

A Draft Blueprint for Butterfly Conservation in Columbia County.

Step 1. *Who do we have?* A seasonally-appropriate, habitat-based series of explorations to determine which butterfly species we have where in the County. We already have some of this information, but more ground truthing is needed. Accompany this with ample outreach and public involvement, e.g., the Columbia County Butterfly Atlas.

Step 2. *What's needed for conservation?* Based on Step 1, identify focal habitats and species. It will be important to focus on those species who do occur in the County and who live in actively encroached upon habitats (e.g., the dry-meadow skippers). This will involve trying to assess trends in both habitat extent and species numbers.

Step 3. *How do we get there?* A five-part conservation action plan.

- Based on preceding steps, highlight important habitat patches and advocate for their conservation. Network with conservation organizations like CLC, Hudson River Estuary Program, the Master Naturalist and Master Gardeners programs of Cooperative Extension, and with individual land owners, providing tools for recognizing and maintaining focal habitats. Emphasize that conserving habitat for butterflies is often also means you're conserving habitats for plants and other organisms.
- Assess current habitat condition of individual habitat patches and decide whether any active management would be useful.
- Consider creation of new habitat patches or of complimentary habitats (e.g., nectaring sites) within habitat complementation zones around focal patches.
- Monitor status of habitats and populations so as to learn what works in the long-term. Insects populations naturally fluctuate widely, a mixture of patience and action is appropriate
- Make this an open-source, open-sharing project that through public presentations, school outings, workshops, radio appearances and the like involves everybody in loving butterflies; network with national organizations like Xerces and NABA to share and learn. If just 10% more of the County's population regularly thinks about butterflies, that would be a huge accomplishment.

At present these ideas only exist on this paper, they may or may not get any further. If you might be interested in helping to make them a reality, please be in touch. Conrad at Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program, conrad@hawthornevalleyfarm.org, 518 672 7994.