



The NATURALISTS' CLUB

NEWSLETTER

Springfield Science Museum at the Quadrangle, Springfield, Massachusetts

January to March CALENDAR of EVENTS

January

3	Sunday	Winter Hike at Lunden Pond, <i>Monson</i>
10	Sunday	Winter Walk at Conant Brook Dam, <i>Monson</i>
20	Wednesday	JANUARY MEETING: How Glaciers Carve Beautiful Scenery
23	Saturday	Explore the Thousand Acre Swamp, <i>New Marlborough</i>

Groundhog Day -
February 2



February

6	Saturday	A Stroll at Quabbin Gate 30, <i>New Salem</i>
13	Saturday	Nature in Winter – Snowshoeing or Hiking, <i>Belchertown</i>
17	Wednesday	FEBRUARY MEETING: Springtime in the Desert Southwest
20	Saturday	Tracking Winter Wildlife in Bear Hole, <i>West Springfield</i>
27	Saturday	Life Under the Ice, <i>Montgomery</i>

March

5	Saturday	Explore Sandisfield State Forest at York Lake, <i>New Marlborough</i>
16	Wednesday	MARCH MEETING: The American Kestrel – An Update
20	Sunday	How Sweet it is! Maple Sugaring Time in New England at Maple Corner Farm, <i>West Granville</i>

Winter is not a season, it's a celebration.

~ Anamika Mishra

What a severe - yet master - artist old Winter is... No longer the canvas and the pigments, but the marble and the chisel.

~ John Burroughs



NATURALIST'S CORNER

RESCUED FROM EXTINCTION



Pseudogryphus californicus,
California Condor

On a recent trip to Arizona, I spotted a miracle: three California condors, some of North America's rarest birds! If they hadn't been targeted for a rescue effort, condors by now might well have joined a long list of extinct birds. As part of a dramatic and ultimately successful rescue effort in the mid-1980s, 22 individuals were captured and a recovery breeding program was established. Condors raised in this breeding program were first reintroduced to Grand Canyon in 1996. In 2003, the first nestling fledged in the wild. By fall 2014, there were 425 living condors. The three birds I saw, then, represent nearly 1% of the total population of California condors alive in the world at the time.

The rarity of the California condor and its impressive and ongoing recovery are not its only wow factor. These birds also have dramatic physical and behavioral features: With a nine-foot wingspan, condors beat out even the golden eagle for the spot as the largest bird of North America. Weighing in at over 25 pounds, condors rely on their wings to provide the lift necessary to become airborne. Though lacking the extended sternum and associated musculature present in many birds and required for sustained wing flapping, condors manage to travel more than 150 miles a day in search of food, a feat they achieve starting off on the high cliffs where they live, catching updrafts at sunrise, then soaring off with minimal flapping. The Grand Canyon, with its high walls and winds, was therefore an ideal choice as a reintroduction site for the captive breeding program.

In my fall 2015 Naturalist's Corner piece, I described how the declining Eastern wolf mated with the coyote, producing the much larger Eastern coyote that is now experiencing quite a comeback in New England. Genetic features of the wolf live on in this new coyote. By contrast, as the only member of its genus, the California condor has no close relative to carry on its traits or to bolster its prospects for survival. With only a small number of condors remaining in the 1980s, condors were facing extinction unless humans could help.

But perhaps it was humans who had imperiled condors in the first place. Condor fossils, which have been found all over North America, reflect especially large populations in the Pleistocene, when our last ice age occurred some 10,000 years ago. It's likely that condors flew over Springfield while the ice was retreating, feeding on large carcasses of the Pleistocene megafauna. A warming climate at the end of the last ice age curtailed the condor's range to the west. Far more recently, ranchers, seeing condors feeding on dead cattle, mistakenly assumed them to be predators and shot them. Like the wolf, this huge bird was falsely assumed to be dangerous and a threat to livestock. So while it was end of the ice age that initially reduced the condor's numbers, it has been humans in this age who threaten to strike the final blow.

At the start of the captive breeding program, 22 surviving condors were taken to California zoos. Eggs were laid and hatchlings emerged. As condors cannot smell (probably a good thing for an animal that eats carrion!), instead relying on eyesight to locate food, zoo workers were able to coax babies to eat using puppets made to resemble the head of an adult condor. Eventually, the program succeeded in raising young condors to maturity and reintroducing them to the wild.

Even with these breeding and reintroduction efforts, the condor is not out of trouble just yet. Low reproductive rates and substantial risks in early life create ongoing concerns. Condors do not reach sexual maturity until six years of age. Females lay just one egg every two years, and then high rates of predation on their young mean survival to maturity is uncertain. Thus, the low number of eggs and the long wait to reproductive age work against increasing the condor's population numbers. Individuals that do survive to adulthood often live up to 60 years.

Even today, human biases and less than thoughtful activities pose a threat. As a New World vulture, the California condor is not what you might call “cute” or “beautiful”. In fact, many who see a condor close up, with its featherless head, call the bird downright ugly. Many Americans seem to see valor in birds that kill their prey, yet are disgusted by carrion eaters. As a result, the condor likely will never become a poster child for conservation and restoration efforts. Poisoning, too, is a concern. Hunters leave behind bodies of prey animals full of lead buckshot, resulting in lead poisoning in condors (as well as in those eagles who will eat carrion). Some condors have been recaptured and put through chelation therapy to rid them of the lead, using the same approach used to treat a child with lead poisoning. Fortunately, legislation recently enacted requires hunters in condor country to use an alternative to lead in their bullets. Another condor killer is power lines. Power line-aversion conditioning for birds raised in captivity has helped to save some birds from this danger.

Each bird raised through the captive breeding program is released with a number and a radio transmitter on its wings, to enable long-term monitoring. The birds I saw on the Colorado River were identified as H9, 53, and 30. By entering these numbers in an online database, I was able to find out about the birds’ parentage, their age and release date. H9 is a 6-year-old female, 53 is an 8-year-old female, and 30 is a 6-year-old male. When I spotted them, all three birds were spending the morning preening and spreading their glorious wings to soak up some sunshine. Soon the sun would bring thermals up, from the river far below, and off the condors would soar, into the wide blue sky above. I wished them well!

~ Sonya Vickers

Winter Hike at Lunden Pond, *Monson*

Sunday, January 3, starting at 10:30 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup (Please us call if you are coming; 413-525-4697)

Meeting Place: Burlington Coat Factory Shopping Mall at Allen and Cooley Streets, Springfield

Join us for a hike or snowshoe at Lunden Pond, a Trustees of Reservations property. We will explore aquatic sites where there has been beaver activity for many years. From the Pond itself, we’ll continue along the trail into a beautiful forest and a fast-running brook, where wildlife and birds live among the hardwoods and hemlock. The hike is about a 3 mile loop ~ you will love it!

Winter Walk at Conant Brook Dam, *Monson*

Sunday January 10, starting at 1 p.m.

Leaders: Kevin Kopchynski

Registration: Please call Kevin (413-267-4757)

Meeting Place: Directions are available at Kevin’s blog, nature-explorations.com

Conant Brook Dam is a small dam and reservation maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers. There is a network of trails near the parking area that will provide a pleasant afternoon’s walk as we explore nature in winter, including tracks, sign and other delights of the winter season. In the event that bad weather necessitates a change in plans, Kevin will contact those who have registered.

Image from www.thousandwonders.net



JAN.
Meeting

How Glaciers Carve Beautiful Scenery

Wednesday, January 20, at 7 p.m.

Tolman Auditorium

Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Sonya Vickers

Today, Glacier National Park in Montana is host to 25 glaciers, down from as many as 150 in the 1800s. The remaining glaciers are retreating due to climate change. As they retreat, the glaciers leave behind steep, walled valleys, waterfalls, and deep lakes. Sonya will share stories and images from her travels to Glacier National Park itself, and to other glacial sites including Mount Rainier and parks in Alaska, Canada, Antarctica, and Chile. From these views, one can imagine what Glacier used to look like and extrapolate to form an image of how it may look in the future, when all the glaciers are gone.

Explore the Thousand Acre Swamp, New Marlborough

Saturday, January 23, from 9 a.m. to around 4 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Registration: Call Tom (413-454-2331) or Nancy (413-297-0778) or e-mail Nancy at spiderwoman@russellma.net

Meeting Place: Pappa's Gulf Station, at the corner of Route 23 and Pike Road, East Otis

The Thousand Acre Swamp is not a swamp at all, but instead a shallow, 155-acre lake located about six miles south of New Marlborough and surrounded by pristine state forest. We will explore the trail that encircles the lake, plus other hiking possibilities in the area. If time and our enthusiasm permit, we'll travel a few miles by road to hike the short distance to picturesque Campbell Falls along the Connecticut border. Here, the Whiting River tumbles fifty feet over two drops along a fault zone, through twisted gneiss. Bring snowshoes or ice cleats, as weather and ground conditions dictate. Dress in layers, bring a lunch and drink, and come ready for an adventure. Afterwards, join us for a stop at the Southfield Café for a delightful treat and warming drink.

...Outside, in the darkness, the stars are brighter than you can possibly imagine. ~ Isabel Greenberg

FEB.
Meeting

Springtime in the Desert Southwest

Wednesday, February 17 at 7 p.m.

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Jack Megas

Spring is the best season to visit the southwest American borderlands. Join us for a view of the exotic plants, unique animals, and fantastic landscapes of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts. Jack has been exploring these regions for over 30 years and will share his best suggestions for visiting this area yourself.

A Stroll at Quabbin Gate 30, New Salem

Saturday, February 6, starting at 10 a.m.

Leader: Bill Fontaine

Registration and Meeting Place: Please contact Bill (413-533-2153; wlf07@comcast.net)

Join us for a 2.5-mile stroll through woodlands and fields to the shores of the Quabbin. We'll walk the Keystone Bridge to cross the Middle Branch of the Swift River, and will be sure to stop to view the numerous cellar holes along the trail.

Nature in Winter – Snowshoeing or Hiking, Belchertown

Saturday, February 13, starting at 10 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

Registration: Please call Dave (413-525-4697)

Meeting Place: CVS Plaza near junction of Routes 9 and 202

Join us for a snowshoe, or for a hike if there is no snow. Dave has lots of extra pairs of snowshoes to share should you need some. We will be exploring an upland hardwood forest and then walk along old roads and trails. If there is snow, we may see tracks of deer, coyote, ruffed grouse, weasel, fisher and many other species of animals and birds. Learn how they survive in a cold, snow-covered landscape. Along the way, we will see stonewalls and foundations of farms long abandoned. Dress for conditions, bring snack or lunch, and don't forget your binoculars!



Pectis papposa var. papposa
Image from cabezaprieta.org



Image from Wikimedia Commons: Sonoradesert 1.santryl

Tracking Winter Wildlife in Bear Hole, *West Springfield*

Saturday, February 20, from 10 a.m. to noon

Leader: Dietrich Schlobohm

Registration: Please call Dietrich (413-788-4125)

Meeting Place: The “Four Corners” (the intersection of Prospect Ave. and Morgan Road), near the Mass. Turnpike.

In winter, nature appears to slow down and creatures large and small seek shelter from the harsh elements. While many of these animals seemingly become less visible than in the warmer seasons, their presence can be more readily detected and studied through field signs such as the tracks and scats (droppings) they leave behind. The signs of deer, fox, coyote, squirrel, raccoon, beaver, otter and other animals are especially evident when Mother Nature blesses us with a blanket of snow. Our pace for this outing will be a slow walk, with frequent stops to examine, with the guidance of environmental historian and naturalist Dietrich Schlobohm, the tracks and other signs left by passing animals. Making sense of this left-behind evidence is something like deciphering a good mystery – it’s challenging and fun. If we don’t have enough snow cover to observe tracks, we will focus on other aspects of animal activity. Participants should dress warmly, wear good, warm footwear, and pack a snack. Pets should be left at home.

Life Under the Ice, *Montgomery*

Saturday, February 27 from 10 a.m. to noon

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Registration: Call Tom (413-454-2331) or Nancy (413-297-0778) or e-mail spiderwoman@russellma.net

Meeting Place: McDonald’s at 182 N. Elm Street, Westfield

Have you ever stood on 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 your ice cleats for your boots and come join us at Westfield Reservoir. This beautiful pond will be our living laboratory as we explore the ecology and physics of a freshwater pond in the winter. We will crisscross the pond, stopping to peer beneath the ice for signs of life, visit a stream with its oxygen-rich waters, and 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. Be sure to dress appropriately with layers of synthetics or wool blends. Bring a lunch, and plenty of water. You might throw in a thermos of hot cocoa, too!

Explore Sandisfield State Forest at York Lake, *New Marlborough*

New Marlborough

Saturday, March 5, from 9 a.m. to around 3 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Registration: Call Tom (413-454-2331) or Nancy (413-297-0778) or e-mail spiderwoman@russellma.net

Meeting Place: Pappa’s Gulf Station, at the corner of Route 23 and Pike Road, East Otis

Sandisfield State Forest, located in the towns of Sandisfield and New Marlborough, is a collection of properties totaling 9,500 acres. Today’s destination will be York Lake. March is a fickle time of year; we’ll either snowshoe or hike, depending on conditions. York Lake Loop Trial is an easy to moderate hike of 2.2 miles. Bring either snowshoes or ice cleats or regular hiking boots, as weather dictates. Wear appropriate layers and bring along a lunch, drink and your hiking gear.

It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.
~ Charles Dickens





MAR.
Meeting

The American Kestrel – An Update

Wednesday, March 16 at 7 p.m.

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

Speaker: Tom Sayers



Falco tinnunculus,
American kestrel

You may remember that Tom Sayers presented a program to us last year on his work with American kestrels in Connecticut. Well, we have invited him back again this year to update us on the work he has been doing and the status of these magnificent birds. Last summer, a group of club members got together to build several kestrel boxes, which Tom will use to enhance his program again this spring. Tom has also agreed to invite some of our members along in June and July to help band the nestlings to further the study and success of the American kestrel. Join us to learn more about the natural history of the American kestrel and how you can help with Tom's work toward the recovery of this species.

How Sweet it is! Maple Sugaring Time in New England at Maple Corner Farm, West Granville

Sunday, March 20, starting at 11:30 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup (413-525-4697)

Meeting Place: Westfield State University Commuter Parking Lot, Westfield

It's that time of the year again for our visit to Maple Corner Farm in West Granville. The Ripley Farm has been in the family for over one hundred years. An early spring visit to the Farm has become a Naturalists' Club tradition! Enjoy a breakfast or brunch with maple syrup from the farm's maple forest. After brunch you will learn about the process and history of maple syrup production. Then, if conditions permit, we will hike to the maple forest, about one mile round trip, to see how the sap is harvested from the trees. Please call us to register, as Maple Corner Farm will need to know how many guests to expect.



Looking forward to spring

Appreciating the small things in nature

Saturday, April 2

Location and Time: To be Announced

Leader: Sonya Vickers

Registration: Please contact Sonya (413-566-3406; sonya.vickers@yahoo.com)

We often notice the big signs of spring – lengthening days, the calls of spring peepers – but there are also many small things that also announce the change of seasons. Look deep inside an early flower, and glimpse into a drop of pond water to see the newly awakened creatures. Please join us for a day to examine and appreciate these small signs of spring. We will first collect samples. Then we'll examine them under microscopes connected to TVs and laptops, making it even easier to see what is happening in the world just beyond our normal range of vision.

Events @ Laughing Brook, Hampden

Leader: Kevin Kopchynski

Members: Adult \$5, Child \$5

Nonmembers: Adult \$7, Child \$7

Registration required call 413-584-3009 to register.

Please dress to be outdoors for the entire program.

Tracking and Animal Signs at Laughing Brook

Saturdays, January 16 and February 20
from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

At one time, being able to read tracks was vital for survival. Tracking is more than simply finding a trail and following it, and prints are not always necessary to track an animal. The forest is full of signs that tell us about the wildlife within. Learn to read the tracks and signs left by animals that live in our area.

Spring at Laughing Brook

Saturday March, 19 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

According to the calendar, spring begins tomorrow. However, the observant outdoor nature detective might have been seeing evidence for weeks. By this time of year, early avian species such as red-wing blackbirds and turkey vultures have returned to our area. We will look for skunk cabbage poking its leaves from beneath the snow or soil, warming the ground around which it grows. We will also look for spring insects such as lightning bugs, and perhaps see early frogs.

Be on the lookout for our Member Survey!

How are we doing?

Be on the lookout in your e-mail for a survey in the near future. The board of directors and officers would like to have your feedback concerning the Naturalists' Club. Do you have suggestions for outings or speakers? Should we be doing things differently? This is your club and your input is important for shaping our trips and meetings. When the survey arrives, please take a few minutes to let us know how we are doing.

Thank you,
The Naturalists' Club Directors

Announcements of ... Spring Flower Shows

The Amherst Orchid Society Annual Show and Sale, Northampton

Saturday and Sunday, February 20 and 21

Smith Vocational High School, 80 Locust Street (Route 9, west of town), next to the Cooley Dickson Hospital.

For further information, visit amherstorchidsociety.org

Smith College Bulb Show, Northampton

Saturday March 5 to Sunday, March 20 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. most days, plus 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. on Fridays.

For further information about the show, please visit

<http://www.smith.edu/garden/Home/events.html>,

or call (413) 585-2740.

Mount Holyoke College Spring Flower Show, South Hadley

March (dates TBA), from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

For further information, visit https://www.mtholyoke.edu/botanic/flower_show,

or call Talcott Greenhouse at (413) 538-2116.



A special note regarding Club finances...

As a result of a few one-time expenses, including re-establishment of our nonprofit status, some increases in yearly costs such as the Tolman rental fee, a modest decrease in the number of members, and higher-than-usual speaker fees over the past year, the balance in the Club treasury is extremely low.

While we are likely able to weather this storm, we are seeking ways to replenish the treasury. It would be extremely helpful if members who have not yet renewed for 2015-2016 would renew now, rather than wait until the "final reminder" notice in April. A renewal slip is included on p. 8 of this newsletter. Also, the Board is considering a moderate increase in dues for basic membership, which have not increased in 12 years.

Thanks,

Dave Lovejoy, Club Treasurer

FROM THE TREASURER

Those with a date of "15-16" (or later) on your newsletter mailing label have paid for this year. Otherwise, your dues are owed for the year that started in September 2015. You may renew by sending a check (payable to The Naturalists' Club) to Dave Lovejoy, Westfield State University, Department of Biology, Westfield, MA 01086 or by giving the check to Dave at the next monthly meeting.

Note: If your address and email address 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 direct changes or inquiries to Dave Lovejoy, who maintains the Naturalists' Club mailing list. Thanks.

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

Renew your membership

<hr/>	
Name	
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Address	
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Phone Number	Email
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Requests for programs/trips	
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Please send information per the above to: Club Treasurer, Dave Lovejoy, Department of Biology, Westfield State University, Westfield, MA 01086



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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