

The 2019 Newton Conservators' Annual Meeting



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Beth Wilkinson addresses the 2019 annual meeting

How best to welcome a stranger — especially when you're also struggling to say goodbye to old friends — topped the agenda at the 58th annual dinner meeting of the Newton Conservators.

When the Conservators gathered May 8 at Post 440, they mourned the passing of several long-time Conservators and friends, acknowledged the changing roles of a number of Conservator directors and advisors, and picked up some pointers on how best to welcome that new guy in town — the Eastern Coyote.

But first they got a hopeful glimpse of the future — even if it is sometimes rooted in the past. The Conservators, committed to educating residents of Newton about the importance of open space, fund projects and programs that further that goal. During the cocktail hour, The Friends of the Newton Cemetery made a poster presentation on their pollinator planting project, funded in part by the Conservators. The new garden will provide an environment for the bees to pollinate and the public to learn the importance of sustaining the bee population. The Conservators are longtime supporters of Newton's Environmental Science Program, as well as providing classroom and individual student grants. Some of the grant recipients were on hand to talk about their work. Two of the students received a special treat: an anonymous long-time Conservator, who has moved out of state, gifted the students with tickets to the dinner.

Anticipating receiving guidance on achieving peaceful coyote coexistence, attendees were concerned when illness forced featured speaker, John Maguranis, Animal Control Officer and Massachusetts representative of Project Coyote, to cancel at the last minute. But they were not disappointed when Dr. Jonathan G. Way, founder of Eastern Coyote/ Coywolf Research and nationally renowned carnivore



John Way

biologist, stepped in to introduce the new guy in the neighborhood.

While most of us are only now making acquaintance with coyotes, they've been in Newton for at least 20 years. "The coyote's job is to avoid people; which is why human confrontations are amazingly low," said Dr. Way. "I see an incredibly adaptable and family-oriented animal that is personable, social, sentient, and an important member of the ecological community. Coyotes help clear neighborhoods of all sorts of undesirables like mice, rats, voles."



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Jonathan Wall presents slides at the Newton Conservator annual meeting.

And the occasional small dog or cat, which is what has many local residents concerned. At times the concern seems disproportionate — the widely-circulated image of a coyote trotting the streets of Auburndale, a yellow cat clasped firmly in its jowls, still

haunts a year and a half later, while concerns for a six-year old who had to undergo rabies vaccination after being attacked by a raccoon at his Newton Highland home last July had all but vanished by the time school started in the fall — but it does seem that many residents see the coyote as more foe than friend.

But is that fear reasonable? According to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, from 1998 to 2018 only 10 incidents of a coyote attacking a person were reported



Coywolf Closeup

(an 11th incident occurred this past March, when a teenage girl was nipped by a coyote who darted up onto her backyard deck.) Way contrasts that with the estimated 4.5 million dog bites that occur annually in the United States.

Just last year alone, 36 people, age 91 to five days old, died from dog attacks. Almost all of these were “family” dogs.

Every year thousands of Massachusetts residents seek medical attention for dog bites, some of them serious enough to require hospitalization or plastic surgery. In May, a Rehoboth teen was tragically attacked and killed by a pack of dogs. The dogs were owned by a Dighton trainer, and the teen regularly helped care for them.

Nearly all of the very few Massachusetts coyote attacks are attributable to either coyote rabies or to a person inadvertently coming too close to a coyote den. Coyotes, who are very territorial, will also sometimes ignore a person in order to engage with a large dog that they perceive as invading their turf.



Coywolf

Coyotes are recent arrivals in eastern North America, colonizing the habitat over the last century after native wolves were killed off and forests cleared. Way, who has been collaborating with

Dr. Brad White’s genetic research team at Trent University in Ontario to map coyote DNA, actually prefers the name coywolf, as the creature prowling our backyards is actually a hybridization of the native eastern wolf, western coyote, gray wolf and dog.

“We are still trying to sort through this “canid soup,” Way explained, adding that he believes the eastern coyote should be classified as its own species because all of the samples from the Northeast grouped more closely to each other than to western coyotes or wolves.

The coywolf strategizes like a wolf, he notes, lives and hunts near humans like a coyote, and has a reduced fear of humans, like a dog. The hybrid “coywolf” is heavier than

pure coyotes, with longer legs, a larger jaw, smaller ears, and a bushier tail. While Western coyotes are gray or tan colored, coywolves’ coats vary greatly, with colors similar to their Western cousins, as well as red as a red fox, blonde, or even black.

Massachusetts is the third most densely populated state in the country, losing 40 acres of land a day to development. As habitat decreases, human and wildlife interactions

increase. Coyotes are drawn to neighborhoods due to human encroachment of coyote habitat and for food and water, which is generally easily available in urban and suburban areas. But as Way’s tracking research has demonstrated, the resident coyotes do not tolerate other coyotes in their territory, so it is impossible for an area to become “infested” with coyotes.



Suburban Howls by John Way

Like “tomaytoes” and “tomahtoets,” coyotes/coywolves are here to stay.

How can we be good neighbors?

Omnivorous, coyotes are opportunistic hunters. Keep cats indoors. Keep small dogs leashed, and resist the late night or early morning temptation to open the door and let them out alone to “do their business.” Fences are not an absolute deterrent; coyotes can dig under or climb over them.

Do not feed coyotes, purposefully or inadvertently. Coyotes don’t need handouts from self-proclaimed coyote whisperers. Don’t leave pet food and water out in the open, and feed your pets indoors. If you have a bird feeder, clean up any seed spilled underneath. Coyotes will venture into your yard in search of the small rodents feasting on it.

Keep your garbage cans secured, compost bins covered and your grills cleaned. Make sure crawl spaces under porches and decks are inaccessible. Consider installing motion-sensitive lighting around your house.

Keep the calendar in mind. Coyotes are normally shy and elusive, but during mating season (typically January and February), they become territorial and may attack dogs of any size. Likewise when the pups are born in the spring, parents may become quite protective of the den. Come late summer, pups from the spring litters are given freedom to explore their surroundings by the parents; like human toddlers they’re quite curious and have been known to

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follow people and/or stand and stare at walkers. Unless rabid, a bold or aggressive coyote can be driven off by shouting, banging pots together, bright lights or other displays of human dominance.

Conservator Recognitions and Awards

Education is the key to peaceful human/coyote existence, and some day we may even be talking about a shared Good Neighbor Award. But as is traditional at the annual dinner meeting, this year the Conservators made awards in three categories to people or groups who have advanced the cause of open space conservation in Newton:

► Two Directors Awards were given. The first celebrates the Board of Friends of Kennard Park.



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

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"These people have brought new life to the Park,"

Director Peter J. Barrer explained appreciatively. "They have demonstrated that nature and art complement each other — a kind of magic. They have been removing invasives from the park, and have placed native plants. They are making a meadow of native plantings."

But their efforts don't stop there. "They have opened up the park to the wider community, welcoming people by holding events. The park has hosted sculpture, dance, and a speakers series at the Kennard House," Barrer continued. A fall speakers series, an Art Trail, and a labyrinth garden for contemplation and mindfulness are all in the works.

While Mr. Rogers promised you will never go down the drain, it's City Environmental Engineer Maria Rose who's charged with making sure nothing else unwanted finds its way into Newton's storm drains. In presenting Rose with a Directors' award, Conservators' President Beth Wilkinson cited not only her dedication but her knowledge and enthusiasm as she works to improve Newton's drainage infrastructure to manage storm water. As a direct result of Rose's efforts to not only investigate and eliminate illicit



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

Maria Rose and Beth Wilkinson after Maria receives a Directors' award.

connections to the storm drainage system, but to educate the public about the need to protect the watershed, the water quality of Newton's river, streams, lake and ponds have been not only maintained but also improved.

► The 2019 Newton Conservators' Charles Johnson Maynard award was given to Don Lubin for his efforts to discover and identify ferns in conservation areas throughout New England, his strong commitment to promoting biodiversity, and for the decades he has spent sharing his knowledge of ferns with all of us.



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

Conservators' Vice President Chris Hepburn presents the Charles Johnson Maynard award to Don Lubin.

Charles Johnson Maynard was a well-known naturalist, ornithologist, author and publisher who was born and lived in Newton from 1845 until his death in 1929.

"I think it is fair to say that today no one follows in this naturalist's footsteps

better than Don Lubin," said Conservators' Vice President Chris Hepburn in presenting the award. "Don's knowledge of and love for ferns is remarkable and his enthusiasm for showing them to others is truly infectious."

Don leads trips and workshops not only for the Newton Conservators but many other groups, including the NE Wildflower Society. He's contributed dozens of samples of uncommon New England ferns to herbaria including the Asa Gray Herbarium at Harvard, worked on biodiversity surveys throughout eastern Massachusetts, and hosts a website (nefern.info) on New England Ferns called "Ferns et al. of New England."

► The 2019 Environmentalist of the Year Award went to one who might fairly be called first among many. "In Newton, there are a lot of people who are actively working to preserve and protect the environment, so the Conservators have the good fortune of being able to choose from a substantial group," acknowledged David Backer. "But even in that good company, Eric Olson stands out for the

work he is constantly doing here in Newton and in the larger world.”

Eric Olson was recognized not simply for his devotion to the environment, the City of Newton, and the Newton Conservators, but for his work to further the science of ecology and his belief that education will help to save the



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

Eric Olson, Environmentalist of the year.

environment. A professor, advocate and international activist, Olson insists that our actions be guided by best practices and sound science. He works tirelessly to encourage the growth of native plants and the creatures they support.

“I know about Eric’s contributions from personal experience because he has worked for many years with the Environmental Science Program of Newton that I run,” Backer explained. “His

explanations are clear and fun, and his enthusiasm is always a boost for the students and leaders who clear out hundreds of square feet of Japanese Knotweed every summer.”

2018 saw the passing of several Conservators and Friends, whose passing only served to remind us of the indelible marks they’ve left behind.



Jean Moore Husher

Jean Moore Husher was involved with the Conservators for the better part of half a century, serving as president from 1988-1990, vice president, board member, and advisor. A draftsman and illustrator, Jean created the first Conservators logo in the early 1960s. She was chairwoman of the Newton2000 History Committee,

writing a history of land development in Newton. As part of the Commonwealth Avenue Task Force, she shared the 1996 Environmentalist of the Year Award for the successful design for the renovation of Commonwealth Avenue as a linear park.



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Peter Kastner

Peter Kastner was an inspirational and influential force for preservation and management of open space in Newton for over three decades, during which he served as vice-president before becoming president of the Newton Conservators from 1994 to 1996. For many years he coordinated

the Conservators’ walk programs, chaired the nominating committee, and served on the annual audit committee. In 2014 he was named Environmentalist of the Year in recognition more than 30 years of vigilance, tireless service, and advocacy protecting Newton’s environment, leading the Conservators, and representing them on the Parks and Recreation Commission.



Frank Howard

Frank A. Howard sat on the Conservators’ Board of Directors for 13 years. Frank’s wife Deborah also served her time on the board. Frank used to say the family involvement was almost predestined. The couple bought their “first and only” home in West Newton from the Lennihans.

Dick Lennihan had witnessed the neglect of Edmonds Park, as it became a trash dumping ground. In 1961 Lennihan and other residents across the City concerned about uncontrolled development banded together to form the Newton Conservators’ Incorporated (N.C.I.).

Frank also served on the board of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. In 2006 he received The Charles Johnson Maynard Award for his efforts to help develop a disease-resistant strain of the American Chestnut and to bring together specialists in an attempt to pollinate an old chestnut tree in Newton that managed to survive the blight.



Brian Yates

Former Newton City Councilor Brian Yates was the Founder, President, and guiding spirit of the Friends of Hemlock Gorge, transforming a decayed and degraded eyesore into one of the area’s most treasured open space and recreational area. A long time friend of and advisor to the Conservators, he was a strong advocate

on the City Council for the environmental aims of the Conservators and for various historic preservation initiatives including Local Historic Districts (LHD) Conservation Districts.

2018 was a year of persistence, collaboration and outreach for the Conservators. In delivering her final President’s report, Beth Wilkinson noted that the Conservators continue to actively work to preserve Webster Woods, with three Conservators board members and three advisors serving on the Webster Woods Advisory Panel.

In addition to monitoring the existing six Conservation Restrictions (CRs) the Conservators hold on City properties, the Conservators continued to support the City

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in monitoring and placing conservation restrictions on open space. Board members are working with the City's Law Department and the Community Preservation Committee on new CRs for properties on Rogers Street at Crystal Lake and Wabasso Street. Work on CRs for Nahanton Park and Kessler Woods are in various stages of development.



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

*Beth Wilkinson,
president from
2014-2019*

The Conservators' small but mighty invasive plant removal team of dedicated volunteers continued its relentless pursuit of the unwelcome invaders across the City. "This spring alone," Wilkinson reported, "we scheduled 17 invasive removal sessions!"

Routine maintenance on all Conservators' properties continued, with soil testing and an expert from the New England Wild Flower

Society retained to help in developing a plan for improving the health of Dexter Road property in Newtonville.

The Conservators teamed up with new Riverside Greenway Working Group to develop a plan for a trail network to close the gap between the Blue Heron Trail at Lyons Park



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

Past president Beth Wilkinson and new president Ted Kuklinski at the Conservators' annual meeting

in Auburndale and the Riverside MBTA station and beyond. "We also were pleased to support the formation of the Friends of Cold Springs Park," Wilkinson said "and collaborated with staff and volunteers with the Charles River Watershed Association on invasive species control."

And finally the new website went live. Webmaster Dan Brody worked with Scott Lewis of Trailwebsites.com to modernize the site, to make it work better on smartphones and tablets, and to add a

host of new features. "You will find it more user friendly," Wilkinson promised, "and a convenient place to find the latest open space news; events and walks to attend; maps and info for our open spaces; past newsletters, bulletins, and videos; and many helpful search features."

Taking the President's gavel from Beth Wilkinson is long-time board member Ted Kuklinski. Since joining the board in the late 1990s, Ted, a self-taught naturalist, started the Conservators' Lecture Series, created the Conservators' e-Bulletin, and served as video producer, walk leader and vice president. Kuklinski, is a member of Newton's Off-Leash Area Working Group and a steward of Dolan Pond Conservation Area and citizen liaison for Wellington Park in West Newton. He holds a BSEE from



PHOTO: HENRY FINCH

*New Conservator
president Ted Kuklinski*

Drexel University and MS and PhD from MIT in electrical engineering and computer science, and has had a career in tech startups. In his spare time — if his new role of president gives him any — he enjoys birding, playing harmonica and ukulele with several groups, and is an avid volleyball player.

Guide and guard: The essence of the Conservators' Mission Statement distilled into just two words! Never has there been a Conservators' president who so deftly held a lantern in one hand while wielding a sword in the other as Beth Wilkinson. And she has been such a generous advocate, sharing her time and knowledge with other citizens groups, educators and City officials that she has inspired solid alliances when demanding accountability from public and private entities.

Beth Wilkinson joined the Conservators' board in 2011 and served as president from 2014 until 2019. She steps down now, but not away. The Conservators are fortunate that Wilkinson will remain board member, her acumen and tenacity still visible in the public face of the Conservators. ♦

✿ Margaret Doris

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How does one use Amazon Smile? Instead of going to Amazon.com, you go to Smile.amazon.com. On your first visit, you will be asked to choose a nonprofit organization to receive the bonus donation. Enter "Newton Conservators," and you are ready to go. The rest of your shopping proceeds exactly the same as if you had logged in to Amazon.com initially.

Even with relatively few members using the program so far, the rewards have grown. For the first quarter we participated in 2014, we received \$22.32. In 2018, we received \$171.04 and it has grown to \$100 per quarter.

If you have any further questions about the program, check the FAQ page: <http://smile.amazon.com/about>.