

# Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

## Fall 2015

### The Joy of Working in Spy Pond Park

By Betty Athanasoulas

PHOTO BY RUTH SLOTNICK



Arlington/Belmont Crew team members wield their gardening tools

We call them Work Days, but fun and joy better describe the experience of the intergenerational group of eager volunteers who gather at Spy Pond Park every month to help keep the park looking beautiful and clear of invasive plants. Lally Stowell, the volunteer coordinator, introduces people to the Beautification Committee member who will offer guidance as they work on their specific task; appreciative committee members enthusiastically greet the volunteers as they arrive. It's only in a matter of moments that we all become a community working towards one common goal.

Boston University students and alumni participated in BU's Global Day of Service to kick off the Work Days at Spy Pond Park. Their spirits were high throughout their vigorous cleaning of the park after our winter hiatus. We can always count on the annual participation of the Arlington/Belmont Crew Team who came in August this year.

It was a magical afternoon. Four members of the team and their coach, Laura Rothman, were already trimming the hedges by Linwood Circle when Ruth Slotnick, new FSPP committed volunteer, and I arrived with three members of the freshmen girls' team. In no time, they were aligning the hedges with the fence, removing the cuttings and bagging them as they went along. They had everything in such control that supervision wasn't necessary, allowing Ruth and me to move on to a bed thick with saplings, false indigo, horseweed, and Joe-Pye Weed in full bloom. A short time later, having completed their work at another bed, two ad-

ditional crew team members and a mother came to offer their assistance. A special thanks to Nick, a real trooper, who despite having been bitten by a yellow jacket, kept on cutting down the large saplings and false indigo while we were cutting down Joe-Pye Weed, opening up the view of Spy Pond. How exciting it was to see their crew teammates practicing their rowing on the pond! It was wonderful to see in their faces their sense of accomplishment and pride. Everyone could have kept going, but mindful of the time, we had to stop to make sure everything had been cleared away before 1:00 p.m. So nice to have enough energy after three hours to wish for more time to complete the job - all the more reason to return the following month!

We are very grateful for the service of all the community groups, the individual adult "regulars" and those who come from time to time, and all the Friends of Spy Pond Park, who are devoted to keeping this intimate and charming space in Arlington so beautiful and inviting.

### Carporama 2015 - Six Years and Going Strong...

By Jerome Moisand



PHOTO BY SHERIDAN KAHMANN

Brother and sister, Robbie and Katie, caught their first carp nearly at the same time

Last year was the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our carp fishing event at Spy Pond. No way we'll stop there, shall we? I did some math, and roughly 80 kids caught their first carp during one of those events (including 2015), fish weights ranging from a couple of pounds to an 18lb monster. Pretty cool, isn't it?

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# Carporama 2015

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PHOTO BY SHERIDAN KAHMANN



One of "Spy Pond Characters" depicted in Adria Arch's exhibit of wood and acrylic paint was Jerome Moisand

This year started with a surprise, Karen Grossman told me about the "Elements: Art Rocks Spy Pond" project for which Adria Arch would paint five portraits of people who enjoy Spy Pond Park, and I ended up being one of them! And Adria did a really good job of portraying a carp too (see photo in FSPP's Summer 2015 Newsletter). The paintings were displayed in the park for the month of May among sculptures and other creative artifacts.

What about the fishing itself? As usual, I chummed quite heavily before the event, and fish were definitely there for us. Saturday morning, eight kids showed up, everybody on time. It was a bit slow, but we did succeed in catching 5 nice fish, Evan and Logan each getting a 13 pounder. In the afternoon, we had a perfect score, 8 new kids and 8 fish landed, with Leo and Mark respectively landing a 14lb and 15lb fish. This may seem like routine if you've read my reports of the past few years, but I assure you, regular carp anglers do not often enjoy catching 10+ fish in a day...

The Arlington Advocate sent a reporter/photographer for our event, and a few days later, we made the front page of our local newspaper, with a very suitable title: "Fish Are Biting". You can learn more about my carp fishing on acmitv: <http://news.acmi.tv/segments/comfort-food-carp-fishing-at-spy-pond/>

As usual, many thanks to mentors and picture takers, FSPP, the Arlington Recreation Department, and most importantly junior anglers and patient parents. Onto the 7th edition of the event, in June 2016!

*Editor's note: This event teaches catch and release techniques. Carp and other fish from Spy Pond are not safe for consumption due to hazardous materials in sediment at the bottom of the pond.*

## Final 2015 Work Days in Spy Pond Park

September 26 1-4 p.m. (rain date September 27 1-4 p.m.)

October 17 1-4 p.m. (rain date October 18 1-4 p.m.)

*Liability waivers are required for all participants in the above Work and Fun Day activities.*

*If you are working, please download the form from the FSPP website, fill it out and bring it with you.*

*Children below 18 years of age must have parental signature to participate in Spy Pond Park activities sponsored by the Friends of Spy Pond Park.*



PHOTO BY DON ALEX ANTONINE

Marshall McCloskey, Sally Hempstead, and Ruth Slotnick, were happy to assist with outreach and grooming planting beds on the July Work Day



# FSPP Town Day Booth 2015

By Sally Hempstead, FSPP Outreach Chairman

PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



**Karen Grossman (l), Sally Hempstead (r) and the FSPP goose were among those who greeted visitors at our Town Day booth**

It's misty and quiet at our Spy Pond shed as Marshall McCloskey and I load up the car with all the Town Day paraphernalia. The streets are quiet with a few figures clutching coffee cups, traffic is light and the damp, grey morning gives no hint of the action packed day to come. We set up our tent surrounded by other town park booths, exchanging pleasantries with others and giving mutual assistance with stubborn canopies and bulky display items. At ten my trusty volunteers, Bev and Wally Williams, appear ready to greet visitors with a warm smile and helpful information as Town Day has begun. People start wandering up and down Mass. Ave. around nine although ten is the official starting time.

Everybody loves Spy Pond Park, so our booth is always popular and, as usual, the Spy Pond Park "Become a Spy" stickers are a hit garnering much needed donations for our park. At twelve, Lally Stowell arrives. She is on our Beautification Committee, is extremely knowledgeable on all matters pertaining to Spy Pond Park plants and gardens, and is able to answer a myriad of inquiries from local residents. Speaking of questions and remarks about Spy Pond Park, everyone wants to know, "Why aren't people allowed to swim in the pond and is it really filled with toxins both organic and chemical?"

Betty Athanasoulas joins our group at the booth at one and with her contagious enthusiasm she attracts many families to our booth. They love our kayak and canoe rentals on summer weekends and, of course, our playground. Between two and three, Karen Grossman, our president, brings her expertise to the tent and after many small hands and some big ones have emptied our candy bowl, purchased some Friends of Spy Pond Park T-shirts and "SPY" stickers, we pack up our tent and ride off into the sunset. Thanks to all our volunteers for making our Town Day booth a wonderful success!

*Editor's Note: There are no lifeguards at Spy Pond, so the "No Swimming" signs are an indication that anyone who swims in the pond does so at their own risk. Presently, with weeds abounding, water quality in question, and chemicals in the sediment, the signs erected by the Town of Arlington serve to warn the public that there is danger involved in swimming in Spy Pond.*

## President's Letter

Greetings Friends,

As the leaves begin to change color, signaling the beginning of fall, I am happy to report a successful summer season in Spy Pond Park. We are always struggling to keep up with the invasive plants and curb the growth of grass and weeds between the cobblestones. However, we are so grateful to the volunteers, both regular and occasional, groups and individuals, who dedicate their time and energy in the park. At the outreach booth on Work Days and at Town Day, we have gotten so many appreciative compliments about the results of our labor!

The Friends of Spy Pond Park co-sponsored a meeting on September 10 hosted by Belmont Citizens Forum, "Water Trouble: A Tri-Community Dialogue about Storms, Floods and Water Quality". Speakers from Arlington, Belmont, and Watertown presented and answered questions. Information tables and displays provided additional information for attendees. You can read more about it, get some tips about what you can do in your town to mitigate the effect of storms, floods, and their impact on water quality at: [www.belmontcitizensforum.org/newsletter](http://www.belmontcitizensforum.org/newsletter) and view a video of "Water Trouble": [belmontmedia.org](http://belmontmedia.org)

We are thankful to those of you who have become paid members of our organization this year. You have made it possible for us to donate two park benches that will be installed on the grassy area off Pond Lane. This will allow more visitors a place to sit, relax, and enjoy views of Spy Pond there. We'll be conducting an end of year solicitation for funds, too, to give you another opportunity to contribute to the FSPP. We always appreciate support for what we do.

Watch for our announcement of the FSPP December Annual Meeting with details about the location and speaker. I hope to see you there!

Warm regards,  
*Karen L. Grossman*

Karen L. Grossman, President  
Friends of Spy Pond Park

# Mugar Property Development Challenge

By Gail McCormick

It won't come as a surprise to most readers that there is massive community concern about the proposed development of the Mugar property adjacent to Route 2 and Lake Street. Much of this property is wetlands, though just how much has been debated. With climate change producing more intense rain and the impact of sea level rise ultimately affecting even Arlington, we can reasonably expect that more of the Mugar property will be wetlands regardless of exactly how much is wetlands today. Many believe that the proposed plan will increase flooding in surrounding neighborhoods and that the developer's plan to mitigate this is seriously flawed. As you know, we already have flooding problems here.

Virtually all Town and State officials and numerous community organizations are opposed to the development plan.

Little has been written about the development's potential impact on Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park. We already have a problem with runoff from Route 2 negatively affecting the pond and hence the park where people put their boats in using the ramp. Obviously a major reason why the park is a beloved attraction has to do with the beauty of the pond. Anything that detracts from that beauty will hurt Spy Pond Park.

There will continue to be protests about this potential development. You can follow them by going to the Coalition to Save the Mugar Wetlands Facebook page: <https://saveourwetlands.wordpress.com> or by checking YourArlington.com which has frequent updates. Community action may well be important in determining whether or not this development goes forward.

Get involved!

## Raptors!

By Betsy Leondar-Wright

I've been fascinated with hawks and other raptors ever since a peregrine falcon crashed into my car windshield in the Santa Barbara hills. Then, three years ago I stood on Blueberry Hill in Granville and watched the fall mass migration of hawks - and watched the watchers who were tallying the number of each species passing over the valley.

Usually I don't see many raptors on Spy Pond. A Cooper's hawk visits my backyard a couple times a year, but that's about it.

But, this summer was a special time for hawks. On many July and August evenings about 7 pm, an osprey circled the part of the pond near the boat/wheelchair ramp, coming unusually

close to the park. Often bird-watchers would gather around 6 pm to look for it. My neighbors saw it diving for fish; however, I was frustrated that it didn't appear when I was there one day. But then the next week, it swooped down very close to me when I was canoeing near the willows across from the Spy Pond condos, and I saw it catch a fish and carry it up and away. It was so huge that when it was over me, it appeared that the wingspan was almost as long as the canoe - a trick of the eye, no doubt, but I'm sure it was over 5 feet.

Then, in late August I had a different hawk encounter. A pair of small red-tail hawks flew off the backside of Elizabeth Island with a small bird (maybe a swallow?) in hot pursuit. They split up, and the one who was followed and pecked by the little bird let out a series of harsh cries as it flew into a tree near Gould Road. The other one flew back into the trees on the island.

Elizabeth Island seems to be more of a bird sanctuary since the Land Trust took it over and cut down the smothering phragmites. I saw lovely yellow goldfinches many times this summer, little skittering shore birds, a night heron and great blue herons, and more redwing blackbirds and robins than ever. But nothing is more exciting than seeing hawks on Spy Pond.

## The Birthday Party Palace

By Beverly Williams

HERE are

- no crowded rooms,
- no video games,
- no overpriced snacks,
- no distraught parents.

HERE are

- blue skies,
- waves lapping,
- biryani, noodles, sandwiches or that international favorite - pizza,
- balloons on lampposts,
- laughing children on the playground,
- adults happy to see one another, and
- birthday cakes with names from all nations under the sun.

OUR OWN BIRTHDAY PARTY PALACE: SPY POND PARK!

## Parties in Spy Pond Park

If you'd like to have a birthday party or group picnic for fewer than 100 people in Spy Pond Park, you must obtain a permit and pay a fee to do so. Download the form and send it with your payment to the Park and Recreation Department with 48 hours notice: <http://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showdocument?id=17601>.



# Spy Pond Weeds, 2015

By Bill Eykamp

Weed growth in Spy Pond is obvious this year. How did it get this bad?

All green plants require three things to thrive—water, light, and nutrients, in particular nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. (Chemical symbols N, P, and K). On a water body, water and light are a given. Nutrients are variable. Phosphorous is the “limiting nutrient.” In most freshwater lakes adding more N or K makes no difference to plant life. There’s already plenty. Adding P makes a big difference. It is “limiting”, thus the long effort to prevent more P from getting into the pond.

Alas, there is already plenty of P in most urban lakes. It is in the sediment at the pond bottom, and also dissolved in the water.

Eurasian watermilfoil is the bane of most northern hemisphere lakes, foreign and domestic. It is an introduced species in North America, and very invasive. It propagates from cuttings, so harvesting it is almost impossible, and transporting it into new lakes by moving boats, etc. is so easy that there aren’t that many unaffected lakes around. Milfoil is rooted, and most of its nutrients come from the sediment.



**Eurasian watermilfoil**

Another big problem this year is coontail. It is native, and is always around to some degree. It is free floating but submerged, and its nutrients come from the water column.

This year we have lots of both. The milfoil forms the structure, and the coontail gets caught in the branches. Together they form the green mass you can see.

Luckily, the third actor in this drama hasn’t made much of an appearance. That is filamentous algae, sometimes referred to as “wet wool.” It is amazing that single cell algae can form such tenacious strands and such strong mats. Put them with milfoil and coontail, and the pond becomes impassible.



**Filamentous algae (“wet wool”)**

We’ve faced these problems in the past, and avoided this year’s mess. What happened? Our version of the perfect storm!

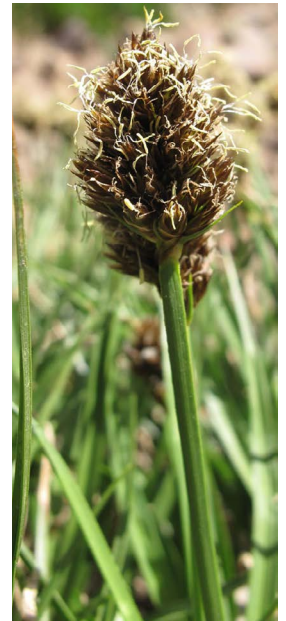
Our practice of late is to knock the milfoil down with herbicide before it gets out of control. We did



**Coontail**

a full pond treatment with Sonar (Fluoridone) in 2010 and another in 2013. In 2012, when the ’10 treatment was starting to wear off, we did a quick spot treatment with a different herbicide, and that let us delay the expensive whole pond treatment for a year. We all expected to see problems in 2015 (we did and they were worse than expected), but thought spot treatment would hold us over until next year.

Then things unraveled. To treat the pond, we need permission. Our permit expired this year. Not a problem normally, but the company who has always assisted us in treatment and permit approval underwent a major management change, then it merged with its sole competitor. The new firm couldn’t cope with all the changes, and became unresponsive in our hour of need. Then, a further complication, the existence of an endangered plant on the shore called Englemann Sedge. To get our permit renewed, we had to convince the state that we knew where it was and could protect it. Protecting it is not nearly as big a deal as finding out where it is currently (it moves around), and that we have taken its protection into account. The sedge looks a lot like other sedges, and is identifiable in the fall. We have hired a botanist to map it out so that we can get our permit renewed, but it is much too late to treat the pond in 2015.



**Englemann Sedge**

We’re truly stuck.

The Town has money set aside for treatment, and it will take even more unforeseen events to stop full pond treatment early in 2016. Early is critical, as we want to stop the weeds before they grow enough biomass to use up dissolved oxygen when they decay.

There is universal agreement that the weed problem is bad, but “wait ‘til next year.”



# Friends of Spy Pond Park next meetings

**at Karen Grossman's  
Sunday, Oct. 25, 2015, 7:00pm  
32 Hamilton Road #402**

Park on Linwood Street off Mass. Ave. or on  
Lakehill off Lake St. at the far end of the complex.

**& Annual Meeting  
at the Jefferson Cutter House  
Sunday, Dec. 6, 2015  
5 pm potluck dinner, 6 pm meeting**

Lower level parking lot entrance, speaker TBD; details to  
be emailed and announced on the FSPP website.

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990  
email [fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org](mailto:fspp@friendsofspypondpark.org)

## To join Friends of Spy Pond Park...

Send your annual dues (\$15 individual, \$25 household, \$5 low-income) to:

FSPP, P.O. Box 1051

Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

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PHOTO BY RUTH SLOTNICK

Richard Norcross rests from pulling invasive plants among the goldenrod