



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.



For the first time in a while, we have a new scientific research study beginning this year. Because of the pandemic, the principle investigator, Jane Dell, Ph.D. at Western Carolina University, is getting a late start and will do field work for the remainder of this field season and in 2021, to maximize their chances of getting the data sets for which they're looking.

Dr. Dell was awarded the Walk for Wildlife grant that the Trust has been giving to local conservation projects. She will be looking for caterpillars, not too unlike the two pictured above. On the left is a spotted Apatelodes (*Apatelodes torrefacta*) and on the right is a giant leopard moth. As is often the case with moths, people often see the caterpillar stages and seldom (or never) see an adult. Please refer to the page in NaturePhile that shows Dr. Dell's study abstract and a photo of the adult version of these amazing animals.

Photos by: J. Knight

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From the Trailhead:

By Michael Skinner, executive director

2020—A Year of Living Quietly, but with Purpose:

By the time you'll have read this, the Balsam Mountain Trust will have engaged in a Covid-style party that had folks socially distancing at Double Top Village and in pod parties happening in myriad places both on and off the Preserve. And while folks who've been planning this celebration have a fair amount of trepidation about BMP members' willingness to attend. As it turns out, there so many of you who wish to help us celebrate that maybe we didn't need to worry. Every year, for the many years we've been celebrating the Trust's birthday, the party draws one of the largest crowds to gather together for an evening of fun, food and support. This year the 'gathering' is going to be somewhat creative in its presentation—because of course, the state of our social systems.

As October usually connotes the beginning of the winding down of the people-in-the-out-of-doors, it is also the time when Mother Nature puts on her own Fourth of July fireworks show with the unmasking of all the green in the woods to a vibrant plethora of an artist's pastels. It also beckons critters of all fashions to contemplate what they're going to do in 'off-season'. For me, this annual wind-down is just another excuse to get outside.

By going outside, one can contemplate the circle of seasons and, hopefully, appreciate the new monotone of grey that will soon be upon us. It's almost like living in black and white.

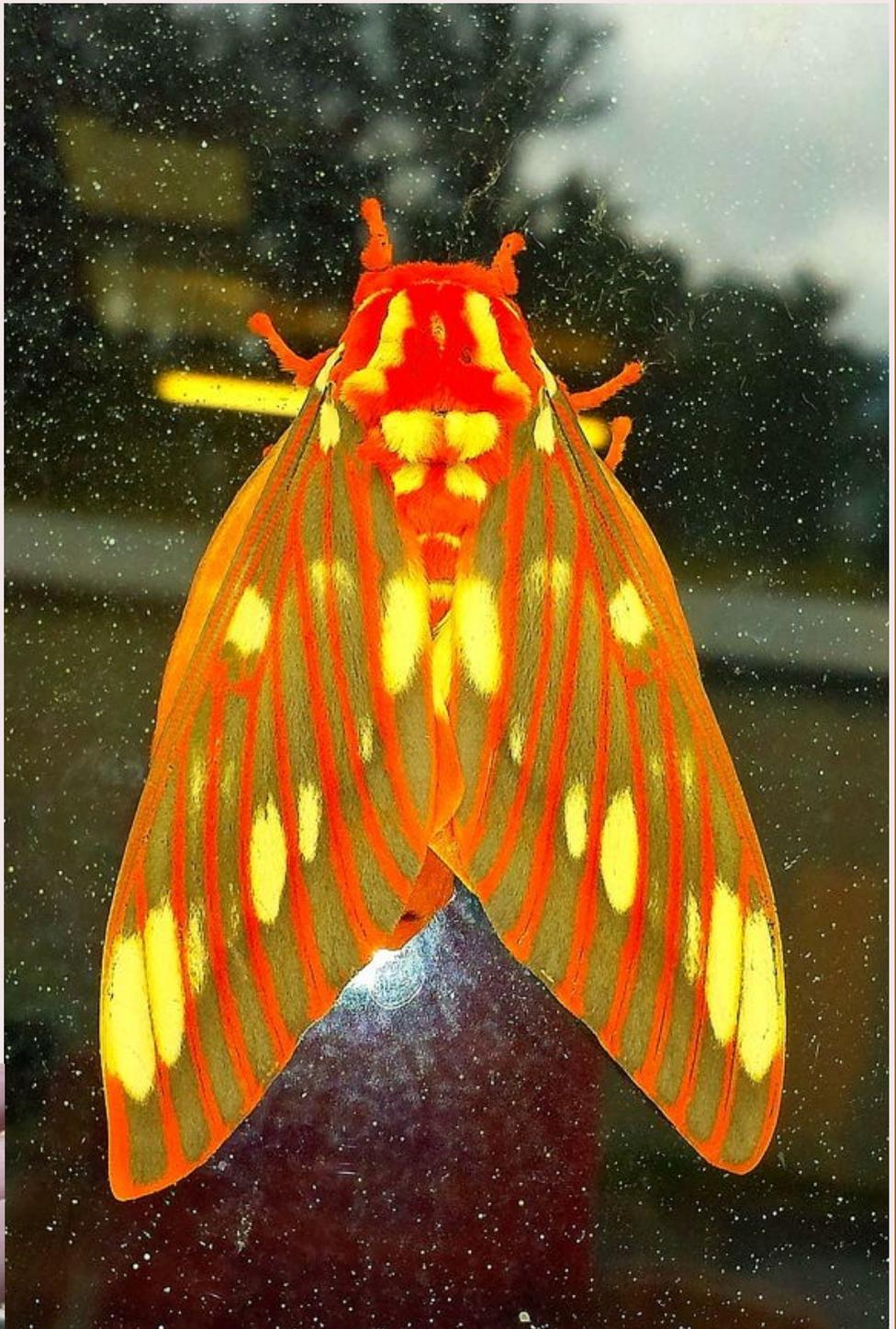
What this season also does for me is allow me to consider the vast, and sometimes, unmanageable 'bad' news we get about the state of the natural world on planet Earth. I hope you saw David Attenborough's interview on 60 Minutes this past Sunday. (If you didn't, please try and find it.) This nonagenarian has been able to be silent no longer about the current states of affairs related to the health and conditions of the natural world. I would like to ask each of you, as we celebrate the Trust's 20th anniversary, to think about how much you would like to see a healthy planet for yourselves, your children and grandchildren. We've reached a point in our existence that we can no longer ignore, as the proverbial ostrich-with-its-head-in-the-sand, might do.

The fact that so many BMP owners support the Trust means, to me at least, that you have the Trust team to educate you, to enthrall and excite you and to provide you with germane and cogent, fact/science-based information—from which we can all make good decisions about your/our role in stewarding the amazing gifts we have on the only place we can call home.

I would to ask each BMP owner, who is not currently engaged with the Trust to consider what and how we can help create a sense of place for you on the Preserve and around western North Carolina. And for those who are engaged, keep up the good work!

Each of you can be great messengers for others with whom you interact. Speaking of those being engaged, I would like to give Kathy Nervie (and the other dedicated people who have volunteered their time to the success of this organization.) a **BIG SHOUT OUT!!!** for her tireless and selfless efforts (the second year in a row!) to make the Trust Party an unmitigated success! Thank you Kathy and all of you!

And finally, I would like to share the following with you: I have been, this year, experiencing one of the challenges of being a living, biological organism. My challenge has been to successfully heal from a foot injury that required surgery and recovery time. And while I'm almost ready to go back on the trail, I'm pursuing one more (and final!) modality that should afford me the opportunity to put my favorite hiking boots on. I've been incredibly humbled by the support of the Trust Board of Trustees, the Trust staff and many other BMP owners who have



wished me well. It is a huge comfort to me. Thank you all!

The shot of a royal walnut moth (*Citheronia regalis*) perfectly illustrates, IMHO, the sheer wonder, joy and beauty of the many AMAZING lifeforms available for us to discover. What do you think? Pretty astonishing moth yes? And the caterpillar, appropriately named hickory-horned devil, is also quite a site yes?



Education Mewsings:

By Rose Wall, Co-Senior Naturalist/Education Director

Our Late-in-the-Season Nesting Birds

One of my favorite backyard birds is the American goldfinch. Known to scientists as *Spinus tristis* or to my Nana simply as a wild canary or butter butt. She and I used to love sitting in the backyard, watching them bounce around in flight come late summer – they always seemed so much busier than all of the other birds that time of year. It wasn't until later in life that I understood what this late season industriousness was all about.

The American goldfinch is one of the latest nesters in the bird world, waiting until late July-early September to even get started – many months after most of their song bird counterparts. Here at my house, I noticed them feeding in their typical small-sized flocks of 5-10 birds until mid-August. Presumably it was not until then that they paired off to nest. This late nest period is no coincidence. As some of the strictest vegetarians in the bird world, American Goldfinches survive almost completely on seeds. Waiting for the seed buffet of late summer and early autumn-- including asters of many kinds, milkweed and thistle – ensures plenty of food to feed new hungry mouths. These clever birds also utilize the downy parts of feed seeds such as thistle and milkweed to line their nests, creating a cozy blanket for their chicks. Once again, nature shows us an example of how interconnected everything really is! Goldfinch nests are also known for being so tightly woven they can hold water – in addition to plant down, they also use plant fibers and rootlets and believe it or not spider webs! Now is a good time of year to be looking for these nests which can usually be found fairly high up in a shrub or sapling in a relatively open area. Look for small cups tucked into the crook of where 2-3 branches meet. This year I've learned another new thing about my backyard butter butts: They love evening primrose! I've seen at least 10 birds on my patch each morning in August, nibbling



Male eastern goldfinch gathering thistle seeds; below, a female feeding her young.



down the seeds along the long stalks like shish-kabobs. These seed eaters also love my purple coneflower, milkweed, sunflowers and of course thistle. I hope that you are able to attract these beauties to your backyard too – they really are such a delight!



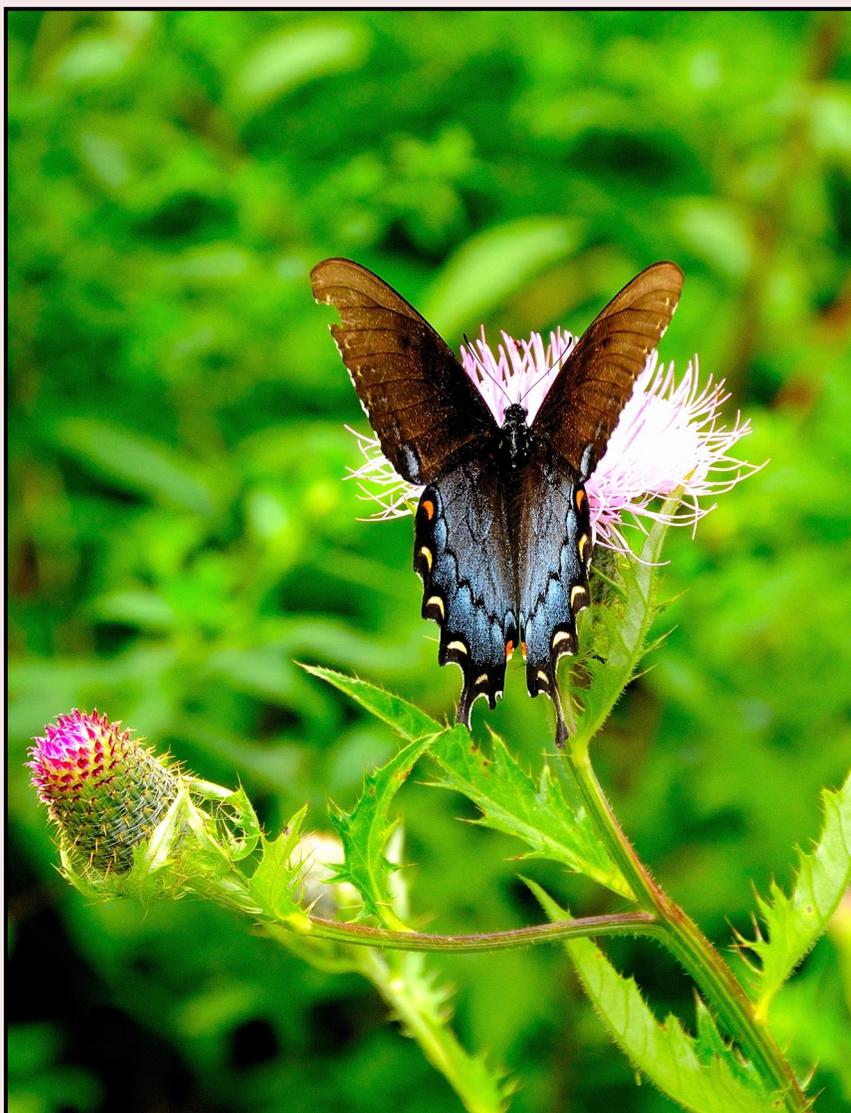
AmeriCorps Update:

By Nicole Cook, AmeriCorps Service Member

Nicole is taking a break from this issue of NaturePhile and will be back with the 4th Quarter edition of this wildly popular publication.

As you read in the last NP, she signed up for another tour of duty with the Trust and we're very lucky that she did. We'll look forward to her doing more amazing things with the Nature Center and the Adopt-A-School programs.

Have a Beautiful Autumn Season Everyone!



A beautiful female eastern tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) nectaring on a thistle on the Preserve.