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Mass Audubon  
*Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts*

# CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF MASS AUDUBON

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AUGUST – DECEMBER 2007

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[www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org)



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Mass Audubon works to protect the nature of  
Massachusetts for people and wildlife. Together  
with more than 100,000 members, we care for  
32,000 acres of conservation land, provide  
educational programs for 200,000 children and  
adults annually, and advocate for sound environ-  
mental policies at the local, state, and federal  
levels. Mass Audubon's mission and actions have  
expanded since our beginning in 1896 when  
our founders set out to stop the slaughter of  
birds for use on women's fashions. Today we are  
the largest conservation organization in New  
England. Our statewide network of 44 wildlife  
sanctuaries welcomes visitors of all ages and  
serves as the base for our conservation, education,  
and advocacy work. To support these important  
efforts, call 800-AUDUBON (283-8266) or visit  
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# The Nature of Climate Change

by Chris Leahy, Gerard A. Bertrand Chair of Natural History and Field  
Ornithology at Mass Audubon



With climate warming, the blazing fall foliage of the Berkshire forests may soon disappear.

A syndrome is spreading through the populace as evidence for climate warming becomes irrefutable. It should be called something like Climate Change Avoidance Disorder (CCAD). The afflicted (I have a mild case myself, so I know what I'm talking about) do not deny the existence of climate change or the primary cause of the current spike in global temperature—*us*. They believe Al Gore's movie, *An Inconvenient Truth*, gets it basically right: If we proceed on our present course, the planet's mean temperature may rise 6 to 12 degrees over the next century, Boston's climate will become like Richmond's or maybe Atlanta's, mean sea level will rise a couple of feet, 25-year floods could happen every 4 years, and the last of the polar bears will die in zoos.

The emergence of CCAD relates to many of the phenomena that we are supposed to be facing—like the shift in the North Atlantic oscillation that could bring on a sudden ice age—and the fact that these are way beyond mere problems to be solved. They are imponderables before which we feel totally helpless. When these nightmares are mentioned, CCAD sufferers nod gravely, but a little voice in their head says: “Think about this tomorrow...or maybe never.”

Effective treatment for the condition is to ignore the apocalyptic dimension of climate change and concentrate, as a naturalist might, on well-documented scenarios at the species and natural-community level that scientists are pretty sure are going to happen. And, while the following scenes are not exactly comforting, they allow us to hope that if we get smart fast and work hard we can make a difference.

**Forests on the March.** It won't be like Tolkien's *Ents*, trees pulling up their roots and trudging north, but the effect will be much the same. As the climate warms, it is expected that the range of forest types will shift 100 to 300 miles to the north by 2100. This means that northern hardwood (maple-beech-birch) forest—the most brilliant expression of our fall foliage displays and the source of maple sugar—will likely disappear from most of New England by century's end. The spruce-fir forest will also become extinct, and we will lose many other species, such as the blackpoll warbler (pictured), which breeds only in spruce-fir forest. And Massachusetts will lose its special ecological position as the place where northern and southern forest types and their inhabitants meet.

**Drowning Salt Marshes.** As sea level rises and severe storm events increase, the barrier beaches of which the Commonwealth has so many spectacular examples will begin to erode and eventually to breach. Initially, this might even improve habitat for the threatened piping plover and other plants and animals of the sands. But ultimately the protective dunes will disappear, leaving the salt marshes to be flooded and broken up by a higher, more violent ocean. Locally, broad salt grass prairies such as the North Shore's Great Marsh will disappear along with the organisms that depend on them.

**Avian Polar Bears.** Polar bears have justly become the poster-quadrupeds of global warming. Since they are dependant on ice fields for hunting their food, their plight as the ice melts is all too obvious and poignant. But many arctic birds face a similar fate as their tundra habitat is shrinking northward until none will remain. Many of the shorebirds that enliven our coasts in summer are already suffering from development and pollution of key feeding grounds along their trans-hemispherical migration routes, and a warming climate is likely to add to

these burdens. Scientists predict over a 50 percent decline in the area of Delaware Bay's mudflats as sea level rises. Red knots and other arctic-nesting sandpiper species depend on the spring spawn of horseshoe crabs on their way north, and the spawn depends on the mudflats. Some researchers predict that red knots have



Rapid climate warming is a major threat to people, land conservation, and wildlife in the Commonwealth and on the planet. Mass Audubon is leading by example to curb the effects of climate change by reducing energy consumption, increasing energy efficiency, and supporting renewable energy.

only one more decade on the planet.

**Fish Tales.** The distribution of both freshwater and saltwater fish species (and other aquatic organisms) is closely tied to water temperature. If these waters warm rapidly the potential for significant changes is great. The Atlantic salmon that historically spawned in the Connecticut River were at the southern end of the species' range and may have been genetically adapted to warmer water temperatures. Is this why fisheries managers have had so much trouble reintroducing salmon from northern stocks to the river? If so, climate warming is not going to help.

**Unwelcome Guests.** Cold temperature is a natural limiting factor and acts as a barrier to the spread of many species including disease organisms and invasive species. The introduced aphid called the woolly hemlock adelgid is decimating eastern hemlock stands

except in the northernmost reaches of the hemlock's range, which is apparently too cold in winter for the adelgid to survive. As the climate warms this will change. Warmer seasons are already occurring in Massachusetts and 10 to 30 percent increases in precipitation are forecast. The abundance and diversity of unwelcome immigrants such as ticks, cockroaches, red tide, and mosquitoes will increase, along with the diseases they carry.

Human responsibility for climate change deniers are fond of telling us that "weather patterns have always changed" and therefore the present warming trend is just "business as usual" on a planet where the atmosphere fluctuates constantly. What it leaves out is that we're approaching global temperatures that haven't existed on earth for at least 400,000 years and that, as far as we can tell, things have never changed this *fast* before. This will have myriad unforeseen consequences as thousands of species struggle to adapt. A 2004 report in *Nature* predicts that 15 to 37 percent of species in habitats that are representative of 20 percent of the earth's land surface will be "committed to extinction" by 2050.

What perhaps makes us most nervous is an immense uncertainty about how our own species will fare as the century progresses and the temperature rises. One of the most worrisome chapters in the earth's history is unfolding before our eyes. We need to brace ourselves for "interesting times" and put serious effort into curbing the human excesses that started things cooking in the first place.

Visit our Climate Change and Energy website for an interview with Chris Leahy, more on Mass Audubon's initiatives in response to global warming, and tips on what you can do to mitigate the effects of climate change.

[www.massaudubon.org/cleanenergy](http://www.massaudubon.org/cleanenergy)

## Fall Birding

### September Birding

Saturday mornings September 8–29: 8–9:30 am  
ARCADIA, Easthampton, 413-584-3009  
arcadia@massaudubon.org

### Birds of Massachusetts

Tuesdays from

September 11–November 13: 7–9 pm  
BROAD MEADOW BROOK,  
Worcester, 508-753-6087  
bmbrook@massaudubon.org

### Hawk Watch

#### at Mount Monadnock

September 29: please call for details  
BROADMOOR, Natick, 508-655-2296  
broadmoorprograms@massaudubon.org

### Block Island Birding Weekend

September 14–16

DRUMLIN FARM, Lincoln, 781-259-2200  
drumlinfarm@massaudubon.org

### Broadwings to Sanderlings

September 22: 8 am–4 pm

IPSWICH RIVER, Topsfield, 978-887-9264  
ipswichriver@massaudubon.org

### Wednesday Morning Birding

Every Wednesday: 9:30 am–12:30 pm

JOPPA FLATS, Newburyport, 978-462-9998  
joppaflats@massaudubon.org

### Surfbirds and Surfmen of Duxbury Beach

November 10: 9 am–12 pm

NORTH RIVER, Marshfield, 781-837-9400  
southshore@massaudubon.org

### Bird Walk at Canoe Meadows

Friday mornings September 7–28: 8–10 am

PLEASANT VALLEY, Lenox, 413-637-0320  
berkshires@massaudubon.org

### South Beach

#### Shorebird Migration

September 9: 5–6:30 pm

STONY BROOK, Norfolk, 508-528-3140  
stonybrook@massaudubon.org

### Hawk Migration

#### Homeschool Program

September 14: 1–3 pm

WACHUSETT MEADOW, Princeton, 978-464-2712  
wachusett@massaudubon.org

### Birding and Natural History on Cape Cod with Elderhostel

September 23–28 or September 30–October 5

WELLFLEET BAY, Wellfleet, 508-349-2615  
wellfleet@massaudubon.org



# BIRDING Beyond the Backyard

## American Oystercatcher—A Comeback Story

by Becky Harris, Director, Coastal Waterbird Program

Twenty years ago only a few dozen pairs of American oystercatchers were nesting in Massachusetts. Although the species was known to inhabit Massachusetts in the 1700s, by the 19th century it was all but extirpated by market gunners. Not until 1969 did the species breed again in Massachusetts, when a pair nested on Martha's Vineyard. The oystercatcher population in the state began attracting more public attention about five years ago, when the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program initiated a concerted effort to compile reports of breeding oystercatchers from partners such as Mass Audubon's Coastal Waterbird Program.

**On the Road to Recovery** Fortunately, because of the coastal habitat protection afforded by the threatened status of piping plovers, oystercatchers, which share somewhat similar nesting habitat, have come along for the ride in a comeback. American oystercatchers also continue to undergo a recovery of their historic range, and part of their resurgence in the state (now close to 280 pairs) is almost certainly due to the northward spread of the Atlantic coast population.

Although, climate change has been acknowledged as one of the contributors to the northern range expansion of numerous bird populations in recent decades, in the case of the American oystercatcher it's possible that improved coastal management and complete protection from hunting have also aided the recovery of this species. Currently, the species seems very particular in its choice of nesting beaches in the state: several Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Buzzards Bay beaches consistently support nesting birds, as do several Boston Harbor Islands. Curiously, seemingly suitable South Shore and North Shore beaches apparently hold little appeal to breeding



oystercatchers, and to date the species has nested at only one Massachusetts locality north of Boston Harbor.

**Catching Oysters** Food sources are likely to influence oystercatchers' nest site selection because they are very selective in their choice of food, typically preferring to consume oysters and

other mollusks. Imagine the strength required from those bright red-orange bills to open shellfish. Oystercatchers open mussel shells with their beak by hammering the shell on one side or the other. Adults feed their young for months; they are not ready to breed until they are at least 3 to 4 years old.

Oystercatchers will go to great lengths to protect their eggs and young. Last year, our staff on South Beach in Chatham observed incredibly attentive actions by an oystercatcher parent. A high tide washed over the nest, causing three eggs to wash out of the nest (a small depression in the sand), ending up 20 to 30 feet away. Over the course of an hour, one of the adults proceeded to carefully roll the eggs, one by one, back into the nest.

**Time Will Tell** Oystercatchers deserve and require our attention. With dwindling numbers of undisturbed beaches and an increase in the concentrations of local predator populations, oystercatchers are living in a difficult and unpredictable world.

Research on oystercatcher populations, both locally and regionally, has increased in recent years. There is an Atlantic coast-wide banding and resighting effort, with unique colors used to identify birds from each state: Massachusetts oystercatchers have yellow bands with black lettering (alpha-numeric combinations). Watch for banded oystercatchers, and report any sightings, the date, and the location to the American Oystercatcher Working Group (Sean Murphy at [spmurp@yahoo.com](mailto:spmurp@yahoo.com)) to contribute to the understanding and protection of this magnificent yet vulnerable species.

For a full listing of Mass Audubon programs and events, visit our online catalog.

[www.massaudubon.org/programs](http://www.massaudubon.org/programs)

When you were young did you enjoy clamoring up a tree house ladder with your friends to disappear from the adults and peer through binoculars to see what birds you could find in the old oak? After a while you and your friends coined a name for yourselves and became a club.

This is exactly what the Blue Hills Trailside Museum After School Nature Club in Milton and Drumlin Farm Young Birders Club in Lincoln offer young members—an opportunity to meet kids close in age who share common interests and to learn about birds and other wildlife.

Christian Miller, 9, who loves being outdoors and enjoys reading about local birds, has found that the After School Nature Club has opened a whole new world for him.

He meets with kids ranging in age from 6 to 11 years old after school each Thursday afternoon to participate in nature arts and crafts, scavenger hunts, mystery animal games, bird monitoring, and more.

“When he grows up he wants to be a naturalist, and that is in great part due to this nature club,” said Maria Miller, his mother.

The members also participate in eBirding ([www.massaudubon.org/ebird](http://www.massaudubon.org/ebird)), Mass Audubon’s online resource to record, archive, and share observations



about species of birds. They take to the trails and locate Baltimore oriole nests, among other sightings, recording and submitting the data.

At Drumlin Farm, the Young Birders Club started last September. It was the inspiration of Strickland Wheelock, an avid bird enthusiast who has led many Mass Audubon birding trips for the past 20 years.

“I thought there were kids out there who would benefit from the support of a group to bird and learn together,” said Wheelock. “The key was to make this club well organized, with good speakers, and see where the combination would take us.”

For Anna Stunkel, 16, it’s encouraging to know there is a club that welcomes her love of nature and nourishes her interest in birding. “I like that I’m with kids my age having fun learning about birds,” she said.

The group, with members ranging from 11 to 18 years old, has spread its wings. And with their avian abilities the Young Birders Club participated this year in Mass Audubon’s annual

Bird-a-thon event. The enthusiastic group migrated to Plum Island and other locales in Newburyport, spotting more than 100 species and raising almost \$2,500 dollars for the annual fundraising event.

“I’m very proud of all the young birders; they have made amazing progress in their birding skills and teamwork,” said Wheelock.

For kids to feel they are part of something that is exclusive to their age group and supports their passion for wildlife is important. Wheelock remembers at 5 years old being out in nature and identifying the rust color underneath a catbird’s tail. In his excitement he ran all the way across town to share the news with his grandmother.

“My family supported my love for birding at a young age,” said Wheelock. “That’s why I want to help create a foundation for other children.”

*For more information or to join:*

*Young Birders Club in Lincoln:  
Becky Gilles  
bgilles@massaudubon.org  
781-259-2223*

*After School Nature Club in Milton:  
Stephen Hutchinson  
shutchinson@massaudubon.org  
617-333-0690, ext. 227*

▲ Gina King



Young Birders Club with Strickland Wheelock during a birding adventure at Drumlin Farm

### Four keys to bird identification

- 1 Place the bird into a **family**—is it an owl, shorebird, raptor, etc?
- 2 Study the **field marks**—shape, color, and size
- 3 Study the **behavior**—is it wagging its tail feathers, looking for insects, or diving under the water?
- 4 Listen to the **birdsong** and observe **habitat**—this can help you to distinguish species

# Help Shape the Future of *Your* Community

“Shaping the Future is an awesome tool. It puts things in perspective for the average person to understand and helps as a valuable guide in maintaining the well-being of a community.”

— Donna Brownell, President,  
Watchdogs for an Environmentally  
Safe Town (WEST).

by E. Heidi Ricci, Senior Policy Analyst

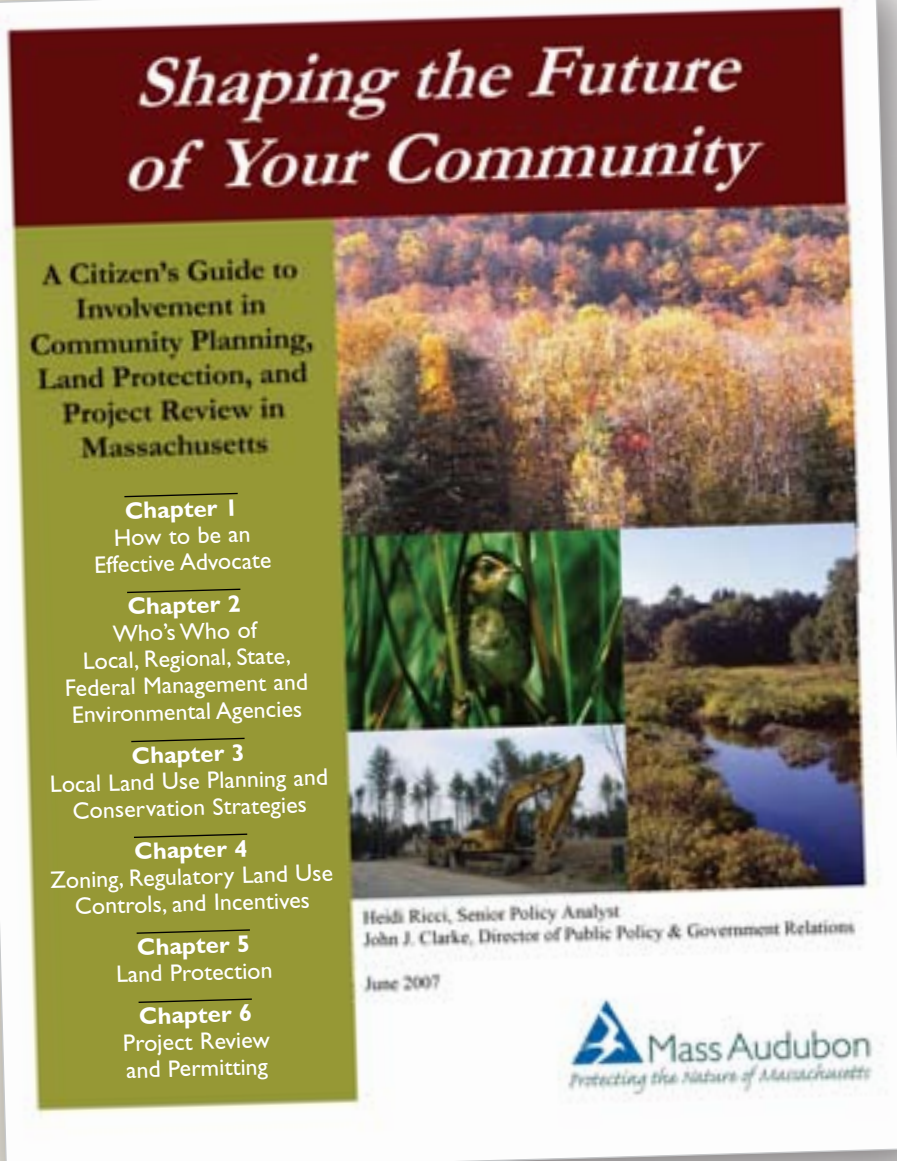
Mass Audubon’s *Losing Ground* series of reports documented the harsh reality that more land has been developed in Massachusetts in the last 40 years than in the previous 340 years. This trend shows no signs of slowing. Sprawling land development patterns hurt people and wildlife by fragmenting habitat, stressing streams and water supplies, and imposing unsustainable costs on municipal services. Solutions are available, but laws and agencies can be confusing and intimidating. Members and citizens contact us every day asking for help. Now, help has arrived!

*Shaping the Future of Your Community: A Citizen’s Guide to Involvement in Community Planning, Land Protection, and Project Review in Massachusetts* is an updated step-by-step guide to help Mass Audubon members and citizens throughout Massachusetts make a real difference in land development patterns and trends.

Readers will discover, in easy-to-understand language, the many ways that individuals can engage effectively in their local government and work with others in their community and beyond to secure habitat, water supplies, and other resources while providing for housing and jobs in a sustainable manner.

This 65-page guidebook (previous version 1998) contains new information on innovative approaches to zoning and a section on land protection techniques. Citizens will also receive the tools needed to update and implement local plans and regulations, protect priority lands, and offer incentives for well-planned growth. *Shaping the Future of Your Community* also provides suggestions for minimizing the impacts of a development project that has already been proposed. And, there are many new resources, including case studies, a summary chart of federal, state, and local environmental and land use laws and regulations, useful contacts, and more than 50 state, regional, and federal websites.

For more information, send e-mail inquiries to [advocacy@massaudubon.org](mailto:advocacy@massaudubon.org), or call 781-259-2171.



Download a free copy of *Shaping the Future of Your Community* at

[www.massaudubon.org/shapingthefuture](http://www.massaudubon.org/shapingthefuture)

**Red-cracked Bolete**  
(*Boletus chrysenteron*)



This small mushroom (1¼ to ¾ inches wide) is one of the first to appear in summer and fall, under deciduous trees, especially oak, and along roadsides and mossy banks.

# EXPLORING THE NATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS

by Lucy Gertz, Visitor Experience Coordinator



**Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*)**

In their expandable cheeks, chipmunks can carry up to two tablespoonsful of small seeds. This allows them to take fewer trips out of their burrows, minimizing their encounters with predators.

## The Forest Floor



**Stone Walls**

Stone walls provided farmers with a place to put all those “New England potatoes,” and they now provide shelter for snakes, insects, spiders, and small mammals to feed, rest, den, and overwinter in the crevices.

There are rich sights and sounds to savor in a woodland—seasonally dressed trees and shrubs, ephemeral wildflowers and mushrooms poking through the ground, birds singing from their favorite feeding and resting spots, squirrels and chipmunks scurrying about. If you look or listen longer, you might spot a salamander traversing a mossy log, or glimpse an owl perched in a patch of sunlight. And if you look more closely, you may see things you never noticed before.

Some of the most interesting dynamics of a forest are happening right at

your feet. Stone walls, built by the backbreaking efforts of farmers, now crisscross the woods. These walls provide us with a reminder of past land uses, and they offer shelter to an assortment of woodland animals.

Under a rotting log and beneath fallen leaves, recyclers are busy at work. Beetles, pill bugs, earthworms, microscopic bacteria, and fungi consume and digest organic matter. They break down the decaying material repeatedly, leaving behind rich humus and returning nutrients to the soil. Salamanders, toads, snakes, and spiders occupy these microhabitats, opportunistically feeding on worms and other invertebrates.

Dotting the moist, shady floor, fungi sprout when conditions are right. The familiar mushrooms we see are the fruiting bodies of an underground system of hairlike mycelia, connected to a world of bacteria and microfungi hard at work and mostly invisible to us.

On your next woodland walk, listen to a woodpecker tapping a distant tree trunk or watch crows mobbing a hawk, but remember to also look down and admire the forest floor, its microhabitats and inhabitants, and those less visible recyclers that help keep the forest healthy.



**Chicken of the Woods**  
(*Laetiporus sulphureus*)

This common mushroom sprouts on stumps, trunks, and logs, growing in large clusters of 5 to 50 shelves, with each 10- to 30-inch shelf weighing up to one pound.

**Nooks**

Hollow trees offer shelter to bats, owls, and larger woodland mammals. Shelter from wind and precipitation are essential for maintaining healthy body temperatures.



Illustrations excluding chipmunk by Kathleen Hogan Knisely • Amanda Grondin – chipmunk / Amanda is a featured new artist. She is a MassArt (Boston) graduate with a major in illustration.

## Visit a Mass Audubon sanctuary near you to discover the forest floor.

**Broadmoor, Natick**—There are a wide range of species living in and around the forests from the red-backed salamander, a lungless amphibian, to mammals and birds. In the fall, chipmunks are gathering and storing food. Beavers are busy making upgrades to their lodges and dams; see their handiwork at the forest edge or swimming in the water. In the winter there are signs of animals including tracks of mink, deer, foxes, and more. Listen for our resident screech-owls and great horned owls.

**Drumlin Farm, Lincoln**—On the Forest Discovery Trail you can build a mouse house, crawl through a groundhog’s tunnel, or search under cover boards for forest-floor animals.

Discover leaves, pinecones, and rocks to place in treasure boxes along the trail. At the Drumlin Underground exhibit, you can see a skunk, rabbit, fox, woodchuck, and mouse on display or in their underground burrows.

**Moose Hill, Sharon**—Along Billings Loop, you can see lots of fall mushrooms and wildflowers. Look for turkeytail and other shelf fungi on the way to the swamp. The loop goes through field, forest, and wetland habitat, with lots of ferns, asters, and fall colors along the way.

**Pleasant Valley, Lenox**—Fall may be the best season to view the activities of beavers at Pleasant Valley as they work to fortify their lodges for the

coming winter and cut sufficient plants to store food for winter use.

**Wachusett Meadow, Princeton**—Rocky mats of sphagnum moss in the wet woods of Hemlock Seep Trail offer refuge to four-toed salamanders, along with goldthread, wood frogs, and the most diverse fungi on the sanctuary. Look for luminescent panellus, witches butter, and lemon drops on fallen logs.

For more information, visit our website.

[www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org)



**Help ensure that  
Massachusetts wildlife  
has a home**

**Your real estate can  
make a real difference**

As someone who cares about nature, you're aware of ongoing pressures that negatively affect our wild places. Land development is a particularly serious concern. In 20 years the window for meaningful land protection in Massachusetts will close forever.

Through our **House to Habitat** program, you can make a real difference. By donating your residential, commercial, or industrial real estate, you can help to ensure that future generations will enjoy wild Massachusetts as much as you do.

For more information, please contact:  
Betsy Watson • Director of Planned Giving • 781-259-2131  
bwatson@massaudubon.org



# Beyond Camp

**Earth, sky, water, plants, animals...  
Discover it all at camp!**

Natural adventures that await at  
Mass Audubon's 16 day camp programs

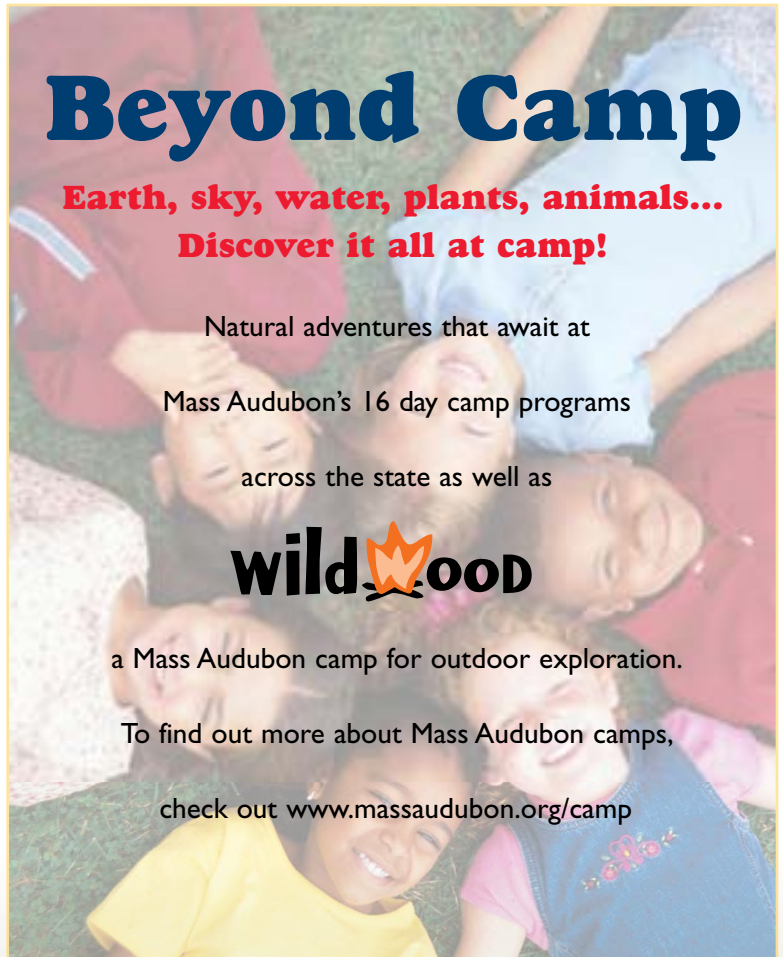
across the state as well as



a Mass Audubon camp for outdoor exploration.

To find out more about Mass Audubon camps,

check out [www.massaudubon.org/camp](http://www.massaudubon.org/camp)



## FALL SAMPLER

A snapshot of programs from among hundreds that Mass Audubon offers this season at our wildlife sanctuaries

### Reading the Forested Landscape with Tom Wessels

November 3: 10 am-3 pm  
ARCADIA, Easthampton, 413-584-3009

### Fest O' Fall

October 6-8: 10 am-4:30 pm  
BLUE HILLS TRAILSIDE MUSEUM,  
Milton, 617-333-0690

### Rappin' with Raptors

September 29: 1-4 pm  
BOSTON NATURE CENTER,  
Mattapan, 617-983-8500

### Monarch Watch

September 8: 1-3 pm  
BROAD MEADOW BROOK,  
Worcester, 508-753-6087

### Farm Family

Thursdays, September 27-November 14:  
3:30-5 pm  
DRUMLIN FARM, Lincoln, 781-259-2200

### Moonrise Meander

September 26: 6:15 pm & October 26: 5:30 pm  
FELIX NECK, Edgartown, 508-627-4850

### Big Woods Hike

November 18: Every 15 minutes  
from noon-1:30 pm  
IPSWICH RIVER, Topsfield, 978-887-9264

### Pelagic Birding

September 9: 8 am-6 pm  
JOPPA FLATS, Newburyport, 978-462-9998

### Cuttyhunk and Elizabeth Islands Tours

September 2, 16, 23, & 30: 9-5 pm  
LONG PASTURE, Cummaquid, 508-362-7475

### Pumpkin Carving

October 25: 6-8:30 pm  
MOOSE HILL, Sharon, 781-784-5691

### Spooktacular 2007

October 20: 6-9 pm  
OAK KNOLL, Attleboro, 508-223-3060

### Berkshire Summit Hike Series

September 8: 9 am-1 pm  
PLEASANT VALLEY, Lenox, 413-637-0320

### Birding Block Island Weekend

September 14-16: overnight trip  
SOUTH SHORE, Marshfield, 781-837-9400

### Autumn Craft Fair

October 13: 10 am-4 pm  
STONY BROOK, Norfolk, 508-528-3140

### Family Art and Nature Studio

September 9: 2-4 pm  
VISUAL ARTS CENTER, Canton, 781-821-8853

### ABCs of Fungi

September 22: 9 am-noon  
WACHUSETT MEADOW, Princeton, 978-464-2712

### Digital Photography in Nature

October 13 & 14: overnight program  
WELLFLEET BAY, Wellfleet, 508-349-2615

For a full listing of Mass Audubon programs  
and events, visit our online catalog at

[www.massaudubon.org/programs](http://www.massaudubon.org/programs)

# Where the **Wild Things** Will Remain

## A Sneak Preview of Mass Audubon's New Wildlife Sanctuary in Groton

by Kathy Sferra, Director of Stewardship

If good things come to those who wait, a truly extraordinary thing is unfolding on the Groton/Ayer line, with the creation of Mass Audubon's new Rocky Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. This 400-acre gem features rugged topography and rocky outcroppings; diverse habitats including stunning red maple swamps, vernal pools, and pond shores; and a host of species, both rare and common.

Given what we now know about the property, it's hard to believe that 25 years ago an inventory of this land found "nothing remarkable." The sanctuary lies within a state-designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern and has been designated BioMap Core Habitat by the state's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program. Moose, beavers, and porcupines live on the property. And an unusually large population of the Allegheny mound ant (*Formica exsectoides*) has attracted the attention of noted naturalist E.O. Wilson.

More than two decades ago, this rough and rocky terrain was identified as a potential sanctuary by Mass Audubon. But without the collaboration of the landowners, town officials, and residents; the Groton Conservation Trust and Nashua River Watershed Association; and others, creation of this new sanctuary would not have come



Vernal pools at Rocky Hill provide habitat for several rare species of turtles and amphibians.

to fruition. Keeping the faith through more than ten years of permitting and approvals, local visionaries Bob Pine, Bob Collins, and Arthur Blackman (see sidebar) helped to build community consensus. This led to a unanimous town meeting vote supporting a mixed-use development on a portion of the land along Route 119 in Groton while allowing the most critical land to be preserved.

As part of the process, landowners David Moulton and Bob Lacombe generously agreed to donate the 400 acres to Mass Audubon with a conservation restriction held by the Groton Conservation Commission. An additional 125 acres of adjacent

land on Snake Hill is being donated to the Ayer Conservation Commission. Combined with already protected land, there are now more than 750 acres of contiguous protected land at Rocky Hill.

Please be patient while we prepare Rocky Hill for public visitation. After working for so long to acquire this special property, we need to carefully inventory the property and lay out trails, put up signage, and create parking. This fall, we'll celebrate the long-awaited sanctuary with a sneak-preview hike. If you're interested in receiving updates or would like to help us get the Rocky Hill sanctuary off to a great start with financial support, please contact us at [rockyhill@massaudubon.org](mailto:rockyhill@massaudubon.org).



### Arthur Blackman— a man with a vision

Like Max in *Where the Wild Things Are*, Arthur Blackman used to sit on his second-floor deck, gazing out,

wondering what unknown creatures inhabited the dark woods of Rocky Hill. "No lights, no roads, no houses, nothing except imaginary creatures like those of Maurice Sendak," Blackman says. "I didn't want the unknown, the mystery, to end. And after story time with my children, I'd sometimes have my own story time looking out into that dark mysterious world." Decades later as Blackman advocated for creation of the Rocky Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, he had an opportunity to explore it with naturalists E.O. Wilson, Peter Alden, and Mass Audubon's Ron Wolanin. "They showed me a place even more magical than Sendak's, a real world almost untouched by man, with living creatures and land formations I could have never imagined," Blackman says. "It's a world that now awaits future generations at Rocky Hill." Blackman's advice: "Have a dream and hold onto it, be stubborn, keep it alive; you never know when it will come true."

Ospreys are frequently seen around Long Pond, part of the Rocky Hill property.

# LIFE LESSONS COME NATURALLY



dismayed to discover that science was not included in the curriculum. Her solution? She went knocking on doors of local businesses and didn't stop until she raised enough money to hire a Mass Audubon educator to teach environmental science to fifth-grade students.

Such a "can-do" attitude is typical of the lifelong educator. "Broad Meadow Brook Wildlife Sanctuary simply would *not* exist without Barbara Fargo," says Deb Cary, director of Mass Audubon's Central Sanctuaries. "She's been an active board member since we first opened a small advocacy office in Worcester in 1985. She also cochaired the original campaign to establish the

active lifestyle, and be open to exciting new learning adventures. "Just one positive outdoor experience can have a lasting impression—especially if it's encouraged," she says. "Kids need to see success in their lives, there's so much negativity and violence. How will children ever contribute to society if they're grounded in fear?"

Ultimately, being outside can establish an environmental ethic in young people, which Fargo believes is important to helping them understand their role in the ecosystem. And that prime lesson, passed down from her father, has established deep roots within her own family tree. Two of her sons have pursued environmental

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"Just one positive outdoor experience can have a lasting impression—especially if it's encouraged." —Barbara Fargo

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**B**arbara Fargo was destined to be an environmental educator. She credits her father, William Elliott, who was head of the Science Department at St. George's School in Middletown, Rhode Island, for sparking her interest in the natural world at a young age. "My father didn't let us kids be afraid of snakes, lightning, or anything else for that matter," she declares. "He always explained how different natural phenomena and organisms—including humans—fit into the overall scheme of Earth."

Fargo took her father's lessons to heart. She went on to graduate from Wheelock College, in Boston, in 1952 and brought her passion for the environment to hundreds of students throughout a teaching career that spanned more than two decades. As one example, after accepting a part-time position at an elementary school in Grafton during the 1970s, she was

sanctuary and then worked on our capital campaign in 1996, gathering community support all along the way." More recently, this Mass Audubon honorary director, council member, and generous donor has put her skills and enthusiasm to use raising significant funds for three critical land protection projects in the greater Worcester area.

Organizing community participation is key for this energetic woman. In addition to supporting Mass Audubon, Fargo is a trustee of Wheelock College and a member of the board of overseers at the Joslin Diabetes Center. The common thread among her volunteer work? Education, with a focus on promoting healthy and responsible living among young people.

She encourages children to get outside to explore nature, lead an

careers, and one granddaughter, Taylor, is studying environmental science at St. Lawrence University.

When asked what advice she'd give to others, Fargo says without hesitation, "Life can be dreary at times so have a sense of humor." Whether having fun (she wore a blue-spotted salamander costume to Broad Meadow Brook's Wild Things Swing 15th anniversary celebration party this past spring) or hard at work washing windows at Broad Meadow Brook's nature center, good cheer flows easily from her contagious smile. "Every time I walk out of the door, I meet someone who I can connect with. And although I can't make a difference in every single life I touch, I sure can try."

▲ Jan Kruse

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# The Natural Inquirer

## Q: I saw what looked like a black bear cub in my tree, but I live in the suburbs—what could it be?

**A:** You probably saw a fisher, the second largest member of the weasel family in Massachusetts. Its dark brown, thick, and glossy coat slightly resembles a bear cub, especially when it's in a tree.

On the ground, fishers have a long, low profile, like that of other species in the weasel family such as mink and ermine. They average 32 to 40 inches in length, including a long (12- to 16-inch) tail, with the males considerably larger than the females. Despite their short legs, fishers are very fast and agile, and their retractable claws make them excellent climbers.

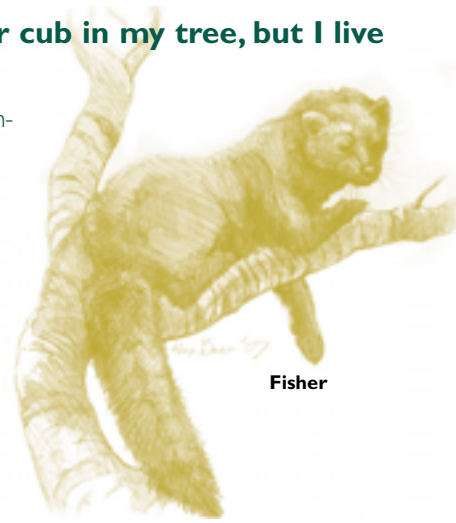
Fishers hunt both day and night. Mainly, their diet consists of rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, mice, reptiles and amphibians, and insects. They also eat berries.

Fisher sightings in suburbia were rare, but since 2000 reports of these solitary mammals have significantly increased. Why? A major factor is reforestation of land previously cleared for farming. Biologists had assumed that fishers could only survive in large, contiguous forests of mixed conifers and hardwoods. However, fishers have begun to occupy second-growth forests and even suburban woodlots. This increase suggests that the habitat requirements of fishers are more flexible than was previously thought.

*Natural fact:* Despite their name fishers do not catch fish. However, they will eat dead fish found on the shore of a lake or pond.

*The Natural Inquirer would like to hear from you; e-mail [inquirer@massaudubon.org](mailto:inquirer@massaudubon.org).*

*Illustration: Alex Baer is a featured new artist. He is a MassArt (Boston) graduate with a major in illustration.*



Fisher



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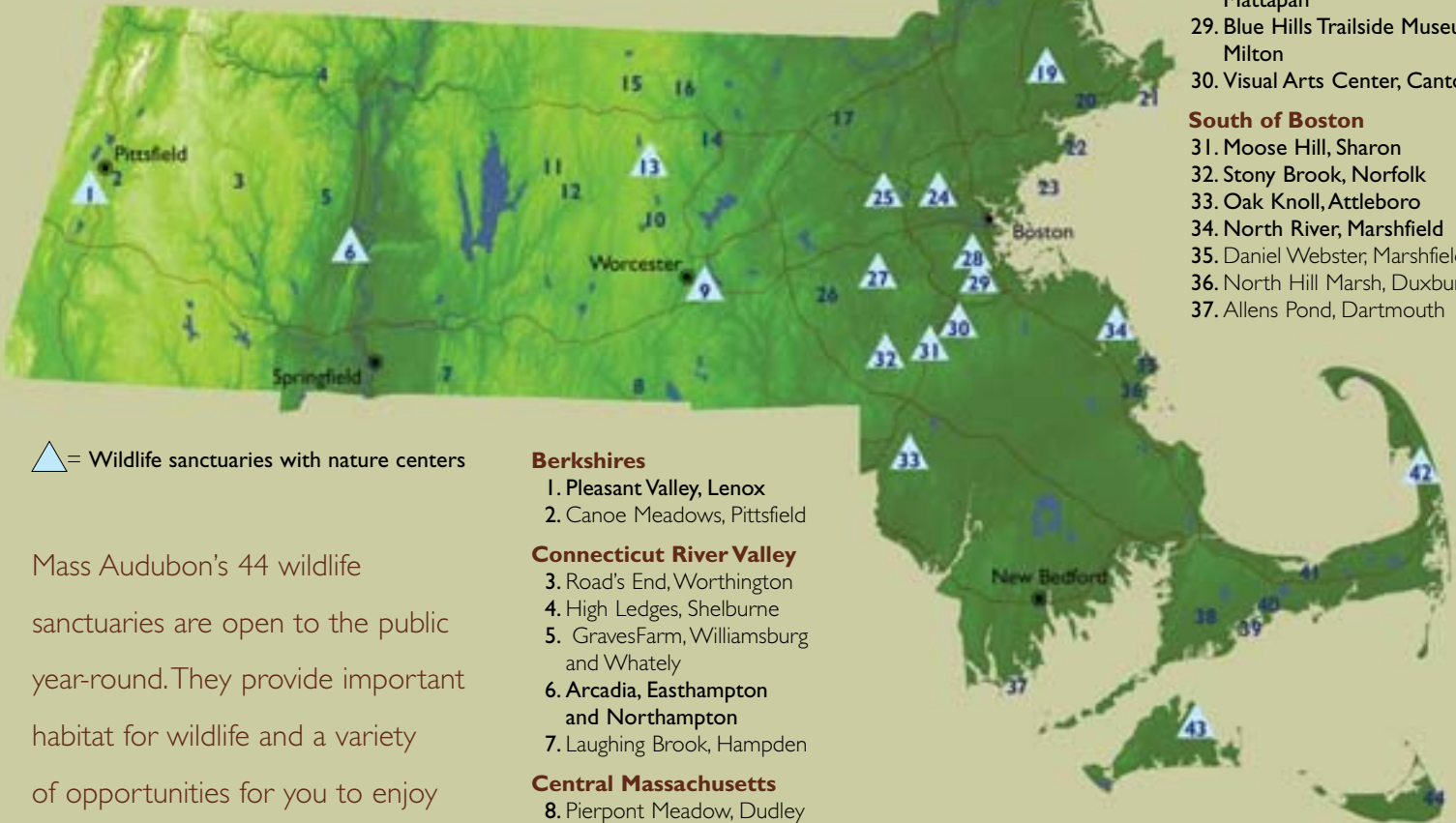
Costa Rica with Christine Turnbull  
February 29–March 9

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- 32. Stony Brook, Norfolk
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- 34. North River, Marshfield
- 35. Daniel Webster, Marshfield
- 36. North Hill Marsh, Duxbury
- 37. Allens Pond, Dartmouth

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- 5. Graves Farm, Williamsburg and Whately
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- 11. Rutland Brook, Petersham
- 12. Cook's Canyon, Barre
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- 14. Lincoln Woods, Leominster
- 15. Lake Wampanoag, Gardner
- 16. Flat Rock, Fitchburg

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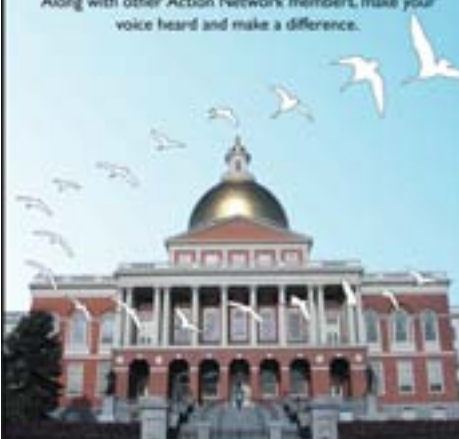
- 17. Nashoba Brook, Westford
- 18. Joppa Flats, Newburyport
- 19. Ipswich River, Topsfield
- 20. Endicott, Wenham
- 21. Eastern Point, Gloucester
- 22. Marblehead Neck, Marblehead
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- 38. Ashumet Holly, Falmouth
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