

Littleton Conservation Trust



Newsletter

Spring 2003

Friday, May 2nd Annual Meeting and Dr. Ed Bell Forum

Featuring: Benjamin Kilham, Author of the Best Selling Book
Among the Bears: Raising Orphan Cubs in the Wild

On Friday evening, May 2nd, the new Littleton High School Performing Arts Center at 56 King Street will host the Littleton Conservation Trust's Annual Meeting starting at 6:30PM. Following immediately afterwards at 7:00 PM will be the 2nd Annual Dr. Edgar Bell Memorial Forum which is expected to draw a large audience. There will be an opportunity to meet and socialize with Trust members, friends, and Ben Kilham, who will autograph copies of his book. Admission is free and open to the public-at-large. Refreshments will be served.

This year's featured speaker at the Dr. Edgar Bell Memorial Forum is the successful naturalist and black bear cub rehabilitator, Benjamin Kilham. While breaking all the traditional rules for observing natural animal behavior and rehabilitating orphaned wild animals, Ben has been extremely successful in teaching and nurturing bear cubs within their own natural environment and reintroducing them as thriving normal adults. Through careful observation and intimate bear-like interaction Ben has made breakthrough discoveries in previously unknown aspects of black bear social interaction, sensory communication, and down-to-earth normal bear development. Ben's experience and knowledge spans the nurturing back to the wild of some 30 bear cubs.

In the tradition of other popular animal behaviorists, such as Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey, Ben has earned national recognition for his study of New England's own native top omnivore, the black bear. Ben's exciting and educational work has been portrayed in his own book *Among the Bears: Raising Orphan Cubs in the Wild*, National Geographic Magazine's March 2002 feature article *Mother Bear Man: Ben Kilham Nurtures Cubs Back to Nature* (available online with several video clips at <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/ngm/0203>), and a soon-to-be-completed third National Geographic Society TV special. Ben's adventuresome stories have also captured the heart of the pop culture scene with his guest appearances on NBC Dateline, CBS Coast to Coast, and the Late Show with David Letterman.

by Don MacIver



Who's Watching You?



Marcia Wilson introduces a young snowy owl

On March 22, naturalist Marcia Wilson presented her "Eyes on Owls" program at the Littleton Middle School. Ms. Wilson introduced six live owls to the 256 members of the audience. All who attended experienced an educational treat with a slide show, hooting lesson, and close-up views of these secretive birds of prey. This popular event was sponsored by the LCT.

For a list of LCT's environmental education programs scheduled for this spring, including our **Annual Canoe Trip**, see page 5.

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Preserving Littleton's Agricultural Heritage by Julie Wormser and Rick Findlay

Although the adage “plant peas on St. Patrick’s Day” was hard to follow this year, with nearly a foot of snow still covering the ground, the lengthening days foretold that spring was not far off. Farmers and gardeners alike have been planning for the upcoming growing season, purchasing seeds and starting seedlings in anticipation of warmer days.

Peruse the shelves of a local garden center and you will find living history in the seed packets—Danvers carrots, Waltham butternut squash. They depict now-urban areas where these varieties were developed. James H. Gregory of Marblehead was the Burpee of his time in the late 1800s, introducing a wide range of vegetables to the United States, including iceberg lettuce and Hubbard squash. Marblehead lost its last farm—a poultry farm—in 1989. Indeed, much of eastern Massachusetts was once a breadbasket, with market gardens lining Route 2 and cattle drives making their way down Mass Ave. into Porter Square. Yet since World War II, nearly all of the working farms within Route 495 have vanished. Fields that once grew corn have been subdivided for housing or paved over to ease the commute to Boston, and our town has not been spared. Home to eleven dairies and many orchards 50 years ago, we now have one of each and much to mourn.

But still we can be thankful. When we leave Staples or Trader Joe’s and follow the strip malls up 2A, we don’t need

a sign to tell us we are home. Our children strain to see the horses, the piles of wood and the pumpkins, the Canada Geese landing in the cornfield and the deer grazing by the woods. We are still rural thanks to the families who still farm and the others who have come here to work the land. There are more than a dozen families raising vegetables, hay, ornamentals, cows, horses, or in some way supporting our agricultural heritage on land that has been open since the colonial period.



The Littleton Conservation Trust sees our hard-working agricultural neighbors as essential land stewards and central to what gives our town its special character. With the relentless development pressures facing communities along the Route 495 corridor, we are focusing our efforts on trying to help Littleton farmers increase their profitability and stay in business for the long term. We want to partner with interested farmers to see how we can help improve their bottom line in the short term, and maintain their land as working farms long into the future. We will be asking Littleton farmers for their thoughts on how we can best assist them—for example through *pro bono* marketing, estate planning, or other assistance. In the mean time, we can all help by buying locally grown produce and supporting our farm stands and nurseries.

Another Reason to Preserve Farmland by Grant Marley

As winter begins to retreat from New England, bird life becomes more plentiful. Vocally and visually, both residents and spring migrants add a welcome touch of life to the landscape. You only need to walk along the edge of a field to hear and see the re-birth of avian activity.

One of the more interesting activities is the early spring courtship dance and flight of the American Woodcock. These plump, land-locked shorebirds are usually shy, woodland dwellers, who feed almost exclusively on earthworms. From late March through April, however, field edges host a whirling, beeping courtship ritual that is truly magical. This show begins at dusk and can continue all night on moon-lit nights. With a series of bows and beeps, the male woodcock rises into the evening sky. After a series of whirls and tumbles he lands back on earth in almost the exact same spot from which he left. Standing on the edge of a field at dusk, you can often hear the woodcock’s distinctive nasal beep.



American Woodcock

One of the most popular birds of the field and open areas is the Eastern Bluebird. The decline and recent return of these colorful creatures has been a topic of much discussion among naturalists. Members of the thrush family, bluebirds are primarily insect eaters in the spring and summer. They like to feed from a perch in an open area such as a field or a cemetery. In the winter, they feed mostly on berries in

heavily-wooded swampy areas. In New England, the bluebird was in deep trouble as little as thirty years ago. However, an aggressive program of protection and nest box building has helped the bluebird make an impressive comeback. Bluebirds are cavity nesters who also take to nest boxes.

You can set up bluebird boxes, and with a little luck, a pair of these avian treasures will be part of your family for the breeding season. Usually an area of an acre or more is required, along with a grassy cover that does not get too high. You should put up the boxes on a wood or metal pole five to ten feet above the ground. It is a good idea to put two boxes close to each other because different bird species, such as tree swallows or house wrens, may use the box. These more aggressive species will tolerate the gentle bluebird next to them but will not put up with another of their own species. You can put up boxes throughout the spring, as bluebirds will raise up to three broods of young throughout the breeding season, which can go from early April to mid-July.

You can buy or make nest boxes. Making them is simple—a good family project. You can find instructions on the internet at <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org> or in “How to Attract Birds” by Ortho Books.

With the once plentiful open spaces here in Littleton on the decline, great care is needed to help preserve the remaining open land, flora, and fauna. Putting up birdhouses can help replace what has already been lost and provide a new way to watch these beautiful creatures.

Membership Information

Your membership, in any amount, is a statement of your support for our all-volunteer efforts. Membership funds allow us to maintain and expand our trails, offer educational programs, promote environmental advocacy, and provide access to our properties at no charge for all residents. Our Permanent Fund is our stable, long-term endowment fund.

Littleton Conservation Trust Membership Form


New membership **Renewal** **Date:** _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

Please send this form to: **Henry S. Harvey, M.D. , Treasurer**
Littleton Conservation Trust
PO Box 594
Littleton, MA 01460



Individual: \$10	Family : \$15	Permanent Fund Donation: \$ _____ Please send me information about how to preserve my own land.
Supporting: \$30	Contributing: \$60	
Patron: \$100	Life Patron: \$1,000	

Our New England Stone Walls by Art Lazarus

New England is unique in many ways, but one particular feature of the land is often overlooked or taken for granted. The profusion of stone walls seen running up and down hills and bordering fields in rural and suburban areas is generally accepted as part of our landscape and not given much notice.

In performing Land Steward activities at the relatively new Long Lake Park, I noticed that the number of stone walls seems unusually numerous. Out of curiosity, I located and mapped each stone wall on the property. This mapping revealed an amazing total of 6.8 miles of walls within the 180-acre area. Here is a sketch that illustrates an aerial view of the complex and unusual pattern created by these walls.

I did some research and discovered the new book *Stone by Stone* by Robert Thorson, which describes the “magnificent history of New England stone walls.” Thorson states that “stone walls lie at the intersection of science and history which became woven together during the transformation of wilderness into family farms.”

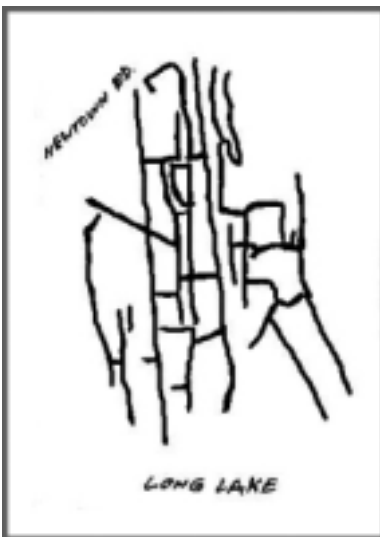


Illustration of the pattern created by stone walls at Long Lake Park

The many miles of stone walls in New England represent the hard work of thousands of persons and oxen. Nearly all the walls were built between the time of the American Revolution (1775) and the first railroad lines (1850). Many of the walls were lengthened and straightened and made more permanent between 1850 and 1900. In 1872, the U.S. Department of Agriculture census estimated that there was 240,000 miles of stone walls in New England.

It was primarily property owners and their children who cleared the wilderness rapidly for farming. This deforestation exposed the surface soil to increased frost heave, which resulted in the annual arrival of fieldstones to the surface. Most early farmers blamed the devil for fieldstones, which magically appeared each spring. In order to separate livestock from crops and to provide some boundaries, the farmers carried the stones to the edge of the field and tossed them into the shape of a wall. The height of the wall was usually thigh-high reflecting the maximum lifting ability of the builder. Oxen were used to

(continued on page 4)

In 1962, Littleton was a relatively small rural town that had escaped the rapid growth of apartments and multiple dwellings that had doubled Acton's population in a decade. It was true that modest homes had replaced the apple orchards along Tahattawan Road. It was also true that George Kimball had built roads named after his children and homes in his hay fields off Goldsmith Street. But there were no stop lights, no heavy traffic, and the recently-built Route 495 was hardly used. The present site of Digital/Compaq/Hewlett Packard was a peach orchard and the site of the Mobil Station at the Common was Roger Conant's iron works, where he made conveyer machines. John Donelan had only recently moved his small grocery store from the corner of Stevens and Adams streets to its present mall location. Fortin Mall was Herpy's Dairy, processing the milk from Dell Dale Farm and from several other local dairy farmers. Today, there is only one dairy farm left in Littleton. We are fortunate that other farmers in town have continued to raise and sell excellent fruits and vegetables.

In the year 1962, the Littleton Conservation Trust (LCT) was conceived by Herb Sonthoff, a clairvoyant and energetic fellow who foresaw the inevitable arrival of industry, traffic, large houses, noise, and light pollution. He gathered a group of a dozen like-minded citizens, including myself. We were interested in preserving open land for the protection of animal and bird life. We wanted to preserve open fields, forests, swamps, and streams: maintaining in healthy state the water we drink and the air we breathe. We established the Littleton Conservation Trust to address the need for a non-profit organization to which land owners could donate land while gaining an income tax deduction for a charitable gift.

Some of the first land donations came from members of the original LCT board. Edith Smith, secretary for the Trust for many years, and her husband, Paul, gave eleven acres along

Beaver Brook near Whitcomb Avenue. The Smiths persuaded their neighbor, Bert Webster, to donate ten of his acres in the same area. The Trustees hoped for a green belt along Beaver Brook all through town. (The town's acquisition this Spring of the Hartwell property on both sides of Beaver Brook, joined by an old farm bridge, will be another step closer to this dream.)

Lois McWilliams, of Power Road, followed Edith as secretary of the Trust. She was friendly with Fanny Knapp and Edith Jenkins, two nurses who retired from work at the Children's Hospital and moved to Littleton after WWII. The two retired nurses worked for Mr. Barrows, a dairy farmer on Nagog Hill, who had lost his cows in a tragic accident. Disgusted with farming, he sold his ninety-two acres to Fanny Knapp and Edith Jenkins quite cheaply. They lived in an enlarged and renovated cabin on the top of Nagog Hill. In 1975 and 1976, influenced by Lois McWilliams, the retired nurses gave their farm to the Trust as an outright gift, reserving six acres around their house for their lifetime use. The entire property is now known as the Sarah Doublet Forest and Nature Preserve.

Currently, the Littleton Conservation Trust holds fourteen properties totaling over 280 acres. In addition, the LCT holds conservation restrictions (also known as easements) on another 100 acres, with more pending. These properties, supplemented by several hundred acres of open land held by the town's Conservation Commission, will guarantee that at least some areas in town will be preserved for wildlife, clean air and water, and human enjoyment.

Henry Harvey is an original Trustee. He is currently the LCT Treasurer.

For an online guide to Littleton conservation lands, go to:
<http://www.littletonconservationtrust.org>

Our New England Stone Walls *(continued from page 3)*

pull wooden sleds with large stones to the edges where they were unloaded. Farmers used children, hired labor, the unemployed, and even slaves to build the walls.

Most stone walls did not have a significant role in agricultural production. According to the referenced 1872 census, most walls were built to hold stones. Other walls served as boundaries, ornaments, retaining walls, pens, dams, cellar walls, and cattle guides. The decline of widespread upland family farms began as early as 1829 with the opening of the Erie Canal and beginning of railroad networks. The migration of upland New England farmers to regional cities and to the West was underway in the early 1800's. The stone walls, along with the farmland, were essentially abandoned and reforestation began. Some stone walls became "estate" walls and stone work became more specialized in the form of "laid," "chinked," and "mosaic walls." Expert stone work is displayed in the walls and foundations in Shaker Village in Harvard, MA. Barbed wire

came into use about 1874, which made fencing easier and did away with the arduous process of raising or building new walls. Many stone walls in Littleton still have rusty barbed wire lying on or beside them.

The stone walls we see in our woodlands represent very hard work by farmers nearly 200 years ago to clear and farm the land. With the decline of upland farming, the walls remained in place as evidence of their hard work as they tried to provide for their families. However, many walls have been destroyed by suburban sprawl. Fortunately for Littleton, at least 1200 acres of town woodlands, fields, and wetlands are protected as conservation and water resource land. Many miles of walls are within those properties, which can be appreciated by all that are interested in our New England history. They are right here, just a few minutes or less from our homes.

Art Lazarus is a LCT Board Member and the Director of Land Stewardship.

LCT Spring 2003 Programs

Here is a list of the environmental education programs we are offering this spring. All programs are free and open to the public.

**Due to the format of the programs, they are limited in size.
To make a reservation, please call 978-486-4517.**

Earth Day Vernal Pools Workshop

Tuesday, April 22 12 noon (~ 2 hours)

Led by: Scott Jackson, Program Director, UMass Extension
Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation Program

Meet: At the Reuben Hoar Library Meeting Room (downstairs)

Limit: 30 participants (call 978-486-4517 to reserve your space)

*Learn about vernal pools and the creatures that inhabit them with a slide show presentation followed by a visit to a nearby vernal pool.
Sunglasses with polarized lenses recommended.*



Spring Time Bird Walk

Saturday, May 4 7 AM (~ 3 hours)

Led by: Grant Marley, experienced birder and naturalist

Meet: At the parking lot behind the Reuben Hoar Library

Limit: 15 participants (call 978-486-4517 to reserve your space)

Annual Canoe Trip: Fort Pond

Saturday, May 17 1:30 PM (~2 hours)
(rain date: Sunday, May 18)

Led by: Steve Sussman, LCT Board Member

Meet: Omega Way off Newtown Road. At the end of Omega
Way look for LCT signs that will direct you to the launch point.

Fort Pond, located on the east side of Littleton, has no public boat access, but Steve has made special arrangements with one of the water front property owners to permit launching by the LCT. This canoe trip provides a rare opportunity to fully explore this extensive pond and its varied shoreline. Bring your own canoe or kayak, appropriate personal floatation devices for paddlers and passengers (especially young children), and clothing suitable for wind exposure on open water.

For more information, call Steven Sussman 978-486-9630.



What is Biodiversity?

Saturday May 31 1:00 PM (~2 hours)

Led by: Mark Boyajian, Naturalist and Environmental Educator

Meet: At the parking lot behind the Reuben Hoar Library

Limit: 12 participants

Learn about how our local environment supports a diversity of life.

Mystery Walks

Saturday, May 31 (rain date: Sunday, June 1) 8:30 AM (~ 2 hours)

Saturday, June 7 (rain date: Sunday, June 8) 8:30 AM (~ 2 hours)

Led by: Don MacIver and Rick Findlay, LCT Board Members

Meet: To Be Determined

Join LCT board members on two walks to investigate the biodiversity of two Littleton conservation parcels. Be prepared for possible bush-whacking. Wear appropriate foot gear (hiking boots), sunscreen, and bug spray.

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 280 acres of property (all gifted from far-sighted residents) on which we manage a system of trails for public use.



LCT Board of Trustees October 2002

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LCT Secretary, Doreen Morse, reminds Littleton folk that she is happy to email advance notice of Trust events to those interested.
Please send your email address to her at dannmorse@yahoo.com



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The Book Corner

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

Inland Fishes of Massachusetts

by Karsten E. Hartel, David B. Halliwell and Alan E. Launer

In reading this book, you will find it more than just Massachusetts's first true guide to our freshwater fishes, but an interesting, readable book full of new and exciting information. The beginning gives a brief history of ichthyology (study of fishes) in Massachusetts from prehistory to the present, along with the authors' thoughts on ecology as it relates to fish-related food production, recreation, and land and water conservation efforts. Did you know that introduced species comprise 45% of Massachusetts's freshwater fishes? This has had a substantial effect on the occurrence of native species. In the guide portion of the book, you will learn the history of each species, its distribution and abundance, with references for further reading accompanied by clear drawings for identification and colored photographs. Did you know that there are five different kinds of "sunfish"?

Hartel and his team encourage the average person to get out and do their own fish watching. Visit your local pond with a pair of binoculars that focus close, and you'll see fish building their nest, guarding their territory, or catching their food. Learn the difference between a bluegill and a pumpkinseed; find out what a trout-perch or a hogchoker look like and where to find them. This is an interesting book on a subject most of us know little about.

Review by Doreen Morse

The Blooming Lawn: Creating a Flower Meadow

By Yvette Verner

In many places our "countryside" is sadly lacking a diversity of plant and animal life because so much of it is green lawns and farmland crops. Author Yvette Verner has written a book about something simple that anyone can do to help create more diversity where we live: growing flowers.

The Blooming Lawn is both a story and a handbook about creating a flower meadow on a small patch of land as a way to create a wildlife habitat with diversity. The author and her husband created a small meadow as a way to enjoy the wildflowers, bushes, trees, birds, insects, and animals that live and visit there. The book tells the story of their efforts to design the meadow's layout, of choosing and planting the wildflowers, trees, and hedges, and of the challenges they faced making them grow and bloom. It also tells of the many satisfying hours they spent enjoying their results.

Included in the book are some "how to's" of meadowcraft such as plans for houses and feeding stations for birds and animals, examples of keeping records and a meadow calendar, and indexes of various species of flowers, grasses, trees, shrubs and butterflies for different regions. Creating flower meadows on even small patches of land (or container gardens!) can help to bring biodiversity to our environment. Who doesn't love to see a beautiful field of flowers and butterflies?

Review by Kathy Stevens