

Officers and Directors 2012

Jane Sender,
President
George Mansfield,
Vice President
AnnaMaria Abernathy,
Secretary
Katherine Howard,
Treasurer
Beth Schroeder,
Past President

Board of Directors

Margaret Albright
Octo Barnett
Dan Brody
Lalor Burdick
Bonnie Carter
Michael Clarke
Jacqueline Daoust
Margaret Doris
Henry Finch
Robert Fizek
Maurice Gilmore
Daniel Green
William Hagar
Peter Kastner
Ted Kuklinski
Alison Leary
Patricia Robinson
Larry Smith
Willis Wang
Elizabeth Wilkinson

Public Street Trees – A Choice

What is happening to Newton's street trees?

In the early 1970's there were approximately 40,000 trees lining the streets of Newton. Today, that number is about 26,000—a 35% loss. The current annual rate of decline is about 650 trees per year.¹ At this rate, if unchecked, public street trees would diminish to approximately 10,000 within a generation (25 years), and in 40 years, public street trees would no longer be part of the Newton landscape. Clearly, that is a situation that no one wants, so we need to analyze why it is happening and what we can do to stop and reverse this trend.

Why haven't these tree losses been obvious to everyone? We're all subject to a phenomenon called "creeping normalcy," the process by which "a major change can be accepted as the normal situation if it happens slowly, in unnoticed increments, when it would be regarded as objectionable if it took place in a single step or short period."² That makes sense. Anyone announcing that they planned to cut down 14,000 of the city's street trees at one time would be subjected to a firestorm of protest, probably run out of town.

Why is it happening?

The current *Annual Rate of Decline* in street trees is due, for the most part, to age. Many of the city's street trees (predominantly Norway Maple with some Sugar Maple, Red Maple, and White Oak) were planted at about the same time some decades ago and, therefore, are reaching the end of their anticipated lifespan at about the same time. The other contributing



Unpruned street trees: unhealthy and healthy.



Photos: Julia Malakie

factors are structural instability due to the absence of pruning, followed by storm damage, vandalism, road salt, and gas leaks.

The reason for the *Total Decline* of 14,000 trees over the last 40+ years is more straightforward: inadequate funding for tree maintenance and the purchase and planting of replacement trees.

In the recent past, funding has effectively dropped to zero. In the last 10 years, no city funds have been appropriated for planting replacement trees. In addition, on an average annual basis, more funds are expended to remove dead trees than to promote the health and longevity of living trees. That imbalance has been necessary for public safety; funding has not been sufficient to do both adequately.

What is the value of trees?

In addition to their aesthetic and environmental values, trees have a considerable monetary value. For municipal budgeting and other public purposes, trees can be considered a capital asset and assigned an appraised value. In purely financial terms then, the 14,000 street trees Newton has lost in the last 40+ years had a value of \$47,600,000.³ The Newton aldermen now are considering whether to list trees as a capital asset. If they do so, the city could bond work to preserve the urban forest just as it bonds repairs on its aging buildings.

Comparative Data

Are public street trees a subject of concern to other cities and towns in Massachusetts? It seems they are. The cities of Somerville and Arlington recognize the contributions of

Public Street Trees continued from page 1:

street trees and the tree canopy to their communities in their planning documents. (Newton’s Open Space Plan currently is being revised, and similar language may be added.)

The most important comparative question, however, is whether other cities in Massachusetts have tree budgets that are as inadequate as Newton’s. Fortunately, the city’s arborist, Marc Welch, has collected public data as well as information gathered from his counterparts in other cities and towns that provide a basis for meaningful comparisons.

Boston, Springfield, and Quincy are suitable cities for comparison. All three have relatively comparable populations of street trees; they have relatively comparable per-pupil educational expenditures⁴; and they have not passed a Prop 2.5 override over the last 10 years. The comparison, as shown in the table below, is surprising.

What the data show is that comparable cities have been spending more to maintain their tree assets while spending comparably, or reasonably so, on education, while dealing with

the same 2.5% cap on revenue and while subject to the same overall increases in costs. They have not been slighting the important function of education or taxing their citizens more than Newton. Ironically, the only city among the four that has passed an override in the last 10 years is Newton.

Boston, with the same per pupil expenditure but a larger number of street trees, spends 4 times as much per tree as Newton; Springfield 3.5 times as much; and Quincy 55% more per tree. The other cities have Forestry personnel and equipment. Newton does not.

What can be done?

What the comparison clearly shows is that maintaining and replacing street trees is not inconsistent with living within municipal resources when there is a commitment to do so. It is a choice.

What can you do to help change this choice? You can let your aldermen and city officials know that you value Newton’s street trees and want the budget to include sufficient funds to care for them properly and to replace them when necessary.

Cities with Comparable Tree Populations								
City	Population	Number of Trees	Spending per Tree	Overrides in Last 10 Years	Expenditure Per Pupil (a)	No. of Tree Workers	Pieces of Equipment	Contracted Services
Boston	588,957	35,000	\$50.99	None	\$16,666	5	5	\$1,100,000
Springfield	152,082	27,000	\$45.00	None	\$13,605	5	4	\$750,000
Quincy	88,025	20,000	\$19.50	None	\$13,942	3	3	\$100,000
Newton	83,829	26,000	\$12.57	Yes (b)	\$16,597	0	0	\$320,000

(a) 2009–10 Per Pupil Expenditures – Mass Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education [http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/ppx.aspx]
(b) 2002 – Schools and General Government – \$11.5 Million

1 Figures provided by Marc Welch, Arborist, City of Newton Forestry Division.
2 Wikipedia
3 Based on the Landscape Appraisal Method, recognized by the court system and insurance industry for calculating the value of trees. Marc Welch.
4 Accounts for about half of city and town budgets in the state. Mass Dept. of Revenue, Division of Local Services.

✍ John DiMiceli, Newton Tree Conservancy

President’s Message

Truly mixed feelings come as the winter of 2011-12 draws to a close. It is late February, and we have had stunningly mild weather for months, with little snow. For those of us who would rather be outdoors than anywhere else, this has been almost pure joy. Unfortunately it’s hard to deny the sinking feeling that a bad hangover likely follows the short-term guilty pleasure of this New England winter that never came. Record storms, more winters like 2010-11 and global disturbances as a result of the climate change are the possible flip side of this great weather. So what do we do?

Our work as Newton Conservators to preserve our open space is one important thing, allowing us to play a role in mitigating climate change by protecting trees and plants

and by flood control, among other strategies. Please join us in our efforts this spring.

On Newton Serves Day, April 29, we will be leading a number of groups at various sites to remove invasive plants to improve the habitat in our parks. Also, as a member of Newton’s Open Space Advisory Committee, we need your help in updating the Open Space Plan, which is essential to acquiring more open space in years to come. Please respond to the City of Newton Recreation and Open Space Survey, and come to the public meeting March 21st. Details can be found on our website, www.newtonconservators.org.

Happy spring to all, and I hope to see you in April.

✍ Jane Sender, President



Native Wildflowers for the Spring Garden

Many native wildflowers can be grown in home gardens. Some native wildflowers are content to grow and bloom before trees leaf out; other, later-blooming wildflowers prefer an environment under the dappled shade of overhead trees. A few wildflowers are ephemeral, appearing early in spring and then going dormant only to reemerge next year. Others bloom later and remain visible longer. Native wildflowers have become popular and available in more nurseries.

Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) has a double-leaf resembling a butterfly's wingspan. While twinleaf looks delicate, it has self-sown nicely in my garden. At first I was afraid to disturb these plants, but now I dig and relocate them. Twinleaf blooms early in April or May. You need to keep an eye on it: if you blink you may miss the bright-white flowers, which only last for a day or two. Their seed pods resemble little trash cans with lids. Ants distribute the seeds, but I think rain may also play a part. I usually find baby twinleaf plants downhill from their parents.



Twinleaf (*Jeffersonia diphylla*) ❧ All photos in this article are by Beth Schroeder.

Mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*) make a terrific groundcover in shade. They spread rapidly, making a sizable colony in just a few years. My original fifteen plants now number well over one hundred. Mayapples with a single leaf do not bloom, but double-leafed plants produce a large, porcelain-white flower in the axis of the double leaf in May or June. This flower develops into an "apple" which you can harvest. If my husband sees them, he eats them right out of the garden, thinking he's beating the squirrels to them. Mayapples go dormant later in the season.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) adds an interesting leaf shape to the garden even after its pure-white, eight-petaled flowers finish blooming in March or April. The deeply scalloped leaves come out of the ground in a tightly wrapped column. Plant a bloodroot, and each year there will be a few more plants as the colony expands.



Top: Mayapples (*Podophyllum peltatum*);
Bottom: Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)

Allegheny foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) makes a pretty edging plant for flowerbeds in part shade. Foamflower has stacks of creamy-white flowers in mid to late spring. After the flowers fade, the plant remains an attractive addition to the flowerbed because of the shapely, veined leaves.

Trilliums are the divas of the flower garden. These plants are rarely found in the wild: they are usually tucked under a grove of trees. When they bloom, there isn't much that is prettier. Trilliums are costly to purchase, but I've found them to be hardy in partial shade or filtered sunlight. Great white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) is a good specimen plant with its three-petaled flowers and three large green leaves to match.



Left: Allegheny foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*);
Right: Great white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*)

Native Wildflowers continued from page 3:

Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) and squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*) are two native bleeding hearts. Dutchman's breeches are named for their creamy white flowers, which look like upside down pantaloons. Squirrel corn usually blooms within a week of Dutchman's breeches. Its white heart-shaped flower looks more like the familiar, old-fashioned bleeding heart (*Dicentra spectabilis*). Dutchman's breeches and squirrel corn both have a lengthier blooming period than many natives, and their fern-like foliage is charming. Shady, moist areas are best, and I've read that morning sunshine will produce more blooms.

Native, three- to six-inch tall crested dwarf Iris (*Iris cristata*) grows happily in sun to part shade if it has consistent moisture. Its amethyst-blue flowers bloom in May. Crested dwarf Iris should be transplanted every few years to give it more breathing room. They would be a sweet surprise on the edge of a woodland path.



Left: squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*);
Right: Tall Crested Dwarf Iris (*Iris cristata*)

Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*) makes a fun garden plant if you have a shady, moist spot. Its green and brown striped "pulpit" (spathe) and the "Jack" (spadix), tucked under the spathe's hood, appears in May, surrounded by a three-part leaf. Its red berries blaze in the fall. Jack-in-the-pulpit grows about three feet high, and it multiplies if happy in its location. It may go dormant and disappear in the summer, but will be back next spring.

False Solomon's seal (*Smilacina racemosa*) is not often thought of as a garden plant. In woodlands it can look a little sparse, but in a flowerbed it flourishes. In dappled shade you'll get a good crop of false Solomon's seal with their large alternating leaves and showy, white flower clusters in April to May. Unlike true Solomon's seal, false Solomon's seal flowers bloom at the end of their stems. I stake my false Solomon's seal to keep it from draping over more delicate plants. Their green berries turn bright red and persist into fall. False Solomon's seal appreciates a bit of watering during dry spells.



Left: Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum*);
Right: False Solomon's seal (*Smilacina racemosa*)

Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum biflorum*) also has large, alternating leaves, but its pendulous flowers hang below each leaf joint. Their green berries turn dark blue. Solomon's seal grows six to seven feet tall and bows into a graceful fountain shape. They are best planted toward the back of garden beds in shade. Solomon's seal appreciates consistent moisture.

Blue-lilac flowering creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*) grows in partial shade or morning sunshine. Since these plants are only six inches tall, they make a good addition to the front of woodland garden beds. Creeping phlox spreads into a small colony in a year or two.

Wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) won't make a big splash in a garden, but it's a nice specimen plant that may attract hummingbirds. This native columbine produces nodding scarlet and yellow flowers in late May. It likes sun or part shade and well-drained soil. If wild columbine is happy in its location, it will self-sow and add more color to the garden.

Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*) is a large plant, growing four to six feet tall, for the back of a flower bed. It grows as big as a bush each year. Its giant plumes of ivory-white flowers bloom in June or July, brightening up shady areas. It grows under my basswood trees in mostly shade. Provide a bit of water during dry spells to keep it robust.



Left: Wild columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*);
Right: Goatsbeard (*Aruncus dioicus*)

Saving the best for last, wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) is one of my favorite native plants. It's hardy and easy to grow in sun or part shade. The palmate leaf shape is eye-catching, and the five-petaled flowers add a cloud of rose-purple to the garden in May and June. Wild geranium disappears in the fall but comes back each year, self-seeding into larger colonies as time goes by.

✂ Beth Schroeder, bsw1@comcast.net

Newton's Secret Garden

On Tuesday, January 10, an audience of more than one hundred people learned about a hidden treasure when they attended a program at the library: Discovering Houghton, Views of Newton's Secret Garden, sponsored by the Newton Free Library, Newton Conservators, Friends of the Houghton Garden, and the new Amherst-College-based literary magazine, *The Common*.

It was an interesting evening filled with discussion of past history, landscape design, and photographic excellence combined with literary commentary—a little something for everyone. As head of the Friends of Houghton Garden, I gave an overview of the acquisition and renovation of the garden. Jane Roy Brown of the Library of American Landscape History provided the historical context for the garden's design. Finally, Sarah Luria, Professor of English at Holy Cross, shared her reflections on looking at the garden through the work of contemporary photographer Daniel Jackson. (Sarah Luria and Daniel Jackson collaborated on a photo essay published in the second issue of *The Common*.)

If you were unable to hear the lecture, let me walk you through a bit of my presentation. Houghton Garden is located at the intersection of Suffolk and Woodman Road, behind the Church of the Redeemer in the Chestnut Hill area. Created in 1906 by Martha and Clement Houghton on 26 acres, which included the house, carriage house, green houses and other sundry maintenance structures, the garden was designed to take advantage of the natural contours of the landscape. With assistance from the landscape architect Warren Manning, the existing waterways were reconfigured to form a peninsula and a disguised water moraine that would bring the desirable growing conditions sought by gardeners, moist but well-drained soil. One side was prepared for acid-loving plants and the other for lime-loving plants. That manipulation would be unthinkable today with the statewide wetlands restrictions.

Martha Houghton traveled to England frequently and to Japan several times to collect plant material that could be



Photo: Daniel Jackson, <http://straightphotography.org/galleries/houghton>



NewtonSERVES

Help us help Newton on Sunday, April 29!

Saw Mill Park Garlic Mustard Pull — 10:00am

Trip Leader is Katherine Howard (617-527-1796)

Blue Heron Bridge Garlic Mustard Pull — 10:00am

Trip leader is Eric Olson (617-872-9928)

Dolan Pond Garlic Mustard Pull — 10:00am

Trip Leader is Eric Olson (617-872-9928)

Nahonton Park Invasive Pull — 10:00am

Trip Leader: Jane Sender (617-462-8425)

To work on one of the projects listed, please send a message to NewtonSERVES@newtoncommunitypride.org or call 617-527-8283.

used in her "wild garden." There is even a letter from the famous landscape architect Fletcher Steele to the United States Department of Agriculture vouching for Mrs. Houghton's plants being allowed to pass by quarantine in the hopes of surviving their travels. Dwarf conifers, exotic bulbs, every known species of rhododendron hardy enough for her location, alpine flowers, water-type plants to suit conditions, and hundreds of primulas were a few of what she brought. In its day, the Houghton Garden provided a pleasurable experience for the knowledgeable who could admire her intelligent selections and skill at cultivating difficult plants and for the less informed visitor who simply recognized the beauty, the color, the perfume of the garden.

Numerous national accolades came to the garden and its owners, and in 1934 Martha became one of the founders of the American Rock Garden Society and its president from 1936-1940. Unfortunately, times change. Martha died in 1956, and in 1968 the city of Newton acquired the land by eminent domain as part of acreage taken from the Webster Trustees. This Webster Conservation Land was the first acquisition of the Newton Conservation Commission, established the same year. Since 1975, when the Chestnut Hill Garden Club signed a maintenance agreement with the Conservation Commission, the club as well as the Friends, who formed in 2003, have worked together to aid in the upkeep of the garden. In 1999, the Houghton Garden was added to the Register of Historic Places, and photographs of it as well as other documents now reside at the Smithsonian and at the Arnold Arboretum.

The Friends are very grateful for the support we get from the Conservators, which enables us to collect funds as a non-profit, and for all the hard work President Jane Sender has given us in recent years during her tenure on the Conservation Commission. Through our combined efforts, we remain the stewards of this historic gem in Newton.

Come by for a stroll or if you can, join us for our park clean-ups that we hold several times a year. The muscles may get sore, but lunch is on me!

✂ Michele Hanss, Head of the Friends of the Houghton Garden

Annual Meeting: Let's Bring Nature Home

This year, the Newton Conservators' annual meeting will take place on Wednesday, May 2, at 6 pm at Nonantum Post 440. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Douglas Tallamy, professor and Chair of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, and author of the wonderful book *Bringing Nature Home*.

In his book, Professor Tallamy reviews how the plant world is the crucial base that converts the sun's energy into food energy and how plant diversity supports insect diversity, which in turn supports the diversity of bird and other animal species.

We all know that bird food comes in bags and is cracked corn and sunflower seeds, right? You may have a different view if you treat yourself to reading Dr. Tallamy's book. The chapter that is titled "What Does Bird Food Look Like?" contains photo after photo of amazing native insects and their sometimes disgusting eggs and larvae. Those insects, he says, are crucial food for our native songbirds.

He studies the ability of insects to propagate on and to eat native and nonnative plants and explains why our important native insect species usually are not able to thrive (or even to survive) on nonnative plants. His tenet is that development, along with the common landscaping trap of pristine lawn plus ornamental shrubs, is destroying crucial habitat for insects. He argues that we must protect habitat and actively choose to landscape our yards with native plants that will sustain and save our insects, our birds, and our planet. Then, he provides helpful native plant lists for our region.

Whenever the Newton Conservators get a grant request for the ever-popular school Butterfly Garden, I share with them Prof. Tallamy's warning:

"When designing a butterfly garden, you need two types of plants: species that provide nectar for adults, and species that are host plants for butterfly larvae. Most people focus only on the plants that produce nectar. Even worse, they often turn to alien plants that are promoted as being good for butterflies, the most popular of which, hands down, is the butterfly bush (Buddleja species). Planting butterfly bush in your garden will provide attractive nectar for adult butterflies, but not one species of butterfly in North America can use buddleias as larval host plants. To have butterflies, we need to make butterflies. Butterflies used to reproduce on the native plants that grew in our yards before the plants were bulldozed and replaced by lawn. To have butterflies in our future, we need to replace those lost host plants, no if's, and's or but's. If we do not, butterfly populations will continue to decline with every new house that is built."

Bringing Nature Home is a wonderful combination of basic science, scholarly research and results, frightening implications, amusing stories, and practical land management and planting tips. Most of all it is eye-opening and inspiring.



Photo: George McLean

After reading the book, I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Tallamy speak at the Cambridge Public Library: the large auditorium was packed, and the audience was riveted by his captivating photos, his astounding research, his dry wit and lively delivery.

I encourage you to read the book for yourselves and to come to hear Dr. Tallamy speak on May 2. (A small number of books will be on sale at the annual meeting.)

Katherine Howard

An Unusual Winter

If you stroll around any of our Newton parks during one of the unseasonably warm 40-degree days, you might see Mallards breaking through the thin ice for the first bite of cold vegetation. Usually our ponds still are covered in ice and snow at this time of year, but with the unusually warm weather, Mallards and some Black Ducks have arrived early. We still await the return of the Wood Ducks: watch for them in Cold Spring Park, probably earlier than their arrival last March.

The Charles River from Norumbega to Watertown Square is another fine place to look for these ducks. There have been Ring-necked Ducks and a few Common Goldeneyes along the Blue Heron trail system with its viewing platforms out over the water. You also might find Great Blue Herons and Black-crowned Night Herons.



Left: Ring-necked Ducks (Photo: George McLean Photog);

Right: Wood Ducks (Photo: Dan Perlman/EcoLibrary.org)

An Unusual Winter continued from page 6:

The Common Merganser, a striking duck, also arrives in the spring. Their white sides, green heads and bright orange-red beaks are dazzling. The smaller Hooded Merganser can also be found in the Charles River and Newton ponds now. Bulloughs Pond is often a good place to see these very ornate ducks together with small Bufflehead Ducks.



Hooded Merganser (☞ George McLean Photog)

The Great Horned Owls have been on their nests for two weeks. The females have a featherless area below on their breast, called a brood patch, where the eggs get the warmth directly from the higher temperature of the mother's flesh. Most years, the owls, which take over the used nests of other large birds such as crows and herons and sometimes even squirrels, have to sit in the snow with their eggs warmed under them.

Screech Owls are also nesting in Newton now. These smaller owls, which come in a rusty red phase and a gray phase, nest in holes in trees and in specially constructed nest boxes provided by their admirers. Both of the above species of owls were seen during the annual Christmas bird count.



Left: Great Horned Owl (☞ Isabelle Stillger);



Right: Eastern Screech Owl (☞ George McLean Photog)

At this year's Christmas count on December 8, folks went out at 5:15 in the morning to search for owls, then went in for warm drinks and doughnuts. After warming up, the intrepid owl searchers joined with ordinary risers to count more birds during daylight hours. This year, perhaps due in part to the warmth, a Wilson's Warbler turned up on the other side of the Newton Commonwealth Golf Course. Wilson's Warblers, which usually spend the winter in Central America, between Mexico and Panama, are small, brilliant yellow birds with a jet black skull cap, like a yarmulke, on top of their heads.

Our squirrels are lucky that the winter is so mild. Because of the defoliation of the oak trees caused by winter moth larvae last spring, finding acorns this winter is a losing proposition for most of them. The oaks had to put their energy into producing a second spread of leaves to gather the sun's energy and did not have enough resources left to put out acorns. As a result, our Blue Jays have mostly left the area, with a few exceptions. The squirrels, on the other hand, have been foraging around (more easily because of the lack of ice) and do visit bird feeders.



Left: Red Tailed Hawk (☞ Fred Yost);



Right: Cooper's Hawk (☞ George McLean Photog)

Throughout the winter, three hawk species make their rounds of our bird feeders—looking for prey. Often the large Red-tailed Hawks are looking for squirrels. The small Sharp-shinned Hawk, however, usually preys on small songbirds. Last week, a Sharpie was perched in a bush, watching my feeders. I frightened him off but had already found the tell-tale feathers of an earlier hit he had made on a small bird at my feeder. In December, a Cooper's Hawk, a larger hawk, chased a songbird into my kitchen window, where it was stunned and fell below. The Cooper's Hawk swooped down to carry it up into a nearby tree, and dined. These latter two species of hawks may be on the increase because of the presence of bird feeders. This practice of hunting at feeders instead of in the wild may have consequences that we have yet to know.

Soon, the Woodcocks will return to perform their evening mating flight displays in Nahanton Park. They were wowing people in the middle of March last year. This year, there already have been reports from people hearing their mating call in several locations in Eastern Massachusetts. Woodcocks



American Woodcock (Photo: David M. Larson Mass Audubon)

are very unusual looking birds, plump with big eyes and a very long bill they use to probe in the earth for worms by sensing their motion underground. The Newton Conservators—together with the city's Department of Parks and Recreation—have been instrumental in having the Massachusetts Audubon Society do a survey of the uses and habitats in Nahanton Park. As a result, the City will do some maintenance on the field that the Woodcocks use in order to keep it from becoming overgrown with invasive brush, which otherwise would discourage the birds from returning to perform their mating ritual.

If you know of a park in Newton near you that could use help maintaining habitat that will support wildlife, let us know. The Conservators exist to preserve and maintain all open space in Newton. If you have an interest in watching our local birds, just go for a walk in any of Newton's open spaces. In addition, this newsletter contains a list of the guided walks sponsored by the Newton Conservators this spring.



Photo: Richard A. Danca

Last minute alert: Two birders just saw the Woodcocks displaying in Nahanton Park, February 19!

Photo: Pete Gilmore

In The Neighborhood

Improving the Path up Institution Hill

There's a wonderful but little-known path that goes from the front of the Bowen Elementary School on Cypress Street up "Institution Hill" to Andover-Newton Theological School (ANTS). At the top of the hill, there are wonderful views of Blue Hills and Downtown Boston, and one can even see planes land at Logan at dusk.

The path used to go through a large, wooded area owned by ANTS, but about ten years ago it was sold to a developer, Terraces, LLC, to develop a gated community. As part of Special Permit #250-01, as a concession to the neighborhood to mitigate losing the wooded area, the developer set aside a fund to plant trees on the abutting street and in the remaining "buffer" area and also promised to restore the path with an easement for public use. Somewhere in the agreement, it was also stipulated that no structure would obscure the view from the top of the hill.

The Petitioner shall provide at its sole expense a footpath measuring four (4) feet in width from Langley Path to the Andover Newton Theological School's campus as shown on the Site Plan referenced in Condition 1 above. Such footpath shall be surfaced with natural materials and shall be reviewed and approved by the City Engineer prior to construction.

The Petitioner shall maintain the footpath annually at its sole expense to the limited extent of removing any trash or obstructions from the footpath and restoring the footpath's natural surface. The Petitioner shall grant an easement in gross measuring ten (10) feet in width to the City of Newton and the Newton Conservation Commission permitting the public to have access for recreational purposes over such footpath in perpetuity."

The building permits were issued, and these conditions were forgotten until some neighborhood residents petitioned the developer. With some help from the city planning department a few years ago, the path was restored with stone dust and a substance called "leaf litter." The path has received some maintenance by the Terraces. Although the path now goes alongside a concrete block wall and comes uncomfortably close to some private property at some points, it is still a pleasant walk.

There is a small section of switchback trail where the Terraces property meets ANTS. From that point on, the trail is not as well defined or as well maintained. Rather than continuing along the ridge to the viewpoint, it seems to go toward a parking lot, through poison ivy and deep leaf piles. ANTS could help improve this. It would also be nice to get markers at the ends of the paths, if the owners are willing. Perhaps this would make a nice CPA project? I encourage neighbors and other interested people to join together to take on this project.

Photo: Adam Peller

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



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: TED KUKLINSKI

Saturday, March 24 (1 pm – 3 pm)

The Hidden Life of Vernal Pools: Forest and Vernal Pool Exploration at Webster Woods

Trip Leader: Eric Olson (617-872-9928)

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 a temporary wetland that will dry but where they are not eaten by fish. These organisms are the "obligate" vernal pool species, so called because they must use a vernal pool for various parts of their life cycle. Join us as we investigate the obligate vernal pool species, including fairy shrimp, mole salamanders and the wood frog. "Herps" (reptiles and amphibians) are the stars of the show but we will also botanize. Sampling equipment will be provided; bring hand lenses if you have them. We will walk even in the rain; dress accordingly. Meet at the end of Warren Street on the western edge of Webster Conservation Area or (for those not up to a 1 mile hike round-trip) meet up with the group at 2 PM in the back parking lot (far back) of Congregation Mishkan Tefila; the vernal pool is right here.

Sunday, April 22 (2 pm)

Finding Newton's Old Waterworks at Cutler Park (Rain or shine)

Walk Leader: Lucy Caldwell Stair

Few people walking through the woods in Cutler Park realize that the park is the site of a waterworks constructed by Newton in the 1870s to supply the City with clean water. Guided by old diagrams and photos, we will locate the old pumps and wells along the 1-mile trail and visualize how this elaborate engineering system worked. Extra option: a 1/2-mile walk along the site of the old filter basins and the pumping station at Needham Street. Meet at the Cutler Park DCR parking lot on Kendrick Street just across the Charles River in Needham.

Saturday, April 28 (10 am)

Spring Migrants Bird Walk

Walk Leaders: Sonja Wadman (857-231-1558); Ted Kuklinski (617-332-7753), Alison Leary (617-821-5619) Co-sponsored by Newton Conservators and Waltham Land Trust

Join expert birders from the Newton Conservators and the Waltham Land Trust as we identify early spring migrants along the Charles River between the Waltham Watch Factory and Auburndale Park. Bring your binoculars to see red winged blackbirds, tree swallows, eastern phoebes, yellow-rumped, palm and yellow warblers. We will also observe many of our resident species of cardinals, downy woodpeckers, blue jays, chickadees and tufted titmice in full breeding mode. If we're lucky, we may also spy Carolina wrens, red-bellied woodpeckers, and some raptors including red-tailed and coopers' hawks. Remember your bird lists! Meet at Waltham Watch Factory, 183 Crescent St, Waltham

Sunday, April 29 (10 am)

Saw Mill Brook Park Garlic Mustard Pull. A NewtonSERVES Project

Trip Leader: Katherine Howard (617-527-1796 home; 617-721-2571 cell)

Garlic Mustard, a native of Europe that probably came here as a garden herb, has now invaded our backyards, parks, forests and conservation areas. It is high up on the federal/state official list of plant invaders threatening our environment. It will quickly cover vast areas and low light forested areas, shading out other plants, chemically altering the soil to inhibit germination of competitor seeds, and altering the habitat for native insects such as butterflies. However, in areas where it is just starting to invade, it only takes a small amount of effort to be rid of it. It is a biennial very easily identified and pulled when the second year plants are flowering in April/May. If not pulled, each plant will scatter hundreds to thousands of seeds later in the season that will become first year plants the next year, and also remain as viable seeds for several more years. Sturdy shoes, long pants, long sleeves and work gloves recommended. Meet at the parking lot on Vine Street.

Sunday, April 29 (10 am)

Garlic Mustard Pull at Blue Heron Bridge. A NewtonSERVES Project

Trip leader: Eric Olson (617-872-9928)

This is the fourth year working along the Charles River Greenway at this bridge site, helping the Trustees of the Reservations with their stewardship of the floodplain forest. We will again mix in some general nature study so bring binoculars and an insect net and hand lens if you have them. Park at the Pleasant Street Super Stop-N-Shop parking lot in Watertown at the corner furthest from the store. This spot is directly in front of you as you enter the parking lot from Pleasant Street. There is a path entrance there. Turn left and follow path to the bridge.



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: TED KUKLINSKI



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Sunday, April 29 (10 am)

Garlic Mustard Pull at Dolan Pond. A NewtonSERVES Project

Trip Leader: Ted Kuklinski (617-332-7753)

Meet at Dolan Pond conservation area in W. Newton. Street Parking is available near the four entrances at Auburndale Avenue, Webster Park, Stratford and Cumberland. Recent (February 2012) surveys found a new garlic mustard stand in an off-trail corner 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 and hand lenses for observing birds, bugs, flowers, and a good variety of pond life.

Sunday, April 29 (10 am)

Invasive Pull at Nahanton Park. A NewtonSERVES project

Trip Leader: Jane Sender (617-462-8425)

Many native habitats, including grassland and open woodland habitats, are all threatened by invasive plants. They out-compete native plants, reduce biodiversity and may negatively impact birdlife. Nahanton Park is one of many of our open spaces suffering from infestations of non-native, invasive plant species, including black swallowwort, multiflora rose, tree of heaven, and black locust seedlings. Join us in preserving the beauty and diversity of this special park by spending a few hours cutting back/removing these invasive species. Sturdy shoes, long pants, long sleeves and work gloves recommended. Meet in the large parking lot off Winchester Street.

Wednesday, May 2 (6 pm)

Newton Conservators Annual Meeting

Location: American Legion Post 440, 225 California Street, Newton 02460. Don't forget to attend the annual meeting—with this year's keynote speaker Dr. Douglas Tallamy, Professor of Entomology and Wildlife Conservation at University of Delaware, and author of "Bringing Nature Home." Register at www.newtonconservators.org.

Sunday, May 6 (10 am)

Garlic Mustard Pull at Cold Spring Park

Trip leader: Katherine Howard (617-527-1796 home; 617-721-2571 cell).

See above description of garlic mustard. Cold Spring Park is one area becoming infested with the highly invasive garlic mustard plant. We will spend a couple hours pulling along the Cochituate aqueduct walk, staying in upland areas away from wetlands. 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. Meet at the Dunklee Rd. entrance, at the Newton Highlands side of the park.

Sunday, May 6 (10 am)

Newton Aqueducts Hike

Trip leader: Henry Finch (617-964-4488).

This is a very popular 4-6 mile hike through woods, meadows and fields along the Newton sections of the Sudbury and Cochituate aqueducts. Parts of the paths traverse close to backyards, so hikers do need to be respectful of private property. 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.

Saturday, May 12 (2 pm - 4 pm)

Follow up Garlic Mustard Pull

Trip leaders: Eric Olson (617-872-9928) and Katherine Howard (617-527-1796)

(Locations TBD). See above description of garlic mustard. Check with website (www.newtonconservators.org) or call leaders; locations will be chosen depending on where the need is greatest.

Sunday, May 13 (8 am)

Nahanton Park Mother's Day Bird Walk

Trip Leaders are Alison Leary (617-821-5619) and Haynes Miller,

Co-sponsored with Friends of Nahanton Park

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, and swallows. 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.



PHOTO: RICHARD DANCA



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: DAN BRODY



PHOTO: STEVEN SULEWSKI

Saturday May 19 (8 am)

Bird Walk at Cold Spring Park (Rain Date May 20)

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

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 like 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.

Sunday, May 20 (2 pm)

Canoe/Kayak Trip at Nahanton Park

Trip leader: Bill Hagar (617-964-2644), Co-sponsored with friends of Nahanton Park

Join us for a canoe trip from Charles River Canoe & Kayak's newest location in Nahanton Park, on a 15-mile stretch of the Charles. Paddlers can enjoy 13 miles of calm water from upstream of Dedham Ave in Needham to Silk Mill Dam at Newton Upper Falls. (See above description of "Birding and Boating" Trip.) If you have your own canoe or kayak, you can put it in the water from this parking lot. Dress appropriately. We recommend you bring a hat, sunscreen, snacks and drinks. Thunderstorms will cancel the trip. Newton Conservator members get a 10% discount on canoe & kayak rentals. Meet at the Nahanton Street entrance next to the river. Parking is available inside the park.

Saturday June 3 (12 pm)

Fern Walk in West Webster Woods (Rain Date June 4)

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

It will not yet be summer, but the ferns will be up. Join fern expert Don Lubin on the hunt for a dozen or more common fern species and a club-moss if we're lucky. Wear long pants for off-trail excursions, but the bugs should not be bad yet, the poison ivy avoidable, and the hike itself fairly level for the most part. Meet at the rear parking lot of Congregation Mishkan Tefila on the west side of Hammond Pond Parkway, just north of the Chestnut Hill Mall (north side of Rt 9). Do not park anywhere near their buildings, but continue beyond to the isolated lot in the woods in the back. We expect the event to take about two hours. Bring fern questions from the woods or from your garden, and any fern fronds you would like to have identified.

TBA (10 am - 12 noon)

Japanese Knotweed Pull at Hammond Pond

Trip leader: Eric Olson (617-872-9928)

Japanese Knotweed is a bamboo-like invader from Asia that can create dense 8'-tall single-species stands. Knotweed is a tough adversary, not because it's spiny or strong or even particularly hard to pull, but like the magic brooms in Disney's "Fantasia" Sorcerer's Apprentice, any small root fragments we leave behind will spring back to life the following year. Government scientists are seeking biological control agents for this species in Asia, but until and unless they find some, we are stuck controlling the plant by hand. Persistence pays with this species, and eradication is possible, but it takes several years to truly finish the job. Bring pitchforks, garden spades, and hand pruners if you have them. Meet at small parking lot off Hammond Pond Parkway adjacent to pond and within view of Macy's.

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 50 years ago in June 1961.

The Newton Conservators Newsletter® is published four times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc., in June, September, December, and March. Deadlines for these issues are the first Friday 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 bethwilkinson@mac.com. Digitized photographs, maps and diagrams are also welcome.

Editor:	Beth Wilkinson	617-969-4443
Design/Layout	Patricia Robinson	617-964-4488
Production:	Bonnie Carter	617-969-0686

Thanks to the following contributors to this edition of the Newsletter: John DiMiceli, Pete Gilmore, Michele Hanss, Katherine Howard, Alison Leary, Adam Peller, Beth Schroeder, Jane Sender, and Beth Wilkinson. As always, thanks to Doug Leith for his excellent proofreading.



NEWTON CONSERVATORS, INC..
P.O. Box 590011
Newton Centre, MA 02459

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organ.
US Postage Paid
Newton, MA 02459
Permit No. 55629



SPRING ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

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

WWW.NEWTONCONSERVATORS.ORG • MARCH - MAY 2012

IN THE SPRING ISSUE:

Public Street Trees—A Choice.	1
President's Message	2
Native Wildflowers for the Spring Garden . . .	3
Newton's Secret Garden	5
Annual Meeting: Let's Bring Nature Home . .	6
An Unusual Winter.	6
In the Neighborhood	6
Spring Walks Schedule	9

Go Green!

...and all the other colors of the rainbow.

You can view this newsletter in color 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

Printed on recycled paper with minimum 20% post-consumer waste

Editor's Note

Welcome to the March 2012 issue of the Conservators' Newsletter!

In this edition, we continue our two-part mission: to share with you the delights of the natural world around Newton and to inform you of some of the work to be done in our city to help preserve those wonders for us and for future generations.

This month, we focus on the increasing loss of the trees that line the city's streets and fill our parks and conservation lands and also on native plants that can make your garden more attractive to our native wildlife (which would please Professor Tallamy, guest speaker at our May 2 annual meeting) and birds that we can see at this time of the year as well as guided walks that you might want to join.

If there are issues that you would like to see covered in this Newsletter, please send your suggestions to me at Bethwilkinson@mac.com.