

**Naturally from page 18**

Rocky and Sandy, are thriving as well. They have begun their flying lessons and are learning how to interact with visiting loons.

Soon all the adult loons will leave for the seacoast, where they spend the winter, while the chicks will remain in their respective lakes as long as possible before ice forces them to leave. Once at the seacoast, the young loons will remain there for two years before returning to the lakes.

**Peregrine Falcons**

In his annual summary of peregrine activity in the state, Chris Martin of New Hampshire Audubon confirmed that a male and female are both “territorial” at the Bulkhead on Ragged Mountain, giving us hope that they will return and nest next year. Chris points out that “one of the more interesting aspects of the 2011 breeding season in New Hampshire was confirmation of immature (one-year-old) females at four separate territories [including Ragged Mountain], three of which were newly occupied sites this season. Previously, in three decades of monitoring, we had never detected such a high percentage (20%) of one-year-olds of either sex in the state’s breeding population. We anticipate that the presence of these younger females at newly occupied sites will translate into greater productivity in future breeding seasons.”

**Woolly Bears**

October is when you are apt to see woolly bear caterpillars, as they are out and about looking for a good winter shelter. Remember that slightly scary, prickly feeling when you pick one up? Of course, those bristles are the caterpillar’s protection from predators, and by quickly curling into a ball, it tries to protect its soft underside.

We’ve all been told that one can predict the harshness of the coming winter by looking at the brown stripe in the center. Instead, it turns out that the size of the brown section may tell you something about the previous winter.

Woolly bears, the larvae of Isabella tiger moths, complete six molts as they grow, and each molt adds to the brown stripe. If spring is early, the woolly bears will have more time to eat and

grow during each molt, thus extending the length of the brown section.

**Witch Hazel**

As the trees drop their leaves, look for the bright, delicate, yellow flowers of witch hazel – the last native plant to bloom. Looking more closely, you will also see its tiny flower buds as well as large nut-like growths. These are seed-pods, which have been on the branch ever since the flowers were pollinated last fall.

The dry, warm days of autumn cause the pods to shrink until they burst with a pop loud enough to hear as you walk in the woods. Two black seeds are sent as far as 50 feet, where they will lie on the ground for two years before germinating, if they aren’t eaten first by a turkey or grouse.

Witch hazel is not a member of the hazelnut family; its name probably comes either from the Anglo-Saxon word “whyhl” meaning “bending” or from the fact that its forked branches are commonly used as a “witching” rod to find water. Early settlers learned from the Onandaga Indians of New York to extract sap from witch hazel and combine it with alcohol for hair tonic, liniment, and lotion.

**Meteor Showers**

The Orionid meteors, which appear to emanate from Orion’s club, north of bright Betelgeuse, are famous for their speed, persistent trains, and bright fireballs. The best viewing for the Orionids will probably be before dawn on Friday or Saturday, October 21 or 22, though the waning crescent moon may diminish this year’s display.

On Saturday, October 29, Jupiter will be at its closest approach to Earth and, with its face fully illuminated by the sun, the giant planet will be as big and bright as it gets in the night sky. With a medium-sized telescope you might be able to see some of the details in Jupiter’s cloud bands. A good pair of binoculars should allow you to observe Jupiter’s four largest moons, appearing as bright dots on either side of the planet.

Please remember to send your observations, photographs, and nature tips to [AndoverNaturally@gmail.com](mailto:AndoverNaturally@gmail.com), so I can include them in next month’s column.

# FNRT Plans Extension Of Northern Rail Trail To Concord

By Lindy Heim  
FNRT

The Friends of the Northern Rail Trail in Merrimack County (FNRT) have won another state Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant to extend its resurfaced length further towards Concord. The project will add about two more miles from Depot Street in West Franklin, south to the Webster Farm. Franklin FNRT board member Nita Tomaszewski spearheaded the grant writing effort and is assisting in the project. Earlier last month, Peter Southworth and Chris and Tim Norris, all of Andover, cut back brush and removed a truckload of trash near the Depot Street bridge to make the old rail bed ready for the planned September 22 start of the project. Franklin Mayor Ken Merrifield and City Manager Elizabeth Dragon helped smooth the disposal process.

It takes a lot of hands (volunteer and paid), planning, and good luck to pull off a project like this. Rail trail volunteer Chris Norris of Andover is the point person responsible for coordinating all the players on the ground for the two phases of the trail extension. He has set entry and exit points with Dick Edmunds of RD Edmunds and Sons who won the contract for

delivering stone dust for this project. He also consulted Dig Safe. Members of the Lakes Region Snowmobile Club have agreed to help by cutting brush further along the trail to Webster Farm for phase one. Board member Alex Bernhard has arranged for stone dust testing before and during the project to ensure a high quality rail trail surface.

Phase one consists of grading and compacting the ballast or large rock surface in preparation for the stone dust and is expected to take about two days. Both phases will be done with the assistance of Durgin and Crowell Lumber Company of New London as provider of the heavy equipment for the project, Ed Larpenner as grader operator, Ed Hiller and Tim Norris as compactor operator and backup operator, and Franklin resident Taffy Johnson as volunteer coordinator of the truck receipt collectors.

Phase two involves dumping, grading, and compacting the stone dust and is expected to begin September 26, as of this writing, taking about three or four days to complete. Delivery trucks will roll out early each day followed by the grader and the compactor. Look for the trail extension to be open for use in early October, just in time for leaf peeping.

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