



Working to preserve open space in Newton for 46 years!

The Newton Conservators

NEWSLETTER

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FARMING COMES ALIVE

Newton calls itself the “Garden City.” More than anyone in recent years, Greg Maslowe has helped the city live up to its name. Greg is the resident farmer at the Newton Angino Community Farm. Greg performs multiple tasks: raising a family, running the farm, overseeing the army of volunteers who help cultivate the farm’s produce, and working as an educator for school groups that visit and learn. Greg is not your ordinary farmer: he is at work on a doctorate at Boston University. He is literate, articulate, and unafraid to get his hands dirty. Greg was the keynote speaker at the Conservators’ annual dinner on May 30.

Greg’s topic was the backyard garden. He noted that a large space is not required for productive use, but there needs to be judicious use of space, including the choice of trees and shrubs. As an example, why not choose a pear tree that not only blooms but that also produces fruit for human use, instead of a dogwood that may be pretty but, for us, less edible?

Greg showed slides of back yards in Newton that have optimized their growing areas and produce bountiful crops. Many had a grape arbor on a wall or terraced attachment. Greg advocated planting perennials that may serve as food and also a hedge.

Greg also showed slides of the Newton Angino Community Farm operation in its first year. Greg made a “play house” for his children from green beans on a matrix structure. The play house served a dual function, with Greg’s wife, Jessica, harvesting beans for dinner.

Greg grew up in Colorado and told the group that he learned his gardening skills from his mother. The family maintained a mulch pile that was used as fertilizer before planting. Fresh vegetables were available much of the

year. Greg’s taste for quality produce prompted his choice of a farming career. After completing his doctorate, Greg will continue at the farm.



Greg and Jessica Maslowe

ENVIRONMENTALIST OF THE YEAR AWARD: DAN BRODY

Dan Brody is the Newton Conservators’ 2007 Environmentalist of the Year. The award is given to Dan this year for his vision, skill, and dedication in building and maintaining the Newton Conservators’ Web site, thereby creating an invaluable educational and informational tool for our community.



Before Dan took on the task of developing our Web site, the Conservators' activities were published primarily through our hard copy and email newsletters and were available to subscribers. Our Web site is open to everyone. Our Web site contains notices of upcoming events, trail maps and guides for those who want to explore Newton's open spaces, news about current activities, and reprints from our current and past publications. The Newton Conservators' Web site is an encyclopedia of information about the Conservators and has information on all aspects of our operations and goals. The Website has resulted in numerous inquiries on environmental topics and has led to an increase in awareness about us and in new memberships.

Dan is accomplished not only as a Web site developer but as a photographer. His and others' photographs bring the life of Newton's open spaces to anyone who comes to our site. Dan's Web site is among the most important tools for putting the people of Newton in touch with their open spaces.

**CHARLES JOHNSON
MAYNARD AWARD:
BETH SCHROEDER
AND THE
LAND MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE'S
SURVEY TEAM**

The Charles Johnson Maynard Award is given each year "to recognize efforts to improve biodiversity, habitat reclamation, and natural resource protection." It is given this year to Beth Schroeder and the Survey Team of the Land Management Committee, for their detailed study and documentation of the plants and animals that inhabit Newton's conservation lands.

As Beth explained at the annual meeting, this group has visited over 37 of Newton's parks and conservation areas during the past year for the purpose of identifying all the flora and fauna found in each open space. This information is summarized in a master list which can be seen on the Conservator's Website.

The information developed by the Survey Team is essential to future activities of the Land Management group. Proper management requires knowledge of just what is present at any location. Identification of problems – encroachments, dumping, the spread of invasives – is essential to a solution. The city is indebted to this group for the assessment of its open spaces.



Beth Schroeder (center)

**DIRECTORS' AWARD:
KATHERINE HOWARD**

A Directors' Award is given this year to Katherine Howard for her work to preserve and protect trees in Newton, and her essential work as Treasurer of the Newton Conservators. Her interest in helping to preserve the chestnut tree has resulted in an increased awareness of tree preservation. Katherine is a tireless worker on many aspects of the Newton Conservators including being in charge of our budget and payment system. Her suggestions at monthly meetings, walks and talks, and other activities have been essential to our successes.



DIRECTORS' AWARD: MARTHA HORN

A Directors' Award is given this year to Martha Horn for her continual input and activity to maintain open space in Newton. Martha is a remarkable civil servant, as she is an active conservationist within the framework of working for the City of Newton. Martha Horn has been an extremely active advocate for the proper use of Newton's open space for its residents and students. Her support for the Environmental Science Program (ESP) has been essential for its continuation.



FROM THE PRESIDENT: ANNUAL MEETING ADDRESS

Welcome to the forty-sixth annual meeting of the Newton Conservators. I want to thank all of you members and friends who are attending tonight's dinner. Special thanks to State Representative Kay Kahn, Alderman Lisle Backer, Alderman Victoria Danberg, Alderman Vern Vance, Alderman Steve Linsky, Alderman Ben Weisbuch, and Mayor David Cohen. We welcome you to our program and thank you for your assistance with various open space projects in the past and the future. We also welcome individuals from other environmental and historical groups that are attending and have cooperated and collaborated with us in the past to keep open space and conservation on the agenda in Newton.

I also want to welcome Garen Corbett and family as we dedicate this evening's Annual Dinner to his mother, Carol Corbett. The Conservators, at their last meeting, provided funds to the Newton Community Farm for a grove of trees in Carol's name. Carol thought the annual meeting renewed and re-energized Conservators for the next year's activities. Old friends, faces and networking provide the energy for continuous conservation efforts. Let us have a

moment of silence to remember Carol and her accomplishments as a Newton Conservator. A quote by Margaret Mead comes to mind, thinking of Conservator activities: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

As a group, the Conservators might be considered as a garden - especially with Greg Maslowe as our speaker this evening. Many of you might be considered as like asparagus, a perennial that continues to produce year after year. Moreover, as I learned from Greg last year, you don't have production from asparagus for about three years. This fits in nicely with new members and new board members. There is something to be gained from new members with their enthusiasm and knowledge, but they become even more important after a few years of mentoring and cultivating. Many of you might be compared to fruit trees which take a whole lot longer to develop and grow before they bear fruit and provide the backbone for the mission of the Conservators.

As a biologist, I think of you as a "garden of talented individuals," each with a particular skill or accomplishment that blends in with other Conservators. Just like a plant seed you always have had the potential for great things; it just takes the proper environment and a little nurturing to bring you up to your proper intellectual potential. A quote from Rachel Carson comes to mind: "If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow."



As Conservators we have to enlighten others about the benefits of environmental action. Individuals learn about and understand the mission and offer help in various ways. Symbolically, some plants pop up quickly, develop and produce fruiting benefits immediately, while others take a lot longer to develop (understand) and produce. Broccoli, asparagus and fruit trees are examples of seed planting that takes years to produce a useful product. This also is true with some Newton residents. All plants have the

photosynthetic ability to convert the sun's energy into carbohydrates, proteins, lipids and nucleic acids; nevertheless, there is some difficulty in obtaining the correct amount of sunlight and nutrients for proper growth for these plants. Environmental advocacy is not easy and there is no quick fix to be able to solve complex problems in a decent time interval. Both plants –and Conservators - need nurturing to fully develop their potential. This includes weeding away distractions and non beneficial activities, and also helping to stabilize the organization with proper support structures. “Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them.” (Eeyore, from A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*)

Some plants are more directed toward finding their own path for enlightenment and survival. These hardy individuals help to pave the way for others to follow into a more habitable environment. They are watched and sometimes directed into a better habitat by a careful gardener. One such Board of Directors' member comes to mind in Duane Hillis, who had the foresight to think of converting the Angino Farm back into a community farm. Duane is retiring this year as an active board member but will continue as an advisor. An appropriate quote for Duane is as follows: "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field." (Dwight Eisenhower)

In what other activities have the Conservators been participants? The TV action group has won several new awards for their nature shows on NEWTV. The addition of a Website link to view these wonderful presentations was added to our Website by Dan Brody. Crystal Lake is another topic that comes to mind, and with our support the City has requested the Community Preservation Committee (CPA) to purchase the property to provide more visual open space and recreational access to the lake and swimming area. We must not forget that it was the Conservators - in collaboration with other conservation groups - that initiated voting activities to approve the CPA for Newton. Our monthly meetings are a multitasker's delight with numerous topics brought up, and analyzed. These include discussions on Guided Walks, Environmental Lectures, Land Management, Publicity, birding activities, Habitat for Humanity, and preservation of open areas. One local preservation area has been “Dexter Woods” a parcel of wooded land on Dexter Street in Newton. Modestino Criscitiello (Cris) and his committee has been the prime mover in Dexter Woods' maintenance and preservation. (We had a tree fall down this year, and others had to be trimmed!). We have to be able to adapt to change to protect areas with indigenous flora and fauna.

“Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective” (Rachel Carson)

- *Conservators' President William Hagar*

THIS YEAR IT DIDN'T RAIN ON MOTHERS' DAY

Our May 13th Mother's Day Bird Walk in Nahanton Park drew a group of twenty-five people, including several who were beginners at the game of bird-watching. It's one of the aims of this annual outing to attract folks with limited experience who would like to learn more about “birding.” The walk is scheduled in mid-May each year to coincide with the reappearance, after months away, of many of our local breeding birds. Also we hope for views of other species stopping over briefly to feed en route to their breeding grounds farther north.

Reports from elsewhere in Eastern Massachusetts during the week before Mother's Day had not been encouraging - there had been scant movement reported from the south. I was worried that nothing much would show up on the 13th. Luckily, strong winds from the southwest on May 10th and 11th gave a big boost to flights of migrants, and by the 12th we had word from nearby birding groups of good sightings. Always most colorful, and awaited with great interest, are the numerous species of wood warblers. By mid-May most of them would be in bright breeding plumage.

In contrast to last year, the morning of Mothers' Day was sunny and clear, and by dawn good numbers of birds had already turned up in Nahanton Park. At 6:30 AM, I found numbers of warbler species feeding in the hedgerows between the lower and upper gardens. There were also other newly-arrived favorites - Baltimore Orioles, Red-winged Blackbirds and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks - singing from trees all around the park. By 8:00 AM, when our group assembled, there was bird-song all over the place! To newcomers in our group it quickly became apparent that a major skill useful for locating and identifying any bird is the ability to recognize its songs and call notes. “Listening” is as much a part of I.D.-ing a bird as “looking”.

At the outset, every other tree or shrub in the park seemed occupied by a Yellow warbler, and all listeners found its song an easy one to remember. We located two handsome

A SPRING WALK TO A VERNAL POOL

male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in the tall oaks behind the upper gardens. Their song, a little like a robin's, was poured out repeatedly by both of them, competing for the interest of a single female waiting around nearby. In contrast to the males with their black and white coloring and a bright splash of rosy red on their chests, she was brown-streaked and drab-colored, easily mistaken for an over-sized sparrow!

Seasoned members of our group – people like Haynes Miller, Alfred Scott, Sue Avery, and Jon Regosin - helped others in spotting birds and in showing how best to use binoculars in locating birds in the shrubbery or moving about in the treetops. In about two hours, as we walked through varied habitats in the park, we picked up a total of 50 different species.

Highlights for me included first-of-the-year sightings of Black-throated blue, Chestnut-sided, Black-and-white, and Northern Parula warblers. Other warblers on our list included Palm, Pine, Yellow-rumped warblers, a Common Yellowthroat, an American Redstart and a Wilson's warbler. I also had a very short glimpse of a Kentucky warbler, a species seen in only small numbers this far north. It was feeding in a cluster of low shrubbery, and typical of its secretive nature, it did not come out in the open to be seen by others. However, we were all treated to prolonged views of an Eastern Bluebird perched on an a tree branch in the open after having inspected a nesting box in the upper gardens.

At the edge of the park near the Charles River, we heard clearly the song of a Warbling Vireo from the tall poplars there. It took considerable patience (another key ingredient of bird-watching) to find him sitting high in the foliage - pale olive-gray in color, almost hidden in the leaves. It was much easier to spot an Eastern Phoebe as it sat on its nest under the eaves of the nature center. There was also a Spotted Sandpiper at the river edge, calling attention to itself by its habit – amusing to us - of continuously bobbing up and down. Other prized entries on the morning's list were a Hairy Woodpecker, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and an Orchard Oriole. We also recorded many of the expected "regulars" including Northern Cardinal, Northern Mockingbird, Common Grackle, Red-winged Blackbird, Gray Catbird, Song Sparrow, American Crow and Brown-headed Cowbird. It turned out to be a rewarding morning for all comers. Perhaps we will have some new enthusiasts added to our Newton birding group.

M.G.Criscitiello

Earth Day, in the spring sunshine, a group of about twenty people set out along the Charles River Path near Angino Farm. Our destination was a vernal pool off the Sawmill Brook Parkway. Jon Regosin, a biologist and Newton resident, was our leader. Nearing the pool, we stopped to hear a loud chorus of spring peepers resonating through the woods. Jon put on his waders and handed nets to his assistants. Our lesson began.

A vernal pool forms a shallow, natural depression in which the water level fluctuates through the seasons, sometimes drying up completely by late summer. As fish generally cannot survive in such an environment, the pool is teeming with other forms of wildlife, creating a unique habitat. In the Northeastern U.S., snowmelt and spring rains provide enough water for frogs, toads, and salamanders to breed. The lack of fish also means that insects and other invertebrates can spend some or all of their life cycle in the pool.



We saw eggs of the spotted salamander, the green frog, and the wood frog. The youngest members of our group explored samples of pool water and were delighted by the interesting creatures to be found. Fairy shrimp, dragonfly larvae, caddisfly larvae, aquatic beetles like water boatmen, predacious diving beetles and backswimmers, and mollusks like fingernail clams and planorbid snails were all on display.

By midsummer, the frog tadpoles and salamander larvae will have developed and migrated out of the pool to upland areas, joining other adults in woodland soil and leaf litter. The fairy shrimp will have laid eggs in the mud where they will remain through drought and winter to hatch the next spring. These are the obligate species of a vernal pool; they rely on this habitat for all their life cycle. Some obligate species of vernal pools, such as the blue-spotted

salamander and the Eastern spadefoot toad, are on the Federal Endangered Species List.

Vernal pools are common in Massachusetts, but such a precious habitat is increasingly vulnerable as more land becomes developed. A certification program of the state aims to protect vernal pools. About 3,000 have been certified. To achieve certification, several criteria must be met, including proof of obligate species and lack of fish. Certification protects the pools and a 100-foot buffer zone from the boundary of the pool under the Wetlands Protection Act. Ideally, the buffer zone should be even larger, to protect the upland areas where amphibians live for most of their life cycle. Therefore, more land protection and conservation restrictions are needed for the forested upland adjacent to pools. Newton has six certified vernal pools, at Cold Spring Park, Webster Woods, and Dolan Pond.

At the end of our stay, the samples of pool water were returned to their rightful place. As we walked back along the path, the sounds of the spring peeper chorus were replaced by birdsong. We left enriched by the beauty and diversity of the life we had seen.

- *Octo Barnett*

DEXTER ROAD

In 2004, Mrs. Carol Fine-Friedman sold her house in Newtonville and graciously turned over to the Newton Conservators a parcel which lay behind it. This was done with the agreement that this wooded slope would remain in its natural state as conservation land. It consists of a fairly steep north-facing hillside, extending downward from her former residence to the level of Dexter Road below, across the road from houses and the Laundry Brook. She had left this landscape undisturbed for many years for her own enjoyment and that of her neighbors.

A study by the Land Management Committee's Survey Team revealed that among the trees on the site are sugar and red maples, mockernut hickory, European beech, and red ashes, a single, small American chestnut, and many Norway maples. There is considerable variety among the wildflower population: wild sarsaparilla, jack-in-the-pulpit, wood aster, jewelweed, Indian pipe, and common yellow sorrel, all of them native plants. Also noted were more recently introduced species including garlic mustard, yarrow, woodruff, celandine, orange day-lily, coral bells, and yucca. There are at least four types of native fern.

In agreement with Mrs. Fine-Friedman's, we plan to leave this hillside in a natural state, with no attempt to alter its character in a major way. However, we do plan to introduce some additional native species appropriate for the habitat, including shrubs such as lowbush blueberry, hazelnut, black huckleberry, mountain laurel, and maple-leaf viburnum. Also we believe that some of the following wildflowers might be good candidates: pink lady slipper, tick-trefoils, Canada mayflower, starflower, and wild oats. Braken fern is another native species that could adapt well.

We will increase the diversity of plants and enhance the beauty and holding quality of the undergrowth. The thick canopy overhead, provided by the tall maples and oaks, blocks sunlight from reaching the ground. It will be necessary to remove maple saplings that are rising among the older trees. The ground beneath them at present is a somewhat barren forest floor, lacking many of the usual soil-retaining plants necessary to prevent erosion on steeper portions of the slope.

Newton's Tree Warden, Marc Welch, has sent his team to clear debris and overhanging limbs of trees along the six foot strip of city land on our side of Dexter Road. Recently, N-Star crews have come by to take out trees and limbs interfering with the telephone and electric wires running along Dexter Road, through the woods up toward Prospect Park. We believe this had greatly reduced the danger of trees falling during storms and damaging parked cars or other property nearby.

This summer we hope to initiate our plan to remove many of the invasive plants and to substitute natives. We look forward to support from our immediate neighbors on Dexter Road, and we hope to involve a few Newton North High School students from the Environmental Science Program in this work. Our Dexter Woods site could evolve into an outdoor classroom for students interested in ecology and natural history. Mr. Zachary Snow and Ms. Andy Dannenberg, members of the science faculty, have expressed interest in having some of their students participate in a study of this sort.

Dexter Woods is one of only two conservation parcels the Newton Conservators actually own outright, and since it lies in a busy neighborhood, we have had to face new responsibilities. In one storm last year, the limb from a tall tree fell across the road, damaging an automobile. Recently another aging tree fell across a neighbor's line, leaving part of its trunk in her yard. Backup from a sewer line running beneath our property caused an unpleasant spill-over into Dexter Road. This required scurrying around to get help from the city sewer crew. They found that tree roots had blocked the drainage line.

We have made a big effort to keep ahead of these problems and to maintain a happy relationship with nearby neighbors on Dexter Road, hoping they, too, can enjoy the beauty of this very small but quite beautiful piece of natural land. With the present-day pattern of large, new houses built on similar pieces of property, we hope that other land owners might think favorably of the idea of transforming plots like ours into miniature conservation areas.

- M.G. "Cris" Criscitiello
Co Chair, Land Management Committee

A WALK IN THE WOODS

A walk in the woods with the Conservators' Land Management Group is not a fast hike. It is not even a stroll. Every plant, tree, shrub, and wildflower is a chance to stop and examine, to see what nature has put somewhere. The Land Management Committee is the Conservators' fastest-growing committee. On a good day when the weather is right, five or more of its sixteen members will gather at one of Newton's open spaces and head into the field.

Led by Beth Schroeder and Cris Criscitiello, the group will stop, examine, consult any of various field guides, draw on the expertise of the members, and make an inventory. The group has inventoried plants and animals at 39 conservation sites around the city, with an eye to evaluating the biodiversity of each location. At our Dexter Road site, which is owned by the Conservators, the group has prepared a list of which invasive shrubs and trees to remove and which native plants to promote. At Dexter, invasive Norway maples are beginning to shade out other species. With the removal of Norway maples, Dexter Road will become a better home for the native sugar maples, American elms, and oaks that are already there.

At Nahanton Park off Nahanton Street at the Charles River on a cool winter day, Beth Schroeder goes first to a stand of what are one of the woods' dominant species, the oak. "This could be a red oak. Or a white oak. Or a black oak," she says. How does she know it's an oak? After all, it's leafless. "There are a lot of ways," she says. She picks up a dead leaf from the ground.

"The white oak has leaves with rounded lobes. The red oak has sharp, bristle-pointed lobes. What do you think it is?"

"Trick question," says a pupil. "I'll bet it's black."

"It could be. It can be difficult to tell red and black oaks apart, because they interbreed. You can often tell the black oak because it has a yellow or orange inner bark that you can see between the furrows of the outer bark. Also, you always need to look at more than one indicator before you make an identification."

Red, white, or black: they're all native, and all beneficial. In the fall, the northern flicker, red-headed woodpecker, white-tailed deer, and squirrels fatten up on the acorns. Schroeder makes notes in her inventory notebook. When she's not volunteering for the Conservators, Beth works as a garden designer. All this knowledge is background to the choices she makes when working with clients so that their yards can be both attractive and nature-friendly.

Up the hill is a stand of birches sprouting from a crack in an old asphalt parking lot that is still in place. "It could be a gray or a white birch," says Beth. "You can tell by the bark. Gray birch bark is chalky white, and it rarely peels. White birch bark has black lines and it peels. This one's gray." More notes.

Florrie Funk has found a buckthorn grove. Buckthorns are invasive. They were brought to New England to make hedges. Now, they've gone wild. "They start like this," says Florrie, "and then they spread and spread." They have spread here. The understory is full of them: buckthorn after buckthorn. They are in the disturbed area near the old parking lot, and they are along a dirt road deeper in the woods. "Give them time, and they will take over. They will make a thick growth nothing can penetrate."

"How do you get rid of them?"

"Cut buckthorn off," says Florrie, "and it'll grow back with six trunks, not one. You need to get them by the roots." The Conservators have invested in a weed wrench.

Past the buckthorns and birches, the land opens out into a field. Red cedars are springing up here. Red cedars are safe from deer browsing, and they are great habitat for birds, for food and nesting. The field itself is mostly little bluestem grass, with other things taking root in patches: a clump of huckleberry, raspberry canes, and wild cherries with black galls. Florrie has eyes for what most of us miss and a knowledge of what she is seeing. "An insect invades this twig, and the tree itself makes the gall." The gall is about the size of a marble. It is tan and light weight.

In a couple of weeks, say Beth and Florrie, the field will be the scene for woodcocks in their mating season. The males come out at dusk and start their pattern of calling and

display. Then they fly up into the sky, circle around, and drop back to earth again.

From the field we head into the woods. Here we find hickory, white pines, pitch pines, and oaks. Plenty of oaks. A big, old trunk on the ground is rotting, going back to earth. Another tree that grew as two trunks has come down, one trunk falling east, the other west. "It still has leaves," says Beth, "and the break is fresh. It came down this year."

Along the fallen trunk, Florrie finds small bore holes that a faster-paced hiker would never see. The holes were made by either a woodpecker or an insect. They, too, look fresh, and they are all along the trunk. Also on the trunk are tiny, white mushrooms. "They're soft," says Funk. She picks one off and examines the gills. More notes for Beth's notebook. Farther along, we find locusts and a stand of what may be aspens. That stays out of the notebook, pending more certain identification. We come to a tree with different bark. "Elm," says Florrie. "Everyone thinks that the elm is gone. But they are out here." This one is young, like most of the growth here, not the towering tree of a virgin forest. At least in winter, nothing about this one said it was about to die.

Coming out of the woods, we follow the trail through sumac. Birds love sumac as food. It makes a tea. And people love the fall color. "This one's a staghorn sumac," says Florrie. "Feel the stems. They've got fuzzy hairs like velvet, like the antlers of a deer."

In the field, the sky starts to sprinkle. It has been holding off. We have been two hours on a loop through one side of Nahanton Woods, and it feels more like minutes. There is so much to learn.

Up ahead, by the cars, Beth opens a different notebook and shows us what she has designed: plantings for the circle in the driveway. The Parks Department has a grant, and in the spring, new native plants will go in. Beth envisions American hornbeam, shadblow, winterberry, spicebush, and mountain laurel around a spruce that is already there. Witch hazel, fragrant low-growing sumac, and clethra will be added to the park entry. The sign at Nahanton Street will be re-positioned, too, so that traffic can see it better. The city makes it easy for visitors: good parking in a lot by the river. If you're lucky, you'll be here on a day when you can join Land Management in the field.

- Eric Reenstierna

KEEPING OUR PARKS FREE OF MESS

Our year-long survey of the Flora and Fauna in Newton's Parks and Conservation areas yielded lots of pleasant surprises, with the discovery of several unusual shrubs and trees and many interesting birds, ferns, and wildflowers. You can find extensive lists of what we saw by checking our Website at www.Newtonconservators.org. On the Home Page, look for the "Inventory of Plants and Animals found in Newton's Natural Areas."

However, it was disappointing to find, in more than a few places, sites where dumping of trash and yard waste had occurred – everything from piles of cut limbs and bunches of twigs to pieces of broken furniture, paint cans and old tires. There were plastic bags, discarded wrappers, and soda cans dropped helter-skelter by thoughtless people. It was also evident that some owners of houses abutting parks, aqueducts or conservation lands are accustomed to tossing piles of cut grass, leaves, and other trimmings onto city-owned property. Aside from spoiling the natural beauty of a wild area, this type of dumping may provide an avenue for introducing invasive plant and tree species.



At soccer or baseball fields, we often found empty plastic water bottles on the ground around benches or tossed into wooded areas nearby. It's obvious that most teams clean up after their games, but we have noticed trash of this sort left behind in places like Lyons Field, Nahanton Park, and the Hunnewell Playground.

The public garden plots in Nahanton Park provide great opportunities for many folks in the city to grow vegetables and flowers, but we noted piles of trash accumulating near a number of the sites. These piles include not only material for composting but also plastic pails, broken folding

chairs, and old tires. Some gardeners have assembled makeshift storage sheds outside the designated areas, with accumulation of equipment and debris around them. Also much of the homemade fencing erected around individual plots is falling apart. (Some cities have a single fence only, extending around the entire public garden area, protecting against deer, rabbits, etc. and making access to each plot much easier.)



Of course most of us *do* care about these problems of dumping or disregard for proper use of open lands, and we make an effort to clean up these messes. In many Newton villages people get together every spring for a clean-up operation. This is one of the major functions of groups like the Friends of Hemlock Gorge, of Dolan Pond, or of Nahanton Park. As individuals we can also help throughout the year by notifying City Hall of any dumping or misuse we discover on our individual walks.

When you see people in the act of throwing trash or junk on city-owned land, it would be important *not* to attempt to confront them yourself. Instead you could make note of any information that might be useful to city officials in dealing with the problem. If you see trashing or dumping taking place on Park or Recreation Land, you can call the Parks and Rec. Dept. at 617 796-1000 and ask for the official in charge of the particular park or playing field involved.

If the problem involves any of Newton's Conservation Areas, you can phone the office of the Conservation Agent at 617 796-1134. In either case, a police inspector will be assigned to check out the problem. It would help to make note of the street address of any abutter who appears to be encroaching on conservation land or the license plate of anyone clearly involved in dumping.

- *Cris Criscitiello*
Co-Chair, Land Management Committee

REVITALIZING SPRING GARDEN BEDS

Last year rainy weather kept me from working on plant divisions and rearranging my perennial beds as I typically do each spring. By June, sunny days reappeared but my schedule didn't allow working outside and I had to accept my garden as is for the remainder of the growing season.

I can't imagine that we will have two months of rain again this spring, so I'm making plans. Each perennial bed and border must be reviewed. Reading favorite books and looking at plant catalogs adds to my desire to improve what's there. Making a wish list of new plants while away dreary winter days. Drawing new plans is almost as much fun as digging new beds, and a lot less effort.

When I first planted my two abutting perennial beds, which I named the horseshoe bed and quarter-moon bed, I decided that the quarter-moon – which creates an enclosed garden view from the screened porch – would be a prairie bed; and the horseshoe – which surrounds a circular lawn – would be filled with mounded plants. Initially they were both successful. But that was years ago, and now they need to be revitalized.

Five years ago, the quarter-moon was cut into a sloping lawn between my screened porch and the neighbor's property. A fence runs along the property line, and a row of shady basswoods, choke cherries and the occasional dogwood create morning shade. The quarter-moon was made by flattening the lawn in front of the screened porch, creating a tilted bed that allows for a raised grassy path up above. I removed the tree roots from the rich soil, and filled the quarter-moon with fresh prairie seedlings. A dense wall of fall-blooming plants grew so tremendously tall and thick that the view of the neighbor's property was completely blocked. Because the bed was only seven feet wide, it looked like a prairie in a teacup. Not exactly what I had in mind.

When I dig here now I find the soil is no longer soft and easy to turn because tree roots have found my gardening plot and reestablished themselves. Many of the original perennials became bullies that pushed out less aggressive plants. Foxgloves spread throughout the middle of the bed and obedience plants excluded everything in their path. Dark holes appeared in the middle of the bed when the cimicifuga foliage burned out mid-summer. Yellow and purple coneflowers and coreopsis reseed ambling this way and that. Meadow rue had never been thrilled in this location but survived year after year. Wild yarrow

remained as a lovely accent, even while it was crowded to the rear of the bed.

I have decided to find a shadier section of the garden for my withering cimicifuga. Structural plants need to be added to my quarter-moon perennial bed to create a variety of eye-catching shapes. Adding tall plants such as Culver's root, gooseneck loosestrife and panicum grasses at intervals will break up the monotonous height similarities. One large specimen of Joe-Pye-weed will serve as a focal point in the fall. Sedum 'Autumn Joy', Siberian iris and a fresh stand of bee-balm will add mid-height structure and missing varieties of plant shapes. Low edging plants such as bergenia, lamb's ears, perennial geraniums and carex 'Ice Dance' will add soft border edging. Excess foxgloves and obedience plants relocated into the horseshoe bed will add cohesiveness to the overall look of the garden.

Two large groupings of peonies are currently dominating the horseshoe bed. Tall grass Panicum virgatum 'Haense Hermes' is a great success, catching light rays and showing off red-edged blades. An ever expanding wave of iris 'Watercolor' fills the mid-region on one side, and the horseshoe's back edges contain a charming grouping of wild geraniums. Poppies and bleeding hearts bloom in early June, but disappear in summer and leave gaping holes. Heuchera 'Purple Palace' is an eye-catching accent in the front, but it gets too little water and too much sun, drying out and burning the leaves by mid-summer.

By adding structure and variety to the horseshoe bed, I plan to add both visual interest and beauty. A second Joe-Pye-weed and several new tall grasses will give height and definition. Culver's root and gooseneck loosestrife added at intervals will create continuity with the quarter-moon bed. Sedum 'Autumn Joy' planted under bleeding hearts should fill in after bleeding hearts have faded.

Lamb's ears, foxgloves and a large sedum specimen can replace long-suffering heuchera as a central accent. Black-eyed-Susans, rose champions and Siberian iris will add variety, with Russian sage and meadowsweet as higher fillers. A low grass named little blue stem and thread-leaf coreopsis will work as soft lower fillers in the drier side of the bed. Pinks, bergenia, perennial geraniums, carex 'Ice Dance', groundcover sedums and moss phlox will be added to soften the edges.

My tools are sharpened and I'm ready to start.

- Beth Schroeder

NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE

For many of us Summer's arrival brings happy childhood memories of the joy of playing outdoors, when we may have experienced the wonder of seeing pollywogs in ponds, building tree forts, exploring creeks, running through a grassy field or simply listening to birds. Sadly, however, kids playing outdoors are becoming all too rare in today's society. Distractions of all sorts keep children inside, wedded to computer games or television. Modern insecurities also play a role in keeping kids indoors.

Author Richard Louv wrote in his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, that "by the 1990's the radius around the home where children are allowed to roam on their own had shrunk to a ninth of what it had been in 1970." He points out that today, during a typical week in the US, only 6% of children ages nine to thirteen play outside on their own.

Indoor-bound children too often end up with symptoms of obesity, stress and hyperactivity which could be alleviated by the simple application of experiencing the natural world, according to many studies cited by Louv.

This spring, the DCR introduced their own *No Child Left Inside* initiative in Massachusetts. The Great Park Pursuit is a team challenge adventure activity that will connect families with the outdoors and their state park resources. Teams are challenged to visit different state parks over a six-week period as part of a fun Massachusetts State Parks Family Adventure! Teams will hike to amazing views, learn to fish, discover secrets of the past, ride a horse drawn wagon, learn about birds of prey and even how cows are milked. Complete details are available at <http://www.greatparkpursuit.org/>

- Mike Ryan, Executive Director
Friends of the Middlesex Fells Reservation

NEW BOARD MEMBER: OCTO BARNETT

The Conservators are pleased to welcome Octo Barnett as a new member of the Board of Directors. Octo has been involved with several community efforts over the past few decades to preserve unique open spaces in Newton. He and his wife have lived in Newton for over 40 years; their children all attended the Newton schools. Octo enjoys hiking, tennis, canoeing, nature walks, and cross-country skiing. Octo works in information technology at Massachusetts General Hospital.

MISSION

Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open space for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters.

A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land, buildings and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, educational, recreational, literary and other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare of the people of our community.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 46 years ago in June 1961.

The **Newton Conservators Newsletter**© has been published five times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc. This year, we have moved to a four-issue schedule. Issues will be published in June, September, December, and March. Deadlines for these issues are the fifth of each month in which an issue is scheduled to be published.

We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to ericreen@tiac.net. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

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**If you haven't paid your membership dues for 2007, now is the time. Please renew today!
And consider a tax-deductible gift to support our work!**



*Celebrating 46 years
of open space advocacy
in Newton*

Newton Conservators Membership Form

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- YES, I'd like to start/renew my one-year membership with the Newton Conservators to help preserve open space in Newton. I'll receive informative newsletters and emails and be invited to participate in guided tours of local conservation areas, lectures, and other programs and activities.
- I'd like to make an additional tax-deductible contribution to support the work of the Newton Conservators: \$_____
- Please do not share my name and address with other groups.

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

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June/July/August 2007 Newsletter



The Newton Conservators **NEWSLETTER**

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