

Habitat Works

CHESAPEAKE WILDLIFE HERITAGE

The newsletter about designing, restoring and managing wildlife habitat.
Fall 2018



Habitat Works is published by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to designing, restoring and managing wildlife habitat and establishing a more sustainable agriculture through direct action, education and research in partnership with public and private landowners. We welcome your comments and contributions.

Save Wildlife Now by Saving Mowing for Later

By Ned Gerber, Director/Wildlife Habitat Ecologist

Too often, we are reminded of Aldo Leopold's words: "One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds." The latest scar resulted from a nice patch of wildflowers on Route 50 being mown by the State Highway Administration in early July. One day, it was thriving with baby rabbits, birds, butterflies, native bees, milkweeds (with Monarch caterpillars on them, to be sure) and many other flowers. Within 24 hours, it was ALL reduced to 1-inch stubble. Every year, a "meadow massacre" takes place when most Delmarva farmers mow all the CREP/CRP they can, on or shortly after August 15, as permitted by short-sighted Natural Resource Conservation Service rules. This is the same agency that puts out weekly tweets and Facebook posts about their concerns for pollinators' well-being.

They should show us they mean what they say by requiring farmers to wait until November 1 to mow no more than half of their CRP ground.

Although March is the preferred time for mowing, mowing in November instead of midsummer allows most of our pollinators and the plants they depend on to become inactive.

Poorly timed mowing remains a common error in the wildlife management of Maryland's tiny reservoir of meadows in agricultural and residential areas. Here we are, very concerned about complex issues like the impact of neonicotinoid insecticides on wildlife, yet we can't even get simple wildlife management techniques like meadow mowing right. Non-manicured grasslands are rare in Maryland, so those that exist deserve careful treatment if we are to reap the many wildlife benefits they can provide.

Monarch butterflies are migrating to Mexico in September and October. It should come as no surprise that this arduous journey requires a lot of energy that

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can only come from flower nectar (Joe-pye weed, goldenrod, wingstem, etc.). The incredible wildflower destruction wrought by late-summer/early-fall mowing may be a contributing factor in the Monarch decline. Researchers now think that an absence of flowers during their travels south may hinder their migration. All the midsummer-blooming milkweed in the world won't provide the energy resources needed by Monarchs to make their incredible fall trip successfully.

Goldenrods (*Solidago* species) are relatively late-blooming wildflowers that provide high-value pollen at the end of the growing season. A bountiful supply of this late-season food is especially critical to native bee species such as bumblebees. Young queen bumblebees are the ONLY ones able to survive the winter (hopefully) and start a new population the following spring. Mowing a meadow in their current feeding territory before November is likely to negatively impact their ability to go into winter in good physical condition and thereby threatens the entire population. Many bumblebee species populations are in decline.

Have you ever noticed the galls on goldenrod stems? These are formed when gall flies lay their eggs in the plant stem. Chemicals in the hatching larvae's saliva cause the plant to grow the gall, and the fly larvae then develop inside it. Birds like Downy Woodpeckers open the gall and eat the larvae. Wasps insert their eggs into the gall so their larvae can eat the fly larvae. If the larvae hatch, they leave a hole when exiting. Several species of spiders will then enter and take up residence

Bee on coneflower



inside the vacant gall, which can persist for a year or more. Patches of goldenrod resist lodging in winter and provide good cover for birds. Goldenrod stands are communities within a meadow. All too frequently, they are destroyed by poorly timed mowing in late summer and early fall.

Many of the plants in a meadow provide essential winter cover and seed sources for species like White-throated Sparrows, rabbits, voles and insects.

By mowing only a portion of the meadow each year in March, winter cover is preserved and standing dead plant material is left to provide nesting cover for the following spring.

Many insects overwinter in the stems and flower heads of standing vegetation. **Please, at least wait until after Thanksgiving to mow these meadows.**

Late-summer mowing not only eliminates many useful flowering plants and harms the pollinators that depend on them; it also destroys other important wildlife species like box turtles, snakes and spiders. In more northern states, where nesting Bobolinks are a concern, funding has been made available to pay hay farmers to delay cutting in order to save declining populations of these popular birds. Perhaps we need to consider further enhancing CREP/CRP payments so that mowing is timed properly for the many pollinators, birds and other wildlife that use Maryland meadows. ●



PLEASE HELP THE WILDLIFE AND NATIVE PLANTS LIVING IN THESE MEADOWS BY:

Mowing mostly in March

Mowing no more than half of your meadow

Mowing at a height of 8–12 inches!

CWH Moves Office to Chester

In November 2017, Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage moved our office from the old Railway Station in Easton, MD, to the old Dominion Schoolhouse at 1201 Parson Island Rd. in Chester, MD.

The Dominion Schoolhouse is part of the 540-acre Barnstable Hill Farm, which was donated to CWH by the White and Bennett families in 2000. Since then, the building had been rented as a single family dwelling; however, in 2017, we decided that it would be the perfect spot for the CWH office, and work began to repair and update it to be suitable for its new use.

The original one-room schoolhouse at this location was built sometime prior to 1893. When it was decided to build a new two-room school in about 1917, it was located on the same property just in front of the original schoolhouse.

The 1917 Dominion Schoolhouse is now home to the CWH office, which works well for field staff. Their work has been based at Barnstable Hill for many years, but now their long trek to Easton is no longer required for paperwork. The new office location seems to be working out well.

As in Easton, this CWH office has nesting boxes, predator guards, sparrow traps, native bee nesting tubes and more for sale. Please give us a call at 410-822-5100 so we can be sure to have the quantity you need ready when you arrive. CWH wants to continue to make available nesting structures and the much-needed predator guards for our feathered friends so their landlords can keep them happy and safe.

Feel free to stop in to see us if you're out this way.



MONARCH HABITAT

Means More Than Milkweed



By Andi Pupke, Education & Outreach Director

Monarch on tickseed (*Bidens* sp.)

Preserving Monarch butterfly populations and their amazing migration requires protecting habitat that is crucial for the species' entire lifespan. This includes preserving habitat for breeding, migrating and overwintering throughout the Monarch's range.

Many organizations and NGOs work to protect the habitat in Mexico where the eastern population of Monarchs overwinters. The relatively small size of this habitat, as well as human interference on these sites, makes their protection critical.

The Monarch caterpillar is utterly dependent on milkweeds (*Asclepias* sp.) as its host plant—it cannot survive on any other plant. At one time in U.S. history, milkweed was listed as an agricultural pest plant, so farmers and other land managers worked to remove it from the landscape.

In recent years, there has been an

increased push in many areas to plant and preserve milkweed patches and incorporate patches of these plants into meadows. This effort is a good practice and will benefit many other pollinators in addition to Monarchs. Controlling invasive plants and planting native species is also important for Monarch survival. Monarchs can be tricked into laying their eggs on two

non-native species—*Cynanchum louiseae* and *C. rossicum*, also known as Louise's swallow-wort and dog-strangling vine, respectively—on which their larvae cannot feed and develop.

But conserving habitat in the wintering sites and planting milkweed in your backyard is not enough to protect and save the Monarch. We must also restore and protect their breeding



Bee on goldenrod

grounds and the habitat along their migration routes in Mexico, the U.S. and Canada.

During fall, the Monarchs migrate south to Mexico. As they make this trip, they must gain weight to survive the winter. Intensive land management practices along their migration routes, such as frequent mowing, impacts of non-targeted insecticide use and an increase in developed areas, deplete the habitat the Monarch needs to survive the arduous trip, much less gain and store weight for the winter.

Fall-flowering species are vital for the monarch to fuel up during the migration. In the Mid-Shore region, plants like asters, goldenrod, and tickseed sunflower offer nectar late into the fall. Milkweeds are nectar-rich plants when in flower, and they benefit many bee species and other pollinators as well as the Monarch, but in our area they flower in midsummer—not during migration. Wetlands that dry up some during the summer are often in full bloom late into the fall and offer a variety of flowering plants for nectaring butterflies.

What can you do along the Monarch's migratory routes? Planting and preserving not only milkweed plants but also flowering species that offer nectar throughout the breeding and migrating seasons will help the Monarch reproduce and migrate to the wintering grounds. Time your mowing outside the breeding and migrating season so you will not remove vital habitat, and use less insecticide in areas used by pollinators.

Only when we work to improve and protect habitat for the entire Monarch butterfly lifecycle will we be able to give Monarchs their best chance for survival. ●

Support Wildlife Habitat with a Planned Gift to CWH

CWH encourages you to think about wildlife when you are planning your estate. A planned gift to CWH can lower estate taxes for your family, support wildlife and the Bay and, depending on the type of gift, provide some income for a beneficiary.

A planned gift is a gift of cash, securities or real estate made with careful forethought. It can be simple and straightforward or more complicated. These gifts should always be reviewed by your financial advisor or estate planning lawyer.

The most basic type of planned gift is a bequest. The donor designates in their will an asset to be given to CWH upon their death. Bequests can lower estate tax burdens and allow **you** to determine where your money will go rather than the federal government. Including CWH in your will is as simple as adding a codicil that names "Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, Inc." as a beneficiary.

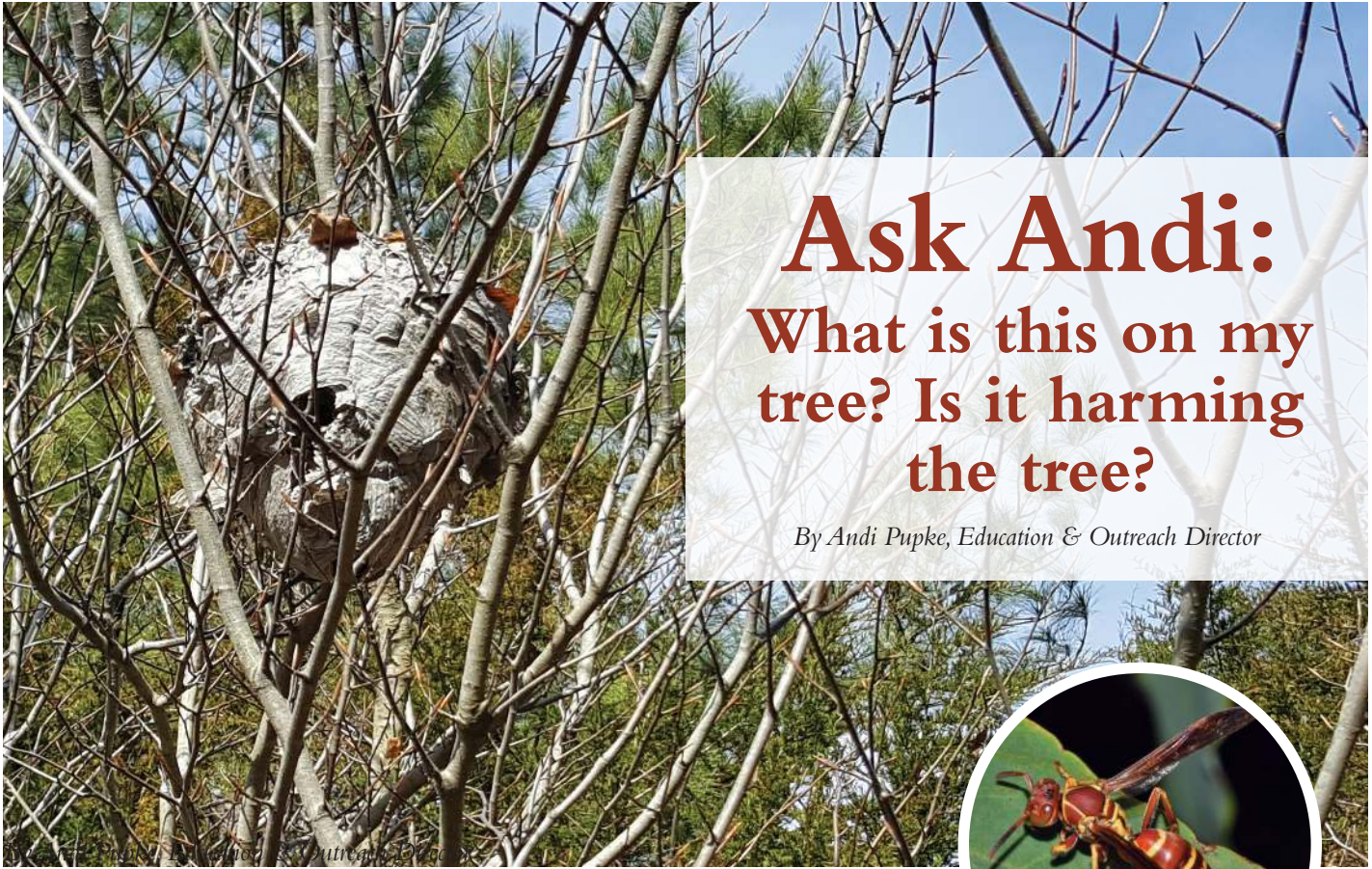


A wetland restored by CWH on Woodmender Farm in Kent County.

You can also use a life insurance policy as a charitable gift. New policies can be purchased or old policies transferred to make CWH the recipient of the death benefits. Certain tax deductions are permitted for this type of gift.

Charitable Remainder Trusts are probably the most complicated common form of a planned gift. However, they are a popular means for individuals to give a significant gift to a charity, receive some tax breaks and provide income for a family member.

Planned gifts are a wonderful opportunity for you to support CWH's work for wildlife and the Chesapeake Bay while preparing your estate to ease the burden on your family. Please call our office at 410-822-5100 for more information about making a planned gift to CWH.



Ask Andi: What is this on my tree? Is it harming the tree?

By Andi Pupke, Education & Outreach Director

The photo shows a paper wasp nest attached to the branch of the tree. It will not harm the tree.

Paper wasps are Vespid wasps. They gather fibers from dead wood and plant stems, combine these fibers with saliva and use the mixture to construct water-resistant nests made of gray or brown papery material. The twenty-two species of paper wasps in North America include some hornets and yellow jackets that also make nests out of papery material.

The nests of most true paper wasps are characterized by open combs with cells for brood rearing and a petiole or constricted stalk that anchors the nest.

During winter, the worker wasps will freeze and the queen will hibernate to start a new colony in spring. The nest will degrade over the winter. These nests can be found in sheltered areas such as the eaves of house, the branches of a tree, the end of an open pipe and many other places.

Most paper wasps are not as aggressive as yellow jackets and hornets, and they will only attack if they or their nest are threatened.

These wasps are beneficial in their natural habitat and are critically important in the ecosystem.



Paper wasps feed on nectar and other insects, including garden pests. Adult paper wasps are efficient predators, mostly of caterpillars such as corn earworms, army worms and many others that can harm crops. They carry their prey back to the nest and feed it to their developing larvae. So, not only do they pollinate plants—they control some pests that could harm plants. Don't be too quick to get rid of a paper wasp's nest if it is not causing a problem. ●

GO GREEN!

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One recent winter, ice and snow brought down Jack and Marcia Moore's osprey platform. When the birds returned in spring, they attempted to build on the downed structure. The Moores called CWH, we reinstalled the structure, and the birds began building almost immediately. These photos and an email from the Moores tell the story:

Thank you for fixing our osprey platform that was damaged by ice and wind last winter. When the platform came down, our pair first tried to rebuild on the downed nest. When they realized that wasn't going to work, they settled in a nearby tree and waited patiently for Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage. You didn't disappoint. They began rebuilding their nest on the straightened pole almost before your truck left our driveway and they seem to be nesting happily.

Thank you for your good work.

Sincerely,
Jack and Marcia Moore

If you are interested in an osprey platform, call CWH at 410-822-5100.

Photos courtesy of Jack and Marcia Moore





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Photo courtesy of David Judd