



GAINING GROUND

Winter 2022



PRESIDENT'S LETTER



The winter newsletter always gives me a moment to stop and reflect on the year past—and what a year it has been! Inside the DLC we added a slew of new staff members, which in turn allowed us to expand our programs and services. From new volunteer and outreach programs to a more robust land projects and stewardship department, to the redesign of our website, we are forging new ground each and every month. While our spring newsletter will feature our 2022 closing report, I can't help but think of a few of the monumental projects we closed this year, like the protection of the Seven Wells property next to the Dover Stone Church Preserve. But perhaps our most notable work, which we highlighted in our last issue, is the creation of the Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve, conserving more than 1,250-acres and the iconic Bontecou Lake. We honored this

tremendous gift at our Annual Fall Luncheon, and the pictures from that magnificent day are included in this newsletter. We have two new additions to our board with Patricia Farman-Farmaian and Nick Bienstock, and we are excited to announce Tim Mayhew as the DLC's new Chairman of the Board when Rebecca Seaman steps down at the end of this year.

It is hard for me to put into words how much Rebecca has meant to the DLC and to me personally. Rebecca served as a truly inspirational chairman for the last eight years, bringing us into a new era. She helped



the DLC complete countless complex projects, grow our financial resources to ensure we are able to steward the land we have promised to protect and chaired countless board and committee meetings. She guided us through our strategic plan, attended and spoke at every special event and facilitated conversations for large development proposals that needed a lot of “greening.” She advocated for our work in Washington DC and co-presented at national land trust conferences side-by-side with the DLC staff. Rebecca is completely dedicated and always

available at the drop of a dime. This thoughtful, caring and inspiring leadership elevated the DLC to a new level of success. Her fingerprints are on so much of what we have accomplished. I will deeply miss working with her so closely, but the good news is that I know where to find her! Thank you, Rebecca, for being such an outstanding leader.

With my best wishes for a healthy and happy holiday season,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Becky".

Becky Thornton



TRIBUTE TO THE CHAIR

We asked a few of the DLC Board Members to reflect on Rebecca Seaman's tenure.

Rebecca has provided dedicated leadership to the DLC, guiding the organization through a time of growth through innovation. I have been most impressed by the time and travel that she has put in, attending national rallies, lobbying government officials, and, of course, interacting with important constituents. She and Becky have moved the DLC from local excellence to national prominence.

– Nancy Hathaway



I have had the pleasure of watching Rebecca deftly navigate the many complexities the DLC faces. Blessed by a close partnership with our president, she steered the DLC through many challenges and opportunities. Several of these have been, or could have been, transformative for the organization, and in some cases, Rebecca wisely guided us not to do something. It is fitting that her final achievement is the Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve, which should seal DLC's reputation as one of the leading conservation organizations in the United States. Thank you, Rebecca. The DLC and generations of our broader community owe you a world of thanks for your years of service.

– Chris Mann

Rebecca's tremendous stewardship during the last eight years has resulted in unprecedented growth in every aspect of the DLC and is an impossible act to follow. I am grateful for her leadership and example and look forward to continuing to serve with her.

– Tim Mayhew

Rebecca has set a very high bar for future chairpersons...her knowledge of the law, her ability to understand the details of every issue and her very generous time commitment set a very high standard. Our preservation of 1300 acres of Rally Farms, one of the most important pieces of land in Dutchess County, is a crowning achievement for her reign as our chairperson.

– Oakleigh Thorne

CONSERVATIONIST'S CALENDAR

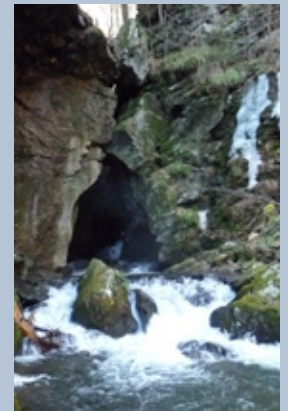
Even in the winter we still have exciting events and opportunities planned. Please visit dutchessland.org for more information or call 845.677.3002.

Dishing the Dirt

Our Earth Matters webinar series continues on the first Tuesday of each month through April. This season's focus is on the health of soils and their importance in building healthy ecosystems, gardens and farms. Speakers include Matt Powers, Jane Lucas, Alexis Doshas and Rick Carr. All webinars will be recorded and available on our website.

Winter Rockin'

Geologist Becky Nesel will lead participants on a winter geology walk to the Dover Stone Church on Saturday, January 14. She will tell the story of tectonic collisions and the powerful forces of erosion that worked together to create this geologic marvel. Meet in the parking lot of the Dover Elementary School, at the intersection of Route 22 and School Street, across Route 22 from the J.H. Ketcham Firehouse. Snow date Saturday, February 4.



OUT & ABOUT: GREAT GOINGS ON

A look back at some of our fall programming.

Come Together

The DLC hosted its first ever Volunteer Appreciation & Open House event on October 19. Volunteers, partners and interested individuals were treated to drinks and snacks from local farms and breweries while learning about the many volunteer opportunities available here at the DLC. A trivia game and the presentation of Volunteer of the Year awards rounded out this fun and energetic evening.



Walk Through Time

Local historian John Cilio and DLC ecologist Julie Hart led a hardy group of participants along the rain-soaked trails for a land history tour of Deer Pond Farm located in Pawling, NY and Sherman, CT on November 12. The group explored the trails of the Connecticut Audubon Sanctuary and learned about the geologic and natural dynamics that created this stunning landscape, as well as the human forces that shaped and changed it.

NATURE OF THINGS



In this installment of our beloved fauna column, Lucas Gordon interviews Finley the Fisher.

Lucas Gordon: Hey there Fisher! Do you mind introducing yourself to the readers?

Fisher: Of course, Lucas! I'm Finley the Fisher, member of the North American species *Pekania pennanti*.

LG: Thanks so much for agreeing to this interview. I'd like to ask you about your nickname: "fishercat?" Does that mean you'd get along with my cat?

Finley: Don't take this personally, but I would probably eat your cat. Despite my name, I'm actually a member of the weasel family. In fact, if there are two things you should learn from this interview it's that I'm not a cat and I don't particularly like fish.

LG: If my cat is off the table, I'm curious what else you like to eat?

F: I'm functionally a carnivore and will pretty much eat any mammal under the sun, but of all the forest's delicacies, my favorite has to be porcupine. It's tender.

LG: Tender?

F: Yes, well at least if you can get to the belly. First, I have to wear them down with the fishers' famous "face-punching" technique. Killing and eating porcupine is so hard that fisher are actually one of the only animals with this acquired taste. Not only is this impressive but also convenient since we're in competition with foxes, bobcats, lynx, coyotes, wolverines and more for pretty much everything else we eat. In fact, when New England struggled to control its porcupine populations in the 1950s, nothing worked until someone had the good sense to reintroduce the fisher.

LG: What kind of habitat did they reintroduce you to? New England has changed a lot since fur traders and deforestation chased the fisher out in the 1800s.

F: Great point. I'm partial to coniferous or mixed hardwood forests with plenty of fallen trees to den in and a strong canopy to keep some of the snow out. Although it's infinitely more fragmented than it used to be, enough of this habitat has grown back for me to come and make a home here.

LG: How do you like it in Dutchess County?

F: Fisher are a very solitary species and each male needs 15 square miles to themselves. Things were getting crowded up north as our population continues its recovery, so I came south. Dutchess County's interconnected, coniferous forests (ensured by conservation efforts like the DLC's) give me plenty of trees to climb and understory to scamper around as I look for food and a mate.

LG: You mentioned a mate; do you have any other plans for the future?

F: I just turned two and fisher have an average lifespan of ten years, so I have a lot left to do.

LG: It was so nice meeting you! How likely am I to see you again?

F: Don't count on it. Secretive and solitary, sightings of fisher are typically low. Just know that every time you see a porcupine, I'm not far behind. 🍃

EXPLORER'S NOTEBOOK

Our own intrepid Julie Hart offers some of her knowledge on evergreen plants you can find on your winter woodland walks this season.

In the Northeast, the transition from summer to autumn brings great changes in how we see the land, most noticeably the change in leaf color and the eventual dropping of leaves from our deciduous trees. And with the onset of winter, perhaps the most striking difference is the lack of the color that denotes photosynthetic plant life: green.

Those verdant summertime forests, fields and wetlands, as well as agricultural fields and pastures, and our own gardens all become many shades of brown for the winter. The color green seems to vanish from the landscape. Almost, but not quite! Most of our coniferous trees, as well as some shrubs and other plants, do hang onto their foliage through the winter and can become welcome spots of color in the landscape.

One of our most common evergreens, the **eastern white pine** (*Pinus strobus*) is easy to differentiate from other pines because it is the only one that has long needles (about four inches long) that occur in bunches of five. White pines can grow to over 100 feet tall and have a bushy, often irregularly shaped crown. While these trees are commonly grown in plantations and harvested for lumber, in forests they usually occur as individuals, making them especially easy to spot in the winter, when their deciduous neighbors have shed their leaves.

In contrast to the tall and majestic white pines, the **eastern red cedar** (*Juniperus virginiana*) is a small tree that seldom grows taller than 40 feet. It has a highly variable growth habit and can be short and shrubby, narrow and upright, or tall and spindly. The foliage of eastern red cedar is distinctive and also highly variable: younger needles are sharp and prickly, while older foliage is smooth and scaly. Juniper “berries” are bluish and mature in the fall, but although they look like berries, they are actually cones. Just what you’d expect to find on a conifer!

A shrub that grows on rocky slopes and in areas of mountainous forest, **mountain laurel** (*Kalmia latifolia*) is related to rhododendron and is similar in appearance but with smaller leaves and flowers. Mountain laurel usually grows to a height of six to fifteen feet and has leathery leaves that are elliptic and pointed at the tip, while the trunks of these shrubs can become twisted and gnarled over time. In the winter, you can take a look at the tips of the branches and find next year’s flower and leaf buds, all ready to open up in the spring.

You wouldn’t want to try and hang a star on top, but the **Christmas fern** (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) is a welcome sign of plant life on the winter landscape. They generally grow in moist and shady places, near stream banks or in woodlands, and tend to grow in tufts or clumps. Christmas fern has dark green leaves that are somewhat leathery, and at the base of each leaflet (called a “pinna”) is a thumb-like projection that makes each pinna look somewhat L-shaped. Over the winter, the fronds often become flattened to the ground by snow cover.

These are just a sampling of the myriad of greenery that dots our winter landscape. 🌿



Eastern White Pine



Eastern Red Cedar



Mountain Laurel



Christmas Fern





Luncheon Spot

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BARBARA BEATTY

The Dutchess Land Conservancy honored Gayle and the late Jesse Bontecou and their extraordinary donation of the new Jesse and Gayle Bontecou Wildlife Conservation Preserve at the annual Fall Country Luncheon on October 9th. More than 400 guests celebrated this wonderful gift and milestone of the DLC's first ever preserve, which is further protected with a conservation easement held by Scenic Hudson. Co-chairs Helen Cook, Rebecca Seaman, David Thieringer and Olivia van Melle Kamp welcomed guests to the event overlooking the iconic Bontecou Lake. Patrons and friends sipped cocktails from the Fizzy Filly while perusing the silent auction before sitting down to lunch catered by the Farmer's Wife. DLC Chairman Rebecca Seaman opened the luncheon program thanking Gayle and Jesse and speaking of the benefits this immeasurable gift will have for the entire community, while close friend Jim Cornell highlighted how important this donation is for the protection of wildlife habitat. DLC President Becky Thornton and Seth McKee of Scenic Hudson expressed their gratitude for this tremendous donation. After lunch, geologist Becky Nesel and DLC ecologist Julie Hart led many attendees on a walk, getting a sneak peak at this beautiful preserve. We would like to especially thank Gayle and Jesse Bontecou, as well as our sponsors, Bank of Millbrook, Harney & Sons, Millbrook Equine, Paula Redmond & Corcoran Country Living, Peter Pennoyer Architects, our generous Trustees of the Land, underwriters and ticket holders who helped to raise nearly \$280,000 to fund land conservation.





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Founded in 1985, the Dutchess Land Conservancy (DLC) is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the rural character, important resources and open lands of Dutchess County, New York. We encourage sound, well-planned growth, balanced with the conservation of our important natural resources and working landscapes to ensure healthy and vibrant communities for the benefit of all generations.

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