be brought to a conclusion in the relatively near future."

The bicyclists riding in support of the alliance went in half-hour intervals on Sunday depending on the length of their routes, with the earliest riders leaving first at 7 o'clock.

When asked whether he was nervous before the century start, David Brochuak replied, "No, no I love it." Then he paused for a few moments, unsure if he heard the question correctly. "At risk: Is that what you said? No, I've expired."

His friend interjected, "He's definitely at risk," he said, laughing.

Less than 10 minutes later, their jersey-clad bikes, hunched over their bikes at a matching angle, disappeared around the first turn.

Despite winding roads through Cape Elizabeth, frequent spurts suddenly leading to an open coast, and the awe-inspiring view of the 17-mile of gravel road across the Scarborough Marsh, reported twice for riders doing 40, 60, and 100 miles, nobody seemed to lose their way. As promised, some orange circles — with a line pointing in the direction of the next turn, were spray painted at frequent intervals along the



David Thompson/Portland Press Herald

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route.

A next stop at Cape Elizabeth's Kettle Cove proved to be popular among the riders. Between predictable sidewalks, waterworks and a heap of bananas, trays of gladders and a big bowl of chocolate peanut butter cups were disappearing at a time-lapse speed. The contents of the trays were reached with gold foil.

This was not a day to rest just one.

A sense of relief from the finish, riders climbed a steep

hill and stopped to admire the view from the Fort Williams Light. "There's a lot of interesting history and symbolism in these lighthouses," said Fred Curran, a senior at Bowdoin College, "but mostly I'm just glad to be along for the ride."

In theory, a handful of lighthouses were visible from each route — and a whopping nine lights marked the century ride — but sometimes they were hard to make out in the fog. Throughout it all, there was the feeling of déjà vu.

"Have we been here before?" one female rider asked at a turnout in Old Orchard, before being encouraged by a clump of other riders that the way on the right coast.

Perhaps what was so quintessentially "Maine" about the ride wasn't the lighthouses themselves, but the repetition of something picturesque and because commonplace — another group of friends on a morning run stepping off the trail to hit a bakery, another beach where the waves went

bowling with the plovers, another well-spent Sunday.

"It was amazing, right — we had no idea what to expect," said Dave Wilton, of Newburyport, Massachusetts.

He and a friend from Cambridge, Massachusetts, had done a 10-mile ride together in February and barely finished it, Wilton said. But on Sunday, they went for the 100-ride and completed it in good spite.

"I've got a 13-year-old daughter I'm looking to impress with this ride," Wilton said.

Photo by David Thompson

HUNT

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taken when preparing it because it lacks the fat that gives farm-raised fish much of their flavor, and less desirable ingredients, and therefore will dry out much quicker.

Flavor needs to be delicious, if properly cared for in the field and at home. It has a flavor and consistency somewhere between beef

and pork and tends to be fatter or "greasier" than venison. That's partly because the moose has more brown fat, the type between the muscles that you leave on beef to add flavor, as opposed to the white fat or lard you trim off deer and moose. I once cooked both for a barbecue and people who had never eaten wild game raved about them.

Wildfowl is more of an acquired taste, which some never acquire. If you don't like liver, you might not like it, unless

you're lucky enough to find wood ducks that have been fattening up on acorns or goose feedings on grass and waste grain. It's chancy. I've had some geese that tasted like roast beef, and some that tasted like a blend of liver and anchovies. To each their own.

Snowshoe hare can be delicious. The first one I cooked had a distinct flavor of spruce needles, which I didn't much care for. The next one, slow-cooked in a crock pot with cream of mushroom soup was outstanding — a lot like squirrel.

Perhaps the best part about preparing wild game is that you know where it came from and how it was handled. For those who have the means but lack the time, a processor is a viable option for preparing your game for the freezer or the kitchen. The rest is up to you and don't be afraid to get creative.

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ASK

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species in 18 genera. There are some pretty odd and distinct species around the world, but here in Maine there are only about a dozen regularly occurring species, plus a few that show up as vagrants.

That is about as clean as we can make any spits in their taxonomy because the use of the terms "heron" or "egret" will result in a bit of confusion. I often hear people call any of the larger Ardeidae herons, but our two largest in Maine are great blue herons and great egrets. These do both fall in the genus Ardea, and that fact that name is apparently a reference to the acidity of their feces. The

account in "Birds of the World" points to a Roman myth of a town called Ardea, which was burned and from the ashes (instead of a phoenix) rose "a pale, lean bird, chaining the cinders from its wings and uttering mournful cries." That myth was tied to stories of how these large herons signify large "burning" feces, after a nesting season, all the feces which have accumulated under the tree where their nest is can actually cause that

tree to die.

Once we take a step down in size from the great egret and great blue heron, we find a few "egrets" and "herons" that are in the genus Egretta. Don't hope that Egretta would just equal egret, but this does include little blue herons and the rare tricolored heron (some of you may remember them as Louisiana heron, but they've since been renamed). The name egret, or Egretta, comes from the French

word egretre, which is a specific reference to the feathers, or more precisely the webfeathers, that would be made with them and often accentuated with rare gems. It does make me wonder which came first — but I digress.

To make things a bit easier, the simple way to know if you're looking at a heron or egret in Maine is based on the color: great egrets and snowy egrets are all white, while the great blue heron, blue heron, and green herons are all somewhat colorful. Of course, there are always exceptions to these rules, and acute birders will be quick to point out the confusion with young (1 to 2 years old) little blue herons, which are also white and can look very similar to snowy egrets. I've heard many people misidentify great egrets

as "great white herons" but that is actually a unique subspecies of great blue heron which are generally restricted to southern Florida, Cuba, and the Yucatan Peninsula.

Oufouled yet?

In bird identification, it's hard to say anything too definitive because there are always exceptions to the rule, and as we've discussed, the ornithologists naming and classifying them didn't help make this any easier.

That said, the short cut to remember in Maine, if it is white, it is probably an egret. True, it has a black bill and yellow feet (spides legs) if it is a snowy egret. The reverse, a white egret that has a yellow bill and black feet, is a great egret. Almost everything else is a heron. And if it is really hard to see, it is a bittern.