



# Friends of Hall's Pond

December 2021

## SANCTUARY NEWS

### HAWKS !

by Neil Gore

SOMETIMES, when I'm having a somewhat dull day birding, suddenly a hawk swoops across my line of sight. And I remember what really excites me: there's nothing that captures the attention like a heron, an eagle, or an owl. And in the case of hawks, their unpredictable appearance adds to the allure and mystique.

The most frequent hawk visitor to Hall's Pond is the Red-tailed Hawk. Unlike most of our other hawks, it is a year-round resident, and has adapted well to urban living. You can't count on seeing one every time you visit, but that only adds to the thrill. If you are at the Pond, and the hawk is bigger than a crow, it's most likely to be a Red-tailed Hawk.

The Cooper's Hawk is a regular but infrequent visitor to Hall's Pond, where it may be found on the ground at water's edge, or up in a tree, or flying. This is the hawk you are most likely to see near your feeder in the winter.

During this spring at Hall's Pond on a birding walk, I had the embarrassment of participating in a hawk misidentification. On a damp cloudy day, with poor visibility, on a distant tree was perched a nondescript hunched over shape. I proclaimed it a Merlin, which I had



Photo by Courtney Allender

Red-tailed Hawk in nearby Fenway Victory Garden.

seen only once at the Pond and badly wanted to see here again; but ignored the fact that it was larger than a nearby Common Grackle. Fortunately someone had a photograph, inspection of which revealed a Peregrine Falcon, an equally unusual sighting for Hall's Pond.

Hawk ID is not easy, partly because we often see them only briefly in flight, or at a great distance overhead. Use a combination of size, speed of flight, and habitat to narrow down the possibilities. There are 3 main groups, or Genera, of hawks: Buteos (like the Red-tailed), Accipiters (like the Cooper's), and Falco (falcons like the Merlin and the Peregrine.) We have approximately 6 other species of regular-

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### From the Co-Presidents

Bob Schram and John Shreffler

HALL'S POND is one of the smallest Conservation Sanctuaries in Massachusetts but even before the pandemic it was by far the most heavily visited, thanks to its location in the heart of North Brookline, just a mile from the center of Boston. When COVID struck, Hall's Pond was one of the few places people felt safe getting outside and a steady stream of visitors visited the Sanctuary at a much increased tempo, deriving delight from nature. The Sanctuary

*Heather Hamilton and Jesse Mermell hard at work on our Fall Community Day.*



John Shreffler

welcomed thousands of new visitors who never before knew of its existence.

As the pandemic-induced restrictions loosened, the *Friends of Hall's Pond* adapted and largely resumed our normal sequence of activities. Fred Bouchard and Neil Gore led a series of very well attended guided bird walks during the Spring Migration. Our Volunteer Maintenance Team, led by Priscilla Smith, began working in early May and continued all summer long until the end of September. An abundance of rain made for a luxurious growing season! Our Annual *Friends Meeting*, held virtually on Zoom in late June, featured Brookline's Conservation Administrator, Tom Brady, who

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**HAWKS!** from page 1

ly seen hawks in eastern Massachusetts, besides the four I have seen at Hall's Pond.

Not all hawks are large: the Merlin, Kestrel, and Sharp-shinned are all less than a foot long. Osprey can be fre-



Photo by Peter Lowy

*A juvenile Red-tailed Hawk at Hall's Pond, April 2021.*

**Co-Presidents** from page 1

gave his report on the Sanctuary, and recently appointed Parks and Open Space Director Alexandra Vecchio who outlined her vision for Brookline's green space.

At season's end, we had a Community Planting Day. Co-President Emerita and horticulturalist Ellen Forrester brought a truckload of new native species, which were planted by our prodigiously efficient team. Our website continues to flourish and is well worth visiting: [friendsofballspnd.org](http://friendsofballspnd.org).

The year saw several new contributions to the Sanctuary. In memory of our late President Frank Caro, we planted two memorial trees: an oak to celebrate his strength and a willow to remember his compassion. The Town provided the trees with the help of a substantial donation from Feet of Clay, a pottery workshop, one of Frank's many groups. The willow was planted on the shore by the meadow and is already flourishing. The oak was planted in Amory Woods and didn't survive the July inundations but it was quickly replaced at a slightly higher elevation. To memorialize our longtime Board Member Bruce Wolff, we financed the installation of a memorial bench overlooking the Amory Woods Vernal Pool. Many thanks to the donors who helped, including John Wolff (Bruce's grandson) and Brookline Greenspace Alliance, who honored Bruce's longtime Board membership and service. We provided the Town with a bat box to help nurture this endangered mammalian species. Fred Bouchard explains why elsewhere in this newsletter.

We carry on and are grateful for the work of all our board members, volunteers and friends, too numerous

quently seen fishing along the coast. Red-shouldered Hawk and Broad-winged Hawk are summer denizens of forests, and are not easy to spot. Northern Harrier (formerly Marsh Hawk) and Kestrel (formerly Sparrow Hawk) prefer open fields and meadows, where they can be seen cruising (Harrier) or perching on wires (Kestrel). And Sharp-shinned Hawk, an identical but smaller version of the Cooper's, can seemingly pop up anywhere (except when I'm looking for one!)

And arguably the most majestic is the Peregrine Falcon, in the news from time to time: although originally nesting exclusively on tall cliffs, it has adapted well to nesting on tall buildings, and can be found in downtown Boston. My favorite hawk experience was this summer in Camden, Maine; while dining on a patio next to an old mill tower, we were entertained by a family of Peregrines coming and going from the top of the tower. Birding should always be so easy....or should it?



Photo by Sharon Gray

*We were thrilled to see the arrival of a male wood duck (above) and his mate at the pond, who appear to have taken up residence in the nesting box we placed there three years ago in the hope of attracting such beautiful tenants.*

to mention, and for our fellow *Friends* officers—Jim Franco (Treasurer), Diane Ryan (Recording Secretary), and Helen Herman (Corresponding Secretary). Harry Breger continues to provide an artist's touch in newsletter layout.

Your membership in the *Friends* and your generous gifts remain essential. We use them to keep up Hall's Pond with plantings and to help the Town with its projects. At present, the pandemic-induced economic downturn still affects the Town's budget, so your gifts and contributions are more important than ever. More volunteers are always welcome—you are an essential part of our team!

We encourage you to keep visiting the Sanctuary during the winter—there is no “off season” for Hall's Pond. The long slanting light of winter has its own magic and nature continues to heal even when dormant.

## Hall's Pond After the Torrential Rains



Rabbi Sam

by Bob Schram

THIS PAST SUMMER saw two occasions when Brookline was hit with more than 4.5 inches of rain over the space of just a few hours. Hall's Pond receives its volume of water from the North Brookline drainage area so, each time this happened, Hall's Pond overflowed its banks. When the waters receded, we went to survey the damage, and we saw that the viewing platform had lifted and twisted. What was perhaps



John Shreffler

even more surprising was that just a few days later our stalwart Brookline Parks and Public Works team was able to put things right. How did they do it?

You have to remember that Hall's Pond, and much of its neighborhood, sit atop the remains of a White Cedar Swamp that has been there for thousands of years. There is a layer of organic matter which is more than 60 feet deep, so when the viewing platforms were constructed more than 20 years ago, the pilings ("heli-



John Shreffler

cal piers") were sunk down more than 40 feet into the thick layer of decomposing matter without ever hitting solid ground. The piers were then topped with "sleeves" which allow the viewing platforms to actually "float" up when the level of the pond rises. When the water level rises too much—more than four feet each time—the platforms floated up and out of the sleeves, creating the roller coaster effect we all witnessed. But this construction technique also means that the platform can be lifted back into position relatively easily. Brookline's able Public Works team worked quickly, wading into the pond to lever the platforms back into position!

This serves as an excellent reminder of how well conceived and designed the decking and boardwalks were back in 2001. And it reminds us how daunting and expensive a task it will be to replace the entire walkway when it comes to the end of its useful lifespan in just a few more years. We are already seeing some gradual deterioration of the decking and rails and the Town has been steadily patching and replacing the damaged areas but a major capital investment is going to be needed in a few years to replace the entire pathway loop. This major project is planned for inclusion in Brookline's capital investments budget. The *Friends of Hall's Pond* is actively engaged in lobbying to make sure that the funding for this restoration project is provided and we preserve public access to this wonderful treasure.



Deborah Brown

# Batter Up!

## Meet the Mysterious Mammal

by Fred Bouchard

WHAT'S YOUR ANIMAL IQ? Beyond our ubiquitous, endearing cats and dogs, what have you seen of the creatures who share our world?

We fondly recall our pets: the regulars (goldfish, gerbils, turtles) and unusual (parrots, ferrets, snakes.) Outside we spot squirrels, chipmunks, deer, a coyote. Hobbyists name colorful butterflies, drab moths. Birder, fisher folk, and hunters tick off their species, from common to iconic.

At Hall's Pond, we recognize Wood Ducks (at last, seasonal residents in our pond-side box!), Painted Turtles on logs, Green Darner dragonflies zooming about. Any mammals? Well, beyond chipmunks and squirrels, there's our own "giant burrowing vole," the Muskrat. And now... say "hello" to the bats.



*Bewitched, Bothered, and Bemildred, à la Pogo.*

"Bats?!" you say. Yes, those furry flying mammals you've probably never seen. And may not, even at the sanctuary, unless you visit close to dusk or dawn.

Bats account for a fifth of the world's mammal species (about 1,000) and are the only ones capable of flight (fun fact: flying squirrels glide). Most bats live in forests; few have adapted to human habitats. Bats fly at night, catching aerial insects by sophisticated echolocation or sound-radar.

Boy, can they eat! An individual bat may consume 600 insects per hour. The late Dr. Thomas Kunz, Boston University bat researcher, estimated that (sub)urban bats eat 13 tons of insects each summer. In winter, they hibernate in tight spaces to conserve radiant heat. Cue the human aid of bat boxes.

Our New England species are few (6–8) and smallish; the Big Brown Bat has a 12-inch wingspan, the Little Brown Bat 9–10. Less common are Eastern Red and Hoary (both solitary and migratory) and Tricolored, endangered because of white-nose fungus.

In fifty years as an amateur naturalist, I can count local bat encounters on one hand. My lone bat experience at Hall's Pond was brief but memorable: May 1996, dawn. Little Brown Bat flutters over pond, hunting mayflies and gnats. Merlin swoops in, snags bat with little flurry, darts off with it dangling. Blip: over in a blink. It's haunted me ever since.



Town of Brookline

*Somewhere in the Sanctuary.*

Hall's Pond Sanctuary has opened its door to batworld by installing a bat box this autumn. We're used to bird houses, but these look weird: tall narrow wood or fiber boxes attached at 15–20 feet in trees, facing south, with a slot along the base, not a hole up front. Our hope is to lure a colony into wintering over, with a view to diversify the Pond's biota, reduce mosquito expansion, balance the ecology.

Sanctuary conservationist Ellen Forrester is an enthusiast. "Bats are major mosquito eaters, easily consuming their body weight nightly. I find their aerial antics fascinating; with each dip, there goes another bug that won't bite me—thank you, Mrs. Bat! They do *not* get in your hair! If one gets in your house, leave the window open and they'll find their way out. They're actually pollinators, like bees, of night-blooming plants and fruit trees. Like bee-hives, their colonies have been decimated by white-nose fungus, so they need our help, and we need theirs to fill a key eco-link between insects and birds. We hope they find our bat box a good home."

Learn more at websites: [massaudubon.org](http://massaudubon.org) and Bat Conservation International, [batcon.org](http://batcon.org)

*Little Brown Bats at home — although one not at Hall's Pond.*



Troy Gippis, Mass Wildlife

## Hall's Pond Volunteer Maintenance Team

by John Shreffler, Priscilla Smith, and Sharon Gray

EVERY YEAR IS DIFFERENT at Hall's Pond Sanctuary. And yet—the same. Despite changes in temperature and precipitation, wind and sun, flowers bloom, plants grow, birds and animals live. Visitors watch birds, walk around the pond, wander through Amory Woods, relax in the formal garden. And each year the Volunteer Maintenance Team works to keep the Sanctuary clean and healthy and welcoming for all visitors.



While the late Frank Caro's oversight was missed immensely, Priscilla Smith took charge of organizing volunteers and tasks. To start the season, John Shreffler arranged a walkthrough with Tom Brady, Brookline conservation officer and town arborist in early May to assess needs. Alex Cassie (Park Ranger) gave a training session to help volunteers identify plants, especially invasives.

Our sessions were held on Wednesday mornings from 9 until noon from May to October. With a schedule set in advance, volunteers were able to schedule other activities around the Hall's Pond work sessions. The team also assembled for an annual picnic just outside the Sanctuary in Amory Park in late August to celebrate its efforts.

Keeping invasives and vines at bay and weeding and tending to the formal garden were regular maintenance assignments. The most egregious invasives in-

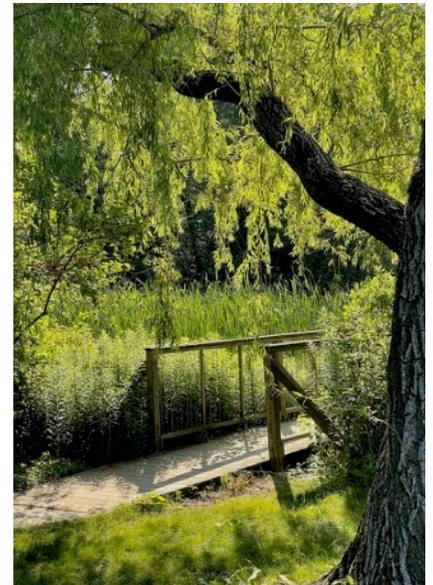


Photos by John Shreffler



clude garlic mustard, black swallow wort, 5 leaf akebia, yellow lilies, Oriental bittersweet, and Japanese knotweed. The storms of early July caused boardwalk inundations and some major damage, but quick town repairs allowed the team to keep working to clear branches, brush, weeds, and litter and trash.

Priscilla Smith counted on a core group of maintenance regulars: Ann Frechette, Fran Givelber, Jennie Chan, Sharon Gray, Andrea Ignatoff, Ros Moore, Fran Perler, Ellen and Jim Perrin, John Shreffler, and Janet Wynn. A supporting cast of Neil Gore, Diane Dalimeda, Kate Enicks & Kaelon, Katerina Gagnon, Julia Herkowitz, Helen Herman, Sharon Hesse, Hayden Perkins, and Alex and Daphne Pissios joined on occasion. Faith Michaels and her Faithful Flowers crew added color and beauty to the formal garden urn. Thanks to all who continue to make Hall's Pond a sanctuary for all throughout the year.



Newcomers are welcome to the Volunteer Maintenance Team whether they come frequently or only occasionally. We provide equipment and on-the-job training to new volunteers. We find light work for those who want it. We accommodate volunteers who prefer the formal garden. We also welcome volunteers who want to work entirely in the Sanctuary or Amory Woods.

## What Price Nature?

NO ONE DOUBTS for a second that Hall's Pond Sanctuary is an amazing treasure in the midst of our community. And sometimes we do have to look at the numbers—what does it cost to maintain the Sanctuary and what will it actually cost to realize our vision for the future of Hall's Pond.

The Town of Brookline can only do so much to maintain our parks and open space so the *Friends of Hall's Pond* helps to make up the difference. Over the last ten years the *Friends* have purchased thousands of native plants and devoted tens of thousands of volunteer hours to improving and protecting the Sanctuary by eliminating invasive species and then planting native replacements. And at this rate, we still have at least thirty years to go to complete the master horticultural restoration plan.



The *Friends* have purchased and planted thousands of native trees, shrubs, and grasses over the years.

Of course we must preserve and protect Hall's Pond for future generations and continue improving the habitat for birds and wildlife. However, over the last several years, our fundraising has not kept up with our pace of spending, and so our financial resources are gradually dwindling. If



Photos by Peter Lowy

everyone who enjoys Hall's Pond were to become a member of the *Friends* for just \$35 per year, we will be able to keep up our work. If you can donate more than this, we can accelerate the long term planting and habitat recuperation program.

We hope you can become a member/supporter—any contribution you make will be a blessing and a gift to our wider community. Please use the enclosed envelope to send us your contribution or log onto the Hall's Pond website at [friendsofhallspnd.org](http://friendsofhallspnd.org) to make an online contribution. Please do this right now!

Your donation may be tax deductible. The *Friends of Hall's Pond* is a 501(c)(3) organization.

## A Note from Brookline's Conservation Administrator

by Tom Brady, Brookline Conservation Administrator, Town Arborist, and Tree Warden



AS WE WIND DOWN the fall season and begin our transition into winter, it is a good time to reflect on 2021.

It is hard to believe it has been almost a year since Frank Caro passed. As we approach the anniversary, I think Frank would be pleased as he looks over the Sanctuary from beyond. The *Friends of Hall's Pond* has a strong leadership team in place, and the group has carried on in fine form. This year COVID-19 has sadly become part of our daily routine, and Brookline residents continue to find solace and peace in our sanctuary. Increased foot traffic continues to inflict an increased level of wear and damage to the pathway and boardwalks.

As we all transitioned to our work in the Sanctuary without Frank's guidance and counsel, the *Friends of Hall's Pond* maintenance team has continued their partnership with the Town. This partnership is critical to ensure the level of maintenance and oversight needed to ensure the sanctuary remains in good condition and visitors are able to enjoy the sanctuary in a safe and respectful manner.

Over the years, the Town has partnered with the *Friends* on Spring and Fall Community Days. We look forward to these workdays, where we have become accustomed to the sounds of laughter, friendly banter, and, more recently, the sounds of music. I am thrilled we will be able to once again gather in an outdoor space and, with some reasonable precautions, speak with each other without the aid of a computer.

As we all work to navigate the new normal, I thank you for your support of the Sanctuary. Now, more than ever, we need these types of natural, quiet, and passive spaces to sit and ponder. As I pass you on the pathways of the Sanctuary I will look forward to sharing a friendly nod, a simple wave, and a pleasant greeting.

## Membership Form

The *Friends of Hall's Pond* was founded in 1976 by Josephine Albrecht and others who established a public-private partnership, making a commitment to partner with the Brookline Conservation Commission as stewards of the newly acquired Hall's Pond Nature Sanctuary. The *Friends* are committed to the maintenance, preservation, and protection of this unique urban resource. Our initiatives include running Community Days, tending the Formal Garden, and raising funds for the Horticulture Fund.

NEW MEMBER       RENEWAL

*Extra donation is in memory of:*

Renewing Members — to save funds, and trees, the *Friends of Hall's Pond* does not send separate renewal forms by mail as in the past. Please check if your membership is due, and use this form and the enclosed envelope to make your generous donations.

Name (please print)

Address

City

State

Zip

Email

ANNUAL DUES:  \$25 INDIVIDUAL  \$35 FAMILY

I would like to make an additional contribution to support the work of the *Friends* at the sanctuary \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in:

- Assisting at Community Days
- Volunteer Maintenance Team
- Investing in the Horticulture Fund
- Working in the Formal Garden
- Taking guided walks in the Sanctuary
- Newsletter and/or Website

Please make checks payable to *Friends of Hall's Pond, Inc.*

Send to: *Friends of Hall's Pond*

PO Box 1844

Brookline MA 02446

Or join at [friendsofhallspond.org](http://friendsofhallspond.org), via credit card or PayPal

***We are ALWAYS grateful for your continued support.*** For further information about membership, volunteering, or to contact the *Friends*, please go to [friendsofhallspond.org](http://friendsofhallspond.org), or write us at [friendsofhallspond@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofhallspond@gmail.com). Our organization is interested in your communication and encourages your involvement.

*Friends of Hall's Pond* is a 501(c)(3) organization.

We do not share personal information with other organizations or with anyone outside the *Friends*.

My or my spouse's place of employment will match my contribution. (Please send matching gift information from your place of employment to the *Friends of Hall's Pond*.)

### The Friends of Hall's Pond BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Founder:**  
Jo Albrecht

**Co-Presidents:**  
Bob Schram  
John Shreffler

**Treasurer:**  
Jim Franco

**Recording Secretary:**  
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Janet Wynn

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*Sanctuary News* is produced by *Friends* volunteers, edited by John Shreffler, designed by Harry Breger, and printed with support from Century Type.

All photos are used by permission and were taken at Hall's Pond Sanctuary unless noted otherwise.



Jasper Weinberg

*Hall's Pond* had a big influx of migrating birds this past April, which included Northern Parula (above), Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, and Palm Warblers.



*Friends of Hall's Pond*  
PO Box 1844  
Brookline MA 02446

*To learn more about Brookline's hidden treasure,  
Please visit our website at [friendsofhallspnd.org](http://friendsofhallspnd.org)*

Dianne MacPherson-Lafey



Helen Herman

## *This isn't Pollution — but what IS it?*

by Bob Schram

MANY A VISITOR to Hall's Pond looks down and wonders what that rainbow sheen on the surface of the water really is. Have we allowed the Pond to be polluted? Not at all—Hall's Pond is one of the last remaining White Cedar Swamps on the eastern seaboard, and in recent years we have planted several new White Cedar saplings to restore them to the Sanctuary.

Over the last several hundred years, nearly all of the other cedar swamps have been lost to urban development and land-fill. Brookline's white cedar swamp once covered much of the Cottage Farm area between what is now Beacon Street and the Charles River. All of it, except Hall's Pond itself, was filled in during the 19th century. The beautiful colors you see on the surface of the water, especially around the periphery of the pond, are the natural resins and tannins from the sixty feet of organic matter that are constantly filtering up to the surface as the white cedar underneath us gradually decomposes, as it has been decomposing for thousands of years.

Once you understand the natural process, you can appreciate its uncanny beauty!