

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

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**Hunter Education,
The Bibles,
Bat Houses**

Massachusetts Junior Duck Stamp Winner Announced

Clifford Kazanjian from Hopkinton won Best of Show in the 2026 Massachusetts Junior Duck Stamp (JDS) Contest. His acrylic on board painting of a red-breasted merganser, "Resurfaced," was selected from 78 entries. Kazanjian's award-winning artwork represented Massachusetts at the National JDS Contest. While his artwork did not take the top national prize, Kazanjian was honored with second place in the Sid Crawford Award competition of the National Duck Stamp Collectors Society. Entries were required to be from graduating high school seniors who took a first-place ribbon in their state contest but did not receive any monetary recognition in the national contest.

Students from kindergarten through grade 12 from across the Commonwealth submit original works of art depicting waterfowl in appropriate wetland habitat, demonstrating both artistic talent and a knowledge of the value of wetlands for wildlife. In March, MassWildlife held the judging, at which time the winning artworks were selected. Combinations of the top artworks will be exhibited throughout Massachusetts in the coming year.

The Massachusetts JDS Program is sponsored by MassWildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with past support from the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council. Please support the JDS Program and student study of wetlands conservation by purchasing Junior Duck Stamps featuring national winners from previous years. Stamps can be purchased at duckstamp.com.

To learn more about the Massachusetts JDS Program, and to access the traveling exhibit schedule, visit mass.gov/dfw/jds.



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2

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

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FEATURES

LESSONS IN SAFETY

2

—Nicole McSweeney

Thousands of residents joined MassWildlife at recent listening sessions to voice their support for removing the ban on Sunday hunting. However, some expressed concerns for public safety. The author explores how fears can shape behavior and policy, the evolution of hunter education, and what we can do to collectively keep the outdoors safe and enjoyable for all.

THE BIBLES

14

—Troy Gipps

A series of expertly written, how-to books published in the 1960s that found their way into the hands of so many outdoorsmen and -women of that era have stood the test of time, proving that they are, in fact, "The Good Books" of fishing, hunting, shooting, outdoor cooking, camping, and so much more.

A PLACE FOR BATS TO CALL HOME

28

—Jennifer Longsdorf

Massachusetts bat populations have seen dramatic declines over the past 20 years since white-nose syndrome was first discovered in a cave near Albany, New York. The disease caused some bat populations to decline by more than 99 percent, while the loss of summer maternity roosts has created additional challenges. Fortunately, MassWildlife, in partnership with MassDOT and dedicated volunteers, launched a program six years ago to help address these challenges by installing and monitoring bat houses across the Commonwealth. The results thus far are encouraging.

28



Faces of Conservation

36

On the Cover: A mature buck makes its way through a hardwood forest in early autumn. Perhaps no species is more emblematic of the need for scientific management, which includes regulated hunting, than the white-tailed deer. Photo © Josh Gahagan, gahaganphoto.com

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FACES of CONSERVATION

Rufin Van Bossuyt: A Conservation Champion

The conservation and sporting communities lost a friend and advocate when Rufin Van Bossuyt of Upton passed away in January at the age of 89. Rufin, or Van as he was also known to family and friends, was an arborist by trade who worked for MassElectric (now National Grid) overseeing their hundreds of miles of transmission lines and managing the vegetation within the rights-of-way. He spent countless hours in chartered helicopters flying low over the power lines to assess the vegetation below, noting areas where trees were encroaching or where red-tailed hawks were nesting on the transmission structures. He developed an array of strategies for managing the vegetation to both protect the power lines and to enhance the shrubby habitat below. He was also careful to work within federal guidelines to only remove hawk nests when they were a threat to power transmission, and always during the off-season when eggs or young were not present. On a right-of-way behind his home in Upton, Rufin maintained a 30-box bluebird trail, building and placing the boxes then monitoring their use by bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and other cavity nesters.

I first met Rufin in 1981 when my boss, State Ornithologist Brad Blodget, made a cold call to MassElectric, looking to secure surplus utility poles, cross arms, and hardware to erect osprey nesting poles. Ospreys were rare at that time, with only 43 nesting pairs known in the state, concentrated on the Westport River and

Martha's Vineyard. Brad felt a concerted effort to increase the number of nesting opportunities would bolster the population and allow it to gradually expand. Being an outdoorsman, fisherman, and conservationist, Rufin was eager to help and put us touch with MassElectric facilities that stockpiled salvaged utility poles. He also directed us to other utility companies like ComElectric and Eastern Utilities that were closer to the osprey's restricted range. They, too, enthusiastically joined the cause and the Osprey Recovery Project was born. Nesting poles started going up all over southeastern Massachusetts, including Buzzards Bay, Cape Cod, and in Bristol and Plymouth counties. The ospreys responded, nesting successfully and

expanding their range. Over time the population grew and by 1995 it surpassed the 400 nesting-pair mark. Ospreys were back.

When MassWildlife embarked on bald eagle restoration in 1982, the plan was to construct a tower overlooking the Quabbin Reservoir and to place eaglets, taken from wild nests in places where they weren't endangered, into man-made nests on the tower, raise them without human contact, and release them to the wild so they would think Quabbin was their home. But where to get utility poles and the expertise to set them and construct a tower in a remote place like Quabbin? Rufin to the rescue! Soon, an experienced MassElectric crew was on site with telescopic pic poles and cables and the 30-foot tower and platform took shape, supported by six utility poles. MassWildlife crews built the 8-foot square



by William J. Davis



cages on the structure and over the next seven years raised and released 41 young bald eagles to the wild—the 1985 cohort being raised by the woman who would become my wife, but that's another story! Rufin also arranged for MassElectric to donate helicopter flight time to monitor the small but growing wintering eagle population in Massachusetts. For several years in a row, I joined him in a Bell Jet Ranger to fly the shoreline and islands of the Quabbin and the Massachusetts reaches of the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers to census the wintering eagles. We were also able to identify many of the first eagle nests established as they were often very distinct when seen from above.

When I talked with Rufin about the need for the Eagle Project to secure a vehicle that could tow a 17-foot Boston Whaler Montauk, I was suddenly placed in touch with MassElectric's fleet manager, who was about to turn in a group of used vehicles painted in classic utility-company yellow. I saw a 1-ton Dodge PowerWagon that would suit our needs perfectly and it shortly appeared at the Westborough Field Headquarters freshly painted in dark blue! That truck not only towed the Whaler all over the Commonwealth, but it also made a trip to Nantucket to salvage a 46-foot-long sperm whale that washed up on the beaches of 'Sconset. The truck hauled

the massive skull back to the Harvard University Field Station for cleaning and preparation before being displayed as a complete skeleton, hanging from the ceiling of the Nantucket Whaling Museum.

And, finally, Rufin was a founding member of the MA/RI Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation and served on the National Board of Directors. He was instrumental in getting more than a dozen chestnut orchards started, including the trees planted at the Central District office in West Boylston and on the Wayne F. MacCallum WMA in Westborough. In 2022, he was honored by having the Westborough orchard dedicated in his name. His legacy lives on in 1,000 pairs of nesting ospreys, 100 pairs of nesting eagles, and thousands of chestnut trees in the orchards in Massachusetts and Rhode Island that hopefully hold the key to American chestnut restoration. Thanks, Rufin. It was an honor to know you. — WJD



About the Author

Bill Davis worked for MassWildlife for 37 years, retiring in 2018 as the Central District Manager. He remains active in conservation, serving on the boards of the Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs and the MA/RI Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation.

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A killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) prepares to settle on its four eggs to continue incubation following a brief period of feeding. The killdeer is a common, large plover sometimes confused with the threatened piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*). Its nest is a simple ground scrape, in this case in gravel, lined with vegetation. Photo © Troy Gipps

