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Newton Conservators Nature Notes

Friday, December 16, 2005

Greetings and Happy Holidays! This email newsletter provides information on upcoming nature and environmental related events, exhibits, and information in and around the Newton, Massachusetts area. For instance, go looking for that partridge in a pear tree this Sunday as part of the annual Newton Christmas Bird Count. This newsletter is sponsored by the Newton Conservators, the local open space organization in Newton and it also serves as the organization's means of sending out time sensitive information. Please visit our website at <http://www.newtonconservators.org>. Welcome to the many new readers of this free email newsletter. If you wish to be removed from this email list, simply reply with "remove" in the message or subject. (Note: email addresses mentioned in this newsletter substitute (AT) for @ to foil spammers).

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Annual Newton Christmas Bird Count - Sunday, December 18

You are encouraged to participate in the 106th annual Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Thirty-four count circles are located entirely or partly within Massachusetts. For more information about the count in general and to see last year's overall results, visit the Audubon website <http://www.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>. You can also check out the MassBird website at www.massbird.org for information regarding local counts and birding clubs in your area.

Newton is part of the Greater Boston Count which is organized by Robert Stymeist and will be held this year on Sunday, December 18. Begun in 1900 and done all over the country by teams of birders, the local counts are done within a specified circular area. According to the Audubon Society, "More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or "CBC", is citizen science in action."

In Newton, the Newton Conservators help organize the count and send out teams - all levels of birders welcome. Please contact Cris Criscitiello if interested in participating this year. You would be astonished at what birds are seen. The full count group will assemble at 2 Raeburn Terrace (Newton Highlands) starting at 7:00 am to leave at 7:30 am. If you are interested in going owling at a 4:00 am please phone Cris. If enough people are interested, there may be two owling groups to cover more owl territory

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.

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 early risers, the owling group could get great looks at screech owls and occasionally Great Horned and Barred Owls.

Although the main Christmas count will be undertaken on Sunday, there is an overlapping interval, starting three days before the official date and ending three days afterwards which defines the "Christmas Count Period". Please note any unusual or rare species seen in our Newton area and continue do to so through Wednesday of next week. Count Organizers some years ago decided to add these extra days

just to introduce a little spice or maybe just a "warm-up" of observation acuity with the hope of increasing the opportunity of finding something out of the ordinary to offer as a prize finding. Counting of the usual suspects will be confined to Sunday only. By "unusual" is meant something like a varied thrush, a western tanager, a spotted towhee, or painted bunting. (all of which have been reported in Eastern Mass within the past few years.)

Representative members from the teams gather back at the meeting place in the afternoon 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 comprehensive report from them on the national count results. For more information, please contact Cris Criscitiello via webmanager (AT) newtonconservators.org.

These Teens Relish Envi-Sci

by Patrica G. Goldman

originally published on the Environmental Pages
in the Newton Tab, Dec. 7, 2005

In our busy suburban world kids don't get to experience nature much unless it's planned into their schedules. That's why Newton's Environmental Science Program for teens is special. You can see this program in action during December on NewTV, Newton's community cable television channel.

This episode of The Environmental Show travels along with teens as they go hiking, biking, canoeing and climbing, and visit woods and ponds, the Charles River, parks, a salt marsh, and mountains, winding up with a stay at the highest peak in the northeast (Mt. Washington). They also participate in a hands-on environmental cleanup project each year. As several of the teens point out, they make friends and have fun while they're out there.

The summer program was started by Newton teachers 38 years ago with a Ford Foundation grant designed to get kids out into the environment instead of learning about it only through books and labs. The program now operates under the Newton Conservation Commission. Many of the students eventually become leaders in the program, trained to teach their younger peers what they have learned about plants and animals, geology, and ecology.

In fact, many of the participants go on to careers in science. All carry with them a lifetime appreciation for our natural environment. To learn more about enrolling in this July program for teens, visit www.newtonenvisci.org.

To watch this show, tune in to NewTV's Blue Channel (Channel 10 for Comcast subscribers and Channel 15 for RCN subscribers). The show will run repeatedly through December on Saturdays (10 a.m.), Mondays (3 p.m.), Tuesdays (1:30 p.m. and 11:30 p.m.), Wednesdays (11:30 a.m.) and Thursdays noon, 4 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

This episode of the Environmental Show is produced by the Newton Conservators. Learn more about the organization's programs and view beautiful photographs at www.newtonconservators.org.

Patricia Goldman is a former Executive Director of the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America/New England Chapter, a former member of the Newton Human Rights Commission, and is currently a board member of NewTV helping to produce The Environmental Show.

Wildlife in the City

by M.G. Criscitiello

originally published on the Environmental Pages
in the Newton Tab, Dec. 7, 2005

During the past decade new types of wild creatures have appeared in parks, woodlands and backyards of the city. In addition to the usual skunks, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, and Canada geese, there are now coyotes, foxes, bobcats, fisher, weasels, river otter, wild turkeys, and an increasingly large white-tailed deer population. Moose have not yet appeared in Newton, but they have had front-page notice in towns nearby, and black bears have reentered the forests of western Massachusetts. Will they be our next big visitors?

Reasons for this change were presented by Colleen Olfenbittel, staff member of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife www.masswildlife.org, in her Nov. 15 lecture at the Newton Free Library sponsored by the Newton Conservators. She noted that all of these animals were living in the forests of New England when European settlers arrived in the 17th century. They disappeared after the trees were cut for timber and the land cleared for farming. By 1840, much of the soil was exhausted, farming became more difficult, and people moved to richer lands of the Midwest or sought their fortunes in large cities with the coming of the industrial revolution.

Since that time, our forests have returned, and now an estimated 70% of Massachusetts is covered with second growth. This has led to restoration of wild animal populations, with the exception of wolves and mountain lions, entirely extirpated from the Northeast through bounty hunting. As housing has exploded into rural areas, with developments rising in forested landscapes, human encounters with wildlife have increased. Suburban gardens, shrubs, fruit trees, and bird feeders provide tempting food for many wild creatures, and garbage added to mulch piles or left outside in trash bags spells "dinner" for raccoons, skunks and coyotes. Crawl spaces under porches and garages attract these same animals, also foxes, as dens for rearing young. With hunting prohibited, large predators absent, food supplies handy, and living

space provided, why should they forego such comforts?

Living with wildlife in our surroundings is a source of pleasure for most Newton residents, but we find some challenges in our attempt to maintain a healthy and happy coexistence with these new species as they return to their rightful domain. In order that they may be protected and continue normal patterns of behavior in the wild, it is important that they not become dependent on humans for food and living space. To underscore this point, Olfenbuttel introduced a discussion of the coyote, displaying a beautiful mounted specimen of the animal. Many who had never seen one in the wild expressed surprise at its relatively small size - its average weight is only 40 pounds.

She described the territorial behavior of the coyote. Its howling and yipping at night are a means of keeping in touch with other members of its group - and a warning to outsiders to stay away! Coyotes are shy and wary by nature, avoiding contact with people. Their diet is varied, and they can be tempted into neighborhoods where food is available. True omnivores, they prey on small mammals such as squirrels and chipmunks, but they also like fruits, berries, and birdseed. They will eat road kill or any pet food or garbage left outdoors. They have been known to run down unprotected small house pets. Owners of cats and little dogs are advised to keep them indoors. (Because house cats, across the nation, kill millions of birds each year, there is further reason to keep them inside!)

To maintain coyotes in their normal wild state, Mass Wildlife suggests the following: - 1. Don't feed or try to pet them! 2. Put garbage outdoors in strong containers, not plastic bags 3. Feed pets indoors so unfinished food is not left outside. 4. Don't let cats or small dogs roam freely outside 5. Keep areas under bird feeders clean 6. Close off crawl spaces under porches. If coyotes become persistent in hanging around, help them to remain wary of humans by scaring them off with loud noises, a bright light, or even water sprayed from a hose if necessary. .

Wild turkeys and the Canada Goose are also year-round Newton residents, but these animals will be discussed in another article.

The goal of conservation is to preserve appropriate habitat for those species rejuvenated by the return of our forests, allowing them to live in nature as they were originally born to it. The effort of Mass Wildlife is to reacquaint the public with the particular needs and behaviors of these animals, so they can remain as wild creatures while sharing much of their territory with the human population.

Modestino Criscitiello is Professor of Medicine, Emeritus, Tufts University School of Medicine. He is a Board member of the Newton Conservator and host of the Conservators' Environmental Show on NewTV.

Notes of Interest

The **Walking Trails in Newton's Park and Conservation Lands** map guide put out by the Newton Conservators is a great resource for those who would like to explore Newton's open space. It is a 56-page guide containing detailed trail maps of 27 conservation areas in Newton, featuring parks, ponds, gardens, trails, canoe launches, nature guides, rock climbing, scenic views, handicapped access, geological features, and bird watching areas. The guide also contains photos, driving directions, interesting historical details, and an overall map of showing the locations of the 27 natural. Many more folks have been observed out in our conservation areas with their trail guide in hand;. It is available by web, mail and also at Newtonville Books and New England Mobile Book Fair. Walking Trails in Newton's Parks and Conservation Lands may be purchased for \$7.95 online at <http://www.newtonconservators.org/buyaguide.htm> or by mailing a check to The Newton Conservators, P.O. Box 590011, Newton Center, MA 02459. It makes a great holiday gift for your outdoors and nature loving friends.

Looking for some other wildlife-related **Holiday Gift Ideas** for the outdoors or wildlife enthusiast on your holiday list? Check out the Newton Conservators website for some nice nature related guides and publications at <http://www.newtonconservators.org/books.htm>. Here are some further suggestions from Mass Wildlife. The following experiences and items are available for both youth and adults. A two year subscription to *Massachusetts Wildlife magazine* (\$10) delivers eight full color issues of the Commonwealth's best wildlife publication. For the budding conservationist try a copy of the recently revised "*Critters of Massachusetts*" book (\$5). "Critters" is a perfect gift for the curious youngster or the beginning adult naturalist with an interest in backyard wildlife and beyond. For the more advanced naturalist, "Field Guide to Dragonflies and Damselflies" (\$20) or "*A Field Guide to the Animals of Vernal Pools*" (\$12) might be just the ticket. In-depth descriptions and detailed photographs help the reader identify and learn more about these creatures. The *Massachusetts Wildlife Viewing Guide* (\$8.95) listing 67 sites across the state where a variety of wildlife can be seen is a perfect gift for the outdoor explorer or a visitor to the state. Click the Publications button at www.mass.gov/masswildlife for more details.

You can visit the Mass Wildlife website at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/land-use-habitats/>. Subscribe to **MassWildlife News**, a free electronic monthly newsletter updating you on research, events, new laws and other agency activities. All you need to do is send an email to: Join-MassWildlife.news(AT)listserv.state.ma.us

The latest **Newton Conservators Newsletter** is now online at <http://www.newtonconservators.org/newsletters/dec05.pdf>. Volunteers are sought for assistance in writing and production of the newsletter. If you are interested in helping out please contact Doug Dickson, newsletter editor at newsletter(AT)newtonconservators.org.

Congratulations to the **Charles River Watershed Association** on their 40th anniversary. They have used science, advocacy and the law to protect, preserve and enhance the Charles River and its watershed. Find out more at their website: <https://www.crwa.org/>.

Check out nature events in nearby Weston at the website of the **Weston Forest and Trail** organization, <http://www.westonforesttrail.org/calendar/>. They have maps of the Weston Trails and hold monthly walks. See <http://www.westonforesttrail.org/calendar/> for a calendar. Their January walk takes place on Sunday, Jan. 8 at the Highland Street Forest and is led by Jonathan White from 2-4 pm. They will meet at Wildflower Land, just off Highland Street in Weston. See map and description on their website.

At the Newton History Museum (Jackson Homestead), check out this late year event called **Animal Tails and Trails Throughout the Seasons** on Thursday, December 29 at 2 pm. "Stand-Up Chameleon" Jackson Gillman's stories will have you laughing, singing, and moving along. Make tree necklaces as winter food for the birds as you sip hot chocolate. Recommended for ages 4 and up; prepaid

registration is required for each day. Cost: \$6 (\$5 for members of Newton Historical Society). Call 617-796-1450 for more info.

"Remaking Boston: The City and Environmental Change over the Centuries" - The Massachusetts Historical Society is organizing a conference on the environmental history of Boston. "Remaking Boston: The City and Environmental Change over the Centuries" which will take place at the Society May 4-6, 2006. Professor Brian Donahue of Brandeis University, the author of *The Great Meadow: Farming the Land in Colonial Concord*, will deliver the principal address Thursday evening, May 4. On Friday and Saturday, May 5-6, attention will turn to five panels. At each of these sessions, authors and assigned commentators will discuss two or three pre-circulated papers before we open the floor to general discussion. Sessions will consider climate and weather, Boston Harbor, the countryside and the city, rivers and water, and land use. For further information on "Remaking Boston," check the Society's web site, <http://www.masshist.org>.

There has been a lot of discussion lately about **Synthetic Turf** in regard to a recent CPA proposal for its use on some Newton South's athletic fields. In the interest of promoting discussion, the website of the Brookline Green Space Association (BGSA), <http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org/>, (the Brookline equivalent of the Newton Conservators) has a page with a list of questions raised by residents in Brookline regarding the use of synthetic or artificial turf on athletic playing fields. It was compiled from internet sources, conversations with staff from agencies such as the EPA and Boston Park and Recreation Department, presenters at public forums, etc. The turf discussion can be found at <http://www.brooklinegreenspace.org>. Please Note: The BGSA does not oppose or support the use of artificial turf in Brookline. However, they do support a broad analysis of field use and needs in Brookline that will provide information for determining whether artificial turf makes sense for our community. They provide this information with the sole intent of sharing the information they have found thus far.

Organic Land Care Course--Held on January 10, 11, 12, 17 and 18, 2005 at The Trustees of Reservations Doyle Conservation Center in Leominster, this course is sponsored by the [Northeast Organic Farming Association](http://www.northeastorganicfarming.org). This is a five-day, 32.5-hour course offered by the MassOrganic Land Care designed to provide for landscapers, designers, municipal and parks employees, horticulturists, master gardeners and entrepreneurs with the education needed for an understanding of organic land care. Professional accreditation is an option. Instructors come from the University of Massachusetts, Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, MassWildlife, Mass. Dept. of Environmental Protection as well as other agencies and land care businesses. At the end of the course attendees will be able to incorporate methods and materials that respect natural ecology and the long-term health of the environment into the care of their own landscapes or ones that they manage. To register, visit <http://www.organiclandcare.net>.

Environmental Education Conference—Registration materials for the Massachusetts Environmental Education Society (MEES) 2006 annual conference March 8 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester are now available. The 2006 theme, "EE Crossing: Crossroads of Math, Arts, Language, and Social Studies" offers participants an opportunity to examine environmental education in the context of these diverse disciplines. Workshops focus on skills, programs and research with reference to the subjects. Classroom teachers, home school educators, naturalists, education administrators and youth group leaders will find useful sessions to meet their varied needs. Registration materials are posted on the MEES website <http://www.massmees.org>.

Newton Centre's Old Morse Farm: Maps and Memories

Sunday, January 22, 2-4 pm

at the Newton History Museum, 527 Washington St

Free. Open to the Public. Newton residents, especially in the Newton Centre neighborhood bounded by Edmands Park/Mill St., Commonwealth Avenue, Centre Street and Walnut St will find this free program of interest. Come to the Newton History Museum for some "hands-on history." There will be exploration of questions such as: Where were our neighborhood's farms, mills, orchards, playing fields, greenhouses, factories and churches? When was your house built? Who designed, built or lived in it? Who were the neighborhood's prominent citizens? How did our streets get named? How did Commonwealth Avenue and its streetcar line change the neighborhood in the late 19th century? We'll learn how to answer these questions with a variety of sources such as maps and atlases, city directories, photographs, newspapers, vital records, deeds and property records. We'll also discuss how we can share this rich neighborhood history by choosing a project such as a community webpage, posters, storefront or sidewalk history exhibits, live and self-guided walking tours, scavenger hunts, or letterboxing for history buffs, families and kids. Please RSVP by Friday, January 21 so we can plan enough chairs and refreshments.

Angino Farm

Last year, the Newton community was presented with a momentous opportunity. Newton's last remaining farmstead — complete with a historic farmhouse and barn — came on the market. Confronted with the choice of seeing this scenic 2.25-acre site developed or saving the site as a public space, Newton residents took action! The tremendous outpouring of support for saving the farm persuaded our elected officials that this was a unique opportunity for our City. Saving the Angino Farm is about preserving open space and a farmstead in continuous operation since 1670. It is also about creating a vibrant community organic farm that will enhance the quality of life in Newton for generations to come by: providing locally-grown heirloom tomatoes, fresh-cut herbs, and other high-quality organic produce, supporting the environment by organic and sustainable agricultural practices, connecting adults and children to the earth through on-site educational programs undertaken in partnership with city schools, providing wholesome produce to people with financial need, modeling sustainable environmental and energy practices, allowing us all the occasional opportunity to leave our busy city life to retreat to a simpler rural past. The farm proposal that the City funded calls for a self-sustaining community farm. Newton Community Farm, Inc., a non-profit organization founded by Newton residents, was recently chosen by the City to operate the farm. Income from the sale of produce will go a long way toward meeting the farm's expenses. However, produce sales alone will not be enough to pay for start-up equipment, critical building maintenance, and the costs of launching educational programming for school children and adults. The success of Newton Community Farm depends upon the generosity and support of Newton residents. Your financial support is needed to get the farm off to a strong start for the 2006 growing season. The farm requires a tractor, hand-tools, seeds, and other farm implements to operate. Your tax-deductible contribution will purchase equipment and provide critical start-up funding to ready the site for crop production, develop educational programming, and prepare the farm buildings for new uses.

The farm was purchased with matching city and state Community Preservation funds. Now that the City has purchased the farm, please help us sow the seeds of a successful Newton community farm with your tax-deductible contribution. If you would like to volunteer or join a farm sub-committee please contact Becka Smillie by sending an email to webmanager (AT) newtonconservators.org. If you would like to

make a tax-deductible contribution to be used exclusively to fund farm start-up costs: Make check payable to Newton Conservators and write "Farm" on memo line. Check out the latest Conservators newsletter for much more background on Angino Farm <http://www.newtonconservators.org/newsletters/dec05.pdf>.

About the Newton Conservators

This email newsletter is sponsored by the Newton Conservators, a local organization 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. 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 third 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 us 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 [emaillist\(AT\)newtonconservators.org](mailto:emaillist(AT)newtonconservators.org). 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 sporadic 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.