

Pinnacle News

Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association
Spring 2022

Ecological Study at Lily Pond Highlands Finds More Than 230 Species

The Pinnacle Association recently undertook an ecological study of Lily Pond Highlands, a 615-acre parcel of land conserved by the Pinnacle and located in the towns of Athens, Brookline, and Townshend. The study was conducted by ecologist Brett Engstrom and cartographer Andrew Toepfer, who's also a former WHPA board member. The study includes an inventory of significant natural communities of plants and animals; ponds, streams, wetlands, and vernal pools; and cultural features at the site.

The study observed 188 species of plants and 45 species of animals, such as scarlet tanager, Blackburnian warbler, spotted salamander, and signs of bear and moose. Ten plants documented on the parcel are rare or uncommon in Vermont, including the lance-leaved violet.

The information will help guide the management of the property, including the placement of hiking trails.

The study states: "As an overarching vision, recommendations for management of LPH lean towards a high-level of protection for the natural communities, both upland and wetland, and the conservation of native species and natural features that are integral parts of the natural communities. The wealth of biodiversity found on these lands during the ecological inventory inspire this vision."

You can [read the study here](#). (Map 4 is omitted to protect the exact location of sensitive features.)



Blackburnian warbler (top), lance-leaved violet (left), moose

Annual Meeting: Saturday, May 7, at 4 p.m. With Featured Speaker Bob Zaino

All WHPA members and supporters are invited to attend our annual meeting on Saturday, May 7, at 4 p.m., held online via Zoom. Board president Silos Roberts will share news and updates on our conservation work and present the Volunteer of the Year award. Our featured speaker will be Robert Zaino, State Lands Ecologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. [RSVP here](#) and see p. 4 for more details.

Fall and Winter Highlights: School Hikes and Wildlife Tracking

From teacher Dena Weiss-Tisman:

Fourth graders from Westminster Center School participated in two days of outdoor education in fall 2021. At the end of September, we hiked up to the Pinnacle on the Holden Trail. Students chose “special spots” where they did silent observations that they recorded in their science journals. Farther up the trail, we stopped and recorded our observations of the remains of a wolf tree and two old house foundations, connecting these to our social studies work of early settlement in Vermont. Students were excited to reach the summit where we had lunch, played the game Camouflage, and wrote our reflections of the day.

In mid-October, we adventured on the Creature Rock Trail from the end of Ledge Road in Grafton. We enjoyed the late foliage at the summit view, and we explored Creature Rock where we also sketched and wrote our observations. This work connected with our science study of geology and Earth’s Processes and the last ice age in Vermont (which left behind a glacial erratic we examined).



Fourth graders on the Creature Rock Trail. Photo: Dena Weiss-Tisman



Lynn Levine's workshop Tracks and Trees taught participants about wildlife tracking and tree identification in winter. Photo: Sandi Meyerhoff

On March 5, 2022, tracker and forester Lynn Levine hosted an informative Tracks and Trees event on Bemis Hill. Lynn and the group identified tracks in the snow including fisher, vole, gray squirrel, mouse, and possibly mink! The workshop also taught helpful tips for identifying trees in winter. Each participant received a copy of Lynn's book, *Mammal Tracks and Scat: Life-Size Pocket Guide*.

Field Note: Yellow Warblers Are a Colorful Harbinger of Spring

By Liz Bergstrom

The yellow warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) is one of the earliest, most recognizable warblers that arrive each spring in Vermont. In late April to early May, keep an eye out for this cheery bird coming back from spending the winter in Central and South America. The yellow warbler is about five inches long and weighs only about one-third of an ounce, yet it migrates thousands of miles twice a year, crossing the Gulf of Mexico in a single nonstop flight.



Yellow warblers (males above, female below) arrive in Vermont in late April to early May. Photos: PutneyPics/Flickr Creative Commons

In Vermont, look for these warblers in woodlands, along the edges of forests, and along streams or wetlands. Their plumage is brilliant yellow on the head, underside, and tail, with darker yellow-brown coloring on the wings. The sexes look similar except that the males have chestnut streaks on the breast. You can also identify them by their song, which sounds like “sweet, sweet, sweeter than sweet.”

The yellow warbler nests in shrubs or small trees. The female bird builds a small, cup-shaped nest, lays speckled eggs that are pale green or gray, and incubates the eggs for 11 to 12 days. The adults and young eat a diet of mostly caterpillars and flying insects. This bird stays in Vermont through the summer, migrating south again in fall to Central or South America.

Although yellow warblers aren't listed as threatened or endangered, the North American Breeding Bird Survey found this species decreased by 25 percent between 1966 and 2014. Warblers and other songbirds benefit from protecting habitat, reducing collisions with windows, mitigating climate change, and growing native plants that support caterpillars and other insects.

For birders like me who find the many, varied species of spring warblers confusing to identify, the yellow warbler is a great place to start. Don't expect them to come to a backyard birdfeeder, since they don't eat seeds, but keep an eye and ear out for their canary-yellow plumage and their sweet song in forests and streamside habitats this spring.



Join Us for Upcoming Events in 2022

Sunday, May 1, at 11 a.m.: Spring Wildflower Walk on Pinnacle Trails

Lisa Merton and Libby Mills will lead this spring wildflower walk, which is limited to 12 people. To register, call Lisa Merton at 802-387-6629. Wear sturdy footwear and meet at the Congregational Church of Westminster West, 44 Church Street. Rain or shine.

If you'd like to brush up on spring wildflowers before or after the walk, check out the Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association's [online spring wildflower guide](#).

Saturday, May 7, at 4 p.m. on Zoom: WHPA Annual Meeting

All WHPA members and supporters are invited to attend our annual meeting on Saturday, May 7 at 4 p.m., held online via Zoom. RSVP on our website, windmillhillpinnacle.org, to receive the Zoom link. Board president Silos Roberts will share news and updates on our conservation work and present the Volunteer of the Year award. Our featured speaker will be Robert Zaino, State Lands Ecologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Robert Zaino has been working with the department since 2008. He holds a master's degree from the Field Naturalist Program at the University of Vermont. As the department's state lands ecologist, Bob is responsible for the inventory, assessment, and monitoring of natural communities and important ecological features. Bob also works statewide on lands owned and



Robert Zaino, State Lands Ecologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, to speak at WHPA annual meeting

managed by the Agency of Natural Resources, including wildlife management areas (WMAs), state forests, and state parks. Bob is also charged with collaborating with other state lands managers to protect and enhance significant ecological features and work on the development of the state lands long-range management plan. During his time off, Bob enjoys fly-fishing, rock climbing, canoeing, and backcountry skiing.

Sat., Oct. 22, 2022: Bald Hill Hike. 1-3 p.m.

Vanessa Stern, former member of the WHPA Board, will lead a riverside walk this fall along the gorgeous Saxtons River. More details will be announced.

Thank you to donors who gave in honor or memory of a special person! You can read the full list on our website on the Support page.

Please **share photos or videos from your hikes on Pinnacle trails** by emailing them to WHPAtrails@gmail.com or posting them to the [Windmill Hill Pinnacle Association's Facebook page](#).

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Chipmunk, moose - PutneyPics, Flickr Creative Commons

Blackburnian warbler - Steven Kersting, Flickr Creative Commons

Lance-leaved violet - Bob Peterson, Flickr Creative Commons

