



# AVALONIA TRAILS

P.O. Box 49  
Old Mystic, Connecticut 06372

DEDICATED TO PRESERVING  
LAND AND WILDLIFE HABITATS

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WINTER 1996

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## Mary and John Walton Meadow Preserve

This past September, Mrs. Mary B. Walton donated a 24-acre meadow across the road from her home on Browning Road in Griswold. Mrs. Walton is one of the founders of the Save Our State Committee, an advocate on environmental issues in eastern Connecticut. The Meadow slopes gently down from the road and offers a rural vista whose inhabitants may sometimes be seen browsing or flying above the meadow. The northern portion includes wooded wetlands and a small stream that flows through two former ponds. South of the meadow is a small pond tucked against a wooded knoll covered by a deciduous forest.

The field will be mowed annually at the end of the growing season to maintain the meadow while providing wildlife habitat during the Summer. It is hoped that meadow larks and other field-nesting birds will find it a safe area in which to fledge their young.

## Deer Run II

Also in September, Mrs. Anne H. Nalwalk, President of the Conservancy, donated an addition to Deer Run on Northwest Corner Road in North Stonington. Deer Run II includes 10.35 acres east of Prentice Brook directly across the road from Deer Run, the parcel she donated to the Conservancy in 1989.

Deer Run I and II now comprise a 22.55-acre preserve along over 2000 feet of the east side of Prentice Brook. Deer Run II is over two-thirds red maple swamp surrounding an area of higher ground that includes a large glacial erratic. Deer Run I is half of a red maple swamp flooded several times by beavers. It is frequented by great blue herons, red-shouldered hawks, kingfishers, and numerous other birds.

### Total Acreage

With the addition of the four gifts described above, Avalonia Land Conservancy now owns over 1250 acres (1258.3744 acres), nearly all of which have been acquired by donation since 1968 when the organization was founded as The Mashantucket Land Trust.

## Fennerswood East Open Space

The 36.51 acres of open space from the Fenner Estate Subdivision in Stonington has been conveyed to the Conservancy by the Washington Trust Company, trustee of the estate of Marcella Beebe Fenner. This parcel is completely wooded with some maple swamp and a small stream. The main access will be from North Main Street through previously owned Conservancy property, although access from Farmholme Road has also been provided.

The open space connects Mrs. Fenner's 1986 bequest of 17 acres with the 8.3313-acre Daukas Preserve, donated by Mr. and Mrs. Galan Daukas in 1995. Thus, the East Tract now includes 61.8413 acres. When added to the 26-acre West Tract, donated by Mrs. Fenner in 1984, Fennerswood provides a total of nearly 88 acres of natural area at the north end of North Main Street where it runs into Pequot Trail, part of which is a State-designated Scenic Road.



## "Stony Brook Preserve"

In December, Ms. Jane M. Preston of Litchfield, Connecticut, donated to the Conservancy the 9.1221-acre Preservation Area in her four-lot subdivision at the southwest corner of the intersection of Taugwonk Road and Sommers Lane in Stonington. This preserve includes approximately 890 feet of Stony Brook and the associated wetlands on both sides for the entire length of the original parcel. Additional higher ground is included so that the parcel will support a short trail.

The Davis Cemetery for the heirs of Clark Davis is cut into the west side of preserve but is not part of it. A 10-foot wide easement along the western boundary of the preserve provides access to the cemetery. To prevent any future liability, Mrs. Preston removed a small pumphouse and its power supply before donating the parcel.

The parcel has not yet been officially named because the Conservancy already owns the Preston Nature Preserve in Preston, Connecticut and having two "Preston Preserves" might be confusing to all.

# Beach Cleanup '96

Beach Cleanup '96 is part of a worldwide effort to draw attention to the world's rivers, bays, and oceans by removing all debris and tabulating its content according to item and composition -- for example, plastic food bags, plastic caps, cigarette butts, styrofoam cups, metal soda cans, and many more. Volunteers complete data sheets for each area cleaned. The information on these data sheets is then entered into a computer data base, which enables researchers to determine the sources of various kinds of pollution and possible ways to reduce or eliminate it by developing new procedures or products or educating the public. A close look at the ground one walks upon also develops an awareness of the amount of littering and pollution caused by careless individuals.

Undaunted by the governor's warning to cease all outdoor activity in southeastern, coastal Connecticut due to Eastern Equine Encephalitis-carrying mosquitoes, numerous volunteers participated in Beach Cleanup '96 on Saturday, September 21, a glorious pre-Autumn day.

Avalonia Land Conservancy has participated in Beach Cleanup for several years on its waterfront properties in Stonington, Connecticut; Sandy Point, Westerly, Rhode Island; and South Dumpling in New York.

## Sandy Point

Thirteen adults picked up and sorted debris on Sandy Point, a sandy island in Rhode Island and Connecticut between Stonington Borough and Napatree Point. Cleaning efforts were concentrated on the southeastern end of the island due to the anticipated dredging of the federal channel at the other end later in the year. Much of the material, including 276 cigarette butts, reflected the heavy use of Sandy Point by boaters and picnickers during the Summer. Among the most unusual items collected were the deck of the sunfish "MICRO PEST," and an orange and white plastic barrel.

Chris Rose and Don Raffo transported Margo Greener, Lynne Kaeser and her son Noah, Nora Spens, and Conservancy Directors Nancy Avery and Anne Nalwalk from Walker's Dock out to Sandy Point. Jon Tobiassen and his friend Joe Jirka paddled out in their sea kayaks to join the group. Don Raffo then joined his family, Ann Baldelli, and friends on the northwest end. They and their young children worked their way down the shore to the center of the island where juice and gingersnaps restored everyone's spirits before the collected materials were loaded on a canoe. Chris Rose towed the canoe behind his brand new boat, and the barrel was towed behind the canoe as all aboard the boat nervously watched its position in the water. The barrel gradually took on water and only Chris'

careful seamanship prevented it from rotating sufficiently to take on more water through the open hole in its top. All materials were safely brought ashore and conveyed to the Westerly Transfer Station.

## Dodge Paddock

Conservancy Director Mary (Billie) Boatwright was joined by Nora MacDonnell and Ellie Harvey in cleaning the Dodge Paddock at the end of Wall Street in Stonington. They reported the area seemed cleaner than usual but they still found plastic food bags, broken glass, lumber pieces, and a ladder.

## Ram Point

Conservancy Director Karel den Tex cleaned Ram Point on the west side of Masons Island in Stonington and found relatively few items, including 20 feet of 1-inch plastic water pipe. His most surprising find was a 10-foot long, undamaged "kid's raft made from tree limbs and trunks lashed with rope, 1-inch mooring line, Y-spliced with chafing gear, eyes, thimble, and foam float." The raft was removed with the hope that its builders were safe and with admiration for their ingenuity.

## South Dumpling

Mr. den Tex also inspected South Dumpling in New York where he found 31 plastic items, 32 foamed plastic pieces, indicating that more lobster pots may have been cut off or mangled. He wondered if the summer's frequent fog had been responsible.

## Knox Preserve

Mr. David Motherway, steward of the Knox Preserve, Stonington, and his family cleaned the perimeter of the Knox Preserve off of Wilcox Road in Stonington.

## Avery Preserve Maintenance

On a damp Saturday, December 7, a hardy crew of volunteers and directors applied their energies to the Sheep Wash and the West Tract of the Avery Preserve on Avery Hill in Ledyard. Director William Haase and Wendy Jastremski replaced the old Mashantucket Land Trust boundary signs with new Avalonia Land Conservancy signs. They found many of the old signs were coming off or being incorporated into the trees.

At the Sheep Wash just south of the West Tract, Directors Harry Tobiassen and Jon Tobiassen and Norm and Judy Owsley, trimmed brush and sprouts from around the rocks so that mowing at a later date would maintain the park-like character desired.

The group then dispersed to trim nearly 2 miles of trails so they would be suitable for cross-country skiing this winter.

# Sandy Point Dredging

After many years of planning, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is dredging the federal channel between the north end of Sandy Point and Edwards Point in Stonington. Over the years, Sandy Point has moved northwestward across the dedicated channel forcing boats to go closer to the rocks near the mainland shore. During the dredging, nearly 250 feet of Sandy Point are being removed to reclaim the channel and allow for continued northwestward migration. The 53,000 cubic yards of material removed are being placed on the narrower portion of Sandy Point south of the large grass-covered northern part. The disposal area will be graded with a flat top and evenly sloping sides. The spoils area does not extend the full length of Sandy Point so there will still be a low area subject to overwashing during extremely high tides or storms. The material on the top of the mound is somewhat coarser than the fine sand on the beach, which means it will be less subject to wind erosion and may remain in place a relatively long time. New London Day reporter and frequent Sandy Point visitor Ann Baldelli described the dredging project in her article in The

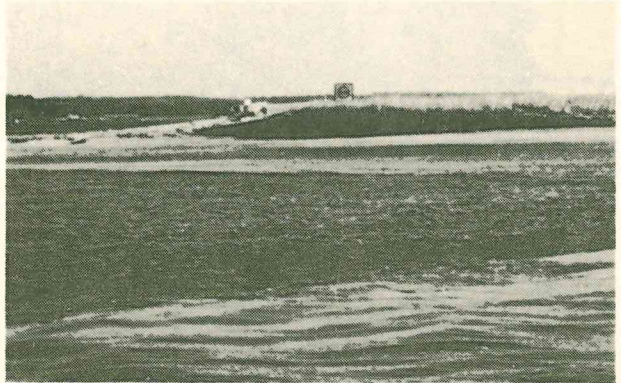
Day on December 9, 1996, indicating that the spoils mound is approximately 11 feet tall so that one could no longer stand at the water's edge and look over the center of Sandy Point.

The material being removed to clear the channel is pumped in a slurry to the disposal site where it is sprayed onto a gentle slope contained within berms of sand created by a small bulldozer. The heavier particles in the slurry are deposited on this slope as the water flows toward the ocean side of the island. Included in the slurry are clams and sand worms, providing a bountiful feast for gulls, plovers, and sandpipers, which were grouped on the slope according to size -- gulls at the top where they could find quohaugs before they were buried; sandpipers at the bottom scurrying for smaller finds. The water flowing across the beach contained only the finest material that did not fall out of suspension. It was barely gritty in the hand.

The project must be completed by December 31 but it is anticipated that it may be finished before Christmas.



*Working end of dredge*



*New north end of Sandy Point*



*View to north from north end of disposal site. Mound extends hundreds of feet behind the viewer.*

# Sandy Point Dune Grass Rescue

On a brilliant, sunny Sunday, October 6, Chris Rose and Director Karel den Tex ferried 20 volunteers from Walker's Dock in Stonington to Sandy Point to embark on a mission to salvage dune grass from the end of Sandy Point that was to be removed during the dredging for the federal channel.

Additional volunteers, included Directors Joellen Anderson, Deane Avery, Nancy Avery, Amanda Lindberg, Anne Nalwalk, and Vicky Connor, Vicky's mother Pat Sherrill, Bill Holton, Jane Keener, Don Murphy, and Nora Spens. Also helping were the Westerly Sea Scouts under the direction of Tom Patton, Mate, and Mike Palazzolla, Skipper. The crew included Kyle Brasier, Nate Champlin, Erin Montgomery, Rebecca Patton, Tom Patton, Sean Swain, and

Sean Wilik. Contacted only the night before, they reported for the work party eager to serve and provided some much-needed energy and manpower (and womanpower). Binti Ackley and her son Jeffery paddled from Stonington in their canoe to join the effort.

Clumps of grass were collected in buckets, plastic bags, or tarpaulins, then placed in two canoes, and towed to the receiving end of Sandy Point. Several areas of beach were planted with grass where it could be used to extend the dune growth (as advised by Dr. William Niering of Connecticut College). The remaining grass was planted in trenches at the very southeastern end of Sandy Point to be available for planting on the dredge dumping area later.



*Deane Avery and Amanda Lindberg planting rescued dune grass.*



*Chris Rose towing canoe load of grass to new location.*



*Jane Keener and Don Murphy planting rescued dune grass.*



# Nesting Bird Study on South Dumpling

South Dumpling is a 2.87-acre island located in the eastern end of Fishers Island Sound in New York. It was given to the Avalonia Land Conservancy (then The Mashantucket Land Trust) by Richard P. Anderson, Jr., and Frederic P. Anderson, sons of Judge and Mrs. Robert P. Anderson of Noank, Connecticut, in 1981. It is a high, gravelly island, part of the glacial moraine left behind by the retreating glaciers. For several years, Project Oceanology (Project O) has incorporated South Dumpling into its educational

programs, introducing students to the gulls nesting around the perimeter of the island. Mr. Brae Rafferty, an instructor at Project O, is also Director of the Conservancy representing Groton.

The following article was written by Ms. Kim Philips, an instructor at Project O. She has recently received her Master of Science degree in Marine Biology from the University of Connecticut and is also interested in birding and ornithology.

by Kim Philips

For six years, I have had the distinct pleasure of visiting an island named South Dumpling just northwest of Fisher's Island. The Avalonia Land Conservancy has given Project Oceanology, a non-profit marine science organization, the privilege of taking their students to this active gull rookery. The students count any eggs or chicks in the active nests. As a member of the Project Oceanology staff, I have seen a change in the bird dynamics of South Dumpling Island. On my first visit six years ago, there appeared to be a 50/50 split in the population of the herring gulls and the greater black-backed gulls. Over time, the latter appear to be replacing the former. This may be due to the increasing numbers of the greater black-backed gulls and their extremely aggressive and dominating behaviors over the smaller herring gulls. Other birds such as the Canada goose (*Branta canadensis*) and mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) have also nested on the island but with limited success. The geese generally abandon their eggs just as the gulls go into full swing. The spring of 1996 saw a herring gull incubating a Canada goose egg and successfully hatching it.

Along with the nesting gulls, which nest mostly on the mid to lower island, the upper island is also seeing dramatic changes in the nesting wading birds. When I first arrived in 1991, the upper island consisted of great egrets (*Casmerodius albus*), black-crowned night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), a pair of little blue herons (*Florida caerulea*) and the nationally threatened species, the snowy egret (*Egretta thula*). Over the years we have visited the island, the staff has observed these birds at a distance so as not to disturb them. Five years ago, I was excited to see a new species of bird which joined the group on the upper island. This was the glossy ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*), a bird with a beautiful iridescent chestnut-green-purple plumage and a long curved bill. In the last four years, I have observed an apparent increase in the populations of all the upper island birds, but in what numbers? As a trained scientist, I wanted to get an accurate count of each of the nesting pairs as well as the success in their hatching rates.

After receiving permission from the land trust to get a census of the upper island, I asked a friend and

fellow scientist, Lisa Wahle, to give me a hand in counting and assessing the foliage of the island. The following table presents the results of our bird census:

Bird Species	# of Nesting Pairs	Avg. # Chicks Hatched/Nest
Great Egret	24	3/4
Snowy Egret	10	4/4
Black-Crowned Night Heron	6	3/3 and 3/4
Glossy Ibis	15	4/4
Little Blue Heron	1	* ND Nest site hidden

\* ND = No data  
 Numbers in the second column may be an underestimate due to the thickness of the briars and other foliage.  
 Numbers in the third column represent the number of chicks hatched over the number of eggs laid.

Two things surprised me about the results of this study. The first was the high numbers of glossy ibis which are nesting on this small island. The second was the fact that the black-crowned night herons were nesting so close to the other birds. They are ferocious predators on the other birds' chicks and, therefore, I was amazed at the closeness of the snowy egrets' and the glossy ibis' nests. Dr. Helen Hays on Great Gull Island (a tern rookery) explained that when she was given permission to kill a marauding black-crowned heron, she found 32 tern chicks in its stomach. They had been ingested in less than 24 hours.

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the Avalonia Land Conservancy for giving me permission to do this study. Hopefully, we can continue to monitor the population of the upper island birds as well as having the students gather data on the mid and lower island. As more birds nest on the upper island, the fecal matter may kill the very habitat they need for material, support and protection. Also, competition for space may be a determining factor for each of the populations. So, what is the future of the upper island? Only future studies will help us answer that question.



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AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY

## Walking Weekend

For the fifth year, Avalonia Land Conservancy participated in Walking Weekend sponsored by the Northeastern Connecticut Council of Governments and Quinebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, Inc. by hosting a walk on the Preston Nature Preserve on Sunday, October 13. The day was one of October's best and nearly 30 people were led through this varied preserve by Directors Maggie Philbrick and Anne Nalwalk, and by Joyce and Palmer Steffenson, stewards of the preserve. (Directors Vicky Connor and Lois Tefft also hosted the walk but were excused due to the group size.)

Noted during the walk were the extensive efforts of the Steffensons (as approved by the Conservancy) to remove much of the encroaching multiflora rose and cedar to maintain the open areas.

## New Trail on Tefftweald

A new trail has been completed on Tefftweald on Grindstone Hill in North Stonington. Starting last Spring, Director Lois Tefft, with the help of her daughter and granddaughter, Lauren and Katie Arpin, Norm Marston, and Director Jon Tobiassen, laid out the path for a new loop trail on Tefftweald. The trail, the Upper Brook Loop, was cleared this Fall by these volunteers aided by Dan Arpin, France Guertin, Norm and Judy Owsley, and Marie Tobiassen.

The trail starts at the Thinking Bench by the pool on Wyassup Brook, runs along the stream before crossing higher ground, and drops down between ledges to connect to the Lower Brook Trail and the Pavilion.

Tefftweald is open for hiking by appointment only. Appointments can be made by calling 535-3634, 464-9462, or 887-5878.

## New Logo

As a gracious gift to the Avalonia Land Conservancy, Mrs. Alfred G. Williams III (Barbara Williams) has redrawn the logo with minor revisions to incorporate the new name. Mrs. Williams drew the original logo for The Mashantucket Land Trust in 1968 so it was especially helpful to have her maintain the character of the art and the lettering style in the new logo.

The logo is a most important element of any orga-

nization or corporation. The Directors chose to maintain the original design in the center -- a mature oak near a rock outcropping with lower shrubbery in the background. The lettering has been rearranged to accommodate the new name.

An accomplished artist, Mrs. Williams teaches science at Williams School. She is involved in many community activities in Ledyard and has served as Treasurer of the Ledyard Historical Society for many years.