



# Avalonia Trails

Fall 2019

*Over 51 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.*



## Climate Change: A Local Perspective



*Laura Craver, formerly on DPNC staff, and Avalonia volunteer, Jean Jerbert, joyously spreading milkweed seeds at Preston Nature Preserve on Krug Rd. in Preston, Ct. According to Bruce Fellman, who often leads walks at the refuge, "The preserve's 56 acres of gentle trails, meadows, woods, and wetlands are at their prettiest in late summer and early fall when the fields are dominated by Joe-Pye weed, various goldenrods, milkweeds, grasses, thistles, asters, and a remarkable expanse of bee balm, to name only a few of the botanical treasures. The abundant blossoms always attract an array of exquisite butterflies, from monarchs and swallowtails to fritillaries and skippers, with a collection of mesmerizing hummingbird moths thrown in for good measure. And that is just the tip of the insect iceberg: the preserve is also alive with dragonflies, beetles, true bugs, bees and wasps, and other invertebrates."*

*Photo by Joellen Anderson*



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## A Message from the President

I am pleased to report that Avalonia is making excellent progress on our promise to acquire and protect important resources and educate the public in accordance with our Mission Statement. When the Atkinson/Dirlam (AD) parcels (see Day article p. 4) close, we will have acquired 796 acres in the first two years of the five-year 2000-Acre Campaign. We're not only right on target for acreage, but the critical functions of watershed protection and education is also being advanced through our collaboration with Groton Utilities. The fundraising for AD came to an amazing \$1.108M in less than two years, with \$12K pledged to date toward the \$33,600 needed for perpetual stewardship. We continue to raise funds to retire The Conservation Fund bridge loan balance of approximately \$177K of the \$972K project cost for the important 409-acre TriTown Forest Preserve parcel.

Looking ahead, we have another 379 acres targeted for closing in 2020, a portion of which includes 3000 feet of watershed protection along the Green Fall River. Fundraising efforts for these properties, including pending grants from Avalonia 'partners' and an abutter campaign, are underway. As this newsletter goes to print, we await word on our 2019 applications for Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) grants on 769 additional acres identified as critical to the State climate change mitigation objectives. Projects (332 additional acres) that have already received OSWA grants totaling \$810K are anticipated to close in 2021.

As I approach the end of my term as President of this remarkable organization on December 31, but stay on as a board member, I look forward to working with our wonderful partners and supporters to complete the fundraising and close on the acquisitions noted above over the next three years of the capital campaign.



*King eider duck, a "rarity" at Harkness Park in Waterford.  
Photo by D. Main*

*Dennis Main*



### Avalonia Trails

This biannual publication communicates Avalonia's mission to "preserve natural habitats in our area by acquiring and protecting lands" with articles about Avalonia's natural resources and the people who protect and enjoy them.

Editor and layout: Eugenia Villagra; Contributors: Kimberly Drelich, Margaret Gibson, Dennis Main, Beth Sullivan, Chuck Toal, David Young; Photos: Joellen Anderson, Margo Doyle, B. Grant, Dennis Main, Rick Newton, Beth Sullivan.

## The Birds and the Bees by Beth Sullivan



*Kingbirds are flycatchers that rely on insects to satisfy their hungry nestlings .  
All photos by B. Sullivan*

People are paying a little more attention to the birds and the bees in recent years. There is a growing awareness of the absolutely critical role they play in so many aspects of our life and economy. Finally, even school children are learning about the importance of pollinators. They're creating gardens and doing citizen science observations of bees and other creatures that are part of this wondrous chain of life.



*A gardener spraying for aphids, may harm the monarch caterpillar.*

There is also greater awareness of the harm pesticides are doing, not just to harmful insects, but to all insects, including bees. Broad use of herbicides affects not only the targeted invasive plants, but if used carelessly, they kill beneficial natives and host plants for all species of insects, including the beloved monarch's milkweed (left). There are programs and websites and projects dedicated to polli-

nators, and hopefully more people will understand our connection to nature. It takes a while to make the connection between a pollinator and a hamburger, but these links are being spelled out and kids get it.

Another factor in this whole process is climate change and the weather. There is an increasing discrepancy and disconnect with the changing seasons. Some places are warmer too early; others remain cool too long into the spring, affecting wildlife and natural cycles. Plants bloom before, or after, their insect pollinators need them. Heavy rains destroy blossoms before pollinators can do their job. Both extreme heat and cold affect bloom time and the health of insect populations, which affects crop success and fruit and berry production. Wildlife, including birds, depend on these fruits for survival later in the year.

We had a very strange spring this year with so much rain and cooler temps lasting longer through the spring and into early summer, especially along the coast. We may not all notice the changes in the bird populations, but as the monitor mom of a purple martin colony, I witnessed the effects firsthand. We were far below other years in terms of nesting success rates.



It is not just the martins.

Think of all the insect-eating birds. Last spring there was a new hatch of leaf-eating caterpillars (above) in swaths of local forestland. These were small and green, not gypsy moths. The migrating warblers settled into the woods and feasted. But after each heavy rainfall, I discovered less activity for a day or so, as possibly the caterpillars were washed off the leaves. During rainy days, flying insects are grounded. Aerial insectivores such as swallows, martins, and flycatchers were hard pressed to find their flying sustenance. When the adults are weakened, their nest-building efforts suffer and egg production diminishes.

Even larger birds, which rely on other food, are having difficulties. Osprey (right) seem to have experienced more nest failures last spring. They catch and eat fish, so that should not be affected by weather, but poor visibility at the water's surface may have decreased their catch rate. The poor hatchlings were left uncovered during torrential downpours and chiller days while their parents were out trying to find food for them.



The changes in weather patterns affect all levels of life, much like dominoes. Some effects are more visible than others. We grumble and complain about spoiled plans, but for most of us the weather is not impacting us, yet, in an immediate life-and-death way on a daily basis. Take the time to think through some of the bigger connections and see where they lead. It is sobering.



*"Weeds" may be sustenance for native pollinators. Let them grow.*



## Avalonia to purchase two Ledyard land parcels by Kimberly Dreilich, The Day

Ledyard — Published October 13, 2019 8:36PM | Updated October 14, 2019 8:05PM

The Avalonia Land Conservancy plans to purchase two properties on Long Cove Road and preserve them for recreational opportunities and watershed protection.

The Atkinson and Dirlam properties feature roughly 5 miles of trails that connect to the Great Oak Greenway in Ledyard and contain wetlands and vernal pools, members of Avalonia Land Conservancy's Board of Directors said.

The conservancy plans to buy the land by the end of the year.

The Groton City Council voted last week to approve a contribution of up to \$159,945 from Groton Utilities to the Avalonia Land Conservancy to purchase the 183-acre Atkinson Property adjacent to the Groton Utilities watershed. The contribution, which the Groton Utilities Commission previously approved, represents the last funding needed to purchase the property.

Last year, Avalonia Land Conservancy was awarded a \$697,775 grant from the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection toward acquiring the Atkinson property along with the abutting 41-acre Dirlam property, which cost a total of \$1,108,925. Other donors included the town of Ledyard, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Helios Foundation, the Bafflin Foundation, and supporters of the Avalonia Land Conservancy, said Dennis Main, president of Avalonia's board of directors.

The acreage, which will be owned by Avalonia Land Conservancy, will be preserved in perpetuity and will be open to the public for passive recreation, except for areas most sensitive for the watershed, said Main.

The Atkinson property is adjacent to the Morgan Pond Reservoir and would protect the Great Brook Watershed, said Groton Utilities Manager of Communications and Community Outreach Daniel Bouges.

Groton Utilities has wanted to protect this land parcel, which is sensitive to the watershed, for about 30 years, said Rick Stevens, manager for Groton Utilities in the water and wastewater division.

Groton Utilities and Avalonia developed a memorandum of understanding that provides a plan for the future of watershed protection, best management practices, and collaboration on educational opportunities, he said.

Wetlands and streams on the properties "form the headwaters of Thompson Brook — water that flows directly into the Groton Utilities reservoir system," according to

the draft agreement. Preserving the land "will permanently protect over 100 acres of vernal pools, wetlands, and streams that contribute significantly to the Thompson Brook, Great Brook and Long Island Sound Watersheds," it states.

The contribution from Groton Utilities is from Groton Utilities' Water Division Retained Earnings fund, Bouges said.

"Water is our most important natural resource, and Groton Utilities believes that all efforts should be made to protect its purity to ensure clean and safe drinking water for its customers," Bouges said. "This is an economical way to protect the watershed with a one-time donation, while Avalonia maintains the area going forward. Both Avalonia Land Conservatory and Groton Utilities have a mutual interest in protecting the environment and water resources, so this donation works for everyone."

Julie DuPont-Woody from the Board of Directors of the Avalonia Land Conservancy said a proposed 73-lot housing subdivision was part of the urgency to preserve the land which has wetlands and vernal pools.

"All of that water is what we drink so it's vital to protect that watershed," she said.

Ledyard contributed \$60,000 in open space funds to Avalonia for land acquisition, said Main. Ledyard Mayor Fred Allyn III said the Town Council decided years ago to direct a portion of the real estate conveyance tax proceeds to a fund designated for the purchase of open space.

"Over time, the collective feeling was that a land preservation group such as Avalonia are better stewards of the acquired parcels than the town may be so we felt this was a wise investment of a portion of the open space funds," he said.

"We also felt these parcels were important due to connectivity to the historic Nathan Lester House and the 109-acre parcel the town owns, which is adjacent," he added. "This acquisition was a shining example of several interests converging, working together and arriving at the common goal."

Avalonia Land Conservancy is continuing to fundraise to cover the costs of long-term stewardship of the land, Main said.

The land trust has acquired recently hundreds of acres of land, including the 409-acre TriTown Forest Preserve in Griswold, North Stonington and Preston; several land donations of waterfront parcels at Pachaug Pond in Griswold; the Dutka Nature Preserve abutting the waterfront parcels; and the Boyd Rixtown Mountain Preserve abutting the TriTown, Main said. In addition, Avalonia closed on the donated 41-acre Leo Antonino property in Groton at the end of last year.

k.drelich@theday.com Reprinted with permission of The Day.

## Volunteer in Focus: Maggie DeFosse by Elizabeth Sorensen

Avalonia has its first volunteer student intern! Maggie DeFosse from Stonington will complete her graduation requirements from Colorado State University by working with us for several months this fall and winter. At Colorado State, Maggie majored in Human Dimensions of Natural Resources. Her studies focused on the social aspects of environmental studies, and included classes in conservation management, conflict management, environmental policy, and communications. In short, she describes her career interests as “being the middle person between science and people.” She hopes that her future work will involve engaging people in the environmental movement and communicating effectively among various constituencies.

Maggie lived in Stonington as a child, then moved to several other Connecticut towns and is now back in our community. She fondly remembers Beth Sullivan visiting her classroom in grade school, saying, “Mrs. Sullivan made an impression on me. She knew so much about the woods and water and animals, and brought this to our classroom with enthusiasm and care.”

As an Avalonia intern, Maggie is working on community outreach and programs. She is in the Avalonia office two days a week, helping with office administration, learning software to help manage donors and membership, writing press releases and web posts. Maggie supported the recent Atkinson-Dirlam fundraising event, and is helping with the upcoming volunteer newsletter. Along with another volunteer,



*Maggie on the Horsetooth Rock Trail in Fort Collins, CO.*

*Photo by M.Doyle*

Kathleen Smith, she hosted a Hike & Seek event with an eye towards re-invigorating the program.

Maggie’s Avalonia internship will provide the final credential for her Bachelor of Science degree. She says, “I hadn’t lived here since I was a child and didn’t know a lot about Avalonia.” Several of Maggie’s family members had been active volunteers with Avalonia and able to reconnect her with Beth Sullivan and get her involved with the organization to complete her degree.

Maggie observed that Avalonia is “shockingly well organized” for an entirely volunteer organization. “Avalonia has amazing people who have so much knowledge and take the time to share it, to support the community in this meaningful and important way. Avalonia has a beautiful website, too. I wasn’t expecting it to be this amazing. It’s great to be working with such an amazing organization.”



**Joel Fuller** is a highly valued Preston volunteer. He shows up at work parties on multiple preserves, helps clear and maintain trails, and supports whatever work needs doing despite his significant health challenges. Joel also diligently maintains a trail of nesting boxes on the Preston Nature Preserve, increasingly important for breeding birds due to loss of habitat,

**Jim Friedlander**, a long-time Stonington volunteer, stepped up and got deeply involved in a major stewardship project at Avalonia’s Hoffman Evergreen Preserve. He coordinated walks with the forester, reviewed maps, and helped get board approval for the project and contract. Hoffman Preserve has been given a new lease on life thanks to Jim’s efforts and commitment.

**Donna Siluk** of Griswold is a neighbor of TriTown Forest Preserve. She loves the preserve and makes a tremendous difference removing invasive plants and doing trail maintenance. She’s a quick study and, as a yoga instructor, has remarkable strength and flexibility to pull out tough invasives. Donna initiates projects on her own, is tireless, enthusiastic, and great with visitors.

**Andy Conway**, until recently a professional arborist and tree climber, is a valued and skillful addition to Ledyard’s volunteer corps. He led a small group of volunteers to remove dead trees from two locations at the TriTown Forest Preserve. An 80-foot ash killed by the emerald ash borer was removed —top down— from the parking lot; 12 trees that were growing in, around, and slowly destroying the old foundation were also removed. Fortunately for Avalonia, Andy has volunteered to donate more high-end arborist work.

## A Message from Chuck Toal Development Director

Change in our environment is a hot topic of conversation these days. A sense of urgency is spreading well beyond the green movement with the news that the climate in portions of southeastern Connecticut has warmed two degrees Celcius, threatening ecosystems, changing landscapes and upending livelihoods. State and local governments and businesses are taking notice of how climate change is affecting us right in our backyards. It is up to each and every one of us to take the steps needed to mitigate the impact of climate change on our families and communities. You can take those steps with your voice, your vote, and your dollars in support of conservation.

Because we acquire and protect high-conservation value land, Avalonia is on the "front lines" of resilience and sustainability efforts. We steward lands that filter water flowing into reservoirs. Our wetlands absorb water from powerful storms, reducing flooding. One acre of wooded land sequesters 106 metric tons of carbon every year; Avalonia protects over 3000 acres of wooded land throughout southeastern Connecticut. Our lands are islands of refuge for wildlife and people alike. And



*A powerful storm hit the south end of West Shore Ave., Groton Long Point, on October 17, 2019  
Photo by B. Grant*

yet...none of this would be possible without your support. In light of the challenges ahead of us, we hope you are willing to continue, even augment your support.

Your **membership** is what enables Avalonia to pursue its mission. Your **generous gift** will help us acquire and steward more conservation lands. Visit our website, [www.avalonia.org/membership](http://www.avalonia.org/membership), to renew or become a new member; use the enclosed envelope to send a donation today or before the end of the year. Be as generous as you can, but please, no gift is too small. Your donation will be put to work to mitigate climate change right here at home.

*Chuck*

## Groton Utilities Assists Avalonia with Land Purchase



On October 23, Groton Utilities and the Avalonia Land Conservancy celebrated the formalization of their partnership with the presentation of a \$159,945 check to Avalonia for the purpose of assisting in the purchase of land important to the region's water quality. This property, of concern to Groton Utilities as it is adjacent to the Morgan Pond Reservoir, will protect the Great Brook Watershed. Having Avalonia manage the property will also help ensure that water running into the reservoir is as clean as possible. Tributaries and streams are highly effective natural filtration systems, and being able to control access and activities in those areas helps ensure the purity of the water running into reservoirs.

## Shop Locally *and* Donate to Avalonia!

### Save the Dates: December 20 – 22

Mention Avalonia to any of these local retailers while shopping for your holiday gifts and they'll donate 10% of your purchase to Avalonia. One weekend only, so plan that special gift for the weekend of December 20 – 22nd. Watch our emails for the latest list of participating retailers. See more retailers on the address page!



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## Because the Earth by Margaret Gibson



*... because the earth as we know  
it will end*

*I plant dahlias*

*And because dahlias will fade, in  
late fall*

*I dig up their roots to make a po-  
tion that dyes*

*my scarf of white silk,*

*the color of the earth*

*And because the scarf will wear  
out*

*and will shred I untie it from around my neck,  
off it flies into the wind with the prayer flags*

*And because my neck*

*will someday not be needed to hold up my head*

*I take down a recipe for stock,*

*good bone broth*

*And because my head takes stock,*

*of each leaf as it settles*

*onto the dark shining surface of the pond*

*I reach for an invisible spool of red cord*

*knot the cord*

*and begin mending the net we've torn  
this net made of air and ocean, made of sun and soil*

*At junctures, woven into this net  
are jewels*

*whose each facet reflects star-groves and owls  
minnows and eel grass*

*meadow larks, milk weed, and monarchs  
so that each apparently single thing exists  
in the light of everything else*

*And because the net also trembles as it senses the glacial erratic  
in any heart*

*that just sits there and sits there and sits there  
a mute lament*

*and because each of us has the power to turn  
harm into healing*

*and because the earth as we know it will end  
just now, I plant dahlias . . .*

Margaret Gibson, Connecticut's current Poet Laureate, is the author of 12 books of poems, all from LSU Press, most recently **Not Hearing the Wood Thrush**, 2018. A poem from that collection, "Passage," was included in **The Best American Poetry**, 2017. Avalonia is fortunate that Margaret is serving for a second time on its board of directors.

## Outstanding Photo by David Young



*Photo by Rick Newton*

There have been wonderful images described in Outstanding Photo in the past. They have all featured nature as objects of our fascination from baby birds to a stunning rat snake. The photos were all congratulated for their focus, colors, and compositions. But if you think about it, the people were missing! Who was there to see that snake? How did they react?

Avalonia is not about nature in the abstract. We are about the value and experience of nature to people, so it is time to give recognition to that. Too often, the records of our visitors or volunteers are groups posed with camera smiles displaying a thumbs up...no interaction, animation or emotion inviting us in to share in their experience.

Rick's photo reveals another aspect of subjects...the variety of their experience. At right, Beth Sullivan is obviously delighted to be dealing with nature, birds and children. The serious, intense concentration of the girl holding the bird offers a perfect counterpoint to Beth. Finally, we have the pure fascination and delight of the observer. It is these expressions, instead of compositional elements, that draw our interest and attention around the scene. So, if you find yourself on a preserve with other folks and a camera, skip the police lineup and try to capture the action. Maybe you'll create an Outstanding Photo.



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