



The

NATURALISTS CLUB

NEWSLETTER

Springfield Science Museum at the Quadrangle, Springfield, Massachusetts

April to June

Calendar of Events

APRIL	9	Sunday	Muskets to Mountaintops: Tekoa Mountain Trek, <i>Westfield</i>
	19	Wednesday	APRIL MEETING: The Evolution of Behavior in Wolves and Dogs
	22	Saturday	Celebrate Earth Day, <i>East Leverett</i>
	30	Sunday	Chapel Brook Falls Hike to the Summit of Pony Mountain, <i>Ashfield</i>
MAY	7	Sunday	Stanley Park Wildflower Garden Tour, <i>Westfield</i>
	17	Wednesday	MAY MEETING: A Walk in the Desert
	20	Saturday	A Walk to Pine Quarry, <i>East Longmeadow</i>
	21	Sunday	Know the World You Walk In: Forest Plants for Hikers, <i>Russell</i>
	28	Sunday	Hike at High Ledges, <i>Shelburne</i>
JUNE	3	Saturday	Birding and Nature Walk at Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge, <i>Hadley</i>
	17	Saturday	Father's Day on the Westfield River, <i>Westfield</i>



"First, April, she with mellow showers
 Opens the way for early flowers;
 Then after her comes smiling May,
 In a more rich and sweet array;
 Next enters June, and brings us more
 Gems than those two that went before;
 Then, lastly, July comes, and she
 More wealth brings in than all those three."
 ~ Robert Herrick



April 29
 ~ It's Arbor Day! ~
 Plant a tree!

NATURALIST'S CORNER

DESERTS

DESERT: a hot, dry barren area of land, especially one covered with sand, that is characteristically desolate, forbidding, waterless and without vegetation: a wasteland.

Did the person who wrote this definition of desert ever see the Grand Canyon, witness southern Arizona in bloom after a springtime rain, or see the vastness and grandeur of Death Valley? This definition was probably written by someone interested in agriculture or focused on practical utility of land and its resources for humankind. It was definitely not written by a naturalist!

So what is a desert? It is better defined simply as an area of land receiving less than 10 inches of rain per year. Compare that to Massachusetts, which gets from 4 to 5 times that amount, or rain forests, which get 10 times that amount. By this measurement, over 30% of the land on Earth qualifies as a desert.

Where do we find the largest desert on Earth? Hint: It's not the Sahara. But it is a huge area receiving less than 2 inches of precipitation a year. The answer? The entire continent of Antarctica. Clearly, Antarctica is not hot and covered with sand. The snow and glaciers we see there derive from snow fallen hundreds or thousands of years ago which still hasn't melted. The second largest desert is the Arctic, only a little behind the Antarctic.

So what is the driest place on Earth? It is the Atacama Desert in Chile. Because Atacama is below the equator, winds blow from the east -- in notable contrast to our own weather here in Massachusetts, which usually blows in from the west. Air blowing over the Andes Mountains drops all its water on the eastern slopes, leaving nothing for the western side, where rainfall amounts to less than 1mm per year! Indeed, for a stretch of 400 years there was no appreciable rain on the western slopes of the Andes, from 1570 to 1971!

Well, what about the sand part of that dictionary definition? In some deserts, the soil tends to be loose and blow around, and since dryness does not foster vegetation, there is nothing to hold the soil in place; this movement of soil results in the formation of dunes. Most hot deserts are characterized by bare rock or coarse gravel, not sand.

We do, however, have some notable sand dunes in this country. Colorado's Great Sand Dunes National Park boasts dunes of up to 1000 feet! Here, two mountain ranges meet to form a "V" shape as viewed from above. Winds gather sand from the wide part of the "V", then the wind blows over the mountain at the end but cannot carry sand that high, so drops it. I have climbed in those dunes and seen the park from 30,000 feet on a cross-country flight as well – an impressive sight! In New Mexico the White Sands National Monument is made not of quartz sand but of gypsum.

On our recent Naturalists' Club trip to Utah, we visited the Pink Coral Sand State Park, composed of eroded red sandstone, not coral as the name implies.

These dune areas are just part of the larger desert biomes in the four North American deserts. The largest desert is the Great Basin, occupying most of Nevada plus parts of Utah, Idaho, and Oregon. The Sonoran Desert in Arizona has just enough rain to be the most biologically diverse desert in the world, The Chihuahuan Desert is mostly in Mexico but also reaches into southern New Mexico and Texas. The Mojave Desert is the smallest of the four, occupying parts of southern California and Nevada. These four deserts are classified by the type of vegetation found in each: The famed Joshua tree grows only in the Mojave; the Saguaro cactus grows only in the Sonoran.



Desert life is attuned both to coping with the typical scarcity of water and to making grand of water in those brief intervals when it is available. Desert plants and animals have evolved mechanisms that aid in conserving water. For example, cacti have leaves reduced to mere spines which serve the double purpose of preventing evaporation and discouraging herbivores from munching. Cacti, which are native to the Americas, conduct photosynthesis not in these spines but instead in green pads, their stems. This adaptive mechanism works so well that euphorbias independently evolved spines, producing cactus-like organisms in the African deserts. Cacti in North and South America therefore look similar to euphorbias in Africa not because they are closely related, but instead because they independently evolved similar mechanisms that are helpful in a hot, dry environment.

Going back to that dictionary definition of a desert as “a desolate land without vegetation”, one has to only see the desert come to life after a rainy spell. Whereas desert plants remain conservative and the seeds dormant for most of the year, the riot of flowers that follows a rainy season produces millions more flowers than one would ever see here in the temperate spring. In the desert there is only a short window to reproduce before things dry out again, and oh do those plants take advantage of that time, whereas New England wildflowers have months to do the same and so they take their time, not all blooming at once.

And what about the word “wasteland”? True, the desert is not a good place to grow crops without irrigation, yet it does have plenty of sunshine. In the deserts of our Southwest there are wide open spaces, under cloudless skies, ideal for capturing the energy of the sun, and that has sprouted solar “farms” that provide pollution-free energy to many cities. Humans are not evolved to live where the moisture level is so low, so we must take plenty of drinking water on our hikes and beware of the plants and animals defending their turf and their water supply. But the desert is ALIVE, all the way from the microscopic, slow-growing cryptobiotic soil to some clonal creosote bushes dated at 11,000 years old! The American Southwest deserts offer naturalists plenty to explore.

~ Sonya Vickers

Muskets to Mountaintops: Tekoa Mountain Trek, Westfield,

Sunday, April 9, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Leaders: Tom & Nancy Condon

Registration: Please contact Nancy Condon to register (413-297-0778; spiderwoman@russellma.net)

Meeting Place: McDonald's, off Elm Street (Route 20) in Westfield

Rising up on the east side of the Westfield River, Tekoa Mountain stretches between the towns of Montgomery, to the north, and Westfield, to the south. From the top of this ridge one can look westward, down to Russell and Huntington, to the Mass Pike bridge spanning the Westfield River, and beyond. This is a fairly strenuous hike, about 5 miles long. We'll start off on a dirt road to Tekoa Reservoir, an impoundment of Moose Meadow Brook. There, we'll see the remnants of a musket armory that Grover Cleveland's great-grandfather, Richard Falley, Jr. built near a picturesque waterfall. This is in what is now the Grace A. Robson Wildlife Sanctuary. Then we'll hike along the hemlock-lined brook, paralleling Tekoa, until we reach the turn-off where we'll start to go up to Tekoa's ridgetop. From the ridge, we'll get to see some views. Bring hiking gear, including poles, plenty of water and a lunch.



Nominating Committee and Election

Naturalists' Club elections are held at the May meeting. Anytime prior, members may contact the Nominating Committee to make additional nominations. Committee members are:

- Karen Daniels (413-786-8228)
- Delores Gentile (413-783-6113)
- Colette Potter (413-786-1805)

The following incumbents are running for office:

- President ~ Dave Gallup
- Vice President ~ Nancy Condon
- Treasurer ~ Dave Lovejoy
- Corresponding Secretary ~ Suzanne Gallup
- Recording Secretary ~ Sonya Vickers
- Directors ~ Tom Condon, Carole Dupont, Jack Megas, Dietrich Schlobohm

Nominations may also be made from the floor at May's meeting.

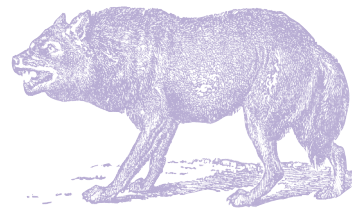


“April prepares her green traffic light and the world thinks Go.” ~
Christopher Morley

April-
Meeting

The Evolution of Behavior in Wolves and Dogs

Wednesday, April 19, starting at 7 p.m.
Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum
Speaker: Dr. Kathryn Lord



It is often assumed that dogs are not able to survive outside of a human home and that dogs living in city streets or in garbage dumps are there as the result of owner neglect. Free-living dogs have a higher pup mortality rate and lack the complex parental care present in their wild counterparts, leading to the view that domestication resulted in loss of a set of traits key to survival in the wild. In this talk, Dr. Lord will argue that dogs have instead evolved new behaviors that increase their survival and reproductive success in their current environment. She will also discuss the implications of these findings for management of the hundreds of millions of free-living dogs inhabiting the world today.

Dr. Kathryn Lord, who received her Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, has extensive experience in the comparative behavior of canids. She has raised many litters of wolves and is now embarking on a project to understand the genetic underpinnings of behavioral differences among dogs, wolves, and dog-wolf hybrids. Dr. Lord is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester.

Celebrate Earth Day, East Leverett

Saturday, April 22, time T.B.A.

Leader: Carole Dupont

Registration: For meeting place and time, please contact Carole (413-896-0124; drbyo@verizon.net)

Join us for an easy Earth Day hike! We'll delight in the treasures of spring as we look for early wildflowers peeking out amid the lifeless leftovers of winter. We will walk through a meadow, along Roaring Brook and observe a couple of beaver lodges as we pause at the scenic viewing area along the pond. The area's many footbridges will allow us to observe a wetland habitat and we will enjoy our snacks seated under a charming covered bridge. Bring binoculars, water, snacks and wear hiking boots for this varied — but interesting — terrain.

Chapel Brook Falls Hike to the Summit of Pony Mountain, Ashfield

Ashfield

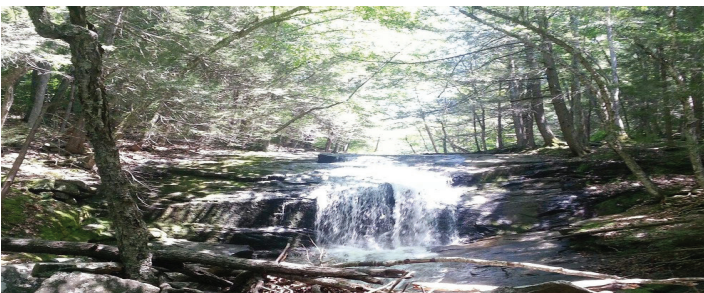
Sunday, April 30, from 10 a.m. to mid-afternoon

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

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

Meeting Place: Table and Vine parking lot, Rt. 5, West Springfield

Chapel Brooks Falls is a ruggedly beautiful place of ridges and forest. Some old-growth trees dot the landscape and wildflowers cover the forest floor. Streams surge and trickle for most of the year, but in spring Chapel Falls will be in full roar! After we explore the falls, we will take a short and exhilarating hike along the summit trail to the top of Pony Mountain. The panoramic views of the highland forests and the foothills of the Berkshires are well worth the hike. All this in another Trustees of Reservations property! Don't forget to bring snacks or lunch and a camera. Rain cancels.



Mobile Phone Upload: Traveler photo by Tia Marie L.

CO-SPONSORED BY THE NATURALISTS' CLUB

Valley Bird Days, Easthampton, Amherst, Hadley, and Springfield
Friday, May 5 to Saturday, May 13

Join us for one or more from this fantastic collection of bird-related events! A variety of programs and activities for kids, families, adults, novice and experienced birders are offered throughout the Valley. Bird-banding demonstrations, bird walks, Tom Ricardi with his raptors, and many other fantastic events help us learn about and conserve birds. The Naturalists' Club is a sponsor along with Department of Conservation and Recreation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Kestrel Land Trust, and others. Visit the website for up-to-date information and details: <https://valleybirddays.wixsite.com/valley-bird-days>

SPONSORED BY CONNECTICUT RIVER VALLEY SANCTUARIES

Atlantic White Cedar Swamp Hike, Wilbraham

Saturday, May 6, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Leader: Kevin Kopchynski

The cedar swamp, located in Wilbraham, is the largest example of an inland Atlantic White Cedar swamp in Massachusetts. Among rare animals known to frequent this habitat is the Hessel's Hair-streak butterfly, last sighted in this area in the 1960s. Atlantic White Cedar swamps are dependent on catastrophic disturbance to clear the area and allow the young trees to grow. For more information, contact Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary at 413-584-3009.

Stanley Park Wildflower Garden Tour, Westfield

Sunday, May 7, from 10 a.m. to noon

Leader: Tom Condon

Registration: Call Nancy or Tom to sign-up (413-297-0778)

Meeting Place: Stanley Park, Rose Garden parking lot; at main entrance off Western Avenue.

Ready to reacquaint yourself with wildflowers this year? The Edward F. Piela Wildflower Garden was established and named for our Club's first president. This is a lovely collection of nearly 200 species of wildflowers and ferns. Each species is labeled along the paths that wind through a beautiful wooded area. Tom, who is the co-author of *Wildflowers of the Smokies*, will bring these flowers to life by sharing identification tips, natural history, and their cultural uses from times gone by. This leisurely walk is level and easy for any and all abilities. Bring a lunch and drink and we'll find a picnic table to eat together after the walk.



A Walk in the Desert

Wednesday, May 17, starting at 7 p.m.
Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum
Speaker: Alex Robb

For those familiar with the Grand Canyon and other great parks in Arizona: This is NOT about them! Instead, I will share some of my experience from 40 years of hiking in the desert environment around Phoenix, where I live. We will discuss climate, common fauna, and flora. I will then take you on a typical short hike through a county park, Estrella Mountain Regional Park, which has 18,000 acres. (Clearly, our parks run large with miles of hiking trails!). I will discuss the hazards of the area, preparation necessary for safe and enjoyable hiking in this region, and the sorts of geology and wildlife you can look forward to encountering on such a hike.

Walk to Pine Quarry, East Longmeadow

Saturday, May 20, starting at 10 a.m.
Leaders: Sonya Vickers and Dave Gallup
Registration: Please call Sonya Vickers (413-566-3406)
or Dave Gallup (413-525-4697)
Meeting Place: Methodist Church Parking lot, 215 Somers Road

East Longmeadow was founded on a stone – red sandstone. In the 1800s, there were 50 active quarries in the town. They supplied the prized building stone use to construct brownstone houses around the country, including those in New York and Boston, and also the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC. The quarries have long since closed and nature has reclaimed the giant holes in the ground. Join us for a short spring walk to view Pine Quarry, set aside by the town as a conservation area, and step back into time to imagine when the immigrant stone cutters worked and became ancestors to many living in the town today. We will talk about the geology of the area and explore wildflowers along the way.

Know the World You Walk In: Forest Plants for Hikers, Russell

Sunday, May 21, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
Leader: Dave Lovejoy
Registration: Please contact Nancy Condon to register
(413-297-0778; spiderwoman@russellma.net)
Meeting Place: AMC's Noble View Outdoor Center, 635 South Quarter Road, Russell, in the main parking lot.

Love plants? Would you like to know more about those trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants that surround you when you hike? Then this is the program for you. Join Dave Lovejoy, a member of the Biology Department at Westfield State University, and our club treasurer, for an informative hike about forest plant communities. Learn why certain plants grow where they do, how to identify certain species, fascinating things about plant physiology, and about how plants and animals interact. Field guides are not necessary, but if you have one you'd like to practice using, bring it along.

Hike at High Ledges, Shelburne

Sunday, May 28 from 9 a.m. to mid-afternoon
Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup
Registration: Please call to let us know you are coming
(413-525-4697)
Meeting Place: Table and Vine parking lot, Rt 5, West Springfield

Enjoy the beauty of the forest and its wildflowers, including the rare yellow lady slipper, on this moderate two-mile hike. One of the many treats of this route is the breathtaking view from High Ledges, overlooking Shelburne Falls and the valley below. After the hike we will visit Shelburne Falls, a picturesque New England town known for its "Bridge of Flowers". If you wish, take the afternoon to explore the town's unique shops and beautiful waterfalls. Wear sturdy footwear and bring a lunch. Rain cancels.



Birding and Nature Walk at Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge, Hadley

Saturday, June 3 from 9 a.m. to mid-afternoon
Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup
Registration: Please call to let us know you are coming
(413-525-4697)
Meeting Place: T.B.D.

Join us for a hike at this new nature trail, part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge in Hadley. This will be a loop hike along pine woods, maple wetlands and marsh edges. There are wonderful raised boardwalks, overlooks and bridges. We will explore a floodplain along the Fort River. This is a great place for birding, so bring your binoculars! Rain cancels.



"I glanced out the window at the signs of spring. The sky was almost blue, the trees were almost budding, the sun was almost bright."
~ Millard Kaufman

Father's Day on the Westfield River, Westfield

Saturday, June 17, from 10 a.m. to 2 pm

Leaders: Tom & Nancy Condon

Registration: Please contact Nancy (413-297-0778;
spiderwoman@russellma.net)

Meeting Place: Rail Trail parking lot at corner of Meadow & Elm by the Great River Bridge

Grab your dad, or someone else, and join us for a paddle on the Westfield River. We'll paddle and float from the Great River Bridge, near downtown Westfield, to Robinson State Park. Although traffic can be heard from some sections, most of this stretch is remote and filled with the sights and sounds of nature. The paddle is through mostly quiet water with a very occasional splash of whitewater – easily avoided by the novice and easily enjoyed by the adventurous. Riparian vegetation is home to eagles, orioles, ducks, turtles, mink and more, so bring your binoculars.

Also bring a lunch, plenty of water, and dress for the weather. Our Scout Crew has plenty of canoes. Please let us know if you would like to rent one (\$5 per seat) for the event.



“In the winter, you may want the summer; in the summer, you may want the autumn; in the autumn, you may want the winter; but only in the spring you dream and want no other season but the spring!” ~ Mehmet Murat ildan



Looking Ahead

Stump Sprouts Weekend, West Hawley

Friday, September 8 through Sunday, September 11, from dinner on Friday evening through Sunday luncheon.

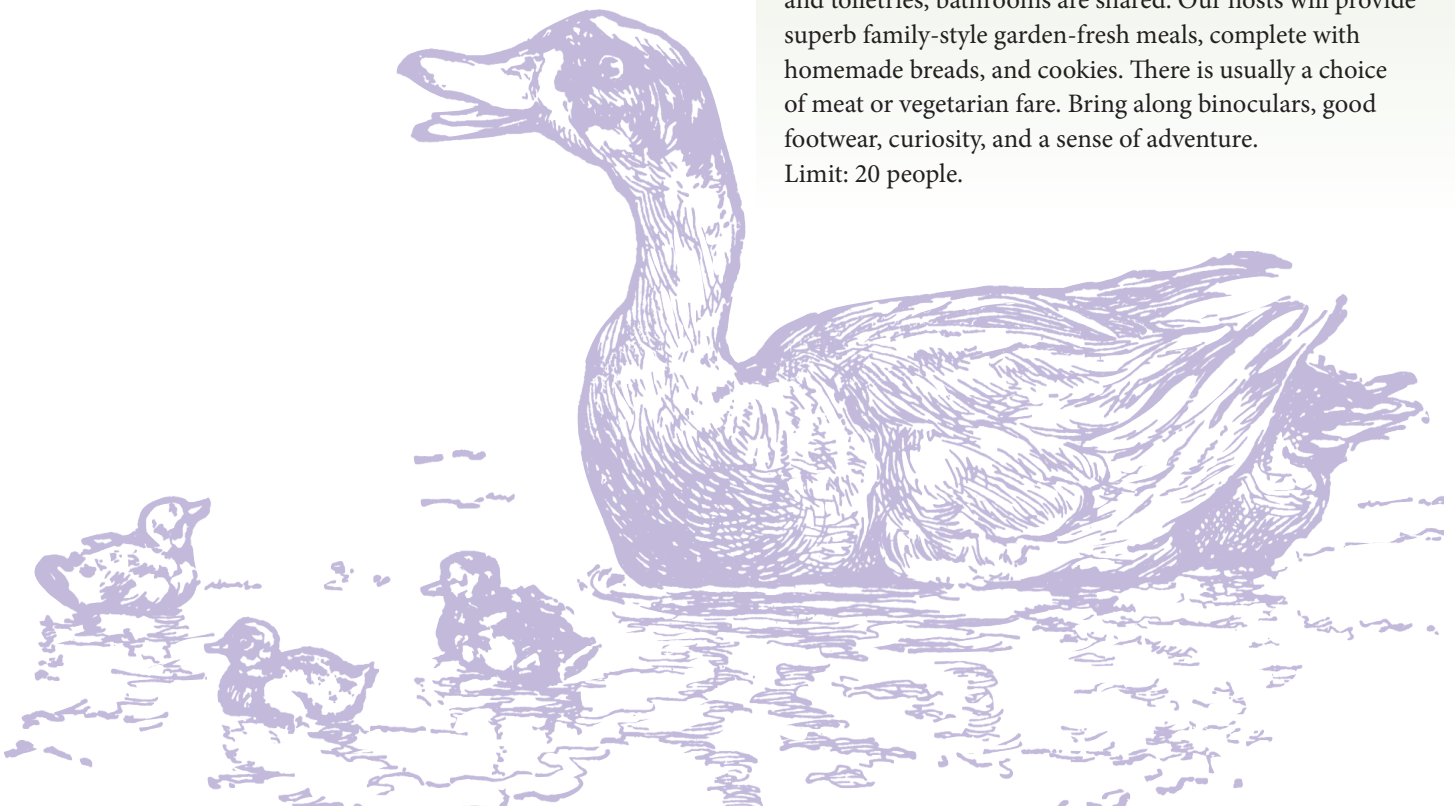
Leaders: Dietrich and Julie Schlobohm

Registration: Reservations and 50% deposit should be sent to arrive by Monday, August 14. This trip may be cancelled if fewer than 18 people have paid by that date. For current information, please call Dietrich or Julie (413-788-4125).

All-inclusive cost for two nights' lodging and six meals is \$162 per person. Indicate your roommate preference and make your check payable to The Naturalists' Club and send to Dietrich Schlobohm, 52 Poplar Ave., West Springfield, MA 01089.

High on the side of a mountain with a magnificent view, Stump Sprouts ski lodge provides a beautiful setting for walking, hiking, or relaxing in solitude. A ninety-minute drive from Springfield, the property consists of a 450-acre tract surrounded by Dubuque, Savoy, and Mohawk State Forests. Guests need to bring their own bedding, towels, and toiletries; bathrooms are shared. Our hosts will provide superb family-style garden-fresh meals, complete with homemade breads, and cookies. There is usually a choice of meat or vegetarian fare. Bring along binoculars, good footwear, curiosity, and a sense of adventure.

Limit: 20 people.



Events @ Laughing Brook, Hampden

April, May, June

These programs at Laughing Brook require registration with Mass Audubon (800-710-4550) and most require a registration fee. For more information and registration, visit the Mass Audubon website at www.massaudubon.org Laughing Brook is located on Main Street in Hampden.

Saturday, April 8, from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Woodcocks at Laughing Brook

You are invited to Laughing Brook to see a special dance - the dance of the American Woodcock! Related to the snipes and other water birds, the woodcock has moved inland. Each spring the male establishes his territory and does an amazing dance to attract a mate. We'll listen for the sound of the woodcock and watch the fields until dark. Please bring a flashlight and wear long pants and socks that can be pulled over your pants for tick prevention. Dress to be outdoors for the entire program. Suitable for children 10 years and up.

Saturday, April 15, from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Vernal Pools at Laughing Brook

Instructor: Kevin Kopchynski, Photographer and Naturalist

Vernal pools are unique and critical habitats, breeding grounds for many state-listed amphibian species. April is the best, and often the only, time to see animals such as spotted salamanders and wood frogs. Join naturalist Kevin Kopchynski to explore a vernal pool, looking for egg masses, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates. Learn why it's so crucial to protect these small bodies of water and what you can do to help ensure their protection. Suitable for children 4 to 16 years. Please wear sneakers or water shoes.

Sundays, April 23 and 30, from 1 to 4 p.m.

Introduction To Digital Photography at Laughing Brook

Instructor: Kevin Kopchynski - Photographer and Naturalist

Meeting Spot: Melville Room, Hampden Town Hall, 625 Main St., Hampden. Please park in the back of the building and enter *via* the back door. Please bring your camera and manual.

Learn the basics of nature photography, just in time to photograph the beauty of spring in the Connecticut River Valley! We will discuss best practices for capturing an image, understanding exposure and focus, and using both manual and automatic exposure settings. Both digital and film users can benefit from this instruction, though when discussing equipment we will concentrate on digital photography and the special opportunities and challenges it offers. After the first session, participants are encouraged to take photos for review at the second session. The program is not designed for children.

Saturday, May 20, from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

Early-Morning Birding at Laughing Brook

Sharpen your bird identification skills during the spring migration season. This is a great opportunity to see and learn about the many birds passing through our area at this time. Open to adult birders of all levels. Bring binoculars and a field guide if you have them. Dress for the weather and be prepared for insects. Heavy rain cancels.

Saturday, May 20, from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Frogs at Laughing Brook

Instructor: Kevin Kopchynski - Photographer and Naturalist

Come explore Laughing Brook's vernal pool in search of wood frogs and spring peepers. At this time of year we should be able to see tadpoles and adults as well as egg masses. Suitable for all ages.

**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.



"Sunshine and water—the perfect recipe for happiness."

~ Toni Sorenson

