



SUMMIT VIEW

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mt. Agamenticus

Summer 2023

OF EASTERN BLUEBIRDS AND TREE SWALLOWS

The Bluebird has been associated with happiness, joy, hope, and good fortune for thousands of years throughout numerous cultures. Blue birds are referenced in ancient Chinese mythology, Native American and European folklore, and popular American culture through endless songs, poetry, theatre, films, and more.

The Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), long a harbinger of Spring here in southern Maine, uses the nesting boxes placed around the Mount Agamenticus summit, and often competes with Tree Swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*), for nest sites. Both Bluebirds and Tree Swallows are insectivores requiring large territories for feeding even as our insect population continues to decline. They also compete for nesting cavities which are becoming more scarce due to so many old trees being taken down.

Though legends extol them as gentle creatures of bliss and lyric,

Bluebirds can become extremely territorial during nesting season and have proven to aggressively attack, injure, and even kill other Bluebirds and other cavity nesters like the Tree Swallows. They can pull Swallows right out of a nesting box (see photo). Bluebirds



Bluebird attacking Tree Swallow's in their nest.

are larger than the Swallows except for wingspan, and will defend a territory of about 300 feet – as large as a football field. It's imperative that Bluebird hobbyists and managers place Bluebird boxes at a minimum of 300 feet apart to reduce competition, and take care not to “cluster” the boxes.

Tree Swallows will only defend feeding territories that approach and surround their nests, which means pairs of Swallows can nest 100 feet from each other while the same area can only support one pair of Bluebirds. A cluster of nesting boxes

can attract groups of Swallows which can mob the lone Bluebird pair, though research has shown that if a Bluebird has its lovely little heart set upon occupying a certain box, it is more than capable of taking it from Swallows. Our Bluebird population is healthy, but Tree Swallows are in decline due to habit and migration corridor loss, and global warming. Having Swallows occupy Bluebird boxes will not threaten the Bluebirds. Bottom line, keep your Bluebird nesting boxes at least 300 feet apart and welcome all native cavity nesters by leaving old trees standing and installing properly sized and placed nesting boxes.



Bluebird with insect. Photo: Richard Spinney

Please see nestwatch.org, “All About Birdhouses”, then “Right Bird, Right House” for nest box information.



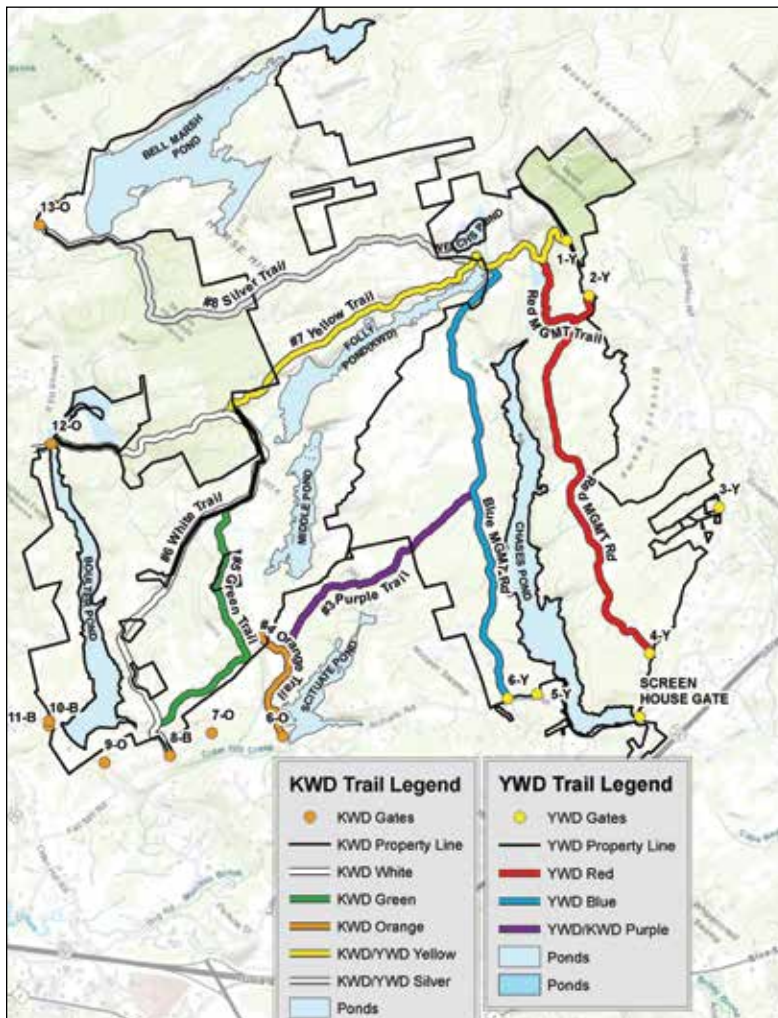
GULF OF MAINE COASTAL LOWLAND AND MOUNT AGAMENTICUS

New England contains low coastal plains, rocky coasts, river floodplains, alluvial valleys, glacial lakes, forested mountains, and alpine peaks. Ecological diversity is great. There are 5 level III ecoregions and 40 level IV ecoregions in the New England states and many continue into ecologically similar parts of adjacent states or provinces.

Ecoregions denote areas of general similarity in ecosystems and in the type, quality, and quantity of environmental resources; they are designed to serve as a spatial framework for the research, assessment, management, and monitoring of ecosystems and ecosystem components.

Mount Agamenticus is located in the Gulf of Maine Coastal lowland, a 10- to 20-mile-wide coastal strip stretching from Casco Bay in Maine to Plymouth Bay in Massachusetts. Extensive glacial sand, silt, and clay deposits blanket this region, with a coastal pattern typified by plutonic capes and intervening sand beaches that front the region's largest salt marshes. The ecoregion has relatively low relief, and elevations are mostly from sea level to 250 feet. Mt. Agamenticus is the atypical high spot at 692 feet.

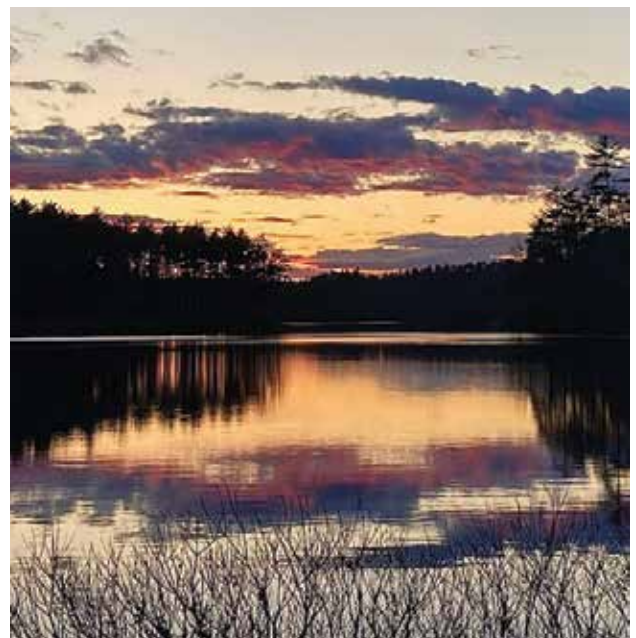
The largely undeveloped expanse of forests in the Mt. Agamenticus region is important for maintaining water quality. The integrity of wetland habitats depends on proper maintenance of hydrology and water quality. Intensive logging, clearing, soil disturbance, new roads, and development on buffering uplands can result in greater runoff, sedimentation, and other non-point sources of pollution that harm wetlands and aquatic systems.



Watershed map courtesy Kittery Water District.

Our Mission: to actively manage and protect our natural resources

The largely undeveloped expanse of forests in the Mt. Agamenticus region is important for maintaining water quality. York and Kittery Water Districts have been acquiring lands to ensure and protect drinking water supplies for the residents of York and Kittery. Over the past century, the Districts have acquired 4,445 acres of land in the area of Mt. Agamenticus.



Chase's Pond Reservoir in York. Photo: Denise Johnson

ABOUT OUR SUMMER NEWSLETTER INSERT

The Friends of Mount Agamenticus are unanimous in taking hope by taking action! We're joining forces with HOMEgrown NATIONAL PARK™, "the largest, cooperative conservation project ever conceived or attempted..." It is Professor "Doug Tallamy's grassroots call-to-action to plant native, to regenerate biodiversity and eco-system function because every human being on this planet needs diverse, highly productive eco-systems to survive."*

CALL TO ACTION



Our National Parks – no matter how grand in scale – are too small and separated from one another to adequately preserve the native trees, plants, insects and animals that our ecosystems depend upon to survive and thrive. Thus, the concept for the Homegrown National Park™, a national challenge to homeowners, property owners, land managers, farmers and anyone with some soil to plant in – to extend our national parks into our yards, communities, and surrounding lands by planting native and removing invasive species.



THE GOAL

Initially, 20 million acres of native plantings in the U.S. This represents approximately 1/3 of the green lawns of privately-owned properties.



TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

We are at a critical point where we are losing so many native plant and animal species that the ecosystem services we rely upon (oxygen, clean water, flood control, pollination, pest control, etc.) will become seriously compromised. However, if many people make small changes, we can restore healthy ecological networks and weather the challenges ahead.

HOMEgrown NATIONAL PARK™ MAP



The MAP enables anyone who plants natives and/or removes invasives to report their accomplishments by State, County and Zip Code. A gauge shows progress towards the goal of 20 million acres of native plantings in the U.S.



SCAN ME

Scan the code or visit: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org>

START DIGGING!



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From cover: Radlitt Schreiber/Fairly Expressive.org

LET'S GET EVERYONE ON THE MAP!



WHAT EACH OF US CAN DO

1. SHRINK THE LAWN AND LEAVE THE LEAVES!

Think, muse, strategize about how you might reduce the area that is now lawn. Maybe start by planting a very small area (perhaps a mini meadow), leaving enough green grass for your paths and recreational use. It doesn't matter how small or how large your plantings are; what's most important is that you get started, and you get on the M.A.P! Leave the leaves wherever you can! Park your leaf blower and give yourself a break from the rake! The leaves that stay on your property are going to return the nutrients that were taken up by the trees' roots in the spring back to the soil so the tree gets to use them again the following year. Leaves are also the perfect mulch. Start by raking up areas of the lawn you know you will keep as lawn. Use those leaves to smother the grass in beds around each of your trees, effectively reducing part of the area that is now grass. Come spring you can plant in your new beds.

2. REMOVE INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive plants are ecological tumors that spread unchecked into our local ecosystems, seriously degrading the ability of these ecosystems to function. If every property owner removed the most egregious invasives, the goal of ridding the U.S. of these troublemakers, or at least reducing their seed dispersal to manageable levels, would be largely realized. Start removing the ornamentals you now have that are known to be invasive species. Learn more about invasive species here: invasivespeciesinfo.gov

3. GENEROUSLY PLANT THE PLANTS THAT DO THE MOST GOOD

A first step in reducing your lawn can be adding keystone plants in an area that is now lawn. You might choose to plant an oak tree and build a bed with leaf litter around it. BOOM! New powerhouse tree and less lawn! If you have a bigger property, a field, a farm or a large landholding, consider planting more native trees and creating a meadow or two or three!

To realize the ecological potential of our landscapes, most of us have



to increase the abundance and diversity of our plantings. If you have one tree in your yard, consider adding two more. The idea is to plant groves of trees at the same density at which they occur naturally in a forest.

Research indicates that a few types of native plants ("keystone genera") form the backbone of local ecosystems, particularly in terms of producing the food that fuels insects. Landscapes that do not contain one or more species from keystone genera will have failed food webs, even if the diversity of other plants is very high. To find keystone plants that host the most caterpillars and native bees, scan the code or visit <https://www.wmfw.org/Garden-for-Wildlife/About/Native-Plants/keystone-plants-by-ecoregion>



4. REDUCE YOUR NIGHTTIME LIGHT POLLUTION

Research is showing that our porch and security lights are major causes of insect decline. Consider turning off your lights at night. Or use motion sensor security lights that light up only when an intruder enters your yard. If nothing else, replace the white bulb in your lights with yellow or amber tinted LED bulbs. These color wavelengths are the least attractive to nocturnal insects.

5. NETWORK WITH NEIGHBORS & GET ON THE HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK MAP

Be a role model for your neighbors. As you transform your property by planting natives in tasteful ways, it is likely your neighbors will follow suit. For a Homegrown National Park Yard Sign, scan the code or visit <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/yard-sign>

6. BUILD A CONSERVATION HARDSCAPE

- Each year millions of toads, frogs, and other small creatures become trapped in our window wells where they slowly starve to death. Installing inexpensive window well covers can reduce these needless deaths to zero.
- Set your mower height no lower than 3 inches. This will give you healthier, greener grass that requires less watering but also mows



SCAN ME



SCAN ME

safely over a box turtle or toad! Try not to mow in the evening when many nocturnal species leave their hiding places. Install a bubbler. Small water features with gentle gurgling sounds are irresistible to migrating and resident birds.



7. CREATE CATERPILLAR PUPATION SITES UNDER YOUR TREES

More than 90% of the caterpillars that develop on trees drop to the ground and pupate within the organic matter on the ground or within chambers they form underground. It is best to replace lawn under trees with well-planted beds with ground covers appropriate for your area. It's easy, you can leave leaf litter under your trees, rocks, and old tree stumps, as well as plant wild ginger, foam flowers, wood poppies, ferns, mayapples, etc.



8. DO NOT SPRAY OR FERTILIZE

Insecticides and herbicides are antithetical to the goals of HOMEGROWN NATIONAL PARK®. Less evident is that fertilizers are also unnecessary. Creating soils rich in organic matter is entirely sufficient for healthy plants. If herbicides must be used, apply them judiciously and in small quantities. See What is the Best Way to Get Rid of Invasive Plants? - You Tube



SCAN ME

Background image: Radim Schneider/FireflyExperience.org

The harsh reminders of climate change are constant. Climate anxiety, ecoanxiety, ecogrief, are all terms for the distress related to worries about the dangers of a changing climate. It's a real threat, so it's normal to experience worry and fear about the consequences. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, more than two-thirds of Americans experience some climate anxiety.

"As uncertainty and a loss of control characterize climate anxiety, the best treatment is to take action."

- www.health.harvard.edu

Our gift to our readers is the enclosed brochure with WHAT EACH OF US CAN DO. No experience

is necessary. We are losing so many plant and animal species that TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE. "In the past, we have asked one thing of our gardens: that they be pretty. Now they have to support life, sequester carbon, feed pollinators and manage water." - Doug Tallamy

If American home and land owners reduce our lawns by half, we can create 20 million acres of native plantings to help heal and sustain those who sustain us. For more information and resources please visit: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org>

WHERE CAN YOU SEE MOUNT A?

Mount Agamenticus is known and loved for its impressive summit views. In all directions, there are local landmarks that can be seen from atop our 692' summit. Our little mountain is unique for the fact that it offers coastal views, as well as views of the White Mountains and the Presidential Range more than 80 miles away! We all love Mount Agamenticus for its spectacular bird's-eye view of Southern Maine and coastal and Eastern New Hampshire, but what about the view of our mountain from elsewhere? I went on a journey to seek out places that our coastal mountain can be seen from.

When looking for Mount A from another peak or high point in our area, it is often distinguishable by its somewhat flat summit, making visible the few tree clusters and three cell phone towers that inhabit this summit. Mount A also has two additional smaller peaks to its East, Second and Third Hill, which do not offer summit views themselves, but can be seen from other high points to identify Mount A. This tactic does not quite work when looking from the West, as Second and Third Hill would be behind the mountain.

On the hunt for a view of our summit, I traveled to different locations I thought might provide the best views. I happened upon Spring Hill in South Berwick, Maine. Adjacent to Knights Pond, Spring Hill offers one of the closest views of the mountain. From here I was able to recognize individual trees on the summit!

Another great spot I found was at Stratham Hill Park in Stratham, New Hampshire. This view of Mount A is worth a visit, as it sits behind Great Bay, which is just barely visible from the top of our mountain. This 16.2 mile distance allows for fairly close viewing of Mount A, and it is easily distinguishable from here as it is the tallest hill formation in the area.



Mount Agamenticus and Second Hill viewed from Garrison Hill Park Tower - 9 miles away - in Dover, NH. Photo: Hailey Tice

Although by far not the only places where our summit can be seen from, here are some other places to check out: Garrison Hill in Dover, NH, Interstate 95 Bridge (heading north)(we don't recommend stopping), Route 4 in North Berwick near Knights Pond Road, Goat Hill Trail in Acton, Maine (accessible trail), The Colony and Ocean Rd. in Kennebunkport, Maine, the tip of Cape Ann in Rockport, Massachusetts, the Isles of Shoals (or off of the coast at least a few miles).

From a Mount Agamenticus Birdwatcher

Mount A inspires wonder - of the beauty of the woods, the distant ocean and mountains, and the native plants and wildlife. Birds especially inspire wonder and curiosity. Where is the nest of an Eastern Towhee with a beak full of nesting materials? What caused the sudden silence of bird chatter: perhaps a Red-tailed Hawk, an American Kestrel, a Cooper's Hawk, the shadow of a Turkey Vulture, or the human intruder - a "bird plow"?

At Mount A you may see and hear the birds of your spring backyard: American Robins, Eastern Blue Jays, Bluebirds, and Phoebe's; House Finches; American Goldfinches; Chipping, Song, and White-Throated Sparrows; White and Red-Breasted Nuthatches; Tufted Titmice; Mourning Doves; Northern Cardinals; and woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy, Red-Bellied, and Pileated).

You may discover new spring migrators: Killdeers, Ruby-Crowned Kinglets, Eastern Towhees, Scarlet Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Eastern Wood-Pewees, Red-Eyed Vireos, Rose-Breasted Grosbeaks, Hermit Thrushes with their haunting melody; Cedar Waxwings of ethereally smooth feathers, Eastern Kingbirds, and warblers like the Prairie, Pine, Black-

and-White, Common Yellowthroat, Black-Throated Green, Ovenbird, and Yellow Warbler. Tree and Barn Swallows zigzag the sky foraging flying insects. Although an experienced birder would recognize more, these warblers were special sightings this year: a Blackburnian, a Wilson's, a Chestnut-Sided, a Bay-Breasted, a Palm, and American Redstarts.

Which migrating birds will you encounter this year while on the trails of Mount A? Which bird behaviors will cause you to pause? Will it be two Common Ravens perched together gently and repeatedly touching beaks; or in an elderberry bush full of Cedar Waxwings, two of them passing a berry back and forth? Are these courting or other social behaviors? Such observations can spur one to seek answers. Come wander these beautiful trails. What wonders will you discover?



Female Red-winged Blackbird with dragonfly. Photo: Richard Spinney



FOMA Suggested Reading

The Mind of the Raven, by Bernd Heinrich

Bernd Heinrich, an incredibly readable, enjoyable and informative author, is Professor Emeritus at the University of Vermont and a resident of Western Maine where he has done much of his research.

Heinrich writes about his experiences doing research with ravens, keeping ravens as observable pets and interacting with the ravens in the wild, as well as with ravens that have adopted humans in the world. This is one of his older, but by no means oldest books.

“What a joy to see her flying freely over the woods where the poplars were all tassels out, the willows starting to bloom, and the first

warblers, the solitary vireo, and winter wren were singing! She brought huge mouthfuls of meat, one after the other to her seemingly insatiable young in her nest in the aviary. Often she dropped a big load of meat near the nest, then made as many as four smaller trips to feed the young from that one load.”

Also, from the University of Maine Press, **The Bog Walker’s Companion: A Guide to the Orono Bog Boardwalk**. It is the newest Maine-themed book in which Bernd Heinrich makes an appearance, having written the foreword. The book is a very interesting series of scientific essays concerning the Orono Bog including: What makes a Bog a Bog? Why are they valuable to the environment? How can Bogs be made accessible to visitors while preserving and protecting them? - Mike Modern

Species Spotlight



Bob Dale

Pictured is Bertram, a non-releasable common raven ambassador at Center for Wildlife in Cape Neddick, Maine.

Common raven *Corvus corax*

If you look up while at the summit of Mount A, you may see a large all-black bird flying across the sky. Often confused with crows, common ravens can be distinguished by their large size, wedge shaped tail, and deep croak-like call. Crows are about a third of the size and have a caw- like sound instead.

Ravens are in the corvid family of songbirds with crows, jays and magpies. They are incredible mimickers and have the ability to produce a large variety of sounds. Did you know that ravens and other corvids are also among the smartest birds in the world? On top of their mimicking skills, they also have the ability to make group decisions, solve complex, multi-step problems, and use tools. While they don’t have strong raptor talons, these traits help them adapt as opportunistic scavengers. They will eat just about anything they find that is easy to catch, including carrion, eggs, fruits, vegetables, bugs, fish, and leftovers from local humans. Trash cans often seem like a bountiful buffet once they figure out how to open it!

While common ravens historically weren’t often observed in the region, they are increasingly seen at Mount Agamenticus and in southern Maine year round. Keep an ear and an eye out for this mischievous species on your next hike!

DROP-IN HIKES AT MT. AGAMENTICUS JOIN US FOR A GUIDED HIKE THIS SUMMER!

This season, visitors can join us twice a month starting in July for drop-in guided hikes and walks. Programs will depart from outside the summit Learning Lodge at 10:00 AM and will last between 1 and 2 hours. Terrain and difficulty will vary, but all walks will take place on First Hill trails. Routes will be announced on our website and social media channels a week prior to program date.

Donations from program participants are greatly appreciated and directly support our outreach and education efforts!

PROGRAM DATES:

- Saturday, July 8th
- Sunday, July 16th
- Sunday, August 6th
- Sunday, August 20th
- Sunday, September 3rd
- Sunday, September 24th
- Sunday, October 8th
- Saturday, October 28th

Hikes are led by conservation program staff & volunteer docents!



Tree Swallow feeding its babies.

Newsletter created by volunteers from the Friends of Mount Agamenticus.

Scan this code To Like Mount Agamenticus Conservation Region on facebook!

