

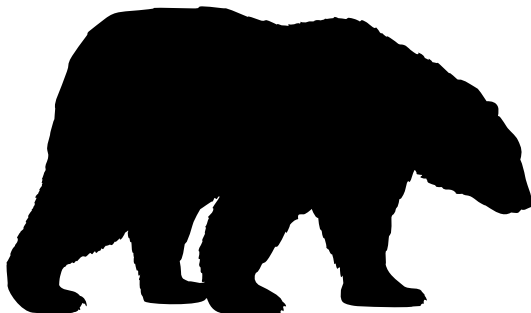


Reflections on A Family's Encounter with Boxborough's Black Bears by Liz Caldwell

In the Winter 2018 *Common Ground* cover article, Bradford Gray wrote a wonderful narrative titled *Co-Existing with Boxborough's Wildlife*. I recently revisited this article while debating topics to include in this publication. I wanted to highlight the ongoing excitement in Boxborough surrounding the black bear sightings that many of us have had or been hearing about from our friends and neighbors. I recommend everyone look at Brad's piece which can be found at BCTrust.org under "Newsletter/Archives."

As I reflected upon his article, I found myself incorporating many of the themes I read while educating my 4-year old son and 2-year old daughter about how we interact with bears and other wildlife we are lucky enough to see roaming through our yard.

My family had its first encounter with the two black bears during the afternoon of Thursday, September 12th. We were returning home and I glanced towards the wooded strip of land alongside my driveway, noticing two large black figures munching away at the shrubby leaves alongside the stream that was all but dried out from the summer sun. My first instinct was to get my children safely inside while remaining as calm as possible. I then quickly realized the



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Common Ground
is published twice a year and
mailed free to every residence

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allowed by law.



A mother Eastern black bear and her offspring

bears wanted nothing to do with us, but were happily minding their own business. This allowed us to take a dozen or so photos and videos, cherished images to braggingly share with family and friends. After the initial hype and my realization that the bears were in no rush to move on, I wanted to bring my children over to see their beauty. I wanted to talk to them about the sacredness of such a moment and provide a deeper lesson about our place in the natural world.

Our talk instinctively began with **respect**. I wanted them to know the importance of respecting the bears' space and admiring from afar. The concept of letting the wild remain wild could not have resonated more clearly. I wanted to teach my children the importance of this moment. This rare sighting offered a unique opportunity to show them we are not the only ones that live on this land, and that it is important to consider who we share our spaces with. Bears are so often depicted in children's stories as these fictional characters whose personalities can range from playful to scary. In this moment my children could see bears are actually real living animals that exist quite differently from what they have imagined in the books we've read. Without any effort, these animals demand our attention and our respect when in their natural environment. **When we respect each other's space** we need not be afraid, but rather we can co-exist in harmony.



Caldwell family camping in Franconia, NH, 2024

The next lesson we easily moved to was **appreciation**. In the moment, this concept seemed simple. I wanted my children to observe the bears, from our safe distance in our driveway, and share in the joy and excitement of the moment. I grew up in a suburban town in Northwestern Connecticut, which has since been dubbed Sims-Beary (aka Simsbury), and I still recall the buzz our family felt when we spotted a bear halfway up one of the trees in our backyard. Our home abutted a fairly expansive woods and it was not uncommon to see deer, wild turkeys, or fox. There was something special about that first moment I locked eyes on a bear in the wild, and I wanted my children to feel that same joy and appreciation that I still remember feeling as a child. There is something undeniably special about seeing such a large and powerful animal in the wild, and I don't ever take this for granted.

In the days following this sighting, we continued to look for the bears almost every time we left the house. We talked about some of the **basic concepts of habitat**. *Why are the bears in our backyard? What do they eat? Where are they going? Where do they live?* All of these questions seem to circle back to habitat. We talked about the woods and the spaces throughout our town and neighboring towns that provided bears places to find shelter, food, and protection. When you pull up the satellite images of Boxborough, your eyes may be immediately drawn



Exploring with Grammy

to those dark spaces on the map. These dark spaces symbolize the main reason I fell in love with Boxborough and they represent the places that our non-human friends are most likely to call home. They exist most profoundly in towns that prioritize and value land conservation and it is no surprise that it is in these areas that we find the most biodiversity and habitat. I wanted my children to begin to understand the importance of protecting our natural habitats because without them, our new neighbors (the bears) would have nowhere to go. Who are we to take away their homes? And how can we continue to protect their vital habitats?

The final concept, and arguably the most important, that I landed on was **interconnectedness**. In these moments of discussion I hope my children began to understand that “our woods” is not only ours, but that we are part of a giant web we often refer to as an ecosystem. In sheer size, we humans are not the largest or most powerful species, however we do have arguably the greatest power

to make the biggest impact in this world. *How will we use this power? Will we make choices that reflect our interconnectedness to the natural world? Or will we try to separate ourselves and consider our own selfish desires and aspirations?* If you are still reading this article, I have to believe you value nature on a high level, and I hope you may take a moment to reflect on how you connect with the natural world. If you are a teacher, parent, grandparent, or anyone who works with children, I hope you will consider what messages you are passing along to the next generation. When we turn on our water, when we plant our gardens, when we landscape our homes, when we power our devices, are we considering our impact? If we are privileged enough to make these choices, are we making them thoughtfully and with consideration to our natural world? Through this exercise I am thinking more mindfully about my own family’s choices and how I can help teach these messages. This can feel hard in our consumer-driven culture, however, and we are reminded of our place within the natural world, these decisions become heavier.

Since the time I started this article until today, we haven’t seen the black bears for a few weeks. The small talk with neighbors, the text messages, and even my curiosity to scan my yard and neighborhood have significantly diminished. There have been a couple times that I have glanced over to my side yard where we had our first Boxborough black bear encounter, and my mind tricked me into believing the bears were back. I don’t think I will ever forget this moment, but I realize now it was just that. A moment in time that forced me and my family to take pause. To admire something greater than us. Something we see so rarely but something that is always there. Our natural world and all its inhabitants will (hopefully) always be a part of Boxborough and our neighborhood. This experience and exercise has helped me to more thoughtfully consider how my family and I will respect and appreciate the natural habitats of Boxborough and the interconnectedness between us and our natural world.

Next page, see some activities and ideas that my family has done and continues to do as a means of connecting with nature. **We hope to see you on the trails soon!**



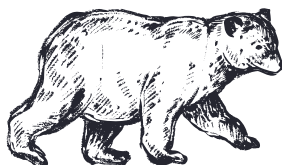
Liz's Top 10 for Outdoor Fun with Children:

- (1) Scavenger Hunt on Boxborough's Trails
- (2) Bike Ride on the Rail Trail
- (3) Geocache hunting
- (4) Fairy House Building
- (5) Kid-friendly gardening
- (6) Rock painting and dispersing
- (7) Collecting—almost anything: acorns, fall leaves, heart shaped rocks, pinecones
- (8) Bird watching: our new hummingbird feeder has been a real hit
- (9) Animal track spotting—best in the snow
- (10) Watching a sunset or sunrise

Resources

Mass Audubon's Bear Information Page:
<https://www.massaudubon.org/nature-wildlife/mammals-in-massachusetts/bears>

State of MA Black Bears in Massachusetts Page:
<https://www.mass.gov/black-bears-in-massachusetts>



Kids, don't forget to play:

- See reflections in puddles
- Stomp in mud puddles with your boots on
- Skate, slide on solid ice
- Build fortresses out of found materials
- Throw sticks and skip stones in the water (not at people, birds, or animals)
- Climb up rocks and trees (safely, carefully)
- Scavenger hunt (always)
- Hike, climb hills, sled, snowshoe, or ski in winter for better views (No Poison Ivy or Ticks!)



Scavenger Hunt

Can you find these things in Boxborough ?

Check the boxes when you find:

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Pinecone | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bird | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Rock | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Animal track | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Brown leaf | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Feather | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Evergreen tree | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stream | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Stick | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pine needle | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Puddle | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Mud | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tree sap | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trail sign | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Letter from the President

by Rita Gibes Grossman

The only positive aspect of drought is the gorgeous weather; otherwise conserving water and not doing anything that could risk a brush or wildfire is the current mode of operation. As would be expected, the “hot” topics in land conservation are how to mitigate climate change and the related extreme changes in the weather, including drought, through strategic conservation and managing the growing problem of invasive species.

When I was researching the history of the BCTrust-sponsored writing contest by reviewing past issues of Common Ground (CG) I noted that sustainability, managing invasives, and not using pesticides has been written about in CG for over twenty years. Yet how much has been accomplished?

In the last few years the BCTrust has taken action at the Beaver Brook Valley Preserve with a professional environmental consultant and vendor (Oxbow Associates) to reduce and manage invasive species. Additionally, we have just signed on as an active member of CIMSA (Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas) initiated by Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT).

At the “grassroots” level, Boxborough is fortunate to have AB Regional High School student Anya Bruncker who has taken on the challenge of dealing with invasive species as a project. Her walks have been greatly appreciated by the BC Trust! I attended a recent one at Patch Hill which focused on bittersweet, multi flora rosa, and burning bush.



Thanks to the leadership of board members Dave Barnett and Karla Briggs, we are accelerating our work on removal and management of invasives.

Stay tuned!

In gratitude

Blanchard Contests: Congratulations to the winners! The BCTrust has sponsored the writing contest at Blanchard Memorial School for over twenty years.

Thanks to Sixth grade teachers Danielle Fredericks and Leanne Berggrum, and contest coordinators Becky Harris and Liz Caldwell.

Thanks also to the judges:

Sam Anderson, Liz Caldwell, and Lucy Indge; and to **every student who participated.**



Bittersweet

Celastrus scandens

BCTrust Members: Thank you to all our members who are making a difference with their support of our work.

Common Ground: Thank you to Lynn Horsky, editor/designer, to Brad Gray, editor and writer, and to editors/production managers for this issue, Liz Caldwell and Becky Harris. Their volunteer time makes this publication possible.



Black bear

Congratulations to Rita Gibes Grossman, our President

on receiving Boxborough's highest honor, the **Golden Fife Award!**



On a beautiful June day, Rita received a well-deserved honor at Fifer's Day: she rode in the parade and received the accolades of the Golden Fife Award, presented to a Boxborough citizen with a long-standing record of service to the town. Rita was also presented with citations from the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Massachusetts Senate by **Representative Danillo Sena** and **Senator Jamie Eldridge**. She received the award from the **Public Celebrations and Ceremonies Committee** who commended her for her decades of work on conservation issues in town, from the coalition she formed to help pass the Community Preservation Act, to her many years of work at the helm of the **BCTrust**.

We can't think of anyone more deserving

Congratulations, Rita! 



Rita Gibes Grossman

Senator Jamie Eldridge



Did you know Boxborough has over 30 miles of scenic, conserved trails when combining both town and conservation trust lands? Fall and winter are great seasons to explore the woods. Complete all the trails and bring your finished tracker to the Library to earn a patch and be recognized in the *Common Ground!* Also, be on the lookout for a **family hike series** utilizing these same trails. <https://bctrust.org/2021/08/06/i-hiked-boxboroughs-30/>

Hikers who have completed the challenge:

NEW finishers!

Michael Campbell, Boxborough
 Lisa St.Amand, Boxborough
 Liz Markiewicz, Boxborough
 John Markiewicz, Boxborough
 Susan Kenney, Somerset
 Brian Kenney, Somerset
 Stephen Kiley, Somerset
 Janel Paquin, Somerset
 Marjorie Kamp, Boxborough
 Mary Sullivan, Boxborough

David Oliva, Boxborough
 Jeff Barrus, Boxborough
 Karen Coopridger, Boxborough
 Anthony Cuoco, Boxborough
 Alicia Colley, Boxborough
 Tom Colley, Boxborough
 Sharon Garde, Boxborough
 Sarah Donovan, Littleton
 Michael Harrison, Boxborough
 Patricia Harrison, Boxborough
 Melinda Strauss, Boxborough

Dave Barnett, Boxborough
 Callen Macdonald, Boxborough
 Liam Macdonald, Boxborough
 Cathy Winsor, Boxborough
 Kitty Lee-Winsor, Boxborough
 Darrell Loverin, Boxborough
 Kyoko Loverin, Boxborough

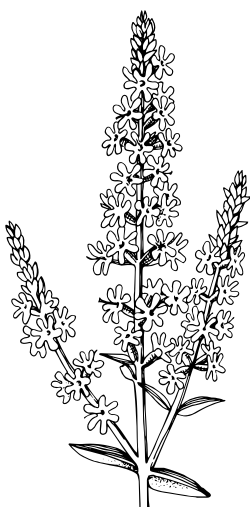
Spotlight on Anya Bruncker

Anya Bruncker, a Boxborough resident and senior at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, recently received the **Girl Scout Gold Award** for her project to **raise awareness about invasive plant species** in Boxborough. The Gold Award is the highest level of achievement in Girl Scouts and can be earned by completing a project that helps to solve a real-life problem in the community. When asked how she arrived on invasive plants for her Gold Award project, Anya described how she has enjoyed the outdoors and nature since childhood and how she has been in Girl Scouts since age 5. When her family moved to Boxborough four years ago, she discovered the many miles of conservation land trails and decided to do her Girl Scout Silver Award project on developing on-line brochures (posted on the Town website) for all of Boxborough's trails.

This began her interest in preserving Boxborough's natural beauty through education and accessibility. When deciding on the topic for her Gold Award project, Anya initially thought about climate change and the associated threats to our natural environment.

Her research led her to the growing challenges of invasive plant species and the threats they represent to Boxborough's woodlands, meadows and waterways.

In September 2023, Anya gave a presentation to the Conservation Commission about her proposal to place signs at various locations along the Town's trails with information about the history, threats, and potential management techniques for some of the most serious invasive species. Commission members enthusiastically endorsed the project, and Anya proceeded



Purple Loosestrife



Japanese Knotweed

to design and construct signs to increase awareness about the following species: Burning Bush, Oriental Bittersweet, Japanese Knotweed, Multiflora Rose, Japanese Barberry, and Purple Loosestrife. You can now find these informative signs along the trails at some of the locations where the invasive plants are most problematic. As part of the Gold Award requirement that a project be sustainable, Anya typed up detailed specifications and instructions for

constructing and installing the signs and provided these documents to both the Conservation Commission and The Boxborough Conservation Trust so that others can produce more signs in additional locations in the future to continue increasing awareness of the environmental threats of invasive plants. Anya also did extensive research about these invasive plant species and provided the information she compiled to the Conservation Commission to be posted on the Town's website.

Why should Boxborough residents be concerned about invasive plants?

As Anya has learned to identify these invasive species originally introduced from Asia and now observes how they are out-competing native species and taking over some of our natural areas, she is reminded of the Lorax in the Dr. Seuss book and hopes that something can be done before it is too late. Both the Conservation Commission and the BCTrust are indeed beginning to more actively focus on this challenge and will be developing management strategies and taking action in the months and years ahead. In the meantime, Anya is in the process of submitting college applications and is currently hoping to pursue studies in both archeology and conservation biology. We want to congratulate and thank Anya for her valuable Gold Award project and wish her all the best as she continues her education and embarks on what will undoubtedly be a successful and productive career.



Black bear

BCTrust Annual WRITING CONTEST

Every year, Blanchard Memorial School sixth-grade students are invited to compose an original piece (fiction, non-fiction, or poetry), based on a chosen conservation theme. Themes from past years have included animal habitats, climate change, the importance of recycling, and protecting our water resources.

A huge thank you to the Blanchard teachers and staff for their collaboration to make this happen, our parent judges, and ALL the students who participated!

The 2024 Theme: Living with Wildlife

Here in Boxborough we are lucky to have conservation land at many of our doorsteps and throughout our community. Through this benefit, we have the opportunity to



Aarya Menon, Viviana Mendoza, Ayala Higgins

observe nature's beauty on a daily basis. We also have the responsibility to take care of our natural spaces that our non-human neighbors call home. This Summer/Fall we have heard numerous stories, and maybe even had our own personal encounter, with two black bears taking residence within Boxborough. Write a poem or personal narrative about what it means to have a harmonious and peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife in our community. Consider what measures we need to take in order to keep wildlife wild.

The Winning Entries



FIRST: Ayala Higgins

Water flowing

Grass growing

Nature thrives in the reeds

Wood creaks, as if it wants to play music for my ears

Dew falls on newly born trees

As if being coated in diamonds

Frogs ribbit and croak, almost in perfect harmony

A lone salamander crawls out from under a branch

And its shiny eyes stare up at me, hoping

The wind rushes past my ears

Whistling a soft but sharp melody

Piercing, yet flaming a feeling deep in me

Crack, croak, chirp

The sound branches make after falling

Falling away from the only home they knew, the Tree
Crack as they get stepped on by passersbys, not knowing where it was before or where it came from

Croak is the noise toads say to each other,
Speaking a language only they can understand
Words meaning anything, anything, but I will never know what

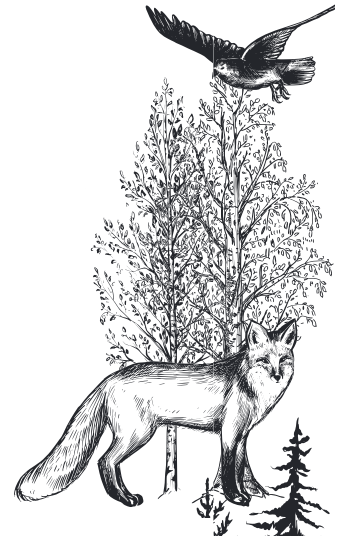
Chirp, say the birds high in the trees, above the canopy
They call to each other, signaling a threat is coming,
And they fly far, far away

The clouds part, letting the sun some in
Some days the clouds block the sun, and a darkness hovers above me

Others the sky rumbles and large droplets fall from the sky
And animals burrow and hide,
Anxious to get away from the rain
I run too

As I turn around, I see the frogs and trees and birds
I see greenery and sky and clouds
I see nature. I see a forest.

I see Blanchard.



My Walk in the Woods

Crunch,
Goes the leaves
under my feet
Swish,
Goes the falling leaves
in a colorful blur,
Landing on my hood
As I walk,
Through the wood

Breathing in the fall air,
Crisp on my cheeks
I take in the wildlife
Trying to be aware
The growing plants,
In advance
Getting their final bit of sunshine
before the harsh winter



SECOND: Viviana Mendoza

The birds tweeting
As they fly south
The chattering squirrels
collecting acorns in their mouth

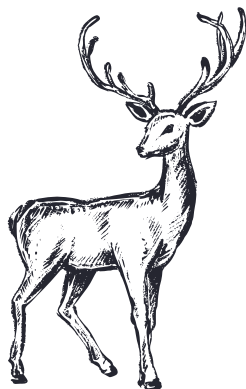
And the deer
Graceful,
Sleek,
And Serene

As I walk past,
They all turn their heads
As if I was different from the last
And regarding me with curiosity
Suddenly, I realize
I'm lost
I didn't keep track of where I was going
I start to sit,
but I then think better of it
I need to be back before sunset
I begin to panic
And I look around
for something I recognize,
Getting very frantic
Then I see it

The deer
Standing near me
Looking into my eyes
As if they were trying to tell me something
Slowly, I take a step closer
And the deer
Starts walking
So I follow carefully

Next thing I know,
I can see my house
I turn to the deer in shock,
But it was already gone,
Quiet as a mouse

When I told the tale
In great detail
No one believed it
Only I understood
What happened
On My Walk in the Woods



THIRD: Aarya Menon

It all started one beautiful summer day, with warm rays of golden sunlight glinting through the tall trees and enveloping us. Chipmunks scurried up trees as bird calls echoed through the forest behind. *Whoosh!* A breeze blew through the bright green, swaying tops of the trees, cooling us with nature's embrace. We played hide-and-seek tag, enjoying the lush hiding spots in our backyard. As I ran around, I pondered where my little brother could possibly be hiding. Creeping through the trees, I spotted a tiny clearing between two tall trees, knowing that he could easily be crouching between them. As I tiptoed towards the clearing, I spotted something unusual, a small pile of bones, scattered as if by the wind. Staring at them for a moment, intrigued, I called out to my brother. We both huddled around to catch a glimpse of the skeleton parts, each wondering which animal they could have come from. We rushed to ask our parents for help. After carrying out a few quick Google searches, they figured out what the animal was: The bones belonged to a rabbit! Astounded, we wondered how it might have met its end—hunger, or predation by a fox? Eventually, we concluded it must have been part of the food chain and ecosystem, having been eaten by another animal. Stumbling upon the rabbit bones offered a small glimpse into the circle of life within our delicate ecosystem, revealing how nature around us could be fragile, and yet so strong.





Preserving and Protecting Boxborough's Undeveloped Land

New Member Registration Form

The **Boxborough Conservation Trust** is an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. We are actively seeking new members to join in the effort of preserving and protecting Boxborough's undeveloped land. Anyone may join. Regular (voting) members must be 18 years of age or older and must be Boxborough residents. All others are honorary members. Membership is on an annual basis.

There are several membership levels. All donations are tax deductible, to the extent allowed by law.

<input type="checkbox"/>	\$30 Member	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$250 Patron	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$2500 Preservationist
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$60 Family	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$500 Sustaining	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$_____ Other
<input type="checkbox"/>	\$100 Associate	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$1000 Sponsor		

Name(s) _____
(please print)

Address _____ (street) (_____) - _____ (telephone)

_____ (town) _____ (state) _____ (zip)

Date ___/___/___ e-mail _____

Please indicate how you would like your name(s) to appear in our membership listings, such as 'The Jones Family,' or 'John and Jane Jones,' or if you prefer, you can just say 'anonymous.'

Membership Listing: _____

Please make your check payable to **The Boxborough Conservation Trust**, and mail it with this form to:

**Treasurer
Boxborough Conservation Trust
650 Massachusetts Ave.
Boxborough, MA 01719**

We will mail you a donation acknowledgment suitable for tax reporting purposes. Please contact your employer to see if they will match your contribution.

Your comments and suggestions would be very much appreciated:

Thank you for your support!
You can find BCTrust at **bctrust.org** or on Facebook.
650 Massachusetts Ave. Boxborough, MA 01719; email: president@bctrust.org


The Boxborough Conservation Trust is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions are fully tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

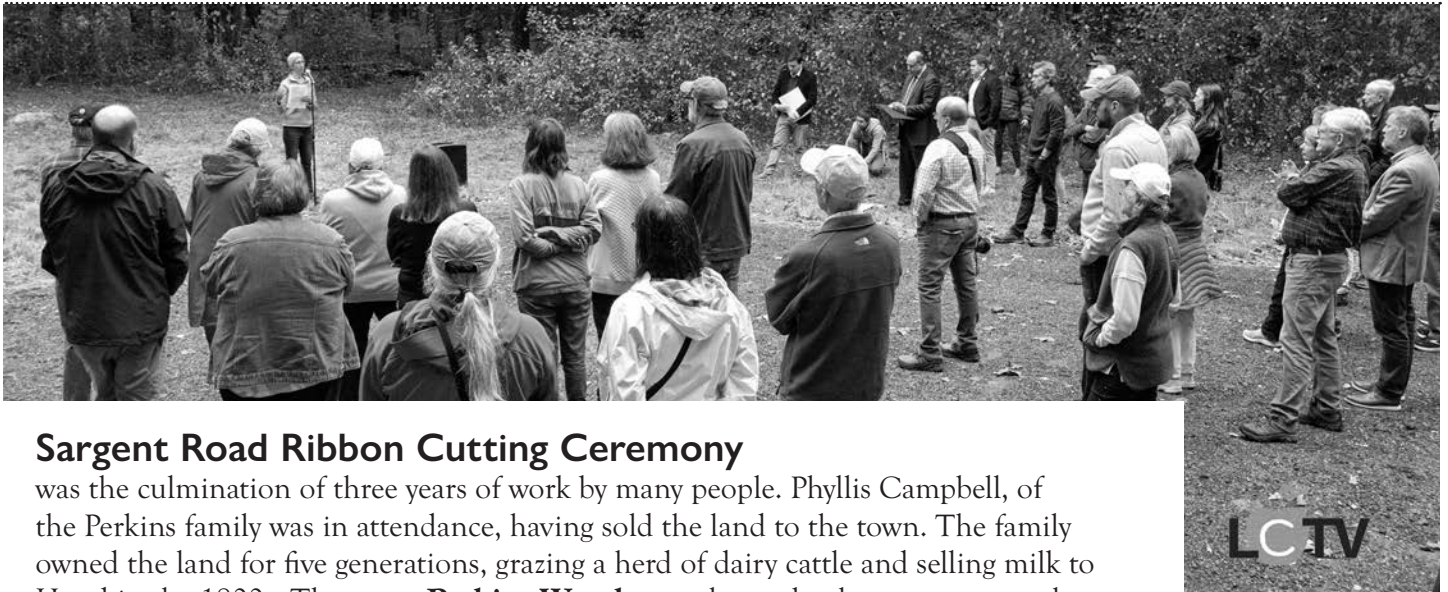
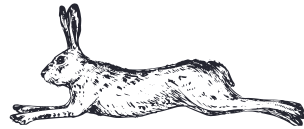


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Sargent Road Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

was the culmination of three years of work by many people. Phyllis Campbell, of the Perkins family was in attendance, having sold the land to the town. The family owned the land for five generations, grazing a herd of dairy cattle and selling milk to Hood in the 1800s. The name **Perkins Woods** was chosen by the new owners: the Conservation Commission and Agricultural Commission. At least 50 people attended, including our State Representative and Senator. With a total of \$1,042,000 raised of the \$1,250,000 purchase price, the cost to the taxpayers was minimal, so everyone had reason to celebrate, with a walk of the land after speeches. Ultimately, the coordinated effort between Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT), the Town and The BCTrust enabled the success of the project.

 *In Memoriam*  



Fred Dushin, former Board Member of the Boxborough Conservation Trust

Fred's valued service on the BCTrust Board was reliable, thoughtful, and logical. He made innumerable strategic contributions to our work on the board and on the BCTrust's land committee. His enthusiastic, manual labor for stewardship made a difference on both Town-owned land (Rolling Meadow) and on BCTrust properties.

Most memorable was his wry sense of humor and enduring smile.

Thank you to all who donated to the BCTrust in his memory after his passing earlier this year in March.