Notes from the Naturalist

Give me spots on my apples, but leave me the birds and the bees. Please! Joni Mitchell

Ms. Mitchell penned those oft-quoted words from the song “Big Yellow Taxi” in 1970, FIFTY-TWO YEARS ago! What jogged them from the recesses of my brain today? As always, a difficult thing for me to do is find a way to begin these notes without boring everyone to death. There are only so many ways you can say “the skunk cabbages bloomed in late February.” Scintillating stuff.

So there I was sitting on my living room couch, staring out the window, pondering words that wouldn’t come, when, lo and behold, a commercial van pulled up in front of my neighbor’s (let’s call him Stan) house. It’s the guy who is going to treat Stan’s yard in order to eradicate every arthropod (mosquitoes and ticks being the main villains in this scenario) that dares to set one of its many legs within the confines of Stan’s property lines. This is the culmination of a yearly competition that begins every March – the quest for the perfect lawn. Stan’s rival is his next door neighbor (I’ll call him Ollie). Endless hours are spent (wasted), sometimes with hired help, sometimes without. Digging, de-thatching, raking, aerating, seeding, watering, mowing, etc. There’s top soil, herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, grass seed, sod, mulch and who knows what else to be purchased. A couple of years ago, Ollie decided to start from scratch. He doused his entire lawn, using a very large hand-held sprayer with what I thought (hoped) was some kind of fertilizer. My worst fears were realized when about 20 minutes later, the lawn began to look a little “off.” That’s all it took – 20 minutes. My suspicions were confirmed when he told another neighbor not to let her little grandson or dog run on the lawn because he had just sprayed it with glyphosate (aka Roundup®). At least he warned her. Given its rapid browning effect, my guess is that it was a pretty concentrated solution, which he had diluted up himself. Did I mention Ollie was wearing sandals and shorts as he spewed liquid death on his lawn? No, I’m not kidding.

All of this would be amusing to watch, if it weren’t so depressing. Have we learned nothing in the 5 decades since Joni Mitchell wrote that song? Some of us have, but too many remain uninformed. How does one get the message out? And why don’t I try to educate my neighbors on this important topic? It is, after all, what I do. But you get to a point in life where you just know who will listen and who will tell you – and not in a kindly way – to mind your own business. I have another neighbor who is always willing to learn. I easily talked her out of planting a non-native Kousa dogwood tree last year. Most of the plants in her yard are now native and she is rewarded with lots of bees, butterflies and other insects, nesting house wrens, plus the occasional hummingbird. So I pick my battles and keep chipping away at it. Hopefully you do too.

Meanwhile, away from the suburban insanity, spring came to Greenbrook, although it was a slow start. The first real sign of the impending season was the return of the red-winged blackbirds to the feeders on February 23. And, yes, the skunk cabbage had indeed bloomed a few days earlier. March is the month when winter tips into spring and on the 3rd, we observed an eastern bluebird on P trail, plus four ring-necked ducks and four wood ducks on the pond. Two days later there were 5 hooded mergansers at the pond. Rain was predicted overnight on March 7 and with a high temperature of 73 degrees that day, there was a high probability that the spotted salamanders would emerge. They didn’t disappoint and the first spermatophores were observed in a vernal pool the next morning. Two days later there was 1.5 inches of slushy wet snow on the ground, but March will do that to you. Not to worry. The next day, we heard the first northern flicker calling near Boulevard Brook and a few days later, the wood frogs were breeding. We also increased the number of observed ring-necked ducks to 8 that week, while at the same time, the spring peepers began their breeding chorus in earnest at the bog and pond edges.
On the 19th, with the male wild turkey in full display mode, I had the first pine warbler of the season, the red maples were in bloom and another member observed our first mourning cloak butterfly on D trail. The next day, Ken noted the first eastern phoebe and a not-often-seen-in-Greenbrook northern mockingbird in Fair Field. And by the end of the month, the early spring amphibians had laid their eggs and left their vernal pools until next spring.

April got off to a good start on the first with our first osprey and palm warbler of the season and a great horned owl near the cliff edge. The next day I noticed a clump of yellow perch eggs in the pond, something I had not seen in several years. It was a woodpecker fest on April 3 when Ken observed 6 northern flickers, 5 red-bellies and 4 downies near the pavilion, each species interacting amongst themselves in what was surely territorial squabbling. The season progressed over the next week with spicebush, spring beauties and Dutchman's breeches in bloom, and sightings of ruby-crowned kinglets, black & white warblers and blue-gray gnatcatchers. There was also an opossum out for a stroll near the parking lot shed.

And then on April 13 came a very unusual sighting. It started in the morning with Ken's observation of 23 chipping sparrows at the feeders, a high number by any account. By the time we left for the day, it was up to 33 sparrows. When I came back to the sanctuary for an early evening Administrative Council meeting, I counted 42 of them. There may even have been a few more. What a treat it was to see so many of these diminutive and sometimes overlooked little birds. It was certainly a record number for Greenbrook.

The parade of April sightings continued: broad-winged hawks, northern rough-winged swallows, shadbush in bloom, eastern towhees, raccoons, redstarts, Lincoln’s sparrow, ovenbirds and a veery. Greenbrook member Tom Esposito noted a red-breasted nuthatch at the feeders on April 16 and reported our first black-throated green warbler on April 24, the same day that member Paul Coburn spotted the first gray catbird of the year.

As of late April, the weather has been pretty chilly, but there's nothing wrong with a prolonged cool spring, at least not in my book. Volunteer with us if you can on Saturday, June 11, as we do a clean-up along the Long Path hiking trail just outside of Greenbrook’s gate. We will be collecting trash, most of it from passing motorists on the PIP (I will spare you a rant on that subject). We will be mailing out new keys this summer, so don’t forget to renew your membership or you will be locked out of the sanctuary on August 1, when the new lock goes on the gate. And you sure wouldn’t want that to happen.

— Sandy Bonardi, Naturalist/Director
**A Bench with a View**

When the old log bench near Patriot's Leap disintegrated, leaving just the stone bases with protruding bolts, I initially thought there were only two options available to me: get rid of it completely or find/hire someone who could make a new one, as was done in the past. Neither choice was appealing and we love a challenge. So Ken researched what was needed to get the job done – the most crucial part being finding the tool that would allow him to cut vertically along a fallen tree trunk to produce the flat surface of the bench. Of course such a tool exists, and that – along with a drill, a tube of construction adhesive and a little mortar – and within a couple of weeks, we were in business. The worst part of the job? Schlepping the deceptively heavy piece of cut red oak from F trail, where the tree had fallen, over to the cliff-edge bench site. The result speaks for itself. We plan to replace a few more of these benches this season and hope you enjoy them.

- Starting point
- Ken makes the crucial cut
- The holes are drilled
- A bench with a view...again

**NEW KEY NOTICE**

Don't get locked out! New Greenbrook keys will be mailed to members in July, with an effective date of August 1, 2022. So make sure you renew your yearly membership when your notice comes in the mail. If you have let your membership lapse but are reading the online version of this newsletter, be sure to renew before the new keys are mailed out.

**SUMMER 2022 ALMANAC**

Programs subject to cancellation ■ Information: 201-784-0484

Saturday, June 11 — 9:00 AM – NOON
Volunteer Day - Long Path Cleanup
Help us collect litter on the Long Path outside of Greenbrook. Meet in the sanctuary parking lot. Bring work gloves. Garbage bags will be provided.

Sunday, June 19 — 10:00 – 11:30 AM
Hike to Bald Eagle Point
Portions of this hike are hilly and rocky. Wear sturdy shoes.

Saturday, June 25 — 10:00 – NOON
First Weekend of Summer Hike

Saturday, July 9 — 8:00 – 9:30 AM
Early Morning Hike Around the Pond

Saturday, July 16 — 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Annual Butterfly Count
Join us as we count butterfly species in the sanctuary. Sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association.

Saturday, July 23 — 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Rain Date for Butterfly Count  See July 16 for details.

Saturday, July 30 — 10:00 – 11:00 AM
A Short Walk in Fair Field  An opportunity to see how the Fair Field restoration is coming along.

Sunday, August 7 — 9:00 – 11:00 AM
Cliff Edge Trail Hike

Saturday, August 13 — 10:00 – 11:30 AM
Trees in Summer

Saturday, August 20 — 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
What’s That Fungus?
Join Paul Sadowski of the NY Mycological Society for an introduction to some of the fungi found in Greenbrook Sanctuary.

Saturday, August 27 — 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Rain date for What’s That Fungus?
See August 20 for details.

**We’re wrapping up our 75th Anniversary Celebration and Fund Appeal**

...Not last and not least
Joel Bauer
Susan Hirschman
Constance Lee
Lorraine Matys
Hung Huei Pan
Ellen Pangburn
Leonardo Pion
Heinz Schroeder
Janice Ann Shaw
Kathy Sobek

Our 75th Anniversary Campaign concludes this summer. If you haven’t yet donated, please consider a gift now (see below for two ways to do so) and your contribution will be acknowledged in the Fall Newsletter. We’ve had generous responses from over 370 donors, but that represents less than 25% of our membership. If you love Greenbrook, and want to help secure its future, we need to hear from you! A number of donors have already made a second gift for this new year and for a tax deduction in 2022. Please help us reach our Anniversary goal of $75,000. **MANY THANKS for your support!**

Send a check with the reply form in the return envelope that came with the donation appeal letter or simply mail to PNA 75th Anniversary Fund - PO Box 155 –Alpine, NJ 07620.

OR  Log onto the PNA website and conveniently donate using PayPal or a credit card at
https://www.njpalisades.org/greenbrook/donation.html
Join Us. THIS FORM IS FOR NEW MEMBERS ONLY.

Yes, I want to become a member of Greenbrook Sanctuary.

- Individual $ 40
- Household $ 60
- Contributor $ 100
- Stewardship $ 250
- Life Member $ 1,000
- Organization $ 50

This is a gift membership given by:

Name

Address

City       State      Zip

Name

Address

City       State      Zip

Please make checks payable to: PNA, PO Box 155, Alpine, NJ 07620, or join on our web site.