



Strategic Plan 2023-2026



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NORMAN BIRD SANCTUARY

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2026

August 2023

We are excited to share with you our new 2023–2026 Strategic Plan framework, which will guide the Norman Bird Sanctuary's efforts for the next three years. This plan represents the collective vision and commitment of our organization to make positive and lasting changes that will allow us to enhance and carry out our mission.

Over the past several months, our dedicated Board and staff have worked to develop a strategic plan that aligns with our core values, mission, and vision. We have engaged with community members, stakeholders, and experts to gather insights and perspectives that have shaped this plan. The result is a roadmap that will guide us toward a brighter and more impactful future as we continue to preserve this special place for the lasting benefit of wildlife, plant life, and humans.

We have refined our mission statement to better articulate the work we do:

Our mission is to spark people's curiosity to explore, steward, and find peace and joy in nature.

At the heart of our 2023–2026 Strategic Plan are four goals:

1. ***Norman Bird Sanctuary's campus demonstrates comprehensive and effective conservation stewardship and showcases adaptive use of historic structures and spaces.***
2. ***An inclusive, accessible hub for community partnerships, Norman Bird Sanctuary offers expansive, diverse, mission-based programming.***
3. ***Norman Bird Sanctuary is a living laboratory for active conservation research on our property, educating the community about the local ecology and the impacts of climate change.***
4. ***Norman Bird Sanctuary has the team, support, and infrastructure needed to implement its strategic plan.***

In the coming weeks, we will further refine our implementation plan and associated timeline. Your feedback and input remain vital as we put these strategies into action to achieve our goals. We look forward to sharing this with you.

Together we have the opportunity to create a thriving, sustainable, and inclusive future for the Norman Bird Sanctuary. We invite each of you to join us in working together to turn this vision into a reality. Thank you for your continued support and dedication.

Warmly,



Kaity Ryan
Executive Director



Liz Drayton
Board Chair

Norman Bird Sanctuary

Strategic Framework – Adopted Aug. 1, 2023

Our Mission

Our mission is to spark people’s curiosity to explore, steward, and find peace and joy in nature.

In service to this, Norman Bird Sanctuary inspires, builds, and engages a community of stewards who preserve, protect, enjoy, and learn from the ecosystem within and beyond our stone walls. We foster lifelong connections between people and our dynamic natural world.

Our Values

We are guided by the following values:

- **Community:** We build community and connection with our partners, visitors, and each other. We treat each other with patience, encouragement, and acceptance.
- **Inspiration:** We foster curiosity and creativity and we try to model what we hope to see in the world.
- **Discovery:** We like to experiment and explore. We plan, learn, and retool.
- **Compassion:** We embody kindness, gratitude, and respect for humans, wildlife, and the land we protect.

The Need and Our Response

The need

As the Norman Bird Sanctuary celebrates the 75th anniversary of its creation, we continue to realize the vision of its founder: that this extraordinarily rich and ecologically diverse property be a home for wildlife, especially birds, and that its lands be preserved as a place for learning and respite for the human spirit.

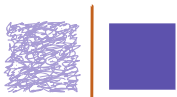
We acknowledge the many changes to Aquidneck Island and our region in the intervening years. Pressures of land development have contributed to a lack of affordability for many residents. Those same pressures continue to constrict the availability of green spaces and places.

A changing climate directly impacts the environment, right here at the doorstep of the Norman Bird Sanctuary. We are direct observers of these changes. With longer growing seasons, invasive plants are gaining a stronger foothold across these lands. Stronger seasonal storms and rising tides are increasing erosion at Third Beach. Change is inevitable.

The community of stewards at Norman Bird Sanctuary stands on the front lines of these dynamics. *How can we engage the next generation as lifelong stewards who value, protect, and preserve our priceless natural resources? How can we guide our citizens in making sense of these climate impacts around us, and adapting to these changes in science-based approaches that preserve the best of what we have and respond with agility to inevitable change? How can we more effectively partner with others to share our knowledge base? How can we better welcome all who seek learning, tranquility, a sense of place?* This strategic plan seeks to answer these questions.

Our response: primary focus areas

Norman Bird Sanctuary owns a 300-acre property in Middletown with significant natural, cultural, and historic values. Over the past 75 years, we have conserved this piece of paradise. As we face urgent threats on Aquidneck Island, we are called upon to help people respond and adapt. We help people explore and develop their own relationship with the Bird Sanctuary through four primary focus areas:



- **Conservation and restoration.** We design and implement projects that restore habitats on our land, guided by science and research.
- **Environmental education.** We offer programs and information to deepen understanding of and connection with nature.
- **Historic preservation and cultural interpretation.** We conserve, curate, and interpret buildings, spaces, images, and artifacts that collectively tell the story of this place and the people who were here before us.
- **Managing our property in service to our goals.** We collaborate with our partners, volunteers, and people with technical expertise to plan for and sustainably manage this property to benefit the land, the plants and wildlife, and the people of Aquidneck Island.

Aligned and unifying approaches

Embedded within those four focus areas, several approaches cut across all aspects of our work.

- **Strategic partnerships:** We will team with public and private partners to identify and implement shared strategies. We will define specific organizational roles in providing programs that activate our property and that invite the community to form connections with the natural environment.
- **Climate resilience:** Through our own programs, partnerships, practices, and property, we will help the people of Aquidneck Island understand, anticipate, and respond to the impacts of climate change (including concerns about water, habitat, and sea level rise) through mitigation and adaptation.
- **Greater inclusion:** We are committed to evolving as an organization to meet the needs of our community in a welcoming and responsible manner. Through understanding, relationship-building, and action, we will form stronger partnerships to help understand who benefits from and who participates in nature conservation, and to work together towards solutions to address longstanding inequities.
- **Organizational capacity:** We will evaluate our own capacity, and thoughtfully prioritize staffing, governance, programs, and systems to ensure we can effectively deliver our mission for the next 75 years.

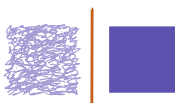
The ideas above, integrated throughout the goals and strategies in this plan, help us to move toward a practical vision of the future we are trying to create.

Practical Vision

Three years from today, we want:

- a comprehensive and scientific approach to land and habitat management;
- an inclusive, accessible Sanctuary functioning as a hub for community partnerships, activated with expansive, diverse programming;
- the Sanctuary's campus serving as a living laboratory to help people learn about and engage with the local environment and address the impacts of a changing climate.

To accomplish all this, we want to see our team of staff and volunteers continue to be engaged in meaningful work and thriving.



Goals and Strategies

Goal 1. Norman Bird Sanctuary's campus demonstrates comprehensive and effective conservation stewardship and showcases adaptive use of historic structures and spaces.

Why this matters: We manage an extraordinary property with rich and diverse habitat types, eleven buildings, and seven miles of trail. This campus is the platform from which we and our partner organizations provide programming. It is also our organization's home base. Our program and operational needs have outgrown the way we currently use our buildings. Investments in our land, our buildings, and the team that cares for them are necessary.

Over the next three years, we will:

1. Use our property to demonstrate comprehensive land management and restoration practices. Use climate data and updated management plans to guide our conservation assessment and investments, and an awareness of the site's human use impacts to guide our programmatic uses and investments.
2. Use our existing buildings to their full potential in meeting organizational needs for program and office spaces, by analyzing their best and highest use and planning for efficiencies, adaptive reuse, and renovation.
3. Use our primary campus as an exemplar and educational showcase for "green best practices."
4. Enhance the visitor experience on our campus through improved multilingual signage, trail connections, and application of "universal design" measures that increase accessibility.
5. Broaden the narrative history of land use and ownership of the property the Sanctuary conserves.

Goal 2. An inclusive, accessible hub for community partnerships, Norman Bird Sanctuary offers expansive, diverse, mission-based programming.

Why this matters: We provide an extensive, engaging array of programming. While much of our core programming is focused on school-age children, we offer a lot for older youth and adults – although those offerings are too much a "best kept secret." We see a need to improve our external communications about what we already offer, and to better understand where the remaining opportunities may be in terms of offering relevant programming for audiences of all ages and backgrounds. This will make it possible for us to offer a complete suite of programs that engage audiences across their entire lives and give them opportunities to develop their own connections and relationship with the natural world.

Over the next three years, we will:

1. Promote our work to a broader audience, communicating the programs we offer; seeking feedback to understand the interests and desires of program / event participants and other visitors; and using their feedback to inform our program planning.
2. Evaluate how our work complements that of other organizations on Aquidneck Island, considering this with respect to race, age, cultural relevance, and topics within the realms of our work (conservation and restoration, environmental education, cultural heritage and historic interpretation, nature and the arts, health and wellness, and gardening and food).
3. Cultivate and strengthen external partnerships to offer programs at the Sanctuary that fill gaps we have identified.
4. Ensure Norman Bird Sanctuary's site and programs are welcoming and culturally responsive.
5. Connect the Bird Sanctuary property more explicitly with partner organizations that conserve other natural areas.



Goal 3. Norman Bird Sanctuary is a living laboratory for active conservation research on our property, educating the community about the local ecology and the impacts of climate change.

Why this matters: Norman Sanctuary is an important bird “hot spot” in Rhode Island, and an ecologically significant property for native flora and fauna more broadly – boasting eight different habitat types from shoreline and coastal tidelands to upland forest. We are already actively working to increase our active, science-based programming that takes advantage of these unique attributes and the property’s ecological significance. We believe that more emphasis on science, and on collecting data, is important for our organization and that there are many opportunities to partner in this work. Our property and our educational role provide the perfect platform for us to help members of our community participate in science and understand and address climate change impacts on Aquidneck Island.

Over the next three years, we will:

1. Work with partners and researchers to define, collect, and curate a select set of baseline metrics about the Sanctuary’s property and species for year-over-year comparison measurements.
2. Integrate climate science actively into our teaching curriculum, using the lens of our property.
3. Continue to provide top-tier educational programming to introduce people of all ages to the natural environment and engage their curiosity.
4. Develop programmatic pathways for participation, with offerings for all ages from toddlers to adults, that deepen knowledge and connection with the natural world and that encourage lifelong learning and an environmental ethic.
5. Provide field-based conservation science career-building experiences for high school and college students through structured internships, community science projects, and Field Studies school.

Goal 4. Norman Bird Sanctuary has the team, support, and infrastructure needed to implement its strategic plan.

Why this matters: Over the past two years, we have already “upped the ante” in everything we are working on. And yet to step into all the opportunity this plan describes – many of which efforts are already in motion – we need additional investments to match our capacity with our ambition.

Over the next three years, we will:

1. Increase our visibility and strengthen our brand awareness through strategic communications.
2. Cultivate a culture of philanthropy within the organization, in which each staff and board member is a “philanthropy facilitator.”
3. Evaluate the needs for additional staff capacity; prioritize, sequence, and invest.
4. Continue to strengthen opportunities for volunteerism in all facets of our organization.
5. Continue to engage board and committee members in core governance and as organizational ambassadors who connect the public to our work.
6. Improve and streamline internal communication and take every opportunity to increase connection / collaboration between staff in different departments and between staff and board members.
7. Upgrade technology to support efficiency, communications, and data needs.



