



# COMPASS

## SUPPLEMENT

THE QUEBEC-LABRADOR FOUNDATION/ATLANTIC CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT | FALL 2017

*Promoting global leadership—one person at a time—through conservation and stewardship of natural resources and cultural heritage. Inspired in the Atlantic Region, shared worldwide.*

## TAKING THE LONG VIEW

Mike Wright inscribed a wonderful tribute to QLF in his and David Western's book, *Natural Connections: Perspectives in Community-based Conservation* (1994): "QLF should have been a chapter." Mike has told me that this unique, bi-national organization was a true pioneer in connecting culture, community, and conservation in an effort to address what our legendary Chairman Emeritus Obie Clifford called the only two problems we humans face: people getting along with people, and people getting along with "Mother Nature." Dealing with those two problems has kept QLF busy for over a half century. And as Obie said, QLF has made at least a dent in dealing with them. Those two problems that Obie states form the essence of QLF's two-part mission statement.

Dare I say it? My four decades with this organization have gone by in a blink. Now under my rather exalted-sounding title of Emeritus (defined by friends as learning to keep my mouth shut), I am enjoying taking the long view on dissecting that elusive word "accomplishment."

In Kath Blanchard's seminal longitudinal research in marine bird conservation, we have a story that not only defines one of QLF's principal accomplishments, but tells the story of this organization through an extraordinary case study that weaves people and community against a spectacular physical backdrop and associated very special natural history.

So many "young professionals" working as QLF Interns and Volunteers have had their eyes opened, and in many cases their careers determined (or at least mightily influenced) through their experience working for Kath. The

daughter of a Newfoundlander who emigrated to Connecticut from the Codroy Valley, Kath's energy, passion, and commitment for conservation is surpassed only by her knowledge of subject. As she now works on a book telling this story, her article here sets the table for what will eventually be a true "contribution to the scientific literature" describing a piece of the environmental movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Hers is a "good news" story — in so many ways — yet one not without setbacks and challenges all along the way. Throughout, she remains upbeat and positive — emotions she conveys to the young Interns working for her. Perhaps most exciting, Kath's story is of cooperation between two countries for a single purpose. Isn't that what QLF says it does — works across borders?

Two years ago, Kath presented her story in a talk at the Arader Galleries in New York. A friend later told me to share it with a much larger audience as it so beautifully captured the essence of QLF.

It was the donation last winter of our beautiful seabird exhibit in our former Massachusetts headquarters to Bowdoin College's Arctic Museum that spurred us to action. Just recently, QLF completed the new interpretive panel for the seabird sanctuary at Perroquets Island that further influenced the timing of this article.

You will be introduced in the following piece to unsung conservation heroes, like Canadian Louise Labarre and her Dreambird production, and American Josh Nove, an Amherst College graduate who worked for Kath for five summers before moving on to an assignment in Alaska. In a tragic twist of fate, Josh lost his life there,



Kathleen Blanchard and Larry Morris at the Perroquets Island viewing platform, Quebec Lower North Shore, 2016. QLF ARCHIVES





drowning in a freak accident while leading an Earthwatch expedition. It is a fitting tribute to a young man who early in life had made such a contribution to the protection of the seabird species living there.

Thank you, Kath, for all you do. You continue to be a role model for the next generation of conservation leaders. It has been my honor

to serve as your colleague and friend. In my new long view role as Emeritus, I am discovering that I finally have time to say thank you.

Lawrence B. Morris  
President Emeritus  
November 2017

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## SEABIRD CONSERVATION: THE LONG VIEW

By Kathleen Blanchard

September 15, 2017, 7:40 P.M. Île aux Perroquets and its birds were clearly visible a few hundred meters offshore from my vantage point at Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon on the Quebec Lower North Shore. Twilight illuminated the western sky over Bonne Esperance and painted the clouds in salmon and gold. The only ship in sight was the distant outline of the *Bella Desgagnés*, traversing westward to more isolated communities: St-Augustin, La Tabatière, Tête-à-la-Baleine, and Harrington Harbour.

I stood in the exact spot where, more than two decades ago, I had photographed QLF Intern and aspiring ornithologist, Joshua (Josh) Nove. I recalled our last walk together in 1995 to monitor birds, and our delight in stumbling upon a Red Knot feeding near a tide pool in thick morning fog. We knew that Blanc Sablon was just a stopover on this shorebird's long migration to South America; thus, we kept our distance and left the Red Knot undisturbed.

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Île aux Perroquets, also known as Perroquets Island, is home to Quebec's largest breeding colony of Atlantic Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*, and one of two islands that comprise the Brador Bay Migratory Bird Sanctuary. Explorers dating as far back as Jacques Cartier in 1534 have described the islands as home to large colonies of seabirds. Puffins at Perroquets Island were so numerous in 1833 that the painter-naturalist John James Audubon found it easy to shoot as many as he needed as background work



Josh Nove observing puffins at Perroquets Island, near Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon, Quebec Lower North Shore, 1995.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD

**“By 1978, the Marine Bird Conservation Program was launched, which grew to become the largest and longest-running conservation program in QLF history.”**

for his portfolio, *Birds of America*. Efforts to protect the colony began a century ago with passage of the Migratory Birds Convention Act, followed by the establishment of the federal migratory bird sanctuary in 1925. In 1937 the

Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds, also known as Bird Protection Quebec (BPQ), purchased Perroquets Island to safeguard the habitat. Over the years, the puffin population experienced severe population declines, particularly after 1955, when it plummeted from nearly 50,000 to less than 7,000 individuals.

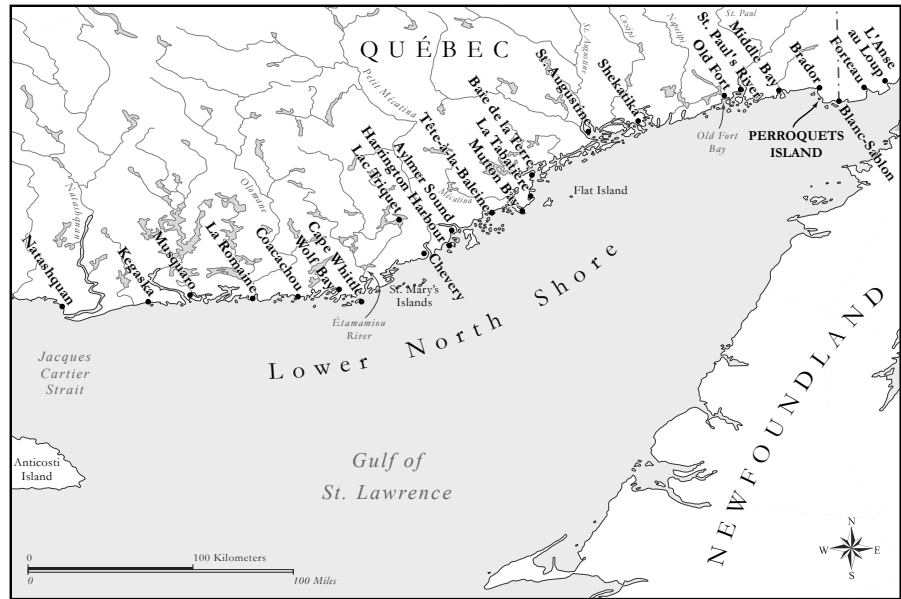
On the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, in the region called the Quebec North Shore, illegal hunting and disturbance of seabirds caused severe declines in the populations of several species breeding on migratory bird sanctuaries between 1955 and 1978. The populations of Razorbill, *Alca torda*, and Atlantic Puffin were reduced by 84 and 76 percent, respectively. The populations of Common Eider, *Somateria molissima*, Common Murre, *Uria aalge*, and Black





Guillemot, *Cephus grylle*, were also severely affected. Wildlife managers responded by strengthening enforcement, but an effective solution needed more than signs and fines.

By the late 1970s, QLF introduced a new approach. It was inspired by QLF Founder, Robert A. Bryan, who believed that the answer lay in engaging the people who lived on the coast and interacted directly with the birds. A pilot program in 1977 brought teams of youth to the St. Mary's Islands, a seabird sanctuary. By 1978, the Marine Bird Conservation Program was launched, which grew to become the largest and longest-running conservation program in QLF history. The program was developed in consultation with the region's residents and in collaboration with Canadian Wildlife Service. The adaptive management framework consisted of four major components: up-front research, planning, implementation, and evaluation of conservation outcomes. Each component provided feedback to the others and allowed for modifications over the years. The goal was the restoration of depleted populations of nesting seabirds in sanctuaries of the Quebec Lower North Shore, while at the same time preserving the integrity of



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN ENGLE

local culture.

The program emerged from the community-based perspective that the people of the Lower North Shore must benefit from any conservation initiative. Part of that perspective was the belief that youth could be trained as future conservation leaders who would help safeguard the region's biodiversity. Maintaining access to bird-viewing areas was part of the program's strategy to keep alive the people's passionate interest in their seabirds. That interest stemmed in part from the historic role seabirds had played in providing vital sustenance to

families of this isolated region. Respectful of that relationship, the program promoted traditions and social norms that were compatible with conservation principles, such as, "Don't waste."

Activities centered around the St. Mary's and the Brador Bay migratory bird sanctuaries, engaging residents from 13 communities from Kegaska to Blanc Sablon. Over a 20-year period, QLF recruited and employed as Interns more than 100 young people from the communities and from Canadian and US universities. The setting became a laboratory for research, resulting in completion of a graduate thesis by Anne Hallowell and my doctoral dissertation, which described the problem and our approach. Program staff were immensely dedicated, talented young professionals, who taught youth during the week-long educational workshops at the seabird colonies, organized community and school events, and helped lead study tours for conservation leaders. As citizen scientists, they participated in Red-throated Loon nesting surveys, breeding bird atlas research, and data gathering for the region's first check-list of birds.

QLF Intern and staff member Louise



Members of Bird Protection Quebec visit Perroquets Island on a study-tour led by QLF in the early 1990s. PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA



Common Murre on Perroquets Island, 2015  
PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD

warden carving an eider duck decoy, or a young boy's look of satisfaction as a hand-held puffin launches into flight. There was no mistaking, the people loved their birds.

Within the first decade, we saw evidence that the program was achieving its three main objectives: an increase in the populations of breeding seabirds; improvements in local knowledge, support, and conservation behaviors; and greater local involvement in seabird conservation. Breeding populations of puffin, Razorbill, Common Murre, and Common Eider increased, as reported by Canadian Wildlife Service and based on results of a census which the Canadian Wildlife Service conducts every five years. The program achieved a reduction in the main threats, namely, hunting, egg harvesting, and habitat disturbance in the colonies. Scientists with



Razorbill on St. Mary's Island - PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA

conservation, and harvest practices were documented by our longitudinal study, using data gathered from household surveys in 1981 and 1988. As people became more informed and supportive of wildlife regulations, illegal hunting of nongame birds declined. A prominent scientist with Fisheries and Oceans Canada declared that the approach was proven effective.

The third objective — greater local involvement in seabird conservation — was measured through job creation, local employment, and interest in the program. For example, the Canadian Wildlife Service hired respected citizens as conservation officers. Demand for places at the St. Mary's Island workshops exceeded capacity. People wanted to be involved all along but they needed to be offered opportunities and empowered to execute more control.

As word of these results spread, conservation professionals from many regions of North America and abroad became interested in learning about our approach and lessons that could be applied to their own programs. On the invitation of more than 100 organizations, I spent a portion of the next several years traveling to conferences and gatherings across Canada and the US, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Iceland, Slovakia, Soviet Union, Argentina,

*“Demand for places at the St. Mary's Island workshops exceeded capacity.”*

Environment Canada agreed that increased productivity and recruitment rates for the bird populations would not have been possible without these improved conditions.

Meanwhile, significant changes in local knowledge, support for

Labarre wrote a play about seabirds and directed the theatrical performance by local youth—a strategy that achieved widespread support among audiences that were considered resistant to change. Josh Nove, well-known locally as the polite young man who monitored birds daily, produced volumes of journal records. Interns and local staff enjoyed working side-by-side while gaining valuable career-related experience. Several program Alumni, including Gregor Beck and Nathalie Zinger, went on to become influential leaders at Canada's top conservation organizations. Several of them, such as Trish Nash, made significant contributions by applying what they had learned on the Quebec North Shore to conservation challenges in other regions.

The program gained widespread recognition in 1986, when the Canadian Broadcasting Company chose to create an hour-long documentary of the program for CBC Television's *The Nature of Things* with David Suzuki. The documentary was repeated on The Discovery Channel for years afterwards. We learned a lot from working with the elite film crew and laughed through many re-enactments of common events. What I admired most was the crew's ability to capture the intimate relationship of people and their birds: for example, a retired game



Kath Blanchard leads a workshop for youth from Harrington Harbour at the St. Mary's Islands Seabird Sanctuary, 1978. PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA





Atlantic Puffin on St. Mary's Island - PHOTOGRAPH BY GREIG CRANNA

Bermuda and New Zealand — sharing descriptions of the program model and the lessons learned. It was inspiring to hear of people’s commitment to similar causes in widely diverse settings. Many instinctively believed in the efficacy of the community-based approach, but lacked convincing evidence that it led to conservation success. The results of the Marine Bird Conservation Program’s longitudinal study gave scientists the evidence they were seeking and policy-makers the justification for why community engagement should be funded.



As dusk was fast approaching, I focused the spotting scope again on Perroquets Island. I counted more than 8,000 puffins in total, including sentinel puffins in front of burrow openings, puffins clustered onto flat boulders

strewn along the shore, puffins cascading from the colony slopes, and puffins swirling and diving on the sea. Congregating in massive swarms of black figures against the darkening sky, they rose, then swooped downward, then rose again and turned, forming great elliptical patterns. This was the largest gathering of puffins I had observed at this colony during the 2017 season. Razorbills and Common Murres had departed back in August, but puffins appeared to be having a later-than-normal season, as evidenced by several birds I observed bringing fish back to their burrows.

The most recent census of breeding seabirds at the Brador Bay Sanctuary gives reason for hope that this historic colony is gaining strength after decades of persecution. Results of the 2015 census showed slight increases in nesting puffins and continued growth in the

number of Razorbill and Common Murre. For Perroquets Island alone, puffins numbered approximately 17,700 individuals, Razorbill approximately 8,800, and Common Murre more than 2,000. The colony is a long way from reaching historically high population levels, but residents of the Municipality of Blanc Sablon are determined to protect it and to do whatever is needed to encourage its continued growth.

My purpose in visiting the site on this day was to examine the recent installation of a new interpretive panel overlooking Perroquets Island. The island is part of the Brador Bay Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and carries international significance in the global network of IBAs. QLF and its partners were pleased to prepare the first interpretive panel to describe the combined efforts of BPQ,





federal and provincial governments, nonprofit organizations, and local authorities in protecting this historic colony of seabirds.

As I stood at the site, I was also mindful that 2017 marks the 20th anniversary of Josh Nove's accidental death at age 23. The incident occurred in Alaska, while he was leading a team of Earthwatch volunteers to a river delta where they could observe Mew Gulls. His integrity and quiet, unassuming ways made him influential and much loved by the people of Blanc Sablon. That relationship was memorialized by the Municipality's dedication to Josh of the Pointe à la Barque trail to the observational platform overlooking Perroquets Island.

By 8 pm the darkness was preventing me from detecting any puffins flying to and from the colony. As I took one last look at Perroquets Island, I felt gratitude for the many QLF Interns and staff, local citizens, biologists, enforcement personnel, and conservation practitioners who were dedicated to the colony's protection and whose work helped bring about a resurgence of seabirds. I would thank them all at the tourism forum for the Lower North Shore that I was planning to address in the next few weeks.

The threat to seabirds of illegal hunting and eggging is much less severe than in decades past; however, new threats have emerged and other historic ones remain. Seabirds need our help today as ever before. The effects of climate change on marine conditions, depletion and availability of forage fish, oil pollution, plastic debris, by-catch in fishing nets, and disturbance at the colonies are some of the current threats to seabirds in the Atlantic



The Red-throated Loon nests at the St. Mary's Islands Seabird Sanctuary. PHOTOGRAPH (1979) BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD

and Gulf of St. Lawrence regions. Education and awareness-building continue to be important first steps in the path toward stewardship. We are continuing that strategy with summer conservation workshops for youth at the Point Amour Lighthouse Provincial Historic Site in the Labrador Straits. Modeled on the St. Mary's Island Seabird Workshop that operated for 20 years, we teach 40 youth from fishing families to identify and record their daily observations of seabirds. Lessons learned from the Marine Bird Conservation Program continue to be applied in the ongoing mission to empower communities as stewards of their local resources.

Throughout the Atlantic region, practitioners now gather periodically to share lessons learned from stewardship programs of many types, which target

the recovery of species at risk. At these sessions, we find that strategies developed for the Marine Bird Conservation Program are as relevant today as they were in the 1980s, and that, to varying degree, basic principles that we used may be applicable to other settings. Here are a few examples:

- Identify a common goal from the start — one to which partners agree and which ensures benefits to the people most affected.
- Make community engagement an essential pillar of the overall management plan, not simply a tool to inform people of policies or a last-ditch effort to win their support.
- Investigate the issue up-front, both from ecological and human dimensions, searching for an understanding of root causes, human behaviors, social norms, motivations, and aspirations.
- Empower the people as true partners of the initiative. Strengthen trust, build a sense of ownership, and share credit.
- Recognize people's passion for nature. Strive to maintain access, however limited. Offer fun, hands-on activities.
- Incorporate leadership

development and capacity building into program strategy.

- Evaluate from beginning to end, with the purpose both to improve program effectiveness and to demonstrate program results.

Community-based conservation is about encouraging local responsibility, local control, and local benefits for conservation initiatives.



Louise Labarre and the cast of *Dreambird*, at the first performance of this popular play, Lourdes-de-Blanc-Sablon, Quebec, 1986. PHOTOGRAPH BY LYNNE ST. JACQUES



Mégane Déziel creating bird costumes for school and community presentations by QLF Interns, 2016. PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD

Yet we live in a dynamic global setting where our actions have impact on populations and ecosystem functions in other parts of the world. Through our work at the community level, we learn the importance of positive relationships, with each other and with nature, as the foundation for a stable, caring global society.



At the QLF Headquarters building in Ipswich, Massachusetts, a different medium was employed to interpret to visitors the Marine Bird Conservation Program and its message of community-based conservation.

In 1982, Larry Morris (QLF Executive Vice President and later President for 28 years) commissioned the great taxidermist, David Schwendeman, who created the famous dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City, to develop a seabird diorama for display at the new QLF Headquarters building. Mr. Schwendeman agreed to craft the larger components of the diorama, but passed the direction of the project to his son, David, Jr., known as Bruce. Meanwhile, Larry assembled a supporting team of experts, including

Dr. Thomas French, Massachusetts Assistant Director of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife; Fred Johnson of the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts; and John Nove, father of Intern Josh Nove and

curator of natural history at the Peabody Essex Museum.

After a mere few months, Bruce arrived with a van containing the specimens, plants, backdrop painting, and a composite model of Canadian Shield. As the team unpacked the components and rolled open the canvas mural, I was amazed to see that the artists had captured the awe-inspiring beauty and rich colors of the Quebec North Shore. “Had they been there?” I wondered. The background painting by artist John R. Quinn, brother to Stephen Quinn who painted the murals at the American Museum of Natural History, resembled a sunset over Bonne Esperance, looking west from Perroquets

Island and Blanc Sablon. In the foreground were seabirds taking flight, perhaps a few hours before twilight.

The diorama features 13 mounted specimens representing seven species of seabirds and sea ducks common along the Quebec North Shore. The centerpiece is a large fiberglass outcrop of Canadian Shield, on which are life-like mounts of locally breeding alcids: Common Murre, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, and Black Guillemot. The groundcover is a re-creation of the heath habitat, including authentic plant and lichen specimens from the region: three-toothed cinquefoil, cranberry, crowberry, and reindeer lichen. We marveled at how well they held up for decades. We



The new interpretive panel describing Ile aux Perroquets (Perroquets Island), 2017 - PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD



Razorbills and Common Murres on the sea at Perroquets Island, where their populations have been increasing in recent years. 2015. PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD





Dr. Kathleen Blanchard and youth observing seabirds and whales near the Point Amour Lighthouse in the Labrador Straits, 2017. PHOTOGRAPH BY HANS VAN KLINKEN

late QLF Director, Frederick G. P. Thorne, served for many years as Chairman of the Bowdoin College Board of Trustees; QLF Canada Board Chairman Philip Nadeau and QLF Director Kirby Nadeau were Alumni of the College. Bowdoin College was the perfect venue for the next chapter of the seabird diorama! After 35 years on display at the QLF offices, on February 17,

2017 the seabird diorama was moved to Bowdoin College.

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From field operations to the diorama at Headquarters, and in film and gatherings at home and abroad, QLF developed, tested, and conveyed the message of community-based conservation to the wider public. The approach proved effective at achieving conservation outcomes. Everyone involved played a vital role, especially the citizens of the coast, who now refer to the seabird islands as “their sanctuaries.” Work that encompassed four decades would not have been possible without the abiding friendship and support of many hundreds of people in the region, the funders and partnering organizations that contributed to the effort, and the program staff and Interns who made it happen. We are forever grateful to them all.

marveled at how well they held up for decades.

Each item in the diorama contained its own story. The seabirds were salvaged birds that had previously died due to entanglement in fishing gear, oil spills, or other causes along the Quebec North Shore and eastern Newfoundland. A retired hunter from Harrington Harbour donated two eider duck decoys. We were grateful to the fishermen, biologists, and other friends who contributed to the collection. The specimens and their place of origin were described in a descriptive key that hung next to the diorama.

In February of 2017, QLF moved its administrative offices to a new riverfront location in the heart of historic downtown Ipswich. Weeks before the move, it was determined that the seabird diorama would need a new home. Larry Morris, now QLF President *Emeritus*, was hoping that the exhibit would be donated to an appropriate museum or center that would appreciate its educational value and the museum standards by which it was created. The search concluded when Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, requested the diorama for their Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum. Personal ties made the arrangement even more attractive: the



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The seabird diorama, on display at QLF Headquarters 1982-2017, interpreted the important relationship between seabirds and the people of the Quebec Lower North Shore. PHOTOGRAPHS (2017) BY KATHLEEN BLANCHARD

