

EGREMONT

L A N D ◆ T R U S T

◆ 2025 NEWSLETTER ◆



MIKE BALD, OWNER AND FOUNDER OF "GOT WEEDS?"



JAPANESE KNOTWEED

CONTROL OF INVASIVES

Presentation by Mike Bald, Owner and Founder of "GotWeeds?"

Begun in 2011 in Royalton, VT, the mission of GotWeeds? is to manually perform organic removal of non-native species. Private landowners, businesses, and municipalities contract with Mike to survey a site, determine tactics and approach, and return each year to remove the undesirable plants manually.

About 40 people gathered in the barn at Greenagers in South Egremont on April 19, 2025, to hear Mike's ideas about how to control invasives without chemicals. His introduction to this idea came from the MA branch of the Northeast Organic Farmers Association, which inspired him to go down the path of organic land care.

Mike stressed that working safely outside is of utmost importance. Some things to watch out for: poison ivy, old steel posts, barbed wire, and overhead branches that have weakened and can fall because they are entangled with heavy vines.

At the top of the list of really pesky invasives are Japanese

knotweed, multiflora rose, and Oriental bittersweet. Mike's method involves a lot of manual labor, so he develops a longterm plan for invasive control. He cuts back Japanese knotweed monthly during the growing season; doing this over several years will eventually kill the root system. For multiflora rose, he recommends stressing the plant by cutting them back three times over a 2-year growth period. This weakens the root system and also prevents them from seeding. Other options were grazing goats or torching the base of the plants (the latter by a professional!). Mike keeps detailed spreadsheets for all the properties he works on, which he advises homeowners to do.

One of Mike's goals when dealing with invasives is to minimize soil disturbance so as not to create newly opened spaces for dormant seeds of other invasives, such as stilt grass and garlic mustard, to take root. Invasive seeds are viable for many years: the seeds of goutweed, another difficult invasive, are viable for 15 years! This is why Mike does not generally recommend digging up invasives unless you are planting native replacements or have a healthy understory.

Mike says that landscapes are healthiest and most resilient when they have strong biodiversity.

The best way to contact Mike is by email: choosewiselyvt@gmail.com.◆

ELT Bird-Banding Event

Egremont Land Trust members were treated to a migratory bird banding session by Berkshire Bird Observatory's (BBO's) Executive Director Ben Nickley. We gathered at the car park of Jug End State Reservation and walked up the trail for a few minutes before going down a path to the banding station. Banding involves raising very fine "mist nets" that the birds fly into and are then retrieved by Ben and the team for data collection. They check the nets every 30 minutes for 6 hours, starting at sunrise, and then take them down. All banding, marking, and sampling is conducted under a federally authorized Bird Banding Permit issued by the U.S. Geological Survey's Bird-Banding Lab. Fun fact: The use of mist nets in the United States was first introduced in the Berkshires. A local schoolteacher observed the nets being used on a trip to England and brought some home.

Once in hand, the birds are weighed and measured. Their plumage is examined for molting and approximate age, and their fat reserves are checked. Then they are banded with a uniquely numbered tiny aluminum band and released. Data is fed into a federal data base, which allows Ben and other scientists to monitor the age-structure and health of bird populations and to glean information on their stopover ecology. Birds are particularly important to monitor because they are early indicators of ecological change.

Ben considers education as important as data collection, and he is indeed bursting with knowledge and a contagious passion for our birds and their amazing habitat at Jug End in Egremont. ELT members learned that the sometimes-maligned bluejay is responsible for the many oak trees in the Berkshires. Like squirrels, bluejays hide caches of acorns for later consumption, but they sometimes forget where they have hidden the nuts, which then grow into trees. We also learned that the despite weighing a mere 6 grams (as much as a piece of chewing gum), the tiny ruby crowned kinglet flies all the way from its breeding grounds in the boreal forests of northern Canada to its wintering grounds as far south as Central America. Ben explained that Jug End is a migratory "resting" area. Migratory birds stay at Jug End for days or weeks getting nourishment and waiting for the best weather conditions to continue their migration, mostly to South America.

Ben said that he scouted many different sites before settling on Jug End, located at the northern end of the South Taconic massif, which he says has the perfect stop-over conditions for migratory birds. The surrounding forested mountains provide a continuous supportive environment for the birds, with a suite of habitats that promote bird diversity: old fields, successional growth orchards, shrub swamp, and a brook. The BBO at Jug End is one of only four bird observatories in Massachusetts and the only one in the Commonwealth that monitors forest birds—the other three focus on shore birds.

Jug End's 1100 acres and their unique environment were saved by the ELT from a developer's proposal for 605 housing units in 1985. After several years of complicated proceedings, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management and the Division of



BEN SHOWING THE GROUP "MIST NETS"

Fisheries and Wildlife acquired the property and established the Jug End State Reservation and Wildlife Management Area, which can be enjoyed by all—especially the migratory birds!

For more information about the BBO or to make a tax-deductible donation, please visit berkshirebirds.org. ♦

MISSION Egremont Land Trust

We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all the members and donors who support the Egremont Land Trust.

Our mission includes the 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 so wildlife can roam, residents can hike, and farms can continue to provide locally grown food and employment.

ELT is responsible for maintaining and caring for the land under our management. In the upcoming year, we will be particularly focused on invasive plant removal, which will help native species and pollinators thrive.

Watch for roadside signage for bittersweet removal from roadside trees. We'll be welcoming volunteers. We are also working on a loosestrife removal and containment plan for the Fen, a wetland property with a short (often wet) public trail, located on Baldwin Hill North/South between Rte 23 and Townhouse Hill Road.

Your tax-deductible contributions fund these projects along with the free educational activities described in the stories in this Newsletter. Donations are our only source of revenue. 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. Your community thanks you. We thank you.

From Ethel Patterson, Chair of the Fund Development Committee

SPRING Bird Walk at Jug End 2025

On May 17, 2025, about 24 men, women, and children attended the ELT's annual spring bird walk at Jug End Reserve in South Egremont. It was led by Brian Kane, professor of commercial arboriculture and urban forestry at UMass Amherst, and we are very lucky to have him. Brian's attention to detail and enthusiasm made for a wonderful experience. His ability to recognize birds by their songs and calls was inspiring, and, as usual, he shared many fascinating tidbits about the species we observed. We saw or heard 54 species, listed below. A highlight was seeing several birds through Brian's spotting scope, a first for some of the attendees. Many thanks to Brian for coming back again for this wonderful walk!

PS: Reminders for next year: Bring your binoculars (if you have them) and insect spray. ♦



CANADA GOOSE



RED BELLIED WOODPECKER



GRAY CATBIRD



ORCHARD ORIOLE

Birds seen and heard:

- Canada Goose 10
- Wood Duck 6
- Mallard 2
- Wild Turkey 2
- Mourning Dove 5
- Chimney Swift 10
- Ruby Throated
- Hummingbird 1
- Turkey Vulture 3
- Broad-Wing Hawk 1
- Red-Tail Hawk 1
- Red Bellied Woodpecker 1
- Downy Woodpecker 1
- Northern Flicker 1
- Alder Flycatcher 2
- Eastern Kingbird 1
- Red Eyed Vireo 3
- Blue Jay 3
- Fish Crow 2
- Common Raven 1
- Black Capped Chickadee 2
- Tufted Titmouse 2
- Tree Swallow 1
- White Breasted Nuthatch 1
- Northern House Wren 1
- Carolina Wren 2
- Gray Catbird 5
- Eastern Bluebird 2
- Veery 1
- Wood Thrush 1
- American Robin 5
- Cedar Waxwing 3
- American Goldfinch 2
- Chipping Sparrow 2
- Field Sparrow 1
- Song Sparrow 2
- Swamp Sparrow 1
- Eastern Towhee 1
- Orchard Oriole 1
- Baltimore Oriole 4
- Red-Winged Blackbird 10
- Brown-Headed Cowbird 4
- Common Grackle 5
- Ovenbird 2
- Louisiana Waterthrush 1
- Northern Waterthrush 1
- Blue-Winged Warbler 1
- Common Yellowthroat 5
- American Redstart 2
- Northern Parula Warbler 1
- Yellow Warbler 3
- Chestnut-Sided Warbler 2
- Scarlet Tanager 2
- Northern Cardinal 1
- Rose-Breasted Grosbeak 2



SCARLET TANAGER

ELT Members & Supporters 2025 Many thanks to our loyal supporters, listed below. Without you, our accomplishments would simply not exist. Please renew your membership for 2025, 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 2025

Learning the Language of the Forest

On ELT's annual guided wildflower walk through a protected stretch of forest along the Green River, we were surrounded by spring wildflowers. Stephanie Bergman, who holds degrees in biology and environmental education, gave us a fascinating lesson in botany, ecology, and cultural history.

Jack-in-the-pulpit has both male and female plants. The male flower has a clever escape hatch for pollinators, allowing them to slip out the back after gathering pollen. The roots of bloodroot ooze a striking red latex once used as dye. Hepatica's leaf shape resembles the human liver, tying it to the ancient "Doctrine of Signatures" — the belief that a plant's appearance indicates its healing properties. The stinking Benjamin trillium smells like rotting meat, thus attracting flies, its primary pollinators. It offers no nectar: the flies are duped.

Other native species added to the tapestry: wild geranium, wood anemones (which take 5 to 7 years to flower from underground rhizomes), foam flower with its delicate tiara-like bloom, and coltsfoot, brought over by settlers to treat coughs and other lung ailments. Trout lily colonies can be 300 years old.

Flowering toothwort, once used by Native Americans as a spice, is vital to the West Virginia white butterfly. When the butterflies mistakenly lay their eggs on invasive garlic mustard instead, the larvae don't survive. This misidentification has contributed to the butterfly's decline.

Invasive plants, including the charming forget-me-not, crowd out local flora. Garlic mustard, brought by settlers for food and erosion control, alters soil chemistry and suppresses native fungi, giving it an unfair advantage over native species. It spreads quickly, and the seeds persist in the soil up to 10 years.

Lesser celandine, another terrible invasive, spreads not just by seed but also by bulbs. Goutweed (bishop's weed), introduced as ground cover, now smothers native flora and resembles native golden Alexander, a valuable early food source for short-tongued insects due to its shallow shape that allows them to reach the nectar.

Other invasives like Japanese knotweed, which can grow 2 feet in a week, and multiflora rose, introduced for erosion control

and livestock fencing, show how human intentions can go awry in ecological systems. Japanese barberry contributes to the rise of tick populations by creating habitats for the white-footed mouse, a key host in the Lyme disease cycle. Still, the forest shows resilience. We noticed yellow avens fighting back against garlic mustard, a hopeful sign.

Alongside the woods, a field of corn and soybeans showed how land use impacts ecosystems. Soybeans fix nitrogen in the soil, but they deplete other nutrients, as does corn. So farmers plant vetch, clover, and rye during off-seasons to restore nutrients and prevent erosion.

Closer to the river, riparian forests shade the water, regulate temperature, and return nutrients to aquatic ecosystems. Plants here, like marsh blue violets, are adapted to wet conditions. Violets have a fascinating reproductive strategy: their seeds are spread by ants attracted to a fatty structure called an elaiosome. After the ants eat the fatty part, they discard the seed in their compost piles — perfect for germination.

Some plants date back to prehistoric times. Scouring rush (horsetail) is an ancient plant that reproduces via spores rather than seeds. Settlers used it to scour pots. The roots of false hellebore have been used cautiously in traditional medicine to slow the heart, and they can act as an insecticide.

Some plants were used in cultural practices: Blue cohosh, from an Algonquin word meaning "rough," was used to induce labor. Serviceberry trees bloom when the ground thaws enough to dig a grave, hence the "service" part. Solomon's plume (aka false Solomon's seal) grows from an underground rhizome system once used by Native Americans to treat a variety of ailments including rheumatism.

A fascinating fact about dandelions may make you see them in a different light. Brought here by settlers (they are neither native nor invasive), they were used as a diuretic and thus are called "pissenlit" in France. Ramps, a wild allium prized for its flavor, are so popular that they must be harvested responsibly: just one leaf per plant, never the bulb, and only from abundant patches. Respecting the forest means understanding the interconnections — the soil, the species, and us.

This walk wasn't just about identifying wildflowers — it was about learning to see. Each plant carries a story: of survival, of displacement, of healing, or of danger. Together, they form the language of the forest — a language worth preserving. ♦



(R-L) TRILLIUM, WILD GERANIUM, LESSER CELANDINE, TROUT LILY, MULTIFLORA ROSE

ELT FALL PRESENTATION

Animals and Us

About 45 people came to the lovely blue barn at April Hill, the home of Greenagers, to hear ELT's 2025 fall presentation speaker, Jen Leahey. Jen operates Nature Matters, based at an organic dairy farm in Lee, which she owns with her husband. She believes that the more we connect with animals and the outdoors, the more we will understand, love, and take care of our world. Half the animals she brought were local critters. Most of them are "rehab flunkies," meaning they can't be released back into the wild. She is licensed by the state to keep them and to educate us about them. They are her wildlife ambassadors.

Jen unfolded a pillowcase to reveal Darla, a beautiful orange and yellow corn snake, maybe 4 feet long. They are called corn snakes because farmers put them in their corn cribs to catch mice. There are 14 snake species native to Massachusetts, and 10 of them are endangered. Darla is a favorite of Jen's, and she pointed out that the personalities of animals differ just like they do in humans.

Next Jen brought out Marcilene, a very fuzzy, long-eared white chinchilla, a grass-eating herbivore native to mountainous regions of South America. Chinchillas are the fuzziest land animal on Earth – sea otters being the most fuzzy of all. They are nocturnal, so the three she has are quite noisy at night. Their once strong population was decimated by the fur trade (300 chinchillas for one coat), and after it rebounded, it was again reduced by habitat loss.

The red-eared slider is very popular as a pet turtle, so a lot of them end up with Jen. They're native to this country but not to our region, and when these "pets" get too large, people let them go in lakes and streams, where they out-compete our native turtles. As is true for many of our amphibians, the roads take their toll. Not only are they run over by cars, but the car lights and noises interfere with their navigation systems.

Next was a baby snapping turtle. Jen said that the quickest way to help a snapper across the road (although not the best way for the turtle) is to grab it at the very base of the tail, keeping the whole turtle far away from your body. Always aim it in the direction it was already going.

Finally, Jen put on a glove to bring out Jules, a gorgeous barred owl that had lost half a wing. Most of us are aware of their call, heard a lot these days because the families are dispersing. Jules is at least 9 years old, but she weighs only about 2 pounds because she's mostly feathers. Barred owls aren't large enough to grab a squirrel, maybe not even a chipmunk. They are slow fliers, so they don't take songbirds. Their superpower is quiet stealth – they wait for a mouse or vole to make a dash. Great-horned owls are our dominant owls. The size of an owl's (or any animal's) territory depends on the availability of resources.

We are so grateful to Jen for sharing her knowledge and love of animals. Truly, Nature Matters! ♦



JEN WITH BARRED OWL 'JULES'

PHOTO CREDIT LISSA MARGULIES

ELT Lucheon 2025

Departing from long-held tradition, our Land Trust luncheon was held in November this year at Cliff House, the restaurant run by Prospect Berkshires, the reimagined campground on Prospect Lake in North Egremont. Cliff House sits on the site built in 1876 as a lake-viewing platform for picnickers. The Mezze Restaurant Group helped develop the restaurant's concept.

Nearly 80 people filled the light-filled interior restaurant room and the enclosed porch that runs along two sides. The luncheon was delicious – we had a choice of fish (steelhead trout), vegetarian (butternut squash), or chicken. Each plate was filled with sides and trimmings. For dessert, we helped ourselves to apple crisp (local apples, of course) with whipped cream, and coffee or tea.

Our speaker was Ian Rasch, one of the owners and creators of Prospect Berkshires. He explained that when the team bought the old campground, most of the land was a monoculture of white pine. The soil was in poor condition, compacted and acidic. The "beach" consisted of nonnative sand that was trucked in most every year. With a team of biologists and soil scientists, they developed a plan to support biodiversity, soil carbon, habitat restoration, and stormwater management with all native plantings.

The site restoration took 4.5 years and included bringing in hundreds of tons of locally sourced, well-composted topsoil, as well as over 90 species of native trees, shrubs, perennials, and groundcover. The shoreline restoration was completed by removing sand, pavement, and manmade fill and planting native wetland gardens and bioswales to mitigate stormwater runoff into Prospect Lake. Invasives were removed without the use of chemicals. Ian explained that, after all, Egremont is his town, and this is his community, so he wanted to be environmentally responsible. The result is apparent in the number of pollinators flitting about in the summer!

During the Q&A, ELT members asked about the flora and fauna, as we would expect from an audience of folks interested in land conservation.

We are grateful to Prospect Berkshires and to Ian for allowing us to hold our annual fundraiser at Cliff House. ♦



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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. Contact our president David Seligman 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!