



SPRING 2022 Landlines

SIMSBURY LAND TRUST

Since 1976

Howls in the Night

Margery Winters, SLT President

January's full moon was known to the Native Americans as the Wolf Moon. This was the time of the year when hungry wolves could be heard howling outside their villages. It is a sound that we do not hear today. Connecticut's last wolf is believed to have been killed by Israel Putnam in Pomfret, Connecticut in 1742. But on a cold winter evening, and other times of the year as well, we now hear the howls, yelps, and high-pitched cries of coyotes.

The eastern coyote was first documented in northwestern Connecticut in the 1950s. Now common and found throughout the state, coyotes have become a part of Connecticut's ecosystem. Highly adaptable and intelligent animals, coyotes thrive in close proximity to people, and they have an important role in helping to maintain healthy ecosystems and species diversity. A coyote's diet consists predominantly of small animals such as mice, woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, fawns, some fruits, roadkill, and when available, garbage and sadly, pets.

The eastern coyote is larger than its western counterpart and weighs between 30 to 50 pounds. Males typically weigh more than females. Genetic research has found that northeastern coyotes are hybrids of western coyote (62%), western wolf (14%), eastern wolf (13%), and domestic dog (11%). This inclusion of genes from both wolves and dogs has likely allowed coyotes to adapt to both forested and human-dominated habitats.

Coyotes seen near homes or in residential areas are rarely a threat to people. Despite their abundance, coyote attacks on humans are extremely rare. When conflicts do occur between people and coyotes, intentional or unintentional feeding of coyotes (and other wildlife) is most likely the cause. Homeowners should eliminate any food sources that attract coyotes: clean up bird seed below feeders; remove pet foods and fallen fruit; and secure garbage and compost in animal-proof containers.

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Importance of Local Farms

Margery Winters, SLT President

Mark Twain supposedly advised “buy land, they aren’t making it anymore.” The corollary is true for agricultural soils — it is estimated that it takes over 100 years to form one inch of topsoil and at least six inches of topsoil is needed to grow food. America today, however, is losing agricultural land at an alarming rate — 175 acres every hour, 1.5 million acres every year. Once that land is gone, it’s gone forever.

Agriculture played a major role in the early growth of Connecticut, particularly in the Connecticut River Valley, which provides fertile soil, temperate climate, and easy access to markets. Today however, only about 7% of Connecticut is actively farmed and much of our best farmland is being lost to development. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture for Connecticut the number of farms decreased by 8% and by 13% in acreage between 2012 to 2017.

With the help of the USDA Farmland Preservation Program, and the Connecticut DEEP, the Simsbury Land Trust was able to purchase the development rights to three of Simsbury’s existing farms — Tulmeadow, Rosedale and Hall. Purchasing the development rights prevented nonagricultural development on the land while leaving the operation and management of the land to the owner. Even with these protections, farming faces many challenges and today’s farmers must continually find new ways to keep their farms viable now and in the future. We encourage everyone to support our local farms to protect this valuable resource.

To learn more about the challenges facing Connecticut farmers go to Connecticut Examiner’s article on the future of Connecticut farming at <https://tinyurl.com/mr3awdzp>.

(Learn more about the farms we protect in perpetuity on the following pages.)



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Tanager Hill Parking Area Complete

Bob Palmer, SLT Trustee

After almost six years of planning, design and consultation with town officials, the construction of a formal parking area began in late May of 2021. An informal parking area had been established shortly after the property was acquired in 2015, but there were concerns with stormwater runoff, soil compaction and erosion, as well as traffic safety with the driveway entrance that needed to be addressed. SLT of Cheshire, CT was selected to design the project and Simscroft-Echo Farms of Simsbury was selected to construct the parking area.

Features of the new parking area include a paved entrance driveway, gravel parking area with a paved handicapped accessible parking spot, and underground and surface drainage to properly direct stormwater to a retention area.

The project was just about completed in August when the heavy rains and the resulting flash flood on the morning of August 19th caused Lucy Brook to overflow. The flood waters destroyed the foot bridge leading to the trail system from the parking area and caused significant damage to the parking area itself, including severe soil/gravel erosion and destroying the paved driveway entrance. SLT was fortunate and grateful that Simscroft-Echo Farms provided an in-kind donation of \$5,000 and was able to repair the damage in September. Next projects for Tanager Hill include replacing the foot bridge over Lucy Brook and making trail improvements to alleviate wet conditions on the Ravine Trail. Both projects are in the planning stages this winter and will be executed during 2022.

Total cost for the project including the remediation of the storm damage, and estimates for the planned improvements exceeds \$50,000. Memberships and additional stewardship donations help fund these and other SLT stewardship projects.



Damage from flood waters at the new Tanager Hill parking area wiped out a bridge and eroded the new paved driveway.

Howls in the Night

(continued from page 1)

Coyotes do attack and kill pets, especially cats and small dogs weighing less than 25 pounds, as these animals are similar in size to their natural prey. For their protection, cats should be kept indoors, especially at night, and small dogs should always be on a leash and under close supervision. The installation of a kennel or coyote-proof fencing is a long-term solution for protecting pets.

Coyotes are most active at night but seeing a coyote during the day is not a sign that the coyote has rabies. Coyotes appear to have low susceptibility to the strain of rabies found in our region. Coyotes may be active during daylight hours, particularly during the young-rearing period and longer days of summer. Coyotes can be frightened away by making loud noises (shouting, air horn, or banging pots and pans) or by acting aggressively (e.g., arm waving, throwing sticks, spraying with a garden hose).

Learning to live with one of our newest wild neighbors takes a little effort, but it is crucial that every person take responsibility to keep our wild neighbors wild. Listening to their howls on winter nights may remind us of the value of ingenuity and adaptability in our ever-changing world.

George Hall and Pharos Farms — Simsbury's Organic Farms

Daren Hall, owner/farmer

Farming is certainly challenging, but a job we love. My wife Janet and I, along with our three children, attend to all matters great and small on George Hall Farm in Simsbury. Simsbury Land Trust successfully completed a preservation effort in 2014 and holds a conservation easement on both George Hall and Pharos Farms.

Founded in 1963 by my uncle George Hall, a fourth-generation farmer, the farm was originally on just 12 acres. We took over the farm upon his passing in 2014 at the age of 87. George was an early adopter of organic farming, having achieved organic certification in 1979 through the Northeast Organic Farming Association and was one of the first farms in Connecticut to become certified. Certification is today maintained through the Baystate Organic Certifiers of Massachusetts.

With over 50 acres in vegetable production, our produce is passed to our customers at the height of its freshness and nutritional value. We offer CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) shares from June through November, and you can also find us at several farmers markets during the season. As the growing season begins, produce variety is initially limited, however the bounty increases steadily as the season advances. We may also include fresh eggs, honey, heirloom tomato sauce, or flowers in your weekly shares. Beehives located at the edge of our fields pollinate all our crops, which sometimes results in vegetables with character! Our honey is available for purchase throughout the growing season.

One of the greatest challenges we face as farmers is adjusting to ever-changing weather conditions. Each year we assess for different crops, their expected growth, yield and performance at market. Over the last several years, we have installed high tunnels (greenhouses over the field), within which crops grow directly in the soil. This addition helps expand our growing season and allows us to better control the crop's climate.

We also have two teams of oxen. Sam and Eli are Dutch Belted, and Moe and Curly are Chianina Holstein cross and celebrities at large, as they were once included in a movie scene. When they aren't starring in movies, they help to smooth out the land by pulling old tires around the farm where tractors have made deep grooves, they move logs around and are the clean up crew at the end of the growing season.

In the past, George would invite students to stay on the farm to learn about agricultural practices, beginning a tradition of internship. Unfortunately, that ceased with the onset of COVID, however, we hope to be able to get back to allowing this again. Interns would come for short or long terms, arriving in May as we start seeding in the greenhouse and planting in the fields, or in July/August for the harvesting season. While working with us, interns learn how to farm organically and how to identify and care for plants, both in the field and during the seeding and sprouting stages. They walk away with the knowledge of how to grow nutritious food and to enjoy its benefits.

We have also offered other educational programs here on the farm. Students from the Farmington Valley Academic Montessori School come to the farm periodically over the course of the summer. With our guidance, they help with anything from planting seeds in the greenhouse to washing vegetables after they have been harvested. They come away with a better understanding and appreciation about farming and what goes into growing the food they eat — lessons we hope they'll carry with them as they grow older. The local chapter of the Bio-nutrient Food Association also has a teaching garden on the farm property and has held many teaching sessions throughout the year. On occasion we also host weed walks with a local herbalist.

As you can see, there is much that goes on at George Hall Farm during the year. For more information on the products we offer and our CSA, visit us at our website <https://www.georgehallfarm.com/offerings>. (As a bonus, you can access the Wagner Woods Preserve from the trailhead in our parking area. This 63-acre preserve is also permanently protected by the Simsbury Land Trust.)

Janet and I look forward to seeing you soon. Don't panic, it's organic!

*We offer CSA (Community
Supported Agriculture)
shares from June through
November, and you can also
find us at several farmers'
markets during the season.*





Winter Planning at Rosedale Farms and Vineyards

Marshall Epstein, owner/farmer

Hello from Rosedale Farms and Vineyards! Winter is a special time here at Rosedale, in between pruning the vineyard and planning our planting schedule we are afforded the opportunity for some quiet reflection of the prior year and ascertain how we can make the coming one even better.

Since our induction into the Simsbury Land Trust in 2003, many of you have joined us on this journey of transition from strictly vegetable farming to the broader portfolio of agritourism options we now are known for. While we remain committed to our roots of growing the best fruits and veggies for our local families, we now also are known for our award-winning wines (made predominantly from grapes grown right here on the property), beautiful weddings and events as well as our ever popular Max Chef to Farm dinner series. (More info: www.maxcheftofarm.com).

This past two years presented a unique set of circumstances to us surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. We are always happy to welcome SLT members to utilize our walking trail and enjoy some of the beautiful views and wildlife that call our farm home, and the past two years saw quite a rise in just that, as well as new and old faces enjoying some live music and libations on our back patio and vineyard. Quite easy to have a good time and social distance when you've got 110 acres to spread out on!

While the grocery stores saw dwindling shelves and obstructed supply lines we saw a surge in demand for our fruits, vegetables and CSA Program. We credit becoming part of Simsbury Land Trust as setting us on a path to be able to provide food for our local families for years to come and provide a bit more assurance to our food security through programs such as our CSA. It is through programs such as our CSA that allow us to continue growing and disperse some of the yearly start up costs such as seed and labor. Each week for 10 or 18 weeks (depending on the program signed up for) a CSA member gets enough fruits and veggies for a family of four while getting the best of what is fresh, local and in season. Occasionally we'll throw in other goodies such as a bouquet of flowers, some wine, or even something yummy from our on-farm bakery. (More information and sign ups: <https://rosedale1920.com/csa.html>)

So the next time you come out to the farm for a walk, stop on by the farm stand if we're open and say hello! Feel free to tag us in any photos you take (@RosedaleFarms on Instagram and Facebook) and perhaps even consider signing up for a CSA share or coming out for a Chef to Farm Dinner. We've got a lot going on and we can't wait to see you DOWN ON THE FARM!

While we remain committed to our roots of growing the best fruits and veggies for our local families, we now also are known for our award winning wines, beautiful weddings and events as well as our ever popular Max Chef to Farm dinner series.



Tulmeadow Farm News

Don Tuller, owner/farmer

At Tulmeadow Farm we are alive and well as we enter 2022. The last two years certainly presented special challenges, including COVID and last year's unusually rainy growing season. Our family has been farming here in West Simsbury for over 250 years. If we look back at the conditions that preceding generations worked through, it was just our turn to meet whatever "inconveniences" we were presented with and make the best of it.

When COVID hit in 2020, we quickly put together our COVID-safe business practices for customers and staff. Emily Tuller and her crew immediately put our store inventory online, sourced the many and varied "essential" items customers were seeking and added curbside pickups. The opening of the season of ice cream window service was delayed, and then only with a winding six-foot marked path for protective social distancing.

Last year brought more COVID challenges, and added above average rainfall and wind damage. While our subsequent crop loss was less than other farmers', the wet ground delayed our planting schedules and plant care. Rainy days also usually mean fewer customer visits. The reported Christmas tree shortage was real. We got only about half the trees that we normally order, and they were substantially more expensive. We sold out early, and didn't have trees for many of our usual customers.

In spite of all that, it was a hopeful time. Some centuries-old barn roofs got some well-deserved upkeep and repair. In the fall, new cover crops were planted which should boost soil productivity beginning this season. We also planted our first garlic crop.

In the coming months, our goal is to increase the variety of plants that we grow. While the farm store is now open Friday-Sunday, 9-5, on April 1 it will be open daily (with window ice cream service starting approximately April 15). We plan to have a good supply of vegetable and flower plants for home gardeners. CSA shares will be for sale again, details still to be finalized. Salad greens are our first harvested crop, with cucumbers and tomatoes to follow, all from our greenhouses. Garlic and field vegetables: lettuce, broccoli, squash, sweet corn, pumpkins, winter squash and gourds and more to follow as the growing season progresses. To offset our electricity costs, we are exploring the possibility of installing ground-based solar panels very near the south side of our bigger greenhouse.

We look forward to seeing you in the farm store, at the ice cream windows or along the walking trail. We would like to remind you walkers that the road and the trail is the only place to walk. Please keep out of the fields at ALL times. We have crops growing there that are damaged when you or your pets walk on them. If you bring a pet, **keep it on leash at all times and pick up their waste and take it home with you.** If you are considerate, everyone will have a better experience. We appreciate your support, we work hard every day to earn it. Many thanks.



To offset our electricity costs, we are exploring the possibility of installing ground-based solar panels very near the south side of our bigger greenhouse.





BOOK DISCUSSION — *THE NATURE OF OAKS: THE RICH ECOLOGY OF OUR MOST ESSENTIAL NATIVE TREES*

Thursday, March 31, 2022

1:00 p.m.

Simsbury Public Library Weatogue Room

Join the SLT for a book discussion of *The Nature of Oaks: The Rich Ecology of our Most Essential Native Trees*. Who knew that oaks were the most powerful plant in North America? Author Doug Tallamy is a leading voice on the unbreakable link between native plants and native wildlife.

According to Tallamy, the oak provides better habitat for food webs (which turn the sun's energy into food then passes that food onto animals) than any other plant in North America. It is preferred by 900 species of moth, making it the most productive plant in this country. In addition, oaks sequester carbon, pumping it back into the soil, and help manage watersheds with their big canopies and large root systems. Does this sound too good to be true?

Copies of the book have been reserved for the group and made available from the library at the front desk. You may be interested in listening to an interview with Doug Tallamy on awaytogarden.com. Don't forget to register on our website simsburylandtrust.org. We look forward to seeing you!

BEES IN YOUR BACKYARD

Thursday, April 21, 2022

6:30 p.m.

**Simsbury Public Library
Main Program Room**

What do you know about the bees in your backyard? Pam Cooper, from the UConn Home and Garden Education Center and lecturer for the Master Garden program, will present a program on bees that are commonly encountered in the wild and in our backyards. The majority of the bees will be native with a couple of non-native bees that are now established here. We will also look at the native and non-native plants they use as seasonal pollen and nectar sources.

In addition to her work at the UConn Home and Garden Education Center, Pamela has also advised several non-profit groups on which plants are important to include in pollinator gardens.

Space is limited. Reservations requested through our website, simsburylandtrust.org. Hope to see you there!

WEST MOUNTAIN TRAILS HIKE

Saturday April 23, 2022

11:00 a.m.

**Meet at the parking area at SLT's
60 Westledge Preserve**

Join us for a moderately strenuous hike around the lovely West Mountain property in West Simsbury. This 2.5-hour, 4-mile hike will require a combination of cardiovascular effort and good balance but will showcase some of the best viewpoints in Simsbury.

The hike begins at SLT's 60 Westledge Preserve. It will cross the preserve with its Hop Brook bottomlands and historic dam. It will follow the red trail from there, up to and along a ridgeline affording splendid views of the Farmington Valley and beyond. A fairly steep descent will lead to the white trail through the saddle, which connects to the blue trail. The blue trail returns to the starting point through a dramatic and geologically significant valley. The loop totals about four miles, much of it steep and with somewhat difficult footing. This is a moderately strenuous hike, not recommended for small children. Wear boots or sturdy shoes, bring drinking water and hiking poles if you use them. RSVP to www.simsburylandtrust.org.



Looking for activities to do with your kids?



EVERY DAY IS A PERFECT DAY TO GET OUT ON THE TRAILS.

Simsbury Land Trust offers many beautiful trails and paths, with scenic vistas, forest views and lovely open fields.

There are over 28 trails in the Simsbury Walkbook, ranging from very easy, short and flat to several miles with tougher terrain.

So many places to explore right in your own backyard!

Take a hike with your kids and sign them up for the SLT 6-Hike Children's Challenge!

- Keep track of your hikes — date and location. Any distance hike or walk counts toward your 6-hike goal. SLT-sponsored hikes, regardless of the location, also count toward the challenge.
- When you are finished complete the SLT 6-Hike Children's Challenge Completion Form on our website and your child will get a free SLT baseball cap!

Visit the Simsbury Land Trust website Family Hiking page for additional information on upcoming hikes and free printables!

To get a free copy of the Dirty Boots Kids Club activity book scan the QR code at right or visit our website today!



If you are not a member of the SLT we encourage you to join online today. Membership donations provide funding for trail maintenance, our newsletter, and printed materials such as the Dirty Boots Guide and Simsbury Walkbook. Members receive a free copy of the Simsbury Walkbook.



www.simsburylandtrust.org

TANAGER HILL/ OWEN-MORTIMER HIKE

Saturday, May 14, 2022
9:00 a.m.

Meet at Tanager Hill parking area

Explore the diverse habitats of SLT's Owen-Mortimer/Tanager Hill Preserve on a 4-mile, 1.5-hour hike across moderate to challenging terrain. We'll explore what makes this property unique among SLT's holdings and the geological features of the adjacent Penwood State Park. In addition to discussing the preserves natural history, we'll discuss some of the management challenges facing this beautiful and very wet property. Sturdy and waterproof footwear is a must for this morning ramble. Contact hike leader at davidkozak12@gmail.com with questions. Register on our website, simsburylandtrust.org.

To download the Tanager Hill/Owen-Mortimer Preserve map scan the QR code at right.



BIRD WALK AT GREAT POND

Saturday, May 21, 2022
8:00 a.m.

Meet at the parking area at Great Pond State Forest

Join members of the Hartford Audubon Society for an easy walk at Great Pond where we may see waterfowl, shorebirds and migrating warblers, plus the many types of birds that call this area home. Depending on conditions, we will spend up to a few hours looking for birds, but you may leave at any time. Walking distance is about 1.5 miles with a possible optional extension. Please bring binoculars and a spotting scope if you have one. No pets please. RSVP via our website simsburylandtrust.org.



SUCCESSFUL PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

Thursday, May 26, 2022
6:45 p.m.

Simsbury Public Library Main Program Room

Simsbury Garden Club members Nicki Cox and Jane Hannah will talk about pollinator gardens and the Garden Club's Pollinator Garden at Gifts of Love Farm. Beginning in October 2017, with the motivation of meeting the CT Federated Garden Club President's challenge "Plant Connecticut — Be a Conservation Champion" by planting either a pollinator garden or xeriscape garden in a public space in their town, the Simsbury Garden Club decided to support the idea of being part of a pollinator corridor and to show people how easy it is to work with native plants to provide food, shelter and habitat for pollinators such as bees, butterflies and birds.

Four years later, the Gifts of Love Pollinator Garden has gone through many changes and fine tuning and is now thriving. It is our hope that this garden will serve as a teaching tool as well as a successful habitat.

RSVP to our website, simsburylandtrust.org. Social distance seating available and masks required.

Our Brains on Nature: “Multisolving” for People and the Planet

Susan A. Masino, Ph.D., a Vernon Roosa Professor of Applied Science and Professor of Neuroscience and Psychology at Trinity College in Hartford.

Human brains are powerful, complex and vulnerable: they hold our dreams, our memories, and everything in between. It's impossible to overstate the importance of protecting our brains at all ages, for all of us. This amazing gray lump is a recent, precious piece of the web of life that evolved and adapted over billions of years. Protecting our brains AND life on earth are essential to our future. Protecting local nature represents a powerful opportunity for both — and it's “multisolving.”

What is multisolving, and why is it so important? It's a term coined by Climate Interactive, an independent not-for-profit think tank that grew out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School. It represents an interdisciplinary strategy for addressing global crises that focuses on solutions with near-term co-benefits — like our health. Multisolving requires limiting the influence of habits and conflicts of interest, and requires an open mind and an ability to think across disciplines.

Protecting a strategic lifeline of local nature is multisolving because it simultaneously keeps carbon out of the atmosphere, prevents species extinction, keeps our water clean, and many more essential ecosystem services. A lifeline of nature also supports our health, including brain health, and time in nature can reduce anxiety, depression, stress hormones and blood pressure significantly. In Ireland a small group of adults with mental ill health went to a national park together weekly for 13 weeks and their improvement was akin to attending private therapy 1-2 hours per week. The participants especially appreciated the quiet, and the beauty. Perhaps the benefits might have been even more significant if they visited the same national park every week, like a friend.

Our multisolving local forests are like mini-national parks. And treating and preventing mental illness is urgent. In October 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency for children's mental health. Nature benefits all ages, and a recent study of teens in the United Kingdom found that forests were more beneficial than parks for improving cognitive development and reducing emotional and behavioral problems. These are foundations of personal resilience that young people need as they transition to adulthood. We are so incredibly blessed in this region with easy access to beautiful natural forests, abundant clean water, and an incredible legacy and ethic of land stewardship.

Multisolving with New England forests is powerful: they can accumulate a lot more carbon, naturally, and they are so important that they are included in what an international team of scientists termed the “Global Safety Net.” The Global Safety Net identifies general areas with high carbon accumulation and high biodiversity, but every community needs a lifeline of clean water and nature. As one step in this direction, the Open Space Commission in Simsbury has adopted a multisolving policy that prioritizes natural processes on some public land called “Natural Area Stewardship.” Local nature benefits everyone, it's a regional asset, and it's our most important gift to the future. Every day our local mini-national parks are multisolving for people and the planet, providing places we can all count on.



The great outdoors is calling. Getting outside and into the beautiful flora and fauna will allow you to reap the mental health rewards of outdoor recreation.

Preparation is the Key to Cold Weather Hiking!

Katie Piccirillo, SLT Trustee

It's chilly. It's dark. It's windy. It can be easy to hunker down, give in to old-man winter, and hibernate for what can seem like the longest of the four seasons. Doing so, however, would mean missing incredible opportunities to see a still-beautiful side of Simsbury that few get to enjoy. The stillness, changing landscapes, crisp air, and sharp color-contrasts of winter landscapes can be extraordinary.

There are several Simsbury Land Trust properties that are well-traveled throughout the winter months and are accessible even with snow on the ground; Rosedale Farms, Wagner Woods, and Tulmeadow Farm offer relatively flat terrain with areas of good sun exposure — tending to minimize icy spots while also keeping us warm. Besides SLT properties, the rail trail can also be a good option. The Town of Simsbury kindly plows and maintains a one-mile strip of the paved path along Ironhorse Boulevard throughout the year. Other properties — Great Pond State Forest and Stratton Brook Forest, McLean in Granby, also offer areas with rather flat terrain, and, being typically well-traveled, have packed down surfaces even if there is snow on the ground.

In order to truly enjoy a cold-weather hike, preparation is key. Please read ahead for suggestions on cold weather hiking gear and planning.

Shoes: A waterproof hiking boot is best. A boot that fits snug to your foot is also important — you don't want any wiggle room in your shoe while trying to balance on ice or uneven terrain. Traction is another important component. You want to feel confident when walking over cold, unpacked terrain (with or without ice/snow cover) and sometimes an external cleat for your shoes will give you that confidence. Popular brands are Yaktrax and LL Bean. If the snow is deep and fluffy enough, it may be a good day for a snowshoe. With snowshoes, plan for a slower, more strenuous walk even on a trail without elevation. Another option for deep snow or wet terrain are gaiters. Gaiters are a waterproof addition to your lower leg that will stop your socks and pants from getting wet. You can find gaiters at many sporting goods and outdoor stores.

Clothes: When in doubt, wear lots of layers. Even in temperatures as low as 10 or 15 degrees, if you are walking up hill or in the sun you may end up sweating. However, as soon as you stop you will get cold again. To help manage this hot/cold cycling, start with a good foundation: a base layer that wicks sweat away from your body. Then, add 1-3 more layers before a final (ideally windproof) “shell” jacket on top. As you hike you may need to stop frequently to adjust your layers. That's okay; having multiple layers allows you to adjust frequently and maintain comfort. Material-wise, avoid cotton — both on top and bottom. This means avoiding jeans and focusing more on hiking-specific pants, thick leggings, or even corduroy pants. Another important consideration is to limit the amount of exposed skin to the extent possible. Keep your ears and hands covered with fleece or wool hat, and mittens. Bringing an extra pair of socks (just in case your socks get wet) is also a good insurance policy.

Food and Water: When hiking in the winter you may not feel as thirsty as when you are hiking in the summer. This doesn't mean, however, that you don't need to hydrate. Maintaining a warm body temperature in the cold requires more calories than keeping your body cool in the summer. Bring water in insulated water bottles so that it doesn't freeze, and keep snacks close to your body so that they don't freeze, either. Sip water frequently throughout the hike to maintain hydration.

Safety: As with all-weather hiking, practice basic safety precautions by bringing a cell phone and basic first aid kit, hiking with a friend, and letting someone know where and when you will be hiking.

If you are new to winter hiking you may be surprised by how enjoyable it can be — especially when fully prepared.



Birding the Simsbury Land Trust

Doug Beach, SLT Member

Simsbury no longer is a rural town. In the last 70 years its population has more than quintupled, from less than 5,000 residents in 1950 to over 25,000 today. But thanks to the foresight of state and local officials, land planners, landscape architects, and the generosity of private donors, Simsbury retains a semblance of the rural, agricultural community that it used to be. And that is one of the many qualities that make our beloved town unique.

In addition to their aesthetic value, the varied and undeveloped landscapes of Simsbury create a mosaic of habitats that are suitable for all sorts of wild animals. No less than 211 species of birds have been documented in our town, and several properties of the Simsbury Land Trust contributed significantly to that number.

The crown jewels of the SLT holdings, from a birder's perspective, are the Tanager Hill/Owen-Mortimer Preserves. With its assortment of wooded hillsides, open fields, swamps, streams and vernal pools, Tanager Hill is a birder's paradise. On a good day during spring migration, it is possible to encounter well over 50 species.

Spring and summer residents, including **Baltimore orioles**, **indigo buntings**, **American goldfinch**, and the namesake **scarlet tanagers** provide a rich and vibrant assortment of color and song. But take a closer look and you will find a more reticent and less obvious avian world at Tanager Hill, with birds such as **blue-winged** and **prairie warblers**, and the secretive **brown creeper**.

One of Tanager Hill's most striking residents, and perhaps the one most sought after by



Baltimore oriole



Dickcissel



Hooded warbler

serious birders, is the **hooded warbler**. A shy ground dweller, its breeding grounds extend from the Gulf coast to southern Ontario. However, northern Connecticut and southern Massachusetts mark the limit of its range in New England, and for that reason, the hooded warbler is an uncommon bird in our area. While usually hidden in the undergrowth and difficult to see, the hooded warbler can often be heard along the Owen-Mortimer Trail, singing on-territory around May 10.

Another uncommon species, the **worm-eating warbler**, was documented at Tanager Hill in 2020 and 2021. This bird prefers hillsides with dense vegetation and talus slopes. Although nesting was not confirmed, a male was seen and heard vocalizing just below the power line last May. Future surveys will attempt to confirm whether breeding occurs at Tanager Hill, not only by the worm-eating warbler, but also by another uncommon species, the **northern waterthrush**.

In the meantime, Tanager Hill has already provided a multitude of avian and non-avian surprises. A pair of **barred owls** and a **North American porcupine** were found last spring while conducting bird surveys. There is no telling what other secrets Tanager Hill will reveal in the future, to those who are patient enough to unlock them.

Another gem in the Simsbury Land Trust's portfolio is the Arthur and Patricia Wegner Preserve along Terry's Plain Road. Originally a militia training field, this land was a tobacco field as recently as the early 1970s. Today it simulates a midwestern prairie, and the birds have responded accordingly. In March and early April, male **American woodcock** can be seen at dusk, performing their bizarre, almost comical mating ritual as they spiral hundreds of feet into the air before descending with a distinctive twittering sound caused by air rushing across their feathers. Later in the spring the Wegner Preserve hosts several **bobolinks**, small but colorful grassland birds that spend their winters in South America. Bobolinks have declined significantly due to a loss of habitat, and for that reason, this handsome member of the blackbird family is listed as a Species of Special Concern in the State of Connecticut.

In April 2019 a pair of **eastern meadowlarks**, listed as a Threatened Species, was discovered on the Wegner Preserve, perhaps on their way to points farther north. The presence of these and other birds, whether they are residents, or migrants passing through, proves the value of preserving and restoring grassland habitat, not only in Simsbury, but also throughout the rest of our state.

In April 2021 Simsbury Land Trust enlisted the help of falcon specialist Art Gingert to install an **American kestrel** nesting box on the Wegner Preserve. SLT members are waiting with great anticipation to see if a pair of kestrels will take up residence this spring.

Three other jewels are Rosedale Farms, Tulmeadow Farm, and the George Hall Farm. Unusual birds having been observed in recent years include a **black-bellied plover**, a **vesper sparrow**, and an unlikely pair of **sandhill cranes** at Rosedale, a **greater white-fronted goose** and a **mute swan** at Tulmeadow Farm, and a **snow goose**, a flock of **snow buntings** and a rare **dickcissel** at the George Hall /Pharos Farm on Terry's Plain Road.

Finally, Wagner Woods, just to the southwest of Great Pond State Forest, is a great place for novice birders to practice and enhance their skills. With a combination of woodlands and open fields, this diverse property contains a variety of habitats that are suitable for many bird species. In October 2021, four bluebird boxes were installed within the wildflower area in the northwest corner of the large field at Wagner Woods. This should be an excellent spot to watch nesting **eastern bluebirds** in the coming spring.

What birds remain to be discovered at various Simsbury Land Trust properties is anyone's guess. Judging, however, by the ones that have already been seen, we are confident that the future will be productive, rewarding, and vastly entertaining.



Volunteers prepare bluebird boxes

With its assortment of wooded hillsides, open fields, swamps, streams and vernal pools, Tanager Hill is a birder's paradise. On a good day during spring migration, it is possible to encounter well over 50 species.



Installation of nesting box at Wegner Preserve for American kestrel (above)





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New Digital Trail Map Available for Owen-Mortimer and Tanager Hill Preserves

Dave Kozak, SLT Steward

Have you ever felt lost or unsure of your location on an SLT property or other open space, or been reluctant to explore a trail you've never traveled before because you didn't know where it would lead? Thanks to a free digital mapping application available at **Avenza Maps** you can now track your location at SLT's Owen-Mortimer and Tanager Hill Preserves and be comfortable exploring the property!

Using the app is easy. Just download the free Avenza Map app on your phone and then download the Owen-Mortimer and Tanager Hill Preserves map using Avenza. Now you're ready to confidently explore this beautiful property by following your location on its trails.

Use the QR code at right to access the map:

The map, created in cooperation with Sperry Geospatial of North Granby, uses digital geo-spatial data made available from a variety of sources including the State of Connecticut's Environmental Conditions Online (CT-ECO). To ensure the map's accuracy, it was ground-truthed by SLT land stewards. Based upon member response to this new digital map, SLT will produce digital maps for its other larger properties. In addition to the SLT map, you may find other interesting trails in Simsbury and the surrounding areas.

So, download the app and map, get on the trails, and tell us what you think by contacting Amy Zeiner, SLT Executive Director at azeiner@simsburylandtrust.org.

Happy trails!

