

onservation Times

Newsletter of the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc.

January 2013

Planting for Pollinators—What's the Buzz?



Pollinators, essential to our existence, are at risk! These small hard-working critters have a huge responsibility: close to 75% of the earth's flowering plants require pollinators to set seed or fruit. And these plants produce about 33% of our food, and an even greater percentage of food for many types of wildlife. Pollinators play a critical role in crop production, keep plant communities productive and healthy, provide food and habitat for animals, and are responsible for many of our beautiful flowers!

As you can see, protecting pollinators is not only important to their own survival, but to humans and other animals too. It's no wonder there's a buzz about protecting and attracting pollinators, whose populations are threatened by habitat loss, pesticide use, and diseases and parasites. Fortunately, there are simple steps we can take as home gardeners and farmers to help pollinators: planting flower rich foraging areas, providing host plants or nesting areas, and using alternatives to toxic pesticides.

While we often think of bees in the context of pollination, pollinators also include other insects, such as butterflies, moths, flies and beetles, as well as hummingbirds, and even bats. Pollinators visit plants for different reasons—looking for food, in search of mates, to collect nest materials. Some, like bees, collect pollen intentionally, while others, like butterflies and birds, dine on nectar from flowers, transferring pollen in the process. For plants that can't self-pollinate, pollinators are essential to seed development and reproduction.



Insects make up the majority of pollinating animals worldwide. So it's of great concern that bees and other insects are the pollinators most threatened by human activity, with dramatic declines documented in their populations. A list of endangered North American pollinator insects developed by The Xerxes Society for Invertebrate Conservation has 59 butterflies and moths and 57 bees on it. Unfortunately, pollinator populations are indicators of ecosystem health, and declines in pollinating insects put plants that need them for pollination at risk, setting off an escalating downhill effect.

So—enough of the bad news! What can we do to help pollinators? Here are three simple things we can do in our home landscapes to promote pollinator health...and survival.



❶ **Plant a Pollinator Garden:** Providing more flowers for pollinators will enhance foraging habitat and increase their numbers. Choose plants that flower at different times over the growing season; group plants in clumps; and provide a variety of flower colors and shapes. Use native plants, which attract native pollinators and serve as larval host plants.

❷ **Provide Habitat for Nesting:** Different pollinators have different needs for nesting sites; some bee species use small cavities in wood, and others are ground nesters, for example. A variety of shrubs, tall grasses and low-growing plants; areas of fallen branches and brush; and small patches of bare ground will all benefit pollinators. You can also create artificial nesting sites like bee nesting blocks by drilling different diameter holes in a block of preservative-free wood.

❸ **Avoid Using Pesticides:** Pesticides are designed to kill and are not selective! Residues can kill pollinators for several days after applying pesticides. Pesticides can also kill natural predators, leading to worse pest problems. Try these safe methods to manage garden pests: remove them by hand (wear gloves!); encourage native predators with a diverse garden habitat; be willing to accept a little bit of pest activity; use non-toxic alternatives.

References and Resources

Attracting Native Pollinators, 2011, The Xerxes Society (guide book), www.xerxes.org

Attracting Native Pollinators to Your Garden, 2011, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (booklet), www.fws.gov/pollinators

The Pollinator Partnership, www.pollinator.org

Illustrations: Nancy Seiler

Don't miss out! A special feature of the District plant sale this year is pollinator plants (see pg. 4 for info. or go to www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal to see our brochure and order form). Check out our great selection when planning for your pollinator friendly yard!

In and Around the Coginchaug — Farm Improvements, Education for Land Use Commissioners and Landowners, Water Quality Monitoring and a River Cleanup

Work to address water quality concerns in the Coginchaug River watershed is moving forward! The local stakeholder committee continues to meet under the direction of District staff to plan and guide outreach, education and restoration work, and progress has been made on several fronts. 2012 efforts were bolstered by special Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) funding from USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, along with US EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 grants administered by CT DEEP.

Farm Improvements Progressing

The District is currently working on water quality protection projects with two farm operations in the upper Coginchaug River Watershed. At Stoneridge Farm, the timber bridge, fenced path and stabilized stream crossings connecting the barn to the pastures up on the hill begun in 2011 are now completed. Ongoing new efforts include planning for more fencing and a new stream crossing, as well as updating the farm's nutrient management plan.

Also in the works is a stormwater management project at Half Mile Acres Farm to address erosion and manure runoff from the pasture. Underground piping will be installed to divert stormwater from the road, and special outlets will release it slowly into the wetlands.

District staff continue to work closely with the farm owners, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on these water quality improvement and protection efforts.

Funded in part by US EPA Clean Water Act Section 319 grants administered by CT DEEP

Landowners Learn about Managing Livestock Waste

Livestock owners and other community members attended a District workshop about managing livestock waste, held in October in Durham.

While intended primarily for landowners in the watershed towns of Middletown, Middlefield, Durham, and Guilford, others were also welcome.

Geared to any size operation, from a few backyard animals to larger farms, presentations covered best management practices to minimize pollution from livestock, including manure, wastewater, and mortality management; and technical and financial resources available to plan, design and install conservation practices. Speakers were Dr. Jenifer Nadeau, UConn Equine Extension Specialist; Joe Wettemann, DEEP Senior Sanitary Engineer; and Javier Cruz, NRCS District Conservationist. Attendees were also given a packet full of resource information, such as the *Good Horse Keeping* manual. Based on the positive feedback we received, the workshop was an evening well-spent!

Funded in part by a USDA-NRCS CTA Grant



Municipal Land Use Commissioners Get Briefed on Tools and Techniques for Protecting Water Quality

Decisions about where and how land is developed can have a major bearing on water quality. A diverse group of Coginchaug watershed municipal land use commissioners and staff attended a District workshop in May to learn how they can contribute to protecting water quality. The packed agenda covered varied topics: the basics of land use law; technical assistance and cost share programs; stormwater management and low impact development; model regulations and ordinances; and working effectively with developers and the public. Presenters were Atty. Marjorie Shansky, Land Use Leadership Alliance Trainer; Javier Cruz, NRCS District Conservationist; Mike Dietz, CT NEMO Program Director; Pat Young, Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed Program Director; Kevin Magee, Guilford Environmental Planner; and Atty. Tiffany Zezula, Pace University Land Use Law Center Director. Attendees also received a variety of take-home resource materials.

Funded in part by a USDA-NRCS CTA Grant

Water Quality Study Yields Useful Information

Fifteen community volunteers participated in a four-month water quality study of the Coginchaug watershed as part of the Connecticut River Watch Program, the District's citizen monitoring program. Water samples were collected at 21 sites throughout the watershed and analyzed for *E. coli* bacteria at the State Public Health Lab, all at no cost through a cooperative arrangement with the towns. Findings will be used to guide future water quality improvement work. While some sites met the criteria in CT's Water Quality Standards, others did not. Several bacteria "hot spots," where levels were highest, will be the target of further investigations to track down possible sources. Thanks to our town and agency partners and our dedicated water sampling volunteers who made this program possible! Contact our office (860-346-3282) for more information, including a summary of results.

Funded in part by a USDA-NRCS CTA Grant

Coginchaug River Cleaned Up at Annual Event



While we watched nervously, an intrepid student shinnied down an overhanging branch to retrieve a plastic bag from the river. As it turned out the bag had dog poop in it. Yuck!! Good thing she fished it out!

Our 3rd annual river cleanup at Veterans Park held with the Middletown Regional Agricultural Science & Technology Center was a success! Many thanks to teacher Courtney Johnson for helping publicize the event and recruit volunteers; the City of Middletown for providing staff, a dump truck and supplies; and the students and community members who scoured the area and picked up trash.

CRCCD's 65th Annual Meeting Highlights Wellstone Farm

On a beautiful November day, friends and partners of the Conservation District joined staff and board members at Wellstone Farm in Higganum for our 65th Annual Meeting. The program featured an information-packed tour of the farm, a two acre biologically managed operation growing vegetables, flowers, berries and herbs, led by Ian and Melissa Gibson, the mother and son team who own and run the farm.



Participants learned all about the summer CSA (community supported agriculture) operation, the farm's focus on organic principles and healthy soil, as well as the many notable environmental initiatives and sustainable practices implemented at the farm, including a composting facility, nutrient management practices, a micro-irrigation system, and energy conservation. Following the tour, everyone gathered in the barn to hear about the District's 2012 conservation highlights, and for a presentation of our annual conservation awards (see below). There was plenty of time for conversation and refreshments—including a delicious farm-to-table soup whipped up by Ian! We even had the opportunity to purchase a wonderful variety of winter squash, and see Ian's gourmet mushroom growing operation. Our sincere thanks to Melissa and Ian for taking the time to host our meeting, and kudos for all of their significant "green" efforts!

Congratulations 2012 Conservation Award Winners!

Environmental Professionals

Seth Lerman, Resource Conservationist,
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Pat Young, Program Director
Eightmile River Wild & Scenic Watershed

Cooperator

Stoneridge Farm, N. Guilford, Dino Esposito

Special Merit

Kevin Magee, Environmental Planner,
Town of Guilford

Ballek's Garden Center, East Haddam
Anita Ballek at right, with District Chairman Tom ODell



Certificates of Appreciation

Gary Crump & Gloria Priam,
Priam Vineyards

David Richards, Clinton Nurseries

Mark & Mindy Yuknat,
CT River Expeditions

Matthew Rubin,
Old Saybrook Shopping Center

Pierre Bennerup,
Sunny Border Nurseries

Rob Merritt, R2 Graphics

Thomas D. Comer, CPA,
Comer and Company, LLC

Roofs, Runoff & Rain Gardens

We are happy to report that our demonstration rain garden at Acton Public Library in Old Saybrook is now complete! This past fall, the finishing touch—an outdoor educational sign—was installed at the garden. Built in Fall 2011 as part of a hands-on course, the rain garden provides a low impact design element to reduce stormwater runoff, and a lasting teaching tool to inform and inspire others. The colorful, attractive sign was developed in collaboration with the Town of Old Saybrook and CT NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials), and designed by local graphic designer, David Wolfram. Funding for the sign was provided by a grant from The Rockfall Foundation and the Town of Old Saybrook. In addition to information about rain garden benefits and design, the sign provides the bit of advice reproduced on the right. You can view the entire sign on our website at conservect.org/ctrivercoastal, under "What's New".

What can you do at your home?

Whether you live in the woods, in town or on the shore, you can reduce the impact that you and your landscape have on local waterways.

- If you can, install your own rain garden!
- Direct gutter downspouts to surfaces like lawns or wetlands where water can soak in, or use a rain barrel to catch rain water.
- Test your soil before fertilizing your lawn, and use organic alternatives if fertilizer is needed
- Look for safe alternatives to toxic pesticides and herbicides that are harmful to humans, pets or aquatic life.
- Pick up after your pets!

District News & Events

INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST BOARD MEMBER—WARREN HERZIG

When Warren Herzig joined the board in March 2012, he was no stranger to the District! He had been an active member of our Cogenchaug Implementation Committee since its formation in 2010, as a representative from the town of Durham. A retired Sanitary Engineer with the Department of Energy & Environmental Protection, Warren's background in livestock waste management provides a new dimension to our varied board, critical to guiding our new efforts with the agricultural community. He currently spends his time tending Christmas trees as owner of Herzig Family Tree Farm, and working to ensure that agriculture is healthy and thriving in Durham as Chairman of the town Agriculture Commission.

8TH ANNUAL RIVER CRUISE FUNDRAISER FEATURES AMAZING SHOW!!

Everything conspired for a memorable and enjoyable evening in August on our annual Tree Swallow and Wine Tasting Cruise to benefit the Connecticut River Watch Program. Perfect weather, a beautiful sunset, a full (blue) moon, and probably the most amazing swallow show we've ever seen! Not to mention a boatful of fun people, a great assortment of local and organic wine, and a lavish dinner spread to top it off.

A special thank you to our sponsors, old and new, whose generous contributions make the event possible: Captain Mark and First Mate Mindy Yuknat, CT River Expeditions; David Richards, Clinton Nurseries; Gary Crump and Gloria Priam, Priam Vineyards; Rob Merritt, R2 Graphics; Mary Kay Brown, Organic Vintages. Many thanks to all who came aboard to support our river monitoring efforts, and made the event so much fun and such a great success. We hope to see new and old faces on the boat next year!



22ND ANNUAL SHRUB & SEEDLING SALE TO BE HELD April 19-21, 2013 Old Saybrook Shopping Center, Boston Post Rd. & Elm St., Old Saybrook



Don't despair...spring, and our annual plant sale, are right around the corner! Once again, we are pleased to offer a variety of Connecticut natives for enhancing your landscape, including shrubs, groundcovers, evergreen tree seedlings, grasses, ferns, flowering perennials, many edibles suitable for landscaping, and wet-loving plants for rain gardens. This year we have a new focus on plants to attract pollinators (see cover article). Popular items first offered last year include the *Buffer in a Bag* packet to enhance habitat and protect water quality along streams, lakes or ponds, and Collins Organic Compost, direct from Enfield, CT. Green up your yard with natives, grow fresh food for your family, provide forage and cover for wildlife, attract butterflies and birds, and support our essential pollinators!! For a brochure and order form go to www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal, or phone (860) 346-3282. Quantities of your selections may be limited, so don't miss out—*reserve your plants by sending in your order form by April 1, 2013.*

January 2013

The Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, Inc. is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote the sound use and management of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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The District serves the towns of Berlin, Chester, Clinton, Colchester, Cromwell, Deep River, Durham, East Haddam, East Hampton, Essex, Haddam, Hebron, Killingworth, Lyme, Madison, Marlborough, Middlefield, Middletown, New Britain, Newington, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Portland, Rocky Hill, Salem and Westbrook.

The Board of Directors holds public meetings every fourth Wednesday, 7:00 PM, at the deKoven House Community Center in Middletown. All programs and services are offered on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, marital status or handicap.

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Connecticut River Coastal
Conservation District, Inc.
deKoven House Community Center
27 Washington Street
Middletown, CT 06457
Phone: (860) 346-3282
FAX: (860) 346-3284
www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal

