

MAKING TRACKS

Volume 14 No. 1

The Newsletter of the New Hampshire Coverts Project

July 2009

From the Ed. – After choosing these two articles for this summer’s issue, I realized that we also included pieces by the same authors in our last issue – thanks to both writers for their excellent literary efforts! Greg and Carl are both volunteers for NH Outside, a writer’s collaborative that works with UNH Cooperative Extension volunteers to share their experiences about the natural world, and publish them in a weekly news release. Many of the writers are Coverts Cooperators. For more information about joining NH Outside, contact coordinator Peg Boyles at 796-2151 or email at: peg.boyles@unh.edu

Confession of a Turtle Killer

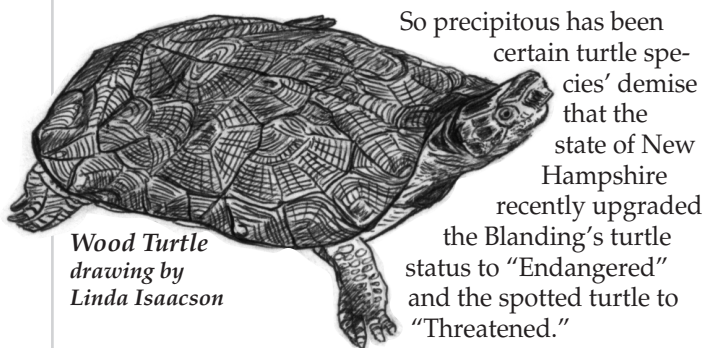
Greg Lowell (CC02)

People who run over turtles were to me nothing but cold-blooded killers. I took their inattention for indifference to the world around them. Until I became one of them.

My hubris was brought up short the day I ran over one. I was driving a busy state route, when I was distracted by three children on bikes riding on the shoulder. I swung out to give them a wide berth, only at the last minute seeing the small black shape between the double yellow lines. The sickening pop under my tire sent a jolt through me.

Returning, I saw the crushed body and the woodland stream flowing under the road where the turtle had emerged. From then on, I held my anger at the operators of turtle-killing cars, chastened in the knowledge that I had joined the criminal element.

Turtles, more than any other New Hampshire animal, are most affected by our roads, our cars, our pets, and our subdivisions. Low, slow and driven by ancient impulses and long-imprinted navigation cues, they follow the same routes year after year, regardless of the changes in the land around them.



Wood Turtle
drawing by
Linda Isaacson

So precipitous has been certain turtle species’ demise that the state of New Hampshire recently upgraded the Blanding’s turtle status to “Endangered” and the spotted turtle to “Threatened.”

For many years, I had a front row seat to the diminishment of these two turtle species.

Our house and small lot was bounded on two sides by a large marsh and a country road on the front. At the end of our property a small pond, a dip in the road, and an active vernal pool on the opposite side, made for a turtle super highway as turtles began to wander to feed or lay eggs in May and June.

Painted and giant snapping turtles were the primary travelers, but the delicate and beautiful spotted turtles and the rare Blanding’s were also there in notable numbers.

I was raised an outdoor kid on the rivers, ponds and lakes of New Hampshire, but I had never seen a spotted turtle until we moved there. Smaller and slightly flatter than painted turtles, these black and yellow turtles are celebrated in New Hampshire naturalist David Carroll’s *Year of the Turtle*. The contrast of their yellow spots and orange skin patches on their ebony shells make them the most beautiful of all turtles.

The shy spotted turtles spend most of their time hidden among the grass humps and the sloughs of marshes, except in the spring when they come out of hibernation and make for the vernal pools to recharge their batteries with wood frog and salamander eggs and again later, when they emerge to lay their eggs.

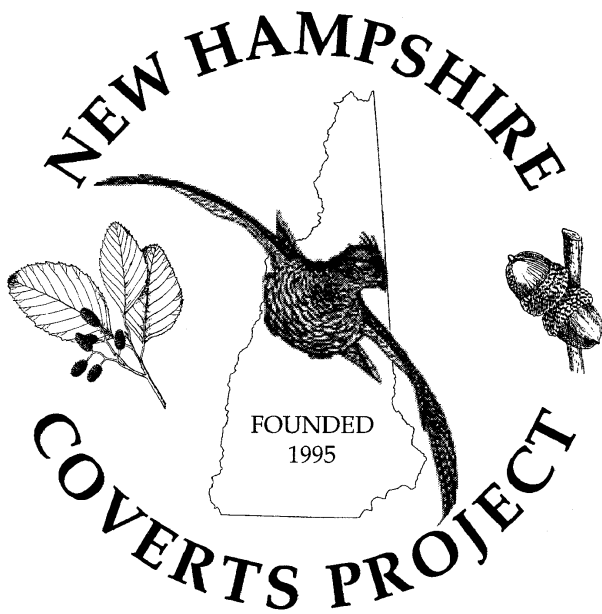
It is during this time that they are most vulnerable to natural predators and automobiles.

Fast and fluid in the water, most turtles are as slow and cumbersome on land as piano movers. Except for the spotted turtles. The little turtles seem to realize that their time on the asphalt is deadly and move quickly.

I learned to recognize their sprints from my home and quickened my own step to try to save them.

Many were the times I sprinted down the road to help them complete their perilous crossings. I saved many. But as the number of houses on my road increased, so too did the traffic and the body count.

The final death sentence for the turtles was a 60-home subdivision. Construction vehicles first and then cars



were a constant on the road. I was gladdened by those motorists who stopped to let the turtles pass, but they were far outnumbered by those who did not.

Short of quitting my job for two months and keeping 24-hour vigil, there was little I could do to stop the slaughter.

But I persevered. I marked their nesting sites, mowed my lawn cautiously as I watched for them in the grass, and tried to educate my neighbors on the turtles’ ways. I even attempted a clumsy Caesarean on a dead spotted turtle, thinking I could salvage her eggs and be a surrogate parent.

But every year the number of dead turtles increased, annually including two or three spotted turtles.

When we sold the home after nearly 30 years, I wondered who would watch out for the turtles. I left the new owner a carefully written instruction sheet on where the turtles nested in the yard, when the quarter-size hatchlings emerged, and the care to take when driving on the road. I hope she’s paying attention. I know I am.

More so than ever now when I drive roads near water, I take care – my eyes always on the road surface for the glint of sun off wet black domes or the dusty gray of a basking turtle. It is the most penance I can do.

Explosion of Life in the Pond

Carl D. Martland (CC07)

Snow lingers in the woods, though a few bare spots have emerged under the firs, where the snow never amounted to much. The ice is mostly gone from the pond, and now, in mid April, we listen carefully for the wood frogs, lovely tan creatures with black masks who find the merest signs of spring reason enough to wake up and go for a swim.

One day I hear a couple of frogs and then a day or two later, I hear hundreds of them, their low key quacking easily mistaken for ducks. If any other frogs are about, it’s only a few spring peepers that pierce the wood frogs’ soft symphony.

The males are the first to reach the pond. Some command a foot or so of shoreline, hoping a female will hop down the hillside; others spread out across one of the coves, spacing themselves about a yard apart, hoping to intercept the females who must swim across from the opposite shore.

When a female arrives, males will try to climb on her back and then grasp her very tightly around her neck, gaining a position that will allow them to fertilize the eggs when they are eventually deposited, a process known as “amplexis.” Since two or more males will, if they can, glom onto a single female, it is essential the females be much larger than the males so they can pop up for a breath of air whenever they want to.

One year the frogs arrived on a Sunday, April 19. I found a spot near the shore where I could see five dozen frogs without even moving my head. While sitting there, I would hear rustling behind me and then watch crazed males take wild leaps into the pond. While any quick movement would cause all the males to submerge, an extremely loud sneeze had no effect!

Finally, a female appeared. Redder and larger than the males, she swam up under some grass clippings and stuck her nose up, the grass hanging over her forehead, making her seem like a teenager who’d dyed her hair to upset her parents. She eventually moved to within an inch of the shoreline. After a while, she set out for the nearest male, who was just hanging in the water four feet away. But she quickly veered off and swam within a couple of inches of the next male, then sped past. This guy quickly caught up, jumped on, and grabbed her around the neck.

Another female made passes at three males. Each time she approached and stopped, allowing the male to swim by for her inspection. The first two times, she apparently didn’t like what she saw and swam away. The third time, she swam past the male, paused, and allowed the male to mount. A would be suitor contested the pairing, but the first male held on tightly enough and the pair swam off.

The wood frogs continued most of that Sunday, taking a break for a couple of hours during the middle of the afternoon, then continuing until at least 9 pm. On Monday morning, there were only a few dozen frogs left in the pond, but there were more than 325 clumps of eggs in the reeds, each with two hundred or so eggs well over 50,000 eggs!

It was a lovely 65 degree day, the first real day of spring, when I next went out to check on the wood frog eggs. Numerous migrating birds had arrived overnight, including a small flock of evening grosbeaks, a phoebe, a flicker, a pair of wood ducks and three mergansers. Two ruby crowned kinglets, faster even than warblers, flitted about in the willows and the brush, while a song sparrow serenaded a pair of tree swallows that were checking out a bird house by the pond.

The wood frogs were gone, but their egg masses attracted a lot of notice. Nine newts squirmed in, around and through

the jumble of egg clumps, sometimes twisting around each other and at other times plunging solo through the gooey masses. Several huge leeches attached to the clumps of eggs, and a painted turtle swam by, checking out the whole operation.

Within five or six days, about half of the tadpoles were out or active within their sacs; within a week, all had emerged; within another day or two, the egg cases themselves were mostly gone. I couldn’t tell who was eating them, it could have been ducks, newts, other frogs, the muskrat I noted hiding in the reeds or perhaps they just dissolve.

It may or may not be coincidence that ducks and a magnificent pair of great blue herons began to visit our little pond just after the wood frogs arrived. They were certainly enjoying their feeding, though I never could see what they were capturing.

From time to time over the next several weeks, I would see a vast swarm of tadpoles a yard wide, a foot deep, and more than 50 feet long, moving slowly along the edge of the pond, feeding on minute bits of vegetation and detritus and generally cleaning up the grasses and sedges at the edge of the pond. What a marvelous example of the incredible explosion of life in the pond!



Wood frog

HAPPENINGS

Kristen Armstrong (CC03) wrote to us this winter: “I had a great time staffing the booth at the Farm & Forest Expo. It was fun to talk to people about the animal pelts. There were lots of old timers that had stories to tell of the old days and some young folks that had their interest whetted in animal habitats by the simple fact of being able to touch the pelt. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to help! **Nancy [Cowan]** was there when I was with the Harris’ hawk. What an experience!”

Judy Bailey (CC 08) wrote in recently from Chatham: “Today we had the first forest road work of our EQUIP grant - clearing an old logging road and putting in a new one up to the spring. [Extension Wildlife Specialist] Matt Tarr is coming out in July to walk the land with me and give suggestions about wildlife habitat improvement. We have only done one day [volunteering] at Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge, but will be logging more.”

Evan Barlow’s documentary “Swanzy Rural Character” premiered at Monadnock Regional High School May 30th to two audiences totaling about 1,000 people. The response to the film has been overwhelming. Evan is the high school senior son of **Bruce Barlow** (CC00) and **Victoria Barlow** (CC01) of Swanzy. The film fulfilled his requirement for a high school senior project. Evan was approached by the Swanzy Open Space Committee and asked to make a documentary celebrating the town. His 62-minute film is the result of over 660 volunteer hours that incorporated 67 interviews with Swanzy residents. It is lyrical, beautiful, and funny. Music was by three-time Grammy winner Eugene Friesen, and the project advisor was Erik Ewers, Supervising Sound Editor and two-time Emmy award winner for Ken Burns’ Florentine Films. New Hampshire Chronicle’s segment on the project aired June 17. The Swanzy Open Space Committee invites anyone interested in hosting a screening of the film and a discussion of how it links to Swanzy’s open space preservation efforts to contact Victoria Barlow at 603-930-8608.

Stephanie Barnes (CC06) sent in the following update from her *Woods Mountain Preserve* in Effingham: “In a very rainy late spring and early

summer, work on habitat improvement included the planting of poplar and black birch on an area cleared last fall for firewood and [early] successional habitat. In the bird and butterfly area, we planted shadbush, cranberry Viburnum, arrowwood, and red-osier dogwood. These new shrubs joined butterfly bush, beebalm, elderberry, blueberry, lilac and a variety of other plants helpful for wildlife. The gardens are an ongoing and constant pleasure. The *Woods Mountain Preserve* now has a basic trail system accessed from Route 153 across from the Watts [NH Audubon] Sanctuary. Any interested Coverts may call for specific directions (539-1349). Mark Suomala has done a breeding bird survey for me identifying over 30 species by song or sight. I am in the process of photographing and identifying plants and animals in New England, particularly those on Woods Mountain. I have just enrolled myself in COCORAHs and will be reporting daily on Woods Mountain precipitation for the National Weather Service....I have recently purchased another 51 acres in Effingham and am working with the Nature Conservancy on a conservation easement. The land is a critical piece in the wildlife corridor and is a part of a large wetland in Main and Effingham, associated with Wilkinson Brook. Natural Heritage will be doing a site survey for unusual or rare plants and animals in 2009-10. I will hopefully be able to join the naturalists in their swamp walk! The Effingham Conservation Commission and Green Mountain Conservation Group had been trying to find money for this parcel for some time, so they are extremely delighted with the acquisition.”

Myra Ferguson (CC07) reports from Meriden, “Allan and I are hosting the [Upper Valley] meeting of Coverts Cooperators on July 22 with Chuck Hersey. We’ll be discussing a new pilot project, where Coverts volunteers will be trained to give public presentations about wildlife and habitats of conservation concern in New Hampshire. Our tree farm will also be the site for Kimball Union Academy’s Natural Leaders Program on July 27. These students have elected to be part of KUA’s “E. E. Just Environmental Education Initiative.” The students will spend the morning walking the forests

and fields of Hawkrider Farm, learning about land conservation, forest management, wildlife habitat maintenance and preservation. If the weather’s nice, we’ll eat lunch in the shade of the orchard; if not, we’ll be in the barn with the tractors!”

Ginger Jannenga sent the following message and photo from her property in Colebrook: “We’d all like to see the rain come to an end, but it’s been wonderful for wildflowers in our fields up here in Colebrook - as you can see from this photo.



Up here, lupines are wildflowers! On my certified wildlife habitat land we’ve been seeing a lot of animals - especially birds. My neighbor and I have seen deer, bear, raccoon, fox and all kinds of song birds, as well as northern harriers flying around looking for lunch! They’ll be happy when it dries up and the hayers can get to work. The hay’s ready, but we need some dry weather.”

Judi Lindsey (CC01) writes from Candia, “We had our 2nd Annual Agriculture Day at Moore School in Candia. We had everything from oxen to felting, alpacas to bees, post and beam to hunter safety. We also honored a local couple, the Sanborns, for placing an agricultural easement on their farmland. My charge was to teach 7th and 8th graders about agriculture. I shared the conservation-agriculture connection through a Powerpoint I created, mostly from photos of plants and animals around Candia. This sparked some interesting discussions. Later I was able to use this presentation again in conjunction with photos from Bearpaw Regional Greenway’s BLOTHON, where we identified 306 plant and animal species! The entire 6th grade learned about invasive species, keying out and classifying flora and fauna, and the importance of reporting threatened or endangered animals. As a side note,

LANDOWNER PROFILE

Woods Without Gile Becomes a Tree Farm

Ann Davis (CC05)

Before purchasing our woodlot in 2002, my husband Marc and I looked at nearly 50 parcels in New Hampshire. To guide our search, we listed several characteristics the land had to have: no road noise, about a large parcel of protected land, open water, running water, undulating terrain (for ease of hiking), potential for forest management, at least 100 acres, and priced within our budget. We finally found the right spot in Springfield. The 470-acre property has more than five miles of boundary and shares nearly half of that with the 6,725-acre John F. Gile Memorial State Forest. We named it the “Woods Without Gile” because it is just outside, or without, the Gile State Forest.



Looking east from the Morrill Homestead, one of five cellar holes on the Woods Without Gile, a 470-acre easement property owned by Ann and Marc Davis. Visitors see a stumped and seeded meadow, patch cut, Morrill Meadow/Marsh, an inactive beaver pond, and Ragged Mountain.

We had two significant goals for the Woods Without Gile: place a conservation easement on the property, and attain Tree Farm certification.

In late 2007, we completed the conservation easement. The Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust, based in New London, holds the easement.

Thanks to the efforts of many experts including Tim Wallace, the consulting forester who wrote the management plan, and Chuck Hersey, Extension Educator, Forest Resources for Sullivan County who conducted the inspection, Woods Without Gile became a certified Tree Farm on June 26, 2009.

Settled in the 1840s, the property has several archeological features including cellar holes, barn foundations, and more than ten miles of stone walls. The area is part of a hill farm community that was known as Fowlertown. It’s abandoned now, but at its peak Fowlertown had an estimated population of 150 to 300 people. At the time, it was a larger town than nearby New London.

Natural features include elevation ranging from 1,350 to 1,750 feet, several wetlands including a forested swamp, beaver meadows, peatlands, two main brooks and innumerable intermittent streams, and diverse forest including northern hardwood and spruce, fir and pine. Although some areas are steep, most of the property is rolling.

The conservation easement allows public access for hiking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, hunting and fishing. The easement also ensures that the land can continue to be a working forest.

We manage the woodlot to improve the timber value, protect water quality, and diversify the habitat for wildlife. Since our first timber harvest in 2004, the number of species of animals we see on the property – especially songbirds – has expanded

significantly. We participate in the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service’s Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP). Our EQIP cost-share projects include completing the management plan, installing gates, grading and seeding skid trails, planting spruce seedlings, timber stand improvement, and re-establishing a meadow.

We encourage people to use and enjoy the property. So, when our friend, Nancy Lyon, asked whether New England K-9 Search & Rescue could conduct an all-day search dog training at Woods Without Gile, we enthusiastically agreed. To scope out the property, Nancy met with Marc and me a week prior to the training session. Early on June 20, nine search dog teams headed out into the Gile State Forest and the Woods

Without Gile. They worked all day. If you’re interested, you can visit the New England K-9 Search & Rescue’s web site (www.nek9sar.org).

Since buying the Woods Without Gile, we have found many resources, including the Coverts Cooperators Workshop, the UNH Cooperative Extension Service, and the New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association, helpful in our quest to become effective, confident stewards.

We love working on this land, learning from it and learning about the people who once farmed it. Just being there, walking the trails, seeing the views, hearing the birds and brooks, is a privilege. But most important, because the land is protected through a conservation easement, we know future generations may enjoy it, too.

one student later did see a wood turtle, took a photo of it on his cell phone, and we were able to report it to Fish and Game!"

Russ and Pam Martens (CC07) of Westmoreland have created an Eighteenth Century Heirloom Garden at the 1789 Little Red School House on River Road in Westmoreland. A brochure with interesting history on each of the plants was presented to the Historical Society which oversees this National Historic Landmark building. An example of one of the plants' history reads as follows:

Foxglove: *Digitalis purpurea*

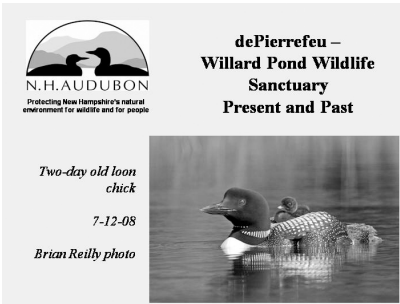
The garden of John Custis of Williamsburg notes Foxglove among the plants in 1738. The plant is native to Great Britain. The dried leaves of foxglove are the principal source of the heart drug, digitalis. Originally called "folkesglove" (glove of little folks or fairies), the plant was first introduced as a medicine in England by William Withering. It was widely used in the treatment of dropsy. Dr. Withering sent the seeds to Dr. Hall Jackson in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, who forwarded some of the seeds to Dr. James Thacher in Boston "to try of its efficacy" and to cultivate it as "a beautiful flower in the garden."

The Martens also created a wildflower garden along the Connecticut River last year. Showing a significant presence this year is coreopsis, toadflax, white yarrow, Queen Anne's lace, and white asters.

Tanya Tellman (CC95) sent in a snapshot she took of falconer **Nancy Cowan** (CC98) at one of the Weeks State Park Thursday evening programs early in the summer. She writes, "We had 111 people with lots of children. Great program! I loved the way the moose is watching [Nancy]!"



Francie Von Mertens (CC99) sends encouraging news from Peterborough, "It was my great pleasure last winter to help NH Audubon raise \$85,000 to purchase the last unprotected shoreline property on Willard Pond in Antrim to add to its 1,500-acre dePierrefeu-Willard Pond Wildlife Sanctuary. So many people know and love the sanctuary. I knew if we could get the word out to them, they would welcome the chance to give something back. Many regular visitors to the Sanctuary aren't Audubon members, all the more reason to give them a chance to help out. Successful fundraising needs a compelling case. A photogenic loon chick helped! Loons nest across the northern tip of the lake from the 45-acre property we sought to buy, and did on Friday the 13th of February. Audubon was so pleased with the project that the June annual meeting was held at the Harris Center, just down the road from the Sanctuary. I was asked to make a presentation about the Sanctuary. Again, the photogenic loon chick came to the rescue. I've always intended to learn PowerPoint but thought it difficult. The name "PowerPoint" is intimidating. But not at all. There it was, it turns out, on my computer, and very user friendly to learn. Photos and some words told the story of the Sanctuary's original 650 acres donated by Elsa Tudor dePierrefeu; other family members who added their acres (and donated to the most recent project); various neighbors who added more land; and conservation partner Harris Center who helped conserve even more. Over 200 families donated, from near and far. As always, there were some great stories of donors' connection to the land." Congratulations to Francie and NH Audubon!



Francie's foray into the World of PowerPoint. The loon with baby chick proved persuasive in her fundraising efforts for Willard Pond.

acres donated by Elsa Tudor dePierrefeu; other family members who added their acres (and donated to the most recent project); various neighbors who added more land; and conservation partner Harris Center who helped conserve even more. Over 200 families donated, from near and far. As always, there were some great stories of donors' connection to the land." Congratulations to Francie and NH Audubon!

WORKSHOP UPDATE

So far this year, we've held several informational tours at properties owned and managed by Coverts Cooperators. These are informal and fun events – a chance for you to share your experiences and ideas as a landowner with other interested folks. If you would like to host an event on your property or on land that you help manage (e.g. a town forest or nearby preserve), please contact the Coverts Project office at 603-862-2166 or email at malin.clyde@unh.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!

Coverts Alumni Gathering, Danville, March 7

Malin Ely Clyde (CC98)



Twenty Coverts Cooperators and friends lucked into spectacular spring weather for a snowshoe hike hosted by **Andy Powell** (CC95) and his wife Jeanne at their tree farm in Danville.

Wild Meadow Woods

was the perfect setting for a hike through some of the patch cuts the Powell's made in the past decade, to improve habitat and improve the standing timber on the property.

Lunch was back at the glassed in porch of their cabin, where several dozen cookies were devoured by all. Most attendees opted for a second hike in the afternoon, up the steeper side of the property where we got a look at nice views, hardwood stands and the

Powell's sugar bush. This was also the locale where the slushy snow got the best of Malin's snowshoes as she tried to step backwards to take a photo... (photo, at left)



Coverts Cooperators & friends gathered at Andy and Jeanne Powell's Danville tree farm for snowshoeing in the March sunshine.

Woodcock Workshop, April 16

Jim Kennedy (CC2008)

The Woodcock Workshop on April 16 was a great success. We had over 40 attendees, with a good mix of wetlands scientists, foresters, wildlife biologists, and land managers. We started the program with a presentation by Mark Ellingwood from NH Fish & Game, who showed some unusual slides from his masters thesis on the American woodcock, and some more recent studies on this bird's distribution, biology and habitats. John Lanier, one of the foremost experts on woodcock and grouse management, preached the gospel of early successional habitat. He showed data from the Wildlife Management Institute



Jim Kennedy (CC98) talks with workshop participants about managing his property to benefit woodcock (Jim is second from left, in vest).

that documents the recent decline of woodcock and their preferred habitat. He showed examples of management techniques with different machinery. Matt Tarr of UNH Cooperative Extension outlined the various state and federal assistance programs available to professionals and landowners.

It was a beautiful spring day, and everyone was ready for a walk in the woods. We toured the Huntington Hill Management Area in Etna, NH, next door to my property. This area has conservation easements with the NH Fish & Game Department and the USDA NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program, and has been managed for woodcock, grouse and wildlife by the landowners since the 1960s. We saw alder thickets, birch and aspen regeneration, apple clearings, vernal pools, wildlife ponds, warm season grass plantings, deer wintering areas, old fields, and a variety of forest age classes. After dinner at our place, Slade Brook Farm, the woodcock cooperated by singing at twilight in all the right places.

The New Hampshire Association of Natural Resource Scientists, who co-sponsored the workshop, thanks UNH Cooperative Extension and the Coverts Program for co-sponsoring the event. Matt Tarr and Malin Clyde did their usual great job of putting on a good show. I also want to thank my wife Deb for helping with the refreshments and the hospitality.

Coverts Alumni Gathering, Orford, May 23

David Falkenham, Extension Educator, Forest Resources, Grafton County

On May 23rd, **Bruce** (CC95) and **Sarah Schwaegler** hosted a Coverts Project get together at their Tree Farm in Orford. The event highlighted some of the Schwaegler's wildlife habitat work completed over the years. An added benefit was that Coverts Cooperators from Grafton County and adjacent counties were able to get together to share thoughts, ideas and stories.



The view from the Schwaegler's lodge in Orford. Photo credit: Charlie Mitchell

Despite the Memorial Day Holiday weekend, nearly 45 people attended the event, including Matt Tarr, Malin Clyde and David Falkenham from UNH Cooperative Extension and retired US Forest Service and NH Fish and Game Biologist John Lanier.

The main event of the morning was a wonderful tour of a 30-acre early successional habitat project that Bruce and Sarah have been working on. The project has been funded by the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program through the USDA. The project includes a large clear-cut area that was formerly grazed by cattle. The Schwaegers have divided up the thirty acres into several management units; some is stumped and graded to be maintained as grassland, and the rest will be placed on a brush hogging schedule to maintain several stages of early successional habitat across the 30-acre area.

A highlight of the tour was Sarah Schwaegler (who is an accomplished botanist) identifying much of the flora and fauna that she has found in this portion of their property. Interjections of species and wildlife diversity and forest management were given by Matt Tarr, Malin Clyde, John Lanier and David Falkenham.

Overall the day was a great success and plans are being made for next year's event!



Sarah Schwaegler shared her considerable botanical skill and enthusiasm with the Coverts Cooperators attending the May 23rd gathering. Here Sarah shows Margarie Goodson (CC05) a detail of the local flora. Photo credit: Charlie Mitchell

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION



“Making Tracks” is the newsletter of the Cooperators of the New Hampshire Coverts Project. The Coverts Project is a special volunteer education and outreach program that promotes wildlife habitat conservation and forest stewardship. Its goal is to increase the amount of New Hampshire’s private and public lands that are managed with good stewardship practices. The efforts of these volunteers are shared through this publication. For more information, please contact Malin Ely Clyde, Coordinator, NH Coverts Project, UNH Cooperative Extension, 131 Main Street, 214 Nesmith Hall, Durham, NH 03824 (603-862-2166); email: malin.clyde@unh.edu

Editor: Malin Ely Clyde, Coordinator, NH Coverts Project

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Coverts Outreach...With the Kindergarten Crowd

Cynthia Bruss (CC97)

During the 2008 and 2009 school year, three members of the Springfield Conservation Commission, Daphne Klein, Todd Richardson and **Cynthia Bruss** (CC97), spent one day a month with the two Springfield kindergarten classes. Our objective was to introduce them to observing nature on a questioning level.

Our first project was the Acorn Hunt and Plant. They collected their own acorns from the school area, discarding ones with holes and then planted two each in pots we had provided. We explained that this was an experiment, and not all acorns would sprout. Nature is that way. Todd stored the tray of pots outside over the winter

Another session involved estimating the age of trees by counting growth rings. The children were introduced to magnification lenses. We used sumac and maple so they could compare the difference in growth patterns.

Our unit on mapping was great fun. After reviewing how to read and follow maps, each student was given a different map, each leading to a “treasure.” The intensity the students showed when they set off on a quest of their own, away from the group, was amazing! Each treasure bag contained a few trinkets but you would think they had all found the Mother Lode. As snow arrived early last winter, we had the opportunity for tracking. Daphne read an illustrated book to the children to prepare them for the outside adventure. Luckily we were able to find deer and squirrel tracks near the school yard and turkey tracks at the town office. We had under-estimated their abilities on this one, and it took much less time than expected so this session quickly down-graded to belly-sliding on snow banks!

Bird feeders were another winter project. Pre-drilled birch logs and the ingredients were provided. The students inserted the perches and eyeleted the tops for hanging. Mixing the peanut butter seed mixture and filling the holes followed. We placed the feeders in plastic bags as gifts for parents, as uncovered seeded peanut butter is not a stable item.

Spring brought a study of ponds. The water sample from a vernal pool was a hit. Out came the magnification lenses and the identification chart. We found salamander eggs and one large leech. Fortunately, the leech escaped the shallow dish and headed across the table. The students were able to see another of its talents and many of the students asked to touch it. They wanted to know what it felt like and what its reaction would be to being touched. Interspersed in this session was how wild things should be handled, what can hurt them, and where they belong after observation.

During the last session in June, we gave the students their acorn experiments. All had sprouts, some larger than others. As one young lady said when looking at hers (which was the shortest) “Well, it’s better than nothing,” and she proudly carried it home. Each student received a Certificate of Completion and had their photo taken for the local newspaper.

Sometimes it’s hard to stay on track while working with children of this age. That’s when it gets really interesting! They often have a slightly different way of associating topics of discussion. Sometimes you field questions while trying hard not to burst out laughing, other times you are in awe of their insight. We are all glad we participated!

THE LAST WORD

New Habitat Stewardship Brochures Available to Landowners

UNH Cooperative Extension announces publication of four new brochures in the *New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan: Habitat Stewardship Series*. The 8-brochure series aims to help landowners learn about and help conserve important wildlife habitats found on their land.

The new brochures cover four habitat types critical for wildlife species at risk in New Hampshire: Peatlands, Appalachian Oak-Pine Forests, Shrublands, and Lowland Spruce-Fir Forests. Previously published brochures in the Habitat Stewardship Series include brochures on Grasslands, Vernal Pools, Marsh & Shrub Wetlands, and Floodplain Forests.



The colorful brochures include practical information for landowners. Pictures and text explain how to identify habitat types, describe the major threats to the health of those habitats, and offer information about wildlife species that depend on each habitat. The brochures also provide specific management recommendations for landowners interested in helping to conserve the wildlife that depend on each critical habitat type.

The brochures were produced by the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension with support from the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department. Landowners may download brochures at www.nhwoods.org or receive a single set free through the UNH Forestry Information Center (call 1-800-444-8978, email forest.info@unh.edu).