

FALL 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.2

## *In this issue...*

Skin to Skin

Land Conservation News

Remembering Paul Geddes

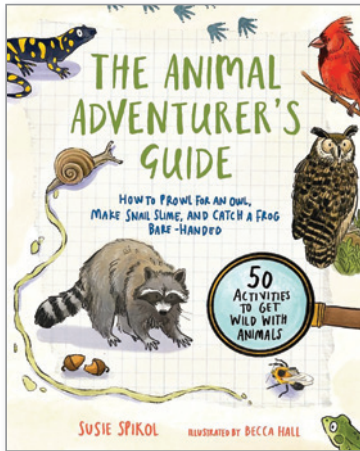
Annual Meeting Highlights

In Memoriam: Carl Von Mertens

Butterfly Community Science

In Snow the Stars I Trace

Well-Deserved Thanks



## **The Animal Adventurer's Guide** **50 Activities to Get Wild with Animals!**

This debut non-fiction children's book by Harris Center naturalist Susie Spikol is packed full of hands-on activities and projects that bring you closer to wild animals than ever before.

*Perfect for kids in Grades K through 4. Paperback.*  
Available through the Harris Center, Toadstool Bookshop, and wherever books are sold.

**[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

◀ **Monitoring for Monarchs**  
Community science volunteer Emily Wrubel searches for monarch eggs and caterpillars in a Harris Center-conserved milkweed patch as part of the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project.

© Brett Amy Thelen



# SKIN to SKIN

by Susie Spikol, Community Programs Director and Teacher-Naturalist

The air is sharp with a hint of winter on this late October morning, the yellowing meadow dotted with open milkweed pods. Their silky seeds unfurl and float to new horizons. We haven't gone very far, but we have already found four woolly bear caterpillars.

**Woolly bears.** Even the name is charming. When crickets have gone quiet and monarchs have floated south, the woolly bear persists. It is bold for a baby bug, trundling across frost-burned grasses at a time when so many other caterpillars have spun themselves cozy cocoons. Dressed in black and rust-red bands of bristly fuzz, the woolly bear chomps its way through violet, dandelion, and clover leaves until the weather turns too cold. Then, curling up under a few leaves with its bristles facing outward, it sleeps snugly, its soft body protected against the chill by a batch of homegrown antifreeze. In the spring, it wakes, defrosts, eats, and eventually spins a cocoon, emerging a few weeks later as the Isabella tiger moth.

What a fairytale story, complete with a magic elixir and enchanting transformation.

Then there's the woolly bear's meteorological mythology. Could it be that this fuzzy-wuzzy is a better weatherman than *The Old Farmer's Almanac*? According to New England folklore, if the bear's black bands are longer than its rust-red middle, buckle up! It's going to be one heck of a winter. If the black band by the head is longer, the beginning of winter will be the harshest; if the tail end is longer, watch out for late-season blizzards. Finally, pay attention to the direction the woolly is traveling: if it's marching southward, pack your bags now and book your flight to warmer climes, for the little caterpillar is trying to escape from winter's frigid hold.

But we forget all this on our October morning. The spell the woolly bear casts over us isn't about facts or folklore. We are in love with the woolly bear just for being itself. I watch my ten homeschooled stretch out along the frost-dewed grass to get nose-to-nose with this ticklish caterpillar. There are giggles and *oohs* and *ahhs* as they gently reach out their fingers to let the fuzz cross their skin. We are so quiet that we hear the bear's bristles rub against the grass as it rambles down the path.



© Susie Spikol

One boy asks if he can pick it up. We stay low on our knees, and I help him hold it in his hands, which are cupped around the caterpillar like a precious gem. It rolls along his young fingers, and the boy's smile fills my heart. I watch the sturdy eight-year-old whisper a thank you to the little bear as he returns it to the grass.

This experience and so many more like it make me think of skin-to-skin contact. I'm especially reminded of when I gave birth to my youngest son. Instead of whisking my infant away to be cleaned, diapered, and swaddled, as had happened after the births of my older children, the hospital staff placed my moments-old son directly against my heart, our skin touching, keeping the physical bond of the last nine months intact. We lived that way for weeks. And it wasn't just about our skin touching; other senses were forming connections, too. He was hearing my heartbeat and learning my smell. And I was falling in love, learning every inch of him, noticing the beauty mark in the swirl of his ear and the sweet sounds he made as he nursed.

I keep thinking about this idea of skin-to-skin contact and the formation of attachment. What if we extended this concept to include our experiences in nature, recognizing touch and other direct sensory experience as a way of forming close relationships with the natural world, the way we do with people?

We need this in our lives, and our children especially need it. They need time with woolly bears and acorns, salamanders and snails, and, yes, spiders and snakes. They need to kick off their shoes and let their bare feet travel the curve of the earth.

You need it, too.

Without these experiences, there is a great loss, not just for us, but also for the animals and plants — for, without the attachments formed by touch today, there is very little hope that we will consider them in the future. ♡

*What a fairytale story, complete with a magic elixir and enchanting transformation.*

# LAND CONSERVATION NEWS

by Jeremy Wilson, Executive Director

The Harris Center became a local land trust in 1980. Since then, our network of connected conserved lands has steadily grown and recently passed a significant milestone. We have now conserved more than **25,000 acres** across eight towns of the Monadnock Region! In addition, we have expanded our land protection focus area west to the edge of Andorra Forest in Stoddard, south to the Monadnock Reservation lands, and southeast to conserved lands around Temple Mountain, Pack Monadnock, and North Pack

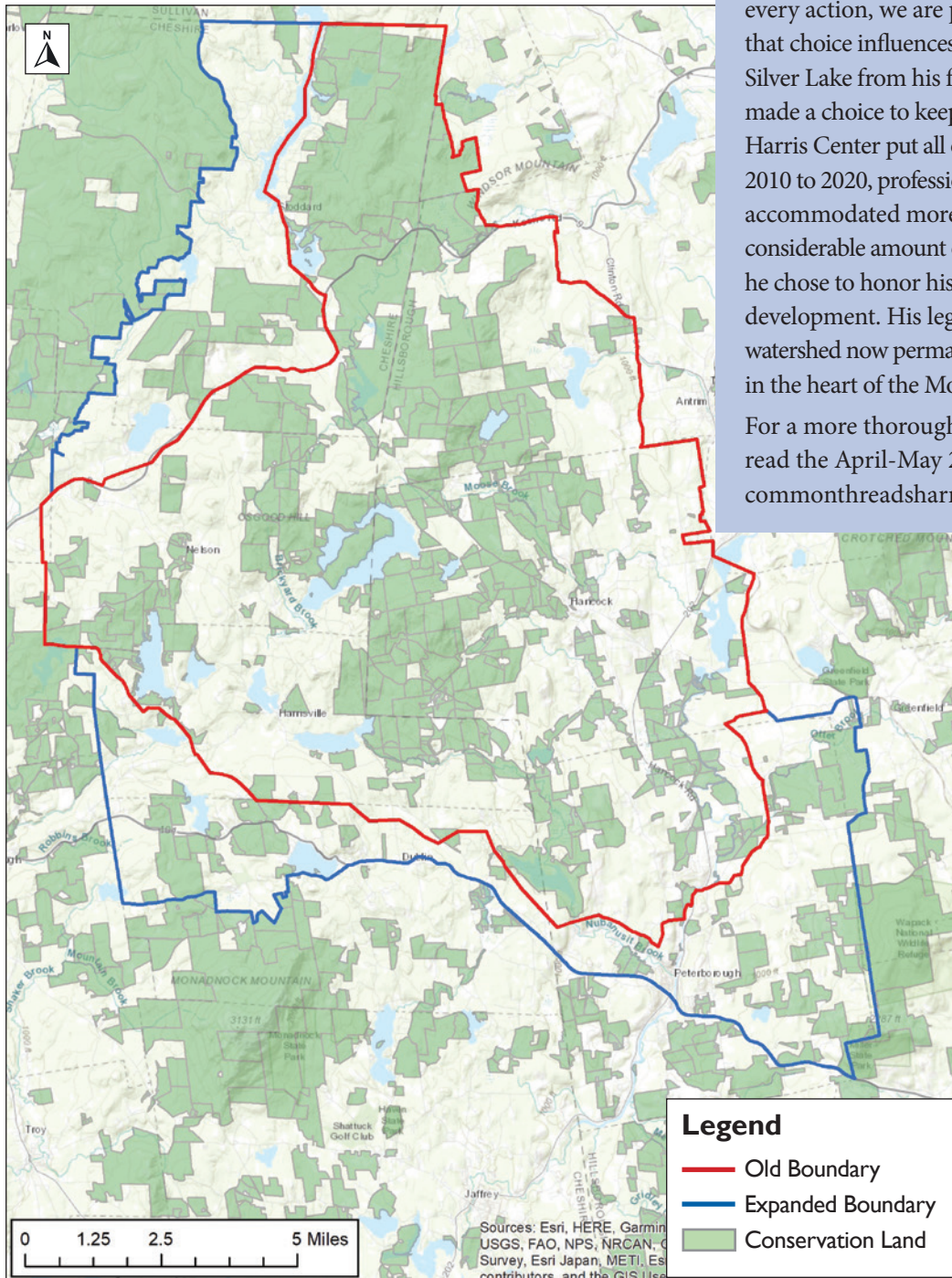
Monadnock. This boundary shift will enable us to pursue future land protection projects connecting the SuperSanctuary to other large blocks of conserved land in the region, ensuring room to roam for wildlife and people alike. ➡

## Remembering Paul Geddes

by Eric Masterson, Land Program Manager

As I sit down to write a short piece about Paul Geddes, I find myself thinking about two words: choice and legacy. With every action, we are presented with choice, and on rare occasions, that choice influences our legacy. When he inherited 330 acres on Silver Lake from his friend, Edgar Seaver, in 1978, Paul Geddes made a choice to keep the land free from development. When the Harris Center put all of that land into conservation easement from 2010 to 2020, professional planners determined that it could have accommodated more than 80 houses. Paul could have made a considerable amount of money, but instead, at great personal cost, he chose to honor his friend and the land by protecting it from development. His legacy is that Silver Lake — with 80% of its watershed now permanently protected — will continue to be a jewel in the heart of the Monadnock Region for future generations.

For a more thorough account of Paul's life, I invite you to read the April-May 2019 issue of *Common Threads* at [commonthreadsharrisville.com/archive](http://commonthreadsharrisville.com/archive). ▼



◀ **Expanding the SuperSanctuary**  
The new SuperSanctuary boundary (in blue) will allow the Harris Center to connect our network of protected land to other large blocks of conserved land in the Monadnock Region.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR 2022 ANNUAL MEETING

# Celebrating Our Extraordinary Partners & Volunteers

by Lisa Murray, Outreach Manager

The Harris Center recognized several extraordinary partners and volunteers at our 52nd Annual Meeting on October 21.



▲ **Educator of the Year** Jenn Sutton cultivates a love of the natural world in her Pierce School students through hands-on learning experiences in the outdoors. © Ben Conant

**Jenn Sutton**, 3rd grade teacher at the Pierce School in Bennington, was honored with our **2022 Educator of the Year Award** for her exemplary teaching and commitment to outdoor education. Cultivating a classroom culture of respect, curiosity, and playfulness, Jenn helps her students become

citizens of the natural world through bird activities, caring for hatchling turtles, and more. She is a skilled and enthusiastic educator who engages her students in hands-on, outdoor learning that teaches them to care for the wild world around them.

**Harry McKelvey**, Keene's Transportation and Storm Water Manager, accepted the **Laurie Bryan Partnership Award** on behalf of the **City of Keene** for its partnership with the Harris Center's Salamander Crossing Brigade program on "Big Night detours" at North Lincoln Street and Jordan Road. Over the past five years, these detours have provided safe passage for thousands of amphibians and offered a safe place for hundreds of people to experience the magic of the spring amphibian migration — including elders, toddlers, and others who would never have

felt safe coming out to see amphibians cross a road if that road were open to traffic.

**Harriet and Stephen DiCicco** were presented with our **Volunteers Extraordinaire Award** for their energy, creativity, and drive. The couple initiated an innovative fundraising effort to purchase Bob

Goodby's book on local Native American history for more than 40 local schools, and to help support a teacher's workshop on how to best utilize this new educational resource. The DiCiccoss also volunteered in our school and afterschool environmental education programs throughout the year.

In addition to these awards, the Harris Center thanked our dedicated Board of Trustees, who volunteer their time and talents to help guide our work. Several treasured Board members, all officers, just completed their six-year terms and were recognized for their service: **Karen Bennett**, **Jim Hassinger**, **Sandy Greene**, and **Dan Langille**. Harris Center Executive Director **Jeremy Wilson** also thanked all the supporters who make our work possible. ➡



▲ **Volunteers Extraordinaire** Stephen and Harriet DiCicco led a fundraising effort to purchase copies of *A Deep Presence: 13,000 Years of Native American History* for more than 40 local schools. © Lisa Murray



## In Memoriam: Carl Von Mertens

**Carl Von Mertens** was an extraordinarily generous man who got things done swiftly, adeptly, and with little fanfare, a doer who seemed happiest when he had a project at hand. Most of the furniture at the Harris Center was crafted by Carl over the course of several decades. Whenever we needed something, Carl simply made it: tables, benches, cubbies, shelving, cupboards, desks, hutches, the outdoor shed, the generator enclosure, our bear-resistant bird feeding station, the Chimney Swift tower, the raptor tally board at our Pack Monadnock Raptor Observatory . . . you get the idea. He even built — and then transported via canoe — wooden "chum boxes" out to our campsites on Spoonwood Pond. (If you don't know what a chum box is, imagine an outhouse without walls!) A quiet and humble man, Carl wasn't one for accolades, yet he deserved them, wholly. The Harris Center was privileged to call Carl not just a supporter, but a friend — forever loved, forever part of the Harris Center in countless ways. ➡

© Jeremy Wilson

# For the Love of Butterflies

## New Community Science Initiatives Take Flight

by Brett Amy Thelen, Science Director



This year, the Harris Center dipped its brushfoot in the entomological waters, taking part in several new-to-us community science projects focused on butterflies.

Over the winter, butterfly enthusiasts came together to dream of sunshine and summer-bright colors during monthly Zoom meetings of the newly formed **SuperSanctuary Butterfly Club**, led by Mark Ellingwood with guidance from New Hampshire Fish and Game (NHFG) butterfly biologist Heidi Holman.



▲ **Studying a Swallowtail**  
Volunteers review the finer points of swallowtail identification during the inaugural **SuperSanctuary Butterfly Count**. © Heather Herring

In July, we put our learning to the test during the first-ever **SuperSanctuary Butterfly Count** — a collaboration with NHFG's new **NH Butterfly Monitoring Network**, which aims to track changes in Granite State butterfly populations over time. Following methods developed by the **North American Butterfly Association**, we surveyed nine sites in Hancock, Antrim, and Peterborough, counting 839 individual butterflies of 23 different species in a single morning. These systematic surveys offer a snapshot of butterfly

activity in July, but some butterfly species are only present at other times of the year. To help paint a fuller picture, we have also been contributing spring-through-fall observations to a related **iNaturalist** project.

Of course, no butterfly endeavor would be complete without the reigning royals. In 2022, Harris Center staff ecologist Karen Seaver and I led two opportunities for local community scientists to contribute to international monarch monitoring efforts: a caterpillar count at a Harris Center-conserved milkweed patch in July through the **Monarch Larva Monitoring Project**, and **Monarch Watch** butterfly tagging at the Hiroshi land in September.



▲ **SuperSanctuary Butterfly Survey** After a winter spent studying butterflies via Zoom with the new **SuperSanctuary Butterfly Club**, an enthusiastic team of community scientists came together for the first-ever **SuperSanctuary Butterfly Count** on July 23. © Karen Seaver

The value of long-term monitoring projects like these lies in collecting the same kind of data, in the same way, year after year — so while this might have been our first summer on the butterfly beat, it won't be our last.

Visit [harriscenter.org/butterfly-monitoring](https://harriscenter.org/butterfly-monitoring) to learn more, and look for the return of flutter-by community science in 2023. Beginners welcome! 🦋



◀ **Monarch Tagging** Every fall, monarch butterflies undertake a spectacular, 3,000-mile migration from New England to central Mexico. Tagging individual butterflies through the **Monarch Watch** project helps answer questions about monarch populations, the timing of the migration, and more. © Kim Snyder



© Brett Amy Thelen

## In Snow the Stars I Trace

The time for sleep is drawing near  
Yet I have more to tell  
And I have just begun to learn  
To taste to hear to smell

I step outside and listen to  
The silence of the Snow  
The Crows today are asking me  
If I see what they know

The Cardinal can never sing  
Of Eden or of Hell  
Yet always speaks of Mysteries  
And much of Love will tell

We caw too much of tragedy  
Of suffering and tears  
We stay inside and close our doors  
And waste away our years

If I could have just one more day  
The Secret may reveal  
The Truth to me and on to you  
And through it we might heal

The Forest always waits for us  
Replete with saving grace  
The Sun the Sky the Mountain Streams  
Of Paradise the trace

— **Raymond Harrison**

## Well-Deserved Thanks

After 15 years as the Harris Center's Finance Administrator, **Sara LeFebvre** has decided to retire. In addition to her vital day-to-day tasks — which kept our lights on and staff paid — Sara's dedication and extraordinary attention to detail helped guide the Harris Center through a period of dramatic growth in staffing and programming, with all the accounting and financial oversight such growth entails. We will miss her warmth, kindness, and deep institutional knowledge, and wish her all the best in her well-deserved retirement. 🐾

