

# the OAK LEAF

a publication of the white oak land conservation society

Fall/Winter 2006

## The Making of a Conservationist

By: Nancy Wilson

The *Oak Leaf* was wondering, Why do some folks grow up to care deeply about open space and its preservation? What goes into the making of a conservationist? So we decided to discuss the question with the Holden couple who has been the longest serving resource to White Oak Land Conservation Society since its very conception in 1977.

The couple, Ruth and Bob Price, can be found in the hilltop house they bought 56 years ago and show no intention of leaving. "We bought this as a temporary place to live in Holden until we found something bigger, but then we never left." Over time they made the house a little bigger and practiced land conservation to expand their property to its present seven acres—a meadow, an expanse of white pine forest, and a swamp bordering Main Street, now ruddy with swamp maples.

Their service to White Oak began 30 years ago when the founding fathers of the organization, George Dresser and his neighbor Phil Truesdell, called on Mr. P, and his legal skills to draw up Articles of Incorporation as a Massachusetts non-profit. Mr. P. was impressed by the gumption of the young men and the merit of their idea, and went to work, drafting the document by which we still operate, and shepherding it through its adoption by the state (*pro bono!*).

In the years since, Mr. P. has helped White Oak in many ways as well as serving on the Holden Conservation Commission. Mrs. P., an artist, created and hand-sewed the multi-hued Carnival banner that announces that event in the library, has cooked up countless vats of Carnival chili, and served it at countless chilly Carnivals, and pitched in to White Oak jobs of every sort.

Their enthusiasm for their conservation work began in the wild places of their childhoods. Mr. P., spending time on his grandfa-



Bob and Ruth Price enjoying a sunny day out on the land

ther's 300-acre farm in Willoughby, Ohio, looked forward to the summer company of his aunt, who was a science and nature teacher at a Cleveland school. Her ability to give names to the fine old trees, the butterflies, and the nighttime constellations rubbed off on her nephew. Mr. P. remembers, "I spent all my time outdoors, swimming in nearby Lake Erie, playing under those very old trees."

Mrs. P. too had the luck of a grandfather who was a farmer, a hundred miles east in Chatauqua County, New York State. She remembers the unusual fencing on his farm—made of pine tree roots tipped on edge and making an impenetrable barrier for animals. Her own father's hobby was botany; as a boy he had shown a remarkable memory for common and Latin names of plants. At the age of 6, he gave his cat the name of *Epigeia repens*. As an adult, he donated some of his land to the Audubon Society. A friend of the family, in Mrs. P.'s childhood, was the naturalist and ornithologist Roger Tory Peterson, and he was a frequent companion on family hikes.

Holden's natural places have been an unflinching source of pleasure to Ruth and Bob Price. A favorite outing is their Sunday morning walk along the Quinapoxet River near Unionville Pond. "The Rail Trail is a wonderful thing as well," they agree.

There is additional local evidence of the Price family gene for appreciating the out of doors. Mr. P.'s father, Willard, traveled to dozens of unusual places throughout his life, and recorded his findings in his books. He incorporated the the natural knowledge he gained in his travels in adventure stories for children, several of them available at the Gale Free Library. The jacket description for *Safari Adventure*, for example, states, "There is a lot of violent action and danger in this; some fun, too, and much to be learnt about animals." Other titles include *Amazon Adventure*, *Diving Adventure*, *African Adventure* and *Elephant Adventure*. A Chinese publisher has discovered Willard Price's adventure series; Mr. P. has a just-published paperback copy in ideographs. The makings of conservationists Ruth and Robert Price weren't hard to discover!



# Mountview School Trails Guide

By: Nancy Wilson

## DONORS ESTABLISH STEWARDSHIP FUND

In March of this year, White Oak celebrated receiving its largest cash donation to date, through a combined gift of \$9,875 from **Richard Harris, Nancy McC. Wilson, and Dorianne Ruml**. At the request of Mr. Harris and Ms. Wilson, White Oak's board has established a new Stewardship Endowment Fund using \$5,000 of the total gift. The Stewardship Endowment Fund is a restricted endowment fund whose income may be used for baseline documentation of conservation restrictions, monitoring of conservation lands and conservation restrictions, and legal actions to enforce conservation restrictions or to defend the integrity of conservation lands.

White Oak is deeply grateful to have members that are willing to donate substantial personal resources to land conservation. If you or anyone you know is interested in making a donation for stewardship or for land acquisition, please call David Sabourin, Treasurer, at 508-829-2204, or email us at [info@whiteoaktrust.org](mailto:info@whiteoaktrust.org). Gifts of appreciated securities or tangible assets (large or small) are also always welcome, and can result in significant tax benefits.

There's a first published work in the Literature of Nature in Holden, thanks to the initiative of a science teacher, the research of her students and some funding by White Oak. Just off the press late spring, 2006, came a 71- page, full color field guide to the flora and fauna found in the woods behind Mountview Middle School on Shrewsbury St.

The book holds full-page descriptions and photos of plants, insects, fungi, invertebrates and vertebrates living in a small wild patch of Holden—a historic inventory of previously uncharted territory. Its authors are the 128 students who were in Jennifer Schmohl's Grade 7 Life Sciences classes for the 2005-2006 school year. The first printed edition of the field guide can be read at the Mountview School library; its contents are preserved on a CD-Rom to be printed into more copies as soon as the school has a color printer to use.

Mrs. Schmohl, who lives in Rutland with her husband, Charles, 4-year old Chip and 2-year old Jayna, has been an appreciative user of White Oak support for several years. An early grant from White Oak covered development costs for photos of life forms taken by her students. The grant behind this year's field guide went for purchase of a digital camera and of its memory card, and then the actual color printing by Kinko.

Each one-page entry, written and signed by an individual student, holds a photo, the common name and formal Latin identification of the plant or animal, and an explanation of its habitat and how it gains nourishment. Then there is one "interesting fact" such as, "You can tell a white pine from a red by the number of needles in a cluster. A white pine has five to spell white, and a red has three, to spell red."

Mrs. Schmohl says, "This was such an excellent project. The digital camera got the kids excited to go out into the woods and take pictures. Then they had to learn research skills, classification by the scientific method, how to use the digital camera, and finally the technology of how to download their work onto the master disk. It was a truly multi-dimensional project."

She credits Thomas Prince school science teacher, Joanne Blum, for her encouragement and help, and the template she followed for the field guide. Mrs. Blum has developed a nature trail beside the school in Princeton and had her students make a field guide.

Each of the Holden elementary schools has a piece of open land or woods just next door, ranging in size from a few acres at Davis Hill to 94-acres behind the Mayo School. Convinced that conservation interest begins in childhood, White Oak has supported teachers in making use of those resources in their curriculum as outdoor classrooms.

There's now talk among White Oak members and the Mayo School staff of connecting Mountview Middle School and Mayo by a walking path through the woods which lie between them.

The field guide turned out to be a swan song for Mrs. Schmohl at Mountview; she has relocated to a middle school science teaching position at the Central Tree School in Rutland, to be closer to home and her own pre-school children. The field guide she and her students left behind for Mountview won't go out of date: Eastern White Pine will continue to be *pinus strobus* and to have 5-needle clusters long after last year's 7th grade authors have grown up.

## Sort of Gives a New Meaning to Preservation...

As a land steward, I often find strange things when bushwhacking along a boundary in the woods, or just wandering over one of our properties on an annual visit. One gets used to finding old tires, dented buckets and similar junk that people take such pains to drag into the forest, but

there are many other objects that give pause for thought. I can imagine the reason why a bed complete with mattress, or a once elegant office chair is now deep in the woods, though both seem eccentric, but a pristine baseball many miles from a field? I have even contributed a piece of woods junk myself -

somewhere on the Paxton border a chipmunk must be contentedly listening to an expensive hearing aid. This year's Strange Find, however, which inspired the title of this article: a labeled bottle of embalming fluid. (No bodies were nearby.) What have YOU found in the woods that is worthy of a report?



# Loons and Ruby Fruit

By: Judy Haran

A devoted group of White Oak members looks forward to the annual pilgrimage to the Wachusett Reservoir for the wild cranberry harvest. This year we've already harvested over 40 lbs of fruit from the shores of Wachusett (contrary to popular belief, wild cranberries do not usually grow in bogs). We often see and hear the Wachusett loons while picking – it's the only sound other than planes and the wind. (The reservoir supports a breeding loon popula-



Edna Tilander harvests cranberries at the Reservoir



Edna shows off her wild cranberries

tion; loons can be seen until the water starts to freeze, at which time they move to the ocean).

Intrepid explorers can find this treasure on their own – follow route 110 north for 1.5 miles from its beginning at route 12 near the old stone church. Park in the grassy area on the left. Walk behind the old colonial house to find Gate 30 (maintained by DCR). Follow the old road behind the gate STRAIGHT ON (20 minutes) until you reach the water. Take a right and follow the shore until you get to the sandy peninsula.

Look for areas covered by a maroon colored vine – these are the cranberries. This year's crop is much larger than store-bought ones, and tastier, too!

Want some help finding the berries? If you're not an intrepid explorer, White Oak is offering individual guided tours to the reservoir throughout November, in exchange for a voluntary donation to our land stewardship fund. Call 774-364-1360, or email [whiteoaktrust@hotmail.com](mailto:whiteoaktrust@hotmail.com) for more info.



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White Oak is a member of the MA Land Trust Coalition and the Land Trust Alliance.

# What Happened to Feral Honeybees?

By: Dick Callahan

Honeybees, (*Apis mellifera*), were introduced to the Americas by European colonists in the mid 17th century. Their ability to produce honey and candle wax and to efficiently pollinate European crops made them important members of the colonial farm. Hives were so prevalent in Colonial times that Indians named the bees, "White man's flies".

Honeybees are social insects that reproduce by swarming, a process in which a large portion of a colony leave the hive with the old queen and much of the honey to establish a new hive. Swarms leave behind a new queen. Individual honeybee queens

are not viable and cannot start new hives on their own. Shortly after their arrival in the US, honeybee swarms "escaped" from colonial farms and established feral colonies, usually in old trees. Initially lacking predators and finding ample nectar and pollen in new world flora they quickly spread across the continent, increasing seed and fruit production everywhere. By the mid 18th century feral colonies were common from north of the Canadian border through South America. Today, however, feral colonies are thought to be nonexistent.

Devastation of feral honeybees began in

*Continued on back page*



PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2006**

**Memorial Hall (*Town Hall*) in Holden**

**7:00 pm**

**“HOLDEN’S LEGACY OF OPEN SPACE - PRESERVE IT WHILE WE CAN”**

Nancy Wilson and Sue Sedgwick will share their recent photos of the landscapes of Holden, both preserved and threatened, and discuss the remaining opportunities to keep some of these landscapes open for future generations.

**Refreshments will be served.**

*A brief board meeting will precede the presentation.*



## Feral Honeybees

*Continued from page 3*

1987 with the arrival of the Asian parasitic bee mite in the US. The Varroa mite is tolerated by its native host but is lethal to European honeybee colonies. The adult mite feeds on adult, larval and pupal bees. Once in a hive, Varroa populations build to levels in which emerging adult bees are greatly weakened and deformed. Common symptoms of infested hives include large numbers of small, weakened worker bees with shriveled wings.

Virtually all honeybee hives in the US are infested with Varroa mites. Beekeepers control Varroa using a combination of cultural practices and chemicals, several of which are naturally occurring (such as formic and oxalic acids, found in many vegetables). Treatments are carefully timed so as not to coincide with honey production. Efforts are being made to produce strains of honeybees which are resistant to Varroa. Someday, if these efforts succeed, honeybees will once again live in old trees deep in the woods.

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