Fall 2026

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE

Sharon Friends of Conservation

SHARE · MAINTAIN · PRESERVE · ENJOY

Moose Hill Journal

Climbing to the Light

By Al Mollitor

The sun set on another season over Moose Hill. One evening, I climbed the trail to the Bluffs of Moose Hill to watch the sun disappear for the last time in autumn. The next morning, the sun would begin its slow climb to the north. Winter was about to begin.

Maybe I suffer from SADD because the short days of December always put me in a strange state of mind. I don't think of it as depression, really, because I'm not in a bad mood, but rather a low, quiet, somewhat melancholy state of mind. I tend to turn off the radio, which is a near-constant companion most of the year, and listen to music instead. Or just silence. These days, I seem to be in a particularly dreamy state of mind. Maybe it's the change that comes with age. Continued on p. 2

Japanese Knotweed

By Susan Drisko, Principal Master Gardener

Japanese Knotweed can quickly take over an area, forming thickets and out-competing the native plants our local insects, birds and animals depend on. Continued on p. 3

The Newsletter of the
Sharon Friends of Conservation
Editor: Jana Katz
Website: www.sharonfoc.org

A Loss for Conservation……2
Meet Your Sharon Neighbor – THE OAK TREE……3
Spicebush……4
The Spotted Lantern Fly……7

Exoskeleton safari: Robber Flies

By Gaurav Shah

Flies get a bad rap. We know them as those annoying bugs that invade the house, sit smugly on the fruit, and are impossible to shoo away.



Photo: Gaurav Shah

And it doesn't help that if you learn a little more, you realize that mosquitos are also a type of fly.

Here is the essence of the Exoskeleton Safari series: dig deeper, and the small things become fascinating. Today's friend is an unappreciated badass: the robber fly.

The world of insects has two well-known apex predators – no one in the insect realm wants to mess with dragonflies, or with wasps. But there's an insect that goes after, and takes down, both of these insects – the robber fly.

Robber flies, which form the family Asilidae, are found around the world. They tend to be ambush hunters; sit on a branch, wait for prey to come by, then grab it. Their success rates tend to be extremely high, perhaps as high as 80%, which is spectacular for a predator. Most aren't picky about their prey – beetles, ants, wasps, all are welcome. Yes, mosquitos are on the menu, as are other robber flies. And no, people are definitely not targets.

The prey is first grabbed by the robber fly's forelegs, after which the fly stabs it with its long, sharp proboscis, injections paralyzing saliva,

Continued on p. 5

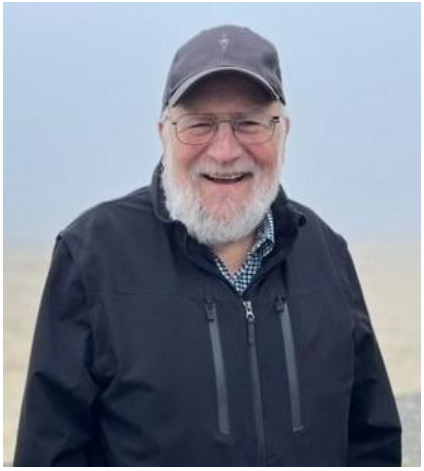
A LOSS FOR CONSERVATION

(A tribute to Steven Cremer from the Conservation Commission delivered at its meeting of September 17, 2026)

The night of September 17th was a sad one for the Conservation Commission. At its last meeting on September 3rd, the members were wondering where their fellow member Steve Cremer was. He rarely missed a meeting without advance notice. Little did we know that Steve had passed away on August 31st while away on vacation.

Steve was a consistent supporter of conservation efforts and a reliable member of the Commission. He had served the Town in this capacity since 2003. Throughout all those years his background in science was important to many decisions the Commission drafted. Steve could listen to presentations, analyze information, and raise any issues he believed needed attention; be it soils, water, wetland impacts or land protection. We were very fortunate to have had his steady participation over the past twenty-three years. His input will be missed and his trademark “motion to adjourn”, at future meetings to be made by someone else, will bring Steve to mind for a long time to come.

The Conservation Commission thanks his family, his wife Sandi, son David, and daughter Sarah, for sharing him with us all these years. We are grateful to Steve for a job well done. May he rest in peace.



Moose Hill Journal continued from p. 1

With the early sunset of the solstice, I didn’t have a lot of time, so I parked the car at the sanctuary parking lot and headed on foot for the bluffs. I climbed the Bluff Trail past the old cistern to the open rocky ledges that offer wonderful views to the south. I walked quickly to make sure I would arrive with time to spare. The sun was already out of sight below the rise in front of me, but an orange glow through the trees told me I would make it.

When I broke out into the open of the rocks, I found a young couple and I wondered if this was a solstice tradition of theirs. I wondered if the ancient ones came here to build bonfires to ward off the darkness of this longest night of the year.

I moved along the ledge to find a spot where I could be alone with the sun. I thought about that summer solstice long ago when I ran up here with my son. I thought back to the warmth and sweat of the run that night and recalled how the ethereal, fluty call of the wood thrush signaled the change of seasons. I remember promising to myself to come back on the other side of the year, and I was glad I could keep my promise.

The woods were quiet on this night as the sun slipped below the horizon far south of where it did in June. Lacking the sarsen stones and heel stone of Stonehenge, I lined the setting sun with a broken-topped red cedar and the water tower at Gillette Stadium. Sometimes we have to make do.

It might have been more appropriate to make this solstice observance with the rising sun the next morning. I like to think of this as the time when we begin our annual climb to the light, when we start leaving the darkness behind and make the turn and begin our journey back to the days of light, warmth, and life. I would like to mark this renewal with a view of the sunrise from these woods, but I don’t yet know of a good spot with views to the east.

Continued on p. 4

Knotweed continued from p. 1

Without consistent and effective management, Japanese Knotweed can take over an entire area (take a walk by the dog park, the community beach, the new gardens in front of the Sharon High School on Beach St or along Cedar St for examples).

Japanese Knotweed grows rhizomically, meaning it grows and spreads primarily through an extensive underground system of rhizomes with horizontal stems underground that send up shoots as large as 6-7 feet tall! The plant can stretch laterally underground up to 20-65 feet and the main plant can go as deep as 7 to 10 feet in the soil making it very hard to get rid of. Not only that, any tiny piece of rhizome left in the soil or moved to a new location (such as a mulch pile) can regenerate and create a new colony of knotweed. It even grows through cement!

Japanese Knotweed stems are noticeably jointed with reddish purple coloring at the nodes. The stems look very similar to bamboo. In the fall it has small white colored flowers that form lacy clusters. It can grow anywhere but loves disturbed areas. It grows in full sun, deep shade, extreme drought, in water. It really is an amazing, and noxious plant.

Prevention is the key to managing Japanese Knotweed! Remove little plants immediately. Once Knotweed has established itself it is very hard to get rid of! You can choose: mechanical and/or chemical control. Continued on p. 6



Photo: Susan Drisko

Spicebush

By Rebecca Kinraide

Everyone in Sharon is aware of and appreciative of the fabulous maple syrup provided for us by the sugarbush at Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. Many probably are also aware of the bounty of native grapes, blueberries, and huckleberries that can be harvested in our woods and fields. A few may even try their hand at cracking black walnuts, beech nuts, and hickory nuts. However, the glories of the native Spicebush (*Lindera Benzoin*) seem to be much less well known. Spicebush is a native North American shrub and is an incredibly important plant for wildlife, along with boasting a rich history of culinary and medicinal uses as well.

Continued on p. 4



Photo: Rebecca Kinraide

Meet Your Sharon Neighbor – The Oak Tree

By Kathy Farrell

Behold the mighty oak! But which oak? Turns out there are over 500 varieties worldwide, divided into red oaks, which have little points or bristles at the end of each leaf lobe, and white oaks, which have more rounded leaves and do not have the leaf bristles. Continued on page. 5

Moose Hill Journal continued from p. 2

Sunrise or sunset, this is a muted celebration here in New England. Thanks to the lag time in the cooling of the Earth, even though the days are getting longer, our coldest days lie ahead. Every winter, I watch the temperature charts and have a private celebration of my own when the average daily high temperature graph finally bottoms-out and makes its first tick upward.

After the sun was out of sight below the horizon and the streaks of red and orange across the sky began to fade, I headed back into the woods. With the sun gone and no moon, the forest grew dark quickly. I was in no rush so I took the long way back along the Old Pasture Trail and had just enough light to see the path in front of me but not enough to peer into the woods around me. I tried to imagine how ancient people in the wilderness may have been terrified to be alone in the dark woods at night. These woods were quiet and peaceful. I pulled my hat off my ears, hoping to hear some sylvan night sounds, but the loudest noise was the roaring river of rubber and steel that is the highway north. I knew I wouldn't meet any other people out here at this hour and I counted my blessings that while others were fighting through rush hour traffic, I could steal a few moments to be alone among the trees of Moose Hill. I paused in the darkness and looked up to see the stars of the first night of winter twinkling through the oaks.

Spicebush continued from p. 3

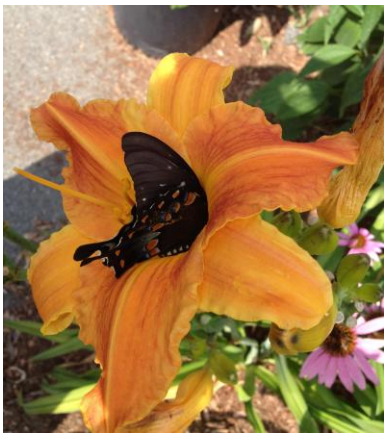


Photo: Rebecca Kinraide

According to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center website, "Northern Spicebush is a single- or few-stemmed, deciduous shrub, usually 6-15 ft. tall, with glossy leaves and graceful, slender, light green branches. Dense clusters of tiny, pale yellow flowers bloom before the leaves from globose buds along the twigs. Flowers occur in umbel-like clusters and are followed by glossy red fruit. Both the fruit and foliage are aromatic. Leaves turn a colorful golden-yellow in fall." Spicebush is dioecious (separate male and female plants); female shrubs produce bright red fall berries if growing near a male partner.

Spicebush is common in Sharon woodlands, especially in wet areas. From my kitchen window I can see at least twelve bushes in the woods behind my house. Their tiny yellow flowers bloom early and appear like faint gauze dusting the ends of the branches. In addition to being lovely signs of spring, these early flowers are an important source of food for adult Spicebush Swallowtail butterflies, which also feast on other native and garden plants.

Spicebush is the primary host plant for the early life stages of this butterfly. Females deposit tiny pale green eggs singly on the underside of leaves, which hatch into larvae that look like bird droppings for camouflage. Fully grown caterpillars are green with large fake "eyes" to mimic small snakes. They live on the shrub until they metamorphose, rolling up in a leaf for protection during the day and emerging at night to eat. In addition to being the primary host for the Spicebush Swallowtail butterfly, the shrub also hosts Eastern Tiger Swallowtail and Promethea Silkmoth.

Glossy, bright red berries, about the size of a raisin, ripen in early fall. These fruits are high in oils, providing an important food source for migrating birds. Research was conducted in 2015 examining the nutritional value of many native and exotic plants eaten by migrating birds. The study found that Spicebush berries have almost the highest content of both protein and fat of all the fruits tested and that the nutrients supplied are essential for the growth of feathers.

continued on p. 5

Spicebush continued from p.4

But wait! There's more…

Spicebush is edible by humans. The plant is highly aromatic; crushing the leaves or scraping bark gives off a strong spicy, citrus smell. Tasty tea is brewed by boiling leaves and chopped twigs in water; steeping until you have achieved the depth of flavor you prefer. If you happen to be brewing this tea in September, fresh ripe berries can be smashed and added to the steeping for more flavor. Even in the winter, you can make a weak tea just from the small branches or a strong tea using ground dried berries. Early colonial settlers used this tea to treat stomach upsets and as a fever reducer. I can't vouch for the medicinal qualities of the tea, but the batch that I made to bring to a Sharon Garden Club event was very tasty, especially with a bit of local honey added in.



Photo: Rebecca Kinraide

The berries can be harvested and dried for use throughout the year. I borrowed a dehydrator from a friend and now have a jar full of dried Spicebush berries that are preserved for future treats.

They can be ground for use in baking, to substitute allspice, or mulled in a tea or cider. But their somewhat peppery flavor also lends to their use in savory dishes. A quick Google search will lead you to many Spicebush recipes. Because Spicebush foods are a treat for humans, but essential for wildlife, if you do choose to harvest the berries, be sure to leave plenty for the birds.

So, if you like native shrubs that provide early flowers, bright edible berries, lovely yellow fall foliage, are highly pest and deer resistant, and are essential for butterflies and birds, you should cultivate the native Spicebush that may already be growing in your yard.

Oak Trees continued from p. 3

Massachusetts has 10 native oak species; here are the ones I found on Sharon trails.

Red Oak Family

Northern Red oak – pointed leaf lobes with bristle tips, dark furrowed bark. Prefers moist, well-drained soils; fast-growing relative to white oak, Produces acorns in alternate years. Grows up to 92' tall. Sighted: King Philip's Trails, Massapoag Trail, Rattlesnake Hill Trail.

Scarlet oak – fast-growing, short-lived red oak of dry, upland sites, named for the red color of its fall foliage. Its leaves are deeply lobed, more so than its cousin, the northern red oak. Grows 60-80', sometimes 100'. Sighted: Beaver Brook Trail, Rattlesnake Hill Trail.

Black oak - shiny dark green leaves whose lobes end in sharp bristles or little spines. It gets its name from its bark which, when mature, turns almost black and breaks into blocky, ridges and furrows. It reaches 50-80' tall, with a trunk 1-3' in diameter. Black oaks tolerate poor, rocky, acid soil and crank out massive acorn crops every 2-3 years. Sighted: Rattlesnake Hill trails.

White Oak Family

·**White Oak** - distinct rounded lobes on leaves, light ashy bark, and deep taproot. Mature height 60-80 feet, sometimes taller. Tolerant of dry, sandy soils and supports a huge number of insect species; excellent acorn producer for wildlife. Sighted: abundant on Rattlesnake Hill trails, Massapoag Trail.

·**Bear oak or scrub oak** - small oak trees, growing to no more than 20 feet and usually less. Their trunks are no more than 5 inches in diameter. Bear oaks tend to form low thickets and prefer acidic nutrient-poor soil, which include sandy and gravel like soils, so it is slow growing and dies out quickly. Its preferred habitats are rocky ridges, barrens, and sandy mountain-like terrain. My guess is their name derives from the leaves' bear paw appearance; not deeply lobed. Sighted: abundant on granite outcrops of Rattlesnake Hill.

Continued on p. 7

Knotweed continued rom p. 3

Mechanical Control:

Cutting the plant down with pruners or lopers three times a year starting in the spring. The last cut should be completed by the end of August. This process weakens, but does not kill knotweed. Make sure all plant material is disposed of in heavy garbage bags and put in the trash. Do not place knotweed debris in a mulch pile or leave it on the ground. I have, with a mid summer pruning, left the stems on my black top driveway to die in the heat and then bagged it and thrown it out. In my experience, mechanical control does not kill all the rhizomes and requires a lot of maintenance.

Digging and hand pulling established plants is NOT recommended as new shoots can reform and it's very hard to dig down and get all of the rhizomes out. The digging process itself can leave fragments of rhizomes in the ground to start over.

Smothering is another option, after cutting down the plants over the growing season you can try covering the plants with thick black plastic, old rugs etc. Remember, this is a plant that can grow through cement!

Chemical Control

I do not recommend spraying an herbicide over an established colony of knotweed. It's too broad, too much and can end up killing good plants! What is recommended, along with mechanical control is applying an herbicide (such as glyphosate) by injecting the cut stem (most effective) or painting/sponging the stump of the plant in the fall when knotweed is preparing for winter by dropping their leaves and sending energy down to their roots. The herbicide injection or painting/sponging will also be brought down to the rhizomes to kill most of the plant. This process will need to be repeated over a couple of years to eradicate the knotweed colony. Once the knotweed is gone, replanting the area with native plants is necessary to help crowd out any new knotweed growth.

Here is some more information for you to consider:
https://blogs.cornell.edu/weedid/japanese-knotweed/

Safari continued from p. 1

and drinks the insides like a slushy. I always feel that a robber fly wolfing its victim is reminiscent of a lion lounging in the Serengeti with its food
Like so many insects, their life cycles involve some stark contrasts. These insects, amazing fliers as adults, actually spend most of their life as larvae that live in the soil.



So the next time you see a harmless, round, slow looking bumblebee, look a little closer. It could be an assassin in disguise.

Photo by Gaurav Shah

What do the larvae eat – other insects, or are they herbivores? Here's something interesting about the field of entomology: there are millions of questions, and not a lot of resources to explore them. As elementary a question as this, regarding the larvae of a very common family, it remains not fully answered. We know there's some carnivory, some herbivory, and some even are ectoparasitoids (parasites that attach to the outside of another animal). But the details, and the mix, are still uncertain. In fact, a given species may cycle between these modes of eating as the larva moves from one stage to another.

Special mention of the particular genus of robber flies that's found here, the genus Laphria. This genus tends to imitate bumblebees, and they are amazing. This photo is of a Laphria fly, but some of the other local species do an even better job.



Photo by Gaurav Shah

The Spotted Lanterfly

By Gaurav Shah

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) recently confirmed the existence of an infestation of Spotted Lanternflies in Sharon. While there have been previous isolated individual specimens that have been reported in town, this is the first time they felt it rose to the level of an infestation. This is not a surprise; other towns nearby have been reporting this for a while now.

What does this mean for us? The Spotted lanternfly is a pest species that thrives on ailanthus (Tree of heaven), grapevines, maple trees, and many other types of plants. They can end up almost covering their host plant, to its detriment. They excrete a sugar-rich substance known as honeydew that can cause a black fungus known as sooty mold to grow. They do not bite or sting.

What can we do? The MDAR still requests sightings, especially from new locations, to be reported on its website: http://massnrc.org/pests/slf. Please be aware that it is not possible for the MDAR to reply to most individual reports. Further information can be found on the site https://massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/spottedlanternfly.html.

At this time of year, we may not see nymphs, but may be seeing egg masses, shown here: https://massnrc.org/pests/linkeddocuments/SLFLook-AlikeSheetEggMasses.pdf.

It can be useful to eradicate some of the host species. Tree-of-heaven is a non-native species that is not ecologically helpful, and is good to remove for multiple reasons (for example, its roots can lead to damage of building foundations). It is very difficult to remove – cutting it down is not sufficient, chemicals are required to make sure it will not grow again. Also, it's important not to let the sap fall on exposed skin. Please consider using professional help for this.

Details can be found here: https://extension.psu.edu/tree-of-heaven and here: https://plant-pest-advisory.rutgers.edu/tree-of-heaven-best-herbicide-treatment-and-removal-timing/.

Finally, we can kill the individual specimens or scrape the egg masses as we find them. However, please be aware that historically this has not had a large effect on controlling their populations.

Oak Tree continued from p. 5

Swamp white oak – differs from a regular white oak in their preferred habitat (swamp oaks like wet sites like swamps, floodplains and stream beds) and the two-toned color of the swamp white oak's leaves. Like the regular white oak, it has rounded leaf lobes without bristles or spines. Sighted: Rattlesnake Hill vernal pools are filled with them!

Chestnut Oak – Because of its dry, rocky habitat and sometimes ridge-top exposure, it is not typically large, growing 59-72 feet tall. Identifiable by its massively-ridged dark gray-brown bark, the thickest of any eastern North American oak. Its acorns are huge, up to 1½ inches, and among the largest of eastern oaks, surpassed only by Bur Oaks and perhaps Swamp White Oaks. My guess is the name comes from the leaves' resemblance to true chestnut tree leaves, without the sharp end points. Sighted: Rattlesnake Hill Trail.

The book *Feed Us with Trees* by Elspeth Hay reminds us that indigenous people and Europeans depended (and in some cases still depend) on acorns as a food source.

In conclusion, at least seven out of ten Massachusetts oak species thrive in Sharon. Chinkapin Oak and Burr Oak exist in MA, are relatively rare, and even more rare in Eastern MA. Can you find them in Sharon? And what is that tenth oak, and is it found in our town? You tell me. Get out there, go oak scavenging!

Sharon Friends of Conservation
26 Arboro Drive
Sharon, MA 02067



SHARON FRIENDS OF CONSERVATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Gaurav Shah, President
Josh Simons, Vice President
Rita Corey, Treasurer
Judy Karlin, Secretary
Kurt Buermann
Kathy Farrell
Paul Lauenstein
Website Support: Jeff Rose

Photo by Kathy Farrell, read her article, *Meet your Sharon neighbor – the Oak Tree,* inside! Page 3

Join or renew your SFOC membership.
SFOC does not share or make your information available to anyone.
Mail: 26 Arboro Drive Sharon, MA 02067
Online: www.sharonfoc.org/become-a-member-of-sfoc

☐ NEW MEMBERSHIP
☐ RENEWAL
Dues are $ 25 per year. Includes family.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
TELEPHONE _____ EMAIL _____
WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER? SPECIAL SKILLS? _____

Sharon Friends of Conservation was founded in 1986 ,"to promote, encourage, and foster the preservation, care, and maintenance of all public lands, waters, and wildlife in the Town of Sharon, in order to further the recreation and enjoyment of the town's residents."

We are a non-profit 501©(3) organization.

We welcome all contributions to our newsletter and we are eager for more – especially those of young people.

Newsletter Submission Guidelines
The Sharon Friends of Conservation welcomes the submission of newsletter articles, poetry, and artwork on nature- or conservation-related topics, especially those of local interest.
We may edit articles for space or clarity. If an article is altered, we'll get your approval before publishing.
Anything you submit must be created by you and not with AI. Minor photographic editing that uses AI (sharpening, noise reduction, etc.) is okay as long as your final image largely represents the original scene in a realistic manner. We won't publish content that includes AI-generated material.