The Hadley Mountain fire tower in sunnier weather. Photo by Dave Gibson

Sunday’s Bird Walk at Hadley Mountain (a part of our Adirondack Forest Preserve near the Warren-Saratoga County line) was a wash-out. Linda Champagne, intrepid newsletter editor for the Hadley Firetower Committee, was the exception. As we walked up the trail a ways, the drumbeat of rain on our heads slowed, and the migratory birds breeding and raising young here could not help themselves. They sang not for our sake but for the life force that seizes and keeps a territory, and a mate in the right habitat, with the right food for that species and its nestlings.

From the parking lot we heard the incessant song of red-eyed vireo; then a veery; an ovenbird; then a hermit thrush. The rain picked-up again, all song was drowned-out, and we headed back to the parking lot. On the way down, I noticed a red eft salamander crossing the trail. These are the dramatically changed terrestrial stage of the common newt or yellow spotted salamander. Having left their natal ponds, these efts are in the forest making a living until their return to aquatic life in a year, two or three, or more. Their dramatic red-
orange color warns off potential predators, and fortunately warned me from stomping on him.

A car pulled in with some hardy hikers and their dog. The rain began again. Linda and I parted company. But after some time a freshening in the air and slackening of the rain drew me back to the trail. I decided to climb to the summit to find what more I could hear.

Eventually in addition to veery, ovenbird, and hermit thrush, my list included chickadee, robin, blue-headed (solitary) vireo, black-throated green warbler, black-throated blue warbler, nashville warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, bay-breasted or cape may warbler, american redstart (also a warbler), wilson’s warbler, scarlet tanager and northern junco nearest the summit.

Sunday was not a day I would have chosen to hike, but this was an official Hadley Bird Walk and I was the last birder standing on the summit. In addition to the great bird song from the enshrouded balsam and birch, the ridge trail to the summit of Hadley treated me to exquisite clumps of blooming pink lady slipper or moccasin flower and bunchberry. The blowing clouds and dripping balsam fir, along with the fire tower coming in and out of the clouds not 100 feet from where I stood, are images I won’t soon forget.

2016 is the 21st year since the Hadley Mountain Fire Tower Committee was organized with the help of a spirited group of local leaders and historians in Hadley, Luzerne, and Corinth, as well as the leadership of Jack Freeman of the Adirondack Mountain Club, the NYS DEC Forest Rangers, and a volunteer from the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, Linda Champagne. As a leader then of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks I was glad to join Linda at one of the committee’s early meetings. Now with Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, I still hike the mountain each year in recognition of a voluntary group dedicated to an educational, historically significant part of the New York State Forest Preserve.
Using the Tower as a teaching tool was a committee purpose from the beginning, and the committee has raised dollars every year since the restoration to pay a small stipend for a Hadley summit steward during the warm months. With the help of corporate and private dollars, and the help of at least two NYS DEC Forest Rangers since 1995, the Hadley Committee has been at the forefront in providing summit information and interpretation, and summer employment for young Adirondack outdoor leaders.

That is a crucially important service. Many hikers, whether serious or casual, don’t necessarily view wild lands the way managers and volunteers do. They don’t always fully appreciate the care, planning, fundraising, supervision and worry, and the sweat that goes into maintaining a summit trail, a safe climb of the fire tower and an old fire observer’s cabin, upright and useful – sometimes in the face of vandalism.

Most hikers do appreciate however, a friendly, outgoing, informative person at the summit, atop the Fire Tower, or on the trail, who symbolizes all of these public land responsibilities, and who also can also encourage appropriate enjoyment and care of the mountain, and orient new visitors to Hadley’s magnificent rocky summit, its trees and views born of hot forest fire a century ago.

You can support the Hadley Mountain steward by sending a financial contribution of any amount to the Hadley Fire Tower Committee (Joe Busch, Treasurer, P.O. Box 4501, Queensbury, NY 12804), or become a volunteer.