



# Avalonia Trails

P.O. Box 49  
Old Mystic, CT 06372

DEDICATED TO PRESERVING  
LAND AND WILDLIFE HABITATS

FALL 2011

## Wequetequock Cove Preserve, Stonington

**Coastal Grassland Acquired for Conservation Through Partnership with Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection** by David Kozak

In the world of land conservation, sometimes, ‘good things come to those who wait.’ This is especially true where the conservation-buyer is lucky enough to work with landowners whose patience reflects their commitment to conserving a treasured local landscape. Thankfully, such was recently the case when a coalition of land conservationists, led by Avalonia Land Conservancy and CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), acquired a 16-acre coastal grassland on Wequetequock Cove on Palmer Neck Road in Stonington. The property, adjacent to



DEEP’s Barn Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA), will expand an existing 1,000+ acre block of contiguous protected open space that includes Avalonia’s Paffard Marsh preserve. With the purchase of the Crowley grassland, a continuous corridor of protected open space now spans 2.4 miles from the Pawcatuck River to Wequetequock Cove (see photo left). The title or ‘fee estate’ to the property is being held by Avalonia while DEEP will hold a conservation easement and manage the property for grassland bird habitat. After nearly six years from the date that Avalonia and DEEP first met to discuss land conservation targets in coastal

southeastern Connecticut, and four years from the initial meeting with the landowners, the property was purchased from the Crowley family of the Wequetequock section of Stonington. The property was part of the Crowley family’s dairy farm operation which ceased in 1958. The land has been used continuously since then for producing hay.

As part of DEEP’s coastal land conservation planning process, the Crowley property was identified in 2005 as an acquisition priority to enhance the protection of the nearby Barn Island WMA, Connecticut’s largest and most ecologically significant coastal wildlife management area. The acquisition will provide a *refuge area* to support the expected upland migration of the Wequetequock Cove tidal marshes onto the property’s fields as sea level in Fishers Island Sound rises. In addition, the acquisition will preserve coastal grassland, an uncommon Connecticut landscape, which, at this site, provides habitat for breeding populations of rare grassland-dependent migratory birds and will provide new opportunities for the public to observe these and other species of marsh and waterbirds at an easily accessible site.

*David Kozak is Senior Coastal Planner with CT DEEP.*

Additional photos of Wequetequock Cove Preserve are available on our website and Facebook page.

### Inside this issue

President’s Corner	2
The times they are a-changin’..	2
Trails Day 2011	3
Horseshoe Crab Tagging	3
Poquetanuck Cove & National Estuaries Day	3
It’s <u>Your</u> Land Trust...	4
Sneaky Invasion of Mile-a-Minute Plant	4
Sandy Point: Critical Habitat	5
Volunteer opportunities	5
From Raptors to Salt Marshes	5
Avalonia VP honored	5
Upcoming events	6

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## President's Corner

As I begin my term as President, it certainly is appropriate to thank all who have contributed to Avalonia Land Conservancy's success to date. You will notice some changes in the list of Directors on the left of this page. Some long-serving Directors have stepped down from the Board, most taking advantage of the Avalonia's reorganization to assume positions in committees within their towns. These include immediate past-President Anne Roberts-Pierson, who accepted the helm from long-time President Anne Nalwalk, and who courageously and successfully piloted the organization through its recent reorganization. She now steps aside to resume those grass-roots conservation activities that have always been her first love. We also applaud the contributions of Brae Rafferty, who served on the Board for more than a decade, and of Ellen Fossum, who, in addition to her long-term Board service was responsible for many of our most successful fund-raising events. Janice Parker, who served as Board Secretary from 2008-2011, has resigned that position to serve Avalonia in a staff capacity. All these former directors plan to continue their involvement with Avalonia at the Town Committee level. We welcome to the Board of Directors new member Michele Fitzpatrick of Groton.

When one starts to undertake some of the work that others have been doing before, the real strength of their contribution becomes very apparent. We remain in awe of the job that Anne Nalwalk did in her 22 years as President, and the contribution that Vicky Connor made in managing membership for so long (17 years). Another effort that may not be readily apparent to general membership is that of our attorney Frank Eppinger and his colleague Carol Banton, whose legal expertise and careful attention to the interests of Avalonia are critical to the successful preservation of the natural habitats we all love.

We are fortunate to have on our current Board of Directors many varieties of technical expertise that conservation efforts desperately need. Not many land trusts can boast of including a forester, a surveyor, an engineer, a lawyer, an historian, a biologist, a geologist, a financial analyst, a toxicologist and a poet in their governing body, (A prize will be awarded to anyone who can successfully match each skill with the corresponding director. Submit entries to [avalonialc@yahoo.com](mailto:avalonialc@yahoo.com)).

As we move forward, I have a number of goals that I would like to achieve during my term as President. I want to consolidate the organizational changes that we have made to establish an organization in which neighborhood activism at the town level supports and forwards the goals and the mission of Avalonia at the regional level. I want to place the organization on a sound financial footing that will permit forward planning. And I want to move the organization toward full accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance.

Some of the toughest tasks we face as an organization, and those that seem to have the least appeal among us "greenies" (as they say in Australia), are the ones involving money and paperwork. Our property list continues to expand, a definite sign of success, but an achievement that brings with it ever-mounting costs, and management and documentation obligations. (Read Rick Newton's article on page 4 for more detail on these issues.) We become aware of the increasing complexity of the land trust business as we begin an assessment of our organization under the procedures of the Land Trust Alliance and the alignment of our organization with the eligibility requirements for insurance of our properties and easements. Please see my article on page 5 for ways in which *you* can help Avalonia rise to these challenges.

*Duncan Schweitzer*

## The times they are a-changin'

*by Janice Parker*

As Avalonia approaches its half-century, we strive to move with the times, embracing current technology, for the convenience of our members:

- Our website: [www.avalonialandconservancy.org](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org) will be familiar to most of you.
- Avalonia has a Facebook page that you can use to keep current with Avalonia events and activities.
- While we include a membership renewal form for your convenience on page 4, you can now renew your membership and/or make donations online at our website.
- You can now opt to receive your newsletter by email. Specify this preference on your membership renewal form, or request it by email: [avalonialc@yahoo.com](mailto:avalonialc@yahoo.com). Past issues of the newsletter are archived at the website.

More options for the convenience of *you*, our valued members.

*Janice Parker is employed part-time by Avalonia and also serves in a volunteer capacity as newsletter editor.*



## CT and National Trails Day, June 4th 2011

Linking State, Town and Land Trust Property Open Space Trails  
in Groton

by Joellen Anderson



Hiking along Brook Street toward the entrance to the Mortimer Wright Preserve

On Trails Day 2011 nineteen hikers participated in a cross-town greenway walk from Poquonnock River at Bluff Point through Bluff Point and Haley Farm State Park trails, across Rte 215, to the town-owned Mortimer Wright Preserve. From there the red trail on the Merritt Family Forest property took everyone to Fishtown Road and hence *via* local sidewalks for about 0.5 mile to the Judson Avenue entrance to Beebe Pond Park, along the blue trail that passes to the right around Beebe Pond (known to some as Hidden Lake) and, after crossing over the Mystic/Noank Road, to a short trail to Beebe Cove *via* Avalonia's Town's End Preserve. The Town of Groton provided us with transportation back to the Bluff Point State Park.

This CT Trails Day hike across Groton excursion was the made possible by the efforts of many people over many years to make this greenway a reality. The Merritt Family Forest property, acquired in May of 2008 by Groton Open Space Association, became the keystone to Groton's eastern greenbelt and was the last piece of the 'puzzle' that now connects all the other trails that we hiked.

The only segment of our hike (other than road crossings) that was not on woods trails was from Fishtown Road to the Beebe Pond Park entrance on Judson Avenue. Eventually, we all hope that an old washed-out bridge over McGuire's Brook near Cutler Middle School might be reconstructed to enable even more of a connected walk on woodland trails.

## Horseshoe Crab Tagging

by Beth Sullivan and Binti Ackley

A casual observer on Sandy Point would be hard pressed to understand exactly what they were seeing: a small group of oddly dressed and more oddly behaving beach walkers, directed by the pull of the highest tides and phases of the moon, thigh deep in water in bulky waders, backpacks, equipped with headlamps and clipboards and awls. There are various calls of: "got one," "got a pair", "triple", "quad", "herd them in" and a series of numbers.

This dedicated group of volunteers arrives on the island by kayak or small boat during the highest tides of the full and new moons during late spring and early summer to survey and tag horseshoe crabs (*Limulus ployphemus*). Sandy Point has emerged as the premier spot in our area for this ancient species to come ashore to mate and lay their eggs. Night time high tides

find the highest numbers approaching the shore for their ritual.

The opportunity to be out at night on the island has also allowed us to experience some other wonderful phenomena. Sunsets are glorious over the waters to the west. Huge orange full moons rise over Watch Hill leaving trails of light on the calm waters at night. Schools of spotfin killifish (*Fundulus luciae*) use the high-water shallows for massive spawning events. Even in the dark of the new moon the stars shine brighter than anywhere inland. We listen to the murmuring of the gulls, chattering of terns and the complaining of geese that nest there, unaccustomed to being disturbed at night. One night three spiny dogfish (*Squalus acanthias*) (small sharks), each over 2 feet long, circled past our legs, bright yellow eyes eerie in our head lamps. Our main goal is to survey and tag the intriguing horseshoe crabs. Gradually patterns emerge as we make our observations and record our data.

This season we tagged a record 1747 crabs. We also recorded more recaptures this season, most of which were tagged on Sandy Point or on Napatree over the last 3 years. On a prime night as many as a thousand or more will arrive to spawn, the shallows filled with crabs jostling for position. Males outnumber females, vying for position on available mates, hence the triples and quads. It's an amazing sight. (See John Anderson's video at: <http://www.vimeo.com/24581391>)

*Binti Ackley is a member of the Stonington Town Committee.*

## Poquetanuck Cove & National Estuaries Day

by Anne Roberts-Pierson

Mark your calendars for Saturday, September 24, 2011! In fall 2010, Avalonia applied for and was accepted into Challenge Cost Share funding with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) for an environmental education kiosk to be placed at the car-top boat public access area to Poquetanuck Cove at Royal Oaks Drive, Ledyard. All the necessary permits and permissions from the Town and State have been obtained. Avalonia, USFWS, Eastern CT Conservation District (ECCD), Thames River Basin Partnership and CT SeaGrant have been busy compiling information to be presented on the kiosk. What better opportunity to dedicate this soon-to-be-erected kiosk then with a little celebration on Saturday, September 24, National Estuaries Day!

Avalonia is very fortunate to own and protect in perpetuity 1.5 acres of important sedge beds in the northern area of the Cove, a freshwater tidal estuary of the Thames River. This was a generous gift to Avalonia in 1980 by the Lionel Wood family. Plan on coming by and visiting with Avalonia volunteers and the natural resource experts from USFWS, ECCD, and CT SeaGrant to learn more about this very special place. Ribbon-cutting at 10 a.m. with all group representatives on hand until noon.

An optional early-riser paddle is offered at 7 a.m. as the tide at this location will then be high within a half hour. Bring your own boat and life-jacket. If you have questions, call me at (860) 464-8101.

*Anne Roberts-Pierson is a member of the Ledyard Town Committee.*



A great blue heron, a typical estuarine denizen.

Photo by Rick Newton

## It's Your Land Trust...

by Rick Newton

Since our inception in 1968, Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. has grown to properties and easements approaching 100 in number with almost 3,000 protected acres in the eight towns we serve, all collectively owned and managed by **you** the membership. We have managed to do the things we do on shoe-string budgets and with countless volunteer hours. Avalonia is well respected in the communities we serve and by partnering organizations such as USFWS, CT DEEP, The Nature Conservancy and many local organizations and land trusts.

The land trust business is changing. It is no longer acceptable to just acquire land and let it sit. It is expected that endangered and threatened species be protected, that properties be actively managed, and that once a property is acquired that it will be protected *forever*. Expenses are real and substantial: insurance; legal costs; survey costs; accounting costs; gas for mowers; boundary signs; trail paint; office supplies; postage; printing; office rent; lumber for bridges... the list could go on and on. Our plans for the future, assuming we can find the resources, include achieving accredited land trust status with the Land Trust Alliance, developing appropriate management plans for every property, developing of more trails and ensuring their compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, enhancing our website, sponsoring more environmental educational programs and, most importantly, acquiring more property, as open space is rapidly being developed. Since even freely donated property has costs associated with its acquisition and subsequent stewardship, all of these goals have associated costs.

Many land trusts of our size and history have a sizeable endowment, which generates interest to cover expenses and operating costs – Avalonia is seriously lacking in this area. We have no endowment. All of our stewardship and other operating costs are covered directly by member dues and donations, supplemented by such grant funding as we can obtain in an increasingly competitive environment. The Bedrock Fund, established for property acquisition, has been depleted by recent land acquisitions. While that is the purpose of that Fund, to prepare for future acquisitions it must be replenished. Further, in order to protect our holdings by participation in the Land Trust Alliance conservation defense insurance program, we will be required to have planned annual budgets that show a positive balance at year-end, a goal we have struggled to meet in recent years.

Your land trust is at a crossroads and we need to decide which path to take for the future. In order to maintain the properties we now hold, and to acquire more in the future, we need your help. As a member you already know the value of open space, but your neighbors and friends may not. Talk to them about the importance of preserving open space and ask them to become members. Sign up for the [Avalonia Capital One credit card](#) and charge a regular bill (gas, groceries, utilities) to it – if 100 members did that, our short-term budget crunch would disappear. If you are eligible to participate in the Combined Federal Campaign, specify Avalonia as a recipient. Think about moving your membership level up to the next higher level the next time you renew. Offer to volunteer when you can. And when the fall fund-raising appeal is sent out, really think about how valuable our properties are to you and your community. We'd like to do a lot more, but are limited in what we can do with the resources we presently have. Remember, once open space is developed, it is gone forever. Thanks for your past and future support of our conservation efforts.

*Rick Newton is Vice-President and Stewardship Chair*

## Sneaky Invasion of Mile-a-Minute Plant

by Anne Roberts-Pierson

In late June, UCONN's CT Invasive Plant Working Group (CIPWG), which includes the CT Agricultural Experiment Station, put out a call for volunteers. The invasive plant

Mile-a-minute, *Polygonum perfoliatum*, had been found along a stretch of the Shetucket River in Sprague and eradication efforts were needed. This plant had yet to be discovered previously in this part of the state, so on a day in early

July and then again a few weeks later, local volunteers heeded the call. I was very pleased to encounter on both days a couple of Avalonia member volunteers besides myself, since Sprague is a rather new addition to the Avalonia family. We all wanted a hands-on introduction to this invader and a chance to help. Hand-pulling was the method we used but beetles have recently been released in a pilot program. The beetles eat this plant and so it is hoped that they can assist in its control. Our work was not excessively difficult, though hot summer weather can be uncomfortable to work in. The Shetucket River is a beautiful spot, so despite the heat, we were happy to be doing something that will make a difference and help obliterate this plant that grows so quickly and can overcome more desirable native plants.

For more info go to [www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg).

*Anne Roberts-Pierson is a current member of the Ledyard Town Committee.*

## Avalonia welcomes new and renewing members!



Renew online: [www.avalonialandconservancy.org](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org)

Click "Donors & Members info"

Or mail this completed form and check to:

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**Old Mystic CT 06372**

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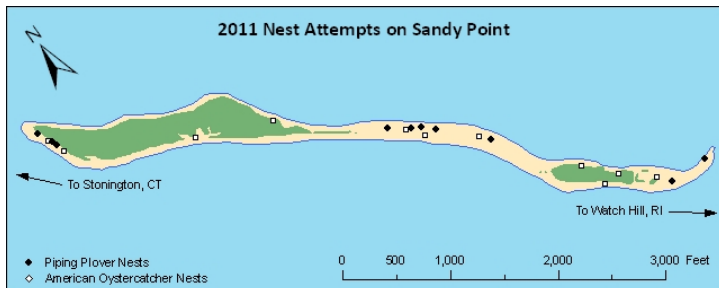
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*Note: Dues, gifts of land, securities and other contributions are tax-deductible within the limits of the law.*

## Sandy Point: Critical Habitat for Vulnerable Birds

by Ryan Kleinert

This season Sandy Point saw unprecedented numbers of nesting birds and has once again served as essential nesting grounds for the federally threatened piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), state-listed least tern (*Sternula antillarum*) and the American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*), which is a species of conservation concern. The continued cooperation of the public and the partnership between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Avalonia Land Conservancy has fostered an outstanding environment for the conservation of these nesting birds.



Graphic provided by Kevin Rogers, USFWS

A total of eight pairs of piping plovers nested on Sandy Point in 2011, two more pairs than last season. Unfortunately, of those eight, only two pairs successfully fledged chicks; one pair fledged one chick and one pair fledged two chicks. In addition to the phenomenal numbers of piping plovers that nested on Sandy Point, unprecedented numbers of American oystercatchers also utilized the island for nesting habitat. A total of eight pairs of American oystercatchers nested on Sandy Point this summer. Amazingly, this is twice the number from last season. Those eight pairs successfully fledged a total of three chicks; one pair fledged two chicks and another pair fledged one chick. The state-listed least tern also came back to Sandy Point this season to nest. Over two hundred individuals were counted in the overwash area and fifty individuals were observed using the western tip of the island in late May. Sadly, the least terns abandoned both colonies before any chicks were able to hatch.

Despite the low number of chicks that fledged, it is very encouraging that such a high number of pairs of piping plovers and American oystercatchers nested on the island. This highlights the importance of Sandy Point as a critical site for the recovery of these species. Sandy Point is a unique haven for some of our region's most vulnerable species. The success of these species is a direct result of the dedication and cooperation of many individuals including the Avalonia members and volunteers and the USFWS staff. In addition, the continued support and compliance with the rules of the island by members of the public has been monumentally important to the conservation of these important species of birds.

Ryan Kleinert is a Biological Science Technician with the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

## Volunteer Opportunities by Duncan Schweitzer

When Avalonia committed to reorganization last year, we established a system of "Town Committees" to undertake much of the routine business of running the organization within our member towns, and "Standing Committees" to undertake key functional responsibilities such as Stewardship and Acquisition, leaving the Board to concentrate on policy issues. While this change has made

serving on the Board a less onerous task, it also created a number of new positions to be filled at the committee level. Most of our town committees now have a full complement of members, but vacancies remain on these Standing Committees: the Development and Public Relations Committee, which is responsible for fundraising, education, membership recruitment and engagement, community outreach and publicity; the Personnel Committee, which is responsible for volunteer recruitment and oversight, and for supervision of any paid staff, and the Finance Committee which is responsible for the overall management of our finances. If you are interested, or if you would like to recommend someone whom you think would be qualified to fill one of these positions, please let us know.

Another driver increasing our need for volunteer help is our goal of achieving Land Trust Alliance accreditation. In order to comply with LTA Standards & Practices, we need (amongst other things) baseline documentation for easements, yearly monitoring of easements, and a written policy for recordkeeping. Easement monitoring is something you, or almost any member, can help with fairly easily. It involves walking the property, photographing existing conditions and reporting back on a form we provide. A seemingly simple task - a walk in the woods - but oddly hard to get done. Perhaps people are intimidated by the documentation part of the process. We are considering a training workshop if there is sufficient interest. Again, please contact us.

Now the really hard job - paperwork. We need to merge and sort old files and we need to sort and organize our deeds in accord with our new draft records policy. So, if you want to join me some rainy day to delve into files please call or email: (860) 884-3500 or avalonialc@yahoo.com.

## From Raptors to Salt Marshes

by Joellen Anderson



Looking at coffee bean snails at Barn Island

The latest in Avalonia's hugely popular Indoor/Outdoor educational programs in conjunction with DPNC drew over 100 participants. At nearby Barn Island State Wildlife Preserve, we explored what lives in, on and around our local salt marshes, found mussels and coffee bean snails, 'dip netted' a few crabs, identified various marsh grasses, and saw and heard red-winged blackbirds and salt marsh sparrows.

## Avalonia VP honored

Rick Newton, Avalonia's Vice President and Stewardship Chair, has been honored by the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center for his role as a volunteer in helping to protect the environmental integrity of our region. Here he accepts his award from DPNC Executive Director, Maggie Jones.



Photo by Al Brown.





AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC.

P.O. Box 49, Old Mystic, CT 06372

*ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED*

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**Avalonia now has a Facebook page:**



## Upcoming Events

- **Celebrate National Estuaries Day**, Saturday, September 24th at Poquetanuck Cove (see page 3 for details) Ribbon Cutting & Celebration of NEW Environmental Education Kiosk at 10 a.m. (rain or shine) at Royal Oaks Drive car-top boat launch area, Al-jen Heights, Ledyard. Join Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, CT Sea Grant, Eastern CT Conservation District as we dedicate this new kiosk! Natural resource experts on hand until noon. Optional 7 a.m. “early-riser” paddle with Avalonia. Bring your own boat and life-jacket. Questions ? (860) 464-8101.
- **National Public Lands Day**, Saturday, September 24th. As in the past two years, Avalonia plans to celebrate National Public Lands Day with a stewardship event on their Town’s End property in Mystic/Groton. This year we hope to offer events on additional Avalonia preserves in other towns, but details have not been finalized as we go to press. To learn more, log onto the National Public Lands Day website and review information for CT: <http://www.publiclandsday.org/> Events will also be posted on our website and Facebook page.
- **Bird Banding at the Knox Preserve** with Bob DeWire of Naturescapes, Inc. Saturday, October 22nd, 8:00 - 11:00 a.m. Meet at the trail head, west side of Quiambaug Cove between Old Route 1 (Wilcox Road) and Amtrak right of way. Rain cancels. Leader: Binti Ackley (860) 535-0832.

## **A belated but sincere thank you!**

We would like to acknowledge the following generous donors whose contributions to our 2010 Annual Appeal came in after the deadline of our last issue or whose names were inadvertently omitted:

- Monica & Francis Dumont
- G.F. Lane
- Stonington Garden Club
- Barbara Washburn