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Massachusetts



The newsletter for owners of land protected by a Watershed Preservation Restriction (WPR) held by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), Division of Water Supply Protection.

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Watershed Currents

Keen On Kestrels

Little Raptors Hunting For Habitat



This particular kestrel actually has a home in a nesting box located on Wachusett Reservoir's North Dike, but others like him are suffering from declining habitat.

Photos: Brian Henderson

While out on North Dike two years ago, a flash of movement caught my eye. As I pulled my binoculars up to my face, I saw a small aerial predator, hovering over the tall grass...wings flapping but the head motionless, eyeing it's potential prey. There was no mistaking what it was. I thought, "We now have Kestrels hunting North Dike!"

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is North America's smallest and most widespread falcon, as it can be found from the east to west coast. About the size of a mourning dove or robin, the kestrel has long, narrow wings and a square-tipped tail. Adult males and females are easily distinguished: males have slate-blue wings and a buff, spotted belly, while female wings are reddish-brown and their bellies are marked with brown vertical streaks. Both males and females have dark streaks, or "sideburns", on their faces.



Although not particularly vocal, kestrels can be easily recognized by their distinctive series of klee! or killy! notes (for some outstanding examples of kestrel calls, go to www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Kestrel/sounds).

Kestrels are excellent hunters, and like many other hawks, they will sit quietly on a high perch looking for food. Kestrels primarily eat insects (grasshoppers, beetles, dragonflies, etc.) but will also capture and eat small mammals (mice, voles), snakes, and small songbirds. Once food is spotted, kestrels will often leave their perch and hover

in place above their prey before dropping down to grab it. Kestrels have been known to cache or hide extra food in bushes, tree limbs, or cavities to save it for the future or hide it from other predators.

Kestrels favor open habitats and can be found in meadows, fields, or pastures. Kestrels are tolerant of human activity and

Meet the Staff

Maura Robie: At home in the outdoors

Seasonal WPR Stewardship Assistant, Maura Robie has had the pleasure of meeting some of you this past fall while monitoring WPRs; she is looking forward to meeting more folks in the spring. Maura brings a varied conservation background to the position.

Most recently, she was a conservation consultant for a Connecticut land trust, writing baseline Conservation Restrictions and volunteering in numerous capacities. Maura enjoyed contributing to research on dragonflies while pursuing her degree in Biology. She has also performed interesting work such as collecting data for spadefoot toad and blue-spotted salamander research in Connecticut, helping with the search for

Asian long-horned beetles in Worcester, and appreciating the enthusiasm of children while working as a teacher/naturalist for both Connecticut and Massachusetts Audubon Societies.

You can find Maura and her partner Tom spending time outdoors nearly every day hiking, bicycling, cross-country skiing, gardening, kayaking, and swimming in local ponds. She considers herself a lifelong naturalist and is a fan of slowing down and becoming immersed in nature. “With enough patience, plants and animals become more noticeable that are missed on first glance, and I love the anticipation of not knowing



Maura, out on the trail.

Photo: Tom Grasso

what I’ll discover. It gives me that great feeling of being a part of the environment.”

Maura is a student of yoga and is a strong proponent of cooking and eating healthy, purchasing local food, and helping support local organic farmers. Originally from Massachusetts, she currently lives in rural Woodstock, CT with Tom and their cat Sophie.

Land Owner Profile

**Ron and Sue Cloutier
Thriving with Nature**

Ron and Sue Cloutier on the deck overlooking their WPR nestled next to Quabbin Reservoir land.

Photo: Jim Taylor

Ron and Sue Cloutier moved many years ago from Wellesley to the deep woods of New Salem, leaving their city jobs for a quieter existence. They live without a blade of lawn in a lovely, carefully designed house tucked into the forest, just outside a Quabbin gate. But they haven’t been quite quiet, making an indelible mark in this region by generously lending their energy and expertise in improving the condition of the natural world and helping others to further understand the importance of knowing the land.

Ron has followed his 25 years as a Boston-based lawyer with a myriad of accomplishments in “retirement.” He took on the presidency of the Massachusetts Forestry As-

sociation, an organization committed to serving forestland owners, for five years. Now called the Massachusetts Forest Alliance, this organization advocates on behalf of its members for a strong, sustainable forest economy, responsible forest management practices, private land equity, and the continuation of working forests on public and private lands.

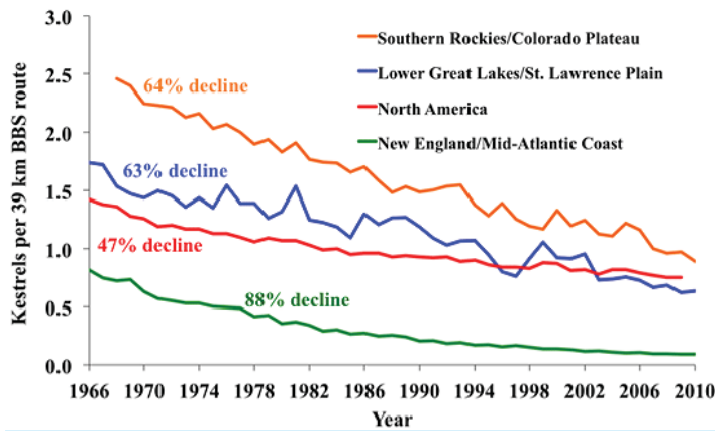
That was not enough, so Ron joined the executive committee of the North Quabbin Regional Landscape Partnership (NQRLP), an affiliated group of private land trusts, government environmental agencies, and community open space advocates seeking to improve effective coordination of efforts to preserve the rural character and economic viability of the north Quabbin region.

It’s difficult to get to the bottom of Ron’s resume. Add to this his work as a director on the Board of the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust (MGLCT), a regional land trust serving 23 towns in Worcester and Franklin counties and supported by 1,100 members. The MGLCT protects significant natural, agricultural, and scenic areas, encouraging land stewardship in Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy, and future generations. Since 1986, Mount Grace has helped protect more than 29,000 acres. And if you wish to learn about butterflies, Ron is totally immersed in this passion – travelling to butterfly conventions and butterfly forays.

Ron’s butterfly interests dovetail nicely with Sue’s work with moths. Through her expertise, she has been able to

Kestrels - From Page 1

BBS data indicate long-term population declines



This graph shows the drastic decline in Kestrel population nationwide, especially in New England. *Source: USGS Breeding Bird Survey*

can be found in urban and suburban parks. They prefer areas with short vegetation but do need a few trees with natural cavities in order to nest (or some nest boxes). Kestrels are secondary cavity nesters, meaning they don't create the cavity themselves, but take advantage of existing ones, either made by woodpeckers or occurring naturally. Males will identify several potential nesting spots, but the female makes the final choice.

Kestrels, once a fairly common sight throughout New England, have been declining steadily for several decades (see graph). Experts are unclear as to why kestrel numbers have dropped, but reasons could

include: changes in land use (fewer farms and open areas), competition for nesting cavities with other birds, or increased predation by larger birds of prey.

Interested WPR landowners can help support this declining species in a variety of ways. While conserving your land with a WPR was a fantastic first step by preserving open space in Massachusetts, many of you may also have habitats on your land that are suitable for kestrels. Several organizations, including MassWildlife and Mass Audubon, are building and deploying kestrel nesting boxes across the state. MassWildlife has installed over 100 boxes. Installing a nest box may attract kestrels to your property. Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has an excellent publication that details how to build a kestrel box and provides tips on where to place it (www.hawkmountain.org/science/research/kestrel-nestbox-program/page.aspx?id=301). If you don't want to build and install your own nest box, you can donate to Mass Audubon to help pay for the construction of new boxes.

Mass Audubon is interested in the distribution of kestrels across the state. If you see a kestrel, please report it to Mass Audubon. Finally, there may be an opportunity to monitor kestrel nests beyond your property. Mass Audubon is always interested in volunteers to check kestrel boxes during the breeding season and record important information.

~Dan Clark



This sequence of dramatic images show the process of a male Kestrel bringing food to the nesting female in a nesting box.

Source: Emily Eaton

WPR News Flash!

Jim French Discovers New Forest Organ-ism

Jim French has a score of accomplishments at DCR. He has conducted countless outings scouting new prospects for conservation, but a recent discovery has really struck a chord with us here in the WPR office. On a recent site, visit Jim came across this unexpected 'organ-ic' find deep in the forest...an abandoned 'pump' reed organ shown at right. And on this note, Jim says that the key to harmony with our landowners is to be ready to pull out all the stops, resulting in a symphony of cooperative effort.



Text and Photo: Jim Taylor

Ron and Sue Cloutier - From Page 2

identify more than 750 species of moths on their 45 acre woodlot! This is accomplished by spending hours observing traps and special lights at all hours of the day and night and in all seasons. It's a life list extraordinaire.

Sue has been a science teacher, giving countless kids the gift of wonder. She is the founding program developer for the Millers River Environmental Center (MREC) in Athol, preparing grants and coordinating between scientists, teachers and a host of environmental organizations. MREC is a community resource providing a working environment for collaboration between governmental and non-governmental agencies and citizens. Integral to their mission is a strong emphasis on the education and training of area citizens to enhance their appreciation for, connection with, and stewardship of the rich natural resources of the region. Sue's involvement in this organization has

been invaluable and she has even presented her ideas at the Second World Conference for Science Centers.

The Cloutiers have lent their skills to their community as well, with Ron chairing the Conservation Commission and Sue serving on the Planning Board. In their spare time, they walk their woodlot trails – narrow unobtrusive paths that a deer would be hard pressed to follow. One can't help appreciate their familiarity with every square foot and every plant on the entire 45 acres. Their knowledge of their land is encyclopedic.

They have recently placed a Watershed Preservation Restriction on this deeply loved piece of the Quabbin Watershed. DCR is proud to have been given the opportunity to partner with Ron and Sue in keeping their land protected for generations to come. Their accomplishments and contributions are many, and this article touches on only a few. Three cheers to Ron and Sue Cloutier.

~Jim French



These are just a few of the many species of moths and butterflies that Sue Cloutier has photographed on the Cloutier land in New Salem.

Photos: Sue Cloutier



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