



TOM ENCOURAGES KIDS TO BE UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH THE OWL



PEREGRINE FALCON



TOM WITH THE TURKEY VULTURE



TOM RICARDI AND GREAT HORNED OWL

ANNUAL PRESENTATION:

Tom Ricardi and His Birds of Prey

In September 2017, at least 70 people attended the presentation by Tom Ricardi at the French Park bandstand. Tom operates the Massachusetts Birds of Prey Rehabilitation Center for raptors in Conway, MA. He works closely with Dr. Robert Schmitt, a veterinarian who offers his services gratis. Tom is seeing more birds that appear, to his practiced eye, to be “sick”— are pesticides the culprit?

Tom worked 40 years as a Massachusetts conservation officer. Now retired, he is licensed for rehab work by the federal government and by the New England states.

Among the 87 birds currently in the 28 large aviaries at his facility are many that cannot be released because their injuries lessen their chances for survival in the wild. Some of these become his “goodwill ambassadors,” which he uses in schools and at events such as ours to demonstrate their need for protection. The birds that he intends to release usually stay in an isolated aviary for 3 to 4 weeks.

Tom says that loss of habitat is the biggest threat to all wildlife. On the other hand, if the slaughter of African elephants continues, they will be extinct in 15 years. Sometimes a public outcry is needed. In 1896, two women started Mass Audubon by raising the level of outrage about the killing of birds for their feathers. A children’s book called “She’s Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head” is a fictionalized account of their story. In 1903, a law passed that prohibited the possession of feathers of protected birds (although molted bald eagle feathers are available to Native Americans for ceremonies).

Although, in general, the larger the bird, the smaller the number of eggs laid per clutch, the number of eggs laid by birds of prey is dictated by the availability of food. Golden eagles are gone from New England but can be seen in western states and Canada.

Tom brought the following birds:

Red-shouldered hawk, a common species in western Mass., but pesticides and habitat destruction have reduced their number.

Red-tailed hawk, the largest New England hawk. Female is larger than male. Its ability to regurgitate a pellet every day, made up of food it can’t digest, is helpful to its digestive tract.

Harris hawk, long tail, short wings. It hunts in the woods, where its long legs help it grab prey. Becoming more common in Mass. as climate change progresses and they are nesting farther north.



TURKEY VULTURE, TOM'S FAVORITE

Tom Ricardi and His Birds of Prey (continued from page 1)

Peregrine falcon population suffered greatly as a result of DDT. The population is rebounding and they now nest even in cities. Their wings are built for speed, and when diving they are faster than any other animal in the world. They eat other birds—even as large as a duck.

Turkey vulture is Tom's favorite, partly because they are perfectly adapted to environment. Their featherless head suits their scavenger role (easier to clean). Their big nostrils provide an excellent sense of smell, and they have amazing eyesight. Their poop not only keeps their legs cool but also has antiseptic value, which is good because their legs get covered with bacteria when they feed on carcasses. In fact, they are clean birds. Spreading out their wings to dry helps get rid of parasites. They make nests on the ground, and many stay north year-round. Because of their weak vocal chords, they make a hissing sound (have you ever heard a turkey vulture make a sound?).

Great horned owl, the largest owl in New England, has tufts on its head that make it look like a broken branch, providing good camouflage. Its facial disk is perfectly shaped to pick up sounds. Tiny feathers also help with hearing. The great horned owl has no sense of smell, so they will prey on skunks. They lay eggs in January.

Barred owl is a very common owl in New England. Owls' large wings don't make any noise in flight—a big advantage in predators.

Eastern screech owl is our smallest owl. It has tiny tufts on its head. It is a cavity nester and loves to occupy an owl box.

We always enjoy Tom's presentations and are very grateful to him for coming to Egremont! ♦

Invasive Plants Walk

On Saturday, September 23, 2017, Bryan Hamlin led a group of aspiring botanists along French Park trails to learn about invasive plants. These opportunistic plants use up resources needed by our native plants, and they tend to be very hard to get rid of. Bryan offered instruction and advice.

What is an invasive plant? It is not native, and it grows more quickly than native species, to the point of disrupting existing communities or ecosystems. French Park offers a plethora of invasive plants, especially in the ecotones, which are areas where two biomes, such as forest and field, meet.

What is the best way to control invasive plants? The best control is to NOT give them the opportunity to grow in the first place. Never leave any soil disturbed. Disturbed soil is the crack in the door that dormant seeds in our soil need to begin growth, and when these are seeds of invasive plants, their growth will take off.

How can I identify invasive plants? The numerous on-line resources include the Massachusetts Audubon Society: <https://www.massaudubon.org/learn/naturewildlife/invasive-plants>.

I have a ton of invasive plants on my property. What is the first step? Getting rid of invasives is a multi-year project requiring knowledge, patience, and persistence. Start with the invasive plants that pose the biggest problem to the health of the biome, and also consider your aesthetics. Identify the worst plants and learn about them. Don't try to get rid of all invasives at once: this is impossible and probably a path to madness. When confronting an invaded area, begin at the periphery of the invasion and work toward the center.

What about those vines that seem to be strangling every tree? Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is the most common invasive plant, and one of the most pernicious, in our area. It was brought over from China around 1860 as an ornamental, and first documented in Massachusetts in 1919. It is very tempting and satisfying (in the short term) to pull down its vines from a tree it has encircled, but the force of yanking can damage the top of the tree and make it more susceptible to disease or insect infestation. Instead, cut off a segment of the vine at the base and let Mother Nature do the rest. After a few hot summer days, the ends of the vine will begin to lose their grip and will fall down on their own. Pull up its orange roots, but make sure you tamp down the soil over any disturbed areas. Seeds from the prior year are just waiting for some sunshine to germinate. Attempts to eradicate Oriental bittersweet are most successful early in the season before it bears its orange fruit.



ORIENTAL BITTERSWEET

Birding Walk FALL 2017

On the sunny fall morning of September 23, 2017, eleven people gathered at the Jug End State Reservation for a bird walk led by Brian Kane. Following the trail through the field and wooded areas, the group spotted 27 species of birds. With Brian's guidance, and observing through his telescope, we were able to get an incredible close-up look at several of them. Toward the end of the walk, we were treated to a quadfecta: a bald eagle, a red-tailed hawk, a broad-winged hawk, and a Cooper's hawk. ♦



FALL BIRD WALK

Birds seen and heard:

- Eastern bluebird
- Cedar waxwing
- American robin
- Catbird
- Song sparrow
- Blue jay
- Sharp-shinned hawk
- Northern flicker
- Tufted titmouse
- American crow
- Chickadee
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Common yellowthroat
- Eastern towhee
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker
- Swamp sparrow
- Phoebe
- Black-throated green warbler
- White-throated sparrow
- Goldfinch
- Bald eagle (adult)
- Red-tailed hawk
- Broad-winged hawk
- Hermit thrush
- Downy woodpecker
- Cooper's hawk



CEDAR WAXING



EASTERN TOWHEE



DOWNEY WOODPECKER



VIEW FROM APPALACHIAN TRAIL ON JUG END RIDGE, LOOKING NORTH

About ELT PROJECTS ACCOMPLISHED

The Egremont Land Trust's mission is to preserve the rural character of Egremont, and undoubtedly the most important part of this mission is land conservation. We accomplish this in a number of ways. The most direct method is the outright purchase of ecologically, aesthetically, or agriculturally significant land, particularly parcels under immediate threat of development. In addition to the obstacle presented by the very high cost of land in Egremont, a prime location for second homes, the Land Trust is reluctant to become a large land owner. Land ownership involves responsibilities of stewardship, and for a very small, all-volunteer organization, stewardship is a time-consuming and demanding task.

What has proved to be our most effective land conservation tool is a cooperative effort with one or more other conservation organizations. Several governmental agencies, both state and federal, have funds to acquire either fee interest in or Conservation Restrictions (CRs) on significant parcels of land, and the same holds true for nonprofit organizations like the Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Our first project was a purchase in 1993 of just under 10 acres of fenland on Baldwin Hill Road. It was offered to us at an amazingly reasonable price. We routinely clear it of invasive species and have built a nature trail around the little pond at its center.

Several of our properties were gifts from generous friends. TNC gave us two parcels of land totaling 42 acres on Mt. Washington Road. In 2005, Marian Faytell and Joel Friedman together with the Guildler Hollow Association gave us four acres in the Brookvale subdivision of Guildler Hills. In other cases, we have received gifts of CRs. In these cases, the land remains in private hands but we hold the legal assurance that the land can never be developed. This is true of a beautiful 50-acre parcel of open field and woodland on Baldwin Hill Road, whose three sets of owners conveyed its CR jointly to ELT and BNRC. And on Mount Washington Road, another landowner gave us a CR on 22 acres bordering Karner Brook,

(continued)



VIEW OF JUG END FROM BALDWIN HILL, LOOKING SOUTH

About ELT **PROJECTS ACCOMPLISHED** *(continued)*

one of Egremont's most prized ecological resources.

In some cases, we have purchased properties, placed conservation easements on them, and then resold them to private owners. This is true of the so-called Bradford property, the site of one of the earliest farms in Egremont and of a graveyard where both Dutch settlers and Indians were buried. We bought the property, helped by funding from TNC, in 1999, held it for several years, and then sold the state an Agricultural Protection Restriction (APR) on most of it. With the assurance that the land would remain farmland forever, we sold it to a local farmer. The remaining small strip, on which we placed a CR, was sold to an abutting landowner.

Our next project was the purchase of 213 acres in 2002. Adjacent to the Jug End State Reservation and bordering Karner Brook, South Egremont's water supply, the land is steep and heavily forested. Because it was designated a federal Forest Legacy area, it qualified for a federal grant, supplemented by a state grant, and the land was then transferred to the Town of Egremont. As part of the deal, the

town agreed to place a permanent CR on three abutting town lots, making a total of 325 mountainside acres preserved in perpetuity.

Then, ELT purchased 22 acres of woods and farmland along the Green River in North Egremont, bought after a vigorous fundraising campaign, a matching grant from a private donor, and the sale of a CR to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. (The Green River is one of the best trout streams in Berkshire County.)

Our largest project, one that we will probably never equal, was the purchase of 445 acres on Baldwin Hill in 2012. This was a longstanding priority for ELT and BNRC. Thanks to the generosity of the Burdsall and Proctor families, and with the help of the Massachusetts APR Program and BNRC, this land was conserved after many years of work. It will be used forever for farming. Critical to the project were donations from more than 400 ELT members and other residents of our area of the Berkshires, which helped to fill the gap between the state's commitment and the fair market value of the APRs –the so-called "local share." The Baldwin Hill projects ensure a productive agricultural base for the town and have saved the most wonderful views in the Southern Berkshires.

Although ELT's first interest is in preserving land, we take seriously our educational mission. Throughout the spring, summer, and early fall, we offer walks and lectures dealing with the ecology and history of Egremont. (Visit us online to see our calendar of events.) And we have contributed to projects at the public school in South Egremont, sponsoring special nature courses and helping with the children's garden.

We are eager for ideas for other projects, and we welcome suggestions from our neighbors. Contact any of our board members -- we'd love to talk with you! (See the Contact tab on our website: www.egremontlandtrust.org/.) ♦

ELT Annual Meeting, **September 2017**

After enjoying Tom Ricardi's presentation, the Land Trust and community members gathered at the French Park Pavilion for lunch provided by ELT (desserts brought by Board members), and our Annual Meeting, chaired by our president, Peg Muskrat.

Treasurer Maureen Steiner reported that the ELT raised about \$18,000 during 2016 from dues, donations, and the annual luncheon in May (thanks to The Old Mill). Program expenses include our nature walks and the special programs at our annual meetings. We also underwrite conservation efforts, and we contribute to the Massachusetts Land Trust and the Audubon Society. Operating expenses include rent, insurance, website and data base, accounting, printing, and postage. We essentially break even each year. Robin Goldberg, membership chair, reported that ELT has about 130 members, of whom about 25 were new in the past year.

Next year's Board of Directors was elected: Ursula Cliff, Lois Ginsberg, Wendy McCain, and Maureen Steiner were reelected by unanimous voice vote for 3-year terms. Peg encouraged anyone interested in becoming a Board member to contact her or one of the members.

Peg introduced Lucinda Vermeulen, who described the Greenagers' French Park project, which she is hoping ELT will help support. The project will consist of at least four vegetable beds in French Park, which will be tended by Greenagers and residents. An additional fund will be set up for ongoing maintenance of the beds. ELT members applauded the plan.

The meeting ended at 1:00 PM. We enjoyed meeting members of the community, and we were delighted that some joined ELT. ♦



SPRING Birding Walk 2017

Brian Kane's spring bird walk at the Jug End Preservation was a great success. The morning, cool and sunny, was perfect. Although the list of birds seen might not be as long as in other years, we saw a greater proportion of all species present than in the past (when we've walked in mid to late May or early June), perhaps because on this April 30, the leaves had not yet fully emerged on many of the trees.

As we followed the trail, crossing Fenton Brook and continuing into the fields and wooded areas beyond, it was, as usual, a great help to have Brian's keen vision and acute hearing. He reminded us to listen – an important part of bird-watching. For example, the field sparrow's call sounds like a ping-pong ball dropping. The drumming pattern of the yellow-bellied sapsucker starts fast and then slows.

Of course, he shared his telescope on a tripod so that we could all take a look (especially helpful to those of us who forgot our binoculars!). Whether you consider yourself an expert or an amateur at birding, Brian's bird walks are inspiring. In 2017, he conducted an additional walk in the fall!

Following is the list of species observed—a pretty respectable number and variety. Note the abundance of warblers, always a treat. ♦

- Canada goose
- Belted kingfisher
- Red-tailed hawk
- Cooper's hawk
- Turkey vulture
- Black vulture
- Tree swallow
- Barn swallow
- Mourning dove
- Downy woodpecker
- Hairy woodpecker
- Red-bellied woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker
- Blue jay
- American crow
- Common raven
- Tufted titmouse
- Black-capped chickadee
- White-breasted nuthatch
- American robin
- Eastern bluebird
- Yellow warbler
- Black-throated green warbler
- Louisiana waterthrush
- Blue-winged warbler
- Black and white warbler
- Common yellowthroat
- Yellow-rumped warbler
- Northern cardinal
- Song sparrow
- Field sparrow
- Chipping sparrow
- White-throated sparrow
- Eastern towhee

- Dark-eyed junco
- Orchard oriole
- Red-winged blackbird
- American goldfinch



COMMON YELLOW THROAT



THE SPRING BIRD WALK



COMMON RAVEN



BLACK CAPPED CHICKADEE



NORTHERN CARDINAL



RED TAILED HAWK

ELT Members & Supporter 2017 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 2017 Membership List

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Heidi & Ari Zorn

ELT

Annual Luncheon

Our 2017 annual luncheon was held on May 21 at The Old Mill. Sixty-six people attended, and another 17 people who were unable to attend sent donations.

We thank Terry Moore, Ginny Filkins, and the wonderful staff of The Old Mill for our delicious luncheon. We were given a choice of corn chowder with smoked bacon, or spring mixed greens; followed by either grilled salmon with pine nuts, capers, and lemon butter sauce, or roast leg of lamb with rosemary; and finally, either strawberry-rhubarb shortcake or profiteroles au chocolat for dessert.

Our speaker for the afternoon was Will Conklin, the Executive Director of Greenagers. Through its paid employment programs, internships, and apprenticeships, Greenagers engages teens and young adults in meaningful work in environmental conservation, sustainable farming, and natural resource management. In the Berkshires and nearby New York State, their trail crews maintain existing trails and build new ones—for example, for the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Trustees of Reservations, Columbia Land Conservancy, and other conservation organizations, including the Egremont Land Trust. ELT has also engaged their services for control of invasive plants on land we own. Their farm apprentices



WILL CONKLIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GREENAGERS

work with local farmers, learning animal husbandry and organic agriculture.

Their volunteer teams install front-yard gardens for area families to encourage homebased food growing. We look forward to seeing the raised beds that they will install at French park this spring, and to furthering our relationship with the Greenagers.

Every year, we are so very grateful to The Old Mill for hosting our annual luncheon, and we hope that ELT members will join us again on May 20, 2018. ♦

ELT COMING EVENTS - 2018

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

- **May 5**, Saturday, 7:30 AM. Spring bird walk with Brian Kane. Jug End State Reservation.
- **May 12**, Saturday, 10 AM. Wild flower and plants walk with Stephanie Bergman. Meet at ELT property on Route 71 (about ½ mi north of North Egremont store).
- **May 20**, Sunday, noon. Annual benefit luncheon, with speakers Penny Hansell, new president of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, and Will Conklin of Greenagers. Old Mill Restaurant.
- **September 8**, Saturday, 11 AM. Annual event, with speaker Tom Tynning on “Why Frogs and Turtles Love Egremont.” French Park.
- **September 22**, Saturday, 7:30 AM. Fall bird walk with Brian Kane. Jug End State Reservation.
- Invasives walk and lecture with Patrick Riordan. Details TBA.

ELT Office

The Egremont Land Trust meets at Berkshire Veneer, Ben Barrett's veneer shop, 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: HANS CARLSON

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*
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