

PLACE

Summer 2020

Brookline GreenSpace Alliance is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to the enhancement of open space in Brookline by supporting citizens in caring for their green spaces.



Board Members

Officers

Arlene Mattison, President
Anita Johnson, Vice President
Marian Lazar, V.P.-Publications
Deborah Rivers, Secretary
Ron Brown, Treasurer

Directors

Rebecca Arnoldi
Harry Bohrs
Ernest Cook
Hugh Mattison
Sean Lynn-Jones
Jules Milner-Brage
Clint Richmond
Deborah Rivers
Robert Schram
John Shreffler
Marilyn Ray Smith
Elissa Yanover

Advisors

Michael Berger
Michael Dukakis
Frances Shedd Fisher
Chobee Hoy
Fred Pery
Bruce Wolff

Park Organizations

Brookline Neighborhood Alliance
Chestnut Hill Garden Club
Climate Action Brookline
Fisher Hill Association
Friends of the Beacon Street Bridle Path
Friends of Billy Ward Playground
Friends of Brookline Reservoir
Friends of Carlton Street Footbridge
Friends of Coolidge Corner Library Garden
Friends of Cypress Street Playground
Friends of Dane Park
Friends of Fairstead
Friends of the Farmers' Market
Friends of the Green Dog Program
Friends of Griggs Park
Friends of Hall's Pond
Friends of Hoar Sanctuary
Friends of Larz Anderson Park
Friends of Lawrence Park
Friends of Leverett Pond
Friends of Linden Park
Friends of Littlefield Park
Friends of Lost Pond
Friends of Minot Rose Garden
Friends of Monmouth Park
Friends of the Muddy River
Friends of the Old Burying Ground
Friends of the Paths and Park on Aspinwall Hill
Friends of Putterham Woods
Friends of Sargent Pond
Friends of Soule
Friends of Waldstein Park
Garden Club of Brookline
Griggs Park Neighborhood Association
Lawton Park Community Garden
Larz Anderson Auto Museum
Linden Parks Association

Editor Marian Lazar

BGSA is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible.

Brookline Reservoir Park Restored



Brookline Reservoir Park has reopened. As part of the restoration there are new handicapped accessible paths (above), many new benches and plantings (at left) and the gatehouse has been restored. The walls of the reservoir have been repaired and the dam has been brought into compliance with state regulations. The path at the gatehouse is no longer interrupted (below).



BGSA Statement

We condemn the cruel taking of Black lives, and we condemn racism that denies individuals their human dignity.

Green spaces should be safe and welcoming for all people. They can be restorative places to grow connection, understanding, and respect for all humanity and all life forms. But often people of color experience discrimination in public spaces including parks.

Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Boston and Brookline's Emerald Necklace parks, believed that parks are the most democratic of all institutions, "each individual adding by his mere presence to the pleasure of all others."

We, the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance, commit to the Olmstedian goal of "common ground" and shared pleasure in green spaces, and we commit to striving for justice, accountability, and peace for all people in our parks and throughout our country. There is much work to do.

A few words about the role nature and parks have played in our lives during a pandemic. . .

In the environmental movement we talk a lot about trees and the role they play to clean the air, control flooding, cool our homes; now we may be more aware of the part they play in reducing stress. It has indeed been a very stressful time in our lives. I do not think many of us thought we would be experiencing a pandemic that brought with it the death of so many and a change of lifestyle and economic uncertainty.

So how have public parks and the people who care for them helped? The calming effect of sitting under a tree, watching the water in a pond, exercising in the fresh air, listening to the birds is invaluable. Brookline parks have been crowded with people needing 'to get away' while remaining at home. The common ground that parks provide has given us a chance to share an experience with others from backgrounds different from our own. The relative quiet and space we can find in nature may be in sharp contrast to being in the same space for most hours of the day.

I would like to thank park users who have been respectful of others and following the public health guidelines of distancing and face covering and also the park workers who maintain our parks even while the parks budget is significantly reduced because of Town cutbacks. We are fortunate that Brookline has parks that can be uplifting and renewing at a time we need room to stretch, the beauty of nature, and 'escape' close to home.

Arlene Mattison

Be safe and considerate – maintain distance of at least 6 feet from others in the park
Wear a facial covering
Follow signage
Touch as little as possible
Take your trash with you

Bird Populations Collapse from Human Invasion

Habitat Degradation > Bird Population Collapse

Bob Mayer

Last fall the journal *Science* published a widely reported study that showed nearly three billion fewer birds exist in North America today than in 1970. The study did not attempt to determine what has caused this massive decline, but suggested several likely factors that collectively brought on the loss, all of which are consequences of human activity. Our urban area presents numerous dangers to birds. Window strikes, particularly on tall buildings, are a major hazard for migrating birds; estimated to kill a billion birds a year, many of which are night migrants distracted by lighted windows. Shockingly, pet cats allowed outdoors, and feral cats, are believed to kill many more; perhaps three billion birds a year! Pesticides can have a devastating effect on bird populations, both directly by poisoning birds or indirectly by poisoning birds that prey on them, as well as disrupting the food chain by killing insects on which many bird species depend.

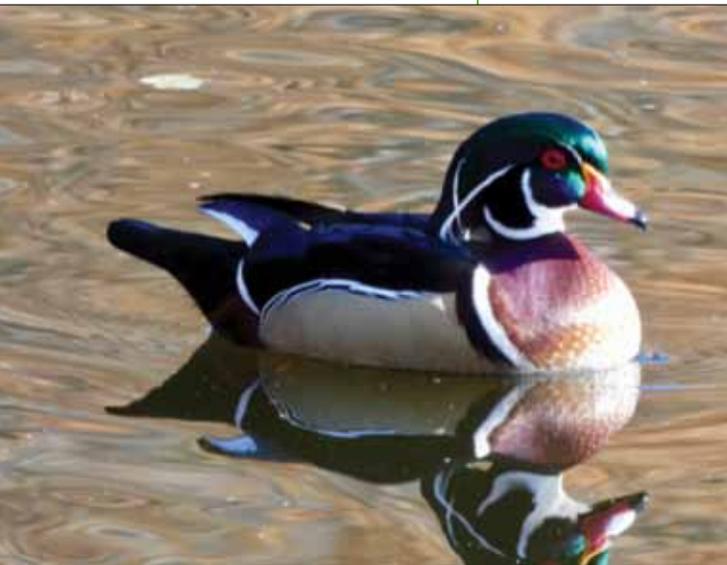
But experts believe the major cause of avian population decline is loss of open space through degradation and development. Loss of open space has three aspects: (1) conversion – replacement of natural areas with houses, buildings, lawns, and pavement, (2) fragmentation – the division of forests and grasslands into small isolated patches, and (3) parcelization – the subdivision of large acreages into smaller ownership parcels.

The loss and fragmentation of open space affects wildlife because of diminished habitat size, reduced forest interior habitat, isolation of existing populations, and elimination of connecting corridors linking relatively undisturbed forest areas. Fragmented areas can be too small to maintain viable breeding populations of some species, such as some migratory songbirds. Although Olmsted was likely thinking of human convenience when he designed the linkage between open spaces that is the Emerald Necklace, it well serves the fauna in our urban area by avoiding the fragmentation of natural areas.

Climate change and landfill for development has caused marine wetland decline and degradation. This is the primary cause of the 37% decline in shorebird populations in the last 50 years.

Grassland species showed the greatest decline; agricultural development has hit this biome with a more than 50% decline -- 700 million birds. This has affected endangered and threatened species like bobolinks and meadowlarks as well as more common birds. Our harbinger of spring, the Red-winged Blackbird, while still relatively common on the Emerald Necklace, has had its numbers reduced by 30%.

Of course much habitat loss is being experienced on the wintering grounds of many migratory birds, Central and South America, from deforestation and development. Close to home, there have been efforts to improve habitat for our local birds. The Muddy River Restoration Project has opened up portions of the waterway previously buried in conduits near the Landmark Center, enhancing wildlife habitat adjacent to the river. This collaboration of federal, state, city and non-profits has worked to remove invasive plant species, replacing them with native plantings which will benefit birds.



Wood Duck

In 2013 BGSA Board Member Hugh Mattison and others erected several wood duck boxes at the edges of Leverett and Ward's Ponds, hoping to encourage nesting. Since the beginning of this millennium, Wood Ducks have been present at Leverett Pond in the winter months, when the waterfowl population always increases in number and variety of species. As these cavity nesters are notoriously secretive, preferring isolated forested and swampy areas for breeding, the prospect of their nesting in our urban setting seemed unlikely. For several years this prediction seemed right; the boxes were mostly used by Tree Swallows or the occasional Gray Squirrel looking for shelter. But in 2015 a local birder reported that a female "woodie" had been seen with a flotilla of younger birds on the pond; a mother with young! Since then Hugh and friends have continued their project by maintaining these nest boxes, and there have been successful broods every year. This is perhaps the most beautiful local duck; the males are especially striking.

There were some promising findings in the investigation of bird population changes in the past 50 years. Waterfowl are among the few bird groups whose population has not decreased; in fact they have experienced an increase of 54%. Ducks have benefited from wetlands conservation efforts and dedicated conservation funding. Ironically, much of this has been funded by the 1934 Duck Stamp Act, which requires purchase of a duck stamp for sport hunting. This year's seasonal duck stamp is, coincidentally, the Wood Duck. Stamp collectors, conservationists and birders also buy these stamps, further supporting wetland conservation. Perhaps we need to develop a similar focused funding mechanism to preserve habitat for all of our avian friends.



The mother duck is to the left, with six ducklings behind



Red Winged Blackbird

Bob Mayer is a retired psychiatrist who has lived and birded in Boston for over fifty years. He has been leading bird walks locally since 2004, sponsored by the Brookline Bird Club and other local organizations including the BGSA.

All photos in this article are by Bob Mayer.

*More information on the Brookline Bird Club is available here:
<https://www.brooklinebirdclub.org/about/>*

The Paths of Brookline—Alternative Openspaces

Linda Pehlke

There are seventeen footpaths winding their way through Brookline. The paths range in length from 69 to 791 feet and are, on average, about 15 feet wide. Created between 1886 and 1926 (with the exception of a recent additional path created in 1972), the footpaths were an integral part of the rapid residential growth and development during this period in Brookline's history.



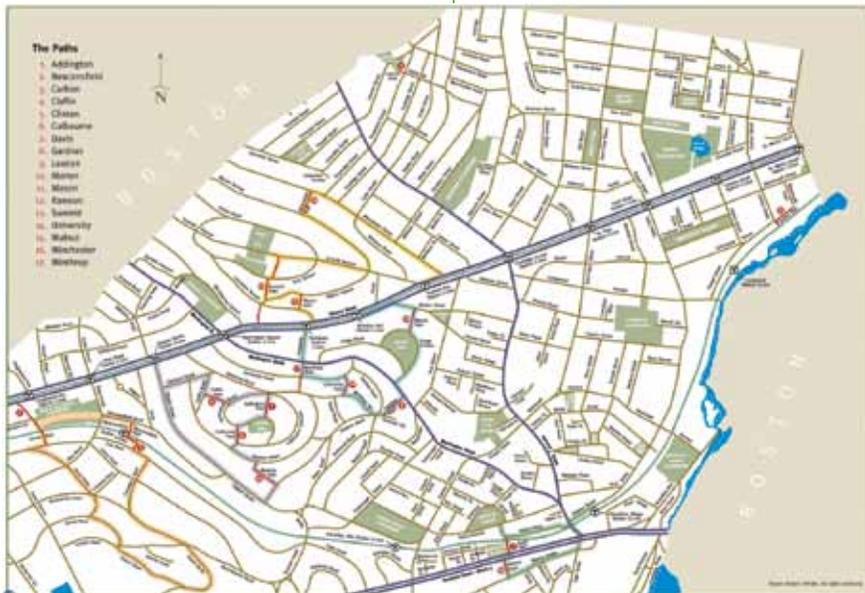
Rawson Path ascending Aspinwall Hill, one of the "wilder" paths.

Like many of the wonderful things about Brookline, we tend to take the existence of these paths for granted. However, they represent a remarkably practical and enduring public amenity. While the paths facilitate pedestrian travel in a variety of settings, they are nonetheless united in purpose. Namely, to accommodate and facilitate foot travel in Brookline. It may seem obvious and simply a matter of common sense that these paths are useful and beneficial. However, the deliberate consideration of the pedestrian is rarely a factor in modern neighborhood design. In addition to providing shortcuts and access to specific public destinations, such as neighborhood parks or transit stops, several footpaths safely carry walkers over or under train tracks, thus eliminating a formidable barrier to foot travel. Some of the paths facilitate walking in neighborhoods that are hilly where the route along the streets would be long, curvy and full of switchbacks. In this setting the paths provide steep shortcuts up and down the hillsides and primarily consist of stairs.

Another unique feature of the footpaths is the fact that they provide public access through areas that are typically included in the domain of private property. Thus, we find ourselves travelling between houses and through backyards, and yet because we are on the path, we are on public property. The paths introduce you to a secret world available only to those on foot. You often feel you are in the woods, or you may find yourself strolling through a lovely neighborhood park, or catching a glimpse of someone's back porch. Yet, the paths serve a practical function too, for the pedestrian with places to go and things to do, by providing useful shortcuts to business districts and transit stops.

Map of all the paths. Davis Path (#7) is currently closed for repairs. Map by Robert Pehlke of Robert Pehlke Design from *Paths of Brookline* by Linda Pehlke

Because the footpaths traverse land between buildings, alongside parks and backyards, and away from the street, being on the paths provides a unique perspective. While front yards are often landscaped in a traditional manner, having their "public face" on, back and side yards are more likely to be left in a more "wild" or unkempt state. Wild plants, woodlands, backyards and gardens can all be found path-side.



In addition to more "wild" natural areas, the paths provide the opportunity to appreciate some of the beautiful and unique architecture in Brookline. There are some beautiful stone walls and stairs, stained or cut glass accent windows, ornate moldings and simply beautiful homes and porches, all to be seen from the unique perspective of the paths. On the paths, the constant noisy distraction from traffic is gone, allowing us to walk more slowly and deliberately, taking in the sights and sounds, free from the need to constantly keep a wary eye on the traffic.

The Intricacies of Native Plants

Native plants provide food and shelter, the habitat that specific insects, birds, mammals, and other animals need.

To survive, native birds need native plants and the insects that have co-evolved with them. Native landscaping is a key tool in increasing bird diversity and the number of other pollinators.

Native plants attract native insects which in turn attract birds. The habitat provided by native plants can also help birds adapt and survive amid a changing climate. Scientists say more than half of North American bird species are threatened by climate change, and native plants can help increase their resilience by giving them food and places to rest and nest.

Environmental benefits are many. Native plants, plants present in regions of the Americas before the introduction of Europeans, have adapted to thrive in their regional landscape without added water. Also, planting different species of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees creates layers of vegetation that may control flooding by deflecting pounding rains, increasing the chance for water to be absorbed by the soil before running off into storm drains and streams.

Native plants are often hardier than non-native ornamentals and can thrive without pesticides or fertilizers. Less lawn mowing, fertilizing, and pesticide application means cleaner air and water and healthier pollinator populations.



Cone Flowers (Echinacea) with bees

We can make choices in our own yards about planting species that are more environmentally friendly. Many of us would also like to see the continued movement toward less intensively manicured public land. The Brookline Parks and Open Space division has planted dry and wet meadows of wildflowers in newly designed parks such as Fisher Hill Reservoir Park and Brookline Avenue playground.

Generally native plants require less care, but plantings of natives and wildflower gardens require management. Since the goal of a pollinator habitat planting is diversity of bloom over seasons, landscaping with native plants isn't maintenance free—invasive weed species are an ongoing concern. The line between an invasive plant and a native thriving plant is not necessarily a distinct one.

Native plants have a tendency to spread rapidly but invasive species can spread even more rapidly, so that pollinator meadows can experience a decline in wildflower diversity. Routine monitoring of the wildflower habitat is required to target weed

Skip the Lawnmower Save a Bee

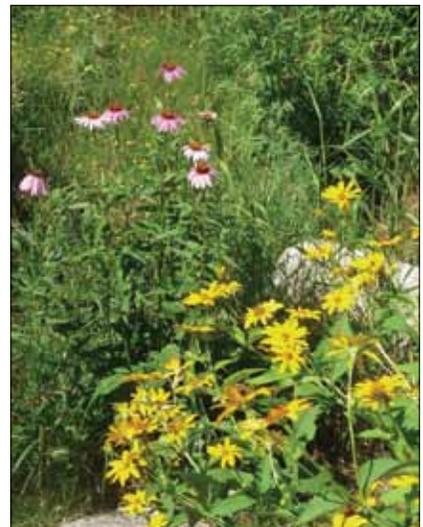
Limiting lawn mowing to every two or three weeks instead of weekly will give flowers a chance to bud and bees a chance to forage. Floral diversity and bee abundance peaks at a growth rate of about two weeks.

Support pollinator legislation at the Massachusetts State House

Call your representatives to support reducing the use of neonicotinoids.

Find your legislators' contact information at <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>.

Meadow planting at Fisher Hill Reservoir Park





P.O. Box 470514
Brookline MA 02447

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Boston MA
Permit #53810

PLACE is usually published twice a year, spring and fall, by the Brookline GreenSpace Alliance.
This summer issue is due to delays caused by the novel corona virus.

t. 617.277.4777

www.brooklinegreenspace.org

info@brooklinegreenspace.org



Black raspberries: food for birds and animals



Heliopsis

Continued from page 7



Goldenrod

populations. Pollinator habitat requires evaluation and re-evaluation of management techniques to insure diversity.

The benefits of planting native species to create a pollinator habitat are substantial. The rewards to pollinators, humans and the quality of the environment are clear. There are many resources to help create the best habitat possible and to provide the maintenance critical for success. (See Brookline GreenSpace Alliance website.)

Sources: Audubon Native Plant Database

Native Plant Trust

University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment

Xerces Center for Invertebrate Conservation