



**NEWTON
CONSERVATORS**

SPRING ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

Newton's land trust working to preserve open space since 1961

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Conservation in Newton: The Conservation Commission

By Jennifer Steel



PHOTOS: DAN BRODY



Newton Conservation Areas from left to right: Flowed Meadow, Helen Heyn Riverway and Dolan Pond

This story doesn't have a villain bent on destroying a kingdom or a fair maiden in distress, but the story of the evolution of Massachusetts's conservation commissions is an interesting, though an admittedly slow-paced, tale that has unfolded over the past six decades. Commissions have evolved over the years and are now bodies with broad regulatory powers that are a key element in the Commonwealth's framework of protective laws and programs. Indeed, Massachusetts has been at the cutting edge of environmental protection and has engaged its citizens in a rather unique way.

The Commonwealth invented the municipal conservation commission in 1957 with passage of the Conservation Commission Act (MGL Ch. 40 §8C), which authorized each city and town in Massachusetts to establish a locally appointed municipal agency "for the promotion and development of the natural resources and for the protection of watershed resources of said city or town." Specifically, conservation commissions are charged with (1) planning for natural resource protection, (2) coordinating with other groups with similar goals, (3) acquiring important land and water areas (in fee or through restrictions), and (4) managing these properties (to "maintain, improve, protect,

limit the future use of or otherwise conserve and properly utilize open spaces in land and water areas within its city or town."

Conservation commissions are made up of volunteer citizens. Some commissions have multiple paid professional staff; some do not have any clerical assistance. Newton has a commission with 7 appointed members, alternate members, and one professional staff member. Newton's Conservation Office is part of the Planning Department (located in the basement level of City Hall). Newton's Senior Environmental Planner, Jennifer Steel, serves as staff to the Conservation Commission and can be reached at (617) 796-1134 or at jsteel@newtonma.gov.

The Newton Conservation Commission meets every three weeks on Thursday evenings beginning at 7:00 pm, usually in Room 204 of City Hall. Conservation Commission meeting dates, agendas, and materials are all available on the Newton Conservation Commission website. At its meetings, the Commission reviews and votes on wetland permit applications, issues of land management, and administrative issues. The Commission welcomes guests and interested members of the public to its meetings.

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Current Newton Conservation Commission members are

- Ira Wallach, Chairman
- Susan Lunin, Vice Chair
- Judy Hepburn, Clerk
- Dan Green
- Norm Richardson
- Jane Sender
- Barbara Newman
- Jeff Zabel, Associate Member

Planning

The Newton Conservation Office plays a lead role in creating and updating the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan (see below).

Land Management

Under MGL Chapter 40, Section 8C, "The Conservation Commission Act," conservation commissions can acquire and manage land. It is up to a land donor or the City at the time of acquisition to determine which City body should be given custody of the parcel. Natural land with watershed or ecological value is usually given to the care and custody of a conservation commission while more managed or manicured lands are usually given to a parks department. Sometimes, however, conservation commissions have custody of land with buildings, parking lots, roads, and other "improvements", and parks departments have custody of natural open spaces.

The Newton Conservation Commission currently controls 20 conservation areas totaling over 280 acres. It is responsible for managing these lands for ecological health and/or passive recreation. Fourteen of the parcels have trails that are open to the public, with a total of over 9.5 miles of trails. Locations of the parcels and individual parcel maps are available on the Conservation Commission's website. Residents are encouraged to explore these natural gems that are scattered across Newton. You will be surprised just how quickly the pace of urban life slips away as you enter one of these wooded gems; you may soon forget that traffic, work deadlines, or home stresses exist as you watch the stream dance along, listen to the wind in the trees, watch a chickadee enter its nest cavity, or smell the rich sweetness of new growth bursting forth from the brown leaves of last year.

Wetland Regulation

In 1972, as the municipal focal point for environmental protection, conservation commissions were given



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Kennard Park

responsibility for administering the state Wetlands Protection Act (MGL Ch. 131 §40). The Wetland's Protection Act is Mass DEP's law, implemented almost exclusively by local conservation commissions. Conservation commissions' role in community government expanded enormously as they suddenly became a major permitting authority, responsible for a very complex set of environmental regulations. (This was, to be sure, a huge unfunded mandate, but it gave each municipality the opportunity to take charge of its own development and natural resource protection!) Conservation commissions' wetland regulatory responsibilities have continued to grow with the addition of new laws and regulations, such as the Rivers Protection Act and stormwater permitting requirements. Now, any work that would alter vegetation, grading, structures, or drainage within 100 feet of a wetland or within 200 feet of a perennial stream must be permitted by a conservation commission—regardless of whether it is on public or private land. Under the Wetlands Protection Act, commissions across the state process thousands of applications every year. Newton processes roughly 40 wetland applications per year, then monitors those projects through to completion. (The Newton Conservation Commission website has lots of information about wetland regulation and permitting and has links to useful maps showing estimated wetland resource areas.)

In 1966, Article 89 of the state Constitution, known as the Home Rule Amendment, was adopted. It allowed cities and towns to adopt laws "not in direct conflict with the General Laws of the state." It is the source of the power of communities to create charters, but it is principally used to adopt bylaws and ordinances. Under Article 89, many commissions have local non-zoning bylaws or ordinances protecting wetlands, well-heads, land. As of 2012, 30% of Massachusetts's 351 communities had adopted wetlands bylaws or ordinances. Newton has a floodplain ordinance, but no other wetland protection ordinance.

Community Preservation Committee

For municipalities that have adopted the Community Preservation Act structure, conservation commissions' obligations expanded yet again since conservation commissions must have representation on their Community Preservation Committee (CPC) and consult over proposed projects. Commissions sometimes end up with land management responsibility for newly acquired lands. Newton has an active CPC.

The Conservation Commission: Conclusion

So, Massachusetts really puts its citizens in the driver's seat (albeit without funding or prior training!) and entrusts them to administer a very powerful set of environmental laws and regulations. Conservation commissioners need to embrace a very steep learning curve to understand the hundreds of pages of regulations that they must administer, and they must engage in land protection and management (and the inherently politically complex job of resource regulation and allocation!).

The Newton Conservation Office

The Senior Environmental Planner, as part of the Planning Department, undertakes a number of other efforts on behalf of Newton.

- **Advocating for expanded and improved trails.** For example, the Senior Environmental Planner is trying to capitalize on trail opportunities on state Department of Conservation and Recreation land along the Charles River.
- **Assisting with the planning for enhancements to the city's stormwater management system.** The Senior Environmental Planner is part of the City's planning team. Since so much of our wetland areas have been filled and so many of our streams have been piped, there is limited opportunity for stormwater to get into the soil, be cleaned by nature, recharge our rivers during dry periods, and mitigate flooding episodes. Hopefully planning efforts will allow for long-term improvements to the system.
- **Undertaking public education.** The Senior Environmental Planner is creating fliers, web information, and public presentations to help residents understand the opportunities for and benefits of things such as green lawn care, rain gardens, tree preservation, use of native species in landscaping, and low impact development strategies.
- **Coordinating with local conservation organizations.** There are many organizations in the

area dedicated to issues of conservation. The Senior Environmental Planner coordinates with groups such as: the Newton Conservators, "Friends of ..." groups, the Charles River Watershed Association, and the Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation.

- **Holding conservation restrictions.** The Newton Conservation Commission "holds" many conservation restrictions (CRs) on privately owned open space that has been deed restricted to remain open space in perpetuity. The Senior Environmental Planner helps maintain the database of CRs.
- **Overseeing the City's Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP).** A planning mandate was one of the primary reasons for the creation of conservation commissions, long before wetlands regulation began. In this planning capacity, the Senior Environmental Planner helped update the 2014 OSRP.

Conclusion

With all of these obligations, the Conservation Office is a very busy place but a truly wonderful one, where planning and regulation meet real-life development projects, where individuals can help to shape the way in which the City grows, where every encounter is an opportunity for education and engagement, and where I, for one, am always reminded of the most important things in life: the health of this planet, an educated and engaged citizenry, and the opportunities for kids to enjoy the wonders of nature... right outside their homes. ■

Do you have a few hours to devote to a good cause each week?

Would you like to learn more about Newton's conservation lands?

As you can tell by reading her article, Jennifer Steel, the Senior Environmental Planner for Newton and city staff member for the Conservation Commission, oversees many tasks. She is looking for an assistant to help her with administrative tasks for several hours (or more) each week.

Some of the tasks can be done from home, and others require going to the office in City Hall.

For more information, call Jennifer at 617-796-1134 or write to her at jsteel@newtonma.gov.

President's Message

We broke the record for the most snow in any winter season! Now, it's time to welcome spring and all the outdoor activities that come with it. Along with the brighter evenings and warmer temperatures, some great Newton Conservators events are on their way:

- 🌿 **Invasive-plant pulls at three sites for Newton Serves on April 26**
- 🌿 **The Annual Meeting and Dinner on May 6**
- 🌿 **June Doin' — our new multi-event day on June 6**
- 🌿 **Walks led by experienced members throughout the season**

Look for information about all those events in this issue of the newsletter, and then check for updates in three different sites: our website, our E-Bulletin sent by email, and our Facebook page.

Our website, maintained by Dan Brody, contains updated listings of our events as well as maps and helpful information about all conservation areas in Newton. If you have any questions, you can reach Dan at websitemgr@NewtonConservators.org.

Ted Kuklinski regularly sends out E-Bulletins with information about events that come up in between issues of the newsletter and, sometimes, events sponsored by other organizations, for which we don't have space in the newsletter. Sign up to receive the E-Bulletin at EmailList@NewtonConservators.org

In the past two months, newcomer Mat Calabro has revived our Facebook page, and it contains reminders of events and is a good source for last-minute changes and other information. Follow us on Facebook!

With all these events on the schedule, we need more volunteer help! If you read about an event that appeals to you and you have some free time to help us, please call or send us an email.

In addition to the invasive-plant pulls for Newton Serves Day, we would like to schedule more pulls. Usually, we work in Cold Spring Park and Hammond Pond in addition to the pulls on Newton Serves Day. We also would like to remove invasive plants along the street at Ordway Park and along Dexter Road. Katherine Howard, our invasive-plant-puller in chief is taking a brief leave to care for her father, so we could use some extra help this year. We need a couple of people who can recognize the plants listed at the top of our listing of pulls at the end of this newsletter (or who are willing to learn about them) to lead a group of workers for one morning or afternoon. To volunteer, contact me at President@NewtonConservators.org.

We look forward to seeing you this spring!

Beth Wilkinson

2015 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

*If you haven't renewed your membership already, now is the time.
And consider a gift for a conservation-minded friend.*

Visit our website at www.newtonconservators.org if you wish to renew your membership online.



PHOTOS, LEFT TO RIGHT: PETE GILMORE, SUZETTE BARBIER

Waban Hill Reservoir



Robert J. DeRubeis
Commissioner



In this time when the construction of multiple-unit residential projects dots the landscape, Newton was presented with a unique opportunity. The city had an option to purchase a diminishing resource, a parcel of open space. Not just any open space, but one with a scenic vista and a water element as well. Seeing this inimitable prospect, the city and in particular the Chestnut Hill neighborhood mobilized quickly to work on a plan to acquire the Waban Hill Reservoir, which had been recently decommissioned by the MWRA. The state legislature authorized the sale of the property to the City of Newton with the stipulation that it be used for open space and recreation.

The Waban Hill Reservoir Advisory Group (WHRAG) organized in January 2013 with the intention of identifying some long-term uses for the site. The group looked at the site with a vision for not only the neighborhood but also the city as a whole. There was consensus that the water element and its location along the Marathon route made for a unique opportunity that would allow many individuals to enjoy this urban oasis. The short-term vision after acquisition would be to open access and allow for walking and other passive activities as a master plan for the site would be developed. Some thoughts for the longer term that were envisioned by the WHRAG were the incorporation of a pre-school imaginative play area with a water element; an informal amphitheater; terracing of the berms; public art displays; seating at various locations and the possibility of an apple orchard.

Once the acquisition is complete, the property would fall under the jurisdiction of the Parks & Recreation Department. Our initial work would be to perform site restoration, which would make the site accessible to the public. There is a fifteen-foot wide path that traverses the entire perimeter of the reservoir. We would want to stabilize and more clearly define the path with the addition of stone dust, as well as placing an ornamental fence along the interior of the pathway to act as a safety barrier to those utilizing the path. To enhance the integrity of the dam, there is a need to remove the vegetation that currently inhabits the granite embankment of the drumlin. As part of ongoing maintenance, the department will mow the grass along the bermed perimeter and to the rear of the property. During the development of the master plan, it is our intention to preserve the area to a level that will allow the public to have access to the site, affording them the opportunity to enjoy the scenic vistas this property has to offer.

After much hard work and perseverance by many people, the vision became a reality when, on March 16, 2015, the Board of Aldermen voted 23-0 to acquire the Waban Hill Reservoir. This significant milestone is not an ending; it is a gateway to the beginning of an exciting journey to create a space that will be another gem that the City of Newton has to offer to its residents.

Robert J. DeRubeis
Commissioner
Parks & Recreation

Our deepest sympathy on the loss of Lucy, his wife of 69 years, to Lawrence Kaplan,
a longtime, valued member of the Newton Conservators board.

Food Waste Without Guilt

by Andreae Downs, Director, Wastewater Advisory Committee to the MWRA

It was tough this winter to reach the compost heap.

Even for someone who grew up in a New England wood-stove-heated home, like me, cutting through the 6-8 foot snow bank to get to the nicely cooking compost piles just became too difficult around mid-February.

But because we are in the MWRA sewer service system, we have an almost-as-good alternative, and it works 24/7, even in the dead of winter: the food grinder.

Yes, that “electric pig” you may have installed in your kitchen sink is one of the better alternatives to throwing organic waste in the trash.

As you may know, in Newton, our trash (blue bin) goes to a waste-to-energy incinerator. But food waste is one of the heavier items in our blue bins, and it takes a lot of diesel to truck it to Millbury.

But organics that go down the kitchen drain? They flow through our gravity sewers to the treatment plant at Deer Island. There, the solids are disinfected (twice) and then sent to those massive, egg-shaped digesters.

And that’s why it’s better to grind organics than trash them. Because those digesters take the energy in your carrot peels and grapefruit rinds and create methane gas to power the plant (about 25% of Deer Island’s power is renewable—mostly this methane). They also create clean water and a high-quality fertilizer (known as Bay State Fertilizer www.mwra.com/03sewer/html/baystate.htm).

Of course, disinfecting your potato peels before digesting them isn’t really necessary. If we could separate food waste (pre-digested food) from post-digested food and feed it directly to the digesters, it would yield more energy. That’s why the MWRA is looking to try co-digestion, where food waste from large producers is fed directly to the digesters. If the pilot gets off the ground, and is successful, Deer Island Director Dave Duest figures nearly 70% of power used on the island could be renewable. (Some plants with co-digestion have reached 100% but don’t have to pump flow up to the plant. Deer Island does.)



Some caveats:

- If you don’t want a sewer backup, then fats, oils and grease (FOG)—and any bones or skin—should not be part of what you send down the drain. That burns nicely at the incinerator. In fact, I’ve cut down on my hand-washing time by wiping greasy pans and pots out with paper napkins (I use the extras always included in take-out meals) and tossing the greasy paper in the trash.
- Eggshells and coffee grounds don’t digest. The MWRA has to screen them out, and then they end up in a landfill. I stored these in my compost bucket until the thaw. They are really good for the garden.



- Those plastic produce stickers: They don’t compost, and they don’t digest. Furthermore, they aren’t all screened out in the treatment process—they are one of the few things found at the Deer Island outfall. Best to remove them before grinding, or they may wind up in the fish.
- And don’t do this outside of a home. If you run a restaurant or cafeteria, you need an organic-waste hauler—big kitchens produce more solids than a home kitchen and are often the cause of sewer blockages.

So until the thaw, I gleefully ground our food waste rather than feeling guilty about not digging out the compost heap. I will miss the extra food for the flowers but not the additional back pain. And now you can, too. ■

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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FOR MORE GEORGE MCLEAN'S PHOTOS: WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/SEARCH/MORE/?Q=GEORGE+MCLEAN&INIT=PUBLIC

FOR MORE JOSH BRIDGER PHOTOS: WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/JOSH.BRIDGER.587?FREF=TS

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.

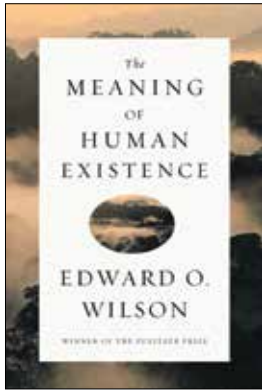
Prior to joining The Trustees in 2014, Rob was Director of Protection & Policy for the Massachusetts Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, where he worked for 14 years

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

B O O K C O R N E R

The Meaning of Human Existence by E. O. Wilson



If you would like to consider the origins of human social behavior and what human existence means, E.O.Wilson will take you on an intriguing trip through evolution, scientific disputes between academics, speculation about extra-terrestrial life, and what we can learn from socialized ant colonies to give you his answers.

His book *The Meaning of Human Existence* is a relatively short but methodically reasoned discussion of how he has thought about these questions and why he believes that the humanities hold the key. He intertwines the science and the philosophy in a persuasive and engaging way.

Along the way in his explanation, he writes about the consequences of the accelerating pace of the collapse of biodiversity, the basis of spirituality, how genes and culture influence human nature, and free will.

He discusses the development of consciousness in humans in connection with the physical increase of brain size in pre-human ancestors over three million years, and the rise of tribes and culture.

His final chapter includes an impassioned defense of evolution as a fundamental process of the universe. He believes an opinion that denies evolution is not a “conception of reality forged by evidence and logical judgment” and that such an opinion places an enormous cost on society as a whole.

Wilson argues that scientific knowledge will continue to grow but that its growth will slow and the knowledge will be very widespread. “What will continue to evolve and diversify indefinitely are the humanities.” Wilson believes that the two disciplines are complementary and that if they are joined, “human existence will rise to an infinitely more productive and interesting meaning.”

Wilson has spent over 60 years studying and writing about biology and biodiversity. His writing style is relaxed but serious about the subject, and he makes it clear that some of the major disagreements by scientists in recent decades have revolved around the specific theories about how humans achieved their apparent dominant status of all the species in the world. Taking that trip with him is an entertaining and persuasive read.

— David Backer

Conservators Launches New Facebook Page

The Newton Conservators is thrilled to announce the launch of our new, enhanced Facebook page. This resource will allow us to better communicate and connect with you – our friends – and to spread the word about the Conservators to folks in our community and beyond.

As some of our most valued supporters, we would love for you to join our page and to stay up to date with all the Conservators has to offer, including:

- Invitations to Conservator-sponsored events, nature walks, and volunteer opportunities;
- Information about Conservator resources like trail guides and park maps;
- News about Newton conservation and open-space issues;
- Fun photos and informative tips and tricks to help you be to live more sustainably.



To join, simply go to www.Facebook.com/NewtonConservators and click “Like.” Oh, and invite your friends, too.

We look forward to seeing you online!

— Mat Calabro

What's On Our Website?

Our website, NewtonConservators.org, is a good source of great information about Newton's conservation areas—and much more. Webmaster Dan Brody keeps the information on the site up to date and also has added a wide array of related features and sources.

First, some general background about the organization of the website: when you go to the website, you'll notice that the list of contents on the left side is divided into two sections. The top green section contains all the information about Newton's parklands; the bottom yellow section lists information about the organization in general and related resources.

Our focus this month is the last item in the top green section: the **GRANTS PROGRAM**.

The Conservators provides grants to Newton's schools, educational institutions, groups, and institutions for the

purpose of fostering the preservation of open space and other environmental matters. The grants generally are modest in size; requests of between \$250 and \$750 may receive priority, although smaller and larger grants will be given full consideration. They can be made for a single event, a longer-term project, or for multiple year funding. Projects for multiple-year funding must be reported upon and resubmitted annually.

Applications are reviewed and grants are awarded twice a year, with application deadlines of October 31 and February 28. However, proposals may be submitted at any time, and grants sometimes are awarded before the next regular review cycle begins. Successful applicants will be required to submit a final report on the project, and may be asked to make a report at our annual meeting or at another time.

For more information about the grants, visit: www.newtonconservators.org/grants.htm

GRANTS APPROVED FOR MARCH 2015

Scholarship Donation to the Environmental Science Program

The Environmental Science Program is a unique month-long outdoor experience that gives teenagers the chance to have fun enjoying the wilderness while learning about the science of the environment. Highlights of the program include hikes in Massachusetts and New Hampshire such as the Blue Hills and Mount Monadnock, bicycle trips, a 12-mile canoe trip on the Charles River, and an expedition through the salt marshes of the North shore near Gloucester. The program ends with a three-day backpacking trip up Mount Washington. Each year there is an environmental cleanup project in which participants get hands-on involvement with improving an environmental site.

Newton Community Farm High School Intern Program

Summer internships at the farm provide opportunities for high school students to learn about sustainable agriculture and community farming in a fun, friendly environment. The program requires students to commit to working as a volunteer, three days per week, 8am to noon, for two consecutive weeks. Once this initial period has been completed, interns can, with the agreement of the Farm Manager, increase the number of hours, days, and weeks that they are at the farm, which many do. In some cases interns return the following summer as Team leaders and take on additional leadership responsibilities.



AMC: Hiking at Crawford Notch

Newton North Special Ed. Department Trip to AMC Mountain Classroom

This grant will help provide funding for 20 special education students from Newton to attend the Appalachian Mountain Club's "Mountain Classroom." For 3 days and 2 nights, students will stay at the Highland Center in Crawford Notch in New Hampshire's White Mountains. They will learn about the natural world through hands-on activities, hiking, and classroom participation. Students learn about night vision, animal winter adaptation, winter weather survival (building igloos), and more. The highlight of the trip is climbing Mount Willard (in snowshoes if necessary) on the second day. The students push themselves beyond what they think they are able to do, but when they come out of the woods and see the valley below, their expressions are priceless. ■

Shade Loving Perennials

It was a long, cold, snowy winter. If you are like me, you are anxious to get back out into your garden. My property, like many of yours, is heavily shaded. Only my curbside gets sun all day. Flower beds on my property are under the canopy of oaks, basswoods, yellowwood, hornbeam and redbud.

Although I long to plant sun-loving perennials, I know from past experience they do not thrive. But shade perennials love my garden. Plant the right perennial in the right location – shade perennials for shady gardens – and you will have great success. You don't need sun-loving perennials to have a beautiful garden. Many of our native perennials are happiest under tree canopies. Some perennials grow well in the sun but tolerate shade; others must be in shade to thrive.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria Canadensis*) and wild ginger (*Asarum canadense*) are in the process of taking over my flowerbeds. Both are jumping across grassy walkways to new locations. Mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*) double in quantity each year. Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) with butterfly-shaped double leaves, is multiplying and relocating willy-nilly in all directions. Their true sign of happiness is the yearly spread of new perennials.



False Solomon's Seal

and green and white *Hosta undulata* are old garden favorites I inherited with my ninety year old property. I've added other interesting varieties such as *Hosta* 'Sum and Substance' with giant seersucker blue-green leaves; *Hosta* 'Cheatin Heart' with small deep-gold leaves; and *Hosta tardiana* 'June' with variegated green and yellow leaves. A trip to your local nursery is in order to investigate the many varieties available.

When adding non-natives to your garden, also think beyond hosta to April blooming Siberian brunnera (*Brunnera*



Brunnera with Foxglove and Sweet Woodruff

I encourage you not to give up on your shady garden. A shade garden can be very beautiful. Non-native, non-invasive shade perennials that do no harm, can add extra flare to a shade garden. Just think of hosta. *Hosta fortunei*, *Hosta lancifolia*

macrophylla) and lungwort (*Pulmonaria*); May blooming Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*); European ginger (*Asarum europaeum*); *Epimedium x rubrum* and *x youngianum* 'Niveum'; June blooming astilbe; and July blooming ligularia. All of these splendid perennials would do well in a shade garden.

Some of our native perennials bloom before our trees leaf out. Bloodroot blooms early in mid-April and twinleaf blooms in late May. Their tiny white flowers are gone in a twink. A bit of wind or rain, and their petals will fall. Our native bleeding hearts, squirrel corn (*Dicentra Canadensis*) and Dutchman's-breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), bloom in early April. Dutchman's-breeches will continue to bloom well into June.

White trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) holds its blooms for weeks from late April to June. Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) blooms from early May to June, and Western bleeding heart (*Dicentra Formosa*) blooms from late May to July. Bunchberry (*Cornus Canadensis*) blooms from late May to mid-June. And don't forget heuchera blooming from mid-June right through to September. I've often seen heuchera listed as a "sun" perennial, but I've found it to be very happy even in deep shade in my garden.

False Solomon's seal (*Smilacina racemosa*) blooms from mid-May to early June and then surprises us with lovely red berries remaining well into fall. Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) blossoms nod brightly on their stalks from late May into June. And then Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*) sends up a tall rocket spray of white feathery blossoms later in the season, from early June into July.

And let's not forget the fern family. Ferns are a treasure trove for shade gardeners. I especially like to use lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) and non-native but lovely variegated-leaved Japanese painted fern (*Athyrium goeringianum*) in my garden. I've found these three ferns to be very hardy and easy to grow.



Bunchberry with ferns

As summer progresses, you will have fewer flowering perennials in a shade garden. But a shade garden can still be attractive if you use interesting combinations of perennials. Even without a single bloom, a thoughtful mix of plant sizes and leaf sizes, shapes, textures and colors will add punch to your garden.

Using large, small and medium-sized perennials grouped together creates interest, much like having three differently sized and shaped items on your living room coffee table. Remember the 1, 3, 5 rule. One large hosta, three medium-sized heuchera, and many smaller-leaved, ground-hugging wild gingers make an interesting grouping. Even a garden filled only with different varieties of hosta would be interesting if you combine their different overall sizes, leaf shapes, textures and colors.

Perennials with different-shaped leaves create interest: a giant blue-green hosta mixed with three petite, chartreuse, lance-leaved hostas, plus the feathery light leaves of lady ferns make a charming grouping. When you think of perennials that you already have in your garden, think of their overall size and shape, their leaf sizes and textures. Could you rearrange perennials you already have in your garden to make them more interesting?

The seersucker look of *Hosta sieboldiana* 'Blue Angel' or 'Sum and Substance'; the curly, wrinkly leaves of heuchera; and the



Foamflower with Dicentra

kidney-shaped, smooth velvety leaves of native ginger (*Asarum canadense*) or the shiny round leaves of European ginger (*Asarum europaeum*) create unique textures in the shade garden.

Perennials with unusually colored leaves or colorful striations within their leaves add punctuation when nothing is in bloom. Two of my favorites are lungwort *Pulmonaria saccharata* 'British Sterling' and 'Mrs. Moon'. No shade garden is complete without lungwort. Not only are their magenta-blue flowers lovely from April to June, their large spotted oval leaves add character all summer long. *Brunnera macrophylla* with tiny blue flowers from late April through June continues to add interest to the garden all season long because of its large variegated white and green leaves.

Many garden perennials have yellow, white or even burgundy mixed in with the green of their leaves. White and pale colored details on perennial leaves attract our attention and create an illusion of light in our gardens. Perennials like heuchera come in myriad colors, from orange to purple and mixes of colors too many to be believed, a regular smorgasbord of color. More hybrid varieties become available each year. Buy three – they're small! Enjoy your shade garden.

✿ Beth Schroeder

ALL PHOTOS: BETH SCHROEDER

It's Only Two Months Away!

New Multi-Event Celebration at Nahanton Park on June 6 • 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Everyone is Welcome! Bring your friends and neighbors, too!

Come to enjoy this park, which includes riverfront, community garden plots, meadows, wooded hillsides, wild blackberry bushes, wetlands, a pond, and a plateau overlooking the river valley.

Enjoy talking with other Conservators and learning from our board members and advisors.
Bring your lunch to picnic with others. We will provide beverages and ice cream.

- Bird Walks • Fishing Tournament • Canoe and Kayak Tours • Introduction to Native Plants
- Fern Walk led by Don Lubin • Walk to meet the Trees of Nahanton Park
- Invasive Plant Pull • Scavenger Hunt for Children

Check our website listing in May for specific times for each event.

Newton Conservators Invasive-Plant Pulls Spring 2015

Newton Conservators, Newton's land trust and open space organization, fights invasive plant species to preserve and to improve the native habitat at our parks and conservation areas. Sessions may be weather dependent: call the leader if in doubt. Check our website (newtonconservators.org) for updates to this schedule.

About the Plant Invaders

Garlic Mustard, native to Europe, was brought here in the 1800s as a medicinal and garden herb and is now an invader of our backyards, parks, forests, and conservation areas. It quickly covers vast areas, including low light forested areas, shades out other plants, chemically alters the soil to inhibit germination of competitor seeds, and alters habitat for native insects such as butterflies. In areas where it is just starting, it takes only a small effort to eliminate: it is a biennial easily identified and pulled when the second year plants are flowering in April/May. If not, each plant will scatter hundreds to thousands of seeds that will become first year plants the next year or will remain as viable seeds for several more years. Because the seeds stay so viable, the plants must be disposed of as trash, not as yard waste. Our efforts are effective: Garlic Mustard can be controlled with easy hand pulling, vigilance, and determination. The areas worked are much improved and require only periodic visits to catch stragglers to avoid re-infestation. The areas NOT worked are worse. **We need more help to get them under control.**

Japanese Knotweed is a bamboo-like invader from Asia that can create dense 8' tall single-species stands. It is a tough adversary, not because it's spiny or strong or even particularly hard to pull, but because any small root fragments left behind spring back to life the following year. Scientists seek biological control agents, but until then we must control by hand. Persistence pays with this species, and eradication is possible, but it takes several years to truly finish the job.

Our sessions also tackle black swallowwort, multi-flora rose, tree of heaven, and black locust.

The three sessions listed below are in conjunction with Newton Serves. Please register with them online at: www.newtoncommunitypride.org/NewtonSERVES-volunteer.php.

Sunday, April 26, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Cold Spring Park Garlic Mustard Pull (NewtonSERVES Project). 1200 Beacon Street Newton, MA 02461
www.newtonconservators.org/14coldspring.htm



Cold Spring Park is being invaded by garlic mustard (see notes below). We will spend a few hours checking the Cochituate Aqueduct walk, to keep it under control after previous years' pulls, and work on the meadow and parking lot areas. In case of poison ivy, wear long pants and garden gloves. Trash bags will

be provided; the plants must be disposed of as trash, not as yard waste. Enter the park at the Beacon Street entrance. Turn left and go to the far end of the parking lot (circle) to meet group. **Leader is Katherine Howard, 617-527-1796 (home) or 617-721-2571 (cell).**

Sunday, April 26, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Garlic Mustard Pull at Dolan Pond (NewtonSERVES Project). 76 Webster Park Newton, MA 02465
www.newtonconservators.org/5dolan.htm

Meet at the Webster Park (a street off Webster Street) entrance of the Dolan Pond Conservation Area in West Newton. (Street parking is available there and at the other entrances at Stratford Road and Cumberland Road.) We will tackle Garlic Mustard stands in off-trail corners of the property and a few patches of rosettes in previously worked areas. Come help us eradicate this soil-damaging invasive from this gem of a pocket park. Crews

also removed nearly every Knotweed stem from one area, but Knotweed removal takes years to complete, and each time it gets easier. We will mix in some general nature study, so bring binoculars for observing birds and other creatures that make this vernal pool area home. In case of poison ivy, wear long pants and garden gloves. **Leader is Ted Kuklinski, 617-332-7753.**

Sunday, April 26, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Garlic Mustard Pull at Blue Heron Bridge (NewtonSERVES Project). Near Super Stop & Shop, 700 Pleasant St, Watertown, MA 02472
www.newtonconservators.org/4charlesmoody.htm

Important note: The location of this pull may change, depending on where the need is greatest. Please check with Eric Olson at the number listed below or on our website a few days before the pull to verify the site.

We continue to work along the Charles River Greenway at this bridge site, helping the Trustees of the Reservations with their stewardship of the floodplain forest, mixing in nature study, so bring binoculars and an insect net and hand lens if you have them. Park at the Watertown Super Stop & Shop (700 Pleasant St) at the corner furthest from the store. There is a path entrance: turn left, and follow path to the Blue Heron Bridge. Or park at Albemarle Rd or Nevada St, a block away from the river. **Trip leader is Eric Olson, 617-872-9928.**

More to come...

WALKS SCHEDULE SPRING 2015

www.newtonconservators.org



Please note: Walks meet at different times. Some trips are weather dependent. Please call trip leader if in doubt.

Sunday, April 5 from 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF VERNAL POOLS: FOREST AND VERNAL POOL EXPLORATION AT WEBSTER WOODS

Join us in Webster Woods, Newton's largest conservation area, as we walk the woods and explore the large vernal pool found there. Vernal pools, because of periods of drying, do not support breeding populations of fish. Many organisms have evolved to use these temporary wetlands, where they are not eaten by fish. Join us as we search obligate vernal pool species, including fairy shrimp, Spotted Salamanders and Wood Frogs. The amphibians are the stars of the show, but you will also watch for mammal tracks and learn about trees and other forest plants.

Sampling equipment will be provided; bring hand lenses if you have them. We will walk even in the rain, so dress accordingly. Meet at the end of Warren Street on the western edge of Webster Conservation Area. For any not up to a 1-mile hike (round-trip), you can meet up with the group at 2 pm in the back parking lot (far back) of Congregation Mishkan Tefila; the vernal pool is right there.

Trip Leader: Eric Olson (Cell phone on day of outing: 617-872-9928)

Sunday, May 10 at 8:00 AM

NAHANTON PARK MOTHER'S DAY BIRD WALK

Nahanton Park offers a mix of woodlands, wetlands, edge habitat and meadows along the Charles River, making it one of the best birding spots in Newton for both migratory and resident songbirds. Likely finds include brightly colored warblers, vireos, and orioles. Also expect bluebirds, scarlet tanagers, swallows and brown thrashers. Enter the park at the Nahanton Street entrance next to the river. Parking is available inside the park. Bring binoculars if you have them. Beginners as well as experienced birders are welcome. Boots are recommended. Walk will be cancelled in steady rain. Co-sponsored with Friends of Nahanton Park.

Trip Leaders: Alison Leary (617-821-5619), Haynes Miller (617-413-2419)

Sunday, May 10 at 2:00 PM

NEWTON AQUEDUCTS HIKE

A 5 mile hike through woods, meadows and fields along the Newton sections of the Sudbury and Cochituate aqueducts. This is a steady but not fast hike. Participants should be in sufficiently good shape to keep up with the group. (There are cutoffs for those who wish to shorten the hike). Meet in front

of the Starbucks coffee shop near the Waban MBTA station.

Trip Leader: Henry Finch (617-964-4488)

Saturday, May 16 at 8:00 AM

BIRD WALK AT COLD SPRING PARK (RAIN DATE: MAY 17TH)

This 67-acre parcel has ample wooded areas, open fields, a brook and wetlands. It is one of the places in Newton where you may hear the call of the Great Horned Owl and observe spectacular songbirds like the rose breasted grosbeak and the indigo bunting. Also frequently found at the park are many favorite migrants such as the red eyed vireo, the wood thrush, and a variety of wood warblers. Bring binoculars if you have them. Beginners as well as experienced birders are welcome. Enter the park at the Beacon Street entrance. Turn left, and go to the far end of the parking lot to meet group.

Trip Leader: Pete Gilmore (617-969-1513)

Saturday, May 30 at 6:30 AM

GREENBELT 32-MILE WALK

This 32-mile walk will start in Waban, proceed to Riverside, and most likely end in Melrose. It is sponsored by the Greenbelt Walkers in support of the proposed 90-mile walking trail to circle Boston.

Henry Finch, the Newton Conservators' representative on their board, requests that walkers who are interested get additional information from the Greenbelt website: www.bostongreenbeltwalk.org

Trip Leader: Henry Finch (617-964-4488)

Saturday, June 20 from 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

FERN WALK AT WEBSTER WOODS (RAIN DATE: JUNE 21)

The Webster and Cohen Conservation areas and the DCR Reservation form a large wooded expanse that stretches from the shopping malls of Route 9 almost to Newton Centre. The woods extend on both sides of Hammond Pond Parkway and both sides of the MBTA Riverside tracks and are home to 20 species of ferns and related plants. We will visit the southeast corner near Hammond Pond and see about a dozen kinds of ferns. Wear long pants to protect against poison ivy and bugs. If you have a hand lens, bring it. Bring any native fern you would like me to identify. Park and meet near the woods behind the shopping center, between the pond and Hammond Pond Parkway.

Trip Leader: Don Lubin, (617-254-8464), <http://nefern.info>

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT : PETE GILMORE, BETH SCHROEDER, SUZETTE BARBIER



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Raven

Photo by Haynes Miller



Go Green! ...and all the other colors of the rainbow. You can view this newsletter at www.newtonconservators.org/newsletter.htm. To elect not to receive a paper copy of the newsletter, update your membership profile at www.newtonconservators.org