



Newsletter – 3rd Quarter 2022

A Message from the President

Recently I watched a series on Connecticut Public Television entitled “The Green Planet.” It was presented by David Attenborough, long known for his programs about nature. Perhaps you watched it too. I enjoyed the entire series, but it was the final episode, “Human Worlds,” that especially caught my attention.

Attenborough opens the episode by stating that the relationship between plants and humans is extraordinary but also notes that relationship is changing. He states further that we rely upon plants for almost everything – the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the clothes we wear. I don’t know about you, but I am not sure that I ever thought about plants in quite that way. At that point I sat up straight and really started paying attention and taking notes.

He talks about the impact of monocultures and how only a small change can be catastrophic for a species. “The loss of plant diversity can make any habitat more vulnerable to changing conditions,” he explains. “Now with the climate changing so fast, we are losing diversity just when we need it the most.” He goes on to say that “two out of five plants are facing extinction. The loss of any one species is a tragedy, but such a loss erodes the stability of a whole ecosystem and that should be a great concern to us all.”

Attenborough then presented action being taken around the world to preserve plant species – from the Millennium Seed Bank at Kew Gardens in London, to one person performing the role of pollinator for the holokea tree in Hawaii, to schoolchildren in Kenya dispersing charcoal dust balls containing seeds from the threatened acaia trees. And thanks to the vision of Greg Decker, we have undertaken the same effort to preserve a threatened species in our own backyard – the pitch pines. This undertaking may not have seemed very important to some, but after listening to the program, I fully realize how critical even local efforts are to the preservation of not only a single species but also a whole ecosystem and eventually the health of the whole environment.

He concludes that “for centuries we have robbed the space plants need to survive. We must now work with the plants and make the world a little greener, a little wilder. If we do this, our future will be healthier, safer, happier.” This is what makes the work we do to preserve and protect Oswegatchie Hills so very important. It is the reason we continue our efforts to acquire the remaining 236 acres in the Hills. Let’s keep fighting.

Kris Lambert

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

~ John Muir ‘Our National Parks’ chapter 7, 1917

iNaturalist: Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills Project

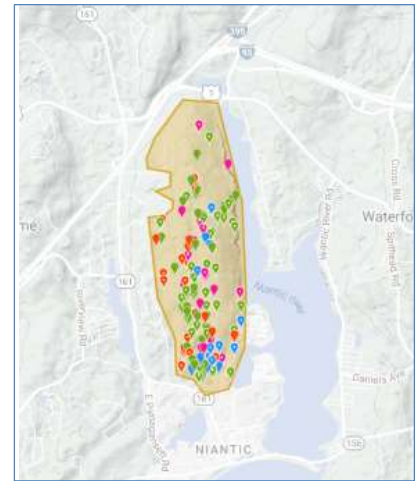


iNaturalist

Be sure to join the iNaturalist community and post photos or videos of your discoveries in the

Hills (or anywhere). Just take a photo and upload it using the iNaturalist app. If you are in the Hills, based on your phone's GPS, it will be added to the 'Diversity in the Oswegatchie Hills' project automatically. This amazing platform is a resource to connect all of us! iNaturalist is a joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society.

The 'Diversity in the Hills' project is overseen by our own Al Burchsted. With 672 observations of 353 species and growing daily, we'd love to have you to join the effort and contribute!



Interactive map from the project

Celebrate East Lyme Day – July 16, 2022

The 'Save Oswegatchie Hills Coalition' booth was busy! Suzanne Thompson from Save the Oswegatchie Hills Coalition along with new Friends board member Kathy Doherty, and Save the River – Save the Hills members provided information at Celebrate East Lyme Day. There were many visitors including US Representative, Joe Courtney, US Senator, Richard Blumenthal, and other elected officials who stopped by to show their support.



Stump Fire

Many thanks to **Greg Garrison** for finding and reporting a smoldering stump fire near the red trail and to the **Niantic Fire Department** who responded quickly to extinguish it on the evening of September 6th. Greg was quick to act and removed dry leaves near the stump and waited to direct the fire crew to the location. The fire danger was extremely high due to the drought. With their help we averted a huge disaster like the fire of 1962 – we are so grateful! Hikers, please be careful and call 911 to report any fire. For a video – visit OSWhills.org



Pitch Pine Plantings

Several supporters, including members of both the Friends (FOHNP) and Nix the Knotweed volunteers, transplanted 16 small pitch pines into their permanent home recently. The 18-inch-tall young pines originally came from the Saratoga Tree Nursery in New York and had been growing for 18 months in a raised garden bed in the newly dedicated Pitch Pine Park adjacent to the OH Preserve. Eight of the trees were planted in the park to replace trees that did not survive the initial planting in 2020 when forty sapling pitch pines were planted in the park. The other eight were planted in a nearby site that is currently being cleared of the invasive Japanese knotweed.



The FOHNP's goal is to both educate the public about the dwindling pitch pine population in CT and to help conserve the remaining pines that thrive on the rocky ridgelines in the preserve

Detour

You may have heard, there's a new detour of the Blue Trail at the Main Entrance on the east side of the Clark Pond Bridge; severe erosion of the steep slope made this detour necessary. The short detour now makes the trail safer and easier to navigate while entering and exiting the Preserve via the Blue Trail. Opened August 29th the detour is marked by blue blazes and the old section is roped off with yellow line and signage. Many thanks to FOHNP trail stewards Bruce Kolowski and Paul Parulis for clearing and installing a waterbar on the new path.



FrogWatch – 2022 Observations

By Don Danila and Susan Gonzalez



This year marked the fifth of our annual FrogWatch observations in the Preserve. FrogWatch is a nationally recognized program providing data on the distribution and abundance of frogs and toads in the U.S. and how they vary over time. We were both trained in FrogWatch sampling protocols and passed an exam showing that each of us could recognize the calls of all 11 species of frogs and toads found in CT. Visit <https://peabody.yale.edu/explore/collections/herpetology/guide-amphibians-reptiles-connecticut> for more information and short sound clips of their calls.

FrogWatch protocols call for 3-minute observations beginning 0.5 hour after sunset and recording all species heard and the intensity of their calls. In 2022 we sampled once monthly starting in March at six sites in East Lyme, including three in the Preserve. Our Preserve sites were Clark Pond at the beginning of the Red Trail and locations overlooking both Wetland (WL) #20, located off the Red Trail Overlook spur, and WL #24, found off the Green Trail. These sites are in the southern part of the Preserve. As opposed to 2021, which was a relatively wet year, 2022 had much less precipitation, so we only visited Clark Pond in July. Based on past experiences, the wetland sites lacked frog activity during and after June.

As found during several other years of these observations we were disappointed in not hearing any wood frogs calling in March, even though people heard them during the day. Also, we heard no toads calling even though we knew that at least the American toad is found in the Preserve. Toads tend to breed following the first warm rain events in spring, so timing of observations is critical. In contrast to last year, only the spring peeper appeared to be more abundant this year, particularly during April and May at all three sites. Although many gray treefrogs were heard calling at Clark Pond in June, they were not heard in other months or at the wetland sites, which they had been last year.

Similarly, abundance of green frogs and American bullfrogs appeared to be less this year than last. These frogs became active in Clark Pond in June, but their calling intensity dropped off in July. Last year for the first time we heard green frogs not only in Clark Pond, but also at WL#24, although only one or a few individuals were heard calling there. However, none were heard there this year. We believe that WL#20 lacks sufficient water for amphibian breeding after spring and WL#24 may have reduced water volume, particularly in dry years.

In summary, our sampling over the past 5 years has demonstrated how variable frog and toad abundance and distribution can be over time. All species monitored to date have shown this variability, which may be related to annual abundance differences and/or the timing of our observations. Although the senior author is mulling hanging up his headlamp after this year, Susan, either with him or another partner, hopes to continue these observations next year to further document the frogs and toads residing in the Preserve.

2022 Results			
Month	Location	Species	Calling Intensity [see note below]
March	Clark Pond	None	-
	WL #20	None	-
	WL #24	None	-
April	Clark Pond	Spring peeper	3
	WL #20	Spring peeper	2
	WL #24	Spring peeper	3
May	Clark Pond	Spring peeper	3
	WL #20	Spring peeper	3
	WL #24	Spring peeper	2
June	Clark Pond	Gray treefrog	3
		American bullfrog	2
		Green frog	1
	WL #20	None	-
July	WL #24	None	-
	Clark Pond	Green frog	1
		American bullfrog	1

1 = individuals could be counted with space between calls
2 = calls overlapping, but individuals could be counted
3 = full chorus with calls continuous and overlapping



Spring Peeper
Approximately 1 inch long