



# THE NORWICH TIMES

Good People — Good Places — Good Things Happening

Norwich, Vermont 05055

Fall 2010

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## Inspiring Kids— Going Beyond the Bake Sale



The whole town benefits from Inspiring Kids projects. The purchase of these daffodil bulbs raised money for Marion Cross School and were planted by MCS kids – a definite win/win all around!

Vicky Fish

We've all been asked to participate in school fundraising projects, whether you're a parent, a child, the neighbor approached to buy gift wrap, or someone who can't make it past a bake sale staffed by cute children without buying a brownie or two. Fundraising for our schools is laudable and necessary. Gift wrap and cookies are good things. Having said that, is there an even better way to raise money for our schools? A more meaningful way to raise money? These are questions that Amy Neuman, mother of three school-aged kids, started to explore a little over three years ago. Those questions led to others:

- Would the community support a green fundraiser, and sponsor the children for doing a job like planting bulbs or clearing a trail as a way to raise money for their schools?
- What if you raised the money such that half went to the school and half went to organizations in need, chosen by the students?
- Would teachers be interested in weaving some educational activities around the fundraiser into the school curriculum?
- Could you get the children more involved and thinking about community, philanthropy and stewardship? Can you do good and have fun... through school fundraising?

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## Elder Profile: The Birdman of Elm Street

Ruth Sylvester



George Clark

"Oh he's great!" exclaimed a local birder about George Clark. "I've been on birdwalks he's led, and it's fascinating. He knows so much, and can identify so many birds by sound."

Clark's expertise is the heritage of a lifetime of study and practice. He was born in New Jersey. "I got interested in birds as a boy," he says. "My maternal grandfather was an all-around naturalist, and I went on little trips with him. Then I discovered in college it was possible to do birds professionally."

Clark and his wife, Nancy (now deceased), and son were based in Storrs, CT, where he was a professor at the University. The family lived in a variety of cities as sabbaticals and projects took him to Seattle, Manhattan, D.C., and Tucson. Preparing for retirement, Clark and his wife picked their Elm Street house because it met most of the 25 criteria on their list. "No huge long driveway was one thing," Clark recalls. They bought the house in the early 1990s and moved up full time in 1997. The Warner Meadows conservation area behind the house is an added attraction for a naturalist.

One of Clark's early research interests was Aus-  
*continued on page 14*

## Sustain Yourself On A Local Norwich Ale



Patrick Dakin, Brewmaster

Mark Meyerrose

That Patrick Dakin has his dream job is probably an understatement. He has been the Norwich Inn's brewmaster for the past four years. As he explains, his ascension to the creator of Jasper Murdock's libations was a matter of "being in the right place at the right time." When Joe and Jill Lavin purchased the Inn, the position of brewmaster was left vacant. Having spent several years tending bar in the Alehouse, Patrick was in the perfect position to assume Tim Watson's role, the Inn's previous co-owner and founding brew master. "Mr. Tim," as he is called, treated Patrick to a three-month apprenticeship. Yet, this was familiar territory for Patrick: before Samuel Adams Brewery put micro brewing onto the national beverage landscape, Patrick had been a home brewer.

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## The Birdman of Elm Street – Continued from page 1

tralian megapodes. ‘Megapode’ means ‘big foot.’ Some of the species are known as brush turkeys. They are unusual in incubating their eggs not by sitting on them but by storing them in large mounds. In some species the mounds are of compost: decaying leaves and so forth the birds pile up. The pile generates heat, which the birds regulate by opening and closing vents on the top. Other species use sand to retain the sun’s heat. The chicks are born quite mature; they can fly soon after hatching.

Tales of strange (to Vermonters) birdlife are easy to come by from Clark, as are explanations about familiar avifauna. Sitting on his backyard patio, Clark continually footnotes his conversation with observations about the birds frequenting his yard. There’s been a lot of change in the last 50 years, he notes, and many species show up farther north than they used to; the list that leaps to his mind includes turkey vultures, cardinals, Carolina wrens, and titmice. Before a listener can suggest assumptions about climate change, he talks about some of the other factors affecting populations. Bird feeders have encouraged cardinals and titmice, and the big highways mean more roadkill for the turkey vultures. Landscape changes make a huge difference. “The early settlers dealt with trees that had 4-foot trunks,” Clark notes, “and by the mid 1880s it was an open landscape” as forests were cleared for pastures.

Now the landscape is filling in with trees as well as scattered houses. “There are about 28,000 acres in Norwich,” says



George and J. Williams after a nest in the Rift Valley, Kenya – 1974

Clark. “It used to be mostly farms, open land. They had some woodlots, but still, there was a lot of room for grassland birds.” Now meadowlarks, for example, are rare in the area.

Earlier cutting of hayfields has also challenged grassland nesters. Increases in predators that don’t mind proximity to people, such as cats and raccoons, have also changed the balance of bird populations. To an ecologist, change is a constant.

Much information about population changes comes from local birding aficionados who help with counts of various

sorts. One of the most well-known is the Audubon Society’s annual Christmas bird count. The project began in 1900, and now has over 50,000 participants, mostly in North America. Obviously data thus gathered give a broad-brush picture, but the trend information is valuable. There’s also the “roadside survey,” which involves driving a set route, with timed pauses for listening and observation. Eager birders in the Upper Valley also execute more high-tech surveys with recordings to lure birds. (The *uv-birders* website has notes of sightings and other info.)

A century ago, killing birds was more common than counting them. Until the 1916 Migratory Bird treaty between the US and Canada, explains Clark, many birds were harvested for food, feathers, or just killed for excitement. Women’s styles for hats dictated “the more birds you could carry, the more fashionable you were.”

Though a July *New Yorker* magazine carried a disturbing article about killing songbirds for food around the Mediterranean, nowadays in North America finding birds is not bloody, at least not for the birds. “I’ve seen a cardinal take a pretty good bite at the finger of someone banding it,” remembers Clark. In general birders aren’t competitive, “not like golfers!” he laughs. The World Series of Birding is in Cape May, and it’s a charity fundraiser.

Ability to identify birds by sound is key for an expert. Learning bird songs is fundamental, but “a frontier now is identification by chip note,” Clark says. “You can hear the migration, the chipping, in a quiet place.” The chip notes

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## THINK LOCAL, THINK NORWICH

# Andrea's



## A HAIR STUDIO

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Nicole Pollock  
Sally Gottling

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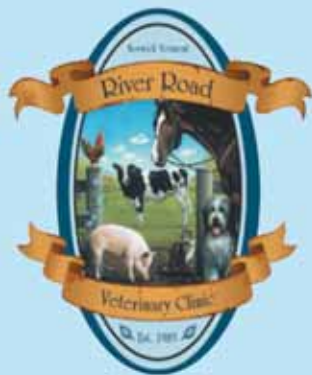


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## A Generous and Expert Birder

George Clark’s quiet, soft-spoken demeanor belies a remarkable energy and enthusiasm, not only for birds and their habits, but for communicating their wonders to others. Although his contributions as a professional ornithologist are well known, many Norwich residents may not be fully aware how much George has contributed to our town. It’s no understatement to assert that few have done more to promote conservation in Norwich over the past decade than George Clark. And, his reach extends well beyond feathered creatures—George is an active member of the Conservation Commission, the Trails Committee, and the Warner Meadows Association. He’s as likely to be out lopping branches or pulling invasive weeds on an overgrown trail, or poring over conservation maps at a meeting, as he is to be leading a group of rapt kids or adults on a bird walk.

George defines the notion of volunteerism in that he gives abundantly of his time and energy for worthwhile causes, yet seeks nothing tangible in return. A lifelong teacher with extraordinary patience and curiosity, George is in his element when it comes to introducing people to birds and the natural world. He has so far led at least one community birding excursion in every month of 2010! He’s also pretty darn good at identifying birds, always with at least one ear and eye, if not both, tuned to the avian world. Ask him a question, simple or complex, about anything ornithological, and you’ll get a reasoned, succinct answer. He’ll be the first to tell you that he doesn’t have all the answers—if he doesn’t know something (a rarity), he won’t hide the fact.

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) has taken full advantage of George’s expertise and dedication since we set up shop in Norwich 3 years ago, and well before that during our tenure at VINS. George did yeoman’s work for our 5-year Vermont Breeding Bird Atlas project ([www.vtecostudies.org/vbba](http://www.vtecostudies.org/vbba))—he served as volunteer coordinator for northern Windsor County, organized scores of amateur birders to beat the bushes for nesting birds, logged 450 hours in the field himself, and even wrote 22 of the 209 species accounts for the Atlas book that VCE plans to publish in 2011. No one has volunteered more time, blood, sweat and tears for bird conservation in Vermont than George Clark.

More recently, George has teamed up with other Norwich birders to spearhead the Norwich 2010 Birding Quest, a year-long effort to identify as many species as possible within our town lines. Part friendly competition, part careful documentation of our town’s avifauna, and part educational outreach to engage citizens in exploring Norwich, the Quest combines many of George’s passions. It provides an ‘excuse’ (not that he needs one) to get out birding every day; it yields a comprehensive record of Norwich’s avian diversity; and it is a vehicle to offer monthly birding walks for the public. Not surprisingly, George’s list now stands at 130 species, eclipsing all other birders, a testament both to his tireless field birding and superb identification skills. The Norwich master list recently surpassed our original target of 150 species, and we’re now aiming for 175 before year’s end. If anyone can get us there, George will!

Norwich residents owe a huge debt of thanks to this unassuming, but energetic and community-minded man.

—Chris Rimmer, Vermont Center for Ecostudies

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*Kevin and Nancy Clark, George's son and late wife, at Yellowstone National Park – 1985*

are the little blips of sound birds use to keep in touch, extremely hard to differentiate. Birds migrate predominantly at night. This decades-old information was gathered even from chance events like a lumberyard fire in Philadelphia that illuminated the night sky and revealed migrating birds. “If you point a scope at the moon,” adds Clark, “you can see them as they fly by. But the moon is such a small portion of the sky—two birds a minute is a good catch” for this method.

Clark’s knowledge has made him a sought-after expert for birding expeditions. He has accompanied Smithsonian cruises to Greenland, Iceland, and Scandinavia, as well as leading five trips to South America. Now his efforts are more local. He’s enthusiastic about the Marion Cross School’s nature area and the learning it provides.

Researchers, including Clark, have uncovered many astounding facts about birds. Some warblers almost double their (tiny) bodyweight, from 12 grams up over 20, and use the fat to fuel flights that may exceed 2000 miles. But there’s more to discover, maintains Clark. “Their response times are so fast, and smell and taste have historically been underestimated. Birds have ultraviolet vision. We’ve been underestimating the abilities of these animals.” ■

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