



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.



This Canada goose, apparently, knows it's the year of the bird as it decided that it in fact did own the road in a Costco parking lot. Michael rendered this shot in black & white to add interest with the monochromatic colors of the goose and the parking lot. If you get great bird shots (or any other critters), please send them to us and we'll put them in *NaturePhile* and on our Facebook page.

Photo by: M. Skinner

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From the Trailhead:

By Michael Skinner, executive director

Yeah, We're Movin' On Up (to the top of the hill)!

Wow! What a journey it's been for the past 18 years since the Trust was incorporated as 501 © (3) nonprofit conservation organization. And now, "Lord wilin' and the creek don't rise", (well, okay, we know the creeks are gonna rise!) the Trust is in its permanent, forever home, And in no small measure, we have many BMP members, who have so selflessly given to make this happen, to thank for this progress.

The Phase 1 remodel of the Nature Center (2.0) began in February and is progressing well. This first reincarnation will focus on the main floor of the building. We will progress to other phases as time and finances allow. Suffice it to say, however, that we believe the new look on the inside (and eventually, the outside) will make each BMP member proud of this resource. There are other ideas, in the sketch-plan stage, for the other floors and the grounds surrounding the building.

Please feel free to come see us at our current headquarters so we can share the plans and progress of the remodel. Not only is the staff going to have shiny new work and exhibit spaces, but our animal ambassadors will also have newer living quarters in which to call home.



This eastern bluebird must find other ways to procure food in the winter months with the dearth of its warm-season food—mostly insects—on the Preserve. Scientists are attempting to determine how climate-change is affecting historically migratory species—many of which are no longer embarking on their exhaustive journeys.

Photo by M. Skinner

The Year of the Bird

There is so much one can opine, and/or otherwise wax philosophically, scientifically, etc., about birds. Birding has become one of the most popular sports in the United States. Whether it's the simple act of spying birds at your window feeder, investing in a pair of decent binoculars and going afield or diving into the endurance sport of the World Series of Birding, any form can bring huge satisfaction...and frustration. The latter can bring both as teams compete at a furious/manic level. How does counting 190 species in a 24-hour period sound?! Please see Bethany's news about the Year of the Bird in her AmeriCorps column in this issue.

A Haiku for Birds by Michael

Hopes are the colors
Of feathers...and promises
Breathe in deeply, rest

Not only would we like to see your photos (as mentioned in the caption on the first page), but we'd also like to have you share with us what inspires you about this amazing world in which we live. It can be a story, poem, or other creative, artistic representation about the awesomeness of the natural world—or cultural and spiritual world—that was/may have been inspired by nature.

Come see us and help us share in the Year of the Bird!



Education Mewsings: 'Re-Wilding' Your Garden

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

Former BMP homeowner Charlie Harris put it beautifully by saying, “When we are all gone, what we’ve planted in our backyards will be our true legacy here at Balsam. As your plants grow and spread, so will your individual (and positive) lasting impact on this land.”

Most everywhere you turn these days you hear about how bees, butterflies or other important pollinators are in trouble. The plight of pollinators is on most everyone’s mind, whether you are a farmer, a biologist or just a backyard gardener who enjoys seeing butterflies. Here at the Trust, we want to help you help pollinators, not to mention, all the other wildlife that calls Balsam Mountain Preserve home! And, you don’t have to go any further than your backyard to make a big impact!

One important way to promote healthy wildlife is through landscaping with native plants. Non-native, exotic plants can be pretty, but in best-case scenarios, they are usually useless to native wildlife. And they are, often harmful, if not downright devastating, to native communities. For example, the princess tree (*Paulownia tomentosa*) brought here from China for its beautiful blooms, has become invasive in our forests, usurping habitat of native plants and often, other living things that depend on those plants. Plants brought from other parts of the world can also have dangerous hitchhikers, such as the Asian fungus that pretty much rendered the American chestnut tree functionally extinct, or the hemlock woolly adelgid, a small bug that is killing our native hemlock trees en masse.

So, if you want to satisfy the birds and the bees and the trees—Go Native! It’s also easier on you – native plants have evolved to exist where you live, meaning lower maintenance is needed to keep them happy.

Here at Balsam, growing native gardens and attracting native wildlife is a part of the culture. We just hope to make it simpler for you. Based on your feedback, one thing you want is easy access to plants that are on the BMP Approved Plant List. This year, we are experimenting with a plant sale that is exclusive to BMP homeowners and only includes plants on the approved plant list. We worked with three nurseries that grow native plants exclusively, to give you a selection of over 40 different species. And in this first sale, you all purchased more than 450 plants!

We see this as a win-win-win-win, supporting:

- The Trust and its environmental education/land stewardship mission
- You! We hope that adding these beauties to your garden brings you joy
- Your local pollinators, birds and other critters that come to visit
- Your community - by purchasing from small-scale, local growers

The plant sale is just one way we hope to make ‘re-wilding’ your gardens easy and fun. Be on the lookout for our 2018 Garden Club announcements as well as workshops and other information about signing up to become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Habitat.



Native butterflies benefit best from native wildflowers with their requisite nectar and pollen sources as these relationships have, often, developed over millenia. Non-native, exotic introductions can, and have, literally, ‘upset the applecart’.



AmeriCorps Update

By Bethany Sheffer

Hello, everyone. It's hard to believe I'm more than halfway through my 2nd AmeriCorps service term! Overall, my projects have been going very well and I'm thrilled that so much is getting done for the Trust. I've immensely enjoyed continuing to deliver our signature Adopt-A-School programs to 4th graders in Jackson and Haywood counties and have helped the Trust reach 282 students so far this season. Between school and public programs, I've reached 1,155 individuals and counting between 2017-2018! Our partnership with the REACH women's shelter in Haywood County continues to provide temporary residents with an incredible opportunity to experience nature on a monthly basis, and I have acquired many new skills through the development of our 1st grade Pollinator curriculum. This curriculum will accompany a 'rentable' bin that teachers in Jackson and Haywood counties will be able to use in their classrooms by the end of 2018. Lastly, I've been connecting with county high schools for our future internship program and planning for World Migratory Bird Day 2018.



4th grade students enjoy a close-up interaction with Beaufort!

The 'Year of the Bird'

Yes, that's right, 2018 is Year of the Bird! The National Audubon Society, National Geographic, BirdLife International and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology have teamed up to better protect birds and their habitats throughout 2018, as this year marks the centennial anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act – the single most important piece of legislation passed to protect birds. Go to: <http://www.audubon.org/news/the-migratory-bird-treaty-act-explained> to find out more about this legislation.

We will also be incorporating this theme into our 2nd annual World Migratory Bird Day festival to be held on Saturday, May 12th from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. at Bridge Park in downtown Sylva. Join us for fun activities, crafts and live bird demonstrations all centered on celebrating and protecting birds in 2018...and beyond!



Golden eagles get their name from the color of their feathers on the crown and nape of the neck which appear when they reach maturity.

Photo credit: C. Kelly

A Golden Ticket!

Golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), majestic apex predators throughout the Northern Hemisphere, have recently been found to overwinter in western North Carolina (WNC) according to a two-year study conducted by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Through the installation of 26 camera-trap stations (provisioned with fresh road-kill for bait) across parts of WNC, the organization collected over 1,000 photos of golden eagles at 17 stations during the winters of 2013-15. These findings are significant because for decades biologists have experienced difficulty studying this species due to its highly reclusive nature. The eagles' documented presence will now inform conservation, public education and habitat management efforts throughout the region. Very exciting!

A Wildflower Rorschach Test



Often considered the bane of people who grow grass lawns, the dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is actually an amazing plant—one of countless other amazing species we are so fortunate to have on this planet. Check out the next page for some background on this species—blooming now at a theater near you!.

Photo by M. Skinner

A Dandy of a Flower

- The dandelion is the only flower that represents the three celestial bodies of the sun, moon and stars. The yellow flower resembles the sun, the puffy seed head resembles the moon and the dispersing seeds resemble the stars.
- The dandelion flower opens to greet the morning and closes in the evening to go to sleep.
- Every part of the dandelion is useful: root, leaves, flower. It can be used for food, medicine and even dye for coloring.
- **Up until the 19th century, people would pull grass out of their lawns to make room for dandelions and other useful “weeds” like chickweed and chamomile.**
- The average American recognizes thousands of logos for commercial products, yet recognizes fewer than five plants that grow in his/her area. Dandelions are most likely one of those familiar plants.
- The name dandelion is taken from the French word “dent de lion” meaning lion’s tooth, referring to the coarsely-toothed leaves.
- Dandelions have one of the longest flowering seasons of any plant.
- Seeds are often carried as many as 5 miles from their origin!
- **A not so fun fact: Every year Americans spend millions of \$\$\$ on lawn pesticides to have uniform lawns of non-native grasses, and we use 30% of the country’s water supply to keep them green.**

And Finally...Ch, Ch, Ch, Ch, Ch...Change Jars

We would like to thank Bobbye and Ken’s daughter, Megan, for creating the Critter Change Jars, which have been filling up, with, as you can see in the photo, all manner of legal tender. Someone placed a \$25 Harrah’s chip in the jar at the Boarding House. We will have to go to Cherokee to cash it in but, it has, after hiring a private detective, been determined to be real.

We want to thank everyone who continues to be supportive of Trust programs. And remember...your change can make a change for conservation.

