

WESTFORD Conservation Trust

January 2001

Editor, Kathy Deschenes



Living with Fishers and Coyotes



Chuck Bell, DFW

On November 2nd at the Trust's Annual Meeting, members and other attendees were treated to a fascinating discussion of coyotes and fishers. Chuck Bell (pictured above), District Wildlife Manager for the Massachusetts Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, was the special guest. He came with a slide presentation, animal pelts, and a wealth of information on two of the areas rapidly growing species.

Fishers and coyotes share many of the same characteristics: they are opportunistic, breed in March, prey on similar creatures, and are not going away anytime soon. Fishers (sometimes called "fisher cats") are the largest members of the weasel family. They are carnivores and are usually nocturnal. They tend to live and breed in trees, especially pines. Their diet consists of mice, squirrel, and

chipmunks that maintain their normal weight of twelve to sixteen pounds.

Coyotes were the audience's biggest concern. Many in attendance had seen coyotes in the area and were concerned for their safety and the safety of smaller creatures in their care. Chuck put the group at ease by explaining how coyotes operate and how we can all learn to co-exist with them. There were a couple of surprises. First of all, coyotes are omnivores who eat creatures such as squirrels and rabbits, but also feast on birdseed, produce, and berries. They are not always nocturnal, as first believed, especially during the time of year when they are raising their young and, therefore, hunting for food more frequently.

The Eastern coyote is heavier than the Western species and normally weighs between 35 and 40 pounds. There are two dominant adults in a pack--an alpha male and an alpha female. Pups remain with the pack for the first year, after which they are pushed out to make it on their own. Coyote dens are usually in rock outcroppings where they produce two or three pups each year.

Coyotes and fishers are on the rise primarily because of what Chuck called "the fragmented forest". This is an area where there are residential developments surrounded by wooded outcroppings. This combination gives them a

greater food supply while still providing cover. The best protection we have from competing too closely with these creatures is simply "fear of man". It is critical that we maintain this fear to keep them from venturing too far into our yards. Although coyotes are not known to attack children, there is no guarantee that they would not if there were a limited food supply available to maintain the pack. The same theory applies to pets as well.

So what do we do to ensure a peaceful coexistence with these creatures? Chuck provided this helpful list:

- * Do not feed
- * Do not approach
- * Secure garbage
- * Secure pets
- * Keep an "open feeling" in your yard so that you do not attract them AND provide cover at the same time
- * Reinforce fear by being aggressive (make loud noises, turn the garden hose in their direction, throw things in front of them).

You need to let them know that you are the alpha animal. For more information about wildlife in our area, please visit the website for the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife
<http://www.masswildlife.com/dfwele>

Bill Turner Receives Conservation Trustee Award

Marian Harman, Contributor



(L-R) Bill Harman, Bill Turner, Marian Harman

At the Trust's Annual Meeting, William Turner, conservation coordinator for the town, was presented with the first annual Conservation Trustee Award.

The Westford Conservation Trust presented this honor to Turner in recognition of his efforts in protection of open space in Westford. Turner first came to Westford 15 years ago and at that time was the joint Planning Board and Conservation coordinator. In 1994, due to the building boom in town, he became the full-time conservation coordinator. In this position he attends all Conservation Commission meetings and oversees all subdivision plans which occur near wetlands. Much of his time is spent in the field delineating wetlands and relating engineering plans to the actual conditions on the site. He also oversees the protection of rare endangered species and coordinates open space parcels and trails within and between developments. Perhaps the most sat-

isfying part of the work is in the identification of open space parcels which the town may wish to protect.

The following is the text of Turner's acceptance speech upon receiving the Conservation Trustee Award:

"This is certainly a great honor, particularly when there are so many individuals in this town

who give of their time so freely to promote the great cause of conservation. Really, I must say that whatever I have been able to accomplish here has been based on the great support of the Conservation Commission and particularly of the chairpersons I have been privileged to work with including Pat Loring, Bill Beck, Mary Morton, Doug Deschenes, and Eric Fahle, as well as the various members who have served over the past 15 years, of whom I feel I must give particular thanks to the most experienced of Westford Conservation Commissioners, Chet Cook. It is to these people that I dedicate this award.

It has been a privilege to work here, for it has allowed me to pursue that thing closest to my heart. I am a firm believer in the Thoreau dictum that in wildness is the preservation of the world. I have been lucky to have had the opportunity to work in the last great remaining wild places of the northeast, the Adirondack Preserve and the Allagash and

St. John river basins of the North Maine Woods. My work as a timber cruiser carried me on foot miles away from any road into a kind of total wilderness that is really beyond my ability with words to describe. It was in such places that I truly came to understand what Thoreau meant that in the contemplation of wild places we find a pathway to greater truths that lifts us above our day to day life and enables us as we come to appreciate how we are a part of the beauty and grace that are revealed to us. We are made better by such places.

Since my time in the north woods I have discovered that one does not need an Allagash or an Adirondack for such revelations. Here, in Westford, as indeed there are in every town that has not been entirely devoid of their wild spots, there are places of rare beauty preserved that provide us the opportunity not just for physical recreation, but also spiritual recreation. I am proud and feel particularly fulfilled that I have been able to play a part in helping to acquire and preserve some of Westford's remaining open spaces. I am particularly gratified by the continuing strong support the citizenry has given for the efforts of the Conservation Commission and all the other so very dedicated people who work together to assure that these wellsprings of grace are preserved for generations to come. Thank you very much."

Accomplishments and Activities for the Year 2000

As always, there was a great deal of activity performed by the Directors and Associates during the year in the name of the Westford Conservation Trust. Here is just a sample of some of the accomplishments and important notes as provided by Liz McGuire, Clerk for the Westford Conservation Trust:

- * Membership is up to 285 and continues to grow
- * Treasury balance as of 10/31/00 was approximately \$45,000
- * Trust owns a total of 14 parcels of conservation land amounting to 117 acres including the newly obtained Prospect Hill Wildlife Sanctuary on Hildreth Street donated by Priscilla Elliot
- * Trust holds 3 conservation restrictions on 52 acres of land and 42 trail easements
- * Trust jointly holds 14 conservation restrictions on 290 acres with the Conservation Commission
- * Trust members led 8 nature walks for the Abbot School 4th grade classes
- * Trust awarded a \$1000 scholarship to Westford Academy graduating senior Ryan Janoch
- * Trust members led Spring Nature Walks for Brownies, Girl Scouts, students, and nature enthusiasts
- * Trust members worked on the Westford Open Space Plan, the Stony Brook Shoreline Survey, the Westford Academy Service Team project for the rebuilding of a playground at Day School, Westford's first Biodiversity Days Program, the Middlesex County Interim Soils Report, an on-going Wildlife Inventory project, and a Notable Tree Search (three of which were chosen by the state as the largest on record)
- * Trust members continued to purchase, build, and install signs to identify trails, nesting areas, and conservation land
- * Trust members continued to clear and mark trails
- * Trust contributed to two Boy Scout projects; one to build a bridge in the Emmet Conservation Land, the other to construct and place wood duck houses

The Orchard That Almost Wasn't

It was an issue most townspeople thought was closed in December 1999. Town Meeting voted to buy Hill Orchard with the understanding that at least 55 percent of it would be kept as conservation land. An orchardist, Anthony Levick, was secured by the town to work the orchard. Westford's heritage was saved. Or so we thought.

The town Finance Committee viewed the 1999 decision as an opportunity for the land to be held for potential future use by the town. This forced the issue to be reopened at Town Meeting in November 2000. The Finance Committee's argument was to keep the land under the control of the Board of Selectmen just in case it might be useful as municipal property, or as a source of revenue for the town. Surely the vote in 1999 sent a message that the town wanted to preserve the orchard and not have it used for future development.

So off we all went back to Town Meeting. But not before the Westford Conservation Trust let its voice be heard. Marian Harman and Richard Emmet, president and vice-president respectively, wrote a very persuasive letter to the editor of *The Westford Eagle*. Trust members attended town meetings and stated their case. Directors and Associates called 280+ members to urge them to attend Town Meeting and vote to save the orchard. Mailings went out to all members to remind them of the importance of this vote.

And on November 13th, 2000 Town Meeting voted, once and for all, in a more carefully worded Article, to save Hill Orchard by turning the entire parcel over to the Conservation Commission. The Trust would like to thank all of its members for getting out the vote and saving what might be the last orchard in Westford.

Flushing Pond Conservation Gets New Trail

John Piekos, Contributor

On April 30th several members of the Westford Boy Scouts from Pack 96 completed a trail clearing project at the Flushing Pond Conservation Area. The group established the main trail from Flushing Pond Road to Kayla Drive. The access on Flushing Pond is located to the left of the flushing pond overflow that creates Flushing brook. The trail winds through beaver ponds and woodlands to the Conservation Easement located on the Circle of Kayla Drive. The Flushing Pond property is home to many varieties of trees, flora and wildlife. This trail also connects to the new trail through Rolling Meadow and Greystone conservation areas.

The scouts worked very hard clearing branches and small trees and raking the entire trail. Scout members and families that helped with the clearing were AJ and Art Berner, Eric and Paul Sampson, William, Natalie and Paul Sandore, Bruce and Kerry Weaver, Cody and Joe Boswell, Adam, Kevin, Brad and Brian Holub, David, Shiela and Steven Clapp, John and Thomas Roper, Matt Davies, Kent Bloom and Peter and Brian and Michael Hennessey, and Colin Garvey. The scouts also did Tree and Flora identification as part of their Forrester Badges. Brad Holub and Matt Davies have expressed interest in building a Bridge over Blue Brook and other projects to make the area even more enjoyable as part of their Eagle Scout work.

Call for email addresses!!!

In order for the Trust to contact you when there is an important issue, we could do so more efficiently by email. Please help us update our database by sending your email address to:

Peter Ewing at ewingpn@earthlink.net THANKS!

Check out the Trust's new website and let us know what you think!

You can find us at: <http://townonline.koz.com/visit/WestfordConservationTrust>



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Permit # 86
Westford, MA

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