



Harpswell Heritage Land Trust

"preserving and protecting Harpswell's natural open spaces, islands, shoreline and cultural heritage for current and future generations"

Newsletter Spring 2012

Issue #38

Eels: Mystery Travelers to Harpswell's Shores

by Anne Perry

Since prehistoric times, visitors have come to coastal Maine for its rich resources. One of the most ubiquitous and least known visitors is the American eel. Some scientists believe the American eel may occupy the broadest diversity of habitats of any species of fish in the world. Maturing eels are general predators and scavengers and will eat a wide variety of aquatic insects, crustaceans, frogs, fish and worms. They feed mostly at night.

Although it can spend decades in Maine's coastal waters, rivers and lakes, we seldom see or hear about the American eel except in the spring when newspapers write



Dipping for elvers

articles about fishing for immature female eels as they migrate up Maine rivers to grow to maturity. In fact eels are prized food items in many parts of the world and

Unlike anadromous species, such as



Elver nets on a river

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Unlike anadromous species, such as

salmon, that spawn in rivers and streams, and then migrate to the ocean to grow to adulthood before returning up the rivers to start the next generation, eels are catadromus, i.e., they do the reverse. They spawn in the huge area of the North Atlantic Ocean known as the Sargasso Sea and migrate to coastal estuaries and freshwater to mature before returning to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. Eels are the only catadromus species in North America.

Despite eel's long history as a food source for humans, their life cycle was a mystery until the 20th century when their spawning grounds were finally identified as the Sargasso Sea. The larval eels are ribbonlike and transparent. These tiny, delicate "glass eels" drift with other tiny organisms in northward flowing currents over the next year until they reach North America. As they find nourishment along the way, they transform into the next stage of their life becoming elvers.

When they reach the Maine coast, the elver males take up residence in shallow coastal waters like Harpswell shore's and Casco Bay where they will grow to maturity, hiding in beds of eel grass or in rockweed or salt marshes by day and feeding by night.

The elver females continue swimming up Maine's rivers and streams toward the ponds and lakes where they will grow to maturity. At this time, these female elvers become a lucrative marine resource. By April and May they are numerous enough to net where streams meet the sea. They can be worth \$1000 or more per pound to Maine fishermen.

But don't expect to find elver pie on local menus. Their great value lies in trade with Japan and other Asian countries where they are grown to maturity on fish farms and sold into Asian food markets. This high demand for American elvers is the

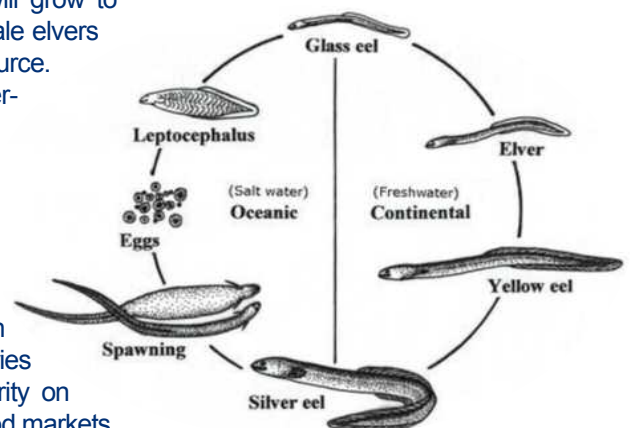


Elvers

result of Asian elver stocks being exhausted by overfishing. To prevent the same fate here, elver fishing is carefully regulated by Maine's Department of Marine Resources.

Marine Patrol Officer Scott Couture estimates at least a dozen spots in Harpswell where elvers enter fresh water. "Wherever you find a stream entering salt water, they are there", he said.

After anywhere from 6-20 years or more of growth, eels are ready to return to their birthplace in the Sargasso Sea to spawn. Sexually mature females may contain two million or more eggs. Determining how old eels can live before returning to spawn and die can be difficult. One was held in an aquarium for 85 years. Perhaps parts of these interesting creatures' lives will remain shrouded in mystery.



What's Happening with Community Viewpoints?

by Ed Robinson

As you know, HHLT has been hard at work for nearly one year on a comprehensive survey of our members, trustees, local opinion leaders and most recently, Harpswell landowners. We are listening to our community, so that we can evaluate our current strengths and weaknesses, and to help shape our forward planning. Any organization can benefit from feedback after 25 years in operation, and this is our chance to gain valuable insights.

Thanks to more than 350 respondents, we now have all kinds of comments and suggestions to review. The Community Viewpoints committee is organizing a work shop in June for the trustees to review this input and to

begin the hard work of shaping initiatives for the future. While most respondents have been highly supportive of HHLT's work to date, we have also received some creative ideas on how to strengthen our efforts in reaching young people, in education and in communicating with the broader Harpswell community.

As we move into summer, we plan to prepare a summary of the Community Viewpoints survey to share with respondents, membership and the community through a variety of communications. We will keep you posted, and a big thanks to those of you who took the time to comment. Of course we are always happy to get new ideas and feedback from our members!

Volunteer Thanks

Our thanks to Nancy Bennett, Tom Burrows,

Marie Clarke, Nellie Coulter, Linda DeHaan, Hannah Dring, Judith Redwine, Hank Schwartz, David Souter, and Trisha Sheaff for their help with our mailings. Our thanks to John Esquirol, Tim Glidden, Harriette and Peter Griffin, Henry Heyburn, the Heyburn Children, Dot Kelly, Jose Mas, Georgette Miller, Ned Perry, Alan Sawyer, and Cynthia Wood for their help with our annual easement monitoring. Our thanks to Tim Vail and Vail's Tree Service for chipping slash at our office.

We expect to schedule a number of work days to fix up our preserves and trail this year. If you would like to help with the work and have not already volunteered with the Trust, please email Reed Coles at info@hhlmaine.org.



Featured Photo: Eagles in Ewing Narrows taken

Jane Owen photo

If you have a great Harpswell photo, please send it to us at info@hhlmaine.org.

President's Message



This past year, HHLT's Board of Trustees agreed to pursue accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The Commission is an

independent entity which awards accreditation to land trusts that meet national standards for excellence, upholding the public trust, and ensuring that conservation efforts are permanent.

So far we have completed the first step in the accreditation process: a self

assessment of our progress toward implementing the Standards and Practices published by the Land Trust Alliance, a national organization representing over 1700 land trusts. These 12 standards and 88 practices cover all aspects of land trust operations and are the benchmark for accreditation. We are using the results of the self assessment to fine-tune our policies and improve our operations prior to submitting a formal application for accreditation.

Although achieving accreditation is a multi-year process that requires significant time and effort, we believe that

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Contact HHLT

Harpswell Heritage Land Trust

PO Box 359 • 153 Harpswell Neck Rd

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info@hhlmaine.org • www.hhlmaine.org

becoming an accredited land trust is important and well worth the effort. It will confirm the confidence you have placed in HHLT and demonstrate to a broader community that we are a strong, effective organization that can be trusted to preserve and protect Harpswell's special places forever.

We will keep you informed of our progress.

Charlie Johnson

A Community Garden Offers More Than Vegetables

by Mary Ann Nahf

In 2005, an anonymous donor gave the Trust a generous gift for the purpose of establishing and supporting community gardens in Harpswell. The donor wished to provide an opportunity for would be gardeners in Harpswell to form communities of gardeners and grow their own vegetables, fruits and flowers even if their own land was unsuitable.



Gardening at Harpswell Community School

In addition, the donor hoped to encourage organic gardening practices, provide handicapped accessible gardening opportunities, and provide learning opportunities for Harpswell's young people. While the gift would fund the creation of the gardens, the gardens would be organized and run by volunteers and the gardeners.

The elementary schools were the first to express an interest. A garden was constructed at the West Harpswell School in 2006 and at the Harpswell Islands School (now the Harpswell Community School) in 2010 and incorporated into the students learning experiences.

In 2011, the Harpswell Community Nursery School (HCNS) founded a garden next to the Elijah Kellogg Church.



Spotting a bug at HCNS garden

The preschoolers, their parents, and their teachers began their garden by constructing raised beds and filling them with loam and compost. Square foot gardens were installed for their plantings of flowers, vegetables and strawberries as they would be a good working size for the youngsters, allowing them to reach in to water easily and pick the crops.

In their first year, the young gardeners harvested more food from their garden than they could eat. So they shared their harvest with the Midcoast Hunger Prevention Program in Brunswick. Their success made them eager to plant again this season and they are especially looking forward to picking the strawberries from the plants started last year.

A plan to create a Mitchell Field community garden began in 2008 with many hours of volunteer time preparing the site. The chosen site was designed to include two 100-foot square gardens, a parking area, and a small orchard.



Soil preparation at HCNS garden

Last year the wet spring cancellation of the season and highlighted the need to work on handling the excess water in the planting area. A drainage swale was installed in the fall. Soil and compost have been tilled into the site. A parking area was staked out and the grading donated by a local business. Volunteers dug a well and a hand pump was installed by another local business volunteering their service. Four Harpswell heritage apple trees are being planted this summer.

One of the gardens, the 'common garden', will proceed this season with the planting being done by those renting plots in the first garden. The harvest from this garden will be distributed to those in town who are housebound or are in need. Any additional bounty will

be distributed to the Mid Coast Hunger Preventions Program.

After years of preparation and an early, rather wet spring, the garden plots are ready for planting. Eight gardeners had signed up by the end of April and there is room for more. Those interested should contact Jane Covey at 725-5601 or coveybrown.ldb@gmail.com.

2012 Summer Events



Sat. July 7th 8:30 am - Grab your Boots! Learn About Clams and More! with Chris Heinig. A 'hands-on' chance to learn about digging and surveying shellfish. Please pre-register. Space is limited.



Fri. July 13th 10 a.m. - The Geology of the Giant Stairs Join Professor R. Beane and students at the Giant Stairs for an on-site program. Park at Johnson Field.



Wed. July 18th 7 p.m. - Annual meeting. Gail Carlson of Colby College will talk on "Where have we come since Silent Spring?".

Coming Events Preview



Why should we be concerned with **invasive plants** and their control? The **August** program will be held at Curtis Farm Preserve. Date to follow



Salt Marsh Ecology. Join us **Wed. Nov. 7th** to find out what makes Maine's coastal marshes unique, and ways to promote their stewardship.

Programs are co-sponsored with the Harpswell Recreation Dept. and Conservation Commission



Attention: 7 – 11 year olds!

HHLT invites you to Explore Harpswell at our Nature Day Camp. July 30 to August 3 — 3 hours 3 mornings & 2 afternoons

Call 207-721-1121 or email info@hhlmaine.org to register or visit www.hhlmaine.org

Gail Carlson to Speak at Annual Meeting

Gail Carlson, Visiting Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies at Colby College, will be the speaker at the Trust's 2012 Annual Meeting. Professor Carlson's topic will be **"Where Have We Come Since Silent Spring?"** 2012 is the fiftieth anniversary of Rachel Carson seminal work on the damage done by pesticides and other pollutants

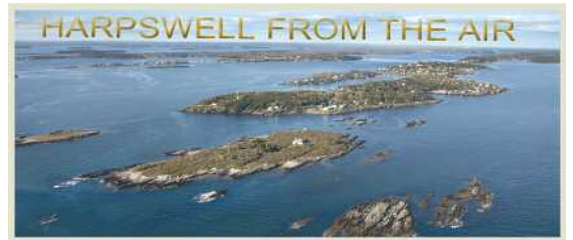
beginning the modern environmental protection movement.

This year's meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 18th at the Elijah Kellogg Church Fellowship Hall in Harpswell Center. The doors will open at 6:30 p.m. A short business meeting will begin at 7 p.m. followed by Professor Carlson's talk. Light refreshments will be available.

Art Exhibitions at the Trust

June 30–July 8: Members of the Casco Bay Art League will be showing their work.

July 15–August 31: Tom Jones Photographs: "Harpswell from the Air"



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Johanna Marie Wigg
Drs. Lea and Nancy Wilds
Sumner and Ida Wiley
Dennis and Linda Wilkins
William and Marilyn Wilkoff
Chris McMahon and Kathryn Willeford
Joanne Williams
Delsa Wilson
Roger and Nancy Wilson
Wesley Wood
Mark and Roseanne Woodbury
Charles and Maria Woodman
Raymond G. Woodman
Frances H. Woodring
Michael D. Wormser
Craig T. Worthley
Stephen and Helen Ann Wright
Jeanette G. York
Peg Davey and Tom Zanzig
Kim Haynes and David Znamierowski