



The Habitat-Friendly Yard

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Dogs on Trails

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Volunteers at Work

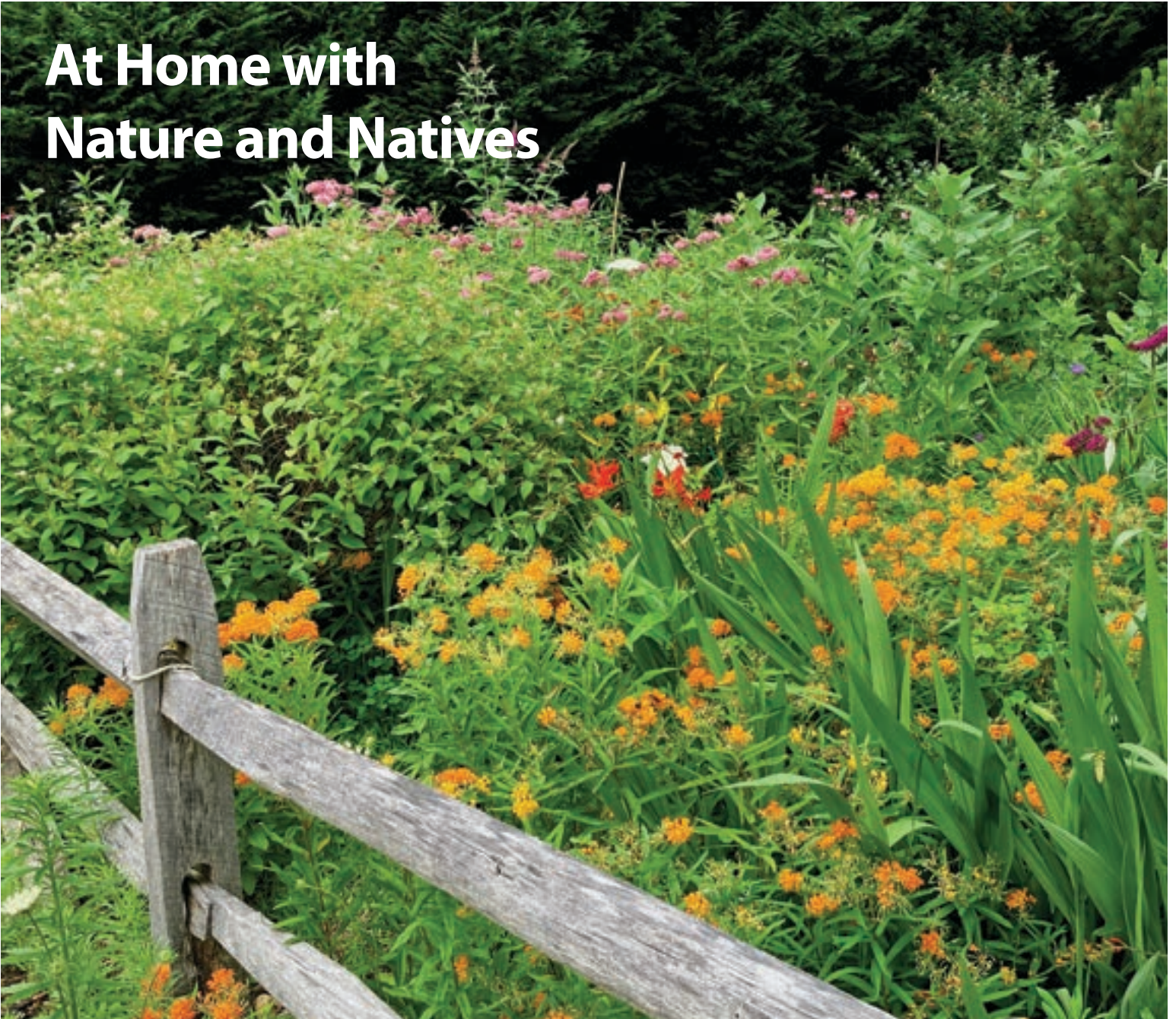
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"Undeveloping" Land

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At Home with Nature and Natives



OCT has a new membership year! **Landmarks**, page 10

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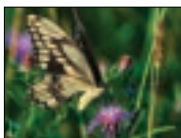
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On the cover: Natives in this Cape Cod garden include butterfly weed, milkweed, echinacea, and Joe Pye weed. Inset: Spicebush swallowtail. Photos © Nancy Graupner. Below: Tiger swallowtail. Photo © Hardie Truesdale.

Annual Plant Sale

On Saturday, June 8, 9am — 11am, 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,

*"Come with me into the woods
where spring is
advancing, as it does, no matter what,
not being singular or particular, but one
of the forever gifts, and certainly visible."*

—Mary Oliver

I am always amazed by the wonders of our natural world. The advancing of spring may be the most welcome of them—one of the forever gifts, as noted poet Mary Oliver writes. We in Orleans are so fortunate to be able to enjoy walks outdoors or simply pause to take in the sounds of birds, peepers, or coyotes. Our bog this spring has been full of life.

The roundup of news on page 3 of this issue highlights an important land acquisition for the Trust. Preserving the Eli Rogers Road property protects water quality and habitat, and we also removed neglected buildings (see Mark Robinson's story on "undevelopment," page 11) and subdivided the land to provide a home for a young local family. This was a first for OCT, and I thank trustees, staff, and Town partners who helped make it happen.

Our investment in other programs and properties continues to bear fruit. It's exciting to learn about the creative projects local teachers are devising for kids with the help of our school grants, about the ongoing recovery of terrapins at OCT's Henson's Cove preserve, and about new offerings for a new season at the Storybook Trail. Not to mention the return of what we now think of as "our" family of eagles (page 10) nesting on OCT land!

Spring's arrival brings out our gardening instincts, and OCT's "At Home with Nature" initiative offers great information



and tools for enhancing the habitat value of your home landscape, along with its beauty. Check out our website and Master Gardener Gary Bowden's account (page 4) of transitioning to a mostly-natives garden.

I'm grateful to trustee and fellow dog lover Sue Meisinger for thoughtfully explaining the whys and wherefores of the Trust's policy about dogs on our trails. As she notes, it's all about finding the right balance.

The work of the Trust is possible only because of the hard work of staff and trustees—and more than ever, the growing corps of volunteers who help steward and maintain our lands. We were happy to be able to thank them with a cookout on our magnificent Window on the Bay preserve.

But more than anything, it is your support that makes the difference, for all of Orleans. In thanking you, I know I speak for all of us at OCT. Have a wonderful late spring and summer—and please save the date (Tuesday, August 27) for our Annual Meeting at the Orleans Yacht Club, when we convene for conversation, good food, and the latest news about your Trust.

Sincerely,

Kevin F. Galligan

President

Don't Forget to Renew Your Membership!

We're changing our membership year (see page 10); make sure you send your dues for 2024. Dues are vital to our land-saving work and our expanding education programs, which benefit the whole community. Please look for our spring mailing so you can help the Trust and your neighbors by renewing your membership.

The Trust in Brief

Some highlights of the season at OCT, to catch you up on our busy year so far:

Eli Rogers Road

In June 2023, the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts purchased 5.5 acres on Eli Rogers Road in South Orleans, giving OCT time to fundraise to protect the property. Since then, we have been busy! The land was divided to facilitate resale of an existing house. Sold in March, that home will provide housing for a young family, who will get to enjoy the surrounding conservation land. We also removed two aging cottages, and rewilding is underway to restore much-needed meadow habitat. As reported in our last issue, we were awarded a \$175,000 state grant, and the Orleans Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has recommended \$200,000 for the Town's partnership in the project. By the time you read

this, voters at Town Meeting (May 13) will have acted on the CPC funding request. If approved, OCT will need to raise just \$100,000 to save these 4.5 acres of ecologically important land! Donations encouraged by check, mailed to 203 South Orleans Road, or at orleansconservationtrust.org.

Education Grants Program in Full Swing

Last year, when the program was launched, we awarded nearly \$18,000 to Orleans Elementary School (OES) and Nauset Regional Middle School (NRMS) to enhance environmental education for Orleans students.

OES second-grade students took a deep dive into water quality, learning from experts from around the Cape and, of course, Boland Pond! They compiled their knowledge into poems, fact sheets, and a student-created website. Fifth-graders took their



Above: A student at Orleans Elementary School takes notes on the Boland Pond ecosystem. Left: a young reader/hiker on OCT's Storybook Trail.

ecosystem science lessons to the trails at Paw Wah Point and John Kenrick Woods, finding evidence of producers, consumers, and decomposers. Fourth-grade students studied animals and plants in the Boland Pond ecosystem and shared their knowledge with first-graders.

NRMS purchased a 3D watershed model, on which seventh-grade students demonstrated the effects of runoff containing fertilizer and pollutants. Students also created PSAs depicting the causes and consequences of algal blooms. Mass Audubon naturalists, Wampanoag educators, and naturalist Russ Cohen taught classes about bird ecology, forest habitat, and

traditional food sources.

Following the successful pilot year, OCT recently awarded a second grant to OES and is working with NRMS to develop its second proposal. Many of last year's projects, field trips, and visits from experts will continue, and new projects have been added: a kindergarten study on the effects of litter, professional development for staff, and more field trips to immerse students in the beauty of OCT lands.

Visit the Storybook Trail

And speaking of kids ... Did you know there's a Storybook Trail tucked into OCT's Ice House & Reuben's Ponds Conservation Area? Beginning

continued on page 10

Land Protection Opportunity: 33 Eli Rogers Road



Making Our Yards Habitat-Friendly

By Gary Bowden

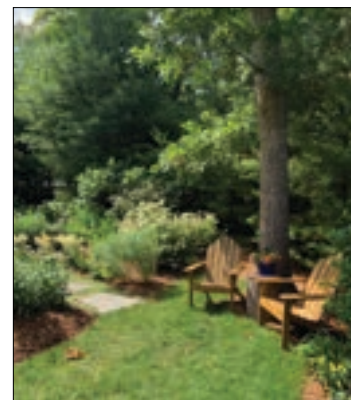
Conventional home landscaping practices and products have contributed to insect loss, harmed bird populations, put our waters at risk, and allowed invasive plants to run rampant—but none of this is inevitable! There are practical, cost-effective alternatives that encourage native plants and the creatures that depend on them. For more than 50 years, OCT has preserved and managed properties in ways that emphasize native plants and create biodiverse habitats. But we only control 600 acres: most of the land in Orleans is in private hands. Our “At Home with Nature” initiative shares what we’ve learned, giving homeowners information and tools to practice nature-friendly landscaping. You can learn much more at OCT’s website. Here, veteran gardener and OCT board member Gary Bowden shares his experience of transitioning to a mostly-natives home landscape.

As we move from May into early summer, if you’re like me, you’re eager to see what plants survived the winter and last year’s rabbits—and you’re starting to visit your favorite garden centers. This year I’ll be shopping to find new plants to fill in empty spots, as planting densely is a way to have sustained visual interest,

and it eliminates the need for mulch (see below). Last fall I created a new bed, part of an ongoing effort to reduce our turf lawn, and I’ll fill that with a combination of newly acquired perennials and plants started from seed.

When Mark and I moved to Orleans permanently five years ago, our home’s outdoor environment featured extensive garden beds around the perimeter of a large, chemically treated turf yard. The beds were mostly filled with spring bulbs, daylilies, roses, catmint, hydrangeas, and Montauk daisies for some fall interest—the typical Cape Cod landscape that looks great for short stretches of time and provides little support to pollinators. There were several shrubs and trees that are recognized as invasive in Massachusetts. Plants were well distanced, and a lot of mulch was used. Mulch is a popular go-to, but consider: it’s expensive; the 3 inches of mulch advised by producers to suppress weeds can deprive some plants of oxygen; and pollinators cannot access the soil below for habitat. You can limit weed growth simply by planting more densely and shading weeds out.

Our landscape was installed by a previous owner around 2010, when people knew much less about the value of native plants and the need to protect native pollinators. Today,



Top: Natives added to a sunny bed with daylilies. Above left: Shaded bed planted mostly with natives. Right: Some lawn was kept for a seating area. To left, lawn was replaced by pavers bordered with thyme and natives.

many gardeners (and some landscapers) understand that we ought to create habitat-friendly landscapes that are free of invasive plants, require less water and no chemicals, use natural leaf mulch, and feature an array of densely planted natives that provide food for

wildlife as well as year-round aesthetic interest.

Do you need to dig out all the non-natives and start fresh to have the ideal nature-friendly yard? Not at all. You can transition toward this kind of landscape over time with great success—a gradual process is a

fun and manageable approach.

I started by removing invasives—a long-term challenge on some properties, but luckily ours was not overrun with them—and turning large sections of unused lawn into new planted areas, emphasizing natives. We stopped treating our lawn with fertilizer and herbicides and cut it less frequently. Three years later, the lawn is a mix of grass, moss, clover, and a few weeds—it's green and looks fine. The original lawn area typically is where we get the best sun; we also wanted to add plants that flower in different seasons to extend the garden's overall bloom time, so we expanded existing beds farther into the lawn and created new ones.

Some managed turf is fine. However, I suggest you think about what value you get from your turf lawn, because it provides minimal value to pollinators and uses lots of water. Only retain the turf you need to frame your garden beds and that you, your family, and pets enjoy using.

As plants die or outgrow a location, we replace them with a native species. My recent approach has been to buy only native perennials for our garden beds and larger planters. If I'm tempted by a non-native, such as a new hydrangea variety, it will typically live in a pot. Our efforts have brought our yard closer to the suggested composition of at least 70 percent native species and no more

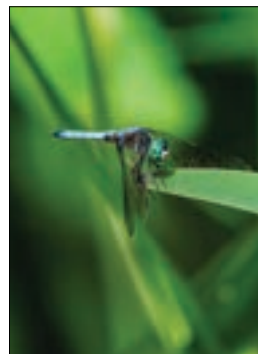


than 30 percent non-natives—ones that provide pollinator and habitat support.

Consider planting great native plants that look similar to non-natives you currently favor. For fall color you could replace a burning bush (a recognized invasive) with a chokeberry (*Aronia*) or bottlebrush (*Fothergilla*). If you are a fan of hydrangeas, think about gradually replacing them with native varieties that reliably bloom every year and feed pollinators: check out the oakleaf (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) or smooth (*Hydrangea arborescens*) varieties, typically available at local nurseries.

If you rely on a landscaper to maintain your yard, I encourage you to let him or her know of your interest in habitat-friendly gardening; a good landscaper is likely aware of native plants and alternative, organic practices for maintaining garden beds and lawn. These professionals should respond to your desire for change. Don't let them assume you want your yard to look like so many other heavily managed landscapes.

As with most landscaping projects, potential improvements are always on the



horizon. Sometimes Mother Nature creates opportunities by bringing down a tree or delivering a harsh winter. As options arise, you may find yourself looking at your garden with a different eye and mindset that favors native plants—which do well naturally in our soil and climate, and help our wildlife.

Gary Bowden and Mark Ziomek moved to Orleans from Washington, DC, in 2019.

Pollinators, clockwise from top left: Gray catbird, Northern pearly-eye butterfly on goldenrod (MN), bumblebee on Russian sage, American Copper on butterfly weed, blue dasher dragonfly, ruby-throated hummingbird and bee balm. Catbird and American Copper © Nancy Graupner; others © Hardie Truesdale.

Gary is an OCT trustee, Master Gardener, and founding member of the Pollinator Pathway Cape Cod. In July their home will be on the 2024 Hydrangea Tour sponsored by the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce.

How to Have a Trail-Friendly Dog

By Sue Meisinger

Whenever I walk on one of OCT's trails, I'm reminded of the delicate balance the Trust seeks between our human need for recreation and the preservation of nature. I'm usually walking with Max, our 25-pound mutt, who's eager to sniff everything and see what's around the next tree. And when we meet up with other dog walkers, I'm reminded of the importance of "dog management" on trails. It's not just about Max and me enjoying the outdoors: I need to be a responsible steward of nature while we're out there.

I love that OCT allows dogs on almost all its trails. I'm also fine with OCT's policy that requires visitors to keep their furry friends on a leash. This simple requirement serves a vital purpose: protecting the wild creatures that call these lands home.

Unleashed dogs pose a significant threat to wildlife, disrupting their habitats and potentially causing physical harm. The presence of unleashed dogs leads to stress and disturbances that can have long-lasting effects on fragile ecosystems. Wildlife will alter their behavior and may abandon an area where dogs are allowed to roam. My friend Bob Granger summed it up nicely: "Our dog loves walking freely, but she has never met a critter she doesn't want to chase. We are visitors in the woods, and good visitors don't harass the residents." Leashed dogs are safer, too: chasing wildlife near roads is perilous, and tangling with a raccoon or fox can mean a mandatory quarantine due to the threat of rabies.

But having a trail-friendly dog goes beyond keeping canine companions on a leash. It also entails picking up after them. Dog poop is not a fertilizer. It contains two main types of pollutants that cause significant harm to local waters and



The author and Max on an OCT trail. Sue is a longtime trustee of OCT.

Unleashed dogs pose a significant threat to wildlife, disrupting their habitats and potentially causing physical harm.

natural lands: nutrients and pathogens. When dog waste ends up in water bodies, it decomposes, releasing nutrients that suppress oxygen and cause excessive growth of algae and weeds. It also carries bacteria and parasites that can transmit diseases to humans.

As fellow dog walker Patty Platten notes, "Not picking up one dog's poop is a problem. But multiply that by the hundreds of people who walk their dogs on OCT lands. If they don't clean up after their pets, it becomes an environmental hazard for us all!" So we bring our bags on walks and carry out their contents. The Orleans Pond Coalition stocks "mutt mitts" on most local trails if you forget bags. And make sure those bags make it into the trash bin, where they can be safely disposed of.

The Trust allows leashed dogs on most of its properties and requires owners to pick up after them. But, as clearly stated, this policy is subject to change if noncompliance becomes an issue. I was among the OCT board members who voted unanimously for the policy years ago, believing that the Trust has an obligation to strike a balance between making its trails available to the public for quiet enjoyment while protecting the lands' natural character and integrity.

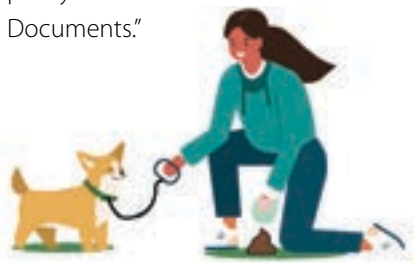
Being able to walk my dog on OCT land is one of the many reasons I love Cape Cod. If everyone practices good dog management, we'll be able to do it for a long time.

Did You Know?


Dog waste contains nearly 2 times the intestinal bacteria per gram compared to humans, and a million times more than a wild rabbit. (This and next item: USEPA, 1993)

Two to three days of waste from 100 dogs in a 20-sq mile watershed can contribute enough bacteria to temporarily close a bay to swimming or shellfishing.

You can find more good information on dogs and trails at thetrustees.org/content/guidelines-for-dog-walkers. OCT's dog policy is on our website under "Trust Documents."



Fall 2024 Speakers

Join us for the latest in our series of **entertaining and informative** talks by **local and regional experts**. Admission **free**. Check OCT's website for location and more details.  denotes programs linked with OCT's "At Home with Nature" initiative.

Design with Nature on Cape Cod: Meeting Nature Halfway

Dr. Jack Ahern



Landscape design featuring native Cape Cod plants helps reduce water and pesticide use, supports native pollinators, and strengthens a sense

of place. By starting with an understanding of site ecology, a designer can mix natives with other species to create beautiful gardens with multi-season interest, among other benefits. Based on Ahern's 2022 book *Design with Nature on Cape Cod and the Islands*.

Tuesday, September 10, 6:30pm

Coexisting with Our Wild Neighbors

Stephanie Ellis 



Wild Care, Inc. is a nonprofit wildlife hospital in Eastham dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, and release of injured and orphaned wildlife on

Cape Cod. Stephanie, Wild Care's executive director, will discuss human impacts on the lives of our native wildlife and offer tips for how we can all coexist. She will suggest alternatives to rodenticides for controlling rodent populations, dispel myths about coyotes, and describe how we benefit from Virginia opossums and other creatures that share our outdoor space.

Wednesday, October 9, 6:30pm

Birds, Bees, and Butterflies in Your Backyard

Mark Faherty



Mark Faherty, Science Coordinator at Mass Audubon Cape Cod, will discuss the importance of a healthy ecosystem in attracting pollinators to your home

landscape. Learn about some of the steps you can take to create your own wildlife haven and the fascinating diversity of life you might expect to find.

Date TBD

Summer/Fall 2024 Walks

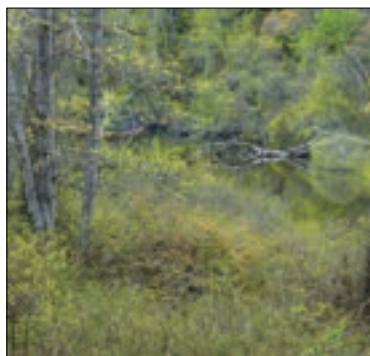
Get to know the **open spaces** of Orleans on our **popular guided walks**. They're **free, fun**, and appropriate for **all ages**. *Space is restricted; advance registration required. Register and find maps at orleansconservationtrust.org.*

Ice House/Reuben's Pond

1.5-mile walk around two freshwater ponds, through pitch pine-oak woodlands on OCT's longest uninterrupted trail.

Meet at 245 Tonset Road, Orleans

Thursday, June 13
10:00–11:30 am



Mill Pond Valley

Get an up-close look at active habitat management and land stewardship at one of OCT's crown jewel preserves.

Meet at 13 Champlain Road, Orleans

Wednesday, July 17
2:00–3:30pm

Putnam Farm

Putnam Farm, acquired by the Town of Orleans in 2010, has become a hub for small-scale agriculture. Learn about wetland restoration and the area's rich history on this short walk.

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

Tuesday, August 6
9:30–11:00am

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 the south end of Nauset Beach parking lot, Orleans

Sunday, September 15
9:00am–1:00pm

Woods Cove

Walk about 1/2 mile through pine-oak woodlands and enjoy views of Nauset Marsh. This lesser-known OCT property preserves important wildlife

habitat including two vernal pools.

Meet at 366 Tonset Road, Orleans

Thursday, October 10
1:30–3:00pm

Three Ponds

A 2-hour walk around Meadow Bog, Sarah's, and Twinings Ponds through more than 80 acres of OCT-protected land, highlighting the connection between lands and waters.

Meet at 135 Quanset Road, South Orleans

Wednesday, November 13
10:00–11:30am

Caring for Conservation Land It Takes a Community of Volunteers

By Lily Gooding

Since OCT's founding, volunteers have been the backbone of our organization—stewarding our lands and safeguarding the diverse ecosystems native to Orleans. Community members often ask how they can support the Trust's growing land stewardship efforts. We reply: by volunteering with us! As our lands expand and evolve, along with their use by visitors (not to mention the never-ending battle with invasives), so does the need. Volunteer Workdays, which OCT hosts twice a month, are pivotal to our success, allowing us to tackle a range of projects beyond our limited staff capacity.

Over the past months, volunteer crews helped install timber steps at Twinings Pond Conservation Area, bolstering steeper sections of the trails for sustained use. Repurposed

from invasive black locust trees, these steps hold up long term under all weather. Steps were placed according to the natural terrain, slope, and estimated stride, and waterbars—beams set diagonally across the trail—divert water to minimize erosion and prevent pooling. OCT will continue making improvements at other trails this year—always calling on volunteers for support!

Volunteers also help OCT manage invasive vegetation, which improves habitat and enhances biodiversity. From continuing efforts on multi-year management projects to breaking ground on new areas, there has been no shortage of roots to pull and brush to cut. At Twinings Pond, we completed another successful season of clearing privet, multiflora rose, and black locust, making space for native growth to take hold this spring. When the cleared material was consumed in a big pile burn in March, frequent volunteer (and ace nature photographer) Hardie Truesdale said with a grin, "It's hard work, but a lot of fun too. You can accomplish a lot working as a team. And that new meadow over there is beautiful!"

Those who cannot make scheduled workdays and prefer a more flexible level of partici-



Above: OCT volunteers Betsy Furtney and Anne and Steve Koehler at our mid-April event at Window on the Bay. Below: Installing locust steps at Twinings Pond. Lily Gooding holds rake.

pation, or enjoy getting to know a property in depth, can join our Volunteer Land Steward program, which encourages quarterly monitoring of an OCT property. This fall and winter, we recruited 18 new volunteers overall and brought back 9 veterans to help steward

more than 15 properties—including all our lands with trails and public access. Since the program was restructured, Land Stewards have submitted more than 25 reports that provide key data, track changes in our landscapes, and identify action items for staff.

No matter your experience and comfort level, you can help OCT care for the places that welcome our whole community.

On April 19, staff and trustees welcomed OCT's volunteers and other community members to our first volunteer appreciation event. Attendees enjoyed a cookout and each other's company, sharing memories of their work this past winter. Outstanding volunteers were honored, and Director of Land Management Tom Keras previewed some opportunities coming up. By offering diverse projects and initiatives, the Trust aims to support our holistic approach to land management. We'll continue to enhance the volunteer experience with education, training, and hands-on programs. No matter your experience and comfort level, you can help OCT care for the places that welcome our whole community.

Land Stewardship Technician Lily Gooding first came to OCT as an AmeriCorps Cape Cod member in 2022.



Above: Before and after views of the Meadow Bog scenic viewshed restoration site.
Left: Volunteers gather at OCT headquarters for a stewardship training.

Restoring the Meadow Bog Landscape

Perhaps the most challenging management project of 2023 was restoration work at the Meadow Bog trailhead, off Quanset Road. Over a span of three days, a crew of volunteers cut back rampant thorny greenbrier, filling a large "brush box" to the brim. Although this native vine produces berries that feed birds, and tender shoots munched by deer, greenbrier can grow quickly and overpower other species nearby. Before and after pictures show remarkable improvement, but more work lies ahead. This summer and fall, volunteers will help plant gallon-sized native shrubs and groundcover; to ensure that they succeed, we'll routinely cut back greenbrier as it continues to grow, eventually "tiring it out" completely. This effort would not be possible without the support of



Tom Keras briefs volunteers confronting the mass of greenbrier and bittersweet at Meadow Bog Trail.

residents from the surrounding Quanset neighborhood. We are grateful for the community's investment in restoring the Meadow Bog habitat.

continued from page 3

just off the Tonset Road trailhead, the .75-mile loop contains a children's picture book that is taken apart and mounted on a series of stations along the gentle trail. Walkers make their way through the story as they go from station to station. Storybook trails bring together reading and fresh air, with kiosks positioned at eye-level for young readers. OCT maintains the kiosks and Friends of Snow Library provides the books, which change with the seasons. Spring and summer are prime times to experience the trail—for local families or grandfolks looking for things to do with young visitors.

Good Tidings on Terrapins

OCT's Henson's Cove Conservation Area (HCCA) provides some of the only nesting habitat for a threatened population of diamondback terrapin turtles in upper Pleasant Bay. Through a partnership with Mass Audubon, volunteers have monitored the terrapins and their nesting activity there since 2012, after OCT restored their preferred grassland nesting habitat.

The population trend has been very positive, and 2023 was no exception: a record 32 nests were documented, and 348 hatchlings entered the population—another new record for the site! (Since 2012, the total number exceeds 1,500.) Most won't make it



Above: One healthy chick is being reared this season. It probably hatched right around March 30. Photo © Kenneth Mayo Johnson. Left: OCT volunteers led by Bob Prescott pass through newly restored land on Henson's Cove to "plant" baby terrapins near the shore.

to adulthood, but some do, judging from some recently found nests containing just a few eggs. Turtles just reaching sexual maturity don't lay as many, so some of these new mothers probably hatched during the early years of monitoring. This summer, we hope to find nests on our newly restored acreage at 4 Braddock's Way. Once colonized, this added habitat will better the odds of nesting success and hatchling survival: the more locations, the more likely it is that one or another will escape the effects of predation or other natural events.

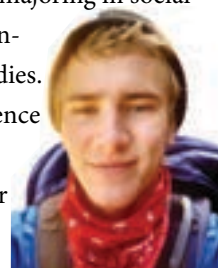
They're Baaack!

Earlier this spring, we learned with delight that the bald eagles who nested on OCT land last year (and graced the cover of our fall newsletter) have returned! Bald eagles, like most large birds of prey, start nesting early; our Orleans pair may

have been incubating as early as January 30 this year. The early start gives chicks adequate time to grow to the enormous size of an adult and learn the skills needed to endure winter's scarcity. Eagles show a high nest-site fidelity, often returning to a nest year after year. Eagles commonly live longer than 20 years and take 4–5 years to reach breeding maturity, so it will be a couple years until last year's fledglings are looking for their own nest sites. Here's to many more successful nests for these Orleans favorites!

Welcome Intern Jack Noble

OCT new summer intern is an undergraduate at Wesleyan University majoring in social and environmental studies. His experience includes working for the mayor



of Seattle (Jack's hometown), studying tropical biology in Costa Rica, and spending a semester conducting research in the Himalayas of Nepal. "I was drawn to OCT because of its commitment to preserving the character of Orleans through protecting its natural spaces," says Jack. "I have always defined the places I live by their natural environments, so cultivating Orleans through land conservation is a goal I am honored to commit my summer to!"

New OCT Membership Year

In December, the OCT board unanimously voted to align our membership year with our fiscal year. Previously, our membership year ran from July 1–June 30; it now runs from January 1–December 31. Alignment to the calendar year will help OCT offer clean and clear reporting, help our fundraising committee identify trends, and increase the number of Red Oak Donors (donors who have contributed for five or more consecutive membership years). Red Oak Donors listed in previous giving reports will maintain their status, but changing to a January–December reporting cycle will enable us to include many more who have been faithful supporters each calendar year! Be sure to look for your name in our next report. Red Oak donors are denoted by an acorn symbol:



Take Back the Cape

Rewilding for New Open Space

By Mark Robinson

Almost half (46 percent) of Cape Cod's land mass has been developed, and in many places, despite our active work in preserving open space, a suburban feel is creeping in. But a new theme is emerging in the business of land conservation: *undevelopment*, or the re-creation of natural places by removing blighted structures in sensitive areas.

In 1991, The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts (OCT is a founding member) published a booklet highlighting ten case studies of local land trusts engaging in eco-restoration projects—mostly by demolishing structures (houses, motels, gas stations) and naturalizing the landscape with native plantings. Each episode inspired other groups to think creatively. We need not accept the hand that development has given us. Occasionally, where it makes sense, we can draw new cards.

Not every land parcel is sensitive, and sometimes a building can be repurposed for affordable housing or a caretaker's cottage. But we know where the most critical properties for protection are: along water bodies, in wellfields, adjoining conservation land, or where rare plants and animals live.

“We need not accept the hand that development has given us. Occasionally, where it makes sense, we can draw new cards.”



And in those spots, less really is more. To be exact, less development can make for more quality habitat.

Orleans has several terrific examples of undevelopment. Most recently, OCT purchased 5-plus acres on Eli Rogers Road across from the Town Wellfield (see page 3). Two dilapidated cottages and several outbuildings are being demolished, a septic system will be removed from the groundwater feeding the wellfield, and the pine-oak forest will regrow over time. Over the past few years, OCT has also undeveloped properties at 66 and 109 Portanimiticut Road. Just off



South Orleans in Pleasant Bay, Sipson Island Trust reached a milestone late last year in undeveloping and rewilding the 22 acres it owns on that island, deconstructing and hauling off debris from three vacation homes (with their septic) and beginning to restore the native landscape.

Farther afield, the Route 28 Task Force has succeeded in reestablishing some vital public spaces in West Yarmouth, creating linked pocket parks at the head of the Mill Creek estuary. And land trusts in Barnstable, Harwich,

Left: OCT's restored Window on the Bay preserve at 109 Portanimiticut Road. Top: Demolishing one of three homes on Sipson Island. Both © Hardie Truesdale. Above: Around Cape Cod Bay, former cranberry bogs are being restored to wetlands. Photo Living Observatory.

and Falmouth are restoring abandoned cranberry bogs to natural freshwater marshes and herring runs. Each example of success inspires another one. Keep it going!

Mark Robinson has served as Executive Director of The Compact since its founding in 1986.

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Photo © Nancy Graupner

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