

April 2 Community Forum on Indian Line Farm

Just west of Ponkapoag Pond, is a portion of the Blue Hills Reservation called Indian Line Farm. This historic landscape, which abuts Route 138 at its western border, contains 44-acres of open fields and woodlands. Any part of the Blue Hills could be developed with a two-thirds vote of the legislature, but this land is particularly attractive to developers since it's a relatively flat, open space of undeveloped land with direct access to Route 128.

Last spring, a local company considered the land as a possible site for an office complex. Just this past February, the Town of Canton considered re-zoning the property to allow development.

While it's rather hard to access now – with few active trails and little real parking – the land could host a range of

recreational opportunities and continue to provide habitat for meadowland species.

Indian Line Farm is still protected as part of the Blue Hills. You are invited to a Community Forum on April 2 to make sure it stays that way. By attending the forum, you will demonstrate that you want to make sure the Blue

Hills stays intact. You will also have the opportunity to contribute your ideas how we all can enjoy and protect this property. After meetings like this in the community, we will work with the Department of Conservation and Recreation to develop and implement a master plan that reflects the community's concerns and recommendations.

The Community Forum will take place on April 2,



Photo by Joe Sloane

7:00 pm – 9:00 pm at the Bradley Estate, 2468-B Washington Street, Canton. For more information: call 781-828-1805; or email judy@Friends-of-the-BlueHills.org; or visit www.FriendsoftheBlueHills.org.

The Community Forum is sponsored by the Trustees of Reservations and the Friends of the Blue Hills.



Photo by Joe Sloane



Photo by Wayne Beitler

Outreach Committee Takes on Invasive Species

Inspired by Carol Stocker's talk at FBH's Annual Meeting last fall, members of the FBH Outreach Committee have been exploring how we can help control invasives in the Blue Hills. Invasive plants disrupt natural habitats, weakening native plant species, animals, vertebrates and invertebrates.

In addition to helping NepRWA and

the Blue Hill Observatory, whose efforts are described in this newsletter, we're organizing volunteers for DCR to help remove invasives in June. (Check Calendar for details.) The Outreach Committee is also looking for volunteers to help us map invasives in the Blue Hills. By understanding where invasive plants grow, we will strengthen existing

control efforts and help prioritize future efforts. We'll also learn about cool plants – and take some great walks!

See Calendar for information on the June 13, 20 and 27 events to help remove invasives. To learn more or get involved, contact us at: info@Friends-of-the-BlueHills.org or 781-828-1805.

Protecting Blue Hills Wetlands with... Beetles?

How can beetles protect a wetland? You can see for yourself this summer at Brookwood Farm and Fowl Meadow!

Last spring, volunteers and staff from the Neponset River Watershed Association (NepRWA) and the Department of Conservation and Recreation launched a five-year wetland restoration project by releasing thousands of two species of beetles originally from Europe. Not native to New England, these beetles (*G. pusilla* and *G. californiensis*) immediately found their favorite food: purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), an invasive plant from the beetles' homeland.

Purple loosestrife, while strikingly beautiful, has a destructive bent. It takes over wetlands, degrading ecological quality and wildlife habitat.

Once Purple loosestrife has established a foothold in a wetland, it spreads until it dominates and essentially crowds out the native wetland vegetation that provides habitat and nutrition to local wildlife. The plant spreads so effectively because it produces many seeds and doesn't have native predators.

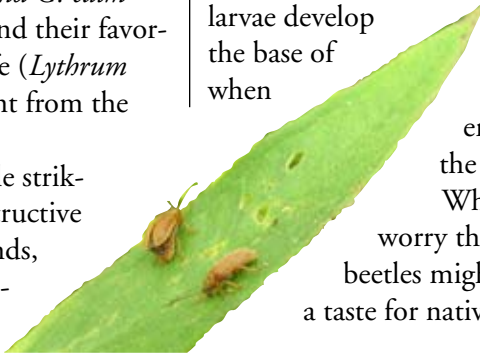
That's where our beetles come in. The beetles need the purple loosestrife to complete their life cycle; the adult beetles feed on purple loosestrife, lay their eggs on the plant, and the larvae feed on the plant. Then the larvae develop in the soil at the base of the plant, and when they finally emerge, they eat the plant again. While you might worry that these exotic beetles might start acquiring a taste for native plant species,

scientists have tested these beetles since 1986 and found that the beetles are consistently loyal to their homeland fare.

The beetles have already started to improve the wetlands. Last summer, beetles fed on purple loosestrife in Fowl Meadow, preventing them from flowering and reproducing. This year, beetles should start to reduce blooms at Brookwood Farm as well.

Would you like to help these beetles fill their bellies and protect our wetlands? There are many ways to get involved, including: donating a kiddie pool, harvesting purple loosestrife plants, monitoring the site, harvesting beetles and releasing beetles. You can also help raise the beetles in your own yard or driveway.

For more information, contact NepRWA: rocklen@neponset.org, 781-575-0354 x303. Learn more about the project at www.neponset.org.



Blue Hill Observatory Science Center Works to Help Reduce Invasives.

By Don McCasland, Blue Hill Observatory Program Director

Since the non-profit Blue Hill Observatory Science Center, Inc. (BHOSC) took over daily operations at the Observatory atop Great Blue Hill, one of the many focuses has been the summit's environment and landscape. Until the 1960s, during both A. L. Rotch's ownership of the Observatory, and from 1912 to 1971 during Harvard's ownership, the summit was kept clear of excess vegetation. The primary plants were the blueberries, that you can still see throughout the hilltop. From the 1960s to 1990s, however, vegetation was barely controlled.

Starting in 2000, the BHOSC, the Department of Conservation and Recreation, and volunteers from many organizations have worked to improve the hilltop vegetation for wildlife and

human visitors. We have cleared meadows to improve songbird and butterfly habitat, widened trails to improve access to the Observatory and trails that surround the summit, cleared viewing vistas, and more. While doing that clearing, we found several types of invasive species. The two worst were black swallow-wort and buckthorn. Since then, we have made a conscious effort to control and ultimately eliminate these and other invasives from the top of Blue Hill. We control these plants by pulling, cutting, and planting natives to prevent (deter is more realistic) the return of the invasives.

All of those are labor intensive. We appreciate the help of school students, scout and church groups,

DCR staff, and the occasional passer-by who joins us in the battle. And we'd love your help as well! As little as one hour of your time is valuable. We need help pulling, cutting and digging up invasives, including black swallow wort, buckthorn and other invasive species we find. Contact Don McCasland at 617-696-0562 or dmccasland@bluehill.org.



In this photo by Jennifer Forman Orth, black swallowwort has almost completely taken over the forest understory

Calendar of Events (1)

Pull and post this section of the Friends of the Blue Hills Newsletter and join us for some exciting events in the Blue Hills Reservation!

Spring 2009

▲ FBH sponsored event

Saturday, April 4, 8:00 am
Blue Hills Bird Walk

FBH joint walk with Brookline Bird Club. Several short hikes, each about one mile, the first of which is steep, to look for early spring migrants. Beginners are welcome. Bring binoculars and bird book. 4.5 hours. Meet at the small parking lot on Chickatawbut Road just off Randolph Ave. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Saturday Eve., April 4, 6:15 pm
Woodcock Walk in Fowl Meadow

FBH joint with Brookline Bird Club. Hike 1 mile to witness the spring mating flight of the American Woodcock. Bring binoculars. 2 hours. Meet at Paul's Bridge parking lot on Neponset Valley Pkwy. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Sunday, Apr. 5, 10:00 am -
Blue Hill Section Hike

FBH joint hike with AMC. 7 mile hike on a variety of trails, some steep, including Skyline Trail with views. 6 hours. Meet at Houghton's Pond lot. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Saturday, April 11, 1:00 pm
Ponkapoag Mud Stomp

Ramble 'round Ponkapoag Pond with a DCR ranger. 4 mile trek for ages 8 and up. 2 hours. Meet at the Ponkapoag Golf Course. For details, call 617-698-1802.

Sunday, April 19, 9:00 am
Canines & Coffee

Team up with your favorite pooch and a cup of joe. DCR ranger-led stroll around Houghton's Pond. Coffee provided. Dogs must be leashed. 1.5 hour. Meet at the Houghton's Pond main parking lot. Call 617-698-1802 for details.

Saturdays, April 25
(DCR Park Serve Day), May 9,
June 6, 9:00 am - 1:00 pm
Trail Maintenance Days

Join FBH to lend a hand on the trails. Tools provided. Please wear work clothes and sturdy footgear and bring a water bottle and work gloves. For ages 16 and up. Attend one – or all events! Call 781-828-1805 or email Trails@friendsoftheBlueHills.org for meeting location and details. ▲

Sunday, May 3, 9:00 am
Blue Hills Skyline Hike

Join a DCR ranger for a rugged 8-mile trek along the Skyline Trail. Must be an experienced hiker. Sturdy hiking boots required. Bring lunch and a water bottle. Ages 15 and up. 5-6 hours. Call 617-698-1802 for details.

Saturday, May 9, 7:00 am
Fowl Meadow Bird Walk

FBH joint hike with AMC. Beginners' Bird Walk, 3 miles. Learn to bird. See common & rare species at height of spring migration. Bring binoculars and bird book. 3.5 hours. Meet at Paul's Bridge parking lot on Neponset Valley Pkwy. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Saturday, May 9, 1:00 pm
Spring Wildflower Wander

Search for woodland wildflowers with a DCR ranger along the trails of the Blue Hills. Ages 12 and up. 2.5 hours. Meet at the Ponkapoag Golf Course. Call 617-698-1802 for details.

Saturday, May 16
10:00 am - 4:00 pm
Blue Hill Observatory & Science Center
Open House & Kite Festival

Things are looking up atop Great Blue Hill. Check out the Observatory during its open house festival for all ages. Free admission to events. Donation for materials for some activities. For details and parking information, call 617-696-0562. Rain or shine. Learn more at www.bluehill.org.

Saturday, May 23, 10:00 am
Great Dome Hike

FBH joint hike with AMC. 8 mile hike on Great Dome Foot Path with wildflowers & scenic hills, some steep. 6 hours. Meet at Shea Ice Rink. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Calendar of Events (2)

Spring 2009

▲ FBH sponsored event

Saturday, May 30, 8:00 am

Fowl Meadow Bird Walk

FBH joint hike with AMC. Beginners Bird Walk, 3 miles. Learn to bird by listening for and identifying late migrant and nesting species in the best birding area in the Blue Hills. Bring binoculars and bird book. 3.5 hours. Meet at Paul's Bridge parking lot on Neponset Valley Pkwy. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

**Sunday, May 31,
10:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Mountain Bike Discovery Day:
Explore the Blue Hills

Perfect your pedaling power with the DCR Rangers, Blue Hills TrailWatch and the New England Mountain Bike Association. Enjoy guided rides for all ages and abilities. Skills clinics throughout the day. Fun obstacles and challenges along the way. Bring your own bike. Helmets are required. Take exit 3 off Route 93 and follow signs to Houghton's Pond Picnic Site #5, Blue Hill River Road. For more info, call 617-698-1802, ext.310. ▲

DCR Blue Hills Adult Walking Club

The DCR Blue Hills Adult Walking Club is a group of adults that meets on a weekly basis for recreational walks. The purpose of these walks is social exercise. There is no fee to join and everyone 16 or older is welcome. Walks are normally 2 to 5 miles with varying terrain. Call 617-727-4573 for details.

**Saturdays, June 13, 20 and 27,
8:00 am – 12:00 pm**

Help Improve the Blue Hills:
Remove Invasives!

(Feel free to attend one or more events!)

Why would you wake up early on a Saturday morning to pull weeds? What if we said the Blue Hills ecosystems depended on it? For three Saturdays in June, we will be helping DCR remove invasive species. These are weeds from another part of the country or world that do so well here they kill off the native plant species, depleting the supply of native plants, disrupting the habitat and food supply of everything connected to it in the ecosystem, including insects, wildlife and other plants. By helping to remove these plants, we'll increase the biodiversity of the ecosystems – meaning more native species will thrive – and the Blue Hills will be home to healthier flora and fauna. And if you're still not convinced, well... we'll provide coffee!

Please RSVP for details, including location:
781-828-1805 or judy@FriendsoftheBlueHills.org.



What's the Latest with the Lantana Land Swap?

*By John Sheehan,
Advocacy Committee Chair*

As many of you know, in 2002, a law was enacted directing the Commonwealth to convey 3.2 acres of undeveloped (forested) Blue Hills Reservation parkland to the Lantana function hall in Randolph to construct a parking lot. Since then FBH has fought against this transfer, which strikes at the very heart of public lands and protected space.

As of this printing, the Lantana function hall has submitted its Final

Environmental Impact Report for consideration of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act office. Public comments on the report are due to MEPA by April 10. By the time this newsletter is printed, we will have reviewed the document and posted suggestions for your comment letters on our blog: <http://friendsofthebluehills.blogspot.com/>. As always, we greatly appreciate all of your past and current support in this effort.

Support FBH with your purchases!

If you're buying something at **Amazon.com** please enter through our website and click on "Get Involved."

Every purchase you make that starts at our website helps support Friends of the Blue Hills!
www.FriendsoftheBlueHills.org

Ponkapoag's Flowering Ericads

by Marsha C. Salett, Naturalist

From April through July, Ponkapoag Bog is abloom with native relatives of the rhododendrons and azaleas in our gardens. Cultivated and wild species alike are ericads - members of the Ericaceae, or Heath and Heather Family.

Ericad shrubs have adapted to the harsh, nutrient-poor conditions of Ponkapoag Bog and other peatlands better than most other plants because they are mycorrhizal. Their roots are associated with fungi that help them produce the nutrients nitrogen and phosphorus. Some ericads are evergreen, giving them a head start on photosynthesis in the spring.

Here are the ericads to look for in Ponkapoag Bog.



First to bloom is Leatherleaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*), the dominant low shrub of bog mats. Leatherleaf forms dense thickets and blooms

profusely in April. Look for one-sided rows of white, urn-shaped flowers. Note that the evergreen leaves get smaller toward the tip of each branch.

You'll see highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) in the tall shrub zone and along the edge of Ponkapoag Pond. Blueberries are one of three native N.E. fruits that are commercially cultivated. The others are American cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*) and Concord grape (*Vitis labruscacultivars*). Blueberry's urn-shaped flowers bloom in dense clusters in April-June before the leaves fully open.

Black huckleberry (*Gaylussacia bacata*) is a low shrub that grows in forests and along pond edges. Its flowers are bell-shaped - more flared than blueberry flowers -- and tinged with pink or red. Huckleberry is often confused with blueberry, but huckleberries crunch when you eat them.

Fetterbush (*Leucothoe racemosa*), or swamp leucothoe, is one of the more non-descript shrubs in the bog. It blooms in May-June. The flowers look like blueberry blossoms except that they hang in long, one-sided rows instead of in clusters. Look for fetterbush among other tall shrubs such as blueberry, sweet pepperbush, and maleberry.



Maleberry's (*Lyonia ligustrina*) clusters of tiny, white, globe-shaped flowers are even harder to find than fetterbush. They appear in June-July.

In late May and June, the striking magenta flowers of sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*) are impossible to miss. Sheep laurel is a medium-tall evergreen shrub. Its leaves contain acetylan-dromedol, which is toxic; hence, its nickname "lambkill".

Swamp azalea (*Rhododendron viscosum*) has the most fragrant flowers in the bog, filling the air with a heavy, sweet perfume in June and July. White, 2-inch long, funnel-shaped flowers appear in clusters at the end of the branches of this tall shrub.

American cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*) is the staple of the cranberry industry, but the "ruby of the bog" still grows wild in natural peatlands. Cranberry is a low, trailing, evergreen shrub. The pale pink flowers resemble the head and neck of a crane; hence, the name cranberry comes from "crane's berry." Cranberry blooms from June-August.

YES! I want to protect the Blue Hills Reservation!

I want to become a Friends of the Blue Hills member

(Please choose one of the following:)

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Please make checks payable to Friends of the Blue Hills, and mail to:

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Visit us on the web at
www.FriendsoftheBlueHills.org
or call 781-828-1805
for membership, maps and
schedule information.

PO Box 416, Milton, MA 02186

Public Meeting and Brainstorming Session
 April 2, 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm
 Bradley Estate, 2468-B Washington St, Canton
 Help shape the future of
 Canton's historic Indian Line Farm
See front page for details

Stay Informed Between Quarterly Newsletters

Add your email address to our list and receive timely updates on FBH news, as well as event reminders. Joining our email list means you can also help FBH to act quickly upon any issues threatening the Blue Hills. Rest assured, we never share our members' emails with other organizations. Please sign up by sending an email with your name as it appears on our membership list to: info@FriendsOfTheBlueHills.org

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