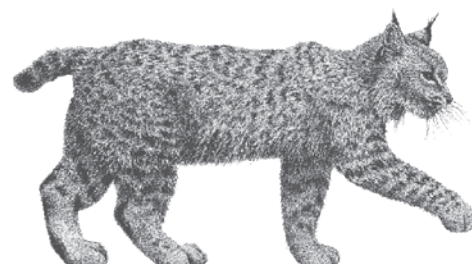


WINTER 2023-2024

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.



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Writing the Land: Channels

Poetry That Celebrates Protected Lands

This anthology features works from local poets Alice B. Fogel and Henry Walters, inspired by their time on two Harris Center-protected properties — the Hiroshi Land and Kulish Ledges. *Channels* additionally showcases poems celebrating lands protected by nine other North American land trusts. Perfect for anyone who loves nature. Paperback. Learn more and order your copy at harriscenter.org/merchandise.

harriscenter.org

▼ A New Kestrel Project Takes Flight

Over the past year, Harris Center volunteers, staff, and interns built, installed, and monitored 24 kestrel nest boxes (including this one) in high-quality habitat across a dozen Monadnock Region towns. As a result of our efforts, 17 kestrel fledglings burst forth into the world. Read more starting on page 4. © Ben Conant



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, the *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



HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR 2023 ANNUAL MEETING

Honoring Exemplary Educators, Partners & Volunteers

by Audrey Dunn, Communications Manager

The Harris Center held our **53rd Annual Meeting** on October 22, welcoming 100 supporters for an afternoon of celebration, reflection, and togetherness. In addition to a keynote by SALT Project Director **Matthew Myer Boulton** about nature's power to inspire awe, we also recognized several exemplary partners and volunteers.



▲ **Educator of the Year** Temple Elementary School teacher **Tina Perrault** (center), with her husband **Richard** and Harris Center teacher-naturalist **Janet Altobello** ©Audrey Dunn

Tina Perreault, 1st and 2nd grade teacher at Temple Elementary School, was honored with our **Educator of the Year Award** for the dedication, enthusiasm, and imagination she brings to her young students as they explore Temple

Elementary School's wild edges. Tina has been teaching for 31 years, and first joined the Harris Center's professional development workshops six years ago. Last winter, she shared, "My students used to rush around outside and now they meander! They notice more, they wonder more, they stay with their curiosity and investigate what they find interesting."

The **Laurie Bryan Partnership Award** was presented to **Maria Colby** and **Wings of the Dawn Wildlife Rehabilitation Center & Bird Sanctuary** for their longstanding work helping the region's injured and sick wildlife, and for Maria's efforts to inspire others to better steward the natural world through education and outreach. Maria joined Wings of the Dawn as a volunteer over 35 years ago, and remains a



▲ **Laurie Bryan Partnership Awardee** **Maria Colby** (left) rehabilitates the hawks that are returned to the wild at our annual **Raptor Release days**, like the broad-wing pictured here. © Kim Nagy

volunteer to this day as the organization's longtime director. Each year, Maria and her team treat thousands of wild birds, mammals, and reptiles — providing shelter, food, medicine, and, sometimes, long-term care, with the goal of returning them to the wild. In her humble words, "It is hard work, and it is never-ending." According to Maria, about 60% of wildlife in her care are released back to the wild, giving them a second chance at life.

We presented two **Volunteer Extraordinaire Awards** this year — one to an individual and one to a team. **Mark Ellingwood** was honored for his invaluable contributions to our new butterfly



◀ **Volunteer Extraordinaire**

Kestrel and butterfly devotee **Mark Ellingwood** (center) with **Bird Conservation Director Phil Brown** and **Science Director Brett Amy Thelen**

© Audrey Dunn

survey and kestrel conservation projects. As one of the founders of the SuperSanctuary Butterfly Count, Mark serves as our liaison to the NH Butterfly Monitoring Network and has trained Harris Center staff and community scientists alike in butterfly identification. Mark was also instrumental in getting our new kestrel nest box project off the ground (literally!) — transporting and storing nest box materials and equipment in his barn, hosting two volunteer workdays to assemble the boxes, and assisting with installation and monitoring of several boxes. As a result of these efforts, 17 new kestrel chicks have entered the world. Phil Brown, who leads the kestrel project, said, "Mark's commitment to this project has been a big part of its early success. In addition, his leadership, creativity, and positive attitude made for an excellent experience for all those around him."

Our pollinator gardeners — **Michelle Caughey**, **Sara Dowse**, **Jean Govatos**, **Francie von Mertens**, **Mary Seebart**, and **Alison Rossiter** — were also honored for their extraordinary dedication to creating and sustaining a home for pollinators at the Harris

Center. Together, this devoted group of women care for the plants that provide habitat for bumblebees, swallowtails, monarchs, moths, hummingbirds, and more. At a time when our pollinators need it the most, they are both providing a resource for these essential creatures and creating an inspiring example of how others can do the same in their own gardens. We are so grateful for all that they do.



▲ **Volunteers Extraordinaire** **Francie von Mertens**, **Mary Seebart**, **Alison Rossiter**, **Sara Dowse**, **Jean Govatos**, and **Michelle Caughey** © George Caughey

In addition to these awards, the Harris Center acknowledged our dedicated **Board of Trustees**, who volunteer their time and talents to help guide our work. We thanked former treasurer **Lois Haskins**, who has just completed her six-year term, and recognized new treasurer **Ethan Harper-Lentricchia**. Finally, we honored three staff members for their longtime dedication and commitment to the Harris Center's mission of connecting people to the natural world: **Karen Rent**, who has been with the Harris Center for five years, and **Margaret Baker** and **Jenna Spear**, who each just reached their ten-year mark with the Harris Center. ➦



WATERBODIES

by Jeremy Wilson, Executive Director

▲ *Summer Sunrise at Robb Reservoir* © Swift Corwin

Flying over the Monadnock Region, one is struck by the sight of hills carpeted with forest, but something else is even more conspicuous — water. Widespread throughout our region, water forms a connected network, flowing through streams and rivers and finding temporary storage in lakes, ponds, and wetlands. Protecting the quality and quantity of these waters for wildlife and people alike is one of the major drivers behind the Harris Center's land conservation program. Over the last 40 years, your support and generosity have helped the Harris Center protect:

- **25,000+ acres of land in local watersheds**
- **862 acres of wetlands**
- **41 miles of shoreline on lakes and ponds**
- **108 miles of river and stream bank**



▲ *Great Meadow in Nelson* © Brett Amy Thelen

Watersheds

The name of the watershed you're in tells you where all the water — rainwater, groundwater, and surface water — in that area will eventually drain. The boundaries of a watershed are determined by the topography of the landscape, with water flowing from areas of higher elevation to areas of lower elevation, such as when you follow the flow of the Nubanusit from the highlands of Hancock to the valleys of Peterborough. The Harris Center's land conservation focus area contains parts of two major watersheds: the Contoocook River to the northeast and the Ashuelot River to the southwest. Find and learn about your watershed at mywaterway.epa.gov.

Wetlands

Sometimes, topography or the engineering of beavers slows the flow of water almost to a halt in shallow bodies of water called wetlands. Wetlands provide essential ecosystem services such as absorbing flood water, recharging groundwater aquifers, and improving water quality. In addition, shrubs, trees, and other plants that wouldn't survive the depths of a pond or the fast-moving flow of a stream are able to take root and grow in the shallow, nutrient-rich waters of a wetland. These and other factors create a complexly structured ecosystem that provides shelter, breeding grounds, and food for a diversity of wildlife.



▲ *Merrill's Marsh in Hancock* © Brett Amy Thelen

Our New Kestrel Project TAKES FLIGHT

by Phil Brown, Bird Conservation Director



◀ **Nest Box Construction** In March 2023, Harris Center volunteers, interns, and staff worked together to construct kestrel nest boxes in the barn of a Harris Center friend. Later, these boxes were installed in 11 towns throughout the Monadnock Region. © Ben Conant

A stunning report published a few years ago in *Science* documented the loss of three billion birds in North America alone in the past 50 years. We may think of birds as built to survive, having outlived the dinosaurs millions of years ago, but the Anthropocene — an era marked by immense human impact — has pushed many bird species to their limits. In just a short period of time, humans have been responsible for the extinction and widespread decline of countless species, including 18% of the world's raptors.

If this alarmist tone gets your attention, it should. I wouldn't be doing my job as an educator and ambassador for birds and wildlife if I didn't address our collective impact on the planet. It's becoming increasingly difficult to ignore, as this past summer's extreme weather has reminded us. Fortunately, though, our species has the ability to create positive change, too. So how do we begin to address these challenges? Land conservation and protection of our region's forests, wetlands, and fields is an excellent first step, and the Harris Center has excelled in this regard. Thanks to these efforts, expanses of conserved forests, wetlands, and other open space can effectively serve as vital habitat for the scores of bird species that breed here. But habitat protection isn't enough.

Some bird species require specialized stewardship actions in order to secure their place in our landscapes. Such is the case of the American Kestrel, a small and colorful falcon of open fields. The kestrel has declined across its entire range, but especially in the Northeast, where populations have decreased by 93% over 60 years, according to Breeding Bird Survey data. As a result, the kestrel is now considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New Hampshire.

This decline has, in large part, been driven by the disappearance of large, open fields, many of which have been converted to either forests or houses. Even within suitable open landscapes, however, kestrels remain an uncommon sight. This is likely due to a combination of factors, such as agricultural changes, forest pests, the decline of large insects (a major food source), and, notably, the absence of suitable natural nesting cavities. Kestrels typically nest in holes previously excavated by woodpeckers, and in other openings in structures like old barns and buildings. The practice of downing dead trees and perhaps even old structures in favor of new development means fewer nesting cavities for kestrels.

Over the past year, the Harris Center launched an **American Kestrel conservation project** that spans the Monadnock Region. Volunteers, staff, and interns built, installed, and



▲ **Kestrel Banding** A springtime spent constructing, installing, and monitoring nest boxes yielded worthwhile results: 17 kestrel chicks, all of which were banded for long-term monitoring before fledging. © Brett Amy Thelen

monitored 24 nest boxes in high-quality habitat across a dozen towns. By placing nest boxes in the most suitable locations, we hope to reverse the decline — and maybe even expand populations — of these beneficial predators throughout the region. Our efforts yielded four successful nesting pairs in this first full season, with 17 kestrel fledglings bursting forth into the outside world in July and early August. All of the chicks were banded to aid in future monitoring efforts.

Aside from the tangible success of fledged baby birds, this project has already sparked tremendous engagement with landowners and conversations about other stewardship actions that will benefit kestrels, other grassland bird species, and biodiversity as a whole. Additionally, the data that we're gathering will help

assess kestrel survival, nest box selection, and site fidelity. Ultimately, we hope this will lead to more informed conservation of this iconic grassland species.

Our 2023 efforts were heartening, but there is still room to grow. In the off-season, we'll be refining our criteria for nest box placement, reaching out to more landowners in priority landscapes, and investigat-

ing ways to better track individual birds in coming years. Despite what we already know about kestrel populations both locally and further afield, there are still many questions about their survival, food sources, and migration routes. Answering some of these questions may ultimately help to make this charismatic and colorful falcon a common sight once again. ♡

A version of this story first appeared in The Keene Sentinel on August 10, 2023.



▲ **An American Kestrel in Flight** © Susan Kline

Ready-To-Be Empty Nesters... by John Benjamin, Teacher-Naturalist



Best Wishes & Fond Farewells

This summer, two treasured Harris Center staff members moved on to other adventures.

Lisa Murray championed our work for the past five years as our outreach manager, recently stepping down for a well-earned retirement. In her time with us, Lisa solidified and grew our giving program and was also a huge driver of many DEI initiatives. Most recently, Lisa launched a project near to her heart, the Harris Center's newest online resource, *Recipe for a Healthy Planet*. We will miss her thoughtfulness, good humor, and dedication.

Karen Seaver, our staff ecologist, helped strengthen and grow our Salamander Crossing Brigades, took a lead role in developing new butterfly monitoring projects, shared her love of science and nature through LAB GIRLS+ and other educational programs, and mentored more than a dozen undergraduate interns with care, dedication, and skill. We wish her all the best!

The Gift of Nature

I consider the work of the Harris Center to be a gift — one that resonates especially with me. Every time I walk along a trail, attend an event, or witness kids enthralled by a particular educational class, I am reminded of the importance of this gift. The staff is putting in the work — on the ground, every day — to ensure we have an environment that will endure. And, even more important, they are teaching and inspiring the young people who will steward the Monadnock Region far into the future.

By now you should have received an Annual Appeal letter. I urge you to do what my family is doing, and that is to give generously to support the Harris Center's work. To me, there's nothing more enjoyable than giving and receiving gifts that make a difference. The Harris Center gives so much. Please give back in whatever way you can. Your support matters.

With appreciation,

Michael George, Board Chair