



Friends of Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge

Fall 2023 Newsletter

Hello Refuge Friends!

It's been a busy several months for the Friends!

In April and May, in a variety of **Earth Day projects**, we potted and planted hundreds of native plants, joining efforts with the Mashpee Conservation Department, Falmouth Rod & Gun Club and Scout Troop 42.

From April through October, we managed "Season Two" of our Osprey Cam at the Waquoit Bay Reserve, including an amazing emergency replacement of the nest platform that almost put an early end to the season. If you missed it, you can still view much of this year's activity on our **highlights page**.

For the seventh straight year, we worked with the **Wampanoag "Preserve our Homeland" Camp** to teach outdoor skills. This year, we worked with tribal youth to create a new wetland pollinator and medicinal plant garden at a newly-cleared site near the Santuit River at the Wampanoag Tribal Farm.

Importantly, we continued efforts begun in 2022 to establish a Refuge visitor center and greenhouse, and **recently secured the unanimous support** of the Mashpee Conservation Commission. Our next steps are to present a proposal to the Mashpee Select Board and to explore building and funding options.

Over the summer, we also worked with an Eagle Scout candidate from Troop 42 as the beneficiary of his Eagle Scout project to support habitat for the New England Cottontail rabbit. Two "rabbittats" were completed by the troop and volunteers as part of this effort.

You may have also joined us at the Mashpee Senior Center for our **presentation on raising Monarch butterflies**. Participants learned about monarch migration, host plants and lifecycles, as well as a live demonstration on monarch eggs and caterpillars.

Our second annual "Walk for the Wild" 5k challenge was a great success! Over twenty walkers (plus 1 dog!) completed the entire 5k walk, on a picture perfect fall day on October 14th! Many more attended our celebration event at Naukabout brewery, supporting our fundraising by purchasing beer and raffle tickets.

Yes, we've been busy!

Our Fall 2023 newsletter edition focuses on AmeriCorps Cape Cod. Included below is a special feature article written by Leo Lainez about his work with English Learning Developing students in the Falmouth Public Schools on a citizen science project about ospreys. Our Creature Feature Corner, devoted to the wild turkey, was written by our new AmeriCorps member, Grace Vachon. Be sure to read about Grace's journey to AmeriCorps Cape Cod, a compelling story of how childhood experiences shape our paths in life.

Scroll down to read more or [download](#) and print the newsletter for later enjoyment.

Glenn Davis
President
Friends of Mashpee NWR

P.S.: If you haven't already renewed your membership, and/or want to get more involved in the Friends organization, see the mail-in form on the last page (or [click here](#) to donate online). More information is always available on our website, with up-to-date info on upcoming events and other Refuge news. Thank you for your support!

Connecting Students to Nature: My AmeriCorps Cape Cod Journey, by Leonel Lainez

At the beginning of my AmeriCorps Cape Cod journey back in September, I was assigned to work with Joan Muller, the Education Coordinator from Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Nancy Church, a board member from the Friends of Mashpee Wildlife Refuge. Together, we were tasked with developing an educational program about Ospreys using a live webcam on the WBNERR campus. As a Person of Color, and Spanish being my first language, I noticed a struggle that no one could see.

During a Pond Study with Joan Muller from Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, I conducted a shoreline survey around the pond. I noticed that the students who were not proficient in English or did not have English as their first language refrained from speaking up. This experience inspired me to create a citizen project for English Learning Developing students (ELD) to help them feel more comfortable and confident in their abilities to participate.

In January, I reached out to Carmela Mayeski, a Learning Partnership Specialist for Falmouth Public Schools, for guidance on which schools to contact, teacher referrals, and student demographics. With her help, I connected with Christine Nicholson, the Head of the English Department in Falmouth, Melissa Crime an ELD teacher from Lawrence, and Mary Beth Knox, an ELD teacher from Morse Pond.



After learning that Ospreys migrated to the Cape from South America, I saw a connection between the students to their homelands through the sea hawk.

In February, I coordinated a meeting with Joan Muller, Nancy Church, and Alan F Poole, a well-known Osprey Biologist from the Cape, to discuss ways to make this project interactive for the students. Alan F Poole helped to create a structure of a citizen scientist project for the

students to observe the Ospreys using a live webcam on a nest at WBNERR.



In March, I presented to Melissa Crim and Mary Beth Knox ELD classrooms to prepare them for the project and provide some basic biology of Ospreys, right before the hawks migrated from South America so the students could see their arrival. The students from both classes were excited and eager to learn more about Ospreys and excited for their arrival in late March. Both teachers dedicated time in their classes to observe the ospreys and write down any observations or behaviors and will continue to do so until the end of the school year.

In between, I visited the schools again to provide another presentation and to see what the students were observing and how they were doing. This presentation focused on the Adaptation and Behaviors of Ospreys; a continuation of the presentation given in March. In June, both classes joined me at WBNERR for a field day and a tour of the campus. I facilitated activities such as the Life of Osprey, an interactive board game that highlights



Osprey's different life stages, migration, and behavior. We also played our DDT Game, in which students picked up popsicle sticks that represent fish. Some of the fish are contaminated with DDT, and this helped illustrate the food chain of Osprey. We looked at the Ospreys the students were observing through binoculars and spotting scopes. This was the most exciting moment of the day because the students got to see the Osprey in person and witness them flying around campus.



Overall, this project was a great success. It not only helped ELD students feel more comfortable participating in class, but it also provided a valuable learning experience for all the students involved. Through this project, they were able to connect with nature and learn about the migration patterns and behaviors of Ospreys. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked on this project and for the support and guidance from all the individuals involved.

Thank you, Leo, for your work on this and other projects during your AmeriCorps placement this past year!

Creature Feature

Wild Turkeys, by Grace Vachon

In the spirit of the season, we are bringing you the wild turkey for this edition's Creature Feature. Known as the "official game bird of the state of Massachusetts" since 1991, wild turkeys are both large and striking in appearance. They are mostly dark brown with feathers that are often striped at the tips and a tail that looks like a large fan. Their distinctive heads may appear as a mix of both red and blue with

a red, wrinkled giblet on their chin and a sharp beak used for pecking and foraging. You can find them in a variety of habitats including mature forests, fields, clearings, and residential or urban areas. It is not uncommon to see turkeys crossing residential roads in small groups or roosting on roofs or atop cars. They often nest on the ground underneath trees, usually in leaves or brush, but will roost on tree branches



Photo credit: US Fish & Wildlife Service

Wild turkeys are omnivores, meaning that they can consume both animal protein and plant material. Their diet varies seasonally based on the resources available to them at the time, and usually consists of leafy vegetation, fruits, buds, nuts and seeds, insects, snails, and small amphibians. They forage by scratching at leaf litter with their sharp talons but avoid foraging on the ground when it is covered with heavy snow. Like many other bird species, adult males (toms) engage in whimsical courtship displays to attract females (hens). As part of a display called “gobbling,” males fan out their tail feathers, point their wings towards the ground, puff out their chests, and then strut around while making low humming noises. Males will mate with multiple females, and after mating, males and females form separate flocks where females assume the responsibility of caring for the young. Despite being large and heavy, turkeys are prey for numerous other wildlife species, and typically live only three to four years in the wild. Their predators include snakes, owls, eagles, skunks, raccoons, coyotes, opossums, and especially humans.



Photo credit: "Wild Turkeys" by flythebirdpath is licensed under CC BY 2.0

If you are a visitor to the Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge, you may see a wild turkey or two while out on your stroll. They are also important to the refuge’s hunting program. Hunting is allowed on about 300 acres of the Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge (except on Sundays), and turkeys are one of the many species that are allowed to be hunted (**visit this page** for more information about hunting within the refuge, and **this page** for more information about turkey hunting in Massachusetts).

They are also the second most sought-after game species following white-tailed deer according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Turkeys have also been an important cultural symbol and source of food for the Wampanoag tribe, one of the refuge partners. With Thanksgiving approaching, it is important to consider the rights of the Wampanoag to their land and their role in preserving and maintaining it. Not only did the early settlers not eat turkey at their Thanksgiving table like we do today, but the original story of the “First Thanksgiving” leaves out many of the unsavory details about colonialism and the relationships between settlers and Native Americans (**read more here**).

Although wild turkeys are of little conservation concern in the present day, their populations suffered massive declines in the early nineteenth century due to habitat loss and overharvesting, so much so that they became extirpated, or locally extinct, from

Massachusetts in the 1850s. However, their populations began to rebound after a few were brought in from New York state in the 1970s, and the turkey population in Massachusetts is now estimated at between 30,000 and 35,000 birds. These curious creatures are now a strong presence in many residential neighborhoods, sometimes to the point where conflicts between humans and turkeys are unavoidable. Specifically, turkey droppings can cause damage to man-made structures like porches, decks, and cars. Their hierarchical social structure, where some turkeys within a group rank higher in the pecking order than others, may cause them to attack humans whom they view as subordinates. Turkeys may also attack their own reflections, mistaking them for another turkey of lower social status. To prevent such conflicts, homeowners can avoid leaving out attractants (bird seed, pet food), cover low-to-the ground wild berries with netting or a tarp, and scare away problem turkeys by making loud noises or shooing them away. Also, be sure to watch out for turkeys when driving on residential roads. If you see one, it is likely that more will follow! Overall, turkeys are pretty cool birds, and it is our job to make sure that we can coexist with them as humans continue to encroach into natural habitats.

My Journey to AmeriCorps Cape Cod by Grace Vachon



Photo courtesy of Henry Torpey (ACC)

Often the career path that we take in life is not straight, and there are usually a few curves or bumps along the way, which is what I am currently experiencing. My name is Grace Vachon, a recent graduate of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and current member of AmeriCorps Cape Cod (ACC), a service organization based in Barnstable County. I will be serving with Waquoit Bay Research Reserve and Friends of Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge this year as part of ACC's individual placement program, where each member is placed with different partner organizations. Many of my earliest memories involve exploring the outdoors and engaging with wildlife of all kinds. For instance, I remember venturing into a deep pond to catch dragonflies with a tiny plastic net, filling my rain boots almost to the top with water. I also recall snatching green, slippery frogs from the depths of a vernal pool, and searching for slugs under wet forest logs. Because of these early

childhood experiences, I developed a life-long interest and passion for nature, wildlife, and conserving our wild lands. I often felt like an outsider as a child because my interests deviated from those of my peers, but when I was in nature, I felt like I had a place where I belonged and could be myself. I was also inspired by the scientists, conservationists, and park rangers who I saw working outside and with their hands, doing the things that I loved to do.

All the time I spent outside growing up made

me want to pursue a career in ecology or wildlife science. I always tried to get the most out of my life science classes in school and declared my major as wildlife and conservation biology upon applying to UNH. During my first few years there, I took up summer volunteer positions at the Saco River Wildlife Center in Limington, Maine, and On the Wing in Epping, New Hampshire. Saco River specialized in rabies vector species like racoons and foxes, while On the Wing specialized in raptors like owls, hawks, vultures, and falcons. I not only learned practical skills like how to handle and care for a variety of different wildlife species, but also how to make connections with people with similar passions and interests. My first real wildlife job was as a field technician up in New Hampshire's White Mountains, where I assisted a graduate student with capturing and taking samples from small mammals like mice, voles, chipmunks, and shrews in order to measure their population trends. This position gave me experience with setting small mammal traps, collecting tissue, fecal, and hair samples; handling animals safely, teamwork, and communication.



Photo courtesy of Savannah Gray (ACC)

However, my career interest shifted during the very end of my senior year when I did my capstone project on how income impacted participation in outdoor recreation within the UNH community. My results hinted that there was a slight correlation between income and participation in outdoor recreation, where lower-income people were less likely to participate. Seeing these results compelled me to want to get into public outreach and environmental education, where I could improve access to nature and bring down barriers by teaching people. That interest was further solidified this past summer when I worked at the recreation department in Rochester, New Hampshire, planning nature programming for the summer camp and senior center. Seeing the summer camp enjoying the nature art activity I planned brought on a great amount of satisfaction. It was great to see kids that might otherwise not have had the opportunity to get outside exploring, being creative, and having a great time.

With the desire to explore different career paths in the natural resources field and to gain more experience with outreach and education, I applied to serve with AmeriCorps Cape Cod as soon as I finished college. I was drawn to the program by its four focus areas: natural resource management, disaster preparedness and response, environmental education, and community outreach and volunteer engagement. Since I was excited to create and deliver educational materials, I knew that Waquoit Bay Reserve and Friends of Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge would be a good fit for me. As an introvert, I was not expecting to want to work with people, but sometimes shifts in your career path are unexpected. I know I will



Photo courtesy of Caroline Lawrence (ACC)

enjoy serving with AmeriCorps Cape Cod, Waquoit Bay, and Friends of Mashpee this year, and that I will learn tons of valuable skills that I can carry with me into my future career. Delivering programs will strengthen my public speaking and communication skills. I am also excited to learn how to design fun and engaging programs that are geared toward a specific audience or age group. My major project for the year is to design and deliver a program about plastics for school kids. I am looking forward to this project as I will get to apply the skills I have learned while working on a topic that I am passionate about, so stay tuned for that. I know it is going to be a great year!

Grace, the Friends look forward to working with you this year!

Please check our website for upcoming events, activities and volunteer opportunities. Also, don't miss the Town of Mashpee Interpretive Nature Tours on Saturday mornings (see our [events calendar](#) for detail)!

2023 Friends of Mashpee NWR Board of Directors:

Glenn Davis, President

MaryKay Fox, Treasurer

Lucinda Keith, Clerk

Joan and Neil Barkin, Membership Committee

Thomas Fudala, Historian

Nancy Church

Katelyn Cadoret

Membership Form

YES! I want to support the **Mashpee National Wildlife Refuge** - enclosed are my dues as checked below.

Name: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (C) _____

Street: _____

Town: _____ State: _____ ZIP Code: _____

Email: _____

Enclose payment for the membership - please make checks payable to: **FMNWR**
Mail to: **FMNWR, P.O. Box 1283, Mashpee, MA 02649**

Thank you!

- Junior (18 and under) \$10
- Individual \$25
- Family \$50
- Conservation Friend \$100
- Wildlife Sponsor \$200
- Refuge Sponsor \$500+
- Lifetime Gift \$1000
- Corporate Gift \$_____
- Other \$_____

Donate Online

Volunteer Form

I would be interested in the following opportunities listed below:

- Stewardship Projects
- Newsletter Editor
- Native Pollinator Gardens
- Education Talks/Walks, Events at Schools
- Volunteer & Membership Coordinator

The Friends meet monthly on the first Tuesday at 5pm on Zoom. Please join us and get involved with Refuge projects, Friends group, pollinators, and community events! If interested, email us at info@friendsofmashpeenationalwildliferefuge.org for a Zoom invite.

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