

SPRING 2023

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.

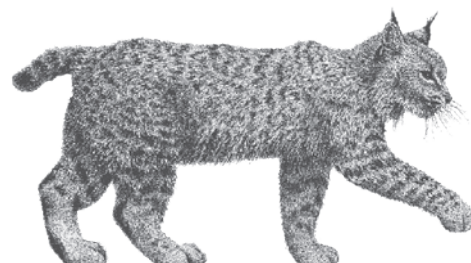
Save the Date
Saturday, June 10

**A Special Event for
Harris Center Supporters:
Turtles All the Way!**

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, 2023) or would like to donate for the first time, please visit harriscenter.org/donate or contact Lisa Murray at murray@harriscenter.org.



▲ **Wood Turtle** © Squam Lakes Natural Science Center



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harriscenter.org

▼ **Broad-winged Hawk in Flight** © raven.digital



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.

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



A Former Mermaid's Wild Wish

by *Susie Spikol, Community Programs Director and Teacher-Naturalist*

It might be hard to tell by looking at me, but once, I was a mermaid. Not an ocean mermaid — instead, I finned my way along the West River, a winding Vermont tributary to the Connecticut. It was long ago, but I remember as if it were today.

I spent my days swimming along mica-flecked cobble, chasing slim silver fish, and diving into mountain-cold deep pools. I was a rare freshwater mermaid who lived this way for an entire summer or two. I knew every pebble in that river, the favorite hiding spots of crayfish, and the tune of the tumbling rapids. Those days flow through me still, and when I close my eyes, I see the rocky river bottom glittering under an August sun and feel each curve and bend of the river in my bones.

My days as a mermaid remind me that the natural world offers us something beyond recreation, beauty, and natural history. It loosens us, inviting us to dream and imagine. So much of our time outdoors is spent categorizing, compartmentalizing, and doing. We identify plants, we recognize birdsong, and we learn to look at the landscape like detectives, picking out clues and searching for evidence. We hike and bike, ski, swim, and boat. We travel from point to point, bagging peaks and conquering rapids.

When I'm with school groups, I feel this push especially. When I teach about nature, I'm supposed to have my students learn words like “adaptation,” “decomposition,” and “sedimentary.” My lessons are supposed to target national standards, meet expectations, and have deliverable outcomes and goals. This is how we measure what we are supposed to know.

But connecting to nature isn't just knowing the names of the trees or understanding the food web — it's also about imagination and creativity. This past summer, I lay in the big meadow by my home with one of my sons. We were stargazing at the height of the Perseid meteor showers. On our blanket, surrounded by chirping crickets and staring at a star-sprinkled sky, my eleven-year-old, not a natural storyteller, spun out a legend of the last

dragons and how the stars shining above us were the remnants of their shimmering scales. Next time I lie in the meadow and gaze towards the night sky, I won't be picking out the big dipper or searching for the double star in its handle. Instead, I'll watch the last dragons' flickering scales on the dark blanket of sky.

What if we first know how to be a mermaid, a red-breasted robin, or just a kid climbing a rock, touching a feather, or finding dragons in the sky? My true heart wants this: to let our imaginations loose and invite our senses to go wild, to fall in love before we set ourselves to knowing. I want us to remember that just because we can identify the tracks and slides of otters doesn't mean that we really know those sleek, playful beings. There is still so much mystery that remains.

Lately, I find myself wanting to get away from definitions. I want to toss out the identification guides and unlearn obscure Latin names and facts. I want to start over by seeing the mountains, soils, wetlands, and the riot of wild creatures without rushing to classify and catalog.

I want to swim in the river again, sweeping along it like the mermaid I once was — I mean to go into nature, without having to know. To sink into it, immersing all my senses. I want more days of tasting summer rains, smelling spicy leaves, letting warbling birdsong into my heart, pressing bare feet into springy moss. I want more time to be with nature, not passing through it.

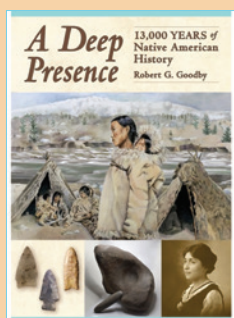
Look for me this spring, meandering instead of marching, playing instead of going, imagining instead of identifying. I invite you to join me. Let's meet at the bend in the river, and don't forget your fins — or find me one summer night in the cricket-filled meadow, where we'll watch the twinkling of dragon scales in the sky. 🐉

50th Anniversary Fund Roundup

by Lisa Murray, Outreach Manager

Launched in celebration of our 50th anniversary in 2020, the 50th Fund was designed to “provide the soil, seeds, water, and sunlight for the Harris Center to innovate and grow, meeting the needs and challenges of our changing region and world” into the organization’s next 50 years — and it’s doing just that. In addition to the projects listed below, a portion of the 50th Fund has been set aside for land stewardship to ensure that our trails and protected lands are well managed far into the future. Here are the projects supported by the 50th Fund to date, with at least 10 years of funding remaining for new initiatives:

- **Turtle Headstarting in Local Classrooms** — launched a project aimed at giving baby turtles a “headstart” on life while introducing students to turtle conservation.
- **Motus Wildlife Tracking Station** — installed a Motus receiving station, which detects radio signals from birds tagged with special transmitters, on the Harris Center’s Granite Lake Headwaters property in Stoddard.
- **Broad-winged Hawk Tracking** — purchased and affixed lightweight satellite and cellular transmitters to adult Broad-winged Hawks nesting in the SuperSanctuary, in collaboration with Hawk Mountain.
- **Nature Almanac & Calendar by Francie Von Mertens** — published this perpetual desktop calendar with page-a-day insights into the natural world in text and photos.
- **Removing Obstacles to Outdoor Teaching During Covid-19** — created an array of resources to help teachers move their traditional class routines and curriculum outdoors.
- **A Deep Presence: 13,000 Years of Native American History by Dr. Robert Goodby** — supported the publication of this book about the long presence of Native people in the Monadnock Region.
- **Harris Center Accessibility Improvements** — installed automatic door openers in our lobby and accessible bathroom, and researched an accessibility plan for our grounds.
- **Growing Babies in Backpacks and Toddlers in Tow** — expanding this program into new communities through partnerships with preschools and family resource centers.



- **Recipe for a Healthy Planet** — created an online resource and event series to promote a greater understanding of how our food choices impact the environment.
- **Professional Development Reunion for Teachers** — continued support for the classroom teachers who participated in yearlong, Harris Center-led professional learning communities over the past few years.
- **Open Lodge Concept** — provided funding for an architectural firm to develop an initial architectural and landscape design for a proposed Open Lodge on the Harris Center grounds.
- **Saw-whet Owl Banding** — piloted a Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project as part of an international research effort to better understand the fall migration of these climate-vulnerable birds of prey.
- **Wild at Home Podcast** — created a podcast series (still in production) for children and families.
- **Telling Our Stories** — supporting the creation of professional-quality videos and photos about the Harris Center’s work for use in outreach and education.
- **Paid Bird Conservation Internships** — supporting paid internships focused on field research and monitoring of bird species of conservation concern.



© Brett Amy Thelen

Stay tuned for more innovative and exciting projects in the future — all made possible by the generous Harris Center supporters who contributed to the 50th Fund! ➡

HARRIS: Where Is He Now? *Following*

Through a partnership with **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary**, biologists have now affixed satellite or cellular transmitters to five Broad-winged Hawks nesting in and near

the Harris Center's SuperSanctuary of conserved lands. We've already learned so much about this familiar summer raptor from the first two seasons of nest and migration monitoring.

①



Meet Harris

© Brett Amy Thelen

②

First, some background:

The Harris Center partners with **Hawk Mountain Sanctuary** in Pennsylvania on a project to better understand **Broad-winged Hawk ecology** by tracking the migration of hawks breeding in New Hampshire to their **wintering grounds** in South America and back.

HARRIS SPENDS HIS WINTERS ⑤

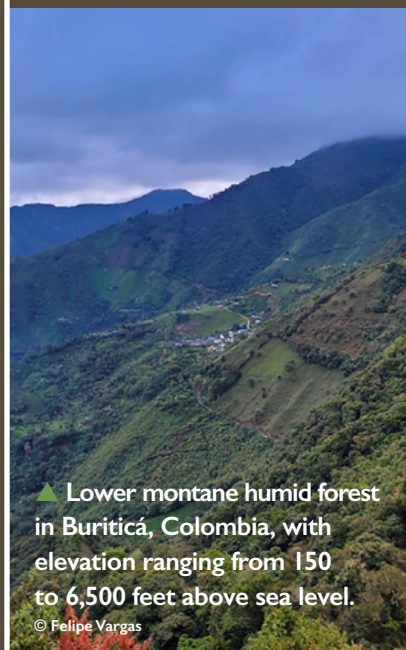
in **north-central Colombia** between the municipalities of Sabanalarga and Buriticá, in the northwest of Antioquia, frequently flying over the **Cauca River**.

Hawk Mountain board member Ana Maria Castaño Rivas happens to be from that region and asked her network to **share some photos of the ecosystem** so that we could learn about where Harris spends his winter months.

The response was instant! She received photos and coordinates from...

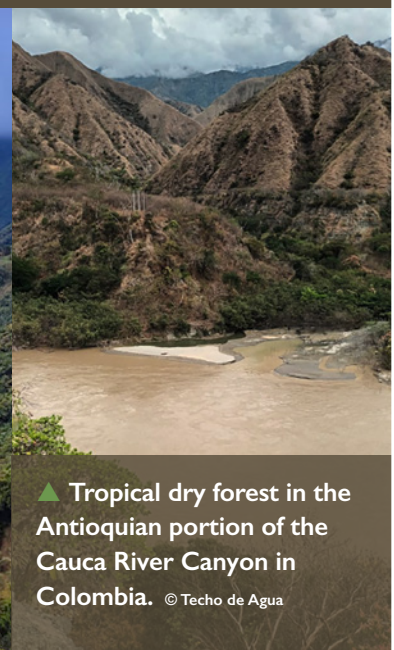
- >> Young conservationists in a nearby municipality
- >> An avid birder doing environmental assessments
- >> Staff from the environmental department of a petroleum exploration company

Harris uses both **lower montane humid forest** (left) and **tropical dry forest** (right). ⑥



▲ Lower montane humid forest in Buriticá, Colombia, with elevation ranging from 150 to 6,500 feet above sea level.

© Felipe Vargas



▲ Tropical dry forest in the Antioquian portion of the Cauca River Canyon in Colombia. © Techo de Agua

g the Journey of a Broad-winged Hawk

Maps showing how these birds use the landscape, both locally and on their wintering grounds as far away as Colombia, have yielded particularly vital insight.

Below you can follow Harris's remarkable journey to South America and his movements through the Andes! To see interactive maps, visit hawkmountain.org/birdtracker.

IN SUMMERS 2021 & 2022

Hawk Mountain biologists affixed **lightweight transmitters** to five adult Broad-winged Hawks in and around the Harris Center's SuperSanctuary of protected lands.



▲ Affixing a transmitter
© Brett Amy Thelen



Harris, an adult male, was the first of this species to ever be satellite-tagged in New Hampshire.

<< Here he is, about to be released after banding.

© Phil Brown

③

SO... WHERE DID HE GO?

④



⑧ BROAD-WINGED HAWK

populations are **declining in some regions**. Tagged hawks such as Harris help researchers better understand the **habitat preferences** of this species along their migration routes and on their wintering grounds.

Another tagged New Hampshire hawk, "Monadnock," also wintered in this region of Colombia, and local birders spotted several more broadwings in the area — meaning that **this region could be an important wintering area for Broad-winged Hawks**.

© raven.digital



This data can be used to inform conservation and management decisions.

He has shown strong **site fidelity**, returning to the same region in the Andes Mountains two years in a row.

THANKYOU to Hawk Mountain board member Ana Maria Castaño Rivas for sharing this very exciting hawk update!



Welcoming Nikko & Audrey

Nikko Gagnon The Harris Center is excited to welcome **Nikko** (she/her) as our newest Teacher-Naturalist. Nikko grew up in eastern New Hampshire, spending her summers camping in the great outdoors. She planned on spending her adult life wandering forests in pursuit of data, but fate stepped in when she was tasked with guiding a local school group for the National Park Service. She's spent the nine intervening years immersed in environmental education — first as a field teacher and assistant director at the University of Maine's 4H Camp and Learning Center, then in beautiful British Columbia as program coordinator at the Cheakamus Centre. Nikko holds a BS in Environmental Science: Ecosystems, and is currently pursuing an MS in Environmental Studies: Environmental Education at Antioch University New England. You can often find her exploring nature through hiking, rock climbing, and skiing.



© Ben Conant

Audrey Dunn We've also recently welcomed **Audrey** (she/her) into the fold as our Communications Manager. Audrey grew up exploring the outdoors coast to coast, from the scrubby deserts of southern California to the rolling forests of central Arkansas, all the way to the muddy salt marshes of southeastern North Carolina. An avid reader from an early age, she yearned to embark on her own adventures, which led her to find work as a research assistant on ecological studies in Madagascar, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and Poland. Audrey has spent the last three years working in various capacities at a Riverkeeper organization in Wilmington, NC, and moved to New Hampshire in January 2023 to join the Harris Center staff. She holds a BA in Anthropology from Tufts University and an MS in Forest and Nature Conservation from Wageningen University in the Netherlands. She enjoys long walks, cycling, and trying new things (except skiing).



© Rob Clark

What's on the Menu? *by John Benjamin, Teacher-Naturalist*

