



Hogback Mountain
Conservation Association

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News and Events at Hogback

Newsletter #14 - July 2011

Printed at the back of this Newsletter as tear-offs, is a calendar of events through September and a trail map. HMCA and the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum (SVNHM) are cosponsoring these events and they look terrific, if we do say so. Michael Clough, assistant director of the museum, has done the lion's share of the work in setting up these great events and will also be leading the nocturnal excursion scheduled for July 16th. The great mapping continues to be done by HMCA's Diana Todd.

For an activity in October, we're considering something for those with an artistic interest to celebrate the foliage season, perhaps with *en plein air* event on Hogback with pencils, paint, canvas or cameras to capture some of the beauty that Hogback offers at that time of year. Some or all of the resulting images could be displayed in the Newsletter or in a special exhibition in the area.

We'd like to hear from readers for suggestions about different ways this event might be carried out and we would be happy to facilitate such an event.

We recently attended a fascinating afternoon talk on the rare snakes of southern Vermont sponsored by Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center, (BEEC), at their center on Bonnyvale Road in Brattleboro and presented by Jim Andrews. Jim a herpetologist at Middlebury College.



North American Racer

Vermont has nearly a dozen species of snakes overall, several of which are quite rare and even threatened. A scale of S1 to S5 has been developed to define a species rarity with the latter designation being very common (think garter snake). Conversely, S1 is "very rare: at very high risk due to extreme rarity". S2 is considered "rare: at high risk due to very restricted range."

Jim pointed out that the timber rattlesnake, Vermont's only venomous snake, is at the top of the scale at S1 and considered endangered and in immediate danger of becoming extinct statewide. The North American racer, a fast-moving constrictor, is also at the top of the list and considered threatened. Statewide the racer is only reported to exist here in Windham County. Two other snakes, the eastern rat

snake and the eastern ribbon snake are given an S2 rating and all four species share a high SGCN designation as having the *greatest conservation need* in Vermont's Wildlife Action Plan. Jim would very much like to hear of any sightings of these species.

Our email address is hogback1@sover.net. If you prefer not to receive future Newsletters please let us know. Suggestions for improvement are always welcome as are articles and pictures for future publication

It is perhaps reasonable to ask at this point why should we be especially concerned about snakes. Snakes scare us. Touching them or even just thinking about them suffuses many of us with a paroxysm of shivers. Nonetheless, Vermont's snake population, all non-venomous except for the timber rattler, offer a harmless and benign interface with the humans. Even timber rattlers choose to elude us if possible, and provide significant warning if our presence is just too close for them to avoid us.

More important, we are starting to understand that our ecosystem is inextricably intertwined in ways that are only beginning to be understood. Casual extinctions or even extirpations (localized extinctions of a species that continue to exist in other regions) have unintended consequences and upset nature's sweet balance and so need to be avoided for its own sake even without any evidence of impact on us.

If you think you've seen one of the rare species, Jim would love to hear from you (jandrews@middlebury.edu), preferably accompanied by photographs and a perhaps a GPS location if you have it. He is also quite happy to help with identifying other more common species of snakes as well, particularly if you can provide photographs.

The following list comprises Vermont's snake population and its associated rarity.

North American racer (S1)

Timber rattlesnake (S1)

Eastern rat snake (S2) (Vermont's largest at up to 8 feet)

Eastern ribbon snake (S2)

Northern water snake (S3)

Smooth green snake (S3)

Ring-necked snake (S3)

Dekay's brown snake (S4)

Red-bellied snake (S5)

Garter snake most common by far (S5)

Milk snake (S5) - sometimes called a spotted adder – but Jim explained it is not an adder at all – you might see one outside your house helping to keep down the mouse population

We came away with a DVD “*Rattlers, Peepers and Snappers*” that Jim helped produce and we'd be happy to loan it out. It's a great video overall and there's an amazing scene of a small garter snake swallowing a whole frog if you can slide past the “yuck” factor. (email hogback1@sover.net)

article by Bob Anderson



Hal, Mike and Malcolm

HMCA's trail crew has been busy recently erecting kiosks on the mountain. This particular kiosk was supplied by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (VDFPR) and erected by a small and doughty crew from HMCA. These efforts are part of the informal partnership established between VDFPR and HMCA to develop and mark a connecting trail between the Hogback Mountain Conservation Area and the Molly Stark Park.

Another important endeavor of this partnership resulted in a handsome composite trail map developed by HMCA's own Diana Todd and printed by VDFPR.

The Southern Vermont Natural History Museum is also making a subset of this trail map, available both at the Hogback Gift Shop and at Sweetie's and here in the Newsletter.

The perhaps unexpected appearance of this issue of the Newsletter a scant several weeks from the last issue may ignite placid surprise. Did someone tap the “send” button by accident? The issue before the recent June issue appeared almost a year back. What’s up with that?

Unlike the steady and sturdy heartbeat of our much-loved pubs like the Marlboro Mixer or the Commons that reveal themselves with a reassuring regularity, the Newsletter is anachronistically aperiodic - a publication that appears out of nowhere, like a humming bird announcing itself in a mild frenzy of flying and feeding and then disappears until some other unknowable time.



Ruby-throated hummingbird

The Newsletter is driven solely by the activities and anecdotes of those who share time at, or interest in the Mountain. If nothing is going on, if nobody has thoughts that relate to nearly 600 acres of beckoning trails and magnificent forest, the Newsletter can have nothing to say. It is also the public voice of the Hogback Mountain Conservation Association. All of this is to say, more obliquely than intended, that the Newsletter invites dialogue among you, our readership, HMCA and any others with an interest in this magnificent Mountain. In short, you talk, we publish.

The Newsletter needs the stimulation engendered by discussion of what’s happening at Hogback. And what’s not.....Are current events and activities interesting? Useful? What should the collective “we” be doing or not doing there.

There is a splendid universe of plants and wildlife dramatically but quietly playing out their natural roles each day on that pristine 600 acres. At what level and depth should humans interact with that world while ensuring its prosperity for future generations?

The great gamut of thought and discussion that is possible is bounded only by imagination and the energy to give it voice. A good chance for some thoughtful discussion might begin with the aforementioned (page 1) proposed artistic endeavour for the October foliage season. The Newsletter encourages you to do so at hogback1@sover.net. - Ed.

Our 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.

Bob Anderson - Ed.

Hogback Mountain Conservation Area

Trail Map

With Molly Stark State Park Trails Included
 Molly Stark trails marked with blue blazes

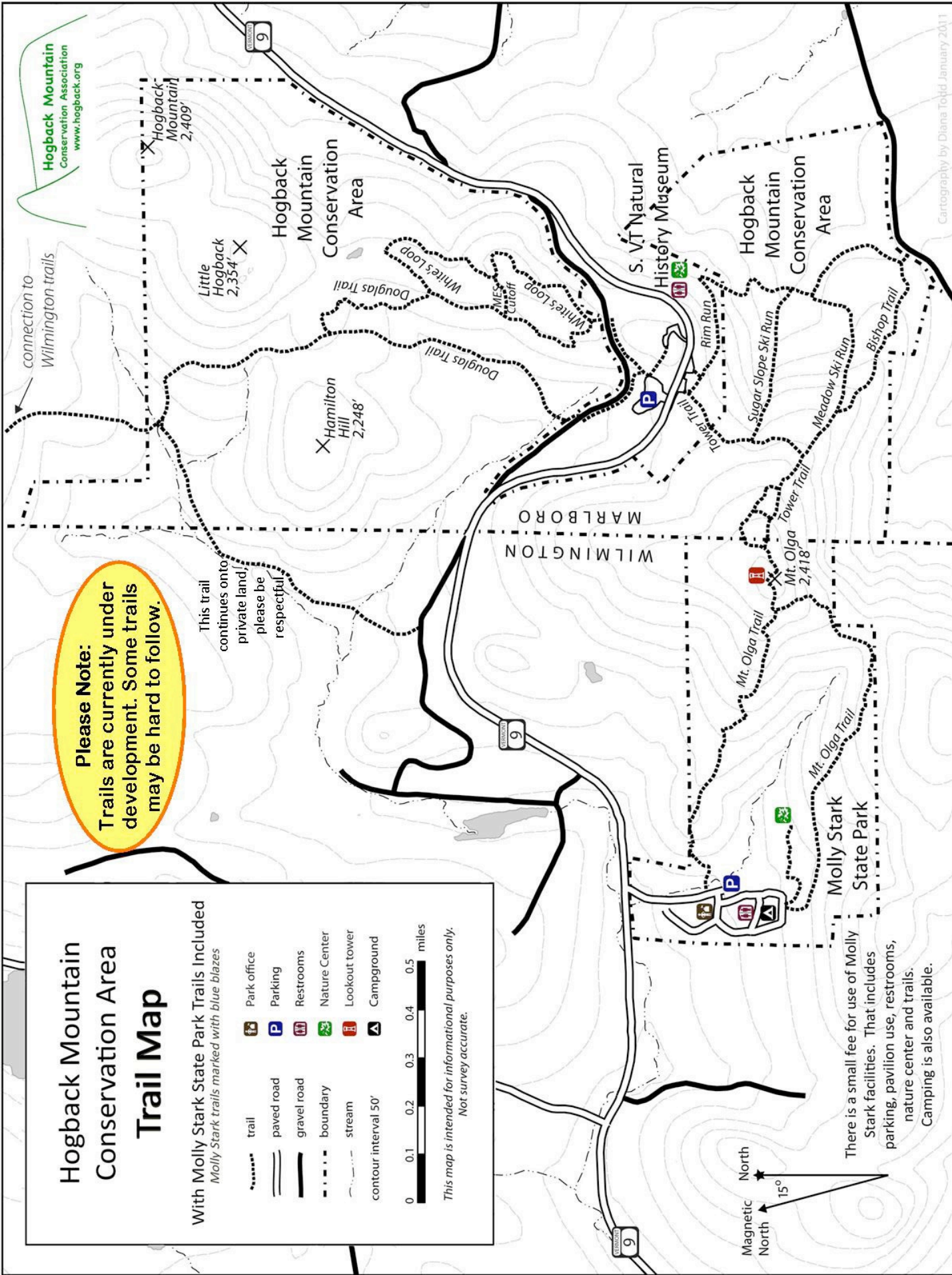
-  trail
-  paved road
-  gravel road
-  boundary
-  stream
-  contour interval 50'
-  Park office
-  Parking
-  Restrooms
-  Nature Center
-  Lookout tower
-  Campground

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 miles
 This map is intended for informational purposes only.
 Not survey accurate.

Please Note:
 Trails are currently under development. Some trails may be hard to follow.

This trail continues onto private land, please be respectful.

There is a small fee for use of Molly Stark facilities. That includes parking, pavilion use, restrooms, nature center and trails. Camping is also available.





SOUTHERN VERMONT NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

HOGBACK MOUNTAIN CONSERVATION AREA NOCTURNAL EXCURSION

Saturday, July 16th at 8:00pm Meet at Old Alpenglo Ski Lodge/ HMCA south trailhead

Join Southern Vermont Natural History Museum Assistant Director, Michael Clough for a moonlit walk on Hogback Mountain. We will explore the night life of southern Vermont with a look at stars, owls, moths and other nocturnal pursuits of our native wildlife. Dress for the weather and wear foot wear appropriate for walking on rough terrain. Flashlights are welcome but will be used as little as possible.

HAWKS OVERHEAD

Saturday, July 30th at 7 pm at the Southern Vermont Natural History Museum.

Ascutney Mountain Audubon will send Phil Morgan, Marshall Wheelock and Alma Beals, all avid Putney Mountain hawkwatchers, to present their fascinating experience and knowledge. They will use slides, stories and life-size silhouettes to explain fall migration and identification of hawks. Together they bring thousands of hours of hawk watching and have seen tens-of thousands of migrating birds of prey from the summit of Putney Mountain.



SEE THE FOREST THROUGH THE TREES

August 27th 10am Meet at the HMCA North Trailhead

Come to Hogback for a morning walk through the woods with forester Pieter van Loon. Bring your questions about tree identification and all other things wood related. We will look for ways to differentiate between red and sugar maple, talk about stresses and threats to the forest, and discuss the value of trees for timber and, perhaps more importantly, their role in the ecosystem related to wildlife habitat.

VERMONT WILDLIFE FESTIVAL

September 17th 10am to 4pm



Join the museum for our second annual wildlife festival! Held here on top of Hogback mountain, thirty conservation, education and outdoor organizations will join us for a celebration of Vermont's natural beauty. Feature presenters include Tom Riccardi's **Live Eagle program**, the Conte Refuge's **Watershed on Wheels** display and The Living Collection's **Canine Cousins** program featuring a live wolf, coyote and much more! Kids' activities, food and family fun presentations and guided hikes will be going on all day!

All events are co-sponsored by the Hogback Mountain Conservation Association