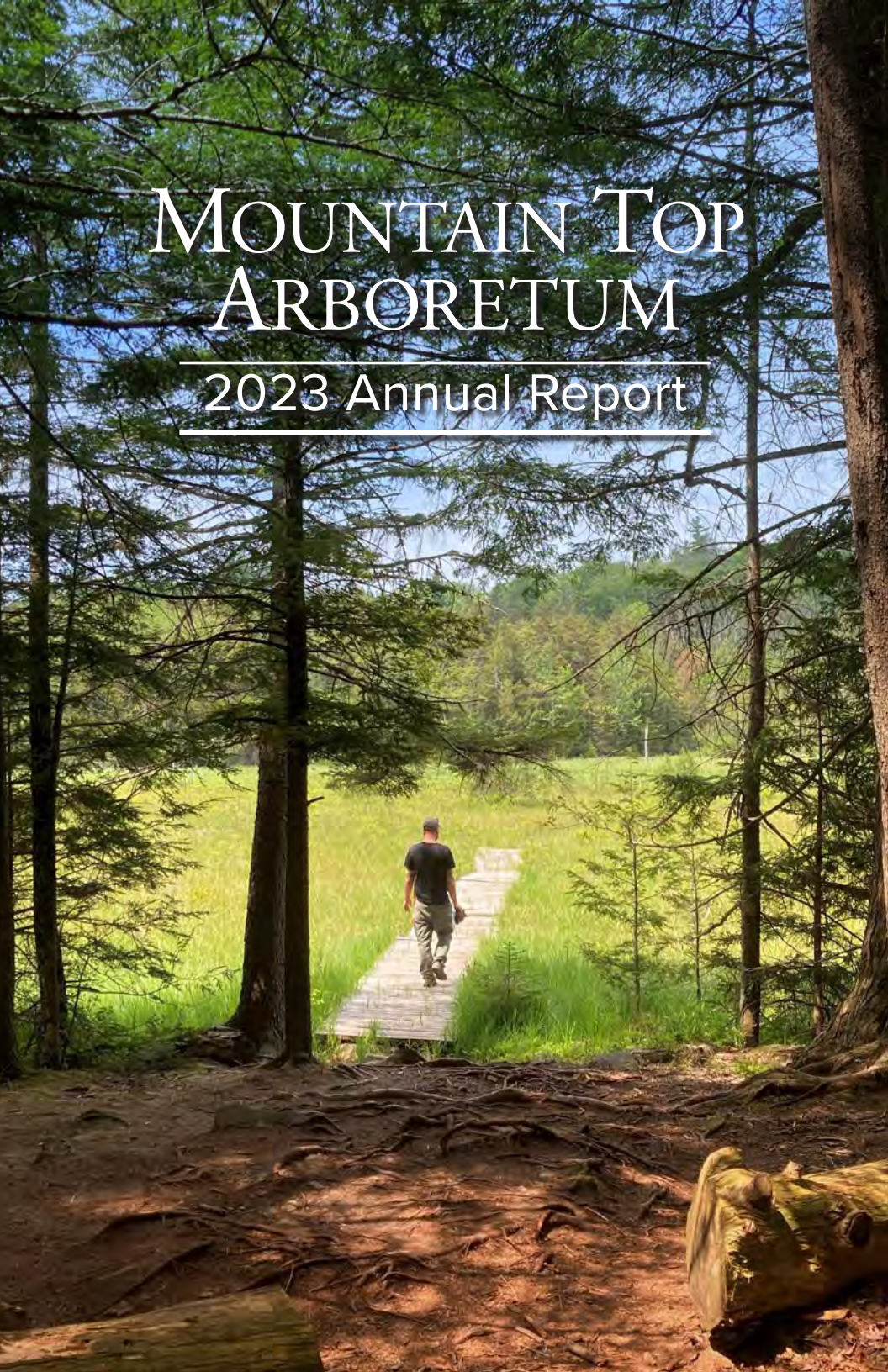


MOUNTAIN TOP ARBORETUM

2023 Annual Report





Mulching the European Hornbeam in the West Meadow

Mountain Top Arboretum Mission Statement

Our mission is to conserve, enhance, and celebrate our distinctive Catskill sanctuary through sustainable horticulture, responsible land stewardship, and innovative educational programming.

Board of Directors and Staff

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Membership and Office Manager

Cookie Brindle

Director of Horticulture & Environmental Stewardship

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Tax-exempt status

Mountain Top Arboretum is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, not-for-profit public charity. Its financial statements for the year ending December 31, 2023 may be obtained from the Arboretum office.

2023 Annual Report photos by Cookie Brindle and Marc Wolf unless otherwise noted.



Photo by Peter Coffin

Board Chair's Letter

Abby Coffin

Dear Friends,

This year's Annual Report is a testament to the ongoing commitment to our enduring values and a celebration of the growth of our capacity and expertise. As a 47-year-old organization, the Arboretum has grown both in size and capabilities. Now spanning 200 acres, the Arboretum is a democratic landscape, offering access daily from dawn to dusk. It is a center for robust educational programming showcasing a diverse collection of trees, shrubs, and plants and it is an environmental and social asset contributing to global well-being.

This June, Jennifer Hemmerlein joined Mountain Top Arboretum as Executive Director bringing dedication, experience, and knowledge to our team. Jennifer joins Cookie Brindle, our Membership and Office Manager, and Marc Wolf in his new role as Director of Horticulture and Environmental Stewardship.

As I reflect on 2023, I am reminded of those who share their talents with us in meaningful (and sometimes unexpected) ways. Robert Hermance, Bob Kerns and Vern Rist have all spent countless hours caring for our trees, plants and landscape, providing free and reduced-cost services whenever possible. Last spring, the Boy Scout Troop 36 not only raised the funds to purchase supplies, they also rebuilt the stairs in the Woodland Walk for our visitors to enjoy—all at no cost to us.



Boy Scout Troop 36 rebuilding the Woodland Walk stairs



John Franklin leads Lichen Walk program

John Franklin, who so expertly led last summer's Lichen Walk, has completed extensive research on the breadth of lichen species found at the Arboretum. Working with Marc Wolf and Dr. James Lendemer of the New York State Museum, John produced a book made especially for us, *The Lichens of Mountain Top Arboretum*. Our copy of the book sits inside the vestibule of the Education Center; I invite you to read through it the next time you visit.

And, we celebrate **you**. Your commitment to Mountain Top Arboretum directly contributes to preserving biodiversity, protecting more open space and providing educational and recreational opportunities to all. These accomplishments and growth would not be possible without you, our volunteers, supporters, donors, foundations, and agencies that provide the funds. Thank you!

Abby Coffin,
Chair, Board of Directors

West Meadow Rain Garden





Executive Director's Letter

Jennifer Hemmerlein

Dear Friends,

They say the only thing constant is change, and 2023 marked another transformative year in the history of Mountain Top Arboretum. After many productive years as our Executive Director, Marc Wolf is now dedicated 100% to his passions: horticulture and environmental stewardship. I think you'll agree that our landscape has never looked more beautiful!

I joined Mountain Top Arboretum back in June after 6 years at Friends of Clermont State Historic Site in Germantown, and what I encountered was a uniquely vibrant organization, with devoted volunteers, generous donors, a gorgeous, diverse landscape, and a committed staff. With a new strategic plan, the future looks bright.

One of the first steps I took to implement our strategic plan was to create a visitor survey, which we sent to our e-mail list back in September. Thanks to your excellent feedback, in 2024 we're implementing several of the changes you suggested:



Larry Federman leads Annual Bird Walk

- **More of our public programs in 2024 will be held on Sundays and during the week**, ensuring that even those who work on weekends may be able to enjoy our programs. We hope to offer even more of them in 2025!

- We have enhanced our programming this winter, offering more than double the number of programs this winter than last.
- We've scheduled more arts-related programming this year. May 25th marks our second annual BioBlitz and we're thrilled to welcome Arm-of-the-Sea Theater for a free, family-friendly performance to conclude the day. A big thanks to the Greene County Soil and Water Conservation District for making this possible! The next day we're holding our first concert since the COVID-19 pandemic, and throughout the year we're offering introductory art workshops for children and adults. Children 12 and under will be welcomed free of charge and as always, programs are free for our members.
- Due to popular demand, we're hosting an exploration of the Cairo Fossil Forest with Drs. Bob and Johanna Titus in August. Stay tuned for more information!



Marc Wolf leads The Garden Conservancy's "Digging Deeper" program



Chuck ver Straeten leads Devonian Geology program



Path along the Education Center Rain Garden

Finally, perhaps the most wonderful milestone of 2023 was Simeon Bayles' and his family's donation of 21 acres of property, nearly completing our ownership of the Hidden Marsh. We're discussing the Hidden Marsh in more detail later in this report, but the Bayles' Family's selflessness ensures that this land will remain protected from construction or other development.

This is the kind of generosity I've seen so many times since joining the Arboretum, and for that, I thank you. I look forward to sharing more updates with you throughout 2024!

Warmly,



Jennifer Hemmerlein, Executive Director



Hidden Marsh Boardwalk

Mountain Top Arboretum is now a stop on the NYS Birding Trail!

Anyone who has visited the Arboretum already knows we're a haven for a variety of birds, but now we've been recognized as part of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Birding Trail! The New York State Birding Trail is not a physically connected trail, but a network of birdwatching hotspots, and the state's map is a resource for those interested in checking them out. We're honored to be the fifth site to be added within Greene County, but all of the sites are worth visiting. Visit the [Birding Trail's website](#) to learn more!



Volunteers maintaining the West Meadow

Agency and Foundation Support

Mountain Top Arboretum is grateful to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation for a grant to assist in maintaining the landscape and living collections, and to the Bank of Greene County Charitable Foundation for a grant supporting the Larry Weaner-designed Wildflower Meadow.

We would also like to thank our wonderful partners: Boundless Arts, Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, Catskill Forest Association, Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership, Cornell Cooperative Extension, The Garden Conservancy, Greene County Chamber of Commerce, Greene County Soil & Water Conservation District, Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program, Hudsonia, Hunter Foundation, Mountain Top Historical Society, Mountain Top Library, New York City Department of Environmental Protection, New York Flora Association, New York Council of Nonprofits, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State Hemlock Initiative, New York State Museum, Schoharie Watershed Advisory Committee and Watershed Agricultural Council.

Using a network of nearly 40 forest monitoring plots between New York City and the Catskills (including the Mountain Top Arboretum), Dr. Andy Reinmann and Justin Bowers from The City University of New York are studying rates of decline in beech health and how forest microclimate, understory plant species composition, and tree regeneration are changing in response to loss of American beech trees. We thank them for including us in their study.

Finally, thank you to Cornell Univ. Dept. of Natural Resources Forest Entomologist Dr. Mark Whitmore and plant pathologist Dr. Vern Rist (Healthy Trees, LLC) for volunteering their time, expertise and materials in a study of the Emerald Ash Borer infestation in the Woodland Walk.

In-Kind Support

Many thanks to these in-kind donors who so generously shared their time, expertise, and resources with us in 2023.

Bates Trucking and Excavation	Cyndi & Paul LaPierre
Simeon Bayles	Lowe's (Catskill, NY)
Catskill Native Nursery	Dave Moorhus
John Franklin	Ron Sherman
Healthy Trees LLC	Pierce & Abby Sioussat
Robert Hermance Landscaping	Platte Clove Naturals
Home Depot (Catskill, NY)	Susan Sodon
Kerns Landscape & Nursery	Story's Nursery



*Students from Boundless Arts in the Outdoor Classroom
Photo by Rebecca Segal*

Speakers/Instructors FY 2023

We are grateful for our amazing instructors! Whether the topic was mushrooms, lichens, or yoga, each instructor made 2023 one of our most vibrant yet. Thank you for sharing your time and talents with us!

Heather Aran	Lauren Giambrone	Matthew Rymkiewicz
Chris Baker	Pamela Martin	Dan Spada
Frank Beres	John Michelotti	Jason Tesauro
Mermer Blakeslee	Carol Miserlian	Charles Ver Straeten, Ph.D.
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Larry Federman	Chris Nilan	Marc Wolf
John Franklin	Frank Parisio	Dan Yacobellis
Maureen Garcia	Maria Pinto	
Robert Gegear	Jeannette Price	



Thank you to our 2023 volunteers!

Did you know that our volunteers contribute hundreds of hours of their time in a given year? Whether they are assisting at a program or event or working in the garden, volunteers are an integral part of our growing community. If you're interested in becoming a volunteer, send us an e-mail at info@mtarboretum.org or call (518) 589-3903 ext.103. We'd love to work with you!

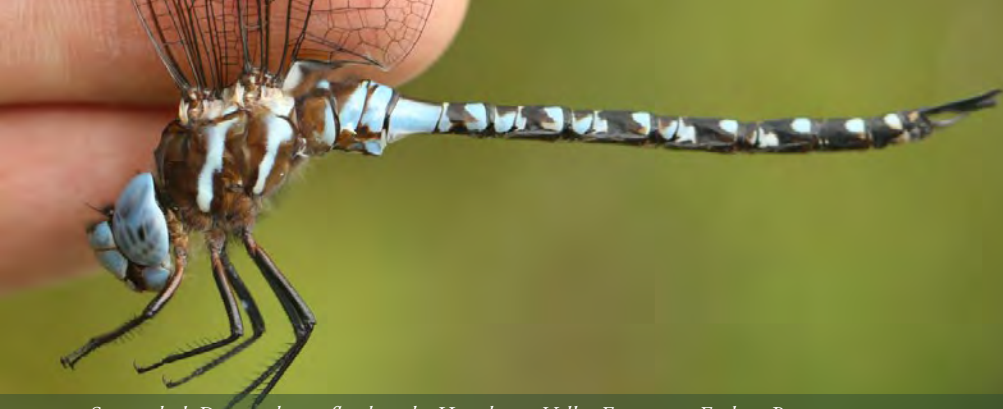
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Our volunteers hard at work pruning the East Meadow native plant hedgerow



Spatterdock Darner dragonfly photo by Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program

Guest Essay:

A Five-Year Update on our Natural Resources Inventory

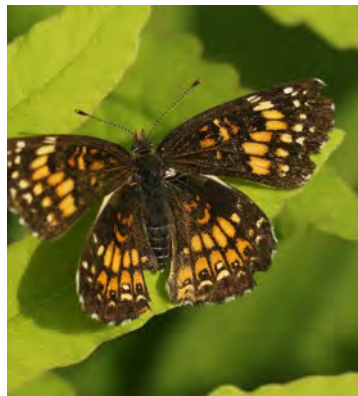
By Conrad Vispo PhD Wildlife Ecology, University of Wisconsin;

MS Wildlife Ecology, Indiana State University; BS Wildlife Ecology, Cornell.

In the Summer of 2023, the Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program repeated some of the animal surveys conducted at Mountain Top Arboretum in 2018. Specifically, we re-surveyed butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, and bats. We added ant and firefly surveys. Animal populations, and insects in particular, can be quite variable from year to year. This means that repeated surveys can add new species to a site list, even if not all the initial species are re-sighted. Thus, by repeating the Arboretum's surveys we hoped to add species to the list of species and also to get a better idea of which ones might be more consistently present.



In 2018, we tallied 38 species of **butterflies**, including the rare Early Hairstreak. In 2023, we did not re-sight the Early Hairstreak (S4*) but did record the unusual Two-spotted Skipper (S4). Harris' Checkerspot (S4) and Dion Skipper (seen only in 2018), and the Arctic Skipper and Baltimore Checkerspot



Harris' Checkerspot butterfly photo by Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program

* "S" ratings refer to state rarity on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being rarest.

(S4; seen in both years) are amongst the other rarer species. As these species suggest, the butterfly (and other insect) fauna reflect a northern affinity and the presence of extensive wetlands.



We had listed 44 species of **dragonflies and damselfly** in 2018; we added 10 species to the Arboretum roster in 2023. Dragonfly larvae are aquatic, and dragonfly communities tend to be specific to different aquatic habitats, such as ponds, marshes, small streams and larger rivers. The fauna reflects the presence of a pond; a small, rocky stream; and extensive marsh. The rarest species found were Forcipate Emerald (S1), Spatterdock Darner (S2), Brush-tipped Emerald (S3), Uhler's Sundragon (S3), and Northern Pygmy Clubtail (S3).



Ant sampling found 20 species, which included 14 Greene County records. These records do not indicate rare species but emphasizes the lack of data for Greene County and our limited understanding of the fauna in the region. Species highlights include the Vampire Ant in Woodland Walk, so-called because adults pierce their larvae to drink the hemolymph (ant blood). We also found *Formica aserva* in East Meadow, a species of kidnapping ant that raids its host species' nests and steals their developing young.



A highlight of the **bee** sampling was adding at least three threatened bumble bee species not seen in the 2018 survey. These included The Golden Northern Bumble Bee (S3), the Yellow-banded Bumble Bee (S3), and Fernald's Cuckoo Bumble Bee (S2). Generally, bumble bee abundance and diversity were higher than in 2018. Identifications of captured and photographed specimens are still ongoing.



Three **firefly** surveys occurred in 2023 between the middle of June and the middle of July. Firefly abundance was highest around field and forest edges and in wetland habitats like Hidden Marsh and the shrub swamp at East Meadow. Our 5th of July survey had the

highest abundance, suggesting that peak firefly activity may have been around this date for 2023 at MTA. We have recorded at least five species in four genera, but identifications are still in progress.



Bats are much less diverse than any of these insect groups, with only nine species regularly present in our area. The core fauna at the Arboretum included Big Brown Bat, Silver-haired Bat, Hoary Bat, Red Bat, and Little Brown Bat. The remaining species may or may not be present –the acoustic survey technique we used does not allow us to be definitive. Bats face various conservation challenges including White-Nose Syndrome and wind-turbine mortality. Several of the smaller species are now considered rare or even nationally endangered, although Arboretum results and those for elsewhere suggest the Little Brown Bat may be rebounding.

Each of these animal groups offers insight into the ecology of the Arboretum but also potential outreach (and research) paths for sharing and studying important current conservation topics, from the effects of climate change on northern species at the southern edge of their distributions (e.g., some of the butterflies) to aquatic ecology (e.g., dragonfly larvae) to the central role of insects in woodland ecology (e.g., ants) to pollinator and bat conservation to the overall issue of insect decline.



Before returning to Columbia County, where he grew up, Dr. Conrad Vispo conducted ecological research on a variety of organisms, including mammals, birds and fish in a variety of places, including the woods of northern Wisconsin and tropical Venezuela. Conrad's recent focus is on agroecology - what habitats can farmland provide for native species and, in turn, what can those native species provide to farming?

Conrad's passion is understanding historical and modern patterns of animal (including human) ecology on the land.

Photos courtesy of Hawethorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program. Licensed animal and insect drawings copyright of various artists (iStock/Getty Images).



Volunteers and seasonal staff at the Hidden Marsh

Unveiling the Hidden Marsh

By Marc Wolf, Director of Horticulture and Environmental Stewardship

Last fall, Mountain Top Arboretum received a very generous donation of 21 acres of property, given to us by local resident and friend of the Arboretum Simeon Bayles. This donation means that Mountain Top Arboretum now owns nearly all of the Hidden Marsh, a beautiful and rare habitat. We know of no wetland in the Catskills that is so large (approximately fifteen acres) at this high an elevation (2,400'). As part of the Arboretum's 2018 Natural Resources Inventory, we studied the Hidden Marsh's original acreage with geologists, forest historians, botanists and naturalists. Geologists believe the Hidden Marsh originally formed as a glacial lake 15,000 years ago as the last glaciers retreated, leaving a natural dam at the southern edge of the Marsh. Over the years, the Marsh has shifted back and forth from a lake to a smaller pond, to a swamp with intermittent trees and shrubs, to a marsh dominated by grasses and sedges. Beavers and humans are responsible for the shifting character of the Marsh over the years, as beavers built and abandoned dams over millennia and as humans built and abandoned dams in the early twentieth century.

Today the Marsh has four distinct plant habitats: 1) a bog-like peat forming wetland



Volunteers and seasonal staff at the Hidden Marsh



Round-leaf sundew photo ©Jacques Vandinteren

and a few orchid species. 2) the deep emergent marsh on the western edge of the Marsh is more typical of a sedge/grass wetland. It is dominated by Canada blue-joint grass and steplebush, with ferns and cattails dispersed throughout. 3) a shrub swamp dominated by speckled alder and 4) a hemlock-spruce swamp located along the Marsh's edge.

The Hidden Marsh provides specialized habitat for a great variety of wildlife.

The wood duck, mallard, merganser, great blue heron, alder flycatcher, willow flycatcher, yellow warbler, marsh wren,

red-winged blackbird, swamp sparrow, and common yellowthroat are among the many birds spotted at the Arboretum that would use this wetland for nesting habitat.

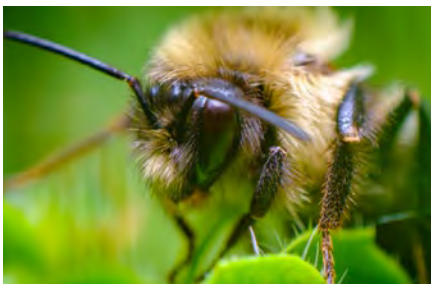
Amphibians and reptiles found here during the 2018 survey include spotted salamander, eastern red-spotted newt, garter snake, milk snake, and several species



Great blue heron photo ©Peter Blottman Photography

of frog. The insect life supported by the Marsh is tremendously important as well.

The New York State critically imperiled bumblebee *Bombus borealis* was seen here. The Hidden Marsh supports other vulnerable insect species like the Dion Skipper, a butterfly, and the dragonflies



Bombus borealis photo ©Ezumel Images



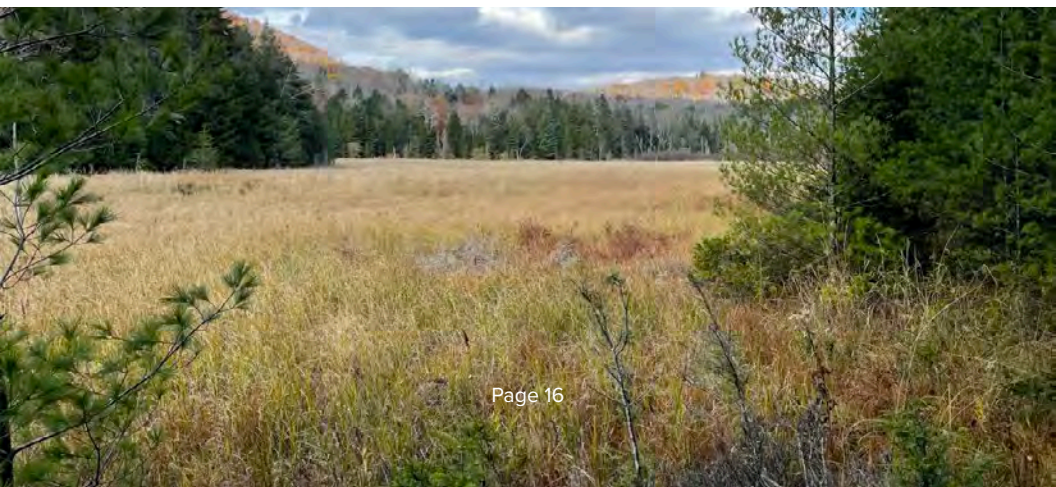
*Planning and conservation efforts continue at the Hidden Marsh
Photo by Cookie Brindle*

Spatterdock Darner and Forcinate Emerald.

And let's not forget the importance of the Marsh for we humans as well. Situated at the headwaters of the Catskill Watershed which, along with the Delaware Watershed directly to our west, supplies 90% of the drinking water for New York City and its surrounding suburbs, the Hidden Marsh is vital for the natural filtration of rainwater and snow melt.

Now that the land is owned by Mountain Top Arboretum, it will be protected. Said Bayles about the donation, “My family and I are so happy that by donating this land we are both sharing and protecting it for so many generations to come. This land will serve both future generations and the planet with its beauty, natural carbon capture and the habitat it provides for wildlife. It’s our hope that this gift inspires others to consider supporting and growing those organizations in their own backyards that protect and conserve our natural environment.”

View of the Hidden Marsh from the boardwalk



2023 Annual Fund Donors

All that we do is possible thanks to our Annual Fund donors and substantial cash donations from visitors. Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of our donor lists.

We regret any errors or omissions and ask that you notify us of any you find by emailing Jennifer Hemmerlein, Executive Director at jennifer@mtarboretum.org.

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Labyrinth Legacy Society Members

The Labyrinth Legacy Society honors donors who have chosen to support Mountain Top Arboretum through a planned gift. Joining the Society and providing a bequest to Mountain Top Arboretum is a meaningful way to ensure that our horticultural and educational mission will continue to grow and thrive. If you'd like to learn more about joining the Labyrinth Legacy Society, e-mail us at jennifer@mtarboretum.org.

Peter & Abby Coffin

Burgess Dole

Byron Knief & Rebecca Robertson

Larry & Mary McCaffrey

Arthur & Anne van der Does Lubow

Adam & Meg Waldron

Lifetime Members

Lifetime Membership is an honor bestowed by the Mountain Top Arboretum Board of Directors. It recognizes those individuals who have made a significant impact on the Arboretum through their outstanding leadership, extraordinary generosity, and strong record of service in support of our mission.

Simeon Bayles

Byron Knief

Michael Kudish

Peter Palmer

Robert and Johanna Titus



Woodland Walk Mountain Laurel Collection

“Nature’s Art: Performing Daily”

Mountain Top Arboretum is a public garden in the Catskill Mountains dedicated to displaying and managing native plant communities of the Northeastern United States in addition to curating its collection of cold-hardy native and exotic trees. Its mountaintop elevation of 2,400 feet at the top of the New York City Watershed creates a unique environment for education, research and pure enjoyment of the spectacular and historic Catskills landscape. The Arboretum trails and boardwalks connect 200 acres of plant collections, meadows, wetlands, forest and Devonian bedrock—a natural sanctuary for visitors interested in horticulture, birding, geology, local craftsmanship, hiking and snowshoeing.

Become a Member!

Memberships begin at just \$25/year and provide much-needed funding in support of the Arboretum’s vital horticulture work, land stewardship activities, and educational programming. Donations are 100% tax-deductible and entitle the member to discounted and free programming throughout the year, as well as free/reduced fee admission at over 345 arboreta, gardens, and conservatories around the United States, Canada, and the Virgin Islands as part of the [American Horticultural Society Reciprocal Admissions Program](#).

To join, visit www.mtarboretum.org/support and select “Join or Give a Membership”. You may also click [HERE](#) for a direct link. Thanks for your generosity!

Join us online!

-  [Mountain Top Arboretum website](#)
-  [Mountain Top Arboretum Facebook](#)
-  [Mountain Top Arboretum Instagram](#)
-  [Mountain Top Arboretum on YouTube](#)



Turtlehead in bloom



Contacting the Arboretum

✉ Mountain Top Arboretum
PO Box 379
Tannersville, New York 12485

☎ Phone: 518-589-3903

✉ Email: info@mtarboretum.org

Visiting the Arboretum in person

📍 [Mountain Top Arboretum](#)
[4 Maude Adams Road](#)
[Tannersville, New York 12485](#)

Open hours: Dawn to dusk, every day of the year.

Education Center open Tuesdays – Saturdays, 9am-4pm