

The NATURALISTS' CLUB Newsletter

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Springfield Science Museum at the Quadrangle, Springfield, Massachusetts
<http://naturalist-club.org/>

J A N U A R Y — M A R C H 2 0 0 7 S C H E D U L E · O F · A C T I V I T I E S

JANUARY

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|----|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6 | Saturday | Evening with Naturalists, <i>Hampden</i> |
| 13 | Saturday | Robinson State Park Hike, <i>Agawam</i> |
| 17 | Wednesday | JANUARY MEETING: There's a Porcupine in My Outhouse |
| 20 | Saturday | Dinosaurs and Edward Hitchcock, <i>Amherst</i> |
| 28 | Sunday | Observing Winter Wildlife at Quabbin, <i>Enfield, Mass.</i> |

FEBRUARY

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| 11 | Sunday | Maple Corners Cross-Country Skiing, <i>West Granville</i> |
| 21 | Wednesday | FEBRUARY MEETING: Owls – Ghosts of the Night |
| 24 | Saturday | Walking Through Winter, <i>Russell</i> |
| 25 | Sunday | Owl Prowl at Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge, <i>Longmeadow</i> |



MARCH

- | | | |
|----|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Saturday | Nature in Winter Walk, <i>West Springfield</i> |
| 18 | Sunday | Foray to Mount Washington State Forest, <i>Mount Washington, Mass.</i> |
| 21 | Wednesday | MARCH MEETING: Glaciers and Whales of Southeast Alaska |
| 25 | Sunday | "How Sweet It Is," <i>West Granville</i> |

NATURALIST'S CORNER

Groundhog Day



In just a few days, a group of nattily dressed men in Pennsylvania will drag a large rodent out of a box, lift it by the scruff of its neck, high into the air, then proclaim the length of the remaining winter season. As the theory goes, if Phil, the groundhog, sees his shadow (with all the TV cameras, it's amazing he wouldn't) there will be six more weeks of winter. So, optimistically speaking, a cloudy day will bring a quick end to the winter season. Where did this belief come from? And does this Pennsylvania prognosticator have any impact on the forecast for the Westfield River Watershed?

Groundhog Day is a special day. Astronomically, it is a "cross quarter day," meaning February 2nd is the halfway point between the winter solstice (December 21st) and the spring equinox (March 21st). As such, ancient astronomers have placed special emphasis on this day. February 2nd was known as Imbolog by the Celts, an agricultural society who decided that if the winter had already been miserable by this midway point then it could only get better, and so, like Phil, they chose to prepare for an early spring. Conversely, or pessimistically speaking, a fair start to the winter led to a poor forecast on Imbolog.

Early Christians in Britain picked up on these beliefs though they changed the day's name to Candlemas. Priests spent the day blessing candles, then distributing them to their congregations. Parishioners took note of the weather on this day and, at least in England, celebrated the old beliefs in song: "If Candlemas be fair and bright, come winter, have another flight. If Candlemas be cloudy and rain, go winter, and come not again." Catchy, huh?

So why have groundhogs been used as weathermen – er, weather animals? Well, along with bats, groundhogs are one of Western Massachusetts' true hibernators. These animals spend up to seven months in their winter dens. As the length of days gets shorter in October, groundhogs enter their dens and begin a very deep sleep. Unlike bears, true hibernators undergo a dramatic change in their physiology. A groundhog's body temperature will drop from 99°F to 38°F. Its heart rate can drop to as low as four beats per minute, and its breathing becomes almost immeasurable. A groundhog has a very difficult time waking from this sleep, although it does occasionally happen (not necessarily on February 2nd), so it is possible to spot a groundhog moving about during the winter but not probable. You are far more likely to see bears, whose "winter sleep" is much shallower.

Groundhog Day...continued on next page.

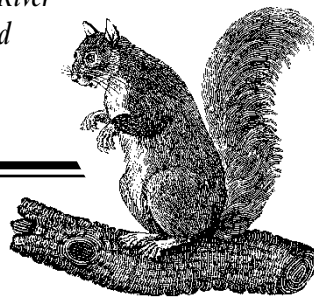
Groundhog Day...continued.

Scientists have been interested in groundhogs and their hibernation for many years now. One study found that hibernation brain activity patterns are different than those for sleep. These scientists theorize that groundhogs actually wake from hibernation so that they can sleep. "To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub." Sleep is just as important as hibernation. Hibernation allows an animal to survive times when food is scarce. Sleep allows the brain of an animal to reorganize neurons into stabilized memories and even to rehearse complex behaviors related to instinct. Another scientific study recently discovered a set of hibernation genes which could lead to improvements in organ transplants for humans or may even facilitate long-term space travel.

So this winter as you tramp through the snow-covered forests of Western Mass., keep an eye out for tracks. You'll see squirrel, fox, deer, and raccoon because these animals stay active all winter. If you're lucky you may see bear and skunk out and about from their winter dens or bobcat and fisher tracks as they pursue their prey. But it will be a rare day that you'll see a groundhog. If you do, don't grab it by the scruff of its neck and raise it high into the air but let it be for it is just out to stretch its legs and sort out its brain. And in fact the groundhog is a poor forecaster of weather: Punxsutawney Phil is only correct about 30% of the time.

Find out more about winter animals in Western Massachusetts by joining some winter hikes with the Springfield Naturalists' Club or the Westfield River Watershed Association (www.westfieldriver.org for more information).

Thomas Condon is a director of the Westfield River Watershed Council as well as of the Springfield Naturalists' Club.



ANNOUNCEMENT!

Between February 16th and 18th, the Naturalists' Club will have a booth set up at the Camping and Outdoor Show held at the Big E fairgrounds in West Springfield. Please let us know if you can help in any way during the show ~ "manning" the booth, displaying nature items, etc. Please contact Nancy Condon (564-0895) or Dave Gallup (525-4697) with questions. We expect to be able to provide parking and admission passes to volunteers. Thanks!

TRAVEL TO THE GALAPAGOS!

Naturalists' Club
Recording Secretary
Sonya Vickers, author of this piece, will be leading a Naturalists trip to the Galapagos on July 31, 2007. If this program sounds interesting to you, how would you like to plan an adventurous trip to the Galapagos? The ten-day trip will include a four-day island cruise aboard the ship Galapagos Legend and five nights in comfortable hotels in Quito. Breakfasts and all shipboard meals are included as is the airline transportation. We will also have the chance to explore the high-altitude volcano in Quito, Ecuador, and you will have the option of extending your trip to Peru and Machu Picchu. At \$3521, the price for this trip is quite competitive with other similar trips. Anyone interested should contact Sonya at 413-566-3406 or, if she is gallivanting, by e-mail at sevickers@charter.net



**An Evening
with Naturalists,
*Hampden***

Date and Time: Saturday, January 6, at 7 p.m.

Hostess: Sonya Vickers (566-3406)

Registration: Please call for directions to her home.

This is the twelfth year that naturalists have gathered for conversation, food and drink, and a sharing of experiences over the past year with nature. There might be a chance to view the macro world of astronomy, or the micro world through a microscope. If you would like, bring a picture or object that shows some part of nature you would like to share with others.

There will be desserts and refreshments to share ~ please let us know if you would like to bring something along. Extreme weather cancels. If you have called for directions, you will be notified of any changes.

Robinson State Park Hike, *Agawam*

Date and Time: Saturday, January 13, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Meeting Place: Robinson State Park main entrance, North Street, Agawam

Registration: Please call 564-0895 to register, so if bad weather forces cancellation we can contact you.

Join us to explore this gem of a state park along the Westfield River. We'll explore various trails at a leisurely pace, looking for and discussing how plants and animals prepare for the harsh winters of New England. We'll also delve into the controversy surrounding the cutting of timber from this land: How will such a harvest change this area and affect the character and natural history of the park?

We'll hope for a light snow the day before and clear, sunny skies on the day of our hike, but of course, we live in New England and as Mark Twain once said, "If you don't like the weather, just wait a minute; it will change." So, come prepared for all types of weather, wear good boots, and bring a lunch.

JANUARY MEETING

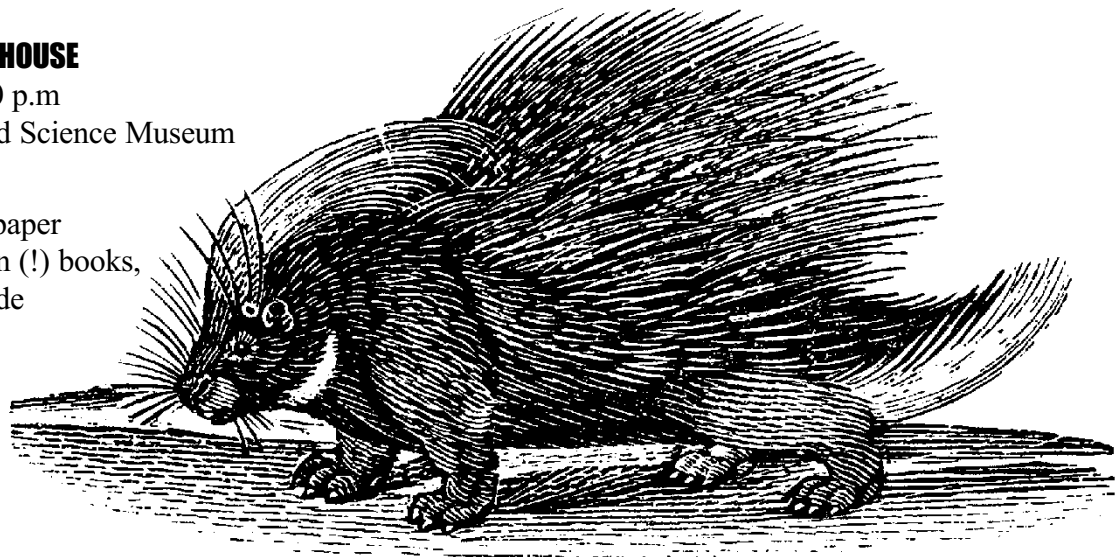
THERE'S A PORCUPINE IN MY OUTHOUSE

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

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Michael Tougas

Naturalist, photographer, newspaper columnist, and author of sixteen (!) books, Michael Tougas will give a slide presentation about his many adventures over the years in the wilds of northern New England, where he bought a cabin as a young man. He will be available to autograph copies of his many books as well.



Dinosaurs and Edward Hitchcock, Amherst

Date and Time: Saturday, January 20, from 2 to 4 p.m.

Leaders: Richard Sanderson and Jack Megas (782-3962)

Meeting Place: The new Amherst College Museum of Natural History near the corner of Routes 9 and 116 in the center of Amherst. Free admission.

Registration: Not necessary

Richard Sanderson, Curator of Physical Science at the Springfield Science Museum, will give us an introduction to the life of geologist Edward Hitchcock and the discovery of dinosaur tracks in our valley. Then tour the new museum on your own.

Observing Winter Wildlife at Quabbin, Enfield, Mass

Date and Time: Sunday, January 28, from 11 a.m. till 2 p.m.

Leaders: Dave Gallup (525-4697) and Jack Megas (782-3962)

Meeting Place: Take Route 9 East from Belchertown center. Enter the second gate at Quabbin and meet at the Enfield Lookout parking area. Rain, ice, or snow cancels.

Registration: Call Jack or Dave for time and directions.

Quabbin's Enfield Lookout is an excellent vantage point from which to view eagles, deer, turkey, coyote, and other wildlife. We are offering this popular trip

again this year to observe winter wildlife in a pristine setting. Dave will lead a short hike at 2 p.m.

Dress warmly and bring binoculars (and a spotting scope if you have one). Dave and Jack will have telescopes along for use by the group. Join us for dinner at 3:30 p.m. at Apollo Pizza House, near the intersection of Routes 9 and 202.

Maple Corners Cross-Country Skiing, W. Granville

Date and Time: Sunday, February 11, from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Meeting Place: Maple Corner Farm, Granville, located on Beech Hill Road, off Route 23

Registration: Please call 564-0895 to register so if bad weather forces cancellation we can contact you.

Join us for some cross-country skiing on the extensive trail system at Maple Corner Farm. Bring your own skis or rent them there. This trip is for all ability levels. Ski as a group or split off and ski the trails of your choice and ability level. The group will explore the trails for signs of animals and discuss winter survival strategies used by plants.

Bring a lunch or buy something to eat at the farm's snack bar. A \$10 trail pass and \$10 equipment rental apply. Treacherous travel conditions or a lack of snow cancels.

FEBRUARY MEETING

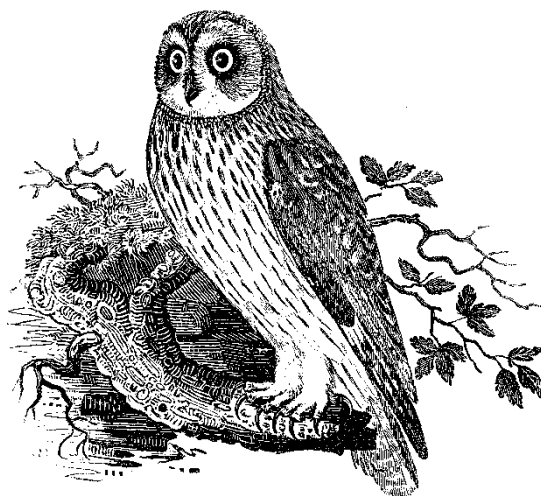
OWLS – GHOSTS OF THE NIGHT

Wednesday, February 21, at 7:30 p.m.

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum
Speaker: Tom Ricardi, Birds of Prey Rehabilitator

We are happy to have Tom Ricardi back this month to give us a great program on owls. The mysterious and elusive owl has always sparked our imaginations. Tom will talk about this fascinating creature and will have live owls to present during his talk and slide presentation.

Tom established the Massachusetts Bird of Prey Rehabilitation facility over 35 years ago. It is a one-person operation that Tom runs at his home in Conway, Mass. Many birds, such as hawks, owls, falcons, eagles, and vultures, are brought to Tom, with all type of injuries. Most of these birds are returned to the wild. Those that cannot be released are used for captive breeding or education. This will be a fascinating program for adults and children. Hope to see you there!



Walking Through Winter, *Russell*

Date and Time: Saturday, February 24, from 10 a.m. to mid afternoon.

Leader: Dave and Suzy Gallup (525-4697)

Meeting Place: Westfield State College commuter parking lot.

Join us for a snowshoe hike through the forest on a frosty winter day! Snowshoeing is invigorating, especially when the forest is covered with a thick blanket of snow: it is silent and tranquil. We will discover animal tracks along the way and learn about the natural history of the area. If there is no snow, we will hike! Dress warm and bring a lunch. First five to sign up will get the use of snowshoes free!!

Call Dave for any questions. Bad weather cancels.

Owl Prowl at Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge,

Longmeadow

Date and Time: Sunday, February 25, from 6 to 8 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Meeting Place: Fannie Stebbins Wildlife Refuge, at the south end of West Road, Longmeadow

Registration: Please call 564-0895 to register, so if bad weather forces cancellation we can contact you.

At our February meeting you will get to see owls that cannot be released into the wild. On this trip, we try to see their wild brethren as we quietly explore the fields and forests of this extensive refuge along the Connecticut River. We'll teach you how to call the local winter resident owls and will discuss owl vocabulary.

It is important to dress warmly for this activity since much of it will involve sitting or standing quietly as we search for owls. You may wish to bring a lightweight chair or insulated pad to sit upon during the trip and perhaps a thermos of hot chocolate or soup. Flashlights are helpful. Red plastic to cover our flashlights and protect our night vision will be provided. Participants should dress warmly, wear good, warm, footwear, and pack a snack. The outing will last about two hours. All ages are welcome. Pets should be left at home.

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

Wayne Hanley, a Life Outdoors

Nature in Winter Walk, *West Springfield*

Date and Time: Saturday, March 10, from 10 a.m. to noon

Leader: Dietrich Schlobohm (788-4125).

Meeting Place: Main entrance to Mittineague Park, West Springfield (off Route 20).

Registration: Call Dietrich to register. Limited to 20 participants.

Winter is a season when nature appears to slow down: Leaves have fallen from trees, plants are dormant, and many animals appear to be hibernating. The familiar sounds of spring and summer are gone. We'll focus on winter survival tactics as well as patterns of life not clearly visible. Have all the insects died? Where are snakes, frogs, and salamanders? Are plants as lifeless as they appear? What's going on beneath that blanket of snow? We may be surprised to find so much more life and vitality in winter than meets the eye.

Dress warmly, wear warm footwear, and pack a snack for this two-hour outing. All ages are welcome. Please leave pets at home.

Foray to Mount Washington State Forest, *Ludlow*

Date and Time: Sunday, March 18, 8 a.m. till 5 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Meeting Place: Westfield State commuter parking lot, Western Ave., Westfield. Carpooling will be necessary.

Registration: Please call 564-0895 to register, so if bad weather forces cancellation we can contact you.

With spring just around the corner, join us as we tour two of the most dramatic features in the southwestern corner of Massachusetts. We will start by taking a short hike to see Bash Bish Falls, along the border with New York. This spectacular falls drops through several gorges before plummeting over an 80-foot ledge to the brook below. Upon return to our cars, we will continue our travel to the trailhead where a hike up Mount Everett will begin. Our hike will take us past Guilder Pond as we ascend to just over 2600 feet and the summit of Mount Everett. This vantage point offers outstanding views of the tri-state area.

Bring a lunch, plenty of water, sturdy hiking boots, and dress for the weather. Plan to join us for a casual dinner in Great Barrington on the trip back to the Pioneer Valley.

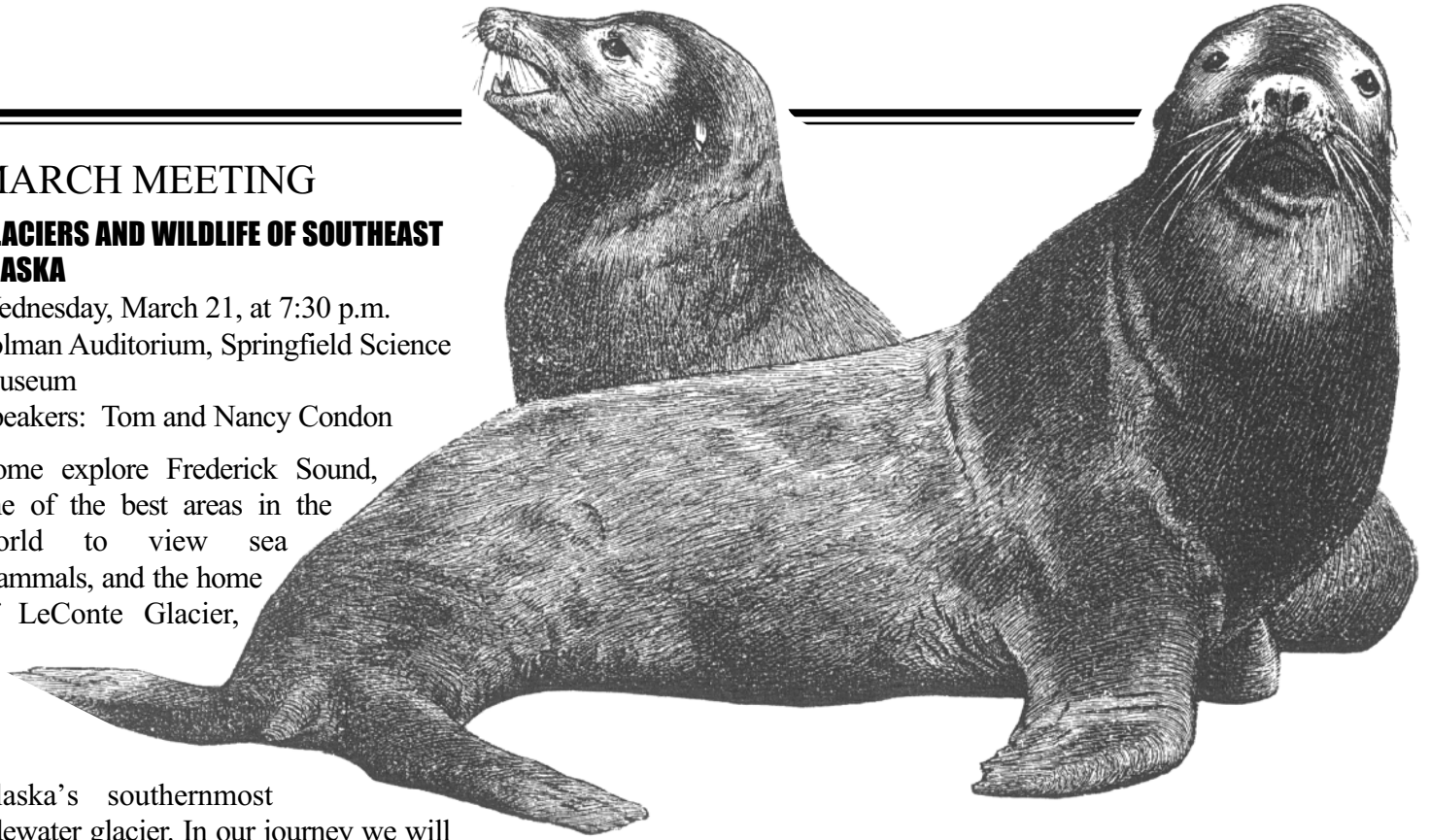
MARCH MEETING

GLACIERS AND WILDLIFE OF SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Wednesday, March 21, at 7:30 p.m.
Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speakers: Tom and Nancy Condon

Come explore Frederick Sound, one of the best areas in the world to view sea mammals, and the home of LeConte Glacier,



Alaska's southernmost tidewater glacier. In our journey we will see humpback whales, sea lions, icebergs, seals, tidal pool invertebrates, and more. We will discuss these remarkable creatures, their amazing survival strategies, and why they spend their summers in Alaska. Discover how the action of glaciers has shaped the land into some of the most spectacular scenery anywhere in the nation. Learn, too, how the present and past cultures of Southeast Alaska have been shaped by the wildlife, landscape, and challenging weather. You can experience tremendous waterfalls, glistening blue icebergs, incessant rain, a calving glacier, and playful marine mammals, all from the warm and dry comfort of Tolman Auditorium.

Having shared their earnest love of nature with so many in local ventures over the years, Tom and Nancy Condon step forth to once again expand our horizons with a naturalist's view of a more far-away point on this Earth.

"How Sweet It Is," *West Granville*

Date and Time: Saturday, March 25, at 11:30 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

Meeting Place: Westfield State College commuter parking lot, off Western Avenue, in Westfield.

Registration: Call by March 21 (525-4697)

Why does the syrup from some maple trees taste sweeter than others? What qualifies as organic maple syrup? In what ways does wildlife interfere with the collection of maple sap? Learn the entire process of maple syrup production from a family involved in the business since 1840.

Enjoy a complete maple-inspired brunch. Following brunch, we will have an insider's tour of the maple sugar house and sugar bush. Dress appropriately for the weather and wear good mud/snow boots. The sugar bush is a short hike in from the road.

A Breath of Spring



In early March, there are lovely spring bulb shows in the plant houses at Mt. Holyoke College and Smith College botanic gardens (daytime 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.). As we go to press there are no times available. When the time comes close, call for information: Smith 585-2740, Mt. Holyoke 38- 2116. The colorful displays will surely lift your spirits.

'06
'07

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

President David Gallup (413-525-4697) davesuzy3@hotmail.com	Vice President Nancy Condon (413-564-0895) science@condon.net	Treasurer Dave Lovejoy (413-572-5307) dlovejoy@wsc.ma.edu	Corresponding Secretary Suzanne Gallup (413-525-4697) davesuzy3@hotmail.com	Recording Secretary Sonya Vickers (413-566-3406) sevickers@charter.net
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Director Tom Condon (413-564-0895) science@condon.net	Director Bill Fontaine (413-533-2153) WBFont98390@aol.com	Director Jack Megas (413-782-3962) jamira@mailaka.net	Director Dietrich Schlobohm (413-788-4125)
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VOLUNTEERS

Publicity Belle Rita Novak bellerita@verizon.net	Webmaster Tom Condon (413-564-0895) science@condon.net	Newsletter Editor Debbie Leonard Lovejoy (413-848-2047) drleona@yahoo.com	Layout & Graphics Loren Hoffman (413-569-5689) blackdogsims@yahoo.com
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MEMBERSHIP

Here's how to become a member of the Springfield Naturalists' Club: Enclose a check, in the appropriate amount, payable to The Naturalists' Club.

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

FROM THE TREASURER:

Many of you know that your mailing label on this newsletter shows whether or not your dues are paid for the current year (06-07). If they are not, please renew promptly by sending a check (payable to the Naturalists' Club) to Dave Lovejoy, Department of Biology, Westfield State College, Westfield, MA 01086. Please refer to membership levels indicated elsewhere on this page.

Please note: Dave Lovejoy maintains the Naturalists' Club mailing list, so direct all address changes to him.

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 non-profit organization.

Education is a main focus of **The NATURALISTS' CLUB**. Programming, with an emphasis on local natural history, is designed to create camaraderie among people of diverse interests through experiences deepening their appreciation of nature. Activities are geared to acquaint the layperson with the natural world, mostly through field trips. Monthly meetings are held at the Science Museum at the Quadrangle in Springfield, Mass. Most field trips and programs are free.



Become a Club Member or
Renew Your Membership for 2007.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Requests for programs/trips _____

Please send information per the above form to Club Treasurer Dave Lovejoy, Biology Department, Westfield State College, Westfield, MA 01086-1630.