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CONSERVATIONIST’S CALENDAR
This issue, we premiere our new calendar of upcoming events in Dutchess County and beyond. To contribute your conservation-oriented event, please call Julie Hart at the DLC office 845.677.3002 or email julieh@dutchessland.org

FINE FEATHERS, OCT 20
Join Suzanne Treyger, Forest Program Manager of Audubon, New York, for Improving Habitat for Forest Birds: Landscape and Local-scale Management Recommendations, where she’ll explain how you can upgrade the bird habitat quality on your land. Learn the population trends of eastern forest birds, their habitat needs, and much more. 10:30 AM to noon; Dutchess Land Conservancy office, 4289 Route 82, Millbrook. RSVP required. 845.677.3002 or julieh@dutchessland.org

NEW BUZZ, NOV 3
Joe Krein of 5 Arrows Beekeeping will lead us in Beekeeping Basics and the Importance of Pollinators. Learn the components of bee hives, how bees make honey and the essentials of beekeeping. 10:00 to 11:30 AM; 85 Shekomeko Lane, Millerton, NY. RSVP required. 845.677.3002 or julieh@dutchessland.org

THE PERFECT MATCH, JAN 17, 19, 24
The Dutchess Land Conservancy and the Columbia Land Conservancy work in collaboration to continually expand their Farmer Landowner Match Program, which connects landowners looking to have their land farmed with farmers seeking land. Since its inception, the program has facilitated more than 70 matches. Our winter program includes these upcoming educational events and workshops:
Finding the Right Land Tenure for your Farm, Jan 17, 6:30-8PM, Columbia County; Evaluating Farmland and Understanding the NYS Agricultural Tax Assessment Program, Jan 19, 6:30-8PM, Dutchess County; Preparing for Farm Transitions, Jan 24, 6:30-8PM, Columbia County. Locations to be announced. For more information, please contact the Dutchess Land Conservancy Office at 845.677.3002 or email julieh@dutchessland.org

OUT IN THE OPEN: GREAT GOINGS-ON

KIDS & LAMBS
Families flocked to the third annual Farm, Food, & Family event at Irene and Jack Banning’s Black Sheep Hill Farm, located in the hamlet of Shokomeko. Held every year on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, visitors chatted with their local farmers, signed-up with CSAs, sampled cheese and salami, bought fresh produce, and learned about biodynamic farming. Jack Banning manned the grill, offering free sliders and sausages to guests, while his wife Irene introduced young visitors to the newest lambs.

DOG DAYS
Sheep herding dogs and their handlers came from all over the United States and Canada for the fifth annual Caora Farm Sheep Dog Trials on June 26-28 in Millerton. Owners Mich Ferraro and Kathy Weather welcomed visitors to watch the herding demonstrations. “It is a way to educate the general public about alternative agricultural practices and land conservation, in addition to enjoying the sheer beauty of a herding dog as it handles the sheep through a course,” Ferraro said. “This course stimulates many of the skills a dog and handler need to accomplish everyday chores on the farm.”

BARN RAISING
More than 300 supporters danced the night away on May 12th at the annual Spring Barn Dinner Dance held at the Hitchcock Hay Barn in Millbrook. Host Tom Hitchcock and co-chairs Felicity and Tim Bontecou, and David Thieringer were on hand to greet guests as they arrived. The night featured a delicious family style dinner catered by the Farmer’s Wife, followed by dancing to the sounds of Harlem Line under the twinkling lights. A paddle raise to fund the protection of six local farms raised more than double our goal! For more photos please visit dutchessland.org.

THE NATURE OF THINGS
In a rare moment, the notoriously reclusive Chrysemys picta granted the DLC’s Karissa Soshok an exclusive interview about what it’s like to be an eastern painted turtle living in Dutchess County.

A CONVERSATION WITH SHELBY SHELLDON, THE EASTERN PAINTED TURTLE
Would you introduce yourself please?
Hi, I’m Shelby Sheldon! I’m a Chrysemys picta, more commonly known as the eastern painted turtle. I have a dark body with red and yellow stripes. The top of my shell is smooth and dark grey, but my underside is orange and yellow! You can find me in freshwater ponds, usually sunning myself on a log.

How old are you and how long do you live?
I am about 25 years old and under healthy habitat conditions, I can live to be 55 years old!

What do you like to eat?
I eat lots of aquatic vegetation and algae, but I never turn down a worm, fish or insect. They’re delicious!

How do you protect yourself?
Well, first, I have my strong outer shell. But my best defense is my habitat. Where do you live?
Our habitat is threatened by development, pollution, and pollution. In addition, many eastern painted turtles are cut short because of urban sprawl.

Do you hibernate?
You bet! During the winter, I hibernate by burying myself at the bottom of the pond, where I can stay for five months without oxygen!

Where do you live?
Personally, I live in this wetland surrounded by this farm here in Amenia. Unlike many turtles which migrate, my species has a very small home range and I’m entirely dependent on my pond. Fortunately, my landowner protected the farm that surrounds my pond ensuring that my pond will never be filled in or used as a building site. There will always be a good-sized buffer between any new structures and my wetland. Thanks to my landowner’s concern for their land, my aquatic home is safe from development and so am I! But sadly, the lives of many eastern painted turtles are cut short because of urban sprawl. The constant threat of habitat loss is why I decided to give you this interview because it’s important for us turtles to speak out.

Are there other issues you’d like to talk about today?
Roads are especially dangerous to our kind. As I’m sure you know from our friend the hare, we move very slowly. Our hard shells are no match for a car! Sadly, each year countless numbers of us turtles are killed while trying to cross a road. Please watch out for us! We can often use a helping hand getting across, but it’s important to keep us pointed in the direction we were going!
Northern Red Oak [QUERCUS RUBRA]

Red oak leaves have seven to nine pointed lobes and are a deep, shiny green which turn red-brown in the fall. These trees “mast” (produce a large acorn crop) every two to five years. Red oak acorns are rounded with shallow caps. The bark of older trees has a distinctive pattern of lighter-colored vertical stripes, especially on the upper trunk.

Sugar Maple [ACER SACCARUM]

Sugar maple is also known as “hard maple” or “rock maple” because the wood is very sturdy. The leaves have five pointed lobes and turn various shades of yellow, orange and red in the fall and the winged seeds are dispersed by the wind. In younger trees the bark is relatively smooth, but as the tree matures it may separate along vertical cracks and curl away from the trunk.

Red Maple [ACER RUBRUM]

Red maple is often found in wooded swamps and along the margins of ponds. Sometimes called “soft maple,” the wood is not as strong or durable as the sugar maple. Red maples are among the first trees to flower in the spring and are easily identifiable by their bright red flowers and the red-tinged seeds that follow. The leaves have three to five lobes and the leaf edges are toothed.

Eastern Cottonwood [POPULUS DELTOIDES]

These trees grow along rivers and streams, in wet woods and along pond margins. They release their seeds in early summer on clouds of cottony fluff that can accumulate on the ground like snowdrifts. Their leaves are triangular in shape and flat at the base, and the leafstalks are flattened, which makes the tree seem to shimmer in the slightest breeze.

Shagbark Hickory [CARYA OVATA]

This tree is easy to spot because as it matures, the bark begins to curl away from the trunk in strips, which gives the tree a shaggy appearance. The leaves are compound and made-up of five leaflets. The edible nuts are covered in a thick husk and are 1.5 – 2.5 inches in diameter, and the wood is very tough and resilient and is often used to make tool handles.

Eastern White Pine [PINUS STROBUS]

This tree can reach heights of over 200 feet. Its thin and flexible needles are three- to five-inches long and occur in bundles of five. The bark of young trees is smooth and greenish grey and as the tree matures it becomes a darker reddish-grey with a scaly texture. White pine cones are five- to ten-inches long and are often sticky with resin. The wood was used for ship masts and carving figureheads in the past and today it is often used for construction.

White Oak [QUERCUS ALBA]

White oak leaves have seven to nine rounded lobes, are dark green and glossy and turn a deep red color in the fall. The trees mast every four to seven years. The whitish-to-light grey bark is flaky with vertical strips on younger trees, which becomes furrowed, ridged and broken into blocks in mature trees. White oak wood is strong and durable; this species is also known as “stave oak” because it was used to make watertight barrels.

Eastern Hemlock [TSUGA CANADENSIS]

Eastern hemlock needles are flat, ¼ - ½ inch long and silvery underneath, while the cones are small and rounded and about ¾ inch long. The bark is reddish brown and scaly and as the tree matures it becomes deeply furrowed into broad ridges. Eastern hemlock can grow on rocky ridges and ravines where other species would struggle to survive.

Tulip Tree [LIRIODENDRON TULIPIFERA]

Tulip tree leaves have four lobes that are somewhat tulip-shaped, but it is the orange and green tulip-shaped flowers that give the tree its name. While most northeastern tree species are pollinated by wind, the tulip tree is pollinated by insects. The flowers then become a cone-like bundle of winged seeds that are spread on the wind. Sometimes known as “yellow poplar,” the tulip tree was commonly used to make dugout canoes.

Paper Birch [BETULA PAPYRIFERA]

Also known as the “white birch,” this tree is easy to spot due to its smooth white bark. As the tree matures, the bark peels off in horizontal strips. The leaves are oval in shape and the leaf edges are doubly toothed. The seeds are produced in a cone-like structure that holds dozens of tiny, winged seeds.
EC: I think it is the duty of people who have a large amount of land to protect it. Parts of Upperville, Virginia, the West, and California are pretty nice, but I think this is one of the most beautiful parts of America. In addition, I think the DLC is a good thing to support. For me, it has a lot of advantages because when we bought this place the land was inexpensive. But when people came along paying $35,000 an acre, we could see what would happen to our estate taxes if our land was assessed.

TK: Let’s talk about the low-cost basis stock. Many of our donors don’t take advantage of this mechanism.

EC: The stock markets are up a lot in the last ten years, and a lot more over the last thirty. When you have holdings of stock that become very valuable and represent 15% to 30% of your portfolio, common sense tells you to reduce these percentages. But, if you sell them you’re going to be stuck with very large [capital gains] tax. So, the idea of giving appreciated stocks to the DLC is important. It helps finance the organization [which receives current market value of the stock] and also provides a tax benefit to you [a full tax deduction without capital gains].

It’s the same with land. We have a large amount invested here and Susie and I decided it was foolish [for the children] to be stuck with an unbelievable inheritance tax. We had to find a way to [lessen the burden]. So, when we decided to sell 300 acres across the road, we put all the land we sold into the Dutchess Land Conservancy. It kept the land from being developed.

TK: How did you first come to Millbrook?

EC: I first came to Millbrook in 1950. I was asked by a lovely girl from Bennett College. I drove down from Harvard with two friends when the Mass Pike was only half completed. It took us seven to eight hours. Now, it takes three. I thought it was really pretty country. Then, I found out I knew a lot of people here. I rented my first house in 1957 and now I’ve been here a long time.

TK: Let’s talk about the land a little bit. When you bought it, was it all in agricultural use?

EC: Yes. There was, however, a plan to make it into a golf course, just like Silo Ridge.

TK: There was a plan to develop it?

EC: Yes. That was the idea behind the golf course. There was no DLC back then. You could see the developments coming up along south of here. Poughkeepsie was growing, and there was a lot of fear, particularly in that period in 1967, that [the area] was going to be overwhelmed by development. Kent Leavitt was the one who figured out land conservation, but it hadn’t been done anywhere yet except in Brandywine, Pennsylvania and no one knew much about it. He said, “We can do this,” and got Leslie [Barclay], his wife’s niece, to get it going.
I meet farmer Mary Stephens in the parking lot of High Field Sheep Facility in Clinton Corners on a cloudy day in the late summer. She greets me with a steady smile and bright eyes. A USDA animal ID coordinator, Stephens has recently returned from a three-week deployment in California to fight virulent Newcastle disease, a fatal poultry virus. Stephens operates her own business, MCS Livestock, out of High Field Farm, where she also serves as the barn manager. As we walk along a dirt path, Ralph, a Great Pyrenees cross, wags his tail as we pass pastures dotted with Romney, Southdown, and Shropshire sheep, while Violet barks the alarm to our approach in a distant field. A guard donkey lumbers toward us. One hundred and twenty acres belonging to the Kagan family, virtually all of it pastured and placed under Dutchess Land Conservancy protection, is home to some 60 head of sheep, a few cows, and various other animals. “The most important thing to happen by selling the development rights on High Field Farm is that this land, no matter what, will always be in agriculture,” Stephens begins. “This farm was once a dairy farm, then a world-renowned Angus farm, now it’s a diversified livestock farm, raising both beef and sheep, and eventually, turkeys, too. The face may change, but the story remains the same.” High Field sells its own yarn, socks, roving, hides, fleeces, freezer lambs, and breeding stock available most of the year. Stephens’ forthcoming endeavor is “Wine and Wool,” a fiber arts studio where the public will be able to create items using High Field’s own roving and wool, while socializing over a glass of wine.

Stephens grew up in Connecticut, joining Future Farmers of America (FFA) as a young girl and “was just hooked,” she says. “I tried to leave agriculture, but I had to come back. Barn time is my time.” In high school, she milked cows after school, during college she managed a chicken farm, and after she graduated from the University of Connecticut’s animal science program, she managed a Hereford cattle farm. She met her husband at the New York State Fair where they were both showing cattle, and, after stints in Maine and Arkansas, the couple settled back in Dutchess County 20 years ago. Today, her husband manages the Kagans’ cattle at Uphill Farm, while Mary manages the High Field Sheep Facility with her daughter, Meagan. “Knowing that the Kagan family made a choice to preserve this land is inspiring. Several young shepherds have raised their own lambs in this barn. Mentoring 4H and FFA shepherds is part of the beauty of this barn and that it will always be available to them,” Stephens says. “I believe more people would pursue agricultural endeavors if there were more opportunities to access land that is not being fully utilized. I am very fortunate to have this relationship with the Kagan family.”
In this new section, we’ll take a look at local, regional, state and national legislation affecting land conservation across the country. DLC President Becky Thornton reports on the Working Farm Protection Act passed earlier this summer.

On August 2, Governor Cuomo signed the Working Farm Protection Act into law. Championed by Assembly Member Didi Barrett (who represents parts of Dutchess County) and Senator Patty Ritchie, the bill was passed unanimously in the New York State Legislature.

The act will make farmland more accessible for working farmers by allowing farm easements to be permanently eligible for funding through a grant program. Broadly supported by the National Young Farmers Coalition, the New York Farm Bureau, the American Farmland Trust and land trusts from around the state, the law expands New York’s current farmland protection program. It will help keep protected farmland affordable and in the hands of farmers through farmer ownership and affordability provisions, such as preemptive purchase rights. This new law will also help ensure working farms pass from one generation to the next and in areas facing major development pressure, high land prices, or where it is more difficult for new farmers to purchase affordable farmland, the bill will help farmers secure land at an affordable rate.

According to the American Farmland Trust, roughly 5,000 farms have been lost to development in New York State since the 1960s; an average of more than three farms a week for the last 30 years. In 1996, the state began to combat this crisis with a program to fund the permanent protection of farms through the purchase of development rights. Three years later, Dutchess County established a first-of-its-kind matching program to help leverage state dollars to protect local farms. Statewide, farms add more than $39 billion annually in total economic activity and support 160,000 jobs. Here in Dutchess County, farms contribute roughly $80 million in sales to the local economy. New York State has permanently protected more than 2,400 farms on 61,000 acres. The DLC and our partners have helped 48 families permanently protect more than 6,500 acres of working agricultural land. This new law will help keep these working farms that are so integral to our communities, landscape and quality of life intact for the future.

Huge thanks to Georgia Schaeffer, special guest editor and writer, for countless hours spent on our newly revised and exciting newsletter!

Thanks to our Trustees of the Land

Members of the Dutchess Land Conservancy’s Legacy Society have expressed their commitment to the DLC through a very special and important form of financial support; these donors have named the DLC as a beneficiary of a planned gift.

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Social Media Alert:
Don’t forget to follow us @dutchesslandconservancy to learn about our upcoming events, photo challenges and more! And please tag us on your fall wilderness adventures in Dutchess County—we love seeing your photos!
The winning entry in our Instagram Photo Contest – Farm by Sarah Yantz of Rhinebeck, NY.