

A Walk Around Cold Spring Park in May

Let's meet in the parking lot near Beacon Street at 7 A.M. The sun is up, and the birds have been singing for about an hour and a half. We stop at the intersection of the paths before the little bridge where we enter the park. The Yellow Warblers are singing around the big willow trees and chasing each other to establish territorial boundaries. If you have binoculars you can see the beautiful red streaks on their breasts, contrasting with their otherwise yellow plumage. Their song can be anthropomorphized as "Sweet, sweet, sweet, so-so-so sweet."

Song Sparrows are also singing nearby. They are LBJ's, little brown jobs, with a dark spot in the center of their streaky breasts. Their songs are complex and hard for me to imitate with words.

We now backtrack and take a small path to our right as we return towards the parking lot. This path leads us out to Beaconwood Road. As we head up Beaconwood away from the apartment buildings we hear the loud, three-part calling of a Carolina Wren. This is a small, rusty-colored wren with a distinctive white line over its eye. One young friend described its song as "Meat-eater, meat-eater, meat-eater." These wrens sing many dialects but always the same three-part cadences.

There are Red-winged Blackbirds showing their fantastic red shoulders and Common Grackles creaking like rusty hinges in the trees ahead of us. Along this road, there are a couple of big willow trees where Baltimore Orioles build a nest every year. The nest is a bag of woven grasses that hangs down like a pendulum over the road, often quite low. We stop and watch for the brilliant orange orioles to show up. The marsh to our right is getting overgrown with phragmites, an invasive European reed. It is now difficult to see much in there, but there always are more Yellow Warblers around this spot, by the marsh. Another yellow bird can be

spotted here, the American Goldfinch with its black wings and cap and bright yellow body. These little finches are often in the tops of the trees, so one can see them above the phragmites.



Red-bellied Woodpecker



Baltimore Oriole

When we come to the turn in Beaconwood Road, we take the path to our right into the park. There are House Sparrows and House Finches in the trees and shrubs here. The male House Sparrows have a dark brown throat. The male House Finches have a bright red head and throat. The females of both species are brown, and the finches have streaky breasts. If you look into the waters on either side of the path, you may see Mallards. It is worth checking the dead snags in the water to your left for a local Red-tailed Hawk. This is a big bird with a rufous tail. Red-tailed Hawks look for squirrels, rabbits and other small prey wherever they live.

As we get about 50 yards into the woods, we look for a poorly marked trail to our left. We follow it out to the water's edge. Here there are usually Canada Geese and a Phoebe. The Phoebe is a small gray flycatcher. Flycatchers are a family of birds that hang out on twigs and dart out to snarf up little bugs on the wing.

Phoebes sing their name, often repeatedly in the spring when they are setting up a territory in which to raise and feed their young. There are more Song Sparrows singing out in this marsh, and occasionally some Green-winged Teal in the rear of the marsh. There are Northern Cardinals in the trees and shrubs here.

We walk around to the right along the edge of the water and on out to the path we left a few minutes ago. We hear Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches making an "earnt-earnt-earnt" sound and Tufted Titmice calling "Peter, Peter, Peter" in this area of the woods. We keep our eyes and ears open for the little calls and

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drumming of the Downy Woodpeckers. By now we have heard and hopefully seen the gaudy Red-Bellied Woodpeckers that nest in the park every year. This is a larger woodpecker with red on the top and back of its head.

Now the trail crosses the Exer-Trail, and we proceed straight on by the little meadow that is getting overgrown. At the corner of the intersection, we pass a cluster of white wood anemone, a native flower. Gray Catbirds are around as are American Robins and more Baltimore Orioles. Red-eyed Vireos may now put in an appearance up high in the canopy of the big trees. They are hard to pick out visually but sing incessantly, which helps you to locate them. They are small, olive-green birds with dark lines over their red eyes.

The woods ahead should contain several wood warbler species. They are just passing through Newton on their way north to nest. These are small, brightly colored birds, like tiny orioles. Some birds to expect are the black-and-orange American Redstarts, the dark-blue-and-black of the Black-throated Blue Warbler and the multi-colored Yellow-rumped Warbler with its distinctive yellow rump. This bird is often referred to as the butter-butt. Other warblers here may be the yellow, black and green Black-throated Green Warbler the black-and-white-striped Black and White Warbler, which creeps along limbs like a nuthatch, and the Ovenbird, which is usually on or near the ground and sings a loud "Teacher, teacher, teacher" song. (You may know Robert Frost's poem *The Oven Bird*.)

As we pass around the corner in the woods, keep your eyes searching. Be aware that there are usually Scarlet Tanagers singing up in the canopy along this stretch of trail. These birds are unbelievably brilliant red with black wings. They sing like a robin with a sore throat, with a burr.



Chipping Sparrow

cap here and possibly more wood warblers in the trees over the water that pools up here.

Keep a sharp eye for Savannah Sparrows that migrate through here but do not stay in Cold Spring Park. They resemble Song Sparrows but have a yellow wash above their

eyes and much finer streaking. We are near a vernal pool here, and we may hear the little bark of the wood frogs. By now, we listen for the lovely flutelike, rising sing of the Wood Thrush, which still nest in the park although much diminished in numbers. The Wood Thrushes are difficult to see but can be tracked down in the spring when they are singing.



Downy Woodpecker

The beak of this species is described as "chisel-like." It is always obviously bigger than the beak of a Downy Woodpecker.

There are roosting places of both a Great Horned Owl and an Eastern Screech-owl along here. We might check these spots that are not at all sure bets.

Carolina Wrens sing here, and there is a large marsh off to the right as we walk farther. Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Red-tailed Hawks, Song Sparrows, Wood Ducks and Brown-headed Cowbirds are often out in this marshy area. Along the trail here, we pass through some larger ferns. At one point, we have big cinnamon ferns down to the right of the path in a wetter area, and uphill to the left are the interrupted ferns. The latter have fronds low down and high on the main stalk but have only spores mid-way up the stalk. The cinnamon ferns have a straight, fuzzy, cinnamon-colored stalk of spores on a fertile frond without blades, or leaves.

We walk straight on the path, going through Wilber Street, a gravelly one-block road, and turn right to stay in the park. We descend into a wetland area and see the green Skunk cabbage leaves. The flowers are long past. These plants bloom up through the last of the snows. The trail here has sweet pepper bush alongside. This will bloom in July and give off wonderful smells. Now, it may harbor Ruby-crowned Kinglets. These are tiny, flitty, little green birds with brilliant red feathers on top of the heads of the males. Since the shrubs are low here, you have a second chance for seeing wood warblers close to you--although there is also plenty of high canopy here. On both sides of the path, there are sizeable jack-in-the-pulpit plants, which are fun to find.

We go on the Exer-Trail around to the right. This stretch of trail often yields the Hairy Woodpecker as well as the other two woodpeckers mentioned earlier. The Hairy Woodpecker resembles a large Downy Woodpecker.

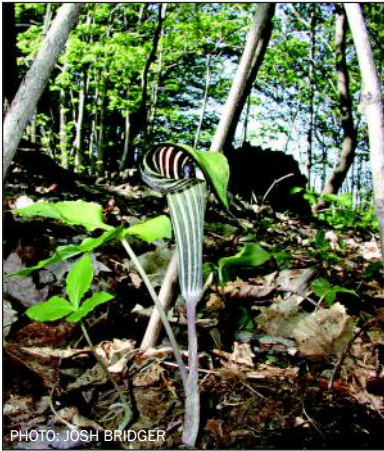


PHOTO: JOSH BRIDGER

Jack-in-the-pulpit

We go across a small bridge just behind the Zervas Elementary School. There may be Mallards in the water here. We turn right at the corner. We notice a cluster of sensitive ferns along the creek. They have broader leaves than most ferns.

The trail here follows Cold Spring Brook, which has been directed into an underground

culvert next to the bridge we just crossed. We may hear wood Thrushes off to our right, and the ever present Blue Jays and American Crows have been in evidence before now. Last spring there were occasional Common Ravens in this neck of the woods, so we keep our ears tuned for the sound of their croaking voices.

We now walk straight towards our entry point into the park. If we're lucky we may hear a Rose-breasted Grosbeak along here. This is a larger bird, mostly black and white, but

with a triangle of red on its breast. It sings like a robin who took voice lessons. Whereas the Scarlet Tanager sounds like a robin with a sore throat, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak sounds like a robin singing opera. It is always a pleasure to hear this song in the spring, along with the Wood Thrush's song. These songs lift your spirit in a way that the visual beauty cannot. It's the difference between the appreciation of your favorite music and your favorite photographs or paintings.

We come to the open baseball and soccer fields now. They may be populated by human soccer players or American Robins or Herring Gulls looking for worms. This is a multi-use area. Scan the skies here for Red-tailed Hawks, which nest in large trees across Beacon Street in the Newton Cemetery. You might also see a passing Turkey Vulture or a Great Black-backed Gull here.

We're now back at the parking lot with lower blood pressure and heads filled with the sights, smells and sounds of the earth, not the worries of civilized life. ■

✿ Pete Gilmore

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Don't miss the Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 6

The Trustees of Reservations: Then and Now



Our guest speaker this year will be Rob Warren, Managing Director of Conservation at The Trustees of Reservations, America's oldest operating land trust. Rob will review the history of The Trustees and discuss the current focus of the organization as well as recent land acquisitions.

Rob's role includes land-protection planning, building partnerships with other organizations, overseeing the Conservation Restriction Program of The Trustees, supervising the Land Conservation staff, and working directly with landowners to conserve their lands.

Prior to joining The Trustees in 2014, Rob was Director of Protection & Policy for the Massachusetts Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, where he worked for 14 years

The annual meeting and dinner will be held on May 6 at the American Legion Post 440 at 295 California Street in Nonantum. A social hour will begin at 6:00 pm; dinner will begin at 7:00, to be followed by a brief annual meeting, an awards ceremony and then Rob Warren's presentation titled "The Trustees of Reservations: Then and Now."

You can register for the meeting online at: www.newtonconservators.org.