



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
Sharon Friends of Conservation
 SHARE + MAINTAIN + PRESERVE + ENJOY

What is happening at the cranberry bogs on South Main Street?

By Josh Philibert, Conservation Administrator

As you may have noticed, the cranberry bogs across from the Sharon Marketplace, between Old Post Road and Route 95, have undergone some changes. These bogs were originally part of the Sharon Gallery parcel, and they have recently been deeded to the town as open space.



Moving forward, this parcel will be managed by the Conservation Department as a natural area. For the next year or two it will be receiving some help, including the removal of an invasive species and the planting of native vegetation in some of the cranberry beds. Throughout the site, a variety of native species are already showing up, and this natural succession will be encouraged. In addition, water flow through the site will be adjusted with the intent of establishing a natural bog reminiscent of the landscape that was present prior to the construction of the first cranberry farm in the mid-1800s. Cont'd on p. 5

Exoskeleton Safari—Scorpionfly

By Gaurav Shah

Some insects look, well, like insects. But now and then we come across one that trips our expectations of what life forms should look like. Meet the scorpionfly!

Scorpionflies belong to the order Mecoptera. The ones



we will be talking about today belong to the family Panorpidae, but a lot of what we mention is common to the order.

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The Newsletter of the

Sharon Friends of Conservation

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Playing Musical Houses

By Kurt Buermann

Sharon Friends of Conservation's bluebird houses sometimes move around. There are a number of reasons for relocating them. Sometimes the habitat around them has changed over time. Bluebirds prefer an open meadow habitat but, with time, bushes and trees can grow up around a house. Sometimes for whatever reason a bluebird house is just not productive. We have kept records for almost 20 years and if we determine that a house is not being used much where it is, we try relocating it. While experts give us rules about the kind of habitat bluebirds prefer, their advice is sometimes like a French verb. There are more exceptions than there are rules.



Recently I ventured out with SFOC bluebird monitor Adam Kraiterman to relocate two houses. The trees and brush had grown up since they were first planted in what had been a small meadow. Besides not attracting too many bluebirds, our bluebird monitors had to do a bit of bushwacking to get to them. If a house is hard to get to, it does not get checked as often as it should (at least once a week).

To relocate a house, you need some heavy tools. The houses are located on metal poles which have to be pulled up from the ground. In the new location a heavy iron bar is used to create a new hole for the poles. Another heavy iron device is used to tamp the poles into the ground. Add to this a variety of pliers, hammers and prybars and it's a weighty load. In the past I would transport it with our Prius down a dirt road through the woods to carry these to the site. Unfortunately, we recently got a new car and my wife drew the line at using it like a Jeep. I realized that I would have to use our garden cart for the transport. Luckily one of our monitors, Adam Kraiterman, stepped up and between us we trundled the tools to the site.

We managed to uproot the two houses. This is not always easy, especially if the pole has been in the ground for a long time. The best way to remove a pole is to pull up and twist it at the same time. Pliers or a pipe wrench make the twisting easier. A prybar helps with leverage upward. A pole is re-planted in its new location by first using an iron bar which is driven about 18 inches into the ground. Once the iron bar has created a hole, the pole is tamped in. Finally, the bluebird house is re-attached to the pole. (The reason for mounting it on a pole is to discourage predators such as snakes and raccoons from easily reaching the house.)

The new location for the house, a small, sunny meadow area, looks very promising.

In Cahoots with the Sharon Historical Society

by Kurt Buermann

Recently Sharon Friends of Conservation has teamed with the Sharon Historical Society to offer hikes and activities. So far, this program has been quite popular, judging by the number of attendees. I could not only get the benefit of fresh air and exercise but they also have a chance to learn more about the places they are passing through. Hikes are dedicated to different aspects of the areas we visit. A hike leader might talk about history, botany, geology or biology. Sometimes we focus on a particular outdoor activity such as wildlife signs, bird-watching, photography, mindfulness or just plain relaxing. Apart from hiking we do conduct some indoor events

such as movies, documentaries or lectures. The hikes vary in length from one to two miles.

All ages are welcome although, depending on the focus of the hike, some age groups might be proscribed. As for dogs, please check ahead of time: sharon-foc@gmail.com So far, we have trekked the Massapoag Trail, King Philips Rock trail and explored the site of the Revolutionary war foundry at Gavin's Pond. Our last outing was the Martin Luther King's Day hike on the Borderland State Park trails. If you are interested in joining us for upcoming outings, please check out website:

www.sharonfoc.org



They're not too common nowadays, and you could spend a lot of time in the woods without noticing one. If you do want to find one, keep your eyes open on low shrubs or shorter leafy trees, often near water. They are pretty brightly colored so if one is there you have a good shot of seeing it!

But they haven't always been this obscure. Go back about 150 million years, before flowering plants took over the trees of the world, and gymnosperms, such as conifers and cycads, dominated the landscape. How did these gymnosperms reproduce? Well, frankly, mostly by wind pollination. But not necessarily only by wind pollination. There is strong evidence that these gymnosperms were also being pollinated by scorpionflies, before bees existed, before any of the other pollinators we love today existed. So -- a little respect, please!

Scorpionflies evolved by diverging from the true flies (Diptera), but their closest relatives, rather strangely, are the fleas. The idea of flying fleas doesn't sound like fun, but scorpionflies will not be found sucking anyone's blood. They are scavengers, eating decaying vegetation and any convenient dead insect bodies they can find. Interestingly, they're often found raiding spider webs for any prey the spider may have caught. And inevitably, dead scorpionflies are often found as prey in those spiderwebs they were trying to raid.

By this point in the discussion, you may be rather impa.org/w/index.php?curid=6859399

That tail looks more ominous than you may like, but there's no venom. That's the male Panorpids' reproductive organ. The love lives of scorpionflies, like those of humans, are a little intricate.

One peculiarity is that it's the males of scorpionflies that produce a pheromone that attracts the opposite sex. In other insects, such as moths, it's the females that do this, and it becomes the male's job to trace the scent to its source. I'm not sure why it's the opposite in scorpionflies, but I can hazard a guess, and it's related to the second interesting aspect of the courtship.

Once the female tracks down the male by following his pheromone trail, it doesn't mean she's ready to mate. The male has to entice her by providing a gift of food, which she has to approve of. This is known as a "nuptial gift", and it's found in many different types of creatures. Among Panorpids, there are two main choices for the nuptial gift: either the male can provide a dead insect, or he can secrete a column of saliva that solidifies into a yummy snack. I've seen different opinions in the literature, and I'm not sure which one most females prefer. How's a girl to choose when both the options are that enticing?

The bigger the nuptial gift is, the more time the female spends consuming it, the longer the male has for mating, the more sperm can get transferred, and the more likely the eggs are his. This treat may be why the females are motivated to follow a pheromone trail in the first place, rather than having males do most of the work. These nuptial gifts presumably have quite a bit of nutrition, which leads to healthier eggs and more surviving offspring for the female, so this is not just a bribe, this is an actual paternal investment by the male.

It's not as simple as that, of course. There are other males who don't have the time or inclination to provide this nice protein treat for the females. They have another strategy: pretend to be females, and rob the males that come with the treats of their own. They then use those nuptial gifts to give to other scorpionflies, presumably crossing their fingers that the scorpionflies that they're passing them on to are actually female.

So please keep an eye out for these fascinating, otherworldly creatures next time. I know that every time I see one, I get so excited that it takes me a while to compose myself and get a good photo. I hope you share the excitement.



Solar Eclipse: April 8, 2024

We're lucky to have the path of totality of a solar eclipse pass through the Northeast USA on April 8th, 2024. For those who have never seen the totality of a solar eclipse, I strongly advise you to try to see it! Those of you who have seen one don't need any encouragement, because this sight is a memory that stays with you for the rest of your life (in my case, since Feb 16, 1980).

There are a few caveats, though. First, the weather. The path of totality in the US ranges from Texas through Vermont, and the weather is not going to be equally eclipse-friendly everywhere. Texas will give you a better chance of seeing the eclipse without clouds blocking the view. I don't know what the exact chances are of the sun being cloud-free in the Northeast, but at the time

of writing this report, we have just incurred ten consecutive days without a sighting of the sun, so the chances can't be too high.

Third, and very important: **it can be very, very dangerous to look at the eclipse before or after totality.** Even if the sun is 99% covered, looking at it with the naked eye can cause damage. There are ways to get around this. You can buy eclipse glasses online and make sure you cover your eyes with them fully. You can project an image on a screen by using a pinhole in a piece of cardboard. But please never look directly at the sun except during totality.



Cont'd on p. 7



spicebush butterfly

Sharon FOC Board & Adinistrative Support

- | | |
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To submit an item for the newsletter, e-mail:
newsletter@sharonfoc.org

Join the Sharon Friends of Conservation
or Renew Your Membership



Name: _____

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☐ New Member

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Check one. Dues are \$25 per year.

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Would you like to volunteer? Special skills? _____

Send to SFOC, 45 Furnace St., Sharon, MA 02067 or join/renew online at www.sharonfoc.org/support/membership.html
Please note: Sharon Friends of Conservation does **not** share or make your membership information available to anyone.

Bogs, continued from p. 1

The original discussions regarding the Sharon Gallery project (called the Sharon Commons at the time) included plans for the bogs to remain a cranberry farm. This was also the intent of the Conservation Commission. Unfortunately, prior to the town taking possession of the land, the one farmer who had expressed interest in the site backed out. No other farmer could be found, and the cranberry beds themselves stopped being managed carefully enough to maintain the health of the cranberry vines. If the area were to be farmed, it would need extensive renovation. Without a farmer in place, the expense of renovation could not be justified. Reluctantly, the Conservation Commission decided that the next best use for the land would be to allow it to return to a natural wetland.

Many residents have expressed dismay at not only the state of the bogs but also the fact that they will no longer be farmed. It may help to understand that these cranberry beds differ in a significant way from many others in the area. These bogs were always dry farmed, meaning that the cranberries were harvested from the beds without the beds being flooded first. This method is viable but requires different equipment from the wet-harvested beds like those on display at Patriot Place and throughout southeastern Massachusetts. Of the 28 acres deeded to the town, about 15 acres were cranberry beds. Even with help from the developer to restore the cranberries, between the ongoing costs of maintaining the vines, managing weeds, clearing the ditches, importing sand for the beds, and transporting the dry-harvesting equipment to and from the site, no farmers were interested in farming the cranberries.

Rather than invest additional money in restoring bogs that nobody wanted to farm, the Sharon Gallery developer agreed to fund some major efforts to help return the area to a natural state. This work included the removal of several large patches of an invasive reed known as Phragmites. This plant, which has limited habitat value, threatened to completely colonize the site and exclude native species, including the remaining cranberries.

The excavators you may have seen on site were working to remove this invasive plant. In addition, some new planting beds that were never planted with cranberries have been spread with loam and will be seeded with native wetland plants in the spring. Cranberries are themselves a native bog plant. They were likely present in the natural bog that is shown in this spot on a map from 1831, and with care they will persist indefinitely on this landscape.

While the site and surrounding areas are under construction, for the safety of the public, the Conservation Department will not be encouraging visits to this site. Please join us in watching from nearby as this area returns to a natural state. We look forward to promoting its use for passive recreation in the years to come.



Sharon Friends of Conservation



Invites all to our general meeting, potluck supper
and a presentation
on Saturday, April 6 at 6:30 PM
at
O'Connell Hall
(at Our Lady of Sorrows church)
52 Cottage St. Sharon

This year's presentation by SFOC President and nature photographer Gaurav Shah, will take us below the surface of vernal ponds, the temporary water bodies that form in spring and dry up in summer.

During their fleeting existence, vernal ponds are a vital resource for many species. Vernal ponds provide a place where the eggs of frogs, salamanders, shrimp and other species are laid and then provide a nursery for the newly-hatched young.

Please come and explore this incredible underwater world!



Please call or email to let us know what food you might bring.

judyRkarlin@gmail.com
or
sharonfoc.org@gmail.com
or
781-784-4625

Geology Hike with Sharon Historical Society

The Sharon Friends of Conservation and the Sharon Historical Society jointly explored Rattlesnake Hill on March 3, 2024.

Paul Lauenstein identified north-south scuff marks from a glacier, visible in this photo, taken at the top of Rattlesnake Hill.



Local geologist, Erika from Acton, provided the group of about 50 people with fascinating facts about the local

landscape dating back to 370 million years ago when Rattlesnake Hill was formed.

Planning the hike in the winter months provided the best visibility as the vegetation is less dense this time of year.

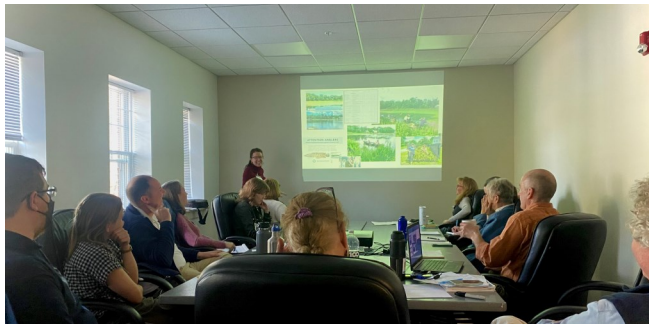


Photos courtesy

of Paull Lauenstein, one of which depicts a collection



of unusual rocks from a neighbor to Rattlesnake Hill. Specimens are labeled quartz, feldspar, and hornblend.



Invasive Species Management in our Watershed

A group of Conservation Administrators met at the Community Center on March 14th to discuss what their communities are doing to mitigate the presence of exotic invasive vegetation. Josh Philibert, the town's Conservation Administrator and Laura Russell, Chair of the Lake Massapoag Advisory Committee discussed aquatic management tactics and phragmites removal.

Ian Cooke, the Executive Director of the NepRWA and Sean McCanty joined them. Additionally, David Wong from DEP and Megan Shave from DCR brought a lot of institutional knowledge to the event. Joe Onorato from Water and Wetland also attended and shared lessons he's gained from his experience working in the local watershed stretching from the Sharon/Foxborough border to Boston Harbor.

Many Lives

by Celia Dolan

*Does a tree grow nostalgic
For the time it was a sapling?
Or long for the day it was a seed?*

*Or does it listen to the wind
When it whispers,
"That is what you were,
Not what you are,
And not what you will be."*





Below is Rita Corey who led a Martin Luther Kind, Jr. Day walk. The group at the bottom left joined her.

Hana Jenner captured Morse Pond beautifully in the photo to the right.

On the left, Judy Karlin enjoys the Pond Loop Trail.



**To keep updated on SFOC hikes and other events,
please follow our Facebook page
www.facebook.com/Conserve18,
visit our website at sharonfoc.org, or send your e-mail address to sharonfov@gmail.com**

Eclipse cont'd from p.4

What should you look for during the eclipse?
Here are some suggestions.

a) As the amount of sun being covered increases, look for confused behavior from birds and other animals. They may cry out, or start flocking as if it were evening.

b) Just before totality, look on the ground for bands of light and dark moving across the landscape. These are known as “shadow bands” and are seen because the light source (the sun) is now almost a point source rather than a large extended one.

c) As totality hits, and as it finishes, you may see the “diamond ring effect”. This is a very short term effect where one can see corona around the moon, and also the very last bit of sunlight passing through a crater or other depression on the moon.

d) Bailey’s beads: during parts of totality, you may see red dots along the rim of the sun. The reason for these is the same as the diamond ring effect, because the surface of the moon is not a perfect circle, there may be parts that let sunlight through while the rest of the sun is covered.

e) During totality, look for planets in the sky. You should be able to see Mercury, Venus, and perhaps Jupiter.

f) The corona! This is of course the star of the show (pun not intended). Around the sun, in the dark sky, you can see the corona displayed. We normally never see it because the main surface of the sun is so bright. We are near solar maximum, so the corona should be quite large. As NASA says on their web site:

“During the 2024 eclipse, the Sun will be in or near solar maximum, when the magnetic field is more like a tangled hairball. Streamers will likely be visible throughout the corona. In addition to that, viewers will have a better chance to see prominences – which appear as bright, pink curls or loops coming off the Sun.

With lucky timing, there could even be a chance to see a coronal mass ejection – a large eruption of solar material – during the eclipse.”

I hope many of you get the chance to see this phenomenon, and clear skies for everyone! Please do share photos if you get them.

Guarav Shah

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Sharon, MA 02067



Sharon Friends of Conservation was started in 1986 "to promote, encourage and foster the preservation, care and maintenance of all public lands, waters and wildlife in the Town of Sharon in order to further the recreation and enjoyment of the town's residents." It is a non-profit, 501(c) (3) organization.

We welcome all contributions this newsletter and we are eager for more, especially those of young people. Please write about a conservation issue of importance to you. We also welcome artwork, stories, and poetry.

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