

a voice
for the natural
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movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
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since 1979.

The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman



Milkweed for the...birds?

On May 30th, 2010, a member posted this note on the Wild Ones Yahoo Group site:

"Last summer I posted a note that I had seen a pair of orioles pulling the fibers from the old stalks of the previous year's common milkweed – to build their nest from these long, strong strands.

Well, this year – just a couple of weeks ago, I had regular visits to my yard for about two weeks in the middle of May – by two pairs of orioles. That's right. These birds visited my old milkweed stalks all day long every day for nearly two weeks straight – carefully stripping off most of the available fibers, and flying off to their chosen nest site, returning a few minutes later for more.

It is a great feeling to know that these birds have found enough old milkweed stalks in my yard to enable them to build a sturdy nest. These birds in particular, need these durable milkweed fibers to weave their hanging-basket style nests. Their nests must be strong enough to endure the stormy winds, rain, and constant swaying in the breezes out on some tree limb – probably a mature elm, cherry, or cottonwood nearby.

I vowed to myself that I'd never remove or take away the old milkweed stalks until the year's nesting season is over. These birds proved once again just how important milkweed is in our native ecosystem. I noticed several other bird species also taking some of the milkweed fibers when the orioles were away – a few goldfinches, robins, a vireo, and I'm sure there may be others.

These birds seemed to relish the fibers from both the swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), and the common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)."

Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/wildonesnativeplants/> and subscribe to this Wild Ones members-only messaging exchange.

Language

The words we use to express ideas, particularly when we need to influence the listener, are very important. The Nature Conservancy commissioned a survey, by a bipartisan research team, into communicating effectively to build support for conservation. The extended report may be found at: <https://www.landtrustalliance.org/policy/documents/tnc-poll-messaging>.

Here are some highlights on words and ideas to stress, (with my own interpolations), while being careful with others. Go to the original article



for much more solid information. While the survey deals with land-conservation ideas, we may adopt similar language when talking about "plants that are important to how nature works."

- Invoke the "Three Ws" – water, wildlife and farms: drinking water; wildlife habitat; working farms and ranches that make room for hedgerows.
- Talk about "future generations."
- Try to evoke a sense of "shared responsibility."
- Try to use phrases that imply ownership and inclusion, such as "our" and "we."
- Try to present the need for conservation of native plants in terms that connect it to clean water, clean air, food safety.
- Many voters are tired of the term "green." It is described by voters as being trendy and trite, and a phrase that immediately gives them the feeling they are being marketed to, due to its association with so many consumer products.
- Stress coalition and collaboration.
- Try to share a positive vision – "this can be done," "this can happen."
- The relationship between native plants and childhood obesity is a distant and murky one in most voters' minds; don't raise it unless you have at your fingertips the steps that connect them.
- Pride of place: Invoking "America" or the name of voters' own state speaks to voters' local pride, and reminds them of the factors that have led them to choose to live where they do. Stay away from metaphorical language like "infrastructure," "safety net," "life support" – they produce little more than the MEGO effect ("My Eyes Glaze Over").
- Try to be specific, and paint a picture: Don't use the term "ecosystem services" – talk about the "benefits of nature."
- Instead of "environment" talk about "our air and drinking water."
- Instead of using general terms like "bio - diversity" or technical terms like "endangered species," be locally specific – specific plants, specific wildlife.
- Instead of regulations, talk about "safeguards and protections."
- Instead of "environmental groups," talk about "conservation groups or organizations working to protect clean air and water."

Invasive cattails alter habitat to their own benefit

Study results submitted for publication by the Ecological Society of America, considered habitat changes by invasive cattails. The mats of dead stems and vegetative matter that accumulate seasonally in stands of cattails produced changes in nitrogen turnover, lower light levels, and cooler soil temperatures. These conditions foster continued growth of cattails, but produce fewer and fewer of the classic wetland species, such as bulrushes, rushes, reeds, and sedges. Asters, goldenrods, and non-native grasses, move in, signaling a step toward a dryer habitat. This same mechanism of altered habitat may also benefit many other invasive plant species.

Molasses for organic weed control and soil improvement

The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service recently put out information on the use of molasses to improve the soil food web (see also the early installments of the "Mysteries Explored" series in the Wild Ones Journal – particularly the July August 2008 issue), and as an organic method of weed control in agricultural fields. One of the references given for this information was www.thesoilguy.com/SG/Molasses.

Preemptive strike against invasive species of plants

The city of Portland, Oregon, is taking preemptive steps against invasive species – even on private property. A Required Eradication List of 15 species of plants that are invasive in the Pacific Northwest has been published in the City Code for Property Maintenance Regulations. The city offers free assistance to identify and remove plants on the list. Property owners can call the Early Detection and Rapid Response team for more information.

Invasive plants are easier to control if they are eradicated before they infest large areas. Large infestations are more expensive to control, and can damage natural habitat. Invasive plants that dominate groundcover lack root structure to bind soils, which increases the likelihood of erosion. Invasive plants grow rapidly and can displace native plants, and destroy food and shelter for native wildlife. What more is there to say.

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