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The Year Ahead for the Dutchess Land Conservancy

It may seem counterintuitive, but the more we accomplish at the DLC, the less change you’ll see in the area. With each passing year, we often count our “wins” not through “newness,” but through “sameness.” The same number of farms in operation, the same number of open acres...

We had an exciting December, receiving news that all four of our farm grants were awarded (accounting for half of the grants for the Mid-Hudson Valley!). These grants, part of Governor Cuomo’s announcement of new state funding for farmland protection, will ensure the preservation of key farms in our area. This much needed support will not only help these families invest in their future, but also create a variety of farm-related activities for the community and protect our valued rural landscape.

For the fiscal year 2019, the DLC will deploy our new Financial Sustainability Model for our long-range strategic plan. The model, created by our volunteer finance expert, Bryant Seaman IV, was presented at the National Land Trust Conference last year and put us on the forefront of innovation for similar organizations across the country.

In April, members of our staff and board will head to Washington, D.C. to participate in a nation-wide Land Trust Advocacy Day. We will meet with our representatives to encourage support for tax incentives and funding programs, as well as fight against legislation that challenges our ability to work effectively.

Our special events are off to a great start with the planning of our annual Spring Barn Dance at the Hitchcock Hay Barn in May. This dance, along with other events planned throughout the year, not only raise valuable funds for us, but bring together hundreds of neighbors in celebration of the county.

We are also highlighting our education department with new programs this year, including a series of hikes in the late spring and summer, where we will explore different properties in the area. With oversight of over 400 easements, helping land owners understand the wonders of nature on their own properties is key to our mission. We hope you (and your children and dogs) will join us on one of these outings!

This is just a smattering of what we are planning here this year at the DLC. Thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm; it is vital to what we do. We couldn’t do it without you!

Sincerely,

Becky Thornton

CONSERVATIONIST’S CALENDAR

For registration or information on any of these events please call the Dutchess Land Conservancy at 845.677.3002.

FOREST FOSTERERS, APR 27

Three-quarters of New York State’s forests are privately owned. How you manage your small wooded backyard or larger forested lands makes a difference. Join DLC Ecologist Julie Hart and Cary Institute Wildlife Biologist Mike Fargione for An Ecological Approach to Forest Stewardship. This workshop will feature classroom time and outdoor hands-on activities. 10AM to 2:30 PM; Cary Institute Carriage House, 2917-2919 Sharon Turnpike, Millbrook. Space is limited. Registration required. $20 fee.

BARN BOOGHEY, MAY 11

Celebrate the arrival of the new season at our annual Spring Barn Dinner Dance, a chance to catch up with friends over dinner and dance the night away! 7PM to 11PM. Hitchcock Farm Hay Barn. By invitation only. RSVP required. Please call our office to request an invitation.

FINE FEATHERED FRIENDING, MAY 18

National Audubon Society’s Director of Conservation Jillian Liner and Land Steward Dave Decker discuss how to improve the bird habitat quality on your land, as well as the population trends of eastern forest birds, their habitat needs and more at Improving Habitat for Forest Birds: Landscape and Local-scale Management Recommendations. The program will include classroom time and an on-site walk in the woods. 10AM to noon; Dutchess Land Conservancy Office, 4289 Route 82, Millbrook. RSVP required. Free.

LITTLE LAMBS, MAY 25

Get to know your local farmers at our annual FarmFest! Hosted by the Banning family and the DLC, this event features fun for the whole family. Chat with farmers about their products and sign up for a CSA. Let the kids cuddle baby lambs or get their hands dirty with garden activities. Learn about sustainable farming and our Farmer/Landowner Match Program. 10AM to 2PM; Black Sheep Hill Farm, 1891 Route 83, Pine Plains. No RSVP required. Free.
The ever-playful and popular *Vulpes vulpes* came out from her den earlier this year to talk to the DLC’s Karissa Stokdal about her new pups and why the red fox doesn’t make for a good house pet, despite their looks.

Please introduce and describe yourself. Hi, I’m Ruby and I’m a *Vulpes vulpes*, but you probably know me as a red fox. My distinct reddish fur has given me my common name, but I also almost always have a white belly and dark paws. My ears are pointed and I have a long snout. Some people say I look like a dog. We both come from the Canidae family but, trust me, I’d make a terrible house pet.

Really? Why terrible? You look so cute... Even if I were raised by humans, I’m still a wild animal. I like to dig, explore and chew on things. Your garden and belongings will not go unscathed if you keep me in captivity. I have a ton of energy and actively mark my territory. I can be very aggressive toward strangers and could also mistake your smaller pets for a snack.

A snack?! Gracious... What do you like to eat? I’m a magnificent hunter! Raw meats and animal bone are very important to my diet. Most people think I’m a carnivore, but I actually do enjoy an occasional fruit or vegetable. Taurine is a key component to my diet; without it I could go blind, have seizures or even die. Lately, my mate has been doing all of the hunting, as I’ve been taking care of our new pups.

So, you’re a new mom? I just had my first litter of five kits! They’ll stay in the den for now, but in about a month they’ll start playing outside. Eventually, I’ll bring them live prey, so they learn to hunt. In about eight months, they’ll head out on their own. Some of them will travel more than 150 miles in search of a new territory to call home. My mate and I will go our separate ways, but I’ll find someone new next winter.

Where do you call home? Currently, I’m settled into a 15-mile territory in Pine Plains. As a species, we thrive in mixed landscape areas and prefer a blend of woodlands and farmland for hunting and making our dens. Thanks to land protection, many areas of Dutchess County are an ideal habitat!
We often think of red-winged blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) as an early-returning migratory bird, but in fact they can be found in our area year-round. We notice them more in the spring because that is the beginning of the breeding season and the males’ loud, trilling *kon-ka-REE!* mating call can be heard echoing over the marshy wetlands, where the females are busily building their nests.

Their two to three-foot long leaves make skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) easy to find in late spring and throughout the summer, but this plant is at its most interesting in early spring when it flowers. A reddish-brown protective structure (called a spathe) emerges, enfolding the flower (called a spadix), and through a chemical reaction the plant generates enough heat that it can push right through the snow! The warmth also attracts pollinating insects to the flower.

They’re so small you’d never spot an individual, but when springtails (*Collembola, a.k.a. snow fleas*) gather, there can be thousands in a square foot. These tiny creatures have an appendage that can be deployed like a catapult, propelling them forcefully into the air to escape danger. In the winter, they can be spotted moving over the snow, while in spring they sometimes migrate in large numbers over the forest floor.

Looking for fish in the woods may seem like a futile task, but in the spring you often see what looks like the mottled green-brown shape of tiny brook trout on the forest floor. This distinctive pattern gives a name to one of our most common spring wildflowers: the trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), also known as the dogtooth violet. The speckled leaves may blend in with the forest floor, but after the bright yellow flowers open, they are easy to spot!

“For winter’s rains and ruins are over…And frosts are slain and flowers begotten; And in green underwood and cover; Blossom by blossom the spring begins,” wrote Algernon Charles Swinburn of the beginning of spring. With winter ebbing into the distance, it’s time to get outside and explore the wonders of the new season. The DLC’s resident ecologist, education director, and favorite intrepid explorer, Julie Hart, offers a list of her favorite markers of spring.
The chipmunk’s Latin name, *Tamias striatus*, means “striped storer.” You probably saw them in the fall, carrying seeds and nuts in their cheek pouches and vanishing into their burrows. They’ve been hibernating all winter, waking occasionally to eat some of those stored nuts and seeds, and now that spring has arrived, they become active again. Chipmunks mate in early spring and their young will be independent by midsummer.

Sometimes it’s the smallest creatures that make the biggest noise – ask anyone with a toddler! Nature has given an outsized voice to the spring peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*), the tiny frog that announces spring is here. The high-pitched peep is the male frog’s mating call. Female frogs lay hundreds of eggs, often attached to aquatic vegetation, which hatch about a week later. And, eight weeks after that, any larvae that have survived predation will emerge from the water as adults who will live the rest of their lives hunting small insects in low vegetation and on trees.

We dote on our early-blooming crocuses and daffodils, but there’s another vibrant bloomer to look for, though we may need binoculars to do so! Red maple trees (*Acer rubrum*) burst into bloom in the spring, and their bright red flowers are a welcome sight over the muddy landscape. If you can find a tree with flowers at eye level, you may be able to see the difference between the bright red female flowers and the yellowish-red or orange male flowers.

What’s covered in feathers, gobbles a lot and appears strangely spherical? A male wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) performing his courtship display! In the spring, these “tom” turkeys will puff out their body feathers, extend and lower their wings and raise their tail feathers into a broad fan to attract a mate. Turkeys eat nuts and seeds, so they’re often seen near forest edges.

Red fox kits (*Vulpes vulpes*) are born in the winter and weaned about twelve weeks later, so it is in the late spring that we begin to see the kits above ground. This is an important time for them, as they learn to hunt the small animals that are their main food source. Foxes often hunt by listening for nearby prey and then leaping up to pounce on it – watching the parents teach their youngsters this method can be very entertaining!

Crawly, wormy, fuzzy, spiky creatures may not sound like anything you’d want to have living nearby, but caterpillars are worth taking another look at! In the springtime, many nesting songbirds rely on caterpillars as a food source for their nestlings; little chicks need a lot of calories so they can grow up quickly and be ready to leave the nest. And after a caterpillar pupates it will become a butterfly or moth, which are important pollinators!
When Eric Roberts began to look for a second home outside of New York City in the early 1990s, he quickly homed in on Millbrook and its surrounding towns in no small part because of the work of the Dutchess Land Conservancy. “[I chose this area] because of the open spaces and the protections already in place to keep the area rural. This was the work of the DLC. I became a supporter and an advocate for their work and mission from those early days until the present.” Growing up in a western suburb of Philadelphia, Roberts saw the horse farms of his youth give way to subdivisions of 50 houses. He watched as the country of America’s oldest subscription hunt, the Rose Tree Hunt, was carved into smaller and smaller lots. “The hay fields we played in as kids became developments of stucco McMansions,” he recalls. “We are so lucky to have open space that is so readily accessible to New York City. I moved here because of the open land and I want to see it remain that way for others in the future.”

After renting in the area for a few years, Roberts bought the main house of Silver Mountain Farm on Charlie Hill Road in Millerton in 1995. The mountain, which is the highest New York peak east of the Hudson between New York City and Albany, takes its name from the silver mines active there in the 1800s. With astounding vistas in all directions and postcard-perfect sunsets, the area was also a favored picnicking spot of FDR. “The views are incredible, so the land was highly desirable,” Roberts notes. The farm had been sold to some land speculators and knowing the possibility of further development, Roberts began buying as much of the land as he could in pieces over the years, and then putting that land into conservation. Today, over 133 of his acres are overseen by the DLC.

Roberts first welcomed DLC visitors to Silver Mountain Farm for a farm tour in 2002. His farm managers, Chris and Vern Schrom, were raising more than 90 Border Leicester and Rambouillet sheep at that time. Today, the McEnroes manage an assortment of cattle, which graze in the fields behind the barns. Putting the land in active agricultural use is important to Roberts who, as a teenager, worked at a local farm after school. His understanding of the direct connection between open land and a farmer’s ability to make a living continues to inform his views.
In 2016, Roberts again welcomed DLC visitors to Silver Mountain Farm when he hosted the Spring Barn Dinner Dance on his property. “I love a good barn dance because it’s a chance for me to enjoy my other passion, music, with a good live band in a great barn setting,” he notes. The mission of DLC and land conservation is always a large part of the celebration for Roberts and the other barn raisers at the spring dance. “If you’re new to the area, the most important thing you can do is become part of the Dutchess Land Conservancy,” he says. “Most of the people who have established a life here have done it because of the land.” Roberts also became a Trustee of the Land in 2016, joining the most generous supporters who donate at the DLC’s highest giving level.

Last year, Roberts signed on as a DLC Legacy Society member, which means he included the DLC in his estate planning. “When I decided to join, I was at my desk in my office eating lunch. I logged into my donor-advised fund and in less than ten minutes I made the DLC a beneficiary of the fund. It’s so simple [to do],” Roberts explains. As a board member (past and present) of several other non-profits, including the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Cary Institute and the American Museum of Fly Fishing, Roberts’ involvement with, and knowledge of, charitable giving is extensive. “My experience with other charities led me to believe that building permanence into an organization is essential for long-term sustainability,” he says. “A healthy endowment is critical to that. The best way to build an endowment is through legacy gifts,” he continues. “The easiest mechanism for making a legacy gift is to make your charity the beneficiary of your IRA, 401k, life insurance policy or a charitable trust. It can be accomplished quickly, often with significant tax savings.” Most importantly, Roberts notes, “when you’re making estate plans—considering charities you’re passionate about is important.”

For Roberts, his passion for preserving Dutchess County has not gone unnoticed in the community and that devotion has led to his new appointment to the DLC board. “Eric has been an avid supporter of the DLC since he moved to Dutchess County,” Rebecca Seaman, Dutchess Land Conservancy’s Board Chairman says. “We are very excited to welcome someone with his passion and enthusiasm for land conservation onto the DLC Board.”
As I pull my car into Brookby Farm in Dover Plains on a chilly January afternoon, Jaime Vincent quickly ushers me inside her 1800s farm house. She’s laid out an assortment of freshly-baked biscuits with three kinds homemade jam and butter to sample. Two dogs, Beau and Roxy, greet me and give me the sniff over. Ultimately, I meet with their approval. Jaime’s husband, fifth-generation farmer Steve Vincent joins us at the kitchen table. The Vincent family has owned and operated Brookby Farm since 1850, when nearly 400 acres was given to Steve’s great-great grandfather as a wedding present. Today, Brookby Farm is the last remaining dairy farm in Dover Plains.

The business hasn’t been without its twists and turns for the Vincents. When Steve’s grandmother died in 1980, she had done little in the way of estate planning for the commercial dairy with 80 cows. “Everything had to be sold,” Steve says. “Dad got the land, but nothing else.” When Steve’s dad got older, the property was subdivided between six children, each of them receiving between 50-75 acres. But when it was time for Steve to sit down with his own three adult children, Steven, William, and Elyssa, to discuss development rights for the property, the decision was unanimous: they would keep the farm and placed their four barns and 50 acres in conservation with the DLC in 2018. “This preserves the open space for future generations,” he says. “In 50 years, when I’m dead and gone, this will still be here.”

Steve and Jaime ran a small beef operation and farmed hay while the kids were growing up, but the milk barn remained empty until four years ago. It was William, who graduated with an agricultural business degree from SUNY Cobleskill in 2011, who first raised the idea of bringing dairy cows back to Brookby Farm. The Vincents began by buying a few calves while William was still in school. Ultimately, the operation grew to a milking herd of some 40 cows. They contracted with Marcus Dairy, a local distributor and the farm seemed to be on its way. But when the price of milk plummeted when Russia was sanctioned for entering Crimea in 2014, the Vincents needed a new plan for Brookby Farm.

The Vincent family has owned and operated Brookby Farm since 1850, when nearly 400 acres was given to Steve’s great-great grandfather as a wedding present. Today, Brookby Farm is the last remaining dairy farm in Dover Plains.
The family spent a year researching the raw milk industry and waited another six months for a permit, meeting the stringent criteria for unpasteurized products. They scaled down their operation, milking between 12 to 18 cows, just enough to be sustainable on their land and land available to them with rotational grazing. Today, their mixed herd of Holstein, Jersey, Brown Swiss, Normande and Ayrshires cows are fed a grass-based diet without any chemical fertilizers. The Vincents are slowly transitioning their herd away from Holsteins, which produce a milk that has a low butter fat content, to breeds like Normande cows, known for their higher butter fat count. This higher butter fat milk is favored by artisan cheese makers, among them Colin McGrath. The Vincents now sell all of their excess milk to The McGrath Cheese Company, whose raw cow milk cheese, Rascal, can be found from the shelves of Adams Fairacre Farms to the menu at the Rainbow Room in New York City.

McGrath isn’t the only die-hard fan of Brookby Farm’s raw milk. Families drive from all over the county and beyond to visit the farm. “Anyone can come in, watch the process and try it if they wish,” Steve says. “Kids have no idea where their food comes from. They love watching the milk go from the cow, to the hose, to the receiver jar, and in to the tank.” International tourists have included a couple from Holland on a farm tour of the North East and a man from Russia who brought his mother and swears the milk cured his arthritis. The Vincents strive to have a herd of good, calm cows for the public to visit and help milk around 4pm. They also prioritize having one of the cleanest facilities, which the micro-biologist who monitors the farm once referred to in jest as “boring.” These efforts have been recognized with the Super Milk Award, given by the Empire State Milk Quality Council, as well as the Dairy of Distinction Award.

With a growing customer base, the Vincents’ current project is renovating a new, larger farm store. In addition to their raw milk, the farm sells their own farmstead cheeses, pasture-raised meats, fresh eggs, homemade jams, as well as foods from local farms and makers in the Hudson Valley. Jaime is also conceiving a private event space for the community in the future. Deep roots and a desire to contribute to the area keep the Vincents motivated on their journey. “It’s beneficial to the town,” Steve says. “No one is building farms.” Certainly, Brookby Farm has benefitted under the fifth- and sixth-generation stewards, and the seventh-generation stewardship is looking bright, too: “My one-and-a-half year old grandchild’s favorite word is “moo.” 🐮
Forty farms across 19 counties, including four here in Dutchess County, will receive much needed funds to protect some 13,000 acres of agricultural land under the state’s Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program. This program is funded through the State’s Environmental Protection Fund. Let’s have a look at how these funds will positively affect some of the farm families across our state.

The Capital District region was awarded $7.4 million for 15 projects to preserve 3,390 acres. Among them, the Kukon family will be able to buy a farm at its protected value ensuring the land remains affordable for future generations. The Cottrell family in Rensselaer County will permanently protect their land, which in turn will allow the local dairy farmer who leases it to buy it at an affordable price. The Sheldon and Cary families, whose 1,250-cow dairy operation is the largest in Washington County, will use funds to keep their land open and in farm use. Funding will also help facilitate the relocation of the Faille family’s Simply Grazin’ Farm from New Jersey to New York’s Washington County.

The Eildon Tweed Farm (the largest dairy operation in Saratoga County) will be provided security in their leasing of the Lendl and Stina families’ preserved farmland. In Albany County, the Lansings will be able to transfer ownership of their CSA farm to their children, while also ensuring long-term affordability for future farm use. The home of retired race and show horses, as well as other horses in need, will be protected by Michele Peters in Saratoga County. Daniel Wilson’s Hicks Orchard will be preserved helping it to continue its legacy as the oldest pick-your-own orchard in New York State.

In Central New York, $7.7 million was awarded for seven projects to protect 3,340 acres. Among these farms, fourth-generation Monanfran Farm in Madison County, in operation since 1919, that supplies dairy products to local schools and hospitals, will be permanently protected, helping to sustain the Kelsey and Mills families. In Cayuga County, the Koons will be able to transition ownership of their dairy operation to the family’s seventh-generation, in an area where the dairy industry is ranked second in the state. The Gianforte family in Madison and Onodaga Counties will be able to protect heir 470-acre organic grain operation.

The Finger Lakes region was awarded $10.1 million for eight projects totaling 4,090 acres. Many of these grants will protect the land that is home to farms that run cash-crop businesses, providing vegetables, grains and field crops that go to local mills, grain markets and hay sold to local horse farms. Among them, Gary Craft and Stephanie Ludwig will be able to expand their operation, G & S Orchard in Wayne County.

Here in the Mid-Hudson Valley, $8.7 million was awarded for eight projects on 1,600 acres (four of these DLC projects!). Some of these new funds will protect Andrew and Tanya Hahn’s Hilly Acres, a livestock farm which hosts “Down on the Farm Day” and other agri-tourism initiatives in Sullivan County. And, here in Dutchess County, these funds will protect the land of four local farm families, helping them to invest in their livestock, hay and dairy operations, support their family owned-and-run nursery business, secure a dairy farm’s base of operation and enhance a breeding and boarding facility for New York State-bred thoroughbred race horses.

While this is just a sampling of some of the farms that will be effected, the scale of this investment is immeasurable. Each of these farms, which collectively touch thousands of lives, is promised a better future with these funds. To thank Governor Cuomo for this landmark legislation, call 1-518-474-8390 or write The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State, NYS State Capitol Building, Albany, NY 12224 or email governor.ny.gov/content/governor-contact-form.

The DLC also wants to give a shout out to our colleagues across the state who partner with our local farmers including Agricultural Stewardship Association, Cazenovia Preservation Foundation, Columbia Land Conservancy, Finger Lakes Land Trust, Genesee Land Trust, Genesee Valley Conservancy, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, New York Agricultural Land Trust, Orange County Land Trust, Saratoga PLAN, Scenic Hudson, Sullivan County, Western New York Land Conservancy, and others who work so hard to preserve our precious farmland.
Thanks to our Trustees of the Land, the DLC’s most ardent supporters, demonstrate their steadfast commitment to land conservation with annual gifts of $10,000 or more.

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Thanks to our Trustees of the Land

The Legacy Society
Members of the Dutchess Land Conservancy 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.

Our Legacy Society Members
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Jay Schwamm
Becky Thornton
Olivia van Melle Kamp
The Weindling Family
Henry H. Westmoreland
“Edward, did you mark the calendar for the DLC Spring Barn Dinner Dance on May 11th?”

“Sorry to be a birdbrain about it, Elaine! I’ll do it now.”