

Spring in Nockum Hill, A Vote to Protect



Wild Lily of the Valley poke crisp green sails into the wind on the forest floor while Pickleweed protuberances peek out like curious worms at the water's edge. Every place from grassy trail to sandy slip welcomes the first green hues back into their brown canvases. It is Spring in Nockum Hill!





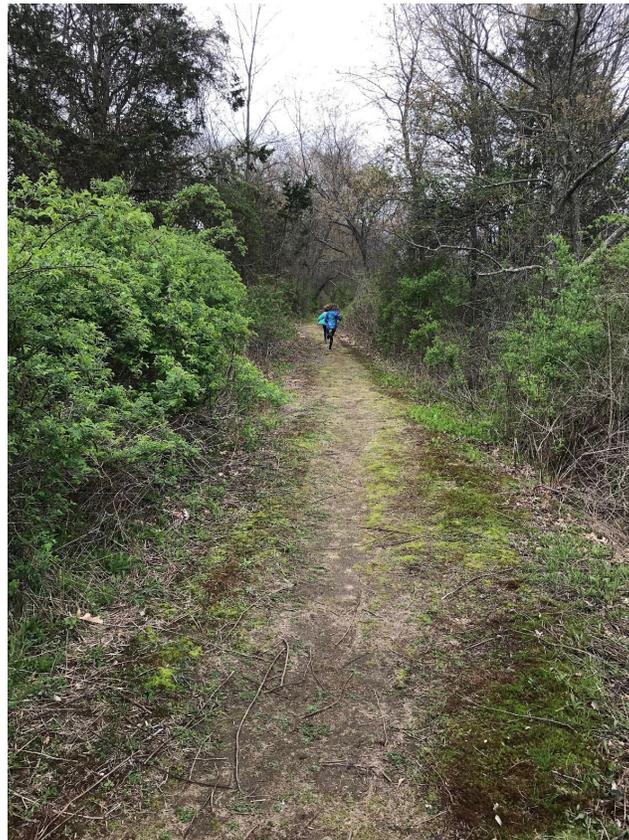
Colonies of fiddler and other crabs begin to excavate the condominiums of mud bound by plant fibers that secure the land and enrich the shallow water. Soon the waters will warm and mother turtles will bob along the shore before committing to the exhausting journey to the top of the hill where sand promises to remain dry and warm. This place is the sandpit and this is where female Diamondback Terrapins have come for years to lay their eggs.

This sandy high ground is the only significant nesting site in the state for Diamondback Terrapins, a threatened brackish water turtle. Last summer's hatchlings will leave the protection of the leaf litter and make their way into the cove to find ghost shrimp and other invertebrates now that it is Spring.





Come June, the turtle activity is just a short walk down a green path, past a field where House Swallows and Bluebirds nest in boxes and on through a collar of woods where Blue Jays and Crows express their concerns. After all the recent rain, it won't be long until the path is lined by proud stands of Timothy, Milkweed and Queen Anne's Lace. Baby cottontail rabbits, turkey and opossums will cross the path before darting into the tangles again.



Right outside the Doug Rayner refuge, adjacent to the asparagus fields, lies an old horse paddock (Lot 3A) slowly maturing as the plant community changes over time. Woody shrubscapes pop out of stands of grass and sandy soil. Here the native ground bees abound and Monarchs flutter when the Milkweed and Goldenrod mature. Goldfinch and Chickadees build their homes in the bramble scavenging for seeds and insects along the ground. Swallows hunt and toads hide in this soft boundary between the field and road.

A quick survey of this open space reveals how connected and integral this land is to the preserve. The patchwork of habitats at Nockum Hill is essential. Each habitat is dependent on the other as energy, water and nutrients, not to mention wildlife, move between them. We are lucky to have this place and wouldn't if not for the visionary townspeople who protected it from development in the 1960's.

Now an opportunity exists for Lot 3A, the horse paddock, to be added to the preserve. The alternative is disheartening, a clear cut and high density housing project that would tax 100 Acre Cove with septic systems and leach fields, widened roads and an invitation to opportunistic predators to parole the turtle's nesting ground. Luckily, Town Council members are planning for the long game here and are working to purchase the property if the voters at the financial town meeting back the effort by passing a resolution to approve the acquisition. Grant and government money will likely be used to secure the property but the budget must reflect the initiative with a line item.

The loss of biodiversity is a global emergency that requires all communities to act decisively to protect their local environment. We, as the Barrington community, can do just that by supporting the resolution to acquire Lot 3A. With a vote to acquire this open field and scrubland, we can stitch another square of land to our beautiful quilt and ensure a balanced and diverse tapestry of ecosystems can thrive in this corner of our town.

Biodiversity needs your vote! Please come out on **May 22nd at 7 pm to the financial town meeting at the Barrington High School** and vote to preserve and extend this landscape. Don't leave it to others to participate. As the Harvard Biologist, E.O. Wilson said..."There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us. "





Amy O'Donnell
Barrington Land Conservation Trust Board Member