

# ACCABONAC PROTECTION COMMITTEE



Newsletter • Volume 25

Spring 2015

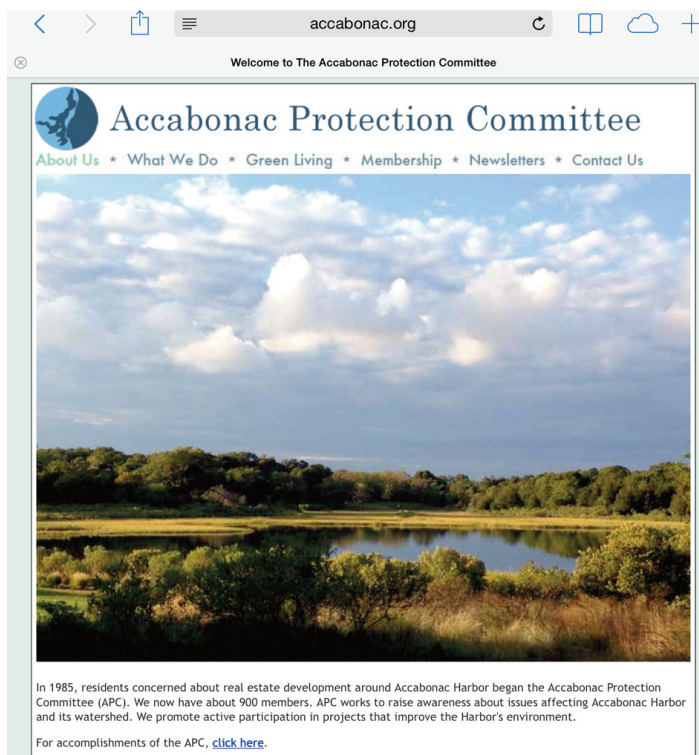
Editor • Jorie Latham

## HOT OFF ... THE INTERNET? ...!

by Jorie Latham

Take note, dear members! This year's newsletter is going to live up to its name! Lots of NEWS!!! Following is a sampler of what you will find in more complete form in articles in this issue. So read on!! First and most exciting for many of us (hope that includes you!) :

### OUR NEW WEBSITE IS UP!



We've been promising a NEW! IMPROVED! website for, in fact, years....It is now a reality and I encourage you to drop everything (including this) and go online and have a look! It is full of great information, a useful archive, splendid photos and even our videos via YouTube! We are yearning to share it with you and hear what you think! There are, of course, a few bugs and wrinkles to be worked out, and they will be. In the meantime, we have connected with the 21st century at last!

### MORE EXCITEMENT ... TWO ADOPTIONS!

In October, we (and that means you) became the proud adoptive "parents" of the Barbara Barnes Hale Refuge through the Town's Adopt-A-Preserve program. This makes official what has been our de facto sense of responsibility for this former (and we hope, future) grassland, dating from well before it became a nature preserve. This should give us standing in meetings with other stakeholders (Town, County and DEC) as we try to move forward with our meadow restoration agenda.



We have also recently adopted Gerard Drive as part of the Town's Adopt-A-Road program. This means we will be doing our best to keep the litter collected on Gerard as well as Louse Point and Landing Lane. While we have not scheduled any cleanups, we count on our members to do their part whenever and wherever you see litter... if there's a little, pick it up — if there's a lot, let us know!

### MORE NEW! IMPROVED!

We mounted a brand new quiz game for the Fisherman's Fair. Using the time-honored kid's game "What's wrong with this picture?" as a theme, we were able to address many of the issues we have been tackling over the years, from invasive plant species to the problems caused by escaped balloons. The colorful display attracted attention and started many discussions among players of all ages.

Continuing to build on our success in 2013, we produced a second *IMAGES OF ACCABONAC* art show, this one in conjunction with the spectacular "Heart of Springs" fundraiser. It was wildly successful and we are planning our third showing this coming October 31-November 1, so start snapping, painting or collaging, and keep checking the website for more information (I LOVE being able to say that!).

Nitrogen is no longer just a topic of conversation,

there are actually things being done to diminish its negative impact on our waters! We invited Pio Lombardo to speak at our Annual Party in September on technologies available to reduce nitrate load. More recently, the County Health Department has initiated a pilot program installing advanced nitrogen reducing septic systems in 19 homes (none of them on the East End, however). There is also a plan afoot (and a grant in the works) to install such a system at Springs School to reduce nitrates flowing into Pussy's Pond.

Although we continue to pursue the possibility of simpler, less expensive approaches, we have not had enough response to report so far. But stay tuned...!

## PUSSY'S POND PROJECT PROGRESSES

by *Chris Ganitsch*

**Here's what we know:** Nitrogen excess, originating from our septic systems, threatens the ecology of our bays, harbors and creeks including our treasured Accabonac Creek.

**Here's what we must do:** Fix the problem!

**Here's some good news:** It can be done!

With the goal of decreasing the amount of nitrogen reaching Accabonac Creek, the East Hampton Department of Natural Resources has recently received grant monies to identify sources of nitrogen flowing in groundwater seepage into Pussy's Pond, which borders Springs School and flows directly into Accabonac Creek. Historically, data gathering has been piecemeal, with various agencies collecting data for their own specific purpose.

Now, state-of-the-art technologies will be employed to locate groundwater seepage, quantify flow rate, and perform chemical sampling for nitrogen concentration. This comprehensive shoreline quantification of nitrogen loading will allow a prioritization of locations, including where to place nitrogen-removing permeable reactive barriers (PRBs) in the area around Pussy's Pond, thereby significantly decreasing nitrogen load to the creek.

Protecting Accabonac Harbor... **IT CAN BE DONE!**

## THREATENED SPECIES NEED MORE GRASSLAND

by *Cile Downs*

You may have read the alarming story in January's *East Hampton Star* that informed us that our state is losing wildlife species at a frightening rate. Many of us already were aware that this was happening, but we had no idea how extreme the decline was or how soon we might see extinctions.

According to *The Star*, "186 mammals, birds, fish, shellfish, and amphibians were described as likely to drop to critical levels unless urgent conservation action is taken. In addition, an equal number of species was listed as expected to see significant

declines by 2025." These projections were released in a recent report by NY Department of Environmental Conservation and the Cornell University Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Other experts believe this report underestimates the danger.

The principal cause of this crisis seems to be loss of habitat. There have been many articles in previous issues of this newsletter that lamented the change around our creek from grassland to a tangle of invasives and impenetrable woods and voiced concern for named species of birds that used to be common here but are now rarely seen: meadowlarks, killdeer, grasshopper sparrows, vesper sparrows, glossy ibis, whippoorwills, quail, pheasant, barn owls, kestrels, and marsh hawks, not to mention occasional visits from very special birds like snowy owls, snow buntings, and once, a Greenland wheatear. All these creatures require meadows.

APC would like to see DEC reexamine its wholesale prohibition on clearing around a water body like Accabonac, a prohibition that has in some cases proved pointless and destructive. Trees, by shading the ground, thin vegetation and consequently allow more erosion than a stand of native grasses would. These lands, now partly contained in the Barbara Barnes Hale Preserve, have been grasslands since as far back as we have records.

For centuries the creek, surrounded by deep-rooted native grasses, was pristine. If it is no longer so, we know it is largely because of human habitations and their septic systems, in no way mitigated by the woods we have now. It goes without saying that we need better septic arrangements that stop wholesale nitrate pollution of the waters. However, restoration of more vigorous grasslands might also help filter the septic wastes that endanger our waters.

## GRASSLANDS HELP MONARCHS

by *Margot Hardy*



If further justification is needed for APC's work to restore the Barbara Barnes Hale Preserve to full-meadow status, it's a recent reminder from the

World Wildlife Fund of the importance of habitat, for food and reproduction, to the Monarch Butterfly.

Years ago, you could sit on the ocean beach on a warm September day and marvel at the clouds of the brilliant orange creatures in almost endless streams fluttering past on their way south, migrating to central Mexico. Not so in recent years.

The WWF reports that the most recent migration was a record low and states that, while "small-scale logging in Mexico and extreme weather conditions across the continent are driving the decline ... the main factor is most likely the near-extirpation in the US and Canada of milkweed."

The Barbara Hale meadow used to provide a profusion of milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and the cheerful orange butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), enjoyed by other species of butterflies as well. Returning the preserve to true meadow status will not only protect it but also support the continued existence of the beauty of butterflies.

## THE TIMES ... ARE THEY A-CHANGING?

by Nicholas Bryan

In our last issue, I wrote an article about nitrogen pollution in Accabonac Harbor, citing the negative effects of nitrogen on that magnificent body of water. Excessive nitrogen, introduced by our septic systems and surface runoff, overstimulates aquatic plants and algae and, in turn, uses up dissolved oxygen as plants decompose and block light to deeper waters. Unsightly algae scum (rife last summer on Pussy's Pond and other areas of the creek) can grow and decrease animal and plant diversity.

Happily, we are beginning to see a serious effort by local and state governments to address the effects of excessive nitrogen on our harbor and other waterbodies. Governor Cuomo referenced this issue in his coastal resilience and water quality task force report. Suffolk County has addressed the issue in its comprehensive water resources management plan. In April, the County, as part of its Septic Demonstration Program, will install next generation alternative technology wastewater systems free of charge to 19 homes up-Island. It will maintain and evaluate these systems over the next five years. Within six months, the County will approve some or all of these systems for use in existing homes.

According to County personnel, these advanced systems remove about 50% of nitrogen, nearly twice the amount properly functioning conventional septic systems remove. Bob DeLuca, of Group for the East End, states that there is "a fairly minimal reduction in nitrogen (other than dilution) in conventional systems." Clearly, the systems currently being used are inadequate for the purposes of saving Accabonac Harbor from the destructive effects of nitrogen.

Unfortunately, the advanced systems being tested by the County currently cost about \$15,000 fully installed, with an annual maintenance cost of \$200-400. If several of these systems receive approval from the Suffolk County Department of Health Services, market competition may help to lower installation costs for homeowners.

Fortunately, our elected officials are aware of the hardship such an expense would create for many homeowners who choose to install an advanced system. As recently reported in the *East Hampton Star* by Joanne Pilgrim, "Town supervisors and village mayors from across the East End are proposing a regional initiative to address the increased pollution

of surface and groundwaters by the nitrogen released from cesspools and septic systems." They are advocating the creation of a \$100 million state fund for financial assistance to homeowners for installing advanced technology systems. The fund may provide a combination of \$5000 rebates and interest-free loans. The program could be funded from New York's share of a \$125 billion national mortgage settlement, money to be paid by banks found to have acted improperly in mortgage servicing and foreclosures.

The article also quotes Kevin MacAllister, former Peconic Baykeeper and founder of Defend H2O, as saying "local municipalities can and should enact standards for septic systems that are more stringent than those upheld" by Suffolk's Health Department.

According to the East Hampton Town Wastewater Management Plan, it is necessary to have regular monitoring of the nitrogen levels in the harbor in order to determine how much nitrogen it can accommodate. We hope that installation of advanced technology wastewater systems in the Accabonac Harbor Protection Overlay District will play a significant part in reducing nitrogen pollution to an acceptable level.

Let's applaud the efforts of our local officials in the role they are playing in helping us protect Accabonac Harbor ... even as we urge them to continue the work necessary to achieve this goal.

## SOMETHING TO SURF ABOUT

by Vay David

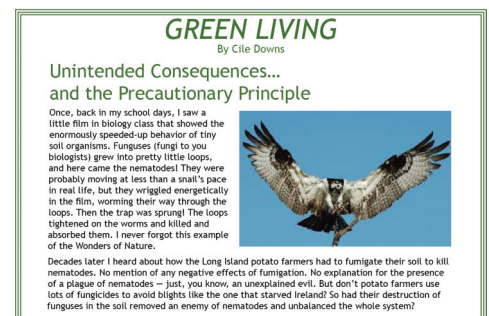
We invite you to start spring by surfing APC's website, in its newly launched version at [accabonac.org](http://accabonac.org).

Come on in and explore it! And keep checking back for the

latest news on our activities and events.

You'll find some great photos and extensive information about the organization and our efforts to protect the beauty and health of Accabonac Creek. We've gathered all of our newsletters together, plus all of Cile Downs' terrific *Green Living* articles, which first appeared in the *East Hampton Star*. In addition, the site provides links to our innovative video series, *Long Live Accabonac*.

We'd love to hear your comments about the changes we've made. We'd also like to know if you want to receive future newsletters (with COLOR photos) by email instead of snail mail. Please email us your newsletter preference and your comments at [accabonac.protection.contact@gmail.com](mailto:accabonac.protection.contact@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from you!





**IMAGES OF ACCABONAC:** APC is making plans for its third IMAGES OF ACCABONAC art show, scheduled for October 31 and November 1, 2015 at Ashawagh Hall in Springs. Renowned local artist Janet Jennings' mixed media work, "Accabonac Storm" (above), was one entry in the impressive array of art displayed in 2014. We'll be looking for more works inspired by Accabonac for this year's show. Watch our website and local papers for more information as the date nears.

#### TOO MUCH PAPER?

Here's a hint we got from our friends at The Overbrook Foundation on reducing the amount of paper that clogs your mailbox and our landfill. Go to Catalog Choice (a not-for-profit site) and sign up. You can also check Forest Ethics' Do Not Mail Campaign, where you can petition to reduce your junk mail. Between them, you can help protect the privacy of your personal information, reduce the clutter of unwanted mail and save natural resources.

## ACCABONAC PROTECTION COMMITTEE



### 2015 Calendar of Events

#### FISHERMAN'S FAIR

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8 • 10 AM – 3 PM  
COME PLAY THE APC GAME!

#### ANNUAL PARTY

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 • 3 – 5 PM  
AT CILE DOWNS HOUSE  
956 SPRINGS FIREPLACE ROAD

#### IMAGES OF ACCABONAC

ART SHOW AT ASHAWAGH HALL  
OCTOBER 31-NOVEMBER 1

#### PLEASE HELP IF YOU CAN

While our membership is free, our operations are not. APC does its best to keep expenses to a minimum, and, as an all-volunteer organization, time dictates that we use our energies and resources for other purposes than fund-raising. Please help us continue our special focus on the important issues facing Accabonac by sending along whatever contributions you can to:  
Accabonac Protection Committee,  
956 Springs Fireplace Road, East Hampton NY 11937.  
Thank you in advance for your generosity and support of our efforts!

Monthly meetings are usually held at 9 am the first Monday of each month. Check papers or call us for locations:

**631-324-2435**

email: [accabonac.protection.contact@gmail.com](mailto:accabonac.protection.contact@gmail.com)

## ACCABONAC PROTECTION COMMITTEE



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