



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
November — December 2021 • Vol. 25 No. 6

Monarch Ranching 2021 in Altamont and Slingerlands

Here in Altamont, it seemed as though Mother Nature was doing her best to discourage butterfly ranching this year. There was plenty of rain for flowers ---- but the gnats and mosquitoes did well also !!!! Then it was the heat that really made it a challenge to collect eggs and caterpillars. The weather however was great for milkweed; my little patch exploded! In spite of the elements, I was able to collect eggs and several sizes of caterpillars. As the summer progressed, the first Lady butterfly flew off on August 7 and the last Lady on September 20 (hope she is well on her way to Mexico). In total I released 21 ladies and 17 gents a little part of the big picture. For curiosity, in 2018 I released 24, 2019 -46, 2020 -29 – so the years really do fluctuate.

- by Bonnie Schaller

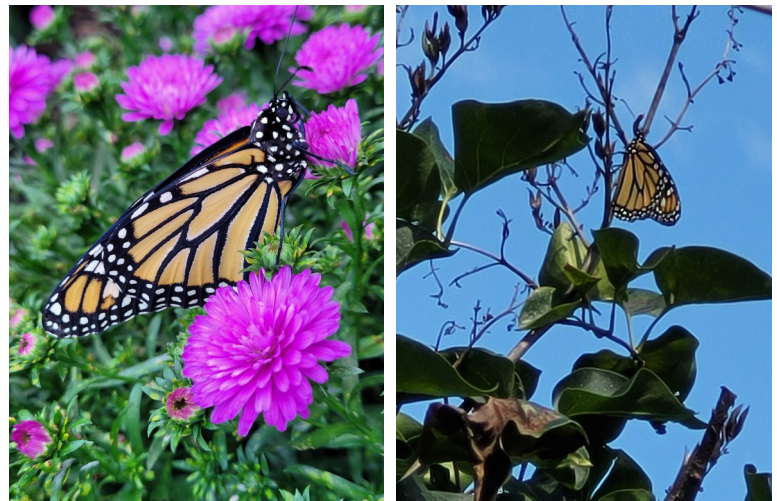
Pictures of Bonnie's graduates:



Despite lots of rain and heat my milkweed grew wonderfully and I collected a total of 14 eggs on the leaves. All hatched into tiny caterpillars. After transforming into chrysalis, all but one made it and emerged as beautiful butterflies. How rewarding is it to see them take off on their journey to Mexico! Happy and safe travel my friends!

- by Anita Wahlen

Pictures of Anita's ranch and butterflies:



For a video of a butterfly emerging stop in to the Nature Center to see Anita Wahlen's remarkable video recording!

Updates from the Park

I want to thank you all for another amazing summer season here. We welcome everyone with open arms and hope every patron visits again and again. It was comforting to see “the new normal” in action, as we attempt to overcome the challenges we have endured. We were able to host graduations, birthday parties, weddings and races again with little to no restriction. Our attendance remains well above the totals for 2019 and we hope the trend upward continues.

Just some of the notable events from the summer:

I Love My Park Day

The 20th Anniversary of the Nature Center held on Emma Treadwell Thacher’s Birthday.

Thacher Park Trail Running Festival.

A feature film was shot at the park.

Nick Offerman (Ron Swanson from Parks and Recreation) came to visit.

Cooler days are upon us now and during my time with parks, Labor Day has been the unofficial end to the busy season. Children go back to school and people start to get that last bit of fresh warm air before winter comes.

Things are not quite like that here in the Helderbergs. At Thacher State Park, Labor Day means that leaf peeping season is right around the corner. We hope everyone gets to view the magnificence and brilliance of the escarpment and Hudson Valley in the explosion of color that nature provides. This year as always, the Helderberg Hawk Watch returned to track the amount of migratory raptors. We even welcomed a new Assistant Park Manager, Erin McPeak, into our ranks, just in time to see the foliage change. There is nothing quite like the Northeast in the fall.

As the leaves and air temperatures fall, and this edition of the newsletter will find its way to you, cold

drinks will turn into warm mugs of hot chocolate, tea or coffee depending on your preference (mine is coffee). The snow will surely fly, some will stay in and others will find their way outdoors to brave the frigid temperatures for a chance at cross country skiing or snowshoeing. Whatever your pleasure, we hope this edition of the newsletter will inspire you to do something you love, or try something new.

In the coming months we are expecting some construction at the park for some long-needed infrastructure improvements. Please give these folks space if you happen across them. This year we are also hosting the Holiday Bazaar (Dec-4-5) and the Holiday Open House (Dec-4) on the same weekend. Two programs for the price of one! Want to know what’s even better? It doesn’t even cost anything so there isn’t even a price! We do hope you will attend. More information on those events will be available on our program calendar.

And with that, I will leave you with a quote, words that I find motivation, curiosity or comfort in. I hope it may do the same for you.

“Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement Get up in the morning and look around at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually.” (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

*- by Bill Hein, Park Manager
John Boyd Thacher State Park*

Upcoming Program

In January, Thacher Nature Center will be offering a free program on winter-sowing native plants from seed. Seeds will be available, but if there’s a particular wildflower you’d like to start for your home garden you may want to plan ahead to bring your own seeds! Call the Nature Center at 518-872-0800 to find out more.

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Bonnie Schaller, Anita Wahlen, Bill Hein, Sigrin Newell, Savannah Wilson and Shannon Duerr for their contributions to this newsletter.

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

Meet the Superfood Salad Tree

Compared to acorns, nuts of the beech tree have twice as much protein and twice as much fat. They are also 19% carbohydrate. Beechnuts are superfoods for wild turkeys, ruffed grouse, bears, white tailed deer, fishers squirrels, chipmunks and mice. Blue jays cache the nuts, carrying them from one woodlot to another, helping distribution.

People like beechnuts too. They have been used by Native Americans and Europeans for centuries. The genus name *Fagus* comes from a Greek word meaning “to eat”. People used beechnuts for cooking oil, for flour, as a coffee substitute and as hair tonic. In early spring the newly emerged leaves were eaten like lettuce.

Before paper, the smooth bark of the beech tree was used for writing. The word for “book” and “Beech” is the same in German, Dutch, Swedish, and in Slavic languages.

Like oaks, beeches are masting trees. Every two to five years trees over a large area bear abundant fruit simultaneously. In the “bust” years between there are few, if any, nuts. Abundant years are particularly good for wildlife. In Maine a study showed that the birth of bear cubs was in perfect synchrony to the years of abundant crops. By contrast, scientists found that in bust years there was a great deal more animal dispersal. Hungry animals colonized new habitats in search of food. An “ecosystem wide domino effect” is how one scientist characterized animal behavior during bust years.

Here at Thacher you can find beeches growing on the Schoolhouse Trail and other places in the park. Prickly, triangular beechnuts are easy to recognize. They are about the size of your thumbnail. After being extricated from the husk, the nuts are safe to eat raw in small quantities, but they are tastier when roasted. However it is best to leave the animals their superfood.

Unfortunately, signs of disease on the trees are all too easy to see. Normally, a mature beech looks rather like a huge gray elephant with smooth skin. The bark of a diseased tree is cracked and warty. This happens when a scale insect punctures the bark followed by a fungus that enters the tree and begins the slow process of killing it. Fortunately a beech tree can continue to produce viable seeds long after it has been visibly ravaged by disease. This is good because beech trees have to be 40 years old before they can start bearing fruit. Beech Tree Canker has been around

since the 1890s, but the trees persist because of their reproductive ability. If you encounter a grove of small beech trees, you will see that the young ones came up from the roots of an old tree.

Beeches are easiest to find in the late fall or winter when copper-colored leaves hang on the branches long after most other leaves are gone. It is thought that these crisp spiky-edged leaves protect the fat cigar-shaped buds from deer browse. Once its nose get prickled and poked, a deer will decide it would rather eat something else. Try it yourself. Find a beech tree that is hanging on to its leaves. Look for a bud among the leaves. See if you can touch the bud with your tongue without getting a face-full of sharp-edged leathery leaves.

- by *Sigrin Newell*

P.S. Beechnut Baby Foods and gum never did have any beechnut oil in them. The company in Canajoharie was originally going to be named “Imperial Foods”. The owners wanted a friendlier more local name. They chose Beechnut for all the beech trees that grew in the woods around their factory.

I'd like to introduce myself: my name is Shannon Duerr, and I recently started as Thacher Nature Center's new Native Plant Specialist. I am an ecologist by training, and I have been lucky enough to work in land conservation, wildlife research, habitat improvement, and community engagement before landing my dream job here. My first love is connecting people with the world around them: helping them



understand, appreciate, and support the native habitats that define our beautiful part of the world.

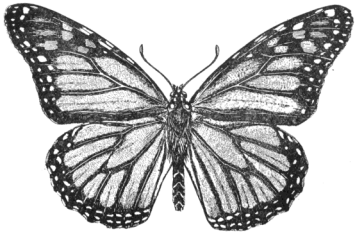
I am excited to work with the Friends of Thacher Park to spread the word about the importance of native plants, and to help our communities appreciate the vital work plants do! If you have questions about native plants or ideas for ways we can reach new audiences, please call me at the Nature Center or email me at Shannon.Duerr@parks.ny.gov.

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2021

Annual Meeting, Wednesday, November 10 at Thacher Visitor Center (Masks required!)

After a short business meeting at 6:30pm, Anna Pirkey and Grace Brennen will talk at 7:00pm about their experiences working at Thacher Nature Center and Park for the last season.

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



<https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Annual Membership Meeting

Next:

6:30 pm at Thacher Visitor Center *(masks required)*

Followed by a presentation at 7:00pm by Anna Pirkey and Grace Brennen about their experiences working at the Park and Nature Center

Thank You to our 2021 Interns!

Anna Pirkey and Grace Brennen started working with us in January, starting with the educational needs of the Nature Center and Visitor Center for a 10-month period, ending shortly into November.



Grace leading an Insect Program

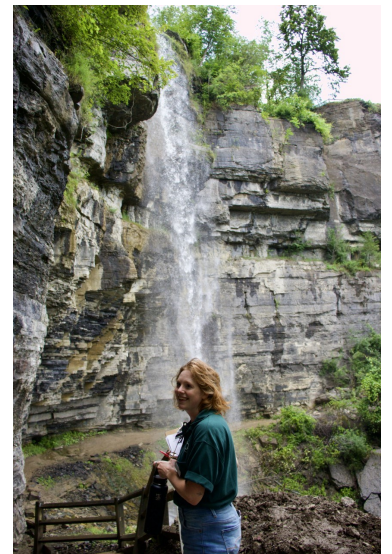
Grace, our Environmental Educator through the Student Conservation Association, focused on leading guided hikes, creating environmental

programs, and updating seasonal displays, and so much more! Anna, our Geology Educator through SCA, has lead dozens of guided walks showcasing the beautiful Indian Ladder Trail and teaching all about our fossils of the park, and she has created new seasonal displays and educational programs and more!

Both Anna and Grace have been amazing at the hard work of nest box monitoring, raising, and selling native plants, caring for the animal ambassadors, diving deep into the world of invasive species removal by removing the wild parsnip from our fields, as well as surveying wild animals with trail cameras! Anna and Grace have welcomed thousands of guests into the Nature Center, happily sharing their passion for the natural world.

We have had great fun working with Anna and Grace and will surely miss them when they go. We are very grateful for everything they've done here and wish them the best of luck in the future!

- by Savannah Wilson



Anna on the Indian Ladder Trail

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