



THE WREN

April 2023



New Storybook at Wolbach



For the Love of Nature



Spotlight On... Going Native



Be a Weed Warrior

Protecting What We Love

There are many reasons to love nature. It gives us places to hike, enjoy scenic beauty, and restore our souls. It provides habitat for wildlife, protects clean air and water, and provides a source of local agriculture.

Reasons like these have long guided SVT's efforts to protect and care for natural areas. We conserve large tracts of land to create wildlife corridors. We design narrow hiking trails to minimally disrupt the natural surroundings. We lead programs that focus on plant and animal behavior.

Now, as we seek to encourage people from all the communities in our region to support local conservation, we are encountering different perspectives about the value of nature—and different ideas about what “nature” is.

For some people, nature is a small green space that can host a community garden. Or it could be a park where an extended family can enjoy a picnic. People with mobility issues prefer nature trails that are wide and smooth. The more self-reliant among us seek places to fish, hunt, or forage for food.

As the SVT staff works to engage the full diversity of people in our region, we are taking note of these differing perspectives and are adding new approaches to our conservation toolbox.

We will always seek to protect large tracts of wildlife habitat, but we are taking a fresh look at saving small patches of land in urban spaces. We want to give many more people access to the health benefits of nature while providing a network of habitat to help wildlife travel through our fragmented landscape. Both people and animals win.

We also are giving those who attend our programs a chance to hear from new voices. Safiyat Hamiss explained how to design a backyard garden to provide fresh produce for your family. Jason George shared his amazing wildlife photographs and explained how his experiences with dyslexia shaped his life.

Equally important, we want everyone to feel welcome to explore our properties. We are adding “All Welcome” messages to our roadside trail signs, and we are making plans for some wide, accessible trails so people of varying physical abilities will have easier access to nature's many benefits.

These are just a few of the steps the SVT staff is taking to reach out to everyone who loves nature. Working together, we can protect what we love to ensure future generations will still have green spaces, clean water, and fresh air to enjoy, however they choose to enjoy them.



Thank you to everyone who supported our “For the Love of Nature” Benefit Gala on February 16. Because of your generosity, we surpassed our fundraising goal of \$175,000!

Barred owls were the perfect symbol for this year's theme. These majestic birds mate for life, and we were delighted when SVT volunteer photographer Nancy Wright sent us this image that she captured in June of last year.

Nancy's neighbor, Shellie James, had spotted two barred owls while walking through the woods near her home in Westborough. When the owls appeared again and again during her walks, Shellie invited Nancy to join her on a hike.

Nancy explained how lucky she was to capture the photo. She and Shellie saw an owl on the ground who flew up to a tree, and “then he flew off to a much higher tree and called for his mate, and the mate came over. She called back and then flew in to share a branch and a few snuggles.” Nancy said it was “like watching a love story unfold before your eyes.” (To see more of Nancy's photos, visit wrightpixphotogifts.com.)

Turn to pages 4 and 5 to enjoy some of the other stories we shared during our Benefit Gala.

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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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Loving and Caring for Nature

Lisa Vernegaard, Executive Director



When I started at SVT nearly 10 years ago, I went on a listening tour to understand why people love nature. I learned that nature pulls at our heartstrings for LOTS of reasons, such as the joy that comes from viewing a beautiful landscape or the delight in hearing a chorus of birdsong.

Some of our love also stems from a need for what nature provides. We need food and timber. We need clean air and water. We need the mental and physical health benefits of spending time outdoors. And as we struggle with extremes in weather, we rely on nature to regulate floodwaters and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

But this can't be just a one-way love affair. Nature needs us, too—now more than ever. What does that mean for SVT?

First, we are becoming a matchmaker. We're introducing natural areas to more and a greater diversity of people. Second, we are working to deepen that love affair. Our programs are addressing a wider variety of interests, and we are planning accessible trails for people of differing physical abilities.

Finally, we are enlisting more people—no matter why they love nature—to care and act. We are advertising our volunteer opportunities more broadly and encouraging everyone to protect our local lands.

I invite you to be part of this effort. Introduce friends to a favorite hiking trail. Tell colleagues why you support a local farm. Encourage your family to vote "yes" for conservation projects. And as Earth Day approaches, take a moment to clean up a roadside or pull up invasive plants.

As we share our love for nature, we'll inspire others to feel the same way. Nature will reap the benefits, and we will, too.

Happy Spring!

Lisa



NATURE SIGHTINGS

An animal that has made a remarkable comeback locally is the fisher, thriving once again thanks to the return of mature forests in Massachusetts. This impressive individual, likely a male due to its size (males can weigh as much as 16 pounds and reach 3 feet in length), was photographed by Jim Makuc on his trail camera in Boylston.

Boardwalk Planned for Lyons-Cutler

SVT's Lyons-Cutler property in Sudbury will soon sport a new boardwalk, thanks to a \$10,000 grant from The Public Lands Fund, a program of Dick's Sporting Goods Foundation.

The trails at this 95-acre natural area encircle a small forest and run alongside two brooks that frequently offer views of a heron rookery in late May. The new boardwalks will enable visitors to safely cross some wetlands and connect to the trails on the Town of Sudbury's Landham Brook Marsh property. We expect to finish the installation by mid-summer.



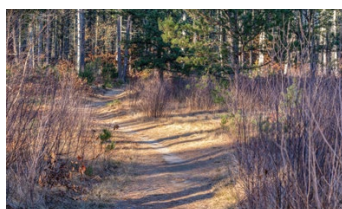
Wayne Hall

Trail Connections to Reopen in Memorial Forest

Two trail links in the Desert Natural Area that have been blocked since November will reopen during May, June, and July, giving hikers easy access to the entire network at this popular conservation area. Located at the intersection of Marlborough, Hudson, and Sudbury, the 900-acre Desert spans several conserved properties, including SVT's Memorial Forest.

The trail links were closed when Eversource began constructing an electric transmission line along an abandoned rail line in the Desert. Despite years of objections, SVT and other conservationists were unable to stop the project, but we were able to reduce its scope and its impact on wildlife.

As a result of this advocacy, Eversource must suspend construction from May through July, which is the breeding season for several threatened species. The suspension allows the trail links to reopen until construction resumes in August. The project should conclude by May 2024. *Dogs must remain on a leash at all times to protect sensitive species.* Trail maps: www.svtweb.org/memorialforest



New Storybook at Wolbach

Beginning in mid-April, the Storybook Trail at SVT's Wolbach Farm in Sudbury will feature *Dear Earth*. This story by Erin Dealey tells of a grade school class that exchanges letters with Earth about how they can help save the planet—a perfect message for Earth Day!

Designed for families with young children, the Storybook Trail consists of 12 stations along a 3/4-mile wooded trail. Details and directions: www.svtweb.org/storybook



Land Protection Successes



Highland Ridge Woods. SVT owns a new conservation area along Highland Street in Berlin! Situated in a mixed pine/hardwood forest with a rich diversity of habitats, the land is part of a meandering wildlife corridor that also plays a role in flood protection.

During the development of an adjacent 55+ housing community, the Town of Berlin required that these 44 acres be conserved as open space. The developer deeded the land to SVT, and we were delighted to permanently protect this ecologically rich land.

In the coming months, we'll grant a conservation restriction to the Berlin Conservation Commission, and we'll work with the Town of Berlin to create public hiking trails.

Grist Mill Pond Conservation Area. This SVT property on the Marlborough-Sudbury line recently gained 2.7 acres, thanks to a member of the Hutch family who donated an adjacent parcel for conservation. We had previously added 4.5 acres to this protected landscape in 2022 when another member of the Hutch family also made a land donation.

Sitting along Route 20, the conservation area is home to native plants such as winterberry and highbush blueberry, and it features impressively large and statuesque oak trees.

For the Love of Nature

During our 2023 Virtual Benefit Gala, we heard from several members and friends as they described their love for nature. The stories confirmed that people who love nature also place a priority on protecting it.

On these pages, we provide excerpts from those stories for you to enjoy. We're also highlighting an esteemed SVT staff member who turned a love for nature into his life's work.

To hear our Gala stories firsthand, visit www.svtweb.org/gala.



"It lets kids of the current generation...and definitely into the future...do the stuff that we loved to do when we were kids... What we're doing at SVT and elsewhere is vital."

—John and Molly Beard



What's so great about nature?

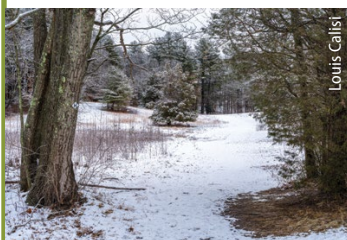
"It gives us good stuff like sticks to make forts."

"It gives us berries."

"The trees give us oxygen."

"It's really fun to be out in nature because you always get to see something new."

So said the members of The Nature Club, a group of four



Wayland grade schoolers who love to explore natural areas and spend time in their tree house.

But Austin, Riley, Wyatt, and Johan do more than just enjoy the open spaces near their homes. They also protect our local lands by picking up trash

and raising money for conservation. Why?

"You need to keep it healthy or then you don't get to see cool things in nature," explained Riley.

Whitney Fair, mother of two club members, said, "It was important for us to instill that love [of nature] in our kids. They've got a big task on their shoulders, so it's important for them to appreciate all that the earth and nature and plants and animals have to offer."

Club member Johan summed it up best. "It's like a living soul like us. So you got to take care of it."



When John and Molly Beard bought their Wayland home in 1958, they loved the natural lands that surrounded their property and a nearby pond. With an eye toward protecting the area from development, they eventually purchased most of the land on their side of the pond.

In 1974, Molly and John further protected the land by donating a 5-acre parcel to SVT that is now part of our Hazel Brook Conservation Area (see page 7). Four decades later, they donated a conservation restriction on 10 additional acres of their land.

Over the years, the Beards have happily allowed others to access their land as part of the SVT trail system. "It lets kids of the current generation—and definitely into the future—do the stuff that we loved to do when we were kids," said John. "What we're doing at SVT and elsewhere is vital."

Molly concurred. "It teaches others about the value of land, and open land particularly."

Today, John and Molly are proud great-grandparents who clearly understand the impact of land conservation. "It's what's going to make this place livable for future generations the way it has been for us," John concluded.

Finding a Vocation

Dan Stimson, Assistant Director of Stewardship, has been a member of SVT's staff for 21 years. He is frequently seen on our properties, where he plans and clears trails, builds and repairs bridges, and leads volunteer work groups.

An avid wildlife lover and photographer, Dan is one of those lucky people who turned his passion for nature into a lifelong career.



“So if you love nature, you’re going to turn into a person who wants to protect it.”

—Emily Schadler



“Being in the woods helps kids to grow up to be more resilient adults,” said Emily Schadler, a mother who homeschools her young children. They learn to “navigate challenges and trust their own bodies and trust their own decision-making skills.”

In Fall 2022, the Schadlers joined with other homeschooling families to form a walking group that visits a different Metrowest natural area each week. They “hike, look at owl pellets, look at plants, and play crazy games that the kids make up in the woods,” Emily explained.

The youngsters clearly enjoy it. “I like to see animals close up,” said Ringo, Emily’s son. His sister, Ruby, added, “Sometimes we do nature art and we take some leaves and we make stuff.”

Emily sees many health benefits to spending time in nature. “There’s all of this research about what [nature] does for kids’ mental health in terms of lowering anxiety and giving kids the ability to test out risk-taking skills.”

And she pointed out that the regular visits also provide reciprocal benefits to nature.

“Nobody protects what they don’t love,” she said. “So if you love nature, you’re going to turn into a person who wants to protect it.”

“The forest is my friend,” said Ringo. It’s clear he and his siblings are well on the path to becoming future conservationists.

I’ve always had a love for nature. I grew up with easy access to “the woods,” and took advantage of that.

I don’t remember *not* being excited to hop through a swamp, peer into a tree cavity, or climb over big rocks. The mystery of who lived in those woods captured my imagination.

Looking for ducks on a pond, or maybe even a muskrat, was something I looked forward to. Hearing woodcocks in spring, or the first peepers and wood frogs, were seasonal highlights.

I remember the first time I was lucky enough to see a bear, a moose, a bobcat—exciting moments that added to that mystery of “what’s out there.” It’s this fascination with wildlife

that drew me to conservation and to working at SVT.

This is the reason why conservation is so important. Providing a space for these creatures, and for ourselves to be marveled by them, has always felt imperative. Sharing this love for nature through my work is how I hope to make similar connections for others.



Of the dozens of people who have volunteered as an SVT Weed Warrior to fight invasive plants, none is more surprising than 9-year-old Nico. When Nico participated in his first Weed Warrior event in 2022, he had already been fighting Asian Bittersweet (pictured below) around his Lincoln home.

“I liked how it coiled around plants,” he said. “And then my Mom told me it was invasive, so I started like pulling it out of the ground and winding it off the plants and trees.”

“When I’m bored, I just come out and go around the whole woods here and check for bittersweet and then go back, get the clippers, and cut it.” He sometimes tries to pull it out by the roots, but “you can never really get rid of it, because the piece of root still there will just grow back again.”



He offered good advice for anyone who cares about our local lands. “Learning about plants is important because you can help the environment by pulling out all the invasive ones, and you can also plant native plants on the ground where you pull it out.”

And in true Weed Warrior spirit, he added, “A lot of people can help take out the invasive plants. One person would take a long time. But if people work as a team, it’ll be much easier to take out.”

“... if people work as a team, it’ll be much easier to take out.”

—Nico





Spotlight On... Going Native

The SVT region has thousands of acres of conservation land, yet a large percentage of the region is covered by lawns and gardens. As a result, private landowners have an important role to play in providing habitat for wildlife.

This Earth Day, you can make a difference in the lives of wildlife by planting native plants, shrubs, and trees in your yard.

Avoid Ornamental Plants

The SVT staff has been inspired by well-known ecologist Doug Tallamy who strongly urges everyone to plant native trees and shrubs that support local biodiversity and require less water. A yard filled with native plants that bloom at different times can provide much-needed habitat for native insects, birds, and mammals.

Tallamy argues against planting non-native ornamental plants that may look pretty but do not support native wildlife. Ornamental plants, which originated in other climates or other countries, may escape a garden and become invasive in our natural areas.

Tallamy is a cofounder of the HomeGrown National Park movement to map gardens where the landowner has switched to native plants. If you are going native, put your yard on the map! homegrownnationalpark.org

Before heading out to purchase native trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals, please:

- Evaluate both the amount of sunlight in your yard and the soil conditions. Whether your yard is shady



Native shrubs such as (clockwise from top left) spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*), sweetbush (*Spirea alba*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*), and arrow wood (*Viburnum dentatum*) will add color to your yard while providing nectar, seeds, and berries for wildlife.

or sunny, moist or dry, you can find native plants that will thrive in your location.

- Choose “straight” native species. Avoid cultivars, which have been cross bred for a trait such as color or bloom size and lack the nutritious nectar and seeds needed by native wildlife. (Cultivars have both a Latin name and a fun name like “Razzmatazz” in quotation marks.) Ask the garden nursery staff to point you toward straight species.

The Bumble Bee Project

Robert Gegear



Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*, top right) and Foxglove beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis* bottom right) are two of the many flowering plants that support at-risk bees such as the golden northern bumblebee (shown at left visiting a native lupine).

A garden can be filled with native plants that attract buzzing bees, but this does not guarantee that it provides habitat for *at-risk* species. The bees you see are often common bumble bees or even honey bees, the latter of which were imported from Europe and are considered livestock. While honey bees play a role in large crop production, they do not support our native plants and they compete with native pollinators for floral resources.

The Metrowest Conservation Alliance and SVT have launched a project to conserve native pollination systems by encouraging everyone to add some of the specific plants required by at-risk native pollinators to your yard. The Bumble Bee Project is based on the research of Dr. Robert Gegear, a professor of biology at UMass Dartmouth.

If your yard is sunny to partly sunny and has medium-to-dry soil, you can add plants that support at-risk bees. Learn more about the Bumble Bee Project and recommended plants at www.svtweb.org/BBP.



Alex Young

Take a Hike: Hazel Brook

At Hazel Brook Conservation Area in Wayland, a gentle hike over flat terrain passes through a shady pine forest, around the perimeter of a beautiful field, and along the shore of the manmade Stone's Pond. This short walk crosses SVT land as well as conservation restrictions held by SVT and the Town of Wayland.

For a longer walk, visitors can venture into Weston's Ogilvie Town Forest, and even north into Lincoln, crossing a long boardwalk and reaching Lincoln Land Conservation Trust land and Mass Audubon's Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary.

Parking is limited with room for only two or three cars to pull off the road at the trail head along Hazelbrook Lane. Directions and a trail map: www.svtweb.org/HazelBrook



A Changing Climate Series

"Growing Resilience Right Where You Are" is the third installment in SVT's *A Changing Climate* webinar series. Allison Houghton, a regenerative growing consultant, author, and educator, will explore how backyard gardens can play a part in climate change resilience. **Thursday, April 20, 7:00 p.m.** Register at www.svtweb.org/calendar.

Recordings of the first two installments are available on our website. In Session 1, Larry Chretien of Green Energy Consumers Alliance discussed renewable energy options. In Session 2, SVT's Lisa Vernegaard explored how land trusts can play a role in mitigating the effects of climate change. www.svtweb.org/webinars



Be a Weed Warrior: Everyone's Invited



Join SVT for a group outing to pull the invasive plants that are threatening the health of our conservation areas. No experience needed! Each outing lasts two hours:

- Smith Conservation Land, *Littleton*: May 2, 13, 16, and 20
- Turenne Wildlife Habitat, *Southborough*: May 17
- Cedar Hill Conservation Area, *Marlborough*: May 25
- Memorial Forest, *Sudbury*: May 30

Details, times, and registration: www.svtweb.org/calendar



Your Membership Matters

Your membership donations truly help SVT fulfill our mission of protecting natural areas, wildlife habitat, and working farms in the 36 communities surrounding the Sudbury, Assabet, and Concord Rivers.

Annual memberships are the bedrock of our organization, and your regular support ensures that our open spaces stay vibrant for all the people and wildlife who call this region home. Thank you!

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Protecting What You Love

See pages 1 and 4-5



Spring 2023 Program Calendar



All Programs and Volunteer Projects require registration. Space is limited! Sign Up Today. www.svtweb.org/calendar

Plant ID & Natural History Walk Nobscot Scout Reservation, Framingham	April 1 10:00 am – 12:30 pm
Explore Wolbach Farm for Families Wolbach Farm, Sudbury	April 8 1:30 pm – 3:00 pm
A Changing Climate: Growing Resilience Right Where You Are Online	April 20 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Earth Day: History Hike Up Nobscot Nobscot Scout Reservation, Framingham	April 22 9:00 am – 11:00 am
Senior Walk Series Memorial Forest, Sudbury	April 25 9:00 am – 11:00 am
Volunteer Orientation: Virtual Online	April 26 7:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Sights & Sounds of the Early Spring Forest Baiting Brook Welch Reservation, Framingham	April 30 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm
Spring Wildflowers at Forty Caves Forty Caves Conservation Area, Berlin/Canton	May 13 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
Spring Wildflowers Wolbach Farm, Sudbury	May 13 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm
Plant ID & Natural History Walk Horse Meadows Knoll, Harvard	May 14 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm
Senior Walk Series Acton Arboretum, Acton	May 17 9:00 am – 11:00 am

Earth Day is April 22

Join with SVT as we celebrate
and care for the earth!

Nature Walk

History Hike Up Nobscot, April 22, 9:00 a.m.

Projects for National Volunteer Week

Spring Forb Pull Smith Conservation Land, Littleton/Harvard	April 15 9:00 am
Trail Building Highland Ridge Woods, Berlin	April 16 10:00 am
Pull Garlic Mustard and Buckthorn Elliott Concord River Preserve, Carlisle	April 18 1:00 pm
Boardwalk Build Lyons-Cutler, Sudbury	April 19 1:00 pm
Spring Forb Pull Smith Conservation Land, Littleton/Harvard	April 20 1:00 pm
Plastic Solarization Smith Conservation Land, Littleton/Harvard	April 22 9:00 am

