

Hi! Some people say "The Sanctuary is colourless at this time of year" while others say "Its asleep". Not so! Not so! Tips of willow are yellow against the sky. Our maples are called red because some part of the tree is always red--in summer just the stems of leaves, and now the buds are red. Thousands of them massed together give an over all blush to the Sanct. They are added to by thousands of buds of wild blueberry and dogwood. A different colour comes from wild blackberry stalks--deep purple with a white waxy coat to protect the growth from the wind cold--reminds one of juicy blueberry pie with melting vanilla ice cream! Same colour! Bittersweet vines trail orange veils from the tops of their host trees. Wild privet twigs are of the palest gold while mosses can make you catch your breath with the brilliance of their greens. Tree barks are many colours--some speckled over with lichen or covered with mosses, few if any are "colourless". Overhead still fly ducks and geese, as they seek open fresh water where the succulent greens they eat grow. They fly mostly at night and, Bob says that they can fly 400-600 miles a day, living on the fat they collected in the summer months. There's not much open fresh water left on our Island now. But when the temp. begins to read 33°F they start their northward trips again. Before the snow there were many signs of wildlife from footprints in the soft earth to small spots among the grasses, rhymed in frost from the condensed breath of little things that smell the air for predators before they dash out into the open. Few of us think to look among the dead leaves for winter insects, but they are there, eating the leaves and so, enriching the earth. Some of them come out onto the snow to mate, and then they can be seen, dark against the white. In the snow, everywhere, everywhere tracks of all "our" animals--mostly rabbits to be sure, but fox, raccoon, skunk, at times mink, often muskrat, tracks are to be found--by those who look! And everywhere, birds, flying, hopping and eating. Truly The Sanct is a gigantic bird feeding station!

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We hope all of you saw Channel 12's evening news just before Christmas. If you did you saw a barred owl being released back on its own home territory. Some one brought it to our Sanct. earlier in the Fall with a badly wounded leg. As an owl, like all predator birds, must have two legs to catch and hold its prey, the owl was doomed to death by starvation. Bob force fed it and cared for the wound. When the bird was well, under the watchful eye of the TV camera, Bob caught it and carefully wrapped it in a big bath towel so not one

This season of the year (when nature is asleep!) the owls will court. In the bitter cold of winter they will mate, build nests and brood the eggs (2 or 3) and with snow on the nests --they seldom find the romantic hollow tree--they will raise their young. While trees creek, groan and snap with cold the owlets will hatch. The parents will find food for them in a world that seems too harsh for small wildlife to endure. But they are born of parents who share their warmth, who have eyesight that is good, and hearing that is good, and who have passed on to their young, feathers that will not ever ruffle the air as they fly, in silence, searching food.

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December 17th was Bird Count Day this year. Total species: 107, total birds numbered 29,923. Down a bit from other years, but really it was only half a day as the wind came up at noon, and birds take to thickets in the wind! There were no wildly unusual birds seen but there were 205 robins and 10,544 starlings! Aside from interest, what does this bird count mean to us? It shows us what is happening in the birds' environment--which just happens to be the same as ours! It was the decline of the osprey which focussed attention on the perils of DDT! So the bird count is not conducted by a bunch of nuts out to spot the strangest bird around! Altho R.I. has been host to some rare ones lately! A white pelican from the Gulf of Mexico was sighted in Little Compton, then in Newport--first time since 1946. A South African shelduck was seen in South Kingstown. It is so rare authorities firmly believe it escaped from a private collector. And an ill fated European barnacle goose was shot and killed in the same area Nov. 11--the first of its species ever recorded in R.I.

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Blue fish, which we all enjoy hot from the broiler with a wedge of lemon, are coastal predators of vast water "territories"--everywhere except North and Central Pacific Ocean. Altho they are not abundant enough for commercializing, they support a great sport fishery along the Atlantic coast. It is a ferocious fish of unequalled reputation in fishdom. So wasteful and voracious that it is called an animated "chopping machine". With canine teeth on both jaws it is designed to maim and destroy as many fish as possible in a feeding period. Only it takes a head here, a tail there until the blue is full. Then it regurgitates, like the ancient Romans, so it can eat some more. The official top weight of a blue is 31 lbs, and they eat twice their weight in fish a day. They prefer menhaddens, mackerel and herring. With the disappearance of these favourites, blue

in estuaries and salt marshes and all the way out to the continental shelf-30-100 miles offshore. 48 hours after fertilization blues 1/10th of 1" long rise to the surface where they hang upside down at an angle--eating. One day later they are already 2" long. Then they form into schools and lie under other schools of menhaden or mackerel, until, in a flash they rise to the kill. From then on they eat and grow as do we all.

A word of warning about blues--they bite! A sea captain in Newport caught one that fastened on his arm. He brought his boat to mooring, rowed ashore, and drove to the hospital with a dead blue still fastened to his arm! A dog we heard of got his nose and tongue shredded when he played with a blue his master had caught and throw onto the rocks. Both Captain and dog recovered, thank you.

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Don't let the Puxatawney PA. Chamber of Commerce fool you. Groundhogs will not come out on Feb 2nd. They are hibernating rodents who will sleep until the sun has warmed the earth around their burrows, then they'll come out. No one wakes the groundhog but the sun itself. By that time the colours of our feeder birds will have sharpened and goldfinches will be gold again. The song sparrows will be trying out their voices and we humans will be looking to see if the bulbs have pierced the ground yet. We'll be on the down side of winter, thanks to the sun shining above us, warming us and all our hemisphere. And down under people will be checking on their longjohns for the winter that will surely come.

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As the weather is suitable--- Cerio Pond is available for pre-school age kids with their parents, for sledding/skating. No bullies allowed!! For adults: cross country skiing on the Sanctuary land--when the snow invites you out.

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No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings

Wm. Blake

NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY

A Wildlife Refuge

MIDDLETOWN, RHODE ISLAND 02840

Telephone 401 - 846-2577

CALENDAR OF EVENTS - JANUARY-MARCH, 1979

Wednesday, January 24 - 8:00 PM - At the Sanctuary Ed Shed.
A free clinic on cross-country skiing by Peter Powell
of Base Camp. Included are equipment evaluations,
skiing and waxing techniques, and maintenance and
repair. Coffee, tea and hot chocolate.

Wednesday, February 7 - 8:00 PM - At the Sanctuary Ed Shed.
Spectacular slides taken this winter "A Rockclimber's
Traverse of the Presidential Range in Winter."
Speaker from the Base Camp. Coffee, tea, and hot
chocolate.

Sunday, February 11 - 7:30 PM - At the Sanctuary. Full moon
walk to look and listen for courtship calls and
flights of the Great Horned Owl. Dress warmly.
Coffee, tea and hot chocolate afterwards.

Saturday, February 17 - 7:30 PM - Another owl listening walk
in the Sanctuary - remember the warm clothes. Hot
drinks later.

Wednesday, February 21 - 8:00 PM - At the Sanctuary Ed Shed.
A magnificent sailing film "A Moment's Glory."
Footage shot at the 1976 Hobie Cat World Champion-
ships at Honolulu with Peter Powell of Base Camp.

Sunday, March 4 - 1:30 PM - At the Sanctuary. Winter Woods
Walk - a chance to see how adaptations for winter are
working. The whole family should enjoy this.

Sunday, March 18 - 1:30 PM - At the Sanctuary Ed Shed.
"Landscaping for Wildlife" a first-rate presentation
by Professional Landscape Architect Carol Bergren
of Newport. Why not plan those property improvements
with an eye to wildlife benefits.

Sunday, March 25 - 1:30 PM - At the Sanctuary. Me First!
Let's walk and see which plants and animals are the
first signs of Spring. Do wildflowers show this
early? Migrating birds? - come and help look.

DO JOIN US!

PLEASE POST

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