

# CHIP NOTES

The Newsletter of  
The Birds of Vermont Museum



Volume 25

Our 24th Year

Fall 2011

## MUSEUM HISTORY & BOB'S HALF BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

On August 13, staff, volunteers, members, and friends joined together to celebrate Bob Spear's 91½ birthday. Of course there was cake (two kinds, even)! We expanded the event to feature a *Museum History Day*. We asked for (and received) many, many memories as written words, oral stories (some videotaped), and photographs. Thank you all!

One of the older and more humorous memories was sent in by founding member and wildlife biologist, Cedric Alexander. We are pleased to share it with you.



*Bob Spear and his long-time partner, Gale Lawrence, August 2011*

I fondly recall his presentation to my class at Mount Mansfield Jr./Sr. High School circa 1970.

Bob showed up with his big, hard-cover suitcases filled with his wonderful bird carvings. He carted these to the front of the class and would pull out carvings one by one, show us the key identification features, and describe their special adaptations and other life history tidbits.

But first he would first ask if anyone in the class knew what kind of bird he was holding up. The fact that the robin, blue jay and chickadee were correctly identified was probably no surprise. But when hands shot up to identify parula warbler, veery, and horned lark, I can remember his bushy eyebrows lifting and a slight grin spreading across his face.

The hands belonged to the 3 founding (and only) members of the J.A.O. (Jericho Amateur Ornithologists) comprised of myself and my friends and bird-watching buddies Jim Vogelmann and Dave Wood. It soon became like a "Jeopardy" contest except Bob allowed us three to caucus on the more obscure carvings before proffering an answer.

It seems like we got most all of them right, and we began wondering if our knowledge of Vermont birds, clearly now on display in front of the class, would impress the 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls and give us an edge for the upcoming school dance (it didn't). However, I think Bob was impressed, and most likely delighted that there were some passionate young birders in the audience, [and] his beautiful carvings only fueled our passion.

Bob's presentation also prompted me to try my hand at carving, and I still have the crude brown creeper and woodcock that I carved over the next few months.

Thanks, Bob, for spending so many hours traveling to schools throughout Chittenden County and for your enormous contribution to the conservation of Vermont's birds!

Happy 91-and-a-half! Wow!

—Cedric Alexander

## THE BIRD CARVER'S DAUGHTER

### *Part 1: The Early Years*

When I was a little kid, I had no idea my father would one day have his own museum. I didn't even know he carved birds. I just knew that he spent a lot of time down in his den, sitting in an old, brown leather rocking chair with wide wooden arms, making a huge pile of shavings on the floor in front of him.

I loved the shavings. They came in all kinds of interesting shapes. Some were short and flat, some were long and twisting. No two were just alike. I would sit on the floor and make jewelry out of them—the long, curly ones made good earrings, and the shorter, curly ones could be hooked together for a bracelet. Some even curled around my fingers for rings. The flat shavings lined up to become roads or fences for my imaginary animals. And if I ever needed one of a certain shape or size, I just had to describe it, and my father would whittle off what I needed. The block of wood in his hands was not remotely interesting, not compared to the ever-growing pile of shavings. If I thought about the block of wood at all, I thought he was carving it up just to make toys for me.

As an adult, I realized that he probably kept a piece of scrap wood handy with which to oblige me—surely he wouldn't have been able to always carve off random shapes to meet my demands from the work of art he was in the process of creating.

The den wasn't the only place I could find shavings. My father also carved in the passenger seat of our car during his lunch hour while he worked for General Electric in Burlington. This meant the car floor also had a constant covering of shavings, even though I can remember my mother insisting that he go vacuum it out once in a while. I had an endless supply of shaving toys to play with on car rides, though I'm sure my mother wasn't happy with me for getting them all over the seat as well. I can remember the first time I rode in a friend's car and being amazed by the clean floor mats. I thought all cars came with shavings, and I felt sorry for my friend because she didn't have anything to play with.



*Kari Jo painted one of her father's chickadee carvings*


Eventually, I got old enough to notice that my father was, in fact, making things. He had a bird-feeder right outside the window next to his chair, and I thought it was pretty amazing that he could make blocks of wood turn into the same things that came to the feeder. Pretty soon, I learned to recognize Chickadees, Woodpeckers, and Nuthatches. But what was cool was that his birds looked just like the real ones. Their heads were perked up, their feathers were fluffed out, and they even seemed to look at me. Each carving was just a little bit different from the rest and had its own personality. I liked to watch how the wooden birds really came to life when he painted them. One day he let me paint one of the Chickadees. It didn't quite look like his when I was finished, but that was okay. I got to keep it when he packed his carvings into a big cardboard box to go to the gift shop where he sold them. And the next day, he'd start making more.

And then there were the dead birds. My father had a taxidermy license, and for many years while I was growing up, he was putting together a collection of specimens to display at the Green Mountain Audubon Center, which he founded

*Continued on page 3*

after he left General Electric. I know now that his knowledge of how birds work on the inside help make his carvings so lifelike. But when I was a kid, it meant that our freezer always had dead birds wrapped in tinfoil among the frozen vegetables and ice cream. My mother would want to thaw out a piece of chicken for dinner and get a Grosbeak instead. I'd go for a Popsicle and end up with a Goldfinch.

Today, my painted Chickadee is in my living room, and my father has a whole museum full of his carvings. But as visitors from all over the world walk through the collection, gazing at the spectacular feathering and marveling at the details of the habitat displays, I sometimes catch myself up in the workshop, just running my fingers through a pile of wood shavings.

—Kari Jo Spear 

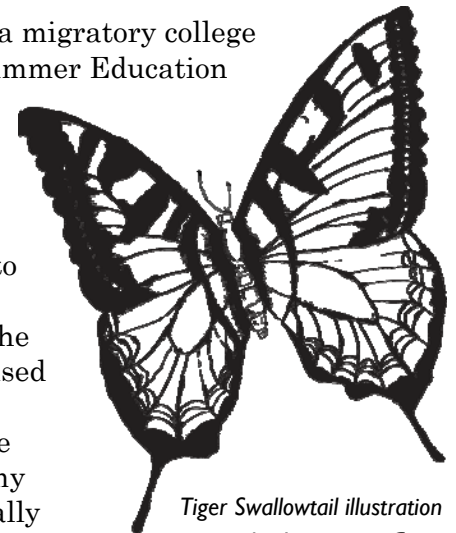
This article has been excerpted; the complete version is online at <http://bovm.wordpress.com/>

Kari Jo Spear's young adult, urban fantasy novel about two gay teenagers, *Under the Willow*, is now available at Phoenix Books in Essex, and on-line at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Borders.

## ANNAMARIE GAVIN, INTERN

Summertime not only brings migratory birds to Vermont but also many a migratory college student. This year, we are pleased to highlight Annamarie Gavin, our summer Education Intern. As an Education Intern at the Museum, Annamarie has been frequently spotted drawing various bird species, ogling the collection of natural history books in the library, identifying insect species, and (of course) assisting in normal day-to-day functions.

Although ink drawings are Annamarie's most familiar skill, she strives to practice and promote all art forms. Her interest in scientific illustration began in high school, in a human biology class where she was studying the anatomy of the human heart. The different directions of blood flow confused her completely. With red and blue pens, Annamarie created a simple schematic to explain the four chambers of the heart and their roles in the respiratory system. From then on, she never confused the heart's anatomy again. Nothing makes more sense to her than a doodle on a page, especially doodles with *lots* of details.



Tiger Swallowtail illustration  
by Annamarie Gavin

Growing up in Richmond, Annamarie remembers annually visiting the Museum as a child. The Museum is one of the inspirations for her illustration studies. Last year, she took an animal drawing class at the American Museum of Natural History. The class covered drawing the physiological structures of mammals and birds as they relate to prehistoric species, as well as locomotion, taxidermy and the famous dioramas. This greatly influenced Annamarie's eagerness to begin formally studying scientific illustration. And it was a great surprise for Annamarie to find out that the American Museum of Natural History is Bob's favorite museum too!



## THANK YOU

Thank you—members, friends, organizations, birders, all—for your support in so many varied ways.

- |                                   |                   |                           |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| ◆ Essex Agway                     | ◆ Dick Allen      | ◆ Bob and Shirley Johnson |
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*And all those great Birthday donors*

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS, SUMMER – FALL 2011

### Museum Day

**Saturday, September 24, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Free admission at the Birds and Vermont Museum and many other museums nationwide as part of the Smithsonian's Museum day. For more details and to print a visitor pass, browse the Smithsonian site: [www.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/museumday/)

Free with pass from website.

### Youth Art Contest Exhibit and Second Annual Community Art Show *Daily in October*

Admire the entries to the Youth Art Contest. Discover a rising artist. Celebrate art and photography by museum members, volunteers and staff as well—including, perhaps, yours.

Appropriate for all ages.

Free with admission.

### Fall Festival and Used Books / Garage Sale

**Saturday, October 8, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Enjoy our Used Books/Garage Sale and attend many nifty bird events. Woodcarvers will be here in the workshop. Live Bird Show, crafts, activities and games, soap carving, tree-walks and more.

Celebrate a great year!

Great for all ages

\$2.00 per person • **Free for members**



### Big Sit!

**Sunday, October 9, Dawn–Dusk**

How many birds can we perceive from a 17-foot diameter circle? Can we beat last year's record?

Free! Snacks and coffee provided.

### Keeping Track of Black Bears

**Thursday, October 20, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

**Saturday, October 22, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

Join us for this year's Lucille Greenough Lecture: a presentation on Black Bears and an outing in Jericho. Learn about their biology, habitat, roles in the ecosystem, and sign.



\$15 to attend evening lecture. \$50 for both • Members pay only \$10/\$35 !

### Owl Carving Class

**Saturday, November 12, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Beginners welcome at our one-day carving class with David Tuttle of the Green Mountain Woodcarvers. We will carve and paint an owl .... Wood blank, eyes, snacks, and coffee provided.

\$25 members • \$35 non-members.

Please bring your lunch.

### Museum Gift Shop Sales

**Saturday–Sunday, October 29–30, and**

**Friday–Saturday, November 25–26,**

10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Have you seen the new T-shirts? Our great selection of books and field guides? Had coffee from a Birds of Vermont mug? Now's your chance. Bring visiting family and friends to the Museum for an enjoyable outing.

20% off for members • 10% for non-members  
(consignment items cannot be discounted)



***Full Bookshelf?  
We can help!***

Donate your used books to our annual Fall Festival/Used Book Sale. Donations accepted

from now until October 1, from 10-4. Ask for Allison or Stewart when you come by.

Please call (802) 434-2167 to pre-register for all programs.

Email us at [museum@birdsofvermont.org](mailto:museum@birdsofvermont.org) with any questions or comments.

## ONGOING EVENTS

### Storytime in the Nestlings Nook

**Tuesdays, September 13 and October 11**  
10:30 a.m. – 11:15 p.m. (or so)

Join us for tales of birds and more. Stories will be followed by a craft project, music, or nature walk, depending on the topics and weather. Got a favorite book about birds? Share it with us!

Perfect for *pre-schoolers* and their family and friends.  
**Free** with admission; donations accepted.

### Weekly Carving Demonstrations

**Saturdays, September–October 31, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.**



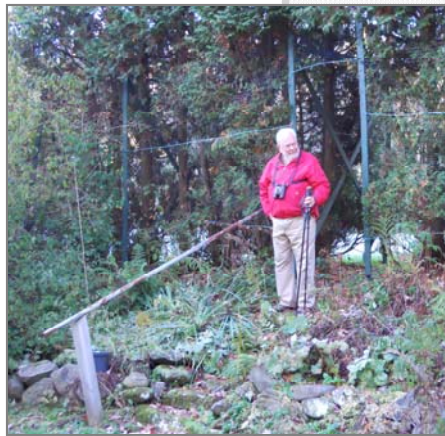
Come watch a wood carver at work. Ask questions, collect fresh ideas, learn a new technique. Upstairs in the Museum workshop.

Appropriate for all ages.  
**Free** with admission

### Bird Monitoring Walks

**Last Saturday of each month**  
8:00 in September and October  
Donations appreciated, outdoors

Join us on our monthly surveying walk while we gather long-term data about the species we find on the Museum property. Bring rain boots or sturdy hiking shoes, sweater or jacket, binoculars, etc., depending on weather. Trail conditions vary.



Check our website for updates and additions:  
<http://www.birdsofvermont.org/events.php>

### Sundays for Fledglings

**Sundays, September–October, 2:00 – 2:45 p.m.**

Kids hike, create, explore, carve, act, write, and investigate with us on Sunday afternoons. We focus on birds...but amphibians, mammals, trees, ferns, forests, insects, and other natural community members may be included. Activity details will be posted at the museum and online each week.



Great for *1st through 4th graders*, and all are welcome.

**Free** with admission; donations accepted.  
Often outdoors; please dress accordingly.

### *Visit Our Friends and Volunteers Out and About*

#### *Shelburne Farms Harvest Festival*

Saturday, September 17, 2011

Visit our booth while you enjoy the Festival : demonstration, raffle tickets, and much more

#### *Dead Creek Wildlife Festival*

Saturday, October 1, 2011

Visit our table for birding tips, field guides, soap carving, and friendly faces!

## WISH LIST

We welcome your help. Checks may be made out to the *Birds of Vermont Museum* and mailed to us at 900 Sherman Hollow Road, Huntington, VT 05462. If you wish to donate an item on the list, please call us at (802) 434-2167. We are also accepted used books for our annual sale!

- ◆ Clear Plastic Storage Bins (\$50)
- ◆ Benches for special spots along the trails, including the pond overlook (\$250)
- ◆ Outdoor sign (\$250)
- ◆ Bookshelf (\$180)
- ◆ Motion sensor light for parking lot (\$250)
- ◆ Sponsor an intern for a season (\$500-2500)

***Thank you!***

## CARVING REPORT

Last issue, we showed both Bob Spear and Dick Allen hard at work on contributions to the wetland dioramas. Bob continues with several concurrent carvings, including two quite large ones: a Snow Goose and a Canada Goose.



Some 4 or 5 smaller waterfowl share his attention—nothing like several projects to stave off boredom!



We're also pleased to report Dick Allen's pair of Buffleheads have made it in the Spring Wetland Diorama.



Thank you as always to Libby Davidson for painting the helpful "Placeholder Birds". Many of these now enliven our offices!



## JULY WINGS

### (but not so much about feathers)

It was a bright Sunday morning when members of the Vermont Entomological Society gathered at the Birds of Vermont Museum. Field guides stowed, bug nets in hand, and socks pulled high over pant legs, naturalists, families, and curious friends set off to learn from those very small creatures that freely roam the Museum's nature trails.

And all kinds of creatures they found! Blue Damselflies raced around the edge of the pond. Spring Azures fluttered about the tall grass as a Painted Lady cruised above the wildflowers—just two of the butterflies seen that day. A last-minute Differential Grasshopper revealed itself hopping along the trail's end. Bullfrogs and Green Frogs sunned on rocks half-submerged in the pond while salamanders kept still to better camouflage themselves. The very much loved Summer Mosquito was spotted more than caught, interrupting admiration of various weevils and beetles. Every "bug walker" wanted to catch something different and the eagerness to see each creature was contagious. The entomologists answered all sorts of questions with great excitement and their answers satisfied the group's many curiosities.

As some surprised explorers soon found out, if you hold a dragonfly for long enough it may share with you a mean bite. Any sting would soon vanish, eclipsed by a Monarch or Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterfly that flew too high to catch.

Luckily (we can now report), no one fell in the pond. Nevertheless, the walk invited peeled eyes and swung nets in service to minds newly identifying what crawled, flew, or swam before them.

The VES Butterfly Walk is an annual summer event at the Birds of Vermont Museum. Keep your feelers on our website or theirs ([www.vermontinsects.org](http://www.vermontinsects.org)) for more details.

—Annamarie Gavin, Intern 

## “THE THING WITH FEATHERS” photography by Heather Forcier

From the demanding gaze of our national bird to the subtle glory of geese at sunrise, we are thrilled to be exhibiting the photography of Heather Forcier. A native Vermonter, Heather has always enjoyed nature and wild-life and spends a great deal of time outdoors. Inspired by a presentation by noted bird photographer Russ Hansen, held here at the museum some years ago, Heather went on to develop her own eye and photographic techniques. With the purchase of her first professional camera in 2000, photography allowed her to experience the outdoors at a different level.

The pursuit of nature photography has taken her to different places throughout North America, including Churchill (Manitoba, Canada), Alaska, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Florida, numerous destinations along the mid-Atlantic coastline, Montana, and at the Galápagos Islands of Ecuador, South America.



Publication credits include National Geographic *Traveler* magazine, the ABA's *Birding* and *North American Birds* magazine, *WildBird*, *Birder's World*, *Audubon*, and *Bird Watcher's Digest*. Her photos have appeared with various news stories through the Associated Press, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN Headline News* (television), CNN.com, MSNBC.com, and AOL news online.

If you were unable to see her work in person, do check for prints in our gift shop after the show. In addition, Heather is kindly donating a percentage of website sales to us, for those prints of photos on exhibit here. Do take some time to enjoy her images at <http://www.heatherforcier.com> and <http://heatherforcier.blogspot.com>.



## ARTS COUNCIL GRANT

Public and private school budget decreases have cut deeply into opportunities for student enrichment. Field trips to areas of interest, including arts and cultural institutions, have been sharply curtailed for many Vermont K-12 classes. *But!*

The Vermont Arts Council is now accepting applications for their new grant: **Cultural Routes**. This grant offers \$200 toward transportation fees to school groups interested in visiting arts and cultural institutions. The Birds of Vermont Museum is promoting this opportunity by encouraging Vermont teachers to research and apply for the funds at [www.vermontartscouncil.org](http://www.vermontartscouncil.org).

Please help spread the word so kids can visit our birds! Thank you!

## ANNUAL ART CONTEST

Entries in the annual Birds of Vermont Museum's Youth Art Contest are filling the walls with a multitude of bird images, creating a delightful counterview to live birds at the Viewing Window. While the majority of artists chose to create 2-D drawings, we have a number of 3-D works as well, and would love to display even more.

The contest is open to anyone 0-18 years old wishing to submit bird-related art. The contributor's name, age, and contact information must be included on the back of the entry and received at the Museum on or before September 30, 2011. Contest winners will be announced at our Fall Festival, October 8, 2011.

For more information, see our website or contact the Museum. *Good luck!*

## SAVE THESE DATES

- Sept. 24      **Museum Day**
- Sept. 30      **Youth Art Content Deadline**
- Oct. 8        **Fall Festival & Used Book Sale**
- Oct. 9        **The Big Sit!**
- Oct. 27, 29    **Keeping Track of Black Bears**  
*(Lucille Greenough Lecture)*
- Nov. 12      **Owl Carving Class**
- September & October:*
- Monthly:**    **Stories for Nestlings** *(Second Tuesdays)*
- Weekends:** **Wood carving Demonstrations** *(Saturdays)*  
**Fledglings Program** *(Sundays)*
- Ongoing:**    **Art Contest Exhibit & Community Show**

Details and more events inside and on our website!  
For info or to register, call (802) 434-2167.

*The mission of the Birds of Vermont Museum is to provide education, to nurture an appreciation of the environment, and to study birds and their habitats using woodcarvings and other Museum resources.*

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