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Cover Photo: Mayapple and eastern box turtle



As the days grow longer and the landscape bursts with life, we're reminded why our conservation work matters now more than ever in the First State. The start of 2025 brought change at both the state and federal levels, but thanks to your constant support, our work hasn't skipped a beat. In fact, we've stepped into this year with renewed purpose. Looking back on 2024, it's clear that it was a transformational year. Our #RestoreMore24 campaign set ambitious goals, and with your help, we surpassed them. Over 52,000 trees are now rooted in Delaware soil, restoring forests, enriching habitats, and bringing new life to our landscapes from Augustine Creek to the Great Cypress Swamp.

But our work reached far beyond tree planting. In 2024, we launched exciting new restoration projects, completed critical infrastructure improvements, and laid the groundwork for the next five years with a thoughtful and bold strategic plan. Our headquarters now features a beautiful 1.8-acre native habitat restoration site and trail, as well as a new terrace overlooking Hangman's Impoundment—both of which now serve as hubs for education, gathering, and connection. In the Great Cypress Swamp, the Eugene H. Bayard Memorial Trail winds through the forest, inviting visitors to experience the magic of this remarkable ecosystem firsthand. We also updated our forest management plan and began crafting a comprehensive conservation vision for the Swamp's future.

These accomplishments serve as a springboard for what's ahead. Our #HabitatsThatThriveIn2025 campaign is already in full swing with thousands more trees and shrubs planted this spring, expanded forest restoration in the Swamp, new quail habitat projects at Taylor's Bridge, and the protection of a 43.6-acre coastal marsh at Milford Neck. This spring, we also proudly revived our beloved Wild Game Dinner. With a fantastic turnout, it was a heartwarming evening filled with good food, laughter, and renewed commitment to the land we all cherish. As we look to the future, we're expanding partnerships, welcoming new staff, and inviting more people and groups to join this important work. Together, we are building a future where Delaware's wildlands thrive for wildlife, for communities, and for generations to come.



Marcia A. Fox **Executive Director**

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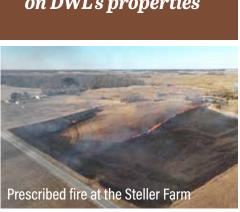
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By the Numbers

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Out and About on DWL's properties

























Birds on the Brock

By Katherine "Kat" Christie

The Delaware Bay is host to an internationally-known natural phenomenon each spring: the mass congregation of red knot (*Calidris canutus*) and other shorebirds on Delaware Bay beaches during their northbound migration towards their breeding areas. These species, some of which have ranges that span as far south as Tierra del Fuego in Argentina to far north Arctic Canada, are not found in concentrations like this anywhere except their critical stopover locations such as the Delaware Bay and the Bay of Fundy in Canada.

The Delaware Shorebird Project was formed in 1997, due to concerns about declines in these species, particularly red knot, following overharvest of horseshoe crabs and subsequent decrease in horseshoe crab eggs, the primary source of food that attracts these birds to the Delaware Bay. The project has continued over the last three decades, utilizing the incredible research and conservation opportunity provided by the spatially- and temporally-reliable appearance of thousands of shorebirds on our coasts. The Delaware Shorebird Project, formed through partnerships with state and federal agencies as well as a group of expert shorebird biologists from the British Trust for Ornithology, the Wash Wader Research Group, is an incredible source of data and insights for shorebird management decisions with hemispheric effects.

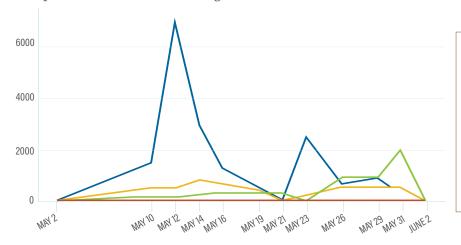
As part of the project, biologists and volunteers monitor shorebirds at strategic sites along the Delaware Bayshore, including Brockenbridge Gut in the Delaware Wild Lands Milford Neck Preserve. Surveyors visit the site on a carefully timed schedule to contribute to population modeling with a direct impact on conservation and management decisions.

During these visits, observers count shorebird flocks, identify all the species present, and continually scan the flocks to record the presence of individually coded leg flags, the other major component of this project. Shorebirds are captured annually in Delaware and other sites around the world, and small plastic leg flags with a unique color and three-digit code combination are applied. Such marked individuals can be used to generate even more data for these widespread species. By having thousands of marked individuals and subsequent observations of them throughout their range over the years, researchers can learn more about longevity, habitat use, migration pathways, and timing, along with many other characteristics otherwise difficult to ascertain from looking at flocks as a whole.

Brockenbridge Gut has been an invaluable part of the Delaware shorebird system in recent years. In 2024, surveyors identified 136 unique flagged individuals of four species on the site and witnessed particularly high use of the site by migratory and resident sanderling (*Calidris alba*). Sanderling count peaked at 7,000 in the second week of May this year, with other species such as ruddy turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) and semipalmated sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) also found in relatively high numbers on this stretch of beach. Flock sizes changed throughout the season as shown in the graph.

The DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife has also recently begun conducting surveys in the fall at sites like Brockenbridge Gut, to detect migratory bird use of these sites during southbound migration. Though the Delaware Bay is not the primary stopover during this time of year (since horseshoe crab spawning is finished by the time birds leave the breeding grounds), individuals of several species were still seen at Brockenbridge Gut, including several newly-fledged ruddy turnstones making their first journey away from the breeding grounds. Birds in this age group can be vulnerable during migration, so having protected areas to land and forage is vital to their survival.

Delaware's Bayshore is a crucially important location for many species, particularly migratory shorebirds, and the opportunities for minimally-disturbed foraging and roosting provided at Brockenbridge Gut are critical for these athletic



Flock counts for four species recorded during surveys at Brockenbridge Gut throughout the migration period in 2024.

REKN = Red knot

RUTU = Ruddy turnstone

SAND = Sanderling

SESA = Semipalmated sandpiper

little birds as they visit Delaware on their incredible annual journey. Anyone interested in learning more about them can visit the Delaware Shorebird Project on the DNREC website, dnrec.delaware.gov/fish-wildlife/ conservation/shorebirds and also can submit an interest form for becoming a volunteer with the project. Volunteer recruitment typically occurs in winter and early spring each year, though the maximum team size varies based on project needs.

KENT COUNTY

Kat Christie is the DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife Coastal Waterbird Biologist and project manager for the Delaware Shorebird Project.



A congregation of shorebirds, including ruddy turnstone, sanderling, semipalmated sandpiper, and dunlin, on the Delaware Bay. (Photo Credit: Kat Christie)



A sanderling with a unique three-digit band. (Photo Credit: Cathy Ryden)

Native Animal Species Profile

The Atlantic Horseshoe Crab

By Samantha Davis

Atlantic horseshoe crabs (Limulus polyphemus) are often referred to as "living fossils" because they have remained unchanged since before the dinosaurs. From May through June each year, they migrate to Delaware's bay shores to form the largest spawning population of their kind in the world. This annual spawning event is crucial to the health of fragile coastal ecosystems and supports a diverse array of wildlife, including migratory shorebirds, finfish, crabs, eels, and sea turtles.

Each female lays thousands of eggs in clusters along the moonlit shoreline, where waiting males quickly fertilize them. However, only a tiny fraction of those fertilized eggs survive to adulthood, as they serve as an irreplaceable food source for numerous species.

Horseshoe crabs also play a role in commercial industries. Their copper-rich blue blood is vital to the pharmaceutical industry for testing new vaccines, and male horseshoe crabs are often harvested for use as bait in whelk fishing. Spawning surveys with the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Division of Fish & Wildlife, DWL, and other organizations throughout Delaware Bay provide valuable data for monitoring population trends and informing conservation efforts.

If you see a horseshoe crab in the sand, leave it where it is! But if you find one flipped onto its back, you can gently turn it over in place to help it return to the water.



To learn more about Delaware Bay's horseshoe crab spawning season—or to volunteer—visit www.delawarebayhscsurvey.org.



Spawning horseshoe crabs at sunset on DWL's Big Stone Beach.



Native Plant Profile

Floating bladderwort (Utricularia gibba)

By Andrew Martin

A Blanket of Yellow Blooms with Secrets Beneath the Surface

When people think of carnivorous life in Delaware, plants usually aren't the first thing that come to mind. And for most, the word "bladderwort" likely doesn't evoke thoughts of beautiful yellow flowers. However paradoxical as it may seem, floating bladderwort is both a carnivorous plant and a producer of small, striking yellow flowers.

Floating bladderwort is native to most of Eastern North America and Central America, as well as the Caribbean, and the Western Mediterranean, and Southern Africa, and has spread as an invasive in other parts of the world. It grows in floating mats of vegetation in still or slow-moving acidic waters. Flowers grow to approximately 8 inches above the water surface and are about half an inch in diameter, resembling snapdragon flowers in shape and structure. Blooms typically appear from May through November and can self-pollinate or be pollinated by numerous insect species.

Asexual reproduction can also occur through fragments of stems or stolons–specialized horizontal stems that spread across the water's surface, forming a vegetative mat. These stolons are also where the plant's bladders develop. These bladders sit beneath the water's surface and trap small aquatic invertebrates, including mosquito larvae, helping to control mosquito populations naturally. The acidic soils and waters of the Great Cypress Swamp can prevent certain plants from absorbing essential nutrients from their environment, creating a niche for plants like floating bladderwort, which instead absorb these nutrients from animals they can trap and digest. Due to its very specific habitat requirements, floating bladderwort is considered a strong indicator species of wetlands.

Our work to restore hydrology in the Great Cypress Swamp has created or enhanced more than 1,000 acres of wetland habitat, much of which now supports colonies of floating bladderwort, along with numerous other wetland obligate species–plants and animals that depend entirely on wetland environments to survive.



Floating bladderwort flowers emerging from a dense mat of stolons.





Floating bladderwort flowers blanket part of the Field 7 Wetland Restoration site at the Great Cypress Swamp.

A Historical Snapshot:



From Sparks to Strategy

DWL's History with Prescribed Fire

Pictured below is Bruce Harvey, son of Delaware Wild Lands Founder, Edmond H. "Ted" Harvey, and brother of DWL's first Executive Director Holger H. "Rusty" Harvey, working on a controlled burn in the Great Cypress Swamp in the mid-1970s. This early experiment in land management, captured by Peter Martin, wasn't particularly successful—but it marked the beginning of DWL's long relationship with fire as a restoration tool.

Fast forward to today, and prescribed fire has become a regular and vital part of our land management strategy. Most of DWL's field staff have received training and certification in Wildland Fire and/or as Prescribed Burn Managers. This April, Hannah Small, Brigham Whitman, and Ron Haas participated in the Delaware Forest Service's Fire Camp, further strengthening our team's expertise.

We continue to work closely with the Delaware Forest Service, Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife, and local volunteer fire departments to implement prescribed burns that improve habitat, reduce invasive species, and promote ecosystem health. In this case, we're proud to say—we're keeping the fire burning, literally and figuratively.



In 2025, Team DWL completes Fire Camp training and pack test.



Bruce Harvey conducts an early controlled burn in the Great Cypress Swamp, circa 1970s.



Habitats that Thrive in 2025

by Andrew Martin and Brigham Whitman

This April, Delaware Wild Lands planted 7,581 trees as well as 2,100 shrubs in the Great Cypress Swamp in **Sussex County.** The majority of the trees planted were a mix of 16 different species of oak trees, which will be monitored to inform species composition on future hardwood plantings and upland restoration sites within the Swamp; these trees are planted in an easily accessible area and will be used as a stop for interpretive tours as well. Additional oaks were planted on a recently completed timber thinning, adding biodiversity and a source of food for wildlife to a mixed hardwood-pine stand near the Delaware-Maryland line. Several hundred baldcypress trees were planted in a low-lying area on a recent cutover, expanding the adjacent wooded wetland habitat. Additional shrubs, including buttonbush, elderberry, and beach plum, were planted on the Hickman Farm restoration site to compensate for some mortality due to last year's drought and to provide a higher-quality habitat for wildlife using the site.

In *Kent County*, the conservation footprint of the Milford Neck Preserve is expanding with the acquisition of a new shoreline property. This 43.6-acre parcel, which is undeveloped and completely surrounded by DWL property, features a mix of coastal marsh wetlands and open water. The protection of this property ensures that this sensitive natural area remains connected to the surrounding landscape, thereby boosting the health and resiliency of the coastal ecosystem. Additionally, full ownership of the area enables DWL to implement comprehensive shoreline protection measures, supporting the healthy landward migration of coastal habitats.

In *New Castle County*, DWL is enhancing the health and resiliency of natural areas through responsible land management and strategic restoration. DWL staff frequently manage invasive species through mechanical removal, prescribed burns, and chemical treatments, allowing natural ecosystems to thrive. Staff are continually adapting and improving their techniques for fighting invasive species and are currently working under a grant from the Delaware Invasive Species Council to target stubborn invasive species at the Liston Farm. Elsewhere in Taylor's Bridge, staff are preparing to restore a failing waterfowl impoundment as a natural wetland on the Roberts Farm. Once restored, this nineacre field will replicate the natural hydrological conditions of the nearby marsh, providing a year-round habitat for local wildlife.





Hardwood restoration planting on a recent cutover in the Great Cypress Swamp.



Planting on the edge of a wooded wetland.



This 9-acre field will soon boast a wetland habitat to support migratory shorebirds, waterfowl, and more.



Tree tubes being installed to prevent deer herbivory of new plantings.



Aerial view of recent restoration planting in the Great Cypress Swamp.



Ron Haas on site as an oak planting is completed.



Donate Today!

We invite you to join us in protecting #HabitatsthatTHRIVEin2025.



Sustainable Forestry

An Investment in the Future. In More Ways Than One

By Andrew Martin

Cutters, skidders, chainsaws—the crash of a falling tree. These sounds might seem at odds with land conservation, restoration, and wildlife habitat... but not everything is as it seems.

Take our Field 7 Wetland Restoration site, for example. This site began its restoration journey in 2011 as a 150-acre clearcut. Today, after careful planning, installation of water control structures, and the planting of more than 100,000 Atlantic white-cedar and baldcypress trees, Field 7 has become one of our greatest restoration success stories. It now provides critical habitat for bald and golden eagles, wading birds, waterfowl, turtles, frogs, and numerous other species.





While forestry is an important revenue source for Delaware Wild Lands, helping to fund infrastructure and property maintenance, it also plays a less obvious but vital role in preparing ecological restoration. You may recall our article from last fall's newsletter, "Restoration in the Great Cypress Swamp: Resilience in the Face of Extreme Weather," where we highlighted how last year's drought enabled us to harvest a section of forest in preparation for a future Atlantic white-cedar restoration. We're circling back to that work now: that timber harvest set the stage for a 2027 planting of more than 40,000 Atlantic white-cedar trees, along with several thousand hardwoods and baldcypress.



By harvesting a mixed hardwood-pine forest, one of the most common types of forest on our 10,700-acre Great Cypress Swamp property, we are increasing overall biodiversity. Timber harvests immediately create early successional and forest-edge habitats. Grasses, sedges, and forbs lying dormant in the soil respond quickly, attracting pollinating insects, which in turn are followed by birds, bats, and other wildlife that depend on them.

Once replanting and hydrologic restoration are complete, along with the installation of a new water control structure, the site will gradually transform into a new forest type. As the forest matures, it will support a dynamic mix of wildlife, from early-stage specialists to species that rely on a closed canopy.

Every timber harvest, guided by our Sustainable Forestry Plan, becomes an opportunity for ecological restoration. In lowerelevation areas like this site, we can enhance the wetland habitat. On drier upland ground, we focus on promoting mast-producing trees such as oaks, which benefit a wide range of wildlife.

Our plan also sets aside one-third of our Great Cypress Swamp property as no-harvest zones. These areas contain older growth forests or sensitive habitats that are intentionally left undisturbed.

Forestry, when practiced thoughtfully, is a powerful tool. It supports biodiversity, enhances ecosystem services, and contributes to the long-term restoration and resilience of the SUSSEX Great Cypress Swamp.





Restoring the Heart of the Delaware Bayshore

New Protection and a Master Plan for Milford Neck

by Hannah Small

In 1985, Delaware Wild Lands launched its land protection efforts at Milford Neck with the acquisition of the 1,775-acre Delaware Bay Transport Company property. Originally slated to become a commercial oil port, the site is now a thriving part of DWL's 3,500-acre nature preserve. Nearly three decades have passed since DWL last expanded this preserve, but this year marks a turning point.

DWL will protect an additional 43.6 acres of critical shoreline and tidal salt marsh habitat and begin developing a master management plan for the entire preserve. This plan will help ensure the future resiliency of one of Delaware's most valuable ecosystems.

The newly protected property—tucked within DWL's three miles of shoreline at Milford Neck—is the last remaining privately owned parcel within the preserve. This site, comprising salt marshes, coastal dunes, and beaches, is bursting with biodiversity. In spring, diamondback terrapins navigate tidal waterways to reach nesting grounds, sanderlings forage along the tide line, and dune grasses ripple in the breeze. It's a strikingly beautiful place, but not immune to threats from sea level rise, storm surges, and human disturbance.

Once secured, DWL will begin a comprehensive evaluation of ecological conditions across the preserve. This includes assessing marsh hydrology, shoreline stability, fish passage, topography, and the health of plant and animal communities. These insights will inform a preserve-wide management plan to guide future restoration, enhancement, and stewardship efforts.

Milford Neck's importance extends far beyond DWL's holdings. The 3,500-acre DWL preserve is part of a larger 10,000-acre conservation complex safeguarded by DWL, The Nature Conservancy, and the State of Delaware's Division of Fish and Wildlife. Together, these lands span 10 miles of shoreline and include upland coastal forests, freshwater wetlands, and agricultural lands.

With the support of our neighbors, the positive effects of our conservation efforts will ripple far beyond the edges of our protected lands.







Empowering Master Naturalists through Education

by Wendy LaManna

In 2020, the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension, in partnership with the Delaware Nature Society, launched the Delaware Master Naturalist program. This science-based certification program trains individuals to become ambassadors and stewards for Delaware's natural resources. Graduates are required to partner with one or more volunteer organizations to fulfill their ongoing obligations, including completing service projects, participating in citizen science, and engaging in education and outreach activities.

Delaware Wild Lands has been a proud local partner with the program for many years. Through this win-win partnership, Master Naturalists gain valuable experience assisting with various projects on DWL properties while DWL benefits from having extra hands to complete those projects.

Master Naturalists are required to complete advanced training hours annually. In early March, DWL was honored to offer an educational opportunity for 25 Master Naturalists at the Great Cypress Swamp (GCS). DWL Field Ecologist/Program Manager Andrew Martin led the training at the Roman Fisher Guest House, providing a history of the GCS and a description of restoration strategies. The day continued with a brisk walk along the Eugene H. Bayard Memorial Trail to observe native trees, grasses, and shrubs, followed by a driving tour of restored wetlands and reforestation areas. The final stop was the Hickman Farm restoration site, where DWL Executive Director Marcia Fox described DWL's efforts to improve the quality of water in the Pocomoke River watershed by reestablishing natural hydrology and planting trees and native grasses.

The 25 Master Naturalists left with a first-hand look at habitat restoration in action—and they're already looking forward to future educational opportunities with DWL.

Wendy LaManna is a certified Master Naturalist and DWL's lead volunteer.



Andrew Martin reviews a map of the GCS at the Roman Fisher Guest House.



Andrew Martin discusses the function of a water control structure at the Swamp.



Marcia Fox talks about restoration efforts at the Hickman Farm.



Savor the Wild!

Delaware Wild Lands' Game Dinner Tradition Revived

On May 20, 2025, Delaware Wild Lands revived a beloved tradition with the return of our Wild Game Dinner, and what an unforgettable night it was! Held at Cantwell's Historic Bank Building in Odessa, Savor the Wild brought together longtime friends, new supporters, and passionate conservationists for an evening of food, fellowship, and commitment to protecting Delaware's natural resources.

The evening featured a stunning five-course wild game dinner with wine and beer pairings, masterfully prepared by Executive Chef Zane Dippold, Josh Tucker, and their team at Cantwell's Tavern. Every dish featured ingredients donated by DWL hunters and supporters, a true celebration of the land and the community that sustains it. We extend a heartfelt thank you to all who contributed wild game and made this culinary experience so memorable!

Vice President of our Board of Directors Carrie Lingo kicked off the night with a toast to conservation and the incredible dedication of our supporters. Executive Director Marcia Fox shared highlights of DWL's growing impact across the state, including tree planting, habitat restoration, forest planning, and land protection efforts. The evening also featured spirited silent and live auctions, with enthusiastic bidding and generous giving. Special thanks to Board Member Peter MacGaffin for his lively work as auctioneer—and to the family of Joe Chas, whose meaningful donation of a shotgun in his memory reflected his lifelong love for nature and support of our mission.

We are so grateful to our generous sponsors—Cantwell's Tavern, Crawford Financial Services, DNREC, Jack Lingo Realty, Lucky Poppy Boutique, and Turner's Creek & Bombay Hook Farms—and to everyone who joined us for this celebration.



Savor the Wild was not only a feast for the senses, but it was a powerful reminder of the impact we make when we come together in the name of conservation.













We're already looking forward to the next Wild Game Dinner— Stay tuned for more details on how you can join us again to Savor the Wild in 2026!



Meet DWL's New Team Members

We're thrilled to welcome three new staff to Delaware Wild Lands whose energy and expertise strengthen our conservation mission.



KESHA BRAUNSKILL **Engagement Specialist**

Kesha grew up on Long Island with deep family roots in Kent County. She holds a B.S. in Animal Science from the University of Maryland and a master's in Agriculture and Natural Resources from Delaware State University, where she focused on ecology. Her career includes roles with the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, Delaware Forest Service, and the U.S. Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program. A skilled educator, beadwork artist, and member of the Lenape community, Kesha lives in Smyrna with her husband, son, and two dogs.



SAMANTHA "SAMMIE" DAVIS Horseshoe Crab Survey Coordinator

A University of Delaware graduate, Sammie returns to the coast after working in D.C. and Colorado. She credits summers on her grandfather's charter boat out of Lewes for inspiring her love of the environment. Now, she's excited to help coordinate DWL's horseshoe crab surveys and reconnect with the local landscape.



AURORA LEWIS

Aurora is a Delaware native and biology student at St. Mary's College of Maryland. She brings experience in plant biology from greenhouse and landscaping work. This summer, she supports DWL's land management efforts in southern New Castle County, focusing on invasive species control, tree planting maintenance, and habitat restoration.

Please join us in welcoming Kesha, Sammie and Aurora!

DWL's By the Numbers







Looking for simple ways to contribute to conservation?

Easy Ways to contribute to land protection and habitat restoration in Delaware:

- Monetary Donation: In addition to accepting cash donations and Donor Advised Funds, DWL accepts the
 transfer of marketable securities [Mutual Funds, Stocks, Bonds, and Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs)].
 These types of donations may qualify for a tax deduction.
- Planned Giving: Did you know you can name DWL as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy or include us in your will? It can be as easy as a phone call to your insurance carrier or attorney.
- Real Estate: DWL loves landscapes...so we are always pleased to accept donations of land! With permission from donors, we also accept donations of boats, buildings, and other assets, that can be sold and then use the proceeds to further DWL's conservation mission.

We encourage you to contact your financial advisor, estate attorney, or tax consultant to discuss how these transactions can benefit you. DWL also has staff and advisors available to help you and answer questions.

Check out our Amazon Wish List!

We've curated a list of items needed to support our work restoring habitats, enhancing wildlife areas, and maintaining Delaware's natural landscapes. *Here's how it works:*

- Browse the list
- Make your purchase
- Select an item
- Your gift will ship directly to us—easy and impactful!

Together, we can protect and preserve the lands we love.

Click the QR code to shop now and make a difference today!

For more information, contact Marcia Fox, DWL Executive Director, at 302-378-2736 or mfox@dewildlands.org



Scan to view our Amazon Wish List