

Attracting Wildlife with Plants

Although the pink flower of the Steeplebush Spirea is beautiful, the most significant quality of this plant is the way it is part of an integrated plant community supporting an associative wildlife community. Long evolutionary processes create adaptive relationships between plant and animal. The beauty of these plants is in the role they perform, giving sustenance and shelter to a multitude of creatures.

Edges between habitats, called ecotones, provide opportunities for a more diverse group of wildlife. There are two edges here — the edge between woodland and wetland habitat and the edge along the stream between land and water. This contiguous stream corridor traverses through an open wetland into a woodland, offering opportunities for wildlife that need space for food, hunting and breeding.

Here we can observe how specific birds, insects, and animals interact with plants and understand in any habitat the loss of one species can cause a chain reaction affecting many more species. We can also learn how to manage our home landscape in order to better create and conserve precious wildlife habitat.

References:

- *The Book of Swamp and Bog: Trees, Shrubs, and Wildflowers of Eastern Freshwater Wetlands* by John Eastman.
- *Attracting Birds, From the Prairies to the Atlantic* by Verne E. Davison.
- *The Field Guide to Wildlife Habitats of the Eastern United States* by Janine M. Benyus.



About the Mountain Top Arboretum

The Mountain Top Arboretum is a living museum of trees and shrubs created for the education and pleasure of the public. Its founders, the Ahrens family, designed and planted a seven acre mountain top area starting in 1977, to display the range of native and exotic trees and shrubs that successfully adapt to the rigorous climate at 2,400 feet elevation. Today we have twenty three acres of displays in three distinct areas: the West Meadow, the Woodland Walk, and the East Meadow. We conduct programs for the public including the Annual Garden Fair, summer lectures, and workshops. Self-guided tours are encouraged and guided tours are possible by contacting the Executive Director at info@mtarboretum.org

Our Mission

The mission of the Mountain Top Arboretum is to provide for the Catskill region a unique and beautiful mountain top environment for a living sanctuary of native and exotic trees and shrubs. Using this sanctuary we will:

- Engage in the applied science of horticulture;
- Promote stewardship of the environment; and
- Offer a diversity of programs for the education and pleasure of the public.



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Mountain Top Arboretum Wildlife Relationships in the East Meadow Wetland



Along the Path and Boardwalk you will find markers for:

A. Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*)

The red winter berries offer important winter food for Mockingbirds, Crows, Yellow Shafted Flickers and Robins. As their fall berries ferment in early winter, they become more digestible. Their thick brush offers a sheltered place for birds like the Veery to nest. Winterberry is a stand out in the winter garden.



A. Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*).

B. Steepletop or Hardhack Spirea (*Spiraea tomentosa*)

This bisexual plant relies on insects for pollination. Its nectar attracts many insects including bumblebees, wasps, and Long Horned Beetles. The Spring Azure butterfly and the Dark Spotted Looper Moth Caterpillar feed on its foliage. In the winter rabbit and deer feed on its twigs and ruffed and sharp tailed grouse dine on the buds. Deer may be found bedding in the dense spirea thicket. Steepletop Spirea are found in mineral rich sunny marshes. (Eastman)



B. Steeplebush (*Spiraea tomentosa*).

C. Sensitive Fern (*Onclea sensibilis*)

Millions of years of evolution may have helped this primitive and dominant species develop biochemical resistance to being eaten by birds and animals. Most of the ferns are considered to have low wildlife value compared to other plants, however birds feed on the sensitive fern's fiddle-heads, and deer and chipmunks have been known to browse on foliage. In wet habitats like this, Sensitive Fern forms colonies through their fibrous root system.



C. Sensitive Fern (*Onclea sensibilis*).



D. Sedge (*Carex crinita*).*

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Sedge is a host for many butterflies including the Eyed Brown Butterfly, the Appalacia Brown, Mulberry Wing, and the Two-Spotted Skipper. (Audubon Butterfly Guide) Snow Buntings; Lapland Longspur; Redpolls; and Swamp Sparrow are amongst the many birds that feed on the pendulous *Carex* seeds. (Davison and Benyus). Snipe come to feed on insects that are attracted to this sedge.

E. Willow (*Salix*)

The fuzzy willow catkins emerge in spring and provide an early food source for pollen collecting insects such as the Bumble Bees, Honey Bees, Andrenida Bees, and Syrphid Flies. Willow thickets provide good nesting sites for Northern Harriers, Alder Flycatchers, Grey Catbirds, Wilson's Warblers, Yellow Warblers and American Goldfinches. Grouse and grosbeak feed on buds. Rabbits, muskrats, deer, and porcupine all feed on twigs and bark in winter. (Eastman and Davison)



E. Willow (*Salix discolor*)

F. Goldenrod (*Solidago*)

The nectar of the goldenrod's fall flowers attract pollen loving insects, insects that provide food for birds. American Goldfinch and Ruffed Grouse feed on Goldenrod seed. (Davison) Goldenrods and Asters are among the few perennials that can penetrate the densely colonized Spirea. They do it by releasing phenols that act as herbicides for competing plants.



F. Goldenrod (*Solidago*)**



Rose gall, a sign of insect activity.



Caption to come

* Jennifer Anderson. United States, IA, Scott Co., Davenport, Nahant Marsh. 2002. **Courtesy Joan Kutcher, Mountain Top Arboretum