



Working to preserve open space in Newton for 45 years!

The Newton Conservators

NEWSLETTER

Winter Issue

www.newtonconservators.org

November/December/January 2006-2007

CONSERVATORS TACKLE INVASIVES

The Newton Conservators pursue a range of activities. One of these is land management. Our Land Management Committee has inventoried more than two dozen of Newton's significant open spaces. Not surprisingly, they have found that invasives pose a significant threat to native species in many of these places.

Invasives are plants and animals that are out of their native location. In the absence of predators and other natural checks, they reproduce out of control. The zebra mussel plagues the Great Lakes, clogging shipping and crowding out native species. Goats brought to tropical islands get loose, go wild, multiply, and denude the vegetation, altering the natural balance beyond recognition.

In Newton, two major invasives are the Norway maple and Japanese knotweed. We all know knotweed as the bamboo-like plant that grows in profusion along roadsides and wetlands. The Norway maple was planted as a street tree in the 20th century. It can be beautiful with its rounded canopy of leaves, but it is a bad neighbor, casting such heavy shade that not much else can grow with it. The tree has spread to woods, crowding out what grew there before.

Several efforts are under way in Newton to help restore our open spaces to better health. Ecologist

Eric Olson proposes a project to remove knotweed along the Charles on the city's north side. The Land Management Committee has proposed to remove the Norway maples and other invasives from the site the Conservators own on Dexter Road near Laundry Brook in Newtonville. That project, if successful, may serve as an example for work that could be done at other locations. Both the Charles River and Dexter Road projects are likely to involve students and plenty of hand labor. And Peter Alden, well-known naturalist, will discuss invasives at a speech at the Newton library at the end of November. Read on to find out more.

"I think it's a good convergence," says Ted Kuklinski of the Conservators' Board, who himself has worked on projects to remove knotweed at Dolan Pond. "This year, there is a lot of focus on invasives. For Newton, this is the Year of the Invasives."

Membership Renewal Time

November is here. It's time to renew your membership. Use the form at the back of this issue to renew. And consider a contribution to support protection of open space in Newton.

ALIEN ATTACK

The City of Newton is under attack from alien invaders. They have come from far away and are taking over our back yards, parks, and conservation areas. Slowly and quietly they are creeping into our public open spaces, disrupting the balance of nature and crowding out our native plants. Some of them, like purple loosestrife, are quite pretty but take over our wetlands; others like Japanese knotweed grow tall extremely fast while spreading farther afield underground; still others are even sold at garden stores to unsuspecting customers.

Well known author, lecturer and naturalist Peter Alden, from Concord, MA, will present a lecture and slideshow with a stunning display of the twenty worst invasive alien plants in the Newton area. You will come away from the presentation with the knowledge of how to recognize these plants and what some of the control options are. You will find out what is happening at the state level and in the legislature on how to deal with this severe menace to our city's biodiversity. The lecturer will also conduct an instant village by village poll of attendees to try to assess where in Newton these invasives pose the most threat. He has in preparation a new *Field Guide to the Invasive Plants of New England and the Northeast*.

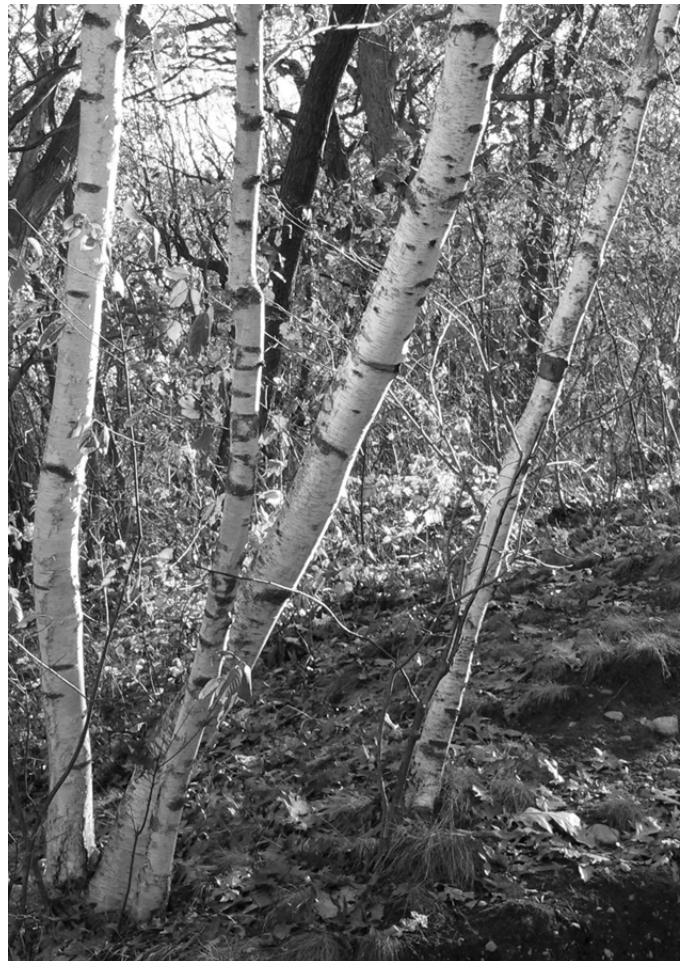
Peter Alden was the inaugural speaker in the Conservators' lecture series (now celebrating its 5th anniversary). Alden, a renowned birder and entertaining and informative speaker, has led over 250 ecotours to over a hundred countries on all seven continents and lectured all over the world for travel and museum organizations. In his work for the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, he spearheaded the first ever statewide Biodiversity Days, in which citizen naturalists in over 80 Massachusetts towns went out into the field to do a species census. This provided a valuable and interesting snapshot of common and unusual species present both here in Newton and across the state of Massachusetts.

He is the author of over a dozen nature field guides including the groundbreaking *National Audubon Society Field Guide to New England* (Knopf, 1998). This book is an easy to use field guide for identifying

1,000 of our region's wildflowers, trees, mushrooms, mosses, fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, butterflies, mammals and much more. Other regional field guides in the series cover California, Florida, the Mid-Atlantic States, the Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountain States, and the Southwestern States. For younger naturalists, along with Roger Tory Peterson, he produced the Peterson First Guide to Mammals of North America and coloring books for both birds and mammals. Other of his books include "The National Audubon Society Field Guide to African Wildlife" (1995) and "Finding Birds Around the World" (1982). Signed copies of his field guide will be available before and after the lecture.

This free Newton Conservators Lecture Series event takes place on Thursday, November 30, 7 pm, at the Druker Auditorium at the Newton Free Library. For more information, visit www.newtonconservators.org/lectures.htm.

- Ted Kuklinski



CONSERVATORS' SURVEY TEAM COMPLETES FIRST YEAR

In the fall of 2005, under the direction of Co-chairs Beth Schroeder and Cris Criscitiello, the Conservators' Land Management Committee initiated a survey of all flora and fauna found within the city's open space and conservation areas. The most recent review of this type had been carried out in 1995 by John P. Richardson, a professional naturalist, at the direction of Martha Horn of Newton's Planning Department. .

The current effort has been undertaken by a group of committee members who visit, in rotation, one of Newton's natural sites each week. Each area is searched methodically, with follow-up checks made at further visits through the seasons. Included on the team are a number of naturalists, both amateur and professional, who, among them, have skills in identification of trees, shrubs, vines, ferns, fungi, wildflowers, birds, and other animal life. An extensive list of the life-forms noted at each site has been accumulated thus far for 29 out of our 31 individual parks and conservation areas. By the year's end, the first go-around of observations in all areas should be completed.

Based on these findings, an overall, city-wide master list and database is now being compiled. This exacting effort has been undertaken by Conservators' Board members Beth Schroeder, Florrie Funk and Sue Avery, joined by Don Lubin and Walter Kittredge, experts on taxonomy. Attention is drawn to types and locations of invasive as well as native species, particularly those present only in small numbers.

This up-to-date master list can be compared with data from the 1995 Richardson Report to identify any major changes during the past decade. As this monitoring effort continues, the fate of our valued native species can be followed and the need for

intervention assessed. This information will also provide a sense of the relative "wildness" of the various open spaces, knowledge which could influence future decisions about land use.

It is the Management Committee's hope that this database may be welcomed as a resource for use at the Newton Free Library, in the Newton Schools, on the Conservators' Website, and by other educational and conservation organizations.

Thanks are extended to AnnaMaria Abernathy, Sue Avery, Larry Burdick, Cris Criscitiello, Henry Finch, Florrie Funk, Pete Gilmore, Debbie Howard, Sam Jaffe, Bill Joplin, Walter Kittredge, Ted Kuklinski, Don Lubin and Beth Schroeder for their interest and their hard work on the Survey Team. Thanks also to Martha Horn for her support of the project.

- *Cris Criscitiello*

OLSON PROPOSES KNOTWEED TASK FORCE

It is one thing to talk about knotweed and another to do something about it. The plant defies efforts to eradicate it. People cut back the shoots, only to find that it has grown back in a matter of weeks, thicker. Herbicides won't do, for the obvious reason that they themselves are unhealthy for the environment. Effective removal requires getting at the roots themselves with hand tools and old-fashioned labor.

Ecologist Eric Olson of Brandeis University presented his plan for knotweed removal along the trails at the Charles River on the north side of Newton at the Conservators' October Board meeting. Olson to date has recruited a dozen Brandeis students. His plan is to cut back the plants, uproot the roots, spread Weed Block (a fabric that allows infiltration by air and water and that prevents regrowth) and to cover the Weed Block with several inches of mulch. Other vegetation, including spotted jewelweed, takes root in the mulch and replaces the knotweed.

Olson reports that he has the approval of state officials who control the land along the Charles. Like him, they see the spread of knotweed as a threat to native vegetation.

Olson proposes to seek a grant of several thousand dollars to obtain the specialized hand tools necessary to deal with the knotweed, as well as to cover the cost of the Weed Block. He proposes that the Conservators serve as an umbrella organization to receive the grant money. The tools would be available for other projects of the Conservators and others, possibly including the Dexter Road project.

Olson's proposal will be made to The Norcross Foundation. His group is to be known as The Knotweed Task Force.

The Conservators' Board discussed a number of issues raised by Olson's proposal. One is the matter of ownership of the tools. Another is storage. The most important is responsibility for proper use of the tools and protection from injury. The Board determined to look into those matters. The Board voted to support Olson and the Task Force in their efforts.

- Eric Reenstierna



TURNING A LEAF

Deep tree roots do a fine job of retrieving trace elements deep in the subsoil; for deciduous trees, the roots then give these minerals to the leaves for temporary storage. At season's end, leaves are returned to the soil but not before enabling brilliant foliage, which will soon spread across much of the United States.

American PIE (*Public Information on the Environment*) urges people to learn to appreciate leaves for their nutritive qualities as well as for their aesthetic ones. Well over half of solid waste is organic material suitable for composting, and ten percent is leaves and lawn clippings from our gardens. During the autumn season, bags of leaves are needlessly making their way to local landfills and incinerators, representing one of the worst kinds of conspicuous waste.

As nature's colorful gifts fall to the ground, consider turning leaves into a long-term investment for your property - and the health of the environment. Leaves can be turned to mulch, a valuable asset for the home landscape and gardens. Mulch helps control weeds, enables soil to hold onto valuable nutrients, permits plant roots to penetrate deeper and conserves moisture in soil by thwarting the effects of rain and snow. Using mulch also protects soil from erosion and runoff caused by heavy rain.

In the winter, the combined effects of freezing, thawing and refreezing can disturb the soil in a garden. This same process can damage plants and shrubs. A layer of mulch over the soil acts as an insulator and reduces the danger to plants from the freeze-thaw cycle. While decomposing, mulch releases beneficial plant nutrients and improves the soil's composition. Leaves - turned to mulch - accomplish this at no financial cost to homeowners.

Turning leaves to mulch works best when they are ground up or permitted to partially rot. Decayed leaves are called leaf mold. The chemical makeup of leaf mold is the closest thing in nature to pure humus. Leaves, unless chopped up, tend to decompose quite slowly. If collected annually, however, a huge pile of leaves becomes a rich and continuing source of mulch

for distribution on gardens, shrubs and trees, even for top-dressing lawns. Simply dig to the bottom of the leaf pile where decomposition has done its job. Oak or beech leaves, if used exclusively, will make a slightly acidic mulch, good for broad leaf evergreens and blueberries. If you choose not to use leaves for mulch this fall, consider adding them to the compost heap. Mixed with other ingredients, leaves will decompose more quickly and build your inventory of compost. Visit our website to learn more about home composting at http://www.americanpie.org/slice_composting.html

This fall, turn a leaf to good use in your landscape.

(Reprinted from American P.I.E., Public Information on the Environment, and Nature Notes, the Conservators' email newsletter)

THE BEACH AT CRYSTAL LAKE

Readers of *The Tab* have followed the conflict between the owner of a home site on Crystal Lake and the City of Newton. The home site abuts the city's bathhouse on Crystal Lake, which receives heavy use and for years has been inadequate for the swimming public. Pat Hannon, who owns the home site, recently decided to move away. He plans to market the property, which he acquired in 2002 for \$3,000,000 and which had a house. His decision opens the possibility of an acquisition of the site by the City, to expand the public facility there.

The site contains 44,449 square feet (about an acre) and has long frontage on the pond. If the City were to acquire the site, the acquisition would expand the City's holding by 140%.

Architect Robert Fizek met with the Conservators' Board in September and discussed the possibility of a public acquisition of the Hannon property, in advance of the Hannon decision to sell, which only became known recently. Fizek has prepared a conceptual site plan showing a new, expanded bathhouse, an expanded parking lot, and a new swimming platform.



Fizek requested that the Conservators support his proposal. The Conservators' Board voted to support an effort by the City to acquire the property.

The Conservators have discussed ways to help the City acquire the property. CPA money would be the likely source of funds. The property's asking price is reported at \$4.5 million. Issues that are likely to make the proposal controversial are the potential size of the financial outlay, neighborhood support or opposition, and, for the Conservators, the extent of open space protection.

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 45 years ago in June 1961.

FROM THE EDITOR:

SEND NEWS!

This marks the third issue of the Conservators' newsletter without Doug Dickson as editor. Doug was not only editor. He also often wrote many of the articles that did so much to inform us about conservation in Newton. Doug has always had a good vantage from which to observe, serving on city committees, leading nature walks, and putting in time for the Conservators as President and as a member of the Board.

It'd be pointless to try to fill Doug's shoes – partly because, who else has that broad a vantage? Your new editor is more inclined to let this newsletter "write itself." What readers are likely to find in print here may include fine prose. It may also include things scratched out on the backs of envelopes, half-formed ideas, and laundry lists. All that matters about an item is that it inform us about some aspect of open space in Newton. All contributions are welcome. Our writers include Board members, subscribers, neighbors who care deeply about a nearby open space, local activists, naturalists, aldermen, and people who are active in promoting a solution to an open space-related problem like the overhead wires that destroy street trees.

The common thread is that these people all care about the same things we do. We welcome items of all kinds – notices of upcoming lectures, nature walks, and local concerns. We welcome photography as well as writing. Many of the photographs you see here are by Dan Brody, who serves on the Conservators' Board. From issue to issue, so much of this newsletter's photography is his that it becomes repetitive to give it attribution. If you see a photograph without attribution, that's his. Find more of Dan's work in color at our Web site, which he maintains.

A practice of "the newsletter writes itself" means that this newsletter may vary greatly in length. When contributions are short, this newsletter will be short. When they are many and long, this could be like the phone book. Whatever is on your mind: send it in. The conservation community needs to know.

Newton Conservators Newsletter

Meeting Calendar

Newton Conservators Board meets the fourth Wednesday of every month at 7:30 pm, usually in a City Hall meeting room or the City Hall cafeteria.

Angino Farm Commission meets the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm in City Hall Room 209.

Community Preservation Committee meets the last Wednesday of every month at 7:00 pm in City Hall Room 209.

Conservation Commission meets the fourth Thursday of every month at 7:30 pm in City Hall Room 209.

Parks and Recreation Commission meets the third Monday of every month at 7:30 pm in City Hall Room 209.

Urban Tree Commission meets the third Friday of every month at 7:45 am in City Hall Room 202.

Aldermanic Committee on Community Preservation meets the last Tuesday of every month at 7:45 pm in City Hall Room 222.

The Newton Conservators Newsletter© is published five times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc. Issues usually appear in mid-February, April, June, September and November. Deadlines for these issues are the fifth of each month in which an issue is scheduled to be published.

Editor: Eric Reenstierna
Production: Bonnie Carter

Thanks to the following contributors to this edition of the Newsletter: Dan Brody, M.G. "Cris" Criscitiello, and Ted Kuklinski. Thanks also to Douglas Leith for his excellent proofreading.



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



*Celebrating 45 years
of open space advocacy
in Newton*

Newton Conservators Membership Form

PO Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459 • www.newtonconservators.org

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

MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS

- ☐ Individual member \$25
- ☐ Family member \$35
- ☐ Sustaining member \$50
- ☐ Donor \$75
- ☐ Patron \$100

All amounts are tax deductible

NAME _____

STREET _____ VILLAGE _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____ Make checks payable to **Newton Conservators, Inc.**

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