



Boxborough
Conservation
Trust

Common Ground

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Preserving & Protecting Boxborough's Undeveloped Land

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From the President

Common Ground is mailed to all the townspeople of Boxborough, members and non-members alike, free of charge. The costs of this publication are supported by members' donations. Are you a member of the BCT? Dues are minimal, beginning at \$25, and payable annually. To join, see the back page. The benefits of your membership go beyond the newsletter, however. Consider the following, just a few examples of recent or upcoming BCT efforts:

(1) Work to Stem Continued Land Loss in Massachusetts: Dues support research, appraisals, surveying, and legal work that paves the way for local land preservation. In the current climate of fiscal restraint, we need to be aware that land in Boxborough continues to face tremendous development pressure. A widely-cited statistic by the Trustees of Reservations notes that 44 acres of open space is developed each day in Massachusetts--equivalent to paving the Boston Common every 12 hours. And not only are we losing acreage at a staggering rate, the resulting open space has become increasingly fragmented. The Nature Conservancy notes that the average size of a forest parcel in Massachusetts is now only ten acres, just half what it was ten years ago. We are available to help you and your neighbors with the sometimes complicated process of conserving land. We have experience that has helped Boxborough's landowners protect and conserve their land in a tax-effective and prudent manner. Just contact any member of our Board.

(2) Member Appreciation Event: Many

thanks to Lisa and David St. Amand for hosting a terrific member appreciation event on November 22. All in attendance had a really enjoyable evening that we hope said a resounding "thank you" to our members for their many contributions of time and resources. In addition, the evening emphasized the ongoing challenge we face in caring for the lands already preserved, and the need for doing the groundwork necessary to preserve the many parcels in town that face development pressure over the coming years.

(3) Annual Meeting: Our annual meeting will take place on Sunday, March 28, at 3:30 PM in the Blanchard School cafeteria. The Annual Meeting is open to members and non-members alike - please plan to come and learn more about what we do!

Jeffrey C. Fuhrer

Annual Meeting ~ Eyes on Owls

This year's Boxborough Conservation Trust Annual Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, March 28 at 3:30 PM in the Blanchard Memorial School cafeteria. Following a very brief business meeting, we are pleased to be hosting Naturalists Marcia and Mark Wilson and their "Eyes on Owls" presentation. The Wilsons will be accompanied by six live owls and will be sharing their wealth of knowledge about both the birds and the New England environment. We will even get a hooting lesson! Bring your children to this fun and informative program. Refreshments will be served.



The Boxborough Conservation Trust (BCT) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) corporation. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 626, Acton MA 01720-0626, Telephone: 978/263-3284
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Student Writing Supports Conservation

BY HUGH FORTMILLER, BCT BOARD MEMBER

In January, 49 Blanchard students submitted poems and essays to the 2nd annual writing contest sponsored by the Boxborough Conservation Trust. Students were asked to write about what they find most interesting or inspiring about protecting our open land, wildlife, and natural resources.

Congratulations go to four winning entries: *The Woods*, by Chelsea R., Grade 5; *Preserving Our Open Spaces*, by Timothy E. L., Grade 4; *The Open Land*, by Marie H., Grade 6; and *A Letter to Boxborough*, by Kyla S., Grade 3. The top two entries appear in this edition of *Common Ground*.

The contest judges also selected the writing of seven students for honorable mention: Bhavana C. from Grade 3; Natalie C. and Madhavi M. from Grade 4; Scott G. and Megan H. from Grade 5; and Ellie L. and Alicia S. from Grade 6.

Sincere thanks must also go to the Blanchard teachers who encouraged their students to enter: Miss Faiella, Mrs. Felcyn, Mr. Follet, Ms. Owen, Mrs. Reaves, Mrs. Ross, Ms. Schuhmacher, Mrs. Sperazzo, and Mrs. Thoman.

THE WOODS — by Chelsea R., Grade 5

The conservation land is very special to Boxborough.
I'll never forget when my dad took me hiking on Half Moon Meadow.
The woods, the woods, my favorite place, autumn leaves at its base.
Snow falling everywhere, from here to there.
Birds are singing in spring's wake.
Summer's heat will start to bake.
Walking on a bridge of logs, catching frogs as we walk.
The brook burbling, sounding like a bird's song.
Playing on the rocks is fun.
Jumping from this one to that one is hard to do,
especially when you are holding one too.
We play hide and seek in the fall leaves.
In wintertime it's also fun making tracks all around.
The woods, the woods, my favorite place.
I would go there rather than Space!



PRESERVING OUR OPEN SPACES — by Timothy E. L., Grade 4

I feel that it is important to protect our environment and wildlife because there are a lot of things that we can all enjoy in nature. It is not only pretty, but it is also the home for many living creatures. I have had many great experiences with nature, and I feel it is important to keep it safe. I have had exciting adventures in the woods both here in Boxborough and in New Hampshire where my dad takes me backpacking.

I think we should preserve and protect land in Boxborough so that animals and humans can appreciate all that nature offers. I recently moved here, and one of the reasons I like it here most is because there is so much nature around me. Some of the great things I've seen in Boxborough are coyotes, rabbits, snapping turtles, snakes, bats, flying squirrels, hawks, and beautiful scenery. Some of the great things I've seen while hiking in other places that have been preserved are black bears, deer, otters, beavers, and a mountain lion.

Hiking can be tiring, but when you finish your hiking goal, you feel like you've accomplished a big task and seen fabulous things.

Exciting Wildlife Opportunity



Do you see yourself as a trailblazer, discovering uncharted territory? Do you like working with others and leading them to achieve enriching goals? Are you passionate about preserving local wildlife? Do you enjoy hiking and working in the great outdoors? If so, then we have an opportunity for you!

Boxborough needs a Stewardship Team Leader. The key requirements for this position are a passion for the environment and the ability to energize others to share your excitement. To enhance Boxborough's hundreds of acres of conservation land you might recruit a team of people to implement a beaver study or a bluebird recovery program, to create a flora/fauna trail guide, to develop an arboretum or bird sanctuary, to build a bridge, upgrade trailhead kiosks, cut a new trail or redirect a wet one. The possibilities are endless!

Working with the Boxborough Conservation Commission, you will help set the agenda for the future of the town's conservation lands. This is a rare opportunity to lead residents, scouts, local students, and other interested organizations (such as the BCT) to support efforts to improve, maintain and encourage the use of our precious resources. The stewardship of our conservation land needs leadership, and Boxborough needs the right person to build an organization from scratch. Although the monetary rewards are few (none, to be exact), the personal rewards make it all worthwhile!

Interested parties should draft a one-page document outlining qualifications, as well as interests and ideas for the position. Please send it to Michael Wierbonics, Boxborough Conservation Agent, Boxborough Town Hall, 29 Middle Road, Boxborough, MA 01719.

Adding Interest to the Winter Landscape

BY GLYNIS HAMEL, STAFF WRITER

Take a look outside your window. If you just found yourself sighing with pleasure, chances are it's the day after a snowstorm and you're looking at a scene of almost indescribable beauty – pristine, white, the sky a glorious blue. If the sound escaping your lips was more like a groan, then it's one of the other 180-or-so days of late fall/winter/early spring; you're looking at clumps of dirty, ice-encrusted snow, dead leaves, broken twigs, and a color palette made up almost exclusively of brown and gray. Given that we live in an area where the landscape is devoid of deciduous vegetation for close to six months of the year, it makes sense to plan a garden that can provide elements of winter interest. And there's no better way to do that than with native plants, which by their very provenance make them suited to New England's winters.

Evergreens are an obvious choice for “sprucing” up the landscape, and there is no lack of the needled variety in Boxborough. But don't overlook other evergreen plants and shrubs. In addition to the popular rhododendrons and azaleas, try native broad-leafed shrubs such as mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*), dog-hobble (*Leucothoe fontanesiana*), and inkberry (*Ilex glabra*). Several species of ferns are evergreen; two that look great year-round are rock fern (*Polypodium virginianum*) and Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*). Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*) is a lovely evergreen groundcover that sports bright red berries among diminutive oval leaves. However, because of its size, and because it is slow to spread, this is one evergreen that is best viewed close up.

Speaking of berries, don't neglect to plant native shrubs and trees with fruits that persist throughout the winter. Not only are they lovely to look at, but they also provide needed food for birds and other wildlife. My absolute favorite shrub in this category is winterberry



(*Ilex verticillata*). This deciduous holly is a rather nondescript plant throughout the growing season, but come autumn it is covered with perfectly round, bright red fruits that last well into February. The effect of a clump of winterberry against a backdrop of snow is nothing short of spectacular. Like other hollies, both male and female plants are required to ensure pollination. Winterberry likes wet soil; you will find it in the wild growing happily in standing water.

Another way to beautify your garden in the winter is to include trees and shrubs with interesting bark. Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) brings to mind images on picture postcards, but in Massachusetts, we are in the southern end of this tree's preferred range. A more suitable alternative is river birch (*Betula nigra*), which has exfoliating bark in shades from pink to orange-red. Striped maple, or moosewood (*Acer pensylvanicum*), is a tree whose trunk is lime-green in color and is furrowed with distinctive white stripes. Moosewood prefers a cool, moist location. Red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) is a shrub with stems that vary in color from deep red to bright yellow. For best twig color, pruning to the ground each spring is recommended.

I try to resist the urge to cut back all the vegetation in my garden in the fall. The seed heads of purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) and black-eyed

Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*) are not only ornamental, but attract flocks of finches and juncos. Many other plants add an architectural component to the garden when left standing throughout the winter. Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*) and black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) are two of my favorites.

Finally, look to non-living elements to add beauty to the garden year-round. A stone cairn adds a point of vertical interest whether surrounded by summer's greenery or winter's snow. A woodpile can provide cover for small animals, not to mention the promise of a cozy fire on a cold night. A lichen-covered stump looks right at home in a woodland garden, and adds valuable nutrients to the soil as it slowly decays. Take your inspiration from a walk in the woods, and turn those groans into sighs by making your garden “wintering”!

Sources:

Cullina, William, *Native Trees, Shrubs, and Vines*, Houghton-Mifflin, 2002

Darke, Rick, *The American Woodland Garden*, Timber Press, 2002

Roach, Margaret, *A Way to Garden*, Clarkson Potter Publishers, 1998

BEWARE OF INVASIVES!

As you plan your winter landscape, don't be tempted to plant non-native invasive species such as Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*). Although this shrub, like winterberry, is covered with bright red berries, it is horribly invasive and will produce dense stands that crowd out all other vegetation. The fruits of many invasive species, while eaten by birds and mammals, are the equivalent of junk food for wildlife; they are heavy in carbohydrates and low in the fat needed for survival throughout the winter.

New Member Registration



BCT welcomes new members to join in the effort of preserving and protecting Boxborough's undeveloped land. Anyone may join. Voting members must be 18 years of age or older and residents of Boxborough. All others are nonvoting members. Membership is on an annual basis. There are several giving levels. Please indicate the level of your tax-deductible contribution.

Name(s) _____ Date _____

Address _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

- \$25 - Individual
 \$50 - Family
 \$75 - Friend
 \$100 - Associate
 \$250 - Patron
 \$500 - Sustaining
 \$1000 - Sponsor
 \$2500 - Preservationist
 _____ Other

Please make your check payable to: The Boxborough Conservation Trust, and mail, with this form to: Treasurer, BCT, 110 Barteau Lane, Boxborough, MA 01719.

An acknowledgement of your tax-deductible contribution will be mailed to you.

Please contact your employer to see if matching funds are available.

The BCT does not release information about members to third parties.

Boxborough In Season



BY RITA GIBES GROSSMAN, BCT BOARD MEMBER

Test your sleuthing skills. The seemingly dreary brown days of early spring are excellent for finding signs of new life.

✿ Take a walk in the woods. You may be surprised to find the snowy surfaces around the base of tree trunks covered with black specks that move! These tiny insects, nicknamed "snow fleas," are springtails. They spend the winter months in the soil feeding on decaying plant matter. As the weather warms, they emerge and hop about

the snow's surface, usually at the base of trees and rocks. Snow fleas are a worthwhile find and very entertaining for children.

✿ As the snow melts, look for evidence of voles, as the tops of their tunnels melt and their burrowed tracks remain. About 95% of the winter diet of eastern hawks and owls consists of the meadow vole.

✿ Many of the winter bird residents begin their spring mating songs in late February and early March. Listen for the varied songs of titmice and chickadees, and the whistling of starlings.

✿ Look for the next full moon on March 6. The Algonquin people named it the Worm Moon in recognition of the earthworms

who become active and begin to prepare the soil for spring planting.

✿ Look for pussy willow catkins, a true sign of spring! This shrub or small tree can be found in damp areas, such as the Heron Rookery (off Depot Road).

✿ Take a wetland walk near a brook or stream where the water spreads to the low lying areas and look carefully for the first plant of spring: the skunk cabbage.

Sources:

Discover Nature in Winter. Elizabeth P. Lawlor. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998.

Guide to Nature in Winter. Donald Stokes. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1976

Farmer's Almanac: Full Moon Days web site: <http://www.almanac.com/details/moondays.html>



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