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Spring 2021 Edward L. Rose Conservancy Newsletter

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THE EDWARD L. ROSE CONSERVANCY

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The Amazing Monarch

And You Thought the Pandemic Only Affected Humans?

Apparently, even the modest monarch butterfly is a victim. Reasons for that come later in the story. The monarch (*Danaus plexippus)* is one of the most iconic, beloved, and easily recognized species of butterfly. Perhaps the most fascinating attribute of the monarch is its migratory ability. The beautiful insect that flits among flowers throughout much of eastern North America in the summertime somehow manages to find its way to a tiny patch of high altitude forest in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, arriving before winter sets in.

Why millions of butterflies (whose grouping is known as a kaleidoscope) of this one species choose to congregate in a small grove of trees at 11,000 feet is still a mystery. How they do it is now more clearly understood. And it is astounding.

> Birds aren't the only pollinators we need to worry about. Butterflies fill that niche as well. Like canaries in a coalmine, butterflies act as a barometer for environmental health. When they proliferate, the ecosystem is in balance. When they disappear it should send us a signal that something is amiss and requires mitigation.

Most monarchs only live a few weeks, certainly not long enough to laze about in our summer gardens and then truck on down to Mexico. They perpetuate their species by laying eggs on only one type of plant—the common milkweed. That is the only food the newborn caterpillars will eat. Why milkweed? Because the milkweed produces a compound that, when ingested by the caterpillar, renders them disgusting to normal predators—a perfect biological shield. Due to the proliferation of pesticides on farmland, we are already seeing a decline in the mid-west monarch population because their source of food has been destroyed. No milkweed, no monarchs.

When cooler days of August arrive, monarchs living at that moment begin to lose their reproductive capacity, shifting their energies to living longer—about nine months. This generation, called the "Methuselah" monarchs, buys time for the transcontinental migration to Mexico. Though they have never been to that small hillside in Oaxaca, they arrive unerringly, deploying two complementary navigation systems to find their way. The first relies on tracking the sun as it moves across the sky. The second is a form of compass, using magnetic fields to maintain proper direction.

How did COVID impact the regal monarch? As it has elsewhere in the world, the pandemic has seriously strained the economic well-being of villagers near the monarch wintering grounds. In desperation to find safe ways to earn a living, some have taken to lumbering the precious oyamel firs on that Oaxaca hillside. This has forced the butterflies to push further up the mountainside in search of more oyamel on which they prefer to roost. Between global warming and uncontrolled deforestation, it is unclear how long the monarchs can continue to rely on the wintering area they have used for eons.

Find further reading on this topic here.

Meet Suzanne O'Neill

Suzanne O'Neill first became involved with the E.L. Rose Butterfly Garden back in 2017 when Kenna Lou Mills, our Board Secretary, asked if she would be interested in reclaiming the gardens. What Suzanne encountered was a patch of ground far different from what she has created today. The garden plots, of which there are three, were covered in thistle and clear weed when she assumed the reins.

Now, one garden plot is full of monarda (or bee balm) and milkweed, which is the only thing monarch caterpillars will eat. This garden in particular attracts many different kinds of butterflies, bees, and hummingbirds. In the spring hundreds of daffodils blossom.

The other gardens are planted with flowers and herbs that attract butterflies, bees, and birds. You can't expect butterflies to adopt a place unless there is a source of water. So Suzanne maintains a Vernal Pool that is home to wood frogs, tadpoles, salamanders and dragonflies, in addition to an impressive variety of butterflies. The species Suzanne has observed include:

Monarch Viceroy White Admiral Skippers Eastern Black Swallowtail Eastern Tiger Swallowtail Great Spangled Fritillary Mourning Cloak Spring Azure Cabbage White

Birds she has observed near the Butterfly Gardens include:

Robin Goldfinch Common Yellow Throat Hummingbirds Downy Woodpeckers Hairy Woodpeckers Red-Bellied Woodpeckers Pileated Woodpeckers Red-Winged Blackbirds Starlings Grackles Orchard Oriole

Here are a few pictures of the Butterfly Garden at this time of year.




The person that does the mowing is Russ Cole. His efforts make it possible to get to the gardens.

Wildlife conservation has been Suzanne's passion for as long as she can remember. Her own property has been a certified National Wildlife member since 1993, and provides food, water, shelter and nesting for all sorts of wildlife. We are very grateful for her efforts on our behalf.

Joyas Voladoras

By Brian Doyle - June 12, 2012

Consider the hummingbird for a long moment.

A hummingbird's heart beats ten times a second.

A hummingbird's heart is the size of a pencil eraser.

A hummingbird's heart is a lot of the hummingbird.

Joyas voladoras, flying jewels, the first white explorers in the Americas called them, and the white men had never seen such creatures, for hummingbirds came into the world only in the Americas, nowhere else in the universe, more than three hundred species of them whirring and zooming and nectaring in hummer time zones nine times removed from ours, their hearts hammering faster than we could clearly hear if we pressed our elephantine ears to their infinitesimal chests.

Each one visits a thousand flowers a day. They can dive at sixty miles an hour. They can fly backwards. They can fly more than five hundred miles without pausing to rest. But when they rest they come close to death: on frigid nights, or when they are starving, they retreat into torpor, their metabolic rate slowing to a fifteenth of their normal sleep rate, their hearts sludging nearly to a halt, barely beating, and if they are not soon warmed, if they do not soon find that which is sweet, their hearts grow cold, and they cease to be.

Consider for a moment those hummingbirds who did not open their eyes again today, this very day, in the Americas: bearded helmet-crests and booted racket-tails, violet-tailed sylphs and violet-capped woodnymphs, crimson topazes and purple-crowned fairies, red-tailed comets and amethyst woodstars, rainbow-bearded thornbills and glittering-bellied emeralds, velvet-purple coronets and golden-bellied star-frontlets, fiery-tailed awlbills and Andean hillstars, spatuletails and pufflegs, each the most amazing thing you have never seen, each thunderous wild heart the size of an infant's fingernail, each mad heart silent, a brilliant music stilled.

Hummingbirds, like all flying birds but more so, have incredible enormous immense ferocious metabolisms. To drive those metabolisms they have race-car hearts that eat oxygen at an eye-popping rate. Their hearts are built of thinner, leaner fibers than ours. Their arteries are stiffer and more taut. They have more mitochondria in their heart muscles—anything to gulp more oxygen. Their hearts are stripped to the skin for the war against gravity and inertia, the mad search for food, the insane idea of flight. The price of their ambition is a life closer to death; they suffer more heart attacks and aneurysms and ruptures than any other living creature. It's expensive to fly. You burn out. You fry the machine. You melt the engine. Every creature on earth has approximately two billion heartbeats to spend in a lifetime. You can spend them slowly, like a tortoise and live to be two hundred years old, or you can spend them fast,

like a hummingbird, and live to be two years old.

The biggest heart in the world is inside the blue whale. It weighs more than seven tons. It's as big as a room. It *is* a room, with four chambers. A child could walk around it, head high, bending only to step through the valves. The valves are as big as the swinging doors in a saloon. This house of a heart drives a creature a hundred feet long. When this creature is born it is twenty feet long and weighs four tons. It is waaaaay bigger than your car. It drinks a hundred gallons of milk from its mama every day and gains two hundred pounds a day, and when it is seven or eight years old it endures an unimaginable puberty and then it essentially disappears from human ken, for next to nothing is known of the the mating habits, travel patterns, diet, social life, language, social structure, diseases, spirituality, wars, stories, despairs and arts of the blue whale. There are perhaps ten thousand blue whales in the world, living in every ocean on earth, and of the largest animal who ever lived we know nearly nothing. But we know this: the animals with the largest hearts in the world generally travel in pairs, and their penetrating moaning cries, their piercing yearning tongue, can be heard underwater for miles and miles.

Mammals and birds have hearts with four chambers. Reptiles and turtles have hearts with three chambers. Fish have hearts with two chambers. Insects and mollusks have hearts with one chamber. Worms have hearts with one chamber, although they may have as many as eleven single-chambered hearts. Unicellular bacteria have no hearts at all; but even they have fluid eternally in motion, washing from one side of the cell to the other, swirling and whirling. No living being is without interior liquid motion. We all churn inside.

So much held in a heart in a lifetime. So much held in a heart in a day, an hour, a moment. We are utterly open with no one in the end—not mother and father, not wife or husband, not lover, not child, not friend. We open windows to each but we live alone in the house of the heart. Perhaps we must. Perhaps we could not bear to be so naked, for fear of a constantly harrowed heart. When young we think there will come one person who will savor and sustain us always; when we are older we know this is the dream of a child, that all hearts finally are bruised and scarred, scored and torn, repaired by time and will, patched by force of character, yet fragile and rickety forevermore, no matter how ferocious the defense and how many bricks you bring to the wall. You can brick up your heart as stout and tight and hard and cold and impregnable as you possibly can and down it comes in an instant, felled by a woman's second glance, a child's apple breath, the shatter of glass in the road, the words *I have something to tell you*, a cat with a broken spine dragging itself into the forest to die, the brush of your mother's papery ancient hand in the thicket of your hair, the memory of your father's voice early in the morning echoing from the kitchen where he is making pancakes for his children.

Reprinted from The American Scholar, Volume 73, No. 4, Autumn 2004.

How Does a Snapping Turtle Cross the Road?

More successfully with your help. Spring is a critical time for all species of turtles, and there are eleven which are native to New York.

A turtle shell is no match for a multi-ton automobile. Those collisions explain, in part, why all land turtles in New York are declining in numbers.

This time of year is an especially vulnerable time for native turtles, who seek out ideal nesting areas, often in the sandy, loose soil one finds adjacent to paved roads.

Turtles lay their eggs only once each year, and their ability to breed for the first time may take ten years or more. Thus, loss of every female has long-term consequences on the sustainability of the species.

If you spot a turtle attemtpung to cross the road and wish to help, a few suggestions will keep both you and the target of your affection safe.

- stand watch as she finishes crossing,
- pick her up at the rear of the shell near the tail using both hands, or
- slide a car mat under the turtle to drag her safely across the road
- do NOT try to pick her up by the tail - you could severely injure the turtle

Click here to see how an expert does it.

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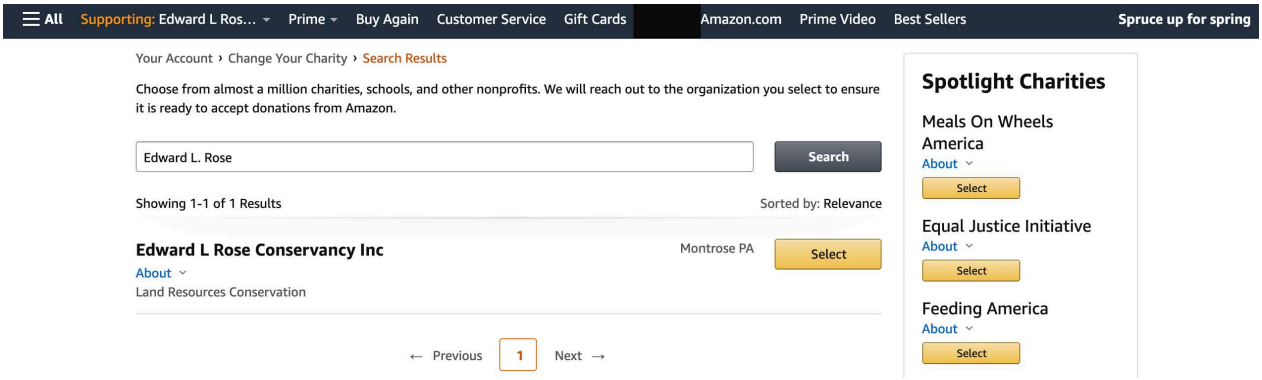
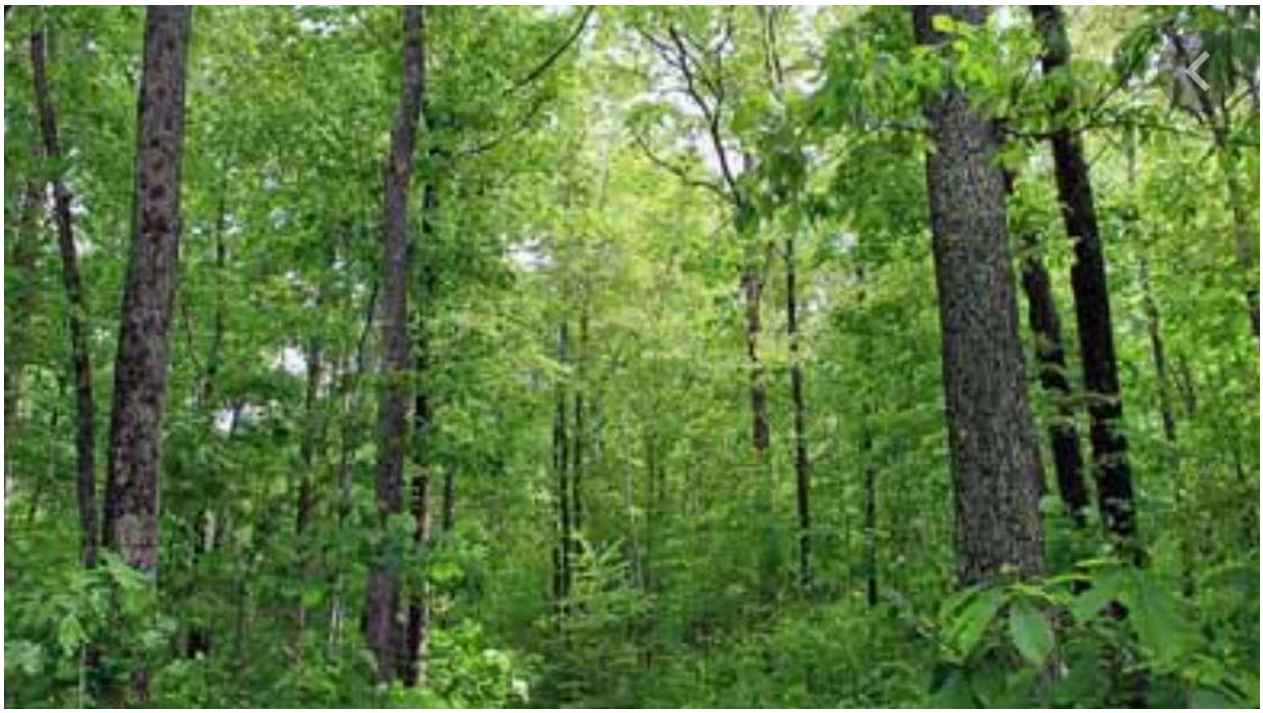


This is a great opportunity to help the Edward L Rose Conservancy.

Regenerate NY Cost-Share Grants Available for Forest Landowners



Do you own between 10 and 1,000 acres of forestland in New York and have an interest in stewardship of those woods?

New York's Department of Conservation will offset a portion of your costs through its Regenerate NY program. Private landowners can improve their woodlot by planting trees, controlling competing vegetation, restoring damage caused by wildlife and fencing off deer – and be paid to do so.

You need a formal plan, developed with the help of a professional forester. You can find foresters here.

Applications will be accepted until 3:00PM on Friday, October 8, 2021 or until funds are depleted.

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