

AVON LAND TRUST

Winter 2025 E-Newsletter



The majesty of the winter landscape never fails to evoke awe. The photo at left of a crystalline blue sky, as a backdrop to ice encrusted branches, is magical. Even during the winter, the Avon Land Trust is active in keeping trails clear of fallen trees, holding events, and supporting wildlife. Please check our events below. We hope you will join us for a seasonal hike or activity. As always, our organization welcomes new members, donors, and volunteers. We are a non-profit that relies on community support and grant funding. Help us continue to protect nearly 350 acres of pristine open space, to keep Avon beautiful for generations.

CO-PRESIDENTS MESSAGE:

It's with great sadness we report the passing of our Secretary Emeritus, Dottie Blanchard. Dottie and her husband Hugh were among the original founders of the Avon Land Trust over 50 years ago. When Hugh passed, Dottie soldiered on as our Secretary for decades. One fond memory from the days before email was the postcard reminders Dottie would send out reminding us of an upcoming board meeting. She indicated the meeting would start at 7:21 pm so that it would better stick in our memory! (and it still does to this day!). She also hosted all our board meetings at her home. We should all strive to follow her wonderful example of greeting everyone with bright eyes and a warm smile. We also thank both Dottie and Hugh for so unselfishly volunteering their time, to the benefit of the human and wildlife communities of Avon. The land trust they started now stands at over 350 acres of open space, which are enjoyed by residents throughout the Farmington Valley and beyond. You showed us that just a few people working together can indeed make a lasting difference. Thank you! We will keep up your good works!

EVENTS:

March 1: Foundland Hike

- 455 Northington Drive parking lot, Avon, CT
- Starts at 10 am
- 2.63 miles, moderate inclines and declines.

March 14: Full Moon "Night" Hike at Fisher Meadows (Worm Moon)

- 775 Old Farms Road, Avon CT
- Starts at 6:30 pm
- 2.5 miles hike, flat terrain, however much of the hike will be in the dark
- Must bring a HIKING HEADLAMP, also recommend poles.

April 5: Huckleberry Hill – through Marge’s Barn property

- 114 Huckleberry Hill Road (parking lot in rear of building), Avon, CT
- Starts at 10 am
- 3 miles, easy with moderate inclines and declines

April 15: Horizon Wings Raptors Program

- Starts at 11 am
- In-person at Library Community Room

May 3: Buckingham and Countryside – this will culminate with the new “town trail”!

- 10 Buckingham Road, Avon CT
- Starts at 10 am
- 2.75 miles, moderate inclines and declines

Date TBD: North American River Otters (Zoom presentation)

- Original date cancelled due to library closing for inclement weather
- Link to register: <https://www.avonctlibrary.info/event/north-american-river-otters-virtual/>

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: AVON’S FLORA AND FAUNA

A Rarer Species of Fox

By Janet M. Conner, Historian



Gray Fox (CT DEEP) website

We have lived in Avon for over 25 years on an acre of land, located on a secondary roadway, with a fair amount of traffic. What has always amazed me is the variety of wildlife that visits our yard. Specifically, the east side of the house is like a wildlife superhighway. We have those outdoor security cameras, so we pick up both diurnal and nocturnal creatures. Recently we had a visit for a few days by a pair of gray fox. I had never seen these before, and I consulted the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection website to learn more about them. Biologists are studying the cause of their population decline, and some theories are maturation of forest, disease, and competition from coyotes.

I got the opportunity to look out my window after my phone pinged with the alert, to see them up close. I marveled at their beauty. They appeared more dog-like in structure, than the ubiquitous and elegant red fox. With dark gray mottled fur and hints of rust in their coat, white at the throat, cheeks, and underside area, and black fur on upper tail, they are very attractive. What impressed me most was their alertness; constantly stopping and listening and watching. They weigh between seven and fourteen pounds, and measure from 32 to 45 inches in length. Their diet consists of “rabbits, mice, voles, chipmunks, squirrels, fruits, insects, birds and eggs, carrion, corn, amphibians and reptiles.” (CT DEEP)

I believe the animals using my superhighway are following scent trails, as they never seem to veer from their path. We have had many deer walk through over the years, and for the past several years, we have had a fawn born in the same spot each May. Of course, we get the strolling bear families that come for a drink from our bird bath. A new addition to our cadre of creatures, has been an opossum. Now he/she will not win any prizes for looks, but comes out at the same time each

night, 6:30 p.m. I watched as it scampered after a mouse one evening. I also get a marvelous selection of winter birds and raptors. In addition, we have rabbit, skunk, perhaps a fisher cat, raccoon, bobcat, and more. All of these magnificent wonders of nature on my one little acre! Now you can understand why the work of the Avon Land Trust is so important in protecting habitat for our flora and fauna.

If you observe gray fox, the Connecticut Dept. of Energy and Environmental Protection would like you to report them, as they are monitoring their population and habitats. Thank you!



AVON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

Digging Into Our Town's Geology

By Janet M. Conner, Historian



Recently, I began learning more about our town's geology. I read about the glaciers that defined our area with a huge, thick layer of ice that scraped its way across the landscape, bringing up shale and sandstone and gouging granite along its way, gouging visible lines still seen today. Our town is neatly bookended between the western ridge of the Huckleberry Hill section, and the eastern Talcott Mountain ridgeline, with the fertile valley in between. There is a glacial esker on Tillotson Road, which is not the same as a basalt landform. "An esker results when sediment is deposited by water flowing through an ice tunnel in a melting glacier. When the glacier finally melts completely, the accumulated sediment is left resembling the tunnel in the ice, resulting in a hill or ridge." (AVFF/Town of Avon) The photo above is from an old mill site in Cider Brook made of basalt.

I found an interesting map by the town of Avon Planning Committee, Town of Avon Plan of Development, dated 1954 that shows the location of various kinds of rock formations and geology. For instance, Talcott Mountain is igneous traprock consisting of basalt and diabase, as is the ridgeline in West Avon. Further west is what is known as 'Collinsville gneiss', or simply gneiss on the map. This gneiss also contains some granite and "...is only present in western Avon, chiefly west of Roaring Brook...". When a well was dug in Lovelytown, near Country Club Road, there was some granite found there. I was quite interested to find that there was a granite source located on Huckleberry Hill Road. In 1850, this site supplied blocks of granite that was used to build a railroad bridge for the old canal line railroad in Unionville, south of the old trolley line! It was located behind the Goodrich blacksmith shop on the eastern side of the road. The shop location can be seen on the 1855 Hartford County map done by the Hartford County surveyor, Edgar M. Woodford. Woodford was a civil war soldier and abolitionist, who died rescuing men, lifting them aboard a ship from the water. There is actually a copy of this large map hanging in the lobby of the Avon Old Farms hotel. His many maps will be a lasting tribute to Edgar after his home on West Avon Road is razed. I would love to see a granite marker placed there to memorialize his home.



Often when I am researching, I fall down into a rabbit hole detour, that I just have to explore. In my research on granite, I came across a publication about the use of 'granite stone meal' that was used as potash for tobacco fields! Experiments showed that the addition of granite dust to tobacco fields led to a longer burn time for cigars! Tons of ground granite meal were added to Connecticut tobacco crops, and that granite was sourced from Massachusetts. The lab testing revealed many trace elements that would not fly with the FDA today, but tobacco farmers back in the day said that the cigars that were made using tobacco fertilized with granite meal tasted much better!

Our town has a rich array of natural resources consisting of aquifers, woodlands, wetlands, meadows, grasslands, landforms including manmade stonewalls, minerals and rocks, and wildlife. The Avon Land Trust is actively involved with the Town in its efforts of balancing development while protecting our natural resources. We hope you will support our efforts.



IF THE WOODS COULD TALK

A Tribute to Louise G. Lusk – A 'Countrywoman' and Early Environmentalist

By Janet M. Conner, Historian



Pink Lady Slipper a.k.a.
Woodland Orchid
Photo taken West Avon
by Janet M. Conner

Louise Lusk was an environmentalist before the term was coined. Mrs. Lusk was a writer for the *Hartford Courant*, where she wrote a column about Avon. The Lusks lived on Lovely Street. An article about the Lusks appeared in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1943, and says that Louise wrote from her "famed log cabin from which beautiful vantage point overlooking a gurgling brook at the back of the Lusk's homestead, her delightful columns are penned." She vividly describes the sights, scents, and landscape of early Avon. I think the best way to give you a flavor of her musings, is to offer some quotes from her writings.

From an October 1919 article: "No...scenery ever displayed the glorious riot of color that the mountain [Talcott] does now. All too quickly it whirls past, a dash of crimson maple, the gold of hickory, green of pine trees and cedar, and scarlet of woodbine; one wonderful view of the valley spread out before you and down through the crisp air to the cozy village at the foot, where lights are beginning to twinkle and the smoke of the

supper fires curl up through the crisp air." Another autumnal article from 1951:

"Much as we love the old house, we know that soon the leaves will fall, the roads may get icy, so like a roving squirrel, we gather scenes instead of nuts, to remember in the winter days, when we hook rugs beside the old fireplace." Their fireplace hearth dated back to the Revolution. Mrs. Lusk goes on to speak of woodland plants she has gathered to festoon her home. She speaks of hazel nuts, catkins, aster, black alder berries and dogwood berries. She tells of silvery artemisia, honesty, luminaria, and bittersweet displayed in a blue Staffordshire sugar bowl.

In another article, Mrs. Lusk speaks about the invasion of 'tent caterpillar' nests in Avon. The early method of dealing with this problem was to burn the nests, but she feared it would also damage the trees. She said "there is no ladylike way to assassinate the wretches." Her solution, after noticing deep, waterfilled ruts in the road, was to go cut them down and drown them! She was an early pioneer in natural ways to take care of pests. She noted that enticing chickadees with suet to your yard would help control the caterpillars, as chickadees eat the eggs.

Mrs. Lusk had thoughts on economy and conservation as well. In a December 1913 article, she expressed these. "If you live in the country, go shopping in your own woods some sunny afternoon; you can find more than one Christmas Gift..." She encourages folks to "spare the laurel", saying that "next year's blossoms are already formed on the tips of this lovely shrub" and "who wants to rob our New England hillsides of one of its chief beauties?"..."Let's save all we can of it". Then she suggests folks use pine, hemlock, ferns, bittersweet, or running pine instead, as it is more plentiful. In a 1913 article she speaks of returning plants to the wild after using them in a dish garden. "...after it has finished blooming, we shall carefully take the roots and plant them in the meadow again, so we try to play fair with old Dame Nature by borrowing and not forgetting to pay back, which is the only way to keep our lovely spots intact and secure, against another Spring."

Mrs. Lusk was especially fond of birds. One humorous mention was made in an April 1913 article. "The funniest thing in the bird line that ever came to the Sign of the Maple Tree [homestead], was a swallow that swore. To be sure, he swore in Choctaw, which is perhaps what makes it so funny, but there he used to sit on the ridgepole of the barn and cuss at his wife by the hour. Possibly she was too lazy or meek." Another tale was about drunk cows where she wrote "...the usually law abiding cows take this season to go on a little excursion of their own, ending as a rule, in an "apple drunk" with the result that the tired farmer must sit up half the night with one or more of them."

Mrs. Lusk also recounts going on "rambles" into the woods for foraging, and to see the natural wonders. I love her descriptions in this segment from a May 1923 article while she and her husband were out foraging for dandelion greens and cowslips [aka marsh marigolds]. "...then came the climb over boulders ringed with polysody, with the music of the waterfalls growing louder and louder till the loveliest brook in New England revealed itself; bordered with moss-covered rocks, embroidered with rosettes of marsh marigolds, doubly golden when reflected in the water, and overhead crowned with feathery spray of clove bud..."

Mrs. Lusk's writings are like a time capsule taking the reader back to the days of farm life and its arduous simplicity. She speaks of children playing outdoors making paper waterwheels "...gayly splashing away in the sunshine, every inch of them homemade." Her descriptions of farm life, with the farmer working dawn to dusk cutting corn, filling the silo, gathering grapes, picking apples and pears, and digging potatoes and the wife keeping pace with him in domestic endeavors, take us back to those days of yore. Reading Mrs. Lusk's writings have showcased what effect citizens can have in support of the environment. She encouraged planting certain plant species to attract birds, such as blue chickery for goldfinches, and Amoor privet for honey bees. She knew about invasive plant species and encouraged her readers to pull out hawkweed, "so the cows get good growing things", or the Japanese bittersweet that "chokes everything from the apple tree to the arbor vitae." She railed against development at the cost of trees being cut down, and also for overhead power lines. In 1962, she wrote an article titled "Why Can't Beauty Remain in Towns", where she speaks of a lovely meadow on Lovely Street with golden daisies and black-eyed Susans. She remarks that Avon's rural beauty is being threatened, and is now fighting for its trees, and that indiscriminate spraying for poison ivy is killing flowers and shrubs.

Mrs. Lusk was ahead of her time as an environmentalist. She passed away in 1974, one year after the formation of the Avon Land Trust. I think we should make her a posthumous honorary member.



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 and improve 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.

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

- I would to help ALT as a volunteer.
- 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 would like information on how to donate development rights, a conservation easement, or land to ALT