



THE WREN

April 2021



Healthy Habitats, Healthy Wildlife

In the recent issues of the Wren, we have discussed the ways that healthy natural areas contribute to human and societal health. Here, we look at the importance of healthy lands to the health of native wildlife.

When we talk about healthy wildlife habitats, what do we mean? At SVT, we define healthy habitats as land that is “diverse, native, and connected.”

A landscape with an abundance of *diverse* plant species provides habitat for a variety of wildlife. Tall trees, short trees, shrubs, grasses, and wildflowers all work together to provide the food and nesting habitat needed by various insects, birds, mammals, and other animals.

Different animals seek out different plants for habitat. The classic example is the monarch butterfly caterpillar that can feed only on certain varieties of milkweed. If milkweed is missing from a region, the monarch population becomes endangered. Milkweed is toxic to other insects, however, so a landscape needs a variety of plant species to ensure every animal finds the food it needs.

An abundance of plants alone, of course, does not guarantee a healthy habitat. *Native* wildlife rely on *native* plants to survive and thrive. Most of our native insects are specialists and can only survive with the native plants with which they have evolved.



Some native insects and plants have developed a symbiotic relationship. The golden northern bumblebee, with its long tongue, finds nectar in the blossoms of the purple giant hyssop plant; in turn, that plant relies on the bee to disperse its pollen.

Non-native invasive plants threaten this ecological balance because they do not provide the necessary food for our native insects and birds. Multiflora rose is a beautiful and fragrant shrub, but it is very aggressive and crowds out other plants in our wetlands and natural areas. Asiatic bittersweet makes a pretty wreath, but this pernicious vine chokes and kills

trees, and its bright red berries are the equivalent of junk food for native birds.

Connectivity is also essential for healthy habitats. The healthiest habitats span large, intact areas of forest, wetlands, and fields. Unbroken by roads or development, connected lands give animals such as bobcats room to roam in search of prey. They also enable eastern box turtles to travel safely from their winter hibernation spots in search of springtime nesting habitat.

Together, SVT and our partners deploy a variety of strategies for protecting and rejuvenating healthy habitats for wildlife in our region. Pages 4 and 5 illustrate just a few of our projects.

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The Wren

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@SudburyValleyTrust



youtube.com/SVTsightings



@sudbury_valley_trustees

Looking for Something to Do?

The Trail Maps page of the SVT website includes an interactive map with "pins" that help you find nearby trails. Click on a pin to learn the name and address of a property and also get a link to its trail map. www.svtweb.org/maps

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Spring 2021

Lisa Vernegaard, Executive Director

As I write this, I'm sitting in a sunny spot along the Assabet River, taking in the sights and sounds of the world as it wakes up on a chilly, spring morning. A red squirrel is scolding me from above, no doubt annoyed that I've intruded on her morning routine, and a slew of birds are exercising their spring song as they get ready for nesting season.

I wonder... have any of these animals been affected by the tough year that's just passed? Have they seen (and perhaps been bothered by) the uptick in visitation to natural areas? Have they felt our appreciation for the natural areas they call home?

Nature's dependability never ceases to amaze me. Deep political rifts and ugly racism tear at the fabric of our society, and a deadly pandemic continues to upend our world, yet nature marches forth, seemingly oblivious. As with all springs before, animals are renewing their breeding rituals, and trees and flowers are putting forth new sprouts.

Year after year, we reap nature's many benefits, but nature's resilience is being tested. Development, pollution, and climate change are disrupting this harmonious rhythm and the very health of nature itself.

Perhaps more than ever, as I celebrate the spring awakening this year, I am thankful to nature for all she does. I am also reminded of how important it is that we ramp up our work to protect vulnerable natural areas and care for those places we have already conserved. I also thank you, our members, for standing up for nature and helping her remain resilient.

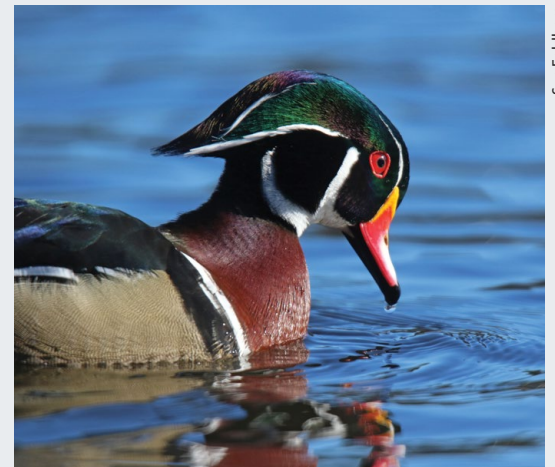
Happy Earth Day,

Lisa



NATURE SIGHTINGS:

The wood duck is one of the most intricately patterned birds in our area. The male's coloration is on full display in breeding season. Unlike most of our local ducks, the wood duck is comfortable in wooded areas, often perching on limbs and using tree cavities to raise ducklings who exit the nest with a dramatic freefall into or near water.



Sue Feldberg



Expanding Peppercorn Hill

SVT is collaborating with Metacomet Land Trust (MLT) and the Town of Upton to protect the 66-acre Kelly Property that sits nestled within Upton's Peppercorn Hill Conservation Area.

Popular hiking trails cross the property and connect to other trails in Upton, Hopkinton, and Milford. The land also includes rocky outcrops, wetlands, and habitat for rare plant species.

We want to permanently protect these ecological features, close a gap in the Conservation Area, and ensure the public always has access to these trails. Please learn more and support this project: www.svtweb.org/kelly

New Colleagues at SVT

In early 2021, the SVT staff welcomed three new colleagues:

Grace Fauver is our new Director of Development and Community Engagement, overseeing our fundraising and communications efforts.



Brandon Parker, part-time Property Maintenance Manager, ensures the buildings and facilities at our Wolbach Farm headquarters stay in tip-top shape.

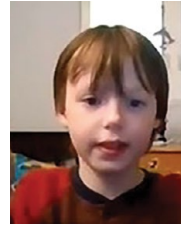


Finally, **Michelle Soares Vanslette**, part-time Director of Finance & Administration, manages our budgets and oversees all financial operations. She replaces Kate Tyrrell, who retired in January after 7 years as our Business Manager.



Youths in Conservation

We are thrilled to report on the conservation efforts of our area youth.



In early 2020, third-grader **Matthew Rosenblum** launched a Nature Needs Our Help campaign to raise funds for SVT's effort to protect pollinator habitats. Through the First Parish of Sudbury, Matthew sold metal water bottles that sported his slogan, and he raised \$600 for SVT. His passion also inspired the parish to incorporate the Nature Needs Our Help message into its religious education curriculum.



Ellie Burke (left) and **Aoife Collier-Clarke**, seniors at Holliston High School, recently joined us for 8-week internships. Working remotely, Ellie and

Aoife assisted with research into the economic value of nature's services. SVT and our state-wide conservation partners will use the data to show municipal officials how important conservation is to local economies.

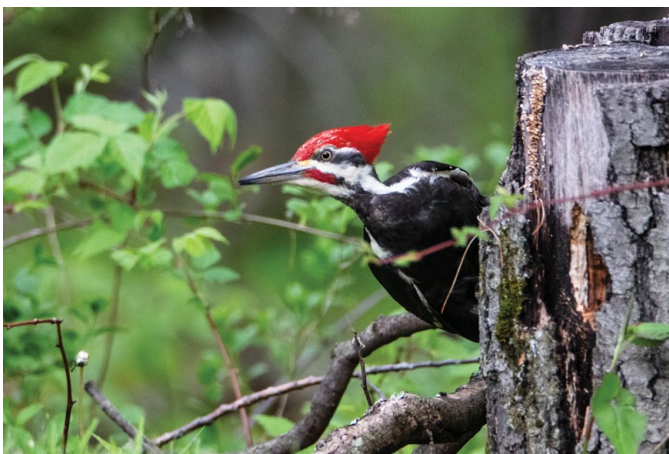
We are also laying the groundwork for engaging more 15-to-20-year-olds. AmeriCorps Member **Jonathan Haarstick** is reaching out to area youth groups to learn how SVT can enlist this age group in efforts to protect and care for natural areas. Future AmeriCorps Members will expand upon his work to develop volunteer opportunities and educational programs geared to the interests of young adults.



The choice is clear: You share our vision for a future filled with healthy natural areas. Thanks to the generous support of more than 500 donors, we raised over \$177,000 during our Imagine 2050 Virtual Gala on March 5. Special thanks to our Virtual Table Hosts, who were key to the evening's success.

Protecting Healthy Habitats for Wildlife

SVT and our partners place a priority on protecting wildlife habitats. With the assistance of volunteers, we lead “pulling parties” to control invasive plants—like glossy buckthorn—and prevent them from crowding out native species. We sometimes cut back mature trees to replicate the natural disturbances that create grasslands and other young landscapes needed by birds like the bobolink. And when designing our hiking trails, we stay clear of vernal pools and other physical features that provide habitat for threatened wildlife.



Jon Turner

Dead wood is good wood

When SVT clears small trees to create a trail, we leave the cut brush on the forest floor. Jumbles of branches and downed logs provide cover to small mammals and birds. Similarly, dead standing trees provide plentiful food for insects and birds like this pileated woodpecker, and they provide good nesting habitat for many animals. Decomposing wood also adds nutrients to the forest soil.

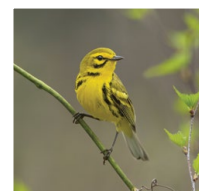
Recovering from deer overbrowsing

The deer population in our region is about twice as dense as the level recommended by MassWildlife. This leads to deer overbrowsing, which prevents young plants and trees from growing. SVT and our partners in the Metrowest Conservation Alliance have implemented bow-hunting programs at some properties to reduce the deer population. We have also installed deer exclosure fencing to give plants a chance to regenerate.



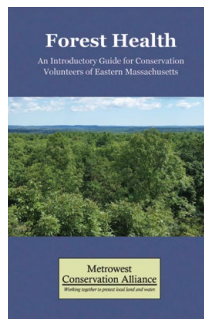
Restarting shrub habitat

At our Cedar Hill Reservation in Northborough, we are creating shrubland habitat for birds such as prairie warblers and blue-winged warblers. In the early 2000s, we cleared young trees to allow young shrubs to grow, and we periodically repeat this clearing when the shrubs and trees start to get too tall again.

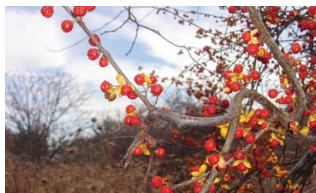


Encouraging forest health

SVT produced a Forest Health booklet for the Metrowest Conservation Alliance, and we are leading educational walks to help conservation commissions and landowners assess the health of their woodlands. Is there an abundance of diverse native species? Enough dead wood? Too many invasives? We're also designing a self-guided tour for our Cowassock Woods Reservation in Framingham to highlight examples of various healthy—and unhealthy—forest features.



Fighting invasives



To battle non-native invasive plants, SVT certifies volunteer Weed Warriors to independently visit our properties and identify and uproot plants such as glossy buckthorn, Asiatic bitter-sweet, and garlic mustard. The Weed Warriors

program was recently adopted by our regional Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) alliance, which is overseeing the training and certification process with conservation groups throughout the SVT region.

Saving vernal pools

Vernal pools, which are devoid of fish, provide essential breeding grounds for amphibians such as the yellow-spotted salamander and wood frog. These pools often dry up by midsummer, leaving little trace of their existence. At Smith Conservation Land in Littleton, we closed down the informal trails that were bisecting several vernal pools to prevent hikers and dogs from damaging the habitat.



Dawn Dentzer



Protecting the pollinators

Norm Levey

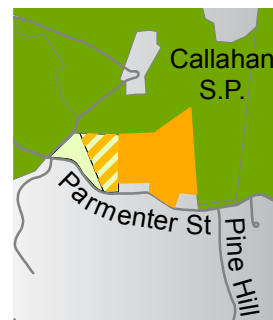


Our forests, meadows, and wetlands could not survive without the native insects that pollinate our plants. As part of the Native Pollinator Task Force of the Metrowest Conservation Alliance, SVT is encouraging gardeners to plant native wildflowers that

provide habitat for the most at-risk pollinators, such as the half-black bumblebee. www.svtweb.org/nptf-toolkit

Expanding wildlife habitat

To build blocks of wildlife habitat, SVT collaborates on long-term projects like the Tri-Town Initiative that conserved 473 acres on 13 properties and connected conservation lands in Berlin, Northborough, and Boylston. In Marlborough, we are currently helping to protect a smaller parcel—the O'Donnell Property—and close a gap in Callahan State Park.





Spotlight On...

Tax Credits for Conservation

Jeffrey and Gretchen Stoddard own 20 beautiful acres of pastureland and woodland in the northern part of Berlin. Their land abuts the picturesque Great Oak Farm, which SVT and the Town of Berlin conserved with a conservation restriction (CR) in 2018.

The Stoddards want to similarly protect their land from future development, so they have placed a CR on the property that forever limits its use to a single-family home and horse facilities.

By donating the CR to SVT, **the Stoddards are able to take advantage of the Massachusetts Conservation Land Tax Credit (CLTC)**. This credit rewards landowners who donate land or a CR (or sell it at below-market value) to permanently protect an important natural resource.

Landowners who qualify can get up to \$75,000 in a state tax credit, which can go a long way toward covering transaction costs such as appraisals and legal fees. Massachusetts funds the program for up to \$2 million per year, and donors must be certified prior to making the donation. (The CLTC is so important to our work that SVT and other groups are supporting legislation to increase the funding to \$5 million per year.)

Although the tax credit makes a nice incentive, for most landowners it plays only a small part in the motivation to leave a legacy of conservation. The Stoddards have made an incredibly generous gift to SVT and to their community in Berlin, and we are truly grateful!



The Stoddards received a tax credit when they protected their beautiful farm in Berlin. To learn more about this state program, contact Christa Collins at ccollins@svtweb.org.



Atlantic White Cedar

Flickr creative commons, user cyanocorax.

Conserving an Imperiled Habitat

Tucked away in northern Sudbury, SVT's Sudbury Cedar Swamp reservation provides an oasis of important habitat in an otherwise suburban setting. The state considers this Atlantic White Cedar Swamp habitat to be "imperiled" as a result of recent development pressure and the historical draining of land for agriculture.

This small SVT reservation—which does not have hiking trails—consists of four parcels, the last of which was donated to us in 2020 by Bill and Martha Cooper. Longtime SVT members, the Coopers lived next to the cedar swamp for decades and enjoyed watching the wildlife that finds refuge there. When they sold their home, they donated an adjacent vacant parcel to us as a lasting legacy.

We thank the Coopers, both for this donation and for their longtime commitment to conservation.

Voice of the Volunteer

Laura Lane has volunteered as a Property Ambassador at our Cedar Hill Reservation in Northborough for the past 4 years. Last year, she added "Nest Box Monitor" to her volunteer tasks. We asked Laura what inspires her to do this work.



I started volunteering on the Cedar Hill property because it is close to my home and I have been walking the trails there for many years. I enjoy getting outside and observing the birds as well as any other wildlife. I think it is important to have a volunteer presence on the property to talk to users and to monitor trail conditions.

It has been especially important to me during the COVID pandemic. The number of other users at Cedar Hill has increased greatly this past year.

Monitoring the nesting birds adds data for science and helps me learn more about the nesting birds.

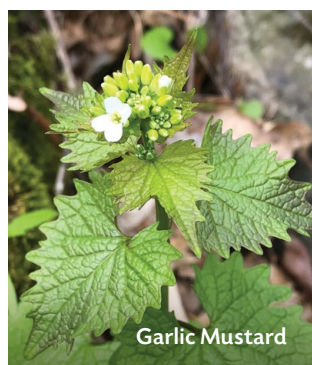
I am an active birder and participate in several other citizen science projects related to birds, including e-bird and two Christmas bird counts.

Controlling Garlic Mustard

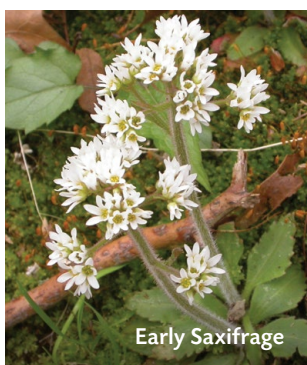
Garlic mustard is an invasive biennial plant that crowds out native plants, both through excessive seed production and by secreting a chemical through its roots that suppresses the growth of other species. You can control garlic mustard by pulling and disposing of it, but it could take several years of persistent effort:

- Learn to distinguish garlic mustard from look-alikes, such as early saxifrage.
- Garlic mustard blooms from April through June. Pull it as early as possible, preferably before it flowers and creates seeds.
- Grab at the base of the plant and pull up the roots.
- Disposal: Compost the plants in a pile (do not put in your garden compost). If no seeds are present, bag the plants until dry and then dispose in the trash. Contact your public works department to see if it offers other options.

Learn more: cisma-suasco.org/invasive/garlic-mustard



Garlic Mustard



Early Saxifrage

Boxes for Birds

For birds that nest in the cavities of trees, our region's relative lack of old, large-diameter trees leaves them with a shortage of places to raise their young. Nest boxes offer a good alternative.

SVT recently installed two donated owl boxes at Wolbach Farm in Sudbury—one for the tiny screech owl, the other for the larger barred owl. We also installed two wood duck boxes in the Beaver Brook wetlands at Smith Conservation Land in Littleton.

These boxes join the 61 smaller nest boxes in the fields at several of our properties. In the coming months, our volunteer Nest Box Monitors will visit these field boxes to track the nesting progress of eastern bluebirds, tree swallows, and house wrens. Using the Nestwatch app, the volunteers will collect data about nesting pairs, eggs, hatchlings, and fledglings to help the Cornell Lab of Ornithology track trends in bird reproduction.

The Nestwatch researchers also welcome reports about birds that build nests in trees and shrubs in your neighborhood or local conservation area. Interested in helping? www.nestwatch.org

Take a Hike: Storybook Trail

The Storybook Trail at Wolbach Farm in Sudbury is a popular destination for families. The 3/4-mile trail loops through the woods behind our headquarters and features 12 stations, each of which contains a few pages of a book written for toddlers and young readers. Just in time for school vacation, the trail will feature *And Then It's Spring* by Julie Fogliano.

Boy Scout Connor Goodwin recently revamped the Storybook Trail for his Eagle Project. Connor built and installed new stations that protect the book pages from bad weather.

Other posts on the trail provide QR codes that link to an online Interpretive Guide with information about the ecology and land use history of the property.

Directions and a trail map: www.svtweb.org/wolbachfarm. The trail crosses uneven ground and can be wet and muddy. It's best to leave the stroller in the car.



Charlie Russo



Dick McWalter



Pam Keeney



SVT's Dan Stimson and Matt Morris installed a barred owl box in the woods at Wolbach Farm. Eastern bluebirds take advantage of smaller boxes located in open fields.



Sudbury Valley Trustees

THE
WREN

WOLBACH FARM

18 WOLBACH ROAD

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Printed with 100% wind power.

Inside: Protecting Habitats for Wildlife

See page 5



STAND UP FOR NATURE: Earth Day is April 22

SVT needs more than 24 hours to celebrate the Earth, so we're planning Earth Day activities for the entire month of April. Stand Up for Nature with SVT and join us for a volunteer project or a nature walk.

www.svtweb.org/earthday2021

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Trail Work
Garlic Mustard Pulls
Glossy Buckthorn Pulls

VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSIONS

Weed Warriors
Bark Rangers
Pollinator Ambassadors
Volunteer Orientation

NATURE WALKS: MEMBERS ONLY

Berlin
Framingham
Littleton
Wayland

Registration required. All in-person volunteer projects and nature walks are limited to 10 participants due to COVID restrictions.

EARTH DAY IN YOUR BACKYARD

We've gathered lots of information to help your family enjoy Earth Day right in your own neighborhood. We have tips for birdwatching, ideas for nature scavenger hunts, plans for pollinator gardens, and more. Plus, we've collected a list of in-person and online Earth Day activities that other organizations are planning for the month of April.

WANT AN SVT EARTH DAY YARD SIGN?

Email us at svt@svtweb.org to schedule a pick-up time.

EARTH DAY
Stand Up for Nature

