



VERMONT *Nature*

SPRING/SUMMER 2018

Citizen Science in Focus



Eastern Bluebird, Sialia sialis. Photo credit: Michael Mill

"If you take care of birds, you take care of most of the environmental problems in the world." So says Thomas E. Lovejoy, biologist and "godfather of biodiversity" – kicking off 2018 as the Year of the Bird.

This year we mark the centennial of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the most powerful and important bird-protection law ever passed, and in honor of this milestone, VINS has teamed up with hundreds of other nature centers across the globe to celebrate, and to commit to protecting birds today and for the next hundred years. We encourage all members of our community to help build a better world for birds by taking a simple, but meaningful, action each month.

Engaging Communities

For the last few decades, VINS' commitment to engaging communities in the stewardship of the natural world has included encouraging participation in citizen science. By crowd-sourcing the collection of data, citizen scientists help real scientists extend the reach of their own research, and learn more about species and populations than they ever could alone. Anyone of any age or knowledge level can participate by

gathering observations and reporting them through free, online projects.

Visitors to VINS are often already curious about science and biology, and through citizen science we give our guests a way to take that curiosity home, while also furthering the body of scientific knowledge. It is one of the simplest and most meaningful of the actions we can take for birds.

Throughout the winter, the Crawl Space at the VINS Nature Center was transformed into a Project FeederWatch observation station. Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders in North America, and a fun way to stay cozy and warm while watching winter birds. With the help of our guests we've tallied sixteen species at our feeders. It wasn't just the birds we collected data on either – we measured the air temperature, precipitation, and hours of effort to make a more complete picture of the birds' world.

Then in February, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) called our visitors to take part in the biggest birding event of the year. Run by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the GBBC is a citizen science weekend of

birding for nature lovers across the globe. Over 175,000 people in 130 countries participate to get a 4-day snapshot of winter bird distributions and abundance. VINS and guests tallied thirteen species here over the long weekend, to add to the 6,300 species documented around the world. The Great Backyard Bird Count is a yearly event, so be sure to join us next February to see what turns up!

Arrival of Spring

Finally, we eagerly anticipate the arrival of spring, and with it an abundance of nesting birds! Last year we participated in NestWatch, making weekly observations of the growing families of Tree Swallows using the boxes in our meadow. We've already had a sneak peek of what might come with this new year – several pairs of Eastern Bluebirds have been observed checking out the boxes. VINS is an official NestWatch, and we look forward to hosting NestWatch Trainings in the future. Watch our Facebook page for more details!

If you love the outdoors or are curious about wildlife, you could be a citizen scientist today. Most citizen science projects are completely free, and involve observing the natural world, then entering your observations online. For as little as fifteen minutes once a year, or a little time every day, you can help conduct real, urgently needed scientific research. Get involved with one of these projects, at VINS or at home, and help make new discoveries now.



—Anna Autilio
Lead, Environmental Educator



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A Special Message

From Our Executive Director

We cannot thank you enough for your support in helping us achieve another banner year at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science and Nature Center.

Accomplishments

The number of visitors to the Nature Center topped 37,000 and we have reached another 23,000 adults and children in our community and school programs. Our educators have led ninety-two on-site field trips, including geology hikes to unearth clues to the formation of the Quechee Gorge; an exploration of diverse ecosystems at the Nature Center to discover how animals make their homes in the forest, field, and river's edge; and a new series of winter field trips highlighted by "Owls in Winter."

Also at the Nature Center, the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation is gearing up for another "baby bird feeding" season. With thirty-three volunteers working in shifts each day, the rehab center will raise more than 200 orphaned baby birds until they are ready to fledge and fly free – being given a chance at life thanks to an amazing group of dedicated people. Is there any greater testament to the importance of volunteers? We thank all our friends and supporters for making it possible for VINS to do what it does every day.

VINS participates in a variety of Citizen Science projects and we invite the public to participate with us. Citizen Science is best defined as public participation in scientific research. We actively engage with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collecting and submitting our data from Project FeederWatch and NestWatch for their analysis. We also offer workshops to the general public to encourage and give guidance on how to participate with these projects. Look for our workshop this fall to learn how to set up a backyard bird feeding station at your home or place of business.

There is an addition of five new birds to the education programs, bringing the total to fifteen education birds. These birds will meet the public almost daily. With the several additions to the program team, we have built a new heated enclosure for the birds to call home.



This new enclosure was built to conform to the new guidelines related to enclosure size. This project was made possible by very generous gifts from two VINS supporters. It is a handsome building and fits nicely on the campus.

Another special exhibit launches this spring: the Adventure Playscape. Also made possible by a gift from a generous supporter, the new VINS Adventure Playscape uses natural wood and stone to create a place for kids that will build confidence, agility, and teamwork. With their imagination, kids can use the surrounding landscape to make music, build forts, balance on logs, and transform into any animal as they experience the many possibilities the Playscape holds. This new exhibit promises a natural place for kids, with elements for creative play, to bring out the inner-explorer in any child.

It's Been Quite a Year

As we look forward, we are excited to welcome long-time friends and new faces. As VINS' co-founder Sally Laughlin once said, "It was the people who believed in it, who made it happen." To you, our remarkable supporters and volunteers, we would like to graciously thank you.

Because of your important contributions and passion, we are able to continue our work to lead the way in environmental education. We look forward to seeing you at the Nature Center this spring!



—Charles F. Rattigan

Baby Bird Season

It's spring and the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation is gearing up for busy season. Birds are beginning to build nests, and with the longer days, migratory birds are returning to their breeding grounds.

For VINS, that means baby bird season. Each spring and summer, rehabbers at VINS hand raise hundreds of orphaned baby songbirds and raptors rescued from throughout Vermont and New Hampshire.

With baby birds arriving in May, we are likely looking at a full house by the end of June. Having many, small mouths to feed can be challenging, so help in the rehab center is much appreciated. We welcome three new interns and up to thirty Baby Bird Feeder volunteers for this busy nesting season. Care is given to the patients from dawn to dusk, with special diets and strict feeding schedules on the half hour or hour.

The volunteers primarily feed the nestlings with nourishing insects and other foods until the birds are full and sleepy. Staff and interns monitor the babies' health with regular weight checks, behavior evaluations, heat support, and medical care when necessary. In the internship program, interns will learn to

assess the health of all patients, plan and administer treatments and medications, and progress birds through the stages of rehabilitation toward the ultimate goal of release. Interns and volunteers also help with the daily husbandry of all of our animal residents and patients, keeping everyone clean, healthy, and fed.

One of the best parts about raising baby birds is how fast they grow. It's amazing to watch a hatchling bird come through the doors, eyes closed and brand new to the world, transform right before your eyes. In a matter of weeks, the bird will have feathers, be starting to fly, and will be ready to explore the world. We look forward to sharing this experience with the many new volunteers and interns, as well as the returning faces we've missed this winter.

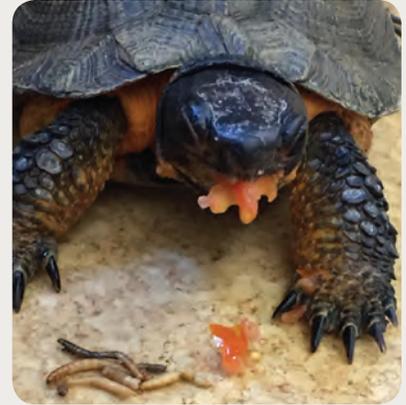
Most importantly, the cuteness factor of these baby birds is off the charts, and we always find time to reflect on how lucky we are to be able to experience them up close and personal. Having passed the many days of snow, it's hard to imagine the feverish, buzzing atmosphere around the corner, but it is coming – and we are ready!



—Lauren Adams
Lead, Wildlife Keeper



VINS Volunteer Katharine Britton



Every day there is something at VINS that moves me:

- Hearing a very young birder, binoculars dangling around her neck, talk enthusiastically about birds;
- Helping a hatchling that arrives, looking nearly lifeless in a shoebox, transform into a fully feathered robin in a matter of weeks;
- Presenting the Wood Turtle "Turt" with a smörgåsbord of her favorite foods, and then follow her as she sets out on a walkabout across the VINS yard;
- Gazing into the face of a raptor perched on my glove;
- Holding the corn snake and watching her twine around my wrists;
- Listening to our educators bring fresh energy to the multiple programs they put on each day;
- Meeting the people who have gone out of their way to rescue an injured bird and bring it to VINS;
- Watching the rehabbers treat an injured bird, and, weeks later, return it to the wild.

Visit us at the Nature Center – new exhibits, science exploration, and more!



Adopt a Raptor

By adopting, you support the care of our avian wildlife, including residential ambassadors and patients in the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation. When you sponsor one of our resident birds, you help provide the specialized care needed by the many and diverse animals living at VINS Nature Center. With this investment, you also show support of the many educational experiences given to the local community and beyond.



Become a Member

As a VINS member, you and your family benefit from unique experiences and the greatest value. Enjoy unlimited visits to the VINS Nature Center, an educational and engaging destination for all ages. Use the free passes to share the experience with your friends, receive a discount on Nature Store purchases, Nature Camp discounts, and early notice of special happenings.



Rental Space

VINS offers a four-season, environmentally friendly locale, ideal for intimate gatherings or large groups. The conference and event spaces possess modern amenities, while maintaining the integrity and beauty of the surrounding natural landscape. Enjoy live bird exhibits and hiking trails and the option to experience additional special nature programs or hands-on presentations.



To learn more ways you can support VINS, visit vinsweb.org.

Upcoming Events *Visit us at the VINS Nature Center*

April 21 & 22
Earth Day Celebration

May 6
Raptors in Focus:
Bird Photography Workshop

May 18 & 21
School Science Symposium

June 2
David Chang Memorial
Fly Fishing Event

June 9
Get Outdoors Day/Fairy Hunts

June 18
First day of Nature Camp

July 7
Incredible Insect Festival

August 11
Magnificent Mammals Day

September 22
Sport of Kings Day

September 29 – October 5
4th Annual en Plein Air
Painting Festival

October 4 – 26
VINS' Annual Silent Auction

October 27
Hoots & Howls

View our full event schedule at vinsweb.org.

VINS NATURE CAMP Pre-K to 8th Grade



Locations in Quechee,
South Pomfret, Washington, VT
and Hanover, NH

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AVAILABLE!**

Contact us at 802.359.5000
or camps@vinsweb.org
vinsweb.org/nature-camp