



Natural News

A Newsletter of the Hamden Land Conservation Trust

Spring & Summer
2013

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A Message from Our President

The promise of spring is in the air – *in more ways than one*. Not only are green shoots beginning to show in the ground – the tough winter of our troubled economy feels as if it is beginning to give way to “greener” times. Sadly, many nonprofit organizations doing good work have not survived the economic downturn. I’m grateful that the Hamden Land Conservation Trust (HLCT) has weathered the deep freeze through careful stewardship of lands and your generous dollars.

I think there is no

season as invigorating and full of promise as spring. Nearly everyone looks forward to spending more time outdoors. Here at the HLCT, we are excited to be getting back to the work of maintaining our open space properties and hosting hikes for the benefit of our residents and their guests. I invite you to take advantage of the hikes we offer as a chance to get you and your children or grandchildren out together, staying fit and enjoying the nature of Hamden.

To the untrained eye, it might seem as if a standing wood, once set aside for preservation, doesn’t need any further effort. As a professional ecologist, I know that’s not the case. Indeed, at the HLCT, a significant portion of the funds we

raise go – not just to secure new properties, but to survey, maintain and



protect the ones currently in our care. Good stewardship is an ongoing proposition.

Also in this mailing, you will find our spring appeal. For less than the price of a new pair of hiking boots, you can make a difference in the future of Hamden all year long. Please give it your careful consideration and be as generous as you can. Your gift to the HLCT makes an enormous difference.

Jim Sirch, President

Saturday June 1
10 AM
Connecticut Trails Day
at Johnson’s Pond

Make a difference in your local landscape! Join us for a walk through this small preserve learning about wildlife and the challenges of controlling invasive plants.



Dutchman’s Breeches



OUR PROPERTIES:

Johnson's Pond

By Bob Zambrano



Nicole MacPherson

Johnson's Pond is a gem of open space located in the Spring Glen section of Hamden. This 3.2 acre property has been owned by HLCT since 2007, and is comprised of a pond and woods, and is bordered on three sides by residential properties. Ingram, Greenway and Thornton Streets form three boundaries; Regional Water Authority holdings form the fourth side. The pond itself is shallow and freezes readily, making it a favorite spot for hockey players and skaters.

Johnson's Pond supports a variety of plants and wildlife; over 100 species of birds have been observed. Early spring brings the sound of spring peepers to the pond; turtles sun themselves on logs in summer, and bullfrogs can be heard.

During 2013, HLCT will begin the removal of invasive plants from the pond area. The kick-off will occur on June 1, CT Trails Day. Join us from 10:00—11:00 AM for a walk through this small preserve, learning about wildlife. We will also be discussing the challenges we face when trying to control invasive plants. Spend an hour with us clearing invasives. Meet by the HLCT sign at the entrance on Thornton Street, between #273 and #279. Heavy rain cancels.

Peepers Prowl at Johnson's Pond!

Friday, April 12 8:30 PM

Join us and we'll and we'll hunt for these fascinating tiny frogs with enormously loud voices. We'll also learn about their incredible life history.

Meet by the HLCT sign at the entrance on Thornton St., between #273 and #279.

Heavy rain cancels.



Johnson's Pond



Right in Your Back Yard

Ah, the wildlife. Watching from the kitchen window, I delight in the circus of squirrels and birds. After years of city captivity, I now awaken to a backyard teeming with wildlife. Skunks and woodchucks come to forage in raised garden beds, planted and tended lovingly by the house's former owners. A family of wild turkeys strolls through on their Spring Glen walkabout, stopping for a welcome respite in the sun.

All manner of birds enjoy the fruit of a newly installed feeder, almost as much as I enjoy them ... the charming downy woodpecker, the regal cardinal, and stunning bluejay. Their songs, alternately cheerful and plaintive, tether me to the natural world.

One particular squirrel, mildly annoyed by the pole's baffle, somehow outsmarts it when I turn away, then sits on the feeder tray staring in at me as he noshes. It's a cartoon come to life. And a connection is made... a mutual and deep understanding. He knows he has the upper hand, and is polite enough not to grin about it. I laugh out loud,

deciding to add another baffle.... and buy a gigantic bag of peanuts.

Born wild and wily, living by instinct, my new companions inspire me to venture out and explore... to forage a little in the land of bipeds. Still I long to be more like my feathered and furry pals...fully engaged in the moment...aware of the danger, yet completely unafraid. Watch and learn, they seem to say, and welcome to the joys of a wilder life.

Amanda Kallenbach



Jean Vincent

Sure Signs of Spring

March

Skunk cabbage has been flowering since February and now starting send up leaves.

Red-winged blackbirds, the first bird of spring, return from the south

Red maples are flowering.

Spring peeper males "peeping" to attract a mate and defend their "patch of water".

Look for mourning cloak butterflies emerging from their bark crevices and flying on warm days.

April

Male American goldfinches are turning bright yellow

Eastern phoebes are back and looking for nest sites under house eaves and bridges.

Both male and female cardinals are singing, which is unusual in birds.

Lyrid meteor shower on April 21-22.

Dutchman's breeches and other spring ephemerals begin to bloom.

May

Spring is really here!



Drawing by Craig Holdrege from an article by him on skunk cabbage (http://natureinstitute.org/pub/ic/ic4/skunk_cabbage.htm)

**Native species:***Ilex glabra* **Inkberry**

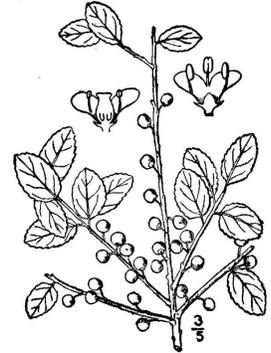
By Andy Brand & Tom Parlapiano

For the past few years, the Hamden Land Conservation Trust has been highlighting "Wild Yards" in its newsletter and in local newspaper articles. The idea behind our "Wild Yards" campaign has been to focus attention on local properties and property owners who have decided to encourage native biodiversity in our neighborhoods through their landscaping choices. Wild Yards is a concept that can transform our suburban environment. In this column, we will introduce you to one component of a "wild yard" at a time. These plant species can be added to what already exists in your yard, or they can replace existing non-native plants that sometimes hurt, or at best do little to help, native biodiversity.

Inkberry, *Ilex glabra*, is an evergreen member of the holly family. It is a native shrub with a round, dense form that can reach 6-8' tall at maturity. However, there are varieties that are better suited to smaller landscapes that grow no taller than 3 or 4 feet tall such as 'Shamrock'. Inkberry has rounded, dark green leathery leaves and produces small white flowers in the spring that turn to dark purple to black berries in the fall. The berries are an important winter food for a variety of wildlife while the dense foliage provides shelter for winter birds such as white-throated sparrows, black-capped chickadees and tufted titmice. It is important to note that inkberry is dioecious, meaning there are male and female plants. Fruit is produced on the female plants.

Inkberry prefers to grow in full sun or partial shade and acidic soils that are consistently moist. It is best to avoid planting this evergreen in areas exposed to harsh winter winds that can result in leaf burn. Pruning every 3-4 years will rejuvenate plants and maintain a full, dense habit. Overtime plants tend to develop into suckering colonies although any suckers can be easily removed by pruning.

Because of its shape and the fact it is evergreen, inkberry can be used in place of a number of non-native shrubs in your residential landscape. It is an excellent alternative to Japanese barberry, yew and boxwood.



USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / Britton, N.L., and A. Brown. 1913. *An illustrated flora of the northern United States, Canada and the British Possessions*. 3 vols. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York. Vol. 2: 487.

CONTACT US

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Look on our website and our Facebook page for our upcoming spring walks at Powder Farm and the ABC property, as well as our annual meeting.