

Nashoba Conservation Trust Winter 2020 News

Conservation Corner

Ken Hartlage

Dedicated. Passionate. Driven.

These three words quickly come to mind when asked to describe local environmental icon Marion Stoddart, not only for her work to clean up the Nashua River, but also for her decades-long commitment to environmental issues. However, as I sat listening to Marion speak this past Saturday, I was equally struck by the dedication, passion, and drive of the two individuals sitting beside her: Wildlands Trust Executive Director Karen Grey and MA State Senator Jamie Eldridge.



Panelists (L to R) Karen Grey, Marion Stoddart, Lucy Wallace and Senator Jamie Eldridge photo by Joe Kim



Sue Edwards addressing packed audience at the showing of The Work of 1000 photo by Steve Loran

All three convened at The Groton Center for a viewing of Sue Edward's documentary *The Work of 1000* and a panel discussion moderated by Nashua River Watershed President Lucy Wallace. The event's theme? How do we become empowered to act, to make a difference, and sustain our commitment to creating healthier communities – especially in the face of climate change and its impacts.

The ensuing discussion touched on many points and opportunities to make a difference. Karen promoted land conservation as a nature-based solution to combat climate change, and Jamie described his efforts to power the state using 100% renewable energy. Both shared their passion for addressing social equity issues. Marion, not one to rest on her laurels, advocated for completing the greenway around the Nashua, Squannacook and Nissitissit Rivers as a means to sequester carbon. Listening to the group's experiences and success stories was very encouraging, uplifting even. We can make a difference, I thought, and, indeed, that was precisely the point. Groton Neighbors President Diane Hewitt, who organized the event, challenged the audience to think of one thing each of us can do to effect change. Call your state rep. Join a conservation group. Plant a tree. There are thousands of actions we can take, but as Marion, Karen and Jamie clearly showed us, we need to step up and do it. And what if we all make that commitment? Now, that is power in numbers. If one person can do the work of a thousand, what we can do together is without limit.

Next time you go for a walk in Heald Orchard

Michael Veit

Many of our readers are familiar with our annual “Breakfast with the Birds” event in May when NCT and the Town of Pepperell Conservation Commission hosts a morning of birding in Pepperell’s Heald Orchard. The Orchard is a premier destination for many regional birders as it attracts a plentitude of both spring migrants, passing through on their way to breeding areas north of us, as well as residents that choose to nest either in the Orchard or in adjacent undeveloped lands. Throughout much of May, a host of extremely colorful warblers, along with sparrows, grosbeaks, indigo buntings, bluebirds, cuckoos, hawks, and many others can be seen and heard while taking advantage of the ample food and cover provided by the grasslands, old apple trees, and other vegetation. One special species of bird that is regularly seen, but hasn’t to our knowledge yet bred in the Orchard is the American Kestrel.



The American Kestrel is North America’s smallest falcon. Fleet on the wing and full of attitude, they are a wonder to observe hunting and riding the wind as they hover and dive in pursuit of prey. The birds are beautiful, especially the males with their blue-hued wings and orange tail feathers; females have orange wings with black stripes and black-barred orange tail feathers. They are a species of open areas, feeding mainly on insects, small rodents, and snakes that they dive upon from their characteristic hovering flight and eat while perched in a tree, utility pole, or other suitable lofty location. American Kestrels nest in pre-existing cavities, most typically tree holes, but for various reasons suitable nesting sites have declined. This is one of several likely factors that have contributed to the Kestrel’s general

decline throughout much of the northern U.S. over the past few decades. Fortunately, some success has been achieved by providing them with man-made nesting structures.

In order to try and attract a pair of kestrels to nest in Heald Orchard we constructed and erected a Kestrel nest box this winter. We located it in what we refer to as the “savannah” region of the orchard, where there are scattered trees nearby for the adults to perch in for feeding, and for resting while not incubating eggs during nesting. You can’t miss it when you go for a walk in the Orchard as it sits above most of the landscape atop a 16 ft. pole. Time will only tell if the nest box and its location will prove enticing enough for a pair of Kestrels. If so, it will certainly add to the enjoyment of the many birders, dog walkers, and hikers who visit the Orchard as well as aid in the conservation of these magnificent creatures.

Pollinator meadow project update

Michael Veit

After clearing the existing vegetation and preparing the soil, with the help of Tony Beattie and his farm equipment we seeded the meadow area with a wildflower mix in October 2018. We patiently waited through the winter and early spring of 2019 to see the fruits (and possibly flowers) of our labors. By late May, as seeds began to germinate, it was evident that the weed seed-bank in the soil was greater than we had expected. We had anticipated that it would not be possible to eliminate all the undesirable plants during our initial season of control, but what emerged was greater than we had hoped for. Not to be discouraged, throughout the course of the summer we carried out a high mowing regime to suppress re-seeding of annual and biennial weeds and spot treated and/or pulled surviving perennial weeds and invasives. We concluded the season with a treatment of a grass-specific herbicide to help eliminate competing perennial orchard/pasture grasses. We are feeling hopeful that we will see greater growth of our desirable meadow plantings come spring of 2020.



of the new access trail to meadow



Rob Rand working on one of the two new bridges on the trail

Concurrently with the 2019 meadow specific work, we made great progress on creating public access to the meadow. Through significant effort of NCT board members and volunteers we built a trail from our signed-access on Pond Circle into the meadow. Special thanks are extended to Rob Rand and Paul Peavey who designed and built two sturdy, wood-plank wetland crossings along the route (see image below). The trail wanders approximately a quarter mile through high-canopied mixed hardwood forest and along a waist-high fern dominated lowland to reach the meadow in its back corner. It's a real beauty and we encourage NCT members to give it a

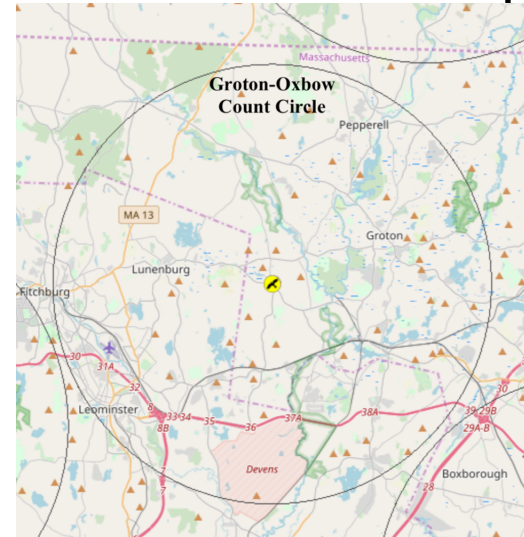
try. There is ample parking along the Pond Circle cul-de-sac where the signage is obvious. Please note: the NCT-owned trail access from the street is a 25-foot-wide grass strip that abuts privately owned land on both sides. Please be respectful of the neighbors and stay within the entrance path. Pets should be leashed until inside the wooded area of the trail. In July, we received a Pollinator Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), prepared by our Xerces Society associate, Emily May, and funded by a grant we received during 2019 from the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The CAP includes numerous site-specific suggestions for improving both the pollinator and wildlife value of the extended meadow area, and will serve as a framework for additional related projects moving forward.

Our goal is to officially open the Meadow and access trails by late summer 2020. Watch our website and keep an eye open for notification. We hope that you will join us.

120th Massachusetts Audubon Christmas Bird Count

Paula Terrasi

The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a program with 120 years of citizen science involvement where volunteers from across the U.S., Canada, and many other countries go out over a 24-hour period on one calendar day to count birds. Audubon uses the CBC with other surveys to understand how bird populations and their locations have changed over time. Thousands of volunteers participate each year to collect critical data to be compiled and used to identify what types of conservation efforts are necessary to protect birds and their habitat.



On Sunday, December 15, more than 20 Pepperell residents, acquaintances, and friends joined bird enthusiasts from seven local communities to participate in the Massachusetts Audubon Christmas Bird Count as part of the Groton-Oxbow Count Circle – one of thousands of 15-mile radius circles that Audubon assigns to communities across the US in order to manage the count. Our count circle has been participating continuously since 2000.

Dedicated birders were up before sunrise listening for owls. Some were out all day in the challenging and unusually windy conditions, while others were only able to commit an hour or two. For some it was an excuse to visit their favorite

Pepperell conservation land or open space during a time of year that they usually don't, and for others, it was a means to exploring a part of the town they weren't yet familiar with. Everyone's contributions, no matter how big or small, were valued and appreciated.

Under the leadership of bird expert and circle compiler Ron Lockwood, community organizers were tasked with coordinating coverage for areas within their towns and tallying results for each species reported that day. The results of the day were tallied and shared at a countdown potluck dinner at the home of Sue Edwards in Pepperell. Conversations around the day's experiences and unique birds seen were shared over dinner.

NCT extends our sincerest appreciation to Ron Lockwood, Sue Edwards, Paula Terrasi (Pepperell Town Compiler) and everyone who participated in the 20th MA Audubon Christmas Bird Count for being part of this event.

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120th Massachusetts Audubon Christmas Bird Count *continued from page 4...*

Paula Terrasi

As a result of the combined effort, an impressive sixty-nine species were recorded including two that had not been documented in the history of the count – a Glaucous Gull and a Red-headed Woodpecker. Results of the species and count data for the Groton-Oxbow Count Circle are listed below:

Canada Goose – 694, Mute Swan – 39, Wood Duck – 1, American Black Duck – 12, Mallard – 433, Northern Pintail – 1, Hooded Merganser – 13, Common Merganser – 5, Ring-necked Pheasant – 2, Ruffed Grouse – 1, Wild Turkey – 163, Turkey Vulture – 4 (new high), Osprey – 1, Bald Eagle – 6 (new high), Sharp-shinned Hawk – 4, Cooper’s Hawk – 6, Red-shouldered Hawk – 3, Red-tailed Hawk – 62 (new high), Merlin – 1, Ring-billed Gull – 25, Herring Gull – 67, Iceland Gull – 1, Great Black-backed Gull – 44, Glaucous Gull – 1 (new for the count), Rock Pigeon – 123, Mourning Dove – 199, Great Horned Owl – count week, Belted Kingfisher – 3, Red-headed Woodpecker – 1 (new for the count), Red-bellied Woodpecker – 71, Downy Woodpecker – 93, Hairy Woodpecker – 24; Northern Flicker – 18, Pileated Woodpecker – 7, Blue Jay – 350, American Crow – 181, Common Raven – 16, Black-capped Chickadee – 479, Tufted Titmouse – 278, Red-breasted Nuthatch – 2, White-breasted Nuthatch – 135, Brown Creeper – 10; Carolina Wren – 25; Winter Wren – 15, Golden-crowned Kinglet – 41, Ruby-crowned Kinglet – 1, Eastern Bluebird – 134, American Robin – 263, Northern Mockingbird – 15, European Starling – 453, Cedar Waxwing – 174, Yellow-rumped Warbler – 3 (tied for highest count), American Tree Sparrow – 15, Chipping Sparrow – 1, Field Sparrow – 3, Fox Sparrow – count week, Song Sparrow – 122, Swamp Sparrow – 1, White-throated Sparrow – 85, Dark-eyed Junco – 342, Northern Cardinal – 184, Red-winged Blackbird – 7, Common Grackle – 1, Brown-headed Cowbird – 2, Purple Finch – 12, House Finch – 108, Pine Siskin – 1, American Goldfinch – 262, House Sparrow – 93

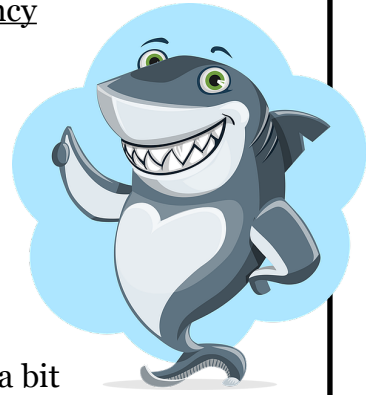
If you would like to participate in next year’s Groton-Oxbow Bird Count, please contact Paula Terrasi at 978-314-1910.



Coming Events

Celebrate Earth Day at the Lawrence Library with the NCT & the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy

Celebrate Earth Day on Wednesday April 22 from 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. at the Lawrence Library in Pepperell MA with an amazing presentation from the Atlantic White Shark Conservancy from North Chatham Mass. Learn about the latest science, biology, and technology relating to the conservation of these fascinating and ancient creatures. Get your questions answered, like "why are there so many Great White sharks in Cape Cod?".



This program has been generously co-sponsored by the Nashoba Conservation Trust, a local non-profit organization dedicated to preserving Pepperell's natural resources and wildlife areas. This is an all-ages event, however some of the information may be a bit technical for very young kids. Register early as seating is limited. Register for this free event [by clicking here.](#)

Annual NCT/PCC Breakfast With The Birds event.

This event is always held in May at the Heald Orchard Conservation area. As we get closer to May, please watch for information on the exact timing on the NCT website, town of Pepperell website, and other electronic communications to our membership

There will be volunteer opportunities in the spring for the wild flower meadow project at the Seminatore Conservation area.

Pat Swain's Natural History walks will restart in late April/early May. The walks are typically about 2 hours long (10:00 AM -12ish) on Sunday mornings. They will be scheduled more or less every 2 weeks in the spring and then once a month in the summer when plants are changing less rapidly. The walks are more or less chosen for having appropriate seasonal flowers at any given time, different topographies and natural communities, different bits of ecology to talk about, and different areas of town. She will try not to go to precisely the same places at the same time as in 2019. We will visit the usual mix of NCT, Pepperell Conservation Commission, and state conservation lands.

Support NCT with your donations

The NCT offers the following levels of membership:

Individual - \$35

Family - \$50

Sponsor - \$100

Patron - \$250

Benefactor - \$1000

All memberships include subscription to the NCT Quarterly Newsletter. Visit the website at nashobatrust.org to donate or mail your check to:

Nashoba Conservation Trust
PO Box 188
Pepperell, MA 01463

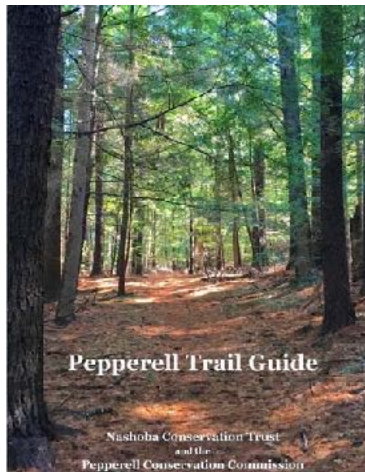
NCT Gear

Our new website makes it easier than ever to order NCT tshirts and window decals. Visit the NCT website at nashobatrust.org and get an NCT tshirt or window decal delivered right to your mailbox!



Pepperell Trail Guide

The Pepperell Trail Guide describes sixteen conservation area and almost 20 miles of trails, some of which pass through or alongside some of Pepperell's most stunning natural areas, including the Nashua and Nissitissit Rivers, Heald Pond and Gulf Brook Ravine. Visit the NCT website at www.nashobatrust.org to download a copy.



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