

FALL 2017

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.

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In this issue...

Chipmunk Dreams

On the Trail of the Nighthawk

Our 47th Annual Meeting

Land Conservation News

**Remembering Ollie Mutch
and Russ Daigle**

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.

Our warmest thanks go out to everyone who has made a donation to the Harris Center's Annual Fund or to our Membership drive. If you've yet to give this year, we hope you'll reflect on the widespread benefit to all as you consider making a contribution. If you'd like to make your donation online, visit us at harriscenter.org. For other ways to donate, please contact Diana at (603) 525-3394 or jacobs@harriscenter.org. We appreciate your support!

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photo: Brett Amy Thelen





Chipmunk Dreams

by Susie Spikol Faber, Teacher/Naturalist

My pockets are loaded with acorns, colorful leaves, and little bits of birch bark, gifts from a group of toddlers. We are on a *Babies in Backpacks and Toddlers in Tow* ramble. As we walk, my little companions gather up treasures, handing them to me for safe keeping.

The toddlers aren't alone in their gathering. The drop in temperature and slow shift from light to dark reminds me that we are hardwired to collect, gather, and put away in preparation for winter. It's an ancient, primitive act. At home my family spends our autumn weekends harvesting tomatoes and peppers from the garden, preserving the harvest in sauces and jams, and stowing vegetables away in our root cellar. We stack our wood, bring out the winter blankets, and take our last swims. We are mad with projects we need to complete before the cold sets in.

I could grieve the passing of summer into fall and fall into the long winter. I don't like the dark or the cold. I like to walk barefoot on the grass, eat soft plums and ripe tomatoes, and feel my skin grow hot under a summer sun.

But this year, I have found a hero to inspire me: *Tamias striatus*, the Eastern Chipmunk.

The toddlers and I spy on this busy ground squirrel as she scampers along a stone wall and dives for her den, her bushy tail straight as a rod. When we see her again, she's stuffing her cheeks with sunflower seeds at the base of a bird feeder. Later we hike into the woods and find rock ledges dotted with acorn shells that have been peeled by Chipmunk's nimble paws.

I am in kinship with this industrious rodent. We are both preparing for winter by gathering our supplies. The chipmunk is the master. In fact, the first part of its scientific name,

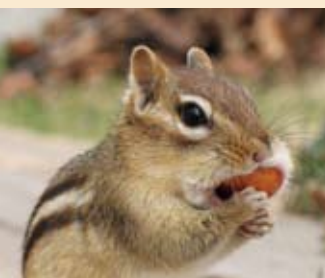
photo: Gilles Gonthier via the Creative Commons

Tamias, means "storer" in Greek. Once, the naturalist John Burroughs unpacked a chipmunk's den and discovered that, over only three days' time, it had stored a bushel of food, including five quarts of hickory nuts, two quarts of chestnuts, and a pile of corn kernels.

At night as I climb under our winter quilt, I imagine the chipmunk, snuggled down in her den, lying atop a thick pile of leaves. Tucked under her bed is her winter stash: acorns, beech nuts, maple seeds, fungi, apple bits, and even a few hazelnuts gathered from the edge of our pond. At some moment when it becomes too cold, the chipmunk will stop her scurrying and take to her bedchamber, waking only every now and then to reach under her leafy bedding for a snack. My dream come true, I think, as I drift off to sleep, that I could reach under my own bed, eat a snack, roll over, go back to sleep, and not even care about the crumbs.

All winter long, the chipmunk will snooze and wake, snooze and wake, never completely going into full hibernation. There will be snacking, stretching, getting up to visit the latrine chamber, and then climbing back into bed to sleep some more, curled up in a ball with her fur fluffed for insulation and her tail stretched over her head. On the warmest days of winter, Chipmunk will emerge from the darkness of her den and stretch in the sunlight, grooming her fur and looking for signs of spring.

Oh, how I'd like to take a page from this little chippie's playbook. To work hard all fall but then retire to a bed stocked with my favorite foods. And to only come out on the days that remind us that spring will indeed come again. 🐿



On the Trail of the Common Nighthawk

by Katie Koster, Project Nighthawk Program Assistant

This past summer, I spent my evenings in downtown Keene, eyes trained skyward and hands cupped behind my ears, trying to pinpoint even the faintest *peent*. As an intern for **Project Nighthawk**, a citizen science endeavor coordinated by the Harris Center and NH Audubon, I was looking for Common Nighthawks (*Chordeiles minor*), with the ultimate hope of locating and monitoring successful breeding pairs.

The birds are active at dusk and dawn, especially in cities, where they feast upon flying insects. The males have a very distinctive *peent!* call. They're of particular interest because, contrary to what their name would suggest, they're endangered in New Hampshire. Keene is one of only a handful of Granite State cities that still hosts nesting pairs.

Given these birds' propensity for nesting on flat gravel rooftops and for twilight flights, I often found myself in empty parking lots



photo: Kenneth Cole Schneider

American Cuckoos, Goatsuckers, Hummingbirds, and Their Allies, Alfred Otto Gross wrote, "The nighthawk, because of its piercing calls and extraordinary evolutions and gyrations of its flight, attracts many persons, even the casual observers who ordinarily pay no special attention to birds."

Indeed, during nearly every observation, people stopped to talk to me. At first, they'd be suspicious. Then, their curiosity would get the better of them, and they'd ask what I was doing. My explanations opened the door to heaps of nighthawk

I won't soon forget standing still in the middle of a Keene sidewalk, pushing aside the events of the day, savoring the slow fading of the sunlight, embracing the light of the first stars, and witnessing – awestruck – a stunning nighthawk courtship dance silhouetted against the twilight.

in the gathering darkness, long after business hours. Noting security cameras, I would clutch a clipboard and pencil to lend myself an air of legitimacy. And I quickly realized that it is inappropriate to stand near bank ATMs when you have binoculars hanging around your neck!

On group survey nights, which took place every few weeks, I was happy to be joined by other birders – novice and accomplished alike. It was inexplicably thrilling to be part of a team as it fanned out across the city to triangulate bird activity.

Once I settled into my role of observer, I was surprised by what unfolded. In his chapter on nighthawks in *Life Histories of North*

stories. People recounted precise details of their personal experiences with nighthawks, with some memories reaching back across many years.

I'm grateful that so many people shared their nighthawk connections with me. I'm also thankful for this project's inherent mandate to *slow down*. I never did find a nighthawk nest, but I won't soon forget standing still in the middle of a Keene sidewalk, pushing aside the events of the day, savoring the slow fading of the sunlight, embracing the light of the first stars, and witnessing – awestruck – a stunning nighthawk courtship dance silhouetted against the twilight. ➔



◀ Katie currently works as a Weather Observer at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, Antarctica. Her first trip to the South Pole occurred ten years ago, and she remains captivated by the austere beauty that surrounds her on the highest, driest, and windiest continent on Earth. When she's home in New Hampshire, she likes to wiggle her toes in the dirt – something she can't do in Antarctica!

Educators Honored at Our 2017 Annual Meeting

The Harris Center for Conservation Education (HCCE) held our 47th Annual Meeting on Sunday, October 22. The gathering included a brief business meeting, educator awards, highlights from the year, and a fascinating talk by Eric Masterson.

Lori Groleau, a 6th grade social studies teacher at South Meadow School, was named the **Harris Center Educator of the Year**. Lori has been working with the Harris Center for 16 years. She is an exemplary and inspiring collaborating teacher, with a unique ability to envision new possibilities, a willingness to dive into unknown territory, tireless dedication above and beyond the classroom, and an infectious curiosity and enthusiasm. Most recently, she has worked with John Benjamin (HCCE) and Matthew Roy (Otter Book Farm) to renovate the South Meadow School (SMS) greenhouse and gardens as part of a unit on sustainable food systems, plant growth, and scientific inquiry. The SMS garden is now teeming with fruits and vegetables and serves as a wonderful outdoor lab, where students can have fun engaging in hands-on learning.

Jay Hale from First Friends Preschools was given the **Laurie Bryan Partnership Award** for her efforts to bring the Harris Center's nature-based education programs to all the First Friends Preschools in the ConVal School District. Because of Jay, Harris Center natural-



◀ **Jay Hale (right) of First Friends Preschools received the Laurie Bryan Partnership Award. Here, she is pictured with Harris Center teacher/naturalist, Jaime Hutchinson.**

ists now visit all four First Friends classrooms five times throughout the school year. In Jay's words: "I like the way the partnership [with the Harris Center] has given the preschool staff a framework for sharing ideas with each other. We often share ways in which we have expanded on a particular Harris Center theme

(with math activities, dramatic play ideas, etc.), which enriches all the programs. I have also liked the way the theme approach has been successful for a diverse group of learners. While one child is expanding vocabulary and labeling an 'acorn,' another is focused on the life cycle of an oak tree."

Eric Masterson's presentation to the standing-room only crowd was a talk entitled: *Kettle of One: the Broad-Winged Hawk Migration Route by Bicycle*. This past year, Eric followed the migration route of the



Broad-Winged Hawk from Hancock, NH to Panama City, Panama on his bike. His entertaining talk mixed fascinating tidbits about bird migration with hilarious and captivating reflections on his travels, the people he met, and plans for his next big adventure.

Harris Center Executive Director Jeremy Wilson reviewed highlights from the past year across the HCCE's major program areas:

In **Environmental Education**, Harris Center naturalists worked with over 3,000 students from 30 different schools this past year, helping them to discover nature in their backyards and schoolyards. In addition, we expanded professional development offerings for classroom teachers in both the ConVal and Keene school districts, helping participating teachers feel more comfortable with bringing their classes outside while still meeting curriculum requirements. Thanks to a grant from 100+ Women Who Care Peterborough, Lab Girls – an HCCE afterschool program at South Meadow and Great Brook Schools that keeps middle school girls engaged in science through mentorship and hands-on learning – also got off to a great start.



▲ **Lori Groleau (right), 6th grade social studies teacher at South Meadow School, with Harris Center teacher/naturalist John Benjamin.**

In **Land Conservation**, the Harris Center has now conserved more than 23,000 acres of land in our eight-town focus area. In addition, progress continues on opening rail trail segments in Hancock and Harrisville for recreational use, with another 1.5-mile section scheduled to open later this fall.

In **Conservation Research**, the Harris Center's Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteers moved more than 3,700 amphibians safely across roads during migration nights last spring. Our Vernal Pool Project volunteers documented an additional 46 vernal pools – which serve as specialized breeding habitat for those migrating amphibians – bringing our total for the Monadnock Region to 286 documented pools. The Harris Center-Keene State College conservation internship program completed its fifth successful year, with four fantastic undergraduate interns from the KSC Department of Environmental Studies helping the Harris Center manage and monitor our conserved lands.

In a brief business meeting, Sue Copley, Chair of the Board of Trustees, thanked retiring board member Alison Rossiter for her years of service and welcomed Lois Haskins to the Board. Officers for the next year include Sue Copley as Chair, Carol Thompson as Vice Chair, Richard Pendleton as Treasurer, and Hunt Dowse as Secretary. Jeremy wrapped up the meeting by thanking all of the Harris Center volunteers, who allow us to accomplish so much each year. ➤



photos: Jeremy Wilson

LAND CONSERVATION NEWS

Reviving a Rail Trail in Harrisville and Hancock

by Jeremy Wilson, Executive Director, and Barbara Watkins, Harrisville Trails Committee Chair

Over the last few years, the Harrisville Trails Committee and the Harris Center have been working to open sections of the old Manchester & Keene Railroad line to non-motorized recreation. This rail line first opened in 1878 to provide train service between Keene and Nashua. In 1893, it was taken over by the Boston & Maine Railroad. Amazingly, it only remained in service for 58 years: railroad use declined during the 1930s, and the Great New England Flood of 1936 damaged many trestles that were never repaired.

Last summer and this fall, we've focused on a 1.5-mile segment that runs from Jaquith Road in Harrisville to Jaquith Road in Hancock – a section that Harrisville Trails has been exploring the possibility of reopening for 20 years! Opening this section of trail has required clearing trees, excavating old drainage ditches, regrading the rail bed, replacing two bridges, and completing concrete work on existing abutments. The biggest challenge was replacing a large missing bridge over Jaquith Brook. Wonderfully, the 50-foot gap between abutments over Jaquith Brook has now been spanned by a steel truss that was once used as an auto bridge in Roxbury, NH. The trusses were installed by a crane and volunteer crew from American Steel and Precast Erectors on October 28. Still to come: decking, guardrails, improved trail drainage, and regrading the approaches to the bridge. We hope to have this remaining work completed by the end of December.

This rail trail project was made possible by grants from the *New Hampshire Recreational Trails Program* and the *Quabbin to Cardigan Partnership*; *Harrisville Trails* and *Steve Lindsey*, who donated the bridge trusses; *Charles Merrill* and the

Merrill Family, who donated land in honor of Mary Merrill; extraordinary donations of both land and funds from *Friends of the SuperSanctuary*; and many generous donations from individuals in support of the bridge installation.

Many fantastic volunteers and local businesses also contributed time, expertise, and materials to make this project happen. These include:

Tom Weller of Weller & Michal Architects and Harrisville Trails, who designed the bridge installation

Ted Fellows, who provided engineering services

Dave Webb (Harrisville Trails) and **Ray Cilley** of American Steel and Precast Erectors, and their crew of Doug Whitney, Michael Sparling, Dave King, Chris Emanuelson, and Bernie Bryant, who installed the trusses

David and Colin Kennard of Wellscroft Farm and Harrisville Trails, who transported the trusses

Jeff Trudelle of Harrisville, who both worked and volunteered on installing the concrete and bridge decking

Brice Raynor of EZCrete and Harrisville

Todd Abbott of Abbott Concrete Construction and Harrisville **The Fastener Mill** and **Hamshaw Lumber**

Thanks to everyone who came together to make such an extraordinary community investment in the region's recreational resources. Stay tuned – we'll be planning a grand opening event in the spring! 🐾



▲ Remembering Ollie Mutch

It's very sad for us all that longtime outing leader Ollie Mutch lost his battle with cancer this year. Ollie was a true friend of the Harris Center, and a man of great wisdom and resourcefulness. When he was just out of high school, he cobbled together enough money to buy a piece of land in Ashby, MA, on which he built a one-room cabin. After his service in the US Army, he began to grow the cabin, one room at a time. And since the late 1990s, he has hosted delicious, post-Harris-Center-hike lunches there with his significant others, Jane Mutch (who died in 2006) and Jan Miller. Ollie began volunteering with the Harris Center way back in the winter of 1993 and was a regular outing leader right up until April 2016. He will be deeply missed. ~ *Meade Cadot*

▼ Remembering Russ Daigle

Russ Daigle was an avid hike leader for the Harris Center, leading an astounding 48 trips by foot, bicycle, and canoe to a variety of special places around the Monadnock Region in just five years. His friendly face – framed by his distinctive, three-eyed, yellow hiking hat – was a



near-constant presence on Harris Center outings. With great sadness, we report that Russ died unexpectedly this summer. A group of his family and friends, including several friends from the Harris Center, gathered this September to scatter his ashes at Pitcher Mountain, one of his favorite places.

~ *Eric Masterson*

Harrisville-Hancock Rail Trail Project

