



# Nantucket Conservation Foundation

2023 Annual Report



# *Our Newly Adopted Mission Statement*

In 2023, the Nantucket Conservation Foundation Board of Trustees adopted a new mission statement that aligns with the new Strategic Initiatives of the organization:

The Nantucket Conservation Foundation owns, protects, and stewards over 9,000 acres of land and coastal shoreline, conserves Nantucket's rare and significant natural resources, and engages in impactful ecological research to inform resource management and further our knowledge of Nantucket's unique ecosystems and species. We share our environmental expertise with the wider community and provide educational and recreational opportunities to encourage respectful enjoyment and appreciation of our properties.

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# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

2023 TRUSTEES & ADVISORS

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Nathan Allen  
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Richard Verney

*\* Executive Committee Member*





# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

When the Nantucket Conservation Foundation was founded sixty years ago, our mission was clear: to preserve, protect, and steward the natural landscapes of this island we call home. Over the years, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to safeguard Nantucket's unique habitats, wildlife, and cultural heritage.

As I reflect on the past 60 years, I am grateful for the accomplishments of this organization, and how far we have come in advancing conservation efforts across the island and beyond. This year marks a significant milestone in our organization's history - our 60th anniversary. Six decades of dedicated conservation efforts, ecological research, community engagement, and environmental stewardship have brought us to this remarkable moment.

This year, the Board of Trustees, Advisors, and Staff came together to build a road map for the future of the organization by adopting our new mission statement (seen on the first page of this document), as well as our new strategic priorities that will guide our organization for the next 5 years: to continue to steward our 9,000+ acres of property; advance our research and restoration programs; deepen our relationships with

partner organizations, support community engagement on our properties, and encourage the respectful use and enjoyment of our properties.

As we celebrate this milestone year, we also look ahead to the future with optimism and determination. The challenges facing our environment are ever evolving, and our work is far from finished. With your continued support, we will build upon the successes of the past sixty years and chart a course towards a more resilient future for Nantucket and its inhabitants.

On behalf of the entire team at the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, I extend deep appreciation to each and every one of you who has contributed to our mission. Whether through your financial support, volunteer efforts, advocacy, or just taking a walk on one of our trails, you play a vital role in our success, and for that, we are truly thankful.

With Gratitude,  
Cormac Collier

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cormac Collier".

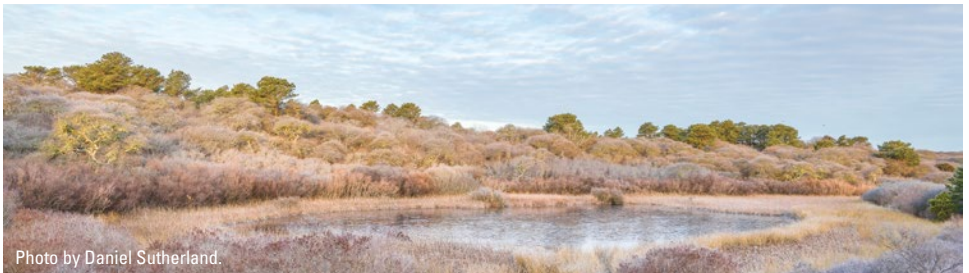


Photo by Daniel Sutherland.



# CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF CONSERVATION ON NANTUCKET



**9,000 acres of land, 100 miles of trails  
available to the community, 365 days a year.**





Photo by Daniel Sutherland.





# TREASURER'S REPORT

CHARLES K. GIFFORD, JR.

2023 was another outstanding year financially for the Nantucket Conservation Foundation.

As a result of the continued generosity of our supporters, Total Contributions and Membership Dues for the year grew to \$6.79 MM, an increase from \$5.31 MM, or 28%, from the prior year. We continue to be humbled by the wide-ranging support of those who share in our mission of preserving the island for everyone. Total Revenue and Support for the year was \$10.7MM, a hefty 48% increase over 2022, buoyed primarily by \$3.0MM in investment income. As always, we are particularly appreciative of the special funding assistance received from our friends at the Tupancy-Harris Foundation.

Our recurring planned giving programs, including The Founders Circle, Conservation Fellows, and Milestone Partners, each continued to grow. The support of these unrestricted funds cannot be understated, as the long-range visibility from the gifts of our most ardent supporters provides our management team with assured

support for the Foundation's education, research, and land conservation programs. In 2023, 28 new families were added across each level bringing the total number of families participating in these programs to 92.

Direct operating costs for the year totaled \$4.5MM, an increase of 12% over 2022, driven primarily by the costs associated with planned new hires to help facilitate our growth. Net Assets, which are comprised almost entirely of our land holdings, increased by 4.1% over the prior year, from \$151.8 MM to \$158.0 MM.

Overall, the Conservation Foundation remains on solid footing as a result of our dedicated team's focus on responsible growth and vigilant cost management.

*The audit of the Financial Statements by Bollus Lynch, LLP for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2023 is in process. The Financial Statements will be on file and available for inspection at the Foundation's office upon the audit completion.*



# STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2023

	12 Months Ending December 31, 2023	12 Months Ending December 31, 2022
<b>REVENUE &amp; SUPPORT</b>		
Contributions	5,536,938	3,649,439
Shawkemo Land Acquisition	-	800,000
In-kind Land Contribution	-	-
Investment Income	3,010,970	(1,934,915)
Grants	683,437	659,118
Membership Dues	1,250,648	1,661,200
Cranberry Revenue	490	982
Gatehouse Revenue	166,475	120,000
Gain on Sale of Property	-	2,182,025
Other Income	96,338	92,338
<b>Total Revenue &amp; Support</b>	<b>10,745,296</b>	<b>7,230,187</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
<b>Program Services:</b>		
Land Management	2,558,262	2,272,735
<b>Supporting Services:</b>		
Management & General	828,045	808,589
Fundraising	1,144,085	972,347
Total Expenses	4,530,392	4,053,671
Change in Net Assets	6,214,904	3,176,516
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	151,798,487	148,621,971
<b>Net Assets, End of Year</b>	<b>158,013,391</b>	<b>151,798,487</b>

The audit of the Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2023 is in process. The Financial Statements will be on file and available for inspection at the Foundation's office upon the audit completion.



# STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2023

	12 Months Ending December 31, 2023	12 Months Ending December 31, 2022
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash & Cash Equivalents	1,077,072	881,500
Accounts Receivable	18,553	-
Pledges Receivable	3,380,876	2,512,218
Prepaid Expenses	42,527	45,960
Investments	29,700,102	24,242,913
Note Receivable	466,742	466,742
Land Held for Conservation	121,226,367	121,226,367
Property & Equipment, Net	3,017,794	2,650,313
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>158,930,033</b>	<b>152,026,013</b>
<b>LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS</b>		
Accounts Payable	236,908	68,243
Accrued Liabilities	69,271	62,235
Other Liabilities	610,463	97,048
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>916,642</b>	<b>227,526</b>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>		
Board Designated	7,447,931	5,854,367
Without Donor Restriction	133,520,241	131,639,625
With Donor Restriction	6,527,973	4,457,830
Permanently Restricted	10,517,246	9,846,665
Total Net Assets	158,013,391	151,798,487
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Net Assets</b>	<b>158,930,033</b>	<b>152,026,013</b>





# DEVELOPMENT REPORT

2023 was another strong fundraising year for the Nantucket Conservation Foundation.

The Foundation reached more of our community than ever before through the winter and summer issues of our Open Spaces printed newsletter, providing insight into the Foundation's work and how to become involved in our mission. This expanded outreach helped increase our donor base, as well as participation in our robust and engaging educational offerings. As we celebrated 60 years of conservation, it was great to see such an increase in people enjoying our excursions, events, and open spaces.

With this growth, NCF created more opportunities to explore our properties with both NCF staff and members. If you were on one of our 50 Mornings for Members walks throughout the year – 40 in the summer and fall and 10 in the winter – you had the opportunity to meet Neil Foley and Allen Reinhard, who shared the history – as well as our current stewardship – of NCF. Our Ecology Excursions introduced our ecology and native landscaping initiatives, botany, and coastal resiliency and wildlife research.

Our Wellness Series programs also expanded in 2023 to include yoga in Squam, mountain biking and kayaking tours, and a multi-week crossing of the Coast-to-Coast trail for senior islanders. This year we hosted our first plein air painting workshop with Nantucket's

own Illya Kagan, where members of the community came out to different NCF properties to paint the natural beauty surrounding them. And, as in past years, we offered boat cruises on the Belle and truck tours for Colleague-level donors, as well as tours of the Milestone Cranberry Bog.

Two of our signature events highlighted the NCF summer season: our 60th Anniversary Bash in the Bog and our Annual Race for Open Space. Our 60th Anniversary Bash in the Bog, a 500-person seated dinner, dancing, and auction, was held on a beautiful evening overlooking the famous Milestone Cranberry Bog. Guests were treated to a night of celebration of the hard work the Foundation has achieved over the past 60 years, and shared insight on where the organization is heading in the future. The night was filled with great food, engaging conversation, dancing, and a shared appreciation of the continued success of the Nantucket Conservation Foundation.

The Foundation's Annual Race for Open Space, broke records with 630 runners and walkers. We also saw over 30 community sponsors support the event. This enhanced participation reflects the community spirit that this event captures year after year.

The Gund family generously offered a challenge grant for pond restoration work on the island, focusing on Capaum and all other ponds on or adjacent to NCF properties. Maintaining good water quality and managing invasive species,

## DEVELOPMENT REPORT

particularly phragmites, is a priority for NCF and other organizations. This challenge grant, which matched contributions on a dollar-for-dollar basis up to \$1.5M, funds remediation work for years to come. In response to this challenge, a long-time supporter suggested we create a new giving program initially focused on the Gund family match. We did and used his proposed name, Conservation Fellows, which is modeled on Milestone Partners. A very generous group joined this new program, and thanks to their support as well as that of another Foundation donor, we secured commitments for 100% of the challenge grant.

The Milestone Partners, Conservation Fellows, and brand-new Foundation Circle programs truly blossomed this

year, as did our popular Trails Fund program. Year-in, year-out, these dedicated supporters continue to show their commitment to our mission. The growing number of contributors to the Trails Fund gives us the ability to improve and expand the network of trails and sand roads that are loved by mountain bikers, runners, walkers, and birders.

The strength of NCF is only possible with the long-term trust and confidence of our many supporters, and the knowledge, guidance, and enthusiastic engagement of our volunteers and staff. By supporting our land and water conservation, science, and stewardship activities, you guarantee that NCF's properties will remain open and free for all visitors to enjoy year-round. Thank you!



Photo by Daniel Sutherland.



# SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

## George A. Fowlkes Scholarships

The 2023 George A. Fowlkes Scholarship Fund provides annual scholarships to qualified graduates of Nantucket High School enrolled in post-secondary school study with a concentration in environmental studies or a closely related field. In honor of George's 21 years of leadership and service to the Foundation, winners are awarded \$2,000 scholarships to help offset the costs of pursuing undergraduate and advanced degrees.

## 2023 | GEORGE A. FOWLKES

### ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES SCHOLARSHIP AWARD WINNERS

**Kipper Buccino**  
Union College

**Eli Fuller**  
University of Vermont

**Julia Fiske**  
Eckerd College

**Mya Kotalac**  
Harvard University

## The Ferguson Family Book Award

The Ferguson Family Education Fund was established by the family of Elizabeth Ford Reighley in 1983 to commemorate her deep commitment to conservation on Nantucket. The fund is designed to help the Foundation educate the public about the fragility of our Island's natural resources. The Foundation's 22nd annual Elizabeth F. Reighley Book Award was presented to **Sarah Swenson**. This Reighley/Ferguson family-funded program provided generous support to purchase ecology books for Sarah to enjoy and continue her academic enrichment.





# ASSOCIATES REPORT

## The Nantucket Conservation Foundation Associates

is a group of dedicated young adults, aged 21-40, who assist in the Foundation’s mission of preserving and protecting the Island’s open spaces and natural habitats. The Associates strive to encourage an appreciation of Nantucket’s fragile environment by increasing participation in Foundation activities by young families and hosting fundraising events.

## 2023 Foundation Associates

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### OFFICERS

#### *President*

Bunny Bispham

Mike Abrahams

Jay Clapp

Gregory Dunbar

Lucy Fowlkes Bell

Scott Estill

Katherine Ghirardelli

Tamara Greenman

Crosby Johnson

Meghan Keneally

Lucinda May

Eliza Loring McGinn

Clay Macfarlane

Jamie Maynard

Jack McGinn

Ashley Mody

Isaac Ro

Dana Ryan

Kat Sullivan

Ethan Ulmer

Lindsay Walker

Missy Walker

Marguerite Wincek

Brace Young

#### *Vice President*

Chris Amory

#### *Secretary*

Mary Lentowski

#### *Treasurer*

Brian Turner



# Nantucket Conservation Foundation



# LAND MANAGEMENT REPORT

This was a demanding season for the land management department. The team was able to accomplish many projects and met all of the goals that were set in the beginning of the year, but had some unforeseen challenges pop up that required creativity and schedule adjustments. Multiple personnel departures took place during the season, equipment had major breakdowns, and invasive beetles infested properties requiring management. The team took on the challenges and powered through them without complaint. By the end of the season the team grew to be five strong and they developed skills that will support NCF for years to come. There is a need to fill one or two other positions, but this is the strongest the team has been for a long time. Donnie, Richard, Angel, Greg, and Nick make up the land management team. These individuals take care of the heavy-lifting and labor-intensive work throughout all 9,000 acres of NCF property. The work that is accomplished on a yearly basis throughout the properties is a tremendous undertaking and would not be possible without the professionals working in the Land Management department.

The annual winter mowing was completed utilizing Kubota tractors and 15ft wide triplex mowers. There are years when over one hundred acres are mowed in order to keep up with habitat management. Mowing must be

completed by April 1st, so to accomplish this in a short time frame, the team kept two mowers active January through the end of March to complete the many acres of mowing. The team jumps into harrowing plots set up by the Science Department once the mowing is complete. The goal is to create pockets of grasslands throughout the Serengeti and Middle Moors where the scrub oak has taken over. The harrows work by shallowly cultivating the soil breaking up the root systems of the scrub oak and exposing the seed bank of the first few inches of the soil. The technique with harrowing was adjusted throughout the season, but we believe we have found the right depth, pattern, and passes that will provide best results.

Road edge mowing became a priority over the winter. NCF acquired a new boom mower to help assist with this job. The boom mower attaches to a skid steer and has a brush cutter and a sickle bar attachment. The mower can reach fourteen feet to the front and side of the machine, allowing the operator to stay in the road and mow back vegetation that impedes traffic flow. Prioritizing the Middle Moors, the boom mower made its way through a majority of the many miles of roads. Overtime the boom mower will make its way throughout the rest of NCF's properties keeping trails and roads open.

Road repair material was screened and stored in the Milestone sand pit.

Holdgate Partners brought their screener and loaders to the site and hired a rock crusher to create gravel. Ten days later there was a two-thousand-yard pile of material ready for the NCF team to use for fixing roads. Over the next few years, property visitors will see roads and trails repaired, providing them with a more enjoyable experience.

An invasive insect called the southern

pine beetle infested its first property on Nantucket at NCF's Westgate entrance to Ram's Pasture. The infestation was discovered in July, but due to nesting protection for the northern long eared bat, the team could not start management until August. The initial assessment of the forest called for 97 trees to come down due to either an active infestation or proximity to an active infestation. Trees were taken down







# LAND MANAGEMENT REPORT

by chainsaw or with a Fecon forestry mulcher. Trees were taken down and then processed into two piles, limbs and boles. The limbs were chipped onsite, but the boles had to be chipped into containers and hauled to the dump. This was necessary to limit the accumulation of mulch on the ground, which would end up inhibiting forest regeneration. By the time the job was finished in October, a total of 225 trees had to be taken down.

The site will be monitored for years to come in hopes of catching a pop-up infestation and managing it before it gets out of control.

The Foundation owns several homes, offices, and maintenance buildings that require maintenance throughout the year. As priorities change and staff levels grow, the use of buildings can change as well. The residence at Squam Farm had an



HVAC system installed to provide heat and AC. This allows the residence to be livable year-round for staff. As NCF's staff continues to grow, so will the need for employee housing.

Office space is essential for a staff member to be productive. With the growing staff, office space continues to be a problem at 118 Cliff Road. To make room for new staff, we had the server room reinstalled in the basement, opening up a large closet on the main floor. This closet was transitioned into office space by installing a window, applying vinyl flooring, a fresh coat of paint, and a desk. Although it is not a large space, it provides an individual privacy to do their job.

The old screening house at the Milestone Cranberry Bog had a new hardwood floor installed and then was sealed with a protective varnish. After years of patching holes in the floor after tractors were pulled out and saved from falling into the basement, a new floor was installed to provide a gathering space for events. The screening house was built in the early 1930's and served as the main support building for the cranberry operation. By maintaining the building, NCF is preserving a piece of Nantucket's history.

Two staff members left the team during the year, Sean Mack and Jim Olney parted ways to continue building their career elsewhere. This left us with two



positions to fill during the season, one in the spring and one in the fall. Angel Landaverde joined the team just in time for the busy season. He joined Donnie in completing all of the land maintenance tasks that are required throughout the year. In October, Greg St. Aubin joined the team as the Facility Maintenance & Land Steward Technician. His role is to stay on top of the many facility projects and support Donnie with land maintenance when needed. Greg will also play a pivotal role in keeping clear communication going between the Ecology and Land Management departments. We feel confident that the team is strong and capable of taking on the next set of challenges as we begin a new season with the Foundation.



# EDUCATION & OUTREACH REPORT

## • Guided Excursions

2023 was another year of growth for our educational programs and community engagement with the Foundation's mission. The hard work of our staff who curated and led these offerings was on display in new and exciting ways. Our popular Mornings for Members walks showcased a new NCF property every week, providing an ecological and historical exploration of iconic trails. With 236 attendees over 17 sessions, these well-attended educational walks were the backbone of our summer programming. Ecology Excursions brought members on in-depth experiences led by our knowledgeable ecologists. Over the 19 science excursions in 2022, 246 attendees learned about NCF's ecological research, habitat restoration, and native plant landscaping projects from the amazing team that directs our science work. Kayak paddle programs expanded in 2023 with the continued partnership with the Egan Maritime Institute on our Folger's Marsh Paddle and the addition of a paddle in Polpis Harbor to showcase our artificial oyster reef with the Town of Nantucket's Selfish Biologists.

Danielle O'Dell's new Southern Pine Beetle Walk helped to describe the identifiers and impact of Southern Pine Beetle outbreaks in the Northeast. The timing of this new walk was roughly one month after discovering an SPB

outbreak in Ram Pasture, providing appropriate evidence of an active infestation that attendees can look out for across the island. Monthly Mornings for Members walks at Windswept Bog prepared dozens of abutters and community members for the upcoming wetland restoration project. After years of planning and surveying, we are finally prepared to break ground and begin the process of rewilding the constrained freshwater wetland soils here. The average number of attendees were up for all styles of programs, building on the success of previous years and bringing more people into our multifaceted ecology and restoration work

The Foundation's free Community Wellness Series continued to expand over the success of the last few years. Our free outdoor yoga sessions allow the public to interact with our properties in a new way and helped us grow our audience for the diverse programs we offer. All Level Yoga Flows and Evening Restorative Classes led by the talented instructors at 1111 Nantucket and freelance teachers Lynne Begier and Ieva Aldins brought mindfulness each month of the summer season. To aid in our outdoor yoga program, the screen house at Milestone Bog has been used on days when the weather turned sour. Increased attendance on our Adventurous Mountain Bike Rides through the Middle Moors led by Jim Olney made excellent use of Jim's role as NCF's Land





Use Manager and his experience riding these trails since he was a kid. Plein Air Workshops led by renowned island artist Illya Kagan were a great success and a draw for people looking to learn how a professional artist sets up their canvas to capture Nantucket's beautiful landscapes.

Partnerships with schools other educators on the island continue to grow and develop. Our Education Coordinator and Ecologist Neil Foley led ecology field trips and learning programs with students from the Nantucket Public School, Lighthouse School, New School, and Children's House along with a Naturalist walk for the Education Interns at the Maria Mitchell Association. Neil and Guthrie Diamond of the Nantucket Land Bank again led a fall series of walks through the Coast to Coast Trail for people over 60. The group walked a few miles each week over 8 weeks to make this 24.7 mile trail approachable and

enjoyable for those who can't participate in the Land Bank's annual Cross-Island Hike.

### • ACKTrails

The free ACKTrails app has continued to provide approachable and adventurous routes for residents and visitors to experience Nantucket's open space. We often get user feedback that the app has shown them new parts of the island to appreciate, even those who have lived here for years or have been visiting for decades. With the Nantucket Land Bank as a full partner and the addition of the Sconset Trust, we have been able to expand to 75 trails and 11 parks from around the island. Improvements on the user experience and alerts for hunting season added to the function of this community resource. With 2,456 total users of the app over the year and 367 active users, this functional and descriptive app has room to grow.





# ECOLOGY DEPARTMENT REPORT



2023 Ecology Team: (Top row l-r) Bridget O'Donnell, Kelly Omand, Isaac Hersh, Danielle O'Dell, Karen Beattie, Gracie Bell, Greg St. Aubin, Meredith Broadus, (front row l-r) Jen Karberg, Hannah Leggett, Amanda Shallit, Jisun Reiner, Bradlie Morgan.

The work of NCF's Ecological Research, Stewardship and Restoration Department (Ecology Department) encompasses our Living Laboratory of 9,000 acres of unique and fragile conservation land. The department's focus unites an appreciation and understanding of Nantucket's natural resources through ecological research, stewardship, habitat restoration, multi-level public engagement and educational outreach.

In support of the Foundation's newly adopted strategic priorities the Ecology Department undertook field research and restoration monitoring, organized research partnerships, implemented land restoration and stewardship, and conducted diverse types of educational and professional outreach during 2023.

This year, we hired 9 highly qualified

year-round, seasonal staff and volunteers to assist with fieldwork and further program development. Greg St. Aubin worked as our Coaue Ranger/Shorebird Monitor and, following the summer season, moved to the Land Maintenance Department as our Facility Maintenance and Land Stewardship Technician. Gracie Bell worked as our Shorebird Technician through the summer and in the off season as our Stewardship Technician. Jisun Reiner joined our team as a year-round Coastal Ecology Research Technician. Additionally, we hired two seasonal Plant Ecology Field Assistants, Hannah Leggett and Amanda Shallit, who joined us for botanical and ecological field work as well as a Wildlife Technician, Isaac Hersh. This year we hosted a Master's Student from Northeastern University, Bradlie Morgan as well as a few fantastic volunteers, Meredith Broadus and Bridget O'Donnell.

## • Restoration Ecology Program

### *Windswept Bog*

We completed over four years of planning, research, permitting, and fundraising to bring our Windswept Bog Wetland Restoration Project to reality with a plan to initiate construction in January 2024. Working with our project partners (Jessica Cohn from the Massachusetts Division of Ecological Restoration's Cranberry Bog Program (MassDER) and Michael Soares and Dr. Julianne Busa from Fuss & O'Neill environmental engineering) we finalized restoration design to create connected wetland function through the retired cranberry bog. Late in 2023, the project went out to bid and project partners were excited to select SumCo Eco-Contracting, based in Peabody MA, to implement our restoration work. SumCo has prior work experience on Nantucket and has been involved in previous cranberry bog restoration projects in southeastern Massachusetts.

Work on the planning, research and upcoming construction of this large-scale restoration project has been generously



2023 Botany Field Assistants Hannah Leggett and Amanda Shalit sample a plot at Windswept Bog. Photo by Kelly Omand.



Seasonal technician Isaac Hersh and volunteer intern Meredith Broadus show a radio-tagged spotted turtle and explain our research to members attending a guided walk to learn about our wetland restoration plans at Windswept Bog. Photo by Karen Beattie.

funded by competitive grants from MassDER, the Richard King Mellon Foundation, and the Southeast New England Program's Watershed Implementation Program. NCF is excited for the next phase of this restoration project: actual construction commencing in early 2024. Successful planning, design and fundraising for this large and complicated restoration project is due to our experienced and committed partners involved at all stages of the project.

### *Pond Management Projects*

We again partnered with the Nantucket Land and Water Council to monitor and manage harmful algae blooms (or HABs) detected in our ponds in recent summers. We worked with SWCA Environmental Consultants to plan and permit treatment at Gibbs and Capaum Ponds, which includes alum applications (to control phosphorus which feeds algae growth) and algacide treatment (to control the algae itself). This year, we also contracted



# ECOLOGY DEPARTMENT REPORT

with SOLitude Lake Management (a nationwide environmental firm) to implement the island's first liquid alum (or Polyaluminum Chloride) application. Prior to this year, all alum has been applied in granular form. The liquid alum was brought to Nantucket via tanker truck and applied as a water column treatment via boat with a trailing application hose – a more efficient way to administer the alum across the pond. All work was performed consistent with the products and methodologies stipulated in permitting through the Nantucket Conservation Commission.

Results at both ponds treated with PAC showed an initial decrease in phosphorus. However, the fully recommended dose of PAC could not be administered due to limited tanker truck capacity and availability of ferry reservations. The initial results are highly promising, and we are currently assessing options for applying a higher dose of PAC to these ponds in 2024, with a goal of achieving more prolonged reductions in phosphorus and more effective algae control.

Other pond management projects undertaken in 2023 include continued HAB monitoring and treatment at Pest House Pond in Shimmo, as well as ongoing non-native, invasive Phragmites management along NCF-owned shorelines of Hummock and Long Ponds. We have also continued our collaborative weekly pond surveys with the Land and Water

Council, Town of Nantucket, and several additional partners to provide notifications to the public about the current locations of HABs and their potential serious health impacts to both humans and pets. This was another particularly problematic summer for HABs across the island due to warm temperatures and drought conditions. A grant from the Gund family, in memory of former Trustee member Lulie Gund, provides generous support for our pond management efforts, along with contributions from abutting property owners and island wide residents.

## • Wildlife Ecology Program

### *Southern Pine Beetle and Pitch Pine*

The Southern Pine Beetle is an insect native to the southern U.S. and is known to experience occasional outbreaks that can have major impacts on pine stands through its range. Due to climate change, the northeast has been experiencing milder winters which has allowed the northward range expansion of southern pine beetles. We have been collaborating with foresters from the Forest Health Program at the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to monitor for the presence of southern pine beetles on Island.

In 2023, the first outbreak of southern pine beetle was detected on Nantucket at the Foundation's West Gate entrance to Ram Pasture and confirmed with assistance from the Forest Health Director at DCR.



Danielle O'Dell leading NCF staff field trip to examine Southern Pine Beetle impacts at West Gate.

NCF immediately began developing a forest cutting plan and obtaining permits from DCR and MA Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP). Additionally, we began work with a licensed MA forester to create a suppression cutting plan and survey of the site. The general recommendation to control SPB outbreaks is to cut trees as soon as possible as this will kill the tree (beetles will not feed on dead material) and serves to disrupt the pheromones (chemical substance produced and released into the environment) that beetles emit to lure more beetles into that tree. NCF Land Management Crew, with additional help from Bartlett Tree, Toscana Corp., and Nantucket Yard Guard, completed suppression cutting of the infested trees

at West Gate in November 2023 with the removal of approximately 220 pitch pine trees from the site.

Looking forward, NCF staff will continue to monitor for southern pine beetle outbreaks during 2024 while also collaborating with our contracted licensed forester to prepare forest management plans aimed at increasing the health and resilience of our pitch pine forests while being prepared for future suppression efforts. The Nantucket Southern Pine Beetle Working Group, made up of representatives from Nantucket's land-owning conservation groups, landscapers, and local forestry professionals will be meeting to review lessons learned from the West Gate outbreak, coordinate





# ECOLOGY DEPARTMENT REPORT

monitoring of all pitch pine forests going forward, implement proactive forest management plans and discuss the ability of all the conservation groups to respond to future outbreaks given the expense, equipment needed and how quickly these beetles spread throughout a forest. NCF will continue to utilize adaptive management to make our forests more resilient and respond to changes caused by climate change.

### *Northern long-eared bats*

In a collaboration with Dr Samantha Hoff, who recently obtained her doctorate from SUNY Albany, NCF ecologists co-authored a recently published article in the Journal of Mammalogy titled “Seasonal roost characteristics and fall behavior of coastal populations of Northern Myotis (*Myotis septentrionalis*).” This manuscript describes the types of roosts and hibernacula that the federally endangered Northern long-eared bats use in the fall and winter on Nantucket, Martha’s Vineyard and Long Island and the behaviors that may explain the continued persistence of this species in northeastern coastal areas despite the threats from White-nose Syndrome.

### *Nantucket Wildlife Outreach and Education*

In the early spring and summer, volunteers joined our science staff to conduct breeding horseshoe crab surveys during the high tide (day and night!) at our Warren’s Landing Property. These surveys are part of a long-term dataset (almost 15 years!) that help us track the health of horseshoe crab populations – 2023 saw a significant increase

in the number of breeding horseshoe crabs. This citizen science activity is a great way to participate in ecological monitoring.

This year, we continued many of our Ecology Excursions for members including “Creatures of the Night” to learn about predator-prey relationships and mist net for bats, our Shorebird walks to explore shorebird breeding sites, and visits to West Gate/Ram Pasture to learn about forest management and the signs of a southern pine beetle outbreak.

### • **Plant Ecology/Botany Program**

#### *Nantucket Flora Project and Teaching Herbarium*

The Nantucket Flora Project is an ongoing collaborative effort to update the list of plant species on Nantucket. This past year we continued to learn more about our rare and unique plants and their distribution on the island while preparing the flora as a manuscript for publication. In the NCF Herbarium, we surpassed 1,000 vouchers (mounted plant specimens) in early December. These important records are held in our office and used as a teaching and research tool. We deposited an additional 85 vouchers with the New England Botanical Club Herbarium at Harvard University as part of the Nantucket Flora Update. Included among these were several new species records for the island as well as a detailed willow genus collection of over 32 individual willows. Collections like these are useful in documenting Nantucket’s current

plant diversity for posterity; depositing the records in regional herbaria facilitates their inclusion in research and regional flora updates.

### *Plant Ecology Research*

The Plant Ecology team conducted several surveys for rare plants on NCF properties including New England blazing star (*Liatris novae-angliae*), which experienced unusually large and robust populations in 2023, and documenting multiple rare species at Windswept Bog prior to restoration. Rare species surveys document trends in rare species populations on NCF properties over time, which allows us to plan our management and restoration activities to support rare species populations and help the state plan guidelines for rare species protection.

### *Native Plant and Botany Outreach*

This year we continued outreach projects to encourage the use of native plants for landscaping on Nantucket. Using native plants in our home and business landscapes increases habitat for native wildlife and provides resilience to climate change, but people often find it difficult to imagine the rewards of a native plant garden. NCF's office landscaping continued to evolve with the addition of new plantings and plant species signs in the wildflower meadow. New ecology outreach programming this year helped make native plants more accessible to our members with a second season of popular native garden tours at the NCF office. We also hosted botanically focused educational



Jisun Reiner, Coastal Ecology Research Technician, monitoring vegetation and salt marsh health at an NCF salt marsh. Photo by Jen Karberg.

walks at Squam Forest and a botanical specimen preparation walk and workshop to learn about how scientists collect and document plant species.

For NCF's August 2023 Annual Meeting, we welcomed speaker Dr. Doug Tallamy, author, and advocate for native species in landscaping. Dr. Tallamy also joined our Plant Ecology team to co-lead a walk exploring NCF's native plant tours at our office landscaping.

As we continued planning for our expanded Native Plant Propagation & Seed Production Program, we spent 2023 learning from off island partners. In November, we welcomed Tim Boland, Executive Director of Polly Hill Arboretum on Martha's Vineyard to consult and give a public presentation on the importance of using varied techniques for growing native plants.

This year we focused on collecting seeds that will be used in our Windswept Bog Wetland Restoration Project, targeting a range of species that will complement the



# ECOLOGY DEPARTMENT REPORT

existing high plant diversity at the site, and offer material for revegetating areas that will be disturbed during the construction in the late winter-early spring of 2024.

## • Coastal Ecology Program

### *Salt Marsh Health Monitoring*

A primary focus of NCF's Coastal Ecology Program for the 2023 field season was exploring NCF-owned salt marshes across the island to document baseline salt marsh condition and health. This research will help NCF understand the ecology of our salt marshes now and current impacts of climate change. In the future, we will use this work to prioritize salt marsh restoration projects. This summer, Jisun Reiner, our Coastal Ecology Research Technician, visited 5 different salt marshes owned by NCF: Eel Point, Pocomo Marsh, Little Neck, Madequecham, and Second Point on Coatue. At each marsh she collected information on salt marsh plant health and composition, salt marsh elevation, tidal hydrology, salinity, and soil conditions. From these measurements, we will be able to understand if the marsh is currently healthy, impacts of changing sea level, and if it has a place to migrate to as sea level rises.

### *The Oyster Reef and Salt Marsh Resilience*

We designed an intertidal oyster reef, the first in Massachusetts, to provide resilience to a salt marsh shoreline and improve Polpis Harbor health. This year,

we saw how well the reef, the oysters and the salt marsh survived their first winter after installation. In collaboration with the Town of Nantucket Natural Resource Department, we constructed the reef using oyster castles set with oyster spat (baby oysters) and installed just offshore of our salt marsh restoration area at Medouie Creek. The reef itself survived its first winter and significantly slowed the force of tides and storm waves hitting the salt marsh shoreline. Sediment began to build up behind the reef and may provide an area for the salt marsh grass to grow into, providing a natural Living Shoreline which will make this area more resilient to rising sea levels. The oysters grew phenomenally, increasing in size to cover the reef castles. The oysters will continue to grow on each other, building up the oyster population and working to improve water quality in the marsh area. In 2023 we hosted a Master's student with the Northeastern University Three-Seas Graduate Program. Bradlie Morgan worked with NCF ecologists to design research questions around the oyster reef including its impacts on sediment movement and biodiversity on the reef. Bradlie defended her Master's research in December and received her graduate degree.

## • Climate Change and Coastal Ecology Outreach/Education

NCF has become an island-recognized expert on coastal ecology and nature-based



Gracie Bell and Greg St. Aubin holding just-banded American oystercatcher chicks. Photos by Danielle O'Dell.

solutions to climate change. Our education and outreach help us connect our research to our members and the public.

Our “Coastal Ecology of Nantucket” spring course brought island residents together for 5 weeks to learn about coastal ecology in the classroom and through field trips across the island. In its third year, this course examined the historic, current, and future use of Nantucket’s coastline through the lens of its ecological importance and resilience. Conducted in collaboration with the Linda Loring Nature Foundation, this course has quickly become a popular island educational activity in the off-season.

In 2023, NCF launched the first annual Nantucket Climate Change Summit in September. This Summit, in partnership with the Linda Loring Nature Foundation and sponsored by ReMain Nantucket and the Great Harbor Yacht Club, provided a baseline state of climate change impacts locally on Nantucket as well as examples

of adaptation from groups including the Nantucket Islands Land Bank, NCF, LLNF, the Nantucket Historical Association and the Town of Nantucket. This Summit brought a common language to understanding climate change on Nantucket and exploring how we are already adapting to future change. This annual event will continue in the future to bring the Nantucket community together and encourage investment in climate change adaptation on Nantucket.

### • Other Projects

In addition to these major projects, the Ecology staff shared our expertise on multiple local and regional committees, workgroups, and professional meetings. We also continued many long-term, ongoing projects: annual nesting shorebird monitoring and protection, research on deer browse impacts in sandplain grasslands, non-native, invasive species management, dune stabilization and restoration at Hither Creek, research on disk harrowing as a sandplain grassland restoration technique, native plant species cultivation for habitat restoration projects, and participation in the Nantucket Biodiversity Initiative’s collaborative efforts.

The Ecological Research, Stewardship and Restoration Department extends our sincerest gratitude to everyone that contributed to the success of our work over the past year - especially our generous donors and dedicated Board of Trustees.





## 2023 Batacular Fall Fun Day

Fall 2023 brought back our Batacular Bike Race, as well as a free community Fall Fun Day to celebrate Nantucket's open spaces and the changing of the seasons. The day started with 75 bikers racing through an offroad course through the Middle Moors that covered over 16 miles of beautiful trails. The Batacular Bike Race not only brings people out to enjoy biking out on our trails, but it also helps us raise awareness for the Northern long-eared bat, an endangered species that our team of wildlife ecologists help to research and protect.

Following the bike race, Nantucket families gathered at the Milestone Cranberry Bog to enjoy a Nanpuppet show, dance in the rain to Dalton & The Sheriffs, and enjoy local food provided by Nantucket food trucks. Our Land Management team brought families around the cranberry bog in a classic tractor-style hayride, and children painted their own pumpkins and played games.

This event showcased what Nantucket is all about: bringing people together to support our local community, celebrating the changing of the seasons, and having some family fun along the way.



# RACE FOR OPEN SPACE

Our 60th Anniversary Race for Open Space was our most successful race to date! On July 1st, a record-breaking total of 630 participants joined in for the 5K, 10K, or completed a 2-mile walk. This annual event brings together serious runners, casual joggers, walkers, and our dedicated supporters of conservation. Proceeds from the Race went to the Foundation's Land Fund which helps preserve and protect the Island's invaluable open spaces. Local businesses sponsored the race with 37 local organizations contributing to the race's success.

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As a member of the Foundation's Board of Trustees from 1978 until her death, Sallie Gail Harris Tupancy learned about the importance of open space protection and was one of the Foundation's strongest supporters. Together with her husband Oswald ("Tup") Tupancy, Sallie created the Tupancy-Harris Foundation in 1987 as a way of supporting the Conservation Foundation as well as a variety of other organizations which they felt benefited Nantucket's year-round population. Today, the Conservation Foundation receives a generous annual grant in support of its organizational operations and to help bridge some of the gap that exists between membership revenues and expenses associated with the responsible stewardship of over 9,000 acres.

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**The Foundation would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Doug Burden, Executor of the Tupancy-Harris Foundation, for his support and generosity.**





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Foundation Circle, Conservation Fellows, and Milestone Partners have a strong understanding and sense of ownership for the work of the Foundation. A special appreciation event is held on-island each summer, and they are invited to meet with the Foundation's Board of Trustee at their winter meeting in January. Members also receive advance notice of special events and are eligible for personalized, small group tours of Foundation properties.

For more information about becoming a Foundation Circle, Conservation Fellow, or Milestone Partner, please contact the Development Office at 508-228-2884.



# TRAILS FUND

Our Trails Fund supports the design, creation, and enhanced maintenance of more than 45 miles of mountain biking, walking, running, and birding trails, as well as more than 50 miles of sand roads that traverse Foundation properties.

While one-time gifts are always welcome, and we received many during 2023, we annually recognize those members of the Nantucket Conservation Foundation who generously gave or pledged at least \$2,500, and often much more, over five years in restricted annual giving to make this work possible.

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