



2011

Scituate Conservation Commission Annual Report

March 2012

*"WORKING TO CONSERVE
SCITUATE'S NATURAL &
COMMUNITY RESOURCES"*

The Scituate Conservation Commission exists to help the community and its citizens sustain their environment and quality of life while meeting their economic needs.

We are a non-regulatory, town organization dedicated to:

- Identifying and conserving Scituate's important natural resources;
- Improving the knowledge base from which land use and natural resource decisions are made;
- Building local capacity to protect and manage natural resources as our town grows;
- Conserving our town's unique community character;
- Continuing the Town's legacy as the steward of the state's primary drinking water supply—the Scituate Reservoir.

For More Information

Contact:

Scituate

Conservation

Commission

P.O. Box 328

North Scituate, RI 02857

Gloria Loyd, Town Hall

647-2822

Lawton Farm Management Activities in 2011

A number of management activities this year at Lawton Farm were funded through NRCS grant monies and supervised by Mike Capirchio of the Scituate Conservation Commission:

- Lime was applied to improve the habitat quality for the grassland-nesting birds and some invasives were removed by hand in the front hayfield.
- Dave Pancarowicz mowed the hayfield in October, and obtained grant monies from NRCS to remove invasives from one stone wall. He will mow the back fields once the ground is sufficiently hard and dry.
- Dave Renzi has removed invasives in several projects at Lawton Farm, and will follow up to maintain the invasives removal in 2012.
- The Bird and Vegetation Survey was conducted again by Sean Camillieri of URI (June 2011). A 30% increase in birds was recorded. Results can be viewed online at www.scituatericonservation.org



The Conservation Commission supports the manufacture and installation in 2012 of an educational, Grassland Nesting Birds sign, designed by Cindy Gianfrancesco and Sara Adams, to promote public knowledge of the importance of the grassland habitat at Lawton Farm to Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark and to heighten public interest in the survival of these remarkable and endangered birds. Permissions and high-resolution-photograph files were obtained from eminent photographers for the sign.

BOBOLINK *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*



The Bobolink averages 7 inches in length, 17.5 inches in wingspan, and 1.5 ounces in weight!

The male Bobolink's breeding plumage is like a backwards band and it is the only bird to have a black belly and white back.

The male Bobolink is the only bird to molt twice a year, changing back to a camouflaged plumage similar to the female's.

Bobolinks produce only one brood per year with both parents caring for the young.



In the bird Olympics, the Bobolink would win the gold medal for the longest migration, traveling over 10,000 miles round trip, from southern North America to South America and back.

GRASSLAND NESTING BIRDS THE LAWTON FARM

TOWN OF SCITUATE
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AREA



The grassland fields at Lawton Farm

DID YOU KNOW?

- Grassland nesting birds' optimum habitat is over 50 acres of open fields to successfully nest
- Populations are in decline due to loss of habitat from early mowing, development, and reforestation of open fields
- Feeding primarily on insects, they provide beneficial pest control
- Elaborate nests are built on the ground, often with canopies and tunnels to provide camouflage
- RIDEM has identified Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark as species in greatest need of conservation
- Mowing after 1 August is an important management strategy at Lawton Farm to increase populations of these threatened birds
- Changes to places like Lawton Farm could negatively alter the birds' habitat and breeding success

EASTERN MEADOWLARK *Sturnella magna*



Eastern Meadowlark males are vivid singers in the spring as they attempt to attract multiple mates.

Male and female Meadowlarks have similar markings.

Eastern Meadowlarks may produce 2 or 3 broods per year, with both parents caring for the young.



They are year-round residents in most of their range. Only those in Canada and New England migrate south.

Additional Lawton Farm, Westconnaug Meadows, and Tasca Field Management Activities

Following tropical storm Irene, downed trees were cut and removed at Westconnaug and Lawton Farm.

The Tasca Field Management Plan is a work in progress with the Youth Soccer Association and the Conservation Commission jointly. Chris Modisette will oversee the details of the new management plan for Tasca Field with turf management expert Brian Boesch of URI.

Alice M. Howland 2011 Conservation Award

Chair Thomas Angell presented the 2011 Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to Robert R. Budway for his many conservation activities on behalf of the Town of Scituate. Budway regularly attended the Commission's meetings as liaison from the Town Council and consistently supported conservation goals in Scituate. He worked on the acquisition of development rights for the Brightman Farm, the Knowlton Farm and the Knight Farm, and worked on the purchase of the Tasca Field.

The Alice M. Howland Conservation Award recognizes an individual, group or organization rendering outstanding service, either recently or over a period of years, to natural resource conservation in the Town of Scituate. The award is dedicated in the memory of Alice M. Howland, formerly of Hope, one of Scituate's conservation pioneers. Previous recipients include Mr. Alvah Vernava (2003), Mr. Alfred Hawkes (2004), Mr. James Doris (2005), Ms. Diana Reisman (2006), Mr. Chris Modisette (2007), Mr. Paul Dolan (2008), Hope Associates (2009), and Mr. Hans Bergey (2010).



Tom Angell presents the Alice Howland Award to Bob Budway.



Paul Dolan presents NRICD Award to Chris Modisette.

Northern RI Conservation District "Educator of the Year" Award

Paul Dolan presented to Chris Modisette the "Educator of the Year" Award from NRICD for his dedication to enhancing conservation awareness through education.

Arbor Day Celebrations, May 2011

This was the 25th year that Arbor Day celebrations were held in the Town. Trees were planted this year at North Scituate, Hope, and Clayville elementary schools, at the High School, and 2 trees were planted at the Chopmist Center. Many thanks to Hope Associates, the Gentian Garden Club, the Rhode Island Tree Council, the Scituate School Department and the teachers and staff at the various schools for their assistance with this year's events. Special thanks go to Paul Dolan and Chris Modisette for their dedication and support for Arbor Day at the schools and for ongoing mulching and forestry instruction at the High School.



Scituate Elementary School



Hope Elementary School



Clayville Elementary School



Scituate High School



Chopmist Hill Center

In the past 25 years, more than 6,000 school children have attended Arbor Day events and 122 trees have been planted to honor the importance of trees in the environment.

Property Steward Program in Fourth Year

People willing to function as “Property Stewards” by walking one of the properties (Lawton Farm or Westconnaug Meadows, especially) once a month and then sending an online paragraph to the Commission regarding the condition of the property, **please call Ruth Strach, 934-2277.**

Providence Water Supply Board Public Field Tours

Scituate Conservation Commission members were pleased to attend a number of public field tours sponsored by the PWSB in 2011 in Scituate Reservoir watershed areas. These pictures were taken at the March 2011 field tour.



Workshops and Celebrations in 2011 Sponsored or Co-sponsored by the Scituate Conservation Commission

- 9th Annual Meeting, March 2011
- Arbor Day Ceremonies Wednesday, May 4 and Friday, May 13, 2011 at the Scituate schools and Chopmist Center
- BioBlitz event at Joslin Farm, June 10 and 11, 2011 organized in partnership with the RI Natural History Survey and the Roger Williams Park Zoo. Scituate Conservation Commission helped to sponsor this event. Cindy Gianfrancesco represented the Commission as a participant in this event. More than 900 different species of life were counted by the many volunteers who participated.
- Deer Management on Providence Water Property. The Scituate Conservation Commission co-hosted this public presentation with the Providence Water Supply Board on August 23, 2011 at the Chopmist Hill Center.
- Low Impact Development (LID) Site Planning and Design Workshop by Scott Millar, Chief, Office of Sustainable Watersheds, RIDEM and Jennifer West, Coastal Training Program Coordinator, Narragansett Bay Research Reserve, September 13, 2011 at the Chopmist Hill Center.

Special Thanks

Our heartfelt thanks go to Leo Thompson, newly resigned from the Land Trust, and Cheryl Dexter, newly resigned from the Conservation Commission, for their many years of dedicated service to conserve and protect the natural resources of the Town of Scituate. Their work has benefitted all of us.

Open Space Saves Tax Dollars

(courtesy of Janet Coit, former Director, The Nature Conservancy, and current Director of the RI Department of Environmental Management)

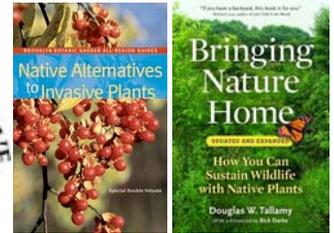
“In Rhode Island communities where this has been carefully studied, for each dollar of tax revenue a new home brings to a town, the cost to the community in schools, police, fire, public works and other services ranges from \$1.05 to \$1.46. Who pays the difference in revenue to expenses? You and I. On the other hand, open space and working lands cost only 31 cents to 46 cents for every dollar of revenue they generate. Do the math—protecting open space and working lands makes solid economic sense for all of us. Once a piece of open space is developed into residential housing, the town is faced with increased costs that outpace the added taxes from the new housing. Farms, forests and other open spaces are good for Rhode Islanders. Rhody Fresh milk, the wine from our East Bay vineyards, fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers markets, clean water, forest and wood products, or the nursery plants in your yard, all come from our working lands. Currently, 28 of Rhode Island’s 36 school districts buy locally raised or grown products. This works perfectly with the state’s initiative to make school meals and snacks healthier and more nutritional for our children. Local agriculture is a growing sector of our economy, and conserving these productive lands is good for our food security and our health. Residents understand that the forests, fields, and wetlands that recharge public aquifers and reservoirs are necessary for clean drinking water, and that the state’s rivers, marshes and coastal ponds support our fisheries. People know that these lands and waters will not continue to support the state’s economy and enhance our quality of life without efforts devoted to protecting them for the future.”

Invasive Plants in our Forests: What Can Be Done?

James Barnes, Project Coordinator for the Forest Health Works Project was our guest speaker at the March 8, 2011 Annual Meeting. He gave a comprehensive overview of several non-native plants that, in our area, are out-competing native plants because native insects don't eat them. While most in the audience knew of the rampant and unwelcome spread of the multiflora rose, and the spread of purple loosestrife in wetland areas, the "mile-a-minute vine" is new to the state, and is the "kudzu of New England," according to Barnes. Japanese barberry is still sold and purchased as a shade tolerant ornamental, but should be banned before it invades more of our woodland areas. Japanese knotweed is an invasive that establishes along roadsides and spreads every time it's mowed. Barnes advised those of us who might be landscaping to select native plants over non-natives. Forest Health Work Project (FHWP) recommends "Rhody Native" labeled plants. Two books especially recommended were *Bringing Nature Home* by Doug W. Tallamy and *Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants* published by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.



James Barnes speaks on invasives at our 2011



Providence Water Supply Board

Rich Blodgett from the PWSB spoke to the Scituate Conservation Commission Annual Meeting attendees in March 2011 about the Board's ongoing successes and plans in purchasing land and development rights for watershed area protection. Leo Thompson of the Scituate Land Trust and Jon Vernava of the Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust have contributed to the PWSB deliberations and have assisted in the selection of properties in the Scituate Reservoir watershed area for possible purchase or development-rights purchase.

Scituate Conservation Commission

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401.647-2822 or
Ruth Strach 401.934-2277



"WORKING TO CONSERVE SCITUATE'S NATURAL RESOURCES"

Mission Statement

To promote and develop natural resources, to protect watershed resources, and to preserve natural aesthetic areas within the town.

Current Members

Thomas Angell, Chair

Ruth Strach, Vice-Chair

Sara Adams

Michael Capirchio

Cheryl Dexter (until December 2011)

Cynthia Gianfrancesco

Jon Vernava

Gloria Loyd, Clerical Assistant

We're on the Web!

www.scituatericonservation.org

Join us on our outings in 2012!