



# The NATURALISTS' CLUB

## NEWSLETTER

Springfield Science Museum at the Quadrangle, Springfield, Massachusetts

### January

- January to March* **CALENDAR of EVENTS**
- Sunday 7 **Phone Photography**, *Russell*  
 Saturday 13 **Bash Bish Falls State Park**, *Mount Washington*  
 Wednesday 17 **JANUARY MEETING The Solar Eclipse Experience**  
 Saturday 20 **Ludlow Reservoir**, *Ludlow*

### February

- Sunday 4 **Life Under the Ice**, *Monterey*  
 Saturday 10 **Stanley Park Wildlife Sanctuary**, *Westfield*  
 Sunday 11 **Historical Forest Park**, *Springfield*  
 Sunday 18 **Winter Snowshoeing or Hiking at Quabbin Reservoir**, *Belchertown*  
 Wednesday 21 **FEBRUARY MEETING Eco-Psychology: Mitakuye Oyasin**

### March

- Sunday 3 **How Sweet It Is! Sugaring Time at Maple Corner Farm**, *West Granville*  
 Sunday 17 **Spring Transitions in Chesterfield Gorge**, *Chesterfield*  
 Wednesday 20 **MARCH MEETING From Roxbury Russet to Honeycrisp:  
 The Changing Landscape of New England's Orchards**  
 Friday 22 **Ashley Reservoir**, *Holyoke*  
 Sunday 24 **Pictures and Hiking at Bear Hole**, *West Springfield*



# NATURALIST'S CORNER

## Mighty Oaks in Winter



The oaks in my backyard stand as skeletons against the winter sky. They certainly look dormant, but appearances notwithstanding, they are an important hub of activity in New England's winter ecology. Oak trees tend to hold onto some of their leaves over the winter, a trait called marcescence. This phenomenon makes cleaning up your yard an ongoing nuisance, but it also ensures a protective blanket for many overwintering organisms. Indeed, the forest floor under the oak leaves can contain up to million nematodes per square meter. These microscopic animals provide food for larger arthropods that also inhabit the rich leaf litter. Nematodes are probably the most numerous animals on our planet. They act as decomposers, recycling nutrients that the oaks use again and again.

During the last ice age, ~65,000 years ago, the snow and ice here in New England was more than a mile deep, with nothing growing at all. As the ice gradually melted ~10,000 years ago, birds, especially acorn-loving jays, brought seeds to our area. As a result, oaks, maples, and other trees from the unglaciated south found a new home here. Today, though, there is a slow-motion war between fast-growing maples and slow-growing oaks. Maples may win the rush to the top, but when high winds blow, oaks are the clear winners.

Those oaks in my backyard may look lifeless in the winter, but they are a hub of above-ground activity, too. Oak trees support 30% of the moth species that overwinter as caterpillars the cracks of bark. Among the birds that depend on these tiny caterpillars are brown creepers and yellow-crowned kinglets, which all winter long eat nothing but insects. Our bird feeders offer a supply of seeds, but the insects on oaks provide an essential protein source for these and other overwintering birds. In spring, the caterpillars that spent the winter on oaks are an essential food source for migrating birds making their way to the north.

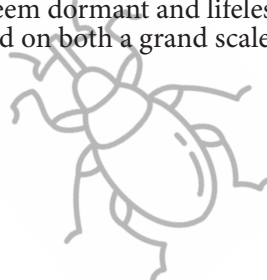
Have you ever noticed that the number of acorns on the ground varies tremendously from year to year? Oak trees communicate with each other and “decide” when to have a bumper crop of acorns. In years when the acorn supply is especially abundant, species that rely on this food source do exceptionally well, and there are even enough acorns left over to germinate. The following year the number of acorns is much smaller, and the numbers of acorn eaters declines, too.

My very first nature journal entry was about an acorn with a tiny hole—the work of an acorn weevil. The acorn weevil lays her egg in a developing acorn, then overwinters inside this snug home, dining on the nutritious nut. In spring, the larva chews its way out, finds a mate, then lays an egg in another developing acorn. Native Americans used acorns to make flour. To avoid acorns inhabited by weevils, they sorted all acorns in water. The acorns that were hollow due to the weevil would float and could be discarded. But the weevil story goes on. As the weevil chews its way out of the acorn, it creates a hollow home just right for one species of ant to use as an apartment. One hundred of these tiny ants can inhabit an acorn, protected from predators.

Have you ever noticed lumps and bumps in oak leaves and stems? These are produced by gall wasps, tiny insects the size of gnats, of which there are 800 species in North America. Most of the species specialize in oaks. After a gall wasp lays an egg, the tree builds additional tissue to protect itself—according to the construction specifications of the wasp DNA. The resulting gall shelters the developing larva. Once leaves have fallen, these gall wasps burrow into the ground to finish developing. Leaves are temporary for the oak, so this damage does not affect the entire tree. Gall wasps themselves are parasitized by 20 known species and are the most heavily parasitized group of animals on earth. As you can see, there is a lot of drama going on in that oak tree, even in winter.

While visiting Tennessee, I became enamored of the oaks there. In keeping with the pattern of higher biodiversity closer to the equator, Tennessee is home to 20 oak species, whereas Massachusetts has only 10.

At this time of year, the line of oaks in my backyard seem dormant and lifeless, but that is hardly the case. Those oaks are intimately connected with the ecology of New England on both a grand scale, and a microscopic scale.



~Sonya Vickers

**Phone Photography, Russell**

Sunday, January 7, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon  
Registration: Please contact us (413-297-0778; or e-mail nancy@paddleforwater.net)  
Meeting Place: Noble View in the upper parking lot, ~¼ mile up from South Quarter Road

We call them cell phones, but they are really computers that we carry everywhere. Cell phones offer an opportunity to explore and record the natural world using evermore sophisticated, pocket-sized cameras. If you are only using your phone for selfies and family gatherings, this walk is for you. If you are already using your phone to take photographs in nature, but want to do even more, this is also for you. We will walk at Noble View Outdoor Center. Weather and conditions will determine how far we go, but you should expect about two miles of easy walking. We'll pause along the way to frame and photograph the natural world. We'll explore composition concepts such as the rule of thirds and anchoring our corners. We'll also explore manual settings and filters.

After a few hours outdoors, we'll retire to the Condons' place nearby for some hot chocolate and to review our photos. Remember to dress for the weather, and bring your spikes and/or walking stick, a lunch/snack, and water. Don't forget your phone!

*You don't take a photograph, you make it.  
~ Ansel Adams*

**Bash Bish Falls State Park, Mount Washington**  
Saturday, January 13, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Leader: Dori Dittmer  
Registration: Please contact Dori (917-346-0969; or dordittmer@gmail.com)  
Meeting place: We will carpool; meeting place TBD.

The drive out will be along Route 57, west towards New York State. We'll have a beautiful view into the Bash Bish Gorge to begin with, followed by a pleasant, easy walk along Bash Bish Creek. Our round trip will be about one mile, total, including a bit of walking in New York State.

At 60 feet, Bash Bish Falls is the tallest waterfall in Massachusetts. It is split in two by a huge "rhinoceros" boulder. At time of publishing, access to the falls is closed due to construction at the nearby parking lot, but the trail itself remains open. We'll check for an update on conditions closer to the date of our hike. Dress for the weather. Bring water, a snack and/or lunch. Bad weather cancels.



**The Solar Eclipse Experience**  
Wednesday, January 17, starting at 7 p.m.  
Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum  
Speaker: Richard Sanderson

Total eclipses of the sun are among nature's most breathtaking events. Richard Sanderson will explain why solar eclipses occur, how they differ from lunar eclipses, and describe the profound and unexpected emotional impact they often have on witnesses. He will also look back at several past eclipses, including the "Great American Eclipse" of 2017. Sanderson will then discuss the upcoming April 8, 2024 total solar eclipse, which will be visible from the northeastern United States, with an emphasis on how to view it safely. The presentation will be illustrated with eclipse photos that Sanderson has taken over the past 50 years, including at sites as far away as East Africa.

About the speaker: Richard Sanderson was Curator of Physical Science at the Springfield Science Museum for two decades, retiring in 2018, and is now Adjunct Curator. He is also President of the Springfield STARS Club. Sanderson has written hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles about astronomy and he co-authored the 2006 book, *The Illustrated Timeline of the Universe*. An asteroid orbiting the sun between Mars and Jupiter was officially named "6893 Sanderson" in recognition of Sanderson's lifelong commitment to astronomy education and popularization.

### **Ludlow Reservoir, Ludlow**

Saturday, January 20, starting at 10 a.m.

Leader: Sonya Vickers

Registration: Please call Sonya (413-218-7742)

Meeting Place: Randall's Farm on Route 21 in Ludlow

This reservoir path is a great winter hike because the path along the lake is plowed, making it possible to walk easily while enjoying the scenery. We will walk about three miles, then return the same way. The parking lot fills quickly, so let's meet at Randall's Farm and carpool the rest of the way.

*In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.*

~William Blake

### **Life Under the Ice, Monterey**

Sunday, February 4, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Registration: Please contact us. (413-297-0778; or e-mail [nancy@paddleforwater.net](mailto:nancy@paddleforwater.net))

Meeting Place: Benedict Pond parking area in Beartown State Forest. To access Benedict Pond Road, take Route 23 to Blue Hill Road.

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! We will circumnavigate Benedict Pond, stopping to peer beneath the ice for signs of life, visit a stream whose oxygen-rich waters feed the lake, and ponder what's going on in a beaver lodge. We'll consider the amazing water molecule, whose unique properties make it possible for life to continue underneath a ceiling of ice and snow. And we'll observe how the surrounding forest influences this aquatic ecosystem. Trail length is 1.7 miles. Hike difficulty is easy to moderate, with little elevation change. Footing may be wet and uneven in places. Dress appropriately with layers of synthetics or wool blends, and be sure to wear comfortable, waterproof boots. Bring lunch, and plenty of water. You might throw in a thermos of hot cocoa, too.

### **Stanley Park Wildlife Sanctuary, Westfield**

Saturday, February 10, starting at 11 a.m.

Leader: Dori Dittmer

Registration: Please contact Dori (917-346-0969; or email [dordittmer@gmail.com](mailto:dordittmer@gmail.com))

Meeting Place: Stanley Park's Granville Road parking lot.

Let's enjoy a lovely winter walk through the Frank Stanley Beveridge Wildlife Sanctuary. Behind the urban park (sports fields, pond, formal gardens, etc.) lies an entirely different environment. We will walk along the Little River, where we can see native trees and ferns, and look for birds and other wildlife. Dress for the weather, bring water, a snack and/or lunch. Bad weather cancels.

*Snow brings a special quality with it—the power to stop life as you know it dead in its tracks.*

~Nancy Hatch Woodward

### **Historical Forest Park, Springfield**

Sunday, February 11

Leader: Carole Dupont

Registration: For meeting place and time, please contact Carole ([carole0136@gmail.com](mailto:carole0136@gmail.com); or text 413-896-0124)

We will hike along some of the interesting trails of 735-acre Forest Park. This land was donated by Orick Greenleaf, Everett Barney, and other wealthy Springfield businessmen around 1884. There's a grotto deep in the hillside, plus the beautiful Samuel Bowles Fountain, which we will stop to admire. Although Forest Park was not designed by the famous Frederick Law Olmsted himself, his firm is credited as the chief architect.

Pecousic Brook runs through Forest Park, so be prepared for some wet areas if we are experiencing a February thaw. Hopefully we'll see some pre-emergent spring offerings! Bring your binoculars, water, snacks, good hiking boots, hiking poles, and dress for the weather.

### **Winter Snowshoeing or Hiking at Quabbin Reservoir,**

Belchertown

Sunday, February 18, starting at 10:30 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup

Registration: Please call us if you plan to attend (413-525-4697)

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

Join us for a snowshoe—or a hike if there is no snow—in the Quabbin Park area. Dave has extra pairs of snowshoes, so let us know if you need a pair. We will explore an upland hardwood forest. If there is snow, we may see tracks of deer, coyote, ruffed grouse, weasel, fisher, and many other species. Learn how these creatures survive in a cold, snow-covered landscape. We will see stone walls and foundations of farms long abandoned. Dress for the conditions, bring snacks or lunch, and don't forget the binocs! Rain or bad weather cancels.

*It seems like everything sleeps in winter, but it's really a time of renewal and reflection. ~ Elizabeth Camden*

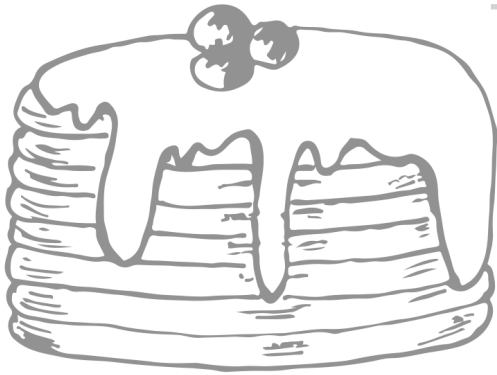


**FEBRUARY MEETING Eco-Psychology: Mitakuye Oyasin**  
**Wednesday, February 21, starting at 7 p.m.**

Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum  
 Speaker: Dori Dittmer

What is Eco-psychology? We all love Nature, as evidenced by our participation in Naturalists' Club events. But why? What's behind our thoughts that it's beautiful, it's interesting, and it makes me forget the world for a moment? Can climate change cause anxiety, depression, and anger? With climate change possibly about to become irreversible, how do we cope psychologically? What about hope? And what does mitakuye oyasin mean? We will explore some of these questions in this month's meeting.

About the speaker: Dori has been a member of the Naturalists' Club for many years, taking part in many of its programs. She is a life coach using many different orientations, including eco-psychology, to help people overcome their life challenges and become more resilient and self-confident. She leads meditation groups in and about nature, and loves photographing subjects of nature.



**How Sweet It Is! Sugaring Time at Maple Corner Farm,**

*West Granville*

Sunday, March 3, starting at 11 a.m.

Leaders: Dave and Suzy Gallup.

Registration: Please call us to register (413-525-4697)

Meeting Place: Westfield State Commuter Parking Lot

It is once again the time of the year when we visit Maple Corner Farm in West Granville. This visit has become a Naturalists' Club tradition! The Ripley Farm has been in the family for over one hundred years. Enjoy breakfast with maple syrup from the Farm's maple forest. After eating, we will learn about the process and history of maple syrup production. Then, conditions permitting, we will hike to the maple sugarbush (about one-mile round trip) to see how the sap is harvested. For ages 8 and up. Bad weather cancels.

*The flowers of late winter and early spring occupy  
 places in our hearts well out of proportion to their size.*

*~Gertrude Wister*

**Spring Transitions in Chesterfield Gorge, Chesterfield**

Sunday, March 17, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Leaders: Tom and Nancy Condon

Registration: Please contact us to register (413-297-0778; or  
 nancy@paddleforwater.net)

Meeting Place: Trustees of Reservations Chesterfield Gorge  
 parking lot on River Road

March, yikes. It could be cold and snowy...and it could be warm and sunny. Either way, March is a transitional time for Western Mass, and Chesterfield Gorge is a great place to watch the transition. We will either explore freshly fallen snow or marvel at the power of the spring melt.

Our hike starts along the cliffs above the gorge. There are cable handrails, but footing could be slippery, so be sure to bring your spikes. We'll continue down the Westfield River along the East River Trail into the Gilbert A. Bliss State Forest. This trail is wide and graded, so walking will be easy. Be sure to dress for the weather and trail conditions, and bring a snack/lunch. For those interested, we'll end our outing with some refreshments at Chesterfield General Store, known for its pastries and brick oven pizza.







## MARCH MEETING From Roxbury Russet to Honeycrisp: The Changing Landscape of New England's Orchards

Wednesday, March 20, starting at 7 p.m.  
Tolman Auditorium, Springfield Science Museum

New England has played a seminal role in American apple history. It is home to the earliest heirloom varieties and the birthplace of the fathers of American apples: John Chapman (a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed) and Henry David Thoreau.

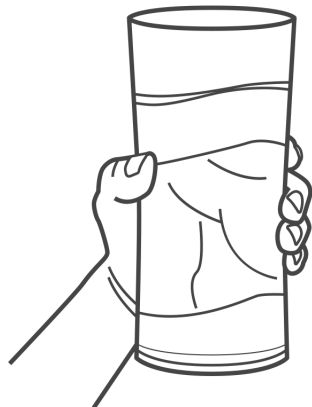
But the contemporary orchard is changing. Standard-sized trees are rapidly being replaced by dwarf varieties that are packed closely together and so easier to pick and maintain. Apples with unfamiliar names are appearing in produce aisles. For legal reasons, many of them cannot be grown in New England. Climate change, too, is impacting New England's fruit production. Weather-related events are more volatile and damaging than ever. In 2023, the region's peach crop was lost in February, the apple crop was decimated by a late freeze, and the fall pick-your-own season was dampened by weekend rains. Pollinators are under duress, and new pests from around the globe are invading the orchard. At our March meeting, Russell Steven Powell will describe both New England's rich apple history and the efforts of today's apple growers to be resilient and resourceful amid contemporary challenges.

About the speaker: Russell Steven Powell has written about and photographed apples for the nonprofit New England Apple Association for the past 27 years, much of that time as its executive director. His books include *America's Apple* (Brook Hollow Press) and *Apples of New England* (Countryman Press). A lifelong New Englander, he resides in Holyoke. Russell is an award-winning videographer, a publisher and artist. His paintings have been exhibited widely, most recently at Holyoke Heritage State Park. His passion for the New England landscape is evident throughout his work.

### **Ashley Reservoir, Holyoke**

Friday, March 22, starting at 10 a.m.  
Leader: Sonya Vickers  
Registration: Please call Sonya (413-218-7742)  
Meeting Place : Elks Lodge Parking Lot on Whitney Street  
Holyoke near the Holyoke Mall

Ashley Reservoir was created in 1873 to support Holyoke's manufacturing industry. Only a mile from Route 91 and the Holyoke Mall, the Reservoir still supplies some of the drinking water for the City of Holyoke. The trail around the Reservoir provides 4.5 miles of completely level walking terrain, and several causeways over the pond offer vistas across the water. Spring starts officially just the day before our walk, but this is New England, so be sure to dress for the weather.



*Water is the driving force of all nature.*  
~Leonardo da Vinci

### **Pictures and Hiking at Bear Hole, West Springfield**

Sunday, March 24  
Leader: Carole Dupont  
Registration: For meeting place and time, please contact  
Carole (carole0136@gmail.com; or text 413-896-0124)

We will hike along the ridge overlooking Bear Hole Reservoir and Paucatuck Brook, pausing to enjoy the spectacular views. When we reach the Paucatuck Falls Bridge, we will witness the gushing winter snow melt cascading down the falls.

Around 1890, West Springfield businessman M.L. Tourtelotte and partners built the fabulous Bear Hole Family Resort next to Massasoit Spring. At the Resort, we will relive the history of Bear Hole by viewing 1890s photos of families visiting the three-legged bear in his den and visiting Massasoit Spring to purchase mineral water. We'll also explore a menu with 1890 bill of fare and prices.

Our route will include a couple short, steep declines calling for good hiking boots, as well as poles if you need some support on the downhill. Bring water, snacks, and dress for the weather.

## Events Sponsored by MassAudubon

For information on pricing and registration, please visit [massaudubon.org](http://massaudubon.org)

### Winter Crow Roost, Easthampton

Sunday, January 28, from 2p.m. to 6 p.m. Meet at Arcadia Wildlife Refuge, 127 Combs Road

Winter is an ideal time to observe crows at their urban roost sites. Springfield hosts one of the largest roosts in the state with over 7,000 birds gathering each evening around sunset. We will begin with an indoor presentation at Arcadia and then carpool to Springfield to view the roost. Be sure to register in advance. Cost: \$20 for MassAudubon members; \$25 for nonmembers. Be sure to register in advance.

### Hometown Habitats: Forests, Online

Saturday, February 24, from 10 a.m. to noon

The east and west meadows in Northampton are ideal spots to view red-tailed Hawks, northern harriers, bald eagles, and even hardier falcons that frequently visit our site. Join us for a walk to see and learn about raptors.



## Spring Flower Shows

Spring is the season of flower shows! At press time, 2024 dates were unavailable for some shows. Please check online for updates.

### The Amherst Orchid Society Annual Show and Sale, Northampton

Saturday and Sunday, February 24 and 25  
Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, 80 Locust Street, Northampton  
<https://www.amherstorchidsociety.org>

### Mount Holyoke Annual Spring Flower Show, South Hadley

Typically starts the first Saturday of March—be sure to check Mount Holyoke's website for updates  
[https://www.mtholyoke.edu/botanic/flower\\_show](https://www.mtholyoke.edu/botanic/flower_show)

### Smith College Bulb and Show, Northampton

Typically starts the first Saturday of March—be sure to check Smith's website for updates.  
The Botanic Garden of Smith College, 16 College Lane, Northampton

<https://garden.smith.edu/plants/lyman-conservatory/seasonal-shows/future-show-dates>

*All bulbous plants are tenacious of life.  
~Theophrastus*

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## Report from the 2023 Holiday Meeting

As usual, Nancy Condon presided over this year's presentations. We heard from five Club members:

Sonya Vickers began with a "micro" look at flies, stentors and rotifers. She included the noteworthy fact that rotifers have been known to withstand 24,000 years of being dried out and can maintain genetic diversity by incorporating DNA of other organisms into their genome.

Dori Dittmer countered with the "macro": images of Zion and Bryce Canyon National Parks, the latter having been described by its namesake as "a hell of a place to lose a cow".

In a program called Phone Photography 2023, Tom Condon showed images of the Club trip to Belize and seasonal views closer to home, mostly in Connecticut.

Peter Langmore then provided a mélange of phone pictures and videos from northern Norway and New Zealand, plus a local highlight of a granola bar-eating bear in Blandford.

Kevin Kopchynski ended the program with his usual fine photography. Most of his photographs were from Massachusetts, but he also shared shots from Shenandoah National Park, in which this summer's Canadian wildfires created a scene reminiscent of the Smoky Mountains

~report by Dave Lovejoy, Recording Secretary



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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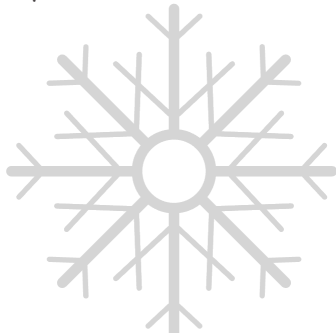
**FROM THE TREASURER**

Those with a date of "23-24" (or later) on your newsletter mailing label have paid for this year. Otherwise, your dues are owed for the year that started in September 2023. You may renew by sending a check (payable to The Naturalists' Club) to

Tom Condon,  
80 General Knox Road,  
Russell, MA 01071

Note: If your contact information has 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 Tom Condon, who maintains our mailing list. And please let Tom know if you would like to receive your newsletter electronically.



**MEMBERSHIP LEVELS**

- \$20 per year for Individual or Family Membership
- \$30 per year for Supporting Membership
- \$50 per year for Sustaining Membership
- \$300 for Lifetime Membership

**Renew your membership**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you opt for electronic delivery of the Naturalists' Club Newsletter? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Requests for programs/trips: Please send information per the above to: Club Treasurer, Tom Condon 80 General Knox Road, Russell, MA 01071