



Provincetown Conservation Trust



Protecting and preserving the tip of Cape Cod since 1980

Spring 2023 Newsletter

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LAND CONSERVATION AND THE RACE TO SAVE BIRDS

PCT'S MISSION AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING AND PRESERVING WILD AREAS



Photo by Susan Packard



THINKING LOCAL

Sometimes preserving land is for the birds

Startling but true - the population of birds in the United States and Canada has fallen by 29 percent since 1970.* It is a crisis that galvanizes the PCT's mission: securing land protection, particularly in sensitive environments. The decimation of forests and wetlands equals habitat loss, and that along with the widespread use of pesticides is the most serious cause of bird decline in North America, according to experts.*

The biggest population drops are seen in the warblers (a yellow warbler is our cover photo), whose numbers have dropped by 617 million - a 37% decline. Even common birds like sparrows and cardinals are finding it harder and harder to survive in a world where habitats disappear overnight to development.* But the list of species in decline is always growing. The PCT can't do much outside our own neighborhood, but we aim to do whatever we can at home to stem the tide.

Provincetown is situated in a unique position along the Atlantic Flyway, the easternmost corridor of bi-annual bird migration from north to south and back. The tip of Cape Cod provides an emergency off-ramp. In many instances, huge squadrons are descending on the first dry land and fresh water they've encountered in hundreds if not thousands of miles. After flying all night they need to rest, eat, and drink before they resume their journey. That doesn't happen in a parking lot, and for these visitors refueling is a matter of life and death. Their ability to land at a suitable pitstop for their rehab is critical to the sustainability of hundreds of species.

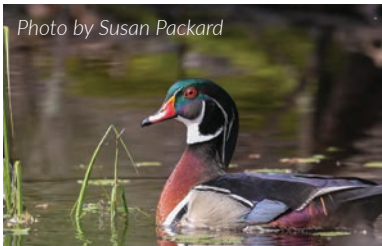


Photo by Susan Packard

Outside the migration season, our resident breeding birds search our Provincetown neighborhoods for the specific terrain, conditions, and food their species requires, be that swamp, bay, ocean, or hardwood forest. Winged creatures are extremely particular about where they live and breed because that's how they've evolved and adapted over the millennia. When that specific habitat is gone or shrunken, so are they.

This spring, as we prepare for another busy summer in our town, take a few minutes to walk the scenic trails at Clapps Pond or Foss Woods and listen for the sounds of any of the 350 bird species that have been documented in Provincetown. You might encounter warblers, thrushes, herons, or wood ducks, among many others. And the PCT wants to ensure they keep coming - and not only for the birds' sake. Our sanctuaries attract thousands of eco-tourists every year. They descend on the town's conservation lands and those of the nearby National Seashore, the vast majority of them birders.

The protection of habitats along the Provincetown Greenway is of critical importance in an age of radical environmental changes. Please join the PCT on our quest to maintain our town's natural biodiversity and ensure the survival of our avian friends for future generations to discover and enjoy.

**New York Times, Sept 2019*

WHAT IS THE GREENWAY?

The Provincetown Greenway is a critical wetland and woodland corridor stretching across town from Foss Woods in the far east to the Shank Painter Pond uplands and Clapps Pond in the west. With its rare cedar swamps and a mixed forest of pine and hardwoods, it serves as important habitat for many species of special concern including the northern bobwhite, box turtles, and dozens of species of resident and migrating birds.

The Provincetown Greenway's rich habitat is utilized by animals as a respite from the harsh and dry conditions of the dunes in the National Seashore and functions as a long narrow "green bridge" to Truro. Snakes, amphibians, foxes, and many other creatures have been recorded traversing this strip between Provincetown and Truro, movement which helps ensure their gene pools remain healthy.



WHISTLE WHILE WE WORK

PCT and Provincetown's Open Space Committee work to restore the Whistle Path to its historic outlet

This past fall the Town of Provincetown closed on the purchase of 668-R Commercial Street after town voters unanimously approved the purchase of the parcel for conservation in May of 2021 (see map below). The rolling and wooded lot presented a unique opportunity for Provincetown to expand Whistle Path Woods (named for the path that traverses the property) and create a new outlet and trailhead for visitors. Prior to the purchase of this important parcel there was no public access to the trail directly from Commercial Street.

That is about to change! This coming spring and summer the PCT and the Town's Open Space Committee will

partner to redirect the current "Whistle Path", which presently dead-ends near a private driveway on Thistlemore Road, and weave it through the newly acquired parcel to a Commercial Street

IF YOU STAND QUIETLY ON THE PATH, YOU MIGHT HEAR THE GHOST OF THE TRAIN'S WHISTLE!



terminus in the far East End.

Dennis Minsky, PCT Trustee and the Chair of the Open Space Committee, lauds the purchase of this key property. "The creation of a trailhead and an access trail through Whistle Path Woods will add significantly to the system of trails that already exist in the conservation areas of Provincetown and enhance the experience of

residents and visitors for generations to come."

Provincetown resident

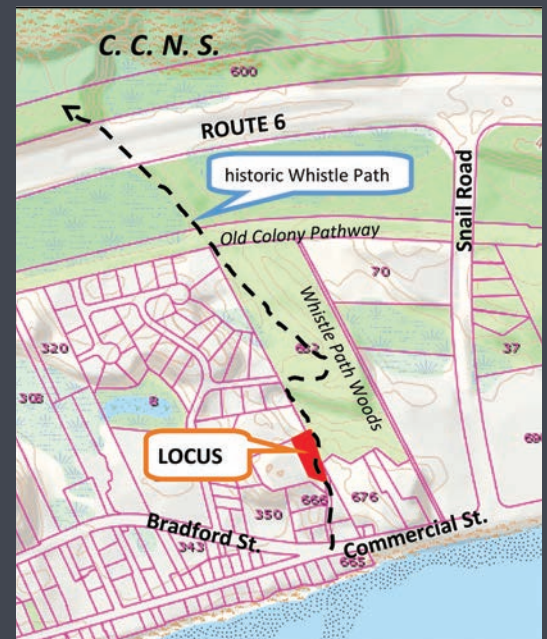
Jane Weissman, author of "The Provincetown Railroad", knows well the history of the "Whistle Path" and how it overlaps with the railroad. Jane believes it's essential to restore easy

access to the historic path so visitors can appreciate both histories, while enjoying a walk in the woods. "Trains barreled through these woods from 1873 until 1960, when the tracks were removed," Jane says. "Signs of the Iron Horse are mostly gone, but occasionally vestiges appear hidden among the underbrush. And, if you stand quietly on the path, you might hear the ghost of the train's whistle!"

A new trailhead is planned with signage and maps to educate visitors on the history and how the path connects to the rest of the Provincetown Greenway.

THE HISTORY OF THE WHISTLE PATH

The original "Whistle Path" was heavily trafficked in the late 1800's by cranberry pickers who regularly commuted from Provincetown Harbor to the cranberry bogs nestled in the dunes. Since the path was intersected by the railroad, locomotives were required to blow their whistles at the crossing to warn the traveling pickers - hence the path's name. Whistle Path Woods is a protected wildlife area that hosts hundreds of species of resident and migratory birds and is a habitat for the threatened northern parula warbler (*Parula americana*), amongst other important local forest dwellers.





Jon Sinaiko and his wife Camille Cabrey with their dog Bobby in front of their donated land

Jon and Camille had seen a lot of changes in Provincetown, especially in recent years, so they felt a renewed motivation to protect the beauty of Provincetown and to help balance the development they were witnessing.

About 5 years ago they approached PCT Consultant Mark Robinson, Executive Director of The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, about subdividing their land and donating the woods and wetlands behind their house. Mark Robinson explains, "Many people love their community and their land and want to see it protected after they're gone, and they appreciate the financial benefits offered by the state and feds for protecting it." He continues, "If you have the will to protect your land, we can find a way, a way that makes sense legally and financially." Part of Mark's work is to design a land conservation proposal crafted to an owner's needs and interests, whether it be an outright donation, a conservation restriction, bequest or bargain sale. Jon was pleased. "Mark made it very easy", he said. "He is incredibly knowledgeable and made the whole process pain-free". Camille cites discussions with family members as an important step for anyone thinking about donating land.

"Make sure your kids are on board. Fortunately for us, our son shares our passion for conservation." After speaking with their son about their decision they were ready to move forward.

In December 2020, the PCT and Jon and Camille closed on 292R Bradford Street, which now is forever protected as a natural habitat. The parcel includes white cedar swamp and lush upland woodlands. The former owners still have a simple path from their house leading through the woods they now share with residents and visitors. "To us, we have a \$30 million dollar yacht. We can walk in pristine woods and hear the birds. And the greatest thing is we can now share it with others," says Jon.

A PASSION FOR NATURE PROTECTION: A CONSERVATION LOVE STORY

Jon Sinaiko and Camille Cabrey are still madly in love with Provincetown. Jon grew up visiting Cape Cod as a child, fell in love with it early, and moved here in the 1970's. Camille, originally from California, came to Provincetown in the 1980's, met Jon, and the two have lived in town ever since. "The natural beauty is unsurpassed here. It's like living in an urban environment with a rural sensibility," says Camille. Perched on a hill in the east end, their home abuts the Provincetown Greenway, a rich woodland and wetland wildlife mecca.

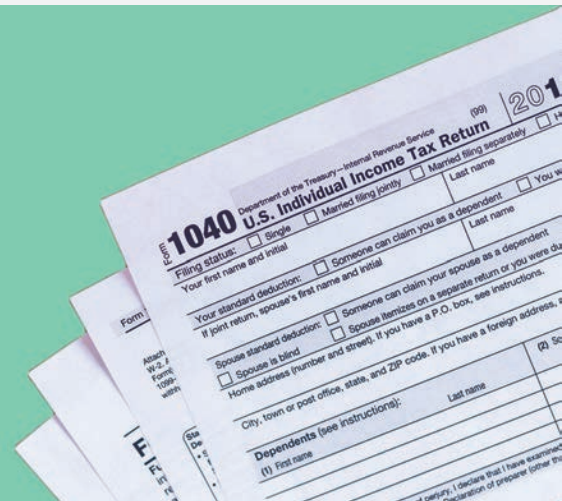
When not clamming in the bay, Jon and Camille's favorite activity is walking Bobby, their Jack Russell Terrier, along the Old Colony Nature Pathway.

For decades they have cherished the woodlands and birdlife surrounding them and thought about ways they could help preserve the beauty they loved. One year, when they heard a neighbor was interested in listing his large lot within the Greenway, they convinced him instead to sell it to the Town of Provincetown for conservation. "To this day, we are always telling people how important the woods behind their home are. We haven't stopped talking about conservation," says Jon. Then in 2009, Jon and Camille sold a parcel of their own to the town, in memory of John's mother. Today we know this particular parcel as Suzanne's Garden, which remains a colorful and peaceful oasis open for all to visit.

LAND DONORS COMMIT TO PRESERVING THE GREENWAY

TAX BENEFITS OF DONATING LAND

If you own land in Provincetown and would like to see it preserved to protect its natural beauty forever, you can donate your property to PCT and enjoy tax benefits, too. The appraised value of the land at the time of the gift is deductible against up to 30% of adjusted gross income each year for up to six years. To have a confidential conversation about the benefits of donating land, please call us at 508-694-7415 or email provincetownconservationtrust@gmail.com



PEEPING AT PROVINCETOWN'S PEEPERS

Scientist Scott Smyers adds Provincetown to amphibian study and tells us what we can do to help

A sure sign of spring's arrival in Provincetown is the persistent chirping of the Spring Peepers, the small tree frogs whose chorus can be heard during mating season in and around Provincetown's many wetlands. The volume and timing of the peepers' vocalizations provide evidence of how these amphibians are doing in the wild, and it's believed climate change may impact this species in the near future. Scott Smyers, an expert herpetologist, has been studying these and other amphibians and reptiles for the last 20 years and in 2022 the PCT was lucky enough to have Scott present a talk on his research studies, which included an eye-opening slide show of species seldom seen without a pro. This year the PCT and the Provincetown Open Space Committee are working together with Scott to expand his study into some of Provincetown's ecosystems by targeting some of our local wetlands, and by recording some the sounds that emanate from them. Scott spoke with us about the study, and about the threats these creatures face in our changing environment.

PCT: Why is it important to undergo this research in Provincetown?

Scott: It's important to first identify which groups of species inhabit specific ponds and wetlands simply to have a record of the local biodiversity. Documenting the peaks and valleys of each species' reproductive effort can help us understand how changes in weather affect amphibians seasonally and over time. And digital recording devices are an efficient way to collect biological information from an ecological soundscape.

I'm really excited to add Provincetown to the collection of other study sites we are already monitoring from Nantucket to the White Mountains of New Hampshire. The one species that is common at every site is the Spring Peeper. I'm especially interested in collecting data on body sizes of peepers and could use some local help finding and measuring them.

PCT: What can residents and visitors to Provincetown do to help sustain a welcoming environment for frogs and amphibians?

Scott: Anyone can contribute by first paying attention to frogs and documenting their locations. iNaturalist is a great phone app I can recommend and it's a free download. Users can now take photos of animals (a toad, for example), then post the photo as an observation. The app then uses a combination of AI and crowdsourcing to identify the species. You can also make sound recordings of animals that make audible noises and submit that as part of your observation. Scientists access the data and residents or visitors can



"Herp" Scott Smyers aims to document Provincetown's amphibian life and evaluate its condition in an age of climate change.

actually end up contributing to important discoveries about a certain location. Residents can also help identifying areas where amphibians and reptiles commonly get run over by vehicle traffic - this happens to frogs and turtles regularly - and coordinate some prevention efforts, or even by moving a reptile across the road before it's hit, if you see one. Of course, the Police Department should be involved in the process to minimize threats to human safety.

PCT: What do you think is the biggest threat to amphibians today?

Scott: There isn't just one threat, there are many: pollution of water and air, habitat destruction, and vehicle traffic are the most obvious and immediate. Though in many ways amphibians are particularly sensitive to environmental threats with their highly permeable skin, in other ways they are quite durable. They can survive all winter without eating and can go for weeks under a log waiting for rain in the summer.

PCT: When will the findings from your research be available?

Scott: The preliminary findings of the New England amphibian study will be available in the fall of 2023.

STEWARDING OUR NATURAL HABITATS

PCT's Land Stewards help keep our preserved lands safe and clean



PCT Land Stewards

From left: David Gural, Eric Cordes, Trustee Marjorie Kehne, Julie DeVita, and Trustee Phil Spletzer.

along the Old Colony Nature Pathway and blocked the trail, a land steward reported the loss and it was quickly cleared. Another steward is spearheading the removal of invasive plant species at a couple of west end sanctuaries. And in April, teams are being organized for our Earth Day mobilization that will tackle the removal of various discarded appliances - TV's, vacuum cleaners - that have been discovered on conservation property.

PCT Trustee Phil Spletzer heads the Land Stewardship program. A life-long lover of the outdoors, he's busy getting others involved in the effort. "It's great for the body, mind, and soul. And these special places in our town don't take care of themselves." David Gural is one-such volunteer. "Volunteering as a PCT land steward is rewarding knowing we're helping to protect these areas which are so vital to both our local wildlife and the very significant migratory bird population passing through Provincetown. And you also get to enjoy our natural conservation areas on a regular basis."

From Foss Woods and The Whistle Path Woods, down Old Colony all the way to Province Lands Rd, we have assigned devoted volunteers. But we're always looking to add to our team! Stewards usually work on their own schedules and visit properties with a frequency of their own determination - there's flexibility - so if you think you're able to join our efforts, please volunteer as a land steward!

The PCT owns just over 60 acres of conserved land in Provincetown, comprised of 34 different conservation areas. In addition, the PCT holds the conservation restriction on a list of town-owned parcels under protection, including Shank Painter Pond and Old Colony Nature Pathway. Regular monitoring of these lands is a crucial part of conservation, and it doesn't happen automatically! There is no dedicated full-time staff to police any of our local sanctuaries, leaving the rarely traversed properties effectively abandoned. Hence, the PCT has put together an army of land stewards, all dedicated volunteers, to get the job done. Stewards "adopt" one or more conservation properties, make frequent visits, try to keep them free of trash, document unusual plant or animal sightings, and report any unauthorized use of the land or illegal dumping they witness. They are our eyes and ears for these sanctuaries, and they are keeping them safe for recreation and wildlife habitat.

IT'S IMPORTANT WE HAVE VOLUNTEERS TO PROTECT THESE ENVIRONMENTAL GEMS FOR THE SAKE OF WILDLIFE AND OUR OWN ENJOYMENT

When a recent fall storm brought down a large oak tree

GET INVOLVED! VOLUNTEER FOR THE PCT

There is plenty of work to go around!

As an all-volunteer organization we are always looking for more volunteers to help us protect and preserve the areas we love.

If you are interested in volunteering, please reach out to us by emailing provincetownconservationtrust@gmail.com.

- Land Stewardship
- Community Outreach
- Grant Searches and Applications
- Photography
- Event Planning
- Environmental Research



PCT'S FREE NATURE PROGRAMMING FOR SPRING/SUMMER 2023



The PCT offers nature walks, nature talks and other events throughout the year. All our events are free. Our Nature Talk co-sponsor is Provincetown Brewing Company and our Nature Walks are sponsored in part by Cape Cod 5.

Below are only some of our events for Spring and Summer 2023. Be sure to check our website at ptownconservation.org/events for the latest events and for online registration.



EARTH DAY CLEAN-UP AND TREE PLANTING

Join us for a morning of tree planting and clean-up on conservation properties in Provincetown followed by a free volunteer lunch at the Provincetown Brewing Company!

April 22nd 9am-2pm

Registration required



NATURE TALK: CAPE COD - ONCE AROUND THE SUN

Renowned field naturalist and educator Peter Trull presents from his new book about the natural history of Cape Cod over a calendar year.

May 11th 5:30pm

Provincetown Brewing Company
141 Bradford Street



NATURE WALK: OLD COLONY NATURE PATHWAY PART I (HOWLAND TO SNAIL ROAD)

Led by PCT President William Mullin and PCT's naturalist Dennis Minsky, this walk focuses on the flora and fauna along the former railroad track.

May 26th 9am-11am

Registration required



NATURE TALK: THE EDIBLE LANDSCAPE WITH RUSS COHEN

Join naturalist and wild edibles expert Russ Cohen as he educates us in finding edible plants right here on Cape Cod.

June 22nd 5:30pm

Provincetown Brewing Company
141 Bradford Street



NATURAL PROVINCETOWN IN WORDS WITH DENNIS MINSKY

PCT Trustee, naturalist, and writer Dennis Minsky reads passages from his writings about our local environment.

July 20th 6pm

Provincetown Library
356 Commercial Street, 1st floor



ANNUAL MEETING AND "GREEN" PARTY

Join us for an evening of drinks and appetizers featuring The Compact's Mark Robinson, presenting the History of Conservation on Cape Cod.

August 31st 5pm-7pm

Provincetown Commons
46 Bradford Street

Registration required



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Conservation
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Mission

*Protecting and preserving the woods,
wetlands, heathlands, dunes and
forests of Provincetown.*

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SUPPORT OUR MISSION TO PROTECT AND PRESERVE PROVINCETOWN'S NATURAL HABITATS

**In order for us to achieve our goals, we need your help.
Please consider a tax-deductible donation to the PCT.**

Your donations will go towards
administration costs, land insurance, land
surveys, appraisals, and helping to keep
our nature programming free for everyone.

Donate more than \$250 and get a free
PCT hat!

Go to:
ptownconservation.org/joinus

