

# The Meadowlark



## FRIENDS of HEMPSTEAD PLAINS at NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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### Open Hours

Come visit us; stroll the rolling plains and explore our sustainable education center.

Monday, Tuesday & Thursday

10 am – 2 pm

### Volunteer Mornings

10 am—12 pm every Thursday

And the following Saturdays:

July 20, August 3, 17 & 31



Steve Walter

# The Value of Hempstead Plains

By Clark Mitchell

The BAND Foundation



I was recently given a Visionary Award from the Friends of Hempstead Plains, but the real visionaries are the folks who give of their time and treasure year after year to make it possible to manage a tiny piece of remnant Hempstead Plains grasslands and now, to expand that work into the Francis T. Purcell Preserve.



Why should we care about grasslands at all? I believe we should care because they are ancient, complex systems, full of biodiversity. I also believe they're totally underappreciated.

I've loved grasslands almost my whole life. I grew up in Arkansas, a place most people associate with rivers and forests and the Ozark Mountains. There's this great misunderstanding that America's grasslands were only in the Midwest and the Plains states—certainly not in places like Long Island, or my childhood home of Arkansas.

When I was a 9th grader at a summer biology camp in Arkansas, I first fell in love with prairies. The teacher had taken me and my fellow campers to this special, postage stamp-size prairie remnant and explained to us that this was *virgin* prairie, that it was different than all the agricultural fields and pasture lands that surrounded it, that it had been like this for *thousands* of years. I never forgot that experience and it made a huge impression on me that someone had had the foresight to set that little tract of land aside (and, of course, manage it for prairie) so that a kid like

me could visit and imagine a landscape that once was. And of course, so that the plants and animals that require this habitat could have at least a little of what they need to survive into the future.

Many people mistakenly believe that all grasslands are transitional ecosystems. Of course, sometimes this is the case, when a canopy opening forms in a woodland or an abandoned field is left fallow in an otherwise forested system, trees and shrubs will eventually become dominant and shade out sun-loving species like grasses and forbs. But our historic grasslands are in fact ancient, old-growth systems. They just have always required some level of disturbance to keep woody plants at bay, in most cases episodic fire, which was a dominant force on the landscape prior to European settlement, but also certain edaphic, or soil-related, conditions.

Robert Askins writes about ancient grasslands in *Grasslands of Northeastern North America*: “A good candidate for an ancient eastern grassland is the Hempstead Plains on Long Island. Until it was developed for farms and housing after 1915, the Hempstead Plains consisted of 24,300 hectares of rolling, essentially treeless prairie. This grassland was described by travelers as early as 1670. The site was characterized by frequent fires and thin soil resting on a porous substratum, features that may have favored the growth of grasses and herbs rather than trees and shrubs.”

So I come back to this question: Why should we care about grasslands? I believe we should care because they're the underdog, one of our greatest misunderstood ecosystems. We as a society readily protect wetlands and forests, but our grasslands have been obliterated. Indeed, most of them were converted early on to agriculture or development and very little is left. It's obvious why: The lack of trees made them perfect places to build or to farm.

I believe we have a duty to those who come after us to protect what is left of our historic grasslands. We should protect them for the biodiversity of plants and animals that inhabit these systems—Northern bobwhites, bobolinks, Sandplain gerardia, bird's-foot violets and countless others.

Most of you have probably never heard of the BAND Foundation. I want to briefly end with a little about us and our work with grassland ecosystems. Here's an excerpt from our mission statement: We believe that today's unprecedented pace of ecosystem destruction and biodiversity loss poses one of the world's most urgent and underappreciated crises—one with profound moral, spiritual, economic, cultural and public health consequences.

In response, we award funding to:

- Cutting-edge initiatives in and around iconic natural landscapes that offer effective, scalable and replicable conservation models;
- Programs seeking to arrest rapid and urgent declines in targeted wildlife and plant communities, especially where public attention and donor funding have been severely lacking.
- Projects aiming to galvanize a more enlightened human relationship with nature and build a deeper, more diverse and more forceful conservation movement.

In selecting grants within the above thematic areas, we seek to back visionary institutions and individuals, improve the connections between science and policy, stimulate the flow of additional conservation dollars (from both the philanthropic and private sectors) and encourage strategic partnerships. In terms of our current grassland work, besides the funding to expand the management area of the Friends of Hempstead Plains, BAND has been supporting a young organization out of Clarksville, TN, the Southeastern Grasslands Initiative, which seeks to address the loss of grasslands across the southeastern United States.

I hope you're all as excited as I am about preserving and expanding this little slice of important habitat right here in Nassau County. As the Chief Ecologist of the New York Natural Heritage Program Greg Edinger said last year, when he delivered the results of a year-long botanical survey of the Plains, we are truly conserving a globally rare grassland community and one of New York's rare plant hot spots.

## Upcoming Events

### Yoga & Nature Walk

Saturday August 10 from 10 am—12 pm

Get in tune with yourself and nature. Enjoy morning yoga with Liri and a nature walk through Hempstead Plains with Amanda \$25pp

### Backyard Habitat

Thursday July 25th from 10am—12pm

Children of all ages are invited to join us for a tour of the rare prairie habitat and learn about the creatures that live there. Find out how to attract birds and pollinators to your own yard and make your very own insect nesting box.

### Natural Design - Landscape Design Workshop

August 13th and 14th - Staten Island, NY

Held by New Directions in the American Landscape

Demand for high performing, ecology-based landscapes is increasing faster than the availability of the specialized knowledge needed to achieve them. This intensive, interactive, two-day workshop will provide concrete, real world guidance for designing and documenting all phases of native landscape development.



Instructors: Larry Weaner, FAPLD, Ian Caton, LD, Ethan Dropkin, MLA



# Prairie Benefit

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual Prairie Benefit on April 5<sup>th</sup> at the Hofstra University club was a huge success. 85 people came to celebrate with us and support our ongoing mission of preserving the Plains. Prizes were raffled off including historical maps of the Plains, wine and dinner baskets, native plants, Fortunoff jewelry, massage treatments and more. We enjoyed a cocktail hour with live music played by the Nassau Community College Jazz Club and honored those who have helped restore the prairie.

Betsy Gulotta was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her 18 years as Conservation Project Manager.

## We Recognized

Honored Special Guest

**Eileen Krieb**

Nassau County Department of  
Parks, Recreation and Museums  
Commissioner

Visionary Award

**Clark Mitchell**

The BAND Foundation

Corporate Partner Award

**Theresa Kelly**

Flushing Bank

Lifetime Achievement Award

**Betsy Gulotta**

Founder and Conservation Project  
Manager Emerita of  
the Friends of Hempstead Plains at  
Nassau Community College



Honorees receiving citation from Nassau County Executive  
Laura Curran - From left: Theresa Kelly, Betsy Gulotta,  
Hon. Laura Curran, Clark Mitchell & Eileen Krieb

There was an outpouring of thanks to her for her enthusiasm and dedication, for her countless hours of weeding, grant writing and activism to preserve the plains.

Attendees were moved by Betsy's heartfelt words of thanks to everyone who made the Friends of Hempstead Plains possible and said that the community's dedication to this cause is what sustains the Hempstead Plains, the only eastern prairie.



Betsy Gulotta receiving Lifetime Achievement Award from Friends of Hempstead Plains Board of Directors  
From left: Bob Pollack, Nina Shah-Giannaris, Meagan Fastuca, Betsy Gulotta, Amanda Furcall, Dr. Lisa Filippi,  
Annetta Centrella-Vitale, Dr. Scott Emmons, Dr. Paul van Wie, David Stolarz  
(Board Members not pictured) Dr. Betty Borowsky & Catherine Ripley

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 Jerry Ahern  
 Elizabeth Marie Bailey  
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 Catherine Ripley

**Betsy Gulotta Education Fund Founded**

This fund was created in honor of Betsy Gulotta's lifetime of service to protecting the environment. Under the management of our Education Committee it will be used to advance the Friends' mission of engaging the public with the prairie through education.

Thank you to all of those who already donated!

If you would like to contribute to the Education Fund please make a check out to Friends of Hempstead Plains with "Education Fund" in the memo section.

~ Thank You ~  
 For a Beautiful Event

**Prairie Benefit  
 Committee Members**

- Ms. Harriet Carotenuto
- Ms. Joanne Delprete
- Ms. Amanda Furcall
- Ms. Wendy Goldstein
- Dr. Roasann Gonzalez
- Ms. CeCe Haydock
- Mr. Tom McCloskey
- Ms. Nancy Youngfert



Artwork by  
 Harriet Carotenuto

**Friends of Hempstead Plains  
 Board of Directors**



Hofstra University Students and Staff



Nassau Community College Jazz Club



Gulotta Family and Friends

You can become a member and support our restoration efforts, just visit our website [friendsofhp.org](http://friendsofhp.org) and click Join

# Francis T. Purcell Preserve Restoration



As many of you know, Friends of Hempstead Plains began a new restoration project at the Francis T. Purcell Preserve last summer. The 26 acre parcel was protected by Nassau County in 1988. It has healthy patches of prairie as well as many acres which are considered restorable.

Over the past year we have mowed and removed invasive and undesirable trees and shrubs in order to promote growth of the prairie species which once dominated all of central Nassau County. Already we have seen grasses such as little blue stem spring up in areas once dominated by invasive shrubs.

All of this is possible because of a three-year grant from The BAND Foundation (You can read more about their mission and work on pg. 2). These funds have allowed us to begin this exciting restoration project and make plans for the future.

We have had tremendous help from the community. On May 8<sup>th</sup> Crown Castle, the nation's largest provider of communications infrastructure, brought 80 employees to the preserve for a clean-up day. Their program called Connected by Good aims to give and volunteer in the communities where their employees live and work. These enthusiastic people enjoyed the fresh air, honed their team-working skills and removed over 75 bursting bags of trash and a dumpster worth of brush from the preserve. Thanks to their efforts Purcell is becoming a welcoming natural site.

Further enhancing the preserve's appeal is a native plant grant through South Shore Audubon. This grant will be used to clean up the entrance and plant native species. Our hope is that these wildflowers will attract wildlife and visitors alike.

Get your company or group get involved by having a  
**Team-Building Community Service Day**  
Contact Amanda Furcall: [amanda@friendsofhp.org](mailto:amanda@friendsofhp.org)



# Long Island Community Foundation Internship Grant

This spring we received funding for a summer internship program from The Long Island Community Foundation (LICF). This grant provides funding for a summer internship program and a stipend for interns working 20 hours a week for 12 weeks, focusing on the Purcell Preserve. Interns will get hands on experience conducting an updated plant community survey, organizing community clean-up days, surveying rare plant populations in detail, beginning wildlife surveys, proposing an interpretive trail system and creating a brochure guide to Purcell Preserve.

For us, this grant is giving us extra hands during our very busy summer months and is allowing us to capitalize on our restoration progress. As Purcell transforms back into prairie grassland these interns will be able to document the changes to plant communities and wildlife.

## Our Summer Ecology Interns

**Charlotte Brennan** is a marine sciences student at Stony Brook University set to graduate in December. She's from Oyster Bay, NY and has previously worked at Stony Brook Southampton and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories. After Charlotte graduates, she hopes to pursue a career in environmental conservation and outreach.

**Alicia Chan** is an undergrad from Hofstra University majoring in Sustainability Studies and GIS. Since the start of her internship with Friends of Hempstead Plains, she has gained an interest in how the invasive plant species interact with the native plants in the prairie. In the future, Alicia hopes to increase her knowledge in field experience and apply her GIS skills to her work.

We are looking forward to having Charlotte and Alicia as part of the Friends' team this summer.

## The Natural and Cultural History of Hempstead Plains - Book Coming this Fall

Natalie Naylor, "Historical Accounts of the Hempstead Plains"

Bret Bennington, "Geology of the Hempstead Plains"

Wendy Goldstein, "Waterways of the Hempstead Plains"

Gary Monti, "History of Mitchel Field"

Jake DiRico, "Racing on the Hempstead Plains"

R. Harper, "Hempstead Plains" [1911 Botanical Study]

Henry Hicks, "Hempstead Plains" [1892 Botanical Study]

Paul van Wie, "Two Models of Suburbanization on the Hempstead Plains"

Annetta Centrella-Vitale, Serafina Vitale, Julia-Lauria Blum, "Women in Aviation on the Hempstead Plains"

2017 Botanical Study of the Hempstead Plains

Betsy Gulotta and Paul van Wie, "History of the Friends of Hempstead Plains"



Summer Ecology Interns Alicia (left) and Charlotte (right) befriending a snail in the pollinator garden.



## Mission

The mission of Hempstead Plains at Nassau Community College is to preserve, restore and manage the Hempstead Plains prairie habitat on the campus of Nassau Community College and to foster good stewardship of the land through education and research.





