



P.O. Box 20
Marlboro, Vermont 05344
802 254 9192
Email: hogback1@sover.net
www.hogback.org

NEWS AND EVENTS AT HOGBACK MOUNTAIN

Newsletter #4

June 2009

Upcoming Events at Hogback: For the next couple of months the focus is on helping to prepare for the Marlboro Community Fair on Saturday, September 12th. The theme for the Fair this year is Hogback Mountain, so please stop by and see what it's all about.

Fundraising: HMCA is pleased to announce that it was awarded several foundation grants in 2009 for the acquisition of Hogback, despite lower giving nationwide due to the recession. The Fields Pond Foundation, the Cricket Foundation, the Davis Foundation, and the Watershed Program of the Agency of Natural Resources contributed to the project as part of the fund raising effort to conserve the property. Combined with earlier grants and donations, we are 81% of the way to our goal of \$1.737 million. That leaves a balance of \$337,133 to be raised through other grants and donations by the end of the project deadline of January 2010.

Vernal Pools: A cool mid-spring morning and three intrepid HMCA members are searching for a small water-filled depression in the Hogback Mountain landscape. A single, quiet "quack" emanates from nearby and we head in that general direction. We find our target and sit quietly. Slowly a chorus of quacking grows. These are not ducks in a pond but wood frogs searching for mates in a vernal pool. A breeding frenzy starts to take place as wood frogs leap upon one another in the water as many more emerge from the surrounding forest to attempt to pass along their genes to a future generation.

Vernal pools are depressions in topography that fill with water from snowmelt, rainfall, runoff, and rising water table. They lack a permanent outlet above ground and may be covered with ice in winter. They typically hold water in the spring and early summer and dry up in summer although some may persist with water.

Due to the drying of the pools these temporary wetland habitats cannot support breeding fish populations. A number of organisms have evolved to exploit these wetlands that lack the fish that are voracious predators. Certain species including spotted salamanders and wood frogs, which breed exclusively in this type of habitat, are known as obligate or indicator species. The presence of these obligate species is used to identify vernal pools and to distinguish them from other wetland types. Vernal pools also provide habitat for a great diversity of other wildlife such as fairy shrimp, fingernail clams, predaceous diving beetles and many other invertebrates and vertebrates.

FUTURE NOTICES AND EVENTS. If you received this Newsletter by snail mail and wish to continue receiving it, please send us your email address. Our email address is hogback1@sover.net. To keep costs down, we use email whenever possible. If you prefer not to receive future email Newsletters please let us know. Suggestions for improvement are always welcome.

We welcome and encourage articles and pictures for future publication as well as ideas for future events.

Although vernal pools provide critical habitat, they do not necessarily enjoy protection from development and other disturbance in Vermont. We are fortunate to have a number of vernal pools on the Hogback conservation property that will be protected and serve as breeding grounds for wood frogs and other species that will disperse throughout the forests to complete their life cycles. They may also provide food for other wildlife such as snakes, birds and small mammals and thus are important components of wetland and upland forest food webs.

I have been periodically identifying, photographing, and mapping potential vernal pools and collecting data for inclusion in Vermont's Vernal Pool Mapping Project. To date I have found 7 of these important wetland ecosystems and have had the pleasure of leading a group of students to one of the vernal pools during the Marlboro Elementary School field trip. I plan to continue searching and documenting vernal pools and welcome anyone interested in participating.



Clockwise from top left: Vernal pool during mid-spring on north side of route 9; wood frog during mating season in the same pool; spotted salamander eggs in a vernal pool on the south side of route 9; wood frog eggs in a vernal pool near the fire tower. (Article and Pictures by Jason Saltman)

Birding at Hogback: On Saturday May 23 the day was cool, a bit buggy and a bit grayish which was well suited for our bird walk. Prior to starting, Marlboro College Biology Professor Bob Engel, our bird expert, shared a book showing bird song sonograms and discussed how we would be doing a bit more listening for songs than we would be looking at the birds themselves due to the new young foliage.

Then off our group of eighteen went starting from the Alpenglo along an access trail toward the Practice Slope. The terrain on the old ski slope has now become quite grown up and provides a more varied habitat than the mowed trails of old. In future days the plan is to maintain diverse habitats in order to encourage a wide range of birds and animals on Hogback lands.

Today we found twenty-one species of birds, starting out with a small flock of Cedar Waxwings, *Bombycilla cedrorum*, that are often seen in winter in large flocks eating the remaining fruit on cherry and apple trees. As we moved through the more open areas we pointed out the yellow-flowered Golden Alexanders, *Zizia aurea*, and saw and heard the Indigo Bunting, *Passerina cyanea*, many American Robins, *Turdus migratorius*, and listened to Red-winged Blackbirds, *Agelaius phoeniceus*, near the little pond beside the Alpenglo. The Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*, the Gray Catbird, *Dumetella carolinensis*, all announced their presence with song and the Common Grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula* did a flyby. On the edge of the woods we heard the Yellow-rumped Warbler, *Dendroica coronata*, and the Chestnut-sided Warbler, *Dendroica pensylvanica*.

In the next opening we learned that the carpet of Hayscented Ferns, *Dennstaedtia punctilobula*, covering the slope creates an almost impenetrable mat for other seedlings to get through. We found three other large ferns growing there, the Cinnamon Fern, *Osmundia cinnamomea*, the Interrupted fern, *Osmundia claytoniana*, and the Ostrich Fern, *Matteuccia Struthiopteris*, and the coarser Bracken Fern, *Pteridium aquilinum*.

We luckily all missed stepping on a hunkered down Wood Frog, *Lithobates sylvaticus*, right in our trail. They are one of the obligate vernal pool species depending upon fish-free environments in which to lay their eggs. Luckily Hogback has a number of these pools.

Entering the wooded areas we heard a number of the forest birds, the high-pitched Black –and–white Warbler, *Mniotilta varia*, and Bob Engel's favorite the Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*, the Eastern Wood Pewee, *Contopus virens*, the Oven bird, *Seiurus aurocapillus*, the Red-eyed Vireo, *Vireo olivaceus*, and also got a glimpse of the orange-throated Blackburnian Warbler, *Dendroica fusca*. We listened to the serene series of flutelike notes of the beautiful Hermit Thrush, *Catharus guttatus*, and heard, and then unwittingly flushed out, the Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*, who had been drumming on a log. He uses his wings to create the thump, thump, thump sound that announces his presence to a potential mate. The Hairy Woodpecker, *Picoides villosus*, was also drumming on a tree, telling others that this was his territory.

Toward the end of the walk we found the tracks of the Wild Turkey, *Meleagris gallopavo*, in the mud and we all had a good look at and heard the Rufous–sided Towhee, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*. The American Goldfinch, *Caruelis tristis* was also heard and two Broad-winged Hawks, *Buteo platypterus*, sailed over the hill.

A nice morning outing with a good number of birds seen. We seem to get more than we bargained for on these Hogback Mountain walks. (Article Barbara Cole)

Tale of a Woodpecker's Tail: We have our fair share of woodpeckers here at home, and often see them feeding on tree trunks, never too long at any one spot. Or we hear them communicating with each other, or staking out their territory by pecking on the metal chimney close to our bedroom window, much too early in the morning for me.

During a hike at Hogback in May, we were surprised that our close presence did not persuade one woodpecker to fly away from its task on a tall, rotten tree stump. It kept pecking away, and as time went on, we saw more and more of its body disappearing into the tree with each thrust. It was obviously building a nest, and its tail seemed to play an important role in rebalancing itself and giving it thrust to dive back into the emerging hole. The effect was very much like a seesaw. Those tail feathers had to be quite stiff and strong. In seeking confirmation of this impression online, I also learned, for those of you who like trivia, that a woodpecker pecks 8,000 to 12,000 times a day. (Article by Nancy Anderson)

Medicinal Plant Walk at Hogback More Than About Plants: On another beautiful, sunny day at Hogback, herbal and medicinal plant expert Allison Turner led 13 eager participants on a plant walk that was filled with surprises. We started out with a list of 50 native and nonnative medicinal plants that are common to our region, and hadn't moved more than 10 feet before stopping and identifying eight plants on the list. By the end of the walk, I counted 42 identified plants before running out of space on my notepaper. We learned about plants that were fun to eat, helpful in curing ailments, or useful in dispersing gophers or insects. Allison also discussed the various ways of preparing the plants- tisanes, decoctions, and tinctures. Some of the participants shared memories of myths and practical advice passed on by mothers and grandmothers. And a touch of history was added in when someone mentioned that bedstraw was reportedly used in Christ's manger, and Allison described that Achilles used yarrow to quickly heal his soldiers after a particularly fierce battle. A more modern story related how a backcountry hiker with a serious injury healed his leg wound with a strip of hemlock bark. And if you closed your eyes for a minute, you might have imagined that you were in a tropical paradise as Allison described a carnivorous plant in the small pond just yards away from Route 9. Our thanks to Allison for such an enjoyable morning. (Article by Nancy Anderson)

King Achilles found this herb
and with it he healed his men
that were wounded with iron.



Artwork by Barbara Cole

MES Day At Hogback Mountain. June 1st broke just fantasticamatically gorgeous! Bright sunlight, warming temps and a nice breeze that kept away the black flies all day long. But the best part began when 70-plus youngsters from the Marlboro Elementary School decamped from buses promptly at 9:00 AM to enjoy this beautiful day on Hogback Mountain under the caring tutelage of Francie Marbury and the MES faculty.

The splendid weather was just a beginning to a day that spiraled onward and upward in fun and excitement (I think) for all. The upward part culminated in a climb up the famous firetower after a picnic lunch and a morning full of activities from trail blazing, to poetry, to kite making to finding animals signs, learning about vernal pools, exploring nature drawing, enjoying a scavenger hunt and learning about nature weaving. Dan got his exercise for the morning leading a group to the old cellar holes at the base of the mountain and then on up to the fire tower where he led the first several groups up the fire tower itself. (my knees ached later that evening, just thinking about Dan).

Particular thanks to Carol Berner who a did so much of the heavy lifting both in formulating specific plans from very vague notions of an MES/Hogback connection and then steadfastly organizing many of the specifics of this MES Day at Hogback.

Equal thanks to Francie Marbury and the faculty and staff at MES in organizing the youngsters, discerning their multiple interests into functioning groups and pulling this all off with great cheer and an impressive alacrity.

I gotta say the whole day was performed with the precision of a drill team; Activity Leaders were on the Mountain with a plan in hand in time to watch the school buses roll in at 9:00 AM extra sharp, and disgorge legions of young people "eager" for the Mountain experience. Just minutes later 70-plus youngsters from K-8 were formed into small, pre-arranged groups for the pre-planned activities and were thence soon headed off to various parts of the mountain. At 11:00 AM these multiple contingents of young people reappeared miraculously from various parts of forest and field for a hike to the fire tower.

Thence the long march to the fire tower, (long for me...not so for the youngsters who passed me going uphill, some at a jog!)... A picnic lunch, photo ops, and then back down to the buses.

And finally a very hearty thanks to all those who showed up to help support this event with their time and expertise in working with the young people. This includes Bruce and Barbara Cole, Hal Himmelstein, George Leoniak, Jason Saltman, Susan Riley, Saint Rosner, Rose Watson, Dan MacArthur, Ron Labrusciano and Kent Brenneck and Emma Hallowell from Antioch. And thanks to David Holzapfel who played dual roles both as an HMCA director who helped set up the event with MES and as an MES faculty proctor, sheparding youngsters around the mountain and up the fire tower.

(Article by Bob Anderson)

Summary Calendar of Events

Saturday, September 12th, 9:30 AM –Community Fair with a Hogback Theme

We will also have two or three other events this fall which haven't been scheduled yet.

Out continuing thanks to the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum and Hogback Gift Shop for gracious use of their facilities in support of many of our events.

(B.A.)