

Table of Contents

- 1 <u>Opening Message</u>
- 2-3 McNeill Land Donation Spotlight
 - 4 The Heritage Recognition Award
 - 5 **Donation in Memory of Wayne Gray**
- 6-7 **2024 Bank Swallow Review**
- 8-10 **Leash Library Initiative**
- 11-13 Piping Plover in PEI
- 14-15 Farmland Birds Program
- 16-18 Field Season Snapshots
 - 19 Holland College Student Spotlight
- 20-21 **2025 Event Series**



Throughout the magazine you will see QR codes accompanying some articles. The codes are a gateway to additional online info & resources.

When you see a code simply open your smartphone camera app, aim at the code and click the pop-up link on your screen. You will then be taken directly to the article or page on your smartphone browser. If you're reading the magazine online, click to learn more!

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As we step into the vibrant days of June, I'm proud to open this edition of Island Nature Trust's magazine with a photo that speaks volumes—our incredible team, together in one frame. This picture isn't just a snapshot; it's a reflection of the passion, dedication, and deep-rooted commitment our staff bring to conservation across PEI every day.

Each person you see above plays a vital role in protecting the Island's natural spaces, biodiversity, and species at risk. Their collective efforts span forest, wetland, field and coastal habitats— and I promise they're friendly so please say hello if you see them hard at work!

In this issue, we're excited to highlight the impactful work INT has been carrying out—from land acquisitions and stewardship initiatives to the invaluable support of our donors and the critical species we monitor. Every page tells a story of collaboration and care for nature, for community, and for the future of PEI.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

Warmly,

Melissa Cameron Executive Director

melissa.cameron@islandnaturetrust.ca

Land Donation Spotlight: Edd and Ruby McNeill Natural Area

McNeill Family Donates 80 Acres in Days Corner

The McNeill family of Days Corner, PE, has made a generous 80 acre donation of land on the Ellis River. This property, which lies just outside of Wellington, is an ecological hotspot, with over a kilometer of coastal salt marsh and habitat for several species at risk.

Honoring Their Parents and Family Legacy

In 1900, Ruby McNeill's grandfather, Simon Day, purchased 101 acres near Wellington, PE. He farmed the land, operated a blacksmith shop on the property, and ran the local mail. Eventually, his youngest son, Lem, took over the land and the blacksmith shop. Lem was offered countless times to have the land developed, but sold it to Edd and Ruby McNeill and their son David to keep it protected.

Edd and David ran a service center out front and allowed the remaining land to regrow into a forest. Edd was a true steward of the forest; he mindfully thinned the trees growing in the old fields and sustainably harvested small amounts of hardwood for firewood.

Edd and David also received numerous offers to sell the land for development, but kept Lem's wish of protecting the land. The family has decided to honor this legacy by donating the land to Island Nature Trust, to be protected forever as the Edd and Ruby McNeill Natural Area.



Ruby and Edd McNeill





We wanted to do something that would create a lasting legacy for our parents.

- David McNeill



Protecting Coastal Wetlands

Salt marshes provide habitat for a wide range of wildlife but consist of only one to two percent of the land mass in PEI. Salt marshes were historically dyked and converted to farmland for hay in PEI, leaving few fully intact. They provide habitat for breeding and migratory species, including willet, Nelson's sparrow, and greater yellowlegs. In addition to wildlife support, salt marshes provide valuable nitrogen filtration for seabound water, and sequester large amounts of "blue carbon" in their soils. They also reduce the impact of storm surges and erosion, making them an invaluable ecosystem on PEI.



Interested in donating your land for Island Nature Trust to protect forever?

Scan to learn more or visit islandnaturetrust.ca/add



Edd and Ruby McNeill Natural Area

Freshwater marsh

Peatland

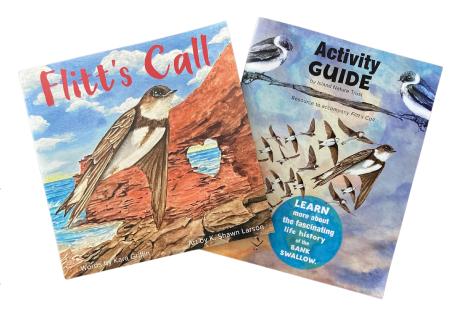
Saltwater marsh

3

Waterways

The Heritage Recognition Award

In March, Island Nature Trust, along with Kara Griffin and K. Shawn Larson, were honoured to receive the Heritage Recognition Award from The PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation. This meaningful award was presented in recognition of our collective work on *Flitt's Call* and the *Flitt's Call Activity Guide*, which aim to inspire the next generation of wildlife conservationists.







Kelly Bush - Office Coordinator, Kaylee Busniuk - Stewardship & Engagement Manager, Cory Gray - CEO & Chairman of the Board

A Generous Gift in Memory of Wayne Gray

Island Nature Trust was honoured to be chosen as one of April's recipients of a generous \$10,000 donation from The Gray Group Inc., as part of their 52 Weeks of Giving in Memory of Wayne Gray program. This heartfelt initiative celebrates the life and legacy of Wayne Gray by giving back to local non-profit organizations working to create positive change in their communities.



We believe that our gift will contribute to a sustainable future where wildlife and nature thrive.

- The Gray Group



We are truly grateful to The Gray Group for recognizing the importance of land conservation on Prince Edward Island. This meaningful contribution will directly support our ongoing efforts to protect ecologically sensitive lands, conserve biodiversity, and foster environmental stewardship across the Island.



2024 Bank Swallow Review

Featured on our magazine cover, Bank swallows (*Riparia riparia*) are a threatened bird species that nest in colonies along PEI's coastline. These remarkable little birds excavate burrows in sandstone cliffs and dunes in which to build their nests. During the summer, flocks of bank swallows can be seen flitting along the coast in a mesmerizing dance as they hunt flying insects.

Bank swallows, like many aerial insectivores, have experienced a dramatic population decline of **98%** over the past four decades. The exact causes of this decline remain unclear, but several contributing factors are likely involved. One major factor is the reduction in insect prey due to the destruction of habitats that support insect production, particularly wetlands. Additionally, the loss of nesting habitats caused by coastal armouring is likely impacting bank swallow populations.

In 2023, Island Nature Trust set out to survey the coastline of PEI for suitable bank swallow habitat over a two-year period. With over 1,000 kilometers of coastline in the province, this was an ambitious goal. We knew this was not a project we could complete on our own, so we reached out to Islander's requesting their help, and were overwhelmed by the response. Over the last two years, we have been training dozens of incredible volunteers who generously have offered time their and knowledge to support this initiative. With their help and partnerships with local watershed groups and the Bank Atlantic Canada Swallow Working Group, we have successfully surveyed all accessible portions of our coastline over the last 2 years.





Together with 28 amazing volunteers, Island Nature Trust surveyed 507km of PEI's coastline and identified 107 active bank swallow colonies in 2024.

Going into the 2025 field season, we aim to build on this knowledge and revisit the sites last covered in 2023 so we can maintain an up-to-date database of bank swallow colonies, which will help guide conservation and management decisions.

Island Nature Trust would like to thank our many exceptional volunteers, partner groups, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and the PEI Wildlife Conservation Fund for making this work possible.



Leash Library Initiative



Since 1984, the piping plover has been listed as endangered under the Species at Risk Act, facing numerous threats, including habitat loss, climate change, and human disturbances. These small shorebirds nest in the dry sand and cobble of PEI's beaches. Unfortunately, the popularity of these beaches in the summer months makes the piping plover particularly vulnerable to disruptions, especially from off-leash dogs.

Ace 🍪

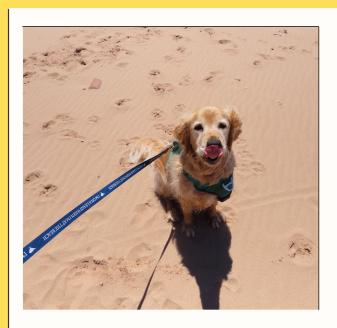
Island Nature Trust has been committed to conserving piping plovers since 1979, conducting outreach campaigns to educate the public and promote dog-leashing on beaches. Despite these efforts, some coastal communities remain resistant to change, as dog owners feel inconvenienced by the requirement to leash their pets and believe their dogs pose no threat to wildlife.



To address this issue, INT has launched a new project targeting popular beaches that serve as breeding habitats for piping plover. Last year, we collaborated with the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative's Community of Practice to develop and install a leash library and kiosk at Barachois Beach in North Rustico. The leash library provided returnable leashes and clear instructions on dog-leashing, while the kiosk featured pictures of local dogs on leashes, promoting dog-leashing as a social norm within the community. The pilot of this project in 2024 was highly successful, receiving much positive feedback from the public, who appreciated the convenience of having leashes provided when they were not accustomed to bringing one with them.







Ronnie loves their leash!

This year, we received funding from the Wildlife Conservation Fund and Environment and Climate Change Canada's Community Nominated Priority Place Project to expand this initiative to four other beaches.

This season, leash libraries have been installed at Bothwell Beach, Little Harbour, and St. Peter's Lakerun, and leash libraries and kiosks have been installed at Lakeside and Barachois.

This initiative employs Community Based Social Marketing principles to shift local attitudes and behaviours towards conservation. By making leashes accessible and highlighting the behaviours of other locals, the project aims to increase voluntary compliance of dog-leashing, reduce disturbances to piping plovers, and improve nesting success.

The project's dual approach of social marketing and practical solutions increases the likelihood of success. Fewer off-leash dogs at the target beaches will significantly decrease disturbances to piping plovers during the 2025 breeding season. This reduction in disturbances will improve nest success and potentially increase the number of fledglings per nest, contributing to the recovery of the endangered species.

INT's efforts to protect piping plovers are crucial as human disturbances continue to threaten their breeding habitats. The knowledge gained from this project will inform future conservation campaigns and be shared with other organizations working towards the recovery of piping plovers.

By fostering a community-based approach to conservation, INT aims to create lasting change in local attitudes and behaviours, ensuring a safer environment for piping plovers and other coastal wildlife.



Mone about piping ploven!

Piping Plover in PEI

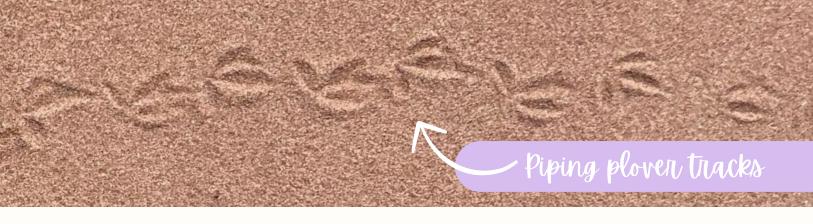


The piping plover (Charadrius melodus melodus) is a small, sand-colored shorebird that inhabits our Atlantic Coast beaches from May through August. These birds are adept at blending with the sands of Prince Edward Island, where they nest and rear their offspring each summer. As an endangered species, their continued existence relies on access to safe and healthy beach habitats for breeding, resting, and feeding. These important coastal habitats are facing increasing pressures from human infrastructure and beach use.

Threats to the Piping Plover

On PEI, fewer than 60 piping plover return to our beaches each year. These charismatic little birds face substantial challenges such as human disturbances, predation, and weather-related issues. In particular, human activities on beaches pose significant risks by attracting predators, reducing foraging activity, trampling nests or young, forcing energy expenditure, and introducing dogs into this sensitive habitat. Simple measures like avoiding signed nesting areas, keeping motorized vehicles off beaches, leashing pets, and walking on wet sand can help protect these birds.





Predation from crows, falcons, raccoons, foxes, mink, coyotes, and pets is a major threat, often exacerbated by leftover food and waste attracting predators. Piping plover will produce an alarm call when approached by humans or our pets. Their predators are quite observant and may be attracted by these calls. Some crows have even been observed following human footprints in search of a quick meal! Beachgoers can help by taking their trash with them and not approaching nests or following birds.

Extreme weather events, intensified by climate change, pose additional risks by flooding nests and endangering chicks. Protecting plover breeding sites and addressing these threats is crucial for their survival.



Island Nature Trust's Piping Plover Conservation Program

INT staff and our amazing volunteers work together to locate piping plover across the province. Once found, staff install symbolic fencing around nesting areas to signal their presence and protect them from disturbances. The fencing, consisting of posts with ropes, helps ensure that people stay out of the nesting areas and give the birds the space they need to thrive.

This year, Jenna Cahill, Kate Teed, Hannah Lisecky, Sydney Matthews, Katherine McEwen, and Genevieve Beaulac make up our Coastal Team. In June, you may have spotted coordinators and technicians on the beaches as they assisted with the annual piping plover census. During this time, staff scoured over 117 km of beach habitat across 58 beaches.

This year, the census revealed several notable successes, including the first nest in Cable Head West area since 2012, and an early June hatching of chicks on the Sandhills. These successes are a testament to the dedication and hard work of everyone involved in the piping plover conservation program.





Join the Effort

Island Nature Trust's work to protect piping plover is vital to their survival on PEI. By respecting nesting areas, reducing human disturbance, managing waste, and leashing your pets, we can all contribute to safeguarding these beautiful birds. Together, we can ensure that PEI's beaches remain a sanctuary for piping plover for generations to come.

For more information on how to support piping plover conservation efforts, visit our website at www.islandnaturetrust.ca.

Farmland Birds Program

Got Hay? Delay!

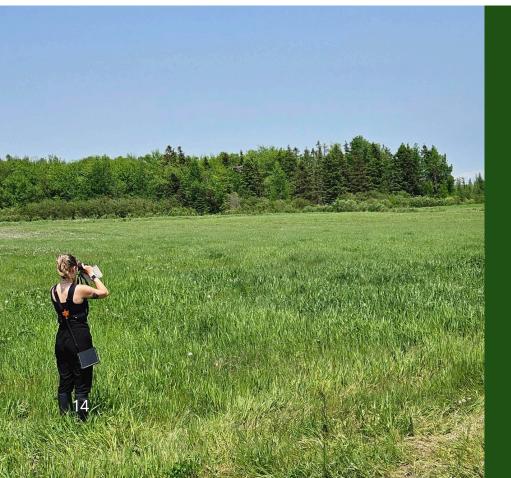
Island Nature Trust works with clients of the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) program and volunteer landowners across PEI to implement the beneficial management practice of a **delayed hay cut until after July 15** and to monitor bobolink and other species using agricultural lands.

Beneficial management practices (BMPs) are any management activity that **reduces or eliminates an environmental risk**. These practices are voluntary and can be supported by incentive payments from programs such as ALUS.

A delayed hay cut is just **one of many** BMPs that farmers can implement on their land. Other practices could include expansion of buffer zones beyond the regulated amount (15m), establishing habitat and nectar sources for beneficial insects, and converting marginal or high-risk croplands (i.e., seasonally wet areas, high slopes) into biodiverse perennial landscapes.







Did You Know?

Bobolink are a species of grassland songbird that has been listed as **threatened** under the Species at Risk Act since 2017.

Bobolink depend on grasslands to nest and raise their young. PEI lacks native grasslands, so bobolink rely heavily on hayfields and pasture lands for their breeding success.

A delayed hay harvest mitigates nest destruction and gives young birds an increased chance of survival.

Multi-Species Benefits



Implementing BMPs on your land can benefit bobolink and many other species that utilize agricultural landscapes. Other bird species frequently using agricultural areas include savannah sparrow, swallow species, northern harrier, and red-winged blackbird.

This year our Farmland Birds Program is piloting an expansion of its focus to include species using forested features on or adjacent to farmlands in addition to our work focusing on bobolink and other grassland species. We will be working with a small group of farmers to provide them an assessment of their farm's biodiversity with a focus on sharing the value of retained forested areas to farming operations.

Forested landscapes and features such as hedgerows are **critical to farming operations** as they provide many ecosystem services to farmers including contributing to good soil health, protection of water resources, climate regulation including moderation of temperatures and reduction of wind speeds, and habitat for pollinators. Additionally, maintaining forested landscapes is critical to protect ecological connectivity and refuges for our native species.

With over 36% of the land in Prince Edward Island dedicated to farmland, farmers play a unique role in the stewardship of natural environments. Maintaining forested landscapes across the Island is **mutually beneficial** to farmers and the natural world.







Field Season Snapshots

Farmland Bird Program



Male bobolink calling from a grassy perch.



Searching for bobolink!



Spotted a northern shoveler on a nearby pond!



Female bobolink perching on a wire.

Field Season Snapshots

Stewardship Team



This spring 22 new and 21 returning Conservation Guardians attended training sessions!



025 Stewardship Team: Beck, Andrew, Brittany, Kaylee and Ray









Three detection traps for an **invasive insect**, emerald ash borer, were installed.

17

Hosted two Holland College Transitions Classes to give the students an opportunity to explore careers related to the environment and conservation.





Over **7,000 lbs of debris** were removed from two Natural Areas.



Helped revegetate Red Point
Provincial Park in
collaboration with Souris and
Area Branch of the PEI
Wildlife Federation, Provincial
Parks, Macphail Woods, and
a Souris Regional School
Grade 9 class.









18

Holland College Student Spotlight

On-the-Job Training



Jurian Vos



Tyler Doucette

Jurian, Tyler, and Rachel were students in the Wildlife Conservation Technology program and joined us for the month of April. This program focuses on plant and animal ecology, map use and analysis, wildlife management, and habitat surveys.

They participated in work including property assessments, trail maintenance, piping plover surveys, signage installation, and annual monitoring with the Stewardship Team.



Rachel Richard

"I was thrilled to be on the INT team this [April], to gain tons of knowledge about PEI land stewardship and species at risk monitoring and conservation! I [was] excited to see some piping plovers, as I've never seen them in person despite living on the Island my whole life!" - Rachel

Harneet was a student in the Environmental Applied Science Technology (EAST) program and joined us for the month of May. The EAST program focuses on scientific theory in classes such as soil science, air quality, environmental chemistry, and site assessments.

Harneet worked on and implemented a water quality monitoring study of the ponds at Jenkins Complex Natural Area. In addition, she utilized mapping software to prioritize areas for land protection outreach based on species at risk habitat and important ecosystems.



Harneet Kaur

2025 Event Series

Feb

Family Snowshoe

An interactive walk allowed families to explore the winter trails at Jenkins Complex Natural Area together.

March

Kids Camp

Day camp for Grades 3 - 5 offered wildlife observation, outdoor games, crafts, and hiking!

April

Native Plant Gardening

Participants learned where to buy native plants on PEI, which ones are best for their garden, and how to plan a native garden for success.

May

Celebration of Land

Together we celebrated the acquisition of 200 acres at Point DeRoche—an exciting expansion of the DeRoche Pond Natural Area.

June

Youth Learn to Bird

Together with the Spring Park Girl Guides we learned to use binoculars and explored our urban environment at Wright's Creek and Andrew's Pond.









Upcoming Events

July

Children's Book Reading

Join author Kara Griffin at the Mount Stewart Library for a reading of *Flitt's Call*.

Aug

Walk to St. Peter's Island (By invitation to members)

Back by popular demand - join us for a walk across the tidal flats to St. Peter's Island.

Sep

Annual General Meeting

Join us at our AGM for an update on our activities for the year and a chance to interact with our staff and board members.

Fall in Love with Nature

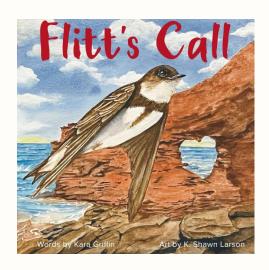
Oct

Come with us on an interpretive walk at Buote Heritage Woods Natural Area to observe the changing seasons.

Nature Trivia

Nov

Come out and show us your love for all things nature. Trivia will cover a wide range of topics and difficulty levels. Beginner nature enthusiasts welcome!





Online registration opens within a month of the event date. Visit our website or watch our social media accounts to find the registration link!





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