

# AVON LAND TRUST

## SPRING 2024 E-NEWSLETTER



Springtime greetings and welcome to our quarterly E-newsletter. This season is magical with the awakening of hibernating animals from their winter slumber, the return of colorful and fragrant flowers, and the foliage returning to the deciduous trees. The Avon Land Trust hopes you will join us in appreciating nature on our hikes and other events. We have many aspirational projects that need volunteers, and we always welcome new members. We are a non-profit organization that relies on memberships, grants, and volunteer help. Thank you for supporting the good work we do preserving open space forever!

### **CO-PRESIDENTS PREAMBLE**

Unlike the many animals that go into hibernation in the depths of winter, your Avon Land Trust has remained very active! Here's some highlights:

- The Land Trust held a successful fundraiser at Puerto Vallarta in February. We also landed several small grants from Hartford Audubon Society, CT Ornithological Association, and CT Water. We are waiting to hear from some larger grants. All this fundraising enables us to tackle many major aspirational projects.
- We commissioned Steven Perry to use his high-tech GIS/GPS technology to generate a new trail map and story board for the Hazen Park kiosk. Our goal is to have a kiosk and improved trail map at all our major trailheads within the next 2-3 years (Hazen/Nod Way, Wellner, Oakes, Huckleberry Hill, Scoville, and Enders).
- The Land Trust and our members teamed up to successfully lobby the Planning and Zoning Commission for a conservation easement to protect pristine Rotondo Pond, located behind the proposed Shake Shack development. Thanks to everyone who joined in our lobbying effort!
- ALT Hike Master Jeff Grindrod continues to lead frequent hikes, with a growing following of hikers. One hike started out at Countryside Park, and stopped at our 1820 barn for refreshments and a tour, before heading back. See schedule below for our upcoming hikes.
- We have one Eagle Scout project nearing completion. Uttej Kollu is building a bridge and installing a kiosk for us at Wellner. There are two other potential Eagle Scout projects in the pipeline.
- We have a Scavenger Hunt scheduled with a local nursery school, to take place at our Huckleberry Hill parcel.
- The Land Trust cleaned out our numerous nest boxes, and we have plans to expand our bluebird nest box trail.
- The Land Trust received a very generous donation of 5 deluxe bluebird nest boxes from Wild Birds Unlimited. Thanks, Lou!

## **ALT UPCOMING EVENTS**

Saturday, April 6<sup>th</sup>, Penwood State Forest, 4 miles, Moderate hike

Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, Buckingham to Farmington River, 4 miles, moderate hike

Saturday, May 4<sup>th</sup>, Found Land & Huckleberry Hill Parks, Two hike options - 2.5 miles easy hike & 6 mile moderate hike

Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, Wellner, moderate Hike, 4 miles

Saturday, June 1, (Trail Day) Fisher Meadow, Two hike options – 2.5 miles easy hike & 4 mile easy hike

Tuesday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, Peoples State Park, Jesse Giraud Trail, 3 miles, difficult hike

TBD, Hike & Hops, Sub-Edge Farms, 3.5 miles, easy hike followed by beers at Hopmeadow Brewery

TBD, Hike with Hounds, Wellner Property, Three options, .6 miles, 1 mile, or 1.5 miles



## **AVON'S FLORA AND FAUNA**



### **Those Dam Beavers!**

By Janet M. Conner, ALT Historian

Contrary to the belief that beavers are destructive and bad for the environment, quite the opposite is true. A beaver's dam building generally has a positive effect on the environment. In consulting a publication by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environment, DEEP, I learned about their benefits.

When beavers gnaw down trees and branches, they are clearing land that will be flooded when they build their dams on brooks and streams. This is called 'flowage' and this creates marshland that is known as a 'beaver meadow'. In turn, this action actually creates a new ecosystem that supports a myriad of wildlife. From the article: "This newly-flooded woodland, with its interspersion of standing water, trees and shrubs, creates ideal nesting and feeding habitat for waterfowl, including cavity nesting species like wood ducks and hooded mergansers...larger trees die...they provide prime nesting sites for great blue herons." Woodpeckers are attracted to insects on the dead trees and create cavities in the trunks, which become homes for other birds such as chickadees, tree swallows, nuthatches, and screech owls. After the tree's leaf canopy disappears, sunlight overspreads the water which encourages the growth of plants and aquatic vegetation. This in turn creates habitat for dragonflies and damselflies, which then attract birds and bats.

As if this wasn't enough benefit to the environment, there is more to the story. If the beavers die or move, their flowage dry up and in its place a grasses and weeds is other species of birds such insects like monarch also habitat for voles, then hunted by predatory the meadow stays as might stay like a period of decades, this return to its original incredible story of the



or water "impoundment" will wildflower meadow with created. This, then, attracts as goldfinch, sparrows, and butterflies. This meadow is mice and shrew which are hawks, coyote, and fox. If wetlands, other amphibians salamanders and frogs. After wetland or meadow may woodland. This is an food chain and circle of life.

This article 'Beavers in Connecticut - Their Natural History and Management' can be read in full at: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/wildlife/pdf\\_files/habitat/beaverctpdf.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/wildlife/pdf_files/habitat/beaverctpdf.pdf)

Beavers, historically, were hunted and trapped for their pelts as part of the fur trade in colonial times. They were also killed by settlers draining their flowages to replace with agricultural crops. By the mid-1850s, beavers no longer inhabited Connecticut. Thanks to the reintroduction of the species in the early 1900s, and a new understanding of the positive impacts these large rodents had, they are no longer endangered. They are truly the engineers of Nature in constructing their dams and their lodges, which can be twenty to forty feet in size below water, and over eight feet high above the waterline!

Here in Avon, I have seen beaver lodges in two places. One site is in West Avon [photo above] with two lodges, and the other site is a pocket park of protected land in the center of town. Despite the nearby traffic, people, and noise, I observed the beaver chewing down saplings and then dragging them down the slope to his lodge, totally oblivious to how close he was to civilization. River beaver also reside in lodges built on ALT properties along the Farmington River in Tunxis Reservation.



## IF THE WOODS COULD TALK

### Communing With Nature

By Janet M. Conner, ALT Historian



Whenever I am stressed out or upset, the one thing that always works to restore my soul is communing with Nature. I go to the woods and I am at once soothed. All my life, the woods 'spoken' to me, without uttering a word. There is solace among the trees reaching up toward the sunlight. I can sit on a rock covered in emerald green moss, and be transported to a realm of peace and tranquility. The smell of the fresh air, the fallen leaves underfoot, the tree leaves, and wet mud, and fallen lichen-covered branches create a glorious perfume. I listen to the sounds of the woodlands...the rustling of a squirrel crossing the carpet of leaves, the hammering of a far-off woodpecker, and the trickling of a glistening brook -- all are all notes in a symphony. Walking through this serene landscape in its solitude, never fails to rejuvenate me. While foraging for interesting pinecones, stones, and ferns, I am transported to a place of serenity and inner peace...I am young again!



Now the Avon Land Trust does not bottle and sell this fountain of youth! It is free for all, and there for the taking. All you have to do is visit our beautiful properties to imbibe all they have to offer your senses. One of my personal favorites is our Oakes Preserve, located at 65 Chidsey Road. This 17-acre parcel has a pond and a 1/2 mile looping trail around it. There is a gazebo for lunch. Don't forget to bring your camera! The pond is a haven for a shy great blue heron, plus painted turtles sunning on the turtle raft. At the fork of the trail, one way takes you to deep woodlands and a fast-flowing waterway that empties into the pond. The other direction takes you past marshland with bluebird nest boxes, a rare buttonbush swamp, and then around the pond back to the parking lot.



There is another favorite place located on our Wellner Conservation parcel known as 'cathedral valley'. It was given this name by our own trail master Scott Lewis. Here is a place where you can go to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life and feel totally at peace. The towering trees do indeed give the feeling that you are standing in a great cathedral. There is relative silence within this conservation area, despite it being very close to Rte. 44. This is a nearly 15 acre parcel and the trail entrance behind Petco is marked. Currently there is a project underway by a Boy Scout working on his Eagle award, building a bridge and installing a kiosk at the entry. These woods are preserved in perpetuity thanks to the donation of the Wellner family, who generously designated this land for public enjoyment, and light recreational use. It is donations like these that are the backbone of Avon Land Trust's mission to preserve open space, that will never be built upon. In doing so, we also are preserving valuable habitat.

Please see our website for maps of our hiking trails offering different hiking experiences and levels of skill. Enjoy!



## Hikers arrive at barn



# AVON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

## History In Plain Sight

By Janet M. Conner, ALT Historian



Locals will recognize the photo at left as the covered bridge walkway at Countryside Park in the Huckleberry Hill section of town. There is a lot of history associated with this waterway, that flows underneath this bridge. There are two ponds here that in more recent years of the 1970s, were used for recreational swimming and ice skating. But dating back to the early 1900s, these ponds were actually reservoirs for the Unionville Water Company. There is a very interesting backstory. A man by the name of

Henry Fischer, who had a house and farm on Huckleberry Hill Road, got the idea to dig a big hole on his property. He then filled it with water from the springs next to Hawley Brook, that ran at the back of his land. His plan was to build a 150 ft. dam and then sell water to neighboring farms. He also tried to incorporate an earlier Avon Water Company in 1901. Lawsuits were filed against him by the Burlington Water Company and the Unionville Water Company, as he was interfering with their water rights. His excavations also muddied the water on land owned by the Unionville Water Company - the two reservoirs mentioned earlier! Fischer held the water in abeyance from them until he got what he wanted. He became the supervisor of the digging and piping for the waterworks in Collinsville, and was installed on the Board of the Collinsville Water Company. The Avon Land Trust's barn parcel, located at 160 Huckleberry Hill Road, has a connection to this story. The owners of the house and barn in the late 1800s to early 1900s, was the Frederick Konold family, from Prussia. Early members of the Konold family were married into the Fischer family!

Further back in time, there was another great history story connected with this waterway. It powered the distillery of Romanta Woodruff. The remnants of the stone foundation of the former cider mill can still be made out on the bank of the pond (photo right). This distillery was active from the early to the mid-1800s. Romanta's house still exists on Edwards Road. His father John owned the property prior to Romanta's circa 1811/1812 marriage. The distillery was very profitable and passed on to Romanta's son Daniel, who operated it until his demise. As you can see with the configuration in today's photograph of the bridge above, the water from the upper reservoir goes over the dam into the lower reservoir. In the Woodruff's time, the water was directed into a sluice or headrace, that powered the apple grinding and press inside the cider house, and then expended back into the waterway via a tailrace.

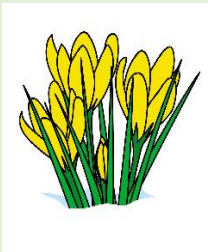
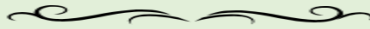


The Collinsville Water Company was chartered in 1893 with rights to take water from Avon, Farmington, and Burlington. The Unionville Water Company was chartered in 1901 and given rights to take water from Burlington, Canton and Avon, excluding the spring on the Konold farm or from Hawley Brook. Henry Fischer moved West, and his farm was put up for auction.



The Avon Land Trust Mission Statement:

- **To preserve and protect undeveloped land** in Avon, and enhance our town’s environmental and historic resources, and scenic beauty.
- **To acquire** through donations and purchases **additional land** to be preserved in its natural state.
- To **maintain wildlife habitats** on our properties.
- To provide public access to appropriate properties, for the **public enjoyment of nature**.
- To actively seek wetlands, woodlands, meadowlands, and ridgelines which have unique scenic, historic, scientific and **ecological significance** for Avon.
- To **promote** the conservation of open space, **an appreciation of nature**, and stewardship of the environment.



## Join us, won't you?

We hope you will support our efforts with donations, memberships, and volunteering.

### THE *Avon* LAND TRUST membership form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, I/we would like to make an annual membership donation to the Avon Land Trust, at the following level:

- \$1,000 Sycamore Membership
- \$500 Oak Membership
- \$250 Maple Membership
- \$100 Birch Membership
- \$50 Family Membership
- \$30 Individual Membership
- \$25 Senior/Student Membership

Please make checks payable to The Avon Land Trust, and mail to: The Avon Land Trust, P.O. Box 267, Avon, CT 06001.  
... **or pay on-line by visiting our website: [www.avonlandtrust.org](http://www.avonlandtrust.org).**

Please let us know if you can help the ALT in any of these other ways:

- I would like information on how to donate to ALT from my IRA distribution.
- I would like information on how to include ALT in my will or estate plan.
- I am interested in donating land to the ALT.
- I would like to help the ALT as a member-volunteer

### **The Book Nook**

Was a California land trust involved in a murder, and a later attempted murder? There's a fictional whodunnit entitled "Mother-Daughter Murder Night", written by Nina Simon, that weaves an interesting murder mystery story. It's the author's first novel, but she did a commendable job, and the book was selected for Reese's Book Club. Contact Rick Dubiel if you want to borrow a copy!