

The official newsletter of Avalonia Land Conservancy

SPRING
2024

AVALONIA *trails*



AVALONIA WELCOMES SPRING

**“MY FAVORITE WEATHER
IS BIRD CHIRPING WEATHER.”**

— TERRI GUILLEMETS

The official newsletter of Avalonia Land Conservancy

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Avalonia Trails is a biannual publication that communicates Avalonia’s work 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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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

A WORD FROM DENNIS S. MAIN

Avalonia’s Board of Directors is finalizing a strategic plan. In alignment with our mission and vision statements, our focus will continue to be to acquire, protect, and communicate the values of land conservation in southeastern Connecticut.

As THE regional land trust for southeastern Connecticut, Avalonia’s prime goal will be contributing to the state’s Green Plan target of conservation acreage (see Acquisitions, page 4) which will include collaborating with municipal and conservation-supportive entities in the New London County area.

A second and equally important goal will be the proper protection of acquired lands and habitats; a multi-faceted endeavor that includes maintaining national accreditation, employing stewardship best practices, sustaining sufficient fee and conservation easements endowment fund legal defense and stewardship reserve levels, and funding adequate staffing for stewardship compliance activities.

A third major goal will entail effective communication of the value of the conserved resources to our members, partners, collaborators, volunteers, and the general public. Our experienced and well-staffed Communications Committee will lead these efforts.

The Annual Appeal is the primary funding source for Avalonia’s operations. Fundraising mailings went out in late 2023 with excellent results, thanks to our many donors.

The annual membership renewal for 2024 has been moved to late winter, with benefits continuing during a three-month grace period, through March 31, 2024. Renewals can be made online at www.Avalonia.org/membership. We hope you will renew your membership to support the important initiatives Avalonia has on the horizon.

BIRDERS FLYING HIGH AFTER SPOTTING RARE SPECIES AT AVALONIA PRESERVES

STORY AND PHOTO BY GAIL KAHOVER



A gaggle of people formed a perimeter around a grove of cedar trees at Knox Preserve, their eyes focused on signs of movement among the branches.

Some of the visitors held binoculars, others had cameras with telescopic lenses. One photographer trudged a suitcase full of lenses over the winter-hardened dirt paths. They were all looking for a bird – a 5-inch yellow-faced songbird called a Hermit Warbler. The warbler breeds in forests from California to Oregon, and winters in Guatemala and Mexico.

And this bird was not the only rarity spotted recently. The Western Kingbird, a large flycatcher from the West, made a visit to the Wequetequock Cove Preserve in November.

These birds have put a focus on Avalonia. In fact, there are 43 “hotspots” in Avalonia preserves listed on eBird, a large, online database of bird observations. The eBird hotspots are locations that people regularly visit for birding.

According to eBird, 53 species of birds were sighted at Knox Preserve in the first 16 days of February, from a Bald Eagle to a Common Loon. In April and May of 2023, 48 bird species were sighted at Henne Preserve, including Ospreys, warblers, and the crazy-haired Red-breasted Mergansers.

Patrick Tamborra, who has been seriously birding since 2012, counts Knox, Cedar Wood, and Dodge Paddock as his favorite Avalonia preserves for birding. Long-time birder Robert Askins lists Pine Swamp Wildlife Corridor as the preserve he most frequents.



Glossy Ibis at Paffard Marsh

YOU DON’T NEED A SUITCASE FULL OF LENSES TO START BIRDING

Tamborra and Askins provided the following advice for beginners:

- 1 Get the basics. Download eBird (www.ebird.org) to discover where birds are being seen throughout New London County and keep track of your sightings.
- 2 Learn to identify birds by their songs. Download Merlin Bird ID, a free phone app produced by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Merlin includes a sound ID button that will identify all the birds singing or calling at the time. Although Merlin’s IDs are generally reliable, Askins recommends confirming identification of birds before submitting checklists.
- 3 Bird with an experienced birder. Make contacts by participating in events sponsored by nature-related organizations.
- 4 Lastly, Tamborra encourages new birders to “enjoy nature, being outdoors, and appreciating the beauty around you.”

Equipment:

Binoculars, field guide or phone app, paper/pencil (or phone app) to mark sightings

Books and Online Resources:

Cornell Lab’s All About Birds (www.allaboutbirds.org) A guide with courses on bird identification

BirdCast (<https://birdcast.info/>) Migration data useful for planning birding outings

Audubon Bird Guide Phone app from the National Audubon Society

Birding in Connecticut, 2018, by Frank Gallo

ACQUISITIONS CONSERVATION ACTIVITY UPDATE

BY DENNIS S. MAIN

Avalonia closed 2023 with a flurry, recording deeds for sales and donations right up to the last business day of December. With a final tally of over 420 acres conserved for the year, parcels in Griswold, Groton, Ledyard, North Stonington, Norwich, Preston and Stonington bring our total conserved acres to 5,152.

Nearly 1,500 acres are still in the pipeline, with many expected to close in 2024. For some perspective on how that aligns with state goals, Section 23-8 of the Connecticut General Statutes (Connecticut Green Plan) requires a goal of conserving 21% or 673,210 acres of Connecticut's land base as open space by year 2023:

- 10% (320,576 acres) is to be held by the state;
- 11% (352,634 acres) is to be held by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies

As of the end of March 2022, 513,310 acres had been preserved (76.2% of the total goal) leaving 159,900 acres still to go according to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). Should Avalonia close on all 1,500 or so acres, that is less than 1% of the desired acres remaining to be conserved under the Green Plan.

As we start 2024, Avalonia likely (as of this printing) has just closed on 159.42 acres, partially in Bozrah (105.2) and in Montville (55.22) which will be Avalonia's first conservation parcels in either town, with Montville being an under served municipality. The next large anticipated closing is the 673.26-acre Bond Property in Montville, a diverse habitat with existing accessible parking and trail infrastructure and 50% of its boundary abutting municipal watershed property.

We are currently awaiting the spring announcement of awards for the DEEP Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) program. Avalonia has applied for two OSWA grants: one in Norwich (101.47 acres) and the other in Ledyard (223.47-acres). Both parcels are expected to offer trails and accessible parking and connect expanded greenways.

Donors + Members Make Conservation Possible

Please renew your membership for 2024 and consider a donation. Contact us at info@avalonialc.org.

5,152
total conserved acres

420
acres conserved in 2023



Above: Map of Hunter Brook Preserve in Norwich, CT; Right: Saporita Woods photographed by Carl Tjerandsen - both acquired in 2023.

RECOMMENDED READING

Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscure the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming by Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt* reveals the tactics used by professional climate deniers to spread doubt and confusion about the reality of global warming. *Merchants of Doubt* was made into a film directed by Robert Kenner and released in 2014.

NORTH STONINGTON GARDEN CLUB FUNDS AN OAK RESTORATION PROJECT AT HERMAN E. SHEETS FAMILY FOREST

BY TOBIAS GLAZA,
DIRECTOR OF STEWARDSHIP

Over the last decade there have been multiple stressors on the health of the region's oak forests. The effects are especially evident in the Connecticut/Rhode Island borderlands where defoliation by the Spongy Moth together with periodic drought have resulted in the die off of many mature oak stands.

Complicated by deer browsing and a tendency to be outpaced by the growth of more shade tolerant trees and shrubs, oak regeneration has been significantly impacted in this area. Avalonia's Herman E. Sheets Family Forest, a nearly 90-acre preserve along the recently designated Wild and Scenic Green Fall River in North Stonington, is no exception to this unfortunate dynamic.

Thanks to funding from the North Stonington Garden Club, stewardship staff, volunteers, and interns have begun to implement a small-scale oak restoration project along the ridge lines in the southwestern portion of this preserve. In an effort to encourage the re-establishment of oak trees, Avalonia's stewardship team has started to enhance existing canopy gaps, release crowded/over topped oaks from competitors, and manage understory vegetation. These efforts will create suitable conditions for the early springtime planting of several hundred red and white oak seedlings.



The overarching goal is a healthier oak forest with trees of various ages and positions in the canopy. If achieved, this in-stand diversity will allow for more resilience in the face of future ecological disturbances and provide specialized habitat for wildlife. Adjacent to the existing trail system, visitors to the preserve will have a front row seat to observe the changes overtime in these restoration areas.

ESSAY AND PHOTO BY
JEFF ALEXANDER



PRESERVING HOFFMAN: A PATH TO BEING USEFUL

My introduction to Avalonia happened when I first crossed the threshold of Hoffman Evergreen Preserve under cover of bluish-green hemlock boughs. We'd recently relocated to Stonington and the heavily-wooded, dead-quiet preserve was a short hop from our home, an easy outlet for my runs and nature hikes.

Early on, I wasn't knowledgeable enough to recognize the mighty struggle of the dense, dark woods primed for a logging project that would tame its overcrowded groves and stimulate the forest's long-overdue rejuvenation. I soon watched from the perimeter as saws and heavy equipment carried out the somber work of slicing and felling. It was a radical sight.

"It affirmed my commitment of time...my modest investment in bubbling streams and pine glens...."

JEFF ALEXANDER

Growing eager to contribute, I decided to volunteer. I planted native seedlings in the cleared ground, rebuilt stone walls, spread buckets of acorns gathered from roadways, removed invasives and shuttled water to aid new growth. In 2022, alongside a friend, we built and installed a sturdy cedar bridge to span the brook on the lower red trail, replacing a feeble structure way past its prime.

It wasn't long before signs of life re-emerged – saplings sprouting, owls screeching, long-absent deer prints returning to the snow. It affirmed my commitment of time, my modest investment in bubbling streams and pine glens, a hedge against the leveling of natural spaces in favor of housing developments. It was my way of doubling down on my son's future and the well-being of the neighborhood's critters – from toads to titmice.

James Carville once said, "Outside of a person's love, the most sacred thing they can give is their labor." So true and for me, the labor isn't toil; it's my form of reimbursement for all nature provides. I volunteer because it's useful, and that's reward enough.

NEWS



In Memory of an Avalonia Conservationist: Joellen Anderson

Avalonia lost a passionate champion of land preservation in February with the death of Joellen Anderson at the age of 86.

She was known for her encyclopedic knowledge of conservation efforts, and her dedication to local land and water preservation.

The Groton resident had been an enthusiastic and resolute member of Avalonia's Communications Committee and the Groton Town Committee. She was involved with Avalonia from its early years and was a fountain of information, serving as a steward of its history. Anderson was also the recipient of Avalonia's Nature's Heroes Award in 2019.

Anderson loved all of Avalonia's preserves, but especially Moore Woodlands in Groton, which she affectionately referred to as "the Moore." She was also a consistent presence on hikes and the eyes and ears of Avalonia's trails.

Our deepest condolences go to Joellen's family. She was a staunch defender of the precious resources we share and she will be missed.



LET'S GO: SUPER SPRING EVENTS

Save these dates and register at www.Avalonia.org (unless otherwise noted). We'll be adding to our calendar so check back often!

A Vernal Pool Adventure at Babcock Ridge Preserve Wednesday, March 20 | 6 pm – 8 pm

Celebrate the arrival of spring with a twilight hands-on visit, led by Avalonia naturalist Bruce Fellman, to a woodland pond alive with the sights and sounds of newly awakened amphibians and invertebrates — Wood Frogs, Spring Peepers, Fairy Shrimp, and Spotted Salamanders.

Earth Day at Groton Public Library Saturday, April 20 | 11 am - 4 pm

Join us as we celebrate Earth Day! Local and regional vendors, kid-friendly activities, food, and speakers.

Honoring Earth Day with a Wild Flora Walk at the Benedict Benson Preserve Sunday, April 21 | 10 am – 12 pm

Led by Avalonia naturalist Bruce Fellman, trek through the Benedict Benson Preserve to watch its uplands, centerpiece stream, and wetlands come to life with greening ferns, mosses, and wildflowers, from the rare Hepatica to the ubiquitous marsh marigolds.

North Stonington Garden Club's 2024 Plant Sale at North Stonington Elementary School Saturday, May 11 | 9 am - 12 pm

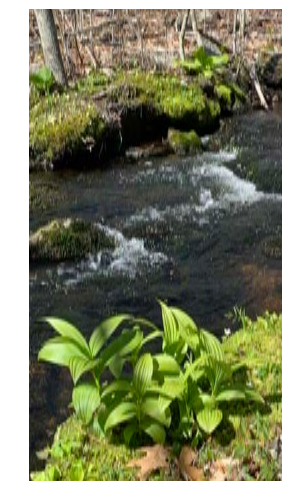
Visit us at the North Stonington Garden Club's biggest fundraiser and take home something special for your garden! Check www.NSGardenClub.org for all the details.

Earthfest CT at McCook Park in Niantic Saturday, May 18 | 11 am - 3 pm

The community comes together for an expressive celebration featuring environmental organizations, live animal exhibits, fun food vendors and musical guests. Visit www.earthdayeverydayct.org for more info.

An Exploration for the Birds at Tri-town Saturday, June 1 | 10 am – 12 pm

As part of National Trails Day, join Avalonia naturalist Bruce Fellman for a bird walk along the woodland trails of Tri-town Ridgeline Forest Preserve as we look and listen for a wide variety of avian delights in full courtship.



(1) A vernal pool at Babcock Ridge
(2) Avalonia at the Groton Public Library
(3) Wild flora in spring
(4) A Wood Frog



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

THE 2024 AVALONIA PHOTO CONTEST STARTS MAY 15TH

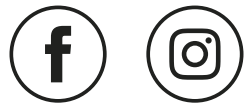


Our photo contest is back! You may submit two photos in each of three categories: View from the Forest Floor, People & Nature, and Life & Water.

Only photos from Avalonia properties are eligible. The contest runs 5/15 through 8/31. Winners will be announced on 9/9/24. Submit entries online at www.Avalonia.org/photo-contest starting 5/15.

Photo by Susan Chester, taken at Knox Preserve

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A VALUABLE MEMBER OF AVALONIA!

Over 56 years of preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources.

