

OPEN SPACES

STAMFORD LAND CONSERVATION TRUST, INC.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." — Margaret Mead

SPRING 2023

MUSHROOM MADNESS!



All about mushroom foraging and other happenings at the SLCT

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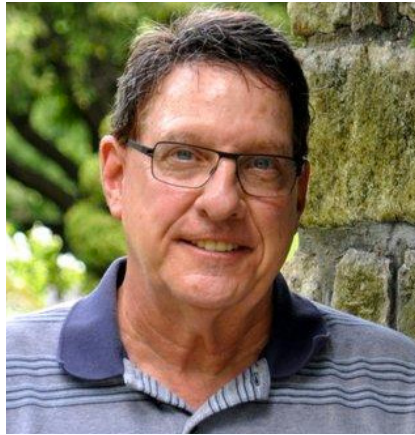
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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

“Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.” ~John Muir



Harry Day, Stamford Land
Conservation Trust President

Dear Friends of SLCT,

In my last letter to you I shared that SLCT was excited to be on the precipice of closing one of the most important acquisitions in its history, the purchase of 64 acres adjacent to our existing Helen Altschul Preserve.

As can happen with any real estate transaction, there have been delays. While disappointing, we understand patience is a virtue and, importantly, the acquisition remains on track! We hope to have good news to share before Spring turns to Summer.

We've stayed busy while waiting for the acquisition to close. You'll see later in this newsletter we've recently added the Gene Wilder Preserve to our family of stewarded properties. And we have another 3-acre donation pending. Both properties are heavily forested, contain wetlands and support a wide variety of wildlife.

We also have some special stewardship projects underway. The most challenging is

erecting an Osprey Tower at our Wallacks Point preserve!

Spring is one of our favorite times of year. The preserves are filled with the sounds of nature waking up and literally coming alive with new growth. It's a great time to get acquainted with our properties with walking trails and we encourage you to come out for a hike.

While you're in one of our preserves, you might want to take a page from this newsletter and do a little mushroom foraging!

Thank you all for your continuing interest and support. As I said last letter, it takes a village. The SLCT is fortunate to have a growing village of donors and volunteers. We could not do what we do without you.

Finally, please join us at one of our upcoming stewardship events. You can check out what we're up to by visiting our website, www.stamfordland.org.

Warm regards,

Harry Day
President



INTRODUCING THE GENE WILDER PRESERVE!



The Stamford Land Conservation Trust is excited to announce the creation of the Gene Wilder Preserve, a 5.2-acre parcel of land on the corner of Scofieldtown and Chestnut Hill Roads in North Stamford. This is the SLCT's 47th preserve.

The property was gifted to the SLCT by Wilder's wife Karen Wilder, so that it can be protected and preserved in perpetuity. Karen lived with Gene in an adjacent home for years.

The preserve is a naturally wooded area with a combination of wetlands and forest that are home to a wide range of plant and animal species. It is close to the Chestnut Hill Bird Sanctuary where SLCT holds a conservation easement from the City of Stamford.

Wilder, a noted writer, actor, comedian, and filmmaker known for his roles in "Blazing Saddles," "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory," and "Young Frankenstein," among many others, was a longtime Stamford resident. He passed away in 2016 at the age of 83.

It's fitting that there is now a preserve named after him in the city he loved so much.

In a 1999 New York Times article, Wilder spoke about Stamford and why he decided to live here. "I don't want to live anywhere else for the rest of my life," Wilder said. "I like the feeling of you're in the city, but you're sort of in the country... It's a small town, yet it has everything."

**It's fitting that there is now a preserve named
after him in the city he loved so much.**

PERCY LEE LANGSTAFF, 1929-2022

— IN MEMORIAM —



We said goodbye to Percy Lee Langstaff in 2022. Percy was the heart of the Stamford Land Conservation Trust for over 25 years, serving 23 years as President. Without her single-minded focus and determination, we would not be able to proudly say that, today, SLCT stewards over 450 acres of open space in Stamford.

We, and the greater Stamford community, have a lot to be grateful for when it comes to Percy. One of her favorite quotes, and one she lived by, was from Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

To learn more about Percy, please see her profile in our Spring 2021 Newsletter (www.stamfordland.org)

MEET A PRESERVE – SQUIRREL RUN



The Stamford Land Conservation Trust's Squirrel Run Preserve is a 13 acre woodland tract with frontage on Riverbank Road in North Stamford.

The preserve is best accessed by parking on Ridgecrest Road and walking to a gated entrance 300 feet south on Riverbank Road. A sign identifies the property. The property was originally donated to The Nature Conservancy in 1972 and transferred to the Stamford Land Conservation Trust in 1991 for local management.

Squirrel Run is forested and is comprised of two diverse large tracts connected by a 20-yard-wide strip of land. It borders two small ponds that provide habitat for waterfowl and amphibians. The northern section is divided into two relatively flat areas by a rock ledge; the eastern portion is elevated.

The northern section of the preserve is now wooded but there are signs it was cleared sometime in the last 50 years. There are remnants of prior plantings including evergreen red cedars which can be seen in the drone photograph above. The property boundaries are marked

on the north and east sides by fencing, and on the south side by an old stone wall. More stone walls crisscross the property.

Traversing from the northern to the southern section requires passing a steep ledge and is best done along the fence at the eastern edge. The southern area includes rougher terrain and a more mature forest that provides a wealth of habitat for mammals and reptiles alike.

Although there is no formal trail system, Squirrel Run is open to the public for exploration and enjoyment.

**We encourage you to come see
the Squirrel Run Preserve for yourself.**

A CHAT WITH AMATEUR MYCOLOGIST AUBREY CARTER



Aubrey Carter is the Stamford Land Conservation Trust's Chief Steward and an amateur mycologist (mushroom expert). We sat down with Aubrey to learn about how he became interested in mushrooms and why they fascinate him.

Q: Aubrey, when did you become interested in mycology?

A: Early in the pandemic I read a book called *Entangled Life*, by Merlin Sheldrake. It's an amazing book all about fungi. Most fungi live out of sight, they are a massively diverse group of organisms that support nearly all living systems. I was fascinated by this concept and started doing more research. Since then, I have immersed myself in the topic — reading books, going to conferences, attending seminars and lectures, and meeting other mycologists.

Q: What makes mushrooms so important in our ecosystem?

A: They contribute to the function of healthy forest ecosystems by forming symbiotic associations with plants. They help decompose organic matter and contribute to nutrient cycling and they provide food for animals. What we are learning now about the natural

world challenges the idea of individual organisms. Mushrooms are a big part of the complex ecosystems in forests.

Q: Mushrooms have other important uses for humans. Can you list those?

A: Mushrooms are important in cuisine, and that is true for cultures worldwide. They also have important medicinal properties, some of which we are only now discovering. Mushrooms are also beautiful, and inspire all types of art. Finally, some mushrooms are psychedelics, and are beginning to be mainstreamed as treatments for PTSD and other mental health conditions.

Q: If someone wants to start foraging for mushrooms can they do that here in Stamford?

A: Absolutely! Our forests are full of mushrooms — spring and fall are a great time to try and find them. Go to one of the Land Trust preserves and look around. Bring a guide to identify them, as well as a knife and a container to help in your foraging. But don't eat them till you have absolutely identified which mushroom you have. There are poisonous mushrooms in our woods.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

A: Yes. If you go foraging bring along the kids. They are great at spotting mushrooms!



MUSHROOM MADNESS

By Vicki Wray



When I think about wild mushrooms, the first thing that comes to mind is dinner at my grandmother's house. She was a great believer in collecting her own mushrooms – known as foraging – and for that reason we were always skeptical about the wisdom of dining with her. Thankfully we all survived, and today mushroom foraging has gained in popularity in Connecticut and elsewhere, due in part to the outdoor time many of us spent during the pandemic.

The Amazing and Versatile Mushroom

For centuries, humans have used mushrooms for a variety of purposes. In addition to food, mushrooms have provided humans with medicine, cultural symbols, art inspiration, and for some a psychotropic path to enlightenment. Certain varieties have also been used for poison.

Fungi, which produce mushrooms, are also critically important to most earthbound ecosystems. They provide plants with life-sustaining mineral nutrients and help decompose their remains — recycling both organic and inorganic byproducts as the fungi grow and reproduce.

Foraging for Mushrooms

You can find a variety of edible mushrooms at the local market, but to experience their beauty and diversity take to the woods and start foraging. For some inspiration, visit the YouTube channel of young Eli Galaise (@thelittlemycologist2342), whose interest in mushrooms started at the age of 6 during the pandemic. Or better yet, try a mushroom walk led by the SLCT's Chief Steward, Aubrey Carter, another passionate, amateur mycologist. Check our website (stamfordland.org) for our events calendar and see the article on page 5 for more on Aubrey.

There are thousands of types of mushrooms growing in Connecticut. They range from the deadly Destroying Angel to those cited in *Mushrooms of Connecticut* as among the top edibles: Morels, Oysters, Chicken of the Woods, Chanterelles, Black Trumpets, Shaggy Mane, Hen of the Woods, Hedgehogs, and Lions Mane.

According to Aubrey, morels are the most desirable edible spring mushroom, though they can be difficult to find. Chicken of the Woods appear later and are easier to spot and identify. Aubrey cautions against eating any wild mushroom without an absolute positive identification. Numerous resources can help with that, or you can email a photo of your find to Aubrey at aubcarte@gmail.com.

STAMFORD LAND CONSERVATION TRUST CONTACTS

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Address: 22 First Street, Stamford CT

Getting Started

If you have a bit of mushroom madness, all you need to start foraging are some keen observation skills, a quality knife and a basket or mesh bag for your finds. You might also consider a field guide, like *Mushrooms of the Northeastern United States and Eastern Canada*, an identification app like iNaturalist, or an in-person guide. As your interest grows, there are associations and written materials to deepen your knowledge, some of which are listed on this page.

Happy hunting!



Other resources:

Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds & Shape Our Futures by Merlin Sheldrake

Mushroom Monday newsletter written by Aubrey Carter (mushroom-Monday.com)

Here's What You'll Need to Start Foraging Mushrooms (<http://bit.ly/3lhL6ZH>)

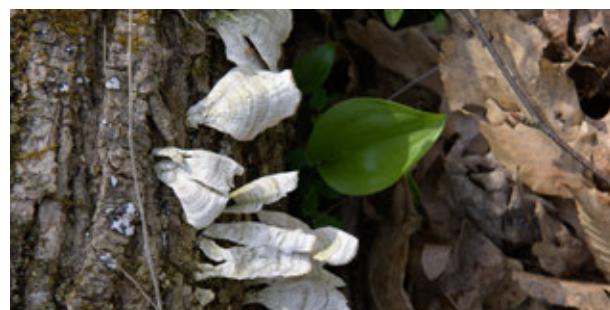
A Beginners Guide to Foraging for Wild Mushrooms (<http://bit.ly/3FqZtlg>)

North American Mycological Association (<https://namyco.org/>)

Connecticut Valley Mycological Society (CVMS) (<http://cvmsfungi.org/>)

Mushrooms of CT (<http://bit.ly/3YWvxnP>)

Fungi, which produce mushrooms, are critically important to most earthbound ecosystems.



STAMFORD LAND CONSERVATION TRUST

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CALLING VOLUNTEERS & NATURE LOVERS

Join us for an upcoming event in one of
our preserves:

Earth Day Knotweed Removal and Native Wildflower Planting at Woods End Preserve

Saturday, April 22 @ 10AM

Mushroom Walk for Walk Your Land Trust Series at Altschul

Saturday, June 10 @ 10AM

Planting with Pollinator Pathways at Woods End Preserve

Saturday, June 24 @ 10AM

Go to our website at stamfordland.com for details and to sign up.