

HALL'S POND SANCTUARY

Brookline, Massachusetts

Wildlife Drawings: © 1999 Zackery Zdinak
Brochure designs: Marian Lazar



If you are interested in helping Friends of Hall's Pond maintain and improve the Sanctuary, please contact the Brookline Conservation Commission at (617) 730-2088.

Friends of Hall's Pond was organized as a private non-profit corporation in 1976 to assist in efforts to protect this natural area. The group performs regular clean-ups and trail work, and maintains the formal garden. It also engages in fundraising and various educational projects.

The Friends of Hall's Pond



Please respect the Sanctuary by:
 Visiting quietly
 Keeping pets out
 Parking bicycles outside the Sanctuary
 Staying on marked paths
 Not feeding the wildlife
 Picnicking elsewhere
 Leaving plants and animals undisturbed

Enjoy your visit!

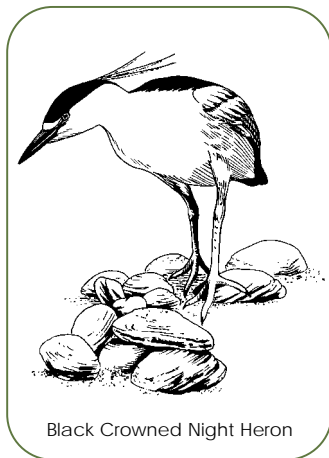
What is special about Hall's Pond?
 Wedged between a busy park and an urban neighborhood, Hall's Pond Sanctuary is an unexpected treasure. The place itself has been shaped and reshaped by human management, yet the pond and woods create a sense of wild nature.

Because the Sanctuary is composed of small parcels acquired from neighboring private owners, it contains a mix of landscaped and more natural elements. Due to its varied plant communities and the fact that it includes one of the few wooded ponds in the area, a surprisingly diverse population of plants and animals exist on this five-acre conservation land. For some plants and animals, especially migrating birds, this haven makes survival possible.

A Brief History

At the time of European settlement, much of the area that is now North Brookline was wetland. Amory Park and Hall's Pond were part of a particular kind of wetland—an Atlantic White Cedar swamp—that extended to the Charles River. The high level of acidity and the low level of oxygen in such a swamp greatly slow down decay, building up peat. The peaty soil that was formed at that time still underlies the park, the sanctuary, and some of the neighborhood. During excavations in 2001, peat and chunks of still-undecayed cedar trees were unearthed.

Early settlers in Brookline cut the cedar trees for their rot-resistant wood and the wet areas were filled for farming or building. Bit by bit, the swamp was almost buried. By the mid 1800's, only a one-acre pond remained.



Black Crowned Night Heron

In 1850, the pond, known as Swallow Pond, was part of the Ivy Street property owned by the family of Minna Hall. She and her friend, Harriet Hemenway, organized their friends to protest the killing of song birds, used at that time to decorate ladies' hats. They founded the Massachusetts Audubon Society which successfully lobbied for legal protection of birds.

Reginald Heber Howe, Jr. described Swallow Pond in an 1899 book, *On the Bird's Highway*, "This bit of country, where Nature still holds sway, is composed of the wilder portions of three estates, and though diminutive in the extreme, it yet offers to the birds all the attractions of marsh, thicket, upland, orchard and wood." He added that there had been plans to fill the pond and run a street through it, but the pond had been so difficult to fill the plan was abandoned.

In 1903, in order to build Amory Park, the Town of Brookline acquired the land that had been the Amory family homestead. Fill was added to raise the playing fields above the water table. The land that is now the Sanctuary remained in private hands.

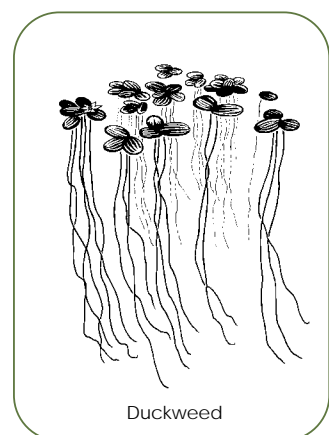
Around 1910, Charles A. Newhall bought the land between Beacon Street and Hall's Pond. He built brick apartment buildings facing Beacon Street, and behind them, provided a formal rose garden for his tenants.

In 1948, the Town built a storm drain system to collect rain water and direct it into Hall's Pond. The area drained is about 110 acres, including Coolidge Corner.

Brookline bought Hall's Pond for the Town's first wildlife sanctuary in 1975. Amory Woods Wildlife Sanctuary was acquired in 1985. By the 1990's, there was increasing worry about the water quality in the pond. Of additional concern were the invasive vines, originally garden plants, which were overrunning the upland.

Beginning in 1995, Brookline planned a major restoration to improve the water quality of the pond and restore suitable habitats for native plants and animals. With state grants, Town funds and private contributions, the renewal project was completed in 2002.

To improve water quality, a sediment forebay was placed at the inlet pipe, so that the first flush of water and litter from the storm drains could be impounded. Two wetland areas were designed and planted. Invasive vines were removed from the upland and replaced with native trees and shrubs and meadow plants. The Amory Woods parcel was joined to the rest of the Sanctuary, new boardwalks were built, and two entrance gates were installed.

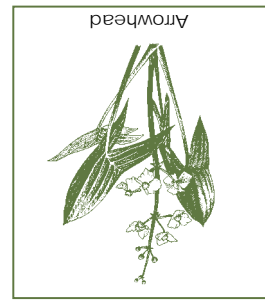


Duckweed

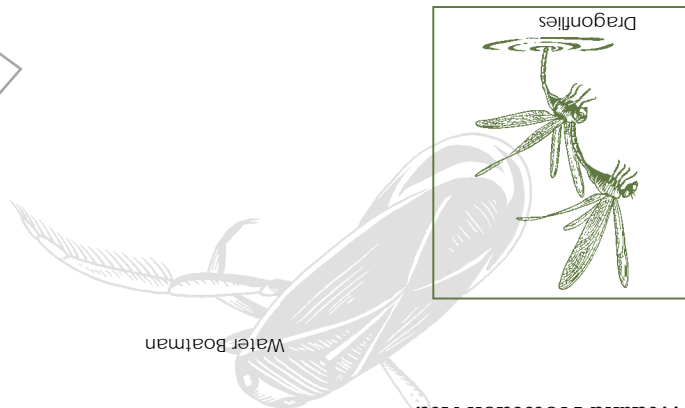
Sanctuaries are different from parks. They protect ecosystems—tangled networks of living things which depend on each other—that cannot survive the mowing, raking and planting that are needed in parks. Nor can they tolerate the disruptions caused by intensive recreational use.

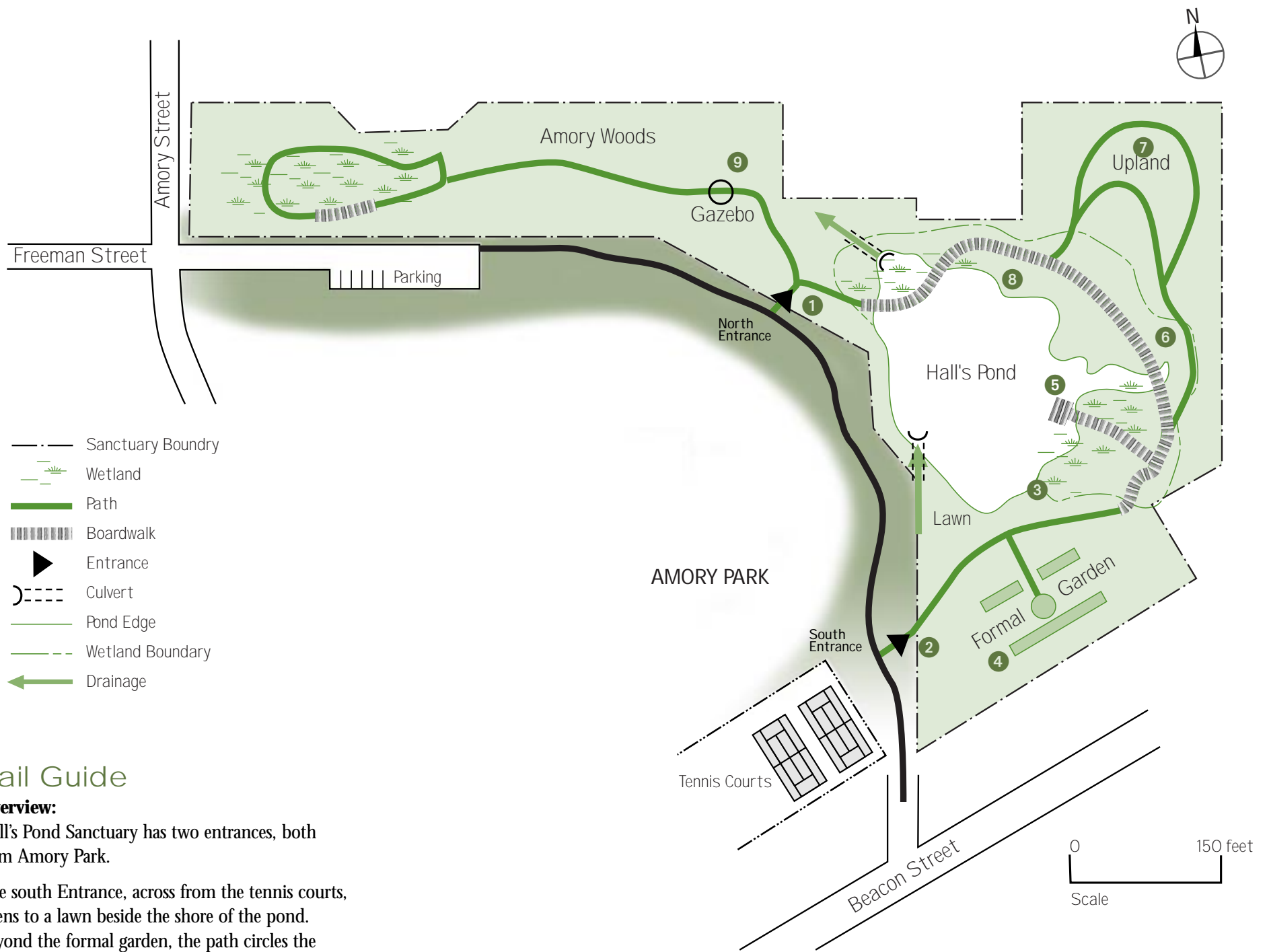
Brookline sanctuaries contain wetlands, including ponds, streams, and vernal pools. These resources are valuable for holding floodwater and replenishing ground water. Since 1972, wetlands have been protected under the Massachusetts Wetland Protection Act.

What is a Wildlife Sanctuary?
 Hall's Pond is one of Brookline's three wildlife sanctuaries. It is owned by the Town and managed by the Brookline Conservation Commission. Brookline sanctuaries have been set aside to maintain habitats for wildlife and to protect the Town's groundwater resources. People also need our wildlife sanctuaries, whether for studying nature or for quiet moments in a natural setting.



Arrowhead





Trail Guide

Overview:

Hall's Pond Sanctuary has two entrances, both from Amory Park.

The south Entrance, across from the tennis courts, opens to a lawn beside the shore of the pond.

Beyond the formal garden, the path circles the sanctuary and leads back to the gate at the North Entrance. To follow this trail guide from the South Entrance, begin at **2** below.

From the North Entrance, near the parking area, the path leads either straight to the wetland bridge and pond or to the left, toward Amory Woods. Please note that there is no path to your right, between the pond and the fence, because foot traffic could erode the bank and damage the magnificent willow trees.

1 The Wetland Bridge and Pond Overlook

The boardwalk crosses a shallow wetland that was created during the 2001 restoration. The wetland helps filter and clean the water in the pond, both by settling and by the action of the plants.

Among the wetland plants are Pickerel Weed, with heart-shaped leaves and spikes of blue flowers, and Arrowhead, also called "duck potato", with arrow-shaped leaves and white flowers. Tiny floating Duckweed plants sometimes cover the water.

The pond overlook provides a full view of the pond, where Painted Turtles bask on logs or slip into the water as people approach. Cormorants and heron hunt for fish and small invertebrates from the pond.

Please don't feed the ducks, fish, squirrels, birds or any of the animals at Hall's Pond. Wild creatures need to find their own natural food; human food can harm them and also degrades the water quality.

2 The South Entrance

This gate opens to a grassy area and the formal garden. Although landscaped, these areas are not park land. Rather, they are significant parts of the sanctuary, providing open space and habitat for diverse species.

3 The Pond

Two large fallen willow trunks serve as seating at the edge of the pond. Dragonflies, Water Striders and Whirligig Beetles patrol the water. Other insects and invertebrates swim below the surface.

Small native fish are present in the pond. The large fish that can be seen just below the surface are carp. These non-native fish tend to crowd out other species. Because they stir up mud from the pond bottom, the sunlight and oxygen available for plants and other animals is decreased.

A cluster of native moisture-loving plants grows at the edge of the pond, including Red-twig Dogwood, Alder, and tall, reedy-looking Cattails.

4 The Formal Garden

An arched trellis leads to the formal garden. This garden has been tended for 25 years by the Friends of Hall's Pond, founded by Josephine Albrecht, to whom the nearby granite bench is dedicated.

Many of the garden shrubs are native, including Shadbush, Witch Hazel and Mountain Laurel. Native flowering perennials include Butterfly Milkweed, New England Aster and Snakeroot. The garden provides food and shelter for a variety of animals, including hummingbirds, butterflies, and garter snakes.

5 The Viewing Platform

A short spur of boardwalk leads to the viewing platform. Poison ivy grows luxuriantly under the boardwalk and up the trees. People can develop a rash from touching this plant, even in winter, but many other animals are not allergic to it. Birds and mice eat the white berries soon after they ripen.

Willows dangle long yellow twigs over the water. Great blue heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Green Heron sometimes hunt food in this sheltered section.

6 The Wooded Wetland

Between the pond and the upland path is a wooded wetland, where trees grow on mounds of soil and water collects during wet seasons. Peat soil lies under the area. As this material decomposes, it releases natural oils as well as nutrients needed by small organisms. This oil on the water may look like pollution, but it is not.

7 The Upland

A side trail to the right loops through the upland area of the Sanctuary. Hall's Pond Sanctuary is so small that its plant communities cannot readily re-establish themselves if they are seriously damaged. During the 1980's and 90's, non-native vines that had escaped cultivation—Porcelain Berry, Oriental Bittersweet, and Multiflora Rose—decimated the native trees, leaving no possibility that the woods could overcome them and regenerate.

Native shrubs and small trees were planted here as part of the renewal project. When they become established, they will naturalize and provide appropriate food and shelter for diverse native animals.

8 The Boardwalk Around The Pond

The boardwalk circling the pond allows access to visitors while minimizing soil compaction and damage to the plants. Cherry saplings, Cat brier and Sweet Pepperbush grow thickly here. Birds hide among them and insects nibble the leaves, flowers, and fruit.

Silver Maples, which stand along the north bank of the pond, reach great size. A major section broke off one of these maples during a storm, splitting its hollow trunk. The closet-sized cavity in the trunk can be seen from the boardwalk. As the fallen part of the tree decays, it will fertilize the soil and provide necessary habitat for a complex community of animals.

9 Amory Woods

The gazebo and naturalized garden plants are relics of private gardens. Over time, trees and shrubs over-ran the gardens, creating a small woodland. In the center is an exceptionally large Northern Red Oak, with a 54-inch diameter and a 60-foot spread.

Blue Jays, crows, hawks, wrens and robins frequent Amory Woods throughout the year, and migrating warblers appear in May and September. Squirrels are active by day, skunks and racoons by night.