



We hope you enjoy our spring 2023 newsletter with its focus on the Bow Wow Woods project in Egremont. We think you'll enjoy hearing about this exciting project that needs your support.

ELT Letter to Our Community

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

You are receiving this letter because we know you care about your Egremont community. More specifically, we know you care about land conservation.

The Egremont Land Trust (ELT) is the only organization in Egremont with a mission solely focused on conservation of farmlands, forests, wetlands, and wildlife areas in our community, through direct land acquisition and conservation restrictions. We have been doing this work for close to 40 years. Many of you donated to the Baldwin Hill Project in 2012. **Thank you!**

We are now partnering with Greenagers, the Egremont-based conservation, agriculture, and education non-profit focused on young adults, and with the Sheffield Land Trust, to acquire and conserve **Bow Wow Woods**, a 54-acre parcel in Egremont. Greenagers will own the property, use it as an outdoor classroom, and build an easy-to-access public trail for all to enjoy. The two land trusts will jointly hold a conservation restriction to ensure its permanent protection.

Bow Wow Woods is the start of a new phase of conservation in southeastern Egremont and northwestern Sheffield, where we are building a larger landscape vision called the Sheffield-Egremont Agricultural, Ecological and Scenic Corridor. A big name for a big vision! **Bow Wow Woods** connects to over 5,000 acres in this Corridor that are protected by non-profits or by the state and federal government. That adds up to protected space for wildlife to roam, for residents to enjoy and for working farms to continue to provide local food and employment.

The total cost to purchase, conserve, and maintain the property is \$1 million. We have already raised \$800,000 through a combination of foundation grants and gifts from generous individuals. We need **\$200,000** more to reach the \$1 million goal.

Please consider making a donation to the Bow Wow Woods project, either by mail or online at Egremontlandtrust.org. In either case, specify that your donation is for Bow Wow Woods.

Working together we can make a real impact on Egremont's future.

Sincerely,

Peg Muskrat
Chair, Board of Trustees
Jmusk43@live.com

Ethel Patterson
Chair, Fund Development Committee
pattersonethel@gmail.com

In Memoriam 2022

WENDY LINSOTT ☞

Wendy Linscott, a long-time board member of the Egremont Land Trust, died in April 2022. An attorney and passionate local community activist, Wendy practiced law in Great Barrington with her late husband James Lamme. Endlessly generous with her time and intellect, Wendy served the community with pro-bono work for several nonprofits. As an ELT board member, she saw the positive side of life and could be relied on for her unvarnished and thoughtful advice. She will be greatly missed for her enthusiasm, her energy, her friendship, and her undaunted advocacy of ELT's mission.

WALTER C. CLIFF SR. ☞

Almost 40 years ago, Walter Cliff joined a handful of others who came together in Egremont living rooms to form Egremont Environmental Action, which later became the Egremont Land Trust. Walter was deeply committed to land preservation and was involved in designating the first Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in our town, preserving Baldwin Hill, and protecting the Karner Brook watershed. Walter led the way in donating a Conservation Restriction on his own land in 1990. He was involved in a number of other Berkshire nonprofits right up until the time of his death last November. His sage advice and keen sense of humor were invaluable to the mission of the Egremont Land Trust.

Egremont's Comprehensive Plan Fundraising - Bow Wow Woods

This fundraising appeal for Bow Wow Woods complements the work currently being done to update Egremont's Comprehensive Plan. Thanks to all of you who completed the survey and attended the January Workshop. Mark your calendars for the next workshop on March 11. Land use and preservation continue to be a key component of that plan. What better way to show your support than to contribute to the Bow Wow Woods project today!



ATTENTION
please!

**ELT NEWSLETTER
NEW SCHEDULE**

We are in the process of changing the timing of our annual newsletter from spring to autumn. Watch for another ELT newsletter in late autumn 2023, and each autumn thereafter.

Walking Bow Wow Woods with Tom Wessels

Tom Wessels, a terrestrial ecologist, founded a master's degree program in conservation biology at Antioch University. Although his interests include desert, arctic, and alpine ecosystems; evolutionary ecology; and the interface of landscape and culture, most of us here are aware of him because of his interest in, simply, trees. We've read his books (including *Forest Forensics*, *Reading the Forested Landscape*, and *Granite, Fire, and Fog: The Natural and Cultural History of Acadia*), and watched his YouTube videos (e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVvDByTRurA>). So, it was with great excitement that more than 100 of us gathered on a late-September afternoon to walk through Bow Wow Woods with him, and we were not disappointed.

Bow Wow Woods (BWW) is 54 acres of mature, healthy conifers and deciduous trees in Egremont on our border with Sheffield, and it is the newest addition to the Sheffield-Egremont Agricultural, Ecological and Scenic Corridor project (see map). Its diverse ecology results from a combination of dry upland and low wetland forest, and it is home to a number of species protected by the state's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. Its calcareous rock outcrops, rich mesic woods, moderate-fertility wetlands, and potential vernal pools provide important plant and wildlife habitat.

Egremont Land Trust, Sheffield Land Trust, and Greenagers have partnered to accomplish the million dollar purchase. Greenagers will own the property. They will convert the old logging trails into accessible public trails, expand their conservation education programs for area schools, and lovingly maintain the property and its trails. The two land trusts will jointly hold the conservation restriction, thus permanently protecting the property.

WE HAVE YET TO RAISE THE LAST \$200,000! We need it to form a stewardship endowment that will generate \$8,000 to \$10,000 annually to allow Greenagers to manage the property responsibly in perpetuity. Please help! Go to <https://egremontlandtrust.org/to-join-renew-online-mail/>, and remember to put "Bow Wow Woods" in the comments section.

Now, back to Tom and his walk-around. Because parking on Bow Wow Road is limited, participants met at April Hill (on Undermountain Road), and Greenagers provided vans to shuttle us to the BWW site. Tom set out on a convenient logging trail until he reached the first point of interest. He then sent half the people just beyond him, while the other half remained behind, and he stood in the middle, where we could all hear him.

At our first stop, Tom noted a double-trunked white pine. Its trunk was split about 30 feet up—evidence of weevil damage to its leader about 70 years ago. Weevils prefer a sunny location, so we it's likely that this pine stood in open agricultural land in the



TOM WESSELS, PHOTO CREDIT KATHY ORLANDO

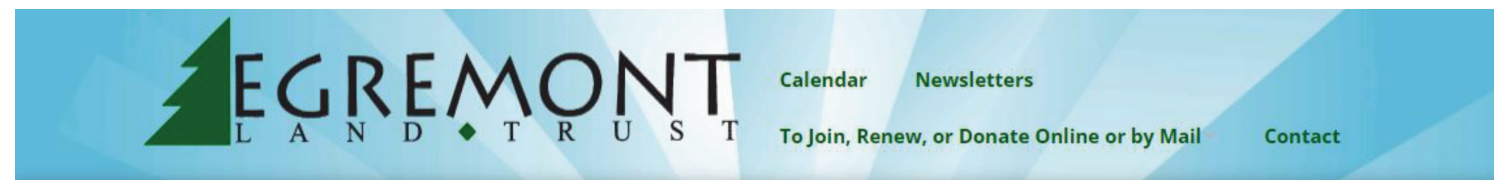
1940s and 1950s. Tom drew our attention to the coarse woody debris littering the ground, home to tremendously valuable decomposers. A single snag (or dead tree) in a woodland can be home to 20,000 species of decomposers, creating incredible biotic diversity.

One of Tom's favorite ideas is the wood-wide web, which describes the layers of communication between the trees in a forest. A major component is mycorrhizal communication, by which fungi in the ground live symbiotically with tree roots, sharing nutrients and conveying information. Trees communicate in other ways, too: When spongy moths tear up oak leaves, a chemical signal is released into the air that tells other oak trees to produce more tannin to protect themselves.

At our second stop along the trail, Tom pointed to a tree with a long wound on its trunk that spiraled vertically up to the left. Spiraling permits the growing tree to offset its limbs for maximal solar gain, instead of having branches set directly over one another. The intensity of this spiral showed that this tree began its growth in the open, where sunlight was abundant. Trees have three times as many light sensors as humans do, which helps increase their solar gain. Hemlocks, for example, can develop limbs wherever they want to capture the available light. Tom calls this biological cognizance, an ability that allows trees to adjust to their environment to survive.

At our third stop, Tom noted the largest canker on a black cherry that he had ever seen, easily 3 ft in diameter, probably formed around a parasitic fungus. He described four kinds of fungi: mycorrhizal, decomposing, parasitic, and lichenizing. We noted several kinds of lichens, and he explained that lichens demonstrate a symbiotic relationship between an alga and two types of fungi. This cryptobiotic relationship permits a lichen to shut down for years if there is insufficient moisture or light. A second symbiotic relationship exists between a tree and the lichens that grow on it, and this changes as the tree grows;

(Continued page 6)



EGREMONT
LAND TRUST

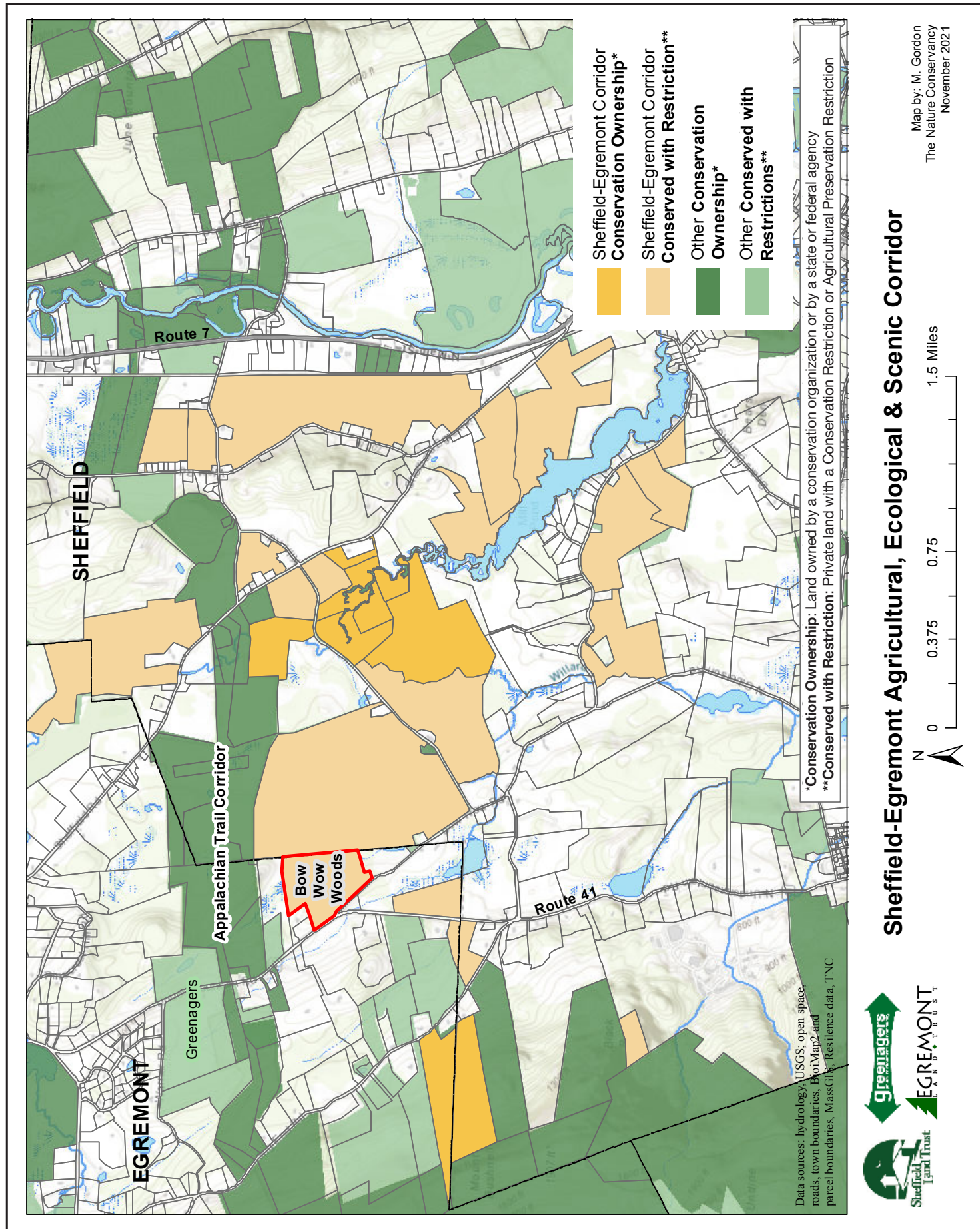
Calendar Newsletters

To Join, Renew, or Donate Online or by Mail Contact

The ELT Website

www.egremontlandtrust.org

Our calendar of events is posted on our website. Our Annual Presentation will take place at French Park in September. We expect to resume our bird, wildflower, and invasive plant walks as soon as possible. Stay tuned! ♦



ELT FALL PRESENTATION

Wingmasters!

At 11 AM on a September morning at French Park, about 120 participants heard Julie Collier describe her raptor rehabilitation group, Wingmasters. Julie and her partner Jim Parks care for injured birds, and if the birds can't be released back into the wild, they provide a home for them and use them for educational programs.

Julie brought three owls (screech, barn, and great-horned), a red-tailed hawk, and two falcons (an American kestrel and a peregrine). Her trip was fraught because the great-horned owl and the red-tail had argued loudly through the whole trip to Egremont!

In her presentation, she emphasized the spiritual connections that Native Americans have with birds of prey, showing us indigenous artifacts that incorporate the birds' feathers.

The biggest problem for raptors, especially hawks, with their hollow bones, is collisions with cars. Rodents crossing a road are easy prey, but if a car is coming when the hawk swoops down, the car wins.

Julie's kestrel is named King Tut because the Egyptian god Horus has the head of a kestrel. Falcons don't soar the way hawks do. They are agile hunters who catch things on the wing, using their tail as a rudder. We have lost about 90% of our falcons, primarily from habitat destruction. The only way to make a difference, Julie said, is to preserve land. (See the article on Bow Wow Woods.)

The feathers in the peregrine falcon's wing feel like plastic, so their flight is noisy. But when they dive for their quarry, as they do at Monument Mountain, they look like crossbows in the air. When a storm drives insects upward, the peregrines dive for smaller birds that pursue the insects.

Red-tailed hawks evolved to catch rodents, including beaver, for which their long sharp talons are useful. When you see a large female soaring and hear her keening, she's not hunting but marking her territory. Her wings can be 4 feet across.

The soda-can-size screech owls are around all year, but their population is dwindling because they are prey for the barred



JULIE WITH RED TAILED HAWK. PHOTO CREDIT LISSA MARGULIES

owl. Owls are thought to be wise, but they're not — they just sit still in trees, where they are camouflaged. Barn owls used to be more common here, before pesticides. Their soft plumage, white under the wings, is so quiet that they seem ghostly. They are rodent-grabbers, and their scream is raspy.

The great horned owl's eggs hatch in March, but they can survive a nor'easter because of an abundance of feathers. Julie's is a 5-lb female capable of tackling a fisher. Her ear-like tufts show her mood: up = alert, down = anger, tilted = relaxed. The great horned watches for movement of white at night — think skunk or cat — and can be dangerous if there are babes in her nest.

We thank Julie of Wingmasters for bringing us this experience, which is barely contained in this brief sketch. Be sure to watch for ELT's fall presentation next September! ♦

Bow Wow Woods (see map on page 4) is an essential link in the Sheffield-Egremont Agricultural, Ecological and Scenic Corridor, a relatively intact natural and rural landscape that extends from the Housatonic River to the Taconic Mountains. So far, the Sheffield and Egremont land trusts have helped families to conserve more than 1,200 acres of spectacular fields, forests, and wetlands in the first four phases of the Corridor project. That land connects to more than 5,000 protected acres, including the Appalachian Trail and the Mount Everett and Jug End State Reservations. The importance of this landscape, and of Bow Wow Woods as the anchor for the fifth phase of the Corridor, is the reason for additional grant support from the Wild East Action Fund, which seeks to accelerate the pace of conservation in the Appalachian Trail corridor.

TOM WESSELS (continued)

for example, lenticels in the bark of a young black cherry tree absorb carbon dioxide from the air, and when the tree matures, those carbonaceous nutrients harbored by the lichens wash down the trunk to the roots when it rains.

Only 30 years after the fungus that caused the American chestnut blight was introduced in 1904, this most important species in our woodlands was decimated. This was accompanied by a significant reduction in the forest diversity formerly supported by the nuts from the chestnuts. Fortunately, our part of Massachusetts is underlain by marble, which keeps our soil from being very acidic and thus enhances the diversity we enjoy. Tom said that present efforts to reestablish the American chestnut are possible because some resistant trees survived. He noted that in the scramble to cut down all our ash trees because they are expected to die anyway from the emerald ash borer, we might kill the trees that would otherwise survive because of genetic resistance.

Tom discussed the mast year phenomenon, which occurs when trees of a given species have built up enough energy over a couple of years to produce a bumper crop of seeds, acorns, or nuts. As an example of the interplay between plants and animals, he told us about the acorn weevil, which drills a tiny hole in the acorn and eats the nutmeat inside, thereby rendering the acorn infertile. Squirrels, which are important oak dispersal agents, ignore the empty acorns and bury only those that will eventually germinate.

Tom noted the exposed roots of several trees growing close together. Sometimes, he said, the roots from different species become grafted together, allowing the trees to share energy. He emphasized the idea of biological cognizance with a description of a 1981 Penn State study about how trees communicate. Two groups of oaks in the study developed tannins in response to a leaf-eating parasite. The arborists noted that even the control group a mile away responded with increased tannin production.

When asked whether we should plant more trees to mitigate global warming, Tom replied that a more efficient strategy would be to preserve older-growth forests. Even after 200 years, old trees take up more carbon than younger ones.

Tom stopped by one of the many stone walls that we find in our woods. These stones were small—fist sized—indicating that this land was used for annual crops such as grains. The small stones were “harvested” by farmers each spring, after the winter’s freeze-thaw cycles brought them to the surface, and used to create walls



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREENAGERS

that defined property lines. On land covered by perennials such as trees, rocks don’t rise to the surface.

Crops in this area before the 1850s were primarily grains, including flax. (A single bedsheet requires the fiber from 1 acre of flax!)

After the 1850s, the expansion of railroads into the Berkshires made dairy farming feasible, because products could now reach larger urban markets. Therefore, much open land was converted to pastureland, requiring fencing, instead of fist-sized-stone walls, to restrain the livestock. Even before dairy farming, “sheep fever” took hold after the Spanish embargo on exporting Merino

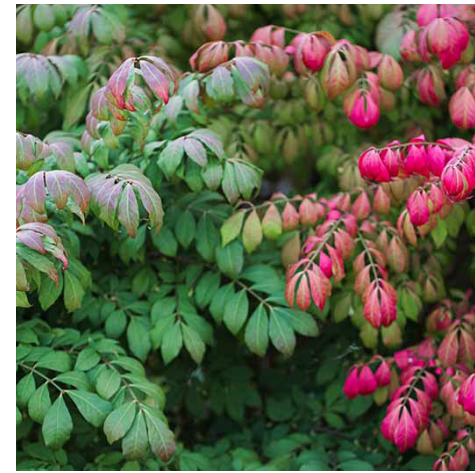
sheep was broken. Thousands of Merinos were exported to the Northeast, which became a major producer of wool textiles. In 1810, only 20% of the land had been open field, but by 1845, 80% had been cleared for pasture. Because so many trees had been cut down, farmers had to use stone walls, often topped with rails or barbed wire. During this period, 130,000 miles of stone walls were built in the Northeast!

This article can’t do justice to Tom Wessels’ talk or to the beauty and value of Bow Wow Woods. We hope you will find the time to visit sometime, and that you will consider contributing to the BWW stewardship endowment via our website, as described above. Thank you!

Fond thanks go to Heidi Shusterman, whose extensive notes, taken as we walked, were essential to this article. ♦

GOING GREEN! We at the Egremont Land Trust 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 (mwexler43@gmail.com).

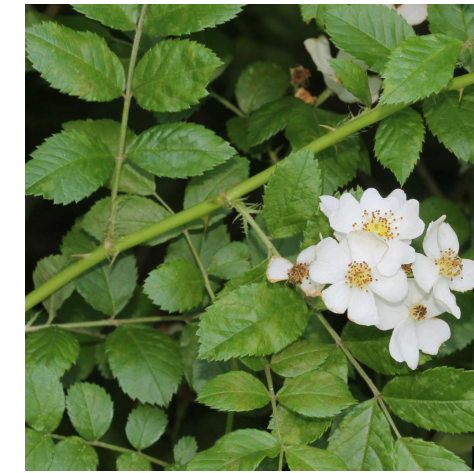
♦ THANK YOU! ♦



BURNING BUSH



GARLIC MUSTARD



MULTIFLORA ROSE

Invasives Walk and Talk with Patrick Riordan

Patrick, a graduate of the Berkshire Botanical Garden Level I Horticultural Certificate program, met us on a fall morning at the Jug End State Reservation on Jug End Road in South Egremont to discuss invasive plants and how to deal with them.

His favorite tools include his Puller Bear, a Canadian product that makes pulling up roots relatively easy; extending clippers by Fiskars; and an extending saw. He showed us how to use alcohol wipes to clean clippers after use, to prevent spreading plant diseases. Because many of us are allergic to poison ivy, he suggested washing with TecNu after working in its vicinity. If the rash develops and is confined to a small area, the topical corticosteroid cream Clobetasol (by prescription) is helpful.

To help protect against ticks, spray gear and clothes with Colman’s permethrin repellent.

Patrick likes the app PictureThis to identify plants he doesn’t know. He also uses this site: www.misin.msu.edu/species-training.

He suggested that we begin attacking the invasives on our own property by taking an inventory of what’s there. He hopes to do the same at Jug End Reservation, at least around the parking lot. Ridding our land of invasives can be a 5-year plan. Limiting the scope to one area at a time, or to the particular invasive that annoys us the most, or to the invasives that are in flower at that moment, will make the task less onerous.

Sometimes, just pulling the invasives isn’t enough, because the bits of roots that remain can sprout new growth in the spring. In such cases, glyphosate can be used, either as a controlled spray (never when it’s windy) or by painting the cut surface of the plant (usually in the fall, when nutrients in the plant tend to go downward). Also, pulling up plants disturbs the soil, exposing hidden seeds to the sun and rain, so they will sprout. Try to tamp down the soil afterward, and even cover it with leaves if possible.

Invasive plants to control:

- Burning bush (winged euonymus) will completely overtake the understory. Unfortunately, it is pretty, and it used to be sold in Massachusetts, so it decorates many yards. Birds eat the berries and disperse them into the woods, where they thrive. (For an example, drive up Prospect Lake Road in the fall and look for the pink bushes in French Park.)
- Bittersweet (so pretty, so destructive).
- Multiflora rose (thorns curve back toward the trunk).
- Buckthorn (Patrick’s nemesis).
- Barberry (mice like to nest under it, so it harbors ticks).
- Morrow’s (or bush) honeysuckle, distinguishable from its noninvasive cousin by its hollow stem.
- Autumn olive grows tall and tree-like.
- Garlic mustard is allelopathic. It sends a message to other plants: Don’t grow here!
- Mile-a-minute vine sends tendrils winding upward, then laterally when they can’t go higher, forming a nest at the top of the plants being enveloped.
- Wild grape is native, but it can damage a tree.

Avoid pulling down wild grape or bittersweet vines because the branches they were clinging to will break, allowing pathogens to enter the tree at the damage sites. Instead, clip out a 1-ft section of the stem and leave the vines above. In time, they will die, dry out, and disappear.

If the plants you collect have gone to seed, bag them in black plastic and then leave the bags in the sun for as long as possible. Don’t toss them where the seeds can find a home, or where birds can eat and disperse them.

To learn more about native plants, Patrick suggests a visit to Garden in the Woods, in Framingham. This 45-acre botanic garden is the headquarters of the Native Plant Trust. ♦



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Egremont Land Trust Online:
www.egremontlandtrust.org

ELT Office

The Egremont Land Trust meets about once a month at April Hill, the home of Greenagers, at 62 Undermountain Road, or by Zoom when necessary. Call our president Peg Muskrat with any questions.

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PHOTOGRAPH BY: PAT KONECKY

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 enclosed 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. Not sure if you have renewed? Email information@egremontlandtrust.org and ask us!