

Natural Events
October
GSWA CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT AREA



Chipmunk and Aster



Milksnake

- 1) Fall is the time when asters shine and shine they do at the CMA. Asters are the tall herbaceous, showy plants in bloom that you see gracing the meadow. When we removed the multiflora rose shrubs some time ago natural succession brought them into the here and the now. New England aster is my personal favorite, growing, tall proud and lavender loud (that rhymes doesn't it). The leaves clasping around the main stem gives this one away. The other more prominent one that seems to pervade the meadow is the panicked aster. Where the ironweed and tall sunflower left off in September as an insect magnet this species continues the task – look for all the different kinds of bees, wasps, bugs and beetles having their way with this plant.
- 2) Take a walk around our boardwalk and stop at the bench along the Silver Brook. Take in all the signs of fall consuming the waning summer moments. Poison ivy will take on the colors of the rainbow while neo-tropical songbirds feast on their berries. Chipmunks and squirrels will be taking advantage of nature's bounty, left behind on the forest floor in the form of fruits and nuts. Dragonflies will be darting hither and fro around the open wet meadow – look close – you're sure to catch a glimpse. Songbirds of all varieties will show up if you wait here long enough – usually an hour will do. Look for short dashes of movement weaving here and there from the tree canopy to the shrub-line and amongst the herbaceous layer before you. Some of these birds will be fattening up on insects to keep their motors running during long migrations while others are preparing to rough-out winter here in the Jersey state.
- 3) Allegheny blackberry is a small thorny, wispy shrub found in the open, along our ditches and streams. The berries have long been consumed by small mammals and birds but in fall it turns crimson and imparts texture to the trails that lace through our property. This shrub has a neat way of colonizing a piece of terra firma. When the shoots reach a certain height they cane down and touch the ground where they root from the tips. In this fashion, individual plants can form clonal thickets.
- 4) Keep your eyes open if you visit our site late in the day near our brush piles. If you're lucky you might catch a glimpse of my favorite scaly friend, the milksnake, slithering from the brush. This snake is a type of constrictor and is a great asset in balancing the scales of nature on our site. With a hefty population of white-footed mice on our restoration site these snakes help curtail their numbers. Truly beautiful, the milksnake is mottled in a patchwork of browns, yellows and orange. These snakes got their name by the inaccurate account that they stoles milk from sleeping cows.
- 5) Of all the cool and obvious bugs floating around the site this month probably the most conspicuous and colorfully bespangled is the milkweed bug – these “True Bugs” are in a group called seed bugs, and yes, you guessed it, they can be found sucking the juices of the milkweed plant. They love to congregate so they won't be hard to find.
- 6) Most importantly take in the smell of fall as a hint of sweet decomposition fills the senses that lets you know natures engine is about to ratchet it down in preparation for winter.