



Westford Conservation Trust Newsletter - Spring 2020

Hike the Trails of Westford and Win an Award! - by Rich Strazdas



This is just in time for relieving COVID-19 cabin fever. Do you frequent trails in town? Explore new areas beyond the same old trails! Do you need to get out of the house, and experience fresh air in a safe haven? Become a frequent hiker! The Westford Conservation Trust is instituting a recognition program for dedicated hikers like you.



At the urging of Trust member Andy Mallio, two levels of recognition will be supported. If you visit every one of the hiking areas in the 13th edition of the **Westford Trails Guide book**, you qualify for the **Explorer award** sticker (at left). This is awarded on the honor system. Simply keep track of your progress on the handy sheet (page 71) near the back of the guide book. When you have visited them all, send an email to: awards@westfordconservationtrust.org. Each family member can qualify for the award. At the next Trust annual meeting in November 2020, we will applaud your effort and award a sticker that can be applied to any smooth surface. Or you can arrange to receive it any time afterwards. Fame awaits you!

The two stickers are based on the Trust's new logo, and were designed by Andy and rendered by yours truly. All that time playing with maps in Photoshop finally came in handy!



But wait! Westford has over seventy miles of documented trails. Is visiting every trail network not enough? What might you have missed? An abandoned car, a double stone wall, a gnarly tree, a not-so-mighty glacial erratic? You gotta catch 'em all! Hike every trail in town and receive the **Redliner award** (at left). The same rules apply: use the trail guide sheet and the honor system. Redliners mark their maps with red lines as they finish each trail segment. Of course, to hike every trail, you have to hike some of them more than once, so you're earning well over seventy miles of obsessive pleasure. Or weight loss. Or better health. Or bragging rights. You take care of Mother Nature. Let her take care of you. See you on the trails - at a social distance!

A Scouting Project Review - by David Ebitson

Spring is here at last, and with many things in today's world to pre-occupy our minds our seventy-plus miles of trails are a refuge to relax in the fresh air and enjoy nature at its best. I would like to point out some of the projects our dedicated Westford Girl and Boy Scouts have accomplished over the past years. As you enjoy the spring air and nature's solitude, you will see many of their projects along our miles of trails and appreciate their dedication to community and country along with their skills and handiwork.

The **Trail at Prospect Hill** lets you enjoy one of the highest points in Westford. Years ago if you had started the slow ascent at the southern end of the trail and descended at the north face, you would have found it dangerously steep and slippery and a bit unnerving. Thanks to the Scouts, today you can walk down the north face of Prospect Hill utilizing a sturdy set of steps. There's even a solid granite bench to rest on at the top of the north face. The Scouts have recently completed the trail around Pageant Field and you may see many nesting bluebirds enjoying the twelve bird boxes installed by the Scouts.



The **Beaver Brook Trail** follows one of our most beautiful and scenic areas as Beaver Brook meanders through Littleton on its way to Forge Pond. Unfortunately, the trail which starts at Butterfield lane and brings us to the western overlook had virtually disappeared with fallen trees and an overabundance of fern and ground cover. The view from the Littleton line across Beaver Brook meadow, a true wildlife sanctuary, had become inaccessible. Picture at right shows Beaver Brook Meadow.



A group of Scouts looking for a summer project started working at the opening of the trail on **Butterfield Lane**. By summer's end they had opened up and cleared the trail in true workmanship worthy of the Appalachian Mountain Club. Their completion was just in time to see the waterfowl gathering for their fall migration south.

The **Acker Trail at Stony Brook** is a wildlife sanctuary which overlooks the Stony Brook from Depot Street to Stony Brook Road. The trail was in need of new footbridges, signs, renewal of trail blazes, and also removal of debris from the adjacent railroad's clearing of trees. You will find new trail map signs have been installed at each end of the trail. A new bridge, shown at right, built by our Scouts on the east end provides sturdy passage over the stream entering Stony Brook. As you walk the trail you will find benches in the opening vistas to sit on and relax as you view the waterfowl and handiwork of our beaver population.



The **Tom Paul Trail** from Roudenbush to the Stone Arch Bridge has thrived as a result of many Scout projects throughout the years. The Trail now has several benches to rest on while hiking back towards Main Street from the Spaulding Town Forest. You will also appreciate the boardwalks built over Boutwell Brook heading east from Evergreen Circle to keep your feet dry. Even the boardwalks behind the Town Hall on the way to Roudenbush (shown at the right) have kept our feet dry over the years. Most recently the Scouts have groomed and widened the trail as you begin west from Main Street and start the descent to Graniteville Road.



The **Francis Hill Wildlife Sanctuary** provides a vigorous walk from Lowell Street uphill to Hunt Road. On a spring day you may have the opportunity to see deer, red foxes, and even a skunk or two enjoying this sanctuary. There is a small stream which meanders down Francis Hill contributing to the biodiversity found in this small sanctuary. Our Eagle Scouts in November of 2005 installed two footbridges that cross the stream. They also posted wildlife sanctuary signs on all boundaries.

Blanchard Farm Trail was cleaned and groomed with the help of Scout volunteers before the snow settled in the fall of 1993. A pickup truck full of trash was removed before the trails and roadsides were covered with snow. The area cleaned ran from Brookside Road to Stony Brook Road. A new foot bridge (shown at right) was recently built at the side of Stony Brook. Yes, the Scouts were at it again.



The **Stone Arch Bridge Trail** brings you to a set of steep steps to the landing at the base of this historic bridge. At the bottom of the steps (shown at left), the platform offers a close view of this remarkable structure and clearly shows the skills of bygone years' - in the building of this bridge. One cannot envision walking down such a steep slope without a set of steps and a railing to hold on to. Once you reach the bottom of the steps, you can see the detailed craftsmanship of the Stone Arch Bridge (shown on the right) - as each stone was carefully placed by the workers years ago. The



water running swiftly under the bridge is cool and well oxygenated. This spot is an excellent habitat for trout and an ideal area for fishing, but don't tell anyone! If you have walked down these steps to marvel at the bridge construction or carried your fishing rod to test this secluded spot, you can thank the Scouts for completing these steps in the years of 2004 - 2005. The Stone Arch Bridge Trail is one of our many trails which allows us to view and unlock the historic past of Westford.



The **Greystone Trail** offers many unique features, such as a group of large boulders balancing on each other since the Ice Age ended. Greystone has experienced a robust beaver population which has increased the need for footbridges throughout the area. Over the years our Scouts have done an excellent job keeping up with the beavers with a series of footbridges and boardwalks. When crossing the streams in the northeast section of Greystone, you will come upon a remote stone foundation (pictured at left) built during the early 1700's. There are other trails with stone foundations, including one with a stone root cellar built by the early settlers of Westford.

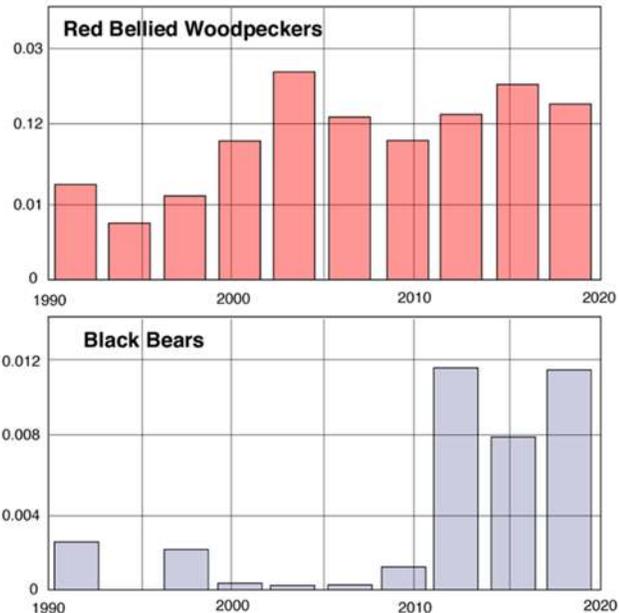
Come explore and enjoy our miles of trails that cross the many streams, marshes and swamps with footbridges and boardwalks constructed by our dedicated Scouts!

30 Year History of the Westford Wildlife Watch by Bill Harman

It was 30 years ago when Westford Wildlife Watch began collecting reports of wildlife sightings. The reports have been saved and tabulated by Marian Harman (my wife), and currently, with so many years of data to look at, we see some interesting trends.

Red-bellied Woodpeckers - For example, we see that Red-bellied Woodpeckers are currently being reported more often than in the early years (bar chart below). This gradual change may reflect global warming. Scientists have found that global warming is causing some southern birds to now become New England residents. It's interesting to realize that this trend discovered by scientists appears in our own Westford data, which consists of informal reports from ordinary people. This type of data can be called "citizen science". The values plotted vertically are small because the reports/year were divided by the total number of reports in that year in order to make the results independent of the number of reporters.

Black Bears - A similar change over the years is also evident for Black Bears — currently being reported at a higher rate than years ago. The underlying cause of this change in Black Bears might be the increased forestation over these years. Throughout most of Westford, almost all of the forest had been removed in the past. During the 30 year period 1990-2020, we have seen the forests regrowing in many areas. This is noticeable in East Boston Camps (about 300 acres) and the Emmet/Audubon Conservation Land (about 500 acres). There are also a number of other large forested areas in Westford which have experienced this regrowth of forest.



By the way, I walk in woods frequently and do not worry about encountering bears. That confidence is based on overwhelming statistical evidence which shows my risk of that danger is far, far higher when I drive a car on a road.

In addition to birds and mammals, the reports in Westford Wildlife Watch include wildflowers, butterflies, frogs, snakes and, actually, all living things. There are reports on interesting lichens, which change from grey to green on rainy days. Marian invites everyone to send her all their reports, either by phone (692-3907) or email (mariancharman@gmail.com). Marian writes a newspaper article each month, listing the reports in that month. The reports are also included on the Westford Conservation Trust website. At the end of each year, Marian gathers all the reports from that year and sends the list to two friends who are statistical experts, Maurilio and Mau Fernandes. They create an organized spreadsheet and many bar charts depicting interesting results.

Migration - It's also interesting to look at wildlife changes as a function of the time of year. It's well known that certain birds fly south for the winter, such as Baltimore Orioles, while certain other birds appear in Westford only in winter, such as Juncos (also called "Snow Birds"). The bar charts (shown on the right) shows the monthly reporting for Baltimore Orioles and Juncos.

Indeed, we see the expected trends: Orioles are absent in the winter months, while Juncos are present only in the winter months. They both overlap slightly in April and May, and only in the month of September are they both absent.

