



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
May-June 2016 • Vol. 20 No. 3

Biodiversity All Stars!



Not all native plants are created equal. Many perennials and shrubs excel at supporting biodiversity. There are many criteria that can be used to gauge a plants accessibility and usefulness to a habitat. Its ability to function as a food source for multiple species or

as a specialized food source, is a high priority.

Plants as food take many forms. Columbine, *Aquilegia canadensis*, is such an important food source for hummingbirds that they follow its blooming as they migrate north from Central America. Pussy Willow, *Salix discolor*, is of vital importance to bees as it is one of the first plants to offer nectar and pollen to hungry bees after a long, cold winter. It is, fortunately, becoming common knowledge that in order to have Monarch butterflies – there must be milkweed – for their caterpillars. What may be less well known is that, in New York state, there are 11 species of milkweed native to the state. We have offered 5 of these species at our plant sales. This year we will again be offering three species: Common Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*; Rose Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*; and Butterfly Milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*. There is a milkweed variety for every yard and every type of moisture. The most recent assessments on the status of Monarch butterflies has revealed a 87% - 90% decline in their populations. "Using data on population abundance, trends, and threats...the eastern monarch population (approximately ¾'s of the US population), was assessed as "critically imperiled" due to recent rapid decline and widespread threats."

I love feeding birds at a feeder. It is such a wonderful opportunity to see wildlife up close and observe their behaviors. But bird feeders do put birds at risk with the possibilities of exposure to predators and disease. Native bird seed is an ideal way to feed our wonderful song birds. Plants such as: Columbine, Blue Wood Aster, Boneset, Sweet Goldenrod and Blue Vervain, all provide songbirds with natural sources of seed, and in a less vulnerable manner.

Silky Dogwood, *Cornus amomum*, a shrub species from the same family as the more commonly known Flowering Dogwood tree, supports over **45** species of birds as well as being the larval host plant for the Spring Azure Butterfly. Buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, a wetlands shrub, feeds birds, butterflies, native bees, honey bees and bumblebees as well as hummingbirds and other pollinators!

Be sure to include as many larval host plants in your gardens as you can possibly squeeze in. Larval host plants are a crucial element in butterfly gardens. At our **native plant sale**, May 21st and 22nd, there will be over a dozen native plants and shrubs that are larval host plants. Knowledgeable staff will be on hand to answer your plant questions. Native plants are easy to grow and require far less maintenance and no soil additives to thrive in your yard and garden. There will be a wide selection of hard to find native perennials and shrubs. Bring nature home to your home and garden with beautiful and easy care native plants.

- by Laurel Tormey Cole

2016 Native Plant Sale at Thacher Park Overlook
Saturday and Sunday, May 21st & 22nd
10am – 3pm

An Enduring Legacy....Friends Support Thacher Visitor Center

And you can too!

To celebrate more than 100 years of beauty and discovery, Thacher Park is undergoing an exciting transformation. The cornerstone of this renaissance is **Thacher Park Center**, currently under construction near the Indian Ladder trailhead. The Center will serve as a gateway for visitors and Park information, and a provide much-needed four-season space to highlight and make more accessible Thacher’s spectacular natural setting.

The Center will house exhibit space to help visitors better understand Thacher’s unique and exceptional history, geologic features and ecology.

While New York State has provided a significant portion of the funding for the Center, private funding, raised through the current Campaign, supports development of the exhibits and will provide other enhancements and ongoing support to keep the Center a vital resource for Thacher’s next 100 years.



The Friends board has made a Campaign gift, and invite you, our Members, to consider doing the same. Do you have a family member who loved Thacher you’d like to memorialize with a paver? Would your kids get a kick out of seeing your family name on a bench or tree outside the Center?

Visit www.thacherparkcenter.com to learn more & donate today!
(Naming opportunities are listed on page 3 of this newsletter)

Campaign Partners

*New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation
 Open Space Institute Alliance for New York State Parks
 Natural Heritage Trust
 Saratoga-Capital District State Park Commission
 Friends of Thacher State Park*

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

Officers of the Friends Board of Trustees

President:	John Kilroy	872-1501
Vice President:	Laure-Jeanne Davignon	578-4718
Treasurer:	Betsey Miller	869-0739
Secretary:	Christine Gervasi	872-1501
	Former President Barbara Flindt	

As always, call 872-0800 or 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call any board member with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Laurel Tormey Cole, Laure-Jeanne Davignon, Sigrin Newell and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

Other Trustees

Jim Schaller	861-7452	Ethan Willsie	588-4148
Chuck Ver Straeten	872-2223	Bert Schou	221-8693
Dan Driscoll	872-0602	Linda Hodges	872-0940

Want to contribute? Please email me at cgervasi@albany.edu
Christine Gervasi—Editor



Friends of Thacher Park Member Form

Member benefits: Newsletter, Scheduled Events Calendar & 10% Discount at the Nature Center Gift Shop. Renewal date follows name on address label.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell _____ Email _____

I'd like to become a member of the Friends of Thacher Park. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____.

I am renewing my membership. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____.

- Individual \$20
- Family \$25
- Student \$5
- Supporter \$40
- Corporate \$100
- Benefactor \$100
- Donation \$ _____
- Senior (62) \$5

Please make checks payable to the **Friends of Thacher Park** and send to Bonnie Schaller, 6324 Hawes Rd, Altamont, NY 12009. For more info: bschaller@nycap.rr.com



**THACHER PARK CENTER
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN**
celebrating the past, building for the future

Opportunities to Honor and Memorialize

Sponsor a Fossil for Children's Treasure Hunt Activity	\$ 10,000
Hearth Fossil	\$ 5,000
Bench (10 available)	\$ 3,000
Tree (30 available)	\$ 1,000
Premium Paver	\$ 500
Paver	\$ 250



Save the Date!

May 7, 2016

9:00 am at

Pear Orchard

Please call 872-1237 or go to www.ptny.org/events/i-love-my-park-day to register and for more information.

Saturday, June 4, 8:30am - 12:30pm

National Trails Day at Thacher Park

Don't have time on May 7 for I Love My Park Day? Here is another chance to show your appreciation for Thacher Park, and spend a morning out of doors. Come and help us out with trail maintenance projects for the morning and stay for lunch, compliments of the Friends of Thacher Park. Call 872-1237 to register or for more information.



Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2016

May 11, July 13, September 14, and November 9.

7:00 pm at Thacher Nature Center. Come join us!

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



Wednesday, May 11, 2016

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Nature Center

Cheetos for Ants

Seed dispersal is a challenge for Trilliums, Spring Beauties, Violets, Bloodroot, and other wildflowers that bloom in the Thacher woods in May and June. There is little wind on the forest floor. There isn't enough sunshine before the deciduous trees leaf out for these plants to grow fruits and berries. Early spring wildflowers have evolved an effective solution for getting their seeds carried to places suited for germination by providing snacks for ants.

The seeds have a fleshy projection filled with fats, sugars, proteins, and amino acids. These appendages are called elaiosomes. Ants are attracted to seeds bearing elaiosomes. They take them to their nests where they feed the 'snacks' to their larvae. The seeds themselves are then disposed of in the ants' compost pile where droppings and dead ants are also collected. This compost makes an excellent bed for germination. Plants with elaiosomes have been shown to have better germination rates than those without. Convergent evolution has resulted in more than 3,000 species world-wide that have elaiosomes. The distribution of seeds by ants is known by the poetic word myrmecochary.



An opened trillium berry reveals ants swarming around the seeds (left). An ant carries a trillium seed with elaiosome back to its nest (right). - www.biodiversegardens.com

Naturalist Ruth Schottman conducted a test to explore the attractiveness of elaiosomes to ants. She chose a place where there were ant nests nearby, but no visible ants. She spread out seeds of White Trillium with their 'snacks'. Soon the place was swarming with ants. Ruth clocked one ant who carried a seed 22 inches in four minutes.

As you hike at Thacher this time of year, open up seed pods and look for the ants' favorite snack and watch for ants gathering them.

- by *Sigrin Newell*

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org