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The MIDDLESEX LANDSCAPE

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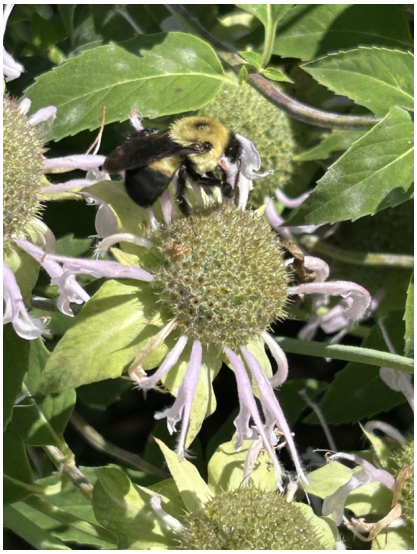
In This Issue:

Nature Note

Fall Insects and the Web of Life

By: Catie Resor



You've probably had the experience of walking along a trail in the fall and finding a little wooly bear caterpillar trundling along underfoot. When I start finding them out and about on a warm fall day, I usually pick them up and transport them off the trail so as to not get stepped on. Whether this is effective or not, I really don't know, but it makes me feel useful. They march along with such purpose, but it's hard for us to know where exactly they are headed. In the past, I have taken for granted that they appear in the fall, only to make themselves scarce the rest of the year. Where do they go?

With the cool nights and beautiful sunny days of fall, you might notice a number of different insects doing their "fall" things. Orb weaver spiders seem to become more ubiquitous in early fall: they seem to be larger, more abundant, and certainly more noticeable when the morning river fog clings to their webs. The bees in my garden rest for the night on the few blossoms remaining, as if they ran out of steam mid-forage the night before and the cool mornings are just not warm enough to get them going again. The crickets are still a constant background chorus, more noticeable on the calm, warm fall days as the

birds get quieter. They'll keep going until they abruptly stop around the first hard frost. **Read more about fall insects...**

Wooly bear in hand

Brown hooded owlet moth larva

Wildlife Spotlight

What's that Sound? The Woodpeckers of Connecticut!

By: Jeff Dickey-Chasins

If you've ever spent an hour in the Connecticut woods, you've probably heard the knocking of a woodpecker's beak against a tree trunk. There are seven species of woodpeckers that frequent our forests, parks, backyards, and orchards. Woodpeckers help the ecosystem by keeping down the insect population—including tree-damaging pests—and providing nest cavities in the trees for birds and mammals that can't excavate a hole themselves, such as nuthatches and squirrels.

Why do they peck? First, they are hungry and spend much of their time looking for spiders and insects. To help with this, they have long, sticky tongues with barbed ends that excel at snagging insects. In order to easily maneuver on tree trunks, they have two toes that face forward and two that face backward. When they drill into the tree, they of course produce wood dust—which is filtered out by bristles lining their nostrils. **Read more about the woodpeckers you may see (and hear) at one of our properties...**

Get Involved

Are you interested in getting involved with the Middlesex Land Trust? We want your help! Here are some ways you can make a difference:

Do you have a creative streak? Like to write or take photos? We'd love to feature your content in future newsletters, our website, or Facebook/Instagram. Submit your creative works, including essays, narratives, photos, photo essays — even poems!

Volunteer with us. Whether it's helping maintain our trails and preserves or pitching in with creative or administrative tasks, we could use your help!

Tell us your stories: How have our preserves or conservation work touched your life — share a memory, a feeling, or a story that shows why protecting these places matters.

Get Involved Today!

Environmental Report

CT Council on Environmental Quality Issues a Mixed Annual Report

By: Ralph Urban

Earlier this year, the Connecticut Council on Environmental Quality issued its 2024 annual report, *Environmental Quality in Connecticut*, on the condition of the state's air, water, land, and wildlife. The report describes a mixture of successes and inadequacies in summing up the state of Connecticut's environment. In its transmission letter to the Governor, the council noted federal abdication and backtracking on environmental issues, asserting that Connecticut "must rise and fill the gap, and lead by example." Using some forty measures of environmental health and human activity, the report details where the state is succeeding and where it is falling short—covering air quality, land stewardship, water, wildlife, invasive disruptors, materials, energy, transportation, and compliance.

While air and water quality have generally improved, climate change poses significant challenges for plants, animals, and people, increasing droughts, extreme rainfall, and invasive species. The report also highlights slow progress toward open space and farmland protection goals and makes twenty-three recommendations focused on reducing pollutants, promoting nature-based solutions, protecting water quality, preserving land, and increasing environmental protection resources. **Read the full summary of the report...**

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News

Highland Pond Dam Removal: Restoring the Flow of Sawmill Brook

This summer marked a major milestone for the Middlesex Land Trust: The completion of the dam removal and stream restoration at Highland Pond Preserve in Middletown. The project has transformed a century-old impoundment into a reconnected, free-flowing stretch of Sawmill Brook.

At its heart, this effort is about **restoring the natural hydrology and stream habitat** of Sawmill Brook so it can once again function as a connected ecosystem. By reestablishing the brook's natural flow, we've reconnected its headwaters to Long Island Sound and in the process restored the ability of fish to migrate upstream. The restored channel now supports a variety of habitats–pools, riffles, and flood plains–that will benefit native fish, aquatic invertebrates, and wildlife throughout the surrounding landscape.

With the dam gone and a series of naturalized rock weirs in place, **fish and other aquatic life can move freely upstream for the first time in more than a century**. The improved flow opens habitat for brown and brook trout, white sucker, American eel, common shiner, fallfish, and blacknose dace. Over time, as downstream populations strengthen, migratory species such as alewife and sea lamprey may also return to the upper reaches of the brook. **Read the latest on the Highland Pond Dam removal project...**

The Middlesex Land Trust is a non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve open space in northern Middlesex County (Durham, Middlefield, Middletown, Cromwell, Portland, and East Hampton).

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