



# STONY KILL ALMANAC

FALL 2025 | WINTER 2026



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### Our Mission

To connect the public with nature, sustainable farming, and local history. Our hands-on programs provide environmental education through the lens of agriculture.

### Vision

A world where sustainable agriculture flourishes and people are inspired to care for their local environment.

### Purpose

Stony Kill is a working farm and education center. It is a place to slow down, explore nature, and learn through experience.

### Cover photo:

Stacey Lynch Adnams

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To inquire about submitting an article or images for the *Almanac*, email:  
Almanac@stonykill.org

# Connecting Past and Present



Autumn is a season of energy and tradition on the farm. As the leaves turn and the air grows crisp, our fields and barn come alive with events that celebrate the harvest, community, and the beauty of the season. Many of these gatherings have been part of our repertoire for years, rooted in the land and the values we hold dear. They connect us to both the present and a legacy of celebration and learning.

This spirit of tradition is echoed in our *Almanac*, started years ago by Anita Sanchez (see page 10), whose vision was to document and share life on the farm and the importance of environmental conservation. Her contribution continues to guide us and remind us of the value in slowing down, observing, and honoring the land.

As we move into the quieter winter months, we will gather stories, honor the past, and prepare for what's to come. In every season, we are reminded that what we do today is always connected to those who came before us.

**Stacey Lynch Adnams**  
**Executive Director**



Photo by Kara Cerilli

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# Nature's Milestones

By Tim Stanley

Natural events and things to look for on the farm as the seasons unfold.

**Late September/early October**—Planting cover crops can greatly improve garden soil—legumes enrich it with nitrogen, rye and oats build structure, and daikon radishes break up compaction.

**September–November**—Migrating geese fly in a V-formation to conserve energy, taking advantage of the updrafts from the bird ahead and rotating leaders when one tires. The formation also improves communication, navigation, and group safety.

**October 6**—Hunter's Moon. "Moonlit nights have the heaviest frost."\*

**Mid-October**—Trees stop producing chlorophyll, and the yellows, reds, and oranges hidden beneath the green are revealed. The leaves provide habitat on the forest floor after they fall, and enrich the soil as they decay.

**November–March**—Begin feeding overwintering birds in late fall as natural food sources dwindle, and you'll soon welcome regular visitors like chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, sparrows, blue jays, and woodpeckers.



**December 21**—Winter solstice. Longest night and shortest day of the year.

**December–March**—Snow forms an insulating blanket and subnivalian zone that shelters small creatures from winter's bitter cold and biting winds. When it melts, look for the winding tunnels rodents left behind.

**February 2**—"Half the wood and half the hay, you should have on Candlemas Day."\* This day marks the halfway point of winter.



\*This folklore is rooted in truths drawn from close observation of nature.

*Tim Stanley is president of Stony Kill Foundation.*

Photos by Tim Stanley

# Humans of Stony Kill



*"Very successful. Overall, it was a good season and we're most proud of our tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and carrots."*

—Ed and Ginny Kenny

Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams



**How was your growing season in the community gardens this year?**



Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

*"Stony Kill is the best place to grow organic food."*

—Mark Repicky



Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams



Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

*"This growing season was an adventure—the very first time I had a plot at Stony Kill."*

—Carmen Vazquezteell



Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams



Photo by Tim Hetrick

# The Sound of the Killdeer

By Stacey Lynch Adnams



The Killdeer bird's sharp, high-pitched call—often described as a loud “kill-deer!”—is hard to ignore. And when I heard it blaring from Stony Kill's community gardens this spring, I got very excited. I followed the sound and noticed a female sitting in a garden bed, a clutch of four eggs underneath her small body. Her feathers were gray with a white chest and black stripes along her neck and head. Typically found by shorelines, Killdeer are about the size of a robin, have long legs, and can move quickly on land. It's before the growing season, so she camouflages well in the garden dirt.

As I inch closer to get a better view, she stands up and makes a loud distress call that sounds like a bubbling high-pitched “dee” and begins fluttering her wings. She gives a performative broken-wing display as she walks away from her nest, encouraging me to follow her and hoping I leave her nest alone. Since that day, several Killdeer families have been spotted in the gardens and lingering in our lower pasture, feasting on worms and grubs in our compost pile.



*Stacey Lynch Adnams is executive director of Stony Kill Foundation.*

*Photos by Tim Stanley*

# Meet the Woodchucks of Stony Kill

By Tim Stanley

Have you spotted the burly ground squirrels of Stony Kill Farm? Around here, they go by many names—woodchucks, groundhogs, even “whistle pigs.” That last nickname comes from their sharp, high-pitched whistle, a signal that warns neighbors of approaching danger. Despite their stout build, woodchucks belong to the squirrel family, making them cousins to chipmunks and tree squirrels.

Beneath the pastures and hayfields, woodchucks are master builders. With strong claws, they dig elaborate tunnel systems with a nesting chamber, side rooms, and hidden escape routes. These burrows are more than just homes—they’re fortresses, nurseries, and even bathrooms, with separate chambers keeping the den surprisingly tidy.



*Photo by Tim Stanley*

## **Winter’s Chill (Out)**

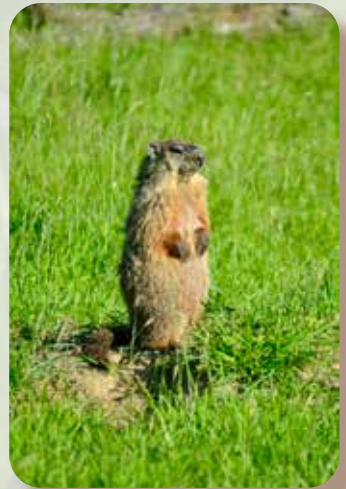
When winter sets in, woodchucks retreat to their underground nesting chamber and slip into one of nature’s deepest sleeps: true hibernation. Their heartbeats drop from 80 per minute to barely 5, breathing slows to only a couple of breaths each minute, and body temperature falls from 99°F to 37°F. For nearly five months, they remain in this suspended state, surviving on the fat they stored through summer and fall.

By the time February 2—the day we celebrate as Groundhog Day—rolls around, the woodchucks of Stony Kill are still fast asleep. No shadows, no predictions—just deep torpor beneath the frozen fields. The folklore may be fun, but the real story is even more remarkable: these small mammals won't stir for another six weeks, until the earth begins to soften and the first shoots of dandelion and clover push through.

### **Spring Awakening**

When they finally emerge in March, they're hungry and lean, having lost up to 40% of their body weight. The males roam widely, searching for mates, while females prepare to raise their young alone. After just a month's gestation, two to six tiny, blind, hairless kits arrive, nestled safely in the underground chamber until they're ready to meet the world above.

The next time you walk the farm lane at Stony Kill, pause and scan the fields. That brown shape munching clover or darting for its burrow is more than a nuisance or a weather-day celebrity—it's a keeper of the seasons. Woodchucks remind us that the land's rhythm runs deep: dig in, rest well, rise again with spring.



*Photo by Tim Stanley*

*Tim Stanley is president of Stony Kill Foundation.*

# Rest Up, My Dear Garden

By Nicki Bogie

As the gardening season winds down, many of us reach for rakes and pruners to tidy up the landscape. In doing so, we may unintentionally destroy vital overwintering sites for pollinators. With a few mindful changes, you can “put your garden to bed” while still protecting the insects that keep it thriving.



Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams

## Let the Leaves (and Plants) Be



Photo by Dorna Schroeter

Fallen leaves provide essential habitat for butterflies, bees, beetles, and moths. Instead of bagging leaves, rake them into garden beds or around shrubs. This natural mulch insulates soil, prevents erosion, and shelters overwintering insects. Species like the luna moth, ground-nesting bees, and other solitary bees also use leaf litter for insulation and protection, creating burrows in or under it to survive the cold. Soil fauna like earthworms, springtails, mites, and millipedes eat decaying leaves. These organisms fragment the leaf material, increasing surface area for further microbial action. They also help nutrients be readily available to growing plants in spring and summer.

Also resist the urge to cut down all perennials (but remove and do not compost any that are diseased). Many native bees nest in hollow or pithy stems, while dried seed heads provide food for birds and other wildlife. Consider



Photo by Tim Stanley

trimming plants in spring instead, once temperatures consistently reach above freezing and the last frost has passed, which is a signal that pollinators that were asleep have emerged.

### **Have an Eco-friendly Mindset**

Do online shopping? Reuse your kraft paper delivery boxes to help insulate and promote a worm-tilled space where you can plant your favorite crops or flowers in the spring. Using cardboard with minimal ink is essential; we would not want to add toxic materials to the soil food web due to the likelihood of bioaccumulation (the gradual buildup of chemicals in the tissues of living organisms).



*Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams*

Avoid using pesticides or herbicides, which can harm hibernating pollinators and beneficial insects hidden in the soil or plant debris. Consider the least-harmful option by pulling the plants you don't want and managing pests with traps or interplanting. Also known as companion planting, interplanting helps deter harmful insects, provides support for crops, offers shade to smaller plants, suppresses weeds, attracts beneficial insects, and increases overall soil health.

By rethinking fall cleanup with pollinators in mind, you're not neglecting your garden— you're nurturing it. A slightly wilder, more natural winter garden is not only beautiful under snow and frost, but also supports the rich web of life that will return in spring.



*Photo by Tim Stanley*

*Nicki Bogie is program coordinator at Sharpe Reservation in Fishkill, NY.*

# On Our Bookshelf: A Sky That Sings

By Kerri Morgan



Meet George Steele and Anita Sanchez: husband and wife, coauthors, and environmental educators.

## **A Love Story**

They met at Stony Kill in 1979, where both were working to educate the community—mostly children—about the environment, a shared passion. George worked for the DEC, running camps, and Anita was the very first employee at Stony Kill through the DEC; in fact, she started our *Almanac*! And so began her passion for writing about the environment. Anita and George were married in 1982 and have spent their life together writing books, educating youth, traveling, bird watching, and remaining committed to environmental conservation.



George and Anita then

Anita has written over 20 books, and loves to highlight unknown or unloved species of plants and animals such as poison ivy and bats. She has written a series on endangered animals, educating youth on actions they can take to help them. One of her more recent books is *A Sky That Sings*, coauthored with George. He admits that Anita is the writer and he helps with specifics and details; they can often be found in their living room having conversations about the books while she writes.

## A Story That Nurtures a Love of Nature

*A Sky That Sings* is a beautiful picture book for children. It follows Mia, a blind child who uses her other senses, mostly her hearing, to identify birds. She is able

to recognize many birds by their call until she finally finds her favorite bird of all! This inclusive book opens the reader's eyes to the idea that there is often more than one way to enjoy nature. It also shows young



children that disabilities can often lead to developing other strengths and are not disadvantages. The book encourages readers to try “bird-listening,” using their hearing to identify birds out in the wild.

George and Anita both have firsthand experience working with blind children and teaching them to “bird-listen”; and this is where the idea for their book started.

Freelance educators who still enjoy teaching youth about the environment, Anita and George are available for school programs and can often be found reading their book and leading bird walks at public libraries. To learn more about the book or ways to connect with them, visit [anitasanchez.com](http://anitasanchez.com).

*Kerri Morgan is a board member of Stony Kill Foundation.*

# Artist's Corner



**Artist: Diane Matsakis**

**Title: Stony Kill Farm**

The painting dates back more than 20 years, I think. It was done in watercolor, which is my favorite medium, as I like the detail I can create by working the paint tightly. I was inspired to paint Stony Kill because I love how the farmhouse buildings blend into the natural surroundings in such a pleasing way, with the warmth of its rich colored fieldstone and of course those splendid locust trees that tower into the sky!

# Volunteer Spotlight: The Morgan Family

By Lauren Biniaris



*Photo by Stacey Lynch Adnams*

If you have visited the farm lately, you have probably seen the heritage turkeys enjoying their amazing new mobile coop. This incredible addition to the farm was supported in part by a Livestock Conservancy grant received by Stony Ground 4-Hers Lyris and Tavin Pennock that subsidized the purchase of a large prefabricated shed kit to comprise the body of the coop. Once assembled atop a tractor chassis, the coop can be moved to new pasture regularly, benefiting both the health of the birds and the soil they graze, turn, and fertilize in their wake.

## Ready for a Challenge



When the shed kit arrived, however, it was apparent that building it would not be an easy job. It was going to require skill, sweat, time, and a positive attitude. Who could help us with such a task? Enter the Morgan family.

Kerri and Chris Morgan and their six-year-old son Brian first visited the farm in 2021. Since then, they have participated in the preschool, homeschool, and 4-H programs, and volunteered as barn guides, event planners, board members, and more. The farm is a very special place for them, and in Brian's own words, "It's basically my home away from home."



*Photos by Kerri Morgan*

## Supporting the Farm, Strengthening Family Bonds

Brian's favorite thing to do at the farm is to talk with visitors during Open Barn about the animals, especially the chickens. A natural teacher, he always shows people how to pet and handle the animals safely. Chris loves to fish in the pond, and Kerri particularly loves walking the Woodland and Farm (a.k.a., Bluebird) Trails. Kerri joined the Stony Kill board in 2024 because she loves watching Brian being raised on the farm, and she wants to help protect and nurture this important place. Chris is a trained carpenter and did not hesitate to donate his time, energy, and talent to build the shed and expertly retrofit it to meet the farm's needs. With Kerri and Brian as his helpers, he donated five full weekends building the mobile coop of Stony Kill's dreams. To say we are grateful is an understatement. We are in awe!



*Photo by Chris Morgan*

Even though the coop build was a huge job, the Morgans agree that it was amazing family bonding time. For Chris in particular, it means so much that he has built something so useful in a place his son loves so much. Every time Brian works with poultry (which he does a lot!) and sees the coop, he can remember building it along with his dad and be proud. Thank you so much, Chris, Kerri, and Brian for the love and spirit you bring to Stony Kill. This place is better because you are in it!



*Photo by Stacey Lynch Adhams*

*Lauren Biniaris is vice president of Stony Kill Foundation.*

# Stony Kill Then and Now: Moving On from Tenant Farming

By Ed Cigna

Tenant farming at Stony Kill lasted about 100 years, until the early 19th century. The last known tenant farmer was William Robinson and his family of nine, and so the property was often referred to as the “Robinson Farm.”

In 1836, the Verplanck holdings were split among seven heirs, with James DeLancey (JD) Verplanck and his wife Julia receiving about 1,000 acres described as “swamp and lowland, and good cover for woodcock!” They moved into the Tenant House, but finding it “unsuitable” to a man of his stature, JD built a new house to be completed in 1843 in the Greek Revival style. The house was called “Stony Kill,” and may be the origin of the name we now use for the entire farm. Today, we call this building the “Manor House.”



*Photo by Kara Cerilli*

## **A Lucrative Market Emerges**

Around this same time, Cornelius Vanderbilt was buying railroad access all along the Hudson, and wanted the rights to the river portion of the Verplanck property. He offered to buy access, but JD considered the price too low. Vanderbilt used his political sway to get the land by eminent domain, and paid JD considerably less than his original offer!

Vanderbilt's railroad did come with a silver lining, as it gave Stony Kill access to New York City markets: Stony Kill animal stock and dairy farm products became a lucrative business for the Verplancks.



*Photo by Tim Stanley*

## **The Farm Continues to Grow**

Around 1860, the barn we see today was built to hold machinery that harvested crops while the lower section housed animals, including the dairy cows. Building on the farm continued. A second living space was added to the Tenant House, making it a duplex, and a farmhouse was built across from the Tenant House. The farm now had four families living on it: one in the Manor House, one in the farmhouse, and two in the Tenant House. The new farmhouse was adapted for dairy farming, and an icehouse was built. All of these structures, with the exception of the icehouse, remain on the property today.

From 1843 through about 1900, JD and his son Samuel, dairy and stock farmers, continued to cultivate the land with the assistance of both Tenant House and farmhouse families.



*Photo by Salita Signorelli*



*Photo by Kara Cerilli*

But what was it like to grow up on Stony Kill Farm, with the shift from tenant to production farming? That will be our next installment of the history of Stony Kill.

*Ed Cigna is an educator and a former board member of Stony Kill Foundation.*

# Salamander Crossings

By Cameron Laird

Once or twice a year, in spring, salamanders have their “big night.” When nighttime temperatures begin to rise and rain fills in pools, salamanders emerge from their overwintering spots and make their great migration. Vernal pools are small seasonal bodies of water made by snow melt and heavy rainfall. These vernal pools, absent of predators, are a perfect place for salamanders to mate and lay their eggs.

## Surveying the (Salamander) Scene

If you monitor weather conditions closely as March rolls around, you may be able to witness their mass migration. In March 2025, Stony Kill Farm held a salamander survey to investigate and learn about our local salamander population with the help of the community. Participants of all ages joined me on our wooded hiking trails, flipping over rocks and fallen logs, crouching around vernal pools, and keeping their eyes peeled for little amphibians! With quick eyes and quicker hands, our attendees found all sorts of local species, including red-backed salamanders, eastern newts, and



the biggest spotted salamander I've ever seen! It's important to note that in order to keep the animals as safe as possible, precautions need to be taken. When handling amphibians, you should have your hands free of lotion, sunscreen, hand sanitizer, or any scented products because of their semi-permeable skin. Amphibians breathe through their skin so anything on your hands can hinder their oxygen intake.

The survey's lesson itself focused on learning mostly about *Ambystoma* (mole salamanders) as they are the most abundant genus in New York and are endemic to North America. Mole salamanders earned their name because they spend most of their adult life underground until they return to the surface to reproduce. Species in this genus include spotted, marbled, Jefferson, and blue-spotted salamanders.



### **Sharing Your Findings**



These types of surveys can be recorded by posting the findings on iNaturalist so that there are records of the species and abundance of salamanders present. Recording your findings in this way is the very essence of science, and can be very helpful to local environmental departments, who are able to use this data for their own research and projects without expending vital resources. Remember, the scientific community is built on collaborating and sharing what you've learned!

*Cameron Laird is a former education/farm intern at Stony Kill Farm.*

*All photos by Cameron Laird*

# Your Support Makes All of this Possible

As someone who cares about Stony Kill, you know how special this place is. You've seen children light up while feeding the animals, families exploring our trails, and volunteers working together to preserve the farm's rich heritage.

Photo by Kerri Morgan

## Help Us Grow What Matters

With your help, we'll continue to grow a space where learning begins in the barn, families connect with the land, and future generations discover the wonder of nature.

Make Your Gift Now at [stonykill.org/donate](https://stonykill.org/donate).

Thank you for being part of our farm community!



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