

# The NATURALISTS' CLUB Newsletter

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Springfield Science Museum • 236 State Street • Springfield, MA 01103  
<http://naturalist-club.org/>

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## O C T O B E R - D E C E M B E R 2 0 0 4 SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

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SEPT.	26	Sunday	Mt. Tom Wildlife Viewing Area Maintenance Picnic Party
OCT.	10	Sunday	Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary
	16	Saturday	Chester Granite Company
	17	Sunday	Trees and Flowers along the Westfield River
	20	Wednesday	OCTOBER DINNER MEETING: Birds of Australia
	24	Sunday	Tour de France à la Norwottuck Trail
	30	Saturday	Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center
	31	Sunday	Quabbin Hike to the Former Town of Dana, Gate 40
NOV.	6	Saturday	Arcadia Grassland Bird Area
	7	Sunday	Gimme Shelter (Expanded)
	7	Sunday	A 'Brief History of Time in the Pioneer Valley
	12	Friday	Autumn Star Party
	13	Saturday	Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway
	17	Wednesday	NOVEMBER MEETING: Native Americans in Springfield: History and Culture
DEC.	5	Sunday	Birding at Holbomb Farm
	11	Saturday	Late Fall Quabbin Hike
	15	Wednesday	DECEMBER HOLIDAY MEETING

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— Watch Club Website for Spontaneous Happenings! —



## A Merlin's Tale

Perhaps the most famous Merlin is the wizard associated with King Arthur's court. Others might connect Merlin with a high-end bike company. There exists, however, another Merlin, which few of us have seen or heard. This bird is a small falcon and close cousin to the better known Peregrine.

In the United States Merlins are widely distributed but nowhere common. In New England, during the summer months they are most frequently found in the conifer forests of Maine.

My wife and I have been fortunate to see these birds up close for the past three summers at Spencer Pond, near Moosehead Lake in Northern Maine. When we arrived there this past August, two chicks had just fledged and left the nest. Merlins fledge 25 to 30 days after hatching, and though they are adult in size at that time, they are neither skilled nor completely independent.

Our Merlins were not people-shy. We saw them 20 or more times a day, frequently at close range when perched on a dead tree. One dying birch tree near our cabin became a point of contention for the Merlins, Pileated Woodpeckers (which had recently fledged three chicks) and a dozen or more Bluejays. Each group took turns trying to force another group from the prime perching spots. The Merlins did not always hold their own.

The Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), or Pigeon Hawk, is about 10 to 13 inches in length and has a wingspan of 24 to 26 inches. The males have steel blue or gray coloration on their backs; the females and immatures are mostly brown. The undersides of Merlins are white streaked with brown. Like all falcons, they are compact, fast flyers, attaining speeds of 100 m.p.h. They have narrow, longish tails with sharply pointed wings, unlike the broad and rounded wings of Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks. Females are larger than males.

Merlins are northern breeders who prefer to use abandoned crow or magpie nests rather than building their own. They are also birds of the edge and do not like the deep forest. Like other raptors, Merlins are birds of prey that feed on small birds, insects, and small mammals.

Within several days of our arrival the Jays gave up the competition for perch space in the birch tree, possibly because at least two had been killed not 30 yards from our cabin, caught unaware by Merlins. One of the hunting techniques of the Merlin is to mimic the behavior and flight patterns of slower, less threatening birds to catch their prey off guard.

One morning we saw an immature Merlin and an adult Pileated in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. The birds were perched within two feet of one another. Neither bird wanted to give ground. After a seemingly eternal moment, the Merlin aggressively lunged and pecked at the Pileated and the latter flew off. Like all falcons, Merlins have a short, sharp hooked bill, which they use to bite through and break the neck (thus cutting the spinal cord) of their prey.

In another nearby confrontation, a Merlin roused a Kingfisher from the dead tree they were sharing. While the Merlin had incredible speed, the Kingfisher acrobatically outflew the Merlin and escaped. Or perhaps the Merlin was simply not hungry enough to seriously pursue his prey. In any event, witnessing their maneuverings was like seeing a fighter scene from Stars Wars.

Our Merlin's tale is just one of the numerous nature adventures we experienced at Spencer Pond this year. We were reminded that while nature does not provide us with guarantees or promises, it does hold out the hope we'll be rewarded from time to time with sights, sounds and experiences which restore the soul and lift the spirit.

by Dietrich Schlobohm

## Mount Tom Wildlife Viewing Area Maintenance Picnic Party

**Date and Time:** Sunday, September 26, from 9 a.m. until 12 p.m.

**Leader:** Nancy Condon (413-564-0895)

**Registration:** It would be helpful to know you are coming, but drop-ins are welcome and encouraged.

**Meeting Place:** Route 5 entrance to Mt. Tom State Park Reservation, Holyoke, MA at 9:00. Later arrivals, meet us at the overlook, entering via Route 141.

Fall along the Holyoke Range makes for an outstanding time and place: Hawks soar on the thermals rising off the cliffs, as they continue their journey south. The color of early trees will begin to dot the hillsides of Easthampton and other towns across the landscape, heralding fall's approach. The Naturalists' Club will be continuing the work of removing invasive trees to encourage the growth of berry-producing shrubs. Everyone's help is needed to clip, trim, and saw our way to a fruitful, wildlife-enriching habitat.

Come for a couple hours, or for the whole time, and enjoy one of the best vistas of Pioneer Valley ~ made possible by our meadow. Stop to scan for hawks migrating overhead, then prune and clip a little bit more. A fulfilling morning of service, camaraderie, and enjoyment should be in store for you.

Come in work clothes, with water to drink, work gloves, and any pruning equipment you wish. The Mt. Tom staff will also provide tools and work gloves.

## Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary, Topsfield, Mass.

**Date and Time:** Sunday, October 10, from 8 a.m. to evening

**Leaders:** Delores Gentile (413-783-6113) and Colette Potter (413-786-1805)

**Meeting Place:** Call Delores or Colette for details and more information.

Join us for a fall tour of the Ipswich River, Mass. Audubon's largest sanctuary, encompassing 2,800 acres of woods, meadows, and wetlands. Swamps and marshes provide habitat for many rare birds. Eight miles of the Ipswich River meander through the sanctuary and the riverine and mixed upland forests harbor a great variety of migrant and resident song-birds.

At the turn of the century, carriage trails and stone bridges were constructed and the unique Rockery was fashioned with local glacial boulders. Species of trees and shrubs from Europe, China, and Japan, as well as a 100-year-old wisteria arbor, can be found on the property.

If time allows, we will also stop at Crane Beach, which is owned by The Trustees of Reservations. Bring a lunch. We will be stopping for an early dinner at a local restaurant. Also, bring sunflower seeds for the chickadees, who will eat from your hand. Bad weather cancels.



## Spontaneous Happenings

Nature follows a broad schedule through the year. We know to expect the best wildflowers in May and hawk migration in September. But on what day and where will Nature make these displays best? Modern technology offers us the opportunity to react quickly to Nature's fickle timing of displays.

In part to encourage use of the Club's Web page and partly as an experiment to make our web-site responsive to the natural world, the Club will offer a couple of events this fall only announced on the Club's Web page. Go online late in the week to find out about an event scheduled for that weekend. The details of the event will be online. If you do not have the internet at home, remember that public libraries provide public access. If you haven't visited our site recently, take a look at the new setup on the Club's Web page, at <http://naturalist-club.org>.

## Chester Granite Company Blandford, Mass.

**Date and Time:** Saturday, October 16, from 9:30 a.m. until 12 p.m.

**Co-Leaders:** Art O'Leary and George Gifford

**Registration:** Limited to 20. Call George at 413-467-9518. Please leave a message, including your phone number.

East of the Skinner House on Mt. Holyoke, if you walk from the parking lot toward the picnic tables, you will pass a memorial to the crew of a bomber that crashed there ~ one of the many projects of Allen Williams, owner of the Chester Granite Company. This quarry, in operation since the 1870's, produces high-quality, fine particle-size stone that is cut, processed, and shipped to as far away as California. Mr. Williams will demonstrate both old and new methods of stone working.

## Trees and Flowers along the Westfield River

**Date and Time:** Sunday, October 17, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

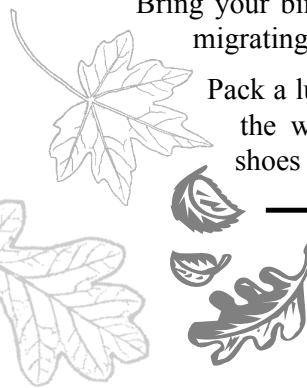
**Leaders:** Nancy and Tom Condon (413-564-0895)

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

Autumn is a spectacular time throughout New England. Join us for a stroll along the Westfield River above Knightsville Dam to explore the wonders of the season. We will stop to identify trees and flowers along the way and marvel at the process by which leaves change color.

Bring your binoculars to help identify those migrating birds as well.

Pack a lunch, plenty of water, dress for the weather, and wear comfortable shoes for the hike.



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### OCTOBER DINNER MEETING

## BIRDS OF AUSTRALIA AUSTRALIA

Wednesday, October 20

School Street Bistro, Westfield, Mass. ~ 6 p.m. Social Hour, 7 p.m. Dinner

Speaker: Sonya Vickers

*Sonya Vickers is a teacher of biology and ecology who has traveled to 24 countries in search of a first-hand view of the natural differences between those places and her home in New England. This last summer she spent three weeks on the eastern coastline of Australia, escorting students and adults on a tour with activities ranging from snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef to hiking the rainforests of northern Australia, from staying at an eco-tourism lodge on the world's longest sand island to seeing the sights of Sydney.*

*A focus of her travels this summer was photographing the unusual birds endemic to Australia. Evolution on this island continent has resulted in unbelievable variety in form and adaptive behavior, including birds who rather than roost on a nest, lay their eggs on gigantic mounds of rotting vegetation which provide just the right warmth for incubation. Seasonal patterns of movement are different: Instead flying along migratory paths, like flocks here in North America, birds down under randomly move about, following the rain clouds. Tonight Sonya has graciously offered to share a vision of her travels with us, and the Naturalists' Club is pleased to welcome her at our banquet meeting.*

*The evening will begin early, with a social hour, cash bar, including the Bistro's Deluxe Cheese and Fruit Display. Choices at the buffet dinner include grilled sirloin strip, roasted turkey breast, baked Boston scrod, penne pasta with marinara sauce, rice, seasonal vegetables, rolls and butter, and a deep dish apple crisp dessert. Coffee and tea is also included. The cost of the buffet is \$26 per person (children 12 and under, \$13).*

*Please make checks payable to The Naturalists' Club and mail to Dave Lovejoy (413-572-5307), PO Box 219, Blandford, MA 01008, by October 12. With advance notification, the Bistro can accommodate strict vegetarians; please indicate so on your registration.*

*The Bistro (413-562-8700) is located on School Street in downtown Westfield, with plenty of adjacent free parking including a large lot between Church and Arnold Streets. Enter downtown Westfield via Route 20 or Routes 10 & 202 (North Elm Street). At junction of Routes 20 and 202, on the north side of the town common, is a traffic light for School Street. The Bistro is about 100 yards down School Street, on the right. View map and directions at [www.schoolstreetbistro.com](http://www.schoolstreetbistro.com).*

## Tour de France à la Norwottuck Trail

**Date and Time:** Sunday, October 24, 2004, from 8 to 10 a.m.

**Meeting Place:** Crystal Springs Dairy Bar, Belchertown, Mass.

**Leader:** Robin Marie Demetrius

Take a morning bicycle ride along the bike path in Hadley with a novice biker. A slow pace may afford views of birds and other wildlife that are migrating or preparing winter homes in our backyards. This trip is aimed towards a peaceful approach on wheels, so any youngsters should be of appropriate age and with an adult.

Bring any necessary items to allow for your comfort (I'm searching for a super-wide, padded tractor seat), water, snacks, binocs ~ you know the list! Super-easy ride, pretty brief so those of us with six-day workweeks can make multiple plans for one day. Rain or snow cancels!

## Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center Conway, Mass.

**Date and Time:** Saturday, October 30, from 10 a.m. to noon

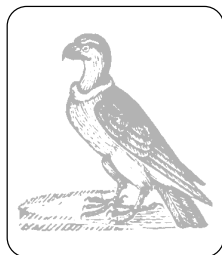
**Leader:** Dietrich Schlobohm (413-788-4125)

**Meeting Place:** At the Yankee Candle parking lot, go in main entrance, turn left, and look for dark blue Mercury sedan.

**Registration:** Call Dietrich to register.

It's that time of year when birds have finished raising their young and we can get an up-close and personal view of them. Tom Ricardi's passion in life is rehabilitating birds of prey. Tom will provide a tour of his rehab center and share with us his vast knowledge of these magnificent birds.

We will pass the hat around and ask you to consider making a donation to help Tom support this wonderful facility. The Club will make a matching donation to whatever we contribute. Kids love this type of outing. What better way to spend a Saturday morning than with our "brothers and sisters of the sky." Come join us and them!



## Quabbin Hike to the Former Town of Dana, Gate 40

**Date and Time:** Sunday, October 31, from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m.

**Leader:** Doug Young (413-267-5883)

**Registration:** Not necessary

**Meeting Place:** Back of McDonald's parking lot, Route 32, Palmer (MassPike Exit 8, turn left after toll booth, approximately 7 mile)

Take a hike back through the past to the former town of Dana. Unlike the other towns lost to the Quabbin, Dana center remains above water. We will park at Gate 40 and hike the old road and see where a thriving town once stood. We will then proceed to the Quabbin and along the way hopefully see some interesting flora and wildlife. Bring a picnic lunch. Hike will be easy and about six miles round trip. Heavy rain cancels.

## Arcadia Grassland Bird Area Easthampton, Mass.

**Date and Time:** Saturday, November 6, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

**Leaders:** Mary Shanley-Koeber, Dan Russell, and Dietrich Schlobohm

**Registration:** Call Dietrich (413-788-4125) to sign up and for more information

**Meeting Place:** Arcadia Wildlife Visitor Center, in Easthampton, Mass.

Club members may recall, last year we gave Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary a \$1000 gift to help save an additional 65 acres bordering the sanctuary. This latest acquisition consists of floodplain forest, fields, and sensitive wetlands along the Mill River.

We now have an opportunity to visit this unique site, which lies right in our own backyard, in Easthampton, Mass. Including the new acreage, Arcadia has 168 contiguous acres of grasslands, and over 725 acres in total.

Mary Shanley-Koeber, director of Arcadia, will lead the outing, assisted by Arcadia interpreters Dan Russell and Dietrich Schlobohm. In addition to walking the property, visitors will hear Mary describe the grassland restoration project and some of the bird populations served (meadowlarks, bobolinks, redwings and various sparrows), as well as the hopes Arcadia has for this area. Join us for a guaranteed interesting outing, illustrative of environmental achievements happening in our local area.

## Gimme Shelter (Expanded)

**Date and Time:** Sunday, November 7, from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.?

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

**Registration:** Call Art by Friday, November 5, (at the latest) to make lunch reservations.

**Meeting Place:** West Brookfield, Mass. (Route 9, east of Ware, Mass.) Call for more details. Rain or shine outing.

This expanded outing now includes a visit to the home of the apple dumpling (à la mode?): Brookfield Orchard Store. This mouthwatering treat, served by the welcoming staff, is available year-round. Housed within this wonderful store is an eclectic collection of baked goods, books, penny candy, antiques, apple memorabilia, and unusual natural artifacts. Browse the aisles, and savor the native fare.

The Rock House Reservation, owned by The Trustees of Reservations, is where Native Americans found shelter in a naturally formed rock room. The Rock House, moderate trails, and pond are located a short distance from the parking lot. In addition to exploring the property, we will discuss debris shelters, snow caves, and quin-zhees.

Next, enjoy food and drink from the heart of New England at the Salem Crofs Inn (\$\$\$). This inn, a National Historic Landmark (1705) is seasoned with history. Tour the extensive collection of Colonial and Federalist period American antiques. Marvel at the 1699 brick beehive oven (annual Best Apple Pie in New England contest), 42-foot long exposed chestnut beams, fireplaces large enough to walk into, and a roasting jack invented by Leonardo da Vinci. After lunch, take a nature walk into the pastures, to inspect and repair one dozen bluebird nest boxes. These unique nest boxes were designed and constructed by the Naturalists' Club, who continue to monitor them.

Bring smart casual attire, hiking boots, rainwear, water, money, and a camera.

## A 'Brief History of Time' in the Pioneer Valley

**Date and Time:** Sunday, November 7, from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m.

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

**Meeting Place:** Pull-off on north side of Route 57 at the Southwick/Feeding Hills line

Join us for a hike along the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail to the top of Provin Mountain. We'll take a leisurely pace up this gradually climbing ridgeline, stopping along the way to explore the geologic past of the Pioneer Valley. The trail will take us past evidence of ancient volcanic activity, continental collisions, and ice ages. We will also explore how this unique geological history has shaped the flora and fauna of Western Massachusetts. The trail offers outstanding vistas toward the west, all along the way, and the outlook from the summit, near the Channel 2 transmitters, presents a 360° panorama of the entire valley. Wear good hiking boots, as the trail is rugged in places. Dress for the weather, and bring a lunch and water for the hike.

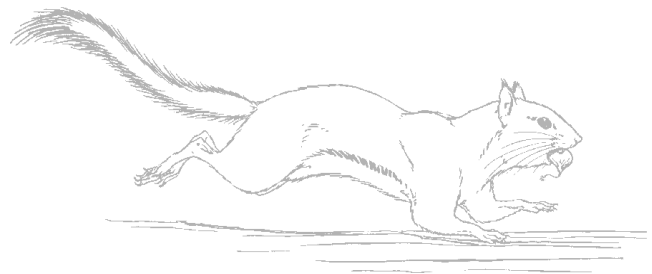
## Autumn Star Party, Wilbraham, Mass.

**Date and Time:** Friday, November 12, at 7 p.m.

**Leaders:** Dave Gallup (413-525-4697) and Jack Megas (413-782-3962) Call for meeting place.

The Flying Horse, Pegasus, is high overhead for crisp fall observing. Features: the Andromeda galaxy, the Double Cluster, and the Pleiades.

Dress warmly. Bring binoculars. Clouds cancel.



## Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway

**Date and Time:** Saturday, November 13, from 10 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

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

**Registration:** Not necessary. Rain or shine event.

**Meeting Place:** Town and Country Liquors parking lot, Route 5/Riverdale Road, West Springfield, Mass.

We will walk portions of the Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway, a 12.9-mile scenic pedestrian and bicycling corridor spanning four cities, officially opened in July 2003. Trail surfaces in Agawam, Chicopee, Springfield, and West Springfield vary (depending on development) from dirt and grass to pavement, concrete, brick and Rails to Trails.

Many interesting birds are attracted to berries in the riparian bush, others to fish in the river. Turtles lay eggs in the warm sand, partially shaded by shrub willow, and river otters live among scoured tree roots at the water line of the island located between Agawam and Longmeadow.

Accessible portions along the Springfield segment have a pedestrian bridge elevator, an overpass with stairs and ramps, and an elevated walkway, while the Agawam segment offers majestic overlooks, and the West Springfield segment will not connect with the rest of the Connecticut River Walk and Bikeway. Handouts will include rules for proper use of this valuable community resource.

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### NOVEMBER MEETING

## NATIVE AMERICANS IN SPRINGFIELD: HISTORY AND CULTURE

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

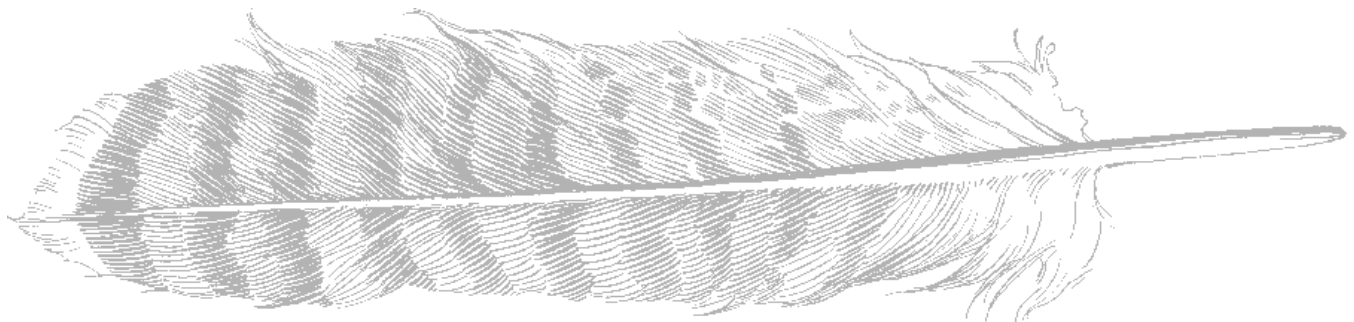
Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Dietrich Schlobohm

Recall your last hike on a nearby Western Massachusetts trail: not a soul there, but you and an occasional squirrel or chirping bird. Little do we realize that many of these same trails were traveled upon by native peoples over 500 years ago. Have you ever wondered about these first people who roamed and inhabited this area? What were they like? Whatever happened to them? Enjoy a trip back in time as we try to discover who these first people were and how they lived. Our guide for this journey will be Dietrich Schlobohm, an environmental historian who teaches at Springfield College.

Dietrich's presentation will focus on the culture and life of Native Americans in the Springfield area during the period of initial contact with whites, and the consequences of that contact, especially for native peoples. Slides will be used as a supplement, to illustrate key points.

After attending this program, think about accompanying Dietrich on a field trip in April, May, or June, next year, to visit some of the probable sites utilized by native peoples in our Springfield area.



## **Birding at Holcomb Farm West Granby, Conn.**

**Date and Time:** Sunday, December 5, from 7 until 10 a.m.

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

**Registration:** Not necessary. Rain or shine event.

**Meeting Place:** McDonald's Restaurant, in the shopping plaza on Route 20 East (near the intersection with Route 10/202) in Granby, Conn.

Shrubs and trees have dropped their leaves, unveiling the life within the forest. Today's focus will be the west trails at Holcomb Farm in Granby, Conn. The penetrating early-morning sunlight illuminates birds flitting in the leafless brush. By the end of December, most of nature's berries and drupes are gone. Winterberry, Sumac, and Multiflora Rose persist, but are rank food sources.

Holcomb Farm maintains a number of multi-use trails, with fitting names like Brookside, Floodplain, High Ridge, and Lookout. This landmark farm offers a vast array of quality programming, from environmental learning to art education. They are involved in Community Supported Agriculture and watershed protection (including a native salmon reintroduction program).

## **Late Fall Hike in Quabbin**

**Date:** Saturday, December 11, 2004

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

Call for meeting place and time.

Join us for our annual December Quabbin hike. Early December is a lovely time to relax and enjoy a wonderful trek on the western side of the Quabbin, before the hustle of the holidays begins. Be sure to bring binoculars, as we should catch a glimpse of resident eagles and loons and perhaps four-footed wildlife, as well, foraging about preparing for winter. Old farm sites, alongside roads that at one time crossed the Quabbin Valley, are open for exploration and contemplation of times gone by.

This hike will be about four miles, with impressive views of the Quabbin Reservoir and the vast woodlands of the surrounding watershed. Grab hiking boots and a lunch, and come along for the last hurrah of the season, hiking in the great outdoors!

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## **DECEMBER HOLIDAYS MEETING**

## **SHARING OF THE NATURALIST SPIRIT**

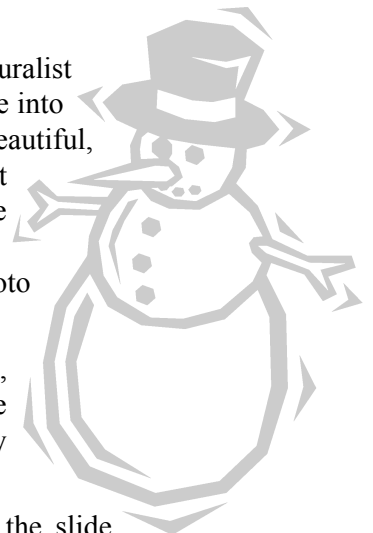
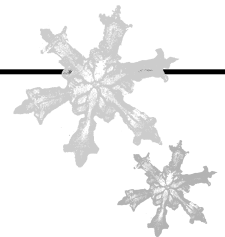
Wednesday, December 15, at 7:30 p.m.

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

The annual holiday meeting provides an opportunity to share experiences and naturalist discoveries with others in the club at year's end: Tell a story about a place or a venture into nature which made a strong impression on you. Do you have some weird, beautiful, unidentified or otherwise curious items you've found while out and about? Bring them to share with those gathered. Read us a quotation from a favorite naturalist. Have you traveled to a striking natural area this past year? Bring your slides and show us in a 10-minute presentation. Or perhaps you took prints. Bring your photo album.

Working together, let's keep presentations to a minimalist format, where less is more, and fewer words make a greater impression. In this way, there will be more time together afterwards to share camaraderie in conversation around the potluck holiday food table. No business meeting tonight!

Please call Nancy Condon (413-564-0895), this evening's emcee, to get a slot on the slide presentation or speaking docket.





## *From the Treasurer:*

September is the time to renew your Naturalists' Club membership for another year. Thanks to those who have already done so. If you have not yet renewed for 2004-05, or if you'd like to join the Club, please use the clip and mail form on this page. Doing so within the next few weeks will save us the expense of sending separate renewal letters. Please consider renewing at the Supporting, Sustaining, or Lifetime membership level. ~ *Dave Lovejoy*



## **MEMBERSHIP**

Here's how to become a member of the Springfield Naturalists' Club:

- \$15 for a year of Individual and Family Membership
- \$25 per year for Supporting Membership
- \$50 per year for Sustaining Membership
- \$300 for Lifetime Membership

Enclose a check, in the proper amount, payable to The Naturalists' Club. Mail to Club Treasurer Dave Lovejoy, Biology Department, Westfield State College, Westfield, MA 01086-1630. Include your mailing address. If there is any change in your mailing address, notify Dave (413-572-5307, [dlovejoy@wsc.ma.edu](mailto:dlovejoy@wsc.ma.edu))

# SEPTEMBER IS RENEWAL TIME!!!

## **NEW MEMBERS AND RENEWING MEMBERS**



Become a Club Member or Renew Your Existing Membership for 2004-2005.

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Name

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Address

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Phone Number

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Requests for programs/trips

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Please fill out the above form, clip, and mail to: Club Treasurer, Dave Lovejoy, Biology Department, Westfield State College, Westfield, MA 01086-1630.

*THANK YOU!!!*



The NATURALISTS' CLUB was founded in 1969, for the purpose of actively promoting knowledge, appreciation, and preservation of our natural environment. It is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization. Education is a main focus of The NATURALISTS' CLUB. Programming, with an emphasis on local natural history, is designed to enable people with diverse interests to get together and exchange ideas. Activities are geared to the layperson, to acquaint her/him with the natural world, mostly through field trips. Monthly meetings are held at the Science Museum in Springfield, Mass. Most field trips and programs are free.



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