



Natural News

Fall/Winter 2020

A publication of The Hamden Land Conservation Trust

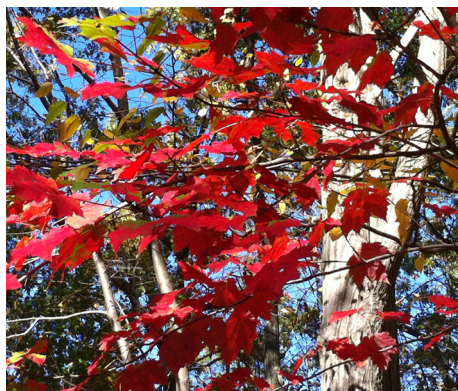
Photo credit: Connie Gersick

President's Message: Carrying on with Lessons Learned

Reflecting on the past and looking to the future

It has been more than a year since we were able to gather together in person for our annual meeting and so much has changed in our lives since then. I do miss greeting all of you, getting to know you better and talking about what you think is important to our mission. Everyone has been affected by the pandemic, either directly or indirectly. We've had to be creative with the ways we communicate, shop, educate our children and spend our time. Most importantly we've learned to be thankful for all that we still have and recognize that life can change in an instant.

Many people have turned to the outdoors as a way of decreasing



stress, filling the voids in their daily routine and finding a safe way to maintain connection. I hope that some of you have visited land trust properties as part of this. Even a short walk helps you to focus on the world around us and discover how wonderful time in nature can be.

Because of difficult economic times many non-profits are struggling. I am so grateful to our members and other supporters for standing by us throughout these last few months, and answering the call for assistance with the Step Up for Brooksvale Campaign. In return, I promise to keep to our mission of preserving and protecting open space in town, and educating the public on the importance of public lands to our physical and mental well bring.

It is my hope that once we return to our usual routines we

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don't forget the lessons we have learned from this disaster. We need to incorporate the ideals of family, home, compassion and community into our lives as we move forward. Our land trust community remains strong and committed to dealing with whatever future challenges we may face. I am optimistic that with your support, the dedication of our board and partnerships with other like-minded groups 2021 will be a good year for HLCT. Thank you all!



HLCT President Gail Cameron.

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Metamorphosis at The Brethren

A remarkable Eagle Scout creates a gift for the community

- By Tim Mack

North Haven Eagle Scout, Sean Stetson and I stood in front of the newly established pollinator garden on the HLCT property known as The Brethren, located at 1381 Shepard Avenue. The expansive garden was Sean's Eagle Scout project. As we stood at the garden, various types of bees were gathering pollen on a native flowering plant, Anise Hysop, also known as Hummingbird mint. Many other diverse native flowering plants gently swayed in the light breeze on a warm and sunny morning. These native pollinator plants benefit native insects by providing nourishment and shelter.

Sean was showing me pictures of the Monarch butterfly's larva stage that he photographed on some Swamp milkweed planted in the garden. The larva would soon enter the pupa stage (chrysalis) before emerging as a butterfly (eclosion). The excitement was evident in Sean's voice, as he knew that he was responsible for a garden that would attract these incredible pollinators.

Sean approached HLCT about a year ago to pitch his idea for a pollinator garden. The land trust was thrilled that his project would align with the Pollinator Pathway initiative, a collaboration between HLCT and other land trusts along the Farmington Canal trail. Sean plotted the numerous steps involved in establishing a garden on a 20x50 foot bank covered in invasive myrtle. He enlisted the help from a host of Troop 608 scouts, parents and friends to eradicate the myrtle and plant the native flowers and shrubs.

The leadership and determination Sean displayed was evident as he accomplished the various stages of planting a pollinator garden that would attract bees, birds and butterflies. In a sense, I witnessed

the metamorphosis of a Boy Scout evolving into an Eagle Scout. I also witnessed an impressive upgrade to a long-held property of the land trust whose flowering plants are now there for everyone to enjoy.



Sean Stetson spending time in the garden he created for his Eagle Scout project.

The Best Flowers of the Northeast and How to Have Them

A closer look at two exceptional pollinator plant species

- By Eliza Caldwell

Asters and Goldenrod are incredible flowers. Their benefits are myriad and the best part is you probably have them growing wild in your yard. They're very easy to care for, here's how: ignore them. The key to having them in the fall is identifying them in the spring.

Last week, I visited the goldenrod in the sunniest spot of our yard multiple times throughout the day. It was absolutely swarming with bugs, and different times of day brought different insect visitors.

What are the best things about asters and goldenrods? I've counted 25+ species of insects on the asters and goldenrod, and that's only because I can't differentiate between

bumblebee types so they count as one. These plants harbor the most beneficial caterpillars of all herbaceous plants. This supports more moths/butterflies and therefore more birds. They bloom late September into October when you're feeling kind of sad about summer ending. They grow without any care or attention from you. They evolved in our climate conditions so they require no watering and no special soil. If you have a yard, you quite possibly have them already.

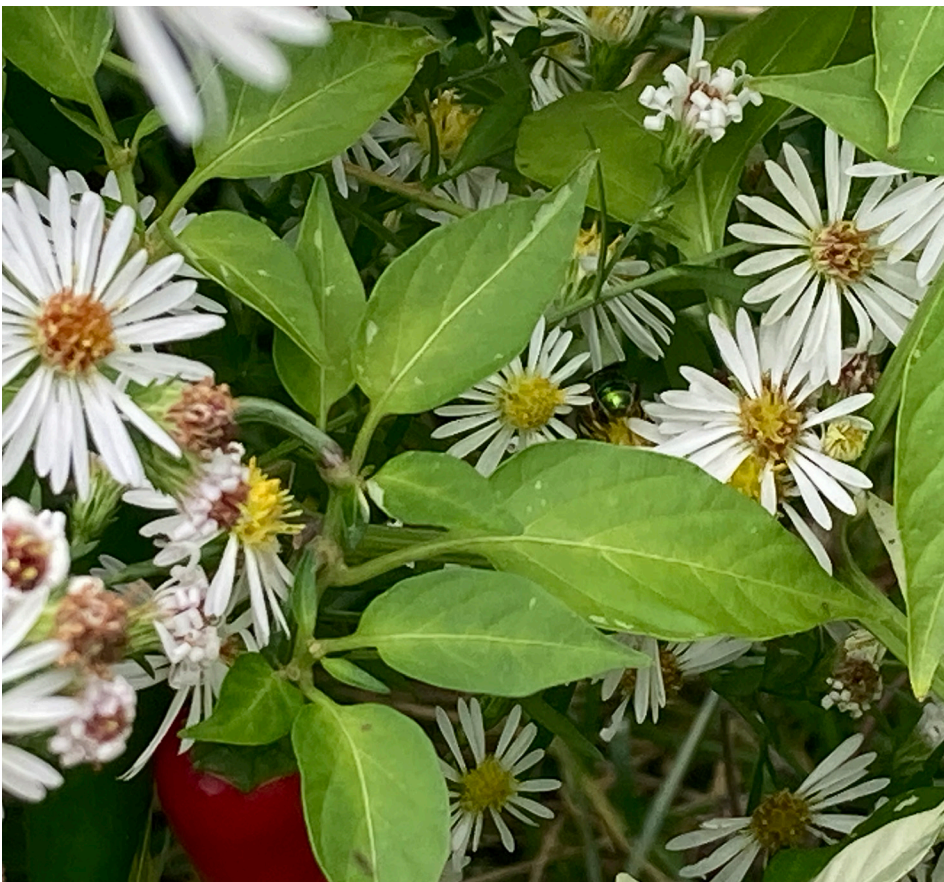
If you have plants that look like young asters/goldenrod but you're not certain that's what they are, (admittedly, lots of plants look like them) just let them grow. Over the

course of the season, they'll exhibit more traits, and you can identify the plants by googling descriptions of what they look like. Maybe you will get asters and goldenrod in the fall, or maybe something else. The only thing you really need to worry about are invasives, and if your mystery plant turns out to be one of those, dispose of it properly.

One final note about asters and goldenrod: woodchucks help you maintain them. Before something happened to him, the woodchuck who visited our yard liked to nibble on the asters. Asters and goldenrod have apical dominance, which means the buds below the top will grow if the top is damaged. These nibbled asters bloom later, extending the pollen availability for insects. It's almost like nature works together in a perfect system. So please don't harm or remove woodchucks. Also, if you accidentally weed whack your asters or goldenrod before June, they'll just bloom later. You can also grow them in pots if you don't have a garden.

I really hope this inspires you to treat yourself to some of the most magnificent flowers the Northeast has to offer. You deserve them.

*Eliza Caldwell is Community Gardens Manager for Gather New Haven and the author of the blog "A Yard to Feed Everybody" at www.yardtofeedeverybody.com. Her article *The best flowers of the Northeast, and How to Have Them* appeared on her blog on October 7, 2020 and is used here with permission.*



Asters support an abundance of important pollinator species.

On The March

Following the path of Banded Woolly Bears

- By Jim Sirch

We often think of migration as long-distance treks by birds, mammals, and fish traveling to wintering or nesting grounds. Animal migrations, however, can be short. It can even happen right in your own yard or neighborhood. Right now, Banded Woolly Bear caterpillars (*Pyrarctia isabella*) are on the move and looking for places to overwinter, such as under a log or in leaf litter. You can see them crawling around in many different habitats. Taking a walk around the neighborhood recently, I spotted quite a few and helped them cross the road.

The Woolly Bear caterpillar is the larva of the Isabella Tiger Moth. They are found throughout most of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. These two-inch (5 cm) caterpillars are usually black on the ends and brown in the middle. If you have never touched a Woolly Bear, they don't actually feel like wool. They are covered with 13 rows of soft bristles called setae.

There is some weather folklore associated with Woolly Bears. You might have heard that if the caterpillars have a wide brown middle band, it will be a mild winter. Or if the black bands at the end are wide and the middle brown band is narrow, expect cold and snow and a more severe winter. In reality, differing band length is partly due to genetics and how mature the caterpillar is, as the brown bands tend to widen with age. Research suggests wetter weather can also widen the black bands.

Other lore has to do with direction. If the caterpillar is traveling



Looking at this Woolly Bear caterpillar, will it be a mild winter? In reality you can't predict how severe the winter will be based on how thick the brown or black bands are, but it is fun to think about! Photo by Micha L. Rieser via Wikimedia Commons.

south, expect a harsh winter. If it is going north, winter will be mild. I'm not sure about east or west though!

Woolly Bear larvae have been found as far north as the Arctic, where temperatures can reach -90°F (-68°C)! These larvae are amazingly adapted to get through harsh winters—their bodies produce a cryoprotectant, an anti-freeze with glycerol, that keeps cells from freezing. The caterpillar's setae also protect it from fluctuating winter temperatures. When spring temperatures rise to 50°F (10°C), the larvae will spin cocoons and a few weeks later pupate into adults.

In Connecticut, there are two broods of Woolly Bears. The first brood ecloses, or hatches, from cocoons and emerges as adult Isabella Tiger Moths in mid-summer. The

second brood overwinters as larvae to pupate in the spring. Female moths put out a scent to attract males and after mating will lay batches of 100 or more eggs. The eggs hatch four to five days later. Woolly Bear larvae are generalist feeders and eat a variety of herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees.

Next time you see a Woolly Bear caterpillar, you can thank yourself for leaving leaves and logs in your yard to help them get through the winter.

Jim Sirch is Past President and a board member of the Hamden Land Conservation Trust. He is Education Coordinator at the Yale Peabody Museum and the author of the blog "Beyond Your Back Door" www.beyondyourbackdoor.net. They're on the March appeared in Jim's Blog on October 30, 2020 and is used here with permission.

Here and There: An Opinion

Exploring the consequences of a meat-based diet amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

- By Willow Ann Sirch

When we think about the benefits of open space where we live, we think of hiking in nature, observing and photographing birds, and appreciating the colors of autumn leaves. But for many people in the world, preserving and protecting land is a matter of survival.

When outbreaks of COVID-19 at meat processing plants in the U.S. slowed production, American wholesalers and grocery chains turned to foreign beef suppliers. Nicaraguan producers were happy to fulfill the demand and Nicaragua, a country the size of Mississippi, became the third largest supplier of frozen beef to the United States.

According to Nathan Halverson, Emmy Award-winning producer for Reveal, an arm of the Center for Investigative Reporting, as beef exports have increased to the U.S., so have attacks on small Indigenous communities in Nicaragua, resulting in whole villages being decimated. In a PBS News Hour segment that aired on October 20, Halverson interviewed native Nicaraguans who asserted that cattle ranchers are stealing Indigenous rain forest land from these vulnerable communities and using slash-and-burn techniques to create cattle-grazing land. The Indigenous people who live there are losing their land, their way of life, and even their lives.

U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (South Dakota-R) has been looking into imported beef. In an interview with Halverson, he said, "Most Americans don't even realize they're eating Nicaraguan beef....

If a meat production plant slices it up here, they can put a "Product of the USA" sticker on it." Consumers are none the wiser.

Although I haven't visited Nicaragua, I have visited rain forests in Trinidad, where we saw blue morpho butterflies and amazon tree boas in the wild, and observed a tree so densely packed with scarlet ibis, it looked like it was on fire. I've also had the opportunity to meet Indigenous people in Ecuador. For a number of years, my husband coled an annual service trip to the Rio Napo region, taking water filters, and medical and school supplies to Indigenous people living there. On one such trip, we traveled the river in a motorized dugout canoe, avoided bullet ants, and played Bluegrass for the community, who then shared their music and dance

traditions with us. Like Indigenous people in Nicaragua, this community was largely marginalized by its government. Although we did not see evidence of rain forests being decimated for cattle ranching, we were told it was happening nearby. For those of us who are passionate about protecting land, it's time to consider the wider picture. As my high school English teacher used to say, "Once we become aware of a truth, we become responsible to it." By the same token, when we protect land anywhere, we become connected to protecting land everywhere. Is eating beef, much of which comes from South America, worth decimating rain forests, releasing carbon that contributes to climate change, and violating the rights of Indigenous communities? These are questions worth asking.



Rain forests have been called "the lungs of the planet" and are home to a wide range of species, including the blue morpho butterfly pictured above.



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You Stepped Up for Brooksvale!



You did it! Thank you to everyone who donated to your land trust's Step Up for Brooksvale Campaign. With your help, we raised \$60,000 to help the town cover costs associated with the open space acquisition at the park. We are in the process of donating the funds to the Town of Hamden to help cover the costs of remediation as required by the State OSHA grant that was awarded to the Town in December 2018. Now, more than ever, we need green spaces for safe, outdoor recreation and family time.