

Sippewissett Association

Newsletter

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Otter on the ice at Quabog Pond, West Falmouth. (Photo by Robert Grosch)

The Sippewissett River Otters

By Arthur Gaines

The North American river otter, also known as the northern river otter, is a semiaquatic mammal endemic to North America, found in and along waterways and coasts. In Sippewissett these charismatic animals are emblematic of species that move along coastal beaches of Buzzards Bay, and then travel inland to the ponds and woodlands of the interior. Otters are known to travel 2-4 miles in a day in the course of their search for food although when so motivated they can move as much as 25 miles in a day. An adult river otter can weigh up to 31 lbs.

My wife, Jennifer, and I the first found evidence of the otter as their footprints on our beach in springtime, running along the shore and then into the coastal pond behind, where it no doubt searched for the fishes and frogs that make up its diet. When bounding, as they often do, the footprints are grouped in sets of four.

Our friend Helen Wilson has followed otter tracks past their house near the shore on Gray Lane inland to Flax Pond near Ransom Road, west of Sippewissett Road. On occasion she has seen an otter in the pond diving and frolicking. Helen has also followed the tracks along Racing Beach where the animal may find the crabs and other crustaceans they are known to relish.

Bob Grosch reports sighting otter tracks in salt-marshes in the mud at low tide. During the summer, when otters are more active at night, you are more likely to sight the tracks than the animal itself. One

The Kelly Woodland

Acquisition of 3.1 acres to link protected lands, expand wildlife corridor and create new public access

The acquisition of the Kelly Woodland by The 300 Committee Land Trust (T3C), in concert with the Buzzards Bay Coalition (BBC), will fulfill a long-term goal of the Sippewissett Association. The lot consists of red maple wetlands grading to white oak upland (of which 0.51 acres is buildable). The sale price on the buildable lot is \$235,000 and the Kelly family, in the conservation spirit of the late George F. Kelly, has generously agreed to donate the abutting 2.6-acre wetlands tract for conservation purposes. The Falmouth Conservation Commission has voted its intent and approval to hold a conservation restriction over the entire 3.1 acres, to ensure its protection in perpetuity.

This land lies between the 28-acre Flume Pond conservation lands (already owned by T3C), and the 483-acre Beebe Woods/Peterson Farm conservation lands, owned by the Town of Falmouth. Thus, acquisition of the Kelly land will create the only protected corridor of more than 500 acres from Beebe Woods to Buzzards Bay.

The Kelly land supports a diverse wildlife, such as deer, turkey, river otter, coyote, woodcock and a diversity of other bird and plant life. During spring, the wetland resounds with the chorus of spring peeper

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autumn Bob saw a family of four romping in the small ponds near Gansett. The otter establishes a burrow close to the water's edge, typically with many tunnel openings, one of which allows the otter to enter and exit underwater. Female otters give birth in these underground burrows, producing litters of one to six young.

Bob suspects there are no more than a few families in Falmouth since they need a large area to feed. They move where the food is, exploring the herring runs in early spring, where one can find scales along the stream banks. They eat perch out of Oyster Pond, herring when available and killifish year round in the marshes. Otters are rapid swimmers, capable of swimming down a fleeing trout. They are also known to eat amphibians, and occasionally small mammals and birds. Nick Witzell has observed otters eating painted turtles on the ice edge in Duck Pond across from his house on Evangeline Road.

According to all local reports, sighting the adult animal is easier during winter months when they are active during the day, and the otters can be seen at holes in the ice where they congregate to enter and leave the water. My wife, Jennifer, has seen them on the frozen surface of Icehouse Pond. Otters can remain underwater up to 4 minutes and travel submerged more than 400 yards. They are capable of reaching the bottom over 60 feet deep.

Nick Witzell sometimes keeps the holes in their pond open with an axe, especially for the otter's use. On occasion, winter is also the time to watch otters playfully sliding in the snow, which is reported both by Bob Grosch and by the Witzells, who observed a pair sliding down a hill in the snow in their back yard. Otters are usually an inconspicuous member of our community but a joy to those who make the effort to seek them out.

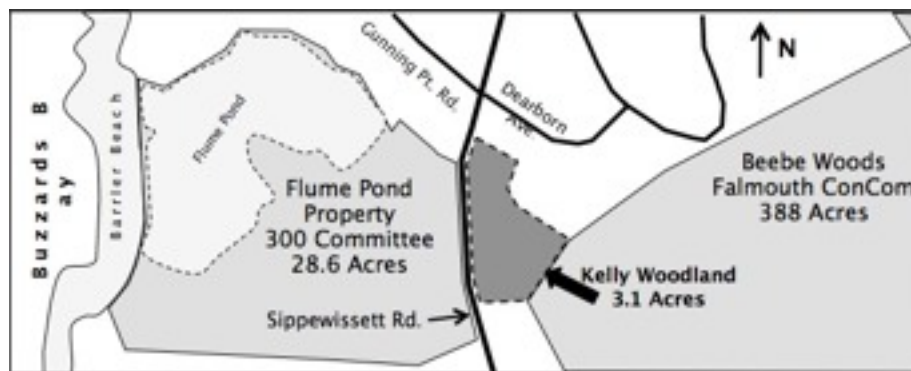
(Kelly Woodland, continued from page 1)

frogs. The land also provides 525 feet of protected wooded roadside along Sippewissett Road.

The plan is to provide a small, non-obtrusive parking area that will support public foot access to a little known part of Beebe Woods from the west side, and enhance foot access to the Flume Pond Conservation Land, directly opposite, that currently has no parking.

In order to acquire the property in April 2016, T3C and Buzzards Bay Coalition (BBC) are committed to raising the \$235,000 purchase price and \$5,000 for engineering and appraisals by March 2016. Proposed funding sources include: an \$85,000 MA Conservation Partnership Grant; \$70,000 from Falmouth Community Preservation Funds; a \$20,000 Buzzards Bay Watershed Municipal Mini-Grant; and \$65,000 from individuals, families and private foundations.

To this end, the Board of the Sippewissett Association proposed that a special fundraising incentive be attached to our annual membership drive in 2015 (approved at our June Annual Meeting). For a contribution of \$60 or more to The 300 Committee for this land acquisition, donors will receive a free annual



Acquisition of the Kelly Woodland will create a protected wildlife corridor from Beebe Woods to Buzzards Bay, provide a small parking area and foot access to Beebe Woods from the west, add to Falmouth's conservation lands, and protect 525 feet of wooded roadside in perpetuity. Gifts are tax deductible.

membership to the Sippewissett Association. T3C has also indicated a free one-year membership will be attached to such contributions. As T3C is a 501(c) (3) organization the contribution will be tax exempt.

We are encouraging our new and renewing members to choose this option for 2015–2016 (of course we are accepting the traditional \$30 membership as well.) See the membership details on the form included in this newsletter. The Kelly Conservation Land will enhance our quality of life and our property values. We need your support to ensure this happens.

Message from the President

Founded in 1969, the Sippewissett Association is a volunteer-based homeowners' group dedicated to the protection of the quality of life and the property values of our area. Our constituency consists of families living along Sippewissett Road from Fieldcrest Farm at Palmer Avenue, to Quissett Harbor Road (a stretch of 2.8 miles), or, along the shore, from Quissett Harbor to Wood Neck Beach.

Homes in this section of Falmouth occur both singly and grouped as 11 neighborhoods (some are planned subdivisions). Both are subject to the building and zoning regulations and other laws of the town, and subdivisions often have their own additional rules. Several subdivisions have associations to protect their special plan, interests, and infrastructure, although few (if any) are formal organizations that actually own common properties (roads, beaches) or have legal power to impose liens on those not paying membership dues.

All of us enjoy two basic natural amenities that enhance the quality of our lives and value of our properties: Buzzards Bay to the west and Beebe Woods to the east. Access to, and the environmental quality of, these natural assets are major concerns.

Also affecting our quality of life is Sippewissett Road, a multiple-use pathway for cars, walkers, runners, and bicyclists (and sometimes rollerbladers and X-country skiers). 134 driveways and 26 roads enter this short stretch of roadway. To promote safety the Board of Selectmen established a special 25 mph speed limit on traffic. A car speeding at 40 mph, a daily infraction, encounters a driveway on average every 1.9 seconds.

Safeguarding both of our natural amenities and ensuring the safety of Sippewissett Road are matters that require constant attention. We are usually better off acting as a coordinated organization than acting singly or as separate subdivisions. In this regard, the Sippewissett Association can be viewed as a congress of subdivisions, in addition to its representation of single homes along the road.

As a small volunteer organization we do not wish to duplicate roles already effectively played by existing organizations and town bodies. We support and collaborate with the major land trusts—The 300 Committee (T3C) and Salt Pond Areas Bird Sanctuaries (SPABSI)—on matters of open space and access. We support the Buzzards Bay Coalition and the Association for the Preservation of Cape Cod. While usually not in a position to provide substantial financial assistance, our neighborhood includes yet another asset: many scientists and naturalists, experienced public administrators, people knowledgeable on zoning and building regulations, spirited activists, and skillful writers, who have joined in on relevant issues with field studies, expert testimony, written reports, and letters to the editor.

The Sippewissett Association's dues are modest, however, we can have a large impact on local issues. But membership is vital to our effectiveness. If you have not renewed your membership please do so (see the attached membership form). If you are not yet a member please join us. We invite you to meet our Board and your neighbors at our summer social on Sunday, August 2. For more information go to: www.sippewissett.org.

Arthur Gaines

Sippewissett Association Board and Officers, 2015–2016

As the result of an election held during the June 20 annual meeting and the continuation of several three-year board terms that started prior to this year, the officers and board of the Sippewissett Association for 2015–2016 are:

Officers (1-year term): President, Arthur Gaines; Vice President, Maureen Conte; Treasurer, Karl Audenaerde

Board of Directors (3-year terms)

Elected 2015: Karl Audenaerde, Maureen Conte, Arthur Gaines, Vacant

Elected 2014: Deborah Gove, Geraldine Klein-Robbenhaar, Merle Mizell, Sylvia Vatuk, Peter Waasdorp

Elected 2013: Susan Cohan, Michael Eder, Bob Skilton, Judy Yost

We thank our retiring president, Peter Waasdorp, who has served ably in this capacity for many years. We're pleased he will be continuing on the Board.

Thanks also go to Nancy McDonald who will be retiring from the board as her term expires. We hope to retain her special talents as her time will allow.

The position of secretary/clerk is currently vacant. If you are new to the area or interested in learning more about your neighbors and community, joining the board and filling this position is an excellent way of doing so. We meet about six times a year and do much work through committees and e-mail. If you would like to join us on the board, or have specific questions, please contact againes@whoi.edu or send a note to our post box.

Is there a neighborhood issue you believe we should address? Are you interested in writing an article for our next newsletter? Please contact us as above. *(Submitted by Susan Cohan)*

Wood Neck Plover Update

And then there was one...

Our favorite plover, the banded female, “Bahama Mama” was back. But this spring she chose to bypass Wood Neck beach and opted to go straight to a spot just east of the Trunk River, pretty close to where she had her nest last year. The canonical number of four eggs followed soon, three of which hatched successfully. During a serious storm one of the chicks was lost, but the remaining siblings survived and flew off around the July 4.

In the meantime, a new pair had arrived on Wood Neck Beach, nesting within the Audubon Society enclosure placed for the birds’ protection. Soon afterward, four eggs appeared and all hatched on June 25. Unfortunately a storm tide killed two of them and a third, while searching for food, was trampled by beach goers.

We are forming a committee to examine diverse management options to further protect this threatened bird species that graces our shores. Look for our report in the 2016 Winter Newsletter.

Karl Audenaerde

Sippewissett Summer Social

Sunday, August 2, 3–5 p.m.

The Sippewissett Association’s annual summer party will be held at the gracious home of Geraldine Klein-Robbenhaar, 217 Sippewissett Road.

All Sippewissett residents, family, and friends are invited. Libations will be provided. Platters of your favorite finger food will be welcomed, but not necessary. Holding with tradition, raw shucked oysters will be served. Dress informal. Please consider walking, biking, and carpooling. Direct walking access is from Gunning Point Beach. Drivers please park on Cape Codder Road.

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The Sippewissett Association

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