



Vibrant Volunteers

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A WARM WEATHER WELCOME!

Early Spring and Bluebirds in Ward Reservation, Andover

by Richard Lombard

Richard Lombard, a longtime volunteer in the North Andover Management Unit, shares his knowledge regarding the Bluebirds within Ward Reservation.

Ward Reservation now covers 716 acres and includes a diversity of habitats as well as the highest point in Essex County, Holt Hill. Approximately 25% of the property is dominated by wetland, including wooded swamps, marshes, a bog and vernal pools as well as several brooks that flow through the reservation toward the Ipswich River. The remainder of the reservation is divided up by secondary forest, fields and shrubland. In the past, the agrarian landscape that had defined this reservation was in decline, as former agriculture fields and pastures reverted to forest. In order to reverse this trend, The Trustees began re-establishing grassland and shrubland habitat by clearing some of the secondary forest. This transition has benefited wildlife, especially grassland birds, many of which are now experiencing significant population declines throughout the Northeast.

To further encourage some of our grassland birds, 45 nest boxes are scattered in fields, barrens and savannas throughout the reservation. They are being used by the Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Black-Capped Chickadee and American Kestrel. These species are obligate cavity-nesters that use natural cavities but will readily accept nest boxes. Two of these nest boxes, significantly larger than the others, are specifically designed for the American Kestrel, North America's smallest falcon.

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**What brought Janelle to The Trustees?**

Prior to accepting her position with The Trustees, Janelle was Director of Service and Giving for Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, where she developed and implemented employee engagement strategies and programming. Janelle was excited to learn that The Trustees was recruiting someone to develop and lead a new initiative focused on community impact, with a special focus on diversity, belonging, inclusivity and equity. She had already been very interested in The Trustees' One Waterfront Initiative, especially the East Boston Piers Park III project, and felt honored to help support this transformational effort. Janelle

loves the work on diversity and inclusivity and values the mission of sustainability and conservation reflected in The Trustees' beautiful properties across Massachusetts. She also enjoys collaborating with such passionate and talented colleagues.

What is Janelle's current role with the Trustees?

Janelle is Vice President of Community Impact. Janelle oversees a number of interesting areas in this position. Janelle leads the Volunteer Services team, which focuses on excellence in volunteer recruitment and engagement. Janelle is deeply involved in community engagement across the Commonwealth, helping property teams positively and successfully engage with local cities and towns, civic groups, community groups - all the many and various ways The Trustees interact with communities and residents of Massachusetts. Finally, Janelle is leading the statewide DBIE (Diversity, Belonging, Inclusivity & Equity) efforts of The Trustees and has created a dynamic DBIE roadmap to support these efforts on Trustees properties, among staff and volunteers, and with members and visitors.

What has been Janelle's favorite day at The Trustees and why?

It's very hard to pick one, but she loves the staff "Days of Service" - one day each year when employees can go to a Trustees property and volunteer their time for a project or activity, working at the property. Her favorite Day of Service was a team building day at Stevens Coolidge House and Gardens in Andover. The Volunteer Services Team worked together to dismantle and clear a "hoop house" (greenhouse) that was not being used so the Stevens Coolidge team could then create more usable space on the property. They took it down piece by piece - it was very intense, hard and hot work. Janelle can be competitive, so she dug deep with the team, and it was a great day - Janelle not only felt closer to the team, but they accomplished a lot and got the job done while having some fun.

What is something about Janelle that might surprise your volunteer colleagues?

Janelle's grandpa grew up in Mississippi and moved to California as an adult. Always a country boy at heart, he decided to buy some land and run a small farm. Janelle and her family would go and visit every weekend. When she was two years old, she was given a pony as a gift. It was at the farm that Janelle learned to ride a horse and milk a cow and where Janelle acquired a love of animals, just like her grandpa.

Two fun facts about Janelle?

Janelle named her pony Thriller because she loved Michael Jackson. Janelle has teenage twins; a boy and a girl, heading to high school this coming fall



PROPERTY SPOTLIGHT – CHESTNUT HILL FARM

By Robin Grossman, Volunteer Services Associate

With its scenic woodlands and rolling fields, [Chestnut Hill Farm](#) is true to its heritage as a working farm, saved from development in the 1960s through the dedication of a local family. Stone walls frame fields and pastures across 170 acres. Loop trails wind through upland forests and along the edges of freshwater wetlands. Meanwhile, designated bird reserves allow for safe nesting habitat for Bobolinks, Eastern Meadowlarks, and other ground-nesting species beneath a wide-open sky. Robin Grossman shares her most recent experience visiting the farm.



When people think of Southborough, they don't usually think of farms, hiking trails or farm stores. It's hard to believe this pastoral oasis, Chestnut Hill Farm, is nestled right here in Southborough. That's right, 170 acres of beautiful stone walls and pastures. It was almost turned into a development in the 1960s. Thank goodness for the Beal family whose commitment to preservation saved this working farm.

I first visited the farm last summer since I am always searching for a new place to walk. I suppose one of my hobbies is to find pretty scenery for walks. I decided to go mid-morning, before it was hot outside. The farm was busy with workers maintaining the land and tending to livestock. I parked my car in the farm store lot, as you can access the trails there; there is another lot adjacent to this one. I chose a very peaceful trail and felt like I was in a faraway, rural place. I noticed birds chirping, bees buzzing, and the beautiful hilly pastures. I didn't have a lot of time, so I left after my walk.



[My Southborough](#)

I returned a second time to stroll and visit the farm store. I arrived at the farm around 3:00 pm on a Thursday and went for a stroll on another beautiful trail. I noticed wood stands with laminated signs telling a story every few yards. It was quite a beautiful story about love and triumph; I kept looking forward to the next sign. The trails are well landscaped and the trail markings on trees make it very easy to not get lost.

I walked into the store, and I was greeted with a very friendly "hello." The woman working there told me about some of her favorite items; she was friendly and very helpful. We talked for a bit and agreed more people need to know about this hidden gem, so please spread the word. By the way, I bought everything from potatoes to dill sauerkraut and Dumpling Daughter's frozen dumplings. Legit, everything was delicious. I will be back! I may sign up for the vegetable CSA or a meat share. The farm even offers hiking with goats and many other family friendly activities. Chestnut Hill Farm has so much to offer!



[My Southborough](#)



THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

In 1891, Charles Eliot proposed the creation of a unique statewide nonprofit organization – a corporation governed by a board of voluntary trustees who would be empowered by the state legislature to hold land free of taxes for the public to enjoy. Eliot enlisted a distinguished group of citizens to support his proposal. In a circular called “The Preservation of Beautiful and Historical Places,” the group laid down the special reasons why “places of historical interest or remarkable beauty should be withdrawn from private ownership, preserved from harm, and opened to the public.”¹ Today, The Trustees continues to offer a variety of volunteer opportunities to continue Charles Eliot’s dream. But did you know, volunteering has benefits to the individual volunteer?

“Researchers have found that volunteering can give you a positive attitude, increased social interaction and physical activity — all things that make a healthier person in the long run.”² Here is a short list of how volunteering positively impacts an individual:

- *Decreased risk of depression* – “Volunteering is a great way to increase your social interaction and broaden your support network by making new friends. It exposes you to people with common interests and gives you a sense of community and connectedness. Research has shown all of these things lead to lower risks of depression, anxiety and feelings of loneliness.”²
- *Mental health boost* – “When you volunteer your time, it gives you a boost of happiness. . . . What’s more, studies show your body actually releases endorphins during positive social contact, similar to the physical response after a hard workout.”²
- *Increased physical activity* – “Many volunteer activities require you to move — whether it’s hosting a dance class at an assisted living facility, giving a museum tour, handing out flyers, washing cars for a fundraiser, and the list goes on. While these activities vary in physical exertion, all of these activities get your heart rate up.”²
- *Reduced stress* – “Volunteering and helping others can give you a sense of purpose and appreciation, which can be a stress reliever. Not to mention, socializing helps you take your mind off worries and escape life’s stressors.”²
- *Lower blood pressure* – “Research by Carnegie Mellon University found that older adults who volunteer at least two hundred hours each year were 40 percent less likely to develop high blood pressure. These findings are not surprising because increased physical activity and decreased stress all contribute to a healthy heart.”²
- *Teaches valuable skills* – Many volunteers learn transferable skills such as gardening, administrative tasks, livestock care and more!



<https://neighbors4neighbors.net/volunteer/why-volunteer/>



THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

Our own Robin Grossman, Volunteer Services Associate, has this to say about her volunteering journey with The Trustees!

"I could talk about all the reasons to volunteer at The Trustees. Everybody knows The Trustees is a wonderful organization. The people, the properties, the history, doing what you love, etc.... However, I would like to discuss my personal journey.

I had been laid off my job as a marketing specialist at a staffing agency. It was a small company and Covid was too much for us to continue, so the company I called home for four years was forced to close its doors. Two and a half years earlier I had a brain hemorrhage. I was nervous of being out of my comfort zone.

I contacted The Trustees in late January 2021. Eileen Small, Engagement Specialist within Volunteer Services, contacted me a couple of weeks later. We had a great conversation. I told her about myself, what happened to me, and what I wanted to do as a volunteer. I told Eileen I enjoyed doing remote administrative work. Nothing was available then, but Eileen said would speak with her manager regarding the creation of a volunteer newsletter. I was extremely excited and sent a few samples to Eileen. Then I received her email telling me she had gotten the "green light" for the first ever quarterly Volunteer Newsletter.

In late February, Eileen emailed me with a template and content suggestions. I was so excited! We are now on newsletter number six. This spring was our second go around, and it seems to be well received. When I first started, I thought I would volunteer for a year and then move on. Now that is not even up for debate. I love The Trustees and I cannot imagine not being a volunteer. As long as they want me, I will be here.

I am part of the Volunteer Services Engagement team. We meet on Microsoft Teams weekly to discuss current events within The Trustees. I look forward to our meetings and sharing our experiences. The group is so funny and smart, our meetings are fun and fulfilling, and I always learn something. I quite honestly think I am a better person because of The Trustees. I have really come to enjoy conversations with these women. I cannot even put into words how amazing Eileen is, very inspiring and a genuinely kind person. I have also come to love the properties and The Trustees' mission.

I cannot promise you anything, but I really think it is life changing."

Want to know more about a particular property?

Our Archives & Research Center located in Sharon has hundreds of pages of information about each of our properties. The materials listed in the link were given to us by the original various property owners and their families!

Click [here](#) for more information!

1. <https://thetrustees.org/content/trustees-history/>
2. <https://www.summahealth.org/flourish/entries/2021/08/5-surprising-health-benefits-of-volunteering>

Earth Day Down on the Farm . . . Appleton Farms, that is!

To celebrate Earth Day this year, the staff of Appleton Farms hosted a volunteer day on April 23. Thirty-six volunteers of all ages came out to assist with projects all around the property. Volunteers helped plant window boxes, cleaned up trails, and worked in the education garden. In addition, volunteers planted more than 200 white pine saplings! It was a beautiful day with blue skies and lots of smiling faces. Thank you to everyone who helped us celebrate the spring by lending a helping hand!

Don't Be a No-Show . . . Just Let Us Know!

We know people have busy lives. If you are registered for a volunteer shift and are no longer able to attend, please let us know as soon as you can. We design our shifts to accommodate a specific number of volunteers and our property staff depends on this additional support. If we don't know that you can't make a shift, we can't contact a volunteer on the waitlist which impacts the support we can provide for an event or project.

You can remove yourself from an upcoming shift by logging into [Volunteer Connect](#). We also suggest that you email the property staff person where you will be volunteering and/or Volunteer Services at volunteer@thetrustees.org. The image below shows where to remove yourself from a shift on Volunteer Connect.

Account Overview For

Bertha Small

Here's a snapshot of your volunteer activity. Review your upcoming commitments, cancel if you cannot attend so another volunteer can take your place, or manage your team signups from here. Use the Volunteer History section below to provide us with feedback.

0

Verified Hours

0

Unverified Hours

?

Upcoming Opportunities

Opportunity	Organization	When▲	Action/Status
Drop-In Thursday Gardening - AKP	Greater Hingham Area	8/4/2022 8:30 AM	<div> Remove me Location Add to Calendar </div>



Featured Summer Volunteer Roles

- [Remote Volunteer Training Session](#) – August 4
- Join our [Garden Team](#) at Farandnear in Shirley
- [Property Steward](#) Volunteers on Martha's Vineyard
- [AND MORE!](#)

Explore Volunteer Connect

Check out the informative links on Volunteer Connect.

- Meet [Robert Havasy](#) our current volunteer spotlight.
- Visit our [resources](#) page to view tutorials, archived newsletters and more.



My volunteer activities in Ward Reservation involve monitoring these nest boxes as well as the two barns located within the reservation, which provide nesting habitat for Barn Swallows. Unfortunately, the Barn Swallow has been absent from both barns for several years. Given that the Barn Swallow population in Massachusetts is declining more than 4% per year, it is not surprising that it is a rare visitor. Fortunately, the barns still provide nesting habitat for the Eastern Phoebe, which frequently constructs its nest on barn beams. I have had some noteworthy observations of the challenges this “little brown bird” faces against the Brown-headed Cowbird, a common brood parasite. The female Cowbird will “dump” one or more eggs in the Phoebe’s nest, often causing some or all of the Phoebe’s clutch of eggs to fail to produce fledglings. When I find a Cowbird egg in a Phoebe’s nest, it is difficult to avoid the temptation to remove the egg from her nest. Such egg removal, no matter where one’s sympathies lie, is illegal as the Cowbird is a protected bird under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

In my opinion, early spring is the best time of year to be out wandering the trails and fields in Ward Reservation. This is also the time when I begin my vigilance monitoring the nest boxes. There is only one bird that I can reliably expect to be nesting so early in the breeding season – our Eastern Bluebird. The Bluebird begins nesting almost a month or more before the Tree Swallow and House Wren, and even before the Black-capped Chickadee, another resident bird, that occasionally nests in our nest boxes. Not only do I have the Bluebirds to myself, but the weather is cool, and the flora and fauna is renewed and emerging from its winter slumber.



https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/eastern_bluebird

And still, it is not an easy time of year for Bluebirds to begin nesting, as winter is still not fully gone. Late March and April can present cold and wet weather with limited foraging opportunities that make nesting success challenging. Such weather can force the female Bluebird to abandon her nest, if she is unable to maintain her own sustenance and keep her clutch of eggs or recently hatched young warm. A choice that is certainly not without stress and a sense of loss.

As I monitor the boxes, I am hopeful for a sign of nesting activity. The first indication that a female Bluebird has begun her handywork inside one of the nest boxes could easily go unnoticed. Her nest begins simply with the scattering of a few dry pine needles on the floor of the box. She obsessively collects only pine needles for her nest, avoiding the more easily available materials, such as dry grass. Her purpose for selecting pine needles is obscure but some experts suggest that pine needles may offer some antimicrobial benefits for her nestlings. And bird nests can accumulate a plethora of parasites. Whatever guides her instincts, the female will make many trips back and forth to the nest box with a bundle of needles securely clasped in her bill, and with each bundle she begins to weave and tuck her nest into shape. Maybe within a week, it is completed. Her focus and commitment to this effort produces a simple but elegant product with a perfectly “cupped” center where she will deposit her clutch of eggs.



Even though the Bluebird is the first to nest in the reservation that is full of empty nest boxes, I do not find many of the boxes occupied by Bluebird nests. In fact, this season as in others, Bluebird nests are never in close proximity to each other. This arrangement is due to the Bluebird's low tolerance to nest near another pair of Bluebirds. And what's too close? Well, do not expect to observe nesting pairs of Bluebirds within at least a football field of distance from each other. And during the breeding season, Bluebirds will defend sufficient territory that they sense is necessary to raise their young. The first "batch" of Bluebird nests this spring were scattered in nest boxes in seven different fields, and as expected, nesting pairs of Bluebirds were always separated by more than 300 feet. This in spite of the fact that many of the nest boxes are arranged in pairs.

It is the female that incubates the eggs and broods the nestlings, but the male keeps her contented with his frequent soft, murmuring song that sounds like a tumble of repeated churrilies. And in early spring, he is attired in his best feathered suit. No wear and tear anywhere on this little bird. With his striking blue feathers covering his back and head, and reddish-brown breast, this male is an eye-catching specimen. When he takes to flight, it is like a piece of sky has flown by.

To the surprise of many, the Eastern Bluebird population in Massachusetts is increasing at a rate of about 0.7% per year. This might not appear to be such a large increase, but with annual compounding, this number adds up fast! This beautiful bird is also one of our resident birds, implying it does not migrate but stays put enduring the challenges of winter. Visitors to the reservation are amazed by the number of Bluebirds and always associate the nest boxes with Bluebirds. I have no doubt if a poll were conducted, our Eastern Bluebird would land at the top of the list.

When April waned and mid-May arrived, the Bluebirds did not disappoint me. There were a total of nine nest attempts. Seven of these nest attempts were successful, producing 34 fledglings. And they usually begin their second nest attempt soon after this. Some will even attempt a third nest this season!

Unfortunately, two nest attempts failed to produce any fledglings. One nest, with a clutch of three eggs was abandoned by the female, probably due to a stretch of cold weather or possibly one of the adults perished. It will take both adults to raise the young. In the case of the other unsuccessful nest, all the nestlings disappeared from the nest well before their expected fledge date. The nest was otherwise undisturbed except for the missing nestlings. As a snake leaves little proof of its deed, the evidence points to snake predation.



<https://www.audubon.org/news/how-build-bluebird-nest-box>

Considering that 34 nestlings fledged, it was still a great beginning of the season for our Bluebirds. I am always surprised by how they appear undaunted by the hardships that nesting so early in the season brings, even though they will more than likely nest again, and often in the same nest box or one that is nearby. Bluebirds certainly display stamina and a special spirit and persistence to forge forward in spite of the odds. As the first half of spring came to an end, I was grateful to have shared this early portion of this season with these amazing birds, experiencing and understanding the challenges they endure to bring forth life so early in the season.