



Connecting to Conservation

By Steve Knauth

The State Department of Environmental Protection has taken the trouble to quantify what many of us already know from experience.

Connecticut has a “remarkably diverse” range of landscapes and waterscapes for being the third-smallest state. From forested mountains in the northwest to coastal plains and salt marshes along Long Island Sound, it’s home to 84 species of mammals (from black bears to bats), 424 recorded species of birds (from eagles and falcons to the endangered Piping Plover) and 49 reptile and amphibian species (12 salamanders, 10 frogs, 14 snakes and four species of sea turtle).

Its 168 species of fish include salt-water and diadromous (salt/freshwater fish) as well as the fresh-water game fish populating the state’s 2,300 lakes, ponds and reservoirs. But, with Connecticut also being the third-most densely populated state in the nation, open space areas are increasingly facing problems. Everything from development to habitat degradation, fragmentation and loss, affect not only our resident species, but migratory species, which are losing the habitat needed to sustain them through their lengthy travels. “Overall diversity is in decline,” the DEP warns. “There are simply less kinds of animals around than there were, not so many years ago.”

In this light, the Land Trust’s 15 properties, totaling over 400 acres, represent an important resource for

conservation. They’re remarkably diverse, too, running from wooded uplands to tidal marshes and supporting all kinds of animals; deer, coyote, beaver, fox, raccoon, squirrel, rabbit; a wide variety of woodland birds; the eagles and osprey of the river and tidal marsh; and the meadow songbirds. Its wetlands and vernal pools, small streams and ponds are vital habitat for reptile and amphibian species.

The Land Trust takes a proactive role in conservation in a variety of ways, focusing on long-term land management and habitat preservation and enhancement. The recent plantings at Cross Lots are a

good example, says ELT president Bob Nussbaum. (In 2008, a hundred volunteers gathered to plant purple coneflower, creeping red fescue, little bluestem, Indian grass, partridge pea, big leaf lupine, Canada wild rye, New England aster, Virginia wild rye, common milkweed and black-eyed Susan.) The idea is to re-establish the former meadow habitat using native warm season grasses and perennials, which will provide food and cover for wildlife, the president says. The message here? You can’t just focus on dealing with invasives, such as bittersweet, for example. You have to look at what you want, too. And what you do want won’t just come back by itself, it needs to be restored.

The acquisition of land contiguous with Heron Pond Preserve, adding four acres to the 25-acre property, is another example of long-term conservation. The Land



Planting native grasses in Cross Lots



Vernal pools are vital habitat for amphibian species

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Trust's acquisition strategy focuses on extending existing properties whenever possible; creating "corridors" that can be used by wildlife. A thorough habitat assessment is part of every acquisition project, which is also used as part of the grant application process.

Heron Pond will be the "test case" for another ambitious ELT project, the creation of a property management project with the guidance of Dr. Juliana Barrett, of UCONN's Sea Grant Program and the Center for Land Use Education and Research. Dr. Barrett will assist in writing a habitat-based management plan for Heron Pond Preserve, to guide our management of the property for the next 20 years [and] serve as a model for other land stewards along Connecticut's coast. Heron Pond has been selected because it is an example of a rapidly dwindling habitat known as coastal forest. Another example of coastal forest habitat is The Preserve, located primarily in Old Saybrook and the largest remaining coastal forest of its kind in Connecticut.

Nussbaum and ELT members Al Macgregor and Chet Arnold recently attended UCONN's seminar on habitat-based management plans. It focused on how to develop the plan, on how to go about the preservation and enhancement of native plant and animal communities, serving as a prologue to the Heron Pond project, which involves doing a specific plan for a specific property.

Long-term conservation requires a simple shift in

perspective. For day-to-day stewardship activities, the focus is on which trails need to be cleared, where leaves need to be picked up, fields mown. "For habitat-based planning," says Nussbaum, "the question is - what do we want this to look like a 100 years from now, for our children's children? And, what do we have to do now for that to happen?"



Heron Pond's watershed is fed by several streams

In summary, land trusts will continue having a critical role in preserving open space but increasingly will need to be actively involved in planning and overseeing habitat management. For further information on this subject, log onto the UCONN's Nemo website: <http://www.nemo.uconn.edu/>.

Nancy Rambeau Elected to ELT Board

The Land Trust Board has elected Nancy Rambeau to join the Board and take over responsibility for the Volunteer portfolio. Nancy is replacing Thea Putnam who will now work with Peggy Tuttle on the Events & Activities Committee. Along with husband George (Steward of ELT's Great Meadow property), Nancy moved to Ivoryton in 1980. Retiring after 35 years in commercial lending at banks in California and Connecticut, most recently in Bridgeport at People's United, Nancy's career included responsibilities as a loan officer, a financial analyst, a credit manager, and a training manager. In joining the Land Trust Board, Nancy is looking forward to 'giving back' for the pleasure and enjoyment her many hikes on ELT properties have given her.



Bartlett Tree Experts Supporting the Land Trust

On December 9th, a three man crew from Bartlett Tree Experts provided volunteer arborist services at the Cross Lots Preserve. Three dead trees

were removed, and support cables were installed on a red maple. The wood chips produced will be used at Cross Lots to help control trail erosion.



Employees of Bartlett Tree Experts providing volunteer services in support of their corporate membership

If your company is interested in obtaining corporate membership through volunteer services, please contact Peter Prichard at 860-581-8888.

In Memory of Henry Towers

By Carol MacElwee

Henry Towers, 89, a prominent Essex resident for more than 60 years, who died on October 10th of this year, was either a visionary or a man with superb instincts who left an amazing impact on this town. His legacy is appreciated by many Essex residents and nowhere was this more evident than at his memorial service at St. John's Episcopal Church where at least 150 people came together to honor him.

Henry was a special friend of the Essex Land Trust as a founding director in 1968 and its second president from 1970-72. In business he was vice president of manufacturing for the Pratt Read Company in Ivoryton for 15 years.

As we reflect on his sixty years in Essex, we know he loved its small town character and did much to preserve it. Without Henry, often known as "Hank," there might not be a Cross Lots, a Great Meadow or a Canfield Meadow Woods.

Many community leaders worked hard to preserve these properties, but Henry convinced his friends, Harriett Cheney Downing, Earl Canfield, and others of the importance of open space. "It was Henry's enthusiasm for land preservation and the Land Trust that made the difference and he infused others with this spirit," commented Al Macgregor, past ELT president and current Chief Steward.

Mrs. Downing agreed to leave her 16 acre beloved estate on West Avenue to the Essex Land Trust if Henry would agree to be its executor. He and Mrs. Downing decided that an endowment to maintain the property was necessary so the proceeds from the sale of a nearby servants' house was used for that purpose. According to David Hyde, former ELT treasurer and board member for many years, "Without the help and guidance from Henry Towers, it is hard to say that Cross Lots would be what it is today...there were many obstacles to overcome but Henry smoothed them over and kept the ball rolling."

Born and raised in Kew Gardens, Queens, Henry was a graduate of the New Hampton School and Colgate University after which he served in the US Navy as a navigator with the amphibious forces in the Mediterranean. He moved to Essex in 1949 and lived in several houses before building a magnificent

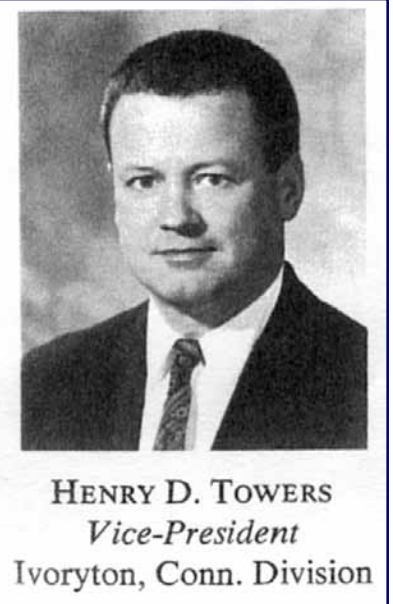
contemporary home in 1957 off Book Hill Road surrounded by beautiful woodlands. The house has a spectacular view of the Connecticut River all the way to Long Island. This home over the years has seen many cocktail gatherings for the Land Trust, Child and Family Agency and other important causes. Henry's partner in life was Shavaun Robinson Towers known to everyone as Chevy. Chevy predeceased Henry in 2009.

Henry's daughter, Shavaun Towers Bennett "Shaunie" grew up in that home. Her love of the property and the house inspired her to become a landscape architect specializing in landscape design and site planning. Her firm, Towers|Golde, in New Haven, will soon celebrate its 30th anniversary and has won many honors and awards for its work.

Henry's other daughter, Deirdre, has lived in New York City for 40 years and has had an impressive career in the world of dance as a writer, choreographer, and film producer. For the past 17 years she has been the producer of the 39 year old international Dance on Camera festival co-sponsored by the Film Society of Lincoln Center.

The death of Henry Deen Towers is a great loss not only to his family and friends but also to the community. His life is a testament and an inspiration that shows what a difference one person can make. As close friend Henry Robinson remarked, "He was the ideal involved American citizen – an accomplished businessman, a wonderful friend – indeed, just a hell of a great guy."

Contributors to this article include most importantly Barbara Edwards but also Barbara Hughes, Cemmy Ryland, Jeff Lovelace, Hans Ullstein, Al Macgregor, Jean Leuchtenburg, Shavaun Towers Bennett, Debbie Weinstein, Woody Comstock.



The Essex Land Trust is always grateful for donations made in memory of former members and in 2010 a total 59 donations were received. A memorial donation to the Essex Land Trust offers a thoughtful, caring way to remember a friend or loved one while contributing to the Land Trust's mission of preserving the character of our community by preserving its open space. In 2010, donations were made in memory of Richard Dempsey, Raymond Gastil, Wendy Huckel, Kenneth Kells and Henry Towers.

Volunteers Celebrated

With approximately 75 participants attending, the Land Trust held its second annual Volunteer Appreciation event at the Pettipaug Yacht Club. A remarkably pleasant fall day made the occasion all the more festive as guests enjoyed snacks, beverages and a remarkable setting. All those attending received ELT mugs and shopping bags. The Land Trust continues to rely on its membership and the community

to support its activities. There are many tasks ranging from helping to plan events, sitting on committees, hospitality and greeting at events, to photography, trail maintenance, office assistance, and mailings. Please contact Nancy Rambeau at 860-767-1523 or nmcrum@comcast.net if you would like to become a more active part of our team.



Mystery Photo

We're on a hill overlooking Essex village, around November of 1905. Some 60 years later, a piece of land in this picture will become the first property and of cornerstone of the Essex Land Trust. Do you recognize it?

Answer: It's Thatchbed Island, stretching away, beyond Middle Cove, to the south as we look down the Connecticut River towards Saybrook. The stak and buildings of the Harriman wood-turning factory can be seen, about where today's Essex Yacht Club is situated.



Photo credit: courtesy of the Essex Historical Society



By Steve Knauth

Heron Pond Preserve has been open for barely four years, but it's already established itself as a pearl in the Essex Land Trust string. Acquired through the private development of the surrounding property, this rare coastal forest habitat is home to three streams, stands of maturing young oak and beech, and every kind of flora from stream-side skunk cabbage to fern beds to laurel groves among the rocky outcroppings.

Steward Nick Fomenko, 32, and his wife, Stephanie, oversee the grounds, along with their young son, Logan, just about a year old. "I got involved with this sort of thing in Guilford, with the Guilford Land Conservation Trust and Westwoods [park]," he says. "When we moved here, I joined the Land Trust. And, I happen to live right next door, so being a steward was an easy move."

The trail system is simple. The Yellow trail bisects the preserve, running from the paved parking lot almost due south for a bit less than a half-mile its terminus. The Green, Blue and Red trails branch off in various directions, each rewarding the hiker with a different kind of terrain and accompanying flora and fauna. "It's a diverse piece of property," says Fomenko. "There are some modest ascents and descents, but it's pretty easy walking." Former pasture land, it's covered now with young forest, including stands of maturing oak and beech.



The property includes two prominent streams and a smaller one, forming the watershed for Heron Pond below. These watercourses are vital to the area wildlife, which includes deer, wild turkey and the occasional coyote, along with a variety of birds and smaller animals. But they can also prove troublesome, the steward says; two bridges washed away in the March

[2010] rain storm and subsequent flooding. Volunteers, including Chief Steward Al Macgregor, repaired the damage.

Tall evergreens greet the hiker at the entrance. Following the pond on the left, the Yellow trail climbs to an oak grove, with uplands on the right and the remains of a cedar grove opposite, amongst the other deadfall – and there's plenty of it. "Keeping the trails clear takes some work," says the steward, who walks the paths once or twice a week, and after storms. A volunteer-powered general cleanup on Earth Day, 2008, was a big help. "Bob Graulich, he was the steward before me, kept the trails in great shape," says Fomenko. "So, I try to do the same."

At the junction with the Green trail, which ascends a rocky outcropping, the Yellow trail approaches the first of Heron Pond's streams. Crossing a footbridge, we continue up a long, gentle slope, entering a stand of young birch trees, green and sun-dappled. Signs of a road bed emerge, a vestige of John Clark Pratt and his family, who had a homestead on the land. Crossing the ridge top, the Yellow trail descends to a stream crossing and to its end, at a junction with the Red trail.

The Red trail turns north, back to the stream, crossing a bridge and starting a gentle climb, once again on the old road, winding through a stand of nicely-maturing birch trees and sturdy young oaks. The Blue trail offers a



different way back, following the third of Heron Pond's streams, a slow, winding waterway which passes through a variegated wetland, well-populated by lowland plants in spring and summer. It soon meets up with the Yellow trail, which leads back to the parking lot.

The total distance, maybe three-quarters of a mile, makes for an easy half-hour woodland walk through a fascinating little watershed. "The trails are pretty well-used," Fomenko says. "It's a pretty easy hike, a good one for families with young kids. I can see Logan running through these woods in a few years."

[The Land Trust recently increased the size of Heron Pond to 29 acres after acquiring 4 acres for \$20,000.]

Coming Events – Mark Your Calendar!



Together with this mailing of *Essex Woods & Waters* Winter Edition we are enclosing a copy of the Land Trust's Events & Activities for 2011.

The enclosed brochure shows the events, dates and venue for a calendar packed 24 events during 2011. Program Chair Peggy Tuttle has put together an exciting, entertaining and educational program. There are events for all ages and interests. So be sure to **Mark Your Calendar!**



Check out the Essex Land Trust website's **New & Notable** tab for news items of interest to all.... including information on the upcoming **Photo Contest**, an article on *Cross Lots Before It Became a Park* by Eve Potts of the Essex Historical Society and a **Guide to New England Bats** in 'Where Have All The Bats Gone?'

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