EGREMONT LAND TRUST

2026 NEWSLETTER

CONTROL OF INVASIVES

Egremont Land Trust at Work in Our Community

In addition to conserving land, ELT also takes care of it. In 2026, we partnered with Greenagers (another Egremont-based non-profit) on a project to remove non-native invasive purple loosestrife from one of the properties we own. The wetland site, known as the Fen, is on Baldwin Hill Road South, across from the fire-pond, just south of the Townhouse Hill Road intersection.

Although pretty to look at, loosestrife has become a noxious weed across the US, particularly in the Northeast. It is found along waterways, marshes, and wetlands, where it takes over, leaving less habitat available for native wildlife to feed, nest, and breed. It also reduces waterflow, causing water quality to decline. This invader can take over a site very quickly!

A process of manual removal and containment is most successful when there are few plants, good access, and easy identification. The Fen meets these conditions. Over two hot summer days, a hardworking Greenagers crew of six, plus volunteers, dug up small and medium-sized plants. Larger ones were chopped to the ground before they went to seed. The debris was piled up on a bed of cardboard for later burning. The site will be regularly monitored by ELT volunteers.

In the late fall, we will tackle another invasive, bittersweet, a non-native vine that winds its way up trees, eventually killing them. Volunteers will cut back these vines at various Egremont roadside locations. Look for our signs showing where we will be working.

These two projects are examples of ELT at work, the first caring for a conserved property and the second helping roadside trees in Egremont thrive for years to come. It is only with your generous donations that this work is possible. Please consider donating today so that we can expand initiatives like these to help protect Egremont land and trees from destructive invasive species. ◆







GREENAGERS TRAIL CREWS WORKING WITH ELT VOLUNTEERS



PHOTO CREDIT ALEXIS WREDEN

BEN NICKLEY WITH WARBLER

ELT Bird-Banding at Jug End

ELT members were treated to a migratory bird-banding session by Berkshire Bird Observatory's (BBO's) Executive Director Ben Nickley. At 8 AM in mid May, we met at the banding station at Jug End Reservation. Banding involves raising very fine "mist nets," which the birds fly into and are then retrieved by Ben and his team for data collection. They check the nets every 30 minutes for 6 hours starting at sunrise, and then they are taken down. The whole process is conducted under a federally authorized permit issued by the US Geological Survey's BBL. Fun fact: The use of mist nets in the U.S. was first introduced in the Berkshires. A local schoolteacher observed them being used in England and brought some back.

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 each is banded with a uniquely numbered tiny aluminum band and released. Data are fed into a federal data base, which allows Ben and other scientists to monitor the age structure and health of bird populations and glean information on their stopover ecology. Birds are important to monitor because they are early indicators of ecological change.

For Ben, education is as important as data collection, and he is bursting with knowledge and passion for birds and their amazing habitat here. We learned about flight patterns, and breeding and nesting habits. Many birds return to Jug End every year. We learned that the despite weighing a mere 6 grams (0.2 ounce), the tiny ruby crowned kinglet flies all the way from its breeding grounds in the boreal forests of northern Canada to its wintering grounds in Central or South America. Jug End is thus a migratory resting area, where birds can stay for days or weeks getting nourishment and waiting for the best weather.

Ben scouted many sites before settling on Jug End, which has perfect stop-over conditions for migratory birds. The surrounding mountains provide a continuous supportive environment for the birds. The suite of habitats promotes bird diversity: old fields, successional growth orchards, shrub swamp, and water. The BBO at Jug End is one of only four Massachusetts bird observatories, and it's the only one that monitors forest birds—the three others focus on shore birds.

The unique environment of Jug End's 1100 acres was saved by ELT from a developer's proposal for 605 housing units in 1985. Eventually, the MA Department of Environmental Management and the Division of 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 donation, please visit berkshirebirds.org. ◆

SPRING
ELT Wildflower Walk 2026

Would it be spring without the Land Trust's wildflower walk?

In May, Stephanie Bergman, who holds degrees in biology and environmental education, led 16 of us across the ELT-owned field along Rte 71, through the narrow stretch of flood-plain forest, and into the riparian zone along the Green River. It was chilly, and the showers had stopped just 15 minutes before, but we were comfortably covered against the cold, wet, and ticks.

We saw garlic mustard (GM), which was imported for both erosion control and food. Unfortunately, it is allelopathic, meaning it exudes chemicals that inhibit the growth of other plants; this is enhanced by fungal networks in the soil that carry the chemicals farther than diffusion could. Of particular concern is its impact on our native West Virginia white butterfly, which needs to lay its eggs on toothworts, the sole host for its larvae. To that butterfly, GM mimics toothwort, and when the emerging larvae eat GM, they die.

We saw trout lilies (up to 7 years before the first flower appears), sharp-lobed hepatica (an outdated cure for liver ailments), bloodroot (with a reddish latex in their roots), and the lovely white wood anemone.

Tiny fungus gnats pollinate the Jack-in-the-pulpit. They enter the hooded structure, which smells like fungus, and then leave the male Jack via an exit hole, brushing by pollen located next to it. But the female Jack doesn't have that exit hole, so the gnat enters, leaves the pollen, and dies.

Continued on page 3

Tree Identification Walk with Tom Ingersoll JUNE 2026

On a lovely June morning, Tom Ingersoll, arborist and passionate tree-hugger, led about a dozen of us into Bow Wow Woods to learn about trees. BWW was recently conserved by ELT, the Sheffield Land Trust, and Greenagers.

Our first stop was at an Eastern hemlock. Two insects are decimating our hemlocks: (1) The woolly adelgid, a bit of white woolly fluff at the base of the needles. It pierces the needle and sucks out the sap. (2) The elongate hemlock scale (the adult resembles an armored car) not only sucks the sap from the needles but also injects a poison, so the branches turn brown and die.

Our iconic New England sugar maple is disappearing because of climate change. Those we see now will generally be OK, but there won't be a new generation because the seeds need cold winters to germinate. So, plant sugar maple saplings! Avoid the nonnative and invasive Norway maple, including the red cultivar, planted widely after Dutch elm disease hit. Their leafy season is longer and their canopies are denser, so they shade out native saplings.

Our native basswood or American linden (Tilia americana) is very adaptive. Its big leaves collect lots of sun even in the understory. Our native striped maple similarly benefits from its large leaves.

King George III claimed all Eastern white pines in Massachusetts for his Royal Navy's ship masts and had them marked with three red slashes. Now, they are under attack by native fungi, which they could have resisted were it not for climate change. A wide application of mulch can help.

The American chestnut was incredibly adaptive. They say that a squirrel could travel through them from Georgia to Maine without setting foot on land. The fungus that caused the blight can't survive in the soil, so a few chestnuts reappear.

Ironwood tolerates shade in the understory. It's so strong that it is used for posts and handrails. Its other name, musclewood, reflects the appearance of its branches – like a well-muscled arm.

Biochar will change horticulture. It involves scouring forest floors for CWD (coarse woody debris) to burn for energy. But CWD is a vital source of the microbial life that sustains trees. Chief tree killers: drought, soil compaction, and insect pressure, all intensified by climate change.

Doug Tallamy, entomologist and conservationist, warns against planting southern trees in anticipation of climate change, because some of our native specimens will adapt. Look for his books and videos. Bluejays are our primary vectors of fruit seeds and nuts, which is generally good. But birds that eat the berries of the invasive buckthorn lose weight because they contain little nutrition – and then they spread the seeds.

We hope Tom will lead another walk soon, and we encourage you to join us! ◆

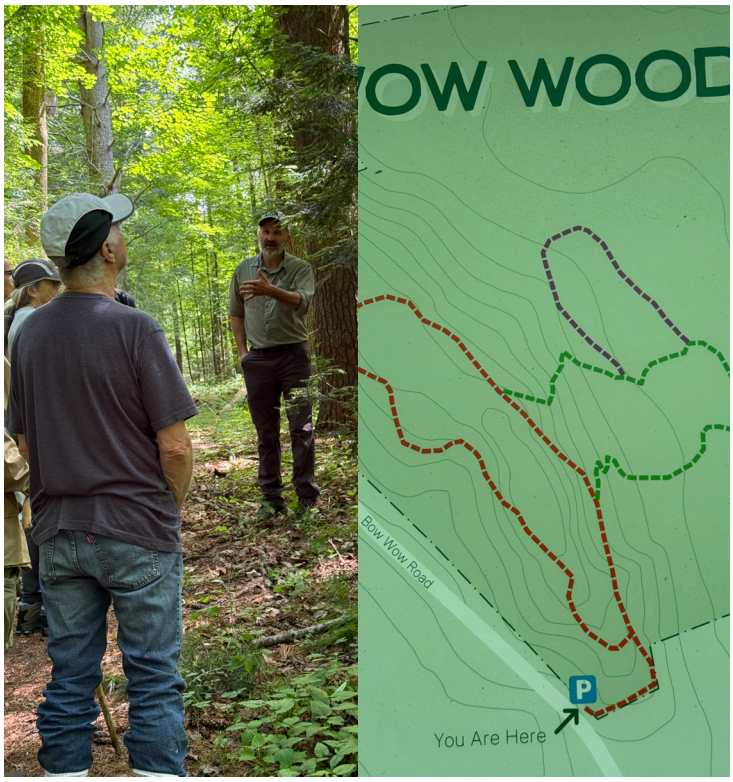


PHOTO CREDIT SUSAN SHAPIRO

(R-L) TOM TALKING TREES, BOW WOW WOODS TRAIL MAP

Wildflower Walk (continued)

We saw creeping foam flower and then the fascinating Equisetum, or horsetail, also called scouring rush because its high silica content made it useful for scouring pots. Its ancestors, 350 million years ago, grew to 90 feet.

We saw sessile bellwort (so named because its leaves clasp the stem), false Solomon's seal (now called Solomon's plume as botanists veer away from the term "false"), and the hop hornbeam tree (whose smooth branches look disturbingly like human arm muscles). The walk was, unfortunately, a showcase for several of the exotic invasives that have proliferated here as the climate warms: multiflora rose (introduced to create "natural" fences), knotweed (introduced as an ornamental and for erosion control), and barberry (offering a perfect microclimate for the white-footed mouse, and thus for ticks).

As always, Stephanie left us all inspired to learn more about our woodlands. ◆



(R-L) GARLIC MUSTARD, SOLOMON'S PLUME

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

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2026 *(Continued)*

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www.egremontlandtrust.org

Our calendar is on our website, 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.

◆ **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!

FALL Bird Walk at 2026

About 20 of us joined Brian Kane, a professional arborist and professor at UMass Amherst with extensive birding knowledge, for ELT's almost-annual fall bird walk. Brian has led us on these walks for about 25 years! He was joined by his wife Noel Watkins, also an accomplished birder, whose keen ear and identification skills are invaluable!

Before we could get beyond the Jug End Reserve parking lot, Brian identified two migrating warblers: the Tennessee and the magnolia. The Tennessee warbler breeds in the Canadian boreal forests and is now headed south. Because they were migrating, they weren't vocalizing—that is, they weren't singing their distinctive songs, which they use to look for mates and to defend their territory—so we just heard their chip notes. Migrating birds need protein for their long trip south, which they get from insects. Insects are poikilothermic, Brian explained, meaning they become active as the sun rises, so we gathered early to be there when they were actively feeding.

Jug End is a wonderful place for migrating birds. Neotropical migrants (vireos, tanagers, some warblers) are genetically programmed to migrate far south (e.g., to Latin America), whereas other birds (hummingbirds, geese, waxwings) move south to find food as it becomes scarce in the winter. By now, most of our hummingbirds have left, and the ones we see are migrating.

Sapsuckers drill neat rows of small holes in aspen, birch, and willow to lap up the sugar and to eat the ants that are attracted to it. Hummingbirds also lap up that sap in the spring before flowers become abundant.

A nest cavity high in a willow was probably made by a northern flicker, a primary cavity nester. Secondary cavity nesters use a hole made by something else.

Many passerines (perching birds) exhibit very different plumage in the breeding season from their "alternate" plumage in the fall. Cedar waxwings are an exception.

Birds use an agitated call (such as the chickadee's "dee-dee-dee") when a predator, such as a hawk, is near. Other birds then gather round, exhibiting "mobbing" behavior, to scare the predator away. In the fall, Brian uses this idea by making "phishing" noises to lure birds closer so we can see them.

We noted a stand of dead oaks—why so many in that small area? One hypothesis: Larvae of the invasive winter moth feed on tree buds in the spring. Then, when we had the spongy moth infestation, those larvae ate any leaves that managed to emerge. Further stressors, like drought, would have made it hard for the oaks to survive.

In all, we saw or heard 36 species, but a bird walk with Brian and Noel yields more surprises than birds. See the photo of the edible chicken-of-the-woods!! ◆

ELT Lucheon 2026

On a mid-May Sunday, ELT held our annual fund-raising luncheon at the beautiful Cliff House restaurant, managed by The Prospect and overlooking Prospect Lake. Cliff House offered a choice of three delicious entrées: steelhead trout nicoise-style, roast Bell Farm chicken, and king trumpet mushroom à la planche, all with local vegetables.

Our guest speaker was Elizabeth Keen, owner of Indian Line Farm. As a welcome surprise, she brought along her husband Al Thorp, and the two told the story of how Indian Line Farm was born as the first Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm in the U.S., and how they have continued the tradition.

In 1724, native Mohican chiefs gave up vast Housatonic lands but reserved one strip for themselves. It ran from the Hudson River to the Housatonic and cut through present-day South Egremont. Old deeds in Egremont often refer to the northerly or southerly Indian Line as a boundary.

In 1935, Olie and Evelyn Wilcox bought land whose northern boundary was on the Indian Line, naming it Indian Line Farm. When they retired in the 1980s, a developer bought the 100+ acres, intending to divide it into lots. However, in 1986, Jan Vander Tuin was encouraged by the Schumacher Center to speak to Robyn Van En and to implement a new model of agriculture that connected the farmer to the consumer. Thus, CSA was born on Jug End Road!

It happened that Elizabeth and Al were in the Berkshires when Robyn died unexpectedly, and they decided to lease the land. The Nature Conservancy and the Community Land Trust (CLT) helped them permanently preserve the land as a working farm, with a conservation restriction that ensures that the Jug End Fen, home to endangered species, would be protected.

Elizabeth and Al's objectives include keeping the land in active agriculture while avoiding agricultural chemicals and unhealthy farming practices. They balance the acres on which they grow food for human consumption, with those on which they plant cover crops to maintain soil health. Because the CLT owns the land, Elizabeth and Al were able to begin farming and invest in the infrastructure of the farm without an insurmountable debt, something young farmers of today find it nearly impossible to do. Elizabeth and Al wish there were more active farms in Egremont, even small ones.

Their CSA now has 270 members, and they sell at the Great Barrington Farmers Market and the Berkshire Grown winter markets, as well as to Guido's and a few restaurants. They strive to pay high-enough wages to keep their employees, and to help them find housing.

Their mantra from 1997 still hangs on their fridge: Bring the land to bear, stay out of debt, eat responsibly, laugh. ◆

ELT FALL PRESENTATION

Rhonda's Reptiles

More than 30 adults and scads of kids came to see Rhonda and her reptiles on a Saturday morning in September. Rhonda Leavitt owns Rhonda's Reptiles, a nonprofit reptile rescue facility in New Lebanon, NY. She takes in local reptiles that have been wounded, and those that were bought as pets but are no longer wanted. Today, she brought eight from her menagerie.

The first was a beautiful leopard gecko, yellow with black spots. He is full-grown at about 7 inches and can live for about 25 years. He's a ground dweller, hiding during the day when it is hot in his native desert and emerging in the mornings and evenings, probably disappointing his former owners who didn't get to see him often.

Bearded dragons come in designer colors (yellow, red, orange, gray) and are quite personable, happily sitting next to their people. They eat vegetables and live to be 8 to 12 years old. When threatened, they puff out their necks to look bigger.

The western hog-nosed snake is the drama queen of the reptile world. When threatened, it will play dead, thrusting out its tongue and even producing drops of blood. It has a cute short head, which it can flatten to resemble a cobra's, and it can also rattle its tail!

Rhonda feeds her blue-tongued skink dog food! He's named Vienna because he looks like a fat sausage. His tongue is startlingly blue, and the bright color is enough to deter predators. From an audience member: This is Batesian mimicry, an adaptation by which a harmless animal evades predators by resembling a similar but dangerous creature.

Rhonda's bumblebee ball python was bred for its attractive yellow and beige coloration. The ball python has a lifespan of 60 years—thus a huge responsibility as a pet—and can roll itself into a ball. It doesn't need to eat frequently, and if it doesn't kill an available prey, the prey may kill it!

Ruby the red-footed tortoise eats most anything: fruit, vegetables, carrion. She has lived with Rhonda for 15 years and is free to go where she wants. Once she got outdoors in the winter, and when found, she looked dead, but by the next day she had thawed out and recovered. Ruby lays eggs regularly, but they are not fertile as there is no male around.

Samantha the boa constrictor experiences her environment by flicking out her tongue, which returns tastes/smells to a Jacobson's organ on the roof of her mouth. Samantha was obese when Rhonda got her. A snake's vital organs are on the underside of her body, which rests on the ground, so extra weight puts great stress on them.

Mrs. Claus is a 3-year-old American alligator. Her snout is banded, as required by law when she's in public. Even before they hatch, alligators make small barking and chirping noises, by which a mom recognizes her babies. Their nictitating eyelid can cover their eyes to allow sight while protecting the eye when they're underwater. They can swim faster than a dolphin. They are smart—they know their names and can recognize familiar people. Rhonda says Mrs. Claus will sometimes display "attitude" by slapping her with her tail.

The kids enjoyed handling many of Rhonda's reptiles—a terrific learning experience! ◆



PHOTO CREDIT PETER GOLDBERG

BUMBLEBEE BALL PYTHON

What we saw on ELT's fall bird walk:

- Ruby-throated hummingbird
- Sharp-shinned hawk
- Cooper's hawk
- Broad-winged hawk
- Yellow-bellied sapsucker
- Red-bellied woodpecker
- Downy woodpecker
- Hairy woodpecker
- Pileated woodpecker
- Northern flicker
- Eastern phoebe
- Red-eyed vireo
- Blue jay
- Black-capped chickadee
- Tufted titmouse
- Northern house wren
- Gray catbird
- Eastern bluebird
- Wood thrush
- American robin
- Cedar waxwing
- American goldfinch
- Song sparrow
- Eastern towhee
- Tennessee warbler
- Common yellowthroat
- American redstart
- Northern parula
- Magnolia warbler
- Black-throated blue warbler
- Palm warbler
- Pine warbler
- Canada warbler
- Scarlet tanager
- Northern cardinal
- Rose-breasted grosbeak



COOPER'S HAWK



PHOTO CREDIT NOEL WATKINS

CHICKEN OF THE WOODS

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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 David Seligman with any questions.



PAINTING BY EGREMONTER MARION JANSEN

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!