

HISTORICAL NOTES

This brief discussion of Gardiner's and Nelson's Ponds, which border the Norman Bird Sanctuary, is an excerpt from an historical study in progress on the Sanctuary by Cynthia Bidart.

Destroying wildlife habitat is rarely looked upon by naturalists as a positive or productive act and yet in the unusual case of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, the destruction of acres of ideal shore bird habitats indirectly resulted in the sanctuary's existence. A salt water marsh generally supports a more diverse bird population than almost any other natural habitat and before George Norman built a dam on Paradise Creek and created what are now Gardiner's and Nelson's Ponds, the existing salt and fresh water marshes were an important habitat for shore birds in this area. But, ironically, by creating the ponds and thus the revenue of selling them to the Newport Water Works in 1931, his daughter, Mabel Norman Cerio, was able to donate the land that is today a priceless sanctuary for wild bird life. And even though the ponds destroyed important salt marsh habitat, they have, over the years, attracted an increasing number of migratory birds to our area who, before this time, by-passed Aquidneck Island in search of areas with large fresh water ponds.

The ponds have also affected aspects of our community other than bird life. Over the years they have been used for a variety of recreational activities, much to the consternation of water works officials. Before St. George's School built their indoor hockey rink, Nelson's Pond was frequently the scene of informal hockey matches and local recreational skating. Natives of the area call fond memories of bonfires and hot cocoa at the pond's edge. Fishing has never been good in the ponds and for obvious reasons greatly discouraged by the Newport Water Works. And yet, some local people claim to have dropped a line from time to time. Today, skating as well as fishing

Winter, 1985

are prohibited for safety and sanitary reasons.

Some interesting facts about the ponds were uncovered with the help of Manuel Bothello at the Newport Water Works. A report written for the City of Newport before their purchase of the Water Works in 1931 covers all aspects of Gardiner's and Nelson's Ponds. In 1882 the dam was built to create Nelson's Pond and at the same time the pumping station and works for diverting the waters of Paradise Brook were built. Gardiner's Pond was formed between 1889 and 1902 by constructing embankments on three sides of a small natural pond and



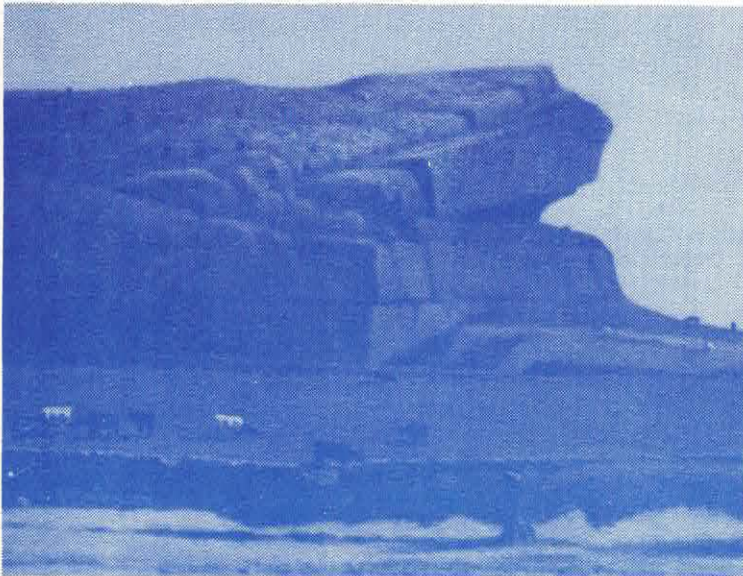
This photograph of George Norman was taken in 1894 and was donated to the Norman Bird Sanctuary by Louis Lorillard.

the large expanse of adjoining marsh. The conduit on Paradise Brook to Nelson's Pond was extended to Gardiner's Pond at this time.

This 1931 report describes the quality of the water supplied to Newport and Middletown as "generally good from a sanitary standpoint, but for at least part of the time during the year the water is unpalatable on account of tastes and odors which are emphasized by the relatively high temperature of the water." But they describe the water as conforming to the present U.S. Treasury standard.

Today Nelson's Pond has a surface area of 29.70 acres and a capacity of 99 million gallons. The usable capacity is 95 million gallons and it is estimated to be 11-12 feet deep. Gardiner's Pond was originally about 90 acres with an average depth of 8 feet and storage capacity of 285 million gallons. Around 1938 the dike was raised to its present level allowing for 400 million gallons of storage, a depth of 15-20 feet, and a surface area of over 100 acres.

Probably the most astonishing facts uncovered though were the estimated real estate values of the ponds in 1931. Three real estate experts separately appraised the properties and the averages of their figures were recorded as the estimated land values. For Nelson's Pond, in 1931, the 30 acres of land were valued at \$5,598 dollars. Gardiner's Pond, which is of considerably greater acreage, was valued at \$22,167 dollars. At the current values of Aquidneck Island waterfront properties, it is certainly fortunate that through George Norman's ingenuity and Mabel Norman Cerio's forethought and generosity the land around the Middletown ponds has been protected from development and preserved as a sanctuary for not only birds, but for the rest of us, as well.



From a 1865 painting of Hanging Rock by Suidam. Note cows grazing on salt marsh hay.

DIRECTORS' NOTES

Depending on which side of the hedge they dig, dogs may be man's best friend or his nemesis. From the Sanctuary manager's point of view, however, there is no question that life would be better without them in the refuge.

Over the ages humans have bred dogs to work for them in many ways, from guarding sheep and pulling sleds to providing companionship, but these dogs all still retain a little of their wild ancestry. Even on a leash, their presence will scare birds and other wildlife away from the trail, disappointing later hikers and disturbing breeding patterns.

Most dog owners understand these problems and leave their pets at home when walking in a wildlife refuge. The real problem here is not dogs in general, but the loose dog. Loose dogs become subsidized predators. They hunt, chase, and occasionally kill birds, rabbits, raccoons, fox, and whatever else they happen to cross scent paths with, then go home for a bowl of dog chow and a warm rug by the fire.

Loose dogs don't always kill, but that does not make them any less deadly. Because non-hibernating mammals and wintering birds are on extremely tight energy budgets in the winter, a series of frequent flights from dog packs can mean starvation. The fox, after being chased all day, finds no bowl of kibbles in his winter den, and no warm fire.

Trying to control loose dogs in a wildlife refuge is time consuming, unpleasant, and, if dog owners accept the responsibility for their pets and act accordingly, unnecessary.



AN INTRODUCTION

The Sanctuary has a new face in the office. Olive Guiney used to work for the City of Worcester's Commission on Elder Affairs. She is now semi-retired and living in Jamestown. She'll be answering the phone, greeting visitors, typing, organizing the office, and managing our membership list. We welcome her!

The Norman Bird Flyer is published by the Norman Bird Sanctuary, a non-profit nature preserve established under the will of Mabel Norman Cerio.

Trustees: Louis Lorillard, RI Hospital Trust National Board
Advisory Committee: George Warren - Chair, Christine Callahan, Patricia Corgan, Norman Hall, Frances Holmes, William Horton, Virginia Laughlin, Charles Levy, Barry Murphy, Harriet Phelps, Virginia Purviance, Peter Randall, William Rogers, Barbara Sturtevant, Hope Van Beuren
Co-Directors: Deborah Clark, Timothy Traver
Norman Bird Sanctuary, 583 Third Beach Road, Middletown, Rhode Island 02840. Telephone: 401/846-2577.

NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY EVENTS

Every
Sunday

BIRD WALK A brisk way to start a winter Sunday! Guided by Sanctuary staff, our winter walks focus on wintering land birds and coastal life, including waterfowl and seals. All levels of experience welcome. Dress warmly. 8:00 AM. No charge
Registration required.

February 16

THE NIGHT WORLD Are you afraid of the woods at night? With any luck at all, you won't be after this walk! Sanctuary Teacher/Naturalist, Larry Taft will guide participants through a variety of activities designed to make them familiar with all the sights and sounds of the woods and fields after dark. All ages are welcome. Dress warmly! 7:00 PM. M/\$2. NM/\$3. No registration required.

February 17

CROSS COUNTRY SKIING The numbers of cross country skiers that flock to the Norman Bird Sanctuary after each snow fall has grown dramatically in the past few years as more people have discovered this relaxing way to enjoy the winter woods and fields. Join us before or after your Sunday afternoon outing for the wonderful film, "SKINNY SKIING," which portrays cross-country skiing in all its moods from a peaceful glide through the woods to the thrill of competition. The film lasts $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. No charge. No registration required. 2:00

February 24

THE YEAR OF THE EAGLE Eagles! These bold birds have long excited our national imagination, but they are becoming increasingly rare. Well-known fish and wildlife photographer Jack Swedburg is one of those lucky few who has observed eagles in the wild and for this program he will share and personally narrate two of his dramatic films. "The Year of the Eagle" portrays the daily life of wintering birds in the Quabbin Reservoir, while "Home Free" tells the story of the translocation and hand rearing of baby eagles from Manitoba to new homes in New England in an attempt to bolster our diminishing populations.

This exciting program is suitable for all ages and will be held in the newly remodeled auditorium of the Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge, just down the road from the Sanctuary. No charge. No registration required.

March 1

OWL PROWL Winter is mating season for the Sanctuary's owls. Join us for a night walk as we try to hear the calls of the Screech owls echoing through the woods. Learn of the specialized haunts and habits of these refuge dwellers. All ages welcome. Bring a flashlight for owl spotting and dress warmly! 7:30 PM. M/\$2. NM/\$3. No registration required.



March 2

MAPLE SUGARING 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 Teacher/Naturalist Larry Taft will guide participants through all phases of sugaring, from identifying the proper trees to a taste of the final product! All ages welcome. 1:30 - 4:00 PM. Pre-registration required. M/\$5. NM/\$7.

March 3

WINTER BIRDS "I keep meaning to get to one of those Sunday morning Bird Walks, but when Sunday morning comes around, I kind of open one eye, stare at the clock and roll back under the covers, thinking, 'Next week for sure!'" Sound familiar? Well, here's some incentive to break the pattern. On this special Sunday morning, directly following the bird walk as we cozily munch on pastries and hot drinks, Dartmouth photographer Andy Provost will share his superb slides of the wintering birds of the Norman Bird Sanctuary. Join us! (For those who don't want to take the plunge all at once, the slides will start at 9:00 AM.) 8:00 AM. No registration required M/\$1. NM/\$2.

NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY EVENTS

- March 6 COOKING WITH SEAWEED From delectable sweet blanc mange pudding to zesty kelp chip snacks, the world of seaweed provides many tasty delights. This workshop will cover collection, identification and preparation techniques. Included will be recipes for seaweed desserts, snacks, soups and breads. Come join the feast! Pre-registration required. 7:00 PM. M/\$5. NM/\$7.
- March 10 WILD ANIMAL BABIES For wild animals, childhood is the age of delight and discovery, as well as the time for quickly learning essential survival skills. This program will feature the lively film, "Wild Babies", produced by Marty Stouffer, which looks at a wide variety of North American babies, from baby skunks and owlets to Bear cubs. Included in the program will be a presentation by Delia Clark on the Norman Bird Sanctuary's own wild babies and what you can do if you come across one of your own in your wanderings. Suitable for all ages. No registration required. 2:00 PM. M/\$2. NM/\$3.
- March 15 WOODCOCK WALK Greet this wiley Spring reveler and welcome Spring itself with a walk through the Sanctuary in search of Philohela minor. Learn about this bird's unique nuptial flight and courtship, then enjoy a champagne toast to his return! No registration required. 5:30 PM. M/\$3. NM/\$4.
- March 20 NATIVES OF MIDDLETOWN Since shortly after the retreat of the last great glacier, many groups have populated Southeastern New England. Recently, archeological investigations along the greater Narragansett Bay have discovered many sites left by these ancient peoples, including one very large and essentially undisturbed site right here in the Norman Bird Sanctuary. Co-sponsored with the Middletown Historical Society, this program will present Alan Leveillee and Peter Thorbahn of the Public Archeology Lab Inc. discussing the lifestyles of these early southern New England natives, with a focus on Middletown. The program will include slides and an artifact exhibit. Join us! No registration required. 7:30 PM. M/\$2. NM/\$3.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

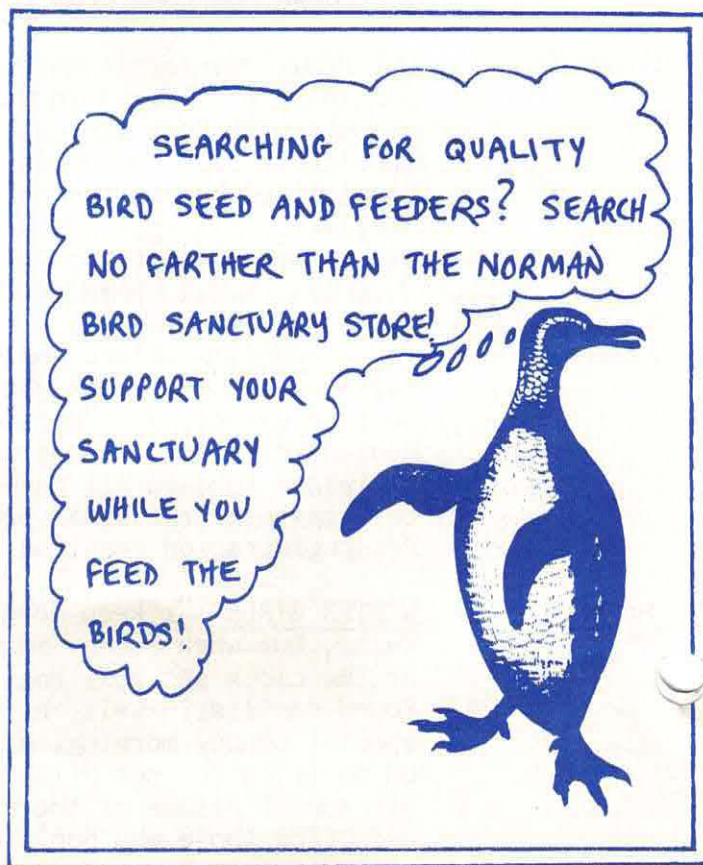
NATURE CLUB

A Saturday morning alternative for your child, the Norman Bird Sanctuary's Nature Club is a place where children can safely do things that have always excited their curiosity, under the guidance of a knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff. Nature crafts, hikes, films, games, nature discovery activities - fun learning! For children in pre-school through grade 4. Children are grouped by age. Saturday mornings 9:30 - 12:30
Session # 3 February 16 - March 16
Session # 4 March 23 - April 20
M/\$25. NM/\$30 per 5-week session.
Pre-registration required.

WINTER WEEK

A vacation at the Norman Bird Sanctuary! Crafts, hikes, films, games, nature discovery activities. Vacation does not need to be an end to fun learning.* For children in pre-school through grade 4.
M/\$25. NM/\$30. Pre-registration required.

*Watch for Spring Week, April 15 - 19!



L.G.B.'S (LITTLE GRAY BIRDS)

Today we are bird watching from the warmth of the office. There is hot tea brewing and a pair of binoculars, neither fogged or stiff with cold, within arm's reach. Our feeders are well-stocked and the first flakes of a snowstorm are falling. The chair is comfortable and the birds, many of them sparrows, are only 20 feet away. Against a backdrop of fresh snow and so close in, sparrows, previously overlooked as "that little gray bird over there", are really quite beautiful, worthy of many hours of study here at the feeder and many more in the field.

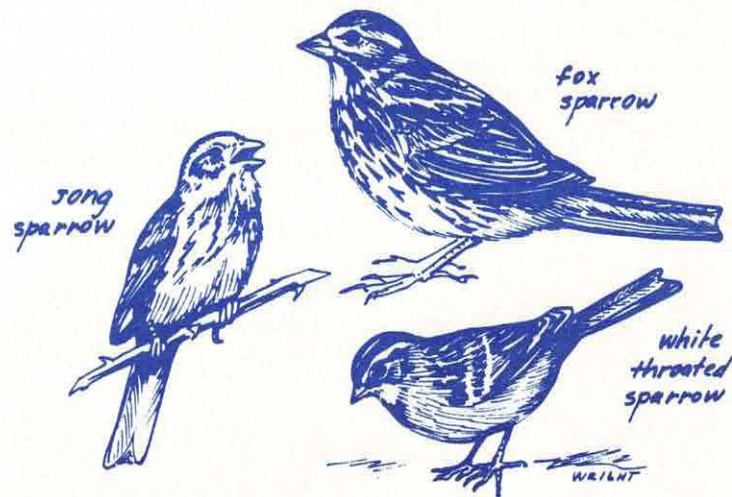
The White-Throated Sparrow is the most numerous bird under the feeder. Here we count 33 scratching around the dried stems of the perennial garden and fence rails. The White-Throat is abundant here in winter but breeds North, haunting the mountainous areas of New England. These birds have a white bib with a dark edge to it which gives way to a pale gray wash over the breast and along the sides of the body. On the brightest birds a spot of yellow between the eye and the bill stands out clearly. But no two White-Throats look alike. They come in all shades of gray and brown - one here lacks the faintest trace of the white throat it hails by.

Actually the color variations of White-Throats have important survival value for the flock. Sparrow watchers have detected a social hierarchy in flocks based on the brightness of the facial patterns and colors of the birds. It's a caste system with dominance preordained to give the brightest birds first rights to food and territory. This survival strategy which prevents members of the flock from constantly fighting to establish dominance, is especially important during times of resource scarcity when there may not be enough food to go around. For the population to survive, some of the flock must survive. flock must survive.

Mixed in with the White-Throats is a Song Sparrow. Hopping nervously in and out of view this sparrow seems to take her territory with her, defending a 6 inch radius of turf against any infiltrator including Blue Jay and Cardinal. She takes a tug at a bundle of aster seeds planted a summer ago in the garden. Song Sparrows are streaked breasted birds with a bold spot on the breast. She is gray around the face and shoulders and her head is striped twice like the White-Throats' but 's confident. Most Song Sparrows fly farther south in the winter but many do stay on here. Mild winters favor the ones that remain; harsh winters select for the birds who move south. There seems to be no definitive answer for the Song Sparrow in this temperate

but finicky northeast climate.

We sip more tea and watch the storm build. Given the choice the sparrows prefer feeding on the ground. But, as the storm thickens, more and more flit up in the feeders. The most exciting bird arrives out of nowhere and sits on the seed tray: the Fox Sparrow. A large thrush-like sparrow with a rufous tail and rump and rusty streaked white sides, it crouches down in the seed tray and faces us so we can all marvel. The streaking comes together under the chin in a solid red-brown dot, leaving a pattern of light-brown speckles on the belly. The head and back are patched with gray and rust. Very pretty. Fox Sparrows breed in northern Canada from Newfoundland and Labrador into Alaska. We are observing a bird on the northern border of its winter range.



Shortly after the arrival of the Fox Sparrow, an American Tree Sparrow flits in. Tree Sparrows are sharp looking sparrows with two crisp white wing bars, smooth pale gray breasts with a faint breast spot and rusty cap. This bird visits just in winter and usually doesn't stay long at the feeder. This one surveys the lowly congress from his fence post perch. He leaves for a patch of short cropped grass somewhere.

One shy House Sparrow hangs on the fringes of the feeder flock. A scrappy noisy stealer of blue bird boxes in the spring and an unscrupulous city dweller, the House Sparrow recovers a little lost image here.

Other winter sparrows could come to our feeder, but you'd be better off going looking for them. Savannah Sparrows and a White-Crowned Sparrow or two feed in the short grassed parking areas at Third Beach and the town trailer camping area. You might find a Field Sparrow in with this

small flock also. Travelling along Third Beach Road by the beach, look under the shanties for Tree Sparrows and an Ipswich Sparrow, a light race of the Savannah Sparrow. Several Swamp Sparrows will winter in the marshy thickets out in the woodland areas of the Refuge. One especially interesting sighting this winter is a partial albino Song Sparrow seen in the parking area at the tip of Sachuest Point.

However you prefer your sparrows, à la feeder or à la field, once you have studied several species up close prepare to be frequently diverted.

VOLUNTEER JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Store Manager to manage potential-packed Sanctuary store. Responsible for maintaining inventory of nature-related books and useful things, tee shirts, and bird feeding supplies. Also responsible for researching inventory additions, pricing items, setting up displays and bookkeeping. Flexible hours and great benefits. Perfect for the right person. Contact the Sanctuary at 846-2577.

Trail Workers needed to build stone path on the Maple Swamp Pond dike on Saturday, March 2, 1985, at 10:00 AM. Bring spades, work boots, gloves. Also on March 9, at 10:00 AM you are needed to dig holes, cut and nail lumber, and carry wood for a new section of boardwalk to go through the maple swamp. Bring hammer, spades, post-hole diggers, mud boots, gloves.

Our thanks to Amy Wright, Rebecca Schoeneck, and Laura Tedeschi for their illustrations for this newsletter.



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

FILL 'ER UP!

Maple Swamp Pond is full. From successive rains in November and December the water level crept upward until, after a heavy rain on December 21, the water spilled over the top retention board.

At the bridge the full water pond depth is 5 feet, shallow enough for light penetration to the bottom sediments, but deep enough for a wide diversity of pond organisms. Most of the flooded area (about 2½ acres) is much less deep, between one - three feet. Emergent aquatic plants and the pond edge plant communities will flourish over time. Our spotted salamander populations will have more than a puddle this year for their annual "congress" in March.

LET'S LOOK IT UP!

Thanks to volunteer Florence Yates, Sanctuary members and staff can now find their way through 20 years of donated and purchased books and periodicals in the Sanctuary library. Putting the skills from her years as a professional librarian to use, Florence has spent well over 100 hours cataloging the Sanctuary's collection of natural history books and preparing them for use.

The library will now be available to Sanctuary members. Books may be borrowed for a one month period. If you are researching a special natural history topic and would like to spend some time in the library, please contact us ahead of time and we'll be happy to arrange a date.

The Sanctuary welcomes contributions of natural history related books and selected periodicals to augment our collection. Florence has generously agreed to continue to catalogue new additions, helping to maintain this valuable Sanctuary resource.

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

