ware river nature club

March 2026

* * * NATURE NEWS * * *

WOODPECKER WISDOM

Populations of our local woodpecker species appear to be stable and thriving. Dead and dying trees in the landscape are ever present and, some would say "unfortunately," increasing in some areas as mature ash trees succumb to emerald ash borer infestations. Cavity nesters will benefit. Also, woodpeckers are versatile in the diet department, able to feed on a wide range of foods – seeds, fruits, and various species of insects. Here are a few interesting facts gleaned from *Woodpeckers: An Identification Guide to the Woodpeckers of the World*, by H. Winkler, D.A. Christie, and D. Nurney.

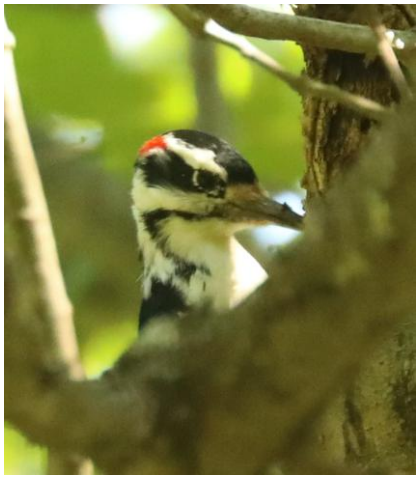
Male **Red-bellied Woodpeckers** usually produce a new cavity in a dead tree as a nest site, but sometimes his roost serves the purpose (roosts are often smaller than nest holes). The female (right) joins in the preparation of the cavity towards completion. Both male and female incubate the eggs, with the male incubating the eggs at night; after nestlings hatch, the male stays with them overnight almost until they fledge.

The drumming of the **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** is very distinctive, consisting of a roll with clearly separated taps at the end, and sometimes at the beginning: *tap-tap trrrrrrrrrrr ta-ta-tat-tat-tat*. Both sexes drum. Ritual tapping at the lower rim of the nest hole is a rather common acoustic signal.

Pileated Woodpecker pairs share in the duties of territorial defense, nest excavation - usually a new one excavated each year, taking about 25 days to complete – incubation, feeding and brooding of young, and nest sanitation, although males seem to take the greater share in nest excavation and brood care.

Male **Downy Woodpeckers** concentrate their foraging more on the upper levels of trees; females forage from middle-levels down to the tree base, a niche breadth greater than that of the males. The male maintains this segregation through supplanting attacks on the female. In conflicts or aggressive encounters, usually between two males or two females, Downys adopt a posture of bill-pointing along the body axis and perform rapid bill-pointing with wing-flicking. At highest intensity wings are held fully extended, the tail is spread, and the bird sways laterally in a "bill-waving dance."

Hairy Woodpeckers are widely distributed in the forests of North and Central America. Geographical variation in plumage is associated with temperature and moisture, with large and pale birds found in the dry-cold areas. A total of 14 races is recognized (in the source used here) differing mainly in size, color of pale areas, and amount of white in the wings.



Northern Flickers can excavate nest holes, but there is low inclination to do so. Many other, often peculiar and possibly less labor-intensive, nest sites have been recorded: fence posts, utility poles, nestboxes clothesline poles, marine breakwater pilings, silt or clay cliffs, haystacks, and suitable structures on buildings. In many cases, flickers are forced to succumb to hole competitors such as other woodpeckers, owls, and starlings.

* * * ANNOUNCEMENTS * * *

ANNUAL MEETING WRAP-UP

Dodging a messy snowstorm the previous Friday and an impending blizzard that night, WRNC's Annual Meeting successfully sandwiched itself between the two weather events and went forward without a hitch. A line-up of helpful volunteers arrived early at Harvard Forest's Fisher Museum, set up the silent auction, and prepared tasty appetizers. The meeting was a great opportunity to connect with fellow Club members in a cozy and attractive setting. Excellent presentations by guest speakers Jim Morelly and Melissa Morris contributed to our knowledge and understanding of the mammals and other creatures that co-exist with us here in central Massachusetts. Who knew that flying squirrels in need of rehabilitation require the presence of another individual of their species in order to survive? Or that Bald Eagles prey on turtles? We are grateful to Melissa and Jim for sharing their insights and amazing experiences.

The silent auction was a notable success, raising $ 575 toward our ongoing commitment to offering free educational nature and wildlife programs and field trips to the central MA community.

A sincere expression of THANKS is due to Jamie of Mama Loves Catering for a tasty hot meal, and to Greta Van Scoy of Harvard Forest for her planning assistance. A shout-out to helpers Barry and Lisa Van Dusen, Justine and Scott Wahlstrom, Anne Greene, and Ted Purcell for all the extra time they volunteered. Special thanks to Justine for her delicious chocolate chip cookies and food prep expertise.

A diorama at Harvard Forest's Fisher Museum Photo by Jim Harrison

* * * UPCOMING EVENTS * * *

HARVARD FOREST SEMINARS

WINTER CLIMATE CHANGE RESHAPES FOREST SOIL CARBON DYNAMICS ACROSS LAB, FIELD AND MODELING EXPERIMENTS

by Joanna Ridgeway, Postdoctoral researcher,
Dartmouth College Department of Biological Sciences

Wednesday March 4th 11 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Harvard Forest, Petersham

Seminars are presented in hybrid format; in-person attendance is welcome and a livestream option is available via Zoom. Free and open to the public.
For Zoom link and password, please contact Joshua Plisinski.

Joanna Ridgeway is a terrestrial biogeochemist who studies how ecosystems respond and feed back to climate change. Her background is in environmental engineering and ecological restoration, and she has a PhD in Biology where she studied plant-microbe-soil interactions and ecosystem carbon and nutrient cycling at West Virginia University.

ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB

NORTH ATLANTIC RIGHT WHALES

with Emily Volmar

Wednesday March 11th 7 – 9 p.m.

Millers River Environmental Center

100 Main St, Athol

Join us for this presentation about North Atlantic right whales, the most endangered whale species on the planet, with only about 350 individuals remaining. Emily was involved in right whale research in 2023-2024, focusing specifically on one female named Staccato. Staccato had died in 1999 in Cape Cod Bay, and her remains are stored at UMass Amherst. Since at least 2017, NA right whales have been found dead in Cape Cod Bay and Gulf of Maine locations more than anywhere else along their migration paths. Emily will discuss why this might be occurring, what can be done to help, why right whales are important, and Staccato's life story.

The program is also available via ZOOM.

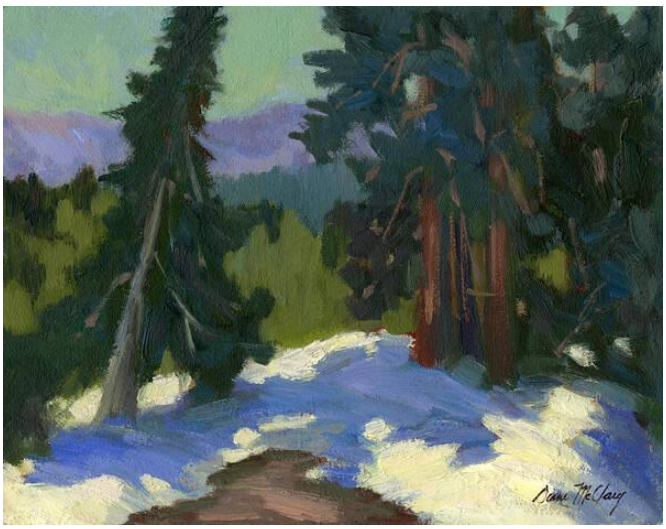
Register HERE

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

SENIOR HIKE
TROUT BROOK
Wednesday March 11th
10 -11 a.m.

We'll walk a 3-mile loop from Manning Street around Trout Brook Conservation Area in Holden, partly along Trout Brook.
Very little variation in elevation.

HELLS HIGHWAY
LOOP HIKE
Saturday March 14th
9 a.m. All day hike



Diane McClary

This route will be along some of the small trails on the southeast side of Leominster State Forest, a loop of about 4 miles. Not much elevation change is involved, but there are some crazy turns!

For more information or to register: TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com

MASS AUDUBON

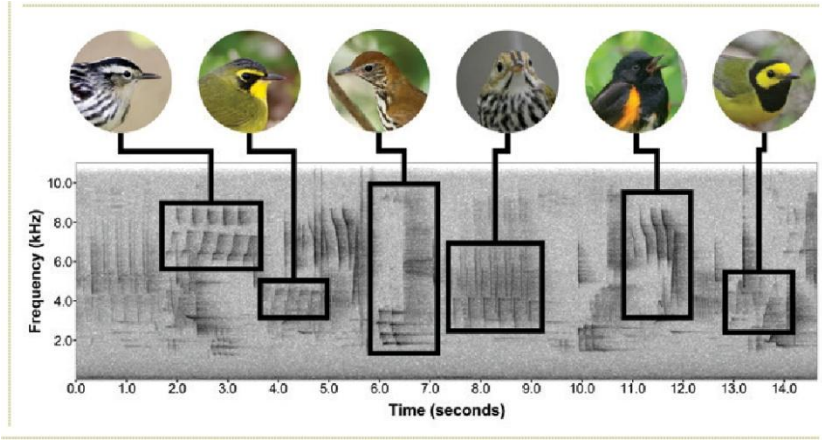
2026 BIRDERS MEETING

WIRED FOR FLIGHT: TECHNOLOGY AND TRIUMPHS IN BIRD CONSERVATION

Saturday, March 14th 9 a.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Hogan Campus Center, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester

As the natural world undergoes rapid transformation, technology is becoming an essential tool for understanding and protecting bird populations. From satellite tracking and AI-powered identification apps to acoustic monitoring and community science platforms, innovation is reshaping how we study and conserve birds. This year's Birders Meeting will explore the intersection of birding, technology, and conservation—and how each of us can help birds thrive in a changing world.



SPEAKERS: Scott Weidensaul, author - Eliot Miller, PhD, American Bird Conservancy - Rebeca Linhart, Natural Resources Science, University of Rhode Island - Michael Hallworth, PhD, Wildlife Ecologist

https://www.massaudubon.org/places-to-explore/activities/birds-birding/birders-meeting

Registration is required REGISTER HERE

HARVARD FOREST SEMINARS

JOURNEY OF BIRD NUTRITION: IMPACTS OF DIET & EXERCISE

by Lillie Langlois

Wednesday, March 18th

11 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Harvard Forest, Petersham

Seminars are presented in hybrid format; in-person attendance is welcome and a livestream option is available via Zoom. Free and open to the public. For Zoom link and password, please contact Joshua Plisinski.

Lillie Langlois received her PhD from the Pennsylvania State University in 2017 and has since taught at PSU and the University of Pittsburgh. Her doctoral research examined landscape changes associated with Marcellus shale gas development in Pennsylvania forests and in particular the effects of pipeline infrastructure on forest bird populations. Her research intertwines ecology, ornithology, and Geographic Information Science (GIS). Previous research experience focused on avian physiology, where she examined energetic stress associated with long-distance migration and nutrient requirements of songbirds. Lillie has conducted field work on birds and mammals in diverse ecosystems including the tundra of Alaska, temperate forests of New Zealand, and landscapes across central Europe.

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB
ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB

EARLY SPRING BIRD WALK
HIGH RIDGE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, GARDNER

Saturday March 21st 8 a.m. – mid-day

Leader: Jon Skinner

High Ridge Wildlife Management Area is 1,040 acres of meadows, grasslands, forests and wetlands that make great habitats for migrating warblers, ducks, herons, rails and other locally breeding birds. We will walk about 2 miles on dirt paths and once-paved roads with a few hills of about 50 feet of elevation difference. Waterproof boots are recommended. There are no restrooms on site. Participants are encouraged to bring snacks and water. A checklist for a previous trip may be viewed here: https://ebird.org/checklist/S165194357

Location: Meet in the dirt parking lot for the Smith Street entrance, which can be found off Rte. 140 in Gardner, a half mile south of the Rte.101/140 intersection. Google Maps link: https://goo.gl/maps/B6CV8LAaTX5Hjg6MA (42.585943, -71.953457)

Registration with the leader is advised in case of inclement weather/change of plans. If you have questions or need further directions, contact Jon at jon@jonrisk.com or via text/call at 978-894-3698.

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

HEYWOOD RESERVOIR LOOP HIKE

Saturday March 21st 9 a.m.- noon

One of the group's favorite hikes is this easy-to-moderate 4-5 mile loop. There will be a bit of exploring at the end. A new bridge over the brook will make that section a bit easier.

For more information or to register: TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com

Coyote in deep snow following the first major storm of the season.
A second coyote (not shown) followed.
The picture demonstrates the difficulty of interpreting tracks under these conditions.
Still from video captured on backyard trailcam in Rutland February 4th - Doug Wipf

HOLDEN GRANGE PRESENTS...

MA. DCR FOREST HEALTH UPDATE

WITH DCR FOREST HEALTH SPECIALIST FELICIA HUBACZ

March 23, 2026

LEARN ABOUT:

- Aisan Longhorned Beetle
- Emerald Ash Borer
- Southern Pine Beetle
- Beech Leaf Disease
- 2025 Aerial Survey Results

FREE PUBLIC PROGRAM!

Holden Senior Center:
1130 Main Street, Holden MA

Monday, March 23, 2026
7:00PM

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

Jennifer Goldberger

MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL HIKE MILL STREET, HOLDEN

Wednesday March 25th

10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

This easy 2-mile hike will take us up and back along a new section of the MCRT.
The walk is to the top of the hill via a mile of switchbacks, then back.
For more information or to register: TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com

Common Merganser at remaining section of open water,
Gate 43 boat launch area, Hardwick 2.19.26
Photo by Alan Rawle

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

ICE AND SNOW: THE COLD STORY

with John Green, Jr. Interpretive Naturalist and Photographer

Saturday March 28th 10:30 a.m.

Rutland Public Library, 280 Main Street, Rutland

Lesli Burke

Here in New England we are fortunate to have four distinct seasons. However, due to the warming climate, the average annual temperature has been higher in recent years. We still experience migrating birds and blossoming flowers in the spring, thunderstorms and rainbows in the summer, and colorful foliage in autumn. But, most recent winters in New England have been less dynamic – landscapes are seldom completely transformed by snow cover, and lakes and ponds are rarely frozen for extended periods.

Our experience with harsher conditions and deeper snow this winter notwithstanding, there is much to observe and discuss regarding the changes we're seeing in our four seasons. John will take us on a visual journey through the beauty of all four seasons while talking about some of those changes.

John Green has been photographing nature for over 50 years. Inspired by the simple and abundant beauty of the natural world, he purchased his first camera in 1970 and began teaching himself the technical aspects of natural light photography. Instead of using a flash attachment, John waits for the optimum light conditions to illuminate his subject perfectly. John has lived in western Massachusetts since 1972, where he frequently is found photographing the wilds of Quabbin Reservation, sharing his slideshows with community groups, and teaching workshops in nature photography. He resides in Belchertown.

CENTRAL MASS WILDLIFE TRACKING CLUB

EXPLORING WILDLIFE TRACKS & SIGN IN THE QUABBIN REGION

Exact location TBA

Sunday March 29th

9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Leader: Bryan DiFabio bryan@dfabio.com

Tracking enthusiasts of all experience levels welcome!
Contact Bryan for more information and/or to sign up.

Above: Comparing red and gray squirrel tracks
Photo by Bryan DiFabio

Right: Snowshoe hare 2.22.26 Bryan DiFabio

NOISY RAVENS AND COYOTE
MUDDY BROOK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, HARDWICK, February 16, 2026

The relationship between ravens and coyotes is a fascinating example of loose symbiosis. Ravens often follow coyotes to carrion, and in return, coyotes will follow ravens to carcasses that are too large for them to open. Ravens can also lead coyotes to live prey or carrion by using their vocalizations. This relationship benefits both species by providing food and early warning signals of potential predators. Ravens cannot kill large prey or open the skin of large carrion, but they can easily spot potential live prey and carrion from the air. By utilizing vocalizations to communicate and lead land-based predators to potential food, ravens and coyotes benefit from a mutually beneficial relationship. Common Ravens feeding on other predators' kills is well-documented, but ravens leading predators, such as coyotes, wolves, bears, or cougars, to potential live prey or carrion, by using vocalizations, is not as well documented. Bernd Heinrich offers possible evidence in his book *Mind of the Raven*, which suggests ravens lead predators to potential food. In a couple of the news stories he recounts, humans credited ravens' vocalizations with saving their lives – one from a cougar and one from a bear. Heinrich has just the opposite interpretation and believes that the ravens were alerting these predators to potential prey, and as a result, both species would benefit with food. It is a much more likely explanation than ravens benevolently vocalizing to save a human from a potential predator!

--Joan Collins *Adirondack Avian Expeditions*

https://adirondackavianexpeditions.com/behavior/communication-between-common-ravens-and-eastern-coyotes-an-observation

For another interesting account: https://jillbeimphotography.com/unclaimed-prize/

Photos by Alan Rawle