

Nature in the Neighborhood – June 2025 – Graduation Season

Spring is in the air in our neighborhood! It's a season that brings longer days and warmer weather ... bird song and flower blooms ... and school graduations.

At commencement ceremonies here and around the country, keynote speakers will undoubtedly reflect on how graduation marks an ending, but also a beginning. It's not just the closing of a chapter, but also the opening of a new one. And in this new chapter, the graduates have the potential to have a positive impact on the world in their particular field of study.

The graduates are also the future stewards of the environment. They will play a significant role in shaping our planet in the years to come at a critical time. As Fred Krupp, President of the Environmental Defense Fund, told the graduates of the Yale School of the Environment at its May 19 commencement ceremony, "You're graduating into a moment when the risks of our world are real and undeniable. Chaos is worsening while the rules that safeguard us from pollution are under attack." He advised them to see, not just the world as it is, but as it *could* be. To never resign themselves to defeat, but to keep daring to hope for – and act towards – a better world.

To that end, we need to ensure that our graduating students have the tools to respond to pressing environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the growing amount of plastic pollution that is clogging our oceans as well as our own bodies. If the future generation is to respond effectively to these challenges, the schools have to invest in providing students with the knowledge and skills to address complex environmental issues. Unfortunately, while recognized as important, governmental restrictions, lack of teacher training, and funding issues contribute to a lack of widespread or in-depth study of environmental education.

Schools also need to have students understand their role as future environmental stewards and to encourage them to raise awareness about environmental issues and engage in environmental advocacy.

In recent years, there has been a remarkable wave of youth activism, not just in our country but around the world. Realizing the repercussions of climate change on their futures, teenagers have become leaders advocating for climate action. For instance, in 2023, eighteen children from California, ranging from ages 8 to 17, filed a constitutional climate lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency claiming the agency affirmatively allowed “dangerous levels of climate pollution.”

These plaintiffs contended that, despite recognizing the disproportionate harms to children, EPA “actively discriminated against children by systematically allowing climate pollution for decades at harmful levels. www.ourchildrenstrust.org/genesis-v-epa. The case is pending following the plaintiff’s filing a notice of appeal to the Ninth Circuit after the district court ruled that they did not have standing for their claims.

But even if the lawsuit ultimately fails, such actions are important because they have the potential to shape public discourse and influence policy.

Along these lines and closer to our neighborhood, at the urging of two Swampscott High School students, bills were filed with the Massachusetts legislature to establish eelgrass as the official “marine flora” of the Commonwealth. Concerned about the threats to eelgrass, a type of sea grass that is essential to a healthy marine environment, high school seniors Collette Heil and James Kimbro approached State Senator Brendan Crighton who filed the bill in the Senate on January 15, 2025. A companion bill was filed in the House by Representative Jenny Armini.

“Eelgrass, which is found in Swampscott Harbor as well as other Northshore coastal waters, is important not only because it provides habitat and a food source for aquatic animals,” said Heil, “but it combats climate change impacts by storing carbon dioxide.”

Kimbro added that “eelgrass needs our attention as it is currently threatened by pollution, boat moorings, and climate change. Our hope is that making eelgrass an official state symbol will raise awareness for eelgrass conservation efforts and so keep our shores healthy.”

The Conservancy is committed to creating opportunities for our youth to develop knowledge and skills in environmental fields. It offers a

Conservancy's Youth Conservation Grant program to support the efforts of Lynn and Swampscott youth who wish to make a positive environmental change in their communities. Students in grades 6-12 who attend Lynn or Swampscott schools are eligible to apply for funds to support a project (as individuals or as part of a group) aimed at making a difference in our natural world. One such grant has been awarded to two high school students, Anna Metaxatos and Thomas Mello, who are building bat houses as part of a school project. As they observe, bats are important for insect control, especially of mosquitoes.

And for the first time this year, made possible through a generous donor contribution by the Spellios family, the Conservancy sponsored a \$ 1,000 Environmental Focus Award Scholarship for a graduating high school student who intends to pursue studies in the environmental and related fields. This year's recipient, Effie Cobbett, demonstrated a commitment to community service and also to protecting and improving our natural environment.

As a Girl Scout Gold Award applicant, Effie is restoring a neglected parcel of conservation land in Swampscott, thereby opening it up for use by the public. With the health, environmental, social, and economic benefits of green spaces, projects like this are indispensable to the well-being of communities.

Effie will be attending Purdue University as a Biological Engineering Major to study plant-based applications such as bioplastics and bioenergy, fields which can improve the world by offering cost-effective climate change mitigation, reducing the demand for fossil-based commodities, and promoting sustainability through bio-degradable plastics.

Effie, a young adult from our neighborhood, will be daring to hope for – and act towards – a better world.