

TRIBUTARIES

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE OLD LYME CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

Incorporated 1966

www.olct.org

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Protecting Wood Ducks and Other Waterfowl in Old Lyme

Wood ducks are considered by many to be the most beautiful waterfowl in North America, and we are fortunate to provide habitat for them in Old Lyme. Their Latin name, *Aix sponsa*, translates into “waterbird in bridal dress”. Each year, Old Lyme hosts wood ducks during the nesting season, including several pair that choose the waters of Mill Lane Brook adjacent to the OLCT’s Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve on Sill Lane. If you have not seen them, you are not alone—they are rarely spotted due to their reclusive nature. However, they are a very special species to birders and others, in large part due to the male’s magnificent plumage.

A Few Facts About Wood Ducks

Wood ducks are small to medium sized dabbling ducks, about 15-21 inches long. They are social animals and often congregate in the evening and migrate in pairs or small flocks of 10 to 50 birds.

In Connecticut, wood ducks seek out freshwater wooded swamps, marshes, ponds, and streams near upland forest. The most important wetland habitats for both adults and young are shallowly flooded areas with dense cover, where they can forage on invertebrates and aquatic plants. Wood ducks are cavity nesters, and require nesting sites within one mile of water. They use natural tree cavities, cavities excavated and abandoned by woodpeckers, and nesting boxes.

Locally, wood ducks breed from mid-March to mid-April. Females lay 6 to 15 eggs, however it is not uncommon for a nest to have more than 15 eggs because other females may lay their eggs in the nest (a behavior called egg-dumping). Eggs are incubated for about 30 days and the chicks leave



Male wood duck.

the nest within 24 hours of hatching in response to the hen’s calling, but she does not otherwise assist them. Remarkably, the ducklings may jump from heights of up to 290 feet without injury! Nest success in tree cavities is about 50 percent, but it can be as high as 80-90 percent in nest boxes placed on posts over water in suitable habitat.

Why Do Wood Ducks Need Protection?

While wood ducks are relatively common today, this was not always the case. It is believed that wood ducks were the most abundant waterfowl species in eastern North America in precolonial times. In the 19th century, they were very popular for their tasty meat and bright decorative feathers, and by the late 1880’s, unregulated hunting and destruction of woodland and wetland habitat had caused the wood duck population to decline precipitously.

In fact, by the beginning of the 20th century, wood ducks had virtually disappeared from much of their former range.

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Featured Property: The Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve

The Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve is a beautiful, 40-acre property located on Sill Lane. It is a favorite of many locals looking for a moderate hike in a wooded setting. In the 75 minutes it takes to walk the preserve, one will pass through laurel stands and large, soft patches of ferns, and may be rewarded by encountering beaver, swans, ducks, deer or songbirds.

The red trail begins at the Sill Lane parking area, and proceeds along a wood road for a hundred yards, then up a hill overlooking the stream. This stream is Mill Lane Brook, which drains water from Rogers Lake to the Lieutenant River. The raked trail then proceeds along the stream for two or three hundred yards where it turns to the right up a slope. This is the area in which an alternative path (the green trail) has been forged recently to protect nesting waterfowl during the months of April- June. Following the trail markers northward

for two hundred yards, the hiker will arrive back at the wood road. This loop takes about 45 minutes to walk. Another trail, the blue trail, is accessed off the wood road further west from the red trail. The end portion of the blue trail forms a loop; hiking its full length takes about 30 minutes.

The Preserve is the result of three generous donations to the Old Lyme Conservation Trust: 24 acres off Sill Lane donated by John L. Hoffman in 1992; eight acres on Millpond Lane donated by Ormsby Hanes Matthiessen in 2001; and another eight acres on Millpond Lane donated by Elisabeth DeGerenday in 2007. These three adjacent parcels together comprise what is known as the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday—sometimes abbreviated as “Hoffman”—Preserve. The southern tip of this preserve is across the Mill Lane Brook from the OLCT’s George and Woodward H. Griswold Preserve.

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A nest box, fitted with a galvanized sheet metal predator guard, along the Mill Lane Brook adjacent to the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve.

Protecting Wood Ducks and Other Waterfowl (Cont. from page 1)

In response to the Migratory Bird Treaty of 1916 and the enactment of the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918, wood duck populations began to slowly recover. These measures ended unregulated hunting and protected remaining habitat. Another positive turn came with the development of artificial nesting boxes in the 1930's, which wood ducks readily accepted. Since then, conservation groups and individuals have helped increase numbers of wood ducks by preserving habitat and erecting nest boxes.

To sustain their populations, wood ducks require high quality wetland habitat with low human disturbance. In Connecticut, heavy human development pressure has a negative impact on wetland habitat and the wood duck population. Wood ducks may abandon their nests if disturbed by human activity. Therefore, while wood duck populations are stable today, it is important that measures are taken to preserve their habitat and protect them from human intrusion.

Actions Taken by the OLC

OLCT properties provide habitat for several waterfowl species, including wood ducks, ring-necked ducks, mallard ducks, hooded mergansers, and swans. Wood ducks have been nesting in the Mill Lane Brook adjacent to the OLC's Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve. Because many of these species are easily disturbed by humans and dogs, it is important to safeguard their habitat, particularly during nesting season to avoid abandoned nests.

Along the Mill Lane Brook, several nesting boxes have been erected in the water by OLC member Ralph Slater. In testimony to the secretive nature of these birds, Ralph, who has been observing them for some 35 years, has only once observed a hen calling the young out and seen the ducklings leap to the water.

To preserve suitable habitat for nesting waterfowl, the OLC has closed a portion of the red trail on the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve, which runs close to the nesting boxes on Mill Lane Brook, during nesting season



OLCT Volunteers John Christiano and Jerry Silberberg putting in an alternative trail section in the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve to avoid the wood duck nesting sites.

(April through June). In April 2010, an alternative trail was blazed by volunteers, to allow hikers to continue to enjoy this beautiful preserve while minimizing disturbance to the nesting waterfowl. The OLC has also erected signs on all its properties open to the public, asking visitors to leash their dogs from April through June.

Sources:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, www.allaboutbirds.org
Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection, Wildlife Division, "Wildlife in Connecticut Informational Series: Wood Duck", Dec. 1999.

Ducks Unlimited, www.ducks.org
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Wildlife Habitat Management Institute, "Wood Duck: Fish and Wildlife Habitat Management Leaflet".

University of Michigan Animal Diversity Web, <http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu>

Wildlife Notes

The white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) is one of Connecticut's most common mammals, giving birth to one or two young during April and May. The mothers will often leave their fawns resting alone in a covered location, while staying out of sight and nearby, in an attempt to distract potential predators. Inexperienced moms have been known to park fawns in foundation shrubbery or close to human traffic. A fawn that is sitting quietly, though in close proximity to humans, has probably not been abandoned or orphaned, and the mother deer will most likely return to feed and move the baby at dusk. Well-intentioned humans often stumble upon these seemingly abandoned fawns and intervene unnecessarily. If a baby is discovered to be calling/bleating repeatedly over several hours however, a licensed wildlife rehabilitator should be contacted to determine if it is indeed in need of assistance. Otherwise, the fawn is best left alone, in the care of its mother.

OLCT Seeks Funding to Purchase 8.24-Acre Sheep's Ledge Property

OLCT has applied for a grant under the DEP's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program to buy what is popularly known as Sheep's Ledge. The property, which is owned by Steven Ames, is a lovely, 8.24-acre piece of piece of forest, ledge and wetland adjacent to the Town-owned Noyes Preserve.

Sheep's Ledge was used by Native American Indians for shelter and has been recognized locally as an important historic site for at least two hundred years. According to Dr. John Pfeiffer, Old Lyme Town Historian, it was referred to as the Old Indian Stone House in Lyme town land records of the 1820's, and was the subject of a painting called "Indian Cliff Dwellers" by Edward Rook. Rook, one of the Old Lyme Impressionists, was a contemporary of Harry Hoffman and stayed at the Florence Griswold Boarding House in the early 1900's.

In 1972, Dr. Pfeiffer studied the site under the auspices of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Connecticut. Says Dr. Pfeiffer: "My excavations revealed a site that was occupied seasonally over the last 4255 years. Various aboriginal groups utilized the rock overhang as an interior hunting camp. In such a function, groups of hunters

Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange

The OLC is one of 12 land trusts participating in the Lower Connecticut River and Coastal Region Land Trust Exchange. The Exchange was formed primarily through the efforts of Margot Burns, Environmental Planner for the Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency (CRERPA), and she continues to guide its activities.

The primary purpose of the Exchange is for its members to get together several times a year to discuss issues of common interest, share ideas, and identify best practices. In addition, the Exchange serves as a vehicle for collaboration with other regional groups on issues that affect a geographic area even broader than the Connecticut River and contiguous coast. For example, the Exchange has recently been recognized as a partner in the efforts of Wildlands and Woodlands to protect the forests of New England. See www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org.

Girl Scout Earns Bronze Award for Work on Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve

In June, local Girl Scout Sophie Christiano applied her energies toward the upkeep and beautification of the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday preserve. Her work included weeding the parking lot, clearing overgrowth, raking trails, repairing the bridge, and widening the blue trail at the head of Mill Pond which is a very picturesque area of the preserve. Sophie is the daughter of John and Catherine Christiano of Old Lyme; John is a steward of the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday preserve. The OLC thanks Sophie for her hard work, which enables hikers to better appreciate the beauty of the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve.

as well as family or extended family units resided within the "cave" during the winter months and then relocated during the spring and summer to more coastal locations. This seasonal shifting residence pattern was dependent upon resource availability and determined the size of the population that stayed at particular sites." Prior to this excavation, it was not known that the prehistory of southeastern New England dated back this far.

2009-2010 Committee Report: Stewardship

The OLC Board decided to begin marking our trails with tree tags this year. However vandalism proved a problem, with a majority of the tags at the Elizabeth B. Karter Watch Rock and the George and Woodward H. Griswold Preserves being removed. It was thus decided to use larger and hopefully less destructible markers, and at the time of this writing they appear to have proven successful.

In the interest of helping wildlife rear their young, signs have been erected asking the public to leash dogs during the months of April through June. The recommendation will assist in protecting ground nesting birds such as the oven-bird and American woodcock as well as offer young rabbits, chipmunks, and doves some added protection. The Board has also continued to close a trail near wood duck nesting sites on the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve, and has added an alternate trail to complete a loop around the property. Other accomplishments include improvement of the main trail at the Elizabeth B. Karter Watch Rock Preserve with gravel to ease the removal of waste from the port-a-potty located there. Work continued on invasive plant species removal on several properties. Though an ongoing battle, it is one which we deem necessary and will continue to work on.

Numerous volunteers have helped us in many capacities with our work over the year and their support is greatly appreciated!

Join Us for Swallow Cruise On Sept. 24

Swallow Cruise: Join us for a fabulous natural spectacle on the Connecticut River. In the late afternoon during fall migration, hundreds of thousands of tree swallows gather over the river from 30 miles around and create beautiful, swooping formations in the sky. Just as the sun sets, they converge into a huge funnel over Goose Island and disappear into the reeds to roost for the night. Roger Tory Peterson, the great ornithologist who lived for many years in Old Lyme, was introduced to this phenomenon by local naturalist and OLC land steward Hank Golet, and later wrote: "For sheer drama, the tornadoes of tree swallows eclipsed any other avian spectacle I have ever seen." The OLC will host a cruise on the Connecticut River to view the swallows in action on Friday, September 24 from 5-8 pm. Tickets are \$30 each. Wine and soft drinks will be provided. You may bring a picnic supper. Contact Agnes O'Connor (860 434-9094) or Chris Clayton (860 434-6294) for more information or to purchase tickets.

The Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve (Cont. from page 1)

The property donated by John L. Hoffman previously was part of the estate of his parents, Harry Hoffman and Beatrice Pope; their home, which they called Chuluota—an Indian word meaning "beautiful view"—was sold as a separate 5 acre parcel and is not part of the preserve. Harry Hoffman was an established artist who loved Old Lyme. He is best known for his use of color in his oil paintings, including several under-water scenes in the Bahamas. He first came to Old Lyme in 1902 to attend summer classes at the local art colony which centered around Miss Florence Griswold and her boarding house. Like many other artists of his time, Hoffman later built a home and studio in Old Lyme (in 1910), spending time here painting and developing a camaraderie with his fellow artists. Hoffman devoted considerable energy to the Lyme Art Association and the Florence Griswold Association, which was founded in 1936 by a small group of artists, relatives, and friends of Miss Florence, whom this arrangement allowed to live out her remaining years in her ancestral home.

A second parcel, to the west of the Hoffman property was donated by Ms. Ormsby Hanes Matthiessen in 2001. Ms. Matthiessen was "enthusiastic about saving all the land that can be saved". This parcel would prove to be important in connecting the three pieces of the preserve together. With the addition of these eight acres, a second trail, passing by a pond and then continuing into the woods, was added to the preserve.

In August, 2007, a third parcel of eight acres was donated by Elisabeth DeGerenday upon her death. Ms. DeGerenday—who went by the name Elisabeth Gordon Chandler professionally—was the founder of the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts in Old Lyme. She moved from New York City to Old Lyme



A view of the Mill Lane Brook looking down from a vantage point on the Red Trail.

in 1962, and established the Lyme Academy in 1976 in order to provide students with an education in traditional, representational art. She was a gifted sculptor who married a fellow sculptor, Laci DeGerenday.

Sources:

Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Gordon_Chandler

New York Times, "The View From Old Lyme: An Academy with a Tradition of Art that's Understandable", Feb 11, 1996.

Elisabeth Gordon Chandler, "The Lyme Academy Story", <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/5aa/5aa352.htm>

Jeffrey W. Andersen, Harry Hoffman: A World of Color, Florence Griswold Museum, 1988.

Old Lyme Conservation Trust MEMBERSHIP FORM

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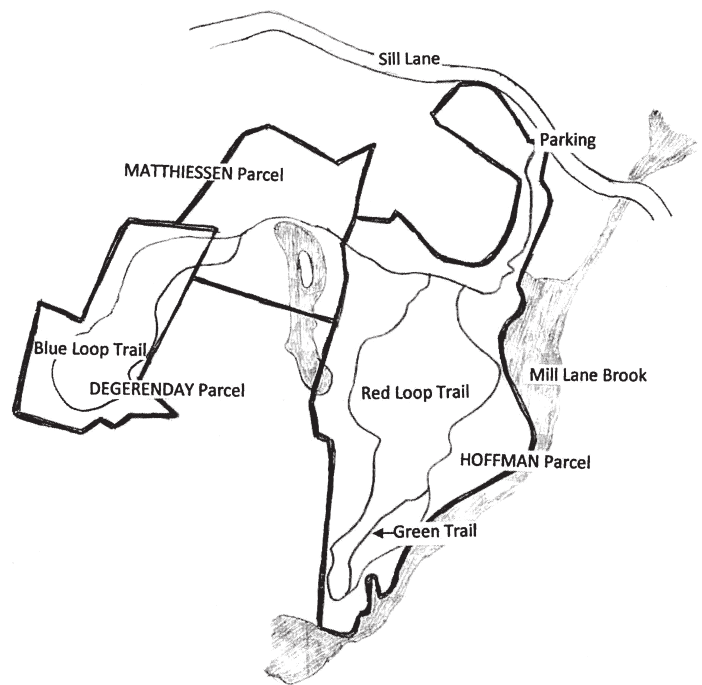
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☐ **YES**, I would like to volunteer! Please call me.



Map of the Hoffman-Matthiessen-DeGerenday Preserve

2010 OLCT Annual Meeting

The 2010 Annual Meeting of the OLCT was held on March 21 at the Lymes' Senior Center. At the meeting, the Landsaver Award was presented to Mr. Milton Allen in recognition of the many years he has provided financial advice to the OLCT. The 2010 Volunteer of the Year Award was given to Attorney Michael Wells in recognition of his pro bono work on OLCT donations and acquisitions. It was also an opportunity to express gratitude to outgoing board members Jerry Silberberg and President Anna Silberberg, for all they have done for the Trust. A new slate of officers was inducted: President Christina Clayton; Vice President Sabine O'Donnell; Treasurer Ted Mundy; and Secretary Lea Harty. Kathi Green was voted in as a new Board member. The business meeting was followed by an enjoyable talk by Mr. Andy Brand of Broken Arrow Nursery in Hamden, CT, on the topic of "The Importance of Native Plants and How to Increase Diversity in our Yards".

Four top priorities for the Trust were described in incoming President Chris Clayton's address:

1. Stewardship. The Board will be considering the need to more actively manage some of our properties. For example, the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District has made recommendations for the Elizabeth B. Karter Watch

Rock Preserve that include taking aggressive action against bittersweet and phragmites, cutting down some trees to promote secondary growth, and expanding the boundaries of the meadow area.

2. Outreach. We would like to communicate more with our existing members, and we would like more members. We would like more hikers—especially children—on our trails. And we would like more residents to understand and appreciate the value of open space and the role it plays in the unique character of Old Lyme.

3. Acquisition. We will continue work on the town-wide trail project initiated by Mike Kiernan, a past OLCT President. The idea is to connect existing preserves—whether they are owned by OLCT, the Town of Old Lyme, The Nature Conservancy, or the State of Connecticut—through walking easements and acquisition of small pieces of land. All we need is willing donors or sellers and funds.

4. Development. OLCT has been fortunate over the years to have the very generous cash donation of Mary Steube in its coffers. However, as this money is converted to land, as with the recent purchase of acreage off Four Mile River Road, we need to replenish our coffers through fundraising.



The Old Lyme Conservation Trust hosted a tree-planting booth at the Old Lyme Midsummer Festival on July 31, 2010. Children decorated the pots and planted seedlings, then took them home to plant outdoors. Over 200 children enjoyed this earth-friendly activity!



Old Lyme Conservation Trust, Inc.

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Progress in the Upper Three Mile River Area



OLCT Board Members walk the newly acquired parcel in the Upper Three Mile River Preserve.

With the recent purchase of a 17 acre parcel from the Romagna family, our Upper Three Mile River Preserve now extends northerly from I-95 to a Town Open Space parcel of land, a distance of nearly one mile. The additional land creates a contiguous parcel

of over 100 acres that will ultimately be open for public use.

The new land is an excellent complement to our existing preserve and includes a variety of terrain including wooded hillsides, impressive rock ledge, scenic views, and extensive wetlands with water plants and moss-covered rocks. We have observed abundant wildlife including a variety of birds, deer, and small animals common to this area.

At the present time the preserve is not open to the public due to difficult access. The Trust has on-going initiatives to improve access and when we achieve this goal, the preserve will be open to the public. In the mean time, if you wish to see the preserve, contact a Board member and a tour will be arranged.

Brown Bat Talk Scheduled August 15

Jenny Dickson, the DEP Supervising Biologist for the Wildlife Division, will give a talk about threats that several bat species are facing and the situation in Connecticut in particular. She is an authority on brown bats and the "White Nose Syndrome". The talk will be held on Sunday, August 15 at the Chester Meeting House from 4-6 pm. The talk is sponsored by the Deep River Land Trust, the Chester Land Trust, and the Old Lyme Conservation Trust. All are welcome. Email smhaig@snet.net for more information.

www.olct.org / email: webmail@old-lymeconservtrust.org