

Andover Naturally: Bog Walk Reveals the Importance of Wetlands

NPR on hand to interview residents

By Lee Carvalho, *Beacon* volunteer

In the United States, we have four categories of wetlands: marshes, bogs, fens, and swamps. A bog is a freshwater wetland characterized by deposits of acidic peat, the result of slowly

converted for agricultural, commercial, or residential use: a big mistake.

To help citizens and landowners understand the importance of bogs, the Andover Conservation Commission (ACC) organized a bog “talk and walk” as part of its Taking Action for Wildlife series. ACC member Nan Kaplan reports that about 30 people gathered in mid-August for a presentation by ecologist Emma Carcagno, Wildlife Program Assistant at UNH. Thanks to Greg Hamel, owner of the Blackwater Junction Restaurant, the group was able to meet indoors for a slide show and lecture before heading out to explore Bog Pond on the Blackwater River in Cilleyville.

Participants learned that bogs are important as a prevention against downstream flooding through their ability to absorb precipitation. During their walk, the group observed that bogs provide crucial habitat for plants such as sundews, pitcher plants, sphagnum moss, and leatherleaf, as well as for crustaceans, amphibians, and fish. Moose and beavers are among the mammals that live and eat in bogs. Plus, we all depend on bogs to help maintain the global climate by storing large amounts of carbon.

During the walk, Andover resident Skip Powers shared some recollections



Nan Kaplan, a member of the Andover Conservation Commission, was interviewed by National Public Radio's Abby Kessler during the Conservation Commission's “talk and walk” at Bog Pond in Cilleyville. Photo: Tina Cotton



This nearly white hummingbird appeared at Edie and Skip Powers' feeder. Experts say it's not an albino, but rather a “color morph” – an ordinary hummingbird with unusual coloring. Photo: Skip Powers

decomposing vegetation, particularly sphagnum moss. All or most of a bog's water comes from precipitation, and the dissolved tannins from plant matter give it a tan color. Although bogs provide important benefits, many of them have been drained in the past and

of his time at Bog Pond. As a young man, he fished and trapped in the area, pointing out that a good muskrat pelt would sell for as much as \$5 back then.

You can see photographs and hear more from Ms. Carcagno and Skip Powers by listening to the audio postcard by NHPR reporter Abby Kessler at TinyURL.com/Andover-Bog-Walk.

I talked with Skip Powers later and learned that he began his life in a house just west of Bog Pond, and now he and his wife Edie live just east of Bog Pond. Their property hugs the side of Ragged Mountain, and they appreciate the wildlife they see there regularly.

Skip and Edie showed me pictures they took of a pair of young grey foxes climbing trees in their yard. Skip learned from Ron Evans that grey foxes have claws like house cats that make it easy to climb trees, but difficult to come back down!

Recently, Edie was surprised by what she saw at their hummingbird feeder, calling to Skip, “There's a white hummingbird at the feeder!” He didn't believe her until he saw it himself. Their son David got online and talked to some experts, and they agreed that it's not an

albino, because its eyes aren't pink. It is a “color morph,” a rare but naturally-occurring color variation of a regular hummingbird. You can learn more about color morphs at ProjectNoah.org/missions/7970027.

Bears

Edie and Skip also see bears in their yard frequently, and many of you *Beacon* readers have sent in pictures of bears at your houses. While it can be thrilling to see these wild animals



Tom Frantz took this picture of a mother bear and her cub in his backyard on July 28.

up close, their visits can also bring trouble. As bear expert Ben Kilham writes, “Nothing good ever happens when people with food invite bears to approach their house.”

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