

Year *in* Review

Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket



Mass Audubon

2023



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INSIDE

Director's Message

Islands Coastal
Waterbird Program

Access For All

Island Endemics

Youth Education and
Community Outreach

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2023

By the Numbers

Supporting Families

\$80,000

Total financial support provided for Fern and Feather camp and preschool families through our new sliding scale fee structure

\$30,000

Increase in financial aid provided from last year.



250

Families supported to send their children to our camp and preschool programs.

Islands Friends:

You know it is a good year when after asking staff what they are most proud of accomplishing, the room is filled with excited exclamations. My voice was among them and, incredibly, we all had different answers. A favorite moment for me was at our annual Fall Festival, where four generations of our founder's family came together to see her vision of Felix Neck played out in the thousand-plus attendees enjoying being outdoors and learning about nature.

Read on to hear staff speak from their hearts of their passions, achievements, and triumphs of the last year. Their work, along with our volunteers, partners, donors, and friends make the Island better – providing time in nature, lifelong learning, protection of wildlife and wildlands, and community building. And we are not done yet, there is so much more to come in 2024. Best wishes in the New Year

Warm Regards,

Suzan Bellincampi

Islands Director

December 2023



Anne Hale



Four generations of the Hale Family



Piping Plover pair

Islands Coastal Waterbird Program

Mass Audubon's Islands Coastal Waterbirds Program monitored record numbers of shorebirds this past season at 22 sites on MV and Nantucket. Thirty pairs of piping plovers and twenty-two pairs of American oystercatchers nested on sites throughout Martha's Vineyard and 6 pairs on Nantucket.

Norton Point Beach was a standout, hosting by far the largest number of birds. Of ten American oystercatcher pairs, all of them fledged chicks, with 25 chicks total. Sixteen pairs of piping plovers nested on Norton Point, an increase from last year's eleven. Amongst those shorebirds, an exceptionally high number of terns nested and staged as well, with Mass Audubon staff monitoring more terns than anyone else in the state. One third of the United States breeding population of roseate terns and 40 to 60 per cent of the state's least terns used this beach as a stopover site this past summer. Of the five Island sites that had nesting terns, over 750 pairs fledged more than 450 chicks. One pair of Black Skimmers nested on Norton Point and fledged three chicks rounding out this very successful shorebird year.



Fern & Feather preschoolers

Access For All

Fern and Feather Day Camp piloted its first year using a sliding scale fee system. The tiered tuition system was a huge success, with an increase in the number of families supported and the amount of financial assistance provided. Early enrollment for Island families allowed for more local access to camp and the sliding scale model was well-received and appreciated by those who needed it most.

Islands Endemics

Found nowhere else in the world is a powerful statement and one that describes two species of hawthorns on two separate Islands.

A new Martha’s Vineyard discovery of *Crataegus schizopylla*, also known as the cleft-leaved or cutleaf hawthorn, is cause to celebrate. It is the only endemic plant on Martha’s Vineyard and a new, second population of this rare plant was found this year at Felix Neck.

Nantucket Sanctuaries has its own endemic hawthorn, Bicknell’s Hawthorn (*Crataegus bicknelli*), of which only 60 plants remain in the world. Most of these plants are found at Sesachacha Heathlands Wildlife



Cleft-leaved Hawthorn

Sanctuary and are threatened due to climate change, intense storms, as well as invasive species.

In partnership with the Botanic Garden of Smith College, staff are working to establish another off- Island population of Bicknell’s Hawthorn. Teams collaborated to protect the existing population with deer-proof fencing and pruning while collecting soil samples, cuttings, and seed to begin growing the off-site population. Due to these efforts, this rare plant species will not go extinct on our watch!

Youth Education and Community Outreach



Youth Climate Leadership (YCLP) students had a very successful program year, with the largest student involvement of 25 active club members on Martha's Vineyard and six on Nantucket. The YCLP student teams hosted well-attended, successful community events, including the popular Climate Cafes, a student-led art show, and film hosting and other advocacy efforts.

The MV 5th annual Youth Climate Summit was combined with the MV Regional High School's 2nd annual Day of Dialogue, enabling us to reach over 700 student attendees at two locations and involve over 20 community members and experts. Scheduling and coordination of four different "tracks" made it possible for all students to participate in something climate related that piqued their interest. Each track—art, food, conservation, horticulture, local action and equity, and more—had a set schedule of events, talks, and activities that immersed kids in a hands-on deep learning about the climate crisis through different lenses, how it applies to them, and what they can do to be a part of the solution.

The Youth Environmental Steward (YES) program on Nantucket welcomed three interns who worked at Lost Farm, Sesachacha Heathlands, and Smith's Point Wildlife Sanctuaries. Their projects included mapping invasive plant species on our lands, providing



Nature-inspired Drag

shorebird pop-up programs on the beach, and conducting a pitch pine forest inventory to inform forest resiliency efforts around climate change and invasive species such as the newly discovered Southern Pine Beetle.

The first annual Nature Inspired Drag Show kicked off Martha's Vineyard PRIDE month celebrations. We partnered with QueerHubMV and raised funds to support LGBTQ+ resources in our community. This multipart program looked at the intersection of drag — a type of entertainment where people dress up and perform, often in highly stylized ways — and nature. The program included an introduction to the concept of nature drag by Providence artist and creator Eli Nixon and Hudson Valley artist and dancer Hana van der Kolk, a two-part workshop to create costumes and the performance, and then the show itself. This event helped us achieve our goal of creating a sense of belonging and a welcoming place for all.