

PARKER RIVER CURRENTS

PARKER RIVER CLEAN WATER ASSOCIATION

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A MR. ROGERS PERSPECTIVE

Pre-pandemic, I was able to see the movie, “A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” a story based on a relationship between Fred Rogers and a cynical New York Esquire writer named Tom Junod. Tom Junod was asked about his thoughts on the movie and his friendship with Mr. Rogers over the years he knew him.

Tom recounted a conversation with Mr. Rogers shortly before he died. He relayed that he had been helplessly stuck in traffic as he watched five people struggle to assist a large Snapping Turtle cross the highway. “Are you going to write about it,” Mr. Rogers said. “No. Why would I write about it?” replied Tom. Mr. Rogers responded, “Because whenever a group of people get together to help another person or one of God’s creatures, a great thing has happened and people want to know about it.”

One of the main missions of PRCWA is to have people connect to the watershed they live in. Many of you have volunteered to collect water quality data, counted alewife heading upstream, helped in the protection of rare species or shared stories and photos. Many programs have been curtailed by the virus pandemic, but we are still involved in watershed activities including trail work, the Blanding’s Turtle project and advocacy.

One of the things I have noticed is the vast numbers of people out and about in the forests and trails. In the past, I seldom came across another person in the woods. Now, it is frequent occurrence to see people out and about enjoying nature.

PRCWA would like to know your observations. Ann Witzig, a member of our organization, has created an App located on our Facebook page and website to document your findings. Please visit this link:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/67e319d0d2894da78348516351e2dcd0>

We are interested in knowing what you have seen, so feel free to contribute.

We hope you all remain well during these difficult times. Please let us know if you have any questions or thoughts.

Stay safe,

George Comiskey
VP, PRCWA

Little River News

Parker River Clean Water Association has been blessed with a \$40,000 Recreational Trails Program grant from the DCR to make the bike trail handicap-accessible and to make sure it is upgraded to proper bike path standards. DCR encourages and welcomes help in the form of volunteer hours as part of PRCWA's commitment in providing matching funds. We had one successful workday on June 20th. Thank you to all that came forward! Another workday has been scheduled for July 11th. Please keep in mind that social distancing and masks are required.

Also, Bog bridges have been partially installed and work is needed to complete a Conservation Commission approved Boy Scout project by installing erosion boards and other work to protect the adjacent wetlands.



We still have one more kiosk to install, protective fencing to place above the culverts and pavement lines and other amenities to provide.

We'd like to give a shout out to two companies: Tropic Star Development, at great expense, has created a path at the Atrium Annex with pavement, stairs and signage from the trail head to the Randal J. Millen Nature Trail. UFP Technologies installed a kiosk and parking area for the Cooper North Pasture Preserve Trail. Recognition and much gratitude must be given to Jamie Tuccolo, Tony Furnari and their hardworking crew for the valiant effort to install kiosks and to do so many "behind the scenes" improvements to the trails.

The reaction by visitors has been nothing but total amazement. So many are overcome by the beauty of the trails, the rich biodiversity so close to an urban center, that many have encouraged me as I have been out working on the trails, to "not to tell anyone; let this be our little secret!"

Happily, we, as an organization, will work to do the opposite as we educate more people about the importance of vernal pools, watersheds, and wetlands!

IS THE PARKER RIVER HEALTHY?

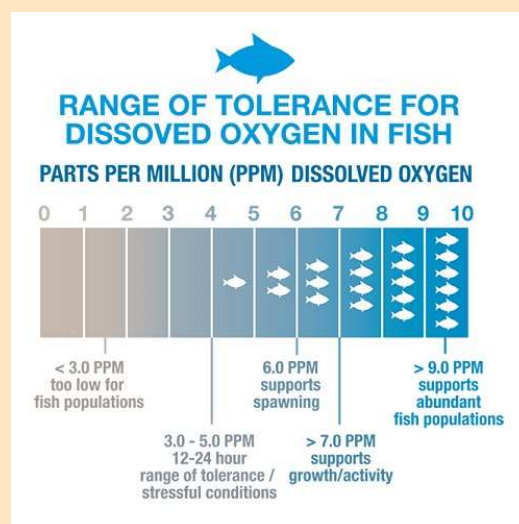
Retired teacher Ann Witzig has created an exciting online review, in story map format, to assist us in analyzing this question. Below are some questions and information that will determine the current status of the Parker River.

Please visit this link: <https://arcg.is/XnDTK> to learn more.

What is a healthy river?



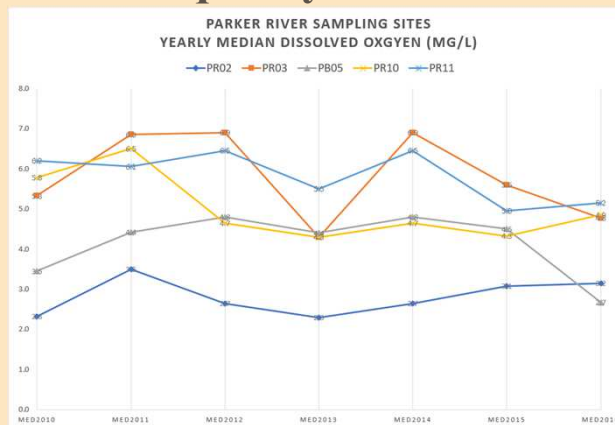
Explaining dissolved oxygen



How is the Parker River doing?



Water quality across time



Recommendations

Please visit this link: <https://arcg.is/XnDTK> to learn more.

The Turtle Times

Another successful Blanding's turtle head-start year is in the books and I want to thank all of our participating teachers at the various schools, volunteers at the Georgetown Peabody Library and especially the students who cared for the turtles. It has been an unusual year, given the COVID-19 pandemic and school closings. Thank you all for your efforts and participation! You all rock and helped make this program a success. On behalf of the turtles, thank you!

Mark Irving, PRCWA Blanding's Headstart Coordinator

2019-2020 Blanding's Head Starting Schools and Sites:

Amesbury Elementary School: Liz Morris - **Georgetown Peabody Library:** Michelle Augeri

Bresnahan School in Newburyport: Julie Malchow, John Gangemi and Nonie Olson

Newburyport High School: Colleen Fallon and Erin Hobbs

River Valley Charter School in Newburyport: Karen Popken, Debbie Collins, Emily (Gala) Doulas, Peter McClure, Melanie O'Keefe, Jane Noyes / Lynne Taylor - **Bagnall School in Groveland:** Laurel Ridge

Hunking School in Haverhill: Kelly Mansour - **Doyon School in Ipswich:** Susan Speak

Amesbury High School: Lindsey Alley - **Triton Regional High School:** Ellen Moore and Tom Horsley

Mass. Audubon Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary in Topsfield: Richard Wolneiwicz and Sara Semenza

Mass. Audubon Endicott Wildlife Sanctuary School in Wenham: Bethany Beers-Mullen

Amesbury Middle School: Derek Bent, Kristin Fitzgerald and Greg Cook

Constentino School in Haverhill: Kim Silvants and Jessica Paquette

Hill View Montessori Charter School in Haverhill: Amy Belanger and Rebecca O'Hearn - **Cashman School in**

Amesbury: Julie O'Neill, Dee Vachon and Joanna Dodier - **Sparhawk School in Amesbury:** Sarah Guard



All turtles were released into various emergent grass and scrub shrub swamps, buttonwood swamps, vernal pools, bogs, and quiet densely-vegetated inlets along the Parker River, close to the nesting sites. There were several release dates: 5/16, 5/23 and 5/24.

Also, a special thanks to Mike Henry, Bruce Ericson, Julie Malchow and Michele Augeri, who helped in the various field releases.

As always, the Parker River Clean Water Association would like to extend a huge thanks to our fellow non-profit and partner organization, the Turtle Rescue League. Through the years of our Blanding's turtle head start program, they've been a huge resource. Thank you!!!

If you can spread the word, I encourage folks to donate at:

<https://www.turtlerescueleague.com/get-involved/donate>

Nature Notes

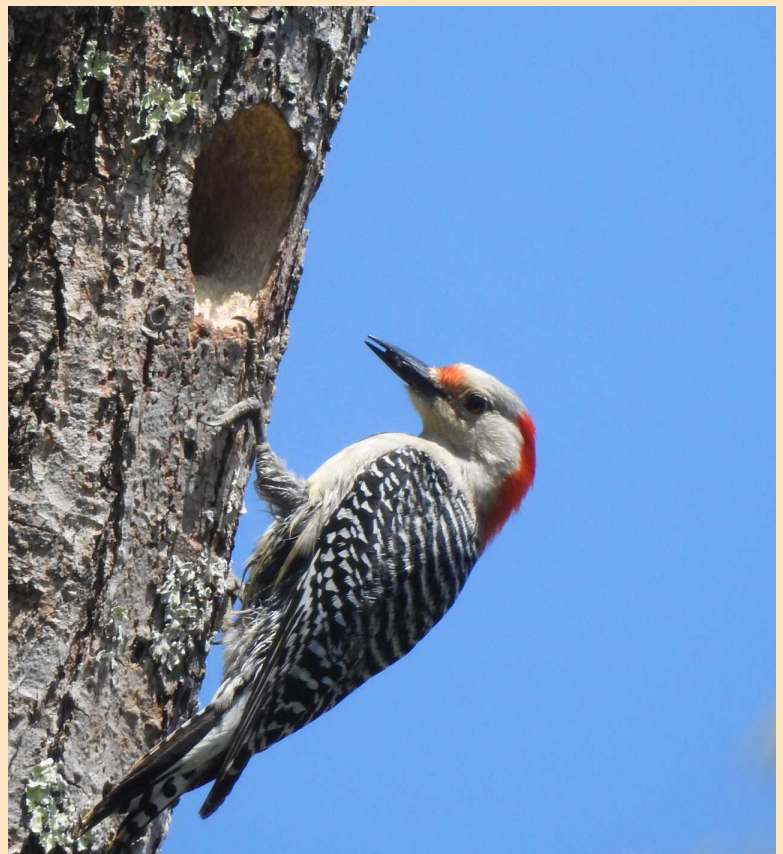
The Red-Bellied Woodpecker, By Dr. Robert Stevenson

I have spent many years helping the Blanding's turtle team locate nesting females in the area around West Street in Georgetown. This effort is part of the PRCWA's nest protection and head start program (see articles by Mark Irving). During these years I have learned to appreciate the wild nature of the upper Parker River as it passes through the large adjacent wetlands and surrounding conservation lands. One of my favorite spots is just as West Street makes a 90-degree bend around the wetland. This is the spot where Lufkins Brook flows under the road into the marsh. Right there is a pull-off next to the sign for the Lufkins Brook Conservation Area. Those wanting to walk in the woods can explore the many trails bounded by Rt. 133, West Street and Pine Plain Road. My attention is often directed at the water. On the upstream side of the brook, there are muskrats living in the bank. Once out across the marsh, there are red-winged black bird males holding territories, while the females are nesting and raising young. Just now the young are fledging. Several other species are commonly observed such as Common Grackles and Tree Swallows. Canada Geese and Mallards are often feeding. Wood ducks, although relatively rare in Essex County, are common in the marsh. One might not notice them until you hear the whirring of their wings as they take flight. The confluence of the brook, forest and marsh creates many chances to see wildlife.

This Spring I have particularly watched a male and female Red-bellied Woodpecker hollow out a cavity to hold their nest (see picture). The name seems a misnomer to me as one can hardly see any red on the belly in the field. What stands out is the red on the head but there is a separate and much rarer species called the Red-headed Woodpecker. (The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology (Lab of O) has extensive descriptions of both the [Red-bellied Woodpecker](#) and the [Red-headed Woodpecker](#)).

I have enjoyed watching the bounding flight of the woodpeckers, hearing them drum on trees in search of food, and listening to their [loud and distinctive calls](#).

If you live near wooded habitat, you have likely heard their calls.



News Around the Watershed

PRCWA Takes Part in Rowley and Georgetown MVP Program

The towns of Georgetown and Rowley are in the process of becoming part of the Commonwealth's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) community. Georgetown is receiving training from the BSC Group, as a result of a grant award from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. Rowley's training is being accomplished by enlisting the staff of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission.

The MVP program focuses on assessing each municipality's strengths and vulnerabilities that would enable an action plan to be drafted on becoming more resilient in the face of Climate Change. Once approved, area towns are eligible for State grants to offset the impacts related to stormwater flooding, drought or other issues related to a changing climate.



Parker River Advocacy

Residents often ask PRCWA to comment on projects that may have an adverse impact on the watershed. In the last few years there have been several developing projects worth noting.

The Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) notified us of two solid waste transfer station proposals in the town of Georgetown: a 300-ton expanded facility that is being proposed on the current site off East Main Street and a 500-ton facility located at the intersection of Rte. 133 and I-95. PRCWA's remarks reflected its concerns related to wetland disturbances, stormwater runoff and impacts on Climate Change. MEPA did not require an Environmental Impact Report be filed by the proponent on either proposal, but did recommend certain guidelines be followed. The two projects are currently in front of town boards.

PRCWA sent comments to the Town of Newbury Planning and Zoning boards on the impact of a Ch. 40B development proposal called, "Byfield Estates." We expressed unease about the strain the project may have on the Byfield water supply and offered suggestions on how the developer may offset the impact. The Board also expressed our concerns in writing about a proposal from the Newbury Board of Health to lift a 300-foot septic restriction meant to protect the stretch of river from the Georgetown line to the Central Street dam.

We heard from residents in Boxford about a change in an agricultural district to convert part of Ingaldsby Farm to a Senior Housing District. Nearby homeowners were concerned about the large development and the effects its withdrawals will have on their own private wells. PRCWA contacted the Drinking Water Program at MassDEP to learn more about this proposal and the overall impacts to Georgetown public wells and the already stressed Parker River.

Heroes in our Midst

Longtime PRCWA member and former Board Director Richard Lombard was named by the Trustees of Reservations as the 2019, “Volunteer of the Year!” It is a well-deserved award for someone who has been dedicated to environmental issues throughout the State. Richard received the award from the Trustees for his work monitoring Bluebird and Tree Swallow nests at the Ward Reservation in North Andover for the last six years.

If this sounds familiar, it is because Rich has been monitoring similar nest locations in the Parker River watershed for decades. Rich is currently monitoring sites in Hampshire Woods in Georgetown, as well as the Common Pasture in Newburyport. A sample of Richard’s work in 2019 appears below:



Nest Sites	West Street Aquifer Field										
Year	2019										
Site Name	Species	Outcome	1st Egg Date	1st Hatch Date	1st Fledge Date	No. of fledged	Max clutch size	Total live young	Unhatched eggs	Hatch Rate	Fledge Rate
1WS	Tree Swallow	At least one host young fledged	2019-06-13	2019-06-30	2019-07-19	4	5	4	1	80.00%	100.00%
1WS	Tree Swallow	Predator known to cause nest failure	2019-05-18			0	5	0	5	0.00%	
4WS	Tree Swallow	At least one host young fledged	2019-05-21	2019-06-09	2019-06-29	4	5	5	0	100.00%	80.00%
3WS	Tree Swallow	At least one host young fledged	2019-05-26	2019-06-12	2019-07-01	5	5	5	0	100.00%	100.00%
3WS	Eastern Bluebird	At least one host young fledged	2019-04-09	2019-04-28	2019-05-15	2	4	4	0	100.00%	50.00%
2WS	Tree Swallow	At least one host young fledged	2019-05-12	2019-06-02	2019-06-22	3	6	5	1	83.33%	60.00%
5WS	Eastern Bluebird	At least one host young fledged	2019-07-04	2019-07-21	2019-08-07	4	4	4	0	100.00%	100.00%
5WS	Tree Swallow	At least one host young fledged	2019-05-15	2019-06-03	2019-06-23	5	5	5	1	100.00%	100.00%

PRCWA salutes the contributions of two members who stepped off the Board last year. Yvonne Buswell has been a tireless advocate on watershed stormwater issues. She is a former member of the Newbury Stormwater and Open Space Committee. Yvonne was also instrumental in making sure our water quality program ran smoothly. We hope to see her in the future, as she spends more time with her family now. She surely will be missed.

Jack Van Loan was one of our longest-serving Board members to step down. He was sort of a jack-of-all trades (no pun intended) when it came to our programs, having been involved in almost everything. The carpenter by trade was also known as the fixer and maker of kiosks. Just drive around the Little River Nature Trail area and you will see his work. I’m sure we will still see him around from time to time. Just mention “Chinese buffet” and he will be at your doorstep.

Thanks to all those through the years who have contributed their time and talent in order to protect the Parker River!

Parker River



CLEAN WATER Association

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Please mail to: PRCWA, PO Box 798, Byfield, MA 01922

Yes, it IS TIME to RENEW your membership, or JOIN the Parker River Clean Water Association. You are on our mailing list because we believe that you are interested in what we are doing – and have participated with us in some of our programs – or have attended one of our annual meetings. Please use the form below to return with your contribution - - and THANKS!

Membership Dues - It's That time!

Parker River *Currents*