

# Littleton Conservation Trust



Newsletter

Spring 2008

LCT Annual Meeting and Dr. Ed Bell Forum

## Wildlife of Fields, Streams, and Woods

Featuring Ron McAdow

Wildlife Photographer and Outdoor Guide Writer

Monday, May 19

7:00 PM LCT annual meeting

8:00 – 9:30 PM Dr. Ed Bell Forum

Littleton High School Performance Center

56 King Street, Littleton, MA



*Otter in the wild*

*Photo credit: Ron McAdow*

If you'd like advance notice of Trust events emailed to you, please send your email address to: [dannmorse@yahoo.com](mailto:dannmorse@yahoo.com)

Ron McAdow, wildlife photographer and author, is this year's Dr. Ed Bell Forum featured presenter. Ron will deliver a slide-illustrated presentation featuring wildlife commonly found in our region. Using motion-triggered cameras, Ron has captured native wildlife images not often observed in the wild. Of particular interest are photographs recording wildlife using four specially-designed passageways recently built under Route 2, spanning from smaller animal tunnels abutting the Concord River wetlands and gradually extending eastward to the larger animal passageways located in wooded uplands. Other motion-triggered images provide insight into nocturnal wildlife ramblings throughout surrounding conservation lands. In addition to capturing exciting action-oriented wildlife photos, this innovative technique provides another tool to better understand how wildlife adapts to man-made structures, moves about at night, and uses natural open space areas.

As an author, Ron has written canoe and walking guides which highlight natural and man-made history along the Sudbury-Assabet-Concord and Charles Rivers, as well as a compilation of stories emanating from New England's most celebrated mountain peaks. Ron is a frequent contributor to local papers on wildlife matters. Ron also serves as the Executive Director of Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT), a noted regional land trust whose service area includes Littleton. LCT and SVT have previously partnered to protect land within Littleton and currently are collaborating to determine how to best protect selected additional lands of mutual interest.

The LCT Annual Meeting will start at 7:00 pm and will include a short business meeting and a report on the past year's activities within the community. Following a short intermission, the Dr. Ed. Bell Forum featuring Ron McAdow will start at 8:00 pm. Refreshments and an opportunity to meet Ron, friends, and fellow conservationists will follow the Forum. This event is free. All are invited.

The LCT gives special thanks to the Littleton Public Schools for supporting this community event. ■

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.

## Discover the lore of an ancient beech tree

by Art Lazarus



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One of the oldest living trees in Littleton is the stately American Beech located within the Newtown Hill Conservation Area (owned by the Town). Located on the northerly side of the second field, westerly of the parking area, the tree dominates the surrounding woodland. Its massive branches reach in all directions and its sturdy trunk is 12 feet in circumference. The trunk and lower branches have been a favorite place for carving initials and dates for generations. Since the beech is one of the few trees that retain its smooth bark in old age, the carvings are easily made and seen. A profuse amount of edible nuts are produced each fall, but are quickly eaten by wildlife, particularly by squirrels, raccoons, and game birds. For those lucky people who get some before the wildlife, they can be eaten after some preparation. The typical procedure to eat beech nuts involves collecting them after the first hard frost, separating the outer burrs from the nuts, drying the nuts, cracking the shells by heating them in an oven, then removing the shells by beating and rubbing them in the hands and, finally, eating them. Nutmeats have been ground and dried to make flour, and nuts can be used as a coffee substitute. Beech nuts were gathered by New England farmers generations ago and were marketed in country stores and even into Boston markets.



This unique tree at Newtown hill is cared for by the Littleton Conservation Trust land stewards who annually cut away hundreds of sprouts from the shallow roots to keep the flow of energy into the main tree. Large broken branches are also removed even when hanging on to the main trunk. Many other smaller beech trees are growing up in groves near the main tree. This tree is particularly beautiful in the fall with its bright golden-yellow leaves. For more information and a map of Newtown Hill Conservation land, see page 47 of the March 2007 *Guide to Conservation Land in Littleton*, available at the Reuben Hour Library for six dollars. ■



*New Morrison parcel trail*

*Photo credit: Rick Findlay*

## Littleton Conservation Trust Membership Form – 2008

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



## Two new trails to be dedicated

by Rick Findlay

Two Brothers Trail was the Town's first attempt to link public and private (LCT) land in an effort to create longer trails that connect disparate neighborhoods. The idea made its way into the 2003 Open Space and Recreation Plan as a goal, and the LCT has been looking for opportunities ever since. On June 7<sup>th</sup>, National Trails Day, we will formally open two new trails that successfully link existing open space. Look for details in the local newspaper as we get closer to the event.

We owe the first trail to the civic mindedness of four families who have allowed it to cross their properties. Only then could we access a forested portion of the Morrison Orchard Purchase to link LCT's Sarah Doublet Forest to an existing trail leading to LCT's Cobb Memorial Footpath. Each of these parcels has unique natural features making for a stimulating stroll or hike. The newest section has ancient Oak and Beech; Black, White, and Yellow Birch; Hop Hornbeam, Witch Hazel and other not-so-common species.

The second trail uses Town and Water Department parcels to connect the Russell Street and Middle Schools (and Two Brothers Trail) to the Hartwell Conservation Land. The trail starts on the West side of the Russell Street bridge over 495. It passes through fields and forests with views of Beaver Brook, and ends at the old granite carriage bridge on the Hartwell land. This trail might eventually include a link to the High School.

The LCT's Trail Committee is looking for other ways to link neighborhoods, shopping districts, and transportation hubs. We welcome input from the community. ■

## What more can we do?

by Henry Harvey, M.D.

*At the outset let me admit that many of the ideas and quotes in this article came from the Spring issue of Sanctuary, the quarterly journal of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which is available with your membership (very much worthwhile).*

Many of us want to do what we can to reduce our use of fossil fuels which play such a large role in global climate change. We recycle. We have changed our light bulbs. We buy energy-saving appliances. What more can we do? There are many who have changed their eating habits to buy more local and seasonal food: fruits and vegetables from farmers markets and neighborhood stores. It takes large amounts of energy to transport avocados from Mexico, asparagus from Chile, even beef from Iowa. Gayle Goddard-Taylor writes in *Sanctuary* about the Locavore Movement of people in NH and VT – a group of people who are determined to know the sources of their food and to buy, as far as possible, only locally-grown food. For example, they search out sources of local, grass-fed cattle who are free of antibiotics, steroids, and pesticides (which render manure unsuitable for fertilizer).

To get help, we can read such books as Michael Pollan's *The Omnivores Dilemma*. The classic read in this field is *Small Is Beautiful, Economics as if People Mattered* by E.F Schumacher, first published in the late 60s but reissued in 1999. We can learn from the North East Organic Farming Association. Help is available from Edible Boston, an association which lists farmers markets and local food sources as far west as Worcester. *Sanctuary* suggests that, for more information, we can contact [pschmid3@att.net](mailto:pschmid3@att.net). In Littleton, we can begin by buying more of our food from the several farm stands on the Groton Road north of the Common. We can buy more organic food at Donelan's and ask management there to buy locally produced food and to identify the sources. Bon Appetite! ■

What do open space, cell towers, and road improvements all have in common? Like any good mystery one should follow the money. In the challenge of balancing town finances, it is common to search for unspent or abandoned leftover amounts from previous financial allocations to meet current pressing needs. Such was the case when, during a comprehensive search for funding long-needed road improvements, it first appeared that there was surplus cash in the cell tower fund.

The fatal flaw was assuming that these reserved funds dedicated for open space acquisition were surplus and abandoned from prior completed projects, as opposed to being part of a long-term strategy for funding current land acquisitions and appropriate new lands that frequently become available suddenly and for a short window of opportunity. Many of today's budgetary and administrative staff and current selectmen had not experienced first-hand the origins of this funding strategy which organically arose from a highly unusual floor debate and discussion at the September 1997 Special Town Meeting.

While town meetings often generate much discussion, rarely do they generate well thought out compromises and good feelings as did this meeting in 1997. At that time, major concerns were raised about how proposed cell towers would ruin the town's scenic landscape and how to appropriately compensate for that. Building upon comments from activist Walter Clancy, Mike Knupp repeatedly cited that the Conservation Commission had no financial source for acquiring and protecting available open space and that the funds generated from the cell tower leases should be so directed to compensate for cell tower impacts. Spirited discussions and debate ensued with additional suggestions from Gerry DelPriore and selectman Danny Sullivan.

Prevailing motions and amendments from Mike Knupp, later elected as selectman, and former assessor, Bob Levite, created the perfect solution. Funding from the cell tower leases on Newtown Hill and Cedar Hill would be directed to the Conservation Commission's dedicated Conservation Fund for the acquisition of protected open space. Funding from the cell tower lease on Spectacle Pond would be directed to a Littleton Water Department special fund dedicated for the acquisition of protected aquifer lands. At the conclusion of the last vote, Sam Slarsky best captured the spirit of the meeting with his summary declaration "If any article has ever shown the wisdom of this Town Meeting, it was this article vote!" upon which the attendees of the meeting erupted in spontaneous applause.

Since then, cell tower lease funds have played critical roles in acquiring significant conservation lands, such as Prouty Woods, the Hartwell Property, and the Morrison Orchards, through leveraging state grants and bonding. Highlighting the need for continued open space protection within Littleton, a recent Boston Globe article (3/20/08), using state environmental data, reported the percentage of protected open space in each community. Of Littleton and its neighboring six communities, Littleton ranked the lowest at 8.8%, followed by Westford, 10.6%; Ayer, 12.4%; Boxborough, 17.4%; Acton, 18.3%;

Harvard, 21.6%; and Groton, 23.5%. The median percentage for all state communities is at 18.7%, more than double Littleton's current level.

Protecting open space is cost effective for towns and lowers everyone's taxes, while providing passive recreation amenities which enhance communities and increases home values. Town-protected open space, which is protected in perpetuity through a one-time purchase cost, pays for itself in several years simply by avoiding the hefty costs of providing ongoing obligatory community services (for example, school services, road construction and maintenance, fire and police services, etc.) which would otherwise occur if that same parcel were built with residential dwellings. Taxes generated from residential dwellings significantly fail to cover the fully-loaded cost of provided services. (For more information, see the online town's master plan which provides details on cost of services calculations, or see the LCT newsletter of Spring 2004 which also provides such details. You can view past LCT newsletters here: [www.littletonconservationtrust.org/newsletters.html](http://www.littletonconservationtrust.org/newsletters.html))

Road maintenance and improvements are very costly. Due to the massive costs and other competing municipal needs, towns often postpone needed road work. Recognizing the unavoidable road improvement needs built up over time, the Littleton town administration this year has planned for a long term strategy which will address the most urgent needs and provide the necessary financing subject to Town Meeting approval.

Additionally, it has been suggested that any proposed hotel built in town carry a room surcharge which would be directed to a dedicated road improvement fund. This would be an appropriate linkage whereby the development benefits, the added revenue generated from paying hotel guests, would contribute toward defraying a portion of road maintenance costs, especially since the hotel and its guests are dependent on well-maintained roads.

Communities need both protected open space and road maintenance and improvements. Typically, towns find ways to fund both. Raiding funds for the acquisition of protected open space (which is proven cost effective) to supplement road maintenance and improvements (a major contributor to the overall costs of town services) is simply financially unwise.

The LCT is thankful for the support of the selectmen who are continuing in their posts (Alex McCurdy, Ken Eldridge, and Joseph Knox), outgoing selectman Reed Augliere, former selectmen Danny Sullivan and Mike Knupp, and the many active community members who took the time and made the effort to express their opinions for removing an ill-advised proposed warrant article. The inappropriate warrant article would have overturned the 1997 Special Town Meeting landmark decisions for funding open space purchases via cell tower leasing revenues and additionally would have diverted that relatively small and cost-effective revenue stream to partially reduce the massive and ongoing road improvement costs. Additionally, the administrative and budgetary staff who crunched through all the financial numbers are due well-deserved credit. ■

This is the eighth in a series of articles intended to alert the Littleton community to the growing threat of invasive plants to our precious New England landscape. Plant populations that have been stable, sometimes for centuries, are now spreading uncontrollably. For additional information visit:

[http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive\\_plants/weeds/index.shtm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/fhp/invasive_plants/weeds/index.shtm)

Previous articles covered:

- Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)
- Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*)
- Oriental Bittersweet (*Celastrus orbicullatus*)
- Japanese and European Barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* and *vulgaris*)
- Glossy and Common Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus* and *Rhamnus cathartica*)
- Multiflora Rose (*Rosa multiflora*)
- Norway Maple (*Acer platanoides*)

This article focuses on the Shrub Honeysuckles (*Lonicera tatarica*, *morrowii*, *maakii* and the hybrid know as *L. x bella*) Future articles will highlight the following species:

- Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*)
- Black and Pale Swallow-wort (*Cynanchum louiseae* and *rossicum*)

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, often by birds. All can 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 them to participate in a solution by cleaning up their own properties and helping out in their neighborhoods. Littleton has an opportunity to set back the onslaught of invasive plants by acting now to reduce seed output. If we do not, we risk losing local biodiversity and the very “nature” we take for granted.

It is difficult to stand anywhere in town and not be within sight of a shrub Honeysuckle. In some areas, they have created impenetrable thickets, but more often they team up with invasive Buckthorns, Autumn Olives, and Multi-flora Roses to dominate hedgerows, roadsides, abandoned fields, and young forests.



*Honeysuckle fruit*

There are already enough plants producing enough seed to create an instant nuisance on newly disturbed soil. If landscapes get “out of control,” mitigation efforts are costly and in themselves damaging to habitat. The best way to deal with shrub Honeysuckles is to remove them when you discover them. Spring and Fall are good times for engagement because early leaf-out and late leaf-drop make them conspicuous in the otherwise leafless landscape. It is this same trait that helps them out-compete our native flora. There are native Honeysuckles in New England, but only in the northern range. If in doubt, you can identify invasive Honeysuckles by their hollow twigs.

Pulling small plants requires only good gloves. Mature shrubs can be grubbed out or repeatedly cut. Applying the herbicide, Glyphosate, to cut stems is effective as well. Read the herbicide label carefully for precautions, timing, and concentrations.

If you have questions or need help, please call Rick Findlay at 978 486 8482. This is a project for all of us. ■

*Photo credits: Rick Findlay*



*Honeysuckle shrub*



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## The Book Corner

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

### *Civic Agriculture: Reconnecting Farm, Food and Community* by Thomas A. Lyson

I highly recommend this book by Cornell University Professor Thomas Lyson, in which he makes a succinct and compelling argument for what he calls “civic agriculture.” He advocates for the revitalization of locally-based farming and food consumption with active community or “civic” support.

This is a short book (105 pages, plus an extensive bibliography) that outlines the history of farming and food production in America, and how it was transformed (hijacked?) in the 20th century from local, small-scale family-oriented endeavors to a globalized, mechanized industry run by multi-national corporations with little respect for the earth or ties to the community.

Lyson explains the interconnected relationships of agriculture, ecology, economics, democracy, and community in a way that is easy to read and understand. His argument fully supports the current movement towards local food production and consumption through a variety of means: farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture, restaurant agriculture (providing produce for local eateries), urban/city farming, and community gardens. I hope this book convinces those readers who don't already buy goods from local farms to do so whenever possible. It may even inspire them to start a garden of their own. ■

### *Small Wonders—Nature Education for Young Children* by Linda Garrett and Hannah Thomas Illustrated by Hilary Elmer

This is a hands-on educational book meant to introduce very young children (ages 3 through 6) to the wonders of the natural world. Parents, teachers, scout leaders, and caregivers will find this book to be a terrific resource for helping their young learners explore the environment through easy-to-relate-to facts, coupled with fun, hands-on projects and experiments for inside and outside the home or classroom. The book is packed with activities on: the cycles of growth and change for various plants; insects, birds and amphibians; animal homes for everything from bats and chipmunks to owls and worms; and the connections to nature that we all need to understand—how food grows, the key roles of the sun and water, and how animals play an integral part in our environment.

There is also plenty of guidance for the parent and teacher, including a glossary of terms, appendices for equipping the classroom/home, and learning standards from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, the creator of this wonderful program. ■

Reviews by Kathy Stevens