

# RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST

# NEWSLETTER

The Worlds Around Us...

## URSUS LEVERETTUS

Dave Field saw one last fall in the Gibavic field along Montague and Rattlesnake Gutter roads. A Northampton man came upon one about the same time in the brush at the back end of Sharlu Farm. One came up onto the back porch of a North Leverett resident to munch on birdseed. There have been recent sightings around Richardson Road, and a Leverett woman was "surprised" not very long ago to find one peering into her bathroom window as she took a shower.

It's Spring. They're out of their dens and roaming around.

Bears. Black bears. In Leverett.

### BEAR NECESSITIES

Favoring wooded wetlands, swamps, and mixed hardwood and conifer forests with dense bushes near ponds and streams, black bears are an impressive sight, if you happen to be lucky enough to spot one.

Dark brown to black with a light brown muzzle, male black bears can weigh as much as 400 pounds, females up to half that. They have good eyesight and hearing, but rely primarily on their excellent sense of smell to locate food and recognize potential danger. Fast and agile--these hefty bruins climb trees with surprising alacrity and can reach speeds of 25 to 30 miles per hour over short distances--they are also intelligent animals with good memories, who find their way back home no matter how far they've been taken, and who can recall the location of plentiful, but periodic food sources several years after their first visit.

Indeed, when it comes to eating, black bears may have only one peer among the larger mammals. Like

humans, they can and will eat almost anything. Depending upon the season, bears will sup on grass, bulbs, roots, cattails, jack-in-the-pulpit, skunk cabbage, jewelweed, berries, ants, grubs, beetles, carrion, black cherries, choke cherries, hickory nuts, hazel nuts, and acorns, to name but a few of the items on a typical ursine menu. And if supplies run low in the woods, black bears are happy to take advantage of the corn, fruit, squash, honey, and birdseed that humans so obligingly leave out for them.

Generally active during the day (although they will take a turn in the evening around campsites or dumps where food can be found), bears are loners, rarely grouping together. Females spend most of their time with their cubs in an area no more than three square miles. Male black bears, on the other hand, are great roamers who, when they get it into their heads to move along, can easily cover 25 or 30 miles a day. Individual black bears have been known to regularly travel hundreds of miles away and then saunter back home at their leisure. One Conway bear decked out in a fashionable radio collar spent a recent summer loping north to Stratton, Vermont, then south to Hartford, Connecticut, then across the Hudson River in New York, before ambling back to Conway.

Like their distant cousin, the famous Baloo Bear, New England's black bears enjoy life to the fullest, spending the spring and summer eating, sleeping, lying out in the sun, splashing in streams and waterfalls, gorging themselves on blueberries, and generally having a good time. In mid-October they begin to hunt out dens--not the caves or earth burrows that may come to mind, but piles of brush that they burrow under and line with hay, grass, or leaves. There

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they will spend the winter, coming out again in April to bear cubs or take off for new adventures in parts unknown.

### A BEAR CENSUS

What makes the recent, increasing sightings of black bears in Leverett so notable is that their ancestors left our neck of the woods quite some time ago. Hunted as pests by early settlers in the Pioneer Valley and elsewhere, their forest habitats turned into farmland, by the end of the nineteenth century black bears had virtually disappeared from most of New England. It was not until the 1950s, and the regrowth of New England forests, that black bears began a cautious comeback into the state. As recently as the early 1970s, biologists estimate that there were perhaps only three dozen bears in all of western Massachusetts.

By the mid 1980s, however, that number had increased to 500 animals. Today, bear watchers estimate that the black bear population of western Massachusetts has climbed to over 1,500. Bears are now broadly established in the area west of the Connecticut River and, in the past several years, have begun to set up housekeeping in Franklin, Hampshire, and Worcester counties.

Without natural predators, bear mortality is primarily a function of hunting (131 bears taken in Massachusetts last year), and of unpleasant encounters with motor vehicles. While these do take their toll, and while bear reproductive rates are low--two to four cubs every two to four years--the ample woodlands and reliable food supplies of western Massachusetts should keep the bear population rising.

Northampton and the towns stretching west along Route 9 have had numerous bear sightings in recent years. There have been bears seen in Deerfield and Turners Falls. A few weeks ago a woman in Greenfield discovered four bears on her front lawn. And now Leverett can once more add black bears to its roster of citizens.

Ethan Howard of North Leverett, one of the region's foremost experts on bears and a longtime participant in the University of Massachusetts black bear monitoring project, suspects that up to 10 black bears are now active in the Leverett-Shutesbury-Montague-Wendell forests, and he predicts that more are on their way.

### WALK, DON'T RUN

So, don't be surprised if you and a bear have a close encounter one of these days. Black bears are not aggressive by nature. Their natural reaction when human beings are tromping around is to retreat. In fact, since they are almost sure to be aware of you before you are aware of them, there's a good chance that they will move out of your way before you even realize there is a bear in the vicinity.

If a bear is wounded, however, or provoked, or if you come upon a female with cubs, discretion is very much the better part of valor. Should you and a bear find one another face to face, don't run. Back away slowly. If the bear comes toward you, make a lot of noise and motion with your arms and hands. This will lead the bear to fall down laughing and you can depart in a dignified manner.

When you get home, make sure you're not keeping food for the dog or cat out on your back porch, an invitation one Leverett bear has already accepted. And keep bird feeders away from your house or you may find a big brown furry thing spitting sunflower seeds onto your front steps.

Just remember, there are some new folks in town. They'll probably take some getting used to. They may even cause a little ruckuss from time to time. But if we give them the benefit of the doubt, they'll probably do the same for us.

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### BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Current trustees and the year of their term's expiration:

Priscilla Greeley	1999
Matthew Kelty	1997 (on leave)
Gordon King	Emeritus
Annette Gibavic	1999
Kathryn Addelson	1997 (on leave)
Albert Shane	1999
David Field	Emeritus
Stephen Weiss	1997
Roberta Bannister	1998
Evelyn Schuyler	1998
Steven Schmidt	1998
Brooke Thomas	1998
Carlyle Field	1999
Glen Ayers	1999

**TREASURER'S REPORT**  
January 1, 1995 to December 31, 1995

<b>Income</b>	
Cards	643.90
Contributions	829.00
Interest Earned	310.08
Memberships	1,472.00
Recycle	2,516.90
T-shirts	533.00
Dividend income	<u>365.28</u>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>6,670.16</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Cost of goods	1,687.13
Dues	6.00
Miscellaneous	39.99
Postage	230.08
Services	92.50
Supplies	68.19
Travel	<u>18.00</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>2,141.89</b>
<b>Balance</b>	<b>4,528.27</b>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>21,452.48</b>

**1996 ANNUAL MEETING**

On April 13, RGT held its annual meeting at the Leverett Transfer Station, better known as The Dump. Gray skies threatened, but the rain held off and we were able to complete the meeting's program, the main event being the Coronation of our Redemption Kings, David Field and Gordon King.

These two gentlemen have made enormous contributions to the Trust's efforts over the years. Both have served as active Trustees since RGT's formation in 1987. Both have accomplished much on behalf of the Trust. Both have worked tirelessly to move us toward our goal, the preservation of special places in Leverett.

Dave headed up the sub-committee which laid the groundwork for the easement on Laurel Hill and, thereby, provided the Trust's initial experience with conservation restrictions. He was very involved in the preservation of Long Hill, and he continues to refine and improve the public areas around Leverett Pond. We salute Dave for his many hours of service to the town and to the Trust.

Gordon King, RGT's first chairperson, has given countless hours and extraordinary good nature to RGT's main fund-raising vehicle, the returnables col-

lection at the Transfer Station. Gordon, recently assisted by Charlie Good and Carlyle Field, sorts, boxes and bags the refundable cans and bottles you all donate to the Trust. He transports truckload after truckload to facilities such as the redemption center in Palmer and then monitors the payments made to the Trust by these facilities. Largely due to his efforts, the Trust has received over \$15,000.

Many people contributed to our gala on April 13, chief among them Brooke Thomas, who directed and produced the Coronation with Steve Adams. Steve also served as the Master of Ceremonies. Cynthia Thomas, Jean Bergstrom, Shirley Thomas, and Georgette Healy created the Dumpettes, a comedic chorus complete with somewhat original musical compositions performed for our amusement and enlightenment. The Gypsy Wranglers provided live music to accompany the merriment. Roy Kimmel volunteered his vintage Ford to serve as Coronation Coach. Natalia Wobst, Cindy Mathews, Elizabeth Sheldon, and Leah Anaya were the Dump Rats.

Twenty-five Valley merchants donated prizes for the Grand Gutter Raffle while Stop & Shop provided refreshments. Raffle prizes were solicited by Perky Greeley, Evelyn Schuyler, and Jane Croston.

The Trust's business meeting followed the Coronation. New Trustees Glen Ayers and Carlyle Field were elected to the Board while Perky Greeley, Annette Gibavic, and Al Shane were re-elected.

The Trust thanks all of those who helped make the 1996 Annual Meeting such a success. A video of the festivities, taped by Mitch Mulholland, is available at the Leverett Library.

**1996 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE**

New members wanted! Old members, let us know you're still with us!

If you wish to become an RGT member or to renew your membership, complete the application below, clip and send with your annual dues (\$5.00 for adults, \$1.00 for children) to:

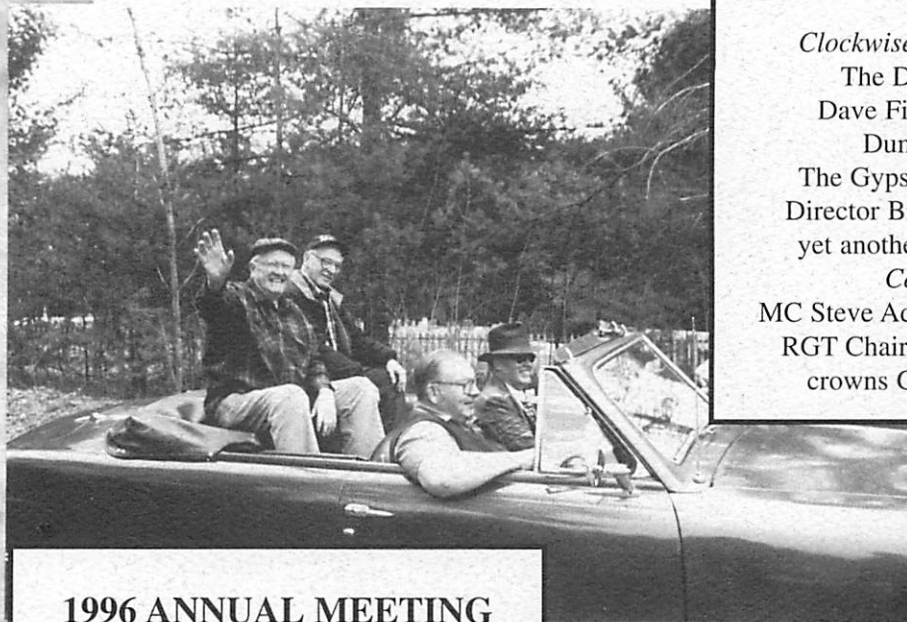
**RATTLESNAKE GUTTER TRUST**

P. O. Box 195

Leverett, MA 01054

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

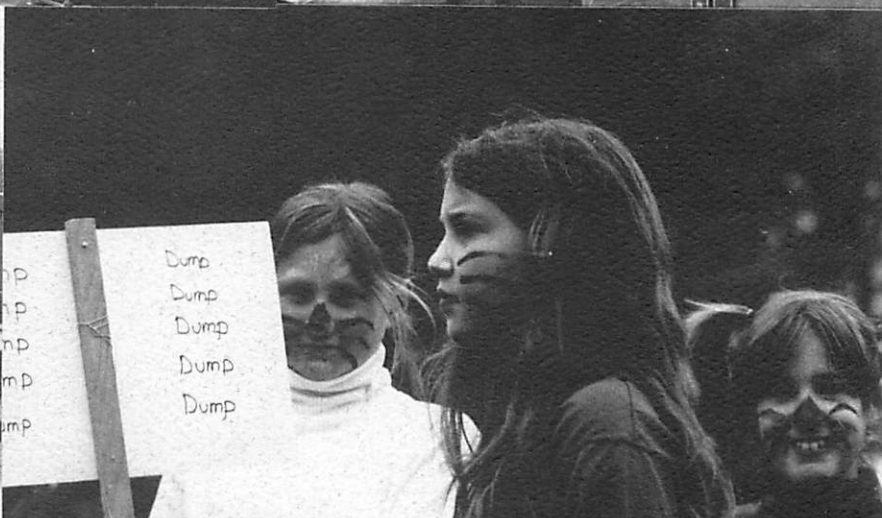


*Clockwise from below:*  
 The Dumpettes;  
 Dave Field at work;  
 Dump Rats;  
 The Gypsy Wranglers;  
 Director Brooke Thomas;  
 yet another Dump Rat.

*Center:*

MC Steve Adams looks on as  
 RGT Chair Steve Schmidt  
 crowns Gordon King

## 1996 ANNUAL MEETING THE CORONATION OF THE DUMP KINGS



## THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL VALUE

*Over all, rocks, wood, and water, brooded the spirit of repose, and the silent energy of nature stirred the soul to its inmost depths.*

*Thomas Cole, 1835*

In the struggle to keep our air and water clean, to preserve open space, to protect wetlands, conserve watersheds, set aside wildlife refuges, and save endangered species, conservationists and preservationists have increasingly relied on cost-benefit analysis as a way of persuading legislators, voters, and fellow citizens of the value of protecting and preserving the natural environment.

This cost-benefit analysis attempts to show that there are practical, technologically-verified, dollars-and-cents reasons for guarding natural climatic regulators, for maintaining biodiversity, or for keeping farmland from residential development.

This approach not only has brought important scientific conclusions to the attention of policy makers and given the environmental movement a "no nonsense" image, it has enlightened ordinary citizens and helped direct effort and resources to where they are needed most.

In the rush to bolster our claims for environmental protection with the weapons of business and science, however, we are in danger of allowing a more fundamental value to become obscured, or even to fall into contempt.

I think it is safe to say that the most central motivation for those of us who wish to see our environment nurtured and protected is not scientific conclusion--as valuable as science is to the environmental movement, or a calculation of gain and loss--as important as those calculations may be, but the very real connection we feel, individually, with the natural world.

In recent years those inchoate feelings of awe, beauty, and mystery in the human encounter with a soaring hawk, or a blade of grass, have become the subject of inquiry by biologists and other scientists who have coined the term "biophilia" to describe the "innate emotional affiliation of human beings to other living organisms."

Biophilia, says Stephen R. Kellert, an environment studies professor at Yale University, and co-editor with Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson of The Biophilia Hypothesis, is the legacy of 100,000 generations of human beings living in the natural world. As Wilson explains, "For more than 99 per cent of human history, people have lived in hunter-gatherer bands" in intimate contact with nature. "In short," he goes on, "the brain evolved in a biocentric world, not a machine-regulated world.... It seems possible that the naturalist's vision is only a specialized production of a biophilic instinct shared by all."

I would suggest that the instinct Kellert and Wilson are talking about goes even beyond an affinity between human beings and other living creatures, to an essential relationship between human beings and all aspects of the natural world.

There are those who denigrate this idea, who scoff at the notion that such feelings are real or have palpable value. They reject the concept that economic development should in any way be moderated by the human need to be part of a natural world without shopping malls, houses, automobile fumes, or lawnmowers.

I am not, by nature, a spiritual person. I am uncomfortable with the view that nature is somehow "sacred," that it is anything other than an intricate, complex interaction of physical forces. At the same time, I am convinced beyond any doubt, that the emotions that human beings experience when we confront the natural world are true and meaningful. Difficult to define, this relationship between human beings and the environment that surrounds us has been, and will always be, the most fundamental value we can uphold.

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In Crossing Open Ground, the naturalist Barry Lopez speaks to the reality and importance of this connection between humans and the natural world from which we emerged:

*I do not know, really, how we'll survive without places like the Inner Gorge of the Grand Canyon to visit. Once in a lifetime, even, is enough. To feel the stripping down, an ebb of the press of conventional time, a radical change of proportion... that elicits keen emotional pleasure, a quick, intimate pounding of the heart.*

*Some parts of the trip will emerge one day on an album. Others will be found in a gesture of friendship to some stranger in an airport, in a letter of outrage to a planner of dams, in a note of gratitude to nameless faces in the Park Service, in wondering at the relatives of the ubiquitous wren, in the belief, passed on in whatever fashion -- a photograph, a chord, a sketch -- that nature can heal.*

*The living of life, any life, involves great and private pain, much of which we share with no one. In such places as the Inner Gorge the pain trails away from us. It is not so quiet there or so removed that you can hear yourself think, that you would even wish to; that comes later. You can hear your heart beat. That comes first.*

Stephen Weiss

**1996 Membership Drive**  
**JOIN FOR THE FIRST TIME!**  
**RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP NOW!**  
Fill out the application on page 3 today!

Rattlesnake Gutter Trust  
P. O. Box 195  
Leverett, Massachusetts 01054

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