



The Friends of Valley Falls, Inc.

NEWSLETTER

Volume *VVII* Number *I*

SPRING

May 2013

VALLEY FALLS PARK

In addition to the passive recreation opportunities such as hiking and swimming that our park offers, it is also the perfect place to observe and learn about the natural world. This was the vision of those that were originally involved in the preservation of the park in the mid-sixties. In keeping with the original intent of this park, several organizations use the park for these purposes. The Friends annually holds a bird walk, a wildflower walk in the spring (see calendar, p. 4), and a mushroom foray in the fall. The Vernon Greenway Volunteers annually hosts a picnic and fishing day for disadvantaged children.

The Vernon Parks & Recreation

Department also takes advantage of the opportunity for hands-on environmental education that the park offers through its summer camp program, Valley Falls Nature Camp, and through the annual Fishing Derby,

held this year on May 4th. The weather was perfect and the pond was stocked with plenty of trout. The event was hosted by JT'S Flyshop, Union CT. Many thanks to our Sponsors - Superior Energy, Granby Bait, Discount Trophy, and Wolff Financial.

Valley Falls Nature Camp features explorations of the

natural world in the Park, including pond life, learning about fishing, excursions on hiking trails, and talks by special guests with expertise in the field. Campers also enjoy games, arts & crafts and swim time. Children ages 6 to 12 years old can participate in the program. The camp starts on June 24, 2013. Registration forms are available



photo by Jon Roe

on the Town of Vernon website: www.vernon-ct.gov/departments, click on Parks & Recreation Department, or call 870-3520.

VALLEY FALLS FARM

We have begun work on the grant for the Heritage Center. Last fall, new roofs were put on four of the outbuildings (the woodshed, ice house, manure shed and piggery; the stable was re-roofed in 2011). This completes the

much needed re-roofing of all seven farm buildings! Spring and summer work will focus on continued painting and repairs to the exteriors of these buildings, including window replacements.



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BEEHIVES AT THE FARM – A MYSTERIOUS LOSS

After harvesting 122 pounds of honey last year and losing bees in one of the two hives in September, Allen Valli discovered a loss of bees in the remaining hive this winter. The bees were active during the fall and winter, but when he checked the hive at the end of February 2013 to begin spring feeding, he discovered the bees in the remaining hive had died. After consulting with the CT State Bee Inspector, Mark Creighton, and supplying him with photos, data and answering many questions, the demise of the colony was not determined. There is the possibility that disease or mites may have caused the bee population to reduce over time from late fall into the winter. With a reduced bee population, the remaining bees could not keep themselves warm and they may have actually froze to death. Allen noted that other beekeepers in the area have lost some or all of their hives in a similar manner.


Not to be deterred, Allen ordered two packages of replacement bees. Each package contains (3)lbs of bees with a Queen. The packages were installed on Thursday, April 18th. The bees will “release” the Queen from her cage by eating through a candy plug at one end the queen cage. Then Allen will begin feeding the bees until the bee population has reached about 50,000 in number and the hive is healthy. If all is successful, fall honey could be harvested from early August until mid September. We wish Allen and the bees well. The beekeeping activity is a welcome addition to Valley Falls Farm. 

NEW COMMITTEES – A FRAMEWORK FOR THE FRIENDS FUTURE

The Board of Directors has set up a committee structure for the organization. This action is a key element of our 2011 Strategic Plan, prepared with our organizational consultants, Musevue 360. Recruiting a core of new volunteers is absolutely essential to the long term sustainability of the Friends.

Four basic committees, and specific tasks for each committee, were defined. Initially, each committee will be led by a member of the Board. The Committees are:

- Community Outreach (marketing, membership development, publications, website, special events development)
- Business Management & Development (fund raising, grant applications, endowment development, budget control, rental management)
- Buildings and Grounds Maintenance (maintenance planning, scheduling and oversight)
- Special Projects (New Grant Project Management, Heritage Center development)

Over the next few weeks we will be contacting you, our members, to talk about interest you may have in participating in any of these activities. We need you, your friends and your neighbors! We look forward to talking with you. 

SPRING WILDLIFE AWAKENINGS! *by Sheryl McMullen*

Valley Falls Park is alive with the awakening of our wildlife, and the return of our migratory birds. On 4/11, this snapping turtle was basking in the sun, near the vernal pool. We locked eyes, she slowly turned around, burrowed into the mud, and disappeared!

Our ground-nesting woodcocks are back! At twilight, they're at the edges of the two fields. The male lifts into the sky, making high-pitched peeping sounds as he flies huge aerial arcs to attract a female. The best part is when he spirals into a downward funnel, faster and faster with increasing peeps, until he lands in the grass. You'll then hear a comical single flat peep like a plugged up nose!

Our two vernal pools - one at the back of the pond and one west of the park entrance on VF Road - are alive with peepers and wood frogs. A beautiful chorus, especially on a

rainy night! (Drive carefully!) Look for clouds of white or green on the water- eggs soon to be salamanders. (See Jane Seymour's great article in the April 2010 newsletter).

Our resident bluebirds and migratory phoebes and tree swallows are here. We've cleaned 10 houses, and replaced two. Good reads in the Connecticut Audubon "State of the Birds" and 4/14 Hartford Courant on the severe demise of these flying insectivores, and how the skies are like the ocean, filled with flying plankton. Maybe the swallows will again build a nest in the eaves of the pavilion!

Our cottontail rabbits are out of hibernation, raising young. Their populations are declining in New En-

gland. Dogs should be kept leashed dogs, particularly at dawn and dusk when the rabbits are foraging.

Our brown bats hibernate and migrate, and will soon be circling the fields and pond. Our box turtle population will be on the grassy path leading to the woods, basking in the sunshine in the wet grasses, looking for favorite foods of slugs and earthworms. Box turtles spend their lives in a two acre area, so these truly are "our" turtles. They are a CT DEEP "special concern species" which means their low numbers are concerning. Don't ever relocate a turtle, even if it's in danger, just help it get to where it's going.




photo by Sheryl McMullen

Our migratory birds arrive in May, ready to raise young, and then make the journey back to Central and South America for winter. Our fields and woods will be filled with catbirds, hermit and wood thrush, warblers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and my favorite, Baltimore orioles. They'll

feast on the insects and flower blossoms, and fill our dawn hours with spectacular sounds.

Lastly, I highly recommend a dawn walk to the cliffs. (For location, check the trail map in the kiosk). At the top of the trail, there's a series of flat cliffs with an unobstructed 180-degree view to the East. You can watch the sun rise and hear the sounds of the birds singing in chorus, wafting up from the Valley. Truly a spectacular, awe-inspiring way to start your day!

Sheryl McMullen served 10 years on the Vernon Conservation Commission, and is a state and federally certified wildlife rehabilitator, specializing in turtles. She is a long-time member of the Friends and enjoys frequent walks in the Park. 

SPRING CALENDAR – COME JOIN US!

Bird Walk led by Denise Anamani at **Valley Falls Park**

7:00 a.m. - Saturday, May 18th

Meet in the Parking Lot in Valley Falls Park

Wildflower Walk led by Ginny Gingras at **Valley Falls Park**

2:00 p.m., Sunday, May 19

Meet in the Parking Lot in Valley Falls Park

Artists Day at the Farm 2013

The Event Is An Uncertainty Without Your Help

As of this writing, we are uncertain whether or not we have sufficient volunteer help to do Artists Day this year. Board Member Karin James has volunteered to be co-chairman of the event, but we need a co-chairman to work with her. If you can help – or you know anyone that would like to co-chair the event, please call 875-4623. If we do go forward with the event, it would likely be scheduled sometime in the last two weeks of August. Stay tuned!

Spring Newsletter 2013

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