



Grafton Land Trust, Inc.

www.graftonland.org

Fall 2012 Newsletter

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Grafton Land Trust Newsletter

P.O. Box 114, Grafton, MA 01519

Lori Muhr and Michael Urban
Editors

Julie Norberg, IBA Print Shop
Design

Dear Grafton Land Trust Member,

While we are experiencing uncertain times, both economically and environmentally, one thing that is certain is the unwavering support and commitment of our Grafton Land Trust members. We stand united for a common cause- open space preservation. Our success isn't measured by land acquisition alone, but by the combination of educating about, advocating for and spreading an awareness of the importance of open space preservation and balanced growth. By that definition, we have been tremendously successful and our message rings loud and clear.

But as I marvel about 2012 and our great team of conservationists, I can't neglect the importance that both past and future play. Our past is long and notable. The legacy of the GLT founders and early members is evident in the 800 plus acres of open space in our town. And the future of the GLT has never been brighter. With a strong and committed Board of Directors, and a growing membership, we are determined to work harder than ever to protect and maintain our precious open spaces for future generations of people and wildlife.

This edition of the newsletter contains the GLT Membership List for 2012. When you see your name in print along with the rest of this "team" I hope you feel proud to be included among such caring and generous individuals who are making a difference. We are proud to stand beside you on our mission of preservation and we are extremely grateful for your support.

Sincerely,

Michael Urban
GLT President



Photo by GLT Member, Dean Cerrati

GLT Honors Richard “Dick” Dion for Long Time Service

On Sunday, October 7th, The Grafton Land Trust (formerly known as the Grafton Forest Association) will honor Richard “Dick” Dion with a trail dedication to recognize his many years of service. A U.S. Air Force veteran who served during the Cold War ('56-'60), Dick and his wife Carmen have lived in Grafton for 35 years.

Dick’s commitment to the GLT spans decades. Shortly after moving to Grafton, Dick received a gift to the Grafton Forest Association (GFA) from his cousin, who thought the GFA and Dick would “make a good match”. He joined the GFA Board of Directors the following year, and proved his cousin right.

As a long-time director, and outdoor enthusiast, Dick worked passionately as President in 1986, 1987, 1988, 2003 and 2004 and most recently as Real Estate Property Manager. Having served the most years of anyone on the GLT Board of Directors, Dick has held every executive position (president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and property manager) multiple times. The GLT is grateful to Dick for his service and for his commitment to preserving wildlife habitat and Grafton’s Open Spaces.

All GLT members, as well as the public, are cordially invited to join us at the Williams Woods property at 2:00 PM on October 7th, where the GLT Board of Directors will name “The Dick Dion Trails” in honor of Dick. A celebratory reception at the Community Barn will follow the dedication. Please check www.graftonland.org or call Shauna at 508-887-0065 for details and to RSVP if you plan to attend.



Dick Dion shaves the Karluk River bank with two Kodiak bears. Kodiak, AK
Photo by Mike McKeown



A strand of *Phragmites Australis*.
Photo by Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut

INVASIVE PLANTS - Another Story

by Donna Onacki

Recently, we’ve been hearing the stories of invasive plants that are overtaking the meadows, wetlands, and other natural spaces, and choking out “natural” plants. I have begun to ask myself some questions because these stories aren’t making sense to me. Who decides what is invasive? If purple loosestrife is invasive then why isn’t golden rod or ragweed? I have always thought of plants as life sustaining and having an intelligence of their own. Because nature has an ebb and flow and climate change is upon us, it might be wise to ask why certain plants are here in abundance. Humans have had quite an impact on this planet and perhaps we now need to take nature seriously and listen to the powerful messages that are being sent our way.

These questions and feelings that I have regarding invasives, and plants in general, have led me on my quest for answers that might just formulate a different story. I am particularly interested in the facts behind Phragmite, Purple Loosestrife, and Japanese Knotweed since they are so abundant in our area and because I’ve heard and read so much about the need to eradicate them. Two sources, *Invasive Plant*

Medicine, the Ecological Benefits and Healing Abilities of Invasives by Timothy Lee Scott and *The Secret Teachings of Plants* by Stephen Harrod Buhner have valuable information about invasive plants. I’ll share a few interesting facts to get you started on perhaps your own plant study.

Phragmite, a beautiful and gracious reed plant, is an important bioremediating plant for wetland ecosystems, and is naturally dispersed among disturbed waterways. While kayaking on the Quinsigamond River a few years ago, I spotted a healthy patch of Phragmite waving gracefully in the breeze just before the waterfall in South Grafton. I sat and observed the surroundings which harbored a fair amount of debris, including a capsized barrel anchored in the sand beside the Phragmite patch, and there, straight ahead of me, lie a luscious green stretch of grassy land. Red winged blackbirds flew overhead while, amid these beautiful reed plants, ducks glided along the water surface and turtles rested on nearby sand. Amazingly, this patch of Phragmite felt like it was in the right place. According to Timothy Scott, under scientific scrutiny this plant has the ability to effectively clean sewage and wastewater removing 15 heavy metals and many toxic pollutants including herbicides, petroleum, TNT, DDT, PCB, phenols, and sulfides. Its native origins are obscure and records indicate that it has been present on some sites for as long as 3,000 years. Besides cleaning up and monitoring contaminants, Phragmite also provides wildlife with an abundance of food.



Purple Loosestrife at Potter Hill Meadows
Photo by Ken Webb



Japanese Knotweed Photo by Ken Webb

Another interesting plant is the Purple Loosestrife, which was introduced to North America from Europe and Asia sometime in the 1800's. Originally revered as a beautiful ornamental plant, it has somehow, over time, become the poster plant for invasives. At what point is a plant considered native? A beautiful dark pink plant, it can be found in wet meadows and wetland areas. I love walking my dog in the nearby wet meadow which has beauty year round as it changes with the different seasons. Surrounded by an old wooden fence, this meadow is at its most gorgeous from late July into early August when it's in full bloom with Queen Anne's Lace, Golden Rod, Joe Pie Weed, and Purple Loosestrife, with beautiful weeping willow trees in the background. Birds, butterflies and bees can always be seen in this meadow, a testimony to its health. Purple Loosestrife is another plant that rehabs wetland areas with its ability to absorb nitrogen and phosphorous from the runoff of fertilizer and pesticides. It also prevents erosion in disturbed wetland areas. Additionally, this plant is an important provider of nectar and pollen for bees, whose honey, in turn, has a very nice and subtle flower flavor as well as medicinal properties.

A third plant of interest is the Japanese Knotweed. Grafton is home to many wonderful waterways, wetland areas, and open spaces where deer are prevalent, increasing our chances for tick bites and Lyme disease. Japanese Knotweed is very successful at treating Lyme disease and, according to Stephen H. Buhner, it can move into an area six months to a year before the disease arrives. Originating in its native Japan, just as the name indicates, this is an unusual plant because it is an exclusively female plant and is the pioneer plant of volcanoes according to Timothy Lee Scott's *Invasive Plant Medicine* book. Japanese Knotweed will gravitate toward polluted areas and can clean up a chemical wash of roundup. Its roots are strong and tenacious and help the plant spread.

This is just the beginning of my invasive plant study, but there seems to be a common thread here. Most plants have a purpose and many clean up the pollution of humans. We need to look at plants as an intelligent life form with an important environmental message. We need to listen to the messenger, not eradicate it. Not only do plants have ecological benefits, they also have medicinal benefits. It is concerning that Federal Advisory Committees intended to "manage" invasives are actually comprised of employees of Monsanto and BASF Chemical, herbicide manufacturing specialists. It is important to gather all the facts from both sides before we remove what nature sends here to help us. As stewards of open space, we need to become advocates for plant life. Hopefully you are motivated to begin your own research on the subject of invasive plants and the many benefits they have- there is no better time than this.

New Hunting Policy Approved

The Grafton Land Trust (GLT) recognizes hunting as one of many viable recreational uses of our properties. We also recognize the need to maintain open lines of communication between our membership, hunting permit holders, abutting landowners and the public-at-large with regard to all aspects of our hunting program. To that end, the GLT Board of Directors recently approved a new hunting policy.

The policy, which was written with both hunters and non-hunters in mind, serves as an excellent educational document and establishes a set of reasonable controls to ensure the safety of all those utilizing our properties during hunting season.

We invite all interested parties to review our new hunting policy, which can be found at www.graftonland.org.

A few of our other Business supporters!

Please patronize these partners of the Grafton Land Trust



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STUDENT

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BUSINESS/INDUSTRY

Citizens Bank
 Millbury National Bank



Pigs turn garden waste into delicious pork. They also help make the compost.

Beautiful heirloom vegetables at the Grafton Farmers' Market - all grown without chemicals.

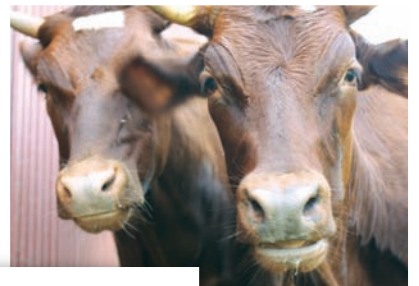


Barley, a new addition to farm and family.



Meet Mack and JJ, our new oxen. Pretty soon they'll be pulling their weight around the farm.

Many colors of heirloom carrots - a big hit at the market each week.



Family Tweets

LISTENING FOR NATURE'S MUSIC

By Susan Thomas

For some, the beauty of nature lies in its diversity and order. For others, it's the drama of the cycle of life. Still others are mesmerized by the colors and patterns that inspire artists. Yet who can deny the singular, emotional power of sound that emanates from our natural world? It's often the tones we hear in the fields, ponds, woods, and back yards that allow us to take a deep breath and slowly release the stresses of the day, washing away the beeps and rings of electronic devices, the slamming of doors, the strident voices from radio and TV, the screeches and honks from motorized vehicles, and the hundreds of competing human voices.

The first thing that comes to mind for many people when considering nature's music is the spring-time calls of songbirds. But there are numerous other melody-makers in nature, including those we can witness over the next several months from late summer into winter.



A Katydid sits camouflaged on a leaf. Photo by Google Images

Who of us hasn't been lulled into a gentle sleep on a hot summer night by the timeless call of katydids? These insects, along with their relatives the grasshoppers and cicadas, are members of the order Orthoptera. Katydids, in the family Tettigoniidae, have leaf-shaped wings that are structured in a manner that creates the unique "katy-did", "katy-didn't" sound we all learned as children. Males rub their forewings together to attract females during mating. A row of serrated teeth called a file is located on the lower part of the wing. It is drawn across a stiff plate on the upper part of the wing. The vibration of the thinner parts of the wings then amplifies the sound produced by this motion. What we may commonly call chirping is known scientifically as stridulation. The "ears" that permit other katydids to hear this vibration are located on the 'knee' portion of their front legs.

The well-known and highly beloved crickets are in the family Gryllidae, and have a similar song-producing mechanism. It is difficult to choose which is more wonderful to hear—the solo of a single male cricket that touches your soul like Chester from *The Cricket in Times Square*, or the chorus of hundreds of individual crickets blurring discrete sounds into a hum that fills our ears and resonates in our belly, making us feel at peace.

One of the quieter but heart-quickenings sounds of late summer is the faint fluttering of bat wings overhead as these hungry aviators soar, bank, and dive for their dinner. Unlike the fluttering produced by the feathers of birds, bats' wings are comprised of a thin membrane called the patagium that allows for precise maneuvering in the air. Bats in New England belong to the suborder Microchiroptera, and they use echolocation—emitting a rapid series of high-frequency squeaks and then listening for reflected sound—to find their insect prey. While these sounds are beyond the range of human hearing, bats make other social communication sounds that we can detect if we allow some quiet moments.

Gradually, summer's hot, still air is replaced by cooler, drier breezes in the fall, and it is then that a new section of nature's orchestra takes center stage. Dry leaves rustle across the ground and winds start picking up speed in the treetops in preparation for seasonal weather changes. Acorns and hickory nuts plunk and thump onto car hoods and shed roofs when the nuts become too heavy to hold on any longer or when a frisky squirrel rushes by, knocking them off. And speaking of squirrels, it will soon be time for these active hoarders to start scratching through leaf cover for nuts to store away for the coming lean months. At times, a single squirrel can make enough noise to warrant us wondering what enormous beast is lumbering around out there.

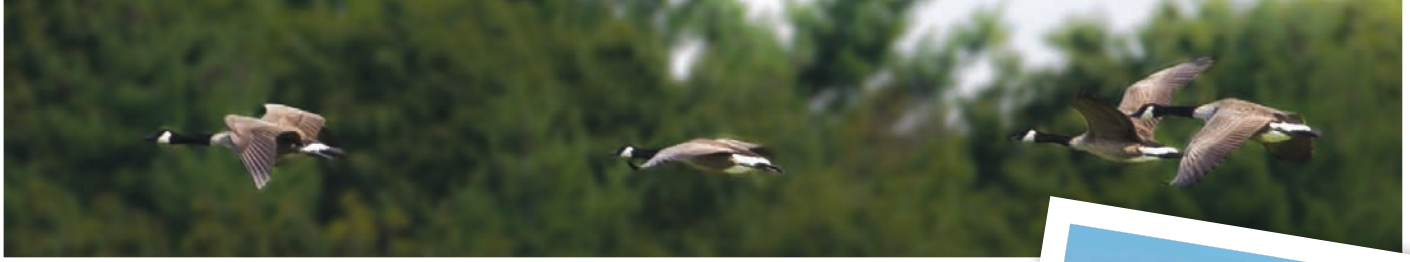
The percussion section makes its entrance in late fall with heavy rains dripping, then pattering, and finally pounding on all surfaces, creating a sound that can block out all others. Winds howl, empty trees creak and groan, and frozen lakes shoot out impossibly deep booms and sharp cracklings when temperatures drop and the sounds of katydids become but distant memories.

Then, one night in late February, when many have stopped listening to nature, the delightful "who cooks for you" call of the barred owl stirs the quiet darkness and reminds us that new life is in the works. The spring frogs and birds will soon be warming up and we'll all be ready for a new season of duets, concertos, and symphonies.

Sometimes, it seems that all we need is the melody and harmonies of nature to remind us that life is good. There are yogis who became enlightened in an instant, just from listening to the sounds of nature. Think what therapeutic and wondrous outcomes you will enjoy by listening to nature for a long summer evening, or a relaxing autumn afternoon. Bravo! Your concert hall awaits you.



Katydid with close up of wing structures used in producing sound. Image from www.musicofnature.org



Canada Geese in Flight

Photo by Dean Cerrati

THE GREAT RACE By Troy M. Gipps



Snow Goose Landing by Google Images.

For most of the year, wildlife activity peaks at the edge of days. At first glance one might surmise that wildlife lead a rather relaxed life, but all roads lead to winter and there is little time to spare. The beat of every wing and the step of every paw and hoof are purposeful actions driven by the change of seasons. At no time is the great race more visible than in autumn.

When Grafton's hills are set ablaze by fall color and ponds and lakes begin to freeze up north the drumbeat quickens. Evidence can be seen all around us. Gray squirrels scurry in the seemingly endless pursuit of acorns. Brightly colored songbirds vanish, one by one, from backyard feeders. The rut propels bucks, which are solitary and elusive by nature, to chase does throughout the day. Beavers step up their pace of cutting and submerging tree limbs that will serve as their sole food source when winter locks them beneath ice. But one of the most amazing visual spectacles signaling the approach of winter is the migration of waterfowl.

Across North America, tens of millions of ducks and geese are forced to fly south as freezing temperatures restrict their access to important food sources and limit the availability of open water upon which they spend the balance of their days. Flight birds from the north, pushed southward by cold fronts, join resident ducks and geese that are in turn pushed south by increasingly colder temperatures.

Grafton lies in the Atlantic Flyway so most of the waterfowl passing overhead originate from the Canadian Maritime Provinces, as well as northern New England. Lesser-known species of waterfowl from the Central Flyway will sometimes drift eastward through Massachusetts on their southward journey.

Look skyward in autumn as temperatures drop you will begin to notice larger and larger flocks of ducks and geese. Smaller ducks with fast wing beats that appear for only an instant as they pass over your part of town are likely wood ducks, which are arguably the most colorful of all North American waterfowl. Their speed and aerobatics truly impress. Flocks of larger ducks with slower wing beats are usually mallards or the lesser-known American black duck, which breeds in the Canadian Maritimes. The familiar green head of the male mallard and the unique markings and bright red-orange feet of the black duck are tough to see when birds are in flight, so size and wing cadence are the best way to identify these birds.

Although Canada Geese are increasing their year round presence in Massachusetts, they remain the most recognizable of all migrating waterfowl in our region. Typically heard before seen, the honks of these migrating geese can be heard from great distances and it sometimes takes a keen eye to spot their V-shaped flight formations as they pass by at impressive heights.

Sightings of Snow Geese over Grafton are rare, but increasing. They are bright white, as their name suggests, with black-tipped wings.

The Snow Goose breeds in large colonies on the Canadian and Northern Alaskan tundra, from the high arctic to the subarctic. There are three regional populations, one of which lies in the east, and their numbers have grown to such an extent in recent years that the birds are causing considerable damage to their limited breeding habitat.

Snow Geese are possibly the noisiest of all waterfowl. Their main call, made by both males and females, is a nasal, one-syllable honk. Distant calling flocks are reminiscent of a pack of baying hounds. Their flight call is a continuous chorus of shrill cries, hoarse honks, and high-pitched quacks, audible both day and night. For these reasons, you will likely hear Snow Geese before you see them.

Snow Geese typically fly at very high altitudes during their epic migrations so binoculars are often needed to get a good look at them. If you are lucky enough to see a flock land you will witness what looks like a bright white tornado of geese spiraling downward and spreading out in an ever-widening circle of hundreds, if not thousands, of Snow Geese.

The mantra of all wildlife in the face of winter's approach is "adapt or flee". So regardless of where your wildlife watching interests lie, autumn provides you with a front row seat to the greatest race of all.

2012 Grafton Land Trust Events

Visit www.graftonland.org for details and photos of all events!

SEPTEMBER

September 9th

Good Dog Trail Race and Canine Social.

Join us Sunday Sept. 9th at 3PM at the Lions Club for this ultra fun event as we try to keep up with our canine friends on a 3 mile trail run/walk in Gummere Woods.

For registration and photos of last year's event, visit www.graftonland.org.

OCTOBER

October 6th

Presidents' Pancake Breakfast and Fall Hike.

Have a great breakfast with us and then head out on the trails! 8AM at the Community Barn. Call Shauna at 508-887-0065 or email us at info@graftonland.org to RSVP.

Tickets available at the door.

~

October 7th

Dick Dion Trail Dedication.

Sunday October 7th at 2PM at Williams Woods. We'll take a short hike to the dedication site on the "The Richard "Dick" Dion Trails". Arrangements can be made for those unable to walk the trail.

After the dedication, join us for a reception at the Community Barn. Call Shauna, 508-887-0065 or email info@graftonland.org for questions and to RSVP.

October 14th

Craig LeClaire/Rich Vacca Memorial Trail Race.

Sunday Oct. 14th. Enjoy this wonderful annual trail race through some of the GLT's most beautiful properties. 10AM at the Community Barn.

Proceeds benefit the LeClaire/ Vacca Scholarship at Grafton High School, the Community Harvest Project and the Grafton Land Trust.

~

October 20th

The Big Pumpkin Ride has been postponed until 2013.

NOVEMBER

November 9th

Annual Meeting, Dinner and Silent Auction.

Join us for dinner and a silent auction in celebration of a year of amazing accomplishments.

~

DECEMBER

Visit our table at the **Grafton Celebrates the Holidays** event and visit our properties for some winter fun too!

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