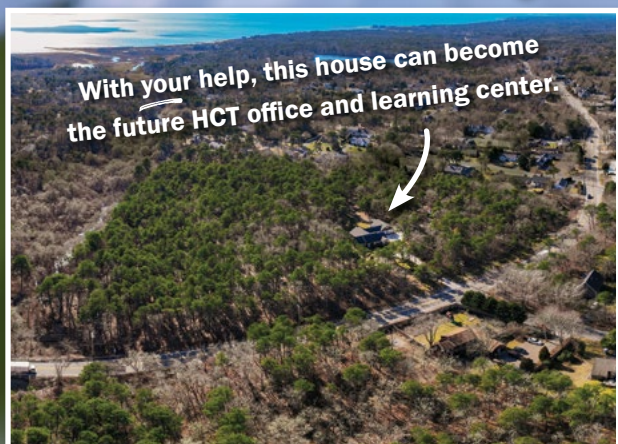


Make Way for Monarchs



*Join Us to Create the
Red River Valley Preserve* See page 2



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- 16 Birdwatching Experience
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Ambitious Project Can Protect Red River & Establish New Office

With about 14% of unprotected natural areas left on the Cape that either could be developed or preserved, *the race is on to save priority lands before they're lost forever.*

You make land preservation possible

In 2022, thanks to your generous support, together we completed three high priority watershed land-saving campaigns, one of which was the Six Ponds Great Woods Project to preserve the largest tract left on the Lower Cape.

Preserving natural lands helps to protect coastal water quality as well as ponds and the public drinking water supply that can be impacted by too much development.

Animals from birds to box turtles to butterflies and every species in between need wild areas to find food, nest, and shelter. Creating conservation destinations gives people a chance to get outside, discover and enjoy nature with family and friends.

PROJECT BUDGET

Land Preservation: \$3,000,000

Purchase and protect 12.34 acres from conversion to a subdivision.

Master Plan: \$85,000

Create a comprehensive site design for public access, trail, native plant garden & more.

Office & Learning Center: \$665,000

Renovate the house into an office & new learning center.

Stewardship Endowment: \$500,000

Ensure long term stewardship of the land, office, class space, and land management tools.

Campaign Total \$4,250,000

We're gearing up again to save another spectacular property.

With your help, we want to accelerate land preservation, stewardship, education and volunteer initiatives with a bold new endeavor called the Red River Valley Preserve Project.

The goal is to preserve 12.34 acres, including the largest forested landscape left from one end of Harwich to the other between Route 28 and Nantucket Sound. The land borders more than 750 feet of stream that empties into Nantucket Sound at the eastern end of the largest and most popular beach in town: Red River Beach.

In March, HCT asked its nonprofit partner The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts to temporarily buy and hold the property, thereby giving HCT time to raise funds. The property includes a 2,144 square foot one-level house plus a garage. HCT plans to adapt the house into expanded office space and new learning center.

With the pace of development increasing, HCT is responding to multiple properties at risk. Along with scheduling numerous guided walks, and many active volunteers lending a hand



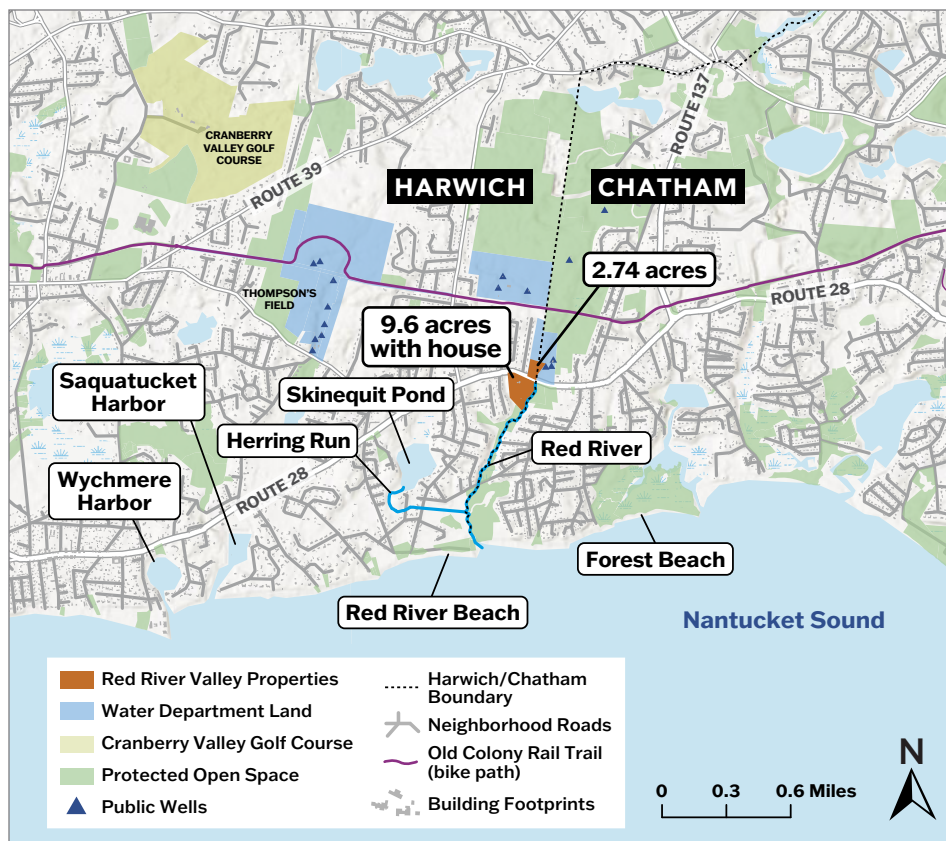
We look forward to creating a master plan that will accommodate outdoor event space.

on a variety of projects, we've been pushing capacity at our current office.

This new property offers a chance to save critical watershed land with a stream that flows to the Sound next to Red River Beach.

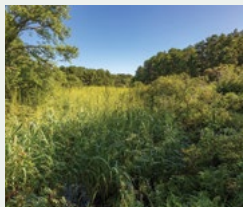
It's an exciting opportunity for establishing a new office that can expand educational and volunteer experiences for the community. And we can create a new trail destination.

– Continues on page 4



Map of Red River Valley properties upstream of Red River Beach on the Harwich/Chatham border.

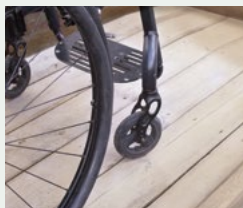
PROJECT GOALS



Land preservation with the acquisition of 12.34 acres of high priority forest, wetland, and stream habitats that provide the ecosystem mosaic for a wide variety of plants and animals;



Water quality with the protection of Red River and Red River Beach from potential subdivision runoff detrimental to herring and other species that rely on the river's clean water;



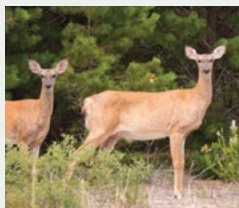
Accessibility with the creation of a wheelchair accessible ramp to the new indoor classroom space and bathroom;



Education and the ability to offer more outdoor experiences for all ages, year-round;



Walking trail with access to a new footpath providing glimpses into the wetland thickets bordering the Red River Valley;



Missing link connection in a wildlife habitat conservation corridor of 475 acres spanning the shared border of Harwich and Chatham north to Route 39 and south along Red River to Nantucket Sound;



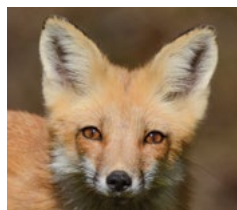
Hope for the future by creating a conservation destination offering walks, talks, volunteer opportunities, and a land preservation hub.

Visit harwichconservationtrust.org to see more photos.

Land-Saving Opportunity & New Learning Center

The Red River land is located on both sides of Route 28 providing a scenic wooded gateway for travelers on the busy road between Harwich and Chatham. South of Route 28 is a house on 9.6 acres that was owned by the Chase family for 90 years. On the north is 2.74 acres owned by the Baker family.

Altogether, the acreage is a critical watershed area tucked into the Red River Valley. Downstream of the land is an active herring run where the feisty fish swim from the Sound into Skinequit Pond to spawn each spring.



Sarah E. Devlin

The 12.34 acres is the missing link needed to complete a north-south wildlife habitat corridor when combined with 475 acres of adjoining conservation and water department land in both towns.



Gerry Beetham

A pitch pine and oak forest with sun-dappled forest floor surprisingly free of invasive plants rambles down to wetland thickets. Deer, fox, turtles, flying squirrels, and songbirds make these habitats their home.

We envision renovating the existing house into a universally accessible, welcoming conservation hub for greeting visitors and hosting education programs as well as creating a demonstration native plant & pollinator garden.

Despite intense development pressure in this area on the border of Harwich and Chatham, both sides of Route 28 have remained natural because of the longstanding stewardship of the Chase and Baker families.

Now it's our turn to take care of the land, provide a new walking trail, and adapt the existing house into an office and learning center open to all. Please join us in this bold, exciting endeavor!

WE NEED YOUR HELP...

To protect and care for this property, we need to raise \$4.25 million.

Generous donors have pledged \$2.75 million so far.

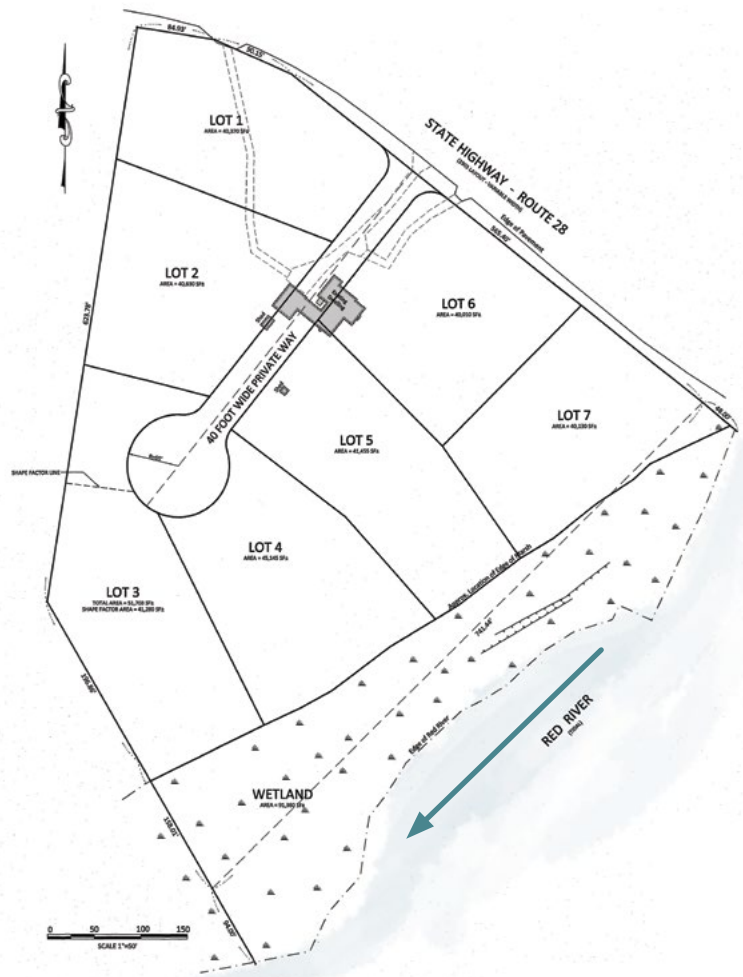
We need your help to raise the remaining \$1.5 million by December 31st. Help ensure the protection and stewardship of this high priority Red River Valley property in perpetuity.

To donate by credit card, scan this QR code with your phone or visit harwichconservationtrust.org. Or, with the enclosed envelope, send a check payable to *Harwich Conservation Trust* & write in check memo: Red River Valley.



Gerry Beetham

The existing house provides ample room to expand office space as well as transform the two-car garage into a spacious new learning center.



If not preserved, the 9.6-acre property south of Route 28 could be converted into a six or seven lot subdivision depending on development scenarios. Red River doubles as the town boundary between Harwich and Chatham.



If you would like to donate stock or have questions about this exciting new land-saving opportunity, please contact Michael Lach at HCT by phone 508-432-3997 or email mike@harwichconservationtrust.org.

HISTORY OF BELL'S NECK CONSERVATION AREA

How Did Bell's Neck Conservation Area Get Its Name?

The Herring River was the first center of industry in Harwich, with three mills built along sections of its waterways. More than 300 years later, the Bell's Neck Conservation Area is the mainstay of open space and wildlife preservation along the river corridor.

Made up of more than 260 acres of open space, wildlife corridors and walking trails, the Bell's Neck Conservation Area is primarily owned by the Town. The Harwich Conservation Trust has assisted with land conservation acquisitions in the area and currently has another purchase in its sights.

The Town Conservation Commission made its initial acquisition in the area on August 19, 1966, and has continued to purchase land in the corridor. The Town's goal is to protect the Herring River, its herring run, and the reservoir while providing open space for public recreation and wildlife.

But how did this bucolic setting get its name? It certainly wasn't from the melodious ringing of the nearby Baptist Church bell.

Little Robin & John Bell

According to Josiah Paine's "A History of Harwich 1620-1800," a resident of Sandwich by the name of John Bell purchased a large tract of land along the east side of the Herring River from Little Robin, a local Native American, on December 16, 1668. Little Robin lived near Nobscussett, now recognized as a bayside section of East Dennis.

Paine writes that Bell came from Sandwich, "perhaps through the influence of John Wing and John Dillingham, who had homes established at Sauquatuckett, and before they came were townsmen of Sandwich."

Little is known of the life of John Bell. He appeared to have resided for a number of years in a secluded place within the limits of his land. In 1690 John Bell's house is mentioned in a Sachemus' deed to John Wing and other proprietors as standing near the Herring River near a marked tree in the line between Sachemus and Napaoitan, an Indian Sachem in Barnstable. Bell was also

one of 12 men who in 1668 laid out the way westward to Stony Brook, which was then in the town of Yarmouth, according to Paine.

Ever since Bell's residency, the property has been known as Bell's Neck.

Bell and his wife had two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. Elizabeth married Samuel Berry, who took care of Bell and his wife in the last years of their lives. While the date of Bell's death is not clear, probate court records show that letters of administration were granted to Berry. In 1721 there was a dispute involving the Wing property lines to the west. Samuel Berry and his

"Innumerable springs are close by and, with an abundance of alewives, other fish from the river, marsh and water birds, deer and other wildlife natural to an area of this type, Bell's Neck was a veritable larder for the Indians."

— Historian Eric Farnham

– Continues on page 6



The different light throughout the seasons offers ever changing perspectives of the land and water at Bell's Neck.

Stephanie Foster

Continued from page 5 –

son John Berry claimed ownership of the property. The dispute was settled through arbitration, according to Paine.

West Harwich resident and planning board chair Duncan Berry noted a bit of ancestral history in a presentation he made to the Massachusetts

Department of Transportation regarding the reconstruction of Route 28 through the village. Berry's family has lived in the area since the 1630s.

Samuel Berry, who was deeded the Bell's Neck property, was his eighth great-grandfather who also signed the Town of Harwich charter of incorporation in 1694.

Native Americans Recognized Bell's Neck Abundance

Going back further into its history, the Bell's Neck area was an archaic summer and fishing camp for Indigenous people dating back 5,000 years.

"The Indian Camp site in this area was located on the south side of a gently sloping hill and, at one time, a small branch of the Herring River flowed close by the camp," Eric Farnham wrote in an Indian history of Harwich, compiled by the Town Historical Commission in 1971. "Innumerable springs are close by and, with an abundance of alewives, other fish from the river, marsh and water birds, deer and other wildlife natural to an area of this type, Bell's Neck was a veritable larder for the Indians."

Large clay pots and pottery used in about 100 A.D. were discovered in Bell's Neck. A stone gouge, likely used for woodworking around 2,000 B.C. was also discovered in the area of the camp.

This trail map of the Bell's Neck Conservation Lands is available at harwichconservationtrust.org.





Birding enthusiasts of all skill levels enjoy walks with naturalist Peter Trull at Bell's Neck.

"It would appear that there has been continuing occupation of Bell's Neck-Herring River area for about 5,000 years. The original occupants enjoyed it and did little to change it. We hopefully have taken steps to preserve it," the Historical Commission's publication reads.

Preserving Bell's Neck Helps Protect the Herring River

The area around Bell's Neck was purchased in the 1920s by Marcus L. Urann, a founder of Ocean Spray Cranberries and the inventor of canned cranberry sauce.

Urann established the West Reservoir, damming a section of the Herring River in 1925, to create a backup supply of fresh water for cranberry growers and protect against salt water intrusion from the tidally influenced river.

In 1966 the Town made the first major step toward creating the Bell's Neck Conservation Area with the purchase of 202 acres for \$235,000. The State covered half of the cost. Since then additional purchases have been made.

By 2011, the Town held 260 acres in the Bell's Neck area. In 2013, working with the Harwich Conservation Trust, the town purchased the 6.5-acre Verrochi property south of the herring flume at the West Reservoir, and in 2015 another 4.1 acres of the Hall property was added.

The Hall property was seen as a key piece of the Bell's Neck open space puzzle to protect wildlife habitat and water quality as well as complete a trail loop around West Reservoir in conjunction with the Cape Cod Rail Trail bike path on the north.

The Town Community Preservation Committee voted to recommend \$125,000 of Town Community Preservation open space funds to assist the Harwich Conservation Trust in acquiring a 2.87-acre parcel, with 1,180 feet of shoreline marsh, located along Bell's Neck Road. The Town would hold a conservation restriction on the property. **In May, Town Meeting voters unanimously approved \$125,000 toward the project.**

The value of the acquisition includes protection of water quality, wildlife habitat, and more than 750 feet or the length of 2-1/2 athletic fields of scenic forest bordering Bell's Neck Road, a public road.

HCT is in the midst of a campaign to raise the remaining \$200,000 needed to preserve this scenic property. A permit for construction of a house had already been approved by the Town Conservation Commission as evidence of the development risk to the land if it's not preserved.

Little is known about John Bell, but his name will endure in association with one of the more bucolic settings on Cape Cod.

Story by Bill Galvin
The Cape Cod Chronicle

SAVE LAND TO PROTECT THE RIVER...

Are you a fan of protecting the Herring River through land preservation?

We welcome your support of the Bell's Neck Road-Herring River Project fundraising campaign to save 2.87 acres. The goal is to raise \$325,000 by December 31st and we have \$200,000 to go.

Let's preserve the land to protect the health of the Herring River, important wildlife habitat including 1,180 feet of salt marsh shoreline, and save the view for travelers enjoying Bell's Neck Road.

Visit harwichconservationtrust.org to donate by credit card.

Or write a check payable to Harwich Conservation Trust and mail to: HCT, P.O. Box 101, South Harwich, MA 02661.

In the check memo, write: Bell's Neck Road-Herring River Project.



Make Way for Monarchs: Plant It and They Will Come

Distinctive orange and black wings like illuminated stained glass windows mark the monarch butterfly as one of the most iconic sights of summer as they flit between a variety of flowers, drinking their nectar.

The caterpillar of the monarch butterfly, however, can only eat one plant: milkweed. But as the land changes and is developed, this crucial food source has been lost, threatening the success of the monarch.

In fact, their populations have dropped as much as 72 percent over recent decades. Sadly, this familiar denizen of summertime meadows is in danger of becoming a memory.

Enter Harwich Conservation Trust's Monarch Butterfly Project at the Pleasant Bay Woodlands, where volunteers who are determined to rejuvenate this quintessential butterfly's population are planting milkweed plots to provide essential egg-laying habitat.

The 49-acre Pleasant Bay Woodlands was preserved in 2013 thanks to generous support from HCT members, businesses and foundations to help safeguard wildlife habitats, protect bay water quality, and create a new walking trail. HCT volunteers and Director of Land Stewardship Connor O'Brien have been working hard on an ongoing meadow restoration project. In several small rectangular garden plots protected by fencing, a milkweed planting experiment is underway as the brainchild of HCT volunteer Jan Oudemool. This effort could create natural meadow habitat and herald the return of the monarch butterfly.

Miraculous migration

"What we're doing is an act of ecological faith," Oudemool said. He explains that he first became fascinated by monarch butterflies while visiting El Rosario in Mexico. This sanctuary west of Mexico City is the

winter nesting grounds for millions of monarch butterflies that migrate from the United States each year.

"They migrate thousands of miles on those fragile wings," Oudemool said. "They come by the millions. They just cover the trees, and as they fly they bump into you. It is an awe-inspiring wonder of nature."

Connor O'Brien explained that the area where the milkweed has been planted is part of what was once the Kendrick farm that the family discontinued over a century ago. The abandoned farmhouse, built around 1823, deteriorated into a safety hazard and was removed in 2015. The goal of returning the disturbed land to its natural state of native meadow habitat requires more planning and effort than simply removing the old building and letting nature take over. O'Brien explained that in the open space that was once farmland, invasive plant species have since taken over.

Oudemool has been working on the property for four years, taking on the laborious endeavor of removing bittersweet and black locust by hand. Additional invasives that have been removed include honeysuckle, privet, and multiflora rose.

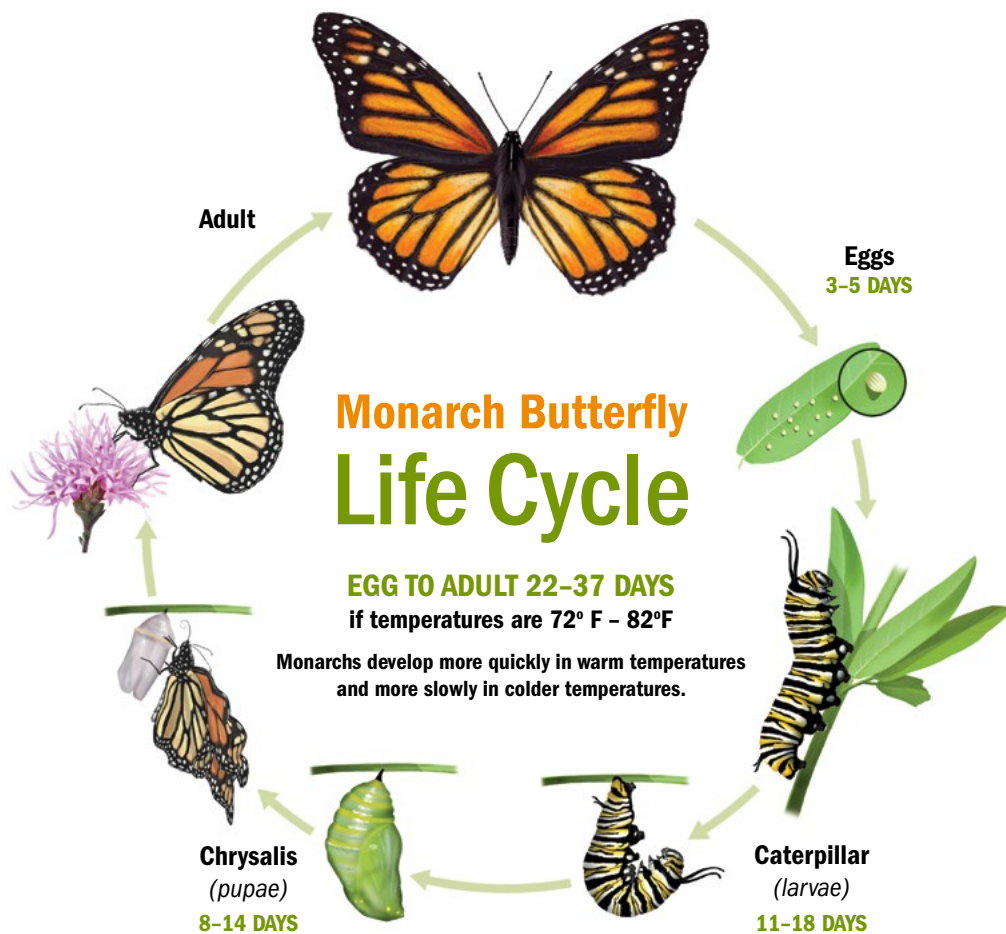
"Invasive plants move into disturbed landscapes," O'Brien said. "Over the past few years, we've been working hard to turn it back into a native meadow habitat, planting native grasses like little bluestem, big bluestem, and other species which will in turn encourage the presence of native wildlife species like bluebirds, hawks, New England cottontails and butterflies, all of which thrive in meadows. Meadows have been disappear-



HCT Director of Land Stewardship Connor O'Brien and volunteer Jan Oudemool prepare milkweed planting plots in the fall.

ing on the Cape over the past 100 years. If we just let things grow, and if we suppress the natural fires that would occur in nature, it will come back as forest, not as meadow. That's how we get so many pine-oak woodlands here on the Cape."





Milkweed is a magnet for Monarchs

O'Brien explained that of the five native species of milkweed present on the Cape, HCT has planted three types: **common milkweed**, **swamp milkweed** and the aptly named **butterfly milkweed**. Why is the monarch caterpillar so particular about its food choice? It's a matter of survival.

The leaves and stems of the milkweed plant are filled with a milky white sap, which contains a chemical known as cardenolides that can be

toxic to some species. The chemical remains in the body of the monarch caterpillar and then after metamorphosis, also in the butterfly. The monarch has evolved an interdependence on the milkweed plant, but the milkweed chemical is poisonous and bitter tasting to predators of the monarch. "The bright yellow striped color of the caterpillar and the bright orange of the adult butterfly tells predators not to eat them," said O'Brien.

This bright coloration as a signal of toxicity, called aposematic coloration, can be thought of as the opposite of camouflage. Instead of trying to hide from hungry birds and animals, the butterfly's bright wings say, "Watch out! I'm dangerous!" Fortunately for us, the same bright wings give the monarch butterfly the distinction of being one of the most beautiful residents of our summertime gardens and wild spaces.

Of course, there's a lot more at stake if the monarch is lost than the disappearance of their aesthetically

appealing qualities in our backyards and meadows.

"Like any species with the potential of becoming extinct, the impact is vast," O'Brien explained. "There could be a cascade effect in the food chain that includes monarchs. Monarchs may not be as prolific a pollinator as bees, but many plants are pollinated by butterflies. Their loss would be felt by other plant species. They all occupy an important niche."

"Everything is connected," Oudemool added.

Bring this butterfly back from the brink

We can look forward to the monarch butterflies' seasonal return to Cape Cod from their southern winter grounds around June. By then, the milkweed plants should be established and growing with green leaves aplenty, should any monarchs venture to the Pleasant Bay Woodlands to lay eggs and start a family in the experimental plots. The milkweed should begin to flower in its second year and reseed the area, spreading throughout the meadow habitat.

"The plants that do well produce a lot. It's a perennial," Oudemool said. "The root system remains underground and continues to grow, and it's not a plant that needs a lot of water. It's drought resistant. Next winter, if this is successful, we will plant more."

Consider planting some native milkweed in your own garden or yard. Help the monarch fly away from the danger of extinction. It's a small step to take to save this iconic symbol of summertime and safeguard its place in our precious native habitats for generations to come.

Story by Jennifer Sexton-Riley

For a trail map of Pleasant Bay Woodlands visit harwichconservationtrust.org and click **Trails**.

On a Wing and a Prayer

Each spring, females lead the northeastern monarch butterflies north from Mexico into parts of Texas where they lay their eggs. The **1st generation** lives 2-6 weeks as adults, flying north as far as they can.

The **2nd generation** continues the journey, lays eggs, and dies.

The **3rd** and **4th generation** hatch through the spring and summer, finishing the journey north.

In the fall, a special “**super generation**” hatches and flies south, all the way to the Oyamel forests in Mexico, that they never knew themselves, but, amazingly, known only to their ancestors a few generations before. They spend the winter resting from their 2-month flight. These butterflies live for 6-9 months.

Although the butterflies are adapted to cool temperatures, if temperatures drop to the mid-to low 20's (F) the butterflies begin to freeze to death.

Monarchs are essentially tropical butterflies and cannot tolerate sub-freezing temperatures for very long.

Overwinter

Super Generation flies back to Mexico
September - November

2nd Generation
May-June

1st Generation
March-April

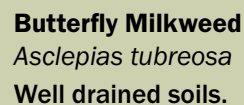
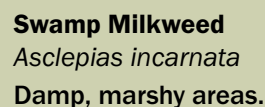
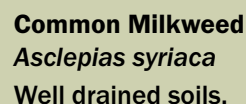




When people see and report a tagged butterfly, the location data can be used to determine the pathways taken by migrating monarchs, the influence of weather on the migration, their survival rate, and more.



Three Varieties of Milkweed



COMMON MILKWEED: @STEVEN KATOVICH, USDA FOREST SERVICE, BUGWOOD.ORG / @ ROBERT VIDEKI, DORONICUM KFT., BUGWOOD.ORG.
SWAMP MILKWEED: @JOHN CARDINA, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, BUGWOOD.ORG. / @DAVID CAPPAERT, BUGWOOD.ORG. **BUTTERFLY MILKWEED:** @JOHN D. BYRD, MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY, BUGWOOD.ORG. / @DAVID CAPPAERT, BUGWOOD.ORG.

Protecting the Hidden Gem of Six Ponds

Harwich holds many beautiful and well-known spots including what has long been a hidden gem called the Six Ponds Special District. It is the largest and most ecologically significant assemblage of undeveloped land and pond shore remaining on Cape Cod.

To protect this area, Harwich Conservation Trust (HCT) has launched a community-based planning effort to deepen our understanding of what we can do to safeguard this fragile stretch of land and water resources for future generations.

The initiative builds on HCT's existing Priority Ponds Project to protect sensitive watershed lands as well as prior work by the Town of Harwich and others.

More than two decades ago, Harwich Town Meeting voters requested that Barnstable County designate 1,200 acres surrounding the ponds, bounded by Routes 6, 39, 124, 137, and Queen Anne Road as the Six Ponds District of Critical Planning Concern (DCPC) also known as the Six Ponds Special District.



Sensitive Natural Resources

The designation recognized the area's abundance of natural, cultural, archaeological, historic, economic and recreational resources of regional, state-wide or natural significance.

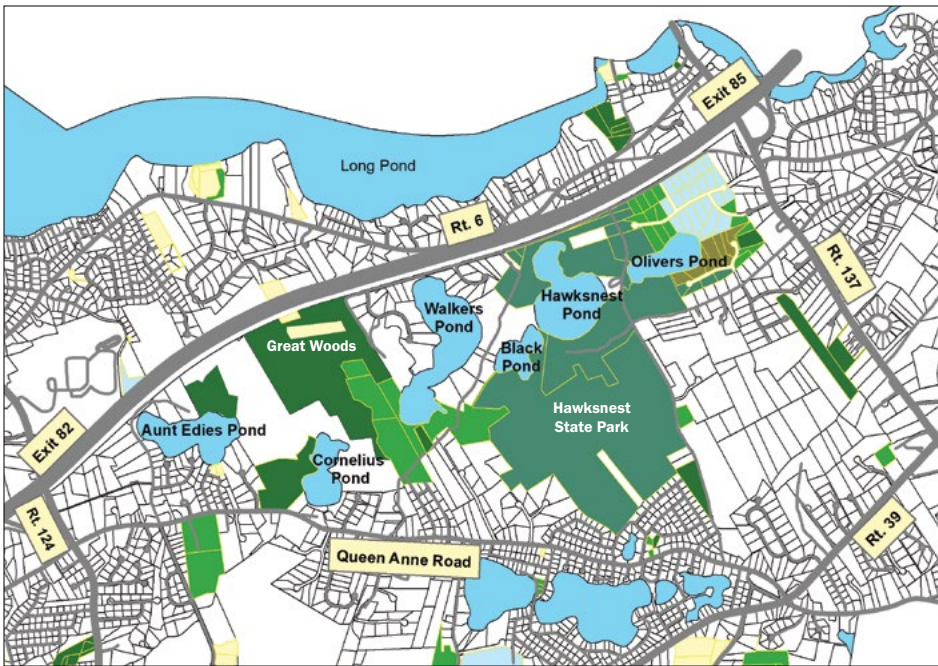
The key features include:

- **114 acres of pond surface in six ponds:** Aunt Edies, Black (aka Little Hawksnest), Cornelius, Hawksnest, Olivers, and Walkers.
- **5 miles of pond shore**, almost all of which is considered globally rare Coastal Plain Pond Shore habitat.
- **400 acres of conservation land** protected by HCT, State and Town with extensive walking trails.
- **Extensive area that contributes to the public water supply**, with underground and surface flow to one of three nitrogen-sensitive coastal embayments in Harwich.
- **Extensive state-designated priority habitat and documented presence of rare wildlife.**
- **Extensive wetlands**, including seven vernal pools certified by HCT volunteers.

Thanks to widespread community support in 2022, HCT's recent \$3 million campaign for the Six Ponds Great Woods property has protected 85 highly developable acres within the DCPC.

The forested hills could have been converted to an 18-lot subdivision. The land had been owned by the Copelas family who decided to sell to HCT instead of the highest bidder. HCT donors, foundations, town meeting voters, and the state contributed to the success.





Sarah E. Devlin

Above: Tree swallow. Left: Map of the Six Ponds Special District bounded by Queen Anne Road, Rt. 124, Rt. 6, Rt. 137, and Rt. 39. The green shaded parcels are protected conservation lands.

This creates an opportunity to expand comprehensive natural resource management planning in the area, including stewardship measures that reinforce the purposes of the DCPC and enhance the benefits of habitat and wildlife protection.

Five Phases

The new Six Ponds Management Initiative will be undertaken in phases.

PHASE 1, already underway, involves a comprehensive assessment of existing data, studies and management measures, and outreach to neighbors and stakeholders including a public presentation at the Harwich Community Center on March 11th.

PHASE 2 will identify technical assessments needed to support a science-based assessment of conditions, trends and management options.

PHASE 3 will involve grant applications and fundraising to support technical assessments and resource management planning.

PHASE 4 will involve preparation of a Six Ponds Resource Management Plan.

PHASE 5 will involve implementing the plan, assessing results and adapting the plan as needed.

Carole Ridley of Ridley & Associates has been selected to coordinate the Six Ponds Resource Management Initiative for HCT. The Initiative will function in consultation with the Town of Harwich, Commonwealth Division of Conservation Services, Cape Cod Commission, regional environmental organizations, Six Ponds neighbors and other community stakeholders. Carole has extensive experience and

expertise leading community resource management plans and projects, including the Pleasant Bay Alliance, Muddy Creek Restoration, Herring River Restoration (Wellfleet), and numerous other natural resource plans and projects on and off-Cape.

Data Gathering Has Started

The Six Ponds Special District is coming up on 25 years old and there is much to be learned about pond health since the DCPC discussion was first started in 1999.

The initial focus of the initiative has been to gather information that has been generated about the health of the ponds. So far that is painting a mixed picture. Data indicate that there is some water quality impairment in some of the ponds. More study is required to pinpoint what is causing this and identify the correct future course. A number of other areas have been identified where additional information is needed to make informed decisions. One such need is an assessment of land use changes in the DCPC over the past two decades, to assess how effective the Town's implementing regulations have been in meeting the goals of the DCPC.

Natural systems are constantly changing, as are influences from surrounding land use and even the way we use areas for recreation. Our understanding through science is also evolving. It is vital to continue to monitor key conditions such as water quality, and to monitor what is happening in the watersheds, to make sure we get ahead of issues before they become more complicated and costly to address. Over time, we hope that this new Six Ponds Resource Management Initiative can help protect the area's watershed recharge, pond health, habitat diversity, and scenic splendor enjoyed by both residents and visitors.

IF YOU GO DOWN TO THE WOODS TODAY

The Delight of a Guided Mindful Outdoor Experience

Whether you were born on Cape Cod, you washed ashore and created a year-round home here, or you count your time here in treasured summertime visits, there is something about the natural surroundings which speaks to you.



Chipmunk climbing to get mullein seeds.

Nobody just “ends up” on this little curl of sandy paradise by accident. Even the most indoorsy among us have chosen this setting over all others, and the reason for that decision is all around us.

Cape Cod’s beautiful and varied beaches, precious pine and oak woodlands, fragile vernal pools, fertile salt marshes and other unique habitats not only comfort us and restore our spirits, but provide vitally important and irreplaceable territory for marine, estuarine, freshwater and terrestrial wildlife to find food, take cover, seek mates, raise new generations, and simply live their lives.

Tuning Into Nature & Your Senses

But when was the last time you entered one of our treasured conservation areas with no other agenda but to simply notice it in all its natural splendor? Not walking the family dog, not getting your steps in, not listening to a podcast or catching up with a chatty friend, but instead noticing the myriad calls of our many local birds as they celebrate spring?

When was the last time you closed your eyes and tried to identify the scents carried on the breeze, examined the rough bark of a venerable old tree, or reached for the softness of brightly colored moss just to see how it feels?

If you find yourself reaching back to childhood to locate memories of these timeless moments in nature, you aren’t alone. Fortunately, a remedy exists for a deficiency of natural wonder. Naturalist and Kripalu Certified Mindful Outdoor Guide Andrea Higgins has the answer in a series of Guided Mindful Outdoor Experiences at some of the most scenic conservation destinations on the Lower Cape.

Rekindle your sense of curiosity, discovery, and wonder during leisurely two-hour walks through the Robert F. Smith Cold Brook Preserve, Pleasant Bay Woodlands, Coy’s Brook Woodlands and Sand Pond Woodlands. Join this unique experience with Andrea and follow her gentle, playful lead while supporting Harwich Conservation Trust’s land-saving work at the same time.

A resident of Harwich since 1983, Andrea describes herself as a true lover of Cape Cod who falls more in love with the region’s natural beauty and wildlife every day. She first learned about the Kripalu Center’s School of Mindful Outdoor Leadership while on a mother-daughter yoga retreat at the Kripalu Center in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where attendees focus on enhancing health and personal well-being through yoga, nutrition, mindfulness, and other supportive practices.

At Kripalu, Andrea learned to guide others through mindful outdoor experiences integrating elements of forest bathing, yoga philosophy and practice, Ayurveda, outdoor survival

and connection skills, along with an overview of relevant research on nature's health benefits.

The program combined her love of nature with her love of connection and her desire to share her beloved Cape Cod with others.

"I felt so called," Andrea reflects. "It was everything I love the most and everything that's so important to me. I knew that was what I wanted to do."

A Guided Mindful Outdoor Experience led by Andrea begins with a pause for the group of participants to think about a time in nature when they felt joyful, happy, and connected. This could be a moment from childhood, from yesterday, or even that very morning. Andrea savors this moment in which people's faces light up when thinking and sharing with others within a natural setting.

Opportunities for Reflection

"It's a gentle reminder that we can return to that joyful connected feeling, both with others and with our natural surroundings," Andrea says. "These gorgeous preserves and sanctuaries are ours, they are such a gift, and at that moment I thank everyone, because the funds raised through their participation in the walks helps preserve that space for always. It's really nice to take a pause and remember."

Next, Andrea leads the group along a path into the forest, asking everyone to please travel in "social silence" and encouraging participants to try walking with the soundless awareness of a fox.

After a peaceful period of hushed sauntering, she then asks the group to circle up and share their thoughts, perceptions and experiences while moving through the woodland fox-style. The delight is apparent on everyone's faces as they remark on the sound of the wind, the scent of earth and marine breezes, and the unexpected pleasure of moving quietly along a path with a likeminded group of wanderers.

As the walk continues, Andrea periodically offers gentle prompts to the group, allowing everyone to experience a gradual awakening to a state of childlike curiosity and a peaceful connection to the beauty surrounding them. At one point she invites the walkers to try listening with "deer ears," using their hands to form cups around each ear and aiming them toward the front or back, noticing how sound is amplified. No wonder deer are able to detect forest visitors and slip away unnoticed!

At another time, Andrea encourages everyone to explore their surroundings using the sense of touch, or to notice any scents they might be able to detect in the cool forest air. As everyone gathers to share their experiences of their environment through different senses, there is a palpable sense of shared enjoyment and camaraderie made possible through Andrea's warm encouragement of curiosity, wonder and appreciation of both the natural world and the people with whom we share it.

Near the end of the shared experience, Andrea passes out small sitting mats and encourages everyone to spread out into the woods, find a place that feels welcoming to them, and spend a few minutes simply sitting and enjoying the present moment. Before parting company, she presents each walk participant with their choice of a collection of heart-shaped stones, each one gathered on one of Andrea's beach strolls. With a small token of their heartfelt experience in nature in hand, everyone returns to their everyday life with a bit more awareness, a bit more connection, a bit more wonder.

"It's a wonderful feeling to be completely immersed in an experience and to allow yourself to be led. I hope people feel they can do that with me, knowing that you are safe and that I will take extra good care of you. You can be free to truly immerse yourself in that moment," expressed Andrea.

Story by Jennifer Sexton-Riley
Photographs by Janet DiMattia



Top left: Fiddlehead ferns; top right: white pine; bottom: wild blueberry blossoms.

JOIN A MINDFULNESS WALK

Spark your sense of wonder, slow down and admire all the beauty that surrounds us.

Stroll scenic trails, feel the calming benefits of mindfulness practice and be completely present among the bounty and the beauty of your local conservation lands.

For upcoming mindfulness walks with Andrea, visit harwichconservationtrust.org and click **Walks & Events**.

Adventures with Peter Trull

“If you want to get my attention, don't call my name,” Peter Trull explains to the group assembled for a morning birdwatching adventure, briefly lowering his binoculars.

“Just say ‘What’s that?’ and I'll stop right away.”

An avid lover of birds since childhood, Trull is incapable of resisting the urge to stop and listen to a faraway avian call. You get the impression that he is rarely, if ever, at a loss to put a name to a song. Occasionally he stops and just takes in the sudden fortuitous appearance of a bird in a nearby bush which seems to have arrived to perform just for us.

“Yes, hello, we know you are here,” Trull says to the little visitor. “Thank you, that was lovely.”

Nothing can quite express the pleasure of an escape into nature during an early morning walk with feathered-friend expert Trull in the Robert F. Smith Cold Brook Preserve, Harwich Conservation Trust's (HCT) largest conservation destination.

As a long-awaited spring gently blooms throughout the 66 acres of wetland and surrounding upland, a world of wildlife reveals itself, both in person and in clues left behind, nestled in the heart of Harwich Port.

After just a few leafy turns of the walking trail it's easy to forget the streets and houses that suddenly seem so far away. There's nothing quite like exploring an area of conservation land with a wildlife expert who unerringly notices, identifies and characterizes creatures we might not even have realized are here, using skills which can almost seem like an extra sense.

“Yes, hello, we know you are here. Thank you, that was lovely.”

– Peter Trull

In a surprisingly short time, with Trull's enthusiastic encouragement, the walk participants are easily identifying the calls of the song sparrow, northern cardinal and carolina wren.

An early sighting of the first red-winged blackbird of the season inspires a collective gasp, and an exclamation of, “I hear geese!” causes every

head to tilt skyward, searching for the source of the wild cries.

Enthusiasm and Experience

Introduced by HCT executive director Michael Lach as an “ambassador for the natural world,” Trull is a charming and knowledgeable walking guide, with over four decades of research and education in his tool kit.

His career has taken him from working with local bird trappers in the coastal villages of Guyana and Surinam of South America to the classrooms and field programs of the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History, where as education director he studied eastern coyotes and other wildlife.

As education director at the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies, he developed classes and taught about whales and marine birds, taking to the ocean on over 2,500 whale watching trips related to education and research. Trull's fascination with and knowledge about our wild neighbors of land, sea and sky is matched only by



Red-breasted nuthatch



White-breasted nuthatch



Red-winged blackbird

You'll not only learn the basics of identifying birds by sight, sound and behavior, you'll also encounter a number and variety of birds that may just astound you.

his passion for sharing this knowledge.

He holds a Master's Degree in education, has written nine books about Cape Cod natural history, and retired a few years ago as a science teacher at the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School.

In other words, Trull is the one you want to wander out in nature with, not only to see and learn about our feathered friends but to enjoy his expertise and enthusiasm for our natural world.

The enjoyment he takes in sharing what he sees, hears and understands about our natural surroundings is contagious in a wonderful way.

You'll not only learn the basics of identifying birds by sight, sound and behavior, you'll also encounter a number and variety of birds that may just astound you.

On this morning's walk, we spot 22 different species of birds, from red-breasted nuthatches to yellow-

rumped warblers, including the guest of honor, a tiny ruby-crowned kinglet, its red-topped head and white eye ring unmistakable in the morning sunlight.

On this particular morning, we learn that the song sparrow repeats its distinctive call 360 times per hour, every ten seconds, all day long, and that brown creepers can be identified by the way they creep up the bark of trees, "like a wind-up toy."

After an hour or so of absorption in the sights and sounds of nature, the walk participants start to exhibit the soothing effects of nature, commenting quietly to one another about their observations and relaxing experience.

Most certainly they'll soon want to get outside again to watch for our avian neighbors in the woods, meadows, and marshes around us.

Story by Jennifer Sexton-Riley

EXPERIENCE THE WORLD OF BIRDS

How fortunate we are to have such unique and valuable natural areas preserved for our wild friends' benefit and our enjoyment, as well as to have such a knowledgeable guide to show us where to look and what to listen for.

Join Peter Trull, our feathered friends, and fellow nature enthusiasts on morning birding walks to discover the world of birds and explore a diversity of scenic spots including Red River Beach for summer shorebird discoveries.

You'll learn identification tips, bird behavior, habits and habitat preferences, and you may even see some species you've never encountered before.

All birding experience levels are welcome. Bring binoculars. Space is limited to 12 per walk.

Visit harwichconservationtrust.org and click **Walks & Events** for available dates and to reserve your space.



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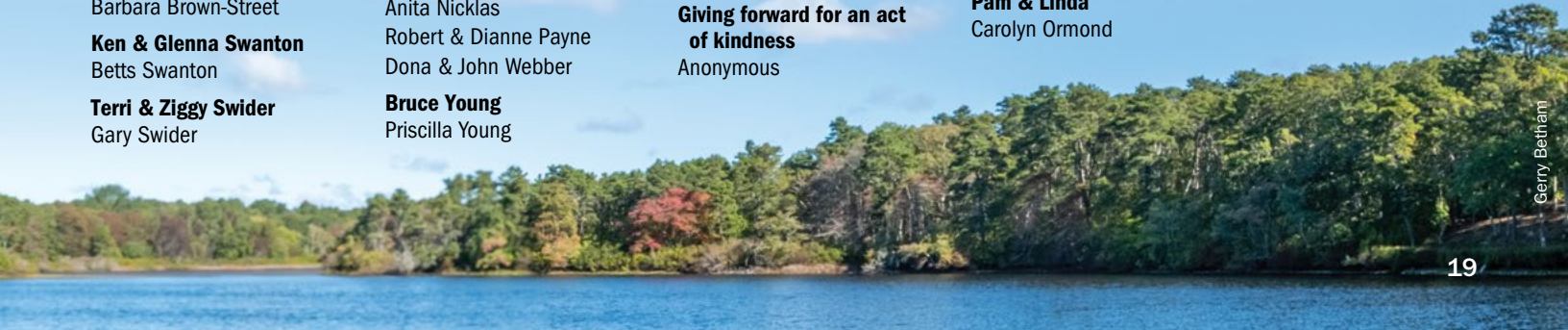
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