

THE

Oak Leaf

A PUBLICATION OF THE WHITE OAK LAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

FALL 2011

Potter Sanctuary/Porcupine Hill Phase 2

White Oak Is Back for More

by
RALPH PECK

White Oak is excited to reveal to our members our most recent land acquisition project. Over the summer, a 24 acre parcel became available that is adjacent to our existing Porcupine Hill property, located on Paxton Road. Visitors who attended Porcupine Hill's official grand opening ceremony last fall will be familiar with this parcel, which we "borrowed" from the Ecotarium for the event. We have reached an agreement with the Worcester Natural History Society (WNHS), a.k.a. the Ecotarium, to purchase the remaining land that they own in Holden and Paxton. This was the land on which the much-loved Nature Training School ran for over 50 years.

The efforts of Richard C. Potter, who founded the Nature Training School, were formally recognized in 1961 by the creation of the "Potter Wild Life and Bird Sanctuary" on a portion of this property. White Oak intends to honor his contribution by retaining this designation and preserving the land as conservation land for the enjoyment of future generations. Hundreds of Worcester area children benefited from Potter's belief in the importance of children's early experience in the natural world, which led to his creation of the Nature Training School.

The land itself is almost entirely wooded, a mix of hardwoods and white pine, and drains entirely into the Worcester reservoir



Nancy Wilson and Scott Morrison discussing the Porcupine Hill project in front of one of the two buildings on the Potter Sanctuary site.

system and Paxton's adjacent Asnebumskit Reservoir. It provides important wildlife habitat and serves as a migration link between preserved conservation lands to the north, south and east. Its fertile wetlands are home to salamanders and wood frogs, and the forest offers habitat for larger animals such as porcupine, fox, deer, coyote and wild turkey.

There is an established trail system which connects seamlessly into the trail systems of White Oak's adjoining 60-acre Porcupine Hill

trail system, and also with an existing trail system on the adjacent 200 acres of state-owned conservation land. With this land's more gentle terrain and easy access via a long dirt road, we can provide walking opportunities for those with more limited mobility. The land will be available for walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting, wildlife and bird watching, as well as passive recreation,

Continued on Page 3

“I cannot endure to waste anything as precious as autumn sunshine by staying in the house. So I spend almost all the daylight hours in the open air.”

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

Arrived in Holden at a Mile-a-Minute

Insidious Invasive Spotted in Town

Former White Oak President Judith Haran recently made a grim discovery: mile-a-minute vine is here in Holden. This invasive plant can grow as much as **six inches per day**, and can quickly overrun trees and posts, shading out other plants. This native to Asia was first discovered in Massachusetts in 2006, and outgrows and outcompetes native species, causing ecological and economic damage.

Mile-a-minute vine has three particular identifying traits:

1. small, curved barbs along stems
2. triangular leaves (often nearly equilateral)
3. saucer-shaped leaves (called ocrea) at stem nodes

Only plants with all three traits are mile-a-minute; there are a number of lookalikes around Massachusetts, which are not problematic. However, if you spot a plant that you strongly suspect is mile-a-minute, take a sam-



Photo by Leslie J. Mehroff

ple or a picture—making note of precisely where you find it—and go to <http://massnrc.org/pests/mamreport.aspx> to report your findings.

So far, the extent of the Holden infestation appears limited. The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources is following up with the property owners in the hope of getting rid of the plants as quickly as possible, but mile-a-minute vine is a pervasive weed. The seeds can last in the soil for five years or more, and can be spread by wild animals eating the fruits. It is important for everyone to keep their eyes open for this invasive plant and to tell the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources about any sightings.

With thanks to Jennifer Forman Orth, Ph.D., State Plant Pest Survey Coordinator, and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources for data and images. 🌿



Photo by Leslie J. Mehroff

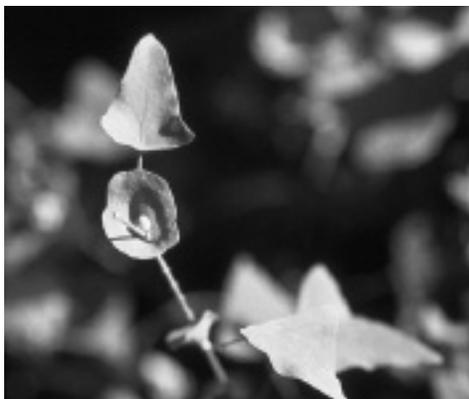


Photo by Jill M. Swearingen, USDI National Park Service



Photo by Leslie J. Mehroff

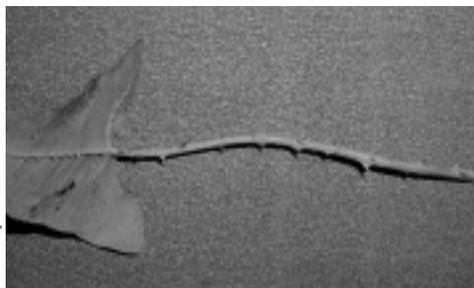


Photo by NCDA & CS



WHITE OAK
LAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Address

P.O. Box 346, Holden, MA 01520

Telephone

774-345-9658

Email

info@whiteoaktrust.org

Website

www.whiteoaktrust.org

Board of Directors

Scott Morrison, President

Erich Mierzejewski, Vice President

Nancy Rocheleau, Secretary/Clerk

David Sabourin, Treasurer

Anthony Costello

Jennifer Leith

Marci Driscoll

Paul McManus

David Driscoll

Ralph Peck

Karen Eisenhauer

Nancy Wilson

George Hamilton

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

White Oak Wants YOU!

Volunteer Recruitment Is Underway

White Oak works hard to preserve open space in Holden. We maintain properties so they can be enjoyed by both the public and by wildlife. To this end, White Oak is looking to rejuvenate the spirit of volunteerism within our membership and in the Holden community at large.

With this in mind, we have begun hosting short monthly work parties to maintain the

land we protect. Projects will include adding new trails, restoring habitat, and improving access to preserved lands. We hope these projects will be enjoyable as well as useful!

The first of these work parties was held in October 22nd at the Porcupine Hill property, where we cleared brush to create a new trail on the property. Our next project will take place at the Henrickson property, on November 19th, where we will work on restor-

ing the habitat in old fields and orchards, and removing brush from the fields in preparation for mowing.

Other projects will follow. We hope that you will consider joining us in November or for future dates. Donuts and coffee will be provided. The work should take about 2 hours each day and will start at 9:30. Anyone interested in volunteering may email volunteer@whiteoaktrust.org for more details. 🌿

Potter Sanctuary/Porcupine Hill Phase 2

Continued from front page



Photo by Anthony Costello.

Left:
The rock that commemorates Richard C. Potter's legacy on the land.

Below:
North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*), one of several species to benefit from extending the protected area.

such as nature photography. We will continue to improve and enhance the trail system, with maps noting points of interest. Cleared areas in the center of the property also offer opportunities for outdoor nature programs both during the day and at night.

The existence of two small wooden buildings on the parcel greatly expands our ability to conduct nature programs for school children, youth groups, White Oak members, and the general public. An observatory building, located on the land, is far too expensive for White Oak to maintain and make compliant with current building and safety codes for buildings open to the public and will, reluc-



Photo courtesy of the National Park Service

tantly, have to be demolished. The demolition of the observatory building is the responsibility of the Ecotarium.

White Oak's agreement with the Ecotarium is contingent on our obtaining a Conservation Partnership grant from the state, which will cover half of the purchase price of \$118,000, plus some costs. This reimbursement grant is only payable when the purchase is complete. White Oak must raise the other half of the purchase price and the balance of total project costs from our members, the general public, and from private foundations. We have already submitted several grant applications, and are awaiting the results of our work. The project's total cost is \$208,980, including a fund to endow, maintain and support the property for public use. The public campaign will be starting soon.

Combined as conservation land with Porcupine Hill, this land project will secure a larger habitat for both plants and wildlife, while expanding and enhancing the public's opportunity to experience the natural world. The whole will truly be greater than the sum of its parts. White Oak will donate a permanent Conservation Restriction on the property to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), ensuring that the land will remain forever undeveloped and open to the public. White Oak will own and manage the land in perpetuity. 🌿



Annual Meeting Is

“One for The Birds”

Marci Driscoll to Speak about Our Avian Neighbors

Sunday, November 6

1 p.m.

Holden Town Hall

Members and non-members are welcome

FREE!

Come one, come all to White Oak’s Annual Meeting, and learn about the secret lives of your favorite neighborhood birds!

Holden is host to many bird species during the winter, and attracting them to your yard is an easy and fun way to add color to an otherwise grey winter landscape. Attendees will also have the chance to create a take-home pinecone bird feeder. Refreshments will be served.

White Oak board member Marci Driscoll is also a passionate bird watcher who loves to share her birding knowledge with others. Marci’s family-friendly presentation style and hands-on activity will appeal to members and non-members of all ages!

The winning entries from White Oak’s second annual photo contest will also be on display during the meeting, before they will be hung at the Gale Free Public Library for a December exhibition.