



Friends of Canonchet Farm Newsletter, Spring 2023

President's Report

We have a lot of great progress and initiatives to report for this edition of the newsletter. Our volunteers continue to accomplish astonishing progress in removing invasive plants both along the Nature Trail and around the lakes. Most of the Fall and Winter, our volunteers have been hard at work in the area east of the South County Museum eradicating porcelain berry, multiflora rose and vast amounts of privet bushes. We have revealed another 75 feet of the stone wall that runs to the right of the trail as you traverse from the Museum to the beach entrance. Some of the privet had grown 20 feet high by 8 feet wide. As we worked, we discovered a historical artifact just beyond the stone wall. On maps dating from the end of the nineteenth century, provided to us by the South County Museum, there was indication of a spring that was part of a water system that included a windmill and a water tank, all probably built by the Spragues to water their livestock. The windmill and the water tank are long gone but we discovered the historic spring that was now a rectangular opening 8 feet deep, with walls of finished stone and holding several feet of water. We reported our find to the Town and helped formulate a plan to put a heavy-duty wooden cover over the opening to prevent children or animals falling in it.



The historic Spring and volunteers who cleared around it

Have you seen Littleneck Pond, the northernmost of the two ponds across from the town beach?

Probably not, because for years the pond has been mostly obscured by invasive phragmites, so much so, that few residents know that it's even there. This European native freshwater grass has become pervasive on the shores of much of Rhode Island's ponds, lakes, high marshes, and wetlands, outcompeting and overwhelming native cattails and wildflowers. In late September 2022, Friends of Canonchet Farm contracted with a specialty environmental firm to spray the phragmites around the pond with a contact herbicide because at that time of year, the plant is storing carbohydrates in its roots for the winter and as a result, the contact herbicide goes directly to the roots to kill the plant. Five months later, on Wednesday, February 22, our dedicated volunteers, along with employees of the contracted firm and with the cooperation of Narragansett Town employees and equipment, returned to cut down the dead stalks and reveal the beautiful vista of the pond from the road. To clear the approximately 60 feet of shoreline along the eastern side of the pond by hand tools only, our volunteers filled a town dump-truck five times, with the cleared plant detritus deposited in the large dumpster near the Museum that has traditionally been donated for that use by Narragansett Rubbish Removal. The company employees used a boat and their power equipment to cut all the dead phragmites along the southern, western and part of the eastern shores of the pond. Now, the remaining grasses along those shores are native grasses only, which are much shorter than phragmites. Our hope is that with selective re-spraying and hand cutting of surviving plants this summer, we will be able to keep these shores from repopulating. This pond, being remoter than Lake Canonchet, has been home to many waterfowl like ducks, swans and great blue herons, one of which I saw when walking there a few days later.



New view of Littleneck Pond from the roadside

Our Initiative to utilize goats to clear the overgrown pastures west of the Museum and straddling the Nature path at its 90 degree midpoint turn is still alive. We have provided Linda Steere of Advanced Biosystems, whom we have hired to write the addendum request to the RI Coastal Resources Management Council, with letters of recommendation from the Museum, the Town, and other interested parties, as well as a garden plan for the Three Sisters Native American garden that we hope to build after the goats have done their job. To allay the CRMC's concerns of fecal contamination of the Narrow River from the goats, we are proposing to leave a 10-foot uncleared cordon on the west and

north sides of the pasture that would absorb any runoff from the goats. If we get the approvals we need in time, we hope to schedule this work (or foodfest, if you're a goat) for this coming July. We expect that the goat scaping initiative with its 20 or more hungry goats chomping away on this tangled knot of vegetation will draw a lot of interest from town residents and school children. We again thank those of you who generously donated to this initiative, and we are determined to make this happen, if not this year then next.

Our partnership with The South County Museum continues to develop. Initiatives slated for this year include labeling the rest of the large trees on the grounds and in the upper meadow, again clearing the knotweed stand that borders the stable ruin, caring for the herb garden outside of Metz Hall and purchasing and planting more native flowers and shrubs on the Museum grounds. If we get the approval we need from CRMC to bring the goats in to clear the overgrown pastures, we are planning to develop, in conjunction with the Narragansett tribe, a Three Sisters Garden consisting of a large patch of corn, beans and squash in the cleared field. Hopefully, this will coincide with a new planned exhibit illustrating indigenous agriculture in Rhode Island. Finally, we also intend to add to and upgrade the Native Plant Garden that we first installed in 2020. We have grant money from the South County Garden Club for this purpose and we hope to install the new plants this April.



September 2021 Native Plant Garden, South County Museum

We are still awaiting some permits before we can schedule the high marsh restoration project. There are some constraints for eligible dates because we do not want to disrupt nesting season for several marsh avian inhabitants. If delays continue, the work may slip until next Fall or even Spring 2024. As a reminder the work involves digging shallow runnels from the impounded "ponding" areas to either the Narrow River or Crooked Brook, which roughly bisects Canonchet Marsh and flows into the Narrow

River through a culvert cut through the old Sea View railroad embankment. Wenley Ferguson, the Save The Bay project leader, detailed this plan in a well-attended lecture at the Narragansett Library on January 29. For those of you who might have missed it and are interested in the details to better understand the scope of the project and the hoped for outcomes, the following link is to an article that Wenley wrote about the same work at Sapowet Marsh in Tiverton:

https://www.savebay.org/wp-content/uploads/Sapowet-Marsh-Restoration_Fall-2022-TidesMagazine.pdf

Spotlight on Invasive Species

European Privet: From Garden Design to Invasive Species

Submitted by Lindsay Leard Coolidge, PhD, 2022 URI Master Gardener Program Intern



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Ligustrum vulgare or European privet has a long history in European and American garden design. The Old English word "pryuet" dates to the Middle Ages and the species was first described in 1542 by Thomas Elyot in *Bibliotheca Eliote Eliotis Librarie* (Oxford English Dictionary). The privet hedge became a prized feature of Elizabethan gardens and in particular knot gardens as the hedge demarcated sections or "rooms." By 1577 privet was celebrated by Thomas Hill in *The Gardner's Labyrinth*, the earliest popular gardening manual published in English. Even as British landscape design evolved to favor more open parkland and natural terrain during the following centuries, the privet hedge remained. It was so ubiquitous that two of Britain's most renowned poets—Lord Alfred Tennyson and William Morris—referenced its white petals as metaphors for women (*Walking to Mail, Earthly Paradise I*). Finally, it was during World War II, when Winston Churchill spearheaded legislation to melt down iron railings to

manufacture fighter planes, that the privet hedge became the ubiquitous plant it is today in Britain.

Given early New England's appropriation of British culture, it follows that privet appeared in American landscape design beginning in the 18th century. Privet reached its height of popularity in garden design during the Colonial Revival period from the 1880s to the 1940s. According to the October 29, 1915 *Bulletin of Popular Information* (Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University) the *Ligustrum vulgare* "is perhaps the handsomest here of all black-fruited shrubs." It was also referred to as "one of the handsomest plants in the Arboretum" (62).

Toward the end of the Colonial Revival period, privet became naturalized, which eventually led to its present-day status as an [invasive plant](#). Paradoxically, privet is still readily available at most nurseries and as recently as August 2022 it was championed by [Better Homes and Gardens](#): "enlist this easy-to-grow shrub as a privacy screen or living fence. You'll love its ample foliage, pretty white flowers, and dark-hued berries." Although it notes the species can be invasive, it encourages the continued planting of privet.

There is evidence that removal of the invasive species can reverse its destructive impact. A [2014 study](#) reported by the United States Department of Agriculture stated conclusively that five years after privet was removed, native plant and animals returned to the cleared areas.

The USDA recommends both manual and chemical removal of privet. Volunteers at Canonchet Farm in Narragansett employ manual removal techniques. Organized by The Friends of Canonchet Farm, volunteers (including URI MGs) meet on Saturday mornings to remove privet from the trails by pulling young plants and digging out larger ones in an ongoing habitat restoration program. In doing so, it is hard to imagine how illustrious privet was for centuries for landscape design.

Our volunteers have pulled out untold thousands of privets from the woodlands of Canonchet Farm. It is by far our most common invasive plant on the property.

Educational Walks and Talks-Spring 2023

- April 8. 1 pm. "Vernal Pool Amphibians at Canonchet Farm". Nancy Karraker, Associate Professor at URI's Dept. of Natural Resources Science.
- May 6, 10:00, "Walking Canonchet Trails in the Spring" with John Kostrzewa, former business editor and nature columnist with *The Providence Journal*.
- May 13, 10:00, "Canonchet: A Woodlands Treasure in the Heart of Narragansett." Tom Hoagland and Alan Woodmansee, Master Gardeners and respectively President and Trail Manager of Friends of Canonchet Farm.
- Date TBA, "Everything about the Trees!" Peter Stetson, OLLI Instructor, former environmental earth science teacher, current President of Educational Mapping Service.

A Final Word

We recently concluded our annual fund drive and, on behalf of the entire FOCF Board I want to thank everyone who donated to support our efforts to restore and enhance Canonchet Farm lakes, trail, and woodlands. We cannot do it without you, and we are very grateful. If you would still like to make a contribution you may via PayPal at our website: <https://canonchet.org/> or by old-fashioned mail to Friends of Canonchet Farm, P.O. Box 418, Narragansett, RI 02882.

Think Spring!



Native yellow Trout Lilies blooming along the Nature Trail