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## Nature Notes

### Newton Conservators Nature Notes - December 11, 2003

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#### About Newton Conservators Nature Notes

#### \* Annual Christmas Bird Count – Sunday, December 14, 2003

It's that time of year again. Sleigh bells, wreaths, shopping malls, and ... birds! While spotting a partridge in a pear tree is unlikely, if you have an interest in our feathered friends, perhaps you'd like to take part in the annual Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, Dec. 14. Begun in 1900 and done all over the country by teams of birders, the local counts are done within a specified circular area. Parts of Newton are within the count circle centered on Boston. The Newton Conservators ([www.newtonconservators.org](http://www.newtonconservators.org)), our local open space organization, is helping to organize this year's count in Newton. This may be the 30th year for the Boston Count.

Newton participants will gather at 6:45 am at the home of Conservators member Chris Criscitiello (Conservators board member and bird walk leader) near Cold Spring Park for coffee and to pick up maps. Cris lives at 2 Raeburn Terrace. Heading on Walnut Street from Whole Foods Market (Bread and Circus) at Beacon and Walnut, Hillside is the fifth right. Raeburn Terrace is a short street right off Hillside at the bottom of a hill.

Beginning at 7 am, about five teams fan out all over Newton to count as many birds of all types as they can especially in conservation, park, and cemetery areas. Any woody areas near water are usually quite productive. Larger open space areas are the focus in the morning, with smaller pocket areas and residential neighborhoods checked later in the day as time permits.

For the truly intrepid, there is usually an owling party which will be heading out probably at 4 am from Raeburn Terrace led by former count organizer Michael Partridge (who promises not to climb any pear trees). Typically, the group could get great looks at as many as a half a dozen screech owls and occasionally Great Horned and Barred Owls. So far about 5 or 6 participants have expressed an interest in the owling expedition.

Any birds seen during the count are recorded as to the species and the number of individuals. The amount of hours and distance traveled by count participants are also recorded (which helps to normalize results to the effort expended). Changes in numbers of our most common birds over the years help to spot environmental trends. Over the history of the count in Newton, over 90 species have been tabulated. This year there is a special request to track roosts of crows and starlings and the late afternoon directions of flying flocks are to be noted.

Representative members from the teams gather back at the meeting place around 4 pm to pool the results from Newton. It's always exciting to hear what the other groups have found, especially any rare or unusual sightings. Later, our local results are taken over to Mass Audubon's Habitat in Belmont where other town coordinators gather to pool the data for the entire Boston count circle. Consider that this same process is done all over the country in roughly the same time period, and it helps to get a handle on the bigger environmental picture.

Experienced and non-experienced birders are welcome. Newcomers will be paired with an experienced group. Even if you would like to participate for only a few hours, you are welcome. It should be noted that the count occurs rain, shine, or snow. There is a participation fee of \$5 which goes to National Audubon to help tabulate the data. Participants receive a report from them on the national count results. For

more information, please contact Cris Criscitiello. Further information on the 104th count may be found at <http://massbird.org/bbc/104th%20Christmas%20Bird%20Count.htm>. Please contact Cris today if you want to be a part of the fun.

The movie "Winged Migration" is still playing locally at the West Newton Cinema. Don't miss this fascinating documentary with almost unbelievable footage of migrating birds on the big screen! For those who like to keep up with latest bird sightings around the area, check out the MassBird website at <http://www.massbird.org>. There is a bulletin board where you can be alerted as to what is being seen. Here's a recent entry from December 7 by Newton resident, Arlene Bandes: "We were rewarded for all of our shoveling by finding first a single redpoll and then a pine siskin at our backyard feeders. They have remained on and off all day." And another correspondent reported some Snow Buntings recently at Cold Spring Park. Last winter we had several reports of Bald Eagles along the Charles – you never know what will show up in Newton!

#### **\* 76 Webster Park CPA Acquisition Update**

We are pleased to report that the closing on the 76 Webster Park property took place on Tuesday, December 2. With a legal agreement between the City of Newton and the Newton Conservators completed, the property was purchased from the estate of Irene Forte' with funds provided under the Community Preservation Act. The property will be divided and approximately .8 acres added to the adjacent Dolan Pond Conservation area and the remaining portion used for Community Housing with the Newton Housing Authority and Habitat for Humanity. Some potential layouts are being prepared and will be presented to the neighborhood and official bodies early next year. Irene Forte' would likely have been pleased at the outcome in fulfilling her wishes for much of the property to be used as open space.

New trail and informational signs will be installed at Dolan Pond in the very near future as part of the Eagle Scout project of Adam Resnick of Troop 355 which meet at St. Bernard's in West Newton. One of the signs will mark the vernal pool known as "Irene's Pond" adjacent to the former Forte' property. In addition, he and the troop will be rehabbing the existing Wood Duck houses in time the arrival of next year's inhabitants.

#### **\* Community Classroom and Playground at Albemarle**

In the Summer of 2003, the Newton Board of Alderman voted to approve allocation of nearly \$100,000 in Community Preservation Act funds to build a Community Classroom at the site of the former Albemarle Playground tot lot. The Classroom, which will feature a gazebo, benches, tables, a drinking fountain and a sundial, will provide this very active park with a fully accessible, multi-generational passive recreation space. Classroom construction will be completed in Spring 2004.

As part of the redesign of the Albemarle Playground, located within the Russell J. Halloran Sports and Recreation Complex, the "tot lot" was relocated within the original footprint of the larger playground. This left underutilized the former tot lot location, an area of approximately 60x64 feet fronting on Albemarle Road. The outdoor Community Classroom, unique to Newton, will provide a permanent yet flexible space for a variety of activities enjoyed by persons of all ages. The Community Classroom will facilitate the enjoyment of the out-of-doors, both for those for whom the outdoors location is central to their activity (or example, a bird watching group or nature photography club) as well as for those for whom the natural setting is an enhancement of their activity (for example, a senior citizens' crocheting club or a book discussion group.) Third graders might meet there as they begin their study of the tadpoles in Cheesecake Brook, while a seventh grade English class might use the space for poetry reading. Two friends might break from their early morning power walk and sit and talk for a while, or two pre-schoolers might "take the stage" and put on an impromptu performance. Benches located close to the tot lot enclosure will allow our seniors a chance to do some toddler watching, without finding themselves in the middle of the toddler action!

The Community Classroom will provide passive recreation space within what is otherwise a large recreational complex devoted to active recreation. This accessible passive area will provide a sense of balance lacking in the present complex configuration. It will also facilitate enjoyment of surrounding open space, including Cheesecake Brook, the Charles River and adjacent conservation land. The Community Classroom will also provide the complex with "street presence", anchoring the playground and playing fields. Carefully planned and constructed, the organizers believe that the Community Classroom will serve Newton well for generations to come. Check out <http://www.newtonplayground.org/classroom.htm> (from which the above material was derived). The following wonderful quotes were found on this website:

"Wherever you are and whatever your resources, you can still look up at the sky – its dawn and twilight beauties, its moving clouds, its stars by night. You can listen to the wind, whether it blows with majestic voice through a forest or sings a many-voiced chorus around the eaves of your house or the corners of your apartment building, and in the listening, you can gain magical release for your thoughts. You can still feel the rain on your face and think of its long journey, its many transmutations, from sea to air to earth. Even if you are a city dweller, you can find some place, perhaps a park or a golf course, where you can observe the mysterious migrations of the birds and the changing seasons. ... What is the value of preserving and strengthening this sense of awe and wonder, this recognition of something beyond the boundaries of human existence? Is the exploration of the natural world just a pleasant way to pass the golden hours of childhood or is there something deeper? I am sure there is something much deeper, something lasting and significant. Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Whatever the vexations or concerns of their personal lives, their thoughts can find paths that lead to inner contentment and to renewed excitement in living. Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts." - Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

The Albemarle Playground Project is also terrific and will serve the community very well. The Learning Express in Newton Center is pulling out all the stops in order to help build the final phase of the Albemarle Playground, Newton's fully accessible playground for children and their adult caregivers. On Friday, Dec. 12 from 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., Learning Express will host a fundraiser for the Playground Project at Albemarle. When you shop at Learning Express and mention the Playground, 20 percent of your purchase total will be donated to the Playground building fund. Refreshments will be served from 6-8 p.m., and representatives from the Playground Project will be on hand to answer questions about this unique playground. The Learning Express will be happy to accept phone or fax orders, too.

In September, hundreds of volunteers from across Newton joined together to build the second phase of the Playground, which features an accessible tot lot, swings and a fantasy fort area for elementary school age children. An additional \$50,000 must be raised before the final phase of the playground, with an accessible play structure for children aged 5-12, can be built. For more information about the Playground Project, please visit [www.newtonplayground.org](http://www.newtonplayground.org) <<http://www.newtonplayground.org/>> , e-mail [info@newtonplayground.org](mailto:info@newtonplayground.org).

A new Friends of Albemarle organization was recently formed partly in response to the recent suggestion of placing a Newton North football stadium at Albemarle, one of our most used city resources.

#### **\* Massachusetts Earth Science Alliance Geology and Geography Project**

The Massachusetts Earth Science Alliance (MESA) is looking for Massachusetts teachers, science educators and work/study students to participate in a project that would document the geology and geography of the Northeast. Teacher stipends, field trip transportation and a digital camera will be provided to each school. GeoMosaic is an interactive and virtual website tour of the geology and geography of Northeast North America. The site would be designed for student use in grades 4-12 and provide teachers and students with an innovative inquiry-based curriculum resource. Their goal is to visually relate the properties of rocks and minerals in our region to tectonic events and erosion processes.

The project was conceptualized out of a need for making our rich, diverse local geology accessible to students...and to inspire students and teachers to learn about and visit the great natural resources in Northeast North America. Imagine traveling to Mistaken Point, Newfoundland to view the rock cliffs with 600 million year old fossils; touring the White Mountain notches in New Hampshire; looking for Dinosaur footprints in Holyoke or descending into a marble quarry in Western MA.

Their website would contain an expanding visual and information database of the rocks and topography of over 200 sites. Over time, the mosaic would become more detailed with increasing teacher/student participation. A key component of the project is that teachers and students become field researchers supplying images, data and information to the mosaic. Information and investigative activities on the site will be aligned to state science, math and technology standards.

Project GeoMosaic's primary objective is to bring our regional geology to students in a simple, participatory and engaging visual framework with links to resources that can deepen knowledge and understanding of geological principles and processes. Find out more about MESA and GeoMosaic at MESA's website at <http://mesa.terc.edu/index.html>. A meeting on the GeoMosaic project will take place on Wed., Dec. 17.

### \* Snow Shoveling

We have been hit pretty hard with snow lately. The City of Newton offers the following hints and tips on the city website (<http://www.newtonma.gov/snowremove.htm>): When shoveling, pile snow to the right of your driveway as you face the street. Shovel the sidewalk in front of your house to ensure public safety. Clear snow from catch basins or fire hydrant nearest your home to assist in emergency response. Trash/recycling pickups will almost always continue during a snow event. Delays may be experienced, however. For a list of students to shovel snow, please call the DPW Customer Service Center at 617-796-1000. Limited number of volunteers available for senior citizens and people with disabilities. Call 617-796-1280.

The situation for pedestrians is quite bad in Newton. While an ordinance does not require homeowners to shovel their walks, it would be the nice thing to do. It always amazes me how many people manage to clear their driveways yet ignore their sidewalks, forcing people to use the narrowed streets. Please be a good neighbor. The following letter was in this weeks Tab:

Once again, (as it has been for many winters past) the sidewalks of Newton are impassable. Many people for whatever reason refuse to shovel the sidewalks in front of their homes after a heavy snowfall. This situation is unacceptable. Children have to get to school. Elderly people who have trouble with their balance are trapped in their homes, as are people in wheelchairs and parents with small children who need a stroller. If people can't get through on the public walkways they end up walking in the street. The alternative is to drive everywhere. What if one doesn't have a car? The streets are narrower and more congested and more dangerous in winter. It would be a big help to the people who really need to be driving for there to be fewer cars on the roads. Newton MUST do something about this situation! I know that several years ago there was a fine imposed for not clearing the walkway in front of a home. If we do not want to do that again, then raise taxes and have the city be responsible for clearing ALL the sidewalks. I would like to suggest that if a sidewalk is not cleared, the city refuses to pick up garbage in front of that house. I would also like to suggest that people should think about their neighbors and their community and do their civic duty so that the city does not have to raise taxes or start punishing citizens. Come on people! We ALL live here. Let's make it a decent place to live! If you cannot shovel or don't want to shovel then hire someone to shovel. The TAB should list phone numbers of companies or individual people who will hire themselves out for shoveling and put it on the front page with a big black border around it. - Micha Klugman-Caspi (Lowell Avenue)

### \* NewtonDogs Organization

There are approximately 2400 licensed dogs in Newton and more than likely twice that number actually. Nationally, about 37% of households have a dog. Dog owners are perhaps one of the largest groups of users of our parks and open spaces. NewtonDogs is a new local organization for Newton dog owners which promotes responsible pet and owner behavior. The new group has advocated for the possibility of designated off leash times and locations in Newton. A public hearing was held on this topic before the Aldermanic Programs and Services Committee on Dec. 3 where officials from Brookline, Wellesely, Cambridge, and Trustees of Reservations described their experiences with less restrictive leash laws. A new email newsgroup and a website at <http://www.newtondogs.org> will strive to keep the Newton canine community up to date on canine related events, rules and legal issues, training and vaccination opportunities and dog related services.

### \* Holiday Greetings

We wish our readers the best of holidays. Take advantage of some of your free time and get out to our open spaces. There are still lots of birds, though different than in other seasons, and animal tracks in the snow can prove to be fascinating puzzles. Speaking of holidays, do you know where in Newton you might find a park with a giant Santa and thousands of lights? In Nonantum, of course, on Watertown Street. This Sunday (Dec. 14) look for a special tree lighting at around 5 pm with Santa. The Nonantum Children's Christmas Party Association decorates the park (and indeed, true to its name, puts on a wonderful holiday party for Newton Special Needs population in conjunction with our city Parks and Rec program). "Fats" Pellegrini, the "mayor" of Nonantum who usually presides, is ill this year but his son Anthony promises a terrific display this year. In this holiday season, below are a few gift ideas that have come across our desk that might be of interest to our readers.

### \*\* Walking Trails in Newton's Parks and Conservation Lands

The new map guide put out by the Newton Conservators would make a fine holiday gift for friends and neighbors who would like to explore Newton's open space. It stuffs well in your back pocket or in a stocking (hint, hint!). It's available [by web](#), mail and also at Newtonville Books and New England Mobile Book Fair. There was a nice article ([http://www.townonline.com/newton/arts\\_lifestyle/arts\\_lifestyle/new\\_feane\\_enguidebook11112003.htm](http://www.townonline.com/newton/arts_lifestyle/arts_lifestyle/new_feane_enguidebook11112003.htm)) in the Newton Tab's environmental pages on November 11, about the guide by Newton Conservators member, Erin Sibley. Some excerpts are below.

"This fall, spending time outdoors doesn't necessarily involve a day-long road trip. Now Newton residents can enjoy autumn in New England for an hour, an afternoon, or an entire day by visiting any of the 27 local parks, ponds, lakes, gardens, and open spaces described in Walking Trails in Newton's Parks and Conservation Lands. This 56-page guide, recently updated and revised by The Newton Conservators, contains an easy-to-use matrix of the locations and their amenities (such as scenic views, picnic tables, boat launches, and life courses), as well as directions, maps, and historical facts about many of the sites. Even longtime Newton residents may discover new places to explore nearby, or learn something new about their favorite local spots.

Walking Trails in Newton's Parks and Conservation Lands may be purchased for \$7.95 online at [www.NewtonConservators.org](http://www.NewtonConservators.org) or by mailing a check to The Newton Conservators, P.O. Box 590011, Newton Center, MA 02459. Sales benefit The Newton Conservators, a nonprofit citizen advocacy organization which actively promotes the acquisition, creation, and preservation of natural open spaces for the people of Newton. Since its formation in the late 1950's, The Newton Conservators has been instrumental in safeguarding more than 200 acres of open space in Newton, creating several major public parks, and enacting ground-breaking environmental ordinances with respect to the protection and preservation of trees, wetlands and clean air, and the conservation of energy.



## \*\* Community Heritage Maps

For those with an interest in maps, check out some of Peter Kastner's work currently on exhibit in the display cases in the hallway entrance to the Newton Free Library. Peter is the organizer for the popular Newton Conservators walk series in the spring and fall. His venture, Community Heritage Maps (<http://www.communityheritagemaps.com>), is dedicated to providing high quality replicas of detailed neighborhood maps based upon pre-1922 insurance and real estate maps. They are fine art quality replicas of detailed neighborhood maps, show individual ownership of buildings and real estate, and are wonderful treasures of information. Peter is making these maps available to individuals that value their historical and fine art character.

## \*\* Peter Alden's Field Guide to New England

What is the one nature field guide you can carry that covers birds, bugs, butterflies, trees, mushrooms, animals, flowers, frogs, turtles, and anything else? Why it's Peter Alden's Field Guide to New England (or the Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountain States, California, Southwestern States, Southeastern States, or Florida.) Amazingly, this fine book has never been advertised by the publisher. It lists 1000 species of plants and animals in a locale and has become an essential resource on any of my nature walks. According to the reviews, "The guide series will appeal to all ages. Concise writing, liberal use of sharp, colorful photographs, drawings, and maps, and logical inclusions of representative species, weather, and habitats found in the region make the guides real horizon expanders ... For some this might be the patch of woods behind their house. For others it might be their first visit to the Everglades. These guides could very well expand the base of people who are interested in and knowledgeable about the natural world."

Peter was the first speaker in our Newton Conservators Lecture Series (<http://www.newtonconservators.org/lectures/lectspring01.htm>). Listing for \$19.95, Peter is offering them directly for \$16.75 (which includes MA tax of .75 and shipping and handling of \$1.00). Order them directly from the author by sending a check to Peter Alden, 11 Riverside Avenue, Concord, MA 01742. Please specify how many of which edition you want and note any personal inscriptions that you would like. This book makes a fine present for your nature loving friends (both here and in other parts of the country)! By the way, Peter is also the author of the Field Guide to African Wildlife and leads safaris to the Serengeti (Call 978-369-5768 or Thomson Safaris at 800-235-0289 for more info) for those who want to travel really far afield.

## \*\* Carole Smith Berney – Charles River Photographs

This fall, one of the most interesting events I attended was a lecture slide show by Watertown photographer, Carole Smith Berney. Her exhibit, "Wet and Wild", at the Boston Biomedical Research Institute in Watertown, was a huge success. She focused on the creatures found along the stretch of the Charles River from Watertown Square upriver to Bridge Street. As she demonstrated, there is a lot to see if you only stop and look.

We hope to bring her work to Newton next year (probably next Fall) as part of our lecture series. Carol is offering framed prints from the photo exhibit in various sizes (5x7, 8x10, 11x14, 10x15, and 16x20) Subject include Great Blue Heron, Yellow Garden Snail, Snapping Turtle, Cormorant with Wings Outspread, Glowing Mallards, Green Darner Dragonfly, or my favorite, Wood Duck swimming on autumnal water with fallen leaves. These are truly beautiful nature photographs. Carol welcomes opportunities to take her slide show on the road to school groups, libraries, community centers, or civic groups. She is also looking for a publisher for Animals of the Charles River, as a photo essay in a magazine or book for children or adults.

And some really great news – the person behind the Charles River pathway, Dan Driscoll, Senior Planner at the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR, formerly known as the MDC), has obtained funding to print 1000 copies of Wildflowers Along the Charles River, a full color, 32 page, photographic guide of common flora. Carole Smith Berney and Patsy Murray have been working on this project for over two years and this free publication should be ready for distribution by the DCR in the spring. A side note: Work was finally begun this year on the missing link to the Charles River Pathway above Bridge Street including the wonderful new footbridge across the river just downstream from Cheesecake Brook.

## \*\* Art Box from the Brookline Green Space Alliance

If you are looking for a special gift for the holidays, or for any occasion, a donation to Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is a thoughtful way of supporting your local environment and makes a great gift as well. For your \$15 donation, Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is pleased to offer a one of a kind "art box" that can be used as a decoration, ornament, or gift box. The box measures 2.25" on each side and shows the beauty of our New England seasons through four paintings of a tree by Massachusetts artist Judy Mehring. On the top inside flap of the box is an explanation that a gift has been made to Brookline GreenSpace Alliance on the recipient's behalf, as well as an inspiring quote from John Muir. To see the box, click on [www.brooklinegreenspace.org](http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org) and scroll down the home page. The easily assembled boxes come flat in a decorative envelope to send to your friends and relatives, or assemble the box yourself and fill it with candy or a gift! Quantities are limited and orders should be placed as soon as possible.

## \*\* Out of Town Visitors this Holiday Season?

Do you have visitors from out of town this holiday season who have asked you for a place to stay that is not too expensive? Here's a secret - check out the Walker Center in Auburndale (144 Hancock Street) just off Grove Street near the Williams School. They have relatively inexpensive B&B (\$40-\$65 including breakfast) room and conference facilities. They are convenient to the Riverside Green Line station and close to Lasell College. Visit their website at <http://www.walkerctr.org> or call them at 617-969-3919. You may have passed it many times and wondered about it. Nature groups have used some of the Walker Center houses for conferences as I found out talking to a loon counter in Maine. This is a terrific place with a wonderful and caring staff. The Walker Center cordially invites you to its Second Annual Christmas Recital with performances by residents and friends of the Walker Center on Saturday Dec. 13 at 7.30 p.m. RSVP to 617-969-3919 or e-mail [walkercenter@rcn.com](mailto:walkercenter@rcn.com).

## \* About the Newton Conservators

This email newsletter is sponsored by the Newton Conservators, a local organization that promotes the protection and preservation of natural areas, including parks, park lands, playgrounds, forests and streams, which are open or may be converted to open spaces for the enjoyment and benefit of the people of the City of Newton, Massachusetts for scientific study, education, and recreation. It further aims to disseminate information about these and other environmental matters. A primary goal is to foster the acquisition of land and other facilities to be used for the encouragement of scientific, recreational, educational, literary, and the other public pursuits that will promote good citizenship and the general welfare in the City of Newton. Please visit our website at <http://www.newtonconservators.org> or contact us at the address below.

If you would like to join the Newton Conservators, please send your name, address, phone and email address (if you wish email alerts) to The Newton Conservators, P.O. Box 590011, Newton Centre, MA 02459. Membership Options are the following: Individual \$25, Family Member \$35, Sustaining Member \$50, Donor \$75, Patron \$100. Membership is tax deductible. Your membership includes the Newton Conservators Newsletter and emails and invitations to participate in guided tours of local conservation areas, lectures, and other programs

and activities. You will also receive by mail a copy of the new Newton Conservators open space map book, "Walking Trails in Newton's Park and Conservation Lands".

The Board of Directors of the Newton Conservators meets monthly usually on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm (usually at City Hall). Members are welcome to attend. If you wish to attend you can contact the organization Secretary to confirm the date, time, location, and agenda.

**\* About Newton Conservators Nature Notes**

If you would like to be more directly kept apprised of future nature related events, walks, lectures, and exhibits, you are invited to join the Newton Conservators sponsored "Newton Conservators Nature Notes" email list by sending an email request to [dolanpond@aol.com](mailto:dolanpond@aol.com). Newton Conservators Nature Notes is automatically sent to members of the Newton Conservators who provide their email addresses as one of their membership benefits. Newton Conservators Nature Notes may be found online at <http://www.newtonconservators.org/naturenotes.htm>. You are welcome to submit any items for this sporadical newsletter via email to the same address. Please feel free to forward our newsletter to others you feel might be interested in the information contained herein.

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