

Summer 2018

# NATURE NOTES

at Magazine Beach Park

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## BLAZING BIRDS OF SUMMER

A blaze of orange streaking from tall tree to tall tree at the park could be a Baltimore oriole. These birds love tall trees in wetland areas and river edges, which offer the mix of insects and dark colored berries they prefer to eat. Named for the colors in Lord Baltimore's coat of arms, this bird does things with grace. In courtship, the male faces the female, stretches upright, then bows deeply with a spread tail and wings slightly open. The female responds by fluttering her wings and calling back to him. The nest she builds is a tightly woven pouch large enough to hold 3-7 eggs, placed at the lower edge of a branch, hanging down on the underside. These nests are artfully woven from plant fibers and often feature silvery colors.

Alternately, orange streaks could be an American redstart, a warbler who also likes the insects and berries of wetland areas and seems never to stand still. It can often be seen trying to startle the insects it hopes to devour into flushing by rapidly flashing its cocked tail and exposing the brilliant orange (male) or yellow (female) color. If the insect is successfully flushed, the redstart darts after it and attempts to catch it in the air. Courtship includes the male taking the female to visit a variety of nest sites...

Redstarts defend territorial boundaries with songs, posturing, and aerial displays, including one in which they fly in circles near each other. Females defend their nests over females by striking at the intruder or by grappling feet, although rarely injuring each other.



The male Baltimore oriole sings to defend the nesting territory.



The male American redstart flashes its cocked tail to startle insects.

# OF MONARCHS & MILKWEED

A tiny blaze of orange is likely a monarch butterfly, possibly checking out the new pollinator garden. When it is time to lay eggs, a female will head to the milkweed edging the western swale and deposit up to her own weight in eggs on the underside of milkweed leaves. When the caterpillars hatch out, their food source is right there for munching. Caterpillars eat only milkweed nectar as they wrap themselves into a chrysalis from which they will emerge as butterflies. Complex chemicals in the nectar also make monarchs poisonous to predators. This useful plant provides nectar to many other kinds of bees and butterflies, and hummingbirds, as well.



Monarchs lay their eggs under milkweed leaves.

# CHECK OUT THE NEW POLLINATOR GARDEN

In May, Meadowscaping for Biodiversity (MS4B) gave us a native plant meadow. Many of the plants, such as Joe Pye weed, liatris, blue vervain, monarda, penstemon, will start flowering later in June or July and run through August. But purple asters and yellow goldenrod begin blooming in September and last through October and even November. It's important to have different flowering plants from April through fall because bees and other pollinators need sources of food (pollen) and energy (nectar) all through the seasons. That's just one of the reasons why homeowners should ignore the hype of the pesticide-herbicide giants, and leave dandelions and clover in their grass.

The Queen of the Prairie (*Filipendula rubra*), the royal centerpiece of this meadow garden, blooms all summer with graceful, pink foamy flowers that resemble a tasty confection. The plant, which will grow to about 5 feet tall, likes moist to wet soil best, so it is well suited to its location in the rain swale. For more information about MS4B, see: [meadowmaking.org](http://meadowmaking.org). Look for students in MS4B's Youth Environmental Entrepreneurship Program (YEEP)—part of the Mayor's Program—as they tend to this wildflower garden this summer.



Look for butterflies and bees in our new meadow.

*Magazine Beach Partners, a newly created 501c3, is dedicated to working with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) and the City of Cambridge to revitalize Magazine Beach Park—the City's second largest park. We support the preservation of this wonderful green open space. To learn more, go to: [magazinebeach.org](http://magazinebeach.org).*