

# The NATURALISTS' CLUB Newsletter

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## J A N U A R Y      -      M A R C H      2 0 0 4

# SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

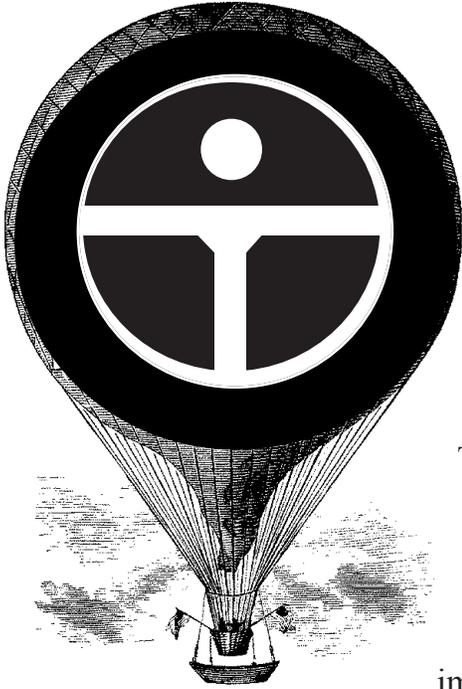
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JAN.	18	Sunday	Cross-Country Skiing at Knightville Wildlife Area
	21	Wednesday	JANUARY MEETING: Owls – Creatures of Mystery
	24	Saturday	An Evening with Naturalists
	30	Friday	Owls – Silent Hunters of the Night
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FEB.	6-8	Fri.-Sat.	Southern Maine Coast
	7	Saturday	Winter Snowshoe Walk
	15	Sunday	A Day on the Pond
	18	Wednesday	FEBRUARY MEETING: Wonders of the Night Sky
	29	Sunday	Sadie Hawkins Day Botany
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MAR.	6	Sunday	How Sweet It Is
	17	Wednesday	MARCH MEETING: Massachusetts' Wild and Scenic Rivers
	20	Saturday	Insider's Tour of The Zoo in Forest Park
	28	Sunday	Hubbard Brook, Granville State Forest

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## NATURALIST'S CORNER

**A Reassuring Perspective**    *Nancy Condon*



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**Only the balloon can drift in still leisurely low-level flight just above the tree-tops. Only a balloon can provide the naturalist with an aerial grandstand seat for observing the natural world from this new and unfamiliar angle.**

*Edwin Way Teal*  
[A Naturalist Buys an Old Farm](#)

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We arrived at Northampton airport just prior to prep time and hopped in the airport van to scoot over to the launching location in the field. We would be riding in one among four hot air balloons to take flight this fine fall afternoon.

Our adept pilot tried to put the four of us at ease by letting us in on the high-tech, confidence-building technology of this very safe venture upon which we were about to embark. The fireproof-coated rayon at the mouth of the balloon would not be burned if touched by the propane flaming blowtorch burner. The ropes tethering basket to balloon were made of Kevlar – that wonderful material bulletproof vests are made of, impossible to just break. “Jesus clips,” made of a strong (but unknown to our pilot) sturdy wood, attached those ropes to the basket carrying us. Tom and I held the maw of the balloon open for the powerful, roaring fan to force air into the magnificent balloon. We managed photos with our SLR cameras, digital cameras, and video cameras. A helicopter was flying around, taking video photos of us, and even flew under us once we'd launched. Technology abounds. Technology, it seems, is making this happen.

Before we knew it, we went up, up, and away! I soon realized that physics – those unbreakable laws of nature – actually makes such flight happen. Hot air rises. One just straps oneself to it and goes along for the ride. The wind, of which there was precious little on this day, nonetheless took charge and directed us wherever it wanted. Vehicles, buildings, roads, all manner of technological clutter, faded away, and the landscape took dominance.

Fields, mountains, streams, and the Connecticut River were displayed out below us. Route 91 and Route 9 were but thin segments, easily ignored. We drifted over the wide, domineering river and field after tidy field of neatly plowed furrows. Barring the occasional conversation-interrupting blast of the burner, all was serene.

I've seldom experienced such a sudden change in perspective. Technology and things man-made surround our lives and dominate our perspectives, but when afforded the opportunity to see the broader picture, we see our lives are built around the natural landscape. In our area, the Connecticut River is this pervasive force.

Our travel routes generally follow lowlands carved out long ago by the Connecticut. We grow crops in the crook of the river's arms, in nutritious river-fertilized soil. Our cities were established along the river that provided the first power sources for mills and factories. Up here, from the view afforded by a balloon, the river's influential force is ever so evident.

Our balloon ride is something I'll never forget. It is easier to see now that nature has the first and final say in shaping our lives. I find that somehow reassuring.

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**How insignificant appear most of the facts which one sees in his walks, in the life of the birds, the flowers, the animals, or in the phases of the landscape or the look of the sky! – insignificant until they are put through some mental or emotional process and their true value appears....One goes to Nature only for hints and half truths. Her facts are crude until you have absorbed them or translated them. Then the ideal steals in and lends a charm in spite of us. It is not so much what we see as what the thing seen suggests. We all see about the same; to one it means much, to another little.... In science or in art...truth must be disentangled and interpreted – must be made in the image of man.**

*John Burroughs, Signs and Seasons*

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## **Cross-Country Skiing at Knightville Wildlife Area**

**Date and Time:** Sunday, January 18, from 9 a.m. to noon

**Leaders:** Tom and Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)

**Registration:** Call Tom or Nancy

**Meeting Place:** Commuter parking lot at Westfield State College

Pray for snow Saturday night and then throw your skis in the car Sunday morning for a trip along the Westfield River above Knightville Dam. We will ski in (or walk

if there's no snow) along old Montgomery Road and up into the Indian Hollow area. We'll stop and explore the area, looking for signs of wildlife in the valley.

This is a beginner's skiing trip, so expect to go 2 to 3 miles on open, flat terrain. Please watch the weather forecast the night before and dress appropriately. Layers of synthetics or wool blends are the best. Bring a small pack to store your shed layers, small snack, and plenty of water. You might throw in a thermos of hot cocoa too. Call Tom or Nancy to pre-register for the trip or with any questions.

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## JANUARY MEETING

### **OWLS – CREATURES OF MYSTERY**

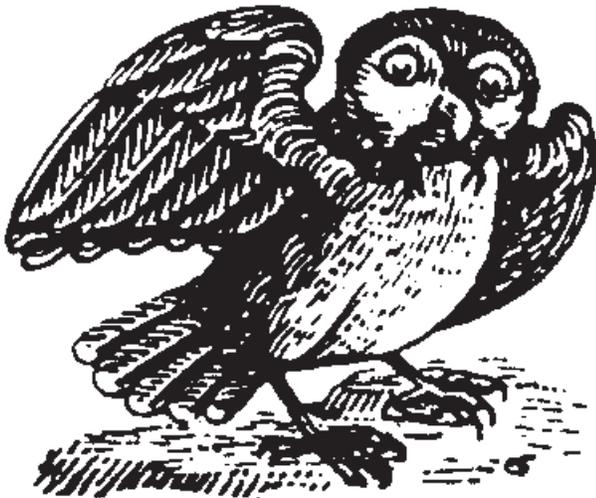
Wednesday, January 21, at 7:30 pm

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Tom Ricardi

This is one of those “can't miss” programs with our friend Tom Ricardi, known throughout New England and across the country for his wonderful Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center in Conway, Massachusetts. Through his love of birds, his caring and patient understanding of them, Tom has restored life to birds of prey who would not otherwise have had the chance to survive.

Tonight Tom will focus on one of this region's most fascinating Birds of Prey – the Owl! We will learn about this silent and stealthful hunter of the night and, yes, you will see live owls close up! So tell your friends not to miss this program!



## **Owls ~**

### **Silent Hunters of the Night**

**Date and Time:** Friday, January 30, at 7:30 p.m.

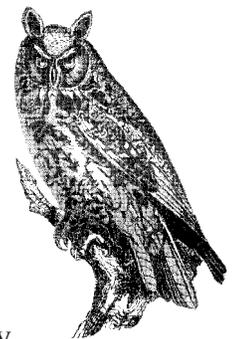
**Leader:** Dave Gallup (413-525-4697)

**Meeting Place:** Westfield State College Commuter Parking Lot

Join us for an owl walk under the first-quarter moon. This time of the year is breeding season for owls, so we might be able to call and hear the Great Horned and Barred owls, as they are very vocal this time of the year.

We can keep in mind Tom Ricardi's program and what we learned about these fascinating birds of prey.

So get that long underwear on and join us for owl calling and good company on this January night. We might get lucky and hear a “hoot” or two. Call Dave if you are coming. Heavy snow, rain, cancels.



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**... the sequence that changed the pair from mute to hoot required two weeks of nightly courting...**

*Wayne Hanley, a Life Outdoors*

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## **An Evening with Naturalists**

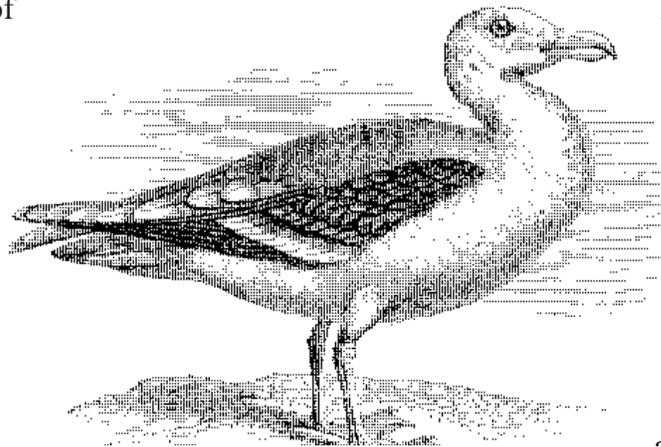
**Date and Time:** Saturday, January 24, at 7 p.m.

**Hosts:** Jim and Nancy Morin (413-596-3377)

**Registration:** Space is limited to 20. Please call.

How's warm friendship on a cold January night sound? Well, maybe it's cold outside, but tonight Jim and Nancy Morin have reopened their doors to friends in the Naturalists' Club for a warm winter gathering, a fireside chat, shared reflections on natural wonders. Perhaps, if unclouded, we can step out to view the constellations of winter before retreating back into the warmth and light to consider how native fauna and flora fare through the long nights and short days of this season.

There will be desserts and refreshment to share. Please call ahead to register, as well as for directions to the Morins' home in Wilbraham. Overly wintery weather cancels.



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**The lost leaves measure our years; they are gone as the days are gone, and the bare branches silently speak of a new year, slowly advancing to its buds, its foliage, and fruit...The delicacy of the outer boughs of the great trees visible against the dark background of cloud is as beautiful in its own way as the massed foliage of summer...The leaves, in fact, when they come, conceal the finish of the trees; they give colour, but they hide the beautiful structure under them.**

*Richard Jeffries, The Life of the Fields*

## **Southern Maine Coast**

**Dates and Times:** 7 p.m. Friday, February 6, through 12 p.m. Sunday, February 8

**Leader:** Art O'Leary (413-789-7274)

**Registration:** Participants must register/pay directly to Lafayette's Oceanfront Resort - P.O. Box 639c, Wells Beach, Maine 04090 (207-646-2831)

**Meeting Place:** Room 244 in the Beach Front Lodge at Lafayette's Resort on Mile Road, Wells Beach, Maine

**Weekend Itinerary:** Potentially, this weekend could include naturalists' activities at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve at Laudholm Farm, Blueberry Barrens, Mount Agamenticus, Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge, Clay Hill Farm Restaurant, The Marginal Way, The Cliff House, The Wedding Cake House, Cape Porpoise Pier, beautiful beaches, and stunning ocean-side homes. Round out this adventure weekend with dining, shopping, sightseeing, and enjoying the resort's hot tub, waterfall, and heated indoor pool.

The rooms at the Beach Front Lodge, at \$74 per night, have a microwave, phone, cable TV, two double beds, and a small refrigerator. Participants will be responsible for their own food. Nearby, there's a shopping plaza, supermarket, chain stores, fast food, and some wonderful restaurants (menus are available in the lobby at Lafayette's Resort). On Friday check in after 2 p.m., relax and enjoy the unobstructed ocean view, walk the beach, take a dip, eat dinner, then meet at 7 p.m. for the weekend itinerary.

Bring a variety of clothing/gear for severe weather: temperatures average 20° F by day and 5° F at night.

## Winter Snowshoe Walk

**Date and Time:** Saturday, February 7, at 7 p.m.

**Place:** TBA

**Leader:** Robin Marie Demetrius (413-323-0049)

Join us for an evening out when the moon is bright and snow is hopefully plentiful. It's a beautiful experience and once you're moving along, you're warm as toast under the glow of the moon. Since this is a snowshoe walk, all folks should have or rent a pair for this evening. Dress in layers and wear good wicking undergarments to keep you dry. We do work up a sweat chasing shadows on the snow and checking out any animal activity in the area. Hope to see you there!



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## A Day on the Pond

**Date and Time:** Sunday, February 15, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**Leaders:** Tom and Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)

**Registration:** Call Tom or Nancy

**Meeting Place:** Russell Pond Town Beach, just off General Knox Road in Russell

Have you ever stood along the shore of a frozen pond and thought about what's going on under that ice? If so, have we got a trip for you! Grab up that old pair of skates or your boots with the stickiest soles and come join us at Russell Pond. This beautiful 400-acre pond will be our living laboratory as we explore the ecology and physics of a freshwater pond in the winter. We will criss-cross the pond, stopping to peer

beneath the ice for signs of life, visit a stream with its oxygen-rich waters feeding the lake, and explore a beaver dam. We will also step up into the surrounding forest to discuss how outside factors influence this ecosystem. If ice conditions are unsafe for travel across the pond, we will still be able to explore from its shoreline.

Please watch the weather forecast the night before and dress appropriately. Layers of synthetics or wool blends are the best. Bring a small pack to stow your shed layers, a small lunch, and plenty of water. You might throw in a thermos of hot cocoa too. Call Tom or Nancy to pre-register for the trip or with any questions.

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## FEBRUARY MEETING

### WONDERS OF THE NIGHT SKY

Wednesday, February 18, at 7:30 pm

Speakers: Jack Megas and Dave Gallup



Come and enjoy a night of seeing and learning about the wonders of the winter sky in a show featuring a beautiful Northern Lights video on the wide screen, followed by a tour of constellations and bright planets now visible in the winter sky. Hear star stories of fact and fiction as we travel to distant stars and galaxies. Dave and Jack have presented many indoor and outdoors star programs, to the delight of hundreds of kids and adults for many years. So come on down and enjoy!



## Sadie Hawkins Day Botany

**Date and Time:** Sunday, February 29, at 1 p.m.

**Meeting Place:** Mittineague Park (West Springfield), at the kiosk near the entrance

**Leader:** Dave Lovejoy

No registration necessary. Horrible weather cancels.

Sadie Hawkins Day is the invention of cartoonist Al Capp (1909-1979) who developed the character for his Li'L Abner cartoon strip. Sadie Hawkins was so unattractive her father, Mayor of Dogpatch, feared he would never marry her off. In a sweeping move, calculated to reverse fortune, the mayor decreed Sadie Hawkins Day, giving all unmarried men in Dogpatch a 10-minute head start before Sadie, along with the other unmarried women in town, took off in hot pursuit. Any man caught would end up in front of Marryin' Sam for a shotgun wedding. Leap Day – the day of the long shot – has been dubbed “Sadie Hawkins Day.”

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## How Sweet It Is

**Date and Time:** Saturday, March 6, from 7:30 a.m. until 11 a.m.?

**Host:** Art O'Leary (413-789-7274)

**Registration:** Not necessary

**Meeting Place:** By the sign at the entrance to Knightville Dam along Route 112 in Huntington, MA

Along the shunpike, tucked back in the woods, sits a rustic restaurant, with gravel flooring, large windows, and a barrel stove. High Hopes Farm (South Worthington, MA) taps 4,000 maple trees and has 20 miles of sap lines. Tour the maple museum, learn how to make maple syrup, browse the maple/farm store, then enjoy an all-inclusive, all you can eat maple buffet (\$8.50 adults, \$6.50 children 6-12, \$3.50 children under 6).

Next, drive deep into the sugarbush to view the colorful sap lines draining into a tank at the Red Bucket Sugar Shack (Worthington, MA). Review this restaurant's menu (maple breakfast sold per item), see the maple tree growing through the ceiling of the dining room, smell the maple-scented steam wafting from the evaporator, then stock up on your favorite variety of amber-colored maple syrup from the maple store.

Lastly, for those wishing to join us, drive a country lane lined with sugar maples, to take winter photos of the William Cullen Bryant Homestead (Cummington, MA).

▶ None of this has much to do with today's field trip – no foot race will be held, nor will the marital status of the participants be at issue! We will spend an hour or two, depending on the weather, learning some basics of winter identification of woody plants. There is a nice variety of species in Mittineague Park, and we'll see how bark, bud, and twig characteristics can be very useful to identification at this time of year, “when the leaves are not present to confuse the issue.” If you have a field guide to trees and shrubs in winter condition, bring it along and get some practice in using it.

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**When the leaves fall the striptease is over; things stand mute and revealed. Everywhere skies extend, vistas deepen, wall become windows, doors open. The mountain's bones poke through, all shoulder and knob and shin. All that summer conceals, winter reveals. Here are the birds' nests hid in the hedge, and squirrels' nests splotched all over the walnuts and elms.**

*Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

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## A Breath of Spring

There are lovely spring bulb shows in the plant houses at Mt. Holyoke College and Smith College botanic gardens (daytime 10am-4pm) in early March, although as we go to press only Smith's dates are available, March 6 thru 21, 2004. When the time comes close, call for information: Smith 585-2740, Mt. Holyoke 538-2116. The colorful displays will surely lift your spirits.



MARCH MEETING

## MASSACHUSETTS' WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Wednesday, March 17, at 7:30 p.m.

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Carrie Banks

In our backyard sits a “wild and scenic” jewel called the Westfield River. Since 1968 the Westfield has been one of six New England rivers designated to receive Wild and Scenic protection.

Come hear Carrie Banks, Westfield River Wild and Scenic Coordinator, explain how these six outstanding rivers receive protection from the effects of dams, hydroelectric plants, pollution, and other threats. Using slides of the Westfield and other rivers, Carrie will explore what characteristics qualify rivers for Wild and Scenic status and what problems these and other New England rivers face. In addition, she will explain how communities and citizens can participate in the Adopt-A-Stream Survey Program. The first step to preserving and protecting our rivers is to become informed. Join us at the March meeting for this stimulating program.

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### Hubbard Brook, Granville State Forest

**Date and Time:** Sunday, March 28, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**Leaders:** Tom and Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)

**Registration:** Call Tom or Nancy

**Meeting Place:** Brooks Shopping Plaza in Southwick

Come join the club for a stroll along one of the prettiest little brooks in Western Mass. Here the spring runoff cascades over numerous small falls, as the water tumbles down a heavily forested hillside. Along the trip, we'll stop and discuss the power of water to shape the watersheds in which we live. We'll also look for signs of an early (we hope) awakening spring.

Dress appropriately for the weather and bring a small pack to stow your shed layers, a small lunch, and plenty of water. Call Tom or Nancy to pre-register for the trip or with questions.

### Insider's Tour of The Zoo in Forest Park

**Date and Time:** Saturday, March 20, from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

**Leader:** Nancy Condon

**Registration:** Limited to 20 people. Call Nancy (413-564-0895) to sign up.

**Fee:** Voluntary donations graciously accepted.

**Meeting Place:** Entrance to The Zoo in Forest Park in Springfield, MA

Springfield's quaint little Zoo really has a lot to offer. Through a guided tour around the grounds, learn of the background and reason these animals have come to reside in the Zoo. Then enjoy some hands-on encounters in the Discovery Room with some of the educational animals used for outreach programs at schools and other locations. This tour will be led by Nancy, Director of Education at the Zoo. Really bad weather may cancel.

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