



**FRIENDS
of HEMPSTEAD
PLAINS**
at NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The mission of the 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 foster good stewardship of the land through education and research.

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Meadowlark



Friends of Hempstead Plains at Nassau Community College

Fall, 2020 Volume 19, No. 1

NOW OPEN SATURDAYS! COME FOR A FALL WALK!

Director's Message

The FHP Board and staff hope that all of you and your loved ones remain safe..

Here at the Hempstead Plains, we have opened in a limited capacity and look forward to sharing this unique Long Island Prairie with visitors and friends.

Unfortunately, we had to cancel our annual Gala. This event is our most important source of revenue needed to support your intentions. We are investigating options for how we next safely host a Gala.

The work as stewards must continue. With this in mind, we are asking our members, friends and supporters to proactively make this year's donation to fund FHP education programs and this rare Long Island Prairie habitat.

Please go to our website at <http://www.friendsofhp.org> to donate, or kindly mail a check made out to "Friends of Hempstead Plains" to:

Friends of Hempstead Plains,
Biology Department,
Nassau Community College
1 Education Drive
Garden City NY 11530.

The support you provide is most appreciated!

Board's Message

New Staff In Place

We are happy to announce that Doug Schmid and Rob Longiaru have joined the Friends of Hempstead Plains. Doug takes on the role of Program Director and Rob is the new Habitat Director.

Doug has a background in environmental and science education, having directed the Outdoor Environmental Education Program for many years and has led field research programs from Argentina to Alaska. He also currently teaches Environmental Science here at Nassau Community College.

Rob works as a Conservation Biologist with the Town of Hempstead's Department of Conservation and Waterways. Rob has a background in ecology, and marine science; and has been working on barrier island habitat restoration, as well as ecological research on threatened & endangered shorebirds.

The FHP Board of Directors welcomes Doug and Rob as we move forward on a number of projects at the Plains. Come out and meet them in person.

The Hempstead Plains Preserve and Education Center is Open!

We wish our members and the general public to know they can stop by to stroll through and enjoy our unique Long Island prairie habitat. The fall is a wonderful time to see the native grasses and flowering plants.

Our sustainable Education Center and the beautiful Hempstead Plains are open until November 21st: Tuesdays - 8:00 AM to noon; Thursdays - 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM and 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM; and Saturdays - 10 AM until 2 PM. Masks and social distancing are required.

We hope to see you there!

Virtual Tours Start this Fall

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic Long Island schools have curtailed field trips for the fall. So that classes can still visit the Hempstead Plains Doug Schmid will be creating a virtual field trip experience, to be live streamed from the Plains, starting in October. We will be piloting this program soon with AP Environmental Science classes from the Wheatley School.

These programs can be tailored to a school's needs, to be appropriate for various grade levels and subjects. If you'd like your class or group to remotely experience the unique habitat of this Long Island grassland, investigate the plant communities and soils, and learn about our sustainably engineered building, please contact Doug at douglas.schmid@ncc.edu for more information and to schedule your program.

Monarch Butterfly Tagging Day

September 19, 2020

This Fall the FHP staff has been tagging migrating Monarch butterflies at the Preserve. These amazing insects are currently on their way to Mexico where they will overwinter. As part of a nationwide effort to map their actual migration routes we are catching, tagging and releasing monarchs.

The Hempstead Plains is an important "pit-stop" as the goldenrod species found here bloom in the fall and provide essential calories and nutrients via their nectar. Each paper tag has an individual number and if someone finds one of the tagged butterflies on along their journey they can access the website listed to report their data. The network of citizens in the U.S., Canada and Mexico has made great contributions to our understanding of these incredible insects.



A monarch butterfly on the Hempstead Plains prior to tagging. The distinctive coloring provides a warning to potential predators to avoid eating it, as monarchs are toxic if ingested.



Program Director Doug Schmid records monarch butterfly tag and location data.

Ridding The Hempstead Plains Of Invasive Species, With Patience

Ridding the Hempstead Plains of invasive, non-native plant species is a long-term goal of Friends of Hempstead Plains. Very long-term. It will only be possible after many years of effort to reduce invasive populations to the point where it would be even thinkable to remove the very last noxious plant of even one unwanted species. Our efforts now are focused on this reduction phase.

Our efforts to reduce the population of mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) are well underway and succeeding. For the past three seasons we have mowed dense patches, sometimes twice in the season. One advantage mugwort has over other plant species is it grows up quickly starting in early spring, shading out the new growth of other plants. We try to remove that advantage by mowing back the first growth, around one or two feet high, in late spring or early summer. A second advantage of mugwort is the toxic mixture of chemicals its leaves put into the soil. These chemicals have an allelopathic effect, inhibiting growth of other plant species. By preventing robust growth with our mower, we reduce the amount of leaf growth and hence the level of these toxins.

This approach is paying off. In patches where there was once only dense mugwort we now have interspersed native plants appearing, such as little bluestem, broomsedge bluestem, goldenrods, and Indian hemp. In the densest patches of mugwort the allelopathic poison in the soil is so great nothing at all grows in the first season. But gradually, nature recovers. Time will tell how well the natives can reestablish themselves.

While continuing mowing the mugwort, we can turn our attention to the next unwanted guest. A good candidate is Chinese bushclover, (*Lespedeza cuneata*), a native of Asia and eastern Australia. Unlike mugwort, which spreads by its roots, Chinese bush clover spreads by seed. As a result, while there are some very dense stands, most of these plants are interspersed all over the plains. They are difficult to pull up and this should be avoided in any case as it disturbs the unbroken sod, creating opportunities for seeds, usually the unwanted kind, to sprout. Here we have an opportunity for volunteers to make a valuable contribution to conservation and restoration. Chinese bushclover is easy to spot and cut off near the soil with a pair of clippers. If we can do this across the plains before the plants go to seed in the fall, we can see a serious decline in the population.

Purcell Restoration Proceeding

Although the COVID-19 pandemic and resultant lock-down has pushed “pause” on many of our activities, this spring and summer, the Friends worked on restoring the Hempstead Plains ecosystem.

Due to the generous support of the BAND Foundation and under the oversight of our Habitat Management Committee, the restoration of the Purcell Preserve has made considerable progress. The Purcell Preserve is a Nassau County property, adjacent to the Uniondale Marriott.

Recently the Friends of Hempstead Plains has mowed 10 acres to control invasive species, removed old berms, filled in obsolete drainage ditches (probably from the old Mitchell Field airfield days) and removed large amounts of old concrete.

Over time, due to the absences of natural wildfires, invasive tree species have been displacing the native grassland plants. We have also removed over 100 invasive red cedar trees this spring, which opens the canopy, favoring the sun-loving prairie plants.

Even though restoration work is not complete we are in the planning process for opening the Preserve to the public.

With our Board President, Nina Shah-Giannaris, Doug and Rob met with Nassau County Park administrators this summer to plan our joint work to create and manage a passive nature/walking trail through the newly restored section of the property. More recently Doug outlined a walking path through sections of the preserve.

Our ultimate goal, in support of Nassau County’s plans for the unused property, is to create the trail system and then open for public utilization and enjoyment of this beautiful Long Island Coastal Grassland habitat.



Work at the Purcell preserve is ongoing through the generosity of the BAND Foundation. Pictured is the remnant of old airfield runway we will use as a parking area for visitors and a dumpster filled with concrete debris as part of our restoration work

Soil and Water Conservation District Volunteers

The Friends of the Hempstead Plains wish to extend our gratitude to volunteers from the Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Their staff and interns have helped us repeatedly over the last few weeks with the important work of invasive species management.

The group has done a great job cutting down and removing invasive species and getting our display garden ready for visitors. Recently the crew has helped us follow the recommendations of the recent study by the NY Natural Heritage Program; specifically to remove by hand thousands of Chinese Bush Clover plants.

Their work to control this aggressive invasive has been critical to maintain our last few acres of the once extensive LI prairie ecosystem.



Agalinis acuta in bloom



David Ganim, Serg Grimm, Olivia Calandra, Kristina Grupe and Conor Murphy have been working with Habitat Director Rob Longiaru in our ongoing effort to control invasive plant species by mowing large areas of the Hempstead Plains.



Bushclover invading the prairie.



Volunteers cleared the way for native plants.



The view after a great job mowing mugwort.

Updated Trail System

Doug and Rob have created an updated trail system at the Hempstead Plains Preserve.

These $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ mile trails are open weekly (see below). Fall is a wonderful time to see the expanses of grasses and other prairie plants in their wonderful autumnal colors and we encourage visitors to come by and stroll through the open grassland.

We require that visitors bring a mask to use inside the Education Center and when near others on the trails.



New Grant for Our Education Efforts

The Friends of Hempstead Plains are pleased to announce we have been awarded a grant from the Nassau County Soil and Water Conservation District. The grant will support our efforts to create an innovative field science education programs for local students and in addition will also help us move our restoration work forward.

For some time our Board of Directors has wanted to share the Plains with more teachers and students and this grant can provide a valuable educational and field science experience. These programs will support elementary classes in meeting the new NYS Science Learning Standards, which require hands-on, inquiry-based investigations.

Students will investigate the prairie plants and associated soil complexes through the use of augers to create soil profiles, sifters and porosity testing, all in the field. Utilizing the Education Center classes will use porosity tubes of different soil particles and see a demonstration of a Long Island Groundwater simulator.

Our goal is to develop exciting and engaging curriculum and activities that will attract school groups to the Hempstead Plains for a powerful learning experience in the natural world. In addition, these activities will give schools the opportunity to meet the new NYS Science Learning Standards. Our staff has begun creating and implementing several authentic science education experiences centered around soils.

Creature Feature: The American Woodcock

On May 22, Doug Schmid and Rob Longiaru were at the Purcell Preserve marking some invasive trees for removal when we came upon a heartening sight. While walking through an area of prairie grasses and secondary growth three Woodcock, beautifully camouflaged, “exploded” in flight from right before our feet.

As Woodcock populations have been declining we were excited, and also heartened, to see these birds surviving here in these last remnants of the LI prairie. So we thought to feature this wonderful bird species in this edition of our newsletter.

The American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) is a shorebird that has adapted to woodlands and scrub/grassland areas.

The long bill is indicative of its shorebird past. This stocky bird superbly blends into forest floor litter and stands about 5 inches tall with an 18 inch wingspan. Colorfully, they are also called timberdoodle, night partridge, bog sucker and Labrador twister.

Woodcock require a diversity of habitats including scrub forest for foraging (they predominantly probe for earthworms in moist soil with that long bill), early successional forest for nesting, open areas for summer roosting and small clearings for courtship. It appears they can find all of these at the Purcell Preserve.

Perhaps most unique about the species is their courtship display and flights. In the early spring, around dusk, woodcock males will stake out “singing groups”, small open areas surrounded by some trees.

Here they announce themselves from the ground with a nasal “bzeent” call. They then fly up for about 300 feet and suddenly plunge earthward in a zig-zap, corkscrew dive, all the while creating a chirping sound as wind moves along their feathers. Just before hitting the ground they pull up and make a soft landing.

Woodcock are migratory, often spending their warmer months in the northeastern parts of North America and their winters in the southeastern reaches of the U.S. Their numbers have been steadily declining, mostly due to habitat loss. A recent paper indicated they are sensitive to climate change and we should expect a northward shift in their ranges.



Volunteering

Master Gardeners at the Plains

On July 24, Doug Schmid and Rob Longiaru hosted a small group from the Cornell Cooperative Extension-Nassau's Master Gardener program at the Hempstead Plains education Center.

FHP Treasurer Annetta Centrella-Vitale and Mary Callanan, Director of East Meadow Farm, Cornell Cooperative Extension Nassau County brought the group. We reviewed the formation of the Hempstead Plains, its history and examined the soils.

Although it was a rainy day, we braved the elements to view the Plains from the building roof, where the grassland plants of the green roof are doing well and concluded with a short examination of some characteristic prairie plants.

This was our first tour, due to the pause in activity necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we look forward to increasing educational offerings.

Mary and Annetta filmed the tour and, with additional footage and the help from Hofstra University student Ryan Chen, will create a short Virtual Tour of the Plains which we will host on our FHP website.

Fall on the Plains

We Are Open!

See inside for days and times, or call/email to bring your group.



Please Follow us on Instagram and Facebook for more images, science and stories

FRIENDS OF HEMPSTEAD PLAINS

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