
THE The Colebrook Land Conservancy NEWSLETTER

“In Land We Trust”

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WILD LIFE

An Owl Odyssey

Terry Benes, who lives in the center of Colebrook village, retells an Owl adventure:

It was Columbus Day, Monday, Oct. 11 — not a holiday from my job in a veterinary hospital — and I was rushing around as usual to get back to the city for work. I took our dog out for her morning walk at 6:45, just as it was getting light.

Raleigh’s hackles went up immediately — she smelled something — and I could see the shadowy outline of what looked like a big cat about 50 yards away at the bottom of our back lawn.

Raleigh was on leash (happily), but she started barking and the creature spread its wings and flapped along the ground. It was an owl.

It did not take off in flight — which I knew was not normal. It flapped its way over our stonewall and into the uncut brambles beyond. I knew owls were nocturnal hunters. I thought maybe he/she had been finishing a meal when we came out and was caught by surprise. Maybe, like a vampire, this one had lost track of time and just didn’t make it back to its nest by dawn. I hoped it would be gone by the time we got back from our walk.

Forty-five minutes later we came back — full daylight — and he was still there, now sitting on the stonewall. I knew something was definitely wrong. I took Raleigh home and went back out with binoculars. He was beautiful — a great horned owl — although I didn’t know that at the time — just sitting motionless on the stonewall and occasionally blinking his incredible amber eyes.

I knew I had to call someone to rescue him, but I didn’t have a clue where to begin. I started with Manuel (who I woke up), who suggested Joyce Hemingson because she “had something to do with the Audubon Society” or maybe call the Department of Environmental Protection. I tried to reach Joyce, but she had already left for work. I got through on an emergency number at the DEP, and was given two numbers: Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton and a wildlife rehabilitator in Hartland. I got voicemail at both numbers and left messages. I called my friend



Holly in Norfolk, who suggested I call Shelley Harms who she knew had done some bird banding in the past. I called Shelley who suggested I call Eric Anderson in Norfolk who had once rescued an owl. I called—Eric wasn’t there, but his wife Susan said I should capture the owl and take it to the Sharon Audubon Center. (I knew I wasn’t going to be able to capture this owl — I had seen him flapping, after all, and he was big!)

At this point Roaring Brook called me back and gave me the name and two numbers for Teresa Kramer at Canton Raptor Care — a clinic and rehabilitation center. I called and got voicemail again: one message was out of date and another phone wasn’t taking messages, so I didn’t leave a message. I was starting to get a little frantic — it was time to leave, Stuart was packing the car...Then Shelley called me back and said she and her father (who had rescued owls in the Midwest) would

come over and capture this owl and take him to Sharon and they would be there in 10 minutes. Halleluiah!

Shelley and her father showed up, as promised. Our owl was still sitting on the wall, and Shelley immediately recognized him as a great horned. But, not surprisingly, as soon as we got within about 20 feet, he flapped his wings and jumped into the brambles. Although Shelley was game to give it a try, catching him would have been extremely difficult, and her father discouraged her. He thought the owl was probably all right (based on his energetic flapping) and might have just eaten too much. Shelley agreed to come back in a couple days to check and make sure he was gone. And they left.

Before leaving for New York, I called Roaring Brook to tell them what was going on. By now, Jay Kaplan, the owl expert, was in and I was able to talk to him. He explained that at that time of year, the parent owls stop feeding their fledglings. If the young birds are not good hunters – and many of them aren’t – they can starve. Incredibly, about 65 percent of young owls don’t make it. He suspected that ours might be a starving young owl. He urged me to leave a message for Teresa at Canton Raptor Care (he said he would come himself to do the rescue, but couldn’t leave the center because of the holiday).

Teresa called back and confirmed what I’d been told about fledglings. She said our owl probably wouldn’t survive two days on the ground and that he might have been injured in some way we couldn’t see (owls can be hit by cars when they are hunting on the road). She volunteered to come and get him, but only if someone would be there to show her where he was. I had to leave for New York, but Shelley agreed to come back and rendezvous with Teresa. Somewhere in Westchester I got a call from Shelley that the owl had been rescued!

He survived and has been rehabilitating at Canton Raptor Care ever since. Teresa found him to be starving (she said it was “like picking up an empty container of milk”) and very weak. He definitely had a head trauma: he had blood in the back of both of his eyes and one side of his skull was swollen. He was covered with nasty external parasites (hypoboscid flies) that would have made him anemic, and had apparently been eating bugs off the ground for some time based on the condition of his beak. Male GHO’s are smaller than females, and Teresa determined that “our little guy” was most probably a male.

He made steady progress. After treatment with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory medication, and once he was able to eat and

digest normal owl food (whole mice), Teresa released him into her “fly” enclosure with another great horned she was rehabilitating. The cage has ramps, so injured birds can launch themselves up, and build up their strength, and soon enough our guy was able to fly again.

Teresa thought she might let both owls overwinter together and release them in the spring. But the other owl, a female, was very aggressive and wanted nothing to do with our youngster. Since the female was healthy and ready to go, Teresa released her on a warm day in November and our guy has had the cage to himself. (Aside: Teresa really liked Colebrook as an owl habitat and released the female behind our house!)

Stuart and I visited Canton Raptor Care the end of January. It’s an amazing place and Teresa is incredibly knowledgeable. Along with our great horned, she has barred owls, a barn owl, screech owls, red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, turkey vultures

and a kestrel. Some are in rehab, some are her “education birds” that she takes to schools and presentations. You can read the story of Canton Raptor Care and about the work Teresa does on her web site: www.cantonraptorcare.org.

The interns at Canton Raptor Care call our owl “Lumpyhead,” since he still shows that effect of his injury. But his eyes have cleared up, he can fly and “helicopter,” and he shows some normal owl spunk. The big question for his future will be if he is able to hunt. He hasn’t caught any live mice yet, and it has been too cold to “prey train” (i.e. put live mice in the cage) this winter.

By early March he is still doing well, we will be keeping our fingers crossed when Teresa starts testing him in the spring. If he shows that he can hunt,

he will be released where he was found, behind our house in Colebrook.

UPDATE: Earlier this spring, Teresa at Canton Raptor Care took in a young GHOW from Tufts who needed some rehabilitation after medical treatment for a fall from his/her nest. Teresa put that owl in the same fly cage as our Colebrook owl, and the two bonded and seemed to boost each other’s recovery. Teresa decided to release them together, in the hopes that our guy would continue to be the “adult” that the younger one needs.

She brought them both over on a Friday evening and we released them at the same time. Our guy flew off with great enthusiasm. The younger one was a little more disoriented, but the hope is that they are together and, relieved of the stress of captivity, will thrive.



State Regulations Help Wildlife

CONNECTICUT WILDLIFE IS IN GOOD HEALTH, says Colebrookian Susan Campbell, because there is good state oversight and control. All hunting and fishing are regulated, for instance, and the DEP provides a state wide system of Environmental Conservation Officers and game wardens. Susan might have been answering the phone at the DEP when Terry Benes called with the owl emergency, for she is an “environmental dispatcher,” referring the caller to appropriate sources of help for their concern. Susan responds to all sorts of requests for emergency help: bear visitors, oil truck accidents, a “dead” possum in someone’s yard, a boating mishap, or a broken CFL light bulb. One third of her calls involve wild life.

As a child Susan became interested in wildlife and learned tracking skills, which she has enjoyed sharing with others. She has taught at Camp Jewell, originated interpretive trails there and teaches several aspects of environmental studies. She points out the extensive education which the DEEP provides in this state, from safe hunting skills to organic gardening. The DEEP also maintains an environmental Center at Sessions Woods and its website is filled with useful information.

Because of the recent merger of environmental and energy departments, there are presently 2 websites. Often one refers to the other, but at the moment, only the DEP website has a red box on the upper right corner entitled “report an

environmental concern or problem”. There one finds 22 categories describing potential upsets, from air pollution, animals, radon, PCB’s to wetland infringement. Each entry directs the reader to a specific phone number to call for advice or help. The page also lists the facts you should have at hand before calling. Check out the information there before calling in an “emergency.”

On the website under “hunting and trapping” one can find forms for black bear and moose reporting. It seems that Colebrook residents have been inattentive or unfazed: Norfolk reports 9 bear sightings, Torrington 35 and Avon 55, but Colebrook only two. That does not match the plethora of oral reports in these parts. The department is particularly interested to know if sighted bears are tagged.

The entries under moose sightings are enlightening: although moose may not be a native species, their growing population in Massachusetts means that we, too, will have increasing numbers. With the first sighting of a moose and calf in Hartland in 2000, The DEEP estimates that with probably 63 in 2004, the numbers will increase by 15% per year, 91 percent in 5 years. In the last decade cows with calves have been reported in 10 different towns, including Goshen, Winchester, Barkhamsted and Colebrook.

Pursuant to the DEEP monitoring and protection of wildlife, there is a TIP hotline on which to register information about deer poaching: 1 800 842 HELP.

Update on Wind Turbines in Colebrook

IN JUNE, the Connecticut Siting Council approved BNE’s applications to put six – two groups of three, one on Flagg Hill, the other on Rock Hall Road – wind turbines in this small town. Subsequently FairwindCT has appealed to decisions to the Supreme Court of the state.

The appeals challenge the authority of the siting council to render a decision in the first place. In the opinion of Nick Harding, FairwindCT’s lawyer, BNE properly should have sought approval from the Colebrook Planning and zoning commission, and from the wetlands commission.

Further, the approval decision was

defective in that it mandated inadequate bird and bat studies be completed after the rendered decision, so application was not actually completed within the required 180 days after BNE first applied.

Among other grievances, the council did not allow appellants to present evidence on several matters, including the cumulative effects of the turbines. Surprisingly enough, the council found that there would be no increase effect in the noise of 6 turbines as compared to a solitary one! And no acknowledgement of other concerns, such as flicker, blinking red lights atop, vibrations or infrasound, was offered.

The state legislature recently passed a law requiring a temporary moratorium on turbine applications while regulations concerning their siting are put together. In the fall a panel will start constructing such standards, with the aim of having them in place by July of 2012. We hope the regulations will prevent the unsuitable placement of industrial turbines in residential areas. Nick Harding says “We hope to raise a strong voice in the in the drafting of the regulations. Our siting council did not want to hear from people who live with turbines in their back yard. They didn’t ask any questions. That needs to change.”

In honor of Earth Day 2011, the CLC donated the following books to the Colebrook School library. We are able to do this annually through The Robert B. Lisle Memorial Fund, which was established by Elizabeth Lisle in memory of her husband, who was particularly fond of reading.

Planting the Wild Garden by Kathryn O. Galbraith
Red Sings from Treetops by Joyce Sidman
Seashore by Hannah Wilson and Simon Mendez
Silk & Venom by Kathryn Lasky
Young Gardener by Stefan & Beverley Buczacki

*Colebrook Land
Conservancy Open
House at Hale Barn,
Sunday October 9th,
2 to 4 pm
Optional walk on
the Hale Trail.*

*The Colebrook Land Conservancy
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