



## Newsletter – 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2020

### President's Message

I hope that some of you were able to join the virtual public hearing of the Zoning Commission on October 1<sup>st</sup> concerning the recent application submitted by Landmark Development to amend Section 32 - Affordable Housing Regulations. It was an interesting experience, to say the least, and one that will probably repeat itself on October 15<sup>th</sup> when the public hearing will be continued at the request of Landmark's attorney.

The changes proposed by Landmark would minimize the detailed information that the Commission is required, by law, to receive and review, in order to determine if a development application will cause health, safety, environmental and coastal concerns. It is ironic that Landmark should request the changes as they drafted the original Section 32, but obviously they now want the regulations to be even more favorable for their one specific application. And just as obviously, we oppose these changes as do Save-the-River-Save -the-Hills, our fellow intervenors, and Save the Sound which represents us in the ongoing legal battle with Landmark.

Nearly 50 participants joined the Zoom call. Many letters opposing the change, including several from members of the Friends (for which we are very grateful), were read into the record of the meeting. You will find a copy of the Friends' letter at [oswhills.org](http://oswhills.org). Mike Dunn, Michael Sheehan, and Roger Reynolds spoke eloquently in opposition to the changes, citing how important it is for the Commission to have all the information needed to make a critically important decision, one that could have significant impact on the Hills as well as the Niantic River.

You can be sure that your leadership will remain vigilant in its effort to protect the Hills. We will keep you updated as details develop, but please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. Thank you for your continuing support.

*Kris Lambert*

### Seen in the Hills



The Pitch Pine Nursery is taking shape and its beautiful!

Left Photo: Stewards working on a raised planter bed.

Right Photo: Greg Decker working on the benches surrounding a calming stonework event space.



# 2020 FrogWatch Observations in the Hills

By Don Danila and Susan Gonzalez

Last summer we reported on our 2018 and 2019 FrogWatch observations in the Preserve. FrogWatch is a nationally recognized program that provides valuable information on the distribution and abundance of frogs and toads in the U.S. We are both trained in FrogWatch sampling protocols recognizing the calls of all 11 species of frogs and toads found in Connecticut.

The Yale-Peabody Museum of Natural History website provides information on our state's frogs and toads, as well as short sound clips of their calls at:

<http://peabody.yale.edu/collections/vertebrate-zoology/herpetology/online-guide-amphibians-and-reptiles-connecticut>.

Protocols call for 3-minute observations to be made beginning 0.5 hour after sunset and recording all species heard and the intensity of their calls.

This year we made observations from March through July at three sites in the Preserve:

- Clark Pond at the beginning of the Red Trail;
- Wetland (WL) #20, located off the Red Trail Overlook spur, and
- WL #24, found off the Green Trail.

These sites are found within the southern portion of the Preserve. Based on past experience, the WL sites were not sampled in July 2020, after no calls were heard there in June and no significant

precipitation occurred in July that might have attracted frogs or toads.

During the previous two years, we did not hear any wood frogs calling during our nightly observations, even though many people could hear them during hikes in daylight hours. Also, we heard no toads calling even though we knew that the American toad is found in the Preserve.

We were pleased to finally hear wood frogs calling at the WL stations during March. Their reproduction was confirmed by observing egg masses in WL #24 on the following day.

| 2020 Results |            |                   |                                       |
|--------------|------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Month        | Location   | Species           | Calling Intensity<br>[see note below] |
| March        | Clark Pond | Spring peeper     | 3                                     |
|              | WL #20     | Wood frog         | 1                                     |
|              | WL #24     | Wood frog         | 3                                     |
| April        | Clark Pond | None              | -                                     |
|              | WL #20     | Spring peeper     | 1                                     |
|              | WL #24     | Spring peeper     | 1                                     |
| May          | Clark Pond | Spring peeper     | 3                                     |
|              |            | American bullfrog | 1                                     |
|              | WL #20     | Spring peeper     | 3                                     |
|              |            | American toad     | 1                                     |
| June         | WL #24     | Spring peeper     | 3                                     |
|              |            | American toad     | 1                                     |
|              | Clark Pond | Green frog        | 2                                     |
|              |            | American bullfrog | 1                                     |
|              |            | Gray tree frog    | 1                                     |
|              | WL #20     | None              | -                                     |
|              | WL #24     | None              | -                                     |
| July         | Clark Pond | Green frog        | 2                                     |

1 = individuals could be counted with space between calls  
2 = calls overlapping, but individuals could be counted  
3 = full chorus with calls continuous and overlapping

Many spring peepers were heard at Clark Pond, but this species had



Spring Peeper

not yet appeared at the WL sites. April was disappointing in that no frogs were heard at Clark Pond and only a few spring peepers were calling at the WL sites. The April observation took place several days after some rainfall, but the cool night air temperature may have inhibited frog activity. In May, after some rain, we finally heard a few American toads calling at both WL sites. Spring peepers were very numerous and loudly calling at all sites. We also heard a few bullfrogs in Clark Pond. As noted earlier, nothing was heard at the WL stations in June, but there were green frogs as well as a few bullfrogs and gray tree frogs at Clark Pond. We finished up in July at Clark Pond, where only green frogs were heard.

This year's sampling showed how variable frog occurrence can be over time. We heard fewer American bullfrogs in Clark Pond this year than in 2018 and 2019. The intensity of gray tree frogs was much less in June 2020 than in June of the previous two years, when full overlapping choruses were noted. We hope to continue to document the frogs and toads in the preserve next year.

## Beaver Deceiver

August 10<sup>th</sup> was a hot humid day. A team from Beaver Solutions, from Southampton Mass, installed a new water leveling device called a "Beaver Deceiver" in Clark Pond. The conservation minded outfit specializes in resolving human/beaver conflicts. This was needed because a young beaver had recently taken up residence in the pond, building a dam and threatening to raise the level of the pond beyond the desired height. Beavers diligently plug leaks in their dams because their survival depends upon the cover provided by the water in their pond. The Beaver Deceiver consists of a cage surrounding a pipe placed into the dam. The cage keeps the beaver from blocking the pipe once it is installed in the dam. Beavers are sensitive to the sound and feel of flowing water and their instinct is to dam the flow. The device works since the intake drainage pipe is underwater, in the protected cage, so the beaver cannot sense the water flow. The Beaver Deceiver maintains the water in the pond behind the beaver dam



*Preparing the Beaver Deceiver*



*Opening Space for pipe within dam*



*Aligning the Deceiver within dam*

but allows the beaver to continue to build their dams at their normal rate, keeping everyone happy. Beavers are an indication of a healthy ecosystem and welcomed in the Nature Preserve. Try to catch a glimpse from the Clark Pond bridge, ideally at dawn. Look for a 'V' shaped wake trailing behind the swimming beaver and know that the water continues to flow through the dam, even though you (and the beaver) can't hear it.

## Eagle Scout Project

Lifelong East Lyme resident Kurt Mahlke, from East Lyme Troop 7, worked to complete his Eagle Scout project in the Hills this summer. He created a berm to direct stormwater from the ballfield's service road into the rain garden installed last year. The area is now covered with black plastic to prevent invasive plants from repopulating the area until it can be seeded with wildflowers in the spring. This will expand the riparian buffer wildflower meadow north of the rain garden and also prevent erosion of the shortcut trail which will now be blocked. The second part of the project was to remove invasive plants at the south end of the riparian buffer where the old steep trail leads to the bridge and the dam area. Soon native plants will repopulate the area. Kurt is a freshman at Union College, majoring in engineering. Besides his love of the outdoors and hiking the Hills, he plays soccer for the Union soccer team. He loves to travel and hopes to study abroad in Germany. Thanks Kurt for a job well done!



*Kurt and Team creating the new berm*



*Improving the entrance near the kiosk*



*Greg and Kurt inspecting project*

## Quarry Dock Road Entrance Closed

As you may be aware the Quarry Dock Road entrance to the preserve is permanently closed. The decision to close this entrance has been a difficult one, however is required due to increasingly frequent and serious incidents that damage the environment and pose safety concerns. Ongoing and inappropriate activities include trespassing, disturbances and privacy concerns associated with people parking after hours and using the area to gain access to Turkey Point (private property). The situation has improved but will continue to be closely monitored by the Friends as well as the police. We are grateful for the continued understanding and support of our friends, neighbors, and visitors, and especially our members.

## Congrats to Mike Dunn

We are so proud of Mike Dunn, co-founder of OHNP. Mike recently received the highest honor for civilian heroism in the country! He received the Carnegie Medal and was recognized as a Citizen Hero for risking his life to try to save a woman who was caught on a bridge piling while still tethered to a paddle board and caught in a fast-moving current in Southold, NY last summer. The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission has awarded a total of 10,168 Carnegie Medals since its inception in 1904. This recognition also includes a financial grant; Mike is working with local organizations to establish a scholarship program for Life Guarding lessons for local kids that don't have access to them.

You can read about Mikes heroic experience here:

<https://www.carnegiehero.org/michael-b-dunn/>

Congratulations Mike!



Senator Richard Blumenthal with Mike Dunn

*Preserve and cherish the pale blue dot,*

*The only home we've ever known.*

*~ Carl Sagan*

## New Research from CT Extension Service

Researcher Robert Marra associated with the Connecticut Agricultural Extension Station, will be conducting an 8 to 10 year long monitoring program focusing on beech trees afflicted with a new disease — beech leaf disease. Now present in Greenwich, New Canaan and Stamford, they are watching for it in various forest ecosystems including the Hills where a small plot of beeches will be monitored annually. For centuries, the state's beech trees have fed the animals of the wild world — squirrels, turkey, blue jays, woodpeckers, deer, and more. Its genus name "Fagus" comes from a Greek word, Fagito, meaning "to eat." The beech nut crops feed the animals that live in the woods.



Bob Marra (above) met with Greg Decker and Kris Lambert to plan for a monitoring station in the Hills looking for the nematodes that cause the disease.

Please be sure we have  
your current email address.  
Simply enter it on the  
[oswhills.org](http://oswhills.org) homepage

If you would like to join the Friends of  
OHNP stewards, please contact us at  
[volunteers@oswhills.org](mailto:volunteers@oswhills.org)