

Newton Conservators' 57th Annual Meeting

Change was the order of the evening on May 2, when The Newton Conservators convened their 57th Annual Meeting at Nonantum's Post 440. After a winter that seemed to end by fits and starts, the approximately one hundred Conservators and friends were eager to engage with change in all its various permutations: historic change, imperceptible change, positive change, and forces of change.

During the social hour, attendees had the opportunity to observe caterpillars brought by Caterpillar Lab founder Sam Jaffe. Jaffe shared not only the larval lepidoptera but also the Caterpillar Lab's operative philosophy: as learners experience caterpillars' life cycles firsthand, they often develop a new sense of ecological scale and time. Science teachers from Newton North and South high schools were also on hand to introduce the work of the next generation of Newton environmentalists.



Beth Wilkinson and Ruthanne Fuller

The changing of the guard was also apparent when Newton's new mayor, Ruthanne Fuller, made her first appearance before the Conservators in her new role as Newton's highest elected official. Mayor Fuller made special note of instances where the City and the Conservators are cooperating to realize mutual goals. Notable among the areas of active support, the Conservators are represented by three directors and two advisors on the city's new Webster Woods Advisory Panel. Other dignitaries in attendance were State Rep Ruth Balser and several City Councilors.

The highlight of the evening was a presentation by best-selling author and naturalist Peter Alden on "Changes in New England Wildlife over Time." As a special opportunity for meeting attendees, Alden — who organized the world's first Biodiversity Days with Harvard's Dr. Edward O. Wilson in 1998 — began the evening with a pre-dinner tour along the boardwalks of the adjacent Charles River Pathway where he



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY
Peter Alden's tour along the Charles River Pathway

identified local birds and flora, and discussed invasive plant species such as tree-of-heaven and garlic mustard.



Clockwise starting at the far left: Hugh Wilkinson, Beth Wilkinson, Peter Alden, Mayor Ruthanne Fuller, Larry Burdick, Pat Burdick, Peter Schuntermann, Karen Komar, and State Rep. Ruth Balser.

As the main event, Alden described the evolution of flora and fauna here in New England since Thoreau's time. He also discussed how bird and mammal life has been changed and challenged, as new elements such as invasive alien plants, pesticides, bird feeders, introduced species, and widespread bans on trapping and hunting have been added to what was once a stable system.

In her annual report Conservators' president Beth Wilkinson reviewed the changes and challenges that engaged the Conservators in the past year. Highlights were efforts to preserve Webster Woods, the collaboration with Bike Newton and the Solomon Foundation and the Conservation Commission to grow the trails along the Charles at Riverside. There was also participation in the Needham Street Area Vision Group (making the case for more open space — and more connections to already existing open space that is nearby — and for more trees and storm-water drainage along Needham Street), and representation at meetings sponsored by the City Parks and Recreation Department to review plans for re-doing Levingston Cove at Crystal Lake to mitigate the damage from erosion. But looking forward, she said, the challenge is sustaining the momentum to ensure the Conservators remain an effective agent for change in Newton.

"Those of you at this event form our core," Wilkinson said. "We hope that you will help us to reach out to the community. Please share your newsletter, talk about what we're doing."

"We are recruiting a coordinator for our popular walks," she continued. "We need a membership coordinator. We're beginning a revision of the beloved Trail Guide, and we need a project manager to see it through production."

The annual awards ceremony recognized efforts to protect, preserve, and reclaim Newton's natural areas and to educate and disseminate information about these and other environmental matters. Honors presented included the

ALL PHOTOS: HENRY FINCH EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

Continued on page 8

Environmentalist of the Year Award — presented to a local citizen or group who has contributed to improvements in the city's environment; the Charles Johnson Maynard Award — to recognize efforts to improve biodiversity, habitat reclamation, and natural resource protection; and Director's Awards for other notable achievements.



André Wilson and Katherine Howard

The Environmentalist of the Year award was presented to André Wilson, for honoring and extending the legacy of parents Richard and Andrée Wilson, by making their public access path through Jolly's Hollow and the Wilson Conservation Area, along with the views from and all around the path, things of beauty, positive environmental impact, and avenues to community engagement and education.

"It is wonderful to see children walking to Mason Rice, their parents, neighbors out doing errands, runners, dog walkers, aqueduct hikers, all using the path, stopping to talk to André, and expressing gratitude for the beautiful and peaceful pathway," explained Conservators' Treasurer Katherine Howard. "André engages them, educates at the same time, gets them to come back and help, and overall demonstrates, through actions and example, what love of a place, of parents, and of the planet, can spur one very wonderful and very determined person to do for others and the greater good."



Pete Gilmore and Liane Hartnett

The Charles Johnson Maynard Award was given to Cris (Modestino) Criscitiello for his work to improve biodiversity, habitat reclamation, and natural resource protection. Cris, a retired cardiologist, was a long-time board member and advisor of the Newton Conservators. He was part of

the Kessler Woods Committee that successfully urged the City to use Community Preservation Act funds to purchase these woods in South Newton in the years 2002-2004. He was active in the Land Management Committee that catalogued the biodiversity of many of the open spaces in Newton over a period of years.

Cris "was a wise and gentle supporter of the nature lovers in Newton for many years," remembered Board member Pete Gilmore. "He was considered the guru of Cold Spring Park. He and his wife, Nancy, hosted the Newton section of

the Greater Boston Christmas Bird Count for a long time." This event has now passed across Raeburn Terrace to Liane Hartnett, who received the award for Cris, who was unable to attend. Cris' "kind and energetic presence among us is missed," Gilmore concluded.



Eric Olson and Anndy Dannenberg

Newton Conservators' Directors' Awards were given to Anndy Dannenberg, a member the Science Department at Newton North for seventeen years, and to Madhumita Bhattacharya, who teaches not only biology but also Conservation Biology & Environmental Science, a course that she started at Newton South.

In addition to her classroom duties (which include introducing a sustainability course this year), Anndy Dannenberg coaches the Newton North Envirothon Team, which has repeatedly placed first in the state competition (and second in the nation in 2013). She encourages her students to engage with the natural world, giving them project-based assignments, helping them to find salamanders hiding in Newton's woods, and chaperoning two student trips to Nicaragua.



Richard Primack and Mita Bhattacharya

Mita Bhattacharya, who holds a PhD in Conservation Biology from Boston University, is interested in pollinator conservation, invasive species, and other conservation related issues. Her goal in teaching is to help students value nature's services, embrace sustainability, become stewards of biodiversity, and informed and active citizens.



Newton North students Gus Betts-O'Rourke, Cody Kotake, Laura Schmidt-Hong, and Einat Gavish

2018 will doubtless be yet another year of change, both anticipated and unforeseen, for the Conservators. But one thing is certain not to change: when next May rolls around, the Conservators will once again gather and celebrate their 58th year of actively promoting

the protection and preservation of natural areas in Newton. ♦

✿ Margaret Doris