



Avalonia Trails

P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic, CT 06372

DEDICATED TO PRESERVING
LAND AND WILDLIFE HABITATS

FALL 2010

Bird Life Flourishes at Sandy Point

by Cindy Maynard

The beautiful Sandy Point island consistently draws the attention of both people and wildlife, and this year has been no exception. New management strategies, resulting from a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. and the cooperation of the public have resulted in phenomenal numbers of nesting birds on the island.



Piping plover. Photo by Rick Newton.

This season, six pairs of the federally threatened piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*) nested on Sandy Point (tripling last year's number). As of early July, of these six pairs, two had abandoned their nests, two pairs each had two 2-week old chicks, one pair was still incubating a four egg nest and one pair had already completed their nesting and fledged one chick. Along with the plovers, the American oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*), which is a high priority species for the USFWS, is doing well nesting on Sandy Point. There are four pairs of American oystercatchers: one pair has fledged one chick, and the other three pairs have fledged two chicks each. Four pairs also attempted to nest last year, but only two pairs successfully



Oystercatchers. Photo by Rick Newton

fledged one chick each. The biggest change from recent years, however, is the immense colony of state listed least terns (*Sternula antillarum*) in the large overwash area in the middle of the island. The most recent count yields about 436 nesting pairs, plus an additional seven pairs on the western tip of the island, which far exceeds the average colony size of 100-200 pairs. Least terns have not nested on Sandy Point since 1998, but this year it boasts the largest colony in southern New England. In addition, there is at least one common tern (*Sterna hirundo*) with a nest in the colony, and over 100 common terns and approximately five federally endangered roseate terns (*Sterna dougallii dougallii*) have been consistently resting along both the north and south shorelines and feeding in the waters off of Sandy Point.

The anticipated success of these vulnerable breeding birds is attributable to a combination of factors working together including the efforts of the USFWS staff to cover the island up to five days a week, the dedication of Avalonia members and volunteers, and most importantly, the cooperation of the public using Sandy Point. The compliance with the "no dog" rule and the respect for the closed nesting areas have both increased this season. The willingness of the public to enjoy and share this beautiful piece of land alongside some of our region's most unique wildlife is the key to their success!



Volunteers from Avalonia and USFWS construct an enclosure to protect nest. Photo by Anne Roberts-Pierson.

Cindy Maynard is a Biological Science Technician with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She has worked at Sandy Point monitoring the bird population during the summers of 2009 and 2010.

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Avalonia now has a Facebook page

We have responded to the suggestions of a number of members and established an Avalonia Land Conservancy Facebook page. Connect from our website, www.avalonialandconservancy.org. Become a fan and receive timely updates of Avalonia news and reminders of upcoming events. You can also submit comments and photographs. Be sure to recommend Avalonia to your Facebook friends!

President's Message

After several months of nonstop news media coverage and images of the horrific BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster and oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the monstrous consequences to the wildlife and humans who depend on the sea, please enjoy our uplifting cover story as it describes a beloved ocean setting where wildlife and humans interact rather closely but right here in Long Island Sound. Contrary to the horror in the Gulf, we present a good news success story on Sandy Point, but one that nonetheless highlights the importance of particular marine ecosystems. Since Ms. Maynard wrote this cover story, the documented number of hatched least tern chicks reached over 400. This fantastic news is somewhat muted when I have to share that actual fledged least tern chicks were perhaps only 50% due to gull predation. This too will be addressed in future as we continue to learn how best to protect federally threatened shore birds on Sandy Point.

Tapping into and heightening awareness within a community's consciousness is a difficult task but I believe we achieved this with Sandy Point this year, as well as within another area where Avalonia owns property and that is Poquetanuck Cove. I invite you to read about this success story (page 5) that became a reality through the dedicated efforts of many partners.

Great conservation achievements all; brought to bear through Board leadership and planning, the likes of which we have been talking about in our past few newsletters. We continue to shape our strategic vision, galvanize public support, recruit friends (see our new Facebook page!), build credibility and raise funds. Conserving land and familiar landscapes that offer opportunities close to home for recreation and renewal demand such extraordinary work by Avalonia's extraordinary volunteers.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Avalonia Trails*. If you are new to our conservation work, please consider joining our efforts to protect places that matter to people in southeastern CT and Long Island Sound. As always, we thank each and every donor for supporting Avalonia's conservation mission.

Anne Roberts-Pierson

In Memoriam: Deane C. Avery August 13, 1922-May 12, 2010

by Anne Nalwalk

This past May, Avalonia and southeastern Connecticut lost the remarkable Deane Avery. Well known as the editor and co-publisher of the *Day* (among many other things), Deane also served as a director of Avalonia for nine years, from 1989 to 1998.

Deane's contributions to the board were legendary. His clear thinking, quick wit, and keen sense of humor brought many floundering discussions into focus, thus maintaining the Board's equilibrium.

Deane and his wife Shirley were excellent stewards of the 142-acre Hoffman Evergreen Preserve, which their Wolf Neck Road property abutted. They kept the trails open and walked them frequently, carefully loading their German Shepherd into a garden cart so she could legitimately cross her boundary alert system to accompany them.

At the time of Deane's memorial service, we all learned so much more of the stuff of which he was made. The *Day* published one of his early articles for a military newspaper in which he detailed the World war II mission in which he miraculously brought his plane back to his carrier only to have it declared beyond repair and dumped over the side. Truly heroic!

We have missed Deane's contributions to the Board in recent years, but valued his gifts of clear thinking, good judgment and humor. His family graciously suggested that, in lieu of flowers, donations could be made to Avalonia and we are grateful for that continuing support.

Anne Nalwalk is a Director-at-Large.

Summer Solstice Garden Party: Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!

Our Summer Solstice Garden Party fundraiser held June 20th at Stone Acres Farm was a resounding success to judge from the number of participants who asked when we planned to do this again! More than 130 people enjoyed the chicken and ribs barbecue provided by Tim Turner, and the music of the Riverboat Ramblers as well as the spectacular gardens and the many silent auction offerings. We thank all who helped, all who gave and all who came, but extend our particular thanks to the following people who made it possible.

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David and Judy Anderson
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President Anne Roberts-Pierson (standing, right) together with organizers Ellen Fossum (left) and Margaret Gibson (center) welcomes guests to the "Circle of Honor" reception.

Photo by Rick Newton. For more of Rick's Garden Party Photos, visit our Facebook page.

Silent Auction Donors

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Beth Sullivan
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Water Street Cafe

National Public Lands Day

by Joellen Anderson

National Public Lands Day (NPLD) is Saturday, September 25, 2010. Watch Avalonia's website www.avalonialandconservancy.org under Events or Stewardship for activities being planned to celebrate the occasion.

Meet Avalonia stewards and learn more about how we manage our properties. Print a trail map and take your family exploring. Sit on a rock beside a stream and enjoy the peace and quiet of the woods. Perhaps you might enjoy a few hours of hands on stewardship efforts such as re blazing trail markers, or clipping back overhanging branches.

Let us know how much you enjoy exploring Avalonia trailed properties maintained for the public's enjoyment by emailing us at avalonialc@yahoo.com.

NPLD is the nation's largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance the public lands Americans enjoy. In 2009, 150,000 volunteers built trails and bridges, removed trash and invasive plants, planted trees and restored our water resources. See you on National Public Lands Day - September 25, 2010.

Joellen Anderson is Chair of the Groton Town Committee.

Book recommendations

Member Adele Erisman recommends "Bringing Nature Home" by Douglas W. Tallamy. The author makes the case for landscaping with native plants, not only for their beauty and ease of maintenance, but also because they support native insects, which in turn are the food supply of native birds. The author offers lists of suggested landscaping plants, but for additional suggestions consider "Native Plants of the Northeast" by Donald J. Leopold, which is lavishly illustrated with color photographs to inspire your native landscaping efforts. Both books are in print, but are also available at your local library.



Volunteer Opportunities within Avalonia

by Janice Parker

Avalonia is always deeply dependent on the volunteer efforts of its members. With the reorganization associated with the revision of the by-laws earlier this year, a range of additional volunteer opportunities have opened up.

With the increased role of more autonomous town committees within the organization, there are openings for members on most of the **town committees**. If you would be interested in participating and helping to forward Avalonia's mission of conservation within your own town, please contact the Director for your town (identified on page 2) or call our office number (860) 884-3500 and leave a message.

The **Finance Committee** has openings for two additional members. Committee Chair Bob Chapin outlines some of the challenges facing his team in an article on this page. The Finance Committee meets monthly and rumor has it that the meetings sometimes feature award-winning brownies.

The **Development & PR Committee** is also recruiting members. Individuals with event planning, grant writing or fund-raising experience are particularly sought, but there are openings for individuals with a wide range of skills and interests.

If you would like to help but are unable to commit to a regular position or program of meetings, we always need people to help out with **stewardship** and **clerical work**. Check our web site www.avalonialandconservancy.org for a full listing of upcoming work parties, or send an email to Rick Newton at rnewton@snet.net to sign up for no-obligation Trails Crew notifications (see Rick's article on page 5 for details).



Avalonia welcomes new and renewing members!

Renew now before rate increase!

Mail completed form and check to:

P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic CT 06372

Name(s).....

Address

Town.....State Zip

Phone

E-mail

Choose membership level:

Individual \$15 Family \$30 Supporting \$50 Patron \$100 Life \$500

I am enclosing \$.....as a contribution in addition to my membership dues.

I want to help: outdoor work fundraising/PR solicit new members other work (please specify)

.....

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

A Message from the Finance Committee

by Bob Chapin

In the last issue of Avalonia Trails, I talked about two of the big current financial obligations facing the organization: having paid staff for the first time (*very exciting!!*) and preparing to start an endowment for our stewardship activities. Now, let me continue to share some of our "opportunities" with you.

The economic downturn has made many properties more affordable, in some cases by as much as 30%. This opens up many more possibilities for new acquisitions than we might have had. The financial challenges these present are formidable, because we barely have the money to cover our outstanding stewardship, much less the purchase of significant tracts of new land. For an excellent view of the value of stewardship, see Rick Newton's piece on page 5. These figures are large, real, and a constant reminder of our obligations as well as our achievements.

To help fill that gap, we're applying for grant funding. This is just flat-out wonderful (aside from the significant time and effort required to prepare these applications), but there really is "no free lunch"; all of these funding sources require matching funds be provided by the recipient organization. This means that we will be coming to the membership once we know the size of those challenges, looking for your help to meet them.

To that end we are planning a change in our dues structure for the first time in several years. Individual membership dues will increase to \$25 and Family membership will be \$45. There will be additional levels of membership for those who are willing and able to contribute more. The increase will be implemented later this year, but please feel free to renew now to extend your membership for as many years as you wish at current rates, or to invest in a Life membership. A renewal form is provided on this page for your convenience.

Also we have taken the unprecedented step of holding a second appeal this summer. If you have contributed to the annual appeal already, you will not be asked a second time. Nor, if you give to the summer appeal, will you be solicited again in the fall. Please know that when you see that envelope in your mailbox, our need for funds is real and pressing.

We take seriously the trust placed in us by our previous land donors, and we want to maximize the value of those parcels Avalonia already holds by connecting them with new acquisitions as they become available and with existing preserves held by other organizations. One long and irregularly-shaped parcel of 500 acres protects more wildlife and habitat than 5 separate 100-acre tracts, and having the money to strategically acquire new land between existing ALC properties remains a high priority.

While more land might be available and at more reasonable prices because of the economic conditions, the criteria we employ to determine whether a candidate parcel fits with our mission and existing properties are constant. The other thing that won't change is our dedication in making this all work: acquiring and stewarding these gorgeous lands so they can be preserved in perpetuity.

Thanks for your continued support!

Bob Chapin is Chair of the Finance Committee.

Poquetanuck Cove, an “Ecological Jewel”, Celebrated

by Anne Roberts-Pierson

For our members of longstanding who have been receiving “*Avalonia Trails*” for several years, you have been following the progress of a major partnership habitat restoration initiative in Poquetanuck Cove (Ledyard/Preston) where Avalonia owns 1.5 acres of sedge bed. We are now approaching year 3 in on-the-ground efforts to control the invasive plant *Phragmites* in these freshwater tidal wetlands of the Cove.



Paddlers enjoy Poquetanuck Cove. Photo by Anne Roberts-Pierson

Recently, our audience became much larger when the Thames River Basin Partnership (TRBP), comprising representatives of 24 organizations and towns with an interest in the Thames River, celebrated the 10th anniversary of their flagship event, the annual Floating Workshop, by focusing on and visiting the Cove. The partnership picked the Cove to recognize one of its successes. As well, Judy Benson, staff writer for *The Day* newspaper, joined us on June 18 to cover this event and to include it in *The Day*'s recent series on the Thames River, “*The River that Shapes Us*”.

The day started with an optional morning hike on The Nature Conservancy's Poquetanuck Cove Preserve which was well attended. A mid-day program and refreshments at St. James Church in Poquetanuck Village offered a historical perspective on the natural and cultural resources of the Cove. During the workshop, speakers, including Ledyard resident and former town planner, Bill Haase, laid out a new challenge for the group: getting the waterway itself protected for the long term. It was then off to the Cove in predominantly paddle craft and two large boats to tour and learn about its special assets and appreciate its beauty. Presentations on the water included CT DEP's Stephen Gephard, fisheries biologist, who spoke about an upcoming fish ladder at Hallville Pond, between the Cove and Amos Lake in Preston that will restore the fish run to this spawning ground; myself, who spoke about Avalonia and this successful multi-partner *Phragmites* project; and senior scientist and founder of Project Oceanology, Howard “Mickey” Weiss, who scooped up some very fertile mud samples to highlight the arthropods, isopods, and worms found therein which feed the fish and larger creatures that live in the Cove.

Judy's article, entitled “*A Conservation Success Story*”, was published in *The Day* on June 27 and can be found at www.theday.com; look for Online Features at the bottom of the home page and click on Thames River Series. Jean Pillo, TRBP coordinator and watershed conservation coordinator for the Eastern CT Conservation District, who organized this wonderful event, also completed a summary of the workshop by putting together a webpage about the event on the TRBP website. There is also a link to a short slide show summary of the event found there as well, in addition to a plethora of additional links. Please enjoy www.thamesriverbasinpartnership.org, click on Floating Workshop 10.

Anne Roberts-Pierson is President.

Trails Crew News

by Rick Newton

Over the course of Avalonia's fiscal year 2009-10 we completed a number of work parties that were advertised *via* the Avalonia Trails Crew email notification system. If you signed up and haven't received the notifications, it's probably because your email program is routing it to your spam folder. Please be sure to put the following email address in your address book: rnewton@snet.net. If you haven't signed up but would like to, just send an email to that same email address and you will be put on the list. We had a few new faces at work parties as a result of the email notifications, but we can always use more.

Documented stewardship volunteer hours in fiscal year 2009-10 totaled 1,126 hours (an estimated value of \$31,000 for purposes of matching grants). It is estimated that only about ½ of the hours get documented, so stewardship volunteers saved Avalonia approximately \$62,000 by donating their time. If Avalonia had to pay for these efforts out of an endowment fund, the fund would need assets of \$1.2 million.

Some of the accomplishments of the stewardship volunteers were: added new trails on the Barrett Preserve and the Knox Family Farm Preserve, roughed in a new connecting trail from Stoneridge to the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center trail system, re-established a trail on the White Cedar Swamp / Deans Mills Farm Preserves and flattened a trail on the Shunock River Preserve -Don Henne Tract. In addition to regular trail maintenance, mowing, litter cleanup, filling map boxes etc., the flooding at the end of March, while not too damaging to most of our properties, required extensive clean-up efforts at Parke Memorial Preserve and a cleanout of the drainage system at the Dodge Paddock / Beal Preserves. A formal conservation easement monitoring program has been established and nine of eleven easements were documented. A group of volunteers spent a day and a half posting the boundary of a 437-acre conservation easement in the towns of Norwich and Sprague (where a bald eagle was flying overhead).

The stewardship committee and town committees will resume scheduling work parties beginning in September. As they are scheduled, an email notification will be distributed and information will be posted on the website. Thanks to those of you who have volunteered – Avalonia couldn't survive without your help.



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC.

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

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Upcoming Events

Preston Town Picnic. Saturday, August 21 from 3:00-6:30 p.m. Avalonia will have an information table. Stop by and say hello!

National Public Lands Day. Saturday, September 25. See article on page 3 for more information or visit the website: www.publiclandscday.org.

Land Trust Alliance Rally 2010. Friday, October 1-Tuesday, October 5. This year's rally is in Hartford and the Connecticut Convention Center. All the excitement of participation, without the plane fares! Go to www.landtrustalliance.org/learning/rally/rally for more details or to register.

Reading (In) The Woods, Sunday October 16, 1 p.m. An hour and a half hike of 3-5 miles through the Reed and Mitchell Preserves in Preston and North Stonington, sponsored by ALC and the Preston Historical Society, as part of the 20th Anniversary Walktober Weekend celebrations. We will walk Avalonia's wooded Reed and Mitchell Preserves with UCONN forester Tom Worthley, who "reads" the woods for historical land use, wildlife activity and habitat. Learn why things grow where they do, and much more. Listen to poems by Thoreau, Frost, Oliver and others actually read on site. Read ahead: Tom Wessells, *Reading the Forested Landscape*. Meet at the parking space at the Reed Preserve on Northwest Corner Road in North Stonington. From Route 2 (traveling east OR west) turn onto Route 164. Turn R on Northwest Corner Road and drive 1 mile to the Reed Preserve Parking. This event is offered by Avalonia and the Preston Historical Society as part of the Walktober 20th Anniversary. For more Walktober events check The Last Green Valley website at www.tlgv.org.

Earth Week 2010 Report

This past April we expanded Earth Day to Earth Week, with six work parties on Avalonia Preserves

- Two in Groton on Moore Woodlands with assistance from Subase personnel
- One on the Preston Nature Preserve also with help from Subase personnel
- One in Stonington on Pequotsepos Brook Preserve with assistance from Stoneridge residents
- One in Stonington on Paffard Woods
- One in North Stonington at Parke Memorial Preserve

Thanks to all the Avalonia members and community volunteers who helped promote the goal of making every day Earth Day.