



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

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September 2012

VALLEY FALLS FARM

Beehives at the Farm - A Continuing Success Story



Allen Valli in protective gear

In our December 2011 newsletter, we reported on Allen Valli's first year of beekeeping at Valley Falls Farm. Allen had set up two hives in the spring, and had harvested 25 lbs of honey by the fall of 2011.

In his second full year at the farm, Allen has collected 122 lbs of honey! The winter was mild, the spring honey flow was strong and the bee population exploded.

In early summer, Allen had to "re-queen" one hive. The queen was not a good fit and had to be removed: her offspring were aggressive and had chased Allen from the hive area. He successfully installed a new queen, ordered from A-Z Apiaries in Hampton, CT.

In early September, when he checked the hives to remove more honey and to begin preparation for the fall weekly feeding of sugar water, he found one hive with no bee activity! Allen brought the frames from the empty hive to the September monthly meeting of the Eastern Connecticut Beekeepers' Association to examine them for clues as to why the bees disappeared. The members, including the new State Bee Inspector, Mark Creighton, could offer no explanation for the empty hive.

Removing honey from the hive first requires several safety steps. Allen puts on protective suiting, including

headcover. In addition, he fires up a smoker (fueled by pine needles) which causes the bees to become confused and unable to communicate with each other. (See photos). He also uses a fume pad with a product call Be-Go which quickly causes the bees to vacate the premises due to a very bad odor.



Bee smoker

The upper two frames of the hive are called the "super honey boxes" and produce the honey that is harvested. The queen bee and the male drones are located in the lower two frames. To remove the honey, Allen takes out the super boxes, covers them with towels, and transports them to his car and to his Skinner Road home. There, he extracts the honey using a centrifugal process. The honey is screened to remove any wax and pollen, and then bottled for sale. He sells raw honey, meaning that he does not use heat or any other processing methods that alter the product.

In the next few weeks the lower boxes will be treated for American Foul Brood and mites. In November, Allen will place an entrance reducer and mouse guard at the entrance of the hive, reducing its size to keep out the mice.

Allen sells the raw honey for \$8/lb, and \$14/2 lbs at his home. He will bring some jars to our Annual Meeting on October 14th if you are interested in purchasing some. Allen is a valued member of the Friends, and presented us with several bottles as a gift. We are truly grateful for the many hours he spends tending the hives, as well as the dedicated care he gives to this venture. What a delight it is to have a successful beekeeping activity at Valley Falls Farm!



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VALLEY FALLS PARK

Braille Trail Dedication

The dedication of the Braille Trail was held on a fine spring day in May. About 30 people attended, including local dignitaries as well as citizens. Mayor George Apel presented a placque to the Friends commending our organization for dedicated volunteer service. Individuals and organizations who had played a key role in creating the Braille trail were recognized: the Friends, the Vernon Greenway Volunteers, Pratt & Whitney, and Eagle Scouts Will Boutwell, Dan Kinsman and Brad Stewart. Don Bellingham of the Vernon Greenway Volunteers assisted with the ribbon cutting.



Mayor George Apel (right) and Don Bellingham (left) cut the ribbon


Refreshments and good conversation were enjoyed by all following the ceremony. 

Student Outing

Also in May, the Vernon Greenway Volunteers hosted a special event, a "Day at Valley Falls Park" for a group of Ellington High School students. Twenty-one students and 14 teachers attended. Each of the students was given a commemorative T-shirt upon arrival. Members from Rockville Fish and Game Club and the CT Fly Fisherman's Association taught the students to fly and bait fish. A tour of the Braille Trail and a hike around the Pond Loop Trail was also held, during which students were taught how to read a trail map and follow trail blazes.



Students try their hands at fishing.

arrived to restock the pond for the upcoming fishing season. Students and volunteers enjoyed a cook-out of burgers and dogs, followed by presentation of fishing trophies. The students and teachers later enjoyed lawn games together following lunch. Many thanks to the volunteers who made this special event a big success, especially Don Bellingham and the Vernon Greenway Volunteers, and members of the Rockville Fish and Game Club and the CT Fly Fisherman's Association. 

THE TANKERHOOSEN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA - VERNON'S NEW OPEN SPACE TREASURE

Just down the road and around the corner from Valley Falls lies Vernon's new open space treasure: 449 acres of ecologically intact forestland, ponds and streams that are in an environmentally sensitive watershed. Bounded by Reservoir Road, Baker Road, Brandy Hill Road and Fish and Game Road, the acreage harbors many species of fish, birds and wildlife that are disappearing and are in need of protection.

On June 22 of this year, the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP) announced that it had purchase the land from the Tancanhoosen, LLC, at a purchase price of \$2,965,000. At the dedication ceremony, Commissioner Daniel Esty said, **"The land we are protecting today is one of the largest and most significant open space preservations in Connecticut history".**

The land was originally part of the large land holdings along the Tankerhoosen River of Lebbeus Bissell and his friend Frederick Belding. They purchased the lands for family recreation, hunting and fishing some 100 years ago. In this generation, the lands fell to 18 family heirs comprising the Tancanhoosen, LLC. Tom Mason, Bissell's grandson and one of the managers of the LLC, worked with DEEP to complete the transaction.

The 449 acres adds to a large corridor of connected open space comprised of the Belding Wildlife Management Area, Valley Falls Park, Bolton Notch State Park, and Northern CT Land Trust property. Within the Town of Vernon, this corridor of connected open space now totals 1250 acres.

Sixty-three species classified as "Greatest Conservation Need" by DEEP are found within the Belding and Tankerhoosen Wildlife Management Areas. These include the eastern box turtle, gray tree frog, and spotted salamander. The river flowing through the lands, the Tankerhoosen, supports a large population of wild brown trout and brook trout, the most abundant in central Connecticut. The area also harbors the eastern pearlshell mussel, which is listed by DEEP as a "species of special concern", and is rapidly declining in CT.

We are very grateful to Tom Mason and the family LLC for carrying on the dream of their grandparents and keeping the land in its natural state for the recreational enjoyment of others.

For more information on the Tankerhoosen River Valley and all its treasures – go to www.tankerhoosen.info.



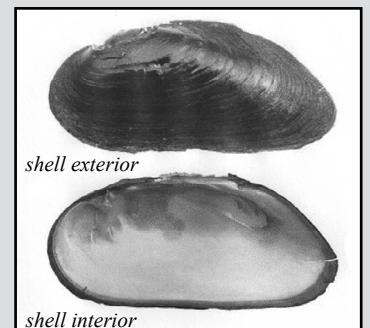
NATURE NOTES

Eastern Pearlshell Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*): "Hitchhikers on Fish"

Classified by DEEP as a 'Species of Special Concern', this freshwater mussel is found in cold water streams and small rivers that support trout or salmon. The outer shell is a shiny purple-black color, and the inside is white. The mussel is a filter-feeder, that is, it filters water for oxygen and food.

Most fascinating is the fact that freshwater mussels need fish to complete their life-cycle. The eastern pearlshell reproduces only with salmon and trout as the host. Fertilized larvae of the mussel (called glochidia) attach to the fish gills and form a cyst. After one to ten weeks, the juvenile mussel breaks out of the cyst, falls to the stream bottom where it burrows in.

Thus the host fish not only provides food and shelter, but it also is a means of dispersing the mussel upstream where it could not go on its own. So – if you happen to spot the eastern pearlshell in a stream, know that the trout have passed by also. Because of its scarcity due to continual loss of cold-water habitat in Connecticut, the DEEP would like to know if you do come across this species. Call (860) 675-8130.



FALL CALENDAR – COME JOIN US!

Mushroom Foray in Valley Falls Park

Sunday, **September 30th**, at 2:00 p.m.

The walk will be led by Irene Gay. Meet in the parking lot at Valley Falls Park.

Annual Meeting

Sunday, **October 14th**, at 2:00 p.m. at the Red Barn in Valley Falls Park

The annual Friends of Valley Falls business meeting will be followed by talks on the latest open space preservation in the Valley Falls neighborhood. Come learn about the history and wonders of the “newest hotspot on the block”:

“The Tankerhoosen Wildlife Management Area: Vernon’s New Open Space Treasure”

Speakers are:

- **Tom Mason**, whose family has owned the property for over a century;
- **Jane Seymour**, DEEP Wildlife Technician, who will talk about the wildlife “species of greatest conservation need” that inhabit its landscape;
- **Ann Letendre**, Chairman of the Vernon Open Space Task Force, will discuss why it was important to preserve the site.

The public is welcome!

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