

ANNUAL PRESENTATION:

Rhonda's Reptiles

Before our annual business meeting, Rhonda Leavitt, owner of Rhonda's Reptiles in New Lebanon, NY, delighted Egrementonters with an up-close and personal visit with her companions. Rhonda is one of very few licensed rehabilitators who care for these amazing creatures from all over the world that have been injured or abandoned, and she clearly enjoys sharing her knowledge and passion. Our audience, children as well as adults, got a kick out of touching the reptiles (a first for some) and learning interesting facts, such as the following:

The blue tongue skink is from Australia. When people buy them as pets and then abandon them, Rhonda gets them. They can escape a predator by dropping a piece of their tail, and it will grow back (mostly). The "holes" in its head are its ears, and it can make a huffing sound. The leopard gecko can survive for months on the fat stored in its tail.

Tortoises are land animals, whereas turtles are aquatic. Both have 13 scutes – the plates that make up the shell. The box turtle can close up its shell and hide within. When turtles' shells are broken, they feel pain, just as we do when we break a bone. Rhonda examined a red-foot tortoise egg with a flashlight and saw life, so she put it in an incubator, and it hatched 6 months after it was laid. Named Chance, it eats carrion and berries.

Corn snakes are excellent tree-climbers. Although they are usually brick-red in the wild, breeders have developed other colors, but breeding tends to weaken their immune systems. Their eyes turn cloudy or blue before they shed their skins. The western hognose snake is a gentle soul that bites, with a mild venom, only when threatened. They'd rather play dead, lying upside down. Life span: about 20 years. Rhonda's boa constrictor, a beautiful designer yellow and beige, uses smell instead of sight to locate prey. It bears live babies (as opposed to eggs).

Chompers, her alligator, has very strong clamping muscles, but his jaw-opening muscles are weak, so duct tape is sufficient to hold his mouth closed. Alligators recognize their owners and, interestingly, don't get infections, even after being wounded.

We are again grateful to Rhonda for her fascinating insight into the world of reptiles. ♦



CORN SNAKES



HEIDI & XAVIER WITH CHOMPERS



BOA CONSTRICTOR



AFRICAN SPUR THIGH TORTOISE



BEARDED DRAGON

Spring Wildflower Walk

Exploring the Green River

On a mild April 30 morning, Stephanie Bergman led a group of 18 wildflower enthusiasts on a walk across ELT's protected land that fronts on Rt 71 in North Egremont and extends to the wooded shores of the Green River.

We learned that the Green River floodplain is a nutrient-rich area that supports many native wildflowers, as well as many invasive plants. The latter, such as Japanese knotweed, phragmites, multiflora rose, celandine, garlic mustard, and cypress spurge, get an early start in the spring before our native plants can keep them in balance.

Stephanie showed us several native medicinal plants: sharp-lobed hepatica, whose leaves can help liver ailments; trout lily, whose roots in a tea can alleviate fever; blue cohosh, which can aid in childbirth; violets, which ancient Greeks used in love potions; and toothwort, which can alleviate toothaches and headaches. Plant names ending in "wort" indicate that the plant has some medicinal value.

We spotted ramps, or wild leeks, members of the Allium family. People love to harvest ramps to use in cooking, but Stephanie cautioned that those who dig up too many whole plants, including the bulb, reduce the following year's harvest. We should just cut the stem and the leaves, and leave the bulb in the ground so that the plant will reappear next season.

Stephanie has a master's degree in environmental education and has led wildflower walks for ELT for the past 7 years. Please join us on May 13 for our next walk (see Coming Events). Thanks, Stephanie! ♦

Join us on our next Wildflower Walk!

Saturday, May 13th, 10 AM with Stephanie Bergman.

Carpooling is encouraged. Meet at the ELT owned field on Rt. 71 about a half mile north of the North Egremont Store. You'll see our ELT sign on a post there, on the right. Pull into the field to park. ♦



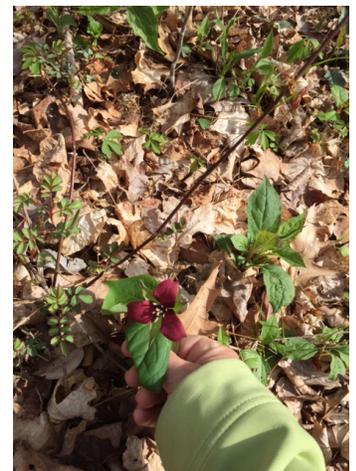
IMPRESSIVE BEAVER WORK SEEN ON THE WILDFLOWER WALK



EXPLORING GREEN RIVER



STEPHANIE & MAYA



RED TRILLIUM

Birding Walk 2016

On June 4, 2016, thirteen bird aficionados gathered with Brian Kane and his wife Noel at the Jug End Preservation. The bird walk had been rescheduled because of bad weather, but that morning the skies cleared as the group gathered in the parking lot. It turned out to be an excellent place to start the morning's observations since we were treated to the drama of a gorgeous male bluebird battling with tree swallows over a nesting box mounted behind one of the "No Hunters" signs. The battling nesters entertained us with numerous skirmishes, but it was not clear which species would ultimately be victorious.

As is often the case, observing the blue bird vs. tree swallow competition led to Brian's sharing information on another member of the sparrow family. Brian explained that house sparrows are invasive to this area and that their population is exploding. Those sparrows will nest almost anywhere, which makes them a good target for eviction from nesting boxes designed to attract more desirable birds.

The group continued up the trail across Fenton Brook and into the fields and wooded areas beyond. In total, we saw or heard 45 different birds, as listed here. Brian's bird walks are always popular events, and Egremont Land Trust has invited him to lead walks this spring and again in the fall. We hope you'll join us on April 30 and on September 23 (details under Coming Events). ♦



SCARLET TANAGER



CEDAR WAXING



INDIGO BUNTING



TUFTED TITMOUSE

Birds seen and heard:

- Wood duck
- Red-tailed hawk
- Turkey vulture
- Mourning dove
- Unidentified woodpecker (*one of the participants heard or saw it, but couldn't identify it*)
- Eastern phoebe
- Least flycatcher
- Alder flycatcher
- Willow flycatcher
- Red-eyed vireo
- Yellow-throated vireo
- Blue jay
- American crow
- Tree swallow
- Barn swallow
- Tufted titmouse
- Black-capped chickadee
- White-breasted nuthatch
- House wren
- Eastern bluebird
- American robin
- Veery
- Gray catbird
- Cedar waxwing
- Yellow warbler
- Chestnut-sided warbler
- Blackburnian warbler
- Prairie warbler
- Black-throated green warbler
- American redstart
- Blue-winged warbler
- Ovenbird
- Common yellowthroat
- Northern cardinal
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Scarlet tanager
- Indigo bunting
- Chipping sparrow
- Song sparrow
- Red-winged blackbird
- Common grackle
- Baltimore oriole
- House finch
- Purple finch
- American goldfinch

South Egremont School: Learning from Environmental Specialist with Help from ELT

The little school in South Egremont, for 5-, 6-, and 7-year-olds, depends on donors to support some of its enrichment programs. This school year, particularly appropriately, Egremont Land Trust's \$400 gift to the school is helping support an environmental specialist, Erica Clark. So far, during their study of fish, the children have talked about camouflage, and they made (dead) fish prints on paper. For the insect interval, they went on a scavenger hunt, and for their mammal study, the most fun of all, they made plaster-of-Paris molds of fox, bobcat, bear, and beaver footprints; animal puppets; and animal masks that they painted and wore; they also wrote a book.

Next, in 2017, they plan to study raptors, including owls. Contributions of owl pellets, if you find some, would be especially welcome. They will be studied under the microscope, and the tiny skulls and bones that are remnants of the owls' dinners will be immortalized in art. ♦



STUDENTS SHOWING OFF THEIR CREATIONS!

ELT Annual Meeting, September 2016

After enjoying Rhonda's Reptiles, the Land Trust held our Annual Meeting, chaired by our president, Peg Muskrat.

Maureen Steiner, treasurer, reported that for 2015, we had revenues of about \$19,600, mainly from dues and the annual luncheon. Expenses totaled about \$18,000 (mainly accounting fees, insurance, website/membership database, and printing). We are on track in 2016, and she encouraged everyone to send in their membership dues if they haven't already.

Robin Goldberg reported that ELT has about 140 members.

Board members Wendy Linscott, Chuck Ogden, and Susan Shapiro were reelected by unanimous voice vote for three-year terms. We hope that anyone interested in becoming a Board member will contact one of the current members. Officers of the Board will be chosen at the next regular ELT meeting.

After the meeting, all attendees mingled and enjoyed lunch provided by ELT, with a wide variety of desserts prepared by members. ♦



ELT

Trail Maintenance

The Egremont Land Trust likes to maintain the land that we own, which includes managing the proliferation of invasive plants. At the ELT property known as the Baldwin Hill fen (on the west side of the more southern portion of Baldwin Hill Road S), flooding had made the pond inaccessible. We hired Will Conklin and his Greenagers to build a new, drier path to reach it. Jess Toro of Native Habitat Restoration spent two days treating *Phragmites australis* (an invasive cattail-like plant that crowds out our native cattails – see photo below) around the pond and in the shrub wetland. Post-treatment monitoring showed success and will continue in 2017.

At our Route 71 site, 0.5 mile north of the North Egremont Store, the Greenagers created a trail from the forest edge to the Green River. We named the trail in honor of long-time, but now retired, board member Walter C. Cliff (see photo at right). The



WALTER C. CLIFF TRAIL

Greenagers also rooted out invasive species such as Japanese knotweed and multiflora rose.

We are very grateful to the Greenagers and to Jess Toro for their excellent and efficient work! We invite you all to walk and enjoy these two recently improved trails.

If you are interested in invasive plants, join us for a walk and lecture by Bryan Hamlinon October 14 (*details under Coming Events*). ♦



PHRAGMITES AT THE FEN

ELT Members 2016 Three cheers and many thanks to our loyal supporters, listed below. Without you, our accomplishments would simply not exist. To renew your membership for the coming year, please use the enclosed envelope. And if you are not yet a member and like what we're doing, please join us. You'll be glad you did.

Egremont Land Trust 2016 Membership List

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Bev Almond
Warren & Eunice Anson
Sandy & Ron Ashendorf
Susan Bachelder
Lisa & Kevin Balestro
Cheryl & Ben Barrett
Peggy & Peter Barrett
Bonnie Bassis
Jack Battipaglia
Nancy Begbie
Lorraine & Stanley Berger
Marcia & Leslie Berglass
Mary Berryhill & Robert Snyder
Ruth Blair & Donald R. Pulfer
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ELT

Annual Luncheon

ELT's 16th Annual Luncheon took place on May 16, 2016, at the Old Mill Restaurant. As always, a delicious meal was prepared and served to us by the Old Mill staff. We started with a choice of potato leek soup or spring vegetable salad, followed by broiled Atlantic halibut or roast breast of organic chicken. Our meal ended with a choice of two scrumptious desserts – strawberry rhubarb pound cake or chocolate mousse cake. Many, many thanks to Terry Moore, Ginny Filkins, and the other Old Mill staff for continuing to host this delicious tradition.

After lunch, our speaker was Rikke Borge, daughter of Victor Borge, the beloved Danish-American pianist and comedian. Rikke shared entertaining stories of his life. For example, although he began as a classical pianist, his career as a comedian-on-a-piano-bench was born when he winked at a pretty girl in the front row at a classical piano engagement and the audience laughed. Thus he found his calling. Victor's first job as an organist was at his father's funeral (!), where one of the pallbearers was small with a very big hat and another was big with a very small hat. He said to his mother, "If father were alive and saw this, he would die laughing."

When his mother was very ill, Victor sneaked back into Denmark from Sweden, wearing a disguise, to visit her in the hospital one last time. No one had told her that Denmark had been invaded and

was occupied. She didn't know her son had been attacked three times by Nazi sympathizers for ridiculing Hitler, in his Cabaret shows. Better that she not know how dangerous it was for him to be in Copenhagen, or why he couldn't stay. He made up a story that he'd been offered a movie contract in Hollywood, and he was going on ahead. When he and his wife were all set up, he told her, they would send for her. She was going to love picking oranges from her own tree! Her last words to him were, "Don't let it go to your head." ♦



FREDERIKKE "RIKKE" BORGE

ELT COMING EVENTS - 2017

SEE THE ELT ONLINE CALENDAR FOR UPDATES: WWW.EGREMONTLANDTRUST.ORG/CALENDAR.PHP

- **April 30**, Sunday, 7:30 AM. Bird walk with Brian Kane, Jug End State Reservation
- **May 13**, Saturday, 10 AM. Riverside wild flower and plants walk with Stephanie Bergman. Meet at ELT property on Route 71 (about ½ mi north of North Egremont store, on the right)
- **May 21**, Sunday, noon, Old Mill Restaurant, South Egremont. Annual benefit luncheon, with speaker Will Conklin of Greenagers
- **September 16**, Saturday, 11 AM, French Park, North Egremont. Annual event, with speaker Tom Ricardi, on birds of prey (*followed by ELT annual meeting*)
- **September 23**, Saturday, 7:30 AM. Fall bird walk with Brian Kane, Jug End State Reservation
- **October 14**, Saturday, 10 AM. Invasives walk and lecture by Bryan Hamlin, French Park pavilion (rain date: Oct 15, same time & place)

BIRD PICTURED: VEERY, SEEN ON THE BIRD WALK

ELT Office

The Egremont Land Trust meets at Berkshire Veneer, Ben Barrett's veneer shop at the Green River Lumber site off Pumpkin Hollow Road. We meet about once a month, usually on Friday afternoons, and we welcome visitors. Call our president Peg Muskrat for the date of the next meeting.

Egremont Land Trust Online:

www.egremontlandtrust.org

Look for our calendar of events and note that contact information is available. To join ELT print and fill out the Membership Application, and please include your email address. We do not share membership information with anyone, no matter how worthy the cause.



PHOTOGRAPH BY: LISA STALKER

THE BALDWIN HILL ELM

PLEASE JOIN US! If you love Egremont but haven't yet joined ELT, please use the enclosed envelope to become part of our work. If you are already a member, pass this envelope to a friend who might be interested.

Going Green

We at the Egremont Land Trust are going green! We continue to collect email addresses so that we can save paper (not to mention postage) when we send out announcements and notifications of events. Please send us your email address by clicking on the "contact" tab of our website (www.egremontlandtrust.org), or by contacting Marj directly (528-3726 or mwexler43@gmail.com). Thank you!

Peg Muskrat, *president*
Lois Ginsberg, *vice-president*
Maureen Steiner, *treasurer*
Marjorie Wexler, *clerk*
Peggy Barrett
Ursula Cliff
Robin Goldberg
Wendy Linscott
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