A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Collaboration is a great force multiplier. In the past few months, Earthplace has had the good fortune to partner with six like-minded organizations, to educate our community about public and residential environmental solutions.

Protecting Pollinators: Working with Wakeman Town Farm and the Westport Garden Club, Westport residents are learning how to restore our pollinator pathways. (see opposite article)

Reducing Single-Use Plastics: The Plastic Pollution Project (P3), a grass roots organization ignited by Westport middle schoolers, and sponsored by Earthplace is targeting more than straws. Watch what they can do together!

Protecting Our Watershed: Harbor Watch and the Norwalk Maritime Aquarium are designing a joint study to help protect sensitive coastal ecosystems.

Planting Native: The Aspetuck Land Trust and Earthplace have joined together on a multiyear project to create and promote native landscapes in Westport to serve as an educational model for homeowners.

Cleaning Our Waste Stream: In partnership with the Sustainable Westport Advisory Team, the public can learn what to recycle and how to compost as we strive to make the Makers Faire

For twelve months, Earthplace has been host to monthly meetings of Sustainable Fairfield County, a group of advocates from ten neighboring towns who share the best local approaches to a more sustainable future.

Momentum has increased; change is upon us, and Earthplace has found its place as the Center For Environmental Learning.

Join the movement.

Tony McDowell
Executive Director

SEEEN AROUNDD THE SANCTUARY: SKUNK CABBAGE

Take a walk along the Swamp Loop Trail over to Frog Hollow Pond and you will find Skunk Cabbage, one of the hallmarks of Spring. Skunk Cabbage is a perennial wildflower that grows in swampy, wet areas of forest lands.

This unusual plant sprouts very early in the Spring, and has an odd chemistry that creates its own heat, often melting the snow around itself as it first sprouts in the spring. Encased in a hard reddish mottled spathe, flowers appear before leaves, and provide an important early pollen source for honey bees.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
Helen Garten, Chair | Kerry Fitzgerald, Vice President | Jeffrey Stefanowicz, Treasurer
Jim Corgel, Elizabeth Falk, Nikki Gorman, M.D., Sherry Jagerson, Howard Lathrop, Matthew Mandell, Peter Zakowich

Shared Purpose

Congratulations to the towns of Norwalk and Greenwich who recently passed plastic bag bans!

The need to protect the environment is now well understood, and on this issue, Westport has led the way. It only makes sense to promote success across communities since we share the same air, water, and natural ecosystems. The more we learn about harms caused to the natural world, the more urgently we need to share information and take action.
THE POLLINATOR PATHWAY

The Pollinator Pathway Project is a nation-wide initiative to create a pesticide-free corridor of private and public properties that provide native plant habitats for pollinators. Intentional pathways have been started by local organization members across Connecticut including Wilton, Ridgefield, Weston, Norwalk, Redding, Darien, Greenwich, and Newtown.

Pollinators (bees, moths, butterflies, beetles, flies, wasps, and hummingbirds) evolved to depend on local plants. While the European honeybee often comes to mind when we talk about pollinators, Connecticut has over 300 native bee species as well as 200 species of butterfly and moths.

Many native bees have a territory of no more than a half mile. As suburbs get developed, landscapes are fragmented and pollinators can end up in isolated “islands” of populations. This isolation is exacerbated by backyards and roadside plantings filled with non-native ornamental plants.

Planting native and going pesticide-free opens up pathways for pollinators. Pollinators are significant to the food web - not only do they pollinate many plants that we grow for food, but they provide a large portion of meals for other animals. Habitat connectivity is key to providing the sustenance that birds, mammals, and insects require while also contributing to a healthy community of species.

Planting native plants is also beneficial to homeowners, as they require less maintenance and fewer resources (such as water and soil amendments) than many non-native ornamentals. Earthplace is working with Sustainable Westport, Wakeman Town Farm and other local groups to support this national initiative as well develop pathways in our community.

For more information, visit www.pollinator-pathway.org

HARBOR WATCH UPDATE

Harbor Watch has been hard at work all winter. In particular, we have been focusing on testing the Norwalk River and the storm water outfalls that flow into local harbors. Our monitoring season ramps up in May, when we will begin our summer monitoring of 16 different rivers in 16 Fairfield County towns.

Our next team of interns is joining us in just a few weeks. The Senior Internship Program begins in late May and will host seven high school students in an all-day program for four weeks. These students will be immersed in water quality activities from river and harbor field work to oyster boat trips to sewage treatment plant tours. Also in late May we will be joined by four undergraduate researchers who will be working with us through August, primarily focused on our river monitoring and pollution track-down projects. Stay tuned to our Facebook and Instagram accounts for updates on the students’ experiences!
BIRD BLIND

The Native Plant Courtyard is the perfect setting to observe the birds that come to our feeder.

We have set up a Bird Blind where you can find information on bird friendly gardening, diet preferences, and information on how to pick the right bird feeder for your backyard. Come look through our binoculars and see what birds you can spot!

It is important to feed and protect our local birds because of the role they play in maintaining our ecosystems.

By eating insects, birds keep species from becoming too numerous. Nectar feeding birds are important pollinators and fruit feeding birds play a crucial role in dispersing seeds to new locations. Bird droppings also provide nutrients back into the soil that help plants flourish and grow.

NEW STAFF

We’re delighted to welcome Sophie Pollmann as Director of Development and Marketing at Earthplace. Previously she was the US Development Director with International Animal Rescue where she focused her efforts on animal conservation around the world.

Here at Earthplace, Sophie will manage the Annual Fund, major gifts, events as well as overseeing marketing initiatives, Sophie lives with her family in Westport.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

Earthplace is one of eleven local organizations participating in a local initiative launched by the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk to make Fairfield County destinations more accessible to individuals with special needs.

This initiative, the Accessibility for All (AFA) project, is funded by the Fairfield County’s Community Foundation. The initiative includes assessing current offerings, reviewing potential new programming, identifying best practices and providing staff training.

Moving forward, Earthplace will be connected to the AFA program via an online portal that will provide a valuable resource for families and service providers. The website launched in April, and features homepages for each of the eleven participating organizations with program calendars as well as contact information for visitors.

To learn more, please visit accessibilityforallct.org
Like many migrating birds, ospreys spend their winters in the south – mostly in Central and South America – and return north to mate and raise their young.

MORE ABOUT OSPREYS:

- They typically **mate for life** and lay eggs (2-4) in April or May.
- Fish make up **99%** of the osprey’s diet.
- Ospreys are found around nearly **any body of water**: saltmarshes, rivers, ponds, reservoirs, estuaries, and even coral reefs.
- When looking for food, Osprey **fly slowly over water**, pausing to hover when they spot fish below; if fish is close enough to surface, the Osprey plunges feet-first, grasping prey in its talons.
- Their nests are **large**, made mostly of sticks, and are constructed on the tops of dead trees, power poles, on manmade nesting platforms, and sometimes on buoys, chimneys, or other structures. The nests are often **used year after year**.
- Each year, the pair returns not only to their same breeding area, but fly separately to their same **wintering grounds**.
- The Osprey population was seriously **endangered by the effects of pesticides** in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Since DDT and related pesticides were banned in 1972, Ospreys have made a good comeback in many parts of North America.

Ospreys were recently in the news in **Westport** after the unauthorized removal of an Osprey nest and platform. After significant public outcry, with the help of a local news blog, the platform has been reinstalled and the ospreys are busy rebuilding their nest.

### NATIVE SEED PROPOGATION

Despite the snow and frozen ground, the Earthplace Grounds Committee has been dirtying their hands getting ready for spring with the **Native Plant Propagation Project**.

Their project is to grow seeds, collected from the local environs, to bolster our supply of native plantings. Native plants have evolved with the local climate and geology, making them a low maintenance addition to any backyard. These plants help form the base of the food web by playing host and food source to a variety of pollinators and other insects. In turn, these insects are food for birds.

**Ninety-seven percent** of songbird nestlings cannot digest seeds, and rely on insects to grow. A backyard full of nonnative ornamental plants is largely a food desert for our feathered friends. Our seeds are collected in the summer and fall from local native plants, sown in gallon jugs in December, and left outside to freeze until March (Plants native to New England require freezing in order to germinate). These jugs are then brought inside and placed under grow lights to be ready for spring germination.
MARK YOUR CALENDARS!
Visit earthplace.org for more information for these & other upcoming events

ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING SERIES:
RAIN GARDEN BASICS
MONDAY, MAY 13
7PM
Come to the Rain Garden Basics class with Eliot Snaith, a teacher & designer of sustainable systems, to learn more about creating your own Rain Garden. It is the perfect solution for drainage issues in your yard while promoting local plant species & water conservation.

COCKTAILS & CLAMS
SATURDAY, JUNE 8
5PM TO 7PM
Join us dockside for a celebration of clean water to benefit Harbor Watch. Enjoy an unlimited raw bar straight off the boat, a signature cocktail, wine, beer, live music, and sunset on the harbor!

WOODSIDE BASH & EARTHPLACE FESTIVAL
SATURDAY & SUNDAY,
OCTOBER 5 & 6
Enjoy a beautiful evening under the stars with craft cocktails, a guided night walk, harvest dinner, live music, camp fire, and open bar. On Sunday, bring the whole family for a day of nature-based exploration & fun with food trucks, live music, & more.

At Earthplace we envision a community where conscious regard for the natural world guides individual action.