



# The Steep Rock *VISTA* Fall 2003

## Stewardship Is One of Our Most Important Obligations

### Trails Assistant's Progress

Last year the Trustees agreed that, even with the help of volunteers and scheduled workdays, Steep Rock wasn't keeping up with the constant maintenance needed in its Reservations. They created the part time Trails Assistant position and hired Clark Gifford. Clark, a recent graduate of Maine College of Art with a major in sculpture, woodworking and furniture design, began working in April. Since then Clark has worked to:

- Clearly reblaze the Reservations' five marked trails (two in Steep Rock and three in Hidden Valley);
- Replace several missing signs and barways in both Reservations;
- Repair the Mitchell Hole Trail in Steep Rock where a major washout threatened the integrity of the trail;
- In Steep Rock and Hidden Valley, cut back many of the trails that were significantly overgrown;
- In Steep Rock, repair several bluebird boxes, installed years ago by students at the Glenholme Devereaux School.

In the Macricostas Preserve, Clark :

- Built a wooden walkway that passes through the wetlands section of the trail;
- Built a bridge that crosses Bee Brook;
- Cleared the existing woods road that will become a significant portion of the loop trail to Waramaug's Rock (the Pinnacle at Lake Waramaug) and back to the walkway.



*Trails Assistant Clark Gifford building Macricostas (Meeker) trail walkway.*

### Migratory Bird Stopover Habitat Survey

**By Natalie Dyer**

If you walked along the old railroad bed in Hidden Valley this past spring or early fall, you may have wondered about the markers in the tress. They were put there by Mr. J. T. Stokowski, a staff member of the DEP Wildlife Diversity Program. The markers locate the spots where birders conduct point count surveys for migratory birds.

More than half of all the U. S. birds species are migratory and for many reasons they are on the decline. One contributing factor for which little information exists is the loss of critical stopover habitats. Migrating birds spend from one to several days at these habitats en route to their summer or winter territory. The birds need the best possible conditions to rest and forage during their long migration. The loss of these "refueling" stops can result in birds having to travel greater distances just when their energy demands are the highest. This can lead to higher death rates during migration.

The identification of stopover habitats is an important priority of the Partners in Flight program. Partners in Flight is a cooperative effort between government agencies and conservation groups in the Western Hemisphere to protect and conserve migratory birds. The surveys being conducted along the rivers in Connecticut will help identify prime migratory bird stopover habitats and guide conservation efforts at both the state and town level.

Steep Rock is pleased that the Shepaug River corridor has been identified as providing diverse habitat for our popular migrating birds. We are also extremely fortunate to have Washington resident Dave Babington, a former president of the Western Connecticut Bird Club, coordinating the survey.

For six wet weekends last spring and five this past fall, several experienced birders spent several early mornings at each of the ten survey points, documenting what they heard or saw. The findings of the surveys are sent to the DEP at Sessions Woods in Burlington. The survey will be conducted again next year. If you are familiar with bird identification by sight and sound and would like to participate, please call the Steep Rock office (860-868-9131).

*cont. on page 7*

## Macricostas (Meeker) Preserve Update

The following article is a summary of an extensive report compiled by **Ed White**, Co-Chair with Sheila Anson, of the Steep Rock Stewardship Committee, and presented to the Board of Trustees at its October meeting. The sub-committees mentioned continue to meet and discuss the numerous issues and challenges Steep Rock faces at the Macricostas Preserve.

### **The Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies Management Plan**

The plan provides Steep Rock with a comprehensive management strategy for the Macricostas Preserve (MP) with these objectives:

- To determine the natural potential of the site and delineate conservation measures to ensure ecosystem viability.
- To encourage community awareness and use of the preserve.

The report took the following issues into account:

- How to manage a resource that was acquired with a significant input of public money;
- How to manage abandoned agricultural lands, which require immediate and aggressive management;
- How to preserve active agricultural lands without degrading the character of natural communities;
- How to reconcile passive recreation [hiking] with active recreation [hunting];
- How to manage rare and unique ecological communities.

### **Steep Rock Stewardship Committee's MP Program**

Since the responsibility for oversight and maintenance of the MP fell onto the SR Stewardship Committee, the following steps have been put in place.

- The committee reviewed the recommendations of the Yale School of Forestry Report in detail. It was agreed that sub-committees of Stewardship would be formed to focus on, make recommendations, and with approval from the board, if necessary, take action.
- The areas of concentration as laid out in the Yale Report were open meadows and grasslands, trails and recreation, hunting, farming, monitoring, areas of ecological interest, education and research opportunities and forest health management.
- With these areas of concentration in mind we formed stewardship sub-committees. The following committees have met, focused on short and long term issues, formulated and, in some cases, put into motion action plans.

### **Meadows, Grasslands, Farming Sub-Committee**

Waddy Davidson, Tara Cherniske, Bob deCourcy, Chick Treadway, Ed White.

### Identified Focal Points

- Fields currently under cultivation
- Pastures, meadows, orchards, etc.
- Semi-open areas which are being invaded by woody plants
- Study the potential use of control burning to keep pasture and other areas open
- Continue to look into possible uses of pasture lands

### 2004 Medium Range Plans

- In conjunction with the Potter lease of the corn field:
  - a. Perimeters cut back
  - b. Removal of perk pipes (left over from the development stage of the parcel)
  - c. Keep corn field trail open
  - d. Pursue potential community use of field adjacent to Christian Street house — potential community or demonstration garden (Garden Club)

### **Eco-Monitoring Sub-Committee**

Natalie Dyer, Addie Roberts, David Babington, Diane Dupuis, Hedda von Goeben, Betsy Corrigan, Jean Chapin, Ed White

### Identified Focal Points

- Identify, locate and manage invasives
- Explore programs to identify and promote wildlife in preserve
- Manage access to significant ecological and archeological sites
- Facilitate educational programs and partnerships
- Facilitate involvement of local and regional groups for the betterment of the preserve (Washington Garden Club, IAIS, The Gunnery and Region 12 schools)

### 2004 Medium Range Plans

- Facilitation of bird habitat (Dave Babington)
- Inventory of flora, habitat restoration (Betsy Corrigan)
- Invasive removal
- Documentation of endangered species (Diane Dupuis)
- Garden club link (Addie Roberts)
- Engage schools, i.e. Gunnery Outing Club (Chip Miller)

*continued on next page*

## Macricostas (Meeker) Preserve Update

### **Trails and Access Sub-Committee**

Robby Barnett, Natalie Dyer, Susan Branson, Ed White

#### Identified Focal Points

- Access to trails from primary parking and access point
- Creation of trails on different grades including Pinnacle trail and vista points
- Wetlands crossings
- Pastures and cornfield access

#### 2003 Activities

- Installation of wetlands crossing complete, including foot bridge
- Pinnacle loop sited
- Trail creation program at 50% of completion
- Coordination with other committees re management of open space in concert with trail and activity access

### **Hunting Pro/Con Management Sub-Committee**

John Potter, John Millington, Susan Branson, Mark Averill, Ed White, Dean Fraley

#### Identified Focal Points

- Types of Hunting
- Ability to co-exist with other forms of public access and activities
- Possible location of hunting activities
- Deer population and its effect on understory (input from Yale report).

#### 2004 Medium Range Plans

- Choose type of hunting
- Work on hunting management program
- Recommend season
- Review model procedures (New Milford Park & Recreation and Sullivan Farm Bridgewater)

### **Monitoring and Emergency Access Sub-Committee**

(Public, activity and emergency access, emergency plan including health and fire.)

Mark Averill, Kirsten Peckerman, Susan Payne, Sheila Anson, Ken Deneault, John Millington, Ed White, Chris Moore

#### Identified Focal Points

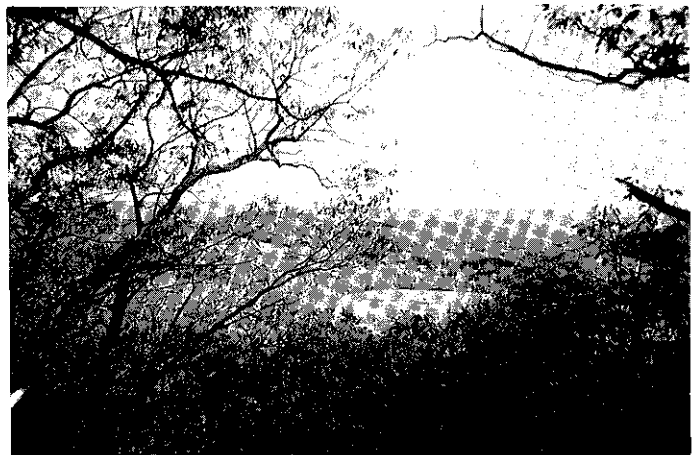
- Location of Macricostas Preserve main access:
  1. Location of parking
  2. Access to trails
  3. Access to right-of-ways

4. Emergency access
5. Control of public access

#### 2003 Activities

- Review potential main parking sites with input from Brian Neff, Civil Engineer. Three sites considered:
  1. Rt. 202 dedication site location
    - Pro: Level site
    - Con: Limited site lines  
State approval needed  
Inability to control access may foster loitering  
Negative public image with neighbors  
Extensive site remediation to be workable within state guidelines
  2. Farm Road access off Christian Street
    - Pro: Off Rt. 202 no site line problem
    - Con: Proximity to neighbors  
Limited parking site  
Wetlands  
Condition of road cut
  3. Christian Street house site
    - Pro: Off Rt. 202 no site line problems  
Existing driveway cut  
Ample parking site  
Location to trail heads  
Protects emergency access  
Protects access to Macricostas land  
Preliminary approval by neighbors
    - Con: Limits use of house site by other than Steep Rock

**On October 4, 2003, the Steep Rock Trustees voted unanimously "to approve the Christian St. house site as the best access to the Preserve".**



*A View from the Proposed Ridge Trail Ridge at the Macricostas Preserve*

# Members of the Steep Rock Association For Fiscal Year 2002-2003

Some of you may not know that the Steep Rock Association is a land trust. Ehrick Rossiter founded the organization in 1925, when he purchased the 100 acres of land that included Steep Rock itself. Steep Rock was incorporated as a land trust in 1961 and became a membership organization in 1994

Steep Rock has always relied on contributions from friends to help defray the costs of maintaining the land we own. This financial support is crucial to our operating budget, which in the coming year is projected to be close to \$200,000.

Our fiscal year runs from October 1—September 30. Our annual membership campaign for 2003-2004 will begin in early November.

We are most grateful to our members for the fiscal year 2002-2003.

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 Alain Wertheimer

The Board of Trustees and the entire Steep Rock community are saddened by the death of Honorary Trustee **Helen Wersebe**. Helen was the longest serving member on the Steep Rock Board, having been a Trustee for a total of 47 years.

## Giant Hogweed Update

By Betsy Corrigan

Many of you are probably aware that Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), a Federally Prohibited Noxious Weed, was discovered this past summer along the Shepaug River in Warren. Approximately 50 plants of all age classes, including seedlings, were found in an overgrown garden on a steep, narrow bank, close to the river. According to the property owner, the plants were already present when she purchased the property three years ago.

Control efforts have been recently initiated to eradicate the plants. The site will be monitored for several years. Plants can re-sprout from the large taproots and seeds that dropped this year will probably germinate, including those that have remained dormant in the soil, as the seeds of Giant Hogweed can remain dormant in the soil seed bank for at least seven years!

Surveys in the Shepaug River corridor must also continue as some of the plants growing in the garden were just inches away from the water's edge, indeed a potential threat to the riparian ecosystem. Once seeds are transported to downstream sites and plants become established, Giant Hogweed can easily out-compete native vegetation.

Since Giant Hogweed is herbaceous, dying back by late fall, stream bank erosion is amplified from autumn to early spring in places where native perennial vegetation would have normally retained the soil.

In addition to the ecological consequences, Giant Hogweed has a toxic sap, making control even more urgent. Both the public and those working on eradication are at risk because skin contact with the sap upon exposure to sunlight causes severe blistering, often leaving permanent scars, and even blindness should sap get into one's eyes.

Mature Giant Hogweed plants have gargantuan, jagged, basal leaves that can grow up to 5 feet long and 3 feet wide. Although the small, whitish flowers, are positioned in an umbrella-like arrangement, most of the time the inflorescence is not domed in shape, but flattened like a platter. The inflorescences, which grow up to 2 feet in diameter, are produced on the top of a single, thick, center stalk that is usually 8-12 feet in height (but is capable of attaining, remarkably, a height of 18 feet!); the stem tends to be blotched with purple.

Please report sightings to the Connecticut Invasive Plants Working Group (CIPWG) at [www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg/](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg/) or call Betsy Corrigan, co-chair, at 868-7830.

Please also note that Cowparsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*), often seen growing along roadsides, strongly resembles Giant Hogweed and is frequently mistaken for it. Be sure to visit the CIPWG (see above) and Invasive Plant Atlas of New England (IPANE) (<http://invasives.ebuconn.edu/ipane/index.html>) websites for additional information, including descriptions of Giant Hogweed look-alikes.



Giant hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*

## Steep Rock Archive Planned

Steep Rock has a significant amount of historical material and numerous photographs that provide a wealth of information about the organization. Currently all of that material is stored in a haphazard manner, making it difficult to access, and in a way that promotes degradation, including discoloration, tearing and brittleness.

Our office assistant, Amanda Branson, will create a system of archival storage for these important historical documents. As an artist, Amanda learned, by necessity, the importance of archival storage.

In preparation for this project she has examined area archival storage facilities and consulted with the archivist at the Bellamy Ferriday House in Bethlehem (owned by the Antiquarian and Landmark Society).

An organized system using archival storage materials will prevent any further damage to these materials and will facilitate research and use by members of Steep Rock and the community.

## Trail Maps Nearing Completion

Anyone who tried to use the old trail maps knows how badly Steep Rock needed to produce an accurate set of maps. Many a hiker got turned around or just plain lost using past editions.

Trustee Robby Barnett has spent countless hours walking the trails in Steep Rock and Hidden Valley using a GPS to accurately record each one. This information was then downloaded into our computer and overlaid on a base map (created for Steep Rock by Planimetrics) that included the reservation boundaries lines, USGS contours lines (elevation levels), rivers and watercourses.

Arroll Borden from Planimetrics was the map making wizard who put all the information together.

The maps should be ready by the end of November!

## New Trustees Elected to Steep Rock Board

**Betsy Corrigan** is an escapee from Fairfield County and has lived in Washington since 1989. She lives on Carmel Hill with her husband, John, and her two children, Erin and Evan. Betsy served for 5 years on the Inland Wetland Commission and is currently on the Conservation Commission. She is a member of the New England Wildflower Society's Plant Conservation Task-force which tracks and monitors the region's endangered flora and co-chairs the CT Invasive Plants Working Group. Betsy is co-author of Non-native Invasive and Potentially Invasive Vascular Plants in Connecticut and is writing her second paper on the conservation and recovery of a CT endangered plant. She works part-time as the staff botanist and GIS Specialist for The Northwest Conservation District helping area towns develop conservation plans. For the past few summers, Betsy has been conducting invasive plant surveys, funded by the USDA, for the University of Connecticut.

Most of all, she loves spending time with her children and exploring nature with them.

**Peter Houldin** grew up in Washington and currently lives on River Road. He attended Rumsey Hall School and the Gunnery. After graduating from Lynchburg College, he returned to Washington and joined Ericson Insurance and Financial Services, a family owned business located in Washington Depot since 1938.

Peter is on the board and past president of the Washington Ambulance Association, a director of the National Iron Bank, a member and past secretary of the Lions Club of Washington and active in alumni relations at the Gunnery. In addition, he just completed a term as Vice President of the Elliot Pratt nature Center.

Peter and his wife Hilary recently became parents of twins. When they're not busy with the babies, they enjoy walking, cross country skiing and snow shoeing in Steep Rock.

**Ed White** returns to the Board of Trustees after being an active Council Member for a year. He served two terms as a Trustee, from 1996 -2002. He is the Co-Chair of Steep Rock's Stewardship Committee; and very importantly in Ed's mind—he's a cook at the Steep Rock Picnic.

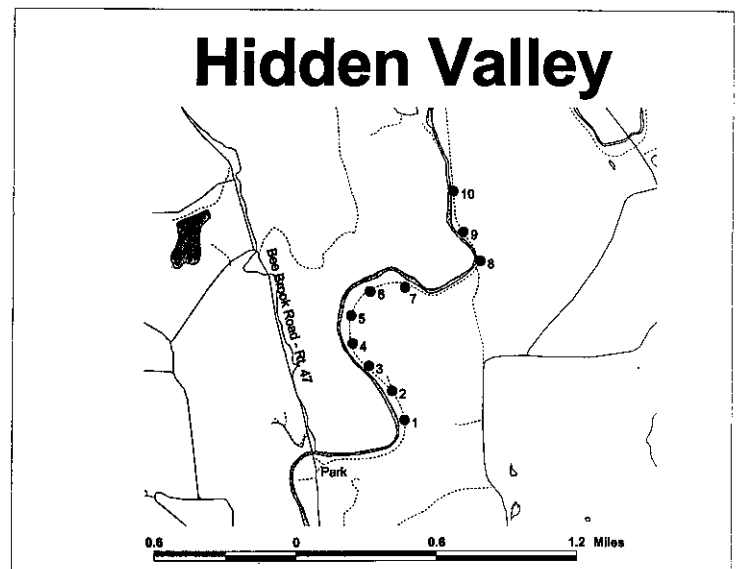
Some of Ed's other civic activities include Chairman of the Town of Washington Zoning Board of Appeals and Chairman of the Post College Foundation.

Ed is Executive Vice President of The Robinson Company, an employee benefit consulting firm. His wife Zemina Mastin is an artist and designer, and they have two sons—Nulty and Clai.

## Migratory Bird Survey, *cont. from page 1*

The Massachusetts based Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences has been invited to help with the project. This organization recently completed a successful Connecticut River watershed project, identifying 29 sites in four states that need protection.

The data from these migratory bird stopover habitat surveys will alert Steep Rock to the needs of migratory birds and help us make informed choices about managing our land. Each year more and more habitats are lost or compromised by human activity and the introduction of alien plant species (invasives) that destroy healthy ecosystems. If we value our once common warblers, orioles and flycatchers, we must work to ensure the stability of their stopover habitats.



*Location Points in Hidden Valley Used in the Migratory Bird Survey*

**We Have A Web Site!**  
**[www.steeprockassoc.org](http://www.steeprockassoc.org)**

Thanks to Trustee Polly Roberts the site is up and running. Visit it to find lots of useful information, including Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences' Management Plan for the Macricostas Preserve (Meeker Swamp). You'll also find interesting links to other environmental web sites and a timeline of Steep Rock's history.

## Steep Rock Association

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## New Logo for Steep Rock

Artist and illustrator Wendell Minor, a member of the Steep Rock Board of Trustees, has designed a new logo for us. We're using it for the first time in this newsletter. The logo will adorn our website, newsletter, and all our forthcoming publications. We believe the logo reflects the grandeur of Steep Rock and Hidden Valley and their predominant hemlocks, the river and its trails. Thank you Wendell!

## Another Great Picnic!

More than 400 people came again this year. The Annual Picnic is Steep Rock's way of saying thank you to our supporting members and to all the residents of the town of Washington. The weather was perfect: sunny, warm, but not really hot. There was plenty of food, fun and fellowship for everyone.



Picnic Workers Kirsten Peckerman, Chick Treadway, Mike Jackson, Bill Fairbairn (in the background), Jane Cahn and John Millington.



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