

January 2024



**\* \* \* ANNOUNCEMENTS \* \* \***

**EXPLORING LOCAL NATURE IN THE NEW YEAR**

Welcome to another year of wildlife, nature, and environmental education and fun with the Club! We plan to continue to offer high-quality monthly presentations and outdoor field trips to explore the biodiversity of central Massachusetts and beyond. While we have a treasure chest full of ideas for talks and walks, we'd like to hear suggestions and ideas from you. Also, our members are scattered throughout a large geographical area including Princeton, the Brookfields, Rutland, Hardwick, Jefferson, Gardner and beyond, so we'd like to know how far members are willing to travel to attend events. Please drop us a line at [warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com) to tell us some subjects you'd like to see addressed. If you hope to attend outdoor programs, which locations are within acceptable striking distance for you? Do you prefer weekends or weekdays?

On this year's slate of offerings are member garden visits featuring native plants; a mushroom identification walk or two; a tree /shrub identification ramble along one of the many beautiful rail trails; birding outings for participants of all levels; and observation of an active beaver colony, just to name a few. Have more ideas? We look forward to hearing from you.



## **YOU ARE INVITED!**

### **ANNUAL DINNER MEETING & SILENT AUCTION FEBRUARY 25, 2024**

February marks the Club's entry into its twelfth year! We hope you'll join our Sunday afternoon celebration on February 25<sup>th</sup> and enjoy a fine meal, two engaging guest speakers, and an entertaining fundraiser silent auction. We're pleased to return to Harvard Forest in Petersham, a lovely venue, for this event.



Our educational theme this year is animal migration, which is a broad topic indeed, but we've managed to whittle it down to a couple of subjects. Birds, of course, come to mind, and researcher Cory Elowe will talk about his fascinating investigations into changes in bird physiology relative to migratory demands.

And since numerous fish species are also migratory, we've also invited Alex Haro, a fish biologist with USGS, to share his vast knowledge about this topic. He'll zero in on a few species that traverse both freshwater and marine environments to feed, grow, and reproduce.



We're now accepting donations of items for our **silent auction**. If you have an outdoor- or nature-themed item to donate, or are willing to ask a local retailer or restaurant to contribute a gift certificate, please let us know. Consider donating a few hours of your time to teach a special skill, offer your expertise (e.g. landscape design, financial planning, baking), or do some work (e.g. cutting/stacking firewood, planting perennials, installing nestboxes). We also welcome quirky or random items that may or may not be outdoor- or nature-themed! Contact [warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com) to make arrangements for us to pick up your item(s).

## **BOBOLINKS AT HIGH RIDGE WMA**



While the Club has had volunteers working for many years with Mass Wildlife to maintain and observe a trail of nestboxes for bluebirds and Tree Swallows at High Ridge Wildlife Management Area in Gardner/Westminster, we were unable until the 2023 nesting season to attract a grassland bird monitor for the property. We're grateful to Amanda Bailey, who dedicated five months of weekly visits to the fields at the WMA that support nesting Bobolinks. She launched the effort in order to fulfill a requirement of Mass Audubon's Birders' Certificate Program (<https://www.massaudubon.org/programs-events/adult-learning/birder-s-certificate-program>) and helped WRNC by obtaining important baseline information. Her primary goal was to gather population data for the Bobolinks occupying the fields as well as to observe their successes and struggles throughout the seasons. She was able to accomplish this goal and created a thorough report, including recommendations regarding conservation efforts to increase the success of Bobolinks breeding in the area.

Amanda's report is an important first step in understanding the status of Bobolinks at the WMA and thinking about management strategies to help these declining birds. Mass Wildlife has to consider the needs of multiple users of the property, so it's a challenge to add best practices for supporting grassland birds into the mix. We're encouraged that Bobolinks have been nesting at some of the High Ridge WMA fields for many years under less-than-optimal conditions. With the information that Amanda has gathered, we hope to ask Mass Wildlife to tweak some of the recreational activities schedules in order to give the birds a boost during the crucial nesting season. Thank you to Amanda for this helpful and well-organized summary! Contact [warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com) if you'd like to read the entire document.



## **PLASTIC IS FOREVER**

Read *Year of No Garbage: Recycling Lies, Plastic Problems, and One Woman's Trashy Journey to Zero Waste* by Eve Schaub, and weep for our poor planet. Plastic is everywhere, even when we don't want it and never asked for it to begin with. In 200 years—if humans are even still around—people will be asking, “What were they thinking?!?!” It's a heartbreaking but important book.



## **TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP**

The Ware River Nature Club membership year starts on February 1<sup>st</sup>. Some early birds have already renewed, and thank you for that!

Consider these options for continuing to support the Club for another year (or more):

- Renew when/if you make a reservation to attend the annual meeting. Reservation forms will be available on our website after January 15<sup>th</sup> and with the February newsletter.
- Go to <http://www.warerivernatureclub.org/join-us.html> for membership renewal form and make payment by check through the mail OR by PayPal.
- If you don't print the form, simply send your name, address, and email address to Ware River Nature Club, P.O. Box 76, Hardwick MA 01037 along with check or money order.



THANK YOU

to ANONYMOUS for your recent generous donation.

It will be used toward payment of printing costs  
of our new promotional flyer.

and to ALL who have made extra contributions.

You help keep us aloft!



## **LOCAL CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS**

Results for some Christmas Bird Counts that took place in our area are now available on our website: <http://www.wararivernatureclub.org/announcements.html>

Many new records were set, and many old ones broken, with high numbers of species and individuals recorded. An open, ice/snow-free landscape, unfrozen waterways, and an abundant wild food crop were combined factors that encouraged many species to linger longer than usual. These are generally “half-hardy” species that are present in small numbers during mild winters, able to survive on non-insect foods, especially if they can supplement their diet at birdfeeders with suet and mealworms. A winter with few rough patches of extreme cold temperatures and snow, with periods of thawing and rain in between, is the kind of season that enables species such as Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, and Pine Warbler to overwinter. Most of the half-hardies are short-distance migrants that spend winter in the southern U.S. and/or into Mexico. More unusual are species such as the Wilson’s Warbler and Orange-crowned Warbler found on the Groton-Oxbow CBC, as these species are commonly medium-distance migrants and rather far from their usual winter destinations. On the other hand, both species can be found at high elevations in the breeding season, so they presumably possess survival strategies with regard to cold temperatures, provided the cold periods are not brutal and long. It’s difficult to know if some of these birds opt to curtail their migration to save energy or end up stuck here in winter accidentally.

Westminster CBC compiler Chuck Caron writes, “My hypothesis is that the phenomenally high numbers and number of species was driven by the massive crop of white pine seed this year. I have never seen anything like it, and as a forest ecologist that is something I have been paying attention to for over 40 years. Pine seed might be the highest energy food source there is in this area, and I suspect there are millions of seeds per acre in the areas dominated by white pine. In addition, there seems to be a bumper crop of gray birch seed, and the acorn crop was decent [as was the wild fruit crop Ed.] Despite our tendency to focus on the weather, this time of year distribution and numbers are driven by food.”

An American Woodcock found on the Groton-Oxbow CBC will probably face quite a challenge to find sufficient prey (earthworms and other invertebrates), but Eastern Phoebes—found on several counts—are amazingly resourceful and able to glean invertebrates from icy stream and pond edges.

Birdfeeders, if they had been deployed at all, were reported by CBC participants to be very quiet with limited bird activity. But following the heavy snowfall of 1/7 we should see increased activity. If you were waiting for “action” before putting your birdfeeders out, now’s the time to feed and enjoy your feathered friends!

# \* \* \* UPCOMING EVENTS \* \* \*

## ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB

Webinar via ZOOM--

### MASSACHUSETTS BEETLES: AN INTRODUCTION

by Jenn Forman Orth, PhD  
Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup>  
7 p.m.



Dr. Orth will talk about beetle observation and identification and the ecological functions of these important creatures. Her talk will showcase the MassBeetles website she created to facilitate compilation of records of beetles found in the state.

As of January 1, 2024 the database consisted of 4171 records, and included 3821 unique species in 100 families. County-level data is still being populated.



Please register in advance  
[HERE](#)

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

**MONOOSNOC TO  
ROCKY POND HIKE,  
LEOMINSTER**  
Sunday January 13<sup>th</sup>  
9 a.m.



This moderate-to-difficult level hike will be a one-way trip from West Road, past Notown Reservoir, and out to Rocky Pond. Distance: 6.3 miles.

**HIKE TO HOGG HILL, STERLING**  
Wednesday January 17<sup>th</sup> 2 p.m.



Located on the former Kristoff farm property off Route 140, now owned by DCR, Hogg Hill can be reached by an easy-to-moderate level hike through what was once a pig farm.

For more information or to register: [TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com](mailto:TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com)

## WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

# WINTER NATURE WALK QUABBIN RESERVOIR GATE 43 HARDWICK Sunday January 21<sup>st</sup> 10 a.m.



Join us for a leisurely walk at this scenic section of the Quabbin Reservation. After exploring around a small beaver pond off Shaft 12 Road, we'll walk along Hell Huddle Road (plowed, but condition will depend on weather leading up to that date) into Fishing Area 3. This will give us a chance to look for eagles and listen and watch for Red Crossbills and other forest birds. We can expect to encounter some mammal sign/scat, and we'll look off-trail for tracks if conditions are suitable.



*Bill Platenik*

Plan to be out for 3-4 hours. Dress for the weather, bring snacks and beverages, and don't forget camera and binoculars if you have them. Please sign-up at [warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com) We'll reschedule if the weather is frightful.



ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB

Open House Guest Presentation—

# BLACK BEARS AROUND THE QUABBIN

with Jim Morelly

Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1:30 p.m.

Millers River Environmental Center, 100 Main Street, Athol

[Center opens at 1 p.m.]



Previously a guest of AB&NC with a presentation about his 5,000-mile Quabbin hiking achievement, Jim returns to share vivid pictures and wonderful anecdotes about his experiences observing and photographing black bears in the Quabbin Region. Please join us for a fascinating program about this charismatic mammal!

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

## SHARING NATURE PHOTOS

Wednesday January 31<sup>st</sup> 7 p.m.

Rutland Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland

Greet the new year with this opportunity to share your camera work with fellow nature-lovers. Choose ten of your favorite nature and outdoor photographs, put them on a thumb drive, and bring them to this casual evening of photo-sharing. We'll supply the screen, projector, and technical help. We invite you to supply some pictures and perhaps say a few words about each of them. The photographs must be taken by you within the last 25 years and can be from anywhere in the world. We're looking for pictures that portray wildlife, natural features, and/or outdoor scenery. All are welcome. Show us what you've seen!

We need an audience, too, so please come to enjoy the show even if you have no pictures of your own to share.

