



ASHFIELD CHESTER CHESTERFIELD CONWAY CUMMINGTON  
GOSHEN HUNTINGTON MIDDLEFIELD PLAINFIELD  
WESTHAMPTON WILLIAMSBURG WINDSOR WORTHINGTON

## Join us at these upcoming events!

04/21 – Beginning Birding session 1

04/28 – Smile! Capturing Critters with Wildlife Cameras

04/29 – JUST ADDED - Edible Native and Invasive Plants

Learn how to identify, responsibly harvest, and prepare edible invasive plants in this event led by Russ Cohen, author of *Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten*.

05/05 – Spring Ephemeral Wildflower walk

05/19 – The Wondrous World of Mushrooms

05/26 – Spring Hike at Stevens

06/02 – JUST ADDED - Beginning Birding session 2

Are you interested in birdwatching but maybe feel a little intimidated by how much there is to learn? Join us on a guided beginners bird walk on a conserved property in Cummington that includes wetlands, farmlands, forest, and a gorgeous waterfall.

06/17 – JUST ADDED - Father's Day History Hike

HLT Board member and Williamsburg historian Eric Weber will lead a hike to the ruins of the Williamsburg Reservoir Company dam whose failure in 1874 devastated four downstream villages. Eric will tell the story of the disaster as we walk and pause at several stops.

To learn more and sign up for these and other HLT events, visit our website at [www.hilltown-land-trust.org](http://www.hilltown-land-trust.org). While you are there, be sure to sign up for our email list and follow links to our social media profiles for all the latest news!



Watchful broad-winged hawk, photo by Matthew Watson

## You are the reason Hilltown Land Trust can do the work featured in this newsletter!

From conserving land for moose habitat, organizing interesting outdoor events, and engaging future conservation professionals, your support means we can ensure the hilltowns retain their rural character and beauty for generations to come. Without your help, we could not do what we do.

On May 1st, you can help us raise much needed funds and win cash prizes through Valley Gives Day, a local, online e-philanthropy event that helps area nonprofits.

**With your donation, we can work together to conserve important wildlife habitat, offer engaging events, and keep our land, water, air, and community healthy and happy!**

To donate, visit  
[tinyurl.com/HLTVValleyGives](http://tinyurl.com/HLTVValleyGives)  
on May 1st!



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## Hilltown Land Trust Board of Directors

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## Your Largest Neighbor, the Moose!

By Andrew Madden, Hilltown Land Trust Board Member



Author's daughter Anna, with an antler found in Chesterfield

The evidence is common in the Hilltowns: large, distinctive tracks; piles of inch-long pellets; bark peeled from striped maple (moosewood); young saplings and shrubs browsed to chest height; or, if you are lucky, a shed antler. Yet moose sightings are rare enough to be an exciting and lasting wildlife experience. Adult moose approach 1,000 lbs, making them the largest animal in our woods.

*The future of moose is not guaranteed in Massachusetts.*

Rapid expansion of settlements and agriculture in Massachusetts during the 1700s and 1800s resulted in cleared forests and drained wetlands. Many native wildlife species—such as moose, bear, turkey, and many others—were eliminated from the area through unregulated hunting, intentional removal, or habitat loss.

As agriculture shifted westward, forests reclaimed abandoned pastureland. With the return of suitable habitat, moose began to repopulate the area. By the 1990s, moose were again an established, reproducing population in the hilltowns.

The future of moose in Massachusetts is not guaranteed. Throughout New England, populations are under stress from climate change, habitat loss, and conditions such as winter tick and brainworm. Conserving land is a critical factor in protecting our native wildlife.

*HLT's work plays an important role in ensuring that moose will continue to be part of hilltown life.*

Active land management may be equally as important. Reforestation created the opportunity for moose to repopulate Western Massachusetts, but too much mature forest is limiting. Habitat diversity is key to protecting many of our wildlife populations. Moose prefer the young forests that are created through responsible and wildlife-friendly timber harvests.



A pair of moose in Western MA, photo by Tricia Bergland

continued next column

*Your Largest Neighbor, continued*

Hilltown Land Trust's work plays an important role in ensuring that moose will continue to be part of hilltown life. HLT's Stevens Property in Huntington and Westhampton has many characteristics attractive to moose, such as the young forest habitat created by a 2006 selective timber harvest. Combining these managed habitats with wetlands and areas of naturally rich soils creates ideal conditions for moose. When you visit the trails at the Stevens property, be sure look for signs of our resident moose!

## A Passion for the History of the Land



*With his favorite museum object: a former railroad man's retirement lantern*

Dave Pierce's enthusiasm for local and railroad history is contagious. Just ask anyone who came on the Keystone Arch Bridges Trail hike with HLT last November in Chester. Despite the cold, windy weather that day, over a dozen participants came to hear Pierce describe the history of the bridges and railroad during the 2-hour hike.

Pierce grew up in a family of railroad enthusiasts and has an enduring fascination with all things railroad-related. His commitment to preserving and publicizing the neglected history of Chester and the Boston and Albany (B&A) Railroad is given tangible form in the Chester Railway Station & Museum and the Keystone Arch Bridges trail, two causes he has been dedicated to for over 20 years.

*Volunteer event leaders like Dave Pierce make organizing programs for HLT a true pleasure.*

These over 175-year-old bridges, in Chester and Middlefield, made possible the Western Railroad—the longest and highest railroad in the world at the time of its completion. Pierce worked with local and state organizations (including Gateway Regional High School and AmeriCorps) to construct the trail that winds through the woods to each bridge.

Volunteer event leaders like Dave Pierce make organizing programs for Hilltown Land Trust a true pleasure. His dedication to the history of the region and his eagerness to share his time and expertise with others is inspirational. We hope to add another event with him soon, preferably on a warmer day!

To learn more about the Keystone Arch Bridges and their history, visit [keystonearches.com](http://keystonearches.com). If you are interested in leading a program for HLT, contact us at [hltoutreach@thetrustees.org](mailto:hltoutreach@thetrustees.org).



*Dave leading HLT hikers at the Keystone Arch Bridges trail*

## Winter-Averse New Englander Finds Joy in the Cold

*By Carol Wasserloos, HLT Volunteer*



*Friends enjoying the Solstice Hike, photo by Wayne Desroches*

A New Englander who hates winter? Who better to love an outdoor celebration of the Winter Solstice?!

Though it comes at the depth of the cold and darkness, the solstice speaks to me as clearly as it must have done to the ancient peoples who monitored the motions of the sun, moon, and stars. It signals the beginning of growth and renewal, however faint the signs of that rebirth may be.

Those signs were indeed faint last December 21, when I joined sixty hardy souls on a Silent Sunset Solstice Hike, co-sponsored by HLT and Western Mass Hilltown Hikers. It was very cold, and rapidly getting colder, when we left the parking area at the DAR State Forest on foot, skirting the edge of Upper Highland Lake to join the Accessible Trail through the forest toward the far shore. Or maybe it only seemed far—less than a mile of flat walking on an icy open path to a small beach to watch the winter sunset. Spring seemed to be much further.

But magic happened. Though we were a large group, we were silent. No chatter. No phones. I could hear the lake ice groaning and cracking. I could hear the wind in the evergreens overhead. I could hear the chirps of chickadees, downy woodpeckers, and nuthatches as they used the last moments of the day to find the calories they needed to survive the night.

It wasn't a long wait on the beach for the highlight of the hike. On the shore, I watched the sun sink quickly below the tree line and then the horizon. Pale pink clouds lit the icy lake with pastel reflections, fading as quickly as they had appeared. Then came pale peach, the signature of a winter sunset in cold, calm weather, then robin's egg blue, then darker hues. I don't think I was alone in feeling the emergence of the sacred into the ordinary world.

Reluctantly, we began to retrace our steps in silence, aware of the dangers of an icy path in the rapidly encroaching darkness. This would be the longest night of the year. But with sunrise in the morning, the light would begin its return. On this solstice eve, we all, I felt, were honoring our part in the world, and honoring the souls of all those who had preceded us, watching the movement of the sun as they awaited the return of spring.

## UMass Students Learn on Our Land

When asked what is remarkable to her about HLT's Conwell property, Jessica Duquenoey enthused, "The property is beautiful! There are lots of hemlock stands and I love hemlocks."

Duquenoey and her colleague, Bruce Traban, are graduating seniors at UMass Amherst, majoring in Natural Resources Conservation with a concentration in Forest Ecology. This semester, they are taking a Forest Resource Management class, which centers around developing a natural resources inventory for an outside organization. On the advice of a professor, Duquenoey and Traban reached out to HLT to inquire about collaboration.

Their phone call couldn't have come at a better time! The Conwell property in Worthington was donated to HLT this fall by Cynthia Conwell Cook and Peter Cook, and a natural resources inventory will capture the current ecological picture of the land. It will also enhance the land management plan we are developing as part of the conservation process.

*"It's great to see how well the neighbors have maintained the property and trails."*

A natural resources inventory records information about the organisms that exist on a property at a point in time. It includes not only a list of species, but also the age and types of different tree stands, evidence of current or potential threat of invasive species, and what the land could look like in the future. Recording this information is an essential element of conservation work, as it gives a baseline to assess ecological change. Any negative biological developments, such as the spread of an invasive species or disease, can be noted and dealt with in a timely manner.



*Checking GPS coordinates in the woods*



*Jesse and Bruce measuring a white pine at Conwell*

"It's great to see how well the neighbors have maintained the property and trails," said Traban. "The history of the land is really interesting, and it's cool that it will soon to be open to the public."

Both he and Duquenoey stated that they "wanted to work with an organization that wanted to work with us. Sally [Loomis, HLT's Executive Director] was very enthusiastic about our project."

Traban and Duquenoey are excited to be working with HLT to make a piece of land a valuable resource for the community. We at HLT are excited to play a part in the education of future conservation professionals, and are grateful that they chose us as a beneficiary of their expertise!