

Fall 2023 Newsletter



Autumn Reflections by Cheryl Daigle

The past seven months have been rich with exploring various properties conserved by the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust. On numerous walks and trail work days, I've joined with board members, volunteers, landowners and new partners in habitat restoration and management. These experiences highlight for me how beautiful and diverse the landscape is throughout our watershed. All of our lands have special and seemingly unique qualities. I love the Rines Wetlands and Wildlife Preserve for the way its trail system showcases two landscape features, a bog-like wetland and a northern forest with northern boreal affinities. This interface of habitats means more biological diversity to discover in the plants and birds, particularly during spring and fall. The Freedom Forest Preserve – one of our two Forever Wild preserves - brings close contact with classic examples of vernal pools, a favorite landscape feature of mine that provides essential breeding habitat for amphibians such as wood frogs and salamanders. A meditative walk led by Peter Wohl in July underscored for me the peaceful nature of these trails, very welcome in this unsettled world we live in.

In the northern watershed, both the Cambridge Woodland Preserve and Pleasant Lake Preserve showcase good forest management. Less than a decade after timber harvests were conducted, the forests are regenerating

nicely and are free of invasive plants. Uneven-aged stands of maple, oak, white pine, hemlock and fir dominate, with a variety of other trees and shrubs typical of Maine woodlands also flourishing. On the infrequent occasion of a timber harvest on our properties (many of which are enrolled in the Maine Tree Growth program), we follow Maine Audubon's Forestry for Maine Birds guidelines; the end result at these preserves and our Richardson Memorial Preserve is excellent habitat for a diversity of bird species (read more about Richardson on page 3). We will be working on updating our Forest Management Plans on select properties in the coming year, and will consider carefully how woodlands management can sustain a healthy environment for native plants and wildlife, provide recreational opportunities and at times also provide local sources of wood that support rural economies.

Land stewards give many hours of time and labor to keep trails open or to manage our fields and boundaries. Our



Chuck Hulsey from the Maine Forest Service and Hannah Mullally, USFWS wildlife biologist, joined land steward Frank Hayman and executive director Cheryl Daigle on a walk at the Cambridge Woodlands Preserve to assess forest growth and wildlife habitat ten years after a selective timber harvest. We are planning a woodlands and wildlife tour here in 2024.



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Tom Aversa, Chair
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Brandon Kulik, Vice-Chair, acting Secretary
Doug Miller
Dana Ward
Doug Wescott
Executive Director: Cheryl Daigle

**Since 2004, we've worked with many organizations to conserve the wild and working landscape of the Sebasticook River Watershed ...
THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS!**

AgAllies
Avian Haven
Biodiversity Research Institute
Colby College - Chace Community Forum
Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative
Kennebec Woodland Partnership
Hills to Sea Trail Coalition
LightHawk
Maine Audubon
Maine Farmland Trust
Maine Land Trust Network
Maine Rivers
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The American Chestnut Foundation
The Cornell Lab of Ornithology
The Ecology Learning Center
The Nature Conservancy
Town of Unity
Two Trees Forestry
RSU 3
RSU 19
Unity Public Library
Unity Barn Raisers
Villageside Farm

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monthly volunteer work days provide opportunities for members and other volunteers to get to know these lands while giving us a helping hand. We greatly appreciate the notes visitors leave in the notebooks in the kiosk cubbies – it is heartening to know people are out and about enjoying these lands that so many people have worked to protect. We also love to hear about your experiences at SRLT properties on social media or as we cross paths in Unity, Benton, Newport, Stetson, and other towns where we work to conserve land or offer related programs.

Something that stands out as I've become immersed in this watershed: you live in an incredibly special place, worthy of attention and recognition for the regions' rural character, and the ways that the land *and the people who live on it* provide for us. We are now seeing increasing threats from development for housing and community infrastructure. Development is not inherently bad, but poor planning for development can dramatically change the character of rural towns, impact local farming and forestry, the wildlife that we enjoy, and how we experience nature.

I believe that the Sebasticook Regional Land Trust has a unique niche in protecting the landscape of this watershed and the rural heritage of Maine. Your support is essential to our ability to realize good land stewardship and help hold on to the values of this rural area. Whether you can donate financially, volunteer your time or attend our programs to learn and share what our protected lands bring to your community, we appreciate everything you do on behalf of land, wildlife, and people.

Please join us or renew as a member of SRLT and connect with us to let us know how we are doing.

~ Cheryl Daigle, Executive Director

Please help us meet our educational outreach and stewardship costs!

We are upgrading kiosks at the Moulton's Mill, Kanokolus Bog and Rines Wetlands preserves and adding signage throughout the watershed. We also need to fund bridge repairs, equipment purchases, mowing, and bush hogging. A generous donor has provided a restricted fund to match donations up to \$3,000 for capital improvements. We are also planning on updating our website in 2024 to improve accessibility and encourage more involvement in SRLT activities.

Please contribute today!

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

**FOLLOW US ON
SOCIAL MEDIA!**



Forestry at Richardson Memorial Preserve

Benefits Birds

by Tom Aversa

In 2021, SRLT stewardship committee members devised a harvest plan with assistance from Two Trees Forestry to promote regeneration of a diverse, wildlife friendly woodland in accordance with a 2018 forest management plan. Before the harvest we marked out potential trails and did preemptive invasive plant removal. Logging began that October with forest operator Tyler Reynolds excelling in his responsiveness to our directives, which included leaving snags, creating brush piles, and minimizing damage to the soil structure. The forest management didn't cost us, yet we were able to avoid cutting the valuable hardwoods and desirable conifers which will support future forest regeneration.

Post-harvest, three trails run like the spokes of a wheel northward from the northern edge of the lower hayfield. They connect along the boundary of Doug and Nina Miller's property. Doug and Nina serve as Richardson's stewards and have helped transform the preserve into a must-see destination. Perhaps the most scenic trail runs along Sandy Stream, but the uphill harvest zone now provides valuable early successional mixed-age forest for a diversity of songbirds. It also hosts a short spur trail which loops by the Carl Richardson memorial. It looks great with the beginnings of a healthy forest stand in evidence.

Bird surveys during the summer of 2023 revealed avian usage which far exceeded our expectations. Not only were the forest warblers and thrush still present, but other interesting bird species were also using the area. In addition to at least 14 species of breeding warbler at the preserve, two other birds which seldom breed in western Waldo County were found nesting. The very presence of Field Sparrow anywhere in the area is notable, so when at least two breeding pairs with offspring were found, it was more than a mild surprise. Dark-eyed Junco also produced young, which is an unusual occurrence anywhere in the watershed. Two other rare Waldo County species that utilize early successional habitat were also found – Prairie Warbler and Eastern Towhee, with the former also confirmed nesting. Other species that nested here this summer included Common Raven, House Wren, Indigo Bunting and White-throated Sparrow. For those who appreciate larger birds, Barred Owls, Red-shouldered and Cooper's Hawk were also present in 2023.

The preserve supports both forest and open country birds. A grant awarded by the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative allows us to continue our successful grassland bird management despite the devastating discovery of PFAS contamination here in 2022. That forced us to suspend two agricultural leases which severely impacted our grassland bird management program. Funds from Cornell will allow us to continue to keep grasslands



Indigo Bunting



Field Sparrow



Prairie Warbler

open and promote use by Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow and Indigo Bunting.

If you enjoy mammals, abundant deer can often be viewed from Stevens Rd. Proceeding beyond the kiosk along the mowed path to the woodland boundary in the lower field will reveal much more along the trail system, but don't miss the birds using the hedgerows on the way downhill. You need to check out Richardson Memorial Preserve if you enjoy birds and wildlife!

Stewardship Activities Update

By Doug Miller, Stewardship Co-chair

The fall newsletter is a great time to review our accomplishments during these past months and start thinking about next year's goals.

On several visits to Connor Mill Trail in Unity a team of volunteers cleared deadfalls, reinstalled the aluminum bridge and realigned several other bridges that were moved during the spring high water. Gravel was added to improve the parking area and kiosk improvements are now in the works thanks to a grant received from the Town of Unity.

Our preserve stewards (see inset below) work tirelessly to keep trails clear of vegetation. They are also instrumental in improving trails as was done at Freedom Forest Preserve. Richardson Memorial Preserve was the focus of two workdays. Invasive, non-native bush honeysuckle was removed and trails were cleared of vegetation and trail blazing was accomplished following our fall 2022 limited harvest. All fields were mowed with the assistance of a grant from Cornell for grassland bird monitoring related to the PFAS issues at the site. At Kanokolus Bog Preserve invasive multiflora rose was removed and trails were cleared of blow downs and vegetation. The preserve steward has been keeping the trails cleared throughout the summer. In October, RSU-3 sent a team of senior students to help with trails. At Rines Wetlands and Wildlife volunteers provided trail maintenance and clearing. The field was bush hogged by the preserve steward.

It is important to recognize the volunteers who support our fieldwork. Specifically at the Moulton's Mill Preserve in Unity, Rick Lawrence has been mowing the trails for over a decade. We owe Rick a great debt of gratitude. Other volunteers cleared blow downs at Carlson Woods, also in Unity. Albert J. Sousa Preserve has had some activity focused on field management and building partnerships with the Balfour Farm in Pittsfield and Brent Grover and his veteran's group, Operation At Ease.

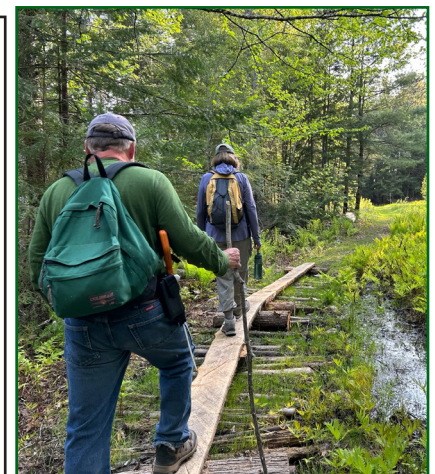


Trail work days in the spring and summer allowed us to clear debris and realign bridges impacted by winter and spring floods and fully open the popular Connor Mill Trail.

Unfortunately the unusually wet weather prevented us from managing the fields as we had hoped. The Pleasant Lake Preserve steward, Jeff Guesman, has continued his vigilance in keeping this preserve in excellent condition. He provides much needed support to the Stewardship Committee...thanks for your help. Our preserve steward at Great Farm Brook continues to maintain the trails. The preserve provides an easy walk through these beautiful woods in Jackson.

This was a difficult season to get all our work done due to the amount of rain. Of note was the wet June that prevented equipment from haying and mowing fields. This year's budget allowed us to obtain some additional equipment for our fieldwork. We purchased an electric chainsaw, which will relieve our volunteers of using their personal equipment. Goals for 2024 will be determined by our Stewardship Committee at the November 14th meeting. In closing, thank you to all our preserve stewards. We are always looking for some additional "hands" to assist in our work. If you are interested in helping us, please reach out to our Executive Director.

Preserve	Steward	Town
Albert J. Sousa Preserve	Tom Aversa	Burnham
Cambridge Woodlands Preserve	Frank Hayman	Cambridge
Fowler Bog Preserve	Daniel Hill	Unity
Freedom Forest Preserve	Frank Siviski & Adri Bessenaire	Freedom
Great Moose Wetlands Preserve	Jeff Guesman	Hartland
Great Farm Brook Preserve	Billy Ashton	Jackson
Kanokolus Bog Preserve	Ron Waldron	Unity
Moulton's Mill Preserve	OPEN – want to help?	Unity
Pleasant Lake Preserve	Jeff Guesman	Stetson
Richardson Memorial Preserve	Doug & Nina Miller & Tom Aversa	Unity
Rines Wetlands & Wildlife Preserve	Barry Stoodley	Unity
Wesley Road Wetlands Preserve	Ellen Batchelder	Unity



Bog boardwalks put in by Jeff Guesman and Billy Ashton allow hikers to cross wet areas at the Pleasant Lake Preserve in Stetson.



2023 Annual Meeting

at the Unity Community Center

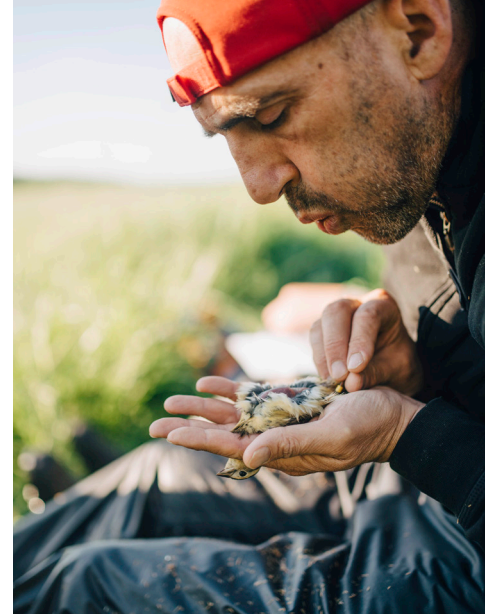
Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 5:30 PM

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Noah Perlut

Community Farming and Grassland Birds: Connecting local ecology and international migration



This Bobolink Odyssey tells the stories of individual grassland birds and their young, aiming to inspire landowners and communities to work together to halt the factors causing population decline of these birds. Many Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows return to breed near where they were born – generation to generation. This allows the Perlut Lab to uniquely tell the stories of bird families: where each was born, who its parents, siblings, and cousins were, where it migrated, where it returned, and its breeding success. We explore how the timing and intensity of haying affects these birds, how climate change interacts with birds and agriculture, and how we use diverse technologies to understand their movements to South America and back.



Noah Perlut is a Professor and Assistant Academic Director in the School of Marine and Environmental Programs at the University of New England. The Perlut Lab focuses on how wildlife adapt or fail to adapt to human-caused habitat change, studying grassland songbirds that nest in agricultural fields, gulls that nest on roof-tops, songbirds that nest in managed forests, and gray squirrels that live on college campuses.



Please join us at the Unity Community Center on November 16 at 5:30 PM for light refreshments and our first in-person Annual Meeting in four years! It will be wonderful to gather together again and celebrate the past year's accomplishments, learn from our speakers about the importance of conservation in the Sebasticook River Watershed and the amazing journey of the Bobolink, and look ahead to the future. Come and vote on our new slate of Board of Directors and a revision of the SRLT by-laws. You can review past and proposed by-laws at the link on our homepage at sebasticookrslt.org.

We will also hear from Buck O'Herin, chair of the Midcoast Conservancy Board of Directors and coordinator of the Hills to Sea Trail on the topic of "Why Conserve Land in the Sebasticook River Watershed?"

SRLT SPEAKER SERIES:

New Venues, New Topics

By Doug Wescott

The popular SRLT Speaker Series continues in 2024 with new presentations, new locations, and the same educational and entertaining goal. As always, these talks are free and open to the public, with a five-dollar suggested donation. The southern watershed talks are on the third Wednesday of each month, except a week earlier in December. In the Fall of 2023, we moved the monthly Speaker Series to the Benton Grange, to bring these talks closer to the center of the Sebasticook River watershed. The Benton Grange is not available in January and February, so for the first talks of 2024 we will return to the Chace Community Forum in Waterville. We also added several presentations in Newport at the Newport Cultural Center to expand our reach to the upper watershed communities.

We are excited about the lineup of topics and expert presenters already set to share their knowledge with the public in 2024. Other topics planned are an update on the Bald Eagle Study on the Lower Sebasticook, Bird Migration in Maine, Mushrooms of Maine, “What’s it Like to be a Maine Game Warden?,” Dams on the Sebasticook, Bats of Maine, and more. See page 8 for currently scheduled talks, and visit us at sebasticookrlt.org for event updates and to RSVP.



Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock in Maine

December 13, 2023 6:30 PM
Benton Grange Hall, Benton

Todd Waldron, Regional Forester with the Ruffed Grouse Society, will present on the ecology and habitat needs of Ruffed Grouse, American Woodcock

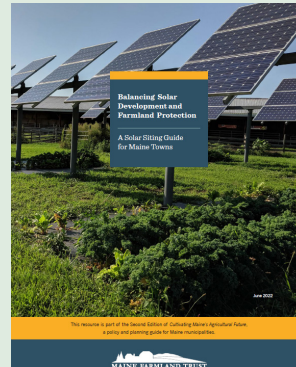
and other wildlife dependent on young forest and early successional habitat, and a call for increasing forest diversity in Maine.

Balancing Solar Development & Farmland Protection

January 17, 2024 6:30 PM

Chace Community Forum, Waterville

Protecting and stewarding farmland is critical for ensuring that Maine has the land base to grow our agricultural economy and support a robust local and regional food system. With solar development expanding across the state, strategies that balance support for solar energy production with the need to protect farmland are becoming increasingly important.



Join Thatcher Carter, Municipal Policy Associate with Maine Farmland Trust (MFT), for a presentation and discussion about why balanced solar siting matters and what strategies local advocates and municipal officials can explore to minimize the impacts of solar development on agricultural resources.

Stay tuned for information about a future presentation with MFT on the Second Edition of Cultivating Maine’s Agricultural Future, a farm-friendly policy and planning guide for municipalities that MFT is producing in collaboration with the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. The revised guide, slated to be released later in 2023, will provide up-to-date facts and information about the benefits farms and farmland create for communities and the challenges and opportunities that are facing Maine agriculture. It will also offer general guidance and resources on a wide range of farm-friendly municipal policy and planning tools and example strategies from towns across Maine and New England.

Update on the State of Maine Rivers

March 20, 2024 6:30 PM

Benton Grange Hall

Landis Hudson, executive director of Maine Rivers. Since the Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, the health of Maine’s Rivers has improved dramatically. But there are still serious threats to our rivers – from the toxins that wash in with every rain storm, to the pollution discharged by paper mills, to water withdrawals by farmers and ski resorts.

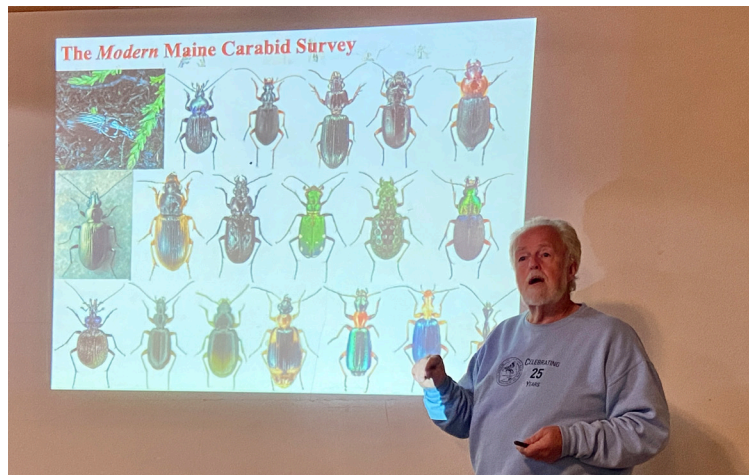
Kennebec River, SRLT photo with aerial support from LightHawk



Speaking of Wildlife ...

We had an exciting series of wildlife-related talks this past year that included information on resources landowners can turn to for improving habitat at their home or in their community, ways to get involved in wildlife studies with the state of Maine, and what it's like to be a wildlife biologist.

We held two talks on the Beginning with Habitat program, presented by Corinne Michaud-Leblanc in Unity and Newport. Corinne shared additional resources for landowners and town officials to help communities identify and document important habitat in their area and ways to protect their local natural resources. These can be accessed through our Activities and Events page on our website. Raptor expert and wildlife biologist Erynn Call provided an update on Peregrine Falcon and Kestrel conservation in Maine and beyond. She also provided information on a community science project to help understand owls and their prey by collecting owl pellets. You can learn more at sites.une.edu/maine-owl-pellet-project. In August, Adri Bessenaire, state wildlife biologist and also an SRLT board member, and Lauren McPherson, wildlife outreach biologist, regaled us with stories from the field, highlighting their work monitoring bears, moose, deer



Bob Nelson of the Maine Entomology Society.

and many other wildlife, and provided tips for how to prepare for a career as a wildlife biologist.

Finally, Bob Nelson, longtime editor of the Maine Entomological Society newsletter, retired Colby professor, geologist and beetle lover presented at the Benton Grange Hall in October. He spoke on the incredible diversity of insects found in Maine and why their study is important now and into the future. You can learn more about the Maine Entomological Society at maineentosociety.org. A video of this presentation and others from our Speaker Series will be added to SRLT's YouTube channel later this fall. ~ Cheryl Daigle



On December 17, 2022, over 50 volunteers participated in the Unity Christmas Bird Count, with 21 in the field. In spite of all-day snowfall, the count of Evening Grosbeaks reached a record high and the volunteers also saw a good number of Bohemian Waxwings. Twenty-five volunteers joined in the Hartland CBC. Trends in recent years continue to show southern bird species moving further north. You can find more details on the 2022 count here: sebasticookrllt.org/christmasbirdcount.

Photo: Rusty Blackbird by Tom Aversa

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Join SRLT for a Christmas Bird Count, an annual tradition started by the National Audubon Society in 1900 to record wintering birds. These annual counts provide data that helps researchers, state, federal and tribal wildlife agencies, and land managers identify and prioritize land conservation and habitat needs to protect declining bird species. SRLT has sponsored the Unity area CBC for over a decade now, with many of our members participating. Bird species are counted and tallied along roads, parks and other greenspaces, including backyard bird feeders and on SRLT preserves. We are sponsoring two CBC's this year:

Saturday, December 16 - UNITY

Saturday, December 23 - HARTLAND

If you'd like to join either the Unity or Hartland count send an email to info@sebasticookrllt.org or sign up on the National Audubon Society's CBC website.



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Sebasticookrlt.org



We love hearing from visitors to our preserves about what you see as you walk the trails. Autumn's rich colors were on full display when Romy Carpenter explored the Rines Wetlands and Wildlife Preserve in October. Starflower was among the many plants and fungi she found along the trail. See more on our Facebook page. What are you seeing out on your woodland walks? Let us know on social media or email us at info@sebasticookrlt.org.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Remember to **JOIN** or **RENEW** your membership!
It takes a community to protect the places we love and all
the creatures that depend on them.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

JOIN US at the SRLT Speaker Series!

NOV 15 Forest Management in the Kennebec River Watershed Roger Crouse and Robbie Bickford, Kennebec Water District - Benton Grange Hall 6:30 - 8 pm

NOV 16 SRLT ANNUAL MEETING
Unity Community Center 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

DEC 13 Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock in Maine
Todd Waldron, Ruffed Grouse Society - Benton Grange Hall 6:30 - 8 pm

JAN 17 Balancing Solar Development and Farmland Protection Thatcher Carter, Maine Farmland Trust - Chace Community Forum, Waterville 6:30 - 8 pm

FEB 21 Maine State Heritage Rivers Bob Mallard, Native Fish Coalition - Chace Community Forum 6:30 - 8 pm

MAR 20 Update on the State of Maine Rivers
Landis Hudson - Benton Grange Hall 6:30 - 8 pm

APR 17 Ins and Outs of Land Surveys in Maine
Frank Siviski, Licensed Surveyor - Benton Grange Hall 6:30 - 8 pm

MAY Bird Talk & Walk Dates and locations tbd!

JUNE Paddle the Sebasticook River Stay tuned!

RSVP at SebasticookRLT.org

WORK DAYS LAST SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH & OTHERWISE POSTED ONLINE