



# Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Winter 2004

## **SPA's Most Important Resource: Generous Members Provide the Foundation for Long-Term Land Conservation**

Heather Steers, President, Sakonnet Preservation Association

The Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) would like to extend a warm welcome to the many people who became new members this past year. Due to the efforts of the SPA's Finance, Fundraising and Membership Committee, 302 people contributed to the 2003 Membership and Annual Appeal drives. Broad community support strengthens the land trust's capacity to preserve Little Compton's rural character and natural resources. Besides contributing directly to the protection of land, strong membership also enhances SPA's ability to secure grants from other funding organizations. If you have not yet joined the SPA, please consider doing so by clipping out and returning the new member form on page 5 of this newsletter. The SPA is grateful to all of its generous supporters.

Such support enabled the SPA board to establish two separate funds last year. SPA board member Letitia Carter donated \$5,000 to initiate a Stewardship Fund for the long-term maintenance of SPA properties. In November the SPA board voted to create a \$20,000 Legal Defense Fund, by moving \$10,000 from unrestricted funds and by applying a small percentage of the amount raised from SPA's Annual Appeal until the \$20,000 funding goal is achieved. This was an important step for the SPA in an ongoing effort to ensure the permanent protection of its property holdings, especially the eight properties on which SPA holds 87 acres of conservation easements and development rights.

In January 2002, SPA initiated a stewardship program for its properties. The group was assisted by private consultant Brenda Lind, who was formerly land agent for the Trust for New Hampshire Lands and who is co-author of *The Conservation Easement Guide*, published by the Land Trust Alliance.

"A conservation easement, no matter how expertly crafted, cannot alone protect important land or historic resources," she states in that book, "only the easement's excellent stewardship can. Acquiring an easement is just the beginning of the protection effort. Your ongoing commitment to monitor, defend and enforce the easement is what ensures protection in perpetuity."

Ms. Lind met with several SPA board members and subsequently compiled an "Assessment of Conservation Stewardship and Recommendations" for the organization. Her recommendation to "develop baseline documentation files for the SPA's existing easements" was completed in 2003 with the help of Sarah Storer, an experienced land manager. Also that year, the Stewardship Committee revised and expanded its monitoring process based on Brenda's suggestions. Now, with the recent establishment of a fund for enforcing existing conservation easements in case there is a serious and otherwise unresolvable violation, the SPA has substantially strengthened its program of responsible stewardship for its easements.





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## **Rhode Island Land Trust Council Hires Director and Expands Efforts**

The Rhode Island Land Trust Council (RILTC), a statewide coalition that was founded in 1999, enables land trusts to work together to foster a sustainable land conservation movement in Rhode Island and supports the missions and operations of the state's land trusts. Last May, Rupert Friday was named as the Council's first full-time Director. The position is funded with grant support from The Rhode Island Foundation and the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Larry Anderson, the SPA's previous president, served on the RILTC Executive Committee from 1999 until 2002 and participated in the development of the council's strategic plan. Heather Steers, the SPA's current president, is serving a three-year term on the RILTC Executive Committee.

In October, Governor Donald Carcieri proposed that an open space bond be placed on the November ballot. The RILTC is urging members of the Rhode Island land trust community to support the passage of the bond by asking their state senators and representatives to sponsor and support the bond. Funds from the 2000 Open Space and Recreation Bond are almost exhausted. Without a new bond, the state will be without funding for open space protection programs for the first time since 1985, when the first Open Space Bond was passed. Land trusts are also being encouraged to ask their own municipalities to adopt a resolution endorsing an Open Space Bond.

RILTC is also asking land trusts to submit their land protection successes since 2000 for an "Annual Report" for Rhode Island's Land Trust Community. The Annual Report will help to increase the visibility of all land trusts and our collective efforts to protect the special places and character of our communities.

For its annual conference this year, the RILTC is cooperating with the RI Rivers Council and the RI Association of Conservation Commissions to hold the Rhode Island Land and Water Summit on March 20, from 8:30 am to 4 pm, at the North Kingstown High School. Everyone is encouraged to attend the conference. In addition to a keynote address by Gus Seelig about the Vermont program that invests in land conservation and affordable housing, the conference program will include 20 different workshop sessions as well as updates on state legislation affecting conservation. If you would like additional information about the conference, please call the SPA office at 635-8800 or RILTC Director Rupert Friday at 331-7110, extension 39; email: [rfriday@tnc.org](mailto:rfriday@tnc.org).



## Conservation Donations Protect 5.5 Acres of Shoreline and Fields



Field property

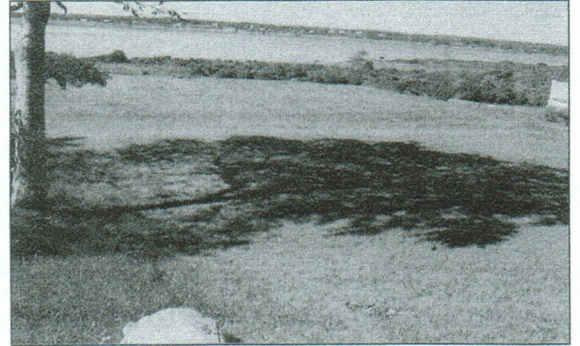
Sakonnet River. It also "provides good cover along the shore . . . for wildlife and migrating birds," in the words of the wildlife biologist who evaluated the conservation values of the property for SPA, and "is part of a larger system of open fields and contiguous freshwater wetlands that currently remains intact and unfragmented by development on adjacent parcels."

The 2-acre Field conservation easement protects an upland field on Indian Hill Road bounded on two sides by stone walls. The parcel provides habitat for a variety of birds, small mammals and other species, including raptors which forage the field for prey.

By placing conservation easements on their land, the Sherers and Fields have ensured that the properties will not be subject to further residential development. The SPA is grateful to the Sherers and the Fields for their exceptional generosity, which will benefit the community of Little Compton for generations to come.

Through the generosity of two Little Compton couples, the Sakonnet Preservation Association (SPA) protected an additional 5.5 acres of open space in December 2003. The donation of conservation easements by Catherine and Joseph F. Sherer III and Janet and H. James Field bring the total of land preserved by SPA to 291 acres.

The 3.5-acre Sherer conservation easement consists of a cobble beach, open field habitat and a freshwater wetland system on the Sakonnet River, a tidal estuary. The easement protects a significant expanse of undeveloped scenic shoreline visible from the



Sherer property

RI Land Trust Council, RI Assoc. of Conservation Commissions, RI Rivers Council  
present the

### SIXTH ANNUAL LAND TRUST CONFERENCE

#### Rhode Island Land and Water Conservation Summit

**SATURDAY March 20 8:30 - 4:00 PM**

North Kingstown High School  
featuring

20 different workshops  
keynote speaker  
RI legislative update

**For information or registration:**  
401. 331. 7110 ext. 39 or email: [rfriday@tnc.org](mailto:rfriday@tnc.org)  
\$25 pre-registration / \$35 at the door

#### SAVE THE DATE **MARCH 4th** SAVE THE DATE

"Source water is the untreated water from streams, lakes, reservoirs, or underground aquifers that is used to supply drinking water." \*

On March 4th Lorraine Joubert of the URI Cooperative Extension Service's Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) will review recent program results with the Little Compton Town Council at 7 pm. The SWAP study maintains that to protect future water quality, the town should consider incorporating several measures identified by the study into town watershed protection efforts. These measures are intended to control nutrient runoff and to encourage good development practices and open space protection throughout watersheds. An interesting report providing an overview of the SWAP study will be available that evening at the town council, at the Brownell Library, or by calling the SPA at 635-8800. Anyone interested in this important subject is welcome to attend. Ms. Joubert spoke last spring at an SPA-sponsored workshop about the Watson Reservoir watershed.

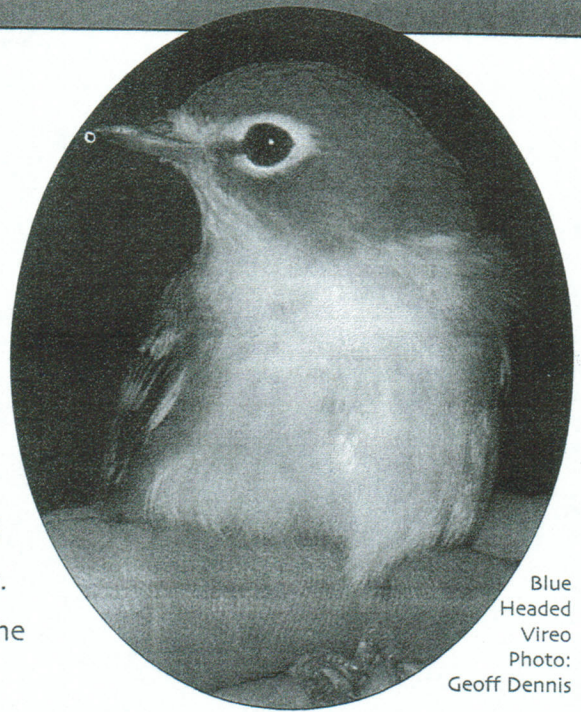
\*From the URI Cooperative Extension Report funded by the RI Department of Health, Source Water Assessment Program



## *Sakonnet Thickets; A Destination for Flight-Weary Songbirds*

*John Berg*

It's January, the hedgerows are barren, and the wind has been pushing out of the northwest for a few weeks now. The clear blue skies of Canada have been sent our way but the 'friendly' skies seem to be making a call of their own.



Blue  
Headed  
Vireo  
Photo:  
Geoff Dennis

I remember our visit to Bumble Bee Farm in October. We were there to greet and look after some other travellers. These were neotropical migrant songbirds on their journey south to Florida, the Caribbean Islands, Central America and the Gulf of Mexico. Scott Comings was with us from The Nature Conservancy's office on Block Island. Scott is a trained ornithologist who carries with him all the gear needed for a field physical of each bird. His patients each receive an assessment of dimension, weight and body fat, and then fly off carrying an identification band as a trophy of the visit. Careful record keeping over the years by Scott and others like him has revealed the story of how these small songbirds thrive and how they lead itinerant lives which enable them to brighten locations many miles apart.

For us, neotropical migrants are the colorful birds of Summer. This blue-headed vireo and its brethren including yellow-rumped warblers and kinglets of both the yellow-crowned and ruby-crowned variety were passing through thicket and hedgerow that day. Scott explained that the first two had been known in my youth as the solitary vireo and myrtle warbler, but that story is for another time.

Like many of our guests, these migrants had arrived in Little Compton for a night or a fortnight, enroute from nesting grounds in the North Woods to winter homes in those sunnier locations. Migration is about the journey itself and the birds that were with us that day would likely visit several more stopover sites before reaching their final destination.



These songbirds subsist on a Spring and Summer diet of insects in the North Woods. With the approach of cold weather and a plunge in available insects, a harvest of berries presents itself on the coast and these become a draw and a route to safety.

The scrub thickets and shrublands these birds found at Bumble Bee Farm were perfect for migratory resting, feeding, fattening, and watering apart from the reach of predators like the redtailed hawk we startled. The berries of arrowwood, bayberry, holly, black gum, catbrier, and even poison ivy provide a feast and a complex food source that is much needed to restore from and prepare for continued flight. Scott showed us that most of the birds had used their water and fat reserves and further travel was unlikely without refueling.

The day of our visit was marked by a cold northwesterly wind, one of the first of our Winter season, and this gave cause for concern. These birds all navigate by following coastal landmarks toward their migratory destination, but Scott's records have shown that many adult veterans of this journey wait and limit their flights to days that show northerly or northeasterly winds as this secures their passage over dry land. Offshore breezes from the northwest are known to carry inexperienced fledglings out to sea. Under these conditions, Block Island shows a host of migrant activity, but this represents the lucky few who have found refuge of last resort.

Fortunately, there are still many acres of coastal thicket and shrubland near the Sakonnet River---and these places all provide restoration and refuge to these neotropical migrant songbirds. *John Berg, a Little Compton resident, is Sakonnet Landscape Manager for the Nature Conservancy.*



## Sakonnet Preservation Association

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO BECOME  
A NEW MEMBER.

*Enclosed is my tax deductible  
membership contribution.*

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Member	\$20
<input type="checkbox"/> Family Member	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$35
<input type="checkbox"/> Special Gift	\$_____

### Sakonnet Preservation Association

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## Developing a Strategic Plan: SPA Looks to the Future

*What is the Sakonnet Preservation Association's (SPA) mission? What are the SPA's long-term goals? What specific actions should SPA take to fulfill that mission and achieve those goals?*

*These were the fundamental questions that all 15 of SPA's directors discussed and debated during two intensive daylong strategic planning sessions held in November and December of 2003. The result of that planning exercise is a draft strategic plan for the next three to five years, which the SPA board will revise, refine and begin to implement during 2004.*

*The two strategic planning sessions were organized and facilitated by Sylvia Bates, a New Hampshire-based consultant who has assisted many land trusts and conservation groups in New England and throughout the nation. The strategic planning program was funded by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation.*

*During the first session, Ms. Bates led the SPA board through a series of exercises designed to identify the organization's strengths and weaknesses as well as the challenges and opportunities the SPA faces in the years ahead. At that first session the board also developed drafts of a mission statement and a set of long-term goals.*

*At the second session, after reviewing the mission statement and goals, the board spent most of the day discussing and identifying specific action steps to meet those goals. After the session, Ms. Bates compiled the board's efforts into a prioritized matrix, which the board will use to assign responsibilities and time frames for carrying out the action steps.*

*At its January meeting, the SPA board established a committee to begin refining the draft plan. The committee includes Tuck Buffum, Sheila Mackintosh, Lucy O'Connor and Heather Steers. The board may also retain Ms. Bates for further assistance in completing and implementing the plan.*

*In the draft plan, the SPA identified long-term goals under four major categories: land and natural resource protection; stewardship; public education, outreach and advocacy; and organizational focus and capacity.*

*Should the SPA continue as an all-volunteer organization or should it hire paid staff? What should the SPA's land-acquisition priorities and policies be in a community where other conservation organizations and agencies are also active? How will the SPA manage the group's resources to ensure the permanent protection of SPA land holdings? These are the kinds of questions the SPA board will be addressing in the months ahead, as it works to develop a realistic, achievable program for the organization's immediate future. At the end of the process, the board will report to members the results and details of the finalized strategic plan.*



*Thanks to all our contributors in 2003 !*

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 for the lasting  
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