



## CLC's Annual Meeting on Thursday, April 5th

Citizens for Lexington Conservation will hold its annual meeting on **Thursday, April 5, at 7:00 pm in the large lecture room at Cary Memorial Library**. Our featured speaker will be Professor Richard Primack, Professor of Biology at Boston University. The topic of his talk will be "Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods: Effects on Plants, Birds, and Insects."

Prof. Primack is an expert in plant ecology, conservation biology, climate change biology, and tropical rain forests. He has carried out extensive fieldwork in Malaysia, New Zealand, Japan, Central America, and other countries. He was the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Biological Conservation* and is the author of two widely used conservation biology textbooks for which 35 foreign language editions have been produced with local co-authors adding in examples from their own countries.

For the past 16 years, Prof. Primack and his colleagues have been investigating the effects of a warming climate on the plants, birds, and insects of Massachusetts, with an emphasis on continuing the observations made 160 years ago by Henry David Thoreau in Concord. Prof. Primack also has been involved in educating the public about the effects of climate change through public talks, interviews, and popular writing, including a recent book about his work: **Walden Warming: Climate Change Comes to Thoreau's Woods**.

The meeting is open to the public. Light refreshments will be available, and Prof. Primack will have copies of his book for sale. Please join us.



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**2018 CLC dues are payable now.** The status of your dues payment can be found on the address label of snail-mailed newsletters, or near the top of the e-mail announcing this issue. If it says Dues Paid April 2017 (or earlier), it is time to renew your membership for 2018.

Pay your dues using PayPal on the CLC Website (<http://www.clclex.org>)

or mail to:

CLC, Inc.

P.O. Box 292

Lexington, MA 02420-0003

Suggested membership levels:

\_\_\_\_ \$20 (Twig)

\_\_\_\_ \$50 (Branch)

\_\_\_\_ \$100(Tree)

\_\_\_\_ \$ (Other)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ New Member

\_\_\_\_ Renewal

\_\_\_\_ Go Green. Check here if you would like to have your newsletter in color with live links, using a download link from an email, instead of the paper snail mail.

Membership fees support our organization. CLC is a registered 501(c)(3) organization and all contributions are tax deductible.

## Positions Available

**Walks Coordinator:** CLC conducts walks on conservation and other open space lands in Lexington during the Spring and Fall. We are looking for a volunteer to serve as Walks Coordinator. The duties include contacting previous and potential walk leaders to arrange scheduling details, and publicizing the walks through local media outlets and listserves. Participation in bi-monthly board meetings, while beneficial, is not a requirement. Contact Eileen Entin ([eileenhome@gmail.com](mailto:eileenhome@gmail.com), 781-862-6418).

**Events Coordinator:** Each year, CLC features a speaker on conservation, resource, or environmental issues. To deepen and enlarge our educational focus, we are seeking a new film/speaker coordinator to take on the tasks of identifying, scheduling, and publicizing videos and speakers. Our plans are to offer 3-4 events per year as an exciting new way for CLC to continue to raise public awareness regarding local, regional and national environmental issues. Contact Eileen Entin ([eileenhome@gmail.com](mailto:eileenhome@gmail.com), 781-862-6418).

## **CITIZENS FOR LEXINGTON CONSERVATION 2018 SPRING WALKS**

*All walks are free and open to the public*

### **Birding Walks:**

#### **Saturday, April 28, 7-9 am, Birding Wright Farm**

Wright Farm is Lexington's newest conservation property that has not been previously birded by the public. Let's see what gems are hidden away on this bucolic former farm. The address is 241 Grove St, where parking is limited, so carpooling is encouraged. Parking is permitted on Carriage Drive opposite the farm.

Walk Leaders: Keith Ohmart ([kohmart@verizon.net](mailto:kohmart@verizon.net), 781-862-6216), Bobbie Hodson ([robertahodson@comcast.net](mailto:robertahodson@comcast.net), 781-861-8421)

#### **Wednesday, May 9, 6:30-9 am, Birding the Western Greenway**

(Co-sponsored with the Menotomy Bird Club)

The Western Greenway consists of over 1,200 acres of interconnected open space in Waltham, Lexington, and Belmont. There has been little documentation of migratory or breeding birds in many parts of the Greenway. We will return to a section in Lexington visited last year that most likely few Menotomy Birders know or bird, where we will be looking in particular for a repeat of last year's Blue-winged Warbler sighting. Meet at Cart Path Lane, off Walnut Street in Lexington.

Walk Leaders: Roger Wrubel ([rwrubel@massaudubon.org](mailto:rwrubel@massaudubon.org)), Keith Ohmart (781-862-6216, [kohmart@verizon.net](mailto:kohmart@verizon.net))

#### **Sunday, May 13, 8-10 am, Warbler Walk in Lower Vine Brook**

Warblers are small, beautiful tropical birds that fly north to breed. Over 15 different species of warbler stop off in this sheltered area during their spring migration to the forests in northern New England and Canada. Depending on the weather and the foliage, you may see a dozen species in a morning. Children with adults are welcome. Wear boots if it's wet, and bring binoculars and a bird book. No dogs. More than light rain or lightning will cancel the event. If the weather is uncertain call the leader. Meet at the entrance to the Lower Vine Brook conservation area opposite 121 Vine Street.

Walk Leader: Harry West (671-461-9500, [hwest2020@gmail.com](mailto:hwest2020@gmail.com))

### **Nature Walks and Activities:**

#### **Sunday, April 22, 2-4 pm, Lincoln Park Garlic Mustard Pull**

Garlic mustard seeds can take up to seven years to sprout, which requires repeated efforts to control and eradicate this aggressive invasive species. Come join CLC's multi-year effort to pull this year's progeny from along the pathways in Lincoln Park. Bring gardening gloves. Steady rain cancels. Meet at the Fitness Path Trail entrance on Worthen Road across from the LHS playing fields.

Leaders: Elaine Quinlan (978-995-5794, [ejquinlan2@gmail.com](mailto:ejquinlan2@gmail.com)), Judy Mello (781-861-7744, [jmacmello@comcast.net](mailto:jmacmello@comcast.net))

**Saturday, April 28, 12-3 pm, Wright Farm Open Field**

(Sponsored by the Lexington Conservation Commission and Conservation Stewards)

Celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day by exploring Lexington's newest conservation property. We will have nature crafts, seed plantings, invasive identification and eradication experts, a tree care demonstration, and a guided walk around the newly marked trail on the property (self-guided walkers are also welcome).

Location: 241 Grove St. Parking is limited, so please carpool or bike if possible. Parking is allowed on Carriage Drive opposite the farm.

Contact: Alex Dohan (781-863-5882, [amdohan@gmail.com](mailto:amdohan@gmail.com))

**Sunday, May 6, 2-4 pm, Willards Woods/Chiesa Farm Walk**

This walk will explore how easy it is to connect these two popular conservation properties in an extended walk via quiet neighborhood streets and sidewalks. ACROSS Lexington's Route A already provides a through connection linking these two properties, but the purpose of this walk will be to learn how to combine walking these two properties in a shorter loop. Meet at the Willards Woods parking lot on North Street opposite 38 North Street.

Walk Leader: Bob Hausslein (781-862-9102, [rhausslein@rcn.com](mailto:rhausslein@rcn.com))

**Sunday, May 13, 2-4 pm, Mother's Day Family-Friendly Community Walk**

After partaking in the traditional Mom's Day brunch, come join this stroller-friendly family fun walk that includes boardwalks, forested paths, and sidewalks intermingled with schools, conservation land, and a favorite swimming hole. Meet at the Town Pool Parking Lot, 80 Worthen Road across from Hastings Park and next to the Town tennis courts and track facilities.

Leader: Judy Crocker ([rjcrocker@msn.com](mailto:rjcrocker@msn.com))

**Tuesday, May 15, 10-12 am, Senior Sneaker Walk, Arlington's Great Meadows**

Join us for this leisurely two mile walk around Arlington's Great Meadows. The route will traverse a portion of the Minuteman Bikeway, town streets, and woodland paths. There will be short uphill portions to the trail with rocky footing along the way. Don't forget your water bottle and walking sticks if you rely on them for balance. Meet at the trail entrance at the end of the rear parking lot behind the former Excel Living Center at the end of Emerson Gardens Road.

Walk Leader: Eileen Entin (781-862-6418, [eileenhome@gmail.com](mailto:eileenhome@gmail.com))

**Saturday, May 19, 9-11 am, Whipple Hill Photography Walk**

Explore the opportunities for capturing the magic of spring at Whipple Hill in pixels with an experienced local photographer. Sunder Neelakantan will be your guide in how to best capture features of the property in memorable photographs. Steady rain cancels. Meet at the signed entrance to the property at the top of Winchester Drive opposite Berkshire Drive.

Leader: Sunder Neelakantan (781-424-7558, [diadensunder@gmail.com](mailto:diadensunder@gmail.com))

**Sunday, May 20, 2-5 pm, Extended ACROSS Lexington Walk**

In celebration of Bike Walk Bus Week (May 12-20) we are offering the longer distance hiker an extended traverse of ACROSS Lexington routes B & H. This 6+ mile hike passes through two of Lexington's larger parcels of open space: Dunback Meadow and Hayden Woods, in addition to traversing Cotton Farm, Upper Vine Brook, Lincoln Park, Idylwilde and the Old Res. Don't forget to bring plenty of water. Meet at the Old Res parking lot. Walk Leader: Keith Ohmart (781-862-6216, [kohmart@verizon.net](mailto:kohmart@verizon.net))

**Wednesday, May 23, 6-8 pm, Wild Edibles of Lexington's Waysides**

Lexington is home to over 70 species of edible wild plants, both native and non-native, including plants considered to be weedy or invasive. Some are more nutritious and/or flavorful than their cultivated counterparts. Join Russ Cohen, expert forager and author of *Wild Plants I Have Known...and Eaten*, on a 2-hour ramble in and around Lincoln Park to learn about at least 18 edible species. Russ will present information on identification tips, edible portion(s), season(s) of availability and preparation methods, as well as general guidelines for safe and environmentally-responsible foraging. Steady rain cancels. Meet at the Fitness Trail entrance at the crosswalk on Worthen Road across from the Lexington High School playing fields.

Leader: Russ Cohen (781-646-7489, [eatwild@rcn.com](mailto:eatwild@rcn.com))

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**Saturday, June 9, 10 am - Noon, Family Longest Day Walk**

On June 9 **Lexington Goes Purple** to end Alzheimer's disease. One of the organized activities is a guided walk through Lincoln Park, one of Lexington's most accessible open spaces. Centrally located across Worthen Road from the LHS playing fields, Lincoln Park includes a graded trail system landscaped with native plant species, as well as a boardwalk loop through wetlands with interpretive signage. The walk will leave from the Lexington Depot and follow side streets to reach the Park.

Walk Leaders: Kate Fricker (781-862-8868, [kfricker@alum.swarthmore.edu](mailto:kfricker@alum.swarthmore.edu)), Eileen Entin (781-862-6418, [eileenhome@gmail.com](mailto:eileenhome@gmail.com)). Lexington Goes Purple website: [http://act.alz.org/site/TR/LongestDay2018/TheLongestDay?team\\_id=457827&pg=team&fr\\_id=10935](http://act.alz.org/site/TR/LongestDay2018/TheLongestDay?team_id=457827&pg=team&fr_id=10935)

**Thank You Walk Leaders**

CLC's walks program is entirely dependent on our walk leaders, who are all volunteers, for its continuing success. We wish to express a sincere thank you to Bobbie Hodson, Keith Ohmart, Eileen Entin, Fran Ludwig and Sunder Neelakantan for their leadership of our Fall 2017 walks and activities.

## **Wright Farm – New Life for an Old Farm**

By Alex Dohan

Farmed for nearly 200 years, the Wright Farm is Lexington's newest conservation parcel. The northernmost property in town, it is over 12 acres of field, forest, and wetland. It abuts the Landlocked Forest in Burlington, and is very close to conservation trails in Bedford, making it a great spot for regional connections. There is a wide variety of flora and fauna at Wright Farm, and by the end of April a loop trail will be marked around the entire parcel, allowing visitors access to the lovely views and abundant wildlife. Invasive plants are a problem in a few areas of the Farm, but projects by Stewards and students have begun to combat the threat.

The Town acquired the bulk of the property in 2011, but just took ownership of the house and barn lot in 2016. The house will be renovated by the Lexington Housing Assistance Board (LexHAB) to provide affordable housing for families. The barn will be renovated into a public facility, the primary purpose of which will be to house an environmental education center. Built before current building codes, there is a huge amount of work to be done in order to upgrade the space to meet today's standards, but planning has begun. With Community Preservation Act funds, a feasibility study for the barn is underway, including structural analysis as it presently exists, and sketches for possible reconstructions. An important next step will be fundraising for the construction.

To educate the public, a spring celebration event will be held on Saturday, April 28, from Noon to 3 pm at the Wright Farm (241 Grove Street). There will be crafts, seed planting, a guided trail walk, information and demonstrations on plant care and identification, a chance to meet Lexington's conservation ranger, and time to check out the property, as well as sketches of plans for the barn and environs. Sponsored by the Conservation Commission and the Conservation Stewards, this event is supported by CLC; a guided bird walk will be conducted from 7-9 am by Bobbie Hodson and Keith Ohmart.

The mix of field, forest, and wetland makes this property ideal for an environmental education center as it encompasses three important New England habitats. A trail has been scouted that will take visitors through all three habitat areas as they traverse a loop around the property, beginning at the barn, near the apple trees. An additional, shorter, all-persons-accessible trail is planned for the upper area, where educational gardens are envisioned. For example, a rain garden to handle runoff from buildings and parking areas, with pollinator-attracting plants for bees and butterflies, and seed plants to attract birds. Another potential project on the Farm is a community garden area, which would enable the continued farming of the land in this location.

The Wright Farm is a delightful addition to Lexington's extensive Conservation holdings. Perhaps next time you head out for some local exploration, you can make this your destination.



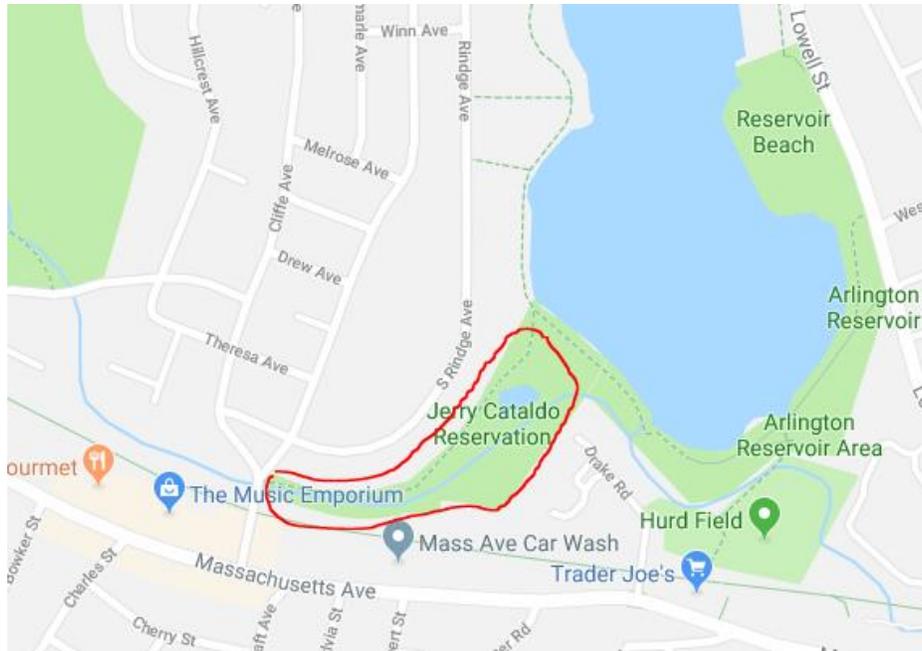
Wright Farm House Barn

## **What's Happening at Cataldo Reservation?**

By Holly Samuels, Cataldo Reservation Conservation Steward

In East Lexington, just off the Minuteman Bike Path, there is a 5 acre Lexington Conservation area called Jerry Cataldo Reservation. The 1/5 mile Reservation trail is heavily traveled as a footpath between Arlington and Lexington by residents of both towns. It is a perfect shortcut from the Bike Path to the Arlington Reservoir and is on ACROSS Lexington Route C. Much of the parcel is water. Mill Brook runs through it on its downstream trip to Alewife, expanding into floodplain during high water times, and becoming a small pond when Mill Brook widens before taking on overflow from Arlington Reservoir.

I've lived in the neighborhood near Cataldo Reservation for the past 15 years and have enjoyed proximity to walking trails in both the Arlington Great Meadows and the Reservoir. This small Cataldo Reservation has been almost like a little secret, in a setting between Mal's auto body shop on Mass Ave. and what is now a residential neighborhood. People who walk there enjoy the privacy and unexpected wildness of the place.



At one time the land was part of Cataldo farm, one of the many small twentieth century family farms in Lexington that have succumbed to residential development. A combination of foresight and unsuitability for development preserved this small parcel for Conservation. The history of the parcel places it by the railroad tracks when the Minuteman Bike Path was a branch of the Boston and Maine Railroad. Maybe for this reason it has had a history of dumping of construction debris, some of which can still be seen there today in the large pieces of granite curbing along the trail.

A few years ago, with increasing awareness of both the invasive plant problem and the importance of native plants in the ecosystem, I noticed a marked increase in the quantity and variety of invasive plants in these wild areas surrounding my neighborhood. When a recent career change to landscape design allowed me to work from home and gave me more free time, I made inquiries with Jordan McCarron of Lexington Conservation and David White of the Friends of Arlington Great Meadows, into what might be done to combat these invasive species. I found out that much of the land surrounding my neighborhood along the waterways belongs to the Town of Arlington and is under dual jurisdiction with Lexington. I was advised to start working with a parcel that is only under the jurisdiction of Lexington Conservation. Doing so I could gain some experience, develop a methodology and (hopefully) some good results. Then I could approach the Town of Arlington for permission to work in the areas that are also under their jurisdiction.

So, very quickly, at the urging of Jordan McCarron of Lexington Conservation, I became a volunteer Conservation Steward at Cataldo Reservation. With a 24 hour deadline, I submitted an application to Lexington Conservation in May 2017 for permission to remove invasive plants and plant native plants in the first 150' of the Reservation, starting at the Bow St. entrance. My purpose was, and remains, to plant areas of native plants that can enhance the biodiversity of this area and suppress the extensive invasive seed bank. Permission was granted and I began to work.

Kicking off the work was a Spring Serve day last May with a small but enthusiastic group of Grace Chapel members. Everyone got involved pulling Garlic Mustard on the steep banks in the first few hundred feet of the Reservation off the Bow St. entrance. Luckily no one fell into the Brook!



For the next six weeks I worked to clear, terrace, and plant some of that steep, mostly shady slope at the start of the Reservation. With the flowering Garlic Mustard under control in that area, I turned my attention to cutting out Oriental Bittersweet vines, Multiflora Rose bushes, and two small but persistent stands of Japanese Knotweed. These stands required cutting the new shoots 2-3 times a week for the next 5 months. I planted the slope with some trial plants, among them were Yellowroot (*Xanthorhiza simplicissima*), Snakeroot (*Actea racemosa*), Hayscented Fern (*Dennstaedtia punctiloba*), Christmas Fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), Barren Strawberry, (*Geum fragaroides*), and White Wood Aster (*Aster divaricatus*). Some of these plants were purchased and some donated. My goal was to plant some nurse colonies to establish soil coverage and then, if successful, add to them and, over time, split and spread the plants over a larger area. A wet spring and shady conditions helped the establishment of these new plantings with no supplemental watering, at least until the dry autumn. We'll see what this spring will bring.

With this area somewhat under control, I got itchy to extend the work further along the path where the invasives were rampant and it was a more level working area. With Conservation permission, I started clearing large areas of Oriental Bittersweet that had been growing over fallen trees, and discovered native trees and shrubs I had never noticed before. Huge Cottonwood trees suddenly seemed to appear, including a massive uprooted specimen in the floodplain. Small Oaks struggling with Bittersweet finally got a chance to stand upright, and I could see a giant, sprawling Willow in the lower floodplain for the first time. I also noticed some native Viburnums under the invasive mess, and that Goldenrod and Sensitive Fern were there amongst the Multiflora Rose. The Brook itself was being revealed in a way I had never seen it before. I really started to get excited by what the clearing was uncovering and it gave me energy to keep going. Russ Cohen, local edible food expert, took a walk with me in June and helped me identify the valuable

natives on the Reservation which informed future planting plans.

That summer, Jordan sent me a group of middle schoolers with their counselors from a summer day camp to do community service. I had them bring a lot of the brush I had been cutting to the Conservation pick-up truck where Jordan's summer crew helped haul it to the dump multiple times. The difference in the area after clearing was remarkable and gave me new areas for planting.



Come fall, with the drier weather, the regrowth of the invasive plants was mercifully slowing. For the past few months, I had been studying for licensure to use herbicide, knowing that the scale of invasive plant regrowth would outrun my solo ability to keep up. I acquired that license in September and will seek permission this spring to use it selectively. My preference is to work mechanically, without herbicides. If I do use them, it will be by painting recently cut stumps of larger specimens at the most effective time, or possibly by spot spraying. I have no wish to damage valuable plant material. By the end of April I will also have completed the Invasive Plant Management certification offered through UMass. I'm hoping that having these credentials will open doors to work on a larger scale.

In October, I was able to pick up about 25 native shrubs on sale as remainders at local nurseries, which I planted in the fall. After planting an Arrowwood Viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*) near the Brook, I had the thrill of discovering an existing one a few feet away that had been smothered by a Multiflora Rose bush. It gave me confidence in my instincts of what to plant where. I also planted more Arrowwood and some Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) along the shore, hoping to establish some colonies. Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) and a few native Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) were planted on the uplands. The bark of the Sumac is apparently very delicious to the healthy local rabbit population in winter, so we'll see if it survives.

I also planted some more trial perennials this past fall, farther along the path, which seem to be alive and coming up very well, at least on my last few walks before the March snows.

They include: Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*), Heartleaf Alexander's (*Zizia aptera*), and Purple Love Grass (*Eragrostis spectabilis*).

In considering future planting, I've been scouring native plant lists and studying the catalogs of suppliers such as New England Wetland Plants, Van Berkum Nursery, and New Moon. Having a business gives me access to wholesale nurseries and their plug-sized plantings, which will enable large-area coverage with small plants that can establish quickly. The goal is to enhance the insect and bird diversity, while at the same time, preserving views of the water. There is an interesting balance between restoring and enhancing the biodiversity of a public site, while still making it open and welcoming for people. The area needs to feel natural and coherent as an ecosystem without being overgrown and overwhelming, even with native plants.

So, this winter I've been working on how to develop that kind of planting plan. I will continue this year with planting trial areas, sometimes with cardboard as a suppressant to invasive seeds, using wood chips as a mulch. Hopefully, over time, a new native seed bank will become established, lessening the need for new planting.

Field work has also continued through the milder days of this winter, mostly on numerous groves of massive Multiflora Rose bushes, clipping and bagging the living shoots and berries, and piling the dead canes either along the path or on cardboard beds near the shore. I've left the Rose cane stumps to note their locations, and will plan on cutting and painting them later when I have permission, or can get help with a tractor to pull them out.



I've been receiving help from neighborhood high school students, unexpected passersby, and have the promise of a Boy Scout Troop this spring, along with a dumpster, to actually get some of the material off site. I've sewn canvas duck cloth into stretchers to be used with metal electrical conduit pipe handles to haul the debris to a dumpster. A Conservation Stewardship Saturday dedicated to Cataldo is planned this June, when I hope for another dumpster and lots of chain sawyers to help with removing some larger fallen trees. You might be wondering why the cut material can't just be left to decompose naturally. In an

environment so overgrown with invasive plants, brush and dead material act as a scaffolding for Bittersweet and Multiflora Roses, and a cover for Garlic Mustard, so it needs to come out. If this were a dense forest and the invasive plant intrusion was just on the forest edge, dead material could be hauled deeper into the shady canopy away from the edge where invasives are not an issue. But, as happens with much of our undeveloped land now, most of it is small, isolated parcels that are really 'edge', and thus open to invasive plant incursion.

Moving forward, the prevention of invasive regrowth and seed sprouting will be the biggest challenges. Managing invasive plants will be, of course, a forever job. Providing dense enough surface growth of desirable plants should help to suppress the sprouting of the existing invasive seed bank and also help with preventing newly dropped invasive seed (from our bird friends) from gaining soil contact. The base of trees is a particular challenge as birds perch, drop, and leave the invasive seed behind. Some magnificent White Pines at Cataldo have enormous Multiflora Rose plants at their base which grow a good 15-20 feet into the trees. Getting groundcover plants to grow in these locations is challenging. You can't beat invasive plants for their ability to grow downright anywhere.

Early on in this process, I knew that funding would be needed to purchase native plant material. To support this effort, I started an initiative called the "East Lexington Habitat Enrichment Project" (ELHEP) and approached the East Lexington Community Association (ELCA) to act as a clearinghouse for any funds that may be donated in the future. They awarded me a grant of \$250 to get started and gave me a dedicated fund within their account to accept online donations. The ELCA also gave me a page on their website to disseminate more information to the community ([www.eastlexingtonca.org](http://www.eastlexingtonca.org)). This winter, letters from Conservation were sent out to abutters and neighbors to introduce them to the work happening at Cataldo and to give them links to this webpage. If anyone reading this is interested in pitching in with this effort, kindly contact me, Holly Samuels, at [elhepinfo@gmail.com](mailto:elhepinfo@gmail.com). Keep an eye out for the June Stewardship Saturday (probably June 16) which will be advertised in the local papers. There should be lots of clearing and planting going on, so you can take part in a variety of different activities. Or, just take a walk in Cataldo reservation and watch the transformation taking place. It is wonderful to talk to the people who stop by and ask what's happening. The project will be ongoing for years, working on both sides of the Brook, and then will hopefully extend to the Arlington Great Meadows along the Bike Path, where I'm eager to get my loppers into action.

If you are interested in learning more about growing native plants, I highly recommend the website of Grow Native Massachusetts ([www.grownativemass.org](http://www.grownativemass.org)). Their resources and free educational opportunities are superb. You can make a real difference in your own yard to manage invasive plants and to plant native plants, which can be as beautiful and decorative as the plants you can find in any garden center, with the added benefit of ecosystem enhancement. The beautiful conservation lands that surround us serve a wonderful function, both in preserving habitat and in giving us places to get immersed in nature. But we can also provide natural habitat in our own yards and, in doing so, begin to link these conservation habitats together to provide an exponentially positive environmental impact. So, here's to a wonderful growing season and I hope to meet you on a trail!

## Tasty Teas (and more) from Trees: Black and Yellow Birch

By Russ Cohen



**Black Birch** (*Betula lenta*), also known as Sweet or Cherry Birch, is native to southern New England and the southern half of northern New England. **Yellow Birch** (*Betula allegheniensis*) is native to all of New England. Black Birch is a spindly-to-medium-sized tree, typically found in colonies in regenerating forests, which are usually eventually replaced by slower-growing, larger tree species like oak or hemlock. Yellow Birch trees can be considerably larger and longer-lived, sometimes surviving for over two centuries. True to their names, Black Birch's bark (see photo on left) is charcoal-colored, whereas Yellow Birch (see photo on right) typically has a much more golden hue. Another difference is that Black Birch bark tends to be smooth (except on older specimens), whereas Yellow Birch's bark flakes and peels in fine horizontal strips.



[BTW - The leaf shape on both species (see black birch leaf, above left) reminds me of the leaf on the outside of a Breyer's Ice Cream™ box. (This is purely a coincidence, though, as William A. Breyer, in coming up for a logo for his Philadelphia-based ice cream business, modeled it on a "briar" leaf, an intended bit of word play on his name.)]

For the sake of experiencing these trees from your nose (or mouth), though, the two species can be lumped together. Scratch and then sniff (or taste) a Black or Yellow Birch twig, and its pleasant aroma/flavor is likely to put a smile on your face. What you are smelling or tasting is oil of wintergreen\*, which is present in the inner bark in each of these species (although typically to a greater degree in Black than in Yellow Birch).



It is fun to simply chew on a Black or Yellow Birch twig and enjoy its flavor while walking in the woods (or while cross-country skiing or snowshoeing, for that matter – the oil of wintergreen is present year-round). If you are camping and have forgotten your tooth brush, you can use a Black or Yellow Birch twig as a natural toothbrush and breath freshener. [This may not be a far a stretch as it sounds: Xylitol, a compound obtained from birch trees (among other sources), is actually used as an ingredient in some varieties of Tom's of Maine™ toothpastes and mouthwashes, and Trident Original Flavor™ chewing gum, as it contributes sweetness without contributing to tooth decay.]

When oil of wintergreen was derived from natural sources and used as a commercial flavoring, it was distilled from the inner bark of black birch trees – as a result, at one time a lot of black birch trees were being cut down for that purpose. Now, though, wintergreen flavoring in candies, toothpaste, etc. is for the most part synthesized artificially (i.e., black birch trees aren't harvested on a large scale for that purpose anymore). [\*Note that while pure oil of wintergreen is toxic, the oil is safe in the low concentrations and amounts naturally present in plants, as well as when used to flavor candy, gum, beverages, toothpaste, etc.]

The chemical name for oil of wintergreen is **methyl salicylate**, and it is related to salicylic acid, the active ingredient in aspirin, thus has a similar pain-killing effect (in fact, methyl salicylate is one of the active ingredients in Bengay™ liniment). So, if you are hiking/skiing in the woods and you twist your ankle, you might want to find a Black or Yellow birch twig to chew on; at the very least it would distract you from the pain in your ankle.

You can make a very nice wintergreen-flavored tea, at any time of year, from peeled Black or Yellow Birch twigs. I advise you against trying to brew this the traditional, way, though (i.e., pouring boiling water from the tea kettle over the birch twigs to steep them). The reason is that oil of wintergreen is volatile (easily driven off by heat), so if you attempt to make tea with boiling or very hot water, your kitchen will smell great but there is likely to be little if any flavor left in your tea.



Here's my recommended method: get a couple good-sized containers ready (like quart-sized, wide-mouth Mason jars). Fill them with cool-to-lukewarm (not hot or boiling) water, then place as many peeled twigs, and the peelings from those twigs, that you have the patience to cram into the jars (the more you put in, the stronger the flavor). About three dozen twigs, and the peelings from those twigs, is a good amount. (A carrot peeler works well to peel the twigs, but if you haven't got one, a sturdy pocket knife should do the trick.) Then put the cap on.

While I used to think that you need to put the jars in the sun for a day or two, and slow-brew it, "sun tea" style, to ensure your finished product has a strong wintergreen flavor, I have since found that just letting the jars sit around, unrefrigerated, for several hours seems to be all you need

to do to get a strong-flavored tea (once again, if you have crammed the jars with lots of peeled twigs and the peelings).

Editor's Note: Russ will be including Yellow Birch in his May 23 CLC walk, "Wild Edibles of Lexington's Waysides". See Page 6.

**More info about Russ Cohen's edible wild plant/mushroom walks, slide shows, etc.:**

<http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/sched.htm>

**More info about Russ' foraging book, Wild Plants I Have Known... and Eaten:** [http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/press\\_release.htm](http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/press_release.htm)

**More info about Russ Cohen:** <http://users.rcn.com/eatwild/bio.htm>

## Conservation Restriction Project Update

By Eileen Entin

Citizens for Lexington Conservation will eventually hold Conservation Restrictions (CRs) for five properties purchased by the Town of Lexington using Community Preservation Funds. An article in last April's edition of the newsletter explained the purpose of a CR and the activities that must be performed by an organization to obtain and hold the CR. Since it was formed, CLC's CR committee has been actively working on the CRs for three of the five properties: Cotton Farm, the Leary property, and Wright Farm.

The work involved in developing the CR for the Cotton Farm property was completed in 2016. In the past year the committee completed the CR materials for the Leary property on Vine Street, which is now part of the Lower Vine Brook Conservation property. This work included identifying and marking the boundaries for the property, taking and logging photos of the property bounds, and describing the nature and ecological value of the property. The CRs for both Cotton Farm and the Leary property have been approved by local Town authorities, and submitted to the Secretary of State's office for final approval.

In the next year, the committee will develop the CR documents and conduct the on-site fieldwork surveying the boundaries for the two smaller Goodwin parcels that are abutting the existing Meagherville property and Katahdin Woods property on either side of Route 95. The fieldwork for all properties involves comparing the boundary markers indicated on the existing survey map for each property with what is found in the field. Typical boundary markers are either 4x4" granite posts set into the ground, or iron or steel pipe sections known as survey pins. The granite posts are typically no more than 4-6" above the level of the soil but can sometimes be buried under leaf litter. The iron or steel pins usually protrude to about knee height and, if we are lucky, can have either remnants of orange flagging tape attached or are painted with orange paint.

The application for the remaining property, Wright Farm, will need to wait until the Conservation Department finishes the Land Management Plan for the property, which is being created by Mass Audubon Society, working on behalf of the Conservation Commission. The CR committee will wait until that plan has been completed to develop the descriptive materials needed for the CR application. This winter the committee identified and marked

the south and east side boundaries of that property, and took photos to document the current state of the property line pending the anticipated development of the abutting property.

Once approved, CR's must be upheld through an annual on-site inspection of the property, and enforcement against incursions should they arise. This fall the committee conducted the first annual inspection of the Cotton Farm property. Developments that had occurred on that property included the closing off of the driveway leading to private property, some work on the apple orchards, and trail restoration near the pond. The committee took updated photos of the changes that had occurred in the year since the original photos were taken for the CR documents. The inspection revealed no irregularities.

CLC's CR committee presently consists of Alex Dohan, Eileen Entin, Keith Ohmart, Carol Ann Benoit, Mary Rose Scozzafava, and Kate McCarey, working in cooperation with Jordan McCarren of the Conservation Department. New members are welcome. If you are interested in helping out with the development of CR documents or participating in monitoring the properties, please contact us at [citizens4lexingtonconservation@gmail.com](mailto:citizens4lexingtonconservation@gmail.com).

## **Town Conservation Web Pages Enhancement Project**

The Conservation Department is interested in enhancing the information available for the Town's various Conservation properties on the Town's website. Currently the page for each property displays a map showing hiking trails and access points. Suggestions for additional information that could be added include seasonal photographs, historical information, audio clips of oral histories and recollections, etc. CLC is looking for individuals who would be interested in assisting with this project as well as one individual who would be willing to serve as the project coordinator. The work would involve working with the Conservation Department and the Town's webmaster to develop guidelines for the type of information desired along with a consistent format, as well as gathering the information itself. No prior experience is necessary, just a willingness to donate time to the organization and coordination of this project. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity please contact Keith Ohmart via the CLC website ([www.clclex.org](http://www.clclex.org)).

### **Cary Library Photo Exhibit *Lexington Conservation Land: At Home in Nature* April 2018 By Bonnie Newman**

The Lexington Conservation Stewards are sponsoring a photography exhibit during April at the Cary Library lower level. The exhibit celebrates our Town's rich conservation heritage by showcasing some of our best Steward photographers and the conservation areas they love.

***There is a reception on Saturday, April 7 from 2-4 pm in the large meeting room downstairs at the library. Everyone is welcome.***



Since the 1960s, Lexington has protected more than 1,300 acres of land in perpetuity and dedicated this land to the conservation of our natural resources and the preservation of the historic and cultural character of our Town. This conserved land encompasses a mosaic of forests, open meadows, and wetlands that covers over 12% of the Town and offers more than 50 miles of wooded trails; an impressive figure for a community so close to Boston.

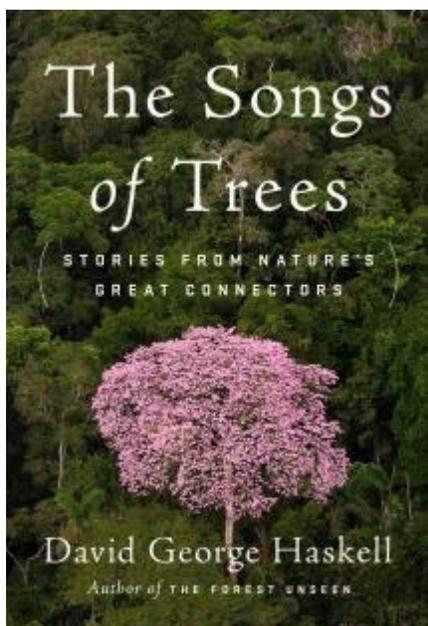
As spring arrives in Lexington, we encourage you to get out on our trails and explore the diversity of nature that Lexington has to offer.

Special thanks to our Steward photographers who donated the prints, frames, and their artistic eye for this exhibit: Bonnie Newman, Tom Whelan, Sunder Neelakantan, Dick Wolk, Steve Hill, Frederica Cushman, and Carolyn Levi.

[www.lexingtonma.gov/conservation/conservation-stewardship](http://www.lexingtonma.gov/conservation/conservation-stewardship)

Email: [landstewards@lexington.ma.gov](mailto:landstewards@lexington.ma.gov)

Facebook: Lexington Conservation Stewards



## **“The Songs of Trees” by David George Haskell**

A Review by Keith Ohmart

For those of you who have read David George Haskell's previous book, "The Forest Unseen", you have no doubt learned that reading his works is something to be done at leisure with the time to savor each chapter as one would a fine cup of tea or glass of wine. His latest volume, "The Songs of Trees," is cut from the same cloth and equally rewarding.

The device he has chosen for this work is to select a dozen individual trees from around the world, returning to each on several occasions to gather information on how they interact with their environment. The diversity of locations ranges from the Amazonian rain forest where his subject is a ceibo tree to an ancient olive tree growing near the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem's old city wall. Other far flung locations include the boreal forest in northern Canada to learn the habits of a balsam fir and the Georgia Sea Islands, which are the home of sabal palms.

From repeat visits to each location, Haskell weaves a tale of the web of life in which each tree is embedded, exploring its interactions with fungi, bacterial communities, other plant life, mammal and bird life, as well as the intimate connections with human civilization both past and present. Particular attention is paid to the sounds or "song's" of the trees themselves interacting with their environment, and the explorations this allows Haskell to mediate on in following the connections of the lives of trees to other lives that surround them.

One comes away from a reading of Haskell's books with a renewed appreciation and respect for the oneness of life. His detailed explorations of the intricacies of these connections is breathtaking and humbling at the same time in terms of what we have to learn from the lives of trees and the natural world of which we and they are an inextricable part.

### **Photo Credits**

Page 8: Wright Farm Barn, by Alex Dohan

Page 10, 11, 12: Cataldo Reservation, provided by Holly Samuels

Page 14, 15: Tasty Teas, by Russ Cohen

Page 18: North Street Pond, by Bonnie Newman

## Lexington Bike Walk 'n Bus Week May 12-20, 2018



<http://lexbikewalkbusweek.org>.

Start planning now to take full advantage of the wealth of activities that have been planned to celebrate Lexington's sixth annual **Bike Walk 'n Bus Week**. This year's celebration runs from May 12 through May 20. This is your chance to explore and familiarize yourself with the many healthy, sustainable, and safe alternative transportation opportunities in the Lexington community.

Events have been planned for all ages and abilities including guided walks and bicycle rides, a hands-on workshop on bicycle safety and maintenance, a day of free rides on LexPress, a School Bus open house event, a Bike Smart safety program for 4th and 5th graders, as well as the annual early morning "Commuter Breakfast" at the Depot for those walking or biking to work or school. All events are free and open to the public.

The goal for the week plus two weekends is to introduce the public to Lexington's extraordinary wealth of alternative transportation resources and how to use them safely to get around town and beyond in a healthy and sustainable fashion. Did you know, for instance, that the **ACROSS Lexington** trail network now provides over 28 miles of walking routes connecting 14 of the Town's Conservation parcels, the Old Res, Lincoln Park and other favorite open spaces?

So do take the time to consult the complete schedule of events at [www.LexBikeWalk-BusWeek.org](http://www.LexBikeWalk-BusWeek.org) to identify the events that are of most interest to you. The planning team for Bike Walk 'n Bus Week hopes that when you're on one of the bike rides or walks, getting your free bike safety check, riding for free on Lexpress, bicycling to work on national Bike to Work Day, or with your children at the par course on Lincoln Field having arrived by foot, bike or bus, that you think:

**What a glorious morning to.....**

**Take a walk,  
Ride my bike  
Catch the bus  
.....And leave my car at home!**