

EGREMONT

L A N D ◆ T R U S T

◆ 2023 FALL NEWSLETTER ◆



FEN SIGN

ELT Properties

The Egremont Land Trust currently owns or manages 11 properties in Egremont. Owned properties comprise 107.55 acres, and we manage an additional 397 acres.

The first property purchased by the Trust is known as the Baldwin Hill Fen. This 9.57-acre wetland includes a nature trail that crosses several spring-fed streams and borders a small pond. Marked by a sign on Baldwin Hill Road South, the Fen is a wildlife preserve—no hunting is permitted—with deer, turkey, mink, foxes, occasional beavers, and many pond and wetland species.

Marked by a sign indicating the Walter Cliff Trail is the 22-acre former Smith property off Egremont Plain Road, which abuts the Green River. This property is managed jointly with the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, which permits hunting during the open seasons, and a portion of it is leased under a management agreement for crop farming. This is the site of ELT's regular wildflower walks as it has abundant native wildflowers. As with many areas in the Berkshires, management of invasive species is a serious challenge.

Another notable property owned by ELT is the combined 58 acres of the former Sabin and Seligman properties on Mt. Washington Road. These two pieces, reaching from the road to the top of the mountain bordering Catamount Ski Resort, are of historical importance, as they are divided by the so-called Indian Line, marking one boundary of the 5/8-mile-



FEN PLANTINGS

wide thoroughway from Sheffield to the New York border, which was ceded to the local Native peoples as a reservation when most of Egremont and Sheffield was inhabited by Dutch and English settlers. This area is steep, providing interesting mountain views and lush stands of mountain laurel.

ELT also owns a piece of land adjacent to the Appalachian Trail, one on Guildler Hollow Road, and another small piece on Mt. Washington Road.

ELT and the Berkshire Natural Resources Council jointly manage approximately 50 acres of land under a Conservation Restriction. It was placed under permanent protection by the Shapiro, McCain, and Kellerman families and is not open to the public.

The Town of Egremont owns 325 acres off Jug End Road, formerly owned by the Friedman family and now jointly managed by ELT along with the Nature Conservancy, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Now known as the Karner Ridge Tract, it is an essential part of the Karner Brook watershed protection area. This beautiful and remote land is extremely sensitive to invasive species and is currently undergoing review for their control and management. A small cabin on the property will be removed under a lease agreement with The Nature Conservancy. Deer, coyotes, and fisher cats have been observed there.

Continued on page 2

ELT Properties (Continued from page 1)

ELT manages, through a Conservation Restriction, an additional 22-acre property on Mt. Washington Road, also in the Karner Brook watershed protection area.

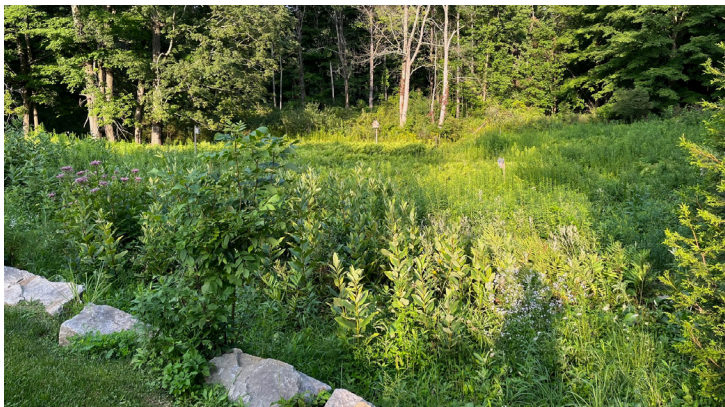
Recently, through a generous gift from the Noonan family, ELT acquired 0.15 acres in the South Village adjacent to the Karner Brook. This piece of land between the Old Mill and Mom's is being restored to pristine condition. It will have a nature walk along the banks of the brook, with lovely overlooks of the stream and opportunities for respite and wildlife viewing just yards away from the busy Route 23.

Together with the Sheffield Land Trust and Greenagers, ELT helped to raise funds for the purchase of 50 acres known as the Bow Wow Woods, off Undermountain Road, a critically important part of the Southern Berkshires Green Corridor. The property was purchased and will be managed by Greenagers, Inc.

With Egremont landowners, ELT continues to discuss providing long-term or permanent protection from adverse development. If you are curious about how to achieve these objectives while maintaining ownership and control of your property, we encourage you to contact ELT to learn more. ♦



BITTERSWEET OVERTAKES TREES



RECLAIMED MEADOW

THE INVASIVE INVASION:

Let's Join Together to Fight Invasives and Bring Back Native

The threat of invasive plants is increasing. They now line nearly every mile of our Egremont roads. They overgrow, block, or poison native species, choke our trees (of nutrients), and offer nothing to most of the insects and animals in our food web, which are not adapted to them. What were once ornamental plants (Oriental bittersweet), or "accidentals" resulting from contamination, are now often the major green cover. The photo on the left is a common sight: trees, shrubs, and understory completely replaced by bittersweet—a blight to the underlying trees and the native food web.

This article is a call for awareness, for observation of our own yards, and for volunteers to help reclaim our land.

Many invasives occur at transition zones—from woods to meadow to road. It can feel overwhelming, an endless blanket. But it's possible to rewild areas that are nearly 100% invasives. We just have to get started!

If you own property, there's a good chance that you have invasives. But there is hope. Just 7 years ago, this meadow (photo, bottom left) was so thick with bittersweet and multiflora rose that you couldn't put your arm through it. Cutting, spraying, and follow-up brush hogging resulted in this native meadow that now has more than 10 species of flowering plants (milkweed, goldenrod, sunflowers), grasses, and ferns. It attracts butterflies, swallows, and a nightly visual symphony of fireflies. Bittersweet is easy to spot and often grows with its evil companion multiflora rose. Limbs can be cut, and young vines can be pulled when it's wet. An effective approach is to prevent invasives from taking root in areas that are mostly native. As you begin to attack the obvious invasives, you'll start to recognize new ones: garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, barberry, common buckthorn. Gardeners are a key source of information and are often happy to discuss their techniques for fighting invasives. Ideally, we can work together to restore our forests, roadways, and meadows, and to lessen the impact of invasives on our precious community.

Call to action:

Let's take back our green spaces! Perhaps we could begin by focusing as a community on a few affected areas. Could Egremont be an example to our neighbors? We might begin by meeting on a Saturday morning to focus on a specific area. If you are interested in joining us, contact Eric Bachman (esbachman@gmail.com).



SPRING Bird Walk at Jug End 2023

An enthusiastic group of eight gathered early on a beautiful May morning at Jug End Reserve in Egremont for a guided bird walk led by Brian Kane, a professional arborist and professor at UMass Amherst with an extensive knowledge of local birds. Brian has led many bird walks for ELT, and we were fortunate to have him again. He was joined by his wife Noel Watkins, a veterinarian and an accomplished birder herself. The pair's infectious enthusiasm was inspiring and made the walk interesting both for those who know a lot about birds and for those who have never been on a bird walk before. Brian has an uncanny ability to imitate bird calls and was very patient in repeating them so that participants could learn to recognize birds by their call—the sign of a true birder. We peppered Brian with questions, which he happily answered, and he was so generous in the use of his scope—setting it up whenever there was a bird in view and encouraging all to have a look.

We ambled through the meadows at the start of the Jug End Loop walk and ventured a little way up the hill. Jug End is a great place to see birds because of the variety of habitats in close proximity—

open meadows, stream, and northern hardwood and Eastern hemlock woodlands. We stopped frequently to get our binoculars on a bird or to see it in Brian's scope.

Highlights included an American kestrel (the kestrel box in the field has five kestrel eggs!) and sightings of two Eastern bluebirds carrying food to their young: one's nest was in a bird box and the other's in a natural tree cavity, which Brian said was quite unusual because bluebirds normally nest in boxes. Another highlight was a Canada warbler—a little unusual—and three male Baltimore orioles competing to mark out their territory. A lively discussion of whether the one we spotted was a Baltimore oriole or an orchard oriole was resolved in favor of the Baltimore. And we learned how to tell the difference between a red tail hawk and a turkey vulture when they are flying very far overhead and only the profile of the bird can be seen. In all, we saw or heard 48 different species of birds (see list below) and were reminded of what an important, diverse, and beautiful habitat Jug End provides for local flora and fauna. We are lucky that it has been preserved and restored to its natural state. ♦

Birds seen and heard:

- Turkey vulture
- Red-tailed hawk
- Mourning dove
- Chimney swift
- Ruby-throated hummingbird
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker
- Northern flicker (*heard only*)
- American kestrel
- Eastern phoebe
- Alder flycatcher
- Eastern kingbird (*heard only*)
- Red-eyed vireo (*heard only*)
- Blue jay
- Tree swallow
- Black-capped chickadee (*heard only*)
- Tufted titmouse (*heard only*)
- White-breasted nuthatch (*female in nest cavity*)
- Blue-gray gnatcatcher (*heard only*)
- House wren (*heard only*)
- Carolina wren (*heard only*)
- Eastern bluebird (*carrying food; in box and in natural cavity*)
- Wood thrush (*heard only*)
- American robin
- Gray catbird
- Cedar waxwing
- European starling
- Ovenbird (*heard only*)
- Louisiana waterthrush (*heard only*)
- Black and white warbler
- Blue-winged warbler
- Common yellowthroat (*heard only*)
- American redstart (*heard only*)
- Magnolia warbler (*heard only*)
- Yellow warbler
- Chestnut-sided warbler
- Canada warbler
- Eastern towhee
- Field sparrow
- Savannah sparrow (*heard only*)
- Song sparrow
- Swamp sparrow (*heard only*)
- Scarlet tanager (*heard only*)
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Northern cardinal
- Red-winged blackbird
- Baltimore oriole
- Brown-headed cowbird
- American goldfinch



AMERICAN KESTREL



GRAY CATBIRD



NORTHERN CARDINAL

ELT Members & Supporters 2023 Many thanks to our loyal supporters, listed below. Without you, our accomplishments would simply not exist. Please renew your membership for 2024, or if you are not already a member, join us. Use the enclosed envelope. We welcome you!

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2023 *(Continued)*

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◆ THANK YOU! ◆

We are grateful for all contributions, and we sincerely apologize if we omitted your name. Please contact us, and we'll make sure it doesn't happen again.

Wildflower Walk 2023

Around 22 people joined naturalist Stephanie Bergman on a beautiful May morning for ELT's wildflower walk. We met at the beginning of the Walter Cliff trail on Route 71. This property along the Green River is owned by the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, and ELT holds the conservation restriction.

We walked across the field, pausing before we reached the Green River to listen to Stephanie explain the importance of the flood plain for absorbing rain.

Stephanie uses the Seek app to identify plants, and we saw many native ones along the way. Trout lily is important for early spring pollinators. Some "colonies" of trout lily are 300 years old. The horsetail scouring-rush contains silica and was used to scour pots long ago. This native has been around for 300 million years. Back then, it would reach 100', but now it's just 3' tall.

We saw two species of violets: the downy yellow and the downy blue. Their seeds are dispersed in two ways: the pods burst open, flinging the seeds like projectiles, or ants eat the seeds and carry them off.

Stephanie pointed out other native plants: trillium (pollinated by carrion flies), wild geranium, foam flower, wood anemone, bloodroot, and early meadow rue. Also, the sessile bellwort (preferred by a particular bee), false hellebore (all parts toxic), blue cohosh (loved by pollinators and once used to induce labor), great angelica, and golden alexander (the host of black swallowtail larvae and loved by all butterflies). We saw Jack-in-the-pulpit, which is pollinated by fungus gnats. The gnats can escape from the male flowers through a hole at the bottom, but they become trapped in the female flowers, which have no exit hole. Toothwort, a medicinal, is required by the white Virginia butterfly to lay its eggs on.



(R-L) DOWNY YELLOW VIOLET, NATIVE RAMP, TOOTHWORT

Our native ramp (wild leek) is edible. However, harvesting the root along with its leaves kills the plant. The best way to harvest ramps is to pick only one leaf per plant.

The invasives that we always see along the river are still there and doing what they do best—spreading. Japanese knotweed, whose roots can go down 8', loves growing along the river. Multiflora rose was brought to the U.S. in the 1800s to stabilize the soil and to create a hedge around farmers' fields. Mugwort, a member of the genus *Artemisia*, is a common ingredient in traditional Asian medicines. In the Middle Ages in Europe, it was considered a magical herb that would protect travelers against evil spirits and wild animals.

Garlic mustard was introduced to North America in the mid 1800s for its medicinal qualities and for erosion control. Because it is in the same family as, and similar to, toothwort, the white Virginia butterflies mistake it for toothwort and lay their eggs on it with a dire result: The mustard's oil kills the emerging caterpillars. Let's end on a happier note—goats love to eat it!

Addendum: We extend heartfelt thanks to Herrington's for the last-minute delivery of a plank so that we could cross the Green River, and to Ari Zorn for helping David lay it in place. And thanks to Bill Turner for mowing a path through the field in time for our walk. ♦

MISSION

Egremont Land Trust

Welcome to the Egremont Land Trust (ELT) newsletter. As you enjoy the stories about the work we are doing and the activities we have organized, please remember that this work is possible only through your donations.

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 acquisition and conservation restrictions. We are doing this work to preserve the distinctive New England rural character of Egremont, for present and future generations.

ELT is also responsible for maintaining and caring for the land under our management, in perpetuity. That costs money.

Members of our Board of Trustees walk each of our properties at least annually, often accompanied by trained professionals from Fisheries and Wildlife or the Berkshire National Research Council. Any land stewardship work that needs to be done is identified and acted on.

This work can involve projects like maintenance of public trails, new native plantings, invasive plant removal, signage for trails and hunting, and selective tree removal and mowing. Several of these projects are described in this newsletter. These services, which are provided by local businesses, are paid for by ELT.

Your contributions fund these projects. As lovers of the beauty of Egremont, please consider donating to the Egremont Land Trust.

You can mail us a check in the envelope tucked into this newsletter, or you can donate online at <https://egremontlandtrust.org/to-join-renew-online-mail/>. *Mother Nature thanks you. We thank you.*



JULIE ANNE COLLIER WITH RED TAILED HAWK (L) AND BLIND SCREECH OWL (R). PHOTO CREDIT: ALISSA MARGULIES

ELT FALL PRESENTATION

Wingmasters!

On a September morning at French Park, about 90 participants came to listen to Julie Collier of the 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 in educational programs.

Julie brought three owls (screech, barred, and great-horned), a red-tailed hawk, and two falcons — an American kestrel and a peregrine. The falcons migrate, but the red-tailed hawk is with us year-round.

About 90% of American kestrels have been lost because liberal use of insecticides is wiping out their primary food source — bugs. However, with fewer kestrels around, the merlin population is increasing. Our sugar maples, which are suffering from global warming, provide holes for merlins to live in, and increased housing development has meant more crows, and merlins feed on baby crows. The merlin's cry is like a car alarm, and even its flight is not silent. It uses its tail as a rudder and its long toes to catch smaller birds in flight.

Peregrine falcons are the fastest animal on the planet. The female is much larger than Karnak, the male that Julie brought — about 4 lb compared to 2.5 lb. Peregrines nest in the horizontal ledges of Monument Mountain. Their flight is fast and flickering, rather than soaring, as they chase flying birds. The females mind the nest while the males hunt. Their long toes reach out and grab the bird, or they form a fist and hit it. They are famous at Boston's Faneuil Hall, where they catch pigeons and are not bothered by their nemesis, the great horned owl.

The red-tailed hawk uses its short, thick, curved talons to catch rodents. Red-tails are territorial — that piercing cry as they soar overhead is not a hunting cry but a marking of their territory. These hawks make messy nests of sticks in white pines. They don't like bright colors, so Julie wears muted tones. Her birds become frightened if we walk toward them with a camera — many of them were hit by cars. Julie told us that if we were to hit one on a highway, it's not our fault. The hawks dive toward rodents and collide with our vehicles. People also have an



impact on hawks via our garbage, which attracts rodents and thus hawks.

Julie's adorable female eastern screech owl weighs only 5 oz, and a male would be even smaller. Their big eyes and ear-like tufts of feathers allow camouflage against a tree trunk. When she is alert, her "ear" tufts are upright; when she's relaxed, they are droopier. She scores high on instinct but not intelligence: if a red-tailed hawk scores a 10 on "smart," an owl scores a 1. Don't use your phone's bird-call app in spring or summer because it interferes with the owls' family life.

The familiar "who-cooks-for-you" call of the barred owl can be a call-and-response, with the female's notes higher than the male's. Julie brought a female barred owl, a medium-size owl without "ear" tufts. It likes wetlands, abundant here because of beavers. They catch rodents, but a chipmunk is their largest prey. In November, they can be seen at dusk; if they were out in daytime, crows might kill them. They can't move their eyes, so they swivel their head, usually to about 180°. Their soft, thick feathers, even on their feet, hold in heat and allow them to fly soundlessly despite their 3-ft wingspan.

Julie's great horned owl is a top predator at night. The female will defend her nesting young, so don't interfere at nesting time. She interprets a moving hand or a sustained stare as a threat. Prey include cats, fishers, Canada geese. The 5-lb female has a higher voice and hoots seven times, whereas the 2.5-lb male gives five hoots in a lower register. Adaptations that make an owl a successful hunter are its flat face with no bony ridges over the eyes, and its feathered eyelids over immovable, forward-facing eyes. When an owl blinks its eyelids and nictitating membranes, it means "Back off."

We are grateful to Julie Collier of Wingmasters for making time to come to Egremont. Next year, go to the ELT website (egremontlandtrust.org) to see details of our 2024 fall presentation. ♦



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ELT Office

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

Egremont Land Trust Online:
www.egremontlandtrust.org

Our calendar is on our website, www.egremontlandtrust.org, where you can find events as soon as they are scheduled. The website is also a great place to donate to ELT. We will not share your information with anyone, no matter how worthy the cause.



PHOTOGRAPH BY: LIZ SULLIVAN

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!