Dennis Conservation Land Trust Year-End Newsletter, 2024

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President's Message

Joseph Masse, President, Board of Trustees



As I write this it is autumn, but more commonly referred to as "fall," a word derived from the 16th century British expression "fall of the leaf."

The "fall of the leaf" season is a great time to take a walk. The trees are bare of leaves, which now cushion the ground beneath our feet. The tree trunks, devoid of the canopy which in another season produces the oxygen we breathe,

stand clearly before us. We now can take in their height and width, and their form shaped by Cape Cod's bracing winds.

Evergreens become more noteworthy – no longer competing with leafy trees for our attention. And, while deciduous trees and plants sleep during late fall and winter, our evergreens never stop being important. Evergreens, along with plankton which produces roughly half the oxygen on Earth, ensure we are not left "breathless" in the leafless times of year.

Holly Worton, in her book, "If Trees Could Talk" says "Trees are living, breathing organisms which humans are able to connect and talk to on a deeper level through silent telepathic communication."

Pretty heady stuff! But what the heck. Look both ways



to be sure no one is listening and give it a go. You can keep to yourself what comes back, but if you are patient, with an active mind, something will. Maybe an acorn on the noggin or perhaps something more. At any rate, get out there. Take a walk with a friend, human or otherwise, and enjoy this peaceful season. And, as you walk among what has been preserved consider what our lives would be without trees. We all know the answer. Yes, trees are beautiful, but they are also pretty darned important.

We hope you enjoyed the final days of the "fall of leaf" season, because we all know what's next.

Happy Holidays!

"Deciduous trees like the oak are tired, as the process of 'de leafing' is arduous. The oak tree absorbs the nutrients of the leaves back into their trunks to grow a barrier of cells between twigs and leaves before shedding their leaves. Pretty exhausting stuff. So, they put their boughs up and sit out the long dark nights of winter, contently doing very little."

—Liz Marvin, How to Be More Tree

This Time of Year

Ronald Harrison Fenn, DCLT Member



Past leafing of christening fall sirens of silence stir and awake

the serenity of seclusions what remains secret and sublime

resurrecting all of its colors that glow in rising repose

leaning into the coming of winter issuing warm layers of clothes

every successive month reminding that warmth is manufactured and cold is instilled

when folk will wave rather than tender conversation an insulation ushers in tightened homes and trees

as reconfigured blood and sap congeal to a halt deep below ground and base of each tree

a lapse arises to ponder where we've been forging a life that now grows wearied calm

as fading landscapes spur less life into motion through the tilt of our earth into long shadow

beyond ourselves as only nature speaks

what light do we effect in late months of coming winter

my shadow draws onto moonlit canvas of snow a mere floating apparition of former self

invisible, invisible head to toe through sleeping landscape

I confide to you within me these few images that be

From the Journal and Other Writings of Ronald Harrison Fenn, Collection of Short Poems; Volume 6 © 10/24/2024

A Year at Home

David Fryxell, Ph.D., Executive Director and Ecologist

Just over a year ago we moved into our new headquarters—a place that has become so much more than expanded office space. What started as our new workspace has blossomed into a dynamic hub for community engagement, environmental education, and conservation, with plenty of room to grow.

As we settled into our new home, we focused on creating

a space that would support our growing team and the expanding scope of our work. One of the first tasks was converting an unfinished section of the walkout basement into a functional "lab" space for our summer interns. With a modest budget of just \$1,000, we transformed what "Mosquito Molly" called the "dungeon" into a vibrant setting for student study.



The "lab"

Our environmental Science Fair Program has flourished since the move. This spring, Molly won the Environmental Protection Agency award at the regional science fair and then earned third place at the state-wide competition. This summer, Nina Hill



Mosquito Molly at the regional science fair

set up experimental ponds to test how septic systems contribute to nutrient pollution. This autumn, Hanna Thornton is deploying wildlife cameras to test how mammals select oak species through acorn caching and feeding behaviors.



Nina Hill sampling her experimental ponds



DCLT's staff and service members, summer 2024

We are calling our headquarters our Environmental Study Center. It has become a laboratory for environmental experimentation of all kinds. Among the most exciting developments this past year has been our foray into farming, which we saw as an opportunity to learn while connecting with the land in a manner that preserves its 300-plus year-old farming tradition.

Under the guidance of our TerraCorps Member, Tara Brew, we grew a wide variety of produce: cucumbers, zucchinis, radishes, corn, pumpkins, and more. The yield surpassed our expectations, and we were able to donate most of the harvest to the Yarmouth Food Pantry. They were grateful to receive it, and we are grateful to have Leeza Barstein – this year's TerraCorps Member – leading this experiment into the coming year.



Carl, Malibu, and Tara with one of their many harvests

As our team has grown, we have extended our reach and taken on new initiatives. The most novel development of the year has been our Community Biodiversity Initiative. The project started with our AmeriCorps Cape Cod member, Jen Clifford, and has since been led by our newly minted Biodiversity Scientist, Dr. Fernando Mendonca. The initiative creates a collective of conservation entities reporting rare species observations to the state, which will protect land without the expense of acquiring it. In addition to our education and conservation programs, we made significant strides in community outreach. We hired Lauren Dreyer as outreach coordinator, who led an open house to thank the donors who made the acquisition of our home possible. With her help, we launched a "Home Grown Tour" series for our members, providing the opportunity to learn about sustainable agriculture from others right here at home.



Home Grown Tour participants check out the highland cattle of Seawind Meadows Farm

Land conservation remains the core of our mission, and our home base provides the space we need to get more of it done. This year, we completed the fouryear-long acquisition of Tobey West. We accepted a generous land donation from Amy Stuehler, a 1.2-acre parcel visible across Sesuit saltmarsh from the back porch of our home. We added a layer of legal protection to over 100 acres of land we own across town, because, when we say "forever protection," we mean it.



An aerial view of DCLT's Tobey West

What land remains left to protect in Dennis is a moving target. Zoning laws change. What was once considered "undevelopable" may soon become available for development. To address the ever urgent need to protect more land and secure our environmental future, we have made what is perhaps the most valuable addition to our team. Kat Garofoli, former DCLT Executive Director, has joined us for one day each week as an employee of the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts. She will ensure what's left in Dennis has the best possible shot at forever protection.

Our new headquarters has provided us with the space, resources, and inspiration to do more than we could have thought possible just a few years ago. We are deeply grateful to all those who have supported us along the way. The addition of several key staff members, not to mention volunteers and board members, will only strengthen our capacity to protect the lands and habitats that make our community so special.

We are incredibly proud of all that we have accomplished together this last year. Our home – our Environmental Study Center – has become a center for community-driven environmental learning as well as conservation innovation.

Thank you—all of you for being part of our journey. Together, we will continue creating a legacy of conservation that will be enjoyed for generations to come.



Tribute to Natalie Chase



Natalie Ann Chase of Dennis Port passed away on July 24, 2024. Born and raised in Dennis, she was a 16th generation Cape Codder known for her warmth, grace, and remarkable memory. Her life exemplified love and strong

Natalie Chase at DCLT's 2023 Auction

connections with others, including her lifelong friend Sue Parker, as well as many of us at DCLT.

Natalie was a member of the Junior Women's Club, the Rainbow Girls, and the Eastern Star. She dedicated over 50 years of her life to John Martin Insurance company in Yarmouth, where she worked full-time until her passing at age 83. Her colleagues there were like family.

Natalie served on the Dennis Land Bank Committee. She made it her mission to protect the remaining open spaces of Dennis Port, with Sea View Playland being at the top of her wish list. In 2005, with Natalie's help, the Town was able to acquire the 13-acre property, now ecologically restored and known as "Sea View Park."

Natalie enjoyed simple pleasures like dining at Scargo Café, trips to Foxwoods, and attending DCLT's Annual Auction. For those who attended, Natalie will be fondly remembered for tenaciously bidding on Ross Coppelman's jewelry. She would not be outbid.

Natalie was an active supporter of both the Dennis Historical Society (DHS) and the DCLT. Predeceased by her parents, Olga and William Chase, Natalie inherited her home on Route 28 in Dennis Port, where she lived her entire life. In a remarkable act of charity for the town she loved, upon her passing, she left her home and assets to be split between DHS and DCLT.

Natalie's kindness and unwavering friendship touched many lives, leaving an irreplaceable void. She will be dearly missed and remembered fondly. But through her generous bequest to DCLT and DHS, Natalie's memory will live on forever in the town she loved and protected.



Sea View Park, Dennis Port

Biodiversity Initiative: Studying Wildlife to Protect Land

Leeza Barstein, TerraCorps Member, David Fryxell, Executive Director, and Fernando Mendonca, Biodiversity Scientist

A few hours after the sun rises, with dew coating crisp leaves, laughter breaks through the still morning air. The source of this cheerfulness? The Dennis Conservation Land Trust's volunteer Stewardship Team is armed with loppers, saws, and brush cutters. Like every Thursday morning workday, the crew is prepared for battle against their notorious enemies—prickly, viny, stubborn invasive plants. A couple of sweat-inducing hours later, and *snap* a trail is cleared of them. Entire canopies of invasive vines are removed. Light begins creeping around newly freed tree branches. What's left is a property that can breathe again.

For years, DCLT's community-supported land management has been critical for nurturing our conservation lands. And similarly, through a bottom-up approach, these efforts have fostered an environmental ethic that empowers locals to actively protect their environment, including activities separate from their volunteer duties with DCLT. But why limit public participation in DCLT's work to one aspect of land protection–land stewardship?

For the past few years, activating community involvement in conservation has been at the forefront of DCLT's collective mind. Our conventional land stewardship practices, like removing invasive species, help conserve land and protect native biodiversity. But DCLT is exploring other, underutilized avenues to engage volunteers in conservation—those that directly contribute to the legal protection of land in Massachusetts—such as documenting the presence of rare biodiversity.

You may have heard the term 'biodiversity' before, but what does it mean? Put simply, biodiversity refers to the great variety of life on planet Earth. In practice, it generally means the set of species that can be found



Stewardship volunteers remove invasive vines

in a location. This diversity is important for many reasons, including maintaining healthy ecosystems that provide clean water, food security, pollination, climate regulation, and disease control. Biodiversity benefits both humans and Mother Earth.

What if we could involve community members in protecting land without intense physical labor, stifling legal jargon, overly complicated paperwork, or the expense of acquiring land by purchase?

DCLT's Biodiversity Initiative revolves around the premise that people, regardless of their formal knowledge about land regulations or natural history, can study biodiversity to protect land. The process is simple: learn to identify particular species, get outside to find and document them, and report your observations to DCLT or to partner organizations. Then, we will upload the observations to MassWildlife—the state agency responsible for protecting the habitat of these species—and that habitat may become legally protected under Massachusetts law. The two types of biodiversity that qualify for these protections are species inhabiting "vernal pools" and rare species listed under the state's Endangered Species Act.

VERNAL POOL DIVERSITY

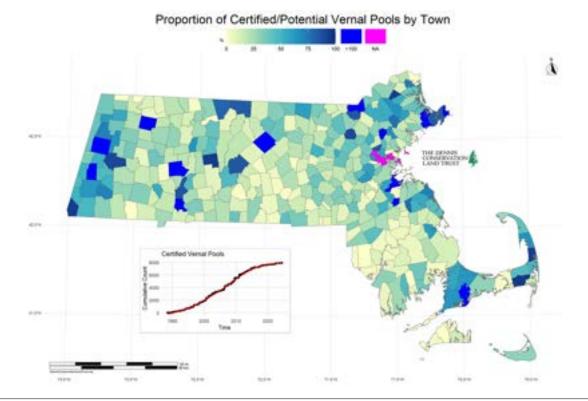
The first prong of our initiative seeks to document the presence of species found living in "vernal pools." To imagine a vernal pool, think of those shallow, water-filled depressions in the earth that you might see on a stroll through the woods. These pools are ephemeral, meaning they exist temporarily each year. Despite being shortlived, they provide critical habitat for charismatic, cryptic animals, such as spotted salamanders, wood frogs, and fairy shrimp. And here's the key: unlike many wetlands in our state, small vernal pools are not legally protected from development and disruption unless certain species, such as the ones listed above, are found and documented to live in them. But once these species are reported, vernal pools achieve "Certified" status and become protected under the state's Wetlands Protection Act.

As a first step in our initiative, we aimed to motivate the observation of vernal pool species where they may be needed most. We looked at patterns of vernal pool "Certification" across the state to rank communities by how well they have protected their vernal pools through Mass Wildlife's reporting process. These patterns indicate where volunteer activities to protect land and vernal pool biodiversity are lacking and where the greatest opportunities for public-led conservation exist.



Spotted salamander egg masses, South Dennis

We found stark differences from town to town and even between neighboring towns. For example, we estimated that just 2% of vernal pools have been certified in Dennis, ranking 322nd across all municipalities in the state. In neighboring Harwich, 96% of pools are certified, a rank of 15th across the state. Furthermore, when we look at trends in certification over time, we see that volunteers were increasingly engaged with this conservation tool in the 1990s and 2000s. However, reporting rates have fallen sharply since then, almost to a standstill in recent years. Our Initiative aims to buck that trend.



STATE-LISTED SPECIES DIVERSITY



Eastern Box Turtle, South Dennis

The second prong of our initiative for public-led land protection focuses on another set of species: those listed under the state's

Endangered Species Act. Take box turtles, for example. Not only are they readily identified by non-experts, but to some extent, the public already seems to know they should report them when observed. Less known is why they should be reported. Just like vernal pool species, the presence of endangered species can also lead to land

STATE-WIDE PARTNERSHIPS



This past year, DCLT's "Community Science Committee" volunteers have been documenting state-listed and

DCLT's Community Science Committee visits a vernal pool

vernal pool species right here at home. But our Initiative aims for a much broader reach. Its central goal is to recruit other local and regional partners, such as land trusts, environmental organizations, and municipal conservation and natural resources departments, to create and manage their staff and volunteers to participate in species reporting.

STUDYING BIODIVERSITY TOGETHER

Here's our hope: Three months from now, just a few hours after the sun has risen, with frost coating crisp leaves, the sound of laughter will break through the still morning air. The Dennis Conservation Land Trust's volunteer Community Science Team will be armed with waders, nets, and sorting trays. They will have studied species identification guides to prepare for this day in search of vernal pool life. If we're lucky, the team will have found and documented evidence that will be submitted to the state, resulting in a certified vernal pool filled with fairy shrimp, salamanders, and frogs; a pool that is much less protection under Massachusetts law.

Box turtles are one of many state-listed species that can and should be reported for these benefits. A total of 452 other species are listed, and once found by volunteers, they too can lead to land protection in Massachusetts. However, as far as we know, there has yet to be a concerted effort to leverage these regulations to spur land protection, either regionally or across the state.

Indeed, many of these species have yet to be discovered by staff and volunteers of land trusts such as our own, let alone the general public. That's a lot of yet untapped potential.

DCLT is seeking partner entities to make a simple "Partner Pledge": follow best practices for fieldwork and reporting and commit to submitting just three observations to the state each year. This is a minor ask, but the collective state-wide impact could be enormous with a large team of partners.

In return for making the pledge, project partners will be given access to a new, data-driven, phone-based resource we are developing to help them locate target species. The tool will prioritize the species and vernal pools most likely to be found within each town and further identify those species and areas most likely to reap new legal protections from reporting. Volunteer users will simply need a smartphone and an app that they may have already downloaded on it.

likely to be filled in, developed, or otherwise destroyed forever. And if we're lucky, if our initiative is successful, we will have recruited dozens of other conservation entities to do the same.

With a little guidance, we and our partners can study and promote local biodiversity while democratizing the process of land protection. Every day, people like our small but mighty Stewardship Team will have the opportunity to make a big environmental impact while having fun and learning together in the great outdoors.

For helping to kickstart this initiative, we wish to thank the Island Foundation, three anonymous donors, our early project partners (Native Land Conservancy, Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, and The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts and its member organizations), and those who have advised us: Tim Simmons, Matt Penella, Micah Jasney, and Alec Kaisand.

Fast Changes, Hopeful Futures: My Mosquito Research with DCLT

Molly Gedutis, Advisor

If I've learned one thing in the past year, it's that things change. Fast.

A little over a year ago, I was coming into my last summer of high school filled with mixed feelings of apprehension and hope – not just for my final year before college but also for the world at large.

It's hard to grow up in today's age of instant global media and remain unaffected by all of the things we hear and see around us, from wars raging across the globe to water crises in our own country. Most of the catastrophes we see seem to have something in common: they're anthropogenic, or caused, at least in part, by humans. Since modern humans have existed on the planet, a mere blip in the span of Earth's history, we've changed it. Fast. And not always for the better.

Water shortages, deforestation, global warming, and overpopulation are problems we've all heard about. When I came to the Dennis Conservation Land Trust as a summer research intern, I knew I would gravitate towards a topic that I could relate to human activity. You see, I was always one to passionately curse my ancestors for their recklessness when I watched nature films documenting human-caused environmental changes. One way to address these problems is to learn more about them, to study and research them. As to research topics, mosquitoes became my subject of choice. More specifically, I was interested in testing for resistance to pesticides in mosquitoes on Cape Cod – extensive pesticide use being one way humans could be affecting the local environment and their own health.

Pesticide resistance – the ability to survive when exposed to products that should kill them – is rising in many pest species, including mosquitoes. This is problematic because mosquitoes spread diseases such as West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis, both of which affected people in Massachusetts this very year. When we see these diseases popping up around us, it's important that we can control their spread by controlling mosquito populations.

After a summer of experiments with DCLT, I found significant differences between resistance to the two major groups of pesticides – adulticides and larvicides. As the names suggest, adulticides are compounds that kill adults, while larvicides are usually products containing naturally occurring, toxin-producing bacteria that are ingested by and then kill mosquitoes while in their aquatic larval state. I found widespread resistance to common chemical compounds used in adulticides, including pyrethrins and their synthetic brothers, pyrethroids, but little to no resistance to bacteriacontaining larvicides such as Bacillus thuringiensis (Bti).



Molly's mosquito breeding buckets



Molly and Dave at the regional science fair

Why is this, you may ask? It's caused by something called a pesticide treadmill, where a pesticide is applied to kill off organisms, but not all of them die. Those who have genes that allow them to survive in the presence of the pesticide live and pass those genes to the next generation – that's Darwinism for you – and rapid evolution at that! So, more pesticide is applied over and over, thus the "treadmill" in the name, and the "genetically superior" organisms survive and create a resistant population. This is what happens with many pests and our chemical solutions to them, and our actions have made it harder to control some deadly infectious diseases.

This result is somewhat alarming. For example, the state-funded Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project regularly uses only larvicides, reserving the use of adulticide sprays for rare cases of significant disease outbreak.

How is it, then, that our local mosquitoes have developed resistance? Most likely this is because

homeowners and other consumers continue to use adulticide sprays in their yards instead of larvicides, as they're unaware that they're actually encouraging pesticide resistance. More widespread public education on pesticide resistance would likely encourage homeowners to make environmentally friendly decisions on how to best control the mosquitoes inhabiting their backyards.

I assure you, whether you believe it or not after reading this article, I'm actually quite an optimist; I believe there's hope for long-term solutions to many of our worldly issues. To start, the development of Bti larvicidal products in the 1970s and 80s led to the creation of safe treatments that are still effective and target the problem before it starts, or rather, before it hatches. And as my study and others have shown, mosquitoes seem unable to develop resistance to it. Science for the win! I also believe that if consumers are aware of their options, they will choose the more environmentally friendly solution to the pesky problem of mosquitoes.

This is where I hold most of my faith in humanity: in scientists who genuinely care about our planet and the organisms (including people!) that inhabit it, as well as the people who listen to their conclusions. These people see that science, unlike politics or morality, is factual and not emotionally driven. I suppose that here I should specify that good science is as such, for there is undoubtedly science out there that has been published for one ulterior motive or another – to that, I say: always check your sources.

I had not ever met people who are so keen to listen to science and foster their own discoveries as those I've met at the DCLT. The fact that I, as a non-experienced



An aerial view of Not Enough Acres Farm

student, could enter a community so encouraging of my research is very telling. Now I've moved on to UMass Dartmouth and have seen much the same in my pursuit of science from the academy.

To most at DCLT, I'm Mosquito Molly, who placed second in the Regional Science Fair and third in the State-wide Science Fair. But it was not just I who worked towards these achievements. There were many people -DCLT and Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project staff and volunteers, donors, and even a family member here and there - who helped me along the way and deserve credit as well.

Change happens fast, but so can progress. It's not just a one-person-job, though. It's a community and global effort. Now, as I'm wrapping up my first semester at college, I think back to the past year with the DCLT. I think of all of the people who constructed my "Breeding Den," lugged mosquito-luring buckets back and forth



Molly with Cape Cod Mosquito Control Project staff

at Not Enough Acres Farm and supported me with encouraging words and smiles every time I spoke of my project. As long as there are good people like this in the world, I believe we can learn and make progress together.



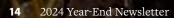
Kayly Gleason, DCLT's 2023 Science Fair Intern, helps Molly with her experiment

A Look Back

DENNIS CONSERVATION CELEBRATION

OPEN HOUSE

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:: 2024 Events

ANNUAL AUCTION

ANNUAL DUCK RACE

Hart Farm

SWEET CORN

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November 1, 2023 to October 31, 2024

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