



* * * **ANNOUNCEMENTS** * * *

COVID-19 AND PROGRAM CHANGES

Those of us who have an interest in science and nature find ourselves in the midst of the unfortunate opportunity to learn about zoonotic viruses—viruses transmitted to humans by animals—and science-based methods of risk reduction. Although the pandemic may be of interest from a scientific viewpoint, any positive learning opportunities are overshadowed by the sad truth about its lethal properties. And it has been very stressful having these fascinating but frightening subjects dropped in our laps so suddenly and with great urgency. It seems like each day we're finding more to try to wrap our heads around! We hope you are all finding your way through the maze of difficulties. Meanwhile, of course, we've suspended our group programs and activities through the end of April, and we'll follow recommendations and health guidelines regarding public gatherings after that.

The program scheduled for March was postponed until May, and perhaps we'll be able to go forward with that. For April we have designed a virtual field trip and scavenger hunt. Take a look at our UPCOMING EVENTS below for information about both.

IF YOU HAVE EXTRA TIME AND THE INCLINATION. . .

. . . help central Massachusetts get rid of garlic mustard!

Here's a suggestion for an outdoor activity that will help your local environment and provide a change of scenery from the usual indoor tasks and self-isolation. It's simply pulling weeds. Because of the abundance and nature of this particular weed, though, you can feel quite virtuous for spending a little bit of time yanking the obnoxious invasive plant from roadsides and "waste areas." Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolate*) has already sprouted and is leafing out in central Massachusetts.

The roots of garlic mustard exude antifungal chemicals into the soil that disrupt associations between mycorrhizal fungi and native plants, suppressing native plant growth. It is not beneficial to wildlife or insects; it's difficult to control once it has reached a site; it can cross-pollinate or self-pollinate, it has a high seed production rate, it out-competes native vegetation and it can establish in a relatively stable forest understory. It can grow in full sun or full shade, making it a threat to a wide variety of our native plants and habitats. Each plant can produce up to 5,000 seeds which remain viable in the soil for five years or more. Is that enough negative news to inspire you? Needless to say, this is a pest plant worthy of aggressive eradication tactics!

Manual removal of this plant has been shown to prevent the spread. Pulling by hand must remove at least the upper half of the root to prevent a new stalk from forming, and this is most easily accomplished in the spring when the soil is soft. Hand-pulling should be performed before seeds are formed and needs to be continued for up to five years in order to deplete any established seed bank. Since seeds have not yet formed, garlic mustard may be left on pavement or driveways to dry out and die (before composting) at this time of year, or it can be bagged with regular trash.

For more information and images, simply do an Internet search or go to <http://www.warernatureclub.org/announcements.html>

A FRIENDLY PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION/CHALLENGE

We're looking for a fresh look for our web-site. The banner photograph portraying a picturesque spring-green hayfield, a known home for nesting Bobolinks, has served us well for five years, but we'd like to change that and switch to a portrayal of the Ware River. We invite you to submit photographs depicting a scenic view of the Ware River.

In order to provide to photographers the opportunity to capture a variety of seasonal features and in keeping with the "two branches" theme, we'll have two "competition" periods: one for spring/summer—beginning now and continuing through September 21st — and a second in fall and early winter.

You may send us your spring/summer photographs anytime, but final submission date is September 22, 2020. Submissions will be posted on our web-site, and viewers will be able to vote for their favorite(s). We'll start using the images on our site soon thereafter. If your photograph is chosen as our web-site's main header image, you'll receive a year's free membership in Ware River Nature Club and the opportunity to attend the Club's annual dinner meeting in February 2021 at no charge.

The Ware River is a 35.4 mile-long, southwest-flowing river with two forks, the longer of which--the East Branch--begins a few miles east of Hubbardston. The river starts at an elevation of about 830 feet (250 m) above sea level, fed from the numerous small streams within its watershed, before ending at the village of Three Rivers at an elevation of about 290 feet (88 m).

The Bickford Pond Dam, forming a pond of the same name, first impounds the East Branch of the Ware River in Westminster. The East Branch flows through parts of Princeton and Rutland.

Mason Brook and Brigham Pond in Hubbardston form the headwaters of the West Branch of the Ware River. From there it flows southwest and joins the East Branch to form the Ware River proper at Barre Falls Dam and continue flowing through Barre, Hardwick, Ware, and points south.

There are hundreds of vantage points and photo opportunities from the many miles of trails along the old railroad line as well as other roadsides and parks. Try your hand at selecting scenic areas along the Ware River and composing a photograph that captures a particular mood, season, or interesting natural feature. Consider cropping your picture to suit a rectangular banner-type format.

We look forward to seeing your camera work! When you are ready to send any photographs, contact waverivernatureclub@yahoo.com for instructions regarding electronic submissions.

NESTBOX RESTORATION & MAINTENANCE AT MOORE STATE PARK, PAXTON and HIGH RIDGE WMA, WESTMINSTER

WRNC nestbox project volunteers were able to get an early start this spring on restoring the abandoned nestboxes at the entryway fields at Moore State Park and cleaning the boxes at High Ridge Wildlife Management Area. Restrictions and recommendations advising avoidance of contact with other public-lands users began after John & Kathy Egan and Wendy Howes had completed the necessary work.

While a bluebird trail on the Davis Hill Road side of Moore State Park is monitored and maintained by a volunteer from the family that donated land to the Park, the dozen nestboxes that were installed along the main field—which also supports Bobolinks—and in the smaller upper fields were in complete disrepair and overgrown. At the beginning of March, the volunteers re-located the mounting posts and installed refurbished nestboxes that had been salvaged from parts of discarded WMA boxes. On one work day, volunteers were cheered to see a pair of bluebirds checking out one of the newly-installed nestboxes within 30 minutes of its placement.

Now that the nestboxes in both locations are cleaned out and ready to welcome avian tenants—bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens—we are seeking individuals to keep an eye on the boxes and monitor nesting activity. Monitoring can easily be accomplished by observation with binoculars from trails, and boxes will not be opened during the nesting season. A volunteer monitor would have to spend some extra time observing boxes, however, as a cursory look often isn't enough to determine whether or not a box is being used.

Park trails and wildlife management areas remain open at this time.

(See <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/departments-of-conservation-recreation> for details about state parks.)

If you can help, contact warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com .

FACEBOOK AND WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

For several years we have maintained a Facebook account and page, and now we're thinking of closing the account.

Actually, "we" is one person who is the Administrator of the account. Although the administrator has only used Facebook to post nature notes and photos as well as some upcoming events, it is a burdensome task. But more burdensome is the constant need to police the Club account and weed out fake Likes and other intrusive features. For example, the administrator must maintain a personal account and is constantly bombarded with unwanted material. It's difficult to maintain privacy and "opt-out" settings.

Finally, there is the disconcerting Facebook management philosophy whereby the company allows false information to be posted on the site. Frankly, this makes us uncomfortable. It doesn't seem fair that we strive for scientific accuracy in our posts while truth and accuracy doesn't seem to be important to the Facebook company.

Please let us know if you have any opinions on whether or not the Club Facebook account should be retained or closed. Do you follow us on Facebook? What do you think of our posts? Let us know at warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com .

https://www.facebook.com/pg/WareRiverNatureClub/posts/?ref=page_internal

*** * * UPCOMING EVENTS * * ***

**FOSTER PARROTS SANCTUARY:
NO CAGE IS BIG ENOUGH**

with

Rachel DeFronzo & Isaiah Duarte

Wednesday, May 27th 7 p.m. [Subject to change.]

Rutland Public Library 280 Main Street (Route 122A) Rutland

Parrots are wild animals that have long suffered the consequences of pet trade exploitation and public misinformation. In this presentation, Rachel and Isaiah look into how parrots end up in captivity, why they are surrendered to the organization, and how a sanctuary housing over 400 parrots is managed.

They will discuss the challenges of keeping these wild animals in a captive setting as well as offsite conservation efforts for wild parrots in South America. Come learn why the Foster Parrots motto is *No Cage is Big Enough!*

Rachel DeFronzo started her career in animal care as a zoo educator and bird trainer 5 years ago. It was in her position at the zoo that she learned about the plight of parrots in captivity and wanted to make a difference in the lives of abandoned and displaced parrots. Rachel has been working at Foster Parrots since 2017 as the Director of Adoptions and Education. Parrot rescue is her passion and working with Foster Parrots has been the most rewarding endeavor of her life. It has also led to the adoption of her own beloved birds, Max and Chuckie!

Isaiah Duarte is an Animal Care Specialist at Foster Parrots Ltd. and the New England Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary, where he works hands-on to help care for parrots and other exotic wildlife that have been abused, abandoned, neglected, and mistreated. From a young age, he has worked with all kinds of wildlife. His love for animals and wildlife has always been a strong passion that eventually bloomed into a career in rescue and conservation.

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP: APRIL SCAVENGER HUNT CHALLENGE

WHEN: From 7 a.m. Wednesday, April 1st through 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 8th

WHO: Individuals, twosomes, or trios maintaining recommended social distance.

HOW: Take your camera or mobile device with camera on outdoor walks anywhere in central MA—your backyard, neighborhood side streets, back roads, and parking lot edges; private or public hiking trails that are open to the public; cemeteries, etc. FIND AND PHOTOGRAPH AS MANY ITEMS ON THE LIST AS YOU CAN IN THE DESIGNATED WEEK. Make sure the time/date settings are recorded. The goal is to get as many points as possible. Maximum for this list: 68 points. Reduce the size of your photos (< 1 MB each) and send to waverivernatureclub@yahoo.com by midnight on Saturday, April 11th.

Top three scorers will be announced Wednesday, April 15th. For prizes, top scorers will be able to choose one book from among a variety of recently-acquired natural history titles.

GENERAL RULES:

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| 1) Don't include people in your photos. | 2) Respect private property. |
| 3) Note the town in which each photo is taken. | 4) Practice healthy social distancing habits. |
| 5) Tread lightly on the earth. Take only pictures, leave only footprints. | 6) Do not disturb wildlife. |

HAVE FUN!

	# OF POINTS
• Eastern skunk cabbage (<i>Symplocarpus foetidus</i>) flower spadix With pollinating insect	2 10
• Tree trunk showing Pileated Woodpecker excavation Pileated Woodpecker	1 6
• Wood frog Wood frog egg mass	4 6
• Coyote scat (Include something in photo to show relative size.)	2
• Common greenshield lichen (<i>Flavoparmelia caperata</i>)	1
• Red squirrel Cone debris pile (midden) created by red squirrel	3
Small (one to few cones)	5
Large (accumulated over months)	9
• Mole hill	3
• Shagbark hickory (<i>Carya ovata</i>) bark	1
• Early season native pollinating insect This insect identified	3 10
• Red-tailed Hawk	4
• Spotted wintergreen/ spotted pipsissewa (<i>Chimaphila maculata</i>)	3
• Mourning Cloak butterfly	5