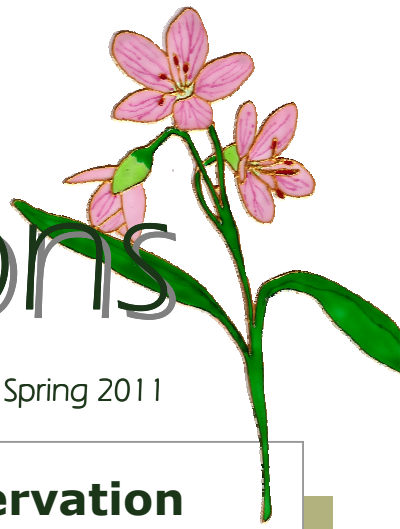




Connections

The newsletter of Cold Hollow to Canada Forest Link: Spring 2011



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Special points of interest:

- Be in touch if you'd like to submit an article to be published in our newsletter. We'd love to hear from you.
- If you'd like more information or to be added to our email list, please email us at <info@coldhollowto canada.org>



Edits and layout by
Corrie Miller

Local Action Towards Conservation

Greetings friends. Signs of spring are creeping in all around the region—from the arrival of town meeting day to turkey vultures soaring above. Join us as we open our arms and welcome spring with this fourth edition of CHC's quarterly newsletter!

First and foremost, we'd like to welcome the newest Conservation Commission to our region. On Town Meeting day the town of Montgomery voted to create a Conservation Commission to maintain an inventory of the town's natural resources, assist the planning commission on natural resource issues, and promote the public understanding of local natural resources. One of the first projects for the new commission will be the creation of a Natural Resource Inventory for the town to assist the Planning Commission in their current revision of Montgomery's zoning by-laws. This effort by the Planning Commission, started in the fall of 2010, also brings together expertise from the Vermont Natural Resource Council, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission, the Staying Connected Initiative and VT's Fish and Wildlife Department. Other projects planned for the new Conservation Commission include local workshops on invasive species control, wildlife habitat enhancement, and promotion of the Town Forest on West Hill.

Photo by Charley Eiseman



Congratulations also go out to Enosburg for passing a Conservation Fund at Town Meeting to be used to leverage additional monies to conserve land in the public interest. The fund will come from a half-penny increase in the tax rate, with priority for community projects and pro-

jects that are not usually funded by other organizations. The plan is to accumulate money associated with the fund over a number of years before being used on a specific project. Public hearings would be held prior to the use of any funds.

The Bakersfield Conservation Commission, in partnership with the H.F. Bingham Free Library, wrapped up its Winter Film Series on Sunday

March 13th. The series was a big success with films focusing on Caribou migration in Canada, conservation efforts in Africa, and the Sand Hill and Whooping Cranes in the western United States. Experts from the community guided the film discussions, bringing the conversations to a local level. The Bakersfield Conservation Commission plans to host the 3rd annual Winter Film and Discussion Series next winter.

Don't forget to check out our website as we periodically update new events in our region.

Enjoy our newsletter,

Charlie Hancock, CHC chair



CHC Steering Committee:

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Enosburgh | Nancy Patch |
| Fletcher | Ed Lidster |
| Montgomery | Charlie Hancock, chair |
| Richford | Bill McGroarty Lenny Tamulonis |



Photo by JoAnne Wazny

Tree ID, River Signage and Green-Up in Richford

by Annette Goynes—Richford Conservation Committee chair

Tell-tale leaves are a couple of months away, but local trees aren't as hard to tell apart without their foliage as you might think. The Richford Conservation Commission offered a Winter Tree Identification Walk in South Richford on Sunday, February 27th. Thirteen people from Richford, Montgomery, and Enosburgh enjoyed a snowshoe hike on a mild day to learn their winter trees. Retired logger Stan Guilmette graciously offered his woods in South Richford for this excursion. By the end of the walk, novices had learned to look at bud size on maples, bark differences on birches, length, shape, and prickliness differences of balsam, spruce, and hemlock needles, and the diamond pattern on the bark of butternut trees. Now these folks will be looking for the opposite branching of stout ash limbs and for delicate opposite twigs on maples. This has been a popular event both this year and last and we hope to offer it again, looking at another habitat next winter. If you would like to try this on your own, an excellent resource is a small guide called *Winter Tree Finder* by May and Tom Watts.

The Conservation Commission was recently involved in assisting a committee of local citizens in organizing images and text for a kiosk to be erected this spring at the new Davis Park boat landing sponsored by the Northern Forest Canoe Trail Association. This kiosk will include information for paddlers, di-

recting them to local businesses, amenities and services, as well as highlight the Richford community and its relationship to the Missisquoi River. Typical wildlife and vegetation one might see along the river will also be represented.

With the snow beginning to melt, the Conservation Commission's next focus will be assisting with Green-up Day in our community. Bags will be available at the Richford Town Hall. We encourage people to get out early and begin the process even before the official first Saturday in May if possible. One can find more before the grass begins to grow and the more everyone pitches in, the cleaner our roadsides will be.



Photo by JoAnne Wazny

Exploding red maple flower buds, far larger against the sky than those of sugar maples at this time of year.



Managing a Sugarbush

by Nancy Patch,
Franklin & Grand Isle County Forester,
CHC Steering Committee, Enosburgh

The maple sugaring tradition is very old, going back as far as the native peoples of this continent. The Abenaki would scar trees in the spring and collect the sap, which they then boiled by throwing in hot rocks until the sap became syrup. When Vermont was colonized the settlers cleared the forest and by the time of the civil war only 20% of Vermont's landscape was forested. Some of that remaining forest included sugarbushes which most farms had as a means to provide sugar for their own homes. These sugarbushes were also usually grazed by cattle, which eliminated most of the understory plants. The constant grazing and impact from the cow hooves greatly changed the ecosystem of these small farm sugarbushes by compacting the soil. The impacts of this past activity can still easily be seen in the woods today. Today, sugaring is often being done at the commodity scale. Sometimes tradition and the concept of annual cropping can get in the way of thinking about the sugarbush as a forested ecosystem. Yet, it is viable to manage the sugarbush in a way that maintains the ecology of the forest, which includes protecting biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and water quality.

As a forester, I encourage sugarmakers to maintain at least 20% of the trees as something other than sugar maple. This benefits the sugarmaker directly by providing a buffer against insect defoliation and disease; the greater the species diversity, the less impact these pests can have on a forest. Structural diversity, (size, age and location of trees within the stand) is also encouraged and enables the sugarmaker to maintain their sugarbush over many generations without losing productivity at some point in the future. This structural complexity also provides habitat for interior forest songbirds which in turn offers additional insect control for the sugarmaker. Another important component of a sugarbush is large woody debris, standing or fallen. Large dead trees offer cavities for wildlife nesting and denning, as well as a home for mosses and lichens (some can only live on very old trees).

There are also uncommon natural communities that have the potential to be managed for sap production. They can be tapped but these special plant communities should be treated with extra care to maintain the species composition that makes them so special. I once came across a Sugar Maple-Hophornbeam (Hardhack) Forest community with a landowner, which is relatively uncommon in Vermont. This natural community only grows on hilltops where calcareous bedrock is close to the surface. We talked about what to do with this forest and about how releasing the maples by removing the hardhack and red oak would likely cause dieback in the maples by lowering the moisture content of the thin

Article continued on next page

Artwork by Katie Ross



Managing a Sugarbush, Continued from Page 3

by Nancy Patch—Franklin & Grand Isle County Forester and CHC Steering Committee, Enosburgh

soil. The landowner decided to leave the hardhack and red oak to maintain the forest's diversity, protect the maples, and also protect this uncommon natural community.

The Use Value Appraisal program was also recently changed to require that sugarbushes enrolled in the forestland category be managed as a forest and not as an annual agricultural crop. Adopting a management system that takes into account all aspect of the forest keeps the sugarbush healthy for songbirds, plants, soil, water, timber and people, while also ensuring that it can produce maple syrup for years into the future.

WHY ORGANIC SYRUP?

I am often asked why maple syrup can be certified as organic. Isn't it always organic? The National Organic Standards state that if your "crop" comes from a wild natural system then it must follow the wildcrafting standards which include ecosystem management. In Vermont, we have recently come up with Maple Syrup standards that meet the National rules. Some of the issues that the standards address include species composition in the forest, structural diversity on the forest floor, the midstory and shrub layer, as well as the overstory. At this time whole tree harvesting is prohibited so as to meet the structural diversity requirements. Nutrient depletion is also a concern in a forest that greatly depends on very high levels of calcium and magnesium to produce sweet sap. In addition the management of the sugarhouse must follow rules on cleaning, pest management and emulsifier use.



Unmarked Photos by JoAnne Wazny



Owl Spotting in Richford

by Lenny Tamulonis, Richford resident

One night several years ago while sitting on the porch in back of the house on a quiet summer evening, I was startled by a loud bizarre noise coming from the edge of the woods nearby. It was a series of low-sounding, but almost musical cries of hoo-hoo/hoo-hoooo* rising and descending in four or eight notes. There was an answering call from the edge of the hayfield, then another call from farther away and yet another from the trees across the road. This exchange went on for almost a quarter hour and sounded so strange I wasn't sure what to make of it. Only later did I find that I had heard the famously secretive Barred Owl. (As a quick anecdote, let me tell you how strange it sounds to someone who has never heard one before: sometime after this, we had a city-dwelling house guest who was relaxing on the porch at night when an owl chorus began. He tore back into the house and swore that he had heard aliens out there in the dark. I can't fault him for that, but then again, he's the one who wouldn't go near our bees because he "heard that they bite.")

Like most owls, Barred Owls are nocturnal hunters but we've seen them during the day perching high up in the branches of a tree, carefully watching us as we hiked along. They really are noticeable because of their large size; they can grow up to about 25 inches with an impressive 40-inch wingspan. Though they usually weigh no more than three pounds, their feathering makes them look much bigger. They are grey with distinctive dark stripes (or bars) horizontally around their necks and vertically down their chests; they have no ear tufts and their faces are outlined with a ring of dark feathers and it almost makes them look as though they're wearing a hoodie.

Barred Owls are pretty abundant in the Richford/North Franklin area but not in the Northeast Kingdom where there appear to be more Great Horned Owls. It's been hard for us to find a Barred's nest and that's not surprising since they'll live in the hollow of a tree or move into an abandoned squirrel or crow's nest. They range throughout the eastern half of the United States, up through southern Canada, and back down through the northwest portion of the States.

We've occasionally seen them all through the year, but notice them more after the hay has been cut and baled. With the tall grass gone, mice, voles, shrews,



Photo Courtesy of D. Gordon E. Robertson

snakes, and rats are more exposed and vulnerable to hungry owls. Usually owls are opportunistic and will patiently perch in a tree waiting for their prey to wander by, but we've seen them circle the field and swoop down on an unsuspecting small animal or bird and gobble their meal on the spot. If it's a larger prey like a possum or rabbit, they'll take it back to their perch for feasting. They are well-recognized as predators by other birds, and a few times near the field we've heard a tremendous racket in the trees and watched a Barred Owl get mobbed by blue jays or some pretty gutsy robins. Conversely, the only bird that preys on *them* is the Great Horned Owl.

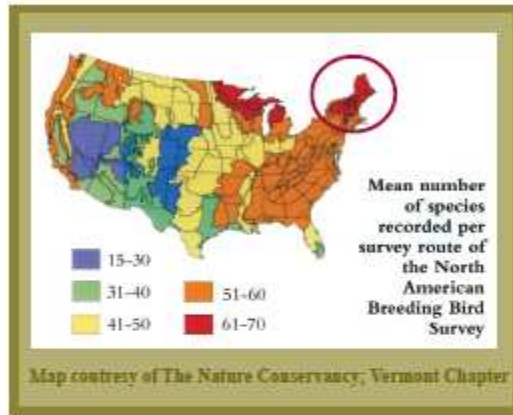
Once in a while we've found their pellets under the trees where they've perched to eat a meal. The pellets are small masses of brownish waste (no more than two inches in size). Since the owls rip their prey and swallow large chunks whole, their stomach acid digests the softer parts of the meal and they regurgitate the indigestible parts – bones, feathers, and fur. As young boys, my friends and I hunted for owl pellets and dissected them to see what we could discover inside and a complete mouse or vole skull was a prize to be treasured.

This is an excellent time to look for the Barred Owl since the trees are bare and you'll stand a better chance of spotting them perching way up in the branches. A handy mnemonic to recognize their distinctive hooting is "who-cooks-for-you/ who-cooks-for-you-alllll." Good luck in your owl spotting!



Why are our northern forests so special to birds?

Every year, millions of migratory birds make the long journey back to the forests of northern New England from their wintering grounds in Central and South America to nest, breed and raise their young. The eruption of song marking their return is as common a sign of spring as trees leafing out. However, many of these seemingly common northern forest birds, such as the Wood Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, and Canada Warbler are experiencing long-term population declines (*Common Birds in Decline*, National Audubon Society, 2007). Our forests are more important than ever as a refuge from the stresses of habitat loss and degradation.



Our northern forests are home to the highest concentration of bird species breeding in the continental United States

We share our northern forests with as much as 90% of the global breeding populations of dozens of species of migratory birds, including the Bicknell's Thrush, Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Canada Warbler (Partners in Flight). The North American Bird Conservation Initiative refers to these birds as *responsibility species*; the responsibility of looking out for the future of these birds is in our hands because our forests are the core of their breeding range. Fortunately, because these birds are still common in our region, we have the opportunity to protect and enhance their breeding habitat now before they become threatened or endangered.

Chestnut-sided Warblers nest in young, early-successional, deciduous forest or overgrown fields.



Wood Thrushes nest in mature deciduous forest with a dense understory and thick leaf litter.

How important is private forestland to birds?

Very. Roughly 80% of our region's forests are privately-owned. When considered within the broader landscape, even the smallest properties can be critical parts of the large blocks of forest in our region that support breeding birds. Small actions by individual landowners can have a global impact.



Can working forests work for forest birds?

Absolutely, with careful planning and thoughtful implementation. Forest products from timber to maple syrup can generate income that helps landowners to offset the costs of land ownership. In this way, income from forest products helps to protect forest bird habitat by minimizing subdivision and conversion to non-forested uses. In

addition, forest management activities have the potential to enhance habitats for some forest birds. For example, growing and cutting firewood can improve future timber potential in a forest stand while also enhancing understory nesting habitats for Black-throated Blue Warblers.

Black-throated Blue Warblers nest in interior deciduous and mixed forests with a dense understory.



Working Forests Work for Birds

The excerpts to the left have been copied (sorry it's a little fuzzy) from Audubon Vermont's Forest Bird Initiative publication. Additional information below by Nancy Patch.

Foresters in Vermont have participated in workshops offered by Vermont Audubon that provide them with the information and tools they need to develop plans and harvests that enhance breeding habitat conditions for forest-dependent neo-tropical migratory birds. The presence of breeding birds in the forest is a reliable measure of forest sustainability and can be a value for landowners to use when managing their woods, allowing them to keep their forests as forests.

If you're interested in managing your land so that it provides habitat for forest-dependent migratory birds, you can work with a consulting forester who has attended the Audubon workshops. Your County Forester has a list of all consulting foresters in your area. Simply ask prospective foresters if they have attended Audubon Vermont's Foresters for the Birds training.

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

Bakersfield Conservation Commission

Meets the last Thursday of every month at 7:00 PM in the Town Hall Building, 40 East Bakersfield Road, Bakersfield.

Enosburg Conservation Commission

Meets the fourth Monday of every month at 7:30 PM in the Emergency Services Building, 83 Sampsonville Road (Rte 105), Enosburg Falls.

Montgomery Conservation Commission

TBA. Keep an eye on the website for details!

Richford Conservation Committee

Meets the first Thursday of the month in the upstairs conference room of the Arvin A. Brown Public Library, 88 Main Street, Richford.

Wild and Scenic River Study Committee

Next meeting is Thursday, April 21, 7:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Stephen Wright and Barry Doolan discuss the region's geology. Locations vary so visit www.vtwsr.org for up-to-date information.

Quick and Dirty Digital Mapping for Woodland Owners

Thursday, April 7, 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM @ Johnson State College. Free mapping data, online mapping applications, and inexpensive GPS units offer opportunities to visualize your land from a new perspective. Leslie Pelch from the VT Center for Geographic Information will guide you, sponsored by Vermont Coverts. With questions or to register, contact Lisa Sausville at (802) 388-3880 or lisa@vtcoverts.org. \$10/person limited to 10 people.

Keeping Forests for the Future: Planning a Legacy for Your Woodland

Saturday, April 30, 8:15 AM – 5:00 PM @ Lake Morey Inn, Fairlee, VT. Listen to a panel of landowners talk about how they planned a legacy for their forestland and determine the strategy that best meets your needs. The Summit will offer hands-on workshops where you can learn about planning strategies from a range of experts. \$30/person (there is some scholarship money). To register visit www.vnrc.org/forest/landowner-summit or contact Lisa Sausville (see above). Sponsored by Coverts, Vermont Natural Resources Council and the VT Dept of Forest Parks and Recreation.

Forest Insects & Diseases in Your Woodlands

Saturday, May 7 @ Jericho Research Forest, Jericho, VT. Come walk with Dale Bergdahl, retired UVM Forest Pathologist and butternut expert, and tour UVM's Jericho Research Forest. Topics include symptoms and signs of common insects and diseases affecting Vermont trees and what landowners can do to keep their trees healthy and productive. Sponsored by VT Woodlands Assoc.

Mother's Day Nature Walk

Sunday, May 8, 1:00 PM–3:00 PM at High Ponds Farm, Montgomery, VT. Join a Hazen's Notch Association Naturalist for a walk looking at and learning many wildflowers. For more information, visit www.hazensnotch.org. Free.

Enosburgh Birdwalk

Sunday, May 22, 7:00 AM. Come learn about spring birds with Dave Brown. For more information or to register, call Nancy Patch at 933-2642. Limit 15 people. Free, donations accepted.



Spring Photos by JoAnne Wazny



Don't forget to check
www.coldhollowtocanada.org
for updated Upcoming Events

