

EGREMONT

L A N D ◆ T R U S T

◆ 2024 NEWSLETTER ◆



VIEW FROM THE STEPS

KARNER BROOK OVERLOOK

Mid-August Update from Alexis Wreden

THE HELICAL PIERS

Wooden posts are no longer allowed by the MassDEP as structural supports in riverfront areas, so the Karner Brook Overlook and decks must be supported by helical piers—metal rods with wide threads. After the first helical pier became stuck in the ledge, we've faced challenges in getting additional piers installed. Months went by and we couldn't find anyone to help until Terry Moore introduced us to Robin Berthet, who, with his crew of Eric and Tim, agreed to work with us. Robin noted that the stone where the piers were to be installed was dolomite, which is powdery and fragile. We were uncertain if we could install the helical piers at all, but Tim and Eric drilled test holes, and the piers were installed several days later. Also, kudos to David Seligman who made a special trip down to the brook early one Tuesday morning to help solve what seemed to be our umpteenth crisis.

WONDERFUL RAILINGS!

The wrought iron railing (see photo) beside the entry steps was installed by a local talented fabricator, Nick Crofut



IRON RAILING INSTALLED

Dillingham. He will return to install the railings on the Overlook deck and steps. The railings are as attractive as they are functional, and now going up and down the entry steps is a breeze! Thanks to Maureen Steiner for expediting payment to our artisans and carpenters.

UP NEXT

Peg Muskrat visited the site the day the entry stone step, wooden screen, and drainage stones were finally completed. We discussed a suitable stain color for the air conditioner screen, and finding a local talent to build the three benches that will honor the many donors, and of course Terry. Thanks to carpenter Bradley Tryon, whose help with construction repair has been so appreciated. We will submit bench design sketches for ELT approval in September.

Robin and his crew will build the decks out of a black locust. It was sent to Will Conklin of Greenagers for milling, along with a cut list. It will probably be ready by early September.

We have found a contractor who may help us with the large steppingstones required at each end of the raised walk and decks. It's a small job by contractor standards and often not worth their trouble, but they sometimes enjoy participating in a community project, so fingers are crossed.

The wheels on our project are turning! ◆

ELT Fundraising

We hope you enjoy the many articles in this newsletter about the meaningful work being done and educational activities being organized by the Egremont Land Trust. Remember that this work is possible only through your donations.

ELT is the only organization in Egremont with a mission focused solely on conservation of farmlands, forests, wetlands, and wildlife areas in our community, through either direct acquisition or conservation restrictions. This work is done to preserve the distinctive New England rural character of Egremont. That means protected space for wildlife to roam, for residents to hike, and for working farms to continue to provide local food and employment.

Members of our Board are regularly initiating conversations with property owners to encourage them to consider a conservation option for their land. Most recently, we contributed the final \$10,000 needed to complete the acquisition of 30 acres of property abutting Smiley's Pond that was acquired for conservation by Mass. Fisheries and Wildlife (see "Land Protection" in this issue of the newsletter). Please contact us if you would like to learn more about conserving part or all of your land.

What our community may be less aware of is that ELT is also responsible, in perpetuity, for maintaining and caring for the land we hold under a conservation restriction. This work involves public trails maintenance, new native plantings, invasive plant removal, signage for trails, selective tree removal, and mowing. Invasive plant removal, including bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, multiflora rose, and garlic mustard, has become a particular area of concern. Please watch for future ELT-organized community volunteer and educational initiatives focused on the identification and removal of these plants.

Your contributions fund these projects. Donations are our only source of revenue. We hope you, as individuals who care about our community and land conservation, will consider donating to the Egremont Land Trust. Mother Nature thanks you. Your community thanks you. We thank you. ♦

Bow Wow Woods Update

Bow Wow Woods is the latest addition to the Sheffield-Egremont Corridor, an ongoing project of the Egremont and Sheffield land trusts. In early 2021, a lovely wooded 54-acre parcel on Route 41 in Egremont, bordering Sheffield, came on the market. In short order, the two land trusts and a third partner, Greenagers, which is located almost directly across the road, joined to purchase it. Just a year later, Greenagers owned the property, with the two land trusts jointly holding a conservation restriction.

Over the past 18 months, a raft of Greenagers trail crew members have been working on the property. These youth cut new trails, improved existing ones, added a small three-car parking lot, and installed a kiosk. A map will be available at the kiosk this fall, but the trail system is ready to be walked by visitors! ♦

Egremont Land Trust Luncheon

ELT's 2024 mid-May luncheon at the Old Mill will be, alas, our last. Terry Moore, along with Ginny Filkins and their staff, have generously hosted a fund-raising luncheon for ELT members every spring for 20 years (except during covid). But now, Terry and Ginny are retiring, so this event turned into a celebration of them and the Old Mill!

As always, the food and the service were excellent. Lunch began with a mixed green salad with spring vegetables and a sherry-Dijon vinaigrette. The entrée was a choice between pan-roasted Atlantic cod (spinach, pine nuts, capers, raisins, lemon-butter sauce) and roast breast of chicken (asparagus, morels, mashed Yukon golds, tarragon jus). Dessert was either Terry's famous profiteroles au chocolat or lemon pound cake (with crème fraîche, fresh blueberries). We know your mouth is watering!

Our speaker was Terry himself, who began by denying he was a public speaker, exclaiming, "I make soup for a living!" Then he lovingly described how he first found this late-18th-century mill building and, after fits and starts but with determination, turned it into the restaurant we have loved since 1978.

Terry turned the floor over to Alexis Wreden and Robbie Fakelmann, owners of Workingdesign, their architectural and landscape design business in South Egremont. Alexis and Robbie are spearheading Terry's pet project—the Karner Brook Overlook—on a strip of land adjacent to the restaurant and along Karner Brook. This land, donated to ELT by Linda & Bob Noonan for this purpose, will be transformed into a lovely walk, where we can take a break from the hustle and bustle and just contemplate among native trees and other plants. It will be lovely! Peg announced that ELT will buy a bench for the site with a plaque that honors Terry. She also expressed our gratitude to Ginny with a gift certificate to Ward's.

Terry highlighted the presence at the luncheon of Ursula Cliff, explaining that she and her late husband Walter, founders of ELT, were two of his favorite people, and that he was lucky to be able to host them frequently at the Old Mill. Peg further noted that two of our newest ELT board members represent a second generation.

Thus, the luncheon was a bittersweet event. We will all miss Terry and Ginny—their restaurant and their generosity. We are so grateful that we have been able to enjoy this 20-year tradition of ELT luncheons at the Old Mill. ♦



SPRING Bird Walk at Jug End 2024

On a beautiful, late-May morning, experienced and beginner birders—30 of us, a record number—gathered 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 feel very fortunate that he makes time for us. He was joined by his wife Noel Watkins, a veterinarian and an accomplished birder herself. The pair's warmth and enthusiasm were inspiring.

Because the group was so large, we spent some time in the parking lot of Jug End Reserve (see photo), where Brian gave us some 5ps on using binoculars: When you spot a bird, keep your eyes on it and raise the binocs to your eyes. To describe where you see the bird, use clockface numbers: "At 1:00 from that tall pine." As we stood there, he identified a surprising number of birds, often by their vocalizations—their calls or their chip notes, the latter used during flight—and, when possible, by sight. Brian carries a large scope on a tripod, which he trains on a bird for those who didn't bring their binocs. He assured us that birds aren't scared away by normal conversation.

One of the first he identified was the red-eyed vireo, which calls, "Here I am, where are you?" throughout the day and the season. Birds use such calls to establish their territory, turning their heads to cover a full 360°, and early morning is the best time to hear them. There's also a seasonal sweet spot for bird-watching—when the birds are arriving but the trees haven't yet leafed out.

Some birds are named for the sound of their call—for example the Eastern wood peewee. Other memorable calls we heard include the chestnut-sided warbler's ("pleased-pleased-pleased-to-meetcha" repeated very fast), the goldfinch's ("potato chip"), and the red-bellied woodpecker's (brrr-brrr). The rosebreasted grosbeak has a call like an operatic robin and a chip note like the squeak of a sneaker on a gym floor. The eastern kingbird sounds like electrical sparking; it has a beet-red streak on its crown. Both the chickadee and the phoebe say "fee-bee," but the former's call sounds like a whistle and the latter's more like a song.

Brian cautioned us not to use apps that play bird vocalization, because the birds will experience distress and avoid nesting nearby if they sense that a rival has already claimed that territory. On the other hand, "pishing" is fine—it simply makes them curious, and they might hop out of the undergrowth and become visible.

Experienced birders use the bird's silhouette more than its color because color depends on lighting. The Baltimore oriole looks less orange in the shade.

If your willow has rings of holes around the trunk, blame the yellow-bellied sapsucker, drilling for sap.

As we walked farther along the trail at Jug End Reserve, we saw one of the 54 kestrel boxes placed by Ben Nickley of the Berkshire Bird Observatory, a nonprofit organizaon, www.berkshirebirds.org. The

boxes are carefully constructed and sited, with the hole 10 feet 6 inches off the ground. This year, Ben's third on this project, there are 15 confirmed kestrel parent pairs. He bands the babies at 29 days after the eggs are laid, using colored bands, which can be easily recognized. Banding doesn't disturb the babies or the parents.

In all, we saw or heard 48 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. ♦

Birds seen and heard:

- Mallard
- Great blue heron
- Turkey vulture
- Red-tailed hawk
- Mourning dove
- Red-bellied woodpecker
- Northern flicker
- Downy woodpecker
- Pileated woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker
- American kestrel
- Eastern wood-pewee
- Eastern kingbird
- Willow flycatcher
- Alder flycatcher
- Red-eyed vireo
- Warbling vireo
- Blue jay
- Tree swallow
- Black-capped chickadee
- Eastern bluebird
- Wood thrush
- Veery
- American robin
- Cedar waxwing
- European starling
- Gray catbird
- Ovenbird
- Louisiana waterthrush
- Blue-winged warbler
- Common yellowthroat
- American redstart
- Yellow warbler
- Chestnut-sided warbler
- Prairie warbler
- Eastern towhee
- Field sparrow
- Song sparrow
- Scarlet tanager
- Rose-breasted grosbeak
- Indigo bunting
- Red-winged blackbird
- Common grackle
- Brown-headed cowbird
- Baltimore oriole
- American goldfinch



WILLOW FLYCATCHER



AMERICAN REDSTART

ELT Members & Supporters 2024 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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◆ 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.

Going Green

We at the Egremont Land Trust continue to collect email addresses so that we can save paper (and 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!

Wildflower Walk 2024

We continue to be very fortunate to have our spring wildflower walks led by Stephanie Bergman, who holds a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's in environmental education and is now director of development for Berkshire Grown. Stephanie pointed out a host of beautiful wildflowers as we walked the Walter Cliff trail to the Green River.

Trillium with its three-petal blossom can take up to 7 years to flower. A single plant can live for up to 25 years, so don't pick them—"stinking Benjamin," the dark-red one, is extremely fragile and will be harmed even by an attempt to transplant it. Trillium is spread not by bees or birds but by ... ants! They carry the seed away, eat the fatty covering, and leave the interior in their compost heap, where eventually it takes root and then produces a flower.

We also saw tons of violets, including the less common yellow violet. They all seemed extra robust and tall. The tiny blue clustered forget-me-nots spread so easily as to be almost invasive. We saw bloodroot and wood anemone, which both have pretty, white petals with a yellow center so are often mistaken for one another.

It was distressing to see so many invasive plants and learn about their dangers. For example, invasive garlic mustard was introduced to North America from Europe and Asia in the mid 1800s for its herbal and medicinal qualities and for erosion control. It resembles toothwort, a spring wildflower that provides critical food for a rare native butterfly called the West Virginia white. The population of this butterfly has fallen because they mistake garlic mustard for their true diet and lay their eggs on its leaves, and those leaves are toxic to the hatching caterpillars. It's easy to pull up, but be sure to do this before it goes to seed (seeds remain viable for up to 10 years), and get the entire root.

Similarly, the highly invasive and nonnative bittersweet produces berries that birds mistake for their traditional local diet.

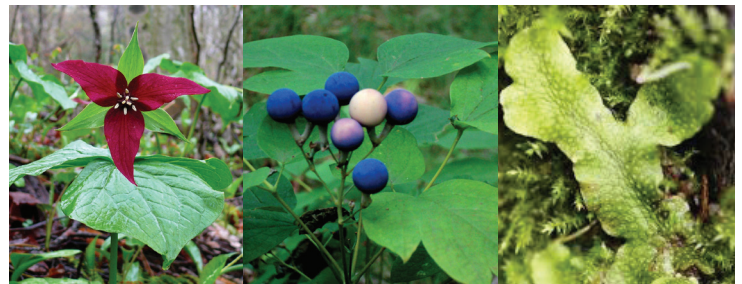
Unfortunately, the bittersweet berries do not have the nutritional value of the native berries, so the birds that eat them begin their migration undernourished and low on energy.

Dandelions provide nectar and pollen to honeybees and other beneficial insects, which is especially valuable in the early spring. Angelica is a genus of about 90 species of aromatic herbs, both biennial and perennial, in the carrot family. Native to the Northern Hemisphere, they are valuable for our pollinators, especially butterflies.

Blue cohosh, a perennial herbaceous wildflower, is typically found in oak or maple woodlands. It is valued for its lacy blue-green foliage and clusters of blue fruit-like seeds. In the past, it was used to induce labor. Horsetail, another perennial, has been with us since dinosaur times, 300 million years ago. It is instantly recognized by its resemblance to a horse's tail, and it reproduces by spores.

Plants with the suffix "wort" (toothwort, mugwort, liverwort, lungwort, bladderwort) were considered beneficial for the part of the human anatomy their flowers resembled. Although the Old English word "wort" simply meant plant, root, or herb, it implied a medicinal plant, as opposed to a weed, such as ragweed, knotweed, or milkweed.

We also met various types of mayflies in the Green River. The water was crystal clear and very inviting—a lovely place to bring kids to explore nature. ♦



(R-L) TRILLIUM, BLUE COHOSH, LIVERWORT

Land Protection

In February 2024, ELT was contacted by Peter Milanesi, Land Acquisitions Agent for the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, regarding the desire of the Commonwealth to purchase property on Hillsdale Road that borders on existing protected areas. The State had authorized a maximum of \$300,000 for the purchase of approximately 30 acres and was in negotiations with the landowners and the realtor, ultimately arriving at a final purchase price of \$310,000. At this point, recognizing the significant ecological value of the property and its adjacency to Smiley's Pond and other lands protected by the State and the Nature Conservancy, the ELT Board authorized the donation of \$10,000 to meet the purchase price.

Although the Land Trust principally seeks to have property donated to us or to be placed under Conservation Restriction rather than purchasing land outright, we feel that it is in keeping with our mission to assist other agencies and conservators in protecting significant lands. Most recently, the Land Trust received a donation of the land that is now being developed as a park along Karner Brook, and along with the Sheffield Land Trust we provided financial support for the purchase of the Bow Wow Woods property now owned by Greenagers. All of these activities add to the protection of land in Egremont in accordance with the priorities established in the recently approved Egremont Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Land acquisition by the Commonwealth is a complicated process, but by June, all the i's were dotted and t's crossed, and on June 25 the closing was completed at the Registry of Deeds in Great Barrington. The Egremont Land Trust is pleased to have played a role in the protection of another significant area in our Town. ♦

ELT FALL PRESENTATION

Tom Tynning

On a gray September morning at French Park, ELT President Peg Muskrat introduced Tom Tynning, herpetologist, to a crowd of more than 40 people. Tom's passion has been snakes and turtles since growing up in the Connecticut River Valley. He studied wildlife biology at UMass Amherst and later worked for Mass Audubon for 24 years. Since 1999, he's been a professor of environmental science at Berkshire Community College. As usual, he shared fascinating tidbits about the reptiles and amphibians he loves.

The timber rattlesnake can be found in the southern parts of Egremont and in Mount Washington. When people bring Tom these snakes, he obtains a sample of their DNA and, if they're alive, he microchips them.

The most-often-killed snake in Berkshire County is the Eastern milk snake, an egg-laying snake found in stone walls and barns. Typically nocturnal, they eat small mammals (mice) and other snakes, which they kill by constriction. Their coloration is particularly bright after they shed their skin, and their eyes and tongue are brilliant red.

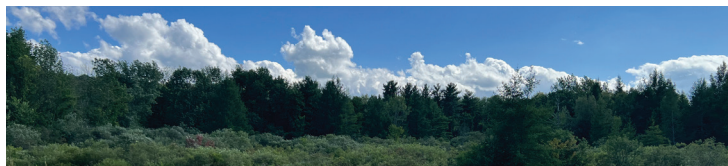
The most common snake in Berkshire County is the garter snake, a live-bearing snake that catches its prey by the grab-and-swallow method. It eats ant pupae and sometimes frogs. Another live-bearing snake is the brown snake, which eats slugs, which are not native to New England.

The ventral side of ring-necked snakes is bright yellow, which also encircles their neck. A slight indentation about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way from the head to the tip of the tail indicates the beginning of the tail section. Males have longer tails than females.

Tom showed us a beautiful painted turtle that he had rescued from the road (NB: turtles don't run out in front of cars!). He showed us its long front claws, with which the courting male grabs the female's head and massages her face and neck. A clutch can have 30 eggs, and the turtles can live 50 to 60 years.

Tom brought Larry, an Eastern box turtle that had had a small crack in its shell resulting from a run-in with a car. Although they are found everywhere else in Massachusetts, Eastern box turtles are not naturally found in Berkshire County, so Tom didn't release it. Instead, he had a student take it—for 13 years. Turtles shed as they grow, but they don't shed their whole shell, just a surface layer, leaving behind something like tree rings at the edge of the scute, so that their age can be determined.

We are grateful to Tom Tynning. We could truly have listened to his stories for hours! ♦



TOM TYNNING WITH A TURTLE AT THE FALL PRESENTATION

IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM!

Living with a Changing Climate and Invasive Plants in Egremont

1. **A new initiative** at ELT involves increasing awareness and gaining community support to address the problem of invasive plants. One philosophical but practical point of view is that, although we may not be able to eradicate invasives, we can learn to manage them and **reclaim a habitat that's mostly native**. After all, Massachusetts was largely deforested in the last 100 years, so we are rewilding anyway!

2. **How will our climate change?**

Climate models (University of Maryland, www.umces.edu/futureurbanclimates) allow us to glimpse how the climate might be different in 60 years. For example, the nearby city of Kingston, NY (similar to Pittsfield, MA), puts us in temperate forest about 11° F warmer in 2080. How might we design plantings to anticipate this kind of change? Will fossil fuels be a factor by then?

3. **Be part of the solution.**

ELT and local folks who are interested in grassroots approaches can brainstorm and effect solutions together. We've already begun conversations with conservationists in Mount Washington and the Commonwealth (Mass DCR) to determine ways to approach the problem, and our Egremont Conservation Commission is supportive. We are all becoming more aware of invasives as their visibility increases—just drive along our roads to see bittersweet, right, infesting ash trees. Express your interest by contacting Eric Bachman at esbachman@gmail.com.

4. **What are you seeing** in your front or back yard or on roadsides? Here are a few of the usual suspects:

Garlic mustard is allelopathic, meaning that its foliage releases a chemical that inhibits the growth of native plants.

Oriental bittersweet, formerly sold as an ornamental, has spread to all of our roads and parks, wherever there is bare soil.

Multiflora rose forms an impenetrable barrier, even to local wildlife (see both sides of the Jug End parking lot). ♦



RENEWAL ENVELOPE ENCLOSED!

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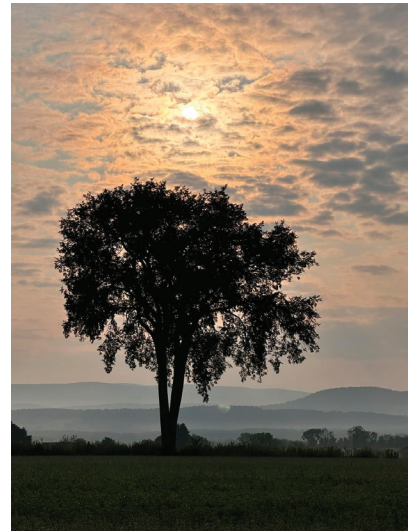
ELT Office

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 MOMMARAZZI IMAGES: DEB BURDSALL

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!