



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

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

Volume 69 Winter 2025

FLYING SQUIRREL

Alyssa Bennett, VT Fish and Wildlife

Tarzan isn't the only creature known for gliding effortlessly through the trees. Perhaps you have been fortunate enough to witness a large-eyed ball of fur zip by under the cover of wooded darkness and wondered, "Who was that creature of the night?"

Chances are, it was one of Vermont's two species of flying squirrel, the northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) or the southern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*). Despite their name, flying squirrels glide, rather than fly, from tree to tree on loose folds of skin stretched between their front and hind legs, using their tail as a rudder to steer. Both species nest in tree cavities and typically raise one litter of pups each summer. Northern flying squirrels sometimes also construct stick nests, or dreys.

The northern flying squirrel is known to feed extensively on fungi. By excreting mycorrhizal fungal spores around the forest, they contribute to a healthy forest ecosystem. Both flying squirrel species eat a variety of nuts, buds, insects, lichens, bird eggs, and seeds, contributing to seed dispersal.

Unfortunately, we know little about the distribution or abundance of flying squirrels in Vermont. As a result, determining how well these rodents are doing now or in relation to threats like habitat fragmentation, parasites, and climate change is difficult at best.

To address this challenge, Vermonters are partnering with researcher C.J. Wong, creator of the New England Flying Squirrel Network (NEFSN). Flying squirrels are natural cavity nesters but large cavity trees are in high demand by all kinds of wildlife from squirrels to mice and bats to birds.

Through this program, volunteers buy or build specially designed nest boxes and hang these up above 10 feet on rough barked trees, facing south through east. Flying squirrels typically use separate locations for nesting, feeding, and as a latrine, so putting up more than one nest box in an area is recommended. A handy online application is used to report



Flying Squirrel Nest Box

Photo credit Joshua Morse, VT Fish and Wildlife

the nest box contents. There are currently 21 Vermonters participating in the NEFSN project, with a total of 48 nest boxes being monitored.

Flying squirrels face a number of pressures including habitat loss and fragmentation, competition, parasites, and climate change. Although southern flying squirrels have been documented gliding up to a record 262 feet at a stretch, they still need a connected forested landscape to move from tree to tree seeking food and shelter.

The northern flying squirrel relies on moist coniferous and mixed coniferous/deciduous forests where their fungal diet can be supported. Climate change may impact these conditions through extreme drought. Warming temperatures may also result in a continued northward expansion of the smaller, but more aggressive, southern flying squirrel, which spreads a parasite that poses a greater threat to its northern relative.

continued on page 3



MISSION: Together we enlist and support Vermont landowners in a long-term commitment to maintain and enhance diverse wildlife habitat and healthy ecosystems.

NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Rich Chalmers, Class of 2005 Spring



The 40th anniversary has gotten me thinking a lot about change.

It's interesting to consider the evolution this land has gone through after the ice retreated roughly 13,000 years ago and trees gradually began to overtake the land.

I'm curious about this

forest before European settlement, and what life was like roughly two hundred years ago for those who hand hewed the posts and beams of our farmhouse. Given the abundance of abandoned cellar holes and huge pasture trees scattered throughout the woods, change has been a common theme of this land.

The years since Coverts was founded is a short time on this scale, but it too has been filled with change. Topics such as invasive plants, passing lands, ecological forestry and climate change were not on the first Cooperator Training curriculum. Human-bear coexistence was not the issue it is today, and populations of wild turkey and beaver were significantly lower.

In addition, our understanding of wildlife biology, forestry and ecology has evolved. Technology has taken huge leaps - the internet, geolocators, game cameras, apps such as Seek... We are learning so much about connectivity, migration and the role mycorrhizal fungi play in the health of a forest ecosystem. Add to all this a recent burst of ecosystem books that focus even more attention on this new frontier.

And yet, the 40th anniversary celebration reinforced for me that many things have not changed since 1985. The Coverts concept of learning and sharing with one's peers is just as powerful as it was at that first Training. This bond with others who share one's ideals and are searching for similar solutions is age-old, valuable, motivating and rewarding, not to mention greatly enjoyable.

The challenges to wildlife have increased in the last four decades, but the best path forward is still the same - getting out in the woods together, learning about our surroundings, engaging resource professionals, and making sound management decisions based on science.

Thank you for being a part of this great effort and for your enthusiastic support as we wrap up this annual fund drive. You make all of this possible.

Sincerely,

Rich Chalmers, President



Fall 2025 Cooperator Training Class

Front Row: Cindy Mowry, Tricia Bhatia, Rod Borrás, Bonnie Daley, Eli Tierney, Meg Woolhouse, Diedre Rogers, Julie Grover **Back Row:** Jill Hahn, Katie Stiles, Jude Tharinger, David Hill, Jess Eller, Bill Hantzós, Fen Levy-O'Malley, Kyle Lapointe, Steve Cummins, Erik Skarsten

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRAINING

Eli Tierney, Coverts Outreach Specialist

The Fall 2025 Cooperator Training class was a great example of the variety and enthusiasm Coverts Cooperators represent. There were land stewards with differing acreages, length of land ownership, and levels of experience in forest management. It was energizing to see how engaged everyone was with each presentation, learning more, leading with curiosity and connecting with each other. Conversations were full of classmates offering their input, ideas and experiences, helping with challenges others shared. I enjoy the saying "together we know a lot" and the Coverts network is a great representation of that. I hope everyone left feeling proud of how their unique perspectives enriched the discussions and the experience for the whole group.

COVERTS BOOK GROUP

The Coverts Book Group has been meeting online since 2021 and we've loved exploring conservation and nature reads together. In 2026 we will continue this tradition by meeting every other month on the last Tuesday of the month. Interested in joining us? Email lisa@vtcoverts.org. Even if you can't make the meetings, you might enjoy diving into some of the books on our list!

The Serviceberry by Robin Wall Kimmerer (Jan 27)

Not the End of the World by Hannah Ritchie (Mar 31)

Is a River Alive? by Robert McFarlane (May 26)

The Light Eaters by Zoe Schlanger (Jul 28)

Wolverine Way by Douglas Chadwick (Sep 29)

Wild at Heart by Alice Outwater (Nov 24)

FLYING SQUIRREL

continued from page 1

Landowners can take steps to support flying squirrels in their own woods by retaining standing cavity trees that are not a hazard to property. Cavity trees are a coveted source of safety, warmth, and food storage for many wildlife species and are often used as places to raise young as well.

Many animals select larger diameter internal cavities, so the bigger the tree the better. Flying squirrel nest boxes should have a 1.5" diameter entrance hole and can be placed in both urban and rural landscapes. Flying squirrels sometimes make their homes in attics as well but can be safely evicted using one-way doors that allow the squirrels to go out, but not back in. These should be installed when the young are not present.

Historic records of both northern and southern flying squirrels are scattered throughout Vermont. Landowners with game cameras could help add to the mapping effort by sharing observations with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Alyssa.bennett@vermont.gov), reporting observations in iNaturalist, or participating in the NEFSN (<https://sites.google.com/view/nefsn>).

Because the two species can be difficult to distinguish through photos alone, the NEFSN is collecting nest box contents to analyze DNA from hair and droppings. These results will help in mapping where each species occurs across New England. With continued help from landowners and community scientists, we can fill important data gaps and learn more about these fascinating and secretive creatures of the night.



Northern Flying Squirrel (Glaucomys sabrinus)

Photo Credit: CJ Wong



Cooperators Connecting over Conversation at the 40th

VERMONT COVERTS 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Lisa Sausville, Executive Director

This fall, on September 21st, we gathered at Lareau Farm to celebrate a remarkable milestone, 40 years of Vermont Coverts. More than 100 friends, partners, and Cooperators joined us to honor the work that began in 1985 and continues today: helping landowners care for their woods with confidence and curiosity.

Throughout the day, attendees connected with the land and each other. Programs explored deer and forest health, the power of camera traps to illuminate wildlife activity, water quality, trails, amphibians, and the importance of community engagement in stewarding Vermont's forests. Conversations flowed easily over shared meals, laughter, and a deep appreciation for the places we all care about.

It was a truly special gathering that reflected both our history and our future. After four decades of peer-to-peer outreach, education, and woodland stewardship, we left inspired by the commitment of our community and excited for the next chapter.

And there is a lot ahead. We're already building an exciting line-up of 2026 programs, including new and expanded offerings in tree identification, workshops on passing land to the next generation, casual meet-and-greets around the state, and of course, our signature Cooperator Training. These programs continue the legacy of learning, connection, and practical stewardship that has defined Vermont Coverts for 40 years.

As we look forward, we're also in the midst of our annual fund drive—an essential part of sustaining this work. Your support ensures we can continue offering high-quality training and resources to landowners across Vermont. If you haven't yet contributed, we hope you'll consider making a gift this season to help propel us into the next chapter.

Check out the match opportunity on page 4.

Keep Vermont Coverts growing strong!



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ANNUAL DRIVE UPDATE

**Your Gift Can Unlock Up to
\$7500 for VT Coverts!**

This year, generous supporters have offered a Fund Drive Match to boost our 2025 campaign:

- \$50 unlocked per donor (up to \$2500) when a new or lapsed donor makes a gift
- \$5000 unlocked when we reach our overall goal

That's \$7500 waiting – all we need is you!

Make your gift today and help us unlock the full match for Vermont's forests and wildlife.

**Donate online at www.vtcoverts.org
or mail in your gift.**