



Enjoying the Great Outdoors: Partnering with the Essex Park & Recreation Department

By Steve Knauth

There's a grass roots movement taking hold in town. Call it - Occupy Essex.

It began last year, as the Essex Land Trust joined the town's Park and Recreation Department in their Essex Great Outdoor Pursuit program. The program is a series of family-oriented events designed to encourage people to "get out and about." It worked. In 2011, under the program, we hiked wintry trails in the cold, walked by springtime's vernal pools, and paddled our rivers and coves in summer and fall. We picnicked and listened to jazz.

And we learned. We heard from and spoke with naturalists and educators, talking wild life and conservation, trailside and in the lecture room. The kids were treated to a fishing clinic. In short, during the Essex Great Outdoor Pursuit, we explored and enjoyed the parks and preserves of our town as, perhaps, never before.

"We felt that the program went great," says Park & Rec's department head Rick Audet, who shared much of the organizational duties with the trust's Peggy Tuttle. "We were very happy with the results. We found out that cold weather does not stop our intrepid local outdoor pursuit enthusiasts, too. The winter walks at Falls River and the vernal pools walk had excellent turnouts. And, we ended the year with about 35 people participating in the Turkey Tromp. Six actually did the Turkey Plunge [a dip in Viney Hill Brook's pond]."



Bushy Hill's Eric Becker showing how to light a fire without matches

2012's Essex Great Outdoor Pursuit program should be just as popular, with multiple new venues, including an Arbor Day event, a birding walk during spring migration and a turtle education program. There will also be the chance to take a walk with a naturalist in one the Land Trust's wildest and least-accessible pieces of property. There's even a mountain bike run on the calendar. Fall events include the annual Ivoryton 5K Run/Walk, benefiting the Ivoryton Library and a repeat of the Family Turkey Tromp and Plunge at Viney Brook.

"We are very excited about the new events," says Audet. "We hope once again to meet our objective of bringing families together in trying new activities and visiting new locations." The diversity is planned, says Audet.

Enjoying the Great Outdoors ... continued from page 1



Rick Audet, Essex Park & Recreation Director

“We want to make sure we offer something for everyone, especially things that kids would be interested in doing with their families; participating together in the events was one of our main objectives. Connecting kids with nature is especially important in today’s day and age.”

Part of the program’s success lies in the department’s partnership with the Essex Land Trust, says Audet. “I would characterize their help in co-sponsoring these events as whole-hearted, enthusiastic, and committed. I was not really surprised by the strong level of participation we had in the program, because they are a great organization with great marketing.”

And, it’s all for a great cause. “We have fabulous open spaces and parks that people want to enjoy, and an active group of residents,” Audet says. “It’s important to showcase the variety of ways in which the outdoors and nature can be enjoyed by both active and passive recreational programs.”

For more information on Essex Land Trust 2012 Events and for the Essex Great Outdoor Pursuit program, check out the following websites: www.essexlandtrust.org or www.essexct.gov



Participants at last winter’s Falls River walk



Our Wild Neighbors: The Eastern Coyote

In the news: bear hunts, deer culling, problems with beavers and wild turkeys. As we preserve land, we also provide animal habitat, sometimes leading to confrontations with the very wildlife we seek to encourage. Occasionally, the Conservation Corner will take a closer look at “Our Wild Neighbors” in order to increase awareness, dispel myths and seek practical ways to live in balance with them.

We see them on the trails, sometimes; a furtive, gray-ish figure, dog-like, tail held low, crossing a path, or peering with yellow eyes from the undergrowth. To some, the coyote is a vicious animal to be feared, a killer of household pets and livestock; to others, it’s a survivor, to be respected for its adaptability to life around humans.

In fact, the Eastern coyote is a bit of both. Native to the West and Midwest, the coyote was first spotted in Connecticut in the northwest part of the state in the early 1960s. Now, they’re found throughout the state, living in the wild, as well as in urban parkland.



The Eastern coyote is about the same size and weight as a German Shepherd, with which it’s often confused. The coyote, on closer examination, has distinct, pointed ears, a longer muzzle and slender legs with small feet. Look for a black-tipped tail, held low, and those unmistakable yellow eyes. Coloring varies, and the fur may include grey, cream-colored, reddish and charcoal tones.

Mates bond for several seasons, bringing up their young together in protected burrows or dens. They breed

in mid-winter, with an average litter of seven, and the cubs learn to forage for themselves at eight weeks. The family usually breaks up by fall, the young seeking their own territories.

The coyote and the human come into conflict over food. The coyote’s diet consists largely of small rodents (mice, squirrels, rabbits, woodchucks) and larger animals up to 25-30 pounds. And, because they do not distinguish between a wild animal and a household pet, they’re a real and present danger to cats and smaller dogs and other domestic animals, including poultry and some livestock.

According to the state DEEP, coyotes “rarely threaten human safety” and the danger of an attack is “extremely low.” Coyotes are not especially prone to “raccoon” rabies, but they do get canine distemper.

How should you handle coyotes? On the trail: frighten them off with a loud and sudden shout, along with an aggressive action, such as arm waving or throwing a stone or a stick. In the yard: household pets should be supervised outdoors at all times, and should be kept indoors or in a well-protected kennel or pen at night, especially. Around the house: eliminate attractions such as open garbage cans, compost piles, bird seed, even fruit on the ground around fruit trees.

	<p>Check out the Essex Land Trust website at: www.essexlandtrust.org</p> <p>You will find the 2012 Events and Activities Calendar along with many other items including Slide Shows, Photo Archive, What’s New and Notable, etc.</p>
--	---



On the Trail

Fern Ledge: A 'highland park' with unusual summit views

By Steve Knauth

Fern Ledge might be called the “highland park” among the Land Trust’s many properties, with its mighty ledge of lichen-covered rock, steep stretches of trail and unusual summit views. But, it’s also a historic park, in its own way, located in one of the oldest settled parts of greater Essex and its villages.

The great pile of ancient rock, which gives Fern Ledge its name, rises majestically from the valley of the Mud River floodplain, behind the Shoreline Clinic. Early settlers, who dubbed it Scotch Plains, farmed this fertile area. From these farms, grew “Center Brook”.

Today, through the bare trees of winter, you can look down from the summit into Tiffany Pond, scan the hills of Old Saybrook and, looking east, see all the way to the Lyme hills.

Be warned; Fern Ledge does contain one of the steepest sections of trail in any of the ELT properties. But, it’s relatively short and, once at the top, it’s an easy walk through woodland terrain with clear, leaf-strewn trails through young growth forest springing up in what was once old pasture and farmland.

The single-loop Yellow trail begins and ends at the parking lot at the Shoreline Medical Center on Route 153. A leafy track runs down a long-abandoned forest road to the Mud River, crossed by a footbridge, with a swamp to the left and Birch Mill Pond to the right. From there, the trail runs on foot bridges through a boggy area, turns left, and begins a slow, gradual ascent. Here is where you first notice the enormous ledge, a gray, lichen-covered eminence rising from the forest floor.

The trail gets a bit steeper as it approaches the ledge, running through tumbled rock and fern beds

on the flank of the ledge. There’s an old foundation on the left, a reminder of the land’s earlier days. A little exploring reveals pieces of wrought iron from what might have been a stove. (Was it a barn, a shed, a cabin? The tumbled, moss-covered stones and artifacts hold their secrets.)

After a brief rest, it’s time to tackle the “steeps”, a stretch of about 150 feet that seems to run upwards at a 45-degree angle. Hiking up, you come to a trail junction and – straight ahead – another equally steep section! But here, ELT trailblazers, in their wisdom, offer an alternative; a trail off to the left, which takes a far easier track along the ledge face, winding around to the top.

At the summit, the trail continues west to another ledge and climbs easily to its summit; the highest point on Fern Ledge. Behind the ledge, the trail goes to an old stonewall and eventually reaches remnants of an old cedar stand before coming back to the junction to complete the loop.



Tips for enjoying Fern Ledge:

1. Wear hiking boots or walking shoes; leafy trails can be slippery, even in dry weather, when going downhill, and there are a few boggy areas around the stream crossing.
2. Bring a walking stick; it’s a good thing to lean on when you’re making your way uphill, and very handy as a “third leg” when going downhill.
3. Please respect the posted Private Property signs.

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Winter Walk: Falls River Preserve and Jean's Island

Saturday, February 4 - 10am at Falls River Preserve

Naturalist Phil Miller and Chet Arnold, former president of the Essex Land Trust, will lead groups through the spectacular Falls River Preserve. Walk to Jean's Island if the ice is thick. Cocoa and donuts served before the hike. This walk is the year's kick off for the Essex Great Outdoors Pursuit, co-sponsored with the Essex Land Trust and the Essex Park & Recreation Department. Park at the end of Falls River Drive in Ivoryton. Only really bad weather (blizzard or torrential rain) cancels.

Talk: Saving Central Park

Monday, March 5 - 2pm at Essex Town Hall

Sara Cedar Miller, the official historian and photographer of the Central Park Conservancy, will discuss the various scientific practices and technological innovations to maintain and restore Central Park, a manmade landscape. Topics will also include the Soil, Water and Ecology Lab's role in maintaining the Park's water bodies for its wildlife (mainly birds and fish) and its soil for the plantings and trees. Co-sponsored by the Essex Garden Club. Refreshments served. Parking behind Town Hall, 29 West Avenue, Essex.

Essex Land Trust Property Spruce-up

Saturday, March 31 - 9am-12pm at Essex Town Hall

Help the Land Trust restore our preserves after the winter by picking up brush and debris, raking and clearing trails and streams. All are welcome, including local groups and organizations. Make this a family event. Meet at Essex Town Hall parking lot, 29 West Avenue, Essex, for your assignment. Rain or shine. Refreshments served.

Essex Land Trust Annual Meeting

Tuesday, April 17 - 5:30 pm at Essex Meadows

Members and non-members of the Essex Land Trust are invited to attend its Annual Meeting. There is a charge for the buffet (5:30-6:30pm) but there is no charge for attending the business meeting that follows. Members automatically receive invitations. Non-members who wish to attend should contact

Peggy Tuttle, 860-767-7916. Parking spaces are limited; please carpool if possible. Essex Meadows is located at 30 Bokum Road in Essex.

Arbor Day Celebration

Saturday, April 28 - 9am-12pm at Essex Town Hall

Join us in planting a next generation of trees at Cross Lots and other ELT properties in celebration of Arbor Day. Learn from demonstrations of techniques for successful tree planting. This event will also include family friendly activities. All ages and abilities are welcome. This is an Essex Great Outdoors Pursuit event. Rain or shine. Park at Essex Town Hall, 29 West Avenue, Essex. Refreshments served.

Walk & Talk: Spring Bird Migrants

Saturday, May 5 - 8am-10am at Viney Hill Brook Park

Join Essex resident and birding enthusiast, Jim Denham, in exploring Viney Hill Brook Park in search of arriving bird migrants. Early May is an ideal time to watch the arrival and passage of forest dwelling birds as they set up nesting territories or bulk-up on their migration northward. Learn how to spot warblers, woodpeckers, sparrows and other avian denizens in one of our town's unique parks. Bring binoculars and wear good walking shoes. Meet at the parking lot next to the pond. This is an Essex Great Outdoors Pursuit event. The park is accessed off Hillside Drive in Essex. Rain or shine. Ample parking is available near the pond. Refreshments served.

Walk & Talk: Great Meadow Walk & Turtle Talk

Wednesday, June 27 - 5-7pm at Pettipaug Yacht Club

Enjoy one of the Land Trust's most stunning preserves with naturalist Phil Miller, leading our walk from 5:00-6:00 pm. At 6:15, Kasha Breau, Connecticut Audubon educator, will join us at Pettipaug Yacht Club for a presentation: "Tremendous Turtles of Connecticut." This is an Essex Great Outdoors Pursuit event. Rain or shine, with talk taking place indoors at PYC if weather is bad. BYO picnic to enjoy after the talks. Entrance to Pettipaug is located between 143 and 145 River Road, Essex.

ELT Needs You!

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization and the Land Trust continues to rely on our membership and the community for their most valuable asset, their time. We have many tasks including helping plan events, sitting on committees, hospitality and greeting at events, trail maintenance, office assistance, and mailings. Some of our specific needs are listed below.



Pick-up Trucks with Drivers: Spring clean-up of properties in March and April will generate brush, leaves and downed branches in our wooded preserves as well as general debris along the Connecticut River at Great Meadow and Thatchbed Island. A clean-up typically involves two to three trips to the Essex town dump and two to three hours of time. Additional volunteers help with the loading and unloading of brush. Having several vehicles available enables us to better plan the work in a short period of time. Can we count on you?

Photographers: We are looking to expand our pool of talented and experienced photographers to record the many diverse and exciting events scheduled for the

coming year. These include indoor events such as our annual meeting and our speaker programs; and outdoor events, such as hikes and trail maintenance and clean up. We can tailor an assignment to your schedule, as events occur on weekdays and evenings as well as weekends.



Video Editing: Volunteer needed to work on 2012 OspreyCam project. Opportunity for student internship with possibility of remuneration.

Assistant Steward: Our land Stewards are extraordinary people, but they need a hand – with walking the land, marking boundaries, establishing and maintaining trails, noting areas of concern (destruction of plants, pollution in streams and pools, dumping, litter, inappropriate use), coordinating special events (clean-up, brush removal, walks and talks), assessing storm damage. Are you interested?

Research Assistant: Assist with research projects utilizing public records and the Internet. Compile information using existing databases. This will require good Internet research skills and experience with database input and report generation.

Please email [volunteering @essexlandtrust.org](mailto:volunteering@essexlandtrust.org) or contact Nancy Rambeau at 860-767-1523 for further information or to express your interest.

Essex Woods & Waters is published in January, May & September. Jim Denham & Steve Knauth, Editors - Kathy LaBella, Photography - A.C. Proctor (Essex Printing), layout and printing. Funding for the publication is provided by the **Essex Savings Bank & Essex Financial Services**.

Board Members: Bob Nussbaum (President); Jim Denham (Vice President, Communications); Gudrun LeLash (Secretary); Mike Carlucci (Treasurer); Bill Grover (Past President); Paul Greenberg (Land Acquisition); Al Macgregor (Chief Steward); Suzy Burke (Nominations); Linda Levene (Membership); Peter Prichard (Development); Peggy Tuttle and Thea Putnam (Programs & Events); Nancy Rambeau (Volunteers)

Essex Land Trust, PO Box 373, Essex, CT 06426

www.essexlandtrust.org

Email: essexlandtrust@comcast.net



The Essex Land Trust is very appreciative of Essex Savings Bank and Essex Financial Services for their ongoing and generous support in underwriting the publication of *Essex Woods & Waters*.

Essex Printing

Essex Printing Company
Centerbrook, CT 06409
860 767 9087
www.essexprinting.com



HainesDesign
Essex CT 06426
860 581 8064
www.hainesdesign.com