

## A Natural Partnership

Beginning last August, CLCT joined with the Musketaquid Arts and Environment program to create opportunities for families and



*Canoes and kayaks beached at Scout Island.*

children to explore the outdoors. Our first activity involved paddling to Scout Island in Fairhaven Bay, where Nancy Lippe, the Musketaquid program coordinator, trained the group in survival skills. Next, Musketaquid organized and CLCT sponsored an introduction to orienteering in the Wright Woods. Coming up on Saturday, Feb. 1st



*Orienteering in the Wright Woods.*

is an animal tracking event on Soutter Field. Sign up for this winter workshop at the Emerson Umbrella website.

If the Land Trust office has your email address, we will notify you of our joint upcoming events.

## Land Trust Fields...

Of the almost 900 acres that the Land Trust owns, less than 20% are open fields. Yet, in different ways, our old fields and our actively farmed land provide some of our most visible and best-loved landscapes. In this issue of the newsletter, we highlight our fields — some that are important as wildlife habitat and others that are agriculturally productive.

### For Farming

On five of our properties CLCT partners with local farmers who manage the land for grazing or crop land, keeping it fertile, productive,



*Hubbard Brook Farmfield*

and a vibrant part of our community's economy. Although the cultivated areas account for only about 70 acres of CLCT's land holdings, they are essential to the character of Concord and visible reminders of the critical relationship between people and the land on which we depend.

1 Off of Elm Street near the intersection with Route 2, Eric Nelson farms about 14 acres of land given to CLCT by the Kazmaier family in 1981. As with all the farmers of CLCT land, Eric "came with" the land when it was first acquired. In these fields, Eric grows pumpkins and corn for sale at his family's farm stand in

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### For Habitat

Knowing that the old fields in Concord can support a diversity of wildlife certainly adds to our enjoyment of them. Yet it takes active management to keep these scenic fields open and to maintain their habitat value. For CLCT, this usually means an annual mowing. But we wanted to know more: What species should we be managing for? Is mowing the best management tool, and if so, what should the frequency, timing and pattern be? How should the invasive plants that are making incursions into the fields be handled?

Two of the Land Trust's fields – French's Meadow and Newbury Field – are not only beautiful, but also provide uncommon wildlife habitat. In an effort to improve our management of these fields, we invited Tim Simmons, a Restoration Ecologist with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW), to come survey these two properties. A part of Tim's job is to develop habitat restoration and management plans to conserve the biodiversity of the state. On July 29th, Tim and his colleague Marianne Piche, a partner biologist with the DFW and the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service, came to Concord.

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## Managing Fields for Habitat

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Our first stop was off Lowell Rd. at **Newbury Field**, a 34-acre property with seven acres that are classified as abandoned field/shrubland habitat. We observed a mix of herbaceous plants dominated by the native, little bluestem grass, with scattered shrubs and trees: pitch pine, red cedar and oak. As noted in Tim's subsequent report, the "species of greatest conservation need" for this type of habitat include snakes (the black racer) and birds (broad-winged hawk, American kestrel, American woodcock and field sparrow).

To date, CLCT's management of Newbury Field has been effective in



*Marianne Piche, Tim Simmons, Joan Ferguson and Gordon Shaw on Newbury Field.*

maintaining the existing "vegetative structure" and Tim recommends continuing our program with some modifications.

We should proceed with our practice of the past few years of spot-treating the buckthorn with a cut-and-dab herbicide procedure and consider combining that with a foliar application. Just mowing

buckthorn will only result in an increase in the density of stems. As Tim's report notes: "Invasive species are recognized as one of the greatest threats to the integrity of natural communities."

We should continue to mow during the growing season. It reduces woody plants (a good thing) but impacts either nesting birds if done too early or nectaring insects if done too late. Rotational mowing, when half or a third of the field is mowed every year, lessens these impacts.

Our tour continued on to Nashawtuc Rd. and **French's Meadow**. Due to the lack of rainfall this year, we were able to walk around the entire 20 acres of meadow without having to wade! This

field is classified as marsh/wet meadow. In general, these wetlands are some of the most important inland habitats for numerous species of animals, both rare and common. We observed a mix of herbaceous plants including wetland rushes and sedges (common bulrush, tussock sedge, soft rush, cordgrass, spike rush), swamp smartweed, and pickerel weed.

Large white oaks are scattered across the flood plain where the ground is slightly elevated. The 'species of conservation concern' here include the eastern ribbon snake, northern leopard frog, green heron, sora, and two-striped cord grass moth.

Recommended management practices for French's Meadow include



*Tim Simmons examining the grasses at French's Meadow*

continuing to mow to inhibit woody plant growth. The animals that occupy the meadow can be protected from mowing if the mower height is over seven inches, if the mower speed is slow, and if the pattern of mowing – for example, mowing in an outward spiral – enables animals to escape. Eradicating invasive species such as yellow flag iris and purple loosestrife is also recommended. We already have introduced the *Galerucella* beetle into the meadow to biologically control the loosestrife, with some success.

Although we think of both Newbury Field and French's Meadow as natural areas, they reflect a legacy of human use that took place over centuries, as the land was cleared for cultivation, grazed by farm animals or hayed. The Land Trust is just one more intermediary in natural processes, mowing to prevent the succession to woodland and trying to control invasives to prevent a monoculture of buckthorn, purple loosestrife or other exotic species. These meadows continue to support the wildlife that they do because they are actively managed, no longer for agricultural purposes, but for their scenic and habitat values.

**Managing Fields for Farming**

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Acton and at other local farm stands.

**2** On the Soutter Field at the intersection of Sudbury Road and Route 2, Verrill Farm grazes a small herd of beef cattle (eight in 2013) on about 11 acres of the field each summer. They wander freely, providing a pastoral diversion for commuters stuck in traffic on Route 2. For the past few years, cattle have been joined by flocks of chickens raised by Pete and Jen’s Backyard Birds. About 400 birds reside in mobile “hoop coops” which are moved to a new part of the field every day to allow the chickens to graze on fresh grass. The chickens are helping to control invasive grasses and fertilize the soil, improving the quality of the pasture as they fatten up for market.

**3** The Miller Field near Nine Acre Corner was given to the Land Trust in 2001 by the Poutasse family. Here, Verrill Farm cultivates about 15 acres and grows a wide diversity of vegetables and berries, available at their

farm stand, through their new CSA, and on the menus of many local restaurants. Parsnips that overwinter in the field are the first vegetables harvested in the spring. A new bed of 18,000 strawberries was planted in the field at the end of last season, so the coming strawberry harvest should be bountiful. Brigham Farm grows sweet corn on the four-acre field closest to Willard School, about two-thirds of which is sold just down the road at their farm stand on Route 117.

**4** The well-drained Hubbard Brook Farmfield is where Verrill Farm sows its first plantings of corn on about 11 acres. The entire crop is harvested in July, making it some of the first local corn available in the area, and allowing for a long season of rye and vetch cover crop to improve the soil.

**5** On Barrett’s Mill Road, CLCT owns two beautiful hayfields, thanks to the generosity of the Corey family. Dan Pickard from Littleton cuts hay on eight acres of the Corey-Bourquin Land on the north side of the road.

**2013 Fall Walk and Annual Meeting**



*Along the trail during CLCT’s fall walk in the Chamberlin and Estabrook woods.*



*Members listen to a presentation at the annual meeting that followed the fall walk.*

**Thank You To...**

John Myers and David Bell for their many mornings of work stacking pine saplings for our forestry project in Wright Woods.



*Eastern Coyote tracks in the snow. photo by G. Hopkins*

Gigi Hopkins for providing photographs of animal tracks for the back cover of the upcoming Trail Guide.

Margaret O’Brien, CCHS Class of 2014, for volunteering a week of her time to pull water chestnuts.

Sally and Michael Schnitzer for graciously hosting the annual meeting on November 3rd.

Chris Van Dyke for her help in locating new trail disks and then nailing them up(!) on the newly revived Corey-Bourquin trail.

Many 5th graders from Willard School—students from the Service Day last spring and Girl Scouts from Troop 72678 this fall—for improving our Miller Farm property and also for showing us how much fun the woods there can be!

The many other students in Concord and Carlisle who chose to spend their community service hours working on Land Trust land.



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## A Little Help From Our Friends



*Pictured above are some of those who helped pull water chestnuts from the Sudbury River. Left to right: Henry Holmes, Nick Stewart, Michelle Pinter-Petrillo, Erin Duffy, Katharine Murphy, Nee-C Wiggins, Gabriella Golzarian, Devaughn Clayton, Laura Mahoney, Blake Mershon, and in the front Ury Melton.*

We were very lucky this year to have lots of help out on the Sudbury River handpulling the invasive water chestnut. First, there were our own stalwart returning interns: Erin Duffy, Katharine Murphy, and Nick Stewart. They were joined at times by interns from Concord's Department of Natural Resources and by an Americorps crew. The latter was funded by SuAsCo CISMA\* using funds from the Nyanza Superfund settlement. Other individuals volunteered as well. Results were very good and for the second year in a row we did not need to use the mechanical harvester.

\*Sudbury-Assabet-Concord Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area