

ORLEANS
CONSERVATION TRUST



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Exploring Orleans, Family-Style



Learn about ecological restoration at Mill Pond Valley **Walks & Talks**, pages 6–7

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On the cover: Wolf and Cole Dempsey have been exploring the outdoors in and around Orleans since infancy with their parents. Photo by Maia Ward. Inset: Youth Services Librarian Ann Foster on the Storybook Trail.

Plant Sale Returns

On Saturday, June 11, from 10:00 am to noon, OCT will again host a plant sale at our headquarters at 203 South Orleans Road. Many are pollinator plants grown and generously provided by Lake Farm Gardens of Orleans. Proceeds benefit the Trust; the plants benefit our local ecosystems.



from the president

Dear OCT members and supporters,

This season is full of wonderful reminders about why we conserve land—for habitat but also, as our founders sought, to bring the benefits of nature to all the inhabitants of Orleans. As I listen to peepers call from the bogs and vernal pools, it reminds me of when I was a kid playing outside after school, catching frogs, salamanders—and sometimes poison ivy. It's time to welcome back the red-winged blackbirds, Eastern bluebirds, and my favorite: the industrious Baltimore oriole with its whistling song. As a member of Orleans Conservation Trust, you probably have a favorite winged creature too, and maybe a favorite trail where you go to experience the beauty and power of the natural world.

Playing outside after school isn't always easy for today's children, for all kinds of reasons. But nurturing the next generation of conservation supporters is obviously key to our future success, so in this issue we've chosen to focus on ways that we, as an organization and as citizens, can provide outdoor opportunities for young folks and their families. A trail of their own, for instance! As I write, we're celebrating the new Storybook Trail, pairing outdoor adventure with reading at OCT's Ice House & Reuben's Pond Conservation Area.

This issue's update on how we manage our lands emphasizes recent improvements that will help make OCT properties more family-friendly (see page 8). You can also read an interview with Mass Audubon naturalist and educator Norman Smith (aka the "owl man") as he shares a lifetime of

wisdom on getting kids interested in wildlife.

All spring, trustees and staff have been hard at work on an updated strategic plan for OCT's next decade. As grounding for this important process—which includes plans for an exciting new education initiative—we solicited feedback from a wide cross-section of the Orleans community (see page 3). We will have more news to share about these plans at our Annual Meeting on September 12—please save the date!

Recently I wrote to a fellow trustee about how amazed I am, each and every day, by the accomplishments of this nonprofit land trust. Our work is funded through your generous support as members and performed in the most professional way by our Executive Director Steve O'Grady, Director of Land Stewardship Alex Bates, Administrative Assistant Pam Schultz, and AmeriCorps Cape Cod member Jami Baker—and by all our volunteers and trustees. We welcome our summer intern, Amy Hinesley, to the team. I'll close with deepest thanks and a request: please make time to to play outdoors and hear some new sounds of nature. And be safe: don't forget to check for ticks!

Sincerely,

Kevin F. Galligan
President



Remember to renew!

Your membership dues are vital to our land-saving work, which benefits the whole community. Please help the Trust, yourself, and your neighbors by renewing your membership when you receive our spring mailing. And mark your calendar for the **OCT Annual Meeting on Monday, September 12, 5:00 pm at the Orleans Yacht Club**, with featured speaker Rich Delaney.

The Next Generation for Conservation

Along with preserving natural lands, a big part of OCT's mission has always been to educate—to date mainly through our lecture series, monthly guided walks, our annual summer internship and partnership with AmeriCorps Cape Cod, and sharing information in this newsletter and digital bulletins.

For two important reasons, we want to do more now. First, it's clear that the *why* and *how* of saving and stewarding natural lands has become more complex and challenging. As open land gets scarcer, and the changing climate impacts land and marine environments in new ways, land trusts should be in the forefront of communicating this science to the public and setting an example by implementing solutions. Promoting good "conservation citizenship," you might say. Second, the "conservation citizens" of tomorrow are growing up today, and their lives are sometimes so confined by schedules and screens that they don't get out in nature much. We'd like to help change that.

Throughout the past winter, staff and board members have been looking into how OCT might expand, improve, and/or refocus our educational activities. To gather input, an ad hoc committee conducted more than thirty interviews with OCT members and donors, schoolteachers and environmental educators, and staff from local institutions like Snow Library and the National Seashore. That effort and internal surveys revealed substantial support for broadening our outreach to better serve Orleans families and youth.

Says Bob Granger, who chaired the task force, "Our research is pointing us in a few specific directions. In the near term, we look forward to working with Nauset Middle School and Orleans Elementary



Alex Bates, OCT's Director of Land Stewardship, with students from Nauset Regional Middle School on a hike around Baker's Pond.

School to revitalize the neglected walking trail and develop educational opportunities around Boland Pond, which lies on school property. We also think we can partner with other organizations that already provide nature-related education to the K-8 population. We're exploring the idea of a small grants program to aid some of those providers, and the future prospect of involving high-school-age youth in land stewardship activities run by our staff."

For Orleans residents of all ages, OCT has been adding QR codes to our signage, linking to sources of information on the history and natural history of a place. We're taking steps to make our properties and trails more accessible to families (see page 8, *Managing Our Lands*). Longer-term plans may include guided outings at night or on the water, walks tailored to kids and families, partnering in school enrichment programs, and more activities and access for seniors. Working with partners can leverage our efforts: OCT Director of Land

Stewardship Alex Bates has co-led walks for middle-schoolers with staff from Brewster Conservation Trust. Stay tuned for further developments!

Envisioning the Trust's Future

To equip our half-century-old organization for the next era of land conservation work, and recalibrate how to best serve our community and our mission, staff and trustees are currently engaged in a strategic planning process. Again, this started with interviews: people working in conservation, as well as town officials, educators, and other active citizens.

We've been encouraged by hearing positive views of OCT's accomplishments and efforts to improve the quality of life in Orleans. And we are challenged by the scope and difficulty of issues we will face in years to come: a finite and shrinking pool of open land, competing pressures for how

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Partners Connect on the Storybook Trail

OCT, Town Committees, and Snow Library Create a Place for Orleans Kids

Just off Tonset Road, where OCT's Ice House & Reuben's Ponds Trail takes off, a poster on a sturdy wooden stand welcomes visitors to the first "storybook trail" in Orleans. A storybook trail is a fun way for children (and adults!) to enjoy reading. A children's picture book is taken apart



and the pages laminated for protection, then mounted on a series of stations along a gentle trail. Visitors make their way through the story as they walk—or run—from station to station. Right now, you can read about a little girl named Stella and her brother Sam exploring the magic of a forest, in *Stella, Fairy of the Forest*.

For the more than a decade, storybook trails (some go by the name StoryWalk®, a program that started in Vermont) have been springing up around the

country and beyond. It's not hard to see why they're popular. "They offer a great way to help address two challenges kids face today: getting enough exposure to books and getting enough fresh air," says OCT Executive Director Stephen O'Grady. According to the Boston Children's Museum, research supports "an interactive and experiential process" of learning language skills. Reading stations can be as simple as a stake in the ground or more permanent, like the stands on the Ice House Trail—the important thing is that they're at eye level for small readers.

Building a Partnership

Orleans' new Storybook Trail started as the brainstorm of Morgan Stewart, a lifelong early childhood educator, mother of two teens, and a member of the Orleans Recreation Advisory Committee (RAC). "We're an outdoor family, and when Covid first hit, I made a point of planning 'an outing a day,' says Stewart. "For a while, discovering jetties kept us busy. I'd heard about story walks, and it seemed like a really good way to get kids outdoors for a modest investment." Another RAC member, Tracy Murphy, concurs, "We're a fairly new committee and eager to find



A Storybook Trail station near the end of the trail.

projects that give our local families opportunities to be active." Joan Francolini, who serves on both the RAC and the Community Preservation Committee, let it be known that the CPC was seeking to fund just such projects; an application was duly submitted and made its way through the approval process. "The CPC was very excited by this idea and approval was easy," says Francolini. "What could be better than supporting outdoor recreation and literacy!"

To find a location for the trail, the RAC turned to

OCT. Our staff and Land Management Committee, chaired by Steve Gass, proposed candidates, and the collaborators settled on the Ice House preserve in East Orleans with its winding, flat, wooded trail just steps from the road. The essential expertise in children's books came from Snow Library—specifically Youth Services Librarian Ann Foster. Execution was coordinated by OCT Director of Land Stewardship Alex Bates, who consulted with Foster on the number, design, and location



of the stands that would hold book pages. Nineteen stations—strategically placed so that at each stop the next one is within sight—comprise a .75-mile loop from the trailhead. Yet another partner, AmeriCorps Cape Cod, was enlisted to install the stands as a service project last November.

From Library to Trail

“We planned a ‘soft opening’ for January,” says Foster, “a test run for the equipment and the process.” For the first book, she chose the winter-themed *Tracks in the Snow* by Wong Herbert Yee. Early in April, Foster installed the spring book (*Stella*), and the summer offering will be the delightfully silly *Duck on a Bike* by Caldecott Honor winner David Shannon. Four books will cycle through the year in the current plan. “I look for books that have a connection to nature, of course,” says Foster, “and that can be enjoyed by readers of any age.” The Friends of Snow Library are funding the cost of the books used.

On the afternoon of April 20, just before Earth Day, the library hosted a “ribbon-cutting” event for the trail at its Craine Gallery. Library patrons, visiting families and others came by for refreshments and information about the Storybook Trail and OCT. Foster led a



“letterboxing” activity, which combines elements of hiking, treasure hunting, and creative expression. Participants follow clues on the internet to find hidden letterboxes and record discoveries in a personal journal or “passport.” Letterboxers who visit the Storybook Trail can use their personal stamp to mark “I was here” in a logbook.

The Storybook Trail was a natural for Orleans, thinks Stewart, who recalls the benefits of taking her children on “tyke hikes” when they were young. Partnering with OCT also felt natural, as her committee “looked for ways to take greater advantage of everything Orleans has to offer,” such as the Trust’s conservation land and trails. Stewart is reaching out to bookstores, teachers, and librarians to spread the word about the trail. “We all

Augie and Mo Goodman with their mom, Lindsey, on the Storybook Trail. At left, they discover the hidden letterbox kit. Left: Ann Foster teaches letterboxing at the library event. Below: Copies of books on the trail are available for sale at Sea Howl Bookshop on Main Street and to borrow at Snow Library. Sea Howl proprietor Jonathan Nedeau.

need to connect,” she says, for the benefit of young folks in town.

Tracy Murphy has visited the trail several times with her daughter, ten-year-old Gwen. “Even though she’s a bit old for the actual stories, the concept of going from each page to the next in the woods is intrinsically fun for her,” she says. Gwen knows many of Orleans’ trails well, notes Tracy, but especially likes this one. “She could be independent and take off ahead of me to find the next station.” Murphy looks forward to taking her nieces and nephews there when they visit in summer. “It’s already become part of our family’s life.”



Summer/Fall 2022 Speakers

Join us for the latest in our series of **entertaining and informative** talks by **local and regional experts**. Admission **free**.

Events take place at the Orleans Yacht Club (39 Cove Road, Orleans) except as noted below.



From Coast to Cow: A New Way to Reduce Methane

Charlotte Quigley

Assistant Director of Center for Seafood Solutions, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences

Dairy cows produce a lot of methane, one of the most potent greenhouse gases heating up our planet. Charlotte will provide an update on a promising initiative from Bigelow Lab in Boothbay, Maine, exploring whether seaweed and algae may provide an answer. How? Feed them to the cows!

Tuesday, August 30

6:00 pm via Zoom only



Climate Change: How Local Communities Can Take Action

Rich Delaney

Executive Director, Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative

At our Annual Meeting, as OCT celebrates more than 50 years of protecting land, Rich will discuss the greatest environmental challenge we've ever faced: global climate change. How can land conservation be part of the solution? What is the Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative doing locally, and how can you get involved?

Monday, September 12, immediately following OCT's Annual Meeting at 5:00 pm



The Buzz about Mosquitoes

Aubrey Paolino

Entomologist, Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project

You encounter them daily for much of the year, but how much do you really know about mosquitoes? Learn about mosquito biology, how the CCMCP manages mosquito habitat, and how you can best protect yourself from mosquito bites and the diseases they transmit.

October



Fighting with Fire: A Neglected Method for Managing Habitat

Erin Hilley

Conservation Biologist, Massachusetts Army National Guard

Land managers across the country are learning about the benefits of prescribed burns and trying to catch up on years of misguided fire suppression. Erin will discuss her experience in habitat management and invasive species control, including her work with the National Guard using prescribed fire on Joint Base Cape Cod.

November

**For updates on the fall programs, check our webpage
orleansconservationtrust.org/programs-speakers/**

Summer/Fall 2022 Walks

Get to know the **open spaces** of Orleans on our **popular guided walks**. They're **free, fun**, and appropriate for **all ages**.

Space is restricted; advance registration required at orleansconservationtrust.org.

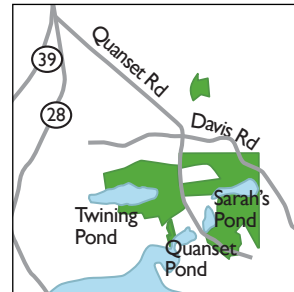


Kent's Point Conservation Area

Celebrate the start of the summer with a ~1-mile stroll at the town's popular Kent's Point Conservation Area.

Meet at 39 Keziah's Lane, Orleans

Wednesday, June 22
9:30 – 11:00 am



Twinings Pond Conservation Area

Walk about 1 mile around Twinings Pond and learn to read the landscape as we share details about the land's historical uses.

Meet at 135 Quanset Road

Thursday, October 20
1:30 – 3:00 pm

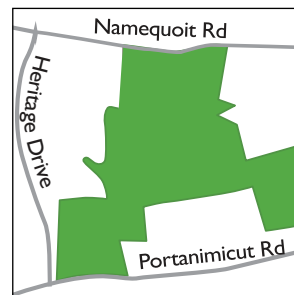


Mill Pond Valley Conservation Area

Get an up-close look at active habitat management as we make our way down to Little Mill Pond through one of OCT's crown jewel preserves.

Meet at 13 Champlain Road

Wednesday, July 13
9:30 – 11:00 am

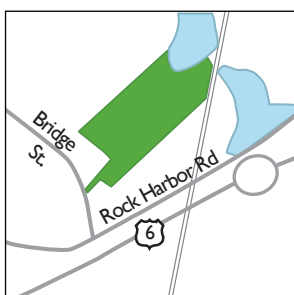


Portanimitic Greenbelt

Walk about 1.5 miles, including a stretch on Portanimitic Road, and visit the newly protected Greenbelt Gateway and Window on the Bay preserves.

Meet at 66 Portanimitic Road

Monday, November 7
9:30 – 11:00 am

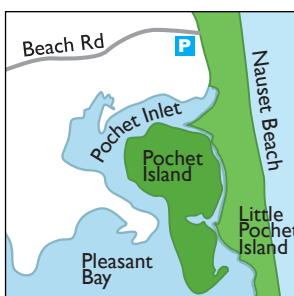


Putnam Farm Conservation Area

Putnam Farm, acquired by the Town of Orleans in 2010, has become a hub for small-scale agriculture. Hear from one grower about his experience and learn about the property's rich history.

Meet at Putnam Farm, accessed by dirt drive next to District Courthouse on Rock Harbor Road

Wednesday, August 17
9:30 – 11:00 am



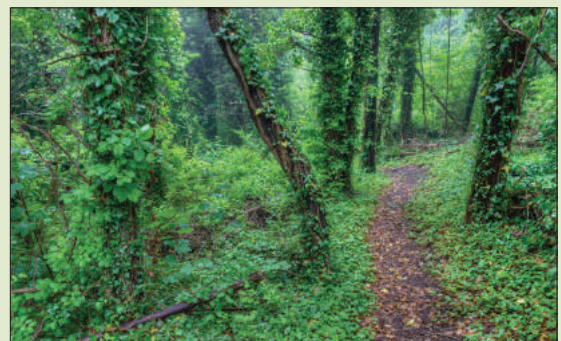
Hike to Pochet Island

OCT leads this walk as part of Orleans Pond Coalition's Celebrate Our Waters weekend. Walk about 5 miles, including strenuous portions over soft sand, to this hidden gem within the National Seashore.

Meet at south end of Nauset Beach parking lot

Sunday, September 18
9:00 am – 1:00 pm

Ecological Restoration in Progress



Learn about how OCT manages ecological restoration projects on our Mill Pond Valley walk. What's the problem with non-native plants? Why do we remove them, how do we keep them from coming back, and what do we do to minimize negative impacts? We'll answer these questions and more. You'll come away with pointers for managing your own property.

Register for walks and find trail maps on our website, orleansconservationtrust.org

Improving Access for Families

by Alex Bates

With summer around the corner and our forests emerging from winter dormancy, this is the perfect time for getting outside to enjoy the spring colors and new growth.

Over the fall and winter, we worked to improve access to our properties, especially for families. Partnering with the Orleans Recreation Advisory Committee, we obtained funding from the Community Preservation Committee for bike racks, picnic tables, and the Storybook Trail (see page 4). Bikes have become a popular way to get around Orleans, and we've installed racks at six prime OCT trailheads. Sturdy picnic tables—including one designed to be ADA-compliant—were placed at the newly acquired Window on the Bay preserve at 109 Portanimitic Road. You can enjoy a picnic lunch at this very special property overlooking a saltmarsh and Pleasant Bay—just pack out any trash, please!

In East Orleans, we've improved parking by the trailheads at the Ice House & Reuben's Pond and Mill Pond Valley Conservation Areas. Though the parking areas will remain small (3 or 4 cars), vehicles now can pull completely off the road to park.

Back in South Orleans, our scenic Meadow Bog Trail



Visitors to OCT's new Window on the Bay preserve at 109 Portanimitic Road will have new picnic tables from which to enjoy the great views. Right: Jeff Norgeot finishing work on the new steps and rope railing at Meadow Bog Trail. From the top you can see Pleasant Bay and the former cranberry bog.

can now welcome walkers of wide-ranging abilities, with the addition of dug-in steps along a steep section. Up near Sarah's Pond the trail crosses a small ravine, created long ago to irrigate a former cranberry



bog that's transitioned into a saltmarsh. Erosion made footing tricky on that piece of trail; getting up and down is now much easier thanks to the

new steps of rot-resistant black locust, installed by Jeff Norgeot.

Providing outdoor spaces for kids and families to enjoy is a growing priority for OCT. Just down the hill from Orleans Elementary and Nauset Regional Middle School lies Boland Pond, where we're exploring an opportunity to revitalize a walking trail and outdoor education area. At Boland Pond, kids can learn about kettle ponds, water quality, terrestrial and aquatic vegetation, and much more, right in their backyard. Such close-at-hand spaces help teachers work outdoor learning into busy curriculums and avoid the logistical challenges of off-site transportation.

From Acquisition to Restoration

Last year, OCT supporters stepped up to protect land at 109 Portanimitic (see above)



and at 4 Braddocks Way (expanding the Henson's Cove Conservation Area). Soon we'll embark on important habitat improvement projects at both properties.

At 109 Portanimitic, now known as Window on the Bay, two cottages and an adjacent garage will be removed, and those sites will be regraded and seeded with native grasses. We'll maintain the grassy area around the picnic tables for visitors who come to enjoy the beautiful, wide-open vistas. Another part of the property will be restored to early successional habitat, which can range from grassland to old fields to shrub thickets and young forest. This habitat is crucial for some wildlife but is shrinking with development. And it requires disturbance to prevent forest

from encroaching; mowing on an annual or biannual basis will help establish early successional species such as goldenrod, smooth and staghorn sumac, and milkweed. These plants—especially goldenrod, which blooms later in the summer—are an important food source for pollinators and other insects that are the foundation of the food web.

At 4 Braddocks Way, OCT will undertake a restoration project similar to an earlier restoration at Henson's Cove Conservation Area (HCCA). This diverse preserve contains upland pine-oak forest, warm-season grassland, and fringe saltmarsh habitat. In 2009 we restored a heavily invaded woodland north of the cove to a warm-season grassland, chiefly to provide nesting habitat for the threat-

ened diamondback terrapin. Thanks to a partnership with Mass Audubon, Henson's Cove sustains Pleasant Bay's largest breeding population of this estuarine turtle species, which needs coastal grasslands with open, sandy areas to nest.

As this critical habitat becomes scarcer, we're taking advantage of the opportunity to restore grassland at the Braddocks Way property. Starting later in 2022, we'll work with Wilkinson Ecological Design to remove much of the non-native invasive vegetation, including Asiatic bittersweet, hedge privet, Norway maples, and black locusts. Then the area will be seeded with a warm-season grassland mix, augmented with native shrubs. The terrapins will benefit from more places to nest—and, as OCT members who visit here know, they are



Above: Students and AmeriCorps volunteers on the trail around Boland Pond in 2015.
Left: As in this earlier restoration project, we're creating more habitat for nesting terrapins at Henson's Cove.



just one of many species that enjoy this peaceful preserve, including humans.

Alex Bates is Director of Land Stewardship at Orleans Conservation Trust.

Next Generation, continued from page 3

land is best used, questions around public access to private conservation areas, threats to water quality and wildlife from pollution sources and climate disruption, the perennial battle against invasive species.... We could go on. But we're confident in the Trust's capacity to address these challenges, with the help of our superb staff and steadfast support from our ever-growing membership.

We Meet Again!

Strategic planning is essential, if not our favorite pastime. What we *do* love is to gather with OCT members at our Annual Meeting. Finally, in 2022, we believe we can plan a gathering without resorting to

Zoom. So **mark your calendars now for Monday, September 12, and join us at the Orleans Yacht Club.** (For various reasons, we've set the date a bit later this year.) We will at long last celebrate the Trust's 50th anniversary, honor some of its past leaders, and enjoy time together with catered goodies and beverages from the club's famous bar. Meanwhile, you'll be hearing from us early in the summer as usual, with a slate of candidates for the board—keep an eye on your e-mail or snail mail.

Intern Power

Amy Hinesley will serve as OCT's summer intern for 2022, starting in May. She's a local, from Chatham, currently studying



biology and society at Cornell and hoping to work toward a PhD at the intersection of biological research and political sciences. She is

especially interested in research and advocacy for global environmental justice and equitable sustainability. "Growing up on the Cape, I've always had a strong connection to the natural world," says Amy. "I've watched so much of it get developed, and I'm super-excited to work with OCT to preserve our local ecosystems."

How Do You Nurture a Love for Nature?

Q&A with raptor rescuer (and grandparent)

Norman Smith

This February, members who tuned into the OCT lecture on Zoom were treated to an enthralling presentation by Norman Smith about his work with snowy owls and their kin. His humorous, rapid-fire talk was illustrated with fabulous pictures, including some small children holding very large birds with big talons!

Norman was 13 when he went to work as a volunteer at the Blue Hills Trailside Museum (now part of Mass Audubon) in Milton. After finishing high school, he was hired as an assistant naturalist. More than 50 years later, he's still there in a consulting role as one of the foremost experts on the snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*), a magnetic seasonal visitor to the shores of Cape Cod. As founder of the Snowy Owl Project, he has rescued nearly 900 owls from the wintry expanses of Logan Airport (which looks to the birds like their home Arctic tundra). In 2000 he was the first to use satellite transmitters on wintering snowy owls to investigate their migration patterns.

Inevitably, Norman's young children wanted to go along and see the owls. Daughter Danielle and son Joshua became his assistants and accomplished naturalists themselves. Besides feeding his own endless curiosity about snowy owls and their kin, Norman works to share his passion for these creatures. In his own words: "to encourage and kindle excitement in every child that walks through the door; to get kids and adults to put down their phones and experience the wonders of nature up close."

We figured Norman must know a few things

about how to engage children with the natural world, so we contacted him to talk about that.



Q. *What's your take on why kids today aren't spending as much time outdoors in nature? And what are they missing out on?*

A. Technology is certainly part of the problem. My granddaughter wonders how I managed to grow up without a cell phone or a computer. I'm all for technology in its place—our satellite transmitters are incredible, much more sophisticated than when I started. But it's sad that young folks today feel they don't have to go outside their house to see something amazing. Sure, you can see a picture or video of a snowy owl on your screen, but it's nothing like seeing one in the wild. To be able to share their world with them is just so captivating.

I think some kids feel that everything about the world is known today. That's so untrue! If you spend any time in nature, you quickly realize how much we don't know. Even the "experts."

You don't have to be a scientist with advanced degrees to study nature and wild animals. You just have to want to do it. Get out and make your own observations, be willing to question accepted wisdom, follow your interests and dreams.

Q. *What was the most important factor in stoking your passion for owls?*

A. I think finding a mentor is important in getting kids hooked on nature. When I started at Blue Hills in 1970, Garret VanWart was the sanctuary director and a great mentor. He made a point of finding out what each young person was into. When I said I liked owls, he took me to see a great horned owl's nest. Later we went on a field trip to Marina Bay in Quincy, and I saw my first snowy owl through a scope he set up.

You need adults who are knowledgeable but, more importantly, who can transmit their passion and encourage kids to explore as deeply as they care to.

Q. *How can parents encourage and equip their children to explore the wild world?*

A. Well, I think it starts with paying attention to what they're interested in and supporting that. My parents let us four kids take turns deciding what activity we'd do as a family. When it was my turn, I wanted to see owls—so we went to an old landfill in Hingham and waited for it to get dark. When my siblings complained, my dad said, "We're here because it's Norman's turn, and we're going to wait and see if we can find his owl."

Look for things to do close to home. What's that noise you're hearing outside at night? Spring peepers! Did you know that creature making the big noise is only an inch long? So, let's get a flashlight and go see if we can find and catch one. Or just get everyone outside for a walk or a drive somewhere. At first the child might say, why do we have to do that? I just want to play my video game! But you never know what might catch their attention if you go someplace they haven't seen before.

Repetition is important to sustain and deepen a young person's interest. Cultivating patience is important because learning about wildlife depends on long-term research. We had to keep going with our owl work in years when very few of them turned up, not just in the years when we found many.

Q. *How did your children start going along with you on owl rescues and tagging work? And what do you think they learned?*

A. They'd see me getting ready to go, probably sensing that I was excited, and ask where I was off to. "I'm going up to the hawk-banding station on Chickatawbut Hill and catch some hawks." "Can I come?" They learned all kinds of things starting with how to wait patiently in a blind.

But I often learned from them too. We captured hawks for banding by

manipulating lures (small birds) with strings, then triggering a net when a hawk landed on the lure. One time I was getting ready to take a bird out the trap, and a little voice (Danielle) says, “Freeze—there’s a sharpie out there!” I didn’t see the sharp-shinned hawk coming in, but she did.

Q. *What role do institutions like nature museums play?*

A. They can be great resources, especially if families can visit often and build on their experiences. You don’t need state-of-the-art facilities; the programs and people are what matter. Someone once said about Blue Hills, “This is a great place—you should make it bigger.” But the goal wasn’t to keep people inside a fancy building. It was to start them learning and then take them outside to the real museum—the 7,500 acres of habitat in our backyard.

Nature centers can also correct bad or outdated information people have received. Like the old wives’ tale that you can’t handle a baby bird or return it to the nest because the parents will shun it. If you find a robin’s nest on the ground, put it in a shoebox and back up in the tree. The parents may come back. Sure, a raccoon or other predator may get the babies, but that’s part of nature. You can still give them a chance.

Q. *What about programs that give kids and families the opportunity to see wild animals up close?*



Opposite page: Norman’s children, Joshua and Danielle, in 1991. Above: Danielle’s daughters Carmela and Alexa with Norman releasing a snowy at Duxbury Beach. Photo ©Ray-MacDonald.com

A. Nature museums have used resident animals as a stimulus to encourage deeper learning. These days, wildlife rehabilitation centers often do that work. Like the WildCare sanctuary in Eastham near you. They are important places for public outreach and education.

And they are learning how to do it better. It used to be standard to let kids come up and pet the animal. At Blue Hills there was a skunk named Sandy. But someone’s child got sprayed on a camping trip when a skunk wandered over and she tried to pet “Sandy.” Today we might let children handle a pelt of fur, but we emphasize that it’s not good for humans or live animals to pet them. Diseases like distemper and mange can be transmitted, for one thing. And it’s best not to name wild creatures—they’re not pets.

We also know more about leaving animals in their habitats. In former days, we’d catch peepers during breeding season and put them in an aquarium so people could see and hear them easily. Now we take people to a pond and catch peepers with a net, while a guide describes their breeding cycle. Then they get returned to the pond to go about their lives.

Q. *Viewers are startled to see young children holding snowy owls in your slideshow. How did you teach them to do that safely?*

A. There’s a safe procedure. It’s a matter of showing them how to do that correctly when they’re young, and make sure they’re paying close attention. The past year has been challenging for our work—not just with Covid around, but we’ve had a problem with avian flu in our region as well. So we

have to take extra precautions in handling any birds. But my grandkids are still getting outside with me.

Learn More Online

Norman and his granddaughters release a snowy owl at Sandy Neck in Barnstable
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cyu6gjm88w

Mass Audubon’s Snowy Owl project
www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/blue-hills-trailside-museum/our-work/snowy-owl-project

Slideshow of photos from Norman’s 50 years with Blue Hills Trailside Museum
slideshow.massaudubon.org/WildlifeSanctuaries/Blue-Hills-Trailside-Museum/Norman-Smith/n-cjzkh9/

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