

Littleton Conservation Trust



Biannual Newsletter

Autumn 2005

Great Walking in Littleton

by Henry Harvey, M.D.

Acquisitions of open land by the Littleton Conservation Trust, Conservation Commission, and the Town have provided residents with great walking trails. Maps and descriptions of these properties are available in the *Guide to Conservation Land in Littleton, Massachusetts* by Art Lazarus, updated this past May and available for observation or purchase at the Reuben Hoar Library

The extensive trail system on Oak Hill has long been known by hikers in town. The same is true of the trails in the Sarah Doublet Forest off Nashoba Road, and also off Nagog Hill Road on the Ed Bell Memorial Trail, but some of the others are less well known.

The Hartwell Family Memorial Preserve has an excellent parking space off Hartwell Avenue and a network of old cross-country ski trails, an old stone bridge over Beaver Brook, and a variety of forest, meadow, and swamp habitats. It is also accessible from Russell Street at the curve near the bridge over Route 495.

The Two Brothers Trail, memorializing two hills over Long Lake as well as two Prouty brother donors, extends from Conant Park off White Street, crosses King Street at the Congregational Church through the Town's Morgan Purchase and joins the Loop Trail of the New England Forestry Foundation on its way to the shore of Long Lake from whence a trail leads to Prouty Landing and Wilderness Road. There is parking at both ends.

The Cobb Memorial Forest is accessible from the Pickard Lane cul-de-sac, off Nashoba Road, and from Nagog Hill Road. The latter access point, Blue Dot Trail, is on Morrison land purchased by the Town along with the orchard.

Long Lake Park, made up of tax title lands and the Town's purchase of the Frost-Whitcomb property, includes 1800 feet of shore front on Long Lake and a high meadow with great views adjacent to the telephone tower. You can access it from a large parking area on Harwood Avenue near its end at Newtown Road and also at the far end of Colonial Drive and of Middlesex Drive, although parking is limited at both of these places.

See Art Lazarus's guide for a description of other trails, such as those at Whitetail Woods, Nashoba Wetlands, Mill Hill, and Mary Shepherd Open Space. You can also get this information online at: www.littletonconservationtrust.org ■



Photograph by Rick Findlay

New Cobb boardwalk compliments of Eagle Scout Jeff Gehly and friends

See another article on page 2 for further details about the Cobb Memorial Trail

In Memory of Paul E. Smith, Jr.

The Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT) dedicates this issue of our newsletter to Paul E. Smith, Jr.. Mr. Smith and his wife, Edith, were one of the first land donors to the LCT. The Smiths donated nine acres of land across from their home on Whitcomb Avenue along the banks of Beaver Brook. They also persuaded their neighbor to sell ten acres of adjoining land. This was the first step in preserving a green belt along Beaver Brook that now runs through Littleton. Later, in 1994, the Smiths gave a large portion of their land as a conservation easement to the Trust and endowed it generously thereby ensuring its permanent protection. In addition to his land contributions, Paul Smith dedicated many years to studying the demographics of Littleton so that he could advise the school committee on what schools needed to be built. His hard work was instrumental in getting the two schools on Russell street built. Paul Smith died this past October. The LCT will always be thankful for his foresight and generosity.

The Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT), distinct from the Town's Conservation Commission, is a private land trust formed in 1962 to promote Littleton's rural character; to preserve its water, plant, and wildlife resources and its unique views; and to provide environmental education. The LCT is caretaker of over 300 acres of property (all gifted from far-sighted residents) on which we manage a system of trails for public use.

Explore the Cobb Memorial Trail by Art Lazarus

The latest Littleton Conservation Trust land acquisition features a 0.7 mile main trail with a 0.5 mile connector trail on town conservation land. The Cobb family donated 31 acres of forest to the Trust last year. The land has a relatively linear shape extending from Pickard Lane Extension on the north to Nashoba Road on the south. The town connector trail goes to Nagog Hill Road. Signed parking areas are located on Nashoba Road and Pickard Lane Extension. Much of the land was once used as a chicken farm that was a major producer of eggs and chicks. The Trust has removed most of the farm debris from the land. Only some barbed wire fences remain to be removed.

The land is quite different from all of the other conservation parcels in Town. Some of the more outstanding features include:

- Close proximity and view of Cobb's Pond.
- Diverse wildlife such as water and forest birds, beavers, coyotes, deer, wild turkeys, frogs, and evidence of bears.
- Numerous, small, steep bedrock hills up to 50 feet in height.
- Vernal ponds, brooks, pocket swamps, and large glacial-age boulders.
- An abandoned beaver dam, a restored old rock slab bridge, and a pond with a grand display of brilliant red cardinal flowers in August.
- An extremely high tree canopy of oaks, white pines, and black birches.
- A long boardwalk through a swamp, built by the Boy Scouts in 2005.
- A sunken, wooded bedrock fault zone to a depth of 30 feet containing brooks and hemlock groves.

A trail map and a description of the property is included in the *Guide To Conservation Land of Littleton, Massachusetts* available at the Reuben Hoar Library and the Conservation Commission office in the Town hall (for five dollars, cash only). You can also get this information online at:

www.littletonconservationtrust.org ■



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Changes to the LCT Board of Trustees

Both Doreen Morse and Julie Wormser have been long-time board members of the Littleton Conservation Trust. Sadly but understandably, both of these dedicated volunteers have decided to retire from the board this year to pursue other interests. We give them thanks for their hours of dedication and commitment to the local land conservation effort and we wish them well in their next endeavors.

New to the LCT board this year is Jeff Menzigian. Jeff is taking over Doreen's role as secretary, although Doreen will continue to maintain our email list and send out announcements about conservation-related events.

LCT volunteer, Doreen Morse, reminds Littleton folk that she is happy to email you advance notice of Trust events. Please send your email address to her at:
danmorse@yahoo.com

Littleton Conservation Trust Membership Form – 2005

New Renewal

Date: ___/___/___
(Date determines year of tax deduction)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual: \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Family: \$ 40
<input type="checkbox"/> Friend: \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> Supporter: \$ 250
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron: \$500	<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor: \$1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: \$ _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gift to Permanent Fund: \$ _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Please send me information about how to preserve my own land.	

(Provide your email address if you want to receive notification of upcoming walks and conservation-related events.)

Please cut out this form and send it to:

Kathy Stevens, Treasurer
Littleton Conservation Trust
PO Box 594
Littleton, MA 01460



Coping with All Terrain Vehicles on Conservation Land

by Art Lazarus

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are causing significant damage and disruption to at least 3 of the 20 properties owned and/or maintained by the Littleton Conservation Commission, Littleton Conservation Trust, and the New England Forestry Foundation. All three organizations prohibit the use of motorized vehicles on their conservation properties.

The 180-acre Long Lake Park is where the damage from ATVs is most evident. The "No ATV" signs are ripped down. Posted regulations are also torn down or ignored. The tough tires of the ATVs tear up the well-developed walking trails and create mud holes and deep ruts. The vehicles crush low vegetation and smash down tree and shrub saplings. Wildlife and walkers are disrupted by the noise and the intrusion. In addition, the possibility of serious accidents to ATV riders, as well as people or animals walking the trails, is high. It is hoped that ATV riders will respect the land use regulation on their own initiative as enforcement of the regulation is challenging and costly for all.

Littleton is fortunate to have excellent conservation properties totaling almost 1400 acres. Most of the properties contain well-developed trails balanced with many wild areas. Nearly all of the people who walk the properties are very conscious of the good appearance of the land as there is very little vandalism and litter. The Trust does not wish for walkers to do any thing confrontational with ATV riders, but if the opportunity presents itself to educate ATV users as to the dangers and the land use regulations, please feel free to do so.

This problem exists in other communities as well. For example, the Town of Chelmsford Meeting representatives just approved a new bylaw requiring all riders of dirt bikes, snowmobiles, and ATVs under age 18 to be accompanied by an adult (source: *Lowell Sun*, 10/23/2005).



ATV tracks on Littleton conservation land (last winter)

This is the third in a series of articles about non-native invasive plants. The first two articles discussed Japanese Knotweed and Burning Bush. This article focuses on Oriental Bittersweet. All of these plants are alien or exotic to this region. They have few natural enemies to keep them in check, and most spread at a prodigious rate. Many colonize to the exclusion of native flora, and some are extremely persistent and resistant to control.

*Our goal is to make readers aware of the problem and to encourage you to participate in a solution by cleaning up your own property. I say a solution, but in reality it is **the only** solution. Non-profits (such as the Nature Conservancy and local Land Trusts) as well as local, state, and federal governments will take up the challenge. But without the public, the battle for our landscape will be a losing one. No one will ever make you chop down your ‘glorious’ Burning Bush, for example, but perhaps if you recognize the monster that lurks within, you will choose to do it yourself.*



Oriental Bittersweet smothers shrubs and trees, and thus takes over the landscape.

Oriental Bittersweet

Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*) is a vine common enough that most of us have tangled with it at one time or another. It may have come into our home as a holiday arrangement (pretty orange berries) and taken over the yard via the compost pile. More likely a bird left a seed under a shrub which the emerging vine soon enveloped.

Bittersweet is an extremely aggressive invader smothering all types of native vegetation much like the Kudzu of our southern states. Well-supported vines can reach six inches in diameter and take down full grown shade trees. On the ground, a three-foot high tangle can cover a field. It kills by girdling and shading, thus preventing photosynthesis of the plant it is smothering.

It was introduced as an ornamental in the 1860’s and has now spread from Maine to North Carolina and Illinois. We will likely never get rid of it in Littleton, but we can manage it by destroying the largest seed bearing vines. Since these are the most obvious, especially in autumn, it should be possible.

Unfortunately, simply cutting the vine only stimulates regrowth. A number of conservation organizations have suggested that the only way to kill it is by painting the cut end with a concentrated solution of Glyphosate (Roundup), or Triclopyr (Brush-Be-Gone). When using herbicides, always follow label instructions and take recommended precautions. Be certain that your chemical is labeled for your site.

Visit the New England Wildflower Society web site (www.newfs.org) for additional information and links to other sites. Note that there is a native American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) that blooms and fruits at the tips rather than along the stem. If you are in doubt, call me for assistance: 978-486-4031. ■



Oriental Bittersweet bears fruits all along the plant stem. In contrast, American Bittersweet bears fruits only at the tips.

Photographs by Rick Findlay

If a single goose is a goose and multiple are geese, why is it that a single moose is a moose and multiple are moose, not meese? This is likely due to the vagaries of the English language. But there are even more interesting questions about moose. . .

For example, moose have been absent from Massachusetts since the early 1700s. As recently as the 1970s, a moose sighting was considered a rare sight. So why are moose here now after being absent for so long? As early settlers cleared the extensive forests in the state for pastures and farming, moose habitat disappeared and so did the moose. This was a trend through much of New England. Habitat for moose recovered due in part to farmers moving to the more fertile Midwest or to factories during the Industrial Revolution.

Moose are now reclaiming their former range and moving into areas where they haven't been seen for hundreds of years. Moose populations got a boost in northern New England states from a combination of forest cutting practices and protection from hunting which created ideal moose habitat and allowed for high reproduction and survival rates. Gradually, as the population increased, moose moved southward into their historic range. By the early 1980s, this largest member of North America's deer family moved into northern Worcester and Middlesex Counties and began to breed and disperse throughout central Massachusetts.

Currently, MassWildlife biologists estimate 500-700 moose live in Massachusetts, with the majority of them found in northern Worcester County. During the year, moose home ranges vary from 5-50 square miles depending on the season. MassWildlife has been monitoring moose populations through sighting reports and urban/suburban situations. They have recently started a study that involves catching and collaring moose to follow their movements and gain an understanding of their reproduction and survival rates.

What does a moose look like? A moose is a horse-sized deer with long, dark brown hair. It has high humped shoulders, long slender legs, and a tail that's almost invisible. Despite its ungainly appearance, this animal can run through the forest quietly at speeds up to 35 mph. Only males (bulls) have antlers. A bull's antlers begin growing in March, attain full growth by August, and are shed by breaking or falling off between December and February. Each year, the antlers of a bull moose grow larger. The bull uses his antlers to thrash brush (probably to mark territory), to fight for mates, and to root plants from the pond floor. The moose is a solitary animal in the summer but several may gather near streams and lakes to feed. In winter, moose often herd, packing down snow to facilitate movement. Winter herding is not social behavior; rather, they congregate in favorable habitat. The summer diet of moose is willows and aquatic vegetation, including the leaves of water lilies. In winter, moose browse on woody plants, including the twigs, buds, and bark of willow, balsam, aspen, dogwood, birch, cherry, maple, and



A bull moose

viburnum. Moose lose weight in winter and gain it back in summer.

Moose are mostly active between dawn and dusk. Their breeding period runs from September through October. Many moose sightings are reported during these months. The bull stays with the cow only long enough to breed then he leaves in pursuit of another cow. Both bulls and cows travel more during this time in pursuit of a mate. Females can breed very young—as early as 1½ years of age.

The other period of high moose activity is in May, when the young of the past year are leaving the adult cow before she calves again. Cows usually give birth in late May through June to only one calf per year. Twins are unusual. At birth, moose calves are covered with reddish fur and weigh 20-25 pounds. By fall they will have gained nearly 300 pounds!

The newborn calf can stand up the first day; within a couple of weeks, it can swim. The mother weans her calf at about six months and just before the birth of her next calf, she drives the yearling off. The life span of the moose is up to 20 years. Wolves are their main predator, but are now extirpated from much of the moose's range.

The moose is unpredictable and can be dangerous. It is normally a shy animal and avoids human contact, but a cow with calves is irritable and fiercely protective, and rutting bulls occasionally have charged people, horses, cars, and even trains.

Be particularly alert, especially at night during the fall breeding season and in May and June when yearling moose are driven from their mother. Moose will step out onto a roadway without showing the slightest concern for oncoming traffic. Its dark body is difficult to see at night and its eyes are higher in the air compared to the level of a whitetail deer's eyes.

In recent months there have been several sightings of moose in the Littleton area. This just goes to show you how much we have all become involved in protecting our environment, allowing these animals to come back. ■

LITTLETON



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It's time to renew your membership!
(see page 3)

 This newsletter is printed on recycled paper (20% post-consumer waste)

The Book Corner

These and other books donated by the LCT are available at the Reuben Hoar Public Library

Suburban Safari: A Year in the Lawn by Hannah Holmes

In reading this compelling book by science and nature writer Hannah Holmes, I was fascinated by the diversity of life discovered in a "simple" suburban yard. By spending a full year observing in close detail all the inhabitants she could find in her small (1/5 acre) patch of land in Maine, Holmes reveals the incredible variety of plants, animals, and insects that share our world with us. In engaging and humorously blunt words, she writes about the lives of the creatures around her, giving names to many of them as she watches their antics and admires their survival techniques. She befriends a chipmunk (Cheekie) and grows to care deeply about the crows she comes to think of as hers. She meets with experts in a variety of fields (botany, biology, ecology, entomology, and energy) to help create a framework for understanding the community in which she realizes we are all members. From wondering at the beauty of a slug under the microscope, to discovering the chemical language of plants and trees, Holmes delves wholeheartedly into her quest to better understand the earth's other inhabitants, providing us with a great deal of important and thought-provoking information about the impact we have on the earth. I will never walk across my yard again without thinking about all the incredible things going on all around (and under!) me in winter, spring, summer, and fall.

Review by Kathy Stevens

Drawn to Nature by Clare Walker Leslie

Several years ago, attendees of the Littleton Conservation Trust's annual meeting enjoyed a talk by Clare Walker Leslie, a professional artist and teacher. At that time, the Trust gave to the Reuben Hoar Library one of her several published books, *Nature Journaling*, a book to inspire close observation of natural objects by drawing what you see. Her ability to catch the shape and color of a bird, butterfly, squirrel, or any daily exceptional image (DEI) has been further demonstrated in her recently published paperback, *Drawn to Nature*.

In the Forward, Bill McKibben writes "Although it first may appear that Clare Walker Leslie is engaged in teaching people how to draw or keep a journal, this seems to me to be clearly secondary. Clare is teaching us how to notice." Her quick colorful sketches lavishly demonstrate her ability in this field.

A copy of *Drawn to Nature* will be given to the library by the Littleton Conservation Trust. You can also get your own copy at the Willow Books store in Acton.

Review by Henry Harvey, M.D.