

# WinterFEST in Cold Spring Park

By Amelia Gantt

In partnership with Friends of Cold Spring Park and Newton Community Pride, Newton Conservators hosted a successful 3rd annual WinterFEST walk at Cold Spring Park. After a meet and greet with Olaf (from *Frozen*, the animated film) and sipping hot chocolate (Dunkin' Donuts), children and adults joined a free guided walk that traced the park's outer The Life Trail loop.



PHOTO: KEN MALLORY

*Children and adults gather at the entrance to Cold Spring Park.*



PHOTO: MARGARET MALLORY

*Olaf gets a hug from a fan.*

“Attendance at the annual WinterFEST walk has doubled every year since the beginning of the partnership,” says Blair Lesser Sullivan, the Executive Director of Newton Community Pride. The large group of approximately 50 people split to follow the path either clockwise or counterclockwise, led by either Barbra Bates, board member of the Newton

Conservators, or Alan Noguee, President of Friends of Cold Spring Park.

Bates spoke with a mouthpiece microphone, and when she did, children gathered around her raising their hands in excitement before she asked a question. Her short lessons were a mix of fun facts about the ecology of the park and conservation notes, like how to identify native plant species. Her goal, and the goal of these community walks, is to inspire that sense of wonder about nature that could lead to conservation. “People protect the things they love,” Bates said.

We don't have to look far from our backdoor to find exciting plants and animals. Cold Spring Park is just a three-minute drive from Newton Centre, and many small natural curiosities can be found right outside your door. On the trail, Bates stopped to pick up a gnawed pinecone core from a squirrel that had peeled the scales to eat the two seeds inside each scale. “Because it's so clean, Barbara notes, “I would say this was a chipmunk, a red squirrel, or a mouse, not a grey squirrel, which would have torn everything off.”

As she continued, we look closely at the ground, to the leaves and needles falling onto our path, and there are explanations for everything, even the dark bumps living upon a stick picked up by a participant from the moist soil. “They may be galls caused either by an insect or a fungus. It's the tree's defense to grow around it and encase it.” Even parents learned new things, made clear by the many gasps of surprise and ‘wows’ from the crowd throughout the 1.5-mile loop.



PHOTO: MARGARET MALLORY

*Children gaze at a gnawed pinecone along a trail in Cold Spring Park.*

Conservation is a theme throughout. Farther on our walk, we encountered chicken wire circling young plants. In an effort of ecological restoration, Cold Spring Park recently planted native trees and plant species throughout the park, like the native silky dogwood whose new twigs are dark red.

Who would have known one can see owls in the park? As we encounter a floodplain at one of the entrances to the park, Barbara tells us that this is a great place for owls to hunt mice. “There are rodents running back and forth here, and it used to be pretty reliable to see a barred owl watching and waiting. You might see the owl, and it would fly off, and you wouldn't hear a sound, not even a whisper, because their wings are so silent.”

More questions. Why do female mallards have a brown head and males have green? What is the difference between a marsh and a swamp? How can we identify white pines? What are those little mushrooms poking out of the stump of that tree, and do they turn the stump into soil?

The trail boasts new amenities like plaques with QR code links to the new orienteering course along the trail. Although bordered by homes in some places, the Life Trail is well-maintained by stone dust paths, easy for a short walk or a long adventure. Taking advantage of our nearby outdoor areas draws us closer to nature and, as Bates suggests, closer to conservation. The message of this walk is clear — be curious, look more closely, and protect those things you love. ♦