

Chip Notes

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM THE BIRDS OF VERMONT MUSEUM

Volume 28

Winter 2014



PERILOUS PASSAGES

This year, the Birds of Vermont Museum joins an array of museums, nature centers, conservation organizations, and wildlife agencies in the centenary observation of the Passenger Pigeon's loss to extinction. Did you know that flocks numbering in the *billions* frequently blocked the sun while flying to roosting or migratory destinations? Passenger Pigeon populations in the Midwest and Northeast U.S. plummeted during the 1800s to early 1900s, finally being obliterated entirely by the end of 1914. The Passenger Pigeon's story is remarkable in itself, but that story becomes part of a bigger cautionary tale, one that compels us to consider the survival pressures on all species.

Naturalist author Joel Greenberg, along with Chicago's Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, is spearheading *Project Passenger Pigeon* (P3), which will increase

awareness and commitment toward habitat preservation and species conservation as well as spur actions geared to promoting biodiversity. Greenberg's new book, *A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction*, and the 2014 commemoration of the death of Martha, the last Passenger Pigeon, have provided the Birds of Vermont with a theme for this year's art and science focus: *Perilous Passages*.

We hope to open up a rich discussion that explores the Passenger Pigeon's fate through the late 19th century and examines the bigger story. This history demands we confront the realities of past extinctions and the certainty of more to come without a concerted effort to recognize and reorder our priorities and actions.

The Birds of Vermont Museum is one of very few venues whose collection includes the Passenger Pigeon. Bob Spear selected and carved a number of distinctive North American birds for his Endangered and Extinct Gallery; we feel especially proud that his early activism on behalf of conservation awareness and practices continues to resonate with visitors to the Museum.

Stay tuned to our website events calendar (www.birdsofvermont.org/events.php) for information on speakers, educational programming, family activities, and many new surprises inside the Museum and out on the trails. The Museum is especially excited to showcase an art installation featuring works by local artists and the Museum community that presents their own perspectives on the Passenger Pigeon's story through a variety of media. Please make a point of visiting the Museum to appreciate Bob's Passenger Pigeon carving and share in the story with us.

—Allison Gergely 



Passenger Pigeon, carved by Bob Spear, 1991.
Photographed by Nate Van Der Els in 2007; used by permission.

Call to Artists! Submissions are open for the Perilous Passages exhibit. Deadline: March 15. Call or email for details.

THE CARVER'S DAUGHTER

Part 7: Growing Up

Things were starting to get out of hand.

My father's carvings had been well received during their debut in the art gallery in Montpelier. People had flocked in to see them. Photos had been taken. Articles had been written. In short, Vermont was interested in his project. After their few weeks in fame and glory, my father returned his carvings to his shop in triumph.

The problem was, they seemed to have grown while they'd been gone. Or else the shop had shrunk. The first day they were back, I stood in the doorway, surveying the long, rectangular room. Or trying to survey it. I couldn't really see it, or the bench, or the wood stove, or any of my father's tools. Or my father, for that matter, and even in his younger days, he wasn't hard to miss. (Meaning that he wore red shirts back then, too, of course! I don't mean to imply anything about his general recognizable shape.)

The whole room was full, as far as I could tell, of green, leafy branches, tree trunks, and bright spots of plumage.

"I'm back here!" My father's voice came from somewhere near the window. I turned sideways and squeezed between Plexiglas cases in his direction, stopping to glance at my favorites—the red-winged blackbirds. Yup, the mud I'd painted down at the bottom still looked good.

I finally found my father sitting on his stool, peering in my direction.

"You made it," he said.

"Yeah, it's getting a little tight in here. What'd they feed these guys in Montpelier, anyway? Did they put steroids in the suet, or something?"

My father didn't laugh. "I've been talking to the Shelburne Farms people. And the Ethan Allen Homestead."

"About?" I prompted.

"Housing them," he said. "The collection."

So he'd evidently noticed the overcrowding of the avian population in the room, too.

"What are they thinking?" As tight as it was getting in here, I suddenly felt kind of funny about the carvings all going away permanently. I'd kind of missed them just while they'd been off on their maiden flight. And would strangers take good care of my mud, and everything? I mean, that mud was the first and only mud I'd ever painted! It wasn't just any mud, after all. It was part of my childhood memories.

"No one seems to think they've got enough room."



"Are you kidding me? Those barns at Shelburne Farms are huge!"

My father cleared his throat and said something that sounded like "...more cases, and a wetland diorama, and endangered species..."

I blinked. "You mean, there's going to be lot more? A lot more?"

My father looked kind of sheepish and muttered something about investors and interested parties. I didn't know much about that kind of thing, but I knew that he was talking about money. For the first time, I began to realize that this project might get really, really big. And not only that, it might really happen.

"Holy cow," I said. "Are you like going to get famous?"

My father suddenly looked horrified and leapt off his stool. "Let's go canoeing," he said in a rush, and he was gone as though he'd grown wings himself.

... continued on page 4

BRIDGES TO BIRDS

So about that flood

Rebuilding efforts after the flood continue! We are working with civil engineers, the town of Huntington, and the State of Vermont to replace the culverts and protect the stream. We are working with structural engineers and Timber and Stone LLC to rework the entrance to include plantings, benches, artwork and an ADA-compliant walkway and bridge. We are developing plans and seeking funds to rebuild some of the flood-damaged trails and make Bob Spear's and Doug Hinshaw's bridge accessible again.

FEMA has helped us with some of the emergency-related costs, and the Vermont Community Foundation's Sudden and Urgent Needs Fund has helped with some of the first and important steps in recovery, including the design work by engineers and the extra hours for staff associated with the flood. Many individual donors stepped up to assist with early costs associated with flood recovery planning, site work, and some of the anticipated re-building costs. However, that barely scratches the surface of all the costs to come.

The current timeline for recovery has site preparation beginning this coming summer after the road culvert had been replaced, and construction of the bridge and walkways commencing in the fall of 2014.

Remember the treehouse?

We mentioned this outdoor bird-watching and education space in the last newsletter. This process began in 2012, and is still going ahead. Shawn Rouleau's building trades class, at the Essex Center for Technology, has built the tree house components and plans for installation in spring are underway. Lynn Monty, of the *Burlington Free Press*, wrote a nice article about this collaboration in December 2013.



Shawn Rouleau explains the timber framing, Fall 2013

We have combined these activities into one: the Bridges to Birds Project.

The rebuilding of our entrance, reconstruction and improvement of the trails, and the installation of a tree house all have one common goal: to make the Museum—indoors and out—accessible to all for bird conservation, environmental education, and the appreciation of Vermont's natural communities. We are putting together a full-fledged campaign to raise the funds needed to complete these projects. The costs for these combined projects are estimated to be over to \$130,000. Northeast Delta Dental gave us the first official donation to this campaign. (Thank you!)

... continued on page 4



The chasm between the public parking lot and the Museum's front door, January 2014

Donation Info

Call (802) 434-2167 with your credit card info or send a check in any amount at any time to

Birds of Vermont Museum
900 Sherman Hollow Road
Huntington, Vermont 05462

For online donation options, please visit our website, <http://www.birdsofvermont.org>



Donate



THE CARVER'S DAUGHTER *(continued from page 2)*

It took me a lot longer to find my way to the door of the shop. Something in the atmosphere had suddenly changed. I looked at the cases and the birds inside them in a new way. Yeah, they were bigger all right. Even my mud didn't feel as though it was all mine any longer. Whatever was starting to happen here might get really weird, like turn into a legacy or something. And outlast my father.

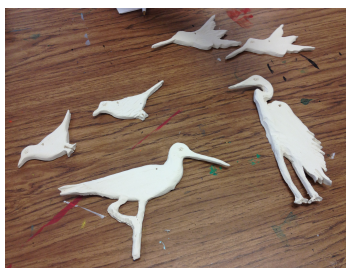
And even me.

—Kari Jo Spear 



BRIDGES TO BIRDS *(continued from page 3)*

Art teacher MC Baker and her students from Williston Elementary are working with us to create a set of ceramic bird ornaments, forming an “Wings of Clay” exhibit that is also a fundraiser for this project.



We have received a grant from the Vermont Community Foundation's Small and Inspiring Fund to help with program development in the treehouse classroom, and we are submitting grant requests for the building and site reconstruction.

To all of you who already donated to the flood recovery, thank you for stepping up so quickly in our time of need. Members have donated close to \$7,000 already! That money has been used for flood recovery activities and expenses, and the remaining is dedicated to the flood recovery-related activities within the Bridges to Birds Project. You will be hearing much more about the activities and accomplishments of this project in the future.

Look for pictures in your next issue of *Chip Notes*!

— Erin Talmage, Executive Director 

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

HAPPY 94th BIRTHDAY to BOB SPEAR!

Friday, February 21

Celebrate with a \$94 donation (or more) to the Museum. Or just have cake!

DINING to DONATE

Thursday Evening, March 6 • 4 - 9pm

Applebee's Restaurant in South Burlington

Celebrate Bob's birthday and support Bridges to Birds. Bring your flyer, or call or email for more details.



WILLISTON KID'S DAY

Saturday, March 22 • 10am - 3pm
Williston Central School

Visit with us and share some fun activities! Arts, contests, active play—plus the bird-focused crafts and puzzles at our own table.

\$1 suggested admission benefits the Williston Community Food Shelf

OPEN for CELEBRATIONS OF MAPLE

Sundays, March 23 and March 30 • 10am - 3pm

We'll be open Sundays during the Audubon and Huntington Sugarmakers' weekends to welcome sugar makers, friends, and those who need a break between doses of deliciousness. Sneak a peek through our Viewing Window, and spot some early migrants.

BIRD MONITORING WALKS

Saturdays, March 29, April 28 •

8:00 - 9:45am

Saturdays, May 31, June 28, July 26 •

7:30 - 9:30am (note earlier start)

Join experienced birders on the monthly bird monitoring walk on the Museum's property. Finish the walk with cocoa, coffee or tea at the bird viewing window inside the Museum. Please bring your own binoculars and dress for the weather.

Free (donations welcome) • Please pre-register

Please call (802) 434-2167 to pre-register
and to confirm times (sometimes they change).

WINTER – SPRING 2014

VOLUNTEER WORK DAY

Saturday, April 26 • 9am - 2pm

Help prepare the Museum for the open season! From trail work to hanging art, we have opportunities for all.

Please let us know if you plan to come so we can provide lunch for everyone.

RETURN TO OPEN DAILY HOURS

Thursday, May 1 • 10am - 4pm

We return to our daily hours! We are open every day from today (May 1) through October 31.

Free admission for members • \$7 non-member adults; discounts for seniors and children

"PERILOUS PASSAGES" and "WINGS OF CLAY" EXHIBITS OPEN

Daily, May 1— October 31 • 10am - 4pm

Come to understand the consequences of the extinction of the Passenger Pigeon as interpreted in art. Admire (and purchase) ceramic bird ornaments made by local students.

Free admission for members • \$7 non-member adults; discounts for seniors and children

HERRICK'S COVE WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

Sunday, May 4 • 10am - 4pm

Visit our table at the annual (and wonderful) Herrick's Cove Wildlife Festival. Discover how the science of ornithology meets up with the art of woodcarving. Try your hand at carving –with soap!

EARLY BIRDER MORNING WALKS

Every Sunday, May 4 – June 29 • 7:00 - 9:30am

Join us for an early morning ramble in the Birds of Vermont Museum forest and meadows. Walks are led by experienced birders familiar with Vermont birds. Come to several walks to hear the changes in who calls and when!

Finish the walk with bird-friendly coffee at the viewing window inside the Museum. Bring binoculars and good walking shoes.

Free • Please pre-register

SUNDAYS *for* FLEDGLINGS: KIDS + BIRDS = FUN

More or less alternate Sundays, May – October • 2 – 3pm

Welcome to the 2014 "Sundays for Fledglings" series. Come discover birds with us, from feathers to flying, from art to zoology. Want to develop mad skillz in observation, research, and goofing around? Yes! Kids can earn a Junior Birder Badge! If you already have one, we will help you become an even better birder, biologist, or artist.

Perfect for kids aged 5-9 (siblings welcome). Included with admission to Museum, donations always welcome.

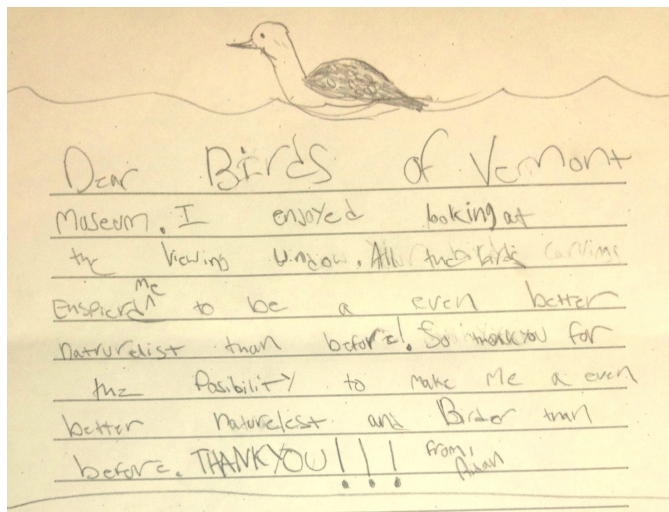
Keep an eye on the online calendar for monthly themes, schedule details, and more!

STORYTIME *in the* NESTLINGS NOOK

*Tuesdays, May 13, June 10, July 8, August 12 •
10:30 - 11:30am*

Join us for stories about birds and more. Intended for pre-schoolers but all ages are welcome. Stories are followed by a craft project, music or nature walk, depending on the topic and the weather. Got a favorite book about birds? Share it with us!

Free with admission; donations accepted.



Find us online for more information, updates, changes, and additions



All events are at the Birds of Vermont Museum unless noted otherwise.

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

AMAZING VOLUNTEERS

Every year, the Birds of Vermont Museum welcomes a very loyal group of volunteers and a few new individuals and families to help with the many projects that enable us to maintain our focus on bringing people and birds closer together in ways that benefit both. As most of you know, in 2013, the Museum endured a soggy spring then experienced a devastating flash flood in early July. In the aftermath, extra attention was directed to such immediate priorities as the loss of the entrance path and trail reparation.

With *well over one thousand hours* of hard work, dedication and remarkable talent, volunteers managed the mundane and met the unexpected. Between spring clean-up and midsummer, our volunteers escalated their efforts from the usual window netting repairs, indoor cleaning, and trail maintenance tasks of spring, to helping assess damage and recover items washed downstream or hung up in debris. They tackled more brush and tree limb removal than ever before, raked the grounds, and positioned planking over soggy trails. They continued to lead bird walks, and mowed a labyrinth into the north-side field and planted sunflowers (just for fun)!

Other volunteers facilitated outreach programs for libraries, as well as delivered, installed, and retrieved bird-related educational displays. They produced and mailed materials for the library pass program. Our volunteers staffed special programs and presentations off-site, helped install the Breeding Bird Atlas display and complementary art show, and created videos, photographic slideshows, and lots of publicity for both flood recovery awareness and regular programming. Volunteers worked tirelessly to install a long-needed public wireless access system for the Museum.

Our soap carving occasions at the Museum and festivals remain very popular, so new popsicle stick tools were constantly being fashioned by volunteers. Our docents usually balance interactive roles for Museum visitors, such as introducing the video, engaging with visitors at the viewing window, and managing admissions and the gift shop, with helping research birds or books in the Museum library. Fundraising became the principal focus this past half-year, with many seeking financial support for the construction of a bridge to the Museum's entryway.

One of our favorite groups helping out as the season closed was the dedicated bird watching circle of folks who steadfastly count birds and raise funds (for the Museum) at The Big Sit! Another much appreciated group is the Museum's own Board of Directors. These hardy trustees spent hours contributing their own time and professional expertise in clarifying, advising, facilitating, publicizing, and working together to consider and address the daunting array of issues that swept in with the flood.

Because of the good works our volunteers are able to accomplish, the Museum continues to be strong and resilient. It is with the utmost gratitude that we say *thank you!!*

Also, many thanks to :

- ◆ Gale Lawrence
- ◆ Denver Holt
- ◆ Linda and Kerry Hurd
- ◆ Bill and Mae Mayville
- ◆ John and Allison Gergely
- ◆ Dick Allen, carver
- ◆ Jim Osborn, fundraising birder
- ◆ Dean Grover, PE
- ◆ Shawn Rouleau and his students at Essex Center for Technology
- ◆ Journalists Candace Page, Ethan de Seife, and Lynn Monty
- ◆ Art teachers Lisa Foley, Kim Desjardin, and MC Baker (and MC's students!)
- ◆ Bookshelf-makers Curtis Wilson, Brenda Wilson, and Floyd Scot
- ◆ Letter writers Linda Gionti, Ariel Kalie Burgess, and Ali Wagner
- ◆ IT helpers Tom Mathews, Chris Snyder and Bill Mayville
- ◆ All who supported our Annual Appeal
- ◆ Northeast Delta Dental
- ◆ Vermont Community Foundation
- ◆ Friends and family of Neal Dodge
- ◆ Friends and family of Margaret Jean Ormsbee
- ◆ Gallagher, Flynn & Co. with Dann Van Der Vliet
- ◆ Those who gave in honor of Michelle Patenaude and Toni Hurd
- ◆ The donors to our Silent Auction: Leo Labonte, Elizabeth Spinney, Reed Prescott, Richmond Home Supply, Bill and Jen of Ye Olde Sign Shoppe, Kir of Whimsical Dreams, and Shirley Johnson.

Interested in volunteering too?
Great! Please contact the Museum for opportunities, or suggest a need and offer your own expertise.



REFLECTIONS WITH BOB

These days Bob spends more time at the viewing window than in the workshop.

One afternoon we were quietly watching the birds when Bob started to reminisce a bit more than usual. Prior to our sitting there together we had been talking with Ethan de Seife from *Seven Days* about Bob's work as an artist, his myriad accomplishments, and his lasting legacy. It became apparent during the interview that reflecting on his work, his art, and the Museum itself were not where Bob's mind was focused at the moment.

After the interview Bob and I sat in silence for a long while, watching the activity at the feeders, listening to the Chickadees chitter as they stocked up for the cold night ahead, occasionally commenting on the number of Mourning Doves and the brilliance of the Cardinals.

If thinking back over your life doesn't include creating a Museum, starting a nature center, preserving majestic features of Vermont's landscape, introducing and educating thousands of people about bird conservation, what *does* rise to the surface?

The silence stretched out, and then Bob asked if I remembered when we hiked up Camel's Hump with Craig Reynolds (when Bob was a mere 85 years old). As we gazed at the snow-covered mountain, he recalled, with a slight smile, hiking down in the dark, a flashlight-less young man who had joined us, and the four of us walking down the mountain with the aid of only two headlamps. Bob recalled another excursion with the Miller family, a year later, when they hiked the whole thing in the daylight. A few minutes later he told me about hiking the entire Long Trail with the Pirkanens, and some of the things they saw along the hike. He followed that with a story of a trip to Florida that included a canoe trip in the Okefenokee Swamp with Doug Hinshaw.

We took a break for hot chocolate and then settled back for a story of a trip he took with Gale, Ed Everts and Debbie (now Raven) Davis. All whom he mentioned were people or names I knew, as their names appear in many places of honor around the Museum.

Later, I reflected on the connections these people have with Bob, the Museum, and their shared love for the outdoors and the treasures that can be found there when you know how to look. I thought about how much Bob has accomplished in his professional life—yet what he wanted to talk about on that cold February day, at 93 years of age, were hikes, mountains, trails, canoe trips, and being outside with friends.

The Birds of Vermont Museum is a legacy, to be sure; yet so is a lifetime of connections with each other.

—Erin Talmage 

TRAVELING LIBRARY EXHIBITS

In *February*, stop by the Charlotte Public Library to see our touring display about **Owls**. In *March*, that same library will host our newest travelling exhibit, **Passenger Pigeons and Extinction**. In *July*, at the Richmond Free Library, browse our **Woodcarving** display.

Interested in having an exhibit at your library? Call us!



Our new bookshelf! Thanks to builders Curtis Wilson, Brenda Wilson, and Floyd Scot

SAVE THE DATES

Feb 21 Happy birthday, Bob Spear!

March 6 Dining to Donate

March 23, 30 Open for Sugarmakers
Celebrations of Maple

April 26 Volunteer Work Day

May 1 Return to Open Daily
Perilous Passages exhibit opens
Wings of Clay exhibit / sale opens

Repeated: Bird Monitoring Walks (*Last Saturdays*)
Early Birder Morning Walks (*Sundays, May–June*)
Nestlings (*Second Tuesdays, May–October*)
Fledglings (*alternate Sundays, May–October*)

Details inside and on our website! To register,
call (802) 434-2167 or email museum@birdsofvermont.org

*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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The Birds of Vermont Museum
900 Sherman Hollow Road • Huntington, Vermont 05462
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