

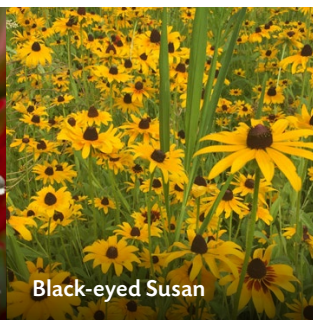


THE WREN

January 2020



Help Save the Pollinators



It's never too early to start planning your pollinator garden: Look for plants that are native to New England. Choose an assortment of flowers that collectively bloom from spring to fall and that vary in color, size, and shape. Avoid buying plants that have been treated with neonicotinoids (a class of pesticides linked to declining bee populations). Learn more at www.svtweb.org/pollinator-garden.

The primary reason? Loss of habitat. The native plants where insects eat, shelter, and lay their eggs have been crowded out by development and by non-native invasive plants. The lack of pollinators has a detrimental effect on the health of our forests and flowers, as well as on the health of the native birds and amphibians that eat insects to survive.

But all it takes to turn this trend around is a little yard space and some gardening tools.

By planting just a few native wildflowers such as blue wood aster, red columbine, and orange butterfly milkweed, you can create a colorful garden that pollinators will love. In addition to providing the necessary nectar and pollen, you'll also provide a food source for the caterpillars of native pollinators that feed only on the leaves of native plants. When enough people transform a small patch of their backyard into a pollinator garden, we'll have a regional network where insects can thrive.

To inspire people to use more native plants, the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA), of which SVT is a member, has formed a Native Pollinator Task Force (NPTF). The NPTF is encouraging municipalities and local land trusts to create pollinator gardens on public lands, and the group hopes to motivate homeowners to fill their gardens with the native plants needed by declining pollinators.

To learn about other ways that people are helping native pollinators, check out our center spread (pages 4 and 5).

Just as you shelter indoors from the January cold with blankets and a warm beverage, insects also seek protection from winter weather. Many take shelter in leaf litter, in stems and branches, or underground. Others, like the monarch butterfly, migrate southward before cold weather sets in.

When spring arrives, and trees and flowers start budding, insects emerge to forage for food. Soldier beetles collect sugar-rich nectar from golden alexanders and wild geraniums. Bumblebees gather pollen from wild rose bushes and willows. While foraging, insects incidentally provide an essential service that we all depend on: pollination.

As they flit about, insects like bumblebees and butterflies transfer pollen from the male parts of one plant to the female parts of a different plant of the same species. This keeps populations of trees, wildflowers, and other plants healthy and diverse.

Yet over the last two decades, the populations of these pollinators have been dropping.

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Looking for Something to Do?

Subscribe to our "Outdoors This Week" e-newsletter to learn about nature-themed outings and programs in the SVT region: www.svtweb.org/OTW.

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Why Native Plants Matter

Lisa Vernegaard, Executive Director

As I write this on a brisk January day, my mind keeps turning to thoughts of my garden. Like a child anticipating Christmas, I am eagerly awaiting the arrival of seed catalogs and the treasures they'll reveal.

Increasingly, I'm trying to fill my garden with native plants so that my own little patch of our region can support wildlife. Why do native plants matter? The answers are pretty straightforward:

1. Native plants provide food and shelter for our native wildlife. Native wildlife, including insects, often don't "like" non-native plants, and some non-natives are even toxic to certain birds and bees. Together, native plants and native wildlife protect the natural health of our region.
2. A diverse wildlife population relies on a diverse native plant population. Some insects search for nectar on flat-headed blossoms; other seek out tubular flowers. Some pollinators feed in spring, others in summer. Different native plants blossom at different times to meet all these needs.
3. Native plants are generally easier—and cheaper—to maintain. They have adapted to our local conditions, and they typically do just fine without our adding water, fertilizers, or pesticides.

In addition to these environmental benefits, native plants are also beautiful. Think bee balms, cardinal flowers, and black-eyed Susans. Need I say more?

So if, like me, you are impatiently awaiting the growing season, I hope you'll add a few native plants to your garden this year. Each garden, no matter how small, can be part of a network that provides healthy food and shelter for a great diversity of the wildlife that calls this region home.

Think spring!

Lisa



Great spangled fritillary on milkweed

Help Save a Farm in Holliston

During a Town Meeting in October, Holliston residents voted to protect 28 acres of Thistle Dew Farm on Highland Street. The town will contribute \$500,000 of Community Preservation Act funds toward the purchase of an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) on the property.

The Massachusetts Department of Agriculture will also contribute \$465,588 toward the APR's \$1.1 million price. Holliston's Outpost Farm will own the land, and the state and the town will co-hold the APR to ensure the land remains used for farming.

SVT has agreed to raise \$150,000 to close the gap and cover the project costs. **If we can raise just \$50,000, an anonymous donor has agreed to contribute the final \$100,000.**

Please donate to help keep this beautiful property in agricultural use. www.svtweb.org/thistle-dew.



Adrian Collins and Kevin Drake

Margaret Kush



Upton Gains CR Next to Town Forest

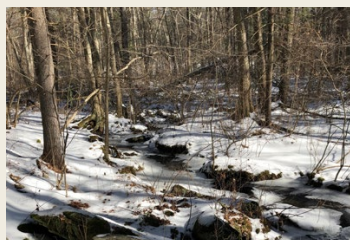
At their November Town Meeting, Upton residents voted to use Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to purchase a conservation restriction on the 48-acre Robertson Property on Fowler Street, adjacent to Upton Town Forest. The CPA funds will be combined with funding from the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to meet the purchase price.

SVT has assisted the town and DCR in protecting the property, which provides habitat for rare salamanders and turtles. It also overlooks Warren Brook, an important coldwater stream that supports native brook trout.

Linking Trails in Berlin and Bolton

SVT is working with the Town of Berlin to protect the 30-acre Wendler Property near the town's boundary with Bolton. SVT has temporarily purchased the property and will sell it to Berlin once the town frees up the necessary funds. We will then hold a conservation restriction on the land.

SVT, Berlin, and Bolton are already creating a trail across the property that will link Berlin conservation lands on Lancaster Road with Bolton's Fyfeshire Conservation Area on Wattaquaddock Hill Road. We'll announce the trail opening in our monthly e-mail newsletter and on our website.



Conservation Corridor Expands

In the northwest part of Upton, a town characterized by beautiful forests, SVT now holds a conservation restriction on the Bonner property. The CR was granted to us by Metacomet Land Trust, which was given the land for habitat protection and passive recreation.

Named for the late Dr. Barbara Bonner, founder of the Turtle Hospital of New England, the 70-acre parcel is part of an extensive corridor of protected land, adjoining SVT's Sweetwilliam Farm CR and Upton's Whitney Conservation Area on North Street. Metacomet is planning trails for the property that will be accessible from the Whitney Conservation Area trailhead.

Creating Places for Pollinators

Whether working on a few acres or a few square feet, there are many ways that SVT, our partners, and our volunteers are improving habitat for native pollinators.



Spreading the Word. The Native Pollinator Task Force wants to protect the rare and declining native pollinators of our region. The group encourages everyone to plant the specific wildflowers and shrubs that these declining species need, especially the native plants recommended by Dr. Robert Gegear (see story at right). Last fall, four Task Force members (including SVT's Matt Morris) toured a wildflower area in Southborough.

Become a Citizen Scientist. If creating a pollinator garden isn't for you, you could help Dr. Robert Gegear, a biologist at UMass Dartmouth, research the foraging behavior of bumblebees. Using the Beecology app, you can submit photos of bumblebees on flowers and also identify the type of bee and the type of plant. Dr. Gegear uses the information to create a list of garden plants that best provide the nectar and pollen needed by declining species of native bees (see his list at www.svtweb.org/pollinator-garden).



Stearns Farm

Farm Workers. While non-native honey bees often receive credit for pollinating our food crops, native bees and other pollinators can sometimes do the job more efficiently. Farmers are increasingly recognizing the importance of native pollinators. Our partners at Stearns Farm in Framingham encourage native pollinators to visit by not spraying pesticides and by planting a variety of flowers and herbs that attract pollinators all season long.

Every Garden Makes a Difference. You don't need acres of land to help our pollinators. Small gardens like the ones at Farm Pond in Framingham and Cordaville Hall in Southborough also provide good habitat. One garden can be the start of a network of gardens that encompasses whole neighborhoods, towns, counties, and states.



Freddie Gillespie



Wildflower Meadows. One way SVT helps pollinators is by creating large gardens that provide essential habitat. In 2016, we created wildflower meadows at Greenways Reservation in Wayland and Wolbach Farm in Sudbury. The patch of wildflowers in the North Field at Greenways now provides an abundance of blooms that pollinators enjoy.



Controlling Invasive Plants. By removing non-native invasive plants, we can prevent them from overtaking the native plants that pollinators eat during their early larvae/caterpillar stages. Caterpillars that are native to Massachusetts typically will not eat plants from outside the region. Plus, some invasive plants like garlic mustard contain chemicals that can kill butterfly caterpillars. SVT often hosts invasive plant-pulling days to give our native plants a fighting chance to survive.



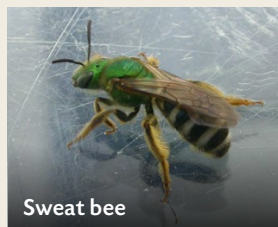
Adobe Stock

A Place Called Home. While native plants provide a critical food source, pollinators also need a place to live. You can give bees a “wing up” and establish a “bee hotel” by drilling holes in an old log to create cavities where they can nest.

Unexpected Heroes

Bumblebees and butterflies are not our only native pollinators. Moths, beetles, sweat bees, and hummingbirds also play important roles in pollination.

Different flowers need different animals for pollination. Insects have tongues of varying lengths, so some species seek out flat-topped asters, while others look for elongated indigos. It’s a symbiotic relationship. If we want to conserve a rich diversity of flowering plants, we need to conserve the full suite of pollinators.



Ron McAdow

Sweat bee



Garry Kessler

Ruby throated hummingbird



Debbie Costine

Cecropia moth



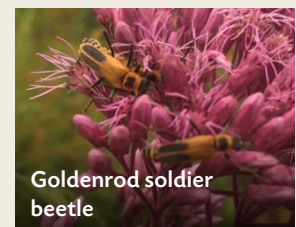
Greg Dysart

Common oak moth



Joan Chasan

Red milkweed beetle



Matt Morris

Goldenrod soldier beetle



More Than Tree Huggers

Maynard residents Dany Pelletier and Ingrid Mach joined SVT in 2015. They've recently started representing us at local farmers markets, and Dany also helps out as a volunteer photographer.

What sparked their interest in SVT? Dany explained that when they were looking for places to hike, they discovered they lived "smack in the middle of SVT's territory." They soon began participating in "wonderful SVT outings with various experts in wildlife, plants, insects, and geology."

He added, "For Ingrid and myself, one of the most appealing aspects of SVT is the diversity and quantity of programs and tours. It's not about becoming tree huggers—it's about being informed and educated about all aspects of the land. It's about helping to carry out SVT's mission first hand: working to protect natural areas and farmland for wildlife and people."

Thank you, Dany and Ingrid. We are grateful to you and all the volunteers and members who are essential to our success.



Thanks to Dany and Ingrid, SVT has been well-represented at Maynard farmers markets. Interested in staffing the SVT table at an event in your town? Let us know at svt@svtweb.org.



Kristin O'Brien

Take a Hike: New Smith Trail

SVT's trails at Smith Conservation Land in Littleton are now open. With a new parking area on Whitcomb Avenue in Littleton, and trail loops on both sides of the road, Smith offers hikers expansive views of both Beaver Brook Marsh and Black Pond Ravine.

Look for tracks and signs of bobcat, porcupine, and even bear during your walk. The yellow trail along the ridge overlooking Black Pond and its stream offers wonderful birding opportunities in the spring. Continue onto additional Town of Harvard Conservation lands for a longer walk or return to the parking area via the blue trail.

A red trail departs the yellow trail shortly after its beginning, and will lead you across the road, by an old farm field, and to Beaver Brook Marsh. Look across the marsh for several great blue heron nests, which promise great sights in the springtime nesting season. Look for remains of a glacial esker on your return.

Directions and a trail map are available at www.svtweb.org/smith.



Double Your Impact—It's Simple and It's Free!

We appreciate the many supporters who take advantage of their employer's matching gift programs when donating to SVT. In 2019 alone, we received \$19,283 in matched donations from area companies. These additional funds help us accelerate our efforts to protect and care for natural areas.

If your company offers a match, you could double (or even triple) your contribution to SVT, at no added cost to yourself. Please check with your Benefits Department; the process may be simpler than you think. Thank you!



Improving Forest Health

SVT has launched a Forest Health Initiative with the Metrowest Conservation Alliance. The goal is to help our conservation partners evaluate their forests and make decisions about forest management.

As a first step, SVT's Laura Mattei coordinated trail walks with members of the Ashland Town Forest Committee and the Carlisle Conservation Foundation. Laura explained how to evaluate factors such as plant diversity, forest regeneration, dead wood, and deer overbrowsing. A guidebook is in the works that will offer tips for forest management.



Jake Lehan, Stream Crossing Assessment Coordinator for Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration, led the training session for partners in the High Ridge Initiative. The Initiative partners want to conserve 1,950 acres in Harvard, Littleton, and Boxborough.

Helping Wildlife Roam

During a training session in October, SVT and our partners in the High Ridge Initiative learned how to study culverts and other road-stream crossings to determine if wildlife can pass safely through them. We'll use the knowledge to evaluate existing culverts on our conservation lands and to assess whether renovating the culverts can help create conservation corridors that allow wild animals to move through the region in search of food and habitat.

Secretive Bird Spotted During Count

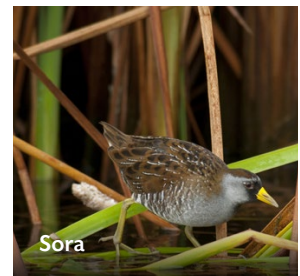
On January 2, SVT hosted the "countdown" for the Concord Christmas Bird Count that took place on December 29.

In conjunction with the National Audubon Society, the Concord Circle, which includes 18 of the towns

in SVT's region, annually enlists volunteers to count birds over a 24-hour period. The tallies help researchers understand how the birds of the Americas are faring over time.

At this year's countdown, group leaders calculated that the Concord Circle counted 24,833 birds (76 species). The count included many oft-seen species: red-bellied woodpeckers, pileated woodpeckers, and turkeys. The "wow" was a sora, a secretive marsh bird spotted at Great Meadows. The last time one was seen during the Christmas Bird Count was 40 years ago!

For more results, visit www.concordcbc.org.



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In Memoriam



It is with a heavy heart that we report the passing of one of our region's mightiest conservation champions, Marylynn Gentry, who died December 7, 2019, after a courageous struggle with multiple myeloma.

Marylynn's love of nature was boundless, and her rare blend of kindness, enthusiasm, and gentle tenacity made her an effective advocate for land protection. With her infectious warmth and smile, she inspired innumerable people to come together to conserve open spaces throughout the region.

SVT was fortunate to have Marylynn as a Board member for 20 years (four of which she served as Board president), and she also served as Executive Director of the Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and the Harvard Conservation Trust. In her hometown of Wayland, Marylynn had been a member of the Conservation Commission and was instrumental in the passage of the Community Preservation Act and in the protection of many of Wayland's natural areas. In a life that was too short, she made an everlasting impact on some of our region's most prized natural areas.

Marylynn will be greatly missed by all who were lucky enough to know and work with her.



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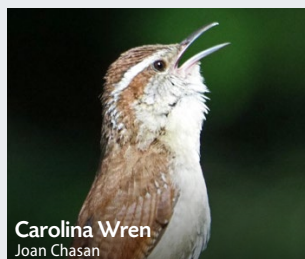
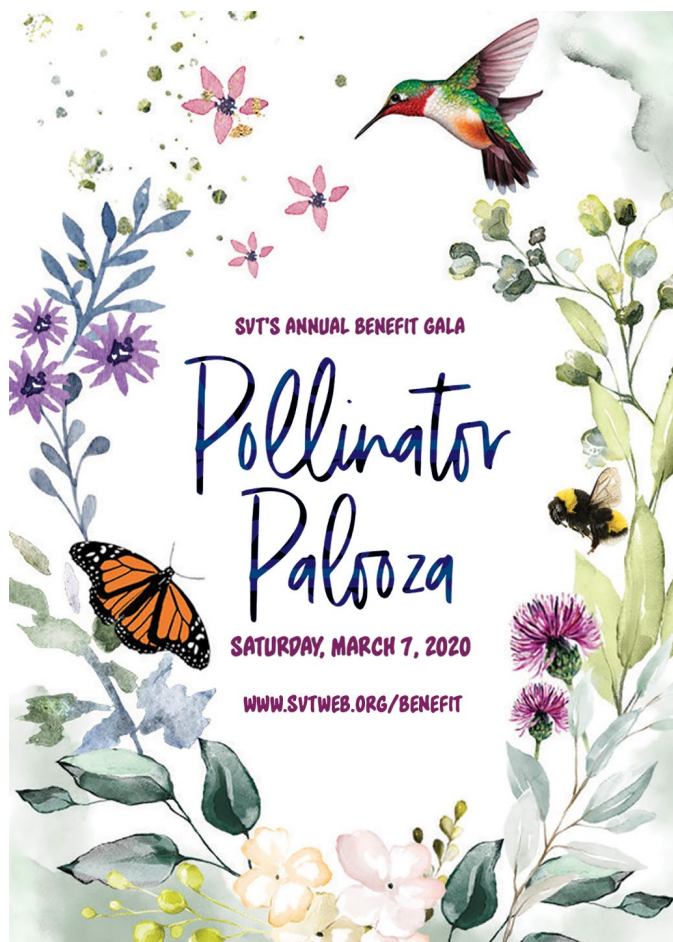
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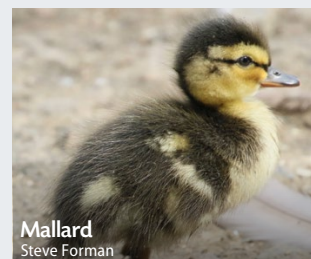


Why choose native plants?

They're beautiful, and they support
our native insects and birds. p. 1



Carolina Wren
Joan Chasan



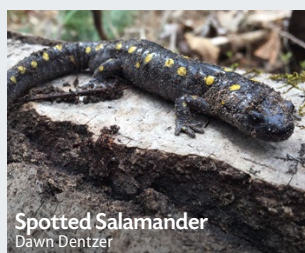
Mallard
Steve Forman

NATURE SIGHTINGS: Best of 2019

For the third year in a row, we've gathered our favorite Nature Sightings submissions from the past 12 months into a Web album that displays the great variety of flora and fauna in our region. Thank you to all the photographers who share these charming reminders of the importance of our work.

View all the beautiful photos at www.svtweb.org/NS2019.

To receive weekly e-mails with the latest images, subscribe to our Nature Sightings newsletter: www.svtweb.org/enews.



Spotted Salamander
Dawn Dentzer



Blue Jay
Sandy Howard