

Nashoba Conservation Trust Summer 2017 News

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View of the Nissitissit Meadows

Conservation Corner

Ken Hartlage

Mid-summer is a great time to visit Nissitissit Meadows. Juvenile Bobolinks are exploring the skies, bull frogs are calling and the blackberries are ripening. When the setting sun hangs low in the western sky and the golden meadow grasses sway in the breeze, it can be positively serene. Yet amongst all this pastoral charm something is missing – the monarch butterfly. The population of this once unmistakable sign of summer has been in steep decline for years now, making sightings in Pepperell, and across New England for that matter, all too rare.



So what's going on and, importantly, what can be done about it? Researchers point to several factors: habitat loss, pesticide use and climate change. Climate change is a stickier problem we'll address in future columns, but the first two factors – habitat loss and pesticide use – are addressable today.

Habitat Loss

Adult monarchs in the eastern half of the US overwinter in Mexico, and migrate north in the Spring. When they find milkweed they mate and lay eggs. Those offspring head north and, over successive generations, populate much of the eastern US. Monarchs emerging in late summer migrate all the way back to Mexico. The 2015 USDA report, [*Conservation and Management of Monarch Butterflies*](#), states that "Having both host and nectar plants available from early spring to late fall and along migration corridors is critical to the survival of migrating pollinators." Unfortunately, both types of plants are disappearing due to a range of factors, including the proliferation of lawns, and industrial agricultural practices that make use of herbicides such as glyphosate.

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Ken Hartlage

Pesticides

There's been a lot of press recently about the connection between neonicotinoid pesticides and the decline of honey bee populations. Not as well-known is that neonicotinoid use may be contributing to monarch population decline. A 2015 USDA [study](#) found that milkweed plants located near corn fields treated with the neonicotinoid clothianidin resulted in "high mortality rates of monarch eggs and neonate larvae." These field observations were backed up in laboratory experiments as well.

Taking Action

Fortunately, restoring monarch and other pollinator populations are the focus of both national and state initiatives. In fact, several Massachusetts bills introduced in the House and Senate take direct aim at the problem. Still, there's plenty we can do ourselves to make monarch friendly habitats available by introducing pollinator friendly plants into our landscapes, cutting back on the use of herbicides and halting the use of any neonicotinoid based pesticides. The following resources can provide you with all the details:

- The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is a great resource to get information on what to do and what to avoid <http://xerces.org/monarchs/>
- For a list of neonicotinoid pesticides and their commercial name see <https://xerces.org/wings-magazine/neonicotinoids-in-your-garden/>
- The New England Wild Flower Society is a great resource for native plants and pollinator plants <http://www.newenglandwild.org/grow/pollinators/pollinators.html>

Celebrating Thoreau

Ken Hartlage

"I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness..." And so begins one of Henry David Thoreau's most influential essays, "Walking", first delivered in 1851 as a speech at the Concord Lyceum. When Thoreau speaks of being able to "walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles...without going by any house, without crossing a road except where the fox and mink do", one can't help but conjure up the romantic image of a Thomas Cole landscape. In the meadows, forests and bogs he explored lay the source of our self-renewal, of creative and imaginative thinking that, to Thoreau, were the key to great societies. Yet, at the same time, Thoreau saw all too clearly that the open and wild landscape he cherished was changing in the name of progress. Rivers were dammed to power mills, and wetlands drained for agriculture. By mid-century up to seventy percent of Massachusetts forests had disappeared to fuel economic growth. In a very practical way Thoreau was concerned about the detrimental effect of "man's improvements" on the whole of society, and it is in this context he makes the case for "wildness". He writes: "Life consists with wildness. The most alive is the wildest. Not yet subdued to man, its presence refreshes him." For Thoreau, hope and future "are not in the lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps".

I try to imagine what it must have been like to hear Thoreau speak at the Lyceum, extolling the virtues of quaking swamps as a necessary ingredient to society's progress. Against the backdrop of growing industrialization, it must have sounded very odd indeed. Yet here we are, two hundred years after Thoreau's birth, making the same argument.

Science tells us that exposure to forests, meadows and other natural surroundings enhances cognitive performance and improves creativity. It can even make us more compassionate. Thoreau concludes: "In short, all good things are wild and free". I think he was on to something.

A Walk in the Woods

Maegan Carrasquillo

Almost every day I start with the intention of finding time to spend outdoors. I'll water the flowers, pick some raspberries, and maybe play in the sprinkler with my little one. Then before I know it I'm getting ready for bed and those ideas are lumped into a pile alongside eating better and exercising. We'll start tomorrow.

Recently, I remembered an interesting email from NCT about a walk with a local ecologist at one of the near by trails. We met at the West Side Trail ** located along a dirt road diagonally across River Road from the Town Forest picnic table area. There were signs indicating where the walk would be as well as a few people helpful enough to point me in the right direction. One of the options from the centrally located Walent parking area is to follow the sign for West Side Trail into the woods along the banks of the river and follow the white triangle signs north to the small peninsula, which offers wide, open views of Pepperell Pond and the islands.

When I pulled in, people were gathered around in little groups speaking to others they already knew or starting up conversation about a plant or two. Once everyone had arrived Pat Swain Rice, our local ecologist guide, introduced herself and immediately began pointing out different species of plants around us. We took off along the path, careful to stop and note the different plants being pointed out along the way. At one of the stops we were shown different types of ferns. One, called the 'Bracken Fern', was used by a few as insect repellent. We continued on along the river which was one of the most beautiful views I'd ever seen and honestly never knew existed so close by.

By the end of the walk I had gotten a little more exercise than usual, I'd met a few new people, I'd learned about different plants and some of the animals in the surrounding area, and I'd had a wonderful time. The path isn't too much for beginners, it is a fairly short hike with few inclines and many areas to stop and rest or just admire the wildlife. If you are ever feeling like getting outdoors or doing something different with your family or friends I'd highly suggest starting out with this trail. The path may be a little hidden but trust me after you've been it is a place you'd find hard to forget!

**For more information on the West Side Trail (and many others), please see item #5 in the Pepperell Trail Guide. Available for download from within the newsletter.





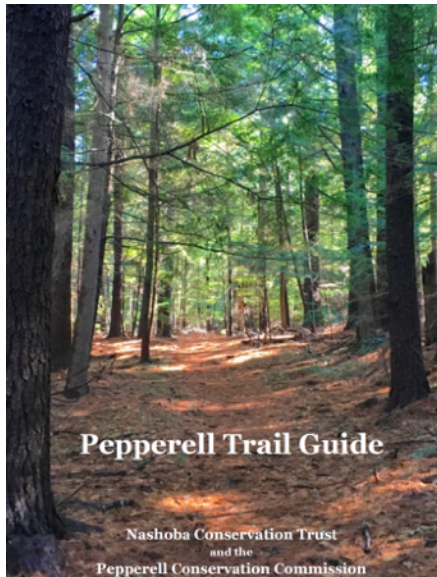
Birches at Heald Orchard

Member Articles

Paul Peavey

As you can see from the article above, we have some excellent writing talent out there in our NCT member base. If you have anything you are interested in or passionate about, from a conservation perspective please use the link below to let us know. 100 – 300 words is about average. We are always looking for volunteers to lend a fresh perspective to our newsletters. Newsletter@nashobatrust.org

Our new 2016 trail guide is available. The guide describes (16) different conservation areas managed by NCT and the Pepperell Conservation Commission. Contained in each section is a description of the parcel, a detailed trail map, and other information to help you enjoy each of these beautiful areas. If you would like a trail guide just visit the NCT website at www.nashobatrust.org



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