



A chickadee draws the attention of the early rising birders, led by birder, naturalist, and field biologist Rich MacDonald, far right. PHOTO BY: JEFF WALLS

Early worms do get the birds

By Jeff Walls
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BAR HARBOR — Acadia National Park gets millions of visitors a year that come to enjoy the natural beauty of Mount Desert Island. When the leaves drop the locals get to come out of hiding, spread their wings and enjoy MDI in a less crowded atmosphere. One method of inspiring motivation to get out and enjoy is birding.

A group of local bird enthusiasts met early on a recent Saturday morning to join Rich MacDonald for a guided trek to the Sand Beach area of Acadia to observe birds on Great Head and along the section of Park Loop Road known as Ocean Drive. Chad Propst, Erica Georgaklis, Ryan Woofenden, Winn Robbins, and Charlotte Burley all opted to roll out from under the blankets early and hit the trails in search of MDI's feathered friends.

The group's arrival was greeted, not by birds, but the ever present "MDI cows", aka white tail deer. Unfazed, a young buck just inside the tree line took a break from his breakfast to watch the binocular-laden group make it's way toward Great Head.

The brisk late fall sun penetrated the outer layers of the group's insulation, warming them as they approached Sand Beach. The first bird that presented itself (other than an elusive chickadee that made its presence known via its distinctive call) was a snow bunting that made a fleeting appearance over the dunes north of the beach.

The group spotted several black ducks in the marsh area north of the dunes as they scanned all four cardinal directions and everything in between.

The morning air gradually warmed as everyone made their way across the beach and up to Ocean Drive. The elevated path along the road provided a spectacular vantage point for observing seabird activity. A small flock of purple sand pipers flitted about the rugged shoreline as waves crashed around them while they searched for food. A collection of horned grebes sat offshore but not out of reach of MacDonald's spotting scope. Out on Old Soaker, the ledge just off of Sand Beach, several silhouettes of great cormorants broke up the skyline.

The spruce and pine on the inland side of the road appeared to be the playground for a flock of chickadees, several common yellowthroats, and a nesting squirrel, all keeping the amateur ornithologists entertained.

On the return trip, the common consensus was that birding was an excellent way to become more in tune with the natural environment.

"The sun and the beautiful day are reason enough. It is great coming out with Rich because he helps us stop and identify the birds," said Burley. "I wouldn't have known those were purple sand pipers if he wasn't here. I started looking through the book to see if I could identify them but he knew right away. It is a beautiful place with a wonderful resource."

MacDonald hosts free 2-1/2-hour bird walks through the winter, departing his Natural History Center alongside the Bar Harbor Village Green Saturdays at 8:30 a.m. The Center opens at 8 a.m. before the bird walks, offering free hot mulled cider, tea or hot cocoa. Dress for the weather.



A downy woodpecker eyeballs the birding crew as they watch him searching for insects under a birch bark. PHOTO BY: JEFF WALLS

From tales of tragedy, lessons in hope

By Laurie Schreiber
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SOUTHWEST HARBOR — This is the ninth in an occasional series on substance abuse in Hancock County.

Earlier this year, Kip Young was at Pemetec Elementary School, setting up a PowerPoint presentation for one of his weekly meetings with the eighth-grade class.

Young is a drug and alcohol counselor with the Acadia Family Center in Southwest Harbor.

He is also a former substance user who got sober 24 years ago and, since then, has built on his personal experience and his professional training to develop a substance abuse prevention program for school settings.

"By telling my own story and stories of people I have known, the most important message that I bring to the kids is a message of choice and hope," he told a visitor to the class. "Sure, there are some kids in high school that use drugs and alcohol. But the majority of kids do not. I talk about the rewards for those who don't use, as well as the possible consequences for those who do. I help them understand the importance of recognizing their own strengths, and using these strengths to navigate their young lives."

On this particular morning, the classroom teacher, Sonia Philbrook, explained that Young's 10-week program is an integral part of the school's health education curriculum for eighth-graders.

For this, the final day of the weekly sessions, Young told the class that he wanted to share the stories of some people who had been in his life. Most, he said, had experienced the depths of misery because of substance abuse, and their lives had taken a variety of trajectories.

"I put this together a couple of years ago because I thought it was important to demonstrate the power of the decisions you all make," he told the class before turning on the PowerPoint. "I made my most important decisions in my teen years. And even before that, from about 10 years old to 15, I really set myself on a course that was going to be really difficult to change. And here you are — 13, 14 — and you are going to make some huge choices, not only in what you do but in what you don't do, and in who you hang out with. So what I want to do is talk to you about some of the friends I had when I was younger and where they are today."

The class was quietly attentive as Young reminded them of his own story, which he had shared earlier in the program. He grew up in Maine, took his first swig of beer at age 12, and began a litany of drugs that included marijuana, LSD and what became a debilitating addiction to smoking cocaine.

A near-death experience in 1987, when he was 27, landed him at Mount Desert Island Hospital. He was sent to a detoxification center in Portland and began his rehabilitation.

"I was one of the lucky ones," he said. "Starting drugs young usually leads to multiple life difficulties or some kind of tragedy."

In 1990, he began to study for his license as an addiction counselor. He went to work for the Bangor-based treatment center Wellspring Inc.; then for the Caron Foundation in Pennsylvania.

In 1994, he returned to Maine, where he worked as a commercial fisherman while also developing school programs and working for



Kip Young, a drug and alcohol counselor with Acadia Family Center in Southwest Harbor, speaks to eighth-graders at Pemetec Elementary School. PHOTO BY: LAURIE SCHREIBER

the Open Door Recovery Center in Ellsworth

In 2008, he was hired by Acadia Family Center, where in addition to his extensive school-based program, he works one-on-one with clients and facilitates a number of groups.

Over the years, Young has brought his education programs to schools from Mount Desert Island and the nearby islands to Ellsworth and into the Down East region. His goal, he said, is to inform without being "preachy" and to "let their own curiosity investigate." His program has been part of the Pemetec curriculum for seven years now.

Young's friends

For the Pemetec eighth-graders, Young pulled up photos on the projector of people who had once been in his life. He said that a couple of old friends had ended up as lucky as he had; most had not. He spoke warmly about each person.

One of the success stories was "Johnny," who stayed away from drugs and alcohol through high school, where he was "a Tom Cruise type of guy," played soccer and trumpet, and was on the student council.

"I don't know why, but he started hanging around people who used drugs and alcohol, and he began using, too," Young said.

The two ended up living in a "drug house" in Florida.

"But one day, I woke up and went out into the kitchen and there was Johnny with all his bags packed. We were both 18. I said, 'Dude, what's going on?' And he said, 'I'm going back to Maine.' I asked why. He kind of talked around it and never really said it, but what he did is, he woke up and he looked around and he realized he was living with a bunch of drug dealers and psychotics and criminals. And I think he looked at his future and was looking at their lives, and he made a decision that he wanted more than that. And he left."

Eventually, said Young, Johnny enlisted in the military and became a rescue chopper pilot and then a base commander. In recent years, Johnny was received at the White House by former President George Bush, and recognized for his leading role in the response to a plane crash over the Atlantic Ocean, where he assisted with the retrieval of bodies through a

48-hour period.

"Think about this," Young told the students. "Here's this kid, he's 18 years old, he's living in Florida with a bunch of his friends, they're all smoking and drinking, partying, just kind of living life like a leaf in a wind. And one morning, he woke up and made a decision that would forever alter his life. He said, 'I want something better.' He went home and joined the military. Now he's retired, lives with his wife, and is a very happy guy. We're still great friends. One decision, it changed his life forever."

He also told a story of a high school friend he graduated with who worked hard in high school, went to college and later became one of the pioneers in the Microsoft Corporation.

But the majority of stories, said Young, did not end happily.

"Jim" was a drug dealer who landed twice in a federal penitentiary and died two years ago in a single-car accident. Jim's friend, "Ty," also went to prison for drug trafficking. Ty, a gentler personality, was determined to stay clean when he was freed. He got a job as a cook. Two months later, he died of a heroin overdose. "Ron" was kicked out of the military, a career he loved, for possession of marijuana and LSD.

"Eddie" was the first person Young had ever met who injected drugs.

"He invited me over one day. He came out of the kitchen and he had two syringes. He put one down on the table and said, 'There you go.' And I said, 'No, man.' Next thing, he tied his arms off, and he stuck one in one forearm and one in the other."

Young said he later learned that Eddie drowned when he was sitting by the water one day, injecting heroin.

"What happens with people when they inject heroin, they kind of go to sleep," Young said. "But instead of falling over backwards, he fell forward into the water, and when they fished him out of the water he still had the syringe in his arm."

Then there was "Melissa," a former girlfriend and a binge user of alcohol and prescription opiates. Melissa would stay clean for a month or two, then disappear for days and

• **EGGS**

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another couple.

Tammy said the Subaru still runs and that they plan to take the car to a mainland mechanic. She said she learned the repair work will likely involve taking off and cleaning the gas tank and fuel lines, and checking the motor.

The vandalism to the truck, she said, affects the whole town. Her husband had just outfitted it to do the town's snowplowing.

She said she and her husband have suspicions about who the vandal was. Last week, she said, they'd filed a report with Maine State Police regarding a late-night driver who was blaring music. And, she said, she's pretty sure the vandalism occurred the night of

Nov. 30, when she said she was alone and remembered their dog barking.

Living on a small island with just a mile of paved road, she said, it's not uncommon for several days to go by without needing the car. She said that's why they think the vandalism may have occurred that Wednesday, but that they didn't notice it until a few days later.

Across the harbor, Jackie and Charlie Mitchell also found egg in the gas tank of their vehicle — twice.

Like the Desjardins, the Mitchells don't use their car every day, said Jackie.

"I didn't know about it until Jay came over, driving his Subaru, and said, 'Look what they did. They put eggs in our gas tanks,'" said Jackie. "I felt bad for Jay. And then I looked over at our truck and there was egg in ours, too."

Jackie said the amount of shell on the ground appeared to add up to more

than one egg.

Both couples also filed reports with the Hancock County Sheriff's Office.

"We'll investigate it as best we can. I have a couple of leads, but they're third-hand and hard to follow up on," said Deputy Luke Gross, who was reached at the agency early this week.

Gross said that the island's remote location made immediate investigation difficult to pursue, given the agency's stretched resources.

"I'd love to go out and look into this specific criminal mischief," he said. "I plan to meet with my lieutenant and probably with my chief to see if we can get out there."

Rob Stuart, chairman of the Frenchboro Board of Selectmen, said he was aware of the incidents and that the town is concerned about any behavior that impacts the well-being of the community.

• **FRAUD**

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warrant alleges that Lozano deposited three checks totaling \$24,000 to the Best of Bar Harbor account from Oct. 26 to Oct. 28 and also deposited five checks in the total amount of \$30,000 to the Parkside Restaurant account from Oct. 26 to Oct. 28.

According to the warrant, in the five days following the deposits, Lozano made several large withdrawals from both Camden National Bank accounts. When the checks were remitted for payment, all were returned due to non-sufficient funds.

The warrant also indicated that Camden National made at least four attempts to contact Lozano by phone on Nov. 2 and Nov. 3, all of which were unsuccessful.

Following her arrest, Lozano was booked at the Bar Harbor Police Station and subsequently released after posting a \$50,000 surety bond. No court date has yet been set in the case. If convicted, Lozano faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$20,000 fine.

• **LESSONS**

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return burned out. She went off with another man who dumped her because of her drug habit.

She turned to Young and his friend "Ralph" for help, because she was pregnant and penniless. Ralph took her in, she got clean, the baby was born, and they became a family.

When the baby was a few months old, she began getting high again. Ralph accepted her apologies for a while, then called it quits. Melissa moved in with her mother, left her baby with a friend and disappeared on a binge for three days. The friend called the Department of Health and Human Services. Facing the loss of her child, Melissa enrolled in treatment programs but was unable to stay clean. Melissa lost her child, moved in with another man, and continued her pattern of substance use.

One day, said Young, she returned, said hi to her boyfriend, grabbed a beer and went into the living room.

"A few minutes later, someone knocked on the door. It was a State Policeman. He said, 'Someone has jumped off your balcony,'" Young said.

It was Melissa. She fell five stories, landed on her feet, and suffered multiple broken bones and internal injuries.

At the hospital, he said, her opiate addiction was exacerbated by painkillers. When she returned to Ralph's apartment, she was sitting in her wheelchair one day and appeared to be napping. Instead, she had stopped breathing, possibly a result of overdosing on her opiate medication, said Young. She was in her early 30s.

Getting the message

Throughout the narratives, the students were clearly engaged. Some expressed admiration for Johnny's success in life. Others expressed dismay about Melissa's fate but, more so, about the effects of Melissa's choices on her child.

Young told the students that the goal of sharing his own story and those of others in his life was to try to make them "think a little deeper" as they coped with the influences that life would present.

At their age, he said, he was already well along in a life of drink and drugs.

"This is where I lost control of my life. I started using before this time. I drank a few times in the sixth grade, and I started smoking in the seventh grade. By eighth grade, something was already happening to me. Partying was something I was very involved in. I was smoking weed, I was drinking, and I was trying other drugs," he said. "High school can be the place to prepare and get your life ready, and if you want, get ready to go to college. And yes, there are some kids who are involved in high-risk behaviors, but you get to choose if you're going to be one of them."

Young told the students they were at a crucial transition time in their lives, as they head into high school and its larger world of opportunities and influences.

"What you do is so incredibly important," he said. "What you've got to understand is that, what you do now will shape the rest of your life."

The bigger picture

Awareness of the problem of drug abuse generally varies by region, Young said in a subsequent interview.

"Last year, I was at a local elementary school, and I asked the sixth-graders, 'How many of you have heard of the drug Oxycontin?' One or two students raised their hands. I asked that same question at several schools in Washington County and nearly every student raised their hand," he said. "You get in some of the parts of Maine where it's more rural and drug use is a lot more rampant, so even if you have an intact family and people are paying attention to raising their kids, it can be hard to protect them from what they're hearing from other kids. Right now we have a plague here. I'm going to name it a plague. Opiate use; it's just so rampant. I have met some high school kids who have used opiate prescription drugs, and I have known one student in the last few years from a local high school who had used heroin. So far, I think we've done pretty good educating them, but the opiate drugs have become such a part of our community that they are here to stay, unfortunately."

For those high school students who do drugs, the

most common choices are mainly alcohol and pot, with some use of prescription opiate pills, he said.

"I am concerned that pills will become more mainstream in the high school," he said. "Then you may have some kids either not finishing high school or leaving high school already with an opiate addiction. And bouncing back from opiates is not the same; it's a hard, hard thing to do. Many of my clients are opiate-dependent. It's hard because opiate drugs are addictive on so many levels. Most importantly is that they're physically addictive. The opiate withdrawal symptoms are brutal, but recovery is still possible. The courage that many of my clients show in recovering from opiate dependence is very inspiring."

Prescription opiates and even opiate replacement drugs, such as Suboxone, are common in the local community, he said. Young said that people are able to get drugs on the street or through diversion of someone else's legitimate prescription.

"You can get anything you want," he said. "Heroin seems to have taken a little dip right now, but that's probably temporary. That stuff's around. And Percocet, Oxycontin, hydrocodone, methadone, Suboxone, morphine. Some people are using methadone illegally."

According to Young, Bar Harbor can be a center for drug-dealing, and there's drug-dealing in other parts of the community as well.

"My clients will say things like, 'I just can't go to Bar Harbor,' because when they go to Bar Harbor, they start seeing people that trigger them. This is one of the things I teach people that I work with — the number one thing is, don't hang around people who use. So people start protecting themselves by staying away from the old haunts. For some of my clients in early recovery, just going to Bar Harbor or not can mean the difference between using or not using."

For children, he said, regular education about chemical dependency is key to drug prevention.

"Addiction seems to be a young person's problem," he said. "And most of the people I've worked with, when you

ask them, 'How old were you when you first started using?' you get answers between 10 and 15. And these are the people who end up in treatment centers when they're in their 20s and 30s, if they're lucky."

Kids are particularly vulnerable, he said, because of society's promotion of alcohol and pain medication use, and generally permissive outlook on marijuana use.

"Because of the reality in our community, kids need to know what opiates are, what they do to people and how to avoid it," he said. "It's one of the things I'm hoping the state will recognize and take responsibility for."

Young said that, when he's in the schools, he does not

engage with students about any specific experiences they might have with drugs in their lives.

"I'm not there to get information from them, I'm there so they can information from me," he said.

Still, he said, with addiction and dependency so widespread in the community, it is apparent that "there will most likely be a certain number of kids in every class who will somehow be affected by someone else's substance use."

Using real-life stories in his program is a time-tested method that helps Young convey his message.

"People live through stories," he said. "I'll see kids 10 years later who can still tell me some of the stories I

told. And that tells me that that approach — going in and giving them real-life stories about people I've worked with and what I've seen other people go through — the kids do remember that. Especially the people I have an emotional attachment with. By the time I'm done, the kids have an emotional attachment, too. And so the people I care about, they care about, too. I tell a couple of stories of friends of mine who died from opiate overdoses, and sometimes I get choked up and the kids do, too. They realize, 'Hey, this is real.' This isn't just a poster. There's real tragedy, and there's real hope of learning from the tragic lives of some of these people."

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