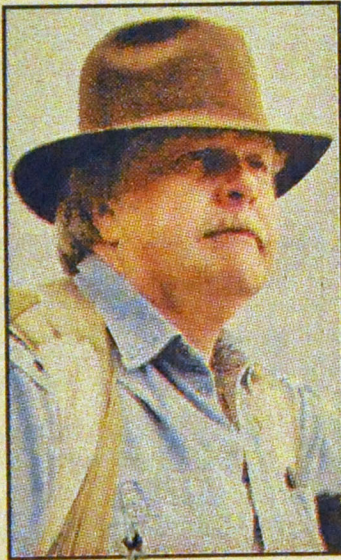


Silliker's passion creates final tribute to wildlife

Bill Silliker Jr., who died last fall at 56, was known for both his skill as a photographer and his deep respect for the natural world and the creatures inhabiting it.

P file photo



● Nature photographer Bill Silliker Jr. caps his legacy with 'Wild Maine.'

By STEPHANIE BOUCHARD
News Assistant

In "Wild Maine: Discoveries of a Wildlife Photographer" – the book Bill Silliker Jr. finished before his death last October – the nationally known photographer shares a revealing story with readers.

One predawn morning, Silliker

writes, he set out to photograph black ducks at the Goosefare Marsh in Saco.

He draped himself in camouflage cloth, and set about waiting for the ducks, with a view from the brook's east bank.

Only able to see through his camera lens trained on the brook, he had no idea what landed on his head until it flew off in front of him. A kingfisher.

The bird flitted from Silliker's head not because it was startled by the human beneath its feet, but because it saw food. When it had

what it wanted, the kingfisher returned to Silliker's head, and ate.

The close encounter with a wild creature was routine for Silliker, who spent countless hours in the wilderness photographing and communing with wildlife. Silliker – who suffered a heart attack while leading a nature workshop in the Maine wilds – is largely regarded as Maine's premier nature photographer.

His final book of photos will be

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on store shelves Tuesday. The book is much anticipated not only because it represents his final work, but also because of the skill and passion he brought to wildlife photography.

"Bill had a great way about him," says Alan Hutchinson, executive director of the Forest Society of Maine. "He understood... [he] paid attention to how they (animals) behaved – how they reacted in the presence of people."

Silliker considered the wilderness a spiritual place and that sense of wonder is apparent in the 97 color photographs of the bears, moose, eagles, beavers, puffins, and other critters in "Wild Maine."

His interests were land conservation and wildlife, and he used his passion for photography to enhance the public's understanding of the importance of the natural world. This new book is considered almost a sequel to his previous one, "Saving Maine," which documents successful land conservation stories. While the first book was on the land, his latest and last book is on the wildlife of his cherished state.

Both books are published by Down East Books. The photos in "Wild Maine" are framed by his personal anecdotes of venturing into the woods and encountering wild animals.

"Bill really (was) one of those folks who (was) committed to saving Maine," says friend and nationally known nature photographer Michael H. Francis of Montana. "When I think of Bill, I think of him as the ultimate spokesman for Maine."

Silliker got his start in the mid-1980s when he became involved in proving how a large housing development on Goosefare Brook in Scarborough Marsh would severely impact the wildlife there.

His photographs – his first photographic mission – helped stop the development from being built. The land later became part of the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge.

Silliker also went on to help begin the Friends of Rachel Carson. Over the rest of his life – he died at age 56 – he and his photographs, books, and nature films championed nature and Maine's abundant natural resources.

Silliker and Francis were both charter members and members of the ethics committee of the North American Nature Photography Association. They helped to fine-tune ethical field practices for nature photographers that could also be used by anyone out in the wild, photographer or not.

"He always put the resource before the photograph," says Baxter State Park director Buzz Caverly.

In a world in which many people are so disconnected, especially from nature, friends say that Silliker wanted to use the beauty of the natural world to inspire others, to get people to really appreciate and to understand the importance of the land and wildlife as a resource and as enrichment in people's lives.

Hutchinson, of the Forest Society, said Silliker was a master at structuring his behavior so that an animal was comfortable.

Hutchinson, who collaborated with Silliker on two books, "Just Loons"



Bill Silliker pretends to be asleep while a bull moose takes a real nap just 20 feet away. The photograph, taken in Maine's Baxter State Park, was taken by Alan Hutchinson, who collaborated with Silliker on two books, "Just Loons" and "Just Eagles."

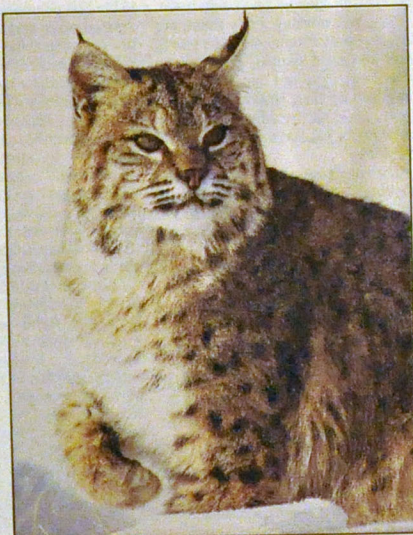


Bill Silliker Jr. photo
A bald eagle offers Bill Silliker a steely gaze while roosting on a log.

BOOKS BY BILL SILLIKER

- "Wild Maine" (Down East Books)
- "Saving Maine" (Down East Books)
- "Just Eagles" with Alan Hutchinson (Willow Creek Press)
- "Just Loons" with Alan Hutchinson (Willow Creek Press)
- "Moose Watchers Handbook" (R.L. Lemke)
- "Maine Moose Watchers Guide" (R.L. Lemke)
- "Uses for Moose" (Down East Books)
- "Moose: Giant of the Northern Forest" (Firefly Books)

According to Bill Silliker, bobcats such as this one are seldom viewed in Maine. Silliker's final book, "Wild Maine: Discoveries of a Wildlife Photographer," includes a number of personal stories about his treks into the woods and encounters with wild animals.



Bill Silliker Jr. photo

and "Just Eagles," often went out in the field with Silliker and witnessed his magic with animals.

One of the times they were out with their cameras in Baxter State Park, says Hutchinson, Silliker followed a massive bull moose into the woods, leaving Hutchinson to work his own area. After two hours, Silliker returned to Hutchinson and waved for him to follow.

Back in the woods and in the presence of the moose, Silliker talked to the moose in a calm voice. "Bill said [he'd] recognize his voice," Hutchin-

son says, and remember him.

It seemed Silliker was right. The moose, says Hutchinson, was so comfortable with them, he just ignored them ("like we were squirrels") as the pair stayed with the moose while he browsed through the woods.

Silliker would anticipate where the moose would go next; then he and Hutchinson would loop out ahead and set up their cameras. One of the times they'd looped out ahead, Hutchinson relates, they were in for a surprise. The moose laid down for a nap not 20 feet away from where Sil-



Bill Silliker Jr. photos / Courtesy of Down East Books

This "Wild Maine" photograph shows a fox with her hungry kits. Silliker took several weeks to get the shot.

liker and Hutchinson were set up.

"Bill and I looked at each other, and said 'This is amazing,'" says Hutchinson.

They decided to take advantage of the situation. Hutchinson had Silliker recline against a tree near the sleeping moose, and pretend that he, too, was asleep.

"The spot where that picture was taken," Hutchinson adds, "is about

100 yards from where Bill died."

When Silliker collapsed and died of a heart attack in Baxter State Park, he was leading a nature photography group into an area he called "his church."

He respected the space he was working in, making sure to walk in designated areas so as not to destroy habitat, taking photographs of animals in captivity rather than in the

wild if he knew the photos were too intrusive.

"He was always interested in and driven by getting the wonder of wildlife out to the general public," says Hutchinson.

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