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About the DLC

Founded in 1985, the Dutchess Land Conservancy (DLC) is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to preserving the rural character, important resources and open lands of Dutchess County, NY. We encourage sound, well-planned growth, balanced with the conservation of our important natural resources and working landscapes to ensure healthy and vibrant communities for the benefit of all generations.

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Cover: Thompson-Finch Farm. Photo by Tara Kelly.
OUT IN THE OPEN: GREAT GOINGS ON

NAME THAT TREE
It was a great day for our Winter Tree Identification Workshop co-hosted by the Cary Institute. DLC ecologist Julie Hart and Cary Institute wildlife biologist Mike Fargione led morning and afternoon sessions on March 2nd, familiarizing attendees with the woody plants on their property. Mike and Julie reviewed how to recognize native and invasive trees and shrubs by their shape, bark patterns, twigs, fruits and seeds. After spending some time in the classroom, the group moved outside to test their knowledge in a wooded area.

FARM FROLICS
Forever-protected farm, Brookby Dairy took part in the 2019 Harlem Valley Farm and Food Alliance Spring Farm Days on March 30th and 31st. Along with J.S.K. Cattle Company, Harlem Valley Homestead, Hoofprint Cheese Company, Locust Hill Market and Soukup Farms, Brookby Dairy opened their doors to the public to experience farm life with tours and milking demonstrations. Visitors were greeted by Toby the cat, three brand new calves (one with a heart marking on her nose!) and about a dozen impatient milking cows. The Vincent family, recently profiled in our spring newsletter, celebrated the opening of their new farm store, where guests were treated to cheese tastings and able to purchase local farm products.

FOREST FOSTERERS
An Ecological Approach to Forest Stewardship drew a capacity crowd to learn about the ecology and stewardship of wooded lands. Held at the Cary Institute, and led by DLC ecologist Julie Hart and Cary Institute wildlife biologist Mike Fargione, attendees learned about the history of local forests, how to create a simple forest inventory, as well as how to identify and manage land for threats to forest health.

EARTH TONES
More than 150 students connected with DLC staff to learn about land conservation at the Dover Schools Earth Day Fair. Held each year in April, the fair gives students the opportunity to explore the many environmental organizations in our area. Kids who visited the DLC booth were thrilled to earn prizes for taking a quiz on land conservation.

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

BEST IN SHOW, JUN 21-23
Don’t miss the Caora Farm Sheep Dog Trials. Michele Ferraro and Kathie Weathers’ forever-protected farm hosts these trials each year in June to give visitors an inside look into the world of sheep dog herding competitions. Bring your lawn chair and a picnic basket and stay for the day! Fri and Sat 8AM-4 PM; Sun 8AM-2 PM; Caora Farm, 235 Sharon Road, Millerton. Free.

SHEKOMEKO STROLLS, JUN 15 & JUL 20
New for 2019! Join the Dutchess Land Conservancy this summer for a series of guided nature walks at our property in the Shekomeko Valley. Led by the DLC’s Senior Manager of Stewardship & Education and resident ecologist, Julie Hart, learn about local flora and fauna while enjoying the great outdoors! Children and dogs are welcome for this easy hike. 85-91 Shekomeko Lane (off Route 83), Pine Plains. Free. RSVP required. Contact Julie Hart at 845.677.3002 or julieh@dutchessland.org. Stay tuned for more information via our email blasts or visit our website at dutchessland.org.
Please introduce and describe yourself.

Hi, I’m Chill Jill and a *Didelphis virginiana*, otherwise known as a Virginia opossum. Don’t let the name fool you though, my species’ habitat stretches from Canada to Central America! Personally, I am settled in my home town of Washington in Dutchess County. Our species have a grey body and a white head, but my nose, paws and tail are pink. We can grow to the size of a small house cat. Although bullies like to compare us to giant rodents, we are North America’s only marsupial!

**Q: What’s in your diet?**

**A:** As an omnivore, I eat all kinds of food, although I love to eat grains, fruits and other plants. I also eat frogs, eggs, insects and other small animals. One of my favorite foods is ticks and I can eat up to 5,000 of them in a single season! I am a master scavenger and once I find food, I’m very good at remembering where it is. Don’t be surprised if you find me hanging around your garbage cans at night; that’s my prime foraging time! I may look scary, but I shouldn’t frighten you. I am really only interested in finding food. I am practically immune to rabies and am eight times less likely to carry the disease than a wild dog.

You don’t want me around your horse barn, however, since my feces can carry protozoa *Sacrocystis neurona*, which can contaminate feed, hay, water or pastures and can cause Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis (EPM). While EPM specifically affects horses and is perhaps the most dangerous as it impacts their central nervous system, as a general rule stay away from all animal feces. Inquisitive pets may contract Coccidiosis or Tularemia, while people may be at risk for Leptospirosis or Salmonella.

**Q: What’s your personality like?**

**A:** I am not aggressive and when I feel threatened, my natural defense is to roll over and play dead. This immobile state can last up to four hours, complete with muscle stiffness, a fixated stare and open mouth. If we ever meet in person, it’s best to leave me alone so we can skip this dramatic, yet Oscar-worthy performance.

**Q: What’s your daily schedule?**

**A:** Because I am a nocturnal animal, I prefer to spend my days sleeping in the woods. I’ll make my den in hollow trees, wood piles or even burrows dug by other animals. Since I am not a very good fighter, I change my nest frequently to avoid confrontation with predators. I do not hibernate, but I will extend my stay if it gets too cold or if I’ve just had babies.

I am a busy mom, sometimes having three litters a year with eight to nine little opossums each, keeping my paws full! Like my kangaroo cousin, I carry my joeys in my pouch after they’re born and when they get too big, I’ll carry them on my back. They’ll stick around for about four months before going off on their own, just before the next breeding season!
Summer is a great time for watching butterflies, and with a little patience and persistence you can learn to identify these fantastic flutterers as they flit around your flowers! A typical butterfly life cycle is less than two months: they hatch from eggs and then spend a week or two as larvae (caterpillars), then metamorphose into a chrysalis, where they hang out (literally) for a week or so and then emerge as adults. Adult butterflies live for about two weeks, flitting from bloom to bloom, feeding on the nectar and fruits of our local flora and serving as important pollinators.

Males and females can look completely different, often with considerable variation in pattern and colors within a single species. The upper and undersides of their wings are also often strikingly different. Butterflies are easiest to see in flight, when the brightly-colored upper-sides of the wings are visible. At rest, the butterfly may fold its wings together, showing the more muted coloration of their wings’ undersides that serve as camouflage against predators.

Here are some of the butterfly Families common to our area. You’ll notice that the different Families have distinctive shapes or coloration, which will help you identify them, even when you can’t get very close! If you’d like to learn more about particular butterfly species, please visit our website at dutchessland.org.

**SWALLOWTAILS (Papilionidae)** Generally large with a wingspan of four to five inches, these brightly-colored butterflies are distinguished by a long flaring tail similar in shape to a barn swallow’s tail feathers. The Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) (left) and the Black Swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes*) (right) are among the most striking butterflies found in the Dutchess County area.

**WHITES AND SULPURS (Pieridae)** Most butterflies in this Family are white, yellow or yellowish-green. With a wingspan of only two inches, they are on the smaller side and can be found in almost any type of open space, including meadows, fields, gardens, roadsides and even lawns. Keep an eye out for the Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*) (left) and the Clouded Sulpher (*Colias philodice*) (right), which can often be spotted in your own garden!

**GOSSAMER WINGS (Lycaenidae)** Butterflies of the Gossamer Wing Family are also small, with a wingspan that is usually around one inch. Often brightly-colored, these butterflies fold their wings when at rest, displaying their dull-colored undersides and making them difficult to see. The blazing orange American Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) (left) and the brilliant blue Spring Azure (*Celastrina ladon*) (right) are examples of this colorful family.

**BRUSH-FOOTS (Nymphalidae)** This large and diverse Family of butterflies is so named for their foremost pair of legs, which are not fully formed, leaving them with only two pairs of legs for walking. Brush-footed butterflies generally have a wingspan between two to three inches and many are brightly-colored and boldly-patterned, like the iconic Monarch! Also in this family are the Great Spangled Fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*) (left) and the Common Wood-Nymph (*Cercyonis pegala*) (right), whose names are a good indicator of the great variability in this family.
Sitting down with Tim Bontecou for an interview, I kept returning to the word “folksy.” So I looked it up. Some of the descriptors included unpretentious, down-to-earth, modest, affable, neighborly, low key, comfortable and informal. And that’s exactly what I found in Tim. There are few people who perhaps better encapsulate the culture and customs of Dutchess County than Tim Bontecou. A native of the county, he is the founder, president and co-owner of Tamarack Preserve. Tim served on the Dutchess Land Conservancy’s (DLC) Board of Directors from 1991 to 2013, which he chaired from 2005 to 2013. He rejoined in 2016 and currently serves on the DLC’s executive, conservation and education committees. Few residents are as deeply-rooted and committed to the area as Tim. He participates in a variety of local organizations in various posts, among them: the Berkshire Taconic Quest for Excellence Fund (Quest) at the Webutuck School, the Bank of Millbrook, the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, the Dutchess County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Dutchess Day School and the Millbrook Hunt. For this dedication, Tim was honored with the Good Scout Award by the Boy Scouts of America.

“My grandparents came up here in 1926 from Rye. My grandmother went to Vassar and was a big rider,” Tim begins. “They heard of a fledgling fox hunt happening here in the Millbrook area. So, they bought some land and then bought some more,” he says with signature matter-of-factness. “It was the riding that interested them in the area and farming became an off-shoot.” Today, the family’s 2,000 plus acre Rally Farms is one of the largest and oldest Angus farms in New York State, known for using innovative practices to protect and enhance natural resources. Tim and his siblings worked on the farm growing up. “As soon as you can reach the pedals of the tractor, you’re out there,” he says. After attending the Dutchess Day and Holderness schools, Tim headed to SUNY Cobleskill to study animal husbandry and then to NYU for biology. But, he’s quick to note he was “not cut out to be a city boy” and returned to Millbrook, where he worked at the family farm and in real estate before founding Tamarack Preserve in 1991.

Now a popular private sportsman’s club, Tim began Tamarack to utilize some of the family’s forested land and raise funds for the farm. “One of the real strong points of the DLC is [we] work very hard with landowners to ensure that the conservation easement that they place on their land, reflects the landowner’s wishes,” he says. “We would like to know what you would like on this property for perpetuity and we work with you to achieve that… as perpetuity is a very long time.”
For Tim this meant placing a conservation easement to forever protect 300 acres of Tamarack Preserve. “We have about 400 members. Some are associate members who dine and shoot clays and others are full members who hunt as well. It’s different every season and I’ve met a lot of really nice people,” he says. “We have a very good chef and have provided a place where people can come and enjoy the day.”

A consummate outdoorsman himself, Tim says: “I like to fish and I like to hunt. But the older one gets, you appreciate the process more than the product. I enjoy watching the dogs work, but I don’t have to shoot a bird. I enjoy catching a fish, as long as it can be released.” This philosophy extends to his environs as well. “I enjoy standing in a river lashing the water. I like to be in the surrounds where you find yourself pursuing your sport.” To these ends, Tim has traveled all over the world on fishing expeditions. “I’ve been pretty lucky. I’ve fished in Chile, Argentina, Russia, Alaska, Canada, all over the US, the Bahamas and the Caribbean.” This season, Tim is headed to Canada for two fishing excursions, one to the Restigouche River and then to the Grand Cascapedia River in Quebec. But for all his travels to magnificent locales, he readily recognizes the charms of Dutchess County: “You can travel where you like, but you come back here, and it measures up pretty well against most places.”

Tim says that despite more people coming to the county, remarkably little has changed since his childhood. “I believe that folks moving here recognize what attracted them to the area and would like to help preserve it,” he says. “You pop over from Connecticut with smaller parcels of land, and over here there’s this open, rolling, agricultural landscape. It’s pretty stunning.” Still, he cites, “there is more pressure...it’s getting tougher and tougher with maintenance costs going up and up.” To mitigate this, Tim is a staunch believer in inclusivity and shared resources. He applies this logic to almost every situation at the DLC and beyond, from encouraging developers to protect important resources when developing land, to collaborating with other local organizations like the Columbia Land Conservancy and Scenic Hudson on farmland protection. “What does it matter who holds the easement, so long as the land is preserved?,” he asks. “We’re all in the same canoe, paddling the same direction, maybe with a slightly different shaped oar.” If that sounds folksy to you, pass me an oar.😊
“We didn’t envision what’s here now,” Marnie MacLean begins speaking of Thompson-Finch Farm in Ancram, New York. “I envisioned a homestead and maybe Donnie envisioned an orchard. But we did not think we would be farming so much land and bringing in so many people.” While the MacLeans moved to the 209-acre farm from Vermont in 1981, the property has been in Marnie’s family since the 1860s. Originally operated as dairy farm by Marnie’s family and then leased out to other dairy farmers in subsequent generations, today Marnie and Don operate one of the largest, organic fruit farms in the area.

The MacLeans planted their first orchard in 1982 and began growing a small amount of vegetables, selling them to local restaurants, stores and organizations including Guido’s, the Hawthorne Valley CSA and Store, the Berkshire Co-op and Camphill Village in Copake. “We planted a very small patch of strawberries and the next year we let people come and quickly realized they would pick what we grew; that little patch morphed into five acres,” Marnie continues. While the MacLeans retain their wholesale accounts, the pick-your-own strawberries and blueberries are the main draw at Thompson-Finch Farm. “We were very clear from the beginning that we didn’t want any extraneous attractions,” Marnie says. “There is no petting zoo or corn mazes.” With little to no advertising, some 200 families a day come to pick from the MacLeans’ patches in the summer months. “I think that’s why it’s become so popular. One, because it’s organic, but I think almost all people like to think of themselves as farmers, agrarians or connected to the earth in some way, even if they don’t have their own garden,” she says. “We allow [people], with respect, to treat [the farm] as if it was theirs. It’s like a fishing hole that nobody talks about.”
The MacLeans spent almost 40 years building up their organic farm, but when Marnie’s parents passed away, the future of Thompson-Finch Farm was uncertain. “Every generation in my family was committed to and struggled with the concept of keeping the farm in the family, even if the family couldn’t be farming it,” Marnie says. The MacLeans originally approached the Columbia Land Conservancy (CLC) for help finding farm land to lease when they believed Thompson-Finch would need to go on the market. The CLC came back with a better offer: what if they bought the farm and leased it back to the MacLeans? “We don’t have need for the ownership of the land, but we wanted to preserve it so other farmers could farm it.”

The CLC, in partnership with Don and Marnie and Equity Trust (a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization dedicated to farmland affordability), worked together to devise a plan, and then implemented their collective vision with even more partners and supporters. More than 300 individuals, businesses and foundations, as well as the DLC and Scenic Hudson, jointly contributed to a successful $1.5 million fundraising campaign to save the farm. This past March the innovative project was finally complete; the CLC owns the land and is leasing it back to Don and Marnie, while the DLC holds the conservation easement. “There were a lot of really smart people involved and it’s set up with layers of protection for possible failures. We are really so happy with the project,” Marnie says. The MacLeans hold a 99-year lease on Thompson-Finch farm. When they are ready to retire, the CLC will work with them to find the next organic farmers who will take over the lease and carry out Don and Marnie’s legacy of thoughtful land stewardship practices. These practices have improved and enhanced the farm’s prime agricultural soils while protecting sensitive natural wetlands, streams and high-quality woodland habitats. Marnie adds, “It’s really quite amazing to be a farmer and to know that the land you are farming will be in agriculture for perpetuity.”
The Dutchess Land Conservancy’s Annual Spring Barn Dinner Dance
Clockwise from top left: Greg and Perrin Martin; Elissa Kramer and Jay Newman; Robbianne Mackin and Eric Roberts; Daniele Bodini and Clair Glover; Andrew Garcia, Lea and Jim Cornell and Rebecca Seaman; our hosts, the Hitchcock Family; Yuri and Vicki Salnikoff, Kirk Henckels and Fernanda Kellogg; Connie and Tom Newberry; co-chairs Tim and Felicity Bontecou and David Thieringer.

Photographs by Barbara Beatty Photography
The Dutchess Land Conservancy would like to thank our Co-Chairs Tim and Felicity Bontecou and David Thieringer, and our Underwriters for making this year’s Sixth Annual Spring Barn Dinner Dance another outstanding success!
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