

the OAK LEAF

a publication of the white oak land conservation society

Spring 2007

One Board Member explains her enthusiasm

By: Teresa Wolcott

I am part of the generation that spent a great deal of unsupervised time outdoors. We were free to roam the woods and wetlands behind my parent's home and as we got older, to travel further afield through meadows to a nearby pond. We were all collectors and observers of the plants and animals of the woods and familiar with their cycles over the seasons. I will never forget the destruction of the property behind my parent's house when I was about 12 years old. Our neighbor, an older boy of about 19, was aware of the plans for development and let all of the other kids that played in the woods know what was happening. We all urged our parents to try to put a stop to development, but the land was privately owned and the wetlands, home to ladies slippers, jack in the pulpits and spotted turtles were plowed up and the land partially drained then planted with shrubs as a nursery for a local landscaper. After 2 years, the landscaper's business went under and the abutters were able to get him to agree to turn the land over to the town for conservation. 25 acres of wetlands were preserved, but the disturbed area, many years later, is a complete disaster. It now is dominated by purple loosestrife and Russian olives along with other non-native escaped plants. This experience inspired me to get involved in land conservation.

I went on to get a degree in Zoology and to work research and development in the pharmaceutical industry for about 12 years. After the birth of my twin sons I spent 7 years as a stay-at-home mom, first in the Boston area and for the last 4 years in Holden. Sharing the excitement of exploring the out-of-doors for hours and reading about the natural world with my children



has been one of my greatest joys in life. When the boys started school, I fed my craving to teach by volunteering at Math and Science night and continuing to spend time outdoors enjoying the many beautiful conservation areas in and around our new home town. I began to look around for a part time job and started working at the EcoTarium, presenting programs to children on field trips. I found the combination of teaching, researching topics and answering the tough questions posed by kids of all ages with the help of the knowledgeable staff at the EcoTarium stimulating and exciting. I was able to put my background in zoology and my years of interest in the plants, animals and the environment to good use and learned an incredible amount about carnivorous plants, animals from microscopic to

large and even a little bit about the stars and planets.

I agreed to become the liaison to White Oak for the Davis Hill School and had the pleasure of meeting Nancy Wilson and Judy Haran and learning a bit about the White Oak mission for land conservation in Holden and of their hopes of engendering a love of the beautiful landscape in our town while providing assistance and enrichment opportunities and encouragement to teachers and students in the area of nature education. I had the pleasure of helping out and spending time at the former Winter (now Spring!) Carnival last April, and was pleased to be accepted as a White Oak Board member at this year's annual meeting. I look forward to spending time with all of you!



Raptor Rapture

What lies behind our fascination for birds of prey? Do we envy their far-sightedness, the hooked beak for ripping flesh, the strong talons capable of carrying a slippery 10-pound fish, or that lazy circling and soaring overhead? Some elements of that appeal brought a full house audience to Holden Town Hall on a late January Saturday morning to hear Larry Keating and meet his 6 varieties of raptors. White Oak sponsored the Meet the Raptors program presented by Marlboro middle school science teacher Keating. To explain his own interest in the hawks of the world, he said, "Endangered species are my passion", and there they were behind him, each in its own custom-built wooden box, listening to their caretaker. Each had been injured in the past and though recovered the birds were too disabled to catch their prey in the wild.

One by one Mr. Keating opened each door to bring out his supporting cast. A red tailed hawk came first, a bird increasing in number in Massachusetts, which can be spotted cruising above the highways and



Red Tailed Hawk

open clearings, and is able to see small prey a quarter of a mile in the distance. With the red tail tethered to his wrist, Mr. Keating walked around Memorial Hall giving many in the audience a first close look at a raptor. The bird is attracted to high bare branches (or the town hall rafters), grows from hatch-

ing to full-sized bird in a mere six weeks, and wears white breast, throat and pantaloons beneath a patterned brown back.

Next out came a peregrine falcon, clocked at 200 miles per hour in flight, endangered by remnant DDT and almost gone from Massachusetts. Falcons are cliff-dwellers who have in the last 20 years adapted to city life, with nesting pairs seen in Worcester, Fall River and Boston. They catch their food (fast food?) on the wing; marked with dark-stripes under its eyes, the gray-backed falcon looked like a wary football player. Mr. Keating continued to introduce his traveling companions - next a barred owl likely to fly up to 2,000 miles in a year, whose sensitive eyes enable him to hunt by starlight, and whose powerful hearing allows even a blind barred owl to catch food. There was a pair of screech owls, and a tiny, 3-ounce saw whet owl, all able to take a good look at their Holden audience as Mr. Keating moved around the room with them.

Survival rates for raptors are horrible; these birds have very tough lives. Up to 80% of the birds die in their first year of life. As fields have been turned into parking lots or buildings raptor habitat has diminished. There are some steps that raptor fans can take to support these birds: protect open space, leave standing the dead trees they like for perches or build a owl nesting box from plans

Mr. Keating had available.

Mr. Keating has worked with birds of prey for 22 years as a falconer, a bird bander and a licensed custodian of raptors. "If you open my refrigerator at home, you'd find dead rats, mice and squirrels. That's what my birds eat. If you keep animals, you don't



Peregrine Falcon

have a hobby, you have a way of life!" The author of this story is pleased to report that a red tail has settled down, or rather, up, in the wooded area just to the east of Wachusett Regional High School.



WHITE OAK LAND
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY

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



The White Oak Board, 2007

COLLEEN ABRAMS is well known to most of us through her leadership of the Wachusett Greenways and Earth day. She previously worked as an elementary school teacher and as a volunteer for a branch of Vista. She also devotes time to the Mayo School butterfly garden. She finds great joy in exploring nearby open lands with friends.

RICHARD CALLAHAN, a biologist, spent the first dozen years of his professional career measuring the effects of chemicals in the environment. He then spent twenty years as an entrepreneur, returning to Central Ma. in 1992. He retired in 2001 and now pursues various community activities including outdoor and biologically based hobbies.

ANTHONY COSTELLO, clerk, was drawn to conservation work as a result of spending his childhood in the English countryside, and has been an enthusiastic naturalist since age five. A child psychiatrist, he is now retired, and lives in an 18th century farmhouse in Jefferson

JOANNE CRYSTOFF grew up in Holden, and has been a long time supporter of White Oak, including serving on the board in the past for several years. She recently qualified as a landscape designer. She serves on our Education sub-committee, and is an enthusiastic proponent of our school program

GEORGE DRESSER, assistant clerk, is one of the founders of White Oak. He grew up and still lives in Jefferson and decided to become a lawyer to specifically work on land conservation. He's been donating his services to area land trusts since 1984. In his free time he enjoys hiking, sailing, and cross country skiing with his family.

KAREN EISENHAUER is a medical writer at Vertex Pharmaceuticals in Cambridge.. She has a life-long interest in nature and was drawn to land conservation because of a wish to balance development with open space preservation. Karen enjoys riding her horse and going on hikes with her Jack Russell Terrier

JUDY HARAN, vice president, works part time as a psychiatrist.. She is on the steering committee of the MA Land Trust Coalition, a statewide land trust service organization, and a member of the Massachusetts Advisory Council for the Trust for Public Land, for which she raises funds by selling books over the internet. She is an avid hiker and cross-country skier.

PAUL McMANUS has managed to turn a life-long love of the outdoors into a career as a wetland scientist. In addition to working with White Oak, he is active in the International Society of Wetland Scientists,

serving as the New England Chapter President. The McManus family spends as much time as possible on the snow, in the woods, and messing around in boats.

NANCY ROCHELEAU, president, who has lived in Holden since 1986, serves on the Conservation Commission, is an officer of the Holden Historical Society, and feels passionately about the environment, having lived in the wide-open spaces of Kansas.

DAVID SABOURIN, treasurer, is an avid amateur naturalist, which gives him relief from his weekday occupation as a financial analyst. His researches have expanded the known location of a species on the state list of threatened species in Holden. On weekends he divides his time between his young family and coaching baseball.

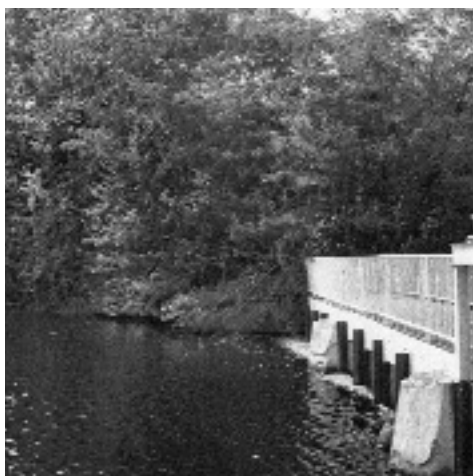
NANCY WILSON has lived in Holden since the 1960s. A former schoolteacher, she has been deeply involved in many community activities, including land conservation, for forty years. She now divides her time between Holden and Grafton.

TERESA WOLCOTT, an environmental educator who works for the Ecotarium in Worcester, loves working with children and teaching them natural history. She lives with her husband in an old house in Holden's historical district.

Volunteers needed for work on Eagle Lake Dam

In October 05 torrential rain threatened many of Massachusetts 3,000 dams, most notably in Taunton, where 2,000 people had to be evacuated when a wooden dam was on the point of collapse. In New Hampshire a dam did fail, with much damage. Shortly after this event the state published amended dam safety regulations, requiring each to be inspected by a qualified engineer, and each owner to submit plans for repair and emergency management.

White Oak has owned the Eagle Lake dam since 1985, and together with the town had the dam repaired in 1993. An inspection this summer showed that more minor repairs are needed to bring it to the stan-



Eagle Lake Dam

dards the state now requires. We have to remove trees that are growing on the sides of the dam, since the roots may weaken the earth and stone structure. The walkway railings and ironwork need painting, and we should make repairs to the concrete piers, and to the sluiceway. We are applying for a permit (work of this type is under the Wetlands Protection Act), and plan to start work in the late spring.

Volunteers please step forward! If anyone fancies himself or herself working with a chainsaw, hauling brush or feeding a chipper, and can spare a few hours, please call Anthony Costello at 829-4829, or send an email to info@whiteoaktrust.org.



**SAVE
THE DATE**

Traditional Carnival *at* Trout Brook


April 29

12 noon until 3 p.m.

Spring won out again this year. After its 28 years as a February winter festival, Carnival was canceled due to a blizzard in 2006. Our flexible planners decided to try instead a Sunday late in April. This time the weather cooperated; scores of anglers of all ages got a chance to try out fishing in the pond, and guests basked in the sunshine. So this year also, Carnival will be a spring event. Old-timers and first-timers are invited to join White Oak members for live music, a sing-along, special programs for children including nature crafts and art, nature walks, a Treasure Hunt, exhibits of spring pond life, and New Games. Volunteers from the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife will bring equipment and patience to introduce people to fishing. The traditional tractor-pulled hay rides and cross-cut saw contest will take place. No admission charge; homemade chili and desserts will be served in the Trout Brook Lodge.

If you would like to help make the fun, or the food on that day, call 508-829-5739 and ask for Nancy.

If you are not sure if you have renewed your membership for the year, please check your address label.

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