

THE BALLARDVALE GAZETTE

NEWSLETTER OF THE BALLARDVALE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
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Light Up Andover

The Town of Andover has launched the Light Up Andover initiative to encourage residents to display lights in support of all those on the front lines of pandemic response. Bill Ferris of Ballardvale-based Ferris Landscaping and Christmas Décor of Andover, pitched in by decorating trees in front of the library and on BallardVale Green with red, white, and blue lights.



#HopeTree.

Ferris also launched a Hope Tree of Andover GoFundMe campaign to support local restaurants while providing meals to teams at area hospitals. Part of the nationwide Hope Tree movement to raise funds for first responders, the spirited display of lights on BallardVale Green expresses community solidarity in the face of the pandemic. To join in, dig out those holiday lights and donate to Hope Tree of Andover MA.

Feedback? Subscribe by email?

Contact the editors:

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Fire Station Update

Groundbreaking for the new Ballardvale Fire Station, originally scheduled for March 13, will be held once it is safe to gather in groups. Meanwhile, construction is underway in the lot behind the current building (which will be torn down when the new structure is completed).

Editors' note: The 2019 editions of the BallardVale Gazette celebrated the 125th anniversary of AVIS. This year we're taking a look at some Ballardvale wildlife. We invite you to contribute a piece about your favorite local fauna. White squirrels, anyone?

Coyotes in the Vale

Andover native Bob Dalton Jr. believes there are no critters inhabiting our woods more misunderstood or, for that matter, more underappreciated than coyotes. "Because they are so elusive and we hear stories about them going after cats and small dogs, many people think of coyotes as something we would be better off without," says Dalton, a lieutenant with the Ballardvale Fire Department. "Truth is we should be thankful we have coyotes here. They are a friend of the forest and are helping to maintain our ecosystem," says Dalton.

An avid outdoors enthusiast who has observed Ballardvale wildlife for over four decades, Dalton has a lifelong fascination with coyotes. "They are pretty impressive animals. As you can tell I'm a huge fan," he says. If you have questions, he has answers.

How many coyotes are there in Ballardvale?

Because the packs move around often, it's impossible to say. Coyotes live in packs of

three to five, with each pack claiming a territory of between five and 25 miles. Also, their dens are usually hidden extremely well in hollow logs and behind bushes.

What do coyotes eat?

Practically anything, including fruit and plants, but they also hunt mice, rabbits, and even sick or wounded deer. A sure sign you are near a den is a small pile of animal bones. Coyotes are most active during the evening, but will also hunt during the day.



Coyotes in Pole Hill (courtesy of Scott Rogers)

How big do they get?

Coyotes in these parts usually weigh between 30 and 70 pounds each, and their bloodlines include part wolf and part dog. Like wolves, coyotes have just one litter a year, usually in the spring (typically May around here).

Why do coyotes howl?

Coyotes howl to let the rest of the pack know where they are and to regroup. Coyotes will bark like dogs when they feel threatened.

What should I do if I cross paths with a coyote?

They are more scared of us than we are of them, so make a lot of noise. Unless they are rabid, coyotes will almost always back down to humans. Coyotes will instinctively keep a close eye on anyone who gets near one of their dens and will likely follow you until you clear the area. Remember that this is their home too, and we need to respect coyotes. That said, always leash your pets when walking outside and keep cats indoors.

— *Joe Halpern*

The Owls of Pole Hill

I usually walk the trails of Pole Hill early in the morning and then just before sunset. The sunrises and sunsets from the top of Pole Hill are absolutely beautiful, I am also lucky during these walks to spot a lot of wildlife, including deer, fisher cats, coyote, beavers, ducks, swans, herons, muskrats, raccoons, kingfishers, and pileated woodpeckers. But owls are my favorite. My amateur observations are just that — I am not a biologist or a world class photographer, I just walk in the woods every day and keep my eyes and ears open.



A young barred owl

This year I was lucky to spot a great horned owl (GHO) and a mating pair of barred owls (I call them BOOBs, the Barred Owls of Ballardvale!), The GHO sightings have been spotty and I have not found any indication of a mating pair this spring. In 2018 I watched a pair of GHO raise their two owlets. I was able to see the owlets in all their fuzz. Every day I went in search of them and watched as they fledged out. I found evidence of what they ate at the bottom of the trees — mainly mice and voles, with the occasional squirrel. I watched them from March to May, after which I did not see the owlets. The GHO sightings have been few and far between, I wonder where they relocated, or maybe I

just haven't been lucky enough to spot them. As of this writing, I have not located the barred owl nest, and so no owlets. But I will continue to look.



Great horned owl

All my sightings of owls and wildlife have been from the marked trails. There is no reason to go off trails. I have usually seen the two barred owls on the white trail. Beginning at the Tewksbury Street entrance, you'll find this trail on the left as you pass the last houses on Pole Hill. For the last two weeks in March and the first week in April, I have seen only one of the barred, which leads me to think the other is on the nest. Also during this time, when I have seen the one owl, I have heard them talking to each other in the "hoot, hoot" of owl language, furthering my belief that the other is on the nest! Fingers crossed for a successful hatch and fledging of baby owls.

I have noticed a few different things about the GHO and barred owls. The GHO I have always seen high in the pine trees, close to the trunk. The barred owls like to perch on tree limbs, away from the trunk, and much lower, usually at eye level or not much higher. The darker colors of the GHO blend in with the dark pine, while the lighter barred blends in with the lighter grayish trees. With this color shading the animals

blend into their environment so as not to be prey themselves and to surprise their own prey by going unnoticed. I always follow a tree from the bottom up, and tree limbs out, and have been pretty successful finding owls this way. Another way I have been able to spot owls is to listen: not for their hoots, but to other birds. Many birds will start a cacophony of noise to alert others of the owl's presence. The chickadees, nuthatches, blue jays, and crows are good at sounding the alarm. When that happens, look around and you may see the owl, which usually doesn't stay long.



Pole Hill barred owl

I hope when you take a walk in Pole Hill, you will do so quietly, so as not to scare off the wildlife. Look and listen for the signs that are all around. You may get lucky and see the Barred Owls of Ballardvale or the GHO. Enjoy the outdoors!

— *Teresa Padvaiskas*

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BallardVale Historic District Commission

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CALENDAR

As of this writing (29 April 2020), community events and BallardVale Historic District Commission meetings are suspended until further notice. BDHDC meeting dates and agendas are posted at andoverma.gov. For questions about the commission, contact Diane Derby, derby01@comcast.net.