Spring 2016

Harris Hearsay

THE HARRIS CENTER FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION
Hancock, New Hampshire

Our Mission

A wood frog in the SuperSanctuary (photo: Brett Amy Thelen)

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...

harriscenter.org

◀ **Tianne Strombeck shares this extraordinary photo of two Goldfinches, taken on a "New Hampshire Safari" at the Harris Center on May 4, 2016.** (photo: Tianne Strombeck)

▲ **A dispatch from Harris Center Naturalist Emeritus Meade Cadot: "On the evening of April 28, 1979, Dartmouth professor and naturalist Dr. William Ballard led our first program on the spotted salamander migration ('New Moon Salameander'). He brought with him and planted what I believe to be Hancock's only Great White Trillium (*T. grandifolium*)." In May you can see them in bloom at the base of the stone steps near the birdfeeder at the Harris Center.** (photo: Meade Cadot)

BECOMING ANIMAL

by Susie Spikol Faber

Walking like a wolf (photo: Bill Gnade)

I've been living as a bear this spring. I've spent the greening days climbing around the woods, sniffing out undiscovered beechnuts, rolling and stretching on fresh new grass, and climbing up trees when danger seems near. And I haven't been alone in my ursine adventures. I've had four young cubs with me. We chuff and snuff with one another while chewing fresh dandelion greens, until darkness falls and their real parents come to take them home.

I could spend many days as a bear with these cubs. It seems to me just the right sort of thing to do with young children. I've noticed in my work as a naturalist, and as a mother of three, that there's often a time in a child's early life when being an animal is how they want to spend their days. My daughter, now sixteen, spent about two years as a cat. She wore whiskers, a tail, and a headband with two black kitten ears. We spoke *meow* talk to each other and she often ate her snack out of a little bowl on the ground, just like a cat would do. She was a cat in heart.

And I've come to think that this is good for a heart. When given the chance to walk on all fours and imagine life as a wild animal, a child is embodying the animal they love. It's vivid to them. The distance between a child as a child and a child as a chipmunk is not too far for a preschooler to travel. Once while I was with a group of five-year-olds pretending to be chipmunks, one child stuffed his pockets full of acorns and beechnuts. When it was time to head back inside for a snack, he cried. He wanted to stay outside forever, he said, as a chipmunk, and eat his acorns and beechnuts. To live in the skin of another animal is one way a young child finds fraternity with the natural world, building a lifelong compassion for creatures great and small.

I watch a young child holding a worm, cradled in her chubby, four-year-old fingers. She's talking softly to the worm, holding it close to her face. I see her kiss the worm, so gently, before she puts it back into the earth and covers it up with a blanket of dirt. She lays down on the ground. When I ask her what she's doing, she explains that she's being a worm, so her worm sister won't be scared of her.

For a young child, compassion and empathy grow from direct experiences. When they have the opportunity to observe wild animals, to slip on the skins and stories of those animals, deep bonds are developed. A child's early environmental identity doesn't come from facts about nature, but rather from living and breathing and even "being" nature.

So how about this? The next time you are with a young child or even just by yourself, get down on your paws and snuffle about in a meadow. Be a wolf, a bear, a worm, or whatever wild creature is in your heart. You might be surprised at how good it feels to become animal.

LAND CONSERVATION NEWS

A spectacular autumn view of Spoonwood Pond (*center*) and Lake Nubanusit (*left*) from the East Pinnacle viewpoint on the Kulish Ledges Trail (photo: Brett Amy Thelen)

Protecting Osgood Hill *by Meade Cadot and Jeremy Wilson*

A CONSERVATION TALE in Three Acts

Large-scale landscape conservation projects require diligence, patience, community support, and often a little luck. The Osgood Hill conservation story provides a remarkable example of all four of these qualities. Osgood Hill rises to the west of Lake Nubanusit and Spoonwood Pond. At 2,253 feet, it's the second highest peak in Cheshire County after Mount Monadnock. Osgood and the surrounding highlands serve as a divide between waters flowing to the Connecticut River, to the west, and the Merrimack River to the east.

Act One

Thirty-two years ago, the Osgood Hill land protection story began when Newt Tolman sold a half-interest in his spectacular property – rising from the shore of Spoonwood Pond to the ridgeline of Osgood Hill – to a lumber and development company. Newt used the proceeds to purchase a Rolls Royce and planned to spend part of the day "sitting in the heated back seat…listening to my television." [1] Newt's son Renn and nephew Barry Tolman filed a lawsuit claiming that the property had been bought at substantially below market value, taking advantage of the 76-year-old Newt. A 1984 out-of-court settlement returned the property to the Tolman family, but they still needed to sell the land to support Newt.

As Karen Tolman remembered in her book, *The Greengate Saga 1982-1986*, "Barry and I quickly learned the skills needed to be a good real estate agent. Neither of us possessed them." [2] But Karen did suggest to family friend and editor of *Yankee Magazine*, Judson Hale, that he might feature Greengate in *Yankee's* column, "House for Sale." After that issue hit newsstands in the middle of July, Barry and Karen's phone rang constantly. "We showed the property at least fifty times – trying to separate the serious from the curious…about a dozen of them became our (and later, the Harris Center's) potential buyer's list."

An extraordinary and timely anonymous donation of nearly $500,000 allowed the Harris Center to buy the property in the fall of 1985. The Tolman family worked with the Harris Center to craft protective covenants for the land. The Harris Center then auctioned off the house and 26 acres while retaining nearly 400 acres. Proceeds from that sale allowed the Harris Center to establish the Spoonwood Fund, a revolving loan fund that has since facilitated many conservation projects, including two that enabled the next two stages of the Osgood Hill conservation tale to unfold.

No Snow? No Problem!

Mammal tracking with students from the James Faulkner Elementary School

by Jenna Spear

My plan was to track mammals with 4th and 5th graders in soft, deep New Hampshire snow but, as often happens, Mother Nature had other plans. There was no snow in Stoddard for my February mammal tracking day with Amanda Bridges' class at the James Faulkner Elementary School. What to do? We got creative! Harris Center Naturalist Emeritus Meade Cadot has a fabulous collection of small mammal "mummies" from years ago, so I brought them to the school and introduced the students to the voles, moles, mice, and shrews of New Hampshire. The kids were fascinated.

The students came up with a question about small mammals to investigate outdoors: *would we find more evidence of small mammals in the forest, or the field?* They wrote hypotheses and developed a plan for testing them. Then, we placed "tracking tubes" in both locations. Tracking tubes are short lengths of (clean!) sewer pipe, filled with bait and coated with a surface that reveals the footprints of any tiny visitors. Three days later, we retrieved the tubes from our experimental sites, and the results were crystal clear. The field tubes showed no evidence of any critters. The bait was untouched, and there were no footprints. In the forest tubes, however, there was no bait left at all, plenty of tiny footprints, and lots of scat. The students confidently concluded that, in a snow-free New Hampshire winter, small mammals spend more time among the brush and stone walls of the forest than in the very exposed field.

Chloe Meyer and Megan Costa look at fresh porcupine toothmarks in a tree base near the active dens. (photo: Amanda Bridges)

Our next adventure was through the woods near the school, where we'd heard that porcupines had set up winter dens in years past. Mrs. Bridges told me her students were quite enthusiastic explorers, and she was right! The class tromped along, with no trail to follow, over ice and mud well into the woods. Their first discovery was scat, and plenty of it, right outside a rocky den. A nearby tree was stripped bare of bark at ground level, and fresh porcupine toothmarks were evident all over the hardwood. As we walked back to the school, more questions arose. In fact, the students had so many questions and ideas for further study that I offered to let them borrow the tracking tubes for a few more weeks. The young naturalists jumped at the chance. Mrs. Bridges helped the students formulate testable follow-up questions, such as: *will we find more evidence of small mammals in the hemlock grove, or near the brush pile?*

The students continued their investigations well after my time with the class. Upon visiting a few weeks later, I discovered a map of the school grounds filled with interesting finds. It seems our winter mammal study wasn't foiled by Mother Nature, after all.

NH Fish and Game Withdraws Bobcat Season Proposal

In the wake of widespread public outcry, New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) has withdrawn their controversial proposal to reinstitute a bobcat hunting and trapping season in the Granite State. The Harris Center applauds this decision, and thanks the NHFG Commissioners, NHFG staff, and all who participated in the process by attending hearings and submitting comments in support of New Hampshire's bobcats.

photo: Vivienne Strauss

To thank NHFG for their wise decision to withdraw the bobcat season proposal, contact the NHFG Commission, care of Executive Director Glenn Normandeau, at director@wildlife.nh.gov.

A view of Mount Monadnock, glowing in spring green, from the summit of Thumb Mountain (photo: Bruce Boyer)

CONSERVATION RESEARCH in the SuperSanctuary with Keene State College

by Brett Amy Thelen

Last year, a group of students in the Environmental Studies Department at Keene State College focused their two-semester capstone research projects on Harris Center lands. The student researchers conducted bee surveys at our new pollinator garden, assessed road-stream crossings for fish passage and flooding potential, investigated road salt impacts in wetlands along Route 123, and explored current wildlife and historic human use of the Harris Center's newly-conserved Hiroshi land. Curious about their findings? Read on for brief summaries of each project.

Abundance and Diversity of Native Bee Species in a Newly-Established Pollinator Garden

Will Holden and **Elijah Wyman** surveyed native bee species in the Harris Center's new pollinator garden – and, for comparison, a nearby orchard – in the summer of 2015. They identified 11 different bee species in the pollinator garden, and consistently observed more individual native bees in the pollinator garden than at the orchard site.

Impact of Road Salt on Wetlands Near Route 123

Braeden Cummings and **Dustin Howe** investigated the impacts of road salt on soil and plant health in wetlands adjacent to Route 123 in Hancock and Antrim. They found elevated soil conductivity, a proxy for salinity, at all of their sampling sites. However, plant health – as measured by chlorophyll and sodium levels within the leaves of cattails, grasses, and red maples – did not appear to be affected by proximity to the road or by this elevated conductivity.

Assessment of Culverts in the Ferguson Brook Watershed

Hunter Guidess and **Joseph Martino** surveyed 20 road-stream crossings in the Ferguson Brook watershed in Hancock, to assess where fish and aquatic wildlife passage were most impacted by undersized or deteriorating culverts. The students found that the majority of the culverts in their study were undersized for both fish passage and floodwater. In addition, 15% were completely impassable to fish and other aquatic organisms, and would be good candidates for replacement or retrofitting to restore stream flow, increase flood resilience, and improve habitat connectivity.

Wildlife on the Hiroshi Land

Josh Dallesander and **Elizabeth King** conducted a game camera survey of wildlife at the Harris Center's newly-conserved Hiroshi Land in Peterborough, with a focus on mammals. They documented 15 mammal species at the site, including beaver, bobcat, black bear, coyote, and gray fox. Notably absent from their trail cams: fisher, otter, and moose!

Protecting Osgood Hill

photo: Brett Amy Thelen

Continued from LAND CONSERVATION NEWS

Act Two

A couple years after the Harris Center sold the Greengate house, a realtor informed Meade that Ann Dunbar wanted to sell her land in Nelson. It wasn't just any land – but approximately 110 acres above the newly acquired Greengate property, high on the slopes of Osgood with steep ledges caused by glacial action, and a mature sub-boreal spruce stand. These provided both a scenic panorama of Spoonwood Pond, Lake Nubanusit, and Thumb and Skatutakee Mountains beyond them *and* (according to renowned Harris Center naturalist, John Kulish) some of the region's best winter bobcat habitat. Ann was willing to sell the property for half its appraised value (a bargain sale), so it was an easy decision to declare the Spoonwood Fund ready for its first use. By June of 1989, contributions made the Spoonwood Fund whole again. On July 1, we had a picnic celebration high on those rocks and surprised John by naming them Kulish Ledges.

Act Three

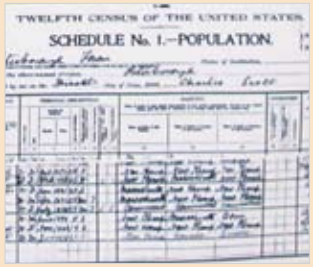
Last December, after 30 years of planning and more than a year of negotiations, the Harris Center, working with the Nelson Conservation Commission, was able to purchase a 580-acre parcel from Ethan Tolman, one of Newt's cousins. This property encompasses the western slopes of Osgood Hill and much of neighboring Hurd Hill. To make the purchase possible, the Spoonwood Fund was drawn upon once again. The Harris Center plans to sell the parcel to the town of Nelson while retaining a conservation easement on the land.

In all, these three land conservation events spanning more than 50 years have conserved over 1,000 acres of highlands, including undeveloped lakeshore, diverse forests, and great glacial features. The result is enhanced wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and human enjoyment – for generations to come.

[1] *The Keene Sentinel*, January 7, 1984: "Lumber firm buys share of 600-acre Nelson forest" by George Manlove.

[2] Karen Tolman, *The Greengate Saga 1982-1986*. For a copy of this account, contact Karen Tolman at tolmanpond@pobox.com.

Human History of the Hiroshi Land


TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES.
SCHEDULE No. 1.—POPULATION.

Colleen Kracik used genealogical records and other historical documents to trace the human history of the Hiroshi Land back to 1874, when the land was first cleared and farmed by Nathan Holt. Colleen also discovered that the farmhouse was used as a summer boarding house for tourists at the turn of the century. In 1905, room and board at "Rock Farm" would have cost you $1/night!

NEXT STEPS

This year, under the guidance of Dr. Renate Gebauer, a new team of Keene State College student researchers is picking up where last year's students left off. They plan to continue the culvert, road salt, and pollinator garden surveys, and to embark on two new research projects: one focused on recreational use of the Harris Center's growing trail network, and another looking at the abundance and distribution of fisher (*Martes pennant*) in the SuperSanctuary. Stay tuned!

Dustin Howe and Braeden Cummings discuss their road salt research at a poster presentation at the Harris Center on December 17, 2015.

▲ The Keene State College Environmental Studies senior seminar students, with proud professor Dr. Renate Gebauer and Harris Center staff

A Great Spangled Frittilary, photographed in the Harris Center's pollinator garden by KSC student researcher Will Holden ▶