



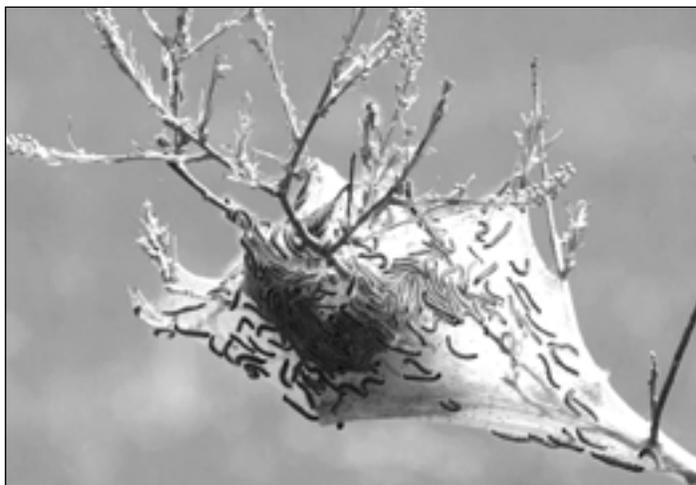
A Cacophony of Cuckoos

Did hairy caterpillars call the tune?

One of the most noteworthy avian phenomena in New Hampshire during the summer of 2020 was an influx of cuckoos. Starting in mid-May, the repetitive “cu-cu-cu cu-cu-cu” of the Black-billed and more exuberant “ca-ca-ca-ca-ca clowp clowp clowp clowp” of the Yellow-billed were common sounds in brushy areas and forest across most of the state. Seeing these secretive birds was another matter entirely, but with perseverance it wasn’t impossible, and the records just kept pouring in to NH eBird (<https://ebird.org/nh/home>).

Both species are regular members of New Hampshire’s avifauna, although their abundance can vary significantly from year to year. The Yellow-billed is usually the rarer of the two, and only reported half as frequently as Black-billed. It’s also usually restricted to parts of the state south of the White Mountains. In contrast, based on data submitted to eBird, Yellow-bills were roughly twice as common as Black-bills in 2020, and 5-6 times more abundant than in “normal” years. They also occurred more often than usual in the North Country. Black-bills were also more common, but not as dramatically as Yellow-bills.

So what was going on with cuckoos in 2020? As noted above, cuckoo abundance often varies among years, and this variation is largely due to fluctuations in prey. Cuckoos eat a wide variety of insects but



Top: A yellow-billed cuckoo. Above: tent worms.

specialize to some degree on outbreaks of caterpillars and cicadas, and are well-known for their penchant for hairy caterpillars (e.g., tent caterpillar, fall webworm, and gypsy moth). As an aside, these cuckoos are unusual in that they can tolerate the irritating hairs possessed by these caterpillars. The hairs actually pierce and get embedded in the bird’s stomach lining, and when enough build up the cuckoo simply regurgitates the now-hairy part of its digestive system and starts fresh. When these preferred prey are abundant, cuckoos show up to eat them, and often even produce more young in years with larger outbreaks.

It would thus stand to reason that the cuckoo invasion of 2020 was tied to some sort of insect outbreak, and while widespread data on this are lacking, there is at least one piece of evidence suggesting that caterpillars were more common in 2020 than most previous years. This evidence comes from the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest in the southern White Mountains, where ecologists have been counting caterpillars as part of a long-term bird study since 1986. The numbers of caterpillars – of all species, not necessarily hairy ones – was higher in 2020 than at any time in the previous 20 years. If caterpillar abundance was similarly high

Cuckoos Continued on page 4



A view of Crotched Mountain from the Brown Forest Wetland Reserve.

Land Acquired in 1929 for Preservation is Protected in 2020

Annie Bradley Brown, her husband, Wilfred Merrill Brown, and their family (son Henry, daughter Lois and Wilfred's brother and family) summered at Juniper Hill Farm, which Annie had bought in 1926. Annie also bought, in 1929, nearby land on Greenfield Road, just east of Spencer Road, to preserve and prevent its development. Annie sold Juniper Hill Farm in 1951 and transferred the "woodlot" to her son, Henry Brown.

From his youth, Henry Brown summered in Frankestown and eventually married native June Clark, sister of Betty (Brown), Connie (Varnum), Roger Clark and Stuart Clark. Settling in Virginia (and later Michigan), Henry and June vacationed with their children most years in Frankestown, staying at the home of June's mother (Marion Prescott Clark Kahle) on Main Street. In the early 1970's, Henry and June built a cottage on Pleasant Pond, affording the extended family a splendid New England refuge in the village of their relatives and forebears. In 1981, Henry added to the woodlot parcel on Greenfield Road by acquiring 6 more acres of wetlands. Henry and June both died in 1998, and the Greenfield Road property passed on to their children, Bradley Brown, Rosemary Lalonde, and Judith Zivic. At that time Judy and her husband, Lou Zivic, also acquired the Pleasant Pond property, which they owned until 2018.

Speaking for the entire Brown family, Judy Zivic said: "The family always enjoyed walking in and exploring the 'woodlot' land. We all have memories of its quiet beauty. It is the wish of all of our

family (including our children Andrew, Amy and Sarah Zivic; Matthew and Peter LaLonde; and Tyler and Lucas Brown) that the land be preserved as a woodland to be enjoyed by the community."

In 2019, the family contacted Frankestown Land Trust (FLT) about protecting the land and, in August 2020, they donated this special property to the community in care of FLT. FLT's project manager, Ben Haubrich, says he thinks this partial upland, mostly wetland property is known by most everybody in town, as it is so visible on the commute between Frankestown and Greenfield. "This wetland area has always been important to me for many reasons. In the spring

I always look for, and find, one of the first returning migratory birds, a male redwing blackbird, perched on one of the shrubs, claiming his territory. There is also a view of Crotched Mountain. Looking over the marsh and upland evergreens. And of course, right around this time of year the early foliage change of the red maples is the harbinger of the season to come."

The approximately 36-acre property, to be known as The Brown Forest Wetland Reserve, contains portions of both Taylor and Brennan Brooks, as well as the foundation of Schoolhouse 11. Barry Wicklow and his Saint Anselm College students have studied both brooks and found each to contain species that are indicators of high water quality. The protection of streams, wetlands and their surrounding lands are a priority for FLT.

Frankestown Land Trust relies on the generous donations of its membership to fund the transactional and stewardship costs of donated conservation properties.

"The family always enjoyed walking in and exploring the 'woodlot' land.

We all have memories of its quiet beauty."

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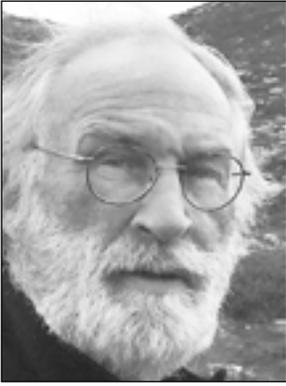
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Founded in 1986

A Letter from the Chair

September 19, 2020



Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Francestown Land Trust,

I'm finding myself feeling somewhat discombobulated these days and longing for a return to normalcy. I've thrown myself into solo activities, such as gardening, hiking, and swimming. I've missed canceled concerts and dances. I've participated in more ZOOM meetings than I care to recall. And I have yet to hold my

granddaughter, who was born on Easter Sunday.

Humans are innately social beings and this lack of connection takes its toll on us.

Connection of another sort is important in habitat protection and land conservation, as you can read in "The Value of Connection" article on page 4.

While recent acquisitions by the Francestown Land Trust have brought multiple benefits (e.g., the Abbottville Farm easement protects some of the town's best agricultural land and the conservation easement on the St. Jean property and the purchase of the Fisher Hill lot have recreational value), all of these projects also advance

the connectivity of conserved lands. Our focus on the Piscataquog River, historically, and in upcoming projects, seeks to preserve water quality in the Merrimack River watershed.

Our membership forges another kind of connection. FLT is a diverse group—including hunters, mountain bikers, snowmobilers, fishermen, hikers, birders, herpetologists, mycologists, botanists, photographers, moms, dads, and so on! While we all appreciate our conserved lands through the lens of how we use them, we are all connected by our desire to protect them for future generations—and our awareness of the need to remember to tread lightly when we visit them.

Fall is returning to the Monadnock region, evidenced by the emergence of the reds and yellows of autumn foliage as chlorophyll makes its retreat. Apples are ripening, broad wing hawks have commenced their annual migration along with the monarch butterflies, pumpkin spice everything is appearing in the market, comforters are emerging from linen closets, and wood smoke fills the air (and not just from the western fires!).

It's a great time of year to get outside and take in the myriad changes of the season.

We hope you are finding ways to get out and enjoy our open spaces. We appreciate your support and ideas and we thank you for helping to conserve these vital resources.

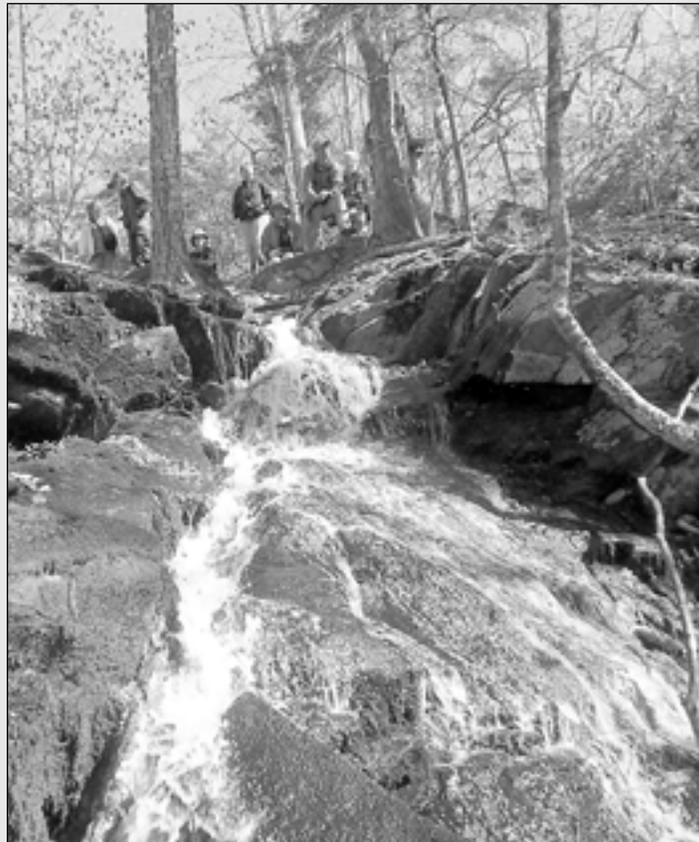
Larry Ames, Chair of the Francestown Land Trust

A Walk in the Woods The Schott Brennan Falls Reserve and a visit to the Lost Village

Recently, posts about "New Hampshire Ghost Towns" have popped up in my Facebook feed. For me, the term "ghost town" conjures up dilapidated buildings with broken windows and freely swinging saloon doors on creaky hinges. Obviously, this ghost town, often a mining boomtown that is no longer booming, comes from old Westerns. Here in New Hampshire, ghost towns are most often a grouping of old cellar holes, the remnants of a millpond, or an old cemetery.

Did you know that Francestown has its own ghost town? Known as Lost Village, it sits on the side of Crotched Mountain.

FLT's Schott Brennan Falls Reserve abuts the area and has within its borders an old dam, a cellar hole, and



Brennan Brook Falls, during a non-drought season.

Brennan Brook Falls. The hike to the Falls is a short one, about 25 minutes, the trail is easy-to-moderate—and there are opportunities to create longer hikes.

From the intersection of Campbell Hill Road and Bullard Hill Road (where the Campbell Hill Road pavement ends) proceed (if driving, only in a high clearance vehicle) along Bullard Hill Road south about a quarter of a mile to the kiosk and trailhead; it's located at the edge of an open area that served as a log landing years ago.

The trail is well-marked and follows an old logging road about a third of a mile to an old dam. I'm not sure if this dam was associated with any particular mill. More likely, it held back water from the Piscataquog River drainage, where many mills were locat-

Schott Brennan Falls Reserve

Continued on page 5

The Value of Connection

When considering the merits of a piece of land that FLT has the opportunity to protect, either via fee ownership or conservation easement, we look at four categories of attributes:

- Water Quality and Quantity
- Wildlife Habitat and Natural Ecosystems
- Recreational, Educational, Scientific, or Scenic Value
- Forests and Agricultural Lands

One of the criteria we use when considering the quality of Wildlife Habitat is whether or not it connects to other tracts of land conserved by FLT or others and can provide a wildlife corridor for safer movement of wildlife within or between protected areas. The need for corridors and connectivity are not limited to terrestrial ecosystems, but are also important for vernal pools, streams, rivers, lakes and even oceans.

There are many reasons that wildlife need to move across habitats. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Daily movements between bedding and feeding areas
- Seasonal migrations related to changing weather or reproductive strategies
- Disturbances in the natural ecosystem, such as those caused by drought, flooding,

fire—or, increasingly, climate change

There are also many different types of barriers to wildlife movement—manmade ones, such as dams, fences, roads, highways and development in general, and natural ones, such as rivers and mountains.

Fragmentation and destruction of habitat are among the leading causes of biodiversity loss. Designation and creation of protected areas is becoming increasingly unfeasible, particularly for large, wide-ranging species, because there simply aren't the necessary large tracts of unfragmented land available. Consider the situation in the American West this year or the Australian fires in 2019; millions of acres burned, destroying wildlife habitat along with whole towns, businesses, and lives. Wildfires are a natural element of a long-term ecosystem's cycles, but without a considerable area of unburned habitat or an escape route to the same, many species may not be able to recover from their loss of habitat.

Climate change also creates pressure on species to move, not as urgently as a fire, but more permanently. As terrestrial and aquatic life experiences warming, acidification, and rising sea levels, connectivity can provide an escape route for climate refugees.

One of the speakers at a recent FLT annual membership meeting used Henry David Thoreau's observations to measure the effect of climate change on the blooming period of native wildflowers—and raise questions about the effect of earlier blooming on the entire ecosystem. What happens to the insect population that relies on these blooms? The birds that feed on those insects? Different species migrate, if they can. But how can entire ecosystems migrate without connectivity of habitat?

Connectivity is important to the human species as well, particularly for hunter/gatherer communities. FLT recognizes the importance of connectivity to local hunters. And, when biking, hiking or snowmobile trail systems are interconnected, they provide an expanded opportunity for people to get outside and enjoy the physical, mental and emotional benefits of recreation.

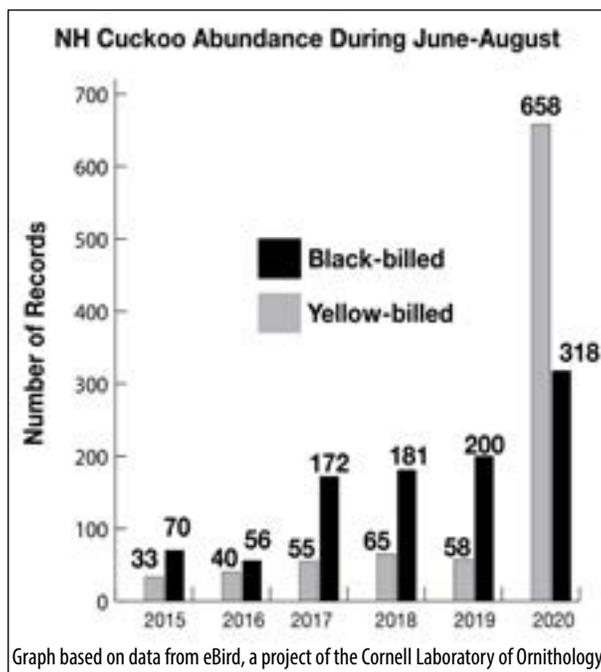
Fortunately, connectivity can be improved at any scale, from easing local movement between small streams and berry patches, to building bridges for trails, to linking large parcels of protected land.

With your help, connectivity is one of the ways we work to protect local wildlife and the varied ecosystems we treasure.

Cuckoos *Continued from page 1* statewide, it could certainly have been attractive to cuckoos as they worked their way north back in the spring.

But how would these cuckoos—especially the rarer Yellow-billed—know to wander north into New Hampshire in the first place? For this answer we must look back in time and a little farther south, where there was a small gypsy moth outbreak in western Massachusetts and Connecticut in 2019. Last summer I heard or saw multiple Yellow-billed Cuckoos in both states, despite being in each for a single weekend, and presume these birds had a productive breeding season given the abundant food. If more young are produced, this generally means there will be more year-old birds returning north the following spring.

In addition, there is some evidence that cuckoos are nomadic for a short period after spring migration and before nesting, and use this time to seek out areas of high prey density. For example, New Hampshire data for 2018 and 2019 show a peak of reports in late May, but these were followed by drops in June, suggesting that migrants didn't stick around. 2020, in contrast, saw no such sum-



mer decline, almost certainly because cuckoos found abundant food and decided to settle down.

Cuckoos generally leave New Hampshire for points south starting in late August (Black-billed) or mid-September (Yellow-billed), and spend the winter in South America. The following May they make their ways back here and start the cycle all over again. Will there be a caterpillar outbreak in 2021, or will all the cuckoos we enjoyed in 2020 end up somewhere else? You can be sure birders will be out looking, and in the process keep adding to our knowledge of the movement patterns of these somewhat enigmatic birds.

Dr. Pam Hunt has been a conservation biologist at New Hampshire Audubon since 2000, and for most of her tenure has also worked closely with the NH Fish and Game Department in the unofficial capacity of "State Ornithologist." Her diverse tasks can be best summed up as involving the coordination and prioritization of avian research and monitoring in the state, including being a core member of the team that developed both of New Hampshire's Wildlife Action Plans.

Schott Brennan Falls Reserve *Continued from page 3*

ed, as part of a water impoundment system that helped keep the mills running through dry summer months. It's an energy storage system that would have been particularly important in a year like this one.

That the system worked well was made evident by the extent to which, with the help of beavers, the trail flooded and it was necessary to create a bypass trail. The bypass rejoins the trail between the flooded area and the dam. Near the pond, there are a few spots where I like to wander off the trail and settle down to observe pond activity.

The trail continues along the left bank of Brennan Brook to the half-mile point, where there is a footbridge across the brook. Here the trail narrows to a single track and ends at Brennan Falls about two thirds of a mile from the trailhead. The Falls are categorized as a "horsetail" type and the official height is fifteen feet. It was not very impressive when I visited in mid-September, during a drought. Plan an April-to-June visit to see the waterfall.

Return to the trailhead back along the same trail. At that point,



A beaver pond on the Schott Brennan Falls Reserve reflects the forest.

you may choose to return to your car or head left (south) on Bullard Hill Road about a half a mile to the intersection of Old Mountain Road, (a trail) where there is a beautiful hay field and good views. (These are Class 6 roads that are not in driving condition).

A right on Old Mountain Road leads to where many of the cellar holes comprising Lost Village are located on private property. Continuing on Old Mountain Road leads to Summit East and Summit West trails. If, instead, you continue along Bullard Hill Road, it will eventually take you to the Farrington Road trailhead at the Francestown Forest, where there is another whole network of trails to explore. Less than fifty yards along Bullard Hill from Old Mountain Road, you'll find one of the Lost Village cellar holes on your left.

A visit to the Schott Brennan Falls Reserve can be anything from a short hike to the Falls and back—to a day-long excursion.

For directions to the trailhead and map, go to:
<http://www.francestownlandtrust.org/maps---directions.ht>

For more information about NH Ghost Towns check out:
<https://raregoldnuggets.com/?p=4270>

Larry Ames

Great American Outdoors Act *Continued from page 6*

Anne Kuster and Congressman Chris Pappas for the critical roles they played in this effort.

Yes, supporters have had to manage the program's up and down history of uneven funding. Yes, there were also times when it felt like we would never see this day, especially during those periods when the authorization for the LWCF lapsed.

However, because of the commitment of this partnership, we can all celebrate what is a milestone event," Savage said.

Matt Leahy is Public Policy Manager for the Society for the Protection of NH Forests. This news release dated August 17, 2020, is reprinted here with permission of the author.

Note: Although LWCF money is for government (federal, state, municipal, etc.) outdoor recreation projects, those agencies often partner with nonprofits like Francestown Land Trust to create large publicly supported outdoor recreation areas. Much of Francestown's 417-acre Shattuck Pond Town Forest was funded through the LWCF. FLT's land manager, Ben Haubrich, capped his 34 year career with NH State Parks as the state administrator for the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Membership Bylaws Update

The Francestown Land Trust recently conducted a review of our bylaws and made a slight change to those regarding membership. Here is the revised version:



Membership Eligibility. Membership in FLT shall be available to any individual(s) who support the organization's stated purpose and who maintain current dues status.

Dues. Annual dues, in an amount set from time to time by the board of directors shall entitle membership in FLT from July 1 or a later date of payment through the following June 30 unless specified by the member to cover a later membership period. All memberships are household memberships.

Voting Rights. Up to two eligible members in a household, if 18 years of age or older, shall be entitled to vote on matters submitted to a vote of the general membership.

As of August 2020 annual dues are set at \$25 for individuals or households. Twenty-five dollars of any donation received will be applied toward membership if the donor is not a current member at the time of the donation.



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Newsorthy

Great American Outdoors Act Becomes Law

On August 4, the bipartisan Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) was signed into law. That action crowns the efforts Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) advocates, including the Forest Society, have been making over the last decade to fully fund the LWCF.

Since its creation in 1964, LWCF has funded thousands of projects at the federal, state and municipal levels. In New Hampshire, it has funded state and municipal parks from Coos County to the sea. In fact, through the end of 2018, our state had received a total of \$165.4 million in LWCF funds since the program's establishment. LWCF has funded major additions to the White Mountain National Forest and the establishment of the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge. It has funded Forest Legacy projects, placing permanent conservation easements on privately owned forest lands, like the 146,100 acre Connecticut Headwaters conservation easement in Coos County, and the Moose Mountains Reservation (owned by the Forest Society) in Middleton and Brookfield.



The funding for all this great work comes from the revenue the federal government receives from offshore oil and gas leases to private energy developers. While it is authorized to receive \$900 million each year, it rarely ever secured that amount. In fact, the program typically saw less than half the authorized level.

The approval of the GAOA corrects that problem. From now on, the LWCF will receive the \$900 million in yearly appropriations the drafters of the program originally intended.

“The LWCF has always been a model for how federal, state and private partnerships result in widespread natural resource, community and economic benefits. GAOA’s enactment is the result of these kinds of connections. Working with our state’s federal delegation, supporters in New Hampshire were part of national network of nonprofits, businesses, local elected officials, recreationists and other stakeholders,” said Forest Society President Jack Savage.

“The Forest Society would like to give special thanks to Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Senator Maggie Hassan, Congresswoman
Great American Outdoors Act *Continued on page 5*