



SOMES · MEYNELL WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Dedicated to Conservation and Education in the Somes Pond Watershed

Summer/Fall 2015

Issue No. 16

SOMES-MEYNELL WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

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1898 – 1990

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Message from the President *by Roberta Sharp*

It is with great pleasure that I welcome William, Billy, Helprin as the new Director of the sanctuary. Billy began his transition from Maine Coast Heritage Trust in mid-June. You may be acquainted with Billy through his involvement there as the Land Steward for MDI. He has extensive involvement with the local community whether it be with children's gardens, Preserve and conservation easement monitoring, bird walks, trail building with high school and Park partners, invasive plant control, citizen science projects or volunteering at Somes-Meynell.

I first met him about 6 years ago on an MCHT early morning bird walk at Babson Creek. Right away I was impressed with his ability to lead a group of people with diverse birding experiences. He shared his wealth of naturalist knowledge with ease and friendliness. When I reviewed his application, I had no doubt that his conscientious awareness of our watershed was a quality that would meet our expectations.

Billy's experience allowed him to quickly assume leadership of the organization's operations and even run some new community events before the summer was over. He has pursued training in water quality monitoring and aquatic invasive plant species patrols, attended the annual Lake Monitoring Conference, led paddles for interested community members on Somes Pond, and met many pond neighbors and visitors. Sanctuary visits from school groups are getting lined up for the fall season.

I would also like to express my appreciation to David Lamon, the Sanctuary's Director for the past 15 years. I was lucky enough to take advantage of his vast naturalist knowledge on many chance encounters as I ran the trails by the headquarters. He would always have a moment to share some exciting happening around the watershed which included countless loon tales. How else would I have known about the miracle of the Big Night (spring amphibian migration event), the importance of alewives to our watershed, or the mating flight of the eagles? I even found the painted trillium hidden along the eastern boundary just as he described.

I vividly recall the first time that I helped David unload alewife stock into the pond. Because he told the story of the Somes ancestors swimming among the alewives, I was compelled to jump in alongside them! He grew to know the trails intimately as he surveyed flora and fauna. He was equally proficient in the study of aquatic plants and led paddles for the purpose of sharing his expertise. I gained a deeper respect for all he accomplished once he assumed his new position at The Herring Gut Institute.

Many board members lent a hand to fill the void between David's departure in February until Billy was hired in June. For this support, I am forever grateful. The search for a new Director was deliberate and time consuming due to the high number of extremely well qualified applicants. I am looking forward to the months ahead as we catch up with programming, the newsletter, new friendships, and community partnerships.

I have great confidence that Billy will successfully lead us forward into this new period with the skillfulness that he possessed in his previous work. Please stop by the Sanctuary headquarters to welcome him perhaps while attending one of the upcoming fall activities, paddling the pond, or while enjoying a peaceful sojourn on one of the nature trails.

Director's Message

by William Helprin

I felt the specialness of Somes Pond from my first in-depth visit here 13 years ago. On the ice, in a blizzard, I learned with students and teachers about the character of the watershed. We took water samples from the depths of the pond. We fished through a network of ice holes to see what fish were near or far from shore, and we followed animal tracks in the woods. As the new Director of Somes-Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary, I feel privileged to experience that specialness time and again, and will work to ensure others in the community also have that opportunity.

Monitoring conservation easement properties around the pond, paddling with friends and family, talking with fellow pond visitors, working with school groups in all seasons on the water and in the woods – all of these experiences and more have contributed to my perceptions of the value of this pond and its greater watershed. I know I am not alone in holding these perceptions.

Maintaining the valuable ecological characteristics of the watershed is partly a function of what nature brings in terms of weather, new species arrivals on land and in water, and other species' departures or reductions. We too, all play a significant role in the health of this complex system.

Trying to understand interrelationships and detecting change means, in part, having a sense of what is "normal" for Somes Pond, Long Pond, or any other watershed. This requires observation, awareness, study, and information sharing. If

something abnormal is detected, intervention based on our best understanding may well be warranted. Restoration of the Somesville fish passageways undertaken by the Sanctuary and many partners ten years ago is a good example.

Among numerous important functions, watersheds provide a clear sense of community for people who live within, visit, or value their health, beauty, and recreational opportunities. This summer I was able to attend the annual Lakes Monitoring Conference and participate in several water quality and aquatic invasive plant training sessions. I witnessed the caring, commitment, and camaraderie of people focused on the protection of the special qualities of their own bodies of water and the lands that surround them.

I also feel very privileged to be in a position to carry on the substantial stewardship and education efforts of former Director David Lamon, summer field assistants, the wide range of project volunteers, the Board of Directors, and Founder of SMWS Virginia Somes Sanderson. I look forward to sharing the joys and work of caring for this watershed and its greater Mount Desert Island environment with you.

Thank you to all the supporters of the Sanctuary and its mission! Your role is vital to the continued success of the organization. Please feel free to contact the Sanctuary to share your thoughts, experiences, and observations with me. Whether out on the ice in a blizzard, on the trails, or paddling the pond observing loons, I welcome your company in experiencing this special place!

Volunteer Profile: J.F. Burns

This spring and summer as the Sanctuary was scrambling to find volunteers to help with various projects, one volunteer made everyone's work a lot easier. A great volunteer might come out as many as 10 times in a season. For something like the alewife run, that means you might need 15-20 volunteers to make it through a season.

Visiting members of the African Children's Choir help volunteer J.F. Burns count and transfer adult alewife from the Long Pond outlet fish ladder into the lake.



By our count JF Burns counted at the Long Pond outflow 60 times. There were only 77 counts done all season from this site. Yep, the 2015 Long Pond count is JF 60, the rest of us 17.

Granted, JF just lives a couple of doors down from the outflow, and we gave him a net and key so that he could do the count without having to pick up equipment at the Sanctuary, but still this was a great effort and allowed the rest of the volunteer crew to focus on the Mill Pond count.

JF is a retired school teacher, having taught science for 17 years at Ellsworth High School, after a 22 year career in the chemical industry! He and his family have lived all over the United States and overseas in his earlier career and now lives with his wife Sue in a house overlooking the wetlands and stream where alewife pass by on their way to Long Pond.



Adult alewife

Species Spotlight:

by Roberta Sharp

Freshwater mussel: Eastern Elliptio, *Elliptio complanata*

The fresh water mussel, Eastern Elliptio (*Elliptio complanata*), is a valuable indicator of water quality and ecosystem health. As filter feeders they remove bacteria, detritus, and algae from the pond, and convert food resources to edible forms that can be digested by plants and animals. It prefers a habitat of ponds and lakes with muddy, sandy, gravelly or clay bottoms, but tolerates sites of disturbance and some pollution.

Its lifecycle requires a host fish to complete its maturation. Breeding occurs in late summer as males release sperm into the pond and the female filters the sperm through its gills. The fertilized eggs are brooded by the female in a temporary modified portion of their gills called the marsupium. The following spring,

females release thousands of mature larvae, glochidia, into the water where it attaches to the fins or gills of a host fish like alewife. They are carried along for a period of weeks or months without harm to the host. During this period the juveniles mature and drop back into the fresh water substrate to begin a new cycle.

The juvenile is predated by leeches, crayfish, and flatworms. The mature mussel is a food source for mink, raccoon, skunk, otter, and muskrat. When swimming or kayaking, I have noticed small beds of eastern elliptio, noting that most have been eaten. They only move 1-2 feet during their lifetime, often greater than 15 years, which limits their ability to find the best site for breeding and feeding.

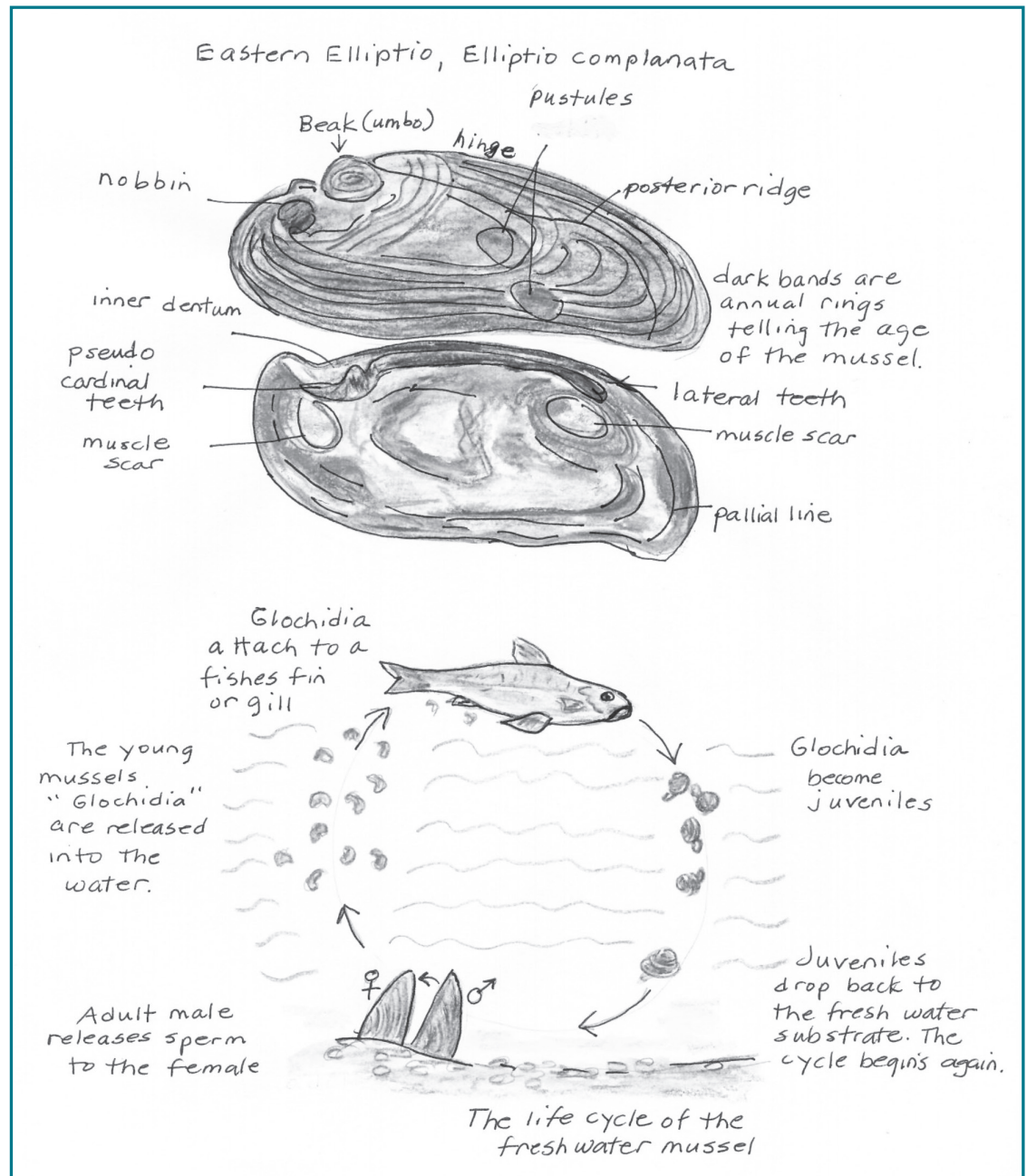


ILLUSTRATION BY ROBERTA SHARP

In addition to her work on the Sanctuary's Board of Directors, Roberta Sharp volunteers for many wildlife and gardening projects on MDI.



Chris Petersen inspects the fish ladder.



COA Professor and SMWS Board member Chris Petersen speaking with students about alewife sampling protocols.



Counting alewife at the Mill Pond dam fish ladder.



Erickson Smith, ANP Biological Technician, and Chris Petersen pulling the Mill Pond fish ladder grate at end of migration season.

Alewife Migration Project

by Chris Petersen

This spring and summer has been a bit of a scramble as we have tried to maintain all of the projects that David Lamon started during his tenure at the Sanctuary. One of the more visible projects has been the alewife restoration work at Somes and Long Pond, and the mill pond fish ladder in Somesville. Again this summer a dozen or more volunteers, school groups and families came out to the mill pond to count alewives as they moved up from Somes Sound to the nearby lakes to spawn and then quickly backtrack to the sea. David gave us the list of past volunteers, and with some great help from Bruce Connery and staff at Acadia National Park we got the gates, boards, and traps in place again this spring so we could count the annual alewife run.

And then we waited... Perhaps you have stricken the spring from your memory, but like much of nature this spring, the alewives were in no hurry to start.

Finally on May 14th we got our first fish count in double digits, when Jake Ressel counted 57, and it would be several days again before Enoch Albert and Sharon Knopp saw a LARGE run, with 1187 in a one-hour sitting on May 19th. They were joined by students from COA and local schools, friends of the sanctuary, and 112 lines of data later we called it quits on June 25th. The final count at the mill pond was 23,078. This is larger than any runs before 2012, but smaller than the last couple of years where runs have been moving up towards 40,000. "We" also counted the fish that made it into Long Pond, but this is a misnomer (see the profile on JF Burns' work on Long Pond).

We did a couple of new things this year, one was to try to keep better records on predators, and the initial numbers are pretty stunning. Just in the times we were out there watching we saw 113 alewives get eaten or taken away by a predator! Top on the list were herring gulls, who took an amazing 78 fish, followed by osprey with 24, and bald eagles, seals, cormorants, mergansers, black-backed gulls all getting a few. One concern we recognized this year was that fish returning to the ocean at low tide were easy prey for gulls, and we have been working on ways to hold the fish in the pond until high tide, and then allowing them to migrate out when it is safer.



Adult alewife schooling in Somes Mill Pond, preparing to head back to the ocean.

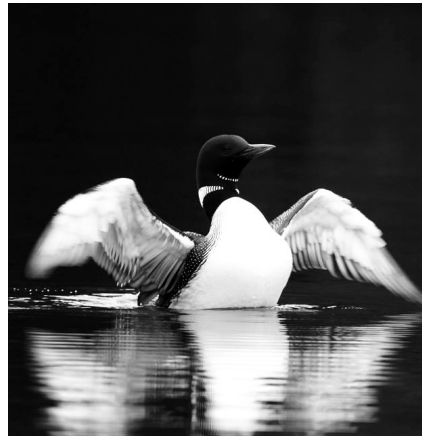
So, as we publish this newsletter, there are probably hundreds of thousands of alewife young eating and growing in Long and Somes Pond, and sometime this fall they will all migrate back down the streams and start their life in the ocean, and the gulls and the volunteers look forward to their return as four-year old adults to spawn in 2019. In 2016 the young of 2012, a large graduating class, is expected back for the 12th annual count, and we will be there again with our counters, thermometers and curiosity and do what we can to encourage and support this spectacle of nature.

2015 Acadia Birding Festival Environmental Stewardship Award to SMWS

The Acadia Birding Festival (ABF) <http://www.acadiabirdingfestival.com/> takes place in late spring each year, headquartered in Somesville, with trips to many birding hot spots around MDI, educational programs, and keynote speakers. The Festival brings people from around the country and around the world to enjoy the splendors of bird life in this part of Maine.

The Acadia Birding Festival gives back to the local community by selecting one or two organizations to receive the ABF Environmental Stewardship Award, along with a \$500 donation. SMWS was one of two winners this year. ABF Executive Director, Becky Marvil, stated in her award letter that “the award goes to an organization that proves to be good stewards of the environment. It is ABF’s way of showing our appreciation for organizations like Somes-Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary that not only work to protect the environment but have programs to engage and educate the public.”

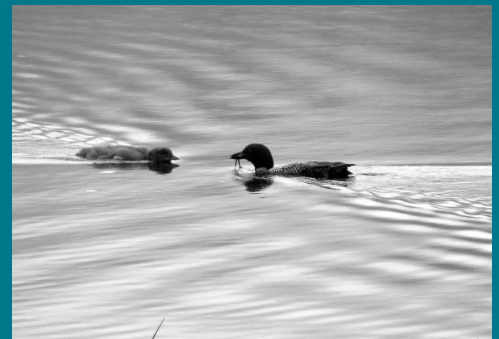
With the ABF based in “downtown” Somesville there is easy walking access to the Sanctuary’s trails for short birding ventures. Thank you ABF!



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN RIVERS

MDI Loon Update

Many people have contributed loon observations on nesting success and survival of chicks this summer. Board President Roberta Sharp coordinated efforts early in the season and new Director Billy Helprin took over that role later in the summer. There were six confirmed chicks hatched: one on Somes Pond, one on Round Pond, two on Upper Hadlock Pond, and two on Eagle Lake. Out of those six, three are known to have survived into September – the Somes Pond, Round Pond, and one of the Eagle Lake chicks. Thank you to all who help protect and contribute information about these amazing birds!





Somes-Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary

*Dedicated to Conservation and Education in the
Somes Pond Watershed*

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Please Help Support Our Work!

Your financial support is critical to helping the Sanctuary fulfill its conservation and education mission, but there are other ways to contribute.

There are several items that would help us better manage and utilize the property and headquarters building. If you would like to donate a used but workable item it would help!

Needed items/tools:

- Chainsaw
- String trimmer/weed wacker
- Branch loppers/sheers
- Folding/stackable chairs
- Kitchen refrigerator

All donations to the Somes-Meynell Wildlife Sanctuary are tax-deductible.

Thank You for your support!

Exploration of Somes Pond took place on a public paddle August 2nd. Paddlers met out on the water and ventured off to look at aquatic plants, birds, frogs and other aquatic life. We discussed land conservation around the pond, MDI loon nesting success, and the threat of aquatic invasive plants. We also had fun paddling and enjoying each other's company!

