



Natural News

A Newsletter of the Hamden Land Conservation Trust

Spring & Summer
2011

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A Message from Our President

I am pleased to report that the Hamden Land Conservation Trust has joined give-Greater.org, an online database of local nonprofit organizations. Visitors to this site have access to detailed information about specific organizations and can contribute to their favorite nonprofits. As part of the HLCT profile, the President is asked to provide a statement about why he or she serves the organization. My reply is below.

Growing up in rural northeastern Connecticut I had endless opportunities to immerse myself in Nature. Whether I was hiking on the blue trail, bird watching or

chasing butterflies, there was no shortage of open space for me to explore. Twenty one years ago I left the forests and pastoral farmland of the "Quiet Corner" and settled in Hamden, a larger, more developed community than I was accustomed to. I quickly became familiar with the largest tracts of open space in Hamden: Brooksvale Park, Sleeping Giant State Park, and West Rock Ridge State Park. These properties are truly gems, vital to the preservation of Hamden's natural heritage. As the years went by I became aware that many other acres throughout town had been lost and was determined to help find ways to protect Hamden's remaining natural resources. When I was asked to join the Hamden Land Conser-

vation Trust (HLCT) Board I jumped at the opportunity. The HLCT Board is a group of individuals from all walks of life who share a love for their town and a passion to conserve its open space. What is most impres-



sive to me is how much a group of volunteers can accomplish when they eagerly work toward a common goal, saving Hamden's remaining open space. Obviously if you are receiving this newsletter you also want to protect Hamden's natural resources. While your membership and monetary donations are indeed vital to the organization, we are always in need of volunteers. Please consider working on a committee, helping at an event or joining us on a work day at one of our properties. You will not be disappointed.

Andy Brand,
President HLCT

Spring Activities

April 30 10—2
Earth Day
Hamden Middle School

Sunday May 15
Powder Farm Walk
One walk at 12:30. For directions, check our website www.hlct.org

Monday May 16 7 PM
Planting for Butterflies
Thornton Wilder Hall

Sunday June 5
National Trails Day
Check for details on our website www.hlct.org

Thursday June 9 7 PM
Annual Meeting
St. Rita's Church
Speaker: Dan Esty,
CT Dept. of Energy and
Environmental Protection
Commissioner



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Native Plants Fight Back Against Invasive Species Eco-Attack

By Andrew Keys

The mission of the Hamden Land Conservation Trust is to protect and preserve open space in Hamden through purchase or easements, and to educate the public about conservation



Drawing by Mimi Kamp

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Powder Farm Walk

Be sure to join us for a visit to the Olin “Powder Farm” on Sunday May 15. Please check our website for up-to-the-minute details.

What’s all the fuss about invasive plants? In a nutshell, invasives are plants from other parts of the world that break out of gardens and spread maniacally through our local ecosystems, threatening native flora and fauna, because the things that keep them in check where they grow naturally don’t exist here. And because of that, invasives out-compete whole communities of native plants, replacing ecosystems that support an abundance of life with communities that support little more than the invaders themselves. You see, where they’re native, plants have evolved alongside other living things for millions of years, and in that time they’ve intertwined in a web of relationships too vast for us to imagine—bestowing food, shelter, and other basic needs on creatures large and small. When communities of invasive species replace native plant communities, that system falls apart.

To preserve our precious local ecosystems, we must fight back. One surefire way to do that is to plant native plants instead of invasive species, and to replace the invasive species in our gardens with natives.

If there’s one invasive plant my clients always ask about, it’s burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*).

Beloved for fire engine-red

fall color, it is also one of our region’s nastiest invaders. Fortunately there’s a treasure trove of native shrubs with equal or better fall color. Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*) is first—and, relax, folks—this isn’t your scout leader’s poison sumac. It’s a pretty shrub, perfect for hedging and tough enough to grow anywhere. (If it’s groundcover you’re after, the variety ‘Grow-Low’ works great; otherwise, go with the species.) Another good choice is Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginica*), whose range extends just to the Northeast. The cultivar ‘Henry’s Garnet’ is a real treat in fall. But my top pick for native fall color shrub? Blueberries, any and all. Yep, the humble blueberry (*Vaccinium* species) isn’t just for fruit anymore. It’s an outstanding shrub in the landscape with unbeatable fall color to boot! Berries are beloved by man and wildlife alike, and they come in varying sizes, one of which is sure to suit your garden.

What about shrubs that are colorful year-round? Red- and purple-leaved barberry (*Berberis* species), popular for their showy foliage, breeds and seeds plain green offspring into the wild across the Northeast.

Multiple native alternatives

are available in red-leaved cultivars of ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*) like Diabolo®, Summer Wine®, and Coppertina™. Not only is ninebark native, it’s also thornless, unlike prickly barberry.

Looking to the heavens, a number of maples are invasive species in the northeast, most notoriously Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*). Fear not, because three native maples will fill the bill: red maple (*Acer rubrum*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) and silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*). If maple just won’t do, sweet gum is an option.

(*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and the cultivar ‘Rotundiloba’ comes without the prickly fruit. Last but certainly not least, a devil I battle in my own garden is bishop’s weed (*Aegopodium podagraria*). I’m baffled to see the showy white-edged variegated form of this invasive plant for sale when infinitely more showy ‘Stairway to Heaven’ Jacob’s ladder is on the market. This selection of native *Polemonium reptans* makes a tough, exquisite groundcover, and it has blue spring flowers to boot. Only some states, such as Massachusetts and Connecticut, ban the sale of invasive plants in nurseries, so it pays to know your invaders. Your state should have a list of plants to avoid on the web. For further reading, check out *Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants*, by C. Colston Burrell. It’s an easy read for amateur gardeners and pros alike.

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A Brief Review of 2010 Activities

Our efforts to identify open-space parcels in Hamden that might be suitable for preservation—the first part of the HLCT's founding mission—were given a major boost in 2010. A student intern from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies developed a ranking system for pieces of land in our database. (The database itself was prepared by another student intern the year before.) We are now ready to approach landowners who might be interested in protecting their property as open space for future generations.

We also pursued the other half of the HLCT's mission—educating the public about conservation. The tradition of walks at the Olin Powder Farm

in southern Hamden continued with spring and fall outings. The spring outing was a morning bird walk; in the fall, tree identification was the theme. We sponsored a National Trails Day hike in June on the "ABC" Regional Water Authority property off Gaylord Mountain Road, where we hold a conservation easement. Outdoor activities included a nighttime event too: in early May, the flashlight-wielding participants in a "peeper prow" at Johnson's Pond were rewarded with views of several nocturnal creatures.

More formal venues to engage the public included

our annual participation in the Earth Day Celebration at the Hamden Middle School in April and the Brooksvale Fall Festival in October, where we had tables with exhibits and information. The Annual Meeting, in June, featured a stimulating talk by Natureworks Garden Center owner Nancy DuBrule-Clemente on replacing lawns with gardens of native plants.

To drive home the idea of transforming our yards from golf greens into habitats for native flora and fauna, the HLCT started a series in the *Post Chronicle* entitled "Hamden's Wild Yards." Photographs and text featured Hamden homeowners who are setting a trend in taking their yards "back to nature." This popular series will return to the *Post Chronicle* in 2011.



Volunteers Needed !

We have several committees needing volunteers:

The Education Committee plans events and produces this newsletter.

The Stewardship Committee maintains each property we hold.

The Acquisition Committee looks for properties that are appropriate for preservation through conservation easements or outright purchase.

Do you know any property that might be saved?

Contact Jackie Downing:
jackie0832@comcast.net

Our Education Committee is always looking for fresh ideas to educate our community about open space issues. If you have suggestions, please contact Betsy Gorman.

Goralbetsy@aol.com

Our Stewardship Committee needs help throughout the spring, summer, and fall with property clean-up. Please contact Mary Tyrrell if you are interested.

Mary.Tyrrell@yale.edu



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Donna Chesner



Servoss/Mather: an Update

Our project to enhance the Servoss/Mather property is well underway. Neighbors joined board members for a clean up on September 11, 2010. We took down the old rusty barbed wire fence, cleared a path through the poison ivy and garlic mustard, and hauled out yard waste, including loads of bamboo cuttings, that had been dumped into the "kettle". A letter to the neighbors seemed to make a difference as we have seen much less dumping since the clean-up.

Let's hope this trend continues through spring clean-up season. We tackled the massive vines of poison ivy, grape, and wisteria (a serious invasive plant problem on the property) that were strangling the trees along the edge at the corner. Now we are waiting for the spring thaw to install the fence and plant a native garden on the corner. In the meantime, we're designing an interpretive sign about glacial kettles and the history of the property. We'll mark the completion of the project with a neighborhood party - look for news of the celebration sometime towards the end of April.

This project was funded by a grant from the Pratt & Whitney Green Power Grant Program, in cooperation with the Whitneyville Civic Association.



CONTACT US

- Our website is: www.hlct.org
- Mailing address:
Box P.O. Box 6185
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- Join our email list by sending your email address to info@hlct.org

Natural News

Spring Phenology

The study of annual cycles of plants and animals and how they respond to seasonal changes in their environment is called phenology. Please also note that this calendar is for a certain place and elevation in Vermont, and some things will occur about a week earlier here in Hamden.

April

Week 1—Robins seem to be happy to be back and may be noisy as they join forces at a loaded crabapple tree. Sometime before the breeding season begins in early April, starling bills turn from dark brown to bright yellow.

Week 2— The dog begins to shed. Belted kingfishers are back. Young cattail shoots break off easily and can be peeled and eaten raw or cooked like asparagus.

Week 3— Earliest ruffed grouse are laying eggs. Average clutch is about a dozen eggs, but the number varies widely

Week 4—The sweet trill of American toads can be heard at night. Queen bumblebees fly a zigzag course close to the ground as they search for a nest site. The queen begins a new colony, usually in an abandoned mouse nest.

May

Week 1— Birds sing most enthusiastically at dawn, perhaps to let it be known that they made it through the night and still control the territory.

Week 2—Wood thrush nests are being built in three layers, usually about ten feet off the ground. Leaves, mosses, grasses on the outside, mud in the middle, and fine rootlets for a lining. The pointy coiled spathes of Jack-in-the-pulpit are opening.

Week 3— Returning hummingbirds will sometimes hover exactly where last year's nectar feeder was positioned, even if you haven't put it up yet.

Week 4— 'Unck,' the sound of plucking a loose banjo string, can be heard now through August, mostly at night, from ponds with green frogs. As you dig in the garden, thank the actinomycetes, the filamentous bacteria that give soil its wonderful earthy smell.

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