Outlook

Greenspace Newsletter

From Jennifer Erena <steward@bobolink-greenspace.com>
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The Neighborhood Chronicle #2

BOB O LINK GREENSPACE

Welcome!

This is the SECOND newsletter from our new Bob O Link Greenspace! I promise I will not announce the number of every edition, but this is exciting times! And I have finally finished the setup of our email address, steward@bobolink-greenspace.com so you can send emails to it. GoDaddy doesn't make it flow naturally! 🤣🤣

Stay green, stay kind, stay connected - Jennifer Erena

STEWARDSHIP SUPPORT



Natural Resource Conservation Service EQIP and CSP Funding

Mary Sigafus and Jennifer Erena headed to the Fayette County Conservation District to see Heather Silvanik and fill out paperwork to register the BOL Greenspace as urban farmland. More to come as we progress through some eligibility determination and funding opportunities. This is a wonderful potential to build a conservation plan and have financial assistance to implement that plan.

EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentives Program

CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program

FIELD NOTES



Lessons from a Messy Yard

> "Every person makes some impact on the planet every single day, and we get to choose what sort of difference we make," Jane Goodall often said.

The late, and much-missed Goodall brought messages of hope and action to a world starving for attention. We can take up her baton with small actions, or as it turns out, inactions in our own yards.

When I bought my home nearly 30 years ago, I spent every free moment in my yard, designing, planting, mowing, weeding, pruning. But life has a way of trouncing the best intentions, shaking up routine, and shrinking time. This year, my attention stretched thin by other responsibilities and my motivation burned to a cinder under an intensely hot summer, my yard suffered. Boy, did it suffer.

Weeds flourished, runaway vines and invasive species strangled and suffocated landscape plantings. When I finally attacked the chaos,

however, I discovered an unexpected gift. There was abundant native life in that mess.

Nurturers of native landscapes and biodiversity have long advocated for “messy” gardens. That’s hard for those of us who value a neat yard, but Nature isn’t fastidious. Sometimes neither am I.

I hated hauling heavy bags of leaves to the street from the far reaches of my backyard. My answer was to ignore those leaves until I decided to plant native woodland flowers back there. Over the years I neglected to rake, Nature began a lot of the work. Nutrient-poor clay had become dark, loamy soil, rich with microbes and fungi that make plants thrive. I’ve cursed a certain ubiquitous vine that takes over everything. I thought it was field bindweed (*Convulvulvus arvensis*), an invasive nonnative morning glory. Whenever I saw it, I ripped it out with gusto.



Monarch caterpillar



Monarch

Oops.

It turns out it's not bindweed, but native honeyvine milkweed (*Cynanchum laeve*). Like the milkweeds I knew about, such as common milkweed or swamp milkweed, honeyvine is also a host plant for monarch butterflies. While it can be aggressive, it also handed me some thank-you gifts — multiple monarch caterpillars. All fifth instars, which is the last stage of larval development, they were on the verge of pupating. They'd made it from egg to maturity nestled in a vine I considered a weed and an eyesore, and they considered home.

Monarchs, fragile butterflies who migrate an astounding 3,000 miles to their winter home in Mexico, are in danger. Their population is dropping. In past summers, I joined the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project. Last year was particularly disheartening. Over the course of four months, our team at Floracliff Nature Sanctuary found no monarch eggs or caterpillars.

Zero. Zilch.

This year, multiple monarch larvae were growing plump and strong on a maligned vine in my yard, protected in part by my neglect. Considering

that only 10% of caterpillars survive to become butterflies, the sheer number I found a few feet from my backdoor was remarkable.

Discovering them forced me to slow down. Instead of cursing and yanking out armfuls of honeyvine, I inspected each leaf before pulling out the vines. Patience paid off. Another caterpillar showed itself, as well as two chrysalises, one empty and one in-progress. Uncovering a gorgeous monarch chrysalis makes slow work worth the time. It looks like a piece of art, carved from translucent jade studded with tiny citrines. The green case blends into the underside of the leaves it hangs on, so you must be careful when pruning shrubs. The gold dots and dashes reflect light, helping to camouflage the chrysalis from hungry wildlife and provide oxygen passage for the creature pupating inside.



Carolina mantis egg sac



Nessus Sphinx moth caterpillar

Nature gifted more than monarchs to me. A large Nessus sphynx moth caterpillar lay on the ground camouflaged a little too well. Plump and at least three inches long, its dirt-brown skin perfectly blended with the soil — a handy protection from hungry birds, but not from big-footed, graceless creatures like me. This one was lucky. I saw it in time.

A Nessus sphynx moth is a day-flying moth that dines on nectar and whose caterpillars consume – wait for it – Virginia creeper and grapevines, prolific native vines I've been known to rip out with manic glee, but I'd overlooked this year.

At least two Carolina mantids visited my garden, had a little nooky, and the survivor left a gift of her eggs on the frame of my suet feeder. Most of us are familiar with Chinese mantids, a large praying mantis that is an aggressive invasive species with an indiscriminate diet that includes our native mantis, the much smaller Carolina. That my leafy landscape provided camouflage for the little one to be able to live out her life cycle and drop some gifts for the future makes me happy.

More than the animal world gifted me with delightful surprises. I uncovered native plants that birds or the wind had spread. A white variety of native ageratum (*Conoclinium coelestinum)* grew in my fence border. Part of the aster family, it has lovely frothy blooms on 12-inch stems. Bees and butterflies love it. Yellow passionflower vine (*Passiflora lutea*) wove its way over a shady area of the fence. Gulf fritillary, zebra longwing, and variegated fritillary butterflies lay their eggs on this hardy vine. Its UFO-shaped flowers also make a good conversation starter.

> Nature is as near as our back doors. Being gifted with the sight of a caterpillar, a chrysalis, an unexpected native plant is a powerful reminder that we are not alone on this planet. I've learned that choosing to let a little corner go wild promotes biodiversity and makes a small but significant difference in our world.

Thank you for caring,

Carol Spence
Master Naturalist
Bob O Link Resident



https://bobolink-greenspace.com/blog/lessons-from-a-messy-yard

STEWARDSHIP STEPS

We are planning a workday / planting day in November - date coming soon!

SEASONAL SNAPSHOT



Yellow Passionflower - found in Carol's yard, Native and produces berries for the birds.



Snakeroot (named for incorrect notion that it cured snakebites)

- enjoyed by bees and butterflies, but toxic ☠️ for animals and humans to eat.



Wingstem (named for its winged stem) after flowering. pollinator with deep roots, similar to ironweed.

🎓 Learn more about our beautiful planet and greenspace from our talented neighbors at https://bobolink-greenspace.com/

📩 Want to write an article? Or have a topic you want to learn more about? Send your article/ideas to jennifer.erena@me.com.

🌐 View newsletter online at Flip the Switch for Wildlife

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