Field Notes—June 21, 2022
Carrie Crompton

Milkweed Café

The Milkweed Café is open for business. The plants are about 30 inches tall and, as of June 17, in fresh, full, mauve bloom. No sign of Monarchs yet.

First bloom in the Milkweed Café, June 17, 2022

In 2021, I saw my first Monarch at the Café on July 11 – that's three weeks from today. Patience!

Monarch Way Station

The Way Station is also open for pollinators, but I am seeing very few insects on the flowers. I think this is due to the location – full sun, but also full wind. The flower stalks have been blowing sideways! No place to land!

Lance-leafed coreopsis and cleome blowin' in the wind, June 19

The wind makes it very difficult to get photos of the pollinators that are tossed and turned in their flight, seeking landing platforms – but I always see a few, like these bumble bees foraging on birdfoot trefoil and crown vetch. These two species were not planted at the Station; they have simply naturalized on the site, and we are letting them be, since they provide food for the pollinators.

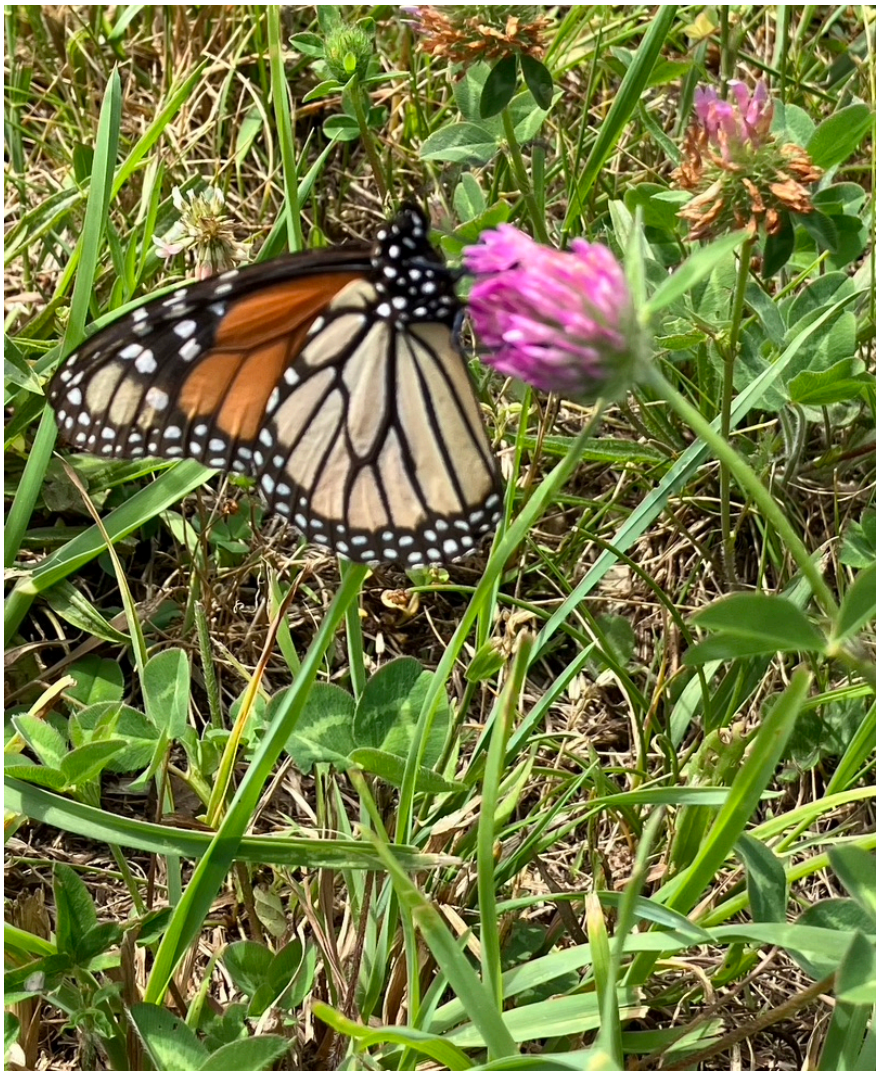
Bumble bees foraging on birdfoot trefoil and crown vetch, June 21

Bee Pasture

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee.
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few. – Emily Dickinson

The Bee Pasture on Riverside Drive, having been mowed earlier in the spring, is blooming entirely below the level of the wind. It is still full of clover blossoms, and hosting a lot of small- and medium-sized bumble bees.

And also, a lovely surprise!



Monarch in Bee Pasture, June 11, just inches from the ground.

Pollinators in Our Yards

Wind from the north, week preceding the Summer Solstice

This is the zenith of the solar year – azure skies, dazzling sun, over fifteen hours of sunlight per day.

Catalpas, in rich bloom for the past week, are just beginning to drop their blooms. All the other native flowering trees have bloomed except American basswood, which will begin to bloom around July 4.

Now is the season of white shrubs—swamp azalea, silky dogwood, gray dogwood, arrowwood viburnum, maleberry, common elderberry, spreading dogbane, staghorn sumac, meadowsweet, *Rhododendron maximum*—and of course, the magnificent mountain laurel, which varies from white to deep pink, with all the shades in between. Why so much whiteness? I wonder.

Bumble bee on silky dogwood

I reckon that when a shrub produces fragrant flower clusters or panicles or umbels the size of hamburg buns, the pollinators will find them without color advertisement. The investment is all in the nectar and the pollen itself. It's the small plants, like the pasture rose that produces only a few individual flowers, that must spend advertising resources on color.

Bumble bee on pasture rose

In our back yard, we have lots of colorful perennials, and I have been seeing bees in spite of the wind; I try to get photos of the ones that are moving slowly, doing what they can to nourish the larvae in their nests.

Honey bee on rough-fruited cinquefoil / Bumble bee on spirea

Mining bee on sedum **Sweat bee on sundrop**

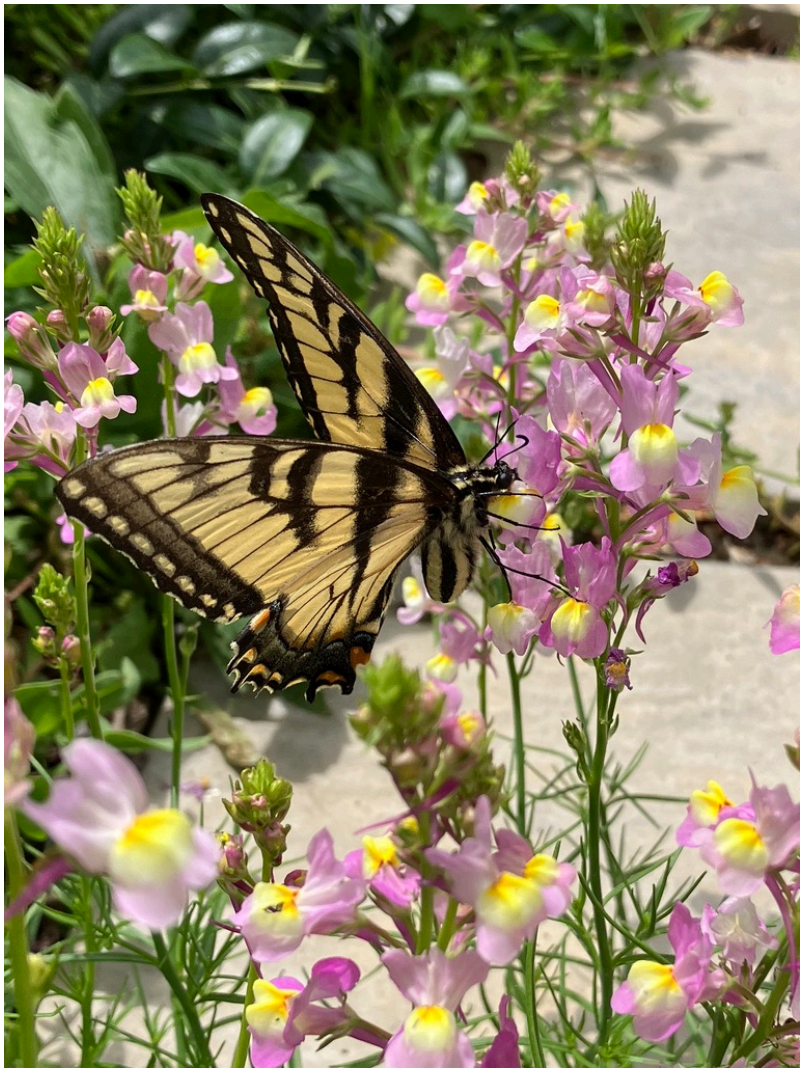
Now that spring is behind us, I have to say that I think it was hard on many of the pollinators. I saw a “bumper crop” of queen bumble bees in April, foraging low in the ground ivy, below the wind. By May 11, I was seeing only five in the yard. When their first daughters emerged in mid-May, the wind was still blowing, as it did until yesterday. I have been seeing a lot of bare-legged

bumble bees, both small- and middle-sized, since the beginning of June. Many are buzzing from flower to flower very quickly. With their skittish, speedy flight, they remind me of last year's males and gynes, which started appearing after the first week of July.

I suspect that at least some of this year's bumble bee queens perished for lack of sustenance in May and others "decided" to cut their losses and produce males before the summer solstice this year, reducing the size of this year's colonies to ensure the future of their genetic lines. If my surmise is correct, this is the beginning of their children's lives as free agents. The newly mated queens will have the long summer and fall in which to fatten up for hibernation over the winter.

I saw many more andrenid bees (mining bees) in the yard this spring than bumble bees. Very few honey bees. Now that summer is beginning, I expect to see more and more sweat bees and butterflies.

Today, plan to sit in the sun and gather solar energy to nourish my soul before the long descent from the summit of the Summer Solstice.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on Linaria, June 11