

SPRING 2022

# Harris Hearsay

*News of the Harris Center and Our Work in the Community*

**Our Mission** A donor-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.



VOL. 45, NO.1

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## *Save the Date* Saturday, June 11

**Special Event for Harris Center  
Supporters: Brunch & Butterflies  
(& Caterpillars Too!)**

*Supporters, look for your invitation in the mail in late May.* If you haven't yet renewed your support for this fiscal year (ending on June 30, 2022) or would like to donate for the first time, please visit [harriscenter.org/donate](http://harriscenter.org/donate) or contact Lisa Murray at [murray@harriscenter.org](mailto:murray@harriscenter.org).

◀ **Painted Lady** © Bruce Boyer

▶ **American Kestrel in Flight** © Josh Hass / HawsOnTheWing

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

## **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 through our planned giving program, Bobcats Forever Legacy Society. 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](mailto:wilson@harriscenter.org).

**BOBCATS  
FOREVER**  
LEGACY SOCIETY  
HARRIS CENTER  
PLANNED GIVING



# FOX TIME

by Susie Spikol, Community Programs  
Director and Teacher-Naturalist



We're in the zone, totally caught up in the moment, and hot on the trail of a red fox. My tracking partners are fourth graders, and they are full-in — following the fox's trail on hands and knees as it slinks around the forest forts and fairy houses that dot their school woods.

With two inches of powdery snow on top of a skin of hard ice, the conditions couldn't be better. Each track is a perfect imprint of four petite toes ending in tiny triangular claw marks. The fox — usually an invisible visitor — is revealed.

We take off our gloves and touch the tracks, feeling each toeprint as if we could slip a little bit of fox into our hearts. We notice where the fox sat down to sniff a mouse hole, and then we find a treasure: the fox's skunk-scented urine. This pungent territorial marking fills the winter air, reminding us that we share the world with a wildness, even behind the elementary school in downtown Hancock.

For an hour, the line between wild and us grows thin. Snaking around hemlocks and pines, we walk in kinship with this fiery animal. I know we aren't really foxes, but in this moment we have slipped out of the everyday and into fox time.

What starts with the fox expands to the forest, as we hear the scrabble of a winter wren climbing up a tree trunk and the way the crinkly brown beech leaves whisper in the wind. We notice how the air smells sharp with snow.

There is a mindfulness to our time — a deep breath filling each of us with woods, sunlight, snow. It brings to mind slow birding, slow eating, forest bathing — all practices that invite us to be present and let the power of our senses draw out a deep connection to the world around us.

It isn't always like this. Sometimes there are no tracks to get lost in. Sometimes fourth graders need to move and have no

patience for following the meandering trail of any animals other than themselves. And sometimes I, as their leader, am distracted by my own ramblings and agenda. But more often than not, spending time tracing the footfalls of wild animals invites us to slow down and take notice.

Deep in each of us lives a tracker, a hunter, and a gatherer. It is our biological legacy, an ancient human hardwiring. None of us would be here today if our ancestors hadn't been so skilled at finding and following the signposts that brought their next meal or signaled danger. Most of us no longer have to track for survival, but we still engage in this ancient experience, even if we don't often recognize it as such. Think, for instance, about how we shop. When we search for a bargain or a specific color, we are keying into a sensory accounting, a way of deeply noticing.

Instead of turning this on inside a store, tune into it on your next walk. Let your eyes wander. Search the soft mud along a river's edge for raccoon tracks, or for the way meadow grass bends like a ribbon where a deer grazed. Take your time, and listen for the chattering red squirrel against the backdrop of birdsong on an early spring morning. Stop to breathe in long and slow, filling your body with the scent of pine needles or the spicy aroma of sun-on-soil. When the lilacs are in bloom this spring, bury your face in the silky blossoms.

And if you can, let yourself walk in fox time. You will never regret it. 🦊



# For the Birds:

## New Bird Research & Education Opportunities with the Harris Center

by Phil Brown, Bird Conservation Director & Land Specialist

Birds have long been a key component of the Harris Center's educational programs. Why? They are among the most visible (and audible) expressions of our living world, present nearly everywhere humans are, during all seasons. One cannot help but notice them, whether it be the familiar backyard American Robin hopping on our lawns, the ubiquitous Wild Turkey strutting in roads and open fields, or the increasingly common Bald Eagle — several of which now breed in the SuperSanctuary — soaring overhead. For many of us, they are a gateway to the natural world.

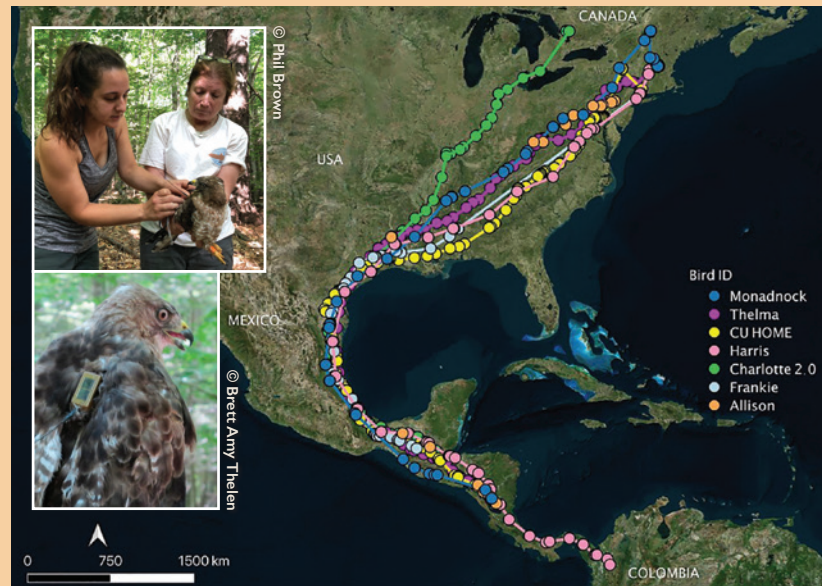
Birds are also useful indicators of environmental health and barometers of climate change. Equally important, as the pandemic has demonstrated to the growing number of us who identify as 'birders,' birds bring us great joy, peace, and connection.

Much of the Harris Center's past work has focused on conserving places birds inhabit, but how much do we really know about the dozens of species of songbirds, raptors, and other birds that breed in the SuperSanctuary? Surveys are often lacking or dated, and statewide monitoring is heavily skewed toward threatened and endangered species. In the famous words of Rosalie Edge, founder of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, "The time to protect a species is while it is still common."

The Harris Center is now committed to expanding our bird research and education work, and to increasing land stewardship activities that benefit birds, other wildlife, and ultimately, us humans — a commitment demonstrated by my new role as the organization's first-ever Bird Conservation Director. In the coming years, we especially aim to grow our community science programming, and to use it as a tool to monitor and manage for bird populations, including those that most need our help.

The **Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory** is a successful example of how this approach can work. Each fall, Harris Center staff and volunteers help tally migrating raptors, with our long-term data informing knowledge of global raptor populations. Additionally, Pack serves as an important outreach site, sharing the raptor migration — and a positive conservation message — with over 6,500 visitors in 2021 alone.

The **Broad-winged Hawk tracking project** is another example. Through a partnership with Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, Harris Center staff and volunteers located nine Broad-winged nests in the Monadnock Region in 2021, and Hawk Mountain researchers affixed three adult birds with satellite and cellular transmitters. We've already learned so much about New England's population of this familiar summer raptor from just one season of nest and migration monitoring. Maps showing how these birds use the

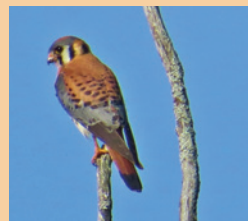


### ▲ Broad-winged Hawk Tracking Project

landscape, both locally and on their wintering grounds as far away as Colombia, have yielded particularly vital insight. By the time you're reading this article, Broad-winged Hawks will have arrived back on their breeding grounds, and our volunteers will have already begun monitoring nest sites for a second season of research.

This year, the Harris Center's raptor work is also expanding to include two less-common and declining species: the American Kestrel and the Northern Goshawk.

The tiny and beautiful kestrel, our smallest falcon, has suffered a slow, steady decline as a nesting bird, both nationally and locally. The reasons for this decline are varied, but conservationists know how to help: by **providing and maintaining kestrel nest boxes** in open landscapes such as meadows. This spring, we're launching a project whose goals include collecting baseline information on breeding kestrels in our region and identifying new locations where nest boxes and other management techniques could make a difference.



▲ American Kestrel  
© Meade Cadot

*Continued inside...*



# Safe Passage for Salamanders:

## Keene to Close Second Road to Protect Migrating Amphibians

by Brett Amy Thelen, Science Director



▲ **Big Night Detour at North Lincoln Street** Keene is the only community in the Granite State (so far) to close roads specifically to protect migrating amphibians.

Every year, on the first warm, rainy nights of spring, thousands of salamanders and frogs migrate to vernal pools and other wetlands to breed. Many are killed when they must cross roads to reach their destinations. Studies have shown that this road mortality can have a significant impact on local amphibian populations, and that efforts to protect migrating amphibians can reverse the negative trend.

Since 2007, our Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteers have moved more than 60,000 amphibians to safety at dozens of road crossings throughout the Monadnock Region — making an indelible impact on the lives of those individual amphibians — but we also know that we can't carry every frog across every road. Our big-picture goal is to collect data that can be used to inform more permanent solutions, such as wildlife tunnels or migration-night road closures.

In 2018, the Harris Center began working with the City of Keene to close the North Lincoln Street crossing site to vehicle traffic on “Big Nights” for amphibian migration, ensuring the safety of migrating amphibians, as well as the many families who come out to witness the spectacle. Initial data from the first three seasons of amphibian road closures at North Lincoln Street indicate that the detours are



▲ **Jefferson Complex Salamander at Jordan Road**

© Sigrid Scholz-Karabakakis

Between 2008 and 2021, our dedicated Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteers provided safe passage for nearly 2,500 amphibians at Jordan Road, and documented more than 350 roadkills. These numbers are underestimates — likely significantly so — as our volunteers typically don't stay out after midnight, but the migration can continue until just before dawn if conditions are right.

*“It gives me hope for this world that Keene closes a street for this.”* — Kathleen B.



reducing amphibian roadkill at that site, even if we can't close the road on every migration night in a given season.

This spring, the Keene City Council voted unanimously in support of expanding these "Big Night detours" to a second crossing site, at Jordan Road. Although fewer individual amphibians cross Jordan Road than North Lincoln Street, the Jordan Road crossing is notable for its concentration of Jefferson complex salamanders, which are a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New Hampshire.

Keene is the first — and, so far, only — community in New Hampshire to close roads for the protection of migrating amphibians, and their decision to do so was based in large part on data collected by our Salamander Brigade volunteers. This is the power of community science! 🐸



### In Memoriam: Sigrid Scholz-Karabakakis

It is particularly poignant that this is the year Big Night detours will come to Jordan Road for the first time, as this is also the year we lost longtime Salamander Crossing Brigade volunteer Sigrid Scholz-Karabakakis — and Jordan Road was Sigrid's site. For more than fifteen years, Sigrid shepherded salamanders and frogs on rainy nights at Jordan Road, never missing a migration unless she was physically incapable of being there. Even then, she always made sure to line up someone to serve in her stead. Over the years, she personally provided safe passage for thousands of amphibians, mentoring many new volunteers along the way. Her care, compassion, and immense dedication to the natural world were an inspiration. We miss her very much, most of all on rainy spring nights.

### For the Birds, *continued...*

Less understood is the Northern Goshawk, a large forest raptor whose steep decline is still a mystery. Although we are still investigating how the Harris Center might play a bigger role in understanding (and hopefully reversing) this decline through collaboration with researchers from Maine to Maryland, our early goals are to **identify goshawk nesting locations** in the Monadnock Region for future monitoring.

This fall, we're also planning to **conduct migration counts of Common Nighthawks**, a species our volunteers already help monitor in Keene during the summer breeding season. Finally, we're **establishing permanent bird monitoring plots** on some of our forested lands — a project that will help assess how forest management and other land uses affect songbird populations.

In addition to these research initiatives, we're also expanding bird-related education in camps and classrooms, as well as through new learning opportunities for the community. **Birding for All** — a new, monthly field trip series, with inclusivity in mind — launches this June. These slow-paced outings will take place on easier trails, starting in places like Peterborough and Keene that are close to home for many people. Additionally, we're thrilled to announce the return of a **Young Birders Club** under the Harris Center's wings: *The Kestrels* will kick off in the fall, engaging teens in grades 8 to 12 in all things birds.



▲ **Birding MacDowell Lake**

© Jim Hassinger

Through it all, our goal is to break down barriers, making science (and birds) more accessible to all. Stay tuned for more ways to get involved! 🐦





© Eric Masterson

# Remembering Rich Taylor

by Eric Masterson, Land Program Manager

On March 18, 46 people hiked the North Pond Trail in Harrisville to celebrate the life of Rich Taylor. The gathering included the extended Taylor clan, including his wife Linda and sons Steve (who flew in from Raleigh, NC) and Reed (from Denver, CO), as well as friends from the Harris Center,

Cheshire Walkers, and Harrisville Trails Committee. Rich's family chose the North Pond Trail in lieu of a more formal memorial service because Rich laid out the original route for that trail, and it remained one of his favorite spots in the Monadnock Region.

Rich's connection to the Harris Center

goes back decades. He joined us first as a supporter, then as a volunteer outing leader, and finally as a volunteer trail steward. In addition to his work on the North Pond Trail, he helped with the arduous task of rehabilitating the Eastview Trail after it had fallen into disrepair.

For years, Rich was also a regular leader of our Friday morning hikes with Lee Baker and the late Ollie Mutch. In keeping with his modest and understated manner, Rich was always the sweep and never the lead. Perhaps nobody at the Harris Center knew Rich better than Lee, who described him as quiet and unassuming — a gentle description of the man that also serves as an accurate account of the trail he helped build. Though we will miss Rich dearly, we can think of no better way to honor his lifetime of hiking and trailwork than by walking together along his favorite trail. 🍄



## Look Closely! Can You Find These Signs of Spring? by John Benjamin, Teacher-Naturalist

- |   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Robin           | <input type="checkbox"/> American Woodcock | <input type="checkbox"/> Trout Lily          | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Frog     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black Bear               | <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Vulture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Common Garter Snake | <input type="checkbox"/> Skunk Cabbage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mourning Cloak Butterfly | <input type="checkbox"/> Bloodroot Flower  | <input type="checkbox"/> Spring Peeper       |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-winged Blackbird     | <input type="checkbox"/> Miner Bee         | <input type="checkbox"/> Spotted Salamander  |  |