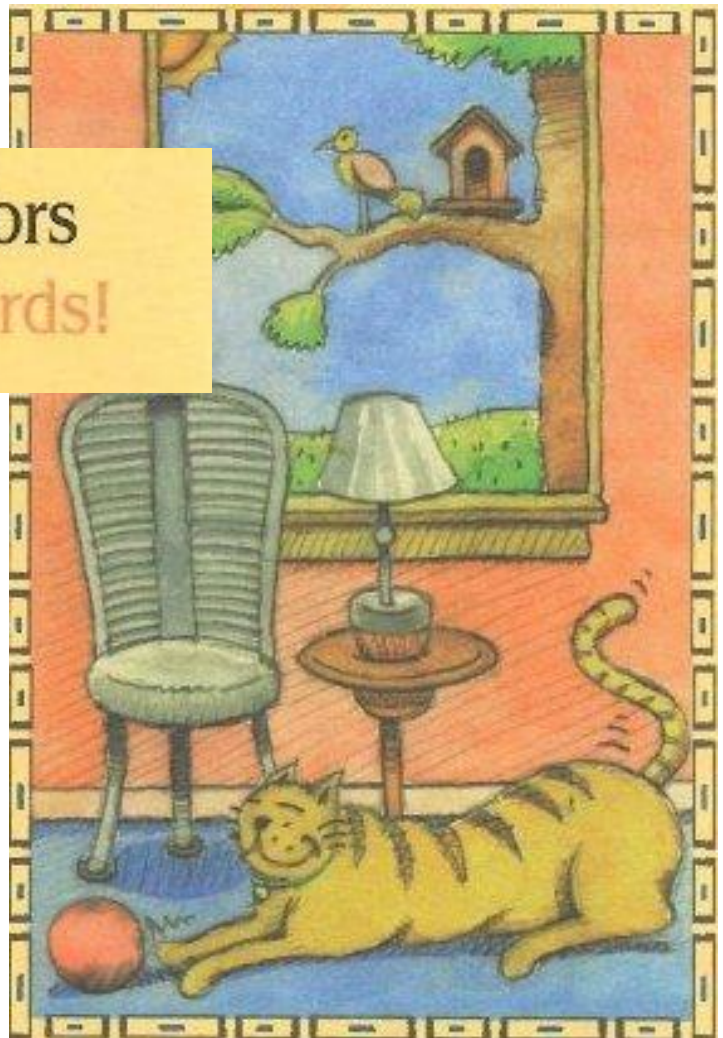




May 2026

\*\*\* **NATURE NEWS** \*\*\*

Keeping Cats Indoors  
Isn't *Just For The Birds!*



Each year, millions of cats are run over by cars, mauled by dogs, poisoned and lost. Hundreds of millions of birds and small mammals are killed annually by free-roaming cats. The suffering of both cats and birds is all the more tragic because it is so unnecessary.

Today's cat owners face an important decision: "Should I keep my cat indoors?" For your cat's sake, and that of the birds and other wildlife in your neighborhood, the answer to that question must be "yes!"

### Keeping Cats Indoors is for the Cats...

The average life expectancy of an outdoor cat is just two to five years, while an indoor cat may survive for 17 or more years. Cats who roam are constantly in danger...

**Cars** - Millions of cats are run over by cars each year. Seeking warmth, outdoor cats crawl into car engines and are killed or maimed when the car is restarted. Motorists risk accidents in attempting to avoid hitting free-roaming cats.

**Animal Attacks** - Torn ears, scratched eyes, abscesses, internal injuries, diseases, and sometimes death result from encounters with dogs, other cats, and wild animals like raccoons, coyotes and foxes.



**Human Cruelty** - Each year, animal shelters and veterinarians treat cats who have been shot, stabbed, or set on fire. Unsupervised cats may also be captured and sold to research laboratories or used as "bait" to train fighting dogs.

**Overpopulation** - Unaltered free-roaming cats are the single most important cause of cat overpopulation. As a result, millions of cats for whom there are no homes must be euthanized each year.

**Disease** - Cats allowed outdoors risk exposure to fatal diseases, including rabies, feline leukemia, distemper, and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Vaccines are not 100 percent effective; there is no vaccine at this time for FIV.

**Parasites** - Cats allowed outdoors are more likely to contract debilitating parasites such as worms, ticks, mites, and fleas.

**Poisons and Traps** - Exposure to pesticides, rodenticides and antifreeze poisons and kills thousands of outdoor cats each year. Cats are maimed and killed in traps set for furbearing animals.

### ...And for the Birds

Today, birds and other wildlife face more obstacles to their survival than ever before. Wildlife habitats are destroyed and degraded every day, and many species are declining as a result. Even the impacts of natural predators on their prey is changing based on how humans are altering natural environments. And the presence of an unnatural predator — the domestic cat — is having an impact as well.

Scientists estimate that cats kill hundreds of millions of birds each year and three times as many small mammals. Most birds killed by cats are members of relatively common species, like the Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco; others are rare and endangered — the California Least Tern,



Piping Plover, Western Snowy Plover and California Gnatcatcher.

Regardless of the status of the species, each wild animal suffers when captured by a cat. By letting our cats outside, we — perhaps without intent — place a higher value on the freedom of our pet than on the life of that cardinal, that chickadee or that chipmunk she kills.

### **“Is it Nature’s Way for Cats to Kill Birds?”**

A descendant of the wild cat of Africa and southwestern Asia, the domestic cat instinctively hunts and captures prey. However, wildlife in the Western Hemisphere did not evolve in the presence of a small, abundant predator like the domestic cat, and thus did not develop defenses against them. Cats were introduced in North America by European immigrants only a few hundred years ago.

While cats may instinctively hunt wildlife, it is clear that they are not adapted to life in the wild as are our native wild cats like the bobcat and mountain lion. Outdoor domestic cat populations are most commonly found in and around human settlements; most do not survive without direct or indirect support by humans. They are in this way very different from native predators.

### **Truths about Cats and Birds**

We all know that cats don’t have nine lives, but there are three other myths about cat predation we’d like to dispel.

1. “Belled” cats do kill wildlife. Cats with bells on their collars can learn to stalk their prey silently. Even if they don’t, wild animals do not necessarily associate the ringing of a bell with danger.
2. Even well-fed cats kill wildlife. The urge to hunt and the urge to eat are controlled by different portions of the cat’s brain.
3. Once caught by a cat, few birds survive, even if they appear to have escaped. Infection from the cat’s teeth or claws or the stress of capture usually results in death.

### **Tips for Happy Indoor Cats**

Kittens who are kept indoors usually show no desire to venture outside as cats. With knowledge, patience, and time, we can change most cats who roam outdoors into happy indoor pets. These tips will help.

Provide a safe, outside enclosure, such as a screened porch.

Provide window shelves to permit cats to monitor the outdoors from the safety of the indoors.

Play with your cat each day. Paper bags and cardboard boxes are sources of unending delight when you are away.

Plant kitty grass (available from pet supply stores) in indoor pots so your cat can graze.

Clean litter boxes regularly.

Because indoor cats may slip out an open door, it's important to keep in mind the other essentials of responsible pet ownership:

Spay or neuter your kitten as early as eight weeks of age;

Provide routine veterinary care, including annual check-ups and vaccinations;

Put an identification tag on your cat's collar— it's her ticket home if she slips out; and

Where such programs exist, license your cat.

### For the Sake of All Cats...

Support local cat control and protection plans;

Support legislation requiring cat owners to register their cats and prevent them from roaming;

Do not feed unowned or free-ranging cats without making a commitment to giving or finding them a permanent indoor home; and

Take cats for whom you cannot care to your local animal shelter to give them the best possible chance of adoption into loving, lifelong homes.



### More for the Birds

Support efforts in your community to protect wildlife and their habitats. All wild animals have three basic needs: food, water and plants that provide escape cover and nesting sites. If you feed birds in your yard, locate feeders away from windows and brushy vegetation that permits neighborhood cats to hide. Keep your feeders clean and well stocked. Where possible, establish a brush pile for wildlife away from feeders. Avoid using pesticides.



**CATS INDOORS!**

THE CAMPAIGN FOR SAFER BIRDS & CATS

Cats cannot be blamed for killing wildlife. It is the responsibility of cat owners to ensure that their cats are safely indoors. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), American Humane Association (AHA), and other groups are working with American Bird Conservancy (ABC) on "Cats Indoors! The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats." Through this campaign, we will educate and encourage cat owners to protect cats, birds and other wildlife by keeping cats indoors.

## **INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE LINKED TO BIRD POPULATION DECLINES**

by François Leroy

Postdoctoral Researcher in Ecology, The Ohio State University

Published in *The Conversation*, March 11, 2026



Bird losses are accelerating across North America, particularly in farming regions where agriculture is most intensive. Since the 1970s, the U.S. has lost billions of birds. We now know that those losses aren't just growing – they are accelerating in places with intensive human activity, particularly where agriculture and expanding communities are changing the landscape. In a new study published in the journal *Science*, my colleagues and I found that bird populations are responding in the same way: Their declines are speeding up, particularly in regions dominated by intensive agriculture.

Using data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey, we analyzed bird population changes for 261 species across the contiguous U.S. between 1987 and 2021. We found that, on average, bird numbers declined by about 15% – for every six birds in 1987, there were only five three decades later. Nearly half of the species we examined showed significant population declines, with the strongest declines observed for the common grackle, the European starling and the red-winged blackbird. Because the survey spans decades, a continent and hundreds of species, it provides an unparalleled window into how bird populations are changing over time.

Most studies using this data focus on whether populations are increasing or decreasing. In our study, we asked a different question: Are those trends themselves speeding up or slowing down? When we examined how the decline of birds evolved over time, a striking pattern emerged. The losses were strongest in southern parts of the United States – a pattern consistent with previous research that linked bird declines to warm and warming regions. Many species have been found to struggle in hotter temperatures, or they shift their ranges toward cooler climates. The Midwest, California and parts of the Mid-Atlantic region stood out as areas where bird declines are accelerating. Populations that were already shrinking in the late 1980s are now losing birds more rapidly than they did three decades ago. These regions share a common feature: intensive agriculture. We measured agricultural intensity using indicators such as cropland area, fertilizer application and pesticide use around survey locations. Areas with higher agricultural intensity were more likely to have accelerating bird declines.

Modern agriculture transforms landscapes. Large cropland areas replace diverse habitats. Herbicides and pesticides used on farms reduce weeds and insects that many bird species depend on for food. Heavy machinery and reduced habitat diversity can limit nesting opportunities. We cannot disentangle which agricultural practices are most responsible for the accelerating declines. Fertilizer use, pesticide application and land-use change often occur together. It is likely that multiple pressures interact to affect birds.

However, studies have linked higher pesticide use to reductions in bird numbers, both directly through toxicity and indirectly through declines in insect prey. These findings suggest that chemicals may play an important role in amplifying population declines in agricultural regions.

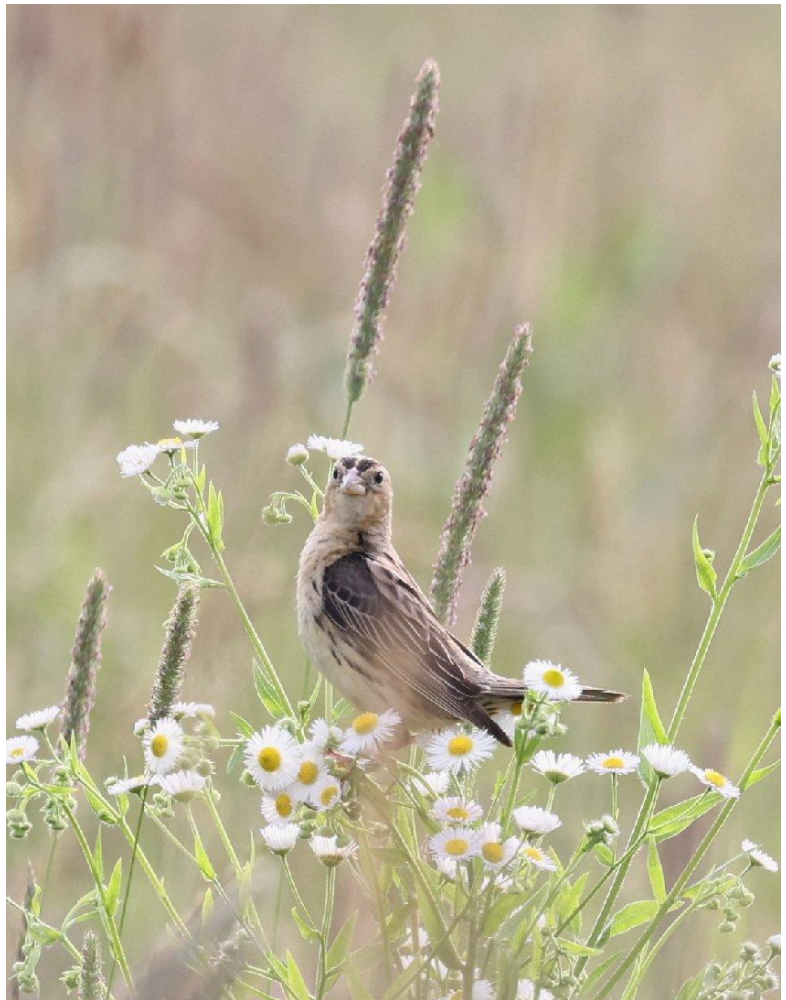
We also found that agricultural intensity and temperature change may reinforce each other. Agricultural landscapes often lack shade trees, so they warm more than natural areas, potentially compounding climate-related stress on bird populations.

[On a local note, intensive hay farming results in high mortality rates for grassland birds like Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and some sparrow species. - Editor]

Accelerating population declines are an early warning sign about birds' well-being. A steady decline is concerning, but when losses grow larger year after year, it means the situation is getting worse faster.

Nearly 40% of U.S. land is used for agriculture. How these landscapes are managed will shape the future for many birds, and farmers are thus at the forefront to address the biodiversity crisis. Balancing food production, environmental sustainability and human health is a shared challenge.

Biodiversity responses to land management changes can occur quickly. So when habitats are restored or chemical pressures are reduced, birds and insects can return within years. That potential for relatively rapid ecological recovery makes agricultural landscapes especially important. Our findings suggest that looking not only at how much biodiversity is changing, but also at how much those changes are speeding up, may offer a clearer picture of the pressures facing wildlife today.



Complete article: <https://theconversation.com/bird-losses-are-accelerating-across-north-america-particularly-in-farming-regions-where-agriculture-is-most-intensive->

## **MASS WILDLIFE'S HABITAT MANAGEMENT GRANT & BOBOLINKS**

Do you know any town properties or private landowners with hayfields who might consider managing their fields as habitat for Bobolinks and other grassland birds if supported by grant funds?

Mass Wildlife's Habitat Management Grant Program provides crucial financial assistance to improve habitat for wildlife, among other objectives. The Habitat Grant Program supports **municipal and private landowners** of conserved land to conduct habitat restoration and management activities that meet several criteria, including improving habitat(s) for Species of Greatest Conservation Need, as identified in the 2025 Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), with emphasis on MESA-listed species. Bobolinks, migratory songbirds that nest in hayfields and open meadows across the state, qualify for protection via habitat management since they are listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the state's Wildlife Action Plan. Though locally stable, Bobolinks face global declines driven by habitat loss and early mowing practices that destroy nests, making coordinated land management essential for its conservation.

On the breeding grounds, the main threats to Bobolink populations are loss of habitat and hayfield mowing during the nesting period. Grassland habitat has declined dramatically in Massachusetts as it continues to be either developed or revert to forests. To maintain the remaining grasslands, fields should be mowed annually, but this activity is harmful to grassland birds if it is conducted during the primary nesting period (late May-mid-July). Harvesting hay when birds are nesting has been documented to result in 100% nesting failure (Perlut et al. 2006). Mowing often occurs 2-3 weeks earlier than in the past, and this is thought to be a major cause of their global decline. Habitat loss and hunting on the wintering grounds may also be an important contributing factor to population declines.

Since WRNC's Grassland Bird Initiative focuses on advocacy for protection of Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and other grassland nesters, we think it's important to get the word out about the availability of grant funds for landowners who would like to manage their fields for these species. Finding compatible schedules for the mowing of hayfields and the nesting cycles of Bobolinks is the primary conservation challenge of bobolink conservation on the breeding grounds.

This year's grant application period is different from past years; it will **open in mid-May and close June 30, 2026**. Interested landowners can visit <https://www.mass.gov/news/habitat-management-grant-announcements> for more information.

## HIGH RIDGE WMA NESTBOX PROJECT CHALLENGES

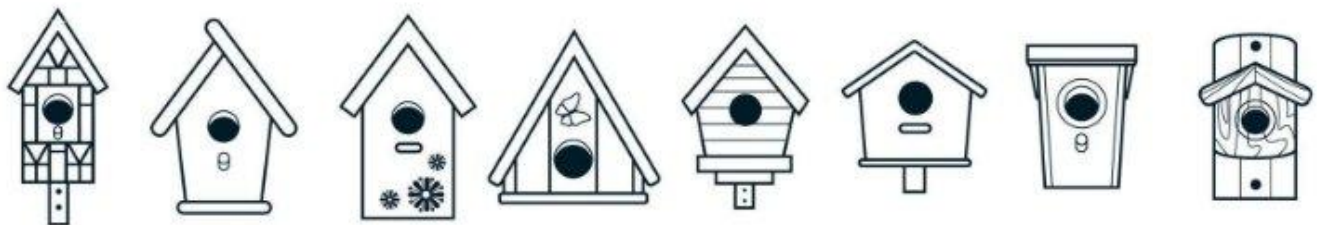


*Jon Skinner installs a nestbox*

Installing and maintaining bluebird/swallow nestboxes at High Ridge Wildlife Management Area not only takes energy and enthusiasm, but also calls for some ingenuity in an ongoing effort to thwart predators and vandals. The Overlook Road area, which originates at the Westminster entrance, is very popular with the birds. Unfortunately, at least one black bear was present in the adjacent residential area during the 2022, 2023, and 2024 seasons and regularly traversed Overlook Road, destroying active nests and nestboxes as it foraged for food. The Overlook section is close to the parking lot and is easily accessible to individuals who have uprooted and carried off nestboxes, steel posts and all. Although mounting nestboxes on wooden posts and trees is generally considered unwise due to the risk of predators, the decision was made to try this option and perhaps reduce the number of lost and destroyed nestboxes. Red and gray squirrels, potential predators, are very few in number at this

site, and Overlook is far from wetlands that attract raccoons that could be problematic. Predatory snakes do not present a high risk. Perhaps the most significant threat to nesting bluebirds and swallows here are the Northern House Wrens that nest close by; nestboxes mounted on steel posts don't protect bluebirds and swallows from wren attacks.

Many thanks to Jon Skinner and John Egan who went out in mid-April to install six nestboxes to replace those that were lost over the past few seasons. Jon and other birders who visit the WMA will observe the new boxes and monitor their use.



# \*\*\* ANNOUNCEMENTS \*\*\*

## OUR EVENTS CALENDAR

Many of the events in this newsletter are hosted by other organizations, such as Princeton's Open Space Committee and Forbush Bird Club. We like to help publicize other local opportunities for getting outdoors, learning about the environment, and enjoying nature and wildlife.

We can understand that there may be confusion when it comes to seeking more information about a hike or program. Each activity listed includes contact information for the sponsoring organization. Please direct questions to the email address or telephone number of the person or group provided. If you are unable to make contact, we will try to help, but going directly to the sponsor or trip leader will be faster.

We apologize for any inconvenience to participants having difficulty getting in touch with other groups or leaders. Overall, however, we hope our events listings are helpful, accurate, and inspiring.



*Northern Flicker*

*Photo by Betty Jenewin*

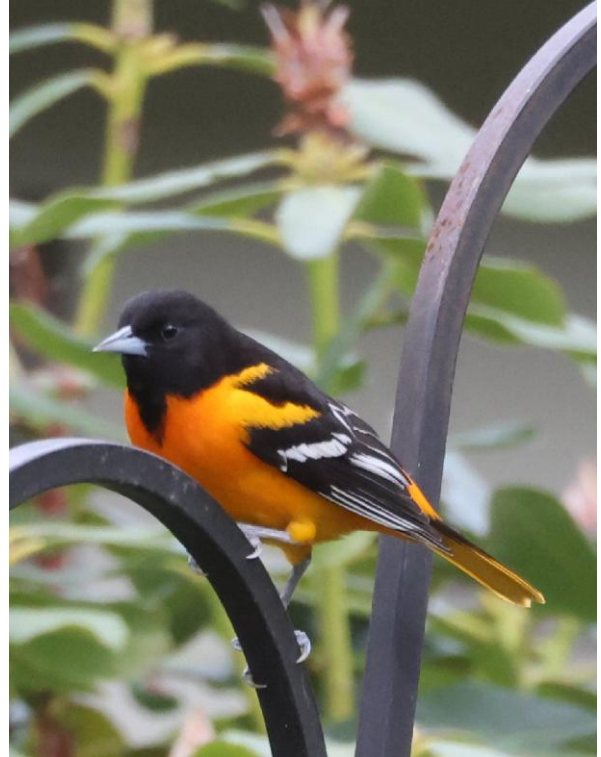
# \* \* \* UPCOMING EVENTS \* \* \*

## ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB

### EARLY BIRD BIRDING WITH JEFF & ERNIE

Fridays: May 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, & 22<sup>nd</sup>  
7 a.m.

Join Jeff Johnstone and Ernie LeBlanc at the Millers River Environmental Center (100 Main Street, Athol) before heading out to explore the North Quabbin area for spring migrant birds. These are great events for the novice birder to learn from some of our best field naturalists. Come for as long as your schedule allows.



Cancelled in the event of severe weather.  
For more info, call or text Jeff Johnstone:  
978-249-9052.

## FORBUSH BIRD CLUB

# BIRDING AT HODGES VILLAGE DAM, OXFORD

Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup> 7 a.m. – late morning

Leader: Mary Bayer Caulway 508-612-5130 [onesadiedog@gmail.com](mailto:onesadiedog@gmail.com)



Expect an abundance of species, especially newly-arrived warblers, throughout the varied habitats of Hodges Dam and vicinity. We will walk 2 to 3 miles on a cart road with relatively flat terrain.

While enjoying the birds, we will remember our friend, Paul Meleski, whose early May walks here delighted Forbush birders for three decades.

30 Howarth Rd., Oxford

Meet at the upper parking area; follow the road up a short, steep hill above the main parking area.



*Photos by Alan Rawle*

## PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!



### HIKE ALONG MIDSTATE TRAIL PRINCETON TO BARRE Saturday May 9th 9 a.m.

This 4.2 - mile hike will follow the Midstate Trail from the East Branch of the Ware River through Savage Hill WMA and take us out to Intervale Road in Barre. The mostly-level, moderate hike will include some road walking.

### SENIOR HIKE~ WACHUSETT MEADOW SANCTUARY, PRINCETON Wednesday May 13th 10 a.m.



This hike will take us along trails on the north side at Mass Audubon's Wachusett Meadow Sanctuary. It will be about 2.5 miles and include the trails to the top of Brown Hill, around North Meadow, and over to Otter Pond. This is a pretty hike, and plenty of wildflowers should be in bloom.

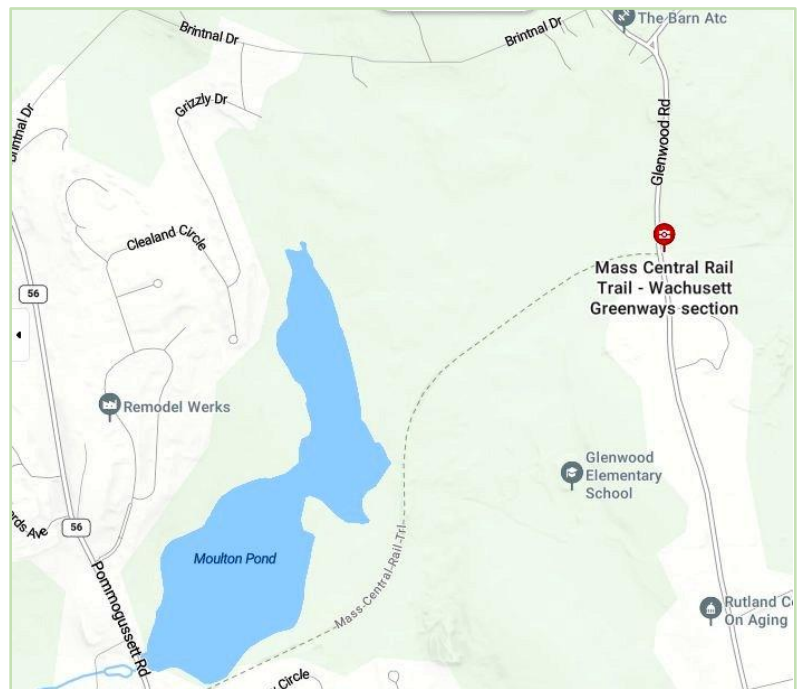
For more information or to register:  
[TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com](mailto:TrailaroundprincetonMA@gmail.com)

## WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB



# SLOW BIRDING WALK MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL Glenwood Road to Moulton Pond Wednesday May 13th 8 a.m. - late morning Leader: Ted Purcell

Migrants are returning, settling into breeding territories, and doing a lot of singing. Join us for an easy walk to take it all in. We'll stop and listen, practice observation without binoculars, and watch for interesting bird behavior. Suitable for beginning birders. We won't ignore any of the emerging wildflowers, insects, or any other signs of spring. Bring cameras, binoculars, and mobile apps that you can't do without (although the emphasis will be on keeping our phones in our pockets).



Registration preferred for weather updates -  
[warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com) – but not necessary.  
Meet at parking area at 102 Glenwood Road

## ATHOL BIRD & NATURE CLUB



In-person or via ZOOM~

### GIANT WASPS

with Paul Sievert

Wednesday May 13<sup>th</sup> 7 p.m.

Millers River Environmental  
Center, 100 Main Street, Athol

Using photos taken in Gill and Montague, Paul will describe the ecology of some of North America's largest wasps: Cicada Killers and Giant Ichneumons. Cicada Killer Wasps provision their offspring with cicadas they capture in treetops, while Giant Ichneumons lay their eggs on larvae of other wasp species found deep within rotting tree trunks. These behemoths of the wasp world play an important role in food webs by controlling insect populations, and serving as prey for insectivorous birds. Come spend an evening with the giants.

### REGISTER FOR ZOOM



*Photo by Bruce Marlin*

FORBUSH BIRD CLUB  
WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

**BIRDING MUDDY BROOK  
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA, HARDWICK**  
Sunday May 17<sup>th</sup> 8 a.m.  
Leader: Wendy Howes

This WMA is being actively managed as part of a large oak-pine restoration effort by Mass Wildlife. The man-made dam that existed here for decades has recently been removed, and restoration/reconstruction of the landscape is in process. Shallow sections of the former waterway channels have drained and now provide mudflat habitat, attracting the occasional shorebird.



Besides passage migrants that may still be moving through the region and common nesting species such as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Eastern Bluebird, we can expect to find Prairie and Blue-winged warbler, Field Sparrow, and Eastern Towhee.  
Note: Ticks are common here.

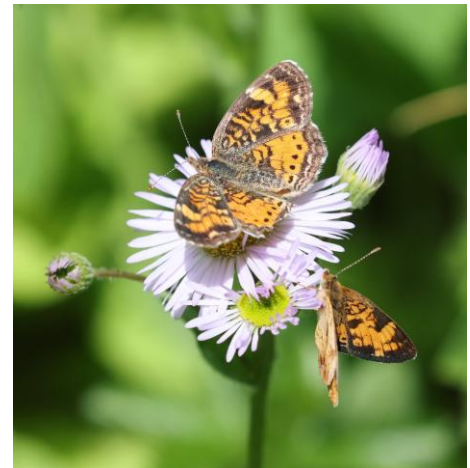
Please pre-register at [waverivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:waverivernatureclub@yahoo.com) for updated meet-up directions and possible changes.

PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!

## HIKE THE RUTLAND-TO-OAKHAM RAIL TRAIL Saturday May 23rd 9 a.m.

One of the favorite sections of the Mass Central Rail Trails, this hike is level and pretty, and it will provide a chance to enjoy some flora along the way. The length will be variable, from 4 - 8 miles towards Barre and back. Hikers may use their discretion to decide how far they wish to go. It's hard to get lost!

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



*Mallard mating commotion, Worcester, April 2026*

*Photo by Betty Jenewin*

WARE RIVER NATURE CLUB

**SLOW BIRDING WALK  
MASS CENTRAL RAIL TRAIL  
MILES ROAD, RUTLAND**

**Tuesday May 26<sup>th</sup> 8 a.m. – late morning**

**Leader: Ted Purcell**



This walk will be similar in spirit to our slow birding/nature walk on May 13<sup>th</sup>, but we can expect changes in both the bird species encountered and nesting cycle behaviors. The appearance of trees and selection of wildflower species will remind us of how quickly the spring season is advancing.

For more information:

[warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com](mailto:warerivernatureclub@yahoo.com)



*Female Brown-headed Cowbird*

*Photo by Betty Jenewin*

## PRINCETON OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE - PRINCETON HIKES!



*Graham Gercken*

**SENIOR HIKE –  
WACHUSETT  
RESERVOIR  
SOUTH SIDE**  
Wednesday  
May 27th  
10 a.m.

This short and slow hike will be two miles round -trip along the south shore of the Reservoir. From the parking area we'll walk over the West Boylston causeway from the Old Stone Church, passing through pine forest. There is one hill to go over, but otherwise the trail is on an easy gravel road with pretty scenery.

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

*Eastern Bluebird nest with first egg  
Rutland 4.24.26  
Photo by Doug Wipf*



FORBUSH BIRD CLUB

## BIRDING BARRE FALLS DAM WARE RIVER WATERSHED IBA

Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> 7:30 a.m. - noon

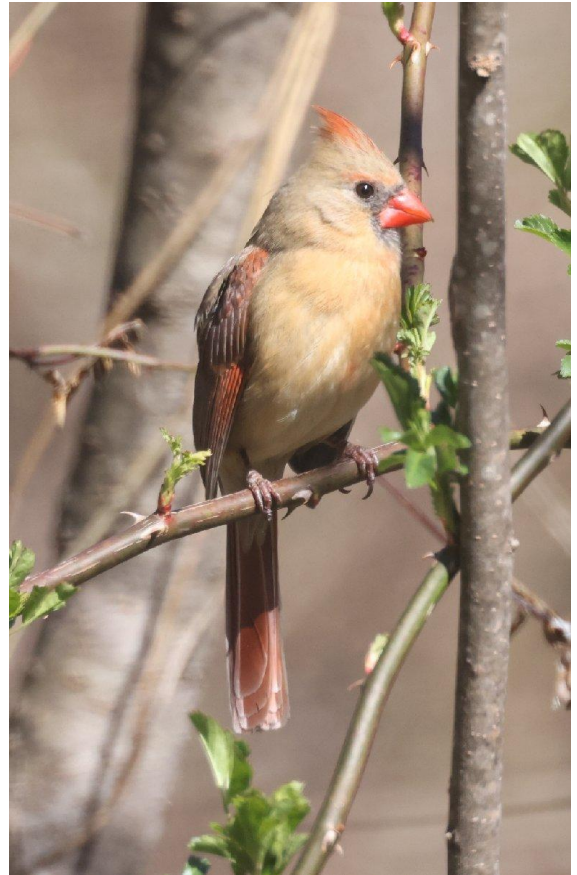
Leader: David Ammerman 508-930-0356 [ammsus@comcast.net](mailto:ammsus@comcast.net)

We will bird the fields from the parking area to Route 62, hike Brigham Road over the Ware River West Branch crossing, and return along the river via Tracy Lane to the parking area (~2.5-mile loop).

Meet at the parking lot above the dam, 1/2 mile south of Route 62 in Hubbardston. Restrooms are available at Barre Falls Picnic Area on Coldbrook Road across the dam.



*Savannah Sparrow Rutland 5.2.26*  
*Photo by Ted Purcell*



*Photo by Alan Rawle*

MASS WILDLIFE

**EVENING WHIP-POOR-WILL WALK  
MUDDY BROOK WMA, HARDWICK**

**Saturday May 30<sup>th</sup> 7:15- 9:15 p.m.**



*Michael King*

Thanks to over a decade of habitat restoration, Muddy Brook WMA is home to one of the largest inland congregations of Eastern Whip-poor-will in the state. Join experts from MassWildlife to experience the iconic whip-poor-will song on this 1.5-mile moonlit walk.

Space is limited, and registration is required. [Click here to register today!](#)



*Promethea moth*

*Photo by Brian Klassanos*

## FORBUSH BIRD CLUB



# BIRDING DCR KRISTOFF FARM, STERLING

Sunday, May 31<sup>st</sup>

7:30 a.m. – late morning

Leaders: Scott Handler & Marion Larson

[srhdvm@verizon.net](mailto:srhdvm@verizon.net)

We'll walk at least 2 miles on the old farm roads of this property looking for birds of the fields and woodlands. We can expect a diverse mix of resident breeders, returning short-distance and neotropical migrants. Blue-winged Warbler and Indigo Bunting are common here. Encountering fifty species for the morning would not be uncommon. Last year, a small group birded until 11:30 a.m., but attendees are welcome to stay as long or as short as they like. RSVP requested so the leaders can communicate regarding any weather-related changes.

Meet at the end of Merrill Road, off Route 140, in Sterling, 1/4 mile north of the Route 90 junction.

