

## The Un-Common Loon

Winter 1987

To anyone who has been to the Lake country of northern New England, or has seen the movie "On Golden Pond", the Common loon (*Gavia immer*) is a symbol of unspoiled wilderness. The sound of its falsetto wails and maniacal laughter, as well as the sight of its striking nuptial plumage of a checkered back, broken white collar and black hood is an experience few forget.

This time of year, loons can be seen on the salty waters of the Rhode Island coastline. Occasionally, one that is still in full plumage is spotted here, as in the case of a Red-throated loon (*Gavia stellata*) seen just off Sachuest Point in mid-December. After its post nuptial molt in winter, the bird's coloring is less striking, but they are fascinating to watch none the less.

Loons, are large chunky birds, which weigh 8 - 10 pounds. Their wings which extend over four feet in length are short for their body size. To compensate for

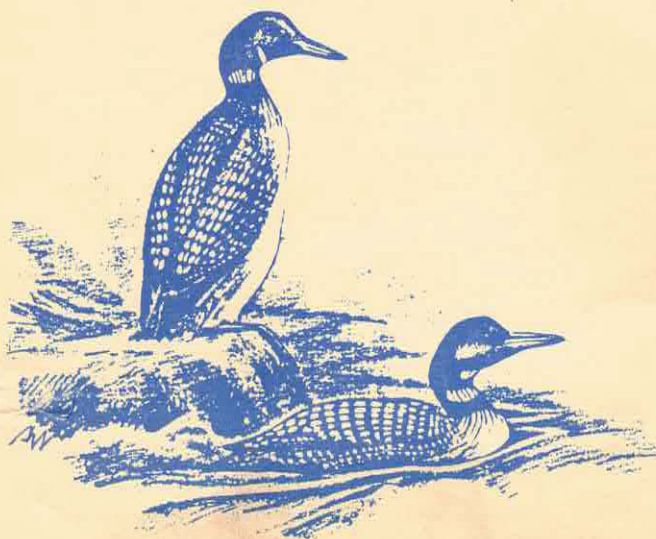
this, they thrash along the water's surface during takeoff, and once airborne, must maintain a rapid wingbeat, (over 260 times per minute) to stay aloft. Though slower flyers than ducks, which are smaller, loons reach an air speed of 75 miles per hour. With hunched backs, sagging appearance and dangling feet, loons are easy to spot as they cruise along above the water's edge.

Loons are highly specialized for life in the water. Their powerful legs set far astern enable them to dive several hundred feet to prey upon fish. Like cormorants, their bones are much more dense than other birds, and have a specific gravity that is remarkably close to that of water. They are quite buoyant floating amidst the chop and swells of the Atlantic coast, but can instantly sink and glide along with only their heads above the surface when they sense danger. When alarmed, loons tend to dive rather than take to the air.

During the late 1800's loon shooting was a popular sport. Their quick diving ability made them a challenge to hit. Loons developed a reputation of being able to "dodge" bullets. Each Spring, gunners lined the shores of Buzzards Bay for this annual event. Dead loons were not eaten or used for anything else. As gun technology improved loons became the losers in this bizarre game. Today, loons are protected by federal law.

The adaptations that make loons marvelous swimmers do little for their walking ability. Vulnerable on land, a nesting pair will build their nest right on the waters edge. During the summer months both pair members share all parental responsibilities.

continued on next page.





cont'd

Since the nests are not concealed the eggs are extremely vulnerable to predation during the month of incubation if both parents should leave the nest. Young loons are completely flightless and confined to their natal lake for the first 11-12 weeks. Therefore they must be ready to hatch by late June in order to be ready to leave before the lakes freeze in October.

Today the loon faces a triple threat. Increased disturbance by boaters on the northern lakes in the summer months force nesting loons to abandon their nests more frequently. As a result their eggs have suffered predation from raccoons and skunks. Housing development around these lakes has seriously encroached on loon breeding habitat. Environmental pollution has had the greatest effect on their population. Acidification of the seemingly pristine northern lakes is causing a breakdown of the food chain upon which the loons depend. During the winter, when they come to our region loons also face the threat of mercury poisoning in our coastal waters.

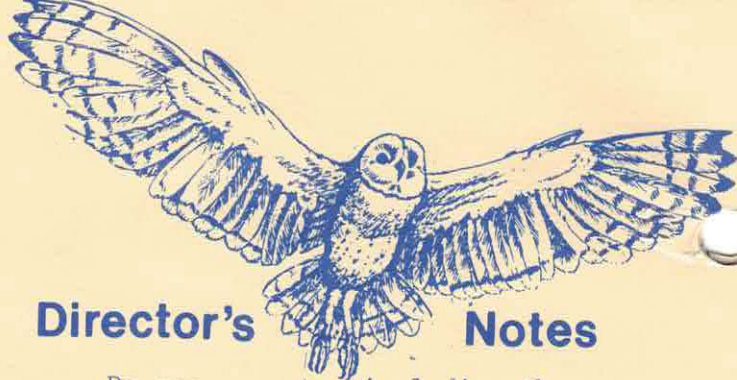
Preservation efforts have had some success in New Hampshire, the adult loon population has increased from 200 to 300 in the past decade as a result of the construction of artificial nesting islands which are safe from predation. This project was undertaken by the state's Loon Preservation Committee. Some loons have also learned to tolerate human disturbances and stick to their nests when people approach.

Despite these efforts, habitat loss and environmental pollution continue to take their toll. Loons are an indicator species that tell us what is happening to the aquatic habitat. The loss of these symbols of the unspoiled wilderness will be an ominous warning for us all.

Alvo Robert, "Lost Loons of Northern Lakes"  
Natural History Vol 95, #9. Sept 1986

McIntyre Judith, "A Louder Voice in the  
Wilderness"

National Wildlife, Vol 24, #5, Aug. 1986



## Director's Notes

By many counts, including the recent Christmas Bird Count (Dec. 20th), organized by the R.I. Ornithological Club, the outlook for much of our local birdlife seems to be on the upswing. The CBC tally showed a record number of bird species (124) in RI this year! The appearance of 2 Snowy owls, a Peregrine falcon, some King eiders and a record number of Harlequin ducks in our area this winter is a positive sign as well.

Even though the over-all results of a bird census such as this is encouraging, we should be concerned about the fate of one of our local species, the Barn owl. Although it is not an endangered species, Middletown has the only known nesting site in our state outside of Block Island. Hopefully there are more. This Spring, an old barn off Green End Ave. in Middletown, known to be a Barn owl roost (a potential nest), may be torn down to make way for new construction.

The Barn owl is distinctly a creature of open country. It roosts and nest in large structures such as barns, windmills, church steeples and large snags (old shade trees) found along the edge of pasture land, all relics of a way of life now slipping away. Ecologically, farmers and the owls had a mutualistic relationship. The farmers created the open fields and large structures, and the owls preyed upon the rodent population.

We may not be able to save every last barn, but we could try to stem the local extinction of the Barn owl. By constructing nesting boxes and placing them at suitable sites we could increase the number of potential roosts. (This has already been done with some success on Block Island.) To start, suitable sites of large open fields adjacent to large trees or structures should be located. If you are sitting on such an area and want to get involved, contact the Sanctuary. Later, in the Spring we will have a workshop on nest box construction.





# Childrens Programs

## PRE-SCHOOL NATURE HOUR

Wednesday mornings 10:00 - 11:00  
Wednesday afternoons 1:00 - 2:00

This program has been so popular with pre-schoolers and their Moms and Dads that we are offering two sessions per week! Designed to offer positive feeling toward the natural world, parents and preschoolers ( 3-5 ) will participate in these one hour programs. We'll spend some time outdoors (weather permitting) exploring the weekly theme. We'll also sing songs, make natural crafts, and listen to stories.

### Winter Series

January 21: Weather or Not  
January 28: Owls  
February 4: Lets Make Tracks  
February 11: Winter Senses

### Early Spring Series

March 4: Skunks  
March 11: Rocks  
March 18: NO PRESCHOOL TODAY  
March 25: Springtime Wake up  
April 1: Spring Birding

Fee: \$8.00 (\$6.00 NBS Members) per series  
Limit 10 children per session  
Pre-registration is required

Children and their parents should dress warmly.

## CHILDREN'S NATURE CLUB

Saturday mornings. 9:30 - 12:30

Through all four seasons, children can explore nature at the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Nature Club. We will be spending most of the time outdoors ( weather permitting) playing games, hiking the trails, and discovering weekly natural themes. Inside, we'll be warming up by our woodstove singing songs, watching movies, and creating crafts. Each week is a new adventure! We will provide a mid-morning snack. Children should dress warmly.

### Session #3

1/ 24 Winter Birding  
1/31 Owls / Hawks  
2/ 7 Woodworking  
2/14 Have a Heart  
(Endangered species)

### Session #4

3/ 7 Lets Make Tracks  
3/14 Rocking, the  
Natural way  
3/21 No Nature Club  
3/28 Mice, Moles &  
Voles  
4/ 4 Springtime  
Wake up

For children in grades K - 4  
Fee: \$28.00 (\$ 24.00 NBS Members)  
Pre-registration is required  
Limit 20 children

## WINTER WEEK

Public School February 16 - 20  
Mon. - Fri. 9:30 - 12:30

New School & St Michael's March 16 - 20  
Mon. - Fri. 9.30 - 12.30

Crafts, hikes, songs, games and natural learning are all part of the activities during our winter weeks. Imagine spending your vacation with Nature!. A mid morning snack will be provided and children should dress warmly.

For children in grades K - 4  
Fee: \$35.00 (\$30.00 NBS Members)

Also watch for Spring week during April vacation.

i ♥ brds





### HERBS AND NATURAL HEALING

Saturday, January 24. 2:00 p.m.

Through the ages wild herbs have been used for their nutritional and healing properties. Join Sanctuary Naturalist, Hap Morgan and learn about the historic uses of herbs and useful herb identification. A slide presentation, recipes and formulas for simple home remedies will be included in the program.

Fee; \$4.00 (\$2.00 NBS Members)  
Pre-registration is required by Thursday Jan. 22

### EAGLES OF QUABBIN RESERVOIR

Saturday, February 14 all day

Eagles have long captured our National imagination, but are becoming increasingly rare. Join us for a day long field trip to the Quabbin Reservoir in Central Massachusetts, a site where eagles have been successfully reestablished. We will view the birds from the Enfield lookout, then stop by the visitor center to view "The year of the Eagle" a dramatic film by well known wildlife photographer Jack Swedburg, that portrays the daily life of these birds that now winter on the Quabbin Reservoir. Dress for the weather, bring binoculars, and a bag lunch. We'll meet at the Sanctuary at 8 a.m. to carpool. Estimated driving time is 2 hours.

Fee: no charge  
Pre-registration is required by Feb. 11, 1987

The programs listed below, with the exception of Evening Star walks require pre-registration. If time and energy is well spent, we ask that you commit to a program. Programs will be cancelled if there are no participants. In this case, you will be notified of your consideration.

### SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Every Sunday. 8 a.m.

A brisk way to start a winter Sunday! Guided by Sanctuary staff, our winter walks focus on wintering waterfowl, coastal birds, and land birds. All levels of experience welcome. Dress warmly and bring binoculars if you have them.

Fee: no charge  
Pre-registration is not required.

### STAR WATCH

Thursday, January 29, 7.30 p.m.

Saturday, February 28, 7.30 p.m.

Winter is one of the best seasons for viewing and learning about the night sky. The Great Bear will be dipping low to the earth, while Andromeda, our distant sister galaxy rises in the sky. Join Bill O'Connell for the evening programs to explore the legends of the stars as the crisp night air moves in. Bring a blanket to sit on and binoculars if you have them. Dress warmly! In case of cloudy skies call 846-2577 before 5.p.m.

Fee: no charge  
Pre-registration is not required

### FULL MOON OWL PROWL

Friday, February 13. 7:30 p.m.

Listen for the calls of our sanctuary owls- Screech, Barred, Barn, and Great-Horned as they call to their prospective mates. Hike the trails with the sanctuary staff under the light of the moon as we learn about some of the mysteries of nature after dark. Bring a flashlight for owl spotting. Dress warmly!

Fee: \$3.00 (\$1.00 NBS Members)  
Pre-registration is required  
Limit 15 participants.



# ograms

of the Sunday morning Bird Walks, and the  
in advance. In order to insure that our  
you call us to let us know if you are coming  
there are not enough pre-registered parti-  
you have pre-registered. Thank you for

## CROSS COUNTRY SKIING WORKSHOP

Sunday, February 15. 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Learn about cross-country skiing by join-  
ing Ann Truslow, a National Outdoor Lead-  
ership Instructor as she discusses basic  
equipment choices, ski clothing, and winter  
safety. She'll also demonstrate waxing and  
skiing techniques and take the participants  
of this workshop out for a practice run (if  
the conditions are snowy). Afterwards, ski  
the trails of NBS, observing nature and en-  
joying the pleasures of the sport. If we  
are out of luck with snow, warm up near our  
woodstove with some hot cocoa and watch  
"SKINNY SKIING" a film that portrays the  
cross-country sport at its best. The  
film lasts 30 minutes. Participants  
should bring their ski's, so they may take  
full advantage of Ann's expertise.

Fee \$7.00 (\$4.00 NBS Members)  
Pre-registration is required by Saturday, Feb. 14  
Limited to 15 participants.



## MAPLE SUGARING

Sunday, February 22. 1:00 p.m.

Since the days of the Native Americans,  
New Englanders have relished the delicious  
amber maple syrup. Through this workshop  
learn how to tap, gather and "boil off"  
maple syrup using equipment made from simple  
household objects. Sanctuary Director, Larry  
Taft will guide participants through all  
phases of sugaring, from identifying the  
proper trees to a taste of the final product.

Fee: \$4.00 (\$2.00 NBS Members)  
Pre-registration is required by Feb. 19, 1987



## WOODCOCK WALK

Saturday, March 21. 5:30. p.m.

Welcome the coming of Spring as we  
listen and spot the male woodcock making its  
annual courtship flight. Learn about the  
peculiar habits of this wonderful spring  
reveler and toast its return to the Sanc-  
tuary with Champagne.

Fee; \$3.00 (\$1.00 NBS Members)  
Pre-registration is required by Friday, March 20  
Limit 15 participants.

## FROGS, TOADS, AND SALAMANDERS

Wednesday, April 1. 7:30 p.m.

What do all these reptiles have in com-  
mon?. They are all called "Herps" and are  
the focus of a R.I. Herp Watch aimed at  
finding out more about these magnificent  
creatures in our state. DEM Biologist,  
Chris Raithel will discuss these herps  
through slides and possibly some live speci-  
mens. Afterwards, if the night is warm,  
meander down to Maple Swamp Pond to find  
these creatures in their natural habitat.

Fee: No charge  
Pre-registration is required by Tuesday, March 31

## **Got any ideas?**

Do you have a natural idea that could  
be creatively used by us in either a public  
workshop or a children's program ?

Do you have an idea for a newsletter  
article?

Do you have anything that you would  
like to contribute to NBS ?

LET US KNOW \*



## Volunteer Notes

Many thanks to all those volunteers, young, old, and in between who participated in making this year's Harvest Fair so extraordinary. Although the two day event was lots of fun, many hours of hard work went into the production of the Fair, so we thought it was appropriate to mention a few of you wonderful workers for a job well done: Bravo! to Ginny Purviance and Bonnie Williams, our Harvest Fair 1986 Co-Chairpersons for pulling it all together and spending huge amounts of time, planning, calling, painting, baking, (great chocolate chip cookies Bonnie) and setting up. Next, our gratitude goes to all you souls who bravely acted as chairpersons for the twenty plus Harvest Fair committees. Those individuals are: Jan Gunzelman, Fran Holmes, Sharon & Phil Pelletier, Kathy Finn, Betsy DeLeiris, Anne Wilson, Paul Jacob, Bill Thomas, Chris Callahan, Joan Breaknell, Pat Chase, Anne Damon, Larry Allen, Patty Corgan, Norman Hall, Lorna Bornemeir, Sue Benefield, Mary Wright, Morris Hirsch, Barry Murphy, Bob Harvey, and Kay Atkins. Special thanks go to Ginny Laughlin and family, Roger Gilman, Marjorie Ward, Phil Bornemeir, George Hawes and family, John Brayman and crew, Rick Oriel, and the O'Connell family. We hope you will join us next year. One last word... New recruits are always welcome. Anyone out there interested?.

\*\*\* Calling all new and semi-retired Sanctuary Volunteers! Despite the cold weather setting in, we still need you!. The Sanctuary has many long and short term projects to be started and completed. If you have a few hours to spare per week and have a special interest or skill, we can really put you to work. Everyone will find his or her niche and new friends as well!

### Wish List

Begin the new year by donating to a good cause!. The Bird Sanctuary is looking for the following items that may be collecting dust in your home:

- 5 - 10 gallon aquarium
- aquarium covers
- water bottles for mice, gerbils
- desk lamp
- parachute for children's games
- a used computer (!)
- wood stove
- slide projector

## GARDEN MEETING

Sunday, March 29. 1:00 p.m.

Any Sanctuary member who is interested in having a garden plot for the summer of 1987 must attend this meeting! Returning gardeners- you must also attend or we will assume that you do not wish to retain your plot.

During the meeting we will assign plots, review garden regulations, share ideas, and have a chance to get to meet one another. Afterwards, we will walk to the garden area and begin clearing away overgrown vines, rocks, and other debris. Bring your sturdy shoes and work gloves. If you want to be part of the Sanctuary garden program mark this date on your calendar.



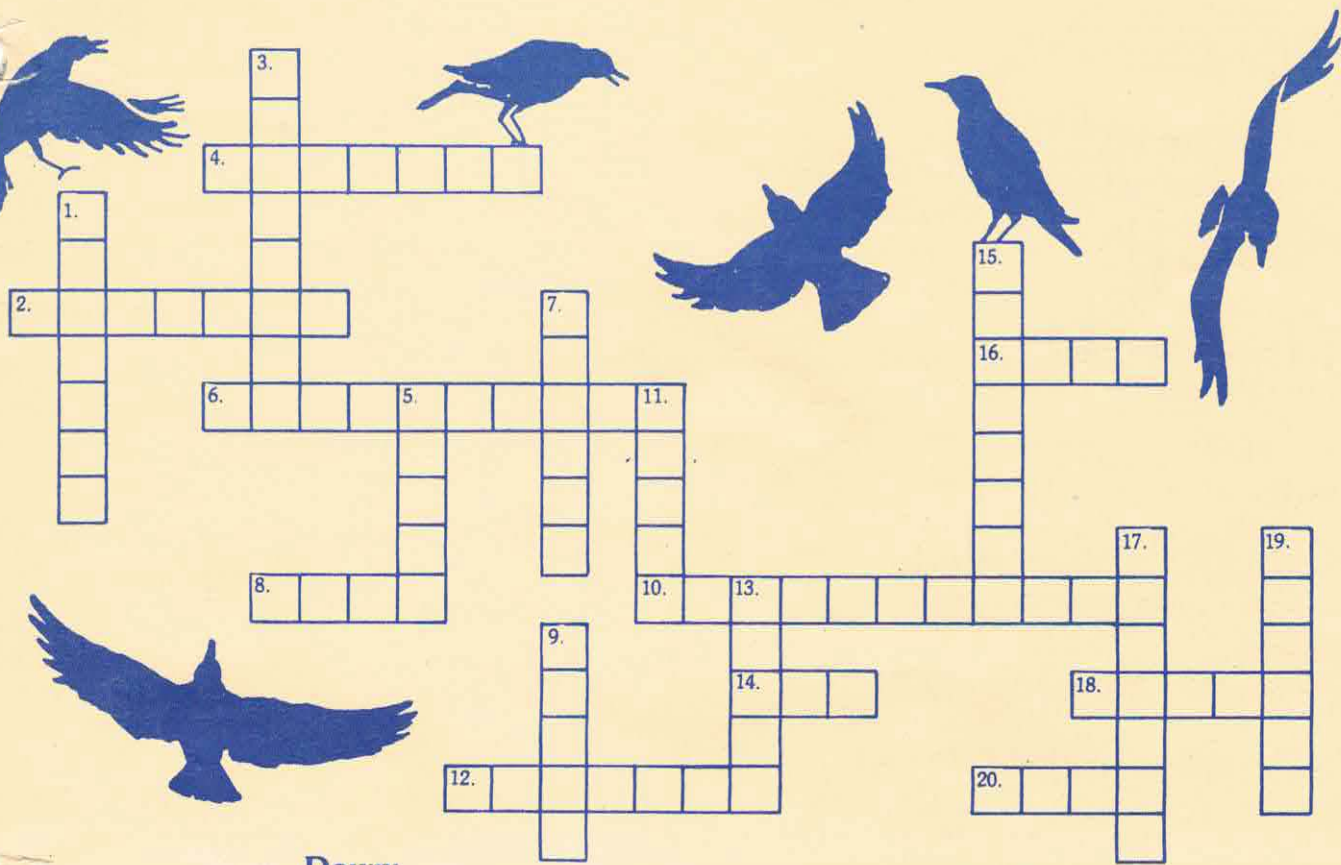
### New Face/New Wings

The new person you may have seen teaching Preschoolers about Gray squirrels or leading school groups to Hanging Rock is not new to the Sanctuary at all. NBS Teacher / Naturalist Hap Morgan grew up in Newport and has been coming here since he was a kid. Hap has been a volunteer here for years leading herb classes and workshops in herbal medicine. He had moved from the Newport area to New Haven to start a Natural Food store. Now he's back taking science courses in pursuit of a degree and possibly a teaching certificate. He'll be teaching children's programs and a few public programs here at the Sanctuary as well. Welcome (Back) Hap.

We have two recent residents in our flight cages, a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk and an adult Broad-Winged Hawk. Both have suffered permanent injuries to their wings from bullet wounds and will continue to live here. We hope to train the Broadwing so she can help us teach children about raptors and their importance to this world.



## Kid's Connection...with Birds

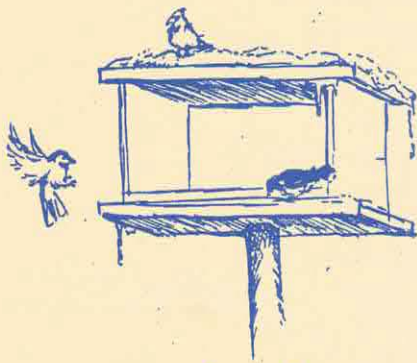


### Down:

1. If you think someone is not brave or daring, you might call him or her a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Statues that decorate lawns often look like this pink bird.
5. In some areas, the return of this bird is a sign that spring's on the way.
7. Miners tested for dangerous gases with this bird—now it's a popular pet.
9. The bald \_\_\_\_\_ is the national emblem of the United States.
11. *The \_\_\_\_\_* is a famous poem written by Edgar Allan Poe.
13. "Silly as a \_\_\_\_\_."
15. *The Ugly \_\_\_\_\_* is a fairy tale written by Hans Christian Andersen.
17. "Light as a \_\_\_\_\_."
19. Many people eat this bird at Thanksgiving.

### Across:

2. These birds carried messages during World War II.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ are often imported illegally from South America, Asia, and Africa.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ is a fast-running desert bird that also appears in cartoons.
8. "Crazy as a \_\_\_\_\_."
10. This bird's name is also the last name of a famous nurse.
12. This bird often soars for hours in search of dead animals.
14. This bird "works the night shift."
16. A scare \_\_\_\_\_ sometimes keeps birds from eating a farmer's crops.
18. In folklore, this bird delivers human babies.
20. This bird is a symbol of peace.



## At the feeders

- House finches are abundant this year
- White-throated sparrows kick up the leaf litter in pursuit of dropped seed down below the feeder
- Chickadee flocks come every morning dee-deeing their way into our hearts
- A lone Tufted Titmouse can be seen daily at our window feeder
- Mourning doves are ground feeding
- Blue Jays and Cardinals are here and there
- Squirrels too, need to eat, so we let them. We put popcorn and bittternuts down for them. Of course they get to some of our bird feeders anyway!

\* \* \*



**NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY**  
THIRD BEACH ROAD  
MIDDLETOWN, R. I. 02840



## Community Calendar

Bebop the night away at a 50's Dance to benefit Channing Music Series, Friday January 23, from 8 - 12 p.m. Tickets are \$10.00 per person and can be purchased at Upper Crust Bakery, Main Frame, and Quilt Artisans. For more information, contact June Doolittle at 847-7456

Save the Bay Conference  
" Helping the Land Save the Bay"  
Saturday, January 31, 1987  
Bay Conference Center  
Butler Hospital, Providence, R.I.

Save the Bay Annual meeting  
Sunday, March 1, 1987  
Sheraton Islander, Newport, R.I.  
For more information call 272-3540

New England Environmental Conference  
March 22-23, 1987  
Lincoln Filene Center  
Tufts University, Medford, Ma.  
for more information call 617-381-3451

The Norman Bird Flyer is published quarterly by the Norman Bird Sanctuary, a non-profit nature preserve established under the will of Mabel Norman Cerio.  
Trustee: R.I. Hospital Trust National Bank  
Advisory Committee: Norman Hall - Chair., Lawrence Allen, Joyce Bothelho, Christine Callahan, Patty Corgan, Ann Damon, Frances Holmes, Virginia Laughlin, Gary MacDonald, Julie Morris, Bary Murphy, Virginia Purviance, Barbara Sturtevant Mark Vissman, George Warren.  
Director: Lawrence Taft.  
Education Coordinator: Lisa Pritchard.  
Norman Bird Sanctuary, 583 Third Beach Road, Middletown, Rhode Island 02840. Telephone (401) 846-2577

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U. S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
NEWPORT, R. I.  
02840  
PERMIT No. 43