



Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter - Fall 2019

You're Invited - Annual Meeting Thursday, November 7th, 7:00 PM



Members and friends are invited to join us for the 2019 Westford Conservation Trust Annual Meeting on Thursday, November 7th, 7:00 pm at Roudenbush Community Center Gym, 65 Main St., Westford. A brief Trust business meeting will be held from 7:00-7:20 pm followed by our guest speaker. The new updated 2019 edition trail booklets and several handmade bird houses will also be available. Hope to see you

there!



Join us for an informative program by our guest speaker WINGMASTERS. We will learn about birds of prey, also known as raptors—hunting birds characterized by hooked beaks and powerful grabbing feet armed with sharp talons. There are several categories of raptors, including hawks, falcons, and owls. We will meet six live birds of prey. What is predation? Why are these birds at the top of the food web? How are they adapted to be stellar hunters, and what is their status in a rapidly changing world? The program includes eight rescued birds, and no exotics.

Our guest speakers are Julie Ann Collier and her partner Jim Parks. The presentation includes one or more endangered species cared for by WINGMASTERS, and we will learn why these species face an uncertain future.



WINGMASTERS is a partnership dedicated to increasing public understanding and appreciation of North American birds of prey. Julie Anne Collier and Jim Parks are both licensed raptor rehabilitators. Together they care for injured birds of prey at their center in Leverett, Massachusetts. Most of the birds they rehabilitate can ultimately be released back into the wild, but in some cases the birds are left permanently handicapped. Julie and Jim are further licensed to provide a home for these non-releasable raptors, and to use them for educational programs. Since 1994 WINGMASTERS has presented over 10,000 programs at schools, libraries and museums throughout New England.

In Memorium - Emily Edwards



We are saddened to share that our Trust board member Emily King Edwards passed away after a long battle with melanoma on July 20th, 2019 at age 35. She will truly be missed by those whose lives she touched. There are no words to describe her loss for family, friends and community.

Emily became an Associate Director in 2009 and then a Director in 2012, joining several committees and sharing her love of nature and education. Emily was an invaluable team member of the Scholarship Committee which awards scholarships to Westford high school and college students pursuing environmental studies. Her feedback and perspective helped to select those who were most deserving of this award. Emily was also interested in nature and education. She helped with the 2nd grade birding program at the Miller school. Emily was involved with our outreach committee and was especially invaluable to our annual fall meeting preparations. We are so sad to lose such a warm, loving and supportive member of our trust. Our sincere condolences to her family and the many friends she loved along the way. We will miss her infectious optimism and love of nature but will always remember her in our hearts.

Westford Conservation Trust 2019 Summer in Review

Trail Maintenance

The year-round Westford Land and Trail Steward program headed by Trust honorary Board member Bill Harman and his group of volunteers continues its effort to keep the town's more than 70 miles of walking trails passable. Every year, many trees fall and block the trails. Volunteers cleared the fallen trees and brush in addition to their normal trail clearing activities. Many thanks to Steve Smith for the mowing he has done at 18 trail sites through the summer. If you would like to join the Tuesday trail group, or would like more information about trails, call Bill Harman at 692-3907.

Pageant Field and Hildreth Meadows Mowing

Trust members David Ebitson, Ron Gemma and Lenny Palmer volunteered many hours over a two day period to mow Pageant Field and Hildreth Meadows. The fields are being maintained as pollinator and native bird habitat. At one time, Hildreth Meadow was a hay field and Pageant Field was used to grow corn. An annual mowing helps control invasive species and prevents reforestation.

Mile a Minute Control



This is the ninth year of the Trust's invasive control project for the [Mile-a-minute](#) Vine (MAM), a highly invasive vine that can grow up to 6 inches a day. If left to grow unchecked, it will outcompete and overgrow native plants and can cause ecological and economic damage. MAM was first discovered here in Westford in 2010 at what is now the Laughton Farm development on Lowell Road. Since then other sites have been identified in Westford and the Invasive Control Committee now monitors a total of four known sites and an additional site in Littleton. The photograph

shows some MAM (triangular leaves) growing on top of other

vegetation.

Each summer the Invasive Control Committee recruits volunteers to manually remove MAM vines from the



known sites. The harvesting was done on seven Saturdays from July to September. This year more than 100 pounds of MAM was harvested (about 30 pounds more than 2018).

Westford Conservation Trust Donates \$8,000 to Help Conserve Salt Box Farm

The Trust Board voted to donate \$8,000 to the Campaign to Conserve Salt Box Farm in support of open space protection in Westford. The 52-acre Salt Box Farm on Hildreth Street in Westford Center is an iconic resource; scenic views of the farm's open meadow and hay fields are treasured by all who drive, walk or bike on Hildreth Street. Beyond the fields, the farm contains a variety of habitats including forested uplands, wetlands and a farm pond. See related story later in this newsletter. The photograph shows Trust President Ron Gemma presenting the donation check to Westford Land Preservation Fund member Ellen Harde.

Stony Brook Water Chestnut Project

This is the 3rd year of the Trust's aquatic invasive Water Chestnut control program on a section of Stony Brook between the Stepinski well and Stony Brook Conservation Land at the railroad bridge. This year the water level was lower, making it more difficult to access all sections of the brook. Trust member Diane



Duane and husband Bill did four pulls in July and August. A total wet weight of 93.8 lbs was pulled, similar to last years total weight. We will look into recruiting more help next year and will try to find other ways to survey hard to access sections of the brook.

Nabnasset School Nature Trail Kiosk

This past summer Trust VP David Ebitson and friend of the Trust Larry Willard built and installed an informational kiosk for the Nab school

Nature Trail. The plexiglass-windowed kiosk contains a trail map and other information. In the photograph of the new kiosk, David is on the left and Larry on the right.

Girl Scout Troop 85411 Transforms Beaver Brook Trail - by David Ebitson

An entrance to the Beaver Brook Trail begins at Butterfield Lane and provides access to a hidden gem located on the north side of Beaver Brook. This scenic vista at the far point of the trail extends from Littleton and follows the meandering brook and wetlands north to the water tower on Prospect Hill. This scene will inspire your enthusiasm to preserve the floral biodiversity and the importance of our ecosystem to all creatures big and small. Early this year the trail suffered damage from several storms and an overabundance of spring rains. With fallen trees and overgrown vegetation and brush, the trail had virtually disappeared back into the forest. With seventy miles of trails to maintain, the Westford Trail Stewards faced a very busy spring and summer of removing brush and clearing trees which had fallen and blocked many trails. Beaver Brook trail clearing would need to wait.



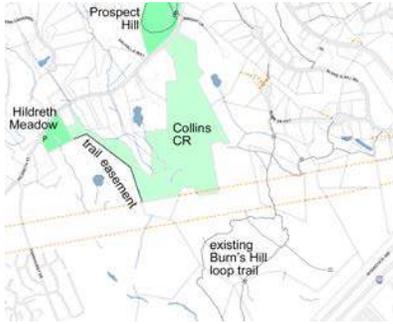
Members of Girl Scout troop 84511 asked to attend a spring meeting of the Trust. At the meeting, they volunteered their services to earn their conservation badge. I suggested that the Beaver Brook Trail would be a good project. But would Troop 84511 be able to work on a trail completely overgrown with vegetation, downed trees, a washout from spring rains and trail markers weathered on the trees? Their commitment and dedication to this project was obvious from day one. Before beginning the trail work, the Scouts walked the trail with me and we discussed the scope of work to be done. Their effort during multiple work sessions resulted in quantum leaps of improvement; such as, re-blazing the trail, and clearing and raking overgrowth from the trail path. They scheduled the Westford Trail Stewards to remove several large trees leaning over the trail. In early August the trail work was completed and a new trail sign was installed at the Butterfield Lane entrance. The trail had become a stage to enjoy the wonders of nature. The photograph shows Girl Scout Troop 85411. From left: Dave Ebitson (Trust project mentor), Zoe Musante, Anamika Pusalkar, Niharika Chawla, and Scout leader Julie Musante. Not pictured is Manasi Deepak.



Meadow in winter.

After the trail project was completed, the Scouts surprised me by what happened next! They created a series of posters and flyers to distribute in the local neighborhood. They wanted the residents of the area to enjoy the peacefulness, solitude and natural beauty that this trail has to offer. I am sure that this fall the local residents are enjoying the scenic vista as the foliage changes colors and countless birds gather in the Beaver Brook Wetlands before migrating south for the winter. The photograph shows the northern section of Beaverbrook

New Trail Opportunity on the Salt Box Farm by Rich Strazdas



In July of this year, a comprehensive CR (Conservation Restriction) was granted by Beverly Collins to the town's Conservation Commission and Sudbury Valley Trustees. This CR on Hildreth Street is often referred to as Salt Box Farm, after the adjacent building dating from 1658. The 43.77 acre restriction was purchased for \$1.28 million, primarily from town Community Preservation Act funds, but also with a donation of \$8000 from the Trust. It protects agriculture and forest, scenic vistas, and wildlife habitat. It furthers Westford Open Space and Recreation Plan guidelines. It also helps protect the antique farmhouse and provides an excellent trail to link

abutting protected land.

This trail will link the Trust's Hildreth Meadow property, three acres on Hildreth Street purchased in 2015, and the vast tract around Burn's Hill, purchased by the town between 1999 and 2011. It further abuts the huge open land of the Hildreth Hills Condo Trust. The map shows the CR, nearby Trust properties and nearby trails.

As part of the carefully crafted CR, a trail easement follows the western edge of the property. It abuts a stone wall bordering the Hildreth Hills field. Nearly all of this easement already contains a primitive path, which affords forest views to the east and field views to the west. The northern segment connects this path to the Trust's Hildreth Meadow property. The latter was cleared of invasive plants by the Trust in 2018, and a maintenance lot was added in 2019. So the property can be used as a trailhead.

Where will this trail go? The plan is to connect it to the existing trail network on Burn's Hill. The centerpiece Burn's Hill Loop Trail was constructed in 2014 by Boy Scout Sean Cheng. Burn's Hill is a wonderful property off Rome Drive. Siting the connector trail will have to be done with care, as there are "moist" areas around the power lines. Our trail stewards will find a way.

This new trail will be completed as soon as our volunteers plan and execute it. If you would like to assist the Trust with trail activities, please [email](#) Bill Harman's Tuesday morning Trail Stewards group. If you have a favorite trail that you frequent, please consider becoming a steward for that trail. You define the effort you provide, but contact the Trust for guidance on opportunities!

The Abbot Trail By Bill Harman



It's fortunate to have a [woodland trail](#) connecting Abbot School with the nearby Cummings Road and Crest Drive neighborhood (see map). Over the years it has been used as part of the school's educational program; 4th grade classes have used the trail for outdoor nature study, poetry inspiration, and just fresh air. Of course the trail can also be used by the general public walking between that neighborhood and the school. It can be used for walking to events at Abbot, such as the Apple Blossom Fair, flu shots, and Town Meetings.

An intermittent stream runs along the west side of the trail most of the way, but near the road the stream crosses the trail. It's dry there much of the year, but there are times when that part of the trail is wet. A footbridge would be useful in that place. Alternatively it might be possible to re-arrange some of the existing stones into stepping-stones. We are hoping that a Scout project or other community project might be initiated there to improve that brook crossing.

Not far beyond the Abbot Trail is the Long Trail, located just on the other side of Providence Road. The Long Trail extends from this point to Cider Mill Pond, and beyond that to the historic Salem Post Road. There was a time in Westford history, prior to the development of the port of Boston, when the Salem Post Road was the primary road to connect to harbors and the Atlantic Ocean. Now the Salem Post Road is a woodland trail flanked by stone walls on both sides. The Long Trail continues beyond the Salem Post Road passing through a number of connecting trails, ending at Mystery Spring near Tadmuck Road.

Interestingly, aggressive vines of Porcelain-berry are currently and dramatically attacking the area near the school. It's a non-native invasive plant species. Looking at the vine's aggressive growth on many trees, some people are considering what can be done to liberate the native trees.

What's in your Backyard? - Recognizing and Controlling Invasives



Mile-a-Minute is only one of the many invasive plants found here in Westford. Much more common plant invasives like Oriental Bittersweet, Japanese Knotweed, Burning Bush, Porcelain-berry, Japanese Barberry, Multiflora Rose, Glossy Buckthorn and Autumn Olive are very common. In the worst case, Oriental Bittersweet can climb and kill trees on your property by smothering them. The following link to the publication [A Landowner's Guide to Invasive Plant Management](#) published by Westfield Watershed Invasive Species can help in the identification and control of invasives. Another good source for invasive plant information is the [SuAsCo CISMA](#) website. Pictured: Porcelain-berry.

Guided Trail Walk Schedule for 2019



Kissacook Hill Hike

Saturday, November 2nd, 9:00 - 10:30 am

Parking: Norman E. Day School, 75 E Prescott St.

Join Westford Conservation Trust Director Lenny Palmer on a hike to the third highest point in Westford (416 ft). Enjoy a fun hike along the almost mile long trail behind the Day School. Parts of the trail are steep, but footing is good.

There are benches for resting along the way. See if you can spot the fading red numbers that mark native flora. Sociable dogs on leash are welcome. Walk is free of charge, no sign-up required. For more information call Lenny at 978-392-9876.

Hike the Sassafras Trail

Saturday, December 7th, 9 - 10:30 am

Parking: At end of Sawmill Road

Take an enjoyable late fall walk on the [Sassafras Trail](#) led by Westford Conservation Trust Director Rich Strazdas. The trail is a bit rugged and steep in places. Wear sturdy footwear appropriate to the weather.

We will walk by an historic quarry on the way out to Tenney Road and stop at the glacial erratics known as "House" and "Barn" on the way back. Walk is free of charge and no sign-up is required. For more information call Rich at 978-692-2057.



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Westford Conservation Trust Website

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