

Sakonnet Preservation

newsletter of the Sakonnet Preservation Association

Islands of Life

As Rhode Islanders are beginning to think about their summer plans in late May, migratory birds are already in full summer mode - courting mates, building nests, and raising young. For birds to be able to raise young, they must have suitable space and habitat that has limited disturbance from people. Waterbirds are species of birds that have adapted to live on or around water. During the breeding season, many waterbirds will nest close to each other in small groups of just a few nests, to groups of hundreds or even thousands of nests. We call those birds *colonial nesting* waterbirds. In Rhode Island, the colonial nesting waterbirds we often encounter are Common Terns, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Black-backed Gulls, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Herring Gulls, and Snowy Egrets. One reason birds use this nesting strategy is to protect their nests and young from predators. Colonial nesting waterbirds will often use habitat that is hard for predators to reach, particularly islands.

The islands off the coast of Rhode Island and within the Narragansett Bay provide a network of valuable nesting habitat that is used by colonial nesting waterbirds. Just off Sakonnet Point, the rocky habitat of West and East Islands support hundreds of nesting Double-crested

Cormorants, Great Black-backed Gulls, and Herring Gulls. A simple nest built of sticks on the ground is all these species need to raise their young. By early June, these protected islands are bustling with activity. Parents are busy either sitting on their eggs or tending to their young, who need consistent nourishment.

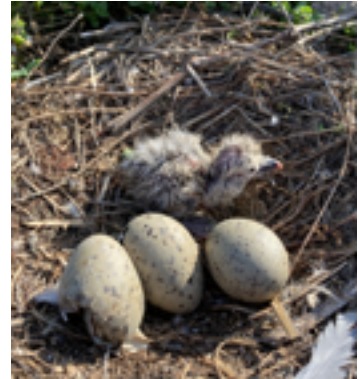
Each year staff of the Rhode Island Division of Fish & Wildlife visit all the waterbird colonies in Rhode Island, including West and East Islands. The purpose of these visits is to count all the nests in Rhode Island to see how these bird populations change over the years. This long-term monitoring is essential to see how the current management strategies for these birds are working and to ensure these populations can persist for years to come. Partnerships and engagement from the public are indispensable when protecting wildlife. Today, thanks to **Sakonnet Preservation**, West Island and East Island are managed to protect colonial nesting waterbirds and other wildlife. If these islands were not protected and people were allowed to visit the islands during this time, the birds would quickly abandon these colonies. The importance of protecting these islands does not stop with colonial nesting waterbirds. Species like the American Oystercatchers also nest on the islands and nonbreeding birds will use the habitat to roost throughout the year.

West and East Islands contribute to a landscape of protected habitat that our wildlife desperately needs. Biologists and those who spend their careers working towards the conservation of wildlife can only do so much. For wildlife conservation to work, we all must work together to give wildlife a chance. Actions as simple as avoiding recreational use of these islands during the breeding bird season go a long way. Now is the time to be thankful for the places and animals we have protected, but we need to ask ourselves what is next. Loss of habitat and human disturbance remain top threats to wildlife. How can we each individually help to protect nature for future generations?

John Herbert, Biologist
RI Department of Environmental Management

The islands will be the focus of **Sakonnet Preservation's** portion of RI PBS *Our Town*, featuring Little Compton, to be aired in March of 2023.

A gull nest and hatchling on East Island, photo by John Herbert



Local Scout Troop 29 constructed this newly installed sign for East Island.
Photo by Geoff Dennis



Celebrating our Fiftieth

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sound finances

ethical conduct

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lasting stewardship



From the President

Approaching the end of 2022 and looking back on the 50 years since the founding of Sakonnet Preservation Association gives us time to reflect on what has been accomplished this year and in the forty-nine that preceded it.

July's 50th Anniversary Celebration, capping an extraordinarily successful five-year campaign raising funds for operations, could not have been better. It was joyous beyond all imagining, intimate and inclusive of nearly 650 attendees feasting on locally-raised or produced foods, connecting with each other, and exuberantly dancing to a great band. Beautiful weather, a gorgeous site, and a hunger to gather after being adrift in Covid for the past two and a half years contributed much to the enthusiasm and gratitude with which everyone partied.



The team of volunteers, board members and staff that pulled off the campaign and celebration could not have worked harder or created more memorable successes. We were honoring 50 years of work by community members dedicated to building this organization into the accomplished and trustworthy land trust it is today. This drove our commitment to find the best possible way of expressing admiration and respect for these achievements. We wanted our celebration to reflect and build on the best parts of our community—its remarkable dedication to volunteerism, neighborly generosity, deeply felt generational affection for Little Compton and its abundant resources, and the recognition that land conservation holds a key to sustaining what we love about this place. Achieving these goals so meaningfully went beyond our wildest dreams. We could not be more grateful to all who have played a part in the successes of this organization over the past 50 years and the community of support that capped these successes during this, our 50th year.

Special thanks to the exceptionally dedicated team of Campaign and Celebration volunteers: Chis Burns, Mara Shore, Charlie Whipple, Warren Jagger, Lisa Mims, Terry Nathan, Rhea Brooks, Bay Hudner, and Martina Halsey.

Abigail Brooks

Accredited again

Sakonnet Preservation was recently awarded national Land Trust Accreditation for the third time. What's involved and what does this say about us? Accreditation is conducted by The Land Trust Accreditation Commission (LTAC), which serves as an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance. The Commission was organized in 2006 to strengthen and recognize well-run land trusts, foster public confidence, and ensure the long-term protection of land. The Commission is governed by a board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts from around the country, with each of them serving as a commissioner. Commissioners volunteer to review the extensive materials of an application and apply their expertise to verifying that a land trust is effectively implementing specific elements of the *Land Trust Standards and Practices* manual covering governance, finance, transactions and stewardship. A land trust applying for accreditation must show compliance with best practices in all twelve categories:

- 1 Ethics, Mission and Community Engagement
- 2 Compliance with Laws
- 3 Board Accountability
- 4 Conflicts of Interest
- 5 Fundraising
- 6 Financial Oversight
- 7 Human Resources
- 8 Evaluating and Selecting Conservation Projects
- 9 Ensuring Sound Transactions
- 10 Tax Benefits and Appraisals
- 11 Conservation Easement Stewardship
- 12 Fee Land Stewardship

Public accountability is another key component of the accreditation process. Included in the review is a request for public comments on a land trust's performance that influence the Commission's decision. An application takes approximately one and a half years to assemble, and the Accreditation Commission takes approximately nine months to review all the materials before a determination is made. This is repeated every five years.



An independent survey has revealed that 85% of public agencies and foundations say accreditation increases their confidence in land trusts and 83% of landowners feel the same way. As of September 2022, only 459 of the 1,363 land trusts across the United States are accredited. We are proud to be one of them and an early adopter of this rigorous and strengthening review thanks to the leadership in 2009 of former Board member, Chris Burns.

Often considered less valuable as real estate, forest wetlands like this on one of our properties are invaluable as filters for our town's drinking water, and are essential life support systems to a wide array of wildlife species.



Stewardship update

Forty years ago this month, David and Phoebe Meehan donated “that certain triangular tract of land ... containing 2.1 acres, more or less” on West Main Road to **Sakonnet Preservation**. This property, now known affectionately as the Meehan Triangle, has been stewarded by SPA ever since with a light hand, guiding it through the decades with little more than a yearly mowing, trash removal and monitoring visits.



Considering its size, the Meehan Triangle supports a surprisingly diverse community of plants and animals, which is still being revealed with continued observation. This knowledge will guide both a management plan and the path a publicly-accessible trail will take through the property. Mapping will be provided that identifies various groups of plants and trees and the habitat they each provide. We’ve purchased a sickle bar mower that can be adjusted to cause minimal disturbance to habitat. Phoebe Meehan (pictured above at the Triangle) has graciously allowed us to store this piece of specialty equipment in her barn nearby, furthering her commitment to **Sakonnet Preservation** as we make use of her gift to create a model for the community of how private property can be managed with protection of habitat as a goal.

It was also a busy year at our Blanchard and Blazer properties at the corner of John Dyer and Cole Brook Roads as we continue implementing our Forest Management Plan. After forester Jim Roies harvested many dead oak trees, our stewardship team, with the help of the Little Compton Tree Committee, got to work building out optimal wildlife habitat. Native trees were planted in some disturbed areas, and Rhode Island Audubon’s Youth Conservation League worked for three days in August helping to eradicate the invasive wisteria vines that threaten to stymie the forest growth. Lofty hardwoods will now be able to grow unencumbered to nurture a more biodiverse community beneath their canopy. Since this is an ongoing project, a sign has been installed on the property informing the public about the work being done.



Barbecue thank you

On Saturday, September 24th 2022, we hosted our first-ever 'Landowner and Volunteer Appreciation Barbecue'. Invitees included landowners who own properties protected with **Sakonnet Preservation** conservation easements or who have donated land outright to us, as well as stewardship monitoring volunteers, board members and staff. The barbecue was an expression of our gratitude to those above, and offered an opportunity to mingle and be well-fed in an informal setting. We gathered on a beautiful late summer evening on property off Willow Avenue, donated to **Sakonnet Preservation** by Alan Trueblood. Gabe and Carolyn Faria and Chris Goulart are renting the land to grow landscaping plantings and pumpkins.



Our volunteer stewardship monitors conduct property visits to meet the requirement that every one of our holdings is visited at least annually. Their visits involve inspecting boundaries, identifying invasive species, checking for waste dumping or any other encroachments that threaten the conservation values on a property and following up with staff when there are violations. On some properties, trail maintenance and clean-up is required. Stewardship monitors are our eyes and ears on the ground, donating their time and talent to make sure our properties and trails are in proper order while helping us maintain connections with landowners and abutting property owners. Many people don't realize how critical their work is to the integrity of our operations and our ability to make informed conservation management decisions.

So, a big thank you to our beloved landowners and monitors. We look forward to seeing you at next year's barbecue. If you are interested in learning more



about becoming a volunteer stewardship monitor, please reach out to Stewardship Director Adam Yorks at stewardship@sakonnetpreservation.org or call him at 401-635-8800.



Our work with your help

Among the various conservation groups working in Little Compton, **Sakonnet Preservation** is distinguished by its willingness to accept properties for conservation that may not be a priority for other groups. We are open to accepting small parcels which make up a high percentage of the remaining undeveloped land in our community. Such parcels are vital for protecting groundwater, habitat corridors, historic stone walls and scenic vistas that define our landscape.

An accredited 501c3 non-profit organization, **Sakonnet Preservation** relies almost exclusively on donor contributions for its work preserving open space and providing conservation education to all ages in the community with activities, volunteer opportunities and information. Donations supporting our work can be paid by check; credit card payment on-line through our website sakonnetpreservation.org; with contributions from donor-advised funds; with gifts of appreciated stock; or with Required Minimum Distribution funds from an IRA. Our correct mailing address is PO Box 945, Little Compton, RI 02837. For direct transfer of funds or financial instruments please contact us for instructions.



Our Town

And I thought to myself, how nice it is
To be able to live in a town like this,
Where people are real and compassionate too,
Who care for the many instead of the few.

And I thought to myself, how long will it last?
For man to hearken to those of the past
Who worked in the soil to build a town
Whose quiet and beauty have won it renown.

And I thought to myself, they loved this place,
Living in dignity with consummate grace,
Toiling from sunrise to sunset close,
Farming the land of Patten's prose.

And I thought to myself, in ages gone,
What man had done was create a song
Whose grandeur speaks from days of yore
From Quicksand Pond to S'cunnet's shore.

And I thought to myself, what must we do?
To ensure a place for those others too,
Dreamers of dreams for solitude rare
Midst green country setting and sweet salt air.

And I said to myself, this gift is ours,
Meadows and fields and bright holly bowers,
Entrusted to us by those who cared
Granting to us the gift they shared.

And I said to myself, we who live now
Must pass to those who will keep the vow
That this fair place shall continue to be
Theirs to enjoy through eternity.

Ian Walker

With grace and poise, Mara Shore read this poem
as the closing to her speech of gratitude at the
50th Anniversary Celebration on July 16th.

A vaccine for Lyme disease?

Board member Davy Cutts has volunteered to participate in a Pfizer Lyme disease vaccine clinical trial named VALOR (Vaccine Against Lyme for Outdoor Recreationists). He states, "it is a phase 3 trial, meaning the vaccine is close to being a product and has already passed the initial safety and effectiveness trials."

Care Access, the clinical trial provider, plans to be accepting applications in December for the first vaccinations. The second vaccination comes 50-70 days after the first, and participants need to get through both vaccinations ahead of the start of the peak Lyme season. Thus the second shot should be in January or February.

Details and more information can be found at fightlyme.careaccess.com.



Recycling plastic (it's not happening)

The vast majority of plastic that people use, and in many cases put into blue recycling bins, is headed to landfills, or worse according to a report from Greenpeace on the state of plastic recycling in the U.S. The report cites separate data published in May 2022 which revealed that the amount of plastic actually turned into new things has fallen to new lows of around 5%. That number is expected to drop further as more plastic is produced.

Greenpeace found that no plastic — not even soda bottles, one of the most prolific items thrown into recycling bins — meets the threshold to be called "recyclable" according to standards set by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation New Plastic Economy Initiative. Plastic must have a recycling rate of 30% to reach that standard; no plastic has ever been recycled and reused close to that rate.

Plastic also degrades after one or two uses.

Greenpeace found the more plastic is reused the more toxic it becomes. New plastic, on the other hand, is cheap and easy to produce. The result is that plastic trash has few markets — a reality the public has not wanted to hear. The link to the full *National Public Radio* report is on their website [npr.org](https://www.npr.org).

Here are some tips from Joy Elvin, Director of Operations, to reduce your 'single-use' plastic:

- 1 If you use a Keurig or Nespresso that uses single-use pods, purchase a reusable metal pod and use your own coffee. We have done this in the office, and it works perfectly.
- 2 If you don't already use your own reusable shopping bags for groceries, make a point to purchase some. I keep mine in the car and have a small fold-up one in my purse just in case I'm caught out without them.
- 3 Find a good quality re-usable insulated coffee mug (for tea, hot chocolate as well) and take this with you when you need coffee on the road. Most shops are happy to serve you in the cup you bring. I have 2 and keep one in the car, just in case.
- 4 Do a 'plastic audit' in your home. Some common items you may find are yogurt pots, Q-Tips & cling film. All of these are 'single-use' items, and you can purchase alternatives. Many companies now sell yogurt in a glass or ceramic pot. Change to purchasing earbuds made of paper or bamboo for the stem, and you can use beeswax cloths instead of clingfilm, or if you must use a type of film, you can purchase compostable perforated clingfilm, not ideal, but a step in the right direction.



Every single day we have an impact on the world around us, so what we do makes a difference. All we need to do is decide what kind of difference we want to make; every small step helps.

A gold star goes to volunteers Geoff Dennis and Tony Silvia (recently profiled in the *Sakonnet Times*) doing plastic and trash pickup on beaches and islands. THANK YOU!

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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.