

# Friends of Spy Pond Park Newsletter

## Summer 2009

### President's Letter

Dear Friends,

Plants are growing and trees have flowered in Spy Pond Park. Volunteers have done preliminary weeding and have spread mulch in the planting beds. Thanks for the hard work performed by Jan Jee Bean, Eric Berger, Doris Birmingham, Gerda Brown, Lyle Cadorette, Allison Cooper, Anne Ellinger, Lionel Fergus, Bill Fletcher, Jacki Katzman, Salvie Levett, Gail McCormick, Agnes O'Donnell, Ilse Oliveira, and Greg and Elijah Watt. If I have inadvertently left out your name, let me know so I can acknowledge your valuable contribution to Park beautification. Now, we have to attack the ever-present weeds!

We have asked for more improvements in Spy Pond Park. A representative from the New England Grassroots Environment Fund (NEGEF) contacted me to ask questions about our request for money that would enable us to purchase materials and provide labor required to curb path erosion. By sometime in July we should hear whether or not we'll receive any money from NEGEF. The Jenny Jones Foundation, also, is considering whether to approve our application to them regarding this project. Town Meeting has just approved the Park and Recreation Department's financial request that would provide for resurfacing the playground with small wood chips. This will eliminate the infestation of sand wasps that nested



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

there last summer. We are hopeful that with our support we will see these changes happen in the playground and on the path in Spy Pond Park.

As for a short-term solution, the Department of Public Works has informed us that repairs to the path will not occur until the Fall due to their priorities and staff shortages. Thus, the handicapped ramp and cobblestones that are exposed near the rocky steps at the Pond's edge will remain grooved until the end of the summer and the playground surface remains a potential home for sand wasps. We'll let you know if we hear of any news about either of these issues.

Approximately 75 households have renewed their memberships with FSPP since our solicitation at the end of April. Many generous people contributed additional money to our organization, too. If you didn't receive a solicitation letter or if you just haven't responded yet, we would still appreciate your sending us your dues. I want to thank Cynthia Thompson who has stepped in as Corresponding Secretary on an ad hoc basis to enter data into our database and acknowledge our receipt of your contributions.

I look forward to seeing more people join us to help on scheduled Work Days. We even would appreciate your going to the Park to perform maintenance tasks on your own schedule. Contact Ilse Oliveira or Doris Birmingham (see back cover) to receive some training on what needs to be done. On June 20 we anticipate having much fun in planned activities for children and adults, too.

Thanks for your interest in Spy Pond Park and the Pond.

Sincerely,  
Karen L. Grossman  
President  
Friends of Spy Pond Park



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES



# A Turtle Tale

by Doris Birmingham



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

Seated at the outreach table gazing out over Spy Pond while other volunteers weeded and mulched, I was doing my best to ignore the ice cream truck's repetitive refrain of Joplin's "Enter-tainer" and a nearby father's futile attempts to calm his four-year old's fit of temper. Suddenly, all was quiet. The ice cream trunk had plinkity-plinked away to greener pastures, and I looked up to see the now smiling toddler extending his hand to me. Wriggling around in his palm was a beautiful little turtle, about the size of a half-dollar.

"We found it on the sidewalk," the little boy said. "What should we do with it?" I suggested putting it into the Pond. "Oh,



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

no!" said the dad. "The geese will eat it! Can't we give it to the park police?" I didn't explain that I thought geese were in fact herbivores, but I did say that there were no park police at Spy Pond. "Well then, what about the environmental police?" the dad persisted. I suppressed a smile at the thought that Spy Pond Park, which depends on volunteers to clean, weed and mulch, would enjoy the luxury of either park or environmental police. "Well," I said, "some of our volunteers are experts on wildlife, so why don't we take the turtle to them and ask them what to do."

The father was skeptical, but he and his son followed along as we sought out the volunteer group. After some consultation, our experts decided that the place for the lost amphibian was a place close enough to the water to enable him to choose between water and terra firma. I put him down on a big rock and walked up the embankment to bid goodbye to the seemingly relieved father and son. When I turned around to look at the rock, the tiny creature was gone.

We managed to gather some photographic evidence that accompanies this piece as the basis for further investigation about our little acquaintance. A herpetologist who looked at the photos says our friend may be a painted turtle. However, if any of you can offer additional comments about this turtle's identity or tell us something about his habits or those of others of his kind, please e-mail me at: [dabirming@aol.com](mailto:dabirming@aol.com).

## Weed Treatment Update

by Elizabeth Karpati

The Town has sent out the RFP (request for proposals) for going after the weeds in Spy Pond. Responses are due in mid-June, and treatment would have to be done quickly thereafter, while the weeds are at the right stage of their growth cycle. (The last treatment was on June 10, 2005.) The Pond would be "closed" (no fishing, boating or swimming) on the day of the treatment only, but the Pond water could not be used for irrigation for 60 to 90 days afterwards, until the herbicide has degraded enough to be harmless to the plants being irrigated. The exact length of time depends on whether a booster dose of herbicide is needed after the initial application.

Before treatment the Pond level will have to be lowered somewhat by removing a board from the outflow structure near Rt. 2 because any heavy rain after treatment would send some Pond water "down the drain", wasting the herbicide in it and possibly harming some vegetation downstream. Also, there is an endangered sedge growing in a few spots on the shore of the Pond, and lowering the water level will help keep the herbicide away from it. The board will be replaced after the herbicide is added, and Mother Nature will gradually restore the normal water level.

Once the date of treatment has been set, it will be publicized and abutters notified.

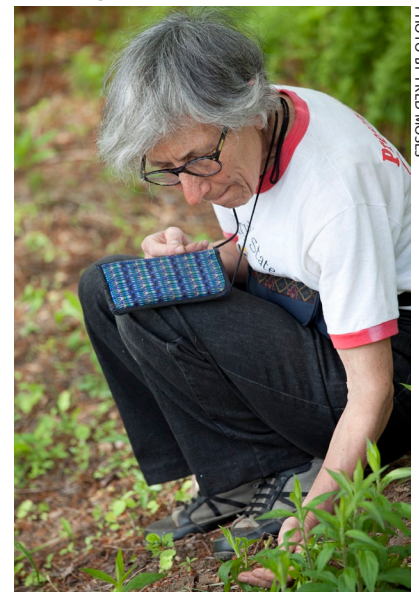


PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

# Remembering Eric William Kurtz

by Dick Rubinstein



My husband, Eric Kurtz, died suddenly on February 13. At my suggestion, a number of our friends have made donations to the Friends of Spy Pond Park in his memory. Eric loved Spy Pond. For the ten years we've lived in Arlington, he walked along the Pond path from our home on Addison Street when he went to swim at the Boys and Girls Club. He was always alert to what was happening on and near the Pond, and always picking up litter he encountered as he walked. Eric

and I walked most nights in warm weather down to the Pond to just see it, with the ducks, swans, and occasional turtles.

Our house does not have a view of Spy Pond. There is a Chinese idea, though, that you can walk to a view, unlike the American ideal of just looking out of the window. We joked that one of the pleasures of living here in Arlington, close to the Pond, was having such a wonderful view of Spy Pond—with the added pleasure of walking to it.

Eric was a casual birder. Real birders are not casual. Eric was not the sort to stand in mud for hours waiting for a sighting of a bird for his lifetime list. Rather, he was alert to birds wherever he was, and could identify most of the birds seen in New England. When he saw a bird that was unfamiliar or unexpected, he was quick to research it, talk to neighbors about the bird, and be alert for further sightings.

If you knew Eric and would like to contribute to the Friends of Spy Pond Park in his name, I encourage you to do so. For myself, I plan to continue to support the organization's work, and to help with maintaining the Pond as a resource and a bit of nature in the center of Arlington. Our friends have also contributed to a memorial fund that plans to erect a bench at the Pond in Eric's memory. We've started the process of donating the bench with the Parks and Recreation Commission, and hope that the process will be completed by fall.

For my part, I will continue to support work of the Friends of Spy Pond Park and the Vision 2020 committee in maintaining Spy Pond for all to enjoy.

*Editor's Note: we thank James Anas, Ruth Curwen, Ronald and Anne Pierrera, Louis Rosenblum, Dick Rubenstein, Stephen and Margaret Senturia, and Jane Weingarten who have donated a total of \$590 to FSPP in memory of Eric William Kurtz.*

# Helping Maintain the Beauty of Spy Pond Park

by Eric Berger

On one lovely Saturday this past April, and three more spring-like glorious Saturdays in May, I took the opportunity to work with other FSPP volunteers as part of a team dedicated to maintaining the pristine beauty of SPP. We weeded, pruned and mulched, and at the end of those four days we had filled about forty very large, doubled-up sturdy brown bags with lawn waste. Although I was weary after each 3-4 hour effort, I felt my body was in better condition. I had pride in my contribution to a worthy cause, and was happily satisfied, too, with the accomplishments of our group. After all, we've left our teenage years in our rear view mirrors, but that sure doesn't slow us down!

When I meander through SPP nowadays, sensing its many treasures, I feel pleasure seeing the fruits of our labors.

Come join our hearty band!

## 2009 Work Schedule\*

Saturday, June 20, 1-4 pm\*\*  
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, July 18, 10 am-1 pm  
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, August 15, 10 am-1 pm  
Weeding, pruning and cleanup

Saturday, September 12, 10 am-1 pm\*\*  
Weeding and cleanup

Saturday, October 17, 1-4 pm  
Fall Cleanup

\*Please mark your calendars now. Contact Ilse Oliveira at 781-646-9332 to volunteer. Bring gloves and gardening tools, if you have them. Meet at the playground at the Pond Lane end of the Park. In case of inclement weather, we'll meet on the next day, Sunday. Check our website, [friendsofspypondpark.org](http://friendsofspypondpark.org) for notices in regard to this.

\*\*There will also be children's activities on these dates. Suggestions for fun activities in the Park for children and adults are welcome; please contact Betsy Leonard-Wright at [betsy@classmatters.org](mailto:betsy@classmatters.org) or call 781-648-0630.



# Can you swim in Spy Pond? Yes and No

by Betsy Leondar-Wright

The most frequently asked question at FSPP information tables is about swimming in Spy Pond.

No, the Pond is not a legal swimming beach. Legal swimming requires lifeguards, chlorine, insurance for Town liability, and other things that Spy Pond doesn't have.

That aside, lots of people do swim in Spy Pond at their own risk. It can be safe and fun for strong swimmers who follow a few guidelines:

- Don't swim barefoot. There are broken glass, metal debris and old pier footings on the bottom. FSPP members have carefully cleaned just two spots for wading, at the foot of the wheelchair ramp below the playground and below the rock steps below Linwood Circle – but we can't guarantee that no one has thrown a bottle since we last cleaned there. Old sneakers, sandals or water shoes will keep your feet safe.
- Don't swim along the Route 2 shore. Motor oil and other pollution enter there via the large drain from the highway. And that whole basin is very shallow, and doesn't mix much with the basin closer to the Park, so the pollutants tend to stagnate there. There is arsenic in the sediment at two spots, one under Rt. 2 and one to the left of Elizabeth Island (looking from the Park) where a lovely lawn with a gazebo juts out towards the Island. The arsenic levels in the water there aren't too high to be allowed in drinking water under the post-2000 lower standards, but children shouldn't put the sediment from those two spots in their mouths.
- Stay away from the weed-choked areas, and don't swim alone, at night, while wearing heavy clothes, or when intoxicated. There have been people who have drowned in Spy Pond, and the circumstances all seem to include some of those ingredients: someone falls out of a boat or swims out alone at night fully dressed after drinking and gets tangled in the weeds. The most weed-free and cleanest spot in the Pond is the deepest part: about two-thirds of the way from the Park to Elizabeth Island, where the water is 38 feet deep and so never has weeds – by far the best swimming area. Unfortunately, it's too far for most children and beginners to swim to, so those who need weed-free water most can't take advantage of it.

So, be careful, but have fun with the Pond this summer. Whether you're just splashing or actually throwing yourself in, there's nothing that beats Spy Pond's water on a 90-degree day!

# Goose Reproduction, 2009

by Bill Eykamp

A little background: some of us can remember when the goose population on the Pond was zero. Then there was one breeding pair. Then success followed success, and all of us remember when goose numbers seemed to be headed for infinity.

For some years the town hired the US Department of Agriculture-Animal Plant Inspection Services to addle eggs-treat them so they did not hatch. They usually visited twice and were about 90% successful, but there were two problems. First, the math: the average goose lays over 1000 eggs in her lifetime. To keep the population steady, only 2 of these need to survive. Factoring in mortality in a benign environment, biologists calculate that >97% of the eggs must be addled just to keep the population static. Second, the USDA is far from free.

The Board of Health decided to give volunteers the task. Two adventurers signed up for the Geese Peace program for "humanitarian goose control". Turns out it is a very popular program, given that geese are a huge North American problem. The adventurers became the trained and licensed volunteers who conduct the annual effort, aided by several other dedicated folk. I am one of those, although my license number is not preceded by 00.

It is really difficult to achieve our goal of >97%. Every year we think we've finally hit 100%, only to get a report of a gosling sighting or two.

Maybe 2009 is our year. Most, but not all, nesting is on Elizabeth Island. I did the first inspection on 4 April and found one pair just starting to build a nest. Others were staking out territory but not getting serious yet. Over the next weeks we paid many visits to nesting sites on the Island and also on shore from the Kelwin Manor phragmites around and into the cove. We treated the eggs as instructed by Geese Peace. On 25 April I visited the Island again and found every nest abandoned and the eggs cracked. Since the incubation time for goose eggs is about 25 days, there is no possibility of a hatch on the Island.

Those who observed all the facts aren't sure how the eggs came to grief. No scenario fits all our observations. Feel free to speculate, but we aren't sure what happened.

Meanwhile it is late enough that someone should have reported a gosling by now if there is one. Our fingers remain firmly crossed. We addled 63 eggs this year, down from 95 in 2005. Progress? I hope so.

*Editor's Note: Geese eggs are being addled because the large number of geese in Spy Pond and Spy Pond Park has become a nuisance and public health issue. The geese litter Spy Pond Park with their droppings. Furthermore, large amounts of goose droppings in Spy Pond overfertilizes the water, contributing to algae blooms. Such algae feed on the nutrients in the water and when their growth is uncontrolled, these algae suffocate fish and plants in Spy Pond.*

# Rowing Club practiced on Spy Pond

by Betsy Leondar-Wright

One day in May I saw several long, thin boats skimming across the Pond, propelled by four or eight strapping young people, with a fifth or ninth person telling them when to row, and with two loud motor boats following them around. Intrigued, I waited until they came up the boat ramp and watched them carry the boats on their heads and put them into the parking lot on the other side of the tunnel.

Turns out they were the Belmont Crew Club – now also known as Belmont *Arlington* Crew Club – high school students who row competitively in races around the region.

I interviewed Head Coach Ted Jenkins about the club right before their season closed at the end of May. He said the club started about five years ago, but in prior years they practiced on the Charles River, until they lost their place at a boat club there. It was experienced rower Rick Stearvas, owner of the Regent Theater, who suggested inviting Arlington High students to join the club and practicing on Spy Pond. The Town of Arlington agreed immediately and offered the parking lot space to store the boats.

It's a little more difficult practicing on a pond than on a river. The club rows a 1000-meter course across the Pond, shorter than the 1500-meter courses they row on races, requiring more turning. Assistant Coach Nick Wright figured out the course using Google Maps; it was hard to find somewhere where three boats could fit side by side and row for 1000 meters. The weeds also pose a problem; the boats can't go to the right of Elizabeth Island. And they have to avoid fishing boats, geese and swans. But in another way Spy Pond is better because there are no other rowers there. The Charles River can be crowded and stressful.

The program grew from 25 kids in 2008 to 76 kids in 2009, still mostly Belmont students; it will probably be over 100 in 2010 because interest is growing in Arlington. It's now really too big a program for just two coaches to handle. Next year Rick Stearvas will become a coach for the club as well. He plans to add skull boats, the kind where each person rows two oars on the two sides, instead of just the current 8s and 4s on which each person rows only on one side.



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

Coach Jenkins got his start rowing in high school with the Community Rowing program on the Charles, but he didn't like it much back then. But then he and Ned Wright rowed crew together at Trinity College and he got hooked.

Reactions within FSPP to this new use of the Pond have been enthusiastic, except for one thing: the coaches' motorboats that go out with the racing boats have gas-powered motors. The club got a waiver on the usual 10 horsepower and 10 mph limit on the Pond. There seems to be confusion about whether or not there is a town or state ordinance against gas-powered motorboats or just a traditional guideline. But during the renovation of the Park, I heard Town officials reassure those concerned that the new boat ramp would attract loud motorboat parties by saying not to worry, because only electric motors are allowed.

A gas leak or oil spill on Spy Pond could be very harmful to the Pond and the animals in it, because water mostly only leaves the Pond by evaporation, especially from the basin near the Park, in which there is no outflow. It's really important not to fill gas tanks in or near the Park and not to take gas-powered motors out on the Pond.

Gas-powered motorboats are extremely noisy. One reason that fishing boats have coexisted so peacefully all these years with kayaks, canoes and quiet enjoyers of the shoreline is because their electric motors are silent as well as clean.

The Parks and Recreation Commission discussed this issue at their June 10 meeting. They told the Rowing Team about community concerns about their gas motors, but didn't add any additional restrictions for now.

Fortunately, Coach Jenkins and a parent of a rower I spoke with were both open to trying to find a way to have electric motors next season, as long as the motors are strong enough to keep up with the 8-rower boats. There's a board of parents that would have to make the decision and find the electric motors.

Let's hope that this is just the first of many springs when we'll see this crew team rowing on Spy Pond, and that they'll be able to do it without any risk to the Pond's ecosystem.

*Adults and boys and girls in grades 7 to 12 interested in learning the beautiful sport of competitive rowing can sign up with the Arlington Recreation Dept. for two-week sessions in July. Call 781-316-3880 or register online at: [http://town.arlington.ma.us/Public\\_Documents/ArlingtonMA\\_RecNotices/0149196A-000F8513](http://town.arlington.ma.us/Public_Documents/ArlingtonMA_RecNotices/0149196A-000F8513)*



PHOTO BY FRED MOSES

# Friends of Spy Pond Park next meeting at Karen Grossman's Sunday, June 14, 2009 7:00 p.m. 32 Hamilton Road #402

RSVP (optional) to 781-646-5990  
email [karen@klgwoman.com](mailto:karen@klgwoman.com)

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

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

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

FSP, P.O. Box 1051

Arlington, MA 02474-0021

For more information, call a Friends officer.

President: Karen L. Grossman (781) 646-5990

General Vice-President: Open

Treasurer: Eric Baatz (781) 641-7479

Recording Secretary:

Elizabeth Karpati (781) 643-4172

Corresponding Secretary: Open

VPs for Communications (Newsletter):

Eric Berger (781) 859-5096

Jamie Ciocco (781) 316-1662

Co-Chairs for Beautification:

Ilse Oliveira (781) 646-9332

Doris Birmingham (781) 641-2392

Website Chair: Fred Moses

[fred@fmoses.com](mailto:fred@fmoses.com)

Co-chairs for Outreach/Park Events:

Anne Ellinger (781) 646-1705

Betsy Leondar-Wright (781) 648-0630

Town Day Coordinators:

Doris Birmingham (781) 641-2392

Ilse Oliveira (781) 646-9332

Grant Writer: Gail McCormick

For newsletter contributions, contact [berkshire2@juno.com](mailto:berkshire2@juno.com)

## Here Comes Summer

by Ilse Oliveira

Summertime, growing up in a small farming village in Austria, was magical—the smell of fresh cut grass to feed the farmer's animals, seeing the fields come alive with different hues of greens and yellows and wildflowers growing along the road. My mother and I used to take walks along some field roads and she would tell me all the names of the flowers. Some had special meanings, like "Wait for me" (Wegwarte), the common blue hickory, which I love. The story my mom told me about blue hickory was that "This young man wanted to see the world and before he left on his adventure, he asked his sweetheart to wait for him until he returned. She did, but he never came back, and she turned into this lovely blue flower."

There were lots of daisies on our walks and my mother called them "Marguerites", her name. They were her and they're still my favorites. I can see them driving along the roads and highways here in New England and I remember my mother. Here is a nice place to be and thanks for the memories.

Friends of Spy Pond Park

<http://www.friendsofspypondpark.org>

P.O. Box 1051

Arlington, MA 02474-0021

## Fun Day at Spy Pond Park

**Saturday June 20  
1 to 4 pm**

*(Rain date Sunday June 21)*

Near the playground & boat ramp by Pond Lane

- Make crafts
- Listen to music
- Solve puzzles
- Do scavenger hunts
- Win prizes
- Learn how to take care of Spy Pond

For more information, call 781-648-0630.