



# 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 2015

### Meet Your New Board



*Dick Conant, Claude Pellegrino, (Treasurer) Dennis Main (VP), Binti Ackley (Secretary), Karen Askins, Rebekah Kepple and Michele Fitzpatrick (President). Not pictured, Mike Pernal, Scott Dawley.*

At Avalonia's Annual General Meeting held May 29, 2015 at the North Stonington Senior Center, members elected a new board for the fiscal year that runs from June 1, 2015 through May 31, 2016. Michele Fitzpatrick, Dennis Main, and Binti Ackley were re-elected for additional 1-year terms as President, Vice-President and Secretary respectively. Claude Pellegrino, who has served as chairman of the Finance Committee for the past two years, was elected to serve as Treasurer. Dick Conant, Mike Pernal and Scott Dawley were elected for additional one-year terms as Directors-at-Large. Two new additions to the Board for this year are Karen Askins and Rebekah Kepple. Karen is a former Peace Corps Volunteer, biology teacher and software trainer. A 30-year resident of Ledyard, she is a passionate gardener with a special interest in native plants. Birding, hiking, and fiber arts round out her interests. Rebekah brings to Avalonia years of experience with other non-profits; Save The Bay and ReSource, Vermont among them. She most recently worked for the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut. Rebekah now runs a small screen printing shop with her husband Morgan at the Velvet Mill in Stonington. When not at the Mill, Rebekah can be found cor-

ralling her little boy Milo, hiking Avalonia's many beautiful preserves, or tending to her garden. For more information on any of our Directors, go to our website: <http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org/our-team>.

The start of a new fiscal year also brings transitions to our committees. Turn to page 2 for a full listing of the Chairs of our Standing Committees and Town Committees. If you are interested in becoming more actively involved in Avalonia's operations, please call or email us; contact information is on page 6. Read Dick Conant's article on page 3 to learn where our areas of greatest need are currently, but rest assured that we have volunteer positions to suit most every individual and skill set.

### Avalonia Establishes Endowment Fund

*by Dick Conant*

Avalonia has long recognized our need to establish an endowment fund, that is, an investment account that would generate the income needed to meet our commitment to preserve our lands in perpetuity. For many years, as we grew from a small land trust into the regional conservation organization that we are today, lack of capital and the always pressing demands upon our limited income made that goal a distant and challenging one. Our recent recommitment to pursue Land Trust Association (LTA) accreditation has re-energized our efforts, and a timely and enormously generous bequest from one of Avalonia's founders, Adele Erisman, has made establishment of an endowment a realizable goal.

The Board of Directors tasked the Development Committee with exploring potential options for establishing and managing an endowment. The committee researched a local non-profit, three local banking establishment and two national investment firms before making a unanimous recommendation to the Board at the August 2015 meeting to establish our endowment with the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut (CFECT). The CFECT serves community giving needs and interests in New London County and manages endowments for over 33 other non-profits. Avalonia has had a close relationship with CFECT over the years and has received a number of grants from them, so using their expertise to manage an Avalonia endowment seems a perfect fit. The Board voted to establish an endowment and subsequently the Finance Committee met and recommended to the Board that the endowment be initially funded with \$50,000 dollars from the Adele Erisman bequest. The Board approved this amount and tasked the Development Committee with establishing a policy document for the endowment.

The Development Committee has met with CFECT to discuss the process for establishment of the endowment and is working on the policy document. We hope all will be ready to present to the Board in October and the endowment fund should be established in November. At that time, both Development and Communications committees will start work to educate Avalonia members and supporters about the endowment fund as we start the process to grow the endowment and strengthen the financial stability of Avalonia for the years to come.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
2015-2016**

**OFFICERS**

Michele Fitzpatrick.....President  
Dennis Main.....Vice-President  
Binti Ackley.....Secretary  
Claude Pellgerino.....Treasurer

**DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE**

Karen Askins  
Richard Conant  
Scott Dawley  
Rebekah Kepple  
Mike Pernal

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Heather Milardo

**HONORARY DIRECTORS**

Carole Clark  
Anne Nalwalk  
Lois Tefft Van Deusen  
Hugo Wilms

**STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Acquisition..... Vacant  
Communications.....Janice Parker  
Development.....Richard Conant  
Finance.....Claude Pellegrino  
Governance.....Dennis Main  
Personnel.....Richard Conant  
Stewardship..... Karen Askins

**TOWN COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

Griswold.....Scott Dawley  
Groton.....Vacant  
Ledyard.....Karen Askins  
Preston.....Margaret Gibson  
North Stonington.....Pat Turner  
Stonington.....Beth Sullivan

**A Note from the Editor**

*by Janice Parker*

Thank you to everyone who contributed the articles and photographs that comprise this issue of "Avalonia Trails," as well as those of you who planned and executed the events, programs and initiatives that are reported here. The deadline for our next issue is **December 30, 2015**, but feel free to submit material at any time, to [newsletter@avalonialc.org](mailto:newsletter@avalonialc.org) since we now offer an e-newsletter "Avalonia Now!" to share information between print issues.

If you would like to receive "Avalonia Now!", please subscribe at our website. Avalonia's contact information is on page 6.

**President's Message**

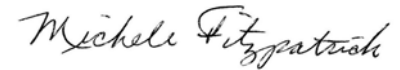
Hi everyone, and welcome to autumn in New England!

You may have noticed that over the past year Avalonia has been offering a number of new programs and events. These programs may have a primary focus of fundraising, education, socializing, but most offer a combination of the three. In the past year we have revitalized the winter pot luck, offered a conservation-related film screening, and sponsored an educational/fundraising trip on the Argia. We have also created the "Art of Conservation," which is being held again on October 24 of this year. These programs give you a chance to connect with other Avalonia members as well as to introduce family members and friends to Avalonia, and also give us a chance to meet with you. Avalonia is *your* land trust and we want to make sure that we are meeting your needs.

We would love to see you at more of our events! Turn to page 6 for a listing of the events we currently have planned, and remember that our new website has a full and up-to-date listing of all of our upcoming events and activities. Please let us know if you have ideas for additional programs or gatherings. Also let us know if you have ideas for celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2018!

If you have enjoyed any of our events, or plan to in the coming year, we hope that you will express your support with a contribution to our Annual Appeal (see page 3 for more details). Your donation is not to cover the costs of these events, which are generally planned to pay for themselves or to raise funds, but to support our primary mission of conservation: acquiring and protecting natural lands. To do this, we need the ongoing financial and volunteer support of our membership.

I hope you get a chance to enjoy the season in some of our beautiful preserves, and thank you for your support.



**Executive Director's Letter**

This is an exciting time for Avalonia. We have several big things going on and we hope that you're as excited about them as we are.

Our biggest project, which has all hands on deck, is our quest for accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance (see Dennis Main's article on page 4 for more information.) We are currently chest deep in that process and are happy to see our organization coming together to meet those national standards of excellence.

In other big news, we have hired a part-time Office Manager, Melissa Gifford. Melissa comes to us from Rhode Island and is a major asset in bookkeeping and the other administrative aspects of running our ever-growing organization. This also means that our office is now staffed by two part-time employees in addition to volunteers, and is open four days a week.

By the time you read this, our most recent major event, the Argia Cruise will be a happy memory for the lucky people who participated. See page 5 (or our Facebook page) for photos. You can still look forward to the *Art of Conservation: Art Show and Auction*, which will be held **Saturday October 24, 7-10p.m.** at the Mystic Arts Center. Read all about it, and see samples of the art to be offered, on page 3. We hope you'll be able to join us!

Finally, we are excited to announce that we are 70% of the way toward reaching our goal in our Challenge Grant. Those of you who received the appeal letter know that we were offered a challenge grant...if we are able to raise \$10,000, we will receive an additional \$10,000 from a very generous benefactor. That \$10,000 grant will be dedicated to our Bedrock Fund for Land Acquisition, which as you know has been depleted by our recent successful acquisitions. If you did not receive the appeal, or if you would like to move us closer still to our goal, please donate on our website. Click the 'Donate' button and specify "Challenge Grant" in the designation

I hope that you have all had a wonderful summer!



## Art of Conservation: 2nd Annual Art Show and Auction

by Heather Milardo

On **Saturday October 24<sup>th</sup>, from 7 to 10 p.m.**, we will hold our Second Annual Art of Conservation: Art Show and Auction.

Those of you who attended this lively event last year know what a great opportunity it is to gather and socialize, and we hope that you will invite all of your friends.

Many talented artists, both professional and amateur, will be contributing their work to this fundraiser. Two of the works that will be available are shown on this page: Beth Sullivan's print 'Dune Path' and Bruce Fellman's photograph 'Baltimore Butterfly'.

Art will be available for viewing while you enjoy live music, food and drinks, and then will be offered for sale through both silent and live auctions. Since artistic offerings this year include not only works in watercolor, oils and photography, but also pastel, sculpture, prints, pottery, ceramics, fabric arts, jewelry and mixed media, you are sure to find something that appeals.

This is an opportunity to invest in a 'New Master', discover an as-yet-undiscovered genius, or possibly get a head start on your gift shopping for the holiday season.



*Dune Path.*

*Print of watercolor original by Beth Sullivan.*



*Baltimore butterfly at the Preston Nature Preserve.*

*Photograph by Bruce Fell-*

The Art of Conservation event takes place, as it did last year, at the **Mystic Arts Center** at 9 Water Street in the heart of downtown Mystic.

Tickets are available for \$25 each and can be purchased through our website [www.avalonialandconservancy.org](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org), or by check. They can also be purchased at Tom's News, 133 Water Street in Stonington Borough. They will also be available at the door on the evening of the event.

Checks should be made out to Avalonia and can be mailed to Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc., PO Box 49, Old Mystic CT 06372.

If you have questions, please call Heather at 860-884-3500 or email [h.milardo@avalonialc.org](mailto:h.milardo@avalonialc.org).

## Annual Appeal

by Heather Milardo

Avalonia is making enormous efforts towards ensuring organizational sustainability. You, our members, support us in the expectation that we will preserve your land donations in perpetuity, and use your financial donations wisely to achieve that goal of conservation.

We are thrilled to be able to tell you that Adele Erisman's bequest will enable us to initiate the process of developing an endowment fund that will generate income to support our mission in the future, as well as bolstering our operating and stewardship reserve accounts. Her generosity will help support our long term goals and ensure the continuation of our mission for years to come.

If you would like to consider creating your own legacy, we would certainly like to talk with you about your goals, and how we can help you to achieve them.

Legacy gifts, though enormously welcome, are infrequent and unpredictable, and we cannot count on them to meet our ongoing operating expenses. Until such time as our investments in our endowment fund yield income, we are hopeful that we will continue to see support through our Annual Appeal to you, our members.

Last year, we experienced a dip in donations in response to our Annual Appeal. While we recognize that this in part reflects your generosity in support of our land acquisition efforts (the trees and the wildlife of Babcock Ridge thank you, each and every one!!) and while we also saw an increase in other forms of giving, including membership dues, it still reflects a trend that many non-profits are seeing across the country – a downturn in general support. Next to membership, our Annual Appeal is the lifeblood of our organization. It is the Annual Appeal that supports our outreach programs, operating costs, and most importantly, land acquisition. As we begin moving forward with Legacy gifts such as bequests and endowment donations, we cannot lose sight of the smaller picture; while legacy gifts ensure long term stability, it is the annual donations that carry Avalonia through the day to day. We hope we can count on your support and generosity.

Donations can be made by mail, or you can go online and make a secure donation through our website. Thank you for your support. Avalonia is your land trust and we are dependent upon you, our members, to achieve our mission of conservation.



## That Mystery Critter

by Bruce Fellman

Late last winter, I had the great good fortune of spotting and photographing a large, sleek mammal as it ran across the ice on Lower Spalding Pond at the edge of the Yannatos Preserve in North Stonington. But try as I might—and I tried mightily—I never came up with an identification that I felt much confidence in. So, after much head-scratching, I sent images of the critter off to experts at several universities in our area.

The most complete analysis came from Kurt Schwenk, who teaches the mammalogy course at UConn and is considered an expert when it comes to deciphering photos captured by camera traps. Dr. Schwenk wrote that, based on his viewing, he was “98.4 percent sure” that the animal in question was a mink and not, as I once suspected, an otter.



Photo by Bruce Fell-

According to the professor, “otters have a different-shaped head and their tails are really long, very fat at the base, and tapered to a point at the tip. This guy has an absolutely typical mink tail, including the dark color and bushiness. It also lacks the big tuft of vibrissae (whiskers) typical of otters, its ears are too large, and its feet are too small (otters have really big feet, especially the hind feet, owing to webbing). In addition, otters are typically pale-colored on the throat and venter, contrasting with the dark upper coat.”

The other possibility, a fisher that didn’t mind the occasional swim, was also ruled out. “It’s DEFINITELY NOT a fisher,” Dr. Schwenk noted emphatically. “I have seen lots of fishers from small to gigantic (some males get 4 feet long, heavy-bodied, and very bushy-tailed), and they are very distinctive—the least ‘weasel-like’ of the mustelids, the mammal family to which all three of the animals belong.”

So, kudos to all of the Facebookers who suggested mink. I haven’t seen the animal since that unexpected afternoon encounter, but I return often to the same area, and I’m ready to capture more pictures and signs like footprints and scat that might remove the 1.6 percent uncertainty in our confidence level.

**Editor’s note:** Bruce’s picture was posted on Avalonia’s Facebook page, with an invitation to readers to make their own identification. Opinions were divided about equally between mink and otter, with a few votes for fisher. This post generated more comments than any other we have posted.

## Our Governance Goal: Land Trust Alliance Accreditation by our 50th!

by Dennis Main

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA) accreditation seal provides you, our members, and the general public, with an assurance that Avalonia Land Conservancy, Inc. meets national quality standards and has the systems in place to protect our natural places, and your investment in them, in perpetuity.

What are the benefits of LTA accreditation? Why should Avalonia invest the effort to qualify? A few of the reasons:

- Donors prefer to give to effective, well-run organizations. Accreditation documents that a land trust meets those criteria.
- Land donors want to know that a land trust will be able to carry out their conservation vision. Accreditation shows that your land trust meets the highest independent standards of excellence.
- Funding agencies set very strict requirements for grant recipients; accreditation makes it easier to meet these requirements..
- A stronger organization is less risky to insure, so accredited land trusts can get discounts on insurance, among other perks.

For more information about LTA Standards & Practices, visit our website, [www.avalonialandconservancy.org](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org); for more information about the LTA accreditation process visit [www.landtrustalliance.org/topics/accreditation](http://www.landtrustalliance.org/topics/accreditation)

A grant provided by LTA has allowed us to hire Lisa Niccolai of Leaf2Landscape Consulting to assist us. Lisa was Team Leader for Lyme Land Conservation Trust’s successful accreditation last December and thus has all the experience necessary to pilot us through this process. Another grant from LTA and Connecticut Land Conservation Council is allowing Amanda Branson to organize and scan all our documents, bringing our record-keeping practices in compliance with LTA guidelines and our own policies. We plan to submit our pre-application in January 2016 and our full application in April 2016.

Stay tuned for updates as we progress through this exciting adventure!

## Personnel Committee Update

by Dick Conant

The Personnel Committee wrapped up the Avalonia fiscal year ending May 2015 by presenting its proposed slate of candidates for the Board of Directors at the annual meeting on May 29<sup>th</sup>. The slate was elected unanimously by the Avalonia membership present at the meeting. You can find the Board’s membership for this current operating year, along with the chairs for all the Standing Committees on page 2 of this issue, and more information about our organization at Avalonia’s new website.

Avalonia and the Personnel Committee are always looking for new members to serve on the Board or any of our committees. We especially need more members to serve in Personnel and Development and we always need individuals willing to assume leadership roles and chair our committees. If you are interested, please contact the Personnel Committee directly or the Chairperson of whatever committee you would be interested in serving on.

For the coming year, the Personnel Committee will be meeting at least quarterly to work on finalizing its charter and developing position descriptions for the Board and the Standing Committee Chairpersons. Our attention will also be focused on Avalonia hiring policies, and volunteer/employee management, with particular emphasis on Board and Standing Committee succession policies to ensure that Avalonia can maintain stable and experienced governance in accordance with the Land Trust Alliance standards, and your expectations of our organization with which you entrust your land and your donations.

We welcome your contributions, comments, and your participation.

## Argia Cruise

by Heather Milardo

It was a beautiful day for a sail! On Saturday, September 26, 2015, twenty-two of Avalonia's members boarded the Schooner Argia for a three and a half hour sail down the Mystic River and through Long Island Sound. Our captain and crew provided great local insights while Mystic Aquarium's – and Avalonia's own – MaryEllen Mateleska provided hands-on education to small groups throughout the day on local invertebrates.



## Come Picnic with Us at Tefftweald

by Bruce Fellman

Last autumn's wine and cheese picnic on Babcock Ridge for Avalonia members was such a hit that we decided to do it again. But, in the spirit of discovery, we're making the October event a movable feast and offering it to everyone interested in participating. Our location this year will be Avalonia's Tefftweald at Bircheturn Preserve, a 77-acre jewel that, as a one-time camp for Girl Scouts, features a bona fide picnic pavilion area, complete with tables and benches (no need to sit on boulders this time).

To work up an appetite, we'll begin with a leisurely hike through the interior of this "weald"—Old English for "well wooded country"—and explore the flora and fauna along the trail, which will take us along the edge of Wyassup Brook. Naturalist and photojournalist Bruce Fellman will highlight botanical and zoological treasures, from Mountain Laurels and Tulip Trees to migrating warblers and late-hopping Wood Frogs, along our meandering route. Since we'll be out at the height of fall foliage season, this is sure to be a walk you'll want to photograph; the leader will be happy to offer lots of helpful advice.



*Birders at Tefftweald.*

*Photo by Bruce Fellman.*

At the end of a mile-long trek, we'll enjoy wine and cheese, fruit and doughnuts, and cider; participants may also bring their own snacks to share. "It was awesome—a great opportunity to really see a preserve and meet people," said one of last year's participants.

This year's picnic takes place on **Sunday, October 18, from 2 to 4**, at the Tefftweald Preserve in North Stonington. We'll meet at the parking area just off 282 Grindstone Hill Road. Note: heavy rain postpones to the following Sunday, October 25. For more information and to register, contact Bruce Fellman, 860-599-4867, or [bruce.fellman@yale.edu](mailto:bruce.fellman@yale.edu).

## Bird Banding at Knox Preserve

with Beth Sullivan and Bob Dewire

This perennially popular event permits up-close and hands-on interaction with our local avifauna, as well as being a wonderful photo opportunity.

We have been banding at this location for two decades now and have compiled invaluable longitudinal data and an impressive list of species. The data collected are used to monitor population trends for resident and migratory birds and are used in the development of management plans.

Banding will start at the preserve, located on Wilcox Road (off Route 1 in Stonington) at **Sunday, October 25 at 8am**. Rain cancels.



*Common Yellow-throat, a Warbler.*

*Photo by Beth Sullivan.*



AVALONIA LAND CONSERVANCY. INC.

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

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Permit No. 126



## Upcoming Events



For a full listing of all upcoming events, visit our **NEW** website:

[www.avalonialandconservancy.org/events/](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org/events/)

**Sunday, October 18, 2-4 p.m. Hike and Picnic, Tefftweald Preserve, North Stonington.** Meet at the parking area just off 282 Grindstone Hill Road. Heavy rain postpones to the following Sunday, October 25. Details on page 5.

**Saturday, October 24, 7-10 p.m. Art of Conservation, Mystic Arts Center, Mystic.** Our 2nd annual art exhibit and auction. Details on page 3.

**Sunday October 25, 8 a.m. Bird Banding at the Knox Preserve, Stonington.** Details on page 5.

**Avalonia phone: (860) 884-3500**  
**Avalonia e-mail: [avalonialc@yahoo.com](mailto:avalonialc@yahoo.com)**  
**[www.avalonialandconservancy.org](http://www.avalonialandconservancy.org)**