

# The Norman Bird Flyer

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME NO. 5 ISSUE 2

## SHRUBS IN BLOOM

Spring, 1984

The Norman Bird Sanctuary is a shrubby place. Its lands in summer disappear under a tangle of dense greenery. Shrub stems and vines comingle, crawl up the trunks of trees, spread across the openings in old fields and reach up to sunlight, all in the push to find light and space, to thrive. Many shrubs thrive in old field settings, and the Sanctuary, having been a farm for many years before becoming a wild-life refuge in the early 1950's, has plenty of old fields. The warm maritime climate and rich glacial soils also encourage dense shrub growth.

In Springtime, foggy, damp, and somewhat delayed here, shrub and vine species stand alone, featured briefly in their blooming, before the green waves of summer wash over them. Spring then is an ideal time to get to know these plants. Our native shrubs are among the most attractive elements of the natural landscape and, due to their fitness to our locality, you can use them in your yard once you learn to recognize them. Listed below are just a few of the shrubs you can find here on a Spring walk through the fields or out into the woods.



Spicebush

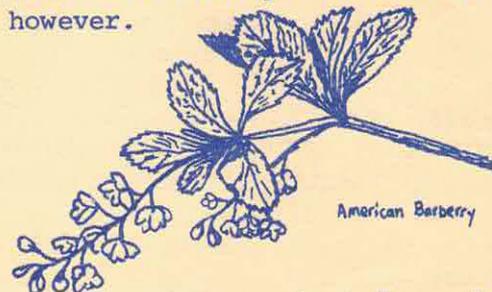
Spicebush. The first of the Sanctuary's shrubs to bloom, spicebush, grows in the understory throughout the red maple swamp woodlands. Its yellow/green flowers appear long before the plant leafs out, giving a combined effect of a yellow sheen or mist throughout the woodland. The flowers of spicebush are reduced to the point where they have no petals. The sepals, instead, hold the flower's color. Spicebush twigs snapped open give off an allspice odor, and settlers used the spicebush in cooking

and herbal preparations. Nature Day Campers are encouraged to chew up a bud or two for the spicy taste. Planted by your front door, spicebush gives you the fragrance of Spring long before most plants begin to push out leaves.



Amelanchier or Shadbush

Shadbush. Shadbush is one of our earliest bloomers, beginning here in late April and running through mid-May. Shadbush, like the crabs and hawthorne, is a member of the rose family. Its thin, white petals, numbering 5, come so early that Shadbush is often standing all alone in flower. In the Sanctuary, it grows in the dry sunny areas of old fields and solitarily up on the ridges. Walk out on the middle ridge in late April, and you'll find some of the old giants awash in white petals. Standing next to the barn, you can pick out these shrub/trees looking like white phantoms in the gray and green hues of the misted ridges. Shadbush, besides producing beautiful flowers, gives a berry both birds and humans find quite palatable. Each berry contains a sizeable pit, however.



American Barberry

American Barberry. Last June, in the far reaches of the Sanctuary (the connecting trail between Gray Crag and Middle Ridge), we found several flowering shrubs

CONT

## Shrubs in Bloom, Cont.

new to us. One grew low to the ground in the gathering shade of hickory trees. Its bright yellow flowers, thorny stems, and small leaves, finely toothed and elliptical in shape, looked vaguely familiar. This turned out to be the American Barberry, familiar because Japanese Barberry is planted in clumps by the front doors of the barn. The leaves of both shrubs taste sweet and lemony. Nature Day Campers sample them in early July. Since finding barberry, we have read of the flower's clever pollinating mechanism. As Donald Stokes describes in his book on wild shrubs and vines:

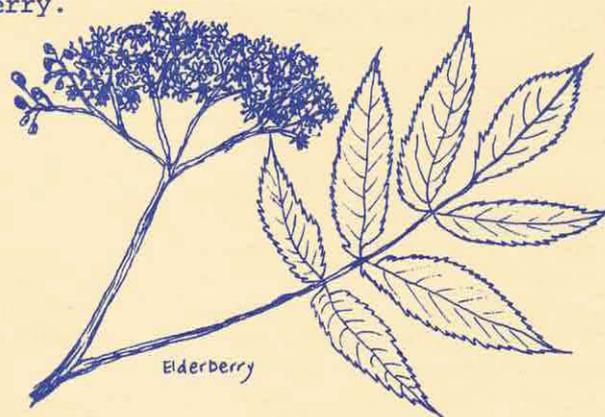
"The female part of the barberry flower, the pistil, is shaped like a small post in the flower's center. Surrounding the pistil, but spread away from it and pressed against each petal, are the male stamens. Nectar is located at the base of the stamens so when the bee sticks its mouth into the nectaries, it triggers a mechanism that makes the stamens spring inward and press against the insect's mouth and head. As the bee pulls its head back, pollen brushes along the sides of its face. Each stamen can spring independently so that the bee may be snapped upon as many as six times."

With a needle or knifeblade, you can simulate the action of the bee. The stamens will reset themselves after dusting your knifeblade with pollen.



Swamp Dogwood. Mixed in with the tangle of honeysuckle, bittersweet, arrowwood, and grape vines along the Quarry Trail, are the maroon stems of Swamp Dogwood. Fine silken hairs near the ends of the stems give the Swamp Dogwood its alias, Silky Dogwood. This dogwood's stems, split open, show a brown pith or core, and its white flowers are borne on flat umbels, umbrella-like flower heads. From these flowerheads come bluish-white berries ravished in the Fall by finches, mockingbirds, robins, cedar-waxwings, and many others. Though not as showy as the native Flowering Dogwood found in the wild and in many a backyard, the shrub dogwoods are important members of the field edge communities, providing nesting cover and food for a number of the birds which feed on insects and fruits found

in the field. Dogwoods as a group are rated fifth in importance to wildlife by the National Wildlife Federation. They are surpassed only by pine, oak, blackberry, and cherry.



Elderberry. We had always heard about the practice of making elderberry preserves and wine--a good idea judging from the taste of the sweet purple fruits that hang out into the trail so invitingly. But somehow we never noticed Elderberry until its fruits were well-formed. Last June was the month of the Elderberry at the Sanctuary. Once noticed, the flowers, clustered umbels of small white blossoms, appeared everywhere. We dug them up for transplanting, used them as centerpieces, and remembered locations the wild edible feast days in Nature Day

Elderberries have a blond warty stem in winter. The leaves pop out of these in Spring, belying their dead appearance. The leaves are compound with 7 sawtooth leaflets. You can find lots of Elderberry along the Woodcock Trail in June. Roadsides are speckled with the white flowers, too.

These are just a very few of the shrubs found here: Arrowwood *Viburnum* covers large areas of old fields with white flowers in late June. *Rosa Rugosa* (introduced) spreads across the sandy places behind the beaches, creating an astonishing sea of pink, white, and red petals in mid-June. Blueberries grow in abundance in the old fields and up on the ridges (the back part of the Hanging Rock Trail is lined with blueberry). Bayberry's bone white and silver stems and deep, waxy leaves are familiar, too, and we can't fail to mention the bright canes of blackberry.

There are new shrubs to discover, too. Last Spring, we were walking in the woodlands and just happened to stop and look up in this place, and high above us were flow small, white petaled wild-rose like flowers, with red stamens in their centers. We traced the branches down to a trunk that hugged the trunk of a large, hollow red cedar, long since overshadowed by larger

trees. These flowers belonged to Red Chokeberry. It must have grown up alongside the Red Cedar in a sunny place, long before the forest there was even a twinkle in the Earth's eye. Another shrub will soon take its place.

There are more "Red Chokeberries" in the Sanctuary. Here are some reading materials to help you find them.

Wild Shrubs and Vines. Donald Stokes. Harper and Row, 1981.

How to Grow Wildflowers and Wild Shrubs and Trees in Your Own Garden. Hal Bruce. Van Nostrand, Reinhold Company, 1976.

The Shrub Identification Book, George Symonds. William Morrow Company, 1963.



## MILESTONES

Died: Hooter the Owl, March 1984, of natural causes

Who out there remembers Hooter? Hooter was the Great-Horned Owl in residence at the Sanctuary for 10 years during Lee Gardner's tenure as director.

In his 16 year life, Hooter influenced the lives of literally thousands of school children by travelling to nearly every elementary school in the state at one time or another, and by starring in a nature TV show. Many children even wrote him fan mail. It was Daphne Smith, says Lee Gardner, who taught Hooter everything he knew, which wasn't much. In fact, all Hooter knew was how to sit on Daphne's head and clack his beak when hungry.

Hooter was never caged, but was simply leashed. His greatest adventure came once

when he got away. He was the subject of an island-wide search. He was found a few days later just three houses down the street in Jeanette Szpinalski's yard with a gullet full of grass. Hooter couldn't travel very far or get his own food with a permanently injured wing.

Hooter first appeared as a little ball of fuzz at the base of a tree in Westport in March of 1968. The tiny owlet was in sorry shape, with one wing broken and twisted out of its socket and a large twig stuck in his eye. Sitting next to him on the ground was his brother. Though a vet removed the twig and set Hooter's wing, he was never able to live on his own. His brother, though, was uninjured and was raised and released to the wild. His brother mated successfully the following year and raised a nest of young.

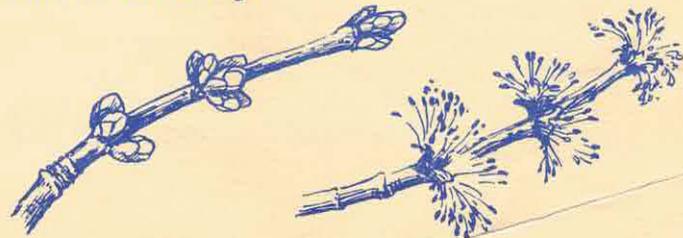
These two owls represent the two best-case scenarios in the issue of human intervention with wildlife. Hooter's brother is an example of our most hoped-for outcome: a successful release to the wild. Hooter is a success story of another kind. In becoming the Sanctuary's educational emissary and symbol, he reached out to thousands of people, increasing their appreciation for wildlife and their sense of responsibility for the earth. His raised eyebrow cock-eyed stare and bill clacking will be remembered by all who set eyes on him.

## GARDENERS

Attention gardeners: there are two spots for you in Sanctuary operations.

1) The Sanctuary will again be running its community gardening program this summer. If you are a Sanctuary member, you are entitled to a free garden plot as long as they last. Come to this year's organizational meeting April 15 at 2:00, or call for more information.

2) The Sanctuary grounds gardening committee is just forming, under the leadership of Jill Hall. This is your opportunity to help the Sanctuary while working in our beautiful perennial gardens, herb garden, and wildlife plantings. You need only commit 2 hours per month--not bad! Please call the Sanctuary if interested. We can provide training.



# DIRECTORS' NOTES

The muddy ground and grey skies of March brought the expected signs of Spring to the refuge.

Willows turned yellow, and the red maples began brimming red with swelling flowers. Wildlife movements increased markedly. Woodcock and redwinged black birds arrived on cue. Spotted salamanders congregated in the ponds. Skunks began making themselves known, and skunk cabbage, too. The Great-horned Owls grew silent during their nesting time, and Mourning Doves began their cascading courtship flights and calls, nesting by late March mid-way up in red cedar. Our year-round residents--song sparrows, tit-mice, cardinals, jays, mockingbirds, towhees, pheasants, and carolina wrens, to name some of the more vocal ones--began setting up territories.

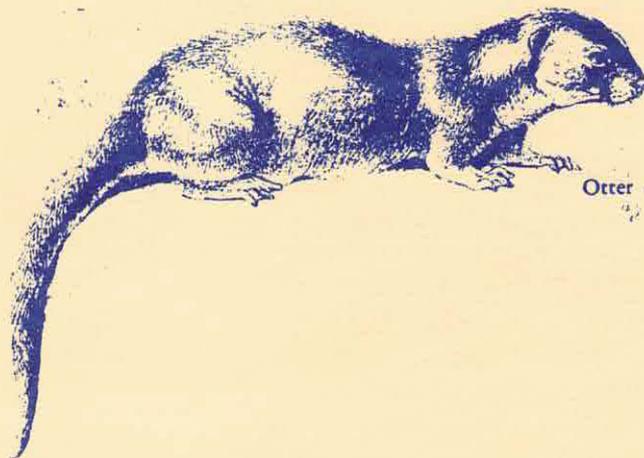
But then March brought with it some unexpected arrivals too, reminding us of our own inadvertent participation in the migration process. A chameleon came out of a crate of Romaine lettuce at Barclay's Restaurant (good fresh lettuce there). We transferred him to a glass terrarium, whereupon his color changed to brown. He basks on his yew branch right here next to the typing table. Anybody going to Florida?

The Sanctuary is also caring for a Snowy Owl. The Snowy had sustained tail feather damage, cut the leading edge of his wings, and had lost alot of weight. Come Spring, he'll need a one-way ticket up to the Tundra

River otters have officially returned to NBS. Unfortunately, Hanging Rock Road took its toll on one. The river otter, *Lutra canadensis*, the largest, most playful member of the weasel family, have repopulated riverine sections of northern and western Rhode Island, but few reports have come from our island. One sighting in the Sakonnet River several years ago and our own observation of otter scat (fish scaley droppings) is all we have. It's encouraging to know otter find our marshes, ponds, and streams to their liking.

Finally, a Northern Diamond-Backed Terrapin surprised us all in mid-March by showing up in a most unlikely place--the bar at Maximillian's discotheque. The turtle was taken from a person who didn't know better by a young girl who did. This dark turtle, 6 inches long, whose local populations have dramatically decreased through breeding habitat destruction, pollution, and collecting, quickly settled

into his new home. We don't know where the turtle was found, but took pleasure in the opportunity to release it back into the wild.



## SPECIAL DATES

### Birds and Breakfast

A spring morning of guided bird walks and a home-cooked breakfast. Come join us May 2 and help contribute to our new visitor information and store area. Watch for a special mailing.

### Wine Tasting

You and your family are invited to a wine tasting at 4:00 pm, Sunday, 3 June. This is a very special reception in honor of the Newport Garden Club and their most recent donation to the Norman Bird Sanctuary--the proceeds from their raffle of a beautiful handmade needlepoint tapestry. The drawing for this tapestry will take place at this time. Punch and cookies will be provided for the children.

### A Flock of Artists

A special juried show of naturalist art by artists from around Rhode Island. The show runs from June 30 - July 4, with opening festivities for Sanctuary members on the evening of June 29. Call 847-0448 if you know of any interested artists we might have missed. We hope to see you there!

### Summer Camps

Mark your calendar! This summer's Nature Day Camp and Summer Challenge programs will run from July 2 - August 31.

# NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY EVENTS

## BIRD WALKS

Spring birding is the most exciting of the year, and Spring is a great time to start if you are a beginner. You can learn to recognize our winter resident birds in early Spring, then gradually increase your repertoire as the colorful songbirds migrate back through our area. Join us! It's a great way to start a Spring Sunday. These informal walks are free of charge and open to everyone. Every Sunday, 8:00 am.

## PROGRAMS

- April 12 EMERGENCY FIRST AID. Offered by the Middletown Firefighters Association, this or  
April 17 one-hour course covers what to do in a medical emergency situation until the rescue wagon arrives. Great for people who spend a lot of time on the trail. Instructor, Phil Rondina will cover such topics as bleeding, choking, burns and heart attack. 8:00 pm. Free. Please call 846-2577 to register.
- April 15 GARDEN MEETING. A meeting for all Sanctuary members interested in having a plot in our community gardens. Whether you are a new or a returning gardener, be sure to attend this meeting so that you can be assigned the plot you want. 2:00.
- April 18 FROGS, TOADS, AND SALAMANDERS. Learn about these eerie strangers of the night through slides, discussion, and demonstration of living examples by DEM biologist, Chris Raithel, then tromp down into the Sanctuary, flashlight in hand, in hopes of seeing some in their natural homes. 7:30 pm. M/\$2, NM/\$3. No registration.
- May 1 STAR WALK. Featuring the Great Bear high above after Winter's hibernation, the Spring sky is full of awakening wonders. Our star walks will focus on constellation and star legends from around the world. Dress warmly for the brisk night air. Held weather permitting. Call 846-2577 for confirmation. 8:00 pm. M/\$2, NM/\$3. No registration required.
- May 2 DOCENT TRAINING. For anyone interested in guiding school groups through the Sanctuary this Spring. No experience required. Call for more information! 9:00-12:00.
- May 13 SPRING WILDFLOWER WALK. Each year the forest floor fills with wildflowers for the brief four weeks when the soil is warm but the trees haven't leafed out to shade the ground. Join us for a stroll through these ephemeral Spring beauties. 2:00. M/\$2, NM/\$3. No registration required.
- May 29 STAR WALK. See above. 8:00 pm.
- June 1 DANCE INTO SUMMER. Dance in the Barn to the music of Geese in the Bog, sponsored by the Newport County Country Dance Society. Join us for a pot-luck supper beforehand. Children welcome. Supper: 6:30, Dance: 8:00. M/\$2.50, NM/\$3.50. No registration required.
- June 26 STAR WALK. See above. 8:00 pm.



# NATURE CLUB

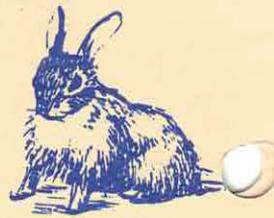
A Saturday morning alternative for your child, the Norman Bird Sanctuary's Nature Club is a place where children can safely do things that have always excited their curiosity, under the guidance of a knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff. Seven to ten children per instructor. Children learn by doing and have fun at the same time. For children in grades K-4.

Saturday mornings, 9:00-12:00

Session #3 APR 7 - MAY 5

Session #4 MAY 12 - JUN 9

M/\$25; NM/\$30; registration required.



## SPRING WEEK

What does a frog feel like? How do you make a slip-bark whistle? Vacation does not need to be an end to fun learning. Enjoy a week of crafts, hikes, games and nature discovery through the Norman Bird Sanctuary. For children in grades K-6.

April 16-20, 9:00-12:00

M/\$25, NM/\$30, registration required.

## SATURDAY AFTERNOON ADVENTURES

Explore the outer limits of the natural world and of your own abilities. Join us for any or all of these special topic programs. For children in grades 5-8. All programs run from 1:00-4:00 pm.

Single program: M/\$5; NM/\$7

Group of any 4 programs: M/\$18; NM/\$26

Registration required

### NATURAL DYEING

Extract a rainbow of hidden colors from the plants found outside and inside your own home. We will go through each step of this fascinating process and finish with a sample of dyed cotton to take home. April 7.

### FLY A KITE!

Explore the winds and weather through the construction of your own Japanese fish kite. Decorate the skies with your own art work! All materials provided. April 28.

### NATURE'S TOYBOX

Make toys, games, and musical instruments using pioneer and Native American designs. Perfect your skill with a jack-knife and

paintbrush while you watch natural materials turn into exciting toys before your eyes. May 5.

### ROCK-CLIMBING

Learn the basic rock-climbing knots, the communication system used by the climber and the belayer, and the safe use of rock-climbing equipment, then explore a very different environment as you scale one of the Sanctuary's ledges. May 12.

### TERRARIUM CONSTRUCTION

Create a mini-climate inside a bottle and grow your own indoor garden of small wild plants. Tools, plants, and bottle will be provided by the Sanctuary. May 19.

### ORIENTEERING

Learn to measure distance and direction using pacing and a compass, then join a group in following a tough course that challenges many of your outdoor skills as it ranges through the refuge. May 26.

## COMMUNITY CALENDER

The following is a listing of local events of interest to nature lovers and conservationists.

Herb Walk. Red Thundercloud will lead an herb walk at the Sanctuary for the Newport Training Institute. April 7, 9:00-10:45. Info: 846-5388

Sunrise Celebration. Celebrate spring with a walk out Hanging Rock on Easter morning. Feel free to bring a favorite quotation. 6:00 am. Info: 846-2577

Leader Training Workshop. Sponsored by Save the Bay, this is a workshop for anyone who has started to take an interest in land use decisions on Aquidneck Island. Portsmouth Middle School April 28, 8:30-3:30. Info: 849-8430

Paul Winter and Sunsinger. The ultimate concert for lovers of wilderness, Winter plays along with whale song and wolf howls. Sponsored by Channing Music Series. May 4 and 5, 8:00 pm. Info: 846-0643

EPA Dinner Dance. A chance to support a group fighting to protect Middletown shoreline habitat. Sponsored by Easton's Point Association. May 4, 6:00. Info: 849-7218

Notice: Anyone retired or otherwise free during weekdays or weekends who would like to arrange hiking, canoeing, biking, or camping trips, please call Roger Gilman, 847-0638.

# Landscaping for Wildlife

Develop a landscape plan for your yard designed to attract and provide for native birds and wildlife while looking beautiful throughout the seasons. Workshop will teach how to identify plants and shrubs that are beneficial to wildlife, how to select those appropriate to your site, and how to plan an overall landscaping scheme. Bring a bag lunch; beverage is provided.

April 14, 9:00-3:00 pm

M/\$15, NM/\$18, registration required

## Watching Birds

Birds, with their bright, shimmering colors, their lovely songs and their seemingly effortless flight have always captured the human imagination. They have served countless times as a springboard into a greater love of the natural world. This course will use slides, guest speakers, readings and easy guided walks to introduce participants to the joys of watching birds. Bring a bag lunch and enjoy these four stimulating afternoons in May. Beverage provided.

May, 2, 9, 16, 23, 12:00-2:00 pm

M/\$20, NM/\$24, registration required

## 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!

June 6, 7:00-9:30 pm

M/\$4, NM/\$6, registration required



## Wildflower Pressing

The art of arranging and pressing wildflowers and ferns has been used for hundreds of years by both craftsmen and the scientific community. Once dried, pressed flowers can be used to decorate notecards, wall hangings and delicate velvet mounts, as well as providing a valuable record of flower species. This workshop will cover collecting, pressing, and mounting techniques. Participants will create a variety of arrangements and will learn how to preserve specimens for a scientific collection. Materials provided.

June 23, 9:00-3:00 pm

M/\$15, NM/\$18, registration required

## Outdoor Teaching Tips

Specially designed for leaders of boy and girl scout groups and youth groups of all ages, this hands-on workshop will provide specific tips on how to bring the outdoors into your program successfully. Participants will have the opportunity to bone up on their knowledge of natural history and to learn about new activity ideas in the areas of nature crafts, outdoor living, using your senses, science investigations, nature walks and group cooperation builders. This one-day workshop is jam-packed with information and includes lots of take-home material.

May 12, 9:30-3:30 pm

M/\$12, NM/\$15, registration required

# PROGRAM REGISTRATION FORM

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE # \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

SANCTUARY MEMBER  NON-MEMBER  PLEASE SEND MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION  # Attending \_\_\_\_\_ Fee \_\_\_\_\_

|                               |              |       |       |  |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------|-------|--|
| Nature Club                   |              |       |       |  |
| Session #3                    | APR 7-MAY 5  | _____ | _____ |  |
| Session #4                    | MAY 12-JUN 9 | _____ | _____ |  |
| Spring Week                   | APR 16-20    | _____ | _____ |  |
| Saturday Afternoon Adventures |              |       |       |  |
| Natural Dyeing                | APR 7        | _____ | _____ |  |
| Fly A Kite                    | APR 28       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Nature's Toybox               | MAY 5        | _____ | _____ |  |
| Rock-Climbing                 | MAY 12       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Terrarium Construction        | MAY 19       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Orienteering                  | MAY 26       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Landscaping for Wildlife      | APR 14       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Watching Birds                | MAY 2-23     | _____ | _____ |  |
| Youth Leader's Workshop       | MAY 12       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Cooking with Seaweed          | JUNE 6       | _____ | _____ |  |
| Wildflower Pressing           | JUNE 23      | _____ | _____ |  |

Or, call: **846-2577**

TOTAL ENCLOSED \_\_\_\_\_



## THE ECCLES ROOM

The Eccles' Room, the Sanctuary's library, is newly carpeted and lined with new pine bookshelves, thanks to your contributions to last year's Birds and Breakfast. The expanded book capacity has the new shelves looking rather bare, though! We are ready and waiting to accept your donations of books related to natural history.

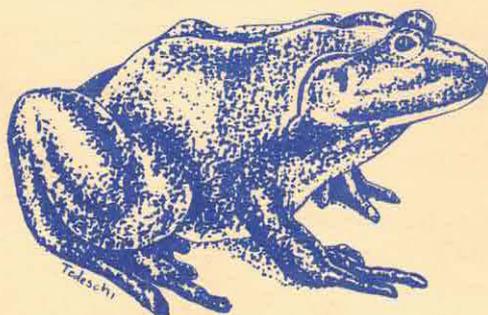
The library, though open to the membership, is most utilized by the program staff. Donations of books on insects and insect life, fish and marine biology, amphibians and reptiles, and especially children's books on nature would be greatly appreciated. Another area we would like to grow in is in international field guides, field guides to the birds, plants, etc., found in other parts of the world for the use of members planning trips.

Do you receive the National Wildlife Federation's Ranger Rick or Your Big Back Yard? The Sanctuary would be glad to take your back issues of these periodicals.

American Birds, National Audubon Magazine, Science, and Natural History are also all periodicals we would like to have on hand here. If you currently receive them and/or would like to donate a subscription, you could help us span the gap. Many thanks!



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



## BARN OWL STUDY

Did you live near a haunted house when you were little? Did the older kids in the neighborhood take you there one night to hear the screams and moans the ghosts made?

There is a good chance your ghost was a Barn Owl. These light-colored owls live in old silos, water towers, barns, and abandoned houses. Their call is a drawn-out, ghost-like scream that, if you didn't know any better, might turn your hair white.

Some Barn Owls live on Aquidneck Island, but no one is sure of numbers. At least two nesting locations are known to exist, but more sites are suspected.

Across the state there are fewer old barns for nesting and less pasture lands for hunting, so Barn Owls have declined, becoming real ghosts. No one really knows yet if that is happening here.

Barn Owls have responded well to the placement of nesting boxes in some parts of New England. Perhaps the same practice can work here. First, we need to know just how many owls we have on the island. You can help us by working on the Barn Owl census. If you'd like to learn more, call the Sanctuary at 846-2577. Thanks.

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