

**Field Notes – First Two Weeks of September**  
**Carrie Crompton**

**HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS**



**Power Line at Cone Road—a pollinator superhighway**

On the powerline, the goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) form a “golden road,” with new species coming into bloom as earlier ones go to seed. There are at least 25 species found in Connecticut. Between species with similar stature and form, the differences are often textural—are the leaves hairy on top, but smooth underneath? Or vice versa? Is the stem hairy? At a certain point in the season, I lose confidence in my ability to identify the different species correctly. But I am more aware this year than ever before that every species has its connoisseurs among the pollinating insects. These days, it’s impossible to look closely at any goldenrod that is fully in bloom without seeing a wasp or a bee or several of both. In my own yard, it seems to me that mining bees are more abundant now than they were in August.



**Mining Bee on Lance-leaved Goldenrod (*Solidago graminifolia*)**



**Honeybee on the same species**

Along roadsides and footpaths shaded by trees, the asters, sweet everlastings, boneset and white snakeroot create a “silver road”:



White Wood Asters (*Eurybia divaricata*) bordering the footpath by the Hop River, September 12



**Sweet Everlasting (*Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium*), September 7, extension of Riverside Drive**

I can't recall ever having seen as much Sweet Everlasting as I am seeing along the roadsides this year. It does like dry conditions; the drought has favored it!



**Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*)**



**White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*)**

The flowers of Boneset and Snakeroot are very similar, though the leaves are different. The Snakeroot begins to bloom a month after the Boneset does, extending the season for the pollinators that like this sort of white composite blossom. Many of the summer whites— yarrow, Queen Anne’s Lace, and fleabanes—are still blooming on the “silver road.”

The largest plant with white flowers right now is not a composite, nor is it a native plant: Japanese Knotweed.



**Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) next to the Hop River, August 30**



**Japanese Knotweed with two honeybees, September 7**

This a very aggressive invasive plant; we have more of it every year along the roadsides and the Hop River. But it is very attractive in fresh flower, and I was surprised to see how popular it is with pollinators; these flowers were audibly a-buzz with honeybees at 5:30 in the afternoon. They are thus not *totally* worthless in our local ecology.

An invasive that does seem to be totally worthless to the pollinators is Mugwort.



**Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), Power Line at Cone Road, September 5**

Mugwort has a long history of use in Europe as a medicinal and an insect repellent (so it's not *totally* worthless). It spreads locally via rhizomes and is dispersed by fragmentation of its rhizomes, so it doesn't have the kind of codependency with pollinators that the goldenrods have. The rhizomes are easily picked up by bulldozers and trucks that move soil around, so it tends to be found on roadsides and at the points on the power line where trucks enter. There's a great deal of it along the power line close to Cone Road. Fortunately, it becomes less prevalent away from the road.

There have been a few "firsts" in the past two weeks that are not part of the gold and silver highways. These species tend to bloom in very small communities, creating little byways for pollinators that wander off the main roads.



**Purple Gerardia (*Agalina purpurea*), Cone Road power line, September 11.**

Such sweet, delicate little spring-like flowers! Purple Gerardia is an annual wildflower, pollinated by bees, with fine seeds dispersed on the wind, so it often shows up where soil has been disturbed. This little stand of Gerardia was very close to Cone Road, nearly hidden under a drooping mugwort plant.



**Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*), August 30, Gay City**

Turtlehead likes “moist to wet or mucky soils, a neutral soil pH, and light levels between full sun and partial shade” (USDA Forest Service). A little fussy in its preferences! It’s a lovely native member of the snapdragon family, visited by bumblebees and ruby-throated hummingbirds.



**Bottle Gentian (*Gentiana clausa*), Gay City, September 6.**

I know of only a few places to look for Bottle Gentian. If you live nearby, it’s worth a walk in Gay City to see it. The deep blue of the blossoms is magical. What look like buds are full blooms—they will never open further. Bumblebees in search of nectar can force their way into them from the tips, but other species find it easier to just make an entry hole, like the one in the blossom at 11 o’clock in the photo above.



**A little “byway” of Closed Gentians among the Sensitive Ferns, Gay City upper pond, September 6.**

There’s another obvious pollinator highway—along Route 6. On the bypass between Columbia and Windham, the Connecticut DOT promotes the growth of many species of native plants along the edges of the highway and in the medians by not mowing until late fall. I’ve enjoyed the changing colors of the wildflowers all summer as I drive to Willimantic for errands. These days, the stars of the show are our native autumn grasses. The grasses (which are wind-pollinated, and therefore not in need of pollinating insects) provide a banquet of seeds for granivorous birds such as cardinals, finches, and sparrows throughout the fall and through the winter. Goldenrods intermingle with the grasses, providing food for insects. Thus, Route 6 is a highway for people, pollinators, and birds! I only wish it were

safe to pull off in more spots to admire the show. I have found that I can find the same mix of grasses in the unmowed areas around the Walmart parking lot in Windham—much safer for taking pictures.



**Purple-top (*Tridens flavus*) and Goldenrod, behind Walmart near Route 6 bypass, September 8**



**Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Route 6 bypass, September 8**



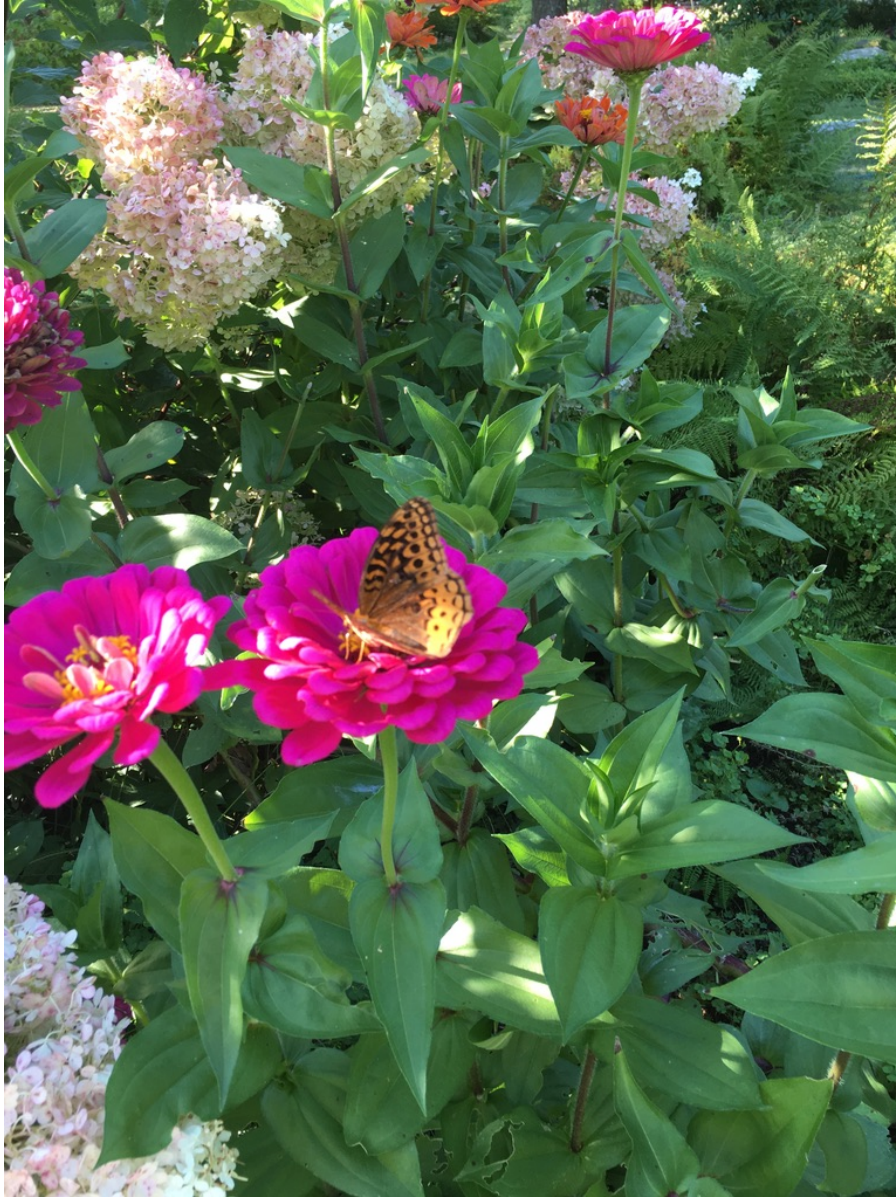
**Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), Route 6 bypass, September 8**



**Switch Grass (*Panicum virgatum*), behind Walmart near Route 6 bypass, September 8**

#### **BUTTERFLY NOTES**

I hardly ever see butterflies on my walks these days, except for the regular Clouded Sulphurs at the soccer field. But I see a different species visiting the Zinnias in the gardens every week or so. At the end of August, it was Monarchs; now it's Great Spangled Fritillaries. This is their second flight of the year—I remember seeing them on the Gooseneck Loosestrife in July. Fritillaries use violets as their larval host plants, and we have lots of violets in the un-mowed parts of the yard. Another reason to reduce mowing!



**Great-Spangled Fritillary on Zinnia, our yard, September 8**

#### **BIRD NOTES**

Hummers, chipping sparrows, and catbirds are still here. Nuthatches, titmice, chickadees, house finches and goldfinches at the black oil sunflower feeder (the goldfinches had been patronizing our actual sunflowers, but rushed to the feeders as soon as they were open). Downy woodpeckers coming to the suet feeder. Cormorants are still on the Lake.

#### **CRICKET AND KATYDID NOTES**

Cricket song all day long, all night long. At noon, the crickets on the power line sing louder than the wires do. Such wonderful music! The katydids start just minutes after the sky goes dark, a little after 7:00 p.m. I like to go out after dinner and listen for the first katydid rasp to break through the sweet trilling of the crickets. Note to self: Next year, I would like to learn to identify a few of the crickets and katydids by their songs, using a wonderful guide that I've had on my shelf for many years and not studied properly yet: *The Songs of Insects* by Lang Elliott and Wil Hersherberger.

## **FOUND ON CHAMBERLAIN POND TRAIL**



**Painted stone carefully placed in the roots of a tree near Chamberlain Pond**

If magic is something that's too complex and wonderful to wrap your mind around, I'd say there's plenty of magic in the September woods and fields. I hope you can get out and find some on one of these beautiful days!