



# Woodlands for Wildlife

Volume 22 August 2009

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

## Managing Land for Woodcock

by Steve Hagenbuch, class of 2006

The American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) is a forest bird like no other. Taxonomically it is a shorebird, quite different from the warblers, thrushes, and other perching birds that come to mind when thinking of birds in our woodlots. Woodcock, or timberdoodle as they are sometimes called, are known for their springtime aerial courtship display and “peent, peent” song.

Unfortunately, American woodcock populations have been declining at an estimated rate of 2-4 percent each year since the 1960s. Among the keys to this species’ long-term conservation is ensuring that quality breeding habitat exists throughout its range. Four distinct habitat conditions are utilized by woodcock during the breeding season.

### On Stage

Upon arrival on the breeding ground in spring male woodcock seek out singing grounds; areas from which to conduct their aerial courtship display and sing (or in this case “peent”) for females.

The “stage” is an open area dominated more by grasses and other herbaceous cover than woody vegetation and includes old fields, pastures, and log landings. This singing ground ranges in size from as small as ¼ acre to over 100 acres. Maintaining areas in an open condition can provide for this habitat requirement.

### Food for Thought

A high proportion of a woodcock’s diet consists of earthworms. Areas that pro-

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## 2009 Annual Meeting Reminder

Vermont Coverts members and friends are invited to attend the 2009 Annual Meeting on September 12, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., at the Ed Kehoe Conservation Camp at Lake Bomoseen, Castleton, Vermont.

This is a woodland educational opportunity as the meeting is held in conjunction with the Fall Cooperator Training weekend. The business part of the annual meeting is a very short session after lunch.

For more information, see the program schedule in this newsletter. Members who are unable to attend are asked to please fill out the Proxy Form and mail or email it to Vermont Coverts for delivery no later than Friday, September 4. (see proxy form on inside page for email instructions).

## Coverts Workshop on Current Use

by Rich Chalmers, class of 2005

Orange County Forester Dave Paganelli and Consulting Forester Jeff Smith conducted an excellent workshop in June on the Current Use Program, its recent changes, and the development of a forest management plan.

Organized by Barry Lawson, the meeting began at the Peacham Library and concluded on land in Topsham owned by Gib Parrish and Sharon McDonnell. This was the second in a series of three Vermont Coverts workshops on the Parrish-McDonnell land this year.

The Current Use program offers landowners property taxation based on the productive value of land rather than the traditional “highest and best” use. As Paganelli explained, the goal of the program is to help landowners preserve their land as a healthy, unfragmented working landscape, supporting a diverse community including foresters, loggers, mills and maple sugar producers.

Although the main focus of the program is timber management, there is

flexibility to meet other landowner objectives, such as enhancing wildlife habitat, while still producing timber.

The landowner must have a minimum of 25 acres and a forest management plan, approved by the County Forester and updated every 10 years.

Recent changes allow all wetlands, rather than the previous maximum of 20 percent, to be enrolled. Ecologically significant areas, such as Champlain Valley clayplain forest, may now be included up to 20 percent without timber management.

Vermont is a seedbed for forest management practices. As County Forester, Paganelli oversees 1,645 properties enrolled in the Current Use Program in Orange County alone. Over half of the total acreage of the county is managed (versus a national average of only 3 percent).

Paganelli and Smith described the process by which foresters create a management plan. The first step is to divide the

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### Current Use

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property into stands, areas of roughly similar characteristics. Plot points are chosen to accurately describe each stand which is then evaluated based on species and quality. A prism is used to calculate basal area, a measurement of stand density.

Other features such as snags, cavities, coarse woody debris, under-story regeneration and invasives may be included in the plan. The level of detail varies based on the forester and landowner.

Smith spoke of his philosophy and objectives embodied in the management plan, which should be a living, evolving document, not something collecting dust on a shelf. Updates are good, as they incorporate changes on the ground, current technology (mapping, GPS and photos) and improvements in our understanding of forest ecology.

### Management Plan Flexibility

It was stressed that the management plan is a broad guideline. The plan and schedule must be flexible to adapt to natural and man-made changes. The forester's experience and judgment will determine what action is taken on the ground. The best plans result from a close partnership between county forester, consulting forester, and landowner.

The Parrish land provided an excellent illustration of a management plan in action. A white and red pine plantation had been thinned to allow regeneration and future succession. A pond stimulated a discussion of buffers and the importance of riparian zones for water quality and wildlife habitat.

The group looked at areas with beaver activity and talked about the positive role of these animals in a healthy, diverse forest. "Beaver deceivers" on culverts and clearing to create regeneration (food) within an existing beaver area were mentioned as ways to manage beaver activity.

Japanese Knotweed along the road back to the cars sparked a conversation about invasives. Paganelli stressed how critical this issue has become. Invasives now represent a serious threat to native forest land. Although Current Use does not officially address invasives at this time, he expects it will have to soon.

Vermont's difficult financial situation has put significant pressure on the Current Use Program. Efforts in the legislature to trim the budget were defeated this year but the program, strongly supported by Vermont Coverts, will be under continued pressure in the future.

### Woodcock

*Continued from page 1*

vide dense cover and moist soils make excellent feeding habitat. Young aspen stands, alder thickets, and other areas of dense woody vegetation near ponds, wetlands, and slow moving waterways are often used. Management activities to create and/or maintain woodcock feeding areas should work to provide these structural conditions.

### Nesting Success

Woodcock build a nest, not much more than a shallow depression lined with a few leaves, directly on the ground. Nest locations are often within 150 yards of the singing ground where mating occurred. Nesting habitat conditions are similar to feeding habitat although generally a bit drier. Pole-sized forest stands may also be used when a dense shrub layer exists in the understory.

### A Roost for Resting

Beginning in early summer, woodcock leave the daytime feeding areas and coveys to spend the night roosting in abandoned farmland and blueberry barrens. Scattered woody growth helps to protect against overhead predators such as owls. Frequently the roosting areas are the same areas that served as singing grounds earlier in the spring.

While there are undoubtedly a host of

factors that are contributing to declines in woodcock populations, there are steps that landowners can take when managing property to provide all or part of a woodcock's breeding habitat requirements. Key among these is the creation and/or maintenance of open areas and brushy, early-successional habitat conditions. In doing so, the "peent, peent" of the American woodcock will hopefully be heard for years to come.

*Source: Timberdoodle.org website; a project of the Wildlife Management Institute.*

### President's Message:

## Cross Boundary Management

*by John McNerney*

It's 6:30 p.m. on a beautiful evening in mid July. A handful of people leave their cars by the side of a dirt road in Monkton and head up a well-maintained trail into a wooded ridge. We pass through a clearing maintained as a meadow and visit some unusual geological features (a cave and an anticline, known locally as "the oven"). We backtrack, passing within sight of some vernal pools, and go off trail into a stunning example of a dry oak-hickory-hophornbeam forest.

The land is part of a 365-acre conservation effort by three landowners and three towns. It's home to a variety of rare, threatened or endangered species, rare plants and natural communities: the endangered Indiana bat, bobcat, otter, raven, to name a few, along numerous amphibian species and a rare example of a Valley clayplain forest.

Our group is led by a representative from the Vermont Land Trust, and another from The Nature Conservancy. These two organizations, along with the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife, have a strong interest in conserving this parcel and others adjacent to it.

So what has this property got to do with

**2009 Annual Meeting and Luncheon**  
**Saturday, September 12, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.**

**Ed Kehoe Conservation Camp, Lake Bomoseen, Castleton, Vermont**

Once again, the Annual Meeting of Vermont Coverts will be held in conjunction with the Fall Cooperator Training Workshop. Attending the Annual Meeting is a great way to get re-inspired about your land and your efforts for Vermont's forests and wildlife. Come for a fun filled, exciting program including great speakers, a tasty lunch and a silent auction.

**Schedule:**

- 10:00 Arrive for coffee
- 10:15 Current Use Changes and Threats  
Steve Sinclair, Director of Forests at the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks and Recreation, will discuss the rule changes involving Environmentally Significant Treatment Areas and potential changes to the Current Use program by the state legislature.
- 11:15 Welcome Wagon Training Kit  
Kim Royer, wildlife biologist at the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, will present information on a newly created Welcome Wagon kit to be provided to landowners.
- 12:15 Lunch and a presentation of Vermont Coverts' two annual awards, followed by a quick business meeting to elect representatives to the Coverts Council.
- 2:00 Speaker to be determined
- 3:15 Field Trip.  
This years field trip will be to Crain Hansen's property adjacent to the Hubbardton Battle Field.

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**Annual Meeting Proxy Form**  
**Please return to Vermont Coverts, P.O. Box 81, Middlebury, VT 05753**  
**No later than Friday, September 4**

If you are a Coverts Cooperator and **CANNOT** attend the Annual Meeting, please return this proxy form to the above address. Your proxy is important to ensure that we gather a legal quorum to conduct elections to the Coverts Council. To email, copy and paste the proxy form text below into email, add your information, and send to [lisa@vtcoverts.org](mailto:lisa@vtcoverts.org).

I, \_\_\_\_\_, a member of Vermont Coverts, hereby constitute John McNerney or Jay Allen as my lawful proxy to attend and vote on my behalf at the Annual Meeting of Vermont Coverts held at the Ed Kehoe Conservation Camp on the afternoon of Saturday, September 12, 2009, or at any adjournment thereof.

Given this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2009  
(date) (month)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

**Annual Meeting and Luncheon Registration Form**

Enjoy quality speakers and lunch for an inspiring day.  
\$20 per person

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Attendees: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_



# Woodlands for Wildlife

Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.  
PO Box 81, Middlebury, VT 05753

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VERMONT COVERTS:  
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## VERMONT COVERTS COUNCIL

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Newsletter Editor: John Evans  
Associate Editor: Lisa Sausville

## Calendar of Upcoming Events

- Sept 11-13 Coverts Fall Training Workshop, Ed Kehoe Conservation Camp, Castleton.
- Sept 12 Coverts Annual Meeting, Ed Kehoe Conservation Camp, Castleton, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

*See the calendar on the [vtcoverts.org](http://vtcoverts.org) web site for additional information on these and other programs.*

## Cross Boundary Management *Continued from page 2*

Vermont Coverts? The 365 acres is part of a larger 657-acre wildlife habitat management project initiated by nine adjacent landowners. One is a friend and fellow Vermont Coverts Cooperator, Mischul Brownstone, Class of 1995. Returning from the class, Mischul got involved as part of his commitment to “share what he had learned” at the co-operator training.

Coverts became involved in eight similar neighborhood projects across the state during that time period as part of a program to encourage cross-boundary management of land on a neigh-

borhood scale. The Monkton project appears to have been wildly successful, and already several parcels have been permanently conserved.

The July hike sparked my interest in learning more about similar Coverts activities. Over the coming year, I hope to dig into this more, visit the projects to find out how they are doing, and touch base with the Cooperators involved. It’s all part of our history as an organization. Collective neighborhood projects to manage lands is an effort that continues to receive attention by Vermont Coverts.