

# Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2018 Annual Report

March 2019

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

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

We are non-regulatory, town organizations 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  
and Scituate Land Trust

P.O. Box 328

North Scituate, RI 02857

(401) 647-2822

[www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)

## ***Bluebird Houses at Lawton Farm***

The annual bird survey at Lawton Farm indicated increased sightings of bluebirds over the last several years. Bluebirds, and more than 60 other species in North America, are cavity nesters. Rather than make their own nests, these birds take advantage of existing nooks and crannies in trees. But today, as natural cavities have become fewer and farther between, cavity nesting species such as Bluebird increasingly rely on human-made homes. To keep populations healthy, there has been effort across the country to erect and tend bluebird houses. Over the past few decades, they've helped all three bluebird species recover from a declining population.

In an effort to further improve the bird habitat at Lawton Farm, a team of local Eagle Scout candidates installed a series of Bluebird houses this past September. The Conservation Commission and Land Trust greatly appreciate such assistance from the community and look forward to seeing our feathered friends take up residence this spring!



**Local Eagle Scout Candidates Install  
Bluebird Houses at Lawton Farm**



**Completed Bluebird Houses at Lawton Farm**

### ***Alice M. Howland 2018 Conservation Award***

Rob Bower and Tom Angell, chairs of the Land Trust and Conservation Commission, presented this year's Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to Barbara Colvin and, posthumously, to her husband, Lloyd Colvin. Among their conservation achievements are Lloyd's role in helping to make Lawton Farm a Scituate Land Trust property more than 25 years ago, and Barbara's work for many years with both Hope Associates and the Gentian Garden Club. Most recently Barbara was instrumental in helping to establish the Blue Star Memorial Garden on the North Scituate Village Green. This is the first time the Alice Howland Award has been presented to a couple and it was a pleasure to recognize the combined work of the Colvins and their contributions to our town!

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. A perpetual tree plaque commemorating all recipients of the Alice Howland Award now hangs in the Town Council Chambers. Each year the new recipient's name is engraved on a metal leaf and added to the tree. 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), Mr. Hans Bergey (2010), Mr. Bob Budway (2011), Mr. Ted Richard (2012), Mr. John Gorham (2013), Mr. Jon Vernava (2014), Ms. Shannon Donovan (2015), Gentian Garden Club (2016), Mr. Michael Capirchio (2017), and Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Colvin (2018).



**Thomas Angel presents Barbara Colvin with the 2018 Alice M. Howland Award**



**Perpetual tree plaque commemorating Alice M. Howland Award recipients**



**Dr. Rick McKinney presents at the 2018 Annual Meeting**

### ***Conservation Commission 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting***

Postponed again this year by a March blizzard, the 16th annual meeting of the Scituate Conservation Commission and Land Trust was held in April at the Chopmist Center. Dr. Rick McKinney, USEPA Research Ecologist and Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Rhode Island, discussed the annual bird surveys conducted at Lawton Farm. These surveys have revealed an increasing trend in bird species richness since 2014, as well as an increase in the total number of bobolink and shrubland bird species. "All the work being done at Lawton is worth it!" Wonderful news for members of both the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, as well as all the supporters and bird watchers at Lawton Farm.



**Tom Angell presents Robert Fain with Stewardship Pin at 2018 Annual Meeting**

Tom Angell also presented a Conservation Commission Stewardship pin to Mr. Robert Fain for his service as a property steward at Westconnaug Meadows in Clayville. Robert's trail work was outstanding for many years!

### *Bird Survey Points to Success in Managing Hayfields at Lawton Farm*

The seventh annual bird survey at Lawton Farm was conducted in June 2018 and indicated a continued sustainable trend of species richness and abundance. Particularly encouraging were the sightings of Bobolink near the brook for the third straight year. Prior to 2016, no Bobolink had been sighted in this field. The continuing strong count is a sign that ongoing hayfield management strategies are paying dividends. Jeffrey Cook, a Foster dairy farmer, has continued his partnership with the Conservation Commission, mowing the fields late in the year to provide prime habitat during the spring and summer nesting season.

To identify breeding birds and evaluate habitat preferences of different species, point count surveys were conducted at three sites within Lawton Farm representing shrubland, forest, and field habitats. In general, survey results in 2018 were similar to the previous year's survey results with respect to species richness and overall bird abundance.

Highlights of the 2018 bird survey include:

- The total species richness recorded this year (38) was comparable to that recorded in recent years, consistent with the increased species richness observed since 2014. This year the five most abundant species were Bobolink, American Robin, Red-eyed Vireo, Gray Catbird, and Eastern Towhee.
- Over the seven consecutive years that this series of surveys has been carried out, a total of 63 unique species have been recorded at Lawton Farm.
- Bobolinks continue to be observed at Lawton Farm in substantial numbers in Field 1 and 2. This year Bobolinks were again observed in Field 3. Lawton Farm continues to provide important habitat for this grassland species, a species of conservation concern in Rhode Island.
- Total abundance across all sites in 2018 was 225 individuals, similar to that observed in 2017.
- Seventeen shrubland species were observed in surveys this year, an increase of three over 2017. A total of 22 unique shrubland species have been reported over the six consecutive survey years (2012-2018). These findings suggest that Lawton Farm continues to provide important habitat for shrubland species.

The survey was conducted for the Scituate Conservation Commission by Dr. Richard McKinney and Clara Cooper-Mullin of the Department of Resource Science at the University of Rhode Island.



### ***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.”**

### Coming in 2019...

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust are working to accomplish multiple goals in 2019.

- Continued Website Development: The new website ([www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)), developed by members of the Conservation Commission and Land Trust, went live in 2015. The organizations have continued to improve the site and add new content. Stay posted for new updates in 2019. The intent of the website is to provide a user friendly forum to share Conservation Commission and Land Trust information with the public. Specific features include our mission statement, meeting schedules, upcoming events, property management plans, publications, affiliations, and member profiles.
- Improvements at Lawton Farm: The Conservation Commission and Land Trust anticipate additional work at the Lawton Farm entrance in 2019, including improvements to the parking area.
- Invasive Species Management: The Conservation Commission will continue to manage and control invasive species at Lawton Farm.
- 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting: The Conservation Commission’s Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 12, 2019 at the Chopmist Senior Center. The Alice M Howland Award will be awarded to a member of the community for their outstanding contributions to the community. The guest speaker will be John Rogers, founder of the NYS Bluebird Society.
- Providence Water Supply Board (PWSB) Public Tours: PWSB regularly sponsors guided tours of Scituate Reservoir watershed areas. Keep an eye on their website for details!

## Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust

Town Hall  
P.O. Box 328  
North Scituate, RI 02857  
Phone: 401-647-2822

### “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.

#### Conservation Commission

- Thomas Angell, Chair
- Cindy Gianfrancesco, Vice-Chair
- Gary DeBlois
- John Rubbiano
- James Safford
- Brian Venditelli
- Ruth Strach
- Rob Bower

#### Land Trust

- Rob Bower, Chair
- Anna Cimini, Vice-Chair
- John Rubbiano
- Brian Venditelli
- James Safford
- Sue Scanlon
- Ruth Strach

Join us on our outings in 2019!

[www.scituateriltcc.org](http://www.scituateriltcc.org)