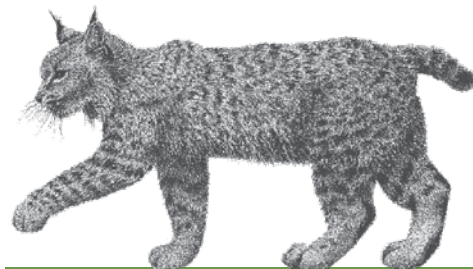


FALL 2018

# Harris Hearsay

THE HARRIS CENTER FOR CONSERVATION EDUCATION

Hancock, New Hampshire



Pileated Woodpecker photo: Maude Cadot



## 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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Broad-winged Hawk before release photo: Ken Bergman

**[harriscenter.org](http://harriscenter.org)**





# A Forest Bath (No Towel Needed)

by Susie Spikol, Community Programs Coordinator and Teacher-Naturalist



I've been out bathing — without a towel, soap, or even a tub. Instead, I've been walking, slowly, through the gateway between field and forest. Each step is intentional. With each breath, I taste the autumn air, filled with the scent of sun-warmed leaves and the spicy aroma of the nearby marsh.

I'm not alone on this ramble. Around me, others are reaching out to feel the rough, chip-like bark of the cherry tree and inhaling the pungent scent of white pine sap. Each one of us has accepted the invitation to slow down, take notice, wake up our senses, and come into the comfort and embrace of the woods. We are forest bathers.

The idea of “forest bathing” comes to us from Japan, where it's called *Shinrin-yoku* and has been practiced since the 1980s. *Shinrin-yoku* asks you to put the emphasis on your senses: what do you see, smell, hear, touch, and even taste? Although it would like to think of itself as a new idea, I recognize its roots in other voices that have come and gone. I think especially of Thoreau, who didn't just walk through the woods, he sauntered.

Forest bathing has a very different feel than a traditional nature walk or a hike to a specific destination. It's about reconnecting, grounding yourself, opening your senses, and being fully present in the moment. Studies conducted in Japan and South Korea have shown that it has clear health benefits, including lower blood pressure, reduced levels of cortisol (a stress hormone), and slower heart rates. Participants also report feeling calmer, more focused, and rejuvenated after their *Shinrin-yoku* experiences.

How is it that a simple amble about the woods can leave us feeling refreshed, refocused, and calmer? It's partly chemical. Research has shown that trees release phytoncides, volatile oils that can increase our immune function and decrease our production of stress hormones.

This idea that being around trees is good for us makes sense to me. Think of evolution: in our prehistoric lives as savannah dwellers, we survived by seeking refuge from ground predators in the safety of trees. We're hardwired, as E.O. Wilson suggests in his book *Biophilia*, with a fundamental need to connect to the natural world. It's part of our evolutionary heritage, our ancient blueprint. It's what makes us who we are, and drifting away from it has affected our health. We become healthier, happier human beings simply by being outside in the embrace of a forest. Our rational minds may not always recognize it, but inside our most elemental selves, our spirits know it to be true.

So take yourself outside for a saunter. Don't bring a field guide. Have no destination in mind. Just go with your senses open. Let your ears hear the rustling of the wind through the leaves, and your hands wander across soft moss. Lift your eyes towards the trees and notice how the light laces through their branches. Breathe the air like you are eating it, deep and full. And when you decide to finish your forest bath, don't dry off. Instead, take it back with you in your heart, for the rest of the day, for the rest of your life. ➡

photo: Ben Conant



# Scenes from the GRANITE LAKE HEADWATERS WILDLIFE CAM

Text by Brett Amy Thelen,  
Science Director

Photos by Taylor White,  
KSC Undergraduate Researcher

This year, Keene State College senior Taylor White conducted a capstone research project on wildlife use of the 515-acre Granite Lake Headwaters property in Stoddard. From May through October, Taylor monitored a set of six trail cameras and recorded tracks, sign, and sightings of wildlife encountered on his frequent visits to the property. His images reveal a landscape alive with activity: bear, moose, bobcat, fisher, otter, beaver, coyote, deer, raccoon, porcupine, snowshoe hare, and even a family of barred owls, complete with gangly, fuzzy fledglings.

The Harris Center is actively working to protect this property. Once conserved, the land will be managed for wildlife habitat, forest health, and downstream water quality. To learn more or to make a donation in support of the Granite Lake Headwaters project, visit [harriscenter.org](http://harriscenter.org).

## BEAR



## FISHER



## BARRED OWLS



## OTTER



## DEER



## COYOTE



## PORCUPINE



## MOOSE





# Community Partners Honored at Annual Meeting



Harris Center naturalist Jenna Spear (right) presented Claudia Dery (left) with the Harris Center's "2018 Educator of the Year" Award.

The Harris Center recognized several extraordinary partners at our 48th Annual Meeting on Sunday, October 28.

**Claudia Dery**, a 5th and 6th grade teacher at the Wells Memorial School, was named the **2018 Educator of the Year**. Claudia's history with the Harris Center dates all the way back to 1988, when she interned with us as a graduate student at Antioch University New England. She then went on to become our summer camp director and one of our teacher-naturalists, where she worked with her own intern — now longtime Harris Center naturalist Susie Spikol — on the Rot and Roll Festival, celebrating soil and decomposition. For the last ten years, Claudia has taught at the Wells Memorial School in Harrisville, where she collaborates with Harris Center teacher-naturalist Jenna Spear on a bee curriculum that has led to the creation of a new pollinator garden on the school grounds. At the heart of all of Claudia's teaching is creating surprising, playful, and memorable experiences for children in the outdoors.

The **2018 Laurie Bryan Partnership Award** — honoring former Harris Center Executive Director Laurie Bryan's achievements in working with community partners — was given to **Ray Cilley** and **American Steel and Precast Erectors**. For twenty years, Ray has generously taken Harris Center staff up in his small plane in order to take aerial photographs of properties we hope to conserve, providing compelling imagery for fundraising efforts. In addition, through Ray's connections and with **Dave Webb's** coordination, a large crane and the labor needed to install a steel truss bridge on the Jaquith Rail Trail were donated by American Steel and Precast Erectors this past year. To say that we're grateful to Ray and American Steel for their contributions to our land program would be an understatement.

In between awards, Harris Center Executive Director reviewed highlights from the past year across the Harris Center's major program areas:

In **Environmental Education**, Harris Center teacher-naturalists led more than 3,000 students from 30 different schools in explorations of nearby nature this year. Hundreds of people also participated in our community programs, which include camps, afterschool activities, early morning walking clubs, outings for babies and toddlers, programs at retirement communities and assisted living facilities, and more than 100 outings and events for the general public.

In **Land Conservation**, we worked with the Harrisville Trails Committee to open a 1.5-mile stretch of rail trail between Harrisville and Hancock, and purchased a 20-acre conservation easement on a wooded parcel near Hancock Village. We also initiated two large conservation projects that we hope to complete next year: a 47-acre conservation easement on the south side of Silver Lake in Harrisville, and the purchase of the 515-acre Granite Lake Headwaters property in Stoddard.

In **Conservation Research**, the City of Keene closed a road to vehicle traffic in order to protect migrating amphibians and to provide a safe space for families to witness the spring amphibian migration. This is the first time a community has closed a road for amphibians anywhere in New Hampshire, and it was based on our Salamander Crossing Brigade data. In addition, the Harris Center-Keene State College conservation internship program completed its sixth successful year, with four fantastic undergraduate interns from the KSC Department of Environmental Studies helping us manage and monitor our conserved lands.

In a brief business meeting, Richard Pendleton, new Chair of the Harris Center's Board of Trustees, thanked outgoing Chair Sue Copley and retiring Board members Hunt Dowse, Tyler Hogan, and Carol Thompson for their years of dedicated service. He also welcomed Michael George of Jaffrey, Tim Jordan of Keene, Tim Riley of Peterborough, and Carol Young of Hancock to the Board and announced officers for the next year: Richard Pendleton as Chair, Jim Hassinger as Vice Chair, Sandy Green as Treasurer, and Dan Langille as Secretary. 🐸



Harris Center Land Program Coordinator Eric Masterson (center) presented Ray Cilley (left) and American Steel with the 2018 Laurie Bryan Partnership Award. Dave Webb (right) of American Steel was also thanked for his invaluable contributions to last year's rail trail bridge installation.

photos: Brett Amy Thelen

# Teaming Up for Hawks

by Phil Brown, Hawk Watch Coordinator

The Harris Center has a long history of collaborating with New Hampshire Audubon on land protection, citizen science, and education projects. Now, we're excited to work together to strengthen research and education activities at the Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory in Peterborough. Every autumn, as thousands of raptors pass above the summit of Pack Monadnock in Miller State Park on their way to southern wintering grounds, Observatory staff tally the birds and introduce thousands of visitors to the spectacle in the sky. The Observatory has been collecting raptor migration data from this premier hawkwatching location for fourteen years.

Through the new partnership, I bring ten years of experience directing the Observatory for New Hampshire Audubon to the Harris Center's new Hawk Watch Coordinator role. Antioch University New England graduate student Chad Witko served as our Seasonal Raptor Biologist. Under the direction of Susie Spikol, the Harris Center also added new educational programming for visiting school groups. Volunteers were vital to both the data collection and education efforts.

## Migration Trends in 2018

As migration season winds down, we're beginning to discern some major trends. Two species, Bald Eagle and Golden Eagle, soared to record high counts in 2018. This upward trend is consistent with recovering Bald Eagle populations locally and across their breeding range, and with Golden Eagle numbers from a breeding population in eastern Canada, which continues to show signs of growth.

Broad-winged Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks, on the other hand, fell well below their long-term averages this year. Local weather patterns including lots of rainfall and fog at high elevations, along with a lack of strong westerly winds during September, are likely to blame for this significant drop in counts

of our two most numerous migratory species.

This year's data also underscore that there is reason to be concerned about several species, including American



**A Kettle of Broad-winged Hawks** photo © Lillian Stokes

Kestrel, Osprey, Northern Harrier, and Northern Goshawk – all of which are exhibiting long-term declines.

## Why Study Hawks?

Raptors are good indicators of environmental health because they inhabit most ecosystem types, occupy large home ranges, feed at the top of the food web, and are highly sensitive to human disturbance. They're also relatively easy to tally when they congregate during migration.

Pack Monadnock is just one location among a large network of raptor monitoring sites that operate under the umbrella of the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), another project partner. The standardized, long-term data collected through HMANA – particularly at Pack – is essential for calculating raptor population estimates and documenting changes in raptor populations over time. ➡



**Hawkwatching** photo: Brett Amy Thelen



**Harris Center teacher-naturalists introduce students to the excitement of hawkwatching.**

photo: Katrina Fenton





# Warm Welcomes and Fond Farewells



Karen Rent, Teacher-Naturalist



Lisa Murray, Outreach Manager

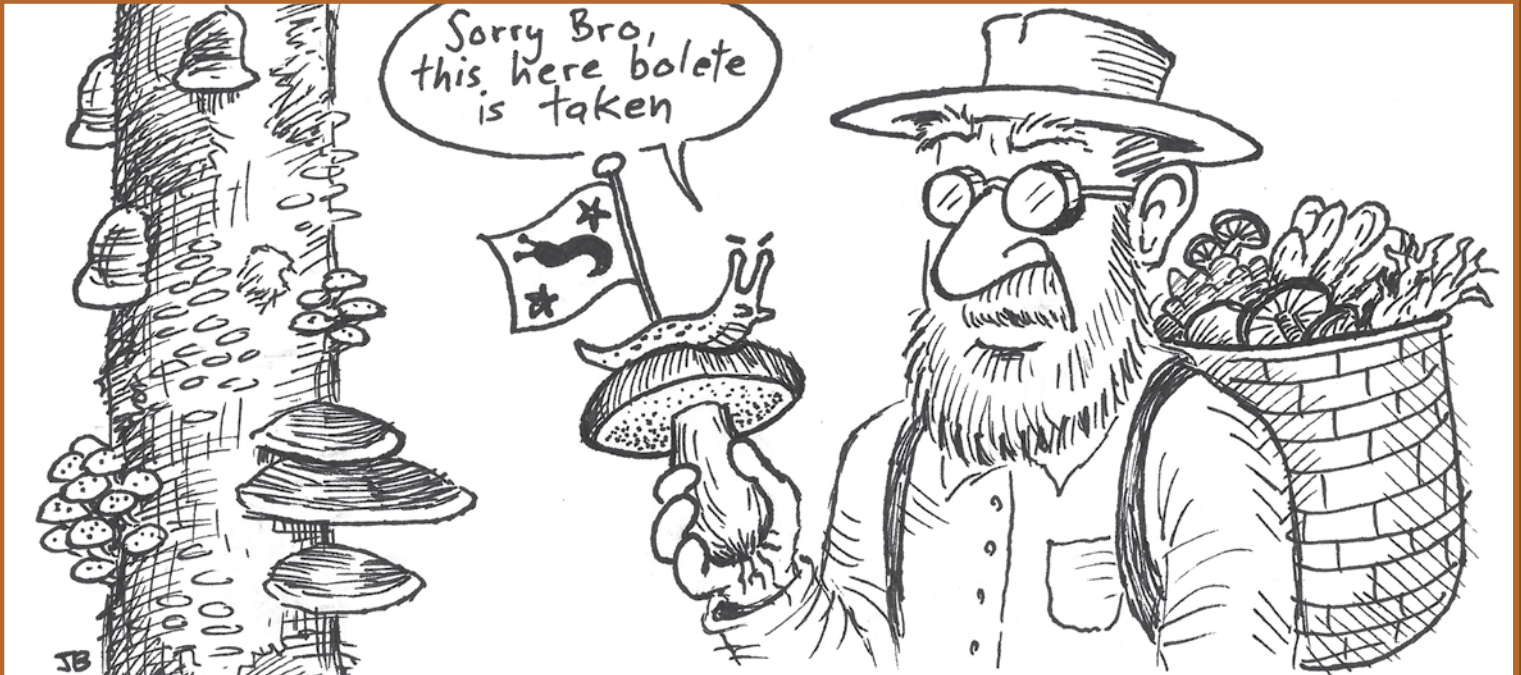


Phil Brown, Hawk Watch Coordinator

We're delighted to share that we've added three new staff members to the Harris Center team: Teacher-Naturalist **Karen Rent**, Hawk Watch Coordinator **Phil Brown**, and Outreach Manager **Lisa Murray**. Karen comes to us with two decades of environmental education experience, including stints with Acadia National Park, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and Maine Audubon. Phil has been NH Audubon's hawk watch coordinator for ten years, and Lisa's impressive background includes development and fundraising for both Franklin Pierce University and Peterborough Players. Welcome, Karen, Phil, and Lisa!

We've also bid a fond farewell to two treasured Harris Center staffers: Teacher-Naturalist **Michael Hightower**, who has taken a new position at ConVal High School, and **Pete Carroll** – master builder, fixer, problem solver, groundskeeper, and cookie purveyor – who has relocated to Glens Falls, NY. We miss them both, and wish them all the best in their new adventures. 🍪

## Mushroom Musings by John Benjamin, Teacher-Naturalist



The disputed mushroom is a King Bolete (*Boletus edulis*), otherwise known as a Porcini, a choice edible species. Boletes, a diverse group of mushrooms with a spongy pore surface under the cap, are abundant in New England woods in the late summer and fall.