



## Hydrilla, The (nearly) Invisible Invasive

By Jim Denham

**W**e are accustomed to hearing about the impact of invasive plants and trees and how they affect the diversity and health of the environment. And there are many, to name just a few of the more familiar ones, such as Japanese Barberry and Knotweed, Multi-flora Rose, Autumn Olive, Privet, Oriental Bittersweet, and Tree of Heaven. Plant invasives are readily visible, reasonably easy to identify and, in many cases, there are clear identified strategies to combat them, although none are easy and require a persistent effort over time.



Allow me to introduce you to a nearly invisible invasive plant which is spreading exponentially in Connecticut: **Hydrilla** (*Hydrilla verticillata*). Although first reported in Connecticut off the coast of Mystic in 1987 on Mason Island, it was found in two lakes on the mainland in 1989. Hydrilla was first identified in the Connecticut River near Glastonbury, CT in 2016 and has since spread to Essex. It has also spread into the river's many coves, tributaries, and boat basins.

Hydrilla (also known as “water thyme”) first appeared in the United States in the early 1950s, primarily in Florida. Its appearance at that time is believed to be due to its use in the aquarium trade and its subsequent release into Florida waterways. It has spread rapidly and is now present in at least 28 states.

### What is its impact

Hydrilla is considered extremely aggressive and can outcompete native and invasive species. It is a perennial with five whorled leaves which are finely toothed, around the stem. A submersed perennial herb, Hydrilla is rooted,

with long stems that branch at the surface where growth becomes horizontal creating dense, thick mats. Significantly, the Connecticut River hydrilla is genetically distinct and unique from other known hydrilla strains. It is different in that it can have as many as 11 whorled leaves and does not spread by producing potato-like tubers, which may be a benefit

in controlling its spread. The plant's biology is largely unknown at this time.

It grows in a wide variety of water and water temperatures and can grow under extremely low light conditions, unlike most native aquatic plants. Hydrilla grows very rapidly (it can double its biomass every two weeks in summer) and has no natural predators or diseases to limit its population. Dense infestations of hydrilla can shade or crowd out all other native aquatic plants, alter water chemistry, cause dramatic swings in dissolved oxygen levels, increase water temperatures, and affect the diversity and abundance of fish populations.

As a result of its pervasiveness, Hydrilla populations have caused economic, environmental, and ecological damage. Due to its competitive nature, Hydrilla creates monocultures, an area dominated by a singular species, rather than having a balance among many species, like in a normal ecosystem.

Mechanical removal is not a permanent solution since fragments can float away and transplant themselves. Other efforts to control Hydrilla involve herbicides, the introduction of grass carp, and insects such as weevils. These are costly and need to be tailored to the specific

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environment being treated. However, once an aquatic site is infested, eradication of hydrilla is very difficult.

### Efforts by the State of Connecticut

To attack the hydrilla problem, Connecticut has created the Office of Aquatic Invasive Species as part of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. This office was created in 2022 after being promoted by the General Assembly's Environmental Committee, which is co-chaired by State Representative for Chester, Deep River, Essex, and Haddam, Christine Palm. The Office will address how hydrilla causes ecological and economic harm, pursue different research and removal projects in the Connecticut River, and offer methods of prevention.

In addition, the U.S. Army Core of Engineers will lead a demonstration project to determine the effectiveness of herbicides registered for aquatic use to safely reduce and control the spread of the Connecticut River hydrilla. The project will investigate hydrilla's growth patterns, water exchange dynamics in the Connecticut River, and evaluate herbicide efficacy in laboratory conditions in 2023 to guide operational scale field demonstrations of herbicide efficacy



in 2024.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be developing site-specific treatment plans for the Connecticut River in the summer of 2024. The use of aquatic herbicides will be considered. There are several safe, well understood, and effective herbicides.

### What you can do

Boaters can play an important role in mitigating the spread of Hydrilla and are urged to clean, drain, and dry their boats every time they leave the river. This applies to all craft including kayaks, canoes, etc. To learn about DEEP's program to halt the spread of this invasive, which is devastating our waterways, go to: <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Fishing/General-Information/Aquatic-Invasive-Species>

As residents of the lower Connecticut River valley, we need to be aware of the effects of this pernicious invasive. It can and will affect the quality of what has been referred to as one of the "Last Great Places in the Western Hemisphere." If this invasive cannot be controlled, the hard-won efforts to clean up the Connecticut River, providing a wonderful recreational resource not to mention a source of economic benefit, will suffer unforeseen consequences.

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## Kayak Launch Inaugurated on Mill Pond

**A** new kayak launch has been installed in Ivoryton's Falls River Park (located on Falls River Drive). The site is the only public accessed point for exploring Mill Pond, a 59-acre impoundment created by the dam located behind Centerbrook Architects facility. While access to the pond was always possible, the new facility makes it much easier for paddlers to launch and return without some of the challenges experienced up to now.

The project was spearheaded by land trust Preserve Management Director, Leif Owens. Over the years, there has been an increase in shore erosion at the current launch site off the parking area. The new floating dock and launch helps protect the shoreline and improves accessibility for boaters and fishermen. The improved accessibility will also enable us to expand educational programs on the Mill Pond.

The kayak launch was officially inaugurated on August 12 with a planned outing to explore Mill Pond. Attending festivities were Cynthia Clegg, President & CEO and Thayer Talbot, Vice President & Chief Operating Officer of the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, which provided a generous grant (from the Guilford Savings Bank Charitable Fund, the Phyllis M. McDowell Fund for the Environment, the Sherry and Herb Clark Family Fund, and the Whelan Family).

On a beautiful summer day with bright blue skies and balmy temperatures, some thirty kayaks and canoes gathered to inaugurate the kayak launch. After enjoying a leisurely paddle led by land trust President Jeff Croyle, which included circumnavigating Jean's Island, many of the participants visited a Mill Pond member's home to enjoy a cookout and refreshments. All in all, it was as nice a day as anyone could ask for.



## **The Mill Pond Story**

Mill Pond in Ivoryton and Centerbrook goes back to the early 1700s when a dam was installed to power a grist mill. The Falls River, which originates its journey as an outflow of Messerschmidt Pond in Westbrook, provides year-round flow as it drains the watershed to the west of Ivoryton. As a recreational resource, Mill Pond provides ample opportunities for fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. Residents who live along its edge are also able to enjoy its diverse natural environment. The present-day condition of Mill Pond is directly attributable to the successful effort since 2002 by an informal voluntary collection of neighbors known as the Friends of Mill Pond.

Michael Delouchry, chair of the Friends of Mill Pond, coordinates efforts to treat various types of weed infestations resulting in a wonderful natural resource for all to enjoy. The Friends of Mill Pond Steering Committee has done an outstanding job in managing this effort and in securing funds from Mill Pond waterfront property owners and others. As one of the abutting landowners, the Essex Land Trust participates in the stewardship of this valuable neighborhood asset.

# Volunteer Spotlight - A Steadfast Promoter of Essex Land Trust: Jim Denham

By Tom Soboleski

If you are a member of Essex Land Trust (ELT), or even just an occasional hiker on our trails, you've seen the work and influence of Jim Denham. You may not realize it, but Jim's mark pervades everything ELT, from *Woods & Waters* newsletters, to signs, brochures, maps, our website, and how we present ourselves on Facebook and Instagram.

All those duties are vital for maintaining ELT's reputation as a respected and responsible organization and Jim has been a key influence in gaining that recognition. In his role as communications director, he decides on the right tone and messaging to achieve a consistent look and feel on all our print and online materials.

These responsibilities are well-suited to Jim. After growing up in Lima, Peru, where his father was a commercial airline pilot, his professional career with the Gillette razor company took him all over the world. His postings were exclusively outside the U.S. - Brazil, South Africa, London - among several others, with his primary responsibility being strategic brand management and marketing. He has been instrumental in raising our branding and communications to a new level, while focussing on the land trust's slogan, "Caring for our World here at Home."

Jim's love of nature first took hold during graduate school at the University of Texas while observing Whooping Cranes on South Padre Island. This inspired a curiosity for birds that made him a life-long bird watcher. Once he got settled into Essex after retiring in 2006, he wanted to get involved in something "and the land trust appealed to me because of nature, the outdoors."

His first project after joining ELT in 2007 was to oversee the publishing of a trail guide that highlighted each preserve; its description, history, flora & fauna. A second improved edition was published in 2019.

Taking the reins as publisher/editor of this newsletter in 2008, Jim immediately increased its frequency and raised its standards. He gave it a mission; "to inform, to educate, to motivate. Education is part of our mission," Jim says,



and he selects articles to publish that will inform us about our natural environment and motivate us to "get outdoors and enjoy."

With these successes, Jim was considered a prime candidate to lead ELT and he was elected president in 2015. After serving a three-year term he spent two years out of office, then was lured back to serve two more years from 2020-22. Throughout his service as president, he continued as communications director.

His prime objective as president was elevating ELT's visibility. "We needed to be more engaged with the community," he says. One mani-

festation of that goal, Jim felt, "is we should be involved with our schools." This led to his giving lectures to biology classes on Ospreys and continuing to organize an Arbor Day project at Essex Elementary School in collaboration with the Essex Tree Warden.

Jim's long tenure in various roles gives him credibility to identify what challenges ELT faces going forward. He is especially interested in biodiversity and sustainability. "Biodiversity is the canary in the coal mine," he says. "Biodiversity consists of all the plants, animals, insects, vegetation, everything that is out there. It's so complex that it's hard for human beings to take it in." It's the biggest issue facing our environment, he maintains, and it is relentlessly impacted by climate change, over-development, poor use of land. He continues to raise awareness of threats to biodiversity and motivate people to act.

Another concern is establishing long-term projects that align with our mission - commitments that "we own, we take care of, we nurture, we give life to." Creating a project is one thing, Jim says but "the challenge with it is sustaining it. Doing it once is not a problem, but how do you keep it up? That takes time and energy."

The Essex Land Trust is fortunate to count among its members many people who had distinguished careers in varied professions. We are grateful to have Jim Denham's dedication and array of skills on our team, providing an immeasurable benefit to both ELT and our community.

# Some of the Benefits of Getting Outdoors

*Editor's note: It is often said that getting outdoors is one of the most beneficial forms of exercise. Not only does it stretch muscles not used in our sedentary way of life, it also creates experiences to observe nature in ways that are not disruptive to the environment. We are fortunate in Essex to have 1,100 acres of open space most of which is owned and managed by the Essex Land Trust. Following are two perspectives on spending time in the outdoors, which we hope will provide inspiration for getting out in nature.*

## The Benefits of Time in Nature

By Rene Smith

If you were to ask me, I could tell you with confidence that there are enormous physical and mental health benefits to spending time in nature. But you don't have to take my word for it. Over the last half a century more and more studies have been published that support what nature enthusiasts like me have known all along.

A while back, my book club chose to read *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*, by Florence Williams. Williams travels the globe investigating the science behind the phenomenon and presents her findings in an engaging way. In particular, I enjoyed the different ways in which this knowledge has been viewed and applied in various countries and cultures.

The Japanese are all about spirituality. The Japanese have long revered the natural world and you may be familiar with the term Shinrin-yoku (often translated to forest bathing) – a phrase allegedly coined in 1982 by a government official to encourage more people to visit forests. The South Koreans have a strong focus on the commercial aspect, such as how to bottle the scents of nature and

sell them as one does perfume. And the Americans? Of course, we are focused on efficiency! What is the minimum amount of time you need to spend in nature for the maximum benefit?

As I write these TrailTalk articles, I am aware that I benefit from having no physical restrictions to accessing nature, but that not everyone is so fortunate. In my July post, entitled Getting a Nature Fix, I offered ideas for places to enjoy nature on gentler paths. I dedicated that article to those readers who have told me that they love to read my monthly TrailTalk even though they themselves are not able to hit the trails anymore.

*Renee Smith writes a regular blog about walks in the outdoors. Each month she shares a new post featuring local trails to explore in Connecticut. These posts include photos and links to help you get the most out of the adventure, whether you are merely reading about these places or planning to explore them on your own. To access her site, go to: <https://trailtalk.org/>*

## Birds Can Increase Your Outdoor Pleasure

By Matt Winkler

As beautiful and peaceful as a walk on a land trust preserve can be, the exercise and the deep breathing are both working to improve your physical health. However, have you ever thought about the other benefits offered by our beautiful, natural, local preserves? Have you thought of trying to integrate some of these additional benefits into your next visit?

Since land trust preserves are blessed with many species of birds, in the underbrush, hidden in the trees, flying by, birds offer us a simple way to observe nature. The benefits from different species, with their different bird songs, further increase our mental benefits. We even benefit from the unique sounds that the particular species of Woodpeckers make as the forage for insects in the trees.

Listening to the sounds of the birds can tend to eliminate negative emotions. Further, just being associated with birds can improve your mental health. And all without

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any side effects of conventional pharmaceutical treatments. Further, it seems bird songs also tend to improve your quality of sleep.

You might be pleasantly surprised! There are visual, audio, and mental benefits awaiting you. Today, I would like to introduce you to the benefits of our local birds, and the songs they offer to you, as you enjoy your time on land trust preserves. Two studies have determined that paying attention to the birds can improve your mental health, whether you are hearing or seeing the birds all around you. Your greater contact with birds and nature are associated with your better body and brain health.

Another short study of listening to six-minute recordings of bird songs through headphones has confirmed the reduced feelings of anxiety, depressions, and paranoia. Listening to bird songs is supplementary to the physical exercise for reducing stress, lowering blood pressure and cortisol levels.

To gain more benefits from birds, we all need to be aware of all of nature that surrounds us, be more curious about

the local birds that are around your home. Notice them and wait to hear their songs. The birds are there for your enjoyment and pleasure. The birds come to you at no cost. Seek them out; you will be the benefactor!

*Matt Winkler is a long-time member and supporter of the Essex Land Trust. His interest in the environment has led him to contribute newsworthy articles for Woods & Waters.*

Listening to birds and identifying them by their song has become much easier with the advent of the smart phone. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a free application called Merlin that can be used to identify bird song simply by pointing your phone in the direction of the sound. The application can be obtained where other apps are available. For more information check out: <https://www.birds.cornell.edu/landtrust/merlin-bird-id/>



## Follow the Falls - Ivoryton

The third installment of *Follow the Falls*, a collaboration between Essex Historical Society and Essex Land Trust, was celebrated at an event held in Ivoryton in September. The project initiated in 2016, tells the remarkable story of the Falls River which binds together the three historic villages of Ivoryton, Centerbrook, and Essex to form what we know today as the Town of Essex.

Besides its historic significance, the Falls River is home to a rich natural history, kept alive by the four Essex Land Trust preserves located along its winding shores.

With the title of *Ivoryton – Ingenuity / Industry / Ivory*, the final installment captures the most comprehensive and diverse perspectives to date. Nearly two years in the making, the Ivoryton installment is a 90-page full color portrayal of Ivoryton's history, providing in-depth coverage



of numerous topics that readers may want to consider individually.

Indigenous peoples hunted and fished in Ivoryton's landscape for more than 9,000 years. Ivory sourced through Africa and international markets placed the village in a global trade web involving Arab merchants, European colonization of Africa and trade of enslaved peoples.

During the development of ivory manufacturing and the Industrial Revolution, nineteenth-century immigrants worked in its factories and shaped the history of the village neighborhoods.

Digital copies are available for download from the Essex Historical Society (EHS). To purchase a printed copy, contact EHS offices by emailing director Melissa Josefiak at [mjosefiak@essexhistory.org](mailto:mjosefiak@essexhistory.org).

# Remembering Two Long-Term Land Trust Members

## Nancy Rambeau

Nancy Rambeau passed away in July after her long battle with cancer. Nancy has been a land trust member with her late husband, George, since 2008. She first joined the board in 2011, as Volunteer Chair. In 2013 she became Secretary and subsequently served as President from 2016 to 2020. In addition to participating in our first Strategic Planning exercise which started in late 2016, Nancy was a key participant in the team which spearheaded the complicated and time-consuming national Land Trust Alliance accreditation process, resulting in accreditation being awarded in 2019. Doing a lot of the heavy lifting where we didn't have good records of material presented to the Board, she had to crawl through minutes to extract material. Also, she helped with reorganizing our paper files using our new filing structure. Nancy also represented the land trust with the Lower Connecticut Council of Governments and the regional Land Trust Exchange.

Nancy's style as both a participant and leader always ensured broad participation in all discussions and deliberations. Achieving consensus has been a hallmark of the Essex Land Trust Board modus operandi, and Nancy's approach strengthened this key organizational fundamental.



## Fred Szufnarowski

Fred Szufnarowski has been land trust supporter for the past 18 years and was for a long time one of the stewards for the popular Cross Lots Preserve. He passed away in early July. What distinguished Fred's contribution to the community was his multiple interest in many organizations, where he volunteered his time despite maintaining an active career in private energy and environmental consulting.

His work for the land trust involved many hours volunteering with close friends to improve public access and biological diversity. He was a president of Essex Library Association, chair of the Town of Essex Inland Wetlands Commission and had a keen interest in the community's history. In addition to working on the bicentennial 1814 British Raid on Essex, Fred was the project leader of the *Follow the Falls* initiative in which the Essex Land Trust participated along with the Essex Historical Society. The value of his leadership and contributions to this 7-year project are an enduring legacy to Fred's volunteering spirit.



# Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



## Ivoryton Pumpkin Chase

**Saturday October 21 9:00 AM -**

**Ivoryton Village Green**

Supported by the Essex Land Trust, this race benefits the Ivoryton Library and its programs. Registration is online and check-in is at the Ivoryton Village green starting at 7:30 am. Race starts at 8:30 am for children and at 9:00 for adults.

## Fall Foliage Story Walk on Leaves

**Saturday, October 21 10:00 AM - Cross Lots,  
40 West Avenue**

Essex Library and Essex Land Trust will host a Fall Foliage StoryWalk® for children and families. Participants will learn why leaves change colors in autumn as they explore Cross Lots and read the book Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert. After the StoryWalk® participants will be invited to meet back at the Essex Library to create leaf animals and other leaf creations inspired by the artwork in the story.

## Electric Lawncare Demo

**Saturday, November 4 10:30 AM - Cross Lots,  
40 West Avenue, Parking at Essex Town Hall**

Hosted by the Essex Land Trust and Sustainable Essex. See demonstrations of and try battery powered lawncare equipment from several manufacturers. Featuring leaf blowers, string trimmers, clippers, mowers, and a chain-saw from manufacturers like DeWalt, EGO, and Stihl. Cider refreshments! Registration is not required but helps us plan. Register at: <https://bit.ly/ELTPrograms>. Rain date: November 5.

## Naturalist Guided Thanksgiving Nature Hike

**Sunday November 26 - 10:30AM -**

**Falls River Preserve, Fall River Drive**

Take a break from your Thanksgiving festivities and enjoy a nature hike with your friends at the Land Trust. Naturalist Phil Miller will lead the hike featuring the



Programs team members Bill Leonard and Mary Lou Bowen helping out at recent kayak event

natural history of the Falls River Preserve as well as its flora, fauna, and geological features. Social gathering following the hike featuring cider and donuts. Members, friends, relatives, and families all welcome. Bring a chair and sit a spell. Registration is not required but helps us plan. Register at: <https://bit.ly/ELTNatureHike>

## Preserve Fall Clean Ups

Help your land trust keep our trails open by helping out at one of our upcoming cleanups. Bring rakes, blowers, and tarps. Families are welcome. Dress warmly. Refreshments provided.

**Saturday, November 18- 9:00 AM -  
Falls River Park, Falls River Drive**

**Saturday, December 2 - 9:00 AM -  
Osage Trails, Foxboro Road**

**Saturday December 9 - 9:00 AM -  
Cross Lots, 40 West Avenue**

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