



WELLFLEET CONSERVATION TRUST

Spring 2026 • www.wellfleetconservationtrust.org

SURVIVING WELLFLEET WINTER 2026

First Day Walk

On January 1, WCT had a taste of the winter to come on our First Day Walk to the Herring



River Overlook Trail. Setting out from the Great Island National Seashore parking lot, walkers stopped at the reburial site of the unknown Wampanoag woman and at the bridge over the Herring River for an update on its construction. We proceeded to the Herring River Overlook Trail. Then a sudden snow squall struck. Undeterred, the intrepid walkers forged on even though we couldn't see much from the Overlook. On the way back along

Chequessett Neck Road, everyone got blasted by the snow as we trudged back to the Great Island parking lot. Another great First Day Walk! See you next year.

Deep Freeze

Blackfish Creek, Drummer Cove, and the Fox Island Marsh all formed ice floes that moved with the tides. We start educating ourselves on the terms for sea ice: frazil ice, grease ice, shuga, nilas, pancake ice, ice rind, fast ice, drift ice, and ballycaddars. Then deep freeze set in, and the entire harbor was frozen.

Snowed-In

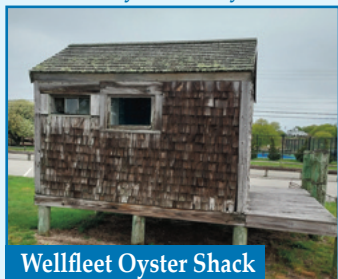
In January, so much snow fell that the roads required much plowing, but we didn't lose power. The trees were intact. Then the blizzard arrived on February 23rd. Trees and branches came down all over town. Toppled trees and utility poles cut off access to many roads. The power went out around noon and wasn't restored for days.



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WCT ANNUAL GUIDED WALK EXPLORES MAYO BEACH AND LORENZO DOW BAKER'S LEGACY

The Lighthouse keeper's house is still there and the fuel storage building. Some of you may recall the bathhouse at Mayo Beach when it was in use, the oyster house in its original location, or the 1966 stranding of the Wellfleet Whale, immortalized by Stanley Kunitz's poem of the same name, but there is no one alive who remembers the heyday of the Chequesset Inn, built by Captain Lorenzo Dow Baker. The remnant pilings of the legendary inn, which drew fashionable vacationers to Wellfleet at the turn of the twentieth century, still may be observed at low tide. The Inn was abandoned in 1934 due to



Wellfleet Oyster Shack

ice floes damaging the pilings. You may know of the Elephant House, built by Baker's son. Speakers will be delving into these topics and more at WCT's Annual Guided Walk on Saturday, September 12th.

This year, no reservation is needed since there is no restriction on the number of participants. Walkers should be on Mayo Beach no later than 9 a.m. Free parking is available at the Mayo Beach parking lot and

at other nearby town facilities. The walk will be along Mayo Beach to the Chequesset Club and return, a total of two miles.

As always, prepare for the walk by bringing sunscreen, insect repellent and water. A hat and comfortable shoes are also advised. Anticipated duration of the walk is two hours.

Do join us for another memorable WCT September walk at 9:00 a.m. on September 12th, the Saturday after Labor Day.



ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

Every 3rd Wednesday of the month, 7 a.m. Meet at So. Wellfleet Post Office parking lot. Gloves, trash bags, and equipment provided.

WELLFLEET TOWN PARADE

Friday, July 4, 10 a.m. Look for us again this year as we celebrate the country's 250th Anniversary.

ANNUAL WCT MEETING

Wednesday, August 19, 4 p.m., Chequesset Club
680 Chequesset Neck Rd. Speaker to be announced.

ANNUAL GUIDED WALK

Saturday, September 12, 9 a.m.
Starts and finishes at Mayo Beach parking lot.

COASTSWEEP

Monday, October 12, 10 a.m.
Sign in at Mayo Beach parking lot for assignment.

SURVIVING WELFLEET WINTER, CONTINUED

Blocked



"This is so sad," a near abutter to the hard-hit Pilgrim Springs Conservation Area declared on the day the snow had melted enough to access the trails. It was an obstacle course of trees; some were uprooted, many had broken off near the base, and more with their tops torn off. Tree litter was everywhere. Similar conditions existed at the Herring River Overlook trail. At the Clover Trail, a tree had fallen across the parking entrance, and more trees had fallen, blocking the trails.

To the Rescue

When you visit the trails this year, you will still see the tree wreckage in



John Elsensohn

the woodlands. Those downed trees will remain where they fell to shelter wildlife and to decompose naturally, but the trails needed to be cleared. Eric Siegler, WCT Ranger for the Pilgrim Spring/Fox Island Conservation trails, mapped all the downed trees blocking the trails in that conservation land, and a crew consisting of Eric, John Portnoy, John Cumbler, and Michael Fisher set out with saws and muscle to clear those trails. The next day Eric, Trustees Barry Johnston, Susie Quigley, Ginie Page, and Michael were out finishing the job. Trustee Jen Elsensohn and husband John, Rangers for the Herring River Overlook Trail, found vast tree destruction there and labored to clear the trails. We give all of these volunteers a huge thank you for their work to get the trails reopened.

PROTECT WATER AND NATURE MA

Every resident in MA, no matter where he/she lives, has the Constitutional right to clean drinking water and access to nature. A new coalition of groups is trying to get that concept reinforced with dedicated funding. WCT has joined with this coalition which includes most of the conservation leaders in the state and many other local conservation trusts. Our obligation is to promote legislation and a ballot initiative in November to make sure the state continues to make Nature available to all.

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REFLECTIONS ON LINDA B. MILLER AND BRUCE HURTER

Two important figures to Wellfleet's conservation efforts have passed away, but they leave us with a lasting legacy.

Linda B. Miller, Ph.D.

Linda B. Miller was a founding member of the Wellfleet Conservation Trust. Trustees who knew her were saddened when Linda passed away on January 19, 2025. This January, we learned that she had left a sizable bequest to WCT,



Dr. Linda B. Miller

for which we are most grateful. Dr. Miller was a professor of political and international studies at Wellesley College and at the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University. After moving to Wellfleet in 1976, she both continued to teach and to publish in her field.

When she finally "retired" to Wellfleet, Linda continued to devote her time to education. She presented her annual series on International Affairs as a part of Open University. She served on the Friends of the Library and the Beach Study Committee for the Town of Wellfleet. She also worked at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown, where she organized the Coastal Solutions Initiative Guide for public policy on

environmental issues. The Wellfleet Conservation Trust was fortunate to have Linda B. Miller as one of the founders who shaped our organization

Bruce P. Hurter, M.D.

Bruce Hurter passed away on Christmas Eve, 2025. Bruce's distinguished medical career as a psychiatrist included time with the National Health Service in Florida and at Harvard Vanguard in Somerville. Much of his work was his practice at UMass Worcester, where he also taught medical residents. He received the Exemplary Psychiatrist of the Year Award for his work with the mentally ill.

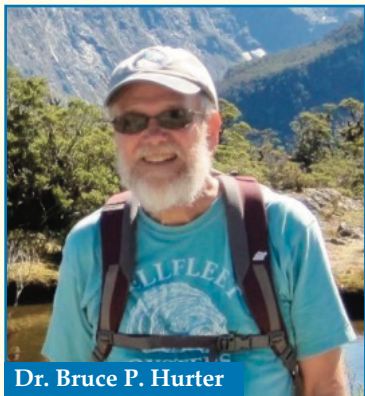
Bruce Hurter, for many years the Open Space Committee Chair and liaison to the WCT, was in attendance at almost all our meetings. He also served on the Advisory Board to the National Seashore and other Wellfleet Town boards. As a volunteer for the Wellfleet Bay Audubon Sanctuary, he was known as "The Turtle Guy."

A Memorial Celebration of Life was held for Bruce on Saturday, April 25, 2026. He is remembered here with affection by current Trustee Tom Janssen:

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REFLECTIONS ON LINDA B. MILLER AND BRUCE HURTER, CONTINUED

"Bruce was my turtle mentor on Old Wharf Point as we would search for terrapin nests, viable eggs, and, ultimately, those little prehistoric creatures so popular around the Outer Cape. Last summer, Bruce was with me when I discovered a nest while walking with my grandchildren. We found evidence of a viable nest with newly hatched terrapin turtles on the side of the road. It's rare to find a nest at any time, but the serendipity of finding one with your grandchildren is a truly joyous occasion! I was amazed and my grandkids were



Dr. Bruce P. Hurter

ecstatic, but I think Bruce was more excited than we were. He was smiling like a small boy on Christmas morning. Ear to ear. He was so happy my little girls got to experience what he and I had seen only infrequently and we're out there every day. His smile was infectious.

"Well, I was told turtles were there that day when we celebrated Bruce and all he embodied. I looked all over and almost missed seeing them - neatly snuggled on every dining table, little baby chocolate turtles that brought a smile to my face. Ear to ear, just like Bruce."

EARTH DAY 2026 – MORE THAN GREEN SIGNS

This year Earth Day was more than the familiar green signs displayed around Wellfleet reminding us that April 22 is Earth Day.



During Earth Week, WCT participated in the Cresta Alta Film Tour with Risan Media's climate change documentary film. The filmmaker Todd Anders Johnson was present to answer questions after the screening. A panel discussion with local conservationists, including WCT President Denny O'Connell, followed. Our State Senator Julian Cyr addressed the audience electronically.

And on Earth Day morning, a team of WCT volunteers cleaned up a great deal of trash from one of our properties, a small pond on Route 6. Eric Siegler, Tom Janssen, and Michael Fisher collected 11 full bags of trash as well as some larger items. An appreciative David Flattery of the State Department of Transportation arranged for pick-up of the collected trash.

Expect our Earth Day signs to appear again in 2027 while we think up more ways to commemorate the day next year.

SPOTLIGHT ON... RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

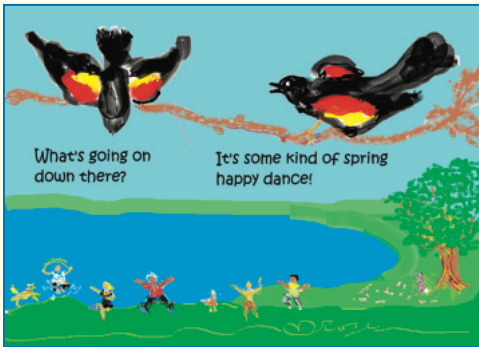
This is a year when we were happier to hear the “Churrrrrrrr” of Red-wing Blackbirds, signaling, even before the peepers, that winter was almost over. Look up to the highest treetops, where the sound is coming from, and you will see a Red-



Red-winged Blackbird

winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*). Male Red-wings are easy to identify by their epaulets, bright red wing patches, outlined with yellow, on their shiny black bodies. The females are more difficult to identify because they are more likely to stay closer to the ground and resemble stocky sparrows with their streaky muted brown coloration.

The call of the male Red-wing, translated into phonetic bird-English by ornithologists as “Konk-Ker-Leee,” is described by poet Robert Penn Warren as a “rusty, musical heart-plumbing cry.” The male is defending his territory for his mates. That’s right – plural – the Red-winged Blackbird is polygamous.



These birds choose marshy or wetland spaces to nest in hard-to-reach locations to thwart predators. A male Red-wing will chase a human intruder or larger bird out of its territory if his females are nesting. Their nests are shaped out of mud and soft grasses where they lay three to five pale blue eggs. Insects are the primary food for Red-wings.

In winter, most Red-wings migrate south, joining large inter-species flocks for the journey. A large flock of grackles, starlings, and cowbirds might have Red-wings traveling incognito with them. We scarcely notice their departure, but we always welcome back this harbinger of spring, the Red-winged Blackbird.

PROTECT WATER AND NATURE MA, CONTINUED

The first step is to convince the legislature to more fully fund the annual budget through H.901/S.2571. At the same time, the Coalition will be pursuing a “Protect Water and Nature” ballot initiative to be voted in November 2026. It will be included in the ballot initiatives when sufficient certified signatures are submitted to the state. The proposal is to dedicate a portion of sales tax receipts on outdoor recreation (think RV’s, golf clubs, camping goods, etc.) to support water and nature initiatives. The goal is to dedicate approximately \$100 million annually. Per the President of Mass Audubon, “Nature is something we care deeply about because it gives us so much in return – clean water, clean air, lands resilient to storm events, and places to enjoy, recreate and escape many distractions of our world...”.

Voters, let your voice be heard and your vote be counted. Virginia, Georgia and Texas have already implemented this policy of dedicating sales tax collections on outdoor recreation to protecting Nature. Why not Massachusetts?

PRESIDENT'S LETTER - SPRING 2026

Greetings to WCT Supporters,

I have been writing these “President’s Letters” for more than 25 years now, but always with the thrust of my thanks for all the voluntary support and encouragement by so many people, including our all-volunteer Board of Trustees. There are many other volunteers who have helped in stewarding our properties, our trails, and helping with litter pickup, such as “Adopt-a-Highway” and the “CoastSweep” in October. In this issue, you will read about volunteers who, along with trustees, helped with clearing up considerable tree damage from our storm of this past February. That was big job – thanks to those doing the work.

We are fortunate to have other volunteers, also. Our financial and land contributions are all voluntary. Land donations have been remarkable. A land conservation trust does not have any inherent sources of revenue, so we must rely on voluntary contributors in order to help with our mission of acquiring and stewarding land for conservation purposes. Our financial donors have been a strength, always meeting our needs. We have achieved some state support through project grants, but such approach takes a fair amount of effort and time to achieve and cannot be counted upon.

In my mind, there is no doubt that Wellfleet is being loved to death, but, with good stewardship, we can go on. For years, there has been insufficient parking for all who wish to go to our beautiful ocean beaches. This will be an on-going problem as erosion continues, especially on the oceanside, but also on the harborside and Cape Cod Bayside. If the changes at Duck Harbor were a bit of a surprise, be forewarned that Ocean View Drive will have “challenges” in the next few years as some parts of that road are very close to going over the dunes.

Sustainability of volunteer trustees and stewards are also a challenge that we must meet. Many of us are getting on in age. I, and other of our trustees, can no longer do some of the physical work we used to do, but we have four newer trustees, and we will always want to involve more.

My appreciation to all of you who are the backbone of WCT. Finally, please enjoy the benefits of Wellfleet and appreciate the critical role that is being played by WCT.

Sincerely,

Dennis (Denny) O'Connell, President, Board of Trustees

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WELLFLEET CONSERVATION TRUST

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