

CONSERVATION’S ROOTS RUN DEEP ON TUCKERNUCK

By Diana Brown



Nearly fifty years ago, residents on Tuckernuck began talking about starting an organization to preserve the island. Henry LaFarge, in particular, foresaw the importance of permanently conserving Tuckernuck, and he was a primary force in urging landowners to focus on conservation. Several others, including Mary and Fran Pease, Rosie Bodman, Anne Witherby, Greg Brewer, Scott Bartlett, Bob Congdon, Franklin Bartlett, and me, met in attempts to organize.

Early in the 1970s, a delegation from The Trustees of Reservations (TTOR) flew to Tuckernuck to meet with residents. Founded in Massachusetts in 1891, TTOR was the very first land trust in the United States. Its representatives, including Fred Winthrop and Wes Ward, understood the importance of our small island’s biodiversity. They encouraged the Tuckernuck group to use conservation restrictions to preserve their land.

A conservation restriction (CR) is a legal agreement between a landowner, who agrees to preserve private property, and a nonprofit organization that promises to monitor and enforce the restriction. While today these agreements must be permanent, in the 1970s they were allowed to expire after thirty years. A small group of landowners agreed to grant TTOR simultaneous, 30-year easements on their properties, and in June 1977, easements were recorded on five parcels.



The Nantucket Land Council, Inc. (NLC), a nonprofit group founded in 1974, became involved on Tuckernuck in the early 1980s, when a plan to subdivide more than 100 acres at the East End of the island went before the Planning Board. The subdivision never happened, but John Roe, then NLC Executive Director, began to work with Tuckernuck landowners interested in donating permanent conservation restrictions. In December 1986, Ruth Stevens and Morris Phinney were the first to record permanent CR’s. The NLC continued working with Tuckernuckers, and today it holds and enforces 23 permanent CR’s across the island. TTOR holds three CR’s, and The Nature Conservancy holds two.

Then, during the 1990s, envisioning an entity dedicated to Tuckernuck, a group—including Laura Hussey, Bam LaFarge, Susie Robinson, Joanne Johnsen, Liz Bell of The Nature Conservancy, and Lynn Zimmerman of the NLC—worked to set up a land trust to acquire, hold, and preserve land on Tuckernuck. In 1998, nearly 20 years ago, the Tuckernuck Land Trust, Inc., was approved by the federal government as a charitable organization, and to date it has acquired nine parcels totaling about 100 acres.

DIANA BROWN PHOTO COURTESY OF CECILY KIHN



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EDIE RAY

WHY PRESERVE MORE LAND ON TUCKERNUCK?

By Lynn Zimmerman

Recently, a Tuckernuck landowner suggested, “Tuckernuck is quite well protected and not under pressure from unreasonable development.” He added that there may be a few houses yet to be built, then asked, “Isn’t that tolerable in the grand scheme of things?”

The answer to that question depends on one’s point of view. The Tuckernuck Land Trust endeavors to eliminate future houses *if possible* because, on Tuckernuck—an isolated island with a relatively intact natural environment—a future house is not just another building. Each will significantly disturb the island’s natural habitats, add vehicles, introduce new plants, multiply human uses, increase fire danger, and compound risks to the island’s sole-source aquifer.

From the perspective of a landowner, the 36 existing houses may seem few and far between. From the perspective of the land trust, every newly developed property threatens the island’s still pristine, breathtaking environmental integrity.

But why did the Tuckernuck Land Trust decide specifically to buy the 26-acre parcel in December 2016, committing to raise \$800,000 over several years to do so? Opportunity! The seller offered TLT the vacant property, which stretches from the south shore’s heathlands far north into the oak forest, at a deep discount and gave TLT the ability to eliminate a future house.

This land, which abuts 18 acres donated to TLT in 2015, is the ninth parcel acquired by the land trust since being founded in 1998. It brings the organization’s total holdings to about 100 acres. However, TLT is a small land trust; it has only a limited ability to raise funds and preserve land, so it seized this infrequent opportunity.

The Tuckernuck Land Trust is a federally approved 501(c)(3) conservation organization. It is funded solely by charitable gifts from its conservation-minded members, like you. Remarkably, in 2016, TLT raised about \$500,000 of the \$800,000 needed to retire the loan and permanently preserve the 26 acres in their natural, vegetated condition.

True, when you visit Tuckernuck, its still vast grasslands and oak forests appear mostly undeveloped, “well protected.” Happily, it is true that, since 1986, about 600 acres of Tuckernuck’s approximately 815 acres have been permanently protected by conservation groups. It is also true that some vacant parcels, even some with conservation restrictions, allow future buildings, so Tuckernuck may yet see new construction in the future.

From the land trust’s perspective, it is preferable that no more houses be built, and TLT hopes for future preservation opportunities. Right now, it is celebrating its latest purchase and concentrating on raising an additional \$300,000 in tax-deductible donations from generous supporters to finalize preservation of its new 26-acre holding.



JENNIFER AHLBORN

PERSEVERANCE ON TUCKERNUCK

By Allison Black, TLT’s 2017 Coastal Steward (and also 2014-2015)



It was wonderful to be able to return for my third year and see familiar faces, while also meeting plenty of new ones. Our summer programs this year, some of my favorites, were attended in great numbers and a highlight of the week for many visitors. The expanding library was also well utilized. We have a wide variety of books for all interests and ages, and we are so thankful to everyone who has donated books, puzzles, and games to the collection. I am also particularly grateful to those who came out for our TLT Volunteer Day and gave their time and effort to help with various needs at the field station and surrounding property.

It was a tough summer for our resident shorebirds, but we did get some baby birds up and off the ground. Eight pairs of American Oystercatchers nested and fledged a total of seven chicks on Tuckernuck this year, and three pairs of Piping Plovers fledged two chicks. These are unfortunately lower numbers than in recent years, though they do not account for effort: two of our plover pairs nested a total of five times, an incredible effort on the part of an endangered species. Overall, while it was a low year in terms of nesting productivity, it was made up for in other areas. In total, I saw about 136 different species of birds during the summer, which is the most I’ve ever counted! Tuckernuck is indeed a place for the birds, and I am so blessed to play a small role in the conservation of this wonderful island.



JENNIFER AHLBORN

ORGANIC VS. FAST FOOD: HERRING GULLS MAKE DIET CHOICES, TOO 2017 RESEARCH ACTIVITY ON TUCKERNUCK

By Matt Fuirst

This year, I spent the months of May and June tagging Herring Gulls at three colonies for my Master of Science thesis research with Stony Brook University. My fieldwork this season primarily involved capturing the gulls using noose carpets and deploying/recovering GPS tags to track foraging movements during incubation along an urban gradient. Deploying these tags provided high-resolution data from individual birds for 1-2 weeks at a time. We also collected blood samples and cloacal swabs to examine, in the lab at a later date, the gulls' immunity and the microbial community.

Field work this year was an adventure, since my study sites were in three distinct colonies: in Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in New York City (my most urban site), in Stony Brook Harbor on Long Island (intermediate), and on Tuckernuck Island (minimally urban). I was very fortunate to have access to Tuckernuck through my collaborator and committee member, Dr. Richard Veit, who was instrumental to my field work. His hospitality allowed me to collect data from Herring Gulls from a location that few biologists can visit, and it enabled me to learn about seabird biology from local ornithologists. Tuckernuck also allowed me many unique bird sightings, including several species of shearwaters, Iceland Gulls, and Blue Grosbeaks.

Preliminary observations from the GPS tracks deployed on Tuckernuck indicate a substantial difference in foraging behavior across individuals from the colony. The data demonstrates that some individual birds target specific human food sources repeatedly, such as the Madaket dump and squid boats offshore. I am now in the process of analyzing my spatial data to identify foraging areas and the microbiome of each bird that I tagged.



SEASON FOR RENEWAL TLT's 22ND ANNUAL MEETING, JULY 1, 2017

No rain contingency plan will help when the weather insists on a practical joke. Five minutes before the start of the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Tuckernuck Land Trust, the clouds burst, moving the whole crowd—the largest representation from around the island in recent years—into close quarters on everything resembling a seat in the Salt Box.

Wedged against the (unlit) parlor stove, President Jamey French led with a celebration of TLT's success in purchasing the 26-acre Jackson property, with its undisturbed variety of island habitats extending from the shore through the heathlands and deep into the old oak forest in the heart of the island. The campaign to fund the purchase enjoyed a successful first year.

Edie Ray provided updates on the TLT Field Station property and past and upcoming Education Walks, and Coastal Steward



Allison Black outlined early data on shorebird nesting. Treasurer Michael Taylor delved into the fiscal health of the organization, and Jamey lauded and called upon the generosity of TLT's donors, stressing that the campaign had not yet reached its goal and that TLT's everyday operations would need regular support from members and friends.

Heartfelt thanks were offered to departing trustees Tris Dammin, Jane Ziesing, and Skip Windsor, and to Charlie Howard, who would continue to assist in financial oversight and the board's current review of its standards and practices. In addition, Dr. Dick Veit was welcomed upon his return to the Board of Directors.

Following the proceedings, the throng emerged from the Salt Box and reveled thankfully in drier air and a potluck repast that featured a generous raw bar provided by Chris Clark. This annual Tuckernuck gathering enjoyed the unsurpassed backdrop of North Pond with Bigelow's Point in the distance.

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AROUND, ABOUT AND ABOVE THE EDUCATION WALKS OF 2017

Chances are, if you attended an Education Walk in 2017, in search Tuckernuck flora and fauna and fun, you also got to meet at least one new person. Half of the eight Walks this year were conducted by experts new to the TLT program, two of them visiting the island for the first time.

Building on the interest generated by the 2016 Walk focused on Tuckernuck's Native American History, noted area historian **Frances Ruley Karttunen**, Ph.D., eagerly delved into historical records to prepare for her presentation on **THE FIRST TUCKERNUCKERS**.



The maiden Tuckernuck visit of local physician **Timothy J. Lepore**, M.D., F.A.C.S., as the **TICK TALK DOC**, continued TLT's updates on the latest research and treatment protocols for tick-related diseases. Dr. Lepore's decades of experience have included work on the front lines of the battle against tick-borne diseases, plus a plethora of anecdotes.

Back by popular demand, **ADVENTURES IN SCIENCE FOR KIDS** delivered on its promise, with TLT Coastal Steward **Allison Black** imparting scientific information about Tuckernuck in the guise of fun experiments and art projects.

Yvonne Vaillancourt, the new Director of UMass Boston's Nantucket Field Station, shone light on a common but overlooked inhabitant of the waters around Tuckernuck: the sponge. Her descriptions and specimens had everyone **PORING OVER SPONGES**.

The 2017 memorial **BAM'S RAMBLE** explored the plants found on the island in August. Thanks to the leadership of Maria Mitchell Association's Field Ornithologist, **Ginger Andrews**, and TLT's own birding biologist, **Allison Black**, participants also explored Tuckernuck's many bird habitats.

Tick collecting is a popular pastime on Tuckernuck, but the **FAMILY SCAVENGER HUNT** actually gave credit—a point apiece! Thanks to the creativity of **Edie Ray**, who included both natural booty (sassafras leaf, anything with a barnacle attached) and interloping items (rusty nail, balloon with string) as targets, everyone went home knowing the island was a little tidier, as well.



When there's something that needs doing, Tuckernuckers lend a hand, and the **TLT VOLUNTEER DAY** was no exception. See "Volunteer Force," at right.

With celestial appetites whetted by the recent solar eclipse, Tuckernuck eagerly welcomed the Maria Mitchell Association's Director of Astronomy, **Dr. Regina Jorgenson**, back for a **SKYGAZERS' DELIGHT**. Gathering at North Head after dark, the crowd took advantage of the low level of artificial light on Tuckernuck to view the heavens with the naked eye, binoculars, and telescopes.

As is traditional, all of the visiting Walk leaders shared their time and expertise, free of charge, to highlight natural elements of life on Tuckernuck. TLT is grateful for their generosity and adventuresome spirit, and we appreciate the many islanders who participated in these programs to expand their knowledge of the island wonders around them.

If you have an idea for an Education Walk, we would love to hear it. E-mail it to the TLT office at tlt@tuckernucklandtrust.org, or phone us at 508-228-2638. The possibilities are vast, and the island awaits!



VOLUNTEER FORCE

It turned out to be one of the quieter weekends on Tuckernuck this summer, but TLT's Volunteer Day assembled a kinetic workforce that proved the "small but mighty" tradition of Tuckernuck.

With a crew of ten on August 20, TLT was able to check off all major items on the to-do list.

The Field Station property was improved inside and out, from door adjustments, window caulking, and attic culling to brush cutting and foundation clearing. Helpers were Michael and Tucker Taylor, Sarah Gilmore, Tessa Kadar, Grace Walker, Susie Robinson, Dick Veit, Charlotte Harvey, Jenny Ahlborn, and head cheerleader Diana Brown, who also helped to catalogue the permanent research collection of the Field Station library.

TLT is grateful to everyone who dedicated a sunny morning to improve the Field Station property, with special thanks to Edie Ray for organizing and Allison for efficiently leading the day's efforts.

For those who wish they could have been there, check in with the TLT office at the beginning of next summer. We keep an ongoing list of small Field Station projects that might be tackled in a day or less. And watch for the next official Volunteer Day. Your hands and heart will be appreciated.

THANK YOU for helping TLT to conserve Tuckernuck Island. Tuckernuck Land Trust, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) organization. Tax-deductible gifts may be sent to P.O. Box 1093, Nantucket, MA 02554, or made online at www.tuckernucklandtrust.org. We welcome your partnership in protecting this special place.