



Avalonia Trails

P.O. Box 49
Old Mystic, CT 06372

...preserving natural habitats in southeastern Connecticut by acquiring and protecting lands and by communicating the value of these irreplaceable resources

FALL 2014

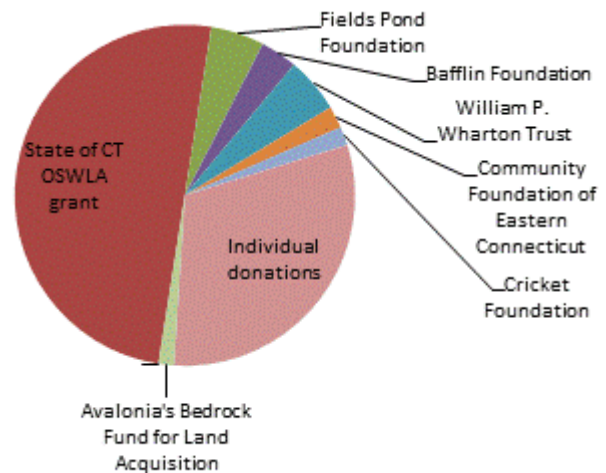
Babcock Ridge Acquisition Completed!

by Janice Parker

We are very happy to report that on June 10, 2014 Avalonia completed the acquisition of 74 acres of wooded uplands in North Stonington, to be known as the Babcock Ridge Preserve. This property will connect Erisman Woodlands in the north with the Donald R. Henne Memorial Tract of the Shunock River Preserve in the south, to create a wildlife corridor of 220 acres.

It took two years of fundraising to accumulate the necessary funds to complete this purchase, and ultimately it was necessary to draw upon Avalonia's own cash reserves to complete the transaction before the expiration of the sales agreement.

Thanks are due to Duncan Schweitzer, who prepared the State of Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWLA) grant application; to Dick Conant who prepared and submitted an additional 15 grant applications; to the State of Connecticut, the William P. Wharton Trust, the Fields Pond Foundation, the Bafflin Foundation, the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut and the Cricket Foundation, all of which contributed funding; and to the more than 100 individuals and organizations who made donations, ranging from \$2 to \$20,000. Thank you all! Each and every one of you, give yourself a pat on the back. **We couldn't have done it without YOU!!!**



Bell Cedar Swamp Dedication



On Sunday May 4th, 2014, about two dozen Avalonia members, friends and neighbors gathered to celebrate the conservation of Bell Cedar Swamp, a rare and imperiled ecosystem in North Stonington. The event was overflowed by a red-shouldered hawk who voiced loud approval.

The photo (by Bruce Fellman) shows the preserve entrance sign, which acknowledges grant funding from the State of CT DEEP Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition

program, and features (from left to right) Avalonia North Stonington town committee members Janice Parker, Pat Turner, Mac Turner, attorney Frank Eppinger, Executive Director Heather Milardo and President Michele Fitzpatrick.

Meet Your New Board

At our Annual Meeting of the general membership on May 30, members voted to elect a Board of Directors for Avalonia's fiscal year June 2014-May 2015. A vote was also taken on changes to the by-laws. This year there was no program, to allow more time for a review of Avalonia's achievements over the recent few years, and to permit presentation and discussion of the proposed by-law changes.

The by-law changes were a consequence of an ongoing strategic planning process. As reported in the last issue of "Avalonia Trails", late last year the Board appointed a Strategic Planning Committee, one of whose first initiatives was to interview members of the Board. On the basis of their findings, their recommendation was to restructure the organization so as to reduce the size of the Board.

Since the last changes in 2010, the by-laws have
(continued on page 3)

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2014-2015**

OFFICERS

Michele Fitzpatrick.....President
Dennis Main.....Vice-President
Binti Ackley.....Secretary
Dori Charnetski.....Treasurer

DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE

Scott Dawley
Richard Conant
Gerry Stefon
Claude Pellegrino
Mike Pernal

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Heather Milardo

HONORARY DIRECTORS

Carole Clark
Anna Coit
Anne Nalwalk
Lois Tefft Van Deusen
Hugo Wilms

STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Acquisition.....Gerry Stefon
Stewardship.....Mike Goodwin
Finance.....Claude Pellegrino
Development.....Dick Conant

TOWN COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Groton.....Dick Conant
Ledyard.....Mike Goodwin
Preston.....Margaret Gibson
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan
North Stonington.....Pat Turner

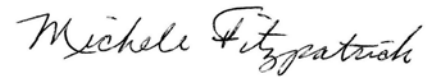
President’s Message

Greetings, everyone. I hope you have all been able to take advantage of the summer weather by visiting and enjoying the beauty of our preserves. I would like to celebrate with you the successful acquisition of the Babcock Ridge preserve. My sincerest thanks to everyone who made this acquisition possible. It is truly a shining star added to our substantial portfolio! We are continuing our efforts to raise funds to replenish the Bedrock Fund, our acquisition reserves that were used to help complete the acquisition. The Art Contest and Auction described on page 4 is one of our planned functions for this purpose – I hope that you will all participate at whatever level is possible for you.

This is a time of transition for Avalonia. We have made some substantial governance changes, which you can read about in other articles in this newsletter. (pages 1 and 3). We are continuing our efforts to improve our processes to align more closely with Land Trust Alliance standards. A number of Board and other active members will be attending the Land Trust Alliance Rally in Providence in September. We look forward to sharing what we learn with everyone.

Finally, I would once again like to thank all our members, donors, and volunteers. It is your efforts and contributions that make it possible for Avalonia to make a difference in the world.

Sincerely,



Executive Director’s Note

Summer is coming to a close and days are getting shorter, but Avalonia is still hard at work. Stewardship is such a primary part of what Avalonia does to preserve the land and our volunteers never stop. If you’ve been out to any of the preserves this summer, you can see the great work that they’ve done implementing land management plans, eradicating invasives, and promoting wildlife habitats and bird sanctuaries.

We also have fantastic news to share. In this issue you will read about our most recent acquisition... Babcock Ridge! Thanks to the generosity of our amazing members and donors we were able to close on this significant piece of property in June. Almost half of the money raised for this purchase came from individual donors! Avalonia is fortunate to have your support. It is your commitment to land conservation that allows us to succeed in our mission.

Avalonia is gearing up for our first annual Art of Conservation fundraising event. We are looking forward to showcasing some of our astounding local talent in this art and photo contest and auction.

So enjoy the cooler days, sit back with our newsletter, and read all about what Avalonia is doing to remain *your* land conservancy.

Sincerely,



Annual Appeal 2014 *by Heather Milardo*

Avalonia’s Annual Appeal goes out every fall and is our single largest source of revenue. As you can see from the graph at the right, this past year there was a gratifying increase in total annual appeal donations, predominantly because of your positive response to our Babcock Ridge acquisition initiative. Thank you!!

It is our hope that, going forward, we can continue to count on your continuing support, not only for land acquisition, but also for our general stewardship and operating needs, as we strive to build our organizational capacity and expand our programming options for you, our members. Please watch for our letter in the mail and give as generously as your circumstances permit.

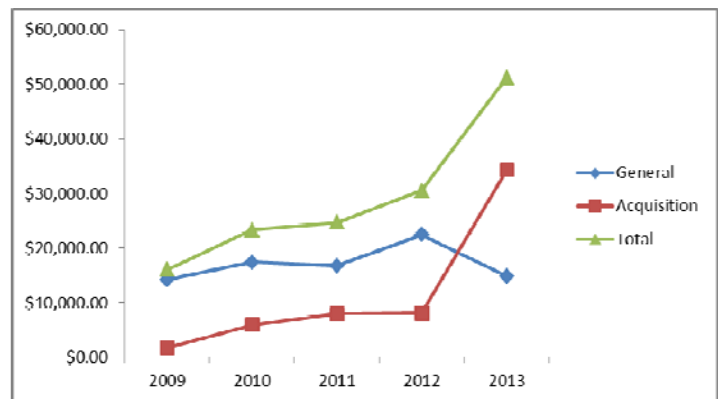




Photo courtesy New London Day

In memoriam **Adele Erisman 1909-2014**

We mourn the death of Adele Erisman, conservationist, environmental activist and benefactor. Adele died this August at the age of 104. She will be remembered with affection and respect throughout the conservation community.

Adele was a member of Avalonia from the time of its founding in 1968 and a generous supporter of our mission of conservation. A life-long bird-lover, she is credited with inspiring the creation of the Denison-Pequotsepos Nature Center (DPNC) by a talk she gave to the Mystic Garden Club in 1943 on the need to preserve bird habitat. For many years she served as the editor of their newsletter, the Chickadee, and there are fern and wildflower gardens at the DPNC that reflect her handiwork. She was a participant in the earliest organizing meetings of the group that founded the Nature Conservancy (TNC), which started here in eastern Connecticut and is now an international organization conserving more than a million acres world-wide. A resident of North Stonington since the early 1940s, Adele is also credited with helping to start its first Conservation Commission.

In 2011, at the age of 102, Adele donated the bulk of the land on which her house stands (62 acres) to Avalonia. A modest and unassuming person, she had to be persuaded to allow it to be named in her honor. (To read more about Erisman Woodlands, and to view photographs, see Beth Sullivan's August 18, 2014, blog post at www.avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com.) At the same time, Adele donated the house itself, together with some acreage, to TNC, retaining a life interest. She continued to reside in the home that she loved until her death. "To me, it's heaven," she said in an interview with Judy Benson of the *New London Day* on the occasion of her 100th birthday. Thank you, Adele, for entrusting us with your piece of heaven.



Photo by Janice Parker

Meet Your New Board

(continued from page 1)

allowed for a maximum of 20 Board members: 4 Officers and 3 Directors-at-Large, plus the Chairs of the 5 Standing Committees and up to 8 Town Committees. This would be a cumbersome size, had it been possible to fill all the positions. In practice, this was becoming increasingly difficult and some Directors served reluctantly, finding themselves on the Board by virtue of their committee Chair responsibilities rather than their own inclination. Meanwhile, there were insufficient Director-at-Large positions for qualified Board members who chose not to assume committee responsibilities in addition to their board role.

Under the new structure, the Board will comprise 4 Officers and 5 Directors-at-Large. The existing structure of Town and Standing Committees will be unchanged, but the Chairs of these committees will have no Board obligations, freeing them to concentrate on their committee responsibilities. Board meetings will be open to any member who chooses to attend, (see page 6 for times and locations) though discussion and voting will be limited to Directors.

The new Board will comprise:

Michele Fitzpatrick (President) Michele is a retired USCG officer and an Avalonia life member since the late 1990s. She has served 3 years on the Board: as Groton Town Director, Vice President, and, for the past year, as President

Dennis Main (Vice-President) Dennis is retired from a career with State of CT Auditors and State Data Center as Fiscal/Admin Manager, has served on Bozrah Boards of Finance and Assessment Appeals, and is a CT licensed real estate broker. For the past year he has served on the Board as Director-at-Large

Binti Ackley (Secretary) Binti is a long time member of Avalonia, and has been very active in the Stonington Town Committee, serving as its Chair and most recently representing it on the Board as Town Director

Dori Charnetski (Treasurer) A long-time Avalonia member as well as supporter and member of several local and national land trusts, Dori has a background in accounting.

Dick Conant is a retired marine biologist and environmental regulatory specialist who in the past year served on the Board as Groton Town Director.

Scott Dawley is a state environmental specialist who has served on the Avalonia Board for many years.

Claude Pellegrino is a former Vice President of the J.P. Morgan Chase Corporation. He has just completed a term as Avalonia Finance Committee Chair

Mike Pernal is a retired Eastern Connecticut State University faculty member and administrator. This will be his first term on the Board.

Gerry Stefon is a surveyor. A long-time Avalonia Board member, he has also served for a number of years as Acquisition Committee Chair.

Anne Nalwalk was made an Honorary Director in recognition of her many years of service.

For a listing of Committee chairs for this year, see page 2.

Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. Presents:



Visit our Preserves and be Inspired!

Art creates a connection between the viewer and nature. We invite you to be a part of creating that connection. On **October 18th**, Avalonia Land Conservancy will be holding its First Annual Art of Conservation: Art and Photo Contest at the **Mystic Arts Center**. This exciting inaugural event will feature amazing fine art and photography as well as a special children's section.

Select artwork will also be available for purchase through live and silent auctions that night as a fundraiser for Avalonia's Land Acquisition Fund.

Let your creativity guide you as you allow others to see the beauty and life of nature through your eyes.

Children's Preview Reception

6:00 p.m.—6:45 p.m.

The Children's Preview is free and open to families whose children participated in the event.

A silent auction for these mini-masterpieces will be held during this preview reception and juice and cookies will be served.

Main Event

7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.

For adults and students, the main event begins 7:00. A Silent Auction will be ongoing. The Live Auction will begin at 8:00 p.m.

Tickets can be purchased for \$25 each and include admission to the event, hors d'oeuvres and two drink tickets.

Contest Guidelines:

The contest and auction are open to the public.

All contest entries should showcase one of Avalonia's preserves or an element of conservation.

Cash prizes will be awarded in each contest category. Other exciting prizes will also be awarded for honorable mentions.

Artists may choose to enter the contest without donating their work to the auction.

Auction Guidelines:

All artists who wish to enter their artwork into the auction will set the minimum bid. Sold artwork is tax-deductible at full value. Unsold artwork will be returned to the artist.

All art included in the auction will be featured in the event program.

Non-contest art may feature any aspect of nature.

Artists do not need to enter the contest to participate in the auction.

- Winners will be featured in Avalonia's newsletter as well as included in press releases and organizational publications, with artist's permission.
- All entrants will receive one free ticket to attend the event.

Entry Fee

\$25 first submission; \$20 additional submissions

Auction *Only*: Free

Student: \$15

Children under 12: Free

Good Times, Bad Times: The Babcock Ridge Vernal Pools Wrap-up

by Bruce Fellman

Babcock Ridge is dotted with vernal pools, those isolated low spots in the woods that fill with water throughout the fall and winter and serve as spring breeding grounds and nurseries for amphibians and invertebrates until the temporary ponds evaporate in the summer. This year, I was able to survey, starting in March, both the main pool and several wetlands areas that, although technically just wide spots in seasonal streams, behave like vernal pools. The results were as surprising as they were sobering, and they demonstrate that if anyone is looking for an appropriate theme song for this kind of habitat, just hum a few bars of "A Hard Knock Life" from *Annie*.



Marbled salamander on June 23, with its gills fully reabsorbed and, now with functional lungs, sitting on the sphagnum moss by the side of the vernal pool and getting ready to head off into the surrounding upland forest. Photo by Bruce Fellman.



Marbled salamander on June 6, with frilly gills visible. Photo by Bruce Fellman.

For starters, the ponds didn't fill at all in the autumn because of persistent drought. This seemed to indicate that the fall-breeding Marbled Salamanders that I'd seen the previous year weren't likely to be in the nursery population. But no sooner had the ice melted in March than I found the dark shadows of Marbled larvae swimming in the water. Somehow the Marbled eggs, deposited on dry ground that awaited autumn rain, survived exposure to the cold, and when the precipitation finally arrived, the hatchlings found enough to eat to make it through the winter.

The young were joined in the early spring by the larvae of March-breeding Wood Frogs and Spotted Salamanders, and the race was on to see who could run the gauntlet of predators and misfortune to metamorphose from an aquatic organism to a land dweller. Yet another drought took hold in May, and by the beginning of June, the vernal pool and the vernal-like areas of the stream were disappearing rapidly. Before that happened, however, the Marbled larvae absorbed their frilly gills, developed lungs, and left the nursery for a life in the forest uplands. With any luck, they'll return in a couple of years to their birthplaces to court and mate in places that will eventually fill with water.

But luck ran out for this year's Spotted Salamander larvae and most of the Wood Frog tadpoles. The vernal pools habitat dried up before they could metamorphose. It's a hard knock life indeed.

Signage from Norwich Tech by Mac Turner

Avalonia has developed a working relationship with the Norwich Technical High School. Students in the wood working program are learning to use a very sophisticated Computer Numerical Control (CNC) machine. CNC machines are automated milling devices that make industrial components without direct human assistance. They use coded instructions that are sent to an internal computer, which allows factories to fabricate parts accurately and quickly. Avalonia has an ongoing need for carved signs. Students in the wood working department of the Technical School set up the machine and create the signs and in the process they gain valuable experience. There are a number of employers in our region who are anxious to hire graduates with experience of this type. Avalonia is grateful for the cooperation it has received from the woodworking instructor, John Kelly. The latest group of signs were produced by students Dylan Renshaw, Dougie Babbitt, Alec Mendez, and Logan Meseroll.



Logan Meseroll holding one of the carved signs in front of the CNC machine. Photo by Mac Turner

Membership

Thank you to everyone who responded to our annual membership drive. You are the ones who have made Avalonia what it is. Your support of this organization and commitment to the conservation community is what is helping to make the preservation of our natural resources a state and local priority.

We would like to acknowledge our appreciation for our renewing members and welcome our new members. In the past 6 months, 38 new families and individuals have joined Avalonia. We look forward to continuing to roll out our new member benefits in the coming months and hope to see you soon.

Volunteer Call!!!!

Avalonia is always looking for volunteers to help in carrying out our mission. While "boots on the ground" volunteers are always needed and appreciated, we have a direct need right now for office volunteers. The three main positions we are looking to fill are Volunteer Coordinator, Event Assistant, and Stewardship Support. These are exciting opportunities to get involved using your skills and abilities in an administrative capacity. We need you!



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY, INC.

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

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Non-Profit Organization

U.S. POSTAGE PAID

Mystic, CT

Permit No. 126

Avalonia has a Facebook page:



**Read our weekly blog for updates between newsletter issues:
<http://avaloniaetrails.blogspot.com>**

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, October 1. Deadline for entries to “The Art of Conservation” Art and Photo Contest. For entry forms call 860 884 3500 or email avalonialc@yahoo.com.

Saturday, October 18. “The Art of Conservation” Art and Photo Contest and Art Auction, Mystic Arts Center, Water Street, Mystic. Details page 4.

Sunday, October 19, 8-11am. Bird banding with Bob Dewire & Beth Sullivan. at Knox Preserve. Participants can provide hands on help with the process and this is a great opportunity for photography.

Saturday, October 25, 1-4 p.m.. Special members-only appreciation hike of our newest acquisition, Babcock Ridge, guided by Bruce Fellman, and featuring a cider and cheese picnic. Details to follow.

Wednesday, November 19. Board of Directors’ meeting. Stephen Main Homestead, 1 Wyassup Road, North Stonington, 6.30 p.m.



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