

# President's Message

Dear Conservators,

Thanks to those who attended the annual meeting on May 3 and heard Andy Finton talk about resilient nature and the importance of supporting biodiversity and increasing connectedness. Many thanks to those intrepid volunteers who have shown up in cold, gray, and sometimes drizzly weather to pull invasive plants on Newton Serves Day and more days since then. What a team!

Thanks, too, to the knowledgeable leaders who share information about Newton's open spaces on our spring walks. If you missed the opportunity to attend a walk, you'll have more chances again in the fall.

In March, several board members attended the Massachusetts Land Conservation Conference. It was an amazing and inspiring experience to be in an auditorium with more than six hundred other dedicated people who share the mission of land conservation.

We learned so many things: methods for defending a conservation restriction, potential new formats to use for our trail guide revision, information about edible plants, ways that the Worcester Land Trust has been successful in creating a new Greenway, and so much more. It was almost too much to absorb in just one day.

For me, the highlight of the day was hearing E.O. Wilson interviewed by Laura Johnson, former President of the Mass Audubon Society and former Northeast Region Vice President for The Nature Conservancy. As Ms. Johnson said, "If there is any rock star for people who work on land conservation and biodiversity, it is E.O. Wilson, acknowledged as the creator of the scientific disciplines island biogeography and sociobiology."

Professor Wilson pointed out that there are an estimated 10 million species of organisms in our world. Of that number, we have discovered/identified only 2 million. Thus, we don't know even the identity of 80% of the species on Earth.

Wilson also talked about the escalating rate of extinction of species, caused largely by the effects of human activity. He explained that the rate of extinction is 100 times the rate before humans developed and that rate is skyrocketing to 1000 times more. Of all the species listed as being at risk of extinction, scientists have been able to slow or reverse the decline of only 20% of them. Thus, many of the 80% of the unknown species may become extinct before we even know they exist.

E.O. Wilson worked with ecologist Robert McArthur to develop the *Theory of Island Biogeography*, which shows that there's a strong relationship between the amount of area on an island and the number of species that could be sustained on it. Wilson calculated that if we view the earth as an island, we must preserve half of the land and half of the ocean waters in order to save 85% of the species currently on the earth.

Wilson believes that it would be "straight forward" to preserve 50% of the oceans. Preserving 50% of the land would be harder. Right now, he estimates that 15% of the land on the earth is safely set aside in preserves.

To learn more about E.O. Wilson's prescription for saving the important diversity of life on our planet, read his book *Half Earth*, in which he describes the locations of land that would help us to reach the 50% allocation and in which he explains that his plan would not require currently occupied land to be vacated.

Laura Johnson ended her interview with a quotation from Wilson's book *The Future of Life*: "A conservation ethic is that which aims to pass on to future generations the best part of the non-human world. To know this world is to gain a proprietary attachment to it. To know it well is to love and take responsibility for it."

*Beth Wilkinson*