



A NEWSLETTER

from the

CAPE ANN VERNAL POND TEAM

Winter/Spring 2004
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~This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Nelson Buck Robinson 1939-2003~

THE CAVPT IS A HOPELESSLY NON-PROFIT VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO VERNAL POND CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION SINCE 1990

Of Broad-winged Hawks and Vernal Ponds

By Ben Flemer

As April approaches, the Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team members eagerly await the activities that occur every spring around the vernal ponds of Massachusetts and the rest of New England. As we walk through the woods to our favorite vernal pond sites, our eyes are trained towards the ground searching for movement of frogs and salamanders. However, there is another animal perched near by and if we did not turn our eyes upward to the lower branches of a nearby Red Oak, we might miss the Broad-winged Hawk, which is in search of the same animals that we have come to observe. Although they do not depend on vernal ponds exclusively, these birds benefit from the ponds' productivity in a number of interesting ways.

Broad-winged Hawks are seasonal migrants and are one of five raptors that completely vacate their breeding range each fall for a winter range in Central and South America. They take a variety of prey including small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects and fledgling birds with the first three items making up the majority of their diet. Since amphibians and reptiles are inactive during the winter months in our region, and because they represent important food sources, this hawk's spring migration coincides with the emergence of the amphibians and reptiles. Among the migratory birds of prey, they are the first to leave in the fall and the last to arrive in the spring. Broad-winged hawk migration occurs between March and May, but the majority usually concentrates around a two-week window during the second half of April.

With a total length of just 16 inches, the Broad-winged Hawk is the second smallest raptor in the genus *Buteo*. They are secretive creatures of the forest and if not for

their distinctively piercing call we might walk right by with out noticing them. It breeds in the eastern half of the United States in deciduous and evergreen forests. Nest sites are selected based on a variety of criteria, but all include a close proximity to a wetland area of some kind. Because they attract such a wide variety of animals, vernal ponds provide productive hunting habitat for these hawks. When hunting, they use a "sit and wait" technique where the hawk will perch on a low canopy limb and wait quietly for prey to pass nearby.

Studies conducted in New York State found that amphibians and reptiles made up between 28 and 45 percent of nestling diet. A similar study in the southern United States showed that the hawks had a higher hunting success rate with reptiles and amphibians than with other food sources. It has been speculated that the inclusion of amphibians in their diet actually saved them from the devastating affect of DDT, which decimated other North American Raptors and their populations are said to be stable at the present time.

Regardless of whether a vernal pond provides all or only a small part of an animal's life requirements, it represents an important piece of healthy forests in our area. You can bet that every animal in the forest that has a vernal pond in its home range, knows exactly where it is.

One of the greatest threats to Broad-winged Hawks and other vernal pond species is the loss and fragmentation of habitat. The fate of these important areas and the species that depend on them is largely in our hands and it is our responsibility to seek the knowledge and make the choices that will help us become caretakers of these wild places. As a friend remarked to me once, "they live here, we're just guests."



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The more you know: Information sources for this article include "Hawks in Flight" by Peter Dunne, David Sibley and Clay Hutton, and The Birds of North America species accounts. Hawks in Flight is available at most bookstores, while the BNA accounts (available for most bird species) are available at Salem State College library in the reference section.

Kestrel Takes Off

By Jessica Kagle

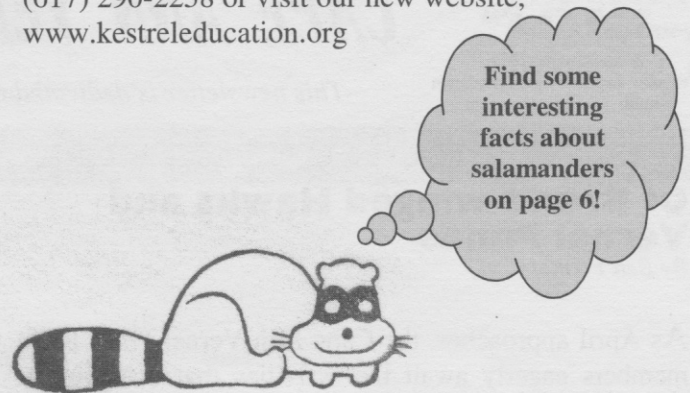
First and second graders on Cape Ann have been designing giant murals depicting the upland habitats of vernal pond - breeding creatures. When the habitats are complete and animal photos have been tucked snugly under leaves, logs, or in trees, the kids draw lines connecting the habitats to the breeding pool in the center of the mural. Then each tells the story of how his or her animal braved hungry foxes, icy rocks, and busy roads to get safely to the pond. Creative arts and challenging games combine with appearances by real live pond creatures to make up an experience kids remember.

Some of you may remember Ponds in the Classroom (PIC) from last year. We began as an outreach program for the Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team and have been bringing vernal pond ecology classes to Cape Ann schools since 2002. We have recently formed a separate organization called Kestrel Educational Adventures, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. Kestrel works in partnership with the CAVPT to deliver Ponds in the Classroom as well as other environmental education programs to school groups. PIC is still Kestrel's primary and most popular program. Our two new programs, Tidepools in the Classroom and Mountain Weekends, like PIC, are playful and creative approaches to learning ecology and promoting conservation. Tidepools in the Classroom is a program that April Ridlon developed last year for high school students. Students of our newest program, Mountain Weekends, will embark on camping adventures in Western Massachusetts to learn about forest ecology.

Last spring, PIC staff worked with 39 separate groups of students from 8 schools and a scout troop. Many of these groups participated in field trips to local vernal ponds as well as classroom workshops. We developed several new games, including the Migration Map game described above and the still evolving "Eco-Balance," a role play for older kids to practice balancing the predator - prey relationships in an ecosystem.

Kestrel, unlike CAVPT, is not entirely a volunteer organization. Though Kestrel staff began as volunteers, we have put so much time into program development and teaching that it has become part of our careers. We continue to get most of our money from grants and donations to fulfill our commitment to allow school groups an opportunity to participate regardless of ability to pay. This season, we have received many requests for programs but are very low on funding. We ask you, generous pond loving

newsletter readers, to help us. Your tax-deductible donations will help with instructor wages, teaching materials, and pay for specialized staff. We would also be grateful for help with grant writing or fund raising. Please call the Kestrel hotline at (617) 290-2258 or visit our new website, www.kestreleducation.org



David Carroll Field Trip

By Rick Roth

In June, CAVPT members Jessica Kagle, Cindy Mom and Rick Roth were fortunate enough to take a field trip with David Carroll, a renowned naturalist and spotted turtle expert who also authored The Year of the Turtle and Swamp Walker's Journal. We were invited by Martha Hoar of Manchester / Essex Conservation Trust. Mr. Carroll was invited by MECT as part of a larger effort to map rare and endangered species in the Manchester/Essex, MA area. Among the critters observed that day was a spotted turtle, which Mr. Carroll caught, measured, sketched and then released. It was a great opportunity to see a master naturalist at work.



A Spotted Turtle accompanies David Carroll

WHAT'S HAPPENING AND WHERE!

FIELD TRIPS

Rainy Nights & Flashlights

Every spring CAVPT members lead nighttime field trips to the ponds to see the amphibian breeding activity. Check your flashlights, get new batteries and put your rain gear on the hook by the door.

To avoid habitat destruction and critter disturbance we limit the number of participants on each trip. We also ask that you leave Fido at home.



Come see one of these on our next field trip!

Upcoming events

April 17- Sawyer Free Library children's program. 10 am to 12pm.

April 24- Earth Day at Beverly Common. 12-3pm. Rain out location Cove Community Center East Corning street Beverly.

April 24- Earth Fest at Lynn Woods. Snake program at some point between 12-2pm

April 25: Field trip with Essex County Greenbelt at the Thompson Reservation. 1:00pm

Additional events include an exhibit at Halibut Point State Park and a field trip in the Manchester/Essex woods, however we don't know exact times and dates yet. For the most current and up to the minute updates check our web site.

CAVPT Fund Raiser & Yard Sale

Watch for our Spring yard sale / fundraiser.
Date, location and time TBA.
Check the Gloucester Daily, Channel 12, or the CAVPT web site:

www.capeannvernalpond.com

If you have stuff to donate we can pick it up!
Please no TVs or computer monitors.
Call 978-281-3480



Hey look dad, it's *Ambystoma maculatum*!

Snakes of Massachusetts and the World

CAVPT members were out there creating some awareness and appreciation for some of nature's most misunderstood animals! Last year we visited:

Rockport Elementary School
Coolidge Point Reservation, Manchester, MA
Halibut Point State Park
Eastern Mountain Sports at the North Shore Mall, Peabody, MA.

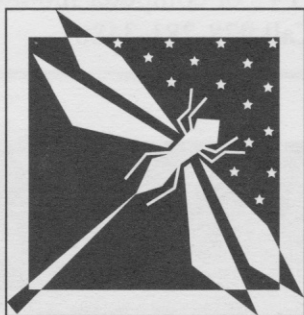
Many thanks to Bill Ewell, Anita Scaterday, Jessica Kagle, Ramona Latham, and Chris Kerry.

The Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team video "Vernal Ponds" is now available at the following lending libraries:

Essex, T.O.H.P. Burnham Free Library
Gloucester Lyceum & Sawyer Free Library
Ipswich Public Library
Manchester by the Sea Public Library
Rockport Public Library
Rowley Public Library

...and the following organization libraries

Boston, Museum of Science
Stoneham, Stone Zoo
The video can also be purchased at the Toad Hall Bookstore or directly through the Cape Ann Vernal Pond Team



Just when you thought you knew it all! There's a New Bug Book...Yay!

A field guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Massachusetts, by Blair Nukula, Jennifer L. Loose, and Matthew R. Burne. This is an amazing field book. If you've ever tried to photograph an insect, you will appreciate the quality of these pics. It is available from the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.

Buck Robinson (1939-2003)

Nelson Buck Robinson died on December 16, 2003 from Lou Gehrig's Disease (A.L.S.). An avid environmental activist, he founded the Essex County Ecology Center (ECEC) in Rockport, MA, one of Buck's many environmental causes. ECEC is a non-profit funded solely through the operation of Toad Hall Bookstore. Mr. Robinson took a special interest in CAVPT. His enthusiasm for our projects continues to be a great help to us.

Thank you to all CAVPT members and friends who participated or helped out last year:

Nan Andrew
Tony & Margo Ashdon
Frank B
Barbara Buls
Nicci Cataldo
Joe Christian
City Living
Ginny Dench
Alex Eisenzopf
Bill Elwell
Ben Flemer
Larry Fleming
Margaret Flowers
Ileen Graham
Cora Hawks
Kathy Heinze
Martha Hoar
Jessica Kagle
Cathy Kelley
H.A. Lind
Manchester / Essex Conservation Trust
Greg Mertz
Nate Mineo
Cindy Mom
Maire Murphy
Nancy Olson
Dennis Pyburn
Curtis and Kim Sarkin
Max Schenk
Gregg Smith
Mary Stafford
New England Herpetological Society
Nick Taormina
The Trustees of Reservations
Toad Hall Bookstore
Mandy Turner
Stephanie Tuxill
Peter Willet
Brian Whitaker
Dez Whitney
Chris Wood

Last year's fun...

Vernal Pools for Educators Workshop:

March 17, 2003 was held at the Doyon School in Ipswich, presented by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program and the Vernal Pond Association with Leo Kenney, Matt Burne and Mike Harney. Nicci Cataldo and Rick Roth attended this informative day - long event.

Earth Day at Beverly Common:

This new event is gaining popularity every year. Thank you Stella Mae Seamans and Joan Johnson from the Beverly Conservation Land Trust.

North Shore Earth Fest at Lynn Woods:

Lots of activities at this celebration. Thank you Don Glazier from North Shore Community College and Park Ranger Dan Small.

Gloucester Pride Stride-Community Fundraising Walk:

April 27, 2003- Maria Mocerri, Jennifer Mineo, Judy Cox, Christina Wolfe, John Bassett and Caroline Manchester raised over \$300.00 for CAVPT. Thank you all. Let's make this an annual event!

Annual CAVPT Yard Sale:

May 31, 2003- we had lots and lots and lots of team members in attendance this year, which made everything go smoothly. We raised stacks of cash for our conservation efforts in the process. And there was much rejoicing...Yay!



Dude! Wicked good bahgins at the yahd sale!

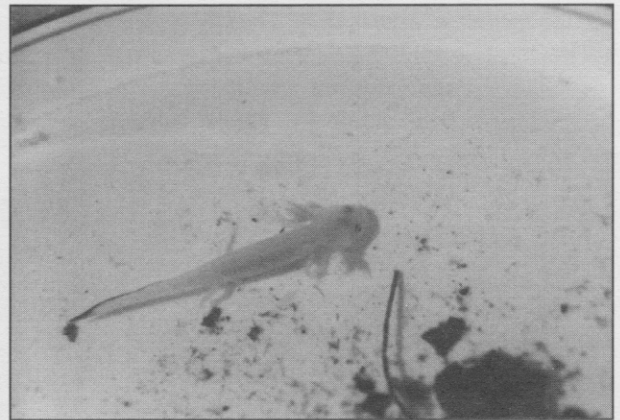
Sidewalk Bazaar:

August 7-9, 2003 This was our first year at the bazaar and we met a lot of new friends and felt it was a huge success. Thanks to City Living for electricity and storage space. We hope to participate again next year.

...AND IN OTHER NEWS.

Bianca: The Albino (sorta) Spotted Salamander Larva!

Jessica and Ben found it last fall in Gloucester. Not a true albino, Bianca is pinkish white with dark pigment on her tail fin and reddish feathery external gill doohickies. A normal salamander larva is light brown. Of the many thousand Spotted Salamander larvae observed, neither CAVPT members nor Leo Kenney (who literally wrote the book on vernal pond education...he really did...I'm not kidding here...I mean it!) have ever come across this mutation. Truly a rare find!



In case you thought we were kidding.

Wicked Cool Library Display by Curtis Sarkin

By Rick Roth

Last summer CAVPT member Curtis Sarkin, age 16, created a display at the Rockport Library, which remained there for over a month. We just gave him some of our materials and let him run with it. Curtis added some of his own materials and filled the glass display case at the top of the stairs with plastic frogs and salamanders, CAVPT shirts and hats, photos and some very clever drawings with captions depicting vernal pond life. I hope you got to see this one where Curtis combined his interest in vernal ponds and his artistic ability for a really terrific exhibit. How did this come about? Several years ago I noticed the glass case at the library was filled with little plastic snakes, turtles, lizards, salamanders and frogs. I said to myself, who is this guy? Later, I met Curtis and his family and recruited him for CAVPT. He has joined us on many field trips and has helped out with our presentations. I think Curtis' good work will inspire other students to create conservation and awareness projects of their own.

More News on back page of insert



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"Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them. Now we face the question whether a still higher 'standard of living' is worth its cost in things natural, wild, and free. For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chance to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech."

Aldo Leopold

DID YOU KNOW?

Some Spotted Salamander larvae have been found overwintering in a few vernal ponds on Cape Ann. "Big deal" you say? Well, it is a big deal! Spotted salamanders normally emerge from ponds as juveniles in, in august, about three months after hatching. A few of the ones we (the CAVPT) found are remaining in their larval stage all winter and presumed to be emerging the following summer. Even vernal pond expert, Leo Kenney, had never seen this before. The reason for this phenomenon is still a mystery.