

As Incidence of Lyme Disease Increases, More Blue Hills Visitors at Risk

After contracting Lyme disease last fall, Westwood resident Elaine worries about getting sick if she returns to the Blue Hills. While we all can still enjoy the Blue Hills, Elaine's story will become ever more common as the incidence of Lyme disease continues to climb. A neighborhood that borders the Reservation reports that 30 households have 30 incidents of Lyme disease. We need to work together to make sure Elaine and everyone who loves the Blue Hills can continue to enjoy it.

Elaine Kerrigan used to love hiking in the Blue Hills. Though she has lived her whole life in Weymouth, just 10 minutes away from the park, she didn't start exploring here until she was in her thirties.

She always enjoyed exercising outdoors, so when she discovered how much fun she found hiking and cross-country skiing, the Blue Hills was a natural fit. She loved exploring different areas with her friends: starting at a different trailhead, exploring the Blue dot trail one day and Red dot the next.

That was before she contracted Lyme disease from a tick last October despite taking precautions. Elaine was always careful to avoid tick bites by wearing long pants, covering her arms with long sleeves, donning a hat and checking herself after her many walks. Still, she found herself one day unable to get out of bed and suffering from excruciating headaches and joints too painful to move. Eventually she found the

tell-tale bulls eye red mark that surrounds the bite of an infected tick bite and her doctor prescribed antibiotics that healed her.

She is back to her regular activities now but is reluctant to return to the park because she is concerned about getting so sick again. Knowing she couldn't help control Lyme disease by herself, she contacted the Friends of the Blue Hills and discovered that she's not alone. Many people who visit the Reservation want to protect themselves and their families from Lyme disease and its potentially devastating effects.

We appreciate your thoughts on how



This is not your grandparents' Blue Hills. When many of us were growing up, most people had never heard of Lyme disease. Now almost everyone knows someone who's had it. Elaine Kerrigan is one of them.

we can work together to reduce the risk of Lyme disease and protect the forests so that all visitors feel comfortable exploring the Blue Hills.

What are the symptoms of Lyme disease?

Massachusetts Representative David Linsky issued a report on Lyme disease that affirms that "the occurrence of Lyme disease has reached near epidemic proportions in Massachusetts." Even so, many doctors do not recognize the symptoms and often misdiagnose. Although you can still have Lyme disease without any of these symptoms, here are common symptoms to look for.

Early stage (days to weeks): Rash where the tick was attached. It often, but not always, starts as a small red area that spreads outward, clearing up in the center so it looks like

a donut. Flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache, stiff neck, sore and aching muscles and joints, fatigue and swollen glands may also occur.

Even though these symptoms may go away by themselves, treatment during the early stage prevents later, more serious problems.

Later stages (weeks to years): If untreated, people with Lyme disease can develop late-stage symptoms even if they never had a rash. The joints, nervous system and heart are most commonly affected.

Source: Mass Department of Public Health Lyme disease fact sheet.

What's Yellow and Black and Parties once a Year?

By John Walsh

Have you ever been beautifully dressed up with nowhere to go? Such is the life of the spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) which spends most of its life beneath ground emerging but for a brief time to mate before returning to its subterranean and solitary existence.

Unlike its more abundant and fully terrestrial relative, the red-backed salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*), the spotted is hard to overlook. A monster by comparison, stretching upwards of seven inches or more, the spotted possesses a striking black background punctuated with large yellow dots. The spotted has several notable close relatives all distinguished by a similar lifestyle. Commonly known as the mole salamanders in recognition of their below ground (or fossorial) existence, members of the family *Ambystomatidae* are unique to North America and are represented by a single genus comprising some 32 currently recognized species. However, only three of these are known to inhabit the Blue Hills. Along with the aforementioned spotted salamander, which is the most common of our local mole salamanders, the blue-spotted (*A. laterale*) and the marbled (*A. opacum*) may also be found in the Reservation. The blue-spotted is distinguished by possessing small blue spots or flecks on a dark background, an appearance reminiscent of vintage blue speckled enamelware. The marbled, as its name suggests is distinguished by having a stockier build with grey or white bands on a black background.

However, it's that party once a year that really sets these mole salamanders apart. With the first warm rains of early spring (typically late March through

April), these critters temporarily vacate their underground quarters during the night and clandestinely make their way to a nearby vernal pool. These pools typically form in depressions that fill with water during the fall and winter, yet are shallow enough to fully dry out as the summer goes along. By drying out completely, these pools thus are not able to sustain populations of fishes that might otherwise prey on tasty salamanders and their eggs. While this might be an effective mechanism to reduce fish predation, it means that salamanders are racing the clock. The race begins with the salamanders reaching these pools where the males place packets of sperm (spermatophores) on submerged surfaces followed by females who take up the spermatophores. The activity can get frenzied with these breeding congresses, as they are known, sometimes involving hundreds of individuals. The female then deposits the fertilized eggs in masses that can contain varying numbers of individual eggs depending upon the species. These egg masses can readily be distinguished from most other amphibian species as they have a smooth appearance due to a gelatinous cover. The masses may also take on a green coloration due to the growth of symbiotic algae that may both provide oxygen and camouflage for the developing eggs. Incubation typically lasts a month or so with the larvae undergoing a rapid metamorphosis in which the external gills of their aquatic stage give rise to the features needed for their terrestrial futures as mature salamanders. They then usually emerge from these drying pools during the summer months and then disperse to surrounding upland habitats. It should be noted that while this scenario is true for both the blue-spotted and spotted salamanders, their marbled cousins go



Photo by Jonathan Twining

through much the sequence but during the fall, instead of the spring and summer months. This strategy has its advantages resulting in an advanced state of growth for marbled larvae that overwinter in these pools allowing them to prey on their newly hatched relatives in the spring.

Like amphibians globally, our own populations are at risk. Although spotted salamander populations are relatively secure, the blue-spotted is listed as a species of Special Concern by the state of Massachusetts. The marbled is at even greater risk and is currently listed as Threatened by the state. This greater level of endangerment may, in part, reflect the fact that our state is at the northern limit of its natural geographic range. However, the range of threats to all of these critters is daunting. Leading the list is unquestionably habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation. Pollution including road runoff and acid precipitation, coupled with road kill as they migrate across roads on their way to breeding pools, also

(continued on page 4)

Calendar of Events

Pull and post this section of the Friends of the Blue Hills Newsletter and join us for some exciting events in the Blue Hills Reservation!

Spring 2012

▲ FBH sponsored event

Blue Hills Bird Walk

Sunday, April 1, 8:00 am

FBH joint walk with Brookline Bird Club. Several short hikes, each about one mile, the first of which is steep, to look for early spring migrants. Beginners are welcome. Bring binoculars and bird book. 4.5 hours. Meet at the small parking lot on Chickatawbut Road just off Randolph Ave. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

DCR Trailwatch Mountain Bike Rides

Saturday, April 7, 9:00 am and
Sunday, May 5, 9:00 am

Here's your chance to perfect your pedal power. Join the DCR Trailwatch volunteers on a series of introductory rides to acquaint you with the biking trails of the Blue Hills as we kick off the biking season. Bring your own bike. Helmet required. Eye protection and gloves recommended. Meet at the Houghton's Pond main lot. Registration required: 617-698-1802. Space is limited.

Park Serve Day

Saturday, April 21, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Lend a hand for DCR Park Serve Day. Join us to spruce up the trails. Includes a hike to the work sites. Wear long pants and gloves. Tools, water, snacks and lunch provided. Email trailwork@FriendsOfTheBlueHills.org for registration and meeting place. ▲

Blue Hill Section Hike

Sunday, April 22, 10:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. 7 mile hike on a variety of trails, some steep, including Skyline Trail with views. 5.5 hours. Meet at Houghton's Pond lot. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Blue Hills Skyline Figure-Eight

Sunday, April 28, 1:00 pm

Join us for a rugged 5 mile figure-eight trek over the skyline trail to the top of Great Blue Hill and then to Buck Hill and back. Sturdy hiking boots required. Bring a snack and a water bottle. Ages 15 and up. 4 hours. Email Raymond.FMcKinnon@state.ma.us for registration & meeting place. Space is limited.

Rockin' in the Park

Saturday, May 5, 1:00 pm

Join Friends of the Blue Hills and Les Tyralla, a registered geologist, as we explore the bedrock and glacial features of Great Blue Hill. Learn the secrets of stone on this moderately strenuous hike over rocky terrain. Sturdy footgear required. Space is limited. 1.5 hours. Email Raymond.FMcKinnon@state.ma.us for registration and meeting place. ▲

Blue Hill Observatory & Science Center Open House & Kite Festival

Saturday, May 12, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Enjoy the amazing view, fascinating history and fun activities at the oldest continually operating Weather Observatory in the country. Join us for an open house and fun fest for all ages. Free admission to events. Donation for materials for some activities. For details and parking information, call (617) 696-0562. Rain or shine. Learn more at www.bluehill.org.

Fowl Meadow Bird Walk

Saturday, May 5, 7:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. Beginner's Bird Walk, 3 miles. Learn to bird. See common & rare species at height of spring migration. Bring binoculars and bird book. 3.5 hours. Meet at Paul's Bridge parking lot on Neponset Valley Pkwy. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Trailside Museum

Creepy Crawly Days

Saturday May 12 & Sunday May 13
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Snakes, bugs and worms, oh my! Hop, slither or slide your way to Trailside Museum to learn about some of nature's most misunderstood animals. Live animal exhibits, fun bug hunts, and crafts are just a few of the activities planned for the weekend. You may arrive saying, "Eeww or Yuck!", but you'll leave saying "Oh, that's really cool!" Don't miss Creepy Crawlies Day at Blue Hills Trailside Museum. Pre-registration is not required. Program admission: Child: \$4 Adult: \$4.

Calendar of Events (2)

Fowl Meadow Bird Walk

Saturday, May 19, 8:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. Beginner's Bird Walk, 3 miles. Learn to bird by listening for and identifying late migrant and nesting species in the best birding area in the Blue Hills. Bring binoculars and bird book if you have one. 3.5 hours. Meet at Paul's Bridge parking lot on Neponset Valley Pkwy. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Green Up the Blue Hills

Sunday, May 20, 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Join the Friends of the Blue Hills and the Appalachian Mountain Club to help keep the forests healthy for people, plants and animals. For more info visit www.FriendsoftheBlueHills.org Meet at Temple Beth David at 1060 Randolph St. in Canton. Email info@FriendsoftheBlueHills.org or call 781-828-1805 for registration. ▲

Wildflower Hike

Saturday, May 26, 10:00 am

FBH joint hike with AMC. 8 mile hike in eastern section viewing wildflowers and climbing scenic hills, some steep, including the new trail along the restored Blue Hill Reservoir. 6 hours. Meet at Shea Ice Rink. Leader: Steve Olanoff, 781-326-6585. ▲

Salamander (continued from page 3)

add significantly to the toll. Climate change and mosquito control methods that act to reduce potential food sources for the salamander may add to the burden. Although vernal pools and associated wetlands do offer some degree of legal protection with additional protection afforded species such as the blue-spotted or marbled under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, this may not be enough. Research, for example, has indicated that while many of these salamanders spend most of their lives within a few hundred feet of their breeding pools, many others may travel from thousands of feet away. Thus, not only must such pools be recognized and protected, but significant swaths of adjoining upland

habitat may require similar protective measures as well to be fully effective.

In any case, if this spring you are all dressed up and ready for a night on the town yet find your plans dampened by wet weather, take heart for in scattered vernal pools and wetlands throughout the Blue Hills the party is just beginning.

Give the Gift that Costs Nothing During Your Lifetime.



Photo by Terilyn Elibero

Thank you for remembering the Friends of the Blue Hills in your will.

The Friends of the Blue Hills newsletter is produced four times a year.

Editors: Sue Christensen, Judy Jacobs,

Layout: Owen Hartford

Visit us on the web at www.FriendsoftheBlueHills.org or call 781-828-1805 for membership, maps and schedule information.
PO Box 416, Milton, MA 02186

YES! I want to protect the Blue Hills Reservation!

I want to become a Friends of the Blue Hills member

(Please choose one of the following:)

Personal: Individual \$25 Family \$45 Senior \$20

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The Blue Hills Reservation: We're In It Together...



Why not explore the Blue Hills on Wheels?

By Steve Cobble

I always introduce new riders to the park with, "Nothing flat about the Blue Hills"....

That's what I love about it. Lots of ups and downs. Climbing builds strength and tenacity, and descents keep me focused on what's down the trail. Ascending to the top of Buck Hill gives me that great sense of accomplishment and a worldwide view. Riding down that same trail, and having lived through it has made me a better rider.

There are many miles of trail in the Blue Hills open to bikes with fast doubletrack, a selection of fun singletrack, and a few quite rocky trails to practice your technique and session with friends. Grab a map the Blue Hills Headquarters on Hillside Street, Milton to negotiate the many intersections you will encounter. There is a small free one for bikers and larger color/topo map that shows the entire reservation for a \$2.00 donation to the Trailside Museum. Every major intersection has a number on a tree that coincides with the map. Keep in mind that when you're looking at the number sign, you're looking north.

An easy way to get to know the Blue Hills is to follow the arrows along two loops which both start at the main lot at Houghton's Pond on Hillside street. Look for the 'Welcome Mountain Bikers' kiosk in the front row of the lot. White arrows take you on about five miles along the south side of Hillside street. You will not encounter any huge hills here, but the loop is challenging nonetheless. The loose gravelly old carriage paths will keep you honest and encourage you to stay upright.

Yellow arrows cross the street at Blue Hills Headquarters and send you immediately on a half mile climb to BreakNeck Ledge. This 'eliminator'

warm-up up Wolcott Path will determine who can hang and is always more fun in a group. But if you hang in there, you'll enjoy another four miles that will get your blood flowing nicely. Each loop will take you from 35 minutes to 1 hour, depending on your fitness level. Neither is very technical, and the terrain is mostly loose gravel and hardpack.

Keep in mind a few things on this loop. This trail is a very popular trail for hikers, dog walkers, and school field trips, so look WAY ahead before letting go of the brakes. The arrowed loops are only signed in one direction but once you get to to know them, try them backwards. If you decide to exit down Wolcott Path at the end of a ride, there are a few overly-enthusiastic waterbars that will take you out at speed, so be careful. If you stay on the yellow, take a hard left just after the last yellow arrow pointing right (you'll see the street below), to follow that side-hill trail all the way back to the street. You'll end up right across from the lot, and it's a much nicer finish than riding the road back. The last little technical, downhill, rocky 'groove' section dumps you out onto the side of the road in the opposite direction of traffic, so again, use caution!

Another fun area to ride in the park is the Ponkapoag section where the green dot loop is now open to bikes. Experienced riders will appreciate the time to 'spin' on the dirt road sections,



Photo by Philip Keyes

while beginners and families will enjoy a loop is relatively flat and wide.

Blue Hills is open to mountain biking all year with the exception of March which is mud season. Check the dedicated DCR mountain biking map for other trails that are open to bikes. There are some trails which are off-limits to riding and would be impossible for most mortal riders, but there are plenty of places to explore here. Oh, did I mention that you'll be climbing some hills?

Steve Cobble is an FBH member and president of the Southeast Mass Chapter of the New England Mountain Bike Association. You can reach him at stevec@semassnemba.org.

Join FBH and a geologist for Rockin' in the Park

May 5, 1:00 pm (see calendar for details.)

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Every little bit helps... join us to Green-up the Blue Hills,
Sunday, May 20. (See calendar for details.)



Friends of the Blue Hills.
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