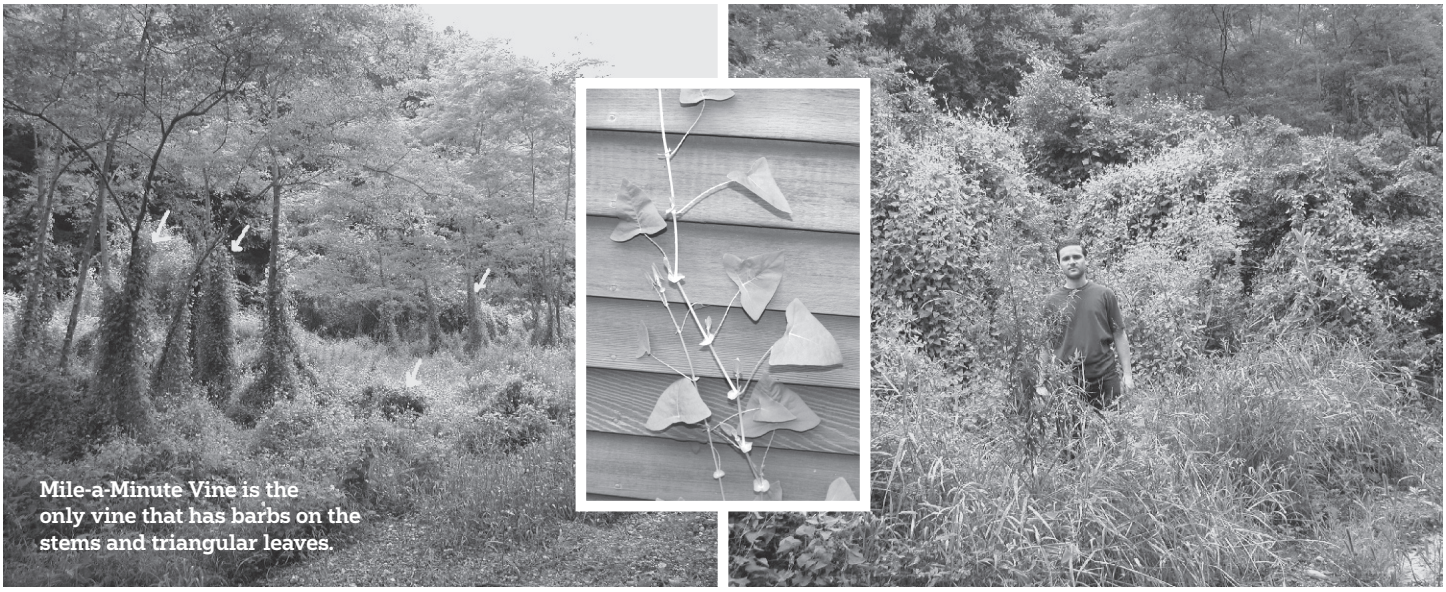
THE NEWSLETTER
The Colebrook Land Conservancy

"In Land We Trust"

Volume 24 Number 2, Spring 2015

Mile-A-Minute Vine on the Move



Mile-a-Minute Vine is the only vine that has barbs on the stems and triangular leaves.

Please check your property for Mile-a-Minute Vine (MAM) at least once a year between mid-July and frost. Yearly checks plus timely action can prevent MAM from becoming a serious pest on your property. Pay particular attention to bird places: shrubby areas, woodland edges, and under trees standing in the open. See the video at www.madgardeners.com for help recognizing the plant.

Mile-a-Minute Vine (Persicaria perfoliata L.) is found in more and more places in New England. MAM usually arrives in new places in soils that contain MAM seeds. Once arrived, birds and other animals carry seeds to nearby properties. Be prepared to take immediate action to prevent establishment of new patches. A single seed arriving at a new place can, within 4-5 years, give rise to a large dense patch covering all other vegetation and producing hundreds of thousands of seeds each year plus satellite patches at least as far as a mile away.

Learn to Recognize Mile-a-Minute Vine

*** Tiny barbs on stems; Vine**

*** Stems reaching upwards**

*** Clusters of tiny flowers, not showy**

*** Clusters of bright blueberry-like ripe fruits, 5 mm in diameter**

Mile-a-Minute Vine can always be recognized by its equilateral triangular leaves and the tiny prickles or barbs on the stems. The size of the triangles varies with the age and vigor of the plant, but the shape remains the same. There are other vines with (almost) equilateral triangular leaves and there are other vines with tiny barbs, but only Mile-a-Minute has both.

MAM Biology

MAM is an annual. Plants die at the end of the season.

Seeds germinate in early April. Plants are usually about a foot or two tall by June 1st, but may be taller or shorter

depending on spring weather.

By late summer MAM plants are growing about 3 feet a week (6 inches per day!)

MAM produces seeds from mid-June to frost. A single MAM plant can produce 2,000 seeds per season.

Most seeds germinate the first year. There are still plenty to germinate the second year. A few seeds remain viable for extended periods of time --- nobody knows how long. We know it is longer than 6 years. If even one seed out of 2,000 remains viable for 20 years, that is enough to re-establish a population in just a couple of years.

• The only places we haven't seen MAM plants growing are 1) lawn, 2) the deepest, darkest shade, and 3) with roots in the water.

• The vine smothers herbaceous plants, shrubs, and young trees in meadows, forest edges, some woodlands, logged forests, stream banks, and utility rights-of-way. The fruits float and are eaten by birds, small mammals, and deer.

Prevention

MAM arriving from a distance often comes in with soil -- perhaps a seed in bulk soil, or on the soil of a potted plant, or on the tires of equipment, or even on shoes.

Don't bring "topsoil" or mixes containing "topsoil" to your property. (Commercial compost, which is heated to a high temperature, should be weed free)

Avoid bare soil: a healthy groundcover of native plants is preferable to a sea of mulch.

Don't destroy the "edges": Leave the natural leaf fall at the edges of lawns. Raking extra leaves into the woods kills the natural cover, leaving a place for weed seeds to germinate. Raking all the leaves out provides bare spots where seeds can germinate.

Remove the non-native invasive shrubs that often form an impenetrable mess in old fields and at woodland edges. Many provide perfect places for MAM to hide. Start with those that have thorns: multiflora rose and barberry. Remove honeysuckle, burning bush, autumn olive and other invasive shrubs and trees. Remove Oriental bittersweet and porcelain berry (Ampelopsis) vines. Where shrubs are desired in a MAM area, consider open shrubs such as the native spicebush (Lindera benzoin) which is open enough that MAM can't hide beneath it.

Seeds carried in water are a particular threat. Between 2004 and 2007 MAM covered several acres of floodplain and river corridor in Newtown, CT. It may be impossible to prevent it from infesting the entire river corridor.

HOW TO REPORT SIGHTINGS

Please report all sightings to knelson151@sbcglobal.net or donna.ellis@uconn.edu or The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group at 860-486-6448 so we can track the spread of MAM vine.

If You Have MAM

Check http://wwwmadgardeners.com/2012Project.pdf

Control requires preventing seed production: timing is critical. The goal is to remove all MAM plants before they prduce seed. If you find MAM in Litchfield County and would like property-specific control advice, contact Kathleen Nelson, knelson@madgardeners.com or 860-355-1547.

Clean up any areas of invasive shrubs that make access difficult.

If the patch is at the edge of a lawn, consider expanding the mowed area. MAM does not survive regular lawn-height mowing. If possible, begin mowing before seed production in mid-June.

MAM seeds germinate in early April. Some pre-emergent herbicides reduce MAM germination. If you plan to use a pre-emergent herbicide, it needs to be applied in mid-to-late March. See www.cipwg.uconn.edu/pdfs/2012_Report_MAM_Vine.pdf

Seed production can begin as early as mid-June. Remove all MAM plants in known MAM areas prior to June 15.

Pulling is easy and very effective. Use gloves to protect your hands from the annoying prickers. Our group does not recommend general-purpose foliar herbicides for MAM control. They are not 100% effective. They kill plants that compete with MAM but they do not kill MAM seeds. They may harm other plants, and they may harm you.

Recheck known MAM areas every three weeks until frost. MAM roots usually come out easily when pulled, but sometimes the stem breaks. Also, you may miss a few plants. Repeat check don't take long. By rechecking regularly you may catch all the plants before they produce seeds.

Plants not yet in flower can be dropped in place. They will dry out and be dead by lunchtime. Don't put them in piles — plants at the bottom of a pile may root.

Disposal: If there is any sign of flower buds, flowers, fruits, or seeds, dispose of them as described below. Do NOT put them in your compost pile. MAM flower buds, flowers, and fruits all look like small green spheres. There are often smaller hidden fruits produced before the main batch-- if in doubt, bag and dispose of the plants.

Seeds live for many years. Continue inspections and pulling yearly at least as long as three years after removing the last MAM plant. The work will be easier each year.

Don't expect the "MAM weevils" to solve the problem — they will not.

Disposal

Dispose of MAM plants containing flower buds, flowers, fruits or seeds in a safe manner. Usually this means bagging the plants in heavy contractors bags and disposing of the bags to be incinerated.

Don't remove brush or soil from a MAM area.

Clean all equipment, including mowers, from a MAM work area on-site or, if that is not possible, on a flat lawn. Do NOT clean equipment on a driveway or road as MAM seeds could be carried by water to a new location with the road run-off.

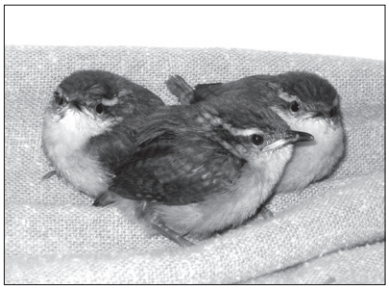
—Kathleen Nelson

Saving Wildlife

Audubon Wildlife Rehabilitation Director Erin O'Connell tends to her charges: at left, above, an owl; at right, above, an osprey; and below, three Carolina wrens.

On April 24th, the Colebrook Land Conservancy held its annual potluck dinner and talk, this year on Animal Rehabilitation, given by Erin O'Connell, who has been until recently the Wildlife Rehabilitation and Outreach Coordinator at Audubon Sharon. Two weeks before the event, Erin sat down with me to talk about her work.

Erin grew up in upstate New York, and spent her childhood playing in the woods near her house in the outer suburbs of Albany. Her parents were Audubon supporters fairly early on, so while still a young child, Erin learned to appreciate the great value and beauty of the wildlife that surrounded her.



Armed with a bachelor's degree in Biology, she was looking online for a job and, somewhat at random, came across a posting for an internship at Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Inc., in Kendalia, Texas. It was the perfect place to start. Treating upwards of 4,000 animals a year, both wild and domesticated, the organization offered her an immersion training in how to rescue, treat and when possible, return animals to their natural habitats.

And so, wildlife rehabilitation became Erin's specialty. For the last eight years, she has worked at the Audubon Sharon Center, providing care and treatment to over 300 birds a year. Although Audubon's primary focus is on bird preservation, Erin says they do treat some other animals and reptiles, as well. 80-90 percent of all injuries to wildlife are caused by human-engineered perils, such as being hit by a car, electrocuted by a power line, suffering head or limb trauma from hitting a window. Cats are also particularly deadly, causing bacterial infection and puncture wounds. Once Erin does an assessment, she refers the wildlife to local veterinarians who will provide needed the additional medical care that the Audubon Sharon Center is unable to furnish.

The work is somewhat seasonal. During the summer, many of the injured are songbirds and migratory birds; in the winter months, those brought to the center are birds of prey, as many of them cannot find adequate sources of food. Erin offered a stunning fact: up to 80 percent of red-tailed hawks, for instance, do not survive their first winter.

The work of rehabilitation is time-consuming and requires a significant amount of resources, such as bird feed and insects for the proper amount of protein needed by each bird and a team of 35-40 volunteers during the peak summer months. The work is intensive, with as little as 10 to 15-minute intervals between feedings over a twelve to fifteen-hour day (the birds do not eat at night). It can take months to rehabilitate some wildlife, depending on the severity of the injury, or in other cases, teaching orphaned birds to do what their parents would have taught them.

But, as Erin says, "I got into this work because I have an affinity for animals," and, in hearing her speak so knowledgeably about her "patients", it is clear that the injured wildlife under her care are the lucky ones.

—Amy Bernstein

A Fresh Look at the North Colebrook Phelps' Property

In 1975, John and Nancy Phelps Blum, whose ancestor was an important landowner in Colebrook, and their neighbor, the noted ecologist, Dr. Frank Egler donated 394 acres along Brummagem Brook to The Nature Conservancy (TNC). An initial assessment in 1977 described the land as "a prime example of unspoiled nature in the northwestern part of Connecticut." By any standard, this gift was impressive, not only because of its size, but also because of the pristine nature of the property, its range of habitats, and the diversity of the fauna and flora to be found there. Its rocky slopes, woodlands, post-agricultural fields, and wetlands supported birds that prefer undisturbed forest for breeding, such as the broad-winged hawk, pileated woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, hermit thrush, white-throated sparrow, and several warblers. Over 20 species of reptiles and amphibians were recorded, and 30 species of animals. Trees included white pine, red oak, ash, beech, sugar maple, hemlock, aspen, red maple, silky willow and chokecherry. Despite its unspoiled nature, the land also offered up clues to a time when it had been used for other purposes, including remnants of a forge along Doolittle Brook and evidence of lumbering in the last extensive old-growth forest in Connecticut.

In 2009, the Nature Conservancy transferred the entire 394 acres to the Colebrook Land Conservancy.

Recently, Bob Grigg, the Colebrook town historian, reviewed the papers of the Phelps family, which were bequeathed to the Colebrook Historical Society in 2014. Here is some history about the family who once owned a significant amount of land in Colebrook, some of which is now preserved in perpetuity.

A Colebrook forest with old-growth trees, as it looked in 1912.

The sheer volume of the Phelps papers was daunting, to say the least. Family letters, contracts, and other documents from nearly 300 years ago needed to be catalogued and deciphered. But as I began to organize the material and unravel the story, a very different picture began to emerge about the land owned by Arah Phelps and his descendants.

In January 30, 1732, Arah's Grandfather, Josiah Phelps II of Windsor, CT was asked by the Colonial Legislature to be a member of a committee to explore the land that was slated to become the Town of Colebrook. As a result, Josiah was in a position to know where all the best acreage was located. So, for the next twenty years or so he purchased many of the most valuable parcels. In 1754, when he made out his will, he left these Colebrook lands to his three grandsons.

In 1787, Arah, then 26 years old, settled on his piece of property and began to follow his grandfather's instructions to "clear the land and make use of it".

His land lay two miles to the north of Colebrook Center, where Erastus Wolcott had already erected a sawmill in 1766. Arah decided to construct his own sawmill at the lower end of his fifty acre field, a large meadow that in the 18th century was called an "intervale" along the eastern side of Sandy Brook. It may have been an even more extensive field at that time, particularly in the area along Brummagem Brook, since Native Americans were known to create and maintain open areas as hunting "parks" to lure their prey to congregate there. This helped improve the odds of obtaining food at a time when their main weapons were bows and spears, none of which was effective at much distance. The existence of thirteen main branches on the Colonial Pine, a huge mature tree in 1787, proves that it had at the very least two hundred years of growth before Arah named it, helped point to the fact that the meadow had been maintained for centuries.

Arah and Welthan had five daughters and one son, Edward Arah, who later became a general. He had two sons, Edward and Dunbar, who was known by

his middle name, Carrington. Edward had a good head on his shoulders, and it is almost a certainty that the history of the Phelps lands in North Colebrook would have been vastly different had he not died a premature death while still in his forties. Carrington, on the other hand had developed a reputation at a very young age for having poor judgment about money. His aunt's letters expressed great concern about his inability to manage any sum of money, whether large or small.

Against the advice of his elders, after graduation from Yale in 1870, Carrington went to Wisconsin and joined a former North Colebrook lawyer who had an unsavory reputation. The predictions of disaster concerning Carrington, unfortunately proved to be accurate. He soon left Wisconsin for the frontier, then in western Minnesota, where he created a small farm and became the president of the bank in Morris, his new home. This move caused consternation among his older relatives, who felt that being a bank president was the last thing he should have undertaken. Unbeknownst to those back in Connecticut, his bank had only $50,000 in its coffers, though the stationery listing him as president was quite impressive.

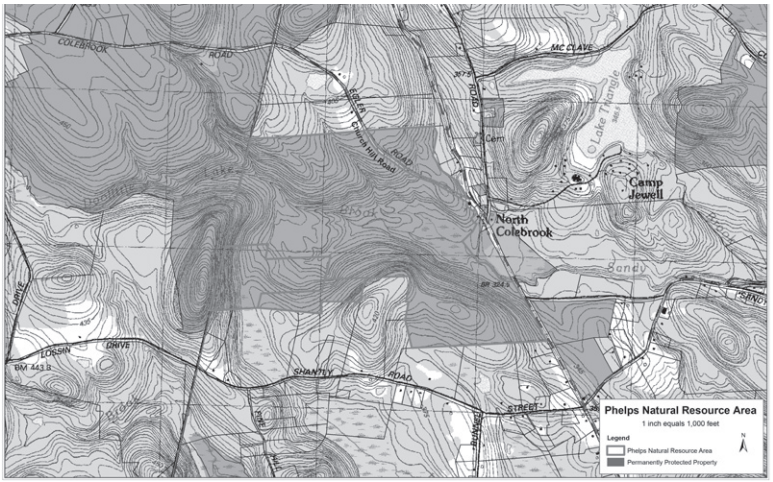
Carrington's interest in farming in Minnesota began to fade, and he decided to develop a large island a few miles west of Minneapolis as a sportsman's paradise. All along the water's edge he envisioned cottages, and in the center, a clubhouse. A railroad station nearby would provide easy access to the Rocky Mountains and the practically untapped potential of the western Canadian provinces. It is amazing to think that he actually believed he could make this happen, since after the sale of his farm in Morris, all the equity he had was $1,000.

In the meantime, back in Colebrook, Gen. Edward A. Phelps had made out his will, and in it he left most of the land and the buildings to his 16 year-old grandson, Carrie (Nancy's father). Carrie was a high school student in Minneapolis at the time. The only property that was specifically left to Carrington was the furniture in the inn, which had belonged to Arah's daughters, of whom only Catherine Candace was still alive.

Over the next sixty-five years or so, it became evident that neither Carrington nor his son Carrie was capable of maintaining the buildings and woods or working the farmland. What had provided a comfortable living for Arah and Edward became an anchor for subsequent generations who could not generate an outside source of income and who clung tenaciously to obsolete farming methods. The result was a series of mortgages and loans, few of which were ever paid off, coupled with a long list of unpaid taxes to the town.

Although Nancy Blum recalled her father's attitude towards the property as being supportive, letters and documents say otherwise. And Nancy's remembrances of her grandfather showed an unbridled love for him and his wife. It does not seem that Nancy ever read the letters and papers that lay for so many years secreted away in the attic.

The biggest unanswered question today is what exactly happened during all those years to the "200 wooded acres" that today represents the core of the Phelps land bequest. Search as we could, the answer remains shrouded in mystery. Several times in the 1800s references were made to the forest, but the episodes of large-scale cutting between the years 1911 and 1915, which must have been documented, are not referred to in the papers given to the Colebrook Historical Society. We don't need documentation to know the reason why they were logged, of course: the bills had mounted higher and higher. Had it not been for the great generosity of the Hurd family, who lived just over the line in Norfolk, but who thought of themselves as living in North Colebrook, and who paid the taxes and enough of the other bills to keep developers from acquiring the Phelps' lands and causing irreparable damage to the entire neighborhood, nothing of Arah's dream would have survived the twentieth century.



The Phelps Natural Research Area, covering 394 acres in North Colebrook, was originally purchased by Josiah Phelps II and given to his three grandsons in 1754.

Carrington's role in all this is somewhat hard to understand. Legally, he had nothing to say about any aspect of the farm, including the forest, but he so dominated his son that it seemed Carrie played no role.

Carrington hated his daughter-in-law (Nancy's mother). Pages of his daily diaries are filled with vitriol about her. She is blamed for the perceived weaknesses of Carrie and the decline of the land and buildings. Nancy knew he disliked her mother, but I don't actually think she was aware of the contents of his private writings; and it is just as well she wasn't.

As far as the forest is concerned, there is nothing in the papers that indicates any wish to preserve the land until Nancy became an adult. Then, for the first time, one of the Phelpses expressed a desire to permanently protect the forest. The Phelps Research Area is a fitting memorial to the far-sightedness of Nancy Phelps Blum, John Blum, and their friend, Frank Egler.

—Bob Grigg

NEWS ROUNDUP

Take a Walk on the Hale Trail

Until 1987, Mason E. Hale Sr. owned all four corners at the intersection of Routes 183 and 182, where he operated one of Colebrook's last dairy farms. The Colebrook Land Conservancy owns 44 acres of the former farm, including the northwest corner with the red barn, silo, small pond and hayfields. To access the Hale Trail, park in the flat area below the barn and walk north along Route 183 to the trail head. You'll see a sign for the trail at an opening in the guard rail on the left side of the road. Please be watchful of oncoming traffic and enjoy your walk through a bit of New England history!

We lack email addresses for many of you, and if there is an alert we wish to send out, information about upcoming events or other announcements, we have no way of contacting you but snail mail. Please send us your email address:

info@colebrooklandconservancy.org

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