

# NATURALISTS\* CLUB NEWSLETTER

Springfield Science Museum at the Quadrangle, Springfield, Massachusetts

## October to December Calendar of Events

#### **OCTOBER**

3	Saturday	Hiking the Holyoke Range, Amherst	
4	Sunday	Hike at Monument Mountain Reservation, Great Barrington	
17	Saturday	Afoot & Afloat in the South-Central Berkshires, New Marlborough	
21	Wednesday	OCTOBER MEETING Exploring Oceans in Space	
22	Thursday	A Stroll at Ashley Reservoir, Holyoke	
24	Saturday	Hiking Alander Mountain, Mount Washington	
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#### **NOVEMBER**

8	Sunday	A Visit to Tom Ricardi's Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center, Conway	
14	Saturday	Gilmore Trail in Tolland State Forest, East Otis	
18	Wednesday	Wednesday NOVEMBER MEETING Underground: Discoveries at the	
		forefront of cave exploration	
21	Saturday	A Hike at Hubbard River Gorge, Granville	
28	Saturday	A Peaked Mountain Hike – Hike Away Your Thanksgiving	
		Holiday Calories, Monson	

#### **DECEMBER**

5	Saturday	Annual Late Fall Quabbin Hike, New Salem	
11	Friday	Nighttime Hike at Noble View, Russell	
12	Saturday	An Evening with Naturalists, Hampden	
16	Wednesday	DECEMBER HOLIDAY MEETING	
19	Saturday	A Stroll (maybe snowshoe) at Lake Fitzgerald, Northampton	

Of winter's lifeless world each tree
Now seems a perfect part;
Yet each one holds summer's secret
Deep down within its heart. ~ Charles G. Slater

# NATURALIST'S CORNER



#### **WOLVES RETURN TO MASSACHUSETTS**

Arriving at my Mom's home in Springfield, I spotted a strange-looking dog by her driveway. Its eyes pierced my very being. I stopped the car. The animal crossed in front of me, turned to look back at me with its x-ray eyes, then sauntered off into the woods. It was then I realized the animal was not a dog. It was a coyote. In my back woods I sometimes hear a triumphant chorus of coyote howls, but I live in the country and hear those sounds only at a distance. What was a coyote doing in Springfield?

Image from Sonya Vickers

I had to find out more about this eastern coyote, or "coydog" as some people call it. Coyotes, it seems, probably reached northern New England in the 1930s and Western Massachusetts in the 1950s. But I was surprised to learn that this contemporary eastern coyote is in fact a new animal: Apparently, even as wolves were killed off in the Northeast, a few of those surviving bred with the coyote, producing a hybrid larger than the western coyote. Genetic studies of the contemporary eastern coyote show it has a complex ancestry: 13% eastern wolf, 13% western wolf, and 10% domestic dog, mingled with the contributions of its coyote forebears. Thus, some genetic features of New England wolves live on in the coyotes that now roam our woods, suburbs, and cities. Perhaps it is hybridization with the domestic dog that has fostered the remarkable ease of coyotes in close proximity to humans. Hybridization with wolves, central to the history of our contemporary eastern coyote, is not a prominent feature in the history of the western coyote: By contrast, while at Yellowstone, our Naturalists' Club group learned that the wolf and coyote there compete for the same food. They are not on friendly terms and do not hybridize.

The contemporary eastern coyote is large and adaptable, living on anything from grass to frogs, from bugs to carrion, from pets to garbage. In the Southeast, farmers complain of coyotes eating watermelons. Eastern coyotes are big enough to bring down deer. They made their entree into the niche of top predator after wolves here had been extirpated. Each pack defends an area of about 15 square miles. Lone coyotes may travel 300 miles, looking for a territory of their own. Now the eastern coyote is the only predator in this state whose numbers are increasing; the Massachusetts coyote population is estimated at 5,000 to 10,000 individuals. Coyotes have been sighted on Cape Cod and even in Boston. I can certainly attest to their presence in Springfield. In addition to its skill and versatility in finding food, the coyote benefits from high fecundity and rapid growth. In spring, a female can give birth to between 2 and 10 pups. Pups grow up so quickly that by fall they are able to feed themselves.

Wolves have had a bad reputation since the time of Little Red Riding Hood and The Three Little Pigs. Here in New England, the eastern gray wolf was methodically driven out. In 1820 farmers set fire to Mount Monadnock to ensure wolves could not den there. In Yellowstone, bringing back the wolf in the mid-1990s was controversial. (As naturalists, we probably have great respect for the wolf and likely are supporters of its reintroduction.)

Has the long-feared wolf been re-introduced, replicated in the genetics of this new eastern coyote? If so, should we be wary of this wolf relative in our midst? To better understand this animal that is part wolf, let's turn to statistics: Never has there been a verified attack by a wolf on a human in Massachusetts; rather, the wolf's bad reputation comes from its preying on livestock. Similarly, in today's urban, suburban, and rural settings, coyotes are known to prey on unattended pets. Veterinarians have long suggested we keep our cats inside (not only for the cats' sake but for the wild birds they hunt at our bird feeders). It is, likewise, useful to compare dangers posed by coyotes to dangers posed by the domestic dog: Annually 4.7 million dog bites are reported in the United States, 800,000 requiring medical attention. Each day approximately 1,000 Americans visit the emergency room seeking treatment for dog bites. By contrast, just five coyote bites are recorded in the annals of Massachusetts.

This past January, I was honored to be present at a small ceremony held at the Roosevelt Gate at Yellowstone to commemorate the 20th year anniversary of the wolf's reintroduction, where I met some of the people who'd worked to make reestablishment possible. In Yellowstone over the intervening years, by getting too close to bison, many tourists have died, whereas by contrast, the wolf has vigilantly kept its distance for humans.

So join me in welcoming the coyote as our new neighbor, now known to be in every town and city in Massachusetts except Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. This new eastern coyote does not depend on wilderness and probably passes through your backyard at night. Perhaps you have heard a pack at night calling to each other, defending their turf or just singing for the sheer fun of it. It would seem that the wolf (or at least its genetic downline) has returned to our New England.

~ Sonya Vickers



A suggestion from Sonya: An interesting book on the eastern coyote is *Suburban Howls: Tracking the Eastern Coyote in Urban Massachusetts*, by Jonathan Way, who studies coyotes on Cape Cod and Boston.

#### **Hiking the Holyoke Range,** Amherst

Saturday, October 3, at 10 a.m. Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

Registration: Call Dave for more information and to let us know if you are coming (413-525-4697) Meeting Place: Notch Visitors Center, Route 116

in Amherst

Join us for a hike through the Holyoke Range. We will be hiking the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail to the top of Mt. Norwotuck, the highest mountain on the range. After lunch on the summit, we will hike to the "horse caves". Here we will trace the steps of Daniel Shays (c. 1787). Legend holds that Shays escaped to the horse caves on the range after an ill-fated attempt to raid the Springfield Armory. From the horse caves, we will connect to the Robert Frost Trail on our hike back to the Visitor's Center. We suggest that participants read about Shays' Rebellion at www.encarta.msn.com before the hike. And please feel free to bring a favorite Robert Frost poem to read.

#### **Hike at Monument Mountain Reservation,**

**Great Barrington** 

Sunday, October 4, from 9 a.m. to around 1 p.m.

Leader: Bob Cantin

Registration: Call Bob or Dawn, or leave a message

(413-536-4126)

Meeting Place: Friendly's parking lot at Exit 3

of the Mass Pike

Join us on this moderate, three-mile hike to the summit of Monument Mountain. We will be taking the Hickey Trail to the summit. Once there, we can enjoy the picturesque scenery and views of Mt. Greylock, and the Catskills. We will then proceed past Inscription Rock and onto the Devil's Pulpit. We will stop there for lunch and observe the quartzite boulders. Please be sure to wear sturdy footwear and bring lunch, water, and your binoculars. Total trip time is approximately three hours.



October is the fallen leaf, but it is also a wider horizon more clearly seen. It is the distant hills once more in sight, and the enduring constellations above them once again. ~ Hal Borland









Images from roonabeck.bellsofireland.com

#### **Afoot & Afloat in the South-Central Berkshires,**

New Marlborough

Saturday, October 17, from 9 a.m. to around 3 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Registration: Call Tom or Nancy or leave a message

(413-564-0895)

Meeting Place: Blandford Post Office

Hidden deep in the hills of the south-central Berkshires are plenty of gems for hiking and paddling. On this trip, we'll be tying two of these together. We'll start our day with a paddle on the Thousand Acre Swamp in New Marlborough. Averaging only 4 feet deep, this quiet little lake is the perfect place to brush up on our aquatic vegetation identification skills. With

no development along its shores, it is also a great place for bird identification, so bring your binoculars, or simply enjoy the early fall colors.

After enjoying a few hours on the water, we'll pack up our gear and travel a few miles to explore the picturesque Campbell Falls along the Connecticut border. Here the Whiting River tumbles 50 feet over two drops along a fault zone through twisted gneiss. Bring a camera and maybe a tripod as well as your imagination as we explore this picture of the ever changing geology of New England. Stick around for a light meal or dessert and coffee at the quant Southfield Café as we cap off a perfect autumn day in the southcentral Berkshires.



#### **Exploring Oceans in Space**

Wednesday, October 21, at 7 p.m. Seymour Planetarium, Springfield Science Museum Presenters: Dave Gallup and Jack Megas

Travel from Earth to the farthest reaches of space in search of life on other worlds. Investigate theories about the beginnings of Earth. Explore evidence that life on our planet began in the depths of the oceans. Examine theories about life in the furthest reaches of the universe. This will be our journey in this special program, which is narrated by Star Trek's Avery Brooks. Hope to see you there!

#### A Stroll at Ashley Reservoir, Holyoke

Thursday, October 22, at 9:30 a.m.

Leader: Colette Potter

Registration and Meeting Place: Please call Colette

(413-786-1805)

Stroll along this scenic trail that rambles round and about various ponds. Ashley Reservoir is lovely all year round, and perhaps especially so with October's colors. Bring your binoculars and dress for the weather. Bad weather cancels.

Buried in the southwest corner of Massachussetts, hidden in the Berkshires, lies Alander Mountain. It is a small mountain with massive views, rewarding those who climb to its open summit with views into New York, Connecticut and across Massachussetts.



#### **Hiking Alander Mountain, Mount Washington**

Saturday, October 24, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Leader: Bill Fontaine

Meeting Place: Former Friendly's parking lot, Great Barrington, Mass., on right side of Route 7 just north

of the Route 23 intersection

Registration: Call Bill (413-533-2153)

Views from the summit of Alander Mountain are well worth the effort it takes to get there. This remote area has been described as one of the most beautiful and ecologically significant regions in the Northeast. The Nature Conservancy has called it one of the nation's "Last Great Places." On this strenuous 5-mile up-and back-hike, we'll climb through a hemlock ravine and northern hardwood community to the summit of Alander Mountain on the western escarpment of the Taconic Range to enjoy views overlooking the Harlem Valley and Catskills to the west, Mt. Everett to the north, and Mt. Frissell and Bear Mountain to the east and south. Wear sturdy footwear, and bring along something to eat and drink. Bring poles, too, if you have them; wet leaves make for slippery surfaces!

### A Visit to Tom Ricardi's Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center, Conway

Sunday, November 8, from noon to midafternoon

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

Registration: Call to sign up for this program

(413-525-4697). Limit 15 people.

Meeting Place: Table and Vine parking lot, Route 5,

West Springfield

Join us for an exciting and informative day at Tom Ricardi's wild bird rehabiltation center in Conway. Tom will introduce us to a number of the birds in his care. We will see firsthand his facility and the work he does there to rehabilitate many different species of birds of prey. Tom's work through the years has offered a second chance for birds that have been injured or have fallen on hard times. He has released a number of hawks and owls back into the wild, and has given many programs for nature centers, schools, and our Naturalists' Club. This is sure to be an informative and exciting afternoon!

#### **Gilmore Trail in Tolland State Forest,** *East Otis*

Saturday, November 14, from 10 a.m. to around 1 p.m. Leaders: Nancy and Tom Condon Registration: Call Nancy or Tom (413-564-0895) Meeting Place: Tolland State Forest Campground, in the parking lot just before you get to the contact station.

Hike this easy to moderate 3.5 mile well-groomed trail in Tolland State Forest with us. This is an interpretive trail, with informational signposts along the way. We will enjoy sights of Otis Reservoir as we walk along the shoreline amid blueberry bushes and ash, pine and birch trees. Then we will turn away from the water and enjoy a dense second growth forest now established where fields of potatoes and orchards dominated the landscape during the 1800s. Stonewalls and a few cellar holes can still be seen. Wear appropriate hiking footwear and dress for the weather. Bring water, lunch, and hiking poles if you wish.

October extinguished itself in a rush of howling winds and driving rain and November arrived. Cold as frozen iron, with hard frosts every morning and icy drafts that bit at exposed hands and faces. ~ J.K. Rowling



#### **UNDERGROUND: Discoveries at the forefront of cave exploration**

Wednesday, November 18, at 7 p.m. Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum Speaker: Kevin Downey

New techniques have helped open up a golden age of underground discoveries. Caves in their natural state offer excellent opportunities to see and study the geology, hydrology and mineralogy of an area. They can also present many challenges. This month's speaker, Kevin Downey, will share images he has captured during more than 2000 cave projects in dozens of countries. Photos of the world's largest passages and rooms will be interspersed with images of exquisite, tiny crystals. The program will include images and discussion of caves in deserts, rainforests, alpine regions, as well as some caves close to home. Deep technical caves, small awkward caves, underwater caves, beautiful caves, and very nasty caves all are part of the underground world and have much to teach us.

#### *About the Speaker:*

Kevin Downey is by trade a professional photographer. He also runs a mineral business, Well-Arranged Molecules, based in Northampton, Massachusetts. Worldwide, he is best known for his exploration, study, and photography of caves. These projects have led to some of the most significant international underground discoveries ever, have set several records for length and depth of caves discovered, and have revealed some spectacular and unique sites. Kevin's photographs of caves and caving challenges have been published in hundreds of magazines and dozens of books. His work has been featured in publications including *Geo*, *Smithsonian*, *Sports Illustrated* and has been used on television for programs including PBS's *Nova* and the BBC's *Planet Earth*.

November's sky is chill and drear. November's leaf is red and sear. ~ Sir Walter Scott

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#### A Hike at Hubbard River Gorge, Granville

Saturday, November 21, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Leader: Bill Fontaine

Registration: Call Bill (413-533-2153)

Meeting Place: Dunkin' Donuts parking lot,

Southwick on Route 10/202.

Come explore the Hubbard River Gorge! On this walk/hike, we'll explore the Hubbard River Gorge in Granville State Forest formerly the hunting and fishing grounds of the Tunxis Native Americans. In 1749 the first white settler in the area, Samuel Hubbard, made his home along the banks of the river that now bears his name. This pristine, high-quality waterway is home to one of Massachusetts' native fish species, the brook trout. The river begins its journey to the sea in the hills surrounding Cobble Mountain, then drops 450 feet over some 2.5 miles as it makes its way to Barkhamsted Reservoir in Connecticut. For much of its course the river flows through Granville State Forest, an underappreciated jewel among Western Massachusetts state forests. We'll begin our walk along a gated forest road and then follow the river south toward Connecticut. When we've had our fill, we'll go back the way we came. Dress appropriately and wear sturdy footwear.

## A Peaked Mountain Hike – Hike Away Your Thanksgiving Holiday Calories (say goodbye to that pie), *Monson*

Saturday, November 28, starting at 9 a.m. Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup (413-525-4697) Meeting Place: Burlington Coat Factory at the shopping mall, Allen and Cooley Streets, Springfield

Join us and walk off the calories from that Thanksgiving dinner! We will hike to the summit of Peaked Mountain. The Mountain offers incredible vistas of the valley below, and even a view of New Hampshire's Mount Monadnock! This is a moderately strenuous hike. Bring a lunch and plenty of water. Sturdy hiking shoes are recommended — and don't forget your binoculars! Rain cancels.

#### **Annual Late Fall Quabbin Hike,** New Salem

Saturday, December 5, starting at 10 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

Registration: Please call us if you are coming! (413-

525-4697)

Meeting Place: Crystal Springs Plaza, near the junction of Routes 9 and 202 in Belchertown

It is that time of the year again, folks! Our destination is Quabbin Reservoir and a hike that promises great views of the western section of the Quabbin, with lots of stone walls and farm sites. There is a chance to see eagles and even hear loons! In past years, we have seen moose tracks on the Quabbin's sandy beaches. This is a great hike in one of the most beautiful areas to explore. Bring your lunch, hot drinks and binoculars. Dress appropriately for the weather. We will surprise you on which gate we decide to hike!! Bad weather cancels – light snow does not.

#### Nighttime Hike at Noble View, Russell

Friday, December 11, from 7 to around 8:30 p.m. Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon Registration: Call Tom or Nancy (413-564-0895) Meeting Place: Noble View Lower Parking Lot

Bundle up on this New Moon night for a leisurely one-mile hike at Noble View Outdoor Center. We'll stop frequently to call owls as some are establishing territory and finding mates at this time of year. Other night hike activities may take place as well. At the end of our trip, we'll pause for a nighttime snack of hot chocolate and some goodies. The new moon will make for supreme stargazing, so long as the night is clear.

This hike is for young and old alike. If it is snowy, bring snowshoes, or ask Tom or Nancy to borrow a set. Bring a flashlight, preferably with a red covering but if you don't have a covering, we will provide one. Bring some goodies to share, if you wish. Be sure to dress in plenty of layers.

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

Saturday December 12, starting at 7 p.m. Hostess: Sonya Vickers Registration: Please call Sonya for directions (413-566-3406).

Every year we gather together to renew friendships and share what we have seen and learned in the past year. The hearth will be warm against the December winds and there will be desserts and refreshments to share, so let us know if you would like to bring something. Directions will be provided when you call to register, and that list will be used to notify everyone if extreme weather cancels the event.



#### **DECEMBER HOLIDAY MEETING**

Wednesday, December 16, at 7 p.m. Springfield Science Museum, Tolman Auditorium Presenters: You!

Emcee: Nancy Condon

Our annual holiday meeting is an opportunity for you to share your most memorable and interesting nature and travel experiences with other club members. Have you visited someplace you would recommend to others? Do you have photos of Naturalists' Club events from this past year? We want to hear from you. Show us some of the highlights, by way of slides, PowerPoint, or photo album. Presentations may be no longer than 10 minutes in length. Also, contribute to the display of intriguing natural objects or pictures. Bring artifacts or natural treasures to show off in the nature display. Even if you don't know exactly what it is, bring it along and we'll see if we can draw from the group's combined wisdom to answer your nagging nature questions. Part of the fun, too, is sharing each other's wonderful holiday treats. Bring a holiday dessert to share during the social hour. Let's celebrate the holidays together! Please call Nancy (413-564-3406) to get on the roster for presentations.

#### A Stroll (maybe snowshoe) at Lake Fitzgerald,

Northampton

Saturday, December 19, starting at 9:30 a.m.

Leader: Carole Dupont

Registration: Please call or email Carole (413-896-0124; *drbyo@verizon.net*)

We will stroll along the boardwalk down to the river trail to look for ducks and geese. After we cross the dam, a wildlife blind will offer the prospect of seeing deer, fox, and maybe even a moose. A light snow would provide the additional opportunity to observe the tracks of mice, squirrels, porcupine, and maybe even an otter slide. We will return along the Hillside Trail. About 3 miles in total.

### **Events** @ Laughing Brook, Hampden

These programs at Laughing Brook require registration with Mass Audubon (800-710-4550) and, in most cases, a registration fee. For more information, contact naturalist Kevin Kopchynski (kevin@nature-explorations.com), or visit the Mass Audubon website at www.massaudubon.org. Laughing Brook is located on Main Street in Hamden.

#### Hiking the Neff Trail at Laughing Brook

Sunday, October 4, from 1 to 4 p.m Kevin Kopchynski, Naturalist

#### Witches' Hats, Traveling Critters, and Fall Colors

Saturday, October 17, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Kevin Kopchynski, Naturalist

#### **Wild Turkeys and Fall Harvest**

Saturday, November 21, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. Kevin Kopchynski, Naturalist

You can't get too much winter in the winter. ~ Robert Frost

#### Reminder: To receive electronic updates, please send us your email address

On occasion, information of interest to club members becomes available after our Newsletter has gone to press. Such information can include, for example, changes in speakers for upcoming meetings and late-breaking trip announcements. If you'd like to receive these electronic updates, please be sure to share your email address with Dave Lovejoy (*dlovejoy@westfield.ma.edu*), who maintains the club membership list.

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#### THE NATURALISTS' CLUB

#### **MEMBERSHIP**

Many of you know that September is the month for membership renewal for the year (September to August). Members with a `14-15 (or later) on their their newsletter mailing label are paid up for (at least) the current year. Those wishing to establish or renew membership can submit information and payment to:

Dave Lovejoy
The Naturalists' Club
Department of Biology
Westfield State University
Westfield MA 01086

If your address and contact information have not changed, the form below need not be completed. We would, however, like to have your email address. If you haven't sent it previously, please do that now. Thank you!

#### **MEMBERSHIP LEVELS**

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

first snow house sparrows darken the hedgerow. ~ Ellen Compton



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.

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#### Renew your membership

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