



THE FRIENDS OF VALLEY FALLS, INC. NEWSLETTER

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MEET JANE SEYMOUR!



Photo by Jay Consolati

Wildlife biologist Jane Seymour with a birdbox she constructed for her American kestrel study. The box is sized to fit the kestrel's nesting needs.

Wildlife consultant Jane Seymour describes the summer of '03 as one of the best in her life. Jane spent that time in the woods, fields and streams of the Belding Wildlife Management Area recording bird life, animal life, amphibians, even the insects, that are all part of the biodiversity of that special area. The study was conducted under contract to the Department of Environmental Protection. The work was funded by an endowment from Maxwell Belding that will provide perpetual care of the 300-acre site.

Jane shared results of that 6-month study with the Friends at our Annual Meeting in October. Of particular note, she recorded 82 bird species, 11 species of amphibians, 11 dragonfly and damselfly species, 15 butterfly and 30 moth species. Discovery of freshwater mussels in the Tankerhoosen River validate that the waters in these upper reaches of the River are particularly pristine.

Jane's professional life started as an artist. She found she particularly enjoyed painting birds, which piqued a desire to understand more about their habits – and

habitats. She returned to college to pursue a second career in wildlife biology, and is currently working on her master's degree at the University of Connecticut. Her graduate research project involves habitat use of the American kestrel. Kestrels require large areas of open habitat such as pastures, meadows and orchards. As these habitats disappear from Connecticut, so do kestrels. The study will continue for one more season.

Painting and sketching birds are still very much a part of Jane's life. Some of her works are currently on exhibit at the Artsake Gallery at the corner of Route 74 and Route 83 in Tolland (the old fire house). Stop in and see them!

Jane will be able to continue her studies in the Tankerhoosen watershed again this summer. Under contract to the Friends of the Hockanum River Linear



Photo courtesy of Jane Seymour

Rehabilitated kestrel fitted with a transmitter just prior to its release back into the wild.

Park, Jane will again spend time in the upper Tankerhoosen documenting bird and amphibian populations in that area.

We are most pleased that Jane has found Vernon! Her work will enable us to better understand our natural resources so that we may be better stewards of these special places – now – and for future generations.

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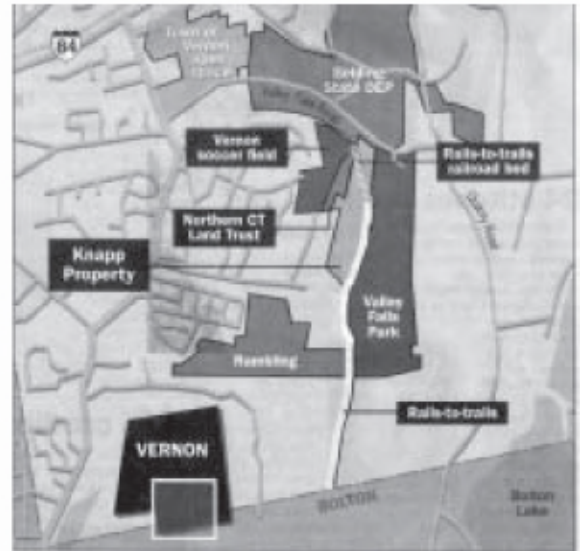
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VALLEY FALLS PARK

LAND TRUST ACQUISITION

On January 14, 2004, the Northern Connecticut Land Trust acquired from the Knapp family, the 35-acre parcel adjacent to Valley Falls Park. It is a welcome addition to the park, which is one of Vernon's great natural treasures. The land is also adjacent to the Belding Wildlife Preserve. To purchase the property, the Land Trust received \$42,700



in matching funds from the State Department of Environmental Protection Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Program. The balance was raised from the Bafflin Foundation and a generous gift from an anonymous supporter who had previously helped the Trust to acquire the adjacent Echo Ridge property. The Trust plans to keep the wooded area in its natural state and will enhance some of the existing trails. The property goes uphill from Valley Falls Road to the Rails-to-Trails path. Thanks to Karl Hasel, Vernon resident and Vice-President of the Land Trust who spearheaded the negotiations for the purchase. A dedication ceremony will be held on the property April 30 and will be named the Andrew Kenneth Webster Preserve.



WOODCOCKS SIGHTED IN THE PARK!

Woodcocks have been heard and seen in the Valley Falls area.

According to a recent article in the Connecticut Audubon Society News, their courtship ritual is one of the most spectacular in the bird world. This shore

bird has evolved to live in the woodlands of northeastern United States. Woodcocks probe for earthworms with their bills, but will eat insects, caterpillars, weed seeds, etc. There has been a decline of woodcocks due to habitat loss, so we are fortunate to have them in our area. Courtship occurs right after sunset. The male makes a nasal "peent" sound several times during a ground display, then spirals approximately 200 feet above the ground while air movement over its wings creates a twittering sound; it descends with a warbling sound. The courtship lasts approximately 30-45 minutes. If you miss the courtship this spring, mark your calendar for next year: latter part of March, early April. Next year, the Friends will plan to hold a Woodcock walk. It is a wonderful way to welcome spring.

NATURE NOTES



SPRING AZURE is a lovely common blue butterfly. Look for it as you walk through the woodlands. The spring azure is among the world's smallest butterflies: its wingspan is .8"-1.3" or less than .5" each wing.



MARSH MARIGOLD (*Caltha ranunculacea*) is a golden yellow flower, growing in clusters in wet areas. The flowers are long lasting, about three weeks, on stems 1 -2 feet high. There is one patch of marsh marigolds in the park.



BLOODROOT (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) is one of the earliest wildflowers to greet us in the spring. Its white flowers emerge from unfolding leaves. The foliage is lovely and will last all summer and fall. Bloodroot is one of many woodland flowers dispersed by ants who carry the seeds to their nest where they eat the outer covering, then discard the seed in their "compost pile." The rhizomes contain a red sap which the Native Americans used as a dye. Bloodroot occurs throughout the park.

VALLEY FALLS FARM

SPRING 'RENEWAL'

The fields and woods of the farm are slowly renewing with signs of spring. At the same time, the Friends are 'renewing' the house on the property. It has been a long-time goal of the Friends to have a resident naturalist/caretaker living in the house. To that end, the two apartments in the house have been vacated so that we may be able to do some sorely needed renovation on the interior. After much discussion, we decided that the timing was right to take this action – and that as responsible stewards of this property it must be done. We have taken out a construction mortgage loan with Tolland Bank for \$25,000 to fund the renovation. (Our original mortgage has a small remaining balance of \$2500). And of course, volunteer efforts will help with the work where they can be utilized.



Our main goal is to make the house safe and livable – and that's about as far as these funds will stretch. Electrical work is needed to bring the house up to code. The house also needs insulation (there is currently none!), some windows need to be replaced, and the exterior needs repair and painting. The septic system and well system will be evaluated, in light of current code. Because it's a wonderful old house, circa 1840, it also needs some basic structural work such as the shoring and squaring of the frame and supports.

We have much to do – and VOLUNTEER support helps! Please call if you have a skill that can be utilized in the renovation work.

JOIN US FOR NATURE WALKS IN THE PARK

WILDFLOWERS

Led by Ginny Gingras and Betty Tedford
Saturday, April 24 - 10:00 a.m.

BIRDWALK

Led by Denise Anamani
Saturday, May 1 - 8:00 a.m.

MUSHROOM WALK

Led by Irene Gay
Saturday, September - 1:00 p.m.

Meet at the picnic shelter.



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