

The Chestnut Challenge

In September UVLT challenged YOU to get out to Smith Pond and identify American Chestnut trees growing on the property using the iNaturalist app! You answered our call to action. Here are the results.



On August 28th UVLT's Vice President of Stewardship and Strategic Initiatives held a public lecture on American Chestnut trees at the Enfield Public Works Building. UVLT staff had found evidence of the rare trees on our Smith Pond Shaker Forest Conservation Area and thought that there might be more out there to find. The lecture ended with a call to action for citizen scientists to use an identification and mapping app called iNaturalist to help locate and identify American Chestnuts on the property.

The public was interested - asking lots of questions and excited to hear that American Chestnuts were alive and well on our property. In six weeks, five individuals have located 16 American Chestnut trees on the Smith Pond Shaker Forest property or nearby. One group of three people made 10 observations in a single day! Those folks have won the Chestnut Challenge! Thank you to the iNaturalist team Curmudg!



There were three distinct groups of mature trees found on the property, and two seedlings that were found not near any as yet identified mature trees. Tree size ranged from seedlings, to one young tree, and up to at least seven mature trees. The largest tree so far identified on the property is seven inches in diameter and 35 feet high. Five of the trees identified were 25 feet and higher. At least five trees were found to be producing nuts.

The American Chestnut Foundation has shown an interest in visiting Smith Pond Shaker Forest to take samples to definitively confirm that these trees are American Chestnuts and to see if the nuts they produce are viable. The one sample that we have taken of the seeds showed nuts that were shriveled and floated when placed in water, indicating that they may not be viable. However, only one sample was taken so other trees may be producing viable nuts.



Given the number of individual trees found in a relatively short search time and in multiple locations that were easy to reach, we expect that we will find many more American Chestnut Trees on the property.

The multiple groups of several mature trees is a good sign that the trees are pollinating and potentially producing viable seeds. All of the information we have collected so far is encouraging and we eagerly anticipate spending more time out at Smith Pond next year searching for American Chestnuts!