



Pascommuck post

Summer 2005

Wildlife Corridors: *Connecting Conservation Lands for Large Animals*

On a mild evening in early June, while I was cooking dinner, I looked out my kitchen window and saw a moose standing in my backyard. You may imagine that it took a moment for my brain to register what it was I was seeing—a moose in Easthampton!—and in that time, the moose turned and trotted around the corner to the front yard. From there, without looking both ways, it crossed East Street and passed down through my neighbor's yard heading toward the Oxbow. As I watched the moose cross the road, I cringed, since I was sure a vehicle racing up the “East Street Speedway” would strike the animal, but luckily for all involved the moose made it safely across. When, later, I saw fresh moose tracks in Williamsburg, I was tempted to think that the same animal I saw at my house could have left them...and that got me to thinking of how that moose lives on and travels through our landscape.

I live on the Mt. Nonotuck end of East Street, where it's not unusual to see large animals in the backyard. A flock of wild turkeys passes through regularly, and deer commonly enjoy the fruits of my efforts in the garden. During the winter, I've seen tracks of coyote, fox, and fisher nearby. Black bears also move through the neighborhood, and though I'm still waiting to actually see one in my yard, I found fresh bear scat next to my garage just the other day. There's no great mystery about why these animals are around: with the Mt. Tom State Reservation just up the hill from me, there's 2,000 acres of wildlife habitat, primarily forest, out my back door. A short stretch away on the opposite side of the Oxbow, the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary provides an additional 720 acres of forest, field, and wetland habitats. And north and west of that, patches of undeveloped land occur through Northampton up to Williamsburg and beyond, providing additional—though mainly unprotected—habitat.

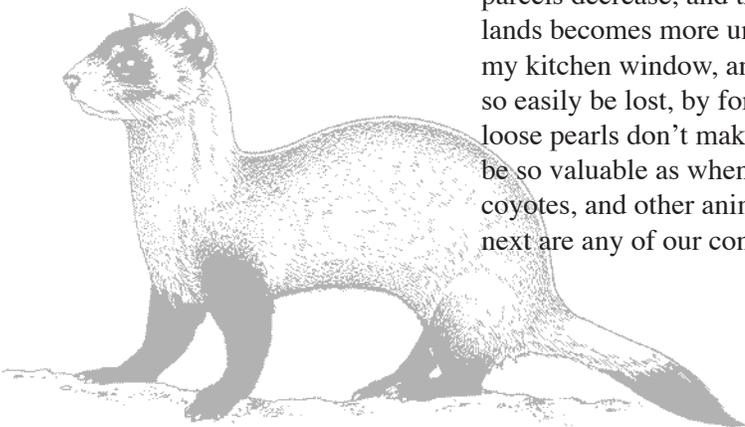
The more than 4 square miles of protected land at Mt. Tom and Arcadia combined seems to provide plenty of space for large mammals to thrive. But if you take a look at the amount of land needed for a species to meet all of its life's needs—a species' home range—a slightly different picture emerges. Species home ranges can vary according to habitat quality, season, and other factors, but for coyotes in western Maine, for example, it averages more than about 19 square miles. The home range for black bear females varies from 6 to 19 square miles, and a male's range can be several times larger. Moose home ranges may be larger than 10 square miles. Even fishers, much smaller than any of these other species, have a home range of more than 7 square miles. Based on these numbers, even the largest blocks of protected open space in our area are inadequate to support any of these species.



So if Mt. Tom and Arcadia combined can't provide enough resources for a coyote, moose, black bear, or fisher, how is it that these species *are* in these places? The answer is that these species are mobile, and they're not thinking of Arcadia, say, as "home." They meet their life needs in the string of undeveloped lands—the necklace of pearls – between Mt. Tom and the hilltowns. If each undeveloped patch, even the largest, were alone, chances are these species would not be able to last there for long. In order to survive, these species need areas where they can travel relatively easily between the larger pearls of habitat, avoiding densely developed neighborhoods, minimizing road crossings, and meeting other requirements.

Such travel areas are called wildlife corridors, and because they are of paramount importance for many of our larger mammals, they are an important focus for the work of PCT and other conservation organizations. Without these corridors, only the very largest tracts of undeveloped land in our region would support populations of large mammal species. My neighborhood in Easthampton is an interesting place to think about wildlife corridors for large mammals, since it is smack between two of the largest pearls of protected open space in the region. PCT plays an enormous role in maintaining a connection between these tracts by protecting the Old Pascommuck Conservation Area on East Street, a property that links undeveloped land on the Mt. Tom side of the road with the Manhan River. The forested ribbons of land along the Manhan's banks in this area provide an excellent, sheltered corridor for many species of wildlife. Additional land PCT has worked to protect, including the Burt farm field and floodplain forest on Clapp Street and Fort Hill Road, and the Old Trolley Line area further upstream, continue the wildlife corridor that allows large mammals to pass from Mt. Tom to Arcadia and back with a minimum of contact with humans, dogs, roads, and other obstructions or stresses.

The importance of the Manhan River wildlife corridor, among other values the river provides, has caused the river to rise toward the top of PCT's conservation priorities. Here, we may be able to preserve, unbroken, the necklace of undeveloped lands that connects Mt. Tom with Arcadia and beyond. But with increasing residential development on East Street and elsewhere, opportunities for maintaining connections between undeveloped parcels decrease, and the survival of large mammals on our conservation lands becomes more uncertain. I cherish the thought that I saw a moose from my kitchen window, and I would be saddened to think that such a thing could so easily be lost, by forces at play far from my home. But as a handful of loose pearls don't make a necklace, isolated parcels of protected land won't be so valuable as when they are linked strongly together. Only when moose, coyotes, and other animals can freely move from one conservation land to the next are any of our conservation lands truly functional.



Tom Lautzenheiser

Old Trolley Line, New Finds

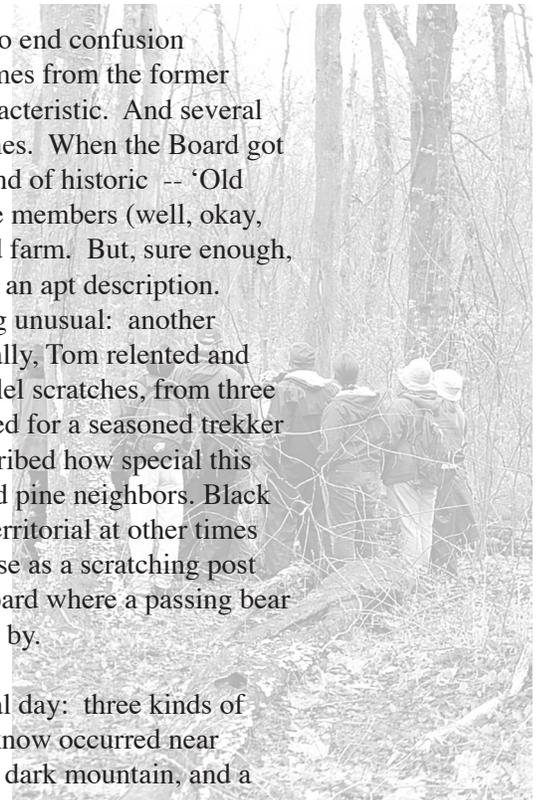
It was a dark and stormy, er, day, and the followers of Tom were gathered around a birch tree. No, that was really the highlight of the May field trip; perhaps it had better wait until later.

Fact is, given the weather (threatening) and attendance for the previous couple of field trips (small), we weren't really expecting much. But much to our delight, eight people showed up for the spring field trip led by Board members (and top-notch naturalists) Marty Klein and Tom Lautzenheiser. Clad in rain gear and hats (and some with gloves, too -- it was that cold), we gathered where the old trolley line crosses Clapp Street and then headed down the green, tree-lined path towards Lovefield Street and Pascommuck's property. When the questions started before we had traveled a scant ten yards, it felt a little dis-loyal to the Trust, as we were still on Mass. Audubon land (they own the trolley line).

Yes, it seemed the wildflowers hadn't gotten the word about the weather -- they were out in force, and each one had to be scrutinized and identified. Our two guides were patient with us in pointing out the identifying features and habits of each plant (and patient, too, when those of us a little slow on the uptake asked them to identify the same plant three or four times). Eventually we ambled our way to where the farm road from Ted Sparko's old homestead crosses the trolley line into an open meadow, purchased by the Trust from the Sparko estate and protected back in 2001. Now this preserved wildlife habitat of field and wooded wetlands extends from Water Department land just off Lovefield almost to Clapp Street. To its north runs the former Pond property, also protected by the Trust and now owned by the Pomeroy family farm of Westfield. And on its eastern edge, the Refuge touches the Burt/Clapp Street property, Pascommuck's most recent 'agricultural preservation restriction' success.

Shortly after the Sparko land was saved, the Board decided it was time to end confusion about which Trust properties were called what. Some had borrowed names from the former landowner; others were described by their location or by a defining characteristic. And several -- and here's where the confusion comes in -- had two or even three names. When the Board got to deciding on a designation for its newest acquisition, it opted for a blend of historic -- 'Old Trolley Line' -- and descriptive -- 'Wildlife Refuge'. Truth be told, some members (well, okay, me) thought this new name was a little grandiose for a modest reclaimed farm. But, sure enough, towards the end of our field trip, we discovered that 'Wildlife Refuge' is an apt description. Tom led us to an isolated birch. He asked us to look around for anything unusual: another wildflower perhaps? Nope. The old Manhan oxbow pond? Nope. Finally, Tom relented and drew our attention to the birch itself. The bark was patterned with parallel scratches, from three to seven feet above the ground. Tom -- who I must say was pretty excited for a seasoned trekker of a good part of the Western Massachusetts wild landscape -- then described how special this tree was, standing out as it does amongst its dark-barked maple, oak, and pine neighbors. Black bear tend to shift camp depending on the season, he told us, and while territorial at other times of year, often cross paths during these transitions. Besides its obvious use as a scratching post (admirably demonstrated by Tom), our birch tree serves as a message board where a passing bear can sniff out from the scents rubbed into the tree who else has wandered by.

Wildlife Refuge, indeed: and Bear Central, to boot. That was one special day: three kinds of trilliums (including one which Tom and the other Audubon staff didn't know occurred near Arcadia), stunning views of the delicate-tinged spring leaves against the dark mountain, and a bear scratching post. Now I can't wait until the next field trip!



The Browning of a Small Town

With all the hoopla in some circles over Easthampton's continuing progress in many directions, this might be an opportune time to review the building boom, and how it has affected the character of the city. Let's travel back to my old neighborhood, where I first realized encroachment was on its way – sometime in the late 40's. I'll attempt to recall, not necessarily in chronological order, the majority of projects in town over the past 50+ years. This should be an eye-opener for newcomers – memory lane for long-time residents.

Growing up in the Bay Avenue/Holyoke Street area then was almost paradise – abundant woods and fields, vacant lots for games, swamps, streams, a frog pond, an old abandoned shack, berries and edible mushrooms to pick. But gradually, just about everything succumbed to individual house lots, while the frog pond, old shack and oak/chestnut forest became Cliffview Manor. From our yard we would skip across Brickyard Brook, zip through Saint Stanislaus Cemetery, then wander within an extensive pine/oak forest bordered on the east and west by streams. We could swing on grapevines in the ravines or gather clay to make figurines and pottery. I can still remember an old heavy-set gent coming each day to sit at the forest edge just to get away from his nagging wife and drink a snort in peace. The East Green Street project now occupies the area.

Another haunt for us was the great red maple swamp between Holyoke and East Streets. We built forts here and crafted swords from the maple branches for our war games. Pheasant hunting was popular in this section. Two streams join in this region to form the beginning of the Brickyard Brook complex. One originates across East Street in the foothills of Mt. Tom, the other across Holyoke Street in the marshes above Broad Brook. All this was filled in – the brooks were piped underground, then a deep trench was dug along the old streambed outside the new project almost to Bay Avenue. The brook ran muddy for weeks! Houses built there should have come equipped with boats in the cellars. So long wetland, hello K-V Homes.

In the early 70's the Plains section (Phelps and Line Streets) experienced a massive influx of housing. It used to be a haven for mushroom pickers and teenage parkers, and remains a primary drinking water recharge area. Later, the Plain and Strong Streets area joined the ballgame – large tracts of farmland and the White Brook watershed became intermingled with the Crown Meadow and Pheasant Run projects. Gads, and to think I took driving lessons on Plain Street when it was a country lane with only a few scattered summer cottages. Hendrick and Brook Streets had their share of house lots and projects also. Some nice farmland, forest and hunting spots were cut into. Brittany Lane, off Hendrick Street used to be a meadow where hang gliders could land. Forested acreage off West, Oliver, and Loudville roads have hosted significant projects. These are part of the Hannum Brook and North Branch watersheds – rich, diverse forest and wetlands here, home to a great number of plant and animal species.

The vast acreage along Florence Road still harbors some farmland, a horse stable, great swamps, forests, the Bassett Brook watershed, diverse wildlife, terrific views of the Park Hill Orchards, and gorgeous sunsets over Pomeroy Mountain. Arrowheads have even been found in this region. Frontage house lots and a couple of projects are in so far. East Street was once a prime scenic road dominated by agricultural parcels. Now house lots dominate the east side, while a condo city is developing on the west frontage. There are still some remnant pastoral scenes on the east side looking toward Mt. Tom, but for how long?

Whew! Enough of this building business. It's plain to see that Easthampton, like most communities, has lost an enormous percentage of open space, with no end in sight. Progress often comes with a high price tag (congestion, maddening traffic, increased taxes, a strain on natural resources, pollution, etc.). The earth isn't flat, after all, and people must realize that unrestricted development can't go on forever. Consequently, just in case the majority doesn't get the big picture, I shall proceed to build a time machine. 2005 and beyond, good riddance. 1950's, here I come!

John Bator

Grant Money Will Address Regional ATV Problems

Across the US and Canada, irresponsible ORV (Off Road Vehicle) users are causing widespread damage to forests, wetlands and conservation lands. Many environmental groups have declared illegal ORV use to be the greatest challenge facing land stewards today. In parts of western MA, illegal riders have created unplanned networks of trails that scar the landscape, damage fragile areas, obscure existing trails and intensify erosion. The majority of this damage is believed to be caused by “renegades” who disregard MA statute 90B, which regulates ORV use. Monitoring and enforcement by environmental police is often ineffective, due to staff cutbacks and the ease with which riders can evade officers. Local police departments face similar hurdles. In fairness, responsible users, such as those belonging to organized groups such as the Western Mass ATV (All Terrain Vehicle) Association, generally ride only in legally authorized areas and perform trail maintenance work as part of an arrangement with the Commonwealth.

In February 2004, the Western Massachusetts Responsible Trail Use Coalition was created in response to a western MA Land Trusts meeting devoted to the issue of destructive ATV use on the region’s trails and conservation lands. It was apparent, from the comments of the 40 attendees, that inappropriate ATV and ORV use is becoming the number one priority for these land stewardship groups. Sales of ATVs and ORVs have risen steeply in recent years, accompanied by a corresponding rise in trespassing complaints and damage to trails and conservation properties where their use is prohibited.

In response to this issue, Marty Klein, from the PCT board and Terry Blunt (MA DCR, Valley Land Fund) assembled a coalition of 10 regional land stewardship organizations and wrote a grant proposal to the federal Recreational Trails program. Recently, they learned that the proposal was accepted and the coalition (which includes PCT!) is eligible for \$20,000 in funding. Under the umbrella of the Valley Land Fund, groups in Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties, will address the escalating problems of ORV use on conservation lands. This grant money will primarily be used to purchase signs and gates aimed at deterring illegal users.

On the individual level, if you observe illegal ORV use, ask the rider to see their written permission from the landowner, make note of their vehicle registration number and file a report with local police, when possible. Those of us who work hard to protect land can help reduce this affront to our landscape only by a concerted effort on several fronts.

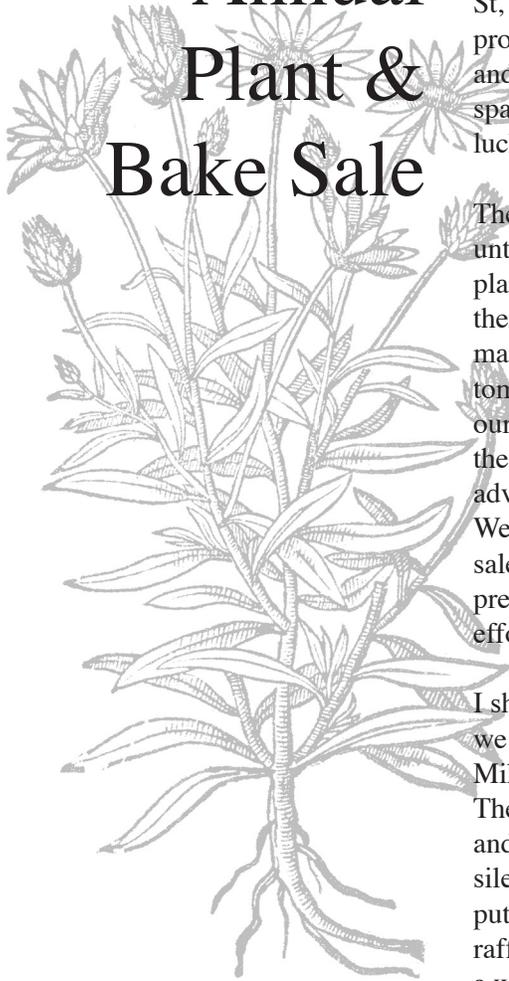
Marty Klein

Volunteers and New Members Needed

The Trust is looking for new members. If you are interested in joining the PCT and/or simply volunteering your time for various work parties doing cleanup and trail maintenance, please contact Dawn Ackley at dawnackley@charter.net.



Annual Plant & Bake Sale



The annual Pascommuck Conservation Trust Plant and Bake sale was held on April 30th, once again in the parking lot at Big E's Supermarket at 11 Union St, thanks to the generosity of Mike Superson. He was also kind enough to provide us with a canopy so that our baked goods, tee shirts, the raffle basket, and our literature on the Trust, spelling out our mission to "preserve open space" would be protected in the event of rain, as had been predicted. We lucked out! No rain!

The sale officially started at 8 am, with plant and baked goods still arriving until well after 10:30 am. We would like to publicly thank each and every plant donor for their gracious offerings to us, year after year. Without YOU, there would be no plant sale. Thank you all! Many Board Members were manning the booth and grounds at this year's event, enabling us to give customers more individual help with their questions and plant choices. Some of our people even offered to deliver plants which customer's could not fit into their vehicle. Thru all of this, John Bator, our President, was there giving advice on the care and growth expectancy of various plants being offered. We also want to thank our "team of bakers" those people who donate to this sale year after year, and also to our new volunteers of baked goods. We appreciate each and every one of you. Thank you so much for supporting our efforts to preserve more of Easthampton's valuable open space.

I should mention that this sale is not just "plants and baked goods", since we also offer Birdhouses, Bat houses, and even Butterfly houses. This year, Mike's brother, Jack, had molded and donated some stepping stones for us. These sold well and we still have some left for the fall sale. Mike also built and donated a 3 pc. Adirondack chair and table set, which was offered at a silent auction. Obviously, these are two talented brothers! Sue Bishop, who puts together some beautiful gift baskets, donated a "garden basket" for our raffle. It contained many beautiful and useful items for the gardener, and was a wonderful surprise to the lucky winner.

As you may have guessed, this was our most successful sale ever and we plan to be back there again next year on or about the same date, and hope to see you then. However, if you can't wait, then just look for us at the upcoming Fall Festival and Trade Show which will be held on Sept. 24th and 25th at Easthampton High School. We'll be in the outside tent and we'll be looking for you – til then – Happy Gardening!

Shirley H. Smith

PCT Conservation Award

This year's recipient of the \$100.00 check was Oleh Koval, a senior at Easthampton High School.

The Trust is pleased to present this award to such a deserving student.

WELCOME

We welcome two new Board Members, Amy Cahill of Easthampton, and Doug Wheat of Florence. Amy has firsthand knowledge of websites, and Doug not only assisted us at the April Plant & Bake sale, but has joined in several work parties. We are pleased to have them aboard!

A Profile of PCT President, John Bator

Date of Birth: May 22, 1941

Address 56 Phelps St, Easthampton

Nicknames Sonny, Clyde, Bushman

Education: Graduated EHS in 1959, U-Mass- Liberal Arts, majoring in Botany, also took Horticultural courses at Stockbridge

Family Status; Married to Christine (Rossi), two children Scott and April, two granddaughters, Leigh Anne and Desiree

Family Pets: Two cats, plus legions of wildlife and neighborhood strays that frequent my feeder and compost pile

Occupation: Landscape technician at Amherst College since 1971

Career background: Worked at my uncle's farm and mowed lawns during grammar school; several summers at Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary; Bartlett Tree in Avon, CT; MacLeod's Nursery in Williamsburg; Assistant Director at Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton, Ct.

Special Interests: Conservation, passive recreation volunteer, Pascommuck Conservation Trust, member of Manhan Rail Trail, Conn. Valley Summit, MassAudubon Society, Spirit In Nature, and past member of Easthampton Photographic club.

Hobbies: Hiking, camping, fishing, organic gardening, and photography

Achievements most Proud of: My volunteer work; helping to build and maintain a special park for the Trust; then having it named after me; recording my song, "Save the Pond", and incorporating it into a slide show presented to various organizations at many events; my landscape creations at the Sacred Heart Parish grounds, a few awards and photos published - and for making so many friends over the years.

Philosophy on Life: Life is complicated and difficult at times, but a holistic approach, practicing moderation in all things, and keeping an open mind can produce little miracles each day.

The Tuesday Afternoon Club of Easthampton extended an invitation to the PCT group to join them on April 5, 2005 at Edward's Library in Southampton. The theme of this meeting was "Visionaries in our Midst". John Bator and Sue Walz provided information on our goals and achievements to date. John also presented a slide show of all the conservation areas entrusted to our care. We wish to thank the Tuesday Afternoon Club for allowing us to share with them not only the mission of the Trust which is "...preserving our past...protecting our future".....but also the slide show illustrating the beauty of the many locations in Easthampton that John has been able to capture on film.

Pascommuck Conservation Trust Board

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Pascommuck Conservation Trust

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On Saturday August 13, from 10 AM until 1 PM, Pascommuck board members Tom Lautzenheiser and Marty Klein will lead an interpretive walk at one of our least known and most beautiful properties - Manhan Meadows. They will explore the floodplain forest and wet meadows along a stretch of the Manhan River, just over the line in Southampton. This will be a good opportunity for bird and wildlife watching, so bring your binoculars. Meet behind Big Y supermarket on Route 10.

www.pctland.org
413-529-9594

