EGREMONT L A N D T R U S T

◆ 2020 NEWSLETTER





JEN WITH JEWEL, A BARRED OWL

FALL FAMILY PRESENTATION:

Jen Leahy of Nature Matters

About 50 people came to French Park to hear ELT's 2019 fall presentation speaker, Jen Leahey, of Nature Matters. Jen owns, with her husband, a working organic dairy farm in Lee, but one of her passions is connecting people with animals and the outdoors. She believes that the more we connect, the more we will understand, love, and take care of our world. The animals she brought were mainly local animals, not exotics. Most of them are "rehab flunkies" (meaning they can't be rehabilitated), so she cares for them. She is licensed by the state to educate us about them, and the animals are her wildlife ambassadors.

First, we admired Darla, a 2-year-old corn snake wearing orange and yellow. Corn snakes are so named because farmers used to put them in their corncribs to catch mice. All snakes are carnivorous and can eat something twice as large as their head. Corn snakes are not native to Massachusetts but to the mid-Atlantic, so Darla was born in captivity. Of the 13 snakes native to our state, half are on the endangered list. Reptiles are ectothermic (Jen calls them solar powered), and in the winter they hibernate in groups, sometimes of 100, in burrows created by other creatures below the frost line.

Jen brought a small snapping turtle that will be released. A snapper's neck will grow to be half as long as its carapace.

They don't hunt for food but wait for it to come to them.

Next was a big brown bat with a broken wing. It could live to be 10 years old in captivity. Little brown bats are considered threatened in Mass. Bats are social, they are pollinators, and they eat hundreds of bugs in a night. They can get, and die from, rabies, so don't touch if you find one.

Kenny the skunk was born in captivity. Skunks used to be listed in the weasel family, but now they are their own family. They are omnivorous, eating grubs, snails, frogs, and turtle and bird eggs. They are strong for their size—in your house, they can get into cupboards and drawers. Once they use their spray, it takes 7 to 10 days to regenerate, so they prefer to give you a warning first: they stand their ground, puff up, stomp, and stare, and if you don't go away, they spray.

Jewel is a barred owl, a well-camouflaged night hunter whose food repertoire is limited. It sits in a tree and waits to spot a small mammal. When small prey are in short supply, as in the bad mast year of 2018, the barred owls go hungry. The great horned can eat larger mammals, such as skunks. Owls eat whole animals and spit out the undigested bones and fur in pellets. Hawks, on the other hand, digest the bones and fur. Having a large territory to disperse into increases the owl population's genetic diversity. Owls mate in late winter, and the females are larger than the males.

We are grateful to Jen Leahey for sharing her wildlife ambassadors with us. Watching children pet and learn about them is wonderful!



DARLA. A CORN SNAKE



KENNY THE SKUNK



JAPANESE KNOTWEED

Invasive Plants Walk 2019

On a May 2019 morning, Patrick Riordan led a walk at Jug End Reservation and shared some of his knowledge about invasives while offering advice about how to keep our sanity as we combat them.

He reminded us that getting rid of these plants is a multi-year effort that may never be completely successful, but we should be vigilant and keep trying. Exotic invasives usually originated in another country and don't have natural enemies here, so they flourish. By definition, the invasive ones have found a way to outcompete the local species, crowding them out or preventing their getting the sun or water they need.

Tools and gear to have on hand: Felco hand-pruners, a small pruning saw (and a telescoping pruning saw if possible), telescoping loppers, a flame thrower, work gloves (cuffs are great for dealing with poison ivy), and Patrick's favorite, a serious uprooting tool called a Pullerbear (uses lever action to pull up roots).

If you find that your property is loaded, it's helpful to focus on one invasive at a time. Some of the worst include the following:

- Japanese knotweed. Cutting it back just encourages the root system, and you'll never succeed in pulling it up. The only way to kill it is to top it off in late June or early July and then spray with glyphosate when the plant is in flower in late August or early September. No one wants to use a glyphosate product, but this is a case where it's necessary.
- Japanese barberry. Mice and their deer ticks enjoy the prickly protection of these shrubs. Dig it out using a pick-axe anytime, but it may be easiest on a warm and wet day in winter. If there are berries on it, burn it.
- Bittersweet. Pulling the live vine from a tree can damage the tree and make an entry point for harmful pests. Cut the vine and then let it fall naturally over the next few years when it's dead and brittle. If you want to uproot the base, it's easier when the ground is wet.
- Garlic mustard. One technique is to attack this biennial with a small flame thrower on a wet day in late winter, when the low-growing rosettes that will mature in spring are identifiable.





PATRICK GARBED FOR INVASIVE PLANTS

BITTERSWEET

• Euonymus. The beautiful burning bush is very invasive. If you doubt it, look for all the showy pink bushes in the woods of French Park in the fall. You'll need help from someone with a tractor to pull out established plants, which have deep roots. Burn if there are berries.

Patrick will lead another walk in 2020, tentatively on May 24. There is so much to learn and share!

Patrick is a 2018 graduate of the Level I Horticultural Certificate program and in 2020 will receive advanced certificates in Native Plant Landscapes and Sustainable Land Stewardship from Berkshire Botanical Garden. He received a certificate from UMass Extension in Invasive Plant Management in 2019. ◆

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 (mwexler43@gmail.com). Thank you!



TOM DISCUSSING FORESTS

Tom Ingersoll's TREE TALK

On a sunny Saturday last October, 18 folks gathered at French Park to benefit from Tom Ingersoll's vast knowledge of trees and their care and nurturing. Tom spoke about their importance above and beyond the visual pleasure they offer-how they clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide, provide shelter for birds and animals, and provide humans with fuel, lumber, paper. Tom described New England as a forest ecosystem—in the 18th century and earlier, it was almost totally forested. (Our grass was imported from the Midwestern grasslands.) Tom estimated that the oldest trees in French Park were probably not more than 75 years old, hardly an old forest. In fact, the term "old growth" as applied to trees refers to those dating to the 15th century or earlier. Tom explained that there are a few remaining small patches of old growth forest in Berkshire County, but they survive only in places where horses and skidders couldn't reach them in early efforts to clear the land, such as on Mount Everett and at Ice Glen in Stockbridge.

To identify a tree, study the color and consistency of the bark; location and growth habit of leaders; shape of the leaf, seed, or fruit; arrangement of twigs; and shape of buds if no leaves are available. He recommended The Tree Identification Book by George W. D. Symonds, and he opined that although there are pretty good plant ID apps for smart phones, there are no such good apps for trees yet.

Tom is passionate about trees and the health of New England forests. This includes root structure and the fungal mycelia in the soil. Two common threats are invasive insects and plants. The emerald ash borer has now been found in Sheffield. That insect, which dooms all ash trees, has no natural predator and is expensive to treat, so no responsible nursery now sells ash. Ash borer, chestnut blight, Dutch elm disease—the list is

discouragingly long, but the biggest threat to our forests is climate change. Our trees require cold weather to thrive, and gradually we are seeing more species native to southern states make their way into New England. One of the beneficiaries of our warming climate is poison ivy.

Lawns and parklands are also terrible for trees. Tree roots grow fairly close to the surface and spread out laterally. Weed-whackers, lawn mowers, and foot traffic damage bark and compact soil, making it harder for moisture and nutrients to reach the roots. Once stressed, roots are a gateway for invasive insects and fungi. The forest floor in its natural state is spongy and soft—ideal for growing trees. Tom advocated for not making wooded areas neater and more park-like. The woody debris from fallen and decomposing trees provides excellent nutrients for forests. That debris, plus ferns and fallen leaves, all keep soil cool in summer and warm in winter, and they harbor moisture. The snowier winters we used to enjoy in New England provided a blanket of snow that insulated tree roots and provided water when it melted.

Furthermore, New England has been in the grip of a drought for years. To help protect landscaped trees from drought and soil compaction, Tom urged that we mulch heavily and create a large surround at the base of any specimen tree. When grass grows close to the tree, lay cardboard over the grass up to the trunk, and add at least three inches of mulch on top. This method of removing grass from around a tree is much better than trying to dig it out.

Tom admitted that he can go on for hours about trees and their importance, so stay tuned. He promised to be back next year and to teach us even more about our New England forests and trees and how to help ensure that they are around for generations. •



Land Steward Report 2019

The Egremont Land Trust owns and/or manages, under Conservation Restrictions, 105 acres of land, more or less. "More or less" because the acreage listed on the deeds for these lands do not always precisely match the surveyors' maps, nor do these always precisely match the assessors' listings. This offers some interesting challenges for the Land Steward in conducting periodic condition assessments of the properties. Among the properties protected by the Land Trust, the Baldwin Hill Fen and the former Smith property on Egremont Plain Road, shown here, are maintained to be accessible to the public for environmentally conscious use.

Other properties owned or managed by the Land Trust will be highlighted in future Newsletters.

Birding Walk SPRING 2019

On a partly cloudy June 1, 2019, morning, about 10 of us joined Brian Kane, of UMass-Amherst's Department of Environmental Conservation, for his always fascinating spring bird walk at Jug End Reserve. This year, our walk was later than usual, and we can expect that the birds we saw were breeding.

As we gathered in the parking lot, Brian gave us a quick tutorial on binoculars. He recommended Swarovski (which he finds to be ergonomic), but Zeiss and Leica are also good. For birding, look for the numbers 10X42, which means a magnification of 10 (8 is also OK) and a field of view of 42.

Brian's tips for recognizing species without your binocs:

- Learn to recognize behavioral characteristics. This requires lots of watching and patience. An example: a cedar waxwing sits in a tree and sallies forth to catch insects.
- Listen for their songs and other sounds. The hammering of a yellow-bellied woodpecker sounds like a motor running out of steam. The warbling vireo's song sounds like "warbling warbling warbling vireo." And we learned the song of the male common yellowthroat (another warbler), which sings "witchety witchety" to defend its territory and attract a mate. Smartphones have birdsong apps, but use discretion when listening to them. If birds hear songs that they interpret as belonging to competition, they may leave the territory.
- Birders make a "pishing" sound to call small birds out from hiding places. Small birds typically band together to ward off a predator. The pishing mimics an alarm call ("a predator is near!"), so that birds come out to join forces. Clearly, this also needs to be used with good judgement.

One of our more common birds is the catbird, which is in a loose group called mimic thrushes. The group includes mockingbirds.

We never regret the early rising for this educational and exhilarating walk! Please join us in spring 2020.

Birds seen and heard:

- · Alder flycatcher
- · American crow
- · American goldfinch
- · American redstart
- · American robin
- · Baltimore oriole
- · Barn swallow
- · Black-capped chickadee
- · Blackburnian warbler
- · Blue iav
- · Blue-winged warbler
- · Cedar waxwing
- · Chestnut-sided warbler
- · Chimney swift
- · Chipping sparrow
- · Common grackle
- · Common raven



COMMON YELLOWTHROAT



WARBLING VIREO



BRIAN AT JUG END RESERVE

- Downy woodpecker
- · Eastern bluebird
- · Eastern kingbird
- · Eastern towhee
- · Field sparrow
- · Gray catbird · Hairy woodpecker
- Indigo bunting
- · Least flycatcher
- · Louisiana waterthrush
- · Mourning dove
- · Northern cardinal
- · Northern flicker
- Ovenbird
- · Red-bellied woodpecker
- · Red-eyed vireo
- · Red-winged blackbird
- · Rose-breasted cardinal
- · Ruby-throated hummingbird
- · Scarlet tanager
- · Song sparrow
- · Tree swallow
- · Turkey vulture
- Veerv
- · Warbling vireo
- · Wood duck
- · Wood thrush
- · Yellow warbler





YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER

(continued)

Wildflower Walk SPRING 2019

Twenty-five people attended ELT's spring wildflower walk on May 11, 2019. This was our 10th annual with naturalist Stephanie Bergman, who holds a master's degree in environmental education and a bachelor's degree in biology. We strolled across the field (protected by ELT and MA Fish & Game) alongside Route 71 in Egremont, down to the Green River.

Stephanie's mission was to point out medicinal wildflowers, native plants, and invasive plants. Along the way, she pointed to one very recognizable plant, one that we call a weed—the dandelion. It was brought by the Pilgrims from Europe, where it is admired for its medicinal and culinary qualities. We can eat the greens before the plant flowers, and we can sauté the flowers. It is high in vitamins A and C, and tea made from the leaves is good for our livers. The dandelion is one of the first flowers to bloom in the spring, for which the bees are grateful.

We spied a groundcover from Eurasia, gill-over-the-ground (Glechoma), a member of the mint family. It is invasive, but it is high in vitamin C, is good for arthritis, and has antibacterial and skin-healing attributes.

Other invasives we saw include Japanese knotweed and multiflora rose. The former was introduced into as an ornamental, but it quickly became a major problem in cities and the countryside, as it spreads rapidly via underground rhizomes. It is said to lower cholesterol, and it can be used to treat Lyme disease. The young shoots are edible. The MF rose was also introduced as an ornamental and thought to be valuable for field windrows and for erosion control. This plant, too, is now a major invasive problem.

Along the river, Stephanie pointed out trees that had been felled by beavers. This activity changes the landscape significantly by allowing more sunlight onto the forest floor, which encourages invasives to spread even more. Tree roots hold the soil along the river banks, so the river flow and the shoreline can be altered when beavers fell trees.

Ramps, or wild onions, grow in patches in the moist forests close to the river. Their stalks and leaves are edible, but they are being overharvested. Harvest just a few bulbs in a patch, and mostly take just the leaves, to preserve next year's crop. The Cherokee eat the plant as a spring tonic for colds and croup, and use the warm juice for earaches.

We also saw blue cohosh, trillium, toothwort, false hellebore, Equisetum (a prehistoric plant, also known as horsetail, which can be used as a scouring brush), colt's foot, great angelica, marsh marigold, trout lily, violets and bloodroot (whose seeds are spread by ants), wild geranium, wood anemone, crowfoot, and early meadow-rue.

Please join us next spring for this always pleasurable spring wildflower walk! ◆



ELT Annual Meeting, September 2019

After enjoying Jen Leahey's presentation, the Land Trust and community members gathered at the French Park Pavilion for lunch provided by ELT (desserts brought by Board members). The September 2019 Annual Meeting was then held, chaired by our president, Peg Muskrat, who introduced the Board.

Treasurer Maureen Steiner reported that the ELT raises about \$18,000 to \$20,000 per year from dues, donations, and the annual luncheon in May (thanks to The Old Mill). Program expenses include our nature walks and the special program at our annual meeting. We also contribute to the Massachusetts Land Trust, the Audubon Society, and Greenagers. Our expenses are of two types: program expenses and basic operating expenses. Our assets consist of the properties we own and our bank accounts.

Wendy McCain named the Board members whose terms were up and asked for any further nominations from the floor (none were offered). Wendy Linscott, Chuck Ogden, and Susan Shapiro were reelected by unanimous voice vote for 3-year terms. Peg encouraged anyone interested in becoming a Board member to contact her or another member.

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



ELT Members & Supporters 2018-2019 Many thanks to our loyal supporters, listed below.

Without you, our accomplishments would simply not exist. Please renew your membership for 2020, or, if you are not already a member, join us. Use the enclosed envelope. We welcome you!

Egremont Land Trust Membership & Supporters

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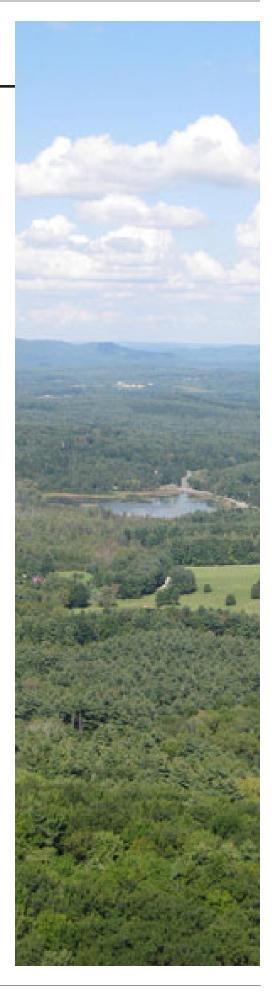
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ELT

Annual Lucheon

On Sunday, May 19, 2019, the Egremont Land Trust hosted our annual spring luncheon. As always, it was a great way to bring our members and guests together to celebrate Egremont and enjoy a delicious meal. It is also our major fundraiser for the year, and we thank the 69 members and friends who attended.

Terry Moore, Ginny Filkins, and the staff of the Old Mill once again hosted a wonderful afternoon.

The luncheon featured a choice of asparagus soup or roasted beets and goat cheese salad. Entrees were either a pan-roasted Atlantic cod or braised beef short ribs. Desserts offered were sour creme pound cake and profiteroles with chocolate sauce. Wine, coffee, and tea complemented this great meal.

Our program featured two speakers. Lucinda Vermeulen, recently elected as a selectwoman of Egremont, spoke of our town's beauty, community spirit, and challenges. She invited all to reach out to her with any ideas or concerns they might have about Egremont. Terry Moore then described his dream of a "Karner Brook Walk" on the stream-front land between the Old Mill and the building housing Mom's Country Café and the Egremont Market. The park would open up the tangled wooded area for the public to walk in, or to just sit and enjoy the Karner Brook. Plans for the design, engineering, and fundraising are underway. lack



STREAM BEHIND THE OLD MILL

ELT is excited to be a participant in an exciting new venture: a walkway along the Karner Brook in the center of South Egremont. Watch for future news as plans are finalized!

ELT COMING EVENTS - 2020

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

- May 2, Saturday, 7:30 AM, Jug End Reservation. Spring bird walk with Brian Kane.
- May 9, Saturday, 10 AM. Spring wildflower walk with Stephanie Bergman. Meet at ELT property on Route 71 (about ½ mi north of North Egremont store).
- May 17, Sunday, noon, Old Mill Restaurant. Annual benefit luncheon, with speaker Becky Cushing, Sanctuary Director of Mass. Audubon's Berkshire Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- May 24, Sunday, 9:30 AM, Jug End Reservation. Invasives walk and demonstration with Patrick Riordan.
- September 12, Saturday, 11 AM, French Park. Annual presentation, with speaker to be announced.
- September 26, Saturday, 9 to 11 AM, French Park. Fall tree walk with Tom Ingersoll.
- October 3, Saturday, 7:30 AM, Jug End Reservation. Fall bird walk with Brian Kane.

FALL Birding Walk 2019

ELT's spring and fall birds walks, led by Brian Kane from UMass-Amherst, are enjoyed by all, regardless of birding skill level. The tidbits Brian shares are priceless, and participants offer their own stories. Everyone learns!

September 21, 2019, came after a string of gorgeous days. Weather can affect birds' activity and migration. Sometimes, during a storm, migrating birds seek shelter and wait for better weather. Then afterwards, they can be seen as they emerge to forage or continue migrating.



BLACK CAPPED CHICKADEE

Brian explained that "vocalization" is the generic term for bird sounds. Vocalizations can be divided into "songs," mostly used in the breeding season to establish a territory and attract a mate, and "chips," used to warn of predators or simply as a bit of communication between individuals of the same species. Many bird lovers know the Eastern towhee's famous "drink your-tea" song, but that's less common when territory and mating aren't on their minds. In the fall, we're more likely to hear their single-note chip.

We watched a woodpecker fly off, recognized by its sinusoidal flight pattern. We watched a house wren taking a bath in the copious dew on leaves of a bush.

Sapsuckers peck into tree bark (their favorites: cottonwoods, apple, birch), and when the tree oozes sap, the birds suck it up! (Brian saw one in the American elm on Baldwin Hill.) Sapsuckers (usually) create small holes in a circumferential ring; other woodpeckers drill larger holes axially; still others flake bark off to search for insects just beneath it. Hummingbirds and other species opportunistically go to those same holes looking for insects, and, finding none, they suck up the sap, too. Thank you, sapsuckers. For nesting, all woodpeckers excavate cavities in decayed or dead wood.

Birds seen and heard:

- · American crow
- · American robin
- · Black-capped chickadee
- · Blue jay
- · Blue-headed vireo
- · Common raven
- Common yellowthroat
- · Cooper's hawk
- · Downy woodpecker

- Eastern bluebird
- · Eastern phoebe
- · Eastern towhee
- Gray catbird
- · Hairy woodpecker
- · House wren
- · Lincoln's sparrow
- · Magnolia warbler
- · Northern flicker
- · Pileated woodpecker

- · Red-bellied woodpecker
- · Red-tailed hawk
- · Ruby-crowned kinglet
- · Scarlet tanager
- Song sparrow
- · Swainson's thrush
- Turkey vulture
- · White-breasted nuthatch
- Wood thrush



Aunt Rose

Many of us have IRAs, and those who do, including me, hate to have to pay income tax on what we take out of it. We were glad to hear that the IRA Rollover Law has been extended, so that we don't have to pay income tax on charitable donations made directly from our IRAs.

Like most of what Washington does, there are catches. You have to be seventy and a half years old. (That fits me, but perhaps not you.) And you cannot give away more than a total of \$100,000 to all your charities combined. (Although ELT would gladly welcome a contribution of more than a hundred thousand dollars.)

I've heard from my friends at the Metropolitan Museum in New York that this arrangement works well for their patrons, but our readers of course will want to use it for gifts to ELT.

If you're interested, and I hope you are (and of course talk to your own legal adviser—I don't know everything), call the institution that holds your IRA and ask them to send your contribution to the Egremont Land Trust (PO Box 132, South Egremont 01258). It will count toward your required minimum distribution, you won't be paying income taxes on this donation, and you will have done a good deed.

ELT Office

The Egremont Land Trust meets at April Hill, the home of Greenagers, at 62 Undermountain 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.



THE BALDWIN HILL ELM

PLEASE RENEW OR JOIN US!

THIS IS THE TIME FOR MEMBERS TO RENEW THEIR MEMBERSHIP IN ELT!

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 and don't need the envelope to renew, please pass it to a friend who might be interested.

Peg Muskrat, president
Ursula Cliff, vice-president
Maureen Steiner, treasurer
Peggy Barrett
Lois Ginsberg, member emerita
Wendy Linscott
Wendy Linscott
Wendy McCain
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Susan Shapiro
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BENEMAL ENVELOPE ENCLOSED!

