



GAINING GROUND

Summer 2023



PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Our Summer Season is well underway as I sit down to write this letter. It's a busy time of year for us, as good weather affords our Education and Volunteer Departments many opportunities to get out and engage with the local community about our mission. In these pages, you'll read about a slew of these efforts which have been taking place and how you can get involved with us in the upcoming weeks and months.

But first I wanted to take a look back at our Spring Season. We were so excited to bring back our Annual Spring Barn Dance, this year hosted by John Merryman at his Merryfield Farm. Co-chaired by Georgina Schaeffer, Julia Workman Brown, Simone Mailman, Vicki Salnikoff and Tim Bontecou, the evening was a tremendous success raising more than expected, both in funds and new friends. I am eternally grateful to our



supporters who generously commit again and again to our fundraising campaigns and events. It was truly a delight to eat, drink, dance and celebrate together.

This year, we also had our first Grace Year Intern, Kara-Lyn join our team. The Grace Year Program, which is run through the Grace Episcopal Church in Millbrook, is part of the national Episcopal Service Corps, a network of young adult communities focused on spirituality, justice and service. We were so lucky to have Kara, who brings a youthful eagerness and enthusiasm to our work and brightens everyone's day. And while we have her with us for a few more weeks, I know I speak for our entire team when I say we will miss her dearly and wish her the best as she continues her education this fall.



I would be remiss not to mention our feature on the Redmond/Crossley easement also in this issue. There are so many notable elements to this land, but what I love the most is the infectious joy Joan and Susan have for their property. These two ladies are a model for each of us—with intelligence and humor to boot!

As usual you will find our flora and fauna columns in this newsletter. Julie takes on the not-so-popular spongy moths and what you can do about these critters who are destroying our foliage for a

second year in a row, while Kara contributes an "interview" with a Blue Heron she saw while exploring the Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve.

Finally, I wanted to close on a quick note of news about a great gift given to us by the Perkins family. On one of those lovely June evenings where the summer sun seems to stretch on forever, we welcomed our Trustees of the Land and Legacy Society Members to what will eventually be our new office at the Perkins house of Walbridge Farm. Stay tuned for more news about this monumental gift and our exciting new home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Becky".

Becky Thornton



OUT & ABOUT: GREAT GOINGS ON

A look back at some of the events from our spring programming

Aerial Ballet Display

A magical evening commenced for spectators who became absorbed in a seldom seen or heard natural experience during the DLC's Woodcock Walk at the Buttercup Farm Audubon Sanctuary in March, held in partnership with Audubon NY. Guests witnessed one of the great ornithological rites of spring, as male American Woodcocks danced in the air, swooping, diving, and tacking in the breeze in attempts to attract females of the species. It was certainly a night to remember!



Ecologist Sightings

Enhanced knowledge about the natural world and a profound sense of wonder was brought to many settings in Dutchess County this spring by the DLC's resident ecologist Julie Hart. Guests at the Pawling Library learned the many fascinating fauna and flora to be found in our vernal pools. Friends at the Stanford Community Garden were led on nature walks and the LaGrange Library Hiking Club's inaugural trek took in the ecological and geological marvels that abound in Dutchess County's landscapes. And, to top off a busy month, a screening of the transformative environmental film, *What's the Rush*, at The Millerton Moviehouse, was followed by a panel discussion with Julie and other top local scientists to the delight of curious attendees. Even the beavers in Dutchess County can't lay claim to being busier than Julie this spring!

Earth Month Journeys

In April, citizens and students throughout Dutchess County learned about the importance of land conservation for our landscapes, waterways and future. As we traveled to Pleasant Valley, Amenia and Millbrook to attend Green Fairs and Earth Day Celebrations, we had the privilege of conversing with community members on topics ranging from native plants and invasive pests to local hiking trails. We were equally honored to join in conversations with the next generation of environmentalists at the Millbrook School and the Dover Middle and High Schools about the state of our environment and the things we can all do to mitigate the effects of climate change.



Pollinator Fun

On a beautiful afternoon in May, kids giggled as they mushed together clay and flower seeds to make native seed bombs with Chris Layman of Fox Farms Apiary. Families deftly tied together dried *Phragmites australis* stalks to construct bee hotels with DLC's Brian Straniti. All of this took place at Plan Bee Farm & Brewery in Poughkeepsie, where the DLC hosted a Pollinator Day, celebrating the bees, bats and birds that help our plants to thrive. The capstone of the event was a walk through the delightful woods, meadows and wetlands of Plan Bee with co-owner Emily Watson, DLC's Julie Hart, and Chris Layman for a discussion of the roles of pollinators there and in our yards.

Supporting Our Future Farmers

The second annual Dutchess County 4-H "A-Fair to Remember," a fundraiser to help 4-H kids attend the Dutchess County Fair proved inspiring. Precocious 4-H'ers joyfully exhibited livestock, proudly displayed crafts and patiently passed on skills with guests. The delicious food, rousing live auction and festive atmosphere at the Millbrook Vineyards & Winery, a property forever protected by the DLC, made for a splendid afternoon supporting the 4-H youth of Dutchess County. The DLC is proud once again to be a sponsor of this event. 🌱



NATURE OF THINGS

In her second, and final, installment of our favorite animal interview, our Grace Year intern Kara-Lyn Moran chats with Hermon the Great Blue Heron.



Kara: Hey, Hermon! It's a beautiful day out here at Bontecou Lake. What are you up to today?

Hermon: I'm catching fish, as we Blue Herons do with 90 percent of the time we are awake. You'll often see us standing on the edges of ponds, streams, or lakes, as I am doing now.

K: Snack Break!

H: It's actually more like our full-time job rather than a break! Our signature stick legs help us stand still in the water so we can watch the fish as they swim around us and we strike with our long, sharp beaks. Sometimes we do get non-fish treats like frogs, salamanders, snakes, rats and squirrels, but our diet depends on our habitat and available food.

K: Wow, that is a big variety of foods. Are you a widespread bird? I think I might have seen your cousin at my parent's house in North Carolina...

H: Yes, we live in a wide variety of habitats throughout most of the United States. Because of this, we adapt to the available foods in each place. Here at Bontecou Lake, we have lots of variety because it is such a large size with a thriving ecosystem. But in other places, like the place near your parents, we adapt to a much smaller size area and with less variety.

K: I'll be sure to look for Great Blue Herons on my summer travels around the country this summer!

H: Yes! We are not endangered and in fact quite common in the United States, but we are uncommon to see. If you are traveling to Florida, you might see one of our sub-species that is pure white! Most of the United States have the "classic" looking Great Blue Herons that are blue/grey looking with a neck that has a distinctive S shape and legs that trail behind our body when flying. Speaking of which, I've got to fly, but thanks for visiting with me! 🦶

EXPLORER'S NOTEBOOK

Education Director Julie Hart tackles the insect everyone is talking about — the spongy moth!

You've probably seen the signs: the bits of chewed leaves on the ground, the rain of insect frass making a mess on your car or porch, the sight of trees with most of their leaves gone in the middle of the summer when they should be green and leafy. The spongy moths are back! Let's explore what we know about these insects, and what we might be able to do that will help our trees.

Where did they come from? Spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar*), was formerly known as gypsy moth. The species is native to Europe and was accidentally introduced to North America in 1869.

Why has the damage been so bad recently? The spongy moth populations go through boom-and-bust cycles every 10 – 15 years. This recent peak in activity has been more widespread and lasted longer than other peaks in recent decades.

What causes trees to become defoliated? Spongy moth eggs hatch in mid- to late April into tiny caterpillars that are about half an inch long. The caterpillars begin feeding on leaves and gradually grow bigger by shedding their skins and molting into a larger caterpillar. It is the largest caterpillars that cause the most damage to trees and in mid- to late June the defoliation is most visible.

What can I do? Unfortunately, there is not much you can do to impact a widespread defoliation. But for individual trees around your house, there are some steps you can take. In late June to early July the caterpillars will pupate and emerge later in the summer as moths. Monitor your trees daily and remove any caterpillars you find; they will be about 2 inches long at this point. (Wear latex or nitrile gloves to do this, as some people are sensitive to the hairs on the caterpillars and may develop a rash.) Later in the summer you will find pupae, and a few weeks after that the moths will emerge from the pupae and can also be removed. Put any caterpillars, pupae and moths you find into a Ziploc bag and put it in the freezer.

Wait, what?!?! Freezing is a humane way to kill insects. Make sure others in your household know you are doing this, as a bagful of dead bugs in the freezer may freak them out a bit. Once the caterpillars/pupae/moths are frozen and dead, you can add them to your compost pile and it will give your compost a nice boost of nitrogen!

The trees look terrible, will they survive? Probably they will be OK, but it depends. Most trees will be able to grow another set of leaves, but their overall ability to photosynthesize has been reduced and they will not be able to store as much energy in their roots over the winter. A tree that is stressed by drought or disease will also have less energy in reserve. Don't cut a tree down just because it has no leaves! It may be saving its energy for next year. 🌿



Spongy moth caterpillar



Caterpillars hatching



Female spongy moth



Male spongy moth



Where can I learn more?

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/83118.html>

History Project

By Georgina Schaeffer

On a winding road in Pine Plains, leading up to a sweeping view of Stissing Mountain, a couple has steadfastly worked to return a sense of history to their house not on a hill.



“For the last two years, we’ve been taking out all the invasives and creating space for the native species” begins Joan Redmond, as we zip up the hill with spectacular views of Stissing Mountain in her Polaris EV. She points out various sycamores, viburnum and even an old pear tree orchard on my tour. “All of this milkweed is great for bees and monarchs,” she continues, as the Polaris climbs up to the top of the property she owns with her partner, Susan Crossley.

Joan and Susan purchased their late 1700’s home with a cottage and the surrounding two acres back in 1990. “It was a real wreck,” says Susan, as we sit together on their porch on a recent summer afternoon. Crime in Philadelphia, where the couple lived and worked, became

unbearable and the two decided to make a move to the country. While both previously visited Pine Plains, finding the house was a fluke. Luckily, the duo worked in restoring old houses, and diligently went about reclaiming the house and gardens, where Susan now plants and harvests the fruits and vegetables, including the original rhubarb garden, peach trees, blueberries, apples, cherries and much more. In 1994, when Susan’s mother could no longer live alone, the couple then fixed up the cottage for her. “What started as a five-year project became a 10-year project, then a 20-year project. Now that it’s been 30 years, we have to start all over again,” jests Susan.

Across the road, Willi and Anne-Marie Kunz owned about 20 acres of land. The Swiss couple used their



hilltop property to camp and never built a house on the site, preferring at first only a wooden platform and eventually a very simple structure for shelter. Over the years, Joan and Susan approached their neighbors about purchasing the land, but the Kunzes were never quite ready to sell. “Every time they would come up, they would fall in love with it all over again,” explains Joan.

“We are thrilled to do our little part for preservation, both the houses and the land.”

Joan and Susan opened a real estate office in Pine Plains in 1997 and operated Crossley Redmond Realty until eventually retiring in 2017. When Joan isn't working on the property and Susan isn't tending to the gardens, the couple takes full advantage of local cultural events, including theater and concerts, and they both became involved in town issues. Joan served as the Chair for the Conservation Advisory Committee in Pine Plains and spearheaded the designation of the area around Stissing Lake as a Critical Environmental Area. Susan was on the Steering Committee for Pine Plains United, a local “smart growth” organization. “We are thrilled to do our little part for preservation, both the houses and the land,” says Joan.

Then about four years ago, the Kunzes finally did call. They had been approached by a few people about selling the property and Joan and Susan quickly worked to buy and protect the land. First, they took the four tax parcels and combined them into a single one. They knew a few of the surrounding farms were already protected with easements held by the DLC, including Dutchess Views Farm, a horse farm that directly abuts the land. Working with a local farmer, Joan and Susan set up two large fields for haying which will be kept in agriculture. The remaining land, not suitable for farming, will be kept mostly wild and add more contiguous protected acreage for local wildlife including birds, deer, bear, bobcat, coyote and countless other species native to the area. “The Kunzes were thrilled that no one will ever build a house on the hill,” says Joan. While Joan and Susan estimate that the original homestead was about 100 acres, the duo have certainly done their part to keep a sliver of that history preserved: “There will never be a house on that side of the road.” 🌿



Raise the Roof

On May 20th some 300 people celebrated the return of the Dutchess Land Conservancy's annual Spring Barn Dance at John Merryman's Merryfield Farm. Co-chaired by Georgina Schaeffer, Julia Workman Brown, Simone Mailman, Victoria Love Salnikoff and Tim Bontecou, the evening raised significant funds for land conservation projects. Guests were welcomed with a signature pomegranate margarita and hors d'oeuvres at cocktail hour and continued into a transformed indoor riding arena with verdant trees and table arrangements by Felicity Bontecou. The evening continued with Sugar & Spice's family-style meal complemented by wines from Le Caviste. As the Silver Arrow Band began to play, the twinkling fairy lights and glowing white lanterns from Stortz Lighting which illuminated the barn changed to a magnificent array of colors as dancers took to the floor for an evening of late-night revelry. 🌿





PROGRAM NOTES

Spring cleaning was in the air as DLC volunteers gave their time and energy to support our mission. Want to get involved and help the DLC? Well, read on to be inspired by the many new opportunities created to help the local ecology.



The robust and growing volunteer program had a busy and productive spring, with community members helping out in a variety of ways. Spring kicked-off in March with a fun and festive get-together at the DLC Headquarters in Millbrook where volunteers enjoyed food from local farms and drinks from Dutchess County breweries and wineries. DLC's Brian Straniti presented the calendar of upcoming opportunities to assist the DLC and the Dutchess County environment, while Grace Year Intern Karalyn Moran served as emcee for the entertaining "Who Ya Gonna Call?" animal call game with contenders eagerly vying for prizes.


The enthusiasm of our volunteers was on full display in early April for a "Habitat Improvement Day" along Wells Brook in Dover. The DLC partnered with the Housatonic Valley Association and Mid-Hudson chapter of Trout Unlimited to remove invasive plants along the brook and replace them with native trees, including red maple, sycamore and willow species. These native trees are well-suited for brookside habitats and will do a better job of mitigating bank erosion. Volunteers also removed garbage from the stream and the surrounding area, helping to improve this important cold-water trout habitat. Finally, participants learned about the macroinvertebrates found in Wells Brook that serve as a large part of the trout's diet.

There is a growing excitement as the DLC's volunteer team, in collaboration with The Nature

Conservancy and Friends of Stissing Landmarks, embarks on an ambitious program to construct a new trail from the Thompson Pond Preserve in Pine Plains to the fire tower atop Stissing Mountain. This new pathway will provide an alternate route on public land expected to be open in the fall. DLC volunteers came out on the first of many workdays planned this year to help build-up a trail bed, create switchbacks and construct stone steps for what will be a very sustainable trail and better protected from the erosive elements.

Finally, volunteers assisted with envelope stuffing at DLC office and helped spread the news of the DLC's work by distributing our spring newsletter to libraries throughout Dutchess County. Marta Nottebohm translated our volunteer e-newsletter into Spanish, while Andrew Pelletier provided his photography and drone piloting skills at the Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve to take photos that will help us to better understand the ecosystems there.

We would like to express our deep heartfelt appreciation to all of our volunteers who brought their abilities and energy to helping us improve the natural world in Dutchess County this spring. We look forward to your continued enthusiasm and support this summer.

For more information on how to volunteer for the DLC please contact our office at 845.677.3002, or email us at info@dutchessland.org. 

INSIDE THE DLC

In September 2022, Kara-Lyn Moran began her tenure at the DLC as a Grace Year Intern. Now, as she prepares to head to Yale for post-graduate studies, we look back on a remarkable partnership with Grace Episcopal Church that led to a memorable year.

The DLC stewardship staff regularly begins each spring season monitoring conservation easement protected properties. These land stewards have logged more than 120 miles walking over hill and dale, and accompanying them on nearly every one of those miles was DLC Grace Year Intern, Kara-Lyn Moran. Spring also brings the DLC's Education and Outreach programs out to various spots around Dutchess County and Kara-Lyn joined in on many of these fun and fact-filled outings, spreading the word on land conservation and helping people to understand the natural world around them.

"The Grace Year Program was developed as a safe space for young people to explore their faith and to learn to serve the community," says Alison Quin, Director of the Grace Year Program at the Grace Episcopal Church in Millbrook. "There's so much pressure on young people... Sometimes all you need is a little place to just be and have some support and then you can flourish." She began leading the program five years ago, taking the reins from the program's founders, Abby Nathanson and Reverend Matt Calkins. "I really felt a call to do something with young people," said Alison. "This came up and it's just been a joy."

The Grace Year Program is part of the national Episcopal Service Corps, a network of young adult communities focused on spirituality, justice and service. The program at Grace Episcopal Church is one of the few within the Corps that is located in a rural setting, which can make finding suitable candidates a challenge. "It's going to be a particular kind of young person who's going to enjoy Millbrook," said Alison. "Someone who loves nature and beauty and can also live through winters in small towns."

Finding partner programs that work well as a match between the needs of the organization and the learning and service desires of the intern can be equally challenging. "We

had to learn deeply about the community and its needs and think about how the [Grace Year] fellows could address some of those needs," Alison says. "Our fellows have worked in the church's immigrant outreach program, at Cardinal Hayes, in areas of food justice and poverty issues, at Hudson River Housing and with environmental organizations like the DLC and the Cary Institute [of Ecosystem Studies]," she continues. "Equally important is the ability of the organizations to supervise and mentor the fellows, clear job descriptions so they know what their responsibilities will be, and someone at the organization who we can check-in and monitor the fellow's progress. I have such a heart of gratitude for these organizations that take a chance on an untried young person," Alison adds. "Their willingness to work with our fellows and faith that they can make a difference are the heart of the program."

It was the formative aspects of the Grace Year Program that drew the notice of DLC President Becky Thornton. "This is a special program that Grace Church has created and bringing a Grace Year intern into the DLC—especially one as conservation-minded as Kara-Lyn—has helped us immensely with our burgeoning stewardship needs. She also brings a youthful eagerness and enthusiasm to our work that just brightens everyone's day."

Kara-Lyn is equally thrilled by her experience at the DLC. "There's obviously the technical side of things that I've learned - mapping software like ArcGIS, outdoor skills like plant identification. I can carry those forward. Seeing what makes for good company culture and the work ethic of the people around me has been really valuable," she says. "Most important, though, has been the relationships I've built here and being able to work with people in positions of authority who value you and your opinions. I had a good set of base skills before I came here, but I've learned so much more." 🌿



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