



Natural News

Spring/Summer 2021

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Photo credit: © Derek Ramsey / derekr Ramsey.com

President’s Message: A Seasonal Update

Plenty of good news to go around

Poet, author and farmer Wendell Berry once wrote, “We have the world to live in on the condition that we will take good care of it. And to take good care of it, we have to know it. And to know it and to be willing to take care of it, we have to love it.”

Those few sentences encompass our passion at Hamden Land Conservation Trust. We have been blessed with the magnificent gift of this earth, but without our love and care. it may not always be there for us. We need to be the guardians and stewards to pass the gift of a livable environment on for generations to come.



HLCT President Gail Cameron.

We take our obligation to the natural world seriously. Protecting land is just the beginning. Our properties are welcoming to people and wildlife alike. Improvement of habitat, invasive plant removal, and trail management are done as often as possible. We plan for the future by looking for ways to link open spaces to provide wildlife-safe corridors. Our educational programs cover a wide range of subjects, and they help us all understand the importance of open space.

We have several good news items to share with you. Our pollinator pathway program is moving ahead with Board Member and former HLCT President Jim Sirch at the helm. We’ll continue to promote the use of native plants free from pesticides. The Brethren property pollinator garden has been expanded with a project by a Girl Scout Gold Award candidate, and we’ll be installing a new entrance garden at Johnson’s Pond with the help of a Master Gardener and HLCT friend.

We’re also very happy to announce the acquisition of a new property at 550 West Todd rear. This 9 acre parcel is wooded with some wetland and an intermittent stream.

We have been blessed with the magnificent gift of this earth, but without our love and care it may not always be there for us.

It was very generously donated to us by Kate Stoddard and Mike Schwartz. It is not open to the public but we hope to lead occasional walks there in the future. The Stewardship Committee will begin this year by doing a baseline assessment of the plants and wildlife there. They will develop a plan for future management.

Lastly I want to thank everyone who supported our “Build a Better Brooksvale” campaign. The Town has now finalized the purchase of 42 acres to add to the park. It was because of our efforts to secure

In this issue:

- President’s Message.....1
- Riding Again in Rock to Rock.....2
- Medallions for Clean Water.....3
- Milkweeds Aren’t Weeds.....4
- Preserving Olin Powder Farm.....5

funding and the donations from many of you that this was able to come to fruition. The Brooksvale expansion will allow more trails for more hiking opportunities for families. It will also help preserve

water quality, and provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.

Please continue to follow our website and Facebook pages for announcements. We expect to have more online programs for you in the

weeks and months ahead, and are really looking forward to the time when we can gather in person again to celebrate nature and open space.

Riding Again in Rock to Rock Earth Day Event

Over \$1,000 raised for Hamden Land Conservation Trust

- By Craig Repasz

Greater New Haven has celebrated Earth Day with the Rock to Rock event since 2009. The event is a fundraiser bicycle event that traditionally ends in a festival in New Haven's East Rock Park.

"Each organization raises money for their different projects — urban farming, climate education, climate organizing, tree planting, advocacy," said Program Coordinator of the New Haven Léon Sister City Project Chris Schweitzer, one of Rock to Rock's partner organizations. The theme this year was "Save the Seas,"

with the tagline "The oceans are rising and so are we."

Covid remained an obstacle to the event this year. In 2020 the event was virtual with riders doing their routes on their own and posting their photos and accounts to social media to raise money.

For the 2021 event, the cyclists were all masked and departed in groups of ten escorted by two ride marshals to maintain social distancing. There was a Metric Century route (100 kilometers or roughly 66 miles) and the popular

20-mile route, with both starting and ending in East Rock Park. Many families chose an easier 2-mile ride at Edgewood Park suitable. For non-bikers, local nonprofits Gather New Haven and Common Ground also led nature walks in East Rock Park and West Rock Park.

In order to take part in the Rock to Rock ride, bikers were asked to individually raise at least \$100 each. This year 25 local organizations fielded 567 riders and raised over \$131,000 for environmental causes. The Top Teams were Massaro Farm raising \$34,685; Common Ground High School, \$21,056; Urban Resource Initiative, \$14,691; Save the Sound \$2,746; Community Placemaking Engagement Network Inc, \$2,585; and, New Haven Léon Sister City Project, \$2,515.

Hamden Land Conservation Trust had two riders Steve Wood and Craig Repasz and 12 donors who raised a total of \$1,075.00.

Individuals that raised more than \$100 by April 6 got a free Rock to Rock t-shirt, and the first 20 riders to raise \$1,000 or more got a \$25 gift certificate to a New Haven restaurant. The individual who raised the most money received a new bike donated by The Devil's Gear Bike Shop, one of the event's sponsors.



Riders biked through East Rock Park to raise money for our environment.

Cleaning Our Waters, One Medallion at a Time

Rock to Rock Day of Service: Storm Drain Medallion Project

- By Tim Mack

During a torrent of rain, a discarded cigarette butt bobs and rolls in the curbside cascade of surging rainwater. This cigarette filter merges with a flotilla of a soda bottle, a plastic coffee cup and a pandemic mask. This newly formed trash is swept into a storm drain as the echo of water reverberates noisily back to the street above. The convoy of trash recollects in the burbling pool and continues to loosely navigate the labyrinth

of underground pipes and tunnel culverts that traverse for miles beneath Hamden.

The above scenario is the consequence of what happens to litter that is discarded onto the streets of Hamden. Unfortunately, these storm-drain basins are also used by the public to dispose of toxic fluids. The storm water and litter debris will drain from pipes into the Mill River or the West River and then eventually into Long Island



The medallions that were applied to 100 storm drains.



Above: The volunteer group poses for a group photo before getting to work. Below: Volunteers applied "no dumping" medallions to a storm drains throughout Hamden.



Sound, adversely affecting wildlife. Commonly found objects in these trash traps include cigarette butts, food wrappers, beverage bottles, cups, plates, bottle caps, straws and single-use bags.

On Saturday, April 10, the "Rock to Rock" Day of Service, a day of community environmental action, was performed. Craig Repasz, a Hamden Land Conservation Trust (HLCT) board member and Rock to Rock cyclist, led members of the HLCT, Hamden Inland Wetland Commission and Quinnipiac University students to apply these "No Dumping" medallions to 100 storm drains dotting the streets between Hamden Middle School and The Government Center.

The Long Island Sound Medallions were supplied by the Mill River Watershed Association, obtained by a grant from the Claire C. Bennett Watershed Fund. MRWA partnered with Hamden Inland Water Commission and HLCT to supply these medallions to educate the public about the impact of littering and dumping trash into storm water catch basins.

Milkweeds Aren't Really Weeds

A closer look at an important pollinator plant species

- By Jim Sirch

I am always confounded that the top pollinator plants in our ecosystems are called weeds. Joe-Pye Weed (*Eutrochium spp.*) and Sneezeweed (*Helenium autumnale*) are two examples. I prefer the name Helen's Flower for Sneezeweed. This plant, once used by some Native peoples as a snuff, doesn't cause allergies at all. Weeds are usually defined as unwanted plants growing in a certain location. Maybe these plants encroached on farmers' forage fields and were not palatable to livestock. Perhaps if our local Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) was called "Monarch Butterfly Flower" it would get less of a bad rap.

Now, with the news of world pollinator declines and the movement to improve backyard biodiversity, milkweeds are all the rage. They should be, for not only are these plants among the top pollinator nectar plants for all kinds of native bees and butterflies, milkweeds are the only larval food plant for the Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). Monarch



Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) nectaring on the fragrant flowers of Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) Photo by Katja Schulz from Washington, D. C., USA / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)

Butterfly caterpillars feed only on the leaves of milkweeds. The caterpillar will crawl up the stem and bite the plant's midrib to cut off the flow of milky, sticky sap, and then move to the outer edge of the leaf to begin feeding. They do ingest some of this milky substance, which contains a heart poison (a cardiac

glycoside). This sap deters many other insects, but the Monarch has evolved with this plant and is not harmed by it. In fact, the chemical makes the butterflies toxic to birds and other predators.

Three milkweed species are most common in our area: Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), and Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Common Milkweed spreads by rhizomes, so the plant tends to roam. You will need a bit of space to let it do so. I let the grass grow in a section of my lawn, but the milkweed has decided to pop up in another area. Oh well. I'll just leave it for the Monarchs and gradually get rid of more lawn.

Butterfly Weed and Swamp Milkweed are both clumping species and would be fine in a pot outside your apartment or planted



One of the most attractive milkweeds for Monarch Butterflies is Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*). Despite its name, Swamp Milkweed can do fine in regular garden soils. Photo by peganum from Small Dole England/ CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>)

in your garden. Butterfly Weed can take dry soils once established, and is very adaptable.

Swamp Milkweed, as its name implies, likes moist soil, but it is also adaptable to regular garden soil. Monarch butterflies, like other pollinators, are better able to see and find a grouping of plants rather than an individual milkweed hidden within lots of other plants. Here in Connecticut, there are several generations, or broods, of Monarchs. The final generation is

the “Methuselah” brood.

Monarchs that hatch, or eclose, in this final brood in September will migrate 2,800 miles to a mountaintop oyamel fir forest in Mexico’s Monarch Biosphere Reserve! These have never been there. Scientists think they use Earth’s magnetic field and the sun’s position to guide them.

Many families like to raise Monarchs by seeing them through their life stages from egg to larva to pupa to chrysalis, and then release

the adults. But research has shown that raising these butterflies indoors can cause them to not migrate successfully. Monarchs that are raised outdoors and purchased locally, rather than from elsewhere, are better able to migrate.

We can all help pollinators like the Monarch. Whether on an apartment stoop, in a garden, or at nearby open lot—plant it and they will come.

Read more at www.beyondyourbackdoor.net

Saving the Olin Powder Farm Property

A 100 acre gem right in our backyard

- By *Bob Pattison*

Some 52 years ago the Hamden Land Trust was formed in part to save this 100 acre parcel from development and for future generations to enjoy. Though many years have gone by, the HLCT is hopeful that this may soon become a reality.

The Powder Farm, as it’s known locally, was purchased by Olin in part between 1889 – 1915 and was used to store gun powder and other materials used by the company’s former Winchester operations in New Haven. In later years it was used as a firing range to test ammunition (there are still today earthen bunkers on the property that stored much of these goods) and this use continued through both World Wars. In the post war era it was used as an industrial waste site and materials were disposed of through burning.

The property has been restricted since the 1980’s and some DEEP mandated clean up has taken place in the intervening years. The RWA monitors the water that flows into

the watershed from the ponds and there has been no effect on the quality of water. This fresh push to make this property open space has been spurred on by the fact that Olin is now (having taken care of the remediation of the Newhall neighborhood) turning it’s attention to this site for cleanup.

The HLCT has joined forces with a growing group of organizations both locally and regionally that are intent on having this property become a park and nature preserve. We are calling ourselves SixLakes.org (after the six ponds on the property). We have met with the Regional Water Authority, DEEP and the Town of Hamden as we are moving this exciting project forward. We will soon have a website with information regarding the property and include the ability for residents to join us in this endeavor. The site will be: sixlakes.org. In the meantime you can visit the HLCT.org website to find information about the property, including some exhaustive School of Forestry papers.

The Powder Farm legacy is not just about the incredible and largely untouched oasis, it is also connected physically, hydrologically and historically to the predominantly African-American Newhall community located just south of the Property. The environmental justice issues around this property are extensive. The marshes were filled with waste and then subdivided and developed with affordable homes that were marketed in recent decades to African-American working class families; then only a decade ago, this neighborhood lived through massive construction disruptions and the loss of a middle school due to the necessary environmental cleanup of this toxic legacy, spearheaded by the DEEP.

These social justice issues will have equal footing with the naturalistic management issues and to that end the two together will help define how this park evolves and how it is ultimately used as we move forward.



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Where are Connecticut's cicadas?



All the news about the Brood X cicadas throughout the mid-Atlantic states has some people wondering, “where are Connecticut’s cicadas?” Connecticut is home to brood II cicadas, last seen in 2013 and due back in 2030.

While we wait, we can enjoy the song of the annual summer cicadas. When you listen, remember that this is the same song as described in Homer’s Iliad. HLCT’s board member Jim Sirch just wrote a blog post on our state’s cicadas: www.beyondyourbackdoor.net/theres-a-buzz-in-the-air. Cicadas are found all over the world and are considered a summer delicacy in many countries. Award-winning chef Bun Lai, formerly of the New Haven restaurant Miya’s Sushi, was recently on a national talk show showing how to cook and eat them.

Happy summer!