



Friends of the OSWEGATCHIE HILLS NATURE PRESERVE

Newsletter – Summer 2019

A Message from the President

As I step back into the role of president of the Friends, I am keenly aware of the “big shoes” I am filling. First there was our beloved Marvin Schutt, whose vision and perseverance led to the creation of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. Next there was Mike Dunn, whose energy and passion for preserving this special place continues to this day. And most recently there was Greg Decker, who, even before he was president, devoted, and continues to devote, countless hours to ensuring that the preserve is thoughtfully managed and maintained for the thousands who visit each year.

In addition to these amazing leaders, many others give their time and talent. Raechel Killeen has steadfastly recorded minutes since the Friends’ was first organized. Jane Templeton pays our bills and carefully tracks our budget. Dave Hughes has carried out the important role of vice president for many years and is always willing to take on “other duties as assigned.” Caren Linden, membership chair, deposits the many checks we receive from you, our generous members, and ensures that they are gratefully acknowledged. Rich Gallagher spent hours trekking in the Hills in order to compile a comprehensive Terrestrial Ecology Survey. Thanks to this mighty effort, we know that the preserve abounds with wildlife and supports a healthy ecosystem.

There is Franz Edson, who enthusiastically agreed with Greg that we needed to put out a better “welcome mat” at the main entrance and provided lots of engineering knowledge and muscle power for the construction of the beautiful new bridge that now greets visitors. Liz Paganetti, the creative spark behind the 10th anniversary celebration of the Hills, now uses that same energy to produce our outstanding newsletters with the help of Rich Gallagher. Don Danila, who sits not only on the Friends’ board but also on the East Lyme Conservation Commission and several other conservation-related committees, provides valuable insight and guidance on environmental matters. Mike Sheehan, a local attorney, has joined with Mike Dunn to advise and guide us on land acquisition issues. Tara Borden has helped us sponsor informative programs about the Hills at the library, even before she became a member of the board. George Milne, an honorary member of the board, can always be counted on for his sage advice and support. And last, but definitely not least, is Paul Whitehouse, who grew up in the Hills and has been in the fight to save this precious resource from the very beginning.

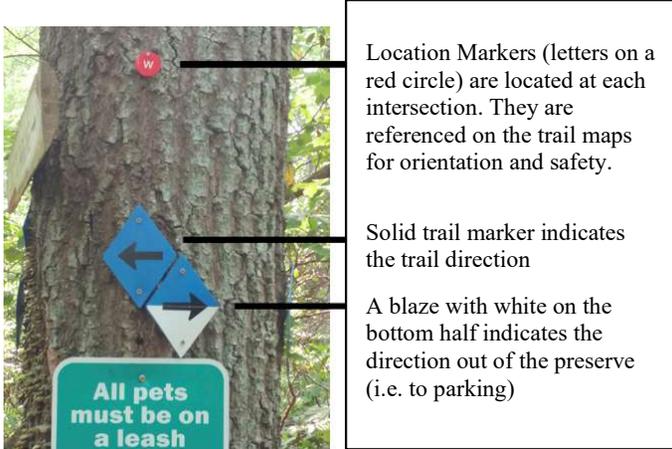
I think we have all heard the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, in East Lyme, it takes a whole board, a whole team of dedicated volunteers, to ensure that the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve will be here for many generations to come. If you see any of them in the Hills or just around town, please be sure to say “thank you.” We are so very lucky to have them.

Kris Lambert

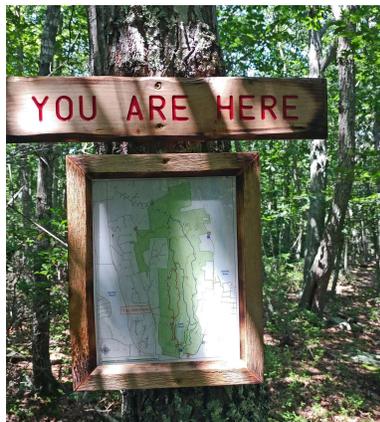
Trail Info

Location Markers

At each intersection you may have noticed small red metal discs with letters. These recently installed discs serve as location makers to assist emergency personnel if needed. Because they are also referenced on the new trail maps, hikers can use them to help identify at which intersection they are.



Also, as part of the upgrade, “You Are Here” signs and framed weatherproof maps like the photo below were installed at 4 key intersections to help enhance a hiker’s knowledge of their location in the Preserve. If the experimental weatherproofing holds up to the weather, more of these will be installed.



Least Steep Trails

A local term sometimes used for the entire geological area boarding the west shore of the upper Niantic River is “**The Hills**”, referring to the Oswegatchie Hills ridgeline. And there is a reason it’s called that. It’s hilly and sections between two ridges can be steep and the terrain challenging to climb for some hikers. Those seeking a more level terrain often ask how to avoid the steep inclines. There are some sections of the trails that are fairly flat, but they will eventually lead to an incline especially if doing a loop trail. An “out and back” walk on flatter sections can be done and we recommend the following trail sections if easier is your preference.

Try the first section of the Blue Trail going north, which you can access by going over the bridge at the OHNP Main Entrance at Veterans Field complex off Penn. Ave., Route 161. One can experience some of the beauty of the Preserve on this first section, stop at and overlook of Clark Pond and then return when it becomes too challenging.

Another flat trail section can be accessed by taking Oswegatchie Hills Road (to the right of Veterans Memorial Drive) and then going left on Quarry Dock Road. There is a small parking lot at the end (entrance #4 on the trail map), and simply follow the Yellow Trail. The beginning is an incline but not too steep. Once you reach the surface granite quarry you can explore that area and then continue on to where the Yellow intersects the Blue Trail. Turn south and left to walk the eastern ridgeline and see some of the pitch pine ecosystem that thrives on the ridgetops. Bluebirds often frequent the area in spring/summer. One can walk for some distance before encountering an incline

Fun Facts

- FOHNP was founded on 4/20/2001; official opening of the preserve in October 2007.
- Currently the nature preserve consists of 7 miles of trails and 457 acres
- Mount Tabor is the highest point at 280 feet, populated by scrub oak and pitch pines.
- In 2008 two Wood Duck Nesting Boxes were installed on Clark Pond; in 2012 broods from both boxes produced approximately 30 fledglings and continue to thrive
- Many bluebird pairs live in the Hills, some lucky enough to call the 7 bluebird boxes home
- March 2019 voted into the TOP 3 ‘Best Places To Take a Hike’ by The Day’s Readers Poll
- There are several translations for the Native American Iroquois word "Oswegatchie." Some define it as "black water" or "black river," while others say it means "at the outlet." But the translation that works the best for the nature preserve called Oswegatchie overlooking the Niantic River is "coming or going around a hill."

Frog Watch Project in the Hills 2018 and 2019 Observations

By Don Danila and Susan Gonzalez

FrogWatch is a nationally recognized program connecting people with nature and providing valuable data on frogs and toads found throughout the U.S., many of which are decreasing in number and range. In early winter of 2018, Don and Susan (current and former Board member, respectively) were trained in the protocols of FrogWatch USA at Mystic Aquarium and passed an online test showing that each could recognize the calls of all 11 frogs and toads found in CT. FrogWatch protocols call for 3-minute observations to be made beginning 0.5 hour after sunset and recording all species heard and the intensity of their calls.



The elusive wood frog

We made observations once a month, from April through July in 2018 and March through July of this year at six sites in East Lyme, including three in the Preserve. Our Preserve sites were Clark Pond by the beginning of the Red Trail and sites overlooking both Wetland (WL) #20, located off the Red Trail Overlook spur, and WL #24, found off the Green Trail (2019 only). Both WL sites are found in the southern portion

of the Preserve (see Gallagher 2011; O.H.N.P. Terrestrial Ecology Survey). At least four frogs use Clark Pond for reproduction with the spring peeper and gray treefrog particularly abundant in April and May. Both green and bullfrogs are commonly heard calling in Clark Pond from May through July. During April the WL sites had abundant spring peepers and we heard at least some gray treefrogs in WL #20 in 2018. But we heard no calls emanating from either WL site after May. Our listening posts are located on small cliffs above each WL and being present at night we could not see the site to know if they had sufficient water to attract frogs or toads after early spring.

We were particularly frustrated by our lack of wood frog observations, even though we know them to be present in the Preserve and breeding in various WLs. Certainly, our late start in 2018 was a factor, so we started 2019 observation in March when others told us about hearing the “quacking” wood frog calls during the day in the northern portion of the Preserve. One of us (Gonzalez) also heard wood frogs in a WL at Millstone Power Station during the day, but not at night, so perhaps we need to ignore the FrogWatch protocol and make both day and night observations in early spring.

We are also interested in knowing if both the American and Fowler’s toads are reproducing in the Preserve. The former is known to be present and the latter has been recorded in the nearby towns of Waterford and East Haddam by Klemens (1993; Amphibians and Reptiles of Connecticut and Adjacent Regions). But we heard no toads calling in either year. According to Klemens, toads tend to breed and call en masse during the first warm spring rains during March and April. When we continue FrogWatch sampling in 2020 we will recognize this fact and attempt to make our observations accordingly. Stay tuned.

Results				
Month	Location	Species	2018 Calling Intensity [a]	2019 Calling Intensity [a]
March	Clark Pond	Spring Peeper	n/a	2
	WL #20	None	n/a	-
April	WL #24	None	n/a	-
	Clark Pond	Spring peeper	3	3
	Clark Pond	Gray treefrog	1	-
	WL #20	Spring peeper	2	3
May	WL #20	Gray treefrog	1	-
	WL #24	Spring peeper	-	3
	Clark Pond	Spring peeper	3	3
	Clark Pond	Green frog	1	1
June	Clark Pond	Am. bullfrog	1	1
	WL #20	Spring peeper	2	[b]
	Clark Pond	Gray treefrog	3	3
	Clark Pond	Green frog	1	2
	Clark Pond	Am. bullfrog	1	2
	Clark Pond	Spring peeper	-	2
July	WL #20	None	-	-
	WL #24	None	-	-
	Clark Pond	Green frog	1	2
	Clark Pond	Am. bullfrog	1	1
	WL #20	None	-	[c]

[a] 1 = individuals counted with space between calls
 2 = calls overlapping, but individuals could be counted
 3 = full chorus with calls continuous and overlapping
 [b] WL (wetland) sites could not be sampled due to a thunderstorm
 [c] WL (wetland) sites dropped as we presumed no activity there

Southington Scouts Hike the Hills



Southington Cub Scouts and parents hiked the Red trail and learned about the wildlife in The Hills

On Sunday, July 8, Pack 8 of the Southington Cub Scouts visited Oswegatchie Hills as part of their requirements to advance to the next level. Their visit focused on two specific requirements:

- Watch at least four wild creatures in the wild. Describe where you saw them and what they were doing.
- Learn about aquatic ecosystems and wetlands, and the important role they play in supporting wildlife and humans, and ways you can help.

The group was led by FOHNP Board Member Rich Gallagher. The hike began at Clark Pond, where the group observed, and listened to, both bullfrogs and green frogs, and watched numerous species of dragonflies, damselflies, and aquatic insects, such as water striders and whirligig beetles. They also observed a female and juvenile wood duck and learned about the Preserve's successful nesting program for these special birds. The group then visited three wetlands located on the Red Trail, where they learned about the role they play in providing wildlife habitat, flood control and water quality.

Scott Smailes, parent of one of the scouts and coordinator of the hike, said *"The scouts, and parents, had a great time hiking the beautiful trails and learning about the environment and its history. Rich was a wealth of knowledge and helped the boys fulfill their requirements, and much more. We were very impressed with the care taken of the land and the effort Rich put into the tour and would certainly recommend Oswegatchie Hills to anybody, not just scouts, looking for a beautiful place to visit and hike."*

Fun & Easy Birding Tools

The Hills are alive with beautiful birds. There are excellent tools available on your phone or laptop to help identify birds on your next hike. Two that are worth your consideration are the Audubon Bird Guide (123MB) and the Cornell Labs 'Merlin' (590MB). Both are available from either Google Play Store or Apple App Store, are free and built for all experience levels. They help with bird identification – simply enter information such as location, date, size, color, habitat, activity, wing and tail shape etc. You will be presented with photos of best possible matches. Once you identify the bird, you can play audio clips of the songs and hope to attract the bird to come investigate. They also offer field guides, providing detailed descriptions, migration, habitat feeding behavior and more.

There are a few differences between these apps. The Audubon Bird Guide allows you to keep track of the birds you see, to be notified if other bird watchers in your area spot a species you are interested in, and to share your photos with others in the community. In addition, you can explore local area hotspots to see postings of recent sightings. Cornell's Merlin can help to identify birds by photos, but the Photo ID feature requires an additional large download of 119MB of data.

East Lyme Day



Board member Mike Sheehan shares information at East Lyme Day

Keep Up to Date by visiting
www.oswhills.org
and following us on [www.Facebook.com/FOHNP](https://www.facebook.com/FOHNP)

Please be sure we have your correct email address. The newsletter will be emailed twice a year to keep you informed while saving money and paper.