

2026

ANNUAL REPORT

Photo taken by member and supporter, Cliff Berger


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





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Message from the Executive Director

In 2026, Norman Bird Sanctuary's mission—to spark curiosity and help people explore, steward, and find peace and joy in nature—came to life thanks to the dedication of our community. The first bloom of our restored coastal pollinator meadow offered a beautiful reminder of what carefully planned stewardship can achieve. After two years of preparation, the meadow – complete with new demonstration plots - is helping us learn more about biodiversity, while plans for a coastal trail promise more opportunities to explore in the years ahead.

Conservation and education continued to reinforce and strengthen one another. Trail cameras documented wildlife, including river otters, which enhanced our understanding of ecosystem restoration efforts and provided insight for programming engagement focused on mammals. Our new Water Quality Monitoring and Restoration Program expanded our understanding of freshwater habitats. And the launch of the Eaddo and Peter Kiernan Scholars Program, made possible by the Kiernan Foundation, gave undergraduates hands-on field research experience under the guidance and mentorship of Salve Regina University's Dr. Jameson Chace.

Our stewardship progress would not have been possible without the many volunteers who cared for trails, took on key projects like rebuilding the Nelson Pond boardwalk, grew vegetables for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center food pantry, and helped remove nearly 1,500 pounds of trash from Third Beach. That same community spirit brought 7,000 visitors to our record-breaking 52nd annual Harvest Fair, making 2026 a record-breaking year for the fair.

As you'll read in the pages that follow, curiosity and discovery connected people of all ages to the outdoor, living classroom that is NBS. From campers discovering a chrysalis to visitors exploring the night sky, we offered innovative opportunities for our community to explore and learn about the natural world.

To our members, donors, volunteers, partners, Board, and staff: thank you. Your generosity supports both the joyful moments we share and the steady, often unseen work behind them. Together, we are building a foundation for continued restoration, discovery, and belonging—and protecting this special place for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Kaity Ryan
Executive Director



Paradise Valley Society



Members of the Paradise Valley Society are a unique group of people who share the same vision as NBS founder, Mabel Norman Cerio, who created the Sanctuary through a bequest in 1949. The Paradise Valley Society recognizes those donors who have made arrangements for deferred gifts in their estate: a bequest in a will, a charitable remainder trust, appreciated stock, a life insurance policy with the Norman Bird Sanctuary named as the beneficiary, and more. Paradise Valley Society members understand the need to provide for the sustainable future of the Norman Bird Sanctuary.

To learn more, get in touch via Giving@NormanBirdSanctuary.org.

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**Deceased*



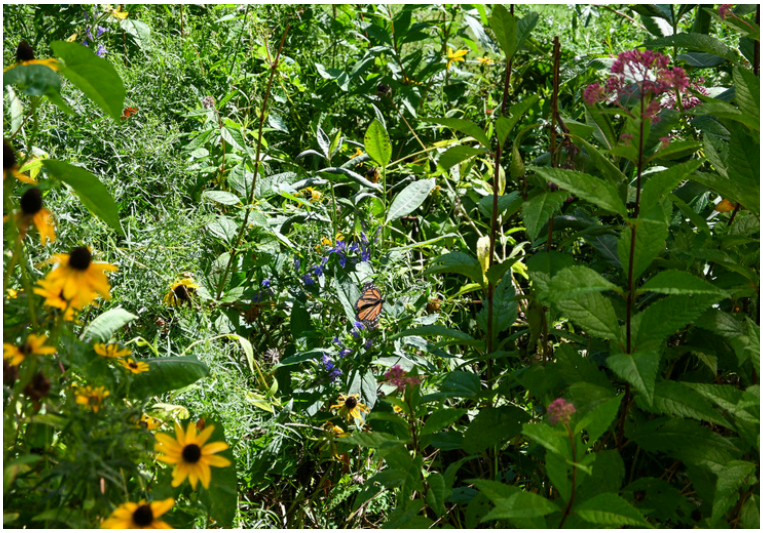
The First Bloom

Restoring a Coastal Pollinator Meadow

by Director of Horticulture and Conservation, Joye Whitney

This year marked a new milestone in our field management initiatives: the first bloom of our restored coastal pollinator meadow. What may appear at first glance to be a field of wildflowers represents two years of careful restoration, patience, observation, and stewardship as well as the beginning of a long-term effort to create a thriving habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

The two-year process was essential to giving native plants the opportunity to establish themselves while reducing competition from invasive and undesirable vegetation. Preparing the site, allowing the soil and existing seed bank to respond, and carefully managing emerging vegetation created the conditions necessary for native flowers and grasses to take hold. This gradual approach is important in a coastal landscape, where plants must adapt to challenging conditions including wind, salt exposure, drought and shifting soil changes. The results became visible with this year's first bloom of vibrant spring and early summer plants including annual bachelor buttons and poppies. The emerging flowers brought new color and movement to the landscape and attracted a diversity of pollinators. Bumblebees, butterflies, birds, spiders and other insects were observed by a summer intern who gathered data about which blooms and sections of the field were most visited by pollinators. Beyond the flowers themselves, the meadow is beginning to function as a living community – providing food and habitat for the wildlife who depend on grassland ecosystems.



Thanks to the generosity of donors Jeff and Stephanie Jarczyk, this year, we also expanded the project by establishing six demonstration plots featuring some of the most prominent pollinator plants already growing on the property. These plots will allow us to observe, how different species perform over time and provide an opportunity to learn which plants are particularly well suited to the Sanctuary's unique conditions. Our long-term goal is to establish these plants successfully enough that, in future years, we can harvest and save seeds from them for additional restoration projects across the property.

The first bloom is not an endpoint, but a beginning.

The meadow will continue to change and mature as plants establish deeper roots, spread naturally and interact with the wildlife that depends on them. For NBS, this project embodies the value of restoration with a long-term perspective. Two years of preparation have given us the first glimpse of what this meadow can become: a resilient coastal habitat, a resource for pollinators, and a living demonstration of the power of land stewardship. While we have maintenance and care ahead to ensure continued success, we are looking forward to introducing a new trail in the meadow and interpretation in the years ahead.

FALL 2024

10-acre field cleared of invasive plants

SPRING 2025

Buckwheat cover crop planted

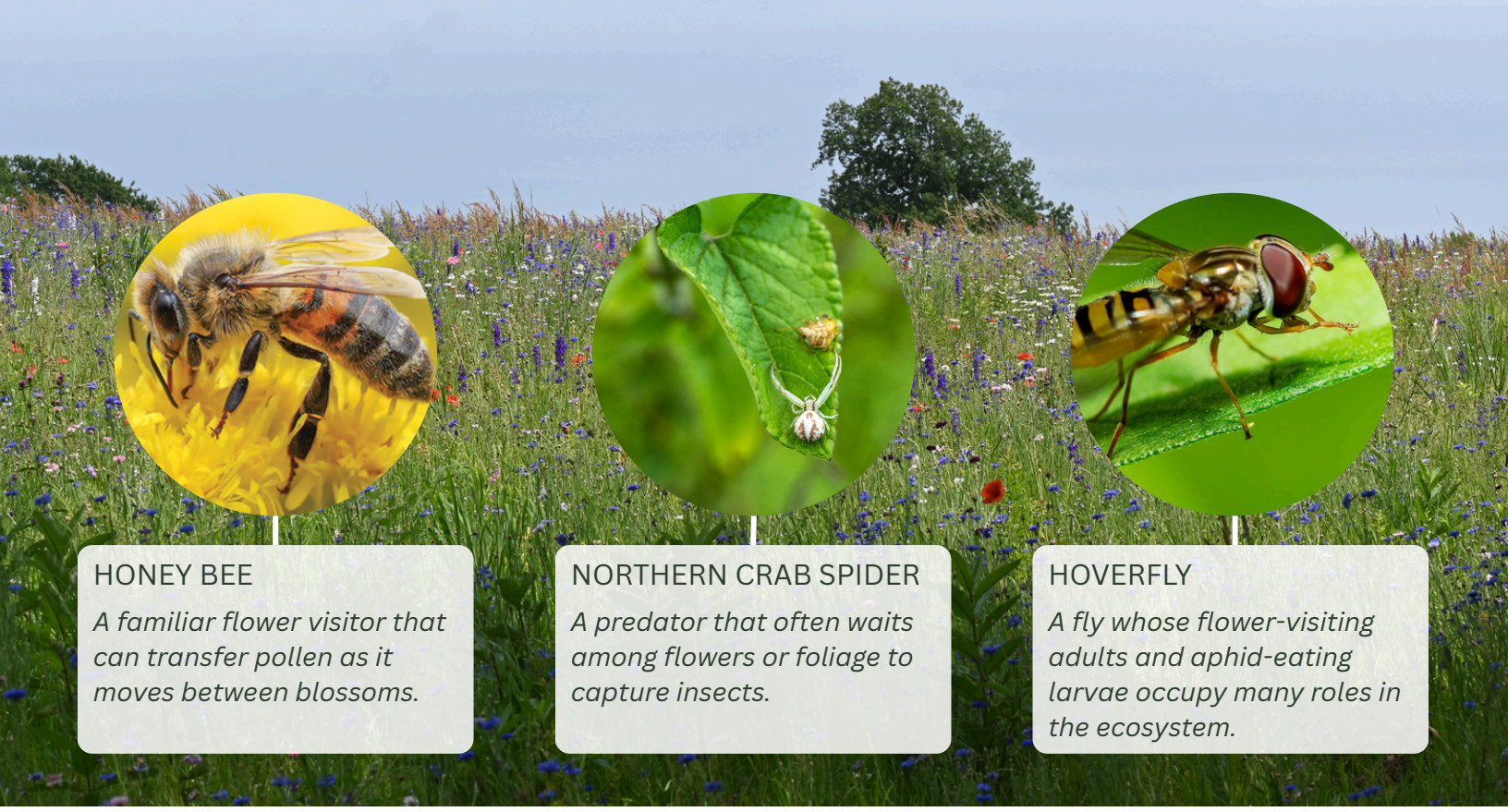
FALL 2025

Pollinator seed mix sown

SPRING 2026

First season of pollinator blooming and mowing





HONEY BEE

A familiar flower visitor that can transfer pollen as it moves between blossoms.

NORTHERN CRAB SPIDER

A predator that often waits among flowers or foliage to capture insects.

HOVERFLY

A fly whose flower-visiting adults and aphid-eating larvae occupy many roles in the ecosystem.

Beyond the Blooms

Life in the Coastal Pollinator Meadow

A meadow in bloom can look like a simple abundance of color. Look closer, however, and each flower becomes a meeting place: a source of food for visiting insects, a site of pollen transfer, and sometimes a hunting ground for predators waiting among the petals and leaves. These interactions are part of what makes a meadow function as a healthy ecosystem. Bees, butterflies, flies, and other pollinators help many flowering plants reproduce by transferring pollen between blooms. In turn, flowering plants provide nectar and pollen that sustain insect life. Those insects support another layer of the community, serving as sustenance themselves, for spiders, birds, and other wildlife.

Pollinators are often associated most closely with bees and butterflies - the most eye-catching, colorful counterparts of the ecosystem. However, there exists a whole subset of species that are equally as important to the health an operation of a meadow. Hoverflies, for example, can resemble small bees or wasps, yet belong to an entirely different insect group. As adults, they visit flowers for nectar and pollen; as larvae, many species feed on aphids and other insects.

A Closer Look

Understanding these relationships begins with observation. During the summer of 2026, Conservation Research Intern, Jesse Tinklepaugh, used timed observations along transects and within smaller focal plots to record pollinators, flowering plants, and insect behavior.



A meadow's relationships extend well beyond pollination. Northern crab spiders observed among the flowers prey on insects drawn to floral resources, while hoverfly larvae feed on aphids and other small insects. Together, these interactions connect flowering plants to a much larger community. Plants support insects, insects become food for predators, and the abundance of insects helps sustain birds and other wildlife. Rather than a simple food chain, a meadow is a network of overlapping relationships that changes with the seasons.

The Ecological Network

Trophic Levels: the hierarchical steps or position levels in an ecosystem's food chain or food web, categorized by how organisms obtain their energy and nutrients:

FOUNDATION: FLOWERING PLANTS PROVIDE FOOD & HABITAT

PRIMARY CONSUMERS: INSECTS & POLLINATORS FEED ON FLORAL RESOURCES

HIGHER TROPHIC LEVELS: SECONDARY CONSUMERS & MEADOW PREDATORS



Crab Spider (Predator): Traps nectar-seeking insects, converting into energy.



Hoverfly: Adult feeds on plant pests. Larvae controls herbivore populations in the web.



Micro-Network in Action: A single milkweed plant simultaneously anchors the two higher trophic levels—providing nectar for primary consumers (pollinators), hunting ground for an ambush predator (crab spider), and foraging habitat for higher-level wildlife (tree swallow).

GOLDENROD *BACHELOR BUTTONS* *ASTER* *POPPIES*


CONSERVATION
CREW

Many Skills and Backgrounds

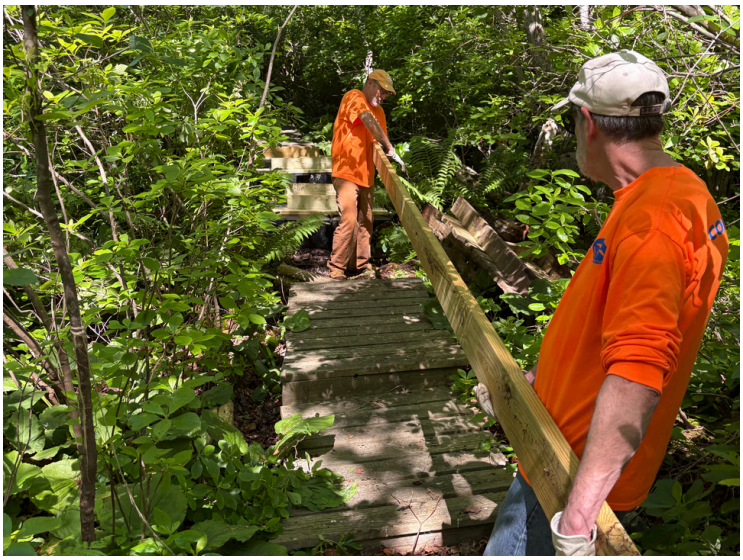
One Sanctuary

by Board Member and Conservation Crew Volunteer, Schuyler Horton

Every week, the Conservation Crew at Norman Bird Sanctuary brings together a diverse group of volunteers with different ages, backgrounds, experiences, and skills—but one common bond: a deep appreciation for this special place and a desire to help protect and preserve it.

Led by Sanctuary Staff - Joye, (Jay - gone but not forgotten), Tom, Bella, Kathleen and John, the crew works throughout the year on an impressive variety of projects. This year followed a familiar seasonal rhythm starting this spring with trail clearing after winter storms, invasive plant removal (attacking the "Holy Trinity" of Privet, Japanese Knot Weed and Greenbriar), bird-box installation and maintenance (318 this season), and work in the Good Gardens (new planting beds and hoop house repairs).

As summer approached, the focus shifted to preparing for Summer Camp, including building presentation boards, setting up the amphitheater and painting and repairing the Coastal Education Center. As we transitioned into the Fall, the Crew shifted to preparations for the Harvest Fair - from updating and repairing children's games and preparing the event space to volunteering during the event.





And then there were projects that required everyone to bring their varied skills together. This year, two major undertakings– rebuilding the floating boardwalk across the wetland Nelson Pond Trail wetland and dismantling, relocating, and rebuilding Hunter's Hawk Enclosure while preparing for a new Pole Barn – provided excellent examples of what this crew can accomplish.

The floating boardwalk presented a unique construction challenge. Heavy materials had to be moved across difficult terrain (thank you War College student volunteers), and the structure had to work within a wetland environment. The crew found inspiration in Newport's floating docks and developed an approach that emphasized flexibility rather than trying to impose a rigid structure on a changing landscape: float rather than fight.

The Hawk Enclosure project required a different set of skills. The existing structure was carefully dismantled (while Hunter was brought to a quieter location), with as much material as possible salvaged and recycled, then moved and rebuilt. At the same time, the site was prepared for a new pole barn that will provide much-needed storage for tractors and other large outdoor equipment.



Both projects required planning, problem-solving, physical effort, flexibility, and—most importantly—teamwork. At times, the crew also called on additional resources, including outside volunteers, contractors, and other specialists.

In many ways, the Conservation Crew reflects the Sanctuary itself: more than 300 acres of meadows, wetlands, forests, coastal areas, ponds, streams, and rocky outcroppings, each different but connected as one remarkable landscape.

The Conservation Crew's greatest strength is its diversity. No one person brings every skill needed for the work. Instead, people contribute what they know, learn from one another, and adapt to whatever challenge is in front of them.

Home Not So Far From Home

by Conservation Crew volunteer, D'Ante Carter

Norman Bird Sanctuary isn't just seeking to grow and preserve the local ecosystem. It's seeking to grow and preserve the local community as well. Education and knowledge sharing are things Norman Bird Sanctuary is committed to providing. Just as they hope to impart knowledge onto volunteers and visitors; they hope volunteers, visitors and academic partners will impart knowledge onto them, so everyone can grow and learn together.

Aquidneck Island is a very beautiful place with a lot of rich history. Much of that beauty and history is somewhat rapidly being pushed out, making it difficult for local community members to be able to enjoy the place they call home. I hope that by working with Norman Bird Sanctuary, I can help to preserve and regrow such beauty for the local residents - human, plant, and animal alike - and help restore faith that we have a home and community worth living in and fighting for.

Read D'Ante's full piece on the Norman Bird Sanctuary blog.





Rooted in Community

Produce, Discovery, and the Good Gardens

by University of Rhode Island Master Gardener, Susanna Williams

As the leader of the Master Gardener team that oversees the Good Gardens at the Norman Bird Sanctuary, I can report that we have had an excellent year!

My team and I, under the aegis of the URI Master Gardener program, work in the Good Gardens at the Sanctuary to demonstrate good gardening practices to the public – i.e. anyone who stops by the garden on their way to walk the woodland trails. And, perhaps more importantly, to grow vegetables for contribution to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center food pantry in downtown Newport. In this way, we are directly addressing the issue of food insecurity in this most gilded of environments.

My team of Master Gardeners and I raise vegetables for donation to the food pantry – every Monday and Thursday I drive down to Newport with a trunk full of vegetables. Kale and bok choy early in the season; come late summer, it's all about the tomatoes, peppers and eggplant (and the cotton, which we grow to demonstrate to curious children where their t-shirts come from!)







*So far this year we have sent more than **1,500 pounds** of produce down to the food pantry with more to come once the winter squash have matured .*

I have to admit, however, that it's been a challenging year. Between the weather – lurching from drought to saturating rain – and the inevitable onslaught of blights, wilts, moulds, and various insect pests (most of them utterly predictable in this climate), we've lost more produce than I should like. But it's all a learning curve – next year I shall know not to plant the tomatoes quite so close together in the high tunnel, and that fennel needs to be transplanted early to reach its full potential.



A singular moment? The discovery of this gorgeous moth, resting on the ground in the high tunnel amongst the tomato plants. It's a Pandora Sphynx moth – closely related to the Carolina Sphynx Moth, whose caterpillar is the infamous Tobacco Hornworm (usually misidentified as the Tomato Hornworm, a closely related species) with which our tomatoes have been infested this season. This moth, however, is entirely harmless – and so beautiful!

We have a great cadre of Master Gardener volunteers, plus several new recruits who have arrived recently via the Sanctuary's social media outreach. I am looking forward to expanding our reach beyond the Master Gardener organization to involve more community volunteers, with all their particular skills and knowledge. That's an intriguing prospect – who knows what we will discover, but I certainly know that the potential is out there.

Next year? Too soon to know – let's see what the weather brings!

Learn more about volunteering and join the team at www.NormanBirdSanctuary.org/Volunteer.



In the Field

Growing the Wildlife Monitoring Program

by Wildlife Conservation Coordinator, Bella Villanueva



This year marked the first year of the Wildlife Monitoring Program at NBS. Moving from my TerraCorps Land Stewardship Coordinator role into my full-time Wildlife Conservation Coordinator role has expanded our Properties Team capacity and allowed us to better understand how wildlife use our property. Through a variety of monitoring projects, we are learning more about the species that call NBS home and using that knowledge to inform land management and habitat conservation.

One of our biggest projects has been mammal biodiversity monitoring. Six trail cameras across the property document which mammal species are present and which habitats they are using. We have captured everything from coyotes and skunks to especially exciting footage of a pair of river otters. Dr. Jameson Chace from Salve Regina University, and his BIO 255 students have also helped us analyze the information we are collecting. Social media has been an important tool for sharing wildlife that is often difficult to see in person and helps us engage the public. Otters and baby animals were among our most popular posts, and our wildlife monitoring work was featured twice in Newport This Week.

We began a dedicated deer monitoring project using three trail cameras after observing the effects of deer browsing on forest regeneration, shrubland health, and the growth of native plants. Understanding deer abundance will help us make informed decisions about future habitat management at the Sanctuary. The Rhode Island Department of Management (RIDEM) has been advising us on how to begin quantifying the deer population on the property so we can address concerns about the condition of our forest health. Based on RIDEM guidance, maintaining a lower deer density, around five deer on our 300-acre property, would help support forest and habitat quality. Our preliminary camera-based calculations suggest approximately 42 deer, although this is an estimate rather than a confirmed count of animals living exclusively on the Sanctuary. We will continue monitoring and hope to conduct a drone survey this winter.



New Norman Bird Sanctuary Trail Cams Lead to Discovery

By Philip Cozzolino

No one would refer to her as a sleuth or a spy, but Isabella Villanueva's job at the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown requires some animal surveillance.

Villanueva supervises the use of trail cameras to observe overnight activity among mammals as part of a habitat restoration project. In the process, she has spied on a collection of nocturnal characters including raccoons, mink, muskrats, skunks, rabbits, possums and coyotes. What she didn't expect to find were otters, but there they were.

A Terra Corps land stewardship service coordinator, Villanueva was assigned to the sanctuary last year to learn more about its wildlife populations. Earlier work helped her expertise as a tracker, including a time in South Africa as a safari guide while she was a college freshman.

One strategy is to "become the animal," she said, a process that gets humans into the mindset of a deer, raccoon, squirrel or other species of interest. Villanueva likens the approach to solving a puzzle.

"It's really just taking a closer look at your environment," she

had seen droppings and heard rumors of sightings. User-generated observations even offered proof the weasel-family mammals had a presence in the sanctuary dating back to 2015.

But she did not think spotting the otters would be easy. Wildlife naturally goes into hibernation in winter, even more so when there is excessive snowfall like there was this year, making observation or confirmation potentially difficult across the sanctuary's 300 acres.

The sanctuary is conducting habitat restorations to repair and rehabilitate damaged or destroyed ecosystems. Among other methods, that largely means

derstanding the wildlife, how it has been affected by the habitat's deterioration, how it will be affected by the restoration and where it is going in the meantime. That's where Villanueva comes in.

"We want to manage our landscape to best serve the wildlife that we have here," she said. "But we can't manage our wildlife if we don't know what the wildlife is."

The discovery happened quickly and unexpectedly that day while Villanue va was hiking the sanctuary with a co-worker. But observation of the otters themselves remained elusive.

"Basically, I stumbled upon their latrine," Villanueva said. "That's when I knew the otters really were here."

Villanueva set up a trail camera pointed at the suspected latrine area. The cameras are small, relatively noninvasive and equipped with infrared technology, allowing them to record clearly at night. She got to work the next day, checked the footage and found two otters, playful as ever, rolling and darting across the area as they searched for food the night before.

Otters are premier indicators of a healthy ecosystem, as they typi-



MAPS Bird Banding

- 7 banding days
- 413 net hours (10 nets, 6 hours per day)
- 265 captures

Most Common Species

- Gray Catbird (88)
- Willow Flycatcher (18)
- Song Sparrow (16)
- American Goldfinch (16)

Bird monitoring has also been an important part of the program. In partnership with Dr. Chace, we participated in the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) program from June through August 2026. All birds were handled following established protocols and appropriate permitting. By contributing to this larger dataset, we can help support long-term research while learning more about the bird species using NBS and how bird populations change over time.

We are continuing to monitor our osprey nests through our partnership with RI Audubon and dedicated volunteers. This year, we hosted an osprey monitoring training giving community members the tools to observe and document osprey nests in their own neighborhoods.

We also participated in a statewide research project with graduate students from the University of Rhode Island studying wild turkeys. Through Dr. Scott McWilliams Lab, Dekka Ducote and Richard Mercer led the capture, assessment and fitting of wild turkeys with GPS packs to help researchers understand their movements on and off the Sanctuary. By participating in this research, we are contributing to a broader understanding of wild turkey populations in Rhode Island and how they use and move through the landscape.

13 — Wild turkeys captured and assessed

6 — Wild turkeys fitted with GPS transmitters

13 — Wild turkeys received a blood sample and nasal swab

Looking ahead, we plan to conduct tick and drone surveys, develop a wildlife section of our website, and explore installing a live camera at our osprey nest. We also hope to expand bird programming with events like Beginning Birding Basics and our Fall Migration Celebration. Most importantly, I hope this program continues to connect our community with wildlife and inspire people to protect the remarkable ecosystem at NBS.



Notes from the Nest

Lessons from the 2026 Nesting Box Season

by Science Coordinator, Sara Poirier

As early autumn sweeps across our coastal fields, our skies fill with a breathtaking spectacle: thousands of Tree Swallows gathering in shimmering, synchronized swarms. Having spent the summer raising their young across the 318 monitored nest boxes in our Alpha, Beta, and Polaris fields, these tireless aerial acrobats are now preparing for their long migration to wintering grounds in the south. The Sanctuary's vibrant grasslands serve as a vital staging ground where newly fledged juveniles and adults refuel on high-protein insects before taking flight.

Science in the field is a story of resilience. Thanks to donor support, NBS science staff and student interns—representing colleges and local schools like URI, UVM, Wheaton, Franciscan University, and St. George's—gained vital insights into the real-world challenges facing our birds:

YEAR	ARRIVAL	FIRST EGG LAID	FIRST HATCH	LAST FLEDGE
2026	March 11	May 1	May 20	July 28
2025	March 14	May 4	May 25	August 1
2024	March 18	May 6	May 28	July 31

- **Earlier Spring Arrivals:** Driven by warmer spring temperatures, swallows arrived in Middletown on March 11th and laid their first eggs five days earlier than in 2024. Your support allows our team to repair and install nest boxes the moment tree swallows arrive, giving these migratory songbirds a head start before invasive competitors move in.
- **Managing Tough Neighbors:** Interns mapped nest attacks and discovered that aggressive invasive House Sparrows and native House Wrens frequently disrupt swallow nests. Armed with this data, our staff can explore the deployment of safe solutions next season, such as protective wooden "wren guards" to reduce attacks.
- **Weathering the Elements:** Record June heat and heavy rainstorms created tough foraging conditions for parent birds, reminding us how critical habitat resilience is during extreme weather.

Despite these hurdles, Tree Swallows established 171 nests and laid 600 eggs this season, bringing 245 new fledglings into the skies.



This year, we expanded our nest monitoring to include a vegetation survey of the Polaris Fields, adjacent to Woodland Trail and Third Beach Road. While birds in the Alpha and Beta fields saw strong activity, Polaris Field presents an exciting opportunity for habitat renewal.

The survey revealed that invasive mugwort, thick blackberry patches, and clovers are crowding out the native wild grasses that Tree Swallows rely on for nest-building and insect foraging. Armed with this data, we will continue with targeted restoration of the Polaris field. By strategically clearing overgrown brush and reseeding native grasses, we will transform this field into a rich, insect-filled grassland where nestlings can flourish for years to come.

Thank you to our Tree Swallow level donors who made this work possible: Quincy and Etta-Louise Cowles, Michele Foster, Thomas and Juliana Fredette, Elizabeth Gibbs, Mary Hickcox, Jessica James, Hanita Kern and Michelle Mostow, Chad Loebs, Douglas McCann, Jim and Shannon Mello, Daphne Micheletti, William and Donna Nedderman, Dr. Charles Nichols, Joanne and Michael Palmer, Valerie and David Paul, Teresa Paiva Weed, Anastasiia Ryzhkova, Kathy Wallace, Eileen Warburton, John and Nancy Whitacre.

Bridging the Gap: Where Field Science Meets Camp Wonder

by Conservation Biology Intern and Teacher Naturalist, Ava Tsohantaridis

Two summers ago, my routine at Norman Bird Sanctuary (NBS) was quiet and steady: walk the coastal fields, open wooden nest boxes, and track the breeding success of Tree Swallows and their feathered neighbors. As a biology major at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio, with roots in Rhode Island, spending my days surrounded by 318 active nest boxes in Alpha, Beta, and Polaris fields felt like a dream field assignment.

This year, my summer got a whole lot louder—and infinitely brighter.

Alongside my research role collecting data for NestWatch, I took on a new title: Teacher Naturalist Alternate and included the next generation in my field work.

Read Ava's full piece on the Norman Bird Sanctuary blog.




SALVE

Emerging Environmental Leaders

Introducing the Kiernan Scholars Program



This spring and early summer, the Norman Bird Sanctuary was a living laboratory for the next generation of environmental scientists through the newly launched Eaddo and Peter Kiernan Scholars Program.

Made possible by a generous four-year grant from the Kiernan Foundation, the Kiernan Scholars program is a summer field ecology intensive led by Norman Bird Sanctuary and Salve Regina University. This program focuses on conservation biology and provides undergraduate students with hands-on, credit-bearing research experience in the field. Students work alongside faculty mentor Dr. Jameson Chace and Sanctuary staff, collecting valuable data on birds, habitats, water quality, and wildlife that will help inform conservation and stewardship efforts at the Sanctuary.

"The diverse array of habitats at Norman Bird Sanctuary makes for an ideal living classroom because our students learn the theory of conservation biology in the classroom and then can put it into practice through field research at the Sanctuary."

-Dr. Jameson Chace

After months of fieldwork and discovery, the program concluded with two milestone events that showcased its early successes to the community and fellow researchers:

- Dr. Jameson Chace Lecture (June 16): More than 75 community members gathered at the Norman Bird Sanctuary for a public lecture by Dr. Jameson Chace, celebrating the growing partnership and the impact of place-based conservation education.
- Kiernan Scholars Presentations (June 24): Kiernan Scholars presented the initial findings from their field research to Sanctuary staff and Board, including an encouraging study of Eastern Towhees! Their findings suggest that the Sanctuary's forests, scrublands, and grasslands are providing the habitat conditions that this species needs, demonstrating how active stewardship benefits wildlife. We are so proud of these students for demonstrating the knowledge, professionalism, and scientific curiosity developed through months of hands-on work at the Sanctuary.

By bringing students into the field, the Eaddo and Peter Kiernan Scholars Program strengthens both conservation education and the Sanctuary's ongoing research efforts. As the inaugural season comes to a close, we are inspired by all that has been accomplished and by the chapter ahead. This partnership is creating a model for how conservation, education, and research can deliver greater mission impact: giving students the opportunity to become environmental leaders while generating the knowledge needed to protect the habitats and species that call the Norman Bird Sanctuary home.








Welcome Center

Guarding the Night

Science and Wonder Under Sanctuary Skies

by Science Coordinator, Sara Poirier



As dusk settles over Norman Bird Sanctuary, a crucial half of our ecosystem awakens. While dark skies reveal celestial marvels, artificial light at night (ALAN) presents a growing, overlooked threat to wildlife. This past year, our Night Sky Programming bridged awe-inspiring astronomy with critical conservation science, demonstrating that protecting natural darkness is essential for pollinators, fireflies, and human well-being alike.

Our programming engaged visitors through both discovery and research. In February, Harvard's Dr. Avalon Owens highlighted how light pollution drives insect declines, showing how simple residential lighting adjustments yield immediate ecological benefits. Hands-on workshops with amateur astronomer Michael Corvese taught families to navigate backyard skies, while moonlit telescope observations brought the Orion Nebula and Jupiter into clear view. Summer brought magical after-hours experiences, including a Firefly Night Hike led by researcher Marc-Antoine Poulin and a Perseid Meteor Shower Watch Party set against ambient music and ocean horizons.

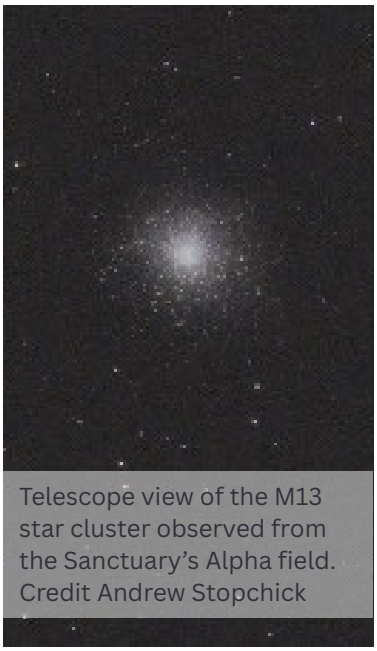
Saving Our Pollinators
Dr. Avalon Owens of Harvard University's Owens Laboratory presented on light pollution's impact on insects, followed by telescope views of the Moon and Jupiter on the Studio lawn.

Beginner's Guide to the Night Sky
Astronomer Michael Corvese shared practical stargazing tips and views of the Orion Nebula.

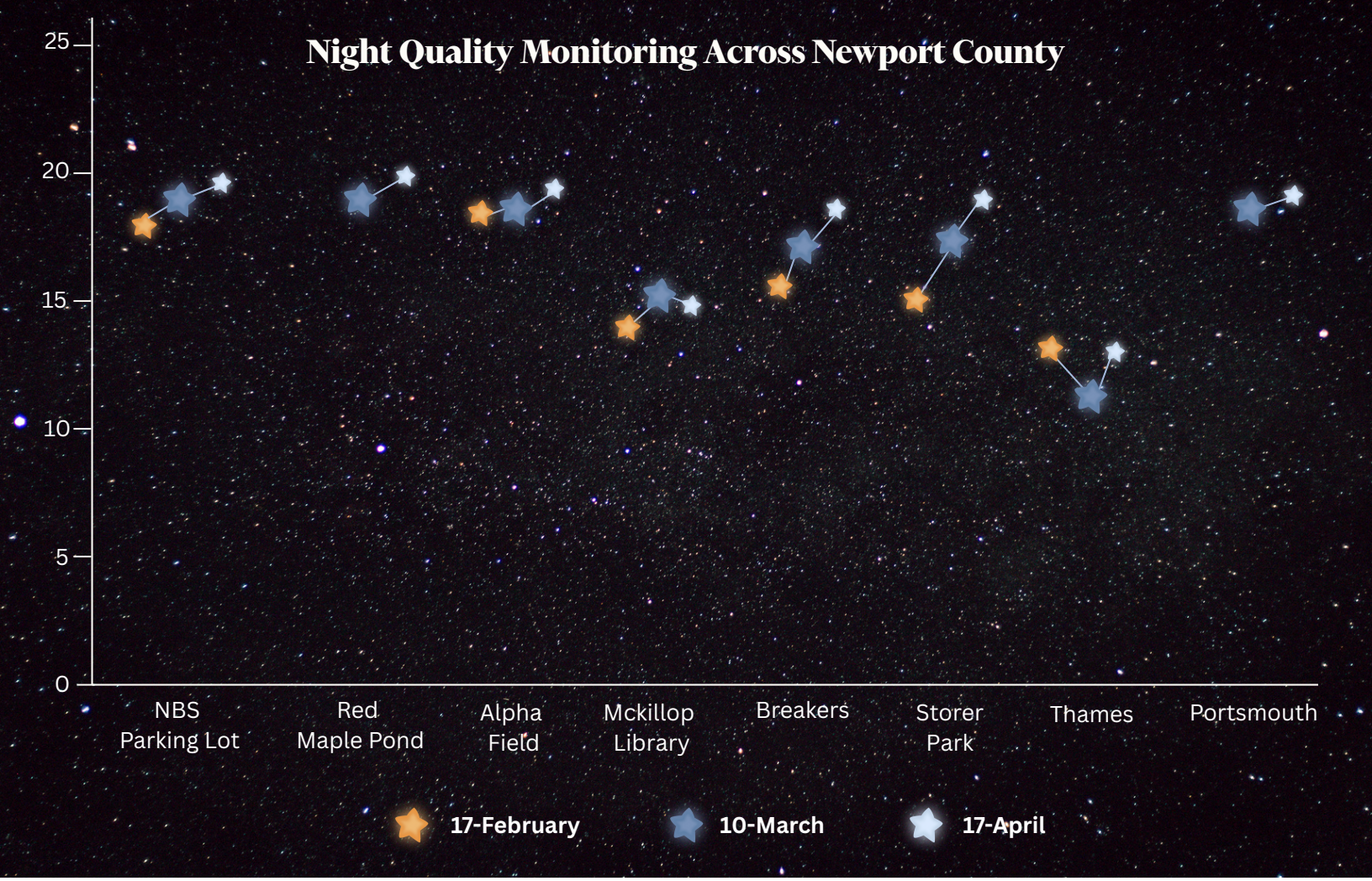
Firefly Night Hike
Marc-Antoine Poulin, also from Harvard's Owens Laboratory, guided members through field and forest boundaries to explore natural darkness and bioluminescent courtship.

Perseid Meteor Shower Watch Party
Norman Bird Sanctuary members gathered on the Sanctuary's Alpha field under zero moonlight to observe meteors and deep-sky objects through telescopes.

Behind the scenes, the Sanctuary served as a living laboratory. Using a Sky Quality Meter, we established baseline darkness measurements, contributing data to the global Globe at Night campaign. In partnership with Salve Regina University, BIO 255 students surveyed light pollution across eight Aquidneck Island locations, audited campus fixtures, and raised community awareness through flyers and an online petition.



Telescope view of the M13 star cluster observed from the Sanctuary's Alpha field. Credit Andrew Stopchick



Average sky brightness measured in magnitudes per square arcsecond using a Unihedron SQM. Readings are shown across eight island locations: Norman Bird Sanctuary (3 sites), Newport (3 sites), Salve Regina University (McKillop Library), and Portsmouth High School (1 site). On this scale, higher values represent darker skies, with 22.0 being a pristine, dark night sky. Credit Allan Ndagano, Cole Hessman, Daphne Higginbottom, Elizabeth Vander Plaat, Jillyan Brush-Shulthiess, Rory Shultz, Samantha Hodgson.

Over the summer, researchers from Harvard University's Owens Laboratory conducted field studies on Sanctuary grounds, exploring insect phototaxis and firefly breeding behaviors to understand how organisms cope with brightened habitats.

Moments of quiet observation stood out most—watching families gaze through telescopes at distant star clusters, or stepping onto trail boundaries to witness fireflies signaling undisturbed in the dark.

Looking ahead, eliminating light pollution remains one of the fastest, most effective ways to support local biodiversity. We look forward to retrofitting our own fixtures, expanding community science, and preserving the night sky for generations to come.







Where Curiosity Blossoms

How summer camp sparks connection



There are some things you only hear at Norman Bird Sanctuary Summer Camp.

Down at the Coastal Education Center it may be:
"*Wow...it's seagull city!"*
"Do mermaids have legs?"
"How in the heck did all of these fish get here?"

By the caterpillar enclosure yelps of excitement are accompanied by exclamations of:
"This is so cool!"
"Look at all of the colors!"
A camper points at the chrysalis.
"Do you think it gets hungry in there?"

These questions often spark a giggle from the other campers and a thoughtful answer from the Teacher Naturalists, and they also serve as a reminder of something important: children experience the natural world with a sense of wonder.

Every feather, spider web, tide pool, and bird call invites another question. Children don't often worry whether they're asking the "right" question. They simply want to know more.

As adults, we often head outside with a destination in mind. We hike to reach the end of Hanging Rock, walk the Gray Craig Trail for a good cardio workout, or make our way down to the pond because we don't have much time. Children remind us to slow down.

They notice the tiny bug hiding beneath a rock, the butterfly flitting across the field, or the tracks left behind in the mud. They find excitement in the smallest discoveries, and their enthusiasm has a way of becoming contagious.

Research indicates that children who spend time outdoors develop stronger observational skills, greater confidence, and a deeper appreciation for the environment. They're also more likely to grow into adults who value and protect the natural places they care about.

Long before someone volunteers for a habitat restoration project, supports land conservation, or teaches their own children about wildlife, they have their own memories of being outside, asking questions, and discovering something new. That's why experiences in nature matter.

We hope our campers leave knowing more about the natural world than when they arrived. But even more than that, we hope they leave feeling connected to it. Because when children develop a sense of wonder about nature, they're far more likely to care for it in the years ahead.

The questions they ask today may seem simple. But those questions remind us that every lifelong conservationist starts somewhere – with curiosity, with discovery, and with the simple joy of spending a summer outside.

649 Total summer campers across all sessions

22 Campers attended because of NBS scholarships

$22,534 Awarded in summer camp scholarships





A Year of Learning Through Nature

This year, NBS created new opportunities for children and adults alike to learn by doing. From observing a caterpillar's transformation to helping care for the land, these hands-on experiences invited visitors to ask questions, get involved, and discover the natural world together. A few of the ways learning came to life at NBS this year:





Conservation in Action

Conservation became something visitors could see and experience firsthand through interactive projects like goat scaping. As goats browsed invasive vegetation, children and adults could observe how grazing can be used as one tool in habitat management and how removing invasive plants can help make space for native species.

These experiences offered a tangible introduction to ecological concepts like competition, habitat restoration, and the ways land managers influence the health and diversity of an ecosystem.





A Closer Look at Caterpillars

Our new caterpillar enclosure gave children and adults the chance to observe metamorphosis as it happened. Visitors could watch caterpillars eat, grow, molt, form chrysalises, and eventually emerge as butterflies, connecting what they see in the enclosure to the larger science of insect life cycles.

The enclosure also offered an opportunity to talk about the important ecological roles of caterpillars and butterflies, from pollination to serving as a food source for birds and other wildlife.



Water Quality Monitoring

Understanding Our Aquatic Ecosystems

by Water Quality and Conservation Coordinator, Kathleen Matthews

The NBS Water Quality Monitoring and Restoration Program began monitoring our freshwater systems with volunteers and college students in February of 2026 and will continue through November 2026 to complete our first year of data. In this program, we sample five freshwater sites and test 14 parameters, including Dissolved Oxygen, Phosphate, Nitrate, Ammonia, Turbidity, and more.

We also sample freshwater macroinvertebrates (aquatic wildlife without a spine that are large enough to see without a microscope) as biological indicators. These freshwater macroinvertebrates give us our "pollution intolerance index scores," which shows us through biology how healthy the water is based on families present or not present at our sample sites.

Along with the chemistry and biology components, we also analyze the physical composition of our streams and pond. With the recent LiDAR mapping of our property, we now have a great visual and location of our potential vernal pools and area of Red Maple Pond. And with the new addition of the Chronolog at Red Maple Pond, we can see changes of water level, duckweed coverage on the surface, and seasonal changes through the daily photo timelapse.

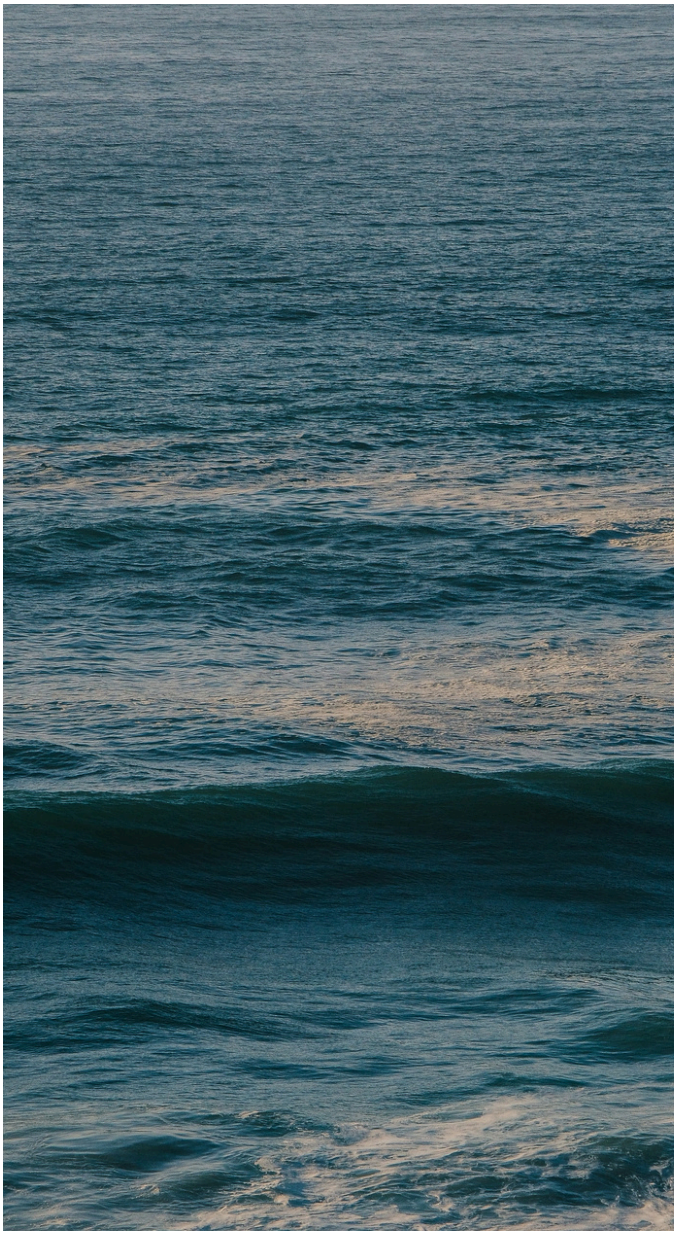
We also keep our aquatic ecosystems clean from trash by hosting beach and roadside stream cleanups once a season and produce to our "Trash Report." This report is where we log items found in order of abundance and total trash poundage removed from the area.

This is an exciting year for the program because it's the first year that we are collecting data on this scale with volunteers and college student interns. So far, we have removed 1,495.9 lbs. of trash from our beaches and roadside streams, opened the NBS Lab, created the methodology and implementation of our freshwater chemistry and macroinvertebrate sampling, created the results page for the community, and much more.





***1,459.9 pounds** of trash removed from our beaches and roadside streams.*



We have had multiple water quality interns and students conduct personal research projects within the program as well, including a freshwater macroinvertebrate and water quality study, an ecology and diversity study of caddisflies, and more. These projects are posted under the "Student Section" of the water quality portion of the NBS website. These opportunities allow college students to gain experience in the field and lab while contributing to our growing understanding of the Sanctuary's aquatic ecosystems.

Monitoring our water quality is important because it gives vital information about the health of our aquatic ecosystems and will guide our future aquatic restoration plans. The more data and trends we see in the field, the better decisions we can make for planning and restoring these ecosystems. With almost a full year of data collected, we are excited to start analyzing these results and begin visualizing the trends we see so far.

Next year will be equally exciting as we hope to expand the program further to include vernal pool monitoring (frogs, salamanders, fairy shrimp, etc.), marine macroinvertebrates, aquatic wildlife and plant catalogs (fish counts, plant I.D., bird monitoring, etc.), and more. We also hope to engage more college students in personal research projects and volunteer positions to gain experience in the field and lab within our water quality monitoring program.

Thank you to our program partners:

AmeriCorps, Aquidneck Resilience, Middletown Coastal Access Alliance, Salve Regina University, Save The Bay, Stormwater Innovation Center, Surfrider Foundation, and TerraCorps.

From TerraCorps to Team NBS

by Water Quality and Conservation Coordinator, Kathleen Matthews

I have served two years in TerraCorps with Norman Bird Sanctuary as my service site, and I have loved every second. I am very excited to have been offered a position on staff at the Sanctuary as the Water Quality and Conservation Coordinator.

I'm looking forward to growing the water quality program even further, engaging more water quality interns, beginning the aquatic plant/wildlife catalog of confirmed species, starting the vernal pool monitoring program, and much more. I also can't wait to create more programming around caterpillars, freshwater macroinvertebrates, and host our first marine macroinvertebrate days.

Read Kathleen's full piece on the Norman Bird Sanctuary blog.




MICHIGAN
INDIANA

52 Years of Harvest Fair

A tradition that brings our community together



For 52 years, the Harvest Fair has brought people together at the Norman Bird Sanctuary for a weekend of community, tradition, and celebration. On October 3 and 4, 2026, approximately 7,000 people joined us for the 52nd annual Harvest Fair, making their way to the Sanctuary to enjoy live music, local food, handmade goods, family activities, and the familiar sights and sounds that have made this event a fall tradition for generations.

While the Harvest Fair has evolved over the years, its purpose remains much the same: to bring people to the Sanctuary, introduce them to the work happening here, and provide critical support for the programs and places that make NBS special. As the Sanctuary's largest fundraiser, the Fair helps sustain our work in conservation, education, stewardship, and access to nature throughout the year.

This year's Fair was once again powered by an incredible network of volunteers, staff, vendors, performers, community partners, and supporters. From setting up the grounds and welcoming visitors to running activity stations, helping vendors, managing parking, and cleaning up at the end of the weekend, hundreds of people contributed their time and energy to making the event possible.

For many visitors, Harvest Fair is an annual tradition—a place to return with friends and family, reconnect with familiar faces, and introduce a new generation to the Sanctuary. For others, it may be their first experience at NBS. That combination of tradition and discovery is part of what makes the Fair meaningful. A weekend spent enjoying the event can become a first step toward exploring the trails, attending a program, becoming a member, volunteering, or simply finding a new connection to the natural world.



The Fair also reflects the broader community that supports NBS. Local businesses, artists, makers, food vendors, musicians, volunteers, and community organizations all play a role in creating the magic of the weekend. Their participation helps make Harvest Fair more than a fundraiser—it is a gathering that celebrates the people and organizations that make our community stronger.

After 52 years, Harvest Fair continues to be an important part of the Sanctuary's story. Each year adds another layer to a tradition that has been passed down through generations, while the funds raised help make possible the work that happens here every day. We are grateful to everyone who attended, volunteered, participated, donated, and helped carry this tradition forward.

Thank you to our sponsors:

11th Hour Racing, Sweet Berry Farm, Hyundai of Newport, Newport Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram, Ragged Island Brewing Company., Chris Electric, Ltd., Forster Orthodontics, Gustave White Sotheby's Realty, A1 Roofing and Construction, Bank Newport, Orsted, Stoneacre Brasserie, Clarke Cooke House, Newport Animal Hospital, Rodriguez Wealth Management, Thames Glass, Montaup Country Club, JFA Security, AAFCPA, and YPTC.



Community Partners

Through our expansive, mission-based programming, the Norman Bird Sanctuary works to be an inclusive hub for community partnerships. Across our campus, we are actively engaging local partners to advance our work.

Community Partner

Art&Newport
AmeriCorps
Aquidneck Land Trust
Aquidneck Resiliences
BikeNewport
Castle Hill Inn
City of Newport
Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Center
East Bay Community Action Program
Eastern RI Conservation District
EBCAP
FabNewport
Fall River Deaconness Home
Harvard's Owens Laboratory
Launchpad
Looking Upwards
Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, East Bay
Middletown Coastal Access Alliance
Music Together
Newport Garden Club
Newport Classical
Newport Live
Newport Transitions Academy
newportFILM
The Preservation Society of Newport County
Preserve Rhode Island
ReNewport
Rhode Island Bird Atlas
Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
Rhode Island Environmental Education Association, Inc.
Rhode Island Natural History Survey
Sacred Center
Salve Regina University
Save the Bay
Star Kids
Stormwater Innovation Center
Surfrider Foundation
St. Columba's Chapel
Terracorps
Town of Middletown, Rhode Island
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
University of Rhode Island
URI Master Gardeners
YMCA - Newport County



Community Partner Spotlight

For the seventh consecutive year, we welcomed campers to the Sanctuary through our partnership with STAR Kids, creating opportunities for participants to connect with nature, explore new environments, and build lasting memories.

From hiking our trails and meeting wildlife to exploring the coastline and forming new friendships, campers experienced the many ways time outdoors can foster curiosity, confidence, and a sense of connection to the natural world. These experiences help make nature accessible and engaging for participants while creating opportunities for discovery, learning, and social connection.

We extend our sincere thanks to Karen Flanagan and the entire STAR Kids team for another wonderful summer of collaboration.

Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

TREASURER'S REPORT

From last year to this year, Norman Bird Sanctuary's total operating revenue grew by $304,445, or 18%, to $1,995,196, while operating expenses increased by $138,873, or 8%, to $1,937,145. As a result, the organization generated an operating surplus of $58,051. In addition, total net assets increased by $782,664, driven by strong investment returns and final contributions to the capital campaign, bringing total net assets to $12,323,426. While these results reflect a strong financial position, continued **financial sustainability depends on the generosity of our members and supporters.** Grants and contributions accounted for 55% of our operating revenue this year, underscoring the importance of ongoing fundraising efforts as our programs and staffing continue to expand. With the capital campaign now complete, our fundraising strategy will shift toward securing support for ongoing programs and operations. This continued generosity will be essential to sustaining the diverse, high-quality programs that serve our community.

Norman Bird Sanctuary Trust - Fiscal year endeded march 31, 2026

Operating Revenue and Support:	**Without Donor Restrictions**	**With Donor Restrictions**	**Total**
Grants and contributions	$871,638	$217,902	$1,089,540
Education and programs	$265,405		$265,405
Rental income	$205.946		$205,946
Membership and admissions	$170.021		$107.021
Perpetual trust distributions	$95,268		$95,268
Special events revenue (net of direct costs of $68,656 and $116,141 for 2026 and 2025 respectively)	$87,515		$87,515
Store income and other revenue	$81,501		$81,501
Net assets released from prupose restrictions	$32,426	($32,426)	
Total operating revenue and support	**$1,809,720**	**$185,476**	**$1,995,196**
Operating Expenses:			
Programs	$1,398,780		$1,398,780
General and administrative	$390,147		$390,147
Fundraising	$148,218		$148,218
Total operating expenses	**$1,937,145**		**$1,937,145**
Changes in net assets from operations	**($127,425)**	**$185,476**	**$58,051**
Non-Operating Revenue (Expenses):			
Capital campaign contributions		$311,705	$311,705
Investment return, net	$13,995	$216,807	$230.802
Change in carrying value of beneficial interest in perpetual trust		$182,106	182,106
Total non-operating revenue (expenses)	**$13,995**	**$710,618**	**$724,613**
Changes in net assets	**($113,430)**	**$896,094**	**$782,664**
Net Assets:			
Beginning of year	$7,336,277	$4,204,485	$11,540,762
End of year	**$7,222,847**	**$5,100,579**	**$12,323,426**

TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE

$1,995,196

+18% ($304,445 vs. prior year)

TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES

$1,937,145

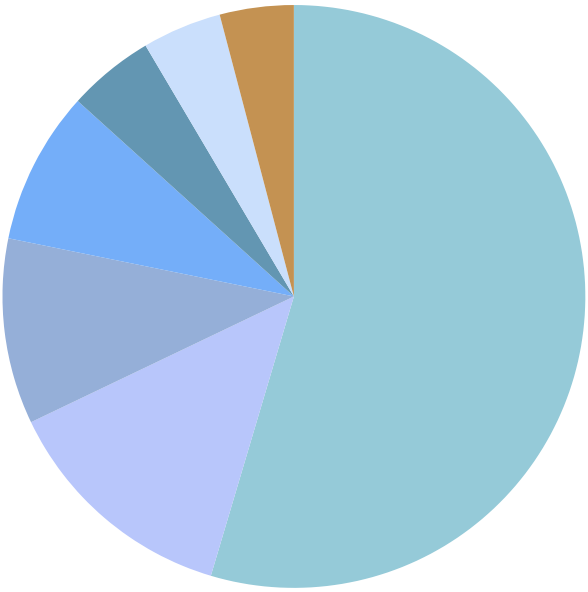
+8% ($138,873 vs. prior year)

TOTAL OPERATING SURPLUS

$58,051

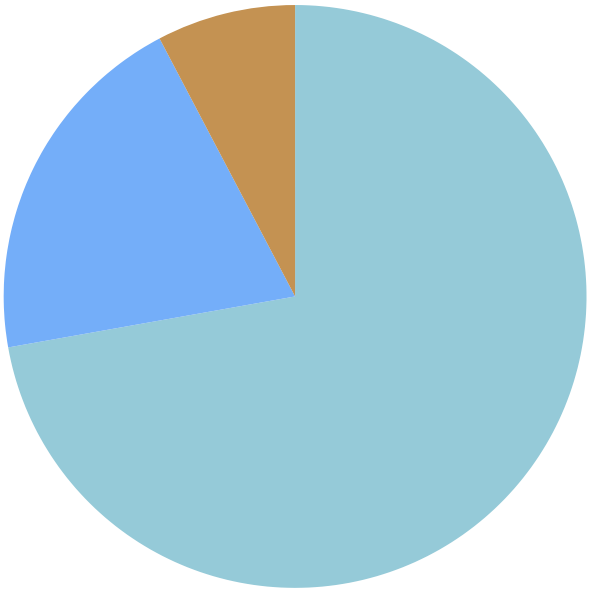
Net Assets: $12,323,426

Operating Revenue Breakdown



Category	Amount	%
Grants & Contributions	$1,089,540	**54.6%**
Education & Programs	$265,405	**13.3%**
Rental Income	$205,946	**10.3%**
Membership & Admission	$170,021	**8.5%**
Perpetual Trust Distributions	$95,268	**4.8%**
Special Events (Net)	$87,515	**4.4%**
Store & Other Revenue	$81,501	**4.1%**

Operating Expenses Breakdown



Category	Amount	%
Programs	$1,398,780	**72.2%**
General & Administrative	$390,147	**20.1%**
Fundraising	$148,218	**7.7%**

Program Efficiency Note:
72.2% of operating funds go directly to Sanctuary programs, education, and land stewardship projects.

As our Statement of Operating Expenses and Income makes clear, the financial health of Norman Bird Sanctuary depends on the generosity of our supporters and members. Your contributions provide essential support for the care of our 300-acre property, conservation efforts, educational programs, and the many ways we connect people with nature. This year's Fall Appeal is an opportunity to invest in the work that makes the Sanctuary such a special place for wildlife and our community. The open space, trails, habitats, and opportunities to experience nature that we cherish will not remain without the ongoing care, stewardship, and financial support needed to protect them. Every gift helps sustain this work today and into the future.

We invite you to make a contribution and help nature take root at Norman Bird Sanctuary.

As autumn settles across the Norman Bird Sanctuary, the fields turn golden, migratory birds gather overhead, and the landscape prepares for winter.

Each year brings new challenges and new opportunities to protect the Sanctuary and inspire a deeper understanding of the natural world. Your support ensures that we can continue to care for the habitats, wildlife, and people who depend on the Norman Bird Sanctuary.

The **Annual Appeal** is your chance to make a difference. However you choose to give, your generosity will sustain the important work we do:

- Make a gift online, in-person, or by mail,
- Contribute through securities, a Donor Advised Fund, IRA or QCD distribution, or planned gift
- Honor someone with a memorial or tribute gift
- Support through donor advised funds or workplace giving
- Become a monthly donor, volunteer your time, join or renew as a member.

Together, we can ensure that the Norman Bird Sanctuary endures as a place of natural beauty, learning, and recreation for generations to come.

Make a Gift Today:

Contact Joanne Rodino, Development Associate
(401) 846-2577
Visit our website, or scan the QR code.



Discover. Preserve. Teach. Inspire.



Help us protect this special place for generations to come.

Norman Bird Sanctuary
583 Third Beach Road, Middletown, RI 02842
TAX ID: 22-2746733
www.NormanBirdSanctuary/join-and-give

1% FOR THE PLANET

Charity Navigator
FOUR-STAR