

HILLTOPPER

Ralph Perkins & Joan Ebbeson, editors
Ann Paulson & Jan Hostage, photographers
Fay Bronstein, Book Buzz

Send your news, views and photos to rlphprkns@yahoo.com or cubby #1. Thank you to all our friendly neighbors who continue to smile and graciously allow us to take their photos.

COMING EVENTS

House Committee Chair Linda Colby hopes and expects Hilltop monthly social events will resume in time for the annual summer party. Meanwhile, watch the bulletin board for updates or for announcement of short-notice outdoor events.

Friday, April 9, 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

The Center for the Arts will host a virtual poetry night featuring the winners of this year's poetry contest and past NH Poet Laureate Marie Harris. Info and access via website: www.centerfortheartsnh.com

Thursday, April 15

Hilltop Greenhouse opens. Contact J.L. Tonner for info and/or to reserve space (526-6858).



"I think we consider too much the luck of the early bird and not enough the bad luck of the early worm."

— Franklin D. Roosevelt



SPRING REBOOT

This year it's a lot more than just the usual exchange of snow boots for wellies! Some of the group activities we've missed for the past year are starting to sprout up again along with the daffodils and the dandelions. Please note that current Hilltop policy is to limit events to individuals who are **fully vaccinated** (i.e., those who have completed their course of injections followed by a two-week effectiveness interval). Please bring a mask and stay distanced from others while enjoying the camaraderie.

- Hilltop Book Group will get together (first time in over a year) on Thursday, May 20, at 2 p.m. to discuss **The Secret Keeper** by Kate Morton. Books will be available at Hilltop House in mid-April.
- Tuesday Craft Group morning meetings are taking place at Sue Hammond's Unit 71 for now. Social distancing is in practice.
- Hilltop Madrigals early music group will resume weekly Friday morning sessions on April 21. Call Joan for details (207-592-3057).
- There are no plans yet to resume the Mahjong group, but watch for future notices. Kathy James points out that the nature of the game requires players to be in close proximity. Play will resume when conditions are suitable and safe.

See Peeps "In Person" Newport's Library Arts Center will display entries to its 10th Annual Peeps Diorama Contest both at its gallery (with COVID precautions) and online April 2 - 31. Always a fun display!

Virtual Chorale Kearsarge Chorale's Spring Virtual Concert will be available at website kearsargechorale.org beginning Sunday, April 25. This is the second concert blended from individual recordings by singers at their homes. Hilltoppers Joan Ebbeson, Nina Rogers and Suzanne Todd are among them.

Where at Hilltop? Phyllis Piotrow challenges you to identify where at Hilltop images of four fishes are in plain view. She will post the answer on the Hilltop bulletin board.

Ralph's Field Notes: Ick!

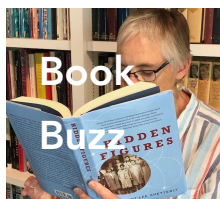
I remember my grandmother, who had a farm and vegetable stand, pointing out to her small grandson one of the first signs of spring: worms on the wet street. "See? The ground's too wet so they have to come up for air. That means the frost's out of the ground, so it's time to plant." To a little kid interested in bugs and stuff, this was a great discovery! Flash forward to Hilltop, and I still look forward to seeing them.

The world has 5000+ kinds of earthworms, ranging from 20-foot "monsters" in South Africa to tiny microworms, which I still raise today to feed my tropical fish. NH is in an odd position with 16 recorded alien kinds; all native worms were wiped out by the ice ages, though about 250 kinds reside south of New England. The only kind of earthworm you'll likely see around Hilltop is the common "nightcrawler" or "lobworm" with a maximum size of 14", a non-native invasive. Earthworms are hermaphrodites - each worm is both sexes - putting a few eggs in each of many 1/4 inch "cocoons", from which they hatch in a few weeks. Earthworms are basically long tubes with up to 200 segments, each with a pair of bristles for traction. They eat whatever their tiny mouths can hold - bugs, protozoans, dirt, etc. - but mostly plant parts. Small leaves may be pulled whole into their burrows to be eaten later.

Now to the good and the bad: Earthworms are food for lots of birds, frogs, shrews, etc. Their ceaseless tunneling aerates the soil, breaks up compacting, mixes it, helps it absorb water, and on and on. On the other hand, they do this at the expense of destroying the forest "duff" layer - leaves, sticks and other plant parts. Scientists have compared numbers of bugs, wildflowers, fungi, sprouting trees, salamanders and ground birds and have found far fewer where earthworms are about. On the third hand, University of Vermont scientists are studying how much carbon (in the form of plant parts) is sequestered underground vs. into the air as CO₂.



A Sunny Afternoon found Ruth, Lansing, Diane, Henry, Gilbert (with Piper) and Diana out walking...and smiling.



Book Buzz writer: Fay Bronstein wants to hear about what you're reading and what you'd like to share about it. Please leave your contributions and comments in her cubby #36.

I have always been an avid newspaper reader so it's no surprise that my morning ritual goes like this: check to see where the Valley News has landed, strip off its plastic cover, place it on the table beside my morning coffee, first scan, then read.

If Margaret Sullivan, the media columnist for the Washington Post, is correct, local newspapers like the Valley News are a vanishing breed. Her book **Ghosting the News** paints a dismal picture of the future of our newspapers, victims of technology, loss of advertising, and fewer subscribers. Some examples: Between 2008 and 2017 American newspapers cut 45% of their newsroom staff and more than 2,000 newspapers have closed since 2004. Local newspapers have been especially hard hit. Sullivan believes that this erosion of print journalism substantially weakens our democracy. Less information translates into more corruption, abuse of power and fewer voters.

While the story of a diminished press may not be news, it is worth reading and thinking about the connection between a professional free press and our democracy. It also makes a case for supporting our local newspapers wherever they exist. *FB*

A new animal in NH, and perhaps someday at Hilltop, is the jumping worm from Asia. When poked, it rapidly slithers and hops about. It also eats the forest duff layer much more quickly. Slightly smaller than the nightcrawler, it's annual (only eggs overwinter), and it differs in that it has an off-white band (clitellum).

Charles Darwin concluded his last book (1881's **The Formation of Vegetable Mold Through the Action of Worms**) with the famous quote "It may be doubted if there are any other animals which have played such an important part in the history of the world than these lowly, organized creatures."

Good or bad, earthworms are here to stay. However, we don't need those nightmarish jumping worms.

