

# If it walks like a... & acts like a...

by Harry Spring

**Turkey!** What an amazing species! More and more frequent sightings of this, our most recently reintroduced native animal, offer a new meaning to the term "birding". Not only are they conspicuous for their size but for their behaviors as well. Flocking is not just a "bunch" of turkeys traveling together. There appears to be a great deal more to it than that. The following series of observations are presented as just that - observations. We leave it to the reader to interpret.

The saga begins in June of '98 with the arrival of mom and pop turkey, their three sons and two daughters. Having found a supply of feed, they returned regularly giving an opportunity to watch behavior development. Dad always led the way, the five fledglings marched single file and mom watchfully brought up the rear. The tom would eat a bit and then move off to the side to act as sentry while the family fed. Eventually he would come in and mom would go on sentry duty while the tom fed and the family would then go marching off into the woods. As the summer wore on, discipline began to break down and the arrival turned into a free-for all. By early winter the fledges matured and the tom and the boys began to come and go together while the hen and her daughters did the same.

In the Spring of '99, mom and pop arrived with their new brood, each of the three sons and their mates and one of the daughters and a stranger tom all arrived with their respective broods - totaling twenty-seven turkeys. This is reproductive success! The original parents had seven fledges - two young toms and a hen being considerably smaller than the others and who began maturation later. Are they a second hatching? If these were humans, would we call the group a tribe? Behavior would indicate so. The now grandfather and father again was clearly in charge. His sentry duty was nerve wracking. He often would perch on a bird bath while the group fed. Occasionally he would flap down to break up a squabble between the "cousin" fledglings. His sons had jurisdiction within their own broods but the hens seemed to have authority to discipline chicks from anyone's group. Often one hen would control her own and another hen's chicks.

In late Autumn, as these chicks began to mature, the flock again separated into a "boys' club" and a "girl's club. The toms came as a group, fed, did some sparring and a lot of elegant displaying in the typical Thanksgiving "I'm just so good looking I can hardly stand it" poses. Quite a scene when there are ten or eleven mature and young toms all strutting about. The hens would come as a group, feed and then go on back to the woods.

There are now three bachelor toms and one "bachelorette" hen. These come together as a feeding group. The bachelors are bedraggled. They spend a lot of time sparring or outright fighting. The others come in what seems to be random order but from different quarters in the woods come the gobble-gobble of territory establishment. I wonder what June will bring.

newsletter produced by Olander Design

# KUDOS KUDOS

Tom Morganti

Don Cole, who has served the Land Trust as Treasurer for many years, has chosen to step down from that office in order to explore other retirement options. Don's excellent and meticulous management of ALT funds has been an invaluable service to the Trust. In addition to his fiscal managerial skill, Don has brought thoughtful, insightful questioning and guidance to ALT Directors' discussions and has been instrumental in developing the philosophy of the Trust. Don has agreed to continue contributing to Directors' debates and will, then, continue to have a hand in guiding our Land Trust.

Bob Garvin has chosen to relinquish his seat on the Board of Directors after many years of service. He has provided guidance, penetrating questioning of policies, intentions and outcomes of ALT activities, often playing "devil's advocate" thereby stimulating lively

discussions and adding another dimension to the Board's deliberations. Bob's dedicated guidance will be missed.

Ron Leathers has also elected to step down from his post on the Board of Directors in order to devote more time to professional activities. He, too, has offered invaluable services, knowledge and professional insight to the Trust. His years of service to the trust are greatly appreciated and will be missed.

Although these accolades are brief, it is clear that each of these members has brought a variety of talents to the Trust. Members of the ALT as well as the present AND future citizens of Avon owe a great debt of gratitude to these individuals. Their concern for this community and their willingness to work to maintain it has enabled the Trust to grow substantially. Avon is the better for having had their service.



## THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

Post Office Box 267

Avon, Connecticut 06001

Non-Profit Org.  
Bulk Rate  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Avon, CT 06001  
Permit No. 283



# THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

*Future generations may not remember our names, but they will certainly be glad that we were here.*

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

May 2000

## OFFICERS

Thomas D. Morganti  
*President*

Harry Spring  
*Vice-President*

Dorothy J. Blanchard  
*Secretary*

Jennifer Aldag (??)  
*Treasurer*

## DIRECTORS

Mary-Frances Mackie

H. Scott Smith

Leslie Chaput

Edward J. Doyle

Dean Applefield

Richard Dubiel

Alan Aldag

Bill Yocum

John Greacen

Diana Goode

Ruth Mahr

*Editor*

can we say  
something  
about the ALT

## WELCOME TO THE AVON LAND TRUST

### President's Message

One year ago, the Farmington River Watershed Association, in conjunction with Northeast Utilities (and its CL&P subsidiary), undertook the formidable task of mapping out the power company's land holdings on the Farmington River. Northeast Utilities possesses land in Connecticut of more than 14,000 acres, with nearly 1000 of those acres within the Farmington watershed boundaries. The company has promised to continue its tradition of conservation and preservation of this vital riverfront resource. With nearly 5 miles of frontage at stake, NU has agreed to work with the Valley towns, the state DEP, land trusts and neighbors in saving these areas from development.

As the deregulation of the energy industry progresses, these dialogues between corporate owners and those dedicated to land preservation will become more vigorous and more heated. NU, with its excellent track record here, is willing to be partners in seeing to the future of the Farmington and its many unique environments.

Tom Morganti  
*President ALT*

## Project Osprey Update

by Rick Dubiel

Thanks to some tremendous teamwork by many parties, two osprey nesting platforms were erected in Avon this spring. The Town Parks and Recreation Dept gave permission to place platforms on town land, and the Public Works Dept volunteered to help install them.

The nesting platforms were built by Land Trust director Rick Dubiel, and his daughter Alaina. The crude nests are fashioned out of sticks on the inside, which is a recommended technique to help attract the birds to new platforms.

The first platform was installed by the Public Works Dept high atop a tree, on the banks of the Farmington River off New Road. Avon is lucky to have a Public Works staff with such an array of skills, including high tree work.

The second platform was erected at Fisher Meadow, by Rick Dubiel and his old high school friend Dr. Robert Breckinridge. It involved the added difficulty of ferrying the base, post, and nest components out to a remote site.

*continued inside*

# Avon Land Lovers

by Ruth Maher

## The People of Woodford Farm

Fascinating stories of people and events in Woodford family history have been written again and again. But Janet and Don Carville, present owners of the farm, are quick to agree that the "people of Woodford Farm" include hundreds of individuals who never occupied a perch on the family tree.

Janet Read Carville is the 11th generation in the family of Thomas Woodford, who arrived in Hartford in 1633 with Thomas Hooker's band of hardy souls. The direct line of succession is as follows:

Thomas... Joseph... Joseph Jr... William...  
Dudley... Chester... Chester Randolph... Frederic  
Gustavus... C. Frederic... Freda... Janet.

In Mary-Frances L. MacKie's wonderful book "Avon, Connecticut," the index names 73 Woodfords. The book provides detailed information about many of their personal and business activities, service to town and state in various volunteer and elected positions, and their contributions to the community. The Woodford family has given Avon some of its most loyal and farsighted public servants.

In 1666 Joseph, son of Thomas, was the first Woodford to settle in the North District of Farmington. The North District was often referred to in writing as "No.D." and was soon simplified to "Nod." All residents of Nod were required to travel to Farmington to attend church services. Eventually the people of Nod were granted "winter privileges," which allowed them to gather for worship in local homes instead of making the long, difficult trek to Farmington in bad weather. Later, when they were finally able to establish their own church, the first structure was a plain, solid building known as "The Lord's Barn."

When Avon was established as a separate town in 1830, two of its nine divisions were designated as Nod Division and Nod Hill. Among the 31 people listed as "head of household" in these divisions were seven Woodfords, five Thompsons, five Millers and four Bishops.

The Woodford story reveals interesting connections among well known personalities of earlier times.

(Chester) Randolph Woodford was the son of Chester and Stella Bishop Woodford. As a young man he and his uncle, Joseph Bishop, embarked on a career of assembling and peddling clocks. In 1838 they were arrested in Illinois for selling clocks without a permit. They hired a young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln, who won the case for them. Randolph later became Avon's first grower of shade tobacco, and he also operated a dairy farm. He died in 1921 at the age of 107.

C. Fred Woodford, orphaned at the age of three, was brought up by his aunts, Mary and Carrie Woodford. Mary was a teacher at the school on Nod Road. During World War I, C. Fred served in the army. He later worked for Senator McLean at the senator's home, now "Harborside," (formerly "Governor's House") on Firetown Road in Simsbury. McLean's property extended to the Massachusetts border and included the present McLean Game Refuge. C. Fred married Elsie Bishop of the family that lent its name to Bishop's Corner in West Hartford. In addition to the work on his own farm, C. Fred held various state offices and also served as judge in local court proceedings. He died in 1979, three months before his 100th birthday.

Harriett Woodford, a cousin of C. Fred, married Senator Charles A. McLean. Many years later their daughter, Mary McLean Daniels, wrote a loving account of her frequent visits with "Grandfather and Grandmother Woodford" at their Nod Road farm. She wrote in detail of the work and the fun, the comforts and discomforts, of life on the farm. She included a wonderful description of a sumptuous Thanksgiving dinner shared by a happy gathering of many family members. Even in their later years she and her sister were still able to recall the words of Grandfather's lengthy blessing that preceded the first taste of the tempting food. A copy of Mary's story is preserved among the family's treasured papers.

Freda, daughter of C. Fred Woodford, married Walter Read, a descendant of George Read who signed the Declaration of Independence as a delegate from Delaware. Oliver T. Bishop, maternal grandfather of

Freda, was Avon's first Postmaster. He also served in the state legislature and held several positions in town government.

Janet Read, Freda's daughter, married Don Carville. Don's parents, Clarence and Elsie, came to Avon as newlyweds. They both worked for Oliver Thompson's father at Sunrise Farm. Later, while Clarence worked for Avon Old Farms School, they lived in a log cabin on Thompson Road, where Don was born. Although the log house has since been renovated and expanded, it is still there.

Janet Carville is a human computer with centuries of family history stored in her memory, instantly retrievable at the mention of a name or an event. She and Don also have an extensive collection of legal papers, bills and receipts, news clippings, certificates of recognition, letters and pictures, which I was privileged to borrow after promising to guard them with my life. They're worth the promise!

The paperwork of earlier days shows some sharp contrasts with that of today.

A tax receipt, dated April 1, 1872, acknowledges payment of \$85.83 (including a 5% discount and one \$1.00 poll tax.) It was full payment "For State, Town, Dog and Highway Tax on List of 1871" and was signed by Jephtha C. Chidsey, Collector.

A 1906 business letter from a tobacco dealer in New York begins:

*"...Gentlemen:*

*Your esteemed favor received and we are pleased to learn that you have accepted our offer of 40 cents for your Lot of Shade Grown..."*

In 1907 a barrel of gasoline was purchased from Standard Oil Company of New York for \$8.00 (.16 per gallon), with a 60-gallon gas tank for \$3.75.

In the "Tobacco Valley" era when Connecticut shade grown tobacco provided superior wrappers for fine cigars, each growing season brought daily truckloads of kids to Woodford Farm to "work on tobacco." The young people were happy for the chance to earn a little money. Generations of them crawled or hitched along on their bottoms between rows, picking "suckers" from the young plants. Later they would pick the three lowest leaves from each plant, discarding



Rendering of the present day Pickin' Patch farm store.

any that were torn or perforated. The undamaged leaves were placed carefully on the ground between rows to be gathered by other workers who

laid them in the big canvas baskets that were dragged to the ends of the rows to be picked up by trucks. As the plants grew and ripened, this process would be repeated again and again.

If the stalks were flattened by heavy rain or high winds, they had to be raised upright and securely propped with mounds of soil, a difficult job. Art Neriani recalls that at such times, C. Fred Woodford himself would be in the fields helping the kids. Sometimes at the end of a hot, dusty day, the boys would go skinny-dipping in the river before going home. Years later C. Fred was the man who recommended Art for the army's Officer Candidate School. Art made the most of the opportunity, received a battlefield promotion to First Lieutenant, and came home after World War II as Captain Neriani. He still feels a sense of gratitude toward C. Fred.

Among local people who spent long hot days hoeing weeds from row after row of tobacco plants were Desolina Neriani, Catherine Betti, Rose Veronesi, Regina Simonelli, Annie Simonelli, Lisa Gri and Louis Fatturini. When Mrs. Neriani retired, her hoe was almost completely worn away at one end. Microscopic fragments of all those worn hoe blades are forever scattered among the grains of Woodford Farm soil.

As the tobacco leaves were picked, they had to be sewed in pairs on laths before they were hung to dry in the huge red sheds. Some of the ladies who worked at this job were Mary Bogino, Celesta Migli, Margarita Togni, Faustina Salvadori and Desolina Neriani. Mrs. Salvadori and Mrs. Neriani took pride in being recognized for their speed and efficiency in the sewing process.

Men who took care of the dairy farm were bound to a seven-days-a-week schedule. Dairy cows didn't take a day off. They had to be fed and milked twice a day, and the barns had to be cleared of that most valuable fertilizer, which was recycled to renew the soil. In 1938 Otis Williams was hired as herdsman, a job he held for more than 20 years. The dairy operation continued until 1984.

Like all farmers, the Woodfords have been at the mercy of the weather, experiencing both good times and bad. In seasons of drought the river has been an indispensable ally. In times of flood it has brought havoc and heartbreak. The flood of 1955 deposited

two or three feet of silt and debris over the fields, removable only by bulldozers.

In May of 1977 a freak storm dropped heavy, wet snow on the already-prepared tobacco fields, destroying overhead irrigation pipes and the wires and poles that were needed to support the shade cloth. In the face of such disastrous, badly-timed damage, farm manager Don Carville scattered pumpkin seeds over the fields. In the fall those seeds turned into a profitable cash crop. That experience inspired the development of the pick-your-own concept that produced today's well-known "Pickin' Patch."

People come from miles around to harvest a share of the bounty offered by the Pickin' Patch, from asparagus in May to Christmas trees in December, with beans and greens and all kinds of berries and vegetables in between...even pumpkins and hayrides. Although we are an industrialized society, many people are drawn to the land that sustains us. The Pickin' Patch gives children an opportunity to see first-hand that not all strawberries and peas and tomatoes and cabbages grow in the freezer case or the produce department of the grocery store. And while we move through the rows to pick our favorites, we are serenaded by the birds who raise their families at their summer homes around the farm, close to water and endless supplies of food. In return for the crops they may sample, they also consume millions of pesky insects.

Don and Janet Carville are farmers who know and love every cubic inch of their land. They feed and nurture it with a perfect balance of all the elements that keep it healthy, productive and free of contaminants. The land is generous in its response.

If you have ever worked on tobacco, tilled Woodford soil, used the farm's dairy products, bent to pick strawberries or tomatoes in the Pickin' Patch, bought plants or fresh produce at the stand or waited on customers who did, then you are one of "the people of Woodford Farm."

## Project Osprey *continued*



Rick Dubiel and daughter Alaina with the platform nest they built.

Trusts in Canton and Farmington, where osprey have also been seen along the river.

The CT osprey population was nearly wiped out by DDT, but is making a gradual comeback, increasing from only 13 nests in 1970 to 106 active nests today. However, there is concern that DDT still being used in the osprey's South American wintering grounds may be having a continued impact.



Tobacco Barn

Thanks to Bill Goralski, we are able to name some of the young men in the truck, several of whom were from Unionville. Bill, who also worked in the tobacco fields, identifies Ed Verosky, George Drezek, Dick Hunter, Andy Smolen, John Machuga, John Smolen, Doug Brown, George Chicharis, John Borawski, George Dal Bon, Joe Goralski, Dick Anderson, Ken Hawkes, Art Brown and the driver, John Kruse. The year was 1943.



Although more commonly associated with the coastline, osprey have been observed for several years now feeding along the Farmington River. Eventually, we hope to build two platforms a year and donate them to neighboring Land