

ANNUAL PRESENTATION:

The Creature Teachers

Our annual business meeting on Saturday, September 12, 2015, was preceded by a fun and educational presentation at French Park by Nancy Melbourne from “The Creature Teachers.” Nancy had brought with her many of the interesting animals that live in the menagerie run by this nonprofit group in Littleton, MA. The ELT program was open to the public, and attendance was around 40. Adults and kids saw creatures that we rarely, if ever, see, and even got to hold or stroke them. We hope everyone will mark next September’s event on their calendars – these programs have consistently been fascinating.

Here are some of the animals Nancy brought, along with a few of the interesting facts she taught us:

Panther chameleon: Brightly colored (green, blue, and orange), looks like a beaded leaf.

Red-eyed tree frog: A Nature Conservancy icon. Large orange eyes make predators think he’s poisonous. Has suction cups on his feet and night vision. Spends life in rainforest trees. The mother carries the tadpoles on her back.

Chinchilla: Softest fur ever. For every hair we have, the chinchilla has 60. Once farmed for their coats, but this was unsuccessful.

“Spike” the green iguana: Its defense from predators (e.g., large birds of prey) is its ability to lose segments of its tail if the tail is caught. The male has a dewlap (loose skin hanging under the neck).

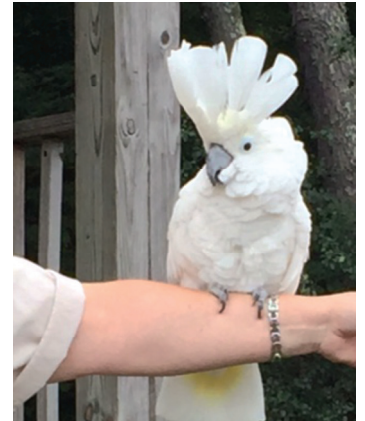
“Double-Stuff” the skunk: Has two rows of white fur and is de-scented. Its only predator is the owl, because owl shave no sense of smell.

“Elliot” the umbrella cockatoo: Beautifully white. We saw that Elliot is very attached to his owners and is noisy when ignored.

“Victor the Constrictor,” the albino Burmese python: About 15 years old, weighing about 40 lb, but can grow to 20 feet long and 100 lb. White with yellow markings (a lovely wallpaper pattern?). Searches out food and heat: On this cool morning, Victor was wrapped snugly around his handler. He has two rows of teeth on top, one on the bottom, but swallows prey whole. Pythons lay eggs, whereas boas have live births.



VICTOR THE CONSTRICTOR



“ELLIOT” THE UMBRELLA COCKATOO



PANTHER CHAMELEON



CHINCHILLA



RED-EYED TREE FROG

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: DARYA GEETTER

“Walter” the American alligator: Carnivorous, and regardless of attempts at domestication, never loses the instinct to pursue prey. State law says the jaw must be taped shut when out of cage. Walter was not full-grown and will return to Florida soon. Alligators live in both salt and fresh water, whereas crocodiles spend more time in salt water. ♦

Nature Walk With Dave Johnson



PHOTOGRAPH BY SHARON SITER

SPRING WALK WITH DAVE JOHNSON

Sixteen walkers gathered at French Park in North Egremont on April 12, 2015, for the first of a series of seasonal Sunday walks, sponsored by ELT and led by Dave Johnson, the chair of Egremont's Conservation Commission. Dave gave us a little background and overview of the trail system through French Park's forested acres and said that we'd be starting out on the Yellow Trail (marked with yellow blazes), which he refers to as the Sidewalk in the Woods. Over the past few years, Dave laid out the trails and then brought in the Greenagers (a local non-profit that engages teens and young adults in meaningful work in environmental conservation, sustainable farming, and natural resource management) to help with the creation of the trails and two bridges over a stream.

Last year's fern leaves and mosses were the only green plant life we spied as we walked along. As we approached some wet areas, Dave educated us about wetlands: land areas that are saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally, so that they take on the characteristics of a distinct ecosystem. The primary factor that distinguishes wetlands from other land forms or water bodies is the characteristic vegetation of aquatic plants. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas. One such "similar area" is a vernal pool, and our biggest treat was hearing wood frogs and peepers in a large vernal pool just off one of the trails. Dave defined a vernal pool: "Where life begins." The seasonal pool (it will dry up in the summer) is crucial to our ecosystem and is truly nature's birthplace in the wet spring.

We then took the blue trail and found ourselves in a small clearing with a tall stone chimney, which is all that's left of Mrs. French's chapel built in the early 20th century. While we stood in the clearing, one of our participants pointed to a bald eagle high up in the sky, another treat for our group. The blue trail brought us back to the parking lot. We look forward to Dave's early summer walk in French Park. ♦

Birding Walk 2015

Brian Kane, professor at UMass and birder extraordinaire, led a record number of ELT members and friends (about 20) through the fields and woods of the Jug End State Reservation at 7:30 AM on Saturday, May 23. With Brian's help, on this near-freezing morning, we observed and heard our local avian population.

He pointed out birds that he recognized by their song or flight pattern, and his large spotting scope enabled us to observe close-ups of individual birds. Here is Brian's list of the birds we saw in 2015. Do try to join us next spring for this delightful annual event. ♦

- mallard
- turkey vulture
- red-tailed hawk
- mourning dove
- ruby-throated hummingbird
- red-bellied woodpecker
- downy woodpecker
- alder flycatcher
- least flycatcher
- eastern kingbird
- red-eyed vireo
- warbling vireo
- blue jay
- American crow
- fish crow
- tree swallow
- barn swallow
- tufted titmouse
- black-capped chickadee
- white-breasted nuthatch
- Eastern bluebird
- American robin
- veery
- gray catbird
- yellow warbler
- chestnut-sided warbler
- blackburnian warbler
- black-throated green warbler



TURKEY VULTURE

- American redstart
- ovenbird
- Louisiana waterthrush
- common yellowthroat
- Northern cardinal
- scarlet tanager
- rose-breasted grosbeak
- Eastern towhee
- chipping sparrow
- song sparrow
- brown-headed cowbird
- red-winged blackbird
- common grackle
- Baltimore oriole
- American goldfinch



EASTERN TOWHEE

Aunt Rose Returns!



A few days ago, the editor received an excited and almost indecipherable scrawl that, on careful analysis, turned out to be from Aunt Rose, taking a few minutes from her legal studies to tell her Egremont neighbors about another way they could do well by doing good, environmentally speaking.

Last year I told you how to save money on your Massachusetts income taxes—even eliminate them altogether—while making sure your beautiful land was conserved forever. This year's big news is that there's a way to save on your federal income taxes in much the same way.

In 2006, Congress passed a piece of legislation called the Enhanced Tax Incentive for Conservation Easement Donations, with a sunset provision for December 2014. That law increased Federal Income Tax deductions

associated with qualified conservation restrictions (land containing important natural, scenic, and historic resources). The enhanced Tax Incentive increased eligible income tax deductions from 30% of adjusted gross income (AGI) to 50% of AGI and extended the carry-forward period from 5 years to 15 years. This incentive was responsible for conserving more than 2 million acres nationwide.

But the sun set on both December 2014 and the law. Now, however, with amazing bipartisan support, the incentive has been made both permanent and better. The law applies retroactively to January 1, 2015.

I can't name another town that has more or better natural, scenic, and historic resources than Egremont. We can keep our town beautiful and save money at the same time. Can you think of a better deal? ♦

ELT Annual Meeting, September 2015

On Saturday, September 12, after we enjoyed Rick Roth's Creature Teachers, ELT's Annual Meeting was held under the pavilion at French Park.

Lunch was provided to all members, and pumpkins and chrysanthemums were sold.

President Peg Muskrat 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 the May luncheon fundraiser at the Old Mill. ELT owns properties valued at \$541,000.

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

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

Ursula Cliff, Lois Ginsberg, Wendy McCain, and Maureen Steiner were reelected to their posts by unanimous voice vote.

The meeting ended at about 1:00 PM.

Right: ELT's sign on Pumpkin Hollow Road, at the entrance to the driveway to our office. ♦



PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ROBIN GOLDBERG

South Egremont School Studies Nature with Help from ELT

In the past year, Susan Weinstein's students at the South Egremont School enjoyed many nature programs in the classroom thanks to funding from the Egremont Land Trust. In the fall, Environmental and Forest Biologist Erica Clark taught the children about bats and how they communicate and navigate using echolocation. They studied bird migration and bird identification, also learning about bird beaks and how and what birds eat. During the winter, they watched birds on the school's feeder and recorded their observations in their journals. They studied birds of prey, focusing on owls –they even dissected owl pellets! In their study of signs that animals leave behind, the kids reproduced animal tracks in sand and then used their knowledge to detect the animals that had visited the school yard. The children love learning about animals and nature, and Erica Clark's programs made a great addition to the school curriculum. ♦



STUDENTS STUDYING OWL PELLETS

Kenver Gathering of Berkshire Nature Network

Kenver, Ltd., on Main Street in South Egremont, was again the setting for a cocktail party held for local conservation-oriented groups and community members. Lucinda Vermeulen and her staff hosted the event on Friday, September 18, to bring these organizations together. Representatives from the Egremont Land Trust, the Sheffield Land Trust, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, the Nature Conservancy, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Project Native, and the Berkshire Bike Path Council described their missions to the group. Everyone enjoyed Kenver's congenial atmosphere and the wonderful food and drink.

It was a perfect early-fall evening, and a highlight was the release, into the warm evening sunshine, of five monarch butterflies, just hatched from their chrysalides at Project Native. They were "banded" with tiny stick-on dots that showed their unique numbers, which will be reported to Monarch Watch when someone finds them, thus contributing to the study of monarch migration patterns. ♦



MALE MONARCH BUTTERFLY

WEST vs EAST

The Old Mill again hosted the annual Egremont Land Trust benefit luncheon, on Sunday, May 17. As always, there was a near-capacity crowd: 68 attendees. Everyone enjoyed a delicious lunch of pea salad with radish and feta, and either broiled filet of gray sole with roasted tomato and asparagus or roast breast of organic chicken with morels and mashed potatoes, followed by strawberry shortcake or ginger mascarpone cheesecake. We are very grateful for the hard work and generosity of the Old Mill's Terry Moore, his general manager Ginny Filkins, and their expert staff.

After the meal, Dr. Bryan Hamlin, former president of the New England Botanical Club and son-in-law of loyal ELT member and supporter Bev Almond, gave a lively and informative talk on plant diversity in Massachusetts, focusing on the differences between plant life here in the southern Berkshires and near his home outside Boston. Few of us knew that hundreds of millions of years ago, what is now Sheffield was



RED TRILLIUM

a coral reef covered by ocean. Over thousands of millennia, the Sheffield valley and surrounding hills were created by the gradual movement of land masses around the globe. Thanks to that ancient reef, the Sheffield soil that we are familiar with is alkaline. Boston, on the other hand, sits on extinct volcanoes, so its soil is quite acidic, particularly enjoyed by plants such as azaleas.

Dr. Hamlin detailed some of the differences in flowers found in each end of the state: red trillium more common in the west, white trillium more readily found in the east; our local wild azaleas are predominantly pink shading to deep pink, whereas Boston has the white swamp azalea, much more fragrant than our local white azalea because of its need to compete with the strong odors of its swampy habitat. Our area offers a particularly wide range of plant diversity because the top of Mt. Everett is an ideal terrain for arctic plant material.

Dr. Hamlin's very informative talk was illustrated by an entertaining power point presentation. We would have been happy to listen to Dr. Hamlin well into the late afternoon. ♦

ELT COMING EVENTS - 2016

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

- Saturday, April 30, 10:00 AM, Wildflower Walk led by Stephanie Bergman
- Sunday, May 15, 12 noon, annual ELT Luncheon, at the Old Mill
- Saturday, May 21, 7:30 AM, Birding Walk led by Brian Kane, at Jug End Reservation
- Saturday, September 10, 11:00 AM, Annual presentation at French Park. Presenter to be announced.
- Saturday, September 10, 12:00 noon, Annual Meeting at French Park, followed by a lunch provided by ELT. We welcome all interested residents to our annual meeting.

ELT Members 2015 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 2015 Membership List

Hannah & Steve Agar
Bev Almond
Eunice & Warren Anson
Sandy & Ron Ashendorf
Susan Bachelder
Jeremy Barnes & Doris Gamser
Cheryl & Ben Barrett
Peggy & Peter Barrett
Bonnie Bassis
Jack Battipaglia
Nancy Begbie
Candace & Frederick Beinecke
Lorraine & Stanley Berger
Marcia & Leslie Berglass
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Mary Berryhill & Robert Snyder
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Monica & Conway Cliff
Ursula & Walter Cliff
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Joyce Frater & Dan Blitzer
Barbara & Lanny Fields
Rachel Fletcher
Dorothy & Charles Flynn
Sandy & Stan Frank
Helen Friedman
Sharon Gamsin
Dr. Leslie Gaines-Ross
Bonita & Harvey Ganot
Roxanne Gawthrop Miller
Darya Geetter
Sheldon Geffner & Sid Schatzky
Lois Ginsberg
Robin & Peter Goldberg
Judith & Stephen Goodman
Mary Jane Goodrich
Jennie Goran & Nick Schkrutz
Valerie & Stan Gracyk
Marilyn & Henry Granger
Judie & Joel Grossman
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Barbara & Robert Kalish
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Dede & Stephen Kessler
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Nancy Kuntz
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Marjorie Wexler
Whalen Nursery
Elizabeth Wilson
Lynn & Bill Wood

SPRING 2015

Spring 2015 Wildflower Walk

On a lovely May 9 morning, Stephanie Bergman again led ELT's annual wildflower walk. Stephanie, who has a master's degree in environmental education, took us from her backyard on Route 71 into the woods across the Green River to see spring's early offerings.

Although we saw no new evidence of beavers, we could see the stumps of the trees they had felled last year, and we remembered that they are an important part of our ecology, as their dams slow the passage of streams, thus reducing erosion and increasing our water table level.

The disgusting rock snot is still in the Green River. This is the common name for *Didymosphenia geminata*, a.k.a. didymo, a non-native invasive microscopic alga that lives in fresh water. Spread readily by people who move from one waterbody to another without disinfecting their gear, it can smother entire streambeds with thick mats! We

can only hope that some sort of natural control emerges.

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

Our awareness of exotic invasive plants is increasing, and we found Japanese knotweed in abundance. Although this plant resembles bamboo, it belongs to the buckwheat family. Multiflora rose is another exotic invasive that deserves concern.

Within a couple of hours, we had seen the following plants: ramps, toothwort, foam flower, horsetail, dandelion, northern white violet, motherwort, gill over the ground (ground ivy), bedstraw, multiflora rose, cypress spurge, strawberry, buttercup, thyme-leaved speedwell, wild geranium, false hellebore, great angelica, knotweed, jack-in-the-pulpit, bloodroot, blue cohosh, bishop's goutweed, and trillium.

Thanks, Stephanie! ♦

Wildflowers observed in spring 2015:

- 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



KNOTWEED



MULTIFLORA ROSE



NORTHERN WHITE VIOLET



BLOODROOT

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 a link to local resources. Send us your email address to receive announcements, or print out a membership and donation form. We do not share membership information with anyone, no matter how worthy the cause.



PHOTOGRAPH BY: PAT MURTAGH

THE BALDWIN HILL ELM

PLEASE JOIN US! If you love Egremont but haven't yet joined ELT, please use the 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 (<http://egremontlandtrust.org>), or by contacting Marj directly (528-3726 or mwexler43@gmail.com). Thank you!

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

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