



NEWTON
CONSERVATORS

WINTER ISSUE

NEWSLETTER

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

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What Does the Newton Conservators Do?



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

Newton Conservators' Board Meeting at Waban Library

The mission of Newton Conservators can be stated briefly: it is to promote “the protection and preservation of natural areas... for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of Newton for scientific study, education, and recreation.”

Telling you about the ways that the Conservators' board members and volunteers fulfill that mission cannot be so brief because we do so in many ways.

1. The Conservators advocates for and works to preserve critical open spaces in Newton.

Unlike many communities outside Route 128, Newton does not have many hundreds of acres of open space (except for golf courses). The green space that does exist is essential for the health of all the people and wildlife in the city. Concerned members keep track of what is happening with important open-space parcels and work to find ways to protect those that are at risk. Helping the city to acquire the Newton Community Farm was one of those projects.

Preserving Webster Woods, the core of the largest natural area in Newton, has been one of our big projects for the past three years. The Conservators collaborated with the Friends of Webster Woods to make sure that



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Children learn about the kind of wildlife that can be found in the vernal pond in Webster Woods.

people throughout the city recognized the environmental importance of the former Congregation Mishkan Tefila land at 300 Hammond Pond Parkway. (The land is now owned by Boston College.) The coalition was delighted to receive the unanimous

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support of the City Councilors and mayoral candidates. One of Mayor Fuller's early acts was to form a Webster Woods Advisory Panel. The Conservators has three board members and two advisors on that fifteen-member panel. The goal is to preserve the woods — by purchase or conservation restriction — by the end of 2019.



Councilor-At-Large, Ward 5, Deb Crossley shows a group of Conservators and friends plans for the Upper Falls Greenway.

not have the permanent protection of a conservation restriction.

Article 97 of the Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution provides protection for land acquired for natural resources purposes, but that does not apply to all city-owned land, and there have been legal challenges to the law. The best way to protect this land in Newton is with a conservation restriction (CR), a legal agreement about



The path at Bracebridge Road has new owners who are committed to maintaining a public walkway.

what activities are and are not allowed on the land — in perpetuity. By state law, property owners cannot hold conservation restrictions on their own land. They must be held by an independent entity, and the Conservators has taken on that role for the City.

Three city-owned properties — the land next to the bathhouse at Crystal Lake, a small property on Wabasso Street, and Kessler Woods — were purchased with Community Preservation funds and, by state law must be covered by a conservation restriction. Newton Conservators has agreed to hold those CRs and is working with the Newton Law Department to create the CR documents for those properties.

The Conservators also has three board members on a working group (with members of the Parks and Rec and

Law departments) to create a conservation restriction for Nahanton Park. The Conservators will also hold that CR.

The Conservators also looks for innovative ways to help preserve open space. It holds the conservation restriction on 1.5 acres of a beautiful residential property at 15 Bracebridge Road. A path through the property, which we completed last year, is open to the public.

2. The Conservators monitors its Conservation Restrictions.

Each year a team of volunteers visits each of the properties on which we hold a conservation restriction.

Currently, there are six of those properties owned by the City: Newton Community Farm (Angino Farm), the Crystal Lake Path, Webster Park at Dolan Pond (76



Fall festival at the Newton Newton Community Farm, a property the Newton Conservators helped preserve through the Community Preservation Act.

Webster Park), Elgin Street Conservation Area, Newton Commonwealth Golf Course, and Waban Hill Reservoir.

The task of the volunteers is to make sure that the terms of the restriction

are being followed and that there is no encroachment on the land from abutters. In addition, every three years, the Conservators hires a professional organization — to date, the Audubon Society or the New England Wild Flower Society — to monitor each property professionally. We report any corrections that are needed to the city department responsible for the land (or in the case of privately owned 15 Bracebridge Road, to the owner).

3. The Conservators helps to maintain city-owned open space.

Especially with the great increase of invasive plants, land that is left alone often does not remain a biologically diverse and healthy environment. Invasive plants crowd out native plants as well as the insects, birds, amphibians, and other animals that have evolved to eat them, so it's not sufficient just to let open space exist "naturally."

The City has not been able to allocate sufficient resources to control invasive plants from its parks and conservation land, so — as much as possible — the Conservators helps to provide hardworking volunteers to do the work. The



PHOTO: BETH WILKINSON
*High school volunteers at the
Newton Public Library.*

volunteer crews, despite valiant efforts, cannot keep up with removal of invasive plants, so we need to find additional ways to address the problem.

In the meantime, as you will see

in the spring and fall newsletters, Conservators volunteers remove invasive plants from many of Newton's parks and conservation lands. The season starts with removing garlic mustard from Dolan Pond, Cold Spring Park, and Blue Heron Bridge. Work continues by removing buckthorn, knotweed, and black swallow-wort throughout the city.

Some parts of our city-owned open space have deteriorated so much that they need special attention. Two of those areas are Woodcock Meadow in Nahanton Park and the Red Maple swamp in Cold Spring Park. As you may have read in past issues of this newsletter, the Conservators has an ongoing project in each of these parks.



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY
*Newton Conservators lead trips into Woodcock
Meadow to remove invasive plants like
buckthorn and black locust.*

In Nahanton Park, advisor Jon Regosin, the new Deputy Superintendent of the Mass. Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, helped us to develop a plan to save the meadow habitat for American Woodcocks and migratory songbirds, wildflowers, bees and other pollinators, and many butterflies. (See <https://bit.ly/2Ow9W1k> for an article.) This work is particularly critical since meadow habitat is under severe threat throughout the state.

In Cold Spring Park, the understory of the red maple swamp is so thick with invasive Eurasian buckthorn, which suppresses the growth of the trees' seedlings, that no new trees are growing to ensure the succession of the forest. With the help of ecologist Eric Olson, horticulturist Bruce Wenning and a dedicated group of volunteers,



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY
Bullough's Pond

the Conservators has established two test plots in hopes of identifying the best way to remove the problematic buckthorn. (See <https://bit.ly/2SSan9K>.)

4. The Conservators advocates for trails.

The mission of the Conservators includes ensuring that open space is accessible to the public. Part of that work is advocating for new trails and helping to make sure that already established trails are kept clear and well marked.

For the past year, the Conservators has worked with the Riverside Greenway Working Group (a coalition of Bike Newton, the Conservators, the Lawrence and Lillian Solomon Foundation, and members of the neighborhoods of Newton Lower Falls and Auburndale) to develop a trail network that will close the gap between the Blue Heron Trail at Lyons Park in Auburndale and the Riverside MBTA station, Newton Lower Falls and beyond.

5. The Conservators works to educate the public about open space.

One of the most rewarding and fun parts of our work is sharing information about the benefits of open space and helping the creatures that live in it.

The Conservators' website (www.NewtonConservators.org) contains a wealth of information and history of Newton's open spaces and the Conservators' work since it was formed in 1961. This quarterly newsletter and our frequent E-bulletin bring regular updates and in-depth looks to your in-box or mailbox. Knowledgeable board members and advisors lead our popular walks every spring and fall. They are listed on the website and in the spring and fall newsletters.

Every year, the Conservators co-sponsors lectures at the Newton Free Library. The Conservators Annual Meeting



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY
*Dolan Pond Conservation
Area Signage*

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and dinner on Wednesday, May 9, will feature John Maguranis, Animal Control Officer in Belmont and representative of Project Coyote. In recent years, our speakers have included Arnold Arboretum Director Ned Friedman, Professor Douglas Tallamy from Delaware, and — last year — naturalist/author Peter Alden.



Boston University biologist Richard Primack leads a tour of the Hammond Pond Reservation.

You also can find members of the NC board at a table at the Elm Street and Cold Spring Park Farmers Markets. Next summer, stop by the booth to learn about the benefits of planting milkweed for monarch butterflies — and get some milkweed seeds.

We love working with students at all levels. We work to remove invasives with classes from both Newton high schools — and Needham High School. We're honored to have had the chance to talk to students from biology classes at both Newton North and Newton South. Annually, we give a grant to the summer Environmental Science Program, which helps students to learn about the environment, and we also give grants to environmentally oriented student projects in the Newton Schools. Those grants recently included funding for Brooks Mathewson's salamander project at Cabot Woods with Newton North students, an indoor planting project at Newton South, and an outdoor gardening project at Peirce Elementary School.

6. And more...

In one article, it is impossible to list all that the Conservators does. There are so many more small and large ways that members of the organization work to preserve open space.

The Conservators' board is grateful for the Friends groups that support specific parcels of open space in Newton. Recently, we became the fiscal sponsor for the new Friends of Cold Spring Park. (See Cold Spring article later in this newsletter)

The Conservators had official representatives to the Needham Street Area Vision Plan Engagement Group and the City's Workshop on Climate Resiliency Planning.

The Conservators also owns three small properties in Newton and not only monitors them but also pays for their maintenance. This fall, the board hired a member of the conservation staff at New England Wildflower Society to do an evaluation of Dexter Woods and to suggest ways to make it a better wildlife habitat. That will be an ongoing project over the next year.

What does the Conservators need most to continue all of our work? Your involvement!

Please join us at the annual meeting on May 8, or attend one of our popular spring walks or an invasive-plant pull, a monitoring team, or at the farmers markets. All events (except the annual meeting, which includes a dinner) are free. Bring a friend or young person, and encourage your neighbors to join.

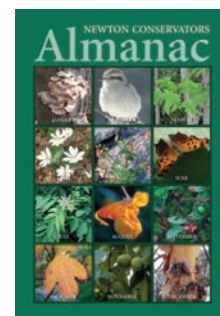
Your membership is very important to us. All of the organization's work is funded by membership fees and donations. (The Conservators is an all-volunteer organization with no paid employees.) Having a large membership helps to give the Conservators a larger voice in its advocacy work. ♦

— Beth Wilkinson

Winter's coming. Take a hike!

*Shop online at www.newtonconservators.org/books.htm to purchase Newton Conservators' publications. **Almanac** is \$19.95 + shipping, and the **Trail Guide** is \$8.95 + shipping.*

- **Members receive a discount from these prices when purchasing online.**



President's Message



Biologist Jon Regosin shows the wildlife that can be found in the vernal pond in Webster Woods.



Biologist Eric Olson removes glossy buckthorn from the red maple swamp in Cold Spring Park.



Walking along the path at 15 Bracebridge Road

Dear Conservators,

The Conservators' walks and invasive-plant pulls have ended for the season. Thanks to the leaders who helped us to enjoy, to learn about, and to help to preserve the city's open space.

The Newton Conservators' board has started to plan the events for next year. Do you have a suggestion of a walk that we should include? If so, do you know a person who knows that area well and might be interested in leading the walk?

Are you interested in going on walks in the winter? Some visitors to our tables at the farmers markets and the Harvest Fair expressed interest in cold-weather walks — maybe even cross country skiing. Does that appeal to you?

Webster Woods Update

As of the end of October, the Community Preservation Committee, the City Council's Zoning and Planning and Finance Committees, and the full City Council approved \$100,000 to hire legal counsel and other experts to assist the City in acquiring the wooded portion of Webster Woods with, potentially, an appropriate buffer as well. This is an important step that will equip the City with a top team of legal and other experts to achieve our goal of permanent protection. At a later time, we expect that we will return to the CPC to approve a purchase of the land, but that step is some time away.

The Path at 15 Bracebridge Road

There are new owners of the path at 15 Bracebridge Road, close to Mason-Rice School. Late this past summer, the Fiete family bought the property from the Wilson Family. They are delighted to own the property and welcome people to use the path from Bracebridge Road through to the path in Wilson Conservation Area, which ends on Greenfield Road. If you walk along the path, look for the beautiful native trees and perennials that former owner André Wilson planted last spring and summer.

If you have comments, suggestions, or questions, write to me at President@NewtonConservators.org.

Wishing you a great winter,

Beth Wilkinson

Cold Spring Park Needs Some Love

By Alan Noguee, Park abutter and Founder, Friends of Cold Spring Park



This schematic shows the extent of Cold Spring Park.

and meets. Zervas students and parents walk to school. There's a seasonal weekly Farmer's Market. Not to mention an annual Halloween Corgi Dress-Up Day. Yes, dogs in costume.

But over decades of heavy use, the trail around the park that is central to most park uses, has suffered from serious erosion. Exposed roots, rocks, and landscape fabric pose tripping hazards. Some sections are nearly perpetually muddy.



Annual Bird Walk at Cold Spring Park led by Pete Gilmore

saplings, and providing a shrinking habitat for native birds, insects and other wildlife. The Newton Conservators does a great job sponsoring invasive pulls at Cold Spring and other city parks, but they clearly need more help.

Last Spring I started a petition to fix up the trail. As I talked to people in the park, I learned of broken bones, lacerations, and concussions from people tripping and falling on the trail. I learned of seniors who had stopped using the trail

A beautiful 67-acre green space in the heart of the city, Cold Spring Park supports an incredible variety of uses by residents from all corners of Newton. A shady 1.4 mile trail through woodlands and wetlands is used 365 days a year — for hiking, birding, jogging, dog-walking, exercising, and just plain nature-loving. Student and adult athletes take advantage of playing fields, tennis and basketball courts. Our high school track teams use the trail for practices



New, better-designed, exercise stations have been installed at four locations throughout the park.

planning to replace old dilapidated exercise stations, thanks to a generous bequest. They had lined up an Eagle Scout candidate to extend wooden walkways over muddy areas. And they were eager to do work with local residents to do more.



New wooden walkways installed by Alex Rivero and Scout Troop 9 now help park visitors negotiate rain accumulation though Cold Spring Park.

because they were afraid of falling; of a high school track coach considering not using the trail any more for his award-winning team because of too many injuries.

With over 450 petition signers, and the support of City Councilors Downs, Rice, Noel, and Danberg, the Conservators, and the Waban and Newton Highlands Area councils, we had two great meetings with Parks & Rec to discuss improvements to the park. They were already

planning to replace old dilapidated exercise stations, thanks to a generous bequest. They had lined up an Eagle Scout candidate to extend wooden walkways over muddy areas. And they were eager to do work with local residents to do more.

But Parks & Rec, like other departments, is budget constrained. We could get in the city Capital Improvement Program queue, with a wait of five or more — maybe many more — years, or we can pitch in ourselves.

Many smaller green spaces and public amenities in Newton have Friends groups that help advocate for them, raise money for improvements, and recruit volunteers to help with maintenance. Thus the recent creation of Friends of Cold Spring Park.

Things are already looking up. Thanks to our advocacy and guaranteeing funding, we were able to double the width of the beautiful new wooden walkways recently installed by Alex Rivero and Scout Troop 9. Parks & Rec has completed installation of new, better-designed, exercise stations. An organizing group with participation from the Conservators, Area Councils, Zervas PTO, and others has been meeting to develop a Mission statement, structure, and plans for future improvements and fundraising. And the Conservators have

graciously agreed to be our fiscal sponsor, enabling us to accept tax-deductible donations.

Parks & Rec is already working with the Water Department to divert the stormwater discharge pipe that regularly floods the trail to Zervas when it rains. Next up, they will be restoring the stone dust between Zervas and the first bridge toward the Beacon Street parking lot, and repairing some of the worst sections between the parking lot and dog park.

Finally, we will work with Parks & Rec and the Conservators to increase efforts to preserve and protect the park for those who cannot advocate for themselves — native plants, and wildlife, and future generations. We aim to help

develop a long-term management plan to maintain the health and vitality of the park.

A web page is under construction. Meanwhile, you can follow progress on our Facebook page, or join an email list by emailing FriendsofColdSpringPark@gmail.com. Finally, please consider joining the Friends by sending a tax-deductible donation, with a check made out to Newton Conservators, with Friends of CSP in the memo line, to Friends of Cold Spring Park, Box 62003, Newton Highlands, MA 02164. Memberships are \$15 for low-income, students or seniors; \$25 for individuals; \$50 for families. If you love the park and can afford to contribute more, additional donations will be greatly appreciated! ♦



RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR JOIN TODAY!

YES, count me in! I want to be a nature steward and help Newton Conservators protect and preserve the natural areas in our community.

Please renew/accept my tax-deductible membership at the level checked below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Directors' Circle *NEW! | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Family Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$125 Patron | <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Individual Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Donor | <input type="checkbox"/> \$15 Student Membership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sustaining Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Additional Contribution \$_____ |

**Want to make an even bigger impact?
Help us support these conservation areas:**

Woodcock Meadow \$_____
Ordway Endowment Fund \$_____
Land Stewardship Areas (Dexter Rd., Bracebridge Rd.)
\$_____

*Contributors at this level receive a copy of the Newton Conservators Almanac. All new members receive Walking Trails in Newton's Parks and Conservation Lands.

NAME _____ EMAIL _____
ADDRESS _____ ZIP _____

☐ **I would like to volunteer!**
Please email me.

Please make checks payable to Newton Conservators, Inc. and send to P.O. Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459, or visit NewtonConservators.org/membership.htm to renew/join online. Consider including Newton Conservators in your estate planning. Contact us at president@NewtonConservators.org.

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 57 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 second Friday of the month before the issue is 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.

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Thanks to the following contributors to this edition of the Newsletter: Beth Wilkinson, Alan Nogee, Pete Gilmore, Richard Primack, David Backer and Newton Coalition for Climate Action.



Irruption Excitement

In the world of North American birding, “irruption” refers to a winter in which northern, boreal species are pushed southwards to find food. This happens when there is a poor seed crop in Canada. It is an infrequent event, but we are now in the winter of such a year. If you have functioning feeders, it will serve you well to keep a sharper eye open for boreal species, most of which are in the finch family. Several years may pass before these birds come south again.

Nuthatches: One non-finch is the attractive cousin to our resident White-breasted Nuthatch, the **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. These nuthatches prefer spruce and fir forests, and so are found in the Berkshires and White Mountains locally. “Fir tree” here is a reference to trees in the same family as the balsam fir that we see in Christmas tree lots, but not growing naturally in eastern Massachusetts.

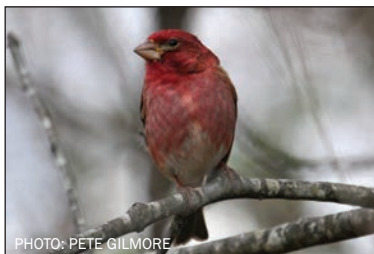


Red-breasted Nuthatch

This year the Red-breasted Nuthatches are around Newton in large numbers. One good way to locate them, other than watching them come to your feeders, is to listen for them in our open spaces, such as Nahanton and Cold Spring Park, Dolan Pond, and in the coniferous woods along the Charles River in Auburndale. Their calls are shorter and more nasal sounding than our larger White-breasted Nuthatches. Their vocalizations are often described as “yank-yank” noises. They usually call more repeatedly than our resident nuthatches. One site on the web where their calls can be heard is <https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/rebnut/introduction>.

As you see, these birds are seriously cute. They crawl up and down vertical tree trunks as well as along branches, calling and gleaning insects as they go. They are often in small groups, a pair or three. They may hang out with a flock of Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and our resident nuthatches, which know the locations of the good, local food sources. In conifers these nuthatches will often feed near the ends of branches, in clusters of cones where they probe and eat the seeds.

Finches: Among the finches we are seeing in greater numbers is the **Purple Finch**. These

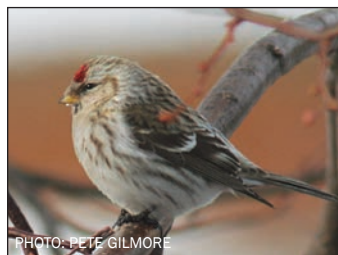


Purple Finch

birds resemble our resident House Finches. The older males are much more deeply red-purple than the House Finches. They have a pronounced red head over their eye and no brown streaking below their wings, as House Finches do. Male House Finches also have brown in their faces, around and below the level of their eyes. Male Purple Finches have a dark patch behind the eye, but are much redder in the face, with no brown there.

The first year male Purple Finches have the same plumage as the females and are brown, streaky birds, like sparrows. The way to pick out the female Purple Finches is to look for the large white “supercilium,” the white line over their eyes. This takes the place of the red over the eyes of the older males. If you have House Finches coming to your feeders, watch for the colorful outlier among them. These birds do breed in Massachusetts but not in Newton. They breed on Plum Island to our north, for instance. You might see them on a walk or at your feeders this winter.

Redpolls: A third boreal species is the exquisite little **Common Redpoll**. These look like little sparrows until you look closely and notice the brilliant red forehead and the dark area around the beak. They have a much frostier



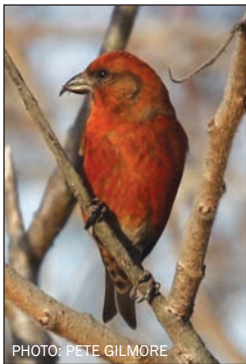
Common Redpoll

look than sparrows. They might come to thistle feeders, especially if the seed is spilled onto the ground underneath the feeder. They also love to eat the catkins of birch trees. So if you walk in an area where there is a grove of birch trees this winter, keep an eye out

and an ear open. Their calls are somewhat like American Goldfinch calls but are more rolling and often occur as a group cacophony. Goldfinches are more solitary callers.

The Common Redpolls nest in the far north, from the southern end of Hudson Bay in Ontario, across northern Canada and into the northern half of Alaska. During most winters, the farthest south they get is the northern tier of the United States.

Crossbills: Another couple of species that are around Massachusetts this year are the **Red Crossbills** and the **White-winged Crossbills**. These birds have beaks that appear to be deformed. The upper and lower mandibles are crossed, and they use these unusual beaks to expertly and efficiently extract seeds from the cones of evergreen trees. They grasp a cone like a parrot might grab a piece of fruit, and wrestle the seeds out. They end up in contorted positions as they focus on extracting seeds.



Red Crossbill

decided that the one subspecies found in southern Idaho should be viewed as a separate species, the **Cassia Crossbill**.

The different Red Crossbill subspecies cannot be reliably separated visually. One must record their calls to identify them. This can be done with the video on a smartphone. We have 11 different subspecies, if you include the Cassia Crossbills, in North America. These birds may fare well in an era of climate change, as they have so many adaptations to different food sources. If climate change causes evolutionary stresses on populations of Red Crossbills, their ability to modify their beaks will be a distinct advantage.

The **White-winged Crossbills** have a much more uniform genetic makeup. There is only one species in North America. There is also just one species in Eurasia, in contrast to the Red Crossbills. They are very nomadic and move large distances to find plentiful cone crops of spruce, tamarack, and hemlock. Because of this behavior, we might see lots of them in January and none in February. Down south here in Newton they will also eat white pine seeds. These birds will breed at any time of year, only depending on whether there is a big enough local cone crop to nourish the female in producing eggs and raising the young.

The crossed beaks are great for prying cone scales apart and then gaining access to the seeds at the bases of the scales. This is a disadvantage in eating the seeds of grasses and sedges. White-winged Crossbills do eat these other seeds but are much less efficient at this activity than the more ordinary finches like American Goldfinches, Dark-eyed Juncos, and House Finches.

Pine Grosbeak:

Yet another boreal finch that is being seen in Massachusetts this year is the larger **Pine Grosbeak**. These birds are seen less than the other

The **Red Crossbills** fascinated Charles Darwin as there are three closely related species in Europe. The different species have slightly different beaks and favor different types of cones. Darwin was interested in them as examples of a single species that had recently evolved into three species. In North America we still have most of them classified as subspecies rather than distinct species. The American Ornithological union has recently



Pine Grosbeak Female

eat fruits like crabapples as well as mountain ash fruits, birch catkins and rose hips. They have a varied diet and so are less likely to be forced southwards by a scarcity of one sort of food. They are primarily vegetarians. Even though they are called grosbeaks, they are not closely related to our colorful Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, which are with us during the summer months. The red bird below bottom left, is a male; the gray bird above is a female eating local crabapples.

Evening Grosbeak: A final boreal finch for us to mention is here in Massachusetts this winter, the **Evening Grosbeak**. These are striking gray and yellow birds. The males resemble a large goldfinch. You can see in the photo that the name grosbeak is quite apt.

Note the yellow supercilium over the eye of the male and his big, white wing-patch. This picture was taken in eastern Massachusetts during November. There were as many as 50 of these grosbeaks coming to some feeders where they will often go to the area under the feeders and eat seeds there. Up in the nearby trees they will eat buds at the end of the branches and insects, if they can find them. In flocks they have a buzzy, quiet call note that might be described as “sheer.” They breed north of us and will stay as resident birds in those latitudes as long as there is ample food. This year, however, there is a shortage of food up north.



Adult Evening Grosbeak Male

Enjoy a healthy walk into Newton's open spaces this winter but be sure you use Yaktrax or stabilicers if conditions get too icy.

If you want to direct your walks to some of the boreal birds, there will be timely information on the American Birding Association's MassBird website. (birding.aba.org/maillist/MASS). ♦

✿ Pete Gilmore



Pine Grosbeak Male

Florrie's Path Gets a Welcome Addition

The Friends of Nahanton Park funded this temporary bridge along Nahanton's Florrie's Path running parallel to the Charles River. Besides the "Friends," the Newton Conservators added volunteer assistance in its construction. The city is looking into the possibility of extending the path along the entire Charles River side of the park.



A team of volunteers celebrate the completion of this temporary bridge along Florrie's Path in Nahanton Park.



Nahanton Park visitors are the first to test the new temporary bridge along Florrie's Path.

ALL PHOTOS EXCEPT TOP MIDDLE:
KEN MALLORY, TOP MIDDLE:
PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

Pudding Stone in Hammond Woods



PHOTO: RICHARD PRIMACK

Hanging Rock at Hammond Woods

Boston University Biologist Richard Primack has submitted the following photo and text from his excursions into Hammond Woods.

"The hanging rock is composed of puddingstone, is roughly 2-1/2 by 2-1/2 by 3 feet (though the shape is irregular, and weighs around 3,000 pounds). The rock has presumably been suspended in this spot, about 3 feet above the ground, for the past 12,000 years.

This is a significant event for me as it illustrates that even though my family members and I have walked in these woods on thousands of occasions over the past 60 years, this is first time that we have noticed this unusual hanging rock. There are still things to be discovered in these woods if we are observant!" ♦

— Richard Primack

More about Richard's work can be found at Primack lab website:
<http://www.bu.edu/biology/people/profiles/richard-b-primack/> or Richard's blog:
<http://primacklab.blogspot.com>

Newton POWERCHOICE

On Tuesday November 27, Mayor Ruthanne Fuller announced that the City of Newton has signed a contract for its forthcoming “Newton Power Choice” program, which will provide all of the City’s electricity customers with power that includes 60 percent of electricity from local renewable sources such as solar and wind. This will significantly reduce the City’s carbon footprint while also cutting the price customers pay.

The Newton Power Choice program is a “municipal aggregation” program, or Community Choice Energy, that allows cities and towns to choose the electricity supplier for electricity customers within its borders.

The City’s decision means that it will have an additional 46 percent above the state mandate of 14 percent for renewable energy. This makes Newton the community with the highest percentage of additional local renewable electricity of any municipal aggregation program in Massachusetts. Approximately 140 cities and towns in Massachusetts have municipal aggregation programs, and about 40 of these provide electricity from renewable energy sources above the amount mandated by state law. The renewable power will be generated from within the New England grid region from one of the “Class 1 renewable energy” facilities.

The program will go into effect in March, 2019, and will guarantee a stable price for 22 months. That is different from Eversource’s Basic Service price, which changes every six months for residential and small business customers and every three months for larger business customers.

Newton residents can also choose from two additional Newton Power Choice options: (1) They can opt up from the standard level to receive 100% renewable electricity for an additional \$2.91 per month, or (2) they can opt down from the standard level to receive only the minimum amount of renewable electricity required by state law, thereby saving \$3.34 per month, as compared to the standard level, while remaining a participant in Newton Power Choice.

Mayor Fuller set the conditions for the contract after thousands of residents of Newton responded to a recent single-question survey from the City that asked for feedback on willingness to pay for additional clean renewable electricity.

Overall, 65% of respondents supported paying more for additional renewable energy.

Customers can leave Newton Power Choice without a cancellation fee at any time.

The lowest income residents who currently receive subsidized electric rates are automatically opted out of Newton Power Choice. Anyone who qualifies for a reduced Eversource rate based on need is exempted from Newton Power Choice. They do not need to do anything to remain on the subsidized plan they have today.

Low-income residents who do not qualify for subsidized rates will be able to Opt Down to 0% additional green energy and will likely save money. Other communities who have adopted similar plans have found that their 0% additional green plans actually cost a little less than Eversource. As a result, these individuals will likely save money through Newton Power Choice.

When you pay your electric bill each month, you pay for two primary services. You pay for the actual generation of electricity, or supply, which can come from a variety of sources. Those sources may include power plants, wind farms, hydroelectric dams, or solar panels. You also pay for the distribution, or delivery, of that energy to get to your home or business.

Thus, as part of our new bills, the second fee will continue to be paid to Eversource for the delivery of the power, and our bills will come from Eversource. It is the generation part of the bill that goes to the new source. ♦

David Backer and Newton Coalition for Climate Action

Photo Feature: Fall Sparrows by Haynes Miller



Savannah Sparrow



Swamp Sparrow



White-crowned Sparrow



White-throated Sparrow



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Scarlet Tanager
photo by Haynes Miller

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