

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BHHT Column, exclusive to Penobscot Bay Press

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Exploring the Peninsula: Stargazing in Sedgwick

by Bonnie Copper, volunteer with Blue Hill Heritage Trust

Nearly 50 people gathered at Blue Hill Heritage Trust's blueberry field at Cooper Farm on Caterpillar Hill in Sedgwick on Monday night, August 25th. It was a clear, moonless (new moon) evening. . .perfect for stargazing.

Charlotte Clews, avid star gazer and naturalist--and former Stewardship Coordinator for Blue Hill Heritage Trust, guided the tour through the stars, planets and constellations. This event was organized by BHHT and is a part of "Exploring the Peninsula," our ongoing series of outdoor activities this year.

The first star to appear was Arcturus. It is the fourth brightest star in the sky. Arcturus is one of 21 stars with a zero or one magnitude. Along most of the East Coast one can pick out around 350 stars with the naked eye, although on a clear night in a dark place like downeast Maine one can view as many as 2,000 stars at a time. We are fortunate to live here in downeast Maine where we have a dark sky due to less "light pollution." As the sky became darker, the Milky Way came into view. Because other areas of our country have so much artificial light at night, the Milky Way is rarely visible on the east coast from Portsmouth, NH all the way to Key West, FL, according to Clews. The importance of dark skies is becoming more well known, both for people's connection to the natural environment and for the animals who use the night sky for navigation. Songbirds use the stars to tell where to fly on their annual migrations, and more are becoming disoriented by the lights of our big cities.

Charlotte, moonlighting as a Jedi knight, used a bright laser to point out the planets Mars (yes, it does appear to be red) and Saturn, which is just above it. Constellations slowly moved around the North Star. Did you know that the Big Dipper is not a constellation but rather an "asterism"--a part of a larger constellation? It is a part of Ursa Major, also known as the Great Bear. The Summer Triangle, consisting of Vega in Lyra (the lyre), Altair in Aquila (the eagle), and Deneb in Cygnus (the swan), was very visible. There were planes, satellites, and shooting stars (perhaps some remnants of the Perseid meteor shower) also crossing the night sky. Some constellations did not appear in the late August sky. Charlotte said that different constellations would be visible at 5 am in the morning or in the winter sky.

It was also a night to become immersed in ancient mythology. People long before us have been looking at the night sky and creating stories about the placement of the stars and how they came to be there. Charlotte shared many tales, including the myths of Cepheus, Perseus, Andromeda and Cassiopeia.

The group lay down on blankets or sat in low lawn chairs and enjoyed the quiet of the warm summer evening as Charlotte shared her stories. A recently formed 4-H group from Blue Hill also joined the onlookers. The Blue Hill 4-H STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) is made up of middle school age girls and boys from around our peninsula. They are interested in science activities and the choice of topics is driven by them. "Last night was awesome" is a sentiment shared by all there--visitors from away, summer people, and locals alike.

For a complete list of BHHT's programs for children and adults, visit our website: bluehillheritagetrust.org.

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UPCOMING PROGRAMS:

*Mushroom ID Workshop (members only)
with David Porter
Sat., September 27 from 1-4 pm
BHHT's Carleton House, Blue Hill

**Please pre-register for the above program by contacting Eileen at 374-5118 or eileen@bluehillheritagetrust.org. Limited space; pre-registration required.

Mushroom walk & talk
with David Porter
Sun., September 28 from 1-3 pm
Greenbie Natural Area, Castine

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