

Spring 2009

The Nature Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

The Oak Log

News From Vermont



2009 Annual Gathering Invitation Inside

Published triannually by
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The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals, and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

The Nature Conservancy is a private, international membership organization committed to the preservation of natural diversity. To date, we have protected more than 117 million acres in the United States and around the world.

The Nature Conservancy is supported by contributions from individuals. Donations may be sent to the Vermont chapter at 27 State Street, Suite 4, Montpelier, VT 05602-2959.

The Oak Log is edited by Jessica Brown and designed by The Laughing Bear Associates, Inc.

Front cover: Mountain Laurel © Warren F. Walker

The other day I came across a study confirming what many of us have long suspected—that nature is good for you. Specifically, new research at the University of Michigan concludes that a walk in nature sharpens the mind, while a walk in the city does not. In fact, volunteers who spent an hour in Ann Arbor’s parks showed a 20% gain in memory and attention tests over volunteers who braved the hustle and bustle of downtown.

“Go Play Outside,” our mothers ordered, and how right they were!

The Conservancy’s official mission is about protecting nature and the diversity of life, about species, natural communities, and ecosystems. But I’ve always felt that providing places where people can get out into nature is almost as important. That’s why our preserves are all open to the public, and why we mark trails, build parking turnouts, and publish preserve guides. Nature isn’t just for wildlife; people belong there, too.

The Conservancy’s Vermont Chapter is entering its 50th year, and we won’t miss the opportunity to celebrate this milestone all year long. I hope you’ll join the celebration by “coming outside to play” on the land that we’ve conserved on your behalf over the last half century. Please note the many events and fieldtrips outlined in this Oak Log newsletter, and mark your calendars accordingly. Yes, we all have serious obligations at home or at work. But getting outside is good for us, too.



Bob Klein

2009-2010 Events

It’s a year long celebration of our 50th Anniversary! Join us for any number of the field trips and events we have planned for the coming year.

2009

June 20: Orchids at Eshqua Bog, Hartland

June 27: Annual Gathering, Grafton. Registration Required

August 15: Paddle the Missisquoi, Swanton. Registration Required

September 19: Hike the Buckner Preserve, West Haven

September 26: Walk a Working Forest, Atlas Timberlands, Belvidere

October 3: The Other Side of Snake Mountain, Bridport

Early 2010 – More to come!

January: Conservation Photo Exhibit, Montpelier

February: Snowshoe at Flagg Pond, Wheelock

May: Poultney Paddle, West Haven

Pew Forest Preserve Open House, Manchester

ONLINE: For more information, meeting times and locations, visit nature.org/vermont/events. If you have questions or would like to receive a print out of event details, please call Jessica Brown at 802-229-4425 ext 113 or email jessica_brown@tnc.org

Land Protection



As of 2009, The Nature Conservancy of Vermont has protected more than 183,000 acres of the state's finest wetlands, forests and shorelines, and this winter season completed a number of new acquisitions that spread the umbrella of conservation even further.

1 Athens Dome Wetlands Complex 79 acres Athens

Northeastern bulrush is an elusive plant, modest in appearance and with a flower head that bows before you. Thriving in neglected beaver ponds, it grows in the mud flats after beaver have abandoned an area and will ebb and flow



Beaver

with the beaver's activity and natural cycles. Federally endangered, this plant is sparsely dispersed across seven northeastern states. After many years and several attempts to conserve a population of Northeastern Bulrush, the Conservancy has succeeded in conserving perhaps the best known Vermont example in the Athens Dome Wetlands Complex. The Conservancy hopes to convey this 79-acre parcel to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department as the start of a new Wildlife Management Area and a larger effort to protect a plateau that holds a number of beaver influenced wetlands in an undisturbed area.

2 Pew Forest 196 acres Manchester

The Nature Conservancy is one step closer to realizing the vision of creating a greenbelt of conserved lands from Equinox Pond to Merck Forest with the newest addition to the Equinox Highlands natural area. This spring, the Conservancy purchased the 196 acre Pew Forest property, previously owned by University of Vermont. With plans to construct a small parking area and blaze a trail that connects with other trails on the mountain, Pew Forest provides a new access point to Manchester's much-loved conserved lands.

3 LaPlatte River and Shelburne Ridge 143 acres Shelburne

Not far from the center of Shelburne, a cliff-side forest with giant sugar maples, hickories, and oaks conceals a hidden den site for bobcats. The site, a conservation priority for the Conservancy, is now protected thanks to an agreement with the Vermont Electric Power Company. 13.6 acres adjacent to the La Platte River Marsh Natural Area was conveyed to The Nature Conservancy in exchange for a utility easement. Additionally, as part of the settlement, the Town of Shelburne granted a conservation easement over three parcels of town land, protecting 23 acres of floodplain forest along the LaPlatte River, 87 acres of floodplain with 280 year old trees just east of the village and 19.6 acres of wet clayplain that will succeed to forest through plantings and natural succession.



© Kent Mason

Bobcat

4 Bald Mountain: 10 acres West Haven

The Conservancy's largest Vermont preserve just got a bit larger with the purchase of an additional 10 acres of rolling rocky terrain at Bald Mountain. The property contains 275 feet of frontage on Lake Champlain and faces the trailhead for one of two nature trails on the preserve. The property was the site of historic Stewart's Dock, a local shipping dock that connected farms in West Haven and Benson with markets served by the railroad.

© U.S. Fish and Wildlife



© Sarah Wakefield / TNIC

View of Bald Mountain

ONLINE: Learn more about places we protect at nature.org/vermont

Bat Situation Deteriorates

By Rose Paul, *Director of Science and Stewardship*

In 2007, bats in a New York mine were found to have a mysterious and fatal illness known as White Nose Syndrome. The illness has spread rapidly and can now be found in nine eastern states including Vermont.

Despite a breakthrough in identifying the fungus that causes white fuzzy growth on muzzles, ears and wings of bats, scientists are no further along in understanding why bats are dying by the thousands.

Winter surveys of Vermont hibernation sites have revealed 12 infected hibernacula. Of the three hibernacula owned by The Nature Conservancy, two are affected, including Mt. Aeolus, the largest bat over-wintering site in New England.

Dave McDevitt, the Conservancy's southern Vermont land steward, helped with the survey at all three preserves. "It was a huge relief when we entered the big chamber of Plymouth Cave and our headlamps showed no white fuzz on the bats. At least one place was spared" McDevitt said.

There was no such luck in Brandon. McDevitt said that bats in the Brandon mine were huddled in their usual clusters; the telltale white fuzz visible on many.

At Mt. Aeolus Cave in Dorset, the scene was much worse. Bats flew weakly outside during a brisk snowstorm, some flapped along the surface of the snow, and some shivered



Bats with White Nose Syndrome

violently on the outside face of the cave. Inside, dead bats littered the icy cave floor.

Scientists recently identified the fungus as a member of the genus *Geomyces*, a cold-loving fungus that can colonize the skin of animals. But it is far from certain whether this is actually the cause or a symptom. The only thing known for sure is that bats are losing their fat reserves (needed to survive hibernation) long before the winter is over and are starving to death.

Producing only one pup per year, bats are particularly vulnerable to extinction. Scott Darling of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife thinks Vermont could lose as many as 95% of our bats. "Bats are great insect predators" says Darling. The consequences of their decline could be dire and may mean more insects — by the billions.

In the meantime, biologists are urging people to stay out of caves. You can help the bats stay healthy during the summer breeding season by building bat houses, managing your woodlands to be more bat friendly, and supporting Conservancy projects that protect bat breeding habitats.

ONLINE: Learn how you can help and read up to date reports from the field. Visit nature.org/Vermont and click on **The Bat Diaries**.

© Al Hicks / NYDEC



L. to r.: hepatica, trout lily, and red trillium

Spring Training

By Jon Binhammer, *Director of Land Protection*

Ah, Spring! When thoughts turn to gardening and other pastimes, like baseball. Part of the magic of spring is the thought of a long, lazy summer season to come. But for some species in our deciduous forests, the growing season is as short as baseball's spring training — they have to grow, flower, and produce seeds just after snowmelt and before the trees leaf out in May. A short season, indeed!

Called spring ephemerals, these species are adapted for the great race of spring — to beat the oncoming shade that will plunge them into darkness. The plants — bloodroot, spring beauty, Dutchman's breeches, hepatica — grow fast, flower, and photosynthesize in early spring. Then, after producing seeds for later dispersal, they store sugars in their bulbs, rhizomes,

or corms for the next season — 11 months later — and die back to their underground parts. Their seeds typically have a small appendage made of proteins and fats called an eliasome. Ants find them delicious and carry them to their colonies where the eliasome is consumed and the seed discarded, left to germinate and grow the following spring.

What is so fascinating about these plants is their ephemeral nature — they remain dormant for summer, fall and winter, and then put on a show in the spring. For all of history, people have been grateful for these little flowers, as they lift our spirits after the long winter and inspire hope for summer revelry.

A hundred years ago, Vermont's landscape was 80% cleared. The sheep craze that swept across the landscape devastated populations of spring wildflowers that were either eaten or out-competed by grasses. The spring ephemerals weren't able to keep pace with tree regeneration, so most post-agricultural forests have very few of these plants. But look carefully and you might find patches along stone walls, at the base of ledges, on steep slopes or rocky areas the sheep missed. Better yet, visit any number of The Nature Conservancy preserves such as, the Equinox Highlands in Bennington County or Chickering Bog in Calais that provide protected habitat for these beauties. Then imagine how many short spring seasons and how many miles covered by ant transport it will take to repopulate our forests with these gorgeous spring ephemerals!

Photos, left: hepatica, public domain; trout lily and red trillium © Emily Boedeker

Planting the Seeds of Change

On a fine spring day, ten students from Camp E-Wen-Akee begin their day by planting tree seedlings in soil that once nourished the roots of mighty oaks and hickories more than a century ago when clayplain forests blanketed the Champlain Valley. Today, this forest community type is rare. Conservancy staff in Vermont are working with community volunteers, AmeriCorps and contractors to restore these forests with native trees grown in our Champlain Valley Native Plant Restoration Nursery.

More than 2,000 miles away, Pedro Agustin begins work at 7 a.m. For nine months out of the year, he spends his days planting seedlings in Brazil's Atlantic Forest. Although just 7 percent of the original forest remains, Agustin and his colleagues are working hard to bring this forest back from the brink of extinction, one tree at a time.

Despite its diminished state, the Atlantic Forest still ranks as a global conservation priority. The remaining 7 percent of the Atlantic Forest is still among the biologically richest and most diverse forests: The forest is home to 1,000 species of birds and more than 20,000 species of plants.

In Vermont, prime planting season begins in late April and ends in June. Conversely, the hot, humid weather between September and May is perfect for tree planting in Brazil. During this time, Agustin plants about 300 native seedlings a day. Agustin and his co-workers dig holes where they'll plant next season's seedlings. They check up on last season's saplings, measuring their growth like proud fathers, watering them and clearing away weeds and invasive grasses. They build fences to protect freshly planted patches on ranches and farms, where meandering livestock could otherwise easily trample months' worth of work.

"It's hard work—year round," Agustin admits. But he smiles when he mentions that he saw his first anteater in a recently reforested area. "We're doing a direct service."

The Atlantic Forest is considered one of the world's most endangered tropical forests. Illegal logging, land conversion to pastures and urban expansion have all contributed to its degradation. But the health of the forest is extremely important to the local communities' livelihoods, cultures and water supply—the Atlantic Forest alone provides clean water to more than 120 million people in Brazil.

Reforestation is also a key component of combating climate change. Every year, as millions of hectares of forests are cut down, millions of tons of carbon emissions are released into the atmosphere. But reforestation efforts and projects to stop deforestation are one of the most cost effective ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Agustin used to work at a nearby eucalyptus plantation—one of the industries that most threatens and fragments the Atlantic Forest. His job involved cutting down native trees



© Adriano Gambanini

Seedlings grown for Atlantic Forest restoration

and planting eucalyptus for pulp and paper, which greatly reduces the number of species living in the area. But when he heard about the opportunity to plant native trees instead, he jumped at the chance to do something he believes in.

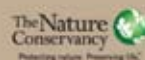
Although they live in another hemisphere, Vermont teens believe in the value of planting trees too. For the past five years, biology students from Rutland High School have come out each spring to help restoration efforts. Mary Droege, Director of Ecological Management and Restoration says "I especially love working with students—I tell them to remember to come back in 50 years with their grandchildren and walk among the trees they helped plant so long ago."

Online: To learn how you can help restore the Atlantic Forest, visit www.plantabillion.org. Or join us for a Vermont tree planting volunteer day and experience forest restoration first hand! Visit www.nature.org/vermont.

Leave a Legacy for the Next 50 Years



The Conservancy is entering its 50th year of conservation in Vermont. What better legacy is there to leave than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your plan, we are here to help. Don't let another day pass by.



Contact: Emily Boedecker
Phone: (802) 229-4425
Web: nature.org/vermont

Please consult a qualified financial advisor before making a gift.



The Nature Conservancy of Vermont invites you to its 2009 Annual Gathering:

Stories of the Land

Celebrating the Conservancy's 50th Year in Vermont

Saturday, June 27, 2009

Riverledge Farm, Grafton, Vermont



The Nature Conservancy of Vermont is turning 50! Half a century of conservation is cause for celebration. Join us as we embark on a year long birthday party to celebrate our 50th year.

NEW FORMAT THIS YEAR! Begin with afternoon field trips that explore the wonders and wild lands of Windham County and then gather together for a celebration and dinner at the beautiful Riverledge Farm in Grafton. Share your stories of nature and conservation and be the first to see a photographic history of our first fifty years through the lens of our own Bob Klein. A delightful dinner will be served in the restored barn starting at 4:30pm.

Field Trips

1. River Trip by Bicycle

Go with the flow on the railtrail, explore the ecology and wild scenery of the West River. Meet in South Londonderry. Own bicycle required. *Moderate / Family Friendly*

2. Water Music to the Ears

Hike to Hamilton Falls, in the heart of pristine forest habitat where many of Vermont's iconic species can be found. Meet in East Jamaica. *Strenuous*

3. Face to Face!

Turn over rocks, dip into a stream, and come face to face with the animals of Vermont inside and out! Meet in Grafton at The Nature Museum. *Easy / Family Friendly*

4. Interpreting our Heritage

Natural and cultural, farm and forest, interpret the signs left by history and discover the landscape of Grafton. Meet at Riverledge Farm. *Moderate*

5. Through the Lens

Discover the unique places, hidden gems and unknown faces from 50 years of conservation through the images of staff and friends. Meet at Riverledge Farm. *Easy*

6. Hunting the Bulrush

Explore the Athens plateau wetlands and the influence of beavers in this off trail hunt for the elusive northeastern bulrush. Meet in Grafton. *Strenuous*

7. The Story of the Land

In the Martin Wildlife Sanctuary, Windham County's oldest forest setting, explore past and present stories of the land, interpreted by Tom Wessels. Meet in Athens. *Moderate*

8. Canoe Herricks Cove

Where the Williams River enters the Connecticut explore river, marsh, and floodplain on this gentle canoe trip. Own boat required. Meet in Rockingham. *Easy*

9. Summit a Volcano

Hike through oak forests, cross glacial terraces and summit Black Mountain for the story of this unexploded volcano. Meet in Dummerston. *Strenuous*

DIRECTIONS: Your confirmation letter will include directions to your chosen field trip.

ONLINE: Visit nature.org/Vermont for more information about field trips and the day's schedule.



Stories of the Land: Celebrating the Conservancy's 50th Year in Vermont

Saturday, June 27, 2009, Riverledge Farm, Grafton, Vermont

REGISTRATION DEADLINE: June 19 — Register early to get the field trip of your choice.

Follow steps 1 through 5 to complete the registration form.

1. Please list the first and last names of all attendees, including children, in the table below as they should appear on nametags. Please also include town of residence.

2. Please select a first, second and third choice of field trip for each person in your party. Use the number of the field trip listed on the previous page to identify each selection. All field trips run simultaneously. You will only be able to attend one field trip. Field trips will be assigned on a first come, first served basis.

NAME / Town of Residence / Ages (of children attending)	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice	Meal Choice (circle one)
				Meat / Veg.
				Meat / Veg.
				Meat / Veg.
				Meat / Veg.
				Meat / Veg.

3. Confirmation letters will all be sent to the same address.

If more than one family or group is signing up and each would like separate confirmation letters, please photocopy this form.

Address: _____

City/Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

4. Please fill in the table below to calculate registration fees for your party. Enclose a check made payable to:

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY. All fees are non-refundable and include the cost of a field trip, cookout, and music.

	NUMBER	COST	TOTALS
Adults		x \$25 each	\$
Children between the ages of 12 and 17		x \$10 each	\$
Children age 11 and under		Free	\$ NO CHARGE
		Total amount for check	\$

5. Please send your registration form and payment no later than June 19, 2009 to:

Kim Ward
The Nature Conservancy of Vermont
27 State Street, Suite 4, Montpelier, VT 05602-2959

Please call Kim with any questions: (802) 229-4425, ext. 100.

Confirmation packets will be mailed starting May 26, 2009.



PLEASE CLIP HERE AND MAIL