

## Nature in the Neighborhood – August 2022

### A Pollinator Garden Attracts More Than Just Bees

Whether you're an avid birdwatcher or not, seeing a hawk soaring overhead is a thrilling sight. Watching one effortlessly riding the thermal air currents, and you can understand why some Native American tribes believe the hawk to be the Earth's guardian and protector: They continually fly overhead, remaining ever vigilant. Hawks also have excellent eyesight, eight times better than ours. They can spot an unsuspecting mouse, frog, or snake from hundreds of feet up, then dive down, at speeds up to 150 mph, to catch it with sharp curved talons.

Recently, while watering the native wildflower meadow at the Swampscott Middle School, Dick Simmons, a member of the Swampscott Conservancy, observed a large bird silently rise up from the field and perch on a nearby telephone pole. "Not a crow or seagull," he thought, "it's a hawk!" It patiently watched Simmons watering the plants, then ascended upward disappearing into the sky, only to later reappear circling over the nearby tennis courts.

A few days later, the hawk was back at the meadow, announcing itself with shrill chirping and landing back on the telephone pole. Armed this time with a camera as well as a water can, Simmons managed to take a number of photos before, tired of the paparazzi, the hawk again took off.

Hawks are found on every continent except Antarctica, with eight species found here in Massachusetts. The one you're most likely to see, like our meadow visitor, is the Red-Tailed.

The wildflower meadow, located between the upper and lower parking lots at the Swampscott Middle School, is one of the Swampscott Conservancy's many projects designed to increase native plantings in the community and improve pollinator insect and bird habitat. This strip of land, which had been traditionally mowed by the town, is in the process of being restored to a wildflower meadow that will promote increased native biodiversity. And it seems to be working! Bees,

butterflies, and other pollinator insects are arriving. These insects, along with the native plants themselves, are then food for birds and small mammals, which, in turn, provide nourishment for predatory birds, such as our visiting hawk.

Native plant meadows like the one at the Middle School -- or the one you decide to grow in your backyard – create the foundation for the entire food chain. As Massachusetts Audubon notes on its website: “Replacing lawns with native plants and avoiding yard chemicals are important ways to strengthen local ecosystems, one backyard at a time.” There are many reasons to considering replacing your backyard lawn with plant natives, including the fact that it will save you time (natives are low maintenance) and money (for things like fertilizers and pesticides, and gas for your mower), but one other very important reason is that you’ll be supporting nature in our neighborhood.

Toni Bandrowicz, President  
The Swampscott Conservancy