



# The Norman Bird Flyer

Volume 18, No. 1

Winter 1998

## Winter Rapture

Long after most of the migratory songbirds have flown south, the relative quiet of the winter months allows precious time to become acquainted, or reacquainted, with some very interesting birds that spend the colder season here. Among them is the Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) also called the "Marsh Hawk." Harriers are raptors, or birds of prey, that can be seen, sometimes in pairs, hunting along the open fields and marshland between the Norman Bird Sanctuary and the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge as well as in similar habitats along the south coast of Rhode Island.

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Harriers are easily identified at a distance by a large white rump patch just above the base of the tail and their owl-like facial disks. These markings are distinctive in juveniles as well as adult birds of both sexes. They have slim profiles and long, narrow wings with somewhat rounded tips. As they glide through the air, usually just above the vegetation, their wings form a distinctive bow-shaped posture. The adult males are grayish above and mostly white below with striking black wing tips. The females are brown with heavy, dark streaking on pale breast and flank with lighter streaking and spotting on the belly. Immature birds of both sexes resemble the adult females but are washed with cinna-





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mon below and on the wings which gives them a brilliant reddish appearance.

Like owls, Harriers have curved, sound-reflecting facial disks for hearing which, combined with their characteristic low flight, enables them to locate prey by sound. They hunt the open fields for meadow voles, other small mammals and, occasionally, small birds. The name "harrier" may come from its characteristic behavior of flying low, close to the ground, barely clearing the tall grass as though "harrying" its prey. Spotting its prey, this raptor has usually already flown past so it may do a backwards loop to land on its target.

This bird habitually seeks its small and medium sized prey by low-level, linear-scanning method. Its search and pounce technique is reminiscent of a fox though its closest avian counterpart as a hunter is the short-eared owl which may occasionally be spotted hunting in the same area.

Generally, the Harrier's buoyant, sustained hunting flight remains less than three meters above the vegetation; the bird appears intent on its search and, now and again, doubles back to reinvestigate a likely spot—as though it had second thoughts after scanning the terrain the first time. Keeping this hawk in sight is not always easy—it may disappear briefly behind a bush or a knolly crest. As the Harrier goes up-slope or over a hedgerow, its flight seems to become slightly labored, and the bird reminds one of a child's kite that has temporarily lost its sustaining airflow. Then having reached the apex, the harrier seems almost to glide over the bushes or downward slope with a sudden increase in speed—again, somewhat like a child's kite—plunging toward earth.

The Northern Harrier was considered a common, though declining resident in RI at the turn of the century. The nesting population has shown continued decline since then. The

reversion of agricultural land into forest clearly reduced habitat for this species state-wide. Other factors including DDT contamination and increased pressure from depredatory mammals, may have also contributed to this process. In Rhode Island, Harriers now nests only on Block Island where there are about 12 nesting pairs. Occasional summer observations of birds in the southern parts of Washington and Newport counties are thought to represent non-breeding sub-adults. The Northern Harrier is currently on the Rhode Island state endangered species lists.

During the winter, Northern Harriers roost on the ground in the tall grass. This is one of the reasons why here at NBS we leave some of our fields uncut through the winter season to provide feeding areas as well as cover for these magnificent birds.

### Sources:

Sturtevant & Howe, *Birds of Rhode Island* (1899)  
R. Enser: *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Rhode Island*, (1987)  
Palmer: *Handbook of North American Birds*, (1987)  
Personal Conversation, Nature Conservancy Rhode Island Field Office

Lawrence Taft





# Sanctuary Receives Grants



*NBS staff members M.R. Guido and Kristine Smith take time out of their lesson, Animal Kingdom, to pose with a Head Start class at Tonomy Hill. The Sanctuary offered these programs gratis to Newport County Head Start.*

This past fall the Sanctuary was awarded two grants to help implement several new initiatives for our environmental education program. The major grant, \$37,500, came from the Prince Charitable Trusts. The North Family Trusts provided a \$3,000 matching grant.

The initiatives are a result of our Strategic Planning process. During the research phase, we found that there were significant gaps in our

educational programming, particularly for adult audiences and for urban youth. With this in mind, we developed the following objectives to enhance our educational program:

- A) To evaluate current program participation trends, marketing efforts, and customer satisfaction. And, as appropriate, strengthen marketing efforts.
- B) To expand our educational programming to meet the needs

of adults and seniors by test marketing ideas with target audiences.

- C) To maintain the current level of the children's program until such a time as marketplace demands warrant a change.
- D) To explore eco-tourism opportunities, especially for visitors to Aquidneck Island.
- E) To develop more off-site programs to reduce the impact on the refuge.
- F) To collaborate with key community organizations; to develop programs for and to assure availability of current programs to urban youth.

This funding has enabled us to increase the size of our staff so that we may begin to implement these objectives over the next two years.

## NBS Welcomes New Education Coordinator

This month the Norman Bird Sanctuary is pleased to welcome Fred Orwiler to the staff. Fred will be taking over the position of Education Coordinator from Hap Morgan who left this past spring.

Originally from Maryland, Fred received his undergraduate degree in history from St. Mary's College and his Masters Degree in Adult Educa-



tion/Environmental Education from the University of Rhode Island. Fred was introduced to the Environmental Education field as an intern at Glen Helen Outdoor Education Center in Ohio. Following that experience, he moved to Rhode Island to work at the URI W. Alton Jones Campus in West Greenwich. Starting as a teacher/naturalist, Fred has served as the Education Coordinator for

the past several years. Supervising a team of 12 teacher/naturalists, he oversaw the resident environmental education program at Alton Jones as well as organizing the teen summer expedition programs.

Fred brings with him a wealth of experience in teaching forest and wetland ecology and outdoor skills such as rock-climbing, camping and canoeing. He has also led backpacking and white-water rafting expeditions with Boston University's Sargent Camp. He and his wife, Karen Binder, reside in Wakefield where she works as the Associate Director of the YMCA's Camp Fuller.



# Environmental Programs

## Spying On Winter Visitors At Sachuest Point

*Ages:* K - 4th grade  
*Day:* Saturday  
*Date:* February 7th  
*Time:* 1:00 - 4:00 pm  
*Fee:* \$4.00 Members  
\$6.00 Non-members.

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*  
**CHILDREN'S PROGRAM**

Our friends from the north have arrived at Sachuest Point! A teacher-naturalist will describe and explain the habits of some feathered friends that spend winters in Rhode Island; then, the naturalist will guide the group down the seaside trails in search of wonderful waterfowl. The most common sighting and winter celebrity at the Point is the Harlequin Duck known for its unmistakable resemblance to a clown. Come hike with us!

## ATTENTION PARENTS!

Summer is on the way!!

Our 1998 *Nature Day Camp* brochure will be mailed in February to all **1997 day camp participants only.**

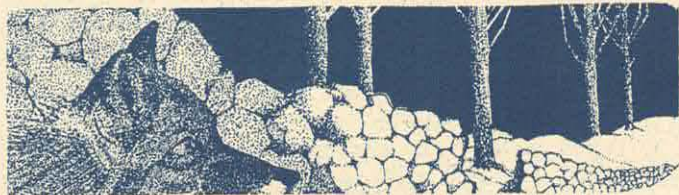
If your child didn't attend camp in 1997 and you want to receive a brochure, please call us at 846-2577, give us your name and address and we'll send you a brochure.

## Winter Vacation Week

*Ages:* K - 4th grade  
*Days:* Tuesday through Friday  
*Dates:* February 17th - 20th  
*Time:* 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM  
*Fee:* \$40.00 Members  
\$50.00 Non-members

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*  
**CHILDREN'S PROGRAM**

Who needs Disney World when we have the natural world! Spend winter vacation at the Sanctuary and discover how the plants and animals survive during the cold winter months. Daily hikes along the trails will be followed by crafts and games. Mickey and Minnie don't know what they're missing! *Please dress for the weather.*



## Animal Signs in Winter

*Ages:* K - 4th grade  
*Day:* Saturday  
*Date:* March 7th  
*Time:* 1:00 - 4:00 PM  
*Fee:* \$4.00 Members  
\$6.00 Non-members

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*  
**CHILDREN'S PROGRAM**

The animals are out there! Help us search the Sanctuary for tracks, winter burrows and other signs of life. Hibernators are hard to find this time of year; but, there are many active animals such as red fox and cottontail rabbits. The evidence is everywhere--come and search for the clues!



## Woodcock Walk

*Day: Friday*

*Date: March 20th*

*Time: 6:00 - 7:30 PM*

*Fee: \$4.00 Members*

*\$6.00 Non-members*

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*

### **FAMILY PROGRAM**

In past years, we have had an outstanding response from our resident woodcocks. Almost as if on cue, we were quickly surrounded by several amorous birds. We watched them perform their bizarre and amazing courtship flight. Join us for a walk in search of these odd birds.

## Spring Egg Hunt for Members Only

*Ages: 3 - 10 years old*

*Day: Saturday*

*Date: April 4th*

*Time: 1:00 PM*

*Fee: \$5.00 per child*

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*

### **FAMILY PROGRAM**

Come celebrate the return of Spring and warmer weather by joining us for our annual Spring Egg Hunt. Search the orchard, the barn, and upper trails for chocolate eggs and other goodies. Special "Earth Eggs" will be filled with earth friendly surprises. Please bring your own collecting basket.

## Geology of Hanging Rock

*Day: Saturday*

*Date: March 7th*

*Time: 9:30 - 11:30 AM*

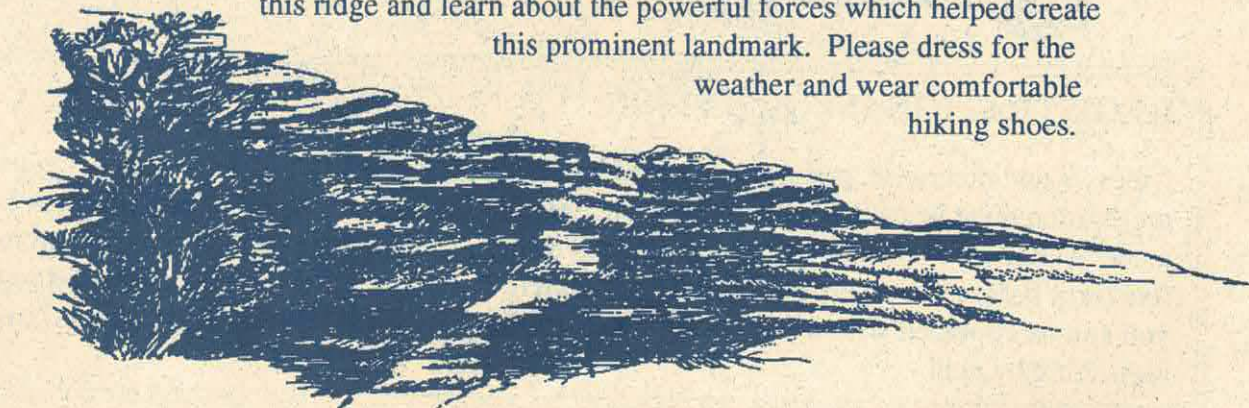
*Fee: \$4.00 Members*

*\$6.00 Non-members*

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*

### **ADULT PROGRAM**

The geology of southeastern Aquidneck Island is both beautiful and wonderfully unique. The 250 million year old rock formation called Hanging Rock has a very long earth history and has fascinated geologists, artists and nature lovers for more than two centuries. Join Hap Morgan for a trip out to this ridge and learn about the powerful forces which helped create this prominent landmark. Please dress for the weather and wear comfortable hiking shoes.





(Programs continued)

## Dyeing Textiles Naturally with the Rhode Island Wild Plant Society

Day: Sunday

Date: February 8th

Time: 1:00 - 3:00 pm

Fee: \$5.00 Members

\$7.00 Non-members

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*

### ADULT PROGRAM

Ever been curious about how the pioneers and Native Americans brought color into their lives? Plants, of course, provided much of the color year round--from spring blooms and summer bounty to the residual colors of dyeing fabrics and yarns. Bring your own swatch of fabric or small skein of yarn and RIWPS member Helen King will demonstrate how to turn onion skins, yarrow, nuts or bark into color for the pale, winter months.

**NOTE:** To register for this program, please call the RI Wild Plant Society directly at 783-5895.



## RI Birder's Conference

Day: Saturday

Date: February 28th

Time: 7:30 AM - 4:30 PM

Fee: \$20.00

(includes field trip and lunch)

*Pre-registration and pre-payment required*

### ADULT PROGRAM

The Conference begins at the Norman Bird Sanctuary with an early morning walk towards the breathtaking Hanging Rock. Then, join Lee Schisler, Executive Director of Audubon Society of Rhode Island, John Hill from the Lloyd Center for Environmental Studies, *Bird Observer's* Jim Berry, Andrea Jones of Mass. Audubon Society and Chris Raithel of RI DEM for an exciting morning of presentations at St. George's School. Adjourn for a catered lunch followed by a mid-day walk at Sachuest Point led by Dave Emerson. The afternoon program includes lectures by renowned birder Joe Kenneally, and Deborah DiQuinzo of URI, while Don Crocket and Shawn Carey finish off the day with *Virtual Birding and the Virtual Birder: Birding & the Internet*.

**NOTE:** For information and registration, please call the RI Audubon Society at 949-5454.

## REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Unless stated otherwise, pre-registration is required for programs. Fees for programs requiring registration must be paid in advance by cash, check or Mastercard/Visa. Registration can be made by mail or by phone (with credit card payments). **Fees will be refunded in full up to five days before the program. With less than five days notice, fees will be refunded only if you can be replaced with a person from the waiting list.** Please use the registration form if registering by mail.

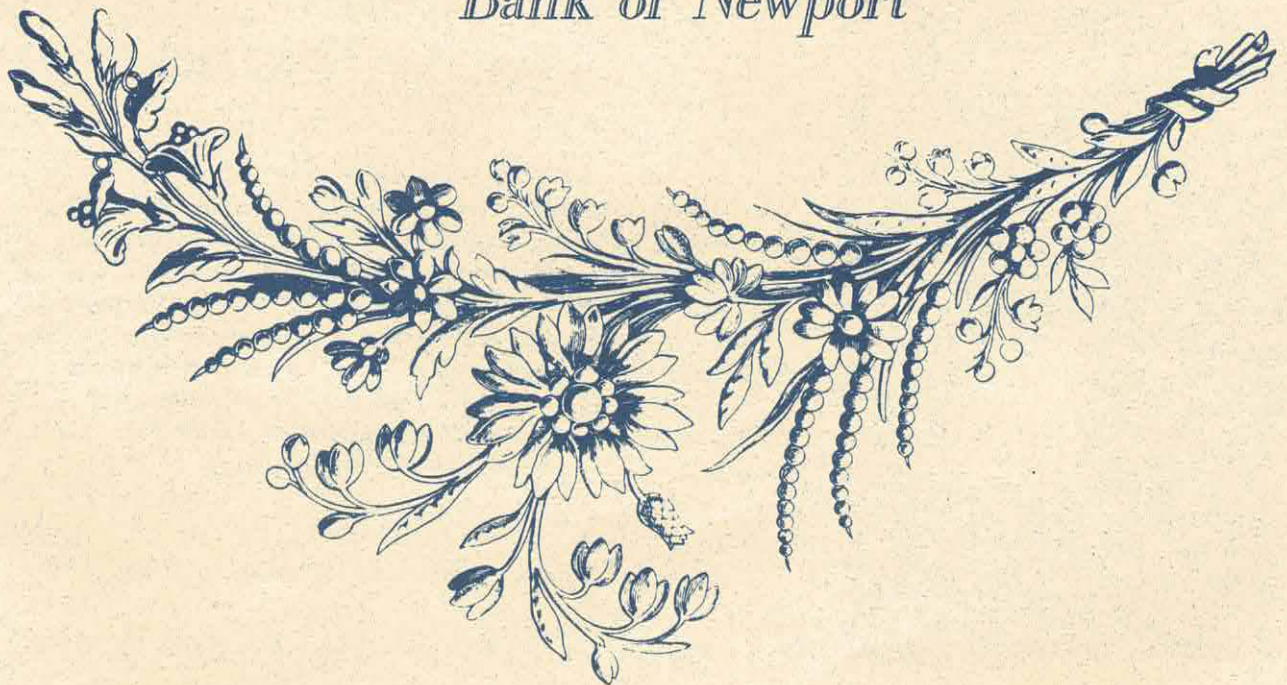




Look for Us  
at Booth 300 at the  
Rhode Island Spring Flower & Garden Show

February 19th - 22nd

*Our appearance at the show is made possible  
through a generous donation from  
Bank of Newport*





## Volunteer Profile

Friday mornings at the Norman Bird Sanctuary always ring with laughter--the reason? Doris Midgley's sparkling presence. When the work week is winding down, Doris' boundless enthusiasm for any task provides a sense of energetic optimism.

Although Doris' parents met and married in Newport, Doris was born and grew up in Westfield, MA where she met her husband Fred. While there, she served as the Executive Secretary to the Director at the Westfield Athenaeum.

In 1980, she and Fred moved to Aquidneck Island. They first became involved at the Sanctuary as members and then as gardeners in the Community Garden



growing everything from asparagus to zucchini. Doris' interest in activities here grew as she began taking some of our adult education classes including Sharon Culberson's basket and wreath-making classes. From there, Doris and Fred started volunteering at *Birds & Breakfast* and working the gates at the Harvest Fair

For the past seven years, Doris has been a dedicated volunteer assisting with her computer proficiency and quick wit. This fall and winter, she worked processing new memberships and renewals; moreover, she aided in the completion of an extensive

membership drive. She also volunteers at the Newport Public Library--behind the scenes of course--cataloging the Newport Daily News.

Doris and Fred, married for 54 years, are now semi-retired working as caretakers at a local estate and maintaining the parking lot at the Bellevue Shopping Plaza. Doris also maintains myriad interests including swimming, crossword puzzles, and dolls. When asked what she thinks is the Sanctuary's best feature, she replied "People here are nice." You got that right Doris!

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## Volunteers Changing the Future

***In November, long-time volunteer Betsy de Leiris was honored as the Norman Bird Sanctuary's Outstanding Partner in Philanthropy. At a celebration of National Philanthropy Day attended by 900 people throughout Rhode Island, Betsy was recognized for her dedication and contribution toward securing Paradise Farm for future generations.***

***Thank you to Betsy for her continued dedication and congratulations on her well-deserved recognition.***





# REGISTRATION/MEMBERSHIP FORM

PLEASE JOIN US!  
NBS Membership Form

- ☐ Student (\$10)
- ☐ Individual (\$20)
- ☐ Family (\$30)
- ☐ Sustaining (\$50)

- ☐ Patron/Business (\$100)
- ☐ Supporting (\$250)
- ☐ Benefactor (\$500)
- ☐ Osprey Circle (\$1,000)

## ADDRESS & PAYMENT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_

Form of Payment: CHECK VISA MASTERCARD

Card # \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please Make Check Payable to: Norman Bird Sanctuary  
583 Third Beach Road, Middletown, RI 02842

Program Fees	\$ _____
Membership	\$ _____
<b>TOTAL DUE</b>	<b>\$ _____</b>

## Please Register the Following:

Name	Age & Grade	Program	Fee
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Please list any medical conditions/problems we should be aware of including allergies & medications:

**Waiver:** In the event that I cannot be reached in an emergency, I hereby give my permission to the Norman Bird Sanctuary staff or medical personnel to take emergency measures as necessary.

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Norman Bird Sanctuary  
583 Third Beach Road  
Middletown, RI 02842

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
Newport, RI 02840  
Permit No. 43



TO CURRENT RESIDENT OR

## ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY VIEWING DATES

*February 13th & 27th*  
6:00pm

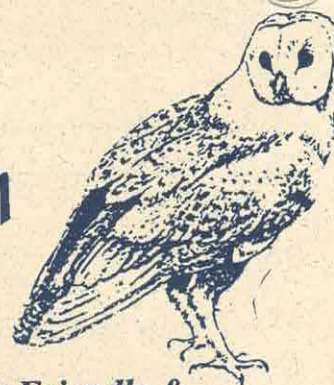
*March 13th & 27th*  
6:00 pm

*April 10th & 24th*  
6:30 pm

*May 15th & 29th*  
7:00 pm



## The Barn Owl Shop



*Environmentally Friendly &  
Educational Gifts*

*Visit our SALE table for  
bargains up to 75% off!!*

**\*Members receive a  
10% discount**

**Open Tuesday - Sunday  
9 am to 5 pm**