



MANCHESTER ESSEX CONSERVATION TRUST

PRESERVING NATURAL BEAUTY, WILDLIFE, AND RESOURCES AT THE GATEWAY TO CAPE ANN

SPRING 2020

Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor: An Expanded View for MECT's Land Conservation Efforts

MECT is branching out on the success of our Acorns to Oaks Capital Campaign. Our Trustees have expanded our conservation goals to encompass land within a Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor, that is centered on the Wilderness Conservation Area (WCA), but also includes land both east and west that meets our core conservation criteria. While the WCA

represents our history, and the heart of the Manchester-Essex woods, we feel that we are ready to reach further.

THE SEED

MECT is, and always has been, in the business of protecting land. The organization was established at a time when the importance of conservation was being

Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor, continues on page 5

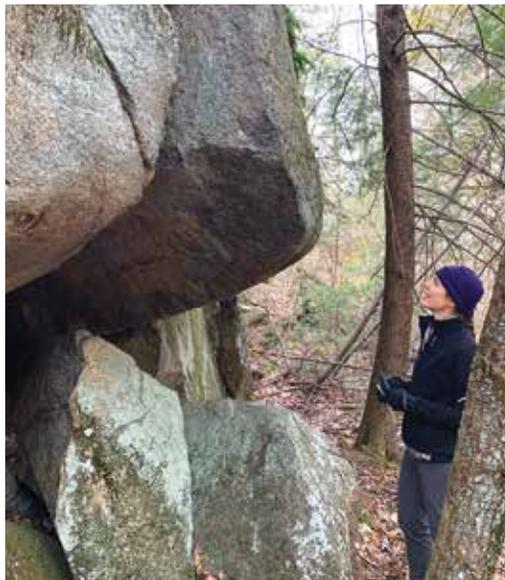
MECT Completes Two Purchases Protecting Twenty Acres of Land

MECT is excited to announce that we've completed two land purchases, one that continues our commitment to completing the conservation of the Wilderness Conservation Area; and the other, that fits our wider vision for a Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor protecting water quality and biodiversity in our two towns, and beyond (see above).

One purchase protects land on the edge of Cedar Swamp, close to the gateway to the Wilderness Conservation Area in Essex. This property is located between the Prospect Ledge Trail and Southern

Avenue. It includes a forest of hemlock, pine and oak, dotted with glacial erratics. It also contains wetlands on the fringe of Cedar Swamp.

MECT has also completed a purchase of land in the Gravelly Pond watershed in northwest Manchester that has been owned by the Halloran family for several generations. It is located in the vicinity of Wyman Hill and expands the border of a 200-acre swath



Amy Blondin on Halloran Parcel.
Photo: Michelle Vaillancourt

of conservation land owned by MECT and the Town of Manchester. It is close to existing trails accessible from Crooked Lane and is a beautiful place to wander. One distinguishing feature is an extensive granite ledge running along the edge of the property. It is covered by the ferns and lichens common to rocky outcroppings of Cape Ann and is surrounded by forest dominated by white pine and oak.

"MECT is pleased to both increase our conservation of the Wilderness Conservation Area and expand the protection of land

in northwest Manchester with these two projects," said George Davis, MECT Land Acquisition and Protection Committee Chair. "We are very pleased that the Halloran family kept this land in its pristine condition through many years and appreciated the importance of conserving it in perpetuity. Both acquisitions help to preserve the beauty and natural resources that define our community."

“Common bird species are vital to ecosystems, controlling pests, pollinating flowers, spreading seeds and regenerating forests. When these birds disappear, their former habitats often are not the same.”

—CARL ZIMMER, NEW YORK TIMES



Above: Pine Warbler. Left: Blue Gray Gnatcatcher. Photos: Mike Dyer



How Do We Save the Birds?

by Greg Crockett, MECT Stewardship Committee Chair

In an article in the New York Times last September, it was revealed that the US and Canada have lost twenty-nine percent of their bird populations since 1970. That amounts to 2.9 billion fewer birds in our skies.

The article was based on a study conducted by a team of researchers from universities, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations that resulted in a report published in the journal *Science* documenting this widespread decline of bird populations. The researchers used two methodologies to determine population levels. First, they used data collected by amateur bird watchers who submitted personal observations to databases managed by professional ornithologists. In this study, researchers turned to information in those databases collected between 2006 and 2015 to estimate the populations of 529 species of birds and then looked back to observations from the 1970 bird census, the earliest year for which concrete data was collected, to compare population levels over time.

The researchers then compared the bird watchers' field observations to birds seen on weather radar scans. Dr. Kenneth Rosenberg, a scientist at Cornell University and the study's lead author, and his team

analyzed springtime migrations by looking at birds recorded on radar at 143 stations across the US from 2007 to 2018. The drop in bird populations observed on the radar scans coincided almost exactly with the field observations of the amateur birders.

Why are bird populations in decline? There are three factors driving this decline in bird populations: climate change, pesticides, and habitat loss.

According to Mass Audubon and their studies, sixty-one bird species are highly vulnerable to climate change. Since the 1960's 305 widespread bird species in North America have had their average wintering latitude shift forty miles north. Climate change has had a severe effect on thirty-six species of long-range migratory birds because some of their primary food sources at their breeding grounds are at maximum abundance weeks earlier than the birds' arrival. Some twelve species of coastal nesting birds are highly vulnerable due to rising sea levels. Higher tides reduce nesting areas, stronger storms over-wash beaches and salt marsh nesting sites. In addition, rising ocean acidification is impacting shell fish on which many of these birds depend for food. Scientists consider thirty species of forest birds as highly vulnerable to climate change due to negative impacts on their habitat.

In another study published recently in the journal *Science*, scientists found that migratory songbirds



Matt Roberts conducting field work for a Forest Management and Bird Habitat Assessment Plan for the Wilderness Conservation Area.
Photo: Michelle Vaillancourt

the state was extensively logged in the 19th century. Unfortunately, these forests are the least advantageous for many of our forest bird species and are a factor in the dwindling bird populations. Many birds prefer the openness of the young forest where there is sufficient sunlight penetrating the canopy to allow shrubs and berries to flourish.

What can we do? MECT is working to find ways to steward our land to encourage more habitat that our forest birds and other wildlife can more successfully utilize. We were awarded a \$15,000 grant to develop a Forest Stewardship and Bird Habitat Assessment Plan by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation in 2019. Our forester, Matt Roberts, is completing his fieldwork this spring and

exposed to a widely used group of pesticides called neonicotinoids had trouble eating and accumulating the necessary fat stores required to make their journeys south. This delayed their departure from their feeding grounds and impacted their migration survival rates and reproductive success. Another problem is the use of rodenticides. Raptors, hawks and owls that eat a poisoned rodent are often poisoned by rodenticide in the rodent.

Massachusetts is covered primarily by what is called middle-aged forests. These have grown back after

we look forward to receiving his final report that will synthesize the data collected and provide management recommendations. We should be presenting the Forest Management Plan to our membership by the end of the summer and expect that it will guide our stewardship efforts moving forward.

What can you do to help the birds? You can minimize your carbon footprint, keep your cat indoors, eliminate any use of pesticides, landscape your yard to be more pollinator friendly, and put special decals on your large windows to help minimize bird impacts.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Birds Are Vanishing From North America

www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/science/bird-populations-america-canada.html

A Neonicotinoid Insecticide Reduces Fueling and Delays Migration in Songbirds

<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/365/6458/1177>

Effects of Climate Change on Birds

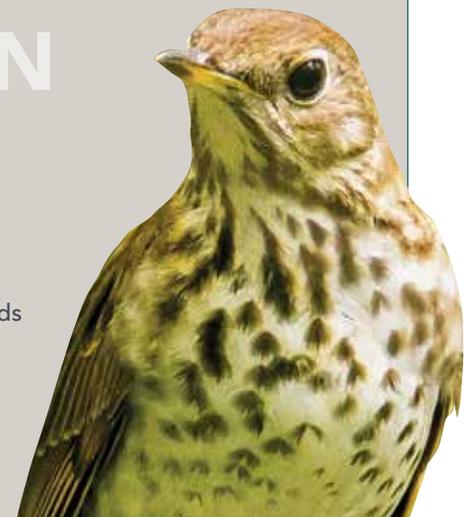
www.massaudubon.org/our-conservation-work/climate-change/effects-of-climate-change/on-birds

Raptors and Rat Poison

www.allaboutbirds.org/news/raptors-and-rat-poison

Foresters for the Birds

www.masswoodlands.org/programs/foresters-for-the-birds



Wood Thrush. Photo: Mike Dyer

MECT Cancels Spring Hike Series

by Mike Dyer, MECT President

MECT has always welcomed visitors onto our trails and cart paths for the enjoyment of our woodland and wetlands, clean air, open space, and recreational opportunities. Our hike series has long been a harbinger of spring, the time of reawakening for the flora and fauna we know and love. We are now dealing with the COVID19 pandemic and living in a new world of “social distancing”, sheltering in place, and profound uncertainty for the future. Sadly, we have had to cancel this year’s spring hikes, as well as the scheduled trail work days.

We look forward to the day when we can all safely enjoy the woods, together, again. Until then, please take the importance of physical and social distancing seriously, even when you are in the woods. If you are using MECT trails, please keep them safe for everyone, and protect the public at large, by maintaining a minimum of six feet of physical distance at all times.

It is a challenge now to maintain connections to each other and with the world at large. In such times, nature especially matters and we hope that you’ll be able to find the right times and places for solitude and soaking the senses with the wonder of all the life emerging around you, maybe even in your own back yard.



Photo: Mike Dyer

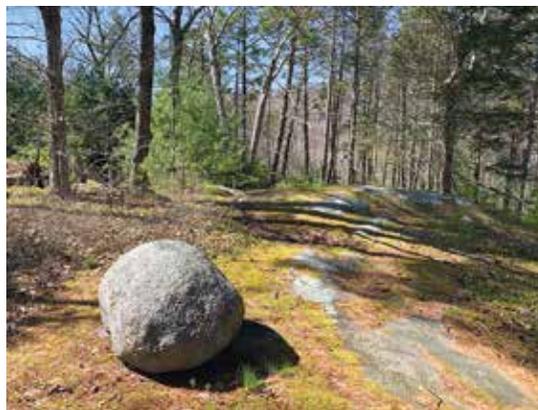
Our mission to conserve wild habitat and healthy watershed continues as strongly as ever. We are working from home, and we intend to proceed with all of our 2020 work plans in a manner consistent with current and emerging governmental guidelines to slow this pandemic. We will be here to protect the woodlands, watershed, and open spaces of Manchester, Essex, and beyond.

We look forward to your continued support and in the future to seeing you again on our trail system. Most of all, keep yourselves safe and healthy.

Best wishes from the MECT Board and Staff

Conservation Leaders Circle is Formed

It is quite clear that community commitment is essential in the effort to preserve the natural beauty of Manchester and Essex. It is also clear that MECT’s members understand the importance of participating in this mission with their financial support. MECT’s success over fifty-seven years is a direct result of that generosity. There are many local families who make significant contributions to support MECT’s mission, and to acknowledge their commitment, we have formed the Conservation Leaders



Round Stone on Granite.
Photo: Michelle Vaillancourt

Circle. This group of donors give \$1,000 or more on an annual basis, building the financial foundation that supports MECT’s work each year.

Many of you stepped up to this level of giving in the 2019 Annual Appeal, answering the call for funds to match a grant offered by the Creighton and Beinecke families. We are delighted to report thirty-seven founding members to the Conservation Leaders Circle. Thank you!

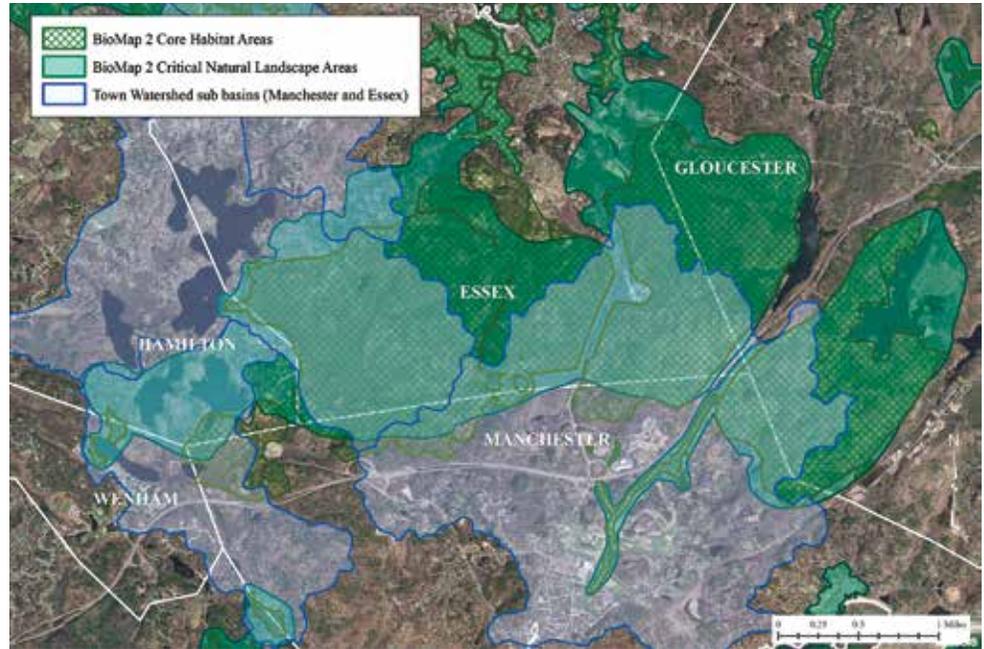
recognized, and also when the first major threat of development to our local woodlands was introduced. The completion of Route 128 provided access to the interior of Cape Ann where no roads had previously existed. MECT's founders saw the highway as a harbinger of development, and because the community had yet to establish funding for land protection through its newly formed Conservation Commission, they established a land trust to protect the woodlands and wetlands of Manchester.

In those days, we were known as the Manchester Conservation Trust (MCT). The organization began purchasing parcels and working with the Town to protect additional land. In the early years, this partnership resulted in the conservation of many special areas, such as Millstone and Powder House Hills, which are much loved and often visited today.

THE SAPLING

Over time, the Trust's land protection efforts focused on the WCA. Although MCT never lost sight of the larger community, protection of the 2,000 forested acres linking Manchester and Essex, has been the overarching organizational priority for decades. MCT eventually went through a process of reorganization, and incorporated as the Manchester Essex Conservation Trust partially to reflect the importance of, and growing land holdings in, the Essex portion of the WCA.

In order to help focus organizational resources, MECT completed its first Strategic Plan in 2015. The Plan identified four specific land acquisition goals: fully preserve the WCA; identify mission-critical lands in both towns; protect drinking water supplies; and identify and address threats posed by climate change. Since MECT adopted that first strategic plan, it has honed in on two criteria—biodiversity of plant and animal life, and water quality—as the most critical qualities of local woodlands and other natural areas that merit conservation.



Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor. Map: Amy Blondin

OUR OAK

The concept of the Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor came through blending all four of MECT's land acquisition goals and viewing them through the lens of biodiversity and water quality protection.

The Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) and the Nature Conservancy's Massachusetts Program (TNC) developed a "BioMap 2" data layer as a tool designed to conserve biodiversity in Massachusetts by identifying land most critical for protection in order to ensure the long-term persistence of rare and other native species and their habitats, exemplary natural communities, and a diversity of ecosystems.

Superimposing the BioMap 2 data layer over the Manchester and Essex watershed boundaries identified a distinct corridor of undeveloped land specific to our organization's goals. The Manchester Essex Conservation Corridor encompasses the WCA and expands beyond both town boundaries to include land in Gloucester, Hamilton and Wenham. This land provides habitat for a healthy and diverse array of plants and animals and also protects our drinking water supply. This is our new focus. This is what we want to protect for our community, our environment and our future.



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Spring is Membership Renewal Time!



Warblers and finches and titmice and deer,
Beavers and foxes and all creatures near,
How we protect them is all up to us!
Please renew your membership in
Manchester Essex Conservation Trust.

Great Egret, Cedar Swamp, Manchester. Photo: David Young, Poem: Alida Bryant

As your local land trust, MECT is dedicated to protecting and preserving wildlife habitat, as well as water quality and other natural resources that our open space provides. Your support is critical to ensuring our enduring ability to do so. To contribute, use the envelope included in this newsletter or go to www.mect.org/join. Please consider using the monthly giving option to increase your membership level. **Thank you!**