



The Living Landscape - Native Plantings for Beauty, Sustainability and Habitat

By Anne Penniman

Over the course of decades of development, fragmentation and urbanization, our rich and biodiverse native landscapes have disappeared at an alarming rate.

Additionally, many of our conservation lands are overrun by invasive species. The combination of land development and invasive species expansion has led to excessive habitat loss.

Why should we care about habitat? Habitat is critical to wildlife, bird, pollinator and insect survival as it provides essential food sources, shelter from the elements, protection from predators, places to make nests and find mates. With the loss of habitat, we are losing native wildlife species. For example, the Cornell Ornithology Lab has reported that we have lost over 3 billion birds in North America since 1970. And recently, the National Geographic reported that if insects were to disappear from our planet, “the environment would collapse into chaos”.

In his groundbreaking book, *Bringing Nature Home*, Douglas Tallamy a Professor of Entomology at the University of Delaware has outlined the inherent connection between indigenous plants and wildlife species. More specifically, he demonstrates the link between our native birds and pollinator insects which have co-evolved with native plant species in a virtuous cycle; without native plants, our native wildlife has limited food sources. According to Tallamy, non-native plants and trees look like

“empty birdfeeders” to our bird species – offering a place to perch but nothing to eat. And without food, our birds, pollinators and insects will fail to survive.



As a case in point, native oak species support hundreds of native caterpillar species which are a food source for multiple native bird species – the virtuous cycle is happening in our own yards!

Despite the devastating data on species loss and habitat degradation, the good news is that we, as individual homeowners and gardeners, can do something to effect positive change and reverse

habitat loss. In our private gardens as well as speaking out about and exercising influence on the landscapes of public and municipal properties, we can plant a rich mosaic of native vegetation that supports habitat and the pollinators, birds and wildlife dependent upon it. In the words of E.O. Wilson, eminent biologist and naturalist, we have it within ourselves to “reweave the wondrous diversity of life”.

This is such an exciting premise and one which is as simple as planting a blueberry bush, a flowering dogwood or an oak tree. Incorporating native plants into our gardens and landscapes can be easy as well as aesthetically rewarding. First of all, the native plants of New England want to grow here – thus reducing maintenance; they also offer a broad array of beauty, seasonal interest and the bonus of attracting birds and pollinator species into our gardens.

continued on page 2



In the thirty plus years of designing for New England landscapes, designing with native species has been an extremely rewarding type of project for our firm. As an example, several highly invasive Norway Maples were removed from a client's property and replaced with a combination of native species: Flowering Dogwood, Eastern Redcedar, Arrowwood Viburnum, American Holly and Highbush Blueberry. As soon as the plants were in the ground, the birds arrived – finding shelter and places to nest as well as food sources from these berry-bearing species.

Landscapes designed with native plants can be either informal and naturalistic or formal and manicured in composition. The 'bones' of the design and garden layout can be created to suit one's stylistic inclinations and then filled in with native plants that are suitable to the solar exposure, soils and hydrology of the site. We call it 'painting inside the lines.'

Our American proclivity for expansive lawns also contributes to loss of habitat. Neither birds nor pollinator insects derive habitat value from lawns. And lawns require a large input of resources – chemicals (often toxic pesticides and herbicides), water, and maintenance budgets. So, we encourage our clients to minimize lawn areas to what's needed for playing soccer and croquet or a game of toss with our dogs. Instead, we suggest planting natural buffer zones next to turf areas: low mow lawns, lush beds of pollinator perennials and grasses – all species that create beauty and interest throughout the seasons.

We can also eliminate invasive species in our landscapes – species that provide little to no nutrient value to our native wildlife but also spread into our open spaces and

conservation lands while crowding out the beneficial native species. Noxious and destructive invasive plants include: burning bush, barberry, multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, privet, Norway maples and flowering pears. We can replace these species with shrubs and trees that provide flowers, fruit, beautiful fall color and winter structure while we attract and support wildlife in our gardens.

We can create landscapes that replicate the functions of habitats found in nature and thereby support our bird species:

- places for birds to hide and find shelter: in dense evergreens and shrub thickets that offer structural capacity for protection from predators and weather.
- places for birds to nest: trunks of trees, plants with erect branch structure, even bird houses.
- plant species that support caterpillars for spring and early summer avian food sources; plants that provide flowers and nectar; plants that bear fruit for summer, fall and winter sustenance; and plants that form seed heads which last into the winter.

There are so many wonderful and beautiful native New England shrub and tree species available: species that provide flowers in the spring, lustrous foliage and fruit in the summer, stunning fall foliage and winter interest with textural bark and picturesque structure. Many if not all species are readily available in local nurseries; many nurseries will order plants upon request if they don't have them in stock. The following list includes some of the most valuable woody species for wildlife.

Oak species

Red cedar

Bayberry

Sugar maple

White Pine

Gray dogwood

Shagbark Hickory

Highbush blueberry

Maple leaf Viburnum

Black cherry

Winterberry

Silky dogwood

Yellow and gray birch

Arrowwood Viburnum

Huckleberry

Flowering dogwood

Red twig dogwood

Black chokeberry

Shadbush

To quote Doug Tallamy in his recent book, *Nature's Best Hope*, "White oaks and their relatives are the very best trees you can plant in your yard for wildlife". So, 'Let it be an oak' – that is – if you want to plant a tree to support wildlife and for human benefits of shade, beauty and sustainability and lastly for future generations.

continued on page 3



Anne Penniman, Professional Landscape Architect, ASLA, is a registered landscape architect with over 30 years of experience in both public and private work. Since founding the firm in 1991, Anne has implemented designs that range in scale from private contemplative gardens to public park master planning. Many of her projects have received regional awards and recognition. Anne is a Member of the American Society of Landscape Architects. She is CLARB certified and a registered Landscape Architect in Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Maine. She is an Approved Designer by the New England Wildflower Society and Member of the State of Connecticut Board of Landscape Architects. She is a proud mother of two daughters and shares interests in design, ecology, gardening and hiking with her husband, George Penniman, Architect.

A Sign of the Times - The Covid-19 Pandemic

As a sign of the times, we have noticed the placement of numerous evocative and hopeful messages on our preserves. The following pictures are a small sampling of the ones we have observed.

There is little doubt that we have all been impacted in some way or other by the Covid-19 pandemic which has spread throughout the world. Here in Connecticut, we have not been immune to its effects having had to quarantine in place for the approximately 2 months. One of the consequences has been the opportunity to explore one's community and, in this regard, Essex Land Trust preserves have become preferred destinations for

families and individual walkers to explore and escape home confinement, enjoying the exposure to fresh air and noticing the natural beauty of our environment.

An unprecedented number of visitors to the 900 acres which the land trust manages have had the opportunity to benefit from the hard work done by land trust stewards to maintain more than 50 trails. These preserves have been acquired over the past fifty plus years in keeping with the land trust's mission of acquiring open space and to protect the environment and the small-town character of the three villages, Essex, Centerbrook and Ivoryton.



Volunteer Spotlight - Roger Field

In this issue we are starting a new feature - **Volunteer Spotlight** - to showcase an individual whose time and efforts greatly enhance our properties and their value to our community. Stewards at the Essex Land Trust spend a lot of time in our forests and fields. Downed trees, blocked trails, the bloom of invasive plants in the spring, the scattering of fallen branches in the fall—nature keeps them busy. It is a unique group of people who tend over 900 acres day in and day out. And among this group there are some who pitch in with a level of energy and commitment that is remarkable. This tradition begins with one of the best.

Hiking into the woods with Roger Field is a serious matter. Not serious like gravity serious or serious like a knee replacement. Serious like a group of committed individuals walking into the woods to work. Roger's first rule: We are not going to hike in without the tools to get the job done--if we need rope, we'll have rope, if we need a chain saw we'll bring two plus pry bars and wedges. We'll be prepared.

Sometimes we kid him "Hey Roger, where's the coffee and donuts...?" Well, a while back, after hiking out from clearing the Margaret Canfield Trail on the back side of Canfield-Meadow Woods, Roger opened up his pack and, sure enough, he served coffee and snacks to the crew.

It is a good bet that Roger would not like the word "indispensable" to describe his value to the land trust team. No, Roger would quibble that no one is indispensable and likely he would suggest...hmmm...



perhaps, useful. We'll go along with that, but it doesn't conjure the level of gratitude we all feel when working with the man. Still, Roger's contributions are useful. Whether working on a snagged tree overhanging a trail or staring at the blade of your chainsaw stuck in a



tree that was supposed to fall but instead closed around your tool pinching in a vice—Roger can help.

Roger Field has been co-steward of the Canfield Woods property since 2015. He shares the stewardship responsibilities for the 300 acres with George Wendell. It is one of the largest and most visited properties in the land trusts holdings. Every week he sends in a report detailing where on the preserve he's walked and what he has found. And what he has fixed.

Roger is the classic land steward perfectly content to walk the trails alone and fix what needs to be fixed. But he is equally comfortable leading a large team. For instance, he organized and led the development of the Woodja Hills Preserve—designed and cleared trails from James Glen in Essex to Lyon's Meadow in Deep River.

He can be stubborn, but not dogmatic. He is often quiet, unless he's not. Absolutely honest and completely honorable. He is a wonderful workmate and a good friend. And good friends are indispensable.

Annual Report and Board Election

The Essex Land Trust Annual Meeting, usually held in April, was postponed this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the Annual Report for 2019 was sent out to all members as part of the 2020 membership renewal process. The Annual Report for 2019 highlights achievements, initiatives and major

activities over the past year. Updates are provided on Accreditation, Awards, the new Trail Guide, Acquisitions, Stewardship, Programs, Volunteers, and Finances. Caring for our properties is a major focus of both time and financial resources. Anyone wanting to download a copy can access the New & Notable page on our website.



Essex Land Trust

Caring for Our World Here at Home

Annual Report for 2019 Another Year of Caring for Our World

As required by our bylaws, the Board of Directors have met via Zoom Meeting to elect the new slate of officers and to nominate two new Board Members. New Board members will serve on an interim basis until an annual meeting is held to confirm their selection by the membership.

The officers for the coming year are: Jim Denham, President; Jeff Croyle, 1st Vice President; Bob Nussbaum, 2nd Vice President; Mike Carlucci, Treasurer; and Carrie Daly, Secretary. New Board Members are wife and husband Carrie Daly and James Daly.

Along with introducing new Board Members, we say farewell to four members: Judy Saunders who has led the Program and Events with great creativity, Tom Rutherford former Chief Steward also responsible for Strategic Planning, Stephanie Gatto Board Secretary who will continue to be a volunteer in Communications and Development, and Cynthia Field who has played a role in the Accreditation process and updating the land trust archives. The Board of Directors extends its appreciation for the many hours contributed by these individuals. Our success as an all-volunteer organization depends on the contributions of individuals such as these.

New Essex Land Trust Board (clockwise from top left): Jeff Croyle, 1st. Vice President - Jim Denham, President - Bob Nussbaum 2nd Vice President - Carrie Daly, Secretary - Mike Carlucci, Treasurer



continued on page 6

Annual Report and Board Election

continued from page 5

Carrie Daly is an employment lawyer with Jackson and Lewis and has recently become a trail monitor for James Glen. Her non-profit experience includes being secretary for Oliver Ellsworth Inn of Court and Co-director of the Bridgeport Bar Association, Young Lawyers section. Carrie will be taking on the role of Board Secretary for the land trust.

James Daly is a cybersecurity expert and salesman for a family owned New Haven IT Consulting firm. James has 30 years' experience organizing corporate conferences lining up speakers, and theme development. He is a new co-steward at James Glen working with Myron Stacks. His background is ideal for taking over the Programs and Events Committee.



New Board Members Carrie and James Daly

ELT Briefs

A New Seating Location at Osage Trails



Falls River Cove and new seating area

Osage Trails Stewards, Glenn Jacobsen and David Sistare were recently inspired to create a very comfortable seating location at the edge of Falls River Cove. This new feature pictured below was donated and hand crafted by David with Glenn's help. The effort is a welcome addition to Osage Trails and is very much in keeping with Osage Trail's donor Diz Callender's vision of making the location attractive as a park-like setting. Many thanks to Glenn and David.

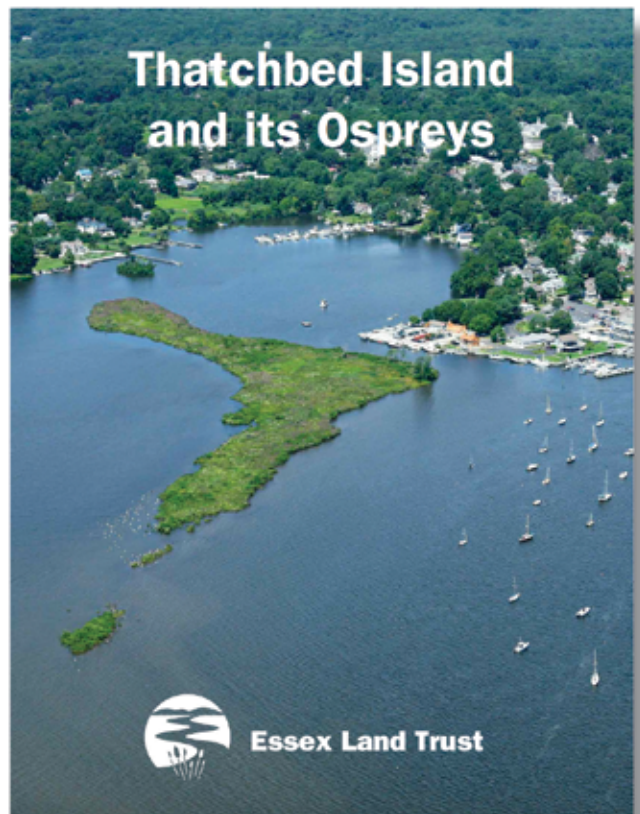


David Sistare and Glen Jacobsen

continued on page 7

Thatchbed Island and its Ospreys

The Essex Land Trust has recently published *Thatchbed Island & its Ospreys*, a booklet commemorating the return of Ospreys to its Thatchbed Island property and the lower Connecticut River. The booklet celebrates the successful recovery of this iconic raptor, one that practically disappeared from Connecticut. The 45-page, full color booklet features a brief history of Thatchbed Island, the experience of building the platform and installing the camera, recounts the breeding season through pictures taken from the OspreyCam live stream and details the causes of Ospreys decline and eventual recovery. Both the publishing of the booklet and the cost of installing the Osprey camera were facilitated by grants received from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County. The booklet was spearheaded by board member Jim Denham who coordinated and edited the project. It is a lasting contribution and serves as a reminder of the land trust's mission: Caring for our world here at home. All land trust members and supporters receive a free copy. A downloadable version is available on the Essex Land Trust website or can be purchased for \$7.50 (postage included) by sending an email to info@essexlandtrust.org.



OspreyCam Live Streams



We have decided to suspend the live streaming of our Thatchbed Island OspreyCam. Over the last several years, we have seen our fledglings suffer the impact of predation, so we have decided to provide alternative Osprey camera streams from nearby locations in Connecticut.

We are pleased to announce that our website is now hosting live OspreyCam streams, showing the nesting season progression at three locations: Hammonasset Beach State Park, Madison and West River Memorial Park, New Haven, courtesy of the Menunkatuck Audubon Society, and Connecticut Audubon Society's Milford Point Coastal Center. We invite you to visit their websites: www.menunkatuck.org and www.ctaudubon.org.

Ospreys continue to make a remarkable comeback after having practically disappeared from our coastal region in the 1970s and 1980s. In 2019, the Connecticut Audubon Society's Osprey Nation Citizen Science Program identified 799 nest locations. Of these sites, there were 501 active nests producing a total of 650 fledglings. Ospreys are now occupying new nesting sites that are further inland than their historical range along the Connecticut coast.

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



The Essex Land Trust has cancelled all events through the end of August. In the meantime, we want to encourage all to enjoy the results of over fifty years of efforts to protect the environment and the small-town character of our three villages. The Town's open space preserves cover approximately 1100 acres and include numerous, marked trails. Our preserves are open from dawn to dusk. We ask that participants heed the advice of authorities to respect personal distances when out on the trails. If you are feeling ill, please stay at home. Keep pets under your control.

The following are currently planned events. Depending on State of Connecticut guidelines, events may be canceled or modified. Please check our website for any updates or contact us at: info@essexlandtrust.org.

Golden Meadow Hike at Johnson Farm - Saturday, September 19, 10 am - Read Hill Street, Ivoryton

Enjoy the pleasure of discovering the new pollinators' meadow at Johnson Farm, a 49-acre property of fields and forest in Ivoryton. The new field of golden rod, a resplendent yellow, providing a natural resource for many bees, butterflies, moths and dragonflies, is well worth the visit. Leashed dogs are welcome. Gather at the parking lot on Read Hill Street, off of Comstock Rd. Bad weather cancels.

Restoring Historic Fish Runs in the Falls River – Saturday, October 17, 2 pm – The Cube at Centerbrook Architects – 67 Main Street, Centerbrook

Steve Gephard of the CT DEEP, Fisheries Division and Sally Harold, formerly from The Nature Conservancy's CT Chapter, have partnered on fish passage restoration projects for nearly two decades. Most recently, their efforts in the completion of two fishways in Centerbrook. Join us as Sally and Steve discuss why river restoration matters, which fish they are targeting and what has been accomplished. Visit the new fishway at Centerbrook Architects on the Mill Pond Dam. Co-sponsored with the Essex Library.

Ivoryton Pumpkin Chase - Saturday, October 17, 7:30 am -Ivoryton Village Green

Supported by the Essex Land Trust, this race benefits the Ivoryton Library and its programs. The 5K racecourse winds through Ivoryton Village and the Essex Land Trust's Falls River Preserve. 5K prizes will be awarded to 10 age groups. Registration begins at the Ivoryton Village green at 7:30 am. Race starts at 8:45 am for children and at 9:15 for adults. Parking in designated lots. Rain or shine.

Bats: Their Lives and Lore - Thursday, October 22, 7 pm - Essex Town Hall, 29 West Avenue

Just in time for Halloween, Master Wildlife Conservationist Maureen Heidtmann, will provide an overview of bats of the world, with an emphasis on our local species. She will talk about the persisting myths and misconceptions about these fascinating creatures, the many roles bats play to ensure a healthy planet, and the perils bats face in their struggle for survival.

November Property Clean-ups - Please bring rakes, blowers and tarps. Families welcome. Dress warmly. Refreshments provided.

- Saturday, November 7, 9 am: Osage Trails, Foxboro Point Rd, Essex. Rain Date: Sunday, November 8.
- Saturday, November 14, 9 am: Cross Lots, 40 West Avenue, Essex. Rain Date: Sunday, November 15.

Stargazing with the New Haven Astronomical Society -Saturday, November 21, 7 pm - Johnson Farm, Walnut Street, Ivoryton

Join us for this unique opportunity to learn what we see in late November skies. Experts from the New Haven Astronomical Society will bring telescopes for us to observe the stars, deep sky galaxies, nebula and clusters close-up. Maybe the moon and some planets. All ages welcome. Parking in designated location at the farm. Cloudy skies or Rain date: November 22.

Year-End Hike at Windswept Ridge - Saturday, December 12, 10 am - Plains Road Entrance behind Essex Financial

Revisit this unique and expanded property which has gone from a neighborhood property to a large preserve stretching 47 acres from Ivoryton to Essex. Trails traverse the ridges, ravines and wetlands of this very special property. All ages welcome. Boots recommended. Rain cancels.

Woods & Waters is published three times a year. **Jim Denham**, Publisher & Editor

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Board Members: **Jim Denham**, President & Communications; **Jeff Croyle**, 1st Vice President, Nominating & Volunteers; **Bob Nussbaum**, 2nd Vice President & Development; **Carrie Daly**, Secretary; **Mike Carlucci**, Treasurer; **Joel Anik**, Member at Large; **Chet Arnold**, Special Projects; **James Daly**, Programs & Events; **Geoff Furtney**, Stewardship; **Paul Greenberg**, Acquisitions; **Nancy Rambeau**, Conservation Outreach; **Barbara Sarrantonio**, Member at Large.

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