



Aerial view of Woodcock Meadow, which is maintained by the city to encourage the Woodcock mating displays.



American Woodcock

usually starting in late February. On a still evening, this unique behavior typically commences at 15 minutes after sunset. It's convenient to park in the small lot off of Nahanton Street just east of the main entrance and

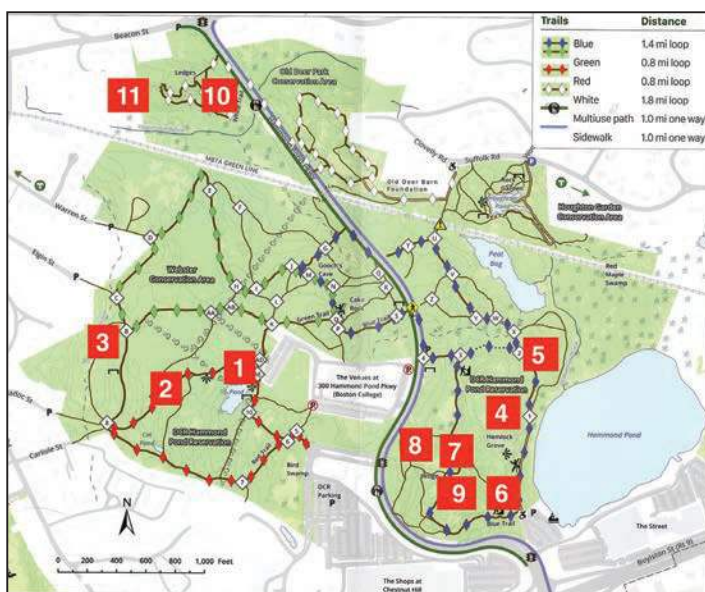
walk through a narrow-forested screen onto “Woodcock Meadow.” The males stand on the ground issuing a sequence of “peent” calls, then fly up in a large loop and return to the same spot. These birds breed in the woods in Nahanton Park, but they are nocturnal and almost never observed over the summer.

As the weather warms, waves of migrants move north, and some birds drop down in Newton to feed and rest on their way to their breeding grounds. Among the early arrivals, look for Blue-headed Vireo and Palm, Pine, and Myrtle Warbler. In addition to the warblers seen in the fall, one can expect Northern Waterthrush, Ovenbird, and Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue, Blackburnian, and Bay-breasted Warbler. Cape May and Hooded Warbler both seem to be increasing, and again the unexpected sometimes shows up, such as Worm-eating or Prothonotary Warbler, and, recently, Summer Tanager. Thrushes also come through — Hermit and Swainson's Thrush (that one often all the way from Argentina) and Veery, and occasionally the rarer Gray-cheeked Thrush. The peak of the spring migration occurs in the first two weeks of May.

Nahanton Park will always have a surprise for the observant bird watcher — at any time of year! ♦

The Wonderful Rocks of Webster Woods

*By Richard B. Primack, a lifelong Newton native and a Professor of Plant Ecology at Boston University.
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See the map for the locations indicated by the number in each specific area.

The most striking feature of the Webster Woods is its abundance of rocks, from sheer cliff faces and rocky slopes to isolated boulders and old stone walls. These are mostly puddingstone, a gray conglomerate rock in which pebble- to cobble-sized rounded stones are embedded in a muddy-sandy matrix, but there are also layers of brownish sandstone. This prevalence of rocky features is found nowhere else in Newton so abundantly and is likely why the area has remained undeveloped.

The woods can be a wonderful place to see leaves change into dazzling displays of colors in autumn, marvel at winter's snow-covered branches, and observe wildflowers and the arrival of migratory birds in spring. I would argue, however, that what makes the Webster Woods special are the unique and varied rock formations left behind when the glaciers melted 15,000 years ago.

Continued on page 6

Webster Woods South



Pyramid Rock in the center of Bare Pond (1)

Bare Pond is a vernal pool occupied by tadpoles and spotted salamander larvae in the spring. Pyramid Rock (1), a six-foot-tall rock, emerges from the middle of the pond and shows distinctive horizontal high-water marks when the pond is dry in summer. On the northern edge is the Bare Pond Overlook, a perfect place to sit and enjoy the view. A rock wall, constructed around 200 years ago, cuts through the pond. To the west is an impressive slope of jumbled rocks to explore, though at this site and elsewhere caution must be used to avoid falls. In late winter and early spring, a thin sheet of ice covers one of the rock faces, called Movie Rock. Water droplets seeping between the ice and rock create a unique display of descending bubbles, winking off and on.



Quarry Rock (2): Note the vertical groove.



Salamander Rock (3): Note keys for scale.

Farther west is Quarry Rock (2), which shows the vertical marking of a two-man hand drill used to break out a block of rock. The rock was then hauled away, perhaps to make a threshold. Nearby in the Vale, Salamander Rock (3), an inconspicuous flat rock about two feet across, can be tilted up by a strong adult and usually has salamanders underneath. Great for kids!

Webster Woods North

North of Temple Road (B-K) is Cake Rock (O-P), named by rock climbers for its straight sides and vertical faces. Nearby Gooch's Caves (M), supposedly named for a past local character, is another rocky slope with chambers and hideouts that are fun to explore, including a deep cave that is difficult to find. On the west slope is a massive 8-foot-tall boulder, which amazingly has not rolled off since it was left by the melting glaciers.

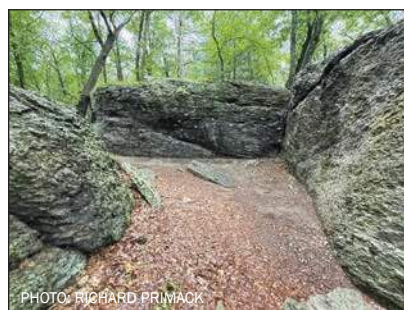
Hammond Pond Woods



Hammond Pond Cliffs (4)



Hanging Rock (5)



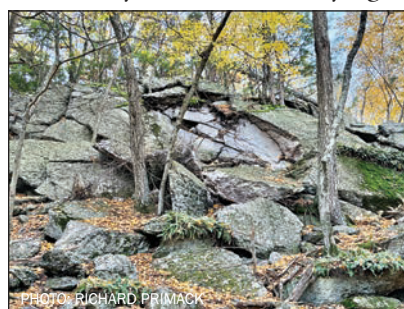
The Alcove (6)

Paralleling the shore of Hammond Pond is an elongated ridge, including a tall cliff face that I call the Hammond Pond Cliffs (4). Perhaps 50 feet high and 100 feet long, it's a premier rock-climbing location due to its size and numerous vertical cracks and handholds. On top of the ridge is a lovely rock wall covered with light gray lichens.

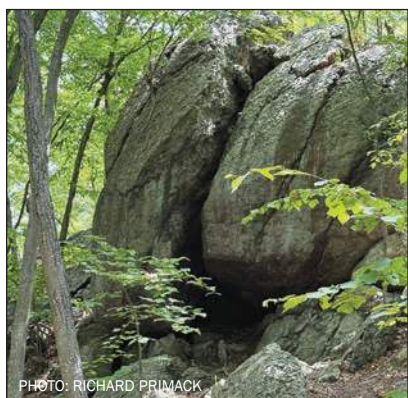
Just north from the Cliffs along the ridge is a hanging rock (5), two feet on a side and six feet long, caught at eye-level between two rock faces. At the southern edge of the ridge near the Parkway, a passageway leads to a magical courtyard enclosed on three sides with 15-foot walls, known to climbers as the Alcove (6).

Hemlock Grove

On the back of the ridge is the Hemlock Grove (7), with a slope of huge rocks and a valley filled with towering hemlock trees, many now dead and dying because of the woolly adelgid infestation. Recently, a massive sheet broke off from a rock face, tumbled 30 feet downslope, and broke into four large pieces and many smaller fragments. The newly exposed rock surface is distinctly lighter in color and the area should not be approached closely as it's still unstable.



Hemlock Grove (7) with rockfall



Elephant's Head (8)



Mountain Lion Rock (9)

At the base of the slope is a round moss-covered rock about 4 feet across with an uncanny resemblance to the Incredible Hulk.

On the Parkway side of the slope is the Elephant's Head (8), probably the largest surface rock in the woods at 100 feet across and weighing tens of millions of pounds.

Above the Hemlock Grove is Mountain Lion Rock (9), a huge boulder with a cat-like face. Nearby is a cluster of four large, block-like boulders, with two of them holding up a third



Angled Sandstone at the Ledges (10)

on the west side of the Parkway. With a combination of cliffs and rocky slopes, including alternating sandstone and puddingstone layers, the Ledges have a fantastic mixture of rock forms. The most striking is the Pinnacle,

a 15-foot free-standing column. At one place, the cliff face is broken up into an exposed matrix of right-angled sandstone fragments.

At the top of the cliff, a gap leads to a private alcove overlooking the valley below.

Continuing westward along the trail and turning left at the old fence, an isolated cluster of a dozen massive boulders (11) suggests the toys of a long-vanished giant.

These are some of the most interesting features of the woods, some named by others and some by me. There are far more waiting to be discovered and appreciated by you!

Editor's note: For letter notations as locations on the map, go to the online version of the newsletter.

The Ledges

The Ledges (10) occur in the northwest section of the woods between Beacon Street and the T tracks, accessed

MISSION Newton Conservators, Inc.

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.

Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 65 years ago in June 1961.

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We welcome material related to our mission from any source. Send proposed articles or letters by email in MS Word or rich text format to articles@newtonconservators.org. Digitized photographs, maps, and diagrams are also welcome.

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