

YAWKEY FOUNDATION

We caught up with Maureen H. Bleday, chief executive officer of the Yawkey Foundation, to talk about the 45-year history of the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center and what's next for the Foundation and The Nature Conservancy.



Forty-five years ago, the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center was donated to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR). What's the story behind that gift?

Tom Yawkey and his wife, Jean, formed a deep lifetime connection to the Georgetown County area. The Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center includes North, South, Sand and most of Cat islands, all located at the mouth of Winyah Bay in Georgetown County. It represents a unique partnership with SCDNR. The 31-square mile property, which Tom spent much of his life acquiring and managing, is dedicated as a wildlife preserve, research area and waterfowl refuge. It hosts educational guided field trips for thousands of visitors each year, free of charge, and plays a critical role in providing habitat and hosting landmark wildlife research on alligators, loggerhead sea turtles and more. It's what Tom—who was an outdoorsman and self-taught ornithologist—would do if he were still with us today.

The Yawkey Foundation has supported TNC's work in Georgetown County since 1979. Why is it important to invest in conservation outside the boundaries of the Wildlife Center?

The Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center is adjacent to Winyah Bay and the Santee Delta, two of the largest watersheds on the east coast. These systems are the building blocks for wetlands and beaches used by sea turtles, waterfowl, shorebirds and alligators at the Wildlife Center. Changes in water quality upstream can have serious negative impacts downstream, so it is important to us to invest in buffers and land protection along these rivers. In addition, many species are highly mobile and need to move between islands of habitat to find food and mates. Protection of other critical lands in the Georgetown County area benefits the Wildlife Center even when those lands are not directly adjacent to the property.

In June 2022, the Yawkey Foundation announced the gift of the 269-acre Blackout Tract on Cat Island to the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center. What made this island such an important addition, both ecologically and historically?

In the 1980s, TNC assisted with the purchase of this tract from its previous owners. We were delighted to donate the 269 acres of protected habitat in Georgetown County to SCDNR so that it could be cared for and managed in perpetuity. It builds on the special connection the Yawkeys had to the people and land in Georgetown County. We are deeply invested—both in spirit and financially—in

preserving and managing the property's natural resources, and with that intention, the Yawkey Foundation has provided more than \$35 million to the State of South Carolina to fund the operations of the Wildlife Center.

The Yawkey Foundation works in two areas that its founders—Tom and Jean Yawkey—considered home: Boston, Mass., and Georgetown County, S.C. You hail from Boston. How has the Foundation's work exposed you to nature and conservation in South Carolina?

Tom visited Georgetown, S.C., frequently as a child and developed a great love of the outdoors and wildlife here. The area was his home for half the year throughout his lifetime. As a Trustee of the Yawkey Foundation, it's been an honor to learn about the region and its unique ecosystems and natural resources, including managed wetlands, wildlife openings, ocean beach, longleaf pine forest and maritime forest. Our work in Massachusetts mirrors the Foundation's priority of preserving and protecting wildlife, and we have partnerships in the region that enable us to perpetuate the Yawkeys' legacy in the Boston area.

Jean Yawkey was part-owner and operator of the Red Sox for 25 years. What does it mean for you also to be a woman leader in business, philanthropy and conservation?

It's truly a privilege to carry out the philanthropic wishes of both Tom and Jean Yawkey. When you visit the Foundation's website, the caption on the main page concisely expresses the reality of who they were and the values they demonstrated: *"Do what is right. Do it quietly. And don't expect praise for being kind."* Their quiet commitment to the people and places they loved is the North Star for me and the other Trustees entrusted with their legacy. The fact that they were so passionate about the outdoors is something that resonates with me on a personal basis. When I'm not in our offices in Dedham, Mass., you'll typically find me in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, enjoying the region's natural beauty and trying to make a dent in the list of 4,000-footer peaks that my family and I love to hike.



FIND OUT MORE about the work of the Yawkey Foundation at <https://yawkeyfoundation.org/>.

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Support the world you love, both today and in the future. Many giving options offer you tax savings and can be tailored to your situation.

- Make a gift of appreciated assets, like stock, and you may avoid realizing capital gains.
- If you are at least 70 ½, you can make a qualified charitable distribution up to \$100,000 from your IRA and avoid income taxes on the distribution.
- Have a Donor-Advised Fund or "Giving Account"? Recommend a grant to support TNC in 2022 or 2023.



To learn more, contact **Elizabeth Foster** at (843) 800-1274 or efoster@tnc.org

TNC cannot provide tax or legal advice, and this information is not intended as such. Because of the complexity of financial and estate planning, it is important that you confer with a qualified advisor to assess the financial, legal, and tax benefits for your personal situation. GREEN HERON © SUJATA ROY