

Veery Chorus at Joe English Reservation

By Tom Sileo

Late afternoon, on July 8, 2015, I decided to take a walk at Joe English Reservation. By 4:00 pm., I parked and walked directly to the wildlife pond opposite the Peabody Mills Environmental Center. Some archetypal meaning associated with water attracts human beings, to be in it, or just to stare into its depths; what does our subconscious see there? We're attracted to the quiet stillness of a pond, the grand appearance of a lake, the soothing sound of a gurgling brook just after a winter thaw, the power of a river current or the expanse of an ocean. Is it because that's where we began?



Wildlife Pond at Joe English Reservation

I walked to the southern side of the pond and stepped onto the small bridge. A blue and gray spring azure butterfly was nestled at the edge of the bridge and a damselfly with a florescent green abdomen and black wings was perched on a plant beside the brook. I turned to admire a small patch of yellow loosestrife also known as swamp candles. This attractive wetland plant is about two feet tall with a spike of yellow flowers with crimson centers. Suddenly a blackish butterfly with prominent orange striping appeared from the dense brook-side thicket. This beautiful red admiral fluttered and landed for only a moment before flying out of sight.

I left the pond and entered the loose woods on the opposite side. I walked along Hammond Brook Trail to the so-called "Wildlife Opening" and then connected with the Timber Trail to the Eagle Trail which ascends to roughly 400 feet. I spent some time looking for a brown creeper that was singing alongside the path. The brown creeper hugs tightly to the trunk of a tree and winds its way upward as it searches for insects. Its color matches so well with tree bark that it's very difficult to find. I never did find it, but I heard its song travel in a large circle around me.

I continued to ascend and heard the ethereal song of a hermit thrush. There were two of them, one seeming to answer the other. The hermit thrush's flute-like song is considered the most beautiful woodland sound: "ee-oh-lee-oh-lee-oh."

I heard a red-eyed vireo singing as well. This vireo sings a very pretty song, but too often the quality of its song is diminished by the incessant repetition of its phrases. The bird pauses its singing only to pluck a caterpillar from the tree bark. Because of this, it's also known as the "preacher bird."

After spending some time bush-whacking to look for the vireo, I

returned to the trail and descended back toward the Peabody Mill buildings and the wildlife pond. Between the "Wildlife Opening" and the parking area, along Hammond Brook Trail, I heard a single sharp call from high up in the trees that sounded like the loud, clear note of a northern oriole. It wasn't an oriole, however.

I left these woods, crossed the parking area and once again approached the pond. I noticed immediately, the unmistakable call of the veery. A member of the thrush family, the veery is known to sing into the evening. It was already 5:00 pm.. Looking out over the pond, I noticed the chestnut-colored veeries flying from tree to tree. There were at least half a dozen veeries flying over the water or singing from the trees that surround the pond. This is a fairly common deep woodland bird that isn't often seen due to its shy nature. So, seeing so many of them out in the open like this was a special experience for me.



Singing Veery

The veery, once known as Wilson's thrush, is a member of the thrush family which includes great songsters, including, course, the hermit thrush, but also the wood thrush and the American robin. Before witnessing this chorus, I put the veery in third place among the thrushes; but now I'm not so sure.

I walked to the south side of the pond and stepped onto the small boardwalk overlooking the pond. I listened to this veery chorus, amazed at the beautiful sounds I was hearing. Sometimes the song of one veery would end just as another veery's song would begin; other times they would overlap or they would sing in unison. It was a spectacular performance.

It's difficult to describe the loud, clear, rolling, flute-like song of the thrush family. Olive Thorne Miller, in Upon the Tree-Tops (1898) noted that the veery's song sounds like "the very breath of the woods."

"Were we to attempt to perform these notes upon a musical instrument," wrote Wilson Flagg in The Birds and Seasons of New England (1875), "we should fail from the difficulty of imitating their peculiar trilling and the liquid ventri-loquial sounds at the end of each strain. The whole is warbled in such a manner as to produce on the ear the effect of harmony, and to combine in a remarkable degree the two different qualities of brilliancy and plaintiveness."

Henry Oldys in his January 1916 The Auk article "Rhythmical Singing of Veeries," describes the veery's song as "Wee-te-a-wee, te-a-

wee, te-a-wee." Imagine these notes with various trills in sharp flute-like echoing tones and overlapping as several veeries sing them at the same time. Besides other hushed calls from their perches, they also sounded out loud, sharp calls that can be translated as "vee." This was the song that sounded to me like the note of a northern oriole.



Veery

The veeries would fly from one high branch to another, across the pond, and they would also land on the high-bush blueberry shrub located at the north side of the pond. I'd see them sailing low, across the open water and land on a concealed branch. Sometimes they would just fly away again, to a spruce and then to a high oak or maple branch at the edge of the woods; and sometimes, they would spend time deep within the shrub, plucking the ripe blueberries from the branches.

"Very curious indeed," wrote Marc Devokaitis, Public Information Specialist at Cornell Lab of Ornithology, in response to my inquiry. "A sort of pre-migratory congregation would have been my first thought." But, he went on to say that veery congregations during migration aren't common. His second thought was that this was a family unit. But, veeries have their second brood in mid-July and I didn't see any immature veeries. "Nice find," he finally wrote. "You've piqued my interest."



Veery with a Blueberry

At one time there were four veeries on this single blueberry shrub. At another time there were two robins. Still another time there were two catbirds, one of which I had noticed earlier carrying nesting material into the woods off the north side of the pond.

Circling the pond, I passed the rough-looking fringed loosestrife with its bright yellow blooms and Deptford pink with delicate, deep pink blooms balanced at the top of its stem. Continuing ahead, I noticed an eastern wood peewee, sitting poised on a high, exposed branch. Suddenly, it began to sing, – "pee-a-weee" - joining this veery-led chorus. Turning away from the peewee, I noticed a phoebe land on a picnic bench before it disappeared

into the woods.

I continued to circle the pond, and when I approached the small brook that leaves the pond, I looked up to my left and noticed a small bird flying to the dead branch of a tall spruce. It was a ruby-throated hummingbird. It continuously turned its head, its long slender beak pointing south and then north, and even upward. It remained on the branch for several minutes looking about as veery after veery darted back and forth among the trees and over the pond settling only briefly before beginning to sing.



Ruby-Throated Hummingbird

Turning from the hummingbird, I noticed a song sparrow on a shrub overlooking the pond. It sang its pretty song once as if to try it out against the simultaneous singing of many veeries. The song sparrow has a beautiful song that immediately brings to mind a broad marsh or swamp. But, several veeries singing together must be intimidating to any individual bird.



Song Sparrow

The veeries were active well past 6:00 pm. While some people collect individual bird sightings or flower sightings, I prefer my life list to contain images and experiences. The thrill of listening to several veeries singing over this lovely pond at Joe English Reservation during the early evening hours is certainly an experience that I'll remember for a long time.

A resident of Amherst, Tom Sileo is a Financial Advisor with a passion for the outdoors and local history. He has written hundreds of articles and columns on the outdoors and five books: *The Great Spirit of Horn Pond*, *Historical Guide to Open Space in Lexington*, *The Lexington Battlegreen*, *Rambling Through a Secular Bear Market* (on financial planning) and *Time Present and Time Past* (a novel). All photos were taken by the author on the property mentioned. You can follow his Nature Blog at www.newenglandrambles.com.

WEDDING



Concannon – Bartlett

Caroline T. Concannon of Amherst and Samuel A. Bartlett of Marshfield, MA were married at an outdoor ceremony performed by George Bartlett, father of the groom, at the Barn at Mount Hope Farm, Bristol, Rhode Island on October 11, 2014.

The bride is the daughter of Larry and Maryellen Concannon of Amherst and the bridegroom is the son of George and Olivia Bartlett of Marshfield, MA.

The bride was given in marriage by her father. The maid of honor was Amy Concannon of Amherst, sister of the bride. Other bridal attendants were Jessica Concannon of Amherst, sister of the bride and Martha Bartlett of Weymouth, MA, sister of the groom.

The best man was Juan Ortega of California. Groomsmen were Jonathan Ellenberger of Plymouth, MA and Matthew Trimble of Medford, MA.

A reception was held at the Barn at Mount Hope Farm, Bristol RI. After a honeymoon at Tall Timbers Lodge, the couple lives in Waltham, MA.

The bride graduated from Souhegan High School class of 2009 and graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in 2013. She is employed as a design quality engineer at Haemonetics, Braintree, MA.

The groom graduated from Marshfield High School class of 2008 and graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in 2012. He is employed as an environmental engineer at AECOM, Chelmsford, MA

ENGAGEMENT



Ferraro - Keane

The engagement of Courtney Ferraro, daughter of Mrs. Judith Ferraro of Amherst, and the late Mr. John Ferraro, to Garrett Patrick Keane, son of Garrett and Marcia Keane, of Newbury, formerly of Amherst is announced by the bride's mother.

The bride-to-be is a 2002 graduate of Souhegan High School. She attended Western Connecticut State University and received her degree in Public Health from Walden University. She is currently completing her Master's Degree in Health Education and Promotion and is employed by the State of New Hampshire, Division of Health and Human Resources as the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program Coordinator.

The groom-to-be is a 2001 graduate of New Hampton School. He received a Bachelor's Degree from Keene State College in Occupational Safety and Health. He is currently completing his Master's Degree in Occupational Safety and Health and is employed by Feeney Brothers Excavation as a Safety Manager.

They reside in Bedford, New Hampshire. An April, 2016 wedding is planned.

Please send Engagement and Wedding announcements (forms available at www.amherstcitizen.com) to Editor: The Amherst Citizen, PO Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031.

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► Caring for Parents in Old Age

continued from page 4

piece of land sufficient for a garden in some convenient place on the premises; allow pa cutting timber for building boards and shingles for his own use; provide a suitable family horse for the use of pa & wife at all times when they shall request it; and allow pa & wife to keep swine & fowls of all kinds on the premises at their own expense. Around this time, son John (who learned shoe-making at some point) was married and a daughter was born in Amherst. This family lease arrangement lasted only two years. In May 1809 the farm was conveyed to a merchant and a gentleman of Amherst Village for a mere \$430 (under financial duress, I suspect – maybe caused by those unspecified debts of the father?), who leased it back to pa Joseph.

Jumping ahead a decade, in April 1820, Joseph Nichols was taxed on 1 horse, 2 cows, 2 three-year-old [neat stock], and 1 two-year-old; and had half acre arable, 2a mowing, and 5a pasturing land but no land devoted to orchard. The following year, Joseph was only taxed for 1 poll so he paid the minimum: town & county taxes \$0.82 + school tax \$0.78 + tax for [Rev.] Mr. Barnard "B" [otherwise 19 cents was minimum] + tax for [Rev.] Mr. Lord "B" [otherwise minimum was 91 cents] + meeting house tax \$0.25 + state tax \$0.21 + highway tax \$1.04. Instead, his son Henry – who had somehow gained title to the family farm in 1820 – in 1821 was taxed on 1 horse, 2 cows, 3 three-year-olds as well as his poll and the real estate, for which he was assessed town & county taxes \$2.27 + school tax \$2.16 + tax for [Rev.] Mr. Barnard \$0.54 + tax for [Rev.] Mr. Lord \$2.52 + meeting house tax \$1.44 + state tax \$0.58 + highway

tax \$2.88.

In March 1822, Joseph negotiated his second life lease, this time with son Henry Nichols: Pa paid son \$600 (in form of mortgage for farm, 142:8) for which Henry was to provide for his father & his "present wife Polly Nichols" during the rest of their natural lives, letting them have the use & occupancy of half of the dwelling house, including the south fore room, equal privilege in the kitchen, also of the cellar & chambers; hauling & cutting up at their door sufficient firewood for their use; and of course providing suitable nursing & doctoring and at their decease a decent burial. The son had to follow one set of requirements until Dec. 1st, 1826, and a different set of conditions thereafter. During the initial period, Henry was further obligated to: bring unto J & P half of the produce of said farm of every description & income yearly to be delivered to their house in proper season and also to deliver half the income of the sheep kept on said farm; to find a horse & carriage for J & P to ride out on proper occasions; to let J & P have half of the swine & fowls raised on said farm, for which J & P were to find half the food. Henry was further bound to pay all the just debts of Joseph Nichols which were contracted as of 1822, but part of the deal was that Henry was "to have the labour of his brothers William & George Nichols while they shall be under the care & control of their father [that is, until the age of 21] for the purpose of helping Henry pay said debts now due."

After the 1st of December 1826, Henry was obligated: to deliver yearly to J & P 10 bushels of corn, 6 bushels of rye and in case there

was any wheat raised on said farm then 1.5 bushels of wheat to be paid with 4.5 bushels of rye instead of 6 bushels of rye, 28 bushels of potatoes, a half bushel of beans, half the garden sauce, one third of the cider and apples, 200 weight of fat pork, \$3 worth of beef or \$3 in money, and a half bushel of salt (or half that quantity to the survivor when one deceased); also to keep summer and winter one cow & 6 sheep yearly but in case of the decease of one of them to keep for the survivor only 3 sheep & the cow (the cow & sheep to be furnished by J & P); also to allow J & P the privilege of keeping fowls on said farm (but Henry would not have to supply their feed); and also to furnish or pay to J & P one third of the flax yearly if any was raised on the farm. But matters never got this far.

To give you a sense of how this convoluted saga ends: In August 1825, Henry Nichols "sold" the farm to his brother George in exchange for mortgage of \$600 on condition that George would "save harmless" his brother from bond or obligation given by Henry to their father Joseph Nichols "now living on the premises in Amherst." Henry & young family moved out of town. George too married and moved out of town, so Henry returned. The tax invoice of April 1827 indicates that Henry Nichols was cultivating half an acre arable land, 2a mowing, and 5a pasturing, and was taxed on 1 horse, 2 cows, 1 three-year-old neat stock, and wild land & bldgs valued \$40. In 1830, Henry's taxable livestock was 1 horse, 2 oxen, 2 cows. (At this time, sheep, hogs, and fowls were not yet taxed.) In September 1830, pa Joseph executed his third life lease (mortgage 166:524), with

yet another son, George Nichols of Lowell, Mass., a carpenter, similar to his earlier deal with son Henry. George did return to Amherst to take over the farm's management. George soon lost a chunk of the land to a creditor, seized by the sheriff per court execution, so in Oct. 1831 George quitclaimed the now 63-acre farm back to his brother Henry of Fishersfield (became Newbury in 1837), N.H., who again returned to the family farm. And in April 1832, Henry Nichols sold the 63-acre farm out of the family for \$300, and pa & wife moved out of Amherst to live with son.

One gets the sense that it was difficult to remain solvent while farming here. Remember the Hillsborough Bank founded in Amherst in 1806? It failed in 1809, causing plenty of folks including farmers to lose money. A neighbor of the Nichols family, Zaccheus Greeley who owned & occupied the farm next east (where his famous son Horace Greeley was born in 1811), abutting the Bedford town line, fled town in 1820 to avoid imprisonment for debts.

By the way, the deed chain for 106 Horace Greeley Road is an interesting example of genealogy via real estate deeds. This particular Nichols family flew under the genealogical radar (pardon me for using a 20th c. metaphor), but deeds reveals their location and occupation as well as names of wives (because when a married man sold property, his wife had to sign in token of relinquishing her right of dower, aka "power of thirds").