

Report to Species at Risk Conservation Fund

Nova Scotia Nature Trust project - Hemeons Head Conservation Lands



Photo credit: Alix d'Entremont

Final Report

November 26, 2014

Project Goal and Objectives

The goal of this project was to protect 310 acres of diverse and significant coastal lands, with habitats used by waterfowl, shorebirds, and migratory birds (including species at risk) at Hemeon's Head (near Lockeport, Nova Scotia). The objectives were: 1) to secure two high priority coastal properties on the peninsula (the Black Point Beach parcel and the Matthews Lake parcel) as conservation lands, through a combination of conservation easement and land purchase, 2) to ensure the natural values of the new conservation lands remain protected, and 3) to increase awareness about conservation and to engage the local community in habitat conservation.

Outline of Work Completed

We are pleased to report that significant progress has been made towards meeting all three objectives of this project. We have completed all the securement-related tasks necessary to formally, legally protect the properties. This work included title work, property value appraisals, deed transfer for the Matthews Lake parcel, and a signed conservation easement between the Nature Trust and Acadia University for the Black Point Beach parcel. We conducted the field work necessary to inform a baseline report for the property, which documents current conditions on the property and identifies habitats and species present on site. This document forms the basis of our management plan for the property (in progress, being done in conjunction with partners). Property Guardians were recruited and trained to monitor the property annually. We hosted a public property celebration when the properties were secured, which included a guided walk. Additionally, we hosted another public guided walk at the property in summer 2014. Both events were carried out in partnership with Bird Studies Canada (BSC).

Results

We have secured 2 properties at Hemeon's Head, totaling 320 acres. All the securement-related steps for the properties have been completed. The Nature Trust now legally owns one property (in the case of the Matthews Lake parcel), and holds a conservation easement over the second property (in the case of the Black Point Beach parcel). The parcels are adjacent to each other and will be managed as one area, named the Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands (see attached map). A baseline study has been completed, which documents the natural features of the site, and indicates any potential threats or management issues. We are developing a stewardship plan for the site, in partnership with Acadia University, BSC, and local people from nearby communities. Three Property Guardians have been recruited and trained to monitor the property, which they will visit annually to monitor it for threats or other changes. The stewardship plan along with the data from Property Guardians informs our management actions on the property. We have coordinated our monitoring efforts with BSC and are in contact with the Piping Plover Guardian for the site. We are working with BSC to determine a more formalized manner in which we will receive and incorporate Piping Plover data from the site into our management actions.

The celebration we hosted when the properties were publically announced as protected was quite successful. We had about 50 people in attendance at the Little Harbour community hall, where we made our announcement, including members of the local community, the local MLA and municipal councillor. The provincial Minister of Environment, Sterling Belliveau, was in attendance, as was Tom Herman, Vice

President Academic of Acadia University. After the celebration at the community hall we went to the protected properties for a guided walk, in partnership with Bird Studies Canada (see attached photos).

The species at risk at the property (Piping Plover, Red Knot, and Harlequin Duck) continue to thrive at the site. BSC volunteers monitored Piping Plovers at the site throughout their breeding season and while chicks were fledged. In 2013, one Piping Plover pair built 2 nests, but both of their nests failed to produce any chicks. A predator was suspected to have caused the nest failure as a Barred Owl had been seen several times on site over the summer. The 2014 breeding season was more successful with one nesting pair producing three fledged chicks. Hemeon's Head was also a banding site for Environment Canada's Piping Plover Banding program. The three fledge chicks along with the adult male were banded this past summer. Harlequin Duck (15 individuals) and flocks of Red Knot (30 – 50 individuals) were seen by birders at the Hemeons' Head Conservation Lands in 2014.

We are excited to be actively participating in another bird conservation project at this site. During the summer of 2014 BSC also installed a small aerial tower on Hemeon's Head as part of the MOTUS flyway project. This tower will be able to pick up signals from passing radio tagged birds during their migration. This will help us better understand bird migration and migratory bird conservation.

Lessons Learned

This project went very smoothly, thanks in part to work with existing partners (Bird Studies Canada and Acadia University), and conservation-minded landowners. We will continue work with these and other partners to produce more conservation results in Nova Scotia.

We did not complete the stewardship plan for the site because we learned that there are management issues that need to be dealt with in an inclusive and sensitive way. There is ATV use at the site, much of it illegal, which we will be approaching delicately. We are working with partners, and the community, to work towards compliance based on education, and cooperation with those currently ATVing at the site. Legal enforcement is a tool we can use, and may have a role in time. Currently, there are locals that are supportive the protection of the lands and like working with the Nature Trust, and we want to build on that.

Recommendations

We recommend continued work on the stewardship plan for the site, including through working with partners at Department of Natural Resources, and from the municipality. We are planning to conduct studies of the impacts of ATV damage at the site, in order to better explain to the local community the impacts this activity has on the local habitat and species who call the site home. This work will also be crucial if on the ground restoration is required in the future.

We sincerely appreciate the support of the NS Species at Risk Conservation Fund in achieving this conservation success!

Attached Documents

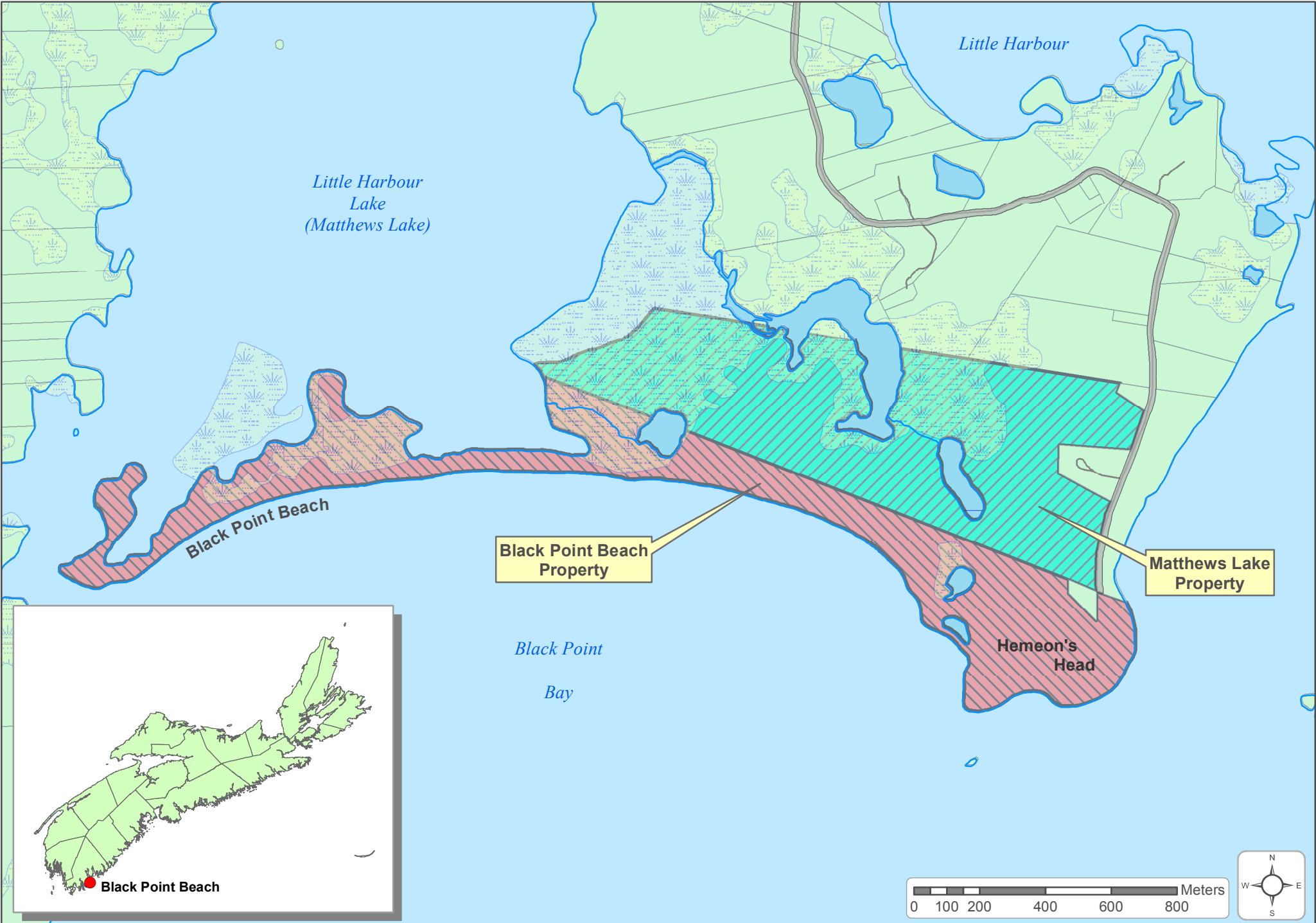
Map of the Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands

Press release about the property celebration

Photos from the property celebration

Digital version of interpretive sign panel for Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands (including recognition of SAR Fund)

HEMEON'S HEAD CONSERVATION LANDS



*Little Harbour
Lake
(Matthews Lake)*

Little Harbour

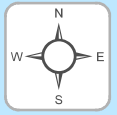
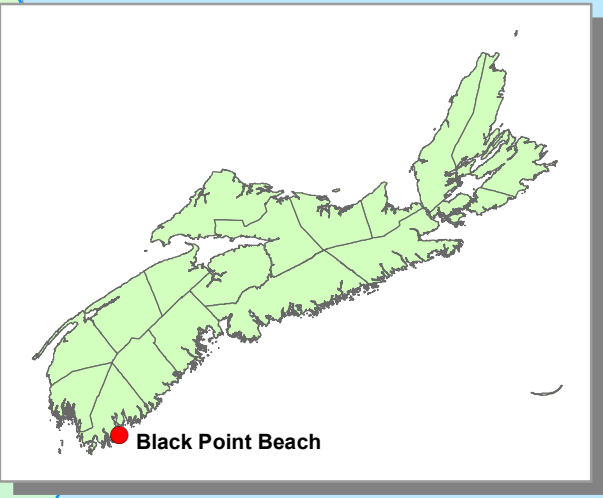
Black Point Beach

**Black Point Beach
Property**

**Matthews Lake
Property**

*Black Point
Bay*

**Hemeon's
Head**



NATURE TRUST AND ACADIA PROTECT INTERNATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT BIRD SANCTUARY

EMBARGOED UNTIL SEPT 7 at 1 pm

Hemeon's Head, N.S. (September 7, 2013)

The Nova Scotia Nature Trust has protected a 320 acre coastal wilderness at Hemeon's Head, Shelburne County. The ecologically rich site encompasses an extensive coastal ecosystem including internationally significant habitat for birds. The new protected area makes an important contribution to coastal conservation in a province where a mere 5% of the coast is protected. It is also a rare good news story for bird conservation at a time when bird populations around the world face serious decline.

At a conservation celebration today in Little Harbour, Shelburne County, Acadia University and the Nature Trust signed a conservation easement that will protect forever, Acadia's 170 acre Black Point Beach property. The Nature Trust also acquired the adjacent 150 acre Matthews Lake property to ensure protection of the entire 320 acre beach and wetland complex.

The newly designated Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands include three kilometers of uninterrupted sand and cobble beach, sand dunes, coastal headland, tidal marshes, sandflats and mudflats, an extensive lagoon, freshwater wetland, bogs, barrens and coastal forest. They support a rich diversity of plants and wildlife.

The site is part of an internationally designated Important Bird Area, recognized for its significance for nesting, breeding and migratory birds. It provides critical habitat for several rare and endangered species, including Harlequin ducks, Red knots and Piping plovers. With so few plover nesting sites left in Nova Scotia, their habitat at Hemeon's Head is essential to survival of the species.

Protection of such a valuable natural sanctuary for birds, especially critical habitat for many migratory birds, is welcome news for international bird conservation at a time when bird populations face significant decreases in Canada and worldwide, primarily as a result of habitat loss.

Chris Curry, with Bird Studies Canada was delighted with site's protection. She noted, "Bird Studies Canada and our volunteers have monitored birds and protected Piping Plovers at Hemeon's Head since 2009. We are thrilled about the long-term protection of this special place and the successful partnerships that made this happen."

Hemeon's Head is the second major achievement in a ground-breaking conservation partnership between Acadia University and the Nature Trust. A year ago today the two organizations made conservation history when they signed the first conservation easement in Canada protecting university lands, an agreement preserving the 300 acre Bon Portage Island.

Bonnie Sutherland, the Nature Trust's Executive Director, commended Acadia's leadership in environmental stewardship. She said, "Acadia University is an environmental pioneer among academic institutions in Canada. By permanently protecting its own ecologically important lands through conservation easements, Acadia is raising the bar on land stewardship for other academic institutions across the country and beyond."

Tom Herman, Vice President Academic of Acadia University was delighted with the signing of Acadia's second conservation easement, noting, "Partnering with the Nature Trust makes it possible for Acadia, as owners of important natural areas, to make a tangible and lasting contribution to biodiversity conservation in Nova Scotia. The conservation easement protects these lands, their conservation values, and their irreplaceable research and educational values, *in perpetuity*, something landowners cannot do on their own."

The new protected area was also welcome news to many in the local community who have enjoyed this wildlife-rich coastal wilderness for generations.

With increasing subdivision, development and loss of traditional access to coastal areas all across Nova Scotia, and with over 85% of the coast in private ownership, Nova Scotians are increasingly concerned about the future of the coast.

Yet Sutherland is optimistic. "Together with visionary landowners like Acadia and enthusiastic local communities and conservation partners, we are already making exciting headway in coastal conservation. More and more Nova Scotians recognize that private land conservation is critical if we want to protect our unique coastal legacy. With their support, we can achieve even more."

The momentum definitely *is* building. Hemeon's Head is the Nature Trust's 59th conservation site, including 28 protecting coastal lands, with a significant number of other coastal conservation projects on the horizon.

-30-

High resolution photos and interviews with Nature Trust and Acadia representatives available

CONTACT:

Bonnie Sutherland, Executive Director

Nova Scotia Nature Trust
(w) 902-425-5263 (c) 902-233-4224
bonnie@nsnt.ca

Scott Roberts, Director of Communications and Marketing

Acadia University
(w) 902-585-1705 (c) 902-670-8966
scott.roberts@acadiau.ca

Photos from Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands Property Celebration

September 7, 2014

All photos by Nova Scotia Nature Trust



Photo 1 – Announcement of protection of Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands at property celebration (Little Harbour Community Hall, Central Woods Harbour, Nova Scotia).



Photo 2 – Minister of Environment Sterling Belliveau, Nature Trust Executive Director Bonnie Sutherland, and Acadia University Vice President Academic Tom Herman signing the conservation easement for the Black Point Beach parcel at Hemeon’s Head.



Photo 3 – Participants at Hemeon's Head Conservation Lands guided walk, looking for Piping Plovers.



Photo 4 – Participants at guided walk looking for Piping Plovers using spotting scopes, aided by Bird Studies Canada volunteer Chris Curry (in red).

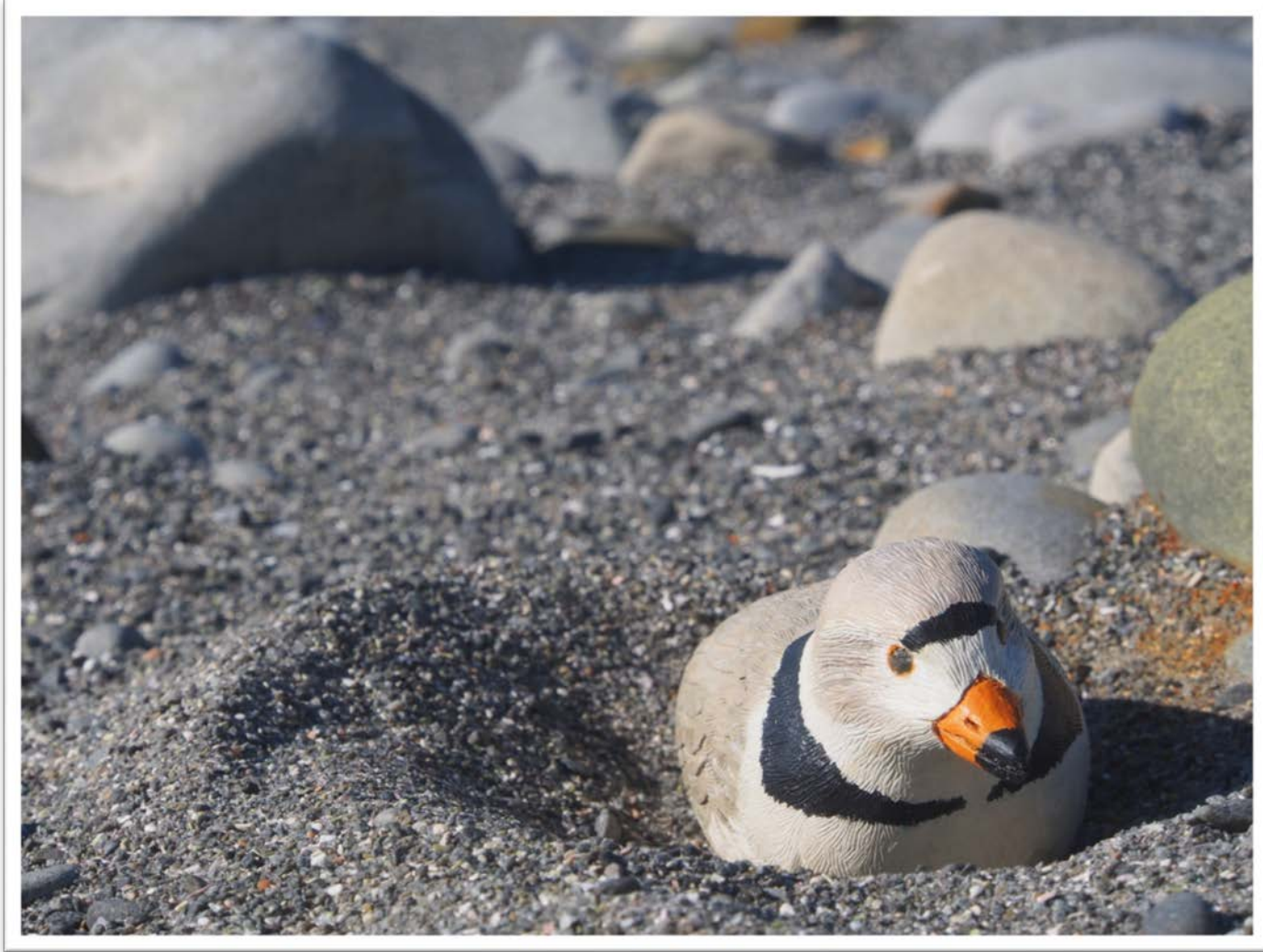


Photo 5 – Model of a Piping Plover on a nest to show participants how difficult it can be to spot them in their nesting habitat!



Photo 6 – High quality Piping Plover nesting habitat on Black Point Beach.



Photo 7 – Marsh on Matthews Lake portion of the property, which is important habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, including the Endangered Red Knot.



Photo 8 – Hemeon’s Head Conservation Lands – protected forever, for all!

CONSERVATION LANDS

HEMEON'S HEAD CONSERVATION LANDS

The beach and coastal wetlands of Hemeon's Head are vital habitats for a variety of wildlife. Endangered Piping Plover nest on the sand of the beach, while waterfowl, shorebirds, and wetland plants are found along the marshes of Matthews Lake.

Rare migratory shorebirds can sometimes be seen on the property. In late summer, you may spot endangered Red Knot on the mudflats or flocks of Whimbrel feasting on crowberries in the coastal barrens. Nearby, fragile bogs host fascinating and colourful plants. These terrestrial ecosystems also nourish marine eelgrass beds, which provide a nursery for baby fish, and shelter our coastline from the impacts of harsh storms.

This assemblage of habitats is protected, forever, through the work of the Nature Trust, in partnership

with Acadia University and Bird Studies Canada. Acadia University owns a portion of the headland, and have protected it through a conservation easement with the Nature Trust. It will be cared for by the Nature Trust, while still offering opportunities for research and education. Bird Studies Canada works with community members to monitor and protect nesting areas for Piping Plover. Their critical work will continue, as will other long-term seabird and shorebird studies at Hemeon's Head.

Top Left: *Rhododendron canadense*—Freshwater wetlands along the trail are home to some beautiful and interesting plants, including Rhodora, Canada's native species of rhododendron.



Top Right: Piping Plovers—You can help this endangered shorebird and other wildlife: Avoid nesting areas by staying on wet sand (May-Aug), keep dogs on-leash, and do not operate motorized vehicles here.



Bottom: Stewardship—Local volunteers actively care for these lands, and enjoy the amazing wildlife viewing opportunities the area offers.



Please respect this protected area for future generations to enjoy.

Thank you to our major supporters:



Nova Scotia Species at Risk Conservation Fund



Davis Conservation Foundation



NOVA SCOTIA
Nature Trust



www.nsnt.ca