

## Nature in the Neighborhood – Jan 2025 –

### The New Year Challenge

It's the start of the New Year and some of us have optimistically typed out our list of resolutions for 2025: lose weight, exercise more, perhaps learn how to play a musical instrument or speak another language. Inevitably, no matter how good our intentions are, some of us may already be failing to keep those resolutions.

A couple of years ago the Conservancy suggested adding a few "green" resolutions to your list, ones that actually may be easier to stick to than losing 20 pounds or conversing in Italian by the end of the year. Though the new year has officially rung in, it's not (never) too late to come up with a few resolutions that will benefit both you and nature in our neighborhood in 2025.

So, the Swampscott Conservancy invites you to a ***"Nature in the Neighborhood New Year Resolution Challenge."*** Write down one or more nature-friendly resolutions to put on your list and send them to us at: [info@swampscottconservancy.org](mailto:info@swampscottconservancy.org), with the subject line: 2025 New Year Resolution Challenge. We'll post your resolutions on our webpage at [swampscottconservancy.org](http://swampscottconservancy.org). You may include your name (first is fine), if you like. Or not. We believe sharing your resolutions may not only help you keep them but may also provide ideas and incentive to others.

We hope that children – the future stewards of the environment – will take part in the Challenge, as well as adults. Engaging our young people in activities for the protection of nature is more important than ever, given the environmental challenges the world is facing today.

Unfortunately, most children spend more time indoors, not outdoors, and more time in front of a screen rather than immersed in the natural world around them. As Richard Louv has put it, children today suffer from a "nature deficit disorder." In his landmark book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Louv documented the decreased exposure of children to nature and the detrimental effect that it has on their mental and physical health.

The distancing of children from nature also has a wide-reaching effect on the health of our planet. "Lacking direct experience with nature, children begin to associate it with fear and apocalypse, not joy and wonder," Louv writes. If they fear rather than love nature, how can they be expected to preserve and protect it, he asks?

So, we urge you to get the children in your life involved in the Conservancy's New Year Resolution Challenge. For resolution ideas, Louv's website at [childrenandnature.org](http://childrenandnature.org) provides helpful information and suggestions on how to connect children with nature.

As you're making your list of nature-friendly resolutions, you may also want to consider the following suggestions:

- **Spending more time in nature.** Adults, not just children, spend way too much time indoors even though study after study confirms the mental and physical health benefits of being out in nature. According to a 2019 scientific report, spending just 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and well-being. One resolution could be to simply get outdoors, either alone or with family and friends, for at least two hours a week. If you're wondering where to go, there's a list of Swampscott's conservation lands and open spaces on the Special Places page on the Conservancy's website noted above. The Conservancy is also in the process of putting the finishing touches on a color brochure, "*Explore, Observe & Conserve – A Guide to Swampscott Special Places*," with more detailed information on these special places. Watch for its debut on our webpage! For natural places to explore in Lynn, you can check the city's "*Lynn Unbound: 11 Exquisite Experiences*" website at [thebostondaybook.com/things-to-do-in-lynn/](http://thebostondaybook.com/things-to-do-in-lynn/). And for Salem's, go to [www.salem.org/things-to-do/outdoors/](http://www.salem.org/things-to-do/outdoors/). And don't forget Breakheart Reservation and the Northern Strand Community Trail in Saugus.
- **Participate in events held by local environmental and conservation groups.** The Conservancy has been hosting events for adults and children, such as beach clean-ups and trail maintenance activities. We're in the process of planning exciting new community-building activities for the new year that will include further habitat improvement and trail exploration programs. Keep an eye on the Events page of the Conservancy's website, but you can also check out the list of events held by other local environmental nonprofits, like Audubon, the Trustees, and Salem Sound Coast Watch. Make a resolution to sign up for several such activities in the new year. Committing to going to some of these events is not only an easily achievable resolution, but also can be a lot of fun.
- **Become a Citizen Scientist.** While you're spending more time outdoors, resolve to take time to observe the natural world around you. One way to do so is to add the **iNaturalist app** on your iPhone to identify the plants and animals you see. [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org). It's simple to use and when you do, *you* become the scientist. This is a fun way to help children not only learn about the environment, but to get them involved in science.
- If you're down at Fisherman's Beach in Swampscott, you can add iPhone photos to the **Chronolog** that the Conservancy installed at Chaisson Park. The simple instructions for how to add photos are right on the Chronolog station, which has its focus on the coastline, the Swampscott Fish House, and the Town Pier. As more and more photos are added, we'll be able to collectively view how the shoreline is impacted by storm surge and the seasonal high tides known as

“King” tides that can be 2 to 4 feet higher than normal. These high tides provide our community with a window into how sea level rise will soon start affecting our daily lives.

- **Learn something new about nature in our neighborhood** by resolving to attend one of the educational lectures and presentations that the Conservancy will be having in the new year. You can also watch past presentations on such topics as climate change, native plants, and wildlife, on the Conservancy’s YouTube channel, a link to which is on the home page of our website. The Conservancy is also planning to have a book club in 2025 that you can join. Stay tuned for more information on the books we’ll be reading and how to sign up.

As we enter into the new year, it is easy to become overwhelmed and disheartened by the divisive state of the world. In times like this we can, like author Amy Tan, find solace in the natural world - in her case, it was watching the birds in her backyard. Her recent bestselling book, *The Backyard Bird Chronicles*, resulted from the despair she felt by all the hostility and misinformation on social media leading up to the 2016 election. In her search for peace, she turned to nature. We can do the same in 2025 by resolving to spend more time connecting with nature in our neighborhood.

The Swampscott Conservancy wishes you a Happy New Year!