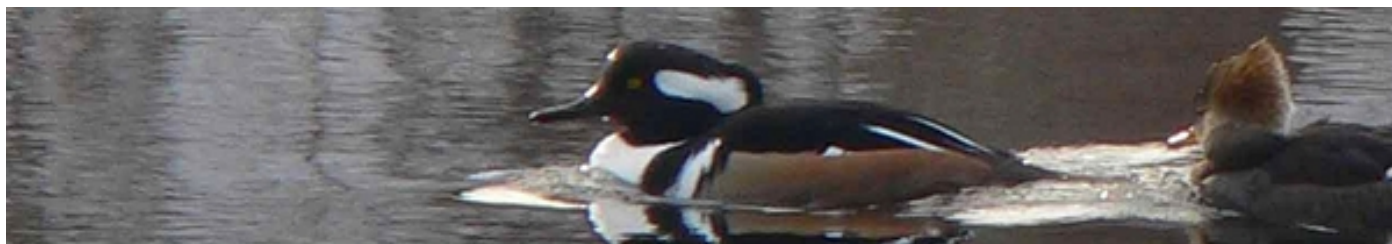




Newton Conservators E-Bulletin

Saturday, December 14, 2019

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



Happy Holidays!

December is here and days are growing shorter! The Winter Moths have arrived again but thankfully their numbers appear to be diminished a bit so far. On Sunday, we take the [annual census of birds](#) in Newton - read all about it below - and we would be happy to have you join us.

We also celebrate the recent unanimous passing by our City Council to acquire and protect Webster Woods with an update on recent happenings. You really should check out our most recent [Newton Conservators Newsletter](#) devoted to Webster Woods. It's hot off the press and will be delivered shortly to many of our members in printed form, but it's also on our website in [PDF form](#).

And we would be most grateful if you renewed your [membership](#) or joined us officially for the first time to support our important open space work! We wish you the best of holidays and hope you enjoy some of them out and about in the [wilds of Newton](#)!

Calling All Birders!



"North Pole Redpoll" - original photo Pete Gilmore

Sunday, December 15, 7 am (5 am for Owling)

Annual Newton Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

Meet at 1 Raeburn Terrace, Newton Highlands

<https://newtonconservators.org/events/join-the-audubon-christmas-bird-count-2/>

This year's annual **Christmas Bird Count (CBC)** in Newton takes place on December 15th this year starting around 7 am. After all, the early birder gets the birds counted! This is the **120th year of the CBC** and helps to measure changes in population of our avian species (and perhaps more global trends such as climate change). Perhaps you have heard that North America has lost more than 1 in 4 birds in the last 50 years. How do we know? Partially from the annual Christmas Bird Count!

See <https://www.audubon.org/news/north-america-has-lost-more-1-4-birds-last-50-years-new-study-says> for details on this startling news!

In Newton, birders will meet at **7 am at 1 Raeburn Terrace** in Newton Highlands (Raeburn is off Hillside which is off Walnut) for some hot refreshment and donuts to fuel up. **Owlers** (the real early birds) usually meet at the same location at **5 am**. The group usually hits a few good spots and tries to call in the owls. A little after 7 am, groups will be formed to go off to various open spaces throughout the city to count all the birds that they see.



The most common question of course is "how do you know you don't count the same bird twice?" Well you can't know for certain but we try our best! Yes, we count all the sparrows, pigeons, and starlings we see, but it is amazing to see how many other types of birds can be found in December in Newton.



Some might remember hearing of the very unusual and very colorful Painted Bunting (more often found in Florida!) that visited Nonantum in very cold weather last year. You never know what you will find - very likely seven or more swans a swimming and maybe even a partridge in a pear tree! Beginners are welcome to accompany some of the more experienced birders (bring binoculars and dress warmly). The weather is looking good!

Most of the counting is done early and group usually wrap up by noon. You are welcome to join the counting even for a short time if you like. Tallies are made by afternoon and consolidated with tallies from other areas within a 15 mile Greater Boston count circle. If you are interested in joining the count this year, please email Pete Gilmore(petegilmore79@gmail.com) or if last minute just show up at 7 am on Sunday. Come join us!

Newton Conservators Newsletter - Webster Woods Issue!

Our newsletter this quarter is devoted to the topic of **Webster Woods** with two outstanding articles. This and past issues can be found online at <https://newtonconservators.org/newsletters/>. The printed version should be in members' mailboxes soon.

The Webster Woods area has a long history, and we are very fortunate to be able to bring that to you in this issue due to the very fortuitous circumstance of a "ghost written" **Letter from Edwin S. Webster**, somehow mysteriously discovered by Newton Conservators' board member Dan Brody. Dan also led the last of our recent special Webster Woods' walks exploring the trail system that connects the land Boston College purchased three years ago with conservation land owned by the City and by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. In the walk, visitors experienced scenic features such as Bare Pond, Gooch's Cave, and Cake Rock.



NEWSLETTER

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

NEWTONCONSERVATORS.ORG • WINTER 2019-2020

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A Letter from Edwin S. Webster

Based on historical documents, Newton Conservators' director Dan Brody has created a narrative that Edwin S. Webster, the original owner of Webster Woods, might have composed at this moment when the future of much of the woods is about to be decided. A version of the letter, with references, larger maps, and additional photos and maps, can be found online at newtonconservators.org/webster-letter.

To the members of the Newton City Council:



My name is Edwin S. Webster. I have a unique perspective for you to consider as you evaluate Mayor Fuller's proposal to take by eminent domain 17 acres of the woods that are named after my family.

I was born in 1867. My friend Charles Stone and I founded Stone & Webster in 1889. What began as a small engineering consulting firm quickly grew to a large enterprise that built streetcar systems, power plants, and office buildings throughout the world.

By 1895, our success made it possible for my wife, Jane, and me to build a 20-room country house on Hammond Street in Newton. I have resided in (or, you may say, haunted) the house ever since.

Hammond Street, and the nearby pond, were named for Thomas Hammond, who farmed much of the nearby land in the 17th century. By the time we moved to this part of Newton, farmland had mostly been replaced by forest, and the land was fragmented among a half dozen owners. Much of the land was owned by my friend, U. S. Circuit Court Judge John Lowell. John and his children built several stately houses on their land on the east side of the pond.



Jane and I were attracted to the area by this description in the 1889 *King's Handbook of Newton*:

"So broad and sequestered and unfrequented is this lovely forest that no sounds of prosaic human life invade its cloisters, and nothing disturbs the saunterer's reflections but the low songs of the birds, or the scampering of an occasional gray squirrel over the dry leaves."

Continued on page 2

Our other feature article, [A Ramble in Webster Woods](#), this month recounts some of what we learned on an earlier fall walk in Webster Woods with the always informative and interesting Brandeis ecologist Eric Olson. You may remember that Eric was the recipient of our Environmentalist of the Year award this past year. He has a special talent for opening up nature-related topics to the average person as anyone who meets him can attest. We are so fortunate to have Eric as a contributor to this issue.

A Ramble in Webster Woods

By Eric Olson, Senior Lecturer in Ecology at Brandeis University

Editor's Note: The following article is written as a companion piece to the letter from Edwin Webster elsewhere in this newsletter. Its intent is to show one of the many ways we can appreciate the park. As the author notes, "Naturalist-educators simply cannot do what we do without wild green canvases to walk out into, with a group of curious locals in tow, looking for opportunities to celebrate rich local biodiversity."

On a recent fall Conservators' outing in Webster Woods, I chose to weave into the walk three questions that, to an evolutionary ecologist, come under the heading of life history theory. The life history of a species of course includes birth, growth, and reproduction. But it also considers the "why" of key details such as "why that number of eggs in a nest, and not more?" We are such visual creatures that we tend to focus on form, size, and color when we consider the evolution of life; but life history theory reminds us that organisms live within energy and resource budgets. Details like egg number for a bird, or seed number for a wildflower, take close study to document, but like color and form are also sculpted by natural selection. To illustrate, here are three questions I discussed as I led my group through Webster Woods this fall: 1) why do birds migrate? 2) why do most — but not all — salamanders

The "why" of bird migration.

Those of us lucky enough to have lived in the tropics for a time have direct experience with the bewilderment of riches such places present. Our local species of hummingbird, the delightful Ruby-throat, takes a thousands-of-miles journey north from as far as Panama, to build its tiny nests and zip through our flower beds here in Newton. But in Panama and surrounding nations in South and Central America, the field guides show not just a few more kinds of hummingbirds, there are *pages and pages* of hummingbirds! Fifty-four species in Costa Rica! An unbelievable 150 species in Colombia! Almost none of these hummers are long-distance migrants.



Map of Webster Woods

Much the same pattern holds true of the orioles — our brilliant Baltimore Oriole has eight or so relatives in Nicaragua, handsome bright birds that never migrate and are doing just fine, thank you. Migration takes a lot of energy, and long-distance travel over unfamiliar ground is risky; those facts and all those handsome stay-put species demand we seek an answer: why migrate?

This question has intrigued ecologists for years, and the details of bird reproduction provide essential clues. Migration may be risky but so is staying put, and the old saying "don't put all your eggs in one basket" definitely applies here. The tropical forests are rich with predators that relentlessly seek out nests and prey on eggs and chicks. There are hawks and owls both here and there, but let me mention boas and other arboreal snakes, and need I say more?



Baltimore Oriole

There are hazards in the jungle that birds just never have to worry about up here, and as expected by this risk argument, on average a female oriole in Massachusetts lays more eggs per nest than her close relatives in the tropics. The life history trait "egg number per nest" reflects relative risk, and a tropical oriole must hold egg-making resources in reserve in case her first (and second, etc.) nest attempt is foiled by predators.

There's another benefit to migration: the northern spring is when moths and butterflies by the thousands hatch and lay eggs, and their caterpillars grow quickly on new tender leaves. Plus, those long June days mean that parents start provisioning nestlings around 5 a.m. and keep right on bringing in food well into the evening. Low risk — wouldn't you migrate, if you were an oriole? It suddenly

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WINTER 2020

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PHOTO: DAN BRODY

Webster Woods Passed at City Council on Dec 2!

It was a great night at City Hall on Monday, December 2nd as the Newton City Council unanimously passed the measures to acquire Webster Woods. This is a process which has played out over many years at this point. Thanks for all the support and advocacy you have provided over that time, as Newton Conservators, as Friends of Webster Woods, as concerned BC community members, and as citizens who value open space. Thanks to Mayor Fuller and so many dedicated city staff, the Webster Woods Committee, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, and especially the City Councilors who all saw the wisdom of making sure this precious woodland is preserved for future generations. It was truly a great effort by so many.



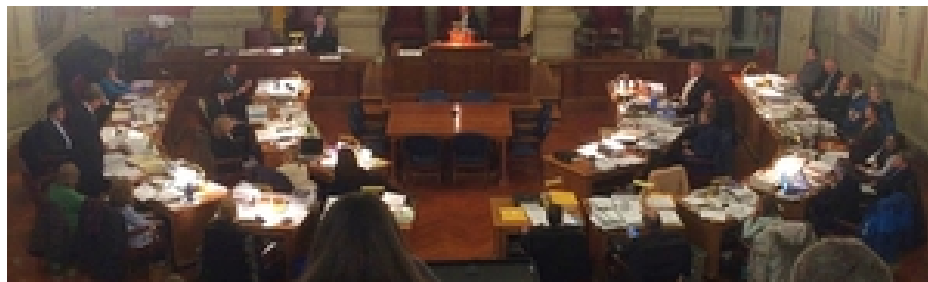
Mayor Fuller explained what happens next in a recent update:

<http://www.newtonma.gov/civicax/filebank/documents/100385>

"... Newton's City Charter requires a 20-day waiting period before any legislative measure can take effect. That means we will record the Order of Taking with the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds by the end of December. At that point, the City of Newton will own the land. A check for \$15.2 million will be cut and issued to Boston College within 60 days of recording the Order of Taking.

We anticipate Boston College will challenge our acquisition and the value of the land. We are prepared. We know the issue may be in the court system for a number of years, but the land's value will be as of the date we file the Order of Taking. How will we pay for a potentially larger acquisition price or additional legal fees? We will apply to the Community Preservation Committee for additional funds to pay these possible added costs if necessary...."

Recent coverage of the City Council vote can be found in the BC Gavel newspaper at:



<http://www.bcgavel.com/2019/12/03/newton-city-council-votes-to-assert-eminant-domain-over-webster-woods-property/> and in the BC Heights campus newspaper at

<https://bcheights.com/2019/12/03/newton-city-council-votes-unanimously-to-seize-webster-woods/> and

in this Newton Tab article: <https://newton.wickedlocal.com/news/20191203/bc-vows-legal-fight-after-newton-takes-webster-woods> and finally the Boston Globe:

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/newton/2019/12/03/newton-moves-seize-webster-woods-from-boston-college/dBtxRHgGaX9T7vmvMgF7FK/story.html>

While the BC administration has been strongly fighting the Webster Woods acquisition and seemingly pledged to fight it into the future (as noted in the above articles), many BC students (see photo from final City Council vote) have been vocal proponents of saving Webster Woods from development, in particular members of the BC EcoPledge (<https://www.facebook.com/BCEcoPledge>) and Climate Action (<https://www.facebook.com/BCFossilFree/>) campus organizations. Read about some of their efforts in the Newton Tab (at: <https://newton.wickedlocal.com/news/20191122/boston-college-students-fight-school-to-preserve-newtons-webster-woods> with kudos to Kyle Rosenthal and Stevie Walker who spoke at the CPC public hearing on Webster Woods. See Kyle's Opinion piece in the Heights BC student newspaper:

<https://bcheights.com/2019/11/27/in-response-to-preservation-committee-passes-webster-woods-acquisition-city-council-to-vote-soon/>. Students had even started a petition to BC to save the woods which has already been signed by over 600 students, faculty, and community



members: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeiiY5LuslFsxccPYDIDGdAOrGpwphDUZa2vc4eBaIP-6HCqw/viewform>



Last week, the Newton Conservators hosted a table at the annual Newton South High School Volunteer Fair. It was wonderful to see so many students who expressed interest in open space issues (especially Webster Woods) and activities who seemed to be a bit in same spirit as Greta Thunberg. One student, Tierney, a frosh at NSHS, to her great credit had spoken up in favor of Webster Woods at the public hearing before the Community Preservation Committee, had attended

many Friends of Webster Woods meetings and had even volunteered at the Conservators Harvest Fair Booth focused on Webster Woods. Another NSHS student, Ari, sent us a link to an early article on the NECN website inspired by his letter to NECN in support of Webster Woods while he was still at Brown Middle School: <https://www.necn.com/news/new-england/Newton-Students-Look-to-Protect-Woods-508205771.html> We also spoke with two other NSHS students who were preparing articles for the NSHS Lion's Roar and Denebola student newspapers. There is great hope for the future!

Here is Newton Conservators' recent statement by your editor on some of the misunderstandings on the Webster Woods issue:

"Newton Conservators strongly supports the acquisition of the current wooded portion of Webster Woods as proposed by Mayor Fuller and recently recommended by the Community Preservation Commission and approved unanimously by the City Council.



For years we have been urging protection of this important portion of Webster Woods which connects existing city and DCR conservation land, thus ensuring its continued open space use as originally intended by donor Edwin Webster. In this case, the whole is indeed more than the sum of its parts from an environmental perspective and as relied upon for its conservation and recreation value. Webster Woods is unusual in Newton for its true "forest" quality mostly undisturbed by invasive understory - a place for easy meandering in quiet solitude.

In communications online and by mail, there seems to be some misunderstanding of the CPA and how funds are allocated in Newton. CPA funds allocated to Webster Woods will not be to the detriment of other housing, historic, recreation, and open space projects. In fact, there are target allocations for each of the uses, and the acquisition of Webster Woods would be bonded over multiple years. It's expected that the acquisition and legal fees would require only a portion of the open-space funding during the bonding period.

Other Newton priorities - such as schools, teacher salaries, fire stations, and unfunded pension liabilities - are also not affected by CPA funding of Webster Woods. In fact, those items are funded by the operating and capital budgets and are not eligible to be CPA expenditures.

The city's valuation of the property was determined by an independent appraiser for the back portion of the property which has certain deed restrictions on usage and includes wetland restrictions - which makes higher valuations of other properties not comparable.

We must proceed to acquire the land now, before it is developed and the conservation value of the whole area is lost. At last

we might be able to "Save Webster Woods" and keep more garden in the "Garden City."

Newton CPA Program Staff Opening



Newton's Community Preservation Program is seeking a new full-time staff manager, to start in January 2020 when current program manager Alice Ingerson will retire. Click [here](#) to read or download the detailed job description and application instructions. Apply from the Job Opportunities page under Human Resources on the City website. Visit

<http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/planning/cpa/default.asp#2019-staff-opening>

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP



As 2019 draws to a close, we would be very grateful for your continued support by renewing your membership. Perhaps, consider renewing at a higher level, adding an extra donation, or purchasing a gift membership for someone else who is passionate about open space.

You can renew or join the Newton Conservators online at <https://newtonconservators.org/renewal-2020/>. A link to our annual members' renewal letter outlining last year's activities can also be found at the above link.

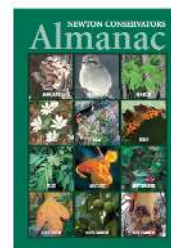
Donations may be made at our secure link <https://newtonconservators.123signup.com/donation/21167>. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, we also accept donations for a number of affiliated local open space groups including Friends of Webster Woods, Friends of Cold Spring Park, the Riverside Trails Working Group and others. As part of the donation process, you can specify a group in the "Comments" section of the form. Thanks so much!

Membership & Publications!



Did you know that you can Join the Newton Conservators online. And consider a gift membership for a conservation-minded friend. New members get a trail guide as well!

Visit <https://newtonconservators.org/membership/> for details on membership options. Did you know that you can register and pay for membership, events, [buy a copy of our Almanac or newly revised Trail Guide](#), or make a donation to the Newton Conservators online? The Trail Guides and Almanac are also available at your local Newton Bookstores. Shop Local!



Our Trail Guide and Almanac make great holiday gifts!

Mission: 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.

- *E-Bulletin Editor & President Ted Kuklinski, Newton Conservators (ebulletin@newtonconservators.org)*

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