

# Scituate Conservation Commission and Scituate Land Trust 2019 Annual Report

March 2020

*"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 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

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

## *Lawton Farm Entrance and Parking Area Renovations*

Improvements to the entrance and parking area at Lawton Farm were completed in the summer of 2019. These improvements included resurfacing of the existing vehicular entrance with gravel; the construction of a 3,740 square foot gravel parking area; and the installation of a new security gate to restrict unauthorized vehicular access to back portions of the property. A special thank you to the Scituate Public Works Department for providing the labor and equipment necessary to complete this project!



**Renovated Entrance and Parking Area  
at Lawton Farm**



**Hikers gather for a photo at the  
entrance to Lawton Farm**



**Conservation Commission members  
discuss local wildlife habitat with hikers**

## *Improvements to Westconnaug Meadows Trailhead Sign*

Over the years, the trailhead sign at Westconnaug Meadows had become worn down. Volunteer Steven Venditelli refurbished the sign in August and the sign now looks as good as new. Thanks Steven!



**Refurbished Trailhead Sign at  
Westconnaug Meadows**

## *Guided Hikes at Lawton Farm and Westconnaug Meadows*

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust led hikes through the trails of Lawton Farm and Westconnaug Meadows in August and November, respectively. During the hikes, Conservation Commission members discussed special features of the landscape, wildlife observed, and the habitat provided at each property. Both hikes were well attended by area residents.

The August hike at Lawton Farm was part of the 2019 Rhode Island Land Trust Days, an annual event organized by the Rhode Island Land Trust Council. For more information about the RILTC and their upcoming events visit [rilandtrusts.org](http://rilandtrusts.org).

### ***Alice M. Howland 2019 Conservation Award***

The Land Trust and Conservation Commission, presented the 2019 Alice M. Howland Conservation Award to Cindy Gianfrancesco. Cindy is an environmental scientist who has dedicated much of her life to giving back to the local community with decades of conservation work. She has served as Vice-Chair of both the Conservation Commission and Land Trust and is a long-time member of the Gentian Garden Club. Additionally, Cindy and her husband Chuck Horbert own, operate, and maintain Gleaner Gardens, one of the largest private collections of Rhododendrons and Azaleas in Rhode Island. On a professional level, she has led environmental restoration and natural resource conservation projects across Rhode Island while working for the RI Department of Environmental Management and the RI Army National Guard. Cindy embodies the spirit of Ms. Howland and we are proud to recognize her hard work and dedication with this year's Alice M. Howland Conservation Award.



**Thomas Angel (CC Chair) and Rob Bower (LT Chair) present Cindy Gianfrancesco with the 2019 Alice M. Howland Award**

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), Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Colvin (2018), and Ms. Cindy Gianfrancesco (2019).



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

### ***Conservation Commission and Land Trust Annual Meeting***



**John Rogers presents at the 2019 Annual Meeting**

The 17th annual meeting of the Scituate Conservation Commission and Land Trust was held on March 12, 2019 at the Scituate Senior Center. John Rogers, co-founder of the New York State Bluebird Society, discussed his experience constructing and monitoring bluebird-nesting boxes throughout central New York. He explained that the national bluebird population has been in decline for approximately 50 years. This is due to a shortage of natural nesting sites combined with competition from non-native, invasive species such as starlings and house sparrows. He outlined steps for constructing the ideal bluebird-nesting box and best practices for monitoring them. Mr. Rogers finished his presentation by answering questions from the audience and encouraging them to enjoy the beauty nature has to offer.

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust Annual Meeting originated nearly two decades ago because of one woman's vision. Ruth Strach envisioned an annual event that would bring the community together to learn about conservation, and more specifically, conservation efforts and opportunities in our Town. Ruth advocated for the event, and in 2003 the first Conservation Commission Annual Meeting was held. She organized that first meeting as well as the next sixteen annual meetings.

Ruth chose to leave the Land Trust at the end of her term in November 2019. Her contributions to the Conservation Commission and Land Trust over the years have been countless and will very much be missed. Ruth, thank you for all you have given to the community as a member of the Land Trust and we wish you all the best on your future endeavors!

***Bird Survey Indicates Continued Success in Managing Hayfields at Lawton Farm***

The eighth annual bird survey at Lawton Farm was conducted in May and June 2019 and indicated a continued upward trend of species richness and abundance. The continuing strong count is a sign that ongoing hayfield management strategies are paying dividends. Jeffrey Cook, a dairy farmer in Foster, RI, 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 locations within Lawton Farm representing shrubland, forest, and field habitats. Results of the 2019 survey indicated an increase to species richness and overall bird abundance in comparison to the 2018 survey.

Highlights of the 2019 bird survey include:

- The total number of species observed this year (44) was the highest number since the surveys began in 2012. This year the five most abundant species were Bobolink, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Towhee, American Robin, and Tree Swallow.
- Over the eight 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, but unlike the past several years no Bobolinks were observed in Fields 2 or 3. However, 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 2019 was 304 individuals, a 35% increase over that observed in 2018.
- Nineteen shrubland species were observed in surveys this year, an increase of two over 2018. A total of 24 unique shrubland species have been reported over the eight consecutive survey years (2012-2019). 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.



**Bobolink**  
*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*  
(Image obtained from intobirds.org)



**Red-winged Blackbird**  
*Agelaius phoeniceus*



**Eastern Towhee**  
*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*  
(Image by Bill Thompson)

***Boys Scouts Assist with Annual Work Day at Lawton Farm***

Scoutmaster Eric Portraits volunteered the boys of North Scituate Troop One for two major projects at Lawton Farm in the past two years.

On a spring day in May 2019, approximately twenty Scouts assisted Land Trust and Conservation Commission members in the annual spring work day. In a few short hours, the volunteers straightened and moved educational signs, repaired a fence, removed invasive plants, and built two stone benches.

The previous fall, Scout Max Johnson and friends built and erected six bluebird houses as part of Max's Eagle Scout project. We are pleased to report that in 2019, bluebirds have nested in three of those houses. Many thanks to Eric and the boys of Troop One!



**North Scituate Boys Scouts Troop One gathers for photo at Lawton Farm**

### Coming in 2020...

The Conservation Commission and Land Trust are working to accomplish multiple goals in 2020.

- The 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. Additionally, the Conservation Commission and Land Trust will be joining Facebook in 2020 to provide a user-friendly forum for posting notifications of upcoming events and interacting with members of the community. Stay posted for new updates and events in 2020!
- The Conservation Commission and Land Trust will be implementing recently updated Property Management Plans for Lawton Farm and Esek Hopkins.
- Members of the Conservation Commission and Land Trust will be participating in the Rhode Island PBS series *Our Town* to discuss the history of Lawton Farm and its significance to the grassland bird community in Rhode Island.
- Invasive Species Management: The Conservation Commission will continue to manage and control invasive species at Lawton Farm.
- 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting: The Conservation Commission's Annual Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 14, 2020 at the Scituate 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 Dr. Charles Clarkson, Coordinator for the Rhode Island Breeding Bird Atlas, a five-year project to document the distribution and abundance of all breeding birds in RI. He also serves as Chair for the Waterbird Society's Conservation Committee and is a member of the Audubon Society of Rhode Island's Board of Directors.
- 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  
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### "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  
Brian Venditelli, Vice-Chair  
Rob Bower  
Gary DeBlois  
William Frederickson  
Cindy Gianfrancesco  
Laura Landen

#### Land Trust

Rob Bower, Chair  
Cindy Gianfrancesco, Vice-Chair  
Thomas Angell  
Anna Cimini  
Matthew Sayer  
Sue Scanlon  
Brian Venditelli

Join us on our outings in 2020!

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