THAMES TALBOT LAND TRUST

25th Anniversary

Celebrating 25 Years of TTLT!

On Friday, October 17, 2025, staff, board members, volunteers, and donors gathered at the Highland Country Club to celebrate 25 years of Thames Talbot Land Trust. Lining the walls of the ballroom were several tables filled with photos and memorabilia collected over the years, all dedicated to the accomplishments, workshops, volunteer opportunities, celebrations, and events that TTLT has orchestrated since day one. Many guests stopped to admire the thoughtfully organized displays, three of which were arranged according to TTLT's pillars - Protect, Restore, and Nurture. Components included markers of integral milestones and activities, like the securement of TTLT's first nature reserve - Meadowlily Nature Preserve, stewardship tools used in land management and maintenance, and promotional materials for events like the Hawk Cliff Woods Migration Weekend. Another table featured a 25-year timeline which showcased awards, old merchandise, and event posters, further detailing the impact TTLT has had on local conservation and giving guests a chance to travel back in time. Some examples include artifacts from the memorable "Eat your Enemies" workshops, Eco-Folk concert posters, and a range of nostalgic photos displaying the hard work put into not only conservation but also connecting communities with nature. Many guests expressed that these tables brought back fond, and some forgotten, memories of great times together. We are appreciative of the efforts of staff and a handful of volunteers for curating and setting up these displays to decorate the venue and fill the atmosphere with the comfort of nostalgia.

The chatter before dinner shined brightly as many commented on how proud they were of TTLT's growth. A former board member said that "it was amazing to see how much the organization had grown since they'd joined just a few years ago". Another said "they felt grateful for the time they were able to give to the organization, and they were excited for TTLT's new trajectory of thinking and acting bigger!"

Guest speaker John Lounds, Director of Business Development at The Centre for Land Conservation, continued to inspire us to think and act bigger after taking the stage. He praised TTLT for currently ranking among the top 25 of 150 land trusts in Canada, and shared thoughtful remarks on the progress that TTLT, and Canadian conservation in general, has made. When looking towards the future, he emphasized the importance of striving higher to grow TTLT's impact and influence among communities, governments, and other organizations. He suggested that TTLT could be among the top 10 land trusts one day with the help of large scale campaigns that can spark awareness around the urgent need for land protection. This incited a feeling of motivation among guests as Lounds lifted the atmosphere with a ray of hope that extended beyond 25 years, declaring that this current milestone is just the beginning of many great things that TTLT will accomplish in years to come.

Following Lounds' presentation, Founding Member, Bernie VanDenBelt, shared a moving speech to honour the life of his friend and fellow Founding Member of TTLT, Mary E. Kerr. VanDenBelt's tribute to Kerr was moving and tissues were passed around for teary eyes as he recounted the origins of her love of nature and how

Continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Celebrating 25 Years of TTLT!	1
2000-2025 Timeline	6
A Conversation with a Founding Member	8
Honouring Jane Bowles	9
A Tribute to Mary Kerr	10
TTLT Launches New Bold Campaign, *Nature Nearby*	11
Protecting *Nature Nearby* for Giving Tuesday	12

she channeled that passion towards conservation.

He sentimentally recalled Kerr's "no nonsense", action-oriented attitude and perseverance that pioneered the establishment of TTLT, forever leaving an impact on protecting the very landscapes she loved. When she mentored others, she made sure it was known that "non-involvement in environmental causes was not an option". Two of Kerr's children were in attendance at the celebration and accepted a certificate on behalf of their mother's contributions to protecting nature. *Read more about Mary Kerr's legacy on page 10.*

TTLT's Executive Director, Daria Koscinski, then stepped up to honour the life of the late TTLT Founding Member, and previous Board Member and Chair of the Property Management Committee, Jane Bowles. Koscinski remembered the life of Bowles through her great sense of humour, mentorship, and deep expertise in all things ecology. Many funny stories were shared and some items that Bowles never left the house without were brought for show and tell, such as a knife and machete and the infamous Bowles' scrolls for collecting samples she found in the field. *Read more about Jane Bowles' special impact on page 9.*

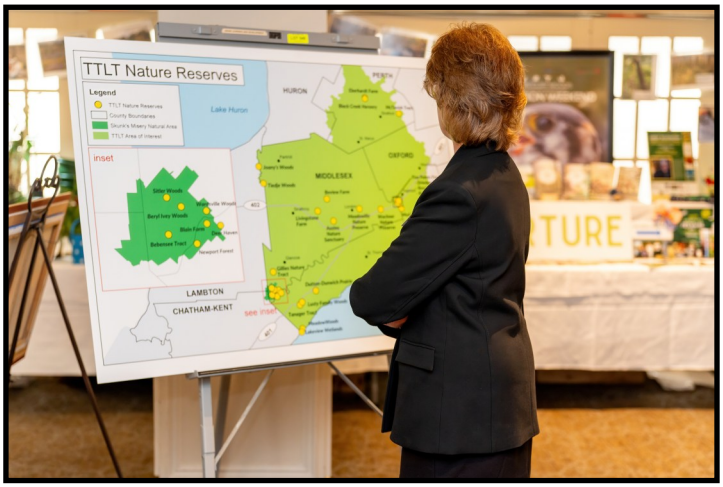
The final presentation ended the night on a note of dreaming big. Koscinski announced the soft-launch of the Nature Nearby campaign, showing how TTLT is taking action to think big! *Read more about the Nature Nearby campaign on page 11.*

Many expressed delight with the evening's announcements and honouring of the late Founding TTLT Members. One said the event "made them feel blessed and their heart is full" after seeing the marvel of community coming together.

Through the lens of a Communications Intern who just joined TTLT this summer, the 25th Anniversary Celebration was an amazing opportunity to meet many of the people in the vast archives of photos that are encountered daily while making communications content. Seeing their happy faces then and now and talking to current and former members really solidified the feeling of mutual care not only for the environment, but for each other. This feeling has transcended generations of people involved with TTLT for two and a half decades. It is no short feat to gather like-minded individuals to take genuine action towards land conservation, and to be able to feel the positive impact they're having on nature and the environment that surrounds them. Whether it is removing invasive species, processing seeds, learning from guided nature hikes, or spending time with friends and family at Passport to Nature events, the community built around TTLT is truly inspirational. I feel ever grateful to have been a part of TTLT at such a pivotal moment in its impact and history.

Thank you to all who attended, and those we wish we could have seen there! Your support and influence on TTLT make it the great organization it is today, laying the foundation for more amazing things to come!

- Sarah Law



Photos by Andrew Price and Carrie Freele

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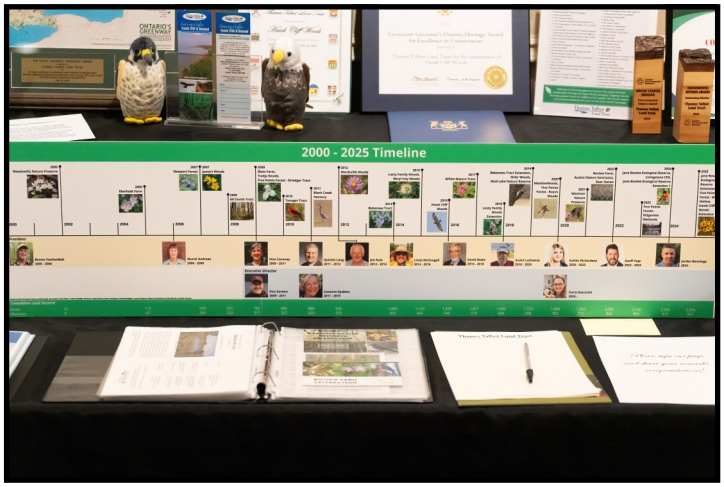


Photos by Andrew Price, Carrie Freele, and Skye Martineau

2000-2025 Timeline

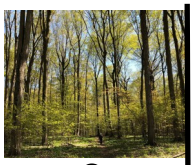
2002
Meadowlily Nature Preserve

2005
Eberhardt Farm

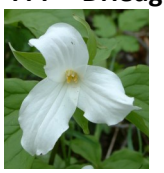
2007
Newport Forest

2007
Joany's Woods

2008
McTavish Tract

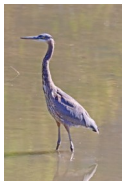


2009
Blain Farm
Tiedje Woods
FPF – Driedger Tract



2010
Tanager Tract

2011
Black Creek Heronry



2012
Wardsville Woods

2000 2002 2004 2006 2008 2010 2012

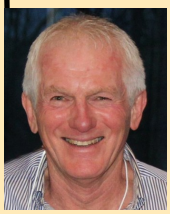
President

Bernie VanDenBelt
2000 – 2006

Muriel Andreae
2006 – 2009

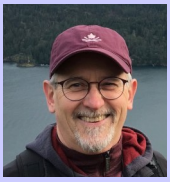
Stan Caveney
2009 – 2011

Quintin Lang
2011 – 2012



Jim Rule
2012 – 2014

Executive Director



Don Gordon
2009 – 2011

Suzanne Gysbers
2011 – 2019

Photos by Daria Koscinski, Payton Landsborough, Jane Bowles, David Wake, P. Allen Woodliffe, Bill Grant, Cathy Quinlan, Mark Cunningham, Brenda Gallagher, Lenore Patterson, Rebecca Launchbury, Darby Alderson, and Stan Caveney

Cumulative Land Secured

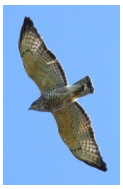
Acres	**15**	**115**	**579**	**625**	**782**	**882**	**886**	**936**
Hectares	**6**	**47**	**235**	**253**	**317**	**357**	**359**	**379**

2000-2025 Timeline

2014
Bebensee Tract

2015
Lusty Family Woods
Beryl Ivey Woods

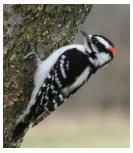
2016
Hawk Cliff Woods



2017
Gillies Nature Tract

2018
Lusty Family Woods Extension

2019
Bebensee Tract Extension
Sitler Woods
Mud Lake Nature Preserve

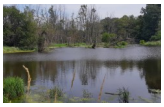


2020
MeadowWoods
FPF – Ross's Woods

2021
Wachner Nature Preserve

2022
Boview Farm
Auzins Nature Sanctuary
Deer Haven

2023
FPF – Ridgeview Wetlands



2024
Jane Bowles Ecological Reserve + Extension 1
Livingstone CEA

2025
Jane Bowles Ecological Reserve Extension 2
Five Points Forest – Birch Hollow
Hawk Cliff Woods Extension

2014 2016 2018 2020 2022 2024 2026

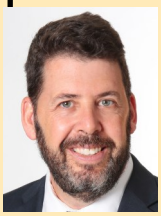
President

Linda McDougall
2014 – 2016

David Wake
2016 – 2018

André Lachance
2018 – 2020

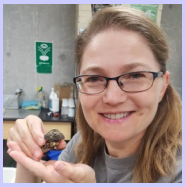
Kaitlin Richardson
2020 – 2022



Geoff Vogt
2022 – 2024

Jordan Banninga
2024 – Present

Executive Director



Daria Koscinski
2020 – Present

Cumulative Land Secured

1,000	1,103	1,333	1,417	1,492	1,723	1,884	1,907	2,092	2,132	2,256	2,364	Acres
405	447	540	574	604	698	763	772	845	863	913	957	Hectares

A Conversation with a Founding Member

Bernie VanDenBelt in Fall.

I was fortunate to sit down with humble and generous founding member Bernie VanDenBelt to learn more about his tenure with the organization over the past 25 years. The following are snippets from the conversation.

Thoughts on TTLT's 25th anniversary

The 25th anniversary event was very meaningful to Bernie, to reconnect with so many of the amazing people who are part of the TTLT story. Bernie found the evening to be "an uplifting celebration" of what has been achieved collectively over the past 25 years while also setting the stage for reaching even higher. "I had always hoped that TTLT would continue to build its network of protected areas, and we have managed to average about one new reserve per year over the first 25 years. However, the pace of protection today – two or three reserves per year and growing – is beyond what I could have ever first imagined." Bernie is extremely proud of the efforts and talents of both staff and volunteers, and how well they complement each other. He loves that staff share the same passion as the volunteers who started the organization. "Everyone is committed to the cause and see it as so much more than a job!"

What are you most proud of over the past 25 years?

Bernie is most proud of the permanent land protection ensured by the land trust. He shared that when he helped launch the organization, he did so with 3 Ps in mind:

1. **Positive** – looking at what they could do to help nature versus being part of an "anti-movement". So often, those concerned about environmental issues are portrayed in a negative light, as being against things or as impeding "progress". Land trusts provide an opportunity to be "for" something and to work with those who share our values to advance the cause of conservation.
2. **Proactive** – looking ahead and acting on priority landscapes. The implementation of the Opportunities Fund allows TTLT to work proactively to protect priority sites now rather than simply responding to crisis situations, when it may be too late.
3. **Permanent Protection** – protection that is not subject to the politics of the day as government and other agencies often face competing demands which may compromise their commitment to conservation. "...land trusts offer a vehicle for truly long-term protection."

What is the biggest hurdle you overcame?

The largest obstacle in the beginning of the organization was that TTLT was a "landless land trust." The organization was established at a conceptual level, not in response to a "land crisis" related to a particular parcel of land. The Organizing Committee did a lot of groundwork around incorporation, creating bylaws, and a Blueprint for Action document. TTLT didn't have a nature reserve for the first two years until the Richardsons donated TTLT's first nature reserve, Meadowlily Nature Preserve, in the heart of London. This first land donation created the publicity needed to raise the profile of the organization. TTLT has become a "go-to" organization for land conservation in Southwestern Ontario.

Why are you so passionate about TTLT?

"Healthy landscapes are key to a thriving society, and it is gratifying to contribute to that." Bernie added,

"A lot of organizations do great work protecting distant landscapes, but TTLT offers an opportunity to protect treasured local landscapes, As the saying goes, there's no place like home."

- Leigh Shand

Honouring Jane Bowles

Jane Bowles holding Garlic Mustard.

As we celebrate 25 years of conservation success, we would like to honour some of those who helped blaze the trail for TTLT and inspire the work still being done today. One of them was the late Founding Member, Jane Bowles, a biologist, botanist, and beloved TTLT advocate. She was a passionate champion for nature, and was integral in planting the seeds of the organization, dedicating countless hours to building its conservation efforts over the years. She left us too soon in 2013, but we still remember and cherish all that Jane accomplished and inspired as both a TTLT catalyst and a human being.

Raised in Kenya by a botanist mother and a nature-loving father, Jane acquired her naturalist skills at an early age. After graduating in Botany from the University of Aberdeen, she came to Canada to study the effect of recreational pressure on the sand dune ecosystems of Pinery Provincial Park, which led to her obtaining a doctorate in Plant Sciences. Jane quickly earned a reputation as a careful and reliable ecologist. In addition to her work as a much-loved professor at Western University and Director of the Sherwood Fox Arboretum, Jane was one of Southwestern Ontario's most respected freelance ecologists.

After TTLT's inception, Jane's efforts were strongly felt through her role as Chair of the Property Management Committee. She met with landowners, prepared Property Management Plans, and committed to expanding TTLT's network of protected lands. In addition, she enjoyed organizing weekend volunteer events, complete with baked treats that could include ingredients such as Garlic Mustard ("Eat the Enemy" was a favoured tactic!)

As more land was acquired, Jane became aware that the Property Manager workload exceeded what could reasonably be expected from a volunteer. In her last weeks fighting cancer, she was preoccupied with her desire to see a paid Conservation Property Manager position established. Jane's last gift was a generous legacy donation to establish TTLT's first Conservation Property Manager position, which was filled by our current Executive Director, Daria Koscinski.

TTLT honoured Jane's legacy at the 25th anniversary celebration on October 17, 2025. This dedication included a display of Jane's essential field items, such as knives and field guides, while also the unveiling of our newly named nature reserve, the Jane Bowles Ecological Reserve, through a moving presentation from Daria Koscinski. Previously known as Lakeview Wetlands, the reserve is made up of exceptional Carolinian tableland forest, swamp, and shoreline bluff habitats that are home to a wide diversity of plants, including several rare species. Permanent protection by TTLT ensures the site will continue to delight and inspire many generations of botanists, in honour of Jane Bowles.

Jane was an accomplished biologist, passionate advocate for nature, artist, dedicated volunteer, valued mentor, and friend. She has been sorely missed, but her legacy can be found in our dunes, meadows, prairies, forests and wetlands, and in the stewardship actions made possible through her commitment. She also lives on in the young professionals she trained and mentored, who will carry on her work with the same passion and dedication she demonstrated throughout her life. The life and legacy of Jane Bowes will always be at the heart of TTLT's story.

- Written from excerpts by André Lachance, Bernie VanDenBelt, Daria Koscinski, and Skye Martineau

A Tribute to Mary Kerr

For many years, one of the hot spots of environmental activism and heritage protection in London was a modest home on Elworthy Avenue in the city's Old South community, that of Mary Kerr. TTLT's 25th anniversary dinner was a fitting occasion to recognize her efforts as one of the Trust's Founding Members.

Mary Kerr, Jim Rule, and Bernie VanDenBelt at TTLT's 2014 Annual General Meeting.

Mary Elizabeth Kerr's advocacy work began in the 1980s. Feisty and forthright, Mary was a mover and shaker in the protection of natural and built heritage and a fixture at London's City Hall. Among her many contributions:

- Serving on the board of the McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London (MFN), now Nature London, for over 20 years, including as president;
- Serving on London's Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee;
- Becoming, in 1990, the first female president of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, now known as Ontario Nature;
- Serving on London's Local Advisory Committee on Heritage; and
- Being a mentor to many, including TTLT past president Jim Rule and his wife, Marg.

So, it was no surprise that, in 1998, when I approached Don Gordon about the possibility of creating a regional land trust, that he immediately knew to call upon Mary. From our first meeting in her living room on October 2, 1998 – together with Bill DeYoung – Mary was tireless in her efforts to organize and promote TTLT. Aside from serving on the Organizing Committee, she was the Trust's founding vice-president and also active at the committee level.

Among her greatest contributions to TTLT was the close connection she fostered between the Trust and Richard and Beryl Ivey. Because they knew and respected her, the Trust had "built in" credibility with them, and it was the strength of this relationship that gave us the courage to successfully approach the Iveys in 2005 for a $1 million donation to inaugurate our Opportunities Fund, which is still active today.

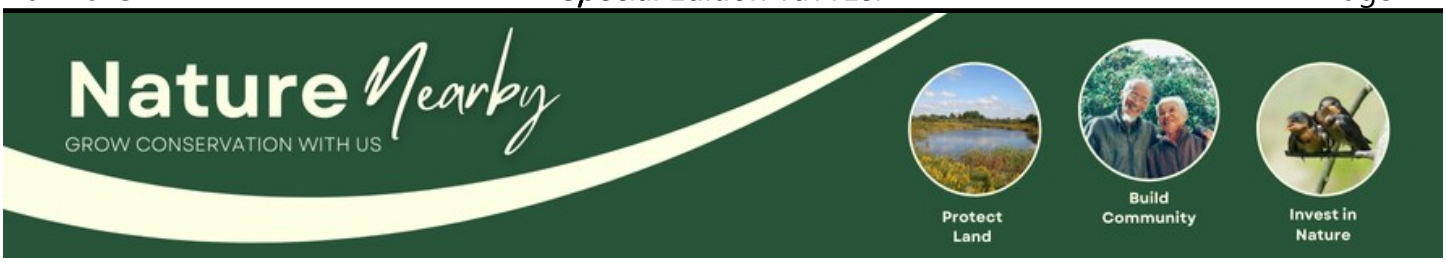
Although she did not have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary education, Mary is a testament to what can be accomplished with passion and persistence. Said her daughter, Cheryl, of her mother, "My mom saw the future through her love of her children, and her grandchildren. She wanted their future and their London to be a beautiful city to grow up in, and . . . she never gave up."

Said Mary once, "My purpose for working as diligently as I have, has always been to speak out, make recommendations, [and] lobby [for] . . . the protection of natural areas for public use and their preservation for future generations."

At the 2014 TTLT Annual General Meeting, Mary was presented with a framed certificate recognizing her invaluable contributions. In her final years, Mary's health no longer permitted her to participate actively in the work of TTLT, but the Trust remains a testament to what passion and persistence can accomplish. Mary passed away peacefully on December 30, 2022.

In recognition of her invaluable contributions to Thames Talbot Land Trust, TTLT was most pleased to present, at the anniversary dinner, a certificate of recognition to her daughter, Cheryl, and son, Charles, who also accepted it on behalf of their brother, Harley.

- Bernie VanDenBelt



TTLT Launches New Bold Campaign, *Nature Nearby*

We are thrilled to announce the launch of Nature Nearby, a bold new campaign by Thames Talbot Land Trust to protect what sustains us. The lands, waters, and wildlife around us are what make Southern Ontario home.

Nature Nearby is rooted in a simple truth: when we protect nature, we protect ourselves. Every wetland that absorbs floodwaters, every forest that purifies the air, and every meadow that shelters pollinators is a living investment in the wellbeing of our communities.

London, Ontario is one of the fastest-growing cities in the province. Rapid development brings jobs and economic activity, but it also puts pressure on natural areas and prime agricultural land. Protecting natural spaces safeguards our drinking water, supports healthy soils, and provides habitat for wildlife, all essential for a stable climate and a healthy community.

The Next Chapter: Expanding Nature Nearby

The Nature Nearby Campaign is TTLT's largest initiative to date. The campaign seeks to raise $10 million over five years to protect and steward natural areas and build capacity within the organization. This represents roughly $2 million per year, doubling TTLT's current annual income. With these funds, TTLT aims to double its land conservation impact by protecting 1,500 acres of land in Southwestern Ontario. The vision is to invest not only in land acquisition but also in the stewardship and community programs that make these places accessible and meaningful.

Turning Donations into Conservation Action

Although the campaign will support all aspects of TTLT's work, several priorities stand out:

1. **Land securement:** ensuring permanent protection of high-priority natural areas and farmlands.
2. **Stewardship and restoration:** caring for the land through the management of invasive species, the restoration of degraded habitats, and prescribed burns or native plantings to help protected areas thrive. Stewardship also means ongoing monitoring using diverse knowledge systems.
3. **Capacity building:** hiring and training staff, improving volunteer management, and strengthening relationships with community partners.
4. **Connecting people with nature:** expanding trails, signage, and programming so more people can experience local nature.

Strong Roots, Growing Momentum

Thanks to early gifts and pledges from generous donors, TTLT has raised $6.5 million of its $10 million goal and secured 543 acres towards the 1,500-acre target. A big thank you to our campaign catalysts: Karen & Eric Auzins, Klara & George Klein, André Lachance, Donald & Gwendolyn McCall, Donald Taves, Bernie VanDenBelt, Finch Auto Group, and Nature London.

Their early commitment provides momentum and demonstrates confidence in TTLT's ability to deliver. But it's the collective support of our entire community that will carry this campaign across the finish line. Every contribution — no matter the size — helps grow conservation across our region.

Continued on page 12

Continuing the Journey Together

The final $3.5 million remains to be raised over the next few years. Achieving this goal will require continued generosity from individuals, foundations, businesses, and government partners. While the goals are ambitious, the need is urgent.

Help Us Keep Nature Nearby

The success of Nature Nearby depends on many hands. You can support the campaign in several ways:

- ***Make a gift:*** Every contribution brings TTLT closer to the $10 million goal and all donations will directly support the Nature Nearby Campaign. One-time gifts, multi-year pledges, and legacy commitments all have a lasting impact.
- ***Become a monthly donor:*** Regular giving provides steady cash flow that allows TTLT to plan acquisitions and stewardship projects with confidence.
- ***Volunteer your time:*** Join stewardship workdays, serve on committees, or help with outreach and events. Your expertise and energy strengthen the conservation movement.
- ***Help us grow the circle:*** A personal introduction is one of the most powerful ways to advance conservation. Connect us with friends, family, or colleagues who share your values and might want to play a part in protecting local land.

Protecting land now ensures a healthy future for all living beings. With your help, the Nature Nearby Campaign will safeguard irreplaceable places, expand access to nature, and build a stronger, greener community.

Thank you for standing with Thames Talbot Land Trust as we grow conservation together. Learn more about the campaign at https://www.thamestalbotlandtrust.ca/nature_nearby.

- Alexander Casciano

Protecting *Nature Nearby* for Giving Tuesday

This year's Giving Tuesday focused on raising funds to protect nature nearby forever. Our goal was to raise $60,000 for our new *Nature Nearby* campaign with the help of Estelle the Eastern Meadowlark (learn more about her story on our website at https://www.thamestalbotlandtrust.ca/givingtuesday_2025). Thanks to a few generous individuals, we were able to provide match donations for the first $30,000 raised, doubling the impact for nature.

We're proud to report that the TTLT community did not disappoint—**we raised $60,000** for *Nature Nearby* this Giving Tuesday! Thank you to everyone who contributed, whether that was through donations, following along with Estelle's story, or talking about TTLT to a friend. It is truly inspiring to see the number of people who are committed to a greener future for all.

- Darby Alderson

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Thames Talbot Land Trust (TTLT) is a registered charity. Our mission is to protect, restore, and nurture nature within Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford, and Perth counties and the City of London, contributing to a stable climate, human well-being, and healthy habitats for all species. These lands and waters have been under the continuous care of Indigenous Peoples from time immemorial. We are committed to working in a spirit of reconciliation and collaboration to build a greener and more inclusive future for all people.