



AUTUMN 2014



Tidal Pools, Davis Farm



Davis Farm Cove

THE DAVIS FARM ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

The Davis Farm site is singularly unique as an archaeological site as it contains a continuous record of Native American and Colonial archaeology; potentially from as early as 8,000 years ago, up through the Eighteenth Century. Archaeological investigations on portions of the Davis Farm by Norris Bull and William Beebe in the late 1930's, and more recently by Dr. Kevin McBride, have documented an extremely rich Native American presence on the land.

Most of the native sites and villages date back to the last 3,000 years, when native peoples in the area began to focus more of their settlements and subsistence activities along the developing tidal and salt marshes. As such, the Davis Farm contains evidence of long-term use. It documents the evolution of Native coastal, and later, horticultural economies in the region and eventually the interactions between Native Americans and colonists such as, Thomas Stanton.



*Dr. Kevin McBride
Photo, UConn*

The Farm consists of land given to Thomas Stanton in 1653, as a reward for his role in the Pequot War. In 1670, Stanton built the house known today as the Stanton-Davis Homestead Museum, the oldest house in Stonington.

The Land Trust's Campaign to preserve 168-acres of the Farm, a 48-acre parcel located along the west bank of the lower Pawcatuck River Estuary and a 120-acre parcel on Greenhaven Road, would complete the preservation of the entire 422-acre historic Farm. This acreage and the 1,013-acres of neighboring Barn Island would create a continuous greenway, along the Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay, consisting of more than 1,400-acres.

From an archaeological perspective, a successful Campaign by the Stonington Land Trust would result in the preservation of one of the most significant archaeological sites in southern New England. ~ *Kevin McBride, Ph.D.; Director of Research, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center; Professor of Anthropology, University of Connecticut* ~



Pawcatuck River, Sunset

ANGUILLA BROOK

Recently, The Nature Conservancy completed two fish passage projects on lower Anguilla Brook; the construction of a fishway at the Wequetequock Pond Dam and the removal of the Rutan Dam. So now, anadromous fish can move up the stream from Fisher's Island Sound throughout the stream's watershed; including the upper area where SLT's Anguilla-Grande Preserve is located. The fact that fish can now move freely up and down stream adds ecological value to the Land Trust's holdings.



Brook Trout, Wild Male
CT DEEP/Inland Fisheries Division



Anguilla Brook ~ S. Simm

The native brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*) is an important species to this brook. It is well suited to this kind of small coastal stream. Most native brook trout will live out their lives entirely in the stream. Historically though, there were also sea-run brook trout that went to sea as juveniles and came back to spawn, like salmon. While we do not believe that sea-run brook trout still exist in Connecticut due to warming sea temperatures, we believe that Anguilla Brook holds the most promise for the restoration of such fish. This is because the stream has native brook trout, it's the closest stream in Connecticut to the colder waters of Fisher's Island Sound & Block Island Sound and is now open for passage. Brook trout can swim out to sea, mature and make their return trip as adults to the shallow, fresh waters of Anguilla, to spawn. In this way, The Nature Conservancy's recent improvements to the brook are helping to restore the natural habitat of this species. SLT is evaluating the possibility of allowing catch-and-release sport fishing at Anguilla-Grande. Preserve is open to the public daily, dawn-to-dusk. ~ Stephen Gephard, Supervisor, Diadromous Fish Program & Habitat and Conservation Enhancement Program, Inland Fisheries Division, DEEP ~

Barn Island 'Winter Birding Excursion'
January 25th, 1PM

LOCAL FARMERS FEED WILDLIFE and LOCAL RESIDENTS

Local farmers, Gene and Nancy Bessette have been farming, in Lower Pawcatuck for many years. Prior to SLT's acquisition of Meadow Woods Preserve, they had been farming a 2-acre portion of that property. Upon acquiring Meadow Woods in 2012, SLT invited them to stay. They continue to farm on the Preserve today, along with farming several adjacent acres of their own property.

The Bessettes offer the public responsibly grown fresh produce, grown with as little pesticide as possible. They prefer natural means of protecting their plants from pests. Also offered are farm fresh eggs, from cage-free chickens. Many of us, at SLT, have appreciated the fruits of their labor, during the 2014 growing season. Next season we will, once again, find their produce wagon along the lower end of River Road, from 10am-6pm, daily.

Did you know that a few acres of land, on nearby Barn Island, are dedicated to the growing of corn, to benefit the wildlife there? A contract through DEEP allows the Bessettes to grow corn, on this tiny portion of Barn Island. Once they harvest the cornstalks, the ears of corn are left behind, helping to provide the wildlife with a winter food source.

We are happy to host these local farmers, who do a service for local residents and wildlife alike! ~ S. Simm



Farm on Meadow Woods



Chicken House



Produce Wagon

'TAILS' of TWO RABBITS

Perhaps you've seen this bunny to the right...

Or was it this one below? Can you tell the difference?



Except to a few researchers who handle these animals on a daily basis, the rare and reclusive native New England cottontail (NEC, *Sylvilagus transitionalis*) above and the ubiquitous introduced Eastern cottontail (EC, *Sylvilagus floridanus*) are pretty much indistinguishable by sight. There is a 99% chance that a rabbit with



a white spot on its forehead is an EC, and a 90% chance it is a NEC if it has a black spot. Alas, many have no spot or a bit of black and white. The most efficient and economical way to determine the presence of NEC is to collect fresh fecal pellets on fresh snow in winter, freeze them and send them off to the lab for DNA analysis.

But, why would you do such a thing, and who cares whether you have ECs or NECs in your neighborhood? Turns out a great many people do, including the US Fish and Wildlife Service, who, in 2006, designated the NEC as a "Candidate" species for listing under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Once occupying a continuous range across New England and eastern New York, the species now exists in five isolated populations... a range reduction of more than 85%. The Service will begin deliberation this fall on whether to list or not to list the species based on all of the data that states with NECs have provided. We have been doing our best to get them all of the best information about the distribution of this species; how much habitat is available, how much habitat enhancement work has been conducted and is planned, what the potential threats are and how we are working on mitigating those threats.

As with many wildlife species in decline, the main reason for the reduction of this species is loss of habitat. Some loss is due to development and fragmentation of the landscape and some to the natural succession of old fields to mature forest. In a forest of big trees, there are few places to hide from predators and not much to eat at bunny level. NECs require dense extensive thickets of shrubs and/or young trees, preferably with lots of thorns and tangles, to support viable local populations. (ECs, on the other hand, do quite well with a couple of rose bushes and a more open habitat... such as a lawn.)

Dense extensive thickets can develop in abandoned fields. But, in order to create new habitat patches, wildlife managers are actually cutting down selected patches of mature forest to allow young dense rabbit-friendly forest to regenerate. It isn't all for the bunnies either. At least 47 species, of greatest conservation need in CT, rely on young forest or shrub habitat. The CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the US FWS are working on public lands and with partners on private lands to create adequate habitat to ensure the continued survival of our native cottontail and other shrubland dependent wildlife species.

Supporting the initiative, Stonington Land Trust has applied for funding through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to conduct a NEC habitat enhancement project on the Thomas Miner Preserve, which directly abuts a property known to support a population of NEC. We are grateful for your contribution to this effort! We invite you to learn more about the many other exciting aspects of the NEC initiative and how you, too, can join the effort to create this crucial habitat! www.newenglandcottontail.org , <http://www.ct.gov/deep/>

Lisa Wahle, Contract Biologist to the Wildlife Management Institute at the CT Department of Environmental Protection

Dear Friends:

The year, which ended on June 30, 2014, included many important accomplishments for the Stonington Land Trust. Our fund raising effort for the purchase of the easement on the Davis Farm got off to a fine start, at the beginning of the year, and has continued to be productive. Currently, we are approaching 75% of our \$2-million goal. We thank you for your support.

We've completed trails open to the public, on both Grandview and Meadow Woods Preserves. A dedicated group of volunteers, logging hundreds of hours, completed a comprehensive wildlife and botanical survey on the Thomas Miner Nature Preserve and Wildlife Sanctuary. Results are being posted to SLT's website, as the data in each category is completed. Please visit us there.

We wish to thank Nick and Happy Smith who, once again, hosted our June annual meeting at their magnificent new facility at Stonington Vineyards. We were also fortunate to have biologist, Lisa Wahle as our guest speaker. The topic was, "The New England Cottontail Initiative in Connecticut"; a very informative and entertaining presentation. (See article, pg. 3)

Also, we are most grateful to our new members, the Blacker family, not only for the work they do to keep our fields beautiful, but also for helping to make our First Annual Hay Ride Social a success. Their expertise made for a safe and enjoyable afternoon, riding through the fields, gates and along the stone walls of Thomas Miner. Our thanks, also, to Juliet Dodge, another recent member, who provided her expert musical talent to the afternoon's proceedings.

We appreciate all of our volunteers, members and donors. We are fortunate indeed to have such wide and continuing support in our community. We ask that you take a moment, now, to send in your membership contribution, in the enclosed remittance envelope. We appreciate your continued support and thank you for it.

Sincerely,

Jim Smith



Wandering Minstrel



Hay Ride Harmony



First Hay Ride!

Photos, S. Simm

ANNUAL MEETING



Photos, B. Lyman