



NaturePhile

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The Balsam Mountain Trust inspires people to be responsible stewards of the natural and cultural resources of the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains through education and conservation leadership.



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There were around two hundred people on hand at Fairway #6 for the total solar eclipse, and what was for many, a once-in-a-lifetime celestial event. Jim Stratigos and friends provided some excellent viewing equipment along with providing *NaturePhile* with this amazing shot of totality.

In this issue: **From the Trailhead:** Thank You Trust Supporters!; MapQuest; Pollinators; Nature Center Update; A Walk in the Woods, a poem by Michael; Education Mewsings: Amphibious Landing



From the Trailhead:

By Michael Skinner, executive director



An Enormous and Heart-Felt Thank You!

The thank you post it note on the cover of this issue is a reference to the success of both the Trust's Metamorphosis

Party and the annual Trust Party. I would like to offer, with ut-

most humility, my heartfelt gratitude to all BMP members, Trustees, Trust Party Committee members, Trust staff, the Club and the Community Association employees for what turned out to be an unmitigated success. With the challenges we face as a species on this planet, it is good to know that there many people who believe in what we do—not to just address the challenges with which we're faced— but to provide the intellectual resources by which we can all make informed decisions to steward the natural resources which sustain life on planet Earth. Your Trust Board supports the efforts made by the Trust staff to explore the wonders of the natural world and to help each of you better understand the complexities of natural world and how those complexities ensure that the cycles of life continue.



The Black & White Fall Ball attracted some very interesting 'critters' and Jeanne and Charlie Harris were no exception. Folks were really in the spirit of the event and total amount raised for the Trust exceeded our expectations. The weather was perfect and a great time was had by everyone.

The Chance to Put BMP on More Maps

In my tenure with the Trust I have been very fortunate to have been able to participate in myriad field experiences with people much smarter than myself. In those 'classes' I've attempted to file away as much as I can - be it by memory, photos, note-taking or, all of the above. What I also attempt to do is stay as current as I can with scientific journals. One of my favorites is Anthropocene journal. This magazine is a really well written 'short-story' type of format for everything environmental—the good news and the not-so-good news. To the point: what we continue to learn places us in a really good position to continue nurturing and stewarding this 'community within a park' ethos developed sixteen years ago by BMP's original visionaries. BMP as a project has what I refer to as the two bookends: one end being Jim Chaffin, the other, Bobbye and Ken Bowdon. Both had and have a vision for this community of cultivating a sense of place and honoring the natural world by becoming stewards of the gifts we've been given.

With that ethos in mind, and as 2017 winds down, we're going to invite all BMP owners/members to join us in a couple of challenges and they are: 1) the community-wide certification of each homestead with the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program. We would like to have the entire Preserve showcased as a community-wide certified wildlife habitat;

For the Preserve to qualify for community-certification status we need to have ten homesteads get their homesteads certified as backyard habitats. The rest of the criteria required for certification will be satisfied by the Trust, namely yours truly.



To take a look at the requirements for getting your BMP homestead certified please go to: <https://www.nwf.org/en/Garden-for-Wildlife/Certify> and follow the prompt for “Certify Your Garden”. This is a very easy process and is basically structured to run on an honor system of meeting NWF’s certification criteria. After completing that process you then submit a \$20 administrative fee. After you’ve certified your homestead I would like you to let me know. Once we get ten homesteads (and while we need only ten, anyone can participate—the more the merrier—and better for conservation) then I’ll complete the rest of the criteria to get the entire Preserve certified. We’ll then be able to announce it and be able to let the rest of the world know about our efforts.

I’m sure many of you have seen the billboards that the Preserve has placed along the highways advertising “A Commitment to Nature”. This program allows us to walk the talk and set the example as a human settlement committed to stewarding the resources we are given, in trust.

And 2) the pollinator plant project on the golf course. We really hope to get this project kicked off in 2018. Each of you, by now, have seen the roadside wildflower plantings on the Preserve. Those are having additional seeding taking place to enlarge their impact within the community. The project on the golf course will create even greater impact as relates to both aesthetic and pollinator food—sources effect within the Preserve.

I’m guessing that most of you are aware of the challenges we face with the loss of large numbers of honeybees as well as our native pollinators. This project will be a great way to help mitigate those losses by offering favored food sources for our local bees, beetles, butterflies, etc. The bonus is the wonderful artistic and aesthetic beauty the pollinator plants will add to the golf course. Stay tuned in later issues of NaturePhile for more information as to how you might be able to help with this amazing project.

Nature Center 2.0 Move Update

The relocation of the relocation is moving along steadily and at a bit of a box turtle’s pace. Rob Howard is leading the charge to get the architect’s drawings finalized and the building contractor and sub-contractor ducks lined up. The pace of the move is being dictated by the queue in which the Trust finds itself with the main players in this project. Rob Howard has been, and continues to be, the driving force project manager to get the Trust moved back into its previous, and soon to be permanent, home. We’ll keep you posted but look for a move-in date sometime about late spring of 2018.



Goldenrod is one wildflower that is an important pollinator food plant in late summer/early autumn. These plants are sport beautiful flowers and important ecologically to a variety of insects.

A Walk in the Woods, Surely Does the Soul Good
By Michael Skinner

V1

I knew when I looked out the window this morning
That something quite special would happen today
The sun was a'rising and I had a yearning
For my friends in the forest I'd meet on my way

V2

A stream came upon me and whispered so gently
Drink deeply the water that's rushing on by
Then walk down the path that is just lightly trodden
And if you need respite you should bend to the sky

Chorus

Oh the clouds were just forming and the twilight was lifting
And my heart ached out loudly for the song of the woods
And settled upon me the voices were singing
A walk in the woods surely does the soul good
A walk in the woods surely does the soul good

V3

There is wondrous abundance in the life and the living
And you may discover that which awaits you
And you'll find that the ramparts might just be willing
To give up their secrets when you search for the clues

Break

Do a quick two-step
Watch out for the branches
There may be a misstep
As the snake slides on by
When crickets start calling
And your senses awaken
Don't mind that your falling
To the trances of nature
To the trances of nature
From the earth to the sky

Education Mewsings: Disease on the Mountain: What you can do to protect Balsam Mountain Preserve's Amphibians

By: Rose Wall, Co-Senior Naturalist/Education Director

(Editor's Note: As of the date of the publication of this issue of NaturePhile, this pathogen has not been officially confirmed on the Preserve. We are awaiting lab results from the state before we issue any type of quarantine protocols. As soon as we know something, BMP residents will be informed.)

The Trust is sad to report that we've probably found a deadly amphibian disease here on the mountain. Chytrid Fungus, Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis, is a wide spread disease that causes mass die-offs in frogs and salamanders. According to those that research it, this fungus is the worst infectious disease ever recorded among vertebrates in terms of the number of species it impacts and its propensity to drive them to extinction.



Resident species of amphibians such as the wood frog (above) and the red-backed salamander (below) are being dramatically affected by the chytrid fungus, which is now found all over western North Carolina. Please read this article to see how you can help preserve these amazing creatures.

Photos by M. Skinner

The numbers:

- Spans six continents
- 6,000 species susceptible
- More than 200 species of amphibians extinct or in severe decline already

Although its exact origin is disputed (it's probably native to Asia), major impacts of the disease were first recorded in both the Netherlands and Australia in the 1990's and it has spanned the globe rapidly ever since. Amphibians are exposed to the disease when they come into contact with water where the fungal spores are present, usually contracting it in close quarters such as mating, at the larval stage when animals are in high densities, or during shipping for the pet trade. Chytrid attacks the skin of the animal, impairing its ability to breathe. In Central America (where the disease has been well documented), half of all amphibian species became locally extinct within six months of exposure to the disease. The disease was first documented in western North Carolina in 2006 and is now widespread in the region's streams. In those areas studied, 10 percent (or fewer) of amphibians have shown signs of the disease. But, we are uncertain of how quickly it's spreading and what the final toll will be. Biologists are particularly concerned with the Eastern hellbender salamander, the



largest salamander in the U.S. Hellbenders have shown a higher rate of disease contraction -- just another blow to an animal that is already a candidate for being added to the endangered species list.

Unfortunately chytrid fungus is not the only disease out there. Other diseases, infestations, etc., are wiping out bats, starfish, coral reefs, and trees like our hemlocks right here on the mountain. In our global society, we are traveling and constantly moving things from place to place. Since this is unlikely to change, it is important that we think of the ramifications on wildlife and wild places. As a society, we are demanding measures be taken to protect human health from disease spread. We need to do the same for our environment and the critters with which we share this planet.

There is rarely a quick fix or a one-size-fits-all solution. The good news is that scientists from all over the world are working on a number of different tactics to preserve amphibian biodiversity. But, there are many easy things you can do to help too!

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT FROGS, TOADS AND SALAMANDERS

The prevalence of chytrid fungus is still relatively low in this region compared to much of the world. What we do goes a long way to reduce the impact.

Disinfect your gear! This is huge for reducing the spread here at Balsam. Disinfect anything that went into a stream or pond (your boots, fishing gear, etc.). Use 10% bleach solution and let sit for 10 minutes.

If you see something, say something. Document sick or suspicious looking animals with photos and location and let us know.

Be Careful Pet Shopping. Many exotic pets are sourced from wild populations. Make sure your pet is captive bred, or get it from a rescue rather than the pet store. Better yet – don't buy exotic pets to begin with.

Never release pets! Releasing exotic pets can disrupt an ecosystem and introduce disease. If you have an exotic pet you can't care for, contact a local school, zoo or wildlife sanctuary to see if you can adopt it out.

Buy products that promote a healthy forest (look for these certifications: Rainforest Alliance, Forests For All Forever, and Certified Sustainable Palm Oil): Chytrid Fungus is an awful disease, but four times as many amphibians are affected by habitat destruction. In addition, destroyed/disrupted forests are more likely to harbor disease.

Engage in the Citizen Science program, Frog Watch to monitor a population near you! <https://www.aza.org/frogwatch>



In an interesting ecological twist, the red eft, a terrestrial stage of our common red-spotted newt (salamander), does not typically contract the chytrid fungus, unless it was exposed before leaving the water or, when it returns to the water (which they all eventually

Photo by M. Skinner