



Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Summer 2015

Chris Miller, a long-time summer resident of Little Compton, will speak at SPA's Annual Meeting on July 7th. "Sakonnet was a huge part of my growing up," he said, "and continues to influence my thinking about conservation, communities, and being a happy person in this crazy world." Chris is head of the Piedmont Environmental Council of Virginia, working at a scale of land conservation that is nearly half the entire size of Rhode Island. Yet no matter the scope, many of the goals and challenges in his work are the same ones we work on here.

Chris' family's historical connection to Little Compton goes back over a hundred years. His great-grandfather and grandfather were instrumental in helping secure some of the early summer institutions and facilities that still exist today, including Warren's Point Beach Club, the Little Compton Yacht Club and its sailing program, and the Harbor's public boat ramp. Chris' parents met on Warren's Point Beach and continue to spend summers in the house built by his great-grandparents.

As with many who have experienced Little Compton as a child, Chris was influenced profoundly by the local landscape and his experiences on the water. Given tremendous freedom to roam and explore as he wished, his grandfather gave him the book *Two Little Savages* by Ernest Thompson Seton, which further induced him to pay attention to the natural world with keen interest. You can



Chris Miller
*Committed to Conservation
Here and Beyond*

Tuesday, July 7, 2015 6-8PM

Sakonnet Golf Club Playhouse
Join SPA for refreshments & a cash bar

All are Welcome

imagine how these words from the book might have struck a curious and adventurous young boy: *"All his tastes inclined him to wild life. Each year when the spring came, he felt the inborn impulse to up and away. He was stirred through and through when the first Crow, in early March, came barking over-head. But it fairly boiled in his blood when the Wild Geese, in long, double, arrow-headed procession, went clanging northward. He longed to go with them. Whenever a new bird or beast appeared, he had a singular prickling feeling up his spine and his back as though he had a mane that was standing up. This feeling strengthened with his strength."*

Over the years, he and his grandfather worked to enhance the fifteen acres of marsh and woods behind the Lisle family house down to Long Pond, experimenting

with different crops to attract wild game, planting native flowering shrubs and flowers, and building a pond for Canada geese. Sometimes in the spring and fall they would hunt together, mostly for the joy of being out in the early morning seeing wildlife. When he was twelve, his grandfather gave him a fledgling crow to raise as a pet.

As a sailor, Chris gained the perspective of an integrated whole landscape by looking back toward shore from an off-shore vantage point. It affected him deeply, he realizes, in his conception of landscape-scale conservation of the sort he now does in Virginia. Come hear what Chris has to say about conservation and stewardship in his work, and in the work being done here in Sakonnet, a landscape that has deeply influenced his life.



Sakonnet Preservation Association

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President's Letter

"Landscape-level conservation" looks at the bigger picture, habitat or species protection on a large scale, beyond the boundaries of ownership. This intriguing concept has emerged during the discussions and activities of the bobolink walks we have sponsored over the years. These walks have drawn scientists, land conservationists, landscapers, farmers, and the public. A stewardship group has been formed to discuss our collective work and to figure out how we might engage private landowners in habitat protection, collaboratively working toward this much larger scale of conservation.

At the recent national conservation conference in Providence, my eyes were opened to the landscape-level work going on around the country. I was stunned and excited to hear

about projects that, parcel by parcel, are creating swaths of protected lands involving communities in both private and public conservation. I was reminded that Sakonnet Preservation

Association, in fact the town of Little Compton, is part of a habitat network extending beyond private, municipal, and state boundaries that mean nothing to the species and natural resources we are trying to protect.

Private landowners have said they want to learn about the types of habitat they own and which species might be attracted to their property. Honeybee die-offs and the struggling monarchs, privately managed beehives and the pollinating plants that support bees and butterflies are all attracting greater notice from the public. A topic being discussed in our collaborative stewardship group is how we might support the management of habitat on private lands that are not conserved, to supplement the work we do on protected lands. The June 12th and 13th BioBlitz and Little Compton Nature Day activities will help the public understand and appreciate the varieties of habitat in which we are blessed to live. It is a good start, as together we can take conservation to the landscape level.

– Abigail Brooks

Corn had been growing each of the past thirty years or so on our sixteen-acre north field. It's a beautiful, gently sloping hillside with spectacular views of the beach and ocean. We are not the first to fall in love with our fields. Until recently, we permitted a local, experienced farmer to continue planting and harvesting his feed corn on our property. He is good spirited and has worked our land for far longer than we have been there, from the time of his youth. He is an earnest, hard working family man, committed to his ways, but seemingly willing to learn new things. Over the years we have gotten to know him and have become friends. Often on a Sunday he will just drive up the lane to sit and look out over this pastoral scene. He loves this land too.

We have lined our driveway with one hundred maple trees and created a "no corn" strip to protect the drive and its trees. We have also acquired a collection of beehives. Over the years, all has not gone well. We noticed that the line of trees bordering the cornfield was decidedly smaller and less healthy than the adjacent line bordering the woods. (The cornfield is to the west of the trees, and the prevailing winds are from the west.) Each year we would have to replace dead trees along the field edge. Our bees would start the season as robust busy hives, but in the end, almost all would die. The bees seemed to be susceptible to every disease or pest. When we first moved to the property, we could walk between the neat rows of corn. As the years passed, the corn grew so densely we worried that a child could get lost wandering into its midst. The bees kept dying. The trees were sick. Something was not right.

We began to question our farmer about what kind of feed corn he was planting, and what he was spraying on the field. It took several years of questions and meetings, conversations and research to discover that he was using the "most modern" techniques to maximize production. He used massive equipment to prepare the field for planting by killing anything living with a shower of insecticides and

herbicides, such as "Round-up". Next came the planting of corn seeds that were genetically modified (GMO) to resist the continued spraying of Round-up throughout the growing season. The corn shoots grew quickly and thickly. Nothing else did. Our west side trees received much of the wind-blown spray, and our bees unfortunately could not keep away from the corn pollen, even though that wind-blown pollen is "empty calories" for them. We really did not wish to dispossess this farmer of his tie to the property. But something had to be done.

We worked with our farmer to change practices. He wanted corn, but he was unprepared to plant corn in any other manner. We wanted an "organic" methodology. He either knew no other way to plant, or was unwilling to revert to the lower yields of old fashioned seeding techniques. Additionally, his major investment in equipment seemed geared to his present practices. After much debate, meetings with agronomists, dueling consultants, and proposals from other farmers, we told him that he must plant natural grasses for feed hay (no GMO), and use neither herbicides nor pesticides, or we would no longer allow him to farm the property. We offered that he could plant and harvest subsequent

crops of hay for his use after he planted a refresher crop for the restoration of the land. He was reluctant to make the necessary investment in seed, fertilizer, and diesel without assurance that he would not be dismissed from the land. Ultimately we agreed to an informal five-year arrangement of mutual trust.

Time will tell whether the GMO corn and all the chemicals were the entire source of the difficulties on our land. Our bets are on the success of our collective new organic attempts to clean the field and restore our property and all living things to good health. We understand that this may require a long-term investment of time, patience and money. We are willing to make this effort to bring healthful change to our small corner of paradise.



Contributed by a local landowner

Thank you, Geoff Dennis



The Little Compton Community Center's Volunteer Recognition dinner on April 11 gave SPA the opportunity to honor and thank Geoff Dennis, volunteer extraordinaire. Geoff applies his energy, commitment and respect for birds and wildlife to the task of tending our beaches and islands. He picks

up after and for us all, despite his dismay at how ceaseless the tide of waste has become along our shoreline. He cleans SPA's East and West Islands off Sakonnet Point, as well as the Town Beach and Goosewing. Geoff monitors the activity of birds and beasts, generously sharing his gorgeous photographs with us, the Nature Conservancy and others. We are blessed to have this gifted and kind-hearted soul who humbly takes on the responsibility of caring for our wild residents. Geoff sets an example for us all.



Photos by Geoff Dennis



1,536 bottles and cans picked up off the Little Compton shoreline during Geoff's walks in 2014. More than 80% single-use plastic bottles. Half of them drifted ashore and half left by beach-goers. As in past years, all were sent for recycling.



Latex beach balloons, their ribbons and ribbons from Mylar balloons found washed/blown ashore on Little Compton beaches during his walks in 2014. Balloons were from CT, NY, NJ, MD, VA and one from Washington state.



Sakonnet Preservation Association

Memorial Donation in Honor of Jean Buffum

*We are honored to have received a memorial gift
in memory of local artist and long time resident Jean Buffum.*

*She summered here all of her married life,
continuing a tradition of attachment to Little Compton
established by her husband's family that has been passed on to the following generations.*

Little Compton Nature Day and BioBlitz Coming to Town

From 10AM to 4PM on Saturday June 13, Little Compton Nature Day will offer nature-centered displays and activities. Local conservation organizations, garden clubs, landscapers, farmers, artists and students will be represented. The Audubon Society of RI and Roger Williams Zoo will provide live bird and animal displays. Come see what the RI Natural History Survey's BioBlitz teams are turning up for biological findings of local flora and fauna from the Ponderosa, the Dunderly Brook Trail environment, Goosewing Beach and Quicksand Pond. Look for posters, newspaper announcements and handouts with the schedule of activities, and come join in the fun of this special day! Events are free and open to the public.



WHAT CAN I DO?

Some links to websites and books or articles that offer suggestions and inspiration for participating in making a difference.

To find out what recyclables to put in your blue and green bins

Go to: www.recycletogetherri.org/what-can-i-recycle

To keep outdoor lighting at a safe minimum that can make a difference

Go to: www.darksky.org

Listen to or read this interview:



www.npr.org/2014/12/22/372409572/stars-shine-bright-in-ireland-s-dark-sky-reserve

For the latest mapping projections for storm surge and sea level rise impacts in RI, including Little Compton

Go to: www.beachsamp.org, click on Maps and go to STORMTOOLS

For suggestions how to garden with native plants to help sustain insects and birds

Read: *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*

by Douglas W. Tallamy, 2007; updated and expanded version published by Timber Press, Inc., 2009





Sakonnet Preservation Association

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Yes, I would like to join or renew my membership.

Enclosed is my tax deductible membership contribution.

<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$20
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$35
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$250
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Bequests *There are many ways to include the Sakonnet Preservation Association in your estate plans:*

- Name the Association as a beneficiary of your retirement plan
- Leave a specific amount, percentage, or the residue of your estate to the Association
- Designate a particular asset to the Association (securities, real estate, artworks, etc.)
- Name the Association in the succession plan of your donor advised fund or family foundation
- Include the Association as a beneficiary of testamentary or living trust
- Name the Association as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy
- Please contact your attorney for specialized legal language to ensure that your bequest intentions will be properly fulfilled

Postal Customer

sakonnetpreservation.org

401.635.8800

For Information:

The Sakonnet
Preservation Association,
a non-profit land trust,
is dedicated to preserving
the rural character
and natural resources
of Little Compton
for the lasting benefit
of the Community.

Our Mission



Sakonnet Preservation Association

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