

President's Message

This is not the spring we expected! COVID-19 has certainly been a spoiler for what should be one of the most delightful times of the year. Our usual ambitious spring walk series highlighted in our last issue was completely canceled. The equally ambitious public invasives-removal program including NewtonSERVES also went by the wayside. And the highlight of our year when we gather at the annual dinner meeting was postponed at least for now to October 21.

Sadly, we have not been able to partake of many of the usual routines of daily life — movies, sports, restaurants, shopping, religious services, libraries, picnics, parties, weddings, concerts, graduations, and of course for some of us, public meetings at City Hall. It seems like “Zoom” has transformed from a somewhat ancient PBS kids program to an online platform where we spend many hours a day doing what we used to do in person.



Toadshade, Cold Spring Park

Yet in these strange times, the need for open space has only become more apparent. It has become our refuge and solace when we can't go about our other regular activities. While playground and court usage have been curtailed, our open spaces have largely remained open to welcome our stressed Newton populace. A recent mobility report for Massachusetts (https://www.gstatic.com/covid19/mobility/2020-05-16_US_Mobility_Report_en.pdf) indicated that parks increased 99% in usage during the pandemic! With more time at home, folks are out walking, exploring, and discovering our parks and conservation areas. It has been heartening to see that many are finding these special places with the help of our trail guide (pocket version or online). There are numerous parents with strollers, folks walking their dogs, joggers, and even folks bringing their laptops to park benches!

Getting up early to go birding at Dolan Pond has been my greatest pleasure this spring, noting each arrival of old avian friends either passing through town on migration or taking up residence for the summer. Pete Gilmore's article on the decline in bird population in this issue is very relevant and alarming.

Katherine Howard updates us on invasive efforts and has been leading socially distanced teams even in the face of the pandemic — since the invasives are growing still, and we do not want to lose ground. Much like the old lemons/lemonade saying, Andreae Downs reminds us that if life gives us so much invasive garlic mustard, perhaps we should make pesto out of it! Look for it in your neighborhood and pull it before the seeds spread.

A major initiative in the past year has been trails! Alan Nogee reports on the major trail renovations at Cold Spring Park — what could be called the “Central Park of Newton” — while Ted Chapman discusses the fabulous progress and plans for the Riverside Greenway along the Charles River. With a goal of building and maintaining our local trail systems, we are recruiting a dedicated “Trails Team” or, alternatively, seeking financial support for trails via our established “Trails Fund,” which is already being put to use on the Riverside Trails projects.

Previous foresight on creating open space has made life much better for us in these sad times. After much work and public input, Newton's new Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is nearing completion and will guide us for the next seven years. How valuable open space is to our well being! With the summer approaching, please get out and enjoy our open spaces safely. Please respect these spaces by following the rules and using proper social distancing and masks where appropriate. This too shall pass!

All the best,

Ted Kuklinski

Ted Kuklinski
President, Newton Conservators