

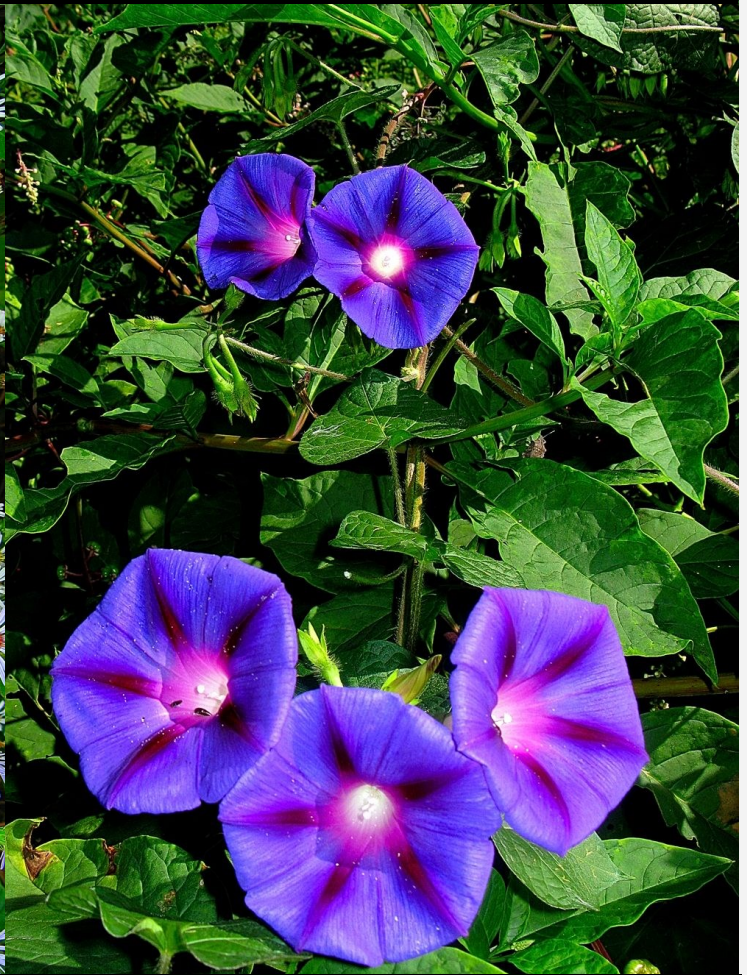
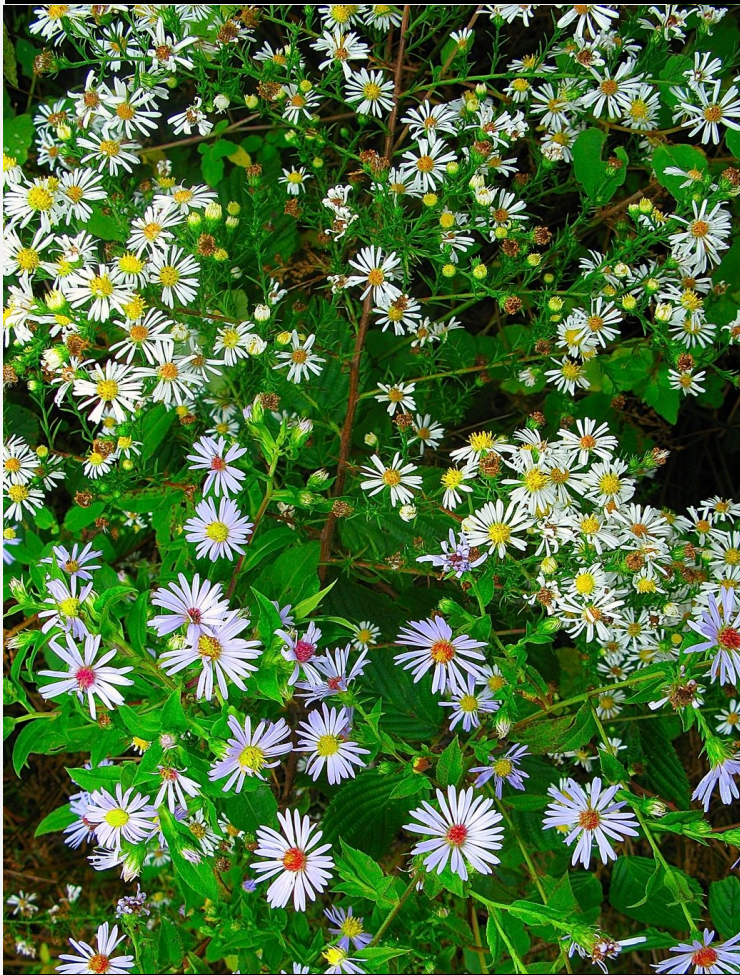


NaturePhile

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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.



The Autumn Explosion: Anyway you look at it and, it seems, everywhere you look, the proliferation of autumn-blooming wildflowers would suggest an almost animated illumination by the shortening of the days, and the concurrent angle of the sun's rays—which seems to light the fuse of autumnal sweet light. The asters on the left [top: frost aster (*Symphotrichum pilosum*) and New England aster (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*)] are two of the most ubiquitous autumn asters. The common morning glory (*Ipomoea purpurea*) is also a beautiful and widespread late summer and autumn wildflower.

Photos by Michael Skinner

In this issue: From the Trailhead—Trust party news; autumn wonders; New species discovered on the Preserve; Education Issue: Reaching Local Communities; Adopt-a-School; AmeriCorps' Reach



From the Trailhead

By Michael Skinner, executive director

A Major Thank You!

Before I get into the wonders of the natural world segment of my article I'd like to publicly acknowledge, with humility—and a large sense of appreciation—all of the BMP members, Trustees, staff and support service personnel who made this year's Trust birthday party celebration an unmitigated success.

And because of the generosity of BMP members, we realized the largest net proceeds of any Trust party to date. Thanks go, especially, to party co-chairs Carol Landers and Cindy Tunstall (and their committee members) for the planning and execution of the event itself.

It was really fun too, to see what mothballed outfits people decided to don in order to 'declare their decade' - this year's party theme. The sense of playful fun exhibited by the revelers really lent a sense of camaraderie and community



The Trust party realized record net proceeds at this year's party because of amazing party organizers Carol Landers (co-chair); super-model Sheri Kreuger (demonstrating one of the very popular Linda James/Ken Bowdon-created black bear sculptures) and, on loan from Sotheby's, auctioneer Dave Walters.



Left: The normally reserved Jen and Rose :-) filled in as the back-up singers for the band at the party. Right: The monarch butterfly release is a fun part of the party and 'newlywed' O'Hara Crosswell assisted with the maiden voyage of these amazing insects.



All photos on this page by Michael Skinner

amongst all who attended this event. There seemed to be, at least from this observers's point of view, a vibrant and palpable energy on the mountain at this party.

And Now...the Rest of the Story

We may, from time to time, opine, write and/or otherwise wax philosophically about seemingly similar issues related to what the Trust does, but in that is an m.o. that includes looking deeper. I often get asked if I get tired of going down the same trail when leading folks on a hike, and my answer is consistently and always, "No, not at all." If, as a naturalist you grow tired of traveling the same trail then you can always, 1) look for new challenges and/or 2) 'take the road less traveled'.

And related directly to that thought is the way autumn is shaping up around the mountains of western North Carolina. I've stated before in this publication that the autumn wildflowers, while maybe prejudiced/weighted towards the asters, makes them nonetheless, spectacular—and, easier to see, stop and appreciate. Because most of the asters are sun-lovers, they will be found in open fields and along road-sides—which makes driving the Blue Ridge Park-



This female monarch butterfly is nectaring on New England aster. While small in volume in terms of nectar production, these flowers provide vital sustenance for monarchs during their long migration to Mexico.

Photo by Michael Skinner

way this time of year especially a mouth-watering and eye-candy adventure. And what the Asteraceae species may generally lack in volume of nectar per flower, they more than make up for in sheer numbers of flowers. So while this may require more trips to the 'salad bar', it does provide a means of 'filling the tank' for nectar-hunting insects—especially world travelers like the monarch.

I highly recommend getting in your steel horses and taking a drive on the Blue Ridge Parkway before the show ends for another year. You won't be disappointed.

Two New Herbaceous Plant Species Discovered on the Preserve

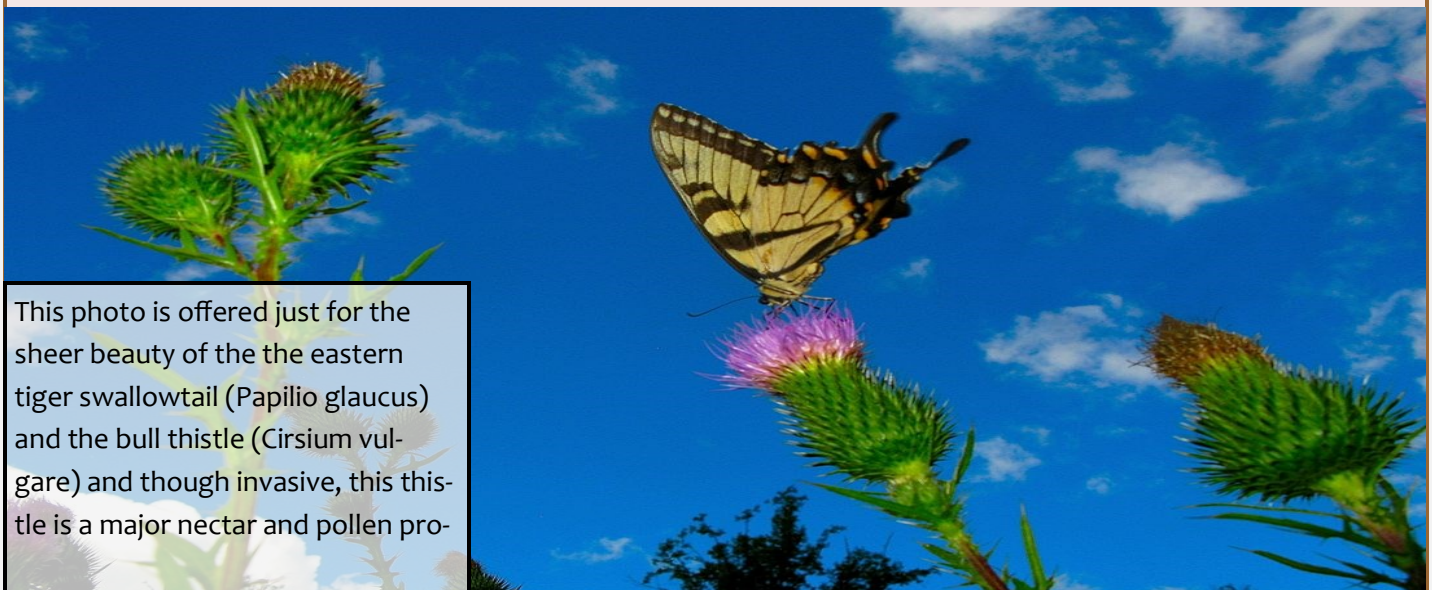
The herbaceous plants are those that are soft-tissued (usually) or, what are referred to as the non-woody stemmed members of the plant community. We usually just call them wildflowers. And the Preserve is replete with a variety of these 'critters' that number in the hundreds.

Two things happened recently that prompted this newsworthy section of my article. 1) I had a member of the maintenance crew stop by with a 'weed' I had never seen on the Preserve and 2) while visiting the location of that plant, I stumbled upon another one I had also never seen on the Preserve. So we have a 'good witch', 'bad witch' (or maybe 'not-so-bad witch') scenario playing out on property. Well,



The 'not-so-bad witch' plant (because while exotic, is not aggressively invasive) on the left is the gallant soldier aster; the Japanese butter bur on the right is definitely a 'bad-witch' plant as it is highly invasive, which usually means it will out-compete native plants. At least some good news is, is that this plant cannot survive in the woods as it requires high-light to be happy. Word to all BMP members: if see either of these critters, PULL THEM UP!!!

okay, they're both probably 'bad witches' but at least with the gallant soldier (*Galinsoga parviflora*), aka: potato weed, Peruvian daisy, etc., is not an aggressive invasive but the Japanese butter bur (*Petasites japonica*) is highly invasive. If there's any good news here, it's that this plant requires high light areas—as do most of the Aster family members—but then, so does kudzu. :(So if you do see either of these critters on the Preserve, please destroy them. Good news is that they are both relatively easy to dispatch but make sure you get the tap root and the rhizomes (the underground runner, rooty-looking part of the plant). Happy Hunting!



This photo is offered just for the sheer beauty of the the eastern tiger swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) and the bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) and though invasive, this thistle is a major nectar and pollen pro-



The Education Issue: How We Reach Our Community at Large
By Rose Wall

In this issue of NaturePhile, we would like to turn our attention outwards, and introduce you to the work the Trust is doing in our community at large. Normally when you see Trust staff, we are usually on Preserve, leading hikes, Trust Talks, and animal programs. But, what you may not know, is that we spend a large part of our time doing important work off property. Since its inception, Trust naturalists have been providing environmental education (EE) programs to our local schools and community members. But, it is not until recently that Trust staff and board members recognized our work in this realm as a top priority. As a part of the Strategic Plan that is being developed for the Trust, we have the vision to:

Enhance our position as a key environmental education partner with schools and community organizations, reaching diverse audiences and inspiring life long stewardship of the natural world.

To date, we have done a great deal of work towards this vision. We plan to continue to grow our reach in a thoughtful way, ensuring that we create and maintain quality programs for the community members that need them most. And, importantly, that we grow in such a way that we continue to be able to offer the same level of programming to you – the Balsam Mountain Preserve homeowners.

How are we working to achieve this goal?

Schedule in a smart way. Offer the bulk of our outreach programs when there are the fewest number of members on the mountain.

Have more hands on deck. We have partnered with the Conservation Trust of North Carolina AmeriCorps program to have a service member creating and delivering programming to our underserved community members. In October, we will welcome our third AmeriCorps member to BMT. We have also increased our volunteer corps, to assist with day to day animal care, allowing us more time for program delivery.

Partner with folks in the community. For example, we partner with teachers, principles and county curriculum coordinators to ensure we are delivering high-quality, relevant programs to students.

Be Financially Sustainable. We offer affordable EE programs that still allow us to cover our costs. In the case of Adopt-a-School, we partner with local business sponsors, so we can deliver programs at no cost to the school.

2016 Outlook

PROGRAM	COMMUNITY GROUP	NUMBER REACHED
Adopt-a-School	4 th -5 th graders	7 schools, 108 programs, 2707 students
Pollinators	1 st -2 nd graders	2 schools, 20 programs, 480 students
Birds of Prey	Various community and school groups	14 programs, 3231 people
Other EE Programs (We have many offerings tailored to specific age groups)	School groups and libraries	65 programs, 2087 people
Field Trips to Nature Center	Schools, summer camps, and community groups	7 programs, 80 people

“Knowledge without love will not stick. But if love comes first, knowledge is sure to follow.”

John Burroughs, American Naturalist, 1837-1921



Top: Michael chats rattlesnakes with visiting middle-schoolers.

Right: Jen coaches some “froglets” through the Nantahala Library Animal Olympics jumping competition.

Bottom: Kids at the Jackson County Library practice their snake skills





Education Issue: Adopt-A-School Grows Minds, Communities, & Stewardship

By Jen Knight, interim naturalist

Of all the Trust’s efforts in conservation outreach, its Adopt-A-School (AAS) program has been one of the most successful in both reach and results. At the heart of this program is providing (NC—state) standards-based environmental education to fourth and fifth graders at local schools. Since 2013 we have grown the program from 2 schools to 10 and have partnered with 12 local businesses. Since the program’s inception, we have presented programs to 217 classes .

Most presentations are part of a 3-lesson fourth grade unit on vertebrate zoology—that’s the study of animals with backbones—for those of you who haven’t taken our course. With the help of our live ani-

Balsam Mountain Trust Adopt-A-School Partners

County	School	Local Business Sponsor
Jackson	Scotts Creek School	F. Patrick McGuire, D.D.S. and Jeanne McGuire
Jackson	Summit Charter School	Timothy S. Spilliards, DMD, PA; Cashiers Family Dental
Jackson	Fairview School	Jim Woods, Wells Fargo
Jackson	Smoky Mountain Elementary	Jim Woods, Wells Fargo
Jackson	Cullowhee Valley School	Tim Newell, Cullowhee River Club
Jackson	School of Alternatives	Jay Pavey, Pavey Law
Haywood	Hazelwood Elementary	Dean Howell, Taylor Ford
Haywood	Junaluska Elementary	Jack Bishop, Edward Jones
Haywood	Clyde Elementary	Kevin Wells, First Citizens Bank
Haywood	Bethel Elementary	Lisa Ferguson, Edward Jones

mal ambassadors we discuss the characteristics and adaptations that separate fish from jellyfish, reptiles from amphibians, birds from mammals, and introduce students to the concepts of ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resource stewardship. Our pre- and post- program assessments show not only With the ongoing support of our AAS sponsors, we will continue to revise and adapt our curricula to meet state standards and teachers’ needs as well as our conservation goals. Together, Balsam Mountain Trust and the Jackson/Haywood communities are helping prepare a generation to protect and conserve our little corner of the Blue Ridge.

The fifth graders get a crash course in regional wildlife diversity through our participation in the Conservation Field Days events put on by Jackson, Haywood, and Swain County Soil and Water Conservation Districts. During the events, various regional conservation agencies and nonprofits set up themed stations for the county’s fifth graders to rotate through. During these marathon events we teach nearly every fifth grader in the respective counties over the course of 2 days – generally 250 – 300 kids!

All of this programming comes at no cost to our local schools, all of which are Title 1 (meaning they have high percentages of children from low income families). This is where the “Adopt” in Adopt-A-School comes in. We recruit local business and community members to sponsor the schools’ programming which not only covers our costs but also forges ties between the Trust and the community at large. We have been heartened and impressed by the generosity of our Jackson and Haywood county partners who understand that true conservation and stewardship must be a group effort.

an increase in students' knowledge, but a positive change in attitude toward wildlife as well as their perception of humanity's role in nature.

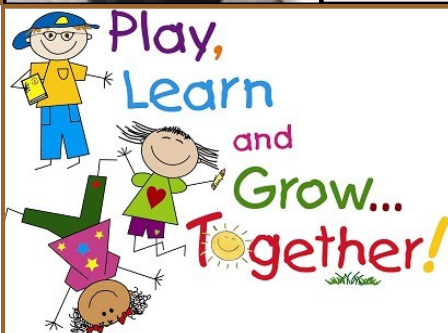
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Trust AmeriCorps service member, Larissa demonstrates some bio-facts during the Scotts Creek Adopt-a-School program





Reaching Our Local Communities

By: Larissa Lopez, Education Outreach Coordinator and AmeriCorps Member

There are dozens of AmeriCorps programs throughout the state of North Carolina dedicated to everything from family health care and affordable housing issues to public land management and conservation efforts. Beginning in 2015, the Trust became one of several host sites partnering with the Conservation Trust for North Carolina in an AmeriCorps program focusing on making environmental education accessible to new, diverse, and underserved populations.

During 10 months of service, the AmeriCorps member at Balsam Mountain Trust develops and delivers programming to adults and school children in Jackson, Haywood, Macon and Swain counties, at no cost to the participants. The Trust's original intent for the AmeriCorps member was to expand Adopt-A-School, a program that provides free live-animal programming to Jackson and Haywood county Title 1 schools. A Title 1 school is one in which there is a high percentage of children from low-income families and receive federal financial assistance. Adopt-A-School provides these children a unique and enriching experience to which they would not otherwise have access, but we didn't want to stop there.

This spring, we launched 1st grade Pollinator Programs at Cullowhee Valley School (Jackson County) and Junaluska Elementary School (Haywood County). During the programs, students discover what pollination is, why it is important, start common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) plants from seed, start a pollinator garden at school, and learn about the micro-ecosystem within a garden. Their pollinator gardens are certified Monarch Waystations. Monarch Waystations are nationally occurring sites that provide

suitable habitat for monarchs along their migration route.

When these students go on to 2nd grade, we visit with them again for two Monarch Programs, the first concentrating on the monarch life cycle and the second discussing their magnificent migration. A special and much beloved component of the Monarch Programs is the opportunity to rear monarch caterpillars in the classroom, which can now be supported by the abundant milkweed growing in their Monarch-Waystations. The continuity of these programs allows the students to: 1) realize the interconnect-

edness of nature and 2)



AmeriCorps service member Larissa Lopez, shown here, explaining how to create pollinator habitat and identify flower characteristics to students in a horticulture class at the Jackson County School of Alternatives identify with Hands-on (experiential) learning is a proven pedagogical modality that creates the 'hook' that creates interest in learning—especially for students who might be challenged in the classroom.

take responsibility for caring for wildlife and their habitats.

We also delivered versions of the pollinator and monarch programs to groups of interest including libraries, camps, local community centers, church youth groups, select classes, and others. To expand our reach and resources beyond live programming, I have developed pamphlets and brochures providing information on pollinators and monarchs with an emphasis on how you can get involved in their conservation and provide pollinator habitat in your own backyard. The information is available in English and Spanish and can be picked up at any pollinator or monarch program, at the Nature Center, and soon to be available on our website.

Beyond this, I am always open to developing a program on almost any wildlife or environmental topic by request. We are constantly looking for creative and new programs to offer in our communities as go-to, trusted environmental educators.



Even though this is the last thought in this edition of NaturePhile, it is not a sunset but rather a sunrise, taken over the Richland Balsams (the mountain range in which the Preserve is located). The thought is that each new sunrise leads to a new day of possibilities and the Trust staff continues to attempt to bring new experiences to all of its stakeholders and constituents in interpreting and appreciating the wonders of the natural world.

This is a really good example of the maxim: Chance favors the prepared mind.

Photo by Michael Skinner