

## Snapshot of a Surgeon's Retirement

# Patience, Persistence Reward Lifelong Nature Lover

by Valerie Marier

Sunlight flickers through a copse of birches bordering the wide, graveled Knight Trail that meanders through the Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm. It's 6:30 AM. There is no breeze stirring, nor another nature-lover in sight.

That, to Kennebunk resident and avid photographer and birder Ken Janes, is the winning trifecta for a morning hike with his Canon 7D camera.

"I like finding a quiet spot and standing there for 15 to 20 minutes to see what happens," he says.

Suddenly, a red squirrel sitting beside a barberry bush starts to squeak. "That's an alarm call to let the neighborhood know we're here," Janes says.

He's been studying a flutter of movement in a distant gnarled apple tree. He quickly hoists his camera, focuses the 400mm Canon lens and, in 20 rapid-fire clicks, photographs a yellow-bellied sapsucker. "Some photos will be out of focus, most I'll toss out, but hopefully there will be at least one good one," he says.

Four years into retire-



Retired surgeon Ken Janes has been interested in wildlife since he was a child and has traveled the world to photograph his subjects. He and his wife now reside full-time in Kennebunk.

ment from his career as a general and vascular surgeon at the Nashoba Valley Medical Center near Groton, Massachusetts, Janes now has the time to pursue two lifelong and cherished hobbies – photography and bird watching.

"Photography always intrigued me, but after I stopped working, I had more time to engage in it," says Janes. "Plus, by then digital cameras had become quite specialized and sophisticated, allowing me to get instant feedback

when I'm out in the field."

He is out on a Maine field or trail almost daily, often sporting a York County Audubon hat (he serves on their Board of Di-

**Ken Janes** —  
— continued on page 25



While bass fishing with a friend on Lake Winnepesaukee, Janes was lucky enough to photograph an eagle returning to the nest.

## Kennebunk Beach

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## Ken Janes

*continued from page 24*

rectors) and always hoping to add a new bird to his list (which he faithfully logs on eBird.com).

Janes says, "I've been interested in wildlife since I was a kid, running through the woods with a bug jar and a butterfly net. Remember too, I'm a doctor and I studied biology, genetics, anatomy and a lot of other sciences. Birding is a natural extension of that interest."

Becoming a doctor was his childhood dream and aspiration while growing

up in Holliston, Massachusetts. After graduating from Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1964, Janes enrolled at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston.

He served in Vietnam as a battalion surgeon with the First Cavalry in 1970, then returned to the States to become director of the emergency room at Evans Army Community Hospital in Fort Carson, Colorado for a year. Janes then returned to Boston to complete his surgical residency at Tufts/New England Medical Center. In 1975, he moved his young family

(wife Sandra, sons Stephen, Matthew and Daniel) to Groton, Massachusetts. "I wanted a country setting for my boys," Janes says.

Over the next 35 years, Janes became chief of surgery, then president of the medical staff at NVMC, and later president of the Independent Physicians Association. By 2011, his sons were grown and retirement became a reality. Janes and his wife decided to make their summer home at Kennebunk Beach their full-time residence. When not out on the trail with his camera, Janes frequently plays golf at the

nearby Webhannet Golf Club.

Though his current bird list includes more than 750 species, Janes modestly insists he is not an expert birder. "I'm just a guy out there looking at the birds," he says.

But there is no doubt that his photographs of Maine flora and fauna have garnered significant local attention and repute. His work has appeared in *Down East Magazine* and in the "Outdoor" section of the *Maine Sunday Telegram*.

The Kennebunk and Mousam Rivers Alliance used several of his photographs for promotional purposes, and recently Cornell University requested one of Janes' photos of a raptor for a course on bird identification. Other area Audubon groups have also used his photography for identification purposes and he frequently speaks to local clubs about the birds of York County.

Asked how he creates his photos, Janes offers several tips to novice shutterbugs. "Don't just go out and take snapshots," he says. "I took several courses on line to devel-



Janes is an avid birder and has photographed everything from majestic bald eagle to tiny ruby-throated hummingbirds. He now has over 750 species on his bird list.

op professional insight and techniques, including where to position myself when taking a photo, how to set up the camera and how to hold the lens so it doesn't shake."

He cites lynda.com in California as an excellent resource for learning and honing photographic skills but also mentions that software groups, such as Adobe and Photoshop, offer equally worthwhile, and free, courses.

Janes urges beginner photographers to take the time to understand and get to know their cam-

eras. "Don't just put it on 'automatic' when taking pictures," he says. "It's so much better to do your own settings and take lots of photos. Don't hesitate to throw away photos that aren't good and don't be happy with those that are just okay. Because digital cameras make it so much easier for an interested amateur to get good photos and delete bad ones, be critical of your work — be honest and be brutal. You'll grow from that."

**Ken Janes**

*— continued on page 37*



Ken Janes catches a surfer as he breaks through a wave.





## Ken Janes

*continued from page 25*

After several hours on the Knight Trail, Janes was satisfied he'd had a successful photographic bird walk at Laudholm. "Sometimes I'm out here and I don't take any photos. Today was a good day," he says.

Indeed, he photographed song sparrows, several blue jays, a mourning dove, three chickadees, a hairy woodpecker, a yellow-rumped warbler ("aka a butter-butt," he says), a peregrine falcon, a yellow-bellied sapsucker and – a coup! – a snow bunting sitting on moss-coated rocks at Drakes Island beach.

"Now that's a lucky sighting," he says, "because snow buntings are northern arctic birds and this guy is a long way from home."

Noted photographer Ansel Adams once said, "You don't just take a photograph



It sometimes takes a lot of patience to get the perfect shot. Janes waited for this young bobcat to finally step out of the shadows into the afternoon sun before capturing this photo.

with a camera. You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved."

Ken Janes brings a lifetime of different and enriching experiences to his craft. He learned persistence while on the men's

gymnastic team at Springfield College where he patiently practiced, then mastered the "iron cross," a strength move in which the gymnast must hold the rings straight out on either side of his body while holding himself up for several seconds – no easy feat.

His creativity is en-

hanced by a zest for off-the-beaten-track travel. Hiking in Iceland, Costa Rica, New Zealand, Alaska, Switzerland and the Canadian wilderness opened his eyes, and lens, to unimagined landscapes and rare creatures.

Always seeking to gain more knowledge, he took an online course in French so that he could better immerse himself in the local scene

while traveling and photographing different areas of France several years ago. He even expanded his vocabulary by reading murder mysteries – in French.

Ken Janes is a quiet man whose photographs resonate with artistic perception and depth.

"The fun of it is being out in the woods, seeing the wildlife and then, if I get a photo or two, working with it on my computer to enhance and shape it," Janes says. "When I take a photograph, I often have no actual idea in mind but if I get in the optimum position, with the sun in the right place, and I just let things happen, sometimes I get lucky."

## Ken Janes' Favorite Spots for Bird Watching

Ken Janes' current bird list totals more than 750 species, including 267 spotted here in Maine. "If you want to see a specific bird, you need to go to their habitat," he says. Here's where he goes:

**Wells Reserve at Laudholm Farm**, offers seven miles of easy-to-moderate trails, including the Salt Marsh Loop and the Forest Interpretive in addition to the Knight Trail. The reserve is located at 342 Laudholm Farm Road, Wells; trails open daily from 7 AM to sunset; for more information call 207-646-1555.

**Scarborough Marsh** is a 3100-acre estuary and the state's largest salt marsh. "You can walk

out on an old railroad bed and be right in the middle of the marsh where there's a great variety of unusual birds for Maine," Janes says. Scarborough Marsh Audubon Center is located at 136 Pine Point Road, Scarborough; open every day from mid-June to Labor Day; for more information call 207-883-5100.

**East Point Sanctuary** is a peninsula situated at the very end of Biddeford Pool, offering a short (.8 mile) but spectacular trail walk, especially in winter. Accessible year round, this sanctuary is a treasure-trove of water and shore birds.

**Timber Point Trail** winds through a 97-acre peninsula and island at

the northern end of Goose Rocks Beach. This ideal habitat attracts a wide variety of wildlife, migratory birds and waterfowl. Open year-round from sunrise to sunset.



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