



Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Summer 2016

Ornithologist Alan F. Poole will be the featured speaker at Sakonnet Preservation Association's Annual meeting July 12th. He will share his experiences assisting in the restoration of osprey in southern New England and elsewhere.

Alan currently serves as an Associate of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, having been the senior editor of *The Birds of North America* from its inception in 1991 until 2015. He was responsible for initiating an on-line version of that publication, making it possible to reach thousands of subscribers and students in the US and Canada daily.

His publications have focused on life history studies and birds of prey, including his book *Ospreys: A Natural and Unnatural History* (Cambridge University Press, 1989). This work looks at the natural history of a bird that has become the major symbol of international bird conservation, with special focus on the successful restoration of threatened osprey populations in Scotland and New England.



Alan F. Poole
*The Restoration of Osprey in
Southern New England & Elsewhere*

**Tuesday, July 12, 2016
6 - 8PM**

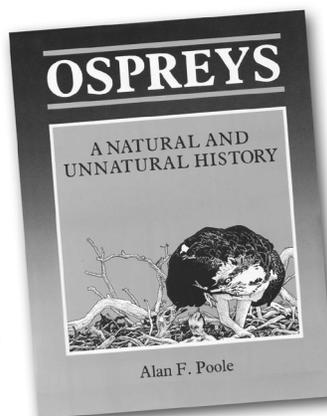
Sakonnet Golf Club Playhouse
Join SPA for refreshments and cash bar

All are Welcome

Dr. Poole has lived in south-eastern Massachusetts for over 35 years. His interests in this region center on the unusually concentrated osprey nesting population in the Westport Rivers, which he has monitored and helped nurture since graduate school. Recently retired from a decade as a Senior Research Associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Alan is now undertaking research on resident and neotropical migrant birds in the mountains of Belize, as well as continuing studies of nesting ospreys in southern New England. Alan writes: "Although work has had me living in various parts of the Northeast over the past few

decades, the marshes and beaches and islands of the South Coast retain a wildness that has continued to draw me back. Little wonder I was unable to resist that siren song in retirement."

With Dr. Poole's help, these large birds have recovered from near extinction and make Little Compton and nearby Westport a seasonal home. All are invited to hear this knowledgeable and noted ornithologist.





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President's Letter

Change: Can't Live With It, Can't Live Without It

What people chose to write on the December posters titled "What I Love Most About Little Compton..." captured much of what we treasure here, and what is worth protecting. The results are listed on the LC Community Center's website using the search window for the poster title. An impressive number of citizens have chosen to protect some of these treasures by giving up the development rights to a portion or all of their property for permanent conservation. Theirs is one example of slowing change for the benefit of us all, wild and human alike.

Change is inevitable, and in many instances it is essential to life itself. We live in a place where seasonal change is dramatic and constant. Changes on our landscape by humans may unfold at a slower pace but they too define our environment. Some changes are relished: the unfolding of spring, the abundance of summer, the colors of autumn, or winter's subtle palette with skeletal trees and exposed vistas. Other changes may cause anxiety, sadness, anger or feelings of frustration or helplessness: the death of a favorite giant tree, the invasion of phragmites reeds choking ponds, winter moths devastating trees and shrubs, the disappearance of a meadow or cornfield to buildings, a view obscured by trees, or an increase in noise or light that interrupts the quiet or the view of the stars. Which do we choose to accept, negotiate, adapt to or fight as change takes away things we care about, things that define our sense of place or are recognized as vital natural resources? Are we open to seeing benefit in changes against which we originally railed?

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Our challenge lies in balancing human uses with the protection of our natural resources. We weigh the soul-sustaining but diminishing "rural way of life" with the need to enable all ages to thrive in our local economy. Land trusts and civic communities have been struggling with these questions for some time and with increasing urgency.

There are no easy solutions. What is clear is that these questions matter greatly to us all. There is passion in our collective recognition that Little Compton is unique with its fragile quiet, its beautiful landscape, its agricultural and pastoral present and palpable history, and in the way many of its structures complement rather than overwhelm its natural environment. We attempt to hold on to our town's character with impressive vitality, knowing it can so easily slip away. It is heartening to see active engagement right now on such important issues.

– Abigail Brooks

When I heard the news of Ellie Hough's passing in March, I was reminded of her subtle but significant influence on the Sakonnet Preservation Association during her more than ten years of service as a member of the SPA Board of Directors. Her example, personality, and intelligence showed her SPA colleagues that there is more than one way to exercise community leadership. In Ellie's case, she sometimes changed the course of a discussion or the outcome of a decision, while leaving barely a trace of how she had done so.

At the beginning of 1998, having served on the board with Ellie during the 1990s, I followed Nick Long as president of SPA. My paper-churning, list-making style often led to long, tedious meetings which could be exasperating to some of my fellow board members. My ambitious plans for the organization called for the creation of several subcommittees to build on efforts that had previously fallen primarily on the shoulders of SPA's president and a few other directors. In 1999, we created a planning committee to formulate a more systematic program to meet the organization's day-to-day operational requirements and future goals. Ellie volunteered for the committee, along with Agnes Langdon, Phoebe Cook, Luke Wallin, the late Chas Edwards, and myself.

At the time, SPA didn't have its own office and meeting room. Ellie generously offered her home as the committee's gathering place. For much of the next year, the six of us met there regularly around a table in a sunny corner. The members were faithful attendees and contributed to frank and wide-ranging conversations about all aspects of SPA's operations. We didn't always agree on priorities or policies, but these discussions were civil and friendly,

in no small part due to the spirit of our gracious hostess who was sure to provide beverages and a plate of cookies.

Ellie created an environment that enabled us to get a lot done. Before the year was out, we had developed, and the board had adopted, a detailed two-year budget for SPA, focused on public education, the land preservation process, and the organization's management and administration. Then the committee turned to an organizational self-assessment, based on the Land Trust Alliance's *Standards and Practices*.

These efforts, initiated around Ellie's table, have continued to bear fruit. From 2001 to 2006 my successor,

Heather Steers, led the SPA board through the arduous development of a long-term strategic plan. Under Heather's successor, Abigail Brooks, that plan led to the SPA's accreditation by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission, one of the first volunteer land trusts to receive such recognition.

I owe Ellie a personal debt of gratitude for another example of her quiet personal influence. In 2001, I had a difficult time persuading board members that I was serious about stepping down as president after four satisfying but time-consuming years.

As in many volunteer organizations, it's not always easy to find board members willing to assume the sometimes thankless task of leadership. We had one capable long-time board member in mind to be president. But Heather Steers demurred when first asked, humbly but incorrectly claiming that she was not ready for the job. Ellie knew that Heather had recently completed a successful term as president of the Little Compton Garden Club. She suggested that she, Heather, and I get together for breakfast at The Barn in Adamsville. Ellie's always pleasant demeanor camouflaged a certain steeli-

Remembering Ellie Hough

by Larry Anderson



ness of will. Heather could resist my entreaties, but she couldn't say no to her friend Ellie. By the time breakfast was over, Heather had agreed to assume the position of SPA president, a position in which she served conscientiously and productively for five years.

Ellie resigned from the SPA board in 2004, having helped set in motion some of the practices and policies that are still paying dividends to the organization and community. While many other SPA board members played important roles in promoting these forward-looking actions, much can be traced back to the self-effacing influence of Ellie

Ellie Hough left a distinctive and lasting mark, not only on the Sakonnet Preservation Association but on the entire community of Little Compton.

Hough. Sometimes a plate of cookies, a sparkling smile, a generous compliment, or a terse, perfectly timed comment or question from a previously silent corner of the meeting room represent forms of leadership as important as bold speeches and dense memos. Ellie Hough left a distinctive and lasting mark, not only on the Sakonnet Preservation Association but on the entire community of Little Compton.

Larry Anderson served as President of the Sakonnet Preservation Association from 1998 until 2001 and again during 2006-2007.

Fireflies

by Aiden Fitzgerald



Does your spirit soar, like mine, at the sight of the season's first flicker of fireflies? The magical "light show" of these beetles, also known as lightning bugs, for me sparks feelings of both glee and nostalgia and signals the start of summer.

Fireflies have light organs under their abdomen. Their intermittent light during twilight, due to a chemical reaction called bioluminescence, flashes in patterns unique to each of the approximately 2,000 firefly species. In larvae, the glow is a signal to predators that they contain distasteful or toxic chemicals. In adult fireflies, however, scientists say the blinking pattern is intended to attract a mate. Some species even synchronize their flashes.

Luckily for us, these luminous insects prefer moist areas, especially wet meadows, forest edges, farm fields and marshes, making Little Compton a perfect habitat for them. To foster fireflies in your own backyard, it's a good idea to turn off porch lights and plant a variety of shrubs, high grass and low-growing plants as shelter for nocturnal adult fireflies that hide in such places during the day. The fact that larvae are born underground is another good reason to avoid using lawn and gardening chemicals and pesticides. Firefly larvae feast on worms, grubs, slugs and snails, so it's best to leave those slimy creatures for them. Many fireflies eat pollen and nectar, and planting an array of flowers may help to entice these winged wonders to light up your June and early July evenings.

Reflections on A Great Love

At Steve Lorch's memorial service in the packed United Congregational Church a year ago, his three children spoke eloquently of their father and the impact Little Compton had on this beloved, worldly, Renaissance man. They gave powerful, emotionally-charged testimony to an extraordinary person, a well-lived life and to the blessings bestowed by this community and this landscape on Steve and his family.

Son Ben quoted his wife, who had stated that very morning: "The land is your father's heart." In his invitation asking us all to join the family at their home after the service Ben said, "Come see what he saw with us, looking over the land he cherished so much." He added, "Little Compton is a sacred place that made us in large part who we are today."

Daughter Kate described imagining the journeys folks had taken to come for this service: exiting Route 24, driving past Evelyn's and down the stonewall-lined road to Little Compton — "A road my dad loved to drive since the 1960's and to bicycle since 1984" — when, after teaching all

"My father had such a love for the peaceful nature of this land. Whenever he drove up the driveway he would say 'I'm so lucky to live here!'"

— ELIZABETH LORCH —

of his children how to ride, he learned himself at age 47. Reading from an email she sent to her father as he faced surgery, she described how a walk in a field of raspberries reminds her of picking them from bushes on the Nelson farm as a child.

Daughter Elizabeth closed her tribute to her father with a poem using words he spoke as he witnessed the annual autumn murmuration of starlings, one of his favorite events in nature:

The Birds Do this Every Year The Birds Do this Every Year
Come Look. Come outside! You have to wait...wait. See them in the trees. See how they've gathered in the trees. Those branches are very thin — those are all birds...Can you hear them? They are so loud. Isn't it amazing? And now, here they go — watch, watch, watch. See how they swoop through the air. They practically fill the *whole* sky. How do they know where to go? Who are they following? They do this every year. Isn't it beautiful? Isn't it beautiful.

We were left to ponder the hold this place exerts on each of us, and also what makes for deep meaning, attachment, awe, and joy in a life. — *Abigail Brooks*

➤ IN MEMORIAM ➤

Elsie Hosking Straight

We recently received a contribution in memory of former resident and artist, Elsie Straight, who died in Florida at the age of 101. The donation came to us from her daughter, Elaine Straight Sanders, who lives in Florida and spent years here starting in the late 1950's when her parents purchased a Sakonnet Harbor cottage that became their permanent residence in the mid-1960's. "For me, it was a place of pure summer fun," Elaine wrote in an earlier letter. Accompanying her gift was this note: "Please accept this check for Sakonnet Preservation Association in memory of my mom, Elsie H. Straight. My mom would be most pleased to know she could help, in some small way, to keep the area preserved as she remembered it. And it is our hope that the area remains unchanged for future residents."

Henry Koehler

We are grateful to have been named as a recipient of gifts in memory of Henry Koehler who treasured his years with his wife Kate in this special place named "Little Compton."

Other Passings

It has come to our attention that a substantial portion of the largest of the "three sisters" remnants of the West Island Club off Sakonnet Point has collapsed. As weather and age take their toll we expect to be bidding them farewell over the coming years. We have also witnessed the demise of the champion elm tree on the Makepiece property on West Main Rd. to age and disease. It was possibly the largest remaining American elm in the state at just over 90 feet tall with a crown of 102 feet.



Sakonnet Preservation Association

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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

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