



Newsletter

November 2017

HPWA is a 501(c)3 Charitable Organization

Volume 8, Issue 4

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Website

www.TheHerringPondsWatershed.org



HPWA - protecting our
Watershed for the future.

Photo courtesy of Paul
Muther

President's Message

Brian Harrington, President

Since our founding in 2008 our membership has grown slowly but steadily. Aside from having a more effective voice, what are the benefits of increasing membership?

With an increased membership, and with the hard work of our incredible Board of Directors, our Association is becoming a constructive force for our watershed. A significant example from the past year is our partnership with the Town of Plymouth where we played a pivotal role in acquiring the recently dedicated David E. Alper Preserve. This 45 acre parcel of land, key to the health of our watershed, was slated for a ten-home development that surely would have degraded the watershed; it is now protected. We also continue monitoring the water quality in two of our major ponds – it is reassuring to know that our waters are safe for swimming and water recreation. All of our committees continue important work for our mutual benefit. And almost every committee will welcome more help. Visit the web site (address below) for more information about opportunities.

HPWA membership promotes and helps protect the wellbeing of a state-designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), roughly 4500 acres in the Herring River Watershed. The 11 ponds and uplands that make up the watershed are precious, beautiful, and fragile. In order to protect and monitor our watershed, HPWA wants to engage every household within the boundaries of the

ACEC. We have made good progress, but can be even more effective if we grow more. Our goal is to be in touch with every single household in our watershed. We are driven entirely by volunteer and membership power. (We do not spend a single dollar on salaries.) If your friends and neighbors do not know about HPWA and our work, please persuade them to visit our web site, www.theherringpondswatershed.org and consider joining our effort. Our membership fees are inexpensive, but persons who cannot help financially can stay informed simply by providing us with their name and email address.

Several years ago, with help from the A.D. Makepeace foundation, our Education Committee developed and published a 22-page guide *The Herring Ponds Watershed – Your Stewardship Guide*. Our volunteers hand-delivered this to about 1300 homes in our watershed, hundreds of copies were provided to local schools, to local government offices, to other watershed organizations, and to some national organizations interested in our purpose. The booklet quickly became a model that we have freely shared with other organizations. Perhaps you have a copy, or if not, have read it on our web site. We are now revising this guide – feel free to send suggestions for topics to our Education Committee. And maybe even consider helping with the revision.

In closing, I take pride in saying that we are a vibrant and effective organization with extraordinary leadership from your Board of Directors. With more help, and a bigger constituency, we can do even more!

Education Committee News

by Lee Pulis, Education Committee Chair

Tidmarsh QR-coded Nature Trail – Modeled after HPWA’s Alper Preserve Pine Barrens Plant ID Trail (Click for video: <https://youtu.be/-whuwvhreMk>)

HPWA’s mobile QR-code trail technology provided a model for replication by Living Observatory at Mass Audubon’s Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary October celebration. Their new QR-coded nature trail debuted, enabling mobile Internet-connected smartphones and tablets to access plant descriptions, research, and wildlife cam video clips at designated viewing stations within the sanctuary’s restored wetlands.



White Oak

Quercus alba

<http://salicicola.com/mobile/alper/docs/whiteoak.html>

River Herring Network Annual Meeting – Agenda:

<http://bit.ly/2yxwquE>

Lee, Martha, and Jim Smith have RSVP’d to attend the River Herring Network annual meeting 9:30-4:00, Thursday, Nov. 2 at Town Hall in Sandwich. Sara Grady will also attend. Goals: a) Get canal count for 2017 herring run for reporting in Newsletter and HPWA Internet media. b) Confer with Mystic River re: underwater camera and crowd source video clip counting considered for Carter’s River in Spring. c) Network re: Spring in-school herring programs, Herring Woman promo video <https://youtu.be/HsMm20-sbyA>, and HPWA mighty river herring comics.

Stewardship and Volunteer Action Guide Revision/ Updating

Input from the Water Quality and Invasive Species committees has been received and is being worked into the revision. Approximately 12 photo-rich pages are being added to accommodate updates, accomplishments, and volunteer opportunities. Wampanoag representatives are reviewing their

history content for updates/revisions as desired. Grant apps for funding the printing will be considered as soon as the page count is firmed up for obtaining cost estimates. Delivery via prioritized neighborhood door-to-door household contact in Spring 2018 was discussed with the Membership committee. Members interested in helping with any aspects of content, layout, printing, or distribution are welcome to contact lee@theherringpondswatershed.org.



Hedges Pond Park Assembly Hall Renovation

Brian and Lee met with Selectman Betty Cavacco and Community Preservation Committee chair Bill Keohan on October 11 to discuss HPWA’s possible role in supporting the Plymouth Youth Foundation (PYF) renovation effort. The building (capacity ~200) is structurally sound, and PYF aims to raise \$100K for interior all-season remodeling. Potential HPWA use for meetings, workshops, youth education, and eco-region awareness and outreach was reviewed. The capacity and Pine Barrens kettle pond setting...within the ACEC...are key assets.



Photo by Frank Mand

Project HOOT! – Brian Cassie, director of The Park School project to promote

screech owl nest box placement and data analysis was notified of a red screech owl seen peering from a HPWA’s box in the Ponds of Plymouth on 10/17/17. Any member or friend that participated in our February 2017 Owl Box workshop or makes a screech owl day roosting sighting in boxes or natural cavities this fall and winter is reminded to email Brian Cassie at cassieb@parkschool.org, or lee@theherringpondswatershed.org.

Invasive Mute Swan count on LHP –

HPWA will be counting swans gathering on Little Herring Pond periodically, in conjunction with sampling *E. coli* fecal bacteria and water quality testing of upwelling pond bottom springs. 54 of the 20-40-pound swans were counted on September 19 and 34 on October 10th. In past years as many as 150 swans have been observed congregating on the 90-acre spring-fed headwaters of Great Herring Pond. LHP rarely freezes over, is sheltered from winds, is shallow and rich with native rooted aquatic plants, and provides minimal human disturbance due to steep forest-buffered shoreline, low density development, motorcraft prohibition, and limited public access.



Photo by Dave Clark

Volunteers are needed now: Step forward to recruit counters and organize HPWA’s Spring river herring count. Volunteers are also needed to make school district/PTA/elementary teacher contacts to offer Spring in-school Herring Woman/Litter Lady classroom or assembly programs (click for video: <https://youtu.be/HsMm20-sbyA>).

Programs include distribution of HPWA river herring migration storybooks free for all youth and their families. Contact Brian brian.harrington205@gmail.com or Lee.

Watershed Water Quality

by Don Williams, Water Quality Co-Chair

The Water Quality Committee is pleased to report that it has two new members. We welcome Chris Lewis a new resident to our area, who works in publishing and marketing and Carol Morley who lives near the Pond Road rain garden.

Jack Kedian, Joe Solimini and Jim Smith of the WQC and Kim Tower of the Town of Plymouth took 12 samples at the primary swimming sites around Great and Little Herring Ponds and sent them for E. coli measurement in September. We are pleased to report that all swimming sites have September E. coli levels well below the state minimum. The next E. coli sampling will be in June, 2018.



Kim Tower obtained the grant for the construction of the runoff remediation at the two Eagle Hill sites. The construction is underway and should be completed soon. This work should reduce the amount of runoff into Great Herring Pond by 48%. Better water clarity, lower phosphorus and E. coli levels should be the result.

Dissolved oxygen is important for a healthy fish population. Jack and his testing crew monitored the dissolved oxygen at the deepest part of the pond and found healthy oxygen concentrations even down deep. Water clarity has been steadily improving into the fall and seems to be better overall than last year. Since 90% of the water in Great Herring Pond comes from the springs of Little Herring Pond, increased emphasis will be placed on monitoring the health of the latter. Jim Smith will be taking water samples every other month at the springs, they will be analyzed for nitrates, an indicator of human impact.

These values will be a good indicator of our watershed aquifer health. Jim will also be taking periodical water samples at Little Herring Pond to be analyzed for E. coli. Monitoring E. coli during the year will be an excellent way to assess the environmental effect of the numerous swans that live on Little Herring Pond.

Unfortunately, the Town of Plymouth was not awarded a MET grant for the Watershed Management Plan study. Kim will try for a grant this spring. Eventually money will come through and we will better know the sources of our ponds' pollutants and amounts from each source when the study is completed.

Invasive Survey Report

Jerry Levine, Chair of Invasive Committee

Non-native invasive aquatic plants are a major worry for our local ponds. Concern due to the large size and recreational value of Great Herring Pond, has caused the HPWA Invasive Committee to set up a baseline survey and provide annual aquatic plant monitoring.

On 10/18/2017 Don Williams and I sampled 17 sites from his boat on Great Herring Pond. The samples were taken approximately 15 meters from the shoreline, dependent on depth and physical obstructions. The sites were approximately 500 meters apart. The bottom consisted of sand, mud or rocks. 7 sites with a rocky bottom yielded no weed growth. The number of plant species from each site varied from 0 - 5. Identification was performed by Sara Grady, Watershed Ecologist, North and South Rivers Watershed Association. Her analysis indicated the following species found:
slender/western waterweed
slender/leafless watermilfoil
common water nymph
ribbonleaf bladderwort
Coontail, common stonewort,
spike-rush, lake quillwort
common bladderwort, algae
wild celery, freshwater sponge

Her analysis indicated that all the species were native and many of the species found were the same as samples taken in 2016. No invasive aquatic plants were found. The sampling indicates GHP currently does not have an aquatic invasive problem. It is important with all the boating activity on the pond, and watercrafts from outside our region being launched at the Bourn public site, that we work to educate the public about the aquatic invasive issue. As members of the HPWA we need to actively look for indications of species that are not native to our Pond. Contact HPWA and we will provide samples to the local and state authorities of any species that are not native.

Membership Appeal

by Martha Sheldon, Membership Chair

Not sure you paid your membership dues this year? If you're like me it might have slipped your mind. I'll be sending out a final appeal in a week to those we have not heard from. I hope you will be a HPWA supporter for 2017-18. Join the nearly 200 current members and learn more about preserving our precious watershed. Thanks!
Martha Sheldon, Membership chair at martha.sheldon205@gmail.com.

HPWA Membership Form 2017-2018

Name _____

Address _____

City/Town _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

___ \$15 Individual Membership.

___ \$25 Family Membership

___ \$55 Contributing Membership

___ \$100 Sustaining Membership

Make checks payable to: **HPWA, Ltd.**

Mail to: HPWA

P O Box 522

Sagamore Beach, MA 02562

Meet the Fisher: *Martes pennanti*

By Martha Sheldon

Have you ever spotted a fisher? It seems that increasing numbers of these shy and elusive animals have been seen in our watershed. I've seen 3, one near the GHP boat ramp! And what is a fisher, exactly?

The fisher is a reclusive, solitary predator, seldom seen even when numerous. It is found throughout Massachusetts, except on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket. As a member of the weasel family, the fisher is a keenly adapted predator that has been very successful; by studying them we gain a better understanding of the ecology and behavior of predator and prey species.



Description

The fisher is a member of the weasel family, the *Mustelidae*—which include mink, otter, short-tailed weasel, and marten. Though often called “fisher cats”, that is a misnomer; they are unrelated to cats.

It is built like a stocky weasel with a long slender body, useful for investigating hollow logs. They are agile in trees, like their cousins the martens. Their eyes are placed facing forward, and have a pale green eye shine. Adult males weigh 8-16 pounds, and are twice as heavy as adult females. The coat color appears almost uniformly black from a distance, especially against snow, but it actually ranges from deep brown to black, with light hairs around the face and shoulders. Fisher have 5 toes, and walk on the whole foot like a bear. The gait is bounding, like many small to medium mammals.



Typical fisher track. Photo by M. Sheldon

Bounding is energetically expensive and in snowy areas the fisher may choose to forage in areas of shallow snow coverage where bounding is less expensive. A typical fisher track pattern shows one foot slightly in front of the other, and the back feet fall into the prints left by the front feet. Check out this video of a fisher taken by HPWA member Phil Angell. Click to view:

<https://streamable.com/n9xci>

Life Cycle

Fisher give birth most commonly in March and April. Females produce 1 litter each year with an average litter size of 3 kits. Dens used to raise young fishers are high up in hollow trees; they are used for the first 8-10 weeks. By five months of age, the kits are about the same size as the adult female and have begun to kill their own prey. In the fall, the young disperse and lead largely solitary lives as adults. Fishers can become prey themselves, and are sometimes killed by coyotes, dogs, eagles, horned owls and cars.

Food and Habits

Fisher are generalized predators. They eat any animal they can catch and overpower, and they readily eat carrion. Fishers are omnivorous and in our area eat mice, shrews, voles, squirrels, rabbits, birds, and fruit. (In northern N.E., fisher eat porcupines and snowshoe hares. They are uniquely adapted to killing

porcupines.) Jays and ruffed grouse are winter birds that are commonly eaten. Apples are often eaten by fisher in New England, where trees from abandoned farms still exist. In suburban areas, problems with fisher can sometimes arise, usually restricted to free-ranging cats or chickens. Fisher can be active day or night, and do not hibernate in winter. They commonly use hollow logs, tree cavities, and brush piles to rest.

Rebounding Populations...

Fishers have evolved to survive the climate of North America, can travel long distances in short periods of time and can hunt a wide variety of prey animals. In the past trapping and logging were the two most important factors influencing fisher populations. (In Massachusetts, fishers are classified as a furbearer species, for which a regulated trapping season and management program have been established.) **Dave Wattles**, MA Division of Fisheries & Wildlife emailed his comments to me about fisher in our area. “You are correct fisher have increased in numbers in the southeast in recent years. One of the ways we can track that is through our trapping information. It was the mid-2000s when we first started seeing fisher trapped in your area. We now see that eastern MA has by far the highest sighting rates in the state, 2-3 times as high as what we see in far more forested areas of the state. We believe the great increase in population is the fisher reoccupying previously unoccupied habitat. But we also believe that the fisher population is being strongly supplemented by people. All the bird feeders in eastern MA are supplementing fisher’s natural prey base of birds and small mammals. So backyards become great hunting areas for fisher, particularly when they are surrounded by forest.”

If any of you reading this have your own story or photo of a fisher, and would like to share it in the HPWA newsletter or FB page, you can email me martha.sheldon205@gmail.com or lee@theherringpondswatershed.org.