



## Environmental Commission Newsletter Township of Long Hill, County of Morris

April 2019 Issue Number 3

### Bird Migration

At this time of year our skies teem with the movement of birds returning north to their breeding grounds. Despite being the most densely populated state in the nation, New Jersey is a great place to observe this phenomenon. It is geographically well placed, being on the Atlantic flyway, and at the northern edge of some species distributions, and the southern edge of others. Habitats here range from mountain forest to sand dunes and salt marshes, swamps, grasslands, ponds, small farms and suburban backyards, and both natural and urban cliffs.

The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is a great place to look for spring migrants. Flocks of wildfowl can be found on the ponds through April, while May brings in a host of interesting warblers, orioles, swallows, and birds of prey like American kestrels and merlins. For



American Redstart

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wildfowl, scan the ponds from the blinds at the Wildlife Observation Center (WOC) off New Vernon Road, or search the forest edges and open fields along Pleasant Plains Road for warblers and other migrant species.

Even smaller patches of forest such as the Hicks Tract in Millington or the wet woodlands along the Passaic river will host an amazing mix of species, especially during the early weeks of May. The Township's Environmental Commission is hosting a series of Birding & Breakfast walks in late April to show you where and how to find these avian treasures. Bring a pair of binoculars and a sense of joy! Get out this weekend to enjoy the beautiful spring weather and watch some of the amazing natural events that take place in New Jersey.



## About BEES

What do you think of when you hear the word BEE? Most of us imagine a flying insect with yellow and black markings. I think of three types of answers. First – the honeybee, an import from Europe essential to pollinate many food crops. Second – the many hundreds of species of native wild bees in NJ that also pollinate. Third – the yellow-jacket wasp that people call a bee when it stings them at a fall picnic. Let us take a closer look at these three “bees”.

Honeybees represent a \$7 million industry in our state contributing to the production of millions of dollars of fruits and vegetables. You might know that hives are in trouble from something called CCD – colony collapse disorder. Pesticides, tiny mites and viruses may all play a part. Some research shows that antiviral extracts from certain shelf fungi with immune-boosting properties has helped. Honeybees are colonial bees. Female worker bees protect the queen in the hive and if threatened, they will sting. But you can carefully watch them at work at flowers without fear. They are gathering pollen and nectar for food for the egg-laying queen and the larvae. Male honeybees do not sting, and are around only to fertilize new queens. Worker honeybees (all females) gather pollen in hair-lined depression on their hind legs called pollen baskets. Check out the colors of the pollen masses when you see a honeybee.

There are about 4,000 Native Bee Species in North America. Most of them are also important pollinators. There are bumblebees, plasterer bees, mining bees, sweat bees, resin bees, mason bees and more. Many of these bees are solitary or semi-social. Solitary bees do not live in a hive. They find a nest in a natural hole and lay one egg. You can create an insect hotel with small tubes or bamboo sections for your yard. Many sweat bees are a beautiful iridescent green. Mason bees collect their pollen under their abdomen. Don't be afraid of the large carpenter bee (shiny black abdomen) as they might dive at you if you walk through the territory of the nest. Don't be fearful or wave your arms or threaten them. Ignore them and keep walking. The male carpenter bee cannot sting. Be sure to plant native flowers in your garden for all these wild bees.

The third “bee” is actually a Yellow-jacket Wasp. Only the queen survives the cold winter in our area. She must find a suitable nest area underground in the spring and start laying eggs. Their population is at its peak in late summer and fall. These wasps are attracted to our outside picnics with all kinds of food. Be careful one has not flown into the opening of your beverage can. Yellow-jacket wasps are aggressive and can sting more than once when threatened. Please don't call them “bees”!



Sweat bee



Mason bee



Nesting area