

Thames Talbot Land Trust

THE CORRIDOR

Protect

A Landholder's Legacy - SpringRush Farm

Land holds stories, memories, and a history of all living beings that have called it home. When a landholder approaches us to protect their land, they're not only protecting its natural features, they're also protecting its legacy.

In the Spring 2026 Edition of The Corridor, we presented five new protected areas, showcasing the magnitude of interest we have had from landholders who care deeply about preserving the lands they know and love. In this article, we are pleased to introduce you to James (Jim) Handyside and Janette Richards, the landholders of SpringRush Farm, a 100-acre site recently protected under a Conservation Easement Agreement (CEA). SpringRush Farm is the second CEA that TTLT holds in Middlesex County.



James Handyside

When they came to this land almost 40 years ago, it was farmland with a 28-acre woodlot. Since 1989, Jim and Janette have overseen transformational stewardship to the land with support from local partners, including Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, Ducks Unlimited, and Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS).

Changes include the decommissioning of 20-acres of pasture and marginal farmland, reforesting retired cropland, and rehabilitating wildlife habitats through tree plantings and the creation of a dug pond.

For those who have the privilege and proximity to nature like this, it is common to wonder, "what will happen to the land once I'm gone?" With the current threat to natural lands, Jim and Janette were happy to discover there was a way to preserve their hard work and avoid the potential development of their land in the future.

CEAs ensure long-term protection of the land through specific restrictions, while allowing the landholder to retain full ownership and continue to work and live on it. The permanence of a CEA means that their stewardship becomes a lasting legacy, no matter who holds title to the land in the future.

Jim and Janette expressed that "for almost 40 years, over two thirds of our lifetimes, we have lived in relationship with this land and its associated inhabitants. We've treated ownership as stewardship and the CEA assures us this relationship will continue with future human inhabitants. Our relationship with this land and our work with it has become a form of love, and a kind of love that begs continuance."

We are grateful for landholders who are committed to conserving the nature around us that we all love. We want to thank Jim and Janette for protecting their land and entrusting TTLT with its legacy.

"With the CEA, we are able to share this land with the distant future. We didn't know in advance how good it would feel having this kind of protection in place...leaving here one day will be much easier with TTLT working to ensure the nature of this land is preserved." - Jim & Janette

By Lily Vuong

Restore

Shell-ebrating Turtle Protection!

Although they are widely loved and turtle-y awesome, unfortunately, all eight native turtle species found in Ontario are classified as species at risk. This is due to numerous threats including habitat loss, road mortality, nest predation, poaching, and exploitation. As nature lovers dedicated to helping healthy ecosystems thrive, TTLT has been steadily growing our involvement with these awesome reptiles to help counteract their decline in local habitats.

If you didn't already know, TTLT has been researching and monitoring turtles on our nature reserves for over eight years. In 2018, we began a turtle inventory project after visual surveys confirmed their presence. Radio telemetry tags were applied to two snapping turtles to learn about their movements, nesting patterns, and habitat use.

As a result, we found one nest and fostered a partnership with the Southern Ontario at Risk Reptiles (SOARR) Lab to incubate our turtle eggs. The SOARR program is one of the longest-running and most successful reptile research and recovery programs in Canada.



Robin Hoogstra

In 2020, we launched our Turtle Program, which aims to increase native turtle populations by collecting their eggs, incubating them, and releasing them back into nature.

You may be thinking: wouldn't it be best to leave turtle eggs alone and not disturb their nests?

The reason we get involved is because in the wild, nests only have a 10% survival rate due to predation by subsidized predators, such as raccoons, skunks, and foxes. These predators rely on human activity, such as garbage and food waste, to supplement their diets. As predator populations continue to grow, turtle nests are increasingly predated. However, when we collect and incubate the eggs, turtles have a hatching rate of over 90%.

This past turtle season, TTLT staff and volunteers collected a record total of 751 eggs from 38 nests! A very special highlight of this season was the hatching of the smallest baby turtle the SOARR lab has seen in over 30 years of its reptile research. This Midland Painted Turtle was collected from one of our nest extraction sites and weighed 1.7 grams, with a shell length of only 1.8 centimetres. We wish this little baby the best of luck in the wild!



Scott Gillingwater

We want to express our gratitude to the SOARR Lab for their ongoing support and partnership, as well as the Government of Ontario's Species Conservation Program for funding our turtle program. Another big thank you to our dedicated team of turtle volunteers, who made this record-year possible!

By **Ellise Proctor**

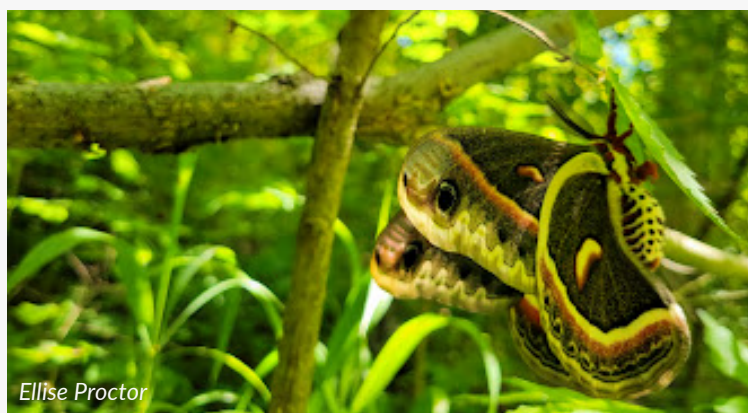
Nurture

Land Stewards of the Future

This past summer, Thames Talbot Land Trust welcomed Ella and Fae as Ecological Technicians to our stewardship team! Both Ella and Fae are students at the University of Guelph, with Ella entering her third year of Marine and Freshwater Biology and Fae entering her second year in Physics.

During their three-month contract with TTLT, they both honed their skills by learning from Payton and Ellise, including how to key out various wildflowers and identify native and non-native plant species, turtle egg extraction, trail maintenance, seed processing, and so much more! If you joined us this summer for stewardship field days or volunteer events, you likely worked alongside them. Their presence made much lighter work and brightened the field experience for staff and volunteers alike!

There were many highlights to their fun learning experience, but something they both found particularly interesting was being part of species at risk (SAR) surveys. These allowed them to visit a number of nature reserves to practise their skills in surveying and cataloging SAR (when they were able to find them, of course!)



Ellise Proctor

Across our many nature reserves, they were able to see a wide range of beautiful species up close. Some that especially stood out to them were the Cecropia moths and Pandora sphinx moths that they found along the trails of Wardsville Woods and during the gardening events at Hawk Cliff Woods.

They also became well acquainted with some of the most well-known native wildflowers from the Carolinian habitats. Through planting some of these native plant species in preparation for the Butterfly Festival, running community gardening events, and assisting with TTLT restoration activities, they enjoyed exploring the world of wildflowers! Fae's personal favourite was Wild Bergamot, while Ella loved the Black-eyed Susans.



Ellise Proctor

Once June hit, it became everyone's favourite season – turtle season! Ella and Fae both went out in the field, keeping an eye out for snapping and painted turtle nests. They both were successful in their mission, finding and excavating plenty of nests! These eggs were then brought to the SOARR lab, a process you learned all about earlier in this edition.

Spring and summer are always our busiest seasons, and we couldn't have done it all without our amazing technicians. These summer roles provide career focused learning opportunities for students and extra energy and helping hands for TTLT's busy field season.

"We had a wonderful time working with the TTLT team and enjoyed the opportunity to learn about the many species and ecosystems of Southwestern Ontario." - Ella & Fae

We hope this experience will help guide their care for nature into the future! Thank you so much, Ella and Fae!

By Lily Vuong, contributions by Ella Warkentin and Fae Mills

Grow

A Bigger Boat

284 acres. That's what we protected in 2025, more than double our usual pace. It's the kind of number that gets the community excited when we share it, and rightfully so! But here's what almost nobody sees: the computers and digital systems that made it possible.

The world is changing at a rapid pace, and it's easy to notice only the scary part of that, but, there's a wonderful side too. Technology, used correctly, can greatly improve our lives. If you think about it, a phone call across the globe used to take multiple steps and was very costly. Now, we can FaceTime someone on the other side of the planet with the press of a button.

"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!"

Behind our curtain are the tools that got us here: our donor database, spreadsheets, maps, and more. They have carried us a long way, but better digital tools exist now, and we are planning to upgrade. The piece we're upgrading has a technical name, "CRM" (Customer Relationship Management). It's the digital system and database that keeps track of every donor, gift, relationship, nature reserve, event, and more, all in one place instead of ten scattered ones.

To use an analogy, picture a canoe that's gotten a small crew safely down the river for years. Solid. Reliable. Exactly what it was built for. Now picture nine people trying to paddle it. The canoe isn't the problem; it's just not big enough for the task at hand anymore.

Technology and internal systems aren't an exciting story, and they're not supposed to be. The land is the story of what we do and always will be.



grant, a three-year investment aimed directly at that invisible layer.

It funds a new CRM (Salesforce), plus a companion system called LOCATE, the CRM's counterpart for land management. Together, they track every nature reserve, monitoring visit, securement project, and our commitments to the people who support us, and it helps guide how we reach the people who care about this work. The grant also funds new capacity, so growth doesn't just mean the same people paddling harder, it means we can add more staff to our roster to better support our work.

Next time you hear "284 acres saved", or "this awesome native species protected," I hope you'll think about the boat that got us there. We can't wait to finally build one big enough for where we're headed together.

By Alexander Casciano

Play

In each category, there are three real native species and one fake. Find the odd one out!

Fish

Bluntnose minnow, Longnose sucker, Brightnose trout, Pugnose shiner

Mushrooms

Lobster mushroom, Horse mushroom, Deer mushroom, Crayfish mushroom

Birds

Baird's sandpiper, Wilde's redthroat, Wilson's snipe, Bonaparte's gull

Moths

Mulberry oculi, Raspberry pyrausta, Snowberry clearwing, Blackberry looper

Wildflowers

Bloodroot, Snakeroot, Culver's root, Hareroot

Answers available on website.