



# Avalonia Trails

Spring 2018

*Celebrating 50 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.*



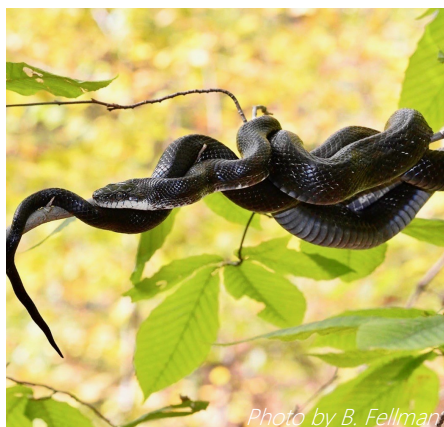
**EXCITING NEW ACQUISITION!** *An old chestnut oak dominates a ridge on Avalonia's 409-acre Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest, Avalonia's largest fee acquisition in its 50-year history. Photo by Kelly Allen.*

Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest p. 4



*Photo by B. Fellman*

50th Anniversary Celebration p. 5



*Photo by B. Fellman*

Outstanding Photo p.5



*Photo by B. Sullivan*

Conn College Students at Work, p. 7-8



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## In Memory of Paul Slosberg

The members, staff, and board of directors of Avalonia were saddened to learn of the passing of Paul Slosberg on March 11, 2018, at Hospice House, Lecanto, Florida, after fighting a courageous battle with cancer. Paul was a generous land donor to Avalonia.



In 2003, Paul became a Life member of Avalonia when he donated 79 acres of his family's land in Ledyard toward the creation of the Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor, a 321-acre, multi-property acquisition. The Corridor was one of Avalonia's most complex but successful projects. His property comprised a central part of that acquisition along with donations made by two other land owners and the Town of Ledyard. Funds were raised to purchase even more of the surrounding land from the Slosberg's at the same time. Today, the entire preserve is surrounded by land zoned R-40 for housing.

The Pine Swamp was originally dominated by Atlantic white cedar trees, which can grow from 65 up to 115 feet tall, 2.5 to 6 feet in diameter, and live from 200 to 1000 years. Although most of these majestic trees were removed for ship masts several hundred years ago, some do remain in the swamp. Once a common component of peat swamps in southeastern Connecticut, there are precious few stands of these trees that remain. Paul's donation was central to the successful conservation of this unique habitat.

We would like to extend our deepest sympathy to Paul's family for their loss and thank them once again for their generous contributions toward the conservation of southeastern Connecticut's natural resources. For more information on Paul, click [HERE](#).



**Avalonia Trails** This triannual 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: Chuck Toal, Dennis Main, David Young, Connecticut College students, Beth Sullivan

Photos: Kelly Allen, Bruce Fellman, Beth Sullivan, Dennis Main

## President's Update

One of the many benefits that Avalonia, other land trusts, state parks, national parks, and wildlife management areas offer is access to the joys and wonders of nature. Photography is a natural extension of that interaction. I snapped the photo of the prothonotary warbler in a Florida state park and it was a thrill. Avalonia is fortunate to have its own award-winning photographer, Bruce Fellman, taking photos on a regular basis; see his amazing shot on page five! As Avalonia's protected acreage in its southeastern Connecticut mission area increases, there will be even more opportunities for such photography and just quiet observation of these marvels.



*Prothonotary warbler (egg yolk bird) in Florida Photo by Dennis Main*

Avalonia has reached the astounding sum of 4000 acres preserved through a combination of fee acquisition and conservation easement. The most recent acquisition, the 409-acre Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest (page four), offers wonderful hiking and photo opportunities (See cover photo of a Connecticut top-10 contender chestnut oak among Connecticut's "notable trees.") Ground-dwelling birds (as seen in the iPhone picture at left)



*Ovenbird nest with hatchlings at Tri-Town. Photo by Dennis Main*

are found throughout the property. The American woodcock, a species of concern in Connecticut spotted on the preserve, spends most of its time on the forest floor probing for earthworms. This is why Avalonia's seven foot dog-leash rule is so critically important for their protection. The preserve's wonderful and strategic maze of hardened logging and interior access trails (which include spurs to sites of special interest and beauty) are being cleaned up by dedicated volunteers. An [informal discussion and guided tour](#) (see back page calendar) for State legislators, community leaders, and other local land trusts to introduce them to Tri-Town will take place this summer along with a trail-building workshop led by Clare Cain, Trails Stewardship Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association.

While on the topic of volunteers and educational interactions, don't miss pages six and seven about some of the wonderful projects undertaken in our 2018 collaboration with Connecticut College's Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment. Twelve students participated this year!

Please mark June 26, 2018, on your calendar for our Annual Meeting at the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center with the social "hour" beginning at 6:00 p.m. and the program starting at 6:30. There will be an exciting but brief overview of Avalonia's new GIS capabilities (check out the GIS maps of all Avalonia's preserves that were recently added to our website) and the election of directors for the January 1, 2019 terms.

One last bit of great news! At last month's Board of Directors meeting, the Treasurer's report indicated that Avalonia has sufficient cash in the various acquisition accounts, together with state-awarded grants, to fully fund the two fee acquisition closings remaining in 2018. We are still raising funds for the Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest to pay down the Conservation Fund bridge loan and the balance on other new acquisitions as part of the multi-year 2000-acre campaign. This is a very nice and well-deserved validation of the efforts of our fund-raising and grant-writing teams and the support of members like you.

*Dennis A. Main*

**Great Breaking News!** The **Aquarion Water Company** named **Avalonia** its statewide **Environmental Champion in the nonprofit category**. To read the article in The Day, click [HERE](#).

## Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest: New Acquisition

On March 20, Avalonia closed on one of its most exciting acquisitions in many years. The Tri-Town Ridgeline Forest, a 409-acre property straddling Griswold, North Stonington and Preston, is the largest fee purchase made in Avalonia's 50-year history.

In 2016, Tri-Town's seller, Billy Y. Walker of Dyersburg, Tenn., contacted the Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC), via Facebook about a property he had placed on the market for the appraised amount of \$1,555,000. CLCC's Advisory Committee then contacted Avalonia and other area land trusts. Avalonia immediately contacted Walker, negotiated a bargain sale of \$925,000, and went into high gear to ensure the property would be acquired and the funds raised.

Avalonia applied for and was awarded a Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Open Space Watershed Land Acquisition grant totaling \$555,000. The Conservation Fund, a national environmental nonprofit, also provided a bridge loan that enabled Avalonia to purchase the property within the seller's timeline. **A fundraising campaign launched in August 2017 is in full-swing now to raise the balance of the funds needed** to both pay back the loan and add to the endowment fund.

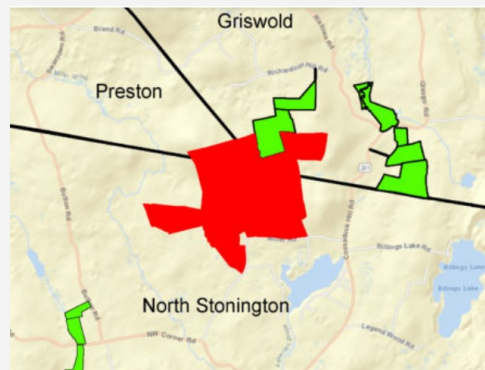


*At higher elevations, visitors will find an abundance of stone walls. Photo by Carl Tjerensen*

The Forest protects the headwaters of Miller Brook and Broad Brook (the latter stocked regularly by CT DEEP with brook and brown trout) which flow into the Quinebaug River, the Shetucket River, and on to the Thames River, forming part of the Thames River Basin of The Last Green Valley, a National Heritage Corridor. The Thames, a key inflow to Long Island Sound, contributes to water quality for the species living there, commercial fishing, and countless recreational activities that flourish there thanks to a healthy Sound. Wetlands are found throughout the forest and support a variety of species including amphibians (wood frogs and green frogs) and birds.

Tri-Town is also the keystone to an increasingly rare wildlife habitat: a large unfragmented forest. This 1,000-acre forest block provides the habitat required by threatened species such as the cerulean warbler. Birds enjoy the native shrubs in the middle wetland and blueberries and other low-berry bushes provide cover and food.

Over ten miles of broad, historic stone-walled trails head west, north, and east through scenic mountains and valleys. The diverse topography, spectacular 100-foot cliffs and rocky outcrops, historic colonial farm ruins, numerous cairns, and other ancient and unique stone structures all make for terrific hiking and other passive recreation activities.



*Tri-Town red; other Avalonia properties green. Map by Mike Goodwin.*



## 50th Anniversary Well Attended

Avalonia Land Conservancy celebrated its 50th anniversary on Feb. 21st at Mystic Aquarium's Great Hall. Photos and videos illustrating fifty years of volunteer land conservation were on display around the exhibit hall and were enjoyed by all. Over 100 people partook in the beer and wine, great food, the company of friends and neighbors, and the spectacular display of marine life.



*Commissioner Klee proposes a toast for 50 more years.*

State Senator Diana Urban (D 43rd) presented a certificate from the state legislature honoring the conservancy and Robert Klee, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, spoke about the need for the state and nonprofits to work together in supporting conservation partnerships.

In steady pursuit of their mission, Avalonia has conserved over 4000 acres on more than 100 properties over the past 50 years and has plans to acquire another 2,000 acres over the next five years. See website for more photos.

## Outstanding Photo by David Young



*"I've been shooting for more than 60 years, and this remains one of my all-time favorite photographs, both for the actual shot and the incredibly good luck that I chanced upon the snake in the first place."*

— Bruce Fellman, photographer

This remarkable image of a rat snake captured at Avalonia's Babcock Ridge Preserve by Bruce Fellman is, understandably, a prize-winning wildlife photo. The subject serpent is certainly arresting itself, but the photo has so many other great qualities. The snake is a little scary, but the background is inviting. The vertical tree trunk and the horizontal branch anchor the composition, while the snake appears to almost float in the air. The elements of the tree are linear while the snake is highly curvilinear, like an art nouveau decorative device. Then there is color. The snake could be a black and white image pasted over all those delicious pastel

hues. Finally, we have definition. The details of each scale on the snake or markings on the tree trunk, enhanced by the use of the camera's flash, placed on top of that soft and creamy background of, what photographers call bokeh (pronounced like OK), the out of focus shapes resulting from the narrow depth of field available with his 55-200mm telephoto lens. Needless to say, this image is a riveting study in contrasts, which is what makes it an Outstanding Photo.

## Avalonia Mentors Conn College Environmental Studies Students by Beth Sullivan

Six years ago we were invited by the founders of the Conn College's Goodwin-Niering Center for the Environment (GNCE) to come and work with the students. The goal was to expose students to and involve them in the everyday work of a land trust organization: the nuts and bolts and the work behind the scenes. In return for our mentoring, the students would develop a project with a deliverable of benefit to Avalonia and the environment.

Over the years we have all learned a lot, especially regarding what kind of projects work well and what do not. They have learned that they cannot save the world all in one semester, nor is the winter-spring term a good one to try and do certain stewardship projects. We, in turn, have learned that this younger generation



*Beth and Conn College students break for a photo at a work party at Dodge Paddock. Photo by Jen Pagach*

has great ideas and energy, and a different perspective that helps us make connections and reach out to younger people. They have infused us with hope for the future!

I have truly enjoyed working with each group as they come through. Some projects are totally unique, different each year; others carry on a tradition of sorts: outreach and work parties are always welcome! The feedback has been that this program and collaboration has been a thoroughly enjoyed, and valuable addition to their education. This year 12 Conn College students participated in the program. The following essays are a sampling of their work.

### Stop Sucking by Anna Laprise and Avatar Simpson

Stop Sucking is a project aimed at promoting the reduction or elimination plastic straw use. This is an extremely important cause due to the negative effects straws have on the environment. To give a sense of the magnitude of the issue, every day in the United States alone 500 million plastic straws are used. This is enough straws to circle the earth 2.5 times in just one day! Furthermore, due to the type of plastic used in the production of straws, they are unable to be recycled. Thus, every plastic straw that has ever been used is still on the planet, either in the ocean or in a landfill. With these things in mind, it is unsurprising that straws are one of the most littered products in the world!

After hearing these staggering figures, it is important to look at what we, as consumers, can do to help positively impact our environment. One alternative to plastic straws is to simply go without! On average, Americans use two straws daily, so one individual skipping straws for one year would save approximately 730 straws! If skipping a straw isn't an option, a second alternative would be to use paper straws that are either biodegradable or compostable, or opt for reusable straws! Both options would significantly reduce waste, and have a less negative effect on the environment. Finally, a great way to combat the use of straws can be done by local coffee shops, and restaurants. A simple step that can be taken to limit straw use is to not automatically provide straws unless requested. The common saying "out of sight, out of mind," is an extremely effective method for limiting straw use. Furthermore, a second step that local businesses can take to limit straw use is to advertise the benefits of skipping on a straw! When using positive reinforcement, people feel more motivated to limit their straw use, and leaves an "everyone wins" sentiment amongst all parties! As such, these two simple steps can vastly decrease straw use!

In sum, due to the negative environmental effects that straws have on our planet, it is extremely important that everyone does what they can to limit their straw use. There are easy fixes to this



*Here we have sophomores Avatar and Anna. Their Stop Sucking campaign has already begun with local coffee shops on campus. One shop is beginning to tally how many plastic straws are being used per day and even adding stainless steel straws. — Alan Lau Photo by Alan Lau*

large problem that can be done at a personal level or on a business level. As we continue to promote the Stop Sucking initiative at Connecticut College and in local communities, we would love to thank Avalonia Land Conservancy and the Mystic Aquarium for inspiring this project and being stewards of this initiative.

*Anna and Avatar have done a great deal of research and taken their message to the public. They are working on the Connecticut College campus, and hope to bring their message to the greater New London community. They were interviewed on the campus radio station, followed by an interview with The Day. The article ran on April 27, and can be found [HERE](#). —Beth Sullivan*



## GNCE Tackles the Wild Asparagus of Dodge Paddock

*Alan Lau, one of the GNCE students, took over Beth's Avalonia E-Trails blog as his project. Here Alan describes a day in the life of a land trust.*

This week on our Avalonia adventures, GNCE sophomores had a workday at Dodge Paddock (2.6 acres) & Beal Preserve (1.08 acres) in Stonington. The beautiful property is right on the coast, filled with a variety of plants and animals. The Beal family donated the portion of land we were working on and had the rights to continue gardening there until Mrs. Beal died almost two years ago. Our challenge that day was to dig up asparagus plants. The roots were well established in the fertile soil, so it was quite a challenge for us to get them out at first. Asparagus are in the lily family along with the onion, garlic, and tulip. The vegetable goes back to early 3000 BCE when Romans first cultivated it. The crop is grown all around the world and has a variety of species.

As we dug up the roots, the strong winds cooled us down. It was a nice 60°F, and everyone was in high spirits and excited to get the job done. Shovels, gloves, and rakes were passed out. We grabbed shovels, began to play some Bob Marley, and dug away. At first it was confusing trying to get the roots out. Trying to pull them out by force clearly wasn't the optimal strategy, as the roots were really deep and interconnected throughout the healthy soil. Luckily, our amazing peer Jonathan showed us his awesome shoveling technique. He carefully placed the shovel on the side of the roots and began to kick the shovel into the dirt with both his legs. One could hear the sweet crackle of the roots breaking as the shovel penetrated the soil. Once the roots broke free, they were ready to be pulled out. It was quite surprising how easy it was to get them out of the soil. It was also really nice to find enormous earthworms. They were so large due to the great amount of organic material that was in the soil after all the years of amazing gardening techniques. It was kept up with tender love and care and provided lots of vegetables and flowers.

**Nothing wasted** After a couple of hours working on the roots, we gathered them up where they would be claimed by North Stonington Garden Club members who would sell them at their annual plant sale. We transported a lot of other organic debris over to an area that was undermined along the old seawall. We filled a lot of holes. We also took some time to explore the preserve and enjoy the new benches that were installed that day by other Avalonia volunteers.

Our GNCE professor Jen went out to get everyone lunch. While waiting for Jen to get back, I began to look at some gulls stationed on a rock about 10 feet away from me. They had yellow beaks that were pointed at me after I began whistling to attract their attention; it worked for a second until the birds went on their way. The scenery was absolutely breathtaking. Finally, Jen came back with lunch. The ravenous students quickly formed a line to acquire their meal. However, some were distracted by Anne's dog Riley who made another guest appearance. Our meal was enhanced by Anne's cookies and juice! In all, it was a good day at Dodge Paddock and Beal Preserve.



*Everyone dug in to dig out those asparagus roots.*

**Pequotsepos Brook Preserve** "Mini History" by Haruko Tateyama based on full history by Conn College '17 students Nako Kobayashi and Moriah McKenna

Pequotsepos Brook Preserve is a 44-acre property settled by Captain John Gallup, one of the first colonial settlers of the area and a member of the original founding families of America. The land's history takes us back to the time after the Pequot War when John Gallup received five hundred acres of land from the royal court in England as a reward for massacring the Pequot Indians, who were native residents of the area. Pequotsepos Brook Preserve is a part of the gift that he received. Parts of Coogan Farm and the historic Whitehall Mansion Inn were also part of that land grant.

The small brook that runs through the lowlands on the western edge of this property gives this preserve its name. It is interesting to know that the word "sepos" means brook in the Pequot language, so the name "Pequotsepos Brook" is a redundant use of the word. Three gorgeous stone bridges cross this brook, all of them part of the historic trails of this property. The bridges were carefully constructed to have very smooth and flat surfaces to allow water to flow under and for farmer's carts to drive over them. Their ability to remain sturdy for over a hundred years proves the elaborate skill put into the construction of the bridge. It also was a practical way to utilize the large rocks found all over the property.

An interesting fact about one of the bridges is what was called the "Plymouth Rock." It is a nickname known among locals for an old Plymouth car that swerved off the road and rolled down into the brook about 75 years ago in the stone bridge area. Although the wrecked car became popular as a landmark of the site, it was polluting the brook. In 2013, Paul Gleason of Dean's Auto Recycling, his son Jim, and employee Frank, all volunteered to hand-carry, piece-by-piece, the rusty wreck hundreds of feet from the brook to the street for removal to his shop.

*Full article by Kobayashi and McKenna can be read on Avalonia's website [HERE](#).*





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### Save Some Trees!

We are pleased to share this paper version of our newly-designed newsletter with all our members. We hope you will enjoy it. If you prefer to save some trees by subscribing to the electronic version only, please visit our website and let us know:  
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## Calendar of Events

*Go to [avalonialandconservancy.org /events/](http://avalonialandconservancy.org/events/) for more info....*

June 23 @ 10:00 - 11:30 am Hike – Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor, Ledyard

June 26 @ 6:00 pm Annual Meeting 2018 at DPNC, 109 Pequotsepos Rd., Mystic

July 7 @ 10:00 - 11:30 am Hike – Hoffman Evergreen Preserve, N. Stonington

July 13 @ 4:00 - 7:00 pm Conservation & Tractor Night, Farmers' Market, 45 Bozrah St., Bozrah

July 14 @ 9:00-10:00 am Hike and Regional Conservation Conversation, Tri-Town, N. Stonington

August 11 @ 10:30 am - 12:30 pm Hike – Preston Nature Preserve, Preston

September 7 @ 4:00 pm Wood-Pawcatuck Paddle and Picnic, Hope Valley, RI