



GREENWICH LAND TRUST

Notes from the Field: Shell Island Preserve

Today, the Shell Island Preserve contains sandy beaches, forested slopes, and a salt marsh. These diverse areas host many types of plants, including red and black oak trees, goldenrod, and *Spartina* grasses. Most of the animal life on the island consists of shorebirds like osprey, herons, egrets, and more. Occasionally a deer, sea turtle, or seal can be seen visiting the island.



The value of this island as a nature preserve is enormous. As waterfront property is so desired, it's rare to encounter a large, permanently preserved site that allows wildlife to thrive. Coastal environments like this are vital in providing feeding, breeding, and resting sites to many shorebirds and other animals.

In the early 20th century, this five-acre island was a summer residence, providing decades of enjoyment, for August and Mary Eimer and their family. The Eimers were known for hosting friends and relatives at their summer home, complete with gardens, fruit trees, and even a tennis court, where everyone would partake in summer fun: sailing, swimming and playing hide-and-seek with the children.

In 1961, Mary Leinbach, the heir to the island, sold it to Julius Silver. Many of the buildings that the Eimer family had built during their time there were eventually lost to fire and vandals. In 1990, Julius donated the island to GLT.

Shell Island Preserve is often informally referred to as Tower Island, due



to the prominent 60-foot tower visible from a distance. This tower was built in 1925 as a memorial to August, the late son of the Eimers, and was recognized by the Connecticut Registry of Historic Places in 2008.

Since then, community-supported restoration work was done by GLT to ensure this unique landmark is properly preserved. In the entrance to the tower, the phrase "*Vivos voco mortuos plango*" is engraved, meaning, "I call the living, I mourn the dead." The tower even inspired a local writer, Arlene Mark, to create a children's book titled, *To the Tower: A Greenwich Adventure*.

The isolated nature of an island habitat provides a place without many predators, something especially important to the many ground-nesting birds that frequent the island. This also makes it a perfect spot for migrating

birds to stop during their journey. The diversity of forested land, beaches, and salt marsh areas allow the wildlife to occupy many different niches on the island.

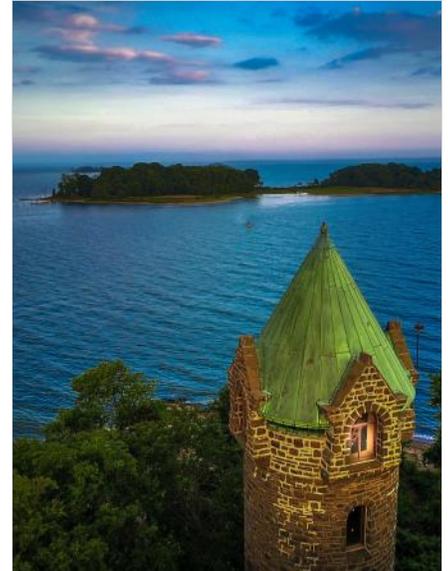


PHOTO: Michael Stempian of The Greenwich Drone

The GLT Youth Corps recently visited Shell Island with the help of the Belle Haven Club and spent a day cutting these invasive trees and shrubs. Removing as much of the invasive plant life as possible will make the island an even more valuable wildlife preserve.



PHOTO: Michael Stempian of The Greenwich Drone