



Heading into the water at Highland Lake is Jared Henry, a visitor from Rhode Island who stayed with us over New Years weekend, and our son, Keith Blinn. The New Years Day cold plunge is a traditional event for Jared. This was a first for Keith, and he admits it was a tad chilly!

Photo and caption: Donna Blinn

SRKG Offers Winter Hikes

SRKG press release

The Sunapee-Ragged-Kearsarge Greenway (SRKG) Coalition's winter hikes continue in February and March. All hikes are free to the public. For SRKG information visit SRKG.com.

Please call the volunteer hike leader at least the night before to learn starting location and time. Be prepared for winter conditions with clothing layers, food, and water. Snowshoes are the presumed mode of transport.

January Hikes

Saturday, January 28. Lunch on an island in Morgan Pond in Springfield. Three miles. Call before Thursday, January 26 if interested. Moderate. Susan and Michael Chiarella, 763-4661 or SChiarella@myfairpoint.net.

February Hikes

Saturday, February 4. Snowshoe over winter trails in Wilmot's Patterson Road area. Refreshments afterward. 3 miles. Moderate. Brian Faughnan, 526-7838.

Saturday, February 11. Exploring Tucker Mountain in East Andover. A walk in the woods. We'll be joined by Frank Baker, a resident of East Andover who will help us to recognize signs of

animal presence. Moderate. Lee Carvalho, 735-5719 or LeeCarvalho6@gmail.com.

Saturday, February 18. Looking for wildlife while walking from Route 4A to Wilmot Center on SRKG Trail 7 and climbing over Bog Mountain's ledges to Wilmot Center. 4.6 miles. Moderate. Nick Baer, 526-8233.

March Hikes

Saturday, March 3. Journey along Sunapee Ridge to Lucia's Lookout via Andrew Brook Trail to frozen Lake Solitude in Mount Sunapee and Pillsbury State Parks. 10 miles. Difficult. Gerry Gold, 526-2857.

Wednesday, March 7, Thursday the 8th, or Friday the 9th. Moonlight Snowshoe Hike to ridge-top skyline vista. Sponsored by SRKG Coalition, Ausbon Sargent Land Protection Trust, and the New London Conservation Commission. Hike date will be selected for best moonlight conditions. Two miles, two hours. Moderate. Not for novice snowshoers. Dave Cook, 526-4570.

Greenway Trail Guides are available at local book stores. The SRKG Coalition is a ten-town all-volunteer nonprofit organization.

Andover Naturally

Acorn Crop Falls Short This Year

By Lee Carvalho
Beacon staff

My mother, Polly Mansell, was the first to mention it back in early October. Returning from her daily walk along the rail trail in Andover village, she remarked, "There aren't very many acorns this year." Since then several Beacon readers have e-mailed with similar observations. What's up?

Acorns are one form of mast, the name given to the edible fruit of woody plants. Hard mast includes acorns and beechnuts, while soft mast is composed of fruits from various plants including grape, blackberry, viburnum, sumac, winterberry, and blueberry.

In our forests, acorns from red and white oak trees are probably the most important form of mast. As a food source for blue jays, squirrels, deer, turkeys, chickadees, nuthatches, grackles, chipmunks, mice, and black bears – among others – they supply protein, carbohydrates, fats, calcium, phosphorus, potassium, and niacin.

In the fall we expect to feel and hear the crunch of acorns underfoot as we walk along country roads, or in our yards, or on forest trails, so we notice when it's missing. Yet acorn fluctuation is normal; in one year oaks may produce a bumper crop, and then the following year hardly any.

A theory for this variation is the predator satiation hypothesis. During bumper years, the forest floor is covered with seeds so thoroughly that the animals cannot eat them all, so some will root and grow.

If every year had such bountiful production, the animals that depend on them would increase in number sufficiently to consume all the acorns. The predator satiation hypothesis suggests that in off years, the trees lower production to keep the predator populations from growing too large to survive.

Another factor in acorn production is weather variability. It takes an oak 18 months to grow an acorn, so some ex-

perts point to the rainy spring of 2010 as the culprit. Wet weather may have reduced the wind-driven transfer of pollen from one tree to another.

Beth McGuinn, Land Protection Specialist at Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust, points out that while acorn production was low, the fall of 2011 was a phenomenal season for other food sources; beech, hop hornbeam, winterberry, and holly all produced abundantly. She wonders if these plants fruited so well in response to a high stress year.

New Hampshire Fish and Game Officer Heidi Murphy of Andover observes that while acorn production was spotty due to micro-region variability,



An injured bobcat turned up in the Glorioso's backyard. The three-year-old male had a broken back due to being struck by a car and had to be euthanized. Photo: Maria Glorioso

beechnuts were more plentiful than in recent years. "Because of our good mast production, not many hunters were successful early on using baits. Bear in particular would not come to a bait pile as readily due to the high amount of natural foods available." Similarly, you may have noticed that songbirds have been eschewing our feeders in favor of the bountiful soft mast in the forests and fields.

Bobcat In Potter Place

In early January, Paul and Maria Glorioso discovered an injured bobcat in their yard in Potter Place. Patrick Tate from the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department came to investigate and determined that the magnificent animal was a male of approximately three years age. The bobcat had been struck by a car about five days earlier. See Naturally on page 21

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