



Little Compton Landscapes

Newsletter of The Sakonnet Preservation Association

Summer 2012

If Migratory Birds Could Tell Stories of Their Journeys to Us

Dr. Miyoko Chu, an ornithologist and Senior Director of Communications with the world-renowned Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, NY, will be the speaker at Sakonnet Preservation Association's Annual Meeting on July 10th from 6 to 8 p.m. Her spellbinding stories of bird migration, recounted in her book *Songbird Journeys: Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds*, integrate wonder with science. The ways in which these "tiny feathered jewels," (David Allen Sibley's description) take on the challenges of weather and distance seem miraculous. Dr. Chu's descriptions of songbirds' migration inspire a deep appreciation for their evolutionary wisdom and complexity.

The Sakonnet Preservation Association presents



Miyoko Chu

Songbird Journeys: Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds

Tuesday, July 10, 2012

6 – 8PM

Join the SPA for refreshments with a cash bar

Sakonnet Golf Club Playhouse

All are welcome!

our Sakonnet peninsula. Some migrating songbirds choose to remain here to breed and raise their young. Protecting the natural resources upon which they and we depend is the heart of SPA's mission.

Sharing and reliving our travel experiences is joyful for many of us. Others of us treasure our discoveries on walks from home. The survival efforts of migratory birds traveling thousands of miles yearly, told with spellbinding authority by Miyoko Chu, will likely put any of our travel stories into an entirely different perspective. Dr. Chu will share her knowledge of the remarkable lives of migratory birds and the scientific quest to answer age-old questions about where

We are blessed in Little Compton to be located on a major migratory route on land and at sea. As they make their seasonal journey, thousands of migratory creatures count on food and resting sanctuaries among the islands, coves, ponds, meadows, coastal shrub and woodlands of



songbirds come from, where they go, how they get there, and what they do in the far-flung places they inhabit throughout the year. It may be the closest we will come to hearing from the birds themselves.

Please join us as we celebrate forty years of conservation in Little Compton.



Sakonnet Preservation Association

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FORTY YEARS AND GOING STRONG

When SPA was founded in 1972, Little Compton's rural landscape was up for grabs. The average percentage of protected land in Rhode Island towns was 9%. Only 1% of our town was protected.

The chronology of this organization's accomplishments over the past forty years presents a powerful statement of what energetic volunteers and conservation-minded landowners in Little Compton can achieve. Today Little Compton is among RI's top tier communities in percentage of land protected. SPA, with the invaluable help of our conservation partners, has been pivotal in this effort. SPA's achievements speak for themselves. Our thanks go to all who made these accomplishments possible: the founders of this organization and their Board member successors; the 56 landowners and their families who have conserved their land with SPA in perpetuity; and the many hundreds of volunteer and financial supporters of this organization.

SPA's History Tells the Story

- 1972** SPA is established as the first private, non-profit community land trust in Rhode Island
- 1974** SPA receives its first donation from Molly Luce Burroughs, a 20 acre parcel
- 1979** SPA protects 25 acres adjoining Wilbur Woods from the DeAlmo family
- 1981** SPA purchases the Ponderosa
- 1983** East and West Islands are donated to SPA by Jessie Lloyd O'Connor
- 1986** The Little Compton Agricultural Conservancy Trust, as recommended by SPA board members and town officials, is established by vote of the RI General Assembly and the Little Compton Financial Town Meeting. Several former SPA Board members serve terms as Trustees
- 2000** SPA's Board adopts the national Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices as guiding principles and establishes a Land Protection Fund
- 2001** SPA acquires its first office at Commons Cottage
- 2002** SPA receives a \$10,000 grant to study land use and conservation within the Watson Reservoir Watershed
- 2003** The SPA Stewardship Fund is established with a \$5,000 gift from a board member
- 2005** SPA's first Strategic Plan is adopted by the board
- 2011** SPA is among the first seven volunteer land trusts in the country to achieve accreditation with the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission
- 2012** SPA celebrates its 40th anniversary having protected over 410 acres encompassing 65 Little Compton properties

Join us in celebrating our 40th year protecting land in Little Compton. The familiarity of our landscape, the protection of our watersheds, and the health of our habitat are ongoing priorities. Our work wouldn't be possible without your help. – Abigail Brooks

Conserving and Creating: A Celebration of Our Landscapes

On May 19th, SPA and the Art Café Gallery celebrated the 40th anniversary of our land trust and the opening of the gallery's summer art season. This collaboration of land conservationists and artists, each group an inspiration to the other, was at the heart of the celebration. "What we seek to conserve, and the IRS considers worthy of protection for its public value, is some of what remains of Little Compton's scenic landscapes," said Abigail Brooks, SPA President. "And these landscapes are what inspire our artists," added Josie Richmond, an artist herself and owner of the gallery she operates with partner Judith Worthen.

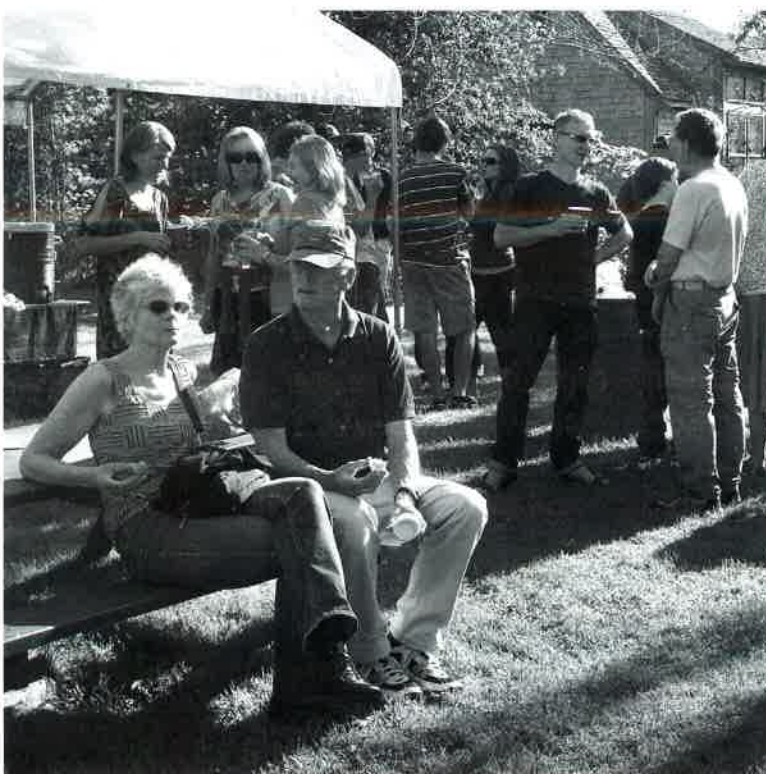
The relationship between the land trust and gallery began in 2001 when SPA rented its first office space in the Commons Cottage, the building owned by Josie and her husband Tom Arkins. Before the Art Café opened in 2004, Josie displayed her paintings in

the conference room shared with SPA. Early on, Josie chose to donate a portion of the proceeds from art sales to this organization. "I want to support the work that preserves what inspires me most," she explained. She pointed out that she and her sisters had many reasons to conserve their historic family property, Treaty Rock Farm, that included the

land's scenic value as it stretches to the west along West Main Road.

The dynamism of land protection and artistic creation is palpable in the space SPA and the Art Café Gallery share. "This is a working space, it's alive, it's had a life of its own since day one," said Josie. SPA contributes to and benefits from the energy of the artists whose work expresses how they see the extraordinary landscape of Sakonnet this organization has helped protect. Our collaborative relationship is a natural fit worthy of celebration.

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Trees In Trouble – Can Invasive Lichen Damage Our Forests?

Our April 16th gathering to hear presenter John Campanini, Technical Director of the RI Tree Council speak about "Trees in Trouble," filled the upstairs of the community center almost to capacity. Co-sponsored by SPA, the Little Compton Tree Committee and the Sogkonate and Little Compton Garden Clubs, Mr. Campanini addressed the ways in which invasive plants inhibit new forest growth and alerted the audience to vines and insects that threaten trees. He educated us about tree species resistant to the destructive Asian Long-Horned Beetle and the Emerald Ash Borer.

The pale green lichen that accumulates on local trees, of concern to many in attendance, was only marginally addressed by Mr. Campanini. He recommended seeking more information from the RI Natural History Survey (RINHS). SPA's follow-up exchange with David Gregg, the Executive Director of RINHS, resulted in a detailed response to questions about the risks to trees from lichen.

Dr. Gregg has explored this issue with the aid of staff botanist Hope Leeson. Their research indicates that much more science is needed. At this time, however, the beard lichen (*Usnea*) we see in increasing abundance on our trees

is not yet known to be harmful. He states that *Usnea* may be heavily dependent on air moisture. In Rhode Island it grows densely only near the coast suggesting that our recent cool wet springs may have encouraged the increase of lichen that has become so noticeable. This might also explain why some areas, such as cooler hollows and slopes have trees with lots of *Usnea*, although Dr. Gregg acknowledges that this is speculation on his part.

He notes that "Lichens do tend to grow on or be most visible on dead or dying branches of trees. This is possible because those branches aren't expanding and "diluting" the lichen cover with new, lichen-free growth or shedding bark scales along with the oldest, largest lichens. Some say this is because lichens need light to grow and trees with crown die-back have a lot of light getting through the canopy."

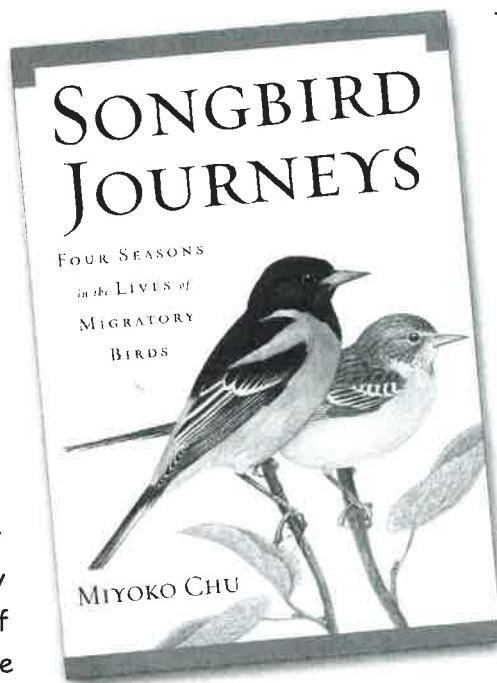
The only effective treatment, he states, is plucking the lichen. Mr. Campanini and Dr. Gregg agree that with pruning, fertilizing, insect control and removal of plant growth around the roots, a healthy, vigorous tree may be less likely to accumulate lichen. There is much more to be learned, but until then, according to SPA's follow-up research, these are the best answers available to us.



Celebrating Songbird Journeys — The Mysteries of Migration

Imagine yourself a research ornithologist, dropped by helicopter on an oil rig 80 miles south of the Louisiana coast. You climb up and down thousands of steps each day to record a census of the migrating songbirds that stop to rest. After days of isolation and inactivity, a line of incoming weather appears on the horizon and, ahead of it, a funnel of neotropical migrating birds of every imaginable hue. Beating their wings into a north wind that fights them every step of the way, they eventually surround the rig with a cacophony of calls, streaming around you by the thousands. Vireos, thrushes, Baltimore orioles, tanagers are completing the last leg of a 600 mile journey over the Gulf of Mexico as they head for northern habitat still many miles away. Miyoko Chu, author of *Songbird Journeys: Four Seasons in the Lives of Migratory Birds*, makes this experience a visceral one for her readers.

My well-worn copy of her book sits on my bedside table. Organized by the seasons in the migratory cycle, it begs



to be opened when each season begins, a kind of self-directed refresher course. Dr. Chu is gifted at explaining the complexity of birds' navigational sensors to the lay person, leaving the reader both awed and inspired to know more. Chu invites all of us to be researchers. She tells us how to find, understand and monitor nests in our own yards. Her chapter about bobolinks — a spring and summer breeder in Little Compton meadows — provides an amazing case study of autumn migration. "Hotspots" for observing songbird migration, as well as

research projects in which we all can participate are referenced in her book.

"Summer" she writes, "is the crucible, the time of invention. The instinct about where and when to return, the power of song, and the brilliance of a bird's feathers are shaped by whoever fledges the most young and passes on the most copies of their genes to the next generation." It is summer in Little Compton. Watch the miracle unfold. — Jana Porter



Dunderly Brook Trail
LITTLE COMPTON, RI

RI Land Trust Days August 31 – 11AM Dunderly Brook Trail

Dunderly Brook Trail walk with
The Nature Conservancy of RI guide,
naturalist and ornithologist, Scott Comings
and Abigail Brooks of
Sakonnet Preservation Association.

All are Welcome!





Sakonnet Preservation Association

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Consider The Gift of an SPA Membership!

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The Sakonnet Preservation Association, a non-profit land trust, is dedicated to preserving the rural character and natural resources of Little Compton for the lasting benefit of the Community.

Our Mission

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