



SPRING 2020

VOL. 18 No. 1

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE

Sharon Friends of Conservation

SHARE • MAINTAIN PRESERVE ENJOY

Rattled!!!

March is dues month!
Please see page 4.

After 20 years of effort Sharon's Town meeting voted on November 4 to acquire the 338 acre property known as Rattlesnake Hill. The property has survived numerous efforts to develop it over the years. Until very recently its fate hung in the balance. Then suddenly a window opened on a chance to preserve the land. It is hard to list all the people responsible for its last-minute reprieve. Credit should go to the Sharon Select Board, The Sharon Conservation Commission, Sharon's Town Administrator, Sharon Friends of Conservation, Neighbors against Destructive Development, Sharon Sustainable Coalition, the Community Preservation Committee and the Finance Committee. The list of individual proponents is long indeed. There are some who believe that some form of development on the Hill would better serve the Town as far as increased income for the Town coffers. Yes revenue might increase, but at the same time the Town would bear increased costs associated with a development. Schools would have increased attendance. Fire and police would need extra assets.

Due to the nature of the land, water and sewage infrastructure would be needed.

The Rattlesnake Hill property is unique. Due to large fires in the 1950's it is a different ecology than the usual "mixed woods" that we experience elsewhere in New England. The planned purchase price for the Rattlesnake Hill property is \$10 million. This amount will not affect the Town's property taxes. \$7.5 million comes from the Town's Community Preservation Act and \$2.5 million will come from the State. There have been some who argue that the Town might better benefit from tax-generating development on the land. They see the loss of tax revenue that the developer, Brickstone Properties, was paying on the large acreage. In the very short term there might be a gain for the Town. In longer term, considering the services and expenses the developed land would entail, preservation is the more profitable course. A celebration of the Rattlesnake Hill acquisition will take place at the April 4 Sharon Friends of Conservation Potluck Supper

The Newsletter of the *Sharon Friends of Conservation*

Kurt Buermann, editor
E-mail sharonfoc@gmail.com

INSIDE:

Bike Collection.....3

New Photo Contest.....3

Upcoming Events.....4

Wildlife Sightings.....5

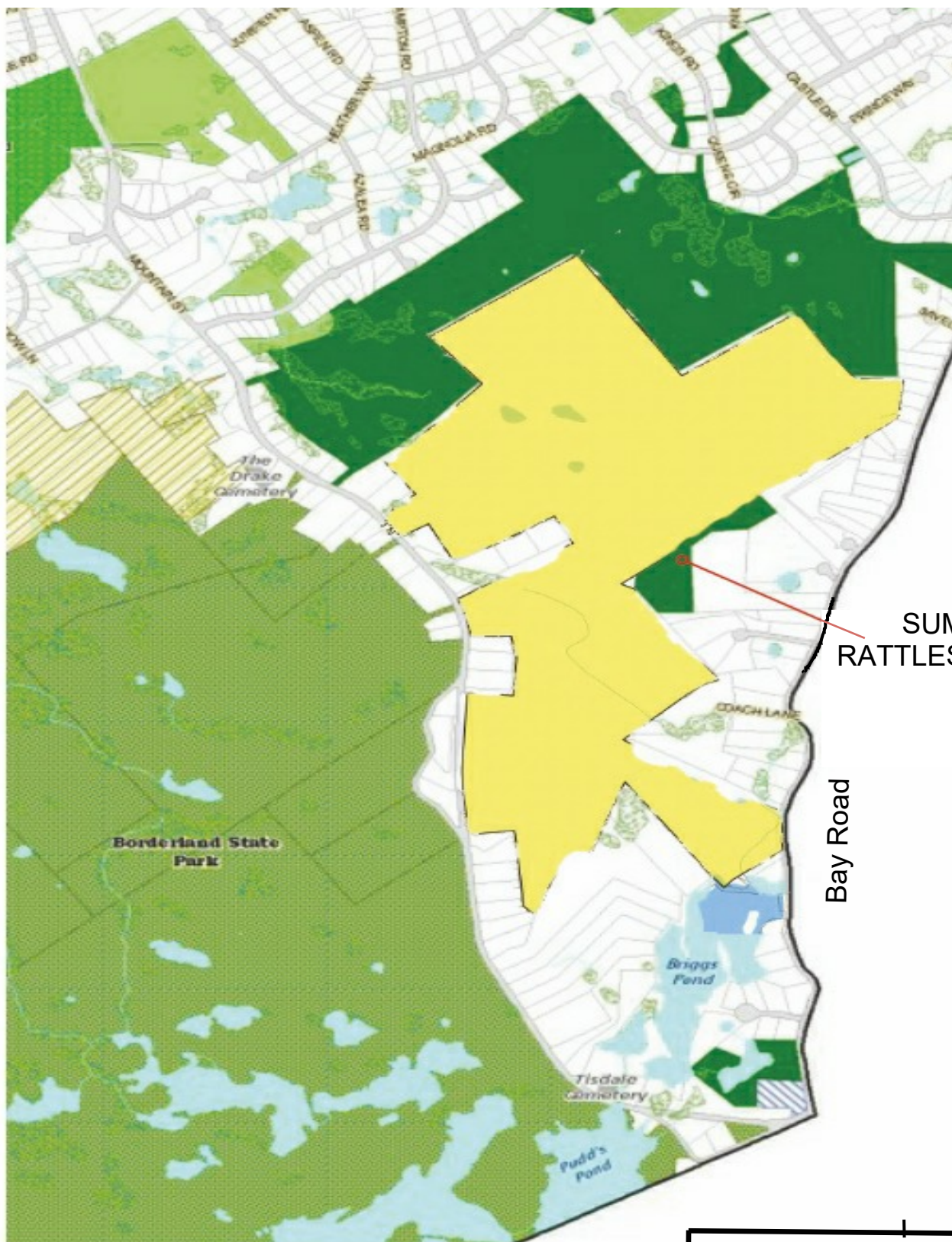
Greg Meister Retires....6

Birds in the Bushes.....7

DEVIL'S ROCK DEBACLE

Hikers to Sharon's Devil's Rock this September were unpleasantly surprised to find it defaced extensive defacement by spray-painted graffiti. Devil's Rock is a highlight of the Massapoag Trail. This large glacial erratic lies in a clearing along with other rock formations. It is a destination on the trail much visited by hikers, young and old as well as by dogs and their humans. Sometimes it is used by rock climbers for practice. It is a peaceful oasis of green and quiet. It is hard to understand the mentality (if any) of the perpetrators. Removal of the graffiti is a problem that should be

cont'd on p. 9



SUMMIT of
RATTLESNAKE HILL

Bay Road

About one mile



Land being acquired by the Town



Existing Conservation land



Baltimore Oriole

Photo by Paul Lauenstein

USED BIKE COLLECTION

**Saturday, April 18 fro 10 am to 23 pm at the Holy Trinity Lutheran Church,
143 Linclon St, North Easton**

Sharon Friends of Conservation and Bikes Not Bombs will collect unwanted bicycles. Bikes Not Bombs reclaims thousands of bicycles each year. We create local and global programs that provide skill development, jobs, and sustainable transportation. BikesNot Bombs mobilizes youth and adults to be leaders in community transformation. **A \$10 donation is welcome.**

www.bikesnotbombs.org

YES

- All types of bikes
- All sizes (adult, child, etc.)
- Parts of any kind
- Tools of any kind
- Broken stuff with usable parts
- Accessories (helmets, bags lights, pumps, locks, etc.)
- Cycling clothing

NO

- Significant rust (a little rust O.K.)
- Kick scooters
- Anything motorized
- Exercise equipment
- Tricycles
- Trail-A-Bikes

Sharon Friends of Conservation Photo Contest

Please enter your best photos of the beauty of Sharon's natural places. The contest runs a full year through 4 seasons. Photos must be made in Sharon and by Sharon residents only

Categories:

- People in nature
- Animals in nature
- Nature by itself.

Each digital entry must be at least 300 dpi. You may enter one picture in each of the three categories. All entries must be received by January 1, 2021

Winners will be notified by email by February 1, 2021 and will be requested to indicate camera used and exposure if known. A framed copy of the winning photo no larger than 16"X20" must be submitted by March 1, 2021. Submission details will be included with award notification.

For more and to enter please visit:
www.sharonfoc.org



Happy hikers pose on the summit of newly preserved Rattlesnake Hill.

Photo by Laura Russell

Sharon Friends of Conservation Events List

for 2020

Saturday, April 4 at 6:00 pm The Annual Meeting and Potluck supper has been postponed this year due to concern about the Covid-19 coronavirus. It will be re-scheduled later on. Please check our website www.sharonfoc.org for updates.

Sunday April 19 at 2 pm: Sharon Botanical Trail. We will explore the newly established Botanical Trail. Distance about ½ mile. Easy walking. Meet and park at the south end of Rob's Lane. Rob's lane is located at the end of Glendale/Glenview Street. Questions ? Call Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday, May 17 at 2 pm: Rattlesnake Hill Hike We will visit Rattlesnake Hill and ascend to the summit. Distance is about 1 1/2 miles, roundtrip. Easy walking but moderate slope. Meet and park at 282 Mountain St. Questions? Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday May 31 at 2 pm: King Philip's Trail Hike. We will visit the fabled King Philips Rock then investigate King Philips Cave. An easy walk. The younger set love the Rock and Cave. Distance about 1 mile. Meet and park at the King Philips lot between 85 and 93 Mansfield St. Questions ? Call Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday, June 14 at 2 pm: Massapoag Trail North We will explore the trail from Mann's Pond to Brook Road. Much of our route follows the bank of the Massapoag brook. Easy walking. Distance about 1 mile. Meet at the Mann's Pond parking lot.(about #161 Billings St.) Questions? Call Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday, July 5 at 2 pm: Beaver Brook South. We will explore the very scenic Beaver Brook Trail. Moderate walking with some steeper places. Distance is a bit over a mile, roundtrip. Meet at the cul-de-sac at the end of Sandy Ridge circle. Questions? Call Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday, August 2 at 2 pm: Rattlesnake Hill Hike We will visit Rattlesnake Hill and ascend to the summit. Distance is about 1 1/2 miles, roundtrip. Easy walking but moderate slope. Meet and park at 282 Mountain St.. Questions? Call Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday, September 13 at 2 pm: Massapoag Trail South We will hike from Mann's Pond to Hammer shop Pond. Distance is about 1.6 miles. Mainly easy walking with one or two steeper places. . Questions? Kurt 781-784-4625

Sunday, October 25 at 2 pm Fall foliage walk. We will meet at the Lakeview Meadow and meander down the King Philips Trail. Easy going. Distance about 1 mile. Meet and park at the split rail lot at the intersection of Morse and Lakeview Streets. Questions? Kurt 781-784-4625

Join Sharon Friends of Conservation or Renew Your Membership

Dues are \$ 25 per year

Mail to: SFOC 45 Furnace St, Sharon, MA 02067 or go online: www.sharonfoc.org

Note: We don't share your information ANYONE!

NAME_____

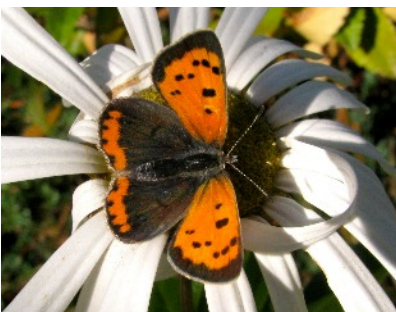
ADDRESS_____

EMAIL_____ PHONE_____

Any special skills or interests? _____

Like to volunteer?_____For:_____

Please indicate: Are you Joining _____ or Renewing _____ your membership?



Have you ever wondered what else might be residing in Sharon besides us humans, and what else might be impacted by our activities besides our grandchildren?

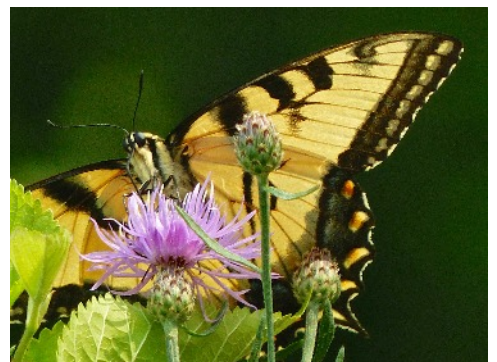
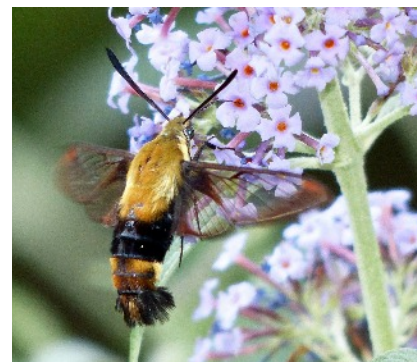
Check out the wildlife sightings at the Sharon Friends of Conservation website, www.sharonfoc.org. There you'll find over 900 wildlife sightings representing over 400 species of wild plants and animals within the boundaries of Sharon.

Plenty more species still remain to be found and documented, so keep your camera handy. When you get a good photo of anything wild and alive in your back yard or anywhere else in our verdant town, share it with the community using the sightings form at www.sharonfoc.org.

—

PS - Can you identify these wild things?

Clockwise from upper left: black swallowtail butterfly, pileated woodpecker, box turtle, indigo bunting, bullfrog, ovenbird, tiger swallowtail butterfly, snowberry clearwing moth, Halloween pennant dragonfly,



Greg Meister Retires

Sharon's Conservation Commissioner Greg Meister has retired after 30 years of Service to the Town. He was recognized at his final conservation commission meeting where he was presented with a specially published book featuring highlights of his career. Greg, winner of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissioners Environmental Service Award over numerous important land issues and acquisitions over his tenure. He helped expedite the purchase of the 90 acre King Philips land off Mansfield Street. He later managed the donation of an abutting 40 acres by Phil and Laurie Perkins. Later on, he became involved in a land swap with the Massapoag Sportsmen's Club which enhanced the area of the Northern Massapoag Trail. Greg helped secure the 11 acre tract between Billings and Glenview Streets so preserving it from development. Over his years in Sharon Greg presided over, either through purchase, or conservation restrictions over 1,880 acres in the Town. Greg also saw that the public had good access to conservation land. He oversaw the revitalization of the Massapoag Trail as well as the creation of the Beaver Brook Trail. He worked with the Sharon Friends of Conservation and Sharon Boy Scout Troop 95 to maintain and improve trail quality. Be it group or a single Sharon citizen Greg would always work with them to address their concerns about the environment. He seemed to enjoy any excuse to get out of the office and into the field. He was very "hands on." And it wasn't just the land. Greg often teamed up with the late Cliff Towner to protect and care for Sharon's Lake Massapoag. Greg always kept a close eye on any occurrences in Sharon that might affect the Town's natural and protected spaces. He concluded his Sharon years by expediting the recent purchase of 330 +/- acres of the Rattlesnake Hill land for conservation. Greg displayed a great talent for dealing with people and Town politics. This, in a job where it is very easy to rub fur the wrong way. Greg's currently is planning to move to a 72 acre property in western Massachusetts. We wish him the very, very best.



Greg Meister (black sweater, 3rd from left) poses with Bay Circuit Trail supporters on Sharon's Beaver Brook Bridge



Greg Meister climbs tree at Rattlesnake Hill summit to survey his new domain after Sharon purchases the property.

Birds in the Bushes

New Smithsonian Study Links Declines in Suburban Backyard Birds to Presence of Non-native Plants

Article and photos by Doug Tallamy and Desirée Narango.

Reprinted courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/conservation>

Carolina chickadees depend on the availability of high-calorie, high-protein prey, such as caterpillars, for a healthy breeding season. Backyards landscaped with even a small portion of nonnative plants, however, lack the appropriate cuisine, leading to a decline in the breeding success and population growth of the bird species, according to a new SCBI study. Photo: Doug Tallamy, University of Delaware SCBI researchers worked with landowners to assess use of nonnative plants — such as these Callery pears — in more than 160 yards, and how that compared to the Carolina chickadee nests, eggs and nestlings that the citizen scientists were seeing in their yards. Because more than 90 percent of herbivorous insects, like this snowberry clearwing caterpillar, will only eat one or a few native plants, the use of these plants in landscaping is essential to ensure breeding birds have enough insect prey to eat.

Native plants, such as the mountain laurel shrub, look pretty and could help increase Carolina chickadee breeding success. Insect-eating birds that depend on the availability of high-calorie, high-protein cuisine — namely caterpillars and spiders — during the breeding season to feed their young are finding the menu severely lacking in backyards landscaped with even a small proportion of nonnative plants, according to a new study from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute. This reduction of food availability has led to a decline in the breeding success and population growth of the Carolina chickadee, the study found. “Landowners are using nonnative plants in their yards because they’re pretty and exotic, they’re easy to maintain, and they tend to have fewer pests on them,” said Desirée Narango, a graduate student researcher at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and first author of the study published Oct. 22 in PNAS. “But it turns out that a lot of those insects they see as pests are actually critical food resources for our breeding birds.

For landowners who want to make a difference, our study shows that a simple change they make in their yards



photo: Desirée Narango, SCBI

can be profoundly helpful for bird conservation.” The study is the first to directly link the decline of a common resident bird species to the lack of insect prey that results from the use of nonnative plants in landscaping. Narango and colleagues placed nest boxes in more than 160 yards in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area and collected data from homeowners monitoring the nest boxes weekly for Carolina chickadee nests, eggs and nestlings. In those same yards, they also studied adult and juvenile survival by gathering data from the homeowners on individually marked birds they had resighted. The researchers found that the only yards that were able to produce enough chickadees to sustain a stable population were those with a plant composition made up of more than 70 percent of native plants. Because more than 90 percent of herbivorous insects will only eat one or a few native plants, the use of these plants in landscaping is essential to

ensure breeding birds have enough insect prey to eat. For the same reason, native plants are also likely critical for other resident birds, endangered species and migratory species — and not just in backyards on the East Coast.

“These novel, artificial suburban landscapes are found across the country,” Narango said. “But a ginkgo that you plant in D.C. and a ginkgo that you plant in L.A. are doing the same thing for bird conservation — nothing. By using native plants, we can provide food for not only our common North American species, but we’re also providing

cont'd p. 8.

It's in the bags

by Kurt Buermann

The golden age of the plastic shopping bag seems to be waning. According to MASSpirg, At least 90 cities and towns in Massachusetts have enacted bans or restrictions on plastic bags. More bans are in the works. A statewide ban is being considered. (Such an overall ban would resolve the many differences in more local bag regulations.) Until five or six years ago we loved our plastic one-use shopping bags. For us, they weren't completely disposable. They had secondary uses as just bags to hold things, especially unpleasant things. They are good as rain protectors for sensitive items. Bags over the hands made fine ersatz gloves. Bags worked as short lengths of rope. These days the sun does seem to be setting on the disposable shopping bag. We finally made the switch to reusable bags. Our first ones came from our local Shaws market. They were made from a fiber actually created from recycled plastic bottles.

After the switch to reusable bags, the first thing we had to learn was remembering to bring our bags to the store. This was soon solved with a hook inside the front door. When we came home with the shopping, we'd hang the empty bags at the door, plainly visible whenever we went out. From the door they went back out into the car. It took a bit longer to remember to bring the bags from the car into the store. Sometimes we just put our groceries into the cart after checkout and bagged them at the car. Finally, we acquired the automatic reflex to grab the bags before entering the store. As time passed, I discovered some of the finer points of reusable bags. First, always get the cloth type. The heavy plastic ones don't skosh down compactly and tend to slither all over the car. Again, they use a lot of plastic to manufacture. Second, get a durable bag. The more times you use it the more plastic bags it is replacing. Durability is very important. We use our bags for a lot more than just groceries. They are wonderful for hard- to-grip items such as laptops

and other electronics. Great book carriers! We have transported tools, rocks, papers and a lot of non-grocery items. The stronger the bag, the better off you are. It is up to you as to the appearance of your bags. Be aware they are trending evermore as fashion statements!



Birds and Bushes

Contd from p. 7

vital stopover habitat and resources for migratory birds during their perilous journeys

"Because more than 80 percent of land in the contiguous United States is privately managed, conservationists are trying to get a handle on the ways these human-dominated landscapes threaten wildlife — and how they can be managed in a way that can help. The study's authors will continue to guide landowners in their landscaping decisions by next looking at whether some native plant species are disproportionately important for supporting insect prey to breeding birds.

This study was conducted in partnership with the University of Delaware and funded by the National Science Foundation. It relied on data collected by landowners participating in the Smithsonian's Neighborhood Nestwatch program, a citizen-science program that engages communities in monitoring the annual survival and reproductive success of specific bird species.

"Urbanization is one of the primary ways we're losing natural habitat around the world, and it remains essential that we figure out how we minimize our impacts while maximizing the protection of biodiversity," said Pete Marra, director of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and co-author of the paper. "By working together with citizen scientists participating in the Neighborhood Nestwatch program, people actually living within the urban matrix, we have collectively found a solution that's good for birds and also for people."

Resources on native plants can be found online at Audubon's Native Plants Database, National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder and the United States Department of Agriculture's Plant Hardiness Zone Map.

The Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute plays a leading role in the Smithsonian's global efforts to save wildlife species from extinction and train future generations of conservationists. SCBI spearheads research programs at its headquarters in Front Royal, Virginia, the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, D.C., and at field research stations and training sites worldwide. SCBI scientists tackle some of today's most complex conservation challenges by applying and sharing what they learn about animal behavior and reproduction, ecology, genetics, migration and conservation sustainability.



dealt with quickly. First, the graffiti becomes more attached after a time. Second, the presence of graffiti tends to attract other perpetrators.

Removal of the graffiti at Devil's rock presented difficulties: There is no source of water nearby to enable the use of high-pressure washers. The rough granite surfaces make the use of graffiti removal compounds largely ineffective. Not to mention the strong chemicals in these compounds as well as the copious amounts of water needed to wash them off.

Sharon Friends of Conservation has had experience with graffiti in the past. Once at Devil's Rock about three years ago. (The graffiti then was much less than this latest case.) Another instance was at King Philips Rock on that trail when anti-Semitic words were painted. Given the difficulty of transporting equipment to these sites, an experiment was tried. Using several cans of spray paint approximating the color of the granite rock, the graffiti is covered over. Using two shades of gray—dark and light--the original granite surface color can be more or less matched. This time at Devil's rock we tried a spray paint offered by Krylon. An olive and a sand camouflage color.



The paint selections worked extremely well matching the original stone. The result is a surface that may look a bit different than the original rock but which is much preferable to the original graffiti. Over time, about a year, the magic begins to take place. As the seasons pass the hot and cold, rain, snow and ice wear away and loosen the paint. But as the gray paint coating wears off, it adheres to the graffiti paint and pulls it off with it. This is most effective if the overcoat of grays can be applied as soon as possible, bonding to the original graffiti. So the task was completed by Sharon Friends of Conservation in league with two hardworking volunteers, Jim Golden, Yaakov Yechiel Winter and the Sharon Conservation Commission.



Black Racer



Garter Snake