

## Annual Meeting 2014



Did you know that the shell of every turtle and tortoise contains exactly 13 scutes – no more, no less, no matter the size of the animal? Did you know that the blue-tongued skink has the ability to drop a piece, or even all, of its

tail at will, and that the discarded part will continue to squirm like a snake on the ground, thus diverting a pursuing predator? You would if you were at the Land Trust's Annual Meeting!

Prior to our annual business meeting, Rhonda Leavitt, the eponymous owner of Rhonda's Reptiles in New Lebanon, NY, gave us a fascinating insight into the world of reptiles. Rhonda is one of very few people who are licensed to care for and rehabilitate these amazing creatures from all over the world that have been injured or abandoned, and she clearly has a passion for what she does. Among the many she introduced to us were Kobe, a 7-year-old American alligator; Chiffon, a 16-pound albino Burmese python; Gonzo, a Savannah monitor lizard, and assorted

bearded dragons, geckos, snakes, turtles, and tortoises, many of which we were invited to touch or hold. She also told us about the thriving world of illegal reptile trade and the efforts being made to stop unscrupulous dealers who smuggle endangered and fragile reptiles into the country. It was an amazing presentation and we all (more than 50 participants) came away with a new appreciation for these remarkable creatures and for the work that Rhonda does.

*Photographs by Robin Goldberg.*



# ANNUAL BIRD WALK

## *Bald Eagle Welcomes New Year on Baldwin Hill*

For the first time in the memory of local residents, a bald eagle was seen perched in a tree overlooking the pond on Baldwin Hill Road. It spent most of the day focused on a goose that lay injured on the icy pond surface and attracted many curious birders and passers-by.

Much birding interest happens in the spring, when many species migrate through our area while others seek mates and prepare nests. That is when Brian Kane, professor at UMass and birder extraordinaire, leads an enthusiastic group of ELT members and friends through the fields and woods of the Jug End State Reservation to observe and listen to our local avian population. He can recognize birds by their songs and flight patterns, and his large spotting scope enables the group to observe close-ups of individual birds. Participants on June 7, 2014, had a great time and noted that they saw more birds than they had expected.

Please join us Saturday, May 23, when Brian returns to Egremont for this wonderful annual event.



*American Redstart, stock photo*

- Eastern bluebird\*
- Eastern phoebe
- Eastern wood pewee
- Gray catbird\*
- Great blue heron\*
- Least flycatcher\*
- Louisiana waterthrush
- Mourning dove
- Northern cardinal
- Northern flicker
- Ovenbird
- Pileated woodpecker
- Red-bellied woodpecker
- Red-eyed vireo
- Red-tailed hawk\*
- Red-winged blackbird\*
- Rose-breasted grosbeak\*
- Ruby-throated hummingbird
- Scarlet tanager
- Song sparrow\*
- Swamp sparrow
- Tree swallow\*
- Tufted titmouse
- Turkey vulture
- Veery
- Warbling vireo\*
- Willow flycatcher\*
- Winter wren
- Wood thrush
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker
- Yellow-rumped warbler
- Yellow warbler\*

***Please join us  
Saturday,  
May 23, 2015  
for this  
wonderful  
annual event.***



*Common Yellow Throat, stock photo*

Here is Brian's list of the birds the group observed in 2014. An asterisk indicates that most people in the group saw the bird.

- Alder flycatcher\*
- American goldfinch\*
- American redstart
- American robin\*
- Baltimore oriole\*
- Black-billed cuckoo
- Black-capped chickadee
- Black-throated green warbler
- Blackburnian warbler
- Blue-headed vireo
- Blue jay\*
- Blue-winged warbler\*
- Brown creeper
- Brown-headed cowbird
- Cedar waxwing\*
- Chestnut-sided warbler
- Chipping sparrow
- Common yellowthroat\*
- Downy woodpecker



*Willow Flycatcher, stock photo*



# Community Gathering at Kenver

Kenver, Ltd., on Main Street in South Egremont, was the setting for a community gathering on Friday, August 15. Lucinda Vermeulen and her staff hosted this event, a summer cocktail party, to bring various organizations into one room to explore how they could work together. Representatives from the Egremont Land Trust, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, the Nature Conservancy, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Project Native, and the Berkshire Bike Path Council attended, as well as members of the community. Contact information and ideas were exchanged in Kenver's very congenial atmosphere. Everyone enjoyed the evening, and we all hope this can become an annual affair.

Kenver, Ltd., also sponsored a bike raffle to benefit the ELT. The \$500 bike was won by an Egremont, and, coincidentally, \$500 was raised from the raffle. We are very grateful to Lucinda and to Kenver for their generosity.

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## ELT Annual Meeting 2014

On Saturday, September 13, after we enjoyed Rhonda's Reptiles, ELT's Annual Meeting was held under the pavilion at French Park.

Peggy thanked Tom Haas, who recently resigned from the ELT Board of Directors, for his years of service.

Treasurer Maureen Steiner reported that the ELT collected \$20,000 in membership income for the current year and netted \$2,000 from May's luncheon fundraiser at the Old Mill. ELT has ownership of properties valued at \$541,000.

Membership Chair Robin Goldberg reported that ELT has 178 members (126 couples and 52 single memberships).

Land Protection: Walter Cliff reported that the 26-acre parcel of land located behind the Egremont water plant, and currently owned by TNC, will eventually be given to the Town of Egremont.

Ursula Cliff, Lois Ginsberg, Wendy McCain, and

Maureen Steiner were reelected by unanimous voice vote. The annual election of officers will take place at a future meeting.

The meeting ended at about 1:00 PM.

### Egremont Land Trust Online: [www.egremontlandtrust.org](http://www.egremontlandtrust.org)

Look for our calendar of events and a link to local resources. Send us your e-mail address to receive announcements, or to print out a membership and donation form. We do not share membership information with anyone, no matter how worthy the cause.

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## DISPATCH FROM AUNT ROSE



*As Newsletter readers know, Aunt Rose is now in law school and has no time for her yearly column. However, she does keep up with environmental news, especially as it might affect her neighbors in Egremont. A few days ago, the editor received the following dispatch.*

Well, those folks who didn't follow my advice last year may have been smarter after all. Then, the Mass EEA (Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs) was offering a tax credit of up to \$50,000 for either an outright donation of fee title or a conservation restriction (CR) on land to be conserved, based on one-half the appraised value of the gift. I warned that this wouldn't last forever and urged everyone to act fast. But I was

wrong. This year those kind people at the EEA are offering a maximum of \$75,000. And they have funding. Naturally, the land has to have significant conservation value and has to be certified as such by the EEA.

Suppose you'd like to donate a CR, appraised at \$150,000 on some forested land you own (and will continue to own.) The Conservation Land Tax credit program will give you a tax credit for half the value of that donation, or \$75,000. But suppose further that your Commonwealth taxes are \$60,000, or \$25,000, or, because you don't live in Massachusetts, your taxes are zero. You will receive a check for the difference between \$75,000 and your tax bill, if, of course, it's less than \$75,000. So the examples cited should get checks for, respectively, \$15,000, \$50,000, or even \$75,000. For more information, go to Google and type in Mass Conservation Land Tax Credit.

This time, as many of you would agree, the political future doesn't include much hope for increased spending on conservation. This offer isn't likely to get better in the foreseeable future. Act now.

# *Egremont Land Trust 2014 Members*

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.

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## *Egremont Land Trust Coming Events for 2015*

See the ELT online calendar for more information:  
[www.egremontlandtrust.org/calendar.php](http://www.egremontlandtrust.org/calendar.php)

- New, starting this spring – **Four Seasonal Walks in French Park**, led by Dave Johnson, chair of the Egremont Conservation Commission, at 1 PM on Sundays: March 22, June 21, September 20, and December 20
- Saturday, May 9, 10:00 AM, **Wildflower Walk** led by Stephanie Bergman
- Sunday, May 17, 12 noon, **Annual ELT Luncheon**, at the Old Mill
- Saturday, May 23, 7:30 AM, **Birding Walk** led by Brian Kane. Meet at Jug End Reservation
- Saturday, September 12, 11:00 AM, “**Nature of My Backyard,**” Come to French Park to meet and learn about our box turtle, flying squirrel, skunk, woodchuck, gray fox, and opossum, and even a fisher!
- Saturday, September 12, 12:00 noon, **Annual Meeting** at French Park, followed by a lunch provided by ELT. The annual meeting is open to the public.

### **PLEASE JOIN US!**

If you're already a member, pass this envelope to a friend who's not yet a member. If you haven't yet joined ELT and love Egremont, use the envelope to become part of the good work.

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## *Annual Luncheon, 2014*

This year's 14th Annual ELT Luncheon was a very special event honoring Ursula and Walter Cliff for their many years of service and leadership of the Egremont Land Trust. A crowd of over 80 attended the event on May 18 at the Old Mill. Terry Moore, the proprietor of the Old Mill, and Ginny Filkins, the general manager, once again hosted a wonderful afternoon.

The guests enjoyed a menu of wild mushroom soup or baby greens with spring peas, radishes, and feta. As entrees, Terry served a choice of roast cod with lobster sauce or organic chicken with goat-cheese stuffing. The meal finished with fresh fruit tarts.

The crowd was regaled with wonderful tributes and stories featuring Walter and Ursula from Terry, Lois Ginsberg, Peggy Muskrat, Tad Ames (president of Berkshire Natural Resources Council), and others.

The ELT Board, in appreciation for the countless contributions the Cliffs have made toward the successes of the Egremont Land Trust, presented them with a beautiful painting by Egremont artist Margot Trout portraying the Burdsall barns on Baldwin Hill.

We look forward to this year's Luncheon on Sunday, May 17, again at the Old Mill. The guest speaker will be announced.





Baldwin Hill elm

## In Memoriam

We are sorry to report that Corina Barnard's mother, Jean Gardner, recently passed away. The Gardner home on Sheffield Road has been in the family since 1949. Because Jean had been very appreciative of the Egremont Land Trust, the family suggested that donations in her memory be made to the ELT. The result has been very gratifying, and we are very grateful to the Gardners.

## A Walk in the Woods

(with apologies to Bill Bryson)

The light but steady September rain that began as Rhonda was wrapping up her fascinating talk about reptiles

was still falling as we finished lunch, so very few people felt like participating in Dave Johnson's Fall Walk in French

Park that afternoon. In fact, there was a grand total of one, namely yours truly. I was determined to participate, both because I enjoy any walk in the woods and because I had never walked any of the trails in the Park.

Dave's plan was to introduce his walkers to the newest trail, which runs through the northern end of the Park from the pavilion to Prospect Lake Road directly across from Prospect Lake Park.

Thus, Dave and I set off on a very enjoyable ramble. He is an experienced and knowledgeable woodsman who knows French Park and its trails very well. A number of well-maintained, very accessible trails meander through the Park. At one point, we took a brief detour to survey an old stone fireplace and chimney, all that remain of the chapel that Mabel French Champion built on the property some years before she gave the land to the town in 1965.

Dave is a wealth of information about the history of the Park as well as about the plants and animals living there, and he is very willing to structure a trail walk to be as vigorous or as slow paced as his walkers wish. Check the ELT 2015 calendar for this year's walks: Dave has generously scheduled four, one for each season, to track the changes in flora and fauna. I urge everyone to mark calendars and come along. You will not regret it.



# SPRING 2014 WILDFLOWER WALK

Stephanie Bergman again led ELT's annual wildflower walk, on May 10. Stephanie took us from her backyard on Route 71 into the woods across the Green River to see spring's early offerings. The day was bright and clear, and we saw some fascinating reminders that we share this land. Beavers had felled a number of small trees, and even a large one, and we remembered that although they may annoy us when they chomp on trees we have planted, they are an important part of our ecology, as their dams slow the passage of streams, thus reducing erosion and increasing the level of our water table.

We stopped to admire (or be disgusted by) the rock snot in the river. Rock snot, or didymo, is the common name for *Didymosphenia geminata*,

an invasive alga that lives in fresh water and is considered a nuisance. It certainly looks nasty!

Stephanie discovered a mayfly nymph, a macroinvertebrate (a spineless creature big enough to see with the naked eye) that was hiding on the underside of a rock.

We have a new appreciation for dandelions now that we know they are "dent de lion" (Middle French for "lion's tooth," for their toothed leaves) and that we can fry up those annoying flower heads in butter -- yum!

Within a couple of hours, we had seen the following plants:

- dandelion
- northern white violet
- motherwort
- gill over the ground (ground ivy)
- bedstraw

- multiflora rose
- Morrow's honeysuckle
- cypress spurge
- strawberry
- buttercup
- thyme-leaved speedwell
- wild geranium
- false hellebore
- great angelica
- knotweed
- Jack in the pulpit
- bloodroot
- blue cohosh
- bishop's goutweed
- trillium
- ramps
- toothwort
- foam flower
- horsetail

Thanks, Stephanie!



*Early meadow rue*



*Red trillium*  
(stinking Benjamin)



*Jack-in-the-pulpit*



*Trout lily*

## *South Egremont School Trip to Sharon Audubon Center*

This year, Elaine Hunter's students at the South Egremont School visited the Audubon Center in Sharon, CT, a trip sponsored by the ELT. As the accompanying photos show, the children enjoyed learning about sugar maple trees, the process of collecting sap (including how the Native Americans did it), and how to make maple syrup. And it was delicious!







## Our New Digs

The Egremont Land Trust has a new home! We now meet at Berkshire Veneer, Ben Barrett's gorgeous veneer shop at the Green River Lumber site off Pumpkin Hollow Road (see our new sign in the photo). We meet about

once a month, usually on Friday afternoons, and we welcome visitors. Just call our president Peg Muskrat for the date of the next meeting.



## ELT Signs on Preserved Land

The ELT now has beautiful signs (thanks to Larkin, Ltd.) on parcels of land in Egremont that we, sometimes in conjunction with other

conservation groups, have preserved. The accompanying photo shows the sign on the field in North Egremont between Route 71 and the Green River. Look for the signs and know that you, as members, have helped conserve that land.

## 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 (<http://egremontlandtrust.org>), or by contacting Marj directly (528-3726 or [mwexler43@gmail.com](mailto:mwexler43@gmail.com)). Thank you!

Marjorie Wexler  
 Susan Shapiro  
 Wendy McCain  
 Wendy Linscott  
 Tom Haas  
 Robin Goldberg  
 Walter Cliff  
 Ursula Cliff  
 Peggy Barrett  
 Maureen Steiner, *treasurer*  
 Chuck Ogden, *clerk*  
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 Peg Muskrat, *president*

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