



THE WREN

December 2025



Trails Open in Acton



Conserving Farms & Fields



Annual Conservation Awards



Conservation Collaborations

Protecting a Local Farm, Supporting the Region

In 2021, SVT was part of a collaborative project that enabled Boston Area Gleaners to buy and protect Stonefield Farm in Acton, a conservation success that has had positive impacts far beyond the protection of 51 acres of land. The Gleaners have since extended their operations and now provide support to other small farms throughout the region.

A nonprofit organization that began in the early 2000s, The Gleaners have a mission to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables across our communities while supporting local farms and reducing systemic food waste. By harvesting surplus crops from farm fields and sharing the crops with people in need, **The Gleaners address a significant problem in the U.S., where more than 30% of crops never leave the farm and go to waste** (which also contributes significantly to climate change).

Stonefield Farm has been in active agriculture for over 300 years and had been owned by members of the Simeone Family since the early 1900s. When the latest generation was ready to retire, they wanted to sell the land to someone who would con-



tinue to farm it. In early 2020, the Gleaners showed interest in purchasing the property.

A partnership quickly formed among the Simeones, The Gleaners, Acton Conservation Trust, the Town of Acton, and SVT to raise funds so The Gleaners could purchase the farm and place an agricultural preservation restriction (APR) on it. The APR, co-held by SVT and the Town, protects the land from development and requires that it be used for agriculture. In the 4 years since acquiring the land, The Gleaners have:

- planted and harvested their own crops, which include a mix of commonly available and culturally relevant foods;
- recruited many more volunteers to harvest and pack food grown at Stonefield and to pack food donated from other farms;
- expanded their distribution program for delivering produce to hunger-relief groups and provided trucking services to small farms who need help getting their produce to market; and
- launched the Boston Food Hub to bridge the gap between small farms and wholesale markets. Wholesalers can order produce from local farms, which puts money into the pockets of small farmers and gets fresh produce to those in need.

In 2019, The Gleaners distributed more than 1 million pounds of produce in a single year for the first time. In 2022, their first full season at Stonefield Farm, they distributed over 4 million pounds!

This is an amazing story of how those with a shared vision of protecting farmland and supporting local farms can have an exponential impact. All SVT supporters should feel proud to be part of this success.



The acquisition of Stonefield Farm gave The Gleaners space to plant a variety of crops that help those facing food insecurity.

Learn more about The Gleaners at bostonareagleaners.org and about the Boston Food Hub at bostonfoodhub.org.

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youtube.com/SVTsightings

SVT is committed to being an equitable and inclusive organization that works in partnership with the full diversity of people in the region to ensure everyone feels welcome to enjoy local natural areas and participate in the efforts to care for these lands.

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NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Supporting Healthy Communities

Davnet Conway, Executive Director

When SVT updated our mission statement in 2018, we added “farmland” to the types of land that we protect. We wanted to highlight—and address—the ever-growing need to preserve agricultural land. Conserved farmland provides extensive co-benefits such as helping to retain open space for wildlife, sequestering carbon for enhanced resilience to climate change, and supporting community well-being.

Retaining access to local sources of food is considered a national security issue. Global events such as the Covid pandemic can disrupt long-distance food supply chains, making access to nutritious fresh produce particularly challenging. Local agricultural sources can help address the immediate and ongoing needs of local food insecurity.

The Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition developed a detailed toolkit of resources in 2022 that quantify the economic benefits of land conservation. The research noted that Massachusetts employs over 25,000 people in the farming industry, which generates over \$475 million in revenue, yet we are considered the 9th most threatened state for farmland loss.

SVT has an important role to play in protecting agricultural land. When we protect a farm from development and creatively steward the land to allow food production while also retaining critical habitat, everyone wins.

In this edition of *The Wren*, we highlight some of the far-reaching impacts of SVT’s successful efforts to preserve farmland in our region. Helping to retain a fundamental part of our landscape while supporting vibrant and healthy communities is a win for both wildlife and humans.

See you on the trail!



NATURE SIGHTINGS

Green Heron. Shorter and more compact than our more common Great Blue Heron, the Green Heron is often seen crouching very still along the edge of water. Green Herons also prefer fishing from a branch or the shore rather than wading into deeper water as Great Blue Herons do. Although Green Herons are relatively common in our region, the bird is one of many species listed as a Common Bird in Steep Decline in the U.S., with its population decreasing by over 50% since 1966.

Nancy Wright captured several images of this heron in Grafton, including an image of it fishing. Her photos are available on the Nature Sightings section of our website. svtweb.org/greenheron



Nancy Wright



Before we opened the trails at District 9, Bill Taylor of the Town of Upton and Davnet Conway of SVT thanked everyone who helped to protect the land from a proposed 200-unit development.

Land Protection Successes

District 9 Schoolhouse Conservation Area is fully conserved! In 2022, SVT helped the Town of Upton purchase this Mechanic Street property, and on October 6 of this year, we recorded a conservation restriction (CR) to permanently protect the land. The 92-acre District 9 property includes a vernal pool and intermittent streams and sits in a conservation corridor that includes Stefans Farm Open Space and the Upton State Forest. During a ceremony on November 12, SVT and the Town formally opened 2+ miles of trails at the site. Maps are available in English, Portuguese, and Spanish. svtweb.org/district9

Laurel Ridge in Hopkinton was conserved on October 15 when SVT purchased a CR on the privately owned land. The 20.5-acre Laurel Ridge features diverse wildlife habitats, stunning views of Whitehall Reservoir, and a great trail network (see page 7). It is part of a conservation corridor that includes Upton State Forest, Hopkinton State Park, and Whitehall State Park.

SVT thanks the landowners; those who donated to our crowdfunding campaign; and Hopkinton Trails Club, Friends of Whitehall, and Hopkinton Area Land Trust. We also thank William P. Wharton Trust, Fields Pond Foundation, the Family of George and Doris Meyers, and an anonymous funder for their financial support. svtweb.org/laurel-ridge

Trails Open in Acton



The 549 Main Street trail-opening ceremony brought together the many partners who collaborated to conserve the Acton property.

On October 28, the Acton Water District opened public trails at its **549 Main Street** property that protects the town water supply and buffers the Nashoba Brook corridor. SVT, the Town of Acton, Acton Conservation Trust, and other groups helped the Water District acquire this land from the Conant Family in 2023. SVT and the Town now hold a conservation restriction over these 57 acres.

The trail system is named "The Trails to Brewster's Meadow" in honor of Brewster Conant, Sr., who cared for the fields for many years before his death in 2018. During the ceremony, representatives of Sen. Jamie Eldridge presented a citation of appreciation to the Conant siblings for conserving their family's land.

svtweb.org/549Main

Staff Transitions

Brandon Parker, our part-time Facilities Maintenance Manager since Fall 2021, has announced he will retire at the end of 2025. Brandon provided a wealth of skills, expertise, and leadership in managing our buildings and grounds at Wolbach Farm. We will miss Brandon's ready smile and good humor, and we wish him the best in his pursuit of more fun and adventure.



Jane Maloney, who joined SVT in Fall 2021 as our Land Steward, has accepted a new position as the Communications Coordinator with the DPW for the City of Watertown. In the past four years, Jane has been integral to numerous SVT stewardship projects, especially our many battles against non-native invasive species. As the manager of our Weed Warrior program, Jane trained and managed volunteers and led hundreds of invasive pulls. We wish her all the best as she takes on her new role and also begins the final semester of her master's degree program at Tufts University.



While we will certainly miss Brandon and Jane, we are delighted that **Sam Rogers**, our Seasonal Stewardship Field Assistant, has agreed to stay on full time as our new Land Steward. Many of you may know Sam from her work during the past several months, when she was outside every day, mowing fields, building bridges, clearing trails, removing invasive plants, and managing volunteers. Sam earned her B.S. in horticulture from Temple University in Philadelphia, and she previously worked as a Seed Collection Technician for the Native Plant Trust. Welcome to SVT, Sam (again)!



Conserving Farms & Fields

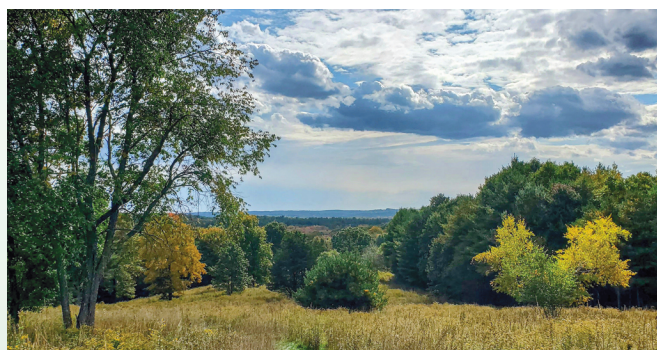
The protection of farms and fields provides extended impacts to individuals, communities, habitats, and wildlife.

Managing Field Habitats

Open fields, shrublands, and farmlands support a diversity of wildlife. Butterflies and bees seek pollen and nectar in flow-ers. Birds like American Woodcock build nests on the ground in open fields near shrubby wetlands. Bobcats roam the fields and hawks soar overhead, both in search of prey.

Left unattended, these important habitats would grow robust shrubs and trees and, probably, invasive plants. Farmlands remain open due to seasonal agricultural activities, but SVT must actively manage open fields and shrublands to retain their open character and habitat values.

Field and shrubland management entails a variety of techniques, including invasives removal, herbicide treatments, regular mowing, tree clearing, and occasional prescribed fires. And while tree removal and prescribed fires may not seem like “conservation,” they maintain important natural disturbance processes that create unique habitats such as pitch pine-scrub oak barrens. Shrublands, a transitional habitat type between field and forest ecosystems, provide nesting habitat for birds in decline such as Prairie Warbler and Blue-Winged Warbler. Open field habitats also support Monarch Butterflies and other native pollinating insects.



Amy Loveless

At our 88-acre Cedar Hill Conservation Area in Northborough, SVT has been improving and maintaining 19 acres of a mix of field and shrubland since 2004. We cleared 12 acres of young forest, we periodically mow sections to maintain the shrubby character, and we use targeted herbicide treatments to control Asian bittersweet.

Our annual birding surveys show that we are having success, as we have observed Prairie Warbler, American Kestrel, Wood Thrush, Black-and-White Warbler, Eastern Towhee, Scarlet Tanager, and other species at this property during the breeding season. For 2026, we are planning a new round of mowing and invasives removal that will sustain this success and continue to support this habitat.

Creating Community Through Conservation

Prospect Hill Community Orchard in Harvard is a stunning hillside property that sits in a corridor of conserved lands. Since 2014, the orchard has been owned by the nonprofit Community Harvest Project, which uses the land to grow apples and peaches for donation to hunger-relief organizations.

In 2023, Community Harvest Project permanently protected 70 acres of the orchard by selling an agricultural preservation restriction to the Town of Harvard and the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. The project, which SVT supported through a fundraising campaign, provided Community Harvest Project with an endowment that will support its mission for years to come.

The conservation effort did more than fill a gap in the conservation corridor and protect a local source of food. It also played an important role in building community.

Community Harvest Project has always operated with a dual mission of addressing food insecurity and engaging the public through volunteer opportunities. Each year, the nonprofit welcomes thousands of volunteers to its two properties (its headquarters are at a Grafton farm), where they harvest produce and pack it for distribution to area food pantries. Volunteers, whether they sign up as individuals or groups, work together to advance an important mission, knowing they are making a difference. community-harvest.org





Scott Strong Hawk Foster

Indigenous Stewards

The Indigenous peoples who have stewarded the lands on this continent for millennia have made many important contributions to agriculture. Among these is the Three Sisters concept of raising corn, beans, and squash, which were historically the main crops of Indigenous peoples of Central and North America.

When these three crops are planted together, each nurtures the other like family. The corn stalk serves as a trellis for the beans, the beans create nitrogen underground to stabilize the roots of the corn (also called maize) in high winds, and the wide leaves of the squash plant shade the ground, keeping the soil damp and preventing weed growth. Indigenous people knew the science behind this symbiotic relationship and taught it to colonists when they set up their farmsteads.

Scott Strong Hawk Foster beautifully photographed the Three Sisters concept in his “Ways of My Ancestors: We Are Still Here” collection. Scott is an Indigenous photographer whose roots include Hassanamisco Nipmuc, Mohegan, and Cherokee lineage.

In September, Scott presented an exhibition of his collection as part of SVT’s Outdoor Voices Speaker Series. The series largely consists of portraits of Indigenous people posing in their individual regalia against a black background. The portraits bring the subject to the forefront, a reminder that Indigenous people are very much still here continuing their culture. scottfosterphotography.com



Scott Strong Hawk Foster

Owls at Wolbach Farm

While farms don’t often come to mind when people think of wildlife habitats, properly stewarded farmlands do provide critical habitat and migratory corridors for many species. Owls and other raptors, for exam-



Anne Dykiel

ple, rely on the semi-open meadows, hedgerows, and mixed forested edges that are typical of farms. At SVT’s Wolbach Farm in Sudbury, we have spotted or heard at least three species of owls in

recent months (Barred, Eastern Screech, and Great Horned).

Great Horned Owls (top photo) are solitary and territorial, but they are also adaptable and can coexist with humans. The white pine trees at Wolbach are ideal roosting and nesting choices for owls due to the dense



cover they provide year-round, and our open meadow offers space for these raptors to hunt. On many nights you can hear the deep and distinct “hoo-hoo” of Great Horned Owls calling back and forth between the stands of white pines at Wolbach and the adjoining properties.

Barn Owls are another species that find habitat at farms, where they take advantage of the safe, dry nesting areas that barns provide while enjoying easy access to abundant hunting of small animals in farmland fields. Our Wolbach barn doesn’t host any Barn Owls, but the Giaquinto Wildlife Center recently led an “Owl Prowl” at Wolbach that featured animal ambassador Bella the Barn Owl (bottom photo). It was a wonderful opportunity for guests to become acquainted with a species that benefits from the protection and stewardship of agricultural lands.



Steady Strides, Big Impact

At our 2025 Annual Meeting, SVT recognized several new Life Members who have made land or financial contributions valued at \$100,000 or more during their lifetimes. When we notified Sudbury couple Sherri Cline and Tom McGowan that they would be honored as Life Members, they were surprised to learn they had donated such “an enormous amount of money” to SVT over the last 30 years.

“I didn’t believe it, so I asked for proof,” Sherri laughed. The list—every contribution since 1994—told the story: Regular donations, made again and again, make a big impact on local land conservation.

“It’s not like we gave the money all at once. It was a donation here, a donation there,” Sherri said, reflecting on decades of year-end gifts and later, charitable distributions from retirement accounts.

Why did they keep giving? Because SVT’s work is visible and vital. “SVT continues to do the work—preserving beautiful woodlands, farms. It doesn’t stop. And it can’t stop,” Tom said.

Sherri and Tom’s message to others is simple: Steady support protects the places we love, and it protects us, too. “Wetlands are protecting us—our property—and keeping that habitat there. It’s worked for hundreds of years. We might as well keep it working!”

Their journey is a reminder: Land conservation requires perseverance. It’s only by staying the course year after year that we will blaze a trail that lasts forever.



Executive Director Davnet Conway with Sherri and Tom.

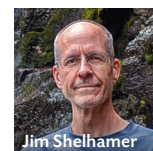
Annual Conservation Awards



SVT Board President Steve Correia (left) and Executive Director Davnet Conway (right) presented the Lifetime Achievement Award to Molly and John Beard of Wayland.

At our Annual Meeting on October 7, SVT presented our Annual Conservation Awards to SVT volunteers, regional conservationists, public officials, and others who care for the environment and strive to increase access to nature.

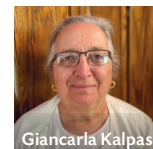
Steward of the Land: Jim Shelhamer of Acton, a volunteer Trail Steward who builds bridges, kiosks, and accessible picnic tables to improve the visitor experience at SVT properties.



Morgan Volunteer Award: Roland “Boot” Boutwell of Winchester, who donates his time to lead free (and popular) SVT nature walks where he shares his in-depth knowledge of the natural world.



Lewis Conservation Award: Giancarla Kalpas of Chelmsford, who improves habitat for declining species of bumble bees by giving presentations, leading winter sow workshops, and helping others create pollination gardens.



Distinguished Public Service Award: Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Worcester (not in attendance) for his environmental leadership and for his partnership in conserving the lands and waters that sustain us all.



Trailblazer in the Outdoors Award (a new award that recognizes those who expand inclusion in the outdoors): SMILE Mass of Sudbury, a nonprofit that helps those with disabilities live healthy lives through education, recreation, and vacation experiences.



Lifetime Achievement Award: John and Molly Beard of Wayland, who over several decades have donated land and a conservation restriction to SVT, have strengthened the organization by volunteering for numerous committees and the Board of Directors, and have helped to protect hundreds of acres of land throughout Wayland and the region.



Take a Hike: Laurel Ridge

Laurel Ridge in Hopkinton sits on a large peninsula that extends into Whitehall Reservoir. Trails across the property connect to the adjacent Whitehall State Park network that encircles the reservoir and offers stunning water views.

With its forest and water habitats, Laurel Ridge is a great place for birdwatching. Scarlet Tanager, Bald Eagle, and Wood Thrush can all find nesting habitat here, and species such as Nashville Warbler, Chestnut-Sided Warbler, and Blackpoll Warbler might stop by on their migratory journeys.

Directions and a link to a trail map are available at svtweb.org/laurel-ridge.



MCA Completes Action Plan



SVT is part of the Metrowest Conservation Alliance (MCA), which brings together municipalities, land trusts, and other non-profits to address

conservation issues in our 36 communities. Recently, the MCA completed its first-ever 10-year Action Plan that includes guidance for land protection, habitat restoration, climate resilience, and community development.

As the MCA coordinator, SVT obtained grant funding to support the development of the plan, and we convened a series of meetings where members discussed their conservation priorities. We anticipate the Action Plan will strengthen the MCA and lead to many successful conservation collaborations. svtweb.org/mca

Conservation Collaborations

University Students.

This past fall, SVT was delighted to partner with students from Framingham State University on two interesting projects. At our Greenways Conservation

Area in Wayland, we trained several students on vegetation-monitoring techniques. The FSU students mapped woody plant growth in the North Field, where we are restoring 7 acres of wildlife habitat. SVT staff will use the data to develop a treatment plan to increase native herbaceous plant growth.

At Cowassock Woods in Framingham, we provided an opportunity for Amy Bickford and Lauren Martinek (who are students in an FSU Environmental Science class taught by long-time SVT volunteer Neela de Zoysa) to lead “Tree ID Walk with Trainees” as part of our Fall Program Calendar.



Student Volunteers.

SVT thanks the students from Middlesex School in Concord who participated in a September workday at Wolbach Farm. The students helped with our long-term invasives-removal efforts at Wolbach, and they also assisted with general property cleanup.



Bridge Builders.

In early November, volunteers Dan Clawson, Leon Rozek, Mike Liuzzo, and Jim Shelhamer worked with SVT’s Dan Stimson to replace the decking on a bridge at Memorial Forest. Regular maintenance of this 72-foot bridge is essential to keep it safe for the many hikers, bike riders, and equestrians who visit the property, which is part of the Desert Natural Area on the Sudbury-Marlborough line.





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Annual Conservation Awards

See page 6



ALSO: Protecting a Local Farm, see page 1

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Annual Gala

February 7, 2026 | Hudson, MA
SVTweb.org/gala26