

Natural Events

August

GSWA Ecological Restoration Site

Juvenile Raccoon



Praying mantis



- 1) Take in the fruits of our labor at Trail stop Number 1 on this site (no pun intended). The August show is in full display. What you're seeing here at first might not be readily apparent or appreciated. Where you are standing was once a monoculture of Multiflora rose is now a garden of predominantly native species of meadow wildflowers. Canada goldenrod has naturally succeeded into this spot giving forth a yellow cast, bathed in insect activity. Tall iron weed stands out with striking adorned lavender florets. One flower that can't possibly be missed this month is the blazing red cardinal flower planted in our native garden directly behind the short stone wall at the end of the cul-de-sac. If you sit in your car next to this "fire-candle" you will eventually bear-witness to New Jersey's only humming bird – the ruby throat. The long tongue of this amazing bird slides easily into the corolla tube of this flower where it anxiously sips high energy-laden nectar from its base.
- 2) The berries of silky dogwood, elderberry, Russian-olive, and trumpet creeper have produced a wind-fall for birds that must turn from high-protein food sources like insects that have recently fed their hunger broods to energy-producing food stuffs that will prepare them for the rigors of the upcoming seasons. Look for robins, catbirds, mocking birds and warblers as they peruse the cornucopia of berries planted and provided by the efforts of the Great Swamp Watershed volunteer work force.
- 3) If it's insects that turn on your naturalist proclivities than look no further than our small meadows floral umbels, spikes and racemes. On goldenrod you'll find striated leather-wing beetles, crab spiders and ambush bugs. On iron weed and asters you'll see swallow tail, skipper and satyr butterflies nectaring from the flowers. Wasps, grasshoppers, beetles and flies of all sorts will be found on Queen-Anne's lace, large sunflower, willow-herb, and butterfly weed capturing other insects, pollinating, laying eggs and feeding on all parts of these herbs during this busy month of biologic activity. The Peterson's and Audubon field guide to the insects is a good place to start to get a handle on the many species of insects that grace our property.
- 4) When looking near our small stone barrier around our native garden or walking down the start of our trail don't be surprised if you startle into view our scaly compatriots that grant us the free service of white-footed mouse control. I'm talking about *Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis* –commonly known to all as the eastern garter snake. The scientific literature tells me that these guys are scent trail hunters of limited home range (600 X 150 feet) feeding predominantly on fish, frogs, tadpoles, salamanders and earthworms. Closely associated with streams, these snakes can be found farther from water but surely must change their feeding behavior. Our site lends itself less to frogs and fish and more toward mice – the most likely candidate on the menu of these reptiles.
- 5) Toward dusk keep an eye to the sky for our site's flying mosquito patrol. Bats are everywhere feeding on the abundance of these pesky blood-suckers. We have 15 bat boxes scattered throughout our property and at least four of them host small colonies. This month the bats are brooding young and need more than ever to feed. If you hate mosquitoes I suggest you put up bat boxes on your own property to help naturally control these pests (refer to stop 7 on our trail guide).
- 6) Depending on the species a female mosquito can lay from 100 to 400 eggs that all have the potential of reaching a point to do the same. It doesn't take an astrophysicist to see the exponential growth capabilities of this pest that has been a known carrier of such pernicious diseases ranging from malaria to yellow fever. Restoring nature is to restore balance. Meadow creation on your property will help attract songbirds, wasps, bats, dragonflies and spiders all allies in the battle against the hungry blood-lusting hoards of the summer mosquito.

By Blaine Rothauser