

## Nature in the Neighborhood – October 2023

### Getting Ready for Halloween!



[infinitespider.com/bold-jumping-spiders/](http://infinitespider.com/bold-jumping-spiders/)

As Halloween approaches and the days grow shorter, our fears of the sinister creatures that live in shadowy corners often grow larger – that includes rats, bats, black cats, and, of course, spiders. Recall the lyrics of one popular children’s Halloween song: “*Five creepy spiders ... five creepy spiders ... see how they crawl ... see how they crawl ... crawl ... crawl ... crawl ... crawl.*”

What can be creepier for this haunting season than a crawling spider? Well, perhaps a spider that jumps! *Phidippus audax* (or as it’s commonly known, the “daring or bold jumping spider”) is a common species of spider found in Massachusetts – and it can be found sometimes inside as well as outside of your house. Because of this spider’s amazing jumps, which have been reported by some sources to be up to 50 times its own body length, you’ll know when you encounter one. Its sudden leap will, if not scare you, certainly surprise you.

But what can be even more shocking is that if you look closely at a jumping spider, it will turn and stare right back at you with its large dark forward-facing eyes. They have eight eyes in total -- all the better to see you and their prey with! As Ed Yong, an award-winning science writer, notes in his fascinating book *An Immense World – How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us*, “despite being just a few millimeters long, [jumping spiders] can see as clearly as the eyes of pigeons, elephants, or small dogs.” Jumping spiders don’t bother spinning webs, they use their sharp eyesight and lightning-fast reflexes to spot and pounce on prey.

Thankfully, they are not tarantula-sized, being less than an inch long, but jumping spiders are hairy like a tarantula. They are mostly black with white hairs on their legs and vibrant turquoise splotches on their jaws. “It is unexpectedly cute,” writes Yong. “Its stocky body, short limbs, large head and wide eyes are rather childlike, and stir the same deep psychological bias that makes babies and puppies adorable.” (Well, maybe.)

This cuteness may have been one of the reasons behind the push by an elementary school class in Hollis, New Hampshire, to have the Governor sign a law designating *Phidippus audax* as the official state spider. (Massachusetts, while having a state insect (Ladybug), reptile (Garter snake), and even Donut (Boston Cream), does not currently have an official arachnid.)

We at the Swampscott Conservancy wish everyone a safe and happy Halloween. And we hope if you happen to come across a jumping spider this season, instead of screaming, you'll give it a smile and a wink and a big thank you for being one of many creatures that keep nature in our neighborhood diverse and interesting.

## Upcoming Conservancy Events

In furtherance of its mission to provide the public with information about the natural world in and around our neighborhood, the Conservancy and partnering organizations will be hosting a number of educational events this Fall including the following:

- **Atlantic White Shark Conservancy: "Being Shark Smart"**

If you're wondering about the increase in shark sightings off the Massachusetts coast, you're invited to an in-person, family-friendly presentation by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy on **Wednesday, October 25th, 6:30 pm**. Hosted by the Clifton Improvement Association ([ciabeachbluff.org](http://ciabeachbluff.org)) and the Swampscott Conservancy ([swampscottconservancy.org](http://swampscottconservancy.org)) it will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lynn ([uucgl.org](http://uucgl.org)) located at 101 Forest Ave., Swampscott.

If you come, you'll gain an understanding of the ongoing white shark research projects being funded by the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy, how that research is impacting conservation and public safety efforts, and up-to-date information on what that research has taught us. You will have an opportunity to view videos and photographs captured during the research season and develop your knowledge of what a shark is and what it takes to conduct white shark research. Q & A and how to get involved will follow the presentation.

FREE Registration for this event can be found at: [uucgl.org/event-details/atlantic-white-shark-conservancy-presentation](http://uucgl.org/event-details/atlantic-white-shark-conservancy-presentation). (Video recording will be available after the event at [youtube.com/@uuchurchofgreaterlynn](https://youtube.com/@uuchurchofgreaterlynn))

- **Raptors Are the Solution ("RATS"): "The Rat Poison Problem: How Rodenticides Are Harming Wildlife, Pets, and People"**

On **November 8th**, there will be in-person talk by RATS, a nonprofit that educates the public about the ecological role of wild birds of prey and the dangers of rat and rodent poisons in the food web.

- **Tailwinds: “Raptor Education & Conservation”**

Then on **November 29th**, there will be an event with live birds of prey by Tailwinds, a nonprofit organization with the mission of connecting the community with wildlife.

More information on these November events will be posted on the Conservancy and CIA websites in the near future