



# Natural News

A Newsletter of the Hamden Land Conservation Trust

Winter & Spring 2014

## A Message from Our President

As I write this, a great-horned owl is hooting outside my window, signaling the time to set up a territory and nest. The new year is here, and I look back on all that the Hamden Land Conservation Trust has accomplished this past year and on exciting things yet to come.

Last October, in cooperation with the Hamden League of Women Voters, we co-sponsored a lively mayoral debate on the environment and open space in town. More than 150 residents attended the event, signaling to local officials that questions about Hamden's environment and how we treat open space in our town are critically important to many residents. We held our fall walk at Olin Powder Farm and continued to keep this gem of open space in the public spotlight. It is our hope that this space will one day be preserved and publicly accessible to residents on a regular basis.

We successfully hosted our first-ever donor recognition wine tasting event in November with the gen-

erous sponsorship of the Mount Carmel Wine and Spirit Shop, in a delightful venue provided by Whitney Center. We were very pleased by the turnout and hope to make this an annual event.

While I am encouraged by these accomplishments, I am sobered by the severity of the environmental challenges we face. Increasingly, the public is beginning to understand that environmental protection is not about hugging trees – it's about public health. A number of disturbing trends have recently made headlines. Many of our members have spoken to me about the fact that monarch butterflies, once frequent visitors in summer, were almost nonexistent this year. It's not your imagination. There are fewer monarchs. Where researchers in Mexico typically see 50 million migrating monarchs, last year they estimated 3 million.

In addition, native bees, essential pollinators for-

everything from corn to cotton are disappearing. Warblers and other bird species are declining in population due to habi-



tat loss both here and in their wintering grounds in South and Central America.

As of January 2014 there are new proposed changes in the way United Illuminating trims trees, enforcing a clearance of 8 feet on either side of and under all wires. In this scenario, property values will suffer and important services that trees provide will be eliminated. More information can be found on the New Haven Garden Club website:

<http://www.gardenclubofnewhaven.org/>

As an advocate for preserving land and trees,

### HAMDEN LAND CONSERVATION TRUST BOARD MEMBERS

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the Hamden Land Conservation Trust feels this needs to be a more considered process. Other options need to be further explored such as underground wiring, the traditional method of V-cuts and more. Please check out our Facebook page for more current info.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Open space preservation and protecting biodiversity offer avenues for positive environmental change. Best of all, these are



## Helping the Birds

### President's Message

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activities we can pursue right here, at home, right now. In this newsletter, we offer ten easy ways anyone can help promote biodiversity.

To further inspire your love of gardening, we're continuing our native plant series highlighting chokeberries, another great native plant to include in your yard.

We are hard at work on a particular open space parcel acquisition that we hope to be able to announce soon. It's early days yet, but things are looking promising for this new addition to our protected properties in Hamden. More on that to come in the days ahead.

*Jim Sirch  
HLCT President*

The HLCT and Bethany Land Trust are currently working on a joint program to be held later this winter. Peter Picone, Wildlife Biologist with the Connecticut DEEP will talk to us about creating songbird habitat and using native plants in our home landscapes.

Many songbird populations are in decline due to habitat loss, fragmentation and climate change. Some have declined as much as 90% in the last 30 years or so. These trends are quite alarming and we all need to think about what we can do to help.

Peter is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic speaker who will inspire you to provide the basic needs of food, water and shelter to the birds. It doesn't matter if you own ½ an acre or 20, by providing these oases it can make a big difference. And just think what can be done if you spread the word to your neighbors and they join you in creating these wildlife



*American Robin  
by Nicole MacPherson*

friendly spaces in their yards too.

We also hope to have a small panel of people who have already done projects in their yards or public spaces to further inspire you. There will be displays by both land trusts and representatives from the Connecticut Coverts Project to talk about their program and the many resources available to landowners who want to create wildlife habitat on their property. Watch our website for an announcement of the date and place and please join us for an educational and entertaining evening.

It will be a great way to lose the winter doldrums and THINK SPRING!

*Gail Cameron*

**Peeper Prowl at Johnson's Pond!  
277 Thornton St.**

**Friday, April 11 @ 7:30**

**Rain Date : Friday, April 18 @ 7:30**



*Spring Peeper (public domain)*



## 10 Easy Ways to Promote Biodiversity

1. **Join the Hamden Land Conservation Trust** and help protect open space and biodiversity right here in Hamden. By volunteering, you can help restore habitat for native species and reduce invasive species that harm or take over from native plants and animals, all while learning something about your local biodiversity. More at: <http://www.hlct.org> and on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/hamdenlandconservationtrust>.
2. **Kick the chemicals.** Reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers in your lawn care system. These often run off lawns into lakes and streams and, in our region, end up in Long Island Sound harming the plants and animals living there. While you're at it, don't work too hard on your lawn: Avoid mowing your lawn too often and be sure to let the edges run wild – it's better for wildlife. Clover helps feed your lawn while providing nectar for bees and other insects. Better yet, reduce the size of your yard with a garden.
3. **Go native.** Put in plantings that attract birds, bees and butterflies to your yard and garden like oaks, milkweeds, willows, hollies, blueberry bushes, asters and coneflowers. If you don't have a garden, help start a butterfly garden at your child's school, join a community garden or work on a municipal tree planting project.
4. **Reduce, reuse, and recycle.** And remember, there's a reason why "reduce" comes first in that list: it's the most important. The more we reduce demand for resources, the less we need to destroy habitat to get those resources.
5. **Compost vegetable waste.** Composting reduces the overall waste stream and provides natural slow-release fertilizer for your yard and garden.
6. **Clean friendly.** Use environmentally friendly cleaning products for your home and business. This reduces chemical contamination of habitats both during the manufacture of cleaning chemicals and when those chemicals go down the drain.
7. **Buy organic.** It helps reduce the amount of fertilizers and pesticides put into the environment, protecting drinking water resources and helping beneficial insects needed for pollination and pest control.
8. **Avoid overfished species** like tuna or cod and opt instead for mackerel and pollock instead. For more about sustainably harvested seafood, get the Seafood Watch app from the Monterey Bay Aquarium.
9. **Be like Scrooge** when it comes to energy efficiency at home. Hire a professional to conduct a home energy audit or do it yourself using the Do It Yourself Home Energy Audit at [Energy.gov](http://Energy.gov). Reducing your energy demand reduces carbon dioxide release into the atmosphere (which contributes to global warming), and the need to disturb habitat for fossil fuel prospecting and extraction. Plus, you'll save money!
10. **Ride together.** Carpool and use public transport when possible. Each gallon of gas saved means an additional 20 pounds of the greenhouse gas CO<sub>2</sub> was kept out of the atmosphere. Besides, getting there together is more fun!



## Native species:

### *Aronia melanocarpa* **Chokeberry**

Chokeberry has been getting a lot of press lately. Perhaps better known by its Latin name - Aronia - health advocates have recently discovered the chokeberry and its anti-oxidant properties. But Aronia, far from being some exotic plant, is actually a deciduous native shrub represented in our area by two species - red chokeberry (*Aronia arbutifolia*) and black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*). Both are naturally resistant to drought, insects, pollution, and disease and make excellent choices for your wild yard.



USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / USDA NRCS. *Wetland flora: Field office illustrated guide to plant species.* USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Red Chokeberry, (*Aronia arbutifolia*), is the taller of the two species, reaching a height of 6-10 feet depending on cultivar and growing conditions. It is a lanky shrub that naturally occurs in the understory of wetland forests and forest edges, but does well in dry sunny locations as well. Clusters of white flowers appear in the spring with dark green foliage throughout the late spring and summer. In late summer, red chokeberry fruit ripens into small red berries on long stems. The cultivar ‘Brilliantissima’ is commonly found at nurseries and produces an abundance of red fruit and very glossy dark green foliage. Aronia fruit are an excellent food source for migrating birds such as thrushes, catbirds and wax-wings. While we would have a difficult time eating chokeberries because of their astringency (hence the name), birds do not seem to have that issue. Also in the fall, the leaves of the red chokeberry turn brilliant shades of scarlet, orange and yellow, adding to its appeal and making it an alternative to burning bush, *Euonymus alatus*, which is considered a non-native invasive species in Connecticut. When used as a border or hedge, it can replace privet, another non-native invasive.

Black Chokeberry, (*Aronia melanocarpa*) is a smaller shrub, growing to a height of 4-5 feet. Its berries are purple-black in color and virtually inedible by humans because of their sour taste. While the berries are not a first choice for wildlife, this means the berries are often available in the winter when there is little other food to be found. The foliage on black chokeberry is dark green and shiny. Black chokeberry also features good fall color, especially when planted in sunny locations, and can replace foundation plantings such as burning bush. The cultivar ‘Autumn Magic’ is even more compact than other varieties while another cultivar ‘Viking’ produces an abundant crop of very large fruit.

Researchers at the University of CT are currently looking into the potential viability of Aronia as a cultivated crop. They believe Aronia’s many health benefits and ease of growing make it a viable possibility for local farmers. Besides their high anti-oxidant levels, chokeberries are also high in polyphenols such as flavonoids. Some energy and health drinks now list Aronia as one of the ingredients. Maybe Aronia juice will be sold in local grocery stores in the near future?

*Andy Brand & Tom Parlapiano*

#### CONTACT US

- Our website is: [www.hlct.org](http://www.hlct.org)
- Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/hamdenlandconservationtrust>
- Mailing address:  
Box P.O. Box 6185  
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- Join our email list by sending your email address to [info@hlct.org](mailto:info@hlct.org)

**Visit our website and our Facebook page for our upcoming spring walks at Powder Farm and our annual Trails Day Walk**