

Year *in* Review

Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket

2025



Mass Audubon



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Mass Audubon

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2025

By the Numbers

45th Annual Fall Festival

\$15,179

Raised thanks to the generosity of
sponsors and attendees.

70

Volunteers and staff working together
before and during the event.



1,200

Attendees celebrated community,
nature, and fall fun.

Twenty years. Yes, this year marks two decades for me of leading the sanctuary and sharing nature at Mass Audubon's Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary. I joined Mass Audubon in 2006 as the sanctuary's second ever director, and it has been an incredible honor to guide this critical work.



Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary

Mass Audubon has always been a force for education, conservation, and wildlife protection, and the Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary is proud to lead this effort on Martha's Vineyard. Our tireless, dedicated crew brings heart, drive, and a deep passion for nature to everything we do.

The last year brought some ups and downs. For six wonderful years, we grew young naturalists at our Fern and Feather Preschool. Despite offering staff housing and competitive salaries, the challenges of living and working on the Island ultimately made long-term staffing and program sustainability impossible, leading to the difficult decision to close our beloved preschool. But we will not be deterred. We started 2026 with the sounds of preschool-aged children back in our Education Barn as part of our new initiatives to serve families with young children. On the very same day, the phones were ringing off the hook with families signing up for summer camp. This year, we had another wildly successful Fall Festival (our 45th!), will also wrap up our fundraising campaign, and break ground on our new All Persons Trail.

Our collective impact is making a difference on the Island, and beyond. Felix Neck is bolstered by dedicated advocates and volunteers, working to advance Mass Audubon's statewide successes, from collecting signatures for the [Nature for Massachusetts ballot initiative](#) to reducing the use of rodenticides through the [Rescue Raptors](#) campaign.

As we celebrate our achievements in 2025, and look ahead to 2026, we are clear-eyed about the moment before us. Now is the time to take action to protect the nature of Massachusetts and our shared planet. All of us at Felix Neck know that connecting with nature and engaging in this work is a powerful antidote—one that will make your life better this year (and for many more to come).

See you at the sanctuary,

Suzan Bellincampi

Islands Director
December 2025



All Persons Trail

Bringing an All Person Trail to Felix Neck

Help us break ground on the All Persons Trail this fall!

This year, we made significant progress toward our goal of creating an [All Persons Trail \(APT\) at Felix Neck](#).

In close collaboration with the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head/Aquinnah, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the Public Archeological Laboratory, this year Mass Audubon completed the required archaeological survey. A limited number of artifacts were found and categorized, allowing the project to move forward as planned.

We are thrilled to share that we are nearing a major milestone with fundraising now at almost 80% of our goal. This progress reflects the generosity and shared vision of both local and off-Island partners committed to expanding access to nature. We are deeply grateful to Mass Trails, Farm Neck Foundation, Martha's Vineyard Community Foundation, Slough Farm Foundation, Martha's Vineyard Bank Charitable Foundation, Edey Foundation, Couch Family Foundation, Athletic Brewing, and many individual donors who believe nature—and the physical, mental, and emotional health benefits that it provides—should be accessible to everyone.

The sanctuary has also been recommended for grant funding to support this project by the Town of Edgartown Community Preservation Committee.

Learn more about supporting this project by contacting [Wendy O'Keefe](#), Associate Director Philanthropy, at 508-556-7806 or [Suzan Bellincampi](#), Islands Sanctuary Director, at 508-627-4850.

**Edgartown residents, please help us get to the finish line by voting to approve Mass Audubon's Community Preservation Act funding request at Town meeting in April 2026.*

Nantucket News

In April, Mass Audubon welcomed Mark Paglierani as the new Nantucket Wildlife Sanctuaries Manager. A Cape Cod native, Mark brings extensive expertise in habitat restoration and land management to Mass Audubon's three Nantucket Sanctuaries—nearly 1,000 acres of vital wildlife habitat.

Mark has hit the ground running, undertaking a variety of projects that protect the nature, wildlife, and habitats of Nantucket, including habitat management to thwart

Southern Pine Beetle, caring for Nantucket's endemic Bicknell's Hawthorne, and mentoring last summer's crop of Youth Environmental Stewards.



Mark Paglierani

Fern & Feather Camp: Where Curiosity Takes Flight

Mass Audubon at Felix Neck proudly marked the 61st year of Fern & Feather Camp, continuing a long-standing tradition of connecting Island children with the natural world. The season was filled with joy and discovery, serving 225 campers—more than half from local, year-round Island families. Through Mass Audubon's sliding scale tuition program, more than \$32,000 in financial assistance was provided, giving even more children the opportunity to experience the magic of Fern & Feather Camp. Coming together as a camp community to spend the summer learning, growing, and building meaningful connections in nature was a true gift. Here is what parents had to say about last summer:



Fern & Feather Nature Camp

The counselors do an amazing job of providing the best experiences for the children. They create an environment of acceptance and curiosity, and my son loves going to this camp each year!

My kids have had the BEST experience this week and I am so grateful for this amazing experience and incredible staff. Truly a gem!!!

Love that our young ones can connect in such a loving way to nature and respect all forms of life...from turtles, to birds of prey, to snakes! The staff was so friendly & professional, AND knowledgeable.

Connecting Schools to Nature

During the 2024–2025 academic year, Felix Neck upheld its commitment of delivering comprehensive, place-based education to Martha's Vineyard students across every grade level. Our programs provide opportunities for learning both in the classroom and outdoors, blending science curriculum with hands-on exploration in local ecosystems.

Highlights included the annual **Freshwater Ponding** series, which engaged approximately 120 third graders from four Island schools and culminated in a field trip to Elizabeth's Pond at Felix Neck. The entire 7th grade classes from Oak Bluffs and Tisbury Elementary Schools—about 65 students—explored local watersheds through immersive kayaking trips through the salt marshes of Sengekontacket.

Additionally, approximately forty 5th and 6th grade students from the Charter School took part in our **Science of Massachusetts, Energy on Earth** series, which combined classroom instruction with time at the sanctuary observing food webs in action.

Growing up on the Island means spending time outdoors and in the classroom with Mass Audubon.



Freshwater Ponding

Increasing Access to Nature

Mass Audubon's Accessible Programs and Learning Experiences (MAPLE) have continued to serve our community by providing adaptive activities, programs, and equipment that enable everyone to meaningfully engage with nature in their own way. In 2025, participation in our signature Access-Able Golf Cart Tours tripled, and the Felix Neck Vocational Transitional Internship program, developed in collaboration with students, once again offered internship opportunities for teens and young adults with intellectual or learning disabilities to support their transition into careers.



MAPLE students on an Access-Able Golf Cart tour

Meet the Nantucket Youth Environmental Stewards

The Youth Environmental Steward (YES) Program empowers local high school and college-aged students through a paid, immersive experience at Mass Audubon's Nantucket Sanctuaries. The program combines hands-on environmental stewardship with early-career training, mentorship, and professional skill-building to cultivate the next generation of conservation leaders.

Meet this year's stewards:



My name is Warner Smith-Jones, born on Nantucket and currently going to school at Lesley University for animation. Growing up, I always appreciated the wildlife on Nantucket, but I wanted to work for Mass Audubon to make that passive-enjoyment into an active understanding. The YES program allows me to better understand and appreciate what is here (on Nantucket) and to play a small part in its future.



My name is Ava Lewis, and I was originally born in Virginia. I am currently an incoming senior in high school. I have lived overseas for almost my entire life. I lived in Africa for seven years, in three different countries—Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Mauritania. I also lived in Europe for three years, in Portugal and Belgium. Nevertheless, my family has

always had property on Nantucket, and I have always had a tie to this island. I have always felt drawn to the environment and Mass Audubon is compelling due to the organization's commitment to conservation, and the outreach that they are able to accomplish through their environmental education. By working as an environmental steward, Mass Audubon has given me the opportunity to put my dedication to the environment into action. This summer, I wanted to focus on advancing my knowledge of plants, especially how to identify different species. I also find developing my practical tool skills essential to participate effectively in hands-on environmental work.



My name is Dylan Marks and I am a Nantucket Island resident. I am currently attending college at the University of Maine, Orono and majoring in Ecology & Environmental Science with a concentration in Forest Ecosystems. I am excited to return for my fourth year as a Youth Environmental Steward for Mass Audubon's YES Program. I started working with Mass Audubon after finding out about their seasonal internship in high school. At the time I was a part of the Youth Climate committee, an Environmental club, and a part of Mass Audubon's Youth Climate Leadership Program. My favorite work over the years has been protecting the Island's Pitch Pine forests from Southern Pine Beetles, helping identify and fence Nantucket's endemic Bicknell's Hawthorne. And occasionally, tagging along with the Coastal Waterbird Program team to assist in shorebird monitoring.