

GAINING GROUND

SPRING/SUMMER 2024



**DUTCHESS LAND
CONSERVANCY**



PRESIDENT'S LETTER



When you come to hold this newsletter in your hand, we should all be celebrating our annual Spring Barn Dance, which this year is being held at the historic Thorndale (thanks to the hard work of host and honorary Co-Chair Felicitas Thorne Co-Chairs Felicity and Tim Bontecou, Juliana Pecchia, Eliza Thorne and Jacqueline and Oakleigh Thorne). The farm was originally purchased by William Thorne in 1787 and today, some eleven generations later, remains in the family. We are lucky to have generations of families, like the Thornes, who are so committed to shepherding this area into the future in a mindful way and the impact of their philanthropy can be felt all through the county. But what is also truly remarkable to me is that this area keeps attracting people and families who share in this commitment.



In this newsletter, Georgina Schaeffer profiles the Kraushaars, a Westchester couple who bought their Meadowland farm 30 years ago. Originally just looking for a small starter farm, they fell in love with Meadowland at first sight, and the rest, as they say, is history. As you'll read, the Kraushaars were drawn to the area by the deep sense of place and now feel the responsibility to steward the land for future generations, not just for their own family, but for the benefit of the community. The Kraushaars' charitable mindset informs many of their choices from helping young farmers get a leg up in the business to donating their food surpluses to local food banks. We are thrilled to now hold a conservation easement on their property and welcome them to our DLC family.

Meanwhile, back in our offices our events calendar has really filled-up with lots of community offerings. This spring our volunteers trimmed back invasives growing at Thompson Pond in Pine Plains and at the Buttercup Farm Audubon Sanctuary in Stanfordville; you can take in their hard work on our annual Summer Solstice Wildflower Walk at Audubon. We also have walks and hikes planned at Wethersfield and Dover Stone Church, but if spectating is more your speed, you can watch the dogs go to work at the Caora Farm Sheepdog Trials. There are tons of upcoming volunteer opportunities including working on the Appalachian Trail in Pawling and cleaning-up invasives at the Lovett Preserve. Once you've made your notes from our "Conservationist's Calendar," turn the page and you'll find our flora and fauna columns dedicated to reptiles with a profile on a timber rattlesnake and a quick guide to our region's turtles. As you can see, it's been a busy season, but I hope to see you on the dance floor at Thorndale!

Sincerely,

Becky Thornton



CONSERVATIONIST'S CALENDAR

Summer events are heating up. Check out these upcoming opportunities to experience the outdoors.

APPALACHIAN TRAIL MANAGEMENT

The DLC is partnering with The Nature Conservancy for volunteer maintenance days on the Appalachian Trail where the world-famous hiking trail winds its way through the Pawling Nature Reserve. Days are currently scheduled for June and July and will include addressing water drainage issues and removing invasives. Follow the DLC on Facebook and Instagram or visit us at dutchessland.org to find out more.

WILDFLOWER SOLSTICE WALK

On Thursday, June 20, we're heading out to the Buttercup Farm Audubon Sanctuary in Stanford for an opportunity to enjoy the longest day of the year amidst the native wildflowers found on this spectacular piece of land. Learn about the many blossoming plants in our area and how to identify them during this evening walk. Visit dutchessland.org to register for this popular walk.

SHEEPDOG TRIALS AT CAORA FARM

One of the most exciting summertime traditions in Dutchess County is the Sheepdog Trials at Caora Farm. This year's trials are scheduled for Friday, June 28 through Sunday, June 30. Stop by to see border collies in action and enjoy the pastoral setting of this remarkable sheep farm protected by the DLC.

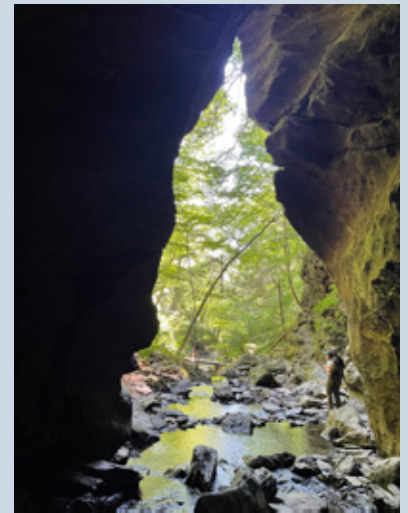
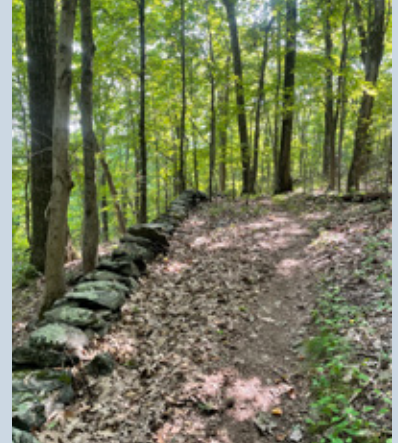
GARDEN & WOODS WALK AT WETHERSFIELD

The legendary Garden & Woods Walk at Wethersfield Estate & Garden is back! Join DLC Ecologist Julie Hart and Wethersfield Head of Horticulture Alaina Mancini for a stroll through the stunning gardens and flourishing forests of Wethersfield on Friday, July 19. Visit dutchessland.org to find out more and to register.

DOVER STONE CHURCH NATURE HIKE

Come explore the natural wonders found at the Dover Stone Church Preserve on Thursday, July 25. We'll witness the environmental changes that occur as this cool ravine transitions from day to night during this early evening adventure and wildlife turn in after a day of foraging and feeding while others use the cover of darkness to come out and play.

Follow the DLC on Facebook and Instagram or visit us at dutchessland.org to find out about all our upcoming events and programs. 🌿



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NATURE OF THINGS

What could have been a frightening interview ended up being a friendly chat as our Communications Manager, Doug Ohlandt, sat down to talk with a Timber Rattlesnake named Tesni.

Photo Credit: Jake Zadik



DOUG: Hi, Tesni. It's very nice to make your acquaintance.

TESNI: I assure you, the pleasure is all mine.

Q: First, I have to point out that your name is quite beautiful.

A: It's Welsh for "warmth from the sun." Most fitting for Timber Rattlesnakes such as myself, for we greatly enjoy sunbathing lying on rocks. While you humans like to give snakes sibilant sounding names – or terrifying ones like your scientific name for us: *Crotalus horridus* – we tend to give ourselves names more befitting our regal stature, for there are few as cunning

and adept as Timber Rattlesnakes when it comes to hunting for prey, but that does not include humans. You are much too large.

Q: That's a relief. People do tend to worry about snakes, particularly venomous ones. It's nice to know that you don't want to eat us.

A: Why, of course, we do not want to eat you! You humans have filled your heads and your stories with myths about snakes in general and rattlesnakes in particular. We do not even want to bite you. We only do that when we are scared, and humans can be frightening. Why, you have hunted us for centuries. Did you know that in these parts there was a bounty for killing us until nearly fifty years ago? We have some old-timers in nearby dens who remember those days.

Q: Fifty-year-old Timber Rattlesnakes? I had no idea!

A: Yes, rattlesnakes can live to be that old, although average lifespans are in the twenty-year range. Assuming they make it to adulthood – juvenile mortality is quite high; we are, after all, prey as well as predator, and suffer greatly from habitat loss and the pet trade – a Timber Rattlesnake can expect a long life.

Q: Tell me about your rattles. They're so unique in the animal kingdom and they make such a loud sound.

A: We are all born with rattles, or at least the start of them. Why, my children, who I birthed just a few weeks ago – note I said "birthed" and not "hatched," for we do not hatch from eggs but are born live – were born with their very first rattle segment, which is called a "pre-button." As they grow, they shed their skin – at least once a year – and add a new segment as part of that process. Anything dangerous, especially large humans with larger feet, frightens us and causes us to vibrate our rattles which produces the sound that, hopefully, will keep those big feet away.

Q: I can see how we would be considered dangerous to you. We don't mean to be. Most of the time we only come across you when we're out for a stroll in the woods or climbing up mountains. But I guess that's your home so we should be more careful.

A: Yes, we do try to avoid you humans as much as possible. But sometimes encounters do happen, particularly due to your penchant for exploration. We are primarily found in mountainous areas. We spend the winters in our dens and are only out of them for half the year, from mid-spring to mid-autumn. Our dens are in crevices in rocks and, being cold-blooded, sunning ourselves on rocks helps to warm our bodies. I would say, in the spirit of cooperation, that it is best to tread lightly through rocky areas with sun exposure at mid-day if you want to avoid us. And if you do come across a Timber Rattlesnake, just slowly and gently step aside.

Q: Thanks for the advice, Tesni, and for taking the time to speak with me.

A: You are most welcome, Doug. You are much less frightening than I was led to believe humans could be. 🍃

EXPLORER'S NOTEBOOK

When you see a sign that says “Slow Turtle Crossing” do you wonder whether it means that you should slow down for turtles crossing the road or whether this is a crossing only for slow turtles and perhaps fast turtles cross elsewhere? Well, you could say that it’s both!

In our region, turtles are laying eggs during the late spring to early summer, so please be particularly cautious and alert during this time to avoid harming female turtles who are on the move and looking for a nesting site. Turtles have a well-deserved reputation for being slow; remember *The Tortoise and The Hare*? They may take a while to get to where they’re going and crossing a road is a particularly dangerous task for a turtle. So, mind the signs, be alert and slow down for slow turtles!

HERE ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TURTLES THAT LIVE IN OUR AREA:

THE PAINTED TURTLE

With red and yellow stripes on its neck and red spots around the edge of its shell, the Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) is easy to identify and is the most common turtle found in the Hudson Valley. You’ll often see them sunning themselves on logs or rocks in ponds and wetlands. These turtles eat a variety of insects and tadpoles, as well as algae and vegetation.

THE WOOD TURTLE

Unsurprisingly, the wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*), is usually found in the woods and often forages in or around woodland streams. The sculpted pattern of its shell and the reddish color of its chin and throat are the wood turtle’s distinctive identifying features, and, if you look closely, you’ll see the growth rings on each plate of the shell, which are reminiscent of tree rings!

THE SNAPPING TURTLE

The snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) can grow quite large and can be recognized by their large head and the saw-toothed rear edge of their shell. Snapping turtles are primarily aquatic and are commonly found in lakes, rivers, streams and ponds. They are known for being aggressive, especially when they are on land.

THE BOX TURTLE

Turtles are usually found in or near water, but the box turtle (*Terrapene carolina*) is our most terrestrial turtle and is commonly found in open fields and forests, retreating to ponds and wetlands only during hot, dry spells. Box turtles are unique in that they are the only local turtle that has a hinged shell and can completely shut its body inside when threatened.

THE SPOTTED TURTLE

The spotted turtle (*Clemmys guttata*) is like a starry night in turtle form! Bright yellow spots are irregularly arranged on their shell and skin and make for a thrilling sight if you are lucky enough to “spot” one. Spotted turtles prefer muddy-bottomed wetlands and live in a variety of wetland types, including swamps, marshes, bogs, wet meadows and streams. 🌿

Photo Credit: Nature Up North



Photo Credit: Wild Adirondacks



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Preserving Land for the Benefit of All

BY GEORGINA SCHAEFFER



The story of Meadowland Farm is both one of falling in love and a labor of love for owners Judah and Michele Kraushaar, a Westchester couple who worked in New York City. Nearly 30 years ago, the couple with their three young children were on the hunt for a 10 to 15-acre starter farm that would be larger than their suburban backyard to grow some vegetables and use as a weekend retreat. A friend suggested they look at the Millbrook area and they were taken to Meadowland as their first showing: it was “love at first sight.”



Meadowland sits on more than 100 acres and is one of Dutchess County’s historical homestead farms, even serving as a stop on the Underground Railroad prior to the Civil War. “We are only the third family to own this house since it was built in 1790,” Judah begins. “We feel a sense of responsibility to steward the land appropriately and leave a legacy to future generations. What really struck us was the depth of the community, the history, the multi-generational families and the sense of place,” he continues. “I grew up outside of D.C. in the ‘60s and I watched in the space of 10-15 years everything being bulldozed and turned into strip-malls.”

Over the next five years, the couple would renovate the house and barns, reclaim the farm structures and roadside farmstand, plant a 100-tree orchard and begin their vegetable garden growing operation. The house was badly in need of renovation and architecturally challenged having served multiple families at different times. Michele’s brother-in-law David Graham, a noted architect, set to work opening-up a rabbit’s warren of rooms, but honoring the house’s history by keeping its original footprint and many architectural details.

Meanwhile, on the grounds, Judah planted the orchard and began with a 50x50 foot vegetable plot, doubling it every year. They sold the crop at local farmers markets and created a CSA, in addition to running the farmstand. Eventually, it became big enough that Judah needed help and, he believed, could financially support someone, which was the nucleus of renting a small portion of the fields for vegetable production. “Our philosophy was to bring young people in who wanted to start their own business,” Judah explains. “With Michele’s background in marketing and design and

mine in finance, we were able to promote their business, offer advice, help with the book-keeping and serve as an incubator for young farmers.” The Kraushaars have seen real value in their contribution of being able to help young people and bring them to the area. “The costs of living and land acquisition are going up. The result is people who want to farm can’t afford to live here and they move away.”

Over the years, the Kraushaars have worked with half a dozen young farmers. “It’s validating that if you’re supportive to the right people and they have the right skills, that they can make a real go of it,” says Michele. “Farming is one of the hardest things to do, in this area or anywhere. It’s a lifestyle choice and its incredible what people sacrifice to do it.” As to the livestock on the farm, the Kraushaar’s first tenant raised a herd of black angus. “I learned a lot from him about traditional farming, animal husbandry and farm equipment,” Judah notes. Today, he has his own herd of 10 steers which he hopes to grow in the future. You can find a quarter-or half-cow share or a sampling of their grass-fed beef on their website, meadowlandfarmny.com. Michele started an egg CSA in Westchester and takes great pride in curating the Meadowland farmstand, where the local community can purchase their vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs and a variety of locally produced products. “I love helping terrific local producers broaden their reach in our community. Michele says. Finally, the couple keep two rescue donkeys, Chauncy and Webster, who greet visitors to the farmstand.

Five years ago, Judah went on to the board of Scenic Hudson which provided a window into land conservation and the recreational activities in the Hudson Valley available because of open space, as well as the benefits of preserving land. Through Scenic Hudson the Kraushaars



became familiar with the DLC, eventually deciding to place a conservation easement on the property. “Erin Hoagland was an absolute joy to work with from day one to the closing four years later,” Judah says. She is an unbelievable professional and committed to what she does. It was an amazing experience.” Giving back to the community has always been at the heart of the Kraushaars personal philosophy. Beyond giving young farmers a leg up in the business, they donate their surpluses to local food banks, and through Scenic Hudson they are now involved with building urban farms and parks in Poughkeepsie, Newburgh and Kingston. This same sense of charity lies at the soul of why they decided to preserve Meadowland Farm. “An old-school way of thinking is that conservatories benefit an elite audience, but that attitude is now changing with an emphasis on that today you should conserve land for the benefit of all.” 🌿



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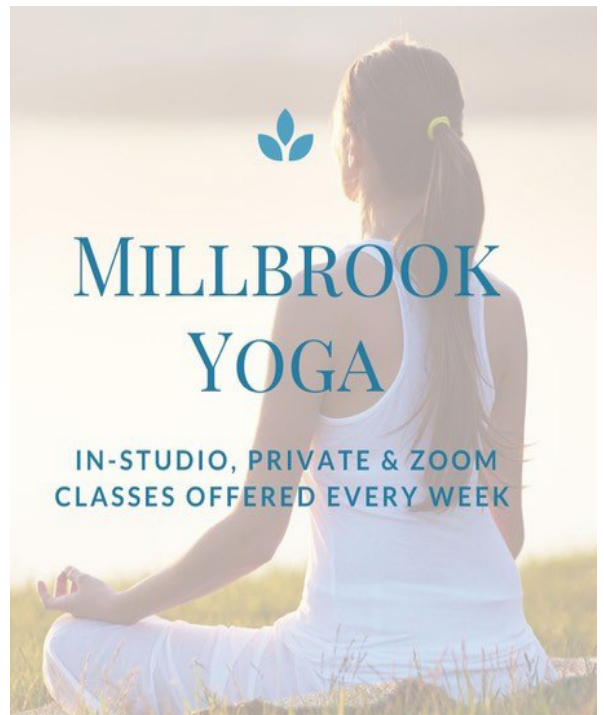


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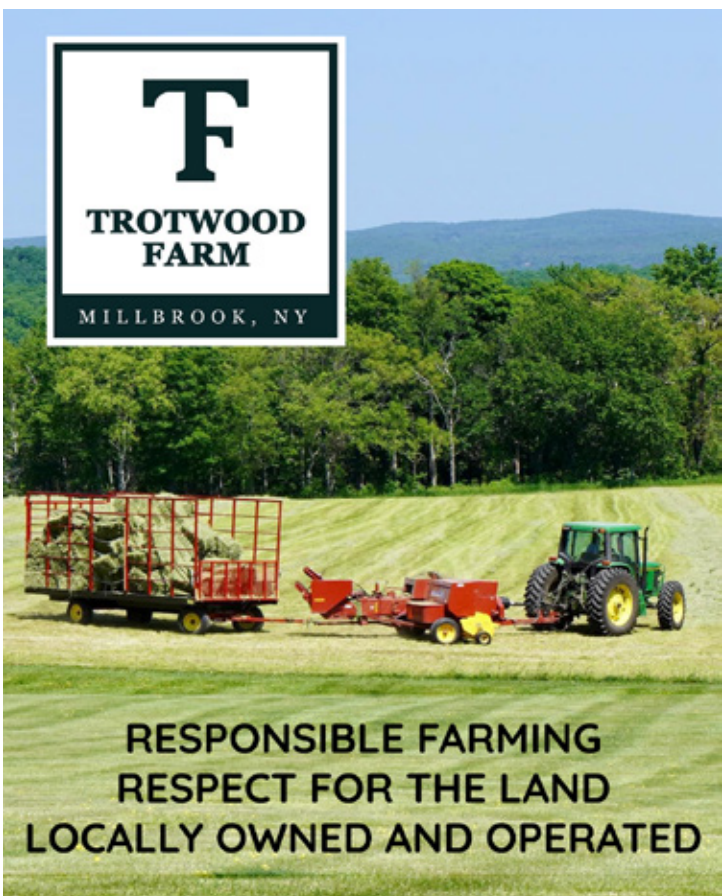
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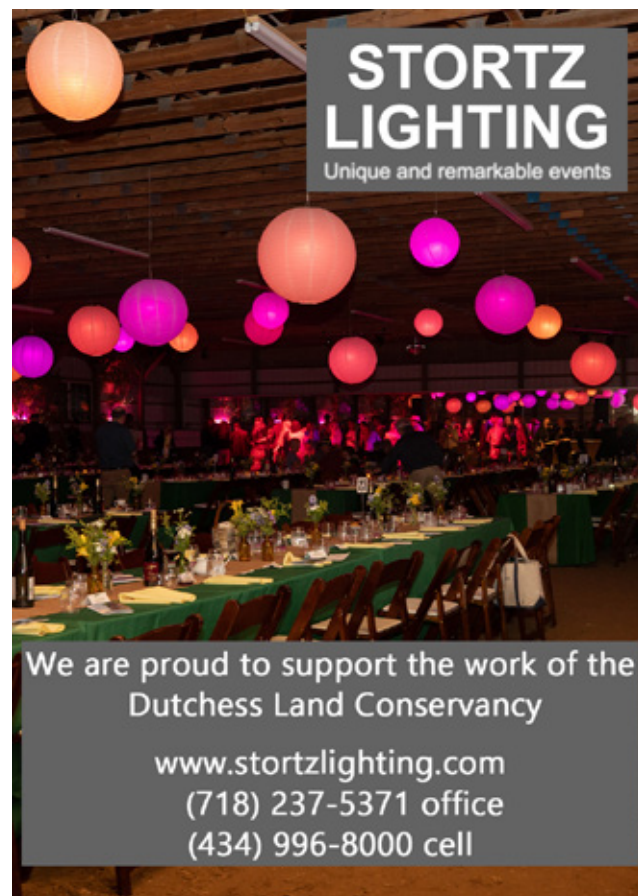
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