

Nashoba Conservation Trust Winter 2018 News

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Winter beauty at Gulf Brook in Pepperell

Conservation Corner

Ken Hartlage

Curling up by the fire with a book or watching the Pats on TV may be quintessential winter pastimes here in New England, but it's also a great time to experience nature, especially if there's snow on the ground. Walking, snowshoeing or skiing along Pepperell's twenty miles of marked trails offers a great opportunity to see animal tracks left by porcupine, deer and the elusive bobcat. Tiny Springtails can be seen hopping around on the snow and Stoneflies may be found crawling around stream banks.

The birdsongs of summer are replaced by the chips and chirps of our winter visitors such as the Golden-crowned Kinglet and Dark-eyed Junco; and year-round residents such as Bluebirds and Cardinals can brighten even the gloomiest winter day. If you're into photography, there's nothing quite like snow and ice to capture nature at its most dramatic. If you're interested in experiencing the winter outdoors with friends, NCT will be hosting a winter walk on February 24th (weather permitting) at Pepperell Springs. Stay tuned for details.



Surprising Results During this years Christmas Bird Count

Michael Veit

Pepperell falls within the Groton-Oxbow Count Circle of the National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count. During this event, which takes place at locations all over the world, participants of all ages and experience identify and count as many birds as they can over a twenty-four hour period. This year, the Groton-Oxbow count occurred on Sunday, December 17th.

Organizers were concerned that the conditions would keep both man and beast away. There was snow on the ground, and Massachusetts was deep in the midst of the frigid arctic vortex. The forecast was for temperatures at the start of the day in the single digits and not rising above freezing! To the delight of many, despite the weather, both the people and the birds came through.



Pepperell residents scoured woods, fields, yards and what little open water there was looking and listening for our fine feathered friends. Many took advantage of our town's ample open space and visited their favorite conservation lands in search of birds. At the end of the day participants commented on how beautiful and crisp the air was, and how pleased they were to have such a worthy excuse to enjoy the outdoors.

A total of 73 species of birds were found within the circle including two species new to the count: House Wren and American Widgeon. We had high counts for 11 species: Coopers Hawk (15), Great Horned Owl (13), Barred Owl (13), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (1, tied previous record), Northern Flicker (20), American Crow (779), Hermit Thrush (6), Pine Warbler (1, tied previous record), and Swamp Sparrow (8). In total, over 8400 birds were counted, a great many within Pepperell and by dedicated Pepperell residents.



Barred Owl in Winter Plumage

The count is open to everyone no matter how experienced a birder they are or where they live (i.e. you don't need to live within the count circle). Individuals contribute at all levels, from the hardcore dawn to dusk participants to those who simply record their backyard birds. Newcomers are welcome, and many more experienced birders embrace the company of novice birders for part or all of the day.

If you would like to participate, you can contact our town count compiler and NCT's vice president, Paula Terrasi, lakelover207@yahoo.com. The Groton-Oxbow count is held each year on the first Sunday of the count period.

Winter Trees

Janet MacFarland

February may bring some of our heaviest snowstorms and coldest temperatures (although this year January certainly is vying for that distinction!). However, February is also a month where we notice the slight increase in daylight hours and the slightly warmer angle of the sun. This can be an excellent time to work on your tree identification skills.

Tree silhouettes are visible, and the bark is a prominent characteristic in its variations of coloring. I became intrigued looking at tree silhouettes in Peterson's Eastern Trees Field Guide. I know the trees along my field edge and as I studied their silhouette photos in the book, I found a new pleasure in studying them in this manner – trunk shape, branching pattern, crown shape. As I drove in a car or took a walk it became a pleasure to look at a tree and recognize its silhouette and think White Oak! Hickory! Sugar Maple! Some silhouettes are more apparent than others, but it does help to begin to notice and name familiar species.

Most people think of identifying trees by their leaf structure, and certainly this is a key characteristic, but there is so much more to see and study to really know a tree. The best tree identification class I took was in the winter where we identified trees by their unique and individual bud shapes as well as the overall branching pattern. Take a look at a tree branch and notice the pattern of the smaller branches and twigs. Are they opposite each other? Or do they alternate? Some trees have opposite branching (Maple, Ash, Dogwood, Horse chestnut: MADHorse) while most have alternate branching. Get closer and clip a twig about 8 inches long. Start by noticing the buds. Each tree species has distinctive terminal buds. For example, the terminal bud of a Horse Chestnut is large and sticky with many overlapping scales while a Shagbark Hickory's is large and velvety with two dark surrounding scales. Also, along the branch you should notice what is known as the leaf scar where the leaf was attached in the summer and fall. Leaf scars have specific shapes and you may see the tiny bundle scars where veins led into and out of the leaf to transport water and food.

I used to have my students draw and label the twigs from two or three common trees such as Sugar Maple, Shagbark Hickory and perhaps White Ash. Each have different coloring and shape to their terminal buds and have leaf scars that can be used as an identification tool. The students did surprisingly detailed sketches and when quizzed later could easily identify the species they had drawn. If you enjoy sketching, try focusing on one or two trees and make note of their silhouettes, bark, branching pattern and terminal buds. A good starting guide to identifying trees can be found at the UNH County extension website which has identifying characteristics of some native tree species at



<https://extension.unh.edu/articles/Mind-Your-B's-Identify-Winter-Trees>

There is also a handy Winter ID Pocket Reference at www.ccfpd.org/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/WinterTreeIDpocketguide.pdf



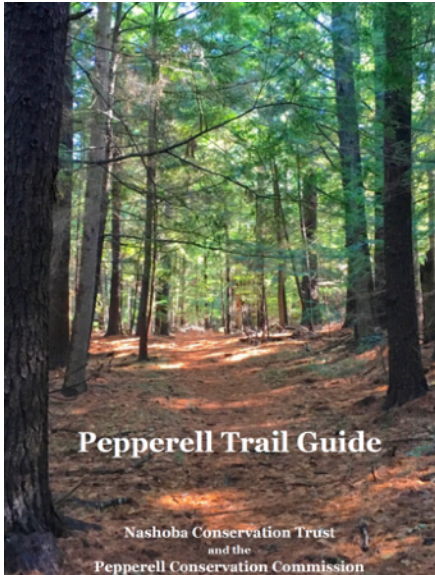
Birches at Heald Orchard

Member Articles

Paul Peavey

As you can see from the article above, we have some excellent writing talent out there in our NCT member base. If you have anything you are interested in or passionate about, from a conservation perspective please use the link below to let us know. 100 – 300 words is about average. We are always looking for volunteers to lend a fresh perspective to our newsletters. Newsletter@nashobatrust.org

Our new 2016 trail guide is available. The guide describes (16) different conservation areas managed by NCT and the Pepperell Conservation Commission. Contained in each section is a description of the parcel, a detailed trail map, and other information to help you enjoy each of these beautiful areas. If you would like a trail guide just visit the NCT website at www.nashobatrust.org



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