

Field Notes July 22, 2023
Carrie Crompton

Andover Monarch Way Station

The Monarch Way Station on the Rail Trail has matured since it was first planted by the Andover Conservation Commission and volunteers in May 2021. Here's how the area looked the day before planting started.



Looking east toward the covered bridge / Looking west toward Long Hill Road

Here's how the area looks now, in July 2023:



Facing the new parking area / Looking west toward Long Hill Road

This is a semi-wild, very-low-maintenance garden. In 2021 and 2022, the Commission purchased some plants known to attract Monarchs and other pollinating insects. We dug holes in the gravelly soil of this former parking lot for each of the purchased plants, and allowed the areas around the holes to send up whatever weeds they would. Since then, we've selectively removed the bunching orchard grass plants, and left everything else to grow and flower and set seed. The Town of Andover mows around the areas we've delineated with old cedar rails (salvaged from an earlier iteration of the fence that runs along the Rail Trail).



April 19, 2023 – cedar edging around the “border” and the “Milkweed Café”

Species we planted on purpose:

- Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
- Lance-leaved coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*)
- Mountain mint (*Pycnanthemum virginianum*)
- Hummingbird mint (*Agastache foeniculum*)
- Blue False Indigo (*Baptisia australis*)
- Woodland Sunflower (*Helianthus divaricatus*)
- Asters (several species)
- Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*)
- Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)

Species that emerged from the seed bank:

- Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)
- Daisy fleabane (*Erigeron annuus*)
- Crown vetch (*Securigera varia*)
- Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*)

Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*)
Bouncing Bet (*Saponaria officinalis*)
Birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)

The first year, Monarchs discovered the milkweed plants that had come up as volunteers – I saw my first at the Monarch Café on July 11, 2021.

The second year, 2022, most of the milkweed plants got mowed by accident, and we had no Monarch activity at the Way Station, though there was moderate pollinator activity in the border.

This is the third year, and it is high time for the Monarchs to be active in our area! By now, the volunteer milkweeds at the Way Station have all begun going to seed, and their leaves are quite thick and leathery – not appealing to the female Monarchs, who are very choosy about where they deposit their eggs. However, the young milkweed plants that we planted in 2021 have developed more slowly, and still have fresh, soft leaves. Perhaps those are more enticing to the females? I found a few holes in the leaves of one plant . . .



Volunteer plants (larger rhizomes) / Young transplants (smaller rhizomes)

. . . and sure enough, I found a third- or fourth-instar (about 1"-long) Monarch caterpillar on one of the young juicy plants on July 21!



A very hungry caterpillar growing at the Monarch Way Station, July 21, 2023

Only one cat so far, but that makes it a Monarch Way Station!

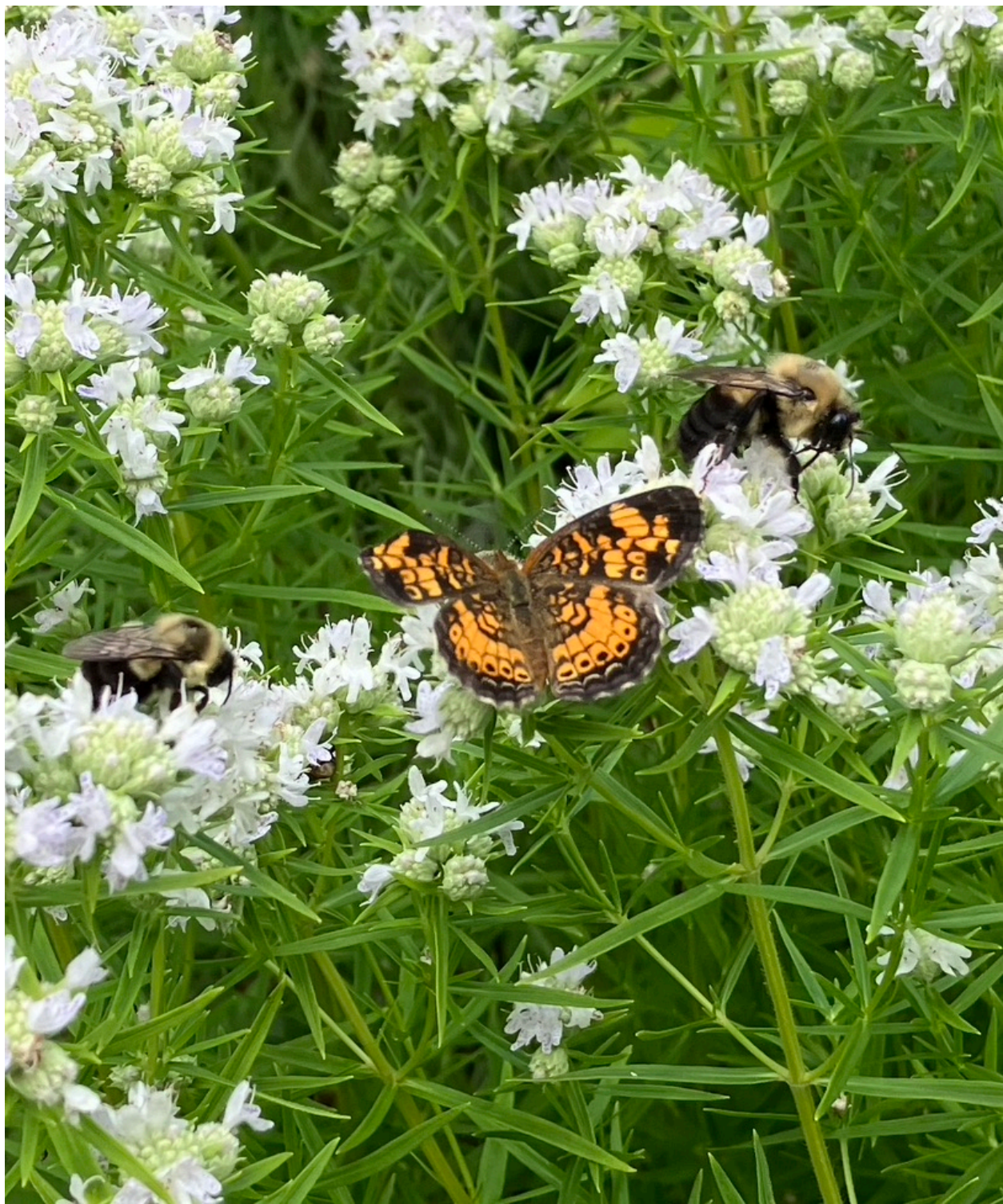
Higher in the floral canopy, the air is alive with pollinators of all sorts:



Two Great-spangled Fritillaries on Purple Coneflowers at the Way Station, July 20, 2023



A Bumble bee on Spotted Knapweed, June 20, 2023



Pearl Crescent butterfly flanked by two bumble bees, July 20



A Cabbage White butterfly on Spotted Knapweed, July 20



A Dun Skipper on *Agastache*, July 22



A Red Admiral visiting the fleabane, July 22

So far, I've seen only a few honey bees. Those were mostly on the milkweed when it was in bloom around the first of July.



Honey bee on milkweed blossoms at Way Station, July 1

As you can see from some of these photos (all taken at the Way Station), the bumble bees and the butterflies –generalist pollinators, not too fussy about nectar sources – frequent both the native and the nonnative flowers. What you can't see from the photos is how very many insects there are in the Way Station this week. There are hundreds of insects foraging all day, from one end to the other. It's positively humming.

Other Pollinators, Other Gardens

In the past week, I've been seeing diurnal sphinx moths in every garden that features Monardas – bee balm and/or wild bergamot. (Hummingbirds also visit the Monardas, but as far as I can see, the bees are not interested; I think the florets are just a little too deep for them.) Sphinx moths are a joy to watch, because they are very, very fast, athletic, and graceful. They forage on the wing, never perching on blossoms the way bees and most butterflies do.



**Hummingbird Clearwing Moth on Wild Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*),
Raymond Brook Preserve Pollinator Gardens, July 19**



Hummingbird Clearwing Moth, on Bee Balm (*Monarda didyma*), our gardens, July 22



**Snowberry Clearwing Moth on Bottlebrush Buckeye (*Aesculus parviflora*),
our gardens, July 11**

It's an odd summer, as we all know – so far, we've had about 8" more rain than "normal" for the month of July, and the air quality has been uncomfortable on many days. The Monarchs are a little late in arriving to our area. I see fewer honeybees out and about. But the garden plants are mostly thriving, the trees are putting on lots of new growth, and the bumble bees are having a very good year. Our yard is filled with baby catbirds, bluebirds, cardinals, song sparrows, and chipping sparrows. Many pairs have had two broods, which suggests to me that they're finding lots of caterpillars to feed their young.

We have an idea of what "normal" summer looks like, but in fact, every year is a variation on the theme. All the species we see actively reproducing in the summer are responding to their genetic plans in interaction with immediate environmental cues (like daylength) and environmental cues received at different times of the year before – the water status of the last summer, the cold of the last winter, the warmth of the last spring. I continue to document first flowering dates for wildflowers, and am always relieved to see my friends responding to the seasonal changes with only slight variations in date. Here are a few that I always look for in the third week of July:

Hardhack, Steeplebush

Spiraea tomentosa

Meadows, pastures, old fields

2018: July 19, Cone Road power line, Andover
2019: July 22, Cone Road power line, Andover
2020: July 15, Gay City
2021: July 16, Cone Road power line, Andover
2023: July 14, Cone Road power line, Andover



Early Goldenrod

Solidago juncea

Dry soil, roadsides, rocky banks, open woods

2018: July 19, Gilead Road, Andover

2019: July 20, Route 6

2020: July 15, Route 6

2021: July 16, our yard

2022: July 23, our yard

2023: July 19, Airline Trail



Spotted Joe-Pye-Weed

Eutrochium maculatum

Wet thickets, meadows

2018: July 25, Bishop Swamp, Andover

2019: July 17, just opening on Cone Road power line

2020: July 25, Townsend Road

2021: July 20, ours, the first

2022: July 25, ours, the first

2023: July 22, ours, the first



Summersweet, Sweet Pepperbush

Clethra alnifolia

Swamps, sandy soils

2018: July 25, shores of Andover Lake.
2019: July 21, very first, Andover Lake.
2020: July 22, very first, Andover Lake.
2021: July 20, very first, Andover Lake.
2022: July 24, very first, Andover Lake.
2023: July 17, very first, Andover Lake.



Although the spring was on the early side of normal, I'd say that since we've passed the summer solstice, first-blooming dates have been pretty close to average. It's a joy to see them again.

Here's hoping you're all seeing flowers and bees and butterflies and moths aplenty wherever you are. And I'd love to see your photos, too!