

NARROW RIVER NOTES

Newsletter of the Narrow River Preservation Association

Fall 2000

A CELEBRATION OF THIRTY YEARS

The Narrow River Preservation Association (NRPA) held its 30th Annual Meeting on September 12th. The evening offered NRPA an opportunity to highlight achievements, provide updates on watershed issues and interact with members of the community.

Richard Grant, President, kicked off the meeting with an introduction and a report on the "Year in Review" (article on page 4). Richard remarked that it has been a great year for the Association and one of the highlights was the September 11th re-naming and dedication of Pettaquamscutt Cove in honor of the late Senator John H. Chafee. Senator Chafee was devoted to the preservation of the Narrow River and his actions resulted in hundreds of acres of the Narrow River watershed being preserved as open space.

New members to NRPA's Board this year include Stephen Vincelette and Vida Wynn-Griffin. Vida is returning to the Board after taking a number of years off. We would also like to thank retiring Board member Meredith Ashworth for her dedication and service.

Veronica Berounsky reviewed NRPA's educational programs and Melissa Hughes presented the NRPA Environmental Awards. This awards program recognizes students who promote environmental awareness through an activity.

An Environmental Recognition Award was presented to Emily Quan in recognition of her public outreach project for the Junior Honor Society at Narragansett Pier School: Emily sent out welcome letters and assembled packages of information on NRPA to new watershed residents.

Environmental Achievement Awards were presented to Ryan Murphy, a senior at South Kingstown High School, and Christopher Collins, a senior at URI. For his Eagle Scout Badge project, Ryan organized a litter clean-up of Middlebridge Road in early May. He also raised the environmental awareness of the Rio Vista neighborhood residents by completing storm drain stenciling in the area and distributing flyers to over 200 homes on the effect of



Jon Boothroyd (l) is presented with the W.E.R. LaFarge Friend of the River Award by Richard Grant (r)

storm water run-off.

Chris Collins was honored for his volunteer efforts in organizing and archiving historic literature of the Narrow River donated to NRPA from the estate of W.E.R. LaFarge.

NRPA Board member Annette DeSilva recognized this year's volunteer monitors of the River Watch program.

Richard Grant followed with the an-

(Continued on page 5)

LIVING IN THE WATERSHED: WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE RIVER

Enclosed with this issue of *Narrow River Notes* is a refrigerator magnet with a list of tips on how Watershed residents can personally make a difference in improving the water quality of the Narrow River. Though it takes a somewhat humorous approach by using the format of David Letterman's familiar "Top Ten" lists, the subject is very serious. All the efforts to date—by NRPA, RIDEM and other organizations—will be much less successful if individual residents do not take personal responsibility for protecting the River. We know that there are problems with pollution, especially from high levels of coliform bacteria (the "germs" found in raw sewage). The magnet is just a handy reminder—here are the details:

DO tie into the town sewers: Aging or failing septic tanks can be a significant source of sewage pollution to the River—one we should be able to stop worrying

INSIDE:
*Your free magnet listing
the "Do's & Don'ts for
Narrow River"*

about. Town sewers have now been extended to many of the neighborhoods in the Watershed. If the sewer is available on your street, make sure that your house is connected. If you aren't sure, find out. You're paying for the sewer, why not use it?

DO inspect and pump your septic tank regularly: A well-maintained septic system is much less likely to pollute the groundwater or the River. If you can't tie in to the town sewers because they don't reach your street, the next best thing is to have your septic tank pumped and system inspected at least

once every two years.

DON'T use lawn fertilizers or herbicides: One effect of sewage pollution on the River is to add excess nutrients (especially nitrogen), which lead to increased growth of algae. This decreases water clarity and, when the algae die and decompose, it uses up the oxygen in the water. If oxygen levels drop too much, fish and other animals can no longer survive and the water could end up smelling like rotten eggs. Lawn fertilizers are never as effective as the TV says; however, if you really need to feed your lawn or garden, please take care not to apply excessive amounts which will wash into the River with the first rain. Herbicides and pesticides are toxic chemicals; follow the directions carefully and take special care to keep them out of the River.

DON'T dump lawn clippings, leaves
(Continued on page 5)

The President's Cove

As NRPA begins another year of protecting the Narrow River watershed, I am happy to be able to serve again as president. One of my goals for the next twelve months is to reach out to every resident within the Watershed and to ask each family to personally participate in protecting this sensitive body of water, in one manner or another.

NRPA River Watch volunteers have been conducting regular water-quality testing in the Narrow River for eight years. The recent detailed TMDL study by RIDEM was very enlightening about the sources of bacterial pollution in the River.

The major sources of pollution are non-point sources; that is, deriving from such things as inadequate or failing septic systems, general street and yard run-off and animal waste. Therefore, the first thing I am asking from each of you is: please take special care in your day-to-day activities in order to minimize your own contributions to pollution of the River. Carefully read the "Do's and Don'ts" article in this newsletter and put the enclosed refrigerator magnet in a conspicuous place as a constant reminder. If you see anything that you think might have an adverse impact on the River, please call our office and we will look into it.

Secondly, I am asking everyone to personally contribute in some way. Be sure to respond to our mailing with your membership for the coming year—at a higher level of support if you can. Or perhaps consider going beyond sending annual dues. Ask us about a lifetime membership or contribution to an endowment fund. Volunteer to serve on the Board and/or on a committee, such as Fund Raising (Road Race, Phonathon, and Kayak Raffle), Education (Science Fairs, Scholarship Awards, Newsletter, School Seminars, and the AWESome program), Water Quality (River Watch and Stormdrain Stenciling), or Land Use (Reviewing Building Applications and Zoning Applications). Or just volunteer to work a couple of hours each week or month in our office. Every little bit helps.

NRPA relies on its volunteer corps for continuing progress toward our goal of protecting and improving Narrow River and the surrounding watershed. I thank you in advance for taking that extra step in contributing to the care of the environment. It gives me great satisfaction to participate in NRPA's programs—to give something back to the environment which has given us all so much, and has made the Watershed a great place to live.

—Richard Grant



TREE SOCIETY FORMED

The Narragansett Tree Society (NTS) was established in January 2000 to provide on-going education on the propagation, planting, protection and maintenance of trees in the community. NRPA has long supported the protection of trees as a means to protect Narrow River.

Trees are good for the environment, both air and water quality. For more information call NTS at 783-2327 or email at valcme@hotmail.com.

NARROW RIVER PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

750 Boston Neck Rd, Narragansett
Mail: P.O. Box 8 Saunderstown, RI 02874
Phone/Fax: (401) 783-NARR
E-mail: NRPA@netsense.net
www.narrowriver.org

Narrow River Notes
Published quarterly by Narrow River
Preservation Association (NRPA)

Editors

Jude Rittenhouse
Robert Kenney

Board of Directors

Richard Grant, President
Ken McShane, Treasurer
Jon Boothroyd, VP Science
Connie Alexander
Veronica Berousky
Annette DeSilva
Skip French
Vida Wynn-Griffin
Stephen Hale
Melissa Hughes
Robert Kenney
Robert Leeson, Jr.
John Maciel
Lesia Meng
Julia Randall Sharpe
Fraser Vaughn
Stephen Vincelette
Tom Warren

Staff

Teresa McKinley, Executive Director
Suzanne Vetromile, Program Coordinator

PLEASE JOIN US OR RENEW!

We welcome your support

Narrow River Preservation Association

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____

<input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor	\$500.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$ 30.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Life	\$100.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$ 20.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$ 50.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$ 10.00
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other	\$ _____

Mail to: NRPA - P.O. Box 8 - Saunderstown, RI 02874

*The Narrow River Preservation Association is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.
The mission of NRPA is to preserve the quality of the communities and natural environment within the Narrow River Watershed.*

6239

NRPA is part of the United Way Workplace Campaign. This is our donor option number. If you plan to make a United Way donation, please consider designating a portion of your gift to NRPA.

RARE BIRDS ALONG THE NARROW RIVER WATERSHED

While many wild animals live around us, birds are probably the ones which are most obvious because they are colorful, vocal and active during the day. The Narrow River and its watershed are not on anyone's list of the top ten birding hot spots in Rhode Island, but you might be surprised by the number of different birds which are found here, or by the number of rarities which have occurred. Nearly 400 species of birds have been seen in Rhode Island and 164 of them are confirmed or likely breeding species in the State, with 96 of those species probably nesting within the Narrow River watershed. I've lived in Edgewater for 22 years; in that time, I've seen at least 75 or 80 species in the neighborhood, flying overhead or in the River nearby.

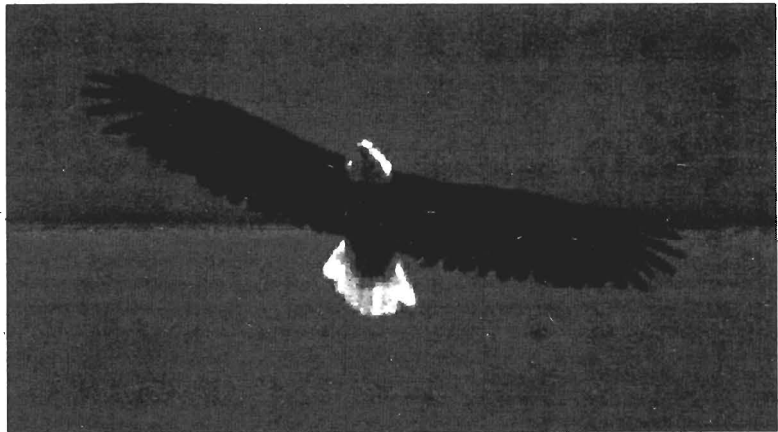
The most recent rarity in the Watershed was the Prothonotary Warbler which was spotted at the beginning of April near the Gilbert Stuart birthplace. A sparrow-sized, brilliant golden-yellow bird with darker wings and back, it made all the papers. It was in its typical habitat of a wooded area along a stream, just a few hundred miles too far north. It is most common in riverfront swamps in the deep South, though it is a rare but regular visitor here during spring and fall migration. There are a variety of reasons why a particular bird may be considered rare; in this case, it was a relatively common species somewhat outside of its usual range, possibly pushed someplace it didn't quite want to go by adverse weather during migration.

Birds outside of their normal range, often during migration periods, are one of the largest categories of rarities. In the spring of 1999, a Chuck-will's-widow was reported calling on the South Kingstown side of the River. A plain brown bird a little larger than a Blue Jay, this is another common southern species. It is a close relative of the Whip-poor-will, which is common here. Both species are named for what their calls sound like, and both are active at night and rarely seen during the day. The same person who reported the Chuck-will's-widow also reported a White Pelican several years earlier flying past toward the River. They normally occur on inland lakes in the western U.S. and Canada, and

they winter in the coastal Southeast and Southwest. A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was seen in October 1999. A six- or seven-inch bird with tail feathers nearly as long, it came here from its normal range in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas. In July 1999, three Black Skimmers were reported feeding in the River near Sprague Bridge. Spectacular black-and-white shore-birds with 44-inch wingspans and long red bills, skimmers feed by flying very low with their mouths wide open and lower beaks slicing through the water, snapping up any small fish they touch. Southern New England is the northern extreme of their range and they nested here in small numbers until the 19th century.

thinning effects of DDT. Their numbers have rebounded since DDT was banned in the U.S. and there are now several pairs nesting along the Narrow River. Another species which was impacted by DDT and is now recovering is the Bald Eagle, another fish-eater. One was reported flying up the River in January 1999. A third species in this category is the Piping Plover. They nest on sandy beaches, which also happen to be preferred summer habitats for humans. Nearly extirpated from Rhode Island by loss of habitat, they are making a modest recovery with protection of some breeding beaches. A few pairs have nested near the mouth of the Narrow River.

Perhaps the most peculiar "rare bird"



A bald eagle soaring in search of a meal of DDT-free ^{fish} photo by R. Kenney

Sometimes out-of-range birds are even farther from home. One winter during the mid-90's a Tufted Duck was seen just below the Lacey (Bridgetown) Bridge (the narrow part of the River there freezes last because of the faster currents and is a good place to see a variety of ducks during cold spells). A diving duck with white sides, black chest and back, and a purplish head with a long tuft of feathers, this is an Old World species which was first recorded in Rhode Island in 1991.

Some birds are rare because human impacts have reduced their numbers. Ospreys are very large, black-and-white birds of prey which feed on fish which they catch in their sharp talons. Like several other birds which feed at the top of the food chain, their populations were severely reduced by the eggshell-

record I came across, while checking all the available sources, was in Robert Conway's *Field Checklist of Rhode Island Birds*. For only one of the "casual and accidental" species was Narrow River specifically mentioned under location. Yellow Rails are brownish, robin-sized, quail-like birds which inhabit freshwater marshes from Nova Scotia and northern New England west to the Canadian Great Plains and winter along the southeastern coast. There are nineteen records for Rhode Island since 1886, all in the fall. Two were recorded for "Narrow River, Narragansett" on 22 October 1970, and another on 12 November 1970. The observer for both days was "R. Saunders" and the type of record specified for both was "Shot." I guess there's more than one way to identify a rare bird.

—Robert D. Kenney

1999-2000: A YEAR IN REVIEW

Thirty years of environmental advocacy! NRPA has gained in strength and achieved greater recognition each year, especially during the last few years, as a result of having our own office staffed by a full time Executive Director, Teresa McKinley; as well as a part time Coordinator, Suzanne Vetromile. We give thanks to our members and the various private foundations and public entities which have shown faith in our efforts by providing the financial support and encouragement to allow us to expand our activities.

- **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS:** The AWESome grade school environmental curriculum is now active in 11 local schools, has trained 27 teachers and educated over 2,700 students. We continue to award college scholarships and science fair prizes to local students for exemplary work in the area of the environment.
- **WATER QUALITY:** NRPA volunteers are active for the ninth year of monitoring water quality at eleven locations in the River. Data is analyzed carefully by URI Watershed Watch staff. We are pleased that RI DEM has become inter-

ested in these studies and is supplementing our work at key areas along the River.

- **HANDBOOK:** After much public acclaim and depleting our original printing run of 4000, we are undertaking revisions and plan to reprint later this year.
- **BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Has been established and is a valuable resource, containing local and international documents as well as works covering scientific, historical and cultural information about the Narrow River and its watershed.
- **RIVERS DAY:** NRPA participated in the 2nd Annual Celebration of Rivers Day by providing free kayak, wildlife and birding tours along the River and also collaborated with Gilbert Stuart Museum and Casey Farm to have their facilities open to the public at no charge on Rivers Day.
- **WEB PAGE:** Is up and running. Learn more about the River and your organization by visiting this site: <http://www.narrowriver.org>.
- **LAND USE:** NRPA continues to be active in the careful review of all land

use proposals within or affecting the Watershed.

- **NARROW RIVER LAND TRUST:** Kudos to NRLT for their dedication to and success in working with Watershed landowners who have donated land and or development rights for perpetual preservation. Over 463 acres are now under perpetual preservation with NRLT and many more are under negotiation. The US Fish & Wildlife Department now has more than 400 acres in the Pettaquamscutt National Wildlife Refuge.
- **WICKFORD ART FESTIVAL:** NRPA greets some 100,000 attendees with information about its purpose, programs, activities and the sale of tickets for our annual Kayak Raffle. Sincere thanks to the Ryan family for allowing us to use their property during this festival.

Many other important actions/activities take place each year. Why not become more closely involved? Join one of NRPA's committees, attend a Board Meeting—learn how you can help your organization protect your Watershed.

—Rob Leeson

RIVERS DAY

Paddling around an edge of the salt marsh, we saw an osprey rising into the blue sky above us. Below us, bubbles of oxygen were rising from the abundant plant life on the productive mud bottom. Although it has been about 10,000 years since the Narrow River has, technically speaking, been a river, we were celebrating Rivers Day this past June 17th.

All the South County watershed organizations—Narrow River Preservation Association, Saugatucket River Heritage Corridor Coalition, Salt Ponds Coalition and Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association—joined in paying tribute to those things that we enjoy about these precious bodies of water: the landscapes, plants, wildlife, recreational opportunities and rich human history. The rivers, salt ponds, estuaries and wetlands are what put the "swamp" in the South County Swamp Yankee.

Although NRPA sponsors many activities, this is one of the few that gets people on (and, if they are not careful



with their boats, sometimes in) the River.

Three kayak trips explored different parts of the River. One trip went to the salt marshes above Middle Bridge, one to the mouth of the River at Narragansett Beach and one to the Upper Pond. Later that night on a moonlight kayak trip, we were lucky to see the moon for an instant before it rose into thick clouds and was obscured. A fierce thunderstorm, which ended just before the trip was scheduled to start, kept the trip down to a few dedicated souls. Although not rewarded

by paddling under the light of the full moon, they felt the difference of the River at night. The kayakers experienced the tug of the tide on their boats without seeing it. They heard a pair of ospreys murmuring on a

nearby nest. They imagined how the bottom beneath them was pulling oxygen back in for nighttime respiration. They talked about the diurnal and seasonal cycles.

There is something special about experiencing the River in a kayak, canoe or rowboat. There is time to see, smell, hear and feel what is around you and to reflect on what it means to you. Your spirits rise along with the ospreys and bubbles of oxygen. This would be a good way to travel through life: as if paddling along a river, as if every day was Rivers Day. —Stephen Hale

ANNUAL MEETING

(Continued from page 1)

nual presentation of the W.E.R. LaFarge Memorial Friend of the River Award. This year's recipient was Jon Boothroyd. Jon is the Vice President of Science for NRPA and has spent countless hours working towards the preservation of the River and its watershed. He approaches every land use issue with dedication and perseverance.

Jon Boothroyd followed the award presentation with a discussion of "What's Happening in the Narrow River." NRPA is now on-line at www.narrowriver.org. Stephen Hale, NRPA Board Member, can be largely credited with the development of the website where all of NRPA's programs and activities can be found.

Jon continued by reviewing a Watershed map showing the dredging/habitat restoration areas under consideration and explaining the potential benefits to be gained by the dredging. Next Jon reported that the Department of Transportation's plans for replacement of Middle-

WATER QUALITY

(Continued from page 1)

or trash into the River: Besides making an unsightly mess, decomposing yard waste will use up the oxygen just the same as decomposing sewage or algae. A good compost pile will do double-duty as a place to dump your yard waste and as a source for a great addition to your garden soil.

DO operate watercraft responsibly: Make sure not to spill gas or oil into the River and make sure your engine is properly maintained to minimize pollution. Follow the boating regulations regarding speeds and no-wake zones or excessive boat wakes; besides being a threat to the safety of other users of the River and just downright rude, wakes cause erosion of the River banks and destruction of habitat.

DO keep pet waste away from the River and storm drains: Coliform bacteria are found in the feces of all warm-blooded animals. Modern sewer systems do a good job of treating human waste but not many dogs use the toilet. Pet wastes in the streets or on lawns do not break down readily and they wash into the storm drains, then directly into Narrow River with the first rain. Be a re-

bridge are on track and construction is expected to begin next year. Jon reported on the proposal to implement a Best Management Plan (BMP) in the Circuit Drive area of Narragansett. The BMP would implement a proposed detention pond. NRPA supports this proposal. Jon explained that NRPA supports the expansion of the South Kingstown bike path into the Watershed but recommends a scaled down version from the one that is in South Kingstown. Julie Randall Sharpe concluded the discussion by reporting on Open Space. The Narrow River Land Trust did not acquire any new land in 2000 but there are about eighty acres currently under negotiation.

A highlight of the meeting was the keynote presentation by Mr. John Torgan, Save The Bay's BayKeeper. As BayKeeper, John is responsible for addressing marine pollution problems in Narragansett Bay. In addition, he facilitates environmental enforcement, conducts water quality monitoring and research, and advocates for responsible uses of the Bay and its watershed.

John's discussion was titled, "How Safe is the Narrow River? - Water quality challenges." He began by explaining that this is a difficult question to answer since the River is a dynamic system which is always changing. Continuous monitoring and study is necessary to fully understand the River and its water quality. John compared the

sponsible pet owner and dispose of pet waste properly.

DON'T feed waterfowl: One surprising result of the recent DEM study of bacteria levels in the River was that geese and ducks are probably a major source of fecal bacteria, especially in the Mettatuxet section of the River. Don't encourage geese and ducks to concentrate or remain in one location by feeding them.

DON'T put anything down the sink that you wouldn't eat or drink: Protect your investment in your septic system or town sewer system by not putting in anything which might harm it or the waterway into which it eventually runs. A good rule of thumb is that the only things which should go down the drain or toilet are (1) something you've already eaten or drunk, (2) something you'd be willing to eat or drink and (3)

River to Narragansett Bay and indicated that both waterbodies have similar attributes. To determine the water quality of the Bay, Save The Bay developed a "State of the Bay" report which examined ten categories of health. This may be a good way to evaluate Narrow River, by examining various attributes such as nutrients, dissolved oxygen and bacteria. Based on the volunteer monitoring results and the DEM study, John reported that fecal coliform levels exceed safe swimming levels on occasion in some areas of the River. The causes are likely non-point sources. These sources are difficult to determine and to remedy. Fecal coliform sources can include failing septic systems, pet waste, waterfowl, etc. John warned that the fecal coliform levels appear to be highest after heavy rain (1/2" or greater). He cautioned the audience to avoid swimming in the River for 72 hours following a storm event. John suggested that every resident of the Watershed can help to reduce pollution and improve the water quality of the River; his ideas corroborated NRPA's research (see "Living in the Watershed" article, page 1).

John concluded his talk by sharing John Chafee's philosophy, "If you give the River half a chance, it will come back."

The evening closed with NRPA's annual Kayak Raffle drawing. Congratulations to this year's winner of the Swiftly Kayak: Michael McElroy of Connecticut.

—Annette DeSilva

toilet paper.

DON'T dump anything down storm drains: The storm drain in your street is one end of a pipe that leads straight to the River; everything that goes into the drain (whether you put it there, or just in the street) ends up in the River almost immediately. When you change the oil in your car, take the used oil to Rose Hill for recycling. Don't let antifreeze, gasoline or any other chemical spill in your yard or the street; make sure to dispose of them properly.

DO report suspected problems to RI DEM: If you see something that doesn't look right to you, let somebody know about it. You can call RI DEM at 401-222-1360 or 800-CLEANRI, or the local authorities in your town, or NRPA's office at 401-783-NARR. The River and your neighbors will appreciate it.

—Robert Kenney



PHONATHON REMINDER

On **Wednesday, November 15**, NRPA will hold its Annual Membership drive, targeted at those members who have not yet renewed for 2000-2001. We will be asking for your support in order to continue our programs in areas including education, water quality, land development oversight and River stewardship.

So please return your membership envelope by early November and save us a phone call!



OPEN SPACE BOND REFERENDUM

Rhode Island is rapidly losing land for parks, farmland, wildlife habitat and drinking water protection. Open spaces that are important for our heritage and environment can be saved through a \$34 million bond issue proposed by Governor Almond.

If supported by voters on election day (November 7), these funds will be used to acquire and protect open space lands in Rhode Island over the next five years.. The allocation of these funds through bond issue will be used to preserve land for parks, beaches, bikepaths and wildlife preserves. Funds will be used to protect lakes, reservoirs, aquifers and other drinking water sources in the State. Monies will also be allocated for restoration and refurbishment of recreational areas.

The Narrow River Preservation Association advocates open space preservation and protection as integral to our mission of restoration, preservation and protection of the Narrow River and its watershed.



Printed on Recycled Paper



02874-1004 14



Return service requested

Saunderstown, RI 02874

Box 8

Narrow River Preservation Association

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SAUNDERSSTOWN, RI
02874
PERMIT No. 3