



# The Steep Rock *VISTA* Spring 2008

## Hidden Valley Goshawks Active in Early April

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The Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) that live in Hidden Valley are already showing the aggressive behavior that indicates there are probably eggs in their nest. This year the probable nest is on the Route 47 side of the ridge in the section of Hidden Valley many call Bee Brook. They've swooped down on at least two hikers.

The birds begin their courtship and nest building in early April, earlier if the winter has been mild. The pair of Goshawks we're familiar with have nested in the same general area — on the top of the ridgeline along the west side of the river, often called the Bee Brook area— for many years. They are year round residents, but don't become aggressive until early spring.

### **They Will Attack!**

*During their mating and subsequent nest building the hawks may only circle high above your head. When there are eggs in the nest they not only circle but call out warnings. When the eggs have hatched and there are fledglings in the nest, the birds, usually the female, will swoop down on unsuspecting intruders (hikers!) with every intention of attack, emitting a piercing call the whole time. The birds will swoop repeatedly, back and forth along the trail, until the intruder is driven away from the area. We've dubbed this activity "dive bombing", and it's a frightening experience. Some say the birds will attack the highest part of the intruder, i.e. your head. If you carry a stick raised above your head, perhaps even put your hat on the stick, you may have some added protection.*

We post the main entries with warning notices as soon as we get the first reports of aggressive Goshawk activity. If we can find the exact location of the nest, we will close that particular trail. Nevertheless, your best protection from attack is to stay away from the whole area once you see we've posted the entries.



*Northern Goshawk (Accipiter gentilis) . Isidor Jeklin photograph, Cornell Lab of Ornithology All About Birds website*

## Goshawks Identified in Steep Rock Preserve

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Last summer, we had two reports from runners on the yellow trail in the Steep Rock Preserve. They each were swooped at by a large bird. Our Land Manager Clark Gifford checked that section of the trail (between the top of Steep Rock and the area known as the saddle) and sure enough, he too was dive bombed. Clark had a chance to identify the bird and it was indeed a goshawk. He didn't locate a nest, but we assume, from the aggressive behavior, a nest was nearby.

We've had no reports yet this year, but be alert if you're on the Yellow Trail and please report any sightings or aggressive activity to the office.

## SR 36ers: The Steep Rock Challenge

*By Natalie Dyer, Trustee*

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The Steep Rock Challenge has been a great success . Over one hundred twenty five participants have signed up, generating enough funds to repair several badly eroded trails. Seven participants have finished the challenge ( walking all 36 miles of trails) and become SR36er. Unless you've participated it's hard to describe the joy of taking a walk with the challenge in mind as each hike becomes an adventure. But don't take my word for it. Here are some comments from the SR36ers..

Peary and BK Stafford were the first to finish, followed closely by Hilary Criollo and her brother Bill Hopkins.

Peary and B. K. said that it was a wonderful way to get to know all parts of the Preserves, be outdoors, get some exercise, do some bird and butterfly watching and raise money for Steep Rock.

Hilary and Bill commented that walking all the trails was a great experience and lots of fun and noted how lucky we are to have Steep Rock close by. Theodosea Grayson , the fifth to finish, ran the trails in only six days spread over a months time . She wrote in her comments , " It is rare that a community comes together to preserve a gift, a piece of land, to be passed to generations to come. The awe of Steep Rock allows me to run its trails with timeless effort and get lost in its beauty."

Peter and Denise Arturi , the 6th and 7th SR36ers, wanted to finish the challenge before '08 and were undaunted by the icy winter trails..Denise wrote "This was such a great idea!Personally, it gave us a goal that we worked toward every week. Plotting our hike was as fun as walking it.There were some beautiful trails and sites that we'd never seen. "

Several other participants are close to finishing and some SR36ers are ready to start again. But I suspect that most are like my dog( also a participant) and me, forever grateful that we have a life time in which to explore the hills and valleys of Steep Rock's Preserves before we become SR36ers.

If you would like to sign up for the challenge send \$36 to the Steep Rock Association and you will receive a set of maps to mark and date after each trail is walked. All proceeds benefit trail maintenance.

## Shepaug River Update Construction of Dam Improvements Begins in April

*By Randy Bernard, Trustee*

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Construction of the Shepaug Dam improvements will begin in April. A notice to proceed with the construction work for the improvements at the Dam and Peter's Weir, mandated in the Shepaug River Agreement, is expected in the next few weeks. A competitive bidding process was completed, a contractor was selected for the work and the construction contract documents are now being prepared for signature. The CT DEP has issued a permit for the work and they have also just approved the flood management certification clearing the way for work to begin. The work must now be completed by June of next year (2009)

The work involves replacing the weir below the dam so that the flow of water released from the dam can be accurately measured. Additionally two, new & larger (12" Vs one - 8"), flow control valves will be inserted in the existing gate valves at the base of the dam. The water flow information will be linked to the flow control valves to provide automatic and reliable control of the amount of water released by the dam.

The Agreement stipulates that during the dry summer months of June through September the minimum water flow down the Shepaug must be at least 12 million gallons per day (MGD) unless there is a drought or water emergency situation that threatens Waterbury's drinking water supply. This is 8X's more water than the previously allowed minimum river flow of 1.5 MGD that had been allowed prior to implementation of this agreement.



*Adam's Bridge at Macricostas After Heavy Rain in February.  
Photo by Clark Gifford*

# American Woodcock at Macricostas

*By Peary Stafford, Trustee*



*An American woodcock at the Macricostas Preserve.  
Photo by Olaf Saltau*

It starts at the time of the evening that the shapes and forms of Macricostas are beginning to grow indistinct in the weakening light. First there's a loud, nasal "Peent" noise emanating from the grass stems flattened by the winter's snows. Repeated for maybe a minute or two, the peenting suddenly stops and is replaced by an eerie winnowing sound that moves up and out, climbing in circles, higher and higher until it's just faintly audible. If that weren't enough, next comes a series of chirping noises that are mixed in with the winnowing wings; the whole show eventually climaxing in a precipitous descent back to the original spot on the grass, only to start all over again in a few seconds.

Such is the display flight of the male American Woodcock – a wonderful and regular spring event at the Macricostas Preserve – and it's all done to convince a female (who's presumably watching from some vantage point) that he's worthy of her attentions. It's really sort of hard to miss if you're there at the right hour. Just stand near the info board and as it grows dark, you'll hear "Peents" from nearly all directions; I've counted as many as eight all sounding off at once.

This spectacle can continue as late as May, so if you have a chance some night, check it out. I love the daffodils and crocuses, the longer days and warmer nights, and even Daylight Saving Time; but for me the coolest harbinger of spring is the dancing of the Woodcock over the fields of Macricostas.

## Trails are Fragile in Spring

Trails are especially fragile this time of year, when nighttime temperatures fall well below freezing and daytime temperatures are much higher. This year we've seen fluctuations from 30 degrees to 60 degrees in one 24 hour period.

The hilly terrain in Hidden Valley, Steep Rock, and the Macricostas Preserve make trails susceptible to water runoff. When hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders leave deep imprints in muddy trails, erosion of the trails soon follows. Please be careful and tread lightly.

### **Annual Membership Drive - Please Join Us!**

We're halfway through our Annual Membership Drive. Please consider becoming a member of Steep Rock. We rely on Membership contributions for 80% of our operating budget. Without these contributions we cannot fulfill our stewardship obligations, which increase with every passing year.

Please detach and mail your check, made out to Steep Rock Association.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

PO Box/  
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Steep Rock Association, P.O. Box 279, Washington Depot, CT 06794

# Garden Club to Expand Macricostas Interpretive Trail

By Natalie Dyer

The Interpretive Trail at the Macricostas Preserve is a project of the Washington Garden Club's conservation committee. In the two years since the trail was dedicated it's become very popular. It's an excellent way to enjoy a leisurely walk while learning about the history of the Preserve and its unique ecosystems.

Each numbered stop, corresponding to a short paragraph in the guide, has something special to offer aimed to make visitors more aware of the natural world around them. The trail is fairly level and there are trailside benches along the way where one can rest and absorb the beauty of the Preserve.

This spring the Washington Garden Club plans to extend the trail by adding five more stops along the north-eastern section of the farm road. The viewing deck overlooking Meeker Swamp will be the final stop of the interpretive part of the trail and is a favorite destination for viewing wildlife.

The new trail guides and numbered signs will be ready in May.

Visit Our Website:  
[www.steeprocksassoc.org](http://www.steeprocksassoc.org)



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