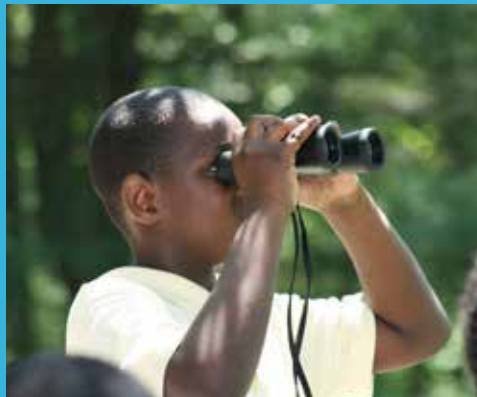


The HABITAT GARDENS at BIRDCRAFT

Restore a Native Habitat: Create a Living Classroom

Proposed by **Sasqua Garden Club, Fairfield, CT, Zone II**
Seconded by **The Fairfield Garden Club, Fairfield, CT, Zone II**



For ten years Sasqua members have brought 3rd grade students from Bridgeport's Read School to participate in Birdcraft's science curriculum

Restore a Native Habitat

Founded in 1914, Birdcraft's original six-acre meadow matured into a woodland monoculture with overgrown, non-native and invasive plants. While Birdcraft is renovating its historic museum—due for 2015 completion—Sasqua is carefully replacing the surrounding invasive species with native, bird-supportive plant material. Doing so will increase the number of insects and better nourish the 120 bird species that visit Birdcraft. Native plants sustain 13 times more insects than invasive plants, which is critical, considering 96% of terrestrial bird species rely solely on insects to feed their young!

With the guidance of Doug Tallamy, recipient of GCA 2013 Margaret Douglas Award, Sasqua is conducting ongoing research to track how native plants impact insect and bird populations.

Mabel Osgood Wright, Birdcraft Founder

Mabel Osgood Wright was a formidable conservationist, writer, gardener, educator, and GCA member. In addition to establishing Birdcraft, she founded the Connecticut Audubon Society in 1896 and GCA's Fairfield Garden Club in 1915. A life-long educator, Mabel could be seen in her seventies carting bird exhibits to local schools via horse-drawn wagon. Sasqua is committed to expanding her commitment to educate students about birds and their habitats.

Birdcraft— a Refuge in Fairfield

Birdcraft provides a vital educational service to the greater Fairfield community, is a major stop for birds on the Atlantic flyway, and is a federally licensed bird-banding station. It is adjacent to Interstate 95, Metro North Railroad, and three public schools. Annually, Birdcraft enjoys more than 16,000 visitors and educates more than 3,000 students as part of the Fairfield public school science curriculum and subsidized inner-city youth programs. Because of Birdcraft's rich history, the Smithsonian granted Sasqua permission to submit the Gardens to its Archives of American Gardens.

For the past two years, Sasqua Garden Club members have worked tirelessly to restore the outdoor teaching spaces at the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary in Fairfield, CT. In an effort to build Habitat Gardens, which reflect the five Connecticut ecosystems (Meadow, Wetland, Seaside, Woodland Edge, Urban Terrace), Sasqua members have identified plant material, removed invasive plants, reintroduced native ones, weeded, watered, and fundraised. The gardens will be completed spring 2015. Sasqua members have been divided into five teams to care for each garden and the club has committed to an annual maintenance fund.

Founders Fund for a Living Classroom

A Founders Fund award will enable Sasqua to turn the Habitat Gardens into a true "Living Classroom" by implementing state-of-the-art signage and a free cellphone tour. These teaching tools will highlight vital conservation concepts—ranging from the symbiosis of native plant and animal populations, to the importance of biodiversity on habitat health.

The Living Classroom will allow thousands of Fairfield and inner-city students to emerge from the Museum and enter a natural habitat where they can see, touch, and understand how native plants play a critical role in healthy ecosystems.



2011 Before Sasqua cleared and removed invasive plants



2014 After Sasqua cleared and started planting. This space is now part of the Urban Terrace Habitat Garden



Birdcraft Museum 2014, National Historic Landmark



Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary located in downtown Fairfield, CT

Endnotes:

1. Costanza, R., R. d'Arge, R. deGroot, S. Farber, M. Grasso, B. Hannon, K. Limburg, S. Naeem, R. V. O'Neill, J. Paruelo, R. G. Raskin, P. Sutton, and M. v. d. Belt. "The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital." *Nature* 387 (1997): 253-260. Print. Tallamy, Doug. *Bringing Nature Home*. Portland: Timber Press, 2007.



Sasqua member leading Fairfield Brownie Troop to remove invasive garlic mustard in Woodland Edge Habitat Garden

“We had thought, aside from making it a haunt for birds, of the [Birdcraft] Sanctuary ultimately as a place for the holding of bird classes, a haunt for bird photographers, and a general gathering ground for children.”

Mabel Osgood Wright, Birdcraft Founder, 1915



Mabel Osgood Wright, 1859-1935, author of 27 books about gardens, birds and conservation