

FALL 2015

Harris Hearsay

THE HARRIS CENTER FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Hancock, New Hampshire

Our Mission

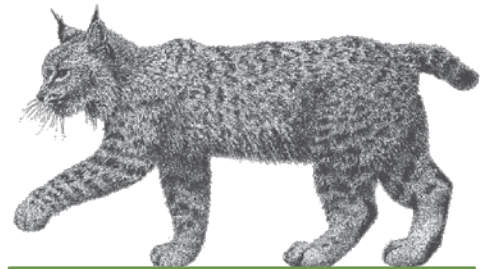


A member-supported nonprofit organization, the Harris Center for Conservation Education is dedicated to promoting understanding and respect for our natural environment through education of all ages, direct protection and exemplary stewardship

of the region's natural resources, conservation research, and programs that encourage active participation in the great outdoors.

If you would like to join or donate to the Harris Center, please visit our website at harriscenter.org, call our office at (603) 525-3394, send an email to Diana at jacobs@harriscenter.org, or visit us at 83 King's Highway in Hancock, NH.

You can help ensure a grand future for the Monadnock Region by naming the Harris Center as a beneficiary in your will or estate plan. Anyone can make a bequest, and no amount is too small. For more information, contact Jeremy Wilson at (603) 525-3394 or wilson@harriscenter.org.



In this issue...

The Gift of a Garden

Land Conservation News

Our 45th Annual Meeting

Stories from the Salamander
Crossing Brigades

Reflections from an Easement
Monitoring Intern

harriscenter.org



The beaver pond along the Harrisville Rail Trail reflects autumn hues on an October afternoon. (photo: Brett Amy Thelen)

The Gift of a Garden

by Susie Spikol Faber

I'm sitting along the edge of the old pool at the Harris Center, which is awash in color. Pinks, blues, purples, and sunny yellows flood the pool's old bones. It's anything but quiet, this flood of color. Instead, it vibrates with buzzing. Bumble bees grasp the Globe Thistle's blue splash, plunging their heads into its nectar-rich blossoms. Solitary, glittering bees flash from Coreopsis to Coreopsis. I hear the familiar buzz of the honeybees and watch their golden-black bodies diving into flower after flower, their pollen baskets stuffed, their furry sides dusted in orange.

A gift, I think, as I sit poolside. The Harris Center's new pollinator garden is a gift, in so many ways. To the bees, butterflies, birds, beetles, and countless other creatures who make their living in the embrace of flowers; to the old pool, once forgotten, long buried in thicket, but now once again a place of refreshment and life; to people like me who love bees and bugs and all the life that comes with them; and to those who adore the fragrant flowers, bold and tender, a paint box of color. Yes, this little sanctuary within the Supersanctuary is indeed a gift.

We're gifted not just by what is so gorgeously visible, but also by what we cannot see. From the reclaimed pool house to the stone patio and the pool itself, each lovely part of this new garden represents the hard work of a capable Harris Center volunteer. Deep in the winter, while the pool was buried under a mountain of snow, a small group of women sat together dreaming about

which flowers would be perfect for the old swimming hole. These women love flowers and spoke of them as if they were dear sweethearts. Then, they planned the plantings, designing a near-constant bloom. When the melting snow revealed a tangle of weeds in the old pool, there were days and days of weeding. And finally, on a very hot day in mid-June, this group of women began digging, planting, mulching, and watering each flower. But their work and commitment didn't end that day. The garden has been tended through the following days, too – women weeding, watering, and watching.

I notice a small, shiny bee floating along the tops of the Purple Cone Flower. This is the way it works, the flower giving to the bee and the bee giving back to the flower. I think of the women who planned, planted, and still care for this garden. They love these plants as much as the bees and butterflies seem to, and work just as hard as their pollinator compatriots. Sisters.

In this garden and in the life all around it, it is true – a gift is not what you get, but what you give. ♡

With gratitude to the pollinator garden

volunteers: Sara Dowse, Jean Gavotos, Polly Pattison, Alison Rossiter, Laura Trowbridge, and Francie Von Mertens. *And to the Caswell Family Foundation, the Bridgebuilders Foundation, and dedicated individual donors, who helped fund the project.*



(photos: Susie Spikol Faber)

LAND CONSERVATION NEWS

Protecting Land and Water in Harrisville and Nelson

by Jeremy Wilson

We've been hard at work on two big land conservation projects along the Nelson Road corridor in Nelson and Harrisville.

Silver Lake to Childs Bog in Harrisville

We're pleased to announce a new conservation easement on 187 acres stretching from the eastern shore of Silver Lake to Childs Bog and Nelson Road in Harrisville.

For nearly two-thirds of a mile, the northeastern shoreline of Silver Lake is undeveloped aside from one small, rustic camp. Throughout this area, thick forest covers steep slopes, helping to shield the lake from the potential impacts of soil erosion. The new conservation easement permanently protects this exceptional shore frontage and adjacent uplands. It also raises the proportion of conserved lands in the Silver Lake watershed above 75 percent, an extraordinary achievement.

Conservation of this land has long been a high priority for the Silver Lake Land Trust, who led an intensive fundraising



This soon-to-be protected property includes 580 acres of prominent highlands in Nelson, including much of Osgood Hill, the second highest peak in Cheshire County. (photo: Brett Amy Thelen)

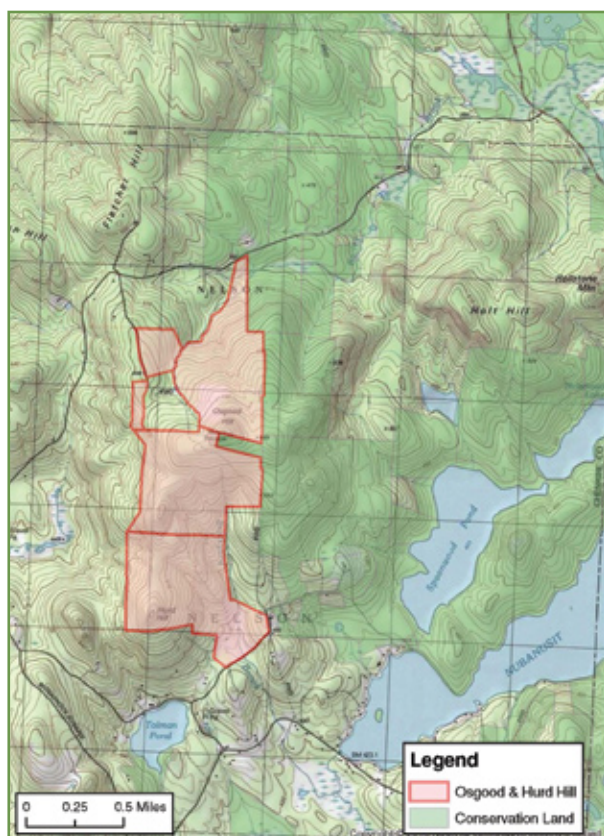
effort in order to bring this project to fruition. Our heartfelt thanks go out to the Silver Lake Land Trust and to all whose generous donations made this project possible.

Nelson Highlands

Land conservation projects can take time, sometimes lots of time. For 30 years, the Harris Center has been interested in protecting a 580-acre parcel in Nelson that includes much of Osgood Hill and all of its neighbor, Hurd Hill. We've been working with the Nelson Conservation Commission on this project, and are delighted to announce that we've recently signed an agreement to purchase the property. We ultimately hope to sell the parcel to the town of Nelson for use as a town forest, while retaining a conservation easement on the land.

This parcel is the largest unfragmented block of land remaining in Nelson, and the highlands – which are the highest hills in Nelson, and the second-highest in Cheshire County – contain headwaters for three separate regional watersheds (the Ashuelot River, Nubanusit Brook, and the North Branch of the Contoocook). In addition, the protection of this property, which shares much of its eastern border with existing Harris Center-conserved lands, will greatly enhance a connected, 1,700-acre corridor of conserved land extending north from Spoonwood Pond all the way to Route 9 in Stoddard.

To complete the purchase, the Harris Center seeks to raise an additional \$60,000 by mid-December. For more information, or to make a tax-deductible contribution to support this important land protection project, please contact me at wilson@harriscenter.org or (603) 525-3394. 📧



Map of soon-to-be-conserved land in the Nelson Highlands.

Volunteers and Educators Honored at Our 45th Annual Meeting



Gorgeous foliage and brief snow squalls provided a backdrop to our 45th annual meeting on Sunday, October 18. Executive Director **Jeremy Wilson** thanked the many volunteers who make what we do possible, honored retiring volunteer trail chief Jim Orr for his 27 years of service, reviewed land protection highlights from the past year, and even presented volunteer Stephen Froling with a priceless relic from an old Silver Lake outhouse!

Brett Amy Thelen, our Science Director, reflected on ten successful years of engaging volunteers in citizen science, relating stories from the celebrated Salamander Crossing Brigades.



Susie Spikol Faber thanks Matthew Roy (left) and Bryn Dumas.

Matthew Roy, Bryn Dumas, and Dr. Rick Van de Poll were presented with the **Laurie Bryan Partnership Award**, which honors those who work with the Harris Center to further the effective-

ness of our mission. Since 2007, these three exceptional individuals have collaborated with nine different Harris Center staff members to reach over 1,000 middle and high school students and more than 30 classroom teachers. We're grateful to them for their outstanding success in introducing students and teachers to the beauty and wonder of the natural world.



"Queen Bee" Susie

Susie Spikol Faber celebrated the vision and hard work of many dedicated volunteers who brought the Harris Center's new pollinator garden to life. After honoring **Sara Dowse, Jean Gavotos, Alison Rossiter, and Francie Von Mertens** for their service to the pollinators, Susie was aptly crowned "Queen Bee" by the gardeners.



Harris Center teacher/naturalist **Polly Pattison** (left) with the 2015 Educators of the Year (left to right): **Teresa Morris, Elizabeth Marchi, and Alli Carr**, 3rd grade teachers from **Symonds Elementary School** in Keene.

The **Educator of the Year** award was given to **Teresa Morris, Elizabeth Marchi, and Alli Carr**, 3rd grade teachers at Symonds Elementary School in Keene, for their partnership in a two-year owl study, part of a broader project called "Birds in Our Neighborhood." This award is given annually to educators who demonstrate exemplary collaboration with Harris Center naturalists. We're

very pleased to recognize and honor these three extraordinary educators.

After the meeting, attendees were invited to view the Symonds Elementary School owl display, and to socialize over the enticing homemade refreshments provided by our board of directors.

Thanks for another great year, and a great annual meeting. 🐼



Thank you to the many volunteers who strengthen every aspect of our important work.

(photos: Meade Cadot, Brett Amy Thelen and Margaret Baker)

When the earth thaws and spring rains drench New Hampshire, thousands of amphibians migrate to vernal pools to breed. Many are killed when their journeys take them across busy roads. Each spring, we coordinate Salamander Crossing Brigades, in which volunteers move migrating amphibians across roads by hand, keeping count as they go. Since the program's inception in 2006, we've trained over **600** Crossing Brigadiers, who've helped more than **25,000** amphibians survive to breed another year.

In celebration of our 10th year of salamander saving, we offer two reflections on why our volunteers brave the cold, dark, rainy roads to do what they do – one from a seasoned salamander veteran, and another from a newfound frog enthusiast, who experienced the magic of “Big Night” for the first time this past spring.

Getting Down and Busy Salamander-Style

by Anika Clark

There are very few reasons I'll venture to the darkest part of my apartment – that skinny chasm where the “space-saving” shoe caddy that fills half my closet gives way to a Jenga-tower of luggage. But this was an exception; this was the night, and my outfit had to be on point. You see, behind the unassuming



A spotted salamander gets a helping hand at Matthews Road in Swanzey, NH.

(photo: Kevin Pearson)

facade of an otherwise average spring eve is a magical night when handsome bachelors pop up all over the Monadnock Region. They're slick, they've got great smiles, and they're driven by one thing and one thing only: babies. Typo? Fantasy? A 33-year-old woman's dating Brigadoon? Not quite. But there's always a catch – and in this case ... there were three.

The suitors weren't there for me (always a bridesmaid...), the single guys looked alarmingly like the single girls, and each of them was covered in yellow

spots. Welcome to the **2015 Amphibian Migration** – the hottest, cold-blooded ticket in town. My outfit? Rain boots, reflective vest, hoodie, and headlamp. My charge? To stand on a road and, as a friend once so eloquently put it, shuttle spotted salamanders and other creatures so they could get busy on the other side.

“Getting busy” salamander-style involves a process called “congressing” – which, since males deposit their spermatophores in vernal pools and not directly into the females, is a lot less scandalous than it sounds. It's also effective, with a female spotted salamander laying one to three egg masses per year, containing a whopping 50 to 250 eggs a pop, according to Brett Amy Thelen of the Harris Center for Conservation Education, which coordinates the salamander “crossing brigades” through its citizen science arm, AVEO.

So why do they need help? Because while our own journeys to romantic bliss might sometimes feel like someone's driving a Chevy over our hearts, for breeding salamanders this becomes frightening reality. And it's not just salamanders either; all sorts of amphibians – from spring peepers and newts to wood frogs and toads – also get caught up in the big-night hubbub and under the tires. My friend and I saw as much Monday on Swanzey's Matthews Road when we ferried more than 80 live amphibians, and tallied many more dead ones. Eventually, the sight of yet another smushed spring peeper became so unrelenting we stopped counting.

As Thelen laid out in our volunteer orientation, there's yet more tragic detail to this whole deal: Spotted Salamanders and other types of amphibians are so loyal to their breeding pools that they'll continue to go there year after year, long after roads have sprung up and they've ceased to be safe.

Thelen listed a whole host of ecological reasons that alone make her case for saving the salamanders (and the peepers, wood frogs, and other amphibians). It also happens to be fun, not to mention those little guys (and girls) are so stinking cute. Allege an “ick” factor if you must, but I say the spotted salamanders' smiling resting-face, their polka dots, and the fact that they look like cartoon characters more than overcomes the faint trace of goo they leave on your hands. But for me, all the ecology and “aww” is admittedly a secondary motivation.

What drove me to join the more than 90 other brigadiers who headed out to local streets Monday can best be summed up by my reaction when I first learned the “big night” was a thing: Seriously? Suffice to say, when I grew up in suburban Los Angeles, I never wore a headlamp. The closest thing I came to a live toad was the animatronics on Disneyland's *Mr. Toad's Wild Ride*. And I certainly didn't spirit salamanders in the rain. “Seriously?” isn't the snotty reaction of a city girl to small-town tradition, but the experience of one not-so-new Keene transplant for whom this area has yet to stop feeling special.

It's the response I've had to seeing kids gather for cocoa and a Christmas story in Central Square and to standing in front of the biggest tower of jack-o'-lanterns I've ever seen. I've thought it of the Strolling of the Heifers, the Dancing of the Ladies, and that time I wound up in the center of Greenville's pot-clanging, siren-sounding Independence Day ritual to make as much noise as humanly possible.

It's not just about the “big night” (or “big nights,” to be more accurate), but about big mornings, learning how sap is made into syrup, afternoons when a trip to the dump is a trip through a postcard, and summer evenings when one of my favorite New Hampshire discoveries – fireflies – gives rural roads a skyline that could rival Manhattan's.

I've found a lot to love about this place; from a march of bovines to a big night in the rain, there's so much to discover. And it all leaves me like a salamander's smile: charmed. 🐸

Anika Clark and her friend Kevin Pearson ferried more than 90 amphibians across the road on their first night as Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteers this past spring. This story was first published in the Keene Sentinel on April 26, 2015.

Why I Go Out on Warm, Rainy Nights

by Kathy Schillemat

I've been thinking about why I go out on warm, rainy nights in the spring to help salamanders and frogs cross the road. Do I do it to make a difference in the lives of these little creatures? Yes, I suppose I do. I do it to know them, to help them fulfill their purpose in life, to see what is beautiful and amazing in these tiny creatures that most people never know, never see. I also do this, this crazy thing, to help others to be aware of our impact on these creatures. I do it to encourage others to slow down a little, to let life happen, in all its glorious forms, to see what's right in front of them, and to care.

I do it because I love these amphibians – the peepers; the wood frogs; the spotties; the dusky, red-backed, red eft, two-lined, four-toed, and spring salamanders; the toads; the gray tree frogs; the pickerel, green, and bull frogs. I love them all. I love their music: the wall of sound that is a chorus of peepers and wood frogs, and the silent song that is a congress of spotted salamanders.

When I am outside in the dark and in the rain, helping them live, I feel alive, too. And happy and grateful and full. By helping these lovely amphibians fill the measure of their creation, I am filling the measure of my creation, too. And perhaps they, like I, feel joy! 🐸

Kathy Schillemat has been shepherding salamanders in Nelson since before there were Crossing Brigades.



A spotted salamander makes its way to a vernal pool on Big Night. (photo: © davehuth.com)



INTO THE WOODS: Reflections from an Easement Monitoring Intern

by Katie Koster

I didn't anticipate that my summer conservation easement monitoring internship with the Harris Center would take me on a healing journey and rekindle my love for the outdoors, but it did. Shortly before the start of the internship, I was diagnosed with Lyme disease. As the implications of my diagnosis sunk in, I grew leery of being outside and developed a hearty fear of the woods. I began my internship with trepidation, venturing forth with light-colored pants tucked into permethrin-treated socks. After each outing, I performed meticulous tick checks.

I found only one tick. With each property that I monitored, my confidence grew and I relaxed a little further into the natural world. I witnessed the subtle changes inherent in the progressing season: the ripening of forest fruits, the deepening greens and first reds of late summer trees, the gradual shortening of the days. It was glorious.

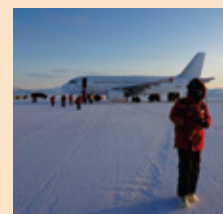
In my wanderings, I stepped into scenes I never could have imagined. During a warm summer rain, red efts emerged from the leaf litter by the hundreds, dotting the forest floor with tiny splashes of bright color. Ruby-throated hummingbirds materialized around me in the midst of a swamp. A deer repeatedly snorted and stomped at me from the safety of a screen of dense brush, until I conceded the space. Again and again, I was startled by glimpses of birds perched on low branches, silently noting my progress. I tried my best to remain calm when I encountered a bear, who paused long enough in its browsing to glance, nonplussed, in my direction.

A significant portion of my time was spent monitoring large tracts of property under easement with the Harris Center, but owned by other conservation organizations. The size of these properties allowed me to pass entire days without encountering any signs of humans other

than survey markers and our ubiquitous New England stone walls. I felt blessed to explore these immense wild areas, so surprisingly close to home.

While wandering solo was great, I found even more enjoyment when I began monitoring easements on land owned by individuals and families. All the landowners I met have incredibly strong connections to the land. Each one shared great stories – from tales of moose courtship to the adventures of Francis, the slightly mischievous, and entirely fictional, neighborhood bear. I even received an introduction to mushroom foraging.

Now I'm on assignment as a weather



(photo: Katie Koster)

observer for the US Antarctic Program at McMurdo Station, Antarctica, where I'm happy to report – no ticks! 🐸