

The official newsletter of Avalonia Land Conservancy

AVALONIA *trails*

SPRING
2021



Photo by Sandra Alexander

THE RIGHT TREES FOR THE RIGHT TIME

FOUR TALKS ON FOREST RESILIENCE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

New approaches to forest management that can help maximize forest resilience in changing climate conditions are the focus of four talks sponsored by Avalonia, Connecticut Sea Grant and UConn CLEAR (Center for Land Use Education & Research). Our LISFF-funded team of collaborators from UCONN and Avalonia will plan for and plant resilient new species of trees at the Hoffman Evergreen Preserve in Stonington and share new ideas about forest stewardship and climate change with conservation communities across the state through a speaker series.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A WORD FROM KIMBERLY BARBER BRADLEY

In January 2020, I stepped up as Avalonia's 10th president and had no idea about the challenges this past year would present to our organization, the community it serves, and each one of us as individuals. I am proud to serve a second term as Avalonia's board president and, based upon the resilience I have observed over the past year, I am confident in doing so. Our organization has adapted to Zoom and is finding new ways to engage and coordinate with our dedicated volunteers and connect with the growing number of visitors enjoying our open space resources.

Avalonia's Director of Development, Terri Eickel, and her planning committee organized and ran the first-ever Great Avalonia Trail Trek in October 2020. This event brought us together in a safe, socially-distanced manner to hike, run, and ride our bicycles to our preserves. It was great for our bodies and minds, connected us to one another in friendly competition, and helped us pay off the Conservation Fund loan on the Tri-Town Forest Preserve by December 2020. The Great Avalonia Trail Trek will return in 2021 as an annual event, so stay tuned for more fun this fall.

As we move forward in 2021, we are hopeful and remain dedicated to Avalonia's mission of regional land stewardship and conservation. We are working toward hiring a stewardship coordinator to support the efforts of our Stewardship and Town Committees in managing our open spaces. Several volunteers are working to make our trail information easier for visitors to access and understand. Our LISFF grant-funded Hoffman Preserve team will be educating communities across the state about climate change and adaptation. Last but not least, Avalonia will move through the Land Trust Alliance reaccreditation process this fall, reaffirming our commitment to the highest standards of land conservation practices.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

The series is being offered as the Stonington / Avalonia Town Committee working with UCONN researchers embark on a project to develop a management plan for the 200-acre forest, which will consider climate change projections and assisted migration of trees suited to projected future conditions.

To register, visit <https://clear.uconn.edu/webinars/schedule.htm>

For more information about the Right Trees for the Right Time speaker series and May workshop information, contact Sharon Lynch at slynch@gwu.edu.

March 10 History of New England Forests and Climate Change

Led by Maria Janowiak, researcher and deputy director of the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science, USDA Forest Service. This program covered the dilemma facing land stewards in coastal New England and innovative ways to preserve natural habitats that are aligned with informed stewardship. View the discussion at <https://bit.ly/3qK1m2g>



April 14 Forest Management for Carbon Sequestration and Climate Adaptation

Presented by Dr. Todd Ontl, PhD, a research scientist and climate adaptation specialist for the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science and Michigan Tech. This program explores how carbon cycles and carbon sequestration are fundamental to understanding forest stewardship.



May 12 Experimenting with Climate-Adaptive Forestry Practices: Challenges and Opportunities

Led by Christopher Riely, a conservationist and licensed forester who works in southern New England. After a brief overview of climate adaptation strategies for forests, he will focus on an experimental project at a 13,000-acre reservoir property in Scituate, R.I.



June 9 Brave New Worlds for Trees: Assisted Migration and the Study of Hoffman Preserve

Led by Juliana Barrett, extension educator and coastal habitat specialist with CT Sea Grant and UConn Extension. Barrett, the principle grant investigator, will describe the history of the preserve and climate projections through 2050. This will include a progress report on techniques for enhancing forest resilience and how to select and nurture the right trees at the right time.



“Avalonia is excited to engage a wide range of community members in discussion and enhance understanding of climate change and its effects on coastal forests in the Northeastern U.S.,” said Kimberly Barber-Bradley, Avalonia’s board president. “Climate change is occurring at a faster pace than traditional stewardship methods allow, and these talks will open up new, evidence-based ways of thinking about forest management and its relationship to Long Island Sound.”

Avalonia Trails is a biannual publication that communicates Avalonia's mission to acquire, protect, and maintain land of high conservation and habitat value; combat climate change for the benefit of people and wildlife; and ensure healthy, livable communities for now and generations to come.

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**DON'T LET THE PANDEMIC
KEEP YOU AWAY FROM
THE VERNAL POOL RIOT
OF AWAKENING LIFE**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BRUCE FELLMAN

In years past, this article would have been an invitation to join me on a night walk to explore one of my favorite species of habitat, a temporary wetland known as a vernal pool. But with the pandemic still too close for comfort, we won't be able to gather, headlights ablaze, at a snowmelt- and rain-shower-filled "part-time puddle" in the woods to witness one of the natural world's most remarkable opening acts.

Don't let COVID-19 keep you inside. The coronavirus that upended the rhythms of our lives has been hardly a whisper in the vernal, and that's kind of reassuring. Life here has proceeded as usual, and if you need an anchor for an unmoored spirit, head to a temporary pond.

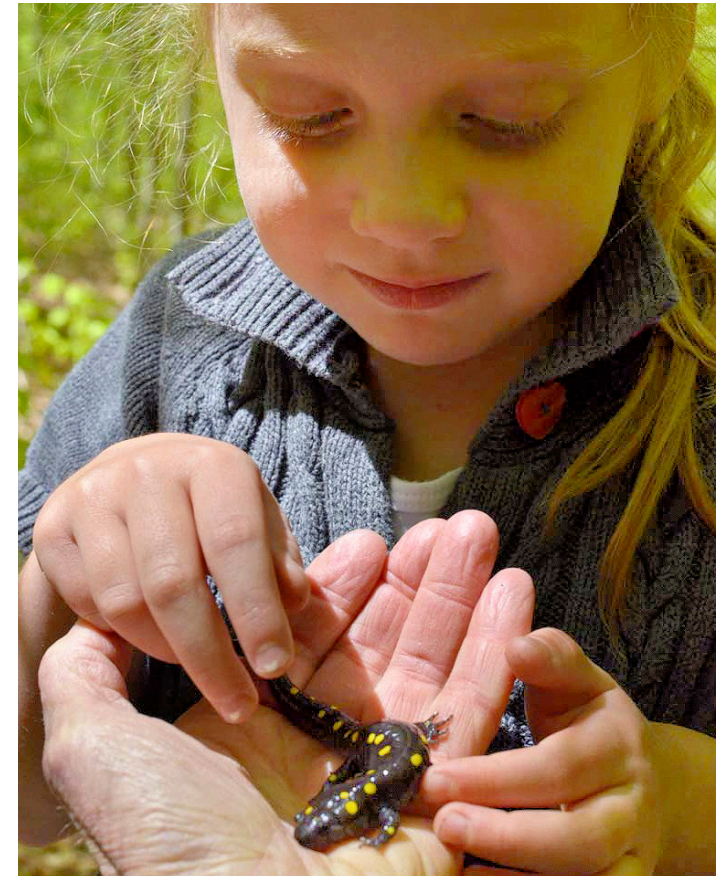
Among my favorites is a group of vernal pools in the glacier-carved valley of Avalonia's Babcock Ridge Preserve, but these small wetlands, which typically fill with water in the autumn and dry to dust by mid-summer, are common features of almost every forest. (More rarely, you can find vernal pools in the middle of open fields and meadows.)

Their key characteristic is that they don't support fish. Usually, this is because they don't hold water for the entire year, but sometimes, due to accidents of geography,

full-time ponds can be fish-less and function like vernal, supporting a cast of noteworthy amphibians and invertebrates that thrive nowhere else.

To find a temporary pond, follow your ears. If you've ever heard what you would swear is a chorus of ducks quacking annoyedly in the forest darkness at night, it's coming from the vernal's signature species, the wood frog. These black-masked bandits are usually accompanied by a chorale of bell-ringers called spring peepers, and if you do enough searching, you'll often find congregations of silent but exquisite spotted salamanders, whose yellow spots almost glow on their black skin.

They congregate at the pond for riotous nights of group breeding—if you have kids in tow, be prepared for The Talk—and some of the vernal pools also host the larvae of prescient marbled salamanders, whose black-and-silver parents courted last fall in what were then dry holes. If you're quiet and lucky, the cold water may also be filled with back-swimming fairy shrimp, inch-long relatives of shrimp and lobsters that can only exist in these fish-less habitats. There are many other animals and plants present in this explosion of life. With any luck, we'll be able to enjoy them together next year.



Vernal players (clockwise, from top): spring peepers, spotted salamander, marbled salamander, fairy shrimp, wood frogs (male, on top).

A BUSY AND FRUITFUL YEAR AHEAD

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE BY TERRI EICKEL

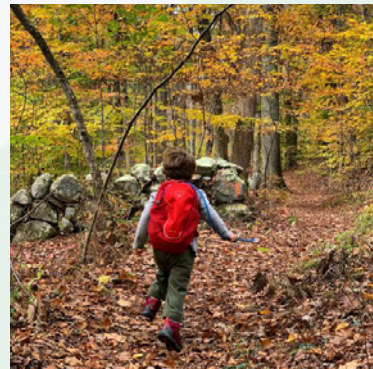
If you know me, you know that I'm always saying, "Thank you!" So, let me begin with a big thank you for all your support in 2020; you truly made a difference. Because of our amazing members and donors, Avalonia was able to save three properties in North Stonington, Stonington, and Ledyard, as well as pay off the Conservation Fund loan that we used to conserve the TriTown Forest Preserve, four months ahead of schedule. Although COVID restricted our ability to hold in-person events, we saw a great increase in visitors to our preserves. We were able to fund our stewardship efforts and keep our trails safe and beautiful for visitors throughout the year. Our first annual Great Avalonia Trail Trek was a huge success and a lot of fun.

2021 will also be a busy and fruitful year. We are working to conserve three new properties in North Stonington, Preston, and Norwich, which will not only provide habitat for birds and wildlife, but also assist in the fight against climate change. Our preserves sequester thousands of tons of carbon each year and our wetlands provide a buffer to storms and rising sea levels. Adding these three preserves will sequester an additional 2,400 metric tons of carbon each year – or over an estimated 5 million pounds of CO₂.

Another priority for 2021 will be to co-host events with Outdoor Afro and Latino Outdoors — two non-profit organizations that celebrate and encourage leadership and participation in outdoor activities for Black and Latino communities. We look forward to partnering with these path-breaking organizations to ensure that our preserves are welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

Finally, we are excited about our partnership with UConn and CT Sea Grant to perform cutting-edge research on planting climate-resilient forests with a study at Hoffman Evergreen Preserve, as well as our four-part webinar series.

Again, thank you for your support. We are grateful for your dedication, time, and commitment to our beautiful planet!



THE GREAT AVALONIA TRAIL TREK RETURNS

BY TERRI EICKEL

Last October's first annual Great Avalonia Trail Trek was a big success. We crushed our \$20,000 goal, raised almost \$25,000, and paid off the balance of the TriTown Forest Preserve Conservation Fund loan. Our Trail Trekkers did a fantastic job fundraising. Our top fundraiser, Dennis Main, raised an impressive \$3,425, closely followed by Elizabeth Sorensen who raised \$2,223 and Beth Sullivan who raised \$1,875. Trekkers who competed in mileage and speed categories included Sue Sutherland who hiked 46 miles in one week and Julie Dupont-Woody who ran the challenging 5.5 mile Blue Trail at TriTown in one hour and six minutes!

The pictures of smiling faces and the stories from the participants were the best part of the Trail Trek. Jess from North Stonington said, "The Great Avalonia Trail Trek was a very rewarding experience for my family and we will forever remember how much we enjoyed raising money for a great cause. I thoroughly enjoyed using this excuse to get my kids out on the trails and to promote the preserves to my friends in town. A great event, good memories; looking forward to next year's Trail Trek!"

We also want to thank our amazing sponsors: Karen and Bob Askins, Sweet Grass Creamery, Hull Forest Products, Full Heart Farm, Charter Oak Federal Credit Union, and Mystic Paintworks.

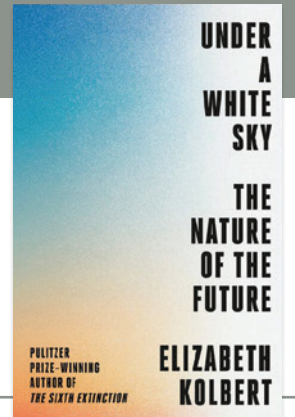
Please Save the Date! The 2021 Great Avalonia Trail Trek will be held October 16 through October 24. The money raised will go toward stewardship of Avalonia's preserves, so this will be a great way for you to exercise in the great outdoors, fundraise for Avalonia, and take care of the land you love.



Photos top-to-bottom submitted by Cail Rodgers, Jennipher Sheridan, Kevin Halter, and Kimberly Barber Bradley

RECOMMENDED READING

Under a White Sky: The Nature of the Future Elizabeth Kolbert, The New Yorker writer and Pulitzer Prize winning author of *The Sixth Extinction* (2014), has written another extraordinary book we should all read if we are still hoping that technology and ingenuity are going to rescue us from the climate predicament we're in as a consequence of our unrelenting environmental exploitation. Ironically, Kolbert's book reveals that the more we engineer to solve one ecological problem, the more ecological problems we create.



AVALONIA TRAIL FINDER: KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

BY CHUCK TOAL



Over the last few months, Avalonia has been designing a searchable database called Trail Finder to make it easier for first-time visitors to find exactly what they are looking for in a trail. Trail Finder will make 40 of our 100+ preserves more accessible because hikers can search for criteria such as trail-head locations, difficulty, and length so they will know (what to expect) before they go. But to build a data base, you have to have data.

Enter Dale Wilson, an avid hiker and dedicated Avalonia volunteer who moved to the Groton area to serve a three-year stint in the Navy as a medical officer at the submarine base. Although Dale had hiked most of the Appalachian Trail and many national parks, he was a rookie when it came to Avalonia's preserves. He had to deal with the occasional tricky parking lot, hard-to-find trailheads, and calculate the length of each colored trail. Dale decided that he would facilitate the experience

for other first-timers by taking notes on trail difficulty, length, trail-head locations and parking on 40 Avalonia trails to make the hiking experience as smooth, stress-free, and fun as possible.

For families, Trail Finder will be a great compliment to Avalonia's Hike & Seek nature discovery program. Together, the programs provide hikers of all ages with an opportunity to go outdoors and have fun using a scavenger hunt format...without mom and dad getting lost!

While Avalonia's Trail Finder is the first to be developed in the state, other Connecticut communities will follow suit and the final result will be a state-wide Trail Finder system (currently in development by UConn Extension). Connecticut's Trail Finder will then join several other states with similar programs. Avalonia's Trail Finder is set to launch on April 1st and the statewide program will begin to roll out the first week in June, just in time for Trails Day (June 5 - 6).

AVALONIA IS INSTAGRAMMABLE!

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Photos: Beth Sullivan, @bucklette @scorpbia





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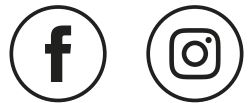
View our full calendar of events
at www.AVALONIA.org



Avalonia's Hike & Seek program encourages people of all ages to explore our preserves with an educational scavenger hunt. GET READY... by locating a Hike & Seek preserve near you; GET SET... by downloading a trail map, fun clues and targets onto your smartphone/tablet; then GO!

AVALONIA.ORG/Hike-and-Seek

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A VALUABLE MEMBER OF AVALONIA!

Over 52 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.

