

## *Spring Update*

By Kim Smith

If you have a minute, please come visit my new website at [www.kimsmithdesigns.com](http://www.kimsmithdesigns.com). I hope this to be a handy site for readers. Past columns are available on the eNewsletter page. Information on upcoming events such as photo exhibits and book related events are posted on the News page. The website includes a photo gallery and links to Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! Many, many thanks to Jenny Connors for my new website. When in need of a talented and highly professional web designer, to create either a new website or redesign an existing site, all in a timely fashion, I wholeheartedly recommend Jenny of White Wave Designs. [www.whitewavedesigns.com](http://www.whitewavedesigns.com). Thank you Jenny!

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The bluebird nesting boxes installed, and then vandalized, at Loop Pond in Rockport, have been restored. The peak nesting time was missed, but the nesting boxes are now in place for next year, thanks to the efforts of Eric Hutchins and his crew of Den Four and Den Six Cub Scouts, and their families. When I asked Eric how the kids were handling the destruction of the nesting boxes, he said he explained to them that a restoration project is not a one time only endeavor, and that to be successful, conservation requires persistent and ongoing care.

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Earlier this May, the dedication of the newly restored Dun Fudgin' Salt Marsh was held behind Gloucester High School, at the site of a former saltwater swimming pool. Built by the WPA during the Great Depression, the pool had been unused for more than 30 years and deteriorated to the point of becoming a safety hazard. Over an acre of intertidal shellfish habitat and salt marsh were restored with removal of the now defunct pool. The area has been re-graded with suitable clean material to match intertidal grades and a salt panne created.

Max Schenk organized the speakers and Eric Hutchins organized the plantings. Vito Calamo and State Representative Tony Verga reminisced about swimming in the pool and playing along the shoreline. Speakers Mayor Bell, State Senator Bruce Tarr, Dun Fudgin' project partners—represented by national, state and local government officials—participated in the celebration. The dedication concluded with the planting of appropriate salt-tolerant vegetation. The restoration creates a living classroom for the Gloucester High School Environmental Oceanographic Department. Dozens of GHS students and Eastern Point Day School third and fourth graders were there to assist with planting. Salt meadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*), the same hay available at garden centers that is used as protective mulch, was planted above the mean high water line. Smooth cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) was planted below the mean high water line, as it typically wants to have the flooding influence of every high tide.

The day of the dedication the weather was delightfully sunny and warm. The podium from where the guests were speaking was sited in front of a flowering crab apple in full glorious bloom. Pink and white apple blossoms, cerulean skies and the seashore sparkling beyond made a splendid picture. It was inspiring to see the project partners—government organizations, the private businesses involved with site preparation, and local schools all coming together to restore the Dun Fudgin' Salt Marsh. In 2002, the Massachusetts Audubon Society had identified the Dun

Fudgin' site as the 15th highest priority, out of 225 potential restoration sites in Massachusetts.

I am reminded of this quote from the remarkable and forward thinking conservationist, Lady Bird Johnson, who wrote in 1967—

*“The environment is where we can all meet; where we all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing that we all share. It is not only a mirror of ourselves, but a focusing lens on what we can become...”*

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The recent spell of warm weather is coaxing early butterflies into life, and other species out from hibernation. Four butterflies were spotted in our garden on the very warmest day. A Spring Azure on the wing, Painted Lady at a mud puddle, a Red Admiral, and an unidentified angelwing, both nectaring at the lilacs. Last year at the organic gardening fair I gave away packets of native lupine seeds (*Lupinus perennis*). A handful of seeds remained, and although in our garden our soil and light condition are, for the most part, unsuitable to grow lupines, I sprinkled the seeds throughout our garden. A dozen small plants sprouted here and there, and the one lupine that has grown to enormous proportions is planted in what are ideal growing conditions for lupines, sun nearly all day with the dry, sandy, well draining soil of a sloping bed. The sundial lupine is growing adjacent to the rock bells, or wild red columbine. Just as native columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) is nearing the end of its florescence, the lupines come into their own. Look for hummingbirds nectaring at the native columbine and Frosted Elfins laying eggs on lupine; the larvae bore into inflated seedpods.

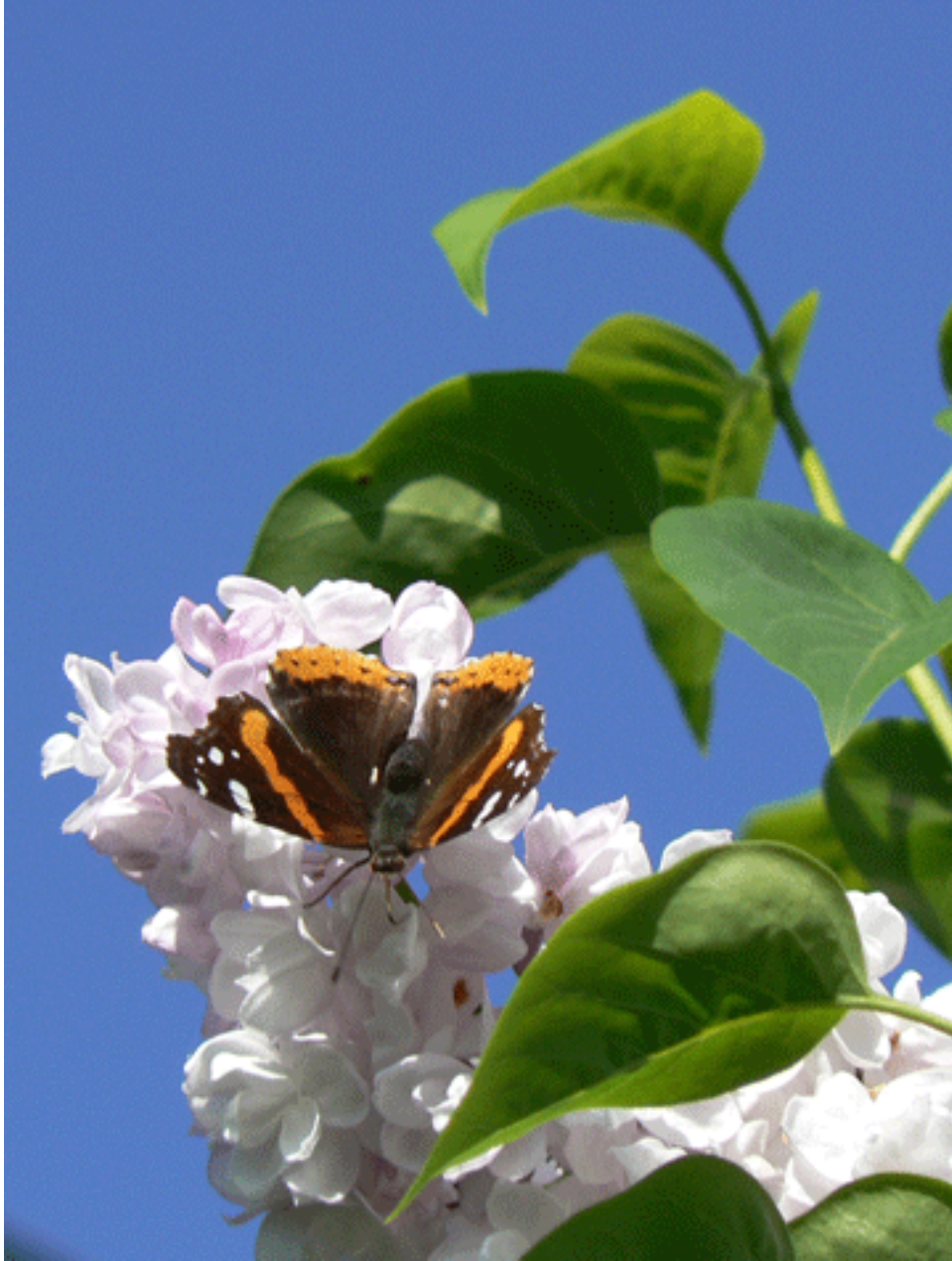
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Our four House Finch chicks, which only two weeks ago were tiny pulsing balls of fluff, with disproportionately wide, bright yellow outstretched beaks, have flown the nest. They now reside in the maple tree directly, above their former home of our porch pillar. Noticing their vigorous squawking and a flourish of wings in motion, I glanced up from an elbow-deep patch of weeds to see what all the ruckus was about. The fledglings were off in a blink of an eye. Where formerly there were only mom and dad House Finch at the back yard feeder, now there are six!

The House Finch pair built the nest together—messy and loosely constructed of twigs and straw, woven with leaves gathered from the climbing rose growing nearby and intertwined with delicate sprigs of blue forget-me-nots. Throughout the day they were spotted, singing from the treetops, bubbly sweet notes and whistles, and round back, together perched atop the fence and at the bird feeder, the one filled with safflower seeds. The male fed the female while she sat on the nest. A female House Finch may abandon the nest if the male neglects to feed her. From four pale aquamarine eggs emerged four perfect baby birds, nestled snugly in the tiny nest. As the young grow larger, so does the nest; the parents build the sides of the nest walls higher and higher with lumpy, paste-like goo of regurgitated seeds. The young develop rapidly after hatching and in only 11 to 19 days the fledglings are nearly full grown and ready to fly. House Finches thrive in sheltered gardens near people, hence the common name House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus*), so much so that their population is rapidly increasing. Although House Finches are not native to the northeast and were introduced in the 1940s, they are native to Mexico and the southwestern states and, like all native American species of birds, are protected under federal law.



*House Finch (Carpodacus mexicanus)*



*Red Admiral and 'Beauty of Moscow' Lilac*



*Lupinus perennis*