



Celebrating our 40th Anniversary!

the Newton Conservators

NEWSLETTER

Summer Issue

www.newtonconservators.org

June 2001

TTOR's Andy Kendall Speaks at Annual Dinner

Awards given to Rep. Ruth Balser, Richard Staley, Ald. Lisle Baker and Ald. Dick McGrath

Andy Kendall, Executive Director of The Trustees of Reservations and Newton resident, was the keynote speaker at this year's Annual Dinner meeting. In his talk, he introduced attendees to the wide range of activities and initiatives undertaken by The Trustees, including some that may be of value to the Conservators.

TTOR was created by an act of the Massachusetts legislature 110 years ago with a mission to protect "beautiful and historic places" and to make them available for public use. It currently owns and manages 90 properties across Massachusetts, and more than one-half of the state's population lives within five miles of at least one TTOR property.

The organization is best known for its signature properties—Castle Hill and Crane Beach in Ipswich and World's End in Hingham, but in fact, it protects a much broader collection of landscapes and structures. Included are farms (including the oldest farm in continuous operation in the state), beaches and islands (it is the largest single landowner on Martha's Vineyard), woods and forests, meadows and fields, rivers and streams, mountaintops, historic buildings and the gardens and landscapes that surround them, and even a reservation in Holyoke on which prehistoric dinosaur footprints are preserved.

Public use is a part of the mission that TTOR takes seriously. It offers educational programs,

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Aldermanic Committees Take Action on CPA Referendum

Two committees of the Board of Aldermen have approved placing a referendum on the November general election ballot to allow voters to consider local adoption of the Community Preservation Act. One more committee must approve the referendum before it goes to the full Board for consideration, hopefully in early July.

On June 6th, the Programs and Services Committee reviewed a recommendation from the Community Preservation Alliance, a group made up of open space, affordable housing and historic preservation advocates, including the Newton Conservators. The Alliance recommended a 2% surcharge on real estate taxes with exemptions for the first \$100,000 of assessed value, all low-income residents and moderate-income elderly residents. The Alliance also recommended that the surcharge be made effective retroactive to July 1, 2001, making Newton eligible for state matching funds in this fiscal year if the measure passes.

After much discussion and input from city departments, including the Planning and Assessors departments, the Programs and Services Committee determined that the complexity of administering the moderate income elderly exemption would not

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(CPA, continued from page 1)

permit a July 1, 2001 effective date. In order to preserve the opportunity to qualify for early matching funds, the Committee agreed to a compromise position that would eliminate all exemptions and lower the surcharge from 2% to 1%. This simplified format was passed overwhelmingly by Programs and Services.

The Zoning and Planning Committee considered the matter at its June 11th meeting, and endorsed this compromise position. The Finance Committee takes up the referendum at its regularly scheduled meeting on June 25th. Assuming passage in Finance, the measure would go to the full Board of Aldermen at its July 9th regular meeting.

Meanwhile, the Programs and Services Committee began a discussion at its June 20th meeting about the size and composition of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), which would be formed as part of the city's adoption of the CPA. The role of the CPC is to consider and recommend to the Board of Aldermen projects for which CPA funds should be allocated.

The CPA requires that the CPC be comprised of at least five members and as many as nine. The five statutory members include representatives of the Conservation Commission, the Housing Authority, the Historic Preservation Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Planning and Development Board.

The Community Preservation Alliance recommended to the Programs and Services Committee that four additional members be appointed to create a nine member CPC. These additional members would be appointed by the Mayor and approved by the Board of Aldermen and would include community advocates in each of the four expenditure categories covered by the CPA: housing, open space, historic preservation and recreation.

In addition, the Alliance recommended that, to the extent possible, these members possess credentials and experience in one of these professions: real estate development, law, architecture and finance. Staggered three-year terms were recommended for all CPC members.

Discussion of this item was held to the next meeting after the Programs and Services Committee ran out of time to complete its deliberation.

By Doug Dickson

The Newton Conservators Newsletter© is published five times each year by the Newton Conservators, Inc. Issues usually appear in February, April, June, September and November. Deadlines for these issues are the fifth of each month in which an issue is scheduled to be published.

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

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Thanks to the following contributors to this edition of the Newsletter: Ted Kuklinski, Matthew Selig, Doug Dickson

(Kendall, continued from page 1)

nature tours, fishing, swimming, cross-country skiing and camping. Through adaptive reuse of its historic homes, TTOR has created inns, bed and breakfasts, and function facilities. Andy stressed that this not only provide active and productive uses for these structures, but generates income for maintenance and connects people to The Trustees in ways that enables it to sustain its mission.

In a typical year, TTOR protects about 2000 acres of land, about 10% of the total saved each year from development in Massachusetts. By comparison, more than 15,000 acres are lost to development each year. In addition to outright purchase, TTOR uses a variety of tools to protect land and historic structures. These range from an increasing use of conservation restrictions to the state's agricultural preservation restriction program. TTOR sometimes acts as an interim funding source, enabling immediate action to protect land from development while other funding sources, including state and federal government dollars, are made available. The organization often enters into partnership arrangements with land trusts and municipalities to accomplish together what none of the groups working alone could achieve.

Andy described a current project that will benefit the Newton Conservators. In cooperation with the Land Trust Alliance, TTOR is creating a facility in central Massachusetts where training programs and other resources will be housed for use by the 500 land trusts in the Northeast. Most of these organizations are run by volunteers, as is the Conservators, and there is a tremendous need for advice, support, mentoring and training. This

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facility will respond to those needs and generate yet another set of services unique to the TTOR mission.

Andy stated that his first objective in joining the organization was to visit and become familiar with all 90 TTOR properties. It took nine months to complete this task and in the process, he put enough miles on his car to circle the globe while never leaving the state. He was reassured by what he saw, but nevertheless reminded at every turn how much open space is being lost to development and sprawl. He said this experience has shaped in him a renewed sense of urgency for the mission of The Trustees and for the land preservation movement in general. Andy has an exceptional platform from which to achieve that purpose in his new role as Executive Director of The Trustees of Reservations.

Andy's presentation was videotaped and will be shown on NewTV as soon as editing is complete.

Environmentalist of the Year Award

Rep. Ruth Balsler was presented the 2001 Environmentalist of the Year Award for her work in preserving publicly-owned land statewide, for her efforts to achieve passage of the No Net Loss bill and for her initiative in convening the Hammond Pond Task Force. This was the 20th presentation of the Environmentalist of the Year Award since it was inaugurated in 1981. Ruth stated that there was no other organization she would rather be recognized by for her work in this area than the Conservators. She described the circumstances of her work in these and related areas, including some disappointments along the way. The award was presented by Mike Clarke, outgoing Past President of the Conservators.

Directors Awards

Three individuals were selected for recognition for particular contributions this year. **Richard Staley** was commended for his many years of service on the Conservation Commission, serving in recent years as its chair. Richard won the Environmentalist of the Year Award in 1989 for creating and directing the Environmental Science Program, which has exposed young people in Newton to environmental science in a rigorous hands-on program each summer since 1975. Richard is retiring from the Commission and moving out of state to be closer to his children and grandchildren.

Ald. Lisle Baker was recognized for his work in negotiating conservation restrictions on properties along the eastern shore of Hammond

Pond. "Since as a 'great pond,' Hammond Pond is an important public resource, we need to protect it from development too close to the shore," Lisle said in accepting the award. "Unlike the publicly owned western shore, the eastern shore is privately owned and those property owners who have offered the city conservation restrictions on its edge are to be commended," he added. Alderman Baker was named Environmentalist of the Year in 1982 for his work in helping the city acquire the Newton Commonwealth Golf Course for public recreation.

A third award was presented posthumously to **Ald. Richard McGrath** for his determined efforts over many years leading to the successful removal of the derelict Rumford Avenue incinerator, capping of the landfill and reclaiming the land as part of the Flowed Meadow Conservation Area. Dick had hoped to be present to receive the award, but his death occurred just two weeks prior to our meeting. In accepting the award for Dick and his family, Ald. Polly Bryson described this as his proudest accomplishment over a long and productive career. She said Dick was very pleased to be recognized in this way and was looking forward to being present for the award. Dick's wife was also unable to attend because of the birth of a grandchild earlier in the week.

By Doug Dickson

MISSION Newton Conservators, Inc.

The Newton Conservators promote 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.

The Newton Conservators was formed as a not-for-profit organization 40 years ago in June, 1961.

Mayoral Proclamation Honors Conservators on 40th Anniversary

Mayor David Cohen attended the Annual Dinner to present the Conservators with a proclamation from the city in recognition of the many contributions by the organization over the past forty years. The text of the proclamation reads as follows:

Proclamation Newton Conservators 40th Anniversary

Whereas, the Newton Conservators were organized in June 1961 in response to a period of intense development during which open space in the city was overtaken or threatened by construction of hotels, malls, homes and businesses; and

Whereas, Newton's first Open Space Plan was developed by the Conservators in the early 1970s and remains the framework for the city's current open space planning process, some thirty years later; and

Whereas, that first plan formed the impetus for acquisition of several hundred acres of conservation and parkland throughout the city during the 1970s and 1980s; and

Whereas, the Newton Conservators were instrumental in passing a wetlands protection ordinance before state legislation was enacted, helped establish the Conservation Commission and strengthen the Parks and Recreation Commission; and

Whereas, the Newton Conservators developed educational programs, providing guided tours of parks and conservation areas, funds for school environmental programs, detailed maps of the city's open spaces and programs on topics of environmental interest; and

Whereas, in its most important role as a local advocacy organization, the Newton Conservators has monitored the activity of city government related to open space, land use and environmental issues, altering and improving the outcomes of dozens of projects over the last 40 years;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that I, David B. Cohen, Mayor of the City of Newton, on behalf of the entire citizenry, do hereby offer our congratulations and appreciation to the Newton Conservators for their sense of mission, persistence and foresight in shaping the future of our community.

/signed/
David B. Cohen
Mayor

President's Report

*Delivered at the Annual Dinner
by Doug Dickson, Outgoing President*

This has been another very active year for the Newton Conservators. Challenges abound and we have been quick to respond. We have also taken a number of proactive steps in preparing for and anticipating future challenges.

One key step is our decision to become a land trust after carefully exploring the experience of other organizations like ours in holding and managing property. While we have owned Ordway Park for 30 years, we have not in recent years at least, embraced this role as a complement to municipal ownership of open space. By offering this alternative, we may succeed in preserving properties that might not otherwise be protected.

We also began to actively educate ourselves about the variety of creative strategies available for protecting or acquiring the rights to open space short of outright purchase, which has been the predominant approach in the city to date. We need to adapt our mind-set about how we protect open land as property values continue their steep ascent even as open space availability tumbles.

Also this year, we took the first tentative steps toward building preservation strategies specific to target parcels. We expect that work to continue under the auspices of the Open Space Planning process this summer and fall.

We were disappointed by the city's failure, despite our urging on many occasions, to commence revision of the Open Space Plan last year when it was due. Unfortunately, the city forfeited access to state funds for phase 2 of Forte Park because of this delay. A desire not to miss that opportunity again, combined with our continued nagging, got that process on the fast track this spring and a draft Open Space Plan will be submitted to the state on Friday.

Through our participation in this process, we were able to influence three key shifts in the focus of the plan. First, we will seek to add to the mass of large holdings with the objective of enhancing wildlife habitat. Second, we will target small properties for pocket parks in underserved areas of the city. And third, we will seek to acquire additional recreation facilities to accommodate

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demand and to relieve pressure on existing playing fields, allowing the city to build on improved maintenance practices through rest and rotation of fields. Biodiversity is explicitly included as a goal in this year's plan as is development of a guideline for determining the amount and location of open space throughout the city. This will be useful in targeting opportunities to create pocket parks.

Time between now and the first of next year will be spent fleshing out the plan and developing specific strategies for achieving its goals. Its relatively easy to develop broad-based goals and put words on paper, but harder to get specific. This is the work that counts and if it's done right, there will be opportunities for all of us to be involved in one way or another. Thanks to Lucy Caldwell Stair and Mike Clarke for serving as our representatives on this committee.

Another key activity this year is working toward passage of the Community Preservation Act in Newton. The Conservators took the lead last fall, after the bill had been signed by the governor, in creating an exploratory committee, then the Newton Community Preservation Alliance. Banding together with housing, historic preservation and other groups, we have, as members of the alliance, held meetings with and encouraged identification of fundable projects by constituent groups such as the various neighborhood associations. We have also met with the Mayor, members of the Board of Aldermen, city departments and boards, commercial interests and others to test and build support. We have sponsored or co-sponsored public meetings. And we have organized ourselves as Municipal Ballot Question Committee and developed a proposal for the Board of Aldermen on the options we believe should be included in the referendum required for passage of the CPA in Newton. Assuming we are able to get this on the November ballot, we will, through the Alliance, go into high gear with an education and advocacy campaign for passage of the referendum.

Jim Broderick has done an outstanding job as chair of the Alliance and now Larry Burdick has stepped in as treasurer. Many other Conservators have been active in this effort, including Mike Clarke who has prepared Powerpoint presentations for our public meetings.

CPA is a key to our success in achieving our mission. City funds are no longer available and other sources are increasingly difficult to obtain.

Rather than forfeit opportunities as we have in recent years, we believe it is critical to dedicate an income stream to preservation. Importantly, money raised through this initiative can be co-opted or re-directed to any purpose other than the four goals of the CPA: open space, housing, historic preservation and recreation.

Our advocacy program covered a wide swath, from helping to form the Metropolitan Parks Council, focused on protecting MDC properties, to focusing attention on the aqueducts. A aqueduct committee is currently being formed by the Mayor at the request of the Board of Aldermen as a direct result of Mike Clarke's and Peter Kastner's efforts. We continue to work on preservation of the vista from Institution Hill (thanks to Sarah Barnett and others) and the clean-up of Hammond Pond, along with Friends of Hammond Pond and others convened by Rep. Balser.

We were active in resolving the Levingston Cove debacle and asked the Mayor to convene a task force that would identify process checkpoints for projects like this and help coordinate the involvement of multiple city departments and boards. We will continue to press for a solution to this problem as well as the absence of any safeguards for identifying properties targeted by the Open Space Plan when they are before the city for subdivision, construction or other action. An opportunity to oppose the subdivision of property on the eastern shore of Hammond Pond was lost last year when the proposal sailed through the Planning Board with no indication of its environmental sensitivity or priority as a target for conservation. We must find ways to prevent this from happening again.

We participated in a review of BC's proposal for restoration of Edmands Park, we contributed money toward the development of Powder House Hill Park over the aqueduct in Newton Centre, and we served on the community liaison committees for the Hebrew College and Bradford development projects (thanks to Sarah Barnett and Larry Burdick).

We participated, along with other environmental organizations in the city, in the development of a monthly environmental page in the Newton TAB. We again co-sponsored one of the Green Decade Coalition's environmental lectures and we co-sponsored walks with the

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Waltham Land Trust and the Chandler Pond Association. For the first time in recent years, we have developed a lecture program in cooperation with the library, starting this March with Peter Alden, who presented his “birds and bees” lecture to a full house. The program will continue this fall with new board member Dan Perlman, who will present material from his work with E.O. Wilson and study of seasonal changes in Cold Spring Park.

We were all shocked to hear last fall of Marty Sender’s accident and untimely death in December. As a memorial to Marty, we have been working with the Charles River Watershed Association, the MDC, the city and Marty’s family on dedicating a section of the Charles River Pathway running from Commonwealth Avenue through Auburndale Park and Flowed Meadow to Forest Grove in his honor. Plans call for this section of the pathway to be marked at both ends by markers and for a bench and marker to be installed in Auburndale Park opposite his home across the cove. We will contribute funds and other support in Marty’s memory.

Through our grants program, we contributed a little over \$3000 to fund five proposals for environmental science projects in the schools. This year’s projects included a worm café at Linclon Eliot School, a butterfly garden at Horace Mann, an outdoor classroom at Bowen, a water quality analysis program at Day Middle School and a science education program sponsored by the Friends of Nahanton Park. Thanks to Bill Hagar, Bud Elliott, Lee Breckenridge, Carol Lee Corbett and Judith Hepburn for their work on our grant program.

We’ve continued to build administrative capacity to support our programs. Katherine Howard, as our treasurer, has taken the lead in developing a comprehensive budget for the year and completing our transition to a new Quicken accounting system. Andy Stern served as our membership committee chair and Jason Glasgow has taken responsibility for maintaining our membership database. Our current membership stands at over 550 households and continues to grow. We will shortly release a mailing to all new homeowners in the city with an offer of a free introductory membership as a way to introduce ourselves to them and them to our parks and open spaces.

Publicity has been ably handled this year by Margaret Albright and Mike Clarke has edited five Newton Conservators Newsletter

issues of our informative Newsletter. Newsletter production continues to be accomplished with efficiency and aplomb by Bonnie Carter. Many others have contributed to our effort this year, and I am sorry that, in the interest of time, I can’t recognize all of them here. But thank you one and all for your contributions to an outstanding year.

In closing, as we contemplate the year just past and the first 40 years of our history, I’d like to take a moment to do the “vision thing,” as we look ahead to what this organization can become over it’s next few years. Imagine with me the day when we hold and manage both land and perhaps historic properties. Imagine a much more active stance in approaching landowners and negotiating restrictions, easements and other deals. Imagine an endowment for maintenance and grant money flowing into the organization for acquisition, restoration and management of properties.

Imagine a paid staff to shoulder the administrative burden and build new capacities for the organization. Imagine stronger ties to likeminded organizations in our region, allowing us to take advantage of knowledge and capabilities we don’t have and create economies of scale when needed. Imagine an environmental education program that we develop and introduce to teachers based on our considerable local resources. And imagine striking a deal with the city to properly maintain conservation and parklands that it can no longer afford to manage.

If any of these ideas seem improbable or far-fetched, other organizations like ours across the country have proven that they’re not. The question is what will we do to respond to local opportunities and needs. We have accomplished a great deal over the last 40 years, but imagine all the great things still out there for us to do.

**Canoe the Wild Margins of Boston Harbor
Saturday afternoon, July 7th**

Explore Wood Island Marsh, the newest salt marsh in New England. Learn about the development of an urban ecosystem and see a historic park.

Suitable for beginners. For experienced paddlers, an optional extension to Belle Island Marsh may be possible. Canoe is free, but a small donation (\$5) may be solicited. Register in advance with trip co-leader Mark Warren at 617-569-6581.

Sponsored by AMC Boston Conservation Committee

New Officers Elected

A new president and vice president will lead the Newton Conservators beginning June 1st. Lucy Caldwell Stair was elected president and Eric Reenstierna will become vice president. Continuing as secretary is Judy Hepburn and Katherine Howard will continue to serve as treasurer. Doug Dickson will become Past President.

Lucy Caldwell Stair brings a wealth of experience to her new role. Active in environmental publishing before she moved to Newton from Washington three years ago, she began to look for local conservation groups even before her arrival. She joined The Trustees of Reservations and began volunteering for the Charles River Watershed Association in their water quality sampling program.

She was introduced to the Newton Conservators by Martha Horn and soon put her expertise in direct mail and database management to work for the organization by putting together a very successful membership development initiative. More than 140 members were added as a result of her efforts, a 25% increase over two years. Along the way, Lucy has researched possible acquisitions along the Charles River valley for TTOR, served on the Mayor's Open Space Planning Committee, worked toward passage of the CPA.

When not working for the Conservators and other environmental organizations, Lucy runs a web-based market research and information business that focuses on mobile finance for the world's banks and brokerages.

Lucy is now a director of the CRWA and a trustee of TTOR in addition to serving as president of the Conservators. We are fortunate that she left the Beltway for Newton three years ago and look forward to her leadership over the coming year.

Eric Reenstierna joined the Newton Conservators Board last year after serving several years on the Conservation Commission. He is a real estate appraiser by vocation and his expertise has already been of help to the Conservators in recent efforts to save a two-acre tract in West Newton. Eric has a passion for land conservation and has actively encouraged our move to function as a land trust and to become more actively involved in preservation activities. His energy and commitment will be of tremendous benefit to the organization.

Two new board members were elected. **Dan Perlman** is a conservation biologist who has taught at Harvard and will teach as Brandeis this fall. He has created a CD-ROM with Prof. E.O. Wilson of Harvard entitled, "Conserving Earth's Biodiversity." Recently, he has studied seasonal changes at Cold Spring Park and recorded his observations through photographs. He will share these with the community in a Newton Conservators-sponsored lecture in the fall.

Don Fishman is associate professor of communications at Boston College. He is also a member of the Design Review Committee of the City of Newton. Don will be an important resource to the organization as we look for new ways to connect to broader segments of our community through education and communications programs.

After many years of service, including as president and treasurer, **Roger Feinstein** retired from his position on the Board of Directors and joined the Advisory Board. We congratulate him on his accomplishments and look forward to continued contributions as time allows.

By Doug Dickson

Rep. Khan Takes Lead in Protecting Metro Parks

Representative Kay Khan has taken the lead on an effort in the State House to preserve and enhance the Metropolitan Park System (Metro Parks). Rep. Khan has filed legislation to require the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) to apply for placement of the Park System on the National Register of Historic Sites. The bill is designed to protect the Metro Parks from the neglect that has plagued these irreplaceable resources in recent years.

The Metropolitan Park System is comprised of over 20,000 acres within Newton and 36 other cities and towns within 15 miles of downtown Boston. The Park System contains riverbanks, marshes, forests, beaches and harbor islands as well as a series of interconnecting parkways, open space and cultural facilities. The MDC manages the Park System. "The Metropolitan Park System is truly an indispensable resource that we must protect," Khan said. "The Metro Parks are so much more than just ball fields and picnic tables, they are historic sites

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that should be cherished and protected for the enjoyment of the people of Newton and other residents of the State."

The Metropolitan Park System was designed in 1892 by architect Charles Eliot, a partner in the firm of another renowned architect Frederick Law Oldmstead, Sr. The MetroParks were the nation's first urban park system and still serve as a model for urban planners throughout the world. Despite the recreational and historic value of the MetroParks, they have recently suffered from neglect. In addition to filing her bill to support the Park System, Rep. Khan has been fighting legislation that has been introduced in the Massachusetts Legislature that would further harm the Park System.

One bill under consideration in the State House would transfer management of the Metro Parks boulevards to the Massachusetts Highway Department. "I strongly oppose this bill and will fight to stop it from passing," Rep. Khan said. "The roadways within the Metro Parks System are of a special character and cannot be under the control of an agency that focuses on road construction and has far less expertise in environmental protection and recreation.

To further the cause of protecting the Metropolitan Park System, Representative Khan invited an expert in landscape architecture and city planning, Boston University Professor Keith Morgan, to make a presentation for legislators at the State House. "Professor Morgan helped put the cause of protecting the Metro Parks into context for Legislators," Rep. Khan said. "Most lawmakers instinctually appreciate the importance of protecting our parks, but the Professor's presentation emphasized the historical value of the Parks as well as the enormous scope of the tragedy we will face if the Parks are abandoned."

By Matthew Selig, aide to Rep. Kay Khan

Where the Wild Things Are

Newton Biodiversity Days — June 8-10

The order taker at McDonald's in Nonantum suspected something was up early that Friday morning when several customers came to the counter wearing binoculars. It was just the rendezvous point for the first of eight nature related events held over a three-day period (June 8-10) as part of Newton Biodiversity Days, locally sponsored by the Newton Conservators. This group

had come for a "birding blitz" of the Newton portion of the Charles River Pathway. In a short while, the dozen or so folks disappeared through a small path behind the restaurant and entered the greener world of Forte Park.

Just in the parking lot, they had already ticked off a quick ten types of birds, some of these just by sound. Their main goal that morning was to do a species census of birds, but any other living things (plant and animal) bigger than 1 mm were also fair game. Before even crossing the field to the river pathway, they were stopped in their tracks by the sight of a giant reptile laying eggs. Snapping turtle—check! Just a little further down the path, a bunny rabbit, more formally known as an Eastern Cottontail, munched nonchalantly on the nearby grass. A home-schooled youngster, Noah, after pointing his high-tech sound magnifier microphone toward a nearby tree, took out his note pad to sketch a bird. Maeve checked her field guide to identify one of the many types of ferns adjacent to the path. The group puzzled over the type of herring that were basking near the shallow bank of the Charles. Further along, near Cheesecake Brook, the group was startled when a Great Blue Heron took off only a feet away from nearby branches.

Early on Saturday morning, another group of early birding citizen-naturalists gathered on the shore of Hammond Pond behind Bloomingdales in a scene that could have easily been in a remote area of Maine. Jane Zanichkowsky, a Mass Audubon interpreter, led the group off into the wilds of the reservation and across the T tracks into Houghton Gardens. This particular morning they were able to tick off some 35 species, including some interesting resident warblers: Yellow, Common yellowthroat, Black-throated green, and American redstart. On a boulder along the trail, they found something that truly stumped them—was it a mushroom, a fungus, or something from an alien planet? It looked like a miniature mesa consisting of hundreds of threadlike strings vertically joined together. No one in the group had ever seen such a growth and a photo was taken for later analysis.

Just a short time after the first walk returned to the parking lot, Professor Richard Primack arrived to lead a second walk focusing on the varied plant communities present in the nearby woods, rocky hills and swampland. Some brave participants, willing to get their shoes a little muddy, were even

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able to experience a quaking bog. Each habitat has its own community of plants and thus other creatures that depend on them. The area is often used as an outdoor classroom for his students. A highlight for some was the encounter with an unusual Pink Ladyslipper in full bloom.

After lunch, a small band at Dolan Pond inspected this West Newton conservation area for evidence of invasive species, which tend to take over and crowd out native species. Jana Tolisano and Mary Loew showed participants how extensive the garlic mustard and knotweed infestations are. One of the most interesting discoveries was a group of tiny frogs with bodies about the size of a house fly. On this particular day, the path was literally jumping with hundreds of them. A quick inspection of the Field Guide came up with no immediate species diagnosis. Later consultation showed the mystery frogs to be immature American Toads, the species responsible for the pleasant trilling wetland chorus in springtime.

That afternoon at Cold Spring Park, with a large crowd of adults and children, it was time to get down and dirty with Dan Perlman, who taught conservation biology at Harvard with E.O Wilson, the godfather of the biodiversity movement. Dan led the group to the woods, where leaves were gathered and put into a giant shaker bag. The dirt that was shaken out of the leaves was collected and spread out on numerous trays for smaller groups to inspect. They were looking for the tiny decomposer and detritivore creatures that help to prevent a huge buildup of dead vegetative matter. Perhaps the most exciting find was the fierce but tiny (eighth of an inch long) pseudoscorpion, which looked like a miniature lobster. The pseudoscorpion has venomous jaws with which it subdues its prey, as one boy found out when he saw one bite a worm many times its own size and weight. The worm writhed, then slowed down, and died. Attendees of this session will never look at dirt quite the same way again.

Early Sunday morning, yet another group of early birders, under the leadership of Haynes Miller, was out to catch the birds (at least a view of them). Traversing the varied habitat provided by Nahanton Park, more species were added to the list. A peek at the pond yielded the shy Green Heron and along Florrie's Path was heard the call of the Black-billed Cuckoo. Veteran birder, Fred Bouchard, tried a change of pace and was able to identify about a

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dozen types of butterflies around the community garden area.

Later that morning came an opportunity to play in the mud of some rare Newton vernal pools near the Solomon Schecter School on Wells Avenue. This walk was led by Jon Regosin, a Tufts University conservation biology grad student. Donning rubber boots, the numerous children and adults collected leaves and water from one of the vernal pools. The water was inspected for small swimming creatures, which were separated out. Next the group retreated to the school's biology lab, where the catch of the day, including a salamander tadpole, could be inspected under a television microscope for all to see.

Finally, at Flowed Meadow in Auburndale, a small dedicated group, armed with one of the naturalist reports commissioned by the city for the area, went off to see if they could come up with the same plant identifications using their field guides. Amateur mycologist, Milton Landowne, pointed out several examples of shelf fungi on a dead tree trunk near Forest Grove.

The results from the weekend are being collected and compiled and eventually will be posted on the state's biodiversity website. This information will provide a glimpse of just what we have here in Newton and may eventually be used to map out ranges for both rare and common life forms in Massachusetts.

With participation by schools (such as Countryside Elementary this year), it is hoped that a new generation of naturalists may be encouraged. Many children today know far more about dinosaurs than the wonders that can be found in their own backyards. To keep informed of results and plans for next year, check out the biodiversity link at www.newtonconservators.org or send email to dolanpond@aol.com.

By Ted Kuklinski, coordinator of Newton Biodiversity Days and a board member of the Newton Conservators

FIGHT THE BITE

Mosquito-Proof Your Home

1. Check and repair door and window screens
2. Eliminate standing water where mosquitoes can breed: garbage cans and lids, old tires, wading pools, gutters

Mosquito-Proof Yourself

1. Limit outdoor activities between dawn and dusk
2. Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts
3. Cover strollers and cribs with mosquito netting
4. Use repellent with DEET (10% for kids, 30% for adults)

NEWTON CONSERVATORS, INC.

40 YEARS OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

- 1961 Opposed construction of 20-story building at site of Norumbega Park
- 1961 Influenced the city to alter its gravel removal ordinance
- 1966 Successfully urged city to establish Conservation Commission
- 1968 Helped acquire first of the parcels making up Webster Conservation Area (113 acres)
- 1969 Achieved passage of ordinance to prevent development of wetlands and floodplains
- 1970 Took ownership of Ordway Park by bequest from the Priscilla Ordway estate
- 1973 Helped arrange conference to plan open space acquisition program
- 1974 Conducted independent survey and recommended open space acquisition targets
- 1976 Supported acquisition of Norumbega Park Conservation Area (13 acres)
- 1976 Funded Environmental Science Program for first of many years
- 1978 Helped acquire Kennard Conservation Area (32 acres)
- 1979 Advocated acquisition of Saw Mill Brook Conservation Area (20 acres)
- 1981 Published *Visit Your Parks*, with detailed maps of parks and walking trails
- 1981 Supported acquisition of Newton Commonwealth Golf Course (71 acres)
- 1981 Initiated Environmentalist of the Year award to recognize open space contributions
- 1982 Helped acquire 16 additional acres for Kennard Park
- 1983 Advocated additions to and development of Cold Spring Park
- 1983 Helped acquire Flowed Meadow Conservation Area (7 acres)
- 1989 Supported development of Nahanton Park (57 acres)
- 1991 Helped replace “highway” plan for Commonwealth Avenue with “greenway” plan
- 1992 Initiated grants program to foster environmental science study in Newton schools
- 1993 Strengthened mission of environmental stewardship of Parks and Rec Commission
- 1995 Intervened to prevent parkland from being used to build new middle school
- 1995 Helped develop plan for renovation of Weeks Field, creating model for other projects
- 1996 Convened Open Space Symposium to focus attention on landscape maintenance
- 1997 Supported acquisition of Wabasso Street properties to extend existing parkland
- 1999 Advocated passage of landmark tree preservation ordinance
- 2000 Unanimously supported conversion of Rumford landfill to conservation land
- 2000 Helped preserve open space focus in Framework Planning process
- 2000 Took lead in effort to pass Community Preservation Act in Newton
- 2001 Played key role in redirecting Open Space Plan to fit current community needs

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