

From left to right, Frances and Douglas McCallum and their friends Patricia and Horace Gilbert proudly pose in front of the new reserve named after them.

Photo: © The Nature Conservancy of Canada



FRANCES and DOUGLAS McCALLUM AND PATRICIA and HORACE GILBERT

The ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

Four Friends Bring Forest and Wetlands under Protection

It all began in 1972, when Frances and Douglas McCallum, together with some associates, acquired a 215-acre tract of forest in Bolton-Centre, at the foot of the Sutton Mountains, in order to build a housing development. With the goal of creating a pleasant natural setting and preserving the natural habitats of this property located near the Missisquoi River, they commissioned a team of landscape architects and surveyors to draw up a residential development plan using detailed aerial and terrestrial surveys. It was the McCallums' wish to set aside some wetland and forest areas at the eastern end of the property in order to preserve them in their natural state.



Photo: © Canadian Wildlife Service

The donated property includes forest and wetlands, such as this beaver pond offering choice habitat for many species of waterfowl, reptiles and amphibians.

Because of some differences of opinion with their associates, the couple decided to find partners who shared their vision and their love of nature to join them in the project. This is how Patricia and Horace Gilbert, with whom they often skied in the area, got involved in the project in 1976. The four friends, originally from different places—British Columbia, Scotland, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Eastern Townships—ended up settling in Bolton-Centre themselves some ten years later.

Today there are some 20 homes scattered in the western part of the vast woodland. From an airplane, it would be difficult to distinguish the houses, were it not for the access road carving a big H through the forest. The eastern part of the property, consisting of 81 acres of wetland and forest, remains intact, despite the fact that over the years several developers have tried to buy it. This land, so dear to the two couples, harbours mixed stands of deciduous and coniferous trees, including maples, birches, spruces, pines, American Beech, Eastern White Cedar, and Eastern Hemlock. The understorey shelters many species of wildflower, such as the Red Trillium, the Painted Trillium, the Yellow Clintonia, and the



Photo: © Rodolph Balej

The Barred Owl is found mostly in mature forests close to wetlands. It seems that wild areas are essential to the conservation of its population.

Stemless Lady's-Slipper. The forested hills, where Frances McCallum likes to go walking, overlook a magnificent beaver pond. The pond and surrounding wetlands contain choice habitats that waterfowl use for migration and nesting. These areas are also home to various reptile and amphibian species, including the Common Garter Snake, the Yellow-spotted Salamander, the Bullfrog, the Green Frog, and the Leopard Frog. In the spring and summer, courting frogs join together in a unique chorus that Patricia Gilbert enjoys listening to in her house, which is near the pond.

Several years ago, after talking with their friend Steward



Photo: © Pierre Bernier, MRNF

The Northern Saw-whet Owl is the smallest owl in Quebec. This discreet nocturnal bird frequents coniferous and mixed forests as well as wet woodlands.

Hopps, the McCallums and the Gilberts decided to take steps to protect their beloved land forever. A biologist friend told them about the possibility of making an ecological donation to a conservation organization. The foursome's dream came true in December 2003, when they transferred their 81 acres (33 hectares) of natural areas to the Nature Conservancy

of Canada (NCC)¹, a non-governmental organization that will protect the land in perpetuity. Their donation was made under Environment Canada's Ecological Gifts Program. The two couples already attached a great deal of importance to these wild areas, but it was during the donation process that they came to discover the enormous ecological value of this piece of land. In addition to providing quality habitat for a variety of plant and animal species, the donated property is now part of a conservation initiative aimed at protecting a corridor of unfragmented forest connecting the Eastern Townships and Vermont. This corridor will provide favourable habitat for species like the Bobcat, the Moose and the Barred Owl, which require large expanses of wilderness for their survival. In November 2004, the four friends proudly attended the inauguration ceremony for the McCallum-Gilbert Natural

Reserve, a protected area in which construction, hunting and resource harvesting are henceforth prohibited. Horace Gilbert died the following year, glad that their project had finally come to fruition after 30 years of effort and, like his wife and the McCallums, hopeful that this important gesture would inspire others.

In the McCallums' home, right beside the protected habitats, one can see framed photos of a Northern Saw-whet Owl and a Barred Owl that were taken in the yard. The owls were both captured on film as they cautiously eyed the goings-on at some birdfeeders. Few people ever get the chance to see these two forest species, let alone from their kitchen window. What a wonderful reward for the McCallums and the Gilberts, who chose to embrace nature by preserving their land and providing a legacy that future generations will be able to enjoy.

For more information on ecological gifts, please contact:

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¹ www.natureconservancy.ca

Ce document est également disponible en français

**FRANCES and DOUGLAS McCALLUM
AND PATRICIA and HORACE GILBERT**

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