



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

A newsletter of Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

Volume 65 Summer 2024

NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Rich Chalmers, *Class of 2005 Spring*



We often talk about the magic of Coverts. What is it that makes this group so special? Why is it so rewarding to be a part of this organization?

In a nutshell, it is the combination of education and connection; people with a passion for wildlife and the desire to learn, gathering to share their questions

and knowledge, helping each other to explore and reach their goals.

This was UVM Extension Forester Thom McEvoy's vision when he created Coverts almost 40 years ago and it still guides us today.

It plays out in many forms, three of which; the Mentor Program pairing new and experienced Cooperators; the Bear Ambassador Program promoting improved human-bear coexistence through community education and outreach; and the Book Group exploring the latest writings on forestry, wildlife and conservation, are highlighted in this newsletter.

It starts with the Cooperator Training and that three day fire hose of information that is too much to absorb all at once but lays the foundation for what is to come.

It continues in Stewardship workshops where concepts in our minds meet reality in our woods; in Passing Lands Popups exploring ways to keep land intact and connected through the generations; and getting to know each other over pizza at Cooperator meet and greets.

It is the foundation of the Coverts mission, the power of peer to peer, connecting us to the land, wildlife and to each other.

Check out the E-news for programs in your area and if you don't see what you are looking for then host a workshop and invite your friends and neighbors.

This the magic of Coverts in action.

Sincerely,

Rich Chalmers
Rich Chalmers, President

BEAR AMBASSADOR PROGRAM LAUNCHED

This past spring VT Coverts launched our Bear Ambassador Program as part of our advanced training initiative. This innovative program is designed to equip Coverts Cooperators with the knowledge and tools necessary to share information in their communities to minimize human-bear conflicts and promote strategies for coexistence. Sixteen Coverts Cooperators completed the program.

We partnered with Jackie Comeau, bear biologist with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. The course provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of bear biology, behavior, and strategies for mitigating conflicts.

Through a combination of three interactive on-line sessions and one full day in-person session participants gained valuable insights into bear ecology, habitat management, and community engagement.



Left to Right (Standing): Gary Moore, Tovar Cerulli, Carolyn Marsh, Jackie Comeau, Judith Falk, Mary Dodge, Barbara Huibregtse, Vivian Prunier, Maurice Chaloux, Randy Knaggs, Ashley Pakenham, Julie Messervy, and Lisa Sausville

Left to Right (Kneeling): Terry Marron, Sabina Ernst, Kathryn Karmen, Steve Jonas and Tom Prunier

BEAR AMBASSADORS

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As we know, seeing a black bear in its natural surroundings is exciting. But when bears end up in human territory like our yards, problems can occur.

Community outreach is the tenet of Vermont Coverts' peer-to-peer network. If neighbors share about taking in bird feeders, securing garbage, and taking other bear aware measures we can help reduce nuisance bear issues.

Biologist Jackie Comeau notes, "Many people who experience a bear visiting their home turn to their neighbors and friends to discuss the situation. This program is a great opportunity to give community members the necessary tools to step up and share helpful information that can improve coexistence."

The curriculum of the Bear Ambassador Program emphasized practical strategies for reducing human-bear conflicts. Cooperators were provided with tools (a slide show) and strategies (front porch forum posts and conversation tactics) to effectively communicate about implementing proactive measures.

Since going through the training, the Bear Ambassadors have posted and responded to posts on Front Porch Forum, had one-on-one conversations, put up signs and even set up a display at their transfer station on electrifying compost.

We are hoping to hold another class in the Spring of 2025. The Bear Ambassador Program reflects Vermont Coverts' and Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's commitment to conservation education and community engagement.

To learn more about living with bears visit the Fish and Wildlife Department's website at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/learn-more/living-with-wildlife/living-with-black-bears>.



We need to change our behavior. Bring in feeders from April 1st through November 30th.

BOOK REVIEW: CROSSINGS BY BEN GOLDFARB

John Hawkins, *Class of 2016 fall*

I have had the pleasure of reviewing several books for the Coverts newsletter; I have only reviewed books that I thought would benefit a reasonable percentage of Coverts Cooperators. *Crossings* is the first book I think would benefit ALL cooperators.

It was a recent selection of the Coverts book group and I benefited from hearing the reactions of a dozen other Cooperators. *Crossings* addresses both woodlands and wildlife in powerful

and unambiguous terms. As Cooperators we know that habitat loss and fragmentation are the most serious problems wildlife faces. *Crossings* examines the role that roads play in fragmentation and goes on to analyze the totality of problems roads cause for animal movement and animals in a more general sense.

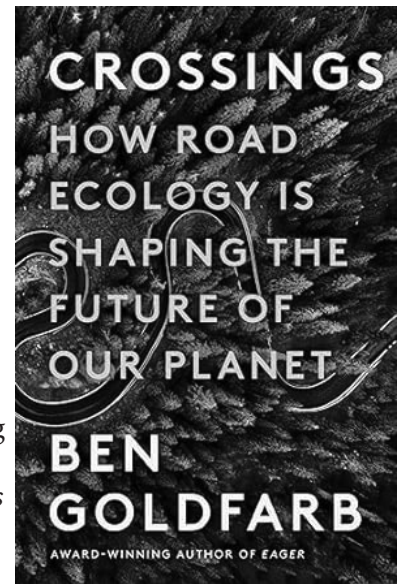
There are 4 million miles of road in the United States. At no place in this country are you more than 13 miles from a road of some sort. The US Forest Service alone manages over 370,000 miles of road. Goldfarb describes our roads as both symbols of freedom and huge ecological disasters.

Goldfarb shares a lot of facts. Over 1 million animals are killed by cars every day in the United States. And it isn't just vertebrates that are killed by cars traveling our roads. Roads play a role in the insect apocalypse we are experiencing. Remember when we used to have insects all over our windshields after any evening drive during the spring and summer?

There are between 1 and 2 million lethal collisions each year with large vertebrates. The average cost of a single collision is \$9,000 when you account for vehicle damage and hospital/doctor bills. These collisions also result in between 200 and 400 human deaths each year.

Aside from the obvious danger of being hit and killed by a car or truck on our roads, *Crossings* brings attention to other less obvious problems with our road network and the lives of animals.

Roads cause species inbreeding as populations are cut off from each other (mountain lions in southern California). Chemical pollution entering streams and rivers from roads can stop migration and spawning (salmon in the northwest). Putting 20 million tons of salt on our roads each year poisons the water for many species of fish and attracts



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MENTORS STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS

An immense amount of information is presented over the Training weekend. New Cooperators leave feeling excited and motivated but also a bit overwhelmed by the many choices to manage their woodlands and share the Coverts message. In 2022, a mentor program was initiated to provide support for these recent graduates.

The idea came about a few years earlier when Blair Brooks, Coverts Class 2013 fall (2013f), said he would have benefited from having a mentor to help guide him through his early stages of stewardship. The program is designed with that help in mind. We connect Cooperators (experienced and new) who want to learn together and deepen their connections to the land, wildlife, and each other.

The program starts by matching a new Cooperator with a previous program graduate as a mentor. The mentor is not expected to be an expert. They are just there to provide support and connection to the new Cooperator. It is an opportunity to share experiences.

The mentor acts as a resource and helps their mentees in a variety of ways. These can include identifying goals, walking each other's property, offering support in carrying out a stewardship project or just answering questions. Mentors also introduce new Cooperators to the VT Coverts network by attending a workshop together or even hosting one.

Mel Ashton (2022s) has been both a mentee and a mentor. He notes that though everyone comes out of the Training with the same information, each new Cooperator has "different land challenges, interests, priorities and time constraints...My mentor, mentee, and myself have had a great deal of discussion and sharing of ideas and priorities but we all have a very different set of project plans...But this is all absolutely fine and enriching and I am definitely a big fan of the program."

Though Joe Cotton (2022s) was a bit apprehensive about being matched up with someone he didn't know, he was pleased by his Mentor Tim McKay's (2001s) wealth of experience, and the compassionate encouragement he received to help achieve his objectives.

Tim enjoys mentoring "because as I age, I feel an increasing desire to pass on things that I have learned through my decades of forest management experience. It is also an opportunity to meet and associate with new people who have a similar attitude toward our natural environment. My mentee Joe has a vastly different background to mine and has tried some practices on his property that I have not. I've enjoyed getting to know him and broadening both our horizons."

We point out in the Training that everyone is a learner, and everyone is a teacher. That is the crux of a peer-to-peer network. Through the mentor program we hope to

strengthen this network and see an increase in the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and best practices in managing our woodland for wildlife.

As we grow our Cooperator base we are always looking for alumni Cooperators to act as mentors. Maybe this is you! It is a great way to get more involved. We have our next class coming up this September. If you are interested in mentoring, reach out to Laura Farrell (laura@vtcoverts.org). It is these continued connections, exchange of ideas, and stewardship that makes Coverts so special!

REVIEW OF CROSSINGS

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animals to an enormous salt lick with cars hurtling through it at lethal speeds.

Road noise interferes with wildlife's ability to both hear (warning calls) and be heard (mating calls) up to a mile away from roads. Lastly, roads enable the spread of invasive plants which can crowd out the native plants that wildlife need to thrive.

There are potential solutions given that we aren't giving up cars or roads. There is a growing international interest in roadside ecology. Changes in the way we think about roads and wildlife crossings are necessary. We know how to build the overpasses and tunnels necessary to safeguard all sorts of wildlife (different species need different crossing infrastructure). There is some movement in the US with \$350 million currently allocated for crossings of all sorts, but this must be weighed against the \$110 billion that is allocated for road maintenance AND expansion.

We need to realize that making roads central to our way of life implies certain ethical obligations, chief among them is not inadvertently killing off other life forms in the process. Goldfarb even delves into what our unrestrained road building also does to our human communities, highlighting how they can institutionalize racial segregation.

Jane Jacobs brought this to national attention when she mobilized opposition to Robert Moses' plan to divide lower Manhattan with a 10-lane freeway (see *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*). Goldfarb goes into some detail describing how citizens of Syracuse fought against and eventually, after 60 years of community degradation, had Interstate 81 routed around the central city thus restoring the possibility of a vibrant center city.

The ideas that Jane Jacobs and many community activists across the country brought to the practice of destructively dividing human communities with roads, Ben Goldfarb brings to the wildlife communities in *Crossings*. Read this book!



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.
PO Box 328, Vergennes, VT 05491

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lisa Sausville
Lisa@vtcoverts.org 802-877-2777

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Spring 2024 Class



Front Row: Taryn Colonnese (Orange), Meg Baldor (Washington), Suzanne Danzig (Lamoille), Michelle Champoux (Washington), Brandon Benedict (Chittenden), Kimberly Peck (Washington), Mike Maloney (Washington), Lisa Miller (Addison)

Back Row: Ted Barnett (Orange), John Howard (Addison), David Hyatt (Addison), Gabriel Tempesta (Lamoille), Pierce Wright (Caledonia), Roger LaChance (Lamoille), Brian Wagner (Washington), Billy Vigdor (Washington), Robert Crawford (Lamoille)

Missing from picture: Susan Durant (Rutland), Kimberly French (Windsor), Chris Ralphs (Orange)



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