

New Director, New Award

EMS Receives First Laurie Bryan Partnership Award at October Annual Meeting

By Jeremy Wilson

Autumn is here and that means Harris Center teacher/naturalists are busy running programs in 27 schools throughout the Monadnock Region. These programs engage students in the outdoors and align with current curriculum requirements. Autumn is also the time for the Harris Center's annual meeting; its 42nd was held on Sunday, October 21.

At the meeting, Board Chair Ted Leach named Eastern Mountain Sports as the first recipient of the Laurie Bryan Partnership Award. This award recognizes past executive director Laurie Bryan's commitment to forming partnerships with organizations, groups, and individuals to further the Harris Center's mission.

Two new board members were introduced and welcomed aboard. **Susan Copley** of Peterborough has a lifelong love of the outdoors. She recently retired as the long-time principal of Peterborough Elementary School, and is currently the executive director of an educational nonprofit. **Carol Thompson** and her husband built a home in Jaffrey 20 years ago as a

refuge from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Carol spent her career as an academic administrator in liberal arts universities. She has served on the board of the Monadnock Conservancy in multiple roles, including president and chair of the stewardship committee. In 2011, Carol became a trustee of Antioch University. Board members who have completed their terms and are stepping down include David Lesser, Ben Haubrich, and Mary Lesser.

Jeremy Wilson, who replaced Laurie Bryan as executive director in July, talked to members about his background in academics, the number and diversity of Harris Center programs, and potential future directions. These include enhancing high school programs and an expanded emphasis on land stewardship. Increased monitoring and even modeling potential changes to the ecosystems within the Supersanctuary will help the Harris Center be a more effective steward and provide tremendous educational resources.

The meeting was followed by great food and socializing. Thanks to all who helped and members who came and made it such an enjoyable event.

This year, the Harris Center for Conservation Education has chosen two third-grade teachers from Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in Keene—Andrea Dube, left, and Gail Woolridge—as the recipients of the 2012 Educator of the Year award. Andrea and Gail were formally honored at the annual meeting, where they were lauded as exemplary collaborators by Harris

Center Teacher/Naturalist Polly Pattison. For the past three years, as part of their Birds Across the Seasons curriculum, these teachers have brought the experience of wild bird banding to their students and to parents in the Keene community. Because of their enthusiastic



support for this curriculum, Franklin School students have learned firsthand about worldwide efforts to monitor bird populations and, in the process, have experienced the wonder of interacting with wildlife on their own school grounds. Congratulations, Andrea and Gail!

In Search of Salamanders

By Francie Von Mertens

This essay originally appeared as a Backyard Birder column in the Monadnock Ledger-Transcript on May 3, 2012.

Nature. Such a large concept with so many layers. Often it's the lure of birds seen and heard in the backyard that draws us into the natural world. Birds as one layer.

Many birders evolve into butterfly watchers and there's a growing number helping to document dragonfly species. Sometimes documentation leads to discovery: a species not known to be in the region.

A few years back I fell in love with bumblebees and then learned about pollination. Bumblebees are pollination pros.

Last week I discovered a new layer and felt the same energizing thrill of discovery.

Tom Delaney, Cynthia Nichols, and I bushwhacked our way across town conservation land that is wonderfully difficult to access: a beaver dam crossing; old logging slash and blowdowns to trip over; boulders that must have made the farmers of old curse, but made us marvel. One formation looked like a natural amphitheater, curved with ready seating.

We paused for wildflowers known as "spring ephemerals" for their brief time to flower in the sun before trees leaf out and steal the light.

A hillside carpeted by reindeer moss gave evidence of sandy soils deposited by glaciers long ago.

Down that hill, approaching river-corridor lowland, we found the first vernal pool—or what we hoped to confirm as a vernal pool. As volunteers for the Peterborough Vernal Pool Project, our mission was to survey a string of potential vernal pools that run along the Contoocook River well north of town.

After two training sessions we were on our own, map, data sheets, and camera in hand. We'd learned

the difference between spotted salamander egg masses (firmly gelatinous globs laid along a submerged twig) and wood frog eggs (looser, larger masses laid in communal groupings that look like bubbles on the water surface).

When we found the first milky white glob submerged in dark, tannic waters we could have been Forty-niners discovering gold or Mayflower passengers sighting land. Eureka!

Find spotted salamander or wood frog eggs in

an isolated forest pool and you've found a vernal pool. Salamander eggs, when first laid, are a tight opaque mass. In time they become more watery, expand, and are more transparent, revealing a clustering of individual eggs.

Cynthia, more experienced than newcomers Tom and I, said she thought the eggs had been laid after a salamander migration five nights before, one of the few rainy nights this spring. That night she had helped salamanders cross a section of Summer Street in Peterborough that's known to



Spotted salamander eggs documented during the Peterborough Vernal Pool Project volunteer training in April.

be an amphibian crossing.

Part of our elation in finding the eggs has to do with a snowless winter and dry spring—two major strikes against the formation of vernal pools.

In our training, Brett Thelen from the Harris Center warned that we might be collecting a lot of "null data." Some vernal pools she has monitored in past years didn't form this year given the lack of snowmelt. As a further contributor to null data, salamanders require wet conditions for their nocturnal migration from upland to vernal pool. This odd spring has not delivered many rainy nights to trigger amphibian migration.

We spent the morning surveying 11 pools that lie along the Contoocook. Some had no egg masses,

Continued on next page ►



A recent fall hike through our program Babies in Backpacks and Toddlers in Tow brought out these budding botanists. The Harris Center has been cosponsoring seasonal family hikes with the Grapevine Family and Resource Center in Antrim for the past several years. Programs designed for our youngest naturalists include these hikes as well as our preschool club Small Wonders, the Wee Wols summer camp, and monthly/seasonal programs in area preschools including Dublin Community Preschool and First Friends Preschool. Helping families and young children make positive and playful connections to the natural world is one of the many ways the Harris Center plants the seeds of stewardship.

Salamanders..... from previous page

most had spotted salamander eggs, and one had a loose mass of comma-shapes that Cynthia identified as eggs half-transformed into wood frog tadpoles. Small tadpoles would soon be darting about the shallow pool. Tadpoles are a frog’s larval stage, midway from egg to adult.

After bushwhacking back to our cars by a route along the river and then a tributary stream, we lingered before driving off our separate ways. In a morning’s brief time we had become best friends, bonded by the shared discovery of fragile life forms in nature’s wild world.

The next day I explored our land in Lyndeborough for vernal pools. The land is generously contoured with occasional wet depressions dense with blueberry and winterberry holly bushes and bordered by exposed tree roots and hummocks covered with mosses.

I found salamander egg masses in four pools. They were small, fist-sized at best, glowing opaquely white in a lush green world.

Again I felt the energizing excitement of discovery along with pleasure in knowing that salamanders on their annual overland march to these pools would never have to undertake a perilous road crossing. No bulldozer would ever clear their home forest or vernal pool.

I regretted that Carl wasn’t along for the discovery. Over the years we have explored the land, built a shack along its no-name stream, become familiar with certain layers—birds, of course, stone walls, a cellar hole we always intend to research, rock formations, a patch of mighty oaks surrounded by a deep, dark hemlockian forest, a stream that roars most springs but was reduced to a trickle one August drought.

Last weekend Carl helped survey three vernal pools for the Vernal Pool Project, so he’s hooked, initiated into a society that awaits spring all the more eagerly, noting depressions along roads and forest trails with the inevitable question—vernal pool?—and making a mental note to return in spring to check it out.

Editor’s Note: In its first year, citizen scientists with the Peterborough Vernal Pool Project visited 50 potential vernal pools, documenting 25 as active amphibian breeding sites, but there is much more vernal pooling to be done! The next round of volunteer trainings for the Peterborough Vernal Pool Project will be held in April 2013; in the meantime, visit www.aveo.org or contact Program Director Brett Amy Thelen at thelen@harriscenter.org or (603) 358-2065 to learn more about this springtime citizen science opportunity.



Our River, the Ashuelot

By Symonds School Fourth-Graders and Janet Altobello

October's Source to Sea Connecticut River Watershed Cleanup Day, sponsored by the Connecticut River Watershed Council, inspired ten fourth-grade classes in Keene to lend their hands to the annual cleanup along the banks of their part of the watershed—the Ashuelot River and its tributary, Beaver Brook. This year in Keene, 375 volunteers collected more than 2,500 pounds of trash. The opportunity to join community members in taking care of Keene's river was the perfect way to start the fourth-graders' Land and Water Earth Science Study.

Below are the reflections of Symonds School fourth-graders:

At Symonds School we used maps to learn about the course of the Ashuelot River. We found where the river begins and where it contributes its water to the Connecticut River. On topographic maps we saw that Keene is a flat valley surrounded by hills with streams carrying water downhill into the Ashuelot. Aha! So that's why so much water gathers in our town after heavy rain or quickly melting snow!

On the day we hiked on the bike path to the river, we dug with soil corers into the river bottom soil and then again up on top of the bank. We found more clay and moisture down below and more sand and roots and rotting leaves up above. Hmm.... It made us

think about why. We looked for signs of past flooding. The bridge posts had mud on them two feet above the flowing water. The soil under the bike path was washed away in places. We became river detectives looking for clues. We drew our soil samples, took the temperature of the river and air in Celsius and Fahrenheit, and watched a mallard duck swim by.



Sorting trash found along the Ashuelot River.

Then we put on our gloves and started the cleanup! We hunted for trash and found it. We made a graph that shows what we found. Most of the garbage was made of plastic. Most of the plastic was from food and drink packaging. Some of the surprising things we found were a shopping cart, towels, a chair like our school chairs, and a big pickle jar.

We were surprised by how much trash we found. We felt sad, or mad, or disappointed that there was so much litter. But we really liked collecting it and filling up garbage bags. One student exclaimed, "How would you like it if the wild animals collected the litter by the river and put it in YOUR house? That is what it is like for them when people litter!"

So please help keep our river and river habitat clean! Help the animals! Try your hardest! We hope you read our story and try to keep the river clean, too. You can make a difference! We can do it together!



HARRIS CENTER
FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

MAKING TRACKS
SINCE 1970

83 King's Highway
Hancock, NH 03449

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 7
Hancock, NH 03449



Printed on recycled paper

Harris Hearsay

The Harris Center for Conservation Education
Hancock, New Hampshire
www.harriscenter.org

In This Issue:

EMS Receives First Laurie Bryan Partnership Award

Searching for Salamanders

Cleaning Up Along the Ashuelot River

Open Space, and a Tale of Two Clusters

The Clustering of Open Space

By Meade Cadot

For three decades of Supersanctuary building, we have promoted “clustering open space,” which has multiple advantages over dispersed land protection. Among these are 1) providing contiguous blocks of habitat for far-ranging species like bobcat, moose, and black bear; 2) providing the forest interior needed by some neotropical migrant songbirds, like the ovenbird and the black-throated blue warbler; 3) preserving the potential for backcountry recreation, such as “wilderness” canoe camping, hunting, and on-and-off-trail trekking; 4) preserving scenic drives down country roads with protected “view sheds” that all ages can enjoy; 5) protecting not only shore lands but also whole watersheds for current and future well heads, reservoirs, and other vital water supply resources; and 6) maintaining forests on a scale large enough to manage both wildlife and timber.

This year, we’ve made major additions to one such cluster. I call it the Bailey Brook Cluster because this former mill stream parallels scenic Old Stoddard (Bailey Brook) Road, the only road through the area. The cluster was initiated in 1990 with our bargain purchase from Maury Collins of a 180-acre conservation easement protecting parcels with frontage on both sides of the road. A decade and a half later, with black bears on the increase, Antioch graduate Nada Wigand undertook a study of the frequency of black bear territorial marking (bites and rubs) on utility poles along roads throughout the Supersanctuary. Her results showed that Old Stoddard Road had more bear-marked utility poles per mile than any other!

So with Maury Collins as our long-time neighborhood watchman, we’ve kept an eye out for opportunities to protect more, and in just the past 12 months, with the backing of Supersanctuary friends, we’ve been able to purchase and thus protect an additional four properties totaling about 300 acres. What’s more, these purchases connect this whole cluster to a larger cluster around Osgood Mountain and Spoonwood Pond. In appreciation, Maury and Martha Collins protected the rest of their land by donating one 40-acre conservation easement and, with daughter Elizabeth (also an owner), donated another easement that protects an additional 138 acres. Then, “for good measure,” they gave up two of the areas



Bailey Brook Falls, part of a cluster of easements initiated in 1990.

reserved for additional houses within the initial 1990 easement. So with the Bailey Brook cluster now greatly enlarged and merged with the Osgood-Spoonwood cluster, there is a protected land block of nearly 1,300 acres—actually, 1,700 counting the Luis Cabot Preserve (between Spoonwood and Lake Nubanusit).

And now some *new* news since our annual meeting, which I should preface with an amplification of clustering advantage number 6 (listed above). The growing of timber is called silviculture, which is a form of agriculture (and why our national forests are overseen by the US Department of Agriculture rather than the Department of Interior). That is to say, protecting clusters of parcels with good agricultural soils also makes it more possible to manage for food crops and livestock as well as wildlife.

So with that in mind, I’m happy to report that Sunnyfield Farm, already protected in part, has decided to protect the rest of its farm land by conservation easement gift. Like the nearby hundred-acre Hidden Meadow Farm we helped protect back in 1988, the three new parcels to be covered by conservation easements total 53 acres along Bogle Road and include more than a mile of road frontage. There will be a big bonus for wildlife, too, in that the easement will also protect forested riparian land along the Contoocook River with more than 3,300 feet of shore frontage. It is, indeed, very reassuring to know that a protected Sunnyfield Farm can continue to provide locally and safely grown food as well as contribute to the protected shoreline—a benefit for wildlife and for those of us who enjoy a paddle on the river.