

Saving the *Woodcock Meadow* at Nahanton Park

A Conservation Partnership



Friends of Nahanton Park



- Did you know that many native plants and animals from migratory songbirds to some of our showiest wildflowers depend on early successional habitats such as grassland and shrubland? These often scenic open areas are also essential for bees, other pollinators and many butterflies.
- Nahanton Park is home to a unique habitat area known as Woodcock Meadow. This is the only grassland of its kind remaining in Newton, supporting a unique mix of native plants, and a breeding ground for the American Woodcock, identified as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife.
- Although dry, sandy soils associated with glacial Lake Charles help to maintain the grassland, active management is required to maintain this unique habitat area. Invasive species such as Black Locust and other woody vegetation are overwhelming the grassland and about half the meadow has been severely degraded since the mid-1990s.



- In recognition of their unique habitat, scenic, and recreational values, organizations such as MassAudubon, MassWildlife, The Trustees of Reservations and many municipalities are working to manage and maintain Massachusetts grasslands and shrublands. MassAudubon's 2011 Nahanton Park Management Plan (supported by the Newton Conservators) highlights restoration and management of the Woodcock Meadow as a high priority.
- Although the City has supported volunteer efforts by the Newton Conservators and Friends of Nahanton Park in the past, such efforts have not been able to keep up with the need, and urgent action is now required to save the Woodcock Meadow.
- To address the need, the Friends of Nahanton Park and Newton Conservators have developed a two-phase restoration plan. Phase 1 will involve removing some White Pine, Black Locust, and other woody vegetation that has invaded the heart of the meadow. Red Cedar, Gray Birch, and other native shrubs and small trees will be thinned, but some of these will be retained to maintain a diverse mosaic of vegetation within and along the edges of the grassland. Phase 2 will involve similar work to reclaim and maintain the edges of meadow and possibly a broader effort to remove larger nonnative and invasive Black Locust adjacent to the meadow, if funding is available. Long-term maintenance will include occasional mowing and volunteer efforts to trim woody plants and control invasives.

Want to know more?

About the American Woodcock

- It is the only member of the Sandpiper family adapted to forest rather than shoreline habitats.
- It breeds in New England to southern Canada, and by winter migrates to the southeastern U.S.
- The courtship ritual is a thing to behold – by sight and sound. The male flies up and up in a spiral, wing feathers making a sharp twitter sound, until almost out of sight, then chirps while takes plunging dives back to earth. Then he performs ground display, strutting and chirping a buzzy nasal “peent”. The session lasts 30-60 minutes and includes 10-20 aerial flights.



Photo: A Woodcock displaying

- Woodcocks need a sandy grassland area for the courtship “singing grounds” and adjacent open woods and wood edges for nesting and additional adjacent moist lowland sites for feeding.
- Nahanton Park has this increasingly rare combination of habitats as evidenced by its regular annual use by Woodcocks; however, the increasing density of trees and large shrubs in the meadow has started to decrease the population using the park.

About the warm season grassland habitat

- Woodcock Meadow already has many of the plant species appropriate for singing grounds – Little Bluestem grass, Bush Clover, Aster, Crabapple, Lichens, Wild Indigo, Blueberry, and young stems of Aspen, White Pine, Pitch Pine, Oak, Gray Birch, Black Cherry, Crabapple, Red Cedar.
- Other species that might be appropriate for a potential later planting phase are Sweet Fern, Juniper, Red Maple, Alder, and Dogwood.

What you can do to help

- Volunteer – Watch for announcements from the Conservators and Friends of Nahanton Park, who will be sponsoring volunteer work days to help clear and remove brush.
- Donate – Some of the work is too big for volunteers, and services of a contractor will be needed.
- Voice your support for this important project.

DONATE NOW

Your donation via Newton Conservators is tax deductible.

ON LINE SECURE: <http://newtonconservators.org/donate.htm> and put “Woodcock Meadow” in Comment field on the Donation form

Or mail check payable to Newton Conservators, with “Woodcock Meadow” on memo line, to PO Box 590011, Newton MA 02459