

# Magic Windows

## Charles D. Hubbard Natural History Dioramas

### L.C.Bates Museum at Good Will-Hinckley

The 32 Charles D. Hubbard (1876-1951) dioramas provide “Magic Windows” that take visitors out into the varied mountain, wetland and ocean habitats in Maine. These dioramas are 3-dimensional displays of once wild animals in their native habitats. All were painted in an Impressionistic (rather than realistic) manner – unique for natural history museums. Their mounted specimens prepared by well known taxidermists provide visitors both an artistic and scientific view of bird and animal species. The dioramas provide a wonderful educational tool for learning about Maine’s wildlife and environment. Please enjoy this virtual tour of the Charles D. Hubbard dioramas in the L. C. Bates Museum.



Charles D. Hubbard, (pictured above making a sketch in Acadia National Park for a bird diorama), drew thumbnail sketches of the outdoor Maine settings where the birds in the dioramas can be observed. The diorama shown at left was painted from the study Hubbard is shown creating. He used the drawings to create impressionist paintings on flexible artist’s board that was used as the backgrounds of the dioramas. Carpenters built the diorama cases, added lights and installed natural materials as planned by Hubbard.

The impressionist artist Hubbard lived and met G.W. Hinckley in Guilford, CT, which was also the home town of G. W. Hinckley. Hubbard spent many summers at Good Will-Hinckley working on the museum dioramas and exhibits, painting landscapes of the region and portraits of people on campus and designing the symbol, the Good Will Roundel.

The L.C. Bates Museum is truly a “Museum of a Museum”, an historic early 1900’s museum that restores and maintains period exhibits and dioramas. The Charles D. Hubbard dioramas in the L.C. Bates Museum among the oldest in the country - among the few from the first quarter of the 20th century. The birds and mammals in them represent a cross-section of wildlife and the background paintings depict a wide range of habitats found in Maine.

The gallery (pictured below) with the bird dioramas is named the Audubon Room, in honor of the father of American ornithology – John James Audubon. A branch of the Maine Audubon Society was actually founded on the Good Will-Hinckley campus in 1902, known at the time as the Good Will Audubon Society.

The Mammal Gallery, also known as Hubbard Hall, like the Audubon Gallery also includes individual mounted examples of wildlife.



Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*), Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*) and Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) in Acadia National Park

Along with skimmers, gulls and terns are in the family *Laridae*, birds that breed on sea islands and coastal beaches, as well as inland marshes, lakes and rivers. These widespread / adaptable birds nest in colonies and have webbed feet. Terns tend to occur in warmer climates than gulls, and they have more pointed bills.



Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*), Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) and Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*) with a background painted in then Lafayette National Park, now Acadia National Park.

These are all duck-like birds in the *Anatidae* family. Note that the two mergansers are actually in different genera. Their common names do help to distinguish these mergansers though – the three birds (two males and one female) on the upper left have prominent crests (hence the Hooded Merganser), while the largest bird (male) on the right with the green head has a rusty breast (hence Red-breasted Merganser).



Barred Owl (*Strix varia*) and Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca*) with a background painted in Acadia National Park

Both of these species are considered to be “true owls” in the *Strigidae* family. They tend to be heard (via their calls) much more than they are seen, probably because most are nocturnal. Their nests are not obvious (usually abandoned stick nests or hollows in trees). Most *hoot* or *bark*, and the call of an owl at night is considered by many as a call of the wild. Because of their fluffy feathers they are quiet in flight, allowing them to sneak up on prey. They consume their prey whole, and regurgitate bones, fur and feathers in “pellets”. Unique attributes of true owls are their ability to rotate their large heads nearly 180°, large eye sockets (that allow them to see better at night), and highly sensitive hearing. This diorama is very popular with young visitors.

Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) in a winter scene painted in Acadia National Park

The Northern Goshawk has an average wingspan of three and a half feet. They commonly breed in coniferous, deciduous or mixed forests, using fresh, smaller branches for nesting. They will vigorously defend their nests, so beware (RE: Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*)! In Maine they commonly prey upon grouse and snowshoe hares. Northern Goshawks are circumpolar in global distribution, and nest through much of Canada and part of Alaska in North America. Those birds that nest in Maine typically winter between Virginia and states west-southwest of there, but as seen here some do winter along the Maine coast, and occasionally inland as well. Winter habitat is typically open country, such as farmland and forest edges.





Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) and Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) in Fairfield

Both of these birds are in the woodpecker family (*Picidae*). Woodpeckers have unusual feet (similar to parrots) for clinging to, and chisel-like bills for pecking into, trees, usually for nesting, courtship, and to feed on insects (sometimes sap) in healthy, sick or dead standing trees (known by foresters as *snags*). The Pileated Woodpecker (on the left) is the largest woodpecker throughout its range in North America. It resides year-round in Maine. Northern Flicker (on the right) is unique for an eastern woodpecker in that it has a brown back and often feeds on the ground (for ants and larvae) in relatively open country – occasionally on lawns and sidewalks in suburban areas.



American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*) along Martin Stream

Hubbard was very familiar with Martin Stream that runs through the Good Will-Hinckley campus and saw bitterns along the stream. In this Impressionist diorama painting, it is easy to see how Hubbard used oils and often a pallet knife to create the feeling of being out in nature.

American Bitterns are in the same family (*Ardeidae*) as herons, but browner. Note here the distinct black band down the side of their throat, appearing blackish-brown during flight. Otherwise they are brown and tan, with white mottles or lines. They occur throughout Maine during the breeding season, nesting on platforms of reeds in marshes. Two of the peculiar attributes of this bird are their loud *oong-KA-chunk call* (that sounds like a water pump), and how well they camouflage themselves. Besides blending into the dense, tall marshy vegetation because of its duller plumage, the American Bittern will actually straighten and sway its long neck with the wind to blend in (*like a wave*) with tall grasses and reeds!



### White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

The largest Hubbard diorama in the museum has a background painting of Pleasant Pond and Mountain in Caratunk, Maine. To cover the back and side walls of the diorama, the painting is over 40 feet long. Note how the painting extends around the corner in the image with the white tailed deer. This Pleasant Pond diorama includes a family of black bears, a piebald white-tailed deer, a caribou, porcupine and ring necked pheasants. This mount was prepared by Maine taxidermist Fred C. M. Parke.

The deer mount with its mazing mixed brown and white color is known as a piebald deer. The nose is black, as in a "normal" deer, and eyesight is not usually affected. Piebaldness occurs due to genetic variations, not due to parasites or illness. White tailed deer are common across all of Maine and there are a number that are piebalds. The deer are named after their white tail which they flash when the sense danger or see a predator, to warn other deer in the vicinity. and get away.





### Black Bears (*Ursus americanus*) In Pleasant Mountain and Pond Diorama

In the diorama background painting of Pleasant Mountain and Pond in Caratunk, Hubbard depicted the pond and its natural setting. Hubbard designed where the mounts, natural leaves, trees, wood and rocks were placed in the diorama. The natural materials make the dioramas seem more real.

The black bears were mounted by a well respected Maine taxidermist Fred C. N. Parke, who also mounted many fish on exhibit in the museum, including a blue marlin caught by Ernest Hemingway.

Black bears have a lot of adaptations that help them survive. They have excellent noses, and can smell food miles away! They have strong legs and paws that help them move obstacles, like rocks and tree trunks that might get in the way of their food. Their claws can help them climb trees to reach nuts, fruit, or honey. And they have long, sticky tongues that are excellent for picking up insects, while their thick fur protects them from stings. During the fall, black bears eat extra to store up body fat for the winter. They survive the winter months by hibernating in dens. During this winter months is when mothers give birth to cubs. By the time the bears are ready to leave the den in Spring the cubs are already 2-3 months old. Mothers bears continue to feed, protect and care for the cubs until the following Summer, when they are about a year and a half old.

Bobcat (Lynx rufus) a with a background painted in Fairfield, ME

Charles D. Hubbard painted the bobcat background to depict a forested area in Fairfield, where this mount was seen. The mount was posed to stand on the rocks and wood Hubbard had placed in the diorama.

The Bobcat's name refers to their short, stubby tails. Bobcats are common throughout most of Maine, except in the Northwest where the winters are long, and the snow gets too deep. Even though they are considered common, they are reclusive, so not seen very often. Although in some places this is less true. In areas where urbanization has taken over habitat, bobcats have become more accustomed to the presence of humans, and are spotted more often. Bobcat coloration can vary between light buff to brown, with darker brown to black spots or spotty- stripes. Why do think Bobcats have these spots? Spots help break up a Bobcats outline, making it more difficult to spot. This plus the color of their fur helps them camouflage.

