

Teeming with Life *By Rory Larson*

Vernal pools have been designated as a type of critical habitat throughout Steep Rock properties...and for good reason. These isolated, woodland water bodies fill seasonally, reaching maximum volume in the spring, and then dry-up annually or every few years. Due to the absence of fish predation, amphibian and invertebrate species have been able to adapt to this hydrologic regime and take advantage of this unique, temporary environment. Some animals, known as obligate species, are completely dependent on vernal pools for reproduction and life stage development. Here in Connecticut, obligate species include the fairy shrimp, wood frog, and four species of mole salamander (spotted, blue-spotted, Jefferson's, and marbled).

As ecologically-minded stewards of our land, we are interested in monitoring these habitats to document any temporal changes in condition and occupancy, which allows us to ensure their continued existence and importance to woodland communities. Detailed surveys of all vernal pools on Steep Rock preserves have been completed, constituting baseline data on pool characteristics, vegetative structure, and biological inventory.

Pools exhibited a considerable degree of variance in size, depth, in-basin vegetation, woody debris, and canopy closure. However, almost all were found in mature, mixed hardwood and hemlock stands, with floors composed of



Green darner dragonfly (*Anax junius*) larvae



Spotted salamander (*Ambystoma maculatum*) egg masses

leaf litter. The array of life observed was remarkable. Isopods (a small crustacean), aquatic beetles and worms, snails, and a slew of fly larvae were frequently seen crawling or darting about. Green frogs and peepers ducked for cover while gray treefrogs called from the safety of nearby trees. Wood ducks secretively swam amongst woody vegetation and veeries hopped between sphagnum-covered root wads in the more substantial pools. Although not many mammals were encountered, signs of their presence were bountiful in the form of scat, tracks and fur. Our observations also confirmed the presence of obligate species. Fairy shrimp were seen in three adjacent pools. Wood frog egg masses and/or tadpoles were detected in all but one of the 24 sites surveyed. Spotted salamanders were the most abundant of the obligate salamander species, present in 83% of pools, followed by Jefferson's (17%), marbled (8%), and blue-spotted salamanders (4%).

It is apparent that vernal pools play a critical role in Steep Rock woodlands and contribute enormously to biodiversity. Monitoring efforts will continue annually to help us better understand their traits, assess the value of their availability, and guide our land management practices.

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From the Executive Director *By Steve Law* “The New Steep Rock Vision”

Ninety years ago, our founders had a vision of creating a community enriched by a diversity of protected wild spaces; sanctuaries for plants and animals, and special places for people to play and embrace nature's bounty. Thanks to their foresight, the Town of Washington is today a picturesque mosaic of preserved forest, farmland and river corridors interspersed with 40 miles of trails.

Although much has changed since 1925, the commitment of the Steep Rock Board and Staff has never veered from that original vision. In the past five years, Steep Rock has matured as an organization by becoming more professional, being better stewards of the land, and expanding the scope and impact of our community outreach initiatives. We expect the next five years to be equally challenging, and now look to our new Strategic Plan 2020 to guide us along the way.

Our goals with this new Plan are to become more strategic in identifying and conserving important land and water resources, to enhance opportunities for people to connect with nature, and to be a good citizen of the Town of Washington. While our focus on land preservation and stewardship is the natural continuation of Steep Rock's rich heritage, this Plan calls for an increase in the emphasis on programming and our leadership role in the Town.

Five key priorities will guide our actions over the next five years:



Stewardship — Carefully manage our lands to preserve their beauty and to protect and enhance biodiversity, especially riparian corridors along the Shepaug River and its tributaries, and to maintain opportunities for the community to enjoy passive recreation and nature.



Preservation — Protect those remaining strategic properties that contain critical habitat, serve as conservation corridors, are important farmland or that will expand passive recreation opportunities.



Outreach — Engage the community using a variety of strategies that enhance people's connection to Steep Rock and raise their environmental consciousness and appreciation and knowledge of nature through experiential learning.



Citizenship — Refine Steep Rock's role as a leader in the community, be active in exploring land-based projects, and when appropriate, act for the mutual benefit of Steep Rock and the Town of Washington.

Excellence — Achieve excellence as a local land trust, including accreditation through the national Land Trust Alliance.

This is an exciting time in Steep Rock's on-going evolution. We hope you will continue to partner with us on this journey toward excellence.

For more information about our Strategic Plan 2020, please visit www.steeprockassoc.org to view the Executive Summary.

Season of Change

It is with great pride and appreciation that Steep Rock acknowledges Mark Averill, Bill Coleman, Steve Solley and Peary Stafford for their nine consecutive years of dedicated service on the Board of Trustees. During their tenure, each has contributed enormously to the advancement of Steep Rock as an effective land trust and as a valued member of the Washington community.

Mark Averill has been the heart and soul of Steep Rock's annual family picnic...our keystone event celebrated in September to thank all who support Steep Rock each year. Mark has also been instrumental in helping Steep Rock attract and engage local residents to serve on the Board of Trustees and on a variety of committees.

Thanks to **Bill Coleman's** tireless

efforts of drafting and refining governance policies, Steep Rock is a much stronger organization today, and is now poised to pursue accreditation from the Land Trust Alliance. Bill has also been instrumental in organizing the land records of all properties owned and/or protected by Steep Rock.

Steve Solley has served Steep Rock admirably as our local "historian" with his extensive knowledge of local lands and the rich history of the Washington community. He has personally helped preserve the historic Camp House and spearheaded an archeological dig at Macricostas Preserve. Steve has also been a guiding influence in the creation of Steep Rock's environmental education outreach programs.

Peary Stafford has helped shape Steep Rock's cutting-edge land man-

agement strategy focusing on the protection of biodiversity. He was the guiding force behind the recent Inventory of Critical Habitats and continues to be a strong advocate of managing Steep Rock lands based on sound science. An excellent naturalist and avid birder, Peary has strengthened Steep Rock's environmental education initiative with presentations on birds, butterflies, dragonflies and wildflowers.

Thank you all for everything you have done in support of Steep Rock!

As we bid farewell to those fellow Board members, Steep Rock is also excited to welcome our newest Trustees...**Alan Mnuchin, Reese Owens, John Santoleri, Anne-Cecilie Speyer** and **Denise Trevenen**. Welcome to the team! ■

Students Take the Lead in Judea Garden

Students from Devereux Glenholme School, Judea Nursery School, Rumsey Hall School, The Gunnery, Washington Montessori School and the Washington Primary School have gotten Judea Garden off to a good start by starting seedlings, making seed tapes, planting, weeding, cleaning the tool shed, dressing scarecrows and setting up the garden. Students from Devereux Glenholme and The Gunnery will tend their own beds growing vegetables all summer.

Make volunteering at Judea Garden part of your summer resolution.



Students from
Judea Nursery
School



Students from
Rumsey Hall
School

JUDEA GARDEN EVENTS

WEED AND WINE:

**You pull the Weeds, we'll
bring the Wine.**

Every Wednesday this Summer
June 17 – August 19
5:30 – 7:00 pm

**Meet us in Judea Garden at
Macricostas Preserve**

Sponsored by County Wine & Spirits
and Washington Liquor Store

OPEN GARDEN DAY:

Saturday, August 29,
3:00 – 5:00 pm

Come See How our Garden Grows

Wander the rows while enjoying
good food and drink.

FALL CLEANUP:

Saturday, October 24
9:00 am – 1:00 pm;

Sunday, Oct. 25
1:00 – 4:00 pm

Explorations in Nature



Join us as we explore various facets of nature through a fascinating array of guided hikes and educational programs. All programs are free; however, **pre-registration is required**. Enrollment is limited and registration is on a first come – first serve basis. To register for a program, please complete and return the enclosed registration form or complete and submit the registration form on our website (www.steeprockassoc.org). Your registration will be confirmed by email. If a program is canceled, registered participants will be notified.



HIDDEN VALLEY THROUGH THE IPHONE LENS

Sunday, July 26 • 6:00 – 7:30 pm

LOCATION: Hidden Valley Preserve
(Bee Brook Road/Hwy. 47)

AUDIENCE: Ages 14-years and older; all children must be accompanied by an adult

Local photographer Rich Pomerantz demonstrates how easy it is to create beautiful photographic landscape images using only your iPhone or iPad. By making use of simple photography apps, you can make your device see what you see. Rich will begin with an instructional talk and then will lead participants along the trails of Hidden Valley Preserve to make photographs using their own creativity and the “digital darkroom” (apps). Participants will receive information on purchasing apps in advance of the program. Walking distance will be approximately a half-mile. Please dress appropriately.

PROGRAM LEADER: Rich Pomerantz is a local freelance photographer whose images have appeared in diverse periodicals ranging from National Geographic publications and books to Garden Design Magazine and Traditional Home. Rich has taught photography at the NY Botanical Gardens, The Massachusetts Horticultural Society and for many garden clubs including the Washington Garden Club.



CHANGING LAND, CHANGING WILDLIFE

Saturday, August 15 • 9:30-11:00 am

LOCATION: Macricostas Preserve
(Christian Street)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12-years and older; all children must be accompanied by an adult

Margery Winters of the Roaring Brook Nature Center returns to Steep Rock, this time to present the fascinating story of Connecticut’s dramatically changing landscapes. Over the last 500 years, Connecticut has transitioned from forest to field to thicket and back to forest. Learn how Native American, colonial, industrial-age and modern-day land-use practices have dramatically impacted the landscape, and how this changing landscape has impacted wildlife. The presentation will be followed by a short hike.

PROGRAM LEADER: Margery Winters is the Assistant Director at Roaring Brook Nature Center in Canton, CT where she manages the native plant gardens. She has been actively involved in Connecticut’s river and land issues for many years and was the former Director of Programs and Research with the statewide river advocacy organization, Rivers Alliance of Connecticut.



SKYHUNTERS IN FLIGHT

Saturday, September 19 • 1:00-2:00 pm

LOCATION: Steep Rock Preserve
(Tunnel Road - Riding Ring)

AUDIENCE: All ages; all children must be accompanied by an adult

Steep Rock welcomes back master falconer Brian Bradley! With his popular birds-of-prey program, Brian gives the audience a peek into the fascinating world of owls, falcons, hawks and eagles. He will introduce us to the ancient sport of falconry, let us witness the silent flight of an owl and leave us gasping at the aerial maneuvers of a trained hawk and falcon as they perform a hunting demonstration overhead. See these beautiful birds up close and learn about their vital role in the environment.

PROGRAM LEADER: Brian Bradley is a licensed master falconer and has been training birds of prey for over twenty-five years. His childhood interest in raptors turned into a lifelong passion of educating others about these magnificent creatures.



HIKING THE WASHINGTON – ROXBURY CONNECTOR

Saturday, October 3 • 1:00-3:00 pm

LOCATION: Steep Rock Preserve
(Tunnel Road - Riding Ring)

AUDIENCE: Ages 15-years and older; all children must be accompanied by an adult

Join Steep Rock Association and Roxbury Land Trust for this collaborative three-mile (one way) hike along Tunnel Road from Steep Rock Preserve to Roxbury’s Battle Swamp Preserve. Along the way, hike leaders from both land trusts will discuss the history of the preserves, land trust natural resource management and the Shepaug River. Participants must be prepared for a rigorous hike. A shuttle

will be provided at the end of the program to transport hikers back to their cars. Those wishing to hike back are welcome to do so.

PROGRAM LEADER: Staff, Board Members and/or volunteers from Steep Rock Association and Roxbury Land Trust.



OWL PROWL

Saturday, October 17 • 7:00-9:00 pm

LOCATION: Macricostas Preserve
(Christian Street)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12-years and older;
all children must be accompanied by
an adult

Join Fran Zygmont as he takes you on a walk in search of Saw-whet, Screech, Barred and Great Horned owls. After a 15-minute informative talk highlighting the finer points of "owl prowling", participants will take to the Macricostas Preserve trails in search of these elusive birds. If time permits, this Owl Prowl may include a short drive to an additional site near Lake Waramaug. Participants are required to bring a flashlight and to wear "quiet" weather appropriate clothing such as fleece jackets and sneakers.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Fran Zygmont* is a longtime member and past President of Litchfield Hills Audubon Society and was past President of the Audubon Council of Connecticut. He is also a longtime member of the Connecticut Ornithological Association.



SOIL AND TREES: NATURE'S MAGICIANS

Tuesday, November 10 • 6:30-8:00 pm

LOCATION: Wykeham Room at
The Gunn Memorial Library
(5 Wykeham Road, Washington)

AUDIENCE: Ages 12-years and older; all
children must be accompanied by an adult

There is a close relationship between trees and the soils in which they grow. Join Washington's well-known arborist Bill Pollock and soil specialist Michael Nadeau for an entertaining and informative talk that reveals the symbiotic miracles that happen underground between the trees and the soil.

PROGRAM LEADER: *Bill Pollock* has worked in trees since the age of 9, when a nearby tree company acquired their first bucket truck and everyone was afraid to go up in it. He took the first ride. In 1988 Bill co-founded Arbor Services of CT, Inc. with his wife, Joslyn and has been caring for trees for 26 years.

Michael Nadeau has worked outside since age 13, planting, renovating and maintaining properties. He co-founded Plantscapes Organics with his brother in 1981. Michael has been an arborist for over 35 years, and was a founding member of the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA).

Reich Bridge Reopens



Hikers are rejoicing that the Reich Bridge at Hidden Valley Preserve has reopened, thus making the loop trail along the Shepaug River accessible once again. Last December, after months of engineering studies and soil investigations, Steep Rock embarked on a mission to replace the failing ramp on the north end of the bridge with a new stairway. Just days from completion, construction was halted in January due to hazardous weather and ground conditions. As winter slowly subsided, construction was finally completed in late April. A hearty thank you to the construction crew from O&G Industries for a job well done under very difficult conditions! ■

The Van Sinderen Family and Hidden Valley

By Louise van Tartwijk, Director of the Gunn Museum



Annie Jean and Adrian Van Sinderen at Glenholme

Attracted by the bucolic charm of the small Connecticut town, the Van Sinderen family of Brooklyn, New York, came to Washington in the 1890's. William Van Sinderen and his wife Mary Brinsmade were looking for a country retreat within a reasonable train ride's distance from New York City. For New Yorkers, Washington's landscape with its hills, vistas, open fields, and forests offered a welcome respite from the busy city life and the constant push of modernization.

Instead of living on or near the Washington Green, as did most of their friends such as, Ehrick Rossiter, Edward van Ingen and Richard Storrs Barnes, the Van Sinderens purchased 110 acres on Sabbaday Lane overlooking the Shepaug River Valley. They named their home Glenholme, because the property's rolling hills were pleasant reminders of their honeymoon in Scotland. At Glenholme the Van Sinderens became weekend and summer-month farmers.

*"There was much to be done and my parents knew little about the doing of it. Father had never built a house, nor owned a horse nor bought a cow. Windmills, and sewerage disposal and ploughing, were completely out of his ken, as were both road construction and wire fences. Mother knew no more but took delight in reading aloud S. Weir Mitchell's *My Farm of Edgewood*, in order to educate her two little sons into the ways of farm life."*

Over time, the Van Sinderen's interests grew from being part-time farmers to fulltime equestrians and Glenholme grew into an impressive equestrian estate. After the death of William Van Sinderen, in 1909,

his son Adrian inherited the property and moved from the small Rossiter-designed "summer cottage" into a much larger Colonial Revival mansion set prominently on a hilltop. Along with the larger home came formal gardens, a swimming pool and tennis courts with viewing pavilion. At the same time, the Van Sinderen's collection of horses continued to grow and additional stables were built and numerous pastures created. Glenholme became an internationally recognized horse farm and the family participated in numerous national competitions. As a consequence, a show ring was added to the property along with storage facilities for the show and pleasure carriages and a trophy room that eventually displayed more than 2,500 ribbons and trophies. For three decades Adrian Van Sinderen was president of the American Horse Show Association.

The Van Sinderen's passion was driving horses and in the early part of the 20th century, carriage driving in Washington was a very popular recreational past time. One of the best-known photographs of Ehrick Rossiter shows the architect sitting comfortably in a buggy with sunlight streaming down the side of his face and the carriage wheel. Edward van Ingen, Rossiter's neighbor on The Green and the philanthropic owner of the Holiday House, would regularly take his buggy from his home, now Bourne Hall on the Gunnery Campus, down to the Valley Station along the Shepaug River to greet the New York factory girls as they arrived for a bit of country respite at their vacation destination. The advent of the automobile, however, began to change the ease with which one could ride and drive carriage horses comfortably on Washington's roads and paths.

"Before long it became evident that the town roads provided little safety for young riders, due to the increasing number of cars and trucks; and the rapid spread of macadamization. The need to furnish protection became evident."

The world was changing and the natural landscape and ease of country living that had so attracted the Van Sinderens, Rossiter and others to Washington was in danger of being lost. The reality of this threat was apparent even back in the 1880's when Rossiter purchased 186 acres near his home on the Washington Green to protect this forested land from the timber industry. At a time when most of the land around Washington was open farmland, these acres, known as Steep Rock, offered a rare forest preserve. Under Rossiter's ownership, these acres remained unspoiled. The trails lined with hemlock trees and mountain laurels were open to the public for hiking and carriage riding.

In 1925, Rossiter no longer wished to be the sole custodian of Steep Rock and gave the property over to the care of nine of his friends. One of those was Adrian van Sinderen who, at this time, undoubtedly inspired by Rossiter's preservation motives and civic generosity, was taking similar steps to preserve the natural lands around his home.

"To the north of Glenholme lies a wild area, hundreds of acres in extent, containing timbered hills, a flat meadow, two brooks, and a peak. Through this country the Shepaug River winds its way for over a mile. As a boy I had often ridden to the top of the peak, or Pinnacle, so-called, to view below the valley which is not visible from any town road, and which is little known to most Washingtonians. Would this not make a splendid area in which to ride? The level ground provided opportunity for a mile-long track on which to gallop, and the remaining area gave space for 30 miles of trails through the woods."

The preservation of this land became a mission for Adrian Van Sinderen, who together with his good friend Ralph Averill, negotiated the purchases of several smaller properties close to or abutting Glenholme. By 1928, Adrian Van Sinderen had accumulated 650 acres and named the property "Hidden Valley" after a place in the mountains of Utah, which he and Averill had visited on a trip out West.

"Soon the Gallop and the trails began to develop. We built the Zigzags, the Pirates Den, a ford to connect the trails on either side of the river, a trail to the summit of the Pinnacle, and miles of paths through the beautiful woods. The trails have always been open to, and enjoyed by, the public, especially the horsemen who love nature, who enjoy the stillness of the woods, the gurgle of a fast-running river, the strength of a galloping horse. No automobile can gain entrance to Hidden Valley and for those who ride within its confines the considerable danger from that source is eliminated."

For the rest of his life, Adrian Van Sinderen remained an active Trustee of Steep Rock, guiding the preserve through many changes, the acquisition of new lands, the planting of new trees, dealing with the problems caused by the arrival of the automobiles, and the transition of Steep Rock into a public land trust. It is thus not surprising that in 1963 Adrian Van Sinderen donated the 650 acres of Hidden Valley as a gift to Steep Rock Association for the continual enjoyment of the public. He died in 1964 leaving their Glenholme estate to his wife Jean who gifted the property and building to the Devereux School in 1968. ■

Land Trusts of NW Connecticut Present:



"Our Hidden Landscapes: Stone Cultural Features and Ceremonial Landscapes

by Dr. Lucianne Lavin, Director of Research,
Institute for American Indian Studies

Sunday, October 4 • 3:00 – 4:00 pm

LOCATION: Washington Montessori School
(240 Litchfield Turnpike, New Preston)

A hike in the woods often reveals a variety of stone cultural features only noticed by an experienced archaeologist and historian. Many of these stone features are the remains of abandoned farmsteads and industrial mill sites. Others, however, represent Native American ceremonial sites. Join Lucianne Lavin, the Director of Research and Collections at the Institute for American Indian Studies, for a power-point presentation that explains the various kinds of European-American and indigenous stone structures found on our Connecticut landscapes. *No registration required.*

Give Local Campaign a \$uccess

During the 36-hour Give Local Campaign sponsored by the Connecticut Community Foundation (CCF) on May 5-6, Steep Rock and Judea Garden supporters contributed very generously. Steep Rock received \$9,515 from 58 donors and Judea Garden received \$950 from 11 donors. Including CCF bonus funds, you helped us raise \$11,495.

Thank you for your support!



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