**INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS**

Lighting is vital to any museum. At the Birds of Vermont Museum, the right lighting brings the carvings to life, highlights the art exhibits and educational displays, and enhances access and health for visitors, staff, and volunteers. Better lighting encourages woodcarvers and other artists to use the workshop and other indoor spaces.

This year saw several fixtures suddenly completely fail. In planning repairs, we learned fluorescent lights are being phased out in Vermont. This meant we had to begin the first and largest step of replacing much of the lighting in the Museum. As any one who’s dealt with home repair knows, this was expensive and became more so.

By switching to LED lighting, we no longer have to worry about the problems of mercury-containing fluorescent bulb waste. LED lights are more efficient than fluorescent, allowing us more light per watt. They are also quieter, don’t flicker, and last longer, reducing overall waste. The color temperature is adjustable in many places, giving us more comfortable workspaces. Most importantly, we now have the capability to choose fixtures that better protect the carvings in the wetland dioramas. Luckily, thanks to Bob Spear’s work, the aimed fiber-optic lights in the Nesting Bird Gallery required no upgrades.

In addition to the lighting upgrade, other big repairs this year included replacing the walkway to the treehouse, the floor of the bird blind, and the water pump for the entire building. Bringing Gale’s Retreat into its now-rentable state—an investment—was another big project, involving a new roof and new windows. Shout out to David Cozzens, Ron Brosius, John Gergely, and Steve Smith who assisted us with some of these repairs.

The Yellow-crowned Night Heron (top picture) was carved by Larry Bertrand. The carving is on loan to the Museum and can be found under new lights in the Spring Wetland diorama. More of Larry’s carvings can be seen on Instagram @buzzardbaybirds.

The Herring Gull (lower picture), may not look impressed but is still quite pleased about the new lighting. The gull was carved by Ingrid Rhind in 2007. The Great Blue Heron in the background was carved by Bob Spear, and the murals were created by Libby Davidson.
I first found out about Birds of Vermont Museum’s internship program through an online search for museum jobs, and I can truly say that my experience here has been life-changing! While I have never described myself as a birder before, spending days surrounded by beautiful carvings has vastly expanded my interest and knowledge on the subject. (I fear it won’t be very long now before I have my own life list!)

Coming to Birds of Vermont Museum has also encouraged a shift in my career aspirations. I began my internship when I already had a master’s degree and professional fieldwork experience in archaeology. While that subject still holds great interest for me, I have increasingly been drawn to the ways in which my original line of study—namely human history—intersects with the natural world. I’m still exploring what this means for my future plans, but at least my current project, which will be a library display on introduced birds in Vermont, reflects such evolving interests.

The three birds that I address in my project were introduced to North America from other continents before making their way to Vermont skies. They include the European Starling, the House Sparrow, and the Rock Pigeon. Introduced species exist because people transported them at some point in the past. Whether this was accidental or intentional, such movements tell the stories of both local ecology (i.e., how these species interact with a novel environment) and of human society (what people were doing that led to this and why). Moreover, our present negative opinions towards these birds and other non-native organisms often say more about our own cultural attitudes than about the species themselves. For anyone who is interested in learning more, my display will be available for local libraries to request in the near future.

Other projects that I have helped with during my time here have included researching a land acknowledgment and preparing for the annual art show, whose theme this year is Spark! In addition to this, I got to learn the ins-and-outs of what it takes to operate a museum. As might be suspected, there is always much more to do than meets the eye, and since I am interested in a potential museums career, all of these additional jobs have been vital learning experiences. Attending to visitors has been particularly rewarding for me because I get to see firsthand just how many people are moved by Birds of Vermont’s unique mission.

One fun fact that I didn’t discover until reading a bit about Bob Spear’s life is that he and my grandfather Eugene (“Gene”) used to work together at General Electric. Apparently, my grandfather had been so excited when the museum first opened that he sent newspaper clippings about it to relatives who weren’t even in Vermont at the time. To me, this demonstrates that Birds of Vermont has had a significant impact on the wider community even before its inception in the 80s, through Bob himself. While I didn’t realize it at the outset, I like to think that engaging with this museum is a way to indirectly connect with my own family’s past as well.

— Molly Palmer

Three species of introduced birds, from left:
House Sparrow (Passer domesticus)
Rock Pigeon (Columba livia)
European Starling (Sturnus vulgaris)
All carved by Bob Spear and on display in the Nesting Bird Gallery.
We saw 22 species from our circle on October 8. It became a chilly rainy day, not particularly warm, therefore requiring us to survive on cider doughnuts and chocolate. Luckily, we are an intrepid group and up to any such challenge. Both kinglets joined us for part of the day, and Kerry Hurd was able to snap this photo of the adorable Ruby-Crowned Kinglet.

More details in our blog: https://birdsofvermont.org/2023/11/03/through-the-window-october-2023#big-sit-23

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EVA BELLANTONI & CARVINGS TO COLOR

Eva came here from California while on a gap year before starting college. They had previously spent two months in Peru banding birds, and they were looking for something to do over the summer. Eva has been both an artist and a bird lover their whole life, and the Museum seemed like the perfect place to combine the two. Their intern project was creating coloring pages of 16 of the Museum’s carvings, which they have worked on between organizing study skins, watching the feeders, and working the front desk. They had the idea for this project before they even arrived in Vermont, and they were glad to have it be so well-received. In addition to having their illustrations available individually for visitors to color, the museum plans to collect the pages into a coloring and activity book.

This fall, they started Whitman College in Washington as a freshman.

— Eva Bellantoni

FRANCESCA PIENTKA-GALATI & VISUAL STORYTELLING

Francesca Pientka-Galati interned in spring 2023. At that time she was enrolled at Essex high School and in the Academy of Visual and Performing Arts. She was drawn to the Museum’s internship program through her interest in learning about birds and their environments.

Francesca’s primary goal was to create a new photo-op board for the museum. She painted one showing a tree with several birds and other animals.

Francesca also explored using carvings in order to tell a story and communicate a need. She and another student created \textit{Catastrophe in Colchester}, a short video of birds “chatting” (and agonizing) about some challenges they face.

It can be seen on YouTube: https://youtu.be/4OZrUr4NJSk

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\textbf{Birding Update: the Big Sit}

We saw 22 species from our circle on October 8. It became a chilly rainy day, not particularly warm, therefore requiring us to survive on cider doughnuts and chocolate. Luckily, we are an intrepid group and up to any such challenge. Both kinglets joined us for part of the day, and Kerry Hurd was able to snap this photo of the adorable Ruby-Crowned Kinglet.

More details in our blog: https://birdsofvermont.org/2023/11/03/through-the-window-october-2023#big-sit-23
LINX FARINA’S DOUBLE PROJECTS: DIORAMA AMBIENCE & POC IN BIRDING

After visiting the Birds of Vermont Museum with UVM in spring of 2023, Linx knew they wanted to become more involved in what the museum had to offer. Linx has a keen interest in ornithology, wildlife conservation and field work, and hopes to use their built-up knowledge to become an educator for young people in marginalized communities. Linx is a second-year student at the University of Vermont, studying Wildlife and Fisheries Biology, with a concentration in Wildlife and minor in Zoology. They have been one of the fall 2023 interns at the Birds of Vermont Museum.

Even before university, Linx has expressed how important it is for more BIPOC voices to be heard throughout the biological and environmental fields. This is something they chose to highlight in one of their two projects for the internship. By highlighting POC figures in birding and ornithology, we show more people that this is a space they can be a part of.

They also worked to improve the lighting and produce a soundscape for the Spring Wetland Diorama. This creates a more immersive experience for future museum patrons into the world of birds.

Linx attributes the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron as their “spark bird”. They came across one this past April—this happened to be the first sighting of the bird in Vermont since 2015! Birding has slowly become a big part of their life since then.

If Linx isn’t doing schoolwork, participating in Wildlife and Fisheries Labs, or out listening to bird songs in Centennial Woods, they’re making music on campus with their a capella group, Viridescent, the competition group at UVM.

— Linx Farina 🦆

BILL PATERSON DONATES MALLARD

Years ago when Bill Paterson met Bob Spear, one of Bob’s parting questions to him was, “Do you want to come back and carve?” Although relocating from Ontario, Canada, to Vermont was not in Bill’s plan, he never forgot the comment. Luckily for us, he did choose to carve birds for the Museum—from afar. Bill’s first carvings for the Museum, the male and female Northern Shovelers, were donated in the spring of 2022.

This past November, Bill and his wife traveled from Canada to deliver his third bird to the collection, a male Mallard. As Bill likes to be doing numerous projects at the same time, he was not sure exactly how long it took to complete, but guesses, “approximately 3– 4 months.” The bird is made of basswood with the exception of the tail curl, which is maple. He used power tools, as well as chisels and wood burners, for the detail work. It is an amazing carving, and we can’t wait for you to see it in person. Thank you, Bill!
Volunteers for the welcome desk and gift shop, May – October
Volunteer Early Birder leaders, May – June
Donations for Solar Panels
Snow shoes, hiking sticks
Funding to support one or more summer interns
Pulk (a Nordic sled for hauling)
Pedestrian counters for trails / outdoor use
Binoculars for public programs
Gift cards to Guy’s Farm and Yard (for bird seed)

Please contact us if you can help with any of these items, and we can provide more details.

We have had a busy, changeable, and successful carving year. The Museum hosted two Green Mountain Woodcarvers Carve-Ins, a private carving session for school children, the GMWC annual three-day class, a painting workshop with Larry Bertrand, and two sessions of feather carving with Bob Lindemann. We also offered soap carving opportunities at Dead Creek Wildlife Day. Thank you all for a successful and busy 2023!

We have no upcoming classes at present. If you are interested in teaching a class or workshop, please get in touch.

CALL TO ARTISTS FOR THE 2024 ART SHOW

The Power of Perspective: a shifting point of view
How do we focus our creative “vision”? Consider the scope of an eagle’s eye—the narrow view of a gleaning warbler—the shadowed sight of a loon underwater. We may see birds above us from the ground, or below us from a plane. We may use a camera lens to record from afar, or a magnifier and lamps to perceive what is normally unknown. How does time influence your perspective? What if we “zoom out” from one bird to a species, to an ecosystem, to a planet? What if we “zoom in” to one bird to its wing, to a feather, to a gene? How does your art reveal a point of view?

The Birds of Vermont Museum seeks art that speaks to both humans’ and birds’ perspectives and experiences. How might a change in perspective alter people’s understanding of the lives and needs of the birds who share our world?


SUBMISSION INFO: Art in any media, by new or returning artists, of any age, may be submitted. Submit up to three (3) works using the online form at https://tinyurl.com/bom-art-2024

We can accept the file types: .jpg (visual art, photographs); .mp3, .mp4 (music/video); .pdf or .txt (stories, poems).
Include your name, email, town, and a brief description of each piece (type, media, when made).

We can also accept submissions by email: send files (same formats) to museum@birdsofvermont.org. Please put “Submission for Perspective art show from Your Name” as the email subject. If you do not have email, you may send up to three prints or photos (not originals) to the Museum, attention: Perspectives art show.

Visual, written, and multi-media works will be considered. In addition to walls, we have shelves for smaller threedimensional pieces, room outdoors for weather-impervious works, and some ceiling area. We may need to work together to display audio or multi-media works. You are welcome to visit to consider the potential.

Entries are due by Monday, March 18, 2024, 11:59 PM.

In choosing works for a show, we strive to create a cohesive exhibit that illustrates the year’s theme. Jurors will select pieces by early April and will let artists know soon after, by email.
WINTER & MORE EVENTS with the MUSEUM

“THE GIFT OF ART” ART SHOW
Open by appointment and during events
November 1 – April 30, 2024

How do different voices blend, clash, and complement in an art show? The winter exhibit brings together works from previous shows, selections from our gift shop, and elements of our long-term collections.

Included with admission (free for members)

BIRD MONITORING WALKS
Saturdays, December 30, January 27, February 24, March 30, April 27 • 8:00 – 9:00 am (7:30 am in April)

Join the monthly monitoring walk on the museum’s forest and meadow trails. Please bring your own binoculars and dress for the weather.

Suggested donation: $5 • Outdoors

GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT
Museum open Saturday, February 17 • 10:00 am– 4:00 pm
The whole GBBC runs Friday—Sunday, February 16-19

Join in the Great Backyard Bird Count. Why do we count birds and how? What is an international community science project?

Free admission for members

MINI OWL: A NEEDLE-FELTED WHIMSY
Saturday, February 17 • 1:00 pm, ~ 2 hours

Needle-felt a thumb-sized owl. Natural and whimsical colors possible. Hats for the owls are optional! Beginners welcome, materials and instruction provided.

$25–$45 (includes admission, your owl, and a felting needle to take home)

Ages 8 and up, max 10 • Registration required

GALE’S RETREAT OPEN HOUSE & FULL MOON CELEBRATION
Wednesday, February 21 • 6:00 pm

Enjoy a winter evening at Gale’s Retreat off Bob’s Trail. Learn about Vermont Huts, nature at night, and more.

By donation • ages 8 and up
Outdoors, mostly • arrive any time between 6 and 8 pm
“Rain” date: Saturday, March 23

CACHE IT IF YOU CAN
Wednesday, February 21 • 10:30 am

Which birds and mammals store their food for the winter? What do they eat? Where do they hide it?

Suggested: $15 - $35 (includes admission)
Ages 6-10 • Outdoors

EGGSTATIC
Wednesday, March 13 • 10:30 am

Eggs are amazing structures with multiple functions. Why do they look and work as they do? How are eggs adapted for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife?

Suggested: $15 - $35 (includes admission)
Ages 6-10

SEE IT, SKETCH IT, BIRD IT
Wednesday, April 17 • 1:00 – 3:00 pm

Get ready for spring birding with this interactive program. Learn techniques for observing, describing, sketching and identifying birds that will immediately help you become a better birder.

Suggested: $15 - $35 (includes admission)
Recommended for older children and adults minimum needed 8 people, so sign up a friend!

Please check our website for updates or additions
https://www.birdsofvermont.org/events
Advance registration required for most events.

To register, visit
https://www.birdsofvermont.org/special-upcoming/
then click or tap on the event name – or call (802) 434-2167
Q: What was your most humbling experience?
A: The problems encountered at the town, state, and federal levels of trying to found an educational nonprofit organization.

**SPRING WILDFLOWER PROGRESSION**
I Sunday, April 21 • 10:30 am ~ 2 hours
II Sunday, May 5 • 10:30 am ~ 2 hours
III Sunday, May 19 • 10:30 am ~ 2 hours
Explore our trails in search of spring wildflowers and ephemerals. Learn about the seasonal challenges and changes influencing these briefly-blooming beauties with Mary Ann Schlegel.

Suggested donation $10 • Max 12 people each walk
Come to one or two or all (sign up separately)

See more and sign up at
https://www.birdsofvermont.org/special-upcoming

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE — STAY TUNED!**
May 1 Opening Day for 2024 season
May 1 Art Show opens
May & June Early Birder Morning Walks
Watch for more art workshops, birding opportunities, carving classes, and other special events.

**Out and About**

**FIRST FRIDAY ARTS**
First Fridays of every month, 3-5 pm, in Huntington.

**LIBRARY DISPLAYS**
Free for libraries to borrow (mileage may apply)

- Birding in Vermont
- Owls
- Introduced Birds
- Birds in Art
- Invasive Plants
- Coffee-Bird Connections
- Feathers
- Carving; Tools & Techniques
- All About Bird Eggs
- Migration

**Our trails are open**
Even when it snows!

#AskBob
Q: What was your most humbling experience?
A: The problems encountered at the town, state, and federal levels of trying to found an educational nonprofit organization.
**THE CARVER’S DAUGHTER**

*Part 26: My Father and Hiking*

My father loved to hike. I hated to hike.

It was one of the few things we completely disagreed on. We both loved being outside. Anything to do with boats and water was great, and cross-country skiing was fun, like flying. But where he could happily spend hours on a hike, pacing himself, pausing to investigate things that chirped, I found anything related to a trail to be sweaty, dirty, buggy, exhausting, boring or utterly terrifying, and there was no place to pee except in the bushes. And my feet always hurt because I’d either outgrown my boots or my new boots were stiff.

“This’ll be great,” my father always said after he parked the car at the trailhead. All trailheads looked the same to me—bumpy parking lots, cars crammed in, and a narrow, dark opening in the trees where a trail led upwards. Always upwards. Usually with rocks and tree roots and puddles of water, or slippery mud hiding under fallen leaves.

I left the warm haven of the car and shivered into my sweatshirt while he put on his pack and adjusted his binoculars. The early morning was damp and misty, but not in a magical way, where there might be dragons peering through hanging evergreen limbs. This mist dripped off leaves down the back of my neck. The sky was heavy and cloudy. But when my father planned a hike, it happened no matter what the weather. We’d sat out thunderstorms underneath ledges, been pelted by hail, and run into unexpected ice-coated rocks.

We headed up the trail. I generally found the lower sections rather boring. The trees were the same ones we had in the back yard, and so were the ferns and the mossy rocks. My father pointed out scars on beech trunks where bears had climbed. He thought that was interesting, not something that made me keep looking over my shoulder as well as down at the roots that were trying to trip me. Crystal clear brooks did sound lovely as they cascaded from pool to pool, but trying to get across meant my uncomfortable boots were now wet.

When we got higher, the air began to smell like Christmas from all the fir trees. It was nice, but made me long for roasting turkey and pies and presents. A grouse startled up from behind a log with a clapping of wings that made me jump. While my father tried to figure out if it was ruffed or spruce, and I sat on the log. After he’d reached a conclusion—ruffled—he delved into his pocket for the bag of M&Ms. He always tried to surprise me with it, but I’d already known it was there because it always was. Chocolate helped a little. Some water to drink, and we were off again.

It was kind of interesting when the trees began to get shorter than I was. I liked the way they grew sideways and into strange shapes sculpted by the wind. We’d left the mist below, but we were in thick clouds now, damply blowing past us like a river. The trail got rockier. We had to squeeze through a place so narrow my father had to take off his pack. Then I became more aware of space around us through the clouds, of height, of places where I could fall and probably tumble all the way down to the car. I wished for the tall, familiar trees again. Boring was better than fear. But my father held out his hand, and there were always more M&Ms ready.

The higher we went, the windier it got. It made my eyes tear up and turned my hair into a giant snarl. Our windbreakers came out of my father’s backpack. Soon it became too hard to stand up straight, and I had to lean forward, sort of crouched over.

“Almost there!” My father pointed up at the summit looming above us through the clouds like a jagged tower. There were wooden ladders attached to the cliff, so cold that my palms ached from the death grip I had on them. The higher I went, the closer the summit got, but then I’d start thinking about the return, when I’d have to actually look down at my feet on the rungs...

At long last, we reached a flat place that my father proudly said was the top. He lifted his binoculars, shouted “hawk!” and pointed into the clouds.

I pulled my hood tighter, shouted, “lunch!” and pointed at a boulder that would block the wind.

Thankfully, he always thought lunch was a good idea, too. The boulder made a place of relative quiet where we ate soggy tuna sandwiches, washed down with root beer. Some Oreos for dessert. I tried not to think about the ladders.

“There it is!” he suddenly cried.

“A helicopter?” I asked hopefully.

“The view! You can see all the way to the Adirondacks!”
Yay, I thought. He’d want to climb those next, and they were even taller. But I stood up into the wind again, and the clouds parted like a curtain across a stage, and there were the trees below us, and the valley, and the river, and the lake, and more mountains on the other side, and sky above them. And then, just as fast, the curtain fell and the view vanished. But it was seared into my memory more vividly than if I had been able to see for miles, for hours.

My father sat back down and went for another Oreo.

“That was cool,” I said.

He handed me some M&Ms. “Sunny days aren’t always the best for hiking,” he said, nodding.

The trip back wasn’t as bad as I’d feared. He went down the ladders first and helped my feet find the rungs. It felt good to hear the wind above us in the trees, which soon grew higher than my head again.

And at last, the waiting car. I dropped into the seat like a rock and got my aching feet out of my boots. My father stood looking around for a few minutes before he got in, handed me the last of the M&Ms, and we headed home to where a soak in warm bathtub was waiting for me.

Years later, my youngest daughter followed in his footsteps by hiking the Long Trail from one end of Vermont to the other. I am so proud of her—she did it straight through in about twenty-three days. But I don’t feel a bit of remorse that I haven’t done it.

Still, listening to her describe some of the more harrowing spots, I would nod and say, “Yeah, I did that section. Wooden ladders. Narrow squeeze. In the clouds.”

She looked impressed.

But what I remember the most was the way the clouds parted for that brief instant, and how tuna fish and root beer tasted better while huddling behind a boulder, and how good it felt to get my feet out of wet boots.

— Kari Jo Spear

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Kari Jo Spear, daughter of Bob Spear, is a writer of young adult novels and more. Her young adult novels, Under the Willow and The Silent One are available through amazon.

Her newest book, The Carver’s Daughter: A Memoir, is available in the museum, at Phoenix Books in Burlington and Essex, as well as from all major online booksellers, including bookshop.org. An eBook version is available also.

Kari Jo is on the web at https://carversdaughter.blogspot.com/. You can also follow her on Facebook as Carver’s Daughter https://www.facebook.com/Carvers-Daughter-105285684579200 .

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Best-dressed on Camel’s Hump

- Our Founding Director, Bob Spear, hiked Camel’s Hump at age 85 and again at 88, both times sporting his red chamois shirt and hiking boots at 4083 feet. (You may know that Bob helped to conserve the land on Camel’s Hump.)
- Bob’s younger granddaughter, Krystal, hiked to the top with her fiancée, wearing wedding dresses and hiking boots for their marriage ceremony at the summit this September. Congratulations to Krystal and Alicia!
BARBIES AND KENS GO

When kids (and adults) visit the museum, we like to offer mini hunts, drawing activities, and other scavenger hunts. Most of these have a special focus: eggs, numbers, or winter, for example. One of the special hunts this year has been... Barbies.

Bird-watcher Barbie was originally dressed and installed by volunteers Haley and Marie DuPont. She was on her own until this year. Inspired by Liza Morse (@TheOverdressedBirder on Instagram) and the help of grandchildren and the internet, we learned of the diversity of Barbies and Kens now available. We began installing one, two, fourteen, seventeen dolls around the museum. They are birding singly and with friends, upstairs and down, in practical gear and fabulous frills. Alice Morse’s fashion creativity added a whole new layer to this hunt.

Please enjoy this whimsical addition to the Museum while it lasts.

p.s. We developed this independently of the movie (we are perhaps not very clued in to pop culture). But we celebrate the coincidence of timing!

ON NAMES

In November of this year, the American Ornithological Society committed to updating English-language names of birds that are named after people (of those names it has purview over). The Society also continues to review and change additional names as needed. We will be updating our museum labels and signs to make it easy for visitors to relate our carvings to birds they might later look up in Merlin or Sibley’s field guides.

The Long-tailed Duck’s name was updated about 20 years ago, at the turn of the century. Jim Mitchell carved this duck for the museum.

Annual Appeal

This is the time of year where we have our annual appeal. We are working to raise funds to cover the rest of the lighting changes (read more about it on our front page).

Please donate if you can (or renew your membership), and please share this newsletter with your family and friends. Thank you!

Give an Experience

Did you know you can purchase passes to visit the museum and the shop? You can give a gift certificate for programs, including small group nature/bird walks for friends and/or families. Or you can give someone an entire Museum membership.

These make wonderful holiday gifts, especially for those who prefer experiences to objects.

Call to arrange these gifts, at 802-434-2167.
RACE AROUND BIRDS 2023

Congratulations to all the walkers, runners, and volunteers who made the fourth running of the Race Around Birds happen!

Again this year we offered both “virtual (self-timed)” racing option and “in-person race day” option. People could run or walk, as they chose.

Trails were pretty muddy but otherwise good in the weeks leading up to the race.

We had 31 people register, 10 of whom chose the “self-timed” option (not all of them submitted their times to us; that’s fine too). Based on what we saw from the museum, more than 10 people ran in the two weeks open for that option.

The overall winners received a map of the Spear Trail (part of the race course), hand-stitched by artists Lori Hinrichsen.

Check out the results! Will you join us next year?

**BOLD** = Overall official winners on Race Day, November 4th.

*V = “virtual” runner, self-timed.*

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SAVE THE DATES

February  
- Gale’s Retreat Open House
- Mini-Owl Felting
- Cache It If You Can

March  
- Eggstatic

April  
- See It, Sketch It, Bird It
- Spring Wildflowers

Last Saturdays  
- Bird Monitoring Walks

#AskBob

Q: What is your pet peeve?
A: Those, who from ignorance or greed, damage the earth.

#AskBob comes from a collection of answers given in 1989 to John Johnson of the Burlington Free Press.