



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
September—October 2018 • Vol. 22 No. 5

Torches for summer's end

Unless you are a bicycle rider, you may not know about one of the newest features of Thacher Park. There is a bicycle skills park on Hailes Cave Road where riders can be challenged by an array of bumps and ramps.

For those who don't ride, there is another reason to drive along Hailes Cave Road. The recently disturbed soil is a good place to find large groupings of common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*). This plant is familiar to almost everyone, even though you may not know its name.

Mullein has fuzzy silvery green leaves and flower stalks that stand 5 to 6 feet tall. The drama of these stalks draws the eye, even though they are not pretty. The stalks look knobby since the small yellow flowers bloom randomly, producing round seed bumps where they have already bloomed.

These flowers are one of many adaptations for living in a dry rocky habitat in full sun. By producing only a few blossoms at a time, the plant is able with minimal effort to extend its chances for pollination over several weeks. Mullein has two kinds of roots; shallow surface roots catch light rain while deep roots tap into the water table.

The fuzz covering the silvery leaves serves the plant by discouraging insects and keeping dust from clogging the plant's pores. Silver color reflects burning rays of the sun. Steeply angled leaves spiral around the plant, assuring that every raindrop is aimed directly to the roots. When you find a mullein, stop and feel the



leaves and observe its many adaptations.

Mullein is not a native. As far back as Roman times, the flower stalks were dipped in wax to use as torches. Roman women used the yellow flowers to dye their hair blond. The plant's ashes were made into a soap to make gray hair turn black again. And throughout the centuries, girls who were not allowed to use rouge reddened their cheeks by rubbing them with mullein's fuzzy leaves

Mullein also has a wide variety of medicinal uses. Tea made from dried leaves was used by the English as a tonic for coughs and colds. A

seventeenth-century herbalist recommended seeds boiled in wine as a poultice to relieve lameness and bruises. Many groups of Native Americans smoked the dried leaves to relieve asthma. Among the many diseases people have treated with mullein are diarrhea, toothaches, migraines, burns, and warts.

Animals like mullein too. Hummingbirds line their tiny nests with mullein fuzz. Woodpeckers and goldfinches have been seen pecking the seeds off the stems. Bees and other insects are lured to the flowers by pollen and by small purple hairs bearing sweet sap.

There's one further use for mullein which bicyclists might appreciate after a day on Thacher's slopes. A leaf inside each shoe will cushion tired feet, and best of all, will remedy stinky feet.

-by Sigrin Newell

Bus Fund

On behalf of the Board of the Friends of Thacher, I want to thank all of you who have participated in the drive over the past few years for the bus fund to bring children to our park. It was a very busy season for school visits and over 2800 children came on buses provided by the Friends fund.

We will not be doing this drive again this year because New York State has seen the value of this program and they are now providing funding for these buses. If this changes in the future you may hear from us again on this topic. We will use the remaining money in the bus fund for trips for other children's groups such as day camps that are not covered by the State plan and for school groups who still solicit our fund.

We thought you might enjoy seeing what a few first graders from the Schenectady thought of their spring visit to the park. Some expressed in writing and some in pictures. Sorry we can't share more with you, but all of the children enjoyed their visits.

Thank you for the field trips ^{Body}

It was so much fun. I am so happy

I got to go on a field trip.

I loved the walk and to see the birds

and to feel safe. Thank you.

Dear Field Trip Helpers

Thank you for this

I liked to see the

birds and everything else

even the nature walk

I liked to smell and feel

the wax, too. Also, structures



Once again thank you for your support in bringing children to our park to connect them with nature.

-by Betsey Miller

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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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 Sigrin Newell, Betsey Miller, Bonnie Schaller, Laurel Tormey-Cole and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

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

Miraculous Monarchs

Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) are not only beautiful, they are also quite remarkable. And they are becoming increasingly rare.

Like all butterflies and moths, Monarchs have four life stages: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa and adult butterfly. In our region, adult Monarchs arrive from the south in late spring and lay eggs on milkweed plants. The eggs hatch within a few days and little eating machines emerge: the purpose of a caterpillar is to eat and grow, and that is what it does, increasing its body mass by about 2000 times in a few short weeks. Monarchs depend on milkweed; the caterpillars ingest and store toxic substances from the milkweed which they use as protection against predators. When the caterpillar is fully grown, it will attach itself to a leaf or stem on its milkweed plant and spin a cocoon of silk (the chrysalis) to metamorphose. Inside this cocoon, the caterpillar changes dramatically – mouthparts morph from chewing to siphoning, wings and reproductive organs develop. When metamorphosis is finished, the adult Monarch emerges and flies off to find a mate, lay eggs and die. This generation of adults only lives about a month. In our region, this cycle repeats for a second and sometimes third time. The adults that emerge in late August, however, neither mate nor die. Instead, they drink nectar and prepare for a most incredible journey which takes them from the United States and southern Canada to central Mexico, where they hibernate in a select few mountain forests. These hibernating Monarchs return to the southern parts of the US the following spring, where they mate, lay eggs and die. This 1,500-2,500 mile journey is one of the most extraordinary migrations known in butterflies. Monarchs can migrate at a speed of 50 miles/day, though how exactly they find their way to their hibernation sites is not known. So if you see any Monarchs these days, know that they are about to embark on a very long trip!

There are several reasons Monarchs are becoming rare, among them climate change, use of pesticides, destruction of hibernation sites in Mexico and the loss of milkweed plants in the US. Here is how you can help: plant native plants, especially milkweed, in your yard; you may find some still for sale at Thacher Nature Center. Or, as one of our board members did (see pictures), raise Monarchs at home! It is fun for the kids (and adults), and helps out the Monarch populations!

-by Christine Gervasi



Photos courtesy of Bonnie Schaller

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2018

September 12, and November 14 (Thacher Visitor Center).

7:00 pm. Come join us!

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



Wednesday, September 12, 2018

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Hawk Watch at Thacher Overlook!

Fall is migration time for many species, including certain hawks. Hawks migrate September into November and a great place to see them is the Helderberg Escarpment. The steep cliffs provide warm updrafts of air that allow the birds to catch a ride and conserve energy during their journey. Broad-winged hawks are among the most common species you will see, but there are others as well. Come join us at the Overlook on **Saturday September 8, 10am to 2pm.**

Thacher Nature Center Native Plants - On Sale

We have several species of native plants remaining from our annual native plant sale. Asters for beautiful autumn color, plants for saturated areas, plants to attract butterflies, and much more!

Stop by Thacher Nature Center
Tuesday - Sunday, 9am-5pm
and check out what is available.

Perennials in quarts: \$4.00 ea. or \$3/\$10.00

-by Laurel Tormey-Cole

New board members welcome!

The word "board" may evoke the image of something stiff and perhaps boring, similar to its wooden counterpart. Well, as a long-time board member of the Friends of Thacher Park, I can tell you that we are anything but (in my opinion at least). Our meetings are quite a lot of fun and in addition to accomplishing many things, we also laugh a lot. We are always looking for new folks to join us. What does it involve? You have to be a member of the Friends, you have to have a genuine interest in helping the park, and be able to come to our bi-monthly board meetings. Want to see what those are like? Drop in one of these days. The next one is September 12, at 7:00pm at Thacher Visitor Center. We hope to see you there!

-Christine Gervasi

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